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THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF  
**ENGLISH  
LITERATURE**



ELEVENTH EDITION

Stephen Greenblatt, *General Editor*

COGAN UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF THE HUMANITIES  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

**PACKAGE 1**

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# Preface

*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* is a massive cultural space. In it the selections are in conversation, echoing and imitating, and also expanding, contracting, observing, playing, arguing, and dissenting, among a host of other responses. To enter this space as a reader is to recognize that works of literature, even the greatest of them, are never strictly solitary. They belong to larger communities, and within these communities they participate in ongoing dialogues. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* represents one such community, formed by a shared relation to the English language as it emerged in the British Isles and has evolved, changed shapes, and spread over the centuries. Literary relations often cross boundaries from one language to another, but their interactions tend to be most concentrated and intense within a shared linguistic community—a community that can be both massive and intimate, both cohesive and fractured, but always part of a wider world.

With this Eleventh Edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, a new generation of editors has assumed the principal responsibility for revising each of the periods of this community. The result is the most thoroughgoing rethinking in the anthology's long and storied life. Though the great landmarks remain, familiar and beloved works of literature find themselves in unfamiliar and sometimes surprising company. It is our hope that fresh perceptions and new conversations will arise out of these changes in the overall anthology environment.

M. H. Abrams, the distinguished literary critic who brought together the original team of editors more than sixty years ago and, with characteristic insight, diplomacy, and humor, oversaw the first seven editions of the anthology, understood that scholarly discoveries and the shifting interests of readers constantly alter the landscape of literary history. As he said, "A vital literary culture is

always on the move." Thus, for example, the First Edition included just 6 women writers. But the sustained work of scholars over the decades has recovered dozens of significant authors who had been marginalized or neglected by a male-dominated literary tradition and has deepened our understanding of those women writers who managed, against considerable odds, to claim a place in that tradition. The Eleventh Edition includes 119 women writers. So too the First Edition included no writers of color and 8 writers whose origins lay outside the British Isles. This edition features 49 writers of color and 78 writers from beyond Britain. Significant change is apparent as well in the expansion of selections from writers already present in earlier editions, including Anne Finch, Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Hutchinson, Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Charles Darwin, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Philip Larkin, and Seamus Heaney. And it is strikingly manifested in the host of writers who appear in these volumes for the first time, among them Clemence of Barking, Meir of Norwich, "John Mandeville," the anonymous author of the Welsh *Lady of the Fountain*, Hester Pulter, the anonymous authors of *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Mary Seacole, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas Gandhi, Mulk Raj Anand, Elizabeth Bowen, Arundhati Roy, Ali Smith, and Rachel Cusk.

Such rethinking extends, of course, beyond individual writers to the larger community of the anthology. The geographical space occupied by that community has continued to expand. For centuries now English literature has not been confined to the British Isles; it is a global phenomenon. Though on pragmatic grounds, we have followed the lead of most college courses in distinguishing between English and American literature, we have, in keeping with the multinational, multicultural, and hugely expansive character of the language, incorporated a substantial number of texts by authors from other countries, among them, Phillis Wheatley, Samson Occom, Dean Mahomet, Mary Seacole, Rabindranath Tagore, Toru Dutt, and Bessie Head.

This border-crossing is not a phenomenon of modernity only. It is fitting that among the first works here is *Beowulf*, a powerful epic written in the Germanic language known as Old English about a singularly restless Scandinavian hero. *Beowulf*'s translator in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Seamus Heaney, is one of the great contemporary masters of English literature—he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995—but it would be misleading to call him an “English poet” for he was born in Northern Ireland and was not in fact English. It would be still more misleading to call him a “British poet,” as if the British Empire were the most salient fact about the language he spoke and wrote in or the culture by which he was shaped. What matters is that the language in which Heaney wrote is English, and this fact links him powerfully with the authors assembled in these volumes, a linguistic community that stubbornly refuses to fit comfortably within any firm geographical or ethnic or national boundaries.

So too do other authors and texts in the anthology lie outside familiar boundaries: in the twelfth century, the noblewoman Marie de France wrote her short stories in an Anglo Norman dialect at home on both sides of the channel; in the sixteenth century William Tyndale, in exile in the Low Countries and inspired by German religious reformers, translated the New Testament from Greek and thereby changed the course of the English language; in the seventeenth century Aphra Behn touched readers with a story that moves from Africa, where its hero is born, to South America, where Behn herself may have witnessed some of the tragic events she describes; and early in the twentieth century Joseph Conrad, born in Ukraine of Polish parents, wrote in eloquent English a novella whose brooding vision of European colonialism in Africa is trenchantly challenged in our pages by Caryl Phillips, born in St. Kitts, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, born in Nigeria.

These contemporary responses to *Heart of Darkness* point to a further, quite crucial feature of this edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Within the cultural space defined by English literature, the nature and the parameters of the conversation are



constantly changing. Eloquent voices call into question the stance of works that had once been viewed as morally impeccable. Authors whose literary style or identity had condemned them to marginality are reappraised and celebrated as centrally important. Historical events that had been overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant come to seem essential to a full understanding of a period and its writing. Topics that few or none had explicitly raised emerge as vital not only to contemporary readers but also to writers of the past who turn out to have engaged with them in significant ways.

Alert to these changes in the cultural conversation, the editors of the Eleventh Edition have not only included many new works but have also taken full advantage of a key feature introduced at the anthology's origin and developed and expanded over the years: the topical cluster. These groupings of short texts, on a wide range of subjects keyed to each period, enable readers to explore the boundaries between writing that was clearly understood at the time it was created as "literary" and writing that, for various reasons, fell outside this category. The boundaries are explored outside of the clusters as well, in the presence of Ottobah Cugoano alongside Samuel Johnson, for example, or of Mohandas Gandhi alongside Rudyard Kipling. The question of what constitutes literature is an open one, and, as the *Norton Anthology* makes clear, the answers are constantly being revised.

The topical clusters serve many additional purposes. They allow a sharp focus on issues that captured the imagination and focused the energy of a community of writers, such as "God's Body" in the Middle Ages, "Crisis of Authority" in the Early Seventeenth Century, or "Science, Speculation, and Experiment" in the Romantic Period. They introduce key writing practices, forms, and artistic movements—such as the commonplace book in the Sixteenth Century, the novel in the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, and digital literature in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries—that help define a period. They assemble a range of voices that speak out on such crucial subjects as "Britain and Transatlantic Slavery" in the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, "Settler Colonialism" in the

Victorian Age, and “Nation, Race, and Language” in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. Here as elsewhere in the *Norton Anthology* the conversation not only illuminates adjacent works but extends across the periods. The texts in “England and the World,” the topic forming a bridge between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, illuminate the two Shakespeare plays, *Othello* and *The Tempest*, and at the same time open up into the major topics on empire in the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century and the Victorian Age. So too in the Victorian Age “The Promise and Price of Industrialization,” with its section on environmental degradation, leads into “Environmental Literature and Climate Change” in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.

The presence in this latter topic of powerful contemporary voices—Ben Okri, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Patience Agbabi, and others—reminds us that literature can be a call to action as well as a mode of reflection and representation. The way we live our lives, including the actions we take or fail to take, depends upon our understanding of the world and of ourselves, and that understanding is and has always been shaped by the stories we tell, the pictures we draw, the songs we sing. Art making in its myriad forms is one of the essential attributes of humanity; it helps to define us as a species. The astonishingly evocative paintings on the walls of caves from 35,000 years ago, together with even older sculptured figures and bone flutes, bear witness to the foundational nature of our impulse to represent the world and to make sense of our experience through art. This is what the world looks and feels like to us, the pictures say; this is what we love and what we fear; this is how we register our sense of beauty and tell our stories; this is how we make or hope to make things happen; this is who we are. The artists who created the images sometimes pressed their hands to the wall and blew pigment around them, leaving their prints on the walls like signatures: remember us, the handprints tell us; we were here once.

Verbal art making almost certainly reaches at least as far back in our collective past as these archaic images, but it could leave no material trace for future generations until writing was invented,

some five thousand years ago in Mesopotamia. From this moment onward, works of literature have helped at once to define and to explore what it means to be human. The Mesopotamian tablets in which words were first inscribed were devised at a time when cities were developing and their inhabitants turned to storytellers to reflect on the human condition. At every point since then our species has looked to its writers for the special guidance that comes from artistic representation. For a host of reasons—from alarming fissures in our social and political order, to the astonishing advances in artificial intelligence, to the critical state of our planet—there has never been a moment in which the written outpouring of the human imagination has been more important than it is now. There is much talk at the moment about a crisis of the humanities, but the more important issue we face is a crisis of the human. In order to confront this crisis—to orient ourselves, to know more fully who we are, and, above all, to respond creatively to the challenges we face—we need literature.

## **PERIOD-BY-PERIOD REVISIONS**

### **Volume A: The Middle Ages**

Edited by Julie Orlemanski and James Simpson, this period, huge in its eight-century scope and immensely varied in its voices, offers exciting surprises, many new to this edition. The heart of the Old English portion is the great elegiac epic *Beowulf*, in the acclaimed translation by Seamus Heaney. Many texts in the anthology resonate with *Beowulf* in various ways. And while *Beowulf* is set in Scandinavia, two new texts offer contrasting responses to the Scandinavian invasions of England from the eighth to the early eleventh centuries: King Alfred's call to resuscitate learning ("Preface to *Pastoral Care*"); and the "Sermon to the English" by Wulfstan of York, which is addressed to Christian listeners under attack by polytheistic invaders. Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries—a key sub-period between the Old and Middle English

sections—offers an illuminating cluster on the genre of romance, with four subtle narratives (one new) by Marie de France; a rich new text translated from Welsh, *The Lady of the Fountain*; three texts about Tristan and Ysolt; and *Sir Orfeo*, a comedic version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story. Also new is a selection from the life of the learned, feisty Saint Catherine of Alexandria, by a female author, Clemence of Barking. As always, the Middle English section offers a generous selection from *The Canterbury Tales*. The *Tales* are presented from the new edition by David Lawton, with additional modifications for ease of reading. Among other notable additions is a cluster focused on religious exclusions: fierce expressions of Christian/Jewish relations by the persecuted and persecutors (respectively Meir of Norwich and the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*) and a text that defines and deepens the divisions between Christian and Muslim (*The King of Tars*). “What the Animals Say” includes, alongside brilliant bird poems by Chaucer and Henryson, a selection from the vivacious debate poem *The Owl and the Nightingale*, in a new translation by Simon Armitage, and a text about a wolf-man by Marie de France. At every point we strive to render these texts, written in a variety of languages, accessible to readers of Modern English. All the relevant Middle English texts (notably all works by Chaucer) are presented in modernized spelling wherever such modernization does not injure meter or rhyme. Plentiful, discreet glosses offer consistent aid.

## **Volume B: The Sixteenth Century**

New to this period, edited by Tiffany Stern and Stephen Greenblatt, are Isabella Whitney, Anne Cooke Bacon, Margaret Tyler, Anne Dowriche, Mary Cheke, and Anne Southell, who add their voices to those of Mary Tudor, Lady Jane Grey, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I. New as well is a cluster that reproduces an influential practice widespread in this period: the “Commonplace Book.” Texts, often surprising, striking, and always memorable, are grouped according to miscellaneous topics, ranging from “Aging,” “Death,” and “Drink” to “Tobacco,” “Trade,” and “Women.” Not only will

readers enjoy this diverse array, but we hope they will be encouraged to assemble their own commonplace books. Included for the first time too is Shakespeare's remarkable late romance *The Tempest*, with its haunting blend of shipwreck, magic, enslavement, and forgiveness. This play, together with *Othello*, offers readers insight into the period's fascination with encountering those it regarded as "other." "England and the World," a topical cluster that serves as a bridge to the Early Seventeenth Century, suggests that this fascination was only beginning. In addition to texts by Thomas Hariot and Walter Raleigh, it includes, new to the anthology, portions of a letter by William Strachey about a momentous wreck of English ships on the Bermudas, a generous selection from Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, the first account of the English colonization of Barbados and the rise of the sugar industry that would change the global economy forever, and a selection from John Smith's *The General History of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*.

## **Volume B: The Early Seventeenth Century**

At the heart of this period, edited by Julie Crawford and Katharine Maus, is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, presented complete. New to the Eleventh Edition is Canto V of Lucy Hutchinson's contemporaneous epic poem *Order and Disorder*, which offers a different account of Adam and Eve's fall and its aftermath. The Eleventh Edition also offers other selections from Hutchinson's work, including from her translation of Lucretius and her elegies; three poems by the (relatively) newly discovered Hester Pulter; a wholly revised entry on Margaret Cavendish, including a much more substantive and representative selection from her mind-bending utopia *The Blazing World*; and a fully revised entry on Aemilia Lanyer, which offers a new selection from her most ambitious poem, "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum." Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* appears in its entirety, offering a rich intertext for the two Shakespeare plays, as well as Richard Ligon's and John Smith's colonial fantasies. The revised cluster on the "Crisis of Authority" includes the full text of a

petition women presented to the House of Commons in February 1641, arguing for their rights as citizens. The period also offers new poems by Donne, Jonson, Herbert, Wroth, Crashaw, Lovelace, and Philips.

## **Volume C: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century**

This volume, edited by Courtney Weiss Smith and James Noggle, situates eighteenth-century British literature in a global context. New to the period are the stories of Scheherazade and Ali Baba from the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, a work of complex global provenance, as well as writing by Phillis Wheatley, Ignatius Sancho, Samson Occom, Dean Mahomet, and “Ossian” (a medieval Gaelic bard ventriloquized by an eighteenth-century Scotsman). Five new topical clusters address themes and issues whose legacies shape our world today. “Global Commerce and Empire” and “Britain and Transatlantic Slavery” explore the violent histories of this period and literature’s role in helping people grapple with them. This edition also offers more work by women writers, including Anne Finch, Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Collier, Charlotte Lennox, and Frances Burney; and a new cluster featuring explorations of gender and sexuality, with works such as Hannah Snell’s *The Female Soldier* and Henry Fielding’s *The Female Husband*. Also new are clusters on the histories of science and of sentimental emotion. The Eleventh Edition shows that classic works long in the anthology—such as Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*, Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, Johnson’s *Rasselas*, and influential poetry by Dryden, Pope, and Gray—become even more interesting when read alongside a wider and more diverse array of voices.

## **Volume D: The Romantic Period**

Edited by Eric Eisner and Deidre Lynch, this volume contains new texts that demonstrate just how conscious Romantic-period authors were of living in an expanded, interconnected world. The “Revolution Controversy” cluster has been retitled “An Age of Revolutions,” registering its inclusion of material on the conflict that led to Haiti’s independence and its development as the first Black republic. Also new is William Blake’s *America: A Prophecy*, which approaches revolution through a transatlantic frame. Additions to the cluster “Slavery and the Literature of Abolition” deepen coverage of the painful interval between the British Parliament’s abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and its abolition of slavery in Britain’s Caribbean colonies in 1833: significantly expanding the excerpt from Mary Prince’s 1831 *History*, we also include an excerpt from a periodical dedicated to anti-slavery and working-class resistance written and published in 1817 by Robert Wedderburn, the son of a Scottish Jamaican planter and an African-born enslaved woman. A new cluster, “Science, Speculation, and Experiment,” showcases the striking forms science writing could take in this period of tremendous scientific advances and controversy. It gathers texts by scientist-poet Erasmus Darwin, natural history writer Gilbert White, astronomer Caroline Herschel, and others. The representation of writing by women continues to increase, with new texts by Charlotte Smith, Dorothy Wordsworth, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon. A substantial new excerpt from the “London cantos” of Byron’s *Don Juan* enlivens the presentation of Romantic writers’ fascination with modern urban experience. The volume now concludes with poems by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, author of the first books of English-language poetry published in India, whose work reinvents popular Romantic models in assembling an idiom for an Indian national identity.

## **Volume E: The Victorian Age**

Edited by Rachel Ablow and Catherine Robson, this volume has been substantially revised, as signaled by “Great Britain’s Imperial Mission,” a major topic that includes the following sections: “Slavery,

Abolition, and the Plantation System”; “India: The ‘Jewel in the Crown’”; “Settler Colonialism: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa”; and “The British Isles: Ireland, Scotland, Wales.” One of the first new entries is a sizable excerpt from *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole*, the memoir of a Jamaican nurse and businesswoman who ministered to British soldiers during the Crimean War. Seacole’s text anchors a host of additions that highlight the extent and literary consequences of British imperial aggression. The much-expanded opening cluster provides important historical context for both Seacole’s text and the writings that follow, among them work by Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mohandas Gandhi from India; Tekahionwake/E. Pauline Johnson and Susanna Moodie from Canada; and Olive Schreiner from South Africa. Another major addition is the novella *The Lifted Veil*, by George Eliot, which introduces the central concerns of nineteenth-century realism. Also new are texts focused on the environmental and human consequences of industrialization—by Friedrich Engels, Henry Mayhew, Elizabeth Gaskell, Adelaide Procter, and Thomas Hardy. And we offer longer excerpts from Charles Darwin’s major works, as well as a wider range of perspectives on gender and sexuality in the period. Newly added are poems by major authors that address issues of empire (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson, Christina Rossetti), as well as texts for two women writers whose work was central to the period: Amy Levy and Augusta Webster.

## **Volume F: The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries**

This volume, edited by Aarthi Vadde and Jahan Ramazani, has undergone substantial revision. Major highlights include two new clusters. The first, “Environmental Literature and Climate Change,” addresses the impact of environmental crises on how writers, including J. G. Ballard, Bessie Head, Ben Okri, Arundhati Roy, and Robert Macfarlane, have depicted the convergence of nature and culture. A special subsection of poetry captures the richness of verse responding to human-caused climate change; it includes anthology favorites such as Seamus Heaney and Simon Armitage alongside



newcomers such as Pascale Petit and Vahni Capildeo. The second cluster, "Born-Digital Literature," features works composed on and for the computer screen by writers who have used digital media to push the boundaries of poetic and narrative form. Poets bpNichol and Caroline Bergvall make their anthology debut here as do novelists Ali Smith, Teju Cole, and David Mitchell. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* continue to serve as exemplars of the modernist novel, with Conrad's novella now framed by responses from Caryl Phillips and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. New to the Eleventh Edition are Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, which join Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to provide a varied look at modern drama. We have widened the selections for Claude McKay and contemporary poet Patience Agbabi as well as added a new poem by Philip Larkin. In response to reader requests, the short story "The Demon Lover" by Elizabeth Bowen now appears in "Voices from World War II" while Una Marson and Samuel Selvon join the celebrated cluster "Nation, Race, and Language." Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand and British novelist Rachel Cusk appear here for the first time, and Zadie Smith is now represented by "The Embassy of Cambodia."

## COMPLETE LONGER TEXTS

As in past editions, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Eleventh Edition, includes a generous selection of complete longer texts:

*Beowulf* (Heaney translation)

*The Lady of the Fountain*

*The York Play of the Crucifixion*

*The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Play*

*The King of Tars*

*The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*

*Sir Orfeo*

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Armitage translation)

*Everyman*

Thomas More, *Utopia*

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* and *Hero and Leander*

William Shakespeare, *Othello* and *The Tempest*

Ben Jonson, *Volpone*

John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*

William Congreve, *The Way of the World*

John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*

Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina*

Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*

William Blake, *Vision of the Daughters of Albion*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *America: A Prophecy*

Jane Austen, *Love and Friendship*

Byron, *Manfred*

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Speckled Band*

Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King*

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

James Joyce, *The Dead*

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*

The presence of so many complete longer works highlights the anthology's extraordinary value when compared to the cost of purchasing each of these works individually. And through the inclusion of hundreds of brilliant poems and prose pieces, these works are integrated into a much larger vision of the literary achievements of their periods. Indeed, the six volumes by themselves constitute a small but surprisingly comprehensive library.

## **VISUAL IMAGES**

Now, as in the past, cultures define themselves through language. But the central importance of visual media in contemporary culture has heightened our awareness of the ways in which songs and stories have always been closely linked to the images that societies have produced and viewed. The Eleventh Edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* features fifty-six pages of color plates (in seven color inserts) and more than 120 black-and-white illustrations throughout the volumes, including six maps. In selecting visual material—from the Sutton Hoo treasure of the seventh century to Yinka Shonibare’s *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* in the twenty-first century—the editors sought to provide images that illuminate the culture of a particular literary period; that conjure up, whether directly or indirectly, the literature of the section; and that relate specifically to works in the anthology.

## **EDITORIAL PROCEDURES AND FORMAT**

The Eleventh Edition adheres to the principles that have always characterized *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Period introductions, headnotes, and annotations are designed to enhance students’ reading and, without imposing an interpretation, to give students the information they need to understand each text. The aim of these editorial materials is to make the anthology self-sufficient, so that it can be read anywhere—in a coffeeshop, on a bus, under a tree. The availability of the ebook makes this aim even easier to realize.

*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* prides itself on both the scholarly accuracy and the readability of its texts. To ease students’ encounter with some works, we have normalized spelling and capitalization in texts up to and including the Romantic period—for the most part they now follow the conventions of modern English. We leave unaltered, however, texts in which such modernizing would change semantic or metrical qualities. From the Victorian period onward, we have used the original spelling and punctuation. We continue other editorial procedures that have

proved useful in the past. After each work, we cite the date of first publication on the right; in some instances, this date is followed by the date of a revised edition for which the author was responsible. Dates of composition, when they differ from those of publication and when they are known, are provided on the left. We use square brackets to indicate titles supplied by the editors for the convenience of readers. Whenever a portion of a text is omitted, we indicate that omission with three asterisks. If the omitted portion is important for following the plot or argument, we provide a brief summary within the text or in a footnote. Finally, we have reconsidered annotations throughout and increased the number of marginal glosses for archaic, dialect, or unfamiliar words.

The Eleventh Edition includes the useful Literary Terminology appendix, an alphabetical glossary with examples from works in the anthology. We have also updated the General Bibliography, as well as the period and author bibliographies, which appear online.

## **New and Expanded Resources for Students and Instructors**

For the Eleventh Edition, we have added exciting new resources and improved and updated existing resources to make them more useful and easy to find online.

# THE NORTON EBOOK READER

Dynamic new features exclusive to the Norton Ebook Reader offer students a supportive, accessible environment for thoughtful reading—all at a great price. Readers of the ebook will find it easy to highlight, take notes, search, read offline, and more. In addition to audio recorded by the anthology editors, the anthology's period introductions feature embedded videos that help situate the literature of a particular time and place and highlight overarching themes.

Annotation tools encourage close reading, and instructors can even embed their own content for students directly on the page. An introduction to annotation—available in the Norton Ebook Reader and enriched with videos—walks students through the general *whats*, *whys*, and *hows* of annotation before they delve into the anthology.

Along with these interactive features, the Norton Ebook Reader includes page numbers and selections that match those of the Full Edition print books. The Full Edition includes all selections in the Shorter Edition (and more). Page references corresponding to the Shorter Edition also appear in the margins of relevant selections, making the digital edition more versatile than ever. Many of the black-and-white images in the print anthology appear in color in the ebook.

To access and learn more about the Norton Ebook Reader for *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, reach out to your Norton representative or contact us at [literature@wnorton.com](mailto:literature@wnorton.com).

## STUDENT SITE

The Student Site for *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* features the videos from the Norton Ebook Reader, a curated selection of links to Spotify recordings, and more. Access to this site

is available with all new copies of the book or as an affordable standalone purchase option for students with used copies.

## TEACHING RESOURCES

Extensive materials are available to adopters to help with course preparation. These include:

- **Teaching with The Norton Anthology of English Literature: A Guide for Instructors.** In addition to new thematic tables of contents, this downloadable file features “Quick Read” summaries, teaching notes, and writing suggestions for authors, works, and clusters.
- **Reading Comprehension Quizzes.** Norton Testmaker brings high-quality testing and quizzing materials online. Quizzes feature multiple-choice questions on often-taught works and can be easily exported to Microsoft Word or as Common Cartridge files for your LMS.
- **Image Files.** All the images from the anthology are available in PowerPoint with alt text and in JPEG format.

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Select a paperback from our new series of classics to bundle for free with *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Edited and produced with the same care that Norton devotes to its anthologies, volumes in the Norton Library include enticing introductions and helpful but unobtrusive annotations by leading scholars. Visit [www.norton/norton-library](http://www.norton/norton-library) for a complete list of titles and to request examination copies.

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STEPHEN GREENBLATT

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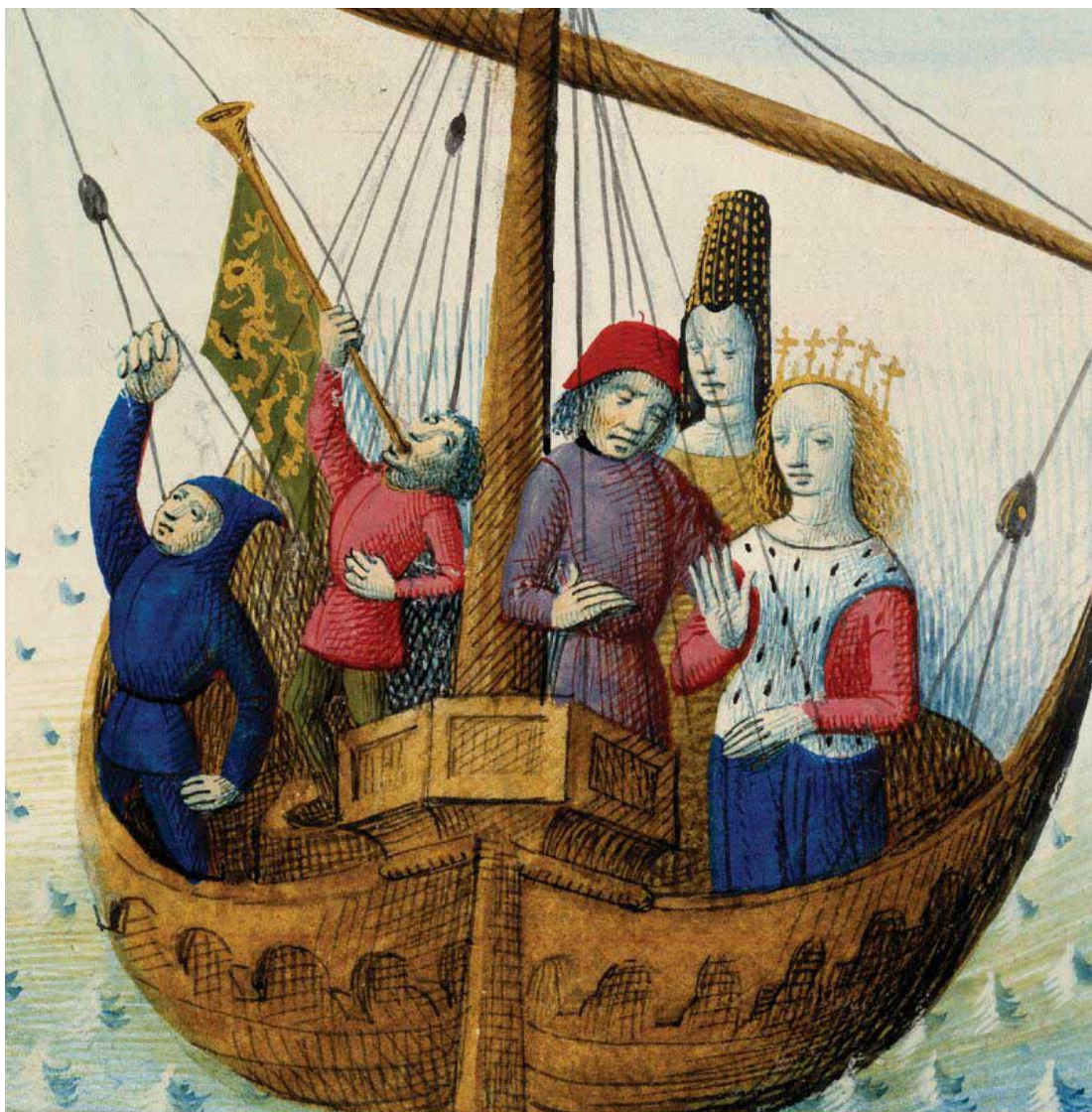
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# VOLUME A: The Middle Ages



THE NORTON  
ANTHOLOGY  
**ENGLISH**  
LITERATURE

THE  
MIDDLE AGES

**VOLUME A**  
ELEVENTH EDITION



# The Middle Ages to ca. 1485



**Pilgrims leaving Canterbury**, ca. 1420. For more information about this image, see the [Image Gallery](#) for this volume.

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43–ca. 410: Roman invasion and occupation of Celtic Britain

ca. 450: Occupation of Britannia by Angles and Saxons begins



597: St. Augustine arrives in Kent; beginning of Angles' and Saxons' conversion to Christianity

790s: first Viking raids in England

871–99: Reign of King Alfred

1066: Norman Conquest

1154–89: Reign of Henry II

ca. 1200: Beginnings of Middle English literature

1360–1400: Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower writing; *Piers Plowman*; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

1485: William Caxton's printing of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, one of the first books printed in England

"The Middle Ages" designates the time span roughly from the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the early fifth century C.E. to the European Renaissance and Reformation of the sixteenth century. The adjective "medieval," coined from Latin *medium* (middle) and *aevum* (age), refers to whatever was made, written, or thought during this 1100-year period (itself, of course, containing many subperiods, each with very distinct cultural formations).

"The Renaissance" was so named by nineteenth-century historians and critics who wished to focus on an outburst of creativity attributed to a "rebirth" or revival of Latin and, especially, of Greek learning and literature, which inflected all the arts. The word "Reformation" designates the powerful religious movement that, from the early sixteenth century, repudiated the supreme authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The Renaissance spread from Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the rest of Europe, whereas the Reformation began in Germany and quickly affected all of Europe to a greater or lesser degree. The very ideas of renaissance or reformation imply something dormant or lacking in the preceding era. More recently, scholars have emphasized the ways in which sixteenth-century writers, in order to highlight what they saw as the brilliance of their own time, in some sense "created" (often with the intention of demonizing) the Middle Ages.

Medieval authors, of course, did not think of themselves as living in the "middle"; indeed, they sometimes expressed the idea that the world was growing old and that theirs was a declining age, close to the end of time. Yet art, literature, and science flourished during the Middle Ages, in both Christian and secular cultures that preserved, transmitted, and transformed pre- and para-Christian traditions. Later medieval Europe also invented two enduring institutions of the highest significance: parliament and the university.

The works covered in this section of the anthology encompass more than eight centuries, from Caedmon's *Hymn* at the end of the seventh century to *Everyman* at the beginning of the sixteenth. The date 1485, the year of the accession of Henry VII and the beginning

of the Tudor dynasty, is an arbitrary but convenient one to mark the “end” of the Middle Ages in England.

Although different institutions within the Roman Catholic Church provided continuity from the seventh century on, the period experienced enormous historical, social, and linguistic changes. To emphasize these distinct cultural formations and the events underlying them, we have divided the period into three primary sections: Literature of the Early Middle Ages (eighth to eleventh centuries), Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, and Literature of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.

The first two of these periods are brought into being by military occupations: the Old English literature of the early Middle Ages is the product of the displacement, for the most part, of Celtic peoples from the area we know as England, by Saxons, Angles, and Jutes beginning in the fifth century. The second period (Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, the period of Anglo-Norman literature) is the product of the Norman Conquest of 1066. The third period (Literature of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries) is not the product of a specific military occupation, but a long period of warfare (1336–1453) known as the Hundred Years’ War, waged between France and England, which may have inflected the increasing use of English for all discursive purposes.

In the first of these periods (Literature of the Early Middle Ages), the main institutions of literary production are royal courts and monasteries. In the second (Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, in Anglo-Norman England), royal courts, feudal castles, and a range of houses of regular religious (that is, ecclesiastics living communally under a rule), including houses of nuns, patronize and produce literature. In the third period (Literature of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries), we see a devolution of institutional patronage: to be sure, royal courts and bureaucracies, as well as the higher nobility, continue to patronize literary production; but a wide range of religious houses (both male and female), gentry families, and urban organizations (including trade unions, or guilds) also initiate and produce literary works.

Each of these three subperiods has a distinctive linguistic practice. The Saxons and Angles, who began their conquest of the southeastern part of Britain around 450, spoke a Germanic language, which we now call Old English. This language, a recognizable ancestor of Modern English, displays features cognate with other Germanic languages of the period (the ancestors of modern Dutch, German, and Norwegian, for example). As late as the tenth century, part of an Old Saxon poem written on the Continent was transcribed and transliterated into the West Saxon dialect of Old English without presenting problems to its English readers. Between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, this is the language of law, spiritual instruction, philosophy, and literature, a literature unique in breadth and depth in the Europe of its time.

All medieval periods in Britain are multilingual, depending on geography and on institutions. Thus before the Roman occupation Celtic languages were spoken throughout Britain. After the occupation of Saxons and Angles from the mid-fifth century, Celtic languages were spoken and written, in two broad groups, in the geographic areas inhabited by Celtic peoples: in Cornwall and Wales, for example (the so-called Brittonic languages), and in Ireland and Scotland (the so-called Gaelic languages). The written language was used for law, religious instruction, and literature. Latin, the *lingua franca* of the learned, was written throughout Britain in centers of learning—at first monasteries throughout the early medieval period, and then, from the twelfth century forward, in universities and also in all centers of religious learning.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 brought a new language of power and administration, the dialect of French that is now called Anglo-Norman. This language was spoken by the upper classes and was used in legal and administrative environments, as well as for purposes of spiritual instruction, up at least to the end of the fourteenth century. It was also used for historiography and for literary writing, both lyric and narrative romance. Despite significant syntactic change in English after the Norman Conquest, the syntactic influence of Anglo-Norman is uncertain. The syntax of English

remained fundamentally Germanic. By contrast, the influence of Anglo-Norman on the vocabulary of English was enormous, with more than half of later Middle English vocabulary derived from Anglo-Norman or, often via Anglo-Norman, from Latin.

The language we call Middle English was a mixture principally of Old English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin, plus, to a lesser extent, Norwegian and Celtic languages. After the Norman Conquest, English was suppressed socially from elite society, and institutionally from Parliament and law courts. It remained permanently in use as a language of the people. From the mid-twelfth century it was deployed occasionally as the language of spiritual instruction and literature. Across the fourteenth century, however, Middle English (which itself has at least five major literary dialectal groupings) effected its ascent in various linguistic spheres. The upper nobility continued to be bilingual in French and English; literary authors certainly read, and sometimes wrote, in three languages (Latin, French, and English). But by 1400 Middle English was a significant if not the main language of literature, Parliament, historiography, encyclopedism, and spiritual instruction.

The doctrines of Christianity, and the Roman Church specifically, were important throughout the English Middle Ages. This form of Christianity is called “Roman” because the pope, the bishop of Rome, is its central governing authority. Like the other Abrahamic religions—Judaism and Islam—Christianity is monotheistic. Yet Christians hold that there are three “persons” in one God, a trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The “Son” is especially important to Christian theology, which maintains that God was incarnated as a man who was crucified and rose from the dead (see “God’s Body,” [pp. 215–84](#)). Christianity incorporated Jewish sacred writings into the Bible. But medieval Christians also maintained that Judaism had been superseded and that Jews’ ongoing religious practice was illegitimate (see “Religious Exclusions and Identities,” [pp. 285–362](#)). The language of the Bible in medieval western Europe was Latin, although parts of it were sometimes translated into the vernacular—

that is, the regional language of spoken discourse, including Old and Middle English.

Book production throughout the medieval period was an expensive process. Until the European development of movable type in the mid-fifteenth century (introduced into England by the entrepreneur William Caxton in 1476), medieval books were reproduced by hand in manuscript (literally “written by hand”). While paper became increasingly common for less expensive manuscripts in the fifteenth century, manuscripts were until then written on carefully prepared animal skin (usually that of calves or sheep), known as parchment or vellum. More expensive books could be illuminated both by colored and calligraphic lettering and by visual images.

The institutions of book production developed across the period. In the earlier medieval period (seventh to eleventh centuries), monasteries were the main centers of book production and storage. Until their dissolution by the government in the 1530s, monastic and other religious houses continued to produce books, but in the early fourteenth century, particularly in London, commercial book-making enterprises emerged. These were loose organizations of various artisans such as parchment makers, scribes, flourishers, illuminators, and binders, who usually lived in the same neighborhoods in towns. A bookseller or dealer (usually a member of one of these trades) would coordinate the production of books to order for wealthy patrons, sometimes distributing the work of copying to different scribes, who would be responsible for different gatherings, or quires, of the same book. Such shops could call upon the services of professional scribes working in the bureaucracies of the royal court.

The market for books also changed across the period: while monasteries, other religious houses, and royal courts continued to fund the production of books, beginning in the Anglo-Norman period (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) books were also produced for (and sometimes by) noble and gentry households. From the fourteenth century on the market was widened yet further, with wealthy urban patrons also ordering books. Some of these books were dedicated to

single works, some largely to single genres; most were much more miscellaneous, containing texts of many kinds and (particularly in the Anglo-Norman period) written in different languages, especially Latin, French, and English. Only a small proportion of medieval English books survive; large numbers were destroyed at the time of the destruction of the monasteries and their libraries in the 1530s.

Texts in Old English, Anglo-Norman, Middle Welsh and Irish, Early Middle English, and the more difficult texts in later Middle English (for example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Piers Plowman*) are here translated. Chaucer and other Middle English works may be read in the original, or lightly modernized versions of the original, even by the beginner, with the help of marginal glosses and notes. These texts have been spelled and generally presented in ways intended to aid the reader in every possible way.

Analyses of the sounds and grammar of Middle English and of Old and Middle English prosody are presented on [pp. 21–24](#).

# LITERATURE OF THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

From the first to the fifth century, England was a province of the Roman Empire and was named "Britannia" after its Celtic-speaking inhabitants, the Britons, who adapted themselves to Roman occupation. The withdrawal of the Roman legions in 410, in a vain attempt to protect Rome itself from the threat of Germanic conquest, left Britain and Britons vulnerable to Germanic occupiers. These belonged primarily to three related ethnic groups: the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes. The name "England" derives from the word "Englaland," the land of the Angles; the names of the counties Essex, Sussex, and Wessex refer to the territories occupied by the East, South, and West Saxons.

The occupation of Angles and Saxons was no sudden conquest, but extended over decades of engagement with the native Britons. The latter were, finally, largely confined to the extremities of Britain, such as the mountainous region of Wales, where the modern form of a Celtic language is spoken alongside English to this day.

The Britons had become Christians by the late fourth century, after Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire in the year 380. For about 150 years after the beginning of the Germanic occupation, Christianity was maintained only in the remoter regions, where the polytheistic Saxons and Angles had failed to penetrate. In the year 597, however, a Benedictine monk (afterward St. Augustine of Canterbury) arrived, sent from Rome by Pope Gregory as a missionary to King Ethelbert of Kent, the most southerly of the kingdoms into which England was then divided. At about the same time missionaries from Ireland began to preach Christianity in the north. Within seventy-five years the island was once more predominantly Christian. By the time of the Synod of Whitby (664), the English Church adopted the rites of the Roman Church, over Celtic Christianity. That allegiance to Rome would survive until 1534, when Henry VIII rejected papal authority and declared himself, as king, head of the English Church.



Christianity is a religion of the book. The impact of Christianity on literacy is evident from the fact that the first extended written specimen of the Old English language is a code of laws promulgated by Ethelbert (ca. 560–616), the first English Christian king. Indeed, Christianity brought an institutionalized commitment to book production and preservation, in the form of monasteries, founded and renewed with royal support. Here we briefly define three major periods in which the promotion of learning was monastic, royal, or both.

The first great period of monastic learning occurred in northern England (Northumbria) in a period of great instability in the Mediterranean basin—the time of the Islamic occupation of the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula—and in Europe generally. On the northeastern coast of England, however, scholarship flourished. Beginning in the mid-seventh century, Benedictine monasteries, some for women, were founded, including Whitby and Wearmouth-Jarrow. The greatest scholar of this period and place is Bede, whose Latin *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731) tells the story of the conversion of England to Roman Christianity. This great book remains one of our most important sources of knowledge about the period.

From 797, the now Christian Saxons and Angles of England were themselves subjected to new Germanic invasions by polytheistic Scandinavians we know as Vikings—called variously Vikings, Danes, and Northmen in early medieval England—who in their longboats repeatedly ravaged the coast, sacking Bede’s monastery among others. (Such a raid late in the late tenth century inspired *The Battle of Maldon*, the last of the Old English heroic poems.) The Danes also occupied the northern part of the island, threatening to overrun the rest. They were contained by Alfred, king of the West Saxons from 871 to 899, who for a time united all the kingdoms of southern England.

This most active king was also responsible for a second great period of textual production in early medieval England. Alfred was an enthusiastic patron of translating sophisticated philosophical,

historical, and pastoral works into the vernacular. He himself translated, or had translated, various key works, mostly written originally between the fourth and sixth centuries in the period of Roman conversion to Christianity, which he considered necessary to know in the period of English conversion and consolidation (for the motivating ideas of his textual program, see his Preface to the *Pastoral Care* in this anthology, [p. 119](#)). The most important of these works was Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (523). Alfred probably also instigated a translation of Bede's *History* and the beginning of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: this year-by-year record in Old English of important events in England was maintained at one monastery until the middle of the twelfth century. Practically all Old English poetry is preserved in copies made in the West Saxon dialect after the reign of Alfred.

The third great period for institutions of learning in pre-Conquest England is known as the Benedictine Reform, a tenth-century movement designed to reaffirm in English monasticism the Benedictine practice (the monastic rule introduced into Europe by St. Benedict in 516). The movement had royal support from King Edgar (r. 959–975) and was strong in the south of England. The greatest scholars to emerge from this movement, a generation later than the original reformers, were as follows: Aelfric of Eynsham (ca. 955–ca. 1010), who produced vernacular hagiography (that is, lives of saints), doctrinal homilies, and biblical translation; and Wulfstan, archbishop of York (d. 1023), one of whose vigorous sermons, written in the face of Viking invasion, is reproduced in this anthology ([p. 132](#)).

# EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND



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## ***Old English Poetry***

The invading Angles and Saxons brought with them a tradition of oral poetry (see "Bede and Cædmon's *Hymn*," [p. 30](#)). Because nothing was written down before the conversion to Christianity, we have only circumstantial evidence of what that poetry must have been like. Aside from a few short inscriptions on small artifacts, the earliest records in the English language are in manuscripts produced at monasteries and other religious establishments, beginning in the seventh century. Literacy was mainly restricted to servants of the church, and so it is natural that the bulk of Old English literature deals with religious subjects and is mostly drawn from Latin sources. Under the expensive conditions of manuscript production, few texts were written down that did not pertain directly to the work of the church. Most of Old English poetry is contained in just four manuscripts.

Germanic heroic poetry continued to be performed orally in alliterative verse and was at times used to describe current events. *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which celebrates an English victory over the Danes in traditional alliterative verse, is preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. *The Battle of Maldon* commemorates a Viking victory in which the Christian English invoke the ancient code of honor that obliges a warrior to avenge his slain lord or to die beside him.

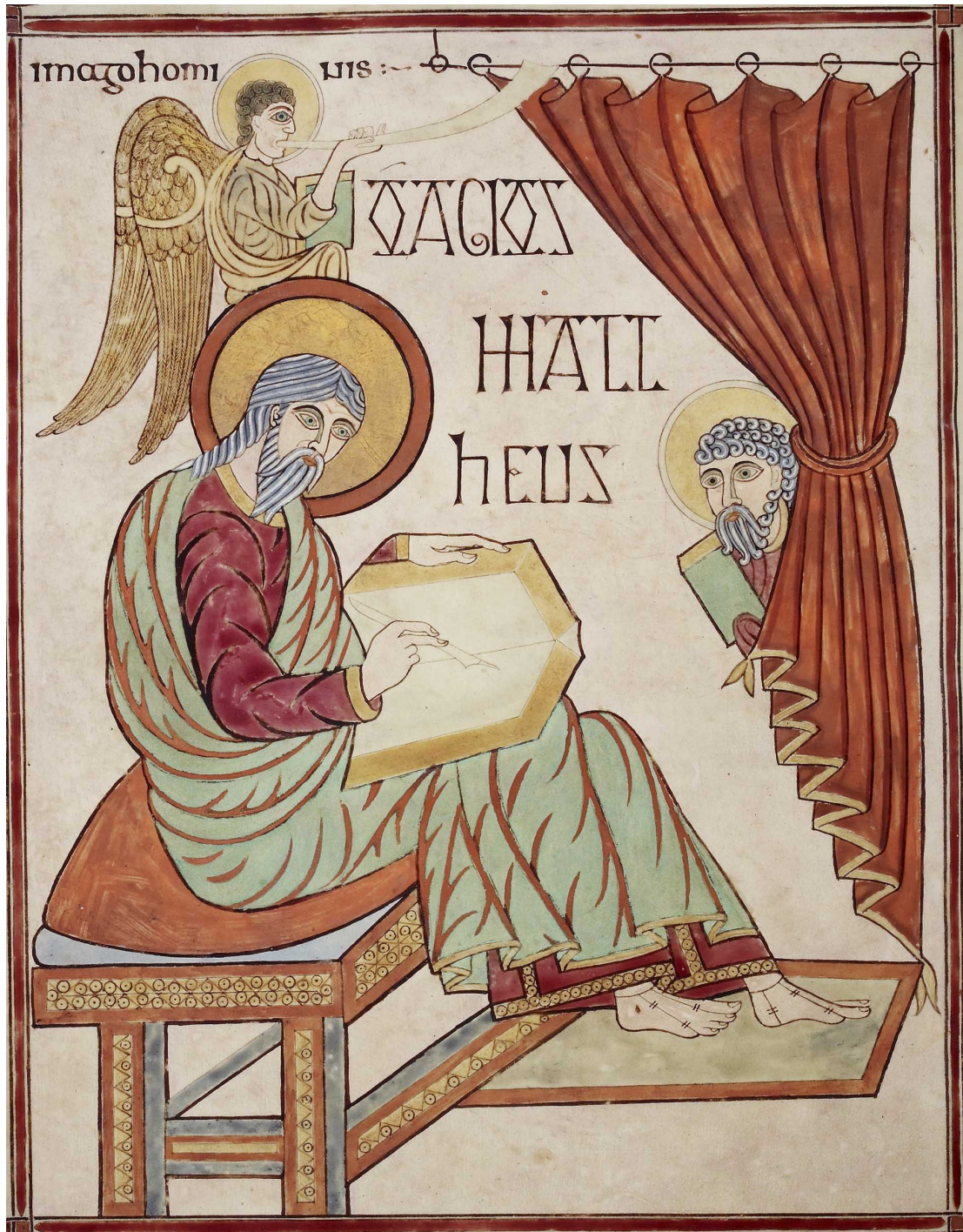
These poems show that the aristocratic, heroic, and kinship values of Germanic society continued to inspire both clergy and laity in the Christian era. As represented in the relatively small body of Old English heroic poetry that survives, this world shares many characteristics with the heroic world described by Homer. Nations are reckoned as groups of people related by kinship rather than by geographical areas, and kinship is the basis of the heroic code. The tribe is ruled by a chieftain who is called *king*, a word that has "kin" for its root. The *lord* (a word derived from Old English *hlaf*, "loaf," plus *weard*, "protector") surrounds himself with a band of retainers (many of them his blood kindred) who are members of his

household. He leads his men in battle and rewards them with the spoils; royal generosity was one of the most important aspects of heroic behavior. In return, the retainers are obligated to fight to the death for their lord, and if he is slain, to avenge him or die in the attempt. Blood vengeance is regarded as a sacred duty, and in poetry, everlasting shame awaits those who fail to observe it.

Even though the heroic world of poetry could be invoked to rally resistance to the Viking invasions, it was already remote from the Christian world of early medieval England. Nevertheless, Christian writers like the *Beowulf* poet were fascinated by the distant culture of their pagan ancestors and by the inherent conflict between the heroic code and a religion that teaches that we should “forgive those who trespass against us” and that “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” The *Beowulf* poet looks back on that ancient world with admiration for the courage of which it was capable and at the same time with elegiac sympathy for its inevitable doom.

For Old English poetry, it is difficult and probably futile to draw a line between “heroic” and “Christian,” for the best poetry crosses that boundary. Much of the Christian poetry is also cast in the heroic mode: although the Saxons and Angles adapted themselves readily to the ideals of Christianity, they did not do so without adapting Christianity to their own heroic ideal. Thus Moses and St. Andrew, Christ and God the Father are represented in the style of heroic verse. In *The Dream of the Rood*, the Cross speaks of Christ as “this young man, . . . strong and courageous.” In Cædmon’s *Hymn* the creation of heaven and earth is seen as a mighty deed, an “establishment of wonders.” Early medieval heroines, too, are portrayed in the heroic manner. St. Helena, who leads an expedition to the Holy Land to discover the true Cross, is described as a “battle-queen.” The biblical narrative related in the Old English poem *Judith* is recast in the terms of Germanic heroic poetry. Christian and heroic ideals are poignantly blended in *The Wanderer*, which laments the separation from one’s lord and kinsmen and the transience of all earthly treasures. Love between man and woman, as described by the female speaker of *The Wife’s Lament*, is disrupted by separation, exile, and the malice of kinfolk.





**Lindisfarne Gospels.** Opening of the Gospel of St. Matthew, ca. 698. The veil of mysteries is drawn aside, and the author of the gospel text copies his book as if by divine dictation.

The world of Old English poetry is often elegiac. Men are said to be cheerful in the mead hall, but even there they think of war, of

possible triumph but probable failure. Romantic love—one of the principal topics of later literature—appears hardly at all. Even so, at some of the bleakest moments, the poets powerfully recall the return of spring. The blade of the magic sword with which Beowulf has killed Grendel's mother in her sinister underwater lair begins to melt, "as ice melts / when the Father eases the fetters off the frost / and unravels the water-ropes, He who wields power."

The poetic diction, formulaic phrases, and repetitions of parallel syntactic structures, which are determined by the versification, are difficult to reproduce in modern translation. A few features may be anticipated here and studied in the text of Cædmon's *Hymn*, printed below ([pp. 31–33](#)) with interlinear translation.

Poetic language is created out of a special vocabulary that contains a multiplicity of terms for *lord*, *warrior*, *spear*, *shield*, and so on. Synecdoche and metonymy are common figures of speech, as when "keel" is used for *ship* or "iron" for *sword*. A particularly striking effect is achieved by the kenning, a compound of two words in place of another as when *sea* becomes "whale-road" or *body* is called "life-house." The figurative use of language finds playful expression in poetic riddles, of which about one hundred survive. Common (and sometimes uncommon) creatures, objects, or phenomena are described in an enigmatic passage of alliterative verse, and the reader must guess their identity. Sometimes they are personified and ask, "What is my name?"

Because special vocabulary and compounds are among the chief poetic effects, the verse is constructed in such a way as to show off such terms by creating a series of them in apposition. In the second sentence of Cædmon's *Hymn*, for example, God is referred to five times appositively as "he," "holy Creator," "mankind's Guardian," "eternal Lord," and "Master almighty." This use of parallel and appositive expressions, known as *variation*, gives the verse a highly structured and musical quality.

The overall effect of the language is to formalize and elevate speech. Instead of being straightforward, it moves at a slow and stately pace with steady indirection. A favorite mode of this

indirection is irony. A grim irony pervades heroic poetry even at the level of diction, where *fighting* is called “battle-play.” A favorite device, known by the rhetorical term *litotes*, is ironic understatement. After the monster Grendel has slaughtered the Danes in the great hall Heorot, it stands deserted. The poet observes, “It was easy then to meet with a man / shifting himself to a safer distance.”

More than a figure of thought, irony is also a mode of perception in Old English poetry. In a famous passage, the Wanderer articulates the theme of *Ubi sunt?* (where are they now?): “Where did the steed go? Where the young warrior? Where the treasure-giver? . . .” *Beowulf* is full of ironic balances and contrasts—between the aged Danish king and the youthful Beowulf, and between Beowulf, the high-spirited young warrior at the beginning, and Beowulf, the gray-haired king at the end, facing the dragon and death.

The formal and dignified speech of Old English poetry was always distant from the everyday language of the people, and this poetic idiom remained remarkably uniform throughout the roughly three hundred years that separate Cædmon’s *Hymn* from *The Battle of Maldon*. This clinging to old forms—grammatical and orthographic as well as literary—by the early medieval church and aristocracy conceals from us the enormous changes that were taking place in the English language and the diversity of its dialects. The dramatic changes between Old and Middle English did not happen overnight or over the course of a single century. The Normans displaced the English ruling class with their own barons and clerics, whose native language was a dialect of Old French that we call Anglo-Norman. Without a ruling literate class to preserve English traditions, the custom of transcribing vernacular texts in an earlier form of the West-Saxon dialect was abandoned, and both language and literature were allowed to develop unchecked in new directions.



# LITERATURE OF THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

The Normans, who took possession of England after the decisive Battle of Hastings (1066), were, like the Saxons and Angles, descendants of Germanic adventurers, who at the beginning of the tenth century had seized a wide part of northern France. Their name is actually a contraction of "Norsemen." A highly adaptable people, they had adopted the French language of the land they had settled in and its Christian religion. Both in Normandy and in Britain they were great builders of castles, with which they enforced their political dominance, and magnificent churches. Norman bishops, who held land and castles like the barons, wielded both political and spiritual authority. The earlier Norman kings of England, however, were often absentee rulers, as much concerned with defending their Continental possessions as with ruling over their English holdings. The English Crown's French territories were enormously increased in 1154 when Henry II, the first of England's Plantagenet kings, ascended the throne. Through his marriage with Eleanor of Aquitaine, the divorced wife of Louis VII of France, Henry had acquired vast provinces in the southwest of France. (See map, The Angevin Empire, [p. 138](#).) Norman rule also saw English involvement in the Crusades and the development of substantial Jewish communities in England. Though encouraged by the Crown to immigrate, Jews faced violence and, in 1290, expulsion.



**King Harold Fatally Struck in the Eye.** Bayeux Tapestry, textile, ca. 1070–80. The decisive historical moment is captured as Harold falls victim to horizontal attack. Note the dead being stripped of their armor, at the bottom.

Inevitably, there was also literary intercourse among the different languages. The Latin Bible and Latin saints' lives provided subjects for a great deal of Old English as well as Old French poetry and prose. The first medieval drama in the vernacular, *The Play of Adam*, with elaborate stage directions in Latin and realistic dialogue in the Anglo-Norman dialect of French, was probably produced in England during the twelfth century.

The Anglo-Norman aristocracy was especially attracted to Celtic legends and tales that had been circulating orally for centuries. The twelfth-century poets Thomas of England, Marie de France, and Chrétien de Troyes each claims to have obtained their narratives from Breton storytellers, who were probably bilingual performers of native tales for French audiences. *Sir Orfeo* may represent the kind

of lay that served as a model for Marie. "Breton" may indicate that they came from Brittany, or it may have been a generic term for a Celtic bard. Marie speaks respectfully of the storytellers, while Thomas expresses caution about their tendency to vary narratives; Chrétien accuses them of marring their material, which, he boasts, he has retold with an elegant fusion of form and meaning. Marie wrote a series of short romances, which she refers to as "lays" originally told by Bretons. Her versions are the most original and sophisticated examples of the genre that came to be known as the Breton lay, represented here by Marie's *Milun*, *Lanval*, *Laüstic*, *Chevrefoil*, and *Bisclavret*. It is very likely that Henry II is the "noble king" to whom she dedicated her lays and that they were written for his court. Thomas composed a moving, almost operatic version of the adulterous passion of Tristan and Ysolt, very different from the powerful version of the same story by Beroul, also composed in the last half of the twelfth century. Chrétien is the principal creator of the romance of chivalry in which knightly adventures are a means of exploring psychological and ethical dilemmas that the knights must solve, in addition to displaying martial prowess in saving ladies from monsters, giants, and wicked knights. Chrétien, like Marie, is thought to have spent time in England at the court of Henry II.

Thomas, Marie, and Chrétien de Troyes were innovators of the genre that has become known as "romance." The word *roman* was initially applied in French to a work written in the French vernacular. Thus the twelfth-century *Roman de Troie* is a long poem in French about the Trojan War. While this work deals mainly with the siege of Troy, it also includes stories about the love of Troilus for Cressida and of Achilles for the Trojan princess Polyxena. Eventually, "romance" acquired the generic associations it has for us as a story about love and adventure.

Romance was the principal narrative genre for late medieval readers. Insofar as it was centrally concerned with love, it developed ways of representing psychological interiority with great subtlety. That subtlety itself provoked a subgenre of questions about love. Thus in the late twelfth century, Andreas Capellanus (Andrew the Chaplain) wrote a Latin treatise, the title of which may be translated

*The Art of Loving Correctly* [*Honeste*]. In one part, Eleanor of Aquitaine, her daughter, the countess Marie de Champagne, and other noble women are cited as a supreme court rendering decisions on difficult questions of love—for example, whether there is greater passion between lovers or between married couples. Whether such “courts of love” were purely imaginary or whether they represent some actual court entertainment, they imply that the literary taste and judgment of women had a significant role in fostering the rise of romance in France and Anglo-Norman England.

In Marie’s *Lanval* and in Chrétien’s romances, the court of King Arthur had already acquired for French audiences a reputation as the most famous center of chivalry. That eminence is owing in large measure to a remarkable book in Latin, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, completed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, ca. 1136–38. Geoffrey claimed to have based his “history” on a book in the British tongue (Welsh), but no one has ever found such a book. He drew on a few earlier Latin chronicles, but the bulk of his history was probably fabricated from Celtic oral tradition, his familiarity with Roman history and literature, and his own fertile imagination. The climax of the book is the reign of King Arthur, who defeats the Roman armies but is forced to turn back to Britain to counter the treachery of his nephew Mordred. In 1155 Geoffrey’s Latin was rendered into French rhyme by an Anglo-Norman poet called Wace, and fifty or so years later Wace’s poem was turned by Layamon, an English priest, into a much longer poem that combines English alliterative verse with sporadic rhyme.

Layamon’s work is one of many instances where English receives new material directly through French sources, which may in turn have been drawn from Celtic or Latin sources. There are two Middle English versions of Marie’s *Lanval*; the English romance *Yvain and Gawain* and the Welsh romance *The Lady of the Fountain* (in this anthology) are both slightly simplified versions of Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier au Lion* (The Knight of the Lion). A marvelous English lay, *Sir Orfeo*, is a version of the Orpheus story in which Orpheus succeeds in rescuing his wife from the other world, for which a French original, if there was one, has never been found. Romance,

stripped of its courtly, psychological, and ethical subtleties, had an immense popular appeal for English readers and listeners. Many of these romances are simplified adaptations of more aristocratic French poems and recount in a rollicking and rambling style the adventures of heroes like Guy of Warwick, a poor steward who must prove his knightly worth to win the love of Fair Phyllis. The ethos of many romances, aristocratic and popular alike, involves a knight proving his worthiness through nobility of character and brave deeds rather than through high birth. In this respect romances reflect the aspirations of a lower order of the nobility to rise in the world, as historically some of these nobles indeed did. William the Marshall, for example, the fourth son of a baron of middle rank, used his talents in war and in tournaments to become tutor to the oldest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. He married a great heiress and became one of the most powerful nobles in England and the subject of a verse biography in French, which often reads like a romance.

Of course, not all writing in Early Middle English depends on French sources or intermediaries. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* continued to be written at the monastery of Peterborough. It is an invaluable witness for the changes taking place in the English language and allows us to see Norman rule from an English point of view. *The Owl and the Nightingale* (late twelfth century) is a witty and entertaining poem in which these two female birds engage in a fierce debate about the benefits their singing brings to humankind. The owl grimly reminds her rival of the sinfulness of the human condition, which her mournful song is intended to amend; the nightingale sings about the pleasures of life and love when lord and lady are in bed together. The poet, who was certainly a cleric, is well aware of the fashionable new romance literature; he specifically has the nightingale allude to Marie de France's lay *Laüstic*, the Breton word, she says, for "rossignol" in French and "nightingale" in English. The poet does not side with either bird; rather he has amusingly created the sort of dialectic between the discourses of religion and romance that is carried on throughout medieval literature. Selections from *The Owl and the Nightingale* are presented in the anthology, below.

There is also a body of Early Middle English religious prose aimed at women. Three saints' lives celebrate the heroic combats of virgin martyrs who suffer dismemberment and death; a tract titled *Holy Maidenhead* paints the woes of marriage not from the point of view of the husband, as in standard medieval antifeminist writings, but from that of the wife. Related to these texts, named the Katherine Group after one of the virgin martyrs, is a religious work also written for women but in a very different spirit. The *Ancrene Wisse* (Guide for Anchoresses) is one of the finest works of English religious prose in any period. It is a manual of instruction written at the request of three sisters who have chosen to live as religious recluses. The author, who may have been their personal confessor, addresses them with affection, and, at times, with kindness and humor. He is also profoundly serious in his analyses of sin, penance, and love. In the selection included here from his chapter on penance, he imagines the enclosed life in richly metaphorical ways, mixing pleasure strangely with pain.

# LITERATURE OF THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

The styles of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *Ancrene Wisse* show that around the year 1200 both poetry and prose were being written for sophisticated and well-educated readers whose primary language was English. Throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, there are many kinds of evidence that although French continued to be the principal language of Parliament, law, business, and high culture, English was gaining ground. Several authors of religious and didactic works in English state that they are writing for the benefit of those who do not understand Latin or French.

Anthologies were made of miscellaneous works adapted from French for English readers and original pieces in English. Most of the nobility were by now bilingual, and the author of an English romance written early in the fourteenth century declares that he has seen many nobles who cannot speak French. Children of the nobility and the merchant class were now learning French as a second language. By the 1360s the linguistic, political, and cultural climate had been prepared for the flowering of Middle English literature in the writings of Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the *Gawain* poet.

## ***The Fourteenth Century***

War and disease were prevalent throughout the Middle Ages but never more devastatingly than during the fourteenth century. In the wars against France, the gains of two spectacular English victories, at Crécy in 1346 and Poitiers in 1356, were gradually frittered away in futile campaigns that ravaged the French countryside without obtaining any clear advantage for the English. In 1348 the first and most virulent epidemic of the bubonic plague—the Black Death—swept Europe, wiping out a quarter to a third of the population. The toll was higher in crowded urban centers. Giovanni Boccaccio's description of the plague in Florence, with which he introduces the



*Decameron*, vividly portrays its ravages: "So many corpses would arrive in front of a church every day and at every hour that the amount of holy ground for burials was certainly insufficient for the ancient custom of giving each body its individual place; when all the graves were full, huge trenches were dug in all of the cemeteries of the churches and into them the new arrivals were dumped by the hundreds; and they were packed in there with dirt, one on top of another, like a ship's cargo, until the trench was filled." The resulting scarcity of labor and a sudden expansion of the possibilities for social mobility fostered popular discontent. In 1381 attempts to enforce wage controls and to collect oppressive new taxes provoked a rural uprising in Essex and Kent that dealt a profound shock to the English ruling class. The participants were for the most part tenant farmers, day laborers, apprentices, and rural workers not attached to the big manors. A few of the lower clergy sided with the rebels against their wealthy church superiors; the priest John Ball was among the leaders. The movement was quickly suppressed, but not before sympathizers in London had admitted the rebels through two city gates, which had been barred against them. The insurgents burned down the palace of the hated duke of Lancaster, and they summarily beheaded the archbishop of Canterbury and the treasurer of England, who had taken refuge in the Tower of London. The Church had become the target of popular resentment because it was among the greatest of the oppressive landowners and because of the wealth, worldliness, and venality of many of the higher clergy.





**The City.** Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Good Government in the City*, 1338–39. The extraordinary energies of urban culture are set in a dynamic relation of peace and competition: the external walls of the city protect against outside invasion, even as the skyscrapers compete for space and power within the city. For more information about this image, See the Image Gallery for this volume.

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These calamities and upheavals nevertheless did not stem the growth of international trade and the influence of the merchant class. In the portrait of Chaucer's merchant, we see the budding of capitalism based on credit and interest. Cities like London ran their own affairs under politically powerful mayors and aldermen. Edward III, chronically in need of money to finance his wars, was obliged to negotiate for revenues with the Commons in the English Parliament, an institution that became a major political force during this period. A large part of the king's revenues depended on taxing the profitable export of English wool to the Continent. The Crown thus became involved in the country's economic affairs, and this involvement led to a need for capable administrators. These were no longer drawn mainly from the Church, as in the past, but from a newly educated laity that occupied a rank somewhere between that of the lesser nobility and the upper bourgeoisie. The career of Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340–1400), who served Edward III and his successor Richard II in a number of civil posts, is typical of this class—with the exception that Chaucer was also a great poet.

In the fourteenth century, a few poets and intellectuals achieved the status and respect formerly accorded only to the ancients. Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes had dedicated their works to noble patrons and, in their role as narrators, address themselves as entertainers and sometimes as instructors to court audiences. Dante (1265–1321) made himself the protagonist of *The Divine Comedy*, the sacred poem, as he called it, in which he revealed the secrets of the afterlife. After his death, manuscripts of the work were provided with lengthy commentaries as though it were scripture, and public

readings and lectures were devoted to it. Francis Petrarch (1304–1374) won an international reputation as a man of letters. He wrote primarily in Latin and contrived to have himself crowned “poet laureate” in emulation of the Roman poets whose works he imitated, but his most famous work is the sonnet sequence he wrote in Italian. Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) was among Petrarch’s most ardent admirers and carried on a literary correspondence with him.

Chaucer read these authors along with the ancient Roman poets and drew on them in his own works. Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale* is based on a Latin version Petrarch made from the last tale in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*; in his prologue, the Clerk refers to Petrarch as “lauriat poete” whose sweet rhetoric illuminated all Italy with his poetry. Yet in his own time, the English poet Chaucer never attained the kind of laurels that he and others accorded to Petrarch. In his earlier works, Chaucer portrayed himself comically as a diligent reader of old books, as an aspiring apprentice writer, and as an eager spectator on the fringe of a fashionable world of courtiers and poets. In *The House of Fame*, he relates a dream of being snatched up by a huge golden eagle (the eagle and many other things in this work were inspired by Dante) that transports him to the palace of the goddess Fame. There he gets to see phantoms, like the shades in Dante’s poem, of all the famous authors of antiquity. At the end of his romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer asks his “litel book” to kiss the footsteps where the great ancient poets had passed before. Like Dante and Petrarch, Chaucer had an ideal of great poetry and, in his *Troilus* at least, strove to emulate it. But in *The House of Fame* and in his final work, *The Canterbury Tales*, he also views that ideal ironically and distances himself from it. The many surviving documents that record Geoffrey Chaucer’s career as a civil servant do not contain a single word to show that he was also a poet. Only in the following centuries would he be canonized as the father of English poetry.

Chaucer is unlikely to have known his contemporary William Langland (ca. 1330–1388), who says in an autobiographical passage (see [pp. 409–11](#)), added to the third and last version of his great poem *Piers Plowman*, that he lived in London on Cornhill (a poor

area of the city) among “lollers.” “Loller” was a slang term for the unemployed and transients; it was later applied to followers of the religious and social reformer John Wycliffe, some of whom were burned at the stake for heresy in the next century. Langland assailed corruption in church and state, but he was certainly no radical. It is thought that he may have written the third version of *Piers Plowman*, which tones down his attacks on the Church, after the rebels of 1381 invoked Piers as one of their own. Although Langland does not condone rebellion and his religion is not revolutionary, he nevertheless presents the most clear-sighted vision of social and religious issues in the England of his day. *Piers Plowman* is also a painfully honest search for the right way that leads to salvation. Though learned himself, Langland and the dreamer who represents him in the poem arrive at the insight that learning can be one of the chief obstacles on that way.

Langland came from the west of England, and his poem belongs to the “Alliterative Revival,” a final flowering in the late fourteenth century of the verse form that goes all the way back to pre-Conquest England. Early medieval traditions held out longest in the west and north, away from London, where Chaucer and his audience were more open to literary fashions from the Continent.

John Gower (ca. 1330–1408) is a third major late fourteenth-century English poet. While his first and second large works are written in French and Latin verse respectively, his *Confessio Amantis* (1390) is written in English four-stress couplets. Gower’s first two works are severe satires; the *Confessio*, by contrast, broaches political and ethical issues from an oblique angle. Its primary narrative concerns the treatment of a suffering lover. His therapy consists of listening to, and understanding, many other narratives, many of which are drawn from classical sources. Like Chaucer, Gower anglicizes and absorbs classical Latin literature.

Admiration for the poetry of both Chaucer and Gower and the controversial nature of Langland’s writing ensured the survival of their work in many manuscripts. The work of a fourth major fourteenth-century English poet, who remains anonymous, is known

only through a single manuscript, which contains four poems all thought to be by a single author: *Cleanness* and *Patience*, two biblical narratives in alliterative verse; *Pearl*, a moving dream vision in which a grief-stricken father is visited and consoled by his dead child, who has been transformed into a queen in the kingdom of heaven; and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the finest of all English romances. The plot of *Gawain* involves a folklore motif of a challenge by a supernatural visitor, first found in an Old Irish tale. The poet has made this motif a challenge to King Arthur's court and has framed the tale with allusions at the beginning and end to the legends that link Arthur's reign with the Trojan War and the founding of Rome and of Britain. The poet has a sophisticated awareness of romance as a literary genre and plays a game with both the hero's and the reader's expectations of what is supposed to happen in a romance. One could say that the broader subject of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is "romance" itself, and in this respect the poem resembles Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in its author's interest in literary form.

Julian of Norwich (ca. 1342–ca. 1416) is a fifth major writer of this period. The first known woman writer in the English vernacular, the anchoress Julian participates in a Continental tradition of visionary writings, often by women. She spent a good deal of her life meditating and writing about a series of visions, which she called "showings," that she had received in 1373, when she was thirty years old. While very carefully negotiating the dangers of writing as a woman, and of writing sophisticated theology in the vernacular, Julian manages to produce visionary writing that is at once penetrating and serene.

### ***The Fifteenth Century***

In 1399 Henry Bolingbroke, the Duke of Lancaster, deposed his cousin Richard II, who was murdered in prison. As Henry IV, he successfully defended his crown against several insurrections and passed it on to Henry V, who briefly united the country once more and achieved one last apparently decisive victory over the French at

the Battle of Agincourt (1415). The premature death of Henry V in 1422, however, left England exposed to the civil wars known as the Wars of the Roses, the red rose being the emblem of the house of Lancaster; the white, of York. These wars did not end until 1485, when the Lancastrian Henry Tudor defeated the Yorkist Richard III at Bosworth Field and acceded to the throne as Henry VII.

The most prolific poet of the fifteenth century was the monk John Lydgate (ca. 1371–1449), who produced dream visions; a life of the Virgin; translations of French religious allegories; a *Troy Book*; *The Siege of Thebes*, which he framed as a “new” Canterbury tale; and a thirty-six-thousand-line poem called *The Fall of Princes*, a free translation of a French work, itself based on a Latin work by Boccaccio. The last illustrates the late medieval idea of tragedy, namely that emperors, kings, and other famous men enjoy power and fortune only to be cast down in misery. Lydgate shapes these tales as a “mirror” for princes—that is, as object lessons to the powerful men of his own day, several of whom were his patrons. A self-styled imitator of Chaucer, Lydgate had a reputation almost equal to Chaucer’s in the fifteenth century. The other significant poet of the first half of the fifteenth century is Thomas Hoccleve (ca. 1367–1426). Like Lydgate, Hoccleve also wrote for powerful Lancastrian patrons, but his poetry is strikingly private, painfully concerned as it often is with his penury and mental instability. The searing poem *My Complaint* is an example of his work.

Religious works of all kinds continued to be produced in the fifteenth century, but under greater surveillance. The Lancastrian authorities responded to the reformist religious movement known as “Lollardy” in draconian ways. They introduced a statute for the burning of heretics (the first such statute) in 1401, and a series of measures designed to survey and censor theology in English in 1409. Despite this, many writers continued to produce religious works in the vernacular. Perhaps the most remarkable of these writers is Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–ca. 1438). Kempe made pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Rome, Santiago, and to shrines in northern Europe; she also visited Julian of Norwich in about 1413. These journeys she records, in the context of her often fraught and painful personal life,

in her *Book of Margery Kempe*. Both Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, in highly individual ways, enable us to see the medieval church and its doctrines from female points of view.





**The Seasons.** Limbourg Brothers, "February," *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (ca. 1411–16). The calm inevitability of cosmic, seasonal change is set above the uncertain yet inventive struggle of peasants, in the main frame, for heat and food. (See the Image Gallery for this volume.)

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Social, economic, and literary life continued as they had throughout all of the previously mentioned wars. The prosperity of the towns was shown by performances of the mystery plays—a sequence or "cycle" of plays based on the Bible and produced by the city guilds, the organizations representing the various trades and crafts. The cycles of several towns are lost, but those of York and Chester have been preserved, along with two other complete cycles, one possibly from Wakefield in Yorkshire, and the other titled the "N-Town" Cycle. Under the guise of dramatizing biblical history, playwrights such as the Wakefield Master manage to comment satirically on the social ills of the times. The century also saw the development of the morality play, in which personified vices and virtues struggle for the soul of "Mankind" or "Everyman." Performed by professional players, the morality plays were precursors of the professional theater that flourished in the reign of Elizabeth I.

The best of Chaucer's imitators was Robert Henryson (ca. 1425–ca. 1500), who, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, wrote *The Testament of Cresseid*, a continuation of Chaucer's great poem *Troilus and Criseyde*. He also wrote the *Moral Fabillis of Esope*, among which is *The Cock and the Fox*, a remake of Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

The works of Sir Thomas Malory (ca. 1415–1471) gave the definitive form in English to the legend of King Arthur and his knights. Malory spent years in prison rendering into English a series of Arthurian romances that he translated and abridged chiefly from several enormously long thirteenth-century French prose romances. Malory was a passionate devotee of chivalry, which he personified in his hero Sir Lancelot. In the jealousies and rivalries that finally break up the Round Table and destroy Arthur's kingdom, Malory saw a



distant image of the civil wars of his own time. A manuscript of Malory's works fell into the hands of William Caxton (ca. 1422–1492), who had introduced the new art of printing by movable type to England in 1476. Caxton divided Malory's tales into the chapters and books of a single long work, as though it were a chronicle history, and gave it the title *Morte Darthur*, which has stuck to it ever since. Caxton also printed *The Canterbury Tales*, some of Chaucer's earlier works, and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Caxton himself translated many of the works he printed for English readers: a history of Troy, a book on chivalry, Aesop's fables, *The History of Reynard the Fox*, and *The Game and Playe of Chesse*. The new technology extended literacy and made books more easily accessible to new classes of readers. Printing made the production of literature a business and made possible the bitter political and doctrinal disputes that, in the sixteenth century, were waged in print as well as on the field of battle.

# MEDIEVAL ENGLISHES

The medieval works in this anthology were composed in different states of the language. Old English, the language that took shape among the Germanic settlers of England, preserved its integrity until the Norman Conquest radically altered English civilization. Middle English, the first records of which date from the early twelfth century, was continually changing. Shortly after the introduction of printing at the end of the fifteenth century, it attained the form designated as Early Modern English. Old English is a very heavily inflected language. (That is, the words change form to indicate changes in function, such as person, number, tense, case, mood, and so on. Most languages have some inflection—for example, the personal pronouns in Modern English have different forms when used as objects—but a “heavily inflected” language, such as Greek or Latin, is one in which almost all classes of words undergo elaborate patterns of change.) The vocabulary of Old English is almost entirely Germanic. In Middle English, the inflectional system was weakened, and a large number of words were introduced into it from French, so that many of the Old English words disappeared. Because of the difficulty of Old English, all selections from it in this book have been given in translation. So that the reader may see an example of the language, Cædmon’s *Hymn* has been printed in the original, together with an interlinear translation. The present discussion, then, is concerned primarily with the relatively late form of Middle English used by Chaucer and the East Midland dialect in which he wrote.

The chief difficulty with Middle English for the modern reader is caused not by its inflections so much as by its spelling, which may be described as a rough-and-ready phonetic system, and by the fact that it is not a single standardized language but consists of a number of regional dialects, each with its own peculiarities of sound and its own systems for representing sounds in writing. The East Midland dialect—the dialect of London and of Chaucer, which is the

ancestor of our own standard speech—differs greatly from the dialect spoken in the west of England (the original dialect of *Piers Plowman*), from that of the northwest (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), and from that of the north (*The Second Shepherds' Play*). In this book, the long texts composed in the more difficult dialects have been translated or modernized, and those that—like Chaucer, Gower, *Everyman*, and the lyrics—appear in the original, have been respelled in a way that is designed to aid the reader. The remarks that follow apply to Chaucer's East Midland English. Chaucer's texts are, with a little patience, readily accessible to readers of Modern English. The best way to absorb Chaucer's language is to read it slowly; to hear it in the inner ear; and to note grammatical distinctions, particularly in verb formation and in pronouns. The spelling of all Chaucer's texts has been modernized to maximize intelligibility.

### ***The Sounds of Middle English: General Rules***

The following general analysis of the sounds of Middle English will enable the reader who does not have time for detailed study to read Middle English aloud and preserve some of its most essential characteristics, without, however, worrying too much about details.

Middle English differs from Modern English in three principal respects: (1) the pronunciation of the long vowels *a*, *e*, *i* (or *y*), *o*, and *u* (spelled *ou*, *ow*); (2) the fact that Middle English final *e* is often sounded; and (3) the fact that all Middle English consonants are sounded.

#### **1. LONG VOWELS**

Middle English vowels are long when they are doubled (*aa*, *ee*, *oo*) or when they are terminal (*he*, *to*, *holy*); *a*, *e*, and *o* are long when followed by a single consonant plus a vowel (*name*, *mete*, *note*). Middle English vowels are short when they are followed by two consonants.

Long *a* is sounded like the *a* in Modern English "father": *maken*, *madd*.

Long *e* may be sounded like the *a* in Modern English “name” (ignoring the distinction between the close and open vowel): *be*, *sweete*.

Long *i* (or *y*) is sounded like the *i* in Modern English “machine”: *lif*, *whit*, *myn*, *holy*.

Long *o* may be sounded like the *o* in Modern English “note” (again ignoring the distinction between the close and open vowel): *do*, *soone*.

Long *u* (spelled *ou*, *ow*) is sounded like the *oo* in Modern English “goose”: *hous*, *flowr*.

Note that in general Middle English long vowels are pronounced like long vowels in modern European languages other than English. Short vowels and diphthongs, however, may be pronounced as in Modern English.

## **2. FINAL E**

In Middle English syllabic verse, final *e* is sounded, like the *a* in “sofa,” to provide a needed unstressed syllable: *Another Nonnë with hire haddë she*. But (see *hire* in the example) final *e* is suppressed when not needed for the meter. It is commonly silent before words beginning with a vowel or *h*.

## **3. CONSONANTS**

Middle English consonants are pronounced separately in all combinations—*gnat*: *g-nat*; *knave*: *k-nave*; *write*: *w-rite*; *folk*: *fol-k*. In a simplified system of pronunciation the combination *gh* as in *night* or *thought* may be treated as if it were silent.

# THE METERS OF OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

All the poetry of Old English is in the same verse form. The verse unit is the single line, because rhyme was not used to link one line to another, except very occasionally in late Old English. The organizing device of the line is alliteration, the beginning of several words with the same sound ("Foemen fled"). The Old English alliterative line contains, on the average, four principal stresses and is divided into two half-lines of two stresses each by a strong medial caesura, or pause. These two half-lines are linked to each other by alliteration; at least one of the two stressed words in the first half-line, and often both of them, begin with the same sound as the first stressed word of the second half-line (the second stressed word is generally nonalliterative). The fourth line of *Beowulf* is an example (*sc* has the value of modern *sh*; *þ* is a runic symbol with the value of modern *th*):

Oft Scyld Scefing      sceapena þreatum.

For further examples, see Cædmon's *Hymn*. It will be noticed that any vowel alliterates with any other vowel. In addition to the alliteration, the length of the unstressed syllables and their number and pattern is governed by a highly complex set of rules. When sung or intoned—as it was—to the rhythmic strumming of a harp, Old English poetry must have been wonderfully impressive in the dignified, highly formalized way that aptly fits both its subject matter and tone.

The majority of Middle English verse is either in alternately stressed rhyming verse, adapted from French after the Conquest, or in alliterative verse that is descended from Old English. The latter preserves the caesura of Old English and in its purest form the same alliterative system, the two stressed words of the first half-line (or at

least one of them) alliterating with the first stressed word in the second half-line. But most of the alliterative poets allowed themselves a number of deviations from the norm. All four stressed words may alliterate, as in the first line of *Piers Plowman*:

In a summer season        when soft was the sun.

Or the line may contain five, six, or even more stressed words, of which all or only the basic minimum may alliterate:

A fair field full of        folk found I there between.

There is no rule determining the number of unstressed syllables, and at times some poets seem to ignore alliteration entirely. As in Old English, any vowel may alliterate with any other vowel; furthermore, since initial *h* was silent or lightly pronounced in Middle English, words beginning with *h* are treated as though they began with the following vowel.

There are two general types of stressed verse with rhyme. In the more common, unstressed and stressed syllables alternate regularly, as x X x X x X; or with two unstressed syllables intervening, as x x X x x X; or a combination of the two, as x x X x X x x X (of the reverse patterns, only X x X x X x is common in English). There is also a line that can only be defined as containing a predetermined number of stressed syllables but an irregular number and pattern of unstressed syllables. Much Middle English verse has to be read without expectation of regularity; some of this was evidently composed in an irregular meter, but some was probably originally composed according to a strict metrical system that has been obliterated by scribes careless of fine points. One receives the impression that many of the lyrics—as well as the *Second Shepherds' Play*—were at least composed with regular syllabic alternation. In the play *Everyman*, only the number of stresses is generally predetermined but not the number or placement of unstressed syllables.

In pre-Chaucerian verse the number of stresses, whether regularly or irregularly alternated, was most often four, although sometimes the number was three and rose in some poems to seven. Rhyme in Middle English (as in Modern English) may be either between adjacent or alternate lines, or may occur in more complex patterns. Most of the *Canterbury Tales* are in rhymed couplets, the line containing five stresses with regular alternation—technically known as iambic pentameter, the standard English poetic line, perhaps introduced into English by Chaucer. In reading Chaucer and much pre-Chaucerian verse, one must remember that the final *e*, which is silent in Modern English, could be pronounced at any time to provide a needed unstressed syllable. Evidence seems to indicate that it was also pronounced at the end of the line, even though it thus produced a line with eleven syllables. Although he was a very regular metricist, Chaucer used various conventional devices that are apt to make the reader stumble until he or she understands them. Final *e* is often not pronounced before a word beginning with a vowel or *h*, and may be suppressed whenever metrically convenient. The same medial and terminal syllables that are slurred in Modern English are apt to be suppressed in Chaucer's English: *Canterb'ry* for *Canterbury*; *ev'r* (perhaps *e'er*) for *evere*. The plural in *es* may either be syllabic or reduced to *s* as in Modern English. Despite these seeming irregularities, Chaucer's verse is not difficult to read if one constantly bears in mind the basic pattern of the iambic pentameter line.

# THE CANON OF OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

By “canon” of literature, we mean the set of texts that is regarded as the most important to be read, both in educational institutions and in a given culture more generally. Literature and canons of literature are formed differently. Gifted writers work from their own circumstances to project literature into the future. Canons of literature, by contrast, are produced by reflection on the past: What pasts, and what texts from those pasts, are most important to be read now? What set of texts tells us who we are? Those questions obviously embed questions of cultural authority: Who defines the past? How do we define “importance”? Who are “we”?

Such questions point to the adventure of canon formation; canons are not at all stable. As answers to these questions change, so too do canons change.

The canon of “Old and Middle English Literature” is a relatively recent, later nineteenth-century phenomenon. Between the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, religion was the driver of canon formation, and religion kept Old English apart from Middle English. Study of Old English writing began from the sixteenth century, in the effort to prove that a largely autonomous English Church—the “primitive Church”—with its vernacular scriptures, preexisted the domination of the Roman Church, with its Latin Scriptures, from the late twelfth century. The principal interests of this movement were to find evidence of a pre-Norman church relatively untouched by Roman “traditions,” and vernacular scriptures in prose. There was no interest in, or knowledge of, Old English poetic literature (the first transcription of *Beowulf* dates only from 1786).

This ecclesiological interest in Old English has its correlative lack of interest in Middle English. Sixteenth-century evangelical reformers thought that the power of the Roman Church was at its height



between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. Apart, then, from sixteenth-century editions of secular works by Lydgate and Gower, and the continuous printing of editions of Chaucer's works, there was no canon of Middle English literary texts until the late eighteenth century. All but the first of the editions of the works of Chaucer printed in 1532, 1542, 1550, 1561, 1598, 1602, 1687, and 1721 presented him as a proto-Protestant.

Once, however, the possibility of a Catholic monarch on the English throne was definitively neutralized in 1745–48 (the failed Jacobite Rebellion), English scholars began to look seriously for the first time at Middle English writing. Thus in 1774–81 Thomas Warton produced his brilliant *History of English Poetry*, where for the first time we have a history of specifically "literary" discourse, aiming to cover the period from the Norman Conquest to the end of the seventeenth century.

Old English and Middle English began to converge as a canon under the influence of nationalist philology, which began in Germany in the early nineteenth century. As different nations sought to define their distinctive qualities, so too they formed canons of vernacular literature. In Britain this meant canons of literature written in forms of English itself. The movement was in the first instance principally philological: many of the texts we recognize as part of the canon were first edited in order to feed the making of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which began in 1857.

The combined effect of philology, nationalism, and greater religious tolerance, along with the formation of a discursive category of "literature," thus produced the conditions for canon formation of "English literature." Old and Middle English were a significant part of this formation, particularly from the late nineteenth century, when university departments of English literature, which needed curricula and a canon, began in both Britain and the United States.

Since the early twentieth century, the canon has undergone significant reformations under the influence of powerful cultural movements. Thus from the 1970s feminism ushered English women writers (for example, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe) into the

canon of vernacular English literature; and from the 1980s the greater Europeanization of English culture (now challenged by Brexit) opened the canon of non-English-language insular writing in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Celtic literatures. Used across the twentieth century as a descriptor for a scholarly field, the term “Anglo-Saxon” itself has undergone a significant reformation: scholars have recently tended to avoid the term on account of its longer and more tendentiously nationalist usage.

# THE MIDDLE AGES

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<p><b>43–ca. 420</b> Romans conquer Britons; Britannia a province of the Roman Empire</p> <p><b>312–80</b> Acceptance of Christianity in Roman Empire, beginning with conversion of Constantine the Great (312), culminating in its adoption as state religion (380)</p>
<p><b>ca. 405</b> St. Jerome completes the <i>Vulgate</i>, a Latin translation of the Bible that becomes standard for the Roman Catholic Church</p>	
	<p><b>432</b> St. Patrick begins mission to convert Ireland</p>
	<p><b>ca. 450</b> Angles' and Saxons' conquest of Britons begins</p>
<p><b>523</b> Boethius, <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (Latin)</p>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>597</b> St. Augustine of Canterbury's mission to Kent begins re-conversion of English to Christianity
	<b>622–750</b> Spread of Islam through Middle East, North Africa, and Spain
<b>ca. 658–80</b> Caedmon's <i>Hymn</i> , earliest poem recorded in English	
<b>731</b> Bede completes <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> (Latin)	
<b>? ca. 750–850</b> <i>Beowulf</i> composed	
<b>ca. 787</b> First Viking raids on England	
<b>871–99</b> Texts written or commissioned by King Alfred	<b>871–99</b> Reign of King Alfred

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>ca. 1000</b> Unique manuscript of <i>Beowulf</i> and <i>Judith</i>	
	<b>1066</b> Norman Conquest by William I establishes French-speaking ruling class in England
	<b>1095–1099</b> First Crusade, European conquest of Jerusalem
<b>ca. 1135–38</b> Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin <i>History of the Kings of Britain</i> gives pseudo-historical status to Arthurian and other legends	
	<b>1152</b> Future Henry II marries Eleanor of Aquitaine, bringing vast French territories to the English Crown
<b>1154</b> Final entry in the <i>Peterborough Chronicle</i> , latest Old English historical record	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>ca. 1155–60</b> Thomas of England, <i>Le Roman de Tristan</i>	
<b>? ca. 1165–80</b> Marie de France, <i>Lais</i> , in Anglo-Norman French from Breton sources	
<b>ca. 1170–91</b> Chrétien de Troyes, chivalric romances about knights of the Round Table (French)	<b>1170</b> Archbishop Thomas Becket murdered in Canterbury Cathedral, the outcome of bitter struggle between Church and Crown
<b>ca. 1180</b> Clemence of Barking, <i>The Life of Saint Catherine</i>	<b>1187</b> Surrender of Jerusalem to Muslim forces
<b>late twelfth century</b> <i>The Owl and the Nightingale</i>	<b>1189–90</b> Anti-Semitic rioting in England, resulting in massacre of the entire Jewish community in York
<b>ca. 1200</b> Layamon's <i>Brut</i>	
	<b>1210</b> Founding of the Franciscan Order, led by St. Francis of Assisi

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>ca. 1215–25</b> <i>Ancrene Wisse</i>	
<b>fl. late thirteenth century</b> Meir of Norwich	<b>1290</b> Expulsion of Jews from England, by royal decree
<b>ca. 1300</b> <i>Sir Orfeo</i>	<b>1291</b> Fall of the city of Acre, ending Crusader presence in the Middle East
<b>ca. 1304–21</b> Dante Alighieri writing <i>Divine Comedy</i> (Italian)	
<b>ca. 1330–40</b> Production of Auchinleck Manuscript in London, containing the romance <i>King of Tars</i>	
<b>ca. 1340–74</b> Giovanni Boccaccio active as writer in Naples and Florence. Francis Petrarch active as writer	
	<b>1348–49</b> Black Death ravages Europe

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>ca. 1351–70</b> Composition of <i>Book of John Mandeville</i> , probably in Anglo-Norman French	
	<b>1362</b> English language first used in law courts and Parliament
<b>ca. 1369</b> Chaucer, first known work, <i>Book of the Duchess</i>	
	<b>1372</b> Chaucer's first journey to Italy
<b>1373–93</b> Julian of Norwich, <i>Book of Showings</i>	
<b>ca. 1375–1400</b> <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	
	<b>1376</b> Earliest record of performance of cycle drama at York



TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1377–79</b> William Langland, <i>Piers Plowman</i> (B-Text)	
<b>ca. 1380</b> Followers of John Wycliffe begin first complete translation of the Bible into English	
	<b>1381</b> People's uprising briefly takes control of London before being suppressed
<b>ca. 1387–99</b> Chaucer composing <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	
<b>ca. 1390–92</b> John Gower, <i>The Lover's Confession</i>	
	<b>1399</b> Richard II deposed by his cousin, who succeeds him as Henry IV
	<b>1400</b> Richard II murdered

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1401</b> Execution of William Sawtre, first Lollard burned at the stake under new law against heresy
<b>ca. 1410–49</b> John Lydgate active	
	<b>1415</b> Henry V defeats French at Agincourt
<b>ca. 1420</b> Thomas Hoccleve, <i>My Complaint</i>	
<b>ca. 1425</b> <i>York Play of the Crucifixion</i>	
	<b>1431</b> English burn Joan of Arc at Rouen
<b>ca. 1432–38</b> Margery Kempe, <i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>ca. 1450–75</b> Wakefield mystery cycle, <i>Second Shepherds' Play</i>	
	<b>1455–85</b> Wars of the Roses
<b>ca. 1470</b> Sir Thomas Malory in prison working on <i>Morte Darthur</i>	
<b>ca. 1475</b> Robert Henryson active	
	<b>1476</b> William Caxton sets up first printing press in England
<b>1485</b> Caxton publishes <i>Morte Darthur</i> , one of the first books in English to be printed	<b>1485</b> The Earl of Richmond defeats the Yorkist king, Richard III, at Bosworth Field and succeeds him as Henry VII, founder of the Tudor dynasty
<b>ca. 1510</b> <i>Everyman</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1575</b> Last performance of cycle plays at Chester

# **Literature of the Early Middle Ages (eighth to eleventh centuries)**

## **BEDE (ca. 673–735) and CÆDMON'S *HYMN***

The Venerable Bede (the title by which he is known to posterity) became a novice at the age of seven and spent the rest of his life at the twin monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. Although he may never have traveled beyond the boundaries of his native district of Northumbria, he achieved an international reputation as one of the greatest scholars of his age. Writing in Latin, the learned language of the era, Bede produced many theological works as well as books on science and rhetoric, but his most popular and enduring work is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed 731). The *History* relates the German conquest and the vicissitudes of the petty kingdoms that made up the England of the Saxons and Angles; Bede's main theme, however, is the spread of Christianity and the growth of the English Church. The latter were the great events leading up to Bede's own time, and he regarded them as the unfolding of God's providence. The *History* is, therefore, also a moral work and a hagiography—that is, it contains many stories of saints and miracles meant to testify to the grace and glory of God.

The story we reprint preserves what is probably the earliest extant Old English poem (composed sometime between 658 and 680) and the only biographical information, outside of what is said in the poems themselves, about any Old English poet. Bede tells how Cædmon, an illiterate cowherd employed by the monastery of Whitby, miraculously received the gift of song, entered the

monastery, and became the founder of a school of Christian poetry. Cædmon was clearly an oral-formulaic poet, one who created his work by combining and varying formulas—units of verse developed in a tradition transmitted by one generation of singers to another. In this respect he resembles the singers of the Homeric poems and oral-formulaic poets recorded in the twentieth century, especially in the Balkan countries. Although Bede tells us that Cædmon had never learned the art of song, we may suspect that he concealed his skill from his fellow workmen and from the monks because he was ashamed of knowing “vain and idle” songs, the kind Bede says Cædmon never composed. Cædmon’s inspiration and the true miracle, then, was to apply the meter and language of such songs, presumably including pagan heroic verse, to Christian themes.

Although most Old English poetry was written by lettered poets, they continued to use the oral-formulaic style. The *Hymn* is, therefore, a good short example of the way Old English verse, with its traditional poetic diction and interwoven formulaic expressions, is constructed. Eight of the poem’s eighteen half-lines contain epithets describing various aspects of God: He is *Weard* (Guardian), *Meotod* (Measurer), *Wuldor-Fæder* (Glory-Father), *Drihten* (Lord), *Scyppend* (Creator), and *Frea* (Master). God is *heofonrices Weard* or *mancynnes Weard* (heaven’s or mankind’s Guardian), depending on the alliteration required. This formulaic style provides a richness of texture and meaning difficult to convey in translation. As Bede said about his own Latin paraphrase of the *Hymn*, no literal translation of poetry from one language to another is possible without sacrifice of some poetic quality.

Several manuscripts of Bede’s *History* contain the Old English text in addition to Bede’s Latin version. The poem is given here in a West Saxon form with a literal interlinear translation. In Old English spelling, æ (as in Cædmon’s name and line 3) is a vowel symbol that represents the vowel of Modern English *cat*; þ (line 2) and ð (line 7) both represented the sound *th*. The spelling *sc* (line 1) = *sh*; *ġ* (line 1) = *y* in *yard*; *ċ* (line 1) = *ch* in *chin*; *c* (line 2) = *k*. The space in

the middle of the line indicates the caesura. The alliterating sounds that connect the half-lines are printed in bold italics.



# ***From An Ecclesiastical History of the English People***

## **[THE STORY OF CÆDMON]**

Heavenly grace had especially singled out a certain one of the brothers in the monastery ruled by this abbe<sup>1</sup>ss for he used to compose devout and religious songs. Whatever he learned of holy Scripture with the aid of interpreters, he quickly turned into the sweetest and most moving poetry in his own language, that is to say English. It often happened that his songs kindled a contempt for this world and a longing for the life of Heaven in the hearts of many men. Indeed, after him others among the English people tried to compose religious poetry, but no one could equal him because he was not taught the art of song by men or by human agency but received this gift through heavenly grace. Therefore, he was never able to compose any vain and idle songs but only such as dealt with religion and were proper for his religious tongue to utter. As a matter of fact, he had lived in the secular estate until he was well advanced in age without learning any songs. Therefore, at feasts, when it was decided to have a good time by taking turns singing, whenever he would see the harp getting close to his place,<sup>2</sup> he got up in the middle of the meal and went home.

Once when he left the feast like this, he went to the cattle shed, which he had been assigned the duty of guarding that night. And after he had stretched himself out and gone to sleep, he dreamed that someone was standing at his side and greeted him, calling out his name. "Cædmon," he said, "sing me something."

And he replied, "I don't know how to sing; that is why I left the feast to come here—because I cannot sing."

"All the same," said the one who was speaking to him, "you have to sing for me."

"What must I sing?" he said.

And he said, "Sing about the Creation."

At this, Cædmon immediately began to sing verses in praise of God the Creator, which he had never heard before and of which the sense is this:

Nu sculon **her**igean    **he**ofonriçes Weard  
Now we must praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian,

**Me**otodes **me**ahte    and his **mod**geþanc  
the Measurer's might and his mind-plans,

**we**orc **W**uldor-Fæder    swa he **w**undra geh**w**æs  
the work of the Glory-Father, when he of wonders of every  
one,

**e**çe Drihten    **or** **on**stealde  
eternal Lord, the beginning established.<sup>3</sup>

He **æ**rest sceop    **ie**lda<sup>4</sup> bearnum  
He first created for men's sons

**he**ofon to **h**rofe    **h**alið Scyppend  
heaven as a roof, holy Creator;

ða **m**iddangeard    **m**oncynnes Weard  
then middle-earth mankind's Guardian,

**e**çe Drihten    **æ**fter teode  
eternal Lord, afterwards made—

**f**irum **f**oldan    **F**rea ælmihtig  
for men earth, Master almighty.

This is the general sense but not the exact order of the words that he sang in his sleep;<sup>5</sup> for it is impossible to make a literal translation, no matter how well-written, of poetry into another language without

losing some of the beauty and dignity. When he woke up, he remembered everything that he had sung in his sleep, and to this he soon added, in the same poetic measure, more verses praising God.

The next morning he went to the reeve,<sup>6</sup> who was his foreman, and told him about the gift he had received. He was taken to the abbeys and ordered to tell his dream and to recite his song to an audience of the most learned men so that they might judge what the nature of that vision was and where it came from. It was evident to all of them that he had been granted the heavenly grace of God. Then they expounded some bit of sacred story or teaching to him, and instructed him to turn it into poetry if he could. He agreed and went away. And when he came back the next morning, he gave back what had been commissioned to him in the finest verse.

Therefore, the abbess, who cherished the grace of God in this man, instructed him to give up secular life and to take monastic vows. And when she and all those subject to her had received him into the community of brothers, she gave orders that he be taught the whole sequence of sacred history. He remembered everything that he was able to learn by listening, and turning it over in his mind like a clean beast that chews the cud,<sup>7</sup> he converted it into sweetest song, which sounded so delightful that he made his teachers, in their turn, his listeners. He sang about the creation of the world and the origin of the human race and all the history of Genesis; about the exodus of Israel out of Egypt and entrance into the promised land; and about many other stories of sacred Scripture, about the Lord's incarnation, and his passion,<sup>8</sup> resurrection, and ascension into Heaven; about the advent of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the apostles. He also made many songs about the terror of the coming judgment and the horror of the punishments of hell and the sweetness of heavenly kingdom; and a great many others besides about divine grace and justice in all of which he sought to draw men away from the love of sin and to inspire them with delight in the practice of good works.<sup>9</sup> \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Abbess Hilda (614–680), a grandniece of the first Christian king of Northumbria, founded Whitby, a double house for monks and nuns, in 657 and ruled over it for twenty-two years.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Oral poetry was performed to the accompaniment of a harp; here the harp is being passed from one participant of the feast to another, each being expected to perform in turn.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, established the beginning of every one of the wonders.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The later manuscript copies read *eorpan*, “earth,” for *ælda* (West Saxon *ielda*), “men’s.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bede is referring to his Latin translation, for which we have substituted the Old English text with interlinear translation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Superintendent of the farms belonging to the monastery.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Mosaic law “clean” animals, those that may be eaten, are those that both chew the cud and have a cloven hoof (see Leviticus 11:3 and Deuteronomy 14:6).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The suffering of Christ beginning on the night of the Last Supper and culminating with his death.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The great majority of extant Old English poems are on religious subjects like those listed here, but most are thought to be later than Cædmon.[Return to reference 9](#)

# **THE DREAM OF THE ROOD**



**Ruthwell Cross**, Ruthwell, Scotland, ca. 8th century. Not only is the cross sculpted with Christian images; it also has lines from *The Dream of the Rood* inscribed in runic letters. They may have been added at a later date.

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*The Dream of the Rood* (that is, of the Cross) is considered the finest of a large number of religious poems in Old English. Neither the author nor its date of composition is known. It appears in a late tenth-century manuscript located in Vercelli in northern Italy, a manuscript made up of Old English religious poems and sermons. The poem may have been written earlier than its manuscript, because some passages from the Rood's speech were carved, with some variations, in runes on a stone cross at some time after its construction early in the eighth century; this is the famous Ruthwell Cross, preserved near Dumfries in southern Scotland. The precise relation of the poem to this cross is, however, uncertain.

The experience of the Rood, often called "tree" in the poem—its humiliation at the hands of those who cut it down and made it into an instrument of punishment for criminals and its humility when the young hero Christ mounts it—has a suggestive relevance to the condition of the Dreamer. His isolation and melancholy are typical of exile figures in Old English poetry. For the Rood, however, glory has replaced torment, and at the end, the Dreamer's description of Christ's entry into heaven with the souls he has liberated from hell reflects the Dreamer's response to the hope that has been brought to him. Christ and the Rood both act in keeping with, and yet diametrically opposed to, a code of heroic action: Christ is both heroic in mounting and passive in suffering on the Rood, while the Rood is loyal to its lord, yet must participate in his death.

# The Dream of the Rood<sup>1</sup>

Attend to what I intend to tell you  
a marvelous dream that moved me at night  
when human voices are veiled in sleep.  
In my dream I espied the most splendid tree  
looming aloft with light all around,  
5 the most brilliant beam. That bright tree was  
covered with gold; gemstones gleamed  
fairly fashioned down to its foot, yet another five  
were standing<sup>2</sup>  
high up on the crossbeam —the Lord's angel  
beheld them<sup>3</sup>—  
cast by eternal decree. Clearly this was no  
10 criminal's gallows,<sup>4</sup>  
but holy spirits were beholding it there,  
men on this earth, all that mighty creation.  
That tree was triumphant and I tarnished by sin,  
begrimed with evil. I beheld Glory's trunk  
garnished with grandeur, gleaming in bliss,  
15 all plated with gold; precious gemstones  
had gloriously graced the Lord God's tree.  
Yet I could see signs of ancient strife:  
beneath that gold it had begun  
bleeding on the right side.<sup>5</sup> I was all bereft with  
20 sorrows;  
that splendid sight made me afraid. I beheld the  
sign rapidly  
changing clothing and colors. Now it was covered  
with moisture,  
drenched with streaming blood, now decked in  
treasure.



Yet I, lying there for a long time,  
sorrowfully beheld the tree of our Savior  
25 until I could hear it call out to me,  
the best of all wood began speaking words:  
“That was years ago —I yet remember—  
that I was cut down at the edge of the forest  
torn up from my trunk. There powerful enemies  
30 took me,  
put me up to make a circus-play to lift up and  
parade their criminals.  
Soldiers bore me on their shoulders till they set  
me up on a mountain;  
more than enough foes made me stand fast. I saw  
the lord of mankind  
coming with great haste so that he might climb up  
on me.  
35 Then I did not dare act against the Lord’s word,  
bow down or fall to pieces when I felt the surface  
of the earth trembling.<sup>6</sup> Although I might  
have destroyed the foes, I stood in place.  
Then this young man stripped himself —that was  
God Almighty—  
strong and courageous; he climbed up on the high  
40 gallows,  
brave in the sight of many, as he set out to  
redeem mankind.  
I trembled when the man embraced me; I dared  
not bow down to earth,  
stoop to the surface of the ground, but I had to  
stand fast.  
I was reared a rood; I raised up a mighty king,  
the heavens’ lord; I dared not bow in homage.  
45 They drove dark nails into me; the dints of those  
wounds can still be seen,

open marks of malice; but I did not dare maul any  
of them in return.

They mocked both of us. I was moistened all over  
with blood,  
shed from the man's side after he had sent up his  
spirit.

50 On that mountain I have endured many  
cruel happenings. I saw the God of hosts  
direly stretched out. Shades of darkness  
had clouded over the corpse of the Lord,  
the shining radiance; shadows went forth  
dark under clouds. All creation wept,  
55 mourning the king's fall: Christ was on the cross.

"Yet from afar fervent men came  
to that sovereign. I saw all that.  
I was badly burdened with grief yet bowed down  
to their hands,  
60 submissive with most resolve. There they took up  
almighty God,  
lifted him from that cruel torment. Then the  
warriors left me there  
standing, blood all over me, pierced everywhere  
with arrows.

They laid him there, limb-wearied; they stood at  
the head of his lifeless body.  
There they beheld the lord of heaven, and he  
65 rested there for a while,  
spent after that great struggle. Then they set  
about to construct a sepulcher,  
warriors in the slayer's<sup>7</sup> sight. Out of bright stone  
they carved it;  
they laid the lord of victories into it. They began  
singing a lay of sorrow,  
warriors sad as night was falling, when they  
wished to journey back

70       warily far from that famous lord;   he rested there  
          with few followers.<sup>8</sup>

          We,<sup>9</sup> grieving there   for a good while,  
          stood still in place;   the soldiers' voices  
          faded away.   Finally men brought axes  
          to fell us to earth.   That was a frightful destiny!  
75       They buried us in a deep pit.   But thanes<sup>o</sup> of the  
          Lord,

          friends learned about me<sup>1</sup> \* \* \*  
          \* \* \* adorned me   with gold and silver.  
          "Now, man so dear to me,   you may  
          understand

          that I have gone through   grievous sufferings,  
          terrible sorrows.   Now the time has come  
80       so that far and wide   men worship me  
          everywhere on earth,   and all creation  
          pray to this sign.   On me the son of God  
          suffered a time;   therefore I now tower  
          in glory under heaven,   and I may heal  
85       any one of those   in awe of me.

          Long ago I became   the most cruel punishment,  
          most hated by men,   until I made open  
          the right way of life   to language-bearers.  
          So the lord of glory,   guardian of Heaven,  
90       exalted me then   over all forest-trees,  
          as Almighty God   before all humankind  
          exalted over   all the race of women  
          His own mother,   Mary herself.

          "Now I command you,   my man so dear,  
95       to tell others   the events you have seen;  
          find words to tell   it was the tree of glory  
          Almighty God   suffered upon  
          for mankind's   so many sins  
          and for that ancient   offense of Adam.

100       There he tasted death;   yet the Redeemer arose

with his great might to help mankind.  
Then he rose to Heaven. He will come again  
to this middle-earth to seek out mankind  
on Judgment Day, the Redeemer himself,  
105 God Almighty and his angels with him,  
so that He will judge, He who has power of the  
Judgment,  
all humanity as to the merits each  
has brought about in this brief life.  
Nor may anyone be unafraid  
110 of the last question the Lord will ask.  
Before the multitude he will demand  
where a soul might be who in the Savior's name  
would suffer the death He suffered on that tree.  
But they shall fear and few shall think  
115 what to contrive to say to Christ.  
But no one there need be afraid  
who bears the best sign on his breast.  
And on this earth each soul that longs  
to exist with its savior forevermore  
120 must seek His kingdom through that cross."  
Then compelled by joy, I prayed to that tree  
with ardent zeal, where I was alone  
with few followers. Then my heart felt  
an urge to set forth; I have suffered  
125 much longing since. Now I live in hope,  
venturing after that victory-tree,  
alone more often than all other men,  
to worship it well. The will to do so  
is much in my heart; my protection  
130 depends on the rood. I possess but few  
friends on this earth. But forth from here  
they have set out from worldly joys to seek the  
King of Glory.  
They dwell in Heaven now with the High-father  
living in glory, and I look forward

135 constantly toward that time the Lord's rood  
 which I beheld before here on this earth  
 shall fetch me away from this fleeting life  
 and bring me then where bliss is eternal  
 140 to joy in Paradise where the Lord's people  
 are joined at that feast where joy lasts forever  
 and seat me there where evermore  
 I shall dwell in glory, together with the saints  
 share in their delights. May the Lord be my friend,  
 145 who on earth long ago on the gallows-tree  
 suffered agony for the sins of men:  
 he redeemed us and gave us life,  
 a home in Heaven. Hope was made new  
 and blossomed with bliss to those burning in  
 fire.<sup>2</sup>  
 150 The Son was victorious in venturing forth,  
 mighty and triumphant when he returned with  
 many,  
 a company of souls to the Kingdom of God,  
 the Almighty Ruler, to the joy of angels,  
 and all those holy ones come to Heaven before,<sup>3</sup>  
 155 to live in glory, when their Lord returned,  
 the Eternal King to His own country.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation by Alfred David is based on *Eight Old English Poems*, 3rd ed., edited by John C. Pope, revised by R. D. Fulk (2000). As in the Old English riddles (see pp. 129–30), an inanimate object here assumes a voice, in this case to disclose a surprising and moving perspective on sacred history.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This longer line and the two following, as well as lines 20–23, 30–34, 39–43, 46–49, 59–70, 75–76, and 133, contain additional stresses and are designated as “hypermetric.” Fewer

than 500 such lines survive in the corpus of Old English poetry.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The translation follows R. D. Fulk's emendation: "beheold on þam engel dryhtnes."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Constantine the Great, emperor from 306 to 337, erected a jeweled cross at the site of the crucifixion, transforming the Roman "felon's gallows" from a symbol of shame into a universal icon of Christian art.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: According to biblical tradition, following John 19:34, Christ was wounded by a Roman military officer's lance on the right side.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: According to Matthew 27:51, the earth quaked at the crucifixion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the Cross. See John 19:41–42.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An example of Old English litotes, ironically expressing something by its contrary. In fact, Christ's tomb is now deserted.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Christ's Cross and those on which the two thieves had been crucified.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The reference in this gap in the manuscript must be to the discovery of the Cross by St. Helena.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This line and those following refer to the so-called Harrowing of Hell. After his death on the Cross, Christ descended into hell, from which he released the souls of certain patriarchs and prophets, conducting them into heaven (see *Piers Plowman*, Passus 18). The analogy is to the triumphal procession of a Roman emperor returning from war.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The line probably refers to a belief that God had sanctified a chosen few before the crucifixion.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *retainers* [Return to reference °](#)

# BEOWULF

*Beowulf*, the oldest of the great long poems written in English, may have been composed more than twelve hundred years ago, in the first half of the eighth century, although some scholars would place it as late as the tenth century. As is the case with most Old English poems, the title has been assigned by modern editors, for the manuscripts do not normally give any indication of title or authorship. Linguistic evidence shows that the poem was originally composed in the dialect of what was then Mercia, the Midlands of England today. But in the unique late tenth-century manuscript preserving the poem, it has been converted into the West-Saxon dialect of the southwest in which most of Old English literature survives. In 1731, before any modern transcript of the text had been made, the manuscript was seriously damaged in a fire that destroyed the building in London that housed the extraordinary collection of medieval English manuscripts made by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571–1631). As a result of the fire and subsequent deterioration, a number of lines and words have been lost from the poem.



# 129 PÆT PE LARDE

na in 7 ear dagum. þeod cýnnig  
 þrym 7e ffrumon huda æþelinas ellen  
 ffe medon. oft scýld scepmz sceape  
 þreatum mone 7u mæþum meodo secl  
 of tearh <sup>hæred</sup> esode eopl syddan ærest þe  
 fea sceapz funden. he þæs ffrorpe seba  
 peox under polcnum peopð myndum þah  
 oð þ him æghpyle þara ymb sittendra  
 oferi hron. rade hypan scolde zomban  
 syl dan þæs god cýnnig. ðam æftera þas  
 æfter cenned zæon in 7 ear dum þone god  
 sende folce to ffrorpe fýra ðearfe on  
 7ear þhe ærdrigon aldon ðise. lange  
 hpile him þæs lif ffræa puldræf pealdend  
 popold aþe for 7ear. beapule þæs þre  
 blæd rive sprang. seyl ða æftera seode  
 landum in. Spa secling. 7ma god  
 7e þrecean ffrumum peoh 7e 7u anra

**Beowulf.** The opening page. Note the charred edges, caused by a fire in 1731.

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It is possible that *Beowulf* may be the lone survivor of a genre of Old English long epics, but it must have been a remarkable and difficult work even in its own day. The poet was reviving the heroic language, style, and pagan world of ancient Germanic oral poetry, a world that was already remote to his contemporaries and that is stranger to the modern reader, in many respects, than the epic world of Homer and Virgil. With the help of *Beowulf* itself, a few shorter heroic poems in Old English, and later poetry and prose in Old Saxon, Old Icelandic, and Middle High German, we can only conjecture what Germanic oral epic must have been like when performed by the Germanic *scop*, or bard. The *Beowulf* poet himself imagines such oral performances by having King Hrothgar's court poet recite a heroic lay at a feast celebrating Beowulf's defeat of Grendel. Many of the words and formulaic expressions in *Beowulf* can be found in other Old English poems, but there are also an extraordinary number of what linguists call *hapax legomena*—that is, words recorded only once in a language. The poet may have found them elsewhere, but the high incidence of such words suggests that he was an original wordsmith in his own right.

Although the poem itself is English in language and origin, it deals not with Germanic inhabitants of England but with their forebears, especially with two south Scandinavian tribes, the Danes and the Geats, who lived on the Danish island of Zealand and in southern Sweden. Thus the historical period the poem concerns—insofar as it may be said to refer to history at all—is some centuries before it was written: that is, a time after the initial invasion of England by Germanic tribes in the middle of the fifth century but before the migration of Angles and Saxons was completed. The one datable fact of history mentioned in the poem is a raid on the Franks in which Hygelac, the king of the Geats and Beowulf's lord, was killed, and this raid occurred in the year 520. Yet the poet's elliptical references to quasihistorical and legendary material show that his

audience was still familiar with many old stories, the outlines of which we can only infer, sometimes with the help of later analogous tales in other Germanic languages. This knowledge was probably kept alive by other heroic poetry, of which little has been preserved in English, although much may once have existed.

It is now widely believed that *Beowulf* is the work of a single poet who was a Christian and that his poem reflects well-established Christian tradition. The conversion of the Germanic settlers in England had been largely completed during the seventh century. The Danish king Hrothgar's poet sings a song about the Creation (lines 87–98) reminiscent of Cædmon's *Hymn*. The monster Grendel is said to be a descendant of Cain. There are allusions to God's judgment and to fate (*wyrd*) but none to polytheistic deities. References to the New Testament are notably absent, but Hrothgar and Beowulf often speak of God as though their religion is monotheistic. With sadness the poet relates that, made desperate by Grendel's attacks, the Danes pray for help at heathen shrines—apparently backsliding just as the children of Israel had sometimes lapsed into idolatry.





**Early medieval helmet**, 6th to 7th centuries. Excavated at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk.

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Although Hrothgar and Beowulf are portrayed as morally upright and enlightened pagans, they fully espouse and frequently affirm the

values of Germanic heroic poetry. In the poetry depicting this warrior society, the most important of human relationships was that which existed between the warrior—the thane—and his lord, a relationship based less on subordination of one man's will to another's than on mutual trust and respect. When a warrior vowed loyalty to his lord, he became not so much his servant as his voluntary companion, one who would take pride in defending him and fighting in his wars. In return, the lord was expected to take care of his thanes and to reward them richly for their valor; a good king, one like Hrothgar or Beowulf, is referred to by such poetic epithets as "ring-giver" and as the "helmet" and "shield" of his people.

The relationship between kinsmen was also of deep significance to this society. If one of his kinsmen had been slain, a man had a moral obligation either to kill the slayer or to exact the payment of *wergild* (man-price) in compensation. Each rank of society was evaluated at a definite price, which had to be paid to the dead man's kin by the killer if he wished to avoid their vengeance—even if the killing had been an accident. In the absence of any legal code other than custom or any body of law enforcement, it was the duty of the family (often with the lord's support) to execute justice. The payment itself had less significance as wealth than as proof that the kinsmen had done what was right. The failure to take revenge or to exact compensation was considered shameful. Hrothgar's anguish over the murders committed by Grendel is not only for the loss of his men but also for the shame of his inability either to kill Grendel or to exact a "death-price" from the killer. "It is always better / to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning" (lines 1384–85), Beowulf says to Hrothgar, who has been thrown back into despair by the revenge-slaying of his old friend Aeschere by Grendel's mother.

Yet the young Beowulf's attempt to comfort the bereaved old king by invoking the code of vengeance may be one of several instances of the poet's ironic treatment of the tragic futility of never-ending blood feuds. The most graphic example in the poem of that irony is the Finnsburg episode, the lay sung by Hrothgar's hall-poet. The Danish princess Hildeburh, married to the Frisian king Finn—probably to put an end to a feud between those peoples—loses both her

brother and her son when a bloody fight breaks out in the hall between a visiting party of Danes and her husband's men. The bodies are cremated together on a huge funeral pyre: "The glutton element flamed and consumed / the dead of both sides. Their great days were gone" (lines 1124–25).

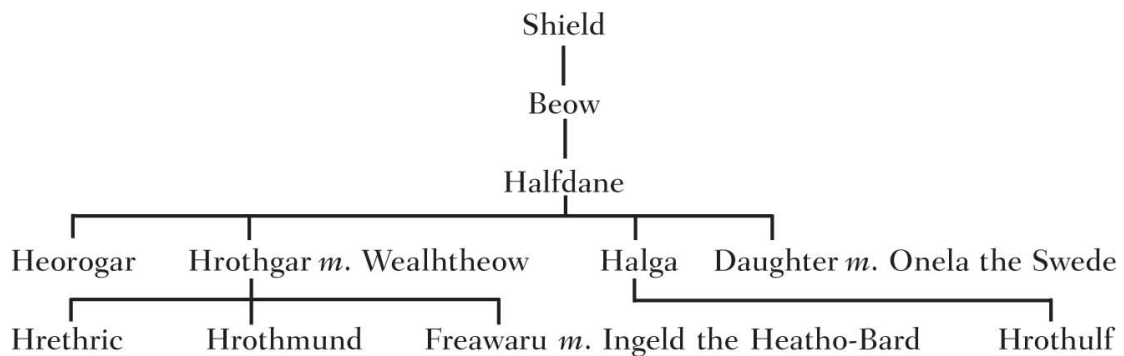
Such feuds, the staple subject of Germanic epic and saga, have only a peripheral place in the poem. Instead, the poem turns on Beowulf's three great fights against preternatural evil, which inhabits the dangerous and demonic space surrounding human society. He undertakes the fight against Grendel to save the Danes from the monster and to exact vengeance for the men Grendel has slain. Another motive is to demonstrate his strength and courage and thereby to enhance his personal glory. Hrothgar's magnificent gifts become the material emblems of that glory. Revenge and glory also motivate Beowulf's slaying of Grendel's mother. He undertakes his last battle against the dragon, however, only because there is no other way to save his own people.

A somber and dignified elegiac mood pervades *Beowulf*. The poem opens and closes with the description of a funeral and is filled with laments for the dead. Our first view of Beowulf is of an ambitious young hero. At the end, he has become an old king, facing the dragon and death. His people mourn him and praise him, as does the poet, for his nobility, generosity, courage, and, what is less common in Germanic heroes, kindness to his people. The poet's elegiac tone may be informed by something more than the duty to "praise a prince whom he holds dear / and cherish his memory when that moment comes / when he has to be convoyed from his bodily home" (lines 3175–77). The entire poem could be viewed as the poet's lament for heroes like Beowulf who went into the darkness without the light of the poet's own Christian faith.

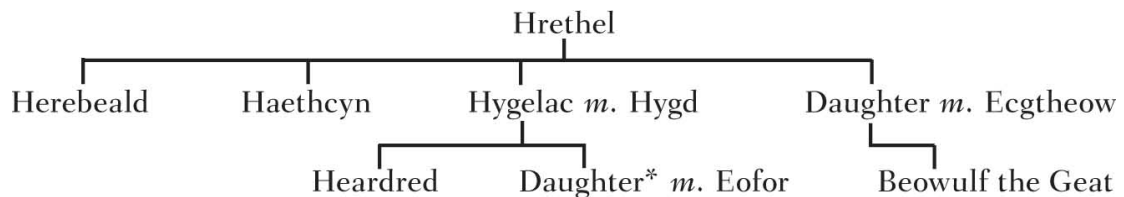
The verse translation here is by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. Selections from Heaney's own poems appear in Volume F of this anthology.

# TRIBES AND GENEALOGIES

1. *The Danes (Bright-, Half-, Ring-, Spear-, North-, East-, South-, West-Danes; Shieldings, Honor-, Victor-, War-Shieldings; Ing's friends)*

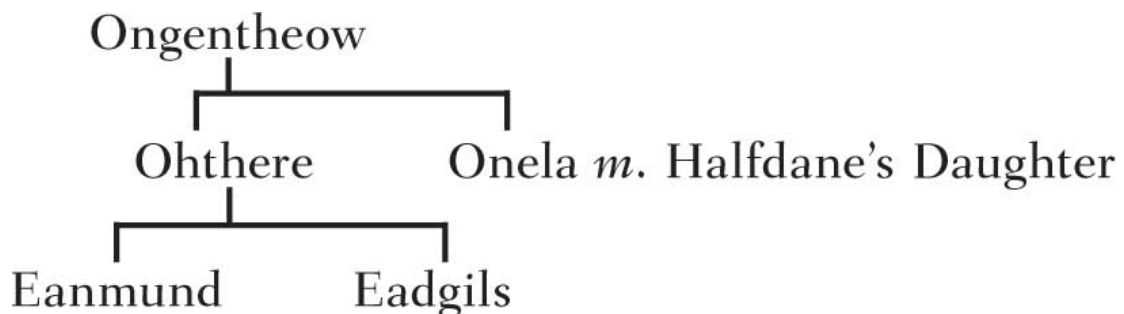


2. *The Geats (Sea-, War-, Weather-Geats)*



\*The daughter of Hygelac who was given to Eofor may have been born to him by a former wife, older than Hygd.

3. *The Swedes*



#### 4. Miscellaneous

A. The Half-Danes (also called Shieldings) involved in the fight at Finnsburg may represent a different tribe from the Danes described above. Their king Hoc had a son, Hnaef, who succeeded him, and a daughter Hildeburh, who married Finn, king of the Jutes.

B. The Jutes or Frisians are represented as enemies of the Danes in the fight at Finnsburg and as allies of the Franks or Hugas at the time Hygelac the Geat made the attack in which he lost his life and from which Beowulf swam home. Also allied with the Franks at this time were the Hetware.

C. The Heatho-Bards (that is, "Battle-Bards") are represented as inveterate enemies of the Danes. Their king Froda had been killed in an attack on the Danes, and Hrothgar's attempt to make peace with them by marrying his daughter Freawaru to Froda's son Ingeld failed when the latter attacked Heorot. The attack was repulsed, although Heorot was burned.

#### ***The Poet's Song in Heorot***

To give the reader a sample of the language, style, and texture of *Beowulf* in the original, we print the following passage, lines 90–98, in Old English with interlinear glosses. One may compare these lines with Cædmon's *Hymn* ([p. 31](#)) on the same theme. See the headnote there for the pronunciation of Old English characters.

Sægde se þe      cupe  
Said      he who knew [how]

**f**rumſceaft      **f**ira      **f**eorran      reccan,  
[the] origin [of] men      from far [time] [to] recount,

cwæð þæt se      **Æ**lmihtiga      **e**orðan worhte,  
said      that the Almighty      [the] earth wrought

**w**ite-beorhtne **w**ang,      swa **w**æter bebugeð,  
beauty-bright      plain      as      water surrounds [it]



gesette **s**ige-hrepig                      **s**unnan ond monan,  
set   triumph-glorious                      sun                      and moon

**l**eoman   to **l**eohte                      **l**andbuendum,  
beacons   as light                      [for] land-dwellers

ond ge**f**rætwaðe                      **f**oldan                      sceatas  
and adorned                      [of] earth [the] grounds

**l**eomum ond **l**eafulm,                      **l**if   eac gesceop  
[with] limbs and leaves,                      life also [he] created

cynna   gehwylcum<sup>\*</sup>                      þara ðe   **c**wice hwyrfaþ.  
[of] kinds [for] each                      [of] those who living move about

## A NOTE ON NAMES

Old English, like Modern German, contained many compound words, most of which have been lost in Modern English. Most of the names in *Beowulf* are compounds. Hrothgar is a combination of words meaning "glory" and "spear"; the name of his older brother, Heorogar, comes from "army" and "spear"; Hrothgar's sons Hrethric and Hrothmund contain the first elements of their father's name combined, respectively, with *ric* (kingdom, empire; Modern German *Reich*) and *mund* (hand, protection). As in the case of the Danish dynasty, family names often alliterate. Masculine names of the warrior class have military associations. The importance of family and the demands of alliteration frequently lead to the designation of characters by formulas identifying them in terms of relationships. Thus Beowulf is referred to as "son of Ecgtheow" or "kinsman of Hygelac" (his uncle and lord).

The Old English spellings of names are mostly preserved in the translation. A few rules of pronunciation are worth keeping in mind. Initial *H* before *r* was sounded, and so Hrothgar's name alliterates

with that of his brother Heorogar. The combination *cg* has the value of *dg* in words like “edge.” The first element in the name of Beowulf’s father “Ecgtheow” is the same word as “edge,” and, by the figure of speech called synecdoche (a part of something stands for the whole), *ecg* stands for *sword* and Ecgtheow means “sword-servant.”

## Endnotes

- Note \*: Modern syntax would be “for each of kinds.” In Old English, the endings *-a* and *-um* indicate that *gewylcum* is an indirect object and *cynna*, a possessive plural. [Return to reference \\*](#)

# Beowulf \*

## [PROLOGUE: THE RISE OF THE DANISH NATION]

So. The Spear-Danes<sup>1</sup> in days gone by  
and the kings who ruled them had courage and  
greatness.  
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.  
There was Shield Sheafson,<sup>2</sup> scourge of many  
tribes,  
5 a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
A foundling to start with, he would flourish later on  
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
10 and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.  
Afterward a boy-child was born to Shield,  
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
by God to that nation. He knew what they had  
tholed,<sup>3</sup>  
15 the long times and troubles they'd come through  
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,  
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
Shield had fathered a famous son:  
Beow's name was known through the north.  
And a young prince must be prudent like that,  
20 giving freely while his father lives  
so that afterward in age when fighting starts  
steadfast companions will stand by him  
and hold the line. Behavior that's admired  
is the path to power among people everywhere.

25 Shield was still thriving when his time came  
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.  
His warrior band did what he bade them  
when he laid down the law among the Danes:  
30 they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,  
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.  
A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbor,  
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.  
They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
35 laid out by the mast, amidships,  
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
were piled upon him, and precious gear.  
I never heard before of a ship so well furbished  
with battle-tackle, bladed weapons  
40 and coats of mail. The massed treasure  
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
on out into the ocean's sway.  
They decked his body no less bountifully  
with offerings than those first ones did  
who cast him away when he was a child  
45 and launched him alone out over the waves.<sup>4</sup>  
And they set a gold standard up  
high above his head and let him drift  
to wind and tide, bewailing him  
and mourning their loss. No man can tell,  
50 no wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
knows for certain who salvaged that load.  
Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.  
He was well regarded and ruled the Danes  
for a long time after his father took leave  
55 of his life on earth. And then his heir,  
the great Halfdane,<sup>5</sup> held sway  
for as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.  
He was four times a father, this fighter prince:  
60 one by one they entered the world,

Heorogar, Hrothgar, the good Halga,  
 and a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's  
 queen,  
 a balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.  
 The fortunes of war favored Hrothgar.  
 Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
 65 young followers, a force that grew  
 to be a mighty army. So his mind turned  
 to hall-building: he handed down orders  
 for men to work on a great mead-hall  
 meant to be a wonder of the world forever;  
 70 it would be his throne-room and there he would  
 dispense  
 his God-given goods to young and old—  
 but not the common land or people's lives.<sup>6</sup>  
 Far and wide through the world, I have heard,  
 orders for work to adorn that wallstead  
 75 were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there  
 finished and ready, in full view,  
 the hall of halls. Heorot was the name<sup>7</sup>  
 he had settled on it, whose utterance was law.  
 Nor did he renege, but doled out rings  
 80 and torques at the table. The hall towered,  
 its gables wide and high and awaiting  
 a barbarous burning.<sup>8</sup> That doom abided,  
 but in time it would come: the killer instinct  
 85 unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note \*: The translation is by Seamus Heaney. [Return to reference \\*](#)
- Note 1: There are different compound names for tribes, often determined by alliteration in Old English poetry. Line 1 reads, "*Hwæt, we Gar-dena in gear-dagum,*" where alliteration falls on

*Gar* (spear) and *gear* (year). Old English hard and soft *g* (spelled *y* in Modern English) alliterate. The compound *geardagum* derives from “year,” used in the special sense of “long ago,” and “days” and survives in the archaic expression “days of yore.”[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Shield is the name of the founder of the Danish royal line. Sheafson translates *Scefing*, that is, *sheaf*+ the patronymic suffix *-ing*. Because Sheaf was a “foundling” (line 7: *feasceaft funden*, that is, found destitute) who arrived by sea (lines 45–46), it is likely that as a child Shield brought with him only a sheaf, a symbol of fruitfulness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Suffered, endured.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See n. 2, above. Since Shield was found destitute, “no less bountifully” is litotes or understatement: the ironic reminder that he came with nothing (line 43) emphasizes the reversal of his fortunes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Probably named so because, according to one source, his mother was a Swedish princess.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The king could not dispose of land used by all, such as a common pasture, or of slaves.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, “Hart,” from antlers fastened to the gables, or because the crossed gable-ends resembled a stag’s antlers; the hart was also an icon of royalty.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An allusion to the future destruction of Heorot by fire, probably in a raid by the Heatho-Bards.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As told later (lines 2020–69), Hrothgar plans to marry a daughter to Ingeld, chief of the Heatho-Bards, in hopes of resolving a long-standing feud. See previous note.[Return to reference 9](#)

## [HEOROT IS ATTACKED]

Then a powerful demon,<sup>1</sup> a prowler through the  
dark,  
nursed a hard grievance. It harrowed him  
to hear the din of the loud banquet  
every day in the hall, the harp being struck  
and the clear song of a skilled poet  
90 telling with mastery of man's beginnings,  
how the Almighty had made the earth  
a gleaming plain girdled with waters;  
in His splendor He set the sun and the moon  
to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,  
95 and filled the broad lap of the world  
with branches and leaves; and quickened life  
in every other thing that moved.  
So times were pleasant for the people there  
until finally one, a fiend out of hell,  
100 began to work his evil in the world.  
Grendel was the name of this grim demon  
haunting the marches, marauding round the heath  
and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time  
in misery among the banished monsters,  
105 Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed  
and condemned as outcasts.<sup>2</sup> For the killing of Abel  
the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:  
Cain got no good from committing that murder  
because the Almighty made him anathema  
110 and out of the curse of his exile there sprang  
ogres and elves and evil phantoms  
and the giants too who strove with God  
time and again until He gave them their reward.  
So, after nightfall, Grendel set out  
115 for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes

were settling into it after their drink,  
and there he came upon them, a company of the  
best  
asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain  
and human sorrow. Suddenly then  
120 the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:  
greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men  
from their resting places and rushed to his lair,  
flushed up and inflamed from the raid,  
blundering back with the butchered corpses.  
125 Then as dawn brightened and the day broke,  
Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:  
their wassail was over, they wept to heaven  
and mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,  
the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless,  
130 humiliated by the loss of his guard,  
bewildered and stunned, staring aghast  
at the demon's trail, in deep distress.  
He was numb with grief, but got no respite  
for one night later merciless Grendel  
135 struck again with more gruesome murders.  
Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.  
It was easy then to meet with a man  
shifting himself to a safer distance  
to bed in the bothies<sup>3</sup> for who could be blind  
140 to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness  
of the hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped  
kept a weather-eye open and moved away.  
So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,  
one against all, until the greatest house  
145 in the world stood empty, a deserted wallstead.  
For twelve winters, seasons of woe,  
the lord of the Shieldings<sup>4</sup> suffered under  
his load of sorrow; and so, before long,  
the news was known over the whole world.  
150



Sad lays were sung about the beset king,  
the vicious raids and ravages of Grendel,  
his long and unrelenting feud,  
nothing but war; how he would never  
parley or make peace with any Dane  
155 nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price.<sup>5</sup>  
No counselor could ever expect  
fair reparation from those rabid hands.  
All were endangered; young and old  
were hunted down by that dark death-shadow  
160 who lurked and swooped in the long nights  
on the misty moors; nobody knows  
where these reavers from hell roam on their errands.  
So Grendel waged his lonely war,  
inflicting constant cruelties on the people,  
165 atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot,  
haunted the glittering hall after dark,  
but the throne itself, the treasure-seat,  
he was kept from approaching; he was the Lord's  
outcast.  
These were hard times, heartbreaking  
170 for the prince of the Shieldings; powerful counselors,  
the highest in the land, would lend advice,  
plotting how best the bold defenders  
might resist and beat off sudden attacks.  
Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed  
175 offerings to idols, swore oaths  
that the killer of souls<sup>6</sup> might come to their aid  
and save the people. That was their way,  
their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts  
they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge  
180 of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,  
Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,  
was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he  
who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul

in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;  
he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he  
who after death can approach the Lord  
and find friendship in the Father's embrace.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poet withholds the name for several lines. He does the same with the name of the hero as well as others.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Genesis 4:9–12.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Huts, outlying buildings. Evidently Grendel wants only to dominate the hall.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The descendants of Shield, another name for the Danes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, *wergild* (man-price); monetary compensation for the life of the slain man is the only way, according to Germanic law, to settle a feud peacefully.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the devil. Heathen gods were thought to be devils.[Return to reference 6](#)

## [THE HERO COMES TO HEOROT]

So that troubled time continued, woe  
that never stopped, steady affliction  
190 for Halfdane's son, too hard an ordeal.  
There was panic after dark, people endured  
raids in the night, riven by the terror.  
When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane  
was on home ground, over in Geatland.  
195 There was no one else like him alive.  
In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,  
highborn and powerful. He ordered a boat  
that would ply the waves. He announced his plan:  
to sail the swan's road and seek out that king,  
200 the famous prince who needed defenders.  
Nobody tried to keep him from going,  
no elder denied him, dear as he was to them.  
Instead, they inspected omens and spurred  
his ambition to go, whilst he moved about  
205 like the leader he was, enlisting men,  
the best he could find; with fourteen others  
the warrior boarded the boat as captain,  
a canny pilot along coast and currents.  
Time went by, the boat was on water,  
210 in close under the cliffs.  
Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank,  
sand churned in surf, warriors loaded  
a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear  
in the vessel's hold, then heaved out,  
215 away with a will in their wood-wreathed ship.  
Over the waves, with the wind behind her  
and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird  
until her curved prow had covered the distance,  
and on the following day, at the due hour,

220 those seafarers sighted land,  
sunlit cliffs, sheer crags  
and looming headlands, the landfall they sought.  
It was the end of their voyage and the Geats vaulted  
225 over the side, out on to the sand,  
and moored their ship. There was a clash of mail  
and a thresh of gear. They thanked God  
for that easy crossing on a calm sea.  
When the watchman on the wall, the Shieldings'  
lookout  
230 whose job it was to guard the sea-cliffs,  
saw shields glittering on the gangplank  
and battle-equipment being unloaded  
he had to find out who and what  
the arrivals were. So he rode to the shore,  
235 this horseman of Hrothgar's, and challenged them  
in formal terms, flourishing his spear:  
"What kind of men are you who arrive  
rigged out for combat in your coats of mail,  
sailing here over the sea-lanes  
240 in your steep-hulled boat? I have been stationed  
as lookout on this coast for a long time.  
My job is to watch the waves for raiders,  
any danger to the Danish shore.  
Never before has a force under arms  
245 disembarked so openly—not bothering to ask  
if the sentries allowed them safe passage  
or the clan had consented. Nor have I seen  
a mightier man-at-arms on this earth  
than the one standing here: unless I am mistaken,  
250 he is truly noble. This is no mere  
hanger-on in a hero's armor.  
So now, before you fare inland  
as interlopers, I have to be informed  
about who you are and where you hail from.  
Outsiders from across the water,

255 I say it again: the sooner you tell  
where you come from and why, the better.”  
The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;  
the distinguished one delivered this answer:  
260 “We belong by birth to the Geat people  
and owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.  
In his day, my father was a famous man,  
a noble warrior-lord named Ecgtheow.  
He outlasted many a long winter  
and went on his way. All over the world  
265 men wise in counsel continue to remember him.  
We come in good faith to find your lord  
and nation’s shield, the son of Halfdane.  
Give us the right advice and direction.  
We have arrived here on a great errand  
270 to the lord of the Danes, and I believe therefore  
there should be nothing hidden or withheld between  
us.  
So tell us if what we have heard is true  
about this threat, whatever it is,  
this danger abroad in the dark nights,  
275 this corpse-maker mongering death  
in the Shieldings’ country. I come to proffer  
my wholehearted help and counsel.  
I can show the wise Hrothgar a way  
to defeat his enemy and find respite—  
280 if any respite is to reach him, ever.  
I can calm the turmoil and terror in his mind.  
Otherwise, he must endure woes  
and live with grief for as long as his hall  
stands at the horizon on its high ground.”  
285 Undaunted, sitting astride his horse,  
the coast-guard answered: “Anyone with gumption  
and a sharp mind will take the measure  
of two things: what’s said and what’s done.

290 I believe what you have told me, that you are a  
troop  
loyal to our king. So come ahead  
with your arms and your gear, and I will guide you.  
What's more, I'll order my own comrades  
on their word of honor to watch your boat  
295 down there on the strand—keep her safe  
in her fresh tar, until the time comes  
for her curved prow to preen on the waves  
and bear this hero back to Geatland.  
May one so valiant and venturesome  
come unharmed through the clash of battle.”  
300 So they went on their way. The ship rode the water,  
broad-beamed, bound by its hawser  
and anchored fast. Boar-shapes<sup>7</sup> flashed  
above their cheek-guards, the brightly forged  
work of goldsmiths, watching over  
305 those stern-faced men. They marched in step,  
hurrying on till the timbered hall  
rose before them, radiant with gold.  
Nobody on earth knew of another  
building like it. Majesty lodged there,  
310 its light shone over many lands.  
So their gallant escort guided them  
to that dazzling stronghold and indicated  
the shortest way to it; then the noble warrior  
wheeled on his horse and spoke these words:  
315 “It is time for me to go. May the Almighty  
Father keep you and in His kindness  
watch over your exploits. I'm away to the sea,  
back on alert against enemy raiders.”  
It was a paved track, a path that kept them  
320 in marching order. Their mail-shirts glinted,  
hard and hand-linked; the high-gloss iron  
of their armor rang. So they duly arrived

in their grim war-graith<sup>8</sup> and gear at the hall,  
and, weary from the sea, stacked wide shields  
325 of the toughest hardwood against the wall,  
then collapsed on the benches; battle-dress  
and weapons clashed. They collected their spears  
in a seafarers' stook, a stand of grayish  
tapering ash. And the troops themselves  
330 were as good as their weapons.

Then a proud warrior  
questioned the men concerning their origins:  
"Where do you come from, carrying these  
decorated shields and shirts of mail,  
these cheek-hinged helmets and javelins?  
335 I am Hrothgar's herald and officer.  
I have never seen so impressive or large  
an assembly of strangers. Stoutness of heart,  
bravery not banishment, must have brought you to  
Hrothgar."

The man whose name was known for courage,  
340 the Geat leader, resolute in his helmet,  
answered in return: "We are retainers  
from Hygelac's band. Beowulf is my name.  
If your lord and master, the most renowned  
son of Halfdane, will hear me out  
345 and graciously allow me to greet him in person,  
I am ready and willing to report my errand."  
Wulfgar replied, a Wendel chief  
renowned as a warrior, well known for his wisdom  
and the temper of his mind: "I will take this  
350 message,  
in accordance with your wish, to our noble king,  
our dear lord, friend of the Danes,  
the giver of rings. I will go and ask him  
about your coming here, then hurry back  
with whatever reply it pleases him to give."  
355

With that he turned to where Hrothgar sat,  
an old man among retainers;  
the valiant follower stood foursquare  
in front of his king: he knew the courtesies.  
Wulfgar addressed his dear lord:  
360 "People from Geatland have put ashore.  
They have sailed far over the wide sea.  
They call the chief in charge of their band  
by the name of Beowulf. They beg, my lord,  
365 an audience with you, exchange of words  
and formal greeting. Most gracious Hrothgar,  
do not refuse them, but grant them a reply.  
From their arms and appointment, they appear well  
born  
and worthy of respect, especially the one  
who has led them this far: he is formidable indeed."  
370 Hrothgar, protector of Shieldings, replied:  
"I used to know him when he was a young boy.  
His father before him was called Ecgtheow.  
Hrethel the Geat<sup>9</sup> gave Ecgtheow  
his daughter in marriage. This man is their son,  
375 here to follow up an old friendship.  
A crew of seamen who sailed for me once  
with a gift-cargo across to Geatland  
returned with marvelous tales about him:  
380 athane, they declared, with the strength of thirty  
in the grip of each hand. Now Holy God  
has, in His goodness, guided him here  
to the West-Danes, to defend us from Grendel.  
This is my hope; and for his heroism  
I will recompense him with a rich treasure.  
385 Go immediately, bid him and the Geats  
he has in attendance to assemble and enter.  
Say, moreover, when you speak to them,  
they are welcome to Denmark."



At the door of the

hall,

Wulfgar duly delivered the message:

390

"My lord, the conquering king of the Danes,  
bids me announce that he knows your ancestry;  
also that he welcomes you here to Heorot  
and salutes your arrival from across the sea.

395

You are free now to move forward  
to meet Hrothgar in helmets and armor,  
but shields must stay here and spears be stacked  
until the outcome of the audience is clear."

400

The hero arose, surrounded closely  
by his powerful thanes. A party remained  
under orders to keep watch on the arms;  
the rest proceeded, led by their prince  
under Heorot's roof. And standing on the hearth  
in webbed links that the smith had woven,  
the fine-forged mesh of his gleaming mail-shirt,  
resolute in his helmet, Beowulf spoke:

405

"Greetings to Hrothgar. I am Hygelac's kinsman,  
one of his hall-troop. When I was younger,  
I had great triumphs. Then news of Grendel,  
hard to ignore, reached me at home:

410

sailors brought stories of the plight you suffer  
in this legendary hall, how it lies deserted,  
empty and useless once the evening light  
hides itself under heaven's dome.

415

So every elder and experienced councilman  
among my people supported my resolve  
to come here to you, King Hrothgar,  
because all knew of my awesome strength.

420

They had seen me boltered<sup>1</sup> in the blood of enemies  
when I battled and bound five beasts,  
raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea  
slaughtered sea-brutes. I have suffered extremes

and avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it  
upon themselves; I devastated them).  
425 Now I mean to be a match for Grendel,  
settle the outcome in single combat.  
And so, my request, O king of Bright-Danes,  
dear prince of the Shieldings, friend of the people  
and their ring of defense, my one request  
430 is that you won't refuse me, who have come this far,  
the privilege of purifying Heorot,  
with my own men to help me, and nobody else.  
I have heard moreover that the monster scorns  
in his reckless way to use weapons;  
435 therefore, to heighten Hygelac's fame  
and gladden his heart, I hereby renounce  
sword and the shelter of the broad shield,  
the heavy war-board: hand-to-hand  
is how it will be, a life-and-death  
440 fight with the fiend. Whichever one death fells  
must deem it a just judgment by God.  
If Grendel wins, it will be a gruesome day;  
he will glut himself on the Geats in the war-hall,  
swoop without fear on that flower of manhood  
445 as on others before. Then my face won't be there  
to be covered in death: he will carry me away  
as he goes to ground, gorged and bloodied;  
he will run gloating with my raw corpse  
and feed on it alone, in a cruel frenzy  
fouling his moor-nest. No need then  
450 to lament for long or lay out my body:<sup>2</sup>  
if the battle takes me, send back  
this breast-webbing that Weland<sup>3</sup> fashioned  
and Hrethel gave me, to Lord Hygelac.  
Fate goes ever as fate must."  
455 Hrothgar, the helmet of Shieldings, spoke:  
"Beowulf, my friend, you have traveled here

to favor us with help and to fight for us.  
There was a feud one time, begun by your father.  
With his own hands he had killed Heatholaf  
460 who was a Wulfing; so war was looming  
and his people, in fear of it, forced him to leave.  
He came away then over rolling waves  
to the South-Danes here, the sons of honor.  
I was then in the first flush of kingship,  
465 establishing my sway over the rich strongholds  
of this heroic land. Heorogar,  
my older brother and the better man,  
also a son of Halfdane's, had died.  
Finally I healed the feud by paying:  
470 I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings,  
and Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of  
allegiance.

"It bothers me to have to burden anyone  
with all the grief that Grendel has caused  
and the havoc he has wreaked upon us in Heorot,  
475 our humiliations. My household guard  
are on the wane, fate sweeps them away  
into Grendel's clutches—but God can easily  
halt these raids and harrowing attacks!

"Time and again, when the goblets passed  
480 and seasoned fighters got flushed with beer  
they would pledge themselves to protect Heorot  
and wait for Grendel with their whetted swords.  
But when dawn broke and day crept in  
over each empty, blood-spattered bench,  
485 the floor of the mead-hall where they had feasted  
would be slick with slaughter. And so they died,  
faithful retainers, and my following dwindled.  
Now take your place at the table, relish  
the triumph of heroes to your heart's content."  
490

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Carved images of boars were placed on helmets, probably as charms to protect the warriors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Graith": archaic for apparel.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hygelac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Clotted, sticky.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, for burial. Hrothgar will not need to give Beowulf an expensive funeral.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Famed blacksmith in Germanic legend.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [FEAST AT HEOROT]

Then a bench was cleared in that banquet hall  
so the Geats could have room to be together  
and the party sat, proud in their bearing,  
strong and stalwart. An attendant stood by  
495 with a decorated pitcher, pouring bright  
helpings of mead. And the minstrel sang,  
filling Heorot with his head-clearing voice,  
gladdening that great rally of Geats and Danes.  
From where he crouched at the king's feet,  
500 Unferth, a son of Ecglaf's, spoke  
contrary words. Beowulf's coming,  
his sea-braving, made him sick with envy:  
he could not brook or abide the fact  
that anyone else alive under heaven  
might enjoy greater regard than he did:  
505 "Are you the Beowulf who took on Breca  
in a swimming match on the open sea,  
risking the water just to prove that you could win?  
It was sheer vanity made you venture out  
on the main deep. And no matter who tried,  
510 friend or foe, to deflect the pair of you,  
neither would back down: the sea-test obsessed  
you.  
You waded in, embracing water,  
taking its measure, mastering currents,  
riding on the swell. The ocean swayed,  
515 winter went wild in the waves, but you vied  
for seven nights; and then he outswam you,  
came ashore the stronger contender.  
He was cast up safe and sound one morning  
among the Heatho-Reams, then made his way  
520 to where he belonged in Branding country,

home again, sure of his ground  
in strongroom and bawn.<sup>4</sup> So Breca made good  
his boast upon you and was proved right.  
No matter, therefore, how you may have fared  
525 in every bout and battle until now,  
this time you'll be worsted; no one has ever  
outlasted an entire night against Grendel."  
Beowulf, Ecgtheow's son, replied:  
530 "Well, friend Unferth, you have had your say  
about Breca and me. But it was mostly beer  
that was doing the talking. The truth is this:  
when the going was heavy in those high waves,  
I was the strongest swimmer of all.  
We'd been children together and we grew up  
535 daring ourselves to outdo each other,  
boasting and urging each other to risk  
our lives on the sea. And so it turned out.  
Each of us swam holding a sword,  
a naked, hard-proofed blade for protection  
540 against the whale-beasts. But Breca could never  
move out farther or faster from me  
than I could manage to move from him.  
Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on  
for five nights, until the long flow  
545 and pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,  
night falling and winds from the north  
drove us apart. The deep boiled up  
and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.  
My armor helped me to hold out;  
550 my hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,  
a fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,  
kept me safe when some ocean creature  
pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast  
and swathed in its grip, I was granted one  
555 final chance: my sword plunged

and the ordeal was over. Through my own hands,  
the fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.

560 "Time and again, foul things attacked me,  
lurking and stalking, but I lashed out,  
gave as good as I got with my sword.  
My flesh was not for feasting on,  
there would be no monsters gnawing and gloating  
over their banquet at the bottom of the sea.  
565 Instead, in the morning, mangled and sleeping  
the sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated  
like the ocean's leavings. From now on  
sailors would be safe, the deep-sea raids  
were over for good. Light came from the east,  
bright guarantee of God, and the waves  
570 went quiet; I could see headlands  
and buffeted cliffs. Often, for undaunted courage,  
fate spares the man it has not already marked.  
However it occurred, my sword had killed  
nine sea-monsters. Such night dangers  
575 and hard ordeals I have never heard of  
nor of a man more desolate in surging waves.  
But worn out as I was, I survived,  
came through with my life. The ocean lifted  
and laid me ashore, I landed safe  
580 on the coast of Finland.

Now I cannot recall  
any fight you entered, Unferth,  
that bears comparison. I don't boast when I say  
that neither you nor Breca were ever much  
celebrated for swordsmanship  
585 or for facing danger on the field of battle.  
You killed your own kith and kin,  
so for all your cleverness and quick tongue,  
you will suffer damnation in the depths of hell.  
The fact is, Unferth, if you were truly  
590 as keen or courageous as you claim to be

Grendel would never have got away with  
such unchecked atrocity, attacks on your king,  
havoc in Heorot and horrors everywhere.  
But he knows he need never be in dread  
595 of your blade making a mizzle of his blood  
or of vengeance arriving ever from this quarter—  
from the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the  
spear.  
He knows he can trample down you Danes  
to his heart's content, humiliate and murder  
600 without fear of reprisal. But he will find me different.  
I will show him how Geats shape to kill  
in the heat of battle. Then whoever wants to  
may go bravely to mead, when the morning light,  
scarfed in sun-dazzle, shines forth from the south  
605 and brings another daybreak to the world.”  
Then the gray-haired treasure-giver was glad;  
far-famed in battle, the prince of Bright-Danes  
and keeper of his people counted on Beowulf,  
on the warrior's steadfastness and his word.  
610 So the laughter started, the din got louder  
and the crowd was happy. Wealhtheow came in,  
Hrothgar's queen, observing the courtesies.  
Adorned in her gold, she graciously saluted  
the men in the hall, then handed the cup  
615 first to Hrothgar, their homeland's guardian,  
urging him to drink deep and enjoy it  
because he was dear to them. And he drank it down  
like the warlord he was, with festive cheer.  
So the Helming woman went on her rounds,  
620 queenly and dignified, decked out in rings,  
offering the goblet to all ranks,  
treating the household and the assembled troop,  
until it was Beowulf's turn to take it from her hand.  
With measured words she welcomed the Geat  
625 and thanked God for granting her wish



that a deliverer she could believe in would arrive  
to ease their afflictions. He accepted the cup,  
a daunting man, dangerous in action  
and eager for it always. He addressed Wealhtheow;  
630 Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, said:  
"I had a fixed purpose when I put to sea.  
As I sat in the boat with my band of men,  
I meant to perform to the uttermost  
635 what your people wanted or perish in the attempt,  
in the fiend's clutches. And I shall fulfill that purpose,  
prove myself with a proud deed  
or meet my death here in the mead-hall."  
This formal boast by Beowulf the Geat  
pleased the lady well and she went to sit  
640 by Hrothgar, regal and arrayed with gold.  
Then it was like old times in the echoing hall,  
proud talk and the people happy,  
loud and excited; until soon enough  
Halfdane's heir had to be away  
645 to his night's rest. He realized  
that the demon was going to descend on the hall,  
that he had plotted all day, from dawn light  
until darkness gathered again over the world  
and stealthy night-shapes came stealing forth  
650 under the cloud-murk. The company stood  
as the two leaders took leave of each other:  
Hrothgar wished Beowulf health and good luck,  
named him hall-warden and announced as follows:  
"Never, since my hand could hold a shield  
655 have I entrusted or given control  
of the Danes' hall to anyone but you.  
Ward and guard it, for it is the greatest of houses.  
Be on your mettle now, keep in mind your fame,  
beware of the enemy. There's nothing you wish for  
660 that won't be yours if you win through alive."

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Fortified outwork of a court or castle. The word was used by English planters in Ulster to describe fortified dwellings they erected on lands confiscated from the Irish [*Translator's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)

## [THE FIGHT WITH GRENDEL]

Hrothgar departed then with his house-guard.  
The lord of the Shieldings, their shelter in war,  
left the mead-hall to lie with Wealhtheow,  
his queen and bedmate. The King of Glory  
665 (as people learned) had posted a lookout  
who was a match for Grendel, a guard against  
monsters,  
special protection to the Danish prince.  
And the Geat placed complete trust  
in his strength of limb and the Lord's favor.  
670 He began to remove his iron breast-mail,  
took off the helmet and handed his attendant  
the patterned sword, a smith's masterpiece,  
ordering him to keep the equipment guarded.  
And before he bedded down, Beowulf,  
675 that prince of goodness, proudly asserted:  
"When it comes to fighting, I count myself  
as dangerous any day as Grendel.  
So it won't be a cutting edge I'll wield  
to mow him down, easily as I might.  
680 He has no idea of the arts of war,  
of shield or sword-play, although he does possess  
a wild strength. No weapons, therefore,  
for either this night: unarmed he shall face me  
if face me he dares. And may the Divine Lord  
685 in His wisdom grant the glory of victory  
to whichever side He sees fit."  
Then down the brave man lay with his bolster  
under his head and his whole company  
of sea-rovers at rest beside him.  
690 None of them expected he would ever see  
his homeland again or get back

to his native place and the people who reared him.  
They knew too well the way it was before,  
how often the Danes had fallen prey  
695 to death in the mead-hall. But the Lord was weaving  
a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats.  
Through the strength of one they all prevailed;  
they would crush their enemy and come through  
in triumph and gladness. The truth is clear:  
700 Almighty God rules over mankind  
and always has.

Then out of the night  
came the shadow-stalker, stealthy and swift.  
The hall-guards were slack, asleep at their posts,  
all except one; it was widely understood  
705 that as long as God disallowed it,  
the fiend could not bear them to his shadow-bourne.  
One man, however, was in fighting mood,  
awake and on edge, spoiling for action.

In off the moors, down through the mist-bands  
710 God-cursed Grendel came greedily loping.  
The bane of the race of men roamed forth,  
hunting for a prey in the high hall.  
Under the cloud-murk he moved toward it  
until it shone above him, a sheer keep  
715 of fortified gold. Nor was that the first time  
he had scouted the grounds of Hrothgar's dwelling—  
although never in his life, before or since,  
did he find harder fortune or hall-defenders.  
Spurned and joyless, he journeyed on ahead  
720 and arrived at the bawn.<sup>5</sup> The iron-braced door  
turned on its hinge when his hands touched it.  
Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open  
the mouth of the building, maddening for blood,  
pacing the length of the patterned floor  
725 with his loathsome tread, while a baleful light,

flame more than light, flared from his eyes.  
He saw many men in the mansion, sleeping,  
a ranked company of kinsmen and warriors  
quartered together. And his glee was demonic,  
730 picturing the mayhem: before morning  
he would rip life from limb and devour them,  
feed on their flesh; but his fate that night  
was due to change, his days of ravening  
had come to an end.

735                                   Mighty and canny,  
Hygelac's kinsman was keenly watching  
for the first move the monster would make.  
Nor did the creature keep him waiting  
but struck suddenly and started in;  
740 he grabbed and mauled a man on his bench,  
bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood  
and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body  
utterly lifeless, eaten up  
hand and foot. Venturing closer,  
745 his talon was raised to attack Beowulf  
where he lay on the bed, he was bearing in  
with open claw when the alert hero's  
comeback and armlock forestalled him utterly.  
The captain of evil discovered himself  
750 in a handgrip harder than anything  
he had ever encountered in any man  
on the face of the earth. Every bone in his body  
quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape.  
He was desperate to flee to his den and hide  
755 with the devil's litter, for in all his days  
he had never been clamped or cornered like this.  
Then Hygelac's trusty retainer recalled  
his bedtime speech, sprang to his feet  
and got a firm hold. Fingers were bursting,  
760 the monster back-tracking, the man overpowering.  
The dread of the land was desperate to escape,

to take a roundabout road and flee  
to his lair in the fens. The latching power  
in his fingers weakened; it was the worst trip  
the terror-monger had taken to Heorot.  
765 And now the timbers trembled and sang,  
a hall-session<sup>6</sup> that harrowed every Dane  
inside the stockade: stumbling in fury,  
the two contenders crashed through the building.  
The hall clattered and hammered, but somehow  
770 survived the onslaught and kept standing:  
it was handsomely structured, a sturdy frame  
braced with the best of blacksmith's work  
inside and out. The story goes  
that as the pair struggled, mead-benches were  
775 smashed  
and sprung off the floor, gold fittings and all.  
Before then, no Shielding elder would believe  
there was any power or person upon earth  
capable of wrecking their horn-rigged hall  
unless the burning embrace of a fire  
780 engulf it in flame. Then an extraordinary  
wail arose, and bewildering fear  
came over the Danes. Everyone felt it  
who heard that cry as it echoed off the wall,  
a God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,  
785 the howl of the loser, the lament of the hell-serf  
keening his wound. He was overwhelmed,  
manacled tight by the man who of all men  
was foremost and strongest in the days of this life.  
But the earl-troop's leader was not inclined  
790 to allow his caller to depart alive:  
he did not consider that life of much account  
to anyone anywhere. Time and again,  
Beowulf's warriors worked to defend  
their lord's life, laying about them  
795

as best they could, with their ancestral blades.  
Stalwart in action, they kept striking out  
on every side, seeking to cut  
straight to the soul. When they joined the struggle  
there was something they could not have known at  
800 the time,  
that no blade on earth, no blacksmith's art  
could ever damage their demon opponent.  
He had conjured the harm from the cutting edge  
of every weapon.<sup>7</sup> But his going away  
out of this world and the days of his life  
805 would be agony to him, and his alien spirit  
would travel far into fiends' keeping.  
Then he who had harrowed the hearts of men  
with pain and affliction in former times  
and had given offense also to God  
810 found that his bodily powers failed him.  
Hygelac's kinsman kept him helplessly  
locked in a handgrip. As long as either lived,  
he was hateful to the other. The monster's whole  
body was in pain; a tremendous wound  
815 appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split  
and the bone-lappings burst. Beowulf was granted  
the glory of winning; Grendel was driven  
under the fen-banks, fatally hurt,  
to his desolate lair. His days were numbered,  
820 the end of his life was coming over him,  
he knew it for certain; and one bloody clash  
had fulfilled the dearest wishes of the Danes.  
The man who had lately landed among them,  
proud and sure, had purged the hall,  
825 kept it from harm; he was happy with his nightwork  
and the courage he had shown. The Geat captain  
had boldly fulfilled his boast to the Danes:  
he had healed and relieved a huge distress,

830 unremitting humiliations,  
the hard fate they'd been forced to undergo,  
no small affliction. Clear proof of this  
could be seen in the hand the hero displayed  
high up near the roof: the whole of Grendel's  
835 shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: See p. 53, n. 4. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Hiberno-English the word "session" (*seisiún* in Irish) can mean a gathering where musicians and singers perform for their own enjoyment [*Translator's note*]. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Grendel is protected by a charm against metals. [Return to reference 7](#)



## [CELEBRATION AT HEOROT]

Then morning came and many a warrior  
gathered, as I've heard, around the gift-hall,  
clan-chiefs flocking from far and near  
down wide-ranging roads, wondering greatly  
at the monster's footprints. His fatal departure  
840 was regretted by no one who witnessed his trail,  
the ignominious marks of his flight  
where he'd skulked away, exhausted in spirit  
and beaten in battle, bloodying the path,  
hauling his doom to the demons' mere.<sup>8</sup>  
845 The bloodshot water wallowed and surged,  
there were loathsome upthrows and overturnings  
of waves and gore and wound-slurry.  
With his death upon him, he had dived deep  
into his marsh-den, drowned out his life  
850 and his heathen soul: hell claimed him there.  
Then away they rode, the old retainers  
with many a young man following after,  
a troop on horseback, in high spirits  
on their bay steeds. Beowulf's doings  
855 were praised over and over again.  
Nowhere, they said, north or south  
between the two seas or under the tall sky  
on the broad earth was there anyone better  
to raise a shield or to rule a kingdom.  
860 Yet there was no laying of blame on their lord,  
the noble Hrothgar; he was a good king.  
At times the war-band broke into a gallop,  
letting their chestnut horses race  
wherever they found the going good  
865 on those well-known tracks. Meanwhile, a thane  
of the king's household, a carrier of tales,

a traditional singer deeply schooled  
in the lore of the past, linked a new theme  
to a strict meter.<sup>9</sup> The man started  
870 to recite with skill, rehearsing Beowulf's  
triumphs and feats in well-fashioned lines,  
entwining his words.

He told what he'd heard  
repeated in songs about Sigemund's exploits,<sup>1</sup>  
all of those many feats and marvels,  
875 the struggles and wanderings of Waels's son,<sup>2</sup>  
things unknown to anyone  
except to Fitela, feuds and foul doings  
confided by uncle to nephew when he felt  
the urge to speak of them: always they had been  
880 partners in the fight, friends in need.  
They killed giants, their conquering swords  
had brought them down.

*After his death*  
*Sigemund's glory grew and grew*  
*because of his courage when he killed the dragon,*  
885 *the guardian of the hoard. Under gray stone*  
*he had dared to enter all by himself*  
*to face the worst without Fitela.*  
*But it came to pass that his sword plunged*  
*right through those radiant scales*  
890 *and drove into the wall. The dragon died of it.*  
*His daring had given him total possession*  
*of the treasure-hoard, his to dispose of*  
*however he liked. He loaded a boat:*  
*Waels's son weighted her hold*  
895 *with dazzling spoils. The hot dragon melted.*  
*Sigemund's name was known everywhere.*  
*He was utterly valiant and venturesome,*  
*a fence round his fighters and flourished therefore*  
900 *after King Heremod's<sup>3</sup> prowess declined*

and his campaigns slowed down. The king was  
 betrayed,  
 ambushed in Jutland, overpowered  
 and done away with. The waves of his grief  
 had beaten him down, made him a burden,  
 a source of anxiety to his own nobles:  
 905 that expedition was often condemned  
 in those earlier times by experienced men,  
 men who relied on his lordship for redress,  
 who presumed that the part of a prince was to  
 thrive  
 on his father's throne and defend the nation,  
 910 the Shielding land where they lived and belonged,  
 its holdings and strongholds. Such was Beowulf  
 in the affection of his friends and of everyone  
 alive.  
 But evil entered into Heremod.  
 They kept racing each other, urging their mounts  
 915 down sandy lanes. The light of day  
 broke and kept brightening. Bands of retainers  
 galloped in excitement to the gabled hall  
 to see the marvel; and the king himself,  
 guardian of the ring-hoard, goodness in person,  
 920 walked in majesty from the women's quarters  
 with a numerous train, attended by his queen  
 and her crowd of maidens, across to the mead-hall.  
 When Hrothgar arrived at the hall, he spoke,  
 standing on the steps, under the steep eaves,  
 925 gazing toward the roofwork and Grendel's talon:  
 "First and foremost, let the Almighty Father  
 be thanked for this sight. I suffered a long  
 harrowing by Grendel. But the Heavenly Shepherd  
 can work His wonders always and everywhere.  
 930 Not long since, it seemed I would never  
 be granted the slightest solace or relief  
 from any of my burdens: the best of houses

glittered and reeked and ran with blood.  
This one worry outweighed all others—  
935 a constant distress to counselors entrusted  
with defending the people's forts from assault  
by monsters and demons. But now a man,  
with the Lord's assistance, has accomplished  
something  
none of us could manage before now  
940 for all our efforts. Whoever she was  
who brought forth this flower of manhood,  
if she is still alive, that woman can say  
that in her labor the Lord of Ages  
bestowed a grace on her. So now, Beowulf,  
945 I adopt you in my heart as a dear son.  
Nourish and maintain this new connection,  
you noblest of men; there'll be nothing you'll want  
for,  
no worldly goods that won't be yours.  
I have often honored smaller achievements,  
950 recognized warriors not nearly as worthy,  
lavished rewards on the less deserving.  
But you have made yourself immortal  
by your glorious action. May the God of Ages  
continue to keep and requite you well."  
955 Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"We have gone through with a glorious endeavor  
and been much favored in this fight we dared  
against the unknown. Nevertheless,  
if you could have seen the monster himself  
960 where he lay beaten, I would have been better  
pleased.  
My plan was to pounce, pin him down  
in a tight grip and grapple him to death—  
have him panting for life, powerless and clasped  
in my bare hands, his body in thrall.  
965 But I couldn't stop him from slipping my hold.

The Lord allowed it, my lock on him  
wasn't strong enough; he struggled fiercely  
and broke and ran. Yet he bought his freedom  
at a high price, for he left his hand  
970 and arm and shoulder to show he had been here,  
a cold comfort for having come among us.  
And now he won't be long for this world.  
He has done his worst but the wound will end him.  
He is hasped and hooped and hirpling with pain,  
975 limping and looped in it. Like a man outlawed  
for wickedness, he must await  
the mighty judgment of God in majesty."  
There was less tampering and big talk then  
from Unferth the boaster, less of his blather  
980 as the hall-thanes eyed the awful proof  
of the hero's prowess, the splayed hand  
up under the eaves. Every nail,  
claw-scale and spur, every spike  
and welt on the hand of that heathen brute  
985 was like barbed steel. Everybody said  
there was no honed iron hard enough  
to pierce him through, no time-proofed blade  
that could cut his brutal, blood-caked claw.  
Then the order was given for all hands  
990 to help to refurbish Heorot immediately:  
men and women thronging the wine-hall,  
getting it ready. Gold thread shone  
in the wall-hangings, woven scenes  
that attracted and held the eye's attention.  
995 But iron-braced as the inside of it had been,  
that bright room lay in ruins now.  
The very doors had been dragged from their hinges.  
Only the roof remained unscathed  
by the time the guilt-fouled fiend turned tail  
1000 in despair of his life. But death is not easily  
escaped from by anyone:

all of us with souls, earth-dwellers  
and children of men, must make our way  
to a destination already ordained  
1005 where the body, after the banqueting,  
sleeps on its deathbed.

Then the due time arrived  
for Halfdane's son to proceed to the hall.  
The king himself would sit down to feast.  
No group ever gathered in greater numbers  
1010 or better order around their ring-giver.  
The benches filled with famous men  
who fell to with relish; round upon round  
of mead was passed; those powerful kinsmen,  
Hrothgar and Hrothulf, were in high spirits  
1015 in the raftered hall. Inside Heorot  
there was nothing but friendship. The Shielding  
nation  
was not yet familiar with feud and betrayal.<sup>4</sup>  
Then Halfdane's son presented Beowulf  
with a gold standard as a victory gift,  
1020 an embroidered banner; also breast-mail  
and a helmet; and a sword carried high,  
that was both precious object and token of honor.  
So Beowulf drank his drink, at ease;  
it was hardly a shame to be showered with such gifts  
1025 in front of the hall-troops. There haven't been many  
moments, I am sure, when men exchanged  
four such treasures at so friendly a sitting.  
An embossed ridge, a band lapped with wire  
arched over the helmet: head-protection  
1030 to keep the keen-ground cutting edge  
from damaging it when danger threatened  
and the man was battling behind his shield.  
Next the king ordered eight horses  
with gold bridles to be brought through the yard  
1035

into the hall. The harness of one  
included a saddle of sumptuous design,  
the battle-seat where the son of Halfdane  
rode when he wished to join the sword-play:  
1040 wherever the killing and carnage were the worst,  
he would be to the fore, fighting hard.  
Then the Danish prince, descendant of Ing,  
handed over both the arms and the horses,  
urging Beowulf to use them well.  
1045 And so their leader, the lord and guard  
of coffer and strongroom, with customary grace  
bestowed upon Beowulf both sets of gifts.  
A fair witness can see how well each one behaved.  
The chieftain went on to reward the others:  
1050 each man on the bench who had sailed with Beowulf  
and risked the voyage received a bounty,  
some treasured possession. And compensation,  
a price in gold, was settled for the Geat  
Grendel had cruelly killed earlier—  
1055 as he would have killed more, had not mindful God  
and one man's daring prevented that doom.  
Past and present, God's will prevails.  
Hence, understanding is always best  
and a prudent mind. Whoever remains  
1060 for long here in this earthly life  
will enjoy and endure more than enough.  
They sang then and played to please the hero,  
words and music for their warrior prince,  
harp tunes and tales of adventure:  
1065 there were high times on the hall benches,  
and the king's poet performed his part  
with the saga of Finn and his sons, unfolding  
the tale of the fierce attack in Friesland  
where Hnaef, king of the Danes, met death.<sup>5</sup>  
*Hildeburh*  
1070

*had little cause  
to credit the Jutes:  
son and brother,  
she lost them both  
on the battlefield.*

*She, bereft  
and blameless, they  
foredoomed, cut down  
and spear-gored. She,  
the woman in shock,  
waylaid by grief,  
Hoc's daughter—*

1075

*how could she not  
lament her fate  
when morning came  
and the light broke  
on her murdered dears?*

*And so farewell  
delight on earth,  
war carried away  
Finn's troop of thanes  
all but a few.*

1080

*How then could Finn  
hold the line  
or fight on  
to the end with Hengest,  
how save  
the rump of his force  
from that enemy chief?*

1085

*So a truce was offered  
as follows:<sup>6</sup> first  
separate quarters  
to be cleared for the Danes,  
hall and throne  
to be shared with the Frisians.*



Then, second:  
                                every day  
at the dole-out of gifts  
                                Finn, son of Focwald,  
should honor the Danes,  
1090                                  bestow with an even  
hand to Hengest  
                                and Hengest's men  
the wrought-gold rings,  
                                bounty to match  
the measure he gave  
                                his own Frisians—  
to keep morale  
                                in the beer-hall high.  
Both sides then  
1095                                  sealed their agreement.  
With oaths to Hengest  
                                Finn swore  
openly, solemnly,  
                                that the battle survivors  
would be guaranteed  
                                honor and status.  
No infringement  
                                by word or deed,  
no provocation  
1100                                  would be permitted.  
Their own ring-giver  
                                after all  
was dead and gone,  
                                they were leaderless,  
in forced allegiance  
                                to his murderer.  
So if any Frisian  
                                stirred up bad blood  
with insinuations  
1105                                  or taunts about this,

*the blade of the sword  
would arbitrate it.  
A funeral pyre  
was then prepared,  
effulgent gold  
brought out from the hoard.  
The pride and prince  
of the Shieldings lay  
awaiting the flame.*

1110 *Everywhere  
there were blood-plastered  
coats of mail.  
The pyre was heaped  
with boar-shaped helmets  
forged in gold,  
with the gashed corpses  
of wellborn Danes—  
many had fallen.*

1115 *Then Hildeburh  
ordered her own  
son's body  
be burnt with Hnaef's,  
the flesh on his bones  
to sputter and blaze  
beside his uncle's.*

*The woman wailed  
and sang keens,  
the warrior went up.<sup>7</sup>*

1120 *Carcass flame  
swirled and fumed,  
they stood round the burial  
mound and howled  
as heads melted,  
crusted gashes  
spattered and ran*

*bloody matter.*

The glutton element  
                *flamed and consumed*  
*the dead of both sides.*

1125                 *Their great days were gone.*  
Warriors scattered  
                *to homes and forts*  
*all over Friesland,*  
                *fewer now, feeling*  
*loss of friends.*

*Hengest stayed,*  
*lived out that whole*  
                *resentful, blood-sullen*  
*winter with Finn,*

1130                 *homesick and helpless.*  
*No ring-whorled prow*  
                *could up then*  
*and away on the sea.*  
                *Wind and water*  
*raged with storms,*  
                *wave and shingle*  
*were shackled in ice*  
                *until another year*  
*appeared in the yard*

1135                 *as it does to this day,*  
*the seasons constant,*  
                *the wonder of light*  
*coming over us.*

*Then winter was gone,*  
*earth's lap grew lovely,*  
                *longing woke*  
*in the cooped-up exile*  
                *for a voyage home—*  
*but more for vengeance,*

1140                 *some way of bringing*  
*things to a head:*

his sword arm hankered  
to greet the Jutes.

So he did not balk  
once Hunlafing

placed on his lap  
Dazzle-the-Duel,

the best sword of all,<sup>8</sup>  
whose edges Jutes  
1145 knew only too well.

Thus blood was spilled,  
the gallant Finn  
slain in his home

after Guthlaf and Oslaf<sup>9</sup>  
back from their voyage  
made old accusation:  
the brutal ambush,  
the fate they had suffered,  
all blamed on Finn.

1150 The wildness in them  
had to brim over.

The hall ran red  
with blood of enemies.

Finn was cut down,  
the queen brought away

and everything  
the Shieldings could find  
inside Finn's walls—

the Frisian king's  
1155 gold collars and gemstones—  
swept off to the ship.

Over sea-lanes then  
back to Daneland

the warrior troop  
bore that lady home.

The poem was over,  
the poet had performed, a pleasant murmur  
started on the benches, stewards did the rounds  
1160 with wine in splendid jugs, and Wealhtheow came to  
sit  
in her gold crown between two good men,  
uncle and nephew, each one of whom  
still trusted the other;<sup>1</sup> and the forthright Unferth,  
1165 admired by all for his mind and courage  
although under a cloud for killing his brothers,  
reclined near the king.

The queen spoke:  
"Enjoy this drink, my most generous lord;  
raise up your goblet, entertain the Geats  
duly and gently, discourse with them,  
1170 be open-handed, happy and fond.  
Relish their company, but recollect as well  
all of the boons that have been bestowed on you.  
The bright court of Heorot has been cleansed  
and now the word is that you want to adopt  
1175 this warrior as a son. So, while you may,  
bask in your fortune, and then bequeath  
kingdom and nation to your kith and kin,  
before your decease. I am certain of Hrothulf.  
He is noble and will use the young ones well.  
1180 He will not let you down. Should you die before him,  
he will treat our children truly and fairly.  
He will honor, I am sure, our two sons,  
repay them in kind, when he recollects  
all the good things we gave him once,  
1185 the favor and respect he found in his childhood."  
She turned then to the bench where her boys sat,  
Hrethric and Hrothmund, with other nobles' sons,  
all the youth together; and that good man,  
Beowulf the Geat, sat between the brothers.

1190 The cup was carried to him, kind words  
spoken in welcome and a wealth of wrought gold  
graciously bestowed: two arm bangles,  
a mail-shirt and rings, and the most resplendent  
torque of gold I ever heard tell of  
1195 anywhere on earth or under heaven.  
There was no hoard like it since Hama snatched  
the Brosings' neck-chain and bore it away  
with its gems and settings to his shining fort,  
away from Eormenric's wiles and hatred,<sup>2</sup>  
1200 and thereby ensured his eternal reward.  
Hygelac the Geat, grandson of Swerting,  
wore this neck-ring on his last raid;<sup>3</sup>  
at bay under his banner, he defended the booty,  
treasure he had won. Fate swept him away  
1205 because of his proud need to provoke  
a feud with the Frisians. He fell beneath his shield,  
in the same gem-crusted, kingly gear  
he had worn when he crossed the frothing wave-vat.  
So the dead king fell into Frankish hands.  
1210 They took his breast-mail, also his neck-torque,  
and punier warriors plundered the slain  
when the carnage ended; Geat corpses  
covered the field.

Applause filled the hall.

1215 Then Wealhtheow pronounced in the presence of the  
company:  
"Take delight in this torque, dear Beowulf,  
wear it for luck and wear also this mail  
from our people's armory: may you prosper in them!  
Be acclaimed for strength, for kindly guidance  
to these two boys, and your bounty will be sure.  
1220 You have won renown: you are known to all men  
far and near, now and forever.  
Your sway is wide as the wind's home,

as the sea around cliffs. And so, my prince,  
 I wish you a lifetime's luck and blessings  
 1225 to enjoy this treasure. Treat my sons  
 with tender care, be strong and kind.  
 Here each comrade is true to the other,  
 loyal to lord, loving in spirit.  
 1230 The thanes have one purpose, the people are ready:  
 having drunk and pledged, the ranks do as I bid."  
 She moved then to her place. Men were drinking  
 wine  
 at that rare feast; how could they know fate,  
 the grim shape of things to come,  
 the threat looming over many thanes  
 1235 as night approached and King Hrothgar prepared  
 to retire to his quarters? Retainers in great numbers  
 were posted on guard as so often in the past.  
 Benches were pushed back, bedding gear and  
 bolsters  
 spread across the floor, and one man  
 1240 lay down to his rest, already marked for death.  
 At their heads they placed their polished timber  
 battle-shields; and on the bench above them,  
 each man's kit was kept to hand:  
 1245 a towering war-helmet, webbed mail-shirt  
 and great-shafted spear. It was their habit  
 always and everywhere to be ready for action,  
 at home or in the camp, in whatever case  
 and at whatever time the need arose  
 1250 to rally round their lord. They were a right people.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: A lake or pool, although we learn later that it has an outlet to the sea. Grendel's habitat. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: That is, an extemporaneous heroic poem in alliterative verse about Beowulf's deeds.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Tales about Sigemund, his nephew Sinfjotli (Fitela), and his son Sigurth are found in a 13th-century Old Icelandic collection of legends known as the *Volsung Saga*. Analogous stories must have been known to the poet and his audience, though details differ.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Waels is the father of Sigemund.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Heremod was a bad king, held up by the bard as the opposite of Beowulf, as Sigemund is held up as a heroic prototype of Beowulf.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Probably an ironic allusion to the future usurpation of the throne from Hrothgar's sons by Hrothulf, although no such treachery is recorded of Hrothulf, who is the hero of other Germanic stories.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
The bard's lay is known as the Finnsburg Episode. Its allusive style makes the tale obscure in many details, although some can be filled in from a fragmentary Old English lay, which modern editors have titled *The Fight at Finnsburg*. Hildeburh, the daughter of the former Danish king Hoc, was married to Finn, king of Friesland, presumably to help end a feud between their peoples. As the episode opens, the feud has already broken out again when a visiting party of Danes, led by Hildeburh's brother Hnaef, who has succeeded their father, is attacked by a tribe called the Jutes. The Jutes are subject to Finn but may be a clan distinct from the Frisians, and Finn does not seem to have instigated the attack. In the ensuing battle, both Hnaef and the son of Hildeburh and Finn are killed, and both sides suffer heavy losses.  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The truce was offered by Finn to Hengest, who succeeded Hnaef as leader of the Danes.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The meaning may be that the warrior was placed up on the pyre, or went up in smoke. "Keens": lamentations or dirges for the dead.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: Hunlafing may be the son of a Danish warrior called Hunlaf. The placing of the sword in Hengest's lap is a symbolic call for revenge.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It is not clear whether the Danes have traveled home and then returned to Friesland with reinforcements or whether the Danish survivors attack once the weather allows them to take ship.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See p. 63, n. 4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The necklace presented to Beowulf is compared to one worn by the goddess Freya in Germanic mythology. In another story it was stolen by Hama from the Gothic king Eormenric, who is treated as a tyrant in Germanic legend, but how Eormenric came to possess it is not known.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Later we learn that Beowulf gave the necklace to Hygd, the queen of his lord Hygelac. Hygelac is here said to have been wearing it on his last expedition. This is the first of several allusions to Hygelac's death on a raid up the Rhine, the one incident in the poem that can be connected to a historical event documented elsewhere.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [ANOTHER ATTACK]

They went to sleep. And one paid dearly  
for his night's ease, as had happened to them often,  
ever since Grendel occupied the gold-hall,  
committing evil until the end came,  
death after his crimes. Then it became clear,  
1255 obvious to everyone once the fight was over,  
that an avenger lurked and was still alive,  
grimly biding time. Grendel's mother,  
monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs.  
1260 She had been forced down into fearful waters,  
the cold depths, after Cain had killed  
his father's son, felled his own  
brother with a sword. Branded an outlaw,  
marked by having murdered, he moved into the  
wilds,  
shunned company and joy. And from Cain there  
1265 sprang  
misbegotten spirits, among them Grendel,  
the banished and accursed, due to come to grips  
with that watcher in Heorot waiting to do battle.  
The monster wrenched and wrestled with him,  
but Beowulf was mindful of his mighty strength,  
1270 the wondrous gifts God had showered on him:  
he relied for help on the Lord of All,  
on His care and favor. So he overcame the foe,  
brought down the hell-brute. Broken and bowed,  
outcast from all sweetness, the enemy of mankind  
1275 made for his death-den. But now his mother  
had sallied forth on a savage journey,  
grief-racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge.  
She came to Heorot. There, inside the hall,  
Danes lay asleep, earls who would soon endure

1280 a great reversal, once Grendel's mother  
attacked and entered. Her onslaught was less  
only by as much as an amazon warrior's  
strength is less than an armed man's  
when the hefted sword, its hammered edge  
1285 and gleaming blade slathered in blood,  
razes the sturdy boar-ridge off a helmet.  
Then in the hall, hard-honed swords  
were grabbed from the bench, many a broad shield  
lifted and braced; there was little thought of helmets  
1290 or woven mail when they woke in terror.  
The hell-dam was in panic, desperate to get out,  
in mortal terror the moment she was found.  
She had pounced and taken one of the retainers  
in a tight hold, then headed for the fen.  
1295 To Hrothgar, this man was the most beloved  
of the friends he trusted between the two seas.  
She had done away with a great warrior,  
ambushed him at rest.

Beowulf was elsewhere.

1300 Earlier, after the award of the treasure,  
the Geat had been given another lodging.  
There was uproar in Heorot. She had snatched their  
trophy,  
Grendel's bloodied hand. It was a fresh blow  
to the afflicted bawn. The bargain was hard,  
both parties having to pay  
1305 with the lives of friends. And the old lord,  
the gray-haired warrior, was heartsore and weary  
when he heard the news: his highest-placed adviser,  
his dearest companion, was dead and gone.  
Beowulf was quickly brought to the chamber:  
1310 the winner of fights, the arch-warrior,  
came first-footing in with his fellow troops  
to where the king in his wisdom waited,  
still wondering whether Almighty God

would ever turn the tide of his misfortunes.  
1315 So Beowulf entered with his band in attendance  
and the wooden floorboards banged and rang  
as he advanced, hurrying to address  
the prince of the Ingwins, asking if he'd rested  
since the urgent summons had come as a surprise.  
1320 Then Hrothgar, the Shieldings' helmet, spoke:  
"Rest? What is rest? Sorrow has returned.  
Alas for the Danes! Aeschere is dead.  
He was Yrmenlaf's elder brother  
and a soul-mate to me, a true mentor,  
1325 my right-hand man when the ranks clashed  
and our boar-crests had to take a battering  
in the line of action. Aeschere was everything  
the world admires in a wise man and a friend.  
Then this roaming killer came in a fury  
1330 and slaughtered him in Heorot. Where she is hiding,  
glutting on the corpse and glorying in her escape,  
I cannot tell; she has taken up the feud  
because of last night, when you killed Grendel,  
wrestled and racked him in ruinous combat  
1335 since for too long he had terrorized us  
with his depredations. He died in battle,  
paid with his life; and now this powerful  
other one arrives, this force for evil  
driven to avenge her kinsman's death.  
1340 Or so it seems to thanes in their grief,  
in the anguish everythane endures  
at the loss of a ring-giver, now that the hand  
that bestowed so richly has been stilled in death.  
1345 "I have heard it said by my people in hall,  
counselors who live in the upland country,  
that they have seen two such creatures  
prowling the moors, huge marauders  
from some other world. One of these things,  
as far as anyone ever can discern,

1350 looks like a woman; the other, warped  
in the shape of a man, moves beyond the pale  
bigger than any man, an unnatural birth  
called Grendel by the country people  
1355 in former days. They are fatherless creatures,  
and their whole ancestry is hidden in a past  
of demons and ghosts. They dwell apart  
among wolves on the hills, on windswept crags  
and treacherous keshes, where cold streams  
1360 pour down the mountain and disappear  
under mist and moorland.

A few miles from here  
a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch  
above a mere; the overhanging bank  
is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.  
At night there, something uncanny happens:  
1365 the water burns. And the mere bottom  
has never been sounded by the sons of men.  
On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:  
the hart in flight from pursuing hounds  
will turn to face them with firm-set horns  
1370 and die in the wood rather than dive  
beneath its surface. That is no good place.  
When wind blows up and stormy weather  
makes clouds scud and the skies weep,  
out of its depths a dirty surge  
1375 is pitched toward the heavens. Now help depends  
again on you and on you alone.  
The gap of danger where the demon waits  
is still unknown to you. Seek it if you dare.  
I will compensate you for settling the feud  
1380 as I did the last time with lavish wealth,  
coffers of coiled gold, if you come back."

## [BEOWULF FIGHTS GRENDEL'S MOTHER]

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better  
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.  
1385 For every one of us, living in this world  
means waiting for our end. Let whoever can  
win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,  
that will be his best and only bulwark.  
1390 So arise, my lord, and let us immediately  
set forth on the trail of this troll-dam.  
I guarantee you: she will not get away,  
not to dens under ground nor upland groves  
nor the ocean floor. She'll have nowhere to flee to.  
1395 Endure your troubles today. Bear up  
and be the man I expect you to be."  
With that the old lord sprang to his feet  
and praised God for Beowulf's pledge.  
Then a bit and halter were brought for his horse  
with the plaited mane. The wise king mounted  
1400 the royal saddle and rode out in style  
with a force of shield-bearers. The forest paths  
were marked all over with the monster's tracks,  
her trail on the ground wherever she had gone  
1405 across the dark moors, dragging away  
the body of that thane, Hrothgar's best  
counselor and overseer of the country.  
So the noble prince proceeded undismayed  
up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths  
and ways where they were forced into single file,  
1410 ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters.  
He went in front with a few men,  
good judges of the lie of the land,  
and suddenly discovered the dismal wood,

1415 mountain trees growing out at an angle  
above gray stones: the bloodshot water  
surged underneath. It was a sore blow  
to all of the Danes, friends of the Shieldings,  
a hurt to each and every one  
of that noble company when they came upon  
1420 Aeschere's head at the foot of the cliff.  
Everybody gazed as the hot gore  
kept wallowing up and an urgent war-horn  
repeated its notes: the whole party  
sat down to watch. The water was infested  
1425 with all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-  
dragons  
and monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,  
serpents and wild things such as those that often  
surface at dawn to roam the sail-road  
and doom the voyage. Down they plunged,  
1430 lashing in anger at the loud call  
of the battle-bugle. An arrow from the bow  
of the Geat chief got one of them  
as he surged to the surface: the seasoned shaft  
stuck deep in his flank and his freedom in the water  
1435 got less and less. It was his last swim.  
He was swiftly overwhelmed in the shallows,  
prodded by barbed boar-spears,  
cornered, beaten, pulled up on the bank,  
a strange lake-birth, a loathsome catch  
1440 men gazed at in awe.

Beowulf got ready,  
donned his war-gear, indifferent to death;  
his mighty, hand-forged, fine-webbed mail  
would soon meet with the menace underwater.  
It would keep the bone-cage of his body safe:  
1445 no enemy's clasp could crush him in it,  
no vicious armlock choke his life out.  
To guard his head he had a glittering helmet

that was due to be muddied on the mere bottom  
and blurred in the upswirl. It was of beaten gold,  
1450 princely headgear hooped and hasped  
by a weapon-smith who had worked wonders  
in days gone by and adorned it with boar-shapes;  
since then it had resisted every sword.  
And another item lent by Unferth  
1455 at that moment of need was of no small importance:  
the brehon<sup>4</sup> handed him a hilted weapon,  
a rare and ancient sword named Hrunting.  
The iron blade with its ill-boding patterns  
1460 had been tempered in blood. It had never failed  
the hand of anyone who hefted it in battle,  
anyone who had fought and faced the worst  
in the gap of danger. This was not the first time  
it had been called to perform heroic feats.  
When he lent that blade to the better swordsman,  
1465 Unferth, the strong-built son of Ecglaf,  
could hardly have remembered the ranting speech  
he had made in his cups. He was not man enough  
to face the turmoil of a fight under water  
and the risk to his life. So there he lost  
1470 fame and repute. It was different for the other  
rigged out in his gear, ready to do battle.  
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"Wisest of kings, now that I have come  
to the point of action, I ask you to recall  
1475 what we said earlier: that you, son of Halfdane  
and gold-friend to retainers, that you, if I should fall  
and suffer death while serving your cause,  
would act like a father to me afterward.  
If this combat kills me, take care  
1480 of my young company, my comrades in arms.  
And be sure also, my beloved Hrothgar,  
to send Hygelac the treasures I received.



Let the lord of the Geats gaze on that gold,  
let Hrethel's son take note of it and see  
1485 that I found a ring-giver of rare magnificence  
and enjoyed the good of his generosity.  
And Unferth is to have what I inherited:  
to that far-famed man I bequeath my own  
sharp-honed, wave-sheened wonder-blade.  
1490 With Hrunting I shall gain glory or die."  
After these words, the prince of the Weather-Geats  
was impatient to be away and plunged suddenly:  
without more ado, he dived into the heaving  
depths of the lake. It was the best part of a day  
1495 before he could see the solid bottom.  
Quickly the one who haunted those waters,  
who had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds  
for a hundred seasons, sensed a human  
observing her outlandish lair from above.  
1500 So she lunged and clutched and managed to catch  
him  
in her brutal grip; but his body, for all that,  
remained unscathed: the mesh of the chain-mail  
saved him on the outside. Her savage talons  
failed to rip the web of his war-shirt.  
1505 Then once she touched bottom, that wolfish  
swimmer  
carried the ring-mailed prince to her court  
so that for all his courage he could never use  
the weapons he carried; and a bewildering horde  
came at him from the depths, droves of sea-beasts  
1510 who attacked with tusks and tore at his chain-mail  
in a ghastly onslaught. The gallant man  
could see he had entered some hellish turn-hole  
and yet the water there did not work against him  
because the hall-roofing held off  
1515 the force of the current; then he saw firelight,  
a gleam and flare-up, a glimmer of brightness.

The hero observed that swamp-thing from hell,  
the tarn-hag in all her terrible strength,  
then heaved his war-sword and swung his arm:  
1520 the decorated blade came down ringing  
and singing on her head. But he soon found  
his battle-torch extinguished; the shining blade  
refused to bite. It spared her and failed  
the man in his need. It had gone through many  
1525 hand-to-hand fights, had hewed the armor  
and helmets of the doomed, but here at last  
the fabulous powers of that heirloom failed.  
Hygelac's kinsman kept thinking about  
his name and fame: he never lost heart.  
1530 Then, in a fury, he flung his sword away.  
The keen, inlaid, worm-loop-patterned steel  
was hurled to the ground: he would have to rely  
on the might of his arm. So must a man do  
who intends to gain enduring glory  
1535 in a combat. Life doesn't cost him a thought.  
Then the prince of War-Geats, warming to this fight  
with Grendel's mother, gripped her shoulder  
and laid about him in a battle frenzy:  
he pitched his killer opponent to the floor  
1540 but she rose quickly and retaliated,  
grappled him tightly in her grim embrace.  
The sure-footed fighter felt daunted,  
the strongest of warriors stumbled and fell.  
So she pounced upon him and pulled out  
1545 a broad, whetted knife: now she would avenge  
her only child. But the mesh of chain-mail  
on Beowulf's shoulder shielded his life,  
turned the edge and tip of the blade.  
The son of Ecgtheow would have surely perished  
1550 and the Geats lost their warrior under the wide earth  
had the strong links and locks of his war-gear  
not helped to save him: holy God

decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord,  
the Ruler of Heaven, to redress the balance  
1555 once Beowulf got back up on his feet.  
Then he saw a blade that boded well,  
a sword in her armory, an ancient heirloom  
from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,  
one that any warrior would envy,  
1560 but so huge and heavy of itself  
only Beowulf could wield it in a battle.  
So the Shieldings' hero hard-pressed and enraged,  
took a firm hold of the hilt and swung  
the blade in an arc, a resolute blow  
1565 that bit deep into her neck-bone  
and severed it entirely, toppling the doomed  
house of her flesh; she fell to the floor.  
The sword dripped blood, the swordsman was  
elated.

1570 A light appeared and the place brightened  
the way the sky does when heaven's candle  
is shining clearly. He inspected the vault:  
with sword held high, its hilt raised  
to guard and threaten, Hygelac's thane  
scouted by the wall in Grendel's wake.  
1575 Now the weapon was to prove its worth.  
The warrior determined to take revenge  
for every gross act Grendel had committed—  
and not only for that one occasion  
when he'd come to slaughter the sleeping troops,  
1580 fifteen of Hrothgar's house-guards  
surprised on their benches and ruthlessly devoured,  
and as many again carried away,  
a brutal plunder. Beowulf in his fury  
now settled that score: he saw the monster  
1585 in his resting place, war-weary and wrecked,  
a lifeless corpse, a casualty  
of the battle in Heorot. The body gaped

at the stroke dealt to it after death:  
 Beowulf cut the corpse's head off.  
 1590 Immediately the counselors keeping a lookout  
 with Hrothgar, watching the lake water,  
 saw a heave-up and surge of waves  
 and blood in the backwash. They bowed gray heads,  
 spoke in their sage, experienced way  
 1595 about the good warrior, how they never again  
 expected to see that prince returning  
 in triumph to their king. It was clear to many  
 that the wolf of the deep had destroyed him forever.  
 The ninth hour of the day arrived.  
 1600 The brave Shieldings abandoned the cliff-top  
 and the king went home; but sick at heart,  
 staring at the mere, the strangers held on.  
 They wished, without hope, to behold their lord,  
 Beowulf himself.  
 Meanwhile, the sword  
 1605 began to wilt into gory icicles  
 to slather and thaw. It was a wonderful thing,  
 the way it all melted as ice melts  
 when the Father eases the fetters off the frost  
 and unravels the water-ropes, He who wields power  
 1610 over time and tide: He is the true Lord.  
 The Geat captain saw treasure in abundance  
 but carried no spoils from those quarters  
 except for the head and the inlaid hilt  
 embossed with jewels; its blade had melted  
 1615 and the scrollwork on it burned, so scalding was the  
 blood  
 of the poisonous fiend who had perished there.  
 Then away he swam, the one who had survived  
 the fall of his enemies, flailing to the surface.  
 The wide water, the waves and pools,  
 1620 were no longer infested once the wandering fiend  
 let go of her life and this unreliable world.

The seafarers' leader made for land,  
 resolutely swimming, delighted with his prize,  
 the mighty load he was lugging to the surface.  
 1625 His thanes advanced in a troop to meet him,  
 thanking God and taking great delight  
 in seeing their prince back safe and sound.  
 Quickly the hero's helmet and mail-shirt  
 were loosed and unlaced. The lake settled,  
 1630 clouds darkened above the bloodshot depths.  
 With high hearts they headed away  
 along footpaths and trails through the fields,  
 roads that they knew, each of them wrestling  
 with the head they were carrying from the lakeside  
 1635 cliff,  
 men kingly in their courage and capable  
 of difficult work. It was a task for four  
 to hoist Grendel's head on a spear  
 and bear it under strain to the bright hall.  
 But soon enough they neared the place,  
 1640 fourteen Geats in fine fettle,  
 striding across the outlying ground  
 in a delighted throng around their leader.  
 In he came then, the thanes' commander,  
 the arch-warrior, to address Hrothgar:  
 1645 his courage was proven, his glory was secure.  
 Grendel's head was hauled by the hair,  
 dragged across the floor where the people were  
 drinking,  
 a horror for both queen and company to behold.  
 They stared in awe. It was an astonishing sight.  
 1650

## Endnotes

- Note 4: One of an ancient class of lawyers in Ireland  
 [ *Translator's note* ]. The Old English word for Unferth's office,

*thyle*, has been interpreted as “orator” and “spokesman.”[Return to reference 4](#)

## [ANOTHER CELEBRATION AT HEOROT]

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"So, son of Halfdane, prince of the Shieldings,  
we are glad to bring this booty from the lake.  
It is a token of triumph and we tender it to you.  
I barely survived the battle under water.  
1655 It was hard-fought, a desperate affair  
that could have gone badly; if God had not helped  
me,  
the outcome would have been quick and fatal.  
Although Hrunting is hard-edged,  
I could never bring it to bear in battle.  
1660 But the Lord of Men allowed me to behold—  
for He often helps the unbefriended—  
an ancient sword shining on the wall,  
a weapon made for giants, there for the wielding.  
1665 Then my moment came in the combat and I struck  
the dwellers in that den. Next thing the damascened  
sword blade melted; it bloated and it burned  
in their rushing blood. I have wrested the hilt  
from the enemy's hand, avenged the evil  
done to the Danes; it is what was due.  
1670 And this I pledge, O prince of the Shieldings:  
you can sleep secure with your company of troops  
in Heorot Hall. Never need you fear  
for a singlethane of your sept or nation,  
young warriors or old, that laying waste of life  
1675 that you and your people endured of yore."  
Then the gold hilt was handed over  
to the old lord, a relic from long ago  
for the venerable ruler. That rare smithwork  
was passed on to the prince of the Danes  
1680 when those devils perished; once death removed

that murdering, guilt-steeped, God-cursed fiend,  
 eliminating his unholy life  
 and his mother's as well, it was willed to that king  
 who of all the lavish gift-lords of the north  
 1685 was the best regarded between the two seas.  
 Hrothgar spoke; he examined the hilt,  
 that relic of old times. It was engraved all over  
 and showed how war first came into the world  
 and the flood destroyed the tribe of giants.  
 1690 They suffered a terrible severance from the Lord;  
 the Almighty made the waters rise,  
 drowned them in the deluge for retribution.  
 In pure gold inlay on the sword-guards  
 1695 there were rune-markings correctly incised,  
 stating and recording for whom the sword  
 had been first made and ornamented  
 with its scrollworked hilt. Then everyone hushed  
 as the son of Halfdane spoke this wisdom:  
 1700 "A protector of his people, pledged to uphold  
 truth and justice and to respect tradition,  
 is entitled to affirm that this man  
 was born to distinction. Beowulf, my friend,  
 your fame has gone far and wide,  
 you are known everywhere. In all things you are  
 1705 even-tempered,  
 prudent and resolute. So I stand firm by the promise  
 of friendship  
 we exchanged before. Forever you will be  
 your people's mainstay and your own warriors'  
 helping hand.  
 Heremod was different,  
 the way he behaved to Ecgwela's sons.  
 1710 His rise in the world brought little joy  
 to the Danish people, only death and destruction.  
 He vented his rage on men he caroused with,  
 killed his own comrades, a pariah king



1715 who cut himself off from his own kind,  
even though Almighty God had made him  
eminent and powerful and marked him from the  
start

for a happy life. But a change happened,  
he grew bloodthirsty, gave no more rings  
to honor the Danes. He suffered in the end  
1720 for having plagued his people for so long:  
his life lost happiness.

So learn from this  
and understand true values. I who tell you  
have wintered into wisdom.

It is a great wonder  
how Almighty God in His magnificence  
1725 favors our race with rank and scope  
and the gift of wisdom; His sway is wide.  
Sometimes He allows the mind of a man  
of distinguished birth to follow its bent,  
grants him fulfillment and felicity on earth  
1730 and forts to command in his own country.  
He permits him to lord it in many lands  
until the man in his unthinkingness  
forgets that it will ever end for him.

He indulges his desires; illness and old age  
1735 mean nothing to him; his mind is untroubled  
by envy or malice or the thought of enemies  
with their hate-honed swords. The whole world  
conforms to his will, he is kept from the worst  
until an element of overweening

1740 enters him and takes hold  
while the soul's guard, its sentry, drowns,  
grown too distracted. A killer stalks him,  
an archer who draws a deadly bow.

And then the man is hit in the heart,  
1745 the arrow flies beneath his defenses,  
the devious promptings of the demon start.

His old possessions seem paltry to him now.  
He covets and resents; dishonors custom  
and bestows no gold; and because of good things  
1750 that the Heavenly Powers gave him in the past  
he ignores the shape of things to come.  
Then finally the end arrives  
when the body he was lent collapses and falls  
prey to its death; ancestral possessions  
1755 and the goods he hoarded are inherited by another  
who lets them go with a liberal hand.

“O flower of warriors, beware of that trap.  
Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part,  
eternal rewards. Do not give way to pride.  
1760 For a brief while your strength is in bloom  
but it fades quickly; and soon there will follow  
illness or the sword to lay you low,  
or a sudden fire or surge of water  
or jabbing blade or javelin from the air  
1765 or repellent age. Your piercing eye  
will dim and darken; and death will arrive,  
dear warrior, to sweep you away.

“Just so I ruled the Ring-Danes’ country  
for fifty years, defended them in wartime  
1770 with spear and sword against constant assaults  
by many tribes: I came to believe  
my enemies had faded from the face of the earth.  
Still, what happened was a hard reversal  
from bliss to grief. Grendel struck  
1775 after lying in wait. He laid waste to the land  
and from that moment my mind was in dread  
of his depredations. So I praise God  
in His heavenly glory that I lived to behold  
this head dripping blood and that after such  
1780 harrowing  
I can look upon it in triumph at last.  
Take your place, then, with pride and pleasure,

and move to the feast. Tomorrow morning  
our treasure will be shared and showered upon you."

1785     The Geat was elated and gladly obeyed  
the old man's bidding; he sat on the bench.  
And soon all was restored, the same as before.  
Happiness came back, the hall was thronged,  
and a banquet set forth; black night fell  
and covered them in darkness.

1790                                     Then the company

      rose  
for the old campaigner: the gray-haired prince  
was ready for bed. And a need for rest  
came over the brave shield-bearing Geat.  
He was a weary seafarer, far from home,  
so immediately a house-guard guided him out,  
1795     one whose office entailed looking after  
whatever a thane on the road in those days  
might need or require. It was noble courtesy.

## [BEOWULF RETURNS HOME]

1800 That great heart rested. The hall towered,  
gold-shingled and gabled, and the guest slept in it  
until the black raven with raucous glee  
announced heaven's joy, and a hurry of brightness  
overran the shadows. Warriors rose quickly,  
impatient to be off: their own country  
1805 was beckoning the nobles; and the bold voyager  
longed to be aboard his distant boat.

Then that stalwart fighter ordered Hrunting  
to be brought to Unferth, and bade Unferth  
take the sword and thanked him for lending it.  
1810 He said he had found it a friend in battle  
and a powerful help; he put no blame  
on the blade's cutting edge. He was a considerate  
man.

And there the warriors stood in their war-gear,  
eager to go, while their honored lord  
approached the platform where the other sat.  
1815 The undaunted hero addressed Hrothgar.  
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
"Now we who crossed the wide sea  
have to inform you that we feel a desire  
to return to Hygelac. Here we have been welcomed  
1820 and thoroughly entertained. You have treated us  
well.

If there is any favor on earth I can perform  
beyond deeds of arms I have done already,  
anything that would merit your affections more,  
I shall act, my lord, with alacrity.  
1825 If ever I hear from across the ocean  
that people on your borders are threatening battle  
as attackers have done from time to time,

1830 I shall land with a thousand thanes at my back  
to help your cause. Hygelac may be young  
to rule a nation, but this much I know  
about the king of the Geats: he will come to my aid  
and want to support me by word and action  
in your hour of need, when honor dictates  
that I raise a hedge of spears around you.  
1835 Then if Hrethric should think about traveling  
as a king's son to the court of the Geats,  
he will find many friends. Foreign places  
yield more to one who is himself worth meeting."  
Hrothgar spoke and answered him:  
1840 "The Lord in his wisdom sent you those words  
and they came from the heart. I have never heard  
so young a man make truer observations.  
You are strong in body and mature in mind,  
impressive in speech. If it should come to pass  
1845 that Hrethel's descendant dies beneath a spear,  
if deadly battle or the sword blade or disease  
fells the prince who guards your people  
and you are still alive, then I firmly believe  
the seafaring Geats won't find a man  
1850 worthier of acclaim as their king and defender  
than you, if only you would undertake  
the lordship of your homeland. My liking for you  
deepens with time, dear Beowulf.  
What you have done is to draw two peoples,  
1855 the Geat nation and us neighboring Danes,  
into shared peace and a pact of friendship  
in spite of hatreds we have harbored in the past.  
For as long as I rule this far-flung land  
treasures will change hands and each side will treat  
1860 the other with gifts; across the gannet's bath,  
over the broad sea, whorled prows will bring  
presents and tokens. I know your people  
are beyond reproach in every respect,

steadfast in the old way with friend or foe.”  
Then the earls’ defender furnished the hero  
with twelve treasures and told him to set out,  
sail with those gifts safely home  
to the people he loved, but to return promptly.  
And so the good and gray-haired Dane,  
that highborn king, kissed Beowulf  
and embraced his neck, then broke down  
in sudden tears. Two forebodings  
disturbed him in his wisdom, but one was stronger:  
nevermore would they meet each other  
face to face. And such was his affection  
that he could not help being overcome:  
his fondness for the man was so deep-founded,  
it warmed his heart and wound the heartstrings  
tight in his breast.

The embrace ended  
and Beowulf, glorious in his gold regalia,  
stepped the green earth. Straining at anchor  
and ready for boarding, his boat awaited him.  
So they went on their journey, and Hrothgar’s  
generosity

was praised repeatedly. He was a peerless king  
until old age sapped his strength and did him  
mortal harm, as it has done so many.  
Down to the waves then, dressed in the web  
of their chain-mail and war-shirts the young men  
marched  
in high spirits. The coast-guard spied them,  
thanes setting forth, the same as before.  
His salute this time from the top of the cliff  
was far from unmannerly; he galloped to meet them  
and as they took ship in their shining gear,  
he said how welcome they would be in Geatland.  
Then the broad hull was beached on the sand  
to be cargoes with treasure, horses and war-gear.

The curved prow motioned; the mast stood high  
 above Hrothgar's riches in the loaded hold.  
 1900 The guard who had watched the boat was given  
 a sword with gold fittings, and in future days  
 that present would make him a respected man  
 at his place on the mead-bench.  
 Then the keel  
 plunged  
 and shook in the sea; and they sailed from Denmark.  
 1905 Right away the mast was rigged with its sea-shawl;  
 sail-ropes were tightened, timbers drummed  
 and stiff winds kept the wave-crosser  
 skimming ahead; as she heaved forward,  
 her foamy neck was fleet and buoyant,  
 1910 a lapped prow loping over currents,  
 until finally the Geats caught sight of coastline  
 and familiar cliffs. The keel reared up,  
 wind lifted it home, it hit on the land.  
 The harbor guard came hurrying out  
 to the rolling water: he had watched the offing  
 1915 long and hard, on the lookout for those friends.  
 With the anchor cables, he moored their craft  
 right where it had beached, in case a backwash  
 might catch the hull and carry it away.  
 Then he ordered the prince's treasure-trove  
 1920 to be carried ashore. It was a short step  
 from there to where Hrethel's son and heir,  
 Hygelac the gold-giver, makes his home  
 on a secure cliff, in the company of retainers.  
 The building was magnificent, the king majestic,  
 1925 ensconced in his hall; and although Hygd, his queen,  
 was young, a few short years at court,  
 her mind was thoughtful and her manners sure.  
 Haereth's daughter behaved generously  
 and stinted nothing when she distributed  
 1930 bounty to the Geats.

## Great Queen Modthryth

perpetrated terrible wrongs.<sup>5</sup>

If any retainer ever made bold

to look her in the face, if an eye not her lord's<sup>6</sup>

1935

stared at her directly during daylight,  
the outcome was sealed: he was kept bound,  
in hand-tightened shackles, racked, tortured  
until doom was pronounced—death by the sword,  
slash of blade, blood-gush, and death-qualms  
in an evil display. Even a queen

1940

outstanding in beauty must not overstep like that.  
A queen should weave peace, not punish the  
innocent

with loss of life for imagined insults.

But Hemming's kinsman<sup>7</sup> put a halt to her ways

1945

and drinkers round the table had another tale:  
she was less of a bane to people's lives,  
less cruel-minded, after she was married  
to the brave Offa, a bride arrayed  
in her gold finery, given away

1950

by a caring father, ferried to her young prince  
over dim seas. In days to come  
she would grace the throne and grow famous  
for her good deeds and conduct of life,  
her high devotion to the hero king

1955

who was the best king, it has been said,  
between the two seas or anywhere else  
on the face of the earth. Offa was honored  
far and wide for his generous ways,  
his fighting spirit and his farseeing  
defense of his homeland; from him there sprang

1960

Eomer,

Garmund's grandson, kinsman of Hemming,<sup>8</sup>

his warriors' mainstay and master of the field.

Heroic Beowulf and his band of men



crossed the wide strand, striding along  
the sandy foreshore; the sun shone,  
1965 the world's candle warmed them from the south  
as they hastened to where, as they had heard,  
the young king, Ongentheow's killer  
and his people's protector,<sup>9</sup> was dispensing rings  
inside his bawn. Beowulf's return  
1970 was reported to Hygelac as soon as possible,  
news that the captain was now in the enclosure,  
his battle-brother back from the fray  
alive and well, walking to the hall.  
Room was quickly made, on the king's orders,  
1975 and the troops filed across the cleared floor.  
After Hygelac had offered greetings  
to his loyal thane in a lofty speech,  
he and his kinsman, that hale survivor,  
sat face to face. Haereth's daughter  
1980 moved about with the mead-jug in her hand,  
taking care of the company, filling the cups  
that warriors held out. Then Hygelac began  
to put courteous questions to his old comrade  
in the high hall. He hankered to know  
1985 every tale the Sea-Geats had to tell:  
"How did you fare on your foreign voyage,  
dear Beowulf, when you abruptly decided  
to sail away across the salt water  
and fight at Heorot? Did you help Hrothgar  
1990 much in the end? Could you ease the prince  
of his well-known troubles? Your undertaking  
cast my spirits down, I dreaded the outcome  
of your expedition and pleaded with you  
long and hard to leave the killer be,  
1995 let the South-Danes settle their own  
blood-feud with Grendel. So God be thanked  
I am granted this sight of you, safe and sound."

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
2000 "What happened, Lord Hygelac, is hardly a secret  
any more among men in this world—  
myself and Grendel coming to grips  
on the very spot where he visited destruction  
on the Victory-Shieldings and violated  
2005 life and limb, losses I avenged  
so no earthly offspring of Grendel's  
need ever boast of that bout before dawn,  
no matter how long the last of his evil  
family survives.

When I first landed

2010 I hastened to the ring-hall and saluted Hrothgar.  
Once he discovered why I had come,  
the son of Halfdane sent me immediately  
to sit with his own sons on the bench.  
It was a happy gathering. In my whole life  
2015 I have never seen mead enjoyed more  
in any hall on earth. Sometimes the queen  
herself appeared, peace-pledge between nations,  
to hearten the young ones and hand out  
a torque to a warrior, then take her place.  
2020 Sometimes Hrothgar's daughter distributed  
ale to older ranks, in order on the benches:  
I heard the company call her Freawaru  
as she made her rounds, presenting men  
with the gem-studded bowl, young bride-to-be  
2025 to the gracious Ingeld,<sup>1</sup> in her gold-trimmed attire.  
The friend of the Shieldings favors her betrothal:  
the guardian of the kingdom sees good in it  
and hopes this woman will heal old wounds  
and grievous feuds.

But generally the spear

2030 is prompt to retaliate when a prince is killed,  
no matter how admirable the bride may be.

“Think how the Heatho-Bards are bound to feel,  
their lord, Ingeld, and his loyal thanes,  
when he walks in with that woman to the feast:  
Danes are at the table, being entertained,  
2035 honored guests in glittering regalia,  
burnished ring-mail that was their hosts’ birthright,  
looted when the Heatho-Bards could no longer wield  
their weapons in the shield-clash, when they went  
down  
with their beloved comrades and forfeited their lives.  
2040 Then an old spearman will speak while they are  
drinking,  
having glimpsed some heirloom that brings alive  
memories of the massacre; his mood will darken  
and heart-stricken, in the stress of his emotion,  
he will begin to test a young man’s temper  
2045 and stir up trouble, starting like this:  
‘Now, my friend, don’t you recognize  
your father’s sword, his favorite weapon,  
the one he wore when he went out in his war-mask  
to face the Danes on that final day?  
2050 After Withergeld<sup>2</sup> died and his men were doomed,  
the Shieldings quickly claimed the field;  
and now here’s a son of one or other  
of those same killers coming through our hall  
overbearing us, mouthing boasts,  
2055 and rigged in armor that by right is yours.’  
And so he keeps on, recalling and accusing,  
working things up with bitter words  
until one of the lady’s retainers lies  
spattered in blood, split open  
2060 on his father’s account.<sup>3</sup> The killer knows  
the lie of the land and escapes with his life.  
Then on both sides the oath-bound lords  
will break the peace, a passionate hate

2065 will build up in Ingeld, and love for his bride  
will falter in him as the feud rankles.  
I therefore suspect the good faith of the Heatho-  
Bards,  
the truth of their friendship and the trustworthiness  
of their alliance with the Danes.

2070 But now, my lord,  
I shall carry on with my account of Grendel,  
the whole story of everything that happened  
in the hand-to-hand fight.

2075 After heaven's gem  
had gone mildly to earth, that maddened spirit,  
the terror of those twilights, came to attack us  
where we stood guard, still safe inside the hall.  
There deadly violence came down on Hondscio  
and he fell as fate ordained, the first to perish,  
rigged out for the combat. A comrade from our ranks  
had come to grief in Grendel's maw:  
he ate up the entire body.

2080 There was blood on his teeth, he was bloated and  
furious,  
all roused up, yet still unready  
to leave the hall empty-handed;  
renowned for his might, he matched himself against  
me,  
wildly reaching. He had this roomy pouch,

2085 a strange accoutrement, intricately strung  
and hung at the ready, a rare patchwork  
of devilishly fitted dragon-skins.  
I had done him no wrong, yet the raging demon  
wanted to cram me and many another

2090 into this bag—but it was not to be  
once I got to my feet in a blind fury.  
It would take too long to tell how I repaid  
the terror of the land for every life he took  
and so won credit for you, my king,

2095 and for all your people. And although he got away  
to enjoy life's sweetness for a while longer,  
his right hand stayed behind him in Heorot,  
evidence of his miserable overthrow  
as he dived into murk on the mere bottom.

2100 "I got lavish rewards from the lord of the Danes  
for my part in the battle, beaten gold  
and much else, once morning came  
and we took our places at the banquet table.  
There was singing and excitement: an old reciter,

2105 a carrier of stories, recalled the early days.  
At times some hero made the timbered harp  
tremble with sweetness, or related true  
and tragic happenings; at times the king  
gave the proper turn to some fantastic tale;

2110 or a battle-scarred veteran, bowed with age,  
would begin to remember the martial deeds  
of his youth and prime and be overcome  
as the past welled up in his wintry heart.

2115 "We were happy there the whole day long  
and enjoyed our time until another night  
descended upon us. Then suddenly  
the vehement mother avenged her son  
and wreaked destruction. Death had robbed her,  
Geats had slain Grendel, so his ghastly dam

2120 struck back and with bare-faced defiance  
laid a man low. Thus life departed  
from the sage Aeschere, an elder wise in counsel.  
But afterward, on the morning following,  
the Danes could not burn the dead body

2125 nor lay the remains of the man they loved  
on his funeral pyre. She had fled with the corpse  
and taken refuge beneath torrents on the mountain.  
It was a hard blow for Hrothgar to bear,  
harder than any he had undergone before.

2130 And so the heartsore king beseeched me

in your royal name to take my chances  
underwater, to win glory  
and prove my worth. He promised me rewards.  
Hence, as is well known, I went to my encounter  
2135 with the terror-monger at the bottom of the tarn.  
For a while it was hand-to-hand between us,  
then blood went curling along the currents  
and I beheaded Grendel's mother in the hall  
with a mighty sword. I barely managed  
2140 to escape with my life; my time had not yet come.  
But Halfdane's heir, the shelter of those earls,  
again endowed me with gifts in abundance.  
"Thus the king acted with due custom.  
I was paid and recompensed completely,  
2145 given full measure and the freedom to choose  
from Hrothgar's treasures by Hrothgar himself.  
These, King Hygelac, I am happy to present  
to you as gifts. It is still upon your grace  
that all favor depends. I have few kinsmen  
2150 who are close, my king, except for your kind self."  
Then he ordered the boar-framed standard to be  
brought,  
the battle-topping helmet, the mail-shirt gray as  
hoar-frost,  
and the precious war-sword; and proceeded with his  
speech:  
"When Hrothgar presented this war-gear to me  
2155 he instructed me, my lord, to give you some account  
of why it signifies his special favor.  
He said it had belonged to his older brother,  
King Heorogar, who had long kept it,  
but that Heorogar had never bequeathed it  
2160 to his son Heoroward, that worthy scion,  
loyal as he was. Enjoy it well."  
I heard four horses were handed over next.  
Beowulf bestowed four bay steeds

2165 to go with the armor, swift gallopers,  
all alike. So ought a kinsman act,  
instead of plotting and planning in secret  
to bring people to grief, or conspiring to arrange  
the death of comrades. The warrior king  
2170 was uncle to Beowulf and honored by his nephew:  
each was concerned for the other's good.  
I heard he presented Hygd with a gorget,  
the priceless torque that the prince's daughter,  
Wealhtheow, had given him; and three horses,  
supple creatures brilliantly saddled.  
2175 The bright necklace would be luminous on Hygd's  
breast.  
Thus Beowulf bore himself with valor;  
he was formidable in battle yet behaved with honor  
and took no advantage; never cut down  
2180 a comrade who was drunk, kept his temper  
and, warrior that he was, watched and controlled  
his God-sent strength and his outstanding  
natural powers. He had been poorly regarded  
for a long time, was taken by the Geats  
2185 for less than he was worth:<sup>4</sup> and their lord too  
had never much esteemed him in the mead-hall.  
They firmly believed that he lacked force,  
that the prince was a weakling; but presently  
every affront to his deserving was reversed.  
2190 The battle-famed king, bulwark of his earls,  
ordered a gold-chased heirloom of Hrethel's<sup>5</sup>  
to be brought in; it was the best example  
of a gem-studded sword in the Geat treasury.  
This he laid on Beowulf's lap  
2195 and then rewarded him with land as well,  
seven thousand hides; and a hall and a throne.  
Both owned land by birth in that country,  
ancestral grounds; but the greater right

and sway were inherited by the higher born.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: The story of Queen Modthryth's vices is abruptly introduced as a foil to Queen Hygd's virtues. A transitional passage may have been lost, but the poet's device is similar to that of using the earlier reference to the wickedness of King Heremod to contrast with the good qualities of Sigemund and Beowulf.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This could refer to her husband or her father before her marriage. The story resembles folktales about a proud princess whose unsuccessful suitors are all put to death, although the unfortunate victims in this case seem to be guilty only of looking at her.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Offa I, a legendary king of the Angles. We know nothing about Hemming other than that Offa was related to him. Offa II was king of Mercia (757–96), and although the story is about the second Offa's ancestor on the Continent, this is the only English connection in the poem and has been taken as evidence to date its origins to 8th-century Mercia.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Eomer, Offa's son. See previous note. Garmund was presumably the name of Offa's father.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Hygelac. Ongentheow was king of the Swedish people called the Shylfings. This is the first of the references to wars between the Geats and the Swedes. One of Hygelac's war party named Eofer was the actual slayer of Ongentheow.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: King of the Heatho-Bards; his father, Froda, was killed by the Danes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One of the Heatho-Bard leaders.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the young Danish attendant is killed because his father killed the father of the young Heatho-Bard who has been



egged on by the old veteran of that campaign.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: There is no other mention of Beowulf's unpromising youth. This motif of the "Cinderella hero" and others, such as Grendel's magic pouch, are examples of folklore material, probably circulating orally, that made its way into the poem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hygelac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.[Return to reference 5](#)

## [THE DRAGON WAKES]

2200 A lot was to happen in later days  
in the fury of battle. Hygelac fell  
and the shelter of Heardred's shield proved useless  
against the fierce aggression of the Shylfings:<sup>6</sup>  
ruthless swordsmen, seasoned campaigners,  
they came against him and his conquering nation,  
2205 and with cruel force cut him down  
so that afterwards  
the wide kingdom  
reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well  
for fifty winters, grew old and wise  
as warden of the land  
2210 until one began  
to dominate the dark, a dragon on the prowl  
from the steep vaults of a stone-roofed barrow  
where he guarded a hoard; there was a hidden  
passage,  
unknown to men, but someone<sup>7</sup> managed  
to enter by it and interfere  
2215 with the heathen trove. He had handled and  
removed  
a gem-studded goblet; it gained him nothing,  
though with a thief's wiles he had outwitted  
the sleeping dragon. That drove him into rage,  
as the people of that country would soon discover.  
2220 The intruder who broached the dragon's treasure  
and moved him to wrath had never meant to.  
It was desperation on the part of a slave  
fleeing the heavy hand of some master,  
guilt-ridden and on the run,  
2225 going to ground. But he soon began  
to shake with terror;<sup>8</sup> . . . . . in shock

the wretch . . . . .  
. . . . . panicked and ran  
away with the precious . . . . .  
2230 metalwork. There were many other  
heirlooms heaped inside the earth-house,  
because long ago, with deliberate care,  
some forgotten person had deposited the whole  
rich inheritance of a highborn race  
2235 in this ancient cache. Death had come  
and taken them all in times gone by  
and the only one left to tell their tale,  
the last of their line, could look forward to nothing  
but the same fate for himself: he foresaw that his  
2240 joy  
in the treasure would be brief.

A newly constructed  
barrow stood waiting, on a wide headland  
close to the waves, its entryway secured.  
Into it the keeper of the hoard had carried  
all the goods and golden ware  
2245 worth preserving. His words were few:  
"Now, earth, hold what earls once held  
and heroes can no more; it was mined from you first  
by honorable men. My own people  
have been ruined in war; one by one  
2250 they went down to death, looked their last  
on sweet life in the hall. I am left with nobody  
to bear a sword or to burnish plated goblets,  
put a sheen on the cup. The companies have  
departed.

The hard helmet, hasped with gold,  
2255 will be stripped of its hoops; and the helmet-shiner  
who should polish the metal of the war-mask sleeps;  
the coat of mail that came through all fights,  
through shield-collapse and cut of sword,  
decays with the warrior. Nor may webbed mail

range far and wide on the warlord's back  
2260 beside his mustered troops. No trembling harp,  
no tuned timber, no tumbling hawk  
swerving through the hall, no swift horse  
pawing the courtyard. Pillage and slaughter  
2265 have emptied the earth of entire peoples."  
And so he mourned as he moved about the world,  
deserted and alone, lamenting his unhappiness  
day and night, until death's flood  
brimmed up in his heart.  
2270 Then an old harrower of the  
dark  
happened to find the hoard open,  
the burning one who hunts out barrows,  
the slick-skinned dragon, threatening the night sky  
with streamers of fire. People on the farms  
are in dread of him. He is driven to hunt out  
2275 hoards under ground, to guard heathen gold  
through age-long vigils, though to little avail.  
For three centuries, this scourge of the people  
had stood guard on that stoutly protected  
underground treasury, until the intruder  
2280 unleashed its fury; he hurried to his lord  
with the gold-plated cup and made his plea  
to be reinstated. Then the vault was rifled,  
the ring-hoard robbed, and the wretched man  
had his request granted. His master gazed  
2285 on that find from the past for the first time.  
When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again.  
He rippled down the rock, writhing with anger  
when he saw the footprints of the prowler who had  
stolen  
too close to his dreaming head.  
2290 So may a man not marked by fate  
easily escape exile and woe  
by the grace of God.

The hoard-guardian  
scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted  
for the trespasser who had troubled his sleep.  
2295 Hot and savage, he kept circling and circling  
the outside of the mound. No man appeared  
in that desert waste, but he worked himself up  
by imagining battle; then back in he'd go  
in search of the cup, only to discover  
2300 signs that someone had stumbled upon  
the golden treasures. So the guardian of the mound,  
the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming  
with fierce impatience; his pent-up fury  
at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back  
2305 and lash out in flames. Then, to his delight,  
the day waned and he could wait no longer  
behind the wall, but hurtled forth  
in a fiery blaze. The first to suffer  
were the people on the land, but before long  
2310 it was their treasure-giver who would come to grief.  
The dragon began to belch out flames  
and burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow  
that scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger  
would leave nothing alive in his wake.  
2315 Everywhere the havoc he wrought was in evidence.  
Far and near, the Geat nation  
bore the brunt of his brutal assaults  
and virulent hate. Then back to the hoard  
he would dart before daybreak, to hide in his den.  
2320 He had swung the land, swathed it in flame,  
in fire and burning, and now he felt secure  
in the vaults of his barrow; but his trust was  
unavailing.  
Then Beowulf was given bad news,  
the hard truth: his own home,  
2325 the best of buildings, had been burned to a cinder,  
the throne-room of the Geats. It threw the hero

into deep anguish and darkened his mood:  
the wise man thought he must have thwarted  
ancient ordinance of the eternal Lord,  
2330 broken His commandment. His mind was in turmoil,  
unaccustomed anxiety and gloom  
confused his brain; the fire-dragon  
had razed the coastal region and reduced  
forts and earthworks to dust and ashes,  
2335 so the war-king planned and plotted his revenge.  
The warriors' protector, prince of the hall-troop,  
ordered a marvelous all-iron shield  
from his smithy works. He well knew  
that linden boards would let him down  
2340 and timber burn. After many trials,  
he was destined to face the end of his days,  
in this mortal world, as was the dragon,  
for all his long leasehold on the treasure.  
Yet the prince of the rings was too proud  
2345 to line up with a large army  
against the sky-plague. He had scant regard  
for the dragon as a threat, no dread at all  
of its courage or strength, for he had kept going  
often in the past, through perils and ordeals  
2350 of every sort, after he had purged  
Hrothgar's hall, triumphed in Heorot  
and beaten Grendel. He outgrappled the monster  
and his evil kin.

One of his crudest  
hand-to-hand encounters had happened  
2355 when Hygelac, king of the Geats, was killed  
in Friesland: the people's friend and lord,  
Hrethel's son, slaked a swordblade's  
thirst for blood. But Beowulf's prodigious  
gifts as a swimmer guaranteed his safety:  
2360 he arrived at the shore, shouldering thirty  
battle-dresses, the booty he had won.

There was little for the Hetware<sup>9</sup> to be happy about  
 as they shielded their faces and fighting on the  
 ground  
 began in earnest. With Beowulf against them,  
 2365 few could hope to return home.  
 Across the wide sea, desolate and alone,  
 the son of Ecgtheow swam back to his people.  
 There Hygd offered him throne and authority  
 as lord of the ring-hoard: with Hygelac dead,  
 2370 she had no belief in her son's ability  
 to defend their homeland against foreign invaders.  
 Yet there was no way the weakened nation  
 could get Beowulf to give in and agree  
 to be elevated over Heardred as his lord  
 2375 or to undertake the office of kingship.  
 But he did provide support for the prince,  
 honored and minded him until he matured  
 as the ruler of Geatland.  
 Then over sea-roads  
 2380 exiles arrived, sons of Ohthere.<sup>1</sup>  
 They had rebelled against the best of all  
 the sea-kings in Sweden, the one who held sway  
 in the Shylfing nation, their renowned prince,  
 lord of the mead-hall. That marked the end  
 for Hygelac's son: his hospitality  
 2385 was mortally rewarded with wounds from a sword.  
 Heardred lay slaughtered and Onela returned  
 to the land of Sweden, leaving Beowulf  
 to ascend the throne, to sit in majesty  
 and rule over the Geats. He was a good king.  
 2390 In days to come, he contrived to avenge  
 the fall of his prince; he befriended Eadgils  
 when Eadgils was friendless, aiding his cause  
 with weapons and warriors over the wide sea,  
 sending him men. The feud was settled  
 2395

on a comfortless campaign when he killed Onela.  
And so the son of Ecgtheow had survived  
every extreme, excelling himself  
in daring and in danger, until the day arrived  
when he had to come face to face with the dragon.  
2400 The lord of the Geats took eleven comrades  
and went in a rage to reconnoiter.  
By then he had discovered the cause of the affliction  
being visited on the people. The precious cup  
had come to him from the hand of the finder,  
2405 the one who had started all this strife  
and was now added as a thirteenth to their number.  
They press-ganged and compelled this poor creature  
to be their guide. Against his will  
he led them to the earth-vault he alone knew,  
2410 an underground barrow near the sea-billows  
and heaving waves, heaped inside  
with exquisite metalwork. The one who stood guard  
was dangerous and watchful, warden of the trove  
buried under earth: no easy bargain  
2415 would be made in that place by any man.  
The veteran king sat down on the cliff-top.  
He wished good luck to the Geats who had shared  
his hearth and his gold. He was sad at heart,  
unsettled yet ready, sensing his death.  
2420 His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain:  
it would soon claim his coffered soul,  
part life from limb. Before long  
the prince's spirit would spin free from his body.  
Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:  
2425 "Many a skirmish I survived when I was young  
and many times of war: I remember them well.  
At seven, I was fostered out by my father,  
left in the charge of my people's lord.  
King Hrethel kept me and took care of me,  
2430 was openhanded, behaved like a kinsman.



While I was his ward, he treated me no worse  
as a wean<sup>2</sup> about the place than one of his own  
boys,  
Herebeald and Haethcyn, or my own Hygelac.  
For the eldest, Herebeald, an unexpected  
2435 deathbed was laid out, through a brother's doing,  
when Haethcyn bent his horn-tipped bow  
and loosed the arrow that destroyed his life.  
He shot wide and buried a shaft  
in the flesh and blood of his own brother.  
2440 That offense was beyond redress; a wrongfooting  
of the heart's affections; for who could avenge  
the prince's life or pay his death-price?  
It was like the misery endured by an old man  
who has lived to see his son's body  
2445 swing on the gallows. He begins to keen  
and weep for his boy, watching the raven  
gloat where he hangs: he can be of no help.  
The wisdom of age is worthless to him.  
Morning after morning, he wakes to remember  
2450 that his child is gone; he has no interest  
in living on until another heir  
is born in the hall, now that his first-born  
has entered death's dominion forever.  
He gazes sorrowfully at his son's dwelling,  
2455 the banquet hall bereft of all delight,  
the windswept hearthstone; the horsemen are  
sleeping,  
the warriors under ground; what was is no more.  
No tunes from the harp, no cheer raised in the yard.  
Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed  
2460 and sings a lament; everything seems too large,  
the steadings and the fields.  
Such was the feeling  
of loss endured by the lord of the Geats

after Herebeald's death. He was helplessly placed  
to set to rights the wrong committed,  
2465 could not punish the killer in accordance with the law  
of the blood-feud, although he felt no love for him.  
Heartsore, wearied, he turned away  
from life's joys, chose God's light  
and departed, leaving buildings and lands  
2470 to his sons, as a man of substance will.

"Then over the wide sea Swedes and Geats  
battled and feuded and fought without quarter.  
Hostilities broke out when Hrethel died.<sup>3</sup>  
Ongentheow's sons were unrelenting,  
2475 refusing to make peace, campaigning violently  
from coast to coast, constantly setting up  
terrible ambushes around Hreosnahl.  
My own kith and kin avenged  
these evil events, as everybody knows,  
2480 but the price was high: one of them paid  
with his life. Haethcyn, lord of the Geats,  
met his fate there and fell in the battle.  
Then, as I have heard, Hygelac's sword  
was raised in the morning against Ongentheow,  
2485 his brother's killer. When Eofor cleft  
the old Swede's helmet, halved it open,  
he fell, death-pale: his feud-calloused hand  
could not stave off the fatal stroke.

"The treasures that Hygelac lavished on me  
2490 I paid for when I fought, as fortune allowed me,  
with my glittering sword. He gave me land  
and the security land brings, so he had no call  
to go looking for some lesser champion,  
some mercenary from among the Gifthas  
2495 or the Spear-Danes or the men of Sweden.  
I marched ahead of him, always there  
at the front of the line; and I shall fight like that

for as long as I live, as long as this sword  
shall last, which has stood me in good stead  
2500 late and soon, ever since I killed  
Dayraven the Frank in front of the two armies.  
He brought back no looted breastplate  
to the Frisian king but fell in battle,  
their standard-bearer, highborn and brave.  
2505 No sword blade sent him to his death:  
my bare hands stilled his heartbeats  
and wrecked the bone-house. Now blade and hand,  
sword and sword-stroke, will assay the hoard."

## Endnotes

- Note 6:  
There are several references, some of them lengthy, to the wars between the Geats and the Swedes. Because these are highly allusive and not in chronological order, they are difficult to follow and keep straight. This outline, along with the Genealogies (pp. 40–42), may serve as a guide. *Phase 1*: After the death of the Geat patriarch, King Hrethel (lines 2462–70), Ohthere and Onela, the sons of the Swedish king Ongentheow, invade Geat territory and inflict heavy casualties in a battle at Hreosnahl (lines 2472–78). *Phase 2*: The Geats invade Sweden under Haethcyn, King Hrethel's son who has succeeded him. At the battle of Ravenswood, the Geats capture Ongentheow's queen, but Ongentheow counterattacks, rescues the queen, and kills Haethcyn. Hygelac, Haethcyn's younger brother, arrives with reinforcements; Ongentheow is killed in savage combat with two of Hygelac's men; and the Swedes are routed (lines 2479–89 and 2922–90). *Phase 3*: Eanmund and Eadgils, the sons of Ohthere (presumably dead), are driven into exile by their uncle Onela, who is now king of the Swedes. They are given refuge by Hygelac's son Heardred, who has succeeded his father. Onela invades Geatland and kills Heardred; his retainer Weohstan kills

Eanmund; and after the Swedes withdraw, Beowulf becomes king (lines 2204–8, which follow, and 2379–90). *Phase 4*: Eadgils, supported by Beowulf, invades Sweden and kills Onela (lines 2391–96).

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The following section was damaged by fire. In lines 2215–31 entire words and phrases are missing or indicated by only a few letters. Editorial attempts to reconstruct the text are conjectural and often disagree.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lines 2227–30 are so damaged that they defy guesswork to reconstruct them.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A tribe of the Franks allied with the Frisians.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See p. 89, n. 6, Phases 3 and 4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A young child (Northern Ireland) [*Translator's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See p. 89, n. 6, Phases 1 and 2.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [BEOWULF ATTACKS THE DRAGON]

2510 Beowulf spoke, made a formal boast  
for the last time: "I risked my life  
often when I was young. Now I am old,  
but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight  
for the glory of winning, if the evil one will only  
abandon his earth-fort and face me in the open."  
2515 Then he addressed each dear companion  
one final time, those fighters in their helmets,  
resolute and highborn: "I would rather not  
use a weapon if I knew another way  
to grapple with the dragon and make good my boast  
2520 as I did against Grendel in days gone by.  
But I shall be meeting molten venom  
in the fire he breathes, so I go forth  
in mail-shirt and shield. I won't shift a foot  
when I meet the cave-guard: what occurs on the  
2525 wall  
between the two of us will turn out as fate,  
overseer of men, decides. I am resolved.  
I scorn further words against this sky-borne foe.  
"Men-at-arms, remain here on the barrow,  
safe in your armor, to see which one of us  
2530 is better in the end at bearing wounds  
in a deadly fray. This fight is not yours,  
nor is it up to any man except me  
to measure his strength against the monster  
or to prove his worth. I shall win the gold  
2535 by my courage, or else mortal combat,  
doom of battle, will bear your lord away."  
Then he drew himself up beside his shield.  
The fabled warrior in his war-shirt and helmet  
trusted in his own strength entirely

and went under the crag. No coward path.  
2540 Hard by the rock-face that hale veteran,  
a good man who had gone repeatedly  
into combat and danger and come through,  
saw a stone arch and a gushing stream  
2545 that burst from the barrow, blazing and wafting  
a deadly heat. It would be hard to survive  
unscathed near the hoard, to hold firm  
against the dragon in those flaming depths.  
Then he gave a shout. The lord of the Geats  
2550 unburdened his breast and broke out  
in a storm of anger. Under gray stone  
his voice challenged and resounded clearly.  
Hate was ignited. The hoard-guard recognized  
a human voice, the time was over  
2555 for peace and parleying. Pouring forth  
in a hot battle-fume, the breath of the monster  
burst from the rock. There was a rumble under  
ground.  
Down there in the barrow, Beowulf the warrior  
lifted his shield: the outlandish thing  
2560 writhed and convulsed and viciously  
turned on the king, whose keen-edged sword,  
an heirloom inherited by ancient right,  
was already in his hand. Roused to a fury,  
each antagonist struck terror in the other.  
2565 Unyielding, the lord of his people loomed  
by his tall shield, sure of his ground,  
while the serpent looped and unleashed itself.  
Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing  
and racing toward its fate. Yet his shield defended  
2570 the renowned leader's life and limb  
for a shorter time than he meant it to:  
that final day was the first time  
when Beowulf fought and fate denied him  
glory in battle. So the king of the Geats

2575 raised his hand and struck hard  
at the enameled scales, but scarcely cut through:  
the blade flashed and slashed yet the blow  
was far less powerful than the hard-pressed king  
had need of at that moment. The mound-keeper  
2580 went into a spasm and spouted deadly flames:  
when he felt the stroke, battle-fire  
billowed and spewed. Beowulf was foiled  
of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,  
infallible before that day,  
2585 failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should  
have.

For the son of Ecgtheow, it was no easy thing  
to have to give ground like that and go  
unwillingly to inhabit another home  
in a place beyond; so every man must yield  
2590 the leasehold of his days.

Before long  
the fierce contenders clashed again.  
The hoard-guard took heart, inhaled and swelled up  
and got a new wind; he who had once ruled  
was furred in fire and had to face the worst.  
2595 No help or backing was to be had then  
from his highborn comrades; that hand-picked troop  
broke ranks and ran for their lives  
to the safety of the wood. But within one heart  
sorrow welled up: in a man of worth  
2600 the claims of kinship cannot be denied.  
His name was Wiglaf, a son of Weohstan's,  
a well-regarded Shyfling warrior  
related to Aelfhere.<sup>4</sup> When he saw his lord  
tormented by the heat of his scalding helmet,  
2605 he remembered the bountiful gifts bestowed on him,  
how well he lived among the Waegmundings,  
the freehold he inherited from his father<sup>5</sup> before him.

He could not hold back: one hand brandished  
the yellow-timbered shield, the other drew his sword  
2610 —

an ancient blade that was said to have belonged  
to Eanmund, the son of Ohthere, the one  
Weohstan had slain when he was an exile without  
friends.

He carried the arms to the victim's kinfolk,  
the burnished helmet, the webbed chain-mail  
2615 and that relic of the giants. But Onela returned  
the weapons to him, rewarded Weohstan  
with Eanmund's war-gear. He ignored the blood-  
feud,

the fact that Eanmund was his brother's son.<sup>6</sup>  
Weohstan kept that war-gear for a lifetime,  
2620 the sword and the mail-shirt, until it was the son's  
turn

to follow his father and perform his part.  
Then, in old age, at the end of his days  
among the Weather-Geats, he bequeathed to Wiglaf  
innumerable weapons.

2625 And now the youth  
was to enter the line of battle with his lord,  
his first time to be tested as a fighter.  
His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade  
would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered  
as soon as they came together in the combat.

2630 Sad at heart, addressing his companions,  
Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:  
"I remember that time when mead was flowing,  
how we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,  
promised our ring-giver we would be worth our  
2635 price,

make good the gift of the war-gear,  
those swords and helmets, as and when



his need required it. He picked us out  
 from the army deliberately, honored us and judged  
 us  
 fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts—  
 2640 and all because he considered us the best  
 of his arms-bearing thanes. And now, although  
 he wanted this challenge to be one he'd face  
 by himself alone—the shepherd of our land,  
 2645 a man unequaled in the quest for glory  
 and a name for daring—now the day has come  
 when this lord we serve needs sound men  
 to give him their support. Let us go to him,  
 help our leader through the hot flame  
 and dread of the fire. As God is my witness,  
 2650 I would rather my body were robed in the same  
 burning blaze as my gold-giver's body  
 than go back home bearing arms.  
 That is unthinkable, unless we have first  
 slain the foe and defended the life  
 2655 of the prince of the Weather-Geats. I well know  
 the things he has done for us deserve better.  
 Should he alone be left exposed  
 to fall in battle? We must bond together,  
 shield and helmet, mail-shirt and sword."  
 2660 Then he waded the dangerous reek and went  
 under arms to his lord, saying only:  
 "Go on, dear Beowulf, do everything  
 you said you would when you were still young  
 and vowed you would never let your name and fame  
 2665 be dimmed while you lived. Your deeds are famous,  
 so stay resolute, my lord, defend your life now  
 with the whole of your strength. I shall stand by  
 you."  
 After those words, a wildness rose  
 in the dragon again and drove it to attack,  
 2670 heaving up fire, hunting for enemies,

the humans it loathed. Flames lapped the shield,  
charred it to the boss, and the body armor  
on the young warrior was useless to him.  
But Wiglaf did well under the wide rim  
2675 Beowulf shared with him once his own had shattered  
in sparks and ashes.

Inspired again  
by the thought of glory, the war-king threw  
his whole strength behind a sword stroke  
and connected with the skull. And Naegling snapped.  
2680 Beowulf's ancient iron-gray sword  
let him down in the fight. It was never his fortune  
to be helped in combat by the cutting edge  
of weapons made of iron. When he wielded a sword,  
no matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade,  
2685 his hand was too strong, the stroke he dealt  
(I have heard) would ruin it. He could reap no  
advantage.

Then the bane of that people, the fire-breathing  
dragon,  
was mad to attack for a third time.  
When a chance came, he caught the hero  
2690 in a rush of flame and clamped sharp fangs  
into his neck. Beowulf's body  
ran wet with his life-blood: it came welling out.  
Next thing, they say, the noble son of Weohstan  
saw the king in danger at his side  
2695 and displayed his inborn bravery and strength.  
He left the head alone,<sup>7</sup> but his fighting hand  
was burned when he came to his kinsman's aid.  
He lunged at the enemy lower down  
so that his decorated sword sank into its belly  
2700 and the flames grew weaker.

Once again the king  
gathered his strength and drew a stabbing knife

he carried on his belt, sharpened for battle.  
He stuck it deep in the dragon's flank.  
Beowulf dealt it a deadly wound.  
2705 They had killed the enemy, courage quelled his life;  
that pair of kinsmen, partners in nobility,  
had destroyed the foe. So every man should act,  
be at hand when needed; but now, for the king,  
2710 this would be the last of his many labors  
and triumphs in the world.

Then the wound  
dealt by the ground-burner earlier began  
to scald and swell; Beowulf discovered  
deadly poison suppurating inside him,  
surges of nausea, and so, in his wisdom,  
2715 the prince realized his state and struggled  
toward a seat on the rampart. He steadied his gaze  
on those gigantic stones, saw how the earthwork  
was braced with arches built over columns.  
And now that thane unequaled for goodness  
2720 with his own hands washed his lord's wounds,  
swabbed the weary prince with water,  
bathed him clean, unbuckled his helmet.  
Beowulf spoke: in spite of his wounds,  
mortal wounds, he still spoke  
2725 for he well knew his days in the world  
had been lived out to the end—his allotted time  
was drawing to a close, death was very near.

"Now is the time when I would have wanted  
to bestow this armor on my own son,  
2730 had it been my fortune to have fathered an heir  
and live on in his flesh. For fifty years  
I ruled this nation. No king  
of any neighboring clan would dare  
face me with troops, none had the power  
2735 to intimidate me. I took what came,  
cared for and stood by things in my keeping,

never fomented quarrels, never  
swore to a lie. All this consoles me,  
doomed as I am and sickening for death;  
2740 because of my right ways, the Ruler of mankind  
need never blame me when the breath leaves my  
body  
for murder of kinsmen. Go now quickly,  
dearest Wiglaf, under the gray stone  
where the dragon is laid out, lost to his treasure;  
2745 hurry to feast your eyes on the hoard.  
Away you go: I want to examine  
that ancient gold, gaze my fill  
on those garnered jewels; my going will be easier  
for having seen the treasure, a less troubled letting-  
2750 go  
of the life and lordship I have long maintained."  
And so, I have heard, the son of Weohstan  
quickly obeyed the command of his languishing  
war-weary lord; he went in his chain-mail  
under the rock-piled roof of the barrow,  
2755 exulting in his triumph, and saw beyond the seat  
a treasure-trove of astonishing richness,  
wall-hangings that were a wonder to behold,  
glittering gold spread across the ground,  
the old dawn-scorching serpent's den  
2760 packed with goblets and vessels from the past,  
tarnished and corroding. Rusty helmets  
all eaten away. Armbands everywhere,  
artfully wrought. How easily treasure  
buried in the ground, gold hidden  
2765 however skillfully, can escape from any man!  
And he saw too a standard, entirely of gold,  
hanging high over the hoard,  
a masterpiece of filigree; it glowed with light  
so he could make out the ground at his feet  
2770

and inspect the valuables. Of the dragon there was  
no  
remaining sign: the sword had dispatched him.  
Then, the story goes, a certain man  
plundered the hoard in that immemorial howe,  
filled his arms with flagons and plates,  
2775 anything he wanted; and took the standard also,  
most brilliant of banners.

Already the blade  
of the old king's sharp killing-sword  
had done its worst: the one who had for long  
minded the hoard, hovering over gold,  
2780 unleashing fire, surging forth  
midnight after midnight, had been mown down.  
Wiglaf went quickly, keen to get back,  
excited by the treasure. Anxiety weighed  
on his brave heart—he was hoping he would find  
2785 the leader of the Geats alive where he had left him  
helpless, earlier, on the open ground.  
So he came to the place, carrying the treasure  
and found his lord bleeding profusely,  
his life at an end; again he began  
2790 to swab his body. The beginnings of an utterance  
broke out from the king's breast-cage.  
The old lord gazed sadly at the gold.

"To the everlasting Lord of all,  
to the King of Glory, I give thanks  
2795 that I behold this treasure here in front of me,  
that I have been allowed to leave my people  
so well endowed on the day I die.  
Now that I have bartered my last breath  
to own this fortune, it is up to you  
2800 to look after their needs. I can hold out no longer.  
Order my troop to construct a barrow  
on a headland on the coast, after my pyre has  
cooled.

It will loom on the horizon at Hronesness<sup>8</sup>  
 and be a reminder among my people—  
 2805 so that in coming times crews under sail  
 will call it Beowulf's Barrow, as they steer  
 ships across the wide and shrouded waters."  
 Then the king in his great-heartedness unclasped  
 the collar of gold from his neck and gave it  
 2810 to the young thane, telling him to use  
 it and the war-shirt and gilded helmet well.  
 "You are the last of us, the only one left  
 of the Waegmundings. Fate swept us away,  
 sent my whole brave highborn clan  
 2815 to their final doom. Now I must follow them."  
 That was the warrior's last word.  
 He had no more to confide. The furious heat  
 of the pyre would assail him. His soul fled from his  
 breast  
 2820 to its destined place among the steadfast ones.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Although Wiglaf is here said to be a Shylfing (a Swede), in line 2607 we are told his family are Waegmundings, a clan of the Geats, which is also Beowulf's family. It was possible for a family to owe allegiance to more than one nation and to shift sides as a result of feuds. Nothing is known of Aelfhere. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, Weohstan, who, as explained below, was the slayer of Onela's nephew Eanmund. Possibly, Weohstan joined the Geats under Beowulf after Eanmund's brother, with Beowulf's help, avenged Eanmund's death on Onela and became king of the Shylfings. See p. 89, n. 6, Phase 2. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An ironic comment: since Onela wanted to kill Eanmund, he rewarded Weohstan for killing his nephew instead

of exacting compensation or revenge.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, he avoided the dragon's flame-breathing head.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A headland by the sea. The name means "Whalesness."[Return to reference 8](#)

## [BEOWULF'S FUNERAL]

It was hard then on the young hero,  
having to watch the one he held so dear  
there on the ground, going through  
his death agony. The dragon from underearth,  
his nightmarish destroyer, lay destroyed as well,  
2825 utterly without life. No longer would his snakefolds  
ply themselves to safeguard hidden gold.  
Hard-edged blades, hammered out  
and keenly filed, had finished him  
so that the sky-roamer lay there rigid,  
2830 brought low beside the treasure-lodge.  
Never again would he glitter and glide  
and show himself off in midnight air,  
exulting in his riches: he fell to earth  
through the battle-strength in Beowulf's arm.  
2835 There were few, indeed, as far as I have heard,  
big and brave as they may have been,  
few who would have held out if they had had to face  
the outpourings of that poison-breather  
or gone foraging on the ring-hall floor  
2840 and found the deep barrow-dweller  
on guard and awake.

The treasure had been won,  
bought and paid for by Beowulf's death.  
Both had reached the end of the road  
through the life they had been lent.

2845 Before long  
the battle-dodgers abandoned the wood,  
the ones who had let down their lord earlier,  
the tail-turners, ten of them together.  
When he needed them most, they had made off.  
Now they were ashamed and came behind shields,



in their battle-outfits, to where the old man lay.  
2850 They watched Wiglaf, sitting worn out,  
a comrade shoulder to shoulder with his lord,  
trying in vain to bring him round with water.  
Much as he wanted to, there was no way  
2855 he could preserve his lord's life on earth  
or alter in the least the Almighty's will.  
What God judged right would rule what happened  
to every man, as it does to this day.  
Then a stern rebuke was bound to come  
2860 from the young warrior to the ones who had been  
cowards.  
Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke  
disdainfully and in disappointment:  
"Anyone ready to admit the truth  
will surely realize that the lord of men  
2865 who showered you with gifts and gave you the  
armor  
you are standing in—when he would distribute  
helmets and mail-shirts to men on the mead-  
benches,  
a prince treating his thanes in hall  
to the best he could find, far or near—  
2870 was throwing weapons uselessly away.  
It would be a sad waste when the war broke out.  
Beowulf had little cause to brag  
about his armed guard; yet God who ordains  
who wins or loses allowed him to strike  
2875 with his own blade when bravery was needed.  
There was little I could do to protect his life  
in the heat of the fray, but I found new strength  
welling up when I went to help him.  
Then my sword connected and the deadly assaults  
2880 of our foe grew weaker, the fire coursed  
less strongly from his head. But when the worst  
happened

too few rallied around the prince.

2885       “So it is good-bye now to all you know and love  
on your home ground, the open-handedness,  
the giving of war-swords. Every one of you  
with freeholds of land, our whole nation,  
will be dispossessed, once princes from beyond  
get tidings of how you turned and fled  
and disgraced yourselves. A warrior will sooner  
2890 die than live a life of shame.”

Then he ordered the outcome of the fight to be  
reported  
to those camped on the ridge, that crowd of  
retainers

who had sat all morning, sad at heart,  
shield-bearers wondering about  
2895 the man they loved: would this day be his last  
or would he return? He told the truth  
and did not balk, the rider who bore  
news to the cliff-top. He addressed them all:

2900       “Now the people’s pride and love,  
the lord of the Geats, is laid on his deathbed,  
brought down by the dragon’s attack.

Beside him lies the bane of his life,  
dead from knife-wounds. There was no way  
Beowulf could manage to get the better  
2905 of the monster with his sword. Wiglaf sits  
at Beowulf’s side, the son of Weohstan,  
the living warrior watching by the dead,  
keeping weary vigil, holding a wake  
for the loved and the loathed.

2910                               Now war is looming  
over our nation, soon it will be known  
to Franks and Frisians, far and wide,  
that the king is gone. Hostility has been great  
among the Franks since Hygelac sailed forth  
at the head of a war-fleet into Friesland:

2915 there the Hetware harried and attacked  
and overwhelmed him with great odds.  
The leader in his war-gear was laid low,  
fell among followers: that lord did not favor  
2920 his company with spoils. The Merovingian king  
has been an enemy to us ever since.  
“Nor do I expect peace or pact-keeping  
of any sort from the Swedes. Remember:  
at Ravenswood,<sup>9</sup> Ongentheow  
slaughtered Haethcyn, Hrethel’s son,  
2925 when the Geat people in their arrogance  
first attacked the fierce Shylfings.  
The return blow was quickly struck  
by Ohthere’s father.<sup>1</sup> Old and terrible,  
he felled the sea-king and saved his own  
2930 aged wife, the mother of Onela  
and of Ohthere, bereft of her gold rings.  
Then he kept hard on the heels of the foe  
and drove them, leaderless, lucky to get away  
in a desperate rout into Ravenswood.  
2935 His army surrounded the weary remnant  
where they nursed their wounds; all through the  
night  
he howled threats at those huddled survivors,  
promised to axe their bodies open  
when dawn broke, dangle them from gallows  
2940 to feed the birds. But at first light  
when their spirits were lowest, relief arrived.  
They heard the sound of Hygelac’s horn,  
his trumpet calling as he came to find them,  
the hero in pursuit, at hand with troops.  
2945 “The bloody swathe that Swedes and Geats  
cut through each other was everywhere.  
No one could miss their murderous feuding.  
Then the old man made his move,

2950 pulled back, barred his people in:  
Ongentheow withdrew to higher ground.  
Hygelac's pride and prowess as a fighter  
were known to the earl; he had no confidence  
that he could hold out against that horde of seamen,  
2955 defend his wife and the ones he loved  
from the shock of the attack. He retreated for shelter  
behind the earthwall. Then Hygelac swooped  
on the Swedes at bay, his banners swarmed  
into their refuge, his Geat forces  
drove forward to destroy the camp.  
2960 There in his gray hairs, Ongentheow  
was cornered, ringed around with swords.  
And it came to pass that the king's fate  
was in Eofor's hands,<sup>2</sup> and in his alone.  
Wulf, son of Wonred, went for him in anger,  
2965 split him open so that blood came spurting  
from under his hair. The old hero  
still did not flinch, but parried fast,  
hit back with a harder stroke:  
the king turned and took him on.  
2970 Then Wonred's son, the brave Wulf,  
could land no blow against the aged lord.  
Ongentheow divided his helmet  
so that he buckled and bowed his bloodied head  
and dropped to the ground. But his doom held off.  
2975 Though he was cut deep, he recovered again.  
"With his brother down, the undaunted Eofor,  
Hygelac's thane, hefted his sword  
and smashed murderously at the massive helmet  
past the lifted shield. And the king collapsed,  
2980 the shepherd of people was sheared of life.  
Many then hurried to help Wulf,  
bandaged and lifted him, now that they were left  
masters of the blood-soaked battle-ground.

2985 One warrior stripped the other,  
looted Ongentheow's iron mail-coat,  
his hard sword-hilt, his helmet too,  
and carried the graith<sup>3</sup> to King Hygelac,  
he accepted the prize, promised fairly  
that reward would come, and kept his word.  
2990 For their bravery in action, when they arrived home,  
Eofor and Wulf were overloaded  
by Hrethel's son, Hygelac the Geat,  
with gifts of land and linked rings  
that were worth a fortune. They had won glory,  
2995 so there was no gainsaying his generosity.  
And he gave Eofor his only daughter  
to bide at home with him, an honor and a bond.  
"So this bad blood between us and the Swedes,  
this vicious feud, I am convinced,  
3000 is bound to revive; they will cross our borders  
and attack in force when they find out  
that Beowulf is dead. In days gone by  
when our warriors fell and we were undefended,  
he kept our coffers and our kingdom safe.  
3005 He worked for the people, but as well as that  
he behaved like a hero.  
We must hurry now  
to take a last look at the king  
and launch him, lord and lavisher of rings,  
on the funeral road. His royal pyre  
3010 will melt no small amount of gold:  
heaped there in a hoard, it was bought at heavy  
cost,  
and that pile of rings he paid for at the end  
with his own life will go up with the flame,  
be furled in fire: treasure no follower  
3015 will wear in his memory, nor lovely woman  
link and attach as a torque around her neck—

but often, repeatedly, in the path of exile  
they shall walk bereft, bowed under woe,  
now that their leader's laugh is silenced,  
high spirits quenched. Many a spear  
dawn-cold to the touch will be taken down  
and waved on high; the swept harp  
won't waken warriors, but the raven winging  
darkly over the doomed will have news,  
tidings for the eagle of how he hoked and ate,  
how the wolf and he made short work of the dead." <sup>4</sup>  
Such was the drift of the dire report  
that gallant man delivered. He got little wrong  
in what he told and predicted.

The whole troop  
rose in tears, then took their way  
to the uncanny scene under Earnaness. <sup>5</sup>  
There, on the sand, where his soul had left him,  
they found him at rest, their ring-giver  
from days gone by. The great man  
had breathed his last. Beowulf the king  
had indeed met with a marvelous death.  
But what they saw first was far stranger:  
the serpent on the ground, gruesome and vile,  
lying facing him. The fire-dragon  
was scaresomely burned, scorched all colors.  
From head to tail, his entire length  
was fifty feet. He had shimmered forth  
on the night air once, then winged back  
down to his den; but death owned him now,  
he would never enter his earth-gallery again.  
Beside him stood pitchers and piled-up dishes,  
silent flagons, precious swords  
eaten through with rust, ranged as they had been  
while they waited their thousand winters under  
ground.

That huge cache, gold inherited  
from an ancient race, was under a spell—  
which meant no one was ever permitted  
to enter the ring-hall unless God Himself,  
3055 mankind's Keeper, True King of Triumphs,  
allowed some person pleasing to Him—  
and in His eyes worthy—to open the hoard.  
What came about brought to nothing  
the hopes of the one who had wrongly hidden  
3060 riches under the rock-face. First the dragon slew  
that man among men, who in turn made fierce  
amends  
and settled the feud. Famous for his deeds  
a warrior may be, but it remains a mystery  
where his life will end, when he may no longer  
3065 dwell in the mead-hall among his own.  
So it was with Beowulf, when he faced the cruelty  
and cunning of the mound-guard. He himself was  
ignorant  
of how his departure from the world would happen.  
The highborn chiefs who had buried the treasure  
3070 declared it until doomsday so accursed  
that whoever robbed it would be guilty of wrong  
and grimly punished for their transgression,  
hasped in hell-bonds in heathen shrines.  
Yet Beowulf's gaze at the gold treasure  
when he first saw it had not been selfish.  
3075 Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, spoke:  
"Often when one man follows his own will  
many are hurt. This happened to us.  
Nothing we advised could ever convince  
3080 the prince we loved, our land's guardian,  
not to vex the custodian of the gold,  
let him lie where he was long accustomed,  
lurk there under earth until the end of the world.  
He held to his high destiny. The hoard is laid bare,

3085 but at a grave cost; it was too cruel a fate  
that forced the king to that encounter.  
I have been inside and seen everything  
amassed in the vault. I managed to enter  
although no great welcome awaited me  
under the earthwall. I quickly gathered up  
3090 a huge pile of the priceless treasures  
handpicked from the hoard and carried them here  
where the king could see them. He was still himself,  
alive, aware, and in spite of his weakness  
he had many requests. He wanted me to greet you  
3095 and order the building of a barrow that would crown  
the site of his pyre, serve as his memorial,  
in a commanding position, since of all men  
to have lived and thrived and lorded it on earth  
his worth and due as a warrior were the greatest.  
3100 Now let us again go quickly  
and feast our eyes on that amazing fortune  
heaped under the wall. I will show the way  
and take you close to those coffers packed with rings  
and bars of gold. Let a bier be made  
3105 and got ready quickly when we come out  
and then let us bring the body of our lord,  
the man we loved, to where he will lodge  
for a long time in the care of the Almighty.”  
Then Weohstan’s son, stalwart to the end,  
3110 had orders given to owners of dwellings,  
many people of importance in the land,  
to fetch wood from far and wide  
for the good man’s pyre:

“Now shall flame consume  
our leader in battle, the blaze darken  
3115 round him who stood his ground in the steel-hail,  
when the arrow-storm shot from bowstrings  
pelted the shield-wall. The shaft hit home.  
Feather-fledged, it finned the barb in flight.”



3120 Next the wise son of Weohstan  
called from among the king's thanes  
a group of seven: he selected the best  
and entered with them, the eighth of their number,  
under the God-cursed roof; one raised  
a lighted torch and led the way.  
3125 No lots were cast for who should loot the hoard  
for it was obvious to them that every bit of it  
lay unprotected within the vault,  
there for the taking. It was no trouble  
to hurry to work and haul out  
3130 the priceless store. They pitched the dragon  
over the cliff-top, let tide's flow  
and backwash take the treasure-minder.  
Then coiled gold was loaded on a cart  
in great abundance, and the gray-haired leader,  
3135 the prince on his bier, borne to Hronesness.  
The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,  
stacked and decked it until it stood foursquare,  
hung with helmets, heavy war-shields  
and shining armor, just as he had ordered.  
3140 Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,  
mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.  
On a height they kindled the hugest of all  
funeral fires; fumes of woodsmoke  
billowed darkly up, the blaze roared  
3145 and drowned out their weeping, wind died down  
and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,  
burning it to the core. They were disconsolate  
and wailed aloud for their lord's decease.  
A Geat woman too sang out in grief;  
3150 with hair bound up, she unburdened herself  
of her worst fears, a wild litany  
of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,  
enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,

3155 slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the  
smoke.  
Then the Geat people began to construct  
a mound on a headland, high and imposing,  
a marker that sailors could see from far away,  
and in ten days they had done the work.  
3160 It was their hero's memorial; what remained from  
the fire  
they housed inside it, behind a wall  
as worthy of him as their workmanship could make  
it.  
And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels  
and a trove of such things as trespassing men  
had once dared to drag from the hoard.  
3165 They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,  
gold under gravel, gone to earth,  
as useless to men now as it ever was.  
Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,  
chieftains' sons, champions in battle,  
3170 all of them distraught, chanting in dirges,  
mourning his loss as a man and a king.  
They extolled his heroic nature and exploits  
and gave thanks for his greatness; which was the  
proper thing,  
3175 for a man should praise a prince whom he holds  
dear  
and cherish his memory when that moment comes  
when he has to be convoyed from his bodily home.  
So the Geat people, his hearth-companions,  
sorrowed for the lord who had been laid low.  
3180 They said that of all the kings upon earth  
he was the man most gracious and fair-minded,  
kindest to his people and keenest to win fame.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The messenger describes in greater detail the Battle of Ravenswood. See the outline of the Swedish wars on p. 89, n. 6.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Ongentheow.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, he was at Eofor's mercy. Eofor's slaying of Ongentheow was described in lines 2486–89, where no mention is made of his brother Wulf's part in the battle. They are the sons of Wonred. *Eofor* means boar; *Wulf* is the Old English spelling of wolf.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Possessions, apparel.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The raven, eagle, and wolf—the scavengers who will feed on the slain—are “the beasts of battle,” a common motif in Germanic war poetry. “Hoked”: rooted about (Northern Ireland) [*Translator's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The site of Beowulf's fight with the dragon. The name means “Eaglesness.”[Return to reference 5](#)

# JUDITH

Biblical narrative inspired Old English poetry from its earliest recorded beginnings: the poet Cædmon ([p. 30](#)) is said, for example, to have composed poetry on biblical subjects from Genesis to the Last Judgment. Although those texts do not survive, up to one-third of surviving Old English poetic texts are translations of biblical material. Prose writers also produced ambitious biblical translations: at the end of the tenth century Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham (died ca. 1010), made partial translations of many biblical texts that he worked into sermon material; an Old English version of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) was compiled at about the same time. The prose translations are more or less faithful to the biblical text. The poetic translations, on the other hand, are much freer: they take liberties with the narrative and style of the biblical sources, reshaping plots and placing the stories within a recognizably Germanic cultural setting.

One of the biblical books from which Ælfric drew material was the book of Judith. This book was regarded as apocryphal (not authentically a part of the Old Testament) by Protestant churches from the sixteenth century, but for all pre- and post-Reformation Catholic readers it was an authentic part of the Hebrew Bible. The narrative recounts the campaign of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar to punish many subject peoples who had refused to join him in his successful war against Media (another ancient empire). Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes plunders and razes many cities that resist his army, and others capitulate to him. He lays

siege to the strategic Israelite town of Bethulia, which blocks his route to Jerusalem (Bethulia no longer exists, and its location in biblical times is uncertain). The leaders of the suffering and thirsty population of Bethulia are almost ready to surrender, but the pious, wealthy, and beautiful widow Judith rebukes them for their faintness of heart and promises to liberate them if they will hold out a few days longer. After praying to God in sackcloth and ashes, Judith dresses and adorns herself sumptuously. With only one servant she enters the enemy camp, where all, and especially Holofernes himself, are amazed at her beauty. She pretends to be fleeing a doomed people and persuades Holofernes that she will lead him to victory over all the Israelite cities. The Old English text begins four days after Judith's arrival, with Holofernes's invitation to his principal warriors to a banquet, after which he plans to go to bed with the beautiful Israelite. Judith, however, has other plans.

The poet of *Judith* translated from the Latin text of the Bible (the so-called Vulgate Bible, produced in the late fourth century). We do not know the date for this rendering of the book of Judith into Old English, but it was probably composed sometime in the tenth century (the one surviving text appears in the same late tenth-century manuscript that contains *Beowulf*). Neither do we know the motives for this translation. Ælfric, writing in the late tenth century, made his translation of Judith to encourage the English in defense of their territory against the invading Vikings. The text is, he says, "set down in our manner in English, as an example to you people that you should defend your land with weapons against the invading army."<sup>\*</sup>

The opening of the poetic *Judith* is lost (scholars estimate that some one hundred lines are missing), but from the remainder we can see that the poet has freely reshaped the biblical source and set the narrative within terms intelligible to an early medieval audience. The poet has stripped the geographical, historical, and political complexity of the story down to its bare essentials: the confrontation between Judith and Holofernes. Judith is the leader of an embattled people up against an exultant and terrifying enemy. Her only

resources are her unfailing courage, her wits, and her faith in God. Within this concentrated narrative, the poet colors certain episodes by employing the traditional language and formulas of Old English poetry. Holofernes, for example, becomes riotous at the feast; “the beasts of battle” anticipate and enjoy *their* feast (see *Beowulf*, lines 3023–27); Judith is rewarded with Holofernes’s battle gear, not with his household treasures as in the biblical narrative. Perhaps the most penetrating detail added by the Old English poet is the account of the net surrounding Holofernes’s bed, from which he can see out but cannot be seen inside. This technology of tyrannical power undermines Holofernes’s army in the end, since his men, waiting nervously around his bed because they are afraid to wake up their leader, lose precious time under attack from the Israelites.

Like the Abbess Hilda (see [p. 111](#), n. 1), Judith is one of the women of power in Old English history and literature. Another is St. Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine the Great: in the poem *Elene* she leads a Roman army to the Holy Land to discover the Cross on which Christ was crucified.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: *The Old English Heptateuch*, ed. S. J. Crawford, Early English Text Society 160 (London, 1922), p. 48.[Return to reference \\*](#)

# Judith<sup>1</sup>

. . . She doubted  
gifts in this wide earth; there she readily found  
protection from the glorious Lord, when she had  
most need  
of favour from the highest Judge, so that he, the  
Lord of creation,  
defended her against the greatest terror. The  
5       glorious Father in the skies  
granted her request, since she always possessed  
true faith  
in the Almighty. I have heard then that Holofernes  
eagerly issued invitations to a feast and provided all  
types of  
magnificent wonders for the banquets; to it the lord  
of men summoned  
10       the most experienced retainers. The warriors obeyed  
with great haste; they came to the powerful lord and  
proceeded to the leader of people. That was the  
fourth day  
after Judith, prudent in mind,  
this woman of elfin beauty first visited him.  
They went into the feast to sit down,  
15       proud men at the wine-drinking, bold mail-coated  
warriors,  
all his companions in misfortune. There, along the  
benches,  
deep bowls were carried frequently; full cups and  
pitchers  
were also carried to the sitters in the hall. They  
received those, doomed to die,

20 brave warriors, though the powerful man did not  
expect it,  
that terrible lord of heroes. Then Holofernes,  
the gold-giving friend of his men, became joyous  
from the drinking.  
He laughed and grew vociferous, roared and  
clamoured,  
so that the children of men could hear from far  
away,  
how the fierce one stormed and yelled;  
25 arrogant and excited by mead, he frequently  
admonished  
the guests that they enjoy themselves well.  
So, for the entire day, the wicked one,  
the stern dispenser of treasures,  
drenched his retainers with wine until they lay  
30 unconscious,  
the whole of his troop were as drunk as if they had  
been struck down in death,  
drained of every ability. So, the men's lord  
commanded  
the guests to be served, until the dark night  
approached  
the children of men. Then corrupted by evil,  
he commanded that the blessed maiden should be  
35 hastily fetched  
to his bed, adorned with bracelets,  
decorated with rings. The retainers quickly did  
as their lord, the ruler of warriors,  
commanded them. They stepped into the tumult  
of the guest-hall where they found the wise Judith,  
40 and then quickly  
the warriors began to lead the  
illustrious maiden to the lofty tent,  
where the powerful man Holofernes, hateful to the  
Saviour,



rested himself during the night.  
45 There was a beautiful  
all-golden fly-net<sup>2</sup> that the commander  
had hung around the bed, so that the wicked one,  
the lord of warriors, could look through  
on each of those sons of men who came in there,  
50 but not one of the race of mankind could look  
on him, unless, brave man, he commanded one  
of his very iniquitous men to come  
nearer to him for secret consultation. They quickly  
brought to bed  
the prudent woman. Then the resolute heroes  
55 went to inform their lord that the holy maiden  
had been brought into his tent. Then the notorious  
one, that lord of cities,  
became happy in his mind: he intended to violate  
the bright woman with defilement and with sin. The  
Judge of glory,  
the majestic Guardian, the Lord, Ruler of hosts,  
60 would not consent to that,  
but he prevented him from that thing. Then the  
diabolical one,  
the wanton and wicked man, departed  
with a troop of his men to find his bed, where he  
would lose his life  
forthwith within that one night. He had attained his  
violent end  
on earth, just as he had previously deserved,  
65 this severe lord of men, since he had dwelled under  
the roof  
of clouds in this world. The mighty man then fell into  
the middle  
of his bed, so drunk with wine that he possessed no  
sense  
in his mind. The warriors stepped

70 out from that place with great haste,  
men sated with wine, who led the traitor,  
that hateful tyrant, to bed  
for the last time. Then the Saviour's  
glorious handmaiden was very mindful  
75 of how she could deprive the terrible one  
of life most easily, before the impure and  
foul one awoke. Then the Creator's maiden,  
with her braided locks, took a sharp sword,  
a hard weapon in the storms of battle, and drew it  
from the sheath  
80 with her right hand. She began to call the Guardian  
of heaven  
by name, the Saviour of all  
the inhabitants of earth, and said these words:  
"God of creation, Spirit of comfort,  
Son of the Almighty, I want to beseech you  
85 for your mercy on me in my time of need,  
glorious Trinity.<sup>3</sup> My heart is intensely  
inflamed within me now, and my mind is troubled,  
greatly afflicted with sorrows. Give me, Lord of  
heaven,  
victory and true belief so I might cut down this  
bestower of torment  
90 with this sword. Grant me my salvation,  
mighty Lord of men: I have never had more need  
of your mercy than now. Avenge now, mighty Lord,  
eminent Bestower of glory, that which is so grievous  
in my mind,  
so fervent in my heart." Then the highest Judge  
inspired her immediately with great zeal, as he does  
95 to each  
of the dwellers on earth who seek help from him  
with reason and with true faith. Then she felt relief  
in her mind,

hope was renewed for the holy woman. She seized  
the heathen man  
securely by his hair, pulled him shamefully towards  
her  
100 with her hands, and skilfully placed  
the wicked and loathsome man  
so that she could most easily manage the miserable  
one  
well. Then, the woman with braided locks struck  
the enemy, that hostile one,  
105 with the shining sword, so that she cut through half  
of his neck, such that he lay unconscious,  
drunk and wounded. He was not dead yet,  
not entirely lifeless. The courageous woman  
struck the heathen hound energetically  
110 another time so that his head rolled  
forwards on the floor. The foul body lay  
behind, dead; the spirit departed elsewhere  
under the deep earth and was oppressed there  
and fettered in torment forever after,  
115 wound round with serpents, bound with  
punishments,  
cruelly imprisoned in hell-fire  
after his departure. Enveloped in darkness,  
he had no need at all to hope that he should get out  
from  
that serpent-hall, but there he must remain  
always and forever, henceforth without end,  
120 in that dark home deprived of the joy of hope.  
Judith had won illustrious glory  
in the battle as God, the Lord of heaven,  
granted it so when he gave her her victory.  
125 Then the prudent woman immediately placed  
the warrior's head still bloody  
into the sack in which her attendant,

a woman of pale complexion, an excellent  
handmaiden,  
had brought food for them both; and then Judith  
put it, all gory, into the hands of her  
130 thoughtful servant to carry home.  
Then both the courageous women  
went from there straightaway,  
until the triumphant women, elated,  
got away out from that army  
135 so that they could clearly see  
the beautiful city walls of Bethulia  
glitter. Then, ring-adorned,  
they hurried forwards along the path  
until, glad at heart, they had reached  
140 the rampart gate. Warriors were sitting,  
men watching, and keeping guard  
in that stronghold, just as Judith the wise maiden  
had asked, when she had previously  
departed from the sorrowful people,  
145 the courageous woman. The beloved woman had  
returned again  
to the people, and the prudent woman  
soon asked one of the men  
from the spacious city to come towards her,  
and hastily to let them in  
150 through the gate of the city-wall; and she spoke  
these words  
to the victorious people: "I am able to tell you  
a memorable thing so that you need no longer  
mourn in your minds. The Ruler, the Glory of kings,  
is well disposed towards you. It had become  
155 revealed  
throughout this wide world that glorious and  
triumphant success  
is approaching and that honour has been granted by  
fate to you

because of the afflictions that you have long  
suffered."

Then the city-dwellers were joyful  
when they heard how the holy one spoke  
160 over the high city-wall. The army was joyous  
and people hurried to the fortress gate,  
men and women, in multitudes and crowds,  
groups and troops pressed forward and ran  
towards the Lord's maiden in their thousands,  
165 old and young. The mind of each one of the people  
in that rejoicing city was gladdened  
when they perceived that Judith had returned  
to her native land; and then hastily  
and reverently, they let her in.  
170 Then the prudent woman, adorned with gold, asked  
her attentive handmaiden  
to uncover the warrior's head  
and to display it, bloodied, as proof  
to the citizens of how she had been helped in battle.  
175 Then the noble woman spoke to all the people:  
"Victorious heroes, here you can gaze clearly  
on the leader of the people, on this head  
of the most hateful of heathen warriors,  
of the unliving Holofernes,  
180 who, among men, inflicted on us the worst torments,  
grievous afflictions, and wished to add to these  
even more; but God would not grant him  
a longer life so that he could plague us  
with wrongs. I deprived him of life  
185 through God's help. Now I intend to ask  
each of the men of these citizens,  
each of the warriors, that you immediately  
hasten to battle, as soon as the God of creation,  
that glorious King, sends his radiant beam of light  
190 from the east. Go forward carrying shields,  
shields in front of your breasts and corslets,

gleaming helmets, into the troop of enemies;  
fell the commanders, those leaders doomed to die  
with shining swords. Your enemies  
195 are condemned to death, and you will possess glory,  
honour in conflict, just as mighty God has  
given you that sign by my hand.”  
Then a host of brave and keen men prepared quickly  
for the battle. Noble warriors and retainers  
200 stepped out; they carried triumphant banners;  
heroes in helmets went forward to battle  
straightaway  
from that holy city  
at dawn of that same day. Shields clashed,  
resounded loudly. The lean wolf rejoiced  
205 in the forest, as did the dark raven,  
a bloodthirsty bird: they both knew  
that the warriors intended to provide them  
with a feast from those doomed to die; but behind  
them flew  
the eagle eager for food, dewy-winged  
210 with dark plumage; the horn-beaked bird  
sang a battle-song.<sup>4</sup> The warriors advanced,  
men to battle, protected by shields,  
hollow wooden shields, those who previously  
had suffered the insolence of foreigners,  
215 the insult of heathens. In the spear-play,  
that was all grievously requited to  
the Assyrians, when the Israelites  
under their battle-banners had gone  
to that camp. Then they boldly  
220 let showers of arrows fly forwards,  
battle arrows from horned bows,  
firm arrows. Angry warriors  
roared loudly, sent spears  
225 into the midst of the cruel ones. The native heroes

were angry against the hateful race,  
resolute, they marched, determined,  
they violently aroused their ancient enemies  
who were drunk with mead. With their hands,  
230 the retainers drew brightly adorned swords from  
their sheaths,  
excellent sword-edges, zealously killed  
the Assyrian warriors,  
those evil schemers. They did not spare one  
man's life from that army, neither the  
lowly nor the powerful whom they could overcome.  
235 So, in the morning, the retainers  
pursued the foreign people the entire time,  
until the chief leaders of that army,  
of those who were the enemies, perceived  
that the Hebrew men had shown violent sword-  
240 brandishing  
to them. They went to reveal  
all that in words to the most  
senior retainers, and they aroused the warriors  
and announced fearfully to those drunk with mead  
the dreadful news, the morning's terror,  
245 the terrible battle. Then, I have heard, immediately  
the warriors, doomed to perish, cast off sleep,  
and the subdued men thronged in crowds  
to the tent of the wicked man,  
Holofernes. They intended to announce  
250 the battle to their lord at once,  
before the terrible force of the Israelites  
came down on them. They all supposed  
that the leader of the warriors and the bright maiden  
were together in that beautiful tent:  
255 Judith the noble one, and the licentious one,  
terrible and fierce. There was not a single one of the  
men  
who dared to wake the warrior

or inquire how the warrior  
had got on with the holy maiden,  
260 the Lord's woman. The armed force of the Israelites  
approached; they fought vigorously  
with hard swords, violently requited  
their ancient grudges, that old conflict,  
with shining swords. The Assyrian's  
265 glory was destroyed in that day's work,  
their pride humbled. Warriors stood  
about their lord's tent very uneasy  
and sombre in spirit. Then together they all  
began to cough, to cry out loudly,  
270 to gnash their teeth, suffering grief,  
to no avail. Then their glory, success and brave  
deeds  
were at an end. The men considered how to awaken  
their lord; it did them no good.  
It got later and later when one of the warriors  
275 became bold in that he daringly risked going  
into the tent, as need compelled him to.  
He found on the bed his pale lord,  
lying deprived of spirit,  
devoid of life. Immediately, he fell  
280 frozen to the floor, and began to tear at his hair  
and clothing, wild in mind,  
and he spoke these words to the warriors  
who were outside, dejected:  
"Here our own destruction is made clear,  
285 the future signified, that the time of troubles  
is pressing near when we shall now lose,  
shall perish at the battle together. Here lies our  
protector  
cut down and beheaded by the sword." Sorrowful,  
they  
threw their weapons down then, and departed from  
290 him weary-spirited



to hasten in flight. The mighty people  
fought them from behind, until the greatest part  
of the army lay destroyed in battle  
on that field of victory, cut down by swords  
as a pleasure for the wolves and also as a joy  
295 to bloodthirsty birds. Those who still lived fled  
from the wooden weapons of their enemies. Behind  
them  
came the army of the Hebrews, honoured with  
victory,  
glorified with that judgement. The Lord God, the  
almighty Lord,  
helped them generously with his aid.  
300 Then quickly the valiant heroes  
made a war-path through the hateful enemies  
with their shining swords; cut down shields,  
and penetrated the shield-wall. The Hebrew missile-  
throwers  
were enraged in the battle,  
305 the retainers at that time greatly desired  
a battle of spears. There in the sand fell  
the greatest part of the total number  
of leaders of the Assyrians,  
that hateful nation. Few returned  
310 alive to their native land. The brave warriors  
turned back to retreat among the carnage,  
the reeking corpses. There was an opportunity for  
the native inhabitants to seize from the most hateful  
ancient enemies, the unliving ones,  
315 bloody plunder, beautiful ornaments,  
shield and broad sword, shining helmets,  
precious treasures. The guardians of the country  
had gloriously conquered their foes,  
the ancient enemy, on that battlefield,  
320 executed them with swords. Those who had been  
the most hateful of living men while alive

rested in their tracks. Then the entire nation,  
the greatest of tribes, the proud braided-haired  
ones,  
325 for the space of one month carried and led  
to the bright city of Bethulia  
helmets and hip-swords, grey corslets,  
men's armour decorated with gold,  
more illustrious treasures than any man  
among the wise could say.  
330 All of that was earned by the warriors' glory,  
bold under the banners and in battle  
through the prudent counsel of Judith,  
the daring maiden. The brave warriors  
brought as her reward from that expedition  
335 the sword of Holofernes and his gory helmet,  
and likewise his ample mail-coat  
adorned with red gold, and everything that the  
arrogant  
lord of warriors owned by way of treasures or  
personal heirlooms,  
rings and bright riches; they gave that to the bright  
340 and ready-witted woman. For all of this Judith said  
thanks to the Lord of hosts, who had given her  
honour  
and glory in the kingdom of this earth, and also as  
her reward in heaven,  
the reward of victory in heaven's glory, because she  
possessed true faith  
in the Almighty. Indeed, at the end she did not doubt  
345 in the reward which she had long yearned for. For  
that be glory  
to the beloved Lord for ever and ever, who created  
wind and air,  
the heavens and spacious earth, likewise the raging  
seas  
and joys of heaven through his own individual grace.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is by Elaine Treharne, *Old and Middle English: An Anthology* (2000).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Book of Judith 10:21: "A mosquito-net of purple interwoven with gold, emerald, and precious stones." Here the "fly-net" is a kind of screen enabling Holofernes to see outside his bed without being seen.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Literally, "threeness" (Old English *drynesse*). In lines 83–84, the heroine prays to the three persons of the Trinity. In the source text, she invokes the "Lord, God of Israel."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See *Beowulf*, lines 3024–27, n. 4 (p. 106).[Return to reference 4](#)

## ALFRED

### 849–899

From the last decade of the eighth century onward, the separate kingdoms of England were subject to repeated attack from Scandinavian raiders. Monasteries at Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow (Bede's monastery) were, for example, attacked in 793–94. After 865 these raids developed into a full-scale invasion, which led to the collapse of the principal English kingdoms except Wessex, in the south. Under the rule of King Alfred (871–99), Wessex was itself almost defeated, but by 878 Alfred managed to conclude a treaty with the Danes that established him as ruler of most of England south of the Humber.

Unsatisfied with military stability alone, Alfred set about a cultural and educational reform of what he saw as the weakened state of English learning. Whereas Old English poetry had a long history before Alfred's reign, there was no corresponding tradition of Old English prose. His Preface to the *Pastoral Care* offers the rationale for Alfred's program of prose translations from Latin into Old English, and for the educational reform he planned in order to exploit those translations. For Alfred, the power of a kingdom went hand in hand with the vigor of its learning. He is acutely aware that learning can flourish only "if we have peace," but no less aware that learning will itself sustain that peace; kings in the past, he says, respected wisdom and learning. Through the application of such wisdom they enlarged their authority both at home and abroad.

Apart from foreign invasion, ignorance of languages is, by Alfred's account, the other main enemy of wisdom. For even before the Viking invasions, Alfred remembers a time when the churches throughout England were full of books that too few were capable of reading. Alfred's solution for this decadent state of affairs is, in part, to promote education in both English and Latin literacy. Educational institutions also need teachers and books; accordingly, Alfred imported foreign scholars of high standing, and promoted the production of texts in the English language. While he deeply respected Latin learning, and clearly wanted to promote the understanding of that language, Alfred was not enthralled by its status. In the Preface he ambitiously traces a "translation of studies," by which he marks the movement of learning from Greek to Roman centers, and from there to other European nations, including England. Each nation translates key texts into its own language.

Remarkably, Alfred wanted to present himself—perhaps accurately—as actively engaged in the translation of these works. His biographer Asser tells us that, as a boy, Alfred learned Old English poetry by heart, and that as an adult he learned to read and translate Latin. Alfred commissioned others to translate some works (for example, the translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and, very possibly, a history of the world by Orosius, as well as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*), but many others are presented as having been translated by Alfred himself: Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, a book of laws, and a prose version of the Psalms.

Taken together, these books offer access to a remarkable range of learning. Many (those by Augustine, Orosius, Boethius, and Gregory) present key, mostly Christian works of late antiquity, originally written between the early fifth and late sixth centuries. *Pastoral Care*, for example, was written by Pope Gregory the Great (540–604), the pope who initiated the missionary project of the Roman Church in Britain; it was designed to instruct bishops ("pastors") in the responsibilities of their office. Just as Roman culture adjusted to Christianity in those centuries, so too did Alfred

introduce the classics of a new Christianity, with many powerful echoes of ancient, pre-Christian Platonic philosophy, to a recently polytheistic England. With the *Ecclesiastical History* translation he may have commissioned, Old English readers could develop a very sharp awareness of England's own recent history. Whether Alfred did himself translate these works we can never know. Certainly many of the additions made to the original source (particularly in the Boethius translation) discuss the pressures of kingship with great insight and personal intensity.

The Preface to the *Pastoral Care* presents us with the image of a king totally committed to, and actively engaged in, learning. Alfred can see the footprints of former lovers of knowledge. With his long memory he is determined not to allow recent forgetfulness and destruction to obscure those traces forever.

## Preface to the *Pastoral Care*<sup>1</sup>

King Alfred greets Bishop Wærferth<sup>2</sup> lovingly and with friendship.

And I let it be known to you that it has very often come into my mind what wise men there were formerly throughout England, both in sacred and secular orders; and what happy times were then throughout England; and how the kings who had power over the people in those days obeyed God and His ministers; and how they preserved peace, morality and their authority at home, and at the same time enlarged their territories abroad; and how they prospered both with war and wisdom; and also how zealous the sacred orders were in both teaching and learning, and in all the services which they owed to God; and how foreigners came to this land in search of wisdom and instruction, and how we now must procure them from abroad, if we are to have them.

So general was the decay of learning in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their services in English or translate a letter from Latin into English; and I believe that there were not many beyond the Humber! There were so few of them that I cannot remember a single one south of the Thames when I came to the throne. Thanks be to Almighty God that we have any teachers among us now.

Therefore I command you to do as I believe you are willing to do, to disengage yourself from worldly matters as often as you can, that you may apply the wisdom that God has given you wherever you can. Consider what punishments came to us in this world, when we neither loved wisdom ourselves, nor bequeathed it to others; we loved the name only that we were Christians, and very few of the virtues.

When I considered all this, then I remembered also that I saw, before it had been all ravaged and burned, how the churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and

books, and there was also a great multitude of God's servants. Yet they had very little knowledge of the books, for they could not understand anything of them, because they were not written in their own language. It was as if they had said: "Our predecessors, who formerly held these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and bequeathed it to us. In this we can still see their track, but we cannot follow it." And therefore we have lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we would not incline our mind to that track.

When I remembered all this, then I very much wondered at the good and wise counsellors who were formerly throughout all England, and who had perfectly absorbed all those books, that they had not wished to translate them into their own language. But I quickly answered myself, and said: "They did not think that men would ever be so careless and that learning would so decay: they deliberately left the task aside, since they wished that the wisdom of this land might increase, the more we knew languages."

Then I considered how the law was first known in Hebrew, and then, when the Greeks had learned it, they translated the whole of it into their own language, along with many other books. And again the Romans, when they had learned it, they translated the whole of sacred letters through learned interpreters into their own language. And also all other Christian nations translated a part of them into their own language.

Therefore it seems better to me, if you agree, that we also translate certain books that are most needful for all people to know into the language which we can all understand, and bring it about, as we very easily can with God's help, if we have the peace, that all the youth of free men now in England—those who have sufficient means that they may apply themselves to it—be set to learning, as long as they are not fit for any other occupation and may not be set to any other use, until they are able to read English writing well. Let those afterwards be taught more in Latin who should be taught further, and who are to be placed in higher orders.



When I remembered how the knowledge of Latin had formerly decayed throughout England, and yet many could read English writing, then I began, among various and manifold obligations of this kingdom, to translate into English that book that is called in Latin *Pastoralis*, and in English *Shepherd's Book*,<sup>3</sup> sometimes word for word, and sometimes according to the sense,<sup>4</sup> as I learned it from Plegmund my archbishop, and from Asser my bishop,<sup>5</sup> and from Grimbold my mass-priest, and from John my mass-priest. And when I had learned it, as I could best understand it, and as I could most clearly interpret it, I translated it into English; and I will send a copy to every bishopric in my kingdom; and in each is an *æstel*, worth fifty mancuses.<sup>6</sup> And I command in God's name that no-one take the book mark from the book, nor the book from the cathedral—it being uncertain how long there may be such learned bishops as now, thanks be to God, there are nearly everywhere.

Therefore I intend each book may always remain in the same place, unless the bishop wish to take it with him, or it be lent out anywhere, or anyone be making a copy from it.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation, with alterations, is taken from Albert S. Cook and Chauncey B. Tinker, eds., *Select Translations from Old English Prose* (1908).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bishop of Worcester (d. ca. 915).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Gregory (ca. 540–604) called his work *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (Book of Pastoral Rule); *pastor* in Latin means “shepherd.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The two standard approaches to translation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Asser, bishop of Sherborne (890s), who wrote a biography of Alfred, *The Life of Alfred*. Plegmund (d. 914 or 923), archbishop of Canterbury.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Coins each equivalent to 30 silver pence. The meaning of *æstel*, a word that appears only here, is unknown; it is

thought to be a book pointer.[Return to reference 6](#)

# THE WANDERER

The lament of *The Wanderer* is an excellent example of the elegiac mood so common in Old English poetry. Such poems look back to a time when oral poets performed heroic songs in the meter preserved, practiced, and recorded in original works by their Christian descendants. In celebration of Beowulf's victory over Grendel, Hrothgar's court poet performs a heroic lay about the Germanic hero Sigemund (lines 883–914). The elegiac tone common to *Beowulf* and these later poems, however, expresses the poets' profound feelings toward their ancestors who lived before St. Augustine brought the "good news" to Kent and initiated the conversion. Nowhere are those feelings expressed more poignantly than in *The Wanderer*.

As is true of most Old English elegiac laments, both the language and the structure of *The Wanderer* are difficult. At the beginning, the speaker (whom the poet identifies as an "earth-treader") voices hope of finding comfort after his many tribulations. After the poet's interruption, the Wanderer continues to speak—to himself—of his long search for a new home, describing how he must keep his thoughts locked within him while he makes that search. But these thoughts form the most vivid and moving part of his soliloquy—how, floating on the sea, dazed with sorrow and fatigue, he imagines that he sees his old companions, and how, as he wakens to reality, they vanish on the water like seabirds. The second part of the poem, beginning "Therefore I don't know why," expands the theme from one man to all human beings in a world wasted by war and time. He

derives such cold comfort as he can from asking the old question,  
“Where are they now, who were once so glad in the mead-hall?”

*The Wanderer* is preserved only in the Exeter Book, a manuscript dating to about 975 (although the poem may be much earlier), which contains the largest surviving collection of Old English poetry.

# The Wanderer <sup>1</sup>

“Often the lone-dweller<sup>2</sup> longs for relief,  
the Almighty’s mercy, though melancholy,  
his hands turning time and again  
the ocean’s currents, the ice-cold seas,  
following paths of exile. Fate is firmly set.”  
5 So spoke the Wanderer,<sup>3</sup> weary of hardships,  
cruel combats, the death of kinsmen.  
“Often alone, always at daybreak  
I must lament my cares; not one remains alive  
to whom I could utter the thoughts in my heart,  
10 tell him my sorrows. In truth, I know that  
for any eorl<sup>4</sup> an excellent virtue  
is to lock tight the treasure chest  
within one’s heart, howsoever he may think.  
A downcast heart won’t defy destiny,  
15 nor the sad spirit give sustenance.  
And therefore those who thirst for fame  
often bind fast their breast chamber.  
“So I must hold in the thoughts of my heart—  
though often wretched, bereft of my homeland,  
20 far from kinfolk— bind them with fetters,  
since in days long past with darkness of earth  
I covered my gold-friend,<sup>5</sup> and I fared from there  
over the waves’ bed, winter-weary,  
longing for a hall and a lord of rings,  
25 where near or far I might find one  
in the mead-hall remembering me and my kin,  
or else show favor to a friendless man,  
requite me with comfort. One acquainted with  
pain

30 understands how cruel a traveling companion  
sorrow is for someone with few friends at his side.  
Exile attends him, not twisted gold rings,  
Heart-freezing frost, not fruits of the earth.  
He recalls tablemates and treasure distributed,  
35 how from the first his friend and lord  
helped him to the feast. That happy time is no  
more.

"This, indeed, anyone forced to forgo for long  
the beloved counsel of his lord knows well.  
Often when sorrow and sleep together  
40 bind the poor lone-dweller in their embrace,  
he dreams he clasps and that he kisses  
his liege-lord again, lays head and hands  
on the lord's knees as he did long ago,  
enjoyed the gift-giving in days gone by.  
Then the warrior, friendless, awakens again,  
45 sees before him the fallow waves,  
seabirds on the water spreading their wings,  
snow and hail falling and sleet as well.  
Then the heart's wounds grow heavier,  
sadness for dear ones. Sorrow returns.  
50 Then through his mind pass memories of kinsmen

—  
joyfully he greets them, eagerly gazes—  
his fellow warriors, the floating spirits,  
fade on their way. They fail to bring  
much familiar talk —trouble is renewed—  
55 for any man who must often send  
his weary spirit over the waves' bed.

"Therefore I don't know why my woeful heart  
should not wax dark in this wide world  
when I look back on the life of eorls,  
60 how quickly they quit the mead-hall's floor,  
brave young men. So this middle-earth<sup>6</sup>

from day to day    dwindles and fails;  
therefore no one is wise    without his share of  
         winters  
in the world's kingdom.    A wise man must be  
65        patient,  
not too hot of heart    nor hasty of speech,  
not reluctant to fight    nor too reckless,  
not too timid nor too glad,    not too greedy,  
and never eager to commit    until he can be sure.  
A man should hold back    his boast until  
70        that time has come    when he truly knows  
to direct his heart    on the right path.  
      "A wise man must know    the misery of that time  
when the world's wealth    shall all stand waste,  
just as in our own day    all over middle-earth  
75        walls are standing    wind-swept and wasted,  
downed by frost,    and dwellings covered with  
         snow.  
The mead-hall crumbles,    its master lies dead,  
bereft of pleasures,    all the warrior-band<sup>7</sup> perished,  
boldly by the wall.    Battle took some,  
80        bore them away;    a bird carried one  
above the high waves;    the gray wolf took another,  
divided him with death;    dreary-spirited  
an eorl buried another    in an earthen pit.  
      "Mankind's Creator    laid waste this middle-earth  
85        till the clamor of city-dwellers    ceased to be heard  
and ancient works of giants    stood empty.  
He who wisely    contemplates this wall-stead,  
and considers deeply    the darkness of this life,  
mature in years,    remembers many  
90        bloody battlegrounds    and so begins:  
      'Where did the steed go? Where the young  
warrior?    Where the treasure-giver?

Where the seats of fellowship? Where the hall's  
festivity?  
Alas bright beaker! Alas burnished warrior!  
Alas pride of princes! How the time has passed,  
95 gone under night-helm as if it never was!  
A towering wall, traced with serpent shapes,<sup>8</sup>  
endures instead of the dear warrior-band.  
Strength of ash-spears destroyed warriors,  
slaughter-greedy weapons, overwhelming fate,  
100 and storms beat against these stone-faced cliffs,  
snow descending seals up the ground,  
drumming of winter when darkness falls,  
night shadows darken, from the north send down  
fierce hail-showers in hatred of men.  
105 All is wretchedness in the realm of earth;  
fate's work lays low the world under heaven.  
Here wealth is fleeting, here friend is fleeting,  
here family is fleeting, here humankind is fleeting.  
All this resting-place Earth shall become empty.' "  
110 So said the wise man as he sat in meditation.  
A good man holds his words back, tells his woes  
not too soon,  
baring his inner heart before knowing the best  
way,  
an eorl who acts with courage. All shall be well for  
him who seeks grace,  
help from our Father in heaven where a fortress  
115 stands for us all.

Alas bright beaker!    Alas burnished warrior!  
Alas pride of princes!    How the time has passed,  
gone under night-helm    as if it never was!

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## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation by Alfred David is based on *Eight Old English Poems*, 3rd ed., edited by John C. Pope, revised by R. D. Fulk (2000). The translation is also indebted to comments by Professor Fulk.[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Old English *an-haga* = one + hedge, enclosure—that is, one who dwells alone in some sort of confinement.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Old English *eard-stapa* = earth + treader. The modern title—there is no title in the manuscript—derives from this compound noun.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *Eorl* = warrior. Only later did the Old English word come to designate a member of the British nobility.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Old English *gold-wine* = gold-friend, one of the many formulas applied to the lord, here in his role as dispenser of treasure to his retainers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The world, viewed as an intermediate region between heaven and hell.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Old English *duguth* = generally something that affords benefit or advantage, but here it specifically applies to a band of warriors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The reference is to a kind of serpentine ornamentation; examples from Roman times survive in Britain.[Return to reference 8](#)

## WULF AND EADWACER

The first three lines of this lyric poem consist of three grammatically coherent sentences, and yet they paint no coherent narrative situation. The reader is forced to infer that situation from the juxtaposition of sentences: thus the gap of narrative sense between the first and second sentences asks the reader to supply a narrative. But what is that narrative? One might infer that the speaker's people and the male to whom the speaker refers are mutually hostile, and that if "he" comes to where the speaker is, he will be easily defeated. One might also assume that there is some special relation between that male and the speaker ("We are apart"). The fourth line might confirm the assumption that the special male is physically absent, and it appears to supply a proper name for him ("Wulf").

Each of these inferences is vulnerable, but the reader is impelled to make assumptions of this kind. The remaining twenty lines prompt many further conjectures. Faced with the vulnerability of those assumptions, we might respond variously. We might dismiss this poem as maddeningly incoherent, inviting us as it does to construct a narrative but refusing to supply the needed connectives. Or we might keep testing hypotheses, working from fundamental elements of narrative (for example, he/I; here/there; now/then). Or we might step back from the enticing puzzles of the poem's texture to think about what kind of poem this is.

*Wulf and Eadwacer* (an editorial title) appears in the Exeter Book (ca. 975), along with (though not precisely grouped with) all the other so-called Old English elegies, such as *The Wanderer*. Many of

these poems are narrated by a first-person narrator who suffers from temporal and physical dislocations. They are relatively short. They tend to suggest, without filling in, a narrative context. Sometimes the experience of worldly pain invites general reflection on the inevitable treacheries of earthly experience.

This poem, like only one other in this group, is voiced by a woman. We learn this for sure only in line 10 (through an adjectival ending). That fact also helps us to set the text in a larger tradition of usually feminine elegy, a genre exemplified especially by Ovid's *Heroides* (*Heroines*). Classical elegy gives voice to the victim of history—often a woman—whose suffering predominates when society demands her sacrifice, and whose suffering is so intense that it overrides any commitment to narrative. The fragmented, incoherently expressed *implied* narrative is part of the poem's point: it sharpens and concentrates the poignancy of the poem's painful expression. This is the voice of a vast tradition of European lyric love poetry, with both male and female narrators.

That understanding of genre accounts for the kind of puzzles we have already encountered. It also accounts for the way in which the pained voice in the present breaks forth over narration of the past ("Wulf, my Wulf"). But the puzzles remain: Is Wulf the narrator's husband or lover? Is the name "Wulf" (a possible proper name, but also a figure for the outlaw) conceptually symmetrical with "Eadwacer" (literally "property watcher"), thus designating the same male? Is the name "Eadwacer" used ironically with regard to the absent, outlawed "Wulf," given that the child of the couple's union is threatened by a literal wolf?

We can never know the answers to these questions, but neither, by the conventions of this genre, are we supposed to. What we do know for sure is that the shared song of this couple is joined painfully only through the longing caused by separation.

# Wulf and Eadwacer<sup>1</sup>

It is as though my people have been given  
A present. They wish to capture him  
If he comes with a troop. We are apart.  
Wulf is on one isle, I am on another.  
Fast is that island set among the fens.  
5 Murderous are the people who inhabit  
That island. They will wish to capture him  
If he comes with a troop. We are apart.  
Grieved have I for my Wulf with distant longings.  
Then was it rainy weather, and I sad,  
10 When the bold warrior laid his arms about me.  
I took delight in that and also pain.  
O Wulf, my Wulf, my longing for your coming  
Has made me ill, the rareness of your visits,  
My grieving spirit, not the lack of food.  
15 Eadwacer, do you hear me? For a wolf  
Shall carry to the woods our wretched whelp.  
Men very easily may put asunder  
That which was never joined, our song together.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is by Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (1970). [Return to reference 1](#)

## THE WIFE'S LAMENT

In modern English translation, the speaker of this poem sounds much like the speaker in *The Wanderer*, lamenting his exile, his isolation, and the loss of his lord. But in Old English the grammatical gender of the pronouns reveals that this speaker is a woman; the man she refers to as "my lord" must, therefore, be her husband. The story behind the lament remains obscure. All that can be made out for certain is that the speaker was married to a nobleman of another country; that her husband has left her (possibly forced into exile as a result of a feud); that his kinsmen are hostile to her; and that she is now living alone in a wilderness. Although the circumstances are shadowy, it is reasonable to conjecture that the wife may have been a "peace-weaver" (a woman married off to make peace between warring tribes), like Hildeburh and Freawaru, whose politically inspired marriages result only in further bloodshed (see *Beowulf*, pp. [64](#) and [85](#)). The obscurity of the Old English text has led to diametrically opposed interpretations of the husband's feeling toward his wife. One interpretation holds that, for unexplained reasons, possibly because of his kinsmen's hostility to her, he has turned against her. The other, which is adopted in this translation, is that, in her mind at least, they share the suffering of his exile and their separation. Thus in the line here rendered "I must suffer the feud of my much-beloved," *fæhðu* (feud) is read by some as the technical term for a blood feud—the way it is used in *Beowulf* when Hrothgar says he settled a great feud started by Beowulf's father with *feo* (fee)—that is, monetary compensation ([p. 52](#)). Others take the word

in a more general sense as referring to the man's enmity toward his wife. In either case, the woman's themes and language resemble those of male "wraeccas" (outcasts or exiles; the Old English root survives in modern *wretch*, *wretched*, and *wrack*) in the Old English poems called "elegies" because of their elegiac content and mood.

## The Wife's Lament<sup>1</sup>

Full of sorrow, I shall make this song  
about me, my own fate. Surely I can tell  
what sufferings I endured since I came of age,  
both the new and old, never more than now.  
I must endure without end the misery of exile.  
5 First my lord<sup>2</sup> departed from his people  
over tossing waves; I worried when day came  
in what land my liege-lord could be.  
Then I set out, a friendless exile,  
to seek a place for my sore need.  
10 My husband's kin had hatched a plot,  
conspiring secretly to separate us,  
so that we<sup>3</sup> widest apart in the world's realms  
lived in most misery, and I languished.  
My lord commanded me to keep house here;  
15 in this dwelling-place; I had few dear ones,  
devoted friends. Therefore I feel downcast.  
Then I learned my lord was like myself—  
down on his luck, dreary-spirited,  
secretly minding murder in his heart.  
20 A happy pair we had promised each other,  
that death alone would ever divide us,  
and nothing else. All that is changed;  
our nearness once is now as though  
it never had been. Now, far or near, I must  
25 bear the malice of the man I loved.  
I was told to live in a grove of trees,  
under an oak in an earthen cave.  
That earth-hall is old; yearning overcomes me.  
30 These dales are dark and the dunes high,

bitter bulwarks    overgrown with briers,  
a joyless place.    Here my lord's departure  
afflicts me cruelly.    Friends here on earth,  
lovers lying together,    lounge in bed,  
while at daybreak    I abandon  
35    this earthen-pit    under the oak  
to sit alone    the summer-long day.  
There I may bewail    my many woes,  
suffering of exile,    for I can never  
obtain comfort    for all my cares  
40    nor all the longing    this life brought me.  
If ever anyone    should feel anguish,  
harsh pain at heart,    she<sup>4</sup> should put on  
a happy appearance    while enduring  
endless sorrows—    should she possess  
45    all the world's bliss,    or be banished far away  
from her homeland.    I believe my lord sits  
by a stony    storm-beaten cliff,  
that water-tossed    my weary friend  
sits in a desolate home.    He must suffer  
50    much in his mind,    remembering too often  
a happier place.    Woe unto him  
who languishing    waits for a loved one.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation by Alfred David is based on *Eight Old English Poems*, 3rd ed., edited by John C. Pope and revised by R. D. Fulk (2000). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A woman would refer to her husband as her "lord." [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Old English *wit*, an example of the dual form, used for two persons. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Old English *geong-man*. The identity of the speaker has been debated, but most recent opinion holds it to be the wife



herself, speaking impersonally. The translation takes the liberty of using “she” in reference to the speaker.[Return to reference 4](#)

# THE RUIN

The power of enduring yet decaying architecture is characteristic of post-imperial cultures. The imperialists may have left (as the Romans did when they quit Britain in 410), but their buildings remain for centuries, serving as figures for the fall of earthly kingdoms. Old English poets certainly admired things bound fast. Stable architecture is almost the last thing upon which the dying Beowulf looks: he beholds “those gigantic stones . . . how the earthwork / was braced with arches built over columns” (lines 2718–19). Some buildings constructed by Germanic kings are provisionally capable of resisting the ravages of time for a few generations (for example, Hrothgar’s Heorot in *Beowulf*, lines 770–74), but only the Roman buildings inspire awe for their capacity to endure for centuries, to evoke memories of the glory of what has been almost entirely lost from mind, and for the fact that they, too, are finally subject to the destructive effects of what speakers of Old English called “wyrd,” or fate (the ancestor of our word *weird*). *The Ruin*, though itself damaged in the Exeter Book (ca. 975), expresses awe, admiration, and grief as it surveys what seems almost certainly a Roman building for hot baths.

# The Ruin<sup>1</sup>

Splendid this rampart is, though fate destroyed it,  
The city buildings fell apart, the works  
Of giants crumble. Tumbled are the towers,  
Ruined the roofs, and broken the barred gate,  
5 Frost in the plaster, all the ceilings gape,  
Torn and collapsed and eaten up by age.  
And grit holds in its grip, the hard embrace  
Of earth, the dead departed master-builders,  
Until a hundred generations now  
10 Of people have passed by. Often this wall  
Stained red and grey with lichen has stood by  
Surviving storms while kingdoms rose and fell.  
And now the high curved wall itself has fallen.  
... <sup>2</sup>

20 The heart inspired, incited to swift action.  
Resolute masons, skilled in rounded building  
Wondrously linked the framework with iron bonds.  
The public halls were bright, with lofty gables,  
Bath-houses many; great the cheerful noise,  
And many mead-halls filled with human pleasures.  
25 Till mighty fate brought change upon it all.  
Slaughter was widespread, pestilence was rife,  
And death took all those valiant men away.  
The martial halls became deserted places,  
The city crumbled, its repairers fell,  
30 Its armies to the earth. And so these halls  
Are empty, and this red curved roof now sheds  
Its tiles, decay has brought it to the ground,  
Smashed it to piles of rubble, where long since  
A host of heroes, glorious, gold-adorned,

35 Gleaming in splendor, proud and flushed with wine,  
Shone in their armor, gazed on gems and treasure,  
On silver, riches, wealth, and jewelry,  
On this bright city with its wide domains.  
40 Stone buildings stood, and the hot steam cast forth  
Wide sprays of water, which a wall enclosed  
In its bright compass, where convenient  
Stood hot baths ready for them at the centre.  
Hot streams poured forth over the clear grey stone,  
45 To the round pool and down into the baths.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is from Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (1970).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Six lines are illegible here in the manuscript.[Return to reference 2](#)

# RIDDLES

"*Saga hwæt ic hatte*" ("Say what I am called") is a frequently repeated imperative in the corpus of Old English riddles. The Exeter Book (ca. 975) contains not only moving elegiac poems, such as *The Wanderer* ([pp. 121–24](#)), *The Wife's Lament* ([pp. 126–28](#)), and *Wulf and Eadwacer* ([pp. 124–26](#)), but also a striking collection of ninety or so riddles. Like the elegies, the riddles are conveyed by first-person narrators, and, also like the elegies, they refuse to disclose the full conditions of their utterance. Whereas that refusal produces an emotional charge in the elegies, in the riddles it produces an intriguing and cognitive challenge.

The Old English riddles are clearly related to a learned Latin tradition of enigmas (*aenigmata*). Even if their subject matter is derived from the empirical world of natural phenomena, of everyday objects and animals, they provoke subtle interpretive challenges that defamiliarize the everyday environment. When a poem fails to supply the crucial term of recognition ("what I am") around which understanding rapidly organizes perception, then every feature of the familiar becomes suddenly fascinating. Outworn metaphors spring into rich conceptual life; that which is regarded as purely conceptual is returned to its material condition; the everyday event becomes a wonder; comedy leaps unexpectedly forth from a revitalized account of the humdrum. Things and creatures disclose their mysterious and layered life in the world.

# The Riddles<sup>1</sup>

## *Riddle 1*

My beak points downwards, and I travel low  
And dig along the ground, move forward as  
The wood's old foe propels me; and my lord  
And guardian walks stooping at my tail,  
Pushes and moves and drives me on the field,  
5 Sows in my track. I sniff along the ground,  
Brought from the forest, firmly bound, and borne  
Upon the wagon; I have many wonders.  
And as I move on one side there is green  
And my clear track is dark upon the other.  
10 A well-made point is driven through my back  
And hangs beneath, and through my head another,  
Firm, pointing forwards; what my teeth tear up  
Falls down beside me, if he serves me well  
Who, as my lord, controls me from behind.<sup>2</sup>  
15

## *Riddle 2*

Some enemy deprived me of my life  
And took away my worldly strength, then wet me,  
Dipped me in water, took me out again,  
Set me in sunshine, where I quickly lost  
The hairs I had. Later the knife's hard edge  
5 Cut me with all impurities ground off.  
Then fingers folded me; the bird's fine raiment  
Traced often over me with useful drops  
Across my brown domain, swallowed the tree-dye  
Mixed up with water, stepped on me again

10 Leaving dark tracks. The hero clothed me then  
With boards to guard me, stretched hide over me,  
Decked me with gold; and thus the splendid work  
Of smiths, with wire bound round, embellished me.  
15 Now my red dye and all my decorations,  
My gorgeous trappings far and wide proclaim  
The Lord of Hosts, not grief for foolish sins.  
If sons of men will make good use of me,  
By that they shall be sounder, more victorious,  
20 Their hearts more bold, their minds more full of joy,  
Their spirits wiser; they shall have more friends,  
Dear ones and kinsmen, truer and more good,  
More kind and faithful, who will add more glory  
And happiness by favors, who will lay  
25 Upon them kindnesses and benefits,  
And clasp them fast in the embrace of love.  
Say who I am, useful to men. My name  
Is famous, good to men, and also sacred.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Riddle 3***

A moth ate words; a marvelous event  
I thought it when I heard about that wonder,  
A worm had swallowed some man's lay,<sup>o</sup> a thief  
In darkness had consumed the mighty saying  
5 With its foundation firm. The thief was not  
One whit the wiser when he ate those words.<sup>4</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Translations are from Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (1970).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Solution: plow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Solution: the Bible.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Solution: bookworm.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Notes

- °: *poem* [Return to reference °](#)



# **WULFSTAN OF YORK**

## **d. 1023**

In 1014 England was under severe pressure: the year of the millennium after the death of Christ was approaching, when the Antichrist was due to arrive, with attendant havoc; and English overlordship of England was under what looked like terminal threat, after a Danish king took the throne in December 1013. Wulfstan, archbishop of York, responded to the pressure with a fierce, not to say pyrotechnic sermon, *Wolf's Sermon to the English*.

Bishop Wulfstan was successively bishop of London and then bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York; from 1016 on, he was archbishop of York alone. In addition to his demonstrable production of sermons in Latin (four) and, more often, Old English (twenty-two), in a very distinctive style, Wulfstan collaborated in the formulation of legal codes for both Aethelred the Unready (ruled England 978–1013, 1014–16) and Cnut (ruled 1016–35).

That Wulfstan served both an English and a Danish king bespeaks the political and military instability of the England in which he lived. Alfred had stabilized Danish incursions into England with the treaty of Wedmore in 878, but Scandinavian invasions recurred from the mid-tenth century; by 1013 a Danish king, Sweyn, was on the throne of England. After Sweyn died in 1014, the English king Aethelred returned for just two years. Aethelred was succeeded very briefly by his son Edmund Ironside (d. 1016), after whom the Danish Cnut, Sweyn's son, became king of England. *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*

was written and delivered in this period of general Danish overlordship of England—certainly after the expulsion of King Aethelred in late 1013, and likely in the two-year interval between the Danish kings Sweyn and Cnut (the sermon's later heading gives 1014 as its date).

In Wolf's *Sermon to the English* Wulfstan, indifferent to the potential contradiction, inserts fierce moral excoriation of the English into an apocalyptic sermon. The vigorous critique aims to produce moral improvement in the face of Danish attack, while the apocalyptic emphasis stresses the world's inevitable deterioration as it nears its end (the Christian world was about to pass its first millennium after the death of Christ, which according to Revelation 20:1–3 would herald the arrival of the Antichrist). Wulfstan's predicament as archbishop is all the more dire since the largely successful enemies of the Christian English are polytheists.

In addition to the apocalyptic and penitential emphases of the sermon, Wulfstan adds a third, specifically historical parallel to the condition of early eleventh-century England. He ends his sermon by making foreboding reference to the sixth-century British historian Gildas (d. ca. 570), whose *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* (Concerning the Overthrow and Conquest of Britain) relates the last time an entire people in Britain was overcome by foreign invasion—that is, the invasion of the Britons by the Saxons.

Noted as a stylist in both Latin and English, Wulfstan's playful nom de plume is the Latin for wolf, *lupus*, which picks up on the first element of his name Wulfstan (literally, "wolf stone"). A bishop is supposed to be a "pastor," a shepherd protecting his flock from wolves; Wulfstan is not so meek and protective. Accordingly, he deploys sharp and biting stylistic devices designed to capture the attention and excite the shame of his listening public: he relies on two-stress phrases, drawn from the basic metrical units of Old English poetry, which sometimes rhyme and frequently alliterate, and he builds to powerful climaxes that encourage penitence.

To hear both these features, consider the following passage:  
"And us stalu and cwalu, stric and steorfa, orfcwealm and uncoðu,

hol and hete and rypera reaflac derede swyðe þearle, and us ungylda swyðe gedrehtan, and us unwedera foroft weoldan unwæstma" (Theft and murder, sedition and pestilence, plague among livestock and disease, malice and hatred, and the plundering of thieves have inflicted untold damage, and excessive taxation has oppressed us, while storms have often provoked crop failures). Phrases commonly have two stresses and alliterate (for example, "hol and hete"), while the syntax of the sentence is shaped by a triplet of coordinate clauses each beginning "And us": the first, the longest, is followed by two structurally similar sequences (subject–verb–adverb), sharper and shorter.

The sermon was a form of verbal art across the entire medieval period and well beyond. Unlike Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, Wulfstan's sermon does not prompt reflection on the moral quality of its speaker: it leaps out to grab the attention of an audience confronting perilous times.

## Wolf's Sermon to the English<sup>1</sup>

Beloved men, know the truth: this world is in haste and it approaches the end.

And so the longer things go in this world, the worse they get. It must necessarily be the case, therefore, on account of the people's sinfulness, that our predicament will badly deteriorate before the arrival of Antichrist. It will indeed be awful and grim widely throughout the world. Understand well, further, that the Devil has now beguiled this people for many years, and that little trust has survived among men, even if they spoke well, and too much injustice prevailed in the land. There were never many who pondered a remedy as intently as was necessary, but people daily augmented evils, one upon another; they inflicted injustices all too widely throughout this land. We have also therefore endured many injuries and insults. If we shall receive any cure, we must earn it better from God than we have done so far, for with full deserving have we merited the misery that has befallen us. With intense efforts must we procure the remedy from God, if henceforth things should improve.

After all, we know all too well that for a great breach of law a great remedy is needful, just as much water is needed to quench a great fire. From now on each man must scrupulously attend to God's law and pay God His due with probity. Among the infidels, people dare not withhold anything at all from what is due for the worshipping of the false gods; yet we everywhere withhold what is due to God all too often. And among the heathen peoples, people do not dare diminish in any respect what is brought and offered as sacrifice to the false gods, whereas we have cleanly stripped God's house within and without.<sup>2</sup> Among us, God's servants are almost everywhere deprived of both respect and protection. Among the heathens, no one dares maltreat the ministers of the false gods in

any way, as frequently occurs to the servants of God; Christians should observe the law of God and protect his ministers.

I am declaring the truth: a remedy is needful, because the due observances of God have waned everywhere for too long among this people. Laws among the people have decayed; places of sanctuary have generally become lawless; houses of God have been entirely deprived of established rights, and stripped within of all that is seemly. Widows are widely forced into marriage, and too many impoverished and painfully humiliated. The poor, wholly innocent of any wrongdoing, are cruelly betrayed, ruthlessly enslaved and frequently sold into slavery under the control of foreigners.<sup>3</sup> Through pitiless injustice, very young children are widely enslaved on account of minor theft throughout this land. The rights of freemen are annulled, and those of slaves reduced; the right to alms diminished. And, in essence, the laws of God are hated and his teachings despised. Thus through God's anger we are all often shamed, be it known by whomsoever may. Whatever one might think to the contrary, the loss will fall upon all of us in this land, unless God shield us.

It is, accordingly, perfectly plain that we have more frequently transgressed than made amends, and many things are therefore assailing this land. Nothing has prospered for a long time, at home or abroad, but we have often experienced invasion and hunger, burning and bloodshed, in almost each corner of our land. Theft and murder, sedition and pestilence, plague among livestock and disease, malice and hatred, and the plundering of thieves have inflicted untold damage, and excessive taxation has oppressed us, while storms have often provoked crop failures.

For in this land there was, whoever thinks about it, many injustices and fragile loyalties among men. Kin did not protect kin any more than strangers, nor a father his children, nor, sometimes a child his own father, nor one brother another. No one has governed his life as he ought, neither those in holy orders following a rule, nor those in the active life following the law. All too frequently lust has been our law, such that we have observed neither doctrine, both

divine and human, nor law. No one held faith with others as they should, but each person instead betrayed and inflicted harm upon others in word and deed. Indeed, each cuts others down with shameful attacks, and would do more thus if they could.

For in this land huge betrayals have occurred with regard both to God and the world, with much treachery to lords in various manners. Indeed, the greatest betrayal on earth is when a man betrays the soul of his lord. An exemplary instance of lord-betrayal is when a man should plot against his lord's life, or drive him living from the land. Yet both have occurred in this land: men plotted against Edward, and afterward killed and burned him.<sup>4</sup> And people widely killed godparents and children throughout this land; and all too many holy places have been destroyed on account of illicit promotions, which would not have happened had men shown respect for God's sanctuary. And men sold too many Christians out of this land for a long time, all of which is hateful to God, let anyone believe it who will.

It is shameful to speak of what has occurred too frequently, and terrible to know what those who have committed the following crime do: they pool resources and buy one woman together, and practice filth with her, one after another, and each after the other, like dogs who disregard filthy acts. They then sell that creature of God, whom he redeemed so dearly, into the power of enemies.

We also know where the crime occurred of a father selling his son, a son his mother, and one brother another into the power of enemies. These are dreadful and horrifying events, whoever should consider them. Yet what is damaging this nation is even greater and more various. Many betray their oaths and perjure themselves; pledges are repeatedly broken. Whoever reflects on the matter can see that God's anger is fiercely aroused against this people.

Alas, how might it be that greater shame should befall us through divine anger, on account of our own sins? If a slave should escape his lord and take refuge among the Vikings, and it happen thereafter that the slave should kill the lord in a violent encounter, the lord's kin will remain unrecompensed.<sup>5</sup> And if the lord should kill

the slave whom he bought previously, he must pay the price of a lord. Ignoble laws and shameful forced payments are now common through God's anger, understand it if you will.

And many disasters have often befallen this people. Nothing has gone well within or without for a long time; invasion and violence have often occurred, everywhere. The English have been entirely without victory and despondent in the face of God's anger. With divine permission, the Vikings are so strong that one of them will often drive ten of us away in an encounter, sometimes more, sometimes less, all on account of our sins. And often ten or twelve, one after the other, disgracefully treat the wife of a nobleman, or his daughter or kinswoman, there where he, who considered himself proud and powerful before that happened, looks on. A slave will often bind him fast who was previously his lord, and make him his slave, through God's anger. Woe for the misery, woe for the shame that the English now endure on account of divine ire.

Two or three Vikings often drive a band of Christians out from among this people, from sea to sea, huddled together, in shame of us all, if we were to understand the magnitude of the event accurately. And yet we repay the humiliation that we suffer with honor to those who inflict the shame upon us. We pay them off continually, while they humiliate us daily; they ravage and burn, steal and rob, taking everything to their ships. What else than God's fury is evidently seen in all these events?

We pay them continually and they humiliate us daily; they ravage and they burn, plunder and rob and carry to the ship; and lo! what else is there clear and evident in all these happenings except God's anger toward this nation?<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

Alas, many might easily recall in addition more than a single person could readily consider, how miserably things have gone for a long time throughout this land. Let each man indeed reflect intently on his own behavior, and not delay to so do for too long. In God's

name, may we do as is necessary: we must protect ourselves as we most readily may, unless we are all to perish together.

In the time of the Britons, there was a scholar named Gildas<sup>7</sup> who wrote about their sins, and how they with their transgressions so excessively angered God, until he finally permitted the army of the English<sup>8</sup> to occupy their land, and completely to annihilate the British host. According to Gildas, this happened through the plunder of the rich, and through their covetousness for ill-gotten gains, and through the lawlessness of the people, through corrupt judgments, through the idleness of bishops, and through the disgraceful cowardice of priests, who all too often fell silent instead of declaring the truth, and who stayed mum when they should have opened their mouths. Through the foul pride of the people and their gluttony and manifold sins they lost their land and they perished themselves.

Let's do what we must, and take warning from these events. What I say is true: that we know of worse things done by the English than we have heard of done by the Britons. It is therefore imperative that we reflect upon ourselves and seek to enlist God's help. Let's do what is necessary: turn to righteousness and at least partly abandon sinfulness, and to repair what we formerly broke. May we love God and follow his laws, and perform what we promised we would when we received our baptism, or what they promised who spoke for us at our baptism. Let us compose our words and deeds with justice, eagerly purify our conscience, and preserve our oaths and pledges, and maintain some sincere loyalty among us. Let us often reflect upon the mighty judgment by which we will all be judged, and shield ourselves against the surging fire of infernal punishment and earn for ourselves the glories and the joys that God has prepared for those who work his will on earth.

May God help us. Amen.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* exists in three forms. The text here is translated by James Simpson from the version



in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (1957).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Possibly a caustic reference to the protection money, known as “Danegeld,” paid to Viking invaders.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Slavery did exist in early medieval England, following the Roman occupation and withdrawal. A late 7th-century law code, repeated in late 10th-century codes, forbade the sale of slaves abroad. Slavery declined steeply in England after the Norman Conquest and disappeared after 1200; English slave trading resumes only in early modernity, in the mid-16th century.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: King Edward (ca. 962–978), son of King Edgar (ruled 959–75), was murdered in 978 and was succeeded by his half-brother Aethelred the Unready.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A reference to the legal system of “wergild,” whereby payments are made to resolve legal disputes, especially murder. The level of payment is determined by the social standing of the injured or slain party.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The following recapitulative section is omitted.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: British monk and historian (d. 570?), author of the Latin work *Concerning the Overthrow and Conquest of Britain*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the Angles.[Return to reference 8](#)

# **EARLY IRISH LYRICS**

Monastic Irish scribes were also composers of beautiful lyrics, inspired by both the study and what could be seen from the study.

## The Scholar and His Cat\*

I and white Pangur practice each of us his special art: his mind is set on hunting, my mind on my special craft.

I love (it is better than all fame) to be quiet beside my book, diligently pursuing knowledge. White Pangur does not envy me: he loves his childish craft.

When the two of us (this tale never wearies us) are alone together in our house, we have something to which we may apply our skill, an endless sport.

It is usual, at times, for a mouse to stick in his net, as a result of warlike battlings. For my part, into my net falls some difficult rule of hard meaning.

He directs his bright perfect eye against an enclosing wall. Though my clear eye is very weak I direct it against keenness of knowledge.

He is joyful with swift movement when a mouse sticks in his sharp paw. I too am joyful when I understand a dearly loved difficult problem.

Though we be thus at any time, neither of us hinders the other: each of us likes his craft, severally rejoicing in them.

He it is who is master for himself of the work which he does every day. I can perform my own work directed at understanding clearly what is difficult.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This and the following lyrics are translated by Gerard Murphy in his *Early Irish Lyrics* (1998). [Return to reference \\*](#)

# The Scribe in the Woods

A hedge of trees overlooks me; a blackbird's lay<sup>1</sup>  
sings to me (an announcement which I shall not  
conceal); above my lined book the birds' chanting  
sings to me.

A clear-voiced cuckoo sings to me (goodly utterance)  
in a grey cloak from bush fortresses. The Lord is  
indeed good to me: well do I write beneath a forest  
of woodland.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Poem, song. [Return to reference 1](#)

# **The Lord of Creation**

Let us adore the Lord, maker of wondrous works,  
great bright Heaven with its angels, the white-waved  
sea on earth.

## **My Hand Is Weary with Writing**

My hand is weary with writing; my sharp great point  
is not thick; my slender-beaked pen juts forth a  
beetle-hued draft of bright blue ink.

A steady stream of wisdom springs from my well-  
colored neat fair hand; on the page it pours its draft  
of ink of the green-skinned holly.

I send my little dripping pen unceasingly over an  
assemblage of books of great beauty, to enrich the  
possessions of men of art—whence my hand is  
weary with writing.

# **Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries**



# THE ANGEVIN EMPIRE, ca. 1190

MILES 0 50 100 150 200  
KILOMETERS 0 75 150 225 300





## THE MYTH OF ARTHUR'S RETURN

During the twelfth century, three authors, writing in Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English respectively, created a mostly legendary history of Britain for their Norman overlords (see [p. 14](#)). This "history" was set in the remote past, beginning with a foundation myth—a heroic account of national origins—modeled on Virgil's *Aeneid* and ending with the Germanic conquest of the native islanders, the Britons, in the fifth and sixth centuries. The chief architect of the history is Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was writing his *History of the Kings of Britain* in Latin prose ca. 1136–38. His work was freely translated into French verse by Wace in 1155, and Wace in turn was translated into English alliterative poetry by Layamon in his *Brut* (ca. 1190).

Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace wrote their histories of Britain primarily for an audience of noblemen and prelates who were descendants of the Norman conquerors of England. Geoffrey wrote several dedications of his *History*, first to supporters of Matilda, the heiress presumptive of Henry I, and, when the Crown went instead to Stephen of Blois, to the new king's allies and to Stephen himself. Layamon tells us that Wace wrote his French version for Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of Stephen's successor, Henry II. The prestige and power of ancient Rome still dominated the historical and political imagination of the feudal aristocracy, and the legendary history of the ancient kings of the Britons, especially of King Arthur, who had defeated Rome itself, served to flatter the self-image and ambitions of the Anglo-Norman barons. Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of*

*Britain* addressed many of the predicaments faced by kings of England, who were also overlords of large parts of western France. Between 1154 and 1214, indeed, English kings were lords of what was effectively an empire, including parts of Ireland and Wales, and all of western France (see map of the so-called Angevin Empire, so named because Henry II, who ruled 1154–89, was count of Anjou). The finally tragic arc of Arthurian narrative in particular highlights the interrelated challenges of both national and imperial governance.

Folklore and literature provide examples of a recurrent myth about a leader or hero who has not really died but is asleep somewhere or in some state of suspended life and will return to save his people. Evidently, the Bretons and Welsh developed this myth about Arthur in oral tradition long before it turns up in medieval chronicles. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon, and subsequent writers about Arthur, including Malory (see [pp. 603–22](#)), allude to it with varying degrees of skepticism.

The selections from Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace are translated by Alfred David. The Layamon selection is translated by Rosamund Allen.

## **GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH: *From The History of the Kings of Britain***

But also the famous King Arthur himself was mortally wounded. When he was carried off to the island of Avalon to have his wounds treated, he bestowed the crown on his cousin Constantine, the son of Duke Cador in the year 542 after the Incarnation of our lord. May his soul rest in peace.

## **WACE: *From Roman de Brut***

Arthur, if the story is not false, was mortally wounded; he had himself carried to Avalon to be healed of his wounds. He is still there and the Britons expect him as they say and hope. He'll come from there if he is still alive. Master Wace, who made this book, won't say more about Arthur's end than the prophet Merlin rightly said once upon a time that one would not know whether or not he were dead. The prophet spoke truly: ever since men have asked and shall always ask, I believe, whether he is dead or alive. Truly he had himself taken to Avalon 542 years after the Incarnation. It was a pity that he had no offspring. He left his realm to Constantine, the son of Cadur of Cornwall, and asked him to reign until his return.

## LAYAMON: *From Brut*

Arthur was mortally wounded, grievously badly;  
To him there came a young lad who was from his  
clan,  
He was Cador the Earl of Cornwall's son;  
The boy was called Constantine; the king loved him  
very much.  
14270 Arthur gazed up at him, as he lay there on the  
ground,  
And uttered these words with a sorrowing heart:  
"Welcome, Constantine; you were Cador's son;  
Here I bequeath to you all of my kingdom,  
And guard well my Britons all the days of your life  
And retain for them all the laws which have been  
14275 extant in my days  
And all the good laws which there were in Uther's  
days.  
And I shall voyage to Avalon, to the fairest of all  
maidens,  
To the Queen Argante, a very radiant elf,  
And she will make quite sound every one of my  
wounds,  
14280 Will make me completely whole with her health-  
giving potions.  
And then I shall come back to my own kingdom  
And dwell among the Britons with surpassing  
delight."  
After these words there came gliding from the sea  
What seemed a short boat, moving, propelled along  
by the tide  
14285 And in it were two women in remarkable attire,

Who took Arthur up at once and immediately carried  
him

And gently laid him down and began to move off.

And so it had happened, as Merlin said before:

That the grief would be incalculable at the passing of  
Arthur.

14290 The Britons even now believe that he is alive  
And living in Avalon with the fairest of the elf-folk,  
And the Britons are still always looking for when  
Arthur comes returning.

Yet once there was a prophet and his name was  
Merlin:

He spoke his predictions, and his sayings were the  
truth,

14295 Of how an Arthur once again would come to aid the  
English.



# ROMANCE

The twelfth century witnessed truly extraordinary bursts of textual activity, in France and England especially. The first half of the century saw remarkable advances in theological, scientific, and historiographical writing. The second half of the twelfth century gave rise, partly in response to those earlier advances, to a daring and sophisticated literary narrative of a kind hardly seen in Europe since late antiquity—that of romance. This genre remained central to later medieval literary culture; we pause now to sketch its fundamental qualities in general, before introducing our first romance, the Welsh text *The Lady of the Fountain*.

Romances satisfy our deepest imaginative desires. If we most fear loss of identity in separation from what we hold dearest and from what makes us what we are, romances allay that fear. As they imagine narratives of separation, errancy, and loss, they therapeutically deliver endings of reintegration, recovery, and return. That which was lost is found.

The word *romans* was originally a simple linguistic designation meaning “French,” since French was derived from Latin, the language of Rome. In the twelfth century, however, the word narrowed in meaning, coming to designate narrative (forms of *roman* still mean “the novel” in French, Italian, and German). The word then became particularly associated with a genre of narrative: it came to designate stories of separation and return, disintegration and reintegration.

Certainly classical Greek literature has examples of “romance” narrative, stories that involve separation, testing, and travel, all the

prelude to, and premise of, a final homecoming and recognition. Homer's *Odyssey* is fundamentally a romance; five later Greek narratives of this kind, written in the first through fourth centuries C.E., also survive. In medieval terminology, these are "comic" stories: thus Dante calls his great poem *The Divine Comedy*; Chaucer refers to the *Canterbury Tales* as a "comédie." Medieval romances are comic not because they make us laugh but rather because they, like Shakespeare's comedies, make us feel good through their happy endings.

The dynamic French-speaking court cultures of twelfth-century France and England gave the genre its most powerful, undying impetus. Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1160–1190) is its greatest exponent in his Arthurian romances, but the rich set of Tristan materials and the lays of Marie de France are also of exceptional importance. The genre, once deeply planted in the twelfth century in French, flourishes anew in all European vernacular languages and in each historical period of European and American culture (many popular movies are romances in this sense). It remains energetically immune to the literary attacks grounded in moralistic objection, high literary disdain for escapist entertainment, and satire.

The fundamental characteristic of romances is structural, not stylistic. They can be short or long, oral or literary, but to be romances they must have, or adapt, a particular configuration. Romances classically have a tripartite structure: integration (or implied integration), disintegration, and reintegration. They begin in, or at least imply, a protected, civilized state of some integrated social unit (for example, the family). That state is disrupted, expelling a member of the unit—the hero or heroine of the story, who is usually young—into a wild place. Undergoing the tests of that wild place is required for return to the integrated, civilized state of familial or social unity. Successfully undergoing tests in the wild often results in marriage, in which case the return to home and family is also a return to an enlarged home and family.



**The Dance of Mirth.** *The Romance of the Rose*, ca. 1500. The scene illustrates a moment in the thirteenth-century French poem. Note the splendor and circularity of this aristocratic performance of amorous ritual.

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This story pattern is characteristic of many fairy stories, medieval romances, Shakespearean comedies, novels, and popular movies. It not only represents desire but activates desire in its readers: the pleasure we take in such stories derives from our desire for the reintegration of lives in a coherent and constructive narrative.

The desired pattern can also, of course, be adapted in many variations. In particular, it can be activated in order to be frustrated: some protagonists, particularly adulterous ones such as Tristan and Ysolt, never reach home, forever needing to defer that unreachable happy ending of recognition. Romances, then, are symbolic stories, replaying and allaying the fears of the young as they face the apparently insuperable challenges of the adult world. Their deepest wisdom is this: civilization is not a unitary concept. To enter into and remain in the world of civilized order, we must, say romances, have commerce with all that threatens it. To regain Rome at the center, we must first be tested in the marginal wilds of romance. To be recognized and found, we must first be lost.

The examples of romance offered in this anthology exemplify different possibilities derived from this story structure. *The Lady of the Fountain* and *Sir Orfeo* are classic examples, true in almost every respect to the model sketched above. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* play fascinating games with classic romance structure. *Milun* and *Lanval* suggest different possibilities for romance within the rigid and suffocating context of the medieval court. *Chevrefoil* expresses the way in which the aspiration to achieve a happy ending is all the more painfully intense because such an ending is impossible. The sample from Thomas's *Tristan* ([pp. 192–96](#)) underlines the inevitable end of such a passion.

# THE LADY OF THE FOUNTAIN

*The Lady of the Fountain* (in Welsh, *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynawn*) is the first romance in this edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. It is an Arthurian prose romance recounting the story of Owain, a knight who excels in battle and marries his beloved. Yet this early “happy ending” is disrupted when Owain neglects his responsibilities to his wife in favor of chivalric adventures. Loss, madness, and violent struggle ensue, before we arrive at the harmonious resolution promised by the genre of romance.

This work is one of three surviving Welsh romances telling stories that were also told by the brilliant and influential French poet Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1170–1190). *The Lady of the Fountain* has a close relationship with Chrétien’s *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*. The Welsh version probably adapts and transforms Chrétien’s text, though it is possible that the two derive from a common source. *The Lady of the Fountain* appears in two important manuscripts of Middle Welsh literature from the fourteenth century, but the composition itself may be significantly older. Eleven narratives from these two manuscripts, including *The Lady of the Fountain*, are often grouped together under the modern title of *The Mabinogion* (a name that apparently reflects a scribal error).

*The Lady of the Fountain* is in many ways a paradigmatic medieval romance. Its hero follows the genre’s structuring plot of integration, disintegration, and reintegration into the social order. Both Owain’s madness and the prominent role of animals emphasize how nearby wildness lurks. At the same time, civilization is idealized

in sensory descriptions that dwell on the beauty and pleasures of aristocratic life. Women play an important role, especially in the character of Luned, Owain's essential ally. The story works by a logic of repetition and substitution, which asks readers to compare similar episodes and interpret their relations.

The unknown Welsh author wrote in a way characteristic of medieval romancers—refashioning an already existing story-world according to specific literary aims, in this case derived from Welsh narrative traditions. The protagonist "Owain the son of Urien" was a significant figure in the historical texts of Wales, and other Welsh persons and place-names feature throughout. In the narration, no distinct authorial voice offers commentary. Witty and erudite asides, of the kind found throughout Chrétien's *Yvain*, do not appear. Instead, the narration focuses on what is externally perceptible, creating an almost cinematic effect.



# The Lady of the Fountain<sup>1</sup>

King Arthur was at Caerlleon upon Usk.<sup>2</sup> One day he sat in his chamber; and with him were Owain the son of Urien, and Kynon the son of Clydno, and Kai the son of Kyner; and Gwenhwyvar and her handmaidens at needlework by the window.<sup>3</sup> And if it should be said that there was a porter at Arthur's palace, there was none. Glewlwyd Gavaelvawr was there, acting as porter, to welcome guests and strangers, and to receive them with honour, and to inform them of the manners and customs of the court; and to direct those who came to the hall or to the presence-chamber, and those who came to take up their lodging.

In the centre of the chamber King Arthur sat upon a seat of green rushes, over which was spread a covering of flame-coloured satin, and a cushion of red satin was under his elbow.

Then Arthur spoke, "If I thought you would not disparage me," said he, "I would sleep while I wait for my repast; and you can entertain one another with relating tales and can obtain a flagon of mead and some meat from Kai." And the King went to sleep. And Kynon the son of Clydno asked Kai for that which Arthur had promised them. "I, too, will have the good tale which he promised to me," said Kai. "Nay," answered Kynon, "fairer will it be for thee to fulfill Arthur's behest, in the first place, and then we will tell thee the best tale that we know." So Kai went to the kitchen and to the mead-cellar and returned bearing a flagon of mead and a golden goblet and a handful of skewers, upon which were broiled collops of meat. Then they ate the collops and began to drink the mead. "Now," said Kai, "it is time for you to give me my story." "Kynon," said Owain, "do thou pay to Kai the tale that is his due." "Truly," said Kynon, "thou art older, and art a better teller of tales, and hast seen more marvellous things than I; do thou therefore pay Kai his tale."

"Begin thyself," quoth Owain, "with the best that thou knowest." "I will do so," answered Kynon.

"I was the only son of my mother and father, and I was exceedingly aspiring, and my daring was very great. I thought there was no enterprise in the world too mighty for me, and after I had achieved all the adventures that were in my own country, I equipped myself, and set forth to journey through deserts and distant regions. And at length it chanced that I came to the fairest valley in the world, wherein were trees of equal growth; and a river ran through the valley, and a path was by the side of the river. And I followed the path until midday and continued my journey along the remainder of the valley until the evening; and at the extremity of a plain I came to a large and lustrous castle, at the foot of which was a torrent. And I approached the castle, and there I beheld two youths with yellow curling hair, each with a frontlet of gold upon his head, and clad in a garment of yellow satin, and they had gold clasps upon their insteps. In the hand of each of them was an ivory bow, strung with the sinews of the stag; and their arrows had shafts of the bone of the whale and were winged with peacock's feathers; the shafts also had golden heads. And they had daggers with blades of gold and with hilts of the bone of the whale. And they were shooting their daggers.

"And a little way from them I saw a man in the prime of life, with his beard newly shorn, clad in a robe and a mantle of yellow satin; and round the top of his mantle was a band of gold lace. On his feet were shoes of variegated leather, fastened by two bosses of gold. When I saw him, I went towards him and saluted him, and such was his courtesy that he no sooner received my greeting than he returned it. And he went with me towards the castle. Now there were no dwellers in the castle except those who were in one hall. And there I saw four-and-twenty damsels, embroidering satin at a window. And this I tell thee, Kai, that the least fair of them was fairer than the fairest maid thou hast ever beheld in the island of Britain, and the least lovely of them was more lovely than Gwenhwyvar, the wife of Arthur, when she has appeared loveliest at



the Offering, on the day of the Nativity, or at the feast of Easter. They rose up at my coming, and six of them took my horse, and divested me of my armour; and six others took my arms and washed them in a vessel until they were perfectly bright. And the third six spread cloths upon the tables and prepared meat. And the fourth six took off my soiled garments and placed others upon me; namely, an undervest and a doublet of fine linen, and a robe, and a surcoat, and a mantle of yellow satin with a broad gold band upon the mantle. And they placed cushions both beneath and around me, with coverings of red linen; and I sat down. Now the six maidens who had taken my horse, unharnessed him, as well as if they had been the best squires in the island of Britain. Then, behold, they brought bowls of silver wherein was water to wash, and towels of linen, some green and some white; and I washed. And in a little while the man sat down to the table. And I sat next to him, and below me sat all the maidens, except those who waited on us. And the table was of silver, and the cloths upon the table were of linen; and no vessel was served upon the table that was not either of gold or of silver, or of buffalo horn. And our meat was brought to us. And verily, Kai, I saw there every sort of meat and every sort of liquor that I have ever seen elsewhere; but the meat and the liquor were better served there than I have ever seen them in any other place.

"Until the repast was half over, neither the man nor any one of the damsels spoke a single word to me; but when the man perceived that it would be more agreeable to me to converse than to eat any more, he began to inquire of me who I was. I said I was glad to find that there was someone who would discourse with me, and that it was not considered so great a crime at that court for people to hold converse together. 'Chieftain,' said the man, 'we would have talked to thee sooner, but we feared to disturb thee during thy repast; now, however, we will discourse.' Then I told the man who I was, and what was the cause of my journey; and said that I was seeking whether anyone was superior to me, or whether I could gain the mastery over all. The man looked upon me, and he smiled and said, 'If I did not fear to distress thee too much, I would

show thee that which thou seekest.' Upon this I became anxious and sorrowful, and when the man perceived it, he said, 'If thou wouldest rather that I should show thee thy disadvantage than thine advantage, I will do so. Sleep here tonight, and in the morning arise early, and take the road upwards through the valley until thou reachest the wood through which thou camest hither. A little way within the wood thou wilt meet with a road branching off to the right, by which thou must proceed, until thou comest to a large sheltered glade with a mound in the centre. And thou wilt see a black-haired man<sup>4</sup> of great stature on the top of the mound. He is not smaller in size than two of the men of this world. He has but one foot; and one eye in the middle of his forehead. And he has a club of iron, and it is certain that there are no two men in the world who would not find their burden in that club. And he is not a comely man, but on the contrary he is exceedingly ill-favoured; and he is the woodward of that wood. And thou wilt see a thousand wild animals grazing around him. Inquire of him the way out of the glade, and he will reply to thee briefly, and will point out the road by which thou shalt find that which thou art in quest of.'

"And long seemed that night to me. And the next morning I arose and equipped myself, and mounted my horse, and proceeded straight through the valley to the wood; and I followed the crossroad which the man had pointed out to me, till at length I arrived at the glade. And there was I three times more astonished at the number of wild animals that I beheld, than the man had said I should be. And the black-haired man was there, sitting upon the top of the mound. Huge of stature as the man had told me that he was, I found him to exceed by far the description he had given me of him. As for the iron club which the man had told me was a burden for two men, I am certain, Kai, that it would be a heavy weight for four warriors to lift; and this was in the black-haired man's hand. And he only spoke to me in answer to my questions. Then I asked him what power he held over those animals. 'I will show thee, little man,' said he. And he took his club in his hand, and with it he struck a stag a great blow so that he brayed vehemently, and at his braying the

animals came together, as numerous as the stars in the sky, so that it was difficult for me to find room in the glade to stand among them. There were serpents, and dragons, and divers sorts of animals. And he looked at them and bade them go and feed; and they bowed their heads and did him homage as vassals to their lord.

"Then the black-haired man said to me, 'Seest thou now, little man, what power I hold over these animals?' Then I inquired of him the way, and he became very rough in his manner to me; however, he asked me whither I would go? And when I told him who I was and what I sought, he directed me. 'Take,' said he, 'that path that leads towards the head of the glade and ascend the wooded steep until thou comest to its summit; and there thou wilt find an open space like to a large valley, and in the midst of it a tall tree, whose branches are greener than the greenest pine trees. Under this tree is a fountain, and by the side of the fountain a marble slab, and on the marble slab a silver bowl, attached by a chain of silver, so that it may not be carried away. Take the bowl and throw a bowlful of water upon the slab, and thou wilt hear a mighty peal of thunder, so that thou wilt think that heaven and earth are trembling with its fury. With the thunder there will come a shower so severe that it will be scarce possible for thee to endure it and live. And the shower will be of hailstones; and after the shower, the weather will become fair, but every leaf that was upon the tree will have been carried away by the shower. Then a flight of birds will come and alight upon the tree; and in thine own country thou didst never hear a strain so sweet as that which they will sing. And at the moment thou art most delighted with the song of the birds, thou wilt hear a murmuring and complaining coming towards thee along the valley. And thou wilt see a knight upon a coal-black horse, clothed in black velvet, and with a pennon of black linen upon his lance; and he will ride unto thee to encounter thee with the utmost speed. If thou fleest from him he will overtake thee, and if thou abidest there, as sure as thou art a mounted knight, he will leave thee on foot. And if thou dost not find trouble in that adventure, thou needest not seek it during the rest of thy life.'

"So I journeyed on, until I reached the summit of the steep, and there I found everything as the black-haired man had described it to me. And I went up to the tree, and beneath it I saw the fountain, and by its side the marble slab, and the silver bowl fastened by the chain. Then I took the bowl and cast a bowlful of water upon the slab; and thereupon, behold, the thunder came, much more violent than the black-haired man had led me to expect; and after the thunder came the shower; and of a truth I tell thee, Kai, that there is neither man nor beast that can endure that shower and live. For not one of those hailstones would be stopped, either by the flesh or by the skin, until it had reached the bone. I turned my horse's flank towards the shower and placed the beak of my shield over his head and neck, while I held the upper part of it over my own head. And thus I withstood the shower. When I looked on the tree there was not a single leaf upon it, and then the sky became clear, and with that, behold the birds lighted upon the tree, and sang. And truly, Kai, I never heard any melody equal to that, either before or since. And when I was most charmed with listening to the birds, lo, a murmuring voice was heard through the valley, approaching me and saying, 'Oh, Knight, what has brought thee hither? What evil have I done to thee, that thou shouldst act towards me and my possessions as thou hast this day? Dost thou not know that the shower today has left in my dominions neither man nor beast alive that was exposed to it?' And thereupon, behold, a Knight on a black horse appeared, clothed in jet-black velvet, and with a tabard of black linen about him. And we charged each other, and, as the onset was furious, it was not long before I was overthrown. Then the Knight passed the shaft of his lance through the bridle rein of my horse and rode off with the two horses, leaving me where I was. And he did not even bestow so much notice upon me as to imprison me, nor did he despoil me of my arms. So I returned along the road by which I had come. And when I reached the glade where the black-haired man was, I confess to thee, Kai, it is a marvel that I did not melt down into a liquid pool, through the shame that I felt at the black-haired man's derision. And that night I came to the same castle where I had spent the night preceding. And I was more agreeably

entertained that night than I had been the night before; and I was better feasted, and I conversed freely with the inmates of the castle, and none of them alluded to my expedition to the fountain, neither did I mention it to any; and I remained there that night. When I arose on the morrow, I found, ready saddled, a dark bay palfrey, with nostrils as red as scarlet; and after putting on my armour and leaving there my blessing, I returned to my own court. And that horse I still possess, and he is in the stable yonder. And I declare that I would not part with him for the best palfrey in the island of Britain.

"Now of a truth, Kai, no man ever before confessed to an adventure so much to his own discredit, and verily it seems strange to me, that neither before nor since have I heard of any person besides myself who knew of this adventure, and that the subject of it should exist within King Arthur's dominions, without any other person lighting upon it."

"Now," quoth Owain, "would it not be well to go and endeavour to discover that place?"

"By the hand of my friend," said Kai, "often dost thou utter that with thy tongue which thou wouldst not make good with thy deeds."

"In very truth," said Gwenhwyvar, "it were better thou wert hanged, Kai, than to use such uncourteous speech towards a man like Owain."

"By the hand of my friend, good Lady," said Kai, "thy praise of Owain is not greater than mine."

With that Arthur awoke and asked if he had not been sleeping a little.

"Yes, Lord," answered Owain, "thou hast slept awhile."

"Is it time for us to go to meat?"

"It is, Lord," said Owain.

Then the horn for washing was sounded, and the King and all his household sat down to eat. And when the meal was ended, Owain withdrew to his lodging, and made ready his horse and his arms.

On the morrow, with the dawn of day, he put on his armour, and mounted his charger, and travelled through distant lands and over

desert mountains. And at length he arrived at the valley which Kynon had described to him; and he was certain that it was the same that he sought. And journeying along the valley by the side of the river, he followed its course till he came to the plain and within sight of the castle. When he approached the castle, he saw the youths shooting their daggers in the place where Kynon had seen them, and the blond man, to whom the castle belonged, standing hard by. And no sooner had Owain saluted the blond man than he was saluted by him in return.

And he went forward towards the castle, and there he saw the chamber, and when he had entered the chamber he beheld the maidens working at satin embroidery, in chairs of gold. And their beauty and their comeliness seemed to Owain far greater than Kynon had represented to him. And they rose to wait upon Owain, as they had done to Kynon, and the meal which they set before him gave more satisfaction to Owain than it had done to Kynon.

About the middle of the repast, the blond man asked Owain the object of his journey. And Owain made it known to him and said, "I am in quest of the Knight who guards the fountain." Upon this the blond man smiled and said that he was as loth to point out that adventure to Owain as he had been to Kynon. However, he described the whole to Owain, and they retired to rest.

The next morning Owain found his horse made ready for him by the damsels, and he set forward and came to the glade where the black-haired man was. And the stature of the black-haired man seemed more wonderful to Owain than it had done to Kynon, and Owain asked of him his road, and he showed it to him. And Owain followed the road, as Kynon had done, till he came to the green tree; and he beheld the fountain, and the slab beside the fountain, with the bowl upon it. And Owain took the bowl and threw a bowlful of water upon the slab. And, lo, the thunder was heard, and after the thunder came the shower, much more violent than Kynon had described, and after the shower the sky became bright. And when Owain looked at the tree, there was not one leaf upon it. And immediately the birds came, and settled upon the tree, and sang.

And when their song was most pleasing to Owain, he beheld a Knight coming towards him through the valley, and he prepared to receive him; and encountered him violently. Having broken both their lances, they drew their swords and fought blade to blade. Then Owain struck the Knight a blow through his helmet, headpiece and visor, and through the skin, and the flesh, and the bone, until it wounded the very brain. Then the black Knight felt that he had received a mortal wound, upon which he turned his horse's head, and fled. And Owain pursued him, and followed close upon him, although he was not near enough to strike him with his sword. Thereupon Owain descried a vast and resplendent castle. And they came to the castle gate. And the black Knight was allowed to enter, and the portcullis was let fall upon Owain; and it struck his horse behind the saddle, and cut him in two, and carried away the rowels of the spurs that were upon Owain's heels. And the portcullis descended to the floor. And the rowels of the spurs and part of the horse were without, and Owain with the other part of the horse remained between the two gates, and the inner gate was closed, so that Owain could not go thence; and Owain was in a perplexing situation. And while he was in this state, he could see through an aperture in the gate, a street facing him, with a row of houses on each side. And he beheld a maiden, with yellow curling hair, and a frontlet of gold upon her head; and she was clad in a dress of yellow satin, and on her feet were shoes of variegated leather. And she approached the gate, and desired that it should be opened. "Heaven knows, Lady," said Owain, "it is no more possible for me to open to thee from hence, than it is for thee to set me free." "Truly," said the damsel, "it is very sad that thou canst not be released, and every woman ought to succour thee, for I never saw one more faithful in the service of ladies than thou. As a friend thou art the most sincere, and as a lover the most devoted. Therefore," quoth she, "whatever is in my power to do for thy release, I will do it. Take this ring and put it on thy finger, with the stone inside thy hand; and close thy hand upon the stone. And as long as thou concealest it, it will conceal thee. When they have consulted together, they will come forth to fetch thee, in order to put thee to death; and they will be much

grieved that they cannot find thee. And I will await thee on the horseblock yonder; and thou wilt be able to see me, though I cannot see thee; therefore come and place thy hand upon my shoulder, that I may know that thou art near me. And by the way that I go hence, do thou accompany me."

Then she went away from Owain, and he did all that the maiden had told him. And the people of the castle came to seek Owain, to put him to death, and when they found nothing but the half of his horse, they were sorely grieved.

And Owain vanished from among them, and went to the maiden, and placed his hand upon her shoulder; whereupon she set off, and Owain followed her, until they came to the door of a large and beautiful chamber, and the maiden opened it, and they went in, and closed the door. And Owain looked around the chamber, and behold there was not even a single nail in it that was not painted with gorgeous colours; and there was not a single panel that had not sundry images in gold portrayed upon it.

The maiden kindled a fire, and took water in a silver bowl, and put a towel of white linen on her shoulder and gave Owain water to wash. Then she placed before him a silver table, inlaid with gold, upon which was a cloth of yellow linen; and she brought him food. And of a truth, Owain had never seen any kind of meat that was not there in abundance, but it was better cooked there than he had ever found it in any other place. Nor did he ever see so excellent a display of meat and drink, as there. And there was not one vessel from which he was served, that was not of gold or of silver. And Owain ate and drank, until late in the afternoon, when lo, they heard a mighty clamour in the castle; and Owain asked the maiden what that outcry was. "They are administering extreme unction,"<sup>5</sup> said she, "to the nobleman who owns the castle." And Owain went to sleep.

The couch which the maiden had prepared for him was meet for Arthur himself; it was of scarlet, and fur, and satin, and sendal,<sup>6</sup> and fine linen. In the middle of the night they heard a woeful outcry. "What outcry again is this?" said Owain. "The nobleman who owned



the castle is now dead," said the maiden. And a little after daybreak, they heard an exceeding loud clamour and wailing. And Owain asked the maiden what was the cause of it. "They are bearing to the church the body of the nobleman who owned the castle."

And Owain rose up, and clothed himself, and opened a window of the chamber, and looked towards the castle; and he could see neither the bounds, nor the extent of the hosts that filled the streets. And they were fully armed; and a vast number of women were with them, both on horseback and on foot; and all the ecclesiastics in the city, singing. And it seemed to Owain that the sky resounded with the vehemence of their cries, and with the noise of the trumpets, and with the singing of the ecclesiastics. In the midst of the throng, he beheld the bier, over which was a veil of white linen; and wax tapers were burning beside and around it, and none that supported the bier was lower in rank than a powerful baron.

Never did Owain see an assemblage so gorgeous with satin, and silk, and sendal. And following the train, he beheld a lady with yellow hair falling over her shoulders, and stained with blood; and about her a dress of yellow satin, which was torn. Upon her feet were shoes of variegated leather. And it was a marvel that the ends of her fingers were not bruised, from the violence with which she smote her hands together. Truly she would have been the fairest lady Owain ever saw, had she been in her usual guise. And her cry was louder than the shout of the men or the clamour of the trumpets. No sooner had he beheld the lady, than he became inflamed with her love, so that it took entire possession of him.

Then he inquired of the maiden who the lady was. "Heaven knows," replied the maiden, "she may be said to be the fairest, and the most chaste, and the most liberal, and the wisest, and the most noble of women. And she is my mistress; and she is called the Countess of the Fountain, the wife of him whom thou didst slay yesterday." "Verily," said Owain, "she is the woman that I love best." "Verily," said the maiden, "she shall also love thee not a little."

And with that the maid arose, and kindled a fire, and filled a pot with water, and placed it to warm; and she brought a towel of white

linen and placed it around Owain's neck; and she took a goblet of ivory and a silver basin and filled them with warm water, wherewith she washed Owain's head. Then she opened a wooden casket and drew forth a razor, whose haft was of ivory, and upon which were two rivets of gold. And she shaved his beard, and she dried his head, and his throat, with the towel. Then she rose up from before Owain and brought him to eat. And truly Owain had never so good a meal, nor was he ever so well served.

When he had finished his repast, the maiden arranged his couch. "Come here," said she, "and sleep, and I will go and woo for thee." And Owain went to sleep, and the maiden shut the door of the chamber after her and went towards the castle. When she came there, she found nothing but mourning and sorrow; and the Countess in her chamber could not bear the sight of anyone through grief. Luned<sup>2</sup> came and saluted her, but the Countess answered her not. And the maiden bent down towards her, and said, "What aileth thee, that thou answerest no one today?" "Luned," said the Countess, "what change hath befallen thee, that thou hast not come to visit me in my grief? It was wrong in thee, and I having made thee rich; it was wrong in thee that thou didst not come to see me in my distress. That was wrong in thee." "Truly," said Luned, "I thought thy good sense was greater than I find it to be. Is it well for thee to mourn after that good man, or for anything else, that thou canst not have?" "I declare to heaven," said the Countess, "that in the whole world there is not a man equal to him." "Not so," said Luned, "for an ugly man would be as good as or better than he." "I declare to heaven," said the Countess, "that were it not repugnant to me to cause to be put to death one whom I have brought up, I would have thee executed, for making such a comparison to me. As it is, I will banish thee." "I am glad," said Luned, "that thou hast no other cause to do so, than that I would have been of service to thee where thou didst not know what was to thine advantage. And henceforth evil betide whichever of us shall make the first advance towards reconciliation to the other; whether I should seek an

invitation from thee, or thou of thine own accord shouldst send to invite me."

With that Luned went forth: and the Countess arose and followed her to the door of the chamber and began coughing loudly. And when Luned looked back, the Countess beckoned to her; and she returned to the Countess. "In truth," said the Countess, "evil is thy disposition; but if thou knowest what is to my advantage, declare it to me." "I will do so," quoth she.

"Thou knowest that except by warfare and arms it is impossible for thee to preserve thy possessions; delay not, therefore, to seek someone who can defend them." "And how can I do that?" said the Countess. "I will tell thee," said Luned. "Unless thou canst defend the fountain, thou canst not maintain thy dominions; and no one can defend the fountain, except it be a knight of Arthur's household; and I will go to Arthur's court, and ill betide me, if I return thence without a warrior who can guard the fountain as well as, or even better than, he who defended it formerly." "That will be hard to perform," said the Countess. "Go, however, and make proof of that which thou hast promised."

Luned set out, under the pretence of going to Arthur's court; but she went back to the chamber where she had left Owain; and she tarried there with him as long as it might have taken her to have travelled to the court of King Arthur. And at the end of that time, she apparelled herself and went to visit the Countess. And the Countess was much rejoiced when she saw her and inquired what news she brought from the court. "I bring thee the best of news," said Luned, "for I have compassed the object of my mission. When wilt thou, that I should present to thee the chieftain who has come with me hither?" "Bring him here to visit me tomorrow, at midday," said the Countess, "and I will cause the town to be assembled by that time."

And Luned returned home. And the next day, at noon, Owain arrayed himself in a coat, and a surcoat, and a mantle of yellow satin, upon which was a broad band of gold lace; and on his feet were high shoes of variegated leather, which were fastened by

golden clasps, in the form of lions. And they proceeded to the chamber of the Countess.

Right glad was the Countess of their coming, and she gazed steadfastly upon Owain, and said, "Luned, this knight has not the look of a traveller." "What harm is there in that, lady?" said Luned. "I am certain," said the Countess, "that no other man than this chased the soul from the body of my lord." "So much the better for thee, lady," said Luned, "for had he not been stronger than thy lord he could not have deprived him of life. There is no remedy for that which is past, be it as it may." "Go back to thine abode," said the Countess, "and I will take counsel."

The next day the Countess caused all her subjects to assemble and showed them that her earldom was left defenceless, and that it could not be protected but with horse and arms and military skill. "Therefore," said she, "this is what I offer for your choice: either let one of you take me, or give your consent for me to take a husband from elsewhere to defend my dominions."

So they came to the determination that it was better that she should have permission to marry someone from elsewhere; and, thereupon, she sent for the bishops and archbishops to celebrate her nuptials with Owain. And the men of the earldom did Owain homage.

And Owain defended the Fountain with lance and sword. And this is the manner in which he defended it: Whensoever a knight came there he overthrew him and sold him for his full worth, and what he thus gained he divided among his barons and his knights; and no man in the whole world could be more beloved than he was by his subjects. And it was thus for the space of three years.

It befell that as Gwalchmai<sup>8</sup> went forth one day with King Arthur, he perceived him to be very sad and sorrowful. And Gwalchmai was much grieved to see Arthur in this state; and he questioned him, saying, "Oh, my lord! what has befallen thee?" "In sooth, Gwalchmai," said Arthur, "I am grieved concerning Owain, whom I have lost these three years, and I shall certainly die if the fourth

year passes without my seeing him. Now I am sure, that it is through the tale which Kynon the son of Clydno related, that I have lost Owain." "There is no need for thee," said Gwalchmai, "to summon to arms thy whole dominions on this account, for thou thyself and the men of thy household will be able to avenge Owain, if he be slain; or to set him free, if he be in prison; and, if alive, to bring him back with thee." And it was settled according to what Gwalchmai had said.

Then Arthur and the men of his household prepared to go and seek Owain, and their number was three thousand, besides their attendants. And Kynon the son of Clydno acted as their guide. And Arthur came to the castle where Kynon had been before, and when he came there the youths were shooting in the same place, and the blond man was standing hard by. When the blond man saw Arthur he greeted him and invited him to the castle; and Arthur accepted his invitation, and they entered the castle together. And great as was the number of his retinue, their presence was scarcely observed in the castle, so vast was its extent. And the maidens rose up to wait on them, and the service of the maidens appeared to them all to excel any attendance they had ever met with; and even the pages who had charge of the horses were no worse served, that night, than Arthur himself would have been in his own palace.

The next morning Arthur set out thence, with Kynon for his guide, and came to the place where the black-haired man was. And the stature of the black-haired man was more surprising to Arthur than it had been represented to him. And they came to the top of the wooded steep and traversed the valley till they reached the green tree, where they saw the fountain, and the bowl, and the slab. And upon that, Kai came to Arthur and spoke to him. "My lord," said he, "I know the meaning of all this, and my request is, that thou wilt permit me to throw the water on the slab, and to receive the first adventure that may befall." And Arthur gave him leave.

Then Kai threw a bowlful of water upon the slab, and immediately there came the thunder, and after the thunder the shower. And such a thunderstorm they had never known before, and

many of the attendants who were in Arthur's train were killed by the shower. After the shower had ceased the sky became clear; and on looking at the tree they beheld it completely leafless. Then the birds descended upon the tree, and the song of the birds was far sweeter than any strain they had ever heard before. Then they beheld a knight on a coal-black horse, clothed in black satin, coming rapidly towards them. And Kai met him and encountered him, and it was not long before Kai was overthrown. And the knight withdrew, and Arthur and his host encamped for the night.

And when they arose in the morning, they perceived the signal of combat upon the lance of the Knight. And Kai came to Arthur, and spoke to him: "My lord," said he, "though I was overthrown yesterday, if it seem good to thee, I would gladly meet the Knight again today." "Thou mayst do so," said Arthur. And Kai went towards the Knight. And on the spot he overthrew Kai and struck him with the head of his lance in the forehead, so that it broke his helmet and the headpiece, and pierced the skin and the flesh, the breadth of the spearhead, even to the bone. And Kai returned to his companions.

After this, all the household of Arthur went forth, one after the other, to combat the Knight, until there was not one that was not overthrown by him, except Arthur and Gwalchmai. And Arthur armed himself to encounter the Knight. "Oh, my lord," said Gwalchmai, "permit me to fight with him first." And Arthur permitted him. And he went forth to meet the Knight, having over himself and his horse a satin robe of honour which had been sent him by the daughter of the Earl of Rhangyw, and in this dress he was not known by any of the host. And they charged each other and fought all that day until the evening, and neither of them was able to unhorse the other.

The next day they fought with strong lances, and neither of them could obtain the mastery.

And the third day they fought with exceeding strong lances. And they were incensed with rage and fought furiously, even until noon. And they gave each other such a shock that the girths of their horses were broken, so that they fell over their horses' cruppers to the ground. And they rose up speedily, and drew their swords, and

resumed the combat; and the multitude that witnessed their encounter felt assured that they had never before seen two men so valiant or so powerful. And had it been midnight, it would have been light from the fire that flashed from their weapons. And the Knight gave Gwalchmai a blow that turned his helmet from off his face, so that the Knight knew that it was Gwalchmai. Then Owain said, "My lord Gwalchmai, I did not know thee for my cousin, owing to the robe of honour that enveloped thee; take my sword and my arms." Said Gwalchmai, "Thou, Owain, art the victor; take thou my sword." And with that Arthur saw that they were conversing, and advanced towards them. "My lord Arthur," said Gwalchmai, "here is Owain, who has vanquished me, and will not take my arms." "My lord," said Owain, "it is he that has vanquished me, and he will not take my sword." "Give me your swords," said Arthur, "and then neither of you has vanquished the other." Then Owain put his arms around Arthur's neck, and they embraced. And all the host hurried forward to see Owain and to embrace him; and there was nigh being a loss of life, so great was the press.

And they retired that night, and the next day Arthur prepared to depart. "My lord," said Owain, "this is not well of thee; for I have been absent from thee these three years, and during all that time, up to this very day, I have been preparing a banquet for thee, knowing that thou wouldst come to seek me. Tarry with me, therefore, until thou and thy attendants have recovered the fatigues of the journey and have been anointed."

And they all proceeded to the castle of the Countess of the Fountain, and the banquet which had been three years preparing was consumed in three months. Never had they a more delicious or agreeable banquet. And Arthur prepared to depart. Then he sent an embassy to the Countess, to beseech her to permit Owain to go with him for the space of three months, that he might show him to the nobles and the fair dames of the island of Britain. And the Countess gave her consent, although it was very painful to her. So Owain came with Arthur to the island of Britain. And when he was once

more amongst his kindred and friends, he remained three years, instead of three months, with them.

And as Owain one day sat at meat, in the city of Caerlleon upon Usk, behold a damsel<sup>9</sup> entered upon a bay horse, with a curling mane and covered with foam, and the bridle and so much as was seen of the saddle were of gold. And the damsel was arrayed in a dress of yellow satin. And she came up to Owain and took the ring from off his hand. "Thus," said she, "shall be treated the deceiver, the traitor, the faithless, the disgraced, and the beardless." And she turned her horse's head and departed.

Then his adventure came to Owain's remembrance, and he was sorrowful; and having finished eating he went to his own abode and made preparations that night. And the next day he arose but did not go to the court, but wandered to the distant parts of the earth and to uncultivated mountains. And he remained there until all his apparel was worn out, and his body was wasted away, and his hair was grown long. And he went about with the wild beasts and fed with them, until they became familiar with him; but at length he grew so weak that he could no longer bear them company. Then he descended from the mountains to the valley and came to a park that was the fairest in the world and belonged to a widowed Countess.

One day the Countess and her maidens went forth to walk by a lake, that was in the middle of the park. And they saw the form of a man. And they were terrified. Nevertheless they went near him, and touched him, and looked at him. And they saw that there was life in him, though he was exhausted by the heat of the sun. And the Countess returned to the castle, and took a flask full of precious ointment and gave it to one of her maidens. "Go with this," said she, "and take with thee yonder horse and clothing, and place them near the man we saw just now. And anoint him with this balsam, near his heart; and if there is life in him, he will arise through the efficacy of this balsam. Then watch what he will do."

And the maiden departed from her, and poured the whole of the balsam upon Owain, and left the horse and the garments hard by,



and went a little way off, and hid herself to watch him. In a short time she saw him begin to move his arms; and he rose up, and looked at his person, and became ashamed of the unseemliness of his appearance. Then he perceived the horse and the garments that were near him. And he crept forward till he was able to draw the garments to him from off the saddle. And he clothed himself and with difficulty mounted the horse. Then the damsel discovered herself to him and saluted him. And he was rejoiced when he saw her and inquired of her what land and what territory that was. "Truly," said the maiden, "a widowed Countess owns yonder castle; at the death of her husband, he left her two Earldoms, but at this day she has but this one dwelling that has not been wrested from her by a young Earl, who is her neighbour, because she refused to become his wife." "That is pity," said Owain. And he and the maiden proceeded to the castle; and he alighted there, and the maiden conducted him to a pleasant chamber, and kindled a fire and left him.

And the maiden came to the Countess and gave the flask into her hand. "Ha! maiden," said the Countess, "where is all the balsam?" "Have I not used it all?" said she. "Oh, maiden," said the Countess, "I cannot easily forgive thee this; it is sad for me to have wasted seven-score pounds' worth of precious ointment upon a stranger whom I know not. However, maiden, wait thou upon him, until he is quite recovered."

And the maiden did so, and furnished him with meat and drink, and fire, and lodging, and medicaments, until he was well again. And in three months he was restored to his former guise and became even more comely than he had ever been before.

One day Owain heard a great tumult and a sound of arms in the castle, and he inquired of the maiden the cause thereof. "The Earl," said she, "whom I mentioned to thee, has come before the castle, with a numerous army, to subdue the Countess." And Owain inquired of her whether the Countess had a horse and arms in her possession. "She has the best in the world," said the maiden. "Wilt thou go and request the loan of a horse and arms for me," said

Owain, "that I may go and look at this army?" "I will," said the maiden.

And she came to the Countess and told her what Owain had said. And the Countess laughed. "Truly," said she, "I will even give him a horse and arms forever; such a horse and such arms had he never yet, and I am glad that they should be taken by him today, lest my enemies should have them against my will tomorrow. Yet I know not what he would do with them."

The Countess bade them bring out a beautiful black steed, upon which was a beechen saddle, and a suit of armour, for man and horse. And Owain armed himself, and mounted the horse, and went forth, attended by two pages completely equipped, with horses and arms. And when they came near to the Earl's army, they could see neither its extent nor its extremity. And Owain asked the pages in which troop the Earl was. "In yonder troop," said they, "in which are four yellow standards. Two of them are before, and two behind him." "Now," said Owain, "do you return and await me near the portal of the castle." So they returned, and Owain pressed forward until he met the Earl. And Owain drew him completely out of his saddle and turned his horse's head towards the castle, and though it was with difficulty, he brought the Earl to the portal, where the pages awaited him. And in they came. And Owain presented the Earl as a gift to the Countess. And said to her, "Behold a requital to thee for thy blessed balsam."

The army encamped around the castle. And the Earl restored to the Countess the two Earldoms he had taken from her, as a ransom for his life; and for his freedom he gave her the half of his own dominions, and all his gold, and his silver, and his jewels, besides hostages.

And Owain took his departure. And the Countess and all her subjects besought him to remain, but Owain chose rather to wander through distant lands and deserts.

And as he journeyed, he heard a loud yelling in a wood. And it was repeated a second and a third time. And Owain went towards the spot and beheld a huge craggy mound, in the middle of the

wood; on the side of which was a grey rock. And there was a cleft in the rock, and a serpent was within the cleft. And near the rock stood a black lion, and every time the lion sought to go thence, the serpent darted towards him to attack him. And Owain unsheathed his sword and drew near to the rock; and as the serpent sprang out, he struck him with his sword, and cut him in two. And he dried his sword, and went on his way, as before. But behold the lion followed him and played about him, as though it had been a greyhound that he had reared.

They proceeded thus throughout the day, until the evening. And when it was time for Owain to take his rest, he dismounted and turned his horse loose in a flat and wooded meadow. And he struck fire, and when the fire was kindled, the lion brought him fuel enough to last for three nights. And the lion disappeared. And presently the lion returned, bearing a fine large roebuck. And he threw it down before Owain, who went towards the fire with it.

And Owain took the roebuck, and skinned it, and placed collops of its flesh upon skewers, around the fire. The rest of the buck he gave to the lion to devour. While he was doing this, he heard a deep sigh near him, and a second, and a third. And Owain called out to know whether the sigh he heard proceeded from a mortal; and he received answer that it did. "Who art thou?" said Owain. "Truly," said the voice, "I am Luned, the handmaiden of the Countess of the Fountain." "And what dost thou here?" said Owain. "I am imprisoned," said she, "on account of the knight who came from Arthur's court and married the Countess. And he stayed a short time with her, but he afterwards departed for the court of Arthur and has not returned since. And he was the friend I loved best in the world. And two of the pages in the Countess's chamber traduced him and called him a deceiver. And I told them that they two were not a match for him alone. So they imprisoned me in the stone vault and said that I should be put to death, unless he came himself to deliver me, by a certain day; and that is no further off than the day after tomorrow. And I have no one to send to seek him for me. And his name is Owain the son of Urien." "And art thou certain that if that

knight knew all this, he would come to thy rescue?" "I am most certain of it," said she.

When the collops were cooked, Owain divided them into two parts, between himself and the maiden; and after they had eaten, they talked together, until the day dawned. And the next morning Owain inquired of the damsel, if there was any place where he could get food and entertainment for that night. "There is, Lord," said she; "cross over yonder, and go along the side of the river, and in a short time thou wilt see a great castle, in which are many towers, and the Earl who owns that castle is the most hospitable man in the world. There thou mayst spend the night."

Never did sentinel keep stricter watch over his lord than the lion that night over Owain.

And Owain accoutred his horse, and passed across by the ford, and came in sight of the castle. And he entered it and was honourably received. And his horse was well cared for, and plenty of fodder was placed before him. Then the lion went and lay down in the horse's manger; so that none of the people of the castle dared to approach him. The treatment which Owain met with there was such as he had never known elsewhere, for everyone was as sorrowful as though death had been upon him. And they went to meat; and the Earl sat upon one side of Owain, and on the other side his only daughter. And Owain had never seen any more lovely than she. Then the lion came and placed himself between Owain's feet, and he fed him with every kind of food that he took himself. And he never saw anything equal to the sadness of the people.

In the middle of the repast the Earl began to bid Owain welcome. "Then," said Owain, "behold, it is time for thee to be cheerful." "Heaven knows," said the Earl, "that it is not thy coming that makes us sorrowful, but we have cause enough for sadness and care." "What is that?" said Owain. "I have two sons," replied the Earl, "and yesterday they went to the mountains to hunt. Now there is on the mountain a monster who kills men and devours them, and he seized my sons; and tomorrow is the time he has fixed to be here, and he threatens that he will then slay my sons before my eyes, unless I will

deliver into his hands this my daughter. He has the form of a man, but in stature he is no less than a giant."

"Truly," said Owain, "that is lamentable. And which wilt thou do?" "Heaven knows," said the Earl, "it will be better that my sons should be slain against my will, than that I should voluntarily give up my daughter to him to ill-treat and destroy." Then they talked about other things, and Owain stayed there that night.

The next morning they heard an exceeding great clamour, which was caused by the coming of the giant with the two youths. And the Earl was anxious both to protect his castle and to release his two sons. Then Owain put on his armour and went forth to encounter the giant, and the lion followed him. And when the giant saw that Owain was armed, he rushed towards him and attacked him. And the lion fought with the giant much more fiercely than Owain did. "Truly," said the giant, "I should find no difficulty in fighting with thee, were it not for the animal that is with thee." Upon that Owain took the lion back to the castle and shut the gate upon him, and then he returned to fight the giant, as before. And the lion roared very loud, for he heard that it went hard with Owain. And he climbed up till he reached the top of the Earl's hall, and thence he got to the top of the castle, and he sprang down from the walls and went and joined Owain. And the lion gave the giant a stroke with his paw, which tore him from his shoulder to his hip, and his heart was laid bare, and the giant fell down dead. Then Owain restored the two youths to their father.

The Earl besought Owain to remain with him, and he would not, but set forward towards the meadow where Luned was. And when he came there he saw a great fire kindled, and two youths with beautiful curling auburn hair were leading the maiden to cast her into the fire. And Owain asked them what charge they had against her. And they told him of the compact that was between them, as the maiden had done the night before. "And," said they, "Owain has failed her, therefore we are taking her to be burnt." "Truly," said Owain, "he is a good knight, and if he knew that the maiden was in such peril, I marvel that he came not to her rescue; but if you will

accept me in his stead, I will do battle with you." "We will," said the youths, "by him who made us."

And they attacked Owain, and he was hard beset by them. And with that the lion came to Owain's assistance, and they two got the better of the young men. And they said to him, "Chieftain, it was not agreed that we should fight save with thyself alone, and it is harder for us to contend with yonder animal than with thee." And Owain put the lion in the place where the maiden had been imprisoned, and blocked up the door with stones, and he went to fight with the young men, as before. But Owain had not his usual strength, and the two youths pressed hard upon him. And the lion roared incessantly at seeing Owain in trouble; and he burst through the wall until he found a way out, and rushed upon the young men, and instantly slew them. So Luned was saved from being burned.

Then Owain returned with Luned to the dominions of the Countess of the Fountain. And when he went thence he took the Countess with him to Arthur's court, and she was his wife as long as she lived.

And then he took the road that led to the court of the Black Oppressor,<sup>1</sup> and Owain fought with him, and the lion did not quit Owain until he had vanquished him. And when he reached the court of the Black Oppressor he entered the hall and beheld four-and-twenty ladies, the fairest that could be seen. And the garments which they had on were not worth four-and-twenty pence, and they were as sorrowful as death. And Owain asked them the cause of their sadness. And they said, "We are the daughters of Earls, and we all came here with our husbands, whom we dearly loved. And we were received with honour and rejoicing. And we were thrown into a state of stupor, and while we were thus, the demon who owns this castle slew all our husbands, and took from us our horses, and our raiment, and our gold, and our silver; and the corpses of our husbands are still in this house, and many others with them. And this, Chieftain, is the cause of our grief, and we are sorry that thou art come hither, lest harm should befall thee."

And Owain was grieved when he heard this. And he went forth from the castle, and he beheld a knight approaching him, who saluted him in a friendly and cheerful manner, as if he had been a brother. And this was the Black Oppressor. "In very sooth," said Owain, "it is not to seek thy friendship that I am here." "In sooth," said he, "thou shalt not find it then." And with that they charged each other and fought furiously. And Owain overcame him and bound his hands behind his back. Then the Black Oppressor besought Owain to spare his life, and spoke thus: "My lord Owain," said he, "it was foretold that thou shouldst come hither and vanquish me, and thou hast done so. I was a robber here, and my house was a house of spoil;<sup>2</sup> but grant me my life, and I will become the keeper of an hospice,<sup>2</sup> and I will maintain this house as an hospice for weak and for strong, as long as I live, for the good of thy soul." And Owain accepted this proposal of him and remained there that night.

And the next day he took the four-and-twenty ladies, and their horses, and their raiment, and what they possessed of goods and jewels, and proceeded with them to Arthur's court. And if Arthur was rejoiced when he saw him, after he had lost him the first time, his joy was now much greater. And of those ladies, such as wished to remain in Arthur's court remained there, and such as wished to depart departed.

And thenceforward Owain dwelt at Arthur's court greatly beloved, as the head of his household, until he went away with his followers; and those were the army of three hundred ravens<sup>3</sup> which Kenverchyn had left him. And wherever Owain went with these he was victorious.

And this is the tale of THE LADY OF THE FOUNTAIN.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is from Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion* (London: Longmans, 1849); at a few points the text has been modified for comprehensibility.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The location in Wales that is home of Arthur's court in this and other Welsh romances.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Some of these names correspond closely to French Arthurian tradition: Gwenhwyvar is Queen Guinevere; Kai, Arthur's steward Kay. Others, like Kynon, are distinctively Welsh.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This figure is called *y gwr du*, literally, "the black man"; however, color as an adjective for a person in Welsh usually refers to hair color.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, administering a ritual in which a priest prays for the recovery and salvation of someone who is seriously ill.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fine, light silk used for luxury garments.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This is the first time the maiden's name is used.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Gwalchmai corresponds to Gawain in French and English Arthurian traditions.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Apparently not Luned.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This episode is a simplification and displacement of an inset narrative found in Chrétien's *Yvain*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A charitable guesthouse.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Owain's own military forces.[Return to reference 3](#)



# MARIE DE FRANCE

## fl. ca. 1180

Much of twelfth-century “French” literature was composed in England in the Anglo-Norman dialect (see [p. 5](#)). Prominent among the earliest poets writing in the French vernacular, who shaped the themes and styles of later medieval European poetry, is the author who, in an epilogue to her *Fables*, calls herself Marie de France. That signature tells us that her given name was Marie and that she was born in France, but circumstantial evidence from her writings shows that she spent much of her life in England. A reference to her in a French poem written in England around 1180 speaks of “dame Marie” who wrote “lais” much loved and praised by counts, barons, knights, and ladies. She dedicates the *Lais* to a “noble king” who was most likely Henry II of England, who reigned from 1154 to 1189.

Three works can be safely attributed to Marie, probably written in the following order: the *Lais* (the English word “lay” refers to a short narrative poem), the *Fables*, and *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*. Marie’s twelve lays are short romances, ranging from 118 to 1,184 lines; each recounts a conflict or crisis in the affairs of noble lovers. In her prologue, Marie tells us that she heard versions of these lays performed, and in several places she refers to Breton storytellers—that is, professional minstrels from the French province of Brittany or the Celtic parts of Britain. Marie’s lays helped establish the genre that came to be known as the “Breton lay,” which also includes *Sir*

*Orfeo* (see [pp. 363–75](#)). The portrait of the author that emerges from Marie's works is of a highly educated noblewoman, proficient in Latin and English as well as her native French, writing for an elite audience. Her works occasionally comment on their own literary production, signaling Marie's self-possessed awareness of her craft.

The *Lais* participated in the period's elevation of erotic love to a worthy topic for literature. Together, the lays in the collection present a multifaceted picture of desire—frequently ennobling or even supernatural in its power, but sometimes limited or imperfect. Lovers often find themselves pulled between social obligation and self-fulfillment. In *Milun*, for instance, both an oppressive system of marriage and chivalry's demands for competitive honor keep the lovers apart. In *Lanval*, Arthur's court is the scene not of noble comradery but of the hero's mistreatment, relieved only in the privacy of love. Notably, many of the lays offer the perspectives of women as well as men.

The brevity of the lay tends to emphasize small, vivid details, which take on symbolic force in the course of a narrative—such as the swan in *Milun*, the nightingale in *Laüstic*, or, in *Chevrefoil*, the honeysuckle wrapped around the hazel tree. Because Marie's lays are structured by repetition, contrast, multivalent symbol, and sudden change, interpreting one can feel like solving a puzzle, or explaining a dream. They often emphasize the creation and interpretation of signs, as though reflecting on their own processes of meaning making.

Marie wrote in eight-syllable couplets, which was the standard form of French narrative verse, employed also by Wace (see [p. 140](#)) and Chrétien de Troyes. Here is the beginning of the prologue to the *Lais* in its original Anglo-Norman French as well as a modern English translation, where Marie reflects on a writer's duty to share her talent:

Ki Deu ad duné escïence  
E de parler bon' eloquence  
Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,

Ainz se deit volunTERS mustrer.

Whoever has received knowledge  
and eloquence in speech from God  
should not be silent or secretive  
but demonstrate it willingly.

The following translations are by Robert Hanning and Joan  
Ferrante, *The Lais of Marie de France* (1978).

# Milun

Whoever wants to tell a variety of stories  
ought to have a variety of beginnings,  
and speak so intelligently  
that people will enjoy listening.  
Now I'll begin *Milun*  
5 and show, in a brief discourse,  
why and how the *lai*  
called by that name was written.  
Milun was born in South Wales.  
From the day he was dubbed knight  
10 he couldn't find a single opponent  
who could knock him off his horse.  
He certainly was a good knight:  
generous and strong, courteous and proud.  
He won fame in Ireland,  
15 in Norway and Gothland;  
in Logres and in Albany<sup>1</sup>  
many envied him.  
He was well beloved  
and honored by many princes.  
20 There was a baron in his country—  
I don't know his name—  
who had a daughter,  
a beautiful and most refined girl.  
She had heard of Milun,  
25 and began to love him.  
She sent a messenger to him,  
to say that, if it pleased him, she would love him.  
Milun was happy with the news,  
and thanked the girl;  
30 he willingly granted her his love,

and said he would never leave her;  
his response to her was very courtly,  
and he gave rich gifts to the messenger,  
promising him his friendship.  
35 "My friend," he said, "please undertake  
to help me speak to my beloved  
and to keep our communications secret.  
Carry my gold ring to her  
and tell her on my behalf:  
40 whenever she wants, she can send you for me  
and I'll go with you."  
The messenger took his leave and soon went away;  
he returned to his lady.  
He gave her the ring and told her  
45 that he had done what she had asked.  
The girl was delighted  
at the love she was being offered.  
Outside her room, in a grove  
where she went to amuse herself,  
50 she and Milun, very often,  
had a rendezvous.  
Milun came there so often and loved her so much  
that the girl became pregnant.  
When she realized this,  
55 she sent for Milun and made her lament.  
She told him what had happened;  
she had lost her honor and her good name  
when she got herself into this situation.  
She would be grievously punished:  
60 tortured by the sword  
or sold into slavery in another land.  
Such were the ancient customs  
observed in those days.  
Milun answered that he would do  
65 whatever she counseled.  
"When the child is born," she said,

“you must bring him to my sister,  
who is married and living in Northumbria;<sup>2</sup>  
she is a rich woman, worthy and prudent.  
70 And send word to her, in writing  
and also orally  
that this child belongs to her sister,  
who has endured great grief because of him.  
She should make sure that he’s well nourished,  
75 whatever it may be, son or daughter.  
I shall hang your ring around his neck  
and send a letter with it,  
in which will be written his father’s name  
and the unfortunate story of his mother.  
80 When he is full grown,  
and has arrived at the age  
when he can listen to reason,  
she should give him the ring and the letter  
and command him to keep them  
85 so that he can find his father.”  
They abided by this plan,  
and the time eventually came  
for the girl to have her baby.  
An old woman who watched over her,  
90 to whom she had disclosed her entire situation,  
covered things up so well  
that she was never discovered,  
by her words or appearance.  
The girl had a beautiful son.  
95 They hung the ring around his neck,  
and also a silken wallet  
with the letter in it, so that no one could see it.  
Then they laid the child in a little cradle,  
wrapped in a white linen cloth;  
100 beneath his head  
they placed a fine pillow

and over him a coverlet,  
hemmed all around with marten fur.  
The old nurse gave him to Milun,  
105 who was waiting for her in the grove.  
He turned the child over to some trustworthy  
retainers  
who would take him to his destination.  
As they traveled from town to town,  
they stopped to rest seven times a day;  
110 they had the child nursed,  
changed, and bathed.  
They took their job so seriously  
that they had brought a wet nurse with them.  
They stayed on the right road  
115 until they reached the sister and gave the child to  
her.  
She took him from them, and was very pleased with  
him.  
She also took the letter with its seal.  
When she knew who he was,  
she cherished him even more.  
120 Then the men who had brought the child  
returned to their own land.  
Milun left his homeland  
to seek honor through martial exploits.  
His mistress remained at home  
125 and her father gave her in marriage  
to a rich lord of the region,  
a powerful man of great repute.  
When she found out about this turn of events,  
she was grief-stricken,  
130 and she cried for Milun.  
She was especially worried about being blamed  
for having had a child already;  
her husband would discover that soon enough.  
"Alas," she said, "what can I do?"

135 Must I be married? How can I?  
I'm no longer a virgin,  
I'll have to be a servant all my life.  
I didn't know it would be like this;  
rather, I thought I could have my love,  
140 that we could keep it a secret between us,  
that I'd never hear it bruited about.  
Now I'd rather die than live,  
but I'm not even free to do that,  
since I have guardians all around me,  
145 old and young; my chamberlains,  
who hate a noble love,  
and take their delight in sadness.  
Now I have to suffer like this—  
if only I could die!"

150 The time came for her to be married,  
and her father led her to the altar.  
Milun came back to his land;  
he was sad and upset—  
he gave himself up to grief.

155 He took some comfort from the fact  
that the one he loved so much  
was still in her country, nearby.  
Milun undertook to plan  
how he could send word to her—  
160 without being discovered—  
that he had come home.  
He wrote a letter and sealed it.  
He had a swan of which he was very fond;  
he tied the letter to its neck,  
165 hid it among the feathers.  
He summoned one of his squires  
and made him his messenger.  
"Go immediately and change your clothes," he said.  
"I want you to go to my mistress' castle,  
170 and take my swan with you."



Make arrangements  
for the swan to be given to her  
by a servant or a maid.”  
The squire did his duty.  
175 He went off quickly, taking the swan with him;  
by the most direct route he knew  
he came to the castle.  
He went through the village  
directly to the main gate,  
180 called out to the porter:  
“Friend,” he said, “listen!  
This is how I make a living:  
I go around catching birds.  
In a meadow outside Caerleon<sup>3</sup>  
185 I captured a swan in my net.  
To earn her goodwill and support,  
I want to make a present of it to the lady of the  
castle,  
so that I won’t be bothered  
while I’m working in this area.”  
190 The porter replied,  
“Friend, no one can speak to her;  
but nonetheless, I’ll go find out:  
if I can find a place  
that I can bring you to,  
195 I’ll arrange for you to speak with her.”  
The porter went to the main hall  
and found only two knights there,  
seated at a big table  
amusing themselves at chess.  
200 Quickly he returned to the messenger,  
and brought him in in such a way  
that he wasn’t seen  
or disturbed by anyone.  
He came to the lady’s chamber, and called;  
205

a girl opened the door for them.  
They came into the lady's presence,  
presented her with the swan.  
She called one of her valets  
and said to him, "Make it your business  
210 to take good care of my swan;  
be sure he has enough food."  
"My lady," said the messenger who brought the  
swan,  
"No one but you should have him;  
this is indeed a royal present—  
215 see how fine and handsome a bird he is!"  
He placed the bird in her hands.  
She accepted it quite willingly,  
petted its neck and head,  
and felt the letter among the feathers.  
220 Her blood ran cold; she shivered,  
realizing the letter was from her lover.  
She had some money given to the messenger,  
and told him to go.  
When the chamber was empty  
225 she called one of her maids.  
She detached the letter,  
broke the seal.  
She read at the top of the sheet, "Milun,"  
and when she saw her lover's name  
230 she kissed it a hundred times, crying,  
before she could read further.  
At the beginning of the letter she read  
what he had written  
of the great sadness  
235 from which he was suffering night and day.  
Now it was entirely in her power  
to kill or cure him.  
If she could think of a scheme  
whereby he could speak with her,

240 she should let him know in a letter  
and send the swan back to him.  
First she should have the swan well guarded,  
then keep him fasting  
three days without any food.  
245 Then the letter should be hung on his neck,  
and he should be released; he would fly  
to where he had formerly lived.  
When she had looked at the whole letter,  
and heard the contents,  
250 she had the swan well taken care of  
with abundant food and drink;  
she kept him in her chamber for a month.  
Now listen to what happened!  
She used her ingenuity so well  
255 that she obtained some ink and parchment;  
she wrote the letter she wanted to,  
and sealed it with a ring.  
Then she made the swan go hungry,  
hung the letter on his neck, released him.  
260 The bird was famished—  
he really wanted food;  
so he quickly returned  
to where he had come from—  
the same town, the same household—  
265 there he landed at Milun's feet.  
When Milun saw him, he was very joyful;  
he quickly grabbed him by the wings,  
he called his steward,  
had him give the swan some food,  
270 and meanwhile took the letter from his neck.  
He read it from one end to the other,  
noting all the words that he found in it,  
and rejoicing at her message:  
"She couldn't have any pleasure without him,  
275 and now he should send back his feelings to her,

by the swan, the same way she had done."  
He'll do that right away!  
For twenty years they lived like this,  
Milun and his mistress.  
280 The swan was their messenger,  
they had no other means of communication,  
and they always made him fast  
before they let him go on his errand;  
whoever the bird came to,  
285 you can be sure, fed it well.  
They met together several times.  
(No one can be so constrained  
or so closely guarded  
that he can't find a way out.)  
290 Meanwhile, the lady who had raised their son  
had him dubbed a knight;  
he had been with her long enough  
to come of age.  
He had become a fine young man.  
295 She gave him the letter and the ring,  
told him who his mother was,  
and his father's story as well:  
how his father was a good knight,  
so bold, hardy, and proud  
300 that there was none who exceeded him  
in worth or valor anywhere.  
When the lady had told him all this  
and he'd listened carefully to her,  
he rejoiced in his father's virtues;  
305 he was delighted with what he had learned.  
He said to himself,  
"A man oughtn't to think he's worth much,  
being born in such a manner  
and having such a famous father,  
310 if he doesn't seek out even greater renown  
away from home, in foreign lands."

He had everything he needed;  
he didn't stay beyond that night,  
but took his leave next morning.  
315 His foster mother admonished him,  
urging him to do good deeds;  
she also gave him plenty of money.  
He went to Southampton to get under way;  
as quickly as he could he set out to sea.  
320 He arrived at Barfleur  
and went right to Brittany.<sup>4</sup>  
There he spent lavishly and tourneyed,  
and became acquainted with rich men.  
In every joust he entered,  
325 he was judged the best combatant.  
He loved poor knights;  
what he gained from rich ones  
he gave to them and thus retained them in his  
service;  
he was generous in all his spending.  
330 He would never willingly stay long in one place;  
in all those foreign lands  
he won renown for his heroic virtues.  
He also excelled in refined and honorable behavior.  
Because of his excellence and fame  
335 the news spread to his own country  
that a young knight of that land,  
who had gone abroad to seek honor,  
had so excelled in prowess,  
goodness, and generosity  
340 that those who didn't know his name  
called him, everywhere, "the knight without equal."  
Milun heard this stranger praised  
and his virtues recounted.  
He was saddened, and complained to himself  
345 about this knight who was worth so much

that, so long as he traveled,  
fought in tournaments, and bore arms,  
no one else born in that land  
would be praised or honored.  
350 Milun came to a decision:  
he would quickly cross the sea  
and joust with this knight,  
in order to do some harm to him and his reputation.  
Anger spurred him on  
355 to try to unhorse the knight—  
that would put him to shame!  
Then he would go look for his son  
who had left the country;  
Milun did not know what had become of him.  
360 He let his mistress know his scheme,  
and asked her leave to go;  
he revealed his intentions  
by sending her a sealed letter,  
by the swan, I believe;  
365 now she had to let him know how she felt.  
When she heard his wish,  
she thanked him, expressing her gratitude  
that he wanted to leave the country  
to find their son,  
370 and to find out about his fortunes;  
she wouldn't interfere with his plans.  
Milun got her message,  
then dressed himself richly  
and went over to Normandy,  
375 whence he traveled to Brittany.  
He made many acquaintances,  
sought out many tournaments;  
his lodgings were usually luxurious,  
and he gave suitably generous gifts.  
380 Through an entire winter, I believe,  
Milun stayed in that land.

He obtained the services of many good knights,  
until Easter came,  
when tournaments began again,  
385 as well as wars and other battles.<sup>5</sup>  
A tournament was held at Mont Saint Michel;<sup>6</sup>  
Normans and Bretons,  
Flemings and Frenchmen all came,  
390 though there were few English knights.<sup>7</sup>  
Milun came early,  
good knight that he was.  
He inquired after the knight without equal;  
there were plenty of knights who could tell him  
where he had come from.  
395 By his arms and shield  
he was pointed out to Milun,  
who observed him carefully.  
The tournament began.  
Whoever wanted to joust quickly found the  
400 opportunity;  
he need only search the ranks a bit  
to find a companion  
in the quest for victory or defeat.  
This much I'll tell you about Milun:  
it went very well with him in combat  
405 and he was highly praised that day.  
But the young man of whom I've told you—  
he was acclaimed beyond all others;  
none could equal him  
in tourneying and jousting.  
410 Milun watched him perform,  
riding and attacking so well;  
although he was Milun's rival,  
he pleased Milun greatly.  
Milun rushed into the ranks against him,  
415 and the two jousted together.

Milun struck him so hard  
that his lance splintered,  
but he didn't unhorse him.  
The other knight struck Milun so hard  
420 that he knocked him right off his steed.  
Beneath Milun's visor,  
he saw his beard and white hair;  
he was sorry to have made him fall.  
He took Milun's horse by the reins,  
425 and presented it to him,  
saying, "My lord, remount;  
I'm saddened  
that I should have so humiliated  
a man of your age."  
430 Milun leaped up, highly pleased,  
for he had recognized the ring on the other's finger  
when he gave Milun his horse.  
He spoke to the young man.  
"My friend," he said, "listen to me!  
435 For the love of almighty God  
tell me your father's name!  
What is yours? Who is your mother?  
I want to know the truth about this.  
I've seen a lot, wandered a lot,  
440 searched in many lands  
in tournaments and wars;  
I never once fell from my war-horse  
because of a blow from another knight.  
You knocked me down in a joust—  
445 I could love you a great deal."  
The other answered, "I'll tell you  
about my father, as much as I know of him.  
I think he was born in Wales  
and is named Milun.  
450 He loved the daughter of a rich man  
and secretly conceived me with her.



I was sent to Northumbria,  
and there I was raised and educated  
by my aunt.  
455 She kept me with her,  
then gave me a horse and my arms,  
and sent me to this land,  
where I have long resided.  
It is my desire and intent  
460 to go back across the sea quickly  
and return to my own land;  
I wish to find out who my father is,  
and how he is behaving toward my mother.  
I'll show him my gold ring  
465 and tell him my story;  
he will certainly not reject me,  
rather, as a loving father he'll make much of me."  
When Milun heard him say all this  
he didn't wait to hear any more;  
470 he quickly leapt forward  
and took the other by the skirt of his hauberk.<sup>8</sup>  
"God!" he cried, "I'm a new man!  
By my faith, friend, you are my son!  
It was to look for you  
475 that I left my homeland this year."  
When the young knight heard him, he got down  
from his horse  
and kissed his father warmly.  
They both looked so happy  
and said such things to each other  
480 that all the others watching them  
began to cry from joy and pity.  
When the tournament broke up,  
Milun went away, very anxious  
to speak at leisure with his son,  
485 to find out what his pleasure was.

They spent the night in a hostel  
where there was much celebrating  
being done by a large number of knights.  
Milun told his son  
490 how he loved the boy's mother,  
and how her father had given her  
to a baron of that region,  
and how he had continued loving her,  
and she him, with all her heart,  
495 and how he used the swan as a messenger,  
having the bird carry his letters,  
since he couldn't trust anyone else.  
The son responded, "Indeed, my good father,  
I'll bring you and my mother together;  
500 I shall kill her husband  
and see you married."  
They spoke no more about it;  
the next day they made ready to leave.  
They said good-bye to their friends,  
505 and returned to their own land.  
Their crossing was speedy,  
thanks to a good strong wind.  
As they went on their way  
they met a boy  
510 coming from Milun's mistress;  
he was on his way to Brittany,  
for she had dispatched him to go there.  
Now his trip was shortened.  
She was sending Milun a sealed letter  
515 with a message telling him  
that he should come to her without delay:  
her husband was dead—now was the time to make  
haste!  
Milun heard the news,  
and it seemed wonderful to him.  
520 Then he told his son.

Nothing held them back now;  
they pushed on until they came  
to the lady's castle.  
525 She was delighted with her son,  
who was so worthy and well behaved.  
Without consulting any relatives,  
with no advice from anyone else,  
their son brought them together,  
530 gave his mother to his father.  
In great happiness and well-being  
they lived happily ever after.

The ancients made a *lai*  
about their love and good fortune;  
and I who have put it down in writing  
535 have thoroughly enjoyed retelling it.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Albany is another name for Scotland; Logres, for England. Gothland is the southern part of what is now Sweden. *Milun* is concerned throughout with geographic specificity.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Region composed of what is now northern England and southeast Scotland.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Welsh town.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Milun sails from the port city of Southampton, on England's south coast, to Barfleur, in what is now Normandy, France. From there, he heads southeast to Brittany.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: During the Middle Ages, the Church prohibited warfare and tournaments during Lent, the forty days of repentance before Easter.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: On the French coast between Normandy and Brittany.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Most of the knights are from northern continental Europe. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chainmail tunic. [Return to reference 8](#)

# Lanval

I shall tell you the adventure of another *lai*,  
just as it happened:  
it was composed about a very noble vassal;  
in Breton, they call him Lanval.

5       Arthur, the brave and the courtly king,  
was staying at Cardoel,  
because the Scots and the Picts  
were destroying the land.  
They invaded Logres  
and laid it waste.<sup>1</sup>  
10       At Pentecost,<sup>2</sup> in summer,  
the king stayed there.  
He gave out many rich gifts:  
to counts and barons,  
members of the Round Table—  
15       such a company had no equal in all the world—  
he distributed wives and lands,  
to all but one who had served him.  
That was Lanval; Arthur forgot him,  
and none of his men favored him either.  
20       For his valor, for his generosity,  
his beauty and his bravery,  
most men envied him;  
some feigned the appearance of love  
who, if something unpleasant happened to him,  
25       would not have been at all disturbed.  
He was the son of a king of high degree  
but he was far from his heritage.  
He was of the king's household  
but he had spent all his wealth,

30 for the king gave him nothing  
nor did Lanval ask.  
Now Lanval was in difficulty,  
depressed and very worried.  
35 My lords, don't be surprised:  
a strange man, without friends,  
is very sad in another land,  
when he doesn't know where to look for help.  
The knight of whom I speak,  
40 who had served the king so long,  
one day mounted his horse  
and went off to amuse himself.  
He left the city  
and came, all alone, to a field;  
45 he dismounted by a running stream  
but his horse trembled badly.  
He removed the saddle and went off,  
leaving the horse to roll around in the meadow.  
He folded his cloak beneath his head  
and lay down.  
50 He worried about his difficulty,  
he could see nothing that pleased him.  
As he lay there  
he looked down along the bank  
and saw two girls approaching;  
55 he had never seen any lovelier.  
They were richly dressed,  
tightly laced,  
in tunics of dark purple;  
their faces were very lovely.  
60 The older one carried basins,  
golden, well made, and fine;  
I shall tell you the truth about it, without fail.  
The other carried a towel.  
They went straight  
65 to where the knight was lying.

Lanval, who was very well bred,  
got up to meet them.  
They greeted him first  
and gave him their message:  
70 "Sir Lanval, my lady,  
who is worthy and wise and beautiful,  
sent us for you.  
Come with us now.  
We shall guide you there safely.  
75 See, her pavilion is nearby!"  
The knight went with them;  
giving no thought to his horse  
who was feeding before him in the meadow.  
They led him up to the tent,  
80 which was quite beautiful and well placed.  
Queen Semiramis,<sup>3</sup>  
however much more wealth,  
power, or knowledge she had,  
or the emperor Octavian<sup>4</sup>  
85 could not have paid for one of the flaps.  
There was a golden eagle on top of it,  
whose value I could not tell,  
nor could I judge the value of the cords or the poles  
that held up the sides of the tent;  
90 there is no king on earth who could buy it,  
no matter what wealth he offered.  
The girl was inside the tent:  
the lily and the young rose  
when they appear in the summer  
95 are surpassed by her beauty.  
She lay on a beautiful bed—  
the bedclothes were worth a castle—  
dressed only in her shift.  
Her body was well shaped and elegant;  
100 for the heat, she had thrown over herself,

a precious cloak of white ermine,  
covered with purple alexandrine,  
but her whole side was uncovered,  
her face, her neck and her bosom;  
105 she was whiter than the hawthorn flower.  
The knight went forward  
and the girl addressed him.  
He sat before the bed.  
"Lanval," she said, "sweet love,  
110 because of you I have come from my land;  
I came to seek you from far away.  
If you are brave and courtly,  
no emperor or count or king  
will ever have known such joy or good;  
115 for I love you more than anything."  
He looked at her and saw that she was beautiful;  
Love stung him with a spark  
that burned and set fire to his heart.  
He answered her in a suitable way.  
120 "Lovely one," he said, "if it pleased you,  
if such joy might be mine  
that you would love me,  
there is nothing you might command,  
within my power, that I would not do,  
125 whether foolish or wise.  
I shall obey your command;  
for you, I shall abandon everyone.  
I want never to leave you.  
That is what I most desire."  
130 When the girl heard the words  
of the man who could love her so,  
she granted him her love and her body.  
Now Lanval was on the right road!  
Afterward, she gave him a gift:  
135 he would never again want anything,  
he would receive as he desired;



however generously he might give and spend,  
she would provide what he needed.  
Now Lanval is well cared for.  
140 The more lavishly he spends,  
the more gold and silver he will have.  
"Love," she said, "I admonish you now,  
I command and beg you,  
do not let any man know about this.  
145 I shall tell you why:  
you would lose me for good  
if this love were known;  
you would never see me again  
or possess my body."  
150 He answered that he would do  
exactly as she commanded.  
He lay beside her on the bed;  
now Lanval is well cared for.  
He remained with her  
155 that afternoon, until evening  
and would have stayed longer, if he could,  
and if his love had consented.  
"Love," she said, "get up.  
You cannot stay any longer.  
160 Go away now; I shall remain  
but I will tell you one thing:  
when you want to talk to me  
there is no place you can think of  
where a man might have his mistress  
165 without reproach or shame,  
that I shall not be there with you  
to satisfy all your desires.  
No man but you will see me  
or hear my words."  
170 When he heard her, he was very happy,  
he kissed her, and then got up.  
The girls who had brought him to the tent

dressed him in rich clothes;  
when he was dressed anew,  
175 there wasn't a more handsome youth in all the  
world;  
he was no fool, no boor.  
They gave him water for his hands  
and a towel to dry them,  
and they brought him food.  
180 He took supper with his love;  
it was not to be refused.  
He was served with great courtesy,  
he received it with great joy.  
There was an entremet<sup>5</sup>  
185 that vastly pleased the knight  
for he kissed his lady often  
and held her close.  
When they finished dinner,  
his horse was brought to him.  
190 The horse had been well saddled;  
Lanval was very richly served.  
The knight took his leave, mounted,  
and rode toward the city,  
often looking behind him.  
195 Lanval was very disturbed;  
he wondered about his adventure  
and was doubtful in his heart;  
he was amazed, not knowing what to believe;  
he didn't expect ever to see her again.  
200 He came to his lodging  
and found his men well dressed.  
That night, his accommodations were rich  
but no one knew where it came from.  
There was no knight in the city  
205 who really needed a place to stay  
whom he didn't invite to join him

to be well and richly served.  
Lanval gave rich gifts,  
Lanval released prisoners,  
210 Lanval dressed jongleurs,<sup>6</sup>  
Lanval offered great honors.  
There was no stranger or friend  
to whom Lanval didn't give.  
Lanval's joy and pleasure were intense;  
215 in the daytime or at night,  
he could see his love often;  
she was completely at his command.

In that same year, it seems to me,  
after the feast of St. John,<sup>7</sup>  
220 about thirty knights  
were amusing themselves  
in an orchard beneath the tower  
where the queen<sup>8</sup> was staying.  
Gawain was with them  
225 and his cousin, the handsome Yvain;  
Gawain, the noble, the brave,  
who was so loved by all, said:  
"By God, my lords, we wronged  
our companion Lanval,  
230 who is so generous and courtly,  
and whose father is a rich king,  
when we didn't bring him with us."  
They immediately turned back,  
went to his lodging  
235 and prevailed on Lanval to come along with them.  
At a sculpted window  
the queen was looking out;  
she had three ladies with her.  
She saw the king's retinue,  
240 recognized Lanval and looked at him.

Then she told one of her ladies  
to send for her maidens,  
the loveliest and the most refined;  
together they went to amuse themselves  
245 in the orchard where the others were.  
She brought thirty or more with her;  
they descended the steps.  
The knights came to meet them,  
because they were delighted to see them.  
250 The knights took them by the hand;  
their conversation was in no way vulgar.  
Lanval went off to one side,  
far from the others; he was impatient  
to hold his love,  
255 to kiss and embrace and touch her;  
he thought little of others' joys  
if he could not have his pleasure.  
When the queen saw him alone,  
she went straight to the knight.  
260 She sat beside him and spoke,  
revealing her whole heart:  
"Lanval, I have shown you much honor,  
I have cherished you, and loved you.  
You may have all my love;  
265 just tell me your desire.  
I promise you my affection.  
You should be very happy with me."  
"My lady," he said, "let me be!  
I have no desire to love you.  
270 I've served the king a long time;  
I don't want to betray my faith to him.  
Never, for you or for your love,  
will I do anything to harm my lord."  
The queen got angry;  
275 in her wrath, she insulted him:  
"Lanval," she said, "I am sure

you don't care for such pleasure;  
people have often told me  
that you have no interest in women.  
280 You have fine-looking boys  
with whom you enjoy yourself.  
Base coward, lousy cripple,  
my lord made a bad mistake  
when he let you stay with him.  
285 For all I know, he'll lose God because of it."  
When Lanval heard her, he was quite disturbed;  
he was not slow to answer.  
He said something out of spite  
that he would later regret.  
290 "Lady," he said, "of that activity  
I know nothing,  
but I love and I am loved  
by one who should have the prize  
over all the women I know.  
295 And I shall tell you one thing;  
you might as well know all:  
any one of those who serve her,  
the poorest girl of all,  
is better than you, my lady queen,  
300 in body, face, and beauty,  
in breeding and in goodness."  
The queen left him  
and went, weeping, to her chamber.  
She was upset and angry  
305 because he had insulted her.  
She went to bed sick;  
never, she said, would she get up  
unless the king gave her satisfaction  
for the offense against her.  
310 The king returned from the woods,  
he'd had a very good day.  
He entered the queen's chambers.

When she saw him, she began to complain.  
315 She fell at his feet, asked his mercy,  
saying that Lanval had dishonored her;  
he had asked for her love,  
and because she refused him  
he insulted and offended her:  
he boasted of a love  
320 who was so refined and noble and proud  
that her chambermaid,  
the poorest one who served her,  
was better than the queen.  
The king got very angry;  
325 he swore an oath:  
if Lanval could not defend himself in court  
he would have him burned or hanged.  
The king left her chamber  
and called for three of his barons;  
330 he sent them for Lanval  
who was feeling great sorrow and distress.  
He had come back to his dwelling,  
knowing very well  
that he'd lost his love,  
335 he had betrayed their affair.  
He was all alone in a room,  
disturbed and troubled;  
he called on his love, again and again,  
but it did him no good.  
340 He complained and sighed,  
from time to time he fainted;  
then he cried a hundred times for her to have mercy  
and speak to her love.  
He cursed his heart and his mouth;  
345 it's a wonder he didn't kill himself.  
No matter how much he cried and shouted,  
ranted and raged,  
she would not have mercy on him,

not even let him see her.  
350 How will he ever contain himself?  
The men the king sent  
arrived and told him  
to appear in court without delay:  
the king had summoned him  
355 because the queen had accused him.  
Lanval went with his great sorrow;  
they could have killed him, for all he cared.  
He came before the king;  
he was very sad, thoughtful, silent;  
360 his face revealed great suffering.  
In anger the king told him:  
"Vassal, you have done me a great wrong!  
This was a base undertaking,  
to shame and disgrace me  
365 and to insult the queen.  
You have made a foolish boast:  
your love is much too noble  
if her maid is more beautiful,  
more worthy, than the queen."  
370 Lanval denied that he'd dishonored  
or shamed his lord,  
word for word, as the king spoke:  
he had not made advances to the queen;  
but of what he had said,  
375 he acknowledged the truth,  
about the love he had boasted of,  
that now made him sad because he'd lost her.  
About that he said he would do  
whatever the court decided.  
380 The king was very angry with him;  
he sent for all his men  
to determine exactly what he ought to do  
so that no one could find fault with his decision.  
They did as he commanded,

whether they liked it or not.  
385 They assembled,  
judged, and decided,  
that Lanval should have his day;  
but he must find pledges<sup>9</sup> for his lord  
390 to guarantee that he would await the judgment,  
return, and be present at it.  
Then the court would be increased,  
for now there were none but the king's household.  
The barons came back to the king  
395 and announced their decision.  
The king demanded pledges.  
Lanval was alone and forlorn,  
he had no relative, no friend.  
Gawain went and pledged himself for him,  
400 and all his companions followed.  
The king addressed them: "I release him to you  
on forfeit of whatever you hold from me,  
lands and fiefs, each one for himself."  
When Lanval was pledged, there was nothing else to  
405 do.  
He returned to his lodging.  
The knights accompanied him,  
they reproached and admonished him  
that he give up his great sorrow;  
they cursed his foolish love.  
410 Each day they went to see him,  
because they wanted to know  
whether he was drinking and eating;  
they were afraid that he'd kill himself.  
On the day that they had named,  
415 the barons assembled.  
The king and the queen were there  
and the pledges brought Lanval back.  
They were all very sad for him:



420 I think there were a hundred  
who would have done all they could  
to set him free without a trial  
where he would be wrongly accused.  
The king demanded a verdict  
according to the charge and rebuttal.  
425 Now it all fell to the barons.  
They went to the judgment,  
worried and distressed  
for the noble man from another land  
who'd gotten into such trouble in their midst.  
430 Many wanted to condemn him  
in order to satisfy their lord.  
The Duke of Cornwall said:  
"No one can blame us;  
whether it makes you weep or sing  
435 justice must be carried out.  
The king spoke against his vassal  
whom I have heard named Lanval;  
he accused him of felony,  
charged him with a misdeed—  
440 a love that he had boasted of,  
which made the queen angry.  
No one but the king accused him:  
by the faith I owe you,  
if one were to speak the truth,  
445 there should have been no need for defense,  
except that a man owes his lord honor  
in every circumstance.  
He will be bound by his oath,  
and the king will forgive us our pledges  
450 if he can produce proof;  
if his love would come forward,  
if what he said,  
what upset the queen, is true,  
then he will be acquitted,

because he did not say it out of malice.  
455 But if he cannot get his proof,  
we must make it clear to him  
that he will forfeit his service to the king;  
he must take his leave."  
460 They sent to the knight,  
told and announced to him  
that he should have his love come  
to defend and stand surety<sup>1</sup> for him.  
He told them that he could not do it:  
465 he would never receive help from her.  
They went back to the judges,  
not expecting any help from Lanval.  
The king pressed them hard  
because of the queen who was waiting.  
470 When they were ready to give their verdict  
they saw two girls approaching,  
riding handsome palfreys.  
They were very attractive,  
dressed in purple taffeta,  
475 over their bare skin.  
The men looked at them with pleasure.  
Gawain, taking three knights with him,  
went to Lanval and told him;  
he pointed out the two girls.  
480 Gawain was extremely happy, and begged him  
to tell if his love were one of them.  
Lanval said he didn't know who they were,  
where they came from or where they were going.  
The girls proceeded  
485 still on horseback;  
they dismounted before the high table  
at which Arthur, the king, sat.  
They were of great beauty,  
and spoke in a courtly manner:  
490

“King, clear your chambers,  
have them hung with silk  
where my lady may dismount;  
she wishes to take shelter with you.”  
He promised it willingly  
495 and called two knights  
to guide them up to the chambers.  
On that subject no more was said.  
The king asked his barons  
for their judgment and decision;  
500 he said they had angered him very much  
with their long delay.  
“Sire,” they said, “we have decided.  
Because of the ladies we have just seen  
we have made no judgment.  
505 Let us reconvene the trial.”  
Then they assembled, everyone was worried;  
there was much noise and strife.  
While they were in that confusion,  
two girls in noble array,  
510 dressed in Phrygian silks  
and riding Spanish mules,  
were seen coming down the street.  
This gave the vassals great joy;  
to each other they said that now  
515 Lanval, the brave and bold, was saved.  
Gawain went up to him,  
bringing his companions along.  
“Sire,” he said, “take heart.  
For the love of God, speak to us.  
520 Here come two maidens,  
well adorned and very beautiful;  
one must certainly be your love.”  
Lanval answered quickly  
that he did not recognize them,  
525 he didn’t know them or love them.

Meanwhile they'd arrived,  
and dismounted before the king.  
Most of those who saw them praised them  
for their bodies, their faces, their coloring;  
530 each was more impressive  
than the queen had ever been.  
The older one was courtly and wise,  
she spoke her message fittingly:  
535 "King, have chambers prepared for us  
to lodge my lady according to her need;  
she is coming here to speak with you."  
He ordered them to be taken  
to the others who had preceded them.  
540 There was no problem with the mules.  
When he had seen to the girls,  
he summoned all his barons  
to render their judgment;  
it had already dragged out too much.  
545 The queen was getting angry  
because she had waited so long.  
They were about to give their judgment  
when through the city came riding  
a girl on horseback:  
550 there was none more beautiful in the world.  
She rode a white palfrey,  
who carried her handsomely and smoothly:  
he was well apportioned in the neck and head,  
no finer beast in the world.  
555 The palfrey's trappings were rich;  
under heaven there was no count or king  
who could have afforded them all  
without selling or mortgaging lands.  
She was dressed in this fashion:  
560 in a white linen shift  
that revealed both her sides  
since the lacing was along the side.

Her body was elegant, her hips slim,  
her neck whiter than snow on a branch,  
her eyes bright, her face white,  
565 a beautiful mouth, a well-set nose,  
dark eyebrows and an elegant forehead,  
her hair curly and rather blond;  
golden wire does not shine  
like her hair in the light.  
570 Her cloak, which she had wrapped around her,  
was dark purple.  
On her wrist she held a sparrow hawk,<sup>2</sup>  
a greyhound followed her.  
In the town, no one, small or big,  
575 old man or child,  
failed to come look.  
As they watched her pass,  
there was no joking about her beauty.  
She proceeded at a slow pace.  
580 The judges who saw her  
marveled at the sight;  
no one who looked at her  
was not warmed with joy.  
Those who loved the knight  
585 came to him and told him  
of the girl who was approaching,  
if God pleased, to rescue him.  
"Sir companion, here comes one  
neither tawny nor dark;  
590 this is, of all who exist,  
the most beautiful woman in the world."  
Lanval heard them and lifted his head;  
he recognized her and sighed.  
The blood rose to his face;  
595 he was quick to speak.  
"By my faith," he said, "that is my love.

Now I don't care if I am killed,  
if only she forgives me.  
For I am restored, now that I see her."  
600 The lady entered the palace;  
no one so beautiful had ever been there.  
She dismounted before the king  
so that she was well seen by all.  
And she let her cloak fall  
605 so they could see her better.  
The king, who was well bred,  
rose and went to meet her;  
all the others honored her  
and offered to serve her.  
610 When they had looked at her well,  
when they had greatly praised her beauty,  
she spoke in this way,  
she didn't want to wait:  
"I have loved one of your vassals:  
615 you see him before you—Lanval.  
He has been accused in your court—  
I don't want him to suffer  
for what he said; you should know  
that the queen was in the wrong.  
620 He never made advances to her.  
And for the boast that he made,  
if he can be acquitted through me.  
let him be set free by your barons."  
Whatever the barons judged by law  
625 the king promised would prevail.  
To the last man they agreed  
that Lanval had successfully answered the charge.  
He was set free by their decision  
and the girl departed.  
630 The king could not detain her,  
though there were enough people to serve her.  
Outside the hall stood

635 a great stone of dark marble  
where heavy men mounted  
when they left the king's court;  
Lanval climbed on it.  
When the girl came through the gate  
Lanval leapt, in one bound,  
640 onto the palfrey, behind her.  
With her he went to Avalun,<sup>3</sup>  
so the Bretons tell us,  
to a very beautiful island;  
there the youth was carried off.  
645 No man heard of him again,  
and I have no more to tell.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Arthur convenes his court in Wales, at Cardoel, to avoid the Scottish forces raiding England ("Logres").[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Christian holiday of Pentecost, which occurs fifty days after Easter, is frequently the starting point for Arthurian adventures.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Legendary Babylonian queen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: First Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar (ruled 27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Small, exquisite dish served between courses in a feast.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Traveling entertainers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In late June.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Queen Guinevere.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Knights to stake their own status and holdings to guarantee Lanval's obedience to the trial.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Be legally responsible.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A small bird of prey, which can be trained to hunt.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Legendary island in Arthurian lore.[Return to reference 3](#)



# Laüstic

I shall tell you an adventure  
about which the Bretons made a *lai*.  
*Laüstic* was the name, I think,  
they gave it in their land.  
In French it is *rossignol*,  
5 and *nightingale* in proper English.  
At Saint-Malo, <sup>1</sup> in that country,  
there was a famous city.  
Two knights lived there,  
they both had strong houses.  
10 From the goodness of the two barons  
the city acquired a good name.  
One had married a woman  
wise, courtly, and handsome;  
she set a wonderfully high value on herself,  
15 within the bounds of custom and usage.  
The other was a bachelor,  
well known among his peers  
for bravery and great valor;  
he delighted in living well.  
20 He jousted often, spent widely  
and gave out what he had.  
He also loved his neighbor's wife;  
he asked her, begged her so persistently,  
and there was such good in him,  
25 that she loved him more than anything,  
as much for the good that she heard of him  
as because he was close by.  
They loved each other discreetly and well,  
concealed themselves and took care  
30 that they weren't seen

or disturbed or suspected.  
And they could do this well enough  
since their dwellings were close,  
their houses were next door,  
35 and so were their rooms and their towers;  
there was no barrier or boundary  
except a high wall of dark stone.  
From the rooms where the lady slept,  
if she went to the window  
40 she could talk to her love  
on the other side, and he to her,  
and they could exchange their possessions,  
by tossing and throwing them.  
There was scarcely anything to disturb them,  
45 they were both quite at ease;  
except that they couldn't come together  
completely for their pleasure,  
for the lady was closely guarded  
when her husband was in the country.  
50 Yet they always managed,  
whether at night or in the day,  
to be able to talk together;  
no one could prevent  
their coming to the window  
55 and seeing each other there.  
For a long time they loved each other,  
until one summer  
when the woods and meadows were green  
and the orchards blooming.  
60 The little birds, with great sweetness,  
were voicing their joy above the flowers.  
It is no wonder if he understands them,  
he who has love to his desire.  
I'll tell you the truth about the knight:  
65 he listened to them intently  
and to the lady on the other side,

both with words and looks.  
At night, when the moon shone  
when her lord was in bed,  
70 she often rose from his side  
and wrapped herself in a cloak.  
She went to the window  
because of her lover, who, she knew,  
was leading the same life,  
75 awake most of the night.  
Each took pleasure in the other's sight  
since they could have nothing more;  
but she got up and stood there so often  
that her lord grew angry  
80 and began to question her, to ask  
why she got up and where she went.  
"My lord," the lady answered him,  
"there is no joy in this world  
like hearing the nightingale sing.  
85 That's why I stand there.  
It sounds so sweet at night  
that it gives me great pleasure;  
it delights me so and I so desire it  
that I cannot close my eyes."  
90 When her lord heard what she said  
he laughed in anger and ill will.  
He set his mind on one thing:  
to trap the nightingale.  
There was no valet in his house  
95 that he didn't set to making traps, nets, or snares,  
which he then had placed in the orchard;  
there was no hazel tree or chestnut  
where they did not place a snare or lime<sup>2</sup>  
until they trapped and captured him.  
100 When they had caught the nightingale,  
they brought it, still alive, to the lord.

He was very happy when he had it;  
he came to the lady's chambers.  
"Lady," he said, "where are you?  
105 Come here! Speak to us!  
I have trapped the nightingale  
that kept you awake so much.  
From now on you can lie in peace:  
he will never again awaken you."  
110 When the lady heard him,  
she was sad and angry.  
She asked her lord for the bird  
but he killed it out of spite,  
he broke its neck in his hands—  
115 too vicious an act—  
and threw the body on the lady;  
her shift was stained with blood,  
a little, on her breast.  
Then he left the room.  
120 The lady took the little body;  
she wept hard and cursed  
those who betrayed the nightingale,  
who made the traps and snares,  
for they took great joy from her.  
125 "Alas," she said, "now I must suffer.  
I won't be able to get up at night  
or go and stand in the window  
where I used to see my love.  
I know one thing for certain:  
130 he'd think I was pretending.  
I must decide what to do about this.  
I shall send him the nightingale  
and relate the adventure."  
135 In a piece of samite,<sup>3</sup>  
embroidered in gold and writing,  
she wrapped the little bird.

She called one of her servants,  
charged him with her message,  
and sent him to her love.  
140 He came to the knight,  
greeted him in the name of the lady,  
related the whole message to him,  
and presented the nightingale.

145 When everything had been told and revealed to the  
knight,  
after he had listened well,  
he was very sad about the adventure,  
but he wasn't mean or hesitant.  
He had a small vessel fashioned,  
150 with no iron or steel in it;  
it was all pure gold and good stones,  
very precious and very dear;  
the cover was very carefully attached.  
He placed the nightingale inside  
and then he had the casket sealed—  
155 he carried it with him always.

This adventure was told,  
it could not be concealed for long.  
The Bretons made a *lai* about it  
which men call *The Nightingale*.  
160

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A port city in Brittany.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sticky substance spread on branches to trap small birds.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Heavy, luxurious silk fabric.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Chevrefoil

I should like very much  
to tell you the truth  
about the *lai* men call *Chevrefoil*<sup>1</sup>—  
why it was composed and where it came from.  
5 Many have told and recited it to me  
and I have found it in writing,  
about Tristan and the queen<sup>2</sup>  
and their love that was so true,  
that brought them much suffering  
and caused them to die the same day.  
10 King Mark was annoyed,  
angry at his nephew Tristan;  
he exiled Tristan from his land  
because of the queen whom he loved.  
Tristan returned to his own country,  
15 South Wales, where he was born,  
he stayed a whole year;  
he couldn't come back.  
Afterward he began to expose himself  
to death and destruction.  
20 Don't be surprised at this:  
for one who loves very faithfully  
is sad and troubled  
when he cannot satisfy his desires.  
Tristan was sad and worried,  
25 so he set out from his land.  
He traveled straight to Cornwall,  
where the queen lived,  
and entered the forest all alone—  
he didn't want anyone to see him;  
30 he came out only in the evening

when it was time to find shelter.  
He took lodging that night,  
with peasants, poor people.  
He asked them for news  
35 of the king—what he was doing.  
They told him they had heard  
that the barons had been summoned by ban.<sup>3</sup>  
They were to come to Tintagel<sup>4</sup>  
where the king wanted to hold his court;  
40 at Pentecost they would all be there,  
there'd be much joy and pleasure,  
and the queen would be there too.  
Tristan heard and was very happy;  
she would not be able to go there  
45 without his seeing her pass.  
The day the king set out,  
Tristan also came to the woods  
by the road he knew  
their assembly must take.  
50 He cut a hazel tree in half,  
then he squared it.  
When he had prepared the wood,  
he wrote his name on it with his knife.  
If the queen noticed it—  
55 and she should be on the watch for it,  
for it had happened before  
and she had noticed it then—  
she'd know when she saw it,  
that the piece of wood had come from her love.  
60 This was the message of the writing<sup>5</sup>  
that he had sent to her:  
he had been there a long time,  
had waited and remained  
to find out and to discover  
65 how he could see her,

for he could not live without her.  
With the two of them it was just  
as it is with the honeysuckle  
that attaches itself to the hazel tree:  
70 when it has wound and attached  
and worked itself around the trunk,  
the two can survive together;  
but if someone tries to separate them,  
the hazel dies quickly  
75 and the honeysuckle with it.  
"Sweet love, so it is with us:  
You cannot live without me, nor I without you."  
The queen rode along;  
she looked at the hillside  
80 and saw the piece of wood; she knew what it was,  
she recognized all the letters.  
The knights who were accompanying her,  
who were riding with her,  
she ordered to stop:  
85 she wanted to dismount and rest.  
They obeyed her command.  
She went far away from her people  
and called her girl  
Brengevin, who was loyal to her.  
90 She went a short distance from the road;  
and in the woods she found him  
whom she loved more than any living thing.  
They took great joy in each other.  
He spoke to her as much as he desired,  
95 she told him whatever she liked.  
Then she assured him  
that he would be reconciled with the king—  
for it weighed on him  
that he had sent Tristan away;  
100 he'd done it because of the accusation.  
Then she departed, she left her love,



but when it came to the separation,  
they began to weep.  
Tristan went to Wales,  
105 to wait until his uncle sent for him.  
For the joy that he'd felt  
from his love when he saw her,  
by means of the stick he inscribed  
as the queen had instructed,  
110 and in order to remember the words,  
Tristan, who played the harp well,  
composed a new *lai* about it.  
I shall name it briefly:  
in English they call it *Goat's Leaf*  
115 the French call it *Chevrefoil*.  
I have given you the truth  
about the *lai* that I have told here.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Old French term for honeysuckle. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tristan and Ysolt ("the queen"), lovers well-known in medieval literature for their tragic separation. Ysolt is the wife of King Mark, Tristan's uncle. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Public proclamation. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In Cornwall. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: It is not clear how Tristan's name on the hazelwood conveys his extensive message. [Return to reference 5](#)

# TRISTAN AND YSOLT

Since its first recorded appearance, the story of Tristan (also known as "Tristan") and Ysolt has attracted adaptation, from plentiful medieval retellings to Wagner's opera (1857–59) and recent Hollywood movies. Two lovers, the brilliant and gifted Tristan and Ysolt, are destined for each other but doomed to be apart. The intensity of their mutual love is both expressed and sealed by the love potion they mistakenly drink as they travel by sea from Ireland to Cornwall, where Ysolt, bound by the inescapable needs of feudal power, is to marry King Mark of Cornwall, Tristan's uncle. This tragic story of love and its consequences was a runaway success in Europe from the mid-twelfth century forward: two twelfth-century Anglo-Norman versions, by Thomas of England (below) and Beroul (ca. 1160) survive, but the fame of Tristan and Ysolt was much more widely dispersed, as attested by other, shorter texts, such as *The Madness of Tristan* (below) and *Chevrefoil* ([pp. 187–90](#)), references in many other texts, and visual artifacts.

## THOMAS OF ENGLAND

### fl. ca. 1155

The tragic love story of Tristan and Ysolt, the wife of Tristan's maternal uncle King Mark, derives mainly from Breton, Welsh, and Irish sources, although it also incorporates motifs of Eastern tales that were probably transmitted to Europe from India via Arabic Spain. The romance of Tristan and Ysolt entered the mainstream of western European literature through the Old French version in octosyllabic couplets by a twelfth-century author who identifies himself only as "Thomas" and of whom practically nothing else is known for certain. Only 3,143 lines (roughly a sixth) of the poem survive, in nine separate fragments. But we can reconstruct the story from the *Tristrams saga* (1226), a relatively faithful translation into Old Norse, and the Middle High German adaptation *Tristan und Isolde* (also early thirteenth century) by Gottfried von Strassburg, who names the author of his major source "Thomas of Britain."

Thomas's *Tristan* is written in a dialect of western France containing Anglo-Norman forms; he is likely to have composed the romance for the court of Henry II. Borrowings from Wace's *Brut* (see [p. 140](#)) prove that he wrote after 1155, probably sometime before 1170. As Thomas himself tells his audience, "My lords, this tale is told in many ways." Comparisons with other early versions in French and German suggest that he was following a lost text from which he eliminated episodes he considered improbable or coarse, and to which he added new courtly and psychological dimensions. Thomas's work not only proved enormously influential by way of Gottfried's important poem (the source of Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*), but it may well have provided the inspiration and model for the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere. That relationship first appears (already in progress) in Chrétien de Troye's romance *The Knight of the Cart*.

The romance of Tristan was drawn into the orbit of Arthurian romance, where Sir Tristan is the only knight who can match Sir Lancelot. After fighting a five-hour duel to a draw, they become fast friends. Tristan is thus a champion in war and tournaments, but in Thomas and in other Tristan romances he has other attributes as well: he is a master of the hunt, chess, and several languages; he is a gifted harp player; and he and Ysolt make an expert team in the art of deceiving a jealous husband.



**Tristan and Isolde**, French ivory, ca. 1350. The image depicts a night scene in which the reflection of the face of King Mark,

hiding in the tree above, is spotted by the lovers in the pool below (note Ysolt's pointing finger).

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Tristan starts life as an orphan. His own story is preceded by the romance of his parents: Rivalen and Blanche-flor, the sister of King Mark. Rivalen is killed in battle before Tristan's birth; Blanche-flor dies in childbirth. Tristan is fostered by his father's steward until he is kidnapped by merchants who lure the handsome youth aboard their ship to play chess and then set sail. A storm they blame on the kidnapping causes them to strand the youth on a deserted coast of his uncle's kingdom. Tristan's gifts and charm lead Mark to adopt him as a trusted servant, who is identified as his nephew when Tristan's foster father arrives at the court in search of him. Mark contracts to marry the king of Ireland's daughter, Ysolt, and sends Tristan to escort the bride to England. On the return voyage, Tristan and Ysolt become lovers after they unwittingly drink a love potion her mother had prepared for Ysolt and Mark. On Ysolt's wedding night, her maid Brengvein takes her place in the marriage bed. Tristan and Ysolt scheme repeatedly to meet secretly and devise ways to allay Mark's suspicions and frustrate his attempts to surprise them. Finally, however, Tristan is exiled from Britain and pursues wars on the Continent. Eventually, fearing that Ysolt no longer loves him and hoping that he will get over his love for her, he marries a second Ysolt, "Ysolt of the White Hands," the sister of Tristan's young friend and admirer Caerdin. Tristan, however, cannot bring himself to consummate the marriage, and the second Ysolt remains an unwilling virgin. When Tristan is wounded by a poisoned spear, Caerdin sets sail for England to fetch the first Ysolt, who alone has it in her power to save Tristan's life.

Medieval people believed that given names sometimes foreshadowed one's destiny, and the French authors of Tristan's story interpreted *trist*, the Celtic root of the name, as French *triste* (sad). The sense of a tragic illicit love whose passion finds an ultimate fulfillment in death haunts the story of Tristan and Ysolt in Thomas and in the different versions that derive from it.

The geography of the Tristan romances varies from version to version. Tristan's homeland Lyonesse may originally have been Lothian in Scotland. In Marie de France's *Chevrefoil* (see [pp. 187–90](#)), it is in Wales. In Thomas it is Brittany, and the voyages across the English Channel and Irish Sea are episodes in which the sea itself plays a pivotal and symbolic role.

# ***From Le Roman de Tristan***<sup>1</sup>

## **[THE DEATHS OF TRISTAN AND YSOLT]**

When Ysolt hears this message, she not only feels anguish at heart. She also feels sorrow and pity, more than at any previous time. She meditates and sighs in her desire for her lover Tristan, without knowing how to proceed. She goes to Brengvein and recounts the story of the poisoning of the wound; of Tristan's pain; of how he lies stricken with weakness; of how and by whom he has sent for her, without whom his wound will never heal. She discloses all this misery and takes counsel as to how she should act. As they sigh and weep, their dialogue is convulsed by pain on account of the sympathy they share for him. They resolve to go to him on a journey with Caerdin, so as to advise him concerning Tristan's illness and to comfort Tristan in his dire need.

They made ready for an evening departure, taking all that was necessary. With everyone else asleep, they left with cunning but in peril, by a small postern<sup>2</sup> in the wall above the Thames. As the tide came in, the water raised their boat. The vessel was completely ready for departure when the queen embarked. As the tide ebbed, they rowed and sailed, swiftly taking leave with the wind's help. With intense effort they did not stop rowing until they arrived at the sea-going ship, where they hoisted sail and departed. With a following wind they sailed beside the coast of the foreign land, past the port of Wissant, then Boulogne and Treport. The wind favored them steadily, with the ship being easily maneuverable. They passed by Normandy, and joyfully sailed on with the wind behind them.

Tristan lay bedridden, languishing from his wound, unable to draw solace from any source. The doctors could do nothing for him, and nothing could relieve his pain. He longs for Ysolt's arrival and thinks of nothing else. Without her, healing is impossible, and only



for her does he continue to live. He weakens in bed, awaiting her; he hopes that she should come and restore his health; he is persuaded that without her he cannot live. Throughout the day he sends servants to the shore, to see if a ship has arrived. His heart is possessed by this single desire. He often commands that his bed be taken to the shore to receive the ship and to see how it moves and with what sails. He is obsessed by the thought, desire, and hope of her coming. He set at naught all his earthly possessions if the queen should not come to him. Just as often he commands that he be taken back inside, on account of his fear that she not come, and that she had broken faith with him; he would much prefer to hear from someone else that she had not come than that he should see the ship arrive without her. He longs to see the ship and would not countenance thought of news that she had not come. His heart is full of trepidation, and he longs to behold her. He often bewails his condition to his wife, without saying (except to Caerdin) what he longs for that does not come. He waits so long that he is deeply anxious that his plan has failed.

Listen now to a heart-rending misfortune, and an event that is full of sorrow and pity for all lovers; you have never heard so painful a story of such desire and such love. While Tristan waits for Ysolt, Ysolt longs to arrive. So close has she come to the shore that she sees the land and the ship sails happily. From the south, however, a strong wind suddenly springs up and strikes the mid-mainsail, causing the ship to turn around. The sailors run to luff,<sup>3</sup> and turn the sail, but whatever they do, the ship turns back. The wind redoubles in force, and raises waves, heaving the depths to the surface. The weather darkens, the sky closes in, the billows of water heave, the sea grows black, rain and sleet fall as the storm rises in force. The cables and bowlines snap. The sailors lower the sail, and are driven by the wind, steered by waves and gale. Because they were close to land, they had put their safety boat on the sea, which was foolish since it was smashed to pieces. What is more, they have now lost so much equipment, and the storm has so redoubled that no sailor



could stand steadily. They all wept and wildly lamented their terrifying predicament.

Then Ysolt spoke. "Alas! Fate is against me! God will not permit me to live long enough to see Tristan my love. Would that I could be drowned in the sea! If only, Tristan, I could have spoken with you just once, I would not have cared then to have died. When, my love, you hear of my death, you will be incapable of any relief. My death will add to your sorrow, adding to your weakness and preventing your recovery. My arrival is now beyond my control.

"Had God willed that I should arrive, I would have tended to your wound, since my only suffering is yours. This is my sorrow and anguish, and in my heart I grieve that you will have no remedy to delay your death when I die. I care nothing for my death; insofar as God wills it, I accept it. But as soon as you hear of it, I know that you will die. Our love is such that I cannot feel anything without you; you cannot die without me, nor I without you. If I must suffer sea wreck, then your own drowning is fit. You cannot drown on dry land; you should come to seek me on the sea. I intuit that you will die before me, and I know well that you will die soon. My love, I die longing since I had hoped to die in your arms and to be buried together in a tomb. Of that we have failed. Even yet, however, it may turn out thus, for if I must drown here, you ought also to die here, with a single fish consuming us both. Thus by chance, my love, we may have one tomb. A man might catch the fish and recognize us, and then honor our bodies as befits our love. But what I say may not come to pass.

"Whatever God wills, must therefore happen. But why would you be searching on the sea? I don't know what you would be doing there, but here I am and here shall I die. I shall drown here without you, Tristan. Then I have some consolation that you will not know of my death. Beyond this place, my love, it will never be known, and I know of no one who could tell you of it. You will live long beyond me and expect my coming. You may be cured by God's will. That is the one thing I most desire, and I long for your recovery more than my safe arrival. For my love for you is so pure, that I should rather be

afraid that you will finally forget my love when you are cured, Tristan, or that you will derive comfort from another woman after my death.

"Truly, my love, I dread and fear Ysolt of the White Hands. I don't know if I should be afraid of her, but rest assured that, if you were to die before me, I would not survive long thereafter. Truly, I do not know what to do, only that I desire you above anything else. May God grant that we are reunited so that I can cure you, my love, or so that we can die together in a single anguish."

Thus while her torment endured, Ysolt wailed and lamented. More than five days the storm and the foul weather lasted; then the wind fell, and the weather was fair. They hoisted up the white sail and sailed with good speed, so that Caerdin espied Brittany. Then were they glad and merry and drew the sail high so that it might be seen from afar whether it were white or black.<sup>4</sup> From afar would Caerdin show that color: it was the last day that Lord Tristan had assigned them that they should return from England.

While they sailed gladly, it grew warmer, and the wind fell so that they might not sail. Entirely soft and smooth was the sea. Neither here nor there their ship stirred, except as the wave drew it, nor did they have their safety boat any longer. Now was there great distress. Near before them they saw the land, but they did not have the wind to attain it. Hither and thither they went drifting, now forward now backward; they may not advance their voyage, and great was their hardship. Ysolt was tormented sorely by this: she perceived the land she had coveted, but might not attain it. She nearly died of her longing. Within the ship they desired land, but the wind blew ever softly. Often Ysolt called herself wretched. They wished the ship at the shore.

Tristan was heavy and woeful and moaned often and sighed for Ysolt, whom he so desired: his eyes wept, his body writhed, and he nearly perished for desire. In this anguish and woe, his wife Ysolt came before him, intending great treason, and she said, "My dear, Caerdin now comes. His ship have I beheld on the sea; I have barely seen it sailing, but yet I have so beheld it that I know it is his. God

grant he bring such tidings by which you shall have comfort for your heart."

Tristan starts up at that news and says to Ysolt, "Fair love, do you know for certain it is his ship? Now tell me, what is the sail?"

Thus says Ysolt: "I know it certainly. Know well that the sail is altogether black. They have hoisted it and drawn it high, since the wind fails them."

Then Tristan feels such sharp anguish that never had he nor would he feel greater, and he turns himself to the wall and says: "God save Ysolt and me. Since you would not come to me, it is fitting for me to die for your love. I may no longer keep my life. For you I die, Ysolt, fair love. You have no pity on my feebleness, but for my death you will have woe. Great solace it is to me, love, that you will have pity for my death." Three time he said, "Ysolt, my love." At the fourth he yielded up his spirit.

Then throughout the house they wept, the knights and the companions; the noise was loud and the lamentation great. Knights and sergeants went forth and bore the body from the bed and laid it upon a cloth of samite and covered it with a striped pall.<sup>5</sup> On the sea the wind has risen and strikes in the midst of the sail and drives the ship to land. Ysolt disembarks from the ship and hears the great laments in the street, and the bells in the minsters and the chapels, and asks of men what news, and why they make such ringing and why such weeping.

An old man then says, "Fair lady, so God me help, we have here such great sorrow that never people had greater. Tristan, the noble and proved, is dead. He was a solace unto all this realm. He gave succor to the poor and great aid to the wretched. Just now he has died in his bed of a wound he had in his body. Never before such misadventure befell this region."

As soon as Ysolt has heard the news, for woe she cannot utter a word. For his death she is so sorrowful. Lifting her robe she goes up the street before the others into the palace. The Bretons never saw a woman of her beauty; they wonder throughout the city about whence she comes and who she is.

Ysolt goes to where she sees the body and turns to the east and prays for him piteously: "Tristan, my love, now that I see you dead, according to reason I should not live. Dead you are for my love, and I die, love, for pity, since I might not arrive in time to heal you and your wound. My love, my love, for your death nevermore shall I have comfort, nor joy nor pleasure nor delight. Cursed be the tempest that kept me so long at sea, my love, that I might not come. If I had come in time, I would have given you life and spoken sweetly to you of the love that was between us; I would have bewailed our fortune, our bliss, our pleasure, and the pain and the great anguish that has been in our love; and I would have recalled this and kissed you and held you. If I did not have the power to heal you, then we would have died together. Since now I might not arrive in time and I did not know your plight and have arrived to your death, of the same drink shall I have solace. For me you have lost your life, and I shall do as a true lover should: for you and with you will I die."

She embraced him and, lying at full length, kissed his mouth and face, and tightly she clung to him, and stretched her body to his body, and laid her mouth to his mouth. Then she yielded up her spirit and died here beside him, for sorrow of her lover. Tristan died for longing, Ysolt because she came too late. Tristan died for love, and the fair Ysolt for pity.

Here Thomas ends his writing. He gives to all lovers greeting, to the wretched and the amorous, to the jealous and the desirous, to the blithe and the despairing, to all those who will hear these verses. If I have not spoken wholly according to their will, I have said the best unto my power, and I have told all the truth even as I promised at the first, and words and verses have I preserved. As an example have I done this, and to make this history beautiful so it should please lovers, so that here and there they might find something to remember, that they might have from it great solace, despite change, despite wrong, despite pain, despite tears, despite all the wiles of love.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is by Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Romance of Tristan and Ysolt* (1923). It has been thoroughly modernized.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Secondary door or gate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Steer a boat nearer the wind.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tristan has instructed Caerdin that upon returning, he should hoist a white sail if Ysolt is with him and a black sail if she is not. Ysolt of the White Hands overhears their plan.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cloth spread over a coffin or tomb. "Samite": heavy, luxurious silk fabric.[Return to reference 5](#)

## THE MADNESS OF TRISTAN

When a richly complex narrative is extremely familiar, later writers can adapt it allusively. Later twelfth-century Anglo-Norman writers adapted the story of Tristan and Ysolt in this way, in usually smaller versions that focus on a sequence, or even a single fragment, of the narrative (for example, Marie de France's *Chevrefoil*, [pp. 187–90](#)). In the Anglo-Norman text presented here, known as the *Oxford Madness of Tristan*, the author shapes his or her own new narrative as a fragment within, and by frequent reference to, the broader, well-known narrative of Thomas ([pp. 190–95](#)). A further example of the "Madness of Tristan" narrative survives, in the *Berne Madness of Tristan* (the manuscripts of these two texts are held in Oxford and Berne, respectively).

That the narrative of Tristan and Ysolt should collapse into fragments is itself peculiarly apt, given that this story of illicit, intensely private love can have no ultimate coherence, and given that the lovers must retreat into tiny, private moments of isolated joy. The intensity of that joy is heightened by contrast with the self-destructive, self-mutilating disguises that Tristan must adopt in order to see his lover. These disguises are extreme: Tristan disfigures himself to appear as a court jester (or *fole*) to such an extent that he borders on madness (*folie*). Even as he uses the truth to disguise himself (the fool declares his love for Queen Ysolt in the presence of the king and the court), so too does the possibility of that love's fulfillment recede (the courtiers all laugh at the jester's seemingly absurd declaration of love). The struggle to maintain one's identity becomes so demanding as to fragment identity, and to merge extreme pain and joy. Tristan must hide his true self from everyone around him—from his friend Caerdin, and from the king and his court. The compulsion to hide becomes so engrained, indeed, that Tristan, to our surprise and shock, finally disguises himself (unnecessarily) from Ysolt when he uses a false voice even in the

intimacy of her chamber. It is no accident that Tristan should say that he will live with Ysolt in a wholly transparent, crystal palace, suspended in the air: a narrative marked by ever-thickening opacity and dissembling, in which even the most intimate relationships need to be disguised, produces a dream of pure transparency. Tokens of recognition and identity, so crucial to romance narratives, serve here almost endlessly to block and defer recognition, producing a seeming romance in reverse; and far from producing private, life-giving understanding, the precious signs of intimacy here become instruments of emotional cruelty.

Deferral of joy seems to be painfully indefinite, until Husdent the dog joyfully recognizes his master (note the distant echoes of the dog of Ulysses as he returns to Ithaca), and until Tristan changes his voice. Tristan, we realize, has been disguising himself deliberately from Ysolt—and from us.

## ***From The Madness of Tristan***<sup>1</sup>

Miserable, dejected, sad, and downcast, Tristan dwelt in his land.<sup>2</sup> He meditated on what he could do, for he lacked all solace: a cure would solace him, or, if there were none, better to die. Better to die once and for all, than for ever to be so distraught, and better to die once and for all, than forever languish in pain. To live in anguish is death itself; anxiety defeats and destroys man. Just so did pain, grief, anxiety, and distress defeat Tristan. He saw there was no cure for him: without solace he would have to die. Death, then, was certain, since he had lost his love, his joy, since he had lost Ysolt the queen. He wished to die, he desired to die, but only so long as she knew he was dying for love of her, for if she knew it, he would at least die more easily. He suspected everyone and hid his mind from them, fearing betrayal. Above all he hid his mind from Caerdin, his friend, for he feared that if he told him his plan, he would prevent him. For he wished and intended to go straight to England, not with a horse but entirely on foot, so as not to be recognized in that land. Because he was well known there, he would be soon spotted. But no one notices a poor man on foot; no one at court takes heed of a poor, bare messenger. He intended to disguise himself and so change his appearance that no one would ever know he was Tristan, however hard they looked. Neither family, neighbors, fellows, nor friends would discover his identity. He kept his thoughts so quiet that he said nothing to anyone; he was wise, for disclosing secrets beforehand often brings great harm. No misfortune, I believe, will ever befall the man who thus hides, and will not reveal, his thoughts. Telling and disclosing secrets is often the cause of many disasters. People suffer from their own thoughtlessness.

Tristan prudently held his counsel and thought hard. He did not long delay: in bed at night he took his decision, and early in the morning he set out on his road. He did not stop till he reached the



sea. He came to the sea and found the ship ready and all that he needed. The ship was large, fine and strong, a good merchants' boat. Its cargo came from many lands, and it was bound for England.

The sailors hauled up the sail and weighed anchor. They were eager to be on the high seas: there was a good wind for sailing. Then Tristan the brave appeared and said to them: "My lords, God save you all! Where are you going, God willing?" "To England, with luck!" they replied. Tristan said to the sailors: "I wish you a good voyage! My lords, take me with you: we both want to go to Britain." They said to him: "Agreed: come along then, embark." Tristan approached and went on board. The wind swelled the topsail and they went speedily through the waves, cutting through the deep sea. They had their will and plenty of good wind. They ran straight for England, spending two nights and a day on the voyage, and on the second day, if the record is true, they came to the port, at Tintagel.

King Mark dwelt there, as did Queen Ysolt, and a great court was gathered there, following the custom of the king. Tintagel was a very fine, strong castle, impervious to attack or siege-engine. . . . <sup>3</sup> It stood by the sea, in Cornwall,<sup>4</sup> its tower large and strong: it was built by giants long ago. All its stones were of marble, superbly laid and joined. The wall was checkered with red and blue blocks. There was a gate to the castle, handsome, large, and strong; the entry and exit were well guarded by two valiant men.

There dwelt King Mark, with Britons and with Cornish-men, because of the castle, which he loved, and so did Queen Ysolt. Round about were many meadows, many woods for game, fresh water, fish-ponds and fine fields. Ships sailing by on the sea would arrive at the castle's port. People from other lands, both friends and strangers, looking for the king would there come to him from over the sea, and that is why he loved it so. The spot was lovely and delightful, the land good and fruitful, and thus once upon a time Tintagel was called the enchanted castle. It was rightly called so, because twice a year, once in winter and once in summer, truly no one can see it, neither a local man nor anyone else, however hard

they try—so say the people in the neighborhood. Tristan's ship arrived and carefully dropped anchor in the port.

Tristan jumped up and left ship, and sat down on the shore. He sought and asked for news of King Mark and his whereabouts. They told him he was in town and held a great court. "And where is Queen Ysolt and Brenguain, her lovely handmaid?" "Indeed, they are here: it's not long since I saw them. But Queen Ysolt, as usual, certainly looks very sad." When Tristan heard Ysolt's name, he fetched a sigh from his heart. He decided on a trick to help him see his mistress.

He knew well there was no device to be found to enable him to talk to her. Prowess, knowledge, intelligence, skill—all were of no avail, for King Mark, he well knew, hated him above all things, and if he could catch him alive, he was convinced he would kill him. Then he thought of his mistress and said: "What does it matter if he kills me? I ought to die for love of her. Alas! I already die every day. Ysolt, for you I suffer so much. Ysolt, for you I so much wish to die. Ysolt, if you knew I was here, I'm not sure you would talk to me. I've gone mad for your love, yet I'm here and you don't know it. I don't know how I can talk to you, hence my anguish.

"Now I want to try something else, to see if I succeed: I'll pretend I'm a fool, behave as if mad. Isn't that clever and a stroke of cunning? That's shrewd: since neither time nor place are on my side, nothing wiser can be done. Whoever holds me silly, I'll be wiser than he, and whoever holds me a fool will have stupider men at home."

Tristan kept to this decision. He saw a fisherman coming towards him. He wore a tunic of coarse wool, with open sides, and a hood. Tristan saw him and beckoned to him and led him off with him in secret. "My friend," he said, "let's change clothes. You shall have mine, which are good. I will have your tunic, which pleases me greatly, for I often dress in such clothes." The fisherman saw the clothes were good, took them, and gave him his, and when he had them he was delighted and went off like a shot.

Tristan had some scissors, which he would carry about with him. He treasured them: Ysolt had given him them. With the scissors he shaved his hair on the top of his head: he certainly looked idiotic and crazy. Then he cut a cross-shaped tonsure.<sup>5</sup> He knew how to transform his voice completely. He stained his face with an herb he had brought from his own land: he smeared it with its juice and then it changed color and went dark. No man alive, seeing and hearing him, would have recognized him or claimed him as Tristan. He took a stake from a hedge and held it on his shoulder. He went straight towards the castle; everyone who saw him was afraid.

When the porter saw him, he summed him up as a mad fool. He said to him: "Come here! Where have you been so long?"

The fool replied: "I was at the wedding of the Abbot of St. Michael's Mount, my old friend. He married an abbess, a fat nun. There was not a priest, abbot, monk, or clerk in orders, of whatever kind, from Besançon to the Mount, who was not invited to the wedding, and they all brought staves and crosses. There, in the pastures below Bel Encumbre,<sup>6</sup> they jump and play in the shade. I left them, because today I've got to serve the king at table."

The porter replied: "Come in, Urgan the Hairy's son. You are large and hairy, to be sure, and thus very like him."<sup>7</sup> The fool entered by the wicket gate. The young men ran up to him, shouting at him as men do to a wolf: "Look at the fool! Hu! hu! hu! hu!" The young men and the squires were intent on attacking him with branches of boxwood. They accompanied him across the courtyard, following the mad boy. He turned on them many times, playing the fool at will. If one attacked him on the right, he turned and struck towards the left. He came to the door of the hall and entered, stake over his shoulder. At once the king, from his seat on the royal dais,<sup>8</sup> noticed him. He said: "There's a good servant. Make him come forward." Many jumped up and went to meet him, greeting him in accordance with his looks. Then they brought the fool, stake over his shoulder, before the king. Mark said: "Welcome, friend. Where are you from? What do you seek here?"

The fool said: "Indeed I'll tell you whence I am and what I seek. My mother was a whale and dwelt in the sea like a siren, but I've no idea where I was born. But I will know who brought me up: a great tigress suckled me, in the rocks where she found me. She found me under a block of stone, thought I was her cub, and fed me from her breast. But I have a most beautiful sister: I will give her to you, if you like, in exchange for Ysolt, whom you love so much." The king laughed and then replied: "What would the wonder of the world say to that?" "King, I'll give you my sister for Ysolt, whom I love dearly. Let's make a bargain, let's make an exchange: it's good to try out something new. You're quite tired of Ysolt: get to know someone else. Give her to me, I'll take her. I'll be of service to you, king, out of love."

The king listened to him and laughed, and said to the fool: "God help you, tell me what you would do with the queen, or where you would put her, if I gave her into your power, to take away?" "King," said the fool, "Up there in the air I have a hall where I live. It's large and splendid, made of glass, and the sun comes streaming in. It's in the air, hanging from the clouds; the wind neither rocks nor shakes it. Beside the hall is a paneled room made of crystal. At daybreak, the sun floods it with light."

The king and the rest laughed at this. They spoke among themselves, saying: "This is a good fool, he talks well. He can speak on anything." "King," said the fool, "I adore Ysolt: my heart suffers and aches for her. I am Trantris,<sup>9</sup> who loved her so, and will as long as I live."

Ysolt heard him, sighed deeply, and was angry and furious with the fool. She said: "Who let you in here? Fool, you aren't Trantris, you lie." The fool listened more carefully to Ysolt than to the others; he was well aware she was angry from the changed color in her face.

Then he said: "Queen Ysolt, I am Trantris who used to love you. You must remember when I was wounded—there were many who knew it well—in fighting the Morholt, who wanted to claim tribute from you.<sup>1</sup> In fighting, I had the luck to kill him, I don't deny it. I

was badly wounded, for the sword was poisoned. It damaged my hip bone and the virulent poison fomented, clinging to the bone and turning it black; there was then such pain there that no doctor could cure it and I thought I would die of it. I put out to sea, to die there, so badly did the suffering torment me. The wind got up and a great storm drove my boat to Ireland. I had to land in the country I most had reason to fear, for I had killed the Morholt, your uncle, Queen Ysolt; hence I was afraid of the land. But I was wounded and wretched. I tried taking pleasure in my harp, but it gave me no comfort, despite my love for it. Very soon people heard tell of my skill at harping. At once I was summoned to court just as I was, in my wounded state. Thanks to the queen, there I was cured of my wound. I taught you fine lays to the harp, Breton lays from our land.<sup>2</sup> You must remember, my lady Queen, how the medicine cured me. There I named myself Trantris: am I not him? What do you think?"

Ysolt replied: "No indeed! For he was a fine and noble man, and you, who call yourself Trantris, are coarse, ugly, and horrible. Now be off, stop shouting at me. I don't care for your jokes or for you." The fool turned about at these words and began playing the madman to perfection. He struck those he found in his way, escorting them from the dais to the door. Then he shouted at them: "Madmen, be off, out of here! Let me confer with Ysolt: I've come here to court her." The king laughed, for he enjoyed this very much. Ysolt flushed and kept silence.

And the king was well aware of it. He said to the fool: "Rascal, come here. Isn't Queen Ysolt your mistress?" "Yes indeed! I won't deny it."

Ysolt answered: "You're a liar! Throw the fool out!" The fool laughed in reply, and spoke as he wished to Ysolt: "Don't you remember, Queen Ysolt, what the king did when he wanted to send me on a mission? He sent me to get you, whom he's now married. I went there as a merchant, seeking my fortune. I was much hated in the land because I had killed the Morholt: that's why I went as a merchant and that was very shrewd.<sup>3</sup> I was to seek you for the

king's use, your lord, whom I see here, who was hardly loved in that land, while I was bitterly hated. I was a splendid knight, enterprising and brave, afraid of no one, from Scotland to Rome."

Ysolt replied: "That's a good story. You're a disgrace to knights, for you're a congenital idiot. A pity you're still alive! Get out, for God's sake!" The fool heard her and laughed.

Then he continued, like this: "My lady Queen, you must remember the dragon I killed, when I arrived in your land. I struck its head from its body,<sup>4</sup> cut its tongue and removed it, thrusting it in my hose. And from the poison I got such a fever, I was sure I would die; I lay fainting by the road. Your mother and you saw me and saved me from death. With skill and powerful medicine you cured me of the poison.<sup>5</sup>

"Do you remember the bath I sat in? You nearly killed me there. You were about to perform that amazing feat once you had unsheathed my sword. When you drew it out and found the notch in it, then you thought, rightly, the Morholt had perished by it. You quickly thought of a clever idea: you opened your casket and found inside the piece you had taken out of his head. You matched the piece to the sword: it fitted at once. You were very bold, at once to try and kill me in the bath with my own sword.<sup>6</sup> How full of fury woman is! And at your cry, the queen came, for she had heard you. You know how I made my peace, for I kept begging for mercy; and besides, I had to defend you against the man intent on taking you.<sup>7</sup> You would not have him at any price for you found him odious. Ysolt, I defended you from him. Isn't what I say true?"

"It's not true, it's a lie; it's your own fantasies you relate. You went drunk to bed last night, and drunkenness made you dream."

"True: I am drunk, from such a drink that I'll never be sober.

"Don't you remember when your father and mother gave you to me? They put us to sea, on the ship; I was to bring you here to the king. When we were on the open sea, I'll tell you what we did. The day was fine and hot, we were on the high seas and you were thirsty from the heat. Don't you remember, king's daughter? We both

drank from the same cup: you drank it, I drank it. I've been drunk on it ever after,<sup>8</sup> but that intoxication costs me dear."

When Ysolt heard this, she wrapped her mantle around her and stood up, wishing to go. The king seized her and made her sit down; he seized her by her ermine cloak and sat her down again beside him. "Patience, Ysolt my love; let's hear this folly through to the end. Fool," said the king, "now I'd like to hear the ways you can be of service."

The fool answered Mark: "I have served kings and counts." "Do you know about dogs? And horses?" "Yes," he said, "I've had some fine ones!" The fool told him: "King, when I want to hunt in woods or forest, with my greyhounds I take the cranes flying up there in the skies; with my leash-hounds I take swans and white and grey geese, one after another. When I go out with my hunting-dogs I take many coots and bitterns." Mark laughed heartily at the fool and so did everyone, great and small. Then he said to the fool: "My friend, my dear brother, what can you catch in the marshes?"

The fool began to laugh and replied: "King, whatever I find, I take, for with my goshawks I take the forest wolves and the great bears.<sup>9</sup> I catch the boars with my gerfalcons, neither hills or valleys protect them. I'll take roe-buck and fallow-deer with my little high-flying falcons and with my sparrow-hawk, the fox, with his fine tail. With my merlin I'll take the hare, with my falcon, the wild-cat and beaver. When I come back home, then I'm a good fencer with my stake: no one escapes a blow of mine, no matter how well he covers. I know how to share out the logs between the squires and the grooms. I know how to tune both harp and rote,<sup>1</sup> and then sing to the melody. I know how to love a noble queen and no lover under heaven is my equal. I know how to cut wood-chips with my knife, and throw them into streams.<sup>2</sup> Am I not a good servant? Today I've served you with my stake." Then he struck those around him with the stake. "Leave the king's presence!" he said. "All go back to your lodgings! Have you not eaten? Why do you stay?"

The king laughed at every word, delighted with the fool. Then he summoned a squire to bring him his horse, saying he wished to go

out and amuse himself, as was his custom. His knights went with him, and so did the squires, to relieve boredom.

"By your leave, my lord," said Ysolt, "I'm ill, my head aches. I will go and rest in my chamber. I cannot listen to this din." Then the king let her go. She jumped up and left, entering her chamber in deep thought. She called herself miserable and wretched. She came to her bed and sat down; the lamentation she made was very great.

"Alas!" she said, "why was I born? My heart is heavy and sad. Brenguain, my fair sister," she said, "really, I'm almost dead. If I were dead, I'd be better off, since my life is so bitter and hard. I meet hostility wherever I look. Indeed, Brenguain, I don't know what to do, for a fool has arrived over there, his hair in a cross-shaped tonsure. He arrived in an evil hour, for he has caused me much pain. Really, this fool, this mad scoundrel, must be a soothsayer or magician, for he knows my life and my situation from top to bottom, my dear friend. Indeed, Brenguain, I wonder who revealed my secrets to him, since no one except you, I and Tristan, was privy to them. But this beggar, I think, knows them all by magic. Never did any man speak more truly, for he never got a single word wrong."

Brenguain replied: "It's Tristan himself, I'm sure I'm right." "No, Brenguain, for he's ugly and hideous and deformed, and Tristan is so shapely, a handsome man, well made, well educated. You could not find in any land a knight of greater renown. So I'll never believe it's my lover Tristan. But curses on this fool! Cursed be his life and cursed be the ship that brought him here! Pity he didn't drown in the waves, out there in the deep sea!"

"Be quiet, my lady," Brenguain said. "Now you are offensive. Where did you learn such talents? You're well acquainted with cursing!" "Brenguain, he put me out of my wits. Never did I hear a man talk so." "By St. John, my lady, I believe he's Tristan's messenger." "Indeed, I'm not sure, I don't know him. But go to him, my dear friend, speak with him, if you can, and discover if you know him."



Brenguain, who was courteous, jumped up, and went straight to the hall, but there she found neither freeman nor serf, only the fool, sitting on a bench. Everyone else had gone to their lodgings in the city. Brenguain saw him and stopped, at a distance, and Tristan recognized her very well. Then he threw down his stake and said: "Welcome, Brenguain. Noble Brenguain, I beg you, for God's sake, to have pity on me."

Brenguain replied: "And why do you want me to pity you?" "Oh come! I am Tristan, living in pain and grief. I am Tristan, in misery for the love of Queen Ysolt." Brenguain said: "No, it's my belief you're not." "Indeed, Brenguain, I really am. Tristan was my name when I came here and I truly am he. Brenguain, don't you remember, when we left Ireland together, how I had you in my care, you and Ysolt, who now won't recognize me? When the queen came towards me, holding you by the right hand, she gave the charge of you into my hands. You must remember, beautiful Brenguain. She charged me with Ysolt and you; she required me, she begged me, to receive you into my care and guard you as best I could. Then she gave you a flask, by no means large but small, telling you to guard it well if you desired her friendship.<sup>3</sup> When we were on the open sea, the weather grew warm. I wore a tunic, I was hot and sweating, I was thirsty, and asked for drink: you know if I'm telling the truth. A lad sitting at my feet got up, and took the flask. He poured into a silver goblet the drink that he found there, then placed the goblet in my hand and, needing it, I drank. I offered half to Ysolt, who was thirsty and wanted to drink. Beautiful Brenguain, would that I had never drunk that drink, or known you. Beautiful Brenguain, don't you remember?" Brenguain replied: "No, indeed."

"Brenguain, since I first loved Ysolt, she would tell it to no other: you knew and heard of it and you allowed the affair. Nobody in the world knew of it, nobody except we three." Brenguain heard what he told her; she went off quickly towards the chamber. He jumped up and followed her, begging for mercy. Brenguain came to Ysolt and smiled at her, according to their custom.<sup>4</sup> Ysolt's face changed color

and paled, and at once she feigned illness. The chamber was immediately emptied because the queen was unwell.

And Brenguain went for Tristan and led him straight to the chamber. When he entered and saw Ysolt, he approached her, wishing to kiss her. But she retreated, much mortified; she stood, sweating, not knowing what to do. Tristan saw that she shunned him. He was crestfallen and ashamed. He stepped back a little to the wall, near the door.

Then he gave vent to some of his desires: "Indeed, I would never have thought that of you, Ysolt, noble Queen, nor Brenguain, your maidservant. Alas! to have lived long enough to see you treating me with such scorn and repugnance! In whom can I trust, when Ysolt won't deign to love me, when Ysolt considers me so base that she now has no memory of me? Ah! Ysolt, ah! my dear, the loving heart is slow to forget. We prize the leaping fountain, whose fine stream runs freely; but the moment it dries, and the water neither rushes nor springs, it is worth praise no longer. Nor is love, when it's disloyal."

Ysolt answered: "My brother, I can't tell. I look at you and I'm dismayed, for I see nothing in you to say you're Tristan the Lover." Tristan replied: "Queen Ysolt, I am Tristan, who used to love you. Don't you remember the seneschal who embroiled us with the king? We were both young then and shared a lodging. One night, when I went out, he got up and followed me. It had snowed and he traced my footsteps. He came to the palisade and crossed it, spied on us in your chamber, and the next day accused us. I believe he was the first to denounce us to the king.<sup>5</sup>

"Again, you must remember the dwarf, whom you so used to fear. He did not care about my pleasure: he was about us day and night. He was put there to spy on us, and carried out this service in a crazy fashion. On one occasion we had been bled;<sup>6</sup> like any lovers in distress, who plan all kinds of cunning, ingenious and artful tricks in order to achieve meetings, pleasure and delight, we did the same. We had been bled in your room, where we were lying. But that crazy dwarf, son of a bitch, sprinkled flour between our beds, thus thinking

to discover whether there really was love between us.<sup>7</sup> But I noticed it: feet together, I jumped into your bed. The wound in my arm spurted from the jump and bloodied your bed; I jumped back the same way and made my own bed bloody.

"Then King Mark arrived and found your bloodstained bed; at once he came to mine and found my bloody sheets. Queen, for love of you, I was then banished from court. Don't you remember, my darling, a little love-token I once sent you, a little dog I got for you? That was Petit Cru,<sup>8</sup> whom you dearly loved. And there is one thing, Ysolt my love, which you must remember.

"When the Irishman came to court, the king showed him honour and affection. He was a harper, he knew how to harp; you knew him well. The king gave you to the harper: he gaily carried you off and was about to enter his ship. I was in the forest and heard about it. I took a rote and followed on horseback at a gallop. He won you through his harp, and I won you through my rote.<sup>9</sup>

"Queen, you must remember when the king banished me and I longed to speak with you, my love. I thought of a ruse, I came to the orchard where we had often been happy. I sat under a pine in the shade and cut woodchips with my knife, which served as signs between us when I wanted to come to you. A spring rose in that place, which ran by the chamber. I threw the chips in the water and the stream carried them along. When you saw the chips, you would know for sure that I would come that night, to delight in taking my pleasure.

"At once the dwarf took notice: he ran to tell King Mark. That night the king entered the garden and climbed into the pine. I came later, knowing nothing, but when I had been there a while, I noticed the shadow of the king sitting in the pine above me. You approached from the other direction. Then I was indeed terrified, but you must know I feared lest your haste were too great. But thank God, He didn't permit it. You saw the shadow, as I had, you stepped back, and I begged you to reconcile me with the king, if you could, or else ask him to pay my wages and let me leave the kingdom. This saved us, and I was reconciled with King Mark.<sup>1</sup>

"Beautiful Ysolt, do you remember the oath you went through for me? When you left the boat, I held you gently in my arms. I had disguised myself thoroughly, as you told me to; I kept my head well down. I well remember what you then told me—to fall, holding you. Ysolt, my love, isn't that true? You fell gently to the ground, opening your thighs and letting me fall between them, and everyone saw it. As I see it, that's how you were saved, Ysolt, at the trial from the oath that you made in the king's court."<sup>2</sup> The queen listened to him, carefully noting every word. She examined him and sighed deeply; she did not know what on earth to say, for he did not look like Tristan in face, appearance, or clothes. But from what he said, she understood very well he told the truth, without a word of a lie. This filled her heart with anguish and she had no idea what to do. It would be mad and deceitful to recognize him as Tristan, when she saw, thought, and believed he was not Tristan but another. And Tristan could see very well that she quite failed to know him.

Then he said: "My lady Queen, how well you showed your nobility when you loved me without disdain. Now I can truly complain of your treachery. Now I see you distant and false, now I've convicted you of deceit. But I've seen the day, my love, when you truly loved me. When Mark banished us and drove us from the court, we took each other by the hand and left the hall. Then we went to the forest and found a most beautiful place there, a grotto in a rock. In front, the entry was narrow; inside, it was vaulted and well shaped, as beautiful as a picture, the stone finely and richly carved. In that vault we lived as long as we stayed in the forest. There I trained Husdent, my dearly loved dog, not to bark."<sup>3</sup> With my dog and with my hawk, I kept us fed every day.

"My lady Queen, you're well aware how we were then found. The king himself found us, and the dwarf he took with him. But God was shielding us, when he found us lying apart and the sword between us. The king took the glove from his hand and put it over your face, gently and without a word, for he saw a sunbeam which had burnt and reddened it. Then the king went away and left us sleeping

there; after that, he had no suspicion of anything wrong between us. He dismissed the anger he had toward us and soon sent for us.<sup>4</sup>

"Ysolt, you must remember: it was then I gave you Husdent, my dog. What have you done with him? Show him to me." Ysolt replied: "I have him, upon my word! I have the dog you speak of: indeed, you shall see him at once. Brenguain, go and get the dog; bring him, along with his lead." She rose and jumped to her feet, she came to Husdent, who frisked for joy. She untied him, letting him go. He bounded off.

Tristan said to him: "Come here, Husdent! Once you were mine, now I'm taking you back." Husdent saw him, at once knew him, and greeted him, rightly, with joy. I have never heard tell of a dog making a greater fuss of his master than Husdent did, so much love did he show him. He rushed at him, head high, rubbing him with his muzzle, patting him with his paws. Never did an animal show such joy: it was pitiful to see.

Ysolt was amazed. She was ashamed and blushed to see him giving him such a welcome as soon as he heard his voice, for he was vicious and badly bred, and would bite and harm all those who played with him and all those who handled him. No one could get to know him or handle him except the queen and Brenguain, so obnoxious had he been since losing his master, who had nurtured and trained him.

Tristan held Husdent and stroked him. He said to Ysolt: "He remembers me, who nurtured and trained him, better than you do, whom I loved so much. There's such great nobility in a dog, such great deceit in woman." Ysolt heard him and changed color; she shuddered and sweated with anguish. Tristan said to her: "My lady Queen, how loyal you once were!

"Don't you remember how we were lying in the orchard when the king appeared, discovered us, and quickly withdrew? He planned a wicked deed: out of spite he would kill you. But thank God, He wouldn't have it, for I realized in time. I had to leave you, my love, for the king wished to disgrace us. Then you gave me your beautiful

ring, richly made of pure gold, and I received it and left, commending you to the one true God.”<sup>5</sup>

Ysolt said: “Tokens will convince me. Have you the ring? Show it to me.” He drew out the ring and gave it to her. Ysolt took it and looked at it; then she burst out weeping, she wrung her hands, she was distraught. “Alas for the day I was born!” she said, “I’ve finally lost my love, for I know well that no other man would have this ring if he were alive. Alas, I will never be comforted!” But when Tristan saw her weep, he was seized with pity, and rightly so.

Then he said: “My lady queen, now you are beautiful and true. Now I will no longer hide, but make myself heard and known.” He altered his tone and spoke in his true voice.

Ysolt realized at once. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed his face and eyes.

Then Tristan said to Brenguain, who was overcome with delight: “Give me some water, my beauty: I’ll wash my dirty face.”

At once Brenguain brought the water and he soon cleansed his face: he washed off all the stain from the herb and its juice, along with the sweat. He resumed his own looks, and he held Ysolt in his arms. Such was the joy she had from her lover, whom she held by her side, that it knew no bounds. She would not let him leave that night, and promised him good lodging and a fine, well-made bed. Tristan desired only queen Ysolt, nothing but her. He was joyful and happy; he realized now he was well lodged.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation and select notes are derived from Judith Weiss, *The Birth of Romance: An Anthology* (1992).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tristan’s “land” is Brittany, in what is now northwest France. It is also the home of Caerdin and his sister, Ysolt of the White Hands, whom Tristan marries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here there is a gap in the text of a line and a half.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Region in the far southwest of Great Britain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tonsure results from shaving part of the scalp, usually to signal renunciation of worldly fashion and esteem.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bel Encumbre is in Normandy; St. Michael's Mount probably refers to the Cornish monastery of that name. Besançon is in eastern France. Here it simply means "from far off."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Urgan appears in other Tristan narratives as a giant defeated and killed by Tristan.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Raised platform at the front of a hall, for those of high social standing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Trantris" is an anagram of "Tristan." Tristan has used this pseudonym in a previous adventure, when he is wounded and seeks a cure in Ireland. Ysolt, an expert in curative plants, heals him completely.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Many Tristan narratives depict Mark's kingdom as having to pay tribute to Ireland, first in money, then in beautiful children. Morholt, the maternal uncle of Ysolt, is a huge warrior who comes to Cornwall to enforce the tribute and is slain by Tristan in single combat. A piece of Tristan's sword is left embedded in Morholt's skull and is kept by Ysolt and her mother. It is Tristan's wound from this battle that requires Ysolt's healing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tristan's skill at the harp is one of his most famous characteristics, depicted in art as well as literature.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tristan returns to Ireland a second time, this time disguised as a merchant, to arrange the marriage of Ysolt and Mark.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: On this second visit, Tristan confronts and kills a dragon. This narrative from Thomas's *Tristan* is preserved in the Norse translation of Thomas.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This is the second time Ysolt and her mother cure Tristan in Ireland; the first is after his fight with Morholt. Tristan



and Ysolt have not yet drunk the love potion that seals their fate.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: In curing Tristan, Ysolt discovers the notch in Tristan's sword that exactly matches the fragment extracted from her uncle Morholt's head, and thereby understands that Tristan had killed her uncle. She threatens to kill Tristan in his bath with the sword, but is dissuaded from doing so.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An Irish court officer had falsely claimed to have killed the dragon, and he demanded the hand of Ysolt in recompense.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In some Tristan texts, the effects of the love potion wear off after three or four years, while in others they endure for life.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The joke is that the fool hunts birds with dogs and beasts with falcons—the inverse of usual practice. It is also ridiculous that a poor jester would be hunting at all, an activity reserved for aristocratic elites.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A triangular zither, with strings on both sides of the soundbox.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See *Chevrefoil* (pp. 187–90) for a depiction of Tristan's skill as carver of secret messages to Ysolt.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This is the love potion prepared for Ysolt and King Mark.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This seems to be an agreed signal between Ysolt and Brenguain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A court officer notices that the footprints of Tristan in the snow lead to Ysolt's chamber; he eventually tells the king.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bloodletting was a regular medical procedure for maintaining health in the Middle Ages.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The dwarf does not appear in the Thomas fragments except in the orchard scene. His flour trick appears in other Tristan texts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Petit Cru is a magical dog that appears in other Tristan texts.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: This is the episode known as “the harp and the rote,” which appears in other Tristan texts. The Irish harper, having asked for, and been granted, an unspecified reward for his music, demands Ysolt. Mark is bound by his promise to hand her over.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This episode appears in many Tristan texts (see also the ivory carving reproduced on p. 191). In Beroul’s version, Tristan and Ysolt, both conscious of the shadow of the king in the tree above them, immediately conduct a dialogue that suggests their innocence to the unwitting Mark as he listens to them.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ysolt undertakes to clear herself of the charge of adultery by undergoing trial, either by oath or by the ordeal of the red-hot iron. On the day, she has arranged that as she lands from a boat, the disguised Tristan should offer to help carry her to shore and stumble in the process. She can then truly and safely swear that nobody, except the king and this “feeble pilgrim,” has ever been between her thighs.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Husdent appears in many Tristan texts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This central episode occurs in all versions of the story. The separation of the lovers by the sword is taken by Mark to indicate their chaste love.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This episode appears in the first of the fragments of Thomas’s poem.[Return to reference 5](#)

# ANCRENE WISSE (GUIDE FOR ANCHORESSES)

An anchoress is a woman who has withdrawn from regular society to lead a solitary life focused on prayer and religious self-discipline. Anchoresses took vows to live in permanent enclosure, often in small, sealed cells attached to churches. The *Ancrene Wisse* (Guide of Anchoresses) is a manual for such women, instructing them in how to pursue their spiritually ambitious vocations. From the time it was composed, probably in the late 1220s, up until the Protestant Reformation of the early sixteenth century, the *Ancrene Wisse* was copied and adapted for a variety of Christian readers, including not only anchorites but monks, nuns, and ordinary members of the laity—the secular part of society, composed of those who belong neither to the priesthood nor to monastic orders.

In the first half of the thirteenth century, the English language had not yet recovered the status it had enjoyed prior to the Norman Conquest, when Old English had been a vibrant literary language. It is thus remarkable that the writer chose English as the medium for such an extensive treatise—and the *Ancrene Wisse* is now known as an innovative, important work of early Middle English prose. In the years after its composition, the *Ancrene Wisse* was even translated into medieval Latin and French, reversing the usual direction of translation. Although the author is unknown, it is clear that he is a man of some religious authority and education. The treatise's original audience seems to have been three sisters who all became

anchoresses, though they are mentioned in just a single copy of the text.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Western Christendom had undergone major changes in devotion and piety. These changes promoted active, rigorous, and individualized modes of spirituality, centered on one's personal encounter with God. Although women pursued these spiritual commitments just as ardently as men, fewer resources were available to support women's spiritual lives. Religious houses for women were comparatively few in number, and joining a nunnery could be very expensive; for instance, to become a nun at Barking Abbey (as did Clemence of Barking; see [pp. 210–14](#)), you needed to be part of the wealthy elite. The role of anchoress provided a more accessible path to the religious life. The *Ancrene Wisse* meets the anchoresses where they are, newly converted from secular life and without much training in doctrine or liturgy (formalized ritual). The text's accessible and foundational instruction made it appealing to many readers in subsequent decades and centuries. (Notably it was an anchoress, Julian of Norwich [d. after 1416; see [pp. 220–32](#)], who almost two hundred years later would write the earliest surviving English-language work known to be authored by a woman.)

The style of the *Ancrene Wisse* is engaging and conversational, incorporating exclamations, rhetorical questions, calls for attention, and imagined speeches—as though the author were speaking directly to listeners. Some of these techniques may be borrowed from contemporary preaching. Indeed, the *Ancrene Wisse* frequently uses two devices thought to render sermons more stimulating to audiences: *similitudines*, or vivid images used as the basis for comparison, and *exempla*, short illustrative narratives. In some passages, the author plays on the contemporary vogue for exalted erotic love, so vividly realized in the *lais* of Marie de France (see [pp. 159–90](#))—though, of course, he redirects this love heavenward, toward God. Another feature of the style is the mingling of “high” and “low” vocabularies: for instance, quoting holy scripture alongside mention of the cook's son. In these several ways, the

*Ancrene Wisse* shapes the largely untested idioms of Middle English writing to achieve distinctive rhetorical and spiritual power.

The *Ancrene Wisse* is divided into eight parts. The selection below comes from Part 6, which concentrates on penance, or the actions and feelings proper to demonstrate contrite repentance for sin. At the point where the selection begins, the author is riffing on an episode from the story of Jesus's death and resurrection, when three of his followers, known as the three Marys, buy spices to anoint his dead body after the crucifixion—but when they arrive at his tomb, the body is gone and an angel announces that Jesus has risen. In the selection, phrases printed in *italics* appeared in Latin within the original language of the *Ancrene Wisse*.

# ***From Ancrene Wisse (Guide for Anchoresses)***<sup>1</sup>

## **[THE SWEETNESS AND PAINS OF ENCLOSURE]**

\* \* \*

Now someone may complain that she cannot feel any inward fragrance or sweetness from God. She should not be at all surprised, if she is not Mary; because she must buy it with external bitterness. Not with every bitterness—because some lead away from God, such as every worldly grief that is not for the soul's salvation. That is why in the Gospel it is written of the three Marys as follows: *So that coming they might anoint Jesus*<sup>2</sup>*—but not going away.* These Marys, it says, these bitteresses, were coming to anoint our Lord.<sup>3</sup> These [bitteresses] are coming to anoint him that one suffers for love of our Lord, who stretches himself towards us like something that has been anointed, and makes himself tender and soft to handle. And wasn't he himself enclosed in Mary's womb?<sup>4</sup> These two things are appropriate for a recluse, constriction and bitterness; for the womb, where our Lord was enclosed, is a constricted space to live in, and this word 'Mary', as I have often said, means 'bitterness'. If, then, you endure bitterness in a constricted space, you are his companions, enclosed as he was in Mary's womb. Are you confined inside four spacious walls? So too was he in a narrow cradle, nailed on the cross, closely confined in a tomb of stone. Mary's womb and this tomb were his anchor-houses. He was not a worldly man in either, but, as it were, out of the world, to show anchoresses that they should have nothing in common with the world. 'Yes,' you answer me, 'but he went out of both.' Indeed; you should go out of both your anchor-houses just as he did, without a breach, and leave them both intact. That will be when the spirit goes out at the end,

intact and unblemished, from its two houses. One is the body; the other is the outer house, which is like the outer wall around the castle.

All that I have said about the mortification of the flesh is not for you, my dear sisters, who sometimes suffer more than I would like, but is for anyone who may perhaps read this and is too soft on herself. Even so, saplings are hedged round with thorns so animals do not eat them while they are tender. You are saplings planted in God's orchard. The thorns are the hardships that I have been talking about, and you need to be surrounded by them, so that the beast of hell, when he creeps up on you to bite you, hurts himself on the sharpness and recoils. In addition to all these hardships, be happy and content if you are not much talked about, if you are not valued; because a thorn is sharp and not valued. Be hedged round by these two things. You should not wish to have a bad reputation. Scandal is a mortal sin; that is, anything said or done in such a way that people can reasonably misconstrue it, and sin afterwards because of it through shameful thoughts, through malicious gossip about her, about others, and sin in deed as well. You ought rather to wish that there should be no talk about you, any more than there is of the dead, and be glad if you have to put up with the insolence of Slurry the cook's boy, who washes and wipes dishes in the kitchen; then you are mountains raised towards heaven. For look how the lady says in that sweet book of love, *My beloved is coming, leaping in the mountains, leaping over the hills.*<sup>5</sup> 'My beloved', she says, 'is coming, leaping on the mountains, leaping over the hills.' The mountains signify those who lead the highest life; the hills are those who are lower. Now she says that her beloved leaps on the mountains; that is, tramples on them, fouls them, lets them be trodden down, shamefully maltreated, reveals in them his own footprints so that people should follow in them, discover how he was trodden down, as his footprints show. These are the high mountains, like the Alps or the mountains of Armenia. As the lady says, her beloved leaps over the hills, which are lower, and relies less on them because their weakness could not endure such trampling-down. And he leaps over

them, spares and avoids them until they grow higher, from hills into mountains. But at least his shadow passes over and covers them while he is leaping over them; that is, he casts on them some image of his life on earth, as if it were his shadow. But the mountains are imprinted with his own footmarks, and he shows in their life what his way of living was like, how and where he went, in what abasement, in what misery he led his life on earth. The virtuous Paul spoke of such mountains, and humbly said, *We are cast down but not destroyed, carrying around the mortification of Jesus in our bodies, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*<sup>6</sup> 'We suffer all kinds of misery and shame,' he said, 'but that is our blessedness, that we bear Christ's mortification on our bodies, so that it may be revealed in us what his life on earth was like'. Certainly those who act like this prove to us their love for our Lord. 'Do you love me? Show it!' For love will show itself through external actions. *Gregory: The proof of love is its demonstration in practice.*<sup>7</sup> However hard anything may be, true love makes it easy and smooth and pleasant. *Love makes everything easy.* What do men and women suffer for false love and for filthy love, and would gladly suffer more? And what is more amazing than that a love that is stable and true and sweeter than any other should have less power over us than the love of sin? Even so, I know someone who wears a heavy coat of mail and a hair-shirt,<sup>8</sup> both together, tightly bound with iron around waist, thighs, and arms, with broad thick fetters, so that the sweat from it is agony to bear. He fasts, keeps vigil, labours, and, believe it or not, complains that it does not trouble him, and often asks me to teach him some way of making his body suffer. Everything that is bitter seems sweet to him for the love of our Lord. Heaven knows, he still complains to me of the most intense distress, and says that God is forgetting him because he does not send him any major illness. Certainly it is love that does that; because as he often says to me, it does not seem to him that for any harm that God might inflict on him, even if he threw him into hell with the damned, he could love him the less. If anybody suspects anything of this kind of him, he is more embarrassed than a thief caught in the

act. I also know a woman like this, who suffers little less. But all that can be done is to give thanks to God for the strength that he grants them, and humbly acknowledge our weakness. Let us love their goodness, and in that way it is our own; because as St Gregory says, love has so much strength that it makes others' goodness our own without any effort, as was said above. Now, it seems to me, we have arrived at the seventh part, which is all about the love that makes the heart pure.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is from Bella Millet, *Ancrene Wisse, Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation* (2009).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Mark 16:1.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The author has previously explained that the name "Mary" signifies "bitterness," which he here associates with salvific suffering.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This statement refers to a different Mary: Jesus's mother, Mary, who is believed to have conceived her son miraculously, as a virgin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Song of Songs 2:8.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: 1 Corinthians 4:9–10.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: From Homily 30 on the Gospels, by St. Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604; pope, 590–604).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A garment of extremely coarse cloth, designed to irritate the skin and worn as a means of penitential suffering. In this case, the pious man wears the hair-shirt under a suit of chainmail armor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This is the final sentence of Part 6 of the *Guide*.[Return to reference 9](#)



# CLEMENCE OF BARKING

## fl. ca. 1180

*The Life of Saint Catherine* tells the story of a beautiful noblewoman who relies on her wit and courage to challenge a wicked emperor and remain faithful to her beloved. Described this way, Catherine sounds like the heroine of a chivalric romance, or one of the *lais* of Marie de France (see [pp. 159–90](#))—except that her lover is Jesus Christ and her story is written by a nun. “I who have translated her life am called Clemence by name. I am a nun at Barking. For the love of her I took this work in hand,” declares the author of the *Life*. This is the only biographical evidence we have for Clemence, but it tells us a good deal. She was evidently part of the community at Barking Abbey in the later twelfth century. Barking was a large and prosperous religious house first established in the seventh century and renowned for the learned women who lived there. Not only was Clemence an accomplished writer in Anglo-Norman French (the language of the *Life of Saint Catherine*), but she must have been an adroit Latinist as well: she explains that she adapted Catherine’s story by “transposing it from Latin into the vernacular, so that it will be more pleasing to those who hear it.” In the twelfth century, the community at Barking Abbey was closely connected to royal and noble circles, where romance literature circulated. Many distinctive elements of the *Life of Saint Catherine*—its intelligent and active heroine, its rhetoric of exalted love, the conflict between an individual and her society, and its rhyming octosyllabic couplets—are

shared with the contemporary romance tradition in Anglo-Norman French.

However, the *Life of Saint Catherine* also belongs to a genre quite different from romance. It is a hagiography, or “writing about the saint,” which recounts the death and miracles of a virgin martyr, someone killed for holding fast to the Christian faith. Here the protagonist is Catherine of Alexandria, thought to have been executed in the early fourth century under Roman rulers who were persecuting Christians. According to the account widely known in the Middle Ages, Catherine is imprisoned, tortured, and ultimately beheaded, but she miraculously suffers no pain, and the spectacle of her persecution leads many to convert to Christianity. In visual depictions, Catherine is often shown with a spiked “breaking wheel,” an instrument of torture, said to have miraculously shattered at her touch, as well as with the sword ultimately used to behead her and a book symbolizing her great learning. In the medieval period, hagiographic *vitae* (lives) of Christian saints constituted an exceedingly popular genre, and one of its pleasures for medieval readers was its unique combination of historical distance and identification. The bloody persecutions under Rome were almost a millennium distant from life at Barking Abbey. Nuns reading Clemence’s text might have marveled at the exotic, violent world depicted. But they could also identify themselves with Catherine’s virtue and faith, treating her heroic Christianity as an ideal as they faced spiritual struggles of their own.



**V**irgo sca  
 thrax  
 na grece ge  
 ma. urbe ale  
 xandria co  
 sti regis erat  
 filia. **V** Dif  
 fusa ē gratia  
 in labris tu

16 **R** Propterea benedixit te deus  
 in eternum. **Oratio**

**D**eus qui dedisti legem mor  
 si. in summitate montis  
 synai 2 in eodem loco. per sanctos  
 angelos tuos. corpus beate fra  
 thrine uirginis 2 martiris tue  
 mirabiliter collocasti tribue  
 quesumus. ut eius meritis et  
 intercessione ad montem qui  
 xpistus est ualeamus perue  
 ire. Per xpistum domnu no  
 strum. Amen

De sancte marguerite. n

**Catherine of Alexandria**, French prayer book, ca. 1490.

Catherine is depicted with a breaking wheel and sword, two instruments of her martyrdom, and with a book, representing her great learning.

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Unlikely as it may sound, Clemence has made the *Life of Saint Catherine* a decidedly humorous text. Her Catherine is not only well-educated and eloquent but a satirical wit, skewering pagan beliefs to reveal their absurdity and elevate Christian doctrine. All of the emperor's attempts to hurt Catherine backfire, and his tyrannical violence ends up proving his own impotence and God's power. This development corresponds with a larger pattern of inversion and paradox, in which earthly riches are made worthless and (physical) death becomes (spiritual) life. Throughout the *Life*, Clemence foregrounds the power of Catherine's speech. Many visual and narrative depictions of virgin martyrs concentrate attention on the stripped and mutilated, but still beautiful, body of the saint (much like those texts in "God's Body," [pp. 215–84](#), that focus on Jesus Christ's wounded but exalted flesh). By contrast, Clemence de-emphasizes the bodily spectacle of Catherine's persecution. Her words dwell less on virgin lives and holy deaths and more on Catherine's own words, using them to represent a remarkably articulate heroine for a learned readership that would have included literate women.



# ***From The Life of Saint Catherine***<sup>1</sup>

## **[CATHERINE DEBATES WITH THE EMPEROR AND HIS PHILOSOPHERS]**

\* \* \*

The king looked at the maiden and then addressed the clerks: 'Lords, what has happened to you? Have you all lost your wits? Why are you struck dumb and dismayed on account of a woman? Nothing like this has ever happened before. I think our gods do not care about us when you are all incapable of defending yourselves against a weak young girl. You are fifty men of great intellect, and against her you have no defence. There was never so great a shame as yours, if you are beaten. Lords,' he said, 'now reply. Defend my honour and my law, for we shall all end up being shamed if we do not win the victory.'

At this one of the clerks, who was very worthy and wise, replied: 'Truly,' he said, 'lord emperor, since our mothers bore us, we have never heard a woman speak so, or debate so wisely. She is not revealing foolish things to us, but matters full of truth. Her argument was mainly about the godhead.<sup>2</sup> No one with whom we might have debated was ever able to stand up to us so. He who thought himself wise at the outset thought himself a fool at the end. I have never seen a clerk, however skilled, whom I could not have forced to surrender. But I cannot refute her claims, for I see nothing wrong with them. It is no small thing that this lady advances against us. She speaks of the creator of the world and confounds our gods with the truth. We no longer know what to say to her, for our cause is false. We truly believe in her God, who created everything from nothing. From the moment this lady spoke to us about Jesus Christ's holy cross, his name, his power, his death and his birth, all our

wisdom fled and we were completely overcome. We believe in him with all our hearts; we shall say nothing else to you.'

The tyrant heard what he said and became very angry. He sighed deeply from the bottom of his heart and was filled with vexation. His heart became aflame with fierce rage. Then he commanded a great pyre to be constructed in the sight of all the inhabitants of the city and ordered the clerks to be bound and thrown into the fire all together. The pyre was quickly prepared and the clerks were seized and tightly bound. They were all soon led towards the blaze, but they did not fear a thing. One began to call out and cried to his fellows: 'Oh, dear companions, what shall we do, now that we believe in the good God who has done us such great honour that we have abandoned our error, who shows us the right way to live and who invites us to come to him by way of martyrdom? Let us first have ourselves baptized and blessed with his holy cross before we lose this life, which we lead with great sorrow.' Everyone cried out with one voice and called upon God's beloved to regenerate and cleanse them through baptism.

The maiden comforted them in kindly fashion and exhorted them to good deeds. 'Lords,' she said, 'do not be afraid. Take comfort in the creator and, I beg you, have no anxiety about baptism, my dear friends.<sup>3</sup> You are all washed in the blood of God and reborn through his death. Through the flame which you see here you will receive the Holy Spirit.' With that the men-at-arms arrived and dragged the clerks towards the fire. They threw them in with great fury, and in that way they suffered their martyrdom on the thirteenth day of November, for love of the good creator who never forgets his faithful servants. He is always ready to help them, for in their life and in their death his support never fails them. Blessed is he who serves him well, for this service is never in vain.

Lords,<sup>4</sup> you have heard very clearly how these martyrs met their end. Their suffering ended in death and thereby they gained true life. Through this death they escaped the eternal death in which they lived before. For if they had not put their belief in God, they would all have been eternally lost. But the good lord did not wish

them to have to perish in that way. Through his grace, which encompasses everything, he drew them to him in his mercy.

I wish to recount a miracle which God deigned to perform on their behalf. Those who were thrown into the fire and had lain there for a long time were not in the slightest injured or consumed by the flame, nor was their fine colour spoilt or their clothing damaged. The good Jesus so protected them that not a single hair on their head was harmed. Their complexions appeared so fresh that you would not have realized they were dead. Such a lord is deserving of love who can so honour his own. He feeds the souls in heaven above and honours the bodies here below. He feeds them there by his presence and preserves their bodies here by his power. His mercy is very great and his goodness ineffable, since he maintains his friends in this way and draws his enemies to him. Whoever hates him he loves dearly, and anyone who flees him he calls back. Oh, how gentle he is and how good, since he never fails his own! He governs everything, and everything is his, for he alone is good in all ways. Everything he has created is good, for all things experience his goodness. He never created anything without its experiencing his excellence. All things were created good, no matter how they have since changed. God never created anything bad, and it would be great folly to dare to say that individuals are predestined to sin against their will, or that they are forced to do evil in spite of a wish to avoid it. Everyone ought to blame themselves for the evil they do and thank God for the good. For it is from him alone that our good comes; he alone can curb evil. He binds evil and destroys it, and his great goodness is experienced by all. These clerks experienced his goodness when they converted to him; they came to scorn him, and he made them convert to him. He loved them; they hated him. He pursued them; they fled from him. He reached them with his goodness and brought them back to the rightful truth. Through death he called them to life, and with his help they won it indeed. Through death they had to seek life, and through their battle they won peace. The good God who deigned to save them did not wish to forget their bodies. He rewarded their souls and kept their bodies from the flames. They

remained whole and beautiful; the flame was never able to touch them. Many who saw this miracle converted to God's law. The Christians removed the bodies by night and buried them all.

The tyrant saw what was happening and he found it extremely distressing and hard to bear. The shame he had undergone filled him with anguish, but when he saw that nothing could be done, he turned towards the maiden. He addressed her with these words: 'Oh, fair maiden, how lovely your face is. Those eyes are so well set; they always seem to have a wise smile in them. No mortal woman born on this earth can be compared to you in beauty. A mantle of royal purple would be very fitting for that beautiful body. Now consider your youth and follow our true path. It would certainly make me very happy if you would believe me. I suffer greatly on your account, fair one, since you scorn our law and consider our gods false and worthless and full of the enemy's cunning. Fair friend, leave this be, for you have good reason to fear that they may take vengeance on you; they are very merciful in their patience. If you were to take my advice, you would sacrifice to our gods. You will certainly have great honour from doing so. You will be in second palace in my place, and together with the queen you will possess all my realm, except for her dowry, for I do not wish to wrong her in that regard. No distinction will be made between you except for the bed in which she will lie. Those whom you wish to honour in court will truly be able to boast of honour and no one will be able to elevate those whom you wish to abase. I shall do even more for you if you will do what I wish. I shall have an image cast and have it honoured in your name. It will stand in the middle of my palace and hold a beautiful sceptre in its hand; all those who see it will greet it with humility. If there is anyone so bold as to pass by without a salutation, he will be considered as guilty as anyone who desired to harm me. No one will have committed a crime so great that it cannot be immediately pardoned if he has bowed low to this image and cried to it for mercy. I shall do you still greater honour, so that no one could do greater. In addition to my other promises, among the temples built for the goddesses I shall make one of marble in



your name; no one will ever have seen one richer.' This he said and a good deal more besides.

The lady heard what he said and smiled. Very politely she said to him, by way of a witty little joke: 'Oh, how fortunate I am, since I am to be turned into gold! I'll have a statue in my name, and people will humbly venerate me. I shall be cast entirely in gold and adored like a goddess. It will suit me quite well, even if it is made of silver. If it is of a baser metal, upon my word, there is no harm in that. Whatever the metal it is cast in, I shall be hugely honoured by it, and you will be able to cast a body for it but without being able to give it life. Now tell me, if you can, the source and nature of the matter which makes mortal bodies live and gives them sight and hearing, so that they can speak and hear, walk, see and feel. If my statue does not possess such capabilities, its body will certainly be of little value. Its wisdom will be of little use to it since it cannot hear or speak. Now you will perhaps reply that this statue, which will be made in my name and worshipped by your followers, will bring me great glory. Oh, what honour they will do me when they speak such praise of me as "This is Catherine who abandoned her God and her faith". King, I do not care for such honour, for praise like that is really blame. Emperor, as long as you live, you will be able to force your men to do this honour to me, either from fear or love of you, but tell me what the birds which fly over me will do? Will they spare me on your account, so as not to alight on me? In no time at all they will have pecked out my eyes and sullied my shining face. Even your dogs will abuse me. Such, king, is your praise. Therefore, I say to you, emperor, that you should abandon your error, for it is worldly glory and folly. Anyone who believes this is certainly very foolish. I shall not believe you, now or ever, so you labour in vain. For Jesus Christ, my bridegroom, so desires my love that the two of us have already made a covenant that I am his beloved and he is my lover. He is my renown and my honour; he is my glory and my worth. He is my pleasure and my comfort, my sweetness and my delight. I love him so much that I cannot be parted from him; for I love him alone, and him alone do I desire. I am fully aware that he loves me in

return and I for my part love him with such faith that I shall never abandon him for anything which anyone may say to me.'

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is from Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths* (1996).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Essence or substance of God.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Christian doctrine requires baptism to enter the kingdom of God, but martyrdom could act equivalently, as Catherine assures the philosophers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Clemence's use of the masculine "Lords" (in Anglo-Norman French, *segnurs*) suggests that she does not envision an audience made up exclusively of other nuns.[Return to reference 4](#)

## GOD'S BODY

The literary and visual representation of the godhead is necessarily, in any religion, a powerful index of religious culture. In some religions, indeed, visual representation of God is such a sensitive issue that it is forbidden altogether. Christian culture has experienced moments of severe hostility to visual representation (for example, in the Reformation period of the sixteenth century), but has, in general, permitted images of God (and especially of God-become-man, Christ). In the later Middle Ages in Europe, the bodily representation of Christ became a central preoccupation for writers, readers, and visual artists.

In the late eleventh century, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1099) developed a new conception of the Atonement (“at-one-ment”), the act whereby humans are reconciled with God after the separation caused by Original Sin. An earlier theory had posited that the Atonement was the solution to a dispute between God and the Devil concerning property rights over mankind. In his tract *Why Did Christ Become Man?* Anselm argued instead that the real center of the Atonement was mankind’s moral responsibility to pay God back. Humanity needed to repay God for the sin committed, but was unable to do so. Faced with this impasse, God could either simply abolish the debt, or else *become human*, in order to repay himself, as it were. God chose this latter route, allowing Christ to suffer and die as a human in order to clear the debt.

Earlier representations of the Crucifixion had tended to place the accent on Christ as impassive king, standing erect on the Cross,

come to claim his property of mankind. In *The Dream of the Rood* (see [pp. 33–37](#)), for example, Christ's suffering is for the most part absorbed by the Cross itself, while Christ is represented as a conquering, royal hero. Later medieval representations of Christ, by contrast, accentuate the suffering, sagging, lacerated body of a very human God. In this newly conceived theology, Christ's suffering humanity takes center stage. The artistic significance of this massively influential development was itself massive. Certainly the older tradition survived in vital form: compare, for example, the triumphalist lyric "What is he, this lordling, that cometh from the fight?" with the quiet suffering of "Ye that pasen by the weye." Langland's Christ, too, comes to claim his property as a conquering hero. It was, nonetheless, the tradition of Christ suffering in his humanity that dominated literary and visual art from the thirteenth century until the Reformation began in 1517.

These theological developments had forceful artistic and stylistic consequences. Because the theology was best expressed through visual or verbal images, it fed readily into both painting and a highly pictorial literature. In both painting and literature, a humble style, focusing on the particularities of bodily pain and grief, became the bearer of high theological significance. The painting of Giotto (1266?–1337), for example, broke with a prior tradition of painting that represented an elegant Christ against a splendid gold background; Giotto's inelegant and crucified Christ suffers under the pull of his own weight. Spiritual experience was, in the first instance, something *seen* more than something *thought*. It was also a spirituality rooted in the dramatic present: as one saw Christ, one saw him in the here and now. Thus works in this almost cinematic mode foreshorten historical and geographical distance: such texts encourage readers, that is, to imagine that they are physically and emotionally present at the crucial scenes of Christ's life. In some examples of the tradition, viewers are encouraged to imagine those around Christ (especially Romans and Jews) as wholly responsible for the infliction of pain; in others, viewers are made to realize that they are themselves responsible for the continued suffering of Christ.

As deployed by the Church, this movement discouraged abstract thought. It did nevertheless have the effect of widening access to spiritual experience, and, in ways unforeseen by official sponsors of such piety, could be the springboard for sophisticated theology. As the Church attempted to deepen the spiritual literacy of its members from the late twelfth century on, emphasis on Christ's humanity in art and literature opened powerful spiritual experience to a much wider audience of readers and viewers. To engage in this spirituality, a public did not need to be versed in detailed matters of doctrine. Instead, a reader or viewer had to develop the capacity for sympathetic response to physical suffering. Such spirituality gained official impetus through the foundation of the Franciscan order of friars (1223), who promoted earthly poverty in imitation of, and emotional response to, Christ's sufferings. The centrality of Christ's living presence in the liturgy was, furthermore, reaffirmed and extended with the establishment, throughout Christendom, of the Feast of Corpus Christi (the Feast of the Body of Christ), first proclaimed by the pope in 1264 and again in 1311. This feast celebrated the Eucharistic host, or wafer, as Christ's body. It grew steadily in popularity and came to involve outdoor processions depicting the biblical foreshadowings of the Eucharist, as a prelude to display of the Eucharist itself. In some medieval English cities this was the day also chosen for the performance of cycle plays, sometimes known as the plays of Corpus Christi.

Female readers in particular, who had been excluded from the Latin-based, textual traditions of theology, discovered fertile ground in this tradition of so-called affective, or emotional, piety. Through such emotive imagining, one gained an apparently unmediated, and potentially authoritative, relation with Christ. But women working in this tradition did not necessarily remain within its visual, imaginative terms: Julian of Norwich is, for example, capable of developing subtle and abstract thought, holding the incarnate image in view all the while.

This powerfully emotional piety also provoked wider social applications of the Christian narrative. Whereas "The Parable of the

Christ Knight" in the *Ancrene Wisse* presents a suffering Christ as an aristocratic lover for a select spiritual elite of women, the Christ of Margery Kempe is very much the "homely" husband of a bourgeois woman (see in particular Book 1, Chapter 36). On a much larger scale, the mystery plays mark the moment in which urban institutions represent Christ for themselves. In these dramas, both Old and New Testament narrative is inflected by the trials of domestic and urban experience (on the origins, civic sponsorship, and production of these plays, see the introduction to "Mystery Plays," [p. 247](#)).

# MIDDLE ENGLISH INCARNATION AND CRUCIFIXION LYRICS

Many religious lyrics were written down and preserved. These were mostly written by anonymous clerics, but in rare instances we know at least the name of an author. Seventeen poems by the Franciscan William Herebert are collected in a single manuscript. In his dramatic lyric printed here, the main speaker is the Christ-knight, returning from the Crucifixion, which is treated as a battle the way it is in *The Dream of the Rood* and in Passus 18 of *Piers Plowman*. The famous image from Isaiah 63:2 of the figure treading grapes in a winepress is compared to Christ in his blood-stained garments.

The religious lyrics are for the most part devotional poems that depend on the Latin Bible and liturgy of the Church. "What is he, this lordling . . . ," the passage from Isaiah adapted by Herebert, was part of a lesson in a mass performed during Holy Week. But the diction of that poem, though there are a few French loanwords, is predominantly of English origin. Many of the poems, like Herebert's, contain an element of drama: "Ye That Pasen by the Weye" is spoken by Christ from the Cross to all wayfarers; similar verses are spoken by the crucified Christ to the crowd (as well as to the audience) in the mystery plays of the Crucifixion.

Among the most beautiful and tender lyrics are those about the Virgin Mary, who is the greatest of all queens and ladies. They celebrate Mary's joys, sorrows, and the mystery of her virgin motherhood. "Sunset on Calvary," a tableau of Mary at the foot of

the Cross, contains an implicit play upon English "sun," which is setting, and the "son," who is dying but, like the sun, will rise again. Like love songs, the Marian lyrics often celebrate the mysteries of the natural world and thus defy any simple division of medieval lyric into "secular" or "religious" poetry. "I Sing of a Maiden" visualizes the conception of Jesus in terms of the falling dew, and he steals silently to her bower like a lover. "Adam Lay Bound" cheerfully treats the original sin as though it were a child's theft of an apple, which had the happy result of making Mary the Queen of Heaven. "The Corpus Christi Carol" has the form of a lullaby but penetrates by stages to the heart of a mystery similar to the Holy Grail, the chalice that contained Christ's blood, which continues to flow, as it does in this carol, for humanity's salvation.



# What is he, this lordling, that cometh from the fight<sup>1</sup>

"What is he, this lordling,<sup>2</sup> that cometh from the  
fight

With blood-rede wede so grislich ydight,<sup>3</sup>

So faire ycountised,<sup>4</sup> so semelich in sight,<sup>4</sup>

So stiflich he gangeth,<sup>5</sup> so doughty<sup>6</sup> a knight?"

5 "Ich<sup>7</sup> it am, ich it am, that ne speke but right,<sup>6</sup>  
Champioun to helen<sup>8</sup> mankinde in fight."

"Why then is thy shroud rede, with blood al ymeind,  
As troddares in wringe with must al bespreind?"<sup>7</sup>

10 "The wring ich have ytrodded al myself one<sup>9</sup>  
And of<sup>10</sup> al mankinde was none other wone.<sup>10</sup>  
Ich hem<sup>8</sup> have ytrodded in wrathe and in game,<sup>11</sup>  
And al my wede is bespreind with here blood  
ysame,<sup>9</sup>  
And al my robe yfouled<sup>12</sup> to here grete shame.  
The day of th'ilke wreche<sup>1</sup> liveth in my thought;

15 The yeer of medes yelding ne foryet ich nought.<sup>2</sup>  
Ich looked al aboute some helping mon;<sup>3</sup>  
Ich soughte al the route,<sup>4</sup> but help nas ther non.  
It was mine owne strengthe that this bote<sup>13</sup> wrought,  
Mine owne doughtinesse that help ther me brought.<sup>5</sup>  
20 Ich have ytrodded the folk in wrathe and in game,  
Adreint al with shennesse, ydrawe down with  
shame." <sup>6</sup>

"On Godes milsfulnesse<sup>o</sup> ich wil bethenche me,<sup>7</sup>  
And herien<sup>o</sup> him in alle thing that he yeldeth<sup>o</sup> me."

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poem, by William Herebert (d. 1333), paraphrases Isaiah 63:1–7, in which the "lordling" (lord's son) is a messianic figure returning from battle against the Edomites.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Who is this lord's son?[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With blood-red garment, so terribly arrayed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: So fair to behold.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: So boldly he goes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Who speaks only what is right.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Why then is thy garment red, all stained with blood, like treaders in the winepress all spattered with must (the juice of the grapes).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Them, that is, humankind symbolized by the grapes in the press. Compare line 20.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: And my garment is all spattered with their blood together.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That same vengeance (perhaps Judgment Day).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I do not forget the year of paying wages.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I looked all around for some man to help (me).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: I searched the whole crowd.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: My own valor brought help to me there.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: All drowned with ignominy, pulled down with shame.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I will bethink myself.[Return to reference 7](#)

# Notes

- °: *appareled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *valiant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *save*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hope*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soiled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mercy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *praise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gives*[Return to reference](#) °

# Ye That Pasen by the Weye

Ye that pasen by the weye,  
Abidet a little stounde.<sup>o</sup>  
Beholdet, all my felawes,  
Yif<sup>o</sup> any me lik is founde.<sup>8</sup>  
5 To the tre with nailes thre  
Wol<sup>o</sup> fast I hange bounde;  
With a spere all thoru my side  
To mine herte is made a wounde.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Lines 1–4 paraphrase Lamentations 1:12. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *while* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *if* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *very* [Return to reference °](#)

# Sunset on Calvary

Now gooth sunne under wode:<sup>9</sup>

Me reweth,<sup>1</sup> Marye, thy faire rode.<sub>°</sub>

Now gooth sunne under tree:

Me reweth, Marye, thy sone and thee.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Both the woods and the wooden Cross.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: I pity.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *face*[Return to reference °](#)

# I Sing of a Maiden

I sing of a maiden  
That is makelees:<sup>2</sup>  
King of alle kinges  
To<sup>o</sup> her sone she chees.<sup>o</sup>

5 He cam also<sup>o</sup> stille  
Ther<sup>o</sup> his moder<sup>o</sup> was  
As dewe in Aprille  
That falleth on the gras.

10 He cam also stille  
To his modres bowr  
As dewe in Aprille  
That falleth on the flowr.

15 He cam also stille  
Ther his moder lay  
As dewe in Aprille  
That falleth on the spray.

20 Moder and maiden  
Was nevere noon but she:  
Wel may swich<sup>o</sup> a lady  
Godes moder be.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Spotless, matchless, and mateless—a triple pun.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mother* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *such* [Return to reference](#) °

# Adam Lay Bound

Adam lay ybounden, bounden in a bond,  
Four thousand winter thoughte he not too long;  
And al was for an apple, an apple that he took,  
As clerkes finden writen, writen in hire book.  
5 Ne hadde<sup>o</sup> the apple taken been, the apple taken  
been,  
Ne hadde nevere Oure Lady ybeen hevene Queen.  
Blessed be the time that apple taken was:  
Therefore we mown<sup>o</sup> singen *Deo Gratias*.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Thanks be to God (Latin). [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *had not* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *may* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>



# The Corpus Christi Carol

Lully, lullay, lully, lullay,  
The faucon<sup>o</sup> hath borne my make<sup>o</sup> away.

He bare him up, he bare him down,  
He bare him into an orchard brown.

5 In that orchard ther was an hall  
That was hanged with purple and pall.<sup>o</sup>

And in that hall ther was a bed:  
It was hanged with gold so red.

10 And in that bed ther lith<sup>o</sup> a knight,  
His woundes bleeding by day and night.

By that beddes side ther kneeleth a may,<sup>o</sup>  
And she weepeth both night and day.

And by that beddes side ther standeth a stoon<sup>o</sup>  
*Corpus Christ*<sup>4</sup> writen thereon.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Body of Christ (Latin). [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *falcon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black velvet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *maid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stone*[Return to reference](#) °

# **JULIAN OF NORWICH**

## **ca. 1342–ca. 1416**

The “Showings,” or “Revelations” as they are also called, were sixteen mystical visions received by the woman known as Julian of Norwich. The name may be one that she adopted when she became an anchoress in a cell attached to the church of St. Julian that still stands in that city in East Anglia, then one of the most important English cities. An anchorite (m.) or anchoress (f.) is a religious recluse confined to an enclosure, which he or she has vowed never to leave. At the time of such an enclosing the burial service was performed, signifying that the enclosed person was dead to the world and that the enclosure corresponded to a grave. The point of this confinement was, of course, to pursue more actively the contemplative or spiritual life. The thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* (see [pp. 206–10](#)) served as a guide to such a life.

Julian may well have belonged to a religious order at the time that her visions led her to choose the life of an anchoress. We know little about her except what she tells us in her writings. She is, however, very precise about the date of her visions. They occurred, she tells us, at the age of thirty and a half on May 13, 1373. Four extant wills bequeath sums for Julian’s maintenance in her anchorage. The most important document witnessing her life is *The Book of Margery Kempe* (see [p. 232](#), below). Kempe asked Julian whether there might be any deception in Kempe’s own visions, “for the anchoress,” she says, “was expert in such things.” Kempe’s

description of Julian's conversation accords well with the doctrines and personality that emerge from Julian's own book.

*A Book of Showings* survives in a short and a long version. The longer text, from which the following excerpts are taken, was the product of fifteen and more years of meditation on the meaning of the visions in which much had been obscure to Julian. Apparently the mystical experiences were never repeated, but through constant study and contemplation the showings acquired a greater clarity, richness, and profundity as they continued to be turned over in a mind both gifted with spiritual insight and learned in theology. Her editors document her extensive use of the Bible and her familiarity with medieval religious writings in both English and Latin.

Julian's sixteen revelations are each treated in uneven numbers of chapters; these groupings of chapters form an extended meditation on a given vision. Each vision is treated with an unpredictable combination of visual description of what Julian saw, the words she was offered, and the meanings she "saw." Her visions are, in her words, "ghostly" (that is, spiritual), "bodily," and subtle combinations of the two. They embrace powerful visual phenomena such as blood drops running from the crown of thorns and revelations that take place in pure mind. All are, nevertheless, "seen"; the spiritualized meanings do not render bodily sights redundant.

Of the selections here, [Chapters 3](#) and [86](#) are from the opening and closing sequences of the work; [Chapters 4](#), [5](#), and [7](#) are from the First Vision; [Chapter 27](#), from the Thirteenth Vision; and [Chapters 58, 59, 60, and 61](#), from the great Fourteenth Vision.

Julian's First Vision is rooted in, but moves beyond, the tradition of affective piety described in the headnote to this section on [pages 215–16](#). The vision is provoked by Julian's own bodily approximation to the bodily pains of Christ, as she thinks she is dying. The crucifix offered for her comfort provokes a kinetic, fresh response, as it seems to move into life, bleeding and persuading Julian that the vision is God's unmediated gift to her. Julian moves well beyond this initial sight, however; she sees a sequence of created things: the Virgin Mary as the best creature that God made, and, lower down

the scale, the entire world in her palm, "the quantity of an hazelnut." Such a vision might lead away from created things altogether into a realm of pure essence; significantly, it does not, precisely because Julian never leaves the sight of the wounded, bodily Christ, whose physical suffering is somehow simultaneous with these almost immaterial visions. Julian strains the tradition of affective piety to its limits, but ends by transforming rather than rejecting it.





**Reading and Vision.** *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, ca. 1475. This extraordinary and utterly impossible view makes perfect sense as a vision of what the woman envisions from her reading.

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The serene optimism Julian's visions express for the material, created world and for fallen creatures extends into the most daring and surprising realms of speculation. "Sin is behovely": these are (Julian's) Christ's own words. They are expressed in the Thirteenth Vision for the first time ([Chapter 27](#)), but only in the extended, daring meditation of the Fourteenth Vision (not included in the shorter version of *The Book of Showings*) are they given their deepest sense. At the heart of Julian's profoundly optimistic theology is a transformative understanding of Christ's humanity. She develops, without ever mentioning it explicitly, the idea of the *felix culpa*: the notion that, given its happy consequence in Christ's redemption of mankind, Adam's sin, or *culpa*, was somehow "happy" (*felix*). Christ is so much a part of us, by Julian's account, that he is "the ground of our kind [natural/kind] making" ([Chapter 59](#)). He is our mother, who strains and suffers as he gives birth to our salvation. Julian's concept of Jesus as mother has antecedents in both the Old and New Testaments, in medieval theology, and in the writings of medieval mystics (both men and women), but nowhere else in Middle English writing is the concept so subtly and resonantly explored.

Julian was clearly aware of the dangers of expressing such high mysteries as a woman writer. She participates, it is true, in a late medieval tradition of visionary writing, often by women, such as the *Dialogue* of Catherine of Siena (translated into Middle English as the *Orchard of Syon*) and the *Revelations* of St. Bridget of Sweden (also translated into Middle English). Julian, however, does not refer to these figures; instead, she negotiates the difficulties and dangers of writing as a woman with enormous tact and shrewdness, both disclaiming and creating exceptional authority. Part of her strategy is to write with calm lucidity; part is to claim that the vision is not particular to her alone. Precisely by virtue of a common humanity, the visions are common property: "We are all one, and I am sure I saw it for the profit of many others."

# ***From A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The text is based on that given by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J., for the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto (1978), but it has been freely edited and modern spelling has been used where possible.[Return to reference 1](#)



## *Chapter 3*

### **[JULIAN'S BODILY SICKNESS AND THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST]**

And when I was thirty year old and a half, God sent me a bodily sickness in the which I lay three days and three nights; and on the fourth night I took all my rites of holy church, and went<sup>2</sup> not to have liven till day. And after this I lay two days and two nights; and on the third night I weened<sup>3</sup> oftentimes to have passed,<sup>4</sup> and so weened they that were with me. And yet in this I felt a great loathsomeness<sup>5</sup> to die, but for nothing that was on earth that me liketh to live for, ne<sup>6</sup> for no pain that I was afraid of, for I trusted in God of his mercy. But it was for I would have lived to have loved God better and longer time, that I might by the grace of that living have the more knowing and loving of God in the bliss of heaven. For me thought<sup>7</sup> all that time that I had lived here so little and so short in regard of <sup>8</sup> that endless bliss, I thought: Good Lord, may my living no longer be to thy worship?<sup>9</sup> And I understood by my reason and by the feeling of my pains that I should die; and I assented fully with all the will of my heart to be at God's will.

Thus I endured till day, and by then was my body dead from the middes downward, as to my feeling.<sup>1</sup> Then was I holpen<sup>2</sup> to be set upright, underset<sup>3</sup> with help, for to have the more freedom of my heart to be at God's will, and thinking on God while my life lasted. My curate was sent for to be at my ending, and before he came I had set up my eyen<sup>4</sup> and might not speak. He set the cross before my face and said: "I have brought the image of thy savior; look thereupon and comfort thee therewith." Me thought I was well, for my eyen was set upright into heaven, where I trusted to come by the mercy of God; but nevertheless I assented to set my eyen in the

face of the crucifix, if I might, and so I did, for me thought I might longer dure to look even forth than right up.<sup>5</sup> After this my sight began to fail. It waxed as dark about me in the chamber as if it had been night, save in the image of the cross, wherein held a common light; and I wist<sup>6</sup> not how. All that was beside the cross was ugly and fearful to me as<sup>7</sup> it had been much occupied with fiends.

After this the over<sup>8</sup> part of my body began to die so farforth that unneth<sup>9</sup> I had any feeling. My most pain was shortness of breath and failing of life. Then went<sup>1</sup> I verily to have passed. And in this suddenly all my pain was taken from me, and I was as whole, and namely in the over part of my body, as ever I was before. I marvelled of this sudden change, for me thought that it was a privy working of God, and not of kind;<sup>2</sup> and yet by feeling of this ease I trusted never more to have lived, ne the feeling of this ease was no full ease to me, for me thought I had liever<sup>3</sup> have been delivered of this world, for my heart was willfully set thereto.

Then came suddenly to my mind that I should desire the second wound of our Lord's gift and of his grace, that my body might be fulfilled with mind and feeling of his blessed passion, as I had before prayed,<sup>4</sup> for I would that his pains were my pains, with compassion and afterward longing to God. Thus thought me that I might with his grace have the wounds that I had before desired; but in this I desired never no bodily sight ne no manner showing of God, but compassion as me thought that a kind soul might have with our Lord Jesu, that for love would become a deadly<sup>5</sup> man. With him I desired to suffer, living in my deadly body, as God would give me grace.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Thought.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Supposed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Died.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Reluctance.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nor.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: I thought, [it] thought me.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In comparison with.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Glory.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As it felt to me.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Helped.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Supported.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Eyes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Endure to look straight ahead than straight up.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Knew.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: As if.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Upper.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To the extent that scarcely.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thought.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nature.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rather.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Julian had prayed for three gifts: direct experience of Christ's passion, mortal sickness, and the wounds of true contrition, loving compassion, and a willed desire for God.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mortal.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Chapter 4

### [CHRIST'S PASSION AND INCARNATION]

And in this suddenly I saw the red blood running down from under the garland, hot and freshly, plenteously and lively, right as it was in the time that the garland of thorns was pressed on his blessed head. Right so, both God and man, the same that suffered for me, I conceived truly and mightily that it was himself that shewed it me without any mean.<sup>6</sup>

And in the same showing suddenly the Trinity fulfilled my heart most of joy, and so I understood it shall be in heaven without end to all that shall come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our keeper, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is endless joy and our bliss, by our Lord Jesu Christ, and in our Lord Jesu Christ. And this was showed in the first sight and in all, for where Jesu appeareth, the blessed Trinity is understand, as to my sight.<sup>7</sup> And I said, "*Benedicite dominums.*"<sup>8</sup> This I said for reverence in my meaning,<sup>9</sup> with a mighty voice, and full greatly was I astoned<sup>1</sup> for wonder and marvel that I had, that he that is so reverend and so dreadful<sup>2</sup> will be so homely<sup>3</sup> with a sinful creature living in this wretched flesh.

Thus I took it for that time that our Lord Jesu of his courteous love would show me comfort before the time of my temptation; for me thought it might well be that I should by the sufferance of God and with his keeping be tempted of<sup>4</sup> fiends before I should die. With this sight of his blessed passion, with the godhead that I saw in my understanding, I knew well that it was strength enough to me, yea, and to all creatures living that should be saved, against all the fiends of hell, and against all ghostly<sup>5</sup> enemies.

In this he brought our Lady Saint Mary to my understanding; I saw her ghostly in bodily likeness, a simple maiden and a meek, young of age, a little waxen above a child,<sup>6</sup> in the stature as she was

when she conceived. Also God showed me in part the wisdom and the truth of her soul, wherein I understood the reverend beholding, that she beheld her God, that is her maker, marvelling with great reverence that he would be born of her that was a simple creature of his making. And this wisdom and truth, knowing the greatness of her maker and the littlehead<sup>7</sup> of herself that is made, made her to say full meekly to Gabriel: "Lo me here, God's handmaiden."<sup>8</sup> In this sight I did understand verily that she is more than all that God made beneath her in worthiness and in fullhead;<sup>9</sup> for above her is nothing that is made but the blessed manhood of Christ, as to my sight.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Intermediary.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Is understood, as I see it.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Blessed be the Lord (Latin).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Intention.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Astonished.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Awe-inspiring.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Familiar, intimate (the quality of being "at home").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Spiritual.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Grown a little older than a child.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Littleness.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Luke 1:38.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Perfection.[Return to reference 9](#)

## *Chapter 5*

### **[ALL CREATION AS A HAZELNUT]**

In this same time that I saw this sight of the head bleeding, our good Lord showed a ghostly sight of his homely loving. I saw that he is to us all thing that is good and comfortable to our help. He is our clothing that for love wrappeth us and windeth us, halseth us<sup>1</sup> and all beclothes us, hangeth about us for tender love that<sup>2</sup> he may never leave us. And so in this sight I saw that he is all thing that is good, as to my understanding.

And in this he showed a little thing, the quantity of an hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as me seemed, and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereon with the eye of my understanding, and thought: What may this be? And it was answered generally thus: It is all that is made. I marvelled how it might last, for me thought it might suddenly have fallen to nought for<sup>3</sup> littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasteth and ever shall, for God loveth it; and so hath all thing being by the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second that God loveth it, the third that God keepeth<sup>4</sup> it. But what beheld I therein? Verily, the maker, the keeper, the lover. For till I am substantially united to him<sup>5</sup> I may never have full rest ne very<sup>6</sup> bliss; that is to say that I be so fastened to him that there be right nought that is made between my God and me.

This little thing that is made, me thought it might have fallen to nought for littleness. Of this needeth us to have knowledge, that us liketh nought all thing that is made, for to love and have God that is unmade.<sup>7</sup> For this is the cause why we be not all in ease of heart and of soul, for we seek here rest in this thing that is so little, where no rest is in, and we know not our God, that is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is very rest. God will be known, and him liketh that we rest us in him; for all that is beneath him suffiseth not to us. And

this is the cause why that no soul is in rest till it is noughted of all things that is made.<sup>8</sup> When she is wilfully<sup>9</sup> noughted for love, to have him that is all, then is she able to receive ghostly rest.

And also our good Lord showed that it is full great pleasance to him that a sely<sup>1</sup> soul come to him naked, plainly and homely. For this is the kind<sup>2</sup> yearning of the soul by the touching of the Holy Ghost, as by the understanding that I have in this showing: God of thy goodness gave me thyself, for thou art enough to me, and I may ask nothing that is less that may be full worship to thee. And if I ask any thing that is less, ever me wanteth;<sup>3</sup> but only in thee I have all.

And these words of the goodness of God be full lovesome to the soul and full near touching the will of our Lord, for his goodness fulfilleth all his creatures and all his blessed works and overpasseth<sup>4</sup> without end. For he is the endlesshead and he made us only to himself and restored us by his precious passion,<sup>5</sup> and ever keepeth us in his blessed love; and all this is of his goodness.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Envelops us and embraces us.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: So that.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Because of.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Looks after.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Joined to him in “substance,” which Julian regards as the eternal essence of being.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: True.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, we need to know that we should not be attracted to earthly things, which are made, to love and possess God, who is not made, who exists eternally.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Emptied of (its attachment to) all created things.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Of its free will.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Innocent.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Natural.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I am forever lacking.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Surpasses.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Suffering.[Return to reference 5](#)



## *Chapter 7*

### **[CHRIST AS HOMELY AND COURTEOUS]**

And in all that time that he showed this that I have now said in ghostly sight, I saw the bodily sight lasting of the plenteous bleeding of the head. The great drops of blood fell down fro under the garland like pellets, seeming as it had come out of the veins. And in the coming out they were brown red, for the blood was full thick; and in the spreading abroad they were bright red. And when it came at the brows, there they vanished; and not withstanding the bleeding continued till many things were seen and understood. Nevertheless the fairhead and livelihead continued in the same beauty and liveliness.

The plenteoushead is like to the drops of water that fall of the evesing<sup>6</sup> of an house after a great shower of rain, that fall so thick that no man may number them with no bodily wit.<sup>7</sup> And for the roundness they were like to the scale of herring in the spreading of the forehead.

These three things came to my mind in the time: pellets for the roundhead<sup>8</sup> in the coming out of the blood, the scale of the herring for the roundhead in the spreading, the drops of the evesing of a house for the plenteoushead unnumerable. This showing was quick<sup>9</sup> and lively and hideous and dreadful and sweet and lovely; and of all the sight that I saw this was most comfort to me, that our good Lord, that is so reverend and dreadful, is so homely and so courteous, and this most fulfilled me with liking and sickness<sup>1</sup> in soule.

And to the understanding of this he showed this open example. It is the most worship<sup>2</sup> that a solemn king or a great lord may do to a poor servant if he will be homely with him; and namely if he show it himself of a full true meaning<sup>3</sup> and with a glad cheer both in private and openly. Then thinketh this poor creature thus: "Lo, what

might this noble lord do more worship and joy to me than to show to me that am so little this marvelous homeliness? Verily, it is more joy and liking to me than if he gave me great gifts and were himself strange in manner." This bodily example was showed so high that this man's heart might be ravished and almost forget himself for joy of this great homeliness.

Thus it fareth by our Lord Jesu and by us, for verily it is the most joy that may be, as to my sight, that he that is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is lowest and meekest, homeliest and courtesousest. And truly and verily this marvelous joy shall he show us all when we shall see him. And this will our good Lord that we believe and trust, joy and like, comfort us and make solace as we may with his grace and with his help, into<sup>4</sup> the time that we see it verily. For the most fullhead of joy that we shall have, as to my sight, is this marvelous courtesy and homeliness of our fader,<sup>5</sup> that is our maker, in our Lord Jesu Christ, that is our brother and our saviour. But this marvelous homeliness may no man know in this life, but if he have it by special showing of our Lord, or of great plenty of grace inwardly given of the Holy Ghost. But faith and belief with charity deserve the meed,<sup>6</sup> and so it is had by grace. For in faith with hope and charity our life is grounded. The showing is made to whom that God will, plainly teacheth the same opened and declared, with many privy points belonging to our faith and belief which be worshipful to be known. And when the showing which is given for a time is passed and hid, then faith keepeth it by grace of the Holy Ghost into our life's end. And thus by the showing it is none other than the faith, ne less ne more, as it may be seen by our Lord's meaning in the same matter, by then<sup>7</sup> it come to the last end.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Eaves.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Intelligence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Roundness.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Vivid.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Security.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Honor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Intent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Until.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Father. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Reward. "Charity": love. See 1 Corinthians 13:13.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: By the time that.[Return to reference 7](#)

## ***Chapter 27***

### **[SIN IS FITTING]**

And after this our Lord brought to my mind the longing that I had to him before; and I saw nothing letted<sup>8</sup> me but sin, and so I beheld generally in us all, and me thought that if sin had not been, we should all have been clean<sup>9</sup> and like to our Lord as he made us. And thus in my folly before this time often I wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the beginning of sin was not letted.<sup>1</sup> For then thought me that all should have been well.

This stering<sup>2</sup> was much to be forsaken; and nevertheless mourning and sorrow I made therefore without reason and discretion. But Jesu that in this vision informed me of all that me needed answered by this word and said: "Sin is behovely<sup>3</sup> but all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."<sup>4</sup> In this naked word "Sin," our Lord brought to my mind generally all that is not good, and the shameful despite<sup>5</sup> and the uttermost tribulation that he bore for us in this life, and his dying and all his pains, and passion<sup>6</sup> of all his creatures ghostly and bodily. For we be all in part troubled, and we shall be troubled, following our master Jesu, till we be fully purged of our deadly<sup>7</sup> flesh which be not very good.

And with the beholding of this, with all the pains that ever were or ever shall be, I understood the passion of Christ for the most pain and overpassing.<sup>8</sup> And with all, this was showed in a touch, readily passed over into comfort. For our good Lord would not that the soul were afeared of this ugly sight. But I saw not sin, for I believe it had no manner of substance, ne no part of being,<sup>9</sup> ne it might not be known but by the pain that is caused thereof. And this pain is something, as to my sight, for a time, for it purgeth and maketh us to know ourself and ask mercy; for the passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this, and so is his blessed will. And for the tender love that our good Lord hath to all that shall be saved, he

comforteth readily and sweetly, meaning thus: It is true that sin is cause of all this pain, but all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

These words were showed full tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me ne to none that shall be safe.<sup>1</sup> Then were it great unkindness of me to blame or wonder on God of my sin, sithen<sup>2</sup> he blameth not me for sin. And in these same words I saw an high marvelous privy<sup>3</sup> hid in God, which privy he shall openly make and shall be known to us in heaven. In which knowing we shall verily see the cause why he suffered sin to come, in which sight we shall endlessly have joy.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Hindered.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Pure.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Prevented.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fretting.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fitting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: T. S. Eliot quotes this statement, versions of which appear several times in the *Showings*, in the last movement of his *Four Quartets*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Spite.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Suffering.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mortal.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Exceeding (pain).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: On "substance" and "being," see chapter 5, p. 224 n. 5.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Saved.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Since.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Secret.[Return to reference 3](#)

*Chapters 58, 59, 60, 61*

**[JESUS AS MOTHER]**

## From *Chapter 58*

God the blessedful Trinity, which is everlasting being, right as he is endless fro without beginning,<sup>4</sup> right so it was in his purpose endless to make mankind,<sup>5</sup> which fair kind<sup>6</sup> first was dight to<sup>7</sup> for his own son, the second person; and when he would,<sup>8</sup> by full accord of all the Trinity he made us all at once.<sup>9</sup> And in our making he knit us and oned<sup>1</sup> us to himself, by which oneing we be kept as clean<sup>2</sup> and as noble as we were made. By the virtue of that ilke<sup>3</sup> precious oneing we love our maker and like<sup>4</sup> him, praise and thank him, and endlessly enjoy<sup>5</sup> in him. And this is the working which is wrought continually in each soul that shall be saved, which is the godly will before said.

And thus in our making God almighty is our kindly<sup>6</sup> father, and god all wisdom is our kindly mother, with the love and the goodness of the Holy Ghost, which is all one God, one Lord. And in the knitting and in the oneing he is our very true spouse and we his loved wife<sup>7</sup> and his fair maiden, with which wife he was never displeased. For he sayeth: "I love thee and thou lovest me, and our love shall never part in two."

I beheld the working of all the blessed Trinity, in which beholding I saw and understood these three properties: The property of the fatherhood, and the property of the motherhood, and the property of the lordship in one God. In our father almighty we have our keeping<sup>8</sup> and our bliss as anemptis<sup>9</sup> our kindly substance which is to us by our making fro without beginning.<sup>1</sup> And in the second person in wit<sup>2</sup> and wisdom we have our keeping as anemptis our sensuality<sup>3</sup> our restoring and our saving, for he is our mother, brother and savior. And in our good lord the Holy Ghost we have our rewarding and our yielding<sup>4</sup> for our living and our travail,<sup>5</sup> and endlessly overpassing<sup>6</sup> all that we desire in his marvelous courtesy of his high plenteous grace. For all our life is in three: in the first we have our

being, and in the second we have our increasing, and in the third we have our fulfilling. The first is kind,<sup>7</sup> the second is mercy, the third is grace.

For the first<sup>8</sup> I saw and understood that the high might of the Trinity is our father, and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our mother, and the great love of the Trinity is our lord; and all these have we in kind and in our substantial making. And furthermore I saw that the second person, which is our mother, substantially the same dearworthy person,<sup>9</sup> is now become our mother sensual,<sup>1</sup> for we be double of God's making, that is to say substantial and sensual. Our substance is the higher part, which we have in our father God almighty; and the second person of the Trinity is our mother in kind in our substantial making, in whom we be grounded and rooted, and he is our mother of mercy in our sensual taking.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*



## From *Chapter 59*

\* \* \*

And thus is Jesu our very<sup>3</sup> mother in kind of our first making, and he is our very mother in grace by taking of our kind made. All the fair working and all the sweet kindly offices of dearworthy motherhood is impropered to<sup>4</sup> the second person, for in him we have this goodly will, whole and safe without end, both in kind and in grace, of his own proper goodness.

I understood three manner of beholdings of motherhood in God. The first is ground of our kind making, the second is taking of our kind, and there beginneth the motherhood of grace, the third is motherhood in working.<sup>5</sup> And therein is a forthspreading<sup>6</sup> by the same grace of length and breadth, of high and of deepness without end. And all is one love.

## Chapter 60

But now me behooveth to say a little more of this forthspreading, as I understood, in the meaning of our Lord: how that we be brought again by the motherhood of mercy and grace into our kindly stead, where that we were in,<sup>7</sup> made by the motherhood of kind love, which kind love never leaveth us.

Our kind mother, our gracious mother (for he would<sup>8</sup> all wholly become our mother in all thing) he took the ground of his work full low<sup>9</sup> and full mildly in the maiden's womb. And that showed he first, where he brought that meek maiden before the eye of my understanding, in the simple stature as she was when she conceived;<sup>1</sup> that is to say our high god, the sovereign wisdom of all, in this low place he arrayed him and dight him<sup>2</sup> all ready in our poor flesh, himself to do the service, he and the office of motherhood in all thing. The mother's service is nearest, readiest, and surest: nearest for it is most of kind, readiest for it is most of love, and sikerest<sup>3</sup> for it is most of truth. This office ne might nor could never none doon to the full but he alone. We wit<sup>4</sup> that all our mothers bear us to pain and to dying. Ah, what is that? But our very Mother Jesu, he alone beareth us to joy and to endless living, blessed moot<sup>5</sup> he be. Thus he sustaineth us within him in love and travail, into the full time that he would suffer the sharpest thorns and grievous pains that ever were or ever shall be, and died at the last. And when he had done, and so borne us to bliss, yet might not all this make aseeth<sup>6</sup> to his marvelous love. And that showed he in these high overpassing words of love: "If I might suffer more I would suffer more."<sup>7</sup> He might no more die, but he would not stint<sup>8</sup> working.

Wherefore him behooveth to find<sup>9</sup> us, for the dearworthy love of motherhood hath made him debtor to us.<sup>1</sup> The mother may give her child sucken her milk, but our precious mother Jesu, he may feed us with himself, and doth full courteously and full tenderly with the blessed sacrament, that is precious food of very life; and with all the

sweet sacraments he sustaineth us full mercifully and graciously, and so meant he in these blessed words, where he said: "I it am that holy church preacheth thee and teacheth thee." That is to say: All the health and the life of sacraments, all the virtue and the grace of my word, all the goodness that is ordained in holy church to thee, I it am.

The mother may lay her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender mother Jesu, he may homely lead us into his blessed breast by his sweet open side,<sup>2</sup> and show us therein in party of<sup>3</sup> the godhead and the joys of heaven with ghostly sureness of endless bliss. And that showed he in the tenth revelation, giving the same understanding in this sweet word where he sayeth: "Lo, how I love thee." \* \* \*

This fair lovely word "Mother," it is so sweet and so kind in itself that it may not verily be said of none ne to none but of him and to him<sup>4</sup> that is very mother of life and of all. To the property of motherhood longeth<sup>5</sup> kind love, wisdom, and knowing, and it is God. For though it be so that our bodily forthbringing be but little, low, and simple in regard<sup>6</sup> of our ghostly forthbringing, yet it is he that doth it in the creatures by whom that it is done. The kind loving mother that woot<sup>7</sup> and knoweth the need of her child, she keepeth it full tenderly as the kind and condition of motherhood will. And ever as it waxeth<sup>8</sup> in age and in stature, she changeth her works but not her love. And when it is waxed of more age, she suffereth it that it be chastised in breaking down of vices to make the child receive virtues and grace. This working with all that be fair and good, our Lord doth it in hem by whom it is done. Thus he is our mother in kind by the working of grace in the lower party for love of the higher. And he will<sup>9</sup> that we know it, for he will have all our love fastened to him; and in this I saw that all debt that we owe by God's bidding to fatherhood and motherhood is fulfilled in true loving of God, which blessed love Christ worketh in us. And this was showed in all, and namely in the words where he sayeth: "I it am that thou lovest."

## ***Chapter 61***

And in our ghostly forthbringing he useth more tenderness in keeping without any comparison, by as much as our soul is of more price in his sight. He kindleth our understanding, he prepareth our ways, he easeth our conscience, he comforteth our soul, he lighteth our heart and giveth us in party knowing and loving in his blessedful godhead, with gracious mind in his sweet manhood and his blessed passion, with courteous marveling in his high overpassing goodness, and maketh us to love all that he loveth for his love, and to be well apaid<sup>1</sup> with him and with all his works. And when we fall, hastily he raiseth us by his lovely becleping<sup>2</sup> and his gracious touching. And when we be strengthened by his sweet working, then we wilfully<sup>3</sup> choose him by his grace to be his servants and his lovers, lastingly without end.

And yet after this he suffereth some of us to fall more hard and more grievously than ever we did before, as us thinketh. And then ween<sup>4</sup> we (that be not all wise) that all were nought that we have begun. But it is not so, for it needeth us to fall, and it needeth us to see it; for if we fell not, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we be of ourself, nor also we should not so fulsomely<sup>5</sup> know the marvelous love of our maker.

For we shall verily see in heaven without end that we have grievously sinned in this life; and notwithstanding this we shall verily see that we were never hurt in his love, nor we were never the less of price in his sight. And by the assay of this falling we shall have an high and a marvelous knowing of love in God without an end. For hard and marvelous is that love which may not nor will not be broken for<sup>6</sup> trespass.

And this was one understanding of profit; and other<sup>7</sup> is the lowness and meekness that we shall get by the sight of our falling, for thereby we shall highly be raised in heaven, to which rising we might never have come without that meekness. And therefore it

needed us to see it; and if we see it not, though we fell it should not profit us. And commonly first we fall and sithen<sup>8</sup> we see it; and both is of the mercy of God.

The mother may suffer the child to fall sometime and be diseased<sup>9</sup> in diverse manner, of peril come to her child for love. And though our earthly mother may suffer her child to perish, our heavenly mother Jesu may never suffer us that be his children to perish, for he is all mighty, all wisdom, and all love, and so is none but he, blessed mote he be.

But oft times when our falling and our wretchedness is showed to us, we be so sore adread and so greatly ashamed of ourself that unnethes<sup>1</sup> we wit where that we may hold us. But then will not our courteous mother that we flee away, for him were nothing loather;<sup>2</sup> for then he will that we use<sup>3</sup> the condition of a child. For when it is diseased and afeared, it runneth hastily to the mother; and if it may do no more, it crieth on the mother for help with all the might. So will he that we do as the meek child, saying thus: "My kind mother, my gracious mother, my dearworthy mother, have mercy on me. I have made myself foul and unlike to thee, and I may not nor can amend it but with thine help and grace."

And if we feel us not then eased, as soon be we sure that he useth<sup>4</sup> the condition of a wise mother. For if he see that it be for profit to us to mourn and to weep, he suffereth with ruth<sup>5</sup> and pity, into the best time,<sup>6</sup> for love. And he will then that we use the property of a child that ever more kindly trusteth to the love of the mother in weal and in woe. And he will that we take us mightily to the faith of holy church and find there our dearworthy mother in solace and true understanding with all the blessed common.<sup>7</sup> For one singular person may oftentimes be broken, as it seemeth to the self, but the whole body of holy church was never broken, nor never shall be without end. And therefore a sure thing it is, a good and a gracious, to willen meekly and mightily been fastened and oned to our mother holy church, that is Christ Jesu. For the flood of his mercy that is his dearworthy blood and precious water is plenteous

to make us fair and clean. The blessed wounds of our savior be open and enjoy<sup>8</sup> to heal us. The sweet gracious hands of our mother be ready and diligent about us; for he in all this working useth the very office of a kind nurse that hath not else to do but to entend<sup>9</sup> the salvation of her child.

It is his office to save us, it is his worship to do it, and it is his will we know it; for he will we love him sweetly and trust in him meekly and mightily. And this showed he in these gracious words: "I keep thee full surely."

## Endnotes

- Note 4: That is, eternal.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, his purpose to make humankind is also eternal.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nature.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Prepared for.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Wanted to.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: All of us at one and the same time.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: United. Julian sustains the idea of oneness in the verb *oned* and the noun *oneing*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Same.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Please.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rejoice.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Both "kind" and "natural."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The relationship between God and humanity is also conceived as a mystical marriage in which Christ is the bridegroom and the human soul his spouse.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Protection.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: With regard to.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, our natural created being, which is eternal.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Intelligence.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With regard to the nature of our sensual being (as opposed to substance).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Payment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Life and labor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Surpassing.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Nature.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: For the first time.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The same beloved person with regard to our eternal being.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mother of our physical being.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Taking on of sensuality.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: True.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Appropriated to.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: At work.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: (Infinite) spreading out, expansion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The natural condition, that is, the state of grace, that we were in originally.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Because he wanted to.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, he laid the groundwork for his mission in a very humble place.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The appearance of the Virgin in Julian's first vision. See chapter 4, p. 223.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Arrayed and dressed himself.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Surest.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Know.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: May.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bring satisfaction.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, If I could suffer more, I would [wish to] suffer more. These and other quotations refer to Julian's earlier revelations.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Stop.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nourish, feed.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As any mother is obligated to look after her child.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The wound inflicted by a soldier in John 19:34.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A part of.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Other manuscripts read “her,” with reference to the Virgin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Belongs.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In comparison with.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Is aware of.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Grows.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Wants.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pleased.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Calling (to us).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Gladly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Suppose.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Fully.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Because of.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Another.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Then.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Unhappy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scarcely.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nothing would be more hateful to him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He wants us to experience.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Right away we are sure he is practicing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compassion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Until the right time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Community.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rejoice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Be busy about.[Return to reference 9](#)



## Chapter 86

### [CHRIST'S MEANING]

This book is begun by God's gift and his grace, but it is not yet performed,<sup>1</sup> as to my sight. For charity, pray we all together with God's working, thanking, trusting, enjoying, for thus will our good Lord be prayed, but the understanding that I took in all his own meaning, and in the sweet words where he sayeth full merrily: "I am ground of thy beseeching." For truly I saw and understood in our Lord's meaning that he showed it for he will have it known more than it is. In which knowing he will give us grace to love him and cleave to him, for he beheld his heavenly treasure with so great love on earth that he will give us more light, and solace in heavenly joy, in drawing of our hearts fro sorrow and darkness which we are in.

And fro the time that it was showed, I desired oftentimes to wit<sup>2</sup> in what was our Lord's meaning. And fifteen year after and more, I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: "What, wouldst thou wit thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Wit it well, love was his meaning. Who showeth it thee? Love. What showed he thee? Love. Wherefore showeth he it thee? For love. Hold thee therein, thou shalt wit more in the same. But thou shalt never wit therein other withouten end."

Thus was I learned,<sup>3</sup> that love is our Lord's meaning. And I saw full surely in this and in all, that ere God made us he loved us, which love was never slaked<sup>4</sup> ne never shall. And in this love he hath done all his works, and in this love he hath made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting. In our making we had beginning, but the love wherein he made us was in him fro without beginning. In which love we have our beginning, and all this shall we see in God withouten end.

*Deo gracias. Explicit liber revelacionum Julyane anacorite  
Norwyche, cuius anime propicietur deus.*<sup>5</sup>

ca. 1390

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Completed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Know.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Taught.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Abated.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thanks be to God. Here ends the book of revelations of Julian, anchorite of Norwich, on whose soul may God have mercy (Latin).[Return to reference 5](#)

# **MARGERY KEMPE**

## **ca. 1373—ca. 1438**

*The Book of Margery Kempe* is the spiritual autobiography of a medieval laywoman, recounting her divine visions and her struggles to live the holy life that Christ himself has instructed her to lead. The claim to such sanctity by a married woman, the mother of fourteen children, was in itself sufficient grounds for controversy. In addition, Kempe's outspoken defense of her visions as well as her highly emotional style of religious expression set her at odds with fellow worshippers and pilgrims and with church authorities, although she also won both lay and clerical supporters.

Margery Kempe was the daughter of John Burnham, five-time mayor of King's Lynn, a thriving commercial town in Norfolk. At about the age of twenty she married John Kempe, a well-to-do fellow townsman. After the traumatic delivery of her first child—the rate of maternal mortality in childbirth was high—she sought to confess to a priest. His harsh, censorious response precipitated a mental breakdown, from which she eventually recovered through the first of her spiritual visions. Her subsequent conversion and strict religious observances generated a good deal of domestic strife, but she continued to share her husband's bed until, around the age of forty, she negotiated a vow of celibacy with him, which was confirmed before the bishop and left her free to undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There she experienced visions of Christ's passion and of the sufferings of the Virgin Mary. These visions

recurred during the rest of her life, and her noisy weeping at such times made her the object of much scorn and hostility. Her orthodoxy was several times examined, but her unquestioning acceptance of the Church's doctrines and authority, and perhaps also her status as a former mayor's daughter, shielded her against charges of heresy.

Kempe reports that she was unable to read or write and acquired her command of the Bible from sermons and other oral sources. Late in her life, she dictated her story in two parts to two different scribes; the latter of these was a priest who revised the whole text. Even if she did not inscribe the words herself, it seems likely that the *Book* retains much of the characteristic style and perspective of its dictating source. The text is narrated in the third person (rather than the first, as most autobiographies are).

Kempe's *Book* offers a perspective on the tradition of "affective piety"—a tradition described in the introduction to this section ([pp. 215–16](#))—unlike any other. Here that visionary tradition comes to life in the context of vividly realized, often painful psychological and bodily experience. Kempe's own marriage and her often troubled social relationships inform and are informed by her "homely" (domestic, intimate) and sometimes erotic spiritual connections. Just as she sees Christ present in male babies or good-looking young men, so she sees the living divine presence in the Eucharistic host (the bread consecrated during the mass). "Sir," she says to a skeptic, "His death is as fresh to me as He had died this same day." Such intensely sympathetic contemplation has an ugly flip side, however. As in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, where tender feeling for the Blessed Virgin is complemented by hatred for the "cursed Jewes," Margery's pathos in meditating on Christ's suffering is accompanied by hostility toward the Jewish people, whom she imagines as the cause of Jesus's pain (Book 1.79).

# ***From The Book of Margery Kempe***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The text is based on the unique manuscript, first discovered in 1934, edited by Lynn Staley. Spelling and inflexional forms have in many cases been modernized. Some archaic words have also been silently translated.[Return to reference 1](#)

## [THE BIRTH OF HER FIRST CHILD AND HER FIRST VISION]

**[Book 1.1]** When this creature<sup>2</sup> was twenty years of age or somewhat more, she was married to a worshipful<sup>3</sup> burgess and was with child within a short time, as nature would. And, after she had conceived, she was labored with great attacks of illness until the child was born, and then, what for the labor she had in childing and for the sickness going before, she despaired of her life, thinking she might not live. And then she sent for her ghostly father,<sup>4</sup> for she had a thing in conscience which she had never shown before that time in all her life. For she was ever hindered by her enemy, the devil, evermore saying to her that, while she was in good health, she needed no confession but could do penance by herself alone, and all should be forgiven, for God is merciful enough. And therefore this creature oftentimes did great penance in fasting on bread and water and other deeds of alms with devout prayers, except she would not show this sin in confession. And, when she was at any time sick or troubled, the devil said in her mind that she should be damned, for she was not shriven<sup>5</sup> of that sin. Wherefore, after her child was born, she, not trusting her life, sent for her ghostly father, as was said before, in full will to be shrive of all her lifetime as nearly as she could. And, when she came to the point to say that thing which she had so long concealed, her confessor was a little too hasty and began sharply to reprove her before she had fully said her intent, and so she would no more say for aught he might do.

And anon, for the dread she had of damnation on the one side and his sharp reproving on that other side, this creature went out of her mind and was wonderfully vexed and labored with spirits for half a year, eight weeks and some odd days. And in this time she saw, as she thought, devils open their mouths, all inflamed with burning flames of fire as if they should have swallowed her in, sometimes menacing her, sometimes threatening her, sometimes pulling her and hailing her both night and day during the foresaid time. And also the devils cried upon her with great threats and bade her that she

should forsake her Christianity, her faith, and deny her God, his mother, and all the saints in heaven, her good works and all good virtues, her father, her mother, and all her friends. And so she did. She slandered her husband, her friends and her own self; she spoke many a reproving word and many a harsh word; she knew no virtue nor goodness; she desired all wickedness; just as the spirits tempted her to say and do, so she said and did. She would have killed herself many a time because of her stirrings and have been damned with them in hell. And as a witness thereof she bit her own hand so violently that it was seen all her life afterward. And also she tore the skin on her body against her heart grievously with her nails, for she had no other instruments, and worse she would have done, save she was bound and kept with strength both day and night so that she might not have her will.

And, when she had long been labored in these and many other temptations, so that men thought she should never have escaped nor lived, then on a time, as she lay alone and her keepers were away from her, our merciful Lord Christ Jesus, ever to be trusted, worshiped be his name, never forsaking his servant in time of need, appeared to his creature, who had forsaken him, in likeness of a man, most seemly, most beautiful, and most amiable that ever might be seen with man's eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk, sitting upon her bedside, looking upon her with so blessed a countenance that she was strengthened in all her spirits, said to her these words: "Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I forsook never you?"

And anon, as soon as he had said these words, she saw verily how the air opened as bright as any lightning, and he rose up into the air, not right hastily and quickly, but fairly and easily so that she might well behold him in the air until it was closed again. And anon the creature was stabled in her wits and in her reason as well as ever she was before, and prayed her husband, as soon as he came to her, that she might have the keys of the buttery<sup>6</sup> in order to take her meat and drink as she had done before.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Throughout the book Kempe refers to herself in the third person as “this creature,” a standard way of saying “this person, a being created by God.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Worthy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Spiritual father; that is, a priest.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Confessed and then absolved.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pantry.[Return to reference 6](#)



## [MARGERY AND HER HUSBAND REACH A SETTLEMENT]

\* \* \*

**[Book 1.11]** It befell upon a Friday on Midsummer Eve in right hot weather, as this creature was coming from York bearing a bottle with beer in her hand and her husband a loaf in his bosom, he asked his wife this question, "Margery, if there came a man with a sword and would smite off my head unless I should common naturally with you as I have done before, tell me the truth from your conscience—for you say you will not lie—whether would you suffer my head to be smote off or else suffer me to meddle with you again, as I did at one time?"

"Alas, sir," she said, "why move you this matter, and have we been chaste these eight weeks?"

"For I will know the truth of your heart."

And then she said with great sorrow, "Forsooth I had rather see you be slain than we should turn again to our uncleanness."

And he said in reply, "You are no good wife."

And then she asked her husband what was the cause that he had not meddled with her eight weeks before, since she lay with him every night in his bed. And he said he was so made afraid when he would have touched her that he dared do no more.

"Now, good sir, amend yourself and ask God mercy, for I told you nearly three years since that you should be slain suddenly, and now is this the third year, and yet I hope I shall have my desire. Good sir, I pray you grant me what I shall ask, and I shall pray for you that you shall be saved through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall have more reward in heaven than if you wore a hair cloth or a jacket of mail. I pray you, suffer me to make a vow of chastity in whatever bishop's hand that God will."

"No," he said, "that will I not grant you, for now may I use you without deadly sin and then might I not so."

Then she said again, "If it be the will of the Holy Ghost to fulfill what I have said, I pray God you may consent thereto; and, if it be not the will of the Holy Ghost, I pray God you never consent thereto."

Then went they forth toward Bridlington in right hot weather, the aforesaid creature having great sorrow and great dread for her chastity. And, as they came by a cross, her husband set himself down under the cross, calling his wife unto him and saying these words unto her, "Margery, grant me my desire, and I shall grant you your desire. My first desire is that we shall lie still together in one bed as we have done before; the second, that you shall pay my debts before you go to Jerusalem; and the third, that you shall eat and drink with me on Fridays as you were wont to do."<sup>7</sup>

"No, sir," she said, "to break the Friday I will never grant you while I live."

"Well," he said, "then shall I meddle you again."

She prayed him that he would give her leave to make her prayers, and he granted it well. Then she kneeled down beside a cross in the field and prayed in this manner with great abundance of tears, "Lord God, you know all things; you know what sorrow I have had to be chaste in my body to you all these three years, and now might I have my wish, and I dare not for love of you. For, if I would break that manner of fasting which you commanded me, to keep the Friday without food or drink, I should now have my desire. But, blessed Lord, you know I will not go against your will, and great now is my sorrow unless I find comfort in you. Now, blessed Jesus, make your will known to me, unworthy, so that I may follow thereafter and fulfill it with all my might."

And then our Lord Jesus Christ with great sweetness spoke to this creature, commanding her to go again to her husband and pray him to grant her what she desired. "And he shall have what he desires. For, my worthy daughter, this was the cause that I bade you to fast, for you should the sooner obtain and get your desire, and

now it is granted you. I wish no longer for you to fast, therefore I bid you in the name of Jesus eat and drink as your husband does.”

Then this creature thanked our Lord Jesus Christ for his grace and his goodness, then rose up and went to her husband, saying unto him, “Sir, if it pleases you, you shall grant me my desire, and you shall have your desire. Grant me that you shall not come in my bed, and I grant you to requite your debts before I go to Jerusalem. And make my body free to God so that you never challenge me by asking the debt of matrimony after this day while you live, and I shall eat and drink on the Friday at your bidding.”

Then said her husband again to her, “As free may your body be to God as it has been to me.”

This creature thanked God greatly, rejoicing that she had her desire, praying her husband that they should say three Our Father’s in the worship of the Trinity for the great grace that he had granted them. And so they did, kneeling under a cross, and afterward they ate and drank together in great gladness of spirit. This was on a Friday on Midsummer Eve.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Christ had told her that keeping a strict Friday fast would allow her to have her wish to end further sexual relations with her husband. [Return to reference 7](#)

## [MARGERY SEES THE HOST<sup>8</sup> FLUTTER AT MASS]

\* \* \*

**[Book 1.20]** One day as this creature was hearing her Mass, a young man and a good priest holding up the sacrament<sup>9</sup> in his hands over his head, the sacrament shook and flickered to and fro as a dove flickers with her wings. And, when he held up the chalice with the precious sacrament, the chalice moved to and fro as though it should have fallen out of his hands. When the consecration was done, this creature had great marvel about the stirring and moving of the blessed sacrament, desiring to see more consecrations, looking if it would do so again. Then said our Lord Jesus Christ to the creature, "You shall no more see it in this manner, therefore thank God that you have seen. My daughter Bridget<sup>1</sup> saw me never in this manner."

Then said this creature in her thought, "Lord, what does this betoken?"

"It betokens vengeance."

"A, good Lord, what vengeance?"

Then said our Lord in reply to her, "There shall be an earthquake; tell it to whom you wish in the name of Jesus. For I tell you forsooth, right as I spoke to Saint Bridget, right so I speak to you, daughter, and I tell you truly it is true, every word that is written in Bridget's book, and by you it shall be known for very truth. And you shall fare well, daughter, in spite of all your enemies. The more envy they have for you because of my grace, the better shall I love you. I were not a rightful God unless I proved<sup>2</sup> you, for I know you better than you know yourself, whatever men say of you. You say I have great patience for the sin of the people, and you say the truth, but, if you saw the sin of the people as I do, you would have much more

marvel in my patience and much more sorrow in the sin of the people than you have.”

Then the creature said, “Alas, worthy Lord, what shall I do for the people?”

Our Lord answered, “It is enough for you to do as you do.”

Then she prayed, “Merciful Lord Christ Jesus, in you is all mercy and grace and goodness. Have mercy, pity, and compassion for them. Show your mercy and your goodness upon them. Help them; send them very contrition, and let them never die in their sin.”

Our merciful Lord said, “I may no more, daughter, for my rightfulness, do for them than I do. I send them preaching and teaching, pestilence and battles, hunger and famine, loss of their goods with great sickness, and many other tribulations, and they will not believe my words, nor will they know my visitation. And therefore I shall say to them that I made my servants to pray for you, and you despised their works and their living.”

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 8: The Eucharistic wafer consumed in the sacrament of Communion.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A metonymy for the Eucharistic wafer, strictly one of the seven sacraments.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Saint Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–1373), to whose *Revelations* Margery refers in Book 1.17 and 1.58.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tested.[Return to reference 2](#)

## [PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM]

\* \* \*

**[Book 1.28]** And so they<sup>3</sup> went forth into the Holy Land till they might see Jerusalem. And, when this creature saw Jerusalem, riding on an ass, she thanked God with all her heart, praying him for his mercy that, as he had brought her to see this earthly city Jerusalem, he would grant her grace to see the blissful city Jerusalem above, the city of heaven. Our Lord Jesus Christ, answering to her thought, granted her to have her desire. Then, for joy that she had and the sweetness that she felt in the dalliance of our Lord, she was in point to have fallen off her ass, for she might not bear the sweetness and grace that God wrought in her soul. Then two German pilgrims went to her and kept her from falling, of which one was a priest. And he put spices in her mouth to comfort her, thinking she had been sick. And so they helped her forth to Jerusalem.

And, when she came there, she said, "Sirs, I pray you be not displeased though I weep sorely in this holy place where our Lord Jesus Christ was quick<sup>4</sup> and dead."

Then went they to the Temple<sup>5</sup> in Jerusalem, and they were let in on the one day at evensong time and abided therein till the next day at evensong time.

Then the friars lifted up a cross and led the pilgrims about from one place to another where our Lord had suffered his pains and his passions, every man and woman bearing a wax candle in their hand. And the friars always, as they went about, told them what our Lord suffered in every place. And the foresaid creature wept and sobbed so plenteously as though she had seen our Lord with her bodily eye suffering his Passion at that time. Before her in her soul she saw him verily by contemplation, and that caused her to have compassion. And when they came up onto the Mount of Calvary, she fell down so that she might not stand or kneel but wallowed and twisted with her body, spreading her arms abroad, and cried with a loud voice as

though her heart should have burst asunder, for in the city of her soul she saw verily and freshly how our Lord was crucified. Before her face she heard and saw in her ghostly sight the mourning of our Lady, of Saint John and Mary Magdalene,<sup>6</sup> and of many others who loved our Lord. And she had so great compassion and so great pain to see our Lord's pain that she might not keep herself from crying and roaring though she should have died from it.

And this was the first cry that ever she cried in any contemplation. And this manner of crying endured many years after this time for aught that any man might do, and therefore suffered she much despite and much reproof. The crying was so loud and so wonderful that it made the people astonished unless they had heard it before or else they knew the cause of the crying. And she had them so often that they made her right<sup>7</sup> weak in her bodily mights, and, namely, if she heard of our Lord's Passion. And sometimes, when she saw the crucifix, or if she saw a man or a beast, whether<sup>8</sup> it were, had a wound or if a man beat a child before her or smote a horse or another beast with a whip, if she might see it or hear it, she thought she saw our Lord being beaten or wounded just as she saw in the man or in the beast, as well in the field as in the town, and by herself alone, as well as among the people.

First when she had her cryings at Jerusalem, she had them often times, and in Rome also. And, when she came home into England, first at her coming home it came but seldom, as it were once in a month, afterward once in the week, afterward daily, and once she had fourteen on one day, and another day she had seven, and so as God would visit her, sometime in the church, sometime in the street, sometime in the chamber, sometime in the field when God would send them, for she knew never time nor hour when they should come. And they came never without passing great sweetness of devotion and high contemplation.

And, as soon as she perceived that she should cry, she would keep it in as much as she might, so that the people should not have heard it, for it annoyed them. For some said it was a wicked spirit vexed her; some said it was a sickness; some said she had drunk too

much wine; some banned her; some wished she had been in the harbor; some would she had been in the sea in a bottomless boat; and so each man as he thought. Other ghostly men loved her and favored her the more. Some great clerks said our Lady cried never so, nor no saint in heaven, but they knew full little what she felt, nor would they not believe that she might have abstained from crying if she wished.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: The company of pilgrims.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Living.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, site of Christ's crucifixion, death, and burial.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mary, St. John, and Mary Magdalene are traditionally portrayed at the foot of the Cross in medieval art. See John 19:25.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Especially.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Whichever.[Return to reference 8](#)



# [MARGERY'S MARRIAGE TO AND INTIMACY WITH CHRIST]

\* \* \*

**[Book 1.35]** As this creature was in the Apostle's Church at Rome on St. John Lateran's Day,<sup>9</sup> the Father of Heaven said to her, "Daughter, I am well pleased with you, inasmuch as you believe in all the sacraments of Holy Church and in all faith that pertains to it, and specially because you believe in the manhood of my son and because of the great compassion that you have for his bitter Passion."

Also the Father said to this creature, "Daughter, I will have you wedded to my Godhead, for I shall show you my secrets and my counsels,<sup>1</sup> for you shall dwell with me without end."

Then the creature kept silence in her soul and answered not thereto, for she was full sore afraid of the Godhead, and she had no knowledge of the dalliance of the Godhead, for all her love and all her affection was set on the manhood of Christ and thereof had she good knowledge, and she would for no thing have parted therefrom. She was so much affected by the manhood of Christ that when she saw women in Rome bearing children in their arms, if she might learn that there were any men children, she should then cry, roar, and weep as though she had seen Christ in his childhood. And, if she might have had her will, oftentimes she would have taken the children out from the mother's arms and have kissed them in the place of Christ. And, if she saw a handsome man, she had great pain to look on him in case she might have seen him who was both God and man. And therefore she cried many times and often when she met a seemly man and wept and sobbed full sorely in the manhood of Christ as she went in the streets at Rome, so that those who saw her wondered full much on her, for they knew not the cause.

And therefore it was no wonder if she were silent and answered not the Father of Heaven when he told her that she should be wedded to his God-head. Then said the second person, Christ Jesus, whose manhood she loved so much, to her, "What say you, Margery, daughter, to my Father of these words that he speaks to you? Are you well pleased that it is so?"

And then she would not answer the second person but wept wonder sore, desiring to have still himself and in no way to be parted from him.

Then the second person in the Trinity answered to his Father for her and said, "Father, have her excused, for she is yet but young and not fully instructed as to how she should answer."

And then the Father took her by the hand in her soul before the Son and the Holy Ghost and the Mother of Jesus and all the twelve apostles and Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret and many other saints and holy virgins, with a great multitude of angels, saying to her soul, "I take you, Margery, for my wedded wife, for fairer, for fouler, for richer, for poorer, as long as you be buxom<sup>2</sup> and obedient to do what I bid you do. For, daughter, there was never a child so buxom to the mother as I shall be to you, both in well and in woe, to help you and comfort you. And thereto I make you surety."

And then the Mother of God and all the saints that were there present in her soul prayed that they might have much joy together. And then the creature with high devotion, with great plenty of tears, thanked God for this ghostly<sup>3</sup> comfort, considering herself in her own feeling right unworthy of any such grace as she felt, for she felt many great comforts, both ghostly comforts and bodily comforts. Sometimes she felt sweet smells with her nose; it was sweeter, she thought, than ever was any sweet earthly thing that she smelled before, nor might she ever tell how sweet it was, for she thought she might have lived thereby if they would have lasted.

Sometimes she heard with her bodily ears such sounds and melodies that she might not well hear what a man said to her in that time unless he spoke the louder. These sounds and melodies had she heard nearly every day for the term of twenty-five years when

this book was written, and especially when she was in devout prayer, also many times while she was at Rome and in England both.

She saw with her bodily eye many white things flying all about her on every side, as thick in a manner as motes<sup>4</sup> in the sun; they were right delicate and comfortable, and the brighter that the sun shone, the better she might see them. She saw them many different times and in many different places, both in church and in her chamber, at her meal and in her prayers, in field and in town, both going and sitting. And many times she was afraid what they might be, for she saw them as well in nights in darkness as in daylight. Then, when she was afraid of them, our Lord said unto her, "By this token, daughter, believe it is God that speaks in you, for whereso God is, heaven is, and where God is there are many angels, and God is in you and you are in him. And therefore be not afraid, daughter, for this betokens that you have many angels about you to keep you both day and night so that no devil shall have power over you nor no evil man harm you."

Then from that time forward she used to say when she saw them come, "*Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini.*"<sup>5</sup>

Also our Lord gave her another token, which endured about sixteen years, and it increased ever more and more, and that was a flame of fire wonderfully hot and delectable and right comfortable, not wasting but ever increasing of flame, for, though the weather was never so cold, she felt the heat burning in her breast and at her heart, as verily as a man should feel the material fire if he put his hand or his finger therein.

When she felt first the fire of love burning in her breast, she was afraid thereof, and then our Lord answered to her mind and said, "Daughter, be not afraid, for this heat is the heat of the Holy Ghost, which shall burn away all your sins, for the fire of love quenches all sins. And you shall understand by this token that the Holy Ghost is in you, and you know well wherever the Holy Ghost is, there is the Father, and where the Father is, there is the Son, and so you have fully in your soul all the Holy Trinity. Therefore you have great cause to love me right well, and yet you shall have greater cause than ever

you had to love me, for you shall hear what you never heard, and you shall see what you never saw, and you shall feel what you never felt.

“For, daughter, you are sure of the love of God as God is God. Your soul is more sure of the love of God than of your own body, for your soul shall part from your body, but God shall never part from your soul, for they are joined together without end. Therefore, daughter, you have as great cause to be merry as any lady in this world, and, if you knew, daughter, how much you please me when you suffer me willfully to speak in you, you should never do otherwise, for this is a holy life, and the time is right well spent. For, daughter, this life pleases me more than wearing of the jacket of mail or of the hair shirt or fasting on bread and water, for, if you said every day a thousand Pater Nosters<sup>6</sup> you should not please me as well as you do when you are in silence and suffer me to speak in your soul.

**[Book 1.36]** “Fasting, daughter, is good for young beginners and discreet penance, especially that which their ghostly father gives them or enjoins them to do. And to bid many beads,<sup>7</sup> it is good to those who can do no better, and yet it is not perfect. But it is a good way toward perfection. For I tell you, daughter, those who are great fasters and great doers of penance, they desire that it should be considered the best life; also those who give themselves to say many devotions, they would have that the best life, and those who give many alms, they would that that was held the best life. And I have oftentimes, daughter, told you that thinking, weeping, and high contemplation is the best life on earth. And you shall have more merit in heaven for one year of thinking in your mind than for a hundred years of praying with your mouth, and yet you will not believe me, for you will bid many beads whether I will or not.

“And yet, daughter, I will not be displeased with you whatever you think, say, or speak, for I am always pleased with you. And, if I were on earth as bodily as I was before I died on the cross, I should not be ashamed of you as many other men are, for I should take

you by the hand among the people and make you great welcome so that they should well know that I loved you right well. For it is suitable for the wife to be homely with her husband. Be he never so great a lord and she so poor a woman when he wedded her, yet they must lie together and rest together in joy and peace. Right so must it be between you and me, for I take no heed what you have been but what you wish to be. And oftentimes have I told you that I have clean forgiven you all your sins. Therefore must I needs be homely with you and lie in your bed with you. Daughter, you desire greatly to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in your bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your most worthy darling, and as your sweet son, for I will be loved as a son should be loved by the mother and will that you love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband. And therefore you may boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you will.

"And, as often as you think on me or would do any good deed to me, you shall have the same reward in heaven as if you did it to my own precious body which is in heaven, for I ask no more of you but your heart to love what loves you, for my love is ever ready for you."

Then she gave thanks and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ for the high grace and mercy that he showed unto her, an unworthy wretch.

This creature had divers tokens in her bodily hearing. One was a manner of sound as if it had been a pair of bellows blowing in her ear. She, being confounded thereof, was warned in her soul no fear to have, for it was the sound of the Holy Ghost. And then our Lord turned that sound into the voice of a dove, and afterward he turned it into the voice of a little bird which is called a red breast that sang full merrily oftentimes in her right ear. And then should she evermore have great grace after she heard such a token. And she had been used to such tokens about twenty-five years at the writing of this book.

Then our Lord Jesus Christ said to his creature, "By these tokens may you well know that I love you, for you are to me a very mother, and to all the world, because of that great charity that is in you, and

yet I myself am the cause of that charity, and you shall have great reward therefore in Heaven.”

## Endnotes

- Note 9: November 9. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Private deliberations. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Submissive. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spiritual. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Specks of dust. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Latin; Matthew 21:9). A blessing used in the mass as part of the consecration. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Our Fathers” (Latin), that is, the Lord’s Prayer. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Prayers (the original sense of the word “bedes,” applied by association to beads in a rosary). [Return to reference 7](#)

## [MARGERY'S REACTION TO A PIETÀ<sup>8</sup>]

\* \* \*

[**Book 1.60**] The good priest, of whom it is written before, who was her reader,<sup>9</sup> fell into great sickness, and she was stirred in her soul to take care of him in God's service. And, when she lacked such as was needful for him, she went about to good men and good women and got such thing as was necessary unto him. He was so sick that men trusted nothing for his life, and his sickness was long continuing. Then on a time, as she was in the church hearing her mass and prayed for the same priest, our Lord said to her that he should live and fare right well. Then was she stirred to go to Norwich to Saint Stephen's Church where is buried the good vicar,<sup>1</sup> who died but little before that time, for whom God showed high mercy to his people, and thank him for the recovery of his priest.

She took leave of her confessor, going forth to Norwich. When she came in the churchyard of Saint Stephen's, she cried, she roared, she wept, she fell down to the ground, so fervently the fire of love burnt in her heart. Afterward she rose up again and went forth weeping into the church to the high altar, and there she fell down with violent sobbing, weepings, and loud cries beside the grave of the good vicar, all ravished with spiritual comfort in the goodness of our Lord who wrought so great grace for his servant who had been her confessor and many times heard her confession of all her living,<sup>2</sup> and administered to her the precious sacrament of the altar at divers times. And in so much was her devotion the more increased in that she saw our Lord work such special grace for such a creature as she had been conversant with in his lifetime. She had such holy thoughts and such holy visions that she might not control her weeping nor her crying. And therefore the people had great marvel of her, supposing that she had wept for some fleshly or

earthly affection, and said unto her, "What ails you, woman? Why do you fare thus with yourself? We knew him as well as you."

Then were there priests in the same place who knew her manner of working, and they full charitably led her to a tavern and made her drink and made her full high and goodly comfort. Also there was a lady who desired to have the said creature to a meal. And therefore, as good manners required, she went to the church where the lady heard her service, where this creature saw a fair image of our Lady called a *pity*. And through the beholding of that *pity*, her mind was all wholly occupied in the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the compassion of our Lady, Saint Mary, by which she was compelled to cry full loudly and weep full sorely, as though she should have died.

Then came to her the lady's priest, saying, "Damsel, Jesus is dead long since."

When her crying was ceased, she said to the priest, "Sir, his death is as fresh to me as if he had died this same day, and so I think it ought to be to you and to all Christian people. We ought ever to have mind of his kindness and ever think of the doleful death that he died for us."

Then the good lady, hearing her communication, said, "Sir, it is a good example to me, and to other men also, the grace that God works in her soul."

And so the good lady was her advocate and answered for her. Afterward she had her home with her to meat<sup>3</sup> and showed her full glad and goodly comfort as long as she would abide there. And soon after, she came home again to Lynn, and the foresaid priest, for whom she went most specially to Norwich, who had read to her for about seven years, recovered and went about where he wished, thanked be almighty God for his goodness.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes



- Note 8: An image, painted or sculpted, of the dead Christ laid across the Virgin's lap.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Book 1.58 relates how a priest newly arrived in King's Lynn read to Margery across seven or eight years, from the Bible and from visionary texts.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Richard of Caister (d. 1429), who had a reputation for sanctity.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Of (sins committed in) her entire life.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dinner.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [MARGERY NURSES HER HUSBAND IN HIS OLD AGE]

\* \* \*

[**Book 1.76**] It happened on a time that the husband of the said creature, a man of great age passing three score years,<sup>4</sup> as he would have come down from his chamber barefoot and bare-leg, he slithered or else failed of his footing and fell down to the ground from the steps, with his head under him grievously broken and bruised, insomuch that he had in his head five rolls of soft material in the wounds for many days while his head was healing. And, as God would, it was known to some of his neighbors how he had fallen down the steps, perhaps through the din and the rushing of his falling. And so they came to him and found him lying with his head under him, half on life, all streaked with blood, never likely to have spoken with priest nor with clerk unless by high grace and miracle.<sup>5</sup> Then the said creature, his wife, was sent for, and so she came to him. Then was he taken up and his head was sewn, and he was sick a long time after, so that men thought that he should have been dead. And then the people said, if he died, his wife was worthy to be hanged for his death, forasmuch as she might have kept him and did not.

They dwelled not together; they lay not together, for, as is written before, they both with one assent and with free will of the other had made a vow to live chaste. And therefore to avoid all perils they dwelled and so journeyed in divers places where no suspicion should be had of their incontinence, for first they dwelled together after they had made their vow, and then the people slandered them and said they used their lust and their liking as they did before their vow-making. And, when they went out on pilgrimage or to see and speak with other ghostly creatures, many evil folk whose tongues were their own, lacking the dread and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, thought and said that they went rather to woods,

groves, or valleys to use the lust of their bodies so that the people should not espy it nor know it. They, having knowledge how prone the people were to think evil of them, desiring to avoid all occasion, inasmuch as they might goodly, by their good will and their mutual consent, they parted asunder as touching their board and their chambers, and went to board in divers places. And this was the cause that she was not with him and also that she should not be hindered from her contemplation.

And therefore, when he had fallen and grievously was hurt, as is said before, the people said, if he died, it was worthy that she answer for his death. Then she prayed to our Lord that her husband might live a year and she delivered from slander if it were his pleasure. Our Lord said to her mind, "Daughter, you shall have your boon, for he shall live, and I have wrought a great miracle for you that he was not dead. And I bid you take him home and keep him for my love."

She said, "No, good Lord, for I shall then not tend to you as I do now."

"Yes, daughter," said our Lord, "you shall have as much reward for keeping him and helping him in his need at home as if you were in church to make your prayers. And you have said many times that you would fain keep me. I pray you now keep him for the love of me, for he has sometime fulfilled your will and my will both, and he has made your body free to me so that you should serve me and live chaste and clean, and therefore I will that you be free to help him at his need in my name."

"A, Lord," said she, "for your mercy grant me grace to obey your will and fulfill your will and let never my ghostly enemies have any power to hinder me from fulfilling your will."

Then she took home her husband with her and kept him years after, as long as he lived, and had full much labor with him, for in his last days he turned childish again and lacked reason so that he could not do his own easement by going to a stool, or else he would not, but, as a child, voided his natural digestion in his linen clothes where he sat by the fire or at the table, wherever it might be, he would

spare no place. And therefore was her labor much the more in washing and wringing and her expense in making fires and hindered her full much from her contemplation, so that many times she should have been irked at her labor save she bethought herself of how she in her young age had full many delectable thoughts, fleshly lusts, and inordinate loves for his body. And therefore she was glad to be punished with the same person and took it much the more easily and served him and helped him, as she thought, as she would have done Christ himself.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Sixty years.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, unlikely to have confessed to a priest and received rites except by grace.[Return to reference 5](#)

# [MARGERY'S VISION OF THE PASSION SEQUENCE<sup>6</sup>]

\* \* \*

**[Book 1.79]** Then she beheld in the sight of her soul our blissful Lord Christ Jesus coming toward his Passion, and, before he went, he kneeled down and took his mother's blessing. Then she saw his mother falling down in swooning before her son, saying unto him, "Alas, my dear Son, how shall I suffer this sorrow and have no joy in all this world but you alone. A, dear Son, if you will die anyway, let me die before you and let me never suffer this day of sorrow, for I may never bear this sorrow that I shall have for your death. I would, Son, that I might suffer death for you so that you should not die, if man's soul might so be saved. Now, dear son, if you have no pity on yourself, have pity on your mother, for you know full well there can no man in all this world comfort me but you alone."

Then our Lord took up his mother in his arms and kissed her full sweetly and said to her, "A, blessed mother, be of a good cheer and of a good comfort, for I have told you full often that I must needs suffer death, otherwise no man should be saved nor ever come into bliss. And mother, it is my father's will that it be so, and therefore I pray you let it be your will also, for my death shall bring me great honor and you and all mankind great joy and profit, for whoever trusts in my passion and works thereafter. And therefore, blessed mother, you must abide here after me, for in you shall rest all the faith of Holy Church, and by your faith Holy Church shall increase in her faith. And therefore I pray you, worthy mother, cease from your sorrowing, for I shall not leave you comfortless. I shall leave here with you John, my cousin, to comfort you instead of me; I shall send my holy angels to comfort you on earth; and I shall comfort you in your soul my own self, for, mother, you know well I have promised you the bliss of heaven and that you are sure thereof. A, worthy

mother, what would you better than where I am king you be queen, and all angels and saints shall be obedient to your will?

"And what grace you ask me I shall not deny your desire. I shall give you power over the devils so that they shall be afraid of you and you not of them. And also, my blessed mother, I have said to you beforetime that I shall come for you my own self when you shall pass out of this world with all my angels and all my saints that are in heaven and bring you before my father with all manner of music, melody, and joy. And there shall I set you in great peace and rest without end. And there shall you be crowned as Queen of Heaven, as lady of all the world, and as Empress of Hell. And therefore, my worthy mother, I pray you bless me and let me go do my father's will, for therefore I came into this world and took flesh and blood from you."

When the said creature beheld this glorious sight in her soul and saw how he blessed his mother and his mother him, and then his blessed mother might not speak one word more to him but fell down to the ground, and so they parted asunder, his mother lying still as if she had been dead, then the said creature thought she took our Lord Jesus Christ by the clothes and fell down at his feet, praying him to bless her, and therewith she cried full loudly and wept right sorely, saying in her mind, "A, Lord, what shall become of me? I had far rather that you would slay me than let me abide in the world without you, for without you I may not abide here, Lord."

Then answered our Lord to her, "Be still, daughter, and rest with my mother here, and comfort you in her, for she who is my own mother must suffer this sorrow. But I shall come again, daughter, to my mother and comfort her and you both and turn all your sorrow into joy."

And then she thought our Lord went forth his way, and she went to our Lady and said, "A, blessed Lady, rise up and let us follow your blessed son as long as we may see him so that I may look enough upon him before he dies. A, dear Lady, how may your heart last and see your blissful son see all this woe? Lady, I may not endure it, and yet am I not his mother."

Then our Lady answered and said, "Daughter, you hear well it will not otherwise be, and therefore I must needs suffer it for my son's love."

And then she thought that they followed forth after our Lord and saw how he made his prayers to his father in the Mount of Olives<sup>7</sup> and heard the goodly answer that came from his father and the goodly answer that he gave his father in reply. Then she saw how our Lord went to his disciples and bade them wake; his enemies were near. And then came a great multitude of people with much light and many armed men with staves, swords, and poleaxes to seek our Lord Jesus Christ. Our merciful Lord as a meek lamb saying unto them, "Whom seek you?"

They answered with a sharp spirit, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Our Lord said in reply, "*Ego sum.*"<sup>8</sup>

And then she saw the Jews fall down on the ground; they might not stand for dread, but anon they rose again and sought as they had done before. And our Lord asked, "Whom seek you?"

And they said again, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Our Lord answered, "I it am."

And then anon she saw Judas come and kiss our Lord, and the Jews laid hands upon him full violently.<sup>9</sup>

Then had our Lady and she much sorrow and great pain to see the lamb of innocence so contemptibly be held and drawn by his own people that he was specially sent unto. And immediately the said creature beheld with her spiritual eye the Jews putting a cloth before our Lord's eye, beating him and buffeting him in the head and striking him before his sweet mouth, crying full cruelly unto him, "Tell us now who smote you."

They spared not to spit in his face in the most shameful way that they could. And then our Lady and she her unworthy handmaiden for the time wept and sighed full sorely, for the Jews acted so foully and so venomously with her blissful Lord. And they would not spare to pull his blissful ears and pull the hair of his beard. And anon after she saw them draw off his clothes and make him all naked and then

draw him forth before them as if he had been the greatest malefactor in all the world. And he went forth full meekly before them, all mother-naked as he was born, to a pillar of stone and spoke no word against them but let them do and say what they would. And there they bound him to the pillar as straight as they could and beat him on his fair white body with switches, with whips, and with scourges. And then she thought our Lady wept wonderfully sorely. And therefore the said creature must needs weep and cry when she saw such ghostly sights in her soul as freshly and as verily as if it had been done in deed in her bodily sight, and she thought that our Lady and she were always together to see our Lord's pains, such ghostly sights had she every Palm Sunday and every Good Friday, and in many other ways for many years together. And therefore cried she and wept full sorely and suffered full much despite and reproof in many a country.

And then our Lord said to her soul, "Daughter, these sorrows and many more suffered I for your love, and divers pains, more than any man can tell on earth. Therefore, daughter, you have great cause to love me right well, for I have bought your love full dearly."

\* \* \*

1436–38

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Margery experiences this vision while participating in a Palm Sunday mass. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For Christ's betrayal on the Mount of Olives, see Luke 22:39–54 and John 18:3–12. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "I am he" (Latin; see John 18:4–8). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In this chapter, Kempe participates in a well-established tradition of Christian anti-Judaism, which blames Christ's suffering on the Jewish people. For more on this Christian



ideology and its violent outcomes, see “Religious Exclusions and Identities” (pp. 285–362).[Return to reference 9](#)

# MYSTERY PLAYS

The increasing prosperity and importance of late medieval urban culture were on powerful display in performances of the mystery plays—a sequence or “cycle” of plays based on the Bible and produced by the city guilds, organizations representing the various trades and crafts of a given city.

Medieval mystery plays had an immensely confident reach in both space and time. In York, for example, the theatrical space and time of this urban amateur drama was that of the entire city, lasting from sunrise throughout the entire long summer holiday. The time represented ran from the fall of the angels and the creation of the world right through to the end of time, in the Last Judgment. Between these extremities of the beginning and end of time, each cycle presents key episodes of Old Testament narrative, such as the Fall of Adam and Eve in Eden and the flood survived by Noah in his ark, before presenting a concentrated sequence of freely interpreted New Testament plays focused on the life and passion of Christ. The Church had its own drama in Latin, dating back to the tenth century, which developed through the dramatization and elaboration of the liturgy—the regular religious service—for certain holidays, in particular the Easter morning service. The vernacular drama was once thought to have evolved from the liturgical, passing by stages from the church into the streets of the town. However, even though they at times echo their Latin counterparts and though their authors may have been clerics, the mysteries represent an old and largely independent tradition of vernacular religious drama. As early as the

twelfth century, a *Play of Adam* in Anglo-Norman French was performed in England—a dramatization of the Fall with highly sophisticated dialogue, characterization, and stagecraft. During the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the great English mystery cycles were performed in provincial yet increasingly powerful and independent cities. They were the production of the city itself, with particular responsibility for staging and performance devolving onto the city guilds. A guild was also known as a “mystery,” from Latin *ministerium*, whence the label “mystery plays.” A guild combined the functions of modern trade union, club, religious society, and political action group. The performance and staging required significant investments of time and money from amateur performers, the status of whose mystery might be at stake, in a kind of product placement, in the quality and materials of their performance. Often the subject of the play corresponded to the function of the guild (thus, for example, the Pinners, or nail makers, performed the York Crucifixion). Most of our knowledge of the plays, apart from the texts themselves, comes through municipal and guild records, which tell us a great deal about the evolution, staging, and all aspects of the production of the cycles. In some of the cities each guild had a wagon that served as a stage. The wagon proceeded from one strategic point in the city to another, and the play would be performed a number of times on the same day. In other towns, plays were probably acted out in sequence on a platform erected at a single location such as the main city square.

The cycles were performed every year at the time of one of two great early summer festivals—Whitsuntide, the week following the seventh Sunday after Easter, or Corpus Christi, a week later (falling somewhere between May 21 and June 24). They served as both religious instruction and entertainment for wide audiences, including unlearned folk like the carpenter in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* (lines 405–74), who recalls from them the trouble Noah had getting his wife aboard the ark. The plays also addressed educated laypeople and clerics, who, besides enjoying the sometimes boisterous comedy, would find the plays acting out traditional interpretations of scripture

such as the ark as a type, or prefiguration, of the Church. Thus the cycles were public spectacles watched by every layer of society. The rainbow in *Noah's Flood* and the Angel's *Gloria* in the *Shepherds' Play*, with their messages of mercy and hope, unite actors and audience in a common faith. Yet the first shepherd's opening speech, complaining of taxation and the insolent exploitation of farmers by "gentlery-men," shows how the plays also served as vehicles of social criticism and reveal many of the rifts and tensions in the late medieval social fabric.

The particular intersection of religious and civic institutions that made the cycles possible was put under strain from the beginning of the Reformation in England in the 1530s. Given the strength of civic institutions, the amateur theater of the cycles survived into the reign of Elizabeth; but partly because they were identified with the Catholic Church, they were suppressed by local ecclesiastical (by then Protestant) pressures in each city in the late 1560s and 1570s. The last performance of the York Cycle in 1569 is nearly coincident with the opening of the first professional theater in Whitechapel (London) in 1567. The cycles of several towns are lost. Those of York and Chester have been preserved, the latter in a post-Reformation form. The Towneley plays, sometimes connected with Wakefield (Yorkshire), and those that constitute the so-called N-town plays from East Anglia treat comparable material, as do fragmentary survivals from elsewhere. On the morality play—the other major form of theater that flourished in England in the fifteenth century and continued on into the sixteenth—see the headnote to *Everyman* ([p. 622](#)).

**The York Play of the Crucifixion** The climax of the mystery cycles is reached with a sequence of plays about the passion, or suffering, of Christ. Everything in each cycle leads up to the Crucifixion, understood by Christians to be the turning point in human history, when the original sin of Adam and Eve is paid for by Christ's suffering and death. No cycle has a more dramatic series of passion plays than that performed at York, the longest of the four extant English cycles. Records of the York mystery plays begin to appear in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, when York was, next to London, England's most populous and prosperous city. Richard II came to see the cycle in 1397. Sometime after 1415 the plays of the passion sequence were extensively revised by a gifted playwright referred to by scholars as the York Realist. The *Crucifixion*, although not written in that author's distinctive alliterative style, has sometimes been attributed to him, and it is, in any case, a powerful example of late medieval dramatic art. It is also an especially moving representation of Christ in his suffering humanity, a theme characteristic of late medieval spirituality.

The York plays leading up to the *Crucifixion* are especially cruel: a silent Jesus is vilified, scourged, crowned with thorns, battered, and mocked in a sadistic game of blindman's buff. Much of the York *Crucifixion* revolves around the mechanical difficulties the soldiers encounter in nailing Jesus to the Cross. The play focuses on the soldiers; they are villains, to be sure, but also ordinary men engaged in what they see as ordinary work. They are not monsters.

The gory details, part of the play's "realism," create a shudder, but the play has larger designs on its audience. While the soldiers are hard at work, the audience sees only them, complaining of bad workmanship by those who bored the nail holes too far apart, necessitating the stretching of Christ's arms. Only when the Cross is raised, and Christ is fully visible, does the audience recognize the full extent to which they have been shielded from the pain inflicted by the soldiers' work. When the Cross is finally vertical, the actor-Christ speaks to "All men that walk by way or street" (see the lyric "Ye That Pasen by the Weye," derived from Lamentations 1:12; [p. 218](#)). He

thereby addresses the spectators in the streets of York as though *they* were representing the crowd around the Cross on Calvary, outside Jerusalem. The actor-Christ's words directly involve and implicate the spectators in the drama and its theme of salvation. The soldiers may concentrate on their "work" of nailing Christ to the Cross, but the audience is prompted to reflect on the relation between daily labor and the "works" of mercy incumbent upon each Christian. The meaning of Christ's words is, however, lost on the soldiers, who truly "know not what they do" and proceed to quarrel about possession of Christ's cloak.

# The York Play of the Crucifixion

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### JESUS FOUR SOLDIERS

#### [*Calvary*]

1ST SOLDIER Sir knights, take heed hither in hie, <sup>o</sup>

This deed on dergh we may not draw <sup>1</sup>

Ye woot <sup>o</sup> yourself as well as I

How lords and leaders of our law

Has given doom <sup>o</sup> that this dote <sup>o</sup> shall die.

2ND SOLDIER Sir, all their counsel well we know.

Sen <sup>o</sup> we are comen to Calvary,

Let ilk <sup>o</sup> man help now as him awe. <sup>o</sup>

3RD SOLDIER We are all ready, lo,

This forward <sup>o</sup> to fulfill.

4TH SOLDIER Let hear how we shall do,

And go we tite theretill. <sup>2</sup>

1ST SOLDIER It may not help here for to hone, <sup>o</sup>

If we shall any worship <sup>o</sup> win.

2ND SOLDIER He must be dead needlings <sup>o</sup> by noon.

3RD SOLDIER Then is good time that we begin.

4TH SOLDIER Let ding <sup>o</sup> him down, then is he done:

He shall not dere <sup>o</sup> us with his din.

1ST SOLDIER He shall be set and learned soon <sup>3</sup>

With care <sup>o</sup> to him and all his kin.

2ND SOLDIER The foulest dead <sup>o</sup> of all

Shall he die for his deeds.

3RD SOLDIER That means cross <sup>o</sup> him we shall.

4TH SOLDIER Behold, so right he reads. <sup>o</sup>

1ST SOLDIER Then to this work us must take heed,  
So that our working be not wrang.<sup>o</sup>

2ND SOLDIER None other note to neven is need,<sup>4</sup>  
But let us haste him for to hang.

3RD SOLDIER And I have gone for gear good speed,<sup>o</sup>  
Both hammers and nails large and lang.<sup>o</sup>

4TH SOLDIER Then may we boldly do this deed.  
Come on, let kill this traitor strong.<sup>o</sup>

1ST SOLDIER Fair might ye fall in fere<sup>5</sup>  
That has wrought on this wise.<sup>o</sup>

2ND SOLDIER Us needs not for to lear<sup>o</sup>  
Such faitours<sup>o</sup> to chastise.

3RD SOLDIER Sen ilk a thing is right arrayed,  
The wiselier<sup>o</sup> now work may we.

4TH SOLDIER The cross on ground is goodly graid,<sup>o</sup>  
And bored<sup>6</sup> even as it ought to be.

1ST SOLDIER Look that the lad on length be laid,  
And made be fest<sup>o</sup> unto this tree.<sup>7</sup>

2ND SOLDIER For all his fare<sup>o</sup> he shall be flayed:<sup>o</sup>  
That on assay<sup>8</sup> soon shall ye see.

3RD SOLDIER Come forth, thou cursed knave,  
Thy comfort soon shall keel.<sup>o</sup>

4TH SOLDIER Thine hire<sup>o</sup> here shall thou have.

1ST SOLDIER Walk on, now work we weel.<sup>o</sup>

JESUS Almighty God, my Father free,<sup>o</sup>  
Let these matters be made in mind:  
Thou bade that I should buxom<sup>o</sup> be,  
For Adam<sup>o</sup> plight for to be pined.<sup>o</sup>  
Here to dead<sup>o</sup> I oblige me<sup>9</sup>  
Fro<sup>o</sup> that sin for to save mankind,  
And sovereignly beseech I thee,<sup>1</sup>  
That they for me may favor find.



And from the Fiend them fend,<sup>o</sup>  
So that their souls be safe,  
In wealth<sup>o</sup> withouten end.  
I keep<sup>o</sup> nought else to crave.

1ST SOLDIER We,<sup>2</sup> hark, sir knights, for Mahound's<sup>3</sup> blood.  
Of Adam-kind<sup>o</sup> is all his thought!

2ND SOLDIER The warlock waxes worse than wood.<sup>4</sup>  
This doleful dead<sup>o</sup> ne dreadeth he nought.

3RD SOLDIER Thou should have mind, with main and mood,<sup>5</sup>  
Of wicked works that thou hast wrought.

4TH SOLDIER I hope<sup>o</sup> that he had been as good<sup>o</sup>  
Have ceased of saws that he up sought.<sup>6</sup>

1ST SOLDIER Those saws<sup>o</sup> shall rue<sup>o</sup> him sore  
For all his sauntering<sup>7</sup> soon.

2ND SOLDIER I'll speed them that him spare<sup>8</sup>  
Till he to dead<sup>o</sup> be done.

3RD SOLDIER Have done belive,<sup>o</sup> boy, and make thee boun<sup>o</sup>  
And bend thy back unto this tree.

[JESUS *lies down.*]

4TH SOLDIER Behold, himself has laid him down,  
In length and breadth as he should be.

1ST SOLDIER This traitor here tainted<sup>o</sup> of treasoun,  
Go fast and fetch him then, ye three.

And sen<sup>o</sup> he claimeth kingdom with crown,  
Even as a king here hang shall he.

2ND SOLDIER Now certes I shall not fine<sup>o</sup>  
Ere his right hand be fest.<sup>o</sup>

3RD SOLDIER The left hand then is mine:  
Let see who bears him<sup>9</sup> best.

4TH SOLDIER His limbs on length then shall I lead,<sup>o</sup>  
And even unto the bore<sup>o</sup> them bring.

1ST SOLDIER Unto his head I shall take heed,

And with my hand help him to hing.°

2ND SOLDIER Now sen° we four shall do this deed,

And meddle° with this unthrifty° thing,

Let no man spare for special speed,<sup>1</sup>

Till that we have made ending.

3RD SOLDIER This forward° may not fail,

Now are we right arrayed.°

4TH SOLDIER This boy here in our bail°

Shall bide° full bitter braid.°

1ST SOLDIER Sir knights, say, how work we now?

2ND SOLDIER Yes, certes, I hope° I hold this hand.

And to the bore I have it brought,

Full buxomly° withouten band.°

1ST SOLDIER Strike on then hard, for him thee bought.<sup>2</sup>

2ND SOLDIER Yes, here is a stub° will safely stand:

Through bones and sinews it shall be sought.°

This work is well, I will warrand.°

1ST SOLDIER Say, sir, how do we thore?°

This bargain may not blin.<sup>3</sup>

3RD SOLDIER It fails° a foot and more,

The sinews are so gone in.°

4TH SOLDIER I hope° that mark° amiss be bored.

2ND SOLDIER Then must he bide° in bitter bale.°

3RD SOLDIER In faith, it was over-scantly scored.<sup>4</sup>

That makes it foully° for to fail.

1ST SOLDIER Why carp° ye so? Fast° on a cord

And tug him to, by top and tail.<sup>5</sup>

3RD SOLDIER Yea, thou commands lightly° as a lord:

Come help to haul, with ill hail.<sup>6</sup>

1ST SOLDIER Now certes° that shall I do

Full snelly° as a snail.

3RD SOLDIER And I shall tach° him to

Full nimbly with a nail.

This work will hold, that dare I heet,<sub>o</sub>  
For now are fest<sub>o</sub> fast both his hend.<sub>o</sub>

4TH SOLDIER Go we all four then to his feet:  
So shall our space<sub>o</sub> be speedly<sub>o</sub> spend.

2ND SOLDIER Let see, what bourd his bale might beet.<sub>7</sub>  
Thereto my back now will I bend.

4TH SOLDIER Ow! this work is all unmeet:<sub>o</sub>  
This boring must be all amend.

1ST SOLDIER Ah, peace, man, for Mahound,<sub>8</sub>  
Let no man woot<sub>o</sub> that wonder,  
A rope shall rug<sub>o</sub> him down,  
If all his sinews go asunder.

2ND SOLDIER That cord full kindly can I knit,<sub>o</sub>  
The comfort of this carl<sub>o</sub> to keel.<sub>o</sub>

1ST SOLDIER Fest<sub>o</sub> on then fast that all be fit.  
It is no force<sub>o</sub> how fell<sub>o</sub> he feel.

2ND SOLDIER Lug on, ye both, a little yit,<sub>o</sub>

3RD SOLDIER I shall not cease, as I have seel.<sub>9</sub>

4TH SOLDIER And I shall fond<sub>o</sub> him for to hit.

2ND SOLDIER Ow, hail!<sub>o</sub>

4TH SOLDIER Ho, now I hold<sub>o</sub> it weel.<sub>o</sub>

1ST SOLDIER Have done, drive in that nail  
So that no fault be found.

4TH SOLDIER This working would not fail  
If four bulls here were bound.

1ST SOLDIER These cords have evil<sub>o</sub> increased his pains  
Ere<sub>o</sub> he were till<sub>o</sub> the borings brought.

2ND SOLDIER Yea, asunder are both sinews and veins  
On ilk a side, so have we sought.<sub>o</sub>

3RD SOLDIER Now all his gauds<sub>o</sub> nothing him gains:  
His sauntering shall with bale be bought.<sub>1</sub>

4TH SOLDIER I will go say to our sovereigns  
Of all these works how we have wrought.

1ST SOLDIER Nay, sirs, another thing  
Falls first to you and me:<sup>2</sup>  
They bade we should him hing<sub>o</sub>  
On height that men might see.

2ND SOLDIER We woot well so their words were,  
But sir, that deed will do us dere.<sub>o</sub>

1ST SOLDIER It may nought mend<sub>o</sub> for to moot<sub>o</sub> more:  
This harlot<sub>o</sub> must be hanged here.

2ND SOLDIER The mortise<sup>3</sup> is made fit<sub>o</sub> therefore.

3RD SOLDIER Fast on your fingers then, in fere.<sup>4</sup>

4TH SOLDIER I ween<sub>o</sub> it will never come there.  
We four raise it not right to<sub>o</sub>-year.

1ST SOLDIER Say, man, why carps thou so?  
Thy lifting was but light.<sub>o</sub>

2ND SOLDIER He means there must be mo<sub>o</sub>  
To heave him up on height.

3RD SOLDIER Now certes I hope it shall not need  
To call to us more company.

Methink we four should do this deed,  
And bear him to yon hill on high.

1ST SOLDIER It must be done withouten dread:<sub>o</sub>

No more, but look ye be ready,  
And this part shall I lift and lead.<sub>o</sub>

On length he shall no longer lie.

Therefore now make you boun:<sub>o</sub>

Let bear him to yon hill.

4TH SOLDIER Then will I bear here down,  
And tent his toes untill.<sup>5</sup>

2ND SOLDIER We two shall see till<sub>o</sub> either side,  
For else this work will wry<sub>o</sub> all wrang.<sub>o</sub>

3RD SOLDIER We are ready.

4TH SOLDIER Good sirs, abide,  
And let me first his feet up fang.<sub>o</sub>

2ND SOLDIER Why tent ye so to tales this tide?<sup>6</sup>

1ST SOLDIER Lift up!

[*All lift the cross together.*]

4TH SOLDIER Let see!

2ND SOLDIER Ow! Lift along!

3RD SOLDIER From all this harm he should him hide<sub>o</sub>  
And<sub>o</sub> he were God.

4TH SOLDIER The Devil him hang!

1ST SOLDIER For great harm<sub>o</sub> I have hent:<sub>o</sub>  
My shoulder is in sunder.

2ND SOLDIER And certes I am near shent,<sub>o</sub>  
So long have I born under.<sup>7</sup>

3RD SOLDIER This cross and I in two must twin<sub>o</sub>—  
Else breaks my back in sunder soon.

4TH SOLDIER Lay down again and leave<sub>o</sub> your din.  
This deed for us will never be done.

[*They lay it down.*]

1ST SOLDIER Assay,<sub>o</sub> sirs, let see if any gin<sub>o</sub>  
May help him up, withouten hone.<sub>o</sub>  
For here should wight<sub>o</sub> men worship win,  
And not with gauds<sub>o</sub> all day to gone.<sub>o</sub>

2ND SOLDIER More wighter<sub>o</sub> men than we  
Full few I hope<sub>o</sub> ye find.

3RD SOLDIER This bargain<sub>o</sub> will not be,<sub>o</sub>  
For certes me wants wind.<sup>8</sup>

4TH SOLDIER So will<sub>o</sub> of work never we wore.<sub>o</sub>  
I hope this carl some cautels cast.<sup>9</sup>

2ND SOLDIER My burden sat<sub>o</sub> me wonder sore:  
Unto the hill I might not last.

1ST SOLDIER Lift up and soon he shall be thore.<sub>o</sub>  
Therefore fest<sub>o</sub> on your fingers fast.

3RD SOLDIER Ow, lift!

1ST SOLDIER We, lo!

4TH SOLDIER A little more!

2ND SOLDIER Hold then!

1ST SOLDIER How now?

2ND SOLDIER The worst is past.

3RD SOLDIER He weighs a wicked weight.

2ND SOLDIER So may we all four say,  
Ere<sup>o</sup> he was heaved on height  
And raised on this array.<sup>o</sup>

4TH SOLDIER He made us stand as any stones,  
So boistous<sup>o</sup> was he for to bear.

1ST SOLDIER Now raise him nimble for the nones,<sup>1</sup>  
And set him by this mortise here;  
And let him fall in all at once,  
For certes that pain shall have no peer.<sup>o</sup>

3RD SOLDIER Heave up!  
4TH SOLDIER Let down, so all his bones  
Are asunder now on sides sere.<sup>2</sup>  
[*The cross is raised.*]

1ST SOLDIER That falling was more fell<sup>o</sup>  
Than all the harms he had.  
Now may a man well tell<sup>o</sup>  
The least lith<sup>o</sup> of this lad.

3RD SOLDIER Methinketh this cross will not abide  
Nor stand still in this mortise yit. [o](#)

4TH SOLDIERAt the first was it made overdue:  
That makes it wave, thou may well wit.◊

1ST SOLDIER It shall be set on ilk a side,  
So that it shall no further flit.◊  
Good wedges shall we take this tide,◊  
And fast◊ the foot, then is all fit.

2ND SOLDIER Here are wedges arrayed  
For that, both great and small.

3RD SOLDIER Where are our hammers laid  
That we should work withal?

4TH SOLDIER We have them here even at our hand.

2ND SOLDIER Give me this wedge, I shall it in drive.

4TH SOLDIER Here is another yit ordand.<sub>o</sub>

3RD SOLDIER Do take<sub>o</sub> it me hither belive.<sub>o</sub>

1ST SOLDIER Lay on then fast.

3RD SOLDIER Yes. I warrand.<sub>o</sub>

I thring them sam, so mote I thrive.<sub>3</sub>

Now will this cross ful stably stand:

All if he rave they will not rive.<sub>4</sub>

1ST SOLDIER Say, sir, how likes thou now

The work that we have wrought?

4TH SOLDIER We pray you, say us how

Ye feel, or faint ye aught?<sub>5</sub>

JESUS All men that walk by way or street,

Take tent—ye shall no travail tine<sub>6</sub>—

Behold mine head, mine hands, my feet,

And fully feel now ere<sub>o</sub> ye fine<sub>o</sub>

If any mourning may be meet<sub>o</sub>

Or mischief<sub>o</sub> measured unto mine.

My Father, that all bales may bete,<sub>7</sub>

Forgive these men that do me pine.<sub>o</sub>

What they work woot<sub>o</sub> they nought:<sub>8</sub>

Therefore my Father I crave

Let never their sins be sought,<sub>o</sub>

But see their souls to save.

1ST SOLDIER We, hark! he jangles like a jay.

2ND SOLDIER Methink he patters like a pie.<sub>o</sub>

3RD SOLDIER He has been doand<sub>o</sub> all this day,

And made great mening<sub>o</sub> of mercy.

4TH SOLDIER Is this the same that gun<sub>o</sub> us say

That he was God's son almighty?<sub>9</sub>

1ST SOLDIER Therefore he feels full fell affray,<sub>1</sub>

And doomed this day was for to die.

2ND SOLDIER Vath! *qui destruis templum!*<sup>2</sup>

3RD SOLDIER His saws<sub>o</sub> were so, certain.

4TH SOLDIER And, sirs, he said to some  
He might raise it again.

1ST SOLDIER To muster<sub>o</sub> that he had no might,

For all the cautels<sub>o</sub> that he could cast;

All if he were in word so wight,<sup>3</sup>

For<sub>o</sub> all his force now is he fast.<sub>o</sub>

All Pilate deemed is done and dight:<sub>o</sub>

Therefore I read<sub>o</sub> that we go rest.

2ND SOLDIER This race must be rehearsed right<sup>4</sup>

Through the world both east and west.

2ND SOLDIER Yea, let him hang here still

And make mows on the moon.<sup>5</sup>

4TH SOLDIER Then may we wend<sub>o</sub> at will.

1ST SOLDIER Nay, good sirs, not so soon.

For certes us needs another note:<sup>6</sup>

This kirtle<sub>o</sub> would I of you crave.

2ND SOLDIER Nay, nay, sir, we will look<sub>o</sub> by lot

Which of us four falls<sub>o</sub> it to have.

3RD SOLDIER I read<sub>o</sub> we draw cut<sub>o</sub> for this coat.

Lo, see now soon, all sides to save.<sup>7</sup>

4TH SOLDIER The short cut<sub>o</sub> shall win, that well ye woot,<sub>o</sub>

Whether it fall to knight or knave.

1ST SOLDIER Fellows, ye thar not flite,<sup>8</sup>

For this mantle is mine.

2ND SOLDIER Go we then hence tite,<sub>o</sub>

This travail here we tine.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes



- Note 1: We may not delay the time of this deed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: And let's get to it quickly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He'll be put in his place and taught quickly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: There is no need to mention any other business.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: May you all have good luck together.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, bored with holes for the nails, which were probably wooden.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the Cross. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, in actual experience.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Render myself liable.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And above all I beseech thee.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "We": an exclamation of surprise or displeasure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Muhammad's; the sacred figures of other religions were considered devils by Christians in the Middle Ages; the soldier is swearing by the Devil.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This devil grows worse than crazy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You should think, with all your strength and wits.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, to have ceased of the sayings that he thought up.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Behaving like a saint.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Bad luck to them that spare him.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Handles himself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Let nobody slacken because of his own welfare.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Drive the nail in hard, for him who redeemed thee (a splendidly anachronistic oath).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This arrangement may not fail; the arrangement is of the four soldiers at the four ends of the cross.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: It was too carelessly bored.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: And stretch him to it, head and toe.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With bad luck to you.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Let's see, what trick could increase his suffering.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See note to line 61, above.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As I may have good luck.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: His acting like a saint (?) shall be paid for with pain.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: You and I must do first.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A hole in the ground shaped to receive the cross.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Fasten your fingers on it, all together.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Then I'll carry the part down here and attend to his toes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Why are you so intent on talking at a time like this?[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: So long have I borne it up.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: For certainly I am out of breath.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I think this knave cast some spells.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For the purpose.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Are pulled apart on every side.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I press them together, so may I thrive.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Even if he struggles, they will not budge.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Or do you feel somewhat faint?[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Take heed, you shall not lose your labor.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: My father, who may remedy all evils.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Luke 23:34.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That he was the son of almighty God.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: For that he suffers a full cruel assault.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Faith thou who destroys the temple (Latin; see Mark 14:58, John 2:19).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Even though he was so clever in words.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This course of action must be retold correctly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: And make faces at the moon.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: For surely we have another piece of business to settle.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See now straightway, to protect all parties.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Fellows, you don't need to quarrel.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: We're wasting our time here.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *haste*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *know*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *judgment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fool*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *each* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ought*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *agreement*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *delay*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *honor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of necessity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strike*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *annoy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *death*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crucify*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *speaks*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *wrong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flagrant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in this manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fakers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more skillfully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behavior* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beaten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grow cold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *payment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obedient*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Adam's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tortured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *welfare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mankind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sayings* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *convicted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *fastened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stretch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hole*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hang*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrewarding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abide* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treatment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *effortlessly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cord*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *driven*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warrant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falls short*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shrunk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hole*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *badly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fasten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *readily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *well*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrongly done*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jerk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diminish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fasten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *matter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *badly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *try*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pull*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *badly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afflicted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hang*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *improve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *argue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rascal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrong*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *take*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *protect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injury*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *received*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *try*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trick*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pranks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stronger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrangement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *work*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at a loss*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vexed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fasten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bulky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cruel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *count*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *move*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fasten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guarantee*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *matched with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injury*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *searched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magpie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doing so*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sayings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exhibit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *charms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caught*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accomplished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tunic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *see*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chances*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lots*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °



## **The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Play** In

putting on the stage biblical shepherds and soldiers, medieval playwrights usually and often quite deliberately gave them the appearance and characters of contemporary men and women. No play better illustrates this aspect of the drama than the *Second Shepherds' Play*, included in the Towneley collection of mystery plays and imaginatively based on scriptural material typical of the cycles. As the play opens, the shepherds complain about the cold, the taxes, and the high-handed treatment they get from the gentry—evils closer to shepherds on the Yorkshire moors than to those keeping their flocks near Bethlehem.

The sophisticated dramatic intelligence at work in this and several other of the Wakefield plays belonged undoubtedly to one individual, who probably revised older, more traditional plays sometime during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. His identity is not known, but because of his achievement scholars refer to him as the Wakefield Master. He was probably a highly educated cleric stationed in the vicinity of Wakefield. The Wakefield Master had a genius for combining comedy, including broad farce, with religion in ways that make these elements enhance one another. In the *Second Shepherds' Play*, by linking the comic subplot of Mak and Gill with the solemn story of Christ's nativity, the Wakefield Master has produced a dramatic parable of what the Nativity means in Christian history and in Christian hearts. No one will fail to observe the parallels between the stolen sheep, ludicrously disguised as Mak's latest heir, lying in the cradle, and the real Lamb of God, born in the stable among beasts. A complex of relationships based on this connection suggests itself. But perhaps the most important point is that the charity twice shown by the shepherds—in the first instance to the supposed son of Mak and in the second instance to Mak and Gill, who are let off with only the mildest of punishments—is rewarded when they are invited to visit the Christ child, the embodiment of charity. The bleak beginning of the play, with its series of individual complaints, is ultimately balanced by the optimistic ending, which sees the shepherds once again singing

together in harmony. The *Second Shepherds' Play* is exceptional among the mystery plays in its development of plot and character. There is no parallel to its elaboration of the comic subplot and no character quite like Mak, who has doubtless been imported into religious drama from popular farce. Mak is perhaps the best humorous character in this period outside of Chaucer's works. A braggart of the worst kind, he has something of the charm of Shakespeare's Falstaff, and he resembles Falstaff also in his grotesque attempts to maintain the last shreds of his dignity when he is caught in a lie. Most readers will be glad that the shepherds do not carry out their threat to have the death penalty invoked for his crime.

Following the 1994 edition of the Early English Text Society, the stanza, traditionally printed as nine lines (with an opening quatrain of four long lines, the first halves of which rhyme with one another), is rendered here as "thirteeners," rhyming *a b a b a b a b c d d d c*.

# The Second Shepherds' Play<sup>1</sup>

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

COLL GILL

GIB ANGEL

MAK MARY

DAW

[*A field.*]

[*Enter* COLL.]

COLL Lord, how this weather is cold,  
And I am ill wrapped;  
I am numb with cold  
So long have I napped;  
My legs they fold,  
5 My fingers are chapped.  
It is not as I would,  
For I am all lapped

In sorrow:  
In storms and tempest,  
10 Now in the east, now in the west,  
Woe is him that never has rest  
Midday nor morrow!

But we hapless husbands<sup>o</sup>  
Who walk on the moor,  
15 In faith we are nearhands<sup>o</sup>  
Out of the door.<sup>o</sup>  
No wonder, as it stands

If we be poor,  
For the earth of our lands  
20 Lies fallow as the floor,<sup>2</sup>  
    As you ken.<sup>o</sup>  
We are so hammed,  
Fortaxed, and rammed,  
We are made hand-tamed  
25 By these gentlery-men.

Thus they rob us our rest—  
Our Lady them harry  
These lords' men are pests,  
Who cause the plow tarry.  
30 What men say is for the best—  
We find it contrary.  
Thus are farmers oppressed  
In point to miscarry  
    In life.  
35 Thus hold they us under,  
Thus they bring us in blunder,  
It were a great wonder  
    If ever should we thrive.

40 For may he get a paint-sleeve<sup>3</sup>  
Or brooch nowadays,  
Woe is him that him grieves  
Or once gainsays.  
Dare no man tell him leave  
With whatever force that he may.<sup>o</sup>  
45 And yet may no man believe  
One word that he says,  
    No letter.  
He can make purveyance<sup>4</sup>  
With boast and bragance,  
50 And all is through maintenance<sup>5</sup>

Of men that are greater.

There shall come a swain<sup>o</sup>  
As proud as a po:<sup>o</sup>  
He must borrow my wain,<sup>o</sup>  
55 My plow also;  
Then I am full fain<sup>o</sup>  
To grant ere he go.  
Thus live we in pain,  
Anger, and woe,  
60 By night and by day.  
He must have if he wants it,  
Even if I should forgo it.  
I were better be hanged  
Than once say him nay.

65  
It does me good, as I walk  
Thus by mine own  
Of this world for to talk  
In manner of moan.  
To my sheep I will stalk,  
70 And hearken anon,  
There abide on a balk,<sup>6</sup>  
Or sit on a stone,  
Full soon;  
For I think pardie,<sup>o</sup>  
75 True men if they be,  
We get more company  
Ere it be noon.

[*Enter GIB, who initially does not see COLL.*]

GIB Bensté Dominus,<sup>7</sup>  
What may this mean?  
80 Why fares this world thus?  
Oft have we not seen.

Lord, these weathers aren't piteous  
And the winds are full keen,  
And the frosts so hideous  
85 They water mine eien,o  
    No lie.  
Now in dry, now in wet,  
Now in snow, now in sleet,  
When my shoes freeze to my feet  
90 It is not all easy.

But as far as I ken,o  
Or yet as I go,  
We poor married men  
Suffer much woe;  
95 We have sorrow then and then—  
It falls oft so.  
Silly Copple, our hen,8  
Both to and fro  
    She cackles;  
100 But begin she to croak,  
To groan or to cluck,  
Woe is him, our cock,  
    For he is in shackles.

These men that are wed  
105 Have not all their will:  
When they are full hard steado  
They sigh full still;  
God knows they are led  
Full hard and full ill;  
110 In bower nor in bed  
They speak not their will.  
    This tideo  
My part have I found  
I know my lesson:  
115 Woe is him that is bound,

For he must abide.

But now late in our lives—  
A marvel to me,  
That I think my heart rives<sup>o</sup>  
120 Such wonders to see;  
What that destiny drives  
It must so be—  
Some men will have two wives,  
And some men three  
125 In store.<sup>9</sup>  
Some are sad that has any,  
But so far as know I,  
Woe is him that has many,  
For he feels sore.

130 But young men awooing,  
For God that you bought,<sup>o</sup>  
Be well ware of wedding  
And think in your thought:  
“Had I known” is a thing  
135 That serves of nought.  
Much secret mourning  
Has wedding home brought,  
And griefs,  
With many a sharp shower,<sup>o</sup>  
140 For you may catch in an hour  
That will vex you full sour  
As long as you live.

For as ever read in ‘pistle,<sup>1</sup>  
145 I have one by my fire  
As sharp as a thistle,  
As rough as a briar.  
She is browed like a bristle,  
With a sourpuss cheer;

150 Had she once wet her whistle  
She could sing full clear  
Her Pater Noster.<sup>2</sup>  
She is great as a whale;  
She has a gallon of gall:  
By him that died for us all,  
155 I would I had run till I'd lost her.  
COLL God look over the row!  
[to GIB] Full deafly you stand!  
GIB Yea, the devil in your maw<sup>o</sup>  
So standing around!  
160 Saw you anywhere Daw?  
COLL Yea, on feedland  
Heard I him blow.  
He comes here at hand,  
Not far.  
165 Stand still.  
GIB Why?  
COLL For he comes, think I.  
GIB He will make us both a lie  
Unless we be ware.

*[Enter the boy DAW, who does not see the two  
older shepherds.]*

170 DAW Christ's cross me speed  
And Saint Nicholas!  
Thereof had I need:  
It is worse than it was.  
Whoso could take heed  
And let the world pass,  
175 It is ever in dread  
And brittle as glass,  
And slide.<sup>o</sup>  
This world was never so,  
With marvels more and more,



180 Now in weal, now in woe,  
And no thing abides.

Was never since Noah's flood  
Such waters seen,  
Winds and rains so rude  
185 And storms so keen:  
Some stammered, some stood  
In fear as I deem  
Now God turn all to good!  
I say as I mean.

190 For ponder:  
These floods so they drown  
Both in fields and in town,  
And bears all down,  
And that is a wonder

195 We that walk on the nights  
Our cattle to keep,  
We see sudden sights  
When other men sleep.  
Yet methink my heart lights:  
200 I see rascals peep.

*[He sees the others, but does not greet them.]*

You are two tall wights.<sup>o</sup>  
I will give my sheep  
A turn.  
But full ill have I meant:<sup>3</sup>  
205 As I walk on this bent<sup>o</sup>  
I may quickly repent,  
My toes if I spurn.<sup>o</sup>

Ah, sir, God you save,  
And master mine!  
210

A drink would I have,  
 And somewhat to dine.  
 COLL Christ's curse, my knave,  
 You're a lazy child!  
 GIB What, the boy's set to rave!  
 Abide for a while  
 215 We have eaten it.°  
 Ill thrift on thy pate!<sup>4</sup>  
 Though the rascal came late  
 Yet is he in state  
 220 To dine—if he had it.  
  
 DAW Such servants as I,  
 Who sweat and swink,°  
 Eat our bread full dry,  
 And that me forthinks°  
 225 We are oft wet and weary  
 When master-men wink,°  
 Yet comes full lately  
 Both dinners and drink.  
 But nately°  
 230 Both our dame and our sire,  
 When we have run in the mire,  
 They can nip at our hire,  
 And pay us full lately.  
  
 235 But here my oath, master,  
 For the food that ye make  
 I shall earn thereafter:  
 Work as I take.  
 I shall do a little, sir,  
 And between times lake,°  
 240 For too much supper  
 Lay never on my stomach  
 In fields.  
 Whereto should I threap?°

245 With my staff can I leap,  
And men say, "Bargaining cheap  
Poor return yields."

COLL You'd be an ill lad  
Yourself to defend  
With a man that had  
250 But little to spend.

GIB Peace, boy, I bade—  
No more to this end,  
Or I shall make thee full rad,<sup>o</sup>  
By the heaven's King!  
255 With thy gauds<sup>o</sup>—  
Where are our sheep, boy?—we scorn.<sup>5</sup>

DAW This same day at morn  
I left them in the corn<sup>o</sup>  
260 When they rang Lauds.<sup>6</sup>

They have pasture good,  
They cannot go wrong.  
COLL That is right. By the rood,<sup>o</sup>  
These nights are long!  
Yet I would, ere we yode,<sup>o</sup>  
265 Come, give us a song.

GIB So I thought as I stood,  
To cheer us among.<sup>o</sup>

DAW I grant.  
COLL Let me sing the tenory.<sup>o</sup>

270 GIB And I the treble so hee.<sup>o</sup>

DAW Then the mean falls to me.  
Let see how you chant.

[*They sing.*]

[*Enter MAK, cloaked.*]<sup>7</sup>

MAK Now, Lord, for thy names seven,  
That made both moon and stars  
275 Well more than I can neven,o  
Thy will, Lord, now me mars.  
I am all uneven—  
That moves oft my harns.o  
Now would God I were in heaven,  
280 For there weep no barnso  
Ever still.

COLL Who is that pipes so poor?

MAK [*aside*] Would God you knew how I foor!o  
[*aloud*] Lo, a man that walks on the moor  
285 And has not all his will.

GIB Mak, where have you gone?  
Tell us tidings.

DAW Is he come? Then each one  
290 Take heed to his things.8

[*Snatches the cloak off him.*]

MAK What! Ich<sup>9</sup> be a yeoman,  
I tell you, of the king,  
The self and the same,  
Sent by a great lording  
And sich.o  
295 Fie on you! Go hence  
Out of my presence:  
I must have reverence.  
Why, who be ich?

300 COLL Why make ye it so quaint?o  
Mak, ye do wrong.

GIB But, Mak, why play the saint?  
Why keep it up so long?

DAW I think the rascal can paint<sup>o</sup>—  
 The devil might him hang!  
 305 MAK Ich shall make complaint  
 And make you all to thwang<sup>o</sup>  
 At a word,  
 And tell just how ye doth.  
 COLL But Mak, is that sooth?  
 310 Now take out that Southern tooth,<sup>1</sup>  
 And set it in turd!

GIB Mak, the devil in your ee!<sup>o</sup>  
 A stroke would I give you!  
 DAW Mak, know ye not me?  
 By God, I could irk you.  
 315 MAK God protect you all three:  
 I thought I had seen you.  
 You are a fair company.

COLL You now remember it's you?<sup>2</sup>  
 320 GIB Crook, peep!<sup>o</sup>  
 Thus late as it goes,  
 What will men suppose?  
 And you have an ill nose<sup>o</sup>  
 Of stealing sheep.  
 325

MAK And I am true as steel,  
 All men know  
 But a sickness I feel  
 That holds me full low:  
 My belly fares not well,  
 330 It is out of estate.  
 DAW Seldom lies the devil  
 Dead by the gate.<sup>3</sup>  
 MAK Therefore  
 Full sore am I and ill  
 335 If I stand stone-still,  
 I eat not a needle,

This month and more.

COLL How fares thy wife? By my hood,  
How fares sho?°  
340 MAK Lies sprawling, by the rood,°  
By the fire, lo!  
And a house full of brood.  
She drinks well, too:  
That's the only good  
345 That she will do!  
But sho  
Eats as fast as she can;  
And each year that comes to man  
She brings forth a bairn°  
350 And some years two.

But were I now more prosperous  
And richer by far,  
I'd still be eaten out of house  
And of harbar.°  
355 Yet is she a foul douce,°  
If you come nar:°  
There is none that trows°  
Nor knows a war°  
Than know I.  
360 Now will you see what I proffer:  
To give all in my coffer  
Tomorrow I'd offer  
Her head-mass penny.⁴

365 GIB I know so forwaked°  
Is none in this shire.  
I would sleep if° I taked  
Less to my hire.  
DAW I am cold and naked  
And would have a fire.

370 COLL I am weary forraked<sup>o</sup>  
And run in the mire.  
The guard is you!<sup>o</sup>

*[Lies down.]*

375 GIB Nay, I will lie down by,  
For I must sleep, truly.

*[Lies down beside him.]*

DAW As good a man's son was I  
As any of you.

*[Lies down and signals to MAK to lie between them.]*

But Mak, come hither, between  
Shall you lie down.

380 MAK Then might I stop your team  
Of what you would rown,<sup>o</sup>  
No dread.<sup>o</sup>

*[Lies down and prays.]*

From my top to my toe,  
*Manus tuas commendo*  
*Pontio Pilato*<sup>5</sup>

385 Christ's cross me speed!<sup>o</sup>

*[He rises as the others sleep and speaks.]*<sup>6</sup>

Now were time for a man  
That lacks what he wold<sup>o</sup>  
To stalk privily then  
Unto a fold,  
390 And nimble to work than,

And be not too bold,  
For he might pay dear the bargain  
If it were told

395     At the end.  
Now were time for to reel:◊  
But he needs good counsel  
That fain would fare well  
And has but little to spend.

*[He draws a magic circle around the shepherds  
and utters a spell.]*

400     But about you a circle  
As round as a moon,  
Til I have done what I will,  
Till that it be noon,  
That ye lie stone-still  
Until that I have done;  
405     And I shall say theretill◊  
Of good words a foon:◊

“On hight,◊  
Over your heads my hand I lift.  
Out go your eyes! Block your sight!”  
410     But yet I must make better shift  
If it’s to be right.

Lord, how they sleep hard—  
That may you all hear.  
Was I never a shepherd,  
415     But now will I lear.◊  
The flock may be scared,  
Yet shall I nip near.

*[He grabs one.]*

How! Draw hitherward!



420 Now mends our cheer  
From sorrow.  
A fat sheep, I dare say!  
A good fleece, dare I lay!  
Repay when I may,  
425 But this will I borrow.

*[Goes with the sheep to his cottage and calls  
from outside.]*

How, Gill, art you in?  
Get us some light.  
GILL *[inside]* Who makes such a din  
This time of the night?  
I am set for to spin;  
430 There's no way I might  
Rise, a penny to win.  
I curse them on height! o  
So fares  
A housewife that has been  
435 Harried thus between:  
Here may no reward be seen  
For such small chares. o  
MAK Good wife, open the hek! o  
Don't you see what I bring?  
440 GILL Just draw the sneck. o  
Ah, come in, my darling.  
MAK Yea, no need to reck o  
About keeping me standing.

*[She opens the door.]*

445 GILL By the naked neck  
Are you like for to hang.  
MAK No way!  
I deserve my meat,

For in a pinch I can get  
More than they that sweat  
450 All the long day.

Thus it fell to my lot,  
Gill, I had such grace.  
GILL It were a foul blot  
To be hanged for the case.  
455 MAK I have escaped, Jelot, o  
From as hard a glase. o  
GILL But "So long goes the pot  
To the water," men says,  
"At last  
460 Comes it home broken."  
MAK Well know I the token, o  
But let it never be spoken!  
But come and help fast.

I would it were flain, o  
465 I sure wish to eat:  
This twelvemonth was I not so fain  
Of one sheep-meat.

GILL Come they ere it be slain,  
And hear the sheep bleat—  
470 MAK Then might I be ta'en o—  
That were a cold sweat!  
Go spar o  
The street-door.

GILL Yes, Mak,  
For if they come at thy back—  
475 MAK Then might I pay, for all the pack,  
The devil of the war. o

GILL A good ploy have I spied,  
Since you have none.  
480 Here shall we him hide

Till they be gone,  
In my cradle. Abide!  
Let me alone,  
And I shall lie beside  
485 In childbed and groan.  
MAK Get you red,<sup>o</sup>  
And I shall say you were light<sup>o</sup>  
Of a boy-child this night.  
GILL Now well is the day bright  
490 That ever I was bred.<sup>o</sup>

This is a good guise<sup>o</sup>  
And a far-cast:<sup>o</sup>  
Yet a woman's advice  
Helps at the last.  
495 I know never who spies:  
To it, go fast.  
MAK Unless I come ere they rise,  
There blows a cold blast.  
I will go sleep.  
500

*[Returns to the sleeping shepherds.]*

Yet sleeps all this meny,<sup>o</sup>  
And I shall go stalk privily,  
As it had never been I  
That carried their sheep.

*[Lies down between them.]*

*[The shepherds are waking up.]*

505 COLL *Resurrex a mortuus!*<sup>7</sup>  
Have hold my hand!  
*Judas carnas dominus!*<sup>8</sup>  
I may not well stand.

My foot sleeps, by Jesus,  
 And I totter fastand.°  
 510 I thought we had laid us  
 Full near England.  
 GIB Ah, yea?  
 Lord, how I have slept well!  
 As fresh as an eel,  
 515 As light I me feel  
 As leaf on a tree.

DAW Bensté° be herein!  
 So my body quakes,  
 My heart is out of skin,  
 520 Whatever it makes.°  
 Who makes all this din?  
 So my skin blakes°  
 To the door will I win.°  
 Hark, fellows, wakes!  
 525 We were four:  
 See ye anywhere of Mak now?  
 COLL We were up ere you.  
 GIB Man, I give God avow  
 Yet went he naw're.°  
 530

DAW Methought he was lapped  
 In a wolfskin.  
 COLL So are many happed°  
 Now, especially within.  
 DAW When we had long napped,  
 535 Methought with a gin°  
 A fat sheep he trapped,  
 But he made no din.  
 GIB Be still!  
 Thy dream makes thee wood.°  
 540 It is but phantom, by the rood.°  
 COLL Now God turn all to good,

If it be his will.

*[They wake up MAK, who pretends to have been asleep.]*

GIB Rise, Mak, for shame!

You lie right long.

545 MAK Now Christ's holy name

Be us among!

What is this? For Saint Jame,

I may not well be gone.

I think I be the same.

550 Ah, my neck has lain wrong.

*[One of them twists his neck.]*

Enough!

Much thank! Since yestereven

Now, by Saint Stephen,

I was flayed with a sweven<sup>o</sup>—

555 My heart out of slough.<sup>1</sup>

I thought Gill began to croak

And labor full sad,<sup>o</sup>

Well-near at the first cock,

Of a young lad,

560 For to grow our flock—

Then be I never glad:

I have tow on my rock<sup>2</sup>

More than ever I had.

Ah, my head!

565 A house full of young tharms!<sup>o</sup>

The devil knock out their harns!<sup>o</sup>

Woe is him has many barns,<sup>o</sup>

And thereto little bread.

570 I must go home, by your leave,  
To Gill, as I thought.°  
I pray you look to my sleeve,  
That I steal nought.  
I am loath you to grieve  
Or from you take aught.  
575 DAW Go forth! Ill might thou chieve!°  
Now would I we sought  
This morn,  
That we had all our store.°  
580 COLL But I will go before.  
Let us meet.  
GIB Whore?°  
DAW At the crooked thorn.

[MAK's *house*. MAK *is at the door*.]

MAK Undo this door!  
585 GILL Who is here?  
MAK How long shall I stand?  
GILL Who makes such a stir?  
Now walk in the weniand!°  
MAK Ah, Gill, what cheer?  
It is I, Mak, your husband.  
590 GILL Then may we see here  
The devil in a band,³  
Sir Guile!  
Lo, he comes with a lote°  
As° he were held by the throat:  
595 I may not sit at my note°  
A short while.  
  
MAK Will you hear what fuss she makes  
To get her a glose?°  
And does nought but lakes°

And scratches her toes?  
600 GILL Why, who wanders? Who wakes?  
Who comes? Who goes?  
Who brews? Who bakes?  
What makes me thus hoarse?  
605 And then  
It is ruth to behold,  
Now in hot, now in cold,  
Full woeful is the household  
That lacks a woman.

610 But what end have you made  
With the shepherds, Mak?  
MAK The last word that they said  
When I turned my back,  
They would look that they had  
615 Their sheep all the pack.  
I don't think they'll be well paid<sup>o</sup>  
When they their sheep lack.  
Pardie!<sup>o</sup>  
But how-so the game goes,  
620 It's me they'll suppose,<sup>o</sup>  
And make a foul noise,  
And cry out upon me.

But you must do as you hight.<sup>o</sup>  
GILL I accord me theretill.<sup>o</sup>  
I shall swaddle him right  
625 In my cradill.

*[She enfolds the sheep and puts it in the  
cradle.]*

If it were a greater sleight,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet could I help still.  
I will lie down straight.<sup>o</sup>  
630

Come cover me.  
MAK I will.

[*Covers her.*]

GILL Behind  
Come Coll and his marrow,<sup>4</sup>  
They will nip us full narrow.  
635 MAK But I may cry "Out, harrow,"<sup>5</sup>  
The sheep if they find.

GILL Hearken ay when they call—  
They will come anon.  
Come and make ready all,  
640 And sing by your own.  
Sing "lullay"<sup>o</sup> you shall,  
For I must groan  
And cry out by the wall  
On Mary and John  
645 For sore.<sup>o</sup>  
Sing "lullay" on fast  
When you hear them at last,  
And if I don't play a false cast,<sup>o</sup>  
Trust me no more.

650

[*The shepherds meet again.*]

DAW Ah, Coll, good morn.  
Why sleep you not?  
COLL Alas, that ever I was born!  
We have a foul blot:  
A fat wether<sup>o</sup> have we lorn.<sup>o</sup>  
655 DAW Marry, God's forbot!<sup>o</sup>  
GIB Who should do us that scorn?  
That were a foul spot!<sup>o</sup>  
COLL Some shrew.<sup>o</sup>



660 I have sought with my dogs  
All Horbury<sup>6</sup> shrogs,<sub>°</sub>  
And of fifteen hogs  
I found only a ewe.<sup>7</sup>

DAW Now believe me, if you will,  
By Saint Thomas of Kent,  
665 Either Mak or Gill  
Was of that assent.

COLL Peace, man, be still!  
I saw when he went.  
You slander him ill—  
670 You ought to repent  
With speed.

GIB Now as ever might I thee,<sub>°</sub>  
If I should even here dee,<sub>°</sub>  
I would say it were he  
675 That did that same deed.

DAW Go we thither, I read,<sub>°</sub>  
And run on our feet.  
Shall I never eat bread  
The truth till I weet.<sub>°</sub>

680 COLL Nor drink in my head,  
With him till I meet.

GIB I will rest in no stead<sub>°</sub>  
Till that I him greet,  
My brother.

685 One thing I hight:<sub>°</sub>  
Till I see him in sight  
Shall I never sleep one night  
Where I do in another.

[*The shepherds outside MAK's house. MAK and  
GILL are inside; GILL lies in bed, groaning; MAK  
sings a lullaby.*]

690 DAW Will you hear how they hack?<sup>8</sup>  
Our sire wants to croon.

COLL Heard I never none crack<sub>o</sub>  
So clear out of tune.  
Call on him.

GIB Mak!

Undo your door soon!<sub>o</sub>

695 MAK Who is that spake,  
As if it were noon,  
On loft?<sub>o</sub>

Who is that, I say?

700 DAW Good fellows, if it were day.<sup>9</sup>

MAK As far as you may,  
[opening] Good, men speak soft

Over a sick woman's head  
That is at malease.<sub>o</sub>  
705 I had rather be dead  
Ere she had any disease.<sub>o</sub>

GILL Go to another stead!<sub>o</sub>

I may not well wheeze:<sub>o</sub>  
Each foot that ye tread  
710 Goes through my nese.<sub>o</sub>  
So, hee!<sub>o</sub>

COLL Tell us, Mak, if you may,  
How fare you, I say?

715 MAK But are you in this town<sub>o</sub> today?  
Now how fare ye?

You have run in the mire  
And are wet yit.  
I shall make you a fire  
If you will sit.  
720 A nurse would I hire.  
Think you on yit?<sub>1</sub>

Well quit is my hire—  
 My dream this is it—  
 A season.<sup>2</sup>  
 725 I have babes, if ye knew,  
 Wel more than enew:°  
 But we must drink as we brew,  
 And that is but reason.

730 I would you dined ere you yode.°  
 Methink that you sweat.  
 GIB Nay, neither amends our mood,  
 Drink nor meat.°  
 MAK Why sir, ails you aught but good?<sup>3</sup>  
 DAW Yea, our sheep that we get°  
 735 Are stolen as they yode:°  
 Our loss is great.  
 MAK Sirs, drinks!  
 Had I been there,  
 Some should have suffered full sore.  
 740 COLL Marry, some men think that you were,  
 And that us forthinks.°

GIB Mak, some men trows,°  
 That it should be ye.  
 DAW Either you or your spouse,  
 745 So say we.  
 MAK Now if you have suspouse°  
 To Gill or to me,  
 Come and ransack the house  
 And then may you see  
 750 Who had her<sup>4</sup>—  
 If I any sheep fot,°  
 Either cow or stot<sup>5</sup>—  
 And Gill my wife rose not  
 Here since she laid her.°  
 755

As I am true and leal,<sup>o</sup>  
To God here I pray  
That this be the first meal  
That I shall eat this day.  
760 COLL Mak, as I have sele,<sup>6</sup>  
Advise thee, I say:  
He learned timely to steal  
That could not say nay.<sup>7</sup>

[*They begin to search.*]

GILL I swelt!<sup>o</sup>  
765 Out, thieves, from my wonnes!<sup>o</sup>  
You come to rob us for the nones.<sup>o</sup>  
MAK Hear you not how she groans?  
Your hearts should melt.

GILL Out, thieves, my barn!<sup>o</sup>  
Approach him not thore!<sup>o</sup>  
770 MAK If you knew how she'd farn,<sup>o</sup>  
Your hearts would be sore.  
You do wrong, I you warn,  
That thus come before<sup>o</sup>  
To a woman that has farn<sup>o</sup>—  
775 But I say no more.

GILL Ah, my middle!  
I pray to God so mild,  
If ever I you beguiled,  
That I'll eat this child  
780 That lies in this cradle.

MAK Peace, woman, for God's pain,  
And cry not so!  
You're harming your brain  
And make me full woe.  
785

GIB I think our sheep is slain.  
What find you two?

DAW All work we in vain;  
As well may we go.

790 But hatters!<sup>8</sup>  
I can find no flesh,  
Hard nor nesh,<sup>o</sup>  
Salt nor fresh,  
But two empty platters.

795 Live creatures but this,<sup>o</sup>  
Tame nor wild,  
None, as I have bliss,  
As bad as he smelled.

*[Approaches the cradle.]*

GILL No, so God me bless,  
And give me joy of my child!

800 COLL We have aimed amiss—  
I judge us beguiled.

GIB Sir, don!<sup>o</sup>  
[to MAK] Sir—Our Lady him save!—  
Is your child a knave?<sup>o</sup>

805 MAK Any lord might him have,  
This child, as his son.<sup>9</sup>

When he wakens he kips,<sup>o</sup>  
That joy is to see.

810 DAW In good time to his hips,  
And in sely.<sup>1</sup>  
But who were his gossips,<sup>o</sup>  
So soon ready?

MAK So fair fall their lips<sup>2</sup>—

815 COLL Hark, now, a lee,<sup>o</sup>  
MAK So God them thank,

Perkin, and Gibbon Waller, I say,  
And gentle John Horne, in good fay—  
He made all the garray—  
820 With the great shank.<sup>3</sup>

GIB Mak, friends will we be,  
For we are all one.  
MAK We? Now I hold for me,  
For amends get I none.  
825 Farewell all three,  
We'd be glad were you gone.  
DAW Fair words may there be,  
But love is there none  
This year.

*[They go out the door.]*

830 COLL Gave ye the child anything?  
GIB I trow not one farthing.  
DAW Fast again will I fling.  
Abide ye me there.

*[He returns quickly.]*

Mak, take it no grief  
If I come to your barn.  
835 MAK Nay, thou does me great reproof,  
And foul has thou farn.  
DAW The child it will not grief,  
That little day-starn.  
840 Mak, with your leave,  
Let me give your barn  
But sixpence.  
MAK Nay, do way! He sleeps.  
DAW Methinks he peeps.  
MAK When he wakens he weeps.  
845

I pray you go hence.

*[The other shepherds come back into the cottage.]*

DAW Give me leave him to kiss,  
And lift up the clout.°

*[Raises the cover.]*

What the devil is this?

He has a long snout!

850 COLL He is shaped amiss.  
There's ill about.

GIB Ill-spun weft, ywis,  
Ay comes foul out.<sup>4</sup>

Aye, so!

855 He is like to our sheep.

DAW How, Gib, may I peep?

COLL I trow kind will creep  
Where it may not go.<sup>5</sup>

860 GIB This was a quaint gaud  
And a far-cast.<sup>6</sup>

It was high fraud.

DAW Yea, sirs, was't.

Let's burn this bawd°

And bind her fast.

865 A false scold  
Should hang at the last:  
So shall thou.

Will you see how they swaddle

His four feet in the middle?

870 Saw I never in the cradle  
A horned lad ere now.

MAK Peace bid I! What,  
Let be your fare!°

875 I am he that him gat.o  
 And yond woman him bare.  
 COLL What devil shall he hat?7  
 Lo, God, Mak's heir!  
 GIB Let be all that!  
 Now God give him careo—  
 880 I saw.  
 GILL A pretty child is he  
 As sits on a woman's knee,  
 A dillydown,o pardie,o  
 To make a man laugh.  
 885  
 DAW I know him by the earmark—  
 That is a good token.  
 MAK I tell you, sirs, hark,  
 His nose was broken.  
 Then told me a clerk  
 890 That he was forspoken.o  
 COLL This is a false work.  
 I would fain be wroken.o  
 Get weapon.  
 895 GILL He was taken by an elf 8  
 I saw it myself—  
 When the clock struck twelf  
 Was he forshapen.o  
  
 GIB You two are well fefto  
 Together in a stead.o  
 900 DAW Since they maintain their theft,  
 Put them to death.  
 MAK If I trespass eft,o  
 Cut off my head.  
 With you will I be left.9  
 905 COLL Sirs, do my read:o  
 For this trespass  
 We will neither curse nor flite,o



Fight nor chide,  
But have done as tite,o  
910 And cast him in canvas.

[*They toss MAK in a blanket.*]

[*The fields.*]

COLL Lord, how I am sore,  
In point for to burst!  
In faith, I may no more—  
Therefore will I rest.  
915 GIB As a sheep of seven score<sup>1</sup>  
He weighed in my fist:  
For to sleep anywhere  
Methink that I list.o

DAW Now I pray you  
920 Lie down on this green.  
COLL On the thieves yet I mean.o  
DAW Whereto should ye teen?o  
Do as I say you.

[*They lie down.*]

[*An ANGEL sings Gloria in Excelsis and then speaks.*]<sup>2</sup>

925 ANGEL Rise, herdmen hend,o  
For now is he born  
That shall take from the fiend  
That Adam had lorn;o  
That devil to shend,o  
This night is he born.  
930 God is made your friend  
Now at this morn,  
He behestys.o

At Bedlem<sup>o</sup> go see:  
There lies that free,<sup>o</sup>  
935 In a crib full poorly,  
Betwixt two bestys.<sup>o</sup>

[*The ANGEL retires.*]

COLL This was a strange steven<sup>o</sup>  
That ever yet I heard.  
It is a marvel to neven<sup>o</sup>  
940 Thus to be scared.

GIB Of God's Son of heaven  
He spake upward.<sup>o</sup>  
All the woods on a leven<sup>o</sup>  
Methought that he gard<sup>o</sup>  
945 Appear.

DAW He spake of a barn<sup>o</sup>  
In Bedlem, I you warn.<sup>o</sup>

COLL That betokens yond starn.<sup>o</sup>  
Let us seek him there.  
950

GIB Say, what was his song?  
Heard ye not how he cracked it?<sup>o</sup>  
Three breves<sup>o</sup> to a long?

DAW Yea, marry, he hacked it.  
Was no crochet<sup>3</sup> wrong,  
955 Nor nothing that lacked it.<sup>o</sup>

COLL For to sing us among,  
Right as he knacked it,  
I can.<sup>o</sup>

GIB Let see how ye croon!  
960 Can ye bark at the moon?

DAW Hold your tongues! Have done!

COLL Hark after, than!

[*Sings.*]

GIB To Bedlem he bade  
 That we should gang:°  
 965 I am full fard°  
 That we tarry too lang.°  
 DAW Be merry and not sad;  
 Of mirth is our sang:  
 Everlasting glad°  
 970 Our reward may we fang.°  
 COLL Without noise  
 Hie° we thither forthy°  
 To that child and that lady;  
 Though we be wet and weary,  
 975 We have it not to lose.<sup>4</sup>

GIB We find by the prophecy—  
 Let be your din!—  
 Of David and Isaiah,  
 And more than I mention  
 980 That prophesied by clergy°  
 That in a virgin  
 Should he alight and lie,  
 To quench our sin  
 And relieve it,  
 985 Humankind from woe,  
 For Isaiah said so:  
*Ecce virgo*  
*Concipiet*<sup>5</sup> a child that is naked.

990 DAW Full glad may we be  
 If we abide that day  
 That lovely lad to see,  
 That all mights may.°  
 Lord, well were me  
 For once and for ay°  
 995 Might I kneel on my knee,

Some word for to say  
 To that child.  
 But the angel said  
 In a crib was he laid,  
 1000 He was poorly arrayed,  
 Both humble and mild.

COLL Patriarchs that has been,  
 And prophets befor,o  
 That desired to have seen  
 1005 This child that is born,  
 They are gone full clean—  
 That have they lorn.o6  
 We shall see him, I ween,o  
 Ere it be morn,  
 1010 To token.o  
 When I see him and feel,  
 Then know I full well  
 It is true as steel  
 What prophets have spoken:  
 1015 To so poor as we are  
 That he would appear,  
 First find and declareo  
 By his messenger.

GIB Go we now, let us fare,  
 The place is us near.  
 1020 DAW I am ready and yare;o  
 Go we in fereo  
 To that bright.o  
 Lord, if thy will be—  
 1025 We are unlettered all three—  
 Grant us some glee  
 To comfort your wight.o

*[They go to Bethlehem and enter the stable.]*

COLL Hail, comely and clean!°  
Hail, young child!  
1030 Hail Maker, as I mean,°  
Of a virgin so mild!  
You have cursed I ween,°  
The warlock° so wild.  
The false guiler of teen,°  
1035 Now goes he beguiled.  
Lo, he merries!°  
Lo, he laughs, my sweeting!  
A well fair meeting!  
I have holden my heting:°  
1040 Have a bob° of cherries.

GIB Hail, sovereign Saviour,  
For you has us sought!  
Hail freely food° and flour,°  
That all thing has wrought!°  
1045 Hail, full of favour,  
That made all of nought!  
Hail! I kneel and I cower.°  
A bird have I brought  
To my barn.°  
1050 Hail, little tiny mop!°  
Of our creed thou art crop.°  
I would drink on thy cup,  
Little day-starn.°

1055 DAW Hail, darling dear,  
Full of Godhead!  
I pray you be near  
When that I have need.  
Hail, sweet is thy cheer°—  
My heart would bleed  
1060 To see you sit here

In so poor weed,<sup>o</sup>  
With no pennies.  
Hail, put forth your dall!<sup>o</sup>  
I bring you but a ball:  
1065 Have and play thee withal,  
And go to the tennis.

MARY The Father of heaven,  
God omnipotent,  
1070 That set all on seven,<sup>o</sup>  
His Son has he sent.  
My name could he neven,<sup>o</sup>  
And light ere he went.<sup>7</sup>  
I conceived him full even  
Through might as he meant.<sup>o</sup>  
1075 And now is he born.  
May he keep you from woe!  
I shall pray him so.  
Tell forth as you go,  
1080 And think on this morn.

COLL Farewell, lady,  
So fair to behold,  
With your child on your knee.

GIB But he lies full cold.  
Lord, well is me.  
1085 Now we go, you behold.

DAW Forsooth, already  
It seems to be told  
Full oft.

COLL What grace we have fun!<sup>o</sup>  
GIB Come forth, now are we won!<sup>o</sup>  
1090 DAW To sing are we bun:<sup>o</sup>  
Let's take on loft.<sup>8</sup>

[*They sing.*]

# Endnotes

- Note 1:  
The text is distantly based on the (1994) edition by A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens, but it has been significantly altered so as to facilitate comprehension and performance. Non-rhyme words have been frequently replaced by modern equivalents; some rhyme words have been modernized where the rhyme can be preserved. Spelling has been normalized except where rhyme makes changes impossible. The result is a text that retains the flavor of the original while being readily intelligible to a reader of modern English. The text presented here could be performed for a modern audience. The original text does not signal changes of scene, of which there are many. The original does supply four stage directions, in Latin (these are identified in the notes). The text presented here signals scene changes and adds stage directions where appropriate.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English landowners converted arable land to pasture for more profitable wool production (the so-called enclosure movement). Book One of Thomas More's *Utopia* underlines the brutal social results of this movement.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A decorated sleeve, a sign of the livery worn by the landlord's aggressive officers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Appropriation (of private property).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The widespread late medieval practice of building aggressive private militias.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An elevated line of grassland forming a boundary.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A phrase effectively meaning "Bless us, Lord," the original Latin form of which has been changed through aural reception by the unlearned.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Gib's wife.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: That is, by marrying again.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Epistle (that is, a New Testament epistle, as read in church); an expression meaning “truly.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Our Father” (Latin); that is, the Lord’s Prayer.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: But it’s a bad idea (to give the sheep a walk).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bad fortune on your head![Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: We are not impressed by your tricks.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The earliest church service of the day.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The original manuscript has this stage direction.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Possessions (in case Mak should steal them). The stage direction below is in the manuscript.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I (a southern dialect form). The Yorkshire shepherds speak in a northern dialect. Mak pretends to be a southerner, and of high social rank.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, drop the southern accent.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Can you now remember (who you are)?[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Road; that is, the devil is always on the move.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The money paid for a mass for her soul; that is, I wish she were dead.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “Thy hands I commend to Pontius Pilate” (Latin). A parody of Luke 23:46, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: One of the original stage directions.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A mangled form of *resurrexit a mortuis* (Latin for “he arose from the dead”), from the Apostles’ Creed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: More mangled Latin: Judas, (in?)carnate lord.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: I'll go to the door. Half-asleep, Daw thinks he's inside.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: My heart leapt out of my skin.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Flax on my distaff (that is, demands, mouths to feed).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In a noose. Gill knows that sheep stealing is a hanging offense.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Coll and his companion are following your tracks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An expression of distress.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A village near Wakefield.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the ram was absent.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, sing (here badly).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, not friends, since the sun has not risen.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Do you remember the dream I recounted?[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: My season's wage is paid—my dream (that Gill was giving birth) has come to pass.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Does anything other than good vex you?[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the sheep.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Of either sex.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As I hope to be saved.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Proverbial.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An expression of unpleasant surprise.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Boy (although Mak evokes an alternate meaning of *knave* as "lowborn").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Good luck and joy to him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: May they enjoy good luck.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An allusion to a dispute among the shepherds in the author's *First Shepherds' Play*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An ill-spun fabric, indeed, always comes out badly (proverbial).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Nature will creep where it can't walk (proverbial); that is, nature will reveal itself one way or another.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This was an elaborate trick and a clever deception.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: What the devil shall he be called?[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the baby is a changeling.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I stand entirely at your mercy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, 140 pounds.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An original stage direction; "Glory [to God] in the highest" (Latin; see Luke 2:14).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A short musical note, requiring skillful control to sing.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: We must not lose the opportunity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Behold, a virgin shall conceive (Latin; Isaiah 7:14).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Matthew 13:17.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: And descended (into me) before he departed (see Luke 1:28).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Let's sing loudly.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *farmers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *almost*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *homeless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *know*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *may use*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fellow*[Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *by God*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *placed*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *she*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *announce (himself)*[Return to reference °](#)
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# RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIONS AND IDENTITIES

Identities take shape through exclusions: we know who we are, who counts as “us,” in part by knowing who we aren’t and against whom our group is defined. In the Middle Ages, those living under the leadership of the Western Church (headed by the pope in Rome) belonged to a powerful collective that was still in the process of formation. How could such a wide swath of people, who resided in different regions, were subjects of different secular rulers, and spoke varied languages—how could this population understand and *feel* their participation in a single community?

One solution was to focus on Christianity’s “others,” those outside the Church who helped define its boundaries. Two of the most prominent figures made to embody religious difference were the Jew and the Saracen. (“Saracen” is a pejorative term used by medieval Christians to refer to Muslims of varying ethnicities and to non-Christian Arabs.) The Jews and Saracens depicted in Western Christian culture almost never reflected the lived experiences of contemporary Jewish and Muslim people. Instead, they were complex stereotypes, constructed over time to answer the intellectual, political, emotional, and imaginative demands of Christian identity formation. Portrayals of Jewish and Saracen difference relied not only on theological doctrine but also on accounts of strange customs, racialized physiology, and geographic determinism. Such stereotyped figures of religious exclusion helped

create a Christian self-understanding powerful enough to fuel evangelism, persecution, and violence.

From its inception, Christianity both claimed Judaism and rejected it: Christians took Jesus to be the messianic savior anticipated by Jewish prophets, but they chastised and blamed Jews who did not accept the “new covenant.” They incorporated the Hebrew Bible into their own scriptures, treating it as the “Old Testament” that foretold the “New.” This stance, of incorporating the Jewish past while rejecting present Judaism, is known as “supersessionism,” and it was central to the theology and the interpretive traditions of the Western Middle Ages.

Significant numbers of Jewish people began to immigrate to England from Normandy (in what is present-day northwestern France) at the encouragement of the French-speaking Norman rulers, who came to power in England in 1066. The Normans’ new government was eager for the financial services that Jews could offer—since Christians were not permitted to lend money to other Christians at interest (a practice known pejoratively as “usury”). Surviving documents indicate that English Jews were multilingual, often writing in Hebrew, Latin, French, and English. Scholars have estimated that by the year 1200 there were probably about three thousand Jews living in England, although the number may have been as high as five thousand. All Jews had a distinctive legal status: they were “servants” of the king, rather than “subjects,” as other English people were. This status afforded them royal protection, but it also made them vulnerable to exploitative rates of taxation. Meanwhile, the Church sought to forcibly convert Jews to Christianity.

Unlegislated acts of Christian violence against Jews—throwing stones, burning homes, and massacres—took place in parallel with official policies. In some cases, Jews seem to have been caught in political disagreements between local governments and the king. Members of the nobility and gentry frequently targeted Jews to avoid paying their own debts, as in the events leading up to the massacre of Jewish residents in York in 1190. In other cases, the

justification for Christian violence was largely devotional. Preachers often repeated the claim that Jews had killed Christ, and in the twelfth century, an English monk developed a popular new falsehood, that Jews murdered Christian children (an accusation known as “blood libel”). Over the course of the thirteenth century, the persecution of the English Jewry intensified. Meir of Norwich’s poem “Put a Curse on My Enemy” offers a Jewish perspective on life amid such brutality and injustice. In the year 1290, Edward I expelled the Jews from England and confiscated their property; they were not officially readmitted until 1656. This long absence raises questions about the significance of Jews portrayed in late medieval English literature. For instance, *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* was written and performed two centuries after the expulsion. How should we understand English audiences’ ongoing craving for fictions of Judaism?

Christian imagination of Muslims, or “Saracens,” usually placed them in exoticized locales outside of Europe. Islam, a monotheistic religion that emerged in the early seventh century C.E. in what is today Saudi Arabia, is centered on the Quran, a religious text considered to be the direct word of God as revealed to the prophet Muhammad. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is considered an Abrahamic religion: all three faiths revere Abraham, an ancient Hebrew patriarch, as a holy figure in sacred history. From its inception, Islam was an evangelical and military success, spreading swiftly beyond the Arabian Peninsula. By the eighth century, the caliphate (or Muslim imperial polity) had brought Islam to territories stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to what is now Pakistan. Scientific, philosophical, and literary culture flourished in the Muslim world.

Perhaps predictably, Western Christians felt threatened by the success of Islam. That attitude assumed a new form after 1095, when Pope Urban II preached a famous sermon calling on Christians to stop fighting among themselves and instead to embark on religious war to conquer Jerusalem. (This message is repeated at the start of *The Book of John Mandeville*.) In this sermon, Urban told

exaggerated stories of Muslim violence against Christians and promised remission of sins for those who joined the cause. Eventually, tens of thousands of Europeans joined the First Crusade, whether inspired by spiritual rewards or motivated by the riches to be gained in conquest. Although the First Crusade was successful in conquering Jerusalem and establishing Crusader colonies in the Near East, these territorial gains were gradually lost. The fall of Acre (on the Mediterranean coast between modern Tel Aviv and Beirut) in 1291 marked the end of any Crusader control in the region. Nonetheless, the ideas and fantasies that had fueled the Crusades persisted. Later writers nostalgically called for a return to holy war. Two broad traditions of Islamophobic literature helped bolster such calls. One tradition mingled true facts about Islamic theology and Muhammad's life with lies, errors, and Christian propaganda. This informative, if distorted, tradition is evident in Mandeville's *Book*. The other tradition is more outlandish, with almost no true content about Islam. It portrays Saracens as idol worshippers and is often found in romances—like *The King of Tars*.

Given the centrality of Christianity to medieval western Europe, religious violence may seem inevitable. It is important to remember, however, that Europe also included regions of multifaith cohabitation, such as the Iberian Peninsula and central and eastern Europe. The Mediterranean Sea was a contact zone where merchants and pilgrims of different faiths crossed paths and relied on one another. Christian thinkers revered the classical authors of antiquity despite their apparent faith in the Greco-Roman gods. Religious difference alone did not entail hatred, and medieval Europe was far from religiously or racially homogeneous. Rather, the ideologies and fantasies that sustained religious exclusion were part of a dynamic society, one that often benefited from a strong sense of Christian identity, the hierarchical ordering of human diversity, and the violence that could result.

# MAPPA MUNDI

How did medieval thinkers conceptualize the world in its entirety? One tool to do so was the *mappa mundi* (map of the world; plural, *mappae mundi*), which pictured the major land masses known to western Europeans at the time—Europe, Asia, and Africa—in a single image. More than a thousand *mappae mundi* from the Middle Ages survive. The vast majority—like the example here, found in a prayer book known as a psalter—are preserved as pictures within manuscripts. This map, known as the Psalter World Map, was made in England in the later thirteenth century. It is not quite seven inches high, and its small surface is crowded with 170 individual inscriptions. A small fraction of surviving *mappae mundi* take the form of large stand-alone documents designed for public display. For instance, the Hereford Map, created in England around 1300, is more than five feet high. It would probably have been seen on the wall at Hereford Cathedral (in western England), where church-goers could gaze on it and marvel.

Both the Psalter World Map and the Hereford Map belong to a category of cartographic representation known as “T-O maps.” In maps of this kind, the habitable portion of the world is depicted as a circle, an O, divided into three regions by the T representing the Mediterranean Sea. The crossbars of the structuring T intersect at the center of the map, and it is here that Jerusalem is found, the most important place in Christian sacred history, where Jesus was crucified and resurrected. T-O maps became more prevalent following the Crusades, when the spiritual urgency of conquering the

Holy Land helped unite and mobilize Western Christendom. Jerusalem was both ideologically and geographically central.

The three territories divided by the Mediterranean's T represent Europe, Asia, and Africa. Since the map is oriented with east at the top, Asia appears there, constituting the largest land mass. Asia was thought to be the home of the first humans, Adam and Eve, who lived in the earthly paradise. Paradise appears on the Psalter World Map directly beneath the figure of Christ, who stands outside the created world and presides over it. The divine figure looks enormous, on a completely different scale from earthly places, and even holds a small T-O sphere in his hand, which mirrors and miniaturizes the globe below. Europe appears on the bottom left of the map (the northwest), and Africa is on the bottom right (southwest). Britain shows up as only a minor and marginal detail, crowded near the edge of the world. Across the map, on the southwest coast of Africa, fourteen tiny figures appear, each characterized by a monstrous feature: one is eating human flesh; another is headless, with eyes in its shoulders; one lacks ears; another has no nose. These represent the remote, semi-human races that had been described in classical antiquity and continued to fascinate medieval audiences. They are detailed in *The Book of John Mandeville*. In both the *mappa mundi* and *Mandeville*, we can recognize how European thinkers projected their fantasies and anxieties about the limits of the human onto remote geographies and peoples.

While the map seems to portray the earth as flat, in fact educated people throughout the Middle Ages understood it to be spherical. The continents that make up the T-O actually represent just the Northern Hemisphere, sometimes thought to be the only inhabitable part of the globe. Those making and using medieval maps understood the *mappa mundi* to offer only a schematic representation of a more complex geographic reality. A map like the Psalter World Map would have been used not for navigation but rather for contemplating the organization and the diversity of the divinely governed world.





***Mappa mundi***, known as the Psalter World Map, made after 1262 in London. As with other T-O maps, east (not north) is at the top. Asia occupies the map's upper half; Europe, the bottom



left (northwest); Africa, the bottom right (southwest). Jerusalem is at the center. Not even 7 inches high, this map contains 170 individual inscriptions. See also the color insert in this volume.

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# **MEIR OF NORWICH (MEIR BEN ELIJAH)**

## **fl. late thirteenth century**

Meir of Norwich's poems, surviving in a single manuscript, testify to a powerful Anglo-Jewish poetic voice. What we know about Meir comes exclusively from his poetry, which includes more than twenty *piyyutim*, or Jewish liturgical poems written in Hebrew, which he composed in the later thirteenth century. His long poem on the Exodus—the episode in Jewish sacred history when the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt—contains an identifying acrostic, a message spelled out by letters in sequential lines of poetry. The acrostic reads, "I am Meir, son of Rabbi Elijah from the city of Norgitz [Norwich], which is in the Isle called Angleterre [England]." Meir's poetry is dense with allusions to the Hebrew Bible, and it indicates dynamic textual exchange with Jewish communities on the Iberian Peninsula and in northern Europe.

Norwich was an important trading center in medieval England, and at its peak the city's medieval Jewish population probably numbered about two hundred people. By the thirteenth century, however, Norwich Jews faced intensified persecution. False accusations against them, attacks, the burning of Jewish houses, mass arrests, and executions became increasingly common from the 1230s onward. Norwich was also the setting for a particularly harmful piece of anti-Jewish propaganda. In 1150, the monk Thomas of Monmouth began circulating the false narrative that a

boy named William, who had been murdered six years earlier, was killed by Norwich Jews in an act of human sacrifice. In his sensationalistic and factually untrue account, Thomas portrays the death of the twelve-year-old William in terms borrowed directly from Jesus's crucifixion. The story is an example of how representations of Christian victimization could be weaponized: sympathy for a child's pain is made into a reason to persecute Jews. Thomas's *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich* is the first known medieval accusation of Jewish ritual murder. The text was wildly popular, and the grotesque allegation became central to medieval ideologies of anti-Judaism. By the time of the expulsion of 1290—when King Edward I forced the entirety of Anglo-Jewry out of England and confiscated their property—only fifty to sixty Jews were still living in Norwich.

Meir's poem "Put a Curse on My Enemy" is a lyrical response to persecution. In the surviving manuscript, it bears a heading indicating that it is about "the heaviness of exile, the slayings in prison, and financial ruin." These are likely to have been personal experiences for Meir's family and neighbors in the late thirteenth century. The poem's refrain centers on divine light and its contrast to the present darkness. The speaker seems to veer tumultuously from hope to despair, from fury to resolve. Nearly every line echoes a verse of the Hebrew Bible (only some of these allusions are pointed out in the footnotes below). The poem—now known by its first line, "Put a curse on my enemy"—is composed of hemistichs, or half-lines, of six or seven syllables apiece. In the Modern English translation below, most half-lines of Hebrew have been translated into a full line. Here is the beginning of the poem in Hebrew (to be read from right to left):

אוֹיְבִי בְּמַאֲרָה תִּקֵּב, כִּי כָּל אֶחָד עָקוֹב יֵעָקֵב,  
מִתִּי תֹאמַר לְבַיִת יֵעָקֵב לָכֵן וְנִלְכָּה בְּאוֹר.  
אֲדִיר אֶתָּה וְנֹאֹר, מִחֲשָׁכִים תִּסּוּבֵב לְאוֹר.

## Put a Curse on My Enemy<sup>1</sup>

Put a curse on my enemy, for every man supplants  
his brother.

When will You say to the house of Jacob, come let us  
walk in the light?<sup>2</sup>

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*<sup>3</sup>

Tear out their hearts—they who brought harm to  
those who come in Your Name

5 When I hoped for good, evil arrived, yet I will wait  
for the light.<sup>4</sup>

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

The words of the seer are garbled, for the foe has  
mocked Your children

Until they don't know which path is the one that  
gives off light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

10 The land exhausts us by demanding payments, and  
the people's disgust is heard

While we are silent and wait for the light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

They make our yoke heavier, they are finishing us  
off.

They continually say of us, let us despoil them until  
the morning light.

15 *You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

Let their victory spatter Your garment, for Your  
beloved's heart is distressed  
But she will be consoled for this; her lord will remain  
until light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

20 Have You forgotten to be gracious, My God?<sup>5</sup> When  
will You gather in the camps,  
Scattered to the corners [of the earth], like infants  
that have not seen the light?

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

Let the King bring home His banished one, let Him  
smell his savory offering.

The foes who make his savor stink will never see the  
light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

25 And if You have continued to afflict him [Israel], be  
abundantly merciful, be gracious to him.  
For he has despaired of [returning to] his dwelling,  
and of Your ways of radiant light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

The vision of His intimates tarries; the predicted time  
has passed.

Let their [the enemies'] hold on us weaken, one and  
all, until the light [dawns].

30 *You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

If his vision shall be hidden, with no interpreter for  
his dreams,<sup>6</sup>

Why should the glory of the crown remain with the filthy one until the light [comes]?

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the darkness into light.*

Even if his [Israel's] sins have really enraged [You], why should his foes wage war [against him]?

35 They whose mouths have spoken arrogantly, they are rebels against the light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the darkness into light.*

They scattered him with their horns,<sup>7</sup> but he hoped in hidden prophecies

For the men of visions have sealed [themselves] up and do not know the light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the darkness into light.*

40 Malicious men have cast down his crown, and presumed to annihilate him.

They put him in prison, where in twilight he hoped for the light.

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the darkness into light.*

Bring near his End to raise him up, before he is lost in his exile,

For they have boasted to annihilate him; they mistake the darkness for light.

45 *You are mighty and full of light. You turn the darkness into light.*

All his days, he [Israel] has surely hoped; day after day [he awaits] consolation.

O Awesome and Mighty One in Heaven, who brings His justice into the light<sup>8</sup>

*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the darkness into light.*

50 If You have given me unto my enemy, rise up to  
plead my cause.<sup>9</sup>  
Establish the Messiah's reign, [so that] light will be  
seen in Your light.<sup>1</sup>  
*You are mighty and full of light. You turn the  
darkness into light.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The translation is by Susan L. Einbinder, from *Journal of Medieval History* 26.2 (2000): 145–62.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Isaiah 2:5. Jacob is regarded as one of the patriarchs, or ancestral leaders, of the Jewish people.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Isaiah 42:16.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Job 30:26.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Psalm 77:10 (in Protestant Bibles, 77:9).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Genesis 40:8.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Zechariah 2:1–2 (in Protestant Bibles, 1:18–19). In Zechariah's prophetic vision, horns symbolize forces hostile to the Jewish people.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Zephaniah 3:5.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Psalm 74:22.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Psalm 36:10 (in Protestant Bibles, 36:9).[Return to reference 1](#)

# THE KING OF TARS

Upward of sixty or so romances (as defined above, [pp. 141–42](#)) survive in Middle English, across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These are for the most part examples of popular literature, with all the standard characteristics of popular appeal. That is, such romances often lack the following: stylistic density; an implied authorial perspective; explicit ethical complexity; resistance to narrative closure; a self-conscious sense of literary tradition, which itself produces a philological interest in preserving a textual tradition; a named patron; a named author; and historical specificity. Instead, they offer simplistic emotional gestures (for example, extreme anger, passionate desire), “happy” endings, and contrastive cultural oppositions that are stark and often wildly incorrect.

The early fourteenth-century romance *The King of Tars* is nothing if not an example of popular literature. Its style is simple, its narrative presented in the chiaroscuro cultural oppositions characteristic of cartoons (here, good Christians and bad Muslims). Examples of wild carelessness with historical culture in *The King of Tars* include the representation of Islam as polytheistic and the juxtaposition of Tharsia (“Tars”), an imagined Christian kingdom bordering China, and Damascus (“Damas”). What counts is contrast, not correctness.

One of the principal functions of romances, however, is to cement alliances across deep oppositions. Romances explore the boundaries of a given culture as they strengthen it through alliances across those boundaries. Does *The King of Tars* do this?



On the face of it, initially, not at all: Christian–Muslim relations are characterized by outright aggression and military confrontation. The marriage between the Christian princess and the sultan, agreed to under duress, is a reflex of that unequivocal hostility. Whereas marriage is normally the culmination of a romance plot, here it occurs midnarrative and promises only more abrasive confrontation. Indeed, so deep is the cultural cleavage that it is manifest in seemingly permanent physiological categories. The cultural conversions and the sacramental rites that confirm them do effect a crossing of cultural boundaries for this couple and their child. But the reality of biological difference (including skin color) between believers of different faiths in fact reaffirms the bristling hostilities and profound sense of difference that divide faith groups. A violent end awaits anyone who resists the new, body-altering dispensation.

For partial analogues to *The King of Tars*, see the narrative of Constance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* 2.587–1612, in which marriage is similarly a metaphor for geographical, historical, and religious synergies. In those two works, the Christian princess Constance effectively traces the boundaries of Christendom through her marriages—first, and unsuccessfully, to a Muslim sultan of Syria and then, successfully, to a Northumbrian king.

The verse form consists of twelve-line stanzas, arranged in four groupings of three lines: a rhyming couplet in four-stress lines followed by one three-stress line. The rhyme scheme is *a a b a a b c c b d d b*.

# The King of Tars<sup>1</sup>

Harkneth to me both old and ying,<sup>o</sup>  
For Marie's<sup>o</sup> love, that swete thing,  
All how a war began  
Between a true Christian king  
And an heathen high<sup>o</sup> lording,  
5 Of Damas<sup>o</sup> the sultan.  
The king of Tars<sup>2</sup> had a wive,  
Fairer might none been alive—  
That any wight<sup>o</sup> telle can.  
A daughter they had them between,  
10 None fairer woman might been—  
As white as feather of swan.  
  
The maiden was chaste and blithe of cheer<sup>o</sup>  
With rode<sup>o</sup> red as blossom on briar  
And eighen stepe<sup>o</sup> and gray.  
15 With lowe shoulders and white swere<sup>o</sup>  
Her for to see was great prayer<sup>o</sup>  
Of princes proud in play.  
The los<sup>o</sup> of her gan springe wide  
In other landes by each a side,  
20 So the sultan heard it say.  
Him thought his heart it burst ofive<sup>o</sup>  
But if<sup>o</sup> he might have her to wive  
That was so fair a may.<sup>o</sup>  
  
25 His messengers he gan calle  
And bad them wightly wenden<sup>o</sup> alle  
To her father the king,  
And said he would, how so<sup>o</sup> it befalle,  
His daughter clothe in riche palle<sup>o</sup>

30       And spouse<sup>o</sup> her with his ring;  
And if he nold,<sup>o</sup> withouten fail,  
He would her win in bataille  
With many an high lording.  
The messengers forth they went  
35       To do the sultan's commandment  
Withouten any dwelling.<sup>o</sup>

Then the king of Tars this understood  
Almost for wrath he wex<sup>o</sup> near wood<sup>o</sup>  
And said thus in sawe:<sup>o</sup>  
40       "By Him that died on the rode,<sup>o</sup>  
I would erst<sup>o</sup> spill min heart blood  
In battle to ben yslawe.<sup>o</sup>  
I nold<sup>o</sup> her give a Saracen<sup>o</sup>  
For alle the land that is mine.  
The devil him erst to drawe,<sup>o</sup>  
45       But<sup>o</sup> she will with her gode wille  
Be wedded to him, herself to spille.<sup>o</sup>  
Her thoughtes not I no knawe,<sup>o</sup>

"Ac<sup>o</sup> I shall wite<sup>o</sup> er than<sup>o</sup> ye pass."  
His daughter anon was brought in place  
50       And he asked her bilive.<sup>o</sup>  
"Daughter, the sultan of Damas  
Yearns for to see thy face  
And would thee have to wive.  
Wouldest thou, daughter, for treasure  
55       Forsake Jesus our Saviour  
That suffered woundes five?"  
The maiden answered with mild mod<sup>o</sup>  
Before her father there she stood  
60       "Nay, lord, so mot I thrive!<sup>o</sup>  
"Jesus my Lord in Trinity  
Let me never that day ysee

A tyrant for to take.  
 O God and Persons Three in One  
 For Marie love, Thy mother free,<sup>o</sup>  
 65     Give him erst tene and wrake."<sup>o</sup>  
 The king said, "Daughter, be stille.  
 Thou shalt never be wedded him tille<sup>o</sup>  
 For no boast he can make.  
 I shall him sende word again  
 70     That alle his thoughts been in vain,  
 For thou hast him forsake."  
  
 Right by the same messengers  
 That came from the sultan fierce  
 These wordes he him sent:  
 75     That she believed not on his manners,  
 She nold not leten<sup>o</sup> her prayers  
 To God omnipotent.  
 He bade him take another thought,  
 For of his daughter no tit him naught<sup>3</sup>  
 80     For treasure nor for rent.  
 The messengers heard him thus sayen;  
 With that word they turned again  
 And to the sultan they went.  
  
 As the sultan sat at his dais,  
 85     Yserved of the first mes,<sup>o</sup>  
 They came into the hall.  
 Before those princes proud in press<sup>o</sup>  
 Their tale to tell withouten les<sup>o</sup>  
 On knees they gan doun fall.  
 90     They said, "Sir, the king of Tars  
 Of wicked wordes is nought scarce.  
 'Heathen hound' he gan thee call;  
 And er<sup>o</sup> he give his daughter thee tille,<sup>o</sup>  
 Thine heart blood he will spille,  
 95     And thine barons alle."

When the sultan these wordes heard  
 Also<sup>o</sup> a wilde boar he ferd.<sup>o</sup>  
 His robe he rent adown;  
 His hair he rent of head and beard;  
 100 He should avenge him with his sword,  
     He swore by Seyn Mahoun.<sup>o</sup>  
 The table so hetelich<sup>o</sup> he smot<sup>o</sup>  
 It fell in to the floor fot-hot<sup>o</sup>  
 And loked as a lion.  
 105 All that he reached, he smote down right—  
 Sergeant, squire, clerk, and knight,  
 Both earl and baron.  
  
 Al thus the sultan fared, yplight;<sup>o</sup>  
 All that day and alle that night  
 110 No man might him chaste.<sup>o</sup>  
 Amorrow when it was light,  
 His messengers he sent full right  
 For his barons well fast  
 That they came to his parliament  
 115 Forto hear his judgment,  
     Both least and most.<sup>o</sup>  
 When the parliament was pleyner,<sup>o</sup>  
 Then bespoke the sultan fer<sup>o</sup>  
 And said to them in haste:  
 120  
 “Lordings,” he said, “what to red?<sup>o</sup>  
 Me hath been don a great misdeed  
 Of Tars the Christian king!  
 I bede<sup>o</sup> him bothe land and lede<sup>o</sup>  
 125 For his daughter worthliche in wede<sup>o</sup>  
 To have wed her with ring,  
 And he me sent word again  
 In battle I should erst<sup>o</sup> be slain  
 And many a high lording!

130 And certes<sup>o</sup> he shall be forsworn.<sup>o</sup>  
Wrotherhele than was he been<sup>4</sup>  
But<sup>o</sup> I thereto it bring.  
"And therefore I have after you sent  
And assembled here this parliament  
To wite<sup>o</sup> your conseyl."<sup>o</sup>  
135 And all they said with good entent  
They were at his commandment,  
Certain withouten fail.  
Right by that day a fourtenight  
They shall be all ready dight<sup>o</sup>  
140 With helm, hauberk<sup>o</sup> of mail.  
And when they were so at his hest<sup>o</sup>  
The sultan made a riche feast  
For love of his bateyle.<sup>o</sup>

145 The sultan gathered a rout unride<sup>o</sup>  
Of Saracens of michel<sup>o</sup> pride  
Upon the king to wende.<sup>o</sup>  
The king of Tars heard that tide;<sup>o</sup>  
He gathered his host by each a side,  
All that he might ofsende.  
150 Then began wrathe to wake  
For that marriage might not take  
Of that maiden hende.<sup>o</sup>  
Of battle they gan set a day,  
Of Seynt Eleyne the third in May,  
155 No longer no wald they lende.<sup>o</sup>

The sultan came with his power  
With bright armor and broad banner,  
Into the field to fight  
With sixty thousand Saracens fer,<sup>o</sup>  
160 That all the feldes far and near  
With helmes lemed<sup>o</sup> light.  
The king of Tars came with his host,

With great pride and michel boast,  
With many an hardy knight,  
165 And either host<sup>o</sup> gan other assail.  
There might men see a strong bateyle  
That grimly was of sight.

There hew<sup>o</sup> houndes<sup>o</sup> on Christian men  
And felled them down by nine and ten;  
170 So wild they were and wode<sup>o</sup>  
That men might see alle the fen<sup>o</sup>  
Of Christian both fremd and ken,<sup>o</sup>  
The valleys ran on blood.  
The sultan and his folk that stounde<sup>o</sup>  
175 Hewe adown with grimly wounde  
Many a frely rode.<sup>o</sup>  
Allas, too well sped Mahoun!<sup>o</sup>  
The Christian men yede al adown<sup>o</sup>  
Was not<sup>o</sup> that them withstode.  
180 The king of Tars saw that sight;  
For wrath he was nigh wode,<sup>o</sup> aplight.<sup>o</sup>  
He hent<sup>o</sup> in hand a spear  
And to the sultan he rode full right.  
With a stroke of michel<sup>o</sup> might,  
185 To ground he gan him bear.<sup>o</sup>  
There he had<sup>o</sup> the sultan slawe<sup>o</sup>  
Ac<sup>o</sup> ten thousand of heathen lawe<sup>o</sup>  
Saved him in that war—  
They set him on a full good steed  
190 That was so good at every need  
That no man might him dere.<sup>o</sup>

And when he was upon his stede,  
Him thought he burned so spark on glede<sup>o</sup>  
For ire and for envy.  
195 He fought so he would wede:<sup>o</sup>  
All that he hit he made bleed.

“Help, Mahoun!” he gan cry.  
Many helm there was ofweved<sup>o</sup>  
And many bacinet<sup>o</sup> tocleaved  
200 And saddles fell empty;  
Many sword and many shield  
And many knight lay in the field  
Of Christian company.

The king of Tars saw him so ride  
205 He flew<sup>o</sup> and dared not abide  
Homeward to his city  
The Saracens followed in that tide<sup>o</sup>  
And slew adown by each a side  
That Christian folk so fre.<sup>o</sup>  
210 Thirty thousand there were yslawe<sup>o</sup>  
Of knights of Christian lawe  
And that was great pity.  
Amorrown for their bother sake<sup>o</sup>  
Truce they gan between them take  
215 A month and dayes three.

On a day, the king sat in his hall  
And made grete diol<sup>o</sup> with all,  
For his folk were forlore.<sup>o</sup>  
His daughter came clad in pall<sup>o</sup>  
220 Adown on knees she gan to fall  
And said with sighing sore,  
Sir, let me be the sultan’s wife  
And rear no more cuntek<sup>o</sup> nor strife  
As hath been here before.  
225 For me hath many man been schent,<sup>o</sup>  
Cités nomen<sup>o</sup> and townes brent;<sup>o</sup>  
Allas that I was bore!<sup>o</sup>  
Father, I will serve at will  
The sultan, bothe loude and still,<sup>o</sup>  
230 And leve<sup>o</sup> on God almight,



But<sup>o</sup> it so be, he shall thee spille<sup>o</sup>  
 And all thy land take him tille<sup>o</sup>  
 With battle and with fight.  
 Certes<sup>o</sup> I nil<sup>o</sup> no longer dreye<sup>o</sup>  
 235 That Christian folk for me die—  
     It were a dolful<sup>o</sup> sight!"  
 The king of Tars answered tho,<sup>o</sup>  
 As man that was in sorrow and woe,  
 Unto that bird<sup>o</sup> bright:  
 240  
 "Now daughter, blessed may thou be  
 Of Jesus Christ in Trinity  
     The time that thou were bore.<sup>o</sup>  
 For thou wilt save thy mother and me,  
 All thy prayer<sup>o</sup> grant I thee,  
 245 As thow hast said before."  
 "Father," she said withouten dwelling,<sup>o</sup>  
 For Jesus' love, Heaven king,  
 If it thy wille were,  
 Do now swithe<sup>o</sup> that I were there  
 250 Er<sup>o</sup> any more sorrow arere<sup>o</sup>  
 That ye be not forlore."<sup>o</sup>  
  
 The king of Tars with good entent  
 Hastily after his wife he sent,  
     That lady that was so hende.<sup>o</sup>  
 255 When she was come in present  
 He said, "Dame, our daughter hath ment<sup>o</sup>  
     To the sultan to wende.<sup>o</sup>  
 Do loke what rede is now at thee,<sup>5</sup>  
 For now are here but we three  
 260 To save Christian kinde."  
 The queen answered withoute fail  
 "I no shall never thereto conseil<sup>o</sup>  
     Our daughter for to schende."<sup>o</sup>

265 The maiden was full of sorrow and woe.  
"Mercy," she cried her mother tho<sub>o</sub>  
With a well rueful steven.<sub>o</sub>  
"Mother, it is not long ago  
For me were slawe<sub>o</sub> knightes thro,<sub>o</sub>  
Thirty thousand and seven.  
270 Forthy<sub>o</sub> I will suffer no longer thrawe<sub>o</sub>  
That Christian folk be for me slawe,  
With the grace of God in Heaven."  
Thus, the maiden with wordes stille<sub>o</sub>  
Brought them both in better wille  
275 With reason right and even.

And when they were thus at one,  
Messengers they sent anon  
Unto that riche sultan,  
To make his friend that were his fon;<sub>o</sub>  
280 And for he should his men not slou,<sub>o</sub>  
His daughter he grant him than.<sub>o</sub>  
The messengers nold<sub>o</sub> no long abide;  
To the sultan they went that tide  
And thus they tell him gan.  
285 When those letters weren yredde,<sub>o</sub>  
The sultan was both blithe and glad,  
And so was many a man.

So glad he was in all manners  
He cleped<sub>o</sub> to him of his peers  
290 Dukes, princes, and kings.  
Into a chamber they went yfers<sub>o</sub>  
To dight<sub>o</sub> unto the messengers  
Good stones and riche rings.  
By conseil of the lordings all,  
295 The sultan did bring into the hall  
Gifts and riche things,

And gave to them great plenty,  
To the messengers, with heart free  
And thanked them their tidings.

300

And said he was alle at his wille,  
Early and late, loud and stille,  
To help him at his need;  
No more folk ne would he spille.<sup>o</sup>  
The messengers went the king tille<sup>o</sup>  
And told him of that deed.

305

The king and the queen also  
Both them<sup>o</sup> was wele<sup>o</sup> and woe,  
In rhyme also<sup>o</sup> we read.  
Great joy they had withoute les<sup>o</sup>  
For that the sultan would have peace  
On Christian felawerede.<sup>o</sup>

310

The first day of July tide,  
The sultan ne would no long abide;  
To the king of Tars he sent  
Knights fele<sup>o</sup> and michel pride<sup>o</sup>  
And riche jewells is not to hide  
To give to<sup>o</sup> his present.  
The messengers, withoute dwelling,<sup>o</sup>  
Came to Tars before the king  
To have his daughter gent.<sup>o</sup>  
They welcomed them with glad cheer—  
Of great pity now may ye hear—  
To chamber when they went.

315

320

They made cry and michel<sup>o</sup> woe  
For they should their daughter forgo  
And to the sultan her send.  
The maiden prayed them both tho<sup>o</sup>  
That they should by their conseil do,  
To saven Christian kinde.

325

330 "For I will suffer no longer thrawe<sup>o</sup>  
That Christian folk be for me slawe."<sup>o</sup>  
To hall they gan wende<sup>o</sup>  
And welcomed those messengers  
That came from the sultan fierce  
335 With wordes free and hende.<sup>o</sup>

Then said the queen to them than,<sup>o</sup>  
"How fareth your lord, the sultan,  
That is so noble a knight?"  
The messengers answered gan  
340 "He farth as well as any man,  
And is your friend aplight."<sup>o</sup>  
The queen said with milde cheer,  
"Well better though<sup>o</sup> my daughter were,  
By Jesus full of might.  
345 My daughter is not to him too good;  
I vouchesafe on him my blood,  
Though she were ten<sup>o</sup> so bright."

The messengers dight<sup>o</sup> them swithe<sup>o</sup>  
With knightes fele<sup>o</sup> and stedes stithe<sup>o</sup>  
350 And brought her into chare.<sup>o</sup>  
The king and the queen were unblithe,<sup>o</sup>  
Their sorrow couth they no man kithe<sup>o</sup>  
When they saw her forth fare.<sup>o</sup>  
Into chamber they went tho<sup>o</sup>  
355 When they were together bothe two  
Then wakened alle their care.<sup>o</sup>

The kinge was in sorrow bound;  
The queen swooned many a stound<sup>o</sup>  
For their daughter dear.  
360 Knights and ladies there them found  
And took them up whole and sound,  
And comfort them in fere.<sup>o</sup>

Thus the queen and the king  
Lived in sorrow and care, mourning;  
365 Great dole<sup>o</sup> it was to hear.  
Their care<sup>o</sup> was ever alike newe,  
Them changed both hide and hewe<sup>6</sup>  
For sorrow and reweli chere.<sup>o</sup>

Now let we been<sup>o</sup> all their mourning,  
370 And tell we of that maiden ying<sup>o</sup>  
That to the sultan is fare.<sup>o</sup>  
He came with many great lording  
Forto welcome that sweete thing  
When she was brought in chare.<sup>o</sup>  
375 He kissed her well many a sithe;<sup>o</sup>  
His joye couth<sup>o</sup> he no man kithe<sup>o</sup>—  
Away was all his care.  
Into chamber she was ladde,  
And richely she was cladde  
380 As heathen woman were.

When she was clad in riche pall,<sup>o</sup>  
The sultan did his knightes call  
And bad<sup>o</sup> that maiden forth fet.<sup>o</sup>  
And when she came into the hall,  
385 Before the high lordinges all,  
Tofore the sultan they her set.  
Great dole<sup>o</sup> it was for to see,  
The bird<sup>o</sup> that was so bright on ble<sup>o</sup>  
To have so foul a mett.<sup>o</sup>  
390 Though that she made great solas<sup>o</sup>  
The sorrow that at her heart was  
No might it noman let.<sup>7</sup>

And when it was come to night,  
The lady that was so fair and bright,  
395 To chamber she gan wende.<sup>o</sup>

And therein anon I you plight,<sup>o</sup>  
 A riche bed there was ydight<sup>o</sup>  
 Unto that lady hende.<sup>o</sup>  
 The lady was to bed ybrought;  
 400 The sultan wild came therein nought  
 Neither for foe nor friend—  
 For nothing would he neighe<sup>o</sup> that may<sup>o</sup>  
 Till that she leved<sup>o</sup> upon his lay,<sup>o</sup>  
 405 That<sup>o</sup> was of Christian kende.<sup>o</sup>

Well loathe war<sup>o</sup> a Christian man  
 To wedde an heathen woman  
 That leved<sup>o</sup> on fals lawe;  
 Als<sup>o</sup> loath was that sultan  
 To wed a Christian woman,  
 410 As I find in my sawe.<sup>o</sup>  
 The sultan yede<sup>o</sup> to bed al priest,<sup>o</sup>  
 Knights and ladies yede to rest;  
 The people them gan withdrawe.  
 That miri<sup>o</sup> maiden little slepe,  
 415 But all night well sore she wepe  
 Till the day gan dawe.<sup>o</sup>

And as she fell on slepe thore<sup>o</sup>  
 Her thought there stood her before  
 An hundred houndes blake,<sup>o</sup>  
 420 And bark on<sup>o</sup> her lesse and more.  
 And one there was that grieved<sup>o</sup> her sore,<sup>o</sup>  
 Away that would her take.  
 And she no durst<sup>o</sup> him not smite<sup>o</sup>  
 For dread that he would her bite,  
 425 Such maistri<sup>o</sup> he gan to make.  
 And as she would from them flee,  
 She saw there stand devils three  
 And each brent<sup>o</sup> as a drake.<sup>o</sup>

430 So lothliche<sup>o</sup> they were al ywrought,<sup>o</sup>  
And each in hand a gleive<sup>o</sup> brought,  
She was aferd<sup>o</sup> full sore.  
On Jhesu Christ was alle her thought;  
Therefore the fendes<sup>o</sup> derd<sup>o</sup> her nought;  
Neither lesse nor more.  
435 Fro the fendes she passed sounde,  
And afterward there came an hounde  
With browes broad and hore.<sup>o</sup>  
Almost he hadde her drawen adoun  
Ac<sup>o</sup> through Jhesus Christes passioun<sup>o</sup>  
440 She was ysaved thore.<sup>o</sup>

Yet her thought withouten lesing<sup>o</sup>  
Als<sup>o</sup> she lay in her swevening<sup>o</sup>  
(That selcouthe<sup>o</sup> was to rede)  
That black hound her was following.  
445 Through might of Jhesu, Heven king,  
Spac<sup>o</sup> to her in manhede<sup>o</sup>  
In white clothes als a knight,  
And said to her, "My swete wight,<sup>o</sup>  
No tharf thee nothing drede<sup>8</sup>  
450 Of Ternagaunt no of Mahoun.<sup>9</sup>  
Thy Lord that suffred passioun  
Shall help thee at thy nede."

And when the maiden was awaked,  
For drede of that, well sore she quaked,  
455 For love of her swevening.<sup>o</sup>  
On her bed she sat al naked;  
To Jhesu her prayer she maked,  
Almightful Heven king.  
As wis<sup>o</sup> as He her dere bought<sup>o</sup>  
460 Of that swevening in sleep she thought  
Should turn to good ending.

And when the maiden risen was  
 The riche sultan of Damas  
 To his temple he gan her bring.  
 465

Then said the sultan to that may,<sup>o</sup>  
 "Thou must believe upon my lay<sup>o</sup>  
 And kneel now here adown  
 And forsake thy false lay  
 That thou hast leved<sup>o</sup> on many a day,  
 470     And honor Seyn Mahoun!<sup>o</sup>  
 And certes, but thou<sup>o</sup> wilt anon,  
 Thy father I shall with war slon<sup>o</sup>  
       By Jovin and Plotoun!<sup>1</sup>  
 And by Mahoun and Ternagant  
 475     There shall no man ben his waraunt<sup>2</sup>—  
 Emperour nor king with croun."  
 The maiden answered with mild chere<sup>o</sup>  
 To the sultan as ye may hear:  
 "Sir, I nil<sup>o</sup> thee nought grieve.  
 480     Teach me now and let me hear  
 How I shall make my preiere  
       When ich<sup>o</sup> on them believe.  
 To Mahoun ichil<sup>o</sup> me take  
 And Jhesu Christ my Lord forsake,  
 485     That made Adam and Eve,  
 And sithen<sup>o</sup> serve thee at wille  
 Arliche<sup>o</sup> and late, loude and stille,  
 A morwe and an eve."

Then was the sultan glad and blithe,  
 490     And thanked Mahoun many sithe<sup>o</sup>  
       That she was so biknawe.<sup>o</sup>  
 His joy couthe he no man kithe;<sup>o</sup>  
 He bad<sup>o</sup> her go and kisse swithe<sup>o</sup>  
       Alle thine godes on rawe.<sup>o</sup>  
 495     She kissed Mahoun and Apolin,



Astirof and Sir Jovin.<sup>3</sup>

For dread of wordes awe,<sup>o</sup>  
And while she was in the temple  
Of Ternagant and Jupiter,  
500 She learned the heathen lawe.  
And though she all the lawes couthe<sup>o</sup>  
And said them openliche with her mouthe,  
Jhesu forgot she nought.  
Where that she was, by north or southe,  
505 No minstrel with harp no crouthe<sup>o</sup>  
No might change her thought.  
The sultan wende<sup>o</sup> night and day  
That she hadde leved<sup>o</sup> upon his lay<sup>o</sup>  
But al he was bicought,<sup>o</sup>  
510 For when she was by herselfen,  
To Jhesu she made her mon,<sup>o</sup>  
That alle this world hath wrought.

The sultan dede cry<sup>o</sup> that tide<sup>o</sup>  
Overal by each a side  
515 A tournament to take  
And doughty men on horse to ride,  
And dubbed them in that tide  
And knightes gan he make.  
The trumpes gun forto blowe;  
520 Knightes priked<sup>o</sup> out o rowe<sup>o</sup>  
On stedes white and blake.  
There might men see sone and swithe,<sup>o</sup>  
Strong men their strengthe kithe<sup>o</sup>  
For that maiden sake.

525 The Christian maiden and the sultan  
In the castle leyen<sup>o</sup> than<sup>o</sup>  
The tournament to behold.  
And tho<sup>o</sup> the tournament began,  
Ther was samned<sup>o</sup> many a man

530 Of Saracens stout and bold.  
To see there was a seemly sight  
Of thirty thousand of helmes bright  
(In gest<sup>o</sup> as it is told).  
535 They leyden on as they were wrothe  
With swerdes and with maces bothe  
Knightes bothe yong and old.

Well many helme ther was ofweved<sup>o</sup>  
And many bacinet tocleved<sup>o</sup>  
And knightes driven to grounde.  
540 Some there fell down on their heved<sup>o</sup>  
And some in the diche lay todreved<sup>o</sup>  
And siked<sup>o</sup> sore unsounde.  
The tournament last tho yplight<sup>o</sup>  
From the morwe to the night  
545 Of men of michel mounde;<sup>o</sup>  
Amorwe<sup>o</sup> the sultan wedded that may<sup>o</sup>  
In the manner of his lay,<sup>o</sup>  
In gest<sup>o</sup> as it is founde.  
At his bridal was noble fest,  
550 Riche, royal, and honest<sup>o</sup>—  
Doukes, kinges with croun.  
For there was melody with the mest<sup>o</sup>  
Of harp and fiddle and of gest<sup>o</sup>  
To lordinges of renoun.  
555 There was geven to the minstrels  
Robes riche and many jewels  
Of earl and of baroun.  
The feast lasted fourtenight<sup>o</sup>  
With mete and drink enough, aflight<sup>o</sup>  
560 Plenté and great foisoun.<sup>o</sup>

That levedi,<sup>o</sup> so fair and so free,<sup>o</sup>  
Was with her lord but monethes three<sup>o</sup>  
Then he gat her with childe.

565 When it was geten, she chaunged ble;°  
The sultan himself that gan see—  
Jolif° he was and wilde.°  
There while she was with child, aflight,  
She bad° to Jhesu ful of might  
570 From shame He should her schilde.°  
Atte forty weekes ende  
The levedi was deliverd o bende°  
Through help of Mary milde.

And when the child was ybore,  
Well sorry women were therefore,  
575 For limb no had it none,  
But as a rond° of flesh yschore°  
In chamber it lay them before  
Withouten blood and bone.  
For sorwe the levedi would die,  
580 For it had neither nose nor eye  
But lay dead as the stone.  
The sultan came to chamber that tide  
And with his wife he gan to chide  
That woe was her begon.°

585 "O dame," he said befor,°  
"Again° my godes thou art forsworn!  
With right resoun I preve°  
The childe that is here of thee born  
Bothe limb and lith° it is forlorn  
590 Al through thy false believe!  
Thou levest nought wele afine°  
On Jubiter no on Apoline,  
A morwe na an eve,  
No in Mahoun no in Ternagant.  
595 Therefore is lorn° this little faunt.°  
No wonder though me grieve!"  
The levedi° answerd and said tho,°

There she lay in care and woe,  
"Leve<sup>o</sup> sir, let be that thought;  
600 The child was geten<sup>o</sup> between us two.  
For thy believe<sup>o</sup> it farth<sup>o</sup> so,  
By Him that us hath wrought!  
Take now this flesh and bear it anon  
Before thine godes everichon  
605 That thou no lete it nought,<sup>o</sup>  
And pray thine godes all yfere,<sup>o</sup>  
Astow<sup>o</sup> art them<sup>o</sup> leve<sup>o</sup> and dere,  
To live<sup>o</sup> that it be brought.

"And if Mahoun and Jovin can  
610 Make it formed after<sup>o</sup> a man  
With life and limbs aright,  
By Jhesu Christ that this world wan<sup>o</sup>  
I shall leve<sup>o</sup> thee better than<sup>o</sup>  
That they are full of might.  
615 And but<sup>o</sup> they it to live bring  
I nil leven<sup>o</sup> on them nothing  
Neither by day no night."  
The sultan took that flesh anon  
Into his temple he gan to gon<sup>o</sup>  
620 There his godes were dight.<sup>o</sup>

Beorn his goddes he gan it leyn<sup>o</sup>  
And held up his honden twain,<sup>o</sup>  
While men might go five mile.  
"A, mightful Mahoun," he gan to seyn,  
625 "And Ternagaunt, of michel meyn,<sup>o</sup>  
In you was never no guile.  
Seyn<sup>o</sup> Jubiter and Apolin,  
Astirot and Seyn Jovin,  
Help now in this perile."  
630 Oft he kneeled and oft he ros<sup>o</sup>  
And cried so long till he was hos<sup>o</sup>

And al he tint<sup>o</sup> his while.<sub>o</sub>

635 And when he hadde al ypreyd,  
And alle that ever he couth<sup>o</sup> he said,  
The flesh lay still as stone.

Anon he stert up at a breyd,<sub>o</sub>  
And in his hert he was atreyd,<sub>o</sub>  
For limb no had it none.

640 He beheld on his godes alle  
And saw there might no bot<sup>o</sup> befall;  
Well woe was him begon.<sup>4</sup>

"O Sir Mahoun," he gan to grede,<sub>o</sub>  
"Will ye nought help me at this nede?  
645 The devil you brenne<sup>o</sup> echon<sup>o</sup>!"

He hent<sup>o</sup> a staff with grete hete<sup>o</sup>  
And stirt<sup>o</sup> anon his godes to beat  
And drough<sup>o</sup> them alle adoun,  
And leyd on til he gan to sweat  
650 And gaf them strokes gode and great,  
Both Jovine and Plotoun.  
And alder best he beat afín<sup>o</sup>  
Jubiter and Apolin,  
And broke them arm and croun,<sub>o</sub>  
And Ternagaunt that was their brother—  
655 He no let never a limb with other<sup>5</sup>  
Nor of his god Mahoun.

And when he hadde beaten them gode won<sup>o</sup>  
Yet lay the flesh stille so ston,<sub>o</sub>  
On high on his altar.  
660 He took it in his hand anon  
And into chamber he gan gon,  
And said, "Lo, have it here.  
I have don all that I can  
To make it formed after<sup>o</sup> a man

665 With kneeling and prayer,  
And for alle that ichave<sup>o</sup> them besought  
Mine godes no may help me nought.  
The devil them sett afere!"<sup>6</sup>

670 And then answered that good woman  
Well hendeliche<sup>o</sup> to that sultan:  
"Leve<sup>o</sup> sir, hear my speech.  
The best rede<sup>o</sup> that I can,  
By Jhesu Christ that made man,  
Now ichil<sup>o</sup> you teach.  
675 Now thou hast proved<sup>o</sup> god thine,  
Gif me leave<sup>o</sup> to assay<sup>o</sup> mine  
Whether is better leech.<sup>o</sup>  
And, leve sir, pray thee this:  
Leve on Him that stronger is  
680 For doute of<sup>o</sup> more wreche."<sup>o</sup>

The sultan answered her thore.<sup>o</sup>  
In heart he was aggrieved sore,  
To see that selcouthe<sup>o</sup> sight.  
"Now, dame, ichil<sup>o</sup> do by thy lore.<sup>o</sup>  
685 If that I may see before  
Thy God is of swiche<sup>o</sup> might  
With any virtue that He can  
Make it formed after a man,  
With life and limbs aright,  
690 Alle my godes ichil forsake  
And to Jhesu thy Lord me take,  
As icham<sup>o</sup> gentil<sup>o</sup> knight."

Well blithe was the levedi<sup>o</sup> than<sup>o</sup>  
For that her lord the riche sultan  
695 Had graunted her prayer.  
For hope he should be Christian man,  
She thanked Him that this world wan<sup>o</sup>

And Mary His mother dear.  
 Now ginneth here a merry pas<sup>o</sup>  
 700 How that child ychristned<sup>o</sup> was  
 With limbs al whole and fere,<sup>o</sup>  
 And how the sultan of Damas  
 Was christned for that ich cas<sup>o</sup>—  
 Now herken<sup>o</sup> and ye may hear.  
 705  
 Then said the levedi in that stounde,<sup>o</sup>  
 "Thou hast in thy prisoun bounde  
 Many a Christian man.  
 Do seche<sup>o</sup> overalle by loft and grounde;<sup>o</sup>  
 If any Christian priest be founde,  
 710 Bring him before me than<sup>o</sup>  
 And I shall er<sup>o</sup> tomorwe at none<sup>o</sup>  
 Wite<sup>o</sup> what Jhesu Christ can done  
 More than thine maumettes<sup>o</sup> can."  
 Anon the prisouns weren ysought;  
 715 They found a priest and forth him brought  
 By hest<sup>o</sup> of that sultan.  
  
 He came before that levedi free,<sup>o</sup>  
 And gret<sup>o</sup> her fair upon his knee,  
 And said with sikeing<sup>o</sup> sore,  
 720 "Madame, yblessed mot<sup>o</sup> thou be  
 Of Jhesu Christ in Trinity  
 That of Mary was bore."<sup>o</sup>  
 The levedi said, "Artow<sup>o</sup> a priest?  
 Tell me sothe if that thow best.<sup>o</sup>  
 725 Canstow<sup>o</sup> of Christian lore?"  
 "Madame," said the priest anon,  
 "In verbo De<sup>o</sup> ich was on,<sup>o</sup>  
 Twenty winter gon<sup>o</sup> and more.  
  
 730 "Ac<sup>o</sup> dame," he said, "by Seyn John,  
 Ten winter song<sup>o</sup> I masse none

And that me liketh ille.<sup>o</sup>  
For so long it is now gon  
Ichave<sup>o</sup> been in thy prison of stone  
With wrong and great unskille."<sup>o</sup>  
735 The levedi said, "Let be thy fare.<sup>o</sup>  
Thou shalt be brought out of thy care  
And<sup>o</sup> thou wilt hold thee stille.  
For through thine help in this stounde,<sup>o</sup>  
740 We shall make Christian men of houndes—  
God grant it if it be His wille."

Then said the sultan's wife,  
"Thou must do still<sup>o</sup> withouten strife  
A well great privy.  
Holy water thou must make,  
745 And this ich<sup>o</sup> flesh thou take,  
All for the love of me,  
And christen<sup>o</sup> it withouten blame  
In the worship of the Father's name  
That sit in Trinity.<sup>z</sup>  
750

"For in Him is mine hope aflight,<sup>o</sup>  
The Father that is full of might  
My sorwe shall me slake.<sup>o</sup>  
If it were christned aright,  
It should have form to see by sight  
755 With limb and life to wake."  
That levedi<sup>o</sup> command<sup>o</sup> anon  
Her maidens out of chamber gon  
For dread of wraying sake.<sup>8</sup>  
The priest no long<sup>o</sup> nold abide;  
760 A fair vessel he took that tide  
And holy water he gan make.

At midsummer tide<sup>o</sup> that deed was don  
Through help of God that sit in throne,



765 As I you telle may.  
 The priest took the flesh anon  
 And cleped<sup>o</sup> it the name of John  
 In worship of the day.  
 And when that it christned was  
 It hadde life and limb and fas<sup>o</sup>  
 770 And cried with great deray,<sup>o</sup>  
 And hadde hide and flesh and fel<sup>o</sup>  
 And alle that ever therto befell,  
 In gest<sup>o</sup> as I you say.

775 Fairer child might non be bore<sup>o</sup>—  
 It no had never a limb forlore,<sup>o</sup>  
 Well shapen it was, withalle;  
 The priest no longe dwelled thore<sup>o</sup>  
 And yede<sup>o</sup> and told the sultan fore<sup>o</sup>  
 There he was in the halle.  
 780 That levedi<sup>o</sup> there she lay in bed  
 That richeliche was bischred<sup>o</sup>  
 With gold and purple palle.<sup>o</sup>  
 The child she take to her blive<sup>o</sup>  
 And thanked our levedi with joyes five  
 785 The fair grace there was befall.

And said, "Lord, I pray Thee,  
 Almighty God in Trinity,  
 So give me might and space  
 That I may that day ysee  
 790 My lord would ychristned<sup>o</sup> be,  
 The sultan of Damas."  
 Then came the sultan that was black,  
 And she showed him the child and spac<sup>o</sup>  
 With life and limbs and face.  
 795 She said, "Mahoun no Apolin  
 Is nought worth the bristle of a swin<sup>o</sup>  
 Again<sup>o</sup> my Lordes grace!"

The sultan said, "Leman min,<sup>o</sup>  
 Ywis icham<sup>o</sup> glad afín<sup>o</sup>  
 800 Of this child that I see."  
 "Ya, sir, by Seyn<sup>o</sup> Martin  
 If the halvendel<sup>o</sup> were thin<sup>o</sup>  
 Well glad might thou be."  
 "O dame," he said, "how is that?  
 805 Is it nought mine that I begat?"  
 "No, sir," then said she,  
 "But thou were christned<sup>o</sup> so it is—  
 Thou no hast no part thereon ywis,<sup>o</sup>  
 810 Neither of the child ne of me.  
 "And but thou<sup>o</sup> wilt Mahoun forsake  
 And to Jhesu my Lord thee take,  
 That tholed<sup>o</sup> woundes five—  
 Anon thou do thee Christian make—  
 815 Thou might be ferd<sup>o</sup> for sorwe and wrake<sup>o</sup>  
 While that thou art alive.  
 And if thou were a Christian man  
 Bothe weren thine," she said than,<sup>o</sup>  
 "Thy childe and eke<sup>o</sup> thy wive.  
 When thou art dead, thou shalt wende  
 820 Into bliss withouten ende,  
 Thy joie may no man kithe."<sup>o</sup>  
 The sultan saw well by sight  
 That Jhesu was of more might  
 Than was his false lawe.  
 825 He said, "Dame, anon right<sup>o</sup>  
 Ichil<sup>o</sup> forsake my gods aplight<sup>o</sup>—  
 They shall be brent and drawe.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ac<sup>o</sup> telle me now par charité,<sup>o</sup>  
 830 And for the love thou has to me,

What shall I seyn in sawe?°  
Now ichave° forsaken my lay.°  
Tell me now what is your fay,°  
And ichil lere° wel fawe."°

835 Then said that levedi hende and fre,  
"Understand, sir, par charité,  
On Jhesu Christes lay:°  
How He was and ever shall be  
O° God and Persones Three,  
And light° in Mary that may,  
840 And in her body nam° flesh and blood,  
And how He bought us on the rode,°  
Upon the Good Friday;  
And how His gost° went to Helle  
Sathanas pousté° for to felle  
845 And brought mankind away.

"The thirdd day in the morning  
To live He rose withouten lesing°  
As He came of the rode,  
And gave His frendes comforting  
850 And stey° to heaven as mightful king  
Bothe with flesh and blood.  
As it is founden in holy writ,  
On His Father right hand He sit,  
And is well mild of mode;°  
855 As it is writen in the creed,  
He demeth° bothe the quick° and dead  
The feeble and eke° the gode.

"And all this world shall todrive,°  
And man arise from dead to live,  
860 Right dome° to understand.  
And then shall Jhesu, withouten strive,°  
Show His bloody woundes five

That He for us gan fond.<sup>o</sup>  
 And then shall He withouten mis<sup>o</sup>  
 865 Deem<sup>o</sup> each man after he is,  
 Earl, baroun, and bond.<sup>o</sup>  
 Leve<sup>o</sup> hereon," she said than,<sup>o</sup>  
 "And do thee make<sup>o</sup> a Christian man  
 For no thing thou no wond."<sup>o</sup>  
 870  
 Then said the sultan, "Dame, be stille.  
 I shall be christned through Godes wille  
 Er than<sup>o</sup> the thirddde day.  
 Loath me were my soul to spille.<sup>o</sup>  
 Pray now the priest, he came us tille  
 875 And teach me Christian lay  
 As priveliche as it may be.  
 That no man wite<sup>o</sup> but we three  
 Als forth<sup>o</sup> as ye may.  
 And<sup>o</sup> any it wist<sup>o</sup> high or lowe,  
 880 Thou shalt be brent and I todrawe<sup>o</sup>  
 And<sup>o</sup> we forsoke our fay."<sup>o</sup>  
 Anon the priest answered than<sup>o</sup>  
 Hendeliche<sup>o</sup> to that sultan  
 "Sir, icham<sup>o</sup> ready here  
 885 With alle the power that I can  
 For to make thee Christian man  
 And Godes lay<sup>o</sup> to lere."<sup>o</sup>  
 His hand upon his breast he laid,  
 "In verbo Dei,"<sup>o</sup> he swore and said,  
 890 "Unto you bothe yfere,<sup>o</sup>  
 Well true and trusty shall I be  
 With alle that ever falleth to me  
 To help with my power."  
 895 Amorwe,<sup>o</sup> when the priest gan wake,  
 A well fair vessel he gan take

With water clear and cold,  
And halwed<sup>o</sup> it for the sultan sake  
And his prayer he gan make  
To Jhesu that Judas sold  
900 And to Marie, His mother dear,  
Tho<sup>o</sup> that the sultan christned were,  
That was so stout and bold,  
He should give him might and space  
Through his virtue and his grace  
905 His christendom well to hold.

And when it was light of day  
The riche sultan there he lay  
Up began to arise.  
To the priest he went his way  
910 And help him alle that he may  
That fell to his servise.  
And when the priest hadde tho<sup>o</sup>  
Dight<sup>o</sup> ready that fell thereto  
In all manner wise,  
915 The sultan with good will anon  
Dede off<sup>o</sup> his clothes everichon  
To receive his baptize.<sup>o</sup>

The Christian priest hight<sup>o</sup> Cleophas;  
He cleped<sup>o</sup> the sultan of Damas  
920 After his owne name.  
His hide<sup>o</sup> that black and loathly was  
All white became through Godes grace  
And clear withouten blame.  
And when the sultan saw that sight,  
925 Then leved<sup>o</sup> he wele on God almight;  
His care went to game.<sup>o</sup>  
And when the priest had alle ysaïd  
And holy water on him laid,  
To chamber they went ysame.<sup>o</sup>

930 When he came there<sup>o</sup> the levedi<sup>o</sup> lay,  
"Lo, dame," he gan to say,  
"Certain, thy God is true."  
The levedi thanked God that day;  
For joy she wept with eyghen<sup>o</sup> gray,  
935 Unnethe<sup>o</sup> her lord she knewe.  
Then wist<sup>o</sup> she well in her thought  
That on Mahoun leved he nought  
For changed was his hewe.<sup>o</sup>  
For that her lord was christned so,  
940 Away was went all her woe—  
Her joy gan wax<sup>o</sup> all newe.

"My lord," she said with herte free,  
"Sende now this priest in privity<sup>o</sup>  
To my father the king,  
945 And pray him for the love of me  
That he com swithe hither to thee  
With alle that he may bring.  
And when my father is to thee come,  
Do christen thy land alle and some,  
950 Bothe old and ying.  
And he that will be christned nought,  
Loke to the death that he be brought,  
Withouten any dwelling."<sup>o</sup>

955 The sultan took the priest by hand  
And bad him wende<sup>o</sup> and not no wond<sup>o</sup>  
To the king of Tars ful yare,<sup>o</sup>  
And do<sup>o</sup> him al to understond  
How Jhesu Christ through His sond<sup>o</sup>  
Hath brought them out of care,  
960 And bid him bring with him his host<sup>o</sup>  
Priveliche withouten boast<sup>o</sup>—  
For nothing he no spare.

965 And Cleophas, with good intent,  
To do the sultan's commandment  
To Tars he gan fare.

And when the priest, Sir Cleophas,  
Com to the court through Godes grace  
Withouten any dwelling,  
970 He told the king all that cas:  
How the child dead born was,  
A misforschapen thing,  
And through the prayer of his wife  
How God had sent it limb and life  
975 In water ate christening,  
And how that heathen sultan  
Was become a Christian man  
Through the might of Heaven king.

He read the letter that he brought,  
And in the letter he found ywrought—  
980 In gest as I you say—  
How that the sultan him besought  
To come to him and let it nought  
Upon a certain day,  
And bring with him alle his host  
985 To take his land by everich coast,  
And search in his cuntray;  
Who that wold nought christned be,  
He should be hanged upon a tree  
990 Withouten any delay.

Blither might no man ben.  
He cleped his barons and the queen  
And told them thus in sawe  
How the sultan stout and keen  
Was christned withouten ween  
995 And leved on Christes lawe,

“And therefore he hath don sent me by sond<sup>o</sup>  
He will do christen alle his lond  
If that he might well fawe,<sup>o</sup>  
And he that will not take christening,  
1000 No be he never so high lording,  
He shall hang and drawe.<sup>o</sup>

“And therefore I pray you now right,  
Earl, baroun, duke, and knight,  
Do alle your folk bide  
1005 With helm on heved<sup>o</sup> and brini<sup>o</sup> bright  
That ye ben alle ready dight<sup>o</sup>  
To help me at this nede.”  
They sent over al by ich a side<sup>o</sup>  
For many Christian men that tide  
1010 That doughty were of dede.  
The king him dight for to wende<sup>o</sup>  
With sixty thousand knightes hende<sup>o</sup>  
That was a fair ferred.<sup>o</sup>

1015 The king came withouten lett<sup>o</sup>  
The selve day that him was set  
To the sultan well yare.<sup>o</sup>  
And when they were together met,  
A merry greeting there was gret<sup>o</sup>  
With lordings less and more.  
1020 There was ruth<sup>o</sup> forto seen  
How the levedi<sup>o</sup> fell on kneen<sup>o</sup>  
Before her father there;  
There was joy and mirth also  
To hear them speken of wele and woe  
1025 Her aventours as they were.

The sultan dede his barons calle  
And sethen<sup>o</sup> anon his knightes alle  
And after alle his meyné,<sup>o</sup>



1030 And when they come into the halle,  
He said, "How so it bifalle,  
Ye mot<sup>o</sup> ychristned be.  
Myselfen, I have Mahoun forsake  
And Christendom I have ytake,  
And certes<sup>o</sup> so mot ye.  
1035 And they that will not so anon<sup>o</sup>  
They schul be heveded<sup>o</sup> erverichon<sup>o</sup>  
By Him that dyed on tree."

When he hadde thus ytold  
Many Saracen stout and bold  
1040 That in his court were,  
Many said that they wold,  
And many said that they nold<sup>o</sup>  
Be christned in none manner.  
Tho<sup>o</sup> that Mahoun would forsake,  
1045 Christian men he let them make  
And were him lief<sup>o</sup> and dear;  
And he that did not by his rede<sup>o</sup>  
Anon he dede strike off his head  
Right fast by the swere.<sup>o</sup>

1050 The sultan had in prison dight<sup>o</sup>  
Ten thousand Christian men, yplight,<sup>o</sup>  
Of many uncouth thede.<sup>o</sup>  
He did them liver<sup>o</sup> anon right  
And tho<sup>o</sup> that were strong and wight,<sup>o</sup>  
1055 He gave them armor and stede;<sup>o</sup>  
And tho he saw that might not so,  
He gave them mete<sup>o</sup> and drink thereto  
And alle that them was nede.  
There might men see with that sultan  
1060 Many blithe<sup>o</sup> Christian man,  
In gest<sup>o</sup> as so we rede.

When he had don thus that tide,  
 Over all his land by each a side  
 The word well wide sprong.  
 1065 Five heathen kinges that tide<sup>o</sup>  
 And many heathen duke unride<sup>o</sup>  
 With people great and strong  
 They sent aboute near and fer<sup>o</sup>  
 Upon that sultan for to war,  
 1070 And said for that wrong,  
 By Mahoun and Ternagaunt,  
 There should not ben his warrant<sup>o</sup>  
 But been drawe and hong.<sup>9</sup>

Tho five kinges of proud parayle<sup>o</sup>  
 1075 Dight<sup>o</sup> them ready to that bateyl;  
 Well stout and strong they were.  
 How the sultan gan them assail  
 And what they hete<sup>o</sup> withouten fail,  
 Now herken and ye may hear.  
 1080 King Canadok and King Lesias,  
 King Carmel and King Clamadas,  
 And King Memarok<sup>1</sup> their fere.<sup>o</sup>  
 Upon the sultan with war they went,  
 His men they slew, his townes brent  
 1085 With strengthe and great power.

The king of Tars and the sultan,  
 Day of bateyle they gun tan<sup>o</sup>  
 Again tho kinges five.  
 Ac ever again<sup>o</sup> a Christian man,  
 1090 Ten heathen houndes were than  
 Of Saracens stout and stithe.<sup>o</sup>  
 Now herkneth to me bothe old and ying  
 How the sultan and the king  
 Amonges them gun drive,

1095 And how the Saracens that day  
Opped hevedles<sup>o</sup> for their pay<sup>o</sup>—  
Now listen and ye may lithe.<sup>o</sup>

The Christian sultan that tide  
Took a spear and gan to ride  
1100 To Canadok that was keen.  
And Canadok with great pride,  
With a spear gan him abide  
To wite and nought atwene.<sup>o</sup>  
So hard they driven together there  
1105 That their lances both yfere<sup>o</sup>  
Brosten<sup>o</sup> them bitweene.  
The sultan drew his fauchon<sup>o</sup> good  
The kinges heved<sup>o</sup> with alle the hood  
He strook off quite and clene.<sup>o</sup>  
1110

King Lesias of Tabarie  
To the sultan he gan heye,<sup>o</sup>  
For Canadok his felawe.  
With a spere that was trusty  
He rode to the sultan well on hey<sup>o</sup>  
1115 And thought him have yslawe.<sup>o</sup>  
The king of Tars between them rod  
And Lesias strok he abod,<sup>o</sup>  
As I finde in my sawe,<sup>o</sup>  
And smote him so on the shield  
1120 That top seyl<sup>o</sup> in the field;  
He made him overthrawe.<sup>o</sup>

He leapt on horse and gan to ride  
And slough adown<sup>o</sup> by each a side  
That<sup>o</sup> he before him founde.  
1125 Whom that Lesias hit in that tide,<sup>o</sup>  
Were he duke or prince of pride,  
He gave him deadly wounde.

The king of Tars came with a spere  
 And through his sides he gan it bere  
 1130 That dead he fell to ground.  
 Then set the Saracens up a cry  
 "A, Mahoun, full of maistry,  
 Help us in this stounde!"  
  
 1135 When King Carmel heard that, him was woe;  
 To fight anon he was full thro.  
 A spear in hand he hent.  
 He pricked his steed and dede him go.  
 He thought the king of Tars to slo  
 Er he thennes went.  
 1140 He smote the king of Tars that tide  
 Through his hauberk a wounde wide  
 That nigh he had him shent.  
 The king out of his saddle fell;  
 The blood out of his wound gan well  
 1145 That many man them biment.  
  
 For sorwe the sultan would wede;  
 When he saw his woundes blede,  
 He rode to him with mayn.  
 He and the Christian ferred  
 1150 Brought the king of Tars his stede  
 And set him up again.  
 And when he was on horse brought  
 Alle that ever he araught  
 He clef him to the brain.  
 1155 King Carmel tho to him went  
 And gave him such another dent  
 That near he had him slain.  
  
 And when the sultan that yseighe  
 All wode he wex for wrathe neye—  
 1160 He rode to King Carmele.

He smote him on the helme an heighe<sup>o</sup>  
 That through the brain it fleighe<sup>o</sup>  
 That no leech<sup>o</sup> might him heal.  
 King Clamadas came riding than<sup>o</sup>  
 1165 With a glaive<sup>o</sup> to the sultan,  
 And thought with him to deal,  
 And smote him above the shield  
 That nigh he felled him in the field  
 Among tho houndes fele.<sup>o</sup>  
 1170  
 The king of Tars in that stounde  
 Had spite of that heathen hounde  
 That was so stout and beld.<sup>o</sup>  
 He swore, "By Him that tholed<sup>o</sup> wounde  
 1175 The dogge shall adown to grounde  
 That fightes thus in field."  
 He rode to him anon right  
 And smote to him a stroke of might—  
 Atwo he clef his shield  
 And through his heart the sword gan glide;  
 1180 The blood ran out by each a side  
 And so he him aqueld.<sup>o</sup>  
  
 Then was King Memaroc in great pain,  
 For his four felawes were slain  
 And in the field todreved.<sup>o</sup>  
 1185 He pricked his steed upon the plain  
 And fly away with might and mayn<sup>o</sup>  
 For dread to hide his heved.<sup>o</sup>  
 The sultan saw him away ride;  
 He pricked after him in that tide,  
 1190 For no thing he it bileved,<sup>o</sup>  
 And smote him so above the shield  
 That helm and heved flew in the field  
 Full wightlike<sup>o</sup> off it weved.<sup>o</sup>

1195 When the Saracens sawen alle  
That Memarok was to grounde yfalle  
And namore up arise,  
"Allas, Mahoun!" they gan to calle,  
"Whi latestow<sup>o</sup> Christian hewe us small?  
Wicke<sup>o</sup> is thy servise!"  
1200 They flew for dread alle yfere<sup>o</sup>  
And dreynt<sup>o</sup> them in o<sup>o</sup> river  
So sore them gan agrise.<sup>o</sup>  
The battle last swithe<sup>o</sup> long  
Till it were time of evensong  
1205 Er<sup>o</sup> they might win the prize.

The Saracens flew by each a side;  
The Christian folk after gan ride,  
And shed them brain and blood.  
There was none that might him hide  
1210 That he nas slain in that tide  
With fight against them stood.  
And tho<sup>o</sup> that yold them to the pes,<sup>o</sup>  
The sultan swore withouten les<sup>o</sup>  
By Him that died on rode,  
1215 He that nold nought forsake his lay,<sup>o</sup>  
He should forlesse<sup>o</sup> that ich<sup>o</sup> day  
The bal up in the hode.<sup>2</sup>

Thirty thousand there were take  
Of Saracens both blo<sup>o</sup> and black  
1220 And don<sup>o</sup> in his prisoun.  
And he that would his lay forsake,  
Christian men he let them make<sup>3</sup>  
With great devocioun.  
And they that would be christned not,  
1225 Into a stede<sup>o</sup> they weren ybrought  
A mile withouten the town

And Christian men withouten wene<sup>o</sup>  
 Striken off their hevedes<sup>o</sup> all bidene.<sup>o</sup>

1230 Thus the lady with her lore  
 Brought her frendes out of sore<sup>o</sup>  
 Through Jhesu Christes grace.  
 All the while that they were there  
 The joy that was among them yare<sup>o</sup>  
 No man may telle the space.

1235 When they were out of world iwent  
 Before God Omnipotent  
 Them was diht<sup>o</sup> a place.  
 Now Jhesu that is full of might  
 Graunt us alle in Hevene light

1240 To see Thy swete face. AMEN.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text is drawn from F. Krause's 1888 edition, which relies on the so-called Auchinleck Manuscript in the National Library of Scotland. Here it has been significantly altered: spelling within the text has been modernized wherever such a change does not interfere with sense or meter.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An imagined Christian kingdom bordering China.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He would not receive his daughter.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: May ill fortune befall him.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Let us know your judgment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Their complexion changed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: No one might prevent it.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: You need not fear anything.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The text ignorantly imagines Islam to be polytheistic, image based, and syncretistic in its choice of deities.  
 "Ternagaunt" designates the god imagined in popular medieval

literature to be worshipped in Islam; "Mahoun" is a contraction of "Muhammad."[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: In another gross misrepresentation of Islamic practice, the text imagines the Muslim sultan swearing by classical Roman gods, Jove and Pluto.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: No man shall stand in for him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The names of supposed gods of the Muslim sultan, as absurdly imagined and, furthermore, erroneously conceived as idols, in this text: Muhammad, Apollo, Astaroth, and Jove.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: He was utterly despondent.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: He left no limb joined to another.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: May the devil set them on fire![Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This stanza is short three lines.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: For fear of being betrayed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Who would not be drawn (that is, dragged behind a horse) and hanged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: So far as can be deduced, the names are fictional.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An unusual expression for "head," attested elsewhere in the Auchinleck manuscript.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He allowed them to become Christians.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *young*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Mary's (Jesus's mother)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *powerful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Damascus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *person*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expression*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complexion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bright eyes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *neck*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *praise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in five pieces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maiden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *however*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine cloth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maddened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speech*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cross*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rather*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not want* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Muslim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sooner obtain the devil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straightaway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might I prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trouble and punishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unto him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abandon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *course*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *retinue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behaved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Saint Muhammad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forcefully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *highest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fully composed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to do* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *people* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendidly clothed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rather* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proven wrong* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *command* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *battle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *huge company* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *news* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would they delay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bold* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gleamed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *army* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *hacked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Saracens)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ditch* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stranger and kin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble face* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *succeeded Muhammad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffered defeat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there were none* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unhorsed him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belief* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut off* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *headpieces* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for the sake of both* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamentation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defeated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *royal cloth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confrontation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroyed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burned* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in every way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will (not)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tolerate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grievous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *request*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrange it quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occur*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intends*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *voice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *therefore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *composed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *read*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *present*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to both of them* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deception*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fellowship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great display*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble and courteous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ten times*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *readied themselves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chariot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *miserable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *come*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grieving*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *let's move on from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *young*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chariot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *could* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *royal cloth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be fetched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woman* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *face*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *companion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *show of happiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *approach* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maiden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *religion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *story*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *directly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beautiful*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *began to dawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accosted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harshly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *threats*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dragon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hideously* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shaped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fiends* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *filthy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deception*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dream*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marvel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(his) humanity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dream*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed her dearly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maiden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *religion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Saint Muhammad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless you*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *slay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demeanor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afterward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *early*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *times*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made her confession of faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *could he to no man express*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a row*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *his words*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a stringed instrument*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *religion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *announced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at that time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rode* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a row*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *show*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stayed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *when*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gathered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the tale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cleaved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scattered*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *groaned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strength*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the next day* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maiden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the tale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to the highest degree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *songs or tales*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two weeks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abundance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for three months only*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *color or appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delighted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ecstatic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *protect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from confinement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lump* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despondent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *first*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *properly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *infant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begotten*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *belief* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fares* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neglect anything* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to them* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beloved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *life* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the shape of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrayed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laid it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great power* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saint* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hoarse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a start* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *baffled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intensity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *started* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knocked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thoroughly* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *head*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for a good while*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as stone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in the shape of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I have*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *graciously*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *advice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I will*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tried*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *permission* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *test*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *savior (lit., "healer")*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for fear of* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grief*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *remarkable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I will* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *direction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *such*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I am* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noble*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lady* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *redeemed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interlude*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *baptized*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *integral*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *very event*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *listen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *time*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *seek* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *high and low*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noon*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *false images of gods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble lady*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greeted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sighing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you are*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by the Word of God* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ago*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sang*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *displeases me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injustice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set aside your misery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *predicament*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discreetly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *baptize*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commanded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *face*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the tale*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *missing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stayed there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in front of the sultan*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rich cloth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *baptized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pig*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in comparison to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *my beloved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I am* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Saint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *half* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yours*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless you are christened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *express*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I will* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burnt and drawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for charity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speech*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I have* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *religious belief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *law*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alighted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cross*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deception*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ascended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judges* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disperse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opposition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experienced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bondman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make yourself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stray*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condemn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *readily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *known*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burned and drawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *graciously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I am*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *law* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by the word of God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the next day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consecrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *when*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *baptism*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turned to mirth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarcely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *color*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *err*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *readily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *messenger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *army*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *display*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *case*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at the*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *composed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the tale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happier*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speech*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctrine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *messenger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drag behind a horse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coat of mail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on every side*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fellowship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knees*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afterward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *retinue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for certain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beheaded* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *every one*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *would not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beloved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counsel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unknown peoples*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliver*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the tale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ferocious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *far*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supporter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *companion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encountered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hopped headless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punish without delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curved sword*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hasten*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *rapidly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sustained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the top of the shield flew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fall down*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut down*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eager*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grasped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chain mail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *killed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bemoaned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fellowship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cleaved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on high*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *spear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courageous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *killed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dispersed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was distracted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *energetically* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you allow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drowned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffer fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peace terms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deception*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *religion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forfeit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hesitation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heads* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forthwith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °

# THE BOOK OF JOHN MANDEVILLE

## ca. 1356

*The Book of John Mandeville* was one of the most popular works of the Western Middle Ages, surviving in nearly three hundred medieval manuscripts. It takes its readers on a tour of the world ordered by eastward movement, from England to Constantinople (now Istanbul), onward to India and China, and finally, at its furthest point, to the gates of the earthly paradise. Full of concrete descriptions, the *Book* offers its readers a wonder-filled globe, one replete with marvelous objects, strange creatures, and surprising cultural practices. These diverse phenomena are framed within a decidedly Christian and European outlook—one that regards Jerusalem and its surrounding territories as Christian by right and that delivers the whole world for the delight and education of European audiences.

The *Book* was composed in French prose, probably around 1356, and the author-narrator claims to be an English knight who traveled the world for thirty-four years, although this is now regarded as a fiction. The *Book* immediately began circulating in various adaptations and translations, appearing in Latin, Middle English, and at least eight other European languages. Despite Mandeville's claim that the *Book* is based on eyewitness experience, modern scholarship reveals it to be a creative patchwork of many different texts—by, for instance, Greco-Roman philosophers, Christian pilgrims, Crusaders, mendicant missionaries, and medieval

merchants. Two of the author's most important sources are genuine medieval travel memoirs: one by William of Boldensele, a Christian pilgrim to the Levant, and the other the account by Odoric of Pordenone of his missionary journey to India and China. In his *Book*, the *Mandeville*-author makes the geographic and cultural information of these Latin texts accessible to lay (secular) readers. The work that results is not a story per se, although the author does include occasional first-person anecdotes about Mandeville's adventures. It is ultimately an encyclopedic itinerary, tracing a path across the surface of the *mappa mundi* (world map; see [pp. 287–88](#)). Copies of *The Book of John Mandeville* were often vividly illustrated, with colorful images that brought remote societies and fantastical bodies before readers' eyes (See the Image Gallery for this volume).

The *Book* begins with a devotional prologue, which anchors world geography in Christian sacred history: the locations of Jesus's life and death are at the center of the world. This prologue echoes the ideology of the Crusades, a series of religious wars waged between 1095 and 1291 as members of the Western Church sought to seize Jerusalem and surrounding territories from Islamic rule. While early Crusaders enjoyed military success, conquering Jerusalem in 1099, European armies eventually lost control of the region. Defeat at the city of Acre in 1291 was the end of Crusader presence in the region. *The Book of John Mandeville* voices nostalgia for past Christian military success. The author-narrator criticizes the noblemen of his day for infighting instead of seeking the Christian "inheritance" in the Holy Land. The *Book* even contrives to have the Mamluk sultan in Cairo parrot this rhetoric. At the end of the *Book*, the pope himself is said to validate Mandeville's account and vouch for its truth.

Geography, bodies, and social practices are entangled throughout *The Book of John Mandeville*. The *Book* shows us localized groups who share distinctive physiologies and idiosyncratic religious, political, and cultural practices. Sometimes these peoples hover on the very edge of human identity. Pay attention to the passage below in which Mandeville invokes the scientific idea that planets influence particular regions. The effects of Saturn on one territory are said to

affect the inhabitants corporeally, making them sedentary—while the moon’s influence disposes Europeans to be fast-moving travelers (a convenient truth for Mandeville!). Such experiments in describing, explaining, and physicalizing human difference were part of the *Book’s* legacy for the early modern period, an era that saw the development of the transatlantic slave trade and European settler colonies. Explorers and colonizers including Christopher Columbus (d. 1506) and Walter Raleigh (d. 1618) are known to have read *The Book of John Mandeville*. It was also a source for later works of English literature such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).

Our source for the Modern English translation here was the dominant English-language version of the text between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. Richard Pynson drew on it for his print edition (ca. 1496), on which most subsequent English printings were based.

# ***From The Book of John Mandeville***<sup>1</sup>

## **[*Preface*]**

Here begins *The Book of John Mandeville*, knight of England, who was born in the town of Saint Albans<sup>2</sup> and traveled about the world in many diverse countries to see marvels and customs of countries and different kinds of folks and diverse shapes of men and beasts. And all the marvels that he saw, he wrote and told in this book, which contains twenty-two chapters. And this knight went out of England and over the sea in the year of our Lord 1332 and passed through many lands, countries, and islands, and compiled this book and had it written in the year of our Lord 1366, thirty-four years after he went out of his country, for he was traveling thirty-four years.<sup>3</sup>

## ***Hic Incipit Prologus Istius Libri.***<sup>4</sup>

Since the land over the sea, which is to say the Holy Land, which men call the land of Bethany, among all lands is the most worthy and is sovereign over all other lands and is blessed and hallowed and sanctified by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—in this land, it pleased Him<sup>5</sup> to take on flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary and to honor this land with His blessed foot. And there He wished to do many miracles and preach and teach the faith and law of us Christians to His dear children. And there He would suffer many insults and mockeries for our sake. And He that was king of Heaven and earth, of air and sea and things that are contained within them, He would only be called king of that land when He said, *Rex sum Judeorum*. That means: “I am king of the Jews.”<sup>6</sup> For at that time the land was Jewish.

And that land He had chosen before all other lands as the most virtuous and most worthy in the world. And therefore the philosopher says thus: *virtus rerum in medio consistit*. That means: "the virtue of things is in the middle."<sup>7</sup> And in that land He would lead His life and endure suffering and death from the Jews<sup>8</sup> in order to redeem us and deliver us from pains of Hell and death without end, which was ordained to us on account of the sin of our forefather Adam and for our own sins also. He did not suffer death for His own sake, for He deserved no wrong since He never did any wrong. And He that was king of joy, He might in that place best suffer death. For whoever will do anything that he wishes to be known widely, he will have it announced openly in the middle of a city or town. So did He that was king of the world. He chose to suffer death in Jerusalem, which is in the middle of the world, so that it might be known to people in all parts of the world how dearly He bought humankind, whom He made according to His likeness, on account of the great love that He had for us. For more valuable property might not be staked for us than His blessed body and His precious blood, which He offered for us.

Lo, dear God, what love He had for his subjects, when He who had done no transgression, only for our transgressions suffered death. Right well should men love and dread and worship such a lord and praise a land so holy, which brought forth such a fruit, through which every man is saved unless by his own fault. This is the land that belongs to our inheritance. And in that land He chose to die and took possession of it to leave to His children. Therefore every good Christian man who has means should exert himself to conquer our true inheritance and chase away the misbelievers. For we are called Christian men from "Christ," our Father. And if we are true children of Christ, we should then claim the true heritage of our Father and take it out of foreign men's hands.

But now pride, greed, and envy have enflamed the hearts of lords of this world, so that they are more concerned to impoverish their neighbors than to claim and conquer their true heritage, aforementioned. And common people who would give their bodies



and wealth to conquer our inheritance may not do so without lords. For an assembly of the common people without a chief lord is like a flock of sheep that has no shepherd: they scatter and do not know where to go. But if God would grant that worldly lords agree with one another and with the common people that they should take this holy voyage over the sea, I believe then, within a little while, our aforesaid true heritage should be recovered and put in the hands of the proper heirs of Jesus Christ.

And because men desire to hear talk of the Holy Land and take from it great enjoyment, entertainment, and comfort, I will tell some of what I have seen—I, John Mandeville, knight, though I am not worthy, who was born in England in the town of Saint Albans and crossed the sea in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ 1332, upon Saint Michael's Day.<sup>9</sup> And ever since then I have been a long time overseas, and I have seen and gone through many lands, and I have resided in many provinces and kingdoms. I have passed through Turkey and Syria, Armenia the Lesser and the Greater, Tartary, Persia, Arabia, Egypt the High and the Low, Libya, Chaldea, and a great part of Ethiopia, Amazonia, and much of India the Greater and the Less, and through many other islands that are around India, where many different peoples dwell with diverse customs, laws, and shapes. About these lands and islands, I will speak more fully. And I'll tell a part of what I have seen in the world as it may come to my mind hereafter—and especially for those who wish and intend to visit the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy places that are around there, I'll tell the routes that men should take there, for I have many times traveled and ridden to Jerusalem in the company of great lords and other good company.

*[The book begins with a detailed account of itineraries to Jerusalem, together with descriptions of sites of interest along the way and in the Levant itself. In the course of his account, Mandeville reports that he has worked as a mercenary for the Mamluk Sultan in Cairo, during the Muslim ruler's wars against the Bedouins.]*

## From *Chapter 12. Truth of Saracens*

Since I have told you about the Saracens<sup>1</sup> and their lands, if you like I will tell you a part of their laws and their faith, as their book recounts, which is called *Akkaron*.<sup>2</sup> And some men call the book *Mesap*, and some *Arne*,<sup>3</sup> according to diverse customs of language. This book Machomet<sup>4</sup> gave to them, in which he wrote, among other things (as I have seen and read many times) that a man who is good will go to Paradise and a man who is wicked will go to Hell—and all Saracens believe that.

\* \* \*

And they have many good articles of our faith, and they know much of Holy Scripture and of prophecies, although they write them in their own language. But they don't understand it, or do so only literally and not spiritually. And therefore Saint Paul says as follows: *Littera occidit, spiritus autem vivificat*. That means, "The letter kills, and the spirit makes live."<sup>5</sup> And the Saracens say that the Jews are wicked, for they do not uphold their law, which Moses brought them. Also Christian men are wicked people, for they do not uphold the Ten Commandments, which Jesus Christ sent to them.

And therefore I shall tell you a tale. I was with the Sultan in his chamber one day, and he emptied the room of all ranks of men, for he said that he would speak to me confidentially. And he asked me how Christian men governed themselves in their country.

And I said, "Very well, thanks be to God."

And he said, "Surely not, for your priests care nothing for God's service. They should provide an example to men to do well, but they give wicked examples. And when your people should go to holy church on a holy day to serve God, they go instead to tavern and to market, and they live in gluttony and greed day and night, and eat and drink like beasts that don't know when they've had enough."<sup>6</sup> Also, Christian men," he said, "labor to fight among themselves and

deceive one another. Also," he said, "they are so prideful that they can't decide what they should wear—now long clothes, now short clothes, now tight clothes, now loose clothes.

"And they should be honest," he said, "and meek and true, and give charity as Jesus did, in whom they believe. But they are so greedy," he said, "that for a little silver, they will sell their wives and children and sisters. One man takes another man's wife, and no man well keeps his pledges to another. It is on account of their own sins," he said, "that Christians have lost all the land that we now hold, and for your sins God has given these lands to us, not on account of our strength. For you well know," he said, "that when you serve your God well, then he will help you, so that no man can stand against you. And you understand by your prophecies that Christians will again conquer these lands, when they serve their God well. But while they live so wickedly as they do, we have no fear of them, for their God will not help them."

And then I asked him how he knew the state of Christians so thoroughly. And he said he knew very well, concerning both commoners and lords, by means of his messengers, whom he sent through all lands as though they were merchants with precious stones and other merchandise, to understand the customs of every land. And then he called again all the lords into his chamber. And he showed me four who were great lords in that country, who described my country and other countries of Christendom as though they had been men of that same country. And they spoke French very well, as did the Sultan too. And then I marveled at the great shame of Christian men. For those who should be converted by our good teaching and example to the Christian faith are instead put off by our wicked model of living. And therefore it is no wonder that they call us wicked men. But the Saracens are faithful, for they truly keep the commandments of their *Ackaron*.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

[*Mandeville continues his travels eastward.*]

### **From *Chapter 13. Diversities of People and of Countries***

There is a river that runs through the land that men call India. In that river, one finds eels twenty feet long. In India, there are more than five thousand islands where people dwell. And on each island there are many cities and people, for the inhabitants of India are of such a condition that they do not often depart from their own land. For they dwell under a planet that is called Saturn, and that planet makes its orbit through the twelve astrological signs over twenty years, while the moon takes a month to pass through the twelve signs.<sup>8</sup> And since Saturn is so slow-moving, therefore the people who dwell under this planet have no strong will to do much traveling about. And our country is just the opposite, for we are in a climate that belongs to the moon and quick movement, for that is the planet of travel. And therefore it gives us the impulse to be moving often and to go into diverse countries of the world, for the moon passes about the world more swiftly than any other planet.

\* \* \*

In this land,<sup>9</sup> and in many others around it, men may not see the star that is called Tramontana,<sup>1</sup> which stands due north and never moves, by which sailors are led—for the star is not visible in the south. But there is another star that is called Antarctic, and that is directly opposite of that other star. And by this star, sailors are led toward the south, and it is not seen in the north. And therefore men may well understand that the land and the sea are entirely round, for parts of the sky that are visible in one place do not appear in another.<sup>2</sup> And one may prove it thus: if one might find a sea-voyage and men who wish to go to sea, one might travel all around the earth, above and beneath. And I can prove this according to what I have seen. For I have been in Brabant<sup>3</sup> and seen the astrolabe<sup>4</sup> reading for the star Tramontana, and it is 54 degrees high in Germany, and toward Bohemia is 59 degrees, and further north it is 62 degrees in height and some minutes.

And you should understand that opposite the star in the north is the Antarctic star. These two stars never move, and the firmament turns on them like a wheel on an axle, so that these two stars divide all the sky into two parts. \* \* \* And therefore I say with certainty that a man could travel all about the world, above and beneath, and come again to his own country, if he had a ship. And he will always find many lands and islands in that region, for I know well that these people who dwell right under the Antarctic star are foot against foot with us and those who dwell under the Tramontana. And these people who dwell opposite of us are foot against foot, for all parts of the earth have their contraries set opposite them.

And you should understand that the land of Prester John,<sup>5</sup> emperor of India, is under us. For if a man goes from Scotland or England toward Jerusalem, he travels ever upward, for our land is in the lowest part of the west, and the land of Prester John is in the lowest part of the east. And they have day when we have night, and night when we have day. And as much as someone ascends upward out of our country toward Jerusalem, just as much will that one travel downward toward the land of Prester John from Jerusalem, and that is because the entire earth is round.

Now you have probably heard that Jerusalem is in the middle of the world, and that may be well demonstrated as follows: if a man there takes a spear and plants it straight in the earth at midday (when night and day are of equal lengths), the spear makes no shadow. And David bears witness to this when he says, *Deus operatus est salute in medio terre*. That means, "God has wrought salvation in the middle of the earth."<sup>6</sup> And therefore all who depart from our western countries for Jerusalem, however far upward they travel as they go there, that far downward will they travel as they go into the land of Prester John from Jerusalem. And so one may venture to these islands, thanks to the roundness of the earth and sea, until one arrives right underneath us.

And therefore I have thought many times of a tale I heard when I was young, how a worthy man from our country set forth once to see the world. And he passed India and these islands beyond India,

of which there are more than five thousand. And he traveled so long by land and by sea, looking about the world, that he found an island where he heard his own speech and where those herding animals were saying such words as men did in his own country—at which he was greatly amazed, for he didn't know how this could be. But I say that he had gone so long over land and sea, traveling about the world, that he had come to his own borders. But because he could travel no further, he turned again as he had come, and so he had a great journey. And it befell afterward that he went toward Norway, thanks to a wind storm at sea, which drove him so that he arrived on an island. And when he disembarked, he thought that it was the island where he had been before, where he heard his own language spoken as men herded animals. And that may well be true, despite the fact that ignorant men do not believe that anyone can pass beneath the earth. For just as we think that these people are under us, so they think that we are under them!

\* \* \*

*[Mandeville returns to the task of describing the islands near India.]*

And in some of these islands there are people who have only one eye, which is in the middle of their forehead, and they eat nothing but raw meat. And on another island live people who have no head at all, and their eyes are in their shoulders and their mouth, in their chest. And on another island there are people who have flat faces, without nose or eyes, but they have two small holes instead of eyes and they have a flat, lipless mouth. And on another island are people who are both man and woman and have the organs of both. And when they want to, they can use both, one at one time and the other at another time. And they beget children when they use the man's organs, and they bear children when they use the organs of the woman.

There are many other kinds of people there, about whom there is too much to tell. But in order to continue on, one comes to an island

where the men are very small, and they have a little hole instead of their mouth, and they might not eat. But when they need to eat or drink, they suck it through a pipe that is hollow all through.

\* \* \*

*[Mandeville travels onward to "Cathay," or Mongol-controlled northern China, ruled by the "Great Khan."]*

## **From *Chapter 17. Arrangement of the Court of the Great Khan***

Now I have told you why he is called the Great Khan. Next I will tell you about the organization of his court when they have great feasts, and that is principally at four times in the year. The first feast is for the Khan's birthday; the second for the day when he was carried into the temple to be circumcised; the third is for his idols, when they first began to speak; and the fourth is when his idols first began to do miracles. And at these times, he has his men well arranged by thousands and hundreds, and every man knows well what he should do. First, there are 4000 rich barons ordered to organize the feast and serve the emperor. And these barons have gold crowns finely decorated with pearls and precious stones, and they are all clothed very richly in garments of gold and camaca.<sup>7</sup> And they can very well have such clothes, for there these are of less cost than woolen clothes are here. And these 4000 barons are divided into 4 groups, and each group is clothed in a different color, very richly. And when the first thousand have passed and displayed themselves, then comes the second thousand, and so the third, and so the fourth. And none of them speaks a word.

And by the emperor's side, at the emperor's table, sit numerous philosophers expert in many sciences—astronomy, necromancy, geometry, pyromancy,<sup>8</sup> and many other sciences. Some of them have astrolabes of gold and precious stones, some spheres, some the skull of a dead man, some vessels of gold full of coals burning.<sup>9</sup> Some have clocks well and richly made, or other kinds of instruments for their sciences. And at certain hours, when they see it is time, they say to the people that stand before them, "Make peace," and then those men standing there shout aloud, so that everyone in the hall may hear, "Now be still a while!" And then one of the philosophers speaks and says as follows: "Every man do reverence and bow to the emperor, who is God's son and lord of all lords and of all the world, for now it is time." And then everyone



bows and kneels on the ground. And then the philosophers bid them to rise again. And at other hours, other philosophers bid everyone to put their fingers in their ears, and they do so. And at another hour, another philosopher bids that all the people should lay their hands on their mouths, and they do so. And, so, after he tells them to take their hands away, they do so. And thus, from hour to hour, the philosophers command diverse things.

And I asked privately what that meant. And one of these masters said that the bowing and kneeling on the ground at that time was a sign that all those who kneeled would evermore be true to the emperor—that despite any gifts or commands, they would never be traitors to him. And putting fingers in their ears had this meaning, that if any of them should hear any wrong spoken of the emperor, from even their fathers or their mothers or anyone else, they would report it either to the emperor or to his council.

And you should understand that no man gives anything to the emperor—neither bread, nor drink, nor clothes, nor any other necessary thing—except at certain times and hours that the philosophers designate. And if anyone wants to make war against the emperor, no matter what country they are in, these philosophers know it immediately and tell the emperor and his council and send men there to put a stop to it.

Also he has many men to keep birds, such as gerfalcons, sparrowhawks, falcons of excellent breed, male and female lanner falcons, speaking parrots, and other kinds of birds. And he has 11,000 elephants, baboons, and monkeys. And he has physicians to look at his urine,<sup>1</sup> of whom 3000 are Christians and 20, Saracens. But he has more dealings with Christians than with Saracens, and in his court are many barons and others who are Christian and others who have been converted to our faith through the preaching of good Christians who live there. But there are many who desire that no one learns that they are Christians. And the emperor has in his chamber a pillar of gold, upon which is a ruby and a carbuncle<sup>2</sup> that is a foot long and that gives off light all night to the whole room. And he has

many other precious stones and rubies, but that is the greatest and best.

\* \* \*

*[After further accounts of eastern regions, Mandeville concludes his text.]*

## From *Chapter 22. Why He Is Called Prester John*

\* \* \*

There are many other countries and marvels that I have not seen, and therefore I might not properly speak about them. And also in countries where I have been, there are many marvels of which I haven't spoken, for it would be too long a tale. I will say no more about the marvels that are there, so that others who travel there may find many new things to say, about which I have not told or spoken. For many people have a great fondness and desire to hear about new things. And I, John Mandeville, knight, who went out of my country and crossed the sea in the year of our Lord 1332—and who have passed through many lands, countries, and islands and have now come to rest—I have compiled this book and had it written the year of our Lord 1366, twenty-four<sup>3</sup> years after my departure from my country, for I was traveling for thirty-four years.

And because many people do not believe anything unless they have seen it with their own eyes or can understand it with their natural reason, therefore I made my way, in turning homeward, to Rome, to show my book to the holy father, the pope, and told him the marvels which I had seen in diverse countries, so that he, with his wise council, could scrutinize it with the diverse people who were in Rome. For in Rome there are so many people living there from different nations of the world. And a little while later, when he and his council had examined it thoroughly, he said to me with certainty that everything was true therein. For he said he had a book in Latin that contained all that and much more, according to which the *mappa mundi*<sup>4</sup> was made—which book he showed to me. And therefore the holy father, the pope, has ratified and confirmed my book in all points.

And I ask that all those who read this book or hear it read, that they should pray for me, and I will pray for them. And all those who say for me a *Paster Noster* and an *Ave*,<sup>5</sup> so that God might forgive me for my sins, I make them partners and grant them part of all my

good pilgrimage and the other good deeds that I have done and worked and will complete before my life's end. And I pray to God, from whom all graces come, that He will fill all those who read or hear this book, who are Christians, with His grace and save them in both body and soul and bring them to His joy that will last forever: He that is, in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who lives and reigns, God without end. Amen.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Original translation based on the edition of Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson, *The Book of John Mandeville* (2007), which follows the so-called Defective Version of the Middle English text.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: English town about 20 miles from London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This preface, written in the third person, is not found in other versions of the *Book*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here begins the prologue of this book (Latin).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The present translation observes the convention of capitalizing pronouns referring to Jesus and God.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Latin. See John 19:19–20.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Latin. The narrator adopts Aristotle's claim that virtue lies at the midpoint between behavioral extremes (*Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6–9) as evidence that Jerusalem's geographic centrality makes it the holiest spot in a sinful world.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The false claim that Jews were responsible for Christ's death, often used to justify Christian violence against Jewish people, was widespread in the Middle Ages.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: September 29, also known as Michaelmas: a feast day that celebrates Satan's banishment from Heaven and marks the start of shortening daylight hours.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A term used by medieval Christians to refer to non-Christian Arabs as well as Muslims of varying ethnicities; Mandeville uses it here as a synonym for “Muslims.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mandeville’s spelling of the Quran.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Versions of Arabic words for, respectively, “book” (*mushaf*) and “sacred” (*haram*).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A widespread Christian misspelling of “Muhammad.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: 2 Corinthians 3:6 (Latin). Medieval Christians often cited this verse to help explain how the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Islam interpreted scripture wrongly (supposedly “literally” rather than “spiritually”).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A close match to the critical portrayal of Christian behavior in *Piers Plowman*; see pp. 380–81.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Quran.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The manuscript of the base text omits a line of text here; the translation has been emended with reference to other, closely related versions.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “Lamory,” or Sumatra, which lies partly in the Southern Hemisphere.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Polaris, the North Star.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The passage that follows draws on Johannes de Sacrobosco’s *De sphaera* (On the Sphere, ca. 1230), a treatise on the Ptolemaic (or geocentric) cosmos. Although Mandeville’s actual calculations are confused, it is clear he understands the world as a complete sphere of 360 degrees.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A region in the Low Countries of Europe.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An astronomical instrument that measures the altitude of celestial bodies above the horizon, calculated in degrees (between 0° at the horizon and 90° at the zenith) and minutes (1/60 of a degree).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A legendary Christian figure, thought (incorrectly) by medieval Christians to rule over India.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Psalms 74:12 (Vulgate 73:12, misquoting the Latin).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An expensive, silklike fabric.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The art of divination by fire. “Necromancy”: the art of communicating with the dead to predict the future.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The manuscript omits a line of text here; the translation is emended with reference to other versions. Skulls were used in divination.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Uroscopy, or the medical examination of urine, was a common method of diagnosis in the Middle Ages.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A bright red gemstone thought to have powers of illumination.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This is a numerical mistake—24 for 34—of the kind common in manuscript transmission.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: On the *mappa mundi* (map of the world; Latin), see pp. 287–88.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “Our Father” and “Hail [Mary],” the Latin names of common prayers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The manuscript is missing its final leaf, so the text has been completed with reference to other, closely related, versions.[Return to reference 6](#)

# **THE CROXTON PLAY OF THE SACRAMENT after 1461**

Written and performed nearly two centuries after the expulsion of the Jews from England, *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* demonstrates how fantasies of Jewishness remained central to the Christian religious imagination. Designed to shock and amaze its audience, the play relies for its effects on the obsessions projected onto its Jewish characters and the grotesque bodies they are given. The play's central character is a Jewish merchant named Jonathas, fixated on what he calls the "conceit," or trick, of the Eucharist. The ritualistic transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is a lie, he thinks, and he sets out to prove it. At one point in his efforts, Jonathas discovers that the host, or consecrated bread, has become inexplicably stuck to his hand. He runs around the stage in a panic, begging his Jewish companions to help him remove the clinging wafer. To secure it, they nail the bread (and Jonathas's hand with it) to a post, in an unwitting parody of the Crucifixion. Attempting to yank their leader free, they "pluck the arm, and the hand shall hang still with the sacrament"—as the play's stage directions read. In what must have been a gruesome special effect, Jonathas's Jewish body falls to pieces. Dismembered then healed, violently blasphemous and then piously converted, Jews are treated in the play as a malleable medium for the Christian message.

*The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* is a miracle play, dramatizing supernatural proofs of divine power. It is set not in the biblical past but in the Middle Ages' own present—"in the year of our Lord, a thousand four hundred sixty and one," as we are told. The play uses stagecraft to make its events vividly present for its viewers—with a Eucharistic "cake" that spews blood, a Jewish hand pulled off, an exploding oven, and a speaking "image" of Jesus, "with wounds bleeding." It veers between comic slapstick and reverent devotion. Though suspicions of Eucharistic fakery receive a miraculous rejoinder in the course of the story, we might also notice how the play's own theatrical spectacle relies on trick-props and devices to create if not fake miracles, then fictional ones. These nonetheless give rise to the enactment of religious and civic unity at the play's end, as the bishop processes with the consecrated host through the assembled crowd of actors and spectators, and the Jews are converted. Note, however, that this is not a version of social harmony able to tolerate the continued existence of Jews as Jews. The play expunges Jewishness from its vision of social cohesion.

The difficulty of believing properly in the Eucharist was a preoccupation of medieval Christianity. The Eucharistic ceremony celebrates the Last Supper, a meal Jesus shares with his disciples before the Crucifixion, where he refers to the bread as "my body" and the wine as "my blood" (see Matthew 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–25, and Luke 22:17–20). According to the doctrine of the Western Church, the priest's consecration of bread and wine is not merely symbolic. Rather, it changes their natures, actually transforming the foodstuffs into Christ's body and blood, in a process known as transubstantiation. Though their observable properties, or "accidents," do not change, their "substance" does.

This invisible but all-important alteration evidently presented a challenge for Christian faith. In the later Middle Ages, miracle stories proliferated recounting how individuals skeptical about the Eucharist witnessed visible, tangible evidence of sacramental change—for instance, with the bread becoming a bleeding chunk of flesh. Sometimes, as in the *Croxton Play*, the skeptics are made out to be



Jews. In such stories, Jewish figures become instruments for exploring and overcoming Christian doubts (or, as in the figure of the Christian merchant Aristorius, very tepid forms of belief). The *Croxton Play* survives in a single manuscript probably copied between 1520 and 1540, a period when transubstantiation was being debated by early modern Protestant reformers and their Catholic opponents. In the play's original fifteenth-century performance context, similar controversies raged. Medieval English Christians holding Wycliffite or Lollard beliefs maintained that even after consecration, the host remained physically bread—a stance considered heretical by the Church.

References to the village of Croxton as well as “Babwell Mill” enable us to locate the play in the vibrant theatrical culture of East Anglia. The *Croxton Play* employs a style of theatrical staging popular in the region, known as place-and-scaffold: several small raised scaffolds are constructed around a central playing space. Three such scaffolds are demanded for the *Croxton Play*—one for the residence of the Christian merchant Aristorius, one for the Jews' lodgings, and one for the church. Even as the play can be identified in its local performance context, it also strives to evoke the wider world. Both Aristorius and Jonathas boast about the far-flung regions linked by their mercantile activity. Indeed, we can understand the *Croxton Play* in part as an effort to grapple with the globalizing cash economy of the later Middle Ages. What is and isn't for sale?

The *Croxton Play* is written for the most part in four-stress lines, arranged in quatrains with alternating rhyme, *a b a b*. Many of these quatrains are linked into eight-line stanzas (*a b a b b c b c*). Yet there is some variation, with occasional three-stress lines and several other stanzaic forms. Indeed, the playwright seems to have associated shifts in stanzaic structure with turning points in the action. Although the play's language has been partly modernized, rhyme is preserved, as well as the pattern of four stressed syllables per line.

# The Croxton Play of the Sacrament<sup>1</sup>

## THE NAMES AND NUMBER OF THE PLAYERS:<sup>2</sup>

JESUS JASON, second Jew

BISHOP JASDON, third Jew

ARISTORIUS, Christian merchant MASPHAT, fourth Jew

PRIEST MALCHUS, fifth Jew

CLERK MASTER BRUNDICH, physician

JONATHAS, first Jew, master COLLE, servant

NINE MAY PLAY IT AT EASE.<sup>3</sup>

*RC*<sup>4</sup>

## [The Banns]<sup>5</sup>

FIRST HERALD

Now the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost,  
That all this wide world have wrought,<sup>o</sup>  
Save all these seemly,<sup>o</sup> both least and most,  
And bring you to the bliss that he hath you to-  
bought!

5 We be full purposed<sup>o</sup> with heart and with thought  
Of our matter to tell the intent,<sup>o</sup>

Of the marvels that were wondrously wrought  
Of o the holy and blessed sacrament.

SECOND HERALD

Sovereigns, and it like o you to hear the purpose of  
this play  
That is represented now in your sight, 6  
10 Which in Aragon was done, the sooth o to say,  
In Heraclea, 7 that famous city, aright—  
Therein wonneth o a merchant of mickle o might,  
Sir Aristory was called his name,  
15 Kenned o full o far with many a wight, o  
Full far in the world sprang his fame.

FIRST HERALD

Anon o to him there came a Jew,  
With great riches o for the nones, 8  
And wonneth o in the city of Surrey o—this full true—  
20 The which had great plenty of precious stones.  
  
Of this Christian merchant he frained sore, o  
When he would have had his intent. o  
Twenty pound and merchandise more  
He proffered for the holy sacrament.

SECOND HERALD

25 But the Christian merchant thereof said nay, o  
Because his proffer o was of so little value;  
A hundred pound but o he would pay  
No longer thereon he should pursue.  
  
But more of their purpose o they gan speke, o  
30 The holy sacrament for to bey; o  
And all for o they would be wreke, o  
A great sum of gold began down lay.

FIRST HERALD

This Christian merchant consented, the sooth<sup>o</sup> to  
say,  
And in the night after, made him deliverance.<sup>o</sup>  
These Jews all great joy made they;  
35 But of<sup>o</sup> this betide<sup>o</sup> a stranger chance:<sup>o</sup>  
  
They grieved<sup>o</sup> our Lord greatly on ground,<sup>o</sup>  
And put him to a new passioun;<sup>o</sup>  
With daggers gave him many a grievous wound;  
40 Nailed him to a pillar, with pincers plucked him  
doun.<sup>o</sup>

SECOND HERALD

And sith<sup>o</sup> they took that blessed bread so sound<sup>o</sup>  
And in a caldron they did him boil.  
In a cloth full just<sup>o</sup> they it wound,  
And so they did<sup>o</sup> him seethe in oil;  
  
45 And then they put him to a new tormentry,<sup>o</sup>  
In an hot oven spered<sup>o</sup> him fast.  
There he appeared with wounds bloody;  
The oven rove<sup>o</sup> asunder and all to-brast.<sup>o</sup>

FIRST HERALD

Thus in our law<sup>o</sup> they were made steadfast;  
The holy sacrament showed them great favor;  
50 In contrition their hearts were cast  
And went and showed their lives to a confessor.  
  
Thus by miracle of the King of Heaven,  
And by might and power given to the priest's  
mouth,<sup>9</sup>  
55 In a household were converted iwis<sup>o</sup> eleven.<sup>1</sup>  
At Rome this miracle is known well couth.<sup>o</sup>

SECOND HERALD

This miracle at Rome was presented, forsooth,  
In the year of our Lord, a thousand four hundred  
sixty and one,  
That the Jews with holy sacrament did woth,  
In the forest said of Aragon.

60

Lo, thus God at a time showed him there,  
Through his mercy and his mickle might;  
Unto the Jews he gan appear  
That they should not lose his heavenly light.

FIRST HERALD

Therefore, friends, with all your might  
Unto your ghostly father show your sin;  
Be in no wanhope day nor night.  
No manner of doubts that Lord put in.

65

For that the doubts the Jews then in stood—  
As you shall see played, both more and less—  
Was if the sacrament were flesh and blood;  
Therefore they put it to such distress.

70

SECOND HERALD

And it please you, this gathering that here is,  
At Croxton on Monday it shall be seen;  
To see the conclusion of this little process  
Heartily welcome shall you been.

75

Now Jesus you save from trei and teen,  
To send us his high joys of heaven;  
There might is without mind to mean.  
Now, minstrel, blow up with a merry steven.

80

*Explicit.*

*Hereafter follows the Play of the Conversion of  
Sir JONATHAS the Jew by Miracle of the Blessed  
Sacrament.*

ARISTORIUS

Now Christ, that is our creator, from shame he cure  
us;°

He maintains us with mirth that moves upon the  
mold;°

Unto his endless joy mightily he restores us,  
All those that in his name in peace well them hold;  
For of a merchant most mighty thereof my tale is  
told,

85

In Heraclea is none such, whoso will understond,  
For of all Aragon I am most mighty of silver and of  
gold—

For and it° were a country to buy, now would I not  
wond.°

Sir Aristory is my name,

90

A merchant mighty of a royal array;°  
Full wide in this world springs my fame,  
Far kenned° and known, the sooth° for to say,  
In all manner of lands, without any nay,°

95

My merchandise runs,° the sooth for to tell;  
In Genoa and in Jenyse<sup>5</sup> and in Geneway,°  
In Syria and in Sheba and in Salerno I sell;

100

In Antioch and in Allemania° much is my might,  
In Brabant and in Britain I am full° bold,  
In Calabria and in Cologne there range I full right,°  
In Dordrecht and in Denmark by the cliffs cold;°  
In Alexandria I have abundance in the wide world.  
In France and in Faeroe° fresh be my flowers,  
In Gelder° and in Galicia have I bought and sold,

In Hamburg and in Holland much merchandise is  
ours;

105 In Jerusalem and in Jericho among the Jews gentle,  
Among the Chaldeans and Catalans kenned is my  
coming;

In Rheims and in Rome to Saint Peter's temple,  
I am known certainly for buying and selling;

110 In Maine and in Milan full merry have I be;  
Out of Navarre to Naples much good is that I  
bring;

In Pondere and in Portugal much is my glee;  
In Spain and in Spruce much is my speeding;  
In Lombardy and in Luxembourg there led is my  
liking;

115 In Tharsia and in Turkey there told is my tale;  
And in the dukedom of Oryon much have I in  
wielding;

And thus throughout all this world set is my sail.

No man in this world may wield more riches;  
All I thank God of his grace, for he that me sent;  
And as a lord's peer thus live I in worthiness.

120 My curate waits upon me to know my intent,  
And men at my wielding, and all is me lent  
My will for to work in this world so wide.

Me dare they not displease by no condescent.  
And who so does, he is not able to abide.

PRIEST

125 No man shall you tarry nor trouble this tide,  
But every man diligently shall do you pleasance;  
And I unto my cunning to the best shall them guide  
Unto God's pleasing to serve you to attrueaunce.

For you be worthy and notable in substance of good,  
Of merchants of Aragon you have no peer—  
130 And thereof thank God that died on the rood,  
That was your maker and hath you dear.

ARISTORIUS

Forsooth, Sir Priest, your talking is good;  
And therefore after your talking I will attain  
To worship my God that died on the rood.  
135 Never while that I live against that will I sayn.  
But, Peter Paul, my clerk, I pray thee go well  
plain  
Throughout all Heraclea, that thou ne wond,  
And wit if any merchant be come to this reign  
Of Syria or of Sheba or of Chalcedon.  
140

CLERK

At your will for to walk I will not say nay,  
Smartly to go search at the water's side;  
If any pleasant bargain be to your pay,  
As swiftly as I can I shall him to you guide.  
Now will I walk by these paths wide,  
145 And seek the haven both up and down,  
To wit if any uncouth ships therein do ride  
Of Syria or of Sheba or of Chalcedon.

*Now shall the merchant's man withdraw himself,  
and the Jew JONATHAS shall make his boast.*

JONATHAS

Now, almighty Machomet, mark in thy majesty,  
Whose laws tenderly I have to fulfill,  
150 After my death bring me to thy high see,



My soul for to save if it be thy will;  
For my intent is for to fulfill,  
As my glorious God thee to honor.  
155 To do against thy intent it should grue<sup>o</sup> me ill,<sup>o</sup>  
Or against thine law for to report.<sup>o</sup>

For I thank thee highly that have me sent  
Gold, silver, and precious stones,  
And abundance of spices thou hast me lent,  
160 As I shall rehearse before you ones:<sup>o</sup>  
I have amethysts, rich for the nones,<sup>o</sup>  
And beryls that be bright of ble;<sup>o</sup>  
And sapphire seemly,<sup>o</sup> I may show you attones,<sup>o</sup>  
And crystals clear for to see;

165 I have diamonds dearworthy to dress,<sup>o</sup>  
And emeralds, rich I trow<sup>o</sup> they be,  
Onyx and agates both more and less,  
Topaziouns,<sup>o</sup> smaragdes<sup>o</sup> of great degree,<sup>o</sup>  
Pearls precious great plenty;  
Of rubies rich I have great renown;  
170 Crapaudes<sup>o</sup> and chalcedonies seemly<sup>o</sup> to see,  
And curious carbuncles here you find mown.<sup>o</sup>

Spices I have both great and small  
In my ships, the sooth<sup>o</sup> for to say,  
175 Ginger, licorice, and galingale,  
And figs fat to please you to pay;<sup>o</sup>  
Pepper and saffron and spices small,  
And dates well dulcet<sup>o</sup> for to dress,<sup>o</sup>  
Almonds and rice, full every male,<sup>o</sup>  
180 And raisins both more and less:

Cloves, grains,<sup>o</sup> and ginger green,  
Mace, mastic that might<sup>o</sup> is,  
Cinnamon, sugar, as you may seen,<sup>o</sup>

Long pepper and Indian licorice;  
Oranges and apples of great aprice,<sup>o</sup>  
185 Pomegranates and many other spices,—  
To tell you all I have now, iwis,<sup>o</sup>  
And much other merchandise of sundry spices.

Jew Jonathas is my name,  
Jason and Jasdon they wait on my will,  
190 Masphat and Malchus they do the same,  
As you may know it is both right and skill.<sup>o</sup>  
I tell you all, by dale and by hill,  
In Heraclea is none<sup>o</sup> so much of might.<sup>o</sup>  
Wherefore you ought tenderly to tend me till,<sup>o</sup>  
195 For I am chief merchant of Jews, I tell you by right.

But Jason and Jasdon, a matter would I mean<sup>o</sup>—  
Marvelously it is meant<sup>o</sup> in mind—  
The belief of these Christian men is false, as I ween;  
<sup>o</sup>  
200 For they believe in a cake—me<sup>o</sup> think it is unkind.<sup>o</sup>  
And all they say how the priest doth it bind,<sup>o</sup>  
And by the might<sup>o</sup> of his word makes it flesh and  
blood—  
And thus by a conceit<sup>o</sup> they would make us blind—  
And how that it should be he<sup>o</sup> that died upon the  
rood.<sup>o</sup>

JASON  
205 Yea, yea, master, a straw<sup>o</sup> for tales!  
That may not fall,<sup>o</sup> in my beleve;<sup>o</sup>  
But might we it get once within our pales,<sup>1</sup>  
I trow<sup>o</sup> we should soon after put it in a preve.<sup>o</sup>

JASDON  
Now, by Machomet so mighty, what you done

of meve,<sup>o</sup>  
210 I would I wist<sup>o</sup> how that we might it get;  
I swear by my great God, and else<sup>o</sup> might I  
not cheve<sup>o</sup>  
But<sup>o</sup> wightly<sup>o</sup> thereon would I be wreck.<sup>o</sup>

MASPHAT

Yea, I dare say faithfully that their faith is false:  
That was never he that on Calvary<sup>2</sup> was killed,  
215 Or in bread for to be blood it is untrue als;<sup>o</sup>  
But yet with their wiles<sup>o</sup> they would we were wild.  
<sup>o</sup>  
<sub>—</sub>

MALCHUS

Yea, I am mighty Malchus, that boldly am build;<sup>o</sup>  
That bread for to beat bigly<sup>o</sup> am I bent.<sup>o</sup>  
Once out of their hands and<sup>o</sup> it might be exiled,<sup>o</sup>  
220 To help cast it in care<sup>o</sup> would I consent.

JONATHAS

Well, sirs, then keep counsel,<sup>o</sup> I command you all,  
And no word of all this be wist.<sup>o</sup>  
But let us walk to see Aristory's hall,  
And afterward more counsel<sup>o</sup> among us shall cast.  
<sup>o</sup>  
225 With him to buy and to sell I am of power prest:<sup>o</sup>  
A bargain with him to make I will assay;<sup>o</sup>  
For gold and silver I am nothing aghast<sup>o</sup>  
But<sup>o</sup> that we shall get that cake to our pay.<sup>o</sup>

*Here shall Sir ISODER the priest speak unto Sir  
ARISTORIUS, saying in this way to him; and  
JONATHAS goes down off his stage.<sup>3</sup>*

PRIEST

230 Sir, by your leave,° I may no longer dwell;°  
it is far past none,° it is time to go to church,  
There to say my evensong,° forsooth as I you tell,  
And sith° come home again, as I am wont to  
werche.°

ARISTORIUS

235 Sir Isoder, I pray you° walk at your will,  
For to serve God it is well done,  
And sith° come again and you shall sup° your fill,  
And walk then to your chamber° as ye are wont to  
doon.°

*Here shall the merchant's men meet with the  
Jews.*

JONATHAS

Ah! Peter Paul, good day and well i-met!  
Where is thy master, as I thee pray?°

CLERK

240 Long from him have I not let°  
Sith° I came from him, the sooth° for to say.  
What tiding° with you, sir, I you pray,°  
After my master that you do fraine?°  
Have you any bargain that were to his pay?°  
Let me have knowledge; I shall wit him to sayn.°

JONATHAS

245 I have bargains royal and rich  
For a merchant with° to buy and sell;  
In all this land is there none like°  
Of° abundance of good,° as I will tell.

*Here shall the CLERK go to Sir ARISTORIUS, saluting him thus:*

CLERK

250 All hail, master, and well may you be!  
Now tidings<sup>o</sup> can I you tell:  
The greatest merchant in all Surré<sup>o</sup>  
Is come with<sup>o</sup> you to buy and sell:  
This tale right well he me told.

255 Sir Jonathas is his name,  
A merchant of right great fame;  
He would sell you, without blame,  
Plenty of cloth of gold.

ARISTORIUS

260 Peter Paul, I can thee thank!  
I pray<sup>o</sup> thee richly array<sup>o</sup> my hall  
As oweth<sup>o</sup> for a merchant of the bank;  
Let no default<sup>o</sup> be found at all.

CLERK

265 Sickerly,<sup>o</sup> master, no more there shall!  
Stiffly<sup>o</sup> about I think to steer,<sup>o</sup>  
Hastily to hang your parlor with pall,<sup>o</sup>  
As longeth<sup>o</sup> for a lord's peer.

*Here shall the Jewish merchant and his men  
come to the Christian merchant.*

JONATHAS

All hail, Sir Aristory, seemly<sup>o</sup> to see,  
The mightiest merchant of Aragon!  
Of your welfare fain wit<sup>o</sup> would we,

And to bargain with you this day am I boun.°

ARISTORIUS

270 Sir Jonathas, you be welcome unto my hall!  
I pray you come up and sit by me,  
And tell me what good° you have to sell,  
And if any bargain made may be.

JONATHAS

I have cloth of gold, precious stones, and spices  
plenty.  
With you a bargain would I make.  
275 I would barter with you in privity°  
One little thing, that you will me it take<sup>4</sup>  
Privily° in this stound;°  
And I will sure° you by this light,  
Never distraign° you day nor night,  
280 But be sworn to you full right°  
And give you twenty pound.

ARISTORIUS

Sir Jonathas, say° me for my sake,  
What manner of merchandise is that you mean?

JONATHAS

285 Your God, that is full mighty, in a cake,  
And this good° anon° shall you seen.°

ARISTORIUS

Nay, in faith, that shall not been.°  
I will not for a hundred pound  
To stand in fear my Lord to teen;°  
290 And for so little a value in conscience to stand  
bound.

JONATHAS

Sir, the intent is, if I might know or undertake<sup>o</sup>  
If that he were God almighty,<sup>o</sup>  
Of all my miss<sup>o</sup> I will amends make,  
And do him worship both day and night.

ARISTORIUS

Jonathas, truth I shall thee tell:  
295 I stand in great doubt to do that dede,<sup>o</sup>  
To you that dear<sup>o</sup> all for to sell.  
I fear me that I should stand in drede.<sup>o</sup>  
For and<sup>o</sup> I unto the church yede,<sup>o</sup>  
And priest or clerk might me aspy,<sup>o</sup>  
300 To the bishop they would go tell that dede  
And appeach<sup>o</sup> me of heresy.

JONATHAS

Sir, as for that, good shift<sup>o</sup> may you make,  
And, for a veil, to walk on a night  
When priest and clerk to rest be take;<sup>o</sup>  
305 Then shall you be spied of no wight.<sup>o</sup>

ARISTORIUS

Now say me, Jonathas, by this light!  
What payment therefore would you me make?

JONATHAS

Forty pound, and pay it ful right,<sup>o</sup>  
Even for that Lord<sup>o</sup> sake.  
310

ARISTORIUS

Nay, nay, Jonathas, there again;<sup>o</sup>  
I would not for a hundred pound.

JONATHAS

Sir, here is your asking<sup>o</sup> told<sup>o</sup> plain,  
I shall it tell<sup>o</sup> in this stound.<sup>o</sup>

315 Here is a hundred pounds, neither more nor less,  
Of ducats<sup>o</sup> good, I dare well say;  
Tell<sup>o</sup> it ere<sup>o</sup> you from me pass;<sup>o</sup>  
Me thinketh it a royal array.<sup>o</sup>

But first, I pray you, tell me this:  
320 Of this thing when shall I have deliverance?<sup>o</sup>

ARISTORIUS

Tomorrow betimes;<sup>o</sup> I shall not miss;  
This night therefore I shall make purveyance.<sup>o</sup>

Sir Isoder he is now at church,  
There saying his evensong,<sup>o</sup>  
325 As it is worship for to werche.<sup>o</sup>  
He shall soon come home, he will not be long,  
His supper for to eat;  
And when he is busked<sup>o</sup> to his bed,  
Right soon hereafter he shall be sped.<sup>o</sup>  
330 No speech among you there be spread;  
To keep<sup>o</sup> your tongues you not let.<sup>o</sup>

JONATHAS

Sir, almighty Machomet be with you!  
And I shall come again right soon.

ARISTORIUS

Jonathas, ye wot<sup>o</sup> what I have said, and how  
335 I shall walk for that we have to doon.<sup>o</sup>



*Here go the Jews away and the PRIEST comes home.*

PRIEST

Sir, Almighty God may be your guide  
And glad<sup>o</sup> you whereso you rest!

ARISTORIUS

Sir, you be welcome home this tide.<sup>o</sup>  
Now, Peter, get us wine of the best.

CLERK

340 Sir, here is a draught<sup>o</sup> of Romney red,<sup>o</sup>  
there is no better in Aragon,  
And a loaf of light bread—  
it is wholesome as sayeth the physician.<sup>5</sup>

ARISTORIUS

345 Drink up, Sir Isoder, and be of good cheer!  
This Romney is good to go with to rest;  
There is no preciouser far nor near,  
For all wicked<sup>o</sup> meats it will digest.

PRIEST

350 Sir, this wine is good at a taste,  
And thereof have I drunk right well.  
To bed to go thus have I caste,<sup>o</sup>  
Even straight after this merry meal.

Now, Sir, I pray to God send you good night.  
For to my chamber now will I go.

ARISTORIUS

Sir, with you be God almight,  
And shield you ever from your foe.  
355

*Here shall ARISTORIUS call his clerk to his  
presence.*

How, Peter! In thee is all my trust,  
In especial<sup>o</sup> to keep my counsel:<sup>o</sup>  
For a little way walk I must.  
I will not be long; trust as I thee tell.  
Now privily<sup>o</sup> will I prove my pace,<sup>o</sup>  
360 My bargain this night for to fulfill.  
Sir Isoder shall not know of this case,  
For he hath often sacred,<sup>o</sup> as it is skill.<sup>o</sup>  
The church key is at my will;  
There is no thing that me shall tarry,<sup>o</sup>  
365 I will not abide<sup>o</sup> by dale nor hill  
Till it be wrought,<sup>o</sup> by Saint Mary!

*Here shall he enter the church and take the  
host.<sup>o</sup>*

Ah! now have I all my intent;  
Unto Jonathas now will I fare;<sup>o</sup>  
To fulfill my bargain have I meant,  
370 For that money will amend<sup>o</sup> my fare,<sup>o</sup>  
As thinketh me.<sup>o</sup>  
But now will I pass by these paths plain;<sup>o</sup>  
To meet with Jonathas I would fain.<sup>o</sup>  
Ah! yonder he comes in certain;<sup>o</sup>  
375 Me thinketh<sup>o</sup> I him see.

Welcome, Jonathas, gentle<sup>o</sup> and true,  
For well and truly thou keep thine hour;  
Here is the host, sacred new,<sup>o</sup>  
380 Now will I home to hall and bower.<sup>o</sup>

JONATHAS

And I shall keep this trusty<sup>o</sup> treasure  
As I would do my gold and fee.<sup>o</sup>  
Now in this cloth I shall thee<sup>o</sup> cover  
That no wight<sup>o</sup> shall thee see.

*Here shall ARISTORIUS go his way and JONATHAS  
and his servants shall go to the table<sup>6</sup> thus  
saying:*

JONATHAS

385 Now, Jason and Jasdon, you be Jews gentle,<sup>o</sup>  
Masphat and Malchus, that mighty are in mind,  
This merchant from the Christian temple  
Has got us this bread that makes us thus blind.  
Now, Jason, as gentle<sup>o</sup> as ever was the lind,<sup>o</sup>  
390 Into the foresaid parlor privily<sup>o</sup> take thy pace;<sup>o</sup>  
Spread a cloth on the table that you shall there  
find,  
And we shall follow after to carp of this case.<sup>o</sup>

*Now the Jews go and lay the host on the table,  
saying:*

JONATHAS

Sirs, I pray you all, hearken to my saw!<sup>o</sup>  
These Christian men carp<sup>o</sup> of a marvelous case;<sup>o</sup>  
395 They say that this is Jesus that was attainted<sup>o</sup> in our  
law,<sup>7</sup>  
And that this is he that crucified was.

On these words their law grounded hath he,  
That he said on Shere Thursday<sup>8</sup> at his supper:  
He broke the bread and said "Accipite,"<sup>o</sup>  
400 And gave his disciples, them for to cheer:<sup>o</sup>

And more he said to them there,  
While they were all together and some,  
Sitting at the table so clear,<sup>o</sup>  
*"Comedite Corpus meum."*<sup>o9</sup>

405 And this power he gave Peter to proclaim,  
And how the same should be sufficient<sup>o</sup> to all  
preachers;  
The bishops and curates<sup>o</sup> say the same,  
And so, as I understood, do all his progenitors.<sup>o</sup>

JASON

Yea, some men in that law rehearse<sup>o</sup> another:  
They say of a maiden<sup>o</sup> borne was he,  
410 And how Joachim's daughter<sup>o</sup> should be his mother,  
And how Gabriel appeared and said "Ave",<sup>o</sup>  
And with that word she should conceived be,<sup>o</sup>  
And that in her should alight the Holy Ghost.<sup>1</sup>  
Against our law this is false heresy,  
415 And yet they say he is of might<sup>o</sup>s most.

JASDON

They say that Jesus to be our king,  
But I ween<sup>o</sup> he bought that full dear.<sup>o</sup>  
But they make a royal array<sup>o</sup> of his uprising;<sup>o</sup>  
And that in every place is preached far and near.  
420 And how he to his disciples again did appear,  
To Thomas and to Mary Magdalene,<sup>2</sup>  
And sith<sup>o</sup> how he styed<sup>o</sup> by his own power;  
And this, you know well, is heresy full plain.

Masphat

425 Yea, and also they say he sent them wit and wisdom  
For to understand every language;  
When the Holy Ghost to them come,

They fared as drunk men of piment or vernage;<sup>o3</sup>  
And sithen<sup>o</sup> how that he likened himself a lord of  
peerage,<sup>o</sup>  
On his father's right hand he him set.  
430 They hold him wiser than ever was sibyl<sup>o</sup> sage,  
And stronger than Alexander,<sup>4</sup> that all the world did  
get.

MALCHUS

Yea, yet they say as false, I dare lay<sup>o</sup> my head,  
How they that be dead shall come again to  
judgment,  
And our dreadful judge shall be this same bread,<sup>5</sup>  
435 And how life everlasting them should be lent.  
And thus they hold, all at one consent,<sup>o</sup>  
Because that Philip<sup>6</sup> said for a little gloss<sup>o</sup>—  
To turn us from our belief is their intent—  
For that he said, '*Judicare vivos et mortuos*.<sup>7</sup>  
440

JONATHAS

Now, sirs, you have rehearsed the substance of their  
law,  
But this bread I would<sup>o</sup> might be put in a prefe,<sup>o</sup>  
Whether this be he that in Bozrah of us had awe.  
There stained were his clothes, this may we  
belefe;<sup>o8</sup>

445 This may we know, there had he grief,  
For our old books verify thus.  
Thereon he was judged<sup>o</sup> to be hanged as a thief—

*Tinctis Bosra vestibus.*<sup>9</sup>

JASON

If that this be he that on Calvary was made red,<sup>o</sup>  
450     Onto my mind, I shall ken you a conceit good:<sup>1</sup>  
Surely with our daggers we shall seize on this bread,  
And so with clouts<sup>o</sup> we shall know if he have any  
blood.

JASDON

Now, by Machomet so mighty, that moveth  
in my mood!<sup>o</sup>  
This is masterly meant,<sup>o</sup> this matter thus to  
move:<sup>o</sup>  
455     And with our strokes we shall fray<sup>o</sup> him as he was  
on  
the rood,<sup>o</sup>  
That he was undone<sup>o</sup> with great reproof.<sup>o</sup>

MASPHAT

Yea, I pray<sup>o</sup> you, smite<sup>o</sup> you in the midst of the  
cake,  
And so shall we smite thereon wounds five.<sup>2</sup>  
We will not spare to work it wrake,<sup>o</sup>  
460     To prove in this bread if there be any life.

MALCHUS

Yea, go to then, and take your space,<sup>o</sup>  
And look<sup>o</sup> our daggers be sharp and keen:  
And when each man a stroke smitten has,  
In the middle part thereof our master<sup>o</sup> shall been.  
<sup>o</sup>  
<sup>o</sup>

JONATHAS

465     When ye have all smitten,<sup>o</sup> my stroke shall be  
seen;  
With this same dagger that is so stiff and strong,

In the midst of this print<sup>o</sup> I think for to preen;<sup>o</sup>  
One lash<sup>o</sup> I shall him lend ere<sup>o</sup> it be long.

*Here shall the 4 Jews prick their daggers in 4  
quarters, thus saying:*

JASON

Have at it! Have at it, with all my might!  
This side I hope for to seize!  
470

JASDON

And I shall with this blade so bright  
This other side freshly afese!<sup>o</sup>

MASPHAT

And I you plight<sup>o</sup> I shall him not please,  
For with this punch I shall him prick.

MALCHUS

And with this auger<sup>o</sup> I shall him not ease,  
475 Another buffet<sup>o</sup> shall he lick.<sup>o</sup>

JONATHAS

Now am I bold with battle him to bleike,<sup>o</sup>  
The middle part all for to preen;<sup>o</sup>  
A stout stroke also for to strike—  
In the midst it shall be seen!  
480

*Here the host must bleed.*

Ah! out! out! harrow!<sup>o</sup> What devil is this?  
Of this work I am in were;<sup>o</sup>  
It bleedeth as it were wood,<sup>o</sup> iwis;<sup>o</sup>  
But if<sup>o</sup> you help, I shall despair.

JASON

485       A fire! a fire! and that in haste!  
          Anon<sup>o</sup> a cauldron full of oil!

JASDON

          And I shalle help it were in cast,<sup>o</sup>  
          All the three hours for to boil!

MASPHAT

490       Yea, here is a furnace<sup>o</sup> stout and strong,  
          And a cauldron therein doth hong.<sup>o</sup>  
          Malchus, where are you so long,  
          To help this deed were dight?<sup>o</sup>

MALCHUS

495       Lo, here is four gallons of oil clear.  
          Have done fast! blow up the fere!<sup>o</sup>  
          Sir, bring that ilk<sup>o</sup> cake near,  
          Manly<sup>o</sup> with all your might.

JONATHAS

500       And I shall bring that ilk<sup>o</sup> cake  
          And throw it in, I undertake.<sup>o</sup>  
          Out! Out! it worketh me wrake!<sup>o</sup>  
          I may not avoid<sup>o</sup> it out of my hand.  
          I will go drench me<sup>o</sup> in a lake.  
          And in woodness I begin to wake!<sup>o</sup>  
          I run, I leap over this land!

*Here he runs wood,<sup>o</sup> with the host in his hand.*

JASON

505       Run, fellows, run, for cock's pain,<sup>3</sup>  
          Fast we had<sup>o</sup> our master again!



Hold prestly<sup>o</sup> on this plain<sup>o</sup>  
And fast bind him to a post.

JASDON

Here is a hammer and nails three, I say;  
Lift up his arms, fellow, on hey,<sup>o</sup>  
While I drive these nails, I you pray,<sup>o</sup>  
510 With strong strokes fast.

MASPHAT

Now set on, fellows, with main<sup>o</sup> and might,  
And pluck his arms away in fight!  
What if he twitch, fellows, aright!  
515 Alas, bales<sup>o</sup> breweth right bad!

*Here shall they pluck the arm, and the hand  
shall hang still with the sacrament.*

MALCHAS

Alas, alas, what devil is this?  
Now has he but one hand iwis!<sup>o</sup>  
Forsooth, master, right woe me is  
That you this harme have had.

JONATHAS

There is no more; I must endure!  
520 Now hastily to our chamber let us goon;<sup>o</sup>  
Till I may get me some recure;<sup>o</sup>  
And therefore charge<sup>o</sup> you, everychoon,<sup>o</sup>  
That it be counsel<sup>o</sup> what we have doon.<sup>o</sup>

*Here shall the leech's man<sup>o</sup> come into the place,  
saying:*

COLLE

525 Aha! here is a fair fellowship,  
Though I be not shapen, o I list o to slip: o  
I have a master, I would he had the pip, o  
I tell you in counsel. o  
He is a man of all science  
But o of thrift o—I may with you dispence! o  
530 He sitteth with some tapster o in the spence: o  
His hood o there will he sell.

Master Brundich of Braban, o  
I tell you he is that same man,  
Called the most famous physician  
535 That ever saw urine. 4  
He sees as well at noon as at night,  
And sometimes by a candlelight  
Can give a judgment aright—  
As o he that hath no eyen. o  
540

He is also a bone-setter;  
I know no man go the better;  
In every tavern he is debtor;  
That is a good tokening. o  
But ever I wonder he is so long; o  
545 I fear there goes something a-wrong,  
For he hath deserved to be hong o—  
God send never worse tiding! o

He had a lady late in cure; o  
I wot o by this she is full sure; o  
550 There shall never Christian creature  
Hear her tell no tale. 5  
And o I stood here till midnight,  
I could not declare aright o  
My master's cunning insight—  
555 That he has in good ale.

But what devil aileth him, so long to tarry!°  
A sickman might soon miscarry.°  
Now all the devils of hell him wary;°  
God grante me my boon!°  
560 I trow° best, we make a cry:°  
If any man can him aspy°  
Lead him to the pillory.°  
In faith, it shall be done.

*Here shall he stand up and make proclamation,  
saying this:*

COLLE  
565 If there be either man or woman  
That saw Master Brundich of Braban,  
Or aught° of him tell can,  
Shall well be quit° his meed;°  
He has a cut beard and a flat nose,  
A threadbare gown and a-rent° hose;  
570 He speaks never good matter nor purpose;  
To the pillory you him lead!

MASTER BRUNDICH

What, thou boy, what janglest° here?

COLLE

Ah! Master, master, but° to your reverence!°  
I wend° never to a° seen your goodly cheer,°  
575 You tarried hence so long.

MASTER BRUNDICH

What hast thou said in my absence?

COLLE

Nothing, master, but to your reverence<sup>o</sup>  
I have told all this audience—  
And some lies among.

580

But, master, I pray you, how doth<sup>o</sup> your patient  
That you had last<sup>o</sup> under your medicament?<sup>o</sup>

MASTER BRUNDICH

I warrant she never feel annoyance.<sup>o</sup>

COLLE

Why, is she in her grave?

MASTER BRUNDICH

I have given her a drink made full well  
585 With scammony and with oxymel,<sup>o</sup>  
Lettuce, sage, and pimpernel.<sup>o</sup>

COLLE

Nay, then she is full save!<sup>o</sup>

For, now you are come, I dare well say  
Between Dover and Calais the right<sup>o</sup> way  
590 Dwells none so cunning, by my fey,<sup>o6</sup>  
In my judgment.

MASTER BRUNDICH

Cunning? Yea, yea, and with practise;<sup>o</sup>  
I have saved many a man's life.

COLLE

On widows, maids, and wife  
595 Your cunning you have nigh<sup>o</sup> spent.<sup>o</sup>

MASTER BRUNDICH

Where is my bowgett<sup>o</sup> with drink profitable?<sup>o</sup>

COLLE

Here master, master, ware<sup>o</sup> how ye tug.<sup>o</sup>

The devil I trow<sup>o</sup> within shrug,<sup>o</sup>

600 For it goes ribble-rabble.<sup>o</sup>

MASTER BRUNDICH

Here is a great congregation,

And all be not whole,<sup>o</sup> without negation;<sup>o</sup>

I would have certification:

Stand up and make a proclamation.

605 Have do fast, and make no pausation,<sup>o</sup>

But wightly<sup>o</sup> make a declaration

To all people that help would have.

*Hic interim proclamacionem faciet.*<sup>7</sup>

COLLE

All manner of men that have any sickness,

To Master Brundich look that you redress.<sup>o</sup>

610 What disease or sickness that ever you have,  
He will never leave you till you be in your grave.

Who has the cancer, the colic, or the lax,<sup>o</sup>

The tertian, the quartian,<sup>o</sup> or the burning axs<sup>o</sup>—

For worms, for gnawing, grinding in the wombe or in  
the boldyro<sup>o</sup>—

615 All manner red eyen,<sup>o</sup> bleared<sup>o</sup> eyen, and the  
migraine also,

For headache, bone-ache, and thereto<sup>o</sup> the  
toothache—

The colt-evil, and the brosten men he will  
undertake,<sup>8</sup>

All those that have the pose, the sneke, or the tisick<sup>9</sup>

—

Though a man were right hale,<sup>o</sup> he could soon make  
him sick.

620 Inquire to the coal-cote,<sup>o</sup> for there is his lodging,  
A little beside Babwell Mill,<sup>1</sup> if you will have  
understanding.

MASTER BRUNDICH

Now, if there be either man or woman  
That needeth help of a physician—

COLLE

625 Mary,<sup>2</sup> master, that I tell can,  
And you will understand.

MASTER BRUNDICH

Knowest any<sup>o</sup> about this place?

COLLE

Yea, that I do, master, so have I gras;<sup>o</sup>  
Here is a Jew, hight<sup>o</sup> Jonathas,  
Hath lost his right hand.

MASTER BRUNDICH

630 Fast to him I would inquire.

COLLE

For<sup>o</sup> God, master, the gate is here.

MASTER BRUNDICH

Then to him I will go near.  
My master, well may you be!

JONATHAS

What doost<sup>o</sup> here, fellow? what wouldst thou han?<sup>o</sup>

MASTER BRUNDICH

635 Sir, if you need any surgeon or physician,  
Of your disease help you well I can,  
What hurts or harms so-ever they be.

JONATHAS

640 Sir, thou art untaught<sup>o</sup> to come in thus homely,<sup>o</sup>  
Or to appear in my presence thus malapertly.<sup>o</sup>  
Voideth<sup>o</sup> from my sight, and that wightly,<sup>o</sup>  
For you be misadvised.

COLLE

Sir, the hurt of your hand is knowen full rife,<sup>o</sup>  
And my master has saved many a man's life.

JONATHAS

645 I trow<sup>o</sup> you be come to make some strife.  
Hence<sup>o</sup> fast, lest that you be chastised.

COLLE

Sir, you know well it cannot miss;  
Men that be masters of science be profitable.<sup>o</sup>  
In a pot if it please you to piss,  
He can tell if you be curable.

JONATHAS

650 Avoid,<sup>o</sup> fellows, I love not your babble!  
Brush them hence both, and that anon!  
Give them their reward that<sup>o</sup> they were gone!

*Here shall the 4 Jews beat away the leech<sup>o</sup> and  
his man.<sub>u</sub>*

JONATHAS

Now have done, fellows, and that anon,<sup>o</sup>  
For doubt of dread<sup>o</sup> what after befall!  
I am near mazed,<sub>u</sub> my wit is gone;  
655 Therefore of help I pray<sup>o</sup> you all.

And take your pincers that are so sure,  
And pluck out the nails one and one;  
Also in a cloth you it<sup>3</sup> cure<sup>o</sup>  
And throw it in the cauldron, and that anon.  
660

*Here shall JASON pluck out the nails and shake  
the hand into the cauldron.*

JASON

And I shall rape me<sup>o</sup> readily anon  
To plucke out the nails that stand so fast,  
And bear this bread and also this bone  
And into the cauldron I will it cast.

JASDON

And I shall with this dagger so stout  
665 Push it down that it might plaw,<sup>o</sup>  
And stir the cloth round about  
That nothing thereof shall be raw.

MASPHAT

And I shall manly,<sub>u</sub> with all my might,  
Make the fire to blaze and brinne,<sup>o</sup>  
670 And set there-under such a light  
That it shall make it right thin.



*Here shall the cauldron boil, appearing to be as blood.*

MALCHAS

Out and harrow!° what devil is herein?  
All this oil waxeth° red as blood,  
And out of the cauldron it begins to rin.°  
675 I am so afraid I am near wood.°

*Here shall JASON and his company go to SIR  
JONATHAS, saying:*

JASON

Ah! master, master, what cheer is with you?°  
I cannot see our work will avail;°  
I beseech you advance° you now  
Somewhat with your counsail.°  
680

JONATHAS

The best counsel that I now wot,°  
That I can deem,° far and near,  
Is to make an oven as red hot  
As ever it can be made with fere;°  
And when you see it so hot appear,  
685 Then throw it° into the oven fast—  
Soon shall he staunch° his bleeding cheer.°  
When you have done, stop it°—be not aghast!°

JASDON

By my faith, it shall be wrought,°  
And that anon, in great hast.°  
690 Bring on firing, sirs, hear ye not?  
To heat this oven be not aghast.

MASPHAT

Here is straw and thorns keen:°

Come on, Malchas, and bring on fere,  
For that shall heat it well, I wene;°

695

*Here they kindle the fire.*

Blow on fast, that° done it were!

MALCHAS

Ah, how this fire ginneth° to burn clear!°

This oven right hot I think to make.

Now, Jason, to the cauldron that ye stere°  
And fast fetch hither that ilk° cake.

700

*Here shall JASON go to the cauldron and take out  
the host with his pincers and cast it into the  
oven.*

JASON

I shall with these pincers without doubt,

Shake this cake out of this cloth,

And to the oven I shall it rout°

And stop° him there, though he be loth.°

The cake I have caught here in good sooth°—

705

The hand is sodden,° the flesh from the bones—

Now into the oven I will therewith.

Stop° it, Jasdon, for the nones!°

JASDON

I stop this oven, without doubt,

With clay I clome° it up right fast,

710

That none heat shall come out.

I trow° there shall he° heat and dry in hast!°

*Here the oven must rive asunder<sup>o</sup>  
and bleed out at the crannies,<sup>o</sup>  
and an image appear out, with wounds  
bleeding.*

MASPHAT

Out! out! here is a great wonder!  
This oven bleedeth out on every side!

MALCHAS

715 Yea, the oven in pieces ginneth<sup>o</sup> to rive asunder;  
This is a marvelous case this tide.<sup>o</sup>

*Here shall the image speak to the Jews, saying  
thus:*

JESUS

*O mirabiles Judei, attendite et videte  
Si est dolor sicut dolor meus.<sup>4</sup>*

Oh you marvelous Jews,  
Why are you to your king unkind,  
720 And I so bitterly bought<sup>o</sup> you to my bliss?  
Why fare<sup>o</sup> you thus foul with your friend?  
Why pain you me and straightly me pinned,<sup>o</sup>  
And I your love so dearly have bought?  
Why are you so unsteadfast in your mind?  
725 Why wrath you<sup>o</sup> me? I grieve you not.  
Why will you not believe that<sup>o</sup> I have taught,  
And forsake your foul negligence,  
And keep my commandments in your thought,  
And unto my godhead to take credence?<sup>o</sup>  
730  
Why blaspheme you me? Why do you thus?

Why put you me to a new tormentry,<sup>o</sup>  
And I died for you on the cross?  
Why consider not you what I did cry?<sup>o</sup>  
While that I was with you, you did me villainy.  
735 Why remember you not my bitter chance,<sup>o</sup>  
How your kin did me advance<sup>o</sup>  
For claiming of my inheritance?  
I showed you the straightness<sup>o</sup> of my grievance,  
740 And all to move you to my mercy.

JONATHAS

*Tu es protector vite mee; a quo trepidabo?*<sup>5</sup>  
O thou, Lord, which art my defender,  
For dread of thee I tremble and quake.  
Of thy great mercy let us receive the shower;  
And meekly I ask mercy, amends to make.  
745  
*Here shall they kneel down all on their knees,  
saying:*

JASON

Ah! Lord, with sorrow and care and great weeping  
All we fellows, let us say thus,  
With condolent<sup>o</sup> heart and great sorrowing:  
*Lacrimis nostris conscienciam nostram baptizemus!*<sup>6</sup>

JASDON

750 Oh thou blessed Lord of mickle<sup>o</sup> might,  
Of thy great mercy, thou hast showed us the path,  
Lord, out of grievous sleep and out of darkness to  
light,  
*Ne gravis sompnus irruat.*<sup>7</sup>

MASPHAT

Oh Lord, I was very cursed, for I would know thy  
creed.

755 I can no means make<sup>o</sup> but cry to thee thus:  
O gracious Lord, forgive me my misdeed!  
With lamentable<sup>o</sup> heart: *miserere mei, Deus!*<sup>8</sup>

MALCHAS

Lord, I have offended thee in many a sundry<sup>o</sup>  
vice,  
That sticketh<sup>o</sup> at my heart as hard as a core.  
760 Lord, by the water of contrition let me arise:  
*Asparges me, Domine, ysopo, et mundabor.*<sup>9</sup>

JESUS

All you that desire my servants for to be  
And to fulfill the precepts of my laws,  
The intent of my commandment know ye:  
765 *Ite et ostendite vos sacerdotibus meis.*<sup>1</sup>  
To all you that desire in any wise<sup>o</sup>  
To ask mercy, to grant it ready I am.  
Remember and let your wits suffice,  
*Et tunc non avertam a vobis faciem meam.*<sup>2</sup>

770 Now, Jonathas, in thine hand thou art but lame,  
And is through thine own cruelty.  
For thine hurt thou mayest thyself blame,  
Thou wouldest prove thy power me to oppress;  
But now I consider thy necessity;<sup>o</sup>  
775 Thou wastest thine hart with great contrition;  
Go to the cauldron—thy care shall be the less—  
And touch thine hand to thy salvation.

*Here shall SIR JONATHAS put his hand into the  
cauldron, and it shall be whole again, and then  
say as follows:*

JONATHAS

Oh thou, my Lord God and Savior, hosanna!°  
Thou King of Jews and of Jerusalem!  
O thou mighty strong Lion of Judah,  
780 Blessed be the time that thou were in Bethlehem!  
Oh thou mighty, strong, glorious, and gracious oil  
stream,  
Thou mighty conqueror of infernal tene,°  
I am quit° of much cumbrance° through thy  
mean,°  
785 That ever blessed may thou been!°  
  
Alas, that ever I did against thy will,  
In my wit° to be so wood°  
That I so ungoodly work should so grill!°  
Against my misgovernance thou gladdest° me with  
good:  
I was so proud to prove° thee on the rood,°  
790 And thou hast sent me lighting° that late° was lame;  
To beat thee and boil thee I was mighty° in mood,  
And now thou hast put° me from duress and  
disfame.°  
  
But, Lord, I take my leave at thy high presence,  
And put me in thy mighty mercy;  
795 The bishop will I go fetch to see our offence,  
And unto him show our life, how that we be guilty.

*Here shall the master Jew go to the bishop, and  
his men kneel still.*

JONATHAS

Hail, father of grace! I kneel upon my knee,  
Heartily beseeching you and interely,°  
A swemful° sight all for to see  
800 In my house appearing verily:°

The holy sacrament, the which we have done  
tormentry,<sup>o</sup>  
And there we have put him to a new passion,<sup>o</sup>  
A child appearing with wounds bloody:  
A swemful sight it is to look upon.  
805

EPISCOPUS

Oh Jesus, Lord, full of goodness!  
With thee will I walk with all my might.  
Now, all my people, with me you dress<sup>o</sup>  
For to go see that swemful<sup>o</sup> sight.  
810 Now, all you people that here are,  
I command you, every man,  
On your feet for to go bare,  
In the devoutest wise<sup>o</sup> that you can.

*Here shall the bishop enter into the Jews' house  
and say:*

*O Jhesu fili Dei,*<sup>3</sup>  
815 How this painful passion<sup>o</sup> rancheth<sup>o</sup> my heart!  
Lord, I cry to thee, *miserere mei,*<sup>o</sup>  
From this rueful sight<sup>o</sup> thou will revert.<sup>o</sup>  
Lord, we all with sorrows smart,<sup>o</sup>  
For this unlawful work we live in languor;<sup>o</sup>  
820 Now, good Lord, in thy grace let us be girt,<sup>o</sup>  
And of thy sovereign mercy send us thy succor;<sup>o</sup>  
And for thy holy grace forgive us our error.  
Now let thy pity spring and spread;  
Though we have been unrightful,<sup>o</sup> forgive us our  
rigor,<sup>o</sup>  
825 And of our lamentable<sup>o</sup> hearts, good Lord, take  
heed.

*Here shall the image change again into bread.*

EPISCOPUS

Oh thou largifluent<sup>o</sup> Lord, most of lightness,<sup>o</sup>  
Unto our prayers thou hast applied:<sup>o</sup>  
Thou hast received them with great sweetness,  
For all our dreadful deeds thou hast not us denied.  
Full mickle<sup>o</sup> ought thy name for to be magnified  
830 With mansuete mirth<sup>o</sup> and great sweetness,  
And as our gracious God for to be glorified,  
For thou showest us great gladness.

Now will I take this holy sacrament  
With humble heart and great devotion,  
835 And all we will go with one consent<sup>o</sup>  
And bear it to church with solemn procession;

Now follow me, all and some,  
And all those that be here, both more and less,  
840 This holy song, *O sacrum Convivium*,<sup>4</sup>  
Let us sing all with great sweetness.

*Here shall the* PRIEST, SIR ISODER, *ask his master  
what this means.*

PRIEST

Sir Aristory, I pray<sup>o</sup> you, what meaneth all this?  
Some miracle, I hope, is wrought<sup>o</sup> by God's might;  
The bishop comes in procession with a great many<sup>o</sup>  
of Jews;  
I hope some miracle is showed to his sight.  
845 To church in haste will I run full right,<sup>o</sup>  
For thither, me think,<sup>o</sup> he begins to take his pace.<sup>o</sup>  
The sacrament so seemly<sup>o</sup> is borne in sight,  
I hope that God hath showed of his grace.

ARISTORIUS



850 To tell you the truth I will not let:°  
Alas that ever this deed was dight!°  
An unlawful bargain I began for to beat;°  
I sold yon same Jews our Lord full right  
For covetise of good,° as a cursed wight.°  
Woe the while° that bargain I did ever make!  
855 But° you be my defender in our diocesan's° sight,  
For a heretic I fear he will me take.

PRIEST

For sooth, nothing well-advised was your wit;°  
Wonderly° was it wrought of° a man of discretion  
In such peril your soul for to pit;°  
860 But I will labor for your absolution.°

Let us hie° us fast, that we were hence,  
And beseech him of his benign grace  
That he will show us his benevolence  
To make a means° for your trespass.  
865

*Here shall the merchant and his priest go to the  
church, and the bishop shall enter the church  
and lay the host on the altar, saying thus:*

BISHOP

*Estote fortes in bello et pugnate cum antico  
serpente,  
Et accipite regnum eternum, et cetera.*<sup>5</sup>

My children, you be strong in battle ghostly°  
For to fight against the fell° serpent,  
That night and day is ever busy;  
870 To destroy our souls is his intent.  
Look you be not slow nor negligent  
To arm you in the virtues seven;<sup>6</sup>

Of sins forgotten take good advisement,<sup>o</sup>  
And acknowledge them to your confessor full even;<sup>o</sup>  
875

For that serpent, the devil, is full<sup>o</sup> strong,  
Marvelous mischiefs for man to mean;<sup>o</sup>  
But<sup>o</sup> that the Passion of Christ is meant us among,<sup>o</sup>  
And that is in despite of his<sup>o</sup> infernal teen.<sup>o</sup>  
Beseech our Lord and Savior so keen<sup>o</sup>  
880 To put down that serpent, cumberer<sup>o</sup> of man,  
To withdraw his furious froward<sup>o</sup> doctrine bidene,<sup>o</sup>  
Fulfilled of the fiend called Leviathan.<sup>7</sup>

Give laurel<sup>o</sup> to that Lord of might  
That he may bring us to the joyous fruition,<sup>o</sup>  
885 From us to put the fiend to flight,  
That never he destroy us by his temptation.

PRIEST

My father under God, I kneel unto your knee,  
In your mighty misericord<sup>o</sup> to take us in  
remembrance,  
As you be material<sup>o</sup> to our degree.<sup>o</sup>  
890 We put us in your moderate ordinance,<sup>o</sup>  
if it like<sup>o</sup> your highness to hear our grievance:<sup>o</sup>  
We have offended sorrowfully in a sin mortal,  
Wherefore<sup>o</sup> we fear us our Lord will take  
vengeance  
For our sins both great and small.  
895

BISHOP

And in fatherhead that longeth to my dignity,<sup>8</sup>  
Unto your grief I will give credence.<sup>o</sup>  
Say what you will, in the name of the Trinity,  
Against God if you have wrought<sup>o</sup> any  
inconvenience.<sup>o</sup>

ARISTORIUS

900 Holy father, I kneel to you under benedicite.°  
I have offended in the sin of covetise:°  
I sold our Lord's body for lucre of money°  
And delivered to the wicked with cursed advice.°  
And for that presumption greatly I agrise°  
905 That I presumed to go to the altar  
There to handle the holy sacrifice—  
I were worthy to be put in burning fire.  
  
But, gracious lord, I can° no more  
But° put me to God's mercy and to your grace:  
910 My cursed works for to restore,°  
I ask penance now in this place.

BISHOP

Now for this offence that thou hast done  
Against the King of Heaven and Emperor of Hell,  
Ever while thou livest good deeds for to done°  
And nevermore for to buy nor sell:  
915 Chastise thy body as I shall thee tell,  
With fasting and praying and other good work,  
To withstand the temptation of fiends of Hell;  
And to call to God for grace look thou never be irk.°  
  
Also, thou priest, for thy negligence,  
920 That thou were no wiser in thine office,  
Thou art worthy° imprisonment for thine offence;  
But beware ever hereafter and be more wise.  
  
And all you creatures° and curates° that here be,  
Of this deed you may take example  
925 How that your pyxes° locked ye should see,  
And beware of the key of God's temple.

JONATHAS

And I ask Christendom with great devotion,  
With repentant heart in all degrees,  
930 I ask for us all a general absolution.

*Here the Jews must kneel all down.*

For that we kneel all upon our knees;  
For we have grieved<sup>o</sup> our Lord on ground<sup>o</sup>  
And put him to a new painful passion:  
With daggers stuck him with grievous wound,  
935 New<sup>o</sup> nailed him to a post and with pincers  
plucked him down.

JASON

And sith<sup>o</sup> we took that blessed bread so sound<sup>o</sup>  
And in a cauldron we did him boil,  
In a cloth full just<sup>o</sup> we him wound  
And so did we see the him in oil.

JASDON

940 And for that<sup>o</sup> we might not overcome him with  
tormentry,<sup>o</sup>  
In an hot oven we spered<sup>o</sup> him fast,  
There he appeared with wounds all bloody:  
The oven rave<sup>o</sup> asunder and all to-brast.<sup>o</sup>

MASPHAT

945 In his law to make us steadfast,  
There spoke he to us words of great favor;  
In<sup>o</sup> contrition our hearts he cast<sup>o</sup>  
And bade take us<sup>o</sup> to a confessor.

MALCHUS

And, therefore, all we with one consent<sup>o</sup>

950 Kneel unto your high sovereignty,  
For to be christened<sup>o</sup> is our intent;  
Now all our deeds to you showed have we.

*Here shall the BISHOP christen the Jews with  
great solemnity.*

BISHOP

Now the Holy Ghost at this time may you bless  
As ye kneel all now in his name,  
And with the water of baptism I shall you bless  
To save you all from the fiend's blame.  
955 Now that fiend's power for to make lame,  
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy  
Ghost,  
To save you from the devil's flame,  
I christen you all, both least and most.

JONATHAS

960 Now our father and bishop that we well know,  
We thank you interly,<sup>o</sup> both least and most.  
Now are we bound to keep Christ's law  
And to serve the Father, the Son, and the Holy  
Ghost.  
Now will we walk by country and coast,  
Our wicked living for to restore:<sup>o</sup>  
965 And trust in God, of mights<sup>o</sup> most,  
Never to offend as we have done before.

Now we take our leave at less and more—  
Forward on our voyage we will us dress;<sup>o</sup>  
970 God send you all as good welfare  
As heart can think or tongue express.

ARISTORIUS

Into my county now will I fare  
For to amend my wicked life,  
And to keep the people out of care<sup>o</sup>  
I will teach this lesson to man and wife.  
975  
Now take I my leave in this place,  
I will go walk my penance to fulfill;  
Now, God, against whom I have done this trespass,  
Grant me forgiveness if it be thy will!

PRIEST

For joy of this me think<sup>o</sup> my heart does weep,  
980 That you have given you<sup>o</sup> all Christ's servants to  
be,  
And him for to serve with heart full meek—  
God, full of patience and humility—  
And the conversion of all these fair men,  
With hearts steadfastly knit in one,  
985 God's laws to keep and him to serve bidene,<sup>o</sup>  
As faithful Christians evermore for to gone.<sup>o</sup>

BISHOP

God Omnipotent evermore look you serve  
With devotion and prayer while that you may;  
Doubt it not he will you preserve  
990 For each good prayer that you say to his pay;<sup>o</sup>  
And therefore in every due<sup>o</sup> time, look you not  
delay  
For to serve the Holy Trinity,  
And also Mary, that sweet may,<sup>o</sup>  
And keep you in perfect love and charity.  
995  
Christ's commandments ten there be;<sup>1</sup>  
Keep well them; do as I you tell.

Almighty God shall you please in every degree,  
And so shall you save your souls from Hell.  
For there is pain and sorrow cruel,  
1000 And in heaven there is both joy and bliss,  
More than any tongue can tell,  
There angels sing with great sweetness;

To the which bliss he bring us  
Whose name is called Jesus,  
1005 And in worship of this name glorious  
To sing to his honor *Te Deum Laudamus*.<sup>2</sup>

*Finis*<sup>o</sup>

*Thus endeth the Play of the Blessed Sacrament,  
which miracle was done in the forest of Aragon,  
in the famous city Heraclea, the year of our Lord  
God 1461, to whom be honor. Amen.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text is drawn from the edition prepared for the Early English Text Society from the sole manuscript of the play (at Trinity College, Dublin). Here, spelling within the text has been modernized wherever such a change does not interfere with sense or meter. Notes have been prepared in consultation with later editions as well, including that of John T. Sebastian (Middle English Text Series, 2012).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This list of characters actually appears at the end of the manuscript, rather than the beginning.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The fact that nine actors ("players") are recommended for twelve characters indicates the doubling of some parts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: These are presumably the initials of the otherwise unknown scribe of the play-text.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Before the play itself begins, the manuscript includes an announcement script for advertising the play; it would have been used to publicly promote the production and attract spectators.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This line suggests that a pantomime of the play's action may have accompanied the pronouncement of the banns.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An imaginary city, here conceived to be in Aragon (a kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "For the nones" (literally, "for the occasion") is a formula often used to fill lines in Middle English rhyming verse.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A reference to the priest's power to consecrate bread, effecting its transformation into the body of Christ, according to the beliefs of the Western Church.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: It is not clear why "eleven" appears here; only five Jews are converted in the course of the play.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hold the Lord in no kind of doubt.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Where power is beyond the ability of the mind to recount.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This concluding line suggests that a musical performance followed the proclamation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Unidentified.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The quasi-alphabetical order of this list suggests Aristotiles's encyclopedic command over the world.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Unidentified.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Unidentified.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A widespread Christian misspelling of "Muhammad," here erroneously invoked to name the god that the Jews supposedly worship.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: If we could get it (the Eucharistic bread) once within our precincts (that is, our control).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The site of Jesus's crucifixion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This stage direction refers to one of three small stages or scaffoldings that would have been constructed around a



central performance space. Jonathas departs from one stage, which represents the Jews' lodgings. The other two stages represent Aristorius's home and the local church, respectively.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: For one little thing that you will bring to me.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bread and wine are the foodstuffs transformed into the Eucharist by the priest's consecration. This meal is a profane version of the sacrament.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A table on the scaffolding that represents Jonathas's lodgings. The table evokes the altar on which a priest consecrates the Eucharist.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Jewish law; Jonathas here repeats the common false accusation that Jews are responsible for Christ's punishment and death.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Holy Thursday, the day immediately before the Crucifixion, when Jesus presided over the Last Supper, the biblical event at the root of the Eucharistic sacrament. See Matthew 26:26–28, Mark 14:22–24, and Luke 22:19–20.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Latin phrases in this speech are part of the ritual for consecrating the Eucharistic bread and wine.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The archangel Gabriel informs Mary, a virgin, that she will give birth to Jesus; see Luke 1:26–35.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Two of Jesus's followers, who meet him after his resurrection; see John 20.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This describes the events of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus's apostles; see Acts 2.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The conqueror Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Christ (whose body constitutes the Eucharistic wafer) is supposed to judge the resurrected souls at the Last Judgment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The reference is uncertain.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: To judge the living and the dead (Latin); echoing 2 Timothy 4:1 and 1 Peter 4:5. All translations in the notes are from Latin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An allusion to Isaiah 63:1, which Christians interpreted as a prophecy of Christ.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: With dyed garments of Bozrah (Isaiah 63:1).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As I recall, I shall make known to you a good trick.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Christ on the Cross is said to have had five wounds.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: For God's pain (a medieval oath).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Medieval physicians often based diagnoses on urine samples.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Colle implies that the patient has died.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The joke is that between Dover and Calais is nothing but the English Channel, where no one dwells.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Here meanwhile he will make a proclamation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The disease of the penis and "burst men" (suffering from hernias) he will take under his care.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: All those who have congestion, a head cold, or tuberculosis.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Babwell, outside Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, was the location of a medieval mill.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "By the Virgin Mary!" (a mild oath).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The detached hand, still joined with the Eucharistic host.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "O astonishing Jews, attend and see / If any sorrow be like to my sorrow." These lines echo the Holy Saturday church service.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You are the protector of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (see Psalm 27:1 [Vulgate 26:1]).[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: With our tears, let us baptize our conscience (source unknown).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: May grievous sleep not seize [us] (from a Christian liturgical hymn).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Have mercy on me, God (Psalm 51:1 [Vulgate 50:3]).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop [an herb], Lord, and I shall be cleansed (Psalms 51:7 [Vulgate 50:9]).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Go and show yourselves to my priests (see Luke 17:14).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: And then I will not turn away my face from you (see Psalm 143:7 [Vulgate 142:7]).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: O Jesus, son of God.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: O holy Feast (from a liturgical hymn celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi—literally, “God’s Body”). It is likely that the theatrical audience would have become part of the procession.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Be strong in war, and fight with the ancient serpent, / And receive the eternal kingdom, etc. (from a liturgical hymn).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The four natural or cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice) plus the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and love).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A sea monster or sea serpent that is God’s enemy; see Isaiah 27:1 and Job 41:1–9 (Vulgate 40:20–28).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: And with the spiritual authority that belongs to my office.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Containers for holding the consecrated host in the church.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Ten Commandments appear in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:2–17; Deuteronomy 5:6–21).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “We Praise You, God” (the title of a popular hymn).[Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *made*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *entirely committed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plan*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *masters, if it pleases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwells* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *known* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *Syria*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asked urgently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began to speak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *buy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *befell* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *event*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmed* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *thought* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *face* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *praise* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fares* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recently* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medical care* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *discomfort* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(medical substances)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(common flowering plant)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fully cured* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *direct* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *faith* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *practice* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nearly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exhausted* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bag* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *healing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beware* [Return to reference °](#)



- °: *guzzle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moves about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rattles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healthy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *address yourself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diarrhea*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(kinds of fever)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aches*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healthy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coal shed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anyone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you doing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impolite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *familiarly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rudely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very widely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go hence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beneficial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *physician* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *servant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for fear of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cover*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hasten myself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boldly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(exclamations of distress)*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *run*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *how are you?*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the hand with host)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plug the oven* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sharp*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begins* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brightly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stir*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throw*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *trap* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unwilling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boiled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plug* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for the occasion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plaster* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the host)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *begins* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *redeemed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forcefully tormented me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you angry with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *proclaim* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *help (to my death)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *severity* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *much* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take no action* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamenting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *varied* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strikes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *way* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *need* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(exclamation of praise)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *free* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *difficulty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thus commit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *comfort* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *turn back* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *misery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrighteous* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *complied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very much*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentle joy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *company*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I think* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *refrain*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *strike*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *man*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bishop's*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *very*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *(the devil's)* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *bold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tempter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deviant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fulfillment*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *necessary* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for this reason*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trust*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *can do*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *repair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slow*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *on earth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *newly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afterward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flawless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very tightly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *torture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *locked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broke* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordered us to take ourselves*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *suffering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yourselves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *liking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suitable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maiden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *The end (Latin)*[Return to reference](#) °

# **Literature of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries**



# SIR ORFEO

## ca. 1300

*Sir Orfeo* is a reworking of the tragic classical myth of Orpheus and his wife, Eurydice. When Eurydice died of a snake bite, Orpheus followed her to the underworld. Having so pleased Pluto and Proserpina with his music, Orpheus was granted Eurydice's release, on condition he not look back to his wife as she followed him from Hades. Orpheus did look back, and so lost his wife. The medieval narrative evokes this tragedy to replace it with the comedy of reunification, not only of husband and wife but also of king and subjects. Orfeo's abdication, his entry into the forest and the underworld, his charming of the fairy kingdom with his music: all permit the rescue of his paralyzed, lacerated wife, Eurydice, and their joyful return home, in a perfect romance ending (see, on the romance genre, [pp. 141–42](#)).

The poem was probably translated from a French romance of the kind called a Breton lay, much like those of Marie de France (see [pp. 159–90](#)). The English translation was likely made before 1300, but it has survived in only three manuscripts of later date. Some scholars believe that the best of these, the Auchinleck manuscript, might once have been read by Chaucer, whose *Franklin's Tale* is also a Breton lay.

The text presented here is flexibly based on the Auchinleck manuscript. The metrical form is the four-stress couplet, the standard English form used to translate French octosyllabic couplets.

# Sir Orfeo<sup>1</sup>

We reden oft and finden ywrite<sup>o</sup>—  
As these clerkes doon<sup>o</sup> us wite<sup>o</sup>—  
The layes<sup>o</sup> that been of harping<sup>2</sup>  
Been yfound<sup>o</sup> of freely<sup>o</sup> thing.  
Some been of war and some of woe,  
5 And some of joy and mirth also,  
And some of treachery and of guile;  
And some of haps<sup>o</sup> that fellen<sup>o</sup> while,<sup>o</sup>  
And some of bourds<sup>o</sup> and ribaldry,  
And many been of faïrye.<sup>3</sup>  
10 Of alle thing that men may see,  
Most of love forsooth they be.  
In Britain<sup>o</sup> these lays been wrought,  
First yfound<sup>o</sup> and forth ybrought.  
Of adventures that felle by days<sup>o</sup>  
15 The Britons<sup>o</sup> thereof maden layes:  
When they might owher<sup>o</sup> yheere<sup>o</sup>  
Of any marvels that there were,  
They taken them their harpes with game,<sup>o</sup>  
Maden layes and yaf<sup>o</sup> them name.  
20 Of adventures that han befall  
I can some telle, but not all.  
Herkneth,<sup>o</sup> lordings<sup>o</sup> that been trewe,  
I will you tell of Sir Orfewe.  
Orfeo was a riche<sup>o</sup> king,  
25 In Engelond an high lording,  
A stalworth<sup>o</sup> man and hardy bo,<sup>o</sup>  
Large<sup>o</sup> and courteous he was also,  
His father was come of King Pluto,  
And his mother of King Juno,<sup>o</sup>  
30

That sometime were as gods yholde<sup>o</sup>  
For adventures that they did and tolde.

35 This king sojourned in Traciens<sup>o</sup>  
That is a city of noble defence<sup>o</sup>  
(For Winchester was cleped<sup>o</sup> tho<sup>o</sup>  
Traciens withouten no<sup>o</sup>).  
Orfeo most of any thing  
Loved the glee<sup>o</sup> of harping:  
Siker<sup>o</sup> was every good harpour  
Of him to have much honour.  
40 Himself he lerned for to harpe,  
And laid<sup>o</sup> thereon his wittes sharpe;<sup>o</sup>  
He lerned so there nothing was  
A better harpour in no plas.<sup>o</sup>  
45 In all the world was no man bore<sup>o</sup>  
That once Orfeo sat before,  
And<sup>o</sup> he might of his harping hear,  
But he should thinke that he were  
In one of the joys of Paradis,  
Such melody in his harping is.  
50 Orfeo had a queen of pris<sup>o</sup>  
That was ycleped<sup>o</sup> Dame Heurodis,  
The fairest lady for the nones<sup>o</sup>  
That might goon<sup>o</sup> on body and bones,  
Full of love and of goodnesse—  
55 But no man may tell her fairnesse.  
Befell so, the comsing<sup>o</sup> of May,  
When merry and hot is the day,  
And away been winter showres,  
And every field is full of flowres,  
60 And blossom breme<sup>o</sup> on every bough  
Overall wexeth<sup>o</sup> merry enough,  
This eche<sup>o</sup> queen Dame Heurodis  
Took with her two maids of pris<sup>o</sup>  
And wente in the undertide<sup>o</sup>  
65 To playe in an orchard-side,

To see the flowers spread and springe  
 And to hear the fowles singe.  
 They setten them<sup>o</sup> down alle three  
 Faire<sup>o</sup> under an impe-tree;<sup>o</sup>  
 70 And well soon this faire queen  
 Fell on sleep upon the green.  
 The maidens durste<sup>o</sup> her not awake,  
 But let her lie and reste take.  
 So she slept til afternoon  
 75 That undertide was al ydoon.<sup>o</sup>  
 But as soone as she gan<sup>o</sup> wake  
 She cried and loathly bere<sup>o</sup> gan make:  
 She frotte<sup>o</sup> her handes and her feet  
 And cracched<sup>o</sup> her visage—it bledde weet;<sup>o</sup>  
 80 Her riche robe she all torit,<sup>o</sup>  
 And was ravised<sup>o</sup> out of her wit.  
 The two maidenenes her beside  
 Ne durste with her no long<sup>o</sup> abide,  
 But runne to the palace right  
 85 And tolde bothe squire and knight  
 That their queen awede<sup>o</sup> would,  
 And bad them go and her atholde.<sup>o</sup>  
 Knightes ran and ladies also,  
 Damselles sixty and mo,<sup>o</sup>  
 90 In th'orchard to the queen they come,  
 And her up in armes nome,<sup>o</sup>  
 And broughte her to bed at laste,  
 And held her there fine<sup>o</sup> faste.  
 But evere she held<sup>o</sup> in oo<sup>o</sup> cry,  
 95 And wolde up and away.  
 When the king heard that tiding<sup>o</sup>  
 Never him nas<sup>o</sup> worse for no thing:  
 Orfeo came with knightes ten  
 To chamber right before the queen,  
 100 And looked and said with great pity,  
 "O leve<sup>o</sup> life, what aileth thee?—

That ever yet hast been so still,  
 And now thou gredest<sup>o</sup> wonder shrill.  
 Thy body that was so white ycore<sup>o</sup>  
 105 With thine nails is all totore.<sup>o</sup>  
 Allas, thy rode<sup>o</sup> that was so red  
 Is as wan as thou were dead.  
 And also thy fingers smale<sup>o</sup>  
 Been all bloody and all pale.  
 110 Allas, thy lovesome yën<sup>o</sup> two  
 Looketh so<sup>o</sup> man doth on his foe.  
 A, dame, ich<sup>o</sup> biseeche mercy—  
 Let be all this rueful cry,  
 And tell me what<sup>o</sup> thee is and how,  
 115 And what thing may thee helpe now.”  
 Tho<sup>o</sup> lay she stille at the laste,  
 And gan to weepe swithe<sup>o</sup> faste,<sup>o</sup>  
 And saide thus the king unto:  
 “Allas, my lord Sir Orfeo,  
 120 Sitthen<sup>o</sup> we first together were  
 Ones wrothe never we nere,<sup>4</sup>  
 But ever ich have yloved thee  
 As my life, and so thou me.  
 But now we mote<sup>o</sup> deele<sup>o</sup> atwo—  
 125 Do thy best, for I moot<sup>o</sup> go.”  
 “Allas,” quath he, “forlorn ich am!  
 Whither wilt thou go and to wham?<sup>o</sup>  
 Whither thou goost ich will with thee,  
 And whither I go thou shalt with me.”  
 130 “Nay, nay, sir, that not nis.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ich will thee tell all how it is:  
 As ich lay this undertide<sup>o</sup>  
 And slept under our orchard-side,  
 There come to me two faire knightes,  
 135 Well y-armed all to rightes,  
 And bade me comen on hying<sup>o</sup>

And speke with their lord the king;  
 And ich answered at<sup>o</sup> wordes bolde  
 That I ne durste not ne I nolde.<sup>o</sup>  
 140 They prikked again as they might drive.<sup>o</sup>  
 Tho<sup>o</sup> came their king also blive<sup>o</sup>  
 With an hundred knightes and mo,<sup>o</sup>  
 And damiseles an hundred also,  
 Alle on snow-white steedes;  
 145 As white as milk were their weeddes:<sup>o</sup>  
 I ne saw never yet before  
 So faire creatures ycore.<sup>o</sup>  
 The king had a crown on his head:  
 It nas<sup>o</sup> of silver n'of gold red,  
 150 But it was of a precious stone;  
 As brighte as the sun it shone.  
 And as soon as he to me cam,  
 Wolde ich, nolde ich,<sup>o</sup> he me nam<sup>o</sup>  
 And made me with him to ride  
 155 Upon a palfrey him beside,  
 And brougte me to his palais  
 Well attired<sup>o</sup> in each a ways,<sup>o</sup>  
 And showed me castels and towers,  
 Rivers, forests, frith<sup>o</sup> with flowers,  
 160 And his riche steeds each one,  
 And sithen<sup>o</sup> brought me again home  
 Into oure owene orche-yard,<sup>o</sup>  
 And said to me thus afterward,  
 'Look tomorrow that thou be  
 165 Right here under this impe-tree,  
 And then thou shalt with us go,  
 And live with us everemo.<sup>o</sup>  
 And if thou makest us ylet,<sup>o</sup>  
 Where<sup>o</sup> thou be, thou worst<sup>o</sup> yfet.<sup>o</sup>  
 170 And all totore<sup>o</sup> thy limes<sup>o</sup> all  
 That no thing thee helpe shall.  
 And though thou beest so totorn,

Yet thou worst<sup>o</sup> with us yborn.' "<sup>o</sup>  
When king Orfeo heard this case,<sup>o</sup>  
175 "O, weel,"<sup>o</sup> quath he, "allas, allas!  
Lever<sup>o</sup> me were to lete<sup>o</sup> my life  
Than thus to lose the queen my wife."  
He asked conseil at<sup>o</sup> each a man,  
But no man him helpe can.  
180 Amorrow the undertide is come,  
And Orfeo hath his arms ynome,<sup>o</sup>  
And well ten hundred knights with him,  
Each y-armed, stout and grim.  
And with the queene wenten he<sup>o</sup>  
185 Right unto that impe-tree.  
They made sheltrom<sup>o</sup> in each a side,  
And said they wolde there abide  
And die there everichone,  
Er<sup>o</sup> the queen should from them goon.  
190 And yet amiddes them full right  
The queene was away ytwight,<sup>o</sup>  
With<sup>o</sup> fairye forth ynome:<sup>o</sup>  
Men wiste never where she was bcome.<sup>5</sup>  
Tho<sup>o</sup> was there crying, weep and woe;  
195 The king into his chamber is go  
And ofte swooned upon the stone,<sup>o</sup>  
And made such dool<sup>o</sup> and such moan  
That nigh his life was yspent<sup>o</sup>—  
There was noon amendement.<sup>o</sup>  
200 He clept<sup>o</sup> together his barouns,  
Earles, lordes of renouns,<sup>o</sup>  
And when they all ycomen were,  
"Lordings," he said, "before you here  
Ich<sup>o</sup> ordain myn high steward  
205 To wite<sup>o</sup> my kingdom afterward;  
In my stede<sup>o</sup> been he shall  
To keep my londes overall.<sup>o</sup>

For now I have my queen ylore,<sup>o</sup>  
 The fairest lady that ever was bore,<sup>o</sup>  
 210 Never eft<sup>o</sup> I nil<sup>o</sup> no woman see;  
 In wilderness now will ich tee<sup>o</sup>  
 And live there for everemore,  
 With wilde beasts in holtes hore.<sup>o</sup>  
 And when ye wite<sup>o</sup> that I be spent,<sup>o</sup>  
 215 Make you then a parliament  
 And choose you<sup>o</sup> a newe king:  
 Now dooth your best with all my thing."  
 Tho<sup>o</sup> was there weeping in the hall,  
 And great cry among them alle;  
 220 Unnethe<sup>o</sup> mighte old or young  
 For weeping speak a word with tongue.  
 They kneeled all adown in fere<sup>o</sup>  
 And prayed him if his wille were,  
 That he ne sholde from them go.  
 225 "Do way,"<sup>o</sup> quath he, "it shall be so."  
 All his kingdom he forsook;  
 But<sup>o</sup> a sclavin<sup>o</sup> on him he took:  
 He had no kirtel<sup>o</sup> ne noon hood,  
 Shirt ne yet none other good.  
 230 But his harp he took algate,<sup>o</sup>  
 And did him<sup>o</sup> barefoot out at yate:<sup>o</sup>  
 No man moste<sup>o</sup> with him go.  
 O way,<sup>o</sup> what<sup>o</sup> there was weep and woe,  
 When he that had been king with crown  
 235 Went so poorelich out of town.  
 Through the wood and over heath  
 Into the wilderness he geeth.<sup>o</sup>  
 Nothing he fint<sup>o</sup> that him is aise,<sup>o</sup>  
 But ever he liveth in great malaise.  
 240 He that had wered<sup>o</sup> the fowe and gris,<sup>6</sup>  
 And on bed the purper bis,<sup>o</sup>  
 Now on harde heath he lith,<sup>o</sup>



With leaves and grass he him writh.<sup>o</sup>  
He that had had castles and towers,  
245 River, forest, frith<sup>o</sup> with flowers,  
Now though it ginne snow and freeze,  
This king moot<sup>o</sup> make his bed in meese.<sup>o</sup>  
He that had had knightes of pris,<sup>o</sup>  
Before him kneeling and ladies,  
250 Now seeth he nothing that him liketh,<sup>o</sup>  
But wilde wormes<sup>o</sup> by him striketh.<sup>o</sup>  
He that had yhad plenty  
Of mete<sup>o</sup> and drink, of each dainty,  
Now may he alday<sup>o</sup> dig and wrote<sup>o</sup>  
255 Er<sup>o</sup> he find his fill of roote.<sup>o</sup>  
In summer he liveth by wilde fruit  
And berien<sup>o</sup> but goode lite,<sup>o</sup>  
In winter may he nothing finde  
But roote, grasses, and the rinde.<sup>o</sup>  
260 All his body away was dwined<sup>o</sup>  
For misaise,<sup>o</sup> and all toched.<sup>o</sup>  
Lord, who may tell of the sore  
This king suffered ten year and more?  
His hair of his beard, black and rowe,<sup>o</sup>  
265 To his girdle-stede<sup>o</sup> was growe.  
His harp whereon was all his glee  
He hidde in an hollow tree,  
And when the weather was clear and bright,  
He took his harp to him well right,  
270 And harped at his owene wille:<sup>o</sup>  
In all the wood the sound gan shille,<sup>o</sup>  
That wilde beestes that there beeth<sup>o</sup>  
For joy abouten him they teeth;<sup>o</sup>  
And all the foules that there were  
275 Came and sat on each a brere<sup>o</sup>  
To here his harping afine,<sup>o</sup>  
So muche melody was therein.  
When he his harping lete<sup>o</sup> wolde,

No beast by him abide nolde.  
 280     Oft he might see him besides  
 In the hote undertides<sup>o</sup>  
 The king of fairy with his route<sup>o</sup>  
 Come to hunt him all aboute  
 With dinne, cry, and with blowing,  
 285     And houndes also with him barking.  
 But no beast they ne nome<sup>o</sup>  
 Ne never he niste where they become.<sup>7</sup>  
 And otherwhile he mighte see,  
 As a great host by him tee,<sup>o</sup>  
 290     Well atourned<sup>o</sup> ten hundred knightes,  
 Each y-armed to his rightes,<sup>o</sup>  
 Of countenance stout and fierce,  
 With manye displayed<sup>o</sup> banners,  
 And each his sword ydrawe holde,  
 295     But never he niste<sup>o</sup> where they wolde,  
 And somewhile he saw other thing:  
 Knightes and ladies come dancing,  
 In quainte<sup>o</sup> atire, degisely,<sup>o</sup>  
 Quainte pas<sup>o</sup> and softly.  
 300     Tabours<sup>o</sup> and trumpes yede<sup>o</sup> him by,  
 And all mannere minstralcy.  
 And on a day he saw beside  
 Sixty ladies on horse ride,  
 Gentle and jolif<sup>o</sup> as bird on ris<sup>o</sup>—  
 305     Not one man amongst them nis.<sup>o</sup>  
 And each a falcon on hand beer,<sup>o</sup>  
 And riden on hawking by river.  
 Of game they founde well good haunt,<sup>o</sup>  
 Mallards, heron, and cormorant.  
 310     The founs of<sup>o</sup> the water ariseth;  
 The falcons them well deviseth:<sup>o</sup>  
 Each falcon his prey slough.<sup>o</sup>  
 That saw Orfeo and lough:<sup>o</sup>

315 "Parfay!"<sup>o</sup> quath he, "there is fair game!  
 Thither ich will,<sup>o</sup> by Goddes name.  
 Ich was ywon<sup>o</sup> such work to see."  
 He arose and thither gan tee.<sup>o</sup>  
 To a lady he was ycome,  
 Beheld, and hath well undernome,<sup>o</sup>  
 320 And seeth by all thing that it is  
 His owne queen Dame Heurodis,  
 Yerne<sup>o</sup> beheld her and she him eke,<sup>o</sup>  
 But neither to other a word ne speak.  
 For misaise<sup>o</sup> that she on him seigh<sup>o</sup>  
 325 That hadde been so riche and heigh,  
 The tears fell out of her eye.  
 The othere ladies this ysye<sup>o</sup>  
 And maked her away to ride:  
 She moste<sup>o</sup> with him no longer abide.  
 330 "Allas," quath he, "now me is woe.  
 Why nil<sup>o</sup> death now me not slo?<sup>o</sup>  
 Allas, wrecche,<sup>o</sup> that I ne might  
 Die now after this sight.  
 Allas, too longe last<sup>o</sup> my life  
 335 When I ne dare not to my wife—  
 Ne she to me—one word ne speak.  
 Allas, why nil myn herte break?  
 Parfay,"<sup>o</sup> quath he, "tide what bitide,<sup>o</sup>  
 Whither so these ladies ride  
 340 The selve<sup>o</sup> waye ich will strecche:<sup>o</sup>  
 Of lif ne deeth me nothing recche."<sup>o</sup>  
 His sclavin<sup>o</sup> he dide<sup>o</sup> on also spak<sup>o</sup>  
 And hung his harp upon his back,  
 And hadde well good will to goon:  
 345 He ne spared neither stub ne stoon.<sup>8</sup>  
 In at a rock<sup>o</sup> the ladies rideth  
 And he after and not abideth.  
 When he was in the rock ago

Well three mile other mo,<sup>o</sup>  
350 He cam into a fair countrey,  
As bright so<sup>o</sup> sun on sommers day,  
Smooth and plain<sup>o</sup> and alle green:  
Hill ne dale nas<sup>o</sup> there none seen.  
Amid the land a castle he seigh,<sup>o</sup>  
355 Riche and royal and wonder heigh.  
All the utemoste<sup>o</sup> wal  
Was clear<sup>o</sup> and shined as crystal.  
An hundred towers there were aboute,  
Degiseliche,<sup>o</sup> and batailed<sup>9</sup> stoute.  
360 The buttress came out of the diche<sup>o</sup>  
Of red gold y-arched riche.<sup>1</sup>  
The vousour<sup>o</sup> was anourned<sup>o</sup> all  
Of each manner diverse aumal.<sup>o</sup>  
Within there were wide wones,<sup>o</sup>  
365 And all were full of precious stones.  
The worste pillar on to beholde  
All it was of burnishéd golde.  
All that land was ever light,  
For when it should be therk<sup>o</sup> and night  
370 The riche stones lighte gone<sup>o</sup>  
As bright as doth at noon the sonne.  
No man may tell ne think in thought  
The riche work that there was wrought.  
By alle thing him thinkth it is  
375 The proude court of Paradis.  
In this castle the ladies alighte<sup>o</sup>:  
He would in<sup>o</sup> after, if he mighte.  
Orfeo knocketh at the gate:  
The porter was ready therate<sup>o</sup>  
380 And asked what he would have ydo.<sup>o</sup>  
"Parfay,<sup>o</sup> ich<sup>o</sup> am a minstrel,<sup>o</sup> lo,  
To solace<sup>o</sup> thy lord with my glee<sup>o</sup>  
If<sup>o</sup> his sweete wille be."

385 The porter undid the gate anoon  
 And let him into the castle goon.  
 Then he gan look aboute<sup>o</sup> al  
 And saw lying within the wall,  
 Of folk that there were thither ybrought,  
 And thoughte<sup>o</sup> dead, and nere not<sup>o</sup>:  
 390 Some stood withouten hade,<sup>o</sup>  
 And some none armes hade,  
 And some through the body had wounde,  
 And some lay wood<sup>o</sup> ybounde;  
 And some armed on horse sete,<sup>o</sup>  
 395 And some astrangled as they ete,<sup>o</sup>  
 And some were in water adreint,<sup>o</sup>  
 And some with fire all forshreint,<sup>o</sup>  
 Wives there lay on child-bedde,<sup>o</sup>  
 Some dede<sup>o</sup> and some awedde.<sup>o</sup>  
 400 And wonder fele<sup>o</sup> there lay besides  
 Right as they slept their undertides<sup>o</sup>  
 Each was thus in this world ynome,<sup>o</sup>  
 With<sup>o</sup> fairye thither ycome.  
 There he saw his owne wife,  
 405 Dame Heurodis, his leve<sup>o</sup> life,  
 Sleep under an impe-tree:  
 By her clothes he knew it was she.  
 When he had seen these marvels alle  
 He went into the kinges halle.  
 410 Then saw he there a seemly<sup>o</sup> sight:  
 A tabernacle<sup>o</sup> well ydight<sup>o</sup>—  
 Their master king therinne sete,<sup>o</sup>  
 And their queene fair and sweete.  
 Their crowns, their clothes shone so brighte  
 415 That unnethe<sup>o</sup> he behold them mighte.  
 When he had seen all this thing,  
 He kneeled adown before the king:  
 "O lord," he said, "if thy will were,  
 My minstralcy thou shouldest yheere."<sup>o</sup>

420 The king answered, "What man art thou  
 That art hither ycomen now?  
 Ich, ne noon that is with me,  
 Ne sente never after thee.  
 425 Sith<sup>o</sup> that ich here regne gan<sup>o</sup>  
 I ne found never so hardy man  
 That hither to us durste wende<sup>o</sup>  
 But<sup>o</sup> that ich<sup>o</sup> him would ofsende."<sup>o</sup>  
 "Lord," quath he, "ye trowe<sup>o</sup> well  
 I nam but a poor minstrel,<sup>o</sup>  
 430 And, sir, it is the manner of us  
 To seeche<sup>o</sup> many a lordes house.  
 And though we not welcome be,  
 Yet we mote<sup>o</sup> proffer forth our glee."<sup>o</sup>  
 Before the king he sat adown  
 435 And took his harp so merry of soun,<sup>o</sup>  
 And tempreth<sup>o</sup> it as he well can.  
 And blissful notes he there gan  
 That all that in the palace were  
 Come to him for to hear,  
 440 And lieth adown to his feet,  
 Them thinkth his melody so sweet.  
 The king herkneith<sup>o</sup> and sit<sup>o</sup> full still:  
 To hear his glee<sup>o</sup> he hath good will.  
 Good bourde<sup>o</sup> he hadde of his glee:  
 445 The riche queen also had she.  
 When he had stint<sup>o</sup> of his harping,  
 Then said to him the riche king,  
 "Minstrel, me liketh well thy glee.  
 Now aske of me what it may be—  
 450 Largeliche<sup>o</sup> ich will thee paye  
 Now speak and thou might it assaye."  
 "Sir," he said, "ich praye thee  
 That thou wouldest give me  
 The eche<sup>o</sup> lady, bright on blee,<sup>o</sup>  
 455 That sleepeth under the impe-tree."

"Nay," quath the king, "that not nere:°  
 A sorry couple of you it were;  
 For thou art lean, rowe,° and black,  
 And she is lovesome, withoute lack.°  
 460 A loathly thing it were forthy°  
 To seen her in thy company."  
 "O sire," he said, "gentle king,  
 Yet were it a well fouler thing  
 To hear a lesing° of thy mouthe.  
 465 So, sire, as ye saide nouthe°  
 What ich would aske, have I wolde,  
 A kinges word moot° needs be holde."  
 "Thou sayest sooth,"° the king said than,°  
 "And sith° I am a trewe man,  
 470 I will well that it be so:  
 Take her by the hand and go.  
 Of her ich will that thou be blithe."²  
 He kneeled adown and thanked him swithe;°  
 His wife he took by the hand  
 475 And did him swithe out of that land,  
 And wente° him out of that thede:°  
 Right as he cam the way he yede.°  
 So long he hath the way ynome°  
 To Winchester he is ycome,  
 480 That sometime was his owne city,  
 But no man knew that it was he.  
 No further than the townes ende  
 For knoweleche³ he durste wende.°  
 But in a beggeres bild° full narwe°  
 485 There he hath take his herbarwe°  
 (To° him and to his owne wife),  
 As a minstrel of poore life,  
 And asked tidinges° of that land,  
 And who the kingdom held in hand.  
 490 The poore begger in his cote°

Told him everich a grote<sup>o</sup>—  
How their queen was stole awy,<sup>o</sup>  
Ten year goon,<sup>o</sup> with<sup>o</sup> faïry.  
And how their king in exile yede<sup>o</sup>  
495 But no man wiste<sup>o</sup> in which thede;<sup>o</sup>  
And how the steward the land gan holde,  
And other many things him tolde.  
    Amorwe ayain the noon-tide<sup>4</sup>  
He maked his wife there abide,  
500 And beggers clothes he borwed anoon,<sup>o</sup>  
And hung his harp his rigge<sup>o</sup> upon,  
And went him into that city,  
That men might him behold and see.  
Bothe earls and barons bold,  
505 Burgeis<sup>o</sup> and ladies him gan behold:  
"Lord," they saide, "such a man!  
How long the hair him hangeth upon!  
Lo, how his beard hangeth to his knee!  
He is yclungen<sup>o</sup> also<sup>o</sup> a tree!"  
510 And as he yede<sup>o</sup> in the streete,  
With his steward he gan meete.  
And loud he set him on a cry,  
"Sir steward," he said, "grant mercy!  
Ich am an harpou of hethenesse:<sup>o</sup>  
515 Help me now in this distresse."  
The steward said, "Come with me, come:  
Of that I have thou shalt have some.  
Each harper is welcome me to  
For my lordes love, Sir Orfeo."  
520 Anon they went into the halle,  
The steward and the lordes alle.  
The steward wash<sup>o</sup> and went to mete,  
And many lordes by him sete.  
There were trumpours<sup>o</sup> and tabourers,<sup>o</sup>  
525 Harpers fele,<sup>o</sup> and crouders:<sup>o</sup>



Much melody they maked alle.  
 And Orfeo sat still in halle.  
 And herkneth; when they been all stille,  
 He took his harp and tempered<sup>o</sup> shille<sup>o</sup>—  
 530 The blisefullest notes he harped there  
 That every man yherde with ear.  
 Each man liked well his glee.<sup>o</sup>  
 The steward looked and gan ysee,  
 And the harp knew also blive.<sup>o</sup>  
 535 "Minstrel," he said, "so mote<sup>o</sup> thou thrive,  
 Where haddest thou this harp and how?  
 I pray that thou me telle now."  
 "Lord," quath he, "in uncouthe<sup>o</sup> thede,<sup>o</sup>  
 540 Through a forest as I yede,<sup>o</sup>  
 I found lying in a dale  
 A man with<sup>o</sup> lions totorn<sup>o</sup> smale,  
 And wolves him frette<sup>o</sup> with teeth so sharp.  
 By him I found this eche<sup>o</sup> harp  
 Well ten year it is ago."  
 545 "O," quath the steward, "now me is woe!  
 That was my lord Sir Orfeo.  
 Allas, wrecche, what shall I do  
 That have such a lord ylore?<sup>o</sup>  
 A, way,<sup>o</sup> that ever ich was ybore<sup>o</sup>  
 550 That him<sup>o</sup> was so hard grace<sup>o</sup> y-yarked,<sup>o</sup>  
 And so vile death ymarked."<sup>o</sup>  
 Adown he fell aswoon to ground.  
 His barons him took up that stounde<sup>o</sup>  
 And telleth him how that it geeth:<sup>o</sup>  
 555 It is no boote<sup>o</sup> of mannes death.  
 King Orfeo knew well by than<sup>o</sup>  
 His steward was a trewe man  
 And loved him as him ought to do,  
 And stondeth up and saith thus, "Lo,  
 560 Steward, herkne now this thing:  
 If ich<sup>o</sup> were Orfeo the king

And had ysuffered full yore<sup>o</sup>  
In wildernesses much sore,  
And had ywonne my queen awy<sup>o</sup>  
565 Out of the land of fairy,  
And had ybrought the lady hende<sup>o</sup>  
Right here to the townes ende,  
And with a begger her in<sup>o</sup> ynome,<sup>o</sup>  
And were myselve hither ycome  
570 Poorelich to thee thus stille,<sup>o</sup>  
For to assay<sup>o</sup> thy goode wille,  
And<sup>o</sup> ich founde thee thus trewe,  
Thou ne sholdest it never rewe:<sup>o</sup>  
Sikerliche,<sup>o</sup> for love or ay,<sup>o</sup>  
575 Thou sholdest be king after my day.  
If thou of my death haddest been blithe,<sup>o</sup>  
Thou sholdest have voided<sup>o</sup> also swithe."<sup>o</sup>  
    Tho<sup>o</sup> alle tho<sup>o</sup> that therinne sete  
That it was Orfeo underyete,<sup>o</sup>  
580 And the steward well him knew:  
Over and over the board he threw<sup>o</sup>  
And fell adown to his feete.  
So did each lord that there sete,  
And all they saide at oo<sup>o</sup> crying,  
585 "Ye beeth our lord, sir, and our king."  
Glade they were of his live:  
To chamber they ladde him as blive,<sup>o</sup>  
And bathed him and shaved his beard,  
And tired<sup>o</sup> him as a king apert.<sup>o</sup>  
590 And sith<sup>o</sup> with greet procession  
They brought the queen into the town,  
With all manere minstrelsy.  
Lord, there was great melody:  
For joy they wepte with their eyë  
595 That them so sound<sup>o</sup> ycomen sye.<sup>o</sup>  
    Now Orfeo newe corowned<sup>o</sup> is,  
And his queen Dame Heurodis,

And lived longe afterward,  
And sitthen<sup>o</sup> king was the steward.  
600        Harpers in Britain after than<sup>o</sup>  
Heard how this marvel began  
And made a lay of good liking,<sup>o</sup>  
And nempned<sup>o</sup> it after the king.  
That lay is "Orfeo" yhote:<sup>o</sup>  
605        Good is the lay, sweet is the note.  
             Thus cam Sir Orfeo out of his care:  
God grant us alle well to fare.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text presented here is based on the Auchinleck manuscript (in the National Library of Scotland), with spelling modernized in order to maximize intelligibility without impairing rhyme or meter. The metrical form is the four-stress, iambic couplet, the standard English form used to translate French octosyllabic couplets.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, composed to be sung to the harp.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fairyland and, more commonly, the otherworld and its supernatural inhabitants.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Never once were we angry (with one another).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: No one knew what had become of her.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: White and gray fur; that is, royal ermine.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Nor did he ever learn what happened to them.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, neither stump nor stone prevented him.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Furnished with battlements.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Made of red gold that arched splendidly: gold was commonly described as red in Middle English.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: With her, I wish that you be happy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, for fear of being recognized.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the morning toward noontime.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *written*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cause* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to learn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poems*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *composed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *events* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *occurred* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jokes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Brittany*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *composed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *once occurred*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Bretons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anywhere* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gave*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *listen* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gentlemen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *powerful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *valiant* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *both*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *generous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *[Queen] Juno*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *considered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Thrace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fortification*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *denial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *music*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *applied* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keenly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beginning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glorious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forenoon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *themselves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fairly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grafted fruit tree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tore at*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scratched* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tore apart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ravished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longer*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *go mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restrain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continued* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *news*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was (not)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cry out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complexion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slender*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what the matter with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not be possible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forenoon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in haste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as fast as they could*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straightway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *clothes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether I wished it or not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equipped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afterward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *orchard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evermore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resistance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wherever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shall be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fetches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torn apart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *limbs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shall be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *story*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preferable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *they*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *military formation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snatched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *floor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expressed such grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great names*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keep*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *again* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gray woods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for yourselves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarcely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pilgrim's cloak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *short coat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at any rate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took himself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *how*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finds* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purple linen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadow*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *renown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleases him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snakes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glide* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scrounge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roots* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *berries* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of little value* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bark* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wasted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardship* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarred* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waist* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began to resound* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are there* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *briar* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to the end* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leave off* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mornings* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *company* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equipped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fittingly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfurled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonderfully* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *step* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drums* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plenty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *descry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laughed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I will go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understood* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wretched one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lasts* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *come what may* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cloak* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cave* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *or more* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outmost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonderfully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vaulting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adorned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enamel* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *halls* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lit it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dismounted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *musical performer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delight* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *music* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *looked about* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seemed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drowned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shriveled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *birthing bed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *driven mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forenoons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by force of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alcove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with difficulty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began to reign*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared to come*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *send for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *musical performer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seek*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *music*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tunes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listens* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *music*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entertainment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ceased*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of hue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blemish*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *therefore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *now*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *country*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared to go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *house* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *news*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hovel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *every detail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ago* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *country*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straightaway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burgesses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heathen country*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *washed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trumpeters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drummers*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *many* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fiddlers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *played* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loudly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *music* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *right away* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *country* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torn to bits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *born* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appointed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *away* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gracious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodging* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surely* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *dread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been dismissed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he overturned the table*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dressed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *openly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *after*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healthy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afterward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well-pleasing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °

# **WILLIAM LANGLAND**

## **ca. 1330–1388**

William Langland is agreed by most scholars to be the sole author of a long religious allegory in alliterative verse known as *The Vision of Piers Plowman* or more simply *Piers Plowman*, which survives in at least three distinct versions that scholars refer to as the A-, B-, and C-texts. The first, about twenty-four hundred lines long, breaks off at a rather inconclusive point in the action; the second (from which all but one of the selections here have been drawn) is a revision of the first plus an extension of more than four thousand lines; and the third is a revision of the second. About Langland we know hardly anything except what can be inferred from the poem itself. He came from the west of England and was probably a native of the Malvern Hills area, in which the opening of the poem is set. We can never identify the persona of the narrator of a medieval text positively or precisely with its author, especially when we are dealing with allegory. Nevertheless, a passage that was added to the C-text, the last of the selections printed here, gives the strong impression of being at one and the same time an allegory in which the narrator represents willful Mankind and a poignantly ironic self-portrait of the stubborn poet who occasionally plays on his own name: "I have lived in *land* . . . my name is *Long Will*" (15.152). In this new episode the narrator tries to defend his shiftless way of life against Conscience and Reason, presumably his own conscience and reason. The entire work conforms well with the notion that its author was a man who



was educated to enter the Church but who, through marriage and lack of preferment, was reduced to poverty and may well have wandered in his youth like those “hermits” he scornfully describes in the Prologue.

*Piers Plowman* has the form of a dream vision, a common medieval genre in which the author presents the story under the guise of having dreamed it. The dream vision generally involves allegory, not only because one expects from a dream the unrealistic, the fanciful, but also because people have always suspected that dreams relate the truth in disguised form—that they are natural allegories. Through a series of such visions the poem traces the Dreamer-narrator’s tough-minded, persistent, and passionate search for answers to his many questions, especially the question he puts early in the poem to Lady Holy Church: “How I may save my soul.” Langland’s theme is nothing less than the history of Christianity as it unfolds both in the world of the Old and New Testaments and in the life and heart of an individual fourteenth-century Christian—two seemingly distinct realms between which the poet’s allegory moves with dizzying rapidity.

Within the larger sequence of the poem, from its beginning until the end of Passus 7, the following selections form a thematically coherent narrative. In the Prologue (the first selection), Langland’s narrator falls asleep and witnesses a compact vision of the whole of late fourteenth-century English society. Poised between two stark and static possibilities of heaven and hell, an intensely active, mobile earthly life is concentrated into a “field full of folk.” Some ideal practitioners of earthly occupations are surrounded and undermined by a much larger set of very energetic social types who exploit their occupations for entirely selfish ends. Langland here participates in the genre of estates satire, which surveys and excoriates each worldly occupation (see Chaucer’s very different example of estates satire in *The General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*). Langland reserves his especial anger for those who abuse church authority and for those who are wealthy but pitiless.



**Between Heaven and Hell.** Hieronymus Bosch, *Haywain Triptych*, ca. 1490–95. The calm scene atop the haystack is perilously perched between heaven and hell, and above the furious activity of the world.

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*Passus*, Latin for “step,” is the word used for the poem’s basic divisions. Passus 1 (the second selection) promises to give some intellectual and moral purchase on the teeming energies of the Prologue. Holy Church instructs the poem’s narrator and dreamer Will in the proper relation of material wealth and spiritual health. In particular, she accentuates the value of the “best treasure,” *truthe*, one of Langland’s key words: *truthe* is the justice that flows from God; it manifests itself in the exercise of earthly justice and fidelity, and in the correlative poetic value of truth telling. Will recognizes the force of Holy Church’s sermon, but still needs to know it by an interior form of knowledge, grounded in the depths of the self.

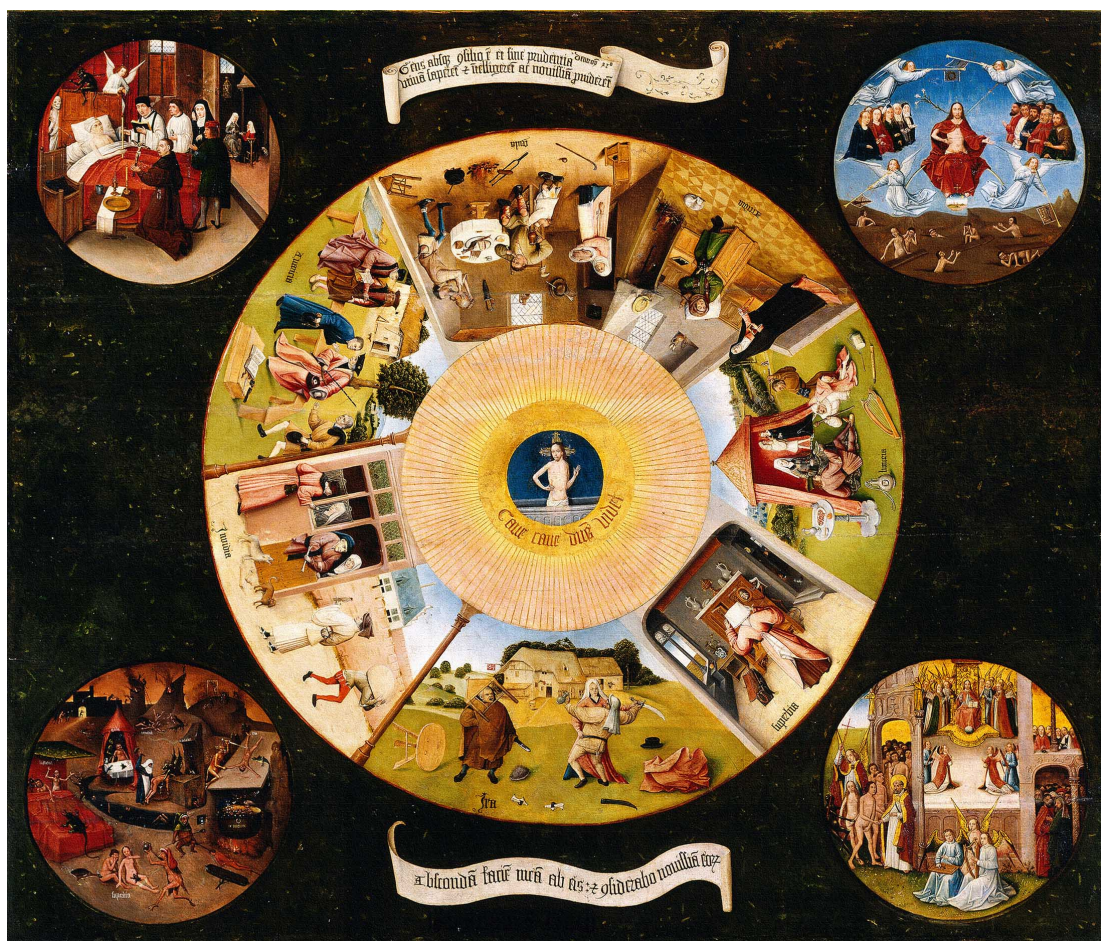
It would seem that the rest of the poem is devoted to the discovery of that internalized truth. The first of the poem’s large-scale narratives (Passus 2–4) represents the attempt of earthly justice to control the disruptive energies of the profit economy. That

economy is here represented by the personification “Lady Mede,” who signifies “reward beyond deserving.” After this sequence concerning earthly justice, the poem then turns to the deeper, more personal mechanisms of spiritual justice. In Passus 5, accordingly, the seven Deadly Sins confess in turn, before the poem’s ideal earthly representative of justice, Piers Plowman, offers to lead a spiritual pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Truth (Passus 5.506–642, the third selection).

The ideal of *truthe* takes a local habitation, then, in the model of society that Piers establishes for the conduct of his “pilgrimage.” The truest form of pilgrimage is no pilgrimage at all; instead, all classes of society should stay at home and work harmoniously for the production of material food by agricultural workers, with knights helping plowmen and protecting the Church, while priests pray for both workers and knights. This ideal scene is pictured in Passus 6 (the fourth selection).

Langland’s poem might seem, thus far, to be a deeply conservative one, whereby justice is manifest only in a manorial society, within which each person knows his or her place, and works harmoniously and obediently with the others. There is a problem with this model, however: it collapses. In Passus 6 the ideal society put into action by Piers fails entirely; workers simply refuse to work, abuse the authority of knights, and respond only to the terrible pressure of Hunger, a punishing, Gargantuan figure who graphically evokes the ravages of famine in the fourteenth century.





**Sin.** Hieronymus Bosch, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, ca. 1500. The violence of sin springs from no abstract source but is embedded in the precise social practices and material fabric of this world.

In Passus 7 (the fifth selection) the limitations of the *truth* model become dramatically visible. A pardon sent from God, as Truth, promises no pardon at all but only retribution for those who fail to meet the standards of God's justice, and reward for those who do not so fail. Yet as the plowing has demonstrated, all fail. Such a "pardon" promises nothing but universal damnation. In an exceptionally powerful, dramatic, and enigmatic moment, Piers actually tears this pardon in two, as he disputes with a priest about its force. Earlier in the poem it had seemed that all Will had to do was to absorb Holy Church's understanding of Truth; once Piers tears up the pardon, however, we realize that the search for Truth modifies the goal. We realize, that is, that Truth cannot be the whole truth.

The shortcomings of Truth propel Will to a more urgent search for God's love and forgiveness, beyond justice, in the deepest resources of his own self.

This search climaxes in the vision of Christ's Atonement. Passus 18 (the sixth selection) describes the central event of Christianity, the Crucifixion, followed by an account of Christ's descent into hell, traditionally called the "Harrowing of Hell." Piers, who had assumed aspects of Adam, Moses, and the Good Samaritan (while never ceasing to be the ideal plowman), is now partially identified with Christ. The terms of this identification are rooted in the material necessity of food: Christ has come to fetch the "fruit" of Piers Plowman. The "food" that Christ seeks has now become the souls of the patriarchs and prophets, and of all humanity, which must be redeemed from the devil's power. And just as the earthly Piers becomes Christlike, so too does Christ, in his bodily manifestation, become intensely human. He jousts in the arms (that is, no arms at all, but the unprotected flesh) of Piers Plowman; he comes to earth precisely in order to *know* what being human is like; and he does so precisely because of his co-natural, sympathetic kinship with suffering humanity.

For all that, Langland does not focus here for long on the grievous suffering of Christ. On the contrary, he addresses the terms of the Atonement through intellectual debate, first through the Four Daughters of God (personifications taken from Psalm 85:10 [Vulgate 84:11]), and then through Christ's direct encounter with Lucifer. Against powerful legal and written evidence to the contrary, first Mercy and Peace and then Christ himself reveal a divine sympathy with imprisoned humanity. This mercy is more powerful than the law of strict Truth or justice, by which humanity appears to have been irredeemably damned. So far from being a wounded, suffering figure, Langland's Christ is at once spiritually triumphant and a delighted trickster, by whose divine guile the devil has been fooled. But we should also notice that this story of redemption depends on anti-Judaic polemic. When Faith calls for vengeance against the "false Jews," the personification speaks in the same terms as those used to justify medieval violence against Jewish communities. For

more on Christian anti-Judaism, see “Religious Exclusions and Identities” ([pp. 285–362](#)).

In the last selection presented here, from the C-text, Langland presents a more moving, if less passionate and conflicted, scene than the tearing up of Truth’s pardon. In a passage often regarded as autobiographical, Will argues with Conscience and Reason (principles of law, but surely also Will’s own conscience and reason). They reproach him for his way of life in a poor district of London, where Will barely supports his family with alms he gets by praying for the souls of wealthy burghers.

A large number of manuscripts and two sixteenth-century editions show that *Piers Plowman* was avidly read and studied by a great many people from the end of the fourteenth century to the reign of Elizabeth I. Almost from the first, it was a controversial text. Within four years of the writing of the second version—which scholars have good evidence to date 1377, the year of Edward III’s death and Richard II’s accession to the throne—it had become so well known that the leaders of the Uprising of 1381 used phrases borrowed from it as part of the rhetoric of the rebellion. Langland’s sympathy with the sufferings of the poor and his indignant satire of corruption in church and state undoubtedly made his poem popular with the rebels. Many persons reading his poem in the sixteenth century (it was first printed in 1550) saw in *Piers Plowman* a prophecy and forerunner of the English Reformation. Immersed as it is in thorny political and theological controversies of its own day, *Piers Plowman* is arguably the most difficult and, at times, even the most frustrating of Middle English texts, but its poetic, intellectual, and moral complexity and integrity also make it one of the most rewarding.

# ***From The Vision of Piers Plowman***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The translation is by E. T. Donaldson (1990) and is based on *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, edited by George Kane and E. T. Donaldson (1975).[Return to reference 1](#)

## From *The Prologue*

### [THE FIELD OF FOLK]

In a summer season when the sun was mild  
I clad myself in clothes as I'd become a sheep;  
In the habit of a hermit unholy of works,<sup>2</sup>  
Walked wide in this world, watching for wonders.  
And on a May morning, on Malvern Hills,  
5 There befell me as by magic a marvelous thing:  
I was weary of wandering and went to rest  
At the bottom of a broad bank by a brook's side,  
And as I lay lazily looking in the water  
I slipped into a slumber, it sounded so pleasant.  
10 There came to me reclining there a most curious  
dream  
That I was in a wilderness, nowhere that I knew;  
But as I looked into the east, up high toward the  
sun,  
I saw a tower on a hill-top, trimly built,  
A deep dale beneath, a dungeon tower in it,  
15 With ditches deep and dark and dreadful to look at.  
A fair field full of folk I found between them,  
Of human beings of all sorts, the high and the low,  
Working and wandering as the world requires.  
Some applied themselves to plowing, played very  
20 rarely,  
Sowing seeds and setting plants worked very hard;  
Won what wasters gluttonously consume.  
And some pursued pride, put on proud clothing,  
Came all got up in garments garish to see.  
To prayers and penance many put themselves,  
25 All for love of our Lord lived hard lives,



Hoping thereafter to have Heaven's bliss—  
Such as hermits and anchorites that hold to their  
cells,  
Don't care to go cavorting about the countryside,  
With some lush livelihood delighting their bodies.  
30 And some made themselves merchants—they  
managed better,  
As it seems to our sight that such men prosper.  
And some make mirth as minstrels can  
And get gold for their music, guiltless, I think.  
35 But jokers and word jugglers, Judas' children,<sup>3</sup>  
Invent fantasies to tell about and make fools of  
themselves,  
And have whatever wits they need to work if they  
wanted.  
What Paul preaches of them I don't dare repeat  
here:  
*Qui loquitur turpiloquium*<sup>4</sup> is Lucifer's henchman.  
40 Beadsmen<sup>5</sup> and beggars bustled about  
Till both their bellies and their bags were crammed  
to the brim;  
Staged flytings<sup>6</sup> for their food, fought over beer.  
In gluttony, God knows, they go to bed  
And rise up with ribaldry, those Robert's boys.<sup>o</sup>  
Sleep and sloth pursue them always.  
45 Pilgrims and palmers<sup>7</sup> made pacts with each other  
To seek Saint James<sup>8</sup> and saints at Rome.  
They went on their way with many wise stories,  
And had leave to lie all their lives after.  
50 I saw some that said they'd sought after saints:  
In every tale they told their tongues were tuned to  
lie  
More than to tell the truth—such talk was theirs.  
A heap of hermits with hooked staffs

Went off to Walsingham,<sup>9</sup> with their wenches behind  
them.  
Great long lubbers that don't like to work  
55 Dressed up in cleric's dress to look different from  
other men  
And behaved as they were hermits, to have an easy  
life.  
I found friars there—all four of the orders<sup>1</sup>—  
Preaching to the people for their own paunches'  
welfare,  
60 Making glosses<sup>o</sup> of the Gospel that would look good  
for themselves;  
Coveting copes,<sup>2</sup> they construed it as they pleased.  
Many of these Masters<sup>3</sup> may clothe themselves  
richly,  
For their money and their merchandise<sup>4</sup> march hand  
in hand.  
Since Charity<sup>5</sup> has proved a peddler and principally  
shrives lords,  
65 Many marvels have been manifest within a few  
years.  
Unless Holy Church and friars' orders hold together  
better,  
The worst misfortune in the world will be welling up  
soon.  
A pardoner<sup>6</sup> preached there as if he had priest's  
rights,  
Brought out a bull<sup>7</sup> with bishop's seals,  
70 And said he himself could absolve them all  
Of failure to fast, of vows they'd broken.  
Unlearned men believed him and liked his words,  
Came crowding up on knees to kiss his bulls.  
He banged them with his brevet and bleared their  
eyes,<sup>8</sup>

75 And raked in with his parchment-roll rings and  
brooches.  
Thus you give your gold for gluttons' well-being,  
And squander it on scoundrels schooled in lechery.  
If the bishop were blessed and worth both his ears,  
His seal should not be sent out to deceive the  
people.  
80 —It's nothing to the bishop that the blackguard  
preaches,  
And the parish priest and the pardoner split the  
money  
That the poor people of the parish would have but  
for them.  
Parsons and parish priests complained to the  
bishop  
That their parishes were poor since the pestilence-  
time,<sup>9</sup>  
85 Asked for license and leave to live in London,  
And sing Masses there for simony,<sup>1</sup> for silver is  
sweet.

\* \* \*

Yet scores of men stood there in silken coifs  
Who seemed to be law-sergeants<sup>2</sup> that served at the  
bar,  
Pleaded cases for pennies and impounded<sup>3</sup> the law,  
And not for love of our Lord once unloosed their lips:  
215 You might better measure mist on Malvern Hills  
Than get a "mum" from their mouths till money's on  
the table.  
Barons and burgesses<sup>4</sup> and bondmen also  
I saw in this assemblage, as you shall hear later;  
Bakers and brewers and butchers aplenty.  
Weavers of wool and weavers of linen,  
220 Tailors, tinkers, tax-collectors in markets,

Masons, miners, many other craftsmen.  
 Of all living laborers there leapt forth some,  
 Such as diggers of ditches that do their jobs badly,  
 And dawdle away the long day with "*Dieu save dame*  
 225       *Emme.*"<sup>5</sup>  
 Cooks and their kitchen-boys crying, "Hot pies, hot!  
 Good geese and pork! Let's go and dine!"  
 Tavern-keepers told them a tale of the same sort:  
 "White wine of Alsace and wine of Gascony,  
 230       Of the Rhine and of La Rochelle, to wash the roast  
               down with."  
 All this I saw sleeping, and seven times more.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: For Langland's opinion of hermits, see lines 28–30 and 53–57. The sheep's clothing may suggest the habit's physical resemblance to sheep's wool as well as a false appearance of innocence.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Minstrels who deceive with jokes and fantastic stories are regarded as descendants of Christ's betrayer, Judas.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Who speaks filthy language (Latin). See Ephesians 5:3–4 and 11–12.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Prayer sayers, that is, people who offered to say prayers, sometimes counted on the beads of the rosary, for the souls of those who gave them alms.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Contests in which the participants took turns insulting each other, preferably in verse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Virtually professional pilgrims who took advantage of the hospitality offered them to go on traveling year after year (see p. 474, n. 4).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, his shrine at Compostela in Spain.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: English town, site of a famous shrine to the Virgin Mary.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In Langland's day there were four orders of friars in England: Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Monks', friars', and hermits' capes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, masters of divinity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The "merchandise" sold by the friars for money is shrift, that is, confession and remission of sins, which by canon law cannot be sold.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The ideal of the friars, as stated by St. Francis, was simply love, that is, charity.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An official empowered to pass on from the pope temporal indulgence for the sins of people who contributed to charitable enterprises—a function frequently abused.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Papal license to act as a pardoner, endorsed with the local bishop's seals.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, pulled the wool over their eyes. "Brevet": pardoner's license.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Since 1349 England had suffered a number of epidemics of the plague, the Black Death, which had caused famine and depopulated the countryside.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Buying and selling the functions, spiritual powers, or offices of the church. Wealthy persons, especially in London, set up foundations to pay priests to sing masses for their souls and those of their relatives (see the portrait of Chaucer's Parson, pp. 485–86, lines 477–528).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Important lawyers (see *The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*, p. 481, lines 311ff.). "Coifs": silk scarves were lawyers' badges of office.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Detained in legal custody. Pennies were fairly valuable coins in medieval England.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Town dwellers who had full rights as the citizens of a municipality. In contrast, barons were members of the upper nobility, and bondmen were peasants who held their land from a

lord in return for customary services or rent.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: “God save Dame Emma” (French), presumably a popular song.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *robbers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interpretations* [Return to reference °](#)

**From *Passus 1***

**[THE TREASURE OF TRUTH]**

What this mountain means, and the murky dale,  
And the field full of folk I shall clearly tell you.  
A lady lovely of look, in linen clothes,  
Came down from the castle and called me gently,  
And said, "Son, are you asleep? Do you see these  
5 people,  
How busy they're being about the maze?  
The greatest part of the people that pass over this  
earth,  
If they have well-being in this world, they want  
nothing more:  
For any heaven other than here they have no  
thought."  
I was afraid of her face, fair though she was,  
10 And said, "Mercy, madam, what may this mean?"  
"The tower on the hill-top," she said, "Truth<sup>6</sup> is  
within it,  
And would have you behave as his words teach.  
For he is father of faith, formed you all  
Both with skin and with skull, and assigned you five  
15 senses  
To worship him with while you are here.  
And therefore he ordered the earth to help each one  
of you  
With woolens, with linens, with livelihood at need,  
In a moderate manner to make you at ease;  
And of his kindness declared three things common to  
20 all:  
None are necessary but these, and now I will name  
them

And rank them in their right order—you repeat them  
after.

25 The first is vesture to defend you from the cold;  
The second is food at fit times to fend off hunger,  
And drink when you're dry—but don't drink beyond  
reason

Or you will be the worse for it when you've work to  
do.

For Lot in his lifetime because he liked drink  
Did with his daughters what the Devil found  
pleasing,  
Took delight in drink as the Devil wished,  
30 And lechery laid hold on him and he lay with them  
both,  
Blamed it all on the wine's working, that wicked  
deed.

*Let us make him drunk with wine, and let us lie  
with him, that we may preserve seed of  
our father.*<sup>7</sup>

By wine and by women there Lot was overcome  
And there begot in gluttony graceless brats.  
Therefore dread delicious drink and you'll do the  
better:  
35 Moderation is medicine no matter how you yearn.  
It's not all good for your ghost<sup>8</sup> that your gut wants  
Nor of benefit to your body that's a blessing to your  
soul.

Don't believe your body for it does the bidding of a  
liar:

40 That is this wretched world that wants to betray you;  
For the Fiend and your flesh both conform to it,  
And that besmirches your soul: set this in your heart,  
And so that you should yourself be wary I'm giving  
this advice."



“Ah, madam, mercy,” said I, “your words much  
please me.  
But the money minted on earth that men are so  
greedy for,  
Tell me to whom that treasure belongs?”  
45 “Go to the Gospel,” she said, “that God himself spoke  
When the people approached him with a penny in  
the temple  
And asked whether they should worship<sup>9</sup> with it  
Caesar the king.  
And he asked them to whom the inscription referred  
‘And the image also that is on the coin?’  
50 ‘*Caesaris*,’<sup>1</sup> they said, ‘we can all see it clearly.’  
‘*Reddite Caesari*,’ said God, ‘what *Caesari* belongs,<sup>2</sup>  
And *quae sunt Dei Deo*, or else you do wrong.’  
For rightfully Reason<sup>3</sup> should rule you all,  
And Kind Wit be keeper to take care of your wealth  
55 And be guardian of your gold to give it out when you  
need it,  
For economy<sup>4</sup> and he are of one accord.”  
Then I questioned her courteously, in the Creator’s  
name,  
“The dungeon in the dale that’s dreadful to see,  
What may it mean, madam, I beseech you?”  
60 “That is the Castle of Care: whoever comes into it  
Will be sorry he was ever born with body and soul.  
The captain of the castle is called Wrong,  
Father of falsehood, he founded it himself.  
Adam and Eve he egged to evil,  
65 Counseled Cain to kill his brother;  
He made a joke out of Judas with Jewish silver,<sup>5</sup>  
And afterwards on an elder tree hanged him high.  
He’s a molester of love, lies to every one;  
Those who trust in his treasure are betrayed  
70 soonest.”

Then I wondered in my wits what woman it might  
be  
Who could show from Holy Scripture such wise  
words,  
And I conjured her in the high name, ere she went  
away,  
To say who she really was that taught me so well.  
75 "I am Holy Church," she said, "you ought to know  
me:  
I befriended you first and taught the faith to you.  
You gave me gages<sup>6</sup> to be guided by my teaching  
And to love me loyally while your life lasts."  
Then kneeling on my knees I renewed my plea for  
grace,  
80 Prayed piteously to her to pray for my sins,  
And advise me how I might find natural faith<sup>7</sup> in  
Christ,  
That I might obey the command of him who made  
me man.  
"Teach me of no treasure, but tell me this one thing,  
How I may save my soul, sacred as you are?"  
85 "When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best.  
I call on *Deus caritas*<sup>8</sup> to declare the truth.  
It's as glorious a love-gift as dear God himself.  
For whoever is true of his tongue, tells nothing  
untrue,  
Does his work with truth, wishes no man ill,  
90 He is a god by the Gospel, on ground and aloft.  
And also like our Lord by Saint Luke's words.<sup>9</sup>  
Clerks who've been taught this text should tell it all  
about,  
For Christians and non-Christians lay claim to it both.  
To keep truth kings and knights are required by  
reason,

95 And to ride out in realms about and beat down  
wrong-doers,  
Take *transgressores*<sup>1</sup> and tie them up tight  
Until Truth has determined their trespass in full.  
For David in his days when he dubbed knights<sup>2</sup>  
Made them swear on their swords to serve Truth  
forever.

100 That is plainly the profession that's appropriate for  
knights,  
And not to fast one Friday in five score winters,  
But to hold with him and with her who ask for truth,  
And never leave them for love nor through a liking  
for presents,  
And whoever passes that point is an apostate to his  
order.

105 For Christ, King of Kings, created ten orders,<sup>3</sup>  
Cherubim and seraphim, seven such and another.  
Gave them might in his majesty—the merrier they  
thought it—  
And over his household he made them archangels,  
Taught them through the Trinity how Truth may be  
known,

110 And to be obedient to his bidding—he bade nothing  
else.  
Lucifer with his legions learned this in Heaven,  
And he was the loveliest of light after our Lord  
Till he broke obedience—his bliss was lost to him  
And he fell from that fellowship in a fiend's likeness  
Into a deep dark hell, to dwell there forever,

115 And more thousands went out with him than any  
one could count,  
Leaping out with Lucifer in loathly shapes,  
Because they believed Lucifer who lied in this way:  
*I shall set my foot in the north and I shall be like the  
most high.*<sup>4</sup>

120 And all that hoped it might be so, no Heaven could  
hold them,  
But they fell out in fiend's likeness fully nine days  
together,  
Till God of his goodness granted that Heaven settle,  
Become stationary and stable, and stand in quiet.  
When these wicked ones went out they fell in  
wondrous wise,  
125 Some in air, some on earth, some deep in hell,  
But Lucifer lies lowest of them all.  
For pride that puffed him up his pain has no end.  
And all that work with wrong will surely make their  
way  
After their death-day to dwell with that wretch.  
But those who wish to work well, as holy words  
130 direct,  
And who end, as I said earlier, in Truth that is the  
best  
May be certain that their souls will ascend to Heaven  
Where Truth is in Trinity, bestowing thrones on all  
who come.  
Therefore I say as I said before, by the sense of  
these texts  
When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best.  
135 Let unlearned men be taught this, for learned men  
know it,  
That Truth is the trustiest treasure on earth."  
"Yet I've no natural knowledge,"<sup>5</sup> said I, "you must  
teach me more clearly  
Through what force faith is formed in my body and  
where."  
"You doting dolt," said she, "dull are your wits:  
140 Too little Latin you learned, lad, in your youth.  
*Alas, I repine for a barren youth was mine.*<sup>6</sup>  
It's a natural knowledge that's nurtured in your heart

To love your Lord more dearly than you love yourself,  
To do no deadly sin though you should die for it.  
This I trust is truth: whoever can teach you better,  
145 Look to it that you let him speak, and learn it after.  
For thus his word witnesses: do your work  
accordingly.  
For Truth tells us that love is the trustiest medicine in  
Heaven.  
No sin may be seen on him by whom that spice is  
used.  
And all the deeds he pleased to do were done with  
150 love.  
And he<sup>7</sup> taught it to Moses as a matchless thing, and  
most like Heaven,  
And also the plant of peace, most precious of  
virtues.  
For Heaven might not hold it,<sup>8</sup> so heavy it seemed,  
Till it had with earth alloyed itself.  
And when it had of this earth taken flesh and blood,  
155 Never was leaf upon linden lighter thereafter,  
And portable and piercing as the point of a needle:  
No armor might obstruct it, nor any high walls.  
Therefore Love is leader of the Lord's people in  
Heaven,  
And an intermediary as the mayor is between  
160 community and king.  
Just so Love is a leader by whom the law's enforced  
Upon man for his misdeeds—he measures the fine.  
And to know this naturally, it's nourished by a power  
That has its head in the heart, and its high source.  
For a natural knowledge in the heart is nourished by  
165 a power  
That's let fall by the Father who formed us all,  
Looked on us with love and let his son die  
Meekly for our misdeeds, to amend us all.

Yet he<sup>9</sup> did not ask harm on those who hurt him so  
badly,  
But with his mouth meekly made a prayer for mercy  
—  
170 For pity for those people who so painfully killed him.  
Here you may see examples in himself alone,  
How he was mighty and meek, and bade mercy be  
granted  
To those who hanged him high and pierced his  
heart.

\* \* \*

205 Love is Life's doctor, and next<sup>1</sup> our Lord himself,  
And also the strait<sup>2</sup> street that goes straight to  
Heaven.  
Therefore I say as I said before, by the sense of  
these texts,  
When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best.  
Now that I've told you what Truth is—there's no  
treasure better—  
I may delay no longer now: our Lord look after you."

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Langland plays on three meanings of the term "Truth": (1) fidelity, integrity—as in modern "troth"; (2) reality, actuality, conformity with what is; (3) God, the ultimate truth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Genesis 19:32.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spirit.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Worship" in Middle English often means religious celebration, but the worship of God is only one instance of showing the appropriate honor and respect to someone or something; the word can therefore be used about objects other than God.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Caesar's (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Render unto Caesar" (Latin); "to Caesar." In the next line the Latin clause means "What are God's unto God." See Matthew 22:15–21.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Langland distinguishes the role of reason, as the distinctive human capacity to reach truth by discursive reasoning, from the functions of a number of other related mental processes and sources of truth, for example, Kind Wit (next line): natural intelligence, common sense.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, prudent management.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For the fall of Adam and Eve, see Genesis 3; for Cain's murder of Abel, see Genesis 4. In the next lines, for Judas's betrayal of Jesus, see Matthew 26:14–16; for his death (line 68), see Matthew 27:3–6.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, pledges (at baptism).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Middle English phrase is "kynde knowynge."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "God [is] love" (Latin): 1 John 4:8.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Not in Luke; but see 1 John 4:16 and see Psalm 81:6. The phrase "a god by the Gospel" is Langland's; what he means by it will be a recurrent theme.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Transgressors: the Latin word appears in Isaiah 53:12 (Vulgate).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Behind the idea that King David created knighthood probably lies his selection of officers for his army (1 Chronicles 12:18) translated into chivalric terms; like other heroes, he was typically portrayed in the Middle Ages as a chivalric figure, just as God's creation of the angels, below, is pictured in terms of a medieval aristocratic household.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, ten orders of heavenly beings: seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, angels, and the nameless order that fell with Lucifer.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Isaiah 14:13–14, which in the Vulgate has "throne" (*solium*) where Langland has "foot" (*pedem*).[Return to](#)

[reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Instinctive or experiential knowledge; Langland's phrase, a recurrent and important one, is "kynde knowynge."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Proverbial.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Truth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, love, which, as the passage goes on, becomes embodied in Christ.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Christ, not the Father as in the sentence before. In such slippery transitions from one subject to another, Langland takes advantage of the greater flexibility of Middle English syntax; and usually, as here, the transition reflects an important connection of ideas, in this case the relationship between God's action and Christ's.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Next to.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, narrow; see Matthew 7:13–14.[Return to reference 2](#)



## From *Passus 5*

### [PIERS PLOWMAN SHOWS THE WAY TO SAINT TRUTH]

Then Hope took hold of a horn of *Deus tu conversus  
vivificabis nos*<sup>3</sup>  
And blew it with *Beati quorum remissae sunt  
iniquitates*,<sup>4</sup>  
So that all the saints sang for sinners at once,  
"Men and animals thou shalt save inasmuch as thou  
hast multiplied thy mercy, O God."<sup>5</sup>  
A thousand men then thronged together,  
510 Cried upward to Christ and to his clean mother  
To have grace to go to Truth—God grant they might!  
But there was no one so wise as to know the way  
thither,  
But they blundered forth like beasts over banks and  
hills  
Till they met a man, many hours later,  
515 Appareled like a pagan<sup>6</sup> in pilgrims' manner.  
He bore a stout staff with a broad strap around it,  
In the way of woodbine wound all about.  
A bowl and a bag he bore by his side.  
A hundred holy water phials were set on his hat,  
520 Souvenirs of Sinai and shells of Galicia,  
And many a Cross on his cloak and keys of Rome,  
And the vernicle in front so folk should know  
By seeing his signs what shrines he'd been to.<sup>7</sup>  
These folk asked him fairly from whence he came.  
525 "From Sinai," he said, "and from the Holy Sepulchre.  
Bethlehem, Babylon, I've been to both;  
In Armenia, in Alexandria,<sup>8</sup> in many other places.

You can tell by the tokens attached to my hat  
That I've walked far and wide in wet and in dry  
530 And sought out good saints for my soul's health."  
"Did you ever see a saint," said they, "that men call  
Truth?  
Could you point out a path to where that person  
lives?"  
"No, so God save me," said the fellow then.  
"I've never known a palmer<sup>o</sup> with knapsack or staff  
535 To ask after him ere now in this place."  
"Peter!"<sup>9</sup> said a plowman, and put forth his head.  
"We're as closely acquainted as a clerk and his  
books.  
Conscience and Kind Wit<sup>1</sup> coached me to his place  
And persuaded me to swear to him I'd serve him  
540 forever,  
Both to sow and set plants so long as I can work.  
I have been his follower all these forty winters,  
Both sowed his seed and overseen his cattle,  
Indoors and outdoors taken heed for his profit,  
Made ditches and dikes, done what he bids.  
545 Sometimes I sow and sometimes I thresh,  
In tailor's craft and tinker's, whatever Truth can  
devise.  
I weave wool and wind it and do what Truth says.  
For though I say it myself, I serve him to his  
satisfaction.  
I get good pay from him, and now and again more.  
550 He's the promptest payer that poor men know.  
He withholds no worker's wages so he's without  
them by evening.  
He's as lowly as a lamb and lovely of speech.  
And if you'd like to learn where that lord dwells,  
I'll direct you on the road right to his palace."  
555

"Yes, friend Piers,"<sup>2</sup> said these pilgrims, and  
proffered him pay.

"No, by the peril of my soul!" said Piers, and swore  
on oath:

"I wouldn't take a farthing's fee for Saint Thomas's  
shrine."<sup>3</sup>

Truth would love me the less a long time after.

560 But you that are anxious to be off, here's how you  
go:

You must go through Meekness, both men and  
women,

Till you come into Consciences<sup>4</sup> that Christ knows  
the truth

That you love our Lord God of all loves the most,  
And next to him your neighbors—in no way harm  
them,

565 Otherwise than you'd have them behave to you.  
And so follow along a brook's bank, Be-Modest-Of-  
Speech,

Until you find a ford, Do-Your-Fathers-Honor;  
*Honor thy father and thy mother, etc.*<sup>5</sup>

Wade in that water and wash yourselves well there  
And you'll leap the lighter all your lifetime.

570 So you shall see Swear-Not-Unless-It-Is-For-Need-  
And-Namely-Never-Take-In-Vain-The-Name-Of-God-  
Amighty.

Then you'll come to a croft,<sup>6</sup> but don't come into it:  
The croft is called Covet-Not-Men's-Cattle-Nor-Their-  
Wives-

And-None-Of-Your-Neighbor's-Serving-Men-So-As-To-  
Harm-Them.

575 See that you break no boughs there unless they  
belong to you.

Two wooden statues stand there, but don't stop for  
them:

They're called Steal-Not and Slay-Not: stay away  
from both;  
Leave them on your left hand and don't look back.  
And hold well your holiday until the high evening.<sup>7</sup>  
Then you shall blench at a barrow,<sup>8</sup> Bear-No-False-  
580 Witness:  
It's fenced in with florins and other fees aplenty.  
See that you pluck no plant there for peril of your  
soul.  
Then you shall see Speak-The-Truth-So-It-Must-Be-  
Done-  
And-Not-In-Any-Other-Way-Not-For-Any-Man's-  
Asking.  
Then you shall come to a castle shining clear as the  
585 sun.  
The moat is made of mercy, all about the manor;  
And all the walls are of wit<sup>o</sup> to hold will out.  
The crenelations<sup>o</sup> are of Christendom to save  
Christiankind,  
Buttressed with Believe-So-Or-You-Won't-Be-Saved;  
And all the houses are roofed, halls and chambers,  
590 Not with lead but with Love-And-Lowness-As-  
Brothers-Of-  
One-Womb.  
The bridge is of Pray-Properly-You-Will-Prosper-The-  
More.  
Every pillar is of penance, of prayers to saints;  
The hooks are of almsdeeds that the gates are  
hanging on.  
The gate-keeper's name is Grace, a good man  
595 indeed;  
His man is called Amend-Yourself, for he knows  
many men.  
Say this sentence to him: 'Truth sees what's true;  
I performed the penance the priest gave me to do

And I'm sorry for my sins and shall be so always  
When I think thereon, though I were a pope.'  
600 Pray Amend-Yourself mildly to ask his master once  
To open wide the wicket-gate that the woman shut  
When Adam and Eve ate unroasted apples.

*Through Eve it was closed to all and through  
the Virgin*

*Mary it was opened again.*<sup>9</sup>

605 For he keeps the latchkey though the king sleep.  
And if Grace grants you to go in in this way  
You shall see in yourself Truth sitting in your heart  
In a chain of charity as though you were a child  
again,<sup>1</sup>  
To suffer your sire's will and say nothing against it."

\* \* \*

630 "By Christ," cried a pickpocket, "I have no kin there."  
"Nor I," said an ape-trainer, "for anything I know."  
"God knows," said a cake-seller, "if I were sure of  
this,  
I wouldn't go a foot further for any friar's preaching."  
"Yes!" said Piers Plowman, and prodded him for his  
good.

635 "Mercy is a maiden there that has dominion over  
them all,  
And she is sib to all sinners, and her son as well,  
And through the help of these two—think nothing  
else—

You might get grace there if you go in time."  
"By Saint Paul!" said a pardoner, "possibly I'm not  
known there;  
640 I'll go fetch my box with my brevets and a bull with  
bishop's letters."

"By Christ!" said a common woman,<sup>2</sup> "I'll keep you  
company.

You shall say I am your sister." I don't know what became of them.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: O God, you will turn and give us life (from the Latin Mass).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Blessed [are they] whose transgressions are forgiven (Latin; Psalm 31.1 [Vulgate]).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Psalm 36:6–7 (Vulgate 35:7–8).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, outlandishly. (Langland's word *paynym* was especially associated with Saracens, that is, Arabs.)[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A pilgrim to Canterbury collected a phial of holy water from St. Thomas's shrine; collecting another every time one passed through Canterbury was a mark of a professional pilgrim. "Sinai": souvenirs from the Convent of St. Katharine on Sinai. "Shells": the emblem of St. James at Compostela, in Galicia. "Many a cross": commemorating trips to the Holy Land. "Keys": the sign of St. Peter's keys, from Rome. "Vernicle": a copy of the image of Christ's face preserved on a cloth, another famous relic from Rome. It was believed to have appeared after Veronica gave her head cloth to Christ, as he was going to execution, to wipe his face on.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Babylon": near Cairo, where there was a church on the site where Mary lived during the Flight into Egypt. "Armenia": presumably to visit Mount Ararat, where the Ark is said to have landed. "Alexandria": the site of the martyrdom of St. Catherine and St. Mark.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, an oath "By St. Peter!"[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Moral sense and natural intelligence (common sense).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Peter, hence the particular appropriateness of his swearing by St. Peter (line 537), a connection that Langland will exploit in a variety of ways.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury was famous for the gold and jewels offered by important pilgrims.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Consciousness, moral awareness, related to but not identical with the moral sense personified in line 539.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Exodus 20:12. Beginning in lines 563–64 with the two “great” commandments (Matthew 22:37–39), Piers’s directions include most of the commandments of Exodus 20.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A small enclosed field, or a small agricultural holding worked by a tenant.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A holiday (that is, a holy day) lasted until sunset (“high evening”); it was not supposed to be used for work, and drinking and games were forbidden, at least until after attendance at church services.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A low hillock or a burial mound.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From a service commemorating the Virgin Mary.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Mark 10:15: “whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.” This childlike quality is here envisaged as total submissiveness. “In a chain of charity”: either Truth is bound by (that is, constrained by) *caritas* (love) or Truth is enthroned, adorned with *caritas* like a chain of office.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Prostitute. “Brevets”: pardoner’s credentials.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *pilgrim*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reason*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *battlements*[Return to reference °](#)

## *Passus 6*

### **[THE PLOWING OF PIER'S HALF-ACRE]**

“This would be a bewildering way unless we had a  
guide  
Who could trace our way foot by foot”: thus these  
folk complained.  
Said Perkin<sup>3</sup> the Plowman, “By Saint Peter of Rome!  
I have a half-acre to plow by the highway;  
If I had plowed this half-acre and afterwards sowed  
5 it,  
I would walk along with you and show you the way  
to go.”  
“That would be a long delay,” said a lady in a veil.  
“What ought we women to work at meanwhile?”  
“Some shall sew sacks to stop the wheat from  
spilling.  
And you lovely ladies, with your long fingers,  
10 See that you have silk and sendal to sew when  
you’ve time  
Chasubles<sup>4</sup> for chaplains for the Church’s honor.  
Wives and widows, spin wool and flax;  
Make cloth, I counsel you, and teach the craft to  
your daughters.  
The needy and the naked, take note how they fare:  
15 Keep them from cold with clothing, for so Truth  
wishes.  
For I shall supply their sustenance unless the soil  
fails  
As long as I live, for the Lord’s love in Heaven.  
And all sorts of folk that feed on farm products,  
Busily abet him who brings forth your food.”  
20



“By Christ!” exclaimed a knight then, “your counsel  
is the best.  
But truly, how to drive a team has never been taught  
me.  
But show me,” said the knight, “and I shall study  
plowing.”  
“By Saint Paul,” said Perkin, “since you proffer help  
so humbly,  
25 I shall sweat and strain and sow for us both,  
And also labor for your love all my lifetime,  
In exchange for your championing Holy Church and  
me  
Against wasters and wicked men who would destroy  
me.  
And go hunt hardily hares and foxes,  
Boars and bucks that break down my hedges,  
30 And have falcons at hand to hunt down the birds  
That come to my croft<sup>o</sup> and crop my wheat.”  
Thoughtfully the knight then spoke these words:  
“By my power, Piers, I pledge you my word  
To uphold this obligation though I have to fight.  
35 As long as I live I shall look after you.”  
“Yes, and yet another point,” said Piers, “I pray you  
further:  
See that you trouble no tenant unless Truth  
approves,  
And though you may amerce<sup>5</sup> him, let Mercy set the  
fine,  
And Meekness be your master no matter what  
40 Meed<sup>o</sup> does.  
And though poor men proffer you presents and gifts,  
Don’t accept them for it’s uncertain that you deserve  
to have them.  
For at some set time you’ll have to restore them  
In a most perilous place called purgatory.

45 And treat no bondman badly—you'll be the better for  
it;  
Though here he is your underling, it could happen in  
Heaven  
That he'll be awarded a worthier place, one with  
more bliss:  
*Friend, go up higher.*<sup>6</sup>  
For in the charnelhouse<sup>7</sup> at church churls are hard to  
distinguish,  
Or a knight from a knave: know this in your heart.  
And see that you're true of your tongue, and as for  
50 tales—hate them  
Unless they have wisdom and wit for your workmen's  
instruction.  
Avoid foul-mouthed fellows and don't be friendly to  
their stories,  
And especially at your repasts shun people like them,  
For they tell the Fiend's fables—be very sure of that."  
"I assent, by Saint James," said the knight then,  
55 "To work by your word while my life lasts."  
"And I shall apparel myself," said Perkin, "in pilgrims'  
fashion  
And walk along the way with you till we find Truth."  
He donned his working-dress, some darned, some  
whole,  
60 His gaiters and his gloves to guard his limbs from  
cold,  
And hung his seed-holder behind his back instead of  
a knapsack:  
"Bring a bushel of bread-wheat for me to put in it,  
For I shall sow it myself and set out afterwards  
On a pilgrimage as palmers do to procure pardon.  
And whoever helps me plow or work in any way  
65 Shall have leave, by our Lord, to glean my land in  
harvest-time,

And make merry with what he gets, no matter who  
 grumbles.  
 And all kinds of craftsmen that can live in truth,  
 I shall provide food for those that faithfully live,  
 Except for Jack the juggler and Jonette from the  
 70 brothel,  
 And Daniel the dice-player and Denot the pimp,  
 And Friar Faker and folk of his order,  
 And Robin the ribald for his rotten speech.  
 Truth told me once and bade me tell it abroad:  
 75 *Deleantur de libro viventium*:<sup>8</sup> I should have no  
 dealings with them,  
 For Holy Church is under orders to ask no tithes<sup>9</sup> of  
 them.  
*For let them not be written with the righteous.*<sup>1</sup>  
 Their good luck has left them, the Lord amend them  
 now."  
 Dame-Work-When-It's-Time-To was Piers's wife's  
 name;  
 His daughter was called Do-Just-So-Or-Your-Dame-  
 Will-Beat-You;  
 His son was named Suffer-Your-Sovereigns-To-Have-  
 80 Their-Will-  
 Condemn-Them-Not-For-If-You-Do-You'll-Pay-A-Dear-  
 Price-  
 Let-God-Have-His-Way-With-All-Things-For-So-His-  
 Word-Teaches.  
 "For now I am old and hoary and have something of  
 my own,  
 To penance and to pilgrimage I'll depart with these  
 others;  
 Therefore I will, before I go away, have my will  
 85 written:  
*'In Dei nomine, amen,*<sup>2</sup> I make this myself.  
 He shall have my soul that has deserved it best,

And defend it from the Fiend—for so I believe—  
Till I come to his accounting, as my Creed teaches  
me—  
90 To have release and remission I trust in his rent  
book.  
The kirk<sup>o</sup> shall have my corpse and keep my bones,  
For of my corn and cattle it craved the tithe:  
I paid it promptly for peril of my soul;  
It is obligated, I hope, to have me in mind  
95 And commemorate me in its prayers among all  
Christians.  
My wife shall have what I won with truth, and  
nothing else,  
And parcel it out among my friends and my dear  
children.  
For though I die today, my debts are paid;  
I took back what I borrowed before I went to bed.  
100 As for the residue and the remnant, by the Rood of  
Lucca,<sup>3</sup>  
I will worship Truth with it all my lifetime,  
And be his pilgrim at the plow for poor men's sake.  
My plowstaff shall be my pikestaff and push at the  
roots  
And help my coulter to cut and cleanse the farrows.”  
105 Now Perkin and the pilgrims have put themselves  
to plowing.  
Many there helped him to plow his half-acre.  
Ditchers and diggers dug up the ridges;  
Perkin was pleased by this and praised them warmly.  
There were other workmen who worked very hard:  
110 Each man in his manner made himself a laborer,  
And some to please Perkin pulled up the weeds.  
At high prime<sup>4</sup> Piers let the plow stand  
To oversee them himself; whoever worked best  
Should be hired afterward, when harvest-time came.

115 Then some sat down and sang over ale  
And helped plow the half-acre with "Ho! trolly-lolly!"<sup>5</sup>  
"Now by the peril of my soul!" said Piers in pure  
wrath,  
"Unless you get up again and begin working now,  
No grain that grows here will gladden you at need,  
And though once off the dole you die, let the Devil  
120 care!"  
Then fakers were afraid and feigned to be blind;  
Some set their legs askew as such loafers can  
And made their moan to Piers, how they might not  
work:  
"We have no limbs to labor with, Lord, we thank  
you;  
But we pray for you, Piers, and for your plow as well,  
125 That God of his grace make your grain multiply,  
And reward you for whatever alms you will give us  
here,  
For we can't strain and sweat, such sickness afflicts  
us."  
"If what you say is so," said Piers, "I'll soon find  
out.  
I know you're ne'er-do-wells, and Truth knows  
130 what's right,  
And I'm his sworn servant and so should warn him  
Which ones they are in this world that do his  
workmen harm.  
You waste what men win with toil and trouble.  
But Truth shall teach you how his team should be  
driven,  
Or you'll eat barley bread and use the brook for  
135 drink;  
Unless you're blind or broken-legged, or bolted<sup>o</sup> with  
iron—  
Those shall eat as well as I do, so God help me,

Till God of his goodness gives them strength to  
arise.  
But you could work as Truth wants you to and earn  
wages and bread  
140 By keeping cows in the field, the corn from the  
cattle,  
Making ditches or dikes or dinging on sheaves,  
Or helping make mortar, or spreading muck afield.  
You live in lies and lechery and in sloth too,  
And it's only for suffrance that vengeance has not  
fallen on you.  
145 But anchorites and hermits that eat only at noon  
And nothing more before the morrow, they shall  
have my alms,  
And buy copes<sup>6</sup> at my cost—those that have cloisters  
and churches.  
But Robert Runabout shall have no rag from me,  
Nor 'Apostles' unless they can preach and have the  
bishop's permission.  
150 They shall have bread and boiled greens and a bit  
extra besides,  
For it's an unreasonable religious life that has no  
regular meals."  
Then Waster waxed angry and wanted to fight;  
To Piers the Plowman he proffered his glove.  
A Breton, a braggart, he bullied Piers too,  
And told him to go piss with his plow, peevish  
155 wretch.  
"Whether you're willing or unwilling, we will have our  
will  
With your flour and your flesh, fetch it when we  
please,  
And make merry with it, no matter what you do."  
Then Piers the Plowman complained to the knight

To keep him safe, as their covenant was, from  
cursed rogues,  
"And from these wolfish wasters that lay waste the  
world,  
For they waste and win nothing, and there will never  
be  
Plenty among the people while my plow stands idle."  
Because he was born a courteous man the knight  
spoke kindly to Waster  
And warned him he would have to behave himself  
165 better:  
"Or you'll pay the penalty at law, I promise, by my  
order!"  
"It's not my way to work," said Waster, "I won't  
begin now!"  
And made light of the law and lighter of the knight,  
And said Piers wasn't worth a pea or his plow either,  
And menaced him and his men if they met again.  
170 "Now by the peril of my soul!" said Piers, "I'll  
punish you all."  
And he whooped after Hunger who heard him at  
once.  
"Avenge me on these vagabonds," said he, "that vex  
the whole world."  
Then Hunger in haste took hold of Waster by the  
belly  
And gripped him so about the guts that his eyes  
175 gushed water.  
He buffeted the Breton about the cheeks  
That he looked like a lantern all his life after.  
He beat them both so that he almost broke their  
guts.  
Had not Piers with a pease loaf [7](#) prayed him to leave  
off

They'd have been dead and buried deep, have no  
doubt about it.  
"Let them live," he said, "and let them feed with  
hogs,  
Or else on beans and bran baked together."  
Fakers for fear fled into barns  
And flogged sheaves with flails from morning till  
evening,  
So that Hunger wouldn't be eager to cast his eye on  
185 them.  
For a potful of peas that Piers had cooked  
A heap of hermits laid hands on spades  
And cut off their copes and made short coats of  
them  
And went like workmen to weed and to mow,  
And dug dirt and dung to drive off Hunger.  
190 Blind and bedridden got better by the thousand;  
Those who sat to beg silver were soon healed,  
For what had been baked for Bayard<sup>8</sup> was boon to  
many hungry,  
And many a beggar for beans obediently labored,  
And every poor man was well pleased to have peas  
195 for his wages,  
And what Piers prayed them to do they did as  
sprightly as sparrowhawks.  
And Piers was proud of this and put them to work,  
And gave them meals and money as they might  
deserve.  
Then Piers had pity and prayed Hunger to take his  
way  
Off to his own home and hold there forever.  
200 "I'm well avenged on vagabonds by virtue of you.  
But I pray you, before you part," said Piers to  
Hunger,



“With beggars and street-beadsmen<sup>9</sup> what’s best to  
be done?  
For well I know that once you’re away, they will work  
badly;  
Misfortune makes them so meek now,  
205 And it’s for lack of food that these folk obey me.  
And they’re my blood brothers, for God bought<sup>o</sup> us  
all.  
Truth taught me once to love them every one  
And help them with everything after their needs.  
Now I’d like to learn, if you know, what line I should  
210 take  
And how I might overmaster them and make them  
work.”  
“Hear now,” said Hunger, “and hold it for wisdom:  
Big bold beggars that can earn their bread,  
With hounds’ bread and horses’ bread hold up their  
hearts,  
And keep their bellies from swelling by stuffing them  
215 with beans—  
And if they begin to grumble, tell them to get to  
work,  
And they’ll have sweeter suppers once they’ve  
deserved them.  
And if you find any fellow-man that fortune has  
harmed  
Through fire or through false men, befriend him if  
you can.  
Comfort such at your own cost, for the love of Christ  
220 in Heaven;  
Love them and relieve them—so the law of Kind<sup>o</sup>  
directs.  
*Bear ye one another’s burdens<sup>1</sup>*  
And all manner of men that you may find  
That are needy or naked and have nothing to spend,

225 With meals or with money make them the better.  
Love them and don't malign them; let God take  
vengeance.  
Though they behave ill, leave it all up to God  
*Vengeance is mine and I will repay.*<sup>2</sup>  
And if you want to gratify God, do as the Gospel  
teaches,  
And get yourself loved by lowly men: so you'll  
unloose his grace."  
*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of  
unrighteousness.*<sup>3</sup>  
"I would not grieve God," said Piers, "for all the  
goods on earth!  
Might I do as you say without sin?" said Piers then.  
230 "Yes, I give you my oath," said Hunger, "or else the  
Bible lies:  
Go to Genesis the giant, engenderer of us all:<sup>4</sup>  
*In sudore*<sup>5</sup> and slaving you shall bring forth your  
food  
And labor for your livelihood, and so our Lord  
commanded.  
And Sapience says the same—I saw it in the Bible.  
235 *Piger propter frigus*<sup>6</sup> would plow no field;  
He shall be a beggar and none abate his hunger.  
Matthew with man's face<sup>7</sup> mouths these words:  
'Entrusted with a talent, *servus nequam*<sup>8</sup> didn't try to  
use it,  
And earned his master's ill-will for evermore after,  
240 And he took away his talent who was too lazy to  
work,  
And gave it to him in haste that had ten already;  
And after he said so that his servants heard it,  
He that has shall have, and help when he needs it,  
And he that nothing has shall nothing have and no  
245 man help him,

And what he trusts he's entitled to I shall take away.  
Kind Wit wants each one to work,  
Either in teaching or tallying or toiling with his  
hands,  
Contemplative life or active life; Christ wants it too.  
The Psalter says in the Psalm of *Beati omnes*,<sup>9</sup>  
250 The fellow that feeds himself with his faithful labor,  
He is blessed by the Book in body and in soul."  
*The labors of thy hands, etc.*<sup>1</sup>  
"Yet I pray you," said Piers, "*pour charité*,"<sup>o</sup> if you  
know  
Any modicum of medicine, teach me it, dear sir.  
For some of my servants and myself as well  
255 For a whole week do no work, we've such aches in  
our stomachs."  
"I'm certain," said Hunger, "what sickness ails you.  
You've munched down too much: that's what makes  
you groan,  
But I assure you," said Hunger, "if you'd preserve  
your health,  
260 You must not drink any day before you've dined on  
something.  
Never eat, I urge you, ere Hunger comes upon you  
And sends you some of his sauce to add savor to the  
food;  
And keep some till suppertime, and don't sit too  
long;  
Arise up ere Appetite has eaten his fill.  
Let not Sir Surfeit sit at your table;  
265 Love him not for he's a lecher whose delight is his  
tongue,  
And for all sorts of seasoned stuff his stomach  
yearns.  
And if you adopt this diet, I dare bet my arms  
That Physic for his food will sell his furred hood

270 And his Calabrian<sup>2</sup> cloak with its clasps of gold,  
And be content, by my troth, to retire from medicine  
And learn to labor on the land lest livelihood fail him.  
There are fewer physicians than frauds—reform  
them, Lord!—  
Their drinks make men die before destiny ordains.”  
275 “By Saint Parnel,”<sup>3</sup> said Piers, “these are profitable  
words.  
This is a lovely lesson; the Lord reward you for it!  
Take your way when you will—may things be well  
with you always!”  
“My oath to God!” said Hunger, “I will not go away  
Till I’ve dined this day and drunk as well.”  
280 “I’ve no penny,” said Piers, “to purchase pullets,  
And I can’t get goose or pork; but I’ve got two green  
cheeses,  
A few curds and cream and a cake of oatmeal,  
A loaf of beans and bran baked for my children.  
And yet I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon  
Nor any hen’s egg, by Christ, to make ham and  
285 eggs,  
But scallions aren’t scarce, nor parsley, and I’ve  
scores of cabbages,  
And also a cow and a calf, and a cart-mare  
To draw dung to the field while the dry weather  
lasts.  
By this livelihood I must live till Lammass<sup>4</sup> time  
When I hope to have harvest in my garden.  
290 Then I can manage a meal that will make you  
happy.”  
All the poor people fetched peasepods;<sup>5</sup>  
Beans and baked apples they brought in their skirts,  
Chives and chervils and ripe cherries aplenty,  
And offered Piers this present to please Hunger with.  
295 Hunger ate this in haste and asked for more.

Then poor folk for fear fed Hunger fast,  
Proffering leeks and peas, thinking to appease him.  
And now harvest drew near and new grain came to  
market.<sup>6</sup>

300 Then poor people were pleased and plied Hunger  
with the best;  
With good ale as Glutton taught they got him to  
sleep.  
Then Waster wouldn't work but wandered about,  
And no beggar would eat bread that had beans in it,  
But the best bread or the next best, or baked from  
pure wheat,

305 Nor drink any half-penny ale<sup>7</sup> in any circumstances,  
But of the best and the brownest that barmaids sell.  
Laborers that have no land to live on but their hands  
Deign not to dine today on last night's cabbage.  
No penny-ale can please them, nor any piece of  
bacon,

310 But it must be fresh flesh or else fried fish,  
And that *chaud* or *plus chaud*<sup>8</sup> so it won't chill their  
bellies.  
Unless he's hired at high wages he will otherwise  
complain;  
That he was born to be a workman he'll blame the  
time.  
Against Cato's counsel he commences to murmur:  
*Remember to bear your burden of poverty patiently.*<sup>9</sup>

315 He grows angry at God and grumbles against  
Reason,  
And then curses the king and all the council after  
Because they legislate laws that punish laboring  
men.<sup>1</sup>  
But while Hunger was their master there would none  
of them complain  
Or strive against the statute,<sup>2</sup> so sternly he looked.

320 But I warn you workmen, earn wages while you may,  
 For Hunger is hurrying hitherward fast.  
 With waters he'll awaken Waster's chastisement;  
 Before five years are fulfilled such famine shall arise.  
 325 Through flood and foul weather fruits shall fail,  
 And so Saturn<sup>3</sup> says and has sent to warn you:  
 When you see the moon amiss and two monks'  
 heads,  
 And a maid have the mastery, and multiply by eight,<sup>4</sup>  
 Then shall Death withdraw and Dearth be justice,  
 330 And Daw the diker<sup>5</sup> die for hunger,  
 Unless God of his goodness grants us a truce.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: A nickname for Piers, or Peter. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Garments worn by priests to celebrate Mass. "Sendal": a thin, rich form of silk. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Punish with a fine the amount of which is at the discretion of the judge. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Luke 14:10. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A house for dead bodies connected to a church graveyard. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Let them be blotted out of the book of the living (Psalm 69:28 [Vulgate 28:29]). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Because the money they make is not legitimate income or increase derived from the earth; therefore, they do not owe the tithes, or 10 percent taxes, due the church. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Psalm 69:28 (Vulgate 28:29). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "In the name of God, amen" (Latin), customary beginning of a will. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An ornate crucifix at Lucca in Italy was a popular object of pilgrimage. "Residue and remnant": land had to be left to one's natural heirs, although up to one-third of personal

property (the “residue and remnant”) could be left to the church for Masses for the testator or other purposes; the other two-thirds had to go to the family, one to the widow and the other to the children. Piers’s arrangements seem to leave the wife considerably more latitude.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: 9:00 a.m., or after a substantial part of the day’s work has been done, because laborers start so early.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Presumably the refrain of a popular song (note similarly musical loafers in the Prologue, lines 224–25).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Capes that signify religious callings.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A cheap and coarse grade of bread, the food of those who cannot get better.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Generic name for a horse; a bread made of beans and bran, the coarsest category of bread, was used to feed horses and hounds, but was eaten by people when need was great.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Paid prayer sayers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Galatians 6:2.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Romans 12:19.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Luke 16:9.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This puzzling epithet has been explained on the grounds that Genesis is the longest book (except for Psalms) in the Bible and that it recounts the creation of humankind.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the sweat [of thy face shalt thou eat bread] (Latin; Genesis 3:19).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The sluggard [will not plow] by reason of the cold (Latin; Proverbs 20:4). “Sapience”: the biblical “Wisdom Books” attributed to Solomon.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Each of the four Evangelists had his traditional pictorial image, derived partly from the faces of the four creatures in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 1:5–12) and partly from those of the four beasts of the Apocalypse (Revelation 4:7): Matthew was

- represented as a winged man; Mark, a lion; Luke, a winged ox; and John, an eagle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The wicked servant (Latin; Luke 19:22—see 17–27). “Talent”: valuable coin.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Blessed [are] all [who] (Latin; Psalm 128:1 [Vulgate 127:1]).[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: Psalm 128:2 [Vulgate 128:2]. Thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: Of gray fur (a special imported squirrel fur).[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Who St. Parnel was is obscure; other manuscripts and editions read “By Saint Paul.”[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: The harvest festival, August 1 (the name derived from Old English *hlaf*, “loaf”), when a loaf made from the first wheat of the season was offered at Mass.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Peas in the pod. These, like most foods in the next lines, are early crops.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Presumably as the new harvest approaches, merchants who have been holding grain for the highest prices release it for sale, because prices are about to tumble.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Weak ale diluted with water; in line 309, laborers are too fussy and will no longer accept even penny ale.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: “Hot” or “very hot” (French).[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: From Cato’s *Distichs*, a collection of pithy phrases (3rd or 4th century C.E.) used to teach Latin to beginning students.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: Like so many governments, late 14th-century England responded to inflation and the bargaining power of the relatively scarce laborers with wage and price freezes, which had their usual lack of effect. One way landowners, desperate to obtain enough laborers, tried to get around the wage laws was by offering food as well as cash.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: That is, anti-inflationary legislation.[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: Planet thought to influence the weather, generally perceived as hostile.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This cryptic prophecy has never been satisfactorily explained; the basic point is that it is apocalyptic.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A laborer who digs dikes and ditches.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *small enclosed field*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bribery*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *church*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *braced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *redeemed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Nature*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for charity*[Return to reference °](#)

## From *Passus 7*

### [PIERS TEARS TRUTH'S PARDON]

Truth heard tell of this and sent word to Piers  
To take his team and till the earth,  
And procured him a pardon *a poena et a culpa*,<sup>6</sup>  
For him and for his heirs for evermore after;  
And bade him hold at home and plow his land,  
5 And any one who helped him plow or sow,  
Or any kind of craft that could help Piers,  
Pardon with Piers Plowman Truth has granted.

\* \* \*

"Piers," said a priest then, "your pardon must I  
read,  
For I'll explain each paragraph to you and put it in  
English."  
And Piers unfolds the pardon at the priest's prayer,  
And I behind them both beheld all the bull.<sup>7</sup>  
110 In two lines it lay, and not a letter more,  
And was worded this way in witness of truth:  
*They that have done good shall go into life  
everlasting;*  
*And they that have done evil into everlasting fire.*<sup>8</sup>  
"Peter!" said the priest then, "I can find no pardon  
115 here—  
Only 'Do well, and have well,' and God will have your  
soul,  
And 'Do evil, and have evil,' and hope nothing else  
But that after your death-day the Devil will have  
your soul."  
And Piers for pure wrath pulled it in two

120 And said, "*Though I walk in the midst of the shadow  
of death*  
*I will fear no evil; for thou art with me.*<sup>9</sup>  
I shall cease my sowing and not work so hard,  
Nor be henceforth so busy about my livelihood.  
My plow shall be of penance and of prayers  
hereafter,  
125 And I'll weep when I should work, though wheat  
bread fails me.  
The prophet<sup>1</sup> ate his portion in penance and sorrow  
As the Psalter says, and so did many others.  
Who loves God loyally, his livelihood comes easy.  
*My tears have been my bread day and night.*<sup>2</sup>  
And unless Luke lies, he finds another lesson for us  
In birds that are not busy about their belly-joy:  
130 '*Ne solliciti sitis,*<sup>3</sup> he says in the Gospel,  
And shows us examples by which to school  
ourselves.  
The fowls in the firmament, who feeds them in  
winter?  
When the frost freezes they forage for food,  
They have no granary to go to, but God feeds them  
135 all."  
"What!" said the priest to Perkin, "Peter, it would  
seem  
You are lettered a little. Who lessoned you in  
books?"  
"Abstinence the abbess taught me my a b c,  
And Conscience came after and counseled me  
better."  
140 "If you were a priest, Piers," said he, "you might  
preach when you pleased  
As a doctor of divinity, with *Dixit insipiens,*<sup>4</sup> as your  
text."

"Unlearned lout!" said Piers, "you know little of the Bible;

Solomon's sayings are seldom your reading."

*Cast out the scornors and contentions with them, lest they increase.*<sup>5</sup>

145 The priest and Perkin opposed each other,  
And through their words I awoke and looked  
everywhere about,

And saw the sun sit due south at that time.

Meatless and moneyless on Malvern Hills,

Musing on my dream, I walked a mile-way.

## Endnotes

- Note 6:

This pardon has remained one of the most controversial elements of the poem. "From punishment and from guilt" is a formula indicating an absolute pardon. Strictly speaking, remissions obtained by pilgrimages (and pardons dispensed by pardoners in return for donations) could remit only the *punishment* for sin; note that even Truth's pardon does both only for some people. Christ alone, through the Atonement, had the power to absolve repentant sinners from the *guilt* and delegated it to St. Peter and to the Church through the apostolic succession to be dispensed in the sacrament of confession and in penance. (This pardon also covers, according to another legal formula in the next line, Piers's heirs, which ordinary pardons could not.) The belief, however, that indulgences (especially those obtained from the pope himself) absolved guilt as well as punishment was widespread.

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A document issued by the pope and sealed with his *bull*, or seal. [Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: From the Athanasian Creed, based on Matthew 25:31–46. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Psalm 23:4 (Vulgate 22:4).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: David, whose Psalm is quoted below.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Psalm 42:3 (Vulgate 41:4).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Take no thought [for your life]" (Latin): Matthew 6:25; also Luke 12:22.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "The fool hath said [in his heart, There is no God]" (Latin): Psalm 14:1 (Vulgate 13:1).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Proverbs 22:10.[Return to reference 5](#)

## ***Passus 18***

### **[THE CRUCIFIXION AND HARROWING OF HELL]**

Wool-chafed<sup>6</sup> and wet-shoed I went forth after  
Like a careless creature unconscious of woe,  
And trudged forth like a tramp, all the time of my  
life,  
Till I grew weary of the world and wished to sleep  
again,  
And lay down till Lent, and slept a long time,  
5 Rested there, snoring roundly, till *Ramis-Palmarum*.<sup>7</sup>  
I dreamed chiefly of children and cheers of "*Gloria,*  
*laus!*"  
And how old folk to an organ sang "*Hosanna!*"  
And of Christ's passion and pain for the people he  
had reached for.  
10 One resembling the Samaritan<sup>8</sup> and somewhat Piers  
the Plowman  
Barefoot on an ass's back bootless came riding  
Without spurs or spear: sprightly was his look,  
As is the nature of a knight that draws near to be  
dubbed,  
To get himself gilt spurs and engraved jousting  
shoes.  
15 Then was Faith watching from a window and cried,  
"*A, fill David!*"  
As does a herald of arms when armed men come to  
joust.  
Old Jews of Jerusalem joyfully sang,  
"*Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the*  
*Lord.*"  
And I asked Faith to reveal what all this affair meant,  
And who was to joust in Jerusalem. "Jesus," he said,

20 "And fetch what the Fiend claims, the fruit of Piers  
 the Plowman."  
 "Is Piers in this place?" said I; and he pierced me  
 with his look:  
 "This Jesus for his gentleness will joust in Piers's  
 arms,  
 In his helmet and in his hauberk, *humana natura*,<sup>9</sup>  
 So that Christ be not disclosed here as *consummatus*  
*Deus*.<sup>1</sup>  
 25 In the plate armor of Piers the Plowman this jouster  
 will ride,  
 For no dint will do him injury as *in deitate Patris*.<sup>2</sup>  
 "Who shall joust with Jesus," said I, "Jews or  
 Scribes?"<sup>3</sup>  
 "No," said Faith, "but the Fiend and False-Doom<sup>o</sup>-To-  
 Die.  
 Death says he will undo and drag down low  
 All that live or look upon land or water.  
 30 Life says that he lies, and lays his life in pledge  
 That for all that Death can do, within three days he'll  
 walk  
 And fetch from the Fiend the fruit of Piers the  
 Plowman,  
 And place it where he pleases, and put Lucifer in  
 bonds,  
 And beat and bring down burning death forever.  
 35 *O death, I will be thy death.*"<sup>4</sup>  
 Then Pilate came with many people, *sedens pro*  
*tribunali*,<sup>5</sup>  
 To see how doughtily Death should do, and judge  
 the rights of both.  
 The Jews and the justice were joined against Jesus,  
 And all the court cried upon him, "*Crucifige!*"<sup>6</sup> loud.  
 Then a plaintiff appeared before Pilate and said,  
 40 "This Jesus made jokes about Jerusalem's temple,

To have it down in one day and in three days after  
Put it up again all new<sup>7</sup>—here he stands who said it  
—

And yet build it every bit as big in all dimensions,  
As long and as broad both, above and below.”  
45 “*Crucifige!*” said a sergeant, “he knows sorcerer’s  
tricks.”

“*Tolle! tolle!*”<sup>8</sup> said another, and took sharp thorns  
And began to make a garland out of green thorn,  
And set it sorely on his head and spoke in hatred,  
50 “*Ave, Rabbi,*” said that wretch, and shot reeds<sup>9</sup> at  
him;

They nailed him with three nails naked on a Cross,  
And with a pole put a potion up to his lips  
And bade him drink to delay his death and lengthen  
his days,  
And said, “If you’re subtle, let’s see you help  
yourself.

55 If you are Christ and a king’s son, come down from  
the Cross!

Then we’ll believe that Life loves you and will not let  
you die.”

“*Consummatum est,*”<sup>1</sup> said Christ and started to  
swoon,

Piteously and pale like a prisoner dying.

The Lord of Life and of Light then laid his eyelids  
together.

60 The day withdrew for dread and darkness covered  
the sun;

The wall wavered and split and the whole world  
quaked.

Dead men for that din came out of deep graves  
And spoke of why that storm lasted so long:

“For a bitter battle,” the dead body said;



65 "Life and Death in this darkness, one destroys the  
other.  
No one will surely know which shall have the victory  
Before Sunday about sunrise"; and sank with that to  
earth.  
Some said that he was God's son that died so fairly:  
*Truly this was the Son of God.*<sup>2</sup>  
And some said he was a sorcerer: "We should see  
first  
70 Whether he's dead or not dead before we dare take  
him down."  
Two thieves were there that suffered death that time  
Upon crosses beside Christ; such was the common  
law.  
A constable came forth and cracked both their legs  
And the arms afterward of each of those thieves.  
But no bastard was so bold as to touch God's body  
75 there;  
Because he was a knight and a king's son, Nature  
decreed that time  
That no knave should have the hardiness to lay hand  
on him.  
But a knight with a sharp spear was sent forth  
there  
Named Longeus<sup>3</sup> as the legend tells, who had long  
since lost his sight;  
80 Before Pilate and the other people in that place he  
waited on his horse.  
For all that he might demur, he was made that time  
To joust with Jesus, that blind Jew Longeus.  
For all who watched there were unwilling, whether  
mounted or afoot,  
To touch him or tamper with him or take him down  
from the Cross,

Except this blind bachelor<sup>o</sup> that bore him through  
the heart.

The blood sprang down the spear and unsparred<sup>4</sup> his  
eyes.

The knight knelt down on his knees and begged  
Jesus for mercy.

"It was against my will, Lord, to wound you so  
sorely."

He sighed and said, "Sorely I repent it.

90

For what I here have done, I ask only your grace.  
Have mercy on me, rightful Jesu!" and thus  
lamenting wept.

Then Faith began fiercely to scorn the false Jews,<sup>5</sup>  
Called them cowards, accursed forever.

95

"For this foul villainy, may vengeance fall on you!  
To make the blind beat the dead, it was a bully's  
thought.

Cursed cowards, no kind of knighthood was it  
To beat a dead body with any bright weapon.  
Yet he's won the victory in the fight for all his vast  
wound,

For your champion jouster, the chief knight of you  
all,

100

Weeping admits himself worsted and at the will of  
Jesus.

For when this darkness is done, Death will be  
vanquished,

And you louts have lost, for Life shall have the  
victory;

And your unfettered freedom has fallen into  
servitude;

And you churls and your children shall achieve no  
prosperity,

105

Nor have lordship over land or have land to till,  
But be all barren and live by usury,

Which is a life that every law of our Lord curses.  
Now your good days are done as Daniel prophesied;  
When Christ came their kingdom's crown should be  
lost:

*When the Holy of Holies comes your anointing  
shall cease.*<sup>6</sup>

110       What for fear of this adventure and of the false  
              Jews

I withdrew in that darkness to *Descendit-ad-*  
*Inferna*,<sup>7</sup>

And there I saw surely *Secundum Scripturas*<sup>8</sup>  
Where out of the west a wench,<sup>9</sup> as I thought,  
Came walking on the way—she looked toward hell.  
Mercy was that maid's name, a meek thing withal,  
115       A most gracious girl, and goodly of speech.  
Her sister as it seemed came softly walking  
Out of the east, opposite, and she looked westward,  
A comely creature and cleanly: Truth was her name.  
Because of the virtue that followed her, she was  
120       afraid of nothing.

When these maidens met, Mercy and Truth,  
Each of them asked the other about this great  
wonder,  
And of the din and of the darkness, and how the day  
lowered,

And what a gleam and a glint glowed before hell.  
"I marvel at this matter, by my faith," said Truth,  
125       "And am coming to discover what this queer affair  
means."

"Do not marvel," said Mercy, "it means only mirth.  
A maiden named Mary, and mother without touching  
By any kind of creature, conceived through speech  
And grace of the Holy Ghost; grew great with child;  
130       With no blemish to her woman's body brought him  
              into this world.

And that my tale is true, I take God to witness,  
Since this baby was born it has been thirty winters,<sup>1</sup>  
Who died and suffered death this day about midday.  
And that is the cause of this eclipse that is closing off  
135 the sun,  
In meaning that man shall be removed from  
darkness  
While this gleam and this glow go to blind Lucifer.  
For patriarchs and prophets have preached of this  
often  
That man shall save man through a maiden's help,  
And what a tree took away a tree shall restore,<sup>2</sup>  
140 And what Death brought down a death shall raise  
up."  
"What you're telling," said Truth, "is just a tale of  
nonsense.  
For Adam and Eve and Abraham and the rest,  
Patriarchs and prophets imprisoned in pain,  
Never believe that yonder light will lift them up,  
145 Or have them out of hell—hold your tongue, Mercy!  
Your talk is mere trifling. I, Truth, know the truth,  
For whatever is once in hell, it comes out never.  
Job the perfect patriarch disproves what you say:  
*Since in hell there is no redemption.*<sup>3</sup>  
Then Mercy most mildly uttered these words:  
150 "From observation," she said, "I suppose they shall  
be saved,  
Because venom destroys venom, and in that I find  
evidence  
That Adam and Eve shall have relief.  
For of all venoms the foulest is the scorpion's:  
No medicine may amend the place where it stings  
155 Till it's dead and placed upon it—the poison is  
destroyed,

The first effect of the venom, through the virtue it  
possesses.  
So shall this death destroy—I dare bet my life—  
All that Death did first through the Devil's tempting.  
And just as the beguiler with guile beguiled man  
160 first,  
So shall grace that began everything make a good  
end  
And beguile the beguiler—and that's a good trick:  
*A trick by which to trick trickery.*<sup>4</sup>  
"Now let's be silent," said Truth. "It seems to me I  
see  
Out of the nip<sup>5</sup> of the north, not far from here,  
Righteousness come running—let's wait right here,  
165 For she knows far more than we—she was here  
before us both."  
"That is so," said Mercy, "and I see here to the  
south  
Where Peace clothed in patience<sup>6</sup> comes sportively  
this way.  
Love has desired her long: I believe surely  
That Love has sent her some letter, what this light  
170 means  
That hangs over hell thus: she will tell us what it  
means."  
When Peace clothed in patience approached near  
them both,  
Righteousness did her reverence for her rich clothing  
And prayed Peace to tell her to what place she was  
going,  
And whom she was going to greet in her gay  
175 garments.  
"My wish is to take my way," said she, "and  
welcome them all  
Whom many a day I might not see for murk of sin.

Adam and Eve and the many others in hell,  
Moses and many more will merrily sing,  
And I shall dance to their song: sister, do the same.  
180 Because Jesus jousted well, joy begins to dawn.  
    *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh  
        in the morning.*<sup>7</sup>  
Love who is my lover sent letters to tell me  
That my sister Mercy and I shall save mankind,  
And that God has forgiven and granted me, Peace,  
    and Mercy  
To make bail for mankind for evermore after.  
185 Look, here's the patent," said Peace: "*In pace in  
        idipsum:*  
And that this deed shall endure, *dormiam et  
        requiescam.*"<sup>8</sup>  
    "What? You're raving," said Righteousness. "You  
        must be really drunk.  
Do you believe that yonder light might unlock hell  
And save man's soul? Sister, don't suppose it.  
190 At the beginning God gave the judgment himself  
That Adam and Eve and all that followed them  
Should die downright and dwell in torment after  
If they touched a tree and ate the tree's fruit.  
Adam afterwards against his forbidding  
195 Fed on that fruit and forsook as it were  
The love of our Lord and his lore too,  
And followed what the Fiend taught and his flesh's  
    will  
Against Reason. I, Righteousness, record this with  
    Truth,  
That their pain should be perpetual and no prayer  
200 should help them,  
Therefore let them chew as they chose, and let us  
    not chide, sisters,

For it's misery without amendment, the morsel they  
ate."

"And I shall prove," said Peace, "that their pain  
must end,

205 And in time trouble must turn into well-being;  
For had they known no woe, they'd not have known  
well-being;

For no one knows what well-being is who was never  
in woe,

Nor what is hot hunger who has never lacked food.

If there were no night, no man, I believe,

Could be really well aware of what day means.

210 Never should a really rich man who lives in rest and  
ease

Know what woe is if it weren't for natural death.

So God, who began everything, of his good will

Became man by a maid for mankind's salvation

And allowed himself to be sold to see the sorrow of  
dying.

215 And that cures all care and is the first cause of rest,

For until we meet *modicum*,<sup>o</sup> I may well avow it,

No man knows, I suppose, what 'enough' means.

Therefore God of his goodness gave the first man

Adam

A place of supreme ease and of perfect joy,

220 And then he suffered him to sin so that he might  
know sorrow,

And thus know what well-being is—to be aware of it  
naturally.

And afterward God offered himself, and took Adam's  
nature,

To see what he had suffered in three separate  
places,

Both in Heaven and on earth, and now he heads for  
hell,

225 To learn what all woe is like who has learned of all  
joy.  
So it shall fare with these folk: their folly and their  
sin  
Shall show them what sickness is—and succor from  
all pain.  
No one knows what war is where peace prevails,  
Nor what is true well-being till 'Woe, alas!' teaches  
him."  
230 Then was there a wight<sup>o</sup> with two broad eyes:  
Book was that beaupere's<sup>9</sup> name, a bold man of  
speech.  
"By God's body," said this Book, "I will bear witness  
That when this baby was born there blazed a star  
So that all the wise men in the world agreed with  
one opinion  
235 That such a baby was born in Bethlehem city  
Who should save man's soul and destroy sin.  
And all the elements," said the Book, "hereof bore  
witness.  
The sky first revealed that he was God who formed  
all things:  
The hosts in Heaven took *stella comata*<sup>1</sup>  
And tended her like a torch to reverence his birth.  
240 The light followed the Lord into the low earth.  
The water witnessed that he was God for he walked  
on it;  
Peter the Apostle perceived his walking  
And as he went on the water knew him well and  
said,  
                  '*Bid me come unto thee on the water.*'<sup>2</sup>  
245 And lo, how the sun locked her light in herself  
When she saw him suffer that made sun and sea.  
The earth for heavy heart because he would suffer



Quaked like a quick<sup>o</sup> thing and the rock cracked all  
to pieces.  
Lo, hell might not hold, but opened when God  
suffered,  
250 And let out Simeon's sons<sup>3</sup> to see him hang on  
Cross.  
And now shall Lucifer believe it, loath though he is,  
For Jesus like a giant with an engine<sup>4</sup> comes yonder  
To break and beat down all that may be against him,  
And to have out of hell every one he pleases.  
255 And I, Book, will be burnt unless Jesus rises to life  
In all the mights of a man and brings his mother joy,  
And comforts all his kin, and takes their cares away,  
And all the joy of the Jews disjoins and disperses;  
And unless they reverence his Rood and his  
resurrection  
260 And believe on a new law be lost body and soul."  
"Let's be silent," said Truth, "I hear and see both  
A spirit speaks to hell and bids the portals be  
opened."  
*Lift up your gates.*<sup>5</sup>  
A voice loud in that light cried to Lucifer,  
"Princes of this place, unpin and unlock,  
For he comes here with crown who is King of Glory."  
265 Then Satan<sup>6</sup> sighed and said to hell,  
"Without our leave such a light fetched Lazarus  
away:<sup>7</sup>  
Care and calamity have come upon us all.  
If this King comes in he will carry off mankind  
And lead it to where Lazarus is, and with small labor  
270 bind me.  
Patriarchs and prophets have long prated of this,<sup>8</sup>  
That such a lord and a light should lead them all  
hence."  
"Listen," said Lucifer, "for this lord is one I know;

Both this lord and this light, it's long ago I knew him.  
No death may do this lord harm, nor any devil's  
275       trickery,  
And his way is where he wishes—but let him beware  
of the perils.  
If he bereaves me of my right he robs me by force.  
For by right and by reason the race that is here  
Body and soul belongs to me, both good and evil.  
For he himself said it who is Sire of Heaven,  
280       If Adam ate the apple, all should die  
And dwell with us devils: the Lord laid down that  
threat.  
And since he who is Truth himself said these words,  
And since I've possessed them seven thousand  
winters,  
I don't believe law will allow him the least of them."  
285       "That is so," said Satan, "but I'm sore afraid  
Because you took them by trickery and trespassed in  
his garden,  
And in the semblance of a serpent sat upon the  
apple tree  
And egged them to eat, Eve by herself,  
And told her a tale with treasonous words;  
290       And so you had them out, and hither at the last."  
"It's an ill-gotten gain where guile is at the root,  
For God will not be beguiled," said Goblin, "nor  
tricked.  
We have no true title to them, for it was by treason  
they were damned."  
"Certainly I fear," said the Fiend,<sup>9</sup> "lest Truth fetch  
295       them out.  
These thirty winters, as I think, he's gone here and  
there and preached.  
I've assailed him with sin, and sometimes asked

Whether he was God or God's son: he gave me short  
answer.  
And thus he's traveled about like a true man these  
two and thirty winters.  
300 And when I saw it was so, while she slept I went  
To warn Pilate's wife what sort of man was Jesus,<sup>1</sup>  
For some hated him and have put him to death.  
I would have lengthened his life, for I believed if he  
died  
That his soul would suffer no sin in his sight.  
305 For the body, while it walked on its bones, was busy  
always  
To save men from sin if they themselves wished.  
And now I see where a soul comes descending  
hitherward  
With glory and with great light; God it is, I'm sure.  
My advice is we all flee," said the Fiend, "fast away  
from here.  
310 For we had better not be at all than abide in his  
sight.  
For your lies, Lucifer, we've lost all our prey.  
Through you we fell first from Heaven so high:  
Because we believed your lies we all leapt out.  
And now for your latest lie we have lost Adam,  
315 And all our lordship, I believe, on land and in hell."  
*Now shall the prince of this world be cast  
out.*<sup>2</sup>  
Again the light bade them unlock, and Lucifer  
answered,  
"Who is that?"<sup>3</sup>  
What lord are you?" said Lucifer. The light at once  
replied,  
"The King of Glory.  
The Lord of might and of main and all manner of  
powers:

*The Lord of Powers.*

Dukes of this dim place, at once undo these gates  
That Christ may come in, the Heaven-King's son."  
320 And with that breath hell broke along with Belial's  
bars;  
For [o](#) any warrior or watchman the gates wide  
opened.  
Patriarchs and prophets, *populus in tenebris*,<sup>[4](#)</sup>  
Sang Saint John's song, *Ecce agnus Dei*.<sup>[5](#)</sup>  
Lucifer could not look, the light so blinded him.  
325 And those that the Lord loved his light caught away,  
And he said to Satan, "Lo, here's my soul in payment  
For all sinful souls, to save those that are worthy.  
Mine they are and of me—I may the better claim  
them.  
Although Reason records, and right of myself,  
330 That if they ate the apple all should die,  
I did not hold out to them hell here forever.  
For the deed that they did, your deceit caused it;  
You got them with guile against all reason.  
For in my palace Paradise, in the person of an adder,  
335 You stole by stealth something I loved.  
Thus like a lizard with a lady's face<sup>[6](#)</sup>  
Falsely you filched from me; the Old Law confirms  
That guilers be beguiled, and that is good logic:  
*A tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye.*<sup>[7](#)</sup>  
340 *Ergo*<sup>[8](#)</sup> soul shall requite soul and sin revert to sin,  
And all that man has done amiss, I, man, will  
amend.  
Member for member was amends in the Old Law,  
And life for life also, and by that law I claim  
Adam and all his issue at my will hereafter.  
And what Death destroyed in them, my death shall  
345 restore  
And both quicken [o](#) and requite what was quenched

through sin.  
And that grace destroy guile is what good faith  
requires.  
So don't believe it, Lucifer, against the law I fetch  
them,  
But by right and by reason here ransom my  
liegemen.

*I have not come to destroy the law but to  
fulfill it.*<sup>9</sup>

350 You fetched mine in my place unmindful of all reason  
Falsely and feloniously; good faith taught me  
To recover them by reason and rely on nothing else.  
So what you got with guile through grace is won  
back.

355 You, Lucifer, in likeness of a loathsome adder  
Got by guile those whom God loved;  
And I, in likeness of a mortal man, who am master  
of Heaven,  
Have graciously requited your guile: let guile go  
against guile!  
And as Adam and all died through a tree  
Adam and all through a tree return to life,<sup>1</sup>  
And guile is beguiled and grief has come to his guile:  
360 *And he is fallen into the ditch which he  
made.*<sup>2</sup>

And now your guile begins to turn against you,  
And my grace to grow ever greater and wider.  
The bitterness that you have brewed, imbibe it  
yourself  
Who are doctor<sup>3</sup> of death, the drink you made.  
365 For I who am Lord of Life, love is my drink  
And for that drink today I died upon earth.  
I struggled so I'm thirsty still for man's soul's sake.  
No drink may moisten me or slake my thirst  
Till vintage time befall in the Vale of Jehoshaphat,<sup>4</sup>

370 When I shall drink really ripe wine, *Resurrectio*  
*mortuorum.*<sup>5</sup>  
And then I shall come as a king crowned with angels  
And have out of hell all men's souls.  
Fiends and fiendkins shall stand before me  
And be at my bidding, where best it pleases me.  
375 But to be merciful to man then, my nature requires  
it.  
For we are brothers of one blood, but not in baptism  
all.  
And all that are both in blood and in baptism my  
whole brothers  
Shall not be damned to the death that endures  
without end.  
*Against thee only have I sinned, etc.*<sup>6</sup>  
It is not the custom on earth to hang a felon  
Oftener than once, even though he were a traitor.  
380 And if the king of the kingdom comes at that time  
When a felon should suffer death or other such  
punishment,  
Law would he give him life if he looks upon him.<sup>7</sup>  
And I who am King of Kings shall come in such a  
time  
Where doom to death damns all wicked,  
385 And if law wills I look on them, it lies in my grace  
Whether they die or do not die because they did evil.  
And if it be any bit paid for, the boldness of their  
sins,  
I may grant mercy through my righteousness and all  
my true words;  
And though Holy Writ wills that I wreak vengeance  
390 on those that wrought evil,  
*No evil unpunished, etc.*<sup>8</sup>  
They shall be cleansed and made clear and cured of  
their sins,

In my prison purgatory till *Parce!*<sup>8</sup> says 'Stop!'  
And my mercy shall be shown to many of my half-  
brothers,  
For blood-kin may see blood-kin both hungry and  
cold,  
But blood-kin may not see blood-kin bleed without  
395 his pity:  
*I heard unspeakable words which it is not  
lawful for a man to utter.*<sup>9</sup>  
But my righteousness and right shall rule all hell  
And mercy rule all mankind before me in Heaven.  
For I'd be an unkind king unless I gave my kin help,  
And particularly at such a time when help was truly  
needed.  
*Enter not into judgment with thy servant.*<sup>1</sup>  
Thus by law," said our Lord, "I will lead from here  
400 Those I looked on with love who believed in my  
coming;  
And for your lie, Lucifer, that you lied to Eve,  
You shall buy it back in bitterness"—and bound him  
with chains.  
Ashtoreth and all the gang hid themselves in  
corners;  
They dared not look at our Lord, the least of them  
405 all,  
But let him lead away what he liked and leave what  
he wished.  
Many hundreds of angels harped and sang,  
*Flesh sins, flesh redeems, flesh reigns as God  
of God.*<sup>2</sup>  
Then Peace piped a note of poetry:  
*As a rule the sun is brighter after the biggest  
clouds; After hostilities love is brighter.*  
"After sharp showers," said Peace, "the sun shines  
brightest;

410 No weather is warmer than after watery clouds;  
Nor any love lovelier, or more loving friends,  
Than after war and woe when Love and peace are  
masters.  
There was never war in this world nor wickedness so  
sharp  
That Love, if he liked, might not make a laughing  
matter.  
And peace through patience puts an end to all  
415 perils."  
"Truce!" said Truth, "you tell the truth, by Jesus!  
Let's kiss in covenant, and each of us clasp other."  
"And let no people," said Peace, "perceive that we  
argued;  
For nothing is impossible to him that is almighty."  
"You speak the truth," said Righteousness, and  
420 reverently kissed her,  
Peace, and Peace her, *per saecula saeculorum*.<sup>3</sup>  
*Mercy and Truth have met together;  
Righteousness and Peace have kissed each  
other.*<sup>4</sup>  
Truth sounded a trumpet then and sang *Te Deum  
Laudamus*,<sup>5</sup>  
And then Love strummed a lute with a loud note:  
*Behold how good and how pleasant, etc.*<sup>6</sup>  
Till the day dawned these damsels caroled.  
When bells rang for the Resurrection, and right then  
425 I awoke  
And called Kit my wife and Calote my daughter:  
"Arise and go reverence God's resurrection,  
And creep to the Cross on knees, and kiss it  
as a jewel,  
For God's blessed body it bore for our good,  
And it frightens the Fiend, for such is its power  
430 That no grisly ghost may glide in its shadow."



## Endnotes

- Note 6: Scratchy wool was worn next to the body as an act of penance.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
Palm Sunday (literally, “branches of palms” in Latin): the background of this part of the poem is the biblical account of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on this day, when the crowds greeted him crying, “Hosanna (line 8) to the son of David (line 15): Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord (line 17a); Hosanna in the highest” (see Matthew 21:9). “*Gloria, laus*” (line 7) are the first words of a Latin anthem, “Glory, praise, and honor,” that was sung by children in medieval religious processions on Palm Sunday.  
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the previous vision, the Dreamer has encountered Abraham, or Faith (mentioned in lines 15, 18, 28, and 92); Moses, or Hope; and the Good Samaritan, or Charity, who was riding toward a “jousting in Jerusalem” and who now appears as an aspect of Christ.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Human nature (Latin), which Christ assumed in order to redeem humanity. “Hauberk”: coat of mail.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The perfect (three-personed) God (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the godhead of the Father (Latin): as God, Christ could not suffer but as man, he could.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: People who made a very strict, literal interpretation of the Old Law and hence rejected teaching of the New.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Hosea 13:14.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sitting as a judge (Latin; see Matthew 27:19).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Crucify him! (Latin; John 19:15).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See John 2:19–21 and Mark 14:58–59.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Away with him, away with him! (Latin; John 19:15).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Arrows, probably small ones intended to hurt rather than to kill. "Ave, Rabbi": "Hail, master" (Latin; Matthew 26:49): these are actually Judas's words when he kissed Christ in order to identify him to the arresting officers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: It is finished (Latin; John 19:30).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Matthew 27:54.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Longeus (usually Longinus) appears in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, which provided Langland with the material for much of his account of Christ's despoiling of hell.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Opened; in the original there is a play on words with "spear."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
In this passage (lines 92–110) and in lines 258–60, Langland participates in a well-established tradition of Christian anti-Judaism; for more on this ideology and its violence, see "Religious Exclusions and Identities" (pp. 285–362). Like other Christian thinkers, Langland sometimes identifies with, and praises, Jewish figures—for instance, in a passage where he holds up Jewish charity as an example to Christians—in addition to condemning them. In the present passage he may intend to distinguish between those who condemned Jesus and the "old Jews of Jerusalem" who welcomed him in the Palm Sunday procession (lines 7–17).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Daniel 9:24–26.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He descended into hell (Latin; from the Apostles' Creed).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: According to the scriptures (Latin).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The word is Langland's and had much the same connotations in his time as it has in ours.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Luke 3:23.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The first tree bore the fruit that Adam and Eve ate, thereby damning humankind; the second tree is the cross on

which Christ was crucified, thereby redeeming humankind.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: See Job 7:9.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From a medieval Latin hymn.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The word is Langland's and the sense obscure; it probably meant "coldness" to him, although an Old English word similar to *nip* meant "gloom."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: What Langland envisioned clothes of patience to look like, aside from their "richness" (line 173), it is impossible to say; to him any abstraction could become a concrete allegory without visual identification.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Psalm 30:5 (Vulgate 29:6).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The "patent" or "deed" is a document conferring authority: this one consists of Latin phrases from Psalm 4:8 (Vulgate 4:9): "In peace in the selfsame"; "I will sleep and find rest."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fine fellow (French). The book's two broad eyes suggest the Old and New Testaments.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hairy star (Latin), that is, comet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Matthew 14:28.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Simeon, who was present at the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple, had been told by the Holy Ghost that "he should not see death" before he had seen "the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26). The Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus echoes the incident in reporting that Simeon's sons were raised from death at the time of Jesus's crucifixion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A device, probably thought of as a gigantic slingshot, although, of course, Christ needs nothing to break down his enemies but his own authority.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first words of Psalm 24:9 (Vulgate 23:9), which reads in the Latin version, "Lift up your gates, O princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:

Langland, following a tradition also reflected in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, pictures hell as populated by a number of devils: Satan; Lucifer (line 273 ff.), who began the war in heaven and tempted Eve; Goblin (line 293); Belial (line 321); and Ashtoreth (line 404). Lucifer the rebel angel naturally became identified with Satan, a word that in the Old Testament had originally meant an evil adversary; many of the other devils are displaced gods of pagan religions.

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: For Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead, see John 11. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: For example, Psalm 68:18 (Vulgate 67:19), as interpreted in Ephesians 4:8–10. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Here and in line 309, "the Fiend" is presumably Lucifer's most articulate critic, Satan, whom Christ names as his tempter in Matthew 4:10. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In Matthew 27:19, Pilate's wife warns Pilate to "have nothing to do with that just man [Jesus]," for she has been troubled by a dream about him. Langland has the Fiend admit to having caused the dream so that Pilate's wife should persuade her husband not to harm Jesus and thus keep him safe on earth and not come to visit hell and despoil it. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John 12:31. "Prince of this world" is a title for the devil. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This and the next two phrases are from Psalm 24:8 (Vulgate 23:9), following immediately on the words quoted in line 262a. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "People in darkness"; the phrase is from Matthew 4:16, citing Isaiah 9:2: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Behold the Lamb of God (Latin; John 1.36). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In medieval art, the devil tempting Eve was sometimes represented as a snake (see the "serpent" of line 288) and

sometimes as a lizard with a female human face and standing upright.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: See Matthew 5:38 citing Exodus 21:24.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Therefore. The Latin conjunction was used in formal debate to introduce the conclusion derived from a number of propositions.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Matthew 5:17.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See 1 Corinthians 15:21–22.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Psalm 7:15 (Vulgate 7:16).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ironic use of the word carries the sense both of “physician” and of “one learned in a discipline.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: On the evidence of Joel 3:2, 12, the site of the Last Judgment was thought to be the Vale of Jehoshaphat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The resurrection of the dead (from the Nicene Creed).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Psalm 51:4 (Vulgate 50:6). The psalm is understood to assign the sole power of judging the sinner to God, because it is only against God that the sinner has acted.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, “Law dictates that the king pardon the felon if the king sees him.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: [He is a just judge who leaves] no evil unpunished [and no good unrewarded]. Not from the Bible but from Pope Innocent III’s tract *Of Contempt for the World* (1195).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
In 2 Corinthians 12:4, St. Paul tells how in a vision he was snatched up to heaven where he heard things that may not be repeated among men. Langland is apparently invoking a similar mystic experience when he puts into Christ’s mouth a promise to spare many of his half-brothers, the unbaptized. The orthodox theology of the time taught that all the unbaptized were irredeemably damned, a proposition Langland refused to accept: in his vision he has heard words to the contrary that

might not be repeated among men, because they would be held heretical.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Psalm 143:2 (Vulgate 142:2).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From a medieval Latin hymn. The source of the two Latin verses immediately below is Alain of Lille, a late 12th-century poet and philosopher.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: For ever and ever (the Latin liturgical formula).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Psalm 85:10 (Vulgate 84:11).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: We praise thee, O Lord (Latin).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Psalm 133:1 (Vulgate 132:1). The verse continues, "it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *sentence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *small quantity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *creature, person*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *living*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in spite of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *revitalize*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Spare!*[Return to reference °](#)

From *The C-Text*

[THE DREAMER MEETS CONSCIENCE AND REASON]<sup>7</sup>

Thus I awoke, as God's my witness, when I lived  
in Cornhill,<sup>8</sup>  
Kit and I in a cottage, clothed like a loller,<sup>9</sup>  
And little beloved, believe you me,  
Among lollers of London and illiterate hermits.  
For I wrote rhymes of those men as Reason taught  
5 me.  
For as I came by Conscience I met with Reason,  
In a hot harvest time when I had my health,  
And limbs to labor with, and loved good living,  
And to do no deed but to drink and sleep.  
My body sound, my mind sane, a certain one  
10 accosted me;  
Roaming in remembrance, thus Reason upbraided  
me:  
"Can you serve," he said, "or sing in a church?  
Or cock hay with my hay-makers, or heap it on the  
cart,  
Mow it or stack what's mown or make binding for  
sheaves?  
Or have a horn and be a hedge-guard and lie  
15 outdoors at night,  
And keep my corn in my field from cattle and  
thieves?  
Or cut cloth or shoe-leather, or keep sheep and  
cattle,  
Mend hedges, or harrow, or herd pigs or geese,  
Or any other kind of craft that the commons needs,

So that you might be of benefit to your bread-providers?"

"Certainly!" I said, "and so God help me,  
I am too weak to work with sickle or with scythe,  
And too long,<sup>1</sup> believe me, for any low stooping,  
Or laboring as a laborer to last any while."

25       "Then have you lands to live by," said Reason, "or  
          relations with money  
To provide you with food? For you seem an idle man,  
A spendthrift who thrives on spending, and throws  
time away.

Or else you get what food men give you going door  
to door,

Or beg like a fraud on Fridays<sup>2</sup> and feastdays in  
churches.

30       And that's a loller's life that earns little praise  
Where Rightfulness rewards men as they really  
deserve.

*He shall reward every man according to his  
works.*<sup>3</sup>

Or are you perhaps lame in your legs or other limbs  
of your body,

Or maimed through some misadventure, so that you  
might be excused?"

35       "When I was young, many years ago,  
My father and my friends provided me with  
schooling,

Till I understood surely what Holy Scripture meant,  
And what is best for the body as the Book tells,  
And most certain for the soul, if so I may continue.  
And, in faith, I never found, since my friends died,  
Life that I liked save in these long clothes.<sup>4</sup>

40       And if I must live by labor and earn my livelihood,  
The labor I should live by is the one I learned best.



*[Abide] in the same calling wherein you were  
called.*<sup>5</sup>

And so I live in London and upland<sup>6</sup> as well.  
The tools that I toil with to sustain myself  
Are Paternoster and my primer, *Placebo* and *Dirige*,<sup>7</sup>  
45 And sometimes my Psalter and my seven Psalms.  
These I say for the souls of such as help me.  
And those who provide my food vouchsafe, I think,  
To welcome me when I come, once a month or so,  
Now with him, now with her, and in this way I beg  
50 Without bag or bottle but my belly alone.

And also, moreover, it seems to me, sir Reason,  
No clerk should be constrained to do lower-class  
work.

For by the law of Leviticus<sup>8</sup> that our Lord ordained  
55 Clerks with tonsured crowns should, by common  
understanding,  
Neither strain nor sweat nor swear at inquests,  
Nor fight in a vanguard and defeat an enemy:

*Do not render evil for evil.*<sup>9</sup>

For they are heirs of Heaven, all that have the  
tonsure,  
And in choir and in churches they are Christ's  
ministers.

*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance. And  
elsewhere, Mercy does not constrain.*<sup>1</sup>

60 It is becoming for clerks to perform Christ's service,  
And untonsured boys be burdened with bodily labor.  
For none should acquire clerk's tonsure unless he  
claims descent  
From franklins<sup>2</sup> and free men and folk properly  
wedded.

Bondmen and bastards and beggars' children—  
65 These belong to labor; and lords' kin should serve  
God and good men as their degree requires,

Some to sing Masses or sit and write,  
Read and receive what Reason ought to spend.  
But since bondmen's boys have been made bishops,  
And bastards' boys have been archdeacons,  
70 And shoemakers and their sons have through silver  
become knights,  
And lords' sons their laborers whose lands are  
mortgaged to them—  
And thus for the right of this realm they ride against  
our enemies  
To the comfort of the commons and to the king's  
honor—  
75 And monks and nuns on whom mendicants must  
depend  
Have had their kin named knights and bought  
knight's-fees,<sup>3</sup>  
And popes and patrons have shunned poor gentle  
blood  
And taken the sons of Simon Magus<sup>4</sup> to keep the  
sanctuary,  
Life-holiness and love have gone a long way hence,  
And will be so till this is all worn out or otherwise  
80 changed.  
Therefore proffer me no reproach, Reason, I pray  
you,  
For in my conscience I conceive what Christ wants  
me to do.  
Prayers of a perfect man and appropriate penance  
Are the labor that our Lord loves most of all.  
85 "*Non de solo*," I said, "*forsooth vivit homo*,  
*Nec in pane et in pabulo*;<sup>5</sup> the Paternoster witnesses  
*Fiat voluntas Dei*<sup>6</sup>—that provides us with everything."  
Said Conscience, "By Christ, I can't see that this  
lies;<sup>o</sup>

But it seems no serious perfectness to be a city-  
 beggar,  
 Unless you're licensed to collect for prior or  
 90 monastery."  
 "That is so," I said, "and so I admit  
 That at times I've lost time and at times misspent it;  
 And yet I hope, like him who has often bargained  
 And always lost and lost, and at the last it happened  
 He bought such a bargain he was the better ever,  
 95 That all his loss looked paltry in the long run,  
 Such a winning was his through what grace decreed.  
*The kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure  
 hidden in a field. The woman who found  
 the piece of silver, etc.*<sup>7</sup>  
 So I hope to have of him that is almighty  
 A gobbet of his grace, and begin a time  
 That all times of my time shall turn into profit."  
 100 "And I counsel you," said Reason, "quickly to begin  
 The life that is laudable and reliable for the soul."  
 "Yes, and continue," said Conscience, and I came  
 to the church.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 7: In the C-text, the last of the three versions of *Piers Plowman*, Langland prefixed to the "Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins" (Passus 5 of the B-text) an apology by the Dreamer, "Long Will," who is at once long (or tall) and long on willing (or, arguably, willful). Although there is no conclusive historical evidence for doing so, readers of *Piers Plowman* have generally regarded this passage as a source of information about the real author, about whom we otherwise know so little.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An area of London associated with vagabonds, seedy clerics, and people at loose ends.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Idler, vagabond. The term was eventually applied to the proto-Protestant followers of John Wycliffe. "Kit": refers to "Kit my wife and Calote [Colette] my daughter" (B-text, 18.426). The Dreamer seems to be someone with clerical training who has received consecration into minor clerical orders (such as that of deacon) but who is not a priest. Lesser clerics could marry, although marriage blocked their further advancement in the Church.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, tall, perhaps a pun on "willfulness." The Dreamer is called "Long Will" in B-text, 15.152.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fast days, because Christ was crucified on a Friday.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Matthew 16:27; see Psalm 62:12 (Vulgate 61:13).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The long dress of a cleric, not limited to actual priests.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See 1 Corinthians 7:20.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the countryside.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "I will please [the Lord]" and "Make straight [my way]" (Latin; Psalms 116:9 [Vulgate 114:9] and 5:8, respectively). *Placebo* and *Dirige* are the first words of hymns based on two of the seven "penitential" Psalms that were part of the regular order of personal prayer. "Paternoster": the Lord's Prayer ("Our father" in Latin). The "primer" was the basic collection of private prayers for laypeople.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Leviticus 21 sets restrictions on members of the priesthood.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See 1 Thessalonians 5:15.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, "mercy is not restricted," source unknown. The first sentence quoted is from Psalm 16:5 (Vulgate 15:5).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Freeman. By this date, the term did not just mean nonserfs but designated landowners who were becoming members of the gentry class yet were not knights. The distinction Langland seems to make in this line between

franklins and freemen may reflect the rising status of certain families of “freedmen,” the original meaning of the word *franklins*.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The estate a knight held from his overlord in return for military service was called his “fee.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Priests who obtained office through bribery or “simony,” a term derived from Simon Magus, a magician who offered the apostles money for their power to perform miracles through the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “Not solely [by bread] doth man live, neither by bread nor by food” (Latin); a slight misquoting of Matthew 4:4, which continues, “but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”: see Deuteronomy 8:3.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “God’s will be done” (Latin). The Lord’s Prayer reads, “Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Matthew 13:44, Luke 15:9–10. Both passages come from parables that compare finding the kingdom of heaven to risking everything you have to get the one thing that matters most.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The four lines that follow this passage connect it to the beginning of the second dream (B-text, 5): “And to the church I set off, to honor God; before the Cross, on my knees, I beat my breast, sighing for my sins, saying my Paternoster, weeping and wailing until I fell asleep.”[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *is pertinent*[Return to reference °](#)

# **SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT**

## **ca. 1375–1400**

Between the *Ancrene Wisse* (see [pp. 206–10](#)) and the later fourteenth century, writers deployed English for many genres, especially saints' lives and romances. The finest Arthurian romance in English survives in only one manuscript, which also contains three religious poems—*Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Purity*—generally believed to be by the same poet. Nothing is known about the author except what can be inferred from the works. The dialect of the poems locates them in a remote corner of the northwest midlands between Cheshire and Staffordshire, and details of Sir Gawain's journey north show that the author was familiar with the geography of that region. But if author and audience were provincials, *Sir Gawain* and the other poems in the manuscript reveal them to have been highly sophisticated and well acquainted both with the international culture of the high Middle Ages and with ancient insular traditions.

*Sir Gawain* belongs to the so-called Alliterative Revival. After the Norman Conquest, alliterative verse doubtless continued to be recited by oral poets. At the beginning, the *Gawain* poet pretends that this romance is an oral poem and asks the audience to "listen" to a story, which he has "heard." Alliterative verse also continued to appear in Early Middle English texts. Layamon's *Brut* (see [p. 140](#)) is the outstanding example. During the late fourteenth century there was a renewed flowering of alliterative poetry, especially in the north

and west of Britain, which includes *Piers Plowman* and a splendid poem known as *The Alliterative Morte Darthur*.

The *Gawain* poet's audience evidently valued the kind of alliterative verse that Chaucer's Parson caricatures as "rum-ram-ruf by letter" (see [p. 571](#), line 43). They would also have understood archaic poetic diction surviving from Old English poetry such as *athel* (noble) and words of Scandinavian origin such as *skete* (quickly) and *skifted* (alternated). They were well acquainted with French Arthurian romances and the latest fashions in clothing, armor, and castle building. In making Sir Gawain, Arthur's sister's son, the preeminent knight of the Round Table, the poet was faithful to an older tradition. The thirteenth-century French romances, which in the next century became the main sources of Sir Thomas Malory, had made Sir Lancelot the best of Arthur's knights and Lancelot's adultery with Queen Guinevere the central event on which the fate of Arthur's kingdom turns. In *Sir Gawain* Lancelot is only one name in a list of Arthur's knights. Arthur is still a youth, and the court is in its springtime. Sir Gawain epitomizes this first blooming of Arthurian chivalry, and the reputation of the court rests upon his shoulders.

Ostensibly, Gawain's head is what is at stake. The main plot belongs to a type that folklorists classify as the "Beheading Game," in which a supernatural challenger offers to let his head be cut off in exchange for a return blow. The earliest written occurrence of this motif is in the Middle Irish tale of *Bricriu's Feast*. The *Gawain* poet could have encountered it in several French romances as well as in oral tradition. But the outcome of the game here does not turn only on the champion's courage as it does in *Bricriu's Feast*. The *Gawain* poet has devised another series of tests for the hero that link the beheading with his truth, the emblem of which is the pentangle—a five-pointed star—displayed on Gawain's coat of arms and shield. The word *truth* in Middle English as in Chaucer's ballade of that name (also called "Balade de bon conseil"; see [p. 574](#)), and in Passus 1 of *Piers Plowman* (see [p. 382](#)), means not only what it still means now—a fact, belief, or idea held to be "true"—but what is conveyed by the old-fashioned variant from the same root: *troth*—that is, faith pledged by one's word and owed to a lord, a spouse, or

anyone who puts someone else under an obligation. In this respect, Sir Gawain is being measured against a moral and Christian ideal of chivalry. Whether or not he succeeds in that contest is a question carefully left unresolved—perhaps as a challenge for the reader.





**Baronial Feasting.** Limbourg Brothers, "January," from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, ca. 1411–16. This wall hanging depicts the Trojan War as if it were invading the protected space of the duke's feast.

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The poet has framed Gawain's adventure with references in the first and last stanzas to what are called the "Brutus books," the foundation stories that trace the origins of Rome and Britain back to the destruction of Troy. See, for example, the headnote on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* ([p. 138](#)). A cyclical sense of history as well as of the cycles of the seasons of the year, the generations of humankind, and of individual lives runs through *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The poem is written in stanzas that contain a group of alliterative lines (the number of lines in a stanza varies). The line is longer and does not contain a fixed number or pattern of stresses like the classical alliterative measure of Old English poetry. Each stanza closes with five short lines rhyming *a b a b a*. The first of these rhyming lines contains just one stress and is called the "bob"; the four three-stress lines that follow are called the "wheel." For details on alliterative verse, see "The Meters of Old and Middle English Poetry" ([pp. 23–24](#)). The opening stanza is printed below in Middle English with an interlinear translation. The stressed alliterating sounds have been italicized.

**S**ithen the **se**ge and the **a**ssaut was **se**sed at Troye,  
After the siege and the assault was ceased at Troy,

The **bor**gh **b**rittened and **b**rent to **b**rondes and  
askes,  
The city destroyed and burned to brands and ashes,

The **t**ulk that the **t**rammes of **t**resoun ther wrought  
The man who the plots of treason there wrought

Was **t**ried for his **t**richerie, the **t**rewest on erthe.  
Was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.

Hit was **E**nnias the **a**thel and his **h**ighe kynde,  
It was Aeneas the noble and his high race,

That sithen de**p**reced **p**rovinces, and **p**atrounes  
bicome  
Who after subjugated provinces, and lords became

**W**elneghe of al the **w**ele in the **w**est iles.  
Wellnigh of all the wealth in the west isles.

Fro **r**iche **R**omulus to **R**ome **r**icchis hym swythe,  
Then noble Romulus to Rome proceeds quickly,

With gret **b**obbaunce that **b**urghe he **b**iges upon  
fyrst  
With great pride that city he builds at first

And **n**evenes hit his aune **n**ome, as hit **n**ow hat;  
And names it his own name, as it now is called;

**T**icius to **T**uskan and **t**eldes bigynnes,  
Ticius (goes) to Tuscany and houses begins,

**L**angaberde in **L**umbardie **l**yftes up homes,  
Longbeard in Lombardy raises up homes,

And **f**er over the **F**rench **f**lod, **F**elix Brutus  
And far over the English Channel, Felix Brutus

On mony **b**onkkes ful **b**rode **B**retayn he settes  
On many banks very broad Britain he sets

**W**yth **w**ynne,  
With joy,



**W**here **w**erre and **w**rake and **w**onder  
Where war and strife and wondrous happenings

Bi sythes has wont therinne,  
On occasions have dwelled therein

And oft **b**othe **b**lysse and **b**lunder  
And often both joy and strife

Ful **s**kete has **s**kyfted synne.  
Very swiftly have alternated since.

# Sir Gawain and the Green Knight<sup>\*</sup>

**FITT<sup>1</sup> i**

Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased,  
with the city a smoke-heap of cinders and ash,  
the traitor who contrived such betrayal there  
was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth;<sup>2</sup>  
Aeneas, it was, with his noble warriors  
5 who went conquering abroad, laying claim to the  
crowns  
of the wealthiest kingdoms in the western world.  
Mighty Romulus<sup>3</sup> quickly careered towards Rome  
and conceived a city in magnificent style  
which from then until now has been known by his  
10 name.  
Ticius constructed townships in Tuscany  
and Langobard<sup>4</sup> did likewise building homes in  
Lombardy.  
And further afield, over the Sea of France,  
Felix Brutus<sup>5</sup> founds Britain on broad banks  
15 most grand.  
And wonder, dread and war  
have lingered in that land  
where loss and love in turn  
have held the upper hand.  
20 After Britain was built by this founding father  
a bold race bred there, battle-happy men  
causing trouble and torment in turbulent times,

and through history more strangeness has happened  
here  
than anywhere else I know of on Earth.  
But most regal of rulers in the royal line  
25 was Arthur, who I heard is honored above all,  
and the inspiring story I intend to spin  
has moved the hearts and minds of many—  
an awesome episode in the legends of Arthur.  
So listen a little while to my tale if you will  
30 and I'll tell it as it's told in the town where it trips  
from  
the tongue;  
and as it has been inked  
in stories bold and strong,  
where loyal letters linked  
35 have lasted loud and long.

It was Christmas at Camelot—King Arthur's court,  
where the great and the good of the land had  
gathered,  
the right noble lords of the ranks of the Round Table  
all roundly carousing and reveling in pleasure.  
40 Time after time, in tournaments of joust,  
they had lunged at each other with leveled lances  
then returned to the castle to carry on their caroling,  
for the feasting lasted a full fortnight and one day,  
with more food and drink than a fellow could dream  
45 of.  
The hubbub of their humor was heavenly to hear:  
pleasant dialogue by day and dancing after dusk,  
so house and hall were lit with happiness  
and lords and ladies were luminous with joy.  
With all the wonder in the world they gathered there  
50 as one:  
the most chivalrous and courteous knights known to  
Christendom;

the most wonderful women to have walked in this  
world;

the handsomest king to be crowned at court.

All these fair folk in their first age, together in  
that hall:

55           most fortunate under heaven,  
              with Arthur, that man of high will;  
              no bolder band could ever  
              be found on field or hill.

60           With New Year so young it still yawned and stretched  
              helpings were doubled on the dais that day.

And as king and company were coming to the hall

the choir in the chapel fell suddenly quiet,

then a chorus erupted from the courtiers and clerks:

65           “Noel,” they cheered, then “Noel, Noel,”

              “New Year Gifts!” the knights cried next  
              as they pressed forwards to offer their presents,  
              teasing with frivolous favors and forfeits,  
              till those ladies who lost couldn’t help but laugh,  
              and the undefeated were far from forlorn.<sup>6</sup>

70           Their merrymaking rolled on in this manner until  
              mealtime,

when, worthily washed, they went to the table,

and were seated in order of honor, as was apt,

with Guinevere in their gathering, gloriously framed

75           at her place on the platform, pricelessly curtained

by silk to each side, and canopied across

with tasteful tapestries of Toulouse and Tharsia,

studded with stones and stunning gems

beyond pocket or purse, beyond what pennies  
              could buy.

80           But not one stone outshone  
              the quartz of the queen’s eyes;  
              with hand on heart, no one  
              could argue otherwise.

85 But Arthur would not eat until all were served.  
He brimmed with ebullience, being almost boyish  
in his love of life, and what he liked the least  
was to sit still watching the seasons slip by.  
His blood was busy and he buzzed with thoughts,  
90 and the matter which played on his mind at that  
moment  
was his pledge to take no portion from his plate  
on such a special day until a story was told:  
some far-fetched yarn or outrageous fable,  
the tallest of tales, yet one ringing with truth,  
like the action-packed epics of men-at-arms.  
95 Or till some chancer had challenged his chosen  
knight,  
dared him, with a lance, to lay life on the line,  
to stare death face-to-face and accept defeat  
should fortune or fate smile more favorably on his  
foe.  
Within Camelot's castle this was the custom,  
100 and at feasts and festivals when the fellowship  
would meet.  
With features proud and fine  
he stood there tall and straight,  
a king at Christmastime  
105 amid great merriment.

And still he stands there just being himself,  
chatting away charmingly, exchanging views.  
Good Sir Gawain is seated by Guinevere,  
and on his other side Agravain the Hard Hand sits,  
110 both nephews of the king and notable knights.  
At the head of the board sat Bishop Baldwin,  
with Ywain, son of Urien, to eat beside him.  
First those sitting on the dais<sup>7</sup> were splendidly  
served,



115 then those stalwarts seated on the benches to the  
sides.

The first course comes in to the fanfare and clamor  
of blasting trumpets hung with trembling banners,  
then pounding double-drums and dinning pipes,  
weird sounds and wails of such warbled wildness  
120 that to hear and feel them made the heart float free.  
Flavorsome delicacies of flesh were fetched in  
and the freshest of foods, so many in fact  
there was scarcely space to present the stews  
or to set the soups in the silver bowls on  
the cloth.

125 Each guest received his share  
of bread or meat or broth;  
a dozen plates per pair—  
plus beer or wine, or both.

130 Now, on the subject of supper I'll say no more  
as it's obvious to everyone that no one went without.  
Because another sound, a new sound, suddenly  
drew near,  
which might signal the king to sample his supper,  
for barely had the horns finished blowing their  
breath

135 and with starters just spooned to the seated guests,  
a fearful form appeared, framed in the door:  
a mountain of a man, immeasurably high,  
a hulk of a human from head to hips,  
so long and thick in his loins and his limbs

140 I should genuinely judge him to be a half giant,  
or a most massive man, the mightiest of mortals.  
But handsome, too, like any horseman worth his  
horse,  
for despite the bulk and brawn of his body  
his stomach and waist were slender and sleek.  
In fact in all features he was finely formed

it seemed.  
145       Amazement seized their minds,  
          no soul had ever seen  
          a knight of such a kind—  
150       entirely emerald green.

And his gear and garments were green as well:  
a tight fitting tunic, tailored to his torso,  
and a cloak to cover him, the cloth fully lined  
with smoothly shorn fur clearly showing, and faced  
155       with all-white ermine, as was the hood,  
worn shawled on his shoulders, shucked from his  
          head.

On his lower limbs his leggings were also green,  
wrapped closely round his calves, and his sparkling  
          spurs  
were green-gold, strapped with stripy silk,  
and were set on his stockings, for this stranger was  
160       shoeless.

In all vestments he revealed himself veritably  
          verdant!  
From his belt hooks and buckle to the baubles and  
          gems  
arrayed so richly around his costume  
and adorning the saddle, stitched onto silk.

All the details of his dress are difficult to describe,  
165       embroidered as it was with butterflies and birds,  
green beads emblazoned on a background of gold.  
All the horse's tack—harness strap, hind strap,  
the eye of the bit, each alloy and enamel  
and the stirrups he stood in were similarly tinted,  
170       and the same with the cantle and the skirts of the  
          saddle,

all glimmering and glinting with the greenest jewels.  
And the horse: every hair was green, from hoof  
          to mane.

175           A steed of pure green stock.  
              Each snort and shudder strained  
              the hand-stitched bridle, but  
              his rider had him reined.

              The fellow in green was in fine fettle.  
180           The hair of his head was as green as his horse,  
              fine flowing locks which fanned across his back,  
              plus a bushy green beard growing down to his  
              breast,  
              which hung with the splendid hair from his head  
              and was lopped in a line at elbow length  
              so half his arms were gownned in green growth,  
185           crimped at the collar, like a king's cape.  
              The mane of his mount was groomed to match,  
              combed and knotted into curlicues  
              then tinselled with gold, tied and twisted  
              green over gold, green over gold.  
190           The fetlocks were finished in the same fashion  
              with bright green ribbon braided with beads,  
              as was the tail—to its tippety-tip!  
              And a long, tied thong lacing it tight  
              where bright and burnished gold bells chimed clearly.  
195           No waking man had witnessed such a warrior  
              or weird warhorse—otherworldly, yet flesh  
              and bone.

              His look was lightning bright  
              said those who glimpsed its glow.  
200           It seemed no man there might  
              survive his violent blow.

              Yet he wore no helmet and no hauberk either,  
              no armored apparel or plate was apparent,  
205           and he swung no sword nor sported any shield,  
              but held in one hand a sprig of holly—  
              of all the evergreens the greenest ever—

and in the other hand held the mother of all axes,  
a cruel piece of kit I kid you not:  
the head was an ell in length at least  
210 and forged in green steel with a gilt finish;  
its broad-edged blade brightly burnished,  
it could shear a man's scalp and shave him to boot.  
The handle which fitted that fiend's great fist  
was inlaid with iron, end to end,  
215 with green pigment picking out impressive designs.  
From stock to neck, where it stopped with a knot,  
a lace was looped the length of the haft,  
trimmed with tassels and tails of string  
fastened firmly in place by forest-green buttons.  
220 And he kicks on, canters through that crowded hall  
towards the top table, not the least bit timid,  
cocksure of himself, sitting high in the saddle.  
"And who," he bellows, without breaking breath,  
"is governor of this gaggle? I'll be glad to know."  
225 It's with him and no one else that I'll hold  
a pact."

He held them with his eyes,  
and looked from right to left,  
not knowing, of those knights,  
230 which person to respect.

The guests looked on. They gaped and they gawked  
and were mute with amazement: what did it mean  
that human and horse could develop this hue,  
should grow to be grass-green or greener still,  
235 like green enamel emboldened by bright gold?  
Some stood and stared then stepped a little closer,  
drawn near to the knight to know his next move;  
they'd seen some sights, but this was something  
special,  
240 a miracle or magic, or so they imagined.

Yet several of the lords were like statues in their  
seats,  
left speechless and rigid, not risking a response.  
The hall fell hushed, as if all who were present  
had slipped into sleep or some trancelike state.

245                   No doubt  
                    not all were stunned and stilled  
                    by dread, but duty bound  
                    to hold their tongues until  
                    their sovereign could respond.

250       Then the king acknowledged this curious occurrence,  
cordially addressed him, keeping his cool.  
"A warm welcome, sir, this winter's night.  
My name is Arthur, I am head of this house.  
Won't you slide from that saddle and stay awhile,  
255       and the business which brings you we shall learn of  
          later."

          "No," said the knight, "by Him in highest heaven,  
I'm not here to idle in your hall this evening.  
But because your acclaim is so loudly chorused,  
and your castle and brotherhood are called the best,  
260       the strongest men to ever mount the saddle,  
          the worthiest knights ever known to the world,  
          both in competition and true combat,  
          and since courtesy, so it's said, is championed here,  
I'm intrigued, and attracted to your door at this time.  
Be assured by this holly stem here in my hand  
265       that I mean no menace. So expect no malice,  
          for if I'd slogged here tonight to slay and slaughter  
          my helmet and hauberk wouldn't be at home  
          and my sword and spear would be here at my side,  
          and more weapons of war, as I'm sure you're aware;  
270       I'm clothed for peace, not kitted out for conflict.  
But if you're half as honorable as I've heard folk say  
you'll gracefully grant me this game which I ask for

by right.”  
The King said, “What you wish,  
275 most notable of knights,  
we will provide you with:  
a fair, unarmoured fight.”

“I’m spoiling for no scrap, I swear. Besides,  
280 the bodies on these benches are just bum-fluffed  
bairns.

If I’d ridden to your castle rigged out for a ruck  
these lightweight men wouldn’t last a minute.  
But it’s Yuletide—a time of youthfulness, yes?  
So at Christmas in this court I lay down a challenge:  
285 if a person here present, within these premises,  
is big or bold or red-blooded enough  
to strike me one stroke and be struck in return,  
I shall give him as a gift this gigantic cleaver  
and the axe shall be his to handle how he likes.  
I’ll kneel, bare my neck and take the first knock.  
290 So who has the gall? The gumption? The guts?  
Who’ll spring from his seat and snatch this weapon?  
I offer the axe—who’ll have it as his own?  
I’ll afford one free hit from which I won’t flinch,  
and promise that twelve months will pass in peace,  
295 then claim  
the duty I deserve  
in one year and one day.  
Does no one have the nerve  
to wager in this way?”  
300

If flustered at first, now totally foxed  
were the household and the lords, both the highborn  
and the low.

Still stirruped, the knight swiveled round in his  
saddle  
looking left and right, his red eyes rolling

305       beneath the bristles of his bushy green brows,  
his beard swishing from side to side.  
When the court kept its counsel he cleared his throat  
and stiffened his spine. Then he spoke his mind:  
"So here is the House of Arthur," he scoffed,  
310       "whose virtues reverberate across vast realms.  
Where's the fortitude and fearlessness you're so  
famous for?  
And the breathtaking bravery and the big-mouth  
bragging?  
The towering reputation of the Round Table,  
skittled and scuppered by a stranger—what a  
scandal!  
You flap and you flinch and I've not raised a finger!"  
315       Then he laughed so loud that their leader saw red.  
Blood flowed to his fine-featured face and he raged  
inside.  
His men were also hurt—  
those words had pricked their pride.  
320       But born so brave at heart  
the king stepped up one stride.  
  
"Your request," he countered, "is quite insane,  
and folly finds the man who flirts with the fool.  
No warrior worth his salt would be worried by your  
325       words,  
so in heaven's good name hand over the axe  
and I'll happily fulfill the favor you ask."  
He strides to him swiftly and seizes his arm;  
the man dismounts in one mighty leap.  
Then Arthur grips the axe, grabs it by its haft  
330       and takes it above him, intending to attack.  
Yet the stranger before him stands up straight,  
highest in the house by at least a head,  
but stands there sternly, stroking his beard,  
drawing down his coat, countenance undaunted,

335 about to be bludgeoned, but no more bothered  
than a guest at the table being given a goblet  
of wine.

By Guinevere, Gawain  
now to his king inclines  
340 and says, "I stake my claim.  
May this melee be mine."

"Should you call me, courteous lord," said Gawain to  
his king,  
"to rise from my seat and stand at your side,  
politely take leave of my place at the table  
345 and quit without causing offence to my queen,  
then I would come to your counsel before this great  
court.

For I find it unfitting, as my fellow knights would,  
when a deed of such daring is dangled before us  
that you take on this trial—tempted as you are—  
350 when brave, bold men are seated on these benches,  
men never matched in the mettle of their minds,  
never beaten or bettered in the field of battle.

I am weakest of your warriors and feeblest of wit;  
loss of my life would be least lamented.

355 Were I not your nephew my life would mean  
nothing;

to be born of your blood is my body's only claim.  
Such a foolish affair is unfitting for a king,  
so; being first to come forward, it should fall to me.  
And if my proposal is improper, let no other person  
360 stand blame."

The knighthood then unites  
and each knight says the same:  
their king can stand aside  
and give Gawain the game.  
365

So the sovereign instructed his knight to stand.



Getting to his feet he moved graciously forward  
and knelt before Arthur, taking hold of the axe.  
Letting go of it, Arthur then held up his hand  
to give young Gawain the blessing of God  
370 and hope he finds firmness in heart and fist.  
"Take care, young cousin, to catch him cleanly,  
use full-blooded force then you needn't fear  
the blow which he threatens to trade in return."  
Gawain, with the weapon, walked towards the  
375 warrior,  
and they stood face-to-face, not one man afraid.  
Then the green knight spoke, growled at Gawain:  
"Before we compete, repeat what we've promised.  
And start by saying your name to me, sir,  
and tell me the truth so I can take it on trust."  
380 "In good faith," said the knight, "Gawain is my name.  
I heave this axe, and whatever happens after,  
in twelvemonth's time I'll be struck in return  
with any weapon you wish, and by you and you  
alone."  
385 The green man speaks again:  
"I swear on all I know,  
I'm glad it's you, Gawain,  
who'll drive the axe-head home."  
390 "Gawain," said the green knight, "by God, I'm glad  
the favor I've called for will fall from your fist.  
You've perfectly repeated the promise we made  
and the terms of the contest are crystal clear.  
Except for one thing: you must solemnly swear  
that you'll seek me yourself; that you'll search me  
395 out  
to the ends of the earth to earn the same blow  
as you'll dole out today in this decorous hall."  
"But where will you be? Where's your abode?  
You're a man of mystery, as God is my maker.

400 Which court do you come from and what are you  
called?

There is knowledge I need, including your name,  
then I shall use all my wit to work out the way,  
and keep to our contract, so cross my heart."

"But enough at New Year. It needs nothing more,"  
405 said the warrior in green to worthy Gawain.

"I could tell you the truth once you've taken the  
blow;

if you smite me smartly I could spell out the facts  
of my house and home and my name, if it helps,  
then you'll pay me a visit and vouch for our pact.  
Or if I keep quiet you might cope all the better,  
410 loafing and lounging here, looking no further. But  
we stall!

Now grasp that gruesome axe  
and show your striking style."  
He answered, "Since you ask,"  
415 and touched the tempered steel.

The green knight took his stance, prepared to be  
struck,

bent forward, revealing a flash of green flesh  
as he heaped his hair to the crown of his head,  
the nape of his neck now naked and ready.

420 Gawain grips the axe and heaves it heavenwards,  
plants his left foot firmly on the floor in front,  
then swings it swiftly towards the bare skin.

The cleanness of the strike cleaved the spinal cord  
and parted the fat and the flesh so far

425 that the bright steel blade took a bite from the floor.  
The handsome head tumbles onto the earth  
and the king's men kick it as it clatters past.

Blood gutters brightly against his green gown,  
yet the man doesn't shudder or stagger or sink  
430 but trudges towards them on those tree-trunk legs

and rummages around, reaches at their feet  
and cops hold of his head and hoists it high,  
and strides to his steed, snatches the bridle,  
435 steps into the stirrup and swings into the saddle  
still gripping his head by a handful of hair.  
Then he settles himself in his seat with the ease  
of a man unmarked, never mind being minus  
his head!

440 He wheeled his bulk about,  
that body which still bled.  
They cowered in the court  
before his speech was said.

445 For that scalp and skull now swung from his fist;  
to the noblest at the table he turned the face  
and it opened its eyelids, stared straight ahead  
and spoke this speech, which you'll hear for  
yourselves:

"Sir Gawain, be wise enough to keep your word  
and faithfully follow me until you find me,  
450 as you vowed in this hall within hearing of these  
horsemen.

You're charged with getting to the Green Chapel,  
to reap what you've sown. You'll rightfully receive  
that what is due to be dealt to you as New Year  
dawns.

455 Men know my name as the Green Chapel knight,  
and even a fool couldn't fail to find me.

So come, or be called a coward forever."  
With a tug of the reins he twisted around  
and, head still in hand, galloped out of the hall,  
so the hooves brought fire from the flame in the  
flint.

460 Which kingdom he came from they hadn't a clue,  
no more than they knew where he made for next.  
And then?

Well, with the green man gone  
they laughed and grinned again.  
And yet such goings-on  
465 were magic to those men.

And although King Arthur was awestruck at heart  
no sign of it showed. Instead he spoke  
to his exquisite queen with courteous words:  
470 "Dear lady, don't be daunted by this deed today,  
it's in keeping that such strangeness should occur at  
Christmas  
between sessions of banter and seasonal song,  
amid the lively pastimes of ladies and lords.  
And at least I'm allowed to eat at last,  
having witnessed such wonder, wouldn't you say?"  
475 Then he glanced at Gawain and spoke gracefully:  
"Now hang up your axe<sup>8</sup>—one hack is enough."  
So it dangled from the drape behind the dais  
so that men who saw it would be mesmerized and  
amazed,  
and give voice, on its evidence, to that stunning  
480 event.  
Then the two of them turned and walked to the  
table,  
the monarch and his knight, and men served the  
meal—  
double dishes apiece, rare delicacies,  
all manner of food—and the music of minstrels.  
And they danced and sang till the sun went down  
485 that day.  
But mind your mood, Gawain,  
lest dread make you delay,  
or lose this lethal game  
you've promised you will play.  
490

# Endnotes

- Note \*: The translation is by Simon Armitage. [Return to reference \\*](#)
- Note 1: “Fitt” is a technical term used by the *Gawain* poet, and other late medieval English alliterative poets, to designate the longer divisions of a poem. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The treacherous knight is Aeneas, who was a traitor to his city, Troy, according to medieval tradition, but Aeneas was actually tried by the Greeks for his refusal to hand his sister Polyxena over to them. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Like Aeneas, the legendary founder of Rome is here given Trojan ancestry. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The reputed founder of Lombardy. Ticius is not otherwise known. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Great-grandson of Aeneas and legendary founder of Britain, not elsewhere given the name *Felix* (Latin, “happy”). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The forfeits that made the ladies who lost laugh were in all likelihood kisses. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A raised platform. Although the Round Table is referred to (line 39), the king and queen, along with the most prominent members of the court, are seated above the rest. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A colloquial expression equivalent to “bury the hatchet,” but here with an ironic literal sense. [Return to reference 8](#)

## ***FITT ii***

This happening was a gift—just as Arthur had asked  
for  
and had yearned to hear of while the year was young.  
And if guests had no subject as they strolled to their  
seats,  
now this serious concern sustained their chatter.  
And Gawain had been glad to begin the game,  
495 but don't be so shocked should the plot turn pear-  
shaped:  
for men might be merry when addled with mead  
but each year, short lived, is unlike the last  
and rarely resolves in the style it arrived.  
So the festival finishes and a new year follows  
500 in eternal sequence, season by season.  
After lavish Christmas come the lean days of Lent  
when the flesh is tested with fish and simple food.  
Then the world's weather wages war on winter:  
cold shrinks earthwards and the clouds climb;  
505 sun-warmed, shimmering rain comes showering  
onto meadows and fields where flowers unfurl;  
woods and grounds wear a wardrobe of green;  
birds burble with life and build busily  
as summer spreads, settling on slopes as  
510 it should.  
Now every hedgerow brims  
with blossom and with bud,  
and lively songbirds sing  
from lovely, leafy woods.  
515  
So summer comes in season with its subtle airs,  
when the west wind sighs among shoots and seeds,  
and those plants which flower and flourish are a  
pleasure

as their leaves let drip their drink of dew  
and they sparkle and glitter when glanced by sunlight.  
520 Then autumn arrives to harden the harvest  
and with it comes a warning to ripen before winter.  
The drying airs arrive, driving up dust  
from the face of the earth to the heights of heaven,  
and wild sky wrestles the sun with its winds,  
525 and the leaves of the lime lie littered on the ground,  
and grass that was green turns withered and gray.  
Then all which had risen over-ripens and rots  
and yesterday on yesterday the year dies away,  
and winter returns, as is the way of the world  
530 through time.

At Michaelmas<sup>9</sup> the moon  
stands like that season's sign,  
a warning to Gawain  
to rouse himself and ride.  
535

Yet he stayed until All Saints' Day<sup>1</sup> by his sovereign's  
side,  
and they feasted in the name of their noble knight  
with the revels and riches of the Round Table.  
The lords of that hall and their loving ladies  
were sad and concerned for the sake of their knight,  
540 but nevertheless they made light of his load.  
Those joyless at his plight made jokes and rejoiced.  
Then sorrowfully, after supper, he spoke with his  
uncle,  
and openly talked of the trip he must take:  
"Now, lord of my life, I must ask for your leave.  
545 You were witness to my wager. I have no wish  
to retell you the terms—they're nothing but a trifle.  
I must set out tomorrow to receive that stroke  
from the knight in green, and let God be my guide."  
Then the cream of Camelot crowded around:  
550 Ywain and Eric and others of that ilk,

Sir Dodinal the Dreaded, the Duke of Clarence,  
 Lancelot, Lionel, Lucan the Good,  
 and Sir Bors and Sir Bedevere—both big names,  
 and powerful men such as Mador de la Port.  
 555 This courtly committee approaches the king  
 to offer up heartfelt advice to our hero.  
 And sounds of sadness and sorrow were heard  
 that one as worthy and well liked as Gawain  
 should suffer that strike but offer no stroke in  
 560 reply.  
 Yet keeping calm the knight  
 just quipped, "Why should I shy  
 away. If fate is kind  
 or cruel, man still must try."  
 565  
 He remained all that day and in the morning he  
 dressed,  
 asked early for his arms and all were produced.  
 First a rug of rare cloth was unrolled on the floor,  
 heaped with gear which glimmered and gleamed,  
 and the stout knight steps onto it and handles the  
 570 steel.  
 He tries on his tunic of extravagant silk,  
 then the neatly cut cloak, closed at the neck,  
 its lining finished with a layer of white fur.  
 Then they settled his feet into steel shoes  
 and clad his calves, clamped them with greaves,  
 575 then hinged and highly polished plates  
 were knotted with gold thread to the knight's knees.  
 Then leg guards were fitted, lagging the flesh,  
 attached with thongs to his thick-set thighs.  
 Then comes the suit of shimmering steel rings  
 580 encasing his body and his costly clothes:  
 well burnished braces to both of his arms,  
 good elbow guards and glinting metal gloves,  
 all the trimmings and trappings of a knight tricked out



585                   to ride:  
                  a metal suit that shone;  
                  gold spurs which gleam with pride;  
                  a keen sword swinging from  
                  the silk belt to his side.

590       Fastened in his armor he seemed fabulous, famous,  
          every link looking golden to the very last loop.  
          Yet for all that metal he still made it to mass,  
          honored the Almighty before the high altar.  
          After which he comes to the king and his consorts  
595       and asks to take leave of the ladies and lords;  
          they escort and kiss him and commended him to  
          Christ.

          Now Gringolet is rigged out and ready to ride  
          with a saddle which flickered with fine gold fringes  
          and was set with new studs for the special occasion.  
600       The bridle was bound with stripes of bright gold,  
          the apparel of the panels was matched in appearance  
          to the color of the saddlebows and cropper and cover,  
          and nails of red gold were arrayed all around,  
          shining splendidly like splintered sunlight.  
          Then he holds up his helmet and hastily kisses it;  
605       it was strongly stapled and its lining was stuffed,  
          and sat high on his head, fastened behind  
          with a colorful cloth to cover his neck  
          embroidered and bejeweled with brilliant gems  
          on the broad silk border, and with birds on the seams  
610       such as painted parrots perched among periwinkles  
          and turtle doves and true lover's knots, tightly  
          entwined  
          as if women had worked at it seven winters  
          at least.

615               The diamond diadem  
                  was greater still. It gleamed  
                  with flawless, flashing gems

both clear and smoked, it seemed.

Then they showed him the shining scarlet shield  
with its pentangle painted in pure gold.<sup>2</sup>  
620 He seized it by its strap and slung it round his neck;  
he looked well in what he wore, and was worthy of it.  
And why the pentangle was appropriate to that prince  
I intend to say, though it will stall our story.  
625 It is a symbol that Solomon once set in place  
and is taken to this day as a token of fidelity,  
for the form of the figure is a five-pointed star  
and each line overlaps and links with the last  
so is ever eternal, and when spoken of in England  
630 is known by the name of the endless knot.  
So it suits this soldier in his spotless armor,  
fully faithful in five ways five times over.  
For Gawain was as good as the purest gold—  
devoid of vices but virtuous, loyal  
and kind,  
635 so bore that badge on both  
his shawl and shield alike.  
A prince who talked the truth:  
known as the noblest knight.



---

640 First he was deemed flawless in his five senses;  
and secondly his five fingers were never at fault;  
and thirdly his faith was founded in the five wounds  
Christ received on the cross, as the creed recalls.  
And fourthly, if that soldier struggled in skirmish  
645 one thought pulled him through above all other  
things:  
the fortitude he found in the five joys  
which Mary had conceived in her son, our Savior.<sup>3</sup>  
For precisely that reason the princely rider  
had the shape of her image inside his shield,  
so by catching her eye his courage would not crack.  
650 The fifth set of five which I heard the knight followed  
included friendship and fraternity with fellow men,  
purity and politeness that impressed at all times,  
and pity, which surpassed all pointedness. Five things  
which meant more to Gawain than to most other  
655 men.  
So these five sets of five were fixed in this knight,  
each linked to the last through the endless line,

a five-pointed form which never failed,  
never stronger to one side or slack at the other,  
but unbroken in its being from beginning to end  
660 however its trail is tracked and traced.  
So the star on the spangling shield he sported  
shone royally, in gold, on a ruby red background,  
the pure pentangle as people have called it  
for years.

665 Then, lance in hand, held high,  
and got up in his gear  
he bids them all good-bye  
one final time, he fears.

670 Spiked with the spurs the steed sped away  
with such force that the fire-stones sparked  
underfoot.  
All sighed at the sight, and with sinking hearts  
they whispered their worries to one another,  
concerned for their comrade. "A pity, by Christ,  
if a lord so noble should lose his life.

675 To find his equal on earth would be far from easy.  
Cleverer to have acted with caution and care,  
deemed him a duke—a title he was due—  
a leader of men, lord of many lands;  
better that than being battered into oblivion,  
680 beheaded by an ogre, through headstrong pride.  
Whoever knew any king to take counsel of a knight  
in the grip of an engrossing Christmas game?"  
Warm tears welled up in their weepy eyes  
as gallant Sir Gawain galloped from court  
685 that day.

He sped from home and hearth  
and went his winding way  
on steep and snaking paths,  
just as the story says.

690

Now through England's realm he rides and rides,  
Sir Gawain, God's servant, on his grim quest,  
passing long dark nights unloved and alone,  
foraging to feed, finding little to call food,  
695 with no friend but his horse through forests and hills  
and only our Lord in heaven to hear him.

He wanders near to the north of Wales  
with the Isles of Anglesey off to the left.  
He keeps to the coast, fording each course,  
700 crossing at Holy Head and coming ashore  
in the wilds of the Wirral, whose wayward people  
both God and good men have quite given up on.<sup>4</sup>  
And he constantly enquires of those he encounters  
if they know, or not, in this neck of the woods,  
of a great green man or a Green Chapel.  
705 No, they say, never. Never in their lives.

They know of neither a chap nor a chapel  
so strange.

He trails through bleak terrain.  
His mood and manner change  
710 at every twist and turn  
towards that chosen church.

In a strange region he scales steep slopes;  
far from his friends he cuts a lonely figure.  
Where he bridges a brook or wades through a  
715 waterway

it's no surprise to find that he faces a foe  
so foul or fierce he is bound to use force.  
So momentous are his travels among the mountains  
to tell just a tenth would be a tall order.  
Here he scraps with serpents and snarling wolves,  
720 here he tangles with wodwos<sup>5</sup> causing trouble in the  
crag,  
or with bulls and bears and the odd wild boar.

Hard on his heels through the highlands come giants.  
Only diligence and faith in the face of death  
will keep him from becoming a corpse or carrion.  
725 And the wars were one thing, but winter was worse:  
clouds shed their cargo of crystallized rain  
which froze as it fell to the frost-glazed earth.  
Nearly slain by sleet he slept in his armor,  
730 bivouacked in the blackness amongst bare rocks  
where meltwater streamed from the snow-capped  
summits  
and high overhead hung chandeliers of ice.  
So in peril and pain Sir Gawain made progress,  
crisscrossing the countryside until Christmas  
Eve. Then  
735 at that time of tiding,  
he prayed to highest heaven.  
Let Mother Mary guide him  
towards some house or haven.

740 That morning he moves on, skirts the mountainside,  
descends a deep forest, densely overgrown,  
with vaulting hills to each half of the valley  
and ancient oaks in huddles of hundreds.  
Hazel and hawthorn are interwoven,  
745 decked and draped in damp, shaggy moss,  
and bedraggled birds on bare, black branches  
pipe pitifully into the piercing cold.  
Under cover of the canopy he girded Gringolet  
through mud and marshland, a man all alone,  
750 concerned and afraid in case he should fail  
in the worship of our Deity, who, on that date  
was born the Virgin's son to save our souls.  
He prayed with heavy heart. "Father, hear me,  
and Lady Mary, our mother most mild,  
755 let me happen on some house where mass might be  
heard,

and matins in the morning; meekly I ask,  
and here I utter my pater, ave  
and creed."

760 He rides the path and prays,  
dismayed by his misdeeds,  
and signs Christ's cross and says,  
"Be near me in my need."

765 No sooner had he signed himself three times  
than he became aware, in those woods, of high walls  
in a moat, on a mound, bordered by the boughs  
of thick-trunked timber which trimmed the water.  
The most commanding castle a knight ever kept,  
positioned in a site of sweeping parkland  
with a palisade of pikes pitched in the earth  
in the midst of tall trees for two miles or more.  
770 He stopped and stared at one side of that stronghold  
as it sparkled and shone within shimmering oaks,  
and with helmet in hand he offered up thanks  
to Jesus and Saint Julian,<sup>6</sup> both gentle and good,  
who had courteously heard him and heeded his cry.  
775 "A lodging at last. So allow it, my Lord."  
Then he girded Gringolet with his gilded spurs,  
and purely by chance chose the principal approach  
to the building, which brought him to the end of the  
bridge

780 with haste.  
The drawbridge stood withdrawn,  
the front gates were shut fast.  
Such well-constructed walls  
would blunt the storm wind's blast.

785 In the saddle of his steed he halts on the slope  
of the delving moat with its double ditch.  
Out of water of wondrous depth, the walls  
then loomed overhead to a huge height,

course after course of crafted stone,  
then battlements embellished in the boldest style  
790 and turrets arranged around the ramparts  
with lockable loopholes set into the lookouts.  
The knight had not seen a more stunning structure.  
Further in, his eye was drawn to a hall  
attended, architecturally, by many tall towers  
795 with a series of spires spiking the air  
all crowned by carvings exquisitely cut.  
Uncountable chimneys the color of chalk  
sprutted from the roof and sparkled in the sun.  
So perfect was that vision of painted pinnacles  
800 clustered within the castle's enclosure  
it appeared that the place was cut from paper.<sup>7</sup>  
Then a notion occurred to that noble knight:  
to seek a visit, get invited inside,  
to be hosted and housed, and all the holy days  
805 remain.

Responding to his call  
a pleasant porter came,  
a watchman on the wall,  
who welcomed Sir Gawain.

810 "Good morning," said Gawain, "will you go with a  
message  
to the lord of this house to let me have lodging?"  
"By Saint Peter," said the porter, "it'll be my pleasure,  
and I'll warrant you'll be welcome for as long as you  
wish."  
Then he went on his way, but came back at once  
815 with a group who had gathered to greet the stranger;  
the drawbridge came down and they crossed the  
ditch  
and knelt in the frost in front of the knight  
to welcome this man in a way deemed worthy.

820



Then they yielded to their guest, yanked open the  
gate,  
and bidding them to rise he rode across the bridge.  
He was assisted from the saddle by several men  
and the strongest amongst them stabled his steed.  
Then knights, and the squires of knights, drew near,  
to escort him, with courtesy, into the castle.  
825 As he took off his helmet, many hasty hands  
stretched to receive it and to serve this noble knight,  
and his sword and his shield were taken aside.  
Then he made himself known to nobles and knights  
and proud fellows pressed forwards to confer their  
830 respects.  
Still heavy with armor he was led to the hall  
where a fire burned bright with the fiercest flames.  
Then the master of the manor emerged from his  
chamber,  
to greet him in the hall with all due honor,  
saying, "Behave in my house as your heart pleases.  
835 To whatever you want you are welcome, do what  
you will."  
"My thanks," Gawain exclaimed,  
"May Christ reward you well."  
Then firmly, like good friends,  
840 arm into arm they fell.

Gawain gazed at the lord who greeted him so  
gracefully,  
the great one who governed that grand estate,  
powerful and large, in the prime of his life,  
with a bushy beard as red as a beaver's,  
845 steady in his stance, solid of build,  
with a fiery face and fine conversation:  
and it suited him well, so it seemed to Gawain,  
to keep such a castle and captain his knights.  
Escorted to his quarters the lord quickly orders  
850

that a servant be assigned to assist Gawain,  
and many were willing to wait on his word.  
They brought him to a bedroom, beautifully furnished  
with fine silken fabrics finished in gold  
and curious coverlets lavishly quilted  
855 in bright ermine and embroidered to each border.  
Curtains ran on cords through red-gold rings,  
tapestries from Toulouse and Turkistan  
were fixed against walls and fitted underfoot.  
With humorous banter Gawain was helped out  
860 of his chain-mail coat and costly clothes,  
then they rushed to bring him an array of robes  
of the choicest cloth. He chose, and changed,  
and as soon as he stood in that stunning gown  
with its flowing skirts which suited his shape  
865 it almost appeared to the persons present  
that spring, with its spectrum of colors, had sprung;  
so alive and lean were that young man's limbs  
a nobler creature Christ had never created, they  
declared.

870                   This knight,  
                  whose country was unclear,  
                  now seemed to them by sight  
                  a prince without a peer  
                  in fields where fierce men fight.

875 In front of a flaming fireside a chair  
was pulled into place for Gawain, and padded  
with covers and quilts all cleverly stitched,  
then a cape was cast across the knight  
of rich brown cloth with embroidered borders,  
finished inside with the finest furs,  
880 ermine, to be exact, and a hood which echoed it.  
Resplendently dressed he settled in his seat;  
as his limbs thawed, so his thoughts lightened.  
Soon a table was set on sturdy trestles

885 covered entirely with a clean white cloth  
and cruets of salt and silver spoons.  
In a while he washed and went to his meal.  
Staff came quickly and served him in style  
with several soups all seasoned to taste,  
890 double helpings as was fitting, and a feast of fish,  
some baked in bread, some browned over flames,  
some boiled or steamed, some stewed in spices  
and subtle sauces which the knight savored.  
Four or five times he called it a feast,  
895 and the courteous company happily cheered him  
along:  
"On penance plates you dine<sup>8</sup>—  
there's better board to come."  
The warming, heady wine  
900 then freed his mind for fun.  
  
Now through tactful talk and tentative enquiry  
polite questions are put to this prince;  
he responds respectfully, and speaks of his journey  
from the Court of Arthur, King of Camelot,  
the royal ruler of the Round Table,  
905 and he says they now sit with Gawain himself,  
who has come here at Christmastime quite by chance.  
Once the lord has gathered that his guest is Gawain  
he likes it so well that he laughs out loud.  
All the men of that manor were of the same mind,  
910 being happy to appear promptly in his presence,  
this person famed for prowess and purity,  
whose noble skills were sung to the skies,  
whose life was the stuff of legend and lore.  
Then knight spoke softly to knight, saying  
915 "Watch now, we'll witness his graceful ways,  
hear the faultless phrasing of flawless speech;  
if we listen we will learn the merits of language  
since we have in our hall a man of high honor.

920 Ours is a graceful and giving God  
to grant that we welcome Gawain as our guest  
as we sing of His birth who was born to save us.

                    We few  
                    shall learn a lesson here  
                    in tact and manners true,  
925                   and hopefully we'll hear  
                    love's tender language, too."

Once dinner was done Gawain drew to his feet  
and darkness neared as day became dusk.  
Chaplains went off to the castle's chapels  
930 to sound the bells hard, to signal the hour  
of evensong, summoning each and every soul.  
The lord goes alone, then his lady arrives,  
concealing herself in a private pew.  
Gawain attends, too; tugged by his sleeve  
935 he is steered to a seat, led by the lord  
who greets Gawain by name as his guest.  
No man in the world is more welcome, are his words.  
For that he is thanked. And they hug there and then,  
and sit as a pair through the service in prayer.  
940 Then she who desired to see this stranger  
came from her closet with her sisterly crew.  
She was fairest amongst them—her face, her flesh,  
her complexion, her quality, her bearing, her body,  
more glorious than Guinevere, or so Gawain thought,  
945 and in the chancel of the church they exchanged  
courtesies.  
She was hand in hand with a lady to her left,  
someone altered by age, an ancient dame,  
well respected, it seemed, by the servants at her side.  
Those ladies were not the least bit alike:  
950 one woman was young, one withered by years.  
The body of the beauty seemed to bloom with blood,  
the cheeks of the crone were wattled and slack.

One was clothed in a kerchief clustered with pearls  
which shone like snow—snow on the slopes  
955 of her upper breast and bright bare throat.  
The other was noosed and knotted at the neck,  
her chin enveloped in chalk-white veils,  
her forehead fully enfolded in silk  
960 with detailed designs at the edges and hems;  
nothing bare, except for the black of her brows  
and the eyes and nose and naked lips  
which were chapped and bleared and a sorrowful  
sight.

A grand old mother, a matriarch she might  
be hailed.

965 Her trunk was square and squat,  
her buttocks bulged and swelled.  
Most men would sooner squint  
at her whose hand she held.

970 Then Gawain glanced at the gracious-looking woman,  
and by leave of the lord he approached those ladies  
saluting the elder with a long, low bow,  
holding the other for a moment in his arms,  
kissing her respectfully and speaking with courtesy.  
They request his acquaintance, and quickly he offers  
975 to serve them unswervingly should they say the word.  
They take him between them and talk as they walk  
to a hearth full of heat, and hurriedly ask  
for specially spiced cakes, which are speedily fetched,  
and wine filled each goblet again and again.  
980 Frequently the lord would leap to his feet  
insisting that mirth and merriment be made:  
hauling off his hood he hoisted it on a spear—  
a prize, he promised, to the person providing  
most comfort and cheer at Christmastime.  
985 “And my fellows and friends shall help in my fight  
to see that it hangs from no head but my own.”

So the laughter of that lord lights up the room,  
and Gawain and the gathering are gladdened by  
games

till late.

990

So late, his lordship said,  
that lamps should burn with light.  
Then, blissful, bound for bed,  
Sir Gawain waved good night.

995

So the morning dawns when man remembers  
the day our Redeemer was born to die,  
and every house on earth is joyful for Lord Jesus.  
Their day was no different, being a diary of delights:  
banquets and buffets were beautifully cooked  
and dutifully served to diners at the dais.

1000

The ancient elder sat highest at the table  
with the lord, I believe, in the chair to her left;  
the sweeter one and Gawain took seats in the center  
and were first at the feast to dine; then food

1005

was carried around as custom decrees  
and served to each man as his status deserved.  
There was feasting, there was fun, and such feelings  
of joy

as could not be conveyed by quick description,  
yet to tell it in detail would take too much time.

1010

But I'm aware that Gawain and the beautiful woman  
found such comfort and closeness in each other's  
company

through warm exchanges of whispered words  
and refined conversation free from foulness  
that their pleasure surpassed all princely sports

by far.

1015

Beneath the din of drums  
men followed their affairs,  
and trumpets thrilled and thrummed  
as those two tended theirs.

1020 They drank and danced all day and the next  
and danced and drank the day after that,  
then Saint John's Day<sup>9</sup> passed with a gentler joy  
as the Christmas feasting came to a close.  
Guests were to go in the grayness of dawn,  
1025 so they laughed and dined as the dusk darkened,  
swaying and swirling to music and song.  
Then at last, in the lateness, they upped and left  
toward distant parts along different paths.  
Gawain offered his good-byes, but was ushered by his  
host  
to his host's own chamber and the heat of its  
1030 chimney,  
waylaid by the lord so the lord might thank him  
profoundly and profusely for the favor he had shown  
in honoring his house at that hallowed season  
and lighting every corner of the castle with his  
character.  
1035 "For as long as I live my life shall be better  
that Gawain was my guest at God's own feast."  
"By God," said Gawain, "but the gratitude goes to you.  
May the High King of Heaven repay your honor.  
Your requests are now this knight's commands.  
I am bound by your bidding, no boon is too high  
1040 to say."  
At length his lordship tried  
to get his guest to stay.  
But proud Gawain replied  
he must now make his way.  
1045  
Then the lord of the castle inquired courteously  
of what desperate deed in the depth of winter  
should coax him from Camelot, so quickly and alone,  
before Christmas was over in his king's court.  
1050 "What you ask," said the knight, "you shall now know.

A most pressing matter prized me from that place:  
 I myself am summoned to seek out a site  
 and I have not the faintest idea where to find it.  
 But find it I must by the first of the year, and not fail  
 for all the acres in England, so the Lord help me.  
 1055 Consequently this inquiry I come to ask of you:  
 that you tell me, in truth, if you have heard the tale  
 of a green chapel and the ground where it stands,  
 or the guardian of those grounds who is colored  
 green.  
 For I am bound by a bond agreed by us both  
 1060 to link up with him there, should I live that long.  
 As dawn on New Year's Day draws near,  
 if God sees fit, I shall face that freak  
 more happily than I would the most wondrous wealth!  
 With your blessing, therefore, I must follow my feet.  
 1065 In three short days my destiny is due,  
 and I would rather drop dead than default from duty."  
 Then laughing the lord of the house said, "Stay  
 longer.  
 I'll direct you to your rendezvous when the time is  
 right,  
 you'll get to the green chapel, so give up your  
 1070 grieving.  
 You can bask in your bed, bide your time,  
 save your fond farewells till the first of the year  
 and still meet him by midmorning to do as you might.  
 So stay.  
 A guide will get you there  
 1075 at dawn on New Year's Day.  
 The place you need is near,  
 two miles at most away."  
 Then Gawain was giddy with gladness, and declared,  
 1080 "For this more than anything I thank you thoroughly,  
 and shall work to do well at whatever you wish,



until that time, attending every task."

The lord squeezed Gawain's arm and seated him at  
his side,

and called for the ladies to keep them company.

1085 There was pleasure aplenty in their private talk,  
the lord delighting in such lively language,  
like man who might well be losing his mind.

Then speaking to Gawain, he suddenly shouted:

"You have sworn to serve me, whatever I instruct.

Will you hold to that oath right here and now?"

1090 "You may trust my tongue," said Gawain, in truth,  
"for within these walls I am servant to your will."

The lord said warmly, "You were weary and worn,  
hollow with hunger, harrowed by tiredness,  
yet joined in my reveling right royally every night.

1095 You relax as you like, lie in your bed  
until mass tomorrow, then go to your meal  
where my wife will be waiting; she will sit at your side  
to accompany and comfort you in my absence from  
court.

So lounge:

1100 at dawn I'll rise and ride  
to hunt with horse and hound."  
The gracious knight agreed  
and, bending low, he bowed.

1105 "Furthermore," said the master, "let's make a pact.  
Here's a wager: what I win in the woods will be yours,  
and what you gain while I'm gone you will give to me.

Young sir, let's swap, and strike a bond,  
let a bargain be a bargain, for better or worse."

1110 "By God," said Gawain, "I agree to the terms,  
and I find it pleasing that you favor such fun."

"Let drink be served and we'll seal the deal,"  
the lord cried loudly, and everyone laughed.  
So they reveled and caroused uproariously,

1115 those lords and ladies, for as long as they liked;  
then with immaculate exchanges of manners and  
remarks  
they slowed and they stood and they spoke softly.  
And with parting kisses the party dispersed,  
footmen going forward with flaring torches,  
1120 and everybody was brought to their bed at long last,  
to dream.  
Before they part the pair  
repeat their pact again.  
That lord was well aware  
of how to host a game.  
1125

## Endnotes

- Note 9: September 29. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: November 1. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A five-pointed star, formed by five lines drawn without lifting the pencil from the paper; as Solomon's sign (line 625), a mystical significance was attributed to it (see. p. 428). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Assumption. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Gawain travels from Camelot north to the northern coast of Wales, opposite the islands of Anglesey, where he turns east across the Dee to the forest of Wirral in Cheshire. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wild men of the woods. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Patron saint of hospitality. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Paper castles were a common table decoration at feasts. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Penance" because, although sumptuous, the meal consists of fish dishes appropriate to a fasting day. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: December 27. [Return to reference 9](#)

### ***FITT iii***

Well before sunrise the servants were stirring;  
the guests who were going had called for their  
grooms,  
and they scurried to the stables to strap on the  
saddles,  
trussing and tying all the trammel and tack.  
The high-ranking nobles got ready to ride,  
1130 jumped stylishly to their saddles and seized the reins,  
then cantered away on their chosen courses.  
The lord of that land was by no means last  
to be rigged out for riding with the rest of his men.  
After mass he wolfed down a meal, then made  
1135 for the hills in a hurry with his hunting horn.  
So as morning was lifting its lamp to the land  
his lordship and his huntsmen were high on  
horseback,  
and the canny kennel men had coupled the hounds  
and opened the cages and called them out.  
1140 On the bugles they blew three long, bare notes  
to a din of baying and barking, and any dogs  
which wandered at will were whipped back into line  
by a hundred hunters, or so I heard tell,  
at least.  
1145 The handlers hold their hounds,  
the huntsmen's hounds run free.  
Each bugle blast rebounds  
between the trunks of trees.

1150 As the cry went up the wild creatures quaked.  
The deer in the dale, quivering with dread  
hurtled to high ground, but were headed off  
by the ring of beaters who bellowed boisterously.  
The stags of the herd with their high-branched heads

1155 and the broad-horned bucks were allowed to pass by,  
for the lord of the land had laid down a law  
that man should not maim the male in close season.  
But the hinds were halted with hollers and whoops  
and the din drove the does to sprint for the dells.  
1160 Then the eye can see that the air is all arrows:  
all across the forest they flashed and flickered,  
biting through hides with their broad heads.  
What! They bleat as they bleed and they die on the  
banks,  
and always the hounds are hard on their heels,  
and the hunters on horseback come hammering  
1165 behind  
with stone-splitting cries, as if cliffs had collapsed.  
And those animals which escaped the aim of the  
archers  
were steered from the slopes down to rivers and  
streams  
and set upon and seized at the stations below.  
So perfect and practiced were the men at their posts  
1170 and so great were the greyhounds which grappled  
with the deer  
that prey was pounced on and dispatched with speed  
and force.  
The lord's heart leaps with life.  
Now on, now off his horse  
1175 all day he hacks and drives.  
And dusk comes in due course.

So through a lime-leaf border the lord led the hunt,  
while good Gawain lay slumbering in his sheets,  
dozing as the daylight dappled the walls,  
1180 under a splendid cover, enclosed by curtains.  
And while snoozing he heard a slyly made sound,  
the sigh of a door swinging slowly aside.  
From below the bedding he brings up his head

1185 and lifts the corner of the curtain a little  
wondering warily what it might be.  
It was she, the lady, looking her loveliest,  
most quietly and craftily closing the door,  
nearing the bed. The knight felt nervous;  
lying back he assumed the shape of sleep  
1190 as she stole towards him with silent steps,  
then cast up the curtain and crept inside,  
then sat down softly at the side of his bed.  
And awaited his waking for a good long while.  
Gawain lay still, in his state of false sleep,  
1195 turning over in his mind what this matter might mean,  
and where the lady's unlikely visit might lead.  
Yet he said to himself, "Instead of this stealth  
I should openly ask what her actions imply."  
So he stirred and stretched, turned on his side,  
1200



**The Temptation of Sir Gawain by Bertilak's Wife.** Gawain may think he is protected, but bedrooms are dangerous places.

---

lifted his eyelids and, looking alarmed,  
crossed himself hurriedly with his hand, as if saving  
his life.

Her chin is pale, her cheeks  
are ruddy red with health;  
1205 her smile is sweet, she speaks  
with lips that love to laugh:

"Good morning, Sir Gawain," said the graceful lady,  
"You sleep so soundly one might sidle in here.  
You're tricked and trapped! But let's make a truce,  
1210 or I'll bind you in your bed, and you'd better believe  
me."

The lady laughed, making light of his quandary.  
"Good morning, madam," Gawain said merrily.  
"I'll contentedly attend whatever task you set,  
and in serving your desires I shall seek your mercy,  
1215 which seems my best plan, in the circumstances!"  
And he loaded his light-hearted words with laughter.  
"But my gracious lady, if you grant me leave,  
will you pardon this prisoner and prompt him to rise,  
then I'll quit these covers and pull on my clothes,  
1220 and our words will flow more freely back and forth."  
"Not so, beautiful sir," the sweet lady said.

"Bide in your bed—my own plan is better.  
I'll tuck in your covers corner to corner,  
then playfully parley with the man I have pinned.  
1225 Because I know your name—the knight Sir Gawain,  
famed through all realms whichever road he rides,  
whose princely honor is highly praised  
amongst lords and ladies and everyone alive.  
And right here you lie. And we are left all alone,

1230 with my husband and his huntsmen away in the hills  
and the servants snoring and my maids asleep  
and the door to this bedroom barred with a bolt.  
I have in my house an honored guest  
1235 so I'll make the most of my time and stay talking  
a while.

You're free to have my all,  
do with me what you will.  
I'll come just as you call  
and swear to serve you well."

1240 "In good faith," said Gawain, "such gracious flattery,  
though I am not him of whom you speak.  
I don't dare to receive the respect you describe  
and in no way warrant such worthy words.  
By God, I would be glad, if you agreed it fitting,  
1245 to devote myself through speech or deed  
to the prize of your praise—my joy in it would be  
pure."

Said the gracious lady, "Sir Gawain, in good faith,  
how improper on my part if I were to imply  
any slur or slight on your status as a knight.  
1250 But what lady in this land wouldn't latch the door,  
wouldn't rather hold you as I do here—  
in the company of your clever conversation,  
forgetting all grief and engaging in joy—  
than hang on to half the gold that she owns?  
1255 I praise the Lord who upholds the high heavens,  
for I have what I hoped for above all else by  
His grace."

That lovely-looking maid,  
she charmed him and she chased.  
1260 But every move she made  
he countered, case by case.

"Madam," said our man, "may Mary reward you,

in good faith, I have found your fairness noble.  
Some fellows are praised for the feats they perform;  
1265 I hardly deserve to receive such respect.  
It is you who is genuinely joyful and generous."  
"By Mary," she declared, "it's quite the contrary.  
Were I the wealthiest woman in the world  
with priceless pearls in the palm of my hand  
1270 to bargain with and buy the best of all men,  
then for all the signs you have shown me, sir,  
of kindness, courtesy and exquisite looks—  
a picture of perfection now proved to be true—  
no person on this planet would be picked before you."  
1275 "In fairness," said Gawain, "you found far better.  
But I'm proud of the price you would pay from your  
purse,  
and will swear to serve you as my sovereign lady.  
Let Gawain be your servant and Christ your Savior."  
Then they muse on many things through morning and  
1280 midday,  
and the lady stares with a loving look,  
but Gawain acts graciously and remains on guard,  
and although no woman could be warmer or more  
winning,  
he is cool in his conduct, on account of the scene he  
foresees:  
1285 the strike he must receive,  
as cruel fate decrees.  
The lady begs her leave—  
at once Gawain agrees.

1290 She glanced at him, laughed and gave her good-bye,  
then stood, and stunned him with astounding words:  
"May the Lord repay you for your prize performance.  
But I know that Gawain could never be your name."  
"But why not?" the knight asked nervously,  
1295 afraid that some fault in his manners had failed him.



The beautiful woman blessed him, then rebuked him:  
 "A good man like Gawain, so greatly regarded,  
 the embodiment of courtliness to the bones of his  
 being,  
 could never have lingered so long with a lady  
 without craving a kiss, as politeness requires,  
 or coaxing a kiss with his closing words."  
 1300 "Very well," said Gawain, "Let it be as you wish.  
 I shall kiss at your command, as becomes a knight,  
 and further, should it please you, so press me no  
 more."  
 The lady comes close, cradles him in her arms,  
 1305 leans nearer and nearer, then kisses the knight.  
 Then they courteously commend one another to  
 Christ,  
 and without one more word the woman is away.  
 Rapidly he rises and makes himself ready,  
 calls for his chamberlain, chooses his clothes,  
 1310 makes himself ready, then marches off to mass.  
 Then he went to a meal which was made and waiting,  
 and was merry and amused till the moon had silvered  
 the view.  
 No man felt more at home  
 1315 tucked in between those two,  
 the cute one and the crone.  
 Their gladness grew and grew.  
  
 And the lord of the land still led the hunt,  
 driving hinds to their death through holts and heaths,  
 1320 and by the setting of the sun had slaughtered so  
 many  
 of the does and other deer that it beggared belief.  
 Then finally the folk came flocking to one spot  
 and quickly they collected and counted the kill.  
 Then the leading lords and their loyal men  
 1325 chose the finest deer—those fullest with fat—

and ordered them cut open by those skilled in the art.  
They assessed and sized every slain creature  
and even on the feeblest found two fingers worth of  
fat.

1330 Through the sliced-open throat they seized the  
stomach  
and the butchered innards were bound in a bundle.  
Next they lopped off the legs and peeled back the pelt  
and hooked out the bowels through the broken belly,  
but carefully, being cautious not to cleave the knot.  
1335 Then they clasped the throat, and clinically they cut  
the gullet from the windpipe, then garbaged the guts.  
Then the shoulder blades were severed with sharp  
knives  
and slotted through a slit so the hide stayed whole.  
Then the beasts were prized apart at the breast,  
and they went to work on the gralloching again,  
1340 riving open the front as far as the hind fork,  
fetching out the offal, then with further purpose  
filleting the ribs in the recognized fashion.  
And the spine was subject to a similar process,  
being pared to the haunch so it held as one piece  
1345 then hoisting it high and hacking it off.  
And its name is the numbles, as far as I know, and  
just that.  
Its hind legs pulled apart  
they slit the fleshy flaps,  
1350 then cleave and quickly start  
to break it down its back.

Then the heads and necks of hinds were hewn off,  
and the choice meat of the flanks chopped away from  
the chine,  
and a fee for the crows was cast into the copse.  
1355 Then each side was skewered, stabbed through the  
ribs

and heaved up high, hung by its hocks,  
and every person was paid with appropriate portions.  
Using pelts for plates, the dogs pugged out  
on liver and lights and stomach linings  
1360 and a blended sop of blood and bread.  
The kill horn was blown and the bloodhounds bayed.  
Then hauling their meat they headed for home,  
sounding howling wails on their hunting horns,  
and as daylight died they had covered the distance  
1365 and had come to the castle where the knight was  
ensconced,  
                    adjourned  
                    in peace, with fires aflame.  
The huntsman has returned,  
and when he greets Gawain  
1370 warm feelings are confirmed.

Then the whole of the household was ordered to the  
hall,  
and the women as well with their maids in waiting.  
And once assembled he instructs the servants  
that the venison be revealed in full view,  
1375 and in excellent humor he asked that Gawain  
should see for himself the size of the kill,  
and showed him the side slabs sliced from the ribs.  
"Are you pleased with this pile? Have I won your  
praise?  
Does my skill at this sport deserve your esteem?"  
1380 "Yes indeed," said the other. "It's the hugest haul  
I have seen this seven years in the winter season."  
"And I give it all to you, Gawain," said the master,  
"for according to our contract it is yours to claim."  
"Just so," said Gawain, "and I'll say the same,  
1385 for whatever I've won within these walls  
such gains will be graciously given to you."  
So he held out his arms and hugged the lord

and kissed him in the comeliest way he could.  
 1390 "You're welcome to my winnings—to my one profit,  
 though I'd gladly have given you any greater prize."  
 "I'm grateful," said the lord, "and Gawain, this gift  
 would carry more worth if you cared to confess  
 by what wit you won it. And when. And where."  
 1395 "That wasn't our pact," he replied. "So don't pry.  
 You'll be given nothing greater, the agreement we  
 have  
    holds good!"  
    They laugh aloud and trade  
    wise words which match their mood.  
 1400 When supper's meal is made  
    they dine on dainty food.  
  
 Later, they lounged by the lord's fire,  
 and were served unstintingly with subtle wines  
 and agreed to the game again next morning  
 and to play by the rules already in place:  
 1405 any takings to be traded between the two men  
 at night when they met, no matter what the  
    merchandise.  
 They concurred on this contract in front of the court,  
 and drank on the deal, and went on drinking  
 till late, when they took their leave at last,  
 1410 and every person present departed to bed.  
 By the third cackle of the crowing cock  
 the lord and his liegemen are leaping from their beds,  
 so that mass and the morning meal are taken,  
 and riders are rigged out ready to run as  
 1415 day dawns.  
    They leave the levels, loud  
    with howling hunting horns.  
    The huntsmen loose the hounds  
 1420 through thickets and through thorns.

Soon they picked up a scent at the side of a swamp,  
 and the hounds which first found it were urged ahead  
 by wild words and shrill shouting.  
 The pack responded with vigor and pace,  
 alert to the trail, forty lurchers at least.  
 1425 Then such a raucous din rose up all around them  
 it ricocheted and rang through the rocky slopes.  
 The hounds were mushed with hollers and the horn,  
 then suddenly they swerved and swarmed together  
 in a wood, between a pool and a precipice.  
 1430 On a mound, near a cliff, on the margins of a marsh  
 where toppled stones lay scattered and strewn,  
 they coursed towards their quarry with huntsmen at  
 heel.  
 Then a crew of them ringed the hillock and the cliff,  
 until they were certain that inside their circle  
 1435 was the beast whose being three bloodhounds had  
 sensed.  
 Then they riled the creature with their rowdy ruckus,  
 and suddenly he breaks the barrier of beaters,  
 —the biggest of wild boars has bolted from his cover  
 —  
 1440 ancient in years and estranged from the herd,  
 savage and strong, a most massive swine,  
 truly grim when he grunted. And the group were  
 aggrieved,  
 for three were thrown down by the first of his thrusts;  
 then he fled away fast without further damage.  
 The other huntsmen bawled “hi” and “hay, hay,”  
 1445 blasted on their bugles, blew to regroup,  
 so the dogs and the men made a merry din,  
 tracking him nosily, testing him time and time  
 again.  
 1450 The boar would stand at bay  
 and aim to maul and maim

the thronging dogs, and they  
would yelp and yowl in pain.

Then the archers advanced with their bows and took  
aim,  
1455 shooting arrows at him which were often on target,  
but their points could not pierce his impenetrable  
shoulders

and bounced away from his bristly brow.  
The smooth, slender shafts splintered into pieces,  
and the heads glanced away from wherever they hit.  
1460 Battered and baited by such bombardment,  
in frenzied fury he flies at the men,  
hurts them horribly as he hurtles past  
so that many grew timid and retreated a tad.  
But the master of the manor gave chase on his  
mount,

1465 the boldest of beast hunters, his bugle blaring,  
trumpeting the tally-ho and tearing through thickets  
till the setting sun slipped from the western sky.  
So the day was spent in pursuits of this style,  
while our lovable young lord had not left his bed,  
and, cosseted in costly quilted covers, there he  
1470 remained.

The lady, at first light,  
did not neglect Gawain,  
but went to wake the knight  
and meant to change his mind.  
1475

She approaches the curtains, parts them and peeps  
in,  
at which Sir Gawain makes her welcome at once,  
and with prompt speech she replies to the prince,  
settling by his side and laughing sweetly,  
looking at him lovingly before launching her words.  
1480 "Sir, if you truly are Gawain it seems wondrous to me

that a man so dedicated to doing his duty  
 cannot heed the first rule of honorable behavior,  
 which has entered through one ear and exited the  
 other;  
 1485 you have already lost what yesterday you learned  
 in the truest lesson my tongue could teach."  
 "What lesson?" asked the knight. "I know of none,  
 though if discourtesy has occurred then blame me, of  
 course."  
 "I encouraged you to kiss," the lady said kindly,  
 1490 "and to claim one quickly when one is required,  
 an act which ennobles any knight worth the name."  
 "Dear lady," said the other, "don't think such a thing,  
 I dare not kiss in case I am turned down.  
 If refused, I'd be at fault for offering in the first  
 place."  
 1495 "In truth," she told him, "you cannot be turned down.  
 If someone were so snooty as to snub your advance,  
 a man like you has the means of his muscles."  
 "Yes, by God," said Gawain, "what you say holds  
 good.  
 But such heavy-handedness is frowned on in my  
 homeland,  
 and so is any gift not given with grace.  
 1500 What kiss you command I will courteously supply,  
 have what you want or hold off, whichever  
 the case."  
 So bending from above  
 the fair one kissed his face.  
 1505 The two then talk of love:  
 its grief; also its grace.  
 "I would like to learn," said the noble lady,  
 "and please find no offence, but how can it follow  
 that a lord so lively and young in years,  
 1510 a champion in chivalry across the country—

and in chivalry, the chiefmost aspect to choose,  
 as all knights acknowledge, is loyalty in love,  
 for when tales of truthful knights are told  
 in both title and text the topic they describe  
 1515 is how lords have laid down their lives for love,  
 endured for many days love's dreadful ordeal,  
 then vented their feelings with avenging valor  
 by bringing great bliss to a lady's bedroom—  
 and you the most notable knight who is known,  
 1520 whose fame goes before him . . . yes, how can it  
 follow  
 that twice I have taken this seat at your side  
 yet you have not spoken the smallest syllable  
 which belongs to love or anything like it.  
 A knight so courteous and considerate in his service  
 1525 really ought to be eager to offer this pupil  
 some lessons in love, and to lead by example.  
 Why, are you, whom all men honor, actually ignorant,  
 or do you deem me too dull to hear of dalliances?  
 I come  
 1530 to learn of love and more,  
 a lady all alone.  
 Perform for me before  
 my husband heads for home."  
 "In faith," said Gawain, "may God grant you fortune.  
 1535 It gives me great gladness and seems a good game  
 that a woman so worthy should want to come here  
 and take pains to play with your poor knight,  
 unfit for her favors—I am flattered indeed.  
 But to take on the task of explaining true love  
 1540 or touch on the topics those love tales tell of,  
 with yourself, who I sense has more insight and skill  
 in the art than I have, or even a hundred  
 of the likes of me, on earth where I live,  
 would be somewhat presumptuous, I have to say.  
 1545



But to the best of my ability I'll do your bidding,  
bound as I am to honor you forever  
and to serve you, so let our Savior preserve me!"  
So the lady tempted and teased him, trying  
to entice him to wherever her intentions might lie.  
1550 But fairly and without fault he defended himself,  
no sin on either side transpiring, only happiness  
that day.

At length, when they had laughed,  
the woman kissed Gawain.  
1555 Politely then she left  
and went her own sweet way.

Roused and risen he was ready for mass,  
and then men sumptuously served the morning meal.  
Then he loitered with the ladies the length of the day  
1560 while the lord of the land ranged left and right  
in pursuit of that pig which stampeded through the  
uplands,  
breaking his best hounds with its back-snapping bite  
when it stood embattled . . . then bowmen would  
strike,  
goaded it to gallop into open ground  
1565 where the air was alive with the huntsman's arrows.  
That boar made the best men flinch and bolt,  
till at last his legs were like lead beneath him,  
and he hobbled away to hunker in a hole  
by a stony rise at the side of a stream.  
1570 With the bank at his back he scrapes and burrows,  
frothing and foaming foully at the mouth,  
whetting his white tusks. The hunters waited,  
irked by the effort of aiming from afar  
but daunted by the danger of daring to venture  
1575 too near.

So many men before  
had fallen prey. They feared

that fierce and frenzied boar  
whose tusks could slash and tear.

1580 Till his lordship hacks up, urging on his horse,  
spots the swine at standstill encircled by men,  
then handsomely dismounts and unhands his horse,  
brandishes a bright sword and goes bounding  
onwards,  
wades through the water to where the beast waits.

1585 Aware that the man was wafting a weapon  
the hog's hairs stood on end, and its howling grunt  
made the fellows there fear for their master's fate.  
Then the boar burst forward, bounded at the lord,  
so that beast and hunter both went bundling

1590 into white water, and the swine came off worst,  
because the moment they clashed the man found his  
mark,  
knifing the boar's neck, nailing his prey,  
hammering it to the hilt, bursting the hog's heart.  
Screaming, it was swept downstream, almost slipping

1595 beneath.  
At least a hundred hounds  
latch on with tearing teeth.  
Then, dragged to drier ground,  
the dogs complete its death.

1600 The kill was blown on many blaring bugle  
and the unhurt hunters hollered and whooped.  
The chief amongst them, in charge of the chase,  
commanded the bloodhounds to bay at the boar,  
then one who was wise in woodland ways

1605 began carefully to cut and carve up the carcass.  
First he hacks off its head and hoists it aloft,  
then roughly rives it right along the spine;  
he gouges out the guts and grills them over coals,

1610

and blended with bread they are tidbits for the  
bloodhounds.

Next he fetches out the fillets of glimmering flesh  
and retrieves the intestines in time-honored style,  
then the two sides are stitched together intact  
and proudly displayed on a strong pole.

1615 So with the swine swinging they swagger home,  
the head of the boar being borne before the lord  
who had fought so fiercely in the ford till the beast  
was slain.

1620 The day then dragged, it seemed,  
before he found Gawain,  
who comes when called, most keen  
to countenance the claim.

Now the lord is loud with words and laughter  
and speaks excitedly when he sees Sir Gawain;  
1625 he calls for the ladies and the company of the court  
and he shows off the meat slabs and shares the story  
of the boar's hulking hugeness, and the full horror  
of the fight to the finish as it fled through the forest.  
And Gawain is quick to compliment the conquest,  
praising it as proof of the lord's prowess,  
1630 for such prime pieces of perfect pork  
and such sides of swine were a sight to be seen.  
Then admiringly he handles the boar's huge head,  
feigning fear to flatter the master's feelings.  
"Now Gawain," said the lord, "I give you this game,  
1635 as our wager warranted, as well you remember."  
"Certainly," said Sir Gawain. "It shall be so.  
And graciously I shall give you my gains in exchange."  
He catches him by the neck and courteously kisses  
him,  
1640 then a second time kisses him in a similar style.  
"Now we're even," said Gawain, "at this eventide;

the clauses of our contract have been kept and you  
have what

I owe."

1645 "By Saint Giles," the just lord says,  
"You're now the best I know.  
By wagering this way  
your gains will grow and grow."

1650 Then the trestle tables were swiftly assembled  
and cast with fine cloths. A clear, living light  
from the waxen torches awakened the walls.  
Places were set and supper was served,  
and a din arose as they reveled in a ring  
around the fire on the floor, and the feasting party  
made much pleasant music at the meal and after,  
1655 singing seasonal songs and carol dancing  
with as much amusement as a mouth could mention.  
The young woman and Gawain sat together all the  
while.

1660 And so loving was that lady towards the young lord,  
with stolen glances and secret smiles  
that the man himself was maddened and amazed,  
but his breeding forbade him rebuking a lady,  
and though tongues might wag he returned her  
attention

all night.

1665 Before his friends retire  
his lordship leads the knight,  
heads for his hearth and fire  
to linger by its light.

1670 They supped and swapped stories, and spoke again  
of the night to come next, which was New Year's Eve.  
Gawain pleaded politely to depart by morning,  
so in two days' time he might honor his treaty.  
But the lord was unswerving, insisting that he stayed:

“As an honest soul I swear on my heart,  
you shall find the Green Chapel to finish your affairs  
long before dawn on New Year’s Day.  
1675 So lie in your room and laze at your leisure  
while I ride my estate, and, as our terms dictate,  
we’ll trade our trophies when the hunt returns.  
I have tested you twice and found you truthful.  
But think tomorrow *third time throw best*.  
1680 Now, a lord can feel low whenever he likes,  
so let’s chase cheerfulness while we have the chance.”  
So those gentlemen agreed that Gawain would stay,  
and they took more drink, then by torchlight retired to  
their beds.  
1685 Our man then sleeps, a most  
reposed and peaceful rest.  
As hunters must, his host  
is up at dawn and dressed.

1690 After mass the master grabs a meal with his men  
and asks for his mount on that marvelous morning.  
All those grooms engaged to go with their lord  
were high on their horses before the hall gates.  
The fields were dazzling, fixed with frost,  
and the crown of sunrise rose scarlet and crimson,  
1695 scalding and scattering cloud from the sky.  
At the fringe of the forest the dogs were set free  
and the rumpus of the horns went ringing through the  
rocks.  
They fall on the scent of a fox, and follow,  
turning and twisting as they sniff out the trail.  
1700 A young harrier yowls and a huntsman yells,  
then the pack come panting to pick up the scent,  
running as a rabble along the right track.  
The fox scurries ahead, they scamper behind,  
and pursue him at speed when he comes within sight,  
1705 haranguing him with horrific ranting howls.

Now and then he doubles back through thorny  
thickets,  
or halts and harkens in the hem of a hedge,  
until finally, by a hollow, he hurdles a fence,  
and carefully he creeps by the edge of a copse,  
1710 convinced that his cunning has conned those canines!  
But unawares he wanders where they lie in wait,  
where greyhounds are gathered together, a group  
of three.

1715 He springs back with a start,  
then twists and turns and flees.  
With heavy, heaving heart  
he tracks towards the trees.

It was one of life's delights to listen to those hounds  
as they massed to meet him, marauding together.  
1720 They bayed bloodily at the sight of his being,  
as if clustering cliffs had crashed to the ground.  
Here he was ambushed by bushwhacking huntsmen  
waiting with a welcome of wounding words;  
there he was threatened and branded a thief,  
1725 and the team on his tail gave him no time to tarry.  
Often, in the open, the pack tried to pounce,  
then that crafty Reynard<sup>1</sup> would creep into cover.  
So his lordship and his lords were merrily led  
in this manner through the mountains until  
1730 midafternoon,  
while our handsome hero snoozed contentedly at  
home,  
kept from the cold of the morning by curtains.  
But love would not let her ladyship sleep  
nor suppress the purpose which suppressed her  
heart.  
1735 She rose from her rest and rushed to his room  
in a flowing robe that reached to the floor  
and was finished inside with fine-trimmed furs.

Her head went unhooded, but heavenly gems  
were entwined in her tresses in clusters of twenty.  
1740 She wore nothing on her face; her neck was naked,  
and her shoulders were bare to both back and breast.  
She comes into his quarters and closes the door,  
throws the window wide open and wakes Gawain,  
right away rouses him with ringing words for  
his ear.

1745 "Oh, sir, how can you sleep  
when morning comes so clear?"  
And though his dreams are deep  
he cannot help but hear.

1750 Yes he dozes in a daze, dreams and mutters  
like a mournful man with his mind on dark matters—  
how destiny might deal him a death blow on the day  
when he grapples with the guardian of the Green  
Chapel;  
of how the strike of the axe must be suffered without  
struggle.

1755 But sensing her presence there he surfaces from  
sleep,  
comes quickly from the depths of his dreams to  
address her.

Laughing warmly she walks towards him  
and finds his face with the friendliest kiss.  
In a worthy style he welcomes the woman  
and seeing her so lovely and alluringly dressed,  
1760 every feature so faultless, her complexion so fine,  
a passionate heat takes hold in his heart.  
They traded smiles and speech tripped from their  
tongues,  
and a bond of friendship was forged there, all blissful  
and bright.

1765 They talk with tenderness  
and pride, and yet their plight

is perilous unless  
sweet Mary minds her knight.

1770 For that noble princess pushed him and pressed him,  
nudged him ever nearer to a limit where he needed  
to allow her love or impolitely reject it.

He was careful to be courteous and avoid  
uncouthness,  
and more so for the sake of his soul should he sin  
and be counted a betrayer by the keeper of the  
1775 castle.

"I shall not succumb," he swore to himself.  
With affectionate laughter he fenced and deflected  
all the loving phrases which leapt from her lips.  
"You shall bear the blame," said the beautiful one,  
1780 "if you feel no love for the lady you lie with,  
and wound her, more than anyone on earth, to the  
heart.

Unless, of course, there is a lady in your life  
to whom you are tied and so tightly attached  
that the bond will not break, as I must now believe.  
So in honesty and trust now tell me the truth;  
1785 for all the love alive, do not lessen the truth  
with guile."

"You judge wrong, by Saint John,"  
he said to her, and smiled.

"There is no other one  
1790 nor will be for this while!"

"Those words," said the woman, "are the worst of all.  
But I asked, and you answered, and now I ache.  
Kiss me as I wish and I shall walk away  
in mourning like a lady who loved too much."  
1795 Stooping and sighing she kisses him sweetly,  
then withdraws from his side, saying as she stands,



"But before we part will you find me some small  
 favor?  
 Give me some gift—a glove at least,  
 that might leaven my loss when we meet in my  
 1800 memory."  
 "Well it were," said Gawain. "I wish I had here  
 my most precious possession as a present for your  
 love,  
 for over and over you deserve and are owed  
 the highest prize I could hope to offer.  
 But I would not wish on you a worthless token,  
 1805 and it strikes me as unseemly that you should receive  
 nothing greater than a glove as a keepsake from  
 Gawain.  
 I am here on an errand in an unknown land  
 without men bearing bags of beautiful things,  
 which my regard for you, lady, makes me regret;  
 1810 but man must live by his means, and neither mope  
 nor moan."  
 The pretty one replies:  
 "Nay, knight, since you decline  
 to pass to me a prize,  
 1815 you must have one of mine."  
  
 She offers him a ring of rich, red gold,  
 and the stunning stone set upon it stood proud,  
 beaming and burning with the brightness of the sun;  
 what wealth it was worth you can well imagine.  
 1820 But he would not accept it, and said straight away,  
 "By God, no tokens will I take at this time;  
 I have nothing to give, so nothing will I gain."  
 She insists he receive it but still he resists,  
 and swears, on his name as a knight, not to swerve.  
 1825 Snubbed by his decision, she said to him then,  
 "You refuse my ring because you find it too fine,  
 and don't care to be deeply indebted to me;

so I give you my girdle, a lesser thing to gain.”  
1830 From around her body she unbuckled the belt  
which fastened the frock beneath her fair mantle,  
a green silk girdle trimmed with gold,  
exquisitely edged and hemmed by hand.  
And she sweetly beseeched Sir Gawain to receive it,  
in spite of its slightness, and hoped he would accept.  
1835 But still he maintained he intended to take  
neither gold nor girdle, until by God’s grace  
the challenge he had chosen was finally achieved.  
“With apologies I pray you be not displeased,  
but end all your offers, for always against them  
1840 I am.  
For all your grace I owe  
a thousand thank-you’s, ma’am.  
I shall through sun and snow  
remain your loyal man.”  
1845  
“And now he spurns my silk,” the lady responded,  
“so simple in itself, or so it appears,  
so little and unlikely, worth nothing, or less.  
But the knight who knew of the power knitted in it  
would pay a high price to possess it, perhaps.  
1850 For the body which is bound within this green belt,  
as long as it is buckled robustly about him,  
will be safe against anyone who seeks to strike him,  
and all the slyness on earth wouldn’t see him slain.”  
The man mulled it over, and it entered his mind  
1855 it might just be the jewel for the jeopardy he faced  
and save him from the strike in his challenge at the  
chapel.  
With luck, it might let him escape with his life.  
So relenting at last he let her speak,  
and promptly she pressed him to take the present,  
1860 and he granted her wish, and she gave with good  
grace,

though went on to beg him not to whisper a word  
of this gift to her husband, and Gawain agreed;  
those words of theirs within those walls  
should stay.

1865 His thanks are heartfelt, then.  
No sooner can he say  
how much it matters, when  
the third kiss comes his way.

1870 Then the lady departed, leaving him alone,  
for no more merriment could be had from that man.  
And once she has quit he clothes himself quickly,  
rises and dresses in the richest of robes,  
stowing the love-lace safely aside,  
hiding it away from all hands and eyes.

1875 Then he went at once to the chapel of worship,  
privately approached the priest and implored him  
to allow his confession, and to lead him in life  
so his soul might be saved when he goes to his grave.

1880 Then fully and frankly he spoke of his sins,  
no matter how small, always seeking mercy,  
beseeching the counselor that he receive absolution.  
The priest declares him so clean and so pure  
that the Day of Doom could dawn in the morning.

1885 Then in merrier mood he mingled with the ladies,  
caroling and carousing and carrying on  
as never before, until nightfall. Folk feel  
and hear

and see his boundless bliss  
and say, "Such charm and cheer;  
1890 he's at his happiest  
since his arrival here."

And long let him loiter there, looked after by love.  
Now the lord of the land was still leading his men,  
finishing off the fox he had followed for so long.  
1895

He vaults a fence to flush out the victim,  
hearing that the hounds are harrying hard.  
Then Reynard scoots from a section of scrub  
and the rabble of the pack rush right at his heels.  
Aware of its presence the wary lord waits,  
1900 then bares his bright sword and swishes at the beast,  
which shirks from its sharpness, and would have shot  
away  
but a hound flew forward before it could flee  
and under the hooves of the horses they have him,  
worrying the wily one with wrathful baying.  
1905 The lord hurtles from his horse and heaves the fox  
up,  
wrestles it from the reach of those ravenous mouths,  
holds it high over head and hurrahs manfully  
while the bloodthirsty bloodhounds bay and howl.  
And the other huntsmen hurried with their horns  
1910 to catch sight of the slaughter and celebrate the kill.  
And when the courtly company had come together  
the buglers blew with one mighty blast,  
and the others hallooed with open throats.  
It was the merriest music ever heard by men,  
1915 that rapturous roar which for Reynard's soul  
was raised.  
The dogs, due their reward,  
are patted, stroked and praised.  
Then red fur rips—Reynard  
1920 out of his pelt is prised.  
  
Then with night drawing near they headed  
homewards,  
blaring their bugles with the fullness of their breath.  
And at last the lord lands at his lovely home,  
to find, by the heat of the fireside, his friend  
1925 the good Sir Gawain, in glad spirits

on account of the company he had kept with the ladies.

His blue robe flowed as far as the floor,  
his soft-furred surcoat suited him well,  
and the hood which echoed it hung from his  
1930 shoulders.

Both hood and coat were edged in ermine.  
He meets the master in the middle of the room,  
greets him graciously, with Gawain saying:

"I shall first fulfill our formal agreement  
which we fixed in words when the drink flowed  
1935 freely."

He clasps him tight and kisses him three times  
with as much emotion as a man could muster.  
"By the Almighty," said the master, "you must have  
had luck

to profit such a prize—if the price was right."

"Oh fiddlesticks to the fee," said the other fellow.  
1940 "As long as I have given the goods which I gained."  
"By Mary," said the master, "mine's a miserable match.  
I've hunted for hours with nothing to my name  
but this foul-stinking fox—fling its fur to the devil—  
so poor in comparison with such priceless things,  
1945 these presents you impart, three kisses perfect  
and true."

"Enough!" the knight entreats,  
"I thank you through and through."

The standing lord then speaks  
1950 of how the fox fur flew!

And with meals and mirth and minstrelsy  
they made as much amusement as any mortal could,  
and among those merry men and laughing ladies  
Gawain and his host got giddy together;  
1955 only lunatics and drunkards could have looked more  
delirious.

Every person present performed party pieces  
till the hour arrived when revelers must rest,  
and the company in that court heard the call of their  
beds.

1960 And lastly, in the hall, humbly to his host,  
our knight says good night and renews his gratitude.  
"Your uncountable courtesies have kept me here  
this Christmas—be honored by the High King's  
kindness.

If it suits, I submit myself as your servant.  
But tomorrow morning I must make a move;  
1965 if you will, as you promised, please appoint some  
person  
to guide me, God willing, towards the Green Chapel,  
where my destiny will dawn on New Year's Day."

"On my honor," he replied. "With hand on heart,  
every promise I made shall be put into practice."  
1970 He assigns him a servant to steer his course,  
to lead him through the land without losing time,  
to ride the fastest route between forest  
and fell.

1975 Gawain will warmly thank  
his host in terms that tell;  
towards the womenfolk  
the knight then waves farewell.

1980 It's with a heavy heart that guests in the hall  
are kissed and thanked for their care and kindness,  
and they respond with speeches of the same sort,  
commending him to our Savior with sorrowful sighs.  
Then politely he leaves the lord and his household,  
and to each person he passes he imparts his thanks  
1985 for taking such trouble in their service and assistance  
and such attention to detail in attendance of duty.  
And every guest is grieved at the prospect of his  
going,

as if honorable Gawain were one of their own.  
By tapering torchlight he was taken to his room  
and brought to his bed to be at his rest.  
1990 But if our knight sleeps soundly I couldn't say,  
for the matter in the morning might be muddying  
his thoughts.  
So let him lie and think,  
in sight of what he sought.  
1995 In time I'll tell if tricks  
work out the way they ought.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Old French word for "fox" (*goupil*) gave way to "Reynard" as a result of the immense success of stories about the cunning fox Reynard, anti-hero of the *Roman de Reynard*. [Return to reference 1](#)

## ***FITT iv***

Now night passes and New Year draws near,  
drawing off darkness as our Deity decrees.  
2000 But wild-looking weather was about in the world:  
clouds decanted their cold rain earthwards;  
the nithering north needled man's very nature;  
creatures were scattered by the stinging sleet.  
Then a whip-cracking wind comes whistling between  
hills  
driving snow into deepening drifts in the dales.  
2005 Alert and listening, Gawain lies in his bed;  
his lids are lowered but he sleeps very little  
as each crow of the cock brings his destiny closer.  
Before day had dawned he was up and dressed  
for the room was livened by the light of a lamp.  
2010 To suit him in his metal and to saddle his mount  
he called for a servant, who came quickly,  
bounded from his bedsheets bringing his garments.  
He swathes Sir Gawain in glorious style,  
first fastening clothes to fend off the frost,  
2015 then his armor, looked after all the while by the  
household:  
the buffed and burnished stomach and breastplates,  
and the rings of chain mail, raked free of rust,  
all gleaming good as new, for which he is grateful  
indeed.  
2020 With every polished piece  
no man shone more, it seemed  
from here to ancient Greece.  
He sent then for his steed.  
2025 He clothes himself in the costliest costume:  
his coat with the brightly emblazoned badge  
mounted on velvet; magical minerals



inside and set about it; embroidered seams;  
a lining finished with fabulous furs.  
2030 And he did not leave off the lady's lace girdle;  
for his own good, Gawain won't forget that gift.  
Then with his sword sheathed at his shapely hips  
he bound himself twice about with the belt,  
touchingly wrapped it around his waist.  
2035 That green silk girdle truly suited Sir Gawain  
and went well with the rich red weaves that he wore.  
But our man bore the belt not merely for its beauty,  
or the appeal of its pennants, polished though they  
were,  
or the gleam of its edges which glimmered with gold,  
2040 but to save his skin when presenting himself,  
without shield or sword, to the fatal swing of  
the axe.

Now in his gear and gown  
he turns towards those ranks  
who served with such renown  
2045 and offers thorough thanks.

Then his great horse Gringolet was got up ready.  
The steed had been stabled in comfort and safety  
and snorted and stamped in readiness for the ride.  
2050 Gawain comes closer to examine his coat,  
saying soberly to himself, swearing on his word:  
"There are folk in this castle who keep courtesy to  
the forefront;  
their master maintains them—happiness to them all.  
And let his lordship's lady be loved all her life.  
2055 If they choose, out of charity, to cherish a guest,  
showing kindness and care, then may heaven's King  
who reigns over all reward them handsomely.  
For as long as I live in the lands of this world  
I shall practice every means in my power to repay  
him."

2060 Then he steps in the stirrup and vaults to the saddle  
and his servant lifts his shield which he slings on his  
shoulder,  
then he girds on Gringolet with his golden spurs  
who clatters from the courtyard, not stalling to snort  
or prance.

2065 His man was mounted, too,  
who lugged the spear and lance.  
"Christ keep this castle true,"  
he chanted. "Grant good chance."

The drawbridge was dropped, and the double-  
fronted gates  
2070 were unbarred and each half was heaved wide open.  
As he clears the planking he crosses himself quickly,  
and praises the porter, who kneels before the prince  
and prays that God be good to Gawain.

2075 Then he went on his way with the one whose task  
was to point out the road to that perilous place  
where the knight would receive the sorry stroke.  
They scrambled up bankings where branches were  
bare,

clambered up cliff faces where the cold clings.  
The clouds which had climbed now cooled and  
dropped

2080 so the moors and the mountains were muzzy with  
mist

and every hill wore a hat of mizzle on its head.  
The streams on the slopes seemed to fume and  
foam,  
whitening the wayside with spume and spray.  
They wandered onwards through the wildest woods  
till the sun, at that season, came skyward, showing  
2085 its hand.

On hilly heights they ride,  
snow littering the land.

The servant at his side  
then has them slow and stand.

2090

"I have accompanied you across this countryside, my  
lord,  
and now you are near the site you have named  
and have steered and searched for with such  
singleness of mind.  
But there's something I should like to share with  
you, sir,  
because upon my life, you're a lord that I love,  
2095 so if you value your health you'll hear my advice:  
the place you proceed to is held to be perilous.  
In that wilderness lives a wildman, the worst in the  
world,  
he is brooding and brutal and loves bludgeoning  
people.  
He's more powerful than any person alive on this  
2100 earth  
and four times the figure of any fighting knight  
in Arthur's house, or Hector<sup>2</sup> or any other hero.  
He chooses the green chapel for his grim goings-on,  
and to pass through that place unscathed is  
impossible,  
for he deals out death blows by dint of his hands,  
2105 a man without measure who shows no mercy.  
Be it chaplain or churl who rides by the chapel,  
monk or priest, whatever man or person,  
he loves murdering more than he loves his own life.  
So I say, just as sure as you sit in your saddle,  
2110 if you come there you'll be killed, of that there's no  
question.  
Trust me, he could trample you twenty times over  
or more.  
He's lurked about too long  
engaged in grief and gore.

2115                   His hits are swift and strong—  
                          he'll fell you to the floor."

                  "Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man go,  
                  and for God's sake travel an alternate track,  
                  ride another road, and be rescued by Christ.  
2120               I'll head off home, and with hand on heart  
                  I shall swear by God and all his good saints,  
                  and on all earthly holiness, and other such oaths,  
                  that your secret is safe, and not a soul will know  
                  that you fled in fear from the fellow I described."

2125               "Many thanks," said Gawain, in a terse tone of voice,  
                  "and for having my interests at heart, be lucky.  
                  I'm certain such a secret would be silent in your  
                  keep.

                  But as faithful as you are, if I failed to find him  
                  and were to flee in fear in the fashion you urge,  
2130               I'd be christened a coward, and could not be  
                  excused.

                  So I'll trek to the chapel and take my chances,  
                  say my piece to that person, speak with him plainly,  
                  whether fairness or foulness follows, however fate  
                  behaves.

2135                   He may be stout and stern  
                          and standing armed with stave,  
                          but those who strive to serve  
                          our Lord, our Lord will save."

2140               "By Mary," said the servant, "you seem to be saying  
                  you're hell-bent on heaping harm on yourself  
                  and losing your life, so I'll delay you no longer.  
                  Set your helmet on your head and your lance in your  
                  hand

                  and ride a route through that rocky ravine  
                  till you're brought to the bottom of that foreboding  
2145               valley,

then look towards a glade a little to the left  
 and you'll see in the clearing the site itself,  
 and the hulking person who inhabits the place.  
 Now God bless and good-bye, brave Sir Gawain;  
 for all the wealth in the world I wouldn't walk with  
 2150       you  
 or go further in this forest by a single footstep."  
 With a wrench on the reins he reeled around  
 and heel-kicked the horse as hard as he could,  
 and was gone from Gawain, galloping hard  
                     for home.  
 2155               "By Christ, I will not cry,"  
                     announced the knight, "or groan,  
                     but find my fortune by  
                     the grace of God alone."

2160       Then he presses ahead, picks up a path,  
             enters a steep-sided grove on his steed  
             then goes by and by to the bottom of a gorge  
             where he wonders and watches—it looks a wild  
             place:  
             no sign of a settlement anywhere to be seen  
             but heady heights to both halves of the valley  
 2165       and set with saber-toothed stones of such sharpness  
             no cloud in the sky could escape unscratched.  
             He stalls and halts, holds the horse still,  
             glances side to side to glimpse the green chapel  
             but sees no such thing, which he thinks is strange,  
 2170       except at mid-distance what might be a mound,  
             a sort of bald knoll on the bank of a brook  
             where fell water surged with frenzied force,  
             bursting with bubbles as if it had boiled.  
             He heels the horse, heads for that mound,  
 2175       grounds himself gracefully and tethers Gringolet,  
             looping the reins to the limb of a lime.  
             Then he strides forwards and circles the feature,

2180       baffled as to what that bizarre hill could be:  
it had a hole at one end and at either side,  
and its walls, matted with weeds and moss,  
enclosed a cavity, like a kind of old cave  
or crevice in the crag—it was all too unclear to  
declare.

2185       “Green Church?” chunters the knight.  
“More like the devil’s lair  
where at the nub of night  
he dabbles in dark prayers.”

2190       “For certain,” he says, “this is a soulless spot,  
a ghostly cathedral overgrown with grass,  
the kind of kirk where that camouflaged man  
might deal in devotions on the devil’s behalf.  
My five senses inform me that Satan himself  
has tricked me in this tryst, intending to destroy me.  
This is a haunted house—may it go to hell.  
2195       I never came across a church so cursed.”  
With head helmeted and lance in hand  
he scrambled towards skylight in that strange abyss.  
Then he heard on the hillside, from behind a hard  
rock  
and beyond the brook, a blood-chilling noise.  
2200       What! It cannoned though the cliffs as if they might  
crack,  
like the scream of a scythe being ground on a stone.  
What! It whined and wailed, like a waterwheel.  
What! It rasped and rang, raw on the ear.  
2205       “My God,” cried Gawain, “that grinding is a greeting.  
My arrival is honored with the honing of an axe  
up there.

              Then let the Lord decide.  
              ‘Oh well,’ won’t help me here.  
              I might well lose my life  
2210       but freak sounds hold no fear.”

Then Gawain called as loudly as his lungs would  
allow,  
"Who has power in this place to honor his pact?  
Because good Gawain now walks on this ground.  
If anyone wants anything then hurry and appear  
2215 to do what he needs—it's now or it's never."  
"Abide," came a voice from above the bank.  
"You'll cop for what's coming to you quickly enough."  
Yet he went at his work, whetting the blade,  
not showing until it was sharpened and stropped.  
2220 Then out of the crags he comes, through the cave  
mouth,  
whirling into view with a wondrous weapon,  
a Danish-style axe for dealing the dint,  
with a brute of a blade curving back to the haft  
filed on a stone, a four footer at least  
2225 by the look of the length of its shining lace.  
And again he was green, as a year ago,  
with green flesh, hair and beard, and a fully green  
face,  
and firmly on green feet he came stomping  
forwards,  
the handle of that axe like a staff in his hand.  
2230 At the edge of the water, he will not wade  
but vaults the stream with the shaft, and strides  
with an ominous face onto earth covered over  
with snow.  
Our brave knight bowed, his head  
2235 hung low—but not too low!  
"Sweet Sir," the green man said,  
"Your visit keeps your vow."

The green knight spoke again, "God guard you,  
Gawain.  
Welcome to my world after all your wandering.

2240 You have timed your arrival like a true traveler,  
honoring the terms that entwine us together.  
Twelvemonths ago at this time you took what was  
yours,  
and with New Year come you are called to account.  
We're very much alone, beyond view in this valley,  
2245 no person to part us—we can do as we please.  
Pull your helmet from your head and take what  
you're owed.  
Show no more struggle than I showed myself  
when you severed my head with a single smite."  
"No," said good Gawain, "by my life-giving God,  
2250 I won't gripe or begrudge the grimness to come,  
so keep to one stroke and I'll stand stock-still,  
won't whisper a word of unwillingness, or one  
complaint."  
He bowed to take the blade  
2255 and bared his neck and nape,  
but, loath to look afraid,  
he feigned a fearless state.  
  
Suddenly the green knight summons up his strength,  
hoists the axe high over Gawain's head,  
2260 lifts it aloft with every fiber of his life  
and begins to bring home a bone-splitting blow.  
Had he seen it through as thoroughly as threatened  
the knight, being brave, would have died from the  
blow.  
But glimpsing the axe at the edge of his eye  
2265 bringing death earthwards as it arced through the  
air,  
and sensing its sharpness, Gawain shrank at the  
shoulders.  
The swinging axman swerved from his stroke,  
and reproached the young prince with some proud  
words:



2270 "You are not Gawain," he goaded, "with his good  
name,  
who faced down every foe in the field of battle  
but now flinches with fear at the foretaste of harm.  
Never could I hear of such cowardice from that  
knight.

Did I budge or even blink when you aimed the axe,  
or carp or quibble in King Arthur's castle,  
2275 or flap when my head went flying to my feet?  
But entirely untouched, you are terror struck.  
I'll be found the better fellow, since you were so  
feeble

and frail."

2280 Gawain confessed, "I flinched  
at first, but will not fail.  
Though once my head's unhitched  
it's off once and for all!"

"So be brisk with the blow, bring on the blade.  
Deal me my destiny and do it out of hand,  
2285 and I'll stand the stroke without shiver or shudder  
and be wasted by your weapon. You have my word."  
"Take this then," said the other, throwing up the axe,  
with a menacing glare like the gaze of a maniac.

2290 Then he launches his swing but leaves him  
unscathed,  
withholds his arm before harm could be done.  
And Gawain was motionless, never moved a muscle,  
but stood stone-still, or as still as a tree stump  
anchored in the earth by a hundred roots.

2295 Then the warrior in green mocked Gawain again:  
"Now you've plucked up your courage I'll dispatch  
you properly.

May the honorable knighthood heaped on you by  
Arthur—  
if it proves to be powerful—protect your neck."

That insulting slur drew a spirited response:  
2300 "Thrash away then, thug, your threats are hollow.  
Such huffing and fussing—you'll frighten your own  
heart."

"By God," said the green man, "since you speak so  
grandly  
there'll be no more shilly-shallying, I shall shatter  
you,

I vow."

2305 He stands to strike, a sneer  
comes over lip and brow.  
Gawain is gripped by fear,  
no hope of rescue now.

Hoisted and aimed, the axe hurtled downwards,  
2310 the blade bearing down on the knight's bare neck,  
a ferocious blow, but far from being fatal  
it skewed to one side, just skimming the skin  
and finely snicking the fat of the flesh  
so that bright red blood shot from body to earth.

2315 Seeing it shining on the snowy ground  
Gawain leapt forward a spear's length at least,  
grabbed hold of his helmet and rammed it on his  
head,  
brought his shield to his side with a shimmy of his  
shoulder,  
then brandished his sword before blurting out brave  
words,

2320 because never since birth, as his mother's babe,  
was he half as happy as here and now.

"Enough swiping, sir, you've swung your swing.  
I've borne one blow without backing out,  
go for me again and you'll get some by return,  
2325 with interest! Hit out, and be hit in an instant,  
and hard.

One axe attack—that's all.

Now keep the covenant  
agreed in Arthur's hall  
and hold the axe in hand."

2330

The warrior steps away and leans on his weapon,  
props the handle in the earth and slouches on the  
head

and studies how Gawain is standing his ground,  
bold in his bearing, brave in his actions,  
armed and ready. In his heart he admires him.

2335

Then remarking merrily, but in a mighty voice,  
with reaching words he rounded on the knight:  
"Be a mite less feisty, fearless young fellow,  
you've suffered no insulting or heinous incident  
beyond the game we agreed on in the court of your  
king.

2340

One strike was promised—consider yourself well  
paid!

From any lingering loyalties you are hereby released.  
Had I mustered all my muscles into one mighty blow  
I would have hit more harshly and done you great  
harm.

2345

But my first strike fooled you—a feint, no less—  
not fracturing your flesh, which was only fair  
in keeping with the contract we declared that first  
night,

for with truthful behavior you honored my trust  
and gave up your gains as a good man should.

2350

Then I missed you once more, and this for the  
morning

when you kissed my pretty wife then kindly kissed  
me.

So twice you were truthful, therefore twice I left  
no scar.

The person who repays  
will live to feel no fear.

2355           The third time, though, you strayed,  
                  and felt my blade therefore."

                  "Because the belt you are bound with belongs to  
                  me;  
                  it was woven by my wife so I know it very well.  
                  And I know of your courtesies, and conduct, and  
2360           kisses,  
                  and the wooing of my wife—for it was all my work!  
                  I sent her to test you—and in truth it turns out  
                  you're by the far the most faultless fellow on earth.  
                  As a pearl is more prized than a pea which is white,  
                  in good faith, so is Gawain, amongst gallant knights.  
2365           But a little thing more—it was loyalty that you  
                  lacked:  
                  not because you're wicked, or a womanizer, or  
                  worse,  
                  but you loved your own life; so I blame you less."  
                  Gawain stood speechless for what seemed a great  
                  while,  
                  so shocked and ashamed that he shuddered inside.  
2370           The fire of his blood brought flames to his face  
                  and he shrank out of shame at what the other had  
                  said.  
                  Then he tried to talk, and finding his tongue, said:  
                  "A curse upon cowardice and covetousness.  
                  They breed villainy and vice, and destroy all virtue."  
2375           Then he grabbed the girdle and ungathered its knot  
                  and flung it in fury at the man before him.  
                  "My downfall and undoing; let the devil take it.  
                  Dread of the death blow and cowardly doubts  
                  meant I gave in to greed, and in doing so forgot  
2380           the freedom and fidelity every knight knows to  
                  follow.  
                  And now I am found to be flawed and false,

through treachery and untruth I have totally failed,”  
said

Gawain.

2385       “Such terrible mistakes,  
and I shall bear the blame.  
But tell me what it takes  
to clear my clouded name.”

The green lord laughed, and leniently replied:  
2390       “The harm which you caused me is wholly healed.  
By confessing your failings you are free from fault  
and have openly paid penance at the point of my  
axe.

I declare you purged, as polished and as pure  
as the day you were born, without blemish or blame.  
2395       And this gold-hemmed girdle I present as a gift,  
which is green like my gown. It’s yours, Sir Gawain,  
a reminder of our meeting when you mix and mingle  
with princes and kings. And this keepsake will be  
proof  
to all chivalrous knights of your challenge in this  
chapel.

2400       But follow me home. New Year’s far from finished—  
we’ll resume our reveling with supper and song.

What’s more  
my wife is waiting there  
who flummoxed you before.  
2405       This time you’ll have in her  
a friend and not a foe.”

“Thank you,” said the other, taking helmet from  
head,  
holding it in hand as he offered his thanks.  
“But I’ve loitered long enough. The Lord bless your  
life

2410 and bestow on you such honor as you surely  
deserve.  
And mind you commend me to your fair wife,  
both to her and the other, those honorable ladies  
who kidded me so cleverly with their cunning tricks.  
But no wonder if a fool finds his way into folly  
and be wiped of his wits by womanly guile—  
2415 it's the way of the world. Adam fell because of a  
woman,  
and Solomon because of several, and as for Samson,  
Delilah was his downfall, and afterwards David  
was bamboozled by Bathsheba and bore the grief.<sup>3</sup>  
All wrecked and ruined by their wrongs; if only  
2420 we could love our ladies without believing their lies.  
And those were foremost of all whom fortune  
favored,  
excellent beyond all others existing under heaven,"  
he cried.  
"Yet all were charmed and changed  
2425 by wily womankind.  
I suffered just the same,  
but clear me of my crime."  
  
"But the girdle," he went on, "God bless you for this  
gift.  
And I shall wear it with good will, but not for its  
2430 gold,  
nor its silks and streamers, and not for the sake  
of its wonderful workmanship or even its worth,  
but as a sign of my sin—I'll see it as such  
when I swagger in the saddle—a sad reminder  
2435 that the frailty of his flesh is man's biggest fault,  
how the touch of filth taints his tender frame.  
So when praise for my prowess in arms swells my  
pride,  
one look at this love-lace will lessen my ardor.

But I will ask one thing, if it won't offend:  
2440 since I stayed so long in your lordship's land  
and was hosted in your house—let Him reward you  
who upholds the heavens and sits upon high—  
will you make known your name? And I'll ask  
nothing else."

"Then I'll treat you to the truth," the other told him,  
2445 "Here in my homelands they call me Bertilak de  
Hautdesert.

And in my manor lives the mighty Morgan le Fay,  
so adept and adroit in the dark arts,  
who learned magic from Merlin—the master of  
mystery—  
for in earlier times she was intimately entwined  
2450 with that knowledgeable man, as all you knights  
know

back home.

Yes, 'Morgan the Goddess'—  
I will announce her name.  
There is no nobleness  
2455 she cannot take and tame."

"She guided me in this guise to your great hall  
to put pride on trial, and to test with this trick  
what distinction and trust the Round Table deserves.  
She imagined this mischief would muddle your minds  
2460 and that grieving Guinevere would go to her grave  
at the sight of a specter making ghostly speeches  
with his head in his hands before the high table.  
So that ancient woman who inhabits my home  
is also your aunt—Arthur's half sister,  
2465 the daughter of the duchess of Tintagel; the duchess  
who through Uther, was mother to Arthur, your king.  
So I ask you again, come and greet your aunt  
and make merry in my house; you're much loved  
there,

and, by my faith, I am as fond of you my friend  
as any man under God, for your great truth.”  
2470 But Gawain would not. No way would he go.  
So they clasped and kissed and made kind  
commendations  
to the Prince of Paradise, and then parted in the  
cold,  
that pair.

2475 Our man, back on his mount  
now hurtles home from there.  
The green knight leaves his ground  
to wander who-knows-where.

So he winds through the wilds of the world once  
more,  
2480 Gawain on Gringolet, by the grace of God,  
under a roof sometimes and sometimes roughing it,  
and in valleys and vales had adventures and victories  
but time is too tight to tell how they went.  
The nick to his neck was healed by now;  
thereabouts he had bound the belt like a baldric—  
2485 slantwise, as a sash, from shoulder to side,  
laced in a knot looped below his left arm,  
as a sign that his honor was stained by sin.  
So safe and sound he sets foot in court,  
and great joy came to the king in his castle  
2490 when tidings of Gawain’s return had been told.  
The king kissed his knight and so did the queen,  
and Gawain was embraced by his band of brothers,  
who made eager enquiries, and he answered them  
all  
with the tale of his trial and tribulations,  
2495 and the challenge at the chapel, and the great green  
chap,  
and the love of the lady, which led to the belt.



And he showed them the scar at the side of his  
 neck,  
 confirming his breach of faith, like a badge  
 of blame.  
 2500       He grimaced with disgrace,  
               he writhed in rage and pain.  
               Blood flowed towards his face  
               and showed his smarting shame.

2505       "Regard," said Gawain, as he held up the girdle,  
               "the symbol of sin, for which my neck bears the  
               scar;  
               a sign of my fault and offence and failure,  
               of the cowardice and covetousness I came to  
               commit.  
               I was tainted by untruth. This, its token,  
               I will drape across my chest till the day I die.  
 2510       For man's crimes can be covered but never made  
               clean;  
               once sin is entwined it is attached for all time."  
               The king gave comfort, then the whole of the court  
               allow, as they laugh in lovely accord,  
 2515       that the lords and ladies who belong to the Table,  
               every knight in the brotherhood, should bear such a  
               belt,  
               a bright green belt worn obliquely to the body,  
               crosswise, like a sash, for the sake of this man.  
               So that slanting green stripe was adopted as their  
               sign,  
 2520       and each knight who held it was honored ever after,  
               as all the best books on romance remind us:  
               an adventure which happened in Arthur's era,  
               as the chronicles of this country have stated clearly.  
               Since fearless Brutus first set foot  
 2525       on these shores, once the siege land assault at Troy  
               had ceased,

our coffers have been crammed  
with stories such as these.  
Now let our Lord, thorn-crowned,  
bring us to perfect peace. AMEN.

HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The greatest of the Trojan warriors in the Trojan War.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lines 2146–49 single out well-known male figures from the Hebrew Scriptures whom Gawain reads as having fallen on account of female deception. The relevant references are as follows: for Adam, Genesis 3:6; Solomon, 1 Kings 11:3; Samson, Judges 16:4–18; and David, 2 Samuel 11:1–15.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “Shame be to the man who has evil in his mind” (Anglo-Norman French). This is practically identical to the motto of the Order of the Garter (“Honi soit qui mal y pense”). The order was founded ca. 1350; apparently a copyist of the poem associated this order with the one founded to honor Gawain.[Return to reference 4](#)

# **GEOFFREY CHAUCER**

## **ca. 1340–1400**

Medieval thinkers traditionally held that society was made up of three “estates”: the nobility, or hereditary aristocracy whose mission on earth was to rule and defend the whole; the church, whose duty it was to look after society’s spiritual welfare; and laborers, the commoners who made up the majority and were supposed to provide for society’s physical needs. But by the late fourteenth century, these basic categories were looking increasingly inadequate. The growing and prosperous middle class did not fit in neatly among the three estates. Social strata were becoming less fixed and more entangled, as wealth, profession, and personal ability (not just parentage or religious ordination) helped determine one’s status and role. It was into the ascendant middle classes that Geoffrey Chaucer was born. Chaucer’s life and works, especially *The Canterbury Tales*, were shaped by these large-scale changes and by the need to develop vocabulary and imaginative forms adequate to the new social reality. (For Chaucer’s portrait, see [p. 472](#) and the color insert in this volume.)

Chaucer was the grandson of a shoemaker (a “chausseur,” whose profession gave the family its name) and the son of a prosperous wine merchant. He probably spent his boyhood in the mercantile atmosphere of London’s Vintry, where ships docked with wines from France and Spain. Here he would have mixed daily with people of all sorts, heard several languages spoken, become fluent in French, and

received schooling in Latin. Instead of apprenticing Chaucer to the family business, however, his father was apparently able to place him, in his early teens, as a page in one of the great aristocratic households of England—that of the countess of Ulster, who was married to Prince Lionel, the second son of Edward III. There Chaucer would acquire the manners and skills required for a career in the service of the nobility. It is notable that throughout his career he wrote poetry exploring the idea that true nobility comes from character rather than noble birth.

We can trace Chaucer's professional and personal life in a considerable number of surviving historical documents, beginning with a reference, in Elizabeth of Ulster's household accounts, to an outfit he received as a page (1357). He was captured by the French and ransomed in one of Edward III's campaigns during the Hundred Years' War (1359). He was a member of King Edward's personal household (1367) and took part in several diplomatic missions to Spain (1366), France (1368), and Italy (1372–73, 1378). As controller of customs on wool, sheepskins, and leather for the port of London (1374–85), Chaucer audited and kept books on the export taxes, which were one of the Crown's main sources of revenue. During this period he was living in an apartment over one of the gates in the city wall. He served as a justice of the peace and knight of the shire (the title given to members of Parliament) for the county of Kent (1385–86), where he moved after giving up the controllership. As clerk of the king's works (1389–91), Chaucer was responsible for the maintenance of numerous royal residences, parks, and other holdings; his duties included supervising the construction of the nave of Westminster Abbey as well as architecture for a celebrated tournament staged by Richard II. While the records show Chaucer receiving many grants and annuities in addition to his salary for these services, they also show that at times he was being pressed by creditors and obliged to borrow money. One potentially disturbing life-record was thought to concern the subject of rape. In 1380 Cecily Chaumpaigne, a London baker's daughter, released Chaucer from a claim of "*raptus*" (that is, either "abduction" or "rape"). Persuaded that this claim involved a charge of sexual

violence against Chaucer, modern scholars productively focused on gender relations in Chaucer's poetry. This scholarship remains powerful and valuable, even as work published in 2022 revealed that Chaumpaigne and Chaucer were partners in a legal case apparently having nothing to do with rape, and that "*raptus*" in the document seems to have meant "abduction."



**Middle-class Prosperity.** Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434. Note the way the religious elements of the scene are secondary to the fine, rich qualities of fabric represented here.

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None of the documents concerning Chaucer's life contains any hint that Chaucer wrote poetry, although it is clear that literature would have been part of his life from the schoolroom onward. Poetry was among the entertainments enjoyed in courtly households at the time of Chaucer's youth—poetry in French, which remained the fashionable language of the English aristocracy. Chaucer's earliest poetic work indicates the influence of French writers such as Guillaume de Machaut (1300?–1377) and Jean Froissart (1333?–1400?), whose lyrics and narratives recount the emotional turbulence of erotic love, often in the framework of the poet's dream. Chaucer's first major poem, *The Book of the Duchess*, is a dream vision that laments a lost beloved, written to commemorate the young duchess of Lancaster, the first wife of the powerful nobleman John of Gaunt; she died in 1368. Chaucer almost certainly met or heard younger French poets, such as Froissart and Eustache Deschamps (1346–1406/7), during the time when the French king was imprisoned in London following one of the many battles of the Hundred Years' War. In Chaucer's time, many of the motifs and conventions of French poetry derived from the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*, a long dream allegory in French featuring a dreamer in obsessive pursuit of an eroticized rosebud. There is evidence that Chaucer translated sections of the *Romance of the Rose* early in his career.

The diplomatic mission that sent Chaucer to Italy in 1372 is often regarded as a milestone in his literary development. Although he may have acquired some knowledge of the Italian language from merchants and bankers posted in London, this visit and a subsequent one to Florence (1378) brought him into direct contact with the extraordinary artistic flourishing—both literary and visual—of fourteenth-century Italy. He likely acquired manuscripts of works by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio—the last two men were still alive at the time of his visit, though there is no evidence that he met them. These writers provided Chaucer with models of new verse forms (including iambic pentameter), new subject matter, and new modes of representation. His *House of Fame* takes the poet on a journey in the talons of a gigantic eagle to the celestial palace of the goddess Fame, a trip that at many points affectionately parodies Dante's

journey in the *Divine Comedy*. Boccaccio provided sources for two of Chaucer's finest poems—although Chaucer never mentions the Italian poet by name. *The Knight's Tale*, the first of *The Canterbury Tales*, is based on Boccaccio's romance *Il Teseida* (The Story of Theseus). Chaucer's longest completed poem, *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1385), is an adaptation of Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* (The Love-Stricken). In beautiful and psychologically astute verse, the poem recounts the misadventures of two Trojans, Prince Troilus and the widow Criseyde, who fall passionately in love during the Trojan War. Even if he had never written *The Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde* would have secured Chaucer a place among the major English poets.

Throughout his life Chaucer also wrote moral and religious works, chiefly translations, which show that he knew Latin as well as French and Italian. One of the most important of these was his translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, originally written in Latin around 524 C.E. by Boethius, a Roman statesman and philosopher who composed the text in prison while he awaited execution for crimes for which he had been unjustly condemned. The *Consolation* was a favorite book of medieval readers and was a source for the popular personification of Fortune as a fickle woman, turning her wheel to bring success and disaster. The *Consolation* also provided an accessible framework for thinking through one of the major puzzles of Christianity: how God's foreknowledge could exist alongside human free will. Chaucer added important Boethian passages to both *The Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. His lyric the *Balade de bon conseil* (Ballad of Good Counsel) compresses Boethian and Christian teachings into three stanzas of plain-spoken moral advice.

Chaucer's writings are full of different kinds of learning. It is clear that he was familiar with classical myths as well as handbooks for priests, the technical jargon of London craftsmen and the teachings of the early Church Fathers, technicalities of astronomy and an array of saints' lives. He must have had access to a considerable number of books. Manuscripts in Chaucer's day were quite expensive, thanks to the costly sheets of treated animal skin on which they were often written as well as to the time-consuming labor of copying them.



Chaucer's personal and professional connections probably gave him access to books in such venues as religious institutions, court and government offices, and well-to-do households, as well as in trade. However, when Chaucer's poetry invokes a branch of learned expertise, we shouldn't assume he knew the discipline exhaustively. Scholars in the Middle Ages often created reference works, gathering snippets of many different sources together in one volume. Someone may seem to have read dozens of books, when they'd really consulted just one! Chaucer is likely to have relied on encyclopedic resources like these in cultivating his learning.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Chaucer's poetry is the juxtaposition of idioms and genres to create new effects. This literary habit of code-switching reflects his biography: his career brought him into contact with diverse bourgeois and aristocratic worlds, without his being securely anchored in any one of them. His experiments with multivocal compilation are realized most fully in *The Canterbury Tales*, where language's differentiation according to factors of profession, class, age, gender, and moral character is simultaneously a major stylistic feature and a central thematic concern. Part of the challenge of reading Chaucer's writing is keeping up with its quicksilver shifts of tone, genre, and voice.

This collaging of voices often makes it difficult to extract simple, direct meanings from Chaucer's writings—an interpretive effect that can make his texts seem especially open-minded and modern. Yet this indeterminacy is not necessarily emancipatory. In some cases, Chaucer's writings give literary expression to hierarchy and violence. *The Prioress's Tale* is a finely wrought work of anti-Judaism, which repeats the false accusation that Jews kill Christian children. *The Man of Law's Tale* is an Islamophobic work, which portrays the Muslim mother of the Sultan as a depraved and bloodthirsty fanatic. Some recent readers have sought to preserve Chaucer's moral standing by blaming the tale-teller pilgrims rather than their author. Yet it is clear from surviving evidence that for at least some of Chaucer's early audience, such stories were read not ironically but earnestly, as affirmations of their expressed ideological values. As is true for the canon of English literature more generally, Chaucer's writings are not

immune to the fantasies of domination and superiority upon which they offer comment.

Looking at Chaucer's legacy, we can conclude that the most important factor in the poet's later literary fame is that he wrote his poetry in English (and, even more particularly, in a version of the dialect that was to become the national standard). Throughout the fifteenth century, Chaucer was a touchstone for poets who likewise wrote in the vernacular, including Thomas Hoccleve (ca. 1367–1426; see [pp. 589–99](#)), John Lydgate (1371–1449), and the Scottish poet Robert Henryson (d. ca. 1490; see [pp. 678–81](#)). These poets paid homage especially to Chaucer's elevation of the English language, making it a vehicle for the highest rhetorical register. Later editors and audiences continued to consolidate Chaucer's reputation until he was very much a literary institution.

In the late twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, a surprising array of writers have returned to Chaucer's corpus, especially *The Canterbury Tales*, and found new possibilities. For instance, the African American novelist Gloria Naylor riffs on the framework of the Canterbury pilgrimage in her 1992 novel *Bailey's Café* (the name of its main narrator alludes to Harry Bailey, convener of Chaucer's tale-telling game). The Nigerian novelist Karen King-Aribisala, in her 1998 story collection *Kicking Tongues*, repurposes Chaucer's narrative frame for a journey to the Nigerian capital. The Black British poet Patience Agbabi (featured in volume F of this anthology) presents a "remix" of *The Canterbury Tales* in her 2014 *Telling Tales*. And the 2016 collection *Refugee Tales* (ed. David Herd and Anna Pincus) assumes the loose structure of the Canterbury pilgrimage to collect various tales of immigration, displacement, and statelessness. The many voices of Chaucer's original writings have continued to be refracted into different idioms and perspectives.

The text here is drawn from David Lawton's *The Norton Chaucer* (2019). However, the spelling of all texts by Chaucer has been modernized wherever modernization does not impair meter or rhyme. All the poetic texts by Chaucer here should be read so as to produce a five-stress line, with an iambic meter following the pattern

x / x / x / x / x / (x), where x = an unstressed syllable and / = a stressed syllable. The final unstressed syllable is optional. If a word ends in a vowel, and the following word begins with a vowel, the final syllable of the first word can be elided with the first syllable of the following word. The language produced is designed for maximize legibility; we sacrifice philological and phonological coherence with that aim in mind. Students should not base any understanding of Chaucer's language on these texts. More extensive discussion of the sounds and meter of Middle English is included in the volume's introduction ([pp. 21–24](#)). Glosses are also based on Lawton's edition, with many additions of our own.

**The Canterbury Tales** Chaucer's original plan for *The Canterbury Tales*—if we assume it to be the same as that which the fictional Host proposes at the end of *The General Prologue*—projected about one hundred twenty stories, two for each pilgrim to tell on the way to Canterbury and two more on the way back. Chaucer actually completed only twenty-two and the beginnings of two others. He did write an ending, however—for the Host says to the Parson that everyone except him has told “his tale.”

Little is known about the origins of *The Canterbury Tales*, but it was perhaps first conceived in 1386, when Chaucer was living in Greenwich, some miles east of London. From his house he might have been able to see the pilgrim road that led toward the shrine of the famous English saint Thomas à Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in his cathedral in 1170. Medieval pilgrims were notorious tale-tellers, and the sight and sound of the groups riding toward Canterbury may well have suggested to Chaucer the idea of using a fictitious pilgrimage as a framing device for a number of stories. Collections of stories linked by such a device were common in the later Middle Ages. Chaucer's contemporary John Gower had used one in his *Lover's Confession* (see [p. 578](#)). The most famous medieval framing tale besides Chaucer's is Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1353), in which ten different narrators each tell a tale a day for ten days. Chaucer perhaps knew the *Decameron*, which contains a few tales with plots analogous to those found in *The Canterbury Tales*, but these stories were widespread, and there is no proof that Chaucer got them from Boccaccio.

In any case, Chaucer's artistic exploitation of the tale-telling device is altogether his own. Whereas in Gower a single speaker relates all the stories, and in Boccaccio the ten speakers—three young gentlemen and seven young ladies—all belong to the same sophisticated social elite, Chaucer's pilgrim narrators represent a wide spectrum of ranks and occupations. The fine delineation of social distinctions should not, however, be mistaken for novelistic or documentary “realism.” It is highly unlikely that a group like

Chaucer's pilgrims would ever have joined together and communicated on such apparently egalitarian terms. That is part of the fiction, as is the tacit assumption that a group so large could have ridden along listening to one another tell tales in verse. The variety of tellers is matched by the diversity of their tales. In numerous instances, tales are assigned to appropriate narrators and juxtaposed to bring out contrasts in genre, style, tone, and ethical code. Thus the Knight's courtly romance about the rivalry of two noble lovers for a lady is followed by the story of a very different love triangle, the Miller's fabliau (a medieval genre of bawdy and humorous narrative, usually featuring commoners as protagonists). For several of *The Canterbury Tales*, the tale takes on new overtones and significance from what we have learned of its teller in *The General Prologue*. In turn, the teller's character seems to be revealed by the story told. In this way, Chaucer conducts two fictions simultaneously—that of the individual tale and that of the pilgrim to whom he has assigned it.

Chaucer develops this second fiction not only in *The General Prologue* but also through the "links," or interchanges between pilgrims, connecting their stories. These interchanges sometimes lead to quarrels. For example, *The Miller's Tale* offends the Reeve, who is not only the manager of an estate or farm (the meaning of "reeve") but also a carpenter. He understands the character of the Miller's foolish, cuckolded carpenter to be a personal attack, and he retaliates with a story satirizing an arrogant miller very much like the pilgrim Miller. The antagonism of the two tellers provides comedy in the links and enhances the comedy of their tales. The links also offer literary commentary on the tales by members of the pilgrim audience, especially the Host, whom the pilgrims have declared "governor" and "judge" of the storytelling. Further dramatic interest is created by the fact that several tales respond to topics taken up by previous tellers. The Wife of Bath's thesis that women should have sovereignty over men in marriage gets a reply from the Clerk, which in turn elicits responses from the Merchant and the Franklin. However, each tale has its own interest quite apart from the framing fiction. This is clear from their later history: some tales circulated

independently, copied on their own without the tale-telling frame. Yet no other framing fiction in medieval literature has such varied and lively interactions between the larger frame and the individual stories: the tale-tellers are central to Chaucer's innovative literary design.



Then fore wordinges alle I yow biseche  
 If yow thynke I saye as in my cawse  
 As thus though that I telle comendat moore  
 Of yowdes than ye han heyd biseche  
 Comendades in this lital netys geue  
 To enforse with theffet of my misteere  
 And though I nat the oame wordes seye  
 As ye han heyd yet to yow alle I prey  
 Althowgh me nat for as in my cawse  
 Shul ye nothesey fynden difference  
 Thro the sentence of this netys lyte  
 After the which this mynne tale I write  
 And the fore seyneth esett yow shal seye  
 And lat me tellen al my talo I prey

Explicit

Where begynneth Chaucers tale of welbeck



**A** young man called welbeck myghty and yche bigat  
 on his wyf that called was prudence a daughter  
 which that called was sophie. Upon a day bikel  
 he for his report is sent in to the felles hym to plye  
 his wyf and all his daughter hath he left with his hous of chiche  
 the sores egeen faste yfthene the of his olde feres han it espyed  
 and gotten laddres to the galles of his hous and by semedres  
 been entred and betten his wyf and wounded his daughter with  
 fyue mortal woundes in fyue contry places this is to sayn in  
 hy feet. in hy handes. in hy eyes. in hy nose. and in hy mouth  
 And lefte hy for dead and senten away. When welbeck se  
 tomydes was in to his hous and caught all this welthef. he hit a  
 was man yertynge his clothes gan to wepe and crye. And prudence  
 as his wyf as ferforth as she dorste bisechte hym of his gemynge  
 for to stynte but nat for thy he gan to crye and ceden ene lenger  
 the moore. This noble wyf prudence remembred hye upon the  
 sentence of omide in his booke that cleped is the remembre of lous  
 shep as he couth he is a fool that destrouyeth the woode to seuen in  
 the deeth of hye chur. til she haue sent hye full as for a certen  
 tyme. And thanne shal man don his diligence with amplyble  
 wordes hye to reconforte and preyen hye of hye gemynge for to  
 stynte. After which reson this noble wyf prudence cuffed hye  
 housbonde for to wepe and crye as for a certen wyte. And when  
 she caught hye tyme she seyde hym in this wyse. Allas my  
 lord quod she why make ye youp self for to be hit a fool for so  
 the it aperteth nat to a deys man to maken such a corde youp

Conclusio de remedio amoris

**Chaucer Portrait.** A page from the Ellesmere manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*, Huntington Library, MS EL 26 C 9, fol. 153v. Chaucer remains unnamed as a pilgrim in the text of *The Canterbury Tales*, but the very early, decorated Ellesmere manuscript (ca. 1400) gives him high profile in this apparently verisimilar pilgrim portrait, the model of most later Chaucer portraits (including that in Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*). Chaucer's image is placed so as to underline his fame, but it is placed beside, and pointing to, a prose text told by the Chaucer pilgrim, the serious *Melibee*, devoted to avoidance of civil war.

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It is not possible to date the composition of any of the tales with precision. Most of them were probably written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life, although a few seem likely to have been drafted earlier and inserted into *The Canterbury Tales* with minimal revisions. The popularity of the poem in late medieval England is attested by the number of surviving manuscripts: more than eighty, none from Chaucer's lifetime. It was also twice printed by William Caxton, who introduced printing to England in 1476, and it was often reprinted by Caxton's early successors. The manuscripts reflect the unfinished state of the poem—when he died, Chaucer had not established a definitive version. Inconsistencies among the surviving copies suggest a process of experimentation and revision. Within the manuscripts, *The Canterbury Tales* falls into at least seven, possibly more, blocks of tales. The order of the tales within each block is generally the same, but the order of the blocks within the manuscripts varies widely. The block containing *The General Prologue*; the Knight's, Miller's, and Reeve's tales; and the Cook's unfinished tale always comes first, and the group consisting of *The Parson's Tale* and *The Retraction* always comes last. But the others, such as that containing the Wife of Bath's, the Friar's, and the Summoner's tales, or that consisting of the Physician's and Pardoner's tales, or the longest block, consisting of six tales concluding with the Nun's Priest's tale, are by no means stable in



relation to one another. The order followed here, that of the Ellesmere manuscript, has been adopted as the most nearly satisfactory.

## The General Prologue

Chaucer did not need to make a pilgrimage himself to meet the types of people that his fictitious pilgrimage includes, because most of them had long inhabited literature as well as life: the ideal Knight, who had taken part in all the major expeditions and battles of Christian warfare during the last half-century; his fashionably dressed son, the Squire, a typical young lover; the lady Prioress, the hunting Monk, and the flattering Friar (all of whom practice the little vanities and larger vices for which such ecclesiastics were conventionally attacked); the prosperous Franklin; the greedy Doctor of Medicine; the lusty and domineering Wife of Bath; the austere Parson; and so on down through the lower orders to that spellbinding preacher the Pardoner, peddling his paper indulgences and phony relics. One meets these types throughout medieval literature, but particularly in a genre called estates satire, which sets out to expose and ridicule typical examples of corruption at all levels of society. A remarkable number of details in *The General Prologue* could have been taken straight from works of estates satire.

Although it has been argued that some of the pilgrims are portraits of actual people, the impression that they are drawn from life is likely to be a function of Chaucer's distinctive artistry rather than his documentary accuracy. The salient features of each pilgrim seem to leap out at the reader, as they might to an observer concerned only with what meets the eye. This imitation of the way our minds perceive reality may make us fail to notice the care with which Chaucer has selected his details to give an integrated sketch of the person being described. Most of these details give something more than mere lifelikeness to the description. The pilgrims' facial features, the clothes they wear, the foods they like to eat, the things they say, and the work they do are all clues not only to their social rank but to their moral and spiritual condition. Together they create a microcosm of late medieval English society. What distinguishes

Chaucer's prologue from more conventional estates satire, such as the *Prologue to Piers Plowman*, is its suppression of overt moral judgment. The narrator, in fact, seems to be expressing chiefly admiration and praise of the superlative skills and accomplishments of this particular group, even such dubious ones as the Friar's begging techniques or the Manciple's success in cheating the learned lawyers who employ him. Readers are left free to draw out the ironic implications of details presented with such apparent naivete. At the same time, they are invited into the easygoing atmosphere of "fellowship" that pervades Chaucer's prologue to the pilgrimage.

## ***The General Prologue***

When that April with his<sup>o</sup> shoures soote<sup>o1</sup>  
The drought of March hath pierced to the roote,  
And bathed every vein<sup>o</sup> in such licour<sup>o</sup>  
Of which virtue<sup>o</sup> engendered is the flower;  
When Zephyrus<sup>o</sup> eek<sup>o</sup> with his sweete breath  
5 Inspired hath in<sup>o</sup> every holt<sup>o</sup> and heath<sup>o</sup>  
The tender crops,<sup>o</sup> and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halve course yronne,<sup>2</sup>  
And smale fowls<sup>o</sup> maken melody  
That sleepen all the night with open eye—  
10 So pricketh them Nature in their corages<sup>o3</sup>—  
Then longen folk to go on pilgrimages,  
And palmers<sup>4</sup> for to seeken strange strondes<sup>o</sup>  
To ferne halwes,<sup>o</sup> couthe<sup>o</sup> in sondry londes;  
And specially from every shires end  
15 Of Engelond to Canterbury they wend,  
The holy blissful<sup>o</sup> martyr<sup>5</sup> for to seeke<sup>o</sup>  
That them hath holpen<sup>o</sup> when that they were seke.<sup>o</sup>  
Befell that in that season on a day,  
In Southwark<sup>6</sup> at the Tabard as I lay,  
20 Ready to wenden<sup>o</sup> on my pilgrimage  
To Canterbury with full devout courage,<sup>o</sup>  
At night was come into that hostelry  
Well nine and twenty in a company  
Of sundry<sup>o</sup> folk, by aventure<sup>o</sup> yfalle  
25 In fellowship, and pilgrims were they alle  
That toward Canterbury wolden<sup>o</sup> ride.  
The chambers and the stables weren wide,  
And well we weren eased at the beste.<sup>o</sup>  
And shortly, when the sonne was to reste,<sup>o</sup>  
30 So had I spoken with them every one  
That I was of their fellowship anon,

And made forward<sup>o</sup> early for to rise,  
 To take our way thereas I you devise.<sup>o</sup>  
 But nonetheless, while I have time and space,<sup>o</sup>  
 35 Er<sup>o</sup> that I further in this tale pace,<sup>o</sup>  
 Me thinketh it accordant to reason<sup>o</sup>  
 To tell you all the condition  
 Of each of them, so as it seemed me,<sup>o</sup>  
 And which they were, and of what degree,<sup>o</sup>  
 40 And eek<sup>o</sup> in what array<sup>o</sup> that they were in;  
 And at a knight then will I first begin.  
 A Knight there was, and that a worthy man,  
 That from the time that he first began  
 To riden out, he loved chivalry,  
 45 Trouth<sup>o</sup> and honor, freedom<sup>o</sup> and courtesy.  
 Full worthy was he in his lordes war,<sup>7</sup>  
 And thereto had he riden, no man ferre,<sup>o</sup>  
 As well in Cristendom as heathenesse,<sup>o</sup>  
 And ever honored for his worthinesse.  
 50 At Alisandre<sup>o8</sup> he was when it was won;  
 Full ofte time he had the board begun<sup>o</sup>  
 Aboven alle nations in Puce;<sup>o</sup>  
 In Lettow<sup>o</sup> had he reised,<sup>o</sup> and in Ruce,<sup>o</sup>  
 No Christian man so oft of his degree;  
 55 In Gernade<sup>o</sup> at the siege eek<sup>o</sup> had he be<sup>o</sup>  
 Of Algezir,<sup>o</sup> and riden in Belmarie;<sup>o</sup>  
 At Lyeis<sup>o</sup> was he, and at Satalie,<sup>o</sup>  
 When they were won; and in the Grete Sea<sup>o</sup>  
 At many a noble armee<sup>o</sup> had he be.  
 60 At mortal battles had he been fifteen,  
 And foughten for our faith at Tramisseen<sup>o</sup>  
 In listes<sup>o</sup> thrice, and ay<sup>o</sup> slain his foe.  
 This ilke<sup>o</sup> worthy knight had been also  
 Sometime with the lord of Palatye<sup>o</sup>  
 65 Against another heathen in Turkey;  
 And evermore he had a sovereign pris.<sup>o</sup>

And though that he were worthy, he was wise,  
 And of his port<sup>o</sup> as meek as is a maid.  
 He never yet no villainy<sup>o</sup> ne said  
 70 In all his life unto no manner wight:<sup>o</sup>  
 He was a very,<sup>o</sup> perfect,<sup>o</sup> gentle<sup>o</sup> knight.  
 But for to tellen you of his array,<sup>o</sup>  
 His hors<sup>o</sup> were good, but he was not gay.<sup>o</sup>  
 Of fustian<sup>o</sup> he wered a gipoun<sup>o</sup>  
 75 All bismotered with his haubergeoun,<sup>o</sup>  
 For he was late<sup>o</sup> ycome from his voyage.  
 And wente for to doon his pilgrimage.  
 With him there was his son, a yonge Squier,  
 A lover and a lusty bachelor,<sup>9</sup>  
 80 With lockes crulle as they were laid in presse.<sup>1</sup>  
 Of twenty year of age he was, I gesse.  
 Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,<sup>o</sup>  
 And wonderly deliver,<sup>o</sup> and of great strengthe.  
 And he had been sometime in chivachye<sup>o</sup>  
 85 In Flandres, in Artois, and Picardy,<sup>2</sup>  
 And born him well as of so little space,<sup>o</sup>  
 In hope to stonden in his lady<sup>o</sup> grace.  
 Embrouded<sup>o</sup> was he as it were a mede,<sup>o</sup>  
 All full of freshe flowers, white and rede;  
 90 Singing he was, or fluting, all the day:  
 He was as fresh as is the month of May.  
 Short was his gown, with sleeves long and wide.  
 Well could he sit on hors, and faire ride;  
 He could songes make, and well endite,<sup>o</sup>  
 95 Joust and eek<sup>o</sup> dance, and well portray<sup>o</sup> and write.  
 So hot<sup>o</sup> he loved that by nightertale<sup>o</sup>  
 He slept no more than dooth a nightingale.  
 Courteous he was, lowly,<sup>o</sup> and servisable,<sup>o</sup>  
 And carf<sup>o</sup> before his father at the table.  
 100 A Yeoman<sup>3</sup> had he and servants namo<sup>o</sup>  
 At that time, for him liste<sup>o</sup> ride so;

And he<sup>o</sup> was clad in coat and hood of greene.  
 A sheaf of peacock arrows, bright and keene,  
 Under his belt he bore full thriftily;<sup>o</sup>  
 105 Well could he dress his tackle<sup>o</sup> yeomanly:  
 His arrows drooped not with fetheres lowe.  
 And in his hand he bore a mighty bowe.  
 A nut-head<sup>o</sup> had he with a brown<sup>o</sup> visage.  
 Of woodcraft well could<sup>o</sup> he all the usage.  
 110 Upon his arm he bore a gay bracer,<sup>o</sup>  
 And by his side a sword and a buckler,<sup>o</sup>  
 And on that other side a gay dagger,  
 Harnessed<sup>o</sup> well and sharp as point of spere;  
 A Christopher<sup>4</sup> on his breast of silver sheene;<sup>o</sup>  
 115 An horn he bore, the baldrick<sup>o</sup> was of greene.  
 A forester was he soothly, as I gesse.  
 There was also a Nun, a Prioress,<sup>5</sup>  
 That of her smiling was full simple and coy.<sup>o</sup>  
 120 Her greatest oath was but by Saint Loy!<sup>6</sup>  
 And she was cleped<sup>o</sup> Madame Eglentine.  
 Full well she sang the service divine,  
 Entuned<sup>o</sup> in her nose full semely;<sup>o</sup>  
 And French she spoke full fair and fetisly,<sup>o</sup>  
 125 After the school of Stratford at the Bowe<sup>7</sup>—  
 For French of Paris was to her unknowe.  
 At mete<sup>o</sup> well ytaught<sup>o</sup> was she withalle:<sup>o</sup>  
 She let no morsel from her lippes falle  
 Ne wet her fingers in her sauce deepe;  
 130 Well could she carye a morsel, and well keepe<sup>o</sup>  
 That no drop ne fell upon her breast.  
 In courtesy was set full muchel her lest.<sup>8</sup>  
 Her over-lippe wiped she so clene  
 That in her cup was no farthing<sup>o</sup> seene  
 Of grease, when she dronken had her draughte;<sup>o</sup>  
 135 Full semely after her mete she raughte.<sup>o</sup>  
 And sikerly<sup>o</sup> she was of great disport,<sup>o</sup>

And full pleasant, and amiable of port,<sup>o</sup>  
 And pained her to countrefete cheere<sup>o</sup>  
 Of court, and to been estatlich<sup>o</sup> of manere,  
 140 And to been holden digne<sup>o</sup> of reverence.  
 But, for to speken of her conscience,  
 She was so charitable and so pitous  
 She wolde weepe if that she sawe a mous  
 Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bledde.  
 145 Of smalle houndes had she that she fedde  
 With roasted flesh, or milk and wastelbreed;<sup>o</sup>  
 But sore wept she if one of them were deed,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or if men smote it with a yarde<sup>o</sup> smerte;<sup>o</sup>  
 And all was conscience and tender herte.  
 150 Full semely<sup>o</sup> her wimple pinched<sup>o</sup> was,  
 Her nose tretis,<sup>o</sup> her eyen<sup>o</sup> gray as glass,  
 Her mouth full small and thereto softe and reed<sup>o</sup>—  
 But sikerly she had a fair forehead:  
 It was almost a spanne<sup>o</sup> broad, I trowe,<sup>o</sup>  
 155 For hardily,<sup>o</sup> she was not undergrowe.<sup>o</sup>  
 Full fetis<sup>o</sup> was her cloak, as I was war;  
 Of small<sup>o</sup> coral about her arm she bar  
 A pair of beads, gauded all with greene,<sup>9</sup>  
 And thereon hung a brooch of gold full sheene<sup>o</sup>  
 160 On which there was first written a crowned A,  
 And after, *Amor vincit omnia.*<sup>o</sup>  
 Another Nun with her hadde she  
 That was her chaplain, and priestes three.  
 A Monk there was, a fair for the maistry,<sup>o</sup>  
 165 An outrider<sup>1</sup> that loved venerye,<sup>o</sup>  
 A manly man, to been an abbot able.  
 Full many a dainty hors had he in stable,  
 And when he rode, men might his bridle heere  
 Gingen<sup>o</sup> in a whistling wind as cleere  
 170 And eek<sup>o</sup> as loud as doth the chapel belle  
 Thereas<sup>o</sup> this lord was keeper of the celle.<sup>2</sup>



The rule of Saint Maure or of Saint Beneit,<sup>3</sup>  
Because that it was old and somdel strait<sup>o</sup>—  
This ilke<sup>o</sup> Monk let olde thinges pace,<sup>o</sup>  
175 And held after the newe world the space.<sup>o</sup>  
He yaf not of that text a pulled hen<sup>4</sup>  
That saith that hunters been not holy men,  
Ne that a monk, when he is recchelees,<sup>o</sup>  
Is likened till<sup>o</sup> a fish that is waterlees—  
180 This is to say, a monk out of his cloister;  
But thilke text held<sup>o</sup> he not worth an oyster.  
And I said his opinion was good:  
What<sup>o</sup> should he study and make himselven wood<sup>o</sup>  
Upon a book in cloister always to poure,  
185 Or swinke<sup>o</sup> with his handes and laboure,  
As Austin<sup>5</sup> bit?<sup>o</sup> How shall the world be served?  
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved!  
Therefore he was a prikasour<sup>o</sup> aright.  
Grey houndes he had as swift as fowl in flight.  
190 Of pricking<sup>o</sup> and of hunting for the hare  
Was all his lust,<sup>o</sup> for no cost would he spare.  
I saw his sleeves purfiled<sup>o</sup> at the hand  
With gris,<sup>o</sup> and that the finest of a land;  
And for to fasten his hood under his chin  
195 He had of gold ywroght a curious<sup>o</sup> pin:  
A love-knot in the greater end there was.  
His head was bald, that shone as any glass,  
And eek<sup>o</sup> his face, as<sup>o</sup> he had been anoint:<sup>o</sup>  
He was a lord full fat and in good point;<sup>o</sup>  
200 His eyen steep,<sup>o</sup> and rolling in his heed,  
That steamed as a furnace of a leed;<sup>o</sup>  
His bootes supple, his horse in great estate<sup>o</sup>—  
Now certainly he was a fair prelate.<sup>o</sup>  
He was not pale as a forpined goost:<sup>o</sup>  
205 A fat swan loved he best of any roast.  
His palfrey<sup>o</sup> was as brown as is a berry.

A Frere there was, a wanton and a merry,  
 A limitour,<sup>6</sup> a full solempne man.  
 In alle the orders four<sup>7</sup> is none that can<sup>o</sup>  
 210 So much of daliaunce<sup>o</sup> and fair langage:  
 He hadde made full many a marriage  
 Of younge wommen at his owene cost;  
 Unto his order he was a noble post.<sup>o</sup>  
 Full well beloved and familiar was he  
 215 With frankelins<sup>o</sup> over all in his countree,  
 And with worthy wommen of the town—  
 For he had power of confessioun,  
 As said himself, more than a curate,<sup>o</sup>  
 For of<sup>o</sup> his order he was licenciate.<sup>o</sup>  
 220 Full sweetely heard he confession,  
 And pleasant was his absolution.  
 He was an easy man to give penance  
 Thereas he wiste to have<sup>o</sup> a good pitance;<sup>o</sup>  
 For unto a poore ordre for to give  
 225 Is signe that a man is well yshrive;<sup>o</sup>  
 For if he gave, he dorste make avant<sup>o</sup>  
 He wiste that a man was repentant;<sup>8</sup>  
 For many a man so hard is of his heart  
 He may not weepe though him soore smerte:<sup>o</sup>  
 230 Therefore, in stead of weeping and prayeres,  
 Men moote<sup>o</sup> give silver to the poore freres.  
 His tippet<sup>o</sup> was ay<sup>o</sup> farsed<sup>o</sup> full of knives  
 And pinnes, for to given faire wives;  
 And certainly he had a merry note.  
 235 Well could he sing and playen on a rote;<sup>o</sup>  
 Of yeddinges<sup>o</sup> he bar outrely<sup>o</sup> the pris.<sup>9</sup>  
 His necke whit was as the flour-de-lis;<sup>o</sup>  
 Thereto he strong was as a champion.<sup>o</sup>  
 He knew the taverns well in every town,  
 240 And every hostiler<sup>o</sup> and tappestere,<sup>o</sup>  
 Bet<sup>o</sup> than a lazar<sup>o</sup> or a beggestere.<sup>o</sup>

For unto such a worthy man as he  
 Accorded not, as by his facultee,  
 To have with sike<sup>o</sup> lazars acquaintance:  
 245 It is not honest,<sup>o</sup> it may not avance,<sup>o1</sup>  
 For to dealen with no such poraile,<sup>o</sup>  
 But all with rich, and sellers of vitaile;<sup>o</sup>  
 And overall,<sup>o</sup> thereas profit should arise,  
 Courteous he was and lowly of service.  
 250 There was no man nowhere so virtuous:  
 He was the beste beggar in his house—  
 And gave a certain ferme for the graunt;<sup>2</sup>  
 252a None of his bretheren came there in his haunt.<sup>o</sup>  
 252b For though a widow hadde not a shoe,  
 So pleasant was his *In principio*<sup>3</sup>  
 Yet would he have a farthing<sup>o</sup> er he wente;  
 255 His purchase<sup>o</sup> was well better than his rente.<sup>o</sup>  
 And rage he could as it were right a whelpe;<sup>o</sup>  
 In love-dayes<sup>4</sup> ther could he muchel<sup>o</sup> helpe,  
 For there he was not like a cloisterer,<sup>o</sup>  
 With threadbare cope, as is a poor scholar,  
 260 But he was like a master<sup>o</sup> or a pope.  
 Of double worstede<sup>o</sup> was his semicope,<sup>o</sup>  
 And rounded as a bell out of the presse.<sup>o</sup>  
 Somewhat he lipped<sup>o</sup> for his wantonesse<sup>o</sup>  
 To make his English sweet upon his tounge;  
 265 And in his harping, when that he had songe,  
 His eyen twinkled in his head aright  
 As doon the sterres<sup>o</sup> in the frosty night.  
 This worthy limitour was cleped Huberd.  
 A Merchant<sup>5</sup> was there with a forked beard,  
 270 In motely,<sup>o</sup> and high on horse he sat,  
 Upon his head a Flandrissh bever<sup>o</sup> hat,  
 His bootes clasped fair and fetisly.<sup>o</sup>  
 His reasons<sup>o</sup> he spoke full solemnly,  
 Sowninge<sup>o</sup> always th'increase of his winning.<sup>o</sup>

275 He would the sea were kept for anything<sup>o</sup>  
Betwixen Middelburgh and Orewelle.<sup>6</sup>  
Well could he in exchange sheeldes selle.<sup>7</sup>  
This worthy man full well his wit beset:<sup>o</sup>  
280 There wiste<sup>o</sup> no wight<sup>o</sup> that he was in debt,  
So estatly<sup>o</sup> was he of his governance,<sup>o</sup>  
With his bargains,<sup>o</sup> and with his  
chevissaunce.<sup>o</sup>  
Forsooth<sup>o</sup> he was a worthy man withalle;  
But, sooth to sayn, I noot<sup>o</sup> how men him calle.  
A Clerk there was of Oxenforde also  
285 That unto logic hadde long ygo.<sup>o</sup>  
As lean was his horse as is a rake,  
And he was not right fat, I undertake,  
But looked hollow, and thereto soberly.  
Full threadbare was his overest courtepy,<sup>o</sup>  
290 For he had gotten him yet no benefice,  
Ne was so worldly for to have office.<sup>8</sup>  
For him was lever<sup>o</sup> have at his beddes head  
Twenty bookes, clad in black or red,  
Of Aristotle and his philosophy,  
295 Than robes rich, or fithel,<sup>o</sup> or gay sautry.<sup>o</sup>  
But all be that he was a philosopher<sup>9</sup>  
Yet had he but little gold in coffer;  
But all that he might of his frendes hente,<sup>o</sup>  
On bookes and on learning he it spente,  
300 And busily gan for the soules praye  
Of them that gave him wherewith to scoleye.<sup>o</sup>  
Of study took he most cure<sup>o</sup> and most heede.  
Not one word spoke he more than was neede,  
And that was said in form<sup>o</sup> and reverence,  
305 And short and quick, and full of high sentence:<sup>o</sup>  
Sowninge in<sup>o</sup> moral virtue was his speech,  
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.  
A Sergeant of the Lawe,<sup>1</sup> war<sup>o</sup> and wise,

310 That often hadde been at the Parvise<sup>2</sup>  
 There was also, full rich of excellence.  
 Discreet he was, and of great reverence—  
 He seemed such, his wordes were so wise.  
 Justice he was full often in assise<sup>o</sup>  
 By patent<sup>o</sup> and by plein<sup>o</sup> commission.  
 315 For his science<sup>o</sup> and for his high renown  
 Of fees and robes had he many one.  
 So great a purchasour<sup>o</sup> was nowhere none;  
 All was fee simple to him in effect<sup>3</sup>—  
 His purchasing ne might not been infect.<sup>o</sup>  
 320 Nowhere so busy a man as he there nas;<sup>o</sup>  
 And yet he seemed busier than he was.  
 In termes<sup>o</sup> had he case<sup>o</sup> and doomes<sup>o</sup>  
 alle  
 That from the time of King William<sup>4</sup> were falle.  
 Thereto he could endite<sup>o</sup> and make a  
 325 thing,<sup>o</sup>  
 There could no wight pinche<sup>o</sup> at his writing;  
 And every statute coulde<sup>o</sup> he plein<sup>o</sup> by rote.<sup>o</sup>  
 He rode but homely<sup>o</sup> in a medley<sup>o</sup> coat,  
 Girt with a ceint<sup>o</sup> of silk, with barres<sup>o</sup> smale.  
 Of his array tell I no longer tale.  
 330 A Frankelin<sup>5</sup> was in his company:  
 White was his beard as is the dayesy;<sup>o</sup>  
 Of his complexion he was sanguine.<sup>6</sup>  
 Well loved he by the morrow<sup>o</sup> a sop  
 in wine.<sup>o</sup>  
 To liven in delight was ever his wone.<sup>o</sup>  
 335 For he was Epicurus'<sup>7</sup> owne sone,  
 That held opinion that plein<sup>o</sup> delit  
 Was verray felicity parfit.<sup>o</sup>  
 An householder and that a great was he:  
 Saint Julian<sup>8</sup> he was in his country.  
 340 His bread, his ale, was always after one;<sup>o</sup>

A better envined<sup>o</sup> man was never none.  
 Withouten bake mete<sup>o</sup> was never his house,  
 Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous  
 It snowed in his house of mete and drinke,  
 345 Of alle dainties<sup>o</sup> that men could thinke.  
 After<sup>o</sup> the sundry seasons of the year  
 So changed he his mete<sup>o</sup> and his supper.  
 Full many a fat partridge had he in mewe,<sup>o</sup>  
 And many a bream, and many a luce<sup>o</sup> in stewe.<sup>o</sup>  
 350 Woe was his cook but if<sup>o</sup> his sauce were  
 Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear.<sup>o</sup>  
 His table dormant in his hall alway  
 Stood ready covered all the longe day.<sup>9</sup>  
 At sessions there was he lord and sire.  
 355 Full ofte time he was Knight of the Shire.<sup>o</sup>  
 An anlaas<sup>o</sup> and a gipser<sup>o</sup> all of silk  
 Hung at his girdle,<sup>o</sup> white as morne<sup>o</sup> milk.  
 A sheriff had he been, and a countour.<sup>o1</sup>  
 Was nowhere such a worthy vavasour.<sup>o</sup>  
 360 An Haberdassher<sup>o</sup> and a Carpenter,  
 A Webb,<sup>o</sup> a Dyer, and a Tapicer<sup>o</sup>—  
 And they were clothed alle in one livery  
 Of a solemn and a great fraternity.<sup>2</sup>  
 Full fresh and new their geare apiked<sup>o</sup> was;  
 365 Their knives were ychaped<sup>o</sup> not with brass,  
 But all with silver—wrought full clean and well  
 Their girdles and their pouches everydel.<sup>o</sup>  
 Well seemed each of them a fair burgess<sup>o</sup>  
 To sitten in a guildhall on a dais.  
 370 Everich,<sup>o</sup> for the wisdom that he can,<sup>o</sup>  
 Was shapely<sup>o</sup> for to be an alderman.<sup>o</sup>  
 For catel<sup>o</sup> hadde they enough and rente,<sup>o</sup>  
 And eek their wives would it well assente<sup>o</sup>—  
 And elles<sup>o</sup> certain were they to blame:  
 375 It is full fair to been ycleped “Madame,”

And go to vigilies<sup>3</sup> all before,<sup>o</sup>  
 And have a mantle royally ybore.<sup>o</sup>  
 A Cook they had with them, for the nonce,<sup>o</sup>  
 To boil the chickens with the marrow bones,  
 380 And powder-marchant tart<sup>o</sup> and galingale.<sup>o</sup>  
 Well could he know a draught of London ale.  
 He coulde roast, and seeth,<sup>o</sup> and broil, and fry,  
 Maken mortreux,<sup>o</sup> and well bake a pie.  
 But great harm was it, as it thoughte me,  
 385 That on his shin a mormal<sup>o</sup> hadde he.  
 For blancmange,<sup>o</sup> that made he with the best.  
 A Shipman<sup>4</sup> was there, woning<sup>o</sup> far by west—  
 For ought I woot, he was of Dartemouthe.<sup>o</sup>  
 He rode upon a rouncy<sup>o</sup> as he couthe,<sup>o</sup>  
 390 In a gown of falding<sup>o</sup> to the knee.  
 A dagger hanging on a laas<sup>o</sup> had he  
 About his neck, under his arm adown.  
 The hot summer had made his hue all brown;  
 And certainly he was a good felawe.  
 395 Full many a draughte of wine had he drawe  
 From Bordeauxward, while that the chapman sleep:<sup>5</sup>  
 Of nice conscience<sup>o</sup> took he no keep;<sup>o</sup>  
 If that he fought and had the higher hand,  
 By water he sente them home<sup>o</sup> to every land.  
 400 But of his craft, to reckon well his tides,  
 His stremes<sup>o</sup> and his dangers<sup>o</sup> him besides,  
 His harbor and his mone,<sup>o</sup> his lodemenage,<sup>o</sup>  
 There was none such from Hulle to Carthage.<sup>6</sup>  
 Hardy he was and wise to undertake;<sup>o</sup>  
 405 With many a tempest had his beard been shake;  
 He knew well all the havens<sup>o</sup> as they were  
 From Gotland to the Cape of Finistere,<sup>7</sup>  
 And every crike<sup>o</sup> in Britain<sup>o</sup> and in Spain.  
 His barge ycleped<sup>o</sup> was the Magdalene.<sup>8</sup>  
 410 With us there was a Doctor of Physic:<sup>o9</sup>

In all this world ne was there none him like  
 To speak of physic and of surgery.  
 For he was grounded in astronomy,<sup>o</sup>  
 He kept his patient a full great deal  
 415 In hours by his magic natural.<sup>1</sup>  
 Well could he<sup>o</sup> fortunen the ascendant  
 Of his images<sup>2</sup> for his patient.  
 He knew the cause of every malady,  
 Were it of hot or cold or moist or dry,  
 420 And where engendered and of what humor:<sup>3</sup>  
 He was a very,<sup>o</sup> perfect practisour.<sup>o</sup>  
 The cause yknowe,<sup>o</sup> and of his<sup>o</sup> harm the root,  
 Anon he gave the sike man his boot.<sup>o</sup>  
 Full ready had he his apothecaries  
 425 To send him drugges and his letuaries,<sup>o</sup>  
 For each of them made other for to winne:<sup>o</sup>  
 Their friendship was not newe to beginne.  
 Well knew he the old Esculapius,  
 And Deiscorides and eek Rufus,  
 430 Old Ipocras, Hali, and Galien,  
 Serapion, Razis, and Avicen,  
 Averrois, Damascien, and Constantin,  
 Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertin.<sup>4</sup>  
 Of his diet mesurable<sup>o</sup> was he,  
 435 For it was of no superfluity,  
 But of great norishing<sup>o</sup> and digestible.  
 His study was but little on the Bible.  
 In sanguine<sup>o</sup> and in perse<sup>o</sup> he clad was al,  
 Lined with taffeta and with sendal;<sup>o</sup>  
 440 And yet he was but easy of dispense;<sup>o</sup>  
 He kepte that<sup>o</sup> he won in pestilence.<sup>o</sup>  
 For<sup>o</sup> gold in physic is a cordial,<sup>o</sup>  
 Therefore he loved gold in special.  
 A good Wife was there of beside<sup>o</sup> Bath,  
 445 But she was somdel<sup>o</sup> deaf, and that was scathe.<sup>o</sup>



Of cloth-making she had such an haunt,<sup>o</sup>  
 She passed<sup>o</sup> them of Ypres and of Gaunt.<sup>o</sup>  
 In all the parish wife ne was there none  
 That to the offring<sup>o</sup> before her shoulde gone,  
 450 And if there did, certain so wroth was she  
 That she was out of all charity.  
 Her coverchiefs full fine were of ground<sup>o</sup>—  
 I dorste<sup>o</sup> swear they weyeden<sup>o</sup> ten pound  
 That on a Sunday weren upon her head.  
 455 Her hosen<sup>o</sup> weren of fine scarlet reed,<sup>o</sup>  
 Full strait yteyd,<sup>o</sup> and shoes full moist<sup>o</sup> and newe.  
 Bold was her face and fair and red of hewe.<sup>o</sup>  
 She was a worthy woman all her life:  
 460 Husbands at churche door she hadde five,<sup>5</sup>  
 Withouten<sup>o</sup> other company in youthe—  
 But theerof needeth not<sup>o</sup> to speak as nouthe.<sup>o</sup>  
 And thrice had she been at Jerusalem;  
 She had passed many a strange stream;<sup>o</sup>  
 At Rome she hadde been, and at Boulogne,  
 465 In Galice at Saint Jame, and at Coloigne:<sup>6</sup>  
 She could muchel of<sup>o</sup> wandering by the waye.  
 Gap-toothed was she, soothly for to saye.<sup>o</sup>  
 Upon an ambler<sup>o</sup> easily she sat,  
 Ywimpled<sup>o</sup> well, and on her head an hat  
 470 As brood as is a buckler or a targe,<sup>7</sup>  
 A foot-mantle<sup>o</sup> about her hippes large,  
 And on her feet a pair of spures<sup>o</sup> sharpe.  
 In fellowship well could she laugh and carpe<sup>o</sup>  
 Of remedies of love she knew parchaunce,<sup>o</sup>  
 475 For she could<sup>o</sup> of that art the olde dance.  
 A good man was there of religion,  
 And was a poore Parson of a town,  
 But rich he was of holy thought and work.  
 He was also a learned man, a clerk,  
 480 That Cristes gospel trewely would<sup>o</sup> preach;

His parisshens<sup>o</sup> devoutly would he teach.  
Benign he was, and wonder<sup>o</sup> diligent,  
And in adversity full patient,  
And such he was ypreved<sup>o</sup> ofte sithes.<sup>o</sup>  
485 Full loath were him to cursen for his tithes,<sup>8</sup>  
But rather would he give, out of doubt,  
Unto his poore parisshens about  
Of his offring and eek of his substance:<sup>o</sup>  
He could in little thing have suffisance.<sup>o</sup>  
490 Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder,  
But he ne lefte not<sup>o</sup> for rain ne thunder,  
In sickness nor in mischief, to visite  
The ferreste<sup>o</sup> in his parish, much and lite,<sup>o</sup>  
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.  
495 This noble example to his sheep he yaf<sup>o</sup>  
That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.<sup>9</sup>  
Out of the Gospel he tho<sup>o</sup> wordes caught,  
And this figure<sup>o</sup> he added eek<sup>o</sup> thereto:  
That if gold rust, what shall iron do?  
500 For if a priest be foul, on whom we truste,  
No wonder is a lewed<sup>o</sup> man to ruste.<sup>o</sup>  
And shame it is, if a priest take keep,<sup>o</sup>  
A shiten<sup>o</sup> shepherd and a clene sheep.  
Well ought a priest example for to give  
505 By his cleanness how that his sheep should live.  
He sette not his benefice<sup>1</sup> to hire  
And let<sup>o</sup> his sheep encumbered in the mire  
And ran to London, unto Saint Paules,  
To seeken him a chauntrye<sup>o</sup> for soules,<sup>2</sup>  
510 Or with a brotherhood to been withholde,<sup>3</sup>  
But dwelt at home and kepte well his folde  
So that the wolf ne made it not miscarry:<sup>o</sup>  
He was a shepherd and not a mercenary.  
And though he holy were and virtuous,  
515 He was to sinful men not despitous,<sup>o</sup>

Ne of his speeche dangerous ne digne,<sup>o</sup>  
 But in his teaching discreet and benigne.  
 To drawen folk to heaven by fairnesse,<sup>o</sup>  
 By good example—this was his busynesse.<sup>o</sup>  
 520 But<sup>o</sup> it were any persone obstinat,<sup>o</sup>  
 Whatso he were, of high or low estat,  
 Him would he snibben<sup>o</sup> sharply for the nonce<sup>o</sup>  
 A better priest I trowe<sup>o</sup> there nowhere none is.  
 He waited after<sup>o</sup> no pomp and reverence,  
 525 Ne maked<sup>o</sup> him a spiced<sup>o</sup> conscience,  
 But Cristes lore<sup>o</sup> and his Apostles twelve  
 He taught, but first he followed it himselve.  
 With him there was a Plowman, was his brother,  
 That had ylad<sup>o</sup> of dung full many a fother.<sup>o</sup>  
 530 A true swinker<sup>o</sup> and a good was he,  
 Living in peace and perfect charity.  
 God loved he best with all his whole heart  
 At alle times, though him gamed or smart,<sup>o</sup>  
 And then his neighebor right as himselve.<sup>4</sup>  
 535 He wolde thressh, and thereto dike<sup>o</sup> and delve,<sup>o</sup>  
 For Cristes sake, for every poore wight,<sup>o</sup>  
 Withouten hire,<sup>o</sup> if it lay in his might.<sup>o</sup>  
 His tithes payed he full faire and well,  
 Both of his proper swink and his catel.<sup>5</sup>  
 540 In a tabard<sup>o</sup> he rode upon a mare.  
 There was also a Reeve and a Millere,  
 A Somnour,<sup>o</sup> and a Pardoner also,  
 A Manciple,<sup>o</sup> and myself—there were namo.<sup>o</sup>  
 545 The Miller was a stout carl<sup>o</sup> for the nonce.  
 Ful big he was of brawn<sup>o</sup> and eek<sup>o</sup> of bones—  
 That preved<sup>o</sup> well, for overall there<sup>o</sup> he cam  
 At wrestling he would have always the ram.<sup>6</sup>  
 He was short-shouldered, broad, a thicke knarre.<sup>o</sup>  
 550 There was no door that he nolde heave off harre,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or break it at a running with his head.

His beard as any sow or fox was red,  
 And thereto broad, as though it were a spade;  
 Upon the cop<sup>o</sup> right of his nose he hade  
 A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs,  
 555 Red as the bristles of a sowes ears;  
 His nosehirles<sup>o</sup> blake were and wide.  
 A sword and a buckler<sup>o</sup> bore he by his side.  
 His mouth as great was as a great furnace.  
 He was a jangler<sup>o</sup> and a goliardais,<sup>o</sup>  
 560 And that was most of sin and harlotries.<sup>o</sup>  
 Well could he stelen corn and tollen thries<sup>7</sup>—  
 And yet he had a thumb of gold, pardee.<sup>8</sup>  
 A white coat and a blue hood wered he.  
 A bagpipe well could he blow and soun,  
 565 And therewithal he brought us out of town.  
 A gentil Manciple<sup>9</sup> was there of a temple,  
 Of which achatours<sup>o</sup> might take example  
 For to been wise in buying of vitaille;<sup>o</sup>  
 For whether that he paid or took by taile,<sup>o</sup>  
 570 Algate<sup>o</sup> he waited<sup>o</sup> so in his achat<sup>o</sup>  
 That he was ay biforn<sup>o</sup> and in good stat.<sup>o</sup>  
 Now is not that of God a full fair grace  
 That such a lewed<sup>o</sup> mannes wit shall pace<sup>o</sup>  
 The wisdom of an heap of learned men?  
 575 Of masters had he more than thrice ten  
 That weren of law expert and curious,<sup>o</sup>  
 Of which there were a dozen in that house  
 Worthy to been stewards of rent<sup>o</sup> and land  
 Of any lord that is in Engeland,  
 580 To make him live by his propre good<sup>o</sup>  
 In honor debtless but<sup>o</sup> if he were wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or live as scarcely<sup>o</sup> as him list desire,<sup>o</sup>  
 And able for to helpen all a shire  
 In any cas<sup>o</sup> that mighte fall<sup>o</sup> or hap;<sup>o</sup>  
 585 And yet this Manciple set their aller cap!<sup>o</sup>

The Reeve was a slender, choleric<sup>1</sup> man;  
 His beard was shave as neigh<sup>o</sup> as ever he can;  
 His hair was by his ears round yshorn;  
 His top was docked<sup>o</sup> like a priest biforn;<sup>2</sup>  
 590 Full longe were his legges and full lean—  
 Ylike a staff, there was no calf yseen.<sup>o</sup>  
 Well could he keep a gerner<sup>o</sup> and a bin<sup>o</sup>—  
 There was none auditor could on him win.<sup>o</sup>  
 Well wiste<sup>o</sup> he by the drought and by the rain  
 595 The yielding of his seed and of his grain.  
 His lordes sheep, his neet,<sup>o</sup> his dayery,<sup>o</sup>  
 His swine, his horse, his stoor,<sup>o</sup> and his poultry  
 Was wholly in this Reeves governing,  
 And by his covenant<sup>o</sup> gave the reckoning  
 600 Since that his lord was twenty year of age.  
 There could no man bring him in arrerage.<sup>o</sup>  
 There nas baillif, herde,<sup>o</sup> nor other hine,<sup>o</sup>  
 That he ne knew his sleight<sup>o</sup> and his covine<sup>o</sup>—  
 They were adrad<sup>o</sup> of him as of the death.  
 605 His woning<sup>o</sup> was full fair upon an heath;<sup>o</sup>  
 With greene trees shadowed was his place.  
 He coude better than his lord purchase.  
 Full rich<sup>o</sup> he was astored privily.<sup>o</sup>  
 His lord well could he plesen subtilly,  
 610 To give and lene<sup>o</sup> him of his<sup>o</sup> owene good,<sup>o</sup>  
 And have a thank,<sup>o</sup> and yet<sup>o</sup> a coat and hood.  
 In youth he had learned a good mister:<sup>o</sup>  
 He was a well good wright, a carpenter.  
 This Reeve sat upon a full good stot<sup>o</sup>  
 615 That was a pomely<sup>o</sup> grey and highte<sup>o</sup> Scot.  
 A long surcoat<sup>o</sup> of perse<sup>o</sup> upon he had,  
 And by his side he bore a rusty blade.  
 Of Norfolk was this Reeve of which I telle,  
 Beside a town men clepen<sup>o</sup> Baldeswelle.<sup>o</sup>  
 620 Tukked he was as is a friar aboute,<sup>3</sup>

And ever he rode the hinderest<sup>o</sup> of our route.<sup>o</sup>  
 A Somnour<sup>4</sup> was there with us in that place  
 That had a fire-red cherubines<sup>o</sup> face,<sup>5</sup>  
 For saucefleem<sup>o</sup> he was, with eyen narrow.  
 625 And hot he was, and lecherous as a sparrow.  
 With scaled<sup>o</sup> brows black and piled<sup>o</sup> beard:  
 Of his visage children were afeared.  
 There nas quicksilver, litarge,<sup>o</sup> ne brimstone,<sup>o</sup>  
 Boras,<sup>o</sup> ceruce,<sup>o</sup> ne oil of tartar none,  
 630 Ne ointement that woulde cleanse and bite,<sup>o</sup>  
 That him might helpen of his whelkes<sup>o</sup> white,  
 Nor of the knobs<sup>o</sup> sitting on his cheeks.  
 Well loved he garlic, onions, and eek<sup>o</sup> leeks  
 And for to drink strong wine red as blood.  
 635 Then would he speak and cry as<sup>o</sup> he were wood;<sup>o</sup>  
 As when that he well drunken had the wine,  
 Then would he speke no word but Latin:  
 A fewe terms had he, two or three,  
 That he had learned out of some decree;  
 640 No wonder is—he heard it all the day,  
 And eek ye knowe well how that a jay  
 Can clepen "Watte"<sup>o</sup> as well as can the Pope—  
 But whoso could in other thing him grope,<sup>o</sup>  
 Then had he spent all his philosophy;<sup>o</sup>  
 645 Ay<sup>o</sup> *Questio quid juris*<sup>6</sup> would he cry.  
 He was a gentle harlot<sup>o</sup> and a kind;  
 A better fellow shoulde men not find:  
 He would suffer,<sup>o</sup> for a quart of wine,  
 A good fellow to have his concubine  
 650 A twelvemonth, and excusen him at the full;<sup>o</sup>  
 Full privily a finch eek could he pull.<sup>7</sup>  
 And if he found owher<sup>o</sup> a good felawe  
 He woulde techen him to have noon awe  
 In such case of the archdeacon's curse,<sup>o</sup>  
 655 But if<sup>o</sup> a mannes soul were in his purse,

For in his purse he should ypunisshed be.  
 "Purse is the Archedeacon's helle," said he.  
 But well I woot<sup>o</sup> he lied right in deed:  
 Of cursing<sup>o</sup> ought each guilty man him dread  
 660 For curse will slay right as assoiling<sup>o</sup> saveth—  
 And also war him<sup>o</sup> of a *significavit*.<sup>8</sup>  
 In danger<sup>o</sup> had he at his owene gise<sup>o</sup>  
 The younge girls<sup>o</sup> of the diocese,  
 And knew their conseil,<sup>o</sup> and was all their reed.<sup>o</sup>  
 665 A garland had he set upon his head  
 As great as it were for an ale-stake;<sup>9</sup>  
 A buckeler<sup>o</sup> had he made him of a cake.<sup>o</sup>  
 With him there rode a gentle Pardoner<sup>1</sup>  
 Of Rouncival,<sup>2</sup> his friend and his compeer,<sup>o</sup>  
 670 That straight was comen from the Court of Rome.<sup>3</sup>  
 Full loud he sung, "Come hither, love, to me."  
 This Somnour bore<sup>o</sup> to him a stiff  
 burdoun:<sup>o</sup>  
 Was never trump<sup>o</sup> of half so great a soun.  
 This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,  
 675 But smooth it hung as doth a strike<sup>o</sup> of flax;  
 By ounces<sup>o</sup> hung his lockes that he had,  
 And therewith he his shoulders oversprad,  
 But thin it lay, by colpons,<sup>o</sup> one by one;  
 But hood for jollity<sup>o</sup> wore he none,  
 680 For it was trussed up in his wallet:<sup>o</sup>  
 Him thought<sup>o</sup> he rode all of the newe jet.<sup>o</sup>  
 Dischevele<sup>o</sup> save his cap he rode all bare.  
 Such glaring eyen had he as an hare.  
 A vernicle had he sewn upon his cap,<sup>4</sup>  
 685 His wallet before him in his lap,  
 Bretful<sup>o</sup> of pardon, comen from Rome all hot.  
 A voice he had as small as hath a goat;  
 No beard had he, ne never should<sup>o</sup> have;  
 As smooth it was as it were late yshave:<sup>o</sup>

690 I trowe<sup>o</sup> he were a gelding or a mare.<sup>5</sup>  
But of his craft, from Berwick into Ware,<sup>6</sup>  
Ne was there such another pardoner;  
For in his male<sup>o</sup> he had a pillow-beer<sup>o</sup>  
Which that he said was Our Lady veil;  
695 He said he had a gobbet<sup>o</sup> of the sail  
That Sainte Peter had when that he wente  
Upon the sea, till Jesu Christ him hente.<sup>o</sup>  
He had a cross of laton,<sup>o</sup> full of stones,  
And in a glass he had pigges bones,  
700 But with these relics when that he found  
A poor parson dwelling upon lond,  
Upon a day he got him more money  
Than that the parson got in monthes tweye;  
And thus with feigned<sup>o</sup> flattery and japes<sup>o</sup>  
705 He made the parson and the people his apes.<sup>7</sup>  
But truly to tellen at the last,  
He was in church a noble ecclesiast;  
Well could he read a lesson and a story,<sup>o</sup>  
But altherbest<sup>o</sup> he sang an offertory;  
710 For well he wiste,<sup>o</sup> when that song was sung,  
He must preach and well affile<sup>o</sup> his tongue  
To win silver, as he full well could—  
Therefore he sung the merrierly<sup>o</sup> and loud.  
Now have I told you soothly in a clause<sup>o</sup>  
715 Th'estaat, th'array, the nombre, and eek<sup>o</sup> the cause  
Why that assembled was this company  
In Southwark at this gentle hostelry  
That hight the Tabard, faste by<sup>o</sup> the Bell.<sup>o</sup>  
But now is time to you for to tell  
720 How that we baren us<sup>o</sup> that ilke<sup>o</sup> night  
When we were in that hostelry alight;<sup>o</sup>  
And after will I tell of our voyage  
And all the remnant of our pilgrimage.  
But first I pray you of your courtesy  
725



That ye n'arete<sup>o</sup> it not my villainy<sup>o</sup>  
 Though that I plainly speak in this matere  
 To telle you their wordes and their cheere,<sup>o</sup>  
 Nor though I speak their wordes proprely;<sup>o</sup>  
 For this ye knowen also well as I:  
 730 Whoso shall tell a tale after a man  
 He moot rehearse,<sup>o</sup> as nigh as ever he can,  
 Everich a word, if it be in his charge,<sup>o</sup>  
 All<sup>o</sup> speak he never so rudeliche and large,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or else he moot<sup>o</sup> tell his tale untrewe,<sup>o</sup>  
 735 Or feine<sup>o</sup> thing, or finde wordes newe.  
 He may not spare<sup>o</sup> although he were his brother;  
 He moot as well say oo<sup>o</sup> word as another.  
 Christ spak<sup>o</sup> himself full broad<sup>o</sup> in Holy Writ,  
 And well ye woot<sup>o</sup> no villainy is it;  
 740 Eek<sup>o</sup> Plato saith, whoso can him read,  
 The words mote<sup>o</sup> be cousin to the deed.<sup>8</sup>  
 Also I pray you to forgive it me  
 All<sup>o</sup> have I not set folk in their degree<sup>o</sup>  
 Here in this tale as that they shoulde stande:  
 745 My wit is short, ye may well understande.  
 Great cheer made our Host us everichon,<sup>o</sup>  
 And to the supper set he us anon.  
 He served us with vitaille<sup>o</sup> at the beste.<sup>o</sup>  
 Strong was the wine, and well to drinke us leste.<sup>o</sup>  
 750 A seemly<sup>o</sup> man our Hoste was withal  
 For to been a marshal<sup>o</sup> in an hall;  
 A large man he was, with eyen steepe;<sup>o</sup>  
 A fairer burgess<sup>o</sup> was there none in Chepe<sup>9</sup>—  
 Bold of his speech, and wise, and well ytaught,  
 755 And of manhood him lakkede right naught.  
 Eek thereto he was right a merry man,  
 And after supper playen he began,  
 And spak of mirthe amonges othere thinges—  
 760 When that we had made our reckonings

And saide thus, "Now, lordings, truely,  
Ye been to me right welcome, heartily.  
For by my truth, if that I shall not lie,  
I saw not this year so merry a company  
At once in this herberwe<sup>o</sup> as is now.  
765 Fain<sup>o</sup> would I do you mirthe, wist I how.<sup>o</sup>  
And of a mirth I am right now bethought,  
To do you ease, and it shall coste nought.  
Ye go to Canterbury—God you speede;  
The blissful martyr quite<sup>o</sup> you your meede.<sup>o</sup>  
770 And well I woot<sup>o</sup> as ye go by the way  
Ye shapen you<sup>o</sup> to talen<sup>o</sup> and to play,  
For truvely, comfort ne mirth is none  
To ride by the waye dumb as stone;  
And therefore will I maken you disport  
775 As I said erst,<sup>o</sup> and do you some comfort;  
And if you liketh<sup>o</sup> all, by one assent,  
For to stonden at my judgement  
And for to worken<sup>o</sup> as I shall you say,  
Tomorrow when ye riden by the way—  
780 Now, by my father soule that is dead,  
But<sup>o</sup> ye be merry I will give you my head!  
Hold up your hands withouten more speche."  
Our conseil was not longe for to seeche;<sup>o</sup>  
785 Us thoughte it was not worth to make it wise,<sup>1</sup>  
And granted him withouten more avise<sup>o</sup>  
And bade him say his verdict as him leste.<sup>o</sup>  
"Lordings," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "now herkneth for the beste,  
But taketh it not, I pray you, in disdain:<sup>o</sup>  
790 This is the point, to speken short and plain,  
That each of you, to shorte with<sup>o</sup> our waye  
In this voyage, shall tellen tales twaye<sup>o</sup>  
To Canterburyward, I mean it so,  
And homeward he shall tellen othere two  
Of adventures<sup>o</sup> that whilom<sup>o</sup> have befall;  
795

And which of you that bereth him<sup>o</sup> best of all—  
 That is to say, that telleth in this cas  
 Tales of best sentence<sup>o</sup> and most solace<sup>o</sup>—  
 Shall have a supper at our aller cost,<sup>o</sup>  
 Here in this place, sitting by this post,  
 800 When that we come again from Canterbury.  
 And, for to make you the more merry,  
 I will myself goodly<sup>o</sup> with you ride—  
 Right at my owene cost—and be your guide.  
 And whoso will my judgement withsaye<sup>o</sup>  
 805 Shall pay all that we spende by the waye.  
 And if ye vouchesauf<sup>o</sup> that it be so,  
 Tell me anon, withouten wordes mo,  
 And I will early shape me<sup>o</sup> therefore.”  
 This thing was granted, and our oathes swore<sup>o</sup>  
 810 With full glad heart, and prayden<sup>o</sup> him also  
 That he would vouchesauf for to do so,  
 And that he woulde been our governour,  
 And of our tales judge and reportour,<sup>o</sup>  
 And set a supper at a certain pris,<sup>o</sup>  
 815 And we will ruled been at his devis<sup>o</sup>  
 In high and low; and thus by one assent  
 We been accorded to his judgement.  
 And thereupon the wine was fet<sup>o</sup> anon;  
 We dronken and to reste wente echon<sup>o</sup>  
 820 Withouten any longer tarrying.  
 Amorrow, when that day began to spring,  
 Up rose our Host and was our aller cok,<sup>o</sup>  
 And gathered us together in a flock,  
 And forth we riden, a little more than pas,<sup>o</sup>  
 825 Unto the watering of Saint Thomas;<sup>2</sup>  
 And there our Host began his horse arreste<sup>o</sup>  
 And saide, “Lordes, herkneth if you leste:<sup>o</sup>  
 Ye woot<sup>o</sup> your forward<sup>o</sup> and it you recorde:<sup>o</sup>  
 If evensong and morwesong<sup>o</sup> accorde,<sup>o</sup>  
 830

Let see now who shall tell the firste tale.  
 As ever mote<sup>o</sup> I drinken wine or ale,  
 Whoso be rebel to my judgement  
 Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.  
 Now draweth cut<sup>o</sup> er<sup>o</sup> that we ferrer twinne:<sup>o</sup>  
 835 He which that hath the shortest shall beginne.  
 "Sire Knight," quod he, "my master and my lord,  
 Now draweth cut, for that is my accord.<sup>o</sup>  
 Cometh near," quod he, "my lady Prioress,  
 And ye, sir Clerk, let be your shamefastness,<sup>o</sup>  
 840 Ne studieth<sup>o</sup> not. Lay hand to, every man!"  
 Anon to drawen every wight<sup>o</sup> began.  
 And shortly for to tellen as it was,  
 Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,<sup>o</sup>  
 The soth<sup>o</sup> is this, the cut fell to the Knight—  
 845 Of which full blithe and glad was every wight—  
 And tell he must his tale, as was resoun  
 By forward<sup>o</sup> and by composicioun,<sup>o</sup>  
 As ye han heard. What needeth wordes mo?<sup>o</sup>  
 And when this good man saw that it was so,  
 850 As he that wise was and obedient  
 To keep his forward by his free assent,  
 He saide, "Since I shall begin the game,  
 What, welcome be the cut, in Goddes name!  
 Now let us ride, and harkneth what I say."  
 855 And with that word we riden forth our way,  
 And he began with right a merry cheer  
 His tale anon, and said as ye may hear.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The classicizing spring opening of lines 1–10 shows the influence of one of the 14th century's most popular books, the Latin *History of the Destruction of Troy* of Guido delle Colonne

(ca. 1215–1290), completed ca. 1287. Chaucer also drew on it in *Troilus and Criseyde*.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Has run its half course in Aries (the Ram).—The first sign of the zodiac in the solar year.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: So Nature spurs (incites) them in their hearts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Experienced pilgrims (traditionally, those who have visited the Holy Land).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: St. Thomas à Becket (ca. 1118–1170), murdered in Canterbury Cathedral.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A suburb of London south of the Thames. The Tabard was a real inn located there, and Harry Bailey—the one pilgrim other than Chaucer to be drawn by name from life—was its landlord.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:

Medieval knights were professionals, taking employment where it was available—serving their king, at times when a royal army was assembled, and their feudal overlord, who paid their service with grants of land. The phrase “his lordes war” may refer to either of these, and perhaps to crusading service in the name of God. In addition, professional knights would join teams for tournaments and participate in far-flung campaigns as mercenaries or irregulars. The abstractions that held all this together were *chivalry* and *courtesy* and the codes of conduct and honor they mandated.

[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:

All the campaigns listed in lines 51–66 are historical. Alexandria fell in 1365; the Teutonic knights fought non-Christians in Prussia and Lithuania; Pope Urban declared a crusade against (Christian but Orthodox) Russia in 1378; Algeciras in Moorish Granada was besieged from 1342 to 1344; and there were forays into North Africa (Morocco) and tournaments there (Tramissene in Algeria). Peter of Cyprus took Lyeys (modern Ayas) in Armenia in 1367, and Satalye (Antalya) in Turkey in 1361, allying with the Emir of Palatye (Balat) in 1365. Most of

these engagements take place in “heathenesse,” that is, heathen lands, but we are told in the same line (49) that the Knight also fought “in Cristendom”—campaigns that are not listed, presumably taking place closer to home. The aim of the portrait is to paint as geographically broad a canvas as possible, across a time period (1342 to the 1380s) too great for the career of any one knight.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Bachelor as in Bachelor of Arts, below a Master. A squire was a trainee knight serving under a master (Chaucer was a squire at court in the 1360s, but did not advance). The Squire is young, smartly and fashionably dressed, and excels in the accomplishments expected of squires (including carving the meat).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: With curly locks (of hair), as if they had been set in a curling press.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This expedition will have formed part of what we now call the Hundred Years’ War. Chaucer himself fought in Artois and Picardy in 1369. The most recent in time to *The General Prologue* was an expedition across France from Flanders through Artois and Picardy, led by the king’s youngest uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, in 1380.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A foot soldier or former soldier (as here) serving as a household official and also working as forester in the (royal) forests.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An image of St. Christopher, the legendary patron saint of travelers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A prioress was the head of a convent of nuns—itsself a socially prestigious position that was sometimes conferred on the basis of noble birth. Chaucer’s Prioress behaves as if she were a great lady and is described in part as if she were a heroine of romance with corresponding social accomplishments.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Eloi, the French name of St. Eligius (ca. 590–660), the patron saint of goldsmiths and all metalworkers. The detail here anticipates the brooch (lines 160–62).[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: According to the manner (school) of Stratford at the Bowe (a London suburb where a convent was located). The joke gently suggests that the Prioress's version of Anglo-Norman, "the French of England," sounded very English, and so undercut her social pretensions.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Her chief delight was in courtesy (good manners). While courtesy is idealized in romance as having to do with interior qualities, table manners play their part—prominently so in the Benedictine Rule, from which secular ideas of courtesy in part derive. Yet Chaucer's portrait throughout stresses social form over spiritual substance.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A rosary, with green beads to mark certain prayers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A monk charged with supervising property distant from the monastery. The portrait puns on "venerye" (hunting) and "priking" (riding, line 191), words perfectly applicable to their ostensible subject, hunting, while—together with the "love-knot" of line 197—perhaps hinting at other forms of extramural activity for a "manly man."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Keeper of an outlying cell of the monastery.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Italian monk St. Benedict (ca. 480–547), considered the father of Western monasticism, was the author of the Benedictine Rule; his disciple St. Maurus (ca. 510–584) was credited with introducing it to France in 543.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: He didn't give a plucked hen for that text.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: St. Augustine (354–430), who wrote that monks should perform manual labor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A friar in a convent of friars granted exclusive begging rights in a certain area.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The four orders of friars, in order of foundation, were Carmelites (ca. 1155), Franciscans (1209), Dominicans (ca. 1216), and Augustinians (1244).[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: For if someone made a gift, the Friar was able to boast that he knew that person to be penitent.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He absolutely took the prize for ballads.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: It was not suitable, in his position.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: And he paid a certain rent for the privilege of begging. Lines 252a and b are in Hengwrt but not Ellesmere and are excluded from the numeration of most editions, presumably on the grounds that Chaucer may have canceled them.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the beginning (Latin).—The Friar’s salutation (John 1:1).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Days appointed for settling lawsuits out of court.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Merchants were importers and exporters, primarily of wool, cloth, and (like Chaucer’s father) wine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Middelburgh in the Netherlands and Orwell in Suffolk were key ports in the wool trade across the North Sea.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, he could speculate profitably in foreign exchange (“sheeldes” are probably Flemish ecus).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Clerk has not gained a living (benefice) as a parish priest nor sought secular employment, in government service or as secretary to a nobleman.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A student of philosophy, with a pun on the secondary sense of the word, “alchemist,” one who turns lead into gold.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sergeants of law were prestigious attorneys, with a monopoly on cases at the Court of Common Pleas.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Paradise, a meeting place for lawyers in St. Paul’s Cathedral.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Owned outright without legal impediments.[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: William the Conqueror (ca. 1028–1087; reigned 1066–87).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A franklin was a freeholder, a prominent member of the landed gentry.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A reference both to the blood-dominated temperament of the Franklin and to his red face. On the temperaments, see p. 484, n. 3.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Greek philosopher (341–270 B.C.E.) who emphasized happiness, which later became identified with sensual pleasure.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Julian the Hospitaller (4th c. C.E.), patron saint of hospitality.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tables were usually disassembled when not in use, but the Franklin kept his mounted and set (covered), hence “dormant.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: He presided over court sessions (as justice of the peace). The word “countour” (line 359)—glossed here as assessor, or tax collector—may also have a legal meaning (“pleader in court”).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The fraternity to which all belong, and at which they wear the livery, must be a parish fraternity rather than one of the craft guilds (which were for single crafts). It is unclear whether these tradesmen are from London or from a country town.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “Vigils” might be feasts held on the eve of saints’ days or funeral processions, which fraternity members attended in livery.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The distinction between sea captains and pirates was not always clear in Chaucer’s day, any more than in the time of Elizabeth I (Sir Francis Drake, for example, was both a royal servant and a privateer). Devon was a center for shipmen in both periods.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: On the way back from Bordeaux, while the Merchant slept.—Bordeaux was an English possession in Chaucer’s time and the main port for London’s trade in French wine.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Either Carthage (in modern Tunisia) or Cartagena (in Spain).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The “land’s end” (in Latin, *finis terrae*) of western Spain; Gotland is an island in the Baltic Sea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: There is historical evidence of a ship called the *Maudelayne* with a Dartmouth connection in Chaucer’s lifetime, but the name (after Mary Magdalen, renowned for her penance and her mercy) may be an ironic contrast to the Shipman’s drowning of his prisoners (line 400) and lack of “nice conscience” (line 398).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Physician holds an advanced degree and is as eminent in his field as the Knight and the Sergeant of Law in theirs.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: He tended his patient closely at the hours dictated by his knowledge of astrology (“natural magic”).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *fortunen . . . images*: assign the propitious time, according to the position of the stars, for using talismanic images.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, wherever the disturbance of the four bodily humors that was thought to cause disease, whether in the melancholy humor, seated in the black bile (cold and dry, like earth); the sanguine, seated in the blood (hot and moist, like air); the choleric, seated in the yellow bile (hot and dry, like fire); or the phlegmatic, seated in the phlegm (cold and moist, like water).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Doctor is familiar with the treatises attributed in the Middle Ages to the great names of medical history: the purely legendary Greek demigod Asclepius; the Greeks Dioscorides, Rufus, Hippocrates, Galen, and Serapion; the Persians Hali and Rhazes; the Arabs Avicenna and Averroes; and the Christians John (?) of Damascus, Constantine the African, the Scotsman Bernard Gordon, and two Englishmen, John of Gaddesden and Gilbert, the former an earlier contemporary of Chaucer.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The civil ceremony of marriage, exchange of vows in front of witnesses, took place outside the church door in the Middle Ages.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Three sites of shrines much visited by pilgrims: Notre Dame Cathedral in Boulogne, France; St. James of Compostela in Galicia, Spain; and the cathedral in Cologne, Germany.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Two types of small shield.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: He would be most reluctant to invoke excommunication in order to collect his tithes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, he practiced what he preached. See Matthew 5:19.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, his parish: a priest might rent his parish to another (a placeholder, or vicar) and take a more profitable position.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: St. Paul's in London had many chantries, or foundations that employed priests for the sole duty of saying masses for the souls of certain persons.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Or to be employed by a brotherhood; that is, to take a lucrative and fairly easy position with a parish guild.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: And then (he loved) his neighbor exactly as himself.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A plowman held a small allotment of land (his *catel*) in return for the service he gave others (his *proper swink*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A ram was frequently offered as a prize in wrestling matches.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Take toll thrice: deduct from the grain ("corn"), which has been brought to his mill for grinding, far more than the lawful percentage.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An ironic reference to the proverb that an honest miller has a golden thumb.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The steward of a college or, as here, one of the Inns of Court (a temple) at which English law was taught.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: That is, dominated by yellow bile. —A reeve was a manorial overseer and bursar.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Clergymen partially shaved their heads (with tonsure).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Having his clothing tucked up (over his girdle), like a friar.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A summoner: one who serves summonses on behalf of ecclesiastical courts and enforces their discipline.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, a face as seen at the Last Judgment, not in scenes of heavenly bliss.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Question: what point of the law (applies)? (Latin), a phrase frequently used in ecclesiastical courts.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He knew how, in secret, to pull a trick. Sexual innuendo is possible but the phrase covers any kind of trickery.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: And also one should be careful of the writ that transferred the guilty offender from the ecclesiastical to the civil arm for punishment (called a “significavit,” from the first Latin word in the writ, “He has signified”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A tavern was signaled by a pole projecting from its front wall, on which hung a garland.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A pardoner, who might be lay or cleric, was a seller of indulgences, remission of sins from the Church’s “treasury of grace.” In late medieval theology, particularly after the development in the late 12th century of the doctrine of purgatory as a formal place (rather than a state), the business is perfectly legitimate. But Chaucer’s Pardoner is a fraud.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An Augustinian house in Charing Cross, accused in 1379 of dealing in fraudulent indulgences, supposedly from the papal court (see lines 671, 687).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Chaucer’s portrait draws on anticlerical satire, particularly of friars, and the figure of Faux-Semblant (False

Seeming) in the *Romance of the Rose* (lines 10898–11950).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A portrait of Christ's face as it was impressed on the handkerchief of the legendary St. Veronica, who gave the handkerchief to him as he carried his cross to Golgotha. The miraculous portrait was often reproduced as a pilgrim's badge, a memento of pilgrimage to Rome.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Chaucer compares the Pardoner to a castrated horse (gelding) and a female horse (mare). Scholars have debated exactly what this implies about the Pardoner's sex and sexuality, but the remark clearly calls his masculinity into question. Nonetheless, later in the *Canterbury Tales* he refers to his anticipated marriage and claims to have a girl in every town.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, from one end of England to the other.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He made monkeys of the parson and the people.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chaucer's immediate source for this is Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 3.pr.12.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cheapside, the bourgeois center of London (where in fact the Host does not reside).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: It did not seem to us worth making an issue of it.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A brook a little distance from London, on the Kent Road.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *its* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sweet showers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(of plants)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *liquid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *power*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the west wind* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *breathed life into* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grove* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *field*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shoots*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *birds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vital spirits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foreign shores*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *far-off shrines* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *known*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blessed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *seek*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *helped* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sick*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spirit, mood*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *various* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wanted to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accommodated in the best way*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *had set*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(we) made an agreement*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where I tell you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proceed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it seems reasonable to me*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as it seemed to me*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rank (class)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dress*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fidelity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *magnanimity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *further*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in Christian as well as heathen lands*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Alexandria*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *sat at the head of the table*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Prussia*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Lithuania* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *campaigned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Russia*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Granada* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Algeciras* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Ben-Marin (Morocco)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Ayas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Antalya*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mediterranean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expedition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Tlemcen (North Africa)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jousts* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Balat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outstanding reputation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rudeness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *any manner of person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consummate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equipment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *richly dressed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thick cloth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tunic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rust-stained from his chain mail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moderate height*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on cavalry expeditions*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *given the short period*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *embroidered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compose poetry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sketch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hotly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at night*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *modest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attentive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carved (meat)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleased him to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the yeoman)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *correctly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care for his equipment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close-cropped head* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tanned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wristguard (for archers)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small shield*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mounted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sash*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sincere and demure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chanted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very adeptly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at meals* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *schooled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *besides*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had taken a drink*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *she reached for her food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good cheer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manner, bearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took pains to imitate the behavior*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dignified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered worthy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine white bread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *switch* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *severely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neatly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well proportioned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *red*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handsbreadth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assuredly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of small size*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *becoming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dainty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Love conquers all (Latin)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a superlatively fine one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hunting (sport of Venus)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jingle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *somewhat strict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *custom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *negligent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *why* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *work* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bids* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hard rider* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *riding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fur-lined* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gray fur* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elaborate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anointed (with oil)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *protruding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *under a cauldron* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high-ranking cleric* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tormented spirit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saddle horse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flirtation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pillar* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *franklins, landowners* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parish priest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *licensed to hear confessions* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wherever he expected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *donation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shriven, absolved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared boast* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he was in great pain (of mind)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *should* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarf* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stuffed* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *zither*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *singing ballads* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily won prize*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fleur-de-lys (lily)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experienced fighter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innkeeper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barmaid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beggarwoman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sick*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dignified* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promote (him)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor people*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *victuals, provisions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *territory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(one-fourth of a penny)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *income*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *puppy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frequenter of cloisters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an academic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavy worsted cloth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *short cloak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lisped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(affected) charm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stars*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *motley (parti-color cloth)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Flemish beaver*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opinions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harping on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profits*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *guarded at all costs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *employed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dignified* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *management*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bargainings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *money dealing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had long been a student of logic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outer coat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he would rather*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fiddle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *psaltery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *get*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the wherewithal to study*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with decorum*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elevated wisdom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to do with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prudent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assize (circuit courts)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *letters patent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with full*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speculator in land*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *invalidated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was (not)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *correct legal parlance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cases* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw up a document*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cavil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *fully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by heart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unpretentiously* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *striped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cross stripes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daisy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the mornings* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bread soaked in wine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *habit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true perfect bliss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of the same quality* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wine-stocked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *baked food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delicacies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *according to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pike* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pond* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cooking equipment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *member of Parliament* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dagger* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assessor, tax collector* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *landholder* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dealer in small items* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weaver* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tapestry or rug maker* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *polished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mounted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in every respect* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *citizen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suitable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elected official*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *income*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greatly wished to agree to it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at the front of the procession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *borne*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tart flavoring powder* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(a spice)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stews*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ulcer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meat with rice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwelling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Dartmouth (in Devon)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carthorse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew how*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavy wool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strap*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine scruples* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *threw them overboard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *currents* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hazards*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pilotage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in his undertakings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harbors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inlet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Brittany*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *astrology*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he knew well how to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *practitioner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *known* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moderate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nourishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blood-red* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thrifty in spending*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plague (outbreaks)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tonic (liquid gold)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from near*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *somewhat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *practice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpassed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Ghent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offertory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *material*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weighed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stockings* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *red*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tied* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supple*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *color*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not to mention*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *there is no need* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for now* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foreign river* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew much about* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to tell the truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saddle horse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wearing a wimple* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *riding skirt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spurs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened to know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desired to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parishioners* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonderfully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *often (times)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property, goods* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sufficiency* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not neglect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *farthest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great and small* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *figure of speech* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uneducated, lay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn rusty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *befouled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not leave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chantry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffer harm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scornful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disdainful nor haughty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentleness* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *endeavor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stubborn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snub, scold* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on any occasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assumed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overfastidious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teaching*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *load*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worker*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he was pleased or grieved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make ditches* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dig*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *charge, fee* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *short tunic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *summoner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *steward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong peasant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *muscle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was evident* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stout blockhead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *off (its) hinge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ridge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nostrils*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shield*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loudmouth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teller of lewd stories*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obscenities*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *purchasers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *victuals, supplies of food*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tally (on credit)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was watchful* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *purchasing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ahead* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(financial) condition*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ignorant* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *surpass*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cunning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *income*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *own money*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *insane*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *frugally* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it pleased him to want*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *event* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *occur* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *happen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *made fools of them all*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *close*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cut short*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *visible*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *granary* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(for grain)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *get the better of him*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knew*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cattle* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dairy herd*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stock*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contract*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arrears*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shepherd* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worker*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trickery* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fraud*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwelling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *richly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stocked secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the lord's)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possessions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *receive thanks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trade*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stallion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dappled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *topcoat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Bawdswell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hindmost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *group*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cherub's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pimplly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scabby* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *patchy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lead ointment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sulfur*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *borax* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *white lead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pustules*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lumps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call Walter (an arbitrary name)*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *examine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(learning)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble rascal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sentence of excommunication*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excommunication*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolution*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *let him also beware*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in his control* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disposal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *youngsters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secrets* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adviser*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shield* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loaf of bread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *comrade*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong bass accompaniment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trumpet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(thin) strands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clusters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to seem attractive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pack*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it seemed to him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fashion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with hair down*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brimful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently shaved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *bag* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pillowcase* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *piece* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brass alloy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *false* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *liturgical narrative* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *best of all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sharpen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sang more merrily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly in brief* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(another tavern)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conducted ourselves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alighted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boorishness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behavior* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accurately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must repeat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *responsibility* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broadly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inaccurately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falsify* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spare anyone* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very frankly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *must*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for all that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to every one of us*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to the full*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleased us*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *master of ceremonies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prominent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *citizen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if I knew how*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tell tales*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seek*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliberation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as it pleased him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disdainfully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in order to shorten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *events* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *performs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wisdom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the cost of us all*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *kindly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contradict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *get ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sworn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(we) prayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recorder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *value*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fetches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the cock of us all (woke us up)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a step*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *halt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it please you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning song (matins)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lots* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go further*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decision*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *modesty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think about it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chance, or luck, or destiny*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pact* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °

[*The Knight's Tale* follows *The General Prologue*. It is a long romance, written in an elevated style. Chaucer is believed to have composed it prior to starting *The Canterbury Tales* and then made minor revisions to fit it to the tale-telling scheme. It is a suitable tale for the noble Knight: it is martial, decorous, morally serious, and in a high rhetorical register. *The Knight's Tale* tells the story of Arcite and Palamon, cousins who are taken prisoner at the siege and destruction of ancient Thebes by Theseus, the ruler of Athens. Gazing out from their prison cell, the Theban cousins fall in love at first sight, at almost the same moment, with Theseus's sister-in-law, Emily, who is taking an early morning walk in the garden below their window. After a bitter rivalry, the two cousins reconcile only when Arcite lies wounded on his deathbed. The tale reaches an apparently peaceful conclusion: despite winning the tournament for Emily's hand, Arcite dies, and Palamon and Emily mourn him and, eventually, marry. The tale is an ambitious combination of classical mythology, romance adventure, and philosophical treatment of the themes of fortune and destiny. It shares with the story told immediately after it, *The Miller's Tale*, the plot structure of a love triangle—and this similarity invites readers to notice the other very marked contrasts between the tales, in their style, genre, theme, and worldview.]



## The Miller's Prologue and Tale

*The Miller's Tale* belongs to a genre known as the "fabliau" (plural, "fabliaux"): a brief comic narrative in verse, usually vulgar and often scatological or obscene. Fabliaux flourished in thirteenth-century France, and Chaucer was clearly intrigued by the possibilities of the genre, employing it not only for the *The Miller's Tale* but *The Reeve's Tale*, *Shipman's Tale*, and fragmentary *Cook's Tale*. Fabliaux tend to be set in the contemporary medieval present and to feature characters whose social roles are ordinary: craftsmen, priests, peasants, wives. The plots of fabliaux revolve around a central trick or ruse, often with sex or money at stake. These are the tales Chaucer is anticipating in *The General Prologue* when he warns his audience that they must expect some rude speaking (see lines 725–42). An even more pointed apology follows at the end of *The Miller's Prologue*.

By having Robin the Miller tell a fabliau to "quite" (to requite or pay back) the Knight's aristocratic romance, Chaucer sets up a fractious dialogue between classes, genres, and styles, which he exploits throughout *The Canterbury Tales*.

## ***The Miller's Prologue***

When that the Knight had thus his tale ytold,  
In all the route nas<sup>o</sup> there young ne old  
That he ne said it was a noble story,  
And worthy for to drawen<sup>o</sup> to memory,  
And namely<sup>o</sup> the gentles<sup>o</sup> everichon.  
5     Our Hoste laughed and swore, "So must I gon,<sup>o</sup>  
This goes aright: unbokeled is the male.<sup>o</sup>  
Let see now who shall tell another tale.  
For trewely the game is well bigonne.  
Now telleth you, sire Monk, if that you conne,<sup>o</sup>  
10     Somewhat to quite<sup>o</sup> with the Knight's tale."  
The Miller, that for drunken<sup>o</sup> was all pale,  
So that unnethe<sup>o</sup> upon his horse he sat,  
He nolde avalen<sup>o</sup> neither hood ne hat,  
Ne abiden<sup>o</sup> no man for his curteisye,  
15     But in Pilate's voice<sup>1</sup> he gan to crye,  
And swore, "By armes<sup>o</sup> and by blood and bones,  
I can<sup>o</sup> a noble tale for the nones,<sup>o</sup>  
With which I will now quite the Knight's tale."  
Our Hoste saw that he was drunk of ale,  
20     And said, "Abide, Robin, leve<sup>o</sup> brother,  
Some better man shall tell us first another.  
Abide, and let us werken thriftily."<sup>o</sup>  
"By Goddes soule," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "that will not I,  
For I will speak or else go my way."  
25     Our Host answerde, "Tell on, a devil way!<sup>o</sup>  
Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome."  
"Now herkneth," quod the Miller, "all and some.<sup>o</sup>  
But first I make a protestacioun<sup>o</sup>  
That I am drunk: I know it by my soun.<sup>o</sup>  
30     And therefore if that I misspeak or say,  
Wite it<sup>o</sup> the ale of Southwerk, I you pray;

For I will tell a legend<sup>o</sup> and a life  
 Both of a carpenter and of his wife,  
 How that a clerk hath set the wright's cap."<sup>2</sup>  
 35     The Reeve answered and saide, "Stint thy clap!<sup>o</sup>  
 Let be thy lewed<sup>o</sup> drunken harlotry.<sup>o</sup>  
 It is a sin and eek<sup>o</sup> a great folly  
 To apairen<sup>o</sup> any man or him defame,  
 And eek to bringen wives in such fame.<sup>o</sup>  
 40     Thou maist enough of other thinges sayn."  
 This drunken Miller spoke full soon again,<sup>o</sup>  
 And saide, "Leve<sup>o</sup> brother Osewold,  
 Who hath no wife, he is no cokewold.<sup>o</sup>  
 But I say not therefore that thou art one.  
 45     There been full goode wives many one,<sup>o</sup>  
 And ever a thousand good ayains<sup>o</sup> one bad.  
 That knowestou<sup>o</sup> well thyself but if<sup>o</sup> thou mad.<sup>o</sup>  
 Why artou<sup>o</sup> angry with my tale now?  
 I have a wife, pardee,<sup>o</sup> as well as thou,  
 50     Yet nolde<sup>o</sup> I, for the oxen in my plough,  
 Take upon me more than enough<sup>o</sup>  
 As deemen of myself that I were one:<sup>o</sup>  
 I will believe well that I am none.  
 An husband shall not been inquisitif  
 55     Of Goddes privetee,<sup>o</sup> nor of his wif.  
 So<sup>o</sup> he may finde Goddes foison<sup>o</sup> there,  
 Of the remenant needeth not enquire."<sup>3</sup>  
 What should I more say but this Miller  
 He nolde<sup>o</sup> his wordes for no man forbear,<sup>o</sup>  
 60     But tolde his churl's tale in his manner.  
 M'athinketh<sup>o</sup> that I shall rehearse<sup>o</sup> it here,  
 And therefore every gentle wight<sup>o</sup> I pray,  
 Deemeth nought,<sup>o</sup> for Goddes love, that I say  
 Of evil intent, but for<sup>o</sup> I must rehearse  
 65     Their tales alle, be they bet<sup>o</sup> or worse,  
 Or elles falsen<sup>o</sup> some of my matere.<sup>o</sup>

And therefore, whoso list<sup>o</sup> it not yhere,<sup>o</sup>  
 Turn over the leaf, and choose another tale,  
 For he shall find enough, great and smale,  
 70 Of storial thing that toucheth gentillesse,<sup>4</sup>  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> morality and holinesse:  
 Blameth not me if that you choose amiss.<sup>o</sup>  
 The Miller is a churl, you know well this,  
 So was the Reeve eek, and other mo,<sup>o</sup>  
 75 And harlotry<sup>o</sup> they tolden bothe two.  
 Aviseth you,<sup>o</sup> and put me out of blame:  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> men shall not maken earnest of game.<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The harsh voice traditionally associated with the portrayal of Pontius Pilate in medieval biblical plays.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Made a fool of the carpenter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of the rest there is no need to inquire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Of historical matter that relates to noble conduct.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *company was not*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *recall*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *especially* [Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *gentlefolk*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *as I live*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *unbuckled is the bag*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *can*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *repay*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *because of being drunk*[Return to reference °](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *with difficulty*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *would not remove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give way to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by (God's) arms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with propriety*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the devil's name*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one and all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *public affirmation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tone of voice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blame it on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(religious) narrative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop your chatter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coarse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obscenity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *report*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in reply*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cuckold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for (every)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so much*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to think that I were one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secrets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plenty*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *would not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hold back, spare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I regret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repeat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falsify* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *material* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make the wrong choice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ribaldry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think hard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take a joke seriously* [Return to reference](#) °

## ***The Miller's Tale***

Whilom<sup>o</sup> there was dwelling at Oxenford<sup>o</sup>  
A riche gnof<sup>o</sup> that guests held to board,<sup>o</sup>  
80 And of his craft he was a carpenter.  
With him there was dwelling a povre<sup>o</sup> scholar,  
Hadde learned art,<sup>5</sup> but all his fantasy<sup>o</sup>  
Was turned for to learn astrology,  
And could a certain<sup>o</sup> of conclusiouns,  
85 To deemen by interrogaciouns,<sup>6</sup>  
If that men asked him in certain houres  
When that men should have drougt or elles  
showers,  
Or if men asked him what shall befall  
Of everything—I may not reckon them all.  
90 This clerk was cleped<sup>o</sup> hende<sup>o</sup> Nicholas.  
Of deme<sup>o</sup> love he could, and of solas,<sup>o</sup>  
And therto he was sly and full privee,<sup>o</sup>  
And like a maide meeke for to see.  
A chamber had he in that hostelry  
95 Alone, withouten any company,  
Full fetisly ydight<sup>o</sup> with herbes swoote,<sup>o</sup>  
And he himself as sweet as is the roote  
Of licorice or any setewale.<sup>o</sup>  
His Almageste<sup>7</sup> and bookes great and smale,  
100 His astrelabye<sup>8</sup> longing for<sup>o</sup> his art,  
His augrim stones<sup>o</sup> layen fair<sup>o</sup> apart  
On shelves couched<sup>o</sup> at his beddes head;  
His press<sup>o</sup> ycovered with a falding red;<sup>9</sup>  
And all above there lay a gay sautry,<sup>1</sup>  
105 On which he made a-nightes<sup>o</sup> melody  
So swetely that all the chamber rong,<sup>o</sup>  
And *Angelus ad Virginem*<sup>2</sup> he song,  
And after that he sang the *Kinges Note*:<sup>3</sup>

Full often blessed was his merry throat.  
 110 And thus this sweete clerk his time spent  
 After his frendes finding and his rent.<sup>4</sup>  
 This carpenter had wedded new<sup>o</sup> a wife  
 Which that he loved more than his life.  
 Of eighteteene years she was of age;  
 115 Jealous he was, and held hire narwe<sup>o</sup> in cage,  
 For she was wild and young, and he was old  
 And deemed himself been like a cokewold.<sup>5</sup>  
 He knew not Cato,<sup>6</sup> for his wit was rude,<sup>o</sup>  
 That bade<sup>o</sup> man wed his similitude:<sup>o</sup>  
 120 Men sholde wedden<sup>o</sup> after their estate,<sup>o</sup>  
 For youth and elde<sup>o</sup> is often at debate.  
 But sith<sup>o</sup> that he was fallen in the snare,  
 He must endure, as other folk, his care.  
 Fair was this yonge wife,<sup>7</sup> and therewithal  
 125 As any weasel her body gent and small.<sup>o</sup>  
 A ceint<sup>o</sup> she wered,<sup>o</sup> barred<sup>o</sup> all of silk;  
 A barmecloth<sup>o</sup> as white as morning milk  
 Upon her lendes,<sup>o</sup> full of many a gore;<sup>o</sup>  
 White was her smock, and broiden<sup>o</sup> all before  
 130 And eek<sup>o</sup> behind, on her collar about,  
 Of<sup>o</sup> coal-black silk, within and eek without;<sup>o</sup>  
 The tapes<sup>o</sup> of her white voluper<sup>o</sup>  
 Were of the same suite of<sup>o</sup> her coler;<sup>o</sup>  
 Her filet<sup>o</sup> broad of silk and set full high;  
 135 And sikerly<sup>o</sup> she had a likerous<sup>o</sup> eye;  
 Full small y pulled<sup>o</sup> were her browes<sup>o</sup> two,  
 And those were bent,<sup>o</sup> and black as any slo.<sup>o</sup>  
 She was full more blissful on to see<sup>o</sup>  
 Than is the newe perejonette<sup>o</sup> tree,  
 140 And softer than the wool is of a wether;<sup>o</sup>  
 And by her girdle<sup>o</sup> hung a purse of leather,  
 Tasseled with silk and pearled with latoun.<sup>8</sup>  
 In all this world, to seeken up and doun,



145 There is no man so wise that coude thenche<sup>o</sup>  
 So gay a popelote<sup>o</sup> or such a wenche.  
 Full brighter was the shining<sup>o</sup> of her hue<sup>o</sup>  
 Than in the Tour<sup>o</sup> the noble yforges new.<sup>9</sup>  
 But of her song, it was as loud and yerne<sup>o</sup>  
 As any swallow sitting on a berne.<sup>o</sup>  
 150 Thereto<sup>o</sup> she could skip and make game<sup>o</sup>  
 As any kid or calf following his dame.<sup>o</sup>  
 Her mouth was sweet as bragot or the meeth,<sup>1</sup>  
 Or hoard of apples laid in hay or heath.<sup>o</sup>  
 Winsing<sup>o</sup> she was as is a joly<sup>o</sup> colt,  
 155 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.<sup>o</sup>  
 A brooch she bar<sup>o</sup> upon her low coler<sup>o</sup>  
 As broad as is the boss of a bokeler;<sup>o</sup>  
 Her shoes were laced on her legges high.  
 She was a primerole, a piggesnye,<sup>2</sup>  
 160 For any lord to leggen<sup>o</sup> in his bed,  
 Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.  
 Now sir, and eft<sup>o</sup> sir, so befell the cas<sup>o</sup>  
 That on a day this hende<sup>o</sup> Nicholas  
 Fil<sup>o</sup> with this yonge wife to rage<sup>o</sup> and play  
 165 While that her husbonde was at Oseney<sup>o</sup>  
 (As<sup>o</sup> clerkes been full subtle and full quainte<sup>o</sup>),  
 And prively<sup>o</sup> he caught hire<sup>o</sup> by the queinte,<sup>3</sup>  
 And said, "Ywis,<sup>o</sup> but if<sup>o</sup> I have my will,  
 For derne<sup>o</sup> love of thee, lemman,<sup>o</sup> I spill,"<sup>o</sup>  
 170 And held her harde by the haunche-bones,<sup>o</sup>  
 And saide, "Lemman, love me all atones,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or I will dien,<sup>o</sup> also<sup>o</sup> God me save."  
 And she sprang as a colt does in the trave,<sup>4</sup>  
 And with her head she wried<sup>o</sup> fast away;  
 175 She said, "I will not kiss thee, by my fay.<sup>o</sup>  
 Why, let be," quod<sup>o</sup> she, "let be, Nicholas!  
 Or I will crye 'Out, harrow,<sup>o</sup> and alas!  
 Do way<sup>o</sup> your handes, for your courtesy!"

180        This Nicholas gan<sup>o</sup> mercy for to crye  
 And spoke so fair, and profred him<sup>o</sup> so fast,  
 That she her love him granted atte last,  
 And swore her oath by Saint Thomas of Kent<sup>5</sup>  
 That she would been at his comandement,  
 When that she may her leiser<sup>o</sup> well espye.  
 185        "Myn husband is so full of jealousy  
 That but<sup>o</sup> you waite<sup>o</sup> well and be privee,<sup>o</sup>  
 I woot<sup>o</sup> right well I nam but dead,"<sup>o</sup>  
              quod<sup>o</sup> she,  
 "Ye moste<sup>o</sup> been full derne<sup>o</sup> as in this cas."  
 "Nay, therof care thee not," quod Nicholas.  
 190        "A clerk hadde litherly biset<sup>o</sup> his while,<sup>o</sup>  
 But if<sup>o</sup> he could a carpenter beguile."  
 And thus they been accorded<sup>o</sup> and ysworn  
 To wait<sup>o</sup> a time, as I have told biforn.<sup>o</sup>  
 When Nicholas had done thus everydel,<sup>o</sup>  
 195        And thakked<sup>o</sup> her upon the lendes<sup>o</sup> well,  
 He kissed hire sweet, and taketh his sautry<sup>o</sup>  
 And playeth fast, and maketh melody.  
 Thanne fell it thus<sup>o</sup> that to the parish chirche,  
 Christes owene werkes for to wirche,<sup>o</sup>  
 200        This goode wife went on an haliday:<sup>o</sup>  
 Her forehead shone as bright as any day,  
 So was it wasshen when she leet<sup>o</sup> her werk.  
 Now was there of that church a parish clerk.<sup>6</sup>  
 The which that was ycleped<sup>o</sup> Absolon:  
 205        Crul<sup>o</sup> was his hair, and as the gold it shoon,  
 And strouted as a fanne<sup>7</sup> large and brode;  
 Full straight and even lay his joly<sup>o</sup> shode.<sup>o</sup>  
 His rode<sup>o</sup> was red, his eyen grey as goose.  
 With Poules window<sup>8</sup> corven<sup>o</sup> on his shoes,  
 210        In hoses<sup>o</sup> red he wente fetisly.<sup>o</sup>  
 Yclad he was full small<sup>o</sup> and properly,  
 All in a kirtel<sup>o</sup> of a light waget<sup>o</sup>—

Full fair and thikke been the pointes<sup>o</sup> set—  
 And thereupon he had a gay surplis,<sup>o</sup>  
 215 As white as is the blosme<sup>o</sup> upon the ris.<sup>o</sup>  
 A merry child<sup>o</sup> he was, so God me save.  
 Well could he laten blood,<sup>o</sup> and clip,<sup>o</sup>  
         and shave,  
 And maken a charter<sup>o</sup> of land, or acquitaunce;<sup>o</sup> <sup>9</sup>  
 In twenty manere<sup>o</sup> could he trip and daunce  
 220 After the school of Oxenforde tho,<sup>o</sup>  
 And with his legges casten<sup>o</sup> to and fro,  
 And playen songes on a small rubible;<sup>o</sup>  
 Therto he song sometime a loud quinible,<sup>o</sup>  
 And as well could he playe on a giterne:<sup>o</sup>  
 225 In all the town nas<sup>o</sup> brewhouse ne taverne  
 That he ne visited with his solas,<sup>o</sup>  
 Ther<sup>o</sup> any gailard tappestere<sup>o</sup> was.  
 But sooth to say, he was somdeel squaimous<sup>o</sup>  
 Of<sup>o</sup> farting, and of speeche daungerous.<sup>o</sup>  
 230 This Absolon, that joly<sup>o</sup> was and gay,  
 Gooth with a cencer<sup>o</sup> on the haliday,<sup>o</sup>  
 Cencing<sup>o</sup> the wives of the parish fast,<sup>o</sup>  
 And many a lovely look on them he cast,  
 And namely<sup>o</sup> on this carpenteres wife:  
 235 To look on her him thought a merry life.  
 She was so proper<sup>o</sup> and sweet and likerous,<sup>o</sup>  
 I dare well say, if she had been a mous,  
 And he a cat, he would her hente<sup>o</sup> anon.  
 This parish clerk, this joly<sup>o</sup> Absolon,  
 240 Hath in his herte such a love-longing<sup>o</sup>  
 That of no wife ne took he noon offring—  
 For courtesy he said he wolde noon.<sup>o</sup>  
 The moone, when it was night, full brighte shoon,<sup>o</sup>  
 And Absolon his giterne<sup>o</sup> hath ytake—  
 245 For paramours<sup>o</sup> he thoughte for to wake<sup>o</sup>—  
 And forth he gooth, jolif<sup>o</sup> and amorous,

Til he came to the carpenteres hous,  
 A little after cokkes<sup>o</sup> had ycrowe,<sup>o</sup>  
 And dressed him up by a shot-windowe<sup>1</sup>  
 250 That was upon the carpenteres wall.  
 He singeth in his voice gentle and small,<sup>o</sup>  
 "Now dere lady, if thy wille be,  
 I pray you that ye will rue<sup>o</sup> on me,"  
 Full well accordant to his giterninge.<sup>2</sup>  
 255 This carpenter awoke and heard him singe,  
 And spoke unto his wife, and said anon,  
 "What, Alison, heerestou<sup>o</sup> not Absolon  
 That chaunteth<sup>o</sup> thus under oure bowres<sup>o</sup> wall?"  
 And she answered her housbonde therewithal,<sup>o</sup>  
 260 "Yes, God woot,<sup>o</sup> John, I heere it everydel."<sup>o</sup>  
 This passeth forth. What will ye bet than wel?<sup>3</sup>  
 From day to day this joly<sup>o</sup> Absolon  
 So woweth<sup>o</sup> hire that him is woe-bigon:<sup>o</sup>  
 He waketh all the night and all the day;  
 265 He combed his lokkes<sup>o</sup> broad<sup>o</sup> and made him gay;  
 He woweth hire<sup>o</sup> by menes<sup>o</sup> and brocage,<sup>o</sup>  
  
 And swore he wolde been her owene page;<sup>o</sup>  
 He singeth, brokking<sup>o</sup> as a nightingale;  
 He sent hir piment,<sup>o</sup> meeth,<sup>o</sup> and spiced ale,  
 270 And wafres<sup>o</sup> piping hot out of the glede;<sup>o</sup>  
 And for she was of town, he profred mede<sup>4</sup>—  
 For some folk will be wonnen for<sup>o</sup> richesse,  
 And some for strokes,<sup>o</sup> and some for gentillesse.<sup>o</sup>  
 Sometimes to show his lightness<sup>o</sup> and maistrye,<sup>o</sup>  
 275 He playeth Herodes<sup>5</sup> upon a scaffold hye.  
 But what availeth him<sup>o</sup> as in this cas?  
 She loveth so this hende<sup>o</sup> Nicholas  
 That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;<sup>6</sup>  
 He ne hadde for his labor but a scorn.  
 280 And thus she maketh Absolon her ape,<sup>o</sup>

And all his earnest turneth til a jape.<sup>o</sup>  
 Full sooth<sup>o</sup> is this proverb, it is no lie;  
 Men saith right thus: "Alway the nye slye<sup>o</sup>  
 Maketh the ferre leve<sup>o</sup> to be loth."<sup>o</sup>  
 285 For though that Absolon be wood<sup>o</sup> or wroth,<sup>o</sup>  
 Because that he far was from her sight,  
 This nigh<sup>o</sup> Nicholas stood in his light.  
 Now bear thee well,<sup>o</sup> thou hende Nicholas,  
 For Absolon may wail and sing "alas."  
 290 And so befell it on a Saturday  
 This carpenter was goon to Oseney,  
 And hende Nicholas and Alisoun  
 Accorded been to this conclusioun,<sup>o</sup>  
 That Nicholas shall shapen<sup>o</sup> them a wile<sup>o</sup>  
 295 This sely<sup>o</sup> jealous husband to beguile,<sup>o</sup>  
 And if so be this game went aright,  
 She sholden sleepen in his arms all night—  
 For this was his desire and hers also.  
 And right anon, withouten wordes mo,<sup>o</sup>  
 300 This Nicholas no longer wolde tarry,  
 But dooth full soft<sup>o</sup> unto his chamber carry  
 Bothe meat<sup>o</sup> and drinke for a day or twaye,<sup>o</sup>  
 And to her husband bade hire for<sup>o</sup> to say,  
 If that he asked after Nicholas,  
 305 She sholde say she niste<sup>o</sup> where he was—  
 Of all that day she saw him not with eye:  
 She trowed<sup>o</sup> that he was in maladye,<sup>o</sup>  
 For for no cry her maide could him call,  
 He nolde<sup>o</sup> answer for nothing that might fall.<sup>o</sup>  
 310 This passeth forth all thilke<sup>o</sup> Saturday  
 That Nicholas still in his chamber lay,  
 And ate, and slept, or dide what him leste,<sup>o</sup>  
 Til Sunday that the sonne gooth to reste.  
 This sely<sup>o</sup> carpenter hath great mervaille<sup>o</sup>  
 315 Of<sup>o</sup> Nicholas, or what thing might him ail,  
 And said, "I am adrad,<sup>o</sup> by Saint Thomas,

It stondeth not aright with Nicholas.  
 God shilde<sup>o</sup> that he deide<sup>o</sup> sodeinly!  
 This world is now full tikel,<sup>o</sup> sikerly:<sup>o</sup>  
 320 I saw today a corpse yborn<sup>o</sup> to chirche  
 That now a<sup>o</sup> Monday last I saw him wirche.<sup>o</sup>  
 Go up," quod<sup>o</sup> he unto his knave<sup>o</sup> anon,  
 "Clepe<sup>o</sup> at his door or knokke with a stoon.<sup>o</sup>  
 Look how it is and tell me boldely."  
 325 This knave gooth him up full sturdily,  
 And at the chamber-doore while that he stood  
 He cried and knocked as that<sup>o</sup> he were wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 "What? How? What do ye, master Nicholay?  
 How may ye sleepen all the longe day?"  
 330 But all for not: he herde not a word.  
 An hole he found full low upon a bord,  
 Thereas<sup>o</sup> the cat was wont<sup>o</sup> in for to creep,  
 And at that hole he looked in full deep  
 And atte last he had of him a sight.  
 335 This Nicholas sat ever caping<sup>o</sup> upright  
 As<sup>o</sup> he hadde kiked<sup>o</sup> on the newe moon.  
 Adown he gooth and told his master soon  
 In what array<sup>o</sup> he saw this ilke<sup>o</sup> man.  
 This carpenter to blessen him<sup>o</sup> began,  
 340 And said, "Help us, Sainte Frideswide!<sup>7</sup>  
 A man woot<sup>o</sup> little what him shall bitide.<sup>o</sup>  
 This man is falle, with his astromye,<sup>o</sup>  
 In some woodnesse<sup>o</sup> or in some agony.  
 I thought ay<sup>o</sup> well how that it sholde be:  
 345 Men should not know of Goddes privetee.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ye, blessed be always a lewed<sup>o</sup> man  
 That not but only his bileve can.<sup>o</sup>  
 So fared another clerk with astromye:  
 He walked in the feeldes for to pry<sup>o</sup>  
 350 Upon the sterres,<sup>o</sup> what there sholde befall,  
 Til he was in a marle-pit<sup>o</sup> yfall<sup>8</sup>—

He saw not that. But yet, by Saint Thomas,  
 Me reweth sore for<sup>o</sup> hende<sup>o</sup> Nicholas.  
 He shall be rated of<sup>o</sup> his studying,  
 355 If that I may, by Jesus, hevene king!  
 Get me a staff that I may underspore,<sup>o</sup>  
 While that thou, Robin, hevest<sup>o</sup> up the door.  
 He shall<sup>o</sup> out of his studying, as I guess."  
 And to the chamber door he gan him dress.<sup>o</sup>  
 360 His knave was a strong carl<sup>o</sup> for the nones,<sup>o</sup>  
 And by the hasp he haf<sup>o</sup> it up atones:<sup>o</sup>  
 Into<sup>o</sup> the floor the dore fil<sup>o</sup> anon.  
 This Nicholas sat ay<sup>o</sup> as still as stoon,  
 And ever caped<sup>o</sup> up into the air.  
 365 This carpenter wende<sup>o</sup> he were in despair,  
 And hente<sup>o</sup> him by the shoulders mightily,  
 And shook him hard, and cride spitously,<sup>o</sup>  
 "What, Nicholay, what, how! What! Look adoun!  
 Awake, and think on Christes passioun!<sup>o</sup>  
 370 I crouche thee from elves and from wightes."<sup>9</sup>  
 Therwith the nightspell<sup>o</sup> said he anonrightes<sup>o</sup>  
 On four halves<sup>o</sup> of the house about,  
 And on the threshold on the dore without:<sup>o</sup>  
 "Jesus Christ and Sainte Benedight,<sup>1</sup>  
 375 Blesse this house from every wicked wight!<sup>o</sup>  
 For nightes nerye<sup>o</sup> the White Pater Noster.<sup>2</sup>  
 Where wentestou,<sup>o</sup> thou Sainte Petres soster?"<sup>o</sup>  
 And at the last this hende<sup>o</sup> Nicholas  
 Gan for to sike<sup>o</sup> sore, and said, "Alas,  
 380 Shall all the world be lost eftsoones<sup>o</sup> now?"  
 This carpenter answerde, "What saistou?<sup>o</sup>  
 What, think on God as we do, men that swink."<sup>o</sup>  
 This Nicholas answerde, "Fetch me drink,  
 And after will I speak in privetee<sup>o</sup>  
 385 Of certain thing that toucheth<sup>o</sup> me and thee.  
 I will tell it none other man, certain."

This carpenter gooth down and comth again,  
 And brought of mighty<sup>o</sup> ale a large quart,  
 And when that each of them had drunk his part,  
 390 This Nicholas his dore faste shet,<sup>o</sup>  
 And down the carpenter by him he set,  
 And saide, "John, my hoste lief<sup>o</sup> and dear,  
 Thou shall upon thy trouthe<sup>o</sup> swere me here  
 That to no wight<sup>o</sup> thou shalt this conseil<sup>o</sup> wray;<sup>o</sup>  
 395 For it is Christes conseil that I say,  
 And if thou tell it man,<sup>o</sup> thou art forlore,<sup>o</sup>  
 For this vengeance thou shall have therefore  
 That if thou wraye<sup>o</sup> me, thou shall be wood.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Nay, Christ forbid it, for his holy blood,"  
 400 Quod tho<sup>o</sup> this sely<sup>o</sup> man. "I nam no  
 labbe,<sup>o</sup>  
 And though I say, I nam not lief to gabbe.<sup>3</sup>  
 Say what thou will, I shall it never tell  
 To child ne wife, by him that harwed hell."<sup>4</sup>  
 "Now John," quod Nicholas, "I will not lie.  
 405 I have yfound in my astrologye,  
 As I have looked in the moone bright,  
 That now a Monday next, at quarter night,<sup>o</sup>  
 Shall fall a rain, and that so wild and wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 That half so great was never Noah's flood.<sup>5</sup>  
 410 This world," he said, "in lasse<sup>o</sup> than an hour  
 Shall all be dreint,<sup>o</sup> so hideous is the shower.  
 Thus shall mankinde drenche<sup>o</sup> and lose their life."  
 This carpenter answered, "Alas, my wife!  
 And shall she drenche? Alas, my Alisoun!"  
 415 For sorwe of this he fell almost adoun,  
 And said, "Is there no remedy in this cas?"  
 "Why yes, for<sup>o</sup> Gode," quod<sup>o</sup> hende<sup>o</sup> Nicholas,  
 "If thou wolt werken after lore and reed<sup>6</sup>—  
 Thou maist not werken after thyn owene heed;<sup>o</sup>  
 420 For thus saith Solomon<sup>7</sup> that was full true,



'Work all by conseil<sup>o</sup> and thou shall not rue.'<sup>o</sup>  
 And if thou werken will by good conseil,  
 I undertake, withouten mast or sail,  
 Yet shall I save her and thee and me.  
 425 Hastou<sup>o</sup> not heard how saved was Noe<sup>o</sup>  
 When that Oure Lord hadde warned him biforn  
 That all the world with water sholde be lorn?"<sup>o</sup>  
 "Yes," quod<sup>o</sup> this carpenter, "full yore ago."<sup>o</sup>  
 "Hastou not heard," quod Nicholas, "also  
 430 The sorwe of Noe with his fellowship  
 Er<sup>o</sup> that he mighte get his wife to ship?<sup>8</sup>  
 Him hadde levere,<sup>o</sup> I dare well undertake,  
 At thilke<sup>o</sup> time than alle his wetheres<sup>o</sup> blake  
 That she had had a ship herself alone.  
 435 And therefore woostou<sup>o</sup> what is best to done?  
 This asketh<sup>o</sup> haste, and of an hastif<sup>o</sup> thing  
 Men may not preach or maken tarrying.  
 Anon go get us fast into this in<sup>o</sup>  
 A kneading-trough or elles<sup>o</sup> a kimelin<sup>o</sup>  
 440 For each of us; but looke<sup>o</sup> that they be large,<sup>o</sup>  
 In whiche we mowen swim<sup>o</sup> as in a barge,<sup>o</sup>  
 And have therinne vitale suffisaunt<sup>o</sup>  
 But for a day—fie on the remenaunt!  
 The water shall aslake<sup>o</sup> and goon away  
 445 About prime<sup>o</sup> upon the nexte day.  
 But Robin may not wite<sup>o</sup> of this, thy knave,  
 Ne eek<sup>o</sup> thy maide Gille I may not save.  
 Axe<sup>o</sup> not why, for though thou axe me,  
 I will not tellen Goddes privetee.<sup>o</sup>  
 450 Suffiseth thee, but if<sup>o</sup> thy wittes mad,<sup>o</sup>  
 To have as great a grace as Noah had.  
 Thy wife shall I well saven, out of doubt.  
 Go now thy way, and speed thee hereabout.<sup>o</sup>  
 But when thou hast for her and thee and me  
 455 Ygeten<sup>o</sup> us these kneading-tubbes three,

Thanne shaltou<sup>o</sup> hangen them in the roof full high,  
 That no man of oure purveyance<sup>o</sup> espy.  
 And when thou thus hast doon as I have said,  
 And hast oure vitaille<sup>o</sup> faire<sup>o</sup> in them ylaid,  
 460 And eek<sup>o</sup> an ax to smite the cord atwo,<sup>o</sup>  
 When that the water comth that we may go,  
 And break an hole on high upon the gable  
 Unto the gardenward,<sup>o</sup> over the stable,  
 That we may freely passen forth our way,  
 465 When that the grete shower is goon away,  
 Thanne shaltou swim as merry, I undertake,  
 As dooth the white duck after her drake.  
 Thanne will I clepe,<sup>o</sup> 'How,<sup>o</sup> Alison? How, John?  
 Be merry, for the flood will pass anon.'  
 470 And thou wolt sayn, 'Hail, master Nicholay!  
 Good morwe, I see thee well, for it is day!'  
 And then shall we be lordes all our life  
 Of all the world, as Noe<sup>o</sup> and his wife.  
 But of oo<sup>o</sup> thing I warne thee full right:  
 475 Be well avised<sup>o</sup> on that ilke<sup>o</sup> night  
 That we been entred into shippes bord  
 That none of us ne speke not a word,  
 Ne clepe,<sup>o</sup> ne crye, but been in his prayere,  
 For it is Goddes owene heeste deere.<sup>o</sup>  
 480 Thy wife and thou mote hange far atwinne,<sup>o</sup>  
 For that<sup>o</sup> bitwixe<sup>o</sup> you shall be no sinne—  
 No more in looking than there shall in deed.  
 This ordinance<sup>o</sup> is said: go, God thee speed.  
 Tomorwe at night when men been all asleep,  
 485 Into oure kneading-tubbes will we creep,  
 And sitten there, abiding<sup>o</sup> Goddes grace.  
 Go now thy way, I have no longer space<sup>o</sup>  
 To make of this no longer sermoning.  
 Men say thus: 'Send the wise and say nothing.'  
 490 Thou art so wise it needeth thee not teach:<sup>o</sup>  
 Go save oure life, and that I thee beseech."<sup>o</sup>

This sely<sup>o</sup> carpenter gooth forth his way:  
 Full oft he said "alas" and "wailaway"  
 And to his wife he told his privetee,<sup>o</sup>  
 495 And she was war,<sup>o</sup> and knew it bet<sup>o</sup> than he,  
 What all this quainte cast was for to saye.<sup>o</sup>  
 But nonetheless she ferde as<sup>o</sup> she wolde deye,  
 And said, "Alas, go forth thy way anon.<sup>o</sup>  
 Help us to scape,<sup>o</sup> or we been dead echon.<sup>o</sup>  
 500 I am thy trewe verray wedded wife:  
 Go, deere spouse, and help to save oure life."  
 Lo, which<sup>o</sup> a great thing is affeccioun!<sup>o</sup>  
 Men may dien<sup>o</sup> of imaginacioun,  
 So deepe<sup>o</sup> may impression<sup>o</sup> be take.  
 505 This sely carpenter biginneth quake;<sup>o</sup>  
 Him thinketh verrailiche<sup>o</sup> that he may see  
 Noah's flood come walwing<sup>o</sup> as the sea  
 To drenchen<sup>o</sup> Alison, his honey dear.  
 He weepeth, wailleth, maketh sorry cheer;<sup>o</sup>  
 510 He siketh<sup>o</sup> with full many a sorry swogh,<sup>o</sup>  
 And gooth and geteth him a kneading-trogh,  
 And after a tub and a kimelin,<sup>o</sup>  
 And prively<sup>o</sup> he sente them to his in<sup>o</sup>  
 And hung them in the roof in privetee;  
 515 His<sup>o</sup> owene hand he made ladders three,  
 To climben by the runges<sup>o</sup> and the stalkes<sup>o</sup>  
 Unto the tubbes hanging in the balkes,<sup>o</sup>  
 And them vitailed,<sup>o</sup> bothe trough and tub,  
 With bread and cheese and good ale in a jub<sup>o</sup>  
 520 Suffising right enough as for a day.  
 But er that<sup>o</sup> he had made all this array,<sup>o</sup>  
 He sent his knave, and eek his wench<sup>o</sup> also,  
 Upon his neede<sup>o</sup> to London for to go.  
 And on the Monday when it drow to<sup>o</sup> night,  
 525 He shut his door withouten candle-light  
 And dressed<sup>o</sup> alle thing as it sholde be;  
 And shortly up they clomben<sup>o</sup> alle three.

They seten stille well a furlong way.<sup>9</sup>  
 530 "Now, Pater Noster, clum,"<sup>1</sup> said Nicholay,  
 And "Clum" quod John, and "Clum" said Alisoun.  
 This carpenter said his devocioun,  
 And stille he sit and biddeth his prayere,  
 Awaiting on the rain, if he it heere.<sup>o</sup>  
 535 The dede<sup>o</sup> sleep, for weary business,<sup>o</sup>  
 Fell on this carpenter right as I guess  
 Aboute curfew time,<sup>2</sup> or little more.  
 For travailling<sup>o</sup> of his gost<sup>o</sup> he groneth sore,  
 And eft he routeth, for his head mislay.<sup>3</sup>  
 540 Down of the ladder stalketh Nicholay,  
 And Alison full softe adown she sped:  
 Withouten wordes more they goon to bed  
 Theras<sup>o</sup> the carpenter is wont<sup>o</sup> to lie.  
 There was the revel and the melody,  
 545 And thus lith<sup>o</sup> Alison and Nicholas  
 In bisiness of mirth and of solace,  
 Til that the belle of Laudes<sup>4</sup> gan to ring  
 And freres<sup>o</sup> in the chauncel<sup>o</sup> gonne sing.  
 This parish clerk, this amorous Absolon,  
 550 That is for love always so woebegone,  
 Upon the Monday was at Oseneye,  
 With company him to disport and play,  
 And asked upon cas a cloisterer<sup>5</sup>  
 Full prively<sup>o</sup> after John the carpenter;  
 555 And he drew him apart out of the chirche,<sup>o</sup>  
 And said, "I noot:<sup>o</sup> I saw him here not wirche<sup>o</sup> <sup>6</sup>  
 Since Saturday. I trowe<sup>o</sup> that he be went<sup>o</sup>  
 For timber there our abbot hath him sent.  
 For he is wont<sup>o</sup> for timber for to go,  
 560 And dwellen atte grange<sup>o</sup> a day or two.  
 Or elles<sup>o</sup> he is at his house, certayn.  
 Where that he be I can not soothly sayn."  
 This Absolon full jolif<sup>o</sup> was and light,<sup>o</sup>

And thoughte, "Now is time to wake all night,  
 For sikerly, <sup>o</sup> I saw him not stirring  
 565 Aboute his door sin <sup>o</sup> day began to spring.  
 So mote <sup>o</sup> I thrive, I shall at cokkes crow  
 Full prively knocken at his window  
 That stant <sup>o</sup> full low upon his boures <sup>o</sup> wall.  
 To Alison now will I tellen all  
 570 My love-longing, <sup>o</sup> for yet I shall not miss <sup>o</sup>  
 That at the leeste way <sup>o</sup> I shall hire <sup>o</sup> kiss.  
 Some manere comfort shall I have, parfay. <sup>o</sup>  
 My mouth hath icched <sup>o</sup> all this longe day:  
 That is a sign of kissing at the least.  
 575 All night me mette <sup>o</sup> eek <sup>o</sup> I was at a feast.  
 Therefore I will go sleep an hour or twaye, <sup>o</sup>  
 And all the night then will I wake and play."  
 When that the firste cock hath crow, anon  
 Up rist <sup>o</sup> this joly <sup>o</sup> lover Absolon,  
 580 And him arrayeth <sup>o</sup> gay at point devis. <sup>o</sup>  
 But first he cheweth grain <sup>o</sup> and licoris,  
 To smellen sweet, er <sup>o</sup> he hadde combed his heer.  
 Under his tongue a trewe-love <sup>7</sup> he beer, <sup>o</sup>  
 For thereby wende <sup>o</sup> he to be gracious. <sup>o</sup>  
 585 He rometh <sup>o</sup> to the carpenteres hous,  
 And still he stant <sup>o</sup> under the shot-window—  
 Unto his breast it raughte, <sup>o</sup> it was so low—  
 And oft he cougheth with a semy soun. <sup>o</sup>  
 "What do ye, honey-comb, sweet Alisoun,  
 590 My faire bird, my sweete cinamome? <sup>o</sup>  
 Awaketh, lemman <sup>o</sup> mine, and speketh to me.  
 Well little thinken ye upon my woe  
 That for your love I swete <sup>o</sup> there <sup>o</sup> I go.  
 No wonder is though that I swelte <sup>o</sup> and swete:  
 595 I moorne <sup>o</sup> as dooth a lamb after the tete. <sup>o</sup>  
 Ywis, lemman, I have such love-longing,  
 That like a turtle <sup>o</sup> true is my mourning: <sup>o</sup>

I may not eat no more than a maide."  
 "Go from the windowe, Jakke fool," she saide.  
 600 "As help me God, it will not be com-pa-me.°  
 I love another, and elles° I were to blame,  
 Well bet° than thee, by Jesus, Absolon.  
 Go forth thy way or I will cast a stoon,  
 And lat me sleep, a twenty devele way."°  
 605 "Alas," quod° Absolon, "and wailaway,  
 That trewe love was ever so yvele biset.°  
 Thanne kiss me, sin° that it may be no bet,°  
 For Jesus love and for the love of me."  
 "Woltou° thanne go thy way therwith?" quod° she.  
 610 "Ye, certes,° lemman,"° quod this Absolon.  
 "Thanne make thee ready," quod she. "I come  
 anon."  
 And unto Nicholas she saide still,°  
 "Now hust,° and thou shalt laughen all thy fill."  
 This Absolon down set him on his knees,  
 615 And said, "I am a lord at alle degrees,°  
 For after this I hope there cometh more.  
 Lemman,° thy grace, and sweete bird, thyn ore!"°  
 The windowe she undoth, and that in haste.  
 "Have do," quod she, "come of and speed thee faste,  
 620 °  
 Lest that oure neighbors thee espy."  
 This Absolon gan wipe his mouth full dry:  
 Dark was the night as pitch or as the coal,  
 And at the window out she put her hole,  
 And Absolon, him fil no bet ne wers,<sup>8</sup>  
 625 But with his mouth he kissed her naked ers°  
 Full savourly,° er° he were war° of this.  
 Aback he sterte,° and thought it was amiss,  
 For well he wiste° a womman hath no berd.°  
 He felt a thing all rough and longe yherd,°  
 630 And saide, "Fie, alas, what have I do?"

"Teehee," quod<sup>o</sup> she, and clapte the windowe to.  
 And Absolon gooth forth a sorry pas.<sup>o</sup>  
 "A beard, a beard!" quod hende Nicholas,  
 "By Goddes corpus,<sup>o</sup> this gooth fair and wel."  
 635 This sely<sup>o</sup> Absolon heard everydel,<sup>o</sup>  
 And on his lip he gan for anger bite,  
 And to himself he said, "I shall thee quite."<sup>o</sup>  
 Who rubbeth now, who froteth<sup>o</sup> now his lippes  
 With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with  
 640 chippes,  
 But Absolon, that saith full oft "Alas"?  
 "My soule bitake<sup>o</sup> I unto Satanas,<sup>o</sup>  
 But me were levere<sup>o</sup> than all this town," quod he,  
 "Of this despit<sup>o</sup> awroken<sup>o</sup> for to be.  
 Alas," quod he, "alas I ne had ybleint!"<sup>o</sup>  
 645 His hote love was cold and all yqueint,<sup>o</sup>  
 For from that time that he hadde kissed her ers  
 Of paramours<sup>o</sup> he sette not a kers,<sup>9</sup>  
 For he was heled<sup>o</sup> of his maladye.<sup>o</sup>  
 Full ofte paramours he gan defye,<sup>o</sup>  
 650 And wept as dooth a child that is ybete.<sup>o</sup>  
 A softe paas<sup>o</sup> he went over the streete  
 Until<sup>o</sup> a smith men clepen<sup>o</sup> daun<sup>o</sup> Gervais,  
 That in his forge smithed plough harneis:<sup>o</sup>  
 He sharpeth<sup>o</sup> shaar<sup>o</sup> and cultour<sup>1</sup> busily.  
 655 This Absolon knokketh all easily,<sup>o</sup>  
 And said, "Undo, Gervais, and that anon."<sup>o</sup>  
 "What, who artou?"<sup>o</sup> "It am I, Absolon."  
 "What, Absolon? What, Christes sweete tree!"<sup>o</sup>  
 Why rise ye so rathe?<sup>o</sup> Ey, *benedicite*,<sup>o</sup>  
 660 What aileth you? Some gay girl, God it woot,<sup>o</sup>  
 Has brought you thus upon the viritoot.<sup>o</sup>  
 By Sainte Note,<sup>2</sup> ye woot well what I mean."  
 This Absolon ne roughete not a bean<sup>o</sup>  
 Of all his play. No word again<sup>o</sup> he yaf:<sup>o</sup>  
 665

He hadde more tow on his distaff<sup>3</sup>  
 Than Gervais knew, and saide, "Friend so dear,  
 This hote cultour<sup>o</sup> in the chimenee<sup>o</sup> here,  
 As lene<sup>o</sup> it me: I have therewith to  
 doon.<sup>o</sup>  
 I will bring it thee again full soon."  
 670 Gervais answerede, "Certes, were it gold,  
 Or in a poke nobles alle untold,<sup>4</sup>  
 Thou sholdest have, as I am trewe smith.  
 Ay, Christes foe,<sup>5</sup> what will ye do therewith?"  
 "Therof,"<sup>o</sup> quod<sup>o</sup> Absolon, "be as be may.  
 675 I shall well tell it thee another day,"  
 And caughte the cultour by the colde stele.<sup>o</sup>  
 Full soft out at the door he gan to stele,  
 And went unto the carpenteres wall:  
 He cougheth first and knokketh therewithal  
 680 Upon the windowe, right as he did er.<sup>o</sup>  
 This Alison answerde, "Who is there  
 That knokketh so? I warrant<sup>o</sup> it a thief."  
 "Why, nay," quod he, "God woot,<sup>o</sup> my sweete lief,<sup>o</sup>  
 I am thine Absolon, my dereling.<sup>o</sup>  
 685 Of gold," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "I have thee brought a ring—  
 My mother yaf<sup>o</sup> it me, so God me save;  
 Full fine it is and therto well ygrave:<sup>o</sup>  
 This will I given thee if thou me kiss."  
 This Nicholas was risen for to piss,  
 690 And thought he wolde amenden<sup>o</sup> all the jape:<sup>o</sup>  
 He sholde kiss his ers<sup>o</sup> er<sup>o</sup> that he scape.<sup>o</sup>  
 And up the windowe did he hastily,  
 And out his ers he putteth prively,  
 Over the buttoke to the haunche-bon.<sup>o</sup>  
 695 And therewith spoke this clerk, this Absolon,  
 "Speak, sweete bird, I noot not<sup>o</sup> where thou art."  
 This Nicholas anon leet fle<sup>o</sup> a fart  
 As great as it hadde been a thunder-dent<sup>o</sup>



700 That with the stroke he was almost yblent,<sup>o</sup>  
 And he was ready with his iron hoot,<sup>o</sup>  
 And Nicholas amidde the ers<sup>o</sup> he smoot:<sup>o</sup>  
 Off gooth the skin an hande-brede<sup>o</sup> aboute;  
 The hote cultour<sup>o</sup> brende so his toute<sup>o</sup>  
 705 That for the smart<sup>o</sup> he wende for to<sup>o</sup> die;  
 As he were wood<sup>o</sup> for woe he gan to cry,  
 "Help! Water! Water! Help, for Goddes herte!"  
 This carpenter out of his slumber sterte,<sup>o</sup>  
 And herde one cryen "Water!" as he were wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 710 And thought, "Alas, now cometh Noweles flood!"<sup>6</sup>  
 He sit him up withoute wordes mo,<sup>o</sup>  
 And with his ax he smote the corde two,  
 And down gooth all: he found neither to sell  
 Ne breed ne ale til he came to the cell,<sup>7</sup>  
 715 Upon the floor, and there aswoune<sup>o</sup> he lay.  
 Up start<sup>o</sup> her Alison and Nicholay,  
 And criden "Out" and "Harrow"<sup>o</sup> in the streete.  
 The neighbors, bothe small and grete,  
 In ronnen for to gauren<sup>o</sup> on this man  
 That aswoune lay both pale and wan,  
 720 For with the fall he brosten<sup>o</sup> had his arm;  
 But stand he must unto his owene harm,<sup>8</sup>  
 For when he spoke he was anon bore doun<sup>o</sup>  
 With<sup>o</sup> hende Nicholas and Alisoun:  
 They tolden every man that he was wood<sup>o</sup>—  
 725 He was aghast so of Noweles flood,  
 Through fantasye, that of his vanitee<sup>o</sup>  
 He had ybought him kneading-tubbes three,  
 And hadde them hanged in the roof above,  
 And that he prayed<sup>o</sup> them, for Goddes love,  
 730 To sitten in the roof, *par compaigny.* <sup>o</sup>  
 The folk gan laughen at his fantasy.  
 Into the roof they kiken<sup>o</sup> and they cape,<sup>o</sup>  
 And turned all his harm unto a jape,<sup>o</sup>

735 For what so that this carpenter answered,  
 It was for not: no man his reason<sup>o</sup> heard;  
 With oathes great he was so sworn adown,  
 That he was holden wood<sup>o</sup> in all the town,  
 For every clerk anonright held<sup>o</sup> with other:  
 They saide, "The man was wood, my leve<sup>o</sup> brother,"  
 740 And every wight<sup>o</sup> gan laughen at this strife.<sup>o</sup>  
 Thus swived<sup>o</sup> was the carpenteres wife  
 For<sup>o</sup> all his keeping<sup>o</sup> and his jalousye,  
 And Absolon has kissed her nether<sup>o</sup> eye,  
 And Nicholas is scalded in the tute:<sup>o</sup>  
 745 This tale is done, and God save all the route!<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Who had completed the first stage of university education, the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: And he knew a number of principles by which to judge in astrological analyses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: *Almagest*, an astronomical treatise by the Egyptian scientist Ptolemy (active 127–148 C.E.).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Astrolabe, an astronomical instrument (about which Chaucer wrote a prose treatise).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Red wool blanket.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A psaltery, a metal-stringed musical instrument somewhat like a modern zither (the Clerk owns one too; *General Prologue*, line 296).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "The Angel's Address to the Virgin" (Latin), a popular late medieval religious song about the Annunciation.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An as yet unidentified (popular?) song.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In accordance with what his friends provided, and his own income.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Judged himself to be a potential cuckold.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dionysius Cato (3rd or 4th c. C.E.), the supposed author of a collection of Latin moral maxims used as an elementary textbook.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This portrait both follows and parodies the rules for description in 13th-century poetic handbooks such as that of Geoffrey de Vinsauf, where a description head-to-toe, *effictio*, is followed by a moral point about character (*notatio*). Alison's portrait is less than orderly in its sequence and concludes with leering anticipation of sexual enjoyment (lines 160–62).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Decorated with tassels on which were pearl-shaped spangles of brass.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: New-minted gold coin.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Braggot or mead, two alcoholic drinks made with honey.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A primrose or cowslip, a pig's eye: spring flowers, names used figuratively of pretty young women.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Private parts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A frame restraining a wild or stubborn horse; the animal imagery is continued from lines 151–55.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Saint Thomas à Becket (ca. 1118–1170), the “blissful martyr” of *The General Prologue*, line 17.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An adjunct assistant (in at least minor holy orders) to the parish priest—a position neither full-time nor well-paid.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Spread out like a fan (a wide-mouthed basket for separating grain from chaff).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: St. Paul's window: that is, intricate tooled designs.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Parish clerks, with their university education, were forced to find other part-time jobs to make ends meet: Absolon as a barber-surgeon, cutting hair and letting blood, and as a legal draftsman.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Took up his position by a casement window.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In harmony with his guitar playing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: So it goes. What do you want next?—This is probably the narrator’s comment, rather than Alison’s.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: And because she was a townswoman, he offered payment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Herod, a role traditionally played as a bully in the mystery or cycle plays—performed on scaffolds, or temporary platform stages. For more on the mystery plays, see pp. 247–48.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “To blow the buck’s horn” is to go without reward, waste one’s time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A princess and abbess of early medieval England (d. ca. 727), the patron saint of the city and university of Oxford.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A story told of the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Thales (ca. 620–ca. 545 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I make the sign of the cross over you against elves and wicked creatures.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–547), Italian monk who is considered the father of Western monasticism; he was the author of the Benedictine Rule.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The White Lord’s Prayer, a charm, was considered to offer powerful protection against evil spirits. What is being represented here is John’s panic, taking the form of a jumble of pious jargon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: And though I say it myself, I don’t like to gossip.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “Him that harrowed hell” is Christ; the story is told in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Genesis 6–9: God decides to destroy his corrupted creation and instructs Noah, a righteous man, to build an ark to preserve himself. Forty days of rain drowns all living creatures except those on the ark.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: If you are willing to act according to instruction and advice.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A king of Israel, renowned in the Hebrew Bible for his wisdom.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A reference to the comic scenes in the biblical cycle plays, in which Noah's wife refuses to enter the ark.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: They sat still the time it takes to go a furlong.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: *Clum* may mean "hush," but probably represents the conclusion of murmured prayers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The curfew bell was rung after dusk, at 8 or 9 p.m.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Then he snores, for his head lay at a bad angle.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lauds, the second church service of the day, sung at daybreak.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: And happened to ask a resident canon.—Absolon has entered the cloisters of Osney Abbey, an Augustinian convent outside Oxford.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: I have not seen him working here.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A truelove—an herb whose four leaves with a single flower or berry in the center resemble a love knot.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: It befell him no better or worse (than that . . .): that is, such was his luck.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He didn't care a piece of watercress (something of little value) for a woman's love.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A coulter, the blade fixed on a plow that cuts the turf.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Perhaps St. Neot (d. ca. 870?), a monk who lived in Cornwall.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: More fiber (for spinning) on his distaff: that is, more on his mind.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Countless gold coins in a bag.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the devil.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: John confuses Noah and Nowel, that is, advent. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He had no time to sell either bread or ale until he arrived at the bottom. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: But he had to stand up (on his own account), to his own detriment. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *once upon a time* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Oxford* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *churl* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *took in lodgers* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *desire* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *certain (number)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *called* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suave, clever* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clandestine* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasures* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secretive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *elegantly garnished* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sweet* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *setwall (ginger)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *belonging to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *counters used in arithmetic* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *neatly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *set* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *storage chest* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at nights* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rang* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lately* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her closely (confined)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *untutored* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *who advised* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *equal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *old age*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slender and delicate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *striped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apron*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loins* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cloth strip*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *embroidered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *both inside and outside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ribbons* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cap*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cloth as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *collar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *headband*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wanton, roaming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delicately plucked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyebrows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arching* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sloeberry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to look upon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(castrated) ram*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetheart, pet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *radiance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complexion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Tower of London*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *lively*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moreover* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *play, frolic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its mother*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heather*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skittish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frisky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straight as an arrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *collar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shield*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *again* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it so happened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flirt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Osney (near Oxford)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *privately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetheart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thighs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twisted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *take away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made advances*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be on guard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discreet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *am as good as dead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have poorly used* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watch for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *every bit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *patted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loins*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stringed instrument*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it so happened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perform*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holy day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *left off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parting (of the hair)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complexion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tights* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trimly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tunic* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *blue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surplice (a clerical vestment)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blossom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bough*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *young man*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bleed (patients)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut (hair)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *legal release*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ways*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fiddle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *false alto*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guitar (small lute)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there was no*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entertainment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lively barmaid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rather squeamish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *about* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prudish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *incense burner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holy day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfuming* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *especially*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delectable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have pounced on her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lovesickness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not want any*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shone*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *guitar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love's sake* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remain awake*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lusty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roosters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high-pitched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you hear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bedroom's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *every bit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant, amorous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woos* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afflicted with woe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hair* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wide-spreading*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wooed her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go-betweens* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mediation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *personal servant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trilling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mulled wine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pastries* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *won over by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courtesy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *facility* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virtuosity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what good does it do him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dupe*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *into a joke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entirely true*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sly man nearby*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distant dear one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unwelcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crazed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearby*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carry on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decision*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deception*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *simple, poor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trick*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very quietly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *told her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *didn't know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he wanted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *simple* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wondered greatly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forbid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *died*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *precarious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *work*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *said* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *manservant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *though* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mad*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gaping*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as if* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gazed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *condition* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *same*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cross himself*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knows* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *will happen to him*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *astronomy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *madness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secrets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *uneducated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knows only his creed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *look*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stars*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clay pit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I sorely pity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clever*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scolded for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pry up*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heave*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shall come*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *addressed his efforts*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fellow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *purpose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heaved* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *onto* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gaped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vehemently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Crucifixion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *night charm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sides*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend (us)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did you go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sister*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sigh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a second time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you saying*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *work*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affects*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beloved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *word of honor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *man* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disclose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anyone* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betray* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said then* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *simple*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blabbermouth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *after midnight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *furious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *less*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drowned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be sorry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Have you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Noah*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long ago*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he would have preferred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rams*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requires* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *urgent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brewing tub*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make sure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *can float* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vessel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food enough*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diminish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *9 a.m.*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *know*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ask*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secrets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go mad*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *get on with it*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *got*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shall you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *provision*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *provisions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *carefully*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in two*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *toward the garden*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hello*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *like Noah*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *one*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *take care*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *same*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *precious command*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *must hang far apart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in order that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *between*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *order*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awaiting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *time*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *there is no need to teach you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I beg you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *simple*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secret*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aware*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *better*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ingenious trick meant*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *acted as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escape* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *emotion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deeply* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mental image* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to tremble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surging* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expression* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sighs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *groan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brewing tub* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwelling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with his* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rungs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uprights* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rafters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stocked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jug* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preparation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *serving maid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on an errand for John* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw toward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arranged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *climbed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to see if he might hear it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wearied by activity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affliction* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *friars* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *church*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *don't know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *work*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *has gone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at the outlying farm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sportive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stands* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bedroom's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lovesickness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *miss out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at least* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *itched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I dreamed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rises* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dresses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to perfection*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cardamom*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supposed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strolls*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reached*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small sound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cinnamon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetheart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wherever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grow faint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turtledove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamentation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *come-kiss-me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the name of twenty devils*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill-used*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetheart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quietly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hush*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in every way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetheart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hurry up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arse*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *with relish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aware* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sprang* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long-haired* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walking sadly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *body* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hapless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *every bit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay you back* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wipes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Satan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I had rather* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insult* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turned aside* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quenched* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(romantic) love* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *illness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *renounce* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beaten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quiet walk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sir* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equipment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sharpens* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plowshare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quietly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *now, immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *dear cross*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *early* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bless me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prowl*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *didn't care a bean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in reply* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot plow blade* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fireplace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *please lend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *something to do with it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concerning that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *engraved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *improve on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thigh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *let fly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thunderbolt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blinded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smote*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *handsbreadth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plow blade* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expected to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jumped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crazed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a faint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jumped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Help*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gape, peer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once talked down*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *folly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for company's sake*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *argument, sense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fuss*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *screwed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guarding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lower*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *company*[Return to reference](#) °

## The Man of Law's Epilogue

After *The Miller's Tale* concludes, the Reeve is furious. Since he is a carpenter as well as estate manager (the meaning of "reeve"), he interprets the story as a personal insult and retaliates with a fabliau about a miller whose wife and daughter are bedded by two clerks. Next, the Cook begins yet another fabliau, which breaks off after fifty-five lines, thereby closing Fragment I of *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer may never have settled on a final order for the tales he completed, but all modern editors, following many manuscripts, agree in putting *The Man of Law's Tale* next. The Man of Law tells a long moralistic tale about the many trials of the heroine Constance, named for the virtue of constancy she personifies. This tale is complete, but it nonetheless suggests that *The Canterbury Tales* reaches us as a work in progress, which Chaucer kept revising, inadvertently creating many problems for scribes and editors. For instance, in the link that introduces him, the Man of Law says he will tell a tale in prose, but the story of Constance turns out to be in seven-line stanzas called rhyme royal. That inconsistency has led to speculation that at one time the Man of Law was assigned the long prose allegory that Chaucer later reassigned to his own pilgrim persona, known as *The Tale of Melibee*.

In thirty-five manuscripts *The Man of Law's Tale* is followed by an *Epilogue* (omitted in twenty-two of the manuscripts). The *Epilogue* begins with the Host praising *The Man of Law's Tale* and calling upon the Parson to tell another uplifting tale. The Parson, however, rebukes the Host for swearing. The Host angrily accuses the Parson of being a "Lollard," a derogatory term for followers of the reformist polemicist John Wycliffe—Chaucer's only overt reference to this important religious and political controversy.

As the *Epilogue* continues, a third speaker, about whose identity the manuscripts disagree (six read "Summoner"; twenty-eight, "Squire"; and one, "Shipman"), interrupts with the promise to tell a

merry tale. Several modern editions print *The Man of Law's Epilogue* followed by *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, as the start of a new group of tales. Because the third speaker sounds like the Wife, an argument has been made that she is the pilgrim who refers to "My jolly body" (line 23), who at one time told a fabliau tale in which the narrator speaks of married women in the first-person plural ("we," "us," "our"). Chaucer, so the argument goes, later gave that story to the Shipman. If in fact the Wife of Bath did once tell what is now *The Shipman's Tale*, that would be an indication of the shifting and exciting possibilities that Chaucer continued to discover in the relationships between teller and tale.



## ***The Man of Law's Epilogue***

Our Host upon his stirrups stood anon  
And said, "Goode men, herkneth<sup>o</sup> everichon,<sup>o</sup>  
This was a thrifty<sup>o</sup> tale for the nones!<sup>o</sup>  
Sir parish priest," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "for Goddes bones,  
Tel us a tale as was thy forward yore.<sup>o</sup>  
5 I see well that ye learned men in lore<sup>o</sup>  
Can<sup>o</sup> mucche good, by Goddes dignity."  
The Parson him answerde, "*Benedicite*,<sup>o</sup>  
What aileth<sup>o</sup> the man so sinfully to swere?"  
Oure Host answered, "O Jankin,<sup>1</sup> be ye there?  
10 I smell a loller<sup>2</sup> in the wind," quod he.  
"Now, goode men," quod our Hoste, "herkneth<sup>o</sup> me:  
Abideth,<sup>o</sup> for Goddes digne<sup>o</sup> passioun,  
For we shall have a predicacioun.<sup>o</sup>  
This loller here will prechen<sup>o</sup> us somewhat."  
15 "Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not,"  
Said the [Wife of Bathe],<sup>3</sup> "shall he not preach:  
He shall no gospel glosen<sup>o</sup> here ne teach.  
We leven<sup>o</sup> alle in the greate God," quod [she].  
"He wolde sowen<sup>o</sup> some difficulty  
20 Or sprengen cockel<sup>o</sup> in oure clene corn.<sup>o</sup>  
And therefore, Host, I warne<sup>o</sup> thee biforn,<sup>o</sup>  
My jolly body<sup>o</sup> shall a tale telle,  
And I shall clinken<sup>o</sup> you so merry a belle  
That I shall waken all this company.  
25 But it shall not been of philosophy,  
Ne physlias,<sup>4</sup> ne termes quaint<sup>o</sup> of lawe:  
There is but little Latin in my mawe."<sup>o</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: A mocking name for a priest. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The meaning of *loller* has been much debated. It is commonly applied to those followers of John Wycliffe (d. 1384) who pressed for ecclesiastical reform and were soon (in the 1390s, especially after the statute of 1401) to be accused of heresy. This more specialized use replaces the broader meaning, “idler” (one who lolls). Like the Wycliffites, the Parson disapproves of swearing and of “tales,” vernacular fictions, opposed here to “predicacioun,” or preaching.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The manuscripts say “Squier,” “Sumnour,” or “Shipman”—none says “Wif of Bathe,” which is E. T. Donaldson’s brilliant emendation. Donaldson argues that the tale originally intended for the Wife of Bath is later given to the Shipman, and that this switch represents Chaucer’s onetime, but not necessarily final, intention. The Wife therefore introduces her own tale (in the usual ordering of parts): the reference to “my jolly body” (line 23) suits her well. But Donaldson’s emendation engages in possibility, not certainty, and highlights the provisional nature of Chaucer’s text.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Though its meaning is unknown, the word is probably a scribal mistake or a garbling by the speaker of a philosophical or legal term.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *listen* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *everyone* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *excellent* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *occasion* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *said* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *promise before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expert knowledge* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *know* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bless me* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *is wrong with* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *listen to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *piece of preaching, sermon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preach* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interpret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scatter tares (weeds)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wheat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *notify* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at the start* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gullet* [Return to reference](#) °

## The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale



**The Wife of Bath.** Illumination from the Ellesmere Manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*, ca. 1400–1405. Note the whip and the spurs.

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In creating the Wife of Bath, Chaucer drew upon a centuries-old tradition of misogynist writing. This tradition held that by nature men were more rational and more spiritual, whereas women were irrational, morally weak, and dominated by material forces. These ideas had their basis in Greco-Roman thought, but Christian

authorities modified and elaborated them over the history of the Church. Medieval misogyny was often bound up with the denigration of marriage. The apostle Paul and the early Church Fathers had celebrated celibacy and virginity. In the fourth century, a monk named Jovinian apparently wrote a treatise presenting marriage as a positive good, although Jovinian's work is known only through St. Jerome's fanatical diatribe against it, a barrage of claims maligning both women and matrimony. Jerome's work remained in wide circulation in Chaucer's day, and it serves as one of the main sources of bookish male "auctoritee" (authority), against which the Wife of Bath asserts her female "experience" and defends her life as a five-time married woman. The valorization of virginity and masculine spiritual authority remained important in Chaucer's day. All monks and clerics were supposed to be celibate, so celibacy was (at least in theory) a central qualification for an entire class of society.

It is a remarkable aspect of the Wife that even as she seems to confirm misogyny's ugliest accusations—that women are materialist, dishonest, and sexually voracious—she also succeeds in showing the blinkered prejudice and violence of this patriarchal system. Readers are invited to admire her cleverness and ferocity, even as we might laughingly pity her first three husbands. Stereotype flips over into critique. A number of twenty-first-century feminist writers—including Jean "Binta" Breeze (b. 1956), Caroline Bergvall (b. 1962), Patience Agbabi (b. 1965), and Zadie Smith (b. 1975)—have found inspiration in reanimating the Wife of Bath in their own works. (For Chaucer-inspired works by Bergvall and Agbabi, see volume F of this anthology.)

As we suggested in the headnote to *The Man of Law's Epilogue*, Chaucer may have originally written the fabliau that became *The Shipman's Tale* for the Wife of Bath. If so, he later replaced it with a different tale, one that is not simply appropriate to her character but that gives further expression to the complexity of her personality. The story is a romance (on the romance genre, see [pp. 141–42](#)). The plot survives in two other versions, in which the knightly protagonist is a much more admirable figure than he is in the Wife's telling. As Chaucer has the Wife recount it, the tale expresses her views about

the relations between the sexes, her wit and humor, and her fantasies. Like Marie de France's lay *Lanval* (see [pp. 171–84](#)), the Wife's tale is about a fairy bride who seeks out and tests a mortal lover.

## ***The Wife of Bath's Prologue***

Experience, though no authority  
Were in this world, is right enough for me<sup>1</sup>  
To speak of woe that is in mariage:  
For lordinges,<sup>o</sup> sith<sup>o</sup> I twelve years was of age<sup>2</sup>—  
Thanked be God that is eterne on live<sup>o</sup>—  
5      Husbondes at chirche door<sup>3</sup> I have had five  
    (If I so ofte might have wedded be),  
    And alle were worthy men in their degree.<sup>o</sup>  
    But me was told, certayn, not long agon<sup>o</sup> is,  
    That sith<sup>o</sup> that Christ ne wente never but ones<sup>o</sup>  
10     To wedding in the Cane<sup>o</sup> of Galilee,<sup>4</sup>  
    That by the same example taught he me  
    That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.<sup>o</sup>  
    Herke eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,<sup>5</sup>  
    Beside a welle, Jesus, God and man,  
15     Spoke in repreve<sup>o</sup> of the Samaritan:  
    "Thou hast yhad five husbondes," quod<sup>o</sup> he,  
    "And that ilke<sup>o</sup> man that now hath thee  
    Is not thyn husbonde." Thus said he certayn.<sup>o</sup>  
    What that he meant thereby I can not sayn,  
20     But that I axe<sup>o</sup> why that the fifthe man  
    Was none<sup>o</sup> husbonde to the Samaritan?<sup>6</sup>  
    How manye mighte she have in mariage?  
    Yet heard I never tellen in mine age  
    Upon this nombre diffinicioun.<sup>o</sup>  
25     Men may divine<sup>o</sup> and glosen<sup>o</sup> up and doun,  
    But well I woot,<sup>o</sup> express,<sup>o</sup> withouten lie,  
    God bade us for to wax<sup>o</sup> and multiply:  
    That gentil text<sup>7</sup> can I well understonde.  
    Eek<sup>o</sup> well I woot<sup>o</sup> he saide mine husbonde  
30     Sholde lete<sup>o</sup> father and mother and take to me,  
    But of no nombre mencion made he—



Of bigamy or of octogamy:<sup>8</sup>  
 Why sholde men thanne speak of it vileiny?<sup>o</sup>  
 Lo, here the wise king daun<sup>o</sup> Salomon:  
 35 I trowe<sup>o</sup> he hadde wives many one,<sup>9</sup>  
 As wolde God it leueful<sup>o</sup> were to me  
 To be refreshed half so oft as he.  
 Which gift<sup>o</sup> of God had he for all his wives!  
 No man hath such that in this world alive is.  
 40 God woot<sup>o</sup> this noble king, as to my wit,  
 The firste night had many a merrye fit<sup>o</sup>  
 With each of them, so well was him on live.<sup>o</sup>  
 Blessed be God that I have wedded five,  
 Of whiche I have picked out the best,<sup>1</sup>  
 44a Both of their nether purs<sup>o</sup> and of their chest.<sup>o</sup>  
 Diverse scoles<sup>o</sup> maken parfit<sup>o</sup> clerkes,  
 And diverse practikes<sup>o</sup> in sondry<sup>o</sup> werkes  
 Maken the workman parfit sikerly:<sup>o</sup>  
 Of five husbondes scoleying<sup>o</sup> am I.<sup>2</sup>  
 44f Welcome the sixte when that ever he shall,<sup>o</sup>  
 45 Forsoothe, I will not keepe me chaste in all:  
 When mine husbonde is from the world ygon,  
 Some Christian man shall wedde me anon.  
 For thanne th' Apostle<sup>o</sup> saith that I am free  
 To wedde, a Goddes half, where liketh me.<sup>3</sup>  
 50 He said that to be wedded is no sinne:  
 Bet<sup>o</sup> is to be wedded than to brinne.<sup>o 4</sup>  
 What rekketh me<sup>o</sup> though folk saye vileinye  
 Of shrewed<sup>o</sup> Lamech<sup>5</sup> and his bigamy?  
 I woot well Abraham was an holy man,  
 55 And Jacob eek,<sup>o</sup> as fer as ever I can,<sup>o</sup>  
 And each of them hadde wives more than two,  
 And many another holy man also.  
 Where can ye say in any manere age  
 That hye God defended<sup>o</sup> mariage  
 60 By express word?<sup>o</sup> I pray you, telleth me.



Or where comanded he virginitee?  
I woot as well as ye, it is no drede,<sup>o</sup>  
Th' Apostle, when he speketh of maidenhede,<sup>o</sup>  
He saide that precept therof had he none:<sup>6</sup>  
65 Men may conseile a woman to be one,<sup>o</sup>  
But conseiling is no comandement.  
He put it in our owene juggement.  
For hadde God commanded maidenhede,  
70 Thanne had he dampned<sup>o</sup> wedding with the deede;<sup>7</sup>  
And certes,<sup>o</sup> if there were no seed ysowe,<sup>o</sup>  
Virginitee, thanne whereof should it grow?  
Paul dorste<sup>o</sup> not commanden at the leeste  
A thing of which his master gave no heeste.<sup>8</sup>  
75 The dart<sup>o</sup> is set up<sup>o</sup> for virginitee:<sup>9</sup>  
Cacche<sup>o</sup> whoso may, who renneth<sup>o</sup> best let see.  
But this word is not take of every wight,<sup>o</sup>  
But thereas God list<sup>o</sup> give it of his might.  
I woot<sup>o</sup> well that th' Apostle was a maide,<sup>o</sup>  
But nathelees,<sup>o</sup> though that he wrote or saide  
80 He wolde<sup>o</sup> that every wight<sup>o</sup> were such as he,  
All nis but conseil<sup>o</sup> to virginitee.  
And for to been a wife he gave me leve  
Of indulgence;<sup>1</sup> so is it no reprove<sup>o</sup>  
To wedde me if that my make<sup>o</sup> die,  
85 Withouten excepcioun of<sup>o</sup> bigamy—  
Al were it<sup>o</sup> good no woman for to touche<sup>2</sup>  
(He meant as in his bed or in his couche,  
For peril is bothe fire and tow<sup>o</sup> t'assemble—  
Ye knowe what this ensample<sup>o</sup> may resemble<sup>o</sup>).  
90 This all and some:<sup>o</sup> he held virginitee  
More parfit<sup>o</sup> than wedding in freletee<sup>o</sup>  
(Freletee clepe I but if<sup>o</sup> that he and she  
Wolde leden all their life in chastity).  
I graunte it well, I have none envy  
95 Though maidenhede preferre bigamy:<sup>3</sup>

It liketh them to be clean in body and ghost.<sup>o</sup>  
 Of mine estate ne will I make no boast;  
 For well ye know, a lord in his household  
 Ne hath not every vessel all of gold:  
 100 Some been of tree<sup>o</sup> and doon their lord servise.<sup>4</sup>  
 God clepeth<sup>o</sup> folk to him in sondry wise,<sup>o</sup>  
 And everich hath of God a propre gift,  
 Some this, some that, as him liketh shift.<sup>o</sup>  
 105 Virginitie is great perfeccioun,  
 And continence<sup>o</sup> eek<sup>o</sup> with devocioun,  
 But Christ, that of perfeccion is well,<sup>o</sup>  
 Bade not every wight<sup>o</sup> he sholde go sell  
 All that he had and give it to the poor,  
 And in such wise<sup>o</sup> folwe<sup>o</sup> him and his fore:<sup>o5</sup>  
 110 He spoke to them that wolde live parfitly<sup>o</sup>—  
 And lordinges, by youre leve, that am not I.  
 I will bistowe the flower of all mine age<sup>o</sup>  
 In th'actes and in fruit of mariage.  
 115 Telle me also, to what conclusioun<sup>o</sup>  
 Were membres made of generacioun<sup>o</sup>  
 And of so parfit wise a wrighte ywroght?<sup>6</sup>  
 Trusteth right well, they were not made for noght.  
 Glose<sup>o</sup> whoso will, and saye both up and down  
 That they were maked for purgacioun  
 120 Of urine, and oure bothe thinges smale  
 Were eek<sup>o</sup> to know a female from a male,  
 And for none other cause—say ye no?  
 Th'experience woot<sup>o</sup> well it is not so.  
 So that<sup>o</sup> the clerkes be not with me wroth<sup>o</sup>  
 125 I saye this, that they maked been for both—  
 That is to say, for office<sup>o</sup> and for ease  
 Of engendrure,<sup>o</sup> there<sup>o</sup> we not God displease.  
 Why sholde men elles<sup>o</sup> in their bookes set  
 130 That man shall yelde<sup>o</sup> to his wife her debt?<sup>7</sup>  
 Now wherewith should he make his payement

If he ne used his sely instrument?°  
 Thanne were they made upon a creature  
 To purge urine, and eek° for engendrure.°  
 But I saye not that every wight° is hold,°  
 135 That hath such harneis° as I to you told,  
 To goon and usen them in engendrure:  
 Thanne sholde men take of chastity no cure.°  
 Christ was a maid° and shapen as° a man,  
 And many a saint sith° that the world began,  
 140 Yet lived they ever in parfit° chastity.  
 I nil° envy no virginity:  
 Let them be bread of pured° whete seed,  
 And let us wives hote° barley breed°—  
 And yet with barley breed, Mark telle can,  
 145 Oure Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.<sup>8</sup>  
 In such estate as God hath cleped us  
 I will persevere; I am not precious.°  
 In wifhode will I use mine instrument  
 As freely° as my Maker hath it sent.  
 150 If I be daungerous,°<sup>9</sup> God give me sorwe:  
 Mine husbonde shall it have both eve and morwe,°  
 When that him list° come forth and paye his debt.  
  
 An husbonde will I have, I will not let,°  
 Which shall be bothe my debtor and my thrall,°  
 155 And have his tribulation withal°  
 Upon his flesh while that I am his wife.  
 I have the power during all my life  
 Upon his propre° body, and not he:  
 Right thus th' Apostle tolde it unto me,  
 160 And bade our husbondes for to love us well.<sup>1</sup>  
 All this sentence° me liketh everydel.°

## AN INTERLUDE

Up sterte<sup>o</sup> the Pardoner and that anon:<sup>o</sup>  
 "Now dame," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "by God and by Saint John,  
 Ye been a noble preacher in this cas.<sup>2</sup>  
 165 I was aboute to wed a wif; alas,  
 What<sup>o</sup> should I buy<sup>o</sup> it on my flesh so dear?  
 Yet had I levere<sup>o</sup> wedde no wife to year."<sup>o</sup>  
 "Abide," quod she, "my tale is not bigonne.<sup>o</sup>  
 Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tonne,<sup>o</sup>  
 170 Er<sup>o</sup> that I go, shall savoure<sup>o</sup> worse than ale.  
 And when that I have told thee forth my tale  
 Of tribulacioun in mariage,  
 Of which I am expert in all mine age—  
 This is to saye, myself hath been the whip—  
 175 Thanne maistou chese<sup>o</sup> wheither thou wolt sip  
 Of thilke<sup>o</sup> tonne that I shall abroach:<sup>o</sup>  
 Beware of it, er<sup>o</sup> thou too neigh<sup>o</sup> approach,  
 For I shall tell ensamples<sup>o</sup> more than ten.<sup>3</sup>  
 'Whoso that nil beware<sup>o</sup> by othere men,  
 180 By him shall othere men corrected be.'  
 These same wordes writeth Ptolomee:  
 Read in his Almageste and take it there."<sup>4</sup>  
 "Dame, I wolde pray you if youre will it were,"  
 Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began,  
 185 Telle forth youre tale; spareth<sup>o</sup> for no man,  
 And teach us yonge men of youre practike."<sup>o</sup>  
 "Gladly," quod<sup>o</sup> she, "sith<sup>o</sup> it may you like;<sup>o</sup>  
 But that I praye to all this compaigny,  
 If that I speak after my fantasy,<sup>o</sup>  
 190 As taketh not agrief<sup>o</sup> of that I say,  
 For mine entente nis but for<sup>o</sup> to play."

## THE WIFE CONTINUES

Now sire, thanne will I telle you forth my tale.  
 As ever might I drinke wine or ale,

195 I shall saye sooth: o tho o husbondes that I had,  
As three of them were good, and two were bad.  
The three men were good, and rich, and old;  
Unnethe o mighte they the statute hold 5  
In which they were bounden unto me—  
Ye woot o well what I mean of this, pardee. o  
200 As help me God, I laughe when I think  
How pitously o anight o I made them swink; o  
And by my faith, I told of it no stoor: o  
They hadde me given their land and their tresoor; 6  
Me needed not do longer diligence  
205 To winne their love or doon them reverence.  
They loved me so well, by God above,  
That I ne tolde no daintee of o their love.  
A wise woman will bisye her ever in one o  
To get their love, ye, thereas she hath none.  
210 But sith o I hadde them wholly in mine hand,  
And sith that they hadde given me all their land,  
What o sholde I take keep o them for to please,  
But o it were for my profit and mine ease?  
I set them so awerke, o by my fay, o  
215 That many a night they songen 'wailaway.' o  
The bacon was not fet o for them, I trowe, o  
That some men have in Essex at Dunmowe. 7  
I governed them so well after o my law  
That each of them full blissful was and fawe o  
220 To bringe me gaye thinges from the fair;  
They were full glade when I spoke to them fair, o  
For God it woot, o I chidde o them spitously. o  
Now herkneth o how I bore me o proprely:  
Ye wise wives, that can understand,  
225 Thus sholde ye speak and bear then wrong on hand o  
—  
For half so boldely can there no man  
Swear and lie as a woman can.

I saye not this by wives that been wise,  
 But if it be<sup>o</sup> when they them misavise.<sup>o</sup>  
 230 A wise wife, if that she can her good,<sup>o</sup>  
 Shall bear him on hande<sup>o</sup> the cow<sup>o</sup> is wood,<sup>8</sup>  
 And take witness of<sup>o</sup> her owene maide  
 Of her assent.<sup>o</sup> But herkneth<sup>o</sup> how I saide:  
 "Sir olde cainard,<sup>o</sup> is this thine array?<sup>o</sup>  
 235 Why is my neighebores wife so gay?  
 She is honoured overal there<sup>o</sup> she gooth:  
 I sit at home; I have no thrifty cloth.<sup>o</sup>  
 What dostou<sup>o</sup> at my neighebores hous?  
 Is she so fair? Artou<sup>o</sup> so amorous?  
 240 What roun<sup>o</sup> ye with oure maide, *benedicite?*<sup>o</sup>  
 Sir olde lechour, let thy japes be.<sup>o</sup>  
 And if I have a gossib<sup>o</sup> or a friend,  
 Withouten guilt ye chiden<sup>o</sup> as<sup>o</sup> a fiend,  
 If that I walk or play unto his house.  
 245 Thou comest home as dronken as a mouse,  
 And preachest on thy bench, with evil preef!<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou saist to me, it is a great mischief<sup>o</sup>  
 To wed a povre<sup>o</sup> woman, for costage.<sup>o</sup>  
 And if that she be rich, of high parage,<sup>o</sup>  
 250 Thanne saistou<sup>o</sup> that it is a tormentrye  
 To suffer her pride and her malencolye.<sup>o</sup>  
 And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou saist that every holour<sup>o</sup> will her have;  
 She may no while in chastity abide  
 255 That<sup>o</sup> is assailed upon each a side.  
 "Thou saist some folk desiren us for richesse,  
 Some for oure shape, and some for oure fairnesse,  
 And some for<sup>o</sup> she can outh<sup>o</sup> sing or daunce,  
 And some for gentillesse<sup>o</sup> and daliaunce,<sup>o</sup>  
 260 Some for her handes and her armes smale—  
 Thus gooth all to the devil by thy tale!<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou saist men may not keep<sup>o</sup> a castle wall,

It may so long assailed been overal.<sup>o</sup>  
 And if that she be foul, thou saist that she  
 265 Coveiteth<sup>o</sup> every man that she may see;  
 For as a spaniel she will on him leap,  
 Til that she finde some man hire<sup>o</sup> to cheap.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ne none so grey goose gooth there in the lake,  
 As, saistou,<sup>o</sup> will be withoute make;<sup>o</sup>  
 270 And saist it is an hard thing for to welde<sup>o</sup>  
 A thing that no man will, his thanks, helde.<sup>o</sup>  
 Thus saistou,<sup>o</sup> lorel,<sup>o</sup> when thou goost to bed,  
 And that no wise man needeth for to wed,  
 Ne no man that entendeth unto<sup>o</sup> hevene.  
 275 With wilde thonder-dint<sup>o</sup> and firy levene<sup>o</sup>  
 Mote<sup>o</sup> thy welked nekke<sup>o</sup> be tobroke!<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou saist that dropping<sup>o</sup> houses and eek<sup>o</sup> smoke  
 And chiding wives maken men to flee  
 Out of their owen houses:<sup>9</sup> a, *benedicite*,<sup>o</sup>  
 280 What aileth such an old man for to chide?  
 Thou saist we wives will oure vices hide  
 Til we be fast,<sup>o</sup> and thanne we will them shewe—  
 Well may that be a proverb of a shrewe!<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou saist that oxen, asses, hors,<sup>o</sup> and houndes,  
 285 They been assayed<sup>o</sup> at diverse stoundes;<sup>o</sup>  
 Basins, lavours,<sup>o</sup> er<sup>o</sup> that men them bye,<sup>o</sup>  
 Spooones, stooles, and all such husbandrye,<sup>o</sup>  
 And so be pottes, clothes, and array<sup>o</sup>—  
 But folk of wives maken none assay<sup>o</sup>  
 290 Til they be wedded—olde dotard shrewe!<sup>o</sup>  
 And thanne, saistou, we will oure vices shewe.  
 Thou saist also that it displeaseth me  
 But if<sup>o</sup> that thou wolt praise my beautee,  
 And but thou poure always upon my face,<sup>1</sup>  
 295 And clepe<sup>o</sup> me 'Faire Dame' in every place,  
 And but thou make a feast on thilke<sup>o</sup> day  
 That I was born, and make me fresh and gay,

And but thou do to my norice<sup>o</sup> honour,  
 And to my chamberere<sup>o</sup> within my bour,<sup>o</sup>  
 300 And to my fadres folk, and his allies<sup>o</sup>—  
 Thus saistou,<sup>o</sup> olde barrel-ful of lies.<sup>o</sup>  
 And yet of our apprentice Janekin,  
 For his crisp<sup>o</sup> hair, shining as gold so fin,<sup>o</sup>  
 305 And for he squiereth me both up and down,<sup>2</sup>  
 Yet hastou<sup>o</sup> caught a false suspecious:  
 I will him not<sup>o</sup> though thou were dead tomorwe.  
 "But tell me this, why hidestou,<sup>o</sup>  
 with sorwe,<sup>o</sup>  
 The keyes of thy chest<sup>o</sup> away from me?  
 It is my good<sup>o</sup> as well as thyn, pardee.<sup>o</sup>  
 310 What, weenestou<sup>o</sup> make an idiot of oure  
 dame?<sup>o</sup>  
 Now by that lord that called is Saint Jame,<sup>3</sup>  
 Thou shalt not bothe, though that<sup>o</sup> thou were  
 wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 Be master of my body and of my good:<sup>o</sup>  
 That one thou shalt forgo, maugree thine eyen.<sup>o</sup>  
 315 "What helpeth it of me inquire and spyen?<sup>4</sup>  
 I trowe<sup>o</sup> thou woldest loke<sup>o</sup> me in thy chest.  
 Thou sholdest saye, 'Wife, go where thee lest.<sup>o</sup>  
 Take youre disport.<sup>o</sup> I nil leve no<sup>o</sup> tales:  
 I knowe you for a trewe wife, dame Alis.'  
 320 We love no man that taketh keep or charge<sup>o</sup>  
 Where that we goon: we will been at oure large.<sup>o</sup>  
 Of alle men yblessed mote<sup>o</sup> he be  
 The wise astrologen<sup>o</sup> daun Ptolomee,<sup>o</sup>  
 That saith this proverb in his Almageste:<sup>o</sup>  
 325 'Of alle men his wisdom is the hyste<sup>o</sup>  
 That rekketh nat<sup>o</sup> who hath the world in  
 hand.'<sup>o</sup>  
 By this proverbe thou shalt understand,  
 Have thou<sup>o</sup> enough, what thar<sup>o</sup> thee



rekke<sup>o</sup> or care  
 How merrily that othere folkes fare?  
 330 For certes, olde dotard, by youre leave,  
 Ye shall have queinte right enough<sup>o</sup> at eve:  
 He is too great a nigard<sup>o</sup> that will werne<sup>o</sup>  
 A man to light a candle at his lanterne;  
 He shall have never the lasse<sup>o</sup> lighte, pardee.  
 335 Have thou enough, thee thar not plaine thee.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Thou saist also that if we make us gay  
 With clothing and with precious array,  
 That it is peril of oure chastitee,  
 And yet, with sorwe, thou must enforce thee,<sup>o</sup>  
 340 And saye these wordes<sup>5</sup> in th'Apostles name:  
 'In habit<sup>o</sup> made with chastitee and shame  
 Ye women shall apparaile<sup>o</sup> you,' quod<sup>o</sup> he,  
 'And not in tressed hair and gay perree,<sup>o</sup>  
 As perles ne with gold ne clothes riche.'  
 345 After<sup>o</sup> thy text, ne after thy rubriche,<sup>o</sup>  
 I will not work as muchel<sup>o</sup> as a gnat.<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou saidest this, that I was like a cat:  
 For whoso wolde singe<sup>o</sup> a cattles skin,  
 Thanne wolde the cat well dwellen in his inn;<sup>o</sup>  
 350 And<sup>o</sup> if the cattles skin be silk<sup>o</sup> and gay,  
 She will not dwell in house half a day,  
 But forth she will, er<sup>o</sup> any day be dawed,<sup>o</sup>  
 To show her skin and goon a-caterwawed.<sup>o</sup>  
 This is to say, if I be gay, sire shrewe,<sup>o</sup>  
 355 I will renne<sup>o</sup> out, my borel<sup>o</sup> for to shewe.  
 Sir olde fool, what helpeth thee t'espyen?  
 Though thou pray<sup>o</sup> Argus<sup>6</sup> with his hundred eyen<sup>o</sup>  
 To be my wardecors,<sup>o</sup> as he can best,  
 In faith, he shall not keepe me but me lest:<sup>o</sup>  
 360 Yet could I make his berd,<sup>o</sup> so mote I thee.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Thou saidest eek<sup>o</sup> that there been thinges three,  
 The whiche things troublen all this earth,

And that no wight may endure the ferth.<sup>o</sup>  
 O leve<sup>o</sup> sire shrewe, Jesus shorte<sup>o</sup> thy life!  
 365 Yet prechestou<sup>o</sup> and saist an hateful wife  
 Yrekened<sup>o</sup> is for one of these meschaunces.<sup>o</sup>  
 Been<sup>o</sup> there not none othere resemblaunces<sup>o</sup>  
 That ye may likne<sup>o</sup> youre parables<sup>o</sup> to,  
 But if<sup>o</sup> a sely<sup>o</sup> wife be one of tho?<sup>o</sup>  
 370 "Thou liknest<sup>o</sup> eek<sup>o</sup> womanes love to hell,  
 To bareine<sup>o</sup> land there water may not dwell;  
 Thou liknest it also to wilde fire—  
 The more it brenneth,<sup>o</sup> the more it hath desire  
 To consumen every thing that brent<sup>o</sup> will be;  
 375 Thou saist, right as wormes shende<sup>o</sup> a tree,  
 Right so a wife destroyeth her husbonde<sup>7</sup>—  
 This knownen they that been to wives bonde."<sup>o</sup>  
 Lordinges, right thus, as ye han understonde,  
 380 Bore I stiffly mine old husbandes on honde<sup>8</sup>  
 That thus they saiden in their drunkeness—  
 And all was false, but that<sup>o</sup> I took witness  
 On Janekin and on my niece also.  
 O Lord, the pain I did them and the woe,  
 Ful giltelees,<sup>o</sup> by Goddes sweete pine!<sup>o</sup>  
 385 For as an horse I coude bite and whine;<sup>o</sup>  
 I coude plaine,<sup>o</sup> and yet was in the gilt,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or elles often time I hadde been spilt.<sup>o</sup>  
 Whoso that first to mille comth first grint.<sup>o</sup>  
 I plained<sup>o</sup> first; so was oure werre stint.<sup>o</sup>  
 390 They were full glad to excusen them full blive<sup>o</sup>  
 Of thing of which they never agilte their live.<sup>o</sup>  
 Of wenches<sup>o</sup> would I beren them on hand,<sup>o</sup>  
 When that for sick<sup>o</sup> they might unnethe<sup>o</sup> stand,  
 Yet tickled I his herte for that he  
 395 Wende<sup>o</sup> that I had of him so great chiertee.<sup>o</sup>  
 I swore that all my walking out by night  
 Was for to espye wenches that he dight.<sup>o</sup>

Under that colour<sup>o</sup> had I many a mirth.<sup>o</sup>  
For all such wit is given us in oure birth:  
400 Deceite, weeping, spinning God hath give  
To women kindly<sup>o</sup> while they may live.  
And thus of one thing I avaunte me:<sup>o</sup>  
At end<sup>o</sup> I had the bet<sup>o</sup> in each degree,  
By sleight<sup>o</sup> or force, or by some manere thing,  
405 As by continuel murmur or grucching.<sup>o</sup>  
Namely abedde<sup>o</sup> hadden they meschaunce:<sup>o</sup>  
There would I chide and do them no plesaunce;  
I wolde no longer in the bed abide  
If that I felt his arm over my side,  
410 Til he hadde made his raunson<sup>o</sup> unto me;  
Thanne would I suffer<sup>o</sup> him do his nicetee.<sup>o</sup>  
And therefore every man this tale I tell:  
Winne whoso may, for all is for to sell;  
With empty hand men may no hawkes lure.<sup>9</sup>  
415 For winning<sup>o</sup> would I all his lust endure,  
And make me a feigned appetite—  
And yet in bacon<sup>o</sup> had I never delight.  
That made me that ever I would them chide;  
For though the Pope hadde seten<sup>o</sup> them beside,  
420 I wolde not spare them at their owene bord.<sup>o</sup>  
For by my troth, I quitte<sup>o</sup> them word for word.  
As help me verray<sup>o</sup> God omnipotent,  
Though I right now sholde make my testament,<sup>o</sup>  
I ne owe them not a word that it nis quit.<sup>o</sup>  
425 I brought it so aboute by my wit  
That they moste<sup>o</sup> give it up as for the best,  
Or elles hadde we never been in rest;  
For though he looked as a wood leoun,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet should he fail of his conclusioun.<sup>o</sup>  
430 Thanne would I saye, "Goodelief,<sup>o</sup> take keep,<sup>o</sup>  
How meekely looketh Wilekin, oure sheep!  
Come near my spouse, let me ba<sup>o</sup> thy cheek—

Ye sholden be all patient and meek,  
 And have a sweete-spiced<sup>o</sup> conscience,  
 435 Sith<sup>o</sup> ye so preach of Jobes<sup>o</sup> patience;  
 Suffreth<sup>o</sup> always, sin<sup>o</sup> ye so well can preach;  
 And but<sup>o</sup> ye do, certayn, we shall you teach  
 That it is fair to have a wife in pees.<sup>o</sup>  
 One of us two moste bowen,<sup>o</sup> doutelees,  
 440 And sith<sup>o</sup> a man is more reasonable  
 Than woman is, ye mosten<sup>o</sup> been suffrable.<sup>o</sup>  
 What aileth you to grucche<sup>o</sup> thus and groan?  
 Is it for<sup>o</sup> ye would have my queinte<sup>1</sup> alone?  
 Why, take it all—lo, have it everydel.<sup>o</sup>  
 445 Peter, I shrewe<sup>o</sup> you but<sup>o</sup> ye love it well.  
 For if I wolde selle my *bele chose*, <sup>o</sup>  
 I coude walk as fresh as is a rose;  
 But I will keep it for your owene tooth.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ye be to blame. By God, I say you sooth!"<sup>o</sup>  
 450 Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.  
 Now will I speak of my fourth husbonde.  
 My fourth husbonde was a revelour<sup>o</sup>—  
 This is to say, he had a paramour<sup>o</sup>—  
 And I was young and full of ragerye,<sup>o</sup>  
 455 Stubborn and strong and jolly as a pie:<sup>o</sup>  
 How could I dance to an harpe smale,  
 And singe, ywis,<sup>o</sup> as any nightingale  
 When I hadde drunk a draught<sup>o</sup> of sweete wine.  
 Metellius, the foule cherl, the swine,  
 460 That with a staff biraft<sup>o</sup> his wife her life  
 For<sup>o</sup> she drank wine,<sup>2</sup> though I had been his wife,  
 Ne sholde not have daunted<sup>o</sup> me from drink;  
 And after wine on Venus<sup>o</sup> must I think,  
 For also siker<sup>o</sup> as cold engendreth hail,  
 465 A likerous<sup>o</sup> mouth must have a likerous tail:  
 In women vinolent<sup>o</sup> is no defence—  
 This knowen lechours by experience.

But Lord Christ, when that it remembreth me<sup>o</sup>  
 Upon my youth and on my jolitee,<sup>o</sup>  
 470 It tickleth me aboute mine herte roote—  
 Unto this day it dooth mine herte boote<sup>o</sup>  
 That I have had my world as in my time.  
 But age, alas, that all will envenime,<sup>o</sup>  
 475 Hath me biraft<sup>o</sup> my beautee and my pith<sup>o</sup> <sup>3</sup>—  
 Let go, farewell, the devil go therewith!  
 The flour is gone, there is no more to tell:  
 The bran as I best can now must I sell;  
 But yet to be right merrie will I fonde.<sup>o</sup>  
 480 Now will I tellen of my fourth husbonde.  
 I say I had in herte great despite<sup>o</sup>  
 That he of any other had delight,  
 But he was quit,<sup>o</sup> by God and by Saint Joce:<sup>4</sup>  
 I made him of the same wood a croce<sup>o</sup>—  
 485 Not of my body in no foul manere—  
 But, certainly, I made folk such cheere<sup>o</sup>  
 That in his owene grease I made him frye,  
 For angre and for verray<sup>o</sup> jealousy.  
 By God, in earth I was his purgatory,<sup>5</sup>  
 For which I hope his soule be in glory.  
 490 For God it woot,<sup>o</sup> he sat full ofte and song<sup>o</sup>  
 When that his shoe full bitterly him wrong.<sup>o</sup>  
 There was no wight<sup>o</sup> save God and he that wiste<sup>o</sup>  
 In many wise how sore<sup>o</sup> I him twiste.<sup>o</sup>  
 He deide<sup>o</sup> when I came from Jerusalem,  
 495 And lith ygrave<sup>o</sup> under the roode-beam,<sup>6</sup>  
 Al<sup>o</sup> is his tombe not so curious<sup>o</sup>  
 As was the sepulcre<sup>o</sup> of him, Darius,  
 Which that Appelles wroghte subtilly:<sup>o7</sup>  
 500 It nis but waste<sup>o</sup> to bury him preciously.<sup>o</sup>  
 Let him fare well,<sup>o</sup> God give his soule rest;  
 He is now in his grave and in his chest.<sup>o</sup>  
 Now of my fifth husbonde will I tell—

God let his soule never come in hell—  
 And yet he was to me the moste shrewe:°  
 505 That feel I on my ribbes all by rewe,°  
 And ever shall unto mine ending day.  
 But in oure bed he was so fresh and gay,  
 And therewithal so well could he me glose°  
 When that he would have my *bele chose*  
 510 That, though he hadde me bet° on every boon,°  
 He coude win again° my love anon.°  
 I trowe° I loved him best for that° he  
 Was of his love daungerous° to me.  
 We women have, if that I shall not lie,  
 515 In this matter a quainte° fantasye:  
 Waite° what° thing we may not lightly° have,  
 Thereafter will we cry all day and crave;  
 Forbid us thing, and that desiren we;  
 Press on us faste,° and thanne will we flee.  
 520 With daunger oute we all oure chaffare:°  
 Great press° at market maketh deare ware,°  
 And too great cheap° is holden at litel price.°  
 This knoweth every woman that is wise.  
 My fifth husbonde—God his soule bless!—  
 525 Which that I took for love and no richness,  
 He sometime was a clerk of Oxenford,  
 And hadde left school and went at home to board°  
 With my gossib,° dwelling in oure toun—  
 God have her soule!—her name was Alisoun;  
 530 She knew mine herte, and eek° my privetee,°  
 Bet° than oure parish priest, as mote I thee.°  
 To hire° biwrayed° I my conseil° all,  
 For hadde mine husbonde pissed on a wall,  
 Or done a thing that should have cost his life,  
 535 To her, and to another worthy wife,  
 And to my niece which that I loved well,  
 I would have told his conseil everydel;°

And so I dide full often, God it woot,<sup>o</sup>  
 That made his face often red and hoot<sup>o</sup>  
 540 For verray<sup>o</sup> shame, and blamed himself for he  
 Hadde told to me so great a privetee.<sup>o</sup>  
 And so befell that once in a Lent<sup>9</sup>—  
 So often times I to my gossib<sup>o</sup> went,  
 For ever yet I loved to be gay,  
 545 And for to walk in March, Averill,<sup>o</sup> and May,  
 From house to house, to heare sondry tales—  
 That Jankin clerk and my gossib dame Alis  
 And I myself into the fieldes went.  
 Mine husbonde was at London all that Lent:  
 550 I hadde the better leiser<sup>o</sup> for to play,  
 And for to see, and eek<sup>o</sup> for to be seye<sup>o</sup>  
 Of lusty<sup>o</sup> folk—what wiste I<sup>o</sup> where my  
 grace<sup>o</sup>  
 Was shapen<sup>o</sup> for to be, or in what place?  
 Therefore I made my visitaciouns<sup>o</sup>  
 555 To vigilies<sup>1</sup> and to processiouns,  
 To preaching eek, and to these pilgrimages,  
 To playes of miracles<sup>o</sup> and to mariages,<sup>o</sup>  
 And wered upon my gaye scarlet gites<sup>o</sup>—  
 These wormes ne these mothes ne these mites,<sup>o</sup>  
 560 Upon my peril, frete<sup>o</sup> them neveradel:  
 And woostou<sup>o</sup> why? For<sup>o</sup> they were used well.  
 Now will I tellen forth what happed<sup>o</sup> me.  
 I saye that in the fieldes walked we,  
 Til trewely we hadde such daliaunce,<sup>o</sup>  
 565 This clerk and I, that of my purveyaunce<sup>o</sup>  
 I spoke to him and said him how that he,  
 If I were widwe,<sup>o</sup> sholde wedde me.  
 For certaynly, I saye for no bobaunce<sup>o</sup>  
 Yet was I never withouten purveyaunce  
 570 Of mariage—n'of othere thinges eek.<sup>o</sup>  
 I holde a mouses herte not worth a leek<sup>o</sup>

That hath but one hole for to sterte<sup>o</sup> to,  
 And if that faile thanne is all ydo.<sup>o</sup>  
 I bore him on hand<sup>o</sup> he hadde enchaunted me  
 575 (My dame<sup>o</sup> taughte me that subtiltee<sup>o</sup>),  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> I said I mette<sup>o</sup> of him all night:  
 He would have slain me as I lay upright,<sup>o</sup>  
 And all my bed was full of verray blood—  
 “But yet I hope that ye shall do me good;  
 580 For blood bitokeneth<sup>o</sup> gold, as me was taught.”  
 And all was false, I dreamed of it right not,  
 But as I folwed ay<sup>o</sup> my dames lore<sup>o</sup>  
 As well of that as of othere thinges more.  
 But now sire—let me see, what shall I sayn?  
 585 Aha, by God, I have my tale again.  
 When that my fourth husbonde was on beere,<sup>o</sup>  
 I weep algate,<sup>o</sup> and made sorry cheere,<sup>o</sup>  
 As wives moten,<sup>o</sup> for it is usage,<sup>o</sup>  
 And with my coverchief<sup>o</sup> covered my visage;  
 590 But for that<sup>o</sup> I was purveyed of a make,<sup>o</sup>  
 I wepte but small, and that I undertake.<sup>o</sup>  
 To chirche was mine husbonde born<sup>o</sup> amorwe<sup>o</sup>  
 With neighebores that for him maden sorwe,  
 And Jankin, oure clerk, was one of tho.<sup>o</sup>  
 595 As help me God, when that I saw him go  
 After the beere,<sup>o</sup> me thought he had a pair  
 Of legges and of feet so clean<sup>o</sup> and fair,  
 That all mine heart I gave unto his hold.<sup>o</sup>  
 He was, I trowe,<sup>o</sup> twenty winter old,  
 600 And I was fourty, if I shall saye sooth<sup>o</sup>—  
 But yet I had always a coltes tooth:<sup>o</sup>  
 Gat-toothed<sup>2</sup> I was, and that became<sup>o</sup> me weel;  
 I had the print of Sainte Venus seal.<sup>3</sup>  
 As help me God, I was a lusty oon,<sup>o</sup>  
 605 And fair and rich and young and wel-bigoon,<sup>o</sup>  
 And trewely, as mine husbandes tolde me,



I hadde the beste *quoniam*<sup>4</sup> mighte be.  
 For certes<sup>o</sup> I am all Venerien<sup>o</sup>  
 In feeling, and mine herte is Marcien:<sup>5</sup>  
 610 Venus me gave my lust, my likerousnesse,<sup>o</sup>  
 And Mars gave me my sturdy hardinesse.<sup>o</sup>  
 Mine ascendent<sup>o</sup> was Taur<sup>o</sup> and Mars therein—  
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!  
 I folwed ay<sup>o</sup> my inclinacioun  
 615 By virtue of my constellacioun;<sup>o</sup>  
 That made me I coude not withdrawe  
 My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.<sup>o</sup>  
 Yet have I Martes<sup>o</sup> mark upon my face,  
 And also in another privee<sup>o</sup> place.  
 620 For God so wise be my savacioun,<sup>o</sup>  
 I loved never by no discrecioun,<sup>o</sup>  
 But ever folwede mine appetite,  
 Al<sup>o</sup> were he short or long or black or white;  
 I took no keep,<sup>o</sup> so that he liked<sup>o</sup> me,  
 625 How povre<sup>o</sup> he was, ne eek<sup>o</sup> of what degree.  
 What should I saye but at the monthes ende  
 This jolly clerk Jankin, that was so hende<sup>o</sup>  
 Hath wedded me with great solempnitee,<sup>o</sup>  
 And to him gave I all the land and fee<sup>o</sup>  
 630 That ever was me given there before—  
 But afterward repented me<sup>o</sup> full sore:<sup>o</sup>  
 He nolde suffer<sup>o</sup> nothing of my list.<sup>o</sup>  
 By God, he smote<sup>o</sup> me once on the list<sup>o</sup>  
 For that<sup>o</sup> I rente<sup>o</sup> out of his book a leaf,<sup>o</sup>  
 635 That of the stroke mine ear wex<sup>o</sup> all deaf.  
 Stubborn<sup>o</sup> I was as is a lioness,  
 And of my tonge a verray jangleress,<sup>o</sup>  
 And walk I would, as I hadde done biforn,<sup>o</sup>  
 From house to house, although he had it sworn;<sup>6</sup>  
 640 For which he often times wolde preach,  
 And me of olde Roman geestes<sup>o</sup> teach,

How he Simplicius Gallus left his wife,  
 And hire<sup>o</sup> forsook for term of all his life,  
 Not but for open-heveded he hire sey<sup>7</sup>  
 645 Looking out at his door upon a day.  
 Another Roman told he me by name  
 That, for<sup>o</sup> his wife was at a someres<sup>o</sup> game<sup>8</sup>  
 Withouten his witing,<sup>o</sup> he forsook her eke;<sup>o</sup>  
 And thanne would he upon his Bible seeke  
 650 That ilke<sup>o</sup> proverb of Ecclesiast<sup>o</sup>  
 Where he commandeth and forbiddeth fast  
 Man shall not suffer<sup>o</sup> his wife go roule<sup>o</sup> about.<sup>9</sup>  
 Thanne would he saye right thus withouten doubt:  
 "Whoso that buildeth his house all of salwes,<sup>o</sup>  
 655 And priketh<sup>o</sup> his blind horse over the falwes,<sup>o</sup>  
 And suffreth<sup>o</sup> his wife to go seeken halwes,<sup>o</sup>  
 Is worthy to be hanged on the galwes."<sup>o</sup>  
 But all for not—I sette not an hawe<sup>1</sup>  
 Of his proverbes n'of his olde sawe;<sup>o</sup>  
 660 N'I wolde not of him corrected be:  
 I hate him that my vices telleth me,  
 And so do more, God woot,<sup>o</sup> of us than I.  
 This made him with me wood all outrelly:<sup>o</sup>  
 I nolde not forbere him in no cas.<sup>2</sup>  
 665 Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,  
 Why that I rent<sup>o</sup> out of his book a leaf,  
 For which he smote me so that I was deaf.  
 He had a book that gladly night and day  
 For his disport he wolde read always;  
 670 He cleped<sup>o</sup> it Valerie and Theofrast,<sup>3</sup>  
 At which book he lough<sup>o</sup> always full fast;<sup>o</sup>  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> there was sometime a clerk at Rome,  
 A cardinal, that highte<sup>o</sup> Saint Jerome,  
 That made a book against Jovinian;<sup>4</sup>  
 675 In which book eek there was Tertulan,<sup>5</sup>  
 Crysippus, Trotula, and Helowis,<sup>6</sup>

That was abbess not far from Paris;  
And eek the Parables of Salomon,<sup>7</sup>  
Ovides Art,<sup>8</sup> and bookes many oon<sup>o</sup>—  
680 And alle these were bounden in one volume.  
And every night and day was his custume,<sup>o</sup>  
When he hadde leiser<sup>o</sup> and vacacioun<sup>o</sup>  
From other worldly occupacioun,  
To reden in this book of wicked wives.  
685 He knew of them more legendes and lives  
Than been of goode wives in the Bible.  
For trusteth well, it is an impossible<sup>o</sup>  
That any clerk will speke good of wives,  
But if<sup>o</sup> it be of holy saintes lives,  
690 Ne of none other woman never the mo<sup>o</sup>—  
Who paintede the leoun, tell me who?<sup>9</sup>  
By God, if women hadden written stories,  
As clerkes have within their oratories,<sup>o</sup>  
They would have written of men more wickedness  
695 Than all the merk<sup>o</sup> of Adam may redress.  
The children of Mercury and Venus<sup>1</sup>  
Been in their werking<sup>o</sup> full contrarious:<sup>o</sup>  
Mercurye loveth wisdom and science,  
And Venus loveth riot<sup>o</sup> and dispence;<sup>o</sup>  
700 And for their diverse disposicioun  
Each falleth in otheres exaltacioun,<sup>o2</sup>  
And thus, God woot,<sup>o</sup> Mercury is desolat<sup>o</sup>  
In Pisces where Venus is exaltat,<sup>o</sup>  
And Venus falleth there<sup>o</sup> Mercurye is raised:  
705 Therefore no woman of<sup>o</sup> no clerk is praised.  
The clerk, when he is old and may not do<sup>o</sup>  
Of Venus werkes<sup>o</sup> worth his olde shoe,  
Thanne sits he down and writes in his dotage<sup>o</sup>  
That women can not keep their mariage.<sup>o</sup>  
710 But now to purpose<sup>o</sup> why I tolde thee  
That I was beaten for a book, pardee:<sup>o</sup>

Upon a night Jankin, that was oure sire,<sup>o</sup>  
 Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,  
 Of Eva first, that for her wickedness  
 715 Was all mankinde brought to wrecchedness,  
 For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain  
 That bought<sup>o</sup> us with his herte blood again—  
 Lo, here express<sup>o</sup> of women may ye find  
 That woman was the loss<sup>o</sup> of all mankind.  
 720 Tho<sup>o</sup> read he me how Sampson lost his heres:<sup>o</sup>  
 Sleeping his lemman<sup>o</sup> cut it with her sheres,<sup>o</sup>  
 Thurgh<sup>o</sup> which treason lost he both his eyen.<sup>3</sup>  
 Tho read he me, if that I shall not lien,<sup>o</sup>  
 725 Of Ercules and of his Dianire,<sup>4</sup>  
 That<sup>o</sup> caused him to set himself afire.  
 Nothing forgot he the sorwe and wo<sup>o</sup>  
 That Socrates hadde with his wives two—  
 How Xantippa caste piss upon his head:<sup>5</sup>  
 This sely<sup>o</sup> man sat still as he were dead;  
 730 He wiped his head, no more dorste<sup>o</sup> he sayn  
 But "Er<sup>o</sup> that thonder stinte,<sup>o</sup> comth a rain."  
 Of Phasipha<sup>6</sup> that was the queen of Crete—  
 For shrewedness<sup>o</sup> him thoughte the tale swete—  
 735 Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly<sup>o</sup> thing  
 Of her horrible lust and her liking.<sup>o</sup>  
 Of Clytermistra<sup>7</sup> for her lecherye  
 That falsly made her husbande for to die,  
 He read it with full good devocioun.  
 He tolde me eek<sup>o</sup> for what occasioun  
 740 Amphiorax<sup>8</sup> at Thebes lost his life:  
 Mine husband had a legend of his wife  
 Eriphylem, that for an ouche<sup>o</sup> of gold  
 Hath prively<sup>o</sup> unto the Greekes told  
 745 Where that her husband hid him in a place,  
 For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.  
 Of Livia tolde he me and of Lucie:<sup>9</sup>

They bothe made their husbandes for to die,  
 That one for love, that other was for hate;  
 Livia her husband on an even late<sup>o</sup>  
 750 Empoisoned<sup>o</sup> hath for that<sup>o</sup> she was his foe;  
 Lucia, likerous,<sup>o</sup> loved her husbände so  
 That for<sup>o</sup> he should always upon hire<sup>o</sup> think,  
 She gave him such a manere love-drink  
 That he was dead er it were by the morwe.<sup>o</sup>  
 755 And thus algates<sup>o</sup> husbandes have sorwe.<sup>o</sup>  
 Thanne told he me how one Latumius  
 Complained unto his fellow Arrius  
 That in his garden growed such a tree,  
 On which he said how that his wives three  
 760 Hanged themselves for herte despitous.<sup>o</sup>  
 "O leve<sup>o</sup> brother," quod<sup>o</sup> this Arrius,  
 "Give me a plante<sup>o</sup> of thilke<sup>o</sup> blessed tree,  
 And in my garden planted shall it be."<sup>1</sup>  
 Of latter date<sup>o</sup> of wives hath he read  
 765 That some have slain their husbandes in their bed  
 And let her lechour<sup>o</sup> dighte<sup>o</sup> her all the night,  
 When that the corpse lay on the floor upright;<sup>o</sup>  
 And some have driven nailes in their brain  
 While that they sleep, and thus they have them  
 770 slain;  
 Some have them given poison in their drink.  
 He spoke more harm than herte may bethink,<sup>o</sup>  
 And therewithal he knew of more proverbes  
 Than in this world there growen grass or herbes:  
 "Bet<sup>o</sup> is," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "thyn habitacioun  
 775 Be with a leoun or a foul dragoun  
 Than with a woman using for<sup>o</sup> to chide.<sup>o</sup>  
 Bet is," quod he, "high in the roof abide<sup>o</sup>  
 Than with an angry wife down in the hous:  
 They been so wicked<sup>o</sup> and contrarious,<sup>o</sup>  
 780 They haten<sup>o</sup> that<sup>o</sup> their husbandes loveth ay."<sup>o</sup>

He said, "A woman casts her shame<sup>o</sup> away  
 When she casts off her smock,"<sup>o</sup> and furthermo,  
 "A fair woman, but<sup>o</sup> she be chaste also,  
 Is like a gold ring in a sowes<sup>o</sup> nose."  
 785 Who wolde weene,<sup>o</sup> or who wolde suppose  
 The woe that in mine herte was and pine?<sup>o</sup>  
 And when I saw he wolde never fine<sup>o</sup>  
 To reden<sup>o</sup> on this cursed book all night,  
 All suddenly three leaves<sup>o</sup> have I plight<sup>o</sup>  
 790 Out of his book right as he read, and eke<sup>o</sup>  
 I with my fist so took<sup>o</sup> him on the cheeke  
 That in oure fire he fell backward adoun.  
 And up he start as dooth a wood leoun,<sup>o</sup>  
 And with his fist he smote<sup>o</sup> me on the head  
 795 That<sup>o</sup> on the floor I lay as<sup>o</sup> I were dead.  
 And when he saw how stille that I lay,  
 He was aghast, and would have fled his way,  
 Til atte last out of my swough I braid:<sup>o</sup>  
 "O hastou<sup>o</sup> slain me, false thief?" I said,  
 800 "And for my land thus hastou mordred<sup>o</sup> me?  
 Er<sup>o</sup> I be dead yet will I kisse thee."  
 And near he came and kneeled fair adoun,  
 And saide, "Deare sister Alisoun,  
 As help me God, I shall thee never smite.<sup>o</sup>  
 805 That I have done, it is thyself to wite.<sup>o</sup>  
 Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."<sup>o</sup>  
 And yet eftsoones<sup>o</sup> I hit him on the cheek,  
 And saide, "Thief, thus muchel<sup>o</sup> am I wreke.<sup>o</sup>  
 Now will I die: I may no longer speke."  
 810 But at the laste, with muchel care and woe  
 We fille accorded<sup>o</sup> by us selven<sup>o</sup> two.  
 He gave me all the bridle in mine hand,  
 To have the governance of house and land,  
 And of his tongue and his hand also;  
 815 And made him brenne<sup>o</sup> his book anonright tho.<sup>o</sup>  
 And when that I hadde gotten unto me

By maistrye<sup>o</sup> all the soverinetee,<sup>o</sup>  
And that he saide, "Mine owene trewe wife,  
Do as thee lust<sup>o</sup> the term of all thy life,  
820 Keep thyn honour, and keep eek<sup>o</sup> mine estate,"  
After that day we hadde never debate.<sup>o</sup>  
God help me so, I was to him as kind  
As any wife from Denmark unto Inde,<sup>o</sup>  
And also true, and so was he to me.  
825 I praye to God that sits in majestee,  
So bless his soule for his mercy dear.  
Now will I saye my tale if ye will hear.

ANOTHER INTERRUPTION

The Frere<sup>o</sup> lough<sup>o</sup> when he had heard all this:  
830 "Now dame," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "so have I<sup>o</sup> joy or bliss,  
This is a long preamble of a tale."  
And when the Somnour<sup>o</sup> hearde the Frere gale,<sup>o</sup>  
"Lo," quod the Somnour, "Goddess armes two,  
A frere will entremette him<sup>o</sup> evermo!<sup>o</sup>  
Lo, goode men, a fly and eek a frere  
835 Will fall in every dish and eek<sup>o</sup> matere.<sup>o</sup>  
What spekestou<sup>o</sup> of preambulacioun?  
What, amble or trot or piss or go sit down!  
Thou lettest<sup>o</sup> oure disport<sup>o</sup> in this manere."  
"Ye, wolto<sup>o</sup> so, sire Somnour?" quod the Frere.  
840 "Now by my faith, I shall er<sup>o</sup> that I go  
Tell of a somnour such a tale or two  
That all the folk shall laughen in this place."  
"Now elles,<sup>o</sup> Frere, I will beshrewe<sup>o</sup> thy face,"  
Quod this Somnour, "and I beshrewe me  
845 But if I<sup>o</sup> telle tales two or three  
Of freres, er<sup>o</sup> I come to Sidingborn,<sup>o</sup>  
That I shall make thyn herte for to morne<sup>o</sup>—  
For well I woot<sup>o</sup> thy patience is gone."  
Our Hoste cride, "Peace, and that anon!"<sup>o</sup>  
850 And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale:  
Ye fare as<sup>o</sup> folk that drunken been of ale.

Do, dame, tell forth youre tale, and that is best."  
 "All ready, sire," quod she, "right as you lest<sup>o</sup>—  
 If I have licence of this worthy Frere."  
 855 "Yes, dame," quod he, "tell forth and I will heare."<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Even if there were no (textual) authority in this world, experience would serve me perfectly well.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Twelve (!) was the legal age of consent for women.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The actual wedding ceremony was celebrated at the church door, not in the chancel.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See John 2:1.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Listen, also, lo, what a sharp word for this purpose.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Christ was actually referring to a sixth man who was not married to the Samaritan woman (John 4:18).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Genesis 1:28.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, of two—or eight—marriages, entered into successively, not simultaneously. The word *octogamy* originates in the polemical tract *Against Jovinian* (393), by St. Jerome (ca. 347–420), which was much copied and imitated in medieval antifeminist writings.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: According to 1 Kings 11:3, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, whom I have cleaned out of everything worthwhile.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lines 44a–f are not in the most authoritative manuscripts and may represent an earlier draft by Chaucer, later omitted on revision.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In God's name, wherever it pleases me.[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: 1 Corinthians 7:9. Many of the Wife's citations of Paul are from this chapter, often echoed by Jerome.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first man whom the Bible mentions as having two wives, though he is cursed not on this account but for murder (Genesis 4:19–24).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He had no precept concerning it (see 1 Corinthians 7:25).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For if God had commanded virginity, (then) he would have condemned marriage at the same time (literally, "with the deed").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A thing about which his master gave no command.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The image of a race comes from 1 Corinthians 9:24 and is echoed by Jerome: virginity wins first prize.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As a concession. In 1 Corinthians 7:1–7, Paul expresses his personal preference for celibacy, but gives permission for men and women to marry "to avoid fornication." The Wife takes him at his word.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Corinthians 7:1).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Takes precedence over remarriage.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The image is Jerome's, *Against Jovinian* 1.3. Again, the Wife enthusiastically takes it as a form of permission.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Matthew 19:21, cited by Jerome (1.34).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: And made by so perfectly wise a maker?—The question is attributed to Jovinian by Jerome (1.36).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Wife refers to the principle, from medieval canon law, of marital debt: each spouse owes a sexual obligation to the other.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Mark 6:38–44; 8:1–9, for the feeding of the five thousand; John 6:9 identifies the loaves as barley bread, which Jerome (*Against Jovinian* 1.7) compares to marriage, with

virginity taking pride of place as “pured whete seed.”[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: In romance, *dangerous* is a term applied to a woman who disdainfully rejects a lover. The Wife means that she will not withhold sexual favors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: 1 Corinthians 7:3–4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Contrary to Paul’s prohibition on women preaching and teaching, 1 Timothy 2:12.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: More than ten exemplary anecdotes in support.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *Almagest*, an astronomical treatise by the Egyptian scientist Ptolemy (active 127–148 C.E.), contains no such aphorism, but it does appear in a collection ascribed to Ptolemy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: With difficulty could they discharge the marriage debt.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As their dowry, in marriage (to be bequeathed on the husband’s death).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Dunmow flitch (a side of bacon) was awarded to a married couple that had not quarreled for a year.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The cowbird (which is supposed to tell husbands of their wives’ infidelity) has gone crazy (“wood”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Proverbial (from Proverbs 27:15), quoted in Jerome’s *Against Jovinian* 1.26 and embellished in several late medieval texts.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And unless you gaze constantly at my face.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: And because he escorts me everywhere.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: According to *The General Prologue* (line 465), the Wife’s pilgrimages included a visit to the shrine of St. James of Compostela in Galicia, Spain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Why do you need to make inquiries about me?[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: See 1 Timothy 2:9. “The Apostle,” again, is St. Paul.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A figure in Greek mythology; Argos was set by Hera to watch over one of Zeus’s mistresses, but Hermes put his hundred eyes to sleep and killed him.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For lines 371–77, see Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 1.28, which cites Proverbs 30:15–16 and 25:20.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: I strongly bore (false) witness against my old husbands.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hawks are trained by means of a lure containing food.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Private parts.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Ellesmere manuscript has a marginal note giving the source of this story as *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, a book of exempla for rhetoricians by the Roman historian and moralist Valerius Maximus (active 30 C.E.).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The source here is La Vieille (the Old Woman) in the *Romance of the Rose*, lines 12902–12, to which Chaucer adds a powerful note of pathos.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: St. Judoc or Josse, a 7th-century Breton hermit: a relatively obscure saint but a useful rhyme.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: According to medieval Christian doctrine, purgatory was what the souls of sinners suffered after death in order to expiate their sins and enable them to enter heaven.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Rood-beam: timber between nave and chancel in a church, supporting a large crucifix, and beneath which wealthy parishioners were sometimes buried.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Ellesmere manuscript has a gloss referring to the *Alexandreis* (ca. 1180) by Walter of Châtillon, which recounts that the Greek craftsman Apelles made an elaborate tomb for Darius (ca. 550–486 B.C.E.), the Persian king.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: With reluctance we display all our merchandise.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Lent consists of forty days of repentance before Easter.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Devotional watches kept in church before a saint's day or other religious festival (and before funerals).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Gap-toothed women were considered to be amorous.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The print of Venus's seal is a metaphor for a birthmark.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "What's it"; a sexual euphemism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dominated by Mars (astrologically).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Even though he had forbidden it.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Only because he saw her bare-headed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: On Midsummer Day (June 24), young people traditionally met in festivities.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ecclesiasticus 25:25–26.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A hawthorn berry (that is, something of no value).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I would not tolerate him under any circumstances.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Jankin's book seems to contain *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum* (ca. 1180–83, *The Advice of Valerius to Rufinus Not to Marry*), by the English churchman Walter Map and the antifeminist *Golden Book of Marriage*, attributed to the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (ca. 370–285 B.C.E.), and frequently quoted by Jerome in *Against Jovinian*. Medieval manuscripts often contained a number of different works, as here, dealing with similar subjects.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The antifeminist *Against Jovinian*, which (as previous notes make clear) acts as an important source for the Wife of Bath's Prologue; Jerome was a Latin Church Father but not a cardinal.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 240), Christian theologian and austere moralist who wrote treatises on sexual modesty.[Return](#)

[to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Héloïse (ca. 1098–1154), French religious whose love affair with and secret marriage to the great scholar Abelard was a medieval scandal; she later became abbess of a nunnery near Paris. Chrysippus (ca. 280–207 B.C.E.), Greek philosopher mentioned by Jerome as an antifeminist. “Trotula” refers to a 12th-century female Italian doctor, Trota, who wrote on women’s health and whose writings sometimes circulated in misogynist compilations.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the Bible’s book of Proverbs, attributed to Solomon.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *The Art of Love* (*Ars amatoria*, ca. 1 B.C.E.), a long mock-didactic poem on the arts of seduction and sexual intrigue, by the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In one of Aesop’s fables, the lion, on being shown a picture of a man killing a lion, asked who had painted the picture and added that in a version painted by a lion, the lion would triumph—a picture by a man is not evidence that a man is more powerful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scholars were thought to be dominated by the planet Mercury; lovers, by the planet Venus.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Each planet loses its power when the other is dominant (in the zodiac).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Samson was betrayed by his lover Delilah to the Philistines, who put out his eyes (Judges 16).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Deianeira, Hercules’ wife, unwittingly gave him a poisoned shirt; dying and in agony, he committed suicide.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: There is a long tradition of portraying Xanthippe, the wife of the Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.), as a scold (as in Jerome’s *Against Jovinian* 1.48); the story of her pouring a chamber pot over his head was popular but without classical support.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pasiphae, the wife of Minos; because he failed to sacrifice a bull to Poseidon, the god made her fall in love with it

- (their offspring was the Minotaur).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae; she and her lover Aegisthus conspired to kill him.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Amphiaraus, a seer who knew that the expedition against Thebes would fail; he was forced to go because his wife Eriphyle, given a gold necklace, betrayed him.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Lucilla, who according to literary tradition was the wife of the Roman poet Lucretius (ca. 94–55 B.C.E.), whom she poisoned with a love potion designed to keep him faithful. Livia, or Livilla, was suspected of poisoning her husband Drusus (d. 23 C.E.), the son of the emperor Tiberius, for the sake of her lover, Sejanus.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: This gruesome story is found in Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum*.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *sirs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *has eternal life* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *their class* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ago* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *once* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Cana* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *only once* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reproach* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *said* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *same* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ask* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *no* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *definition, limit* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *conjecture* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interpret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *explicitly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speak ill of it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *master* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lawful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *What a grace* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bout* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so well things went for him in life* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scrotum* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possessions* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *schools* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *practices* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *schooling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whenever he comes along* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(St. Paul)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do I care* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cursed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to the best of my knowledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prohibited* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *explicitly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virginity* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *single*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *damned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sown*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prize (in a race)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *given*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *catch it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *runs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *applicable to every one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where it pleases God to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virgin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nonetheless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no more than advice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disgrace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *partner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *objection on grounds of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although it would be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flax*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *metaphor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apply to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in sum*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frailty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *calls* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various ways*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *self-restraint* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mainspring*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in such a way* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *follow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *footsteps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfectly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prime of my life*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *genitals made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Theorize*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in order that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *function*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *procreation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innocent tool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *procreation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equipment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have no regard for chastity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virgin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was shaped like*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be called* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastidious, fussy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *standoffish*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whenever it pleases him to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make impediment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *additionally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleases me wholly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jumped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *why* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I would rather* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *this year*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barrel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may you choose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *open*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *near*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *examples*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not be cautioned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *practices*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *please*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inclination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amiss*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is only*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *barely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pathetically* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at night* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *toil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set no store by it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set no value on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *busy herself constantly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *why* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to work* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sang 'alas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brought home* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *according to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasantly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chided* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mercilessly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behaved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accuse them falsely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go wrong* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows what's good for her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *persuade him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cowbird* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evidence from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with her connivance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dolt* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *your doing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wherever* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *decent clothes* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are you doing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are you* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *why whisper* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bless me* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *give up your tricks* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confidante* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scold* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *like* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bad luck to you!* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misfortune* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because of expense* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *descent* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *you say* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bad humor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *utter dolt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lecher* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *who* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gentility* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flirtatiousness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by your account* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *defend* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *everywhere* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *desires* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have commerce with* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *you say* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *own* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *willingly take* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *so you say* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *loser*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aims for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thunderbolt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lightning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withered neck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leaking* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bless me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tethered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a scold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tried out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *times*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bowls* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *buy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *household goods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doddering scoundrel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nurse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chambermaid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bedroom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *relatives*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you say* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lees, dregs (lies)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not want him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you hide*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *bad luck to you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strongbox*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you think to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady of the house*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even though*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *furious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despite your watchfulness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would like to lock*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enjoyment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not believe any*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worries about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *liberty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *astronomer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Sir Ptolemy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(an astronomical treatise)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *highest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *does not care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *controls the world*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if you have* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *why need*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *notice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as much sex as you like*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *miser* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refuse to allow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *less*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you need not complain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strengthen (your position)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dress* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *jewelry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in accord with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interpretation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *house (stay inside)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sleek*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *has dawned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go caterwauling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sir scoundrel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *run* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bodyguard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless I please*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceive him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as I may prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fourth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shorten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you preach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortunes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *comparisons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apply* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *metaphors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compare* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barren* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burns* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bound* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even though* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guiltless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whinny* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrong* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have been ruined* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grinds* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *war stopped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were guilty in their lives* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mistresses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accuse them* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sickness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affection* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had sex with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretext* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delight* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by nature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boast* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at the end* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trick* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grumbling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *especially in bed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortune* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(financial) ransom* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *allow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(sexual) foolery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preserved meat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *table* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repaid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *has not been repaid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *like a raging lion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fall short of his object* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *my dear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *note* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kiss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well-balanced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Job's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peace* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must yield* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long-suffering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grumble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entirely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fair thing (French)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taste* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveler* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *lover*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *playfulness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magpie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gulp*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprived (of)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *erotic activity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as surely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desirous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intoxicated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I think back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gaiety*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprived me of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vigor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *try*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *paid back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cross*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acted so friendly with people*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sang*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pinched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nobody*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grievously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tormented*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *died*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies buried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elaborate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tomb*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *with great craft*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is a mere waste* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expensively*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bless him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coffin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worst rascal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a row*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talk me round*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beaten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *back* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *standoffish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowd* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expensive goods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bargain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *value*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodged at home*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close friend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secrets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as I may prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disclosed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confidences*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entirely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *utter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *friend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *April*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amorous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did I know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good luck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *visits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *miracle plays* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weddings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wore my bright scarlet gowns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothes mites*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intimacy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foresight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *widow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boasting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worthless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rush*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all is lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mother* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trick*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on my back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *signifies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *mother's instruction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bier (dead)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wept continually* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expression*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *must* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *customary*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *kerchief*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *provided with a partner*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *guarantee*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *carried* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the next morning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *those*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bier*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *neat*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *possession*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *believe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *youthful appetites*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suited*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *amorous one*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *well disposed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a child of Venus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sexiness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feistiness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dominant sign* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Taurus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *horoscope*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fellow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Mars's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *private*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *salvation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in moderation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *although*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *notice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided he pleased* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handsome* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *festivity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I repented* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bitterly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tolerate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I desired* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ripped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *page* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *became* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defiant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true chatterbox* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stories* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *summer's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Ecclesiasticus* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roam* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(willow) sticks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rides* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fallow land* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saints' shrines* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gallows* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *sayings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extremely angry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ripped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laughed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heartily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many a one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *habit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spare time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impossibility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chapels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tribe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conduct* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *libertinism* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extravagance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ascendency*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *helpless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on top*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perform*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sexual activity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *old age*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wedding vows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to the point*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *my husband (lord)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who redeemed*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *explicitly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lover* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stops*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *malice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gruesome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trinket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *late one evening*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poisoned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lecherous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in order that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from malice of heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cutting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of more recent times*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lover* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on its back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perverse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contrary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that which* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *modesty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undergarment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female pig's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *read*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pages* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plucked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caught*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raging lion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *like*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I recovered consciousness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *murdered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it's your own fault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beg you*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *again*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *came to an agreement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ourselves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skill* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sovereignty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *never argued*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *India*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Friar* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laughed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as I hope to have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Summoner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exclaim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intrude himself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *matter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you speak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinder* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entertainment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wish you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *otherwise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if I do not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Sittingbourne (Kent)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mourn, grieve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *behave like*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hear*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***The Wife of Bath's Tale***

In th'olde dayes of the King Arthour,  
Of which that Britouns<sup>o</sup> speken great honor,  
All was this land fulfild of fairye:<sup>2</sup>  
The elf-queene with her jolly company  
860 Daunced full ofte in many a greene mede<sup>o</sup>—  
This was the old opinion as I read;  
I speak of many hundred years ago.  
But now can no man see none elves mo,<sup>o</sup>  
For now the grete<sup>o</sup> charity and prayeres  
865 Of limitours,<sup>3</sup> and othere holy freres,<sup>o</sup>  
That serchen<sup>o</sup> every land and every stream,  
As thick as motes<sup>o</sup> in the sonne-beam,  
Blessing halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,<sup>o</sup>  
Cities, burghes,<sup>o</sup> castles, high toures,<sup>o</sup>  
870 Thropes, berners, shipnes,<sup>o</sup> dayeries—  
This maketh that there been no fairies  
For thereas wont to walken was an elf<sup>4</sup>  
There walketh now the limitour himself,  
In undermeles<sup>o</sup> and in morweninges,<sup>o</sup>  
875 And saith his Matins and his holy thinges<sup>o</sup>  
As he gooth in his limitacioun.<sup>o</sup>  
Women may go safely up and down:  
In every bush or under every tree  
There is none other incubus<sup>5</sup> but he,  
880 And he ne will doon them but<sup>o</sup> dishonour.  
And so befell it that this King Arthour  
Had in his house a lusty bachelor,<sup>o</sup>  
That on a day cam riding from river,<sup>o</sup>  
And happed<sup>o</sup> that, alone as he was born,  
885 He saw a maide walking him biforn;<sup>o</sup>  
Of which maid anon, maugree her head,<sup>o</sup>  
By very<sup>o</sup> force he reft her maidenhead;<sup>o</sup>

For which oppression<sup>o</sup> was such clamour,  
And such pursuit<sup>o</sup> unto the King Arthour,  
890 That damned was this knight for to be dead  
By course of law, and should have lost his head—  
Paraventure<sup>o</sup> such was the statute tho<sup>o</sup>—  
But that<sup>o</sup> the queen<sup>6</sup> and other ladies mo<sup>o</sup>  
So longe prayeden<sup>o</sup> the king of<sup>o</sup> grace,  
895 Till he his life him granted in the place,  
And yaf<sup>o</sup> him to the queen, all at her will,  
To choose whether she would him save or spille.<sup>o</sup>  
The queen thanketh the king with all her might,  
And after this thus spake she to the knight,  
900 When that she saw her time<sup>o</sup> upon a day:<sup>o</sup>  
“Thou standest yet,” quod she, “in such array<sup>o</sup>  
That of thy life yet hastou no surety.<sup>o</sup>  
I grante thee life if thou canst tellen me  
What thing it is that women most desiren:  
905 Beware and keep thy nekke boon<sup>o</sup> from iron.<sup>o</sup>  
And if thou canst not tellen me anon,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet will I give thee leave for to gon<sup>o</sup>  
A twelvemonth and a day to seche<sup>o</sup> and lere<sup>o</sup>  
An answer suffisant<sup>o</sup> in this matere;  
910 And surety<sup>o</sup> will I have er<sup>o</sup> that thou pace,<sup>o</sup>  
Thy body for to yelden<sup>o</sup> in this place.”  
Woe was this knight, and sorrowfully he siketh.<sup>o</sup>  
But what, he may not doon<sup>o</sup> all as him liketh,  
And atte last he chees<sup>o</sup> him for to wende,  
915 And come again, right at the yeres ende,  
With such answer as God would him purvey,<sup>o</sup>  
And taketh his leave and wendeth forth his way.  
He seeketh every house and every place  
Whereas he hopeth for to finde grace<sup>o</sup>  
920 To lerne what thing women love most.  
But he ne could arriven in no cost<sup>o</sup>  
Whereas he mighte find in this matere

Two creatures according in-fere.°

925 Some saiden women loven best riches;  
Some said honor, some saide jollinesse;°  
Some rich array,° some saiden lust abed,°  
And ofte time to be widow and wedde.  
Some saide that our hertes been most eased  
930 When that we been yflattered and ypleased—  
He gooth full nigh the soothe,° I will not lie:  
A man shall win us best with flattery,  
And with attendance° and with bisynesse°  
Been we ylimed,° bothe more and lesse.

935 And some sayen that we loven best  
For to be free, and do right as us lest,°  
And that no man reprove us of our vice,  
But say that we be wise and nothing nice.°  
For trewely,° there is none of us all,  
If any wight° will clawe° us on the gall,°  
940 That we nil° kikke for° he saith us sooth:°  
Assay° and he shall find it that so dooth.°  
For be we never so vicious within,  
We will be holden° wise and clean of sin.

945 And some sayn that great delight han° we  
For to be holden stable and eek° secree,°  
And in oo° purpose steadefastly to dwell,  
And not bewraye° thing that men us tell—  
But that tale is not worth a rake-stele.°  
Pardee,° we women conne° nothing hele:°  
950 Witness on Mida.° Will ye hear the tale?

Ovide,<sup>7</sup> amonges othere thinges smale,°  
Said Mida had under his longe heres,°  
Growing upon his head, two asses eres,°  
The whiche vice° he hid as he best might  
955 Full subtilly° from every mannes sight,  
That save° his wife there wiste° of it namo.°  
He loved her most and trusted her also.

He prayed her that to no creature  
 She sholde tellen of his disfigure.◊  
 960 She swore him nay, for all this world to win,  
 She nolde◊ do that villainy or sin  
 To make her husband han◊ so foul a name:◊  
 She nolde not tell it for her owene shame.  
 But nonetheless, her thoughte◊ that she died◊  
 965 That she so longe should a conseil◊ hide;  
 Her thought it swal◊ so sore about her heart  
 That needely◊ some word her must asterte,◊  
 And sith◊ she dorste◊ tell it to no man,  
 Down to a mareis faste by◊ she ran—  
 970 Till she came there her herte was afire—  
 And as a bitore bombleth in the mire,<sup>8</sup>  
 She laid her mouth unto the water down:  
 "Bewray◊ me not, thou water, with thy soun,"◊  
 Quod she. "To thee I tell it and namo:◊  
 975 Myn husband hath longe asses eres◊ two.  
 Now is myn heart all whole,◊ now is it oute.  
 I might no longer keep it, out of doute."  
 Here may ye see, though we a time abide,◊  
 Yet out it moot:◊ we can no conseil◊ hide.  
 980 The remnant of the tale if ye will heare,  
 Redeth Ovide, and there ye may it leere.◊<sup>9</sup>  
 This knight of which my tale is specially,  
 When that he saw he might not come thereby◊—  
 This is to say what women loven most—  
 985 Within his breast full sorweful was his ghost,◊  
 But home he gooth, he mighte not sojourn:◊  
 The day was come that homeward must he turn.  
 And in his way it happed◊ him to ride  
 In all this care◊ under◊ a forest side,◊  
 990 Whereas◊ he saw upon a dance go  
 Of ladies four and twenty, and yet mo;◊  
 Toward the whiche dance he drew ful yerne,◊

In hope that some wisdom should he lerne.  
 But certainly, er<sup>o</sup> he came fully there,  
 995 Vanished was this dance, he niste<sup>o</sup> where.  
 No creature saw he that bore life,  
 Save on the green he saw sitting a wife<sup>o</sup>—  
 A fouler wight<sup>o</sup> there may no man devise.<sup>o</sup>  
 Again<sup>o</sup> the knight this olde wife gan rise,  
 1000 And saide, "Sir knight, here forth ne lith<sup>o</sup> no way.<sup>o</sup>  
 Tell me what ye seeken, by youre fay.<sup>o</sup>  
 Paraventure<sup>o</sup> it may the better be:  
 These olde folk conn muchel thing,"<sup>o</sup> quod she.  
 "My leve<sup>o</sup> mother," quod this knight, "certain,  
 1005 I nam but<sup>o</sup> dead but if<sup>o</sup> that I can sayn  
 What thing it is that women most desire.  
 Could ye me wisse,<sup>o</sup> I would well quite your  
 hire."<sup>o</sup>  
 "Plight<sup>o</sup> me thy truth<sup>o</sup> here in myn hand," quod  
 she,  
 "The nexte thing that I require thee,<sup>o</sup>  
 1010 Thou shalt it do, if it lie in thy might,  
 And I will tell it you er<sup>o</sup> it be night."  
 "Have here my trouthe," quod the knight. "I  
 graunte."  
 "Then," quod she, "I dare me well avaunte<sup>o</sup>  
 Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby.  
 1015 Upon my life the queen will say as I.  
 Let see which is the proudest of them alle  
 That wereth on a coverchief<sup>o</sup> or a calle<sup>o</sup>  
 That dare say nay of that I shall thee teach.  
 Let us go forth withouten longer speech."  
 1020 Tho<sup>o</sup> rouned<sup>o</sup> she a pistel<sup>o</sup> in his ear,  
 And bade him to be glad and have no fear.  
 When they be comen to the court, this knight  
 Said he had holde<sup>o</sup> his day as he had hight,<sup>o</sup>  
 And ready was his answer, as he said.  
 1025 Full many a noble wife, and many a maid,



And many a widow—for<sup>o</sup> that they been<sup>o</sup> wise—  
The queen herself sitting as justice,  
Assembled been this answer for to hear,  
And afterward this knight was bode<sup>o</sup> appear.  
1030 To every wight<sup>o</sup> commanded was silence,  
And that the knight should telle in audience<sup>o</sup>  
What thing that worldly women loven best.  
This knight ne stood not still<sup>o</sup> as dooth a beast,  
But to his question anon<sup>o</sup> answered  
1035 With manly voice that all the court it heard.  
    “My liege<sup>o</sup> lady, generally,”<sup>o</sup> quod he,  
    “Women desire to have sovereignty  
As well over their husband as their love,  
And for to been in maistrie him above.<sup>o</sup>  
1040 This is your most<sup>o</sup> desire though ye me kill.  
Dooth as you list:<sup>o</sup> I am here at your will.”  
    In all the court ne was there wife ne maid  
Ne widow that contraried<sup>o</sup> that he said,  
But saiden he was worthy han<sup>o</sup> his life.  
1045 And with that word up sterte<sup>o</sup> that olde wife,  
Which that the knight saw sitting on the green;  
“Mercy,” quod she, “my sovereign lady queen,  
Er<sup>o</sup> that your court departe, do me right.  
I taughte this answer unto the knight,  
1050 For which he plighte<sup>o</sup> me his trouthe there  
The firste thing I wolde him requere<sup>o</sup>  
He would it do, if it lay in his might.  
Before the court then pray I thee, sir knight,”  
Quod she, “that thou me take unto thy wife,  
1055 For well thou woost<sup>o</sup> that I have kept<sup>o</sup> thy life.  
If I say false, say nay, upon thy fay.”<sup>o</sup>  
    This knight answerd, “Allas and wailaway,  
I woot<sup>o</sup> right well that such was my behest.<sup>o</sup>  
For Goddes love, as chees<sup>o</sup> a new request:  
1060 Take all my good<sup>o</sup> and let my body go.”  
    “Nay then,” quod she, “I shrewe<sup>o</sup> us bothe two.

For though that I be foul and old and poor,  
 I nold<sup>o</sup> for all the metal ne for ore  
 That under earth is grave or lith above,<sup>1</sup>  
 1065 But if thy wife I were<sup>o</sup> and eek<sup>o</sup> thy love."  
 "My love," quod he. "Nay, my damnation!  
 Allas, that any of my nation<sup>o</sup>  
 Should ever so foul disparaged<sup>o</sup> be."  
 But all for naught, th'ende is this, that he  
 1070 Constrained was: he needes must her wed,  
 And taketh his olde wife and gooth to bed.  
 Now wolden some men say, paraventure,<sup>o</sup>  
 That for my negligence I do no cure<sup>o</sup>  
 To tellen you the joy and all th'array<sup>o</sup>  
 1075 That at the feast was that ilke<sup>o</sup> day.  
 To which thing shortly answer I shall:  
 I say there nas<sup>o</sup> no joy ne feast at all;  
 There nas but heaviness and mucche sorwe.  
 For prively<sup>o</sup> he wedded hire on morwe,<sup>o</sup>  
 1080 And all day after hid him as an owl,  
 So woe was him, his wife looked so foul.  
 Great was the woe the knight had in his thought:  
 When he was with his wife abedde brought,  
 He walweth<sup>o</sup> and he turneth to and fro.  
 1085 His olde wife lay smiling evermo,  
 And said, "O dear husband, *benedicite*, <sup>o</sup>  
 Fareth<sup>o</sup> every knight thus with his wife as ye?<sup>o</sup>  
 Is this the law of King Arthures hous?  
 Is every knight of his thus daungerous?<sup>o</sup>  
 1090 I am your owene love and your wife;  
 I am she which that saved hath your life,  
 And certes<sup>o</sup> yet ne did I you never unright.<sup>o</sup>  
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?  
 Ye faren like a man had lost his wit.  
 1095 What is my guilt? For Goddes love, tell it,  
 And it shall been amended<sup>o</sup> if I may."

"Amended!" quod this knight. "Allas, nay, nay,  
 It will not been amended nevermo.  
 Thou art so loathly<sup>o</sup> and so old also,  
 1100 And thereto comen of so low a kinde,<sup>o</sup>  
 That little wonder is though I walwe<sup>o</sup> and winde.<sup>o</sup>  
 So wolde God,<sup>o</sup> myn herte wolde breste!"<sup>o</sup>  
 "Is this," quod she, "the cause of your unreste?"  
 "Ye, certainly," quod he. "No wonder is."  
 1105 "Now sire," quod she, "I could amende all this,  
 If that me liste,<sup>o</sup> er<sup>o</sup> it were dayes three,  
 So<sup>o</sup> well ye mighte bere you<sup>o</sup> unto me.  
 "But for ye speken of such gentillesse<sup>o</sup>  
 As is descended out of old richesse<sup>o</sup>—  
 1110 That therefore sholden ye<sup>o</sup> be gentlemen—  
 Such arrogance nis<sup>o</sup> not worth an hen.<sup>2</sup>  
 Look who that is most virtuous alway,  
 Privy and apert,<sup>3</sup> and most entendeth ay<sup>o</sup>  
 To do the gentle<sup>o</sup> deedes that he can,  
 1115 Take him for the greatest gentleman.  
 Christ will<sup>o</sup> we claim of him our gentillesse,  
 Not of our elders for their old richesse.<sup>o</sup>  
 For though they give us all their heritage,  
 For which we claim to been of high parage,<sup>o</sup>  
 1120 Yet may they not bequeath for nothing  
 To noon of us their virtuous living,  
 That made them gentlemen ycalled be,  
 And bade us folwen them in such degree.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Well can the wise poet of Florence,  
 1125 That highte Dant,<sup>4</sup> speken in this sentence;<sup>o</sup>  
 Lo, in such manner rhyme is Dantes tale:  
 'Full seld<sup>o</sup> up riseth by his braunches<sup>5</sup> small  
 Prowess<sup>o</sup> of man, for God of his prowess  
 Will that of him<sup>o</sup> we claim our gentillesse.'  
 1130 For of our elders may we nothing claim  
 But temporal thing<sup>o</sup> that man may hurt and maim.

Eek<sup>o</sup> every wight<sup>o</sup> woot<sup>o</sup> this as well as I,  
If gentillesse were planted naturally  
Unto a certain lineage down the line,  
1135 Privy and apert<sup>6</sup> then would they never fine<sup>o</sup>  
To doon<sup>o</sup> of gentillesse the fair office<sup>o</sup>—  
They mighte do no villainy or vice.

“Take fire and bear it in the darkeste hous  
Betwix this and the Mount of Caucasus,  
1140 And let men shut the doors and go thenne,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet will the fire as faire lie<sup>o</sup> and brenne<sup>o</sup>  
As twenty thousand men might it behold:  
His office<sup>o</sup> naturel ay<sup>o</sup> will it hold,<sup>o</sup>  
Up<sup>o</sup> peril of my life, till that it die.  
1145 Here may ye see well how that genterye<sup>o</sup>  
Is not annexed<sup>o</sup> to possession,<sup>o</sup>  
Sith<sup>o</sup> folk ne doon their operacion<sup>o</sup>  
Alway, as doth the fire, lo, in his kind.<sup>o</sup>  
For God it wot,<sup>o</sup> men may well often find  
1150 A lordes son do shame and villainy;  
And he that will han pris of<sup>o</sup> his gentrye,<sup>o</sup>  
For<sup>o</sup> he was born of a gentil<sup>o</sup> hous,  
And had his elders noble and virtuous,  
And nil<sup>o</sup> himselven<sup>o</sup> do no gentle deedes,  
1155 Ne folwen his gentle ancestor that dead is,  
He nis<sup>o</sup> not gentle,<sup>o</sup> be he duke or earl—  
For villainy’s sinful deedes make a churl.  
Thy gentillesse nis but renomee<sup>o</sup>  
Of thine auncestres for their high bountee,<sup>o</sup>  
1160 Which is a straunge<sup>o</sup> thing for thy persone.  
For gentillesse cometh from God alone.  
Then comth our verray<sup>o</sup> gentillesse of<sup>o</sup> grace:  
It was nothing bequethe us with our place.<sup>7</sup>  
Thinketh how noble, as saith Valerius,<sup>8</sup>  
1165 Was thilke Tullius Hostilius<sup>9</sup>  
That out of povertē<sup>o</sup> rose to high noblesse.

Redeth Senek, and redeth eek<sup>o</sup> Boece:<sup>1</sup>  
 There shall ye seen express<sup>o</sup> that no drede<sup>o</sup> is  
 That he is gentle<sup>o</sup> that dooth gentle deedes.  
 1170 And therefore, leve<sup>o</sup> husband, I thus conclude:  
 All<sup>o</sup> were it that mine ancestors weren rude,<sup>o</sup>  
 Yet may the high God—and so hope I—  
 Grant me grace to liven virtuously.  
 Then am I gentle when that I begin  
 1175 To liven virtuously and waive<sup>o</sup> sin.  
 “And thereas<sup>o</sup> ye of poverté me repreve,<sup>o</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 The high God, on whom that we believe,  
 In willful<sup>o</sup> poverté chees<sup>o</sup> to live his life;  
 And certes<sup>o</sup> every man, maiden, or wife  
 1180 May understand that Jesus, hevene king,  
 Ne would not choose a vicious living.<sup>o</sup>  
 Glad poverté is an honest<sup>o</sup> thing, certain;  
 This will Senek and othere clerkes sayn.  
 Whoso that halt him paid of<sup>3</sup> his poverté,  
 1185 I hold him rich all<sup>o</sup> had he not a shirte.  
 He that coveiteth<sup>o</sup> is a povre wight,<sup>o</sup>  
 For he would han<sup>o</sup> that is not in his might;<sup>o</sup>  
 But he that not hath, ne coveiteth<sup>o</sup> have,  
 Is rich, although we hold him but a knave.<sup>o</sup>  
 1190 Verray<sup>o</sup> povert it singeth proprely.<sup>o</sup>  
 Juvenal<sup>4</sup> saith of poverté,<sup>o</sup> ‘Merrily  
 The poore man, when he gooth by the way,  
 Beforn the thieves he may sing and play.’  
 Povert is hateful good, and as I guess,  
 1195 A full great bringer out of bisyness;<sup>o</sup>  
 A great amender<sup>o</sup> eek<sup>o</sup> of sapience<sup>o</sup>  
 To him that taketh it in pacience;  
 Povert is thing, although it seem elenge,<sup>o</sup>  
 Possessioun that no wight<sup>o</sup> will challenge;<sup>o</sup>  
 1200 Povert ful often, when a man is low,  
 Maketh<sup>o</sup> his God and eek<sup>o</sup> himself to know;

Povert a spectacle<sup>o</sup> is, as thinketh me,<sup>o</sup>  
 Through which he may his verray<sup>o</sup> frendes see.  
 And therefore, sir, sin<sup>o</sup> that I not you greve,<sup>o</sup>  
 1205 Of my povert no more ye me repreve.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Now sir, of elde<sup>o</sup> ye repreve me:  
 And certes<sup>o</sup> sir, though noon authority  
 Were in no book, ye gentils<sup>o</sup> of honour  
 Sayn that men should an old wight<sup>o</sup> doon favour  
 1210 And clepe<sup>o</sup> him fader, for<sup>o</sup> your gentillesse—  
 And authors<sup>o</sup> shall I finden, as I guess.  
 "Now there ye say that I am foul and old:  
 Then dread you not to been a cokewold,<sup>o</sup>  
 1215 For filth and eld, also mote I thee,<sup>o</sup>  
 Been great wardeins<sup>o</sup> upon chastity.  
 But nonetheless, sin<sup>o</sup> I know your delight,  
 I shall fulfill your worldly appetite.  
 "Choose now," quod she, "one of these thinges  
 tweye:<sup>o</sup>  
 1220 To han<sup>o</sup> me foul and old till that I deye  
 And be to you a trewe humble wife,  
 And never you displease in all my life;  
 Or elles<sup>o</sup> ye will han me young and fair,  
 And take your aventure<sup>o</sup> of the repair<sup>o</sup>  
 That shall be to your house because of me—  
 1225 Or in some other place, well may be.  
 Now choose youreselven whether that you liketh."<sup>o</sup>  
 This knight aviseth him<sup>o</sup> and sore siketh;<sup>o</sup>  
 But atte last he said in this manere:  
 "My lady and my love, and wife so dere,  
 1230 I put me in your wise governaunce:  
 Cheseth<sup>o</sup> youreself which may be most plesaunce<sup>o</sup>  
 And most honour to you and me also.  
 I do no fors the whether<sup>o</sup> of the two,  
 For as you liketh<sup>o</sup> it suffiseth<sup>o</sup> me."  
 1235 "Then have I got of you maistry,"<sup>o</sup> quod she,  
 "Sin<sup>o</sup> I may choose and govern as me lest?"<sup>o</sup>

“Ye, certes,<sup>o</sup> wife,” quod he. “I hold it best.”  
 “Kiss me,” quod she. “We be no longer wrothe.<sup>o</sup>  
 For by my trouthe,<sup>o</sup> I will be to you bothe—  
 1240 This is to sayn, ye, bothe fair and good.  
 I pray to God that I mote sterven wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 But<sup>o</sup> I to you be all so good and trewe  
 As ever was wife sin that the world was newe.  
 And but<sup>o</sup> I be tomorn<sup>o</sup> as fair to seene  
 1245 As any lady, emperice,<sup>o</sup> or queene,  
 That is betwix the east and eek the west,  
 Do with my life and death right as you lest:  
 Caste<sup>o</sup> up the curtain, look how that it is.”  
 And when the knight saw verily all this,  
 1250 That she so fair was and so young thereto,  
 For joy he hente<sup>o</sup> her in his armes two;  
 His herte bathed in a bath of bliss;  
 A thousand time arewe<sup>o</sup> he gan her kiss,  
 And she obeyed him in everything  
 1255 That might do him plesance or liking.  
 And thus they live unto their lives end  
 In parfit<sup>o</sup> joy. And Jesu Christ us send  
 Husbandes meeke, young, and fresh abed<sup>o</sup>—  
 And grace t’overbide<sup>o</sup> them that we wed.  
 1260 And eek<sup>o</sup> I pray Jesu shorte<sup>o</sup> their lives  
 That not will be governed by their wives;  
 And olde and angry niggards<sup>o</sup> of dispence<sup>o</sup>—  
 God send them soon a verray pestilence!<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Filled full of fairy creatures.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Friars licensed to beg in a certain territory, their “limitacioun” (line 877).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Where an elf used to walk.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A spirit that lies with mortal women.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Late medieval English queens performed a public ritual role as intercessors with their husbands: the most famous example is Queen Philippa's interceding with Edward III on behalf of the burghers of Calais in 1347 and saving their lives. Chaucer exploits this public role in *The Knight's Tale*, in *The Tale of Melibee*, and in the *Prologue to The Legend of Good Women* (in the last case, on Chaucer's own behalf).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (before 8 C.E.), 11.174–93; there, the secret is disclosed not by Midas's wife but by a male servant who had cut his hair.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As a bittern (marsh bird) booms in the marshland.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The reeds disclosed the secret by whispering in Latin *aurēs aselli*, "ass's ears."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Is buried or lies above (on the surface).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Gentillesse*, nobility based on character, not class, is a key theme in Chaucer's work—as in *The Franklin's Tale* and his short poem *Gentillesse*. It is an important value for one who, like Chaucer (and Dante before him; see note to line 1126), would rise through merit rather than birth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In private and in public.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dante (1265–1321), Italian poet; see his *Il Convivio* (ca. 1304–07, *The Banquet*), canzone prefixed to the fourth treatise. See also the *Romance of the Rose* (18577–866).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Its own branches (that is, efforts).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In private and in public.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In no way bequeathed to us with our social rank.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Valerius Maximus; see note to line 462, above.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: Tullus Hostilius, traditionally the third king of Rome (r. 673–642 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Boethius (d. 524), Roman statesman and philosopher (see his *Consolation of Philosophy*, 3.pr.6); Seneca the Younger (ca. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.), Roman philosopher, statesman, and tragedian (see *Moral Epistles* 44).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The references in lines 1177–1200 were probably all drawn from the *Communiologium* (ca. 1280) of John of Wales, a preacher's encyclopedia of sources.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Considers himself satisfied with.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roman poet (ca. 55–ca. 130 C.E.); see *Satire* 10.22.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *Bretons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meadow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *more*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *great*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *friars*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scour*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dust specks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bedrooms*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *townships* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *towers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *villages, barns, cowsheds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *afternoons* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mornings*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *liturgical offices*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *on his round*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anything but*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vigorous young knight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hawking*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it so chanced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *without her consent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *actual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took her virginity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crime*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *petitioning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perchance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put to death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assurance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neck bone* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(of an ax)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seek* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *find out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfactory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a pledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliver yourself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sighs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good fortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *region*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreeing together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merrymaking*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *finery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure in bed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goes very near the truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attention* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *solicitude* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trapped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rub* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sore spot* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kick because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *try* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *does* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discreet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rake handle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *can* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conceal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Midas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trivial* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hair* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ears* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flaw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *craftily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no one else* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *deformity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reputation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it seemed to her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would die* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swelled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessarily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escape* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearby marsh* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betray* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no one else* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ears* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it must come out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chanced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beside* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woman* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creature* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *imagine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to meet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *road*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know many things*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *am as good as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repay your trouble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *require of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head cloth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hairnet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whispered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *message*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kept* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bidden to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *open hearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not stay silent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honored* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *universally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dominion over him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greatest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *contradicted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jumped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *require of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possessions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not wish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *other than to be your wife* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kindred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fouly disgraced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take no trouble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *display*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discreetly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her in the morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tosses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bless me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *standoffish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put right*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ugly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *class*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *toss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twist* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *please God* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *break* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if I wanted to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nobility* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *should you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strives always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wishes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lineage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *status* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maxim* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seldom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from him (God)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *something worldly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *and* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carry out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble practice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from there* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blaze* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its function* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maintain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *upon* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *gentility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *connected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perform their functions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its nature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have credit for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *genteel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is nothing but renown*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *their great magnanimity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alien*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poverty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *explicitly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lowborn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whereas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reproach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *voluntary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifestyle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honorable*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covets* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor creature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desires (to have)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commoner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of its own accord* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poverty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *release from anxiety* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *improver* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wisdom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wretched* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dispute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *causes him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyeglass* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it seem to me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reproach* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *old age* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for certain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentlefolk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *textual authority* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cuckold* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as I may prosper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guardians* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thronging (of men)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whichever pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thinks hard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sighs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Choose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not mind whichever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mastery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for certain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at odds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tomorrow morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *empress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lift*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a row*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in bed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outlive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shorten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begrudgers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *real plague*[Return to reference](#) °

## The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

Like *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* develop in profound and surprising ways the portrait sketched in *The General Prologue*. In his *Prologue* the Pardoner boasts to his fellow pilgrims about his own depravity and the ingenuity with which he abuses his office and extracts money from poor and ignorant people.

The medieval pardoner's job was to collect money for charitable enterprises, such as hospitals, supported by the Church. In return for donations, he was licensed by the pope to award some remission of punishment for sins that the donor had repented and confessed. By canon law pardoners were permitted to work only in a prescribed area; within that area they might visit churches during Sunday service, briefly explain their mission, receive contributions, and in the pope's name issue indulgences, which were considered to be not a sale but a gift from the infinite treasury of Christ's mercy made in return for a gift of money. In practice, pardoners ignored the restrictions on their office, made their way into churches at will, preached emotional sermons, and claimed extraordinary power for their pardons.

*The Pardoner's Tale* is a bombastic sermon against gluttony, gambling, and swearing, which he preaches to the pilgrims to show off his professional skills. The sermon is framed by a narrative that is supposed to function as an *exemplum* (that is, an illustration) of the scriptural text, the one on which the Pardoner, as he tells the pilgrims, always preaches: "Radix malorum est cupiditas" (Avarice is the root of evil).

## ***The Introduction***

Oure Hoste gan to swear as he were wood<sup>o</sup>  
"Harrow,"<sup>o</sup> quod he, "by nailes and by blood,  
This was a false churl and a false justice.<sup>1</sup>  
As shameful death as herte may devise  
Come to these judges and their advocats.<sup>2</sup>  
5 Algate<sup>o</sup> this sely<sup>o</sup> maid is slain, alas!  
Allas, too deare bought she beauty!  
Wherefore I say alday<sup>o</sup> that men may see  
The giftes of Fortune and of Nature  
Been cause of death to many a creature.<sup>3</sup>  
10 As bothe giftes that I speak of now,  
Men han<sup>o</sup> full ofte more for harm than prow.<sup>o</sup>  
"But truwely, myn owene maister dear,  
This is a piteous<sup>o</sup> tale for to hear.  
But nonetheless, passe over, is no fors:<sup>o</sup>  
15 I pray to God to save thy gentle cors,<sup>o</sup>  
And eek<sup>o</sup> thine urinals and thy jurdones,<sup>4</sup>  
Thyn ipocras<sup>o</sup> and eek thy galiones,<sup>o</sup>  
And every boiste<sup>o</sup> full of thy letuarye<sup>o</sup>—  
God bless them, and our lady Saint Marye.  
20 So mote I theen,<sup>o</sup> thou art a proper man,  
And like a prelate, by Saint Ronian!<sup>5</sup>  
Said I not well? I can not speak in terme.<sup>o</sup>  
But well I woot,<sup>o</sup> thou doost<sup>o</sup> myn heart to erme<sup>o</sup>  
That I almost have caught a cardinacle.<sup>6</sup>  
25 By corpus bones,<sup>7</sup> but if<sup>o</sup> I have triacle,<sup>o</sup>  
Or else a draught<sup>o</sup> of moist<sup>o</sup> and corny<sup>o</sup> ale,  
Or but I here<sup>o</sup> anon<sup>o</sup> a merry tale,  
Myn heart is lost for pity of this maid.  
"Thou bel ami,<sup>o</sup> thou Pardoner," he said,  
30 "Tell us some mirth or japes<sup>o</sup> right anon."  
"It shall be doon," quod he, "by Saint Ronion.

But first," quod he, "here at this ale-stake<sup>o</sup>  
I will both drink and eaten of a cake."  
And right anon these gentles<sup>o</sup> gan to crie,  
35 "Nay, let him tell us of no ribaudye.<sup>o</sup>  
Tell us some moral thing that we may lere,<sup>o</sup>  
Some wit,<sup>o</sup> and thanne will we gladly heare."  
"I grant, ywis,"<sup>o</sup> quod he, "but I moot<sup>o</sup> think  
40 Upon some honest<sup>o</sup> thing while that I drink."

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Host is responding to the Physician's tale, the story of a beautiful and virtuous Roman maiden who is entrapped by a corrupt judge and then killed by her father to preserve her honor. The Host reacts with grief and consternation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Given the scansion and the rhyme with "allas" (line 6), *advocats* is an example of a word in Chaucer's poetry that requires a pronunciation as in modern French.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Some modern editions here print two lines, that may be an early canceled draft but are more probably scribal embellishments: "Hire beautee was hire deth, I dar wel sayn, / Allas, so pitously as she was slayn." We reject the lines because they repeat the substance of lines 6–7 and interrupt the passage on the gifts of Nature and Fortune.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jordans: vessels or flasks (for examining urine), as are urinals.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: St. Ronan (the name of several Irish saints) or St. Ninian (d. ca. 432), who evangelized the Picts in Scotland, with a possible play on "runnion" (penis). The Pardoner picks up the Host's usage (line 32).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Apparently a cardiac condition, confused in the Host's mind with a cardinal.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A blending of two oaths, “God’s bones” and *corpus Dei* (body of God; Latin).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *insane*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *help*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nevertheless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *innocent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *profit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pitiful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it doesn’t matter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *body*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cordials* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *box* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prosper*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *technical language, jargon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *know* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grieve*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicinal drink*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gulp* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fresh* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *malty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dear friend*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jokes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inn sign*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *gentlefolk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obscenity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wisdom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decent*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***The Prologue***<sup>8</sup>

Lordings<sup>o</sup>—quod he—in churches when I preach,  
I paine me to han<sup>o</sup> an hautein<sup>o</sup> speech,  
And ring it out as round as gooth a bell,  
For I can al by rote<sup>o</sup> that I tell.  
My theme is alway one, and ever was:  
45 *Radix malorum est cupiditas.*<sup>9</sup>  
First I pronounce whennes<sup>o</sup> that I come,  
And then my bulles<sup>1</sup> show I all and some:<sup>o</sup>  
Oure liege lordes<sup>o</sup> seal on my patente,<sup>o</sup>  
That show I first, my body to warente,<sup>o</sup>  
50 That no man be so bold, ne priest ne clerk,  
Me to disturb of Christes holy work.  
And after that then tell I forth my tales<sup>o</sup>—  
Bulls of popes and of cardinals,  
Of patriarks and bisshopes I shewe,  
55 And in Latin I speak a wordes fewe  
To saffron with<sup>o</sup> my predicacioun,<sup>o</sup>  
And for to stir them to devocioun.  
Then show I forth my longe crystal stones,<sup>o</sup>  
Ycrammed full of cloutes<sup>o</sup> and of bones—  
60 Relics been they, as wenen<sup>o</sup> they each one.  
Then have I in latoun<sup>o</sup> a shoulder-bone  
Which that was of an holy Jewes sheep.<sup>2</sup>  
“Goode men,” I say, “take of my wordes keep:<sup>o</sup>  
If that this bone be wasshe in any well,  
65 If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swell,<sup>o</sup>  
That any worm hath eat or worm ystonge,<sup>o</sup>  
Take water of that well and wash his tongue,  
And it is whole<sup>o</sup> anon. And furthermore,  
Of pockes<sup>o</sup> and of scab and every sore  
70 Shall every sheep be whole that of this well  
Drinketh a draught. Take keep eek that I tell:<sup>o</sup>



If that the good man that the beestes oweth<sup>o</sup>  
 Will every week, er<sup>o</sup> that the cock him croweth,  
 Fasting drinken of this well a draughte—  
 75 As thilke<sup>o</sup> holy Jew our eldres taughte—  
 His beestes and his stoor<sup>o</sup> shall multiply.  
 "And sir, also it heleth jealousy:  
 For though a man be fall in jealous rage,  
 Let maken<sup>o</sup> with this water his potage,<sup>o</sup>  
 80 And never shall he more his wife mistriste,<sup>o</sup>  
 Though he the sooth of her defaute<sup>o</sup> wiste,<sup>o</sup>  
 Al had she<sup>o</sup> taken priestes two or three.  
 "Here is a mitten eek that ye may see:  
 He that his hand will put in this mitein  
 85 He shall have multiplying of his grain,  
 When he hath sowen, be it wheat or oates—  
 So that<sup>o</sup> he offer pence or elles grotes.<sup>3</sup>  
 "Good men and women, one thing warn I you:  
 If any wight<sup>o</sup> be in this chirche now  
 90 That hath doon sinne horrible, that he  
 Dare not for shame of it yshriven be,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or any woman, be she young or old,  
 That hath ymaked her husband cokewold,<sup>o</sup>  
 Such folk shall have no power ne no grace  
 95 To offren<sup>o</sup> to my relics in this place;  
 And whoso findeth him out of<sup>o</sup> such blame,  
 He will come up and offre in Goddes name,  
 And I assoile<sup>o</sup> him by the authority  
 Which that by bull<sup>o</sup> ygraunted was to me."  
 100 By this gaude<sup>o</sup> have I wonne, year by year,  
 An hundred mark<sup>4</sup> sith<sup>o</sup> I was pardoner.  
 I stonde like a clerk<sup>5</sup> in my pulpet,  
 And when the lewed<sup>o</sup> people is down yset,<sup>o</sup>  
 I preche so as ye han<sup>o</sup> heard before,  
 105 And tell an hundred false japes<sup>o</sup> more.  
 Then paine I me<sup>o</sup> to strecche forth the nekke,

And east and west upon the people I beke<sup>o</sup>  
As doth a dove, sitting on a berne;<sup>o</sup>  
Mine handes and my tongue goon so yerne<sup>o</sup>  
110 That it is joy to see my busynesse.  
Of avarice and of such cursednesse<sup>o</sup>  
Is all my preaching, for to make them free<sup>o</sup>  
To given their pence, and namely<sup>o</sup> unto me,  
For myn intent is not but<sup>o</sup> for to winne,<sup>o</sup>  
115 And nothing for correccioun of sinne:  
I rekke<sup>o</sup> never when that they been buried  
Though that their soules goon a-blackberried.<sup>o</sup>  
For certes,<sup>o</sup> many a predicacioun<sup>o</sup>  
Comth ofte time of evil intencioun:  
120 Som for plesance of<sup>o</sup> folk and flattery,  
To been avaunced<sup>o</sup> by hypocrisy,  
And some for vaine glory,<sup>o</sup> and some for hate;  
For when I dare none otherwayes debate,<sup>o</sup>  
Then will I stinge him with my tongue smerte<sup>o</sup>  
125 In preaching, so that he shall not asterte<sup>o</sup>  
To been defamed<sup>o</sup> falsly, if that he  
Hath trespassed to<sup>o</sup> my brethren or to me.  
For though I telle noght his propre name,  
Men shall well knowe that it is the same  
130 By signes and by othere circumstances.  
Thus quite<sup>o</sup> I folk that doon us displesances;<sup>o</sup>  
Thus spit I out my venom under hewe<sup>o</sup>  
Of holiness, to seem holy and true.  
But shortly myn intente I will devise:<sup>o</sup>  
135 I preach of nothing but for coveitise;<sup>o</sup>  
Therefore my theme is yet and ever was  
*Radix malorum est cupiditas.*  
Thus can I preach again<sup>o</sup> that same vice  
Which that I use, and that is avarice.  
140 But though myself be guilty in that sinne,  
Yet can I maken other folk to twinne<sup>o</sup>  
From avarice, and sore<sup>o</sup> to repente—

But that is not my principal intente:  
 I preche nothing but for coveitise.  
 145 Of this matter it ought enough suffise.  
 Then tell I them examples<sup>o</sup> many oon  
 Of olde stories longe time agoon,  
 For lewed<sup>o</sup> people loven tales olde—  
 Such thinges can they well reporte<sup>o</sup> and holde.<sup>o</sup>  
 150 What, trowe ye<sup>o</sup> that whiles I may preach,  
 And winne gold and silver for<sup>o</sup> I teach,  
 That I will live in poverty willfully?<sup>o</sup>  
 Nay, nay, I thoghte<sup>o</sup> it never, trewely,  
 For I will preach and beg in sondry<sup>o</sup> landes;  
 155 I will not do no labour with mine handes,  
 Ne make baskettes and live thereby,  
 Because I will not beggen idelly.<sup>o</sup>  
 I will none of the Apostles countrefete:<sup>o</sup>  
 I will have money, wolle,<sup>o</sup> cheese, and whete,  
 160 Al were it<sup>o</sup> given of the poorest page,  
 Or of the poorest widow in a village—  
 Al<sup>o</sup> should her children sterve for<sup>o</sup> famine.  
 Nay, I will drinke licour of the vine  
 And have a jolly wench in every town.  
 165 But herkneth, lordings, in conclusioun,  
 Your liking<sup>o</sup> is that I shall tell a tale:  
 Now have I drunk a draught of corny ale,  
 By God, I hope I shall you tell a thing  
 That shall by reason<sup>o</sup> been at<sup>o</sup> your liking;  
 170 For though myself be a full vicious man,  
 A moral tale yet I you telle can,  
 Which I am wont<sup>o</sup> to preche for to winne.<sup>o</sup>  
 Now hold your peace, my tale I will beginne.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: The model for the Pardoner's *Prologue*, like that of the Wife of Bath, is a confessional figure in the *Romance of the Rose*—in this case, Faux-Semblant, or False Seeming (*Romance*, lines 10973–11950); but most of the detail is Chaucer's own, and much is derived from satire against the clergy and, especially, friars (False Seeming is dressed like a friar, not a pardoner). For pardoners, see the headnote to the tale as well as *General Prologue*, lines 669–714 (and notes).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The root of evils is avarice (Latin; 1 Timothy 6:10).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Papal or episcopal mandates (bulls), in this case specifying remission from divine punishment in exchange for donations or other penitential actions.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The reference here to a holy Jew, as in line 76, is deliberately unspecific and part of the pattern of fraud and mystification.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pennies or else groats (coins worth 4 pence).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Marks are not coins but pecuniary units for accounting: 100 marks in England would have had a value of £66 13s 4d, about four times Chaucer's annual income as controller of wool customs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Pardoner may not be a "clerk" at all (with a university degree and in holy orders), in which case he should not, strictly speaking, be (in a pulpit) preaching.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *gentlemen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *loud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *know all by heart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whence*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *one and all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bishop's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *license*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *safeguard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I keep talking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *add spice to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preaching*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jars*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rags*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suppose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *notice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(with illness)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snake stung*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pox*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also mark my words*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *owns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stock*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have made* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soup*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mistrust*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *infidelity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if she had*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make confession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cuckold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offer (money)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *himself exempt from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *papal or episcopal mandate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trick*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I take pains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nod*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *especially*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gain (wealth)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *get lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sermon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in order to please*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promoted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pride*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take issue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sharply*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slandered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offended against*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay back* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injuries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *color*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *describe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *break away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bitterly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moral anecdotes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uneducated*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *repeat* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *remember* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *do you believe* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by choice* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intended* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *various* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unprofitably* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imitate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wool* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *even though it were* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *even if* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *die of* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for good reason* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gain* [Return to reference °](#)

## ***The Pardoner's Tale***

175 In Flanders whilom<sup>o</sup> was a company  
Of yonge folk that haunteden<sup>o</sup> folly—  
As riot,<sup>6</sup> hazard,<sup>o</sup> stewes,<sup>o</sup> and tavernes,  
Where as<sup>o</sup> with harpes, lutes, and giternes<sup>o</sup>  
They dance and playen at dice both day and night,  
And eat also and drink over their might,<sup>o</sup>  
180 Through which they doon<sup>o</sup> the devil sacrifice  
Within that devil's temple<sup>7</sup> in cursed wise  
By superfluity abominable.  
Their oathes been so great and so damnable  
That it is grisly<sup>o</sup> for to hear them swear:  
185 Our blessed Lordes body they totere<sup>o8</sup>—  
Them thoughte Jewes rent<sup>o</sup> him not enough.<sup>9</sup>  
And each of them at otheres sinne lough.<sup>o</sup>  
And right anon then comen tombesteres,<sup>o</sup>  
Fetis<sup>o</sup> and small, and yonge frutesteres,<sup>o</sup>  
190 Singers with harpes, bawdes,<sup>o</sup> wafereres<sup>o</sup>—  
Which been the verray devil's officers,  
To kindle and blowe the fire of lechery  
That is annexed<sup>o</sup> unto gluttony.  
The Holy Writ take I to my witnessed<sup>1</sup>  
195 That luxury<sup>o</sup> is in wine and drunkenesse.  
Lo, how that drunken Lot unkindely<sup>o</sup>  
Lay by<sup>o</sup> his daughters two unwittingly:<sup>o</sup>  
So drunk he was, he niste<sup>o</sup> what he wroghte.<sup>o 2</sup>  
Herodes, whoso well the stories soughte,<sup>3</sup>  
200 When he of wine was replete<sup>o</sup> at his feast,  
Right at his owne table he yaf<sup>o</sup> his heeste<sup>o</sup>  
To sleen<sup>o</sup> the Baptist John, full guileless.<sup>4</sup>  
Senek<sup>5</sup> saith a good word douteless:  
He saith he can no difference find  
205



Bitwixe<sup>o</sup> a man that is out of his mind  
And a man which that is drunkelewe,<sup>o</sup>  
But that woodnesse,<sup>o</sup> yfallen in a shrewe,<sup>6</sup>  
Persevereth<sup>o</sup> longer than doth drunkenesse.  
O glotonye, full of cursednesse!<sup>o</sup>  
210 O cause first of our confusioun!<sup>o</sup>  
O original<sup>o</sup> of our dampnacioun,<sup>o</sup>  
Till Christ had bought<sup>o</sup> us with his blood again!  
Lo, how dear,<sup>o</sup> shortly for to sayn,  
Abought<sup>o</sup> was thilke<sup>o</sup> cursed villainy;  
215 Corrupt was all this world for gluttony:  
Adam our father and his wife also  
From Paradis to labour and to woe  
Were driven for that vice, it is no drede.<sup>o</sup>  
For while that Adam fasted, as I rede,  
220 He was in Paradis; and when that he  
Ate of the fruit defended<sup>o</sup> on a tree,  
Anon<sup>o</sup> he was out cast to woe and pain.  
O gluttony, on thee well ought us plain!<sup>o</sup>  
O, wiste a man<sup>o</sup> how many maladies  
225 Folwen of excesse and of gluttonies,  
He wolde been<sup>o</sup> the more mesurable<sup>o</sup>  
Of his diete, sitting at his table.  
Allas, the shorte throat, the tender mouth,  
Maketh<sup>o</sup> that east and west and north and south,  
230 In earth, in air, in water, men to swinke,<sup>o</sup>  
To get a glutton dainty mete<sup>o</sup> and drinke.  
Of this matter, O Paul,<sup>o</sup> well canstou trete:  
"Mete unto wombe,<sup>o</sup> and wombe eek<sup>o</sup> unto mete  
Shall God destroyen both," as Paulus<sup>o</sup> saith.<sup>7</sup>  
235 Allas, a foul thing is it, by my faith,  
To say this word, and fouler is the dede,  
When man so drinketh of the white and rede<sup>o</sup>  
That of his throat he maketh his privy<sup>o</sup>  
240 Through thilke<sup>o</sup> cursed superfluity.

The Apostle<sup>o</sup> weeping saith full piteously,  
 "There walken many of which you told have I—  
 I say it now weeping with piteous voice—  
 That they been enemies of Christes crois,<sup>o</sup>  
 Of which the<sup>o</sup> end is death—womb is their god!"<sup>8</sup>  
 245 O womb, O belly, O stinking cod,<sup>o</sup>  
 Fulfilled of dung and of corrupcioun!  
 At either end of thee foul is the soun.<sup>o</sup>  
 How great labour and cost is thee to finde!<sup>o</sup>  
 These cookes, how they stamp<sup>o</sup> and strain and  
 250 grinde,  
 And turnen substance into accident<sup>9</sup>  
 To fulfill all thy likerous talent!<sup>o</sup>  
 Out of the harde bones knocke they  
 The mary,<sup>o</sup> for they caste not away  
 That may go through the gullet softe and soote.<sup>o</sup>  
 255 Of spicery<sup>o</sup> of leef and bark and roote  
 Shall been his sauce ymaked by delight,  
 To make him yet a newer appetit.  
 But certes, he that haunteth<sup>o</sup> such delices<sup>o</sup>  
 Is dead while that he liveth in tho<sup>o</sup> vices.<sup>1</sup>  
 260 A lecherous thing is wine, and drunkenesse  
 Is full of striving<sup>o</sup> and of wrecchednesse.<sup>2</sup>  
 O drunke man, disfigured is thy face!  
 Sour is thy breath, foul artou<sup>o</sup> to embrace!  
 And through thy drunke nose seemeth the soun<sup>o</sup>  
 265 As though thou saidest ay<sup>o</sup> "Sampsoun,  
 Sampsoun"—  
 And yet, God woot,<sup>o</sup> Sampson drank never wine.<sup>3</sup>  
 Thou fallest as it were a stiked swine;<sup>o</sup>  
 Thy tongue is lost, and all thyn honest cure,<sup>o</sup>  
 For drunkenesse is verray sepulture<sup>o</sup>  
 270 Of mannes wit<sup>o</sup> and his discrecioun.  
 In whom that drink hath dominacioun  
 He can no conseil<sup>o</sup> keep, it is no drede.<sup>o</sup>

Now keep you from the white and from the rede<sup>o</sup>—  
 And namely<sup>o</sup> from the white wine of Lepe,<sup>4</sup>  
 275 That is to sell<sup>o</sup> in Fisshstreete or in Chepe.<sup>5</sup>  
 The wine of Spaine creepeth subtilly<sup>o6</sup>  
 In othere wines growing faste<sup>o</sup> by,  
 Of which there riseth such fumosity<sup>o</sup>  
 That when a man hath drunken draughtes<sup>o</sup> three  
 280 And weeneth<sup>o</sup> that he be at home in Chepe,  
 He is in Spaine, right at the town of Lepe,  
 Not at The Rochele<sup>o</sup> ne at Burdeaux<sup>o</sup> toun;  
 And thanne will he sayn "Sampsoun, Sampsoun."<sup>7</sup>  
 But herkneth, lordings, one word I you pray,  
 285 That alle the sovereign actes,<sup>o</sup> dare I say,  
 Of victories in the Olde Testament,  
 Through verray God that is omnipotent,  
 Were doon in abstinence and in prayere:  
 Looketh<sup>o</sup> the Bible and there ye may it lere.<sup>o</sup>  
 290 Look Attila,<sup>8</sup> the grete conquerour,  
 Died in his sleep with shame and dishonour,  
 Bleeding at his nose in drunkenesse:  
 A capitain should live in sobrenesse.  
 And overall this, aviseth you<sup>o</sup> right well  
 295 What was commanded unto Lamuel<sup>9</sup>—  
 Not Samuel, but Lamuel, say I;  
 Redeth the Bible and find it expressly,  
 Of wine-yiving<sup>o</sup> to them that han<sup>o</sup> justise.  
 No more of this, for it may well suffice.  
 300 And now that I have spoken of gluttony,  
 Now will I you defenden hasardry:<sup>o</sup>  
 Hasard is verray<sup>o</sup> mother of lesinges,<sup>o</sup>  
 And of deceit and cursed forsweringes,<sup>o</sup>  
 Blaspheme of Christ, manslaughter, and waste also  
 305 Of catel<sup>o</sup> and of time; and furthermo,  
 It is reprove<sup>o</sup> and contrary of honour  
 For to been holden<sup>o</sup> a commune hasardour,<sup>o</sup>

And ever the higher he is of estate  
The more is he yholden desolate.<sup>o</sup>  
310 If that a prince useth hasardry,<sup>o</sup>  
In alle governance and policy<sup>o</sup>  
He is, as by commune opinioun,  
Yholde the lesse<sup>o</sup> in reputacioun.

315 Stilbon,<sup>1</sup> that was a wise ambassadour,  
Was sent to Corinthe in full great honour  
From Lacedomye<sup>o</sup> to make their alliaunce,  
And when he came him happede<sup>o</sup> parchaunce<sup>o</sup>  
That all the greatest that were of that lond  
Playing at the hasard he them fond,<sup>o</sup>  
320 For which as soone as it mighte be  
He stole him<sup>o</sup> home again to his country,  
And saide, "There will I not lose my name,  
N'I will not take on me so great defame<sup>o</sup>  
You to ally unto none hasardours.<sup>o</sup>  
325 Sendeth othere wise ambassadours,  
For by my trouthe, me were levere<sup>o</sup> die  
Than I you should to hasardours ally.  
For ye that been so glorious in honoures  
Shall not ally you with hasardoures  
330 As by my will, ne as by my treaty."  
This wise philosophre, thus saide he.

Look eek<sup>o</sup> that to the king Demetrius  
The King of Parthes,<sup>o</sup> as the book saith us,  
Sente him a pair of dice of gold in scorn,  
335 For he had used hasard therebiforn,<sup>2</sup>  
For which he held his glory or his renoun<sup>o</sup>  
At no value or reputacioun.  
Lordes may finden other manner play<sup>o</sup>  
Honest<sup>o</sup> enough to drive the day away.

340 Now will I speak of oathes false and great  
A word or two, as olde bookes treat:  
Great<sup>o</sup> swearing is a thing abominable,

And false swearing is yet more reprevable.<sup>o</sup>  
 The heighe God forbad swearing at all—  
 345 Witnesse on Mathew.<sup>3</sup> But in special  
 Of swearing saith the holy Jeremie,<sup>4</sup>  
 "Thou shalt swere sooth<sup>o</sup> thine oathes and not lie,  
 And swear in doom<sup>o</sup> and eek in rightwisnesse,<sup>o</sup>  
 But idle<sup>o</sup> swearing is a cursednesse."<sup>o</sup>  
 350 Beholde and see that in the firste Table<sup>o</sup>  
 Of heigh Goddes heestes<sup>o</sup> honorable  
 How that the second heeste of him is this:  
 "Take not my name in idle or amiss."<sup>5</sup>  
 Lo, rather<sup>o</sup> he forbedeth such swearing  
 355 Than homicide,<sup>6</sup> or many a cursed thing.  
 I say that as by ordre thus it stondeth—  
 This knoweth that<sup>o</sup> his heestes<sup>o</sup> understondeth  
 How that the second heeste of God is that.  
 And further over,<sup>o</sup> I will thee tell all plat<sup>o</sup>  
 360 That vengeance shall not parten<sup>o</sup> from his hous  
 That<sup>o</sup> of his oathes is too outrageous.<sup>7</sup>  
 "By Goddes precious heart!" and "By his nails!"  
 And "By the blood of Christ that is in Hailes,<sup>8</sup>  
 Sevene is my chaunce,<sup>o</sup> and thine is cink<sup>o</sup> and  
 365 traye!"<sup>o</sup>  
 "By Goddes armes, if thou falsly playe  
 This dagger shall throughout thyn herte go!"  
 This fruit cometh of the bicched bones<sup>o</sup> two—  
 Forswearing, ire, falsnesse, homicide.  
 Now for the love of Christ that for us died,  
 370 Let<sup>o</sup> your oathes, bothe grete and smale.  
 But sires, now will I telle forth my tale.  
 These riotoures<sup>o</sup> three of whiche I telle,  
 Long erst er prime<sup>o</sup> rung of any belle,  
 Were set them in a taverne to drinke,  
 375 And as they sat they heard a belle clinke  
 Biforn a cors<sup>o</sup> was caried to his grave.

That one of them gan callen to his knave:°  
 "Go bet,"° quod he, "and axe readily°  
 What cors° is this that passeth here forby,°  
 380 And look that° thou report his name well."  
 "Sir," quod this boy, "it needeth neveradel:°  
 It was me told er° ye cam here two houres.  
 He was, pardee,° an old fellow of youres,  
 And suddenly he was yslain tonight,°  
 385 Fordrunke° as he sat on his bench upright;  
 There came a privy° thief men clepeth° Death,  
 That in this country all the people sleeth,°  
 And with his spear he smoot° his heart atwo,°  
 And went his way withouten wordes mo.°  
 390 He hath a thousand slain this pestilence.°  
 And master, er° ye come in his presence,  
 Me thinketh that it were° necessary  
 For to be ware of such an adversary;  
 Beth° ready for to meet him evermore:  
 395 Thus taughte me my dame.° I say no more."  
 "By Sainte Marie!" said this taverner,  
 "The child saith sooth, for he hath slain this yere,  
 Henne° over a mile, within a great village,  
 Bothe man and woman, child and hine° and page.  
 400 I trowe° his habitacioun° be there.  
 To been avised° great wisdom it were°  
 Er° that he did a man a dishonour."°  
 "Ye, Goddes armes!" quod this riotour,  
 "Is it such peril with him for to meet?  
 405 I shall him seeke by way and eek by street,°  
 I make avowe to Goddes digne° bones.  
 Herkneth,° felawes, we three been al ones:°  
 Let each of us hold up his hand to other  
 And each of us become otheres brother,  
 410 And we will sleen° this false traitour Death.  
 He shall be slain, he that so many sleeth,

By Goddes dignity, er<sup>o</sup> it be night."

420 Togidres han these three their trouthes plight<sup>1</sup>  
To live and dien<sup>o</sup> each of them with other,  
As though he were his owene ybore<sup>o</sup> brother.  
And up they sterte,<sup>o</sup> all drunken in this rage,  
And forth they goon<sup>o</sup> towardses that village  
Of which the taverner hadde spoke biforn.<sup>o</sup>  
425 And many a grisly<sup>o</sup> oath then han<sup>o</sup> they sworn,  
And Christes blessed body they torete:<sup>o</sup>  
Death shall be dead if that they may him hente.<sup>o2</sup>

When they han goon not fully half a mile,  
Right as they would han treden<sup>o</sup> over a stile,<sup>o</sup>  
430 An old man and a povre<sup>o</sup> with them mette.  
This olde man full mekely them grette<sup>o</sup>  
And saide thus, "Now lordes, God you see."<sup>o</sup>

The proudest of these riotoures three  
Answerd again,<sup>o</sup> "What, carl<sup>o</sup> with sorry  
grace,<sup>o</sup>  
435 Why artou all forwrapped<sup>o</sup> save<sup>o</sup> thy face?  
Why livestou<sup>o</sup> so long in so great age?"  
This olde man gan look in his visage,<sup>o</sup>  
And saide thus, "For<sup>o</sup> I ne can not finde  
A man, though that I walked into Inde,<sup>o</sup>  
440 Neither in city ne in no village,  
That wolde change<sup>o</sup> his youthe for myn age;  
And therefore moot<sup>o</sup> I han<sup>o</sup> myn age stille,  
As longe time as it is Goddes wille.

Ne Death, alas, ne will not have my lif.  
445 Thus walk I like a resteleees caitif,<sup>o</sup>  
And on the ground, which is my mother's gate,  
I knokke with my staff both early and late,<sup>3</sup>  
And saye, 'Leve<sup>o</sup> mother, let me in:  
Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin.  
Allas, when shall my bones been at rest?  
450 Mother, with you would I change<sup>o</sup> my chest<sup>o</sup>

That in my chamber longe time hath be,  
 Ye, for an haire-clout<sup>o</sup> to wrappe me.'  
 But yet to me she will not do that grace,<sup>o</sup>  
 For which full pale and welked<sup>o</sup> is my face.  
 455 But sires, to you it is no courtesy  
 To speken to an old man villainy,<sup>o</sup>  
 But<sup>o</sup> he trespass<sup>o</sup> in word or else in deed.  
 In Holy Writ ye may yourself well read,  
 'Agains<sup>o</sup> an old man, hoar upon his head,<sup>4</sup>  
 460 Ye shall arise.'<sup>5</sup> Wherefore I give you reed,<sup>o</sup>  
 Ne doth unto an old man none harm now,  
 Nam<sup>o</sup> than that ye would<sup>o</sup> men did to you  
 In age, if that ye so long abide.<sup>o</sup>  
 And God be with you where<sup>o</sup> ye go<sup>o</sup> or ride:  
 465 I moot<sup>o</sup> go thither as<sup>o</sup> I have to go."  
 "Nay, olde churl, by God thou shalt not so,"  
 Said this other hasardour<sup>o</sup> anon.  
 "Thou partest not so lightly,<sup>o</sup> by Saint John!  
 Thou spake<sup>o</sup> right now of thilke<sup>o</sup> traitour Death,  
 470 That in this country all our frendes sleeth:  
 Have here my trouthe,<sup>o</sup> as thou art his espye,<sup>o</sup>  
 Tell where he is, or thou shalt it aby,<sup>o</sup>  
 By God and by the holy sacrament!  
 For soothly<sup>o</sup> thou art one of his assent<sup>o</sup>  
 475 To sleen<sup>o</sup> us yonge folk, thou false thief."  
 "Now sires," quod he, "if that you be so lief<sup>o</sup>  
 To finde Death, turn up this crooked way,  
 For in that grove I left him, by my fay,<sup>o</sup>  
 Under a tree, and there he will abide:<sup>o</sup>  
 480 Not for your boast he will him nothing<sup>o</sup> hide.  
 See ye that oak? Right there ye shall him find.  
 God save you, that bought again<sup>o</sup> mankind,  
 And you amend." Thus said this olde man.  
 And everich<sup>o</sup> of these riotoures ran  
 485 Till he came to that tree, and there they found



Of florins<sup>o</sup> fine of gold ycoined round  
 Well nigh an eighte busshels,<sup>o</sup> as them  
 thought—  
 Ne longer then after Death they sought,  
 But each of them so glad was of the sight,  
 490 For that the florins been so faire and bright,  
 That down they set them<sup>o</sup> by this precious hoard.  
 The worst of them he spak the firste word:  
 “Bretheren,” quod he, “take keep<sup>o</sup> what that I say:  
 My wit is great though that I bourde<sup>o</sup> and play.  
 495 This treasure hath Fortune unto us given  
 In mirth and jolity our life to liven,  
 And lightly<sup>o</sup> as it cometh so will we spende.  
 Ey,<sup>o</sup> Goddes precious dignity, who wende<sup>o</sup>  
 500 Today that we should han<sup>o</sup> so fair a grace?<sup>o</sup>  
 But might this gold be caried from this place  
 Hoom to myn house—or elles<sup>o</sup> unto youres—  
 For well ye woot<sup>o</sup> that all this gold is oures—  
 Then were<sup>o</sup> we in high felicity.  
 But trewely, by day it might not be:  
 505 Men wolde sayn that we were thieves stronge,<sup>o</sup>  
 And for our owene treasure doon us honge.<sup>o</sup>  
 This treasure moste<sup>o</sup> ycaried be by nighte,  
 As wisely and as slyly as it mighte.  
 Therefore I rede that cut<sup>o</sup> amongst us alle  
 510 Be drawe, and let see where the cut<sup>o</sup> will falle;  
 And he that hath the cut with herte blithe<sup>o</sup>  
 Shall runne to the town, and that full swithe,<sup>o</sup>  
 And bring us bread and wine full prively;<sup>o</sup>  
 And two of us shall keepen subtilly<sup>o</sup>  
 515 This treasure well, and if he will not tarry,<sup>o</sup>  
 When it is night we will this treasure carry  
 By one assent<sup>o</sup> whereas<sup>o</sup> us thinketh best.”  
 That one of them the cut brought in his fest<sup>o</sup>  
 520 And bade them draw and look where it will falle;  
 And it fell on the youngest of them alle,

And forth toward the town he went anon.  
 And also<sup>o</sup> soon as that he was agon,<sup>o</sup>  
 That one of them spak<sup>o</sup> thus unto that other:  
 "Thou knowest well thou art my sworn brother;  
 525 Thy profit will I telle thee anon:<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou woost<sup>o</sup> well that our fellow is agon,  
 And here is gold, and that full great plenty,  
 That shall departed<sup>o</sup> been among us three.  
 But nonetheless, if I can shape<sup>o</sup> it so  
 530 That it departed were among us two,  
 Had I not doon a frendes turn to thee?"  
 The other answered, "I noot<sup>o</sup> how that may be:  
 He woot<sup>o</sup> that the gold is with us twaye.<sup>o</sup>  
 What shall we doon? What shall we to him saye?"  
 535 "Shall it be conseil?"<sup>o</sup> said the firste shrewe.<sup>o</sup>  
 "And I shall tellen in a wordes fewe  
 What we shall doon, and bringe it well aboute."  
 "I graunte," quod that other, "out of doute,  
 That by my trouthe I will thee not biwraye."<sup>o</sup>  
 540 "Now," quod the first, "thou woost well we be  
 twaye,  
 And two of us shall stronger be than one:  
 Look when that he is set<sup>o</sup> that right anon<sup>o</sup>  
 Arise as though thou woldest with him playe,  
 And I shall rive<sup>o</sup> him through the sides twaye,<sup>o</sup>  
 545 While that thou strugglest<sup>o</sup> with him as in game,<sup>o</sup>  
 And with thy dagger look thou do the same;  
 And then shall all this gold departed<sup>o</sup> be,  
 My deere frend, bitwixe<sup>o</sup> thee and me.  
 Then we may both our lustes<sup>o</sup> all fulfill,  
 550 And play at dice right at our owene will."  
 And thus accorded been these shrewes twaye<sup>o</sup>  
 To sleen the third, as ye han heard me saye.  
 This youngest, which that wente to the town,  
 Full oft in heart he rolleth up and down<sup>o</sup>  
 555 The beauty of these florins new and brighte.

"O Lord," quod he, "if so were that I mighte  
 Have all this treasure to myself allone,  
 There is no man that liveth under the throne  
 Of God that sholde live so murye<sup>o</sup> as I."  
 560 And at the last the fiend our enemy  
 Put in his thought that he should poison beye,<sup>o</sup>  
 With which he mighte sleen<sup>o</sup> his felawes tweye<sup>o</sup>—  
 Forwhy the fiend<sup>o</sup> found him in such livinge  
 That he had leave<sup>o</sup> him to sorwe bringe:<sup>6</sup>  
 565 For this was outrelly<sup>o</sup> his full intente,  
 To sleen them both, and never to repente.  
 And forth he gooth<sup>o</sup>—no longer would he tarry<sup>o</sup>—  
 Into the town unto a pothecarye,<sup>o</sup>  
 And prayed him that he him wolde selle  
 570 Some poison that he might his rattes quelle,<sup>o</sup>  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> there was a polcat in his hawe<sup>o</sup>  
 That, as he said, his capons had yslawe,<sup>o</sup>  
 And fain he wolde wreke him<sup>o</sup> if he mighte  
 On vermin that destroyed<sup>o</sup> him by nighte.  
 575 The pothecarye answerde, "Thou shalt have  
 A thing that, also<sup>o</sup> God my soule save,  
 In all this world there is no creature  
 That eat or drunk hath of this confiture<sup>o</sup>—  
 Not but the mountance<sup>o</sup> of a corn<sup>o</sup> of whete—  
 580 That he ne shall his life anon forlete.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ye, sterve<sup>o</sup> he shall, and that in lesse<sup>o</sup> while  
 Than thou wilt goon a paas<sup>o</sup> not but a mile,  
 The poison is so strong and violent."  
 This cursed man hath in his hand yhent<sup>o</sup>  
 585 This poison in a box, and sith<sup>o</sup> he ran  
 Into the nexte street unto a man  
 And borrowed of him large bottles three,  
 And in the two his poison poured he—  
 The thridde he kepte clene for his drinke,  
 590 For all the night he shoop him<sup>o</sup> for to swinke<sup>o</sup>

In carrying of the gold out of that place.  
 And when this rioter with sorry grace  
 Had filled with wine his grete<sup>o</sup> bottles three,  
 To his fellows again repaireth<sup>o</sup> he.  
 595     What needeth it to sermon of it more?  
 For right as they had cast<sup>o</sup> his death before,  
 Right so they han<sup>o</sup> him slain, and that anon.  
 And when that this was doon, thus spak<sup>o</sup> that one:  
 600     "Now let us sit and drink and make us merry,  
 And afterward we will his body bury."  
 And with that word it happed him par cas<sup>o</sup>  
 To take the bottle there<sup>o</sup> the poison was,  
 And drank, and yaf<sup>o</sup> his fellow drink also,  
 For which anon they storven<sup>o</sup> bothe two.  
 605     But certes<sup>o</sup> I suppose that Avicen<sup>7</sup>  
 Wroot never in no canon, ne in no *fen*,  
 Mo<sup>o</sup> wonder signes of empoisoning  
 Than had these wrecches two er<sup>o</sup> their ending:  
 610     Thus ended been these homicides<sup>o</sup> two,  
 And eek the false empoisonere also.  
 O cursed sin of alle cursednesse!  
 O traitours<sup>o</sup> homicide, O wickednesse!  
 O gluttony, luxure,<sup>o</sup> and hasardry!<sup>o</sup>  
 615     Thou blasphemour of Christ with villainy  
 And oathes great of usage<sup>o</sup> and of pride!  
 Allas, mankind, how may it betide<sup>o</sup>  
 That to thy Creator which that thee wroughte,<sup>o</sup>  
 And with his precious herte-blood thee boughte,<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou art so false and so unkinde,<sup>o</sup> allas?  
 620     Now good men,<sup>8</sup> God forgive you your trespass  
 And ware<sup>o</sup> you from the sin of avarice.  
 Myn holy pardon may you alle warice<sup>o</sup>—  
 So<sup>o</sup> that ye offer nobles<sup>o</sup> or sterlinges,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or else silver brooches, spoones, ringes.  
 625     Boweth your head under this holy bulle!<sup>o</sup>

Cometh up, ye wives, offreth of youre wolle!<sup>o</sup>  
 Your name I entre here in my roll anon  
 Into the bliss of hevene shall ye gon.  
 I you assoile<sup>o</sup> by myn high power,  
 630 Ye that will offer, as clean<sup>o</sup> and eek<sup>o</sup> as clear<sup>o</sup>  
 As ye were born.—And lo, sires,<sup>9</sup> thus I preach.  
 And Jesu Christ that is our soules leech<sup>o</sup>  
 So graunte you his pardon to receive,  
 For that is best; I will you not deceive.  
 635 But sires, one word forgot I in my tale:  
 I have relics and pardon in my male<sup>o</sup>  
 As fair as any man in Engeland,  
 Which were me given by the Popes hand.  
 If any of you will of devocioun  
 640 Offren and han<sup>o</sup> myn absolucioun,  
 Come forth anon, and kneeleth here adoun,  
 And mekely receiveth my pardoun,  
 Or elles<sup>o</sup> taketh pardon as ye wende,<sup>o</sup>  
 All new and fressh at every miles ende,  
 645 So that<sup>o</sup> ye offer alway newe and newe<sup>o</sup>  
 Nobles or pence<sup>o</sup> which that be good and trewe.  
 It is an honour to everich<sup>o</sup> that is here  
 That ye mowe<sup>o</sup> have a suffisant<sup>o</sup> pardoner  
 T'assoile<sup>o</sup> you in contrees<sup>o</sup> as ye ride,  
 650 For adventures<sup>o</sup> which that may betide:<sup>o</sup>  
 Paraventure there may fall one or two  
 Down off his horse and break his neck atwo;  
 Look which a surety<sup>o</sup> is it to you alle  
 That I am in your fellowship yfalle,  
 655 That may assoile<sup>o</sup> you, both more and lasse,  
 When that the soul shall from the body passe.  
 I rede<sup>o</sup> that oure Hoste shall begin,  
 For he is most envoluped<sup>o</sup> in sin.  
 Com forth, sir Host, and offer first anon,  
 660 And thou shalt kiss the relics everichon,

Ye, for a groat:° unbuckle anon thy purse.  
 "Nay, nay," quod he, "then have I Christes curse!  
 Let be," quod he, "it shall not be, so theeche!°  
 Thou woldest make me kiss thyn olde breech°  
 665 And swear it were a relic of a saint,  
 Though it were with thy fundement depeint.°  
 But, by the cross which that Sainte Elaine fond,°  
 I would I had thy coilons° in myn hond,  
 Instead of relics or of saintuary.°  
 670 Let cut them off: I will thee help them carry.  
 They shall be shrined° in an hogges turd."  
 This Pardoner answerde not a word;  
 So wroth° he was no word ne would he say.  
 "Now," quod oure Host, "I will no longer play  
 675 With thee, ne with none other angry man."  
 But right anon the worthy Knight began,  
 When that he saw that all the people lough,°  
 "No more of this, for it is right enough.  
 Sire Pardoner, be glad and merry of cheer,  
 680 And ye, sire Host, that been to me so dear,  
 I pray you that ye kiss the Pardoner;  
 And Pardoner, I pray thee, draw thee near,  
 And as we diden let us laugh and play."  
 Anon they kissed and riden forth their way.  
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## Endnotes

- Note 6: "Riotous living": wild parties, tavern going, etc. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The devil's temple is the tavern, and all these sins—excess of drinking, eating, and swearing—are prominent in sermon literature directed against it. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: They tear to bits (by swearing by its members). [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The Pardoner here invokes a commonplace of medieval anti-Judaism, namely, that Jews were responsible for Christ's suffering during the Crucifixion. This accusation was used to justify Christian violence against medieval Jews.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lines 195–300 draw especially from Innocent III, *On the Wretchedness of the Human Condition* (1195), a treatise instilling contempt for the physical world, and Jerome, *Against Jovinian* (393), a treatise denigrating women, sexuality, and marriage (see the Wife of Bath's *Prologue*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Genesis 19:30–36.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Whoever would well search the histories (would learn).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Mark 6:21–28.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Seneca the Younger (ca. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.), Roman philosopher, statesman, and tragedian; see his *Epistles* 83.18.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Occurring in a scoundrel.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: 1 Corinthians 6:13.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Philippians 3:18–19.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A philosophical joke, depending on the distinction between inner reality (substance) and outward appearance (accident). In the hands of cooks, substance turns into accident. The joke comes from Innocent III, *On the Wretchedness of the Human Condition* 2.17; but in Chaucer's day, the terms also had a theological application in explaining the new doctrine of transubstantiation (whereby the substance of bread and wine transforms into the body and blood of Christ). So, the joke gains an added edge by addressing current controversies (the Wycliffites challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: 1 Timothy 5:6.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Proverbs 20:1.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As a Nazirite, Samson was forbidden to drink wine (Judges 13:7).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A town on the southern coast of Spain, near the Portuguese border.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Fishstreet and Cheapside are London localities.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Pardoner is joking at the illegal custom of adulterating the fine French wines of Bordeaux and La Rochelle with strong Spanish wine.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See lines 265–66.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Attila, king of the Huns (d. 453), who led attacks on the Roman Empire; this account of his death is given by the Greek historian Priscus, his contemporary.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink” (Proverbs 31:4).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This and the following exemplum on Demetrius are drawn from the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (ca. 1115–1180), though Chaucer or his scribes make a mistake about the name Stilbo (which should be Chilo).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He had made a habit of gambling previously.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Matthew 5:34.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jeremiah; see Jeremiah 4:2.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A later commandment prohibits murder; see Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 23:12–14 (Vulgate; in English translations, 23:11).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An abbey in Gloucestershire that claimed to possess some of Christ’s blood.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: By highway and also by byway (that is, everywhere).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Together have these three pledged their word.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Hosea 13:14.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This image of Earth as mother and the Old Man’s plea are drawn from the Latin poet Maximian (6th c. C.E.), *Elegy*



1.223–34.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: White-haired.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Leviticus 19:32.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Because the devil found him in such a way of life that he (the devil) had permission to bring him to sorrow.—The man is damned because he is planning murder, “and never to repent.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, 980–1037), Persian scientist and physician; his *Canon of Medicine* is divided into sections called *fens*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The audience of the Pardoner’s usual homily.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Pardoner’s immediate audience, the Canterbury pilgrims.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: St. Helena (ca. 248–ca. 330), mother of Emperor Constantine, was said to have discovered the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (this being an explanation for the conversion of Constantine’s Roman empire to Christianity).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *practiced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gaming* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brothels*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *guitars*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beyond their capacity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *horrible*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tear apart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *broke*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laughed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(female) tumblers*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *shapely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fruit vendors* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brothel workers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wafer sellers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attached* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lechery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnaturally* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slept with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unknowingly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *full* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *order* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drunken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except that madness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *persists* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wickedness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cause* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *damnation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at what cost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *paid for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without doubt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forbidden* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if a man knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moderate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *causes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *labor* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *delicious food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the Apostle Paul)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Paul*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *red (wines)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *latrine (by vomiting)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(St. Paul)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cross*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cater to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *relishing appetite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spices*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frequents* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delicacies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quarreling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stuck pig*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concern for decency*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tomb*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intelligence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secrets* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *red (wines)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *particularly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for sale*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *cunningly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heady fumes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swallows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supposes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *La Rochelle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Bordeaux*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distinguished deeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consult* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consider*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *giving wine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *administer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prohibit gambling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perjuries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *property*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disgrace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gambler*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shunned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *practices gambling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *administration*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *less*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Lacedaemon (Sparta)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by chance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stole away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dishonor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gamblers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I would rather*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Parthians* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *renown*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *amusement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honorable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frequent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reprehensible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *righteousness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frivolous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wickedness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Tablet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commandments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sooner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(he) that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commandments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *besides* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *five* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *three*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cursed bones (dice)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leave off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profligates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before 9 a.m.*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in front of a corpse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask promptly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corpse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by this place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be sure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there's no need*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain last night*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *blind drunk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stealthy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slays*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *during this bout of plague*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mother*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from here*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laborer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *home*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forewarned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caused him offense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of one accord*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jumped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horrible* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tore to shreds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *catch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stepped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fence-crossing*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *poor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *greeted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *may God preserve you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *replied* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *churl*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bad luck to you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wrapped up* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *except*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *do you live*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *peered at his face*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *India*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exchange*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *must* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wretch*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exchange* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(property) chest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *haircloth shroud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *favor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *withered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rudeness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *offend*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in the presence of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *advice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *no more* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *would wish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *survive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wherever* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *walk*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *must* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to the place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gambler*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *easily*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *spoke* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conspiracy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you so desire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(coins)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearly eight bushels' worth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay attention to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joke* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ah* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have supposed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gift (of God)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flagrant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have us hanged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I suggest that lots* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *short straw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glad heart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guard discreetly* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common agreement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wherever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gone away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *divided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *don't know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *villain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betray*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *right away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stab* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struggle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *play*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *divided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desires*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two scoundrels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turns over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merrily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *buy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because the devil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permission*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wholly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goes* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apothecary (druggist)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenge himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were ruining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concoction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amount* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forfeit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shorter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *after*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was preparing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *work*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *big*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *returns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plotted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by chance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *murderers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treacherous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lechery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gambling*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *habit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preserve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *save*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gold coins* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silver coins*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *edict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innocent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ride along*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *over and over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(units of money)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each one*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *should* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *competent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *places*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against contingencies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insurance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *propose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enveloped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *groat (fourpence)*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *as I thrive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breeches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stained from your anus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *balls, testicles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reliquary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enshrined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were laughing*[Return to reference](#) °

## The Nun's Priest's Tale

In the framing story, *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is linked to a dramatic exchange that follows *The Monk's Tale*. The Monk has told a series of brief "tragedies," the common theme of which is the downfall of famous men (and one woman) when Fortune suddenly shifts course. Since the Monk's string of glum narratives promises to go on and on monotonously, the Knight eventually interrupts and politely tells the Monk that his stories are too painful. The Host chimes in to say that the tragedies are "not worth a butterfly" and asks the Monk to try another subject—but the Monk is offended and refuses. The Host then turns to the Nun's Priest, that is, the priest who is accompanying the Prioress. (The three priests said in *The General Prologue* to be traveling with the Prioress have apparently been reduced to one.)

*The Nun's Priest's Tale* is an example of the literary genre known as the "animal fable," familiar from the fables of Aesop, in which animals, behaving like human beings, exemplify moral lessons. In the Middle Ages, fables often functioned as elementary texts to teach boys Latin. Marie de France's fables in French are the earliest known vernacular translations (on Marie, see [pp. 159–90](#)). This particular fable derives from an episode in the twelfth-century French *Roman de Renard*, a "beast epic," which satirically represents a feudal animal society ruled over by Noble the Lion. Reynard the Fox is a wily trickster hero who is constantly preying upon and outwitting the other animals, although sometimes Reynard himself is outwitted.

In *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, morals proliferate: both the priest-narrator and his hero, Chauntecleer the rooster, spout examples, learned allusions, proverbs, and sententious generalizations, often in highly inflated rhetoric. The simple beast fable thus becomes a delightful satire of learning and moralizing and of the pretentious rhetoric by which medieval writers sometimes sought to elevate their

works. Among them, we may include Chaucer himself, who in this tale seems to be making fun of some of his own compositions, like the didactic tragedies that made up *The Monk's Tale*.

A povre<sup>o</sup> widow somdel stape<sup>o</sup> in age  
 Was whilom<sup>o</sup> dwelling in a narrow<sup>o</sup> cottage,  
 Beside a grove, standing in a dale:  
 This widow of which I tell you my tale,  
 Sin<sup>o</sup> thilke<sup>o</sup> day that she was last a wife,  
 5 In patience led a simple life.  
 For little was her catel<sup>o</sup> and her rent,<sup>o</sup>  
 By husbandry<sup>o</sup> of such as God hire<sup>o</sup> sent  
 She fond<sup>o</sup> herself and eek<sup>o</sup> her daughters two.  
 Three large sowes hadde she and namo,<sup>o</sup>  
 10 Three kin,<sup>o</sup> and eek a sheep that highte<sup>o</sup> Mall.  
 Full sooty was her bour<sup>o</sup> and eek her hall,<sup>o</sup>  
 In which she ate full many a slender<sup>o</sup> meal;  
 Of poinant<sup>o</sup> sauce hire<sup>o</sup> needed never a deel:<sup>o</sup>  
 No dainty morsel passed through her throat—  
 15 Her diet was accordant to her cote.<sup>o</sup>  
 Repleccioun<sup>o</sup> ne made hire<sup>o</sup> never sick:  
 Attempre<sup>o</sup> diete was all her physik,<sup>o</sup>  
 And exercise and hertes suffisaunce.<sup>o</sup>  
 The goute let hire nothing for to daunce,<sup>1</sup>  
 20 N'apoplexye shente<sup>o</sup> not her head.  
 No win ne drank she, neither white ne red:  
 Her board<sup>o</sup> was served most with white and  
 black,<sup>o</sup>  
 Milk and brown bread, in which she found no lack;<sup>o</sup>  
 Seind<sup>o</sup> bacon, and sometime an ey<sup>o</sup> or tweye,<sup>o</sup>  
 25 For she was as it were a manere deye.<sup>o</sup>  
 A yard she had, enclosed all without  
 With stickes, and a drye ditch about,  
 In which she had a cock heet<sup>o</sup> Chauntecleer:<sup>2</sup>  
 In all the land of crowing nas<sup>o</sup> his peer.  
 30 His voice was merrier than the merry orgon<sup>o</sup>  
 On massedayes<sup>o</sup> that in the churche gon;<sup>o</sup>  
 Well sikerer<sup>o</sup> was his crowing in his logge<sup>o</sup>

Than is a clock or an abbey orlogge;<sup>o</sup>  
 By nature he knew each ascensioun  
 35 Of th'equinoxial<sup>3</sup> in thilke<sup>o</sup> toun:  
 For when degrees fifteene were ascended,  
 Thenne crew<sup>o</sup> he that it mighte not be amended.<sup>o</sup>  
 His comb was redder than the fine coral,  
 And batailed<sup>o</sup> as it were a castle wall;  
 40 His bill was black, and as the jet it shoon;<sup>o</sup>  
 Like azure<sup>o</sup> were his legges and his toon;<sup>o</sup>  
 His nailes whiter than the lily flour,  
 And like the burned<sup>o</sup> gold was his colour.  
 This gentil<sup>o</sup> cock had in his governaunce  
 45 Seven hennes<sup>o</sup> for to do all his plesaunce,<sup>o</sup>  
 Whiche were his sisters and his paramours,<sup>o</sup>  
 And wonder like to him as of colours;<sup>4</sup>  
 Of whiche the fairest hewed<sup>o</sup> on her throat  
 Was cleped<sup>o</sup> faire damoisele<sup>o</sup> Pertelote.  
 50 Curteis<sup>o</sup> she was, discreet, and debonaire,<sup>o</sup>  
 And compaignable,<sup>o</sup> and bore herself<sup>o</sup> so faire,  
 Sin<sup>o</sup> thilke<sup>o</sup> day that she was seven night old,  
 That trewely<sup>o</sup> she hath the heart in hold<sup>o</sup>  
 Of Chauntecleer, loken<sup>o</sup> in every lith.<sup>o</sup>  
 55 He loved hire<sup>o</sup> so that well was him therewith.  
 But such a joy was it to hear them sing,  
 When that the brighte sonne<sup>o</sup> gan to spring,<sup>o</sup>  
 In sweet accord "My lief is faren in londe."<sup>5</sup>  
 For thilke time,<sup>o</sup> as I have understond,  
 60 Beastes and birdes couden speak and sing.  
 And so befell that in a dawening,<sup>o</sup>  
 As Chauntecleer among his wives all  
 Sat on his perche, that was in the hall,  
 And next him sat this faire Pertelote,  
 65 This Chauntecleer gan gronen<sup>o</sup> in his throat,  
 As man that in his dream is drecched sore.<sup>o</sup>  
 And when that Pertelote thus heard him roar,



She was aghast, and said, "Herte deare,  
 What aileth you to groan in this manere?  
 70 You been a verray slepere, o fie, for shame!"  
 And he answered and saide thus, "Madame,  
 I pray you that you take it not agrief. o  
 By God, me mette o I was in such mischief o  
 Right now, that yet my heart is sore afright.  
 75 Now God," quod o he, "my swevene recche aright, o  
 And keepe my body out of foul prisoun!  
 Me mette how that I roamed up and down  
 Within oure yard, wheras I saw a beast,  
 Was like an hound and would have made arrest o  
 80 Upon my body, and have had me dead. o  
 His colour was bitwixe o yellow and red,  
 And tipped was his tail and both his eres o  
 With black, unlike the remenant o of his heres; o  
 His snoute small, with glowing eyen o tweye. o  
 85 Yet o of his look for fear almost I deye: o  
 This caused me my groaning, douteless."  
 "Avoi," o quod she, "fie on you, herteless! o  
 Alas," quod she, "for by that God above,  
 Now have you lost my heart and all my love!  
 90 I cannot love a coward, by my faith.  
 For certes, o what so o any woman saith,  
 We alle desiren, if it mighte be,  
 To have husbandes hardy, wise, and free, o  
 And secree, o and no nigard, o ne no fool,  
 95 Ne him that is aghast o of every tool, o  
 Ne none avauntour. o By that God above,  
 How dorste o you sayn for shame unto youre love  
 That anything might make you aferd? o  
 Have you no mannes heart and have a berd? o  
 100 Alas, and conne o you been aghast of swevenes? o  
 Nothing, God woot, o but vanity o in swevene is!  
 Swevenes engendren of replexiouns, o

And oft of fume<sup>o</sup> and of complexiouns,<sup>o</sup>  
 When humours been too habundant in a wight.<sup>8</sup>  
 105 Certes,<sup>o</sup> this dream which you have met<sup>o</sup> tonight  
 Comth of the grete superfluitee<sup>o</sup>  
 Of youre rede colera,<sup>o</sup> pardee,<sup>o</sup>  
 Which causeth folk to dreaden<sup>o</sup> in their dreames  
 Of arrows, and of fire with rede lemes,<sup>o</sup>  
 110 Of rede beastes, that they will them bite,  
 Of contek,<sup>o</sup> and of whelpes<sup>o</sup> great and lite<sup>o</sup>—  
 Right<sup>o</sup> as the humour of melancholy  
 Causeth full many a man in sleep to cry  
 For fear of blacke bears or bulles<sup>o</sup> blake,  
 115 Or elles<sup>o</sup> blacke develes<sup>o</sup> will them take.  
 Of other humours could I tell also  
 That werken many a man in sleep full woe,<sup>o</sup>  
 But I will pass as lightly<sup>o</sup> as I can.  
 Lo, Catoun,<sup>9</sup> which that was so wise a man,  
 120 Said he not thus? 'Ne do no force of<sup>o</sup> dreams.'  
 Now, sire," quod she, "when we fly from the beams,<sup>o</sup>  
 For Goddes love, as take some laxatif.  
 Up<sup>o</sup> peril of my soul and of my lif,  
 I conseile<sup>o</sup> you the best, I will not lie,  
 125 That both of choler and of melancholy  
 You purge you; and for<sup>o</sup> you shall not tarry,<sup>o</sup>  
 Though in this town is no apothecary,  
 I shall myself to herbes teachen you,  
 That shall been for your health and for youre prow.<sup>o</sup>  
 130 And in oure yard tho<sup>o</sup> herbes shall I finde,  
 The which have of their property by kinde<sup>o</sup>  
 To purge you beneath and eek above.<sup>o</sup>  
 Forget not this, for Goddes owene love.  
 You been full cholerick<sup>o</sup> of complexioun;  
 135 Ware<sup>o</sup> the sun in his ascencioun  
 Ne finde you not replete of<sup>o</sup> humours hote;<sup>o</sup>  
 And if it do, I dare well lay a grote<sup>o</sup>

That you shall have a fevere terciane,<sup>1</sup>  
Or an ague that may be youre bane.<sup>o</sup>  
140 A day or two you shall have digestives<sup>o</sup>  
Of wormes, er<sup>o</sup> you take youre laxatives  
Of lauriol, centaure, and fumetere,<sup>2</sup>  
Or elles<sup>o</sup> of hellebore that groweth there,  
Of catapuce<sup>o</sup> or of gaiter berries,  
145 Of herb ivy growing in our yard there merry is.<sup>o</sup>  
Peck them up right as they grow, and eat them in.  
Be merry,<sup>o</sup> husbände, for youre father<sup>o</sup> kin!  
Dreadeth no dream: I can say you no more."  
"Madam," quod he, "*graunt mercy* <sup>o</sup> of  
150 youre lore.<sup>o</sup>  
But nathelees,<sup>o</sup> as touching daun<sup>o</sup> Catoun,  
That hath of wisdom such a great renoun,<sup>o</sup>  
Though that he bade no dreames for to dread,  
By God, men may in olde bookes read  
Of many a man more of authority  
155 Than ever Catoun was, so mote I thee,<sup>o</sup>  
That all the reverse<sup>o</sup> say of his sentence,<sup>o</sup>  
And have well founden by experience  
That dreames been significaciouns<sup>o</sup>  
As well of joy as tribulaciouns  
160 That folk endure in this life present.  
There needeth make of this no argument:  
The verray preve<sup>o</sup> showeth it in deed.  
"One of the greatest auctours<sup>o</sup> that men read<sup>3</sup>  
Saith thus, that whilom<sup>o</sup> two felawes<sup>o</sup> went  
165 On pilgrimage in a full good intent,<sup>o</sup>  
And happed so they comen in a toun,  
Wheras there was such congregacioun  
Of people, and eek<sup>o</sup> so strait of herbergage,<sup>o</sup>  
That they ne found as much as one cottage  
170 In which they bothe might ylodged<sup>o</sup> be;  
Wherefore they mosten<sup>o</sup> of necessity

As for that night departen<sup>o</sup> company;  
And each of them gooth to his hostelry,<sup>o</sup>  
And took his lodging as it wolde fall.<sup>o</sup>  
175 That one of them was lodged in a stall,  
Far<sup>o</sup> in a yard, with oxen of the plough;  
That other man was lodged well enough,  
As was his aventure<sup>o</sup> or his fortune,  
That us governeth all as in commune.<sup>o</sup>  
180 And so befell that long er<sup>o</sup> it were day,  
This man mette<sup>o</sup> in his bed, thereas he lay,  
How that his felawe<sup>o</sup> gan<sup>o</sup> upon him call,  
And said, 'Alas, for in an oxes stall  
This night I shall be murdered where I lie!  
185 Now help me, deare brother, or I die!  
In all haste come to me,' he said.  
    "This man out of his sleep for fear abraid,<sup>o</sup>  
But when that he was wakened of his sleep,  
He turned him and took of this no keep:<sup>o</sup>  
190 Him thought his dream nas but a vanitee.<sup>4</sup>  
Thus twice in his sleeping dreamed he,  
And atte thirddde time yet his felawe  
Came, as him thought, and said, 'I am now slawe:<sup>o</sup>  
Behold my bloody woundes deep and wide.  
195 Arise up early in the morwe tide<sup>o</sup>  
And atte west gate of the town,' quod<sup>o</sup> he,  
'A carte full of dung there shaltou<sup>o</sup> see,  
In which my body is hid full prively:<sup>o</sup>  
Do thilke cart arresten<sup>o</sup> boldely.  
200 My gold caused my murder, sooth<sup>o</sup> to sayn'—  
And told him every point how he was slain,  
With a full pitous<sup>o</sup> face, pale of hue.  
And truste well, his dream he found full true,  
For on the morwes<sup>o</sup> as soon as it was day,  
205 To his felawes inn<sup>o</sup> he took the way,  
And when that he came to this oxes stall,

After<sup>o</sup> his fellow he began to call.  
 "The hosteller<sup>o</sup> answered him anon,<sup>o</sup>  
 And saide, 'Sire, youre fellow is agon:<sup>o</sup>  
 210 As soon as day he went out of the toun.'  
 "This man gan fallen in suspecioun,<sup>o</sup>  
 Remembring on his dreames that he mette;<sup>o</sup>  
 And forth he gooth, no longer would he lette,<sup>o</sup>  
 215 Unto the west gate of the town, and fond<sup>o</sup>  
 A dung carte, went as<sup>o</sup> it were to dunge<sup>o</sup> lond,  
 That was arrayed in that same wise<sup>o</sup>  
 As you have heard the dede<sup>o</sup> man devise;<sup>o</sup>  
 And with an hardy heart he gan to cry,  
 'Vengeance and justice of this felony!  
 220 My felawe murdered is this same night,  
 And in this cart he lies gaping upright!<sup>o</sup>  
 I cry out on the ministers,'<sup>o</sup> quod he,  
 'That sholde keep and rulen this citee.  
 Harrow,<sup>o</sup> alas, here lith my felawe slain!  
 225 What should I more unto this tale sayn?  
 The people up start<sup>o</sup> and caste the carte to ground,  
 And in the middle of the dung they found  
 The dede<sup>o</sup> man that murdered was all new.<sup>o</sup>  
 "O blissful God that art so just and true,  
 230 Lo, how that thou biwrayest<sup>o</sup> murder alway!  
 Murder will out,<sup>o</sup> that see we day by day:  
 Murder is so wlatson<sup>o</sup> and abominable  
 To God that is so just and reasonable,  
 That he ne will not suffer it heled<sup>o</sup> be,  
 235 Though it abide<sup>o</sup> a year or two or three.  
 Murder will out: this my conclusioun.  
 And right anon ministers of that toun  
 Han hent<sup>o</sup> the carter and so sore<sup>o</sup> him pined,<sup>o</sup>  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> the hosteller so sore engined,<sup>o</sup>  
 240 That they biknewe<sup>o</sup> their wickedness anon,<sup>o</sup>  
 And were anhanged<sup>o</sup> by the nekke bon.<sup>o</sup>  
 Here may men see that dreames been to dread.<sup>o</sup>

"And certes,<sup>o</sup> in the same book I read—  
 Right in the nexte chapitre after this<sup>5</sup>—  
 245 I gabbe not,<sup>o</sup> so have I joy or bliss—  
 Two men that would have passed over sea  
 For certain cause<sup>o</sup> into a far country,  
 If that the wind ne hadde been contrary  
 That made them in a city for to tarry,  
 250 That stood full merry upon an haven<sup>o</sup> side—  
 But on a day again the even tide<sup>o</sup>  
 The wind gan change, and blewe right as them  
 leste:<sup>o</sup>  
 Jolif<sup>o</sup> and glad they wenten unto rest,  
 And casten them<sup>o</sup> full early for to sail.  
 255 "But to that one man fell<sup>o</sup> a great mervail;<sup>o</sup>  
 That one of them, in sleeping as he lay,  
 Him mette<sup>o</sup> a wonder dream again<sup>o</sup> the day:  
 Him thought a man stood by his beddes side,  
 And him commanded that he should abide,<sup>o</sup>  
 260 And said him thus, 'If thou tomorrow wend,<sup>o</sup>  
 Thou shall be dreint;<sup>o</sup> my tale is at an end.'  
 "He woke and told his felawe what he mette,<sup>o</sup>  
 And prayed him his viage<sup>o</sup> for to lette;<sup>o</sup>  
 As for that day he prayed him to bide.<sup>o</sup>  
 265 "His felawe, that lay by his beddes side,  
 Gan<sup>o</sup> for to laugh, and scorned him full fast.  
 'No dream,' quod he, 'may so my heart aghast<sup>o</sup>  
 That I will lette<sup>o</sup> for to do my thinges.<sup>o</sup>  
 I sette not a straw by<sup>o</sup> thy dreaminges,  
 270 For swevenes been but vanitees and japes:<sup>6</sup>  
 Men dream alday<sup>o</sup> of owles or of apes,<sup>7</sup>  
 And of many a maze<sup>o</sup> therewithal—  
 Men dream of thing that never was ne shall.<sup>o</sup>  
 But since I see that thou will here abide,  
 275 And thus forslewthen<sup>o</sup> willfully thy tide,  
 God woot,<sup>o</sup> it reweth me;<sup>o</sup> and have good day.'

And thus he took his leave and went his way.  
 But er<sup>o</sup> that he had half his course ysailed—  
 Noot I not why ne what meschaunce it ailed<sup>8</sup>—  
 280 But casually<sup>o</sup> the shippes bottom rent,<sup>o</sup>  
 And ship and man under the water went,  
 In sight of othere shippes it beside  
 That with them sailed at the same tide.  
 And therefore, faire Pertelote so dear,  
 285 By such examples olde maistou lere<sup>o</sup>  
 That no man sholde been too recchelees<sup>o</sup>  
 Of<sup>o</sup> dreames, for I saye thee doutelees<sup>o</sup>  
 That many a dream full sore is for to dread.<sup>o</sup>  
 “Lo, in the life of Saint Kenelm<sup>9</sup> I read—  
 290 That was Kenulphus sone, the noble king  
 Of Mercenrike<sup>o</sup>—how Kenelm mette<sup>o</sup> a thing  
 A lite er<sup>o</sup> he was murdered on a day.  
 His murder in his avisioun<sup>o</sup> he say.<sup>o</sup>  
 His norice<sup>o</sup> him expounded<sup>o</sup> everydel<sup>o</sup>  
 295 His swevene,<sup>o</sup> and bade him for to keep him<sup>o</sup> well  
 For<sup>o</sup> treason, but he nas<sup>o</sup> but seven year old,  
 And therefore little tale hath he told  
 Of any dream,<sup>1</sup> so holy was his herte.  
 By God, I hadde levere than my sherte<sup>o</sup>  
 300 That you had read his legende<sup>o</sup> as have I.  
 “Dame Pertelote, I say you trewely,<sup>o</sup>  
 Macrobius,<sup>2</sup> that writ the Avisioun  
 In Affrike<sup>o</sup> of the worthy Scipioun,  
 Affirmeth<sup>o</sup> dreames, and saith that they been  
 305 Warning of thinges that men after seen.  
 “And furthermore, I pray you looketh well  
 In the Olde Testament of Daniel,<sup>3</sup>  
 If he held<sup>o</sup> dreames any vanitee.<sup>o</sup>  
 “Read eek<sup>o</sup> of Joseph,<sup>4</sup> and there shall you see  
 310 Wher<sup>o</sup> dreames be sometimes—I saye not all—  
 Warning of thinges that shall after fall.<sup>o</sup>

"Look of Egypte the king, daun<sup>o</sup> Pharaoh,  
 His baker and his boteler<sup>o</sup> also,<sup>5</sup>  
 Wher<sup>o</sup> they ne felte none effect<sup>o</sup> in dreames.  
 315 Whoso will seek actes<sup>o</sup> of sundry remes<sup>o</sup>  
 May read of dreames many a wonder thing.  
 "Lo Cresus,<sup>6</sup> which that was of Lyde<sup>o</sup> king,  
 Mette<sup>o</sup> he not that he sat upon a tree,  
 Which signified he should anhangd<sup>o</sup> be?  
 320 "Lo here Andromache, Hectores<sup>o7</sup> wife,  
 That day that Hector sholde<sup>o</sup> lose his life,  
 She dreamed on the same night biforn<sup>o</sup>  
 How that the life of Hector sholde be lorn,<sup>o</sup>  
 325 If thilke<sup>o</sup> day he went into batail;<sup>o</sup>  
 She warned him, but it mighte not avail:<sup>o</sup>  
 He wente for to fighte nathelees,<sup>o</sup>  
 But he was slain anon<sup>o</sup> of Achilles.  
 But thilke<sup>o</sup> tale is all too long to tell,  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> it is nigh<sup>o</sup> day, I may not dwell.<sup>o</sup>  
 330 Shortly I say, as for conclusioun,  
 That I shall have of this avisioun<sup>o8</sup>  
 Adversity, and I saye furthermore  
 That I ne tell of<sup>o</sup> laxatives no store,  
 For they been venomes,<sup>o</sup> I woot<sup>o</sup> it well:  
 335 I them defy,<sup>o</sup> I love them neveradel.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Now let us speak of mirth and stinte<sup>o</sup> all this.  
 Madame Pertelote, so have I bliss,  
 Of one thing God hath sente me large<sup>o</sup> grace:  
 For when I see the beauty of youre face—  
 340 You been so scarlet red about your eyen—  
 It maketh all my drede for to dien.<sup>o</sup>  
 For also siker<sup>o</sup> as *In principio*,<sup>9</sup>  
*Mulier est hominis confusio*.<sup>1</sup>  
 Madame, the sentence<sup>o</sup> of this Latin is,  
 345 'Woman is mannes joy and all his bliss.'  
 For when I feel anight youre softe side—



Al be it<sup>o</sup> that I may not on you ride,<sup>o</sup>  
 For<sup>o</sup> that oure perch is made so narrow, alas—  
 I am so full of joy and of solace<sup>o</sup>  
 350 That I defy bothe swevene<sup>o</sup> and dream."  
 And with that word he flew down from the beam,  
 For it was day, and eek<sup>o</sup> his hennes all,  
 And with a "chuk"<sup>o</sup> he gan<sup>o</sup> them for to call,  
 For<sup>o</sup> he hadde found a corn<sup>o</sup> lay in the yard.  
 355 Real<sup>o</sup> he was, he was no more aferd:<sup>o</sup>  
 He feathered<sup>o</sup> Pertelote twenty time,  
 And trod her as ofte, er it was prime.<sup>2</sup>  
 He looketh as it were a grim leoun,<sup>o</sup>  
 And on his toes he roameth up and doun:  
 360 Him deined nat<sup>o</sup> to set his foot to ground.  
 He chukketh<sup>o</sup> when he hath a corn yfound,  
 And to him rennen<sup>o</sup> then his wives all.  
 Thus royal, as a prince is in his hall,  
 Leave I this Chauntecleer in his pasture,<sup>o</sup>  
 365 And after will I tell his aventure.<sup>o</sup>  
 When that the month in which the world began,  
 That highte<sup>o</sup> March, when God first maked man,<sup>3</sup>  
 Was complete, and passed were also,  
 Since March biran,<sup>o</sup> thirty days and two,  
 370 Befell that Chauntecleer in all his pride,  
 His sevene wives walking him beside,  
 Cast up his eyen to the brighte sonne—  
 That in the sign of Taurus had yronne<sup>o</sup>  
 Twenty degrees and one and somewhat more—  
 375 And knew by kind,<sup>o</sup> and by none other lore,<sup>o</sup>  
 That it was prime, and crew<sup>o</sup> with blissful stevene.<sup>o</sup>  
 "The sun," he said, "is clomben<sup>o</sup> up in hevene  
 Fourty degrees and one and more, ywis.<sup>o</sup>  
 Madame Pertelote, my worldes bliss,  
 380 Herkneth these blissful birddes<sup>o</sup> how they sing,  
 And see the freshe flowers how they spring:

Full is my heart of revel and solace."<sup>o</sup>  
 But suddenly him fell<sup>o</sup> a sorrowful cas,<sup>o</sup>  
 For ever the latter end of joy is woe.  
 385 God woot<sup>o</sup> that worldly joy is soon ago,<sup>o</sup>  
 And if a rhethor<sup>o</sup> coude fair endite,<sup>o</sup>  
 He in a chronicle saufly<sup>o</sup> might it write,  
 As for a sovereign notabilitee.<sup>o</sup>  
 Now every wise man let him herkne<sup>o</sup> me:  
 390 This story is also<sup>o</sup> true, I undertake,<sup>o</sup>  
 As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,<sup>4</sup>  
 That women hold in full great reverence.  
 Now will I turn again to my sentence.<sup>o</sup>  
 A colfox<sup>o</sup> full of sly iniquity,  
 395 That in the grove hadde woned<sup>o</sup> yeres three,  
 By high imaginacion forncast,<sup>5</sup>  
 The same night throughout the hedges brast<sup>o</sup>  
 Into the yard where Chauntecleer the fair  
 Was wont,<sup>o</sup> and eek<sup>o</sup> his wives, to repair;<sup>o</sup>  
 400 And in a bed of wortes<sup>o</sup> still he lay  
 Til it was passed undren<sup>o</sup> of the day,  
 Waiting<sup>o</sup> his time on Chauntecleer to fall,  
 As gladly do these homicides<sup>o</sup> all,  
 That in await liggen<sup>o</sup> to murder men.  
 405 O false mordreour,<sup>o</sup> lurking in thy den!  
 O newe Scariot!<sup>6</sup> Newe Geniloun!<sup>7</sup>  
 False dissembler! O Greek Sinoun,<sup>8</sup>  
 That broughtest Troy all outrely<sup>o</sup> to sorwe!  
 O Chauntecleer, accursed be that morwe<sup>o</sup>  
 410 That thou into the yard flew from the beames!  
 Thou were full well ywarned by thy dreames  
 That thilke<sup>o</sup> day was perilous to thee;  
 But what that God forwoot<sup>o</sup> must needes<sup>o</sup> be,  
 After<sup>o</sup> the opinion of certain clerkes.  
 415 Witness on<sup>o</sup> him that any perfect clerk is  
 That in school<sup>o</sup> is great altercacioun<sup>o</sup>

In this mater, and great disputisoun,<sup>o</sup>  
 And hath been of an hundred thousand men.  
 But I ne can not bulte<sup>o</sup> it to the bren,<sup>o 9</sup>  
 420 As can the holy doctor Augustine,  
 Or Boece, or the bishop Brawardine<sup>1</sup>—  
 Whether that Goddes worthy forwiting<sup>o</sup>  
 Straineth<sup>o</sup> me nedely<sup>o</sup> for to do a thing  
 425 ("Nedely" clepe<sup>o</sup> I simple necessity),<sup>2</sup>  
 Or elles<sup>o</sup> if free choice be granted me  
 To do that same thing or do it not,  
 Though God forwoot<sup>o</sup> it er<sup>o</sup> that I was  
     wrought;<sup>o</sup>  
 Or if his witing<sup>o</sup> straineth<sup>o</sup> neveradel,<sup>o</sup>  
 But by necessity conditional<sup>3</sup>—  
 430 I will not have to do of such matere.<sup>o</sup>  
 My tale is of a cock, as you may heare,  
 That took his counsel of his wife with sorwe,  
 To walken in the yard upon that morwe<sup>o</sup>  
 That he hadde met<sup>o</sup> the dream that I you told.  
 435 Womenes counsels<sup>o</sup> been full ofte cold;<sup>o</sup>  
 Womanes counsel brought us first to woe,  
 And made Adam from Paradise to go,<sup>4</sup>  
 Thereas<sup>o</sup> he was full merry and well at ease.  
 But for<sup>o</sup> I noot<sup>o</sup> to whom it mighte displease  
 440 If I counsel of women wolde blame,  
 Pass over, for I said it in my game<sup>o</sup>—  
 Read auctours where they treat of such matere,  
 And what they sayn of women you may heare—  
 These been the cockes wordes and not mine:  
 445 I can none harm of no woman divine.<sup>o</sup>  
     Fair in the sand to bathe hire<sup>o</sup> merrily  
 Lith<sup>o</sup> Pertelote, and all her sisters by,  
 Again<sup>o</sup> the sun, and Chauntecleer so free<sup>o</sup>  
 Sang merrier<sup>o</sup> than mermaid in the sea—  
 450 For Physiologus<sup>5</sup> saith sikerly<sup>o</sup>

How that they singen well and merrily.  
 And so befell that as he cast his eye  
 Among the wortes<sup>o</sup> on a butterfly,  
 He was war<sup>o</sup> of this fox that lay full low.  
 455 Nothing ne liste him<sup>o</sup> thenne for to crow,  
 But cried anon "Cok cok!" and up he start,<sup>o</sup>  
 As man that was affrayed<sup>o</sup> in his heart—  
 For naturally a beast desireth flee  
 From his contrarye<sup>o</sup> if he may it see,  
 460 Though he never erst<sup>o</sup> hadde seen it with his eye.  
 This Chauntecleer, when he gan him espy,  
 He would have fled, but<sup>o</sup> that the fox anon  
 Saide, "Gentil<sup>o</sup> sire, alas, where will you gon?<sup>o</sup>  
 Be you afraid of me that am your friend?  
 465 Now certes,<sup>o</sup> I were worse than a fiend<sup>o</sup>  
 If I to you wolde<sup>o</sup> harm or villainy.  
 I am not come your conseil for t'espy,<sup>o</sup>  
 But trewely<sup>o</sup> the cause of my coming  
 Was only for to herkne<sup>o</sup> how that you sing:  
 470 For trewely, you have as merry a steven<sup>o</sup>  
 As any angel hath that is in heaven.  
 Therewith you have in music more feeling  
 Than hadde Boece,<sup>6</sup> or any that can sing.  
 My lord your father—God his soule bless!—  
 475 And eek<sup>o</sup> youre mother, of her gentiless,<sup>o</sup>  
 Have in my house ybeen, to my great ease.<sup>o</sup>  
 And certes<sup>o</sup> sire, full fain<sup>o</sup> would I you please.  
 "But for men speak of singing,<sup>7</sup> I will say  
 So might I brouke well mine eyen tway,<sup>8</sup>  
 480 Save you, I hearde never man so singe  
 As did youre father in the morweninge.<sup>o</sup>  
 Certes, it was of heart<sup>o</sup> all that he song.<sup>o</sup>  
 And for to make his voice the more strong,  
 He wolde so pain him<sup>o</sup> that with both his eyen  
 485 He moste<sup>o</sup> winke, so loude would he cryen;

And standen on his tiptoon therewithal,  
 And stretche forth his necke long and small;<sup>o</sup>  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> he was of such discrecioun  
 That there nas no man in no regioun  
 490 That him in song or wisdom mighte pass.  
 I have well read in Daun Burnel the Ass<sup>9</sup>  
 Among his verse how that there was a cock,  
 That, for<sup>o</sup> a priestes son gave him a knock  
 Upon his leg while he was young and nice,<sup>o</sup>  
 495 He made him for to lose his benefice.<sup>1</sup>  
 But certain, there is no comparisoun  
 Bitwixe<sup>o</sup> the wisdom and discrecioun  
 Of youre father and of his subtlety.  
 Now singeth, sire, for sainte<sup>o</sup> charity!  
 500 Let see, can you youre father countrefete?"<sup>o</sup>  
 This Chauntecleer his winges gan to bete,  
 As man that could his treason<sup>o</sup> not espy,  
 So was he ravished with his flattery.  
 Alas, you lordes, many a false flatour<sup>o</sup>  
 505 Is in youre court, and many a losengeour,<sup>o</sup>  
 That pleasen you well more, by my faith,  
 Than he that soothfastnesse<sup>o</sup> unto you saith!<sup>o</sup>  
 Readeth Ecclesiaste<sup>o</sup> of flattery.<sup>2</sup>  
 Beth war,<sup>o</sup> you lordes, of their treachery.  
 510 This Chauntecleer stood high upon his toes,  
 Stretching his necke, and held his eyen close,  
 And gan to crowe loude for the nones;<sup>3</sup>  
 And daun<sup>o</sup> Russel the fox start<sup>o</sup> up atones,<sup>o</sup>  
 And by the gargat<sup>o</sup> hente<sup>o</sup> Chauntecleer,  
 515 And on his back toward the woods him beer,<sup>o</sup>  
 For yet ne was there no man that him sued.<sup>o</sup>  
 O destiny that maist<sup>o</sup> not been eschued!<sup>o</sup>  
 Alas that Chauntecleer flew from the beames!  
 Alas his wife ne roughte not<sup>o</sup> of dreames!  
 520 And on a Friday fell<sup>o</sup> all this mischaunce!

O Venus that art goddess of plesaunce,<sup>o</sup>  
 Sin that<sup>o</sup> thy servant was this Chauntecleer,  
 And in thy service did all his power<sup>o</sup>—  
 More for delight than world to multiply<sup>o</sup>—  
 525 Why woldestou suffer<sup>o</sup> him on thy day to die?<sup>4</sup>  
 O Gaufred,<sup>5</sup> deare master sovereign,<sup>o</sup>  
 That, when thy worthy king Richard was slain  
 With shot,<sup>o</sup> complainedest<sup>o</sup> his death so sore,  
 Why ne had I now thy sentence<sup>o</sup> and thy lore,<sup>o</sup>  
 530 The Friday for to chide as diden ye?  
 For on a Friday soothly<sup>o</sup> slain was he.  
 Thenne would I show you how that I coude plain<sup>o</sup>  
 For Chauntecleres dread and for his pain.  
 Certes,<sup>o</sup> such cry ne lamentacioun  
 535 Was never of ladies made when Ilioun<sup>6</sup>  
 Was won, and Pyrrus<sup>7</sup> with his straite swerd,<sup>o</sup>  
 When he had hent<sup>o</sup> King Priam by the berd<sup>o</sup>  
 And slain him, as saith us Eneidos,<sup>8</sup>  
 As maden alle the hennes in the clos,<sup>o</sup>  
 540 When they had seen of Chauntecleer the sight.  
 But sovereignly<sup>o</sup> Dame Pertelote shrigh<sup>o</sup>  
 Full louder than did Hasdrubales<sup>9</sup> wife  
 When that her husband had lost his life,  
 And that the Romans hadden burned Carthage:  
 545 She was so full of torment and of rage  
 That willfully unto the fire she start,<sup>o</sup>  
 And burned herselfen with a stedefast heart.  
 O woeful hennes, right so criden ye  
 As, when that Nero<sup>1</sup> brende<sup>o</sup> the city  
 550 Of Rome, criden senatoures wives  
 For that their husbandes losten alle their lives:  
 Withouten guilt this Nero hath them slain.  
 Now will I turn to my tale again.  
 The sely<sup>o</sup> widow and eek<sup>o</sup> her daughters two  
 555 Herden<sup>o</sup> these hennes cry and maken woe,

And out at dores<sup>o</sup> sterten<sup>o</sup> they anon,  
 And sien<sup>o</sup> the fox toward the grove gon,<sup>o</sup>  
 And bar<sup>o</sup> upon his back the cock away,  
 And criden, "Out, harrow,"<sup>o</sup> and "Wailaway,<sup>o</sup>  
 560 Ah, ah, the fox," and after him they ran,  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> with staves<sup>o</sup> many another man;  
 Ran Colle our dog, and Talbot and Gerland,<sup>o</sup>  
 And Malkin<sup>2</sup> with a distaff in her hand;  
 Ran cow and calf, and eek the very hogges,  
 565 So feared for<sup>o</sup> the barking of the dogges  
 And shouting of the men and women eke.<sup>o</sup>  
 They ranne so them thought their herte breke;<sup>o</sup>  
 They yelleden as fiendes do in hell;  
 The duckes criden as men would them quell;<sup>3</sup>  
 570 The geese for fere<sup>o</sup> flowen<sup>o</sup> over the trees;  
 Out of the hive came the swarm of bees;  
 So hidous was the noise, a, *benedicitee*,<sup>o</sup>  
 Certes,<sup>o</sup> he Jakke Straw<sup>4</sup> and his meinee<sup>o</sup>  
 Ne made never shoutes half so shrill  
 575 When that they wolden any Fleming kill,  
 As thilke<sup>o</sup> day was made upon the fox.  
 Of brass they broughten bemes<sup>o</sup> and of box,<sup>o</sup>  
 Of horn, of bone, in whiche they blew and powped,<sup>o</sup>  
 And therewithal they skried<sup>o</sup> and they howped<sup>o</sup>—  
 580 It seemed as that hevene sholde fall!  
 Now goode men, I pray you herkneth<sup>o</sup> all:  
 Lo, how Fortune turneth<sup>o</sup> suddenly  
 The hope and pride eek<sup>o</sup> of her enemy.  
 This cock that lay upon the foxes back,  
 585 In all his dread unto the fox he spak,<sup>o</sup>  
 And saide, "Sire, if that I were as ye,  
 Yet should I say, as wise God helpe me,  
 'Turneth again,<sup>o</sup> you proude churles all!  
 A verray<sup>o</sup> pestilence<sup>o</sup> upon you fall!  
 590 Now am I come unto this wooded side,

Maugree your heed,<sup>o</sup> the cock shall here abide.  
I will him eat, in faith, and that anon.' "<sup>o</sup>

The fox answered, "In faith, it shall be done."  
And as he spoke that word, all suddenly  
595 The cock broke from his mouth deliverly,<sup>o</sup>  
And high upon a tree he flew anon.

And when the fox saw that the cock was gone,  
"Alas," quod<sup>o</sup> he, "O Chauntecleer, alas!  
I have to you," quod he, "ydoon trespass,<sup>o</sup>  
600 Inasmuch as I maked you aferd<sup>o</sup>  
When I you hente<sup>o</sup> and brought out of the yerd.<sup>o</sup>  
But sire, I did it in no wikke intent.<sup>o</sup>

Come down, and I shall tell you what I meant.  
I shall saye sooth<sup>o</sup> to you, God help me so!"  
605 "Nay thenne," quod he, "I shrewe<sup>o</sup> us bothe two:

But first I shrewe myself, bothe blood and bones,  
If thou beguile me ofter than ones;<sup>o</sup>  
Thou shall no more through thy flatterye  
Do<sup>o</sup> me to sing and winken with my eye.  
610 For he that winketh when he sholde see,  
All willfully, God let him never thee."<sup>o</sup>

"Nay," quod the fox, "but God give him mischance<sup>o</sup>  
That is so indiscreet of governance<sup>o</sup>  
That jangleth<sup>o</sup> when he should holde his pees."<sup>o</sup>  
615

Lo, such it is for to be recchelees<sup>o</sup>  
And negligent and trust on flattery.  
But you that holden this tale a folly  
As of a fox, or of a cock and hen,  
Taketh the morality, goode men.  
620 For Saint Paul saith that all that written is  
To oure doctrine<sup>o</sup> it is ywrit, ywis:<sup>o</sup> <sup>5</sup>  
Taketh the fruit, and let the chaff<sup>o</sup> be still.  
Now goode God, if that it be thy will,  
As saith my lord, so make us alle goode men,  
625 And bring us to his high bliss! Amen.



## Endnotes

- Note 1: Gout did not stop her dancing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: His name means “sing beautifully.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, he knew by instinct each step in the progression of the celestial equator, which was thought to make a 360° rotation around the earth every twenty-four hours; a progression of 15° (line 37) would thus be equal to the passage of an hour.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: And marvelously similar to him in their coloring.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “My Lief Is Faren in Londe,” which is a real medieval song (see p. 602); its fifth line, “She hath myn herte in holde,” inspires line 54.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: May God interpret my dream for good.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dreams have their origin in overeating.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: When humors (bodily fluids) are too abundant in a person. —It was believed that an excess in one of the four humors—black bile (melancholy), yellow bile (choler), phlegm (stolidity), and blood (cheerful spiritedness)—affected temperament.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Dionysius Cato (3rd or 4th c. C.E.), the supposed author of a collection of Latin moral maxims, the *Distichs*, used as an elementary textbook.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Tertian: recurring every third day.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Laureole (spurge laurel), centaury (a gentian), and fumitory: like the herbs mentioned in the next lines, common cathartics in medieval medicine. The tally of laxatives is a parody of rhetorical lists.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This refers to Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), Roman statesman, scholar, and orator; see his *De divinatione* (*On Divination*) 1.27.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: It seemed to him his dream was nothing but an illusion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Earlier, not later, in the same chapter of *On Divination*, Cicero relates a dream similar to the following.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: For dreams are only illusions and tricks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, of absurdities.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: I don't know why nor what was the trouble with it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The son of Cenwulf (d. 821), whom he briefly succeeded as king of the Mercians before being slain by his sister (according to a well-known 11th-century legend).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: He set little store by any dream.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Latin grammarian and philosopher (fl. ca. 400 C.E.); his famous commentary on Cicero's "Dream of Scipio" (book 6 of *On the Republic*, ca. 52 B.C.E.)—a dream vision of the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus, who destroyed Carthage in 146 B.C.E.—came to be regarded as the standard authority on dream lore.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Daniel 7–8, recounting the prophetic dreams of that ancient Hebrew prophet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Genesis 37 and 41 recount, respectively, Joseph's prophetic dreams and his accurate interpretation of the Egyptian pharaoh's dreams.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Genesis 40, Joseph interprets the dreams of the baker and cupbearer of the pharaoh.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Croesus (r. ca. 560–546 B.C.E.), last king of Lydia, who was overthrown by Cyrus the Great; Chaucer also tells his story as part of *The Monk's Tale*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The greatest warrior among the Trojans during the Trojan War; he would be killed by the greatest Greek warrior, Achilles.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Macrobius ranks dreams according to their truth value, from nightmares (least truthful) to visions (most); according to

- Chauntecleer, his dream is a vision.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The first phrase in John 1:1, in the Latin Vulgate translation: "In the beginning [was the Word]," a fundamental axiom of Christianity.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: "Woman is man's downfall" (Latin), an antifeminist maxim.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: And trod her (while copulating) just as often (that is, twenty times) before it was 9 a.m.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: It was a common medieval belief that God's creation took place in springtime.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: The great knight of Arthurian romance, who was the lover of Queen Guinevere.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Predicted by heavenly forethought.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Judas Iscariot, the disciple known for betraying Jesus.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Ganelon, betrayer of Roland in the Charlemagne legend.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Sinon, who persuaded the Trojans to bring the horse filled with Greek warriors into Troy.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: That is, separate the valid and invalid arguments.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: St. Augustine (354–430), Boethius (ca. 480–524), and Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1290–1349), archbishop of Canterbury, were all occupied with the interrelationship between human free will and God's foreknowledge.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: For Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, "simple necessity" is absolute determination in relation to certain essential laws: if we are born, we must at some later point die. His "conditional necessity" allows a large measure of free choice within these larger rules: for example, whether to sit or stand at a given moment. The area in between these examples is the subject of academic contention (as, more to the point, are the nature and limits of human free will).[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Or if his knowledge in no way constrains, except by conditional necessity. (See previous note.)[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The first woman, Eve, persuaded Adam to break God's commandment; see Genesis 3:6.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "The Naturalist," the supposed author of a Greek collection (2nd century C.E., also called *Physiologus*) of moralizing and symbolical stories about animals (a bestiary).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boethius wrote a treatise titled *De musica* (*On Music*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: But since singing has been mentioned.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: So might I enjoy my two eyes (that is, as I live).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Master Brunellus, a discontented donkey, was the hero of *Speculum stultorum* (*Mirror of Fools*), a satirical poem by Nigel Wireker (ca. 1135–1198?).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Because the offended cock neglected to crow, his master overslept—missing his ordination and thus losing his benefice.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Perhaps Ecclesiasticus 12:16; but perhaps Proverbs 26:28, 28:23, or 29:5. The reference is both vague and sweeping.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This formula, "for the nones" (literally, "for the occasion"), is a common line-filler in Middle English rhyming verse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Friday is Venus's day.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Geoffrey of Vinsauf, a famous medieval rhetorician whose *Poetria nova* (ca. 1210, *New Poetics*) contains a lament on the death of Richard I that scolds Friday, the day on which the king was fatally wounded.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ilion or Ilium, another name for Troy (or the citadel of Troy).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pyrrhus (son of Achilles), who killed Priam, king of Troy.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The *Aeneid* (19 B.C.E.), the Latin epic by Virgil; see 2.552–53.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Hasdrubal, leader of the Carthaginian army, surrendered and begged for mercy when Carthage was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C.E. To rebuke his cowardice, his wife killed their children and then threw their bodies and herself into a burning temple. Chaucer's version seems to assume that Hasdrubal was already dead.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fifth Roman emperor (54–68 C.E.); according to legend, Nero not only set fire to Rome but put many senators to death.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Malkin is a maid's name: she holds a distaff, a staff used for spinning, and is often so pictured in medieval illustrations and carvings of a fox being pursued.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ducks cried as if men wanted to kill them.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jack Straw was one of the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, an uprising that directed its violence against not only the aristocracy but also the Flemings (or Dutch-speaking people from the Low Countries) living in London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Romans 15:4.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *poor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rather advanced* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *once* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *small* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the (very)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *property* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *income* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(thrifty) housekeeping* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *provided for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *no more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bedroom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living room*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scanty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pungent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *she* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not a bit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in keeping with her cottage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overeating* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moderate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contentment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hurt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *table*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *milk and bread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grilled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *egg* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a kind of dairywoman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *organ*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mass days* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plays*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more reliable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clock, timepiece*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *improved upon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crenellated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shone*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *lapis lazuli* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *toes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burnished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hens* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lovers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *colored* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courteous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gracious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *companionable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behaved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in possession* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *locked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sun* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began to rise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at that time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at dawn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began to groan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *troubled greatly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are a sound sleeper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amiss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I dreamed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trouble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laid hold* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *killed me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ears* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *rest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hairs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even now* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shame* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faintheart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discreet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *miser* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weapon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *braggart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *can* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreams* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *illusion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bodily humors* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excess* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *red bile* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be afraid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *red flames* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strife* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dogs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *bulls*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do harm to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay no heed to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rafters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in order that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *benefit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *both bottom and top*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bilious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beware that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *filled with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bet a coin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *digestive medicines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caper spurge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where it is fertile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheer up* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *father's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many thanks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *instruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nonetheless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *master*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fame*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may I prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contrary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opinion*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *signifiers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *actual experience*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *authors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *follows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with a very good intention*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *short of lodging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *part*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chance determined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *far away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *governs us all in common*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fellow, friend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *started up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shall you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have that cart stopped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitiable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innkeeper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *has gone*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *began to feel suspicious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spread dung on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *describe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on his back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *officers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rushed out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disclose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loathsome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *severely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tortured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *racked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confessed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hanged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neck bone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to be feared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I am not making this up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a particular reason*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harbor's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *toward evening*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suited them*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *merry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *planned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marvel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he dreamed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *toward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay behind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go forth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drowned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *journey* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrify*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *business*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *don't care a straw for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delusion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor shall be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *idle away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I'm sorry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by chance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *split*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you can learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *careless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *about* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without a doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *should be feared greatly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mercia* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a little before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(true) dream* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *saw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nurse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interpreted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entirely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dream* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guard himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I would give my shirt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(saint's) life*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tell you truly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Africa*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confirms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *illusion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lord*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *butler*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no consequence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *histories* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various realms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Lydia*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hanged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Hector's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *battle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do any good*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nonetheless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *right away*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *near* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(divinely inspired) dream* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poisons* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reject* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *die* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just as certain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meaning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ride (sexually)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vision* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cluck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *embraced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he disdained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clucks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *run* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feeding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what happened to him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is called* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passed* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *run*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nature* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *teaching*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crowed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *voice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *has climbed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *birds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *befell* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *event*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knows* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rhetorician* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *compose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confidently*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *banner headline*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *listen to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *declare*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *main point*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fox with black markings*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dwelled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *broke*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *greens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *midmorning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *biding*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *murderers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lie in wait*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *murderer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *utterly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *morning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *foreknows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessarily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in, according to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take witness of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scholarship* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *controversy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disputation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sift* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *husks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foreknowledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constrains* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessarily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foresaw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *created* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constrains* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subject matter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *women's advice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fatal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *playfully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *herself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more sweetly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surely* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *plants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aware*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he had no desire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *started*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enemy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to spy your secrets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *voice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfaction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heartfelt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sang*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take pains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imitate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undoing by treason*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flatterer*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *deceiver*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *says*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Ecclesiasticus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beware*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lord* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sprang* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pursued*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evaded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took no notice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *befell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did his utmost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to populate the world*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would you allow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supreme*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an arrow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamented*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wisdom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drawn sword*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preeminently* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shrieked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jumped*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *burned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outdoors* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leaped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alas*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wood planks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(dogs' names)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightened by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hearts would break*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bless me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *company*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trumpets* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boxwood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tooted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shrieked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whooped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overturns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go back!*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plague*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in spite of all you can do*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *right away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nimbly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *said*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done wrong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afraid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with no wicked intention*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more often than once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cause*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conduct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chatters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *careless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for our instruction* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *husks*[Return to reference](#) °

**Close of *The Canterbury Tales*** At the end of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer invokes a common allegorical theme, that life on earth is a pilgrimage. As Chaucer puts it in his short moral lyric, the *Balade de bon conseil* ([p. 574](#)), "Here is noon home . . . / Forth, pilgrim, forth!" In the final fragment, he makes explicit a metaphor that has been implicit all along in the journey to Canterbury. The pilgrims never arrive at the shrine of St. Thomas, but in *The Parson's Tale*, and in its short introduction and in the *Retraction* that follows it, Chaucer seems to be making an end for two pilgrimages that have become one, that of his fiction and that of his life.

In the introduction to the final tale we find the twenty-nine pilgrims moving through a nameless little village as the sun sinks to within 29° of the horizon, low in the sky. The atmosphere contains something of both the chill and the urgency of a late autumn afternoon, and we are surprised to find that the pilgrimage is almost over, that there is need for haste to make that "good end" that every medieval Christian hoped for. This delicately suggestive passage, rich with allegorical overtones, introduces the extremely long penitential treatise that constitutes *The Parson's Tale*, which Chaucer translated from Latin or French sources. Although often assumed to be an earlier work belatedly incorporated into the tale-telling framework, it may well have been written by Chaucer to provide the ending for *The Canterbury Tales*.

In the *Retraction* that follows *The Parson's Tale*, Chaucer acknowledges, lists, revokes, and asks forgiveness for his "guilts" (that is, his sins), which consist of having written most of the works on which his reputation as a great poet depends. He thanks Christ and Mary for his religious and moral works. One need not take this as evidence of a spiritual crisis or conversion at the end of his life. The *Retraction* seems to have been written to appear at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*, without censoring any of the tales deemed to be sinful. At the same time, one need not question Chaucer's sincerity; a readiness to question his own reality before the reality of

his God is implicit in many of Chaucer's works. The placement of the *Retraction* within or just outside the border of the fictional pilgrimage suggests that although Chaucer recognized the limitations of his fictions, he also believed that he and they were inseparable.

## ***From The Parson's Prologue and Tale***

## ***The Parson's Prologue***

By that<sup>o</sup> the Manciple had his tale all ended,  
The sonne<sup>o</sup> from the south line<sup>o</sup> was descended  
So low, that he nas<sup>o</sup> not to my sight  
Degrees nine and twenty as in height.<sup>1</sup>  
Four of the clock it was, so as I guess,  
5 For elevene foot, or little more or less,  
My shadow was at thilke<sup>o</sup> time as there,  
Of such feet as<sup>o</sup> my lengthe parted<sup>o</sup> were  
In six feet equal of proporcioun.<sup>2</sup>  
Therewith the moones exaltacioun<sup>3</sup>—  
10 I mean Libra—always<sup>o</sup> gan ascend,  
As we were entring at a thropes<sup>o</sup> end.  
For which our Host, as he was wont to gie<sup>o</sup>  
As in this case our jolly company,  
Said in this wise, “Lordinges everichone,<sup>o</sup>  
15 Now lakketh us<sup>o</sup> no tales more than one:  
Fulfilled is my sentence<sup>o</sup> and my decree;  
I trowe<sup>o</sup> that we han heard of each degree;<sup>o</sup>  
Almost fulfilled is all myn ordinaunce.<sup>o4</sup>  
I pray to God, so give him right good chance  
20 That<sup>o</sup> telleth this tale to us lustily.<sup>o</sup>  
Sir priest,” quod he, “artou<sup>o</sup> a vicary,<sup>o</sup>  
Or arte a parson?<sup>5</sup> Say sooth,<sup>o</sup> by thy fay.<sup>o</sup>  
Be what thou be, ne break thou not our play,  
For every man save thou hath told his tale.  
25 Unbuckle and show us what is in thy male!<sup>o</sup>  
For trewely,<sup>o</sup> me thinketh by thy cheere<sup>o</sup>  
Thou shouldest knit up<sup>o</sup> well a great matere.<sup>o</sup>  
Tell us a fable anon,<sup>o</sup> for cockes bones!”<sup>6</sup>  
This parson answerd all atones,<sup>o</sup>  
30 “Thou getest<sup>o</sup> fable none ytold for me,  
For Paul, that writeth unto Timothee,<sup>7</sup>



Repreveth<sup>o</sup> them that waiven  
 soothfastnesse,<sup>o</sup>  
 And tellen fables and such wrecchednesse.  
 Why sholde I sowen<sup>o</sup> draf<sup>o</sup> out of my fest,<sup>o</sup>  
 35 When I may sowen wheat if that me lest?<sup>o</sup>  
 For which I say that if you list<sup>o</sup> to hear  
 Morality and virtuous matere,  
 And then that ye will give me audience,  
 I will full fain,<sup>o</sup> at Christes reverence,  
 40 Do you plesance leveful<sup>o</sup> as I can.  
 But trusteth well, I am a southern man:  
 I can not geeste rum-ram-ruf by letter<sup>8</sup>—  
 Ne, God woot,<sup>o</sup> rhyme holde<sup>o</sup> I but little better.  
 And therefore, if you list, I will not glose;<sup>o</sup>  
 45 I will you tell a merry tale in prose,  
 To knit up all this feast and make an end.  
 And Jesus, for his grace, wit me send  
 To shewe<sup>o</sup> you the way in this voyage  
 Of thilke<sup>o</sup> perfect glorious pilgrimage  
 50 That highte<sup>o</sup> Jerusalem celestial.  
 And if ye vouchesauf,<sup>o</sup> anon<sup>o</sup> I shall  
 Begin upon my tale, for which I pray  
 Telle your avis:<sup>o</sup> I can no better saye.  
 But nonetheless, this meditacioun  
 55 I put it ay<sup>o</sup> under correccioun  
 Of clerkes, for I am not textuel:<sup>o</sup>  
 I take but the sentence,<sup>o</sup> trusteth well.  
 Therefore I make protestacioun<sup>o</sup>  
 That I will stonde<sup>o</sup> to correccioun.”  
 60 Upon this word we han<sup>o</sup> assented soon,  
 For, as it seemed, it was for to doon<sup>o</sup>  
 To enden in some virtuous sentence,<sup>o</sup>  
 And for to give him space and audience;  
 And bade our Host he sholde to him say  
 65 That alle we to tell his tale him pray.

Our Hoste had the wordes for us all:  
"Sir priest," quod he, "now faire you befall:  
Say what you list, and we will gladly heare."  
And with that word he said in this manere:  
70 "Telleth," quod he, "your meditacioun.  
But hasteth you, the sonne<sup>o</sup> will adown.  
Beth fructuous,<sup>o</sup> and that in little space,<sup>o</sup>  
And to do well God sende you his grace."

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Chaucer establishes the afternoon setting with reference to the heavens: the sun declines from its noontime position, shadows lengthen, the moon is at least rhetorically visible (as opposed to the young sun in *The General Prologue*, lines 7–8), and the number of degrees of the setting sun, in line 4, just happens to equal the number of the original pilgrim company (*General Prologue*, line 24).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Chaucer measures time by his shadow's length and by the angular height of the sun above the horizon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The astrological sign in which the moon's influence is dominant.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Host now speaks as if the contract in *The General Prologue* for four tales per pilgrim has been fulfilled or revoked. The game is "almost fulfilled" (line 19); the pilgrims agree to "enden" it (line 63).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A parson holds the benefice of a parish and takes its income; a vicar, appointed at a lesser salary, serves in place of an absentee parson. This parson, however, is exemplary, and stays with his flock.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A euphemism for "God's bones."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In 1 Timothy 1:4.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, tell stories in alliterative measure. The Host may allude to *Piers Plowman* in line 74 ("do well" and "grace"), but

“geeste” here suggests medieval romance—a poem like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Wars of Alexander*, or *The Siege of Jerusalem*.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *by the time that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sun* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meridian*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that same*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as if* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *divided*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *steadily*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *village's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed to lead*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gentlemen every one*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *we are short of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *purpose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *believe* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *from each rank*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plan*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *who* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasingly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are you* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vicar*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the truth* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *faith*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bag*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expression*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *conclude* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *matter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *are getting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reproaches*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *depart from the truth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chaff* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fist*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it pleases me*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *want*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lawful pleasure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knows* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *consider*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *use fancy language*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *show*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *is called*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *agree* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *speak your mind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *constantly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a scholar*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meaning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *public acknowledgment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be subject to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the right thing to do*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *doctrine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *edifying* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a short time*[Return to reference °](#)

# Chaucer's Retraction<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## HERE TAKETH THE MAKERE OF THIS BOOK HIS LEVE

Now pray I to them all that harken<sup>o</sup> this little treatise or read, that if there be anything in it that liketh<sup>o</sup> them, that thereof they thank our Lord Jesu Christ, of whom proceedeth all wit<sup>o</sup> and al goodness. And if there be anything that displease them, I pray them also that they arrette<sup>o</sup> it to the default<sup>o</sup> of myn unconning,<sup>o</sup> and not to my will, that would full fain<sup>o</sup> have said better if I had had conning.<sup>o</sup> For our book saith, "All that is written is written for our doctrine,"<sup>o</sup> <sup>2</sup> and that is my intent. Wherefore I beseech you meekly, for the mercy of God, that ye pray for me that Christ have mercy on me and forgive me my guilts,<sup>o</sup> and namely<sup>o</sup> of my translations and enditings<sup>o</sup> of worldly vanities, the which I revoke in my retractions: as is the book of Troilus;<sup>3</sup> the book also of Fame;<sup>4</sup> the book of the five and twenty Ladies;<sup>5</sup> the book of the Duchess;<sup>6</sup> the book of Saint Valentines day of the Parliament of Birds;<sup>7</sup> the tales of Canterbury,<sup>8</sup> thilke that sounen into sin;<sup>9</sup> the book of the Leoun;<sup>1</sup> and many another book, if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a lecherous lay,<sup>o</sup> that Christ for his great mercy forgive me the sin. But of the translation of Boece *de Consolacione*,<sup>2</sup> and other books of legends of saints, and homilies, and morality and devotion, that thank I our Lord Jesu Christ and his blissful mother, and alle the saints of heaven, beseeching them that they from henceforth unto my lives end send me grace to bewail my guilts and to study to the salvation of my soul, and grant me grace of very penitence, confession, and satisfaction to do in this present life, through the benign grace of him that is king of kings and priest over all priests, that bought us with the precious blood of his heart, so that I may been one of them at the day of doom<sup>o</sup> that shall be saved. *Qui cum Patre*, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Here is ended the book of the tales of Canterbury, compiled by  
Geffrey Chaucer, of whose soul Jesus Christ have mercy. Amen.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The *Retraction* comes after *The Parson's Tale*, at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Romans 15:4.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Troilus and Criseyde*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *The House of Fame*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *The Legend of Good Women*. The extant text describes only ten women.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *The Book of the Duchess*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: *The Parliament of Birds*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *The Canterbury Tales*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Those that tend toward, or are conducive to, sin.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: *The Book of the Lion* has not survived.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (ca. 524 C.E.), translated by Chaucer as his *Boece*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Who with the Father" (Latin), short for "Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God through all the ages."[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *who hear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleases*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *understanding*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attribute*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fault*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *incompetence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *instruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sins*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *especially*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *writings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *song*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °



## LYRICS AND OCCASIONAL VERSE

In addition to his narrative verse, Chaucer wrote lyric poetry on the models of famous French and Italian poets who made lyric into a medieval art form aimed at learned and aristocratic audiences, an audience that included fellow poets. Chaucer also embedded lyric in narrative poetry. As an example of courtly lyric, we print a “song” that Troilus, the hero of Chaucer’s tragedy *Troilus and Criseyde*, makes up about his violent and puzzling emotions after falling in love. The song is actually Chaucer’s translation into rhyme royal of one of Petrarch’s sonnets, written more than a century before Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the sonnet form itself to England. In the fifteenth century, Troilus’s song was sometimes excerpted and included in anthologies of lyric poetry.

Chaucer also wrote moralizing ballades, including the *Balade de bon conseil* (Ballade of Good Advice), sometimes titled “Truth” by modern editors. A ballade is a verse form of three or more stanzas, each with an identical rhyme scheme and the same last line, the refrain. Often a ballade ends with a shorter final stanza, called an *envoy*, in which the poem is addressed or sent to a friend or patron, or, conventionally, to a “prince” or to “princes” in general. The good advice of *Balade de bon conseil* is to abandon worldly pursuits of wealth and power and to concentrate on the pilgrimage that leads to our true home in heaven. There are many copies of the ballade with only this heartfelt advice. The one printed below contains a humorous *envoy*, found in only a single manuscript, addressed to a “Vache” (French for “cow”), who is probably Sir Philip de la Vache.

The single stanza of *Chaucer’s Words to Adam Sciveyn* comically conveys the author’s exasperation at the sloppy work of a professional copyist. *The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse* is a parody of a lover’s complaint to his lady: ladies, like coins, should be golden, and, like purses, they should not be “light” (fickle). The complaint survives both without and with an *envoy*. The addressee in the latter case is the recently crowned Henry IV, who is being

wittily implored to restore payment of Chaucer's annuity, which had been interrupted when the new king deposed Richard II.

## Troilus's Song<sup>1</sup>

If no love is, O God, what feel I so?  
And if love is, what thing and which is he?  
If love be good, from whence cometh my wo?  
If it be wicked, <sup>o</sup> a wonder thinketh me, <sup>o</sup>  
When every torment and adversity  
5 That cometh of him may to me savory <sup>o</sup> thinke, <sup>o</sup>  
For ay <sup>o</sup> thirst I, the more that I drinke.

And if that at my owne lust <sup>o</sup> I bren, <sup>o</sup>  
From whence cometh my wailing and my plainte? <sup>o</sup>  
If harm agree <sup>o</sup> me, whereto plaine <sup>o</sup> I then?  
10 I noot, <sup>o</sup> nor why unwearie <sup>o</sup> that I fainte.  
O quicke <sup>o</sup> death, O sweete harm so quaint, <sup>o</sup>  
How may <sup>o</sup> of thee in me such quantity,  
But if <sup>o</sup> that I consente that it be?

And if that I consent, I wrongfully  
15 Complain: ywis, <sup>o</sup> thus possed <sup>o</sup> to and fro  
All steerless <sup>o</sup> within a boat am I  
Amid the sea, bitwixen <sup>o</sup> windes two,  
That in contrary standen everemo. <sup>o</sup>  
20 Allas, what is this wonder malady?  
For hot of cold, for cold of hot I die.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book 1, lines 400–420. A translation of Petrarch's Sonnet 132, "S'amor non è." [Return to reference 1](#)

# Notes

- °: *miserable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it seems to me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seem* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complaint* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agrees with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not weary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *can there be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tossed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rudderless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evermore* [Return to reference](#) °

## Balade de bon conseil<sup>1</sup>

Flee from the press,<sup>o</sup> and dwell with soothfastnesse.

<sup>o</sup>  
Suffice unto thy thing,<sup>o</sup> though it be small.  
For hoard hath<sup>o</sup> hate, and climbing tikelnesse,<sup>o</sup>  
Press hath envy, and wele blent<sup>o</sup> overal.  
Savour no more than thee bihove shall.<sup>o</sup>  
5 Rule well thyself, that other folk canst rede.<sup>o</sup>  
And trouthe shall deliver,<sup>o</sup> it is no drede.<sup>o</sup>

Tempest thee not all crooked to redresse,<sup>o2</sup>  
In trust of her that turneth as a bal.<sup>3</sup>  
Moche wele stands in little busynesse.<sup>o4</sup>  
10 Beware therefore to sporne<sup>o</sup> against an awl;<sup>o 5</sup>  
Strive not, as doth the crokke<sup>o</sup> with the wall.  
Daunte<sup>o</sup> thyself, that dauntest others' dede.<sup>o</sup>  
And trouthe shall deliver, it is no drede.

That thee<sup>o</sup> is sent, receive in buxumnesse.<sup>o</sup>  
15 The wrestling for this world axeth<sup>o</sup> a fall.  
Here is noon home, here nis<sup>o</sup> but wildernessse.  
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beast, out of thy stall!  
Know thy country, look up, thank God of all.<sup>o</sup>  
20 Hold the high way, and let thy ghost<sup>o</sup> thee lede.  
And trouthe shall deliver, it is no drede.

### *Envoy*

Therefore, thou Vache,<sup>6</sup> leave<sup>o</sup> thyn old  
wrecchednesse;<sup>o</sup>  
Unto the world leave<sup>o</sup> now to be thrall;<sup>o</sup>

Cry him mercy, that of his high goodnesse  
 Made thee of nought,<sup>o</sup> and in especial  
 Draw unto him, and pray in general  
 For thee, and eek for other,<sup>o</sup> heavenly mede.<sup>7</sup>  
 And trouthe shall deliver, it is no drede.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Taking as his theme Jesus's words to his disciples (in John 8:32), "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," Chaucer plays on the triple meaning that the Middle English word *trouthe* seems to have had for him: the religious truth of Christianity, the moral virtue of fidelity, and the philosophical idea of reality. By maintaining one's faith and one's integrity, one rises superior to the vicissitudes of this world and comes eventually to know reality—which is not, however, of this world.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Do not exhaust yourself to straighten all that's crooked.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fortune, who turns like a ball in that she is always presenting a different aspect to people.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Peace of mind stands in little anxiety.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Awl; that is, "don't kick against the pricks," or wound yourself by kicking a sharp instrument.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Probably Sir Philip de la Vache, with a pun on the French for "cow."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reward, with a pun on *meadow*.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *crowd* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *truthfulness* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *let your property suffice* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *greed causes* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *unsteadiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prosperity blinds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is good for you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set (you) free* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doubt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to put to rights*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *activity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kick* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an awl*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *piece of (breakable) crockery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the deeds of others*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that which to you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *humility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asks for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is nothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for everything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give up* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from nothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also for others* [Return to reference](#) °

# Chaucer's Words to Adam Scriveyn<sup>1</sup>

Adam, scriveyn,<sup>o</sup> if ever it thee bifalle  
Boece or Troilus<sup>2</sup> for to writen newe,<sup>o</sup>  
Under thy long locks thou most<sup>o</sup> have the  
scalle<sup>o</sup>  
But after my making thou write more trewe.<sup>3</sup>  
So oft aday<sup>o</sup> I mot<sup>o</sup> thy work renewe,<sup>o</sup>  
5 It to correct and eek to rub and scrape;<sup>4</sup>  
And all is through thy negligence and rape.<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Chaucer had fair copies of longer works made by a professional scribe. This humorous complaint about Adam's sloppy work is written in the verse form of Chaucer's great poem *Troilus and Criseyde*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Troilus and Criseyde*. "Boece": that is, Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Unless you write more accurately what I've composed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Rubbing and scraping are actions necessary to remove ink from parchment.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *scrivener, copyist*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *again*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *may you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scabby skin disease*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *often* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haste* [Return to reference](#) °

# The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse<sup>1</sup>

To you, my purse, and to no other wight<sup>o</sup>  
Complain I, for ye be<sup>o</sup> my lady dear.  
I am so sorry now that ye be light,  
For certes,<sup>o</sup> but<sup>o</sup> ye make me heavy<sup>2</sup> cheere,<sup>o</sup>  
Me were as lief<sup>o</sup> be laid upon my bier.  
5 For which unto your mercy thus I cry:  
Beth<sup>o</sup> heavy again, or elles mot<sup>o</sup> I die.

Now voucheth-safe<sup>o</sup> this day er it be<sup>o</sup> night  
That I of<sup>o</sup> you the blissful sound may hear,  
Or see your color like the sonne<sup>o</sup> bright  
10 That of yellowness hadde never peer.  
Ye be my life, ye be myn hertes steer,<sup>o</sup>  
Queen of comfort and of good company:  
Beth heavy again, or elles mot I die.

Now purse, that been to me my life's light  
15 And saviour as down in this world here,  
Out of this town<sup>3</sup> help me through your might,  
Since that ye will not been my treasurer—  
For I am shaven as nigh as any friar.<sup>4</sup>  
But yet I pray unto your courtesy:  
20 Beth heavy again, or elles mot I die.

## *Envoy to Henry IV*

O conqueror of Brutes Albyoun,<sup>5</sup>  
Which that by line<sup>o</sup> and free election  
Been very<sup>o</sup> king, this song to you I sende,  
And ye that mowen<sup>o</sup> all our harms amende  
25 Have mind upon my supplication!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Clearly written, by implication at least, to Henry IV as the new king of England, after Richard II was deposed in 1399.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Heavy” here means grave or serious, with a pun on its main sense, weighty (weighed down with money).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Probably Westminster, where Chaucer had rented a house.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Shaved as close as any (tonsured) friar, an expression for being broke.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Britain (Albion) was supposed to have been founded by Brutus, the grandson of the Trojan was Aeneas, ancestor of the Romans.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *person, being*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *you are*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expression*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I’d just as soon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *else must*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *agree* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before it is*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *from*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rudder*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lineage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are the true*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *may*[Return to reference °](#)

# JOHN GOWER

## ca. 1330–1408

Of Gower's life relatively little is known: he was certainly a landowner in Kent, and from about 1377 he seems to have been resident in Southwark, just over the river Thames from the City of London. He had close relations with Chaucer, who sent *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1385) to "moral Gower" (5.1856) for "correction." Indeed, as the co-initiator of a new tradition of English poetry, his reputation throughout the fifteenth century was very nearly on a par with that of Chaucer. He was himself more concerned than Chaucer about his own literary posterity, for he took care that texts of his work would be transmitted in finished, stable form. No contemporary poet matches him for linguistic virtuosity, since Gower wrote in three languages. His main poetic works are as follows: the *Mirour de l'omme* (Mirror of Man), finished 1376–78 and written in Anglo-Norman (the dialect of French spoken in England); the Latin *Vox Clamantis* (Voice of the Crier), written substantially before 1386; and the English *Confessio Amantis* (The Lover's Confession), first published in 1390. The *Mirour*, which was the last major work written in Anglo-Norman in England, was addressed primarily to an upper-class audience capable of reading both French and English, and the Latin *Vox* was clearly directed to a highly educated audience. The first version of the *Confessio* was dedicated to Richard II. By the time of the third recension (1392–93), Richard had been replaced by Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV, as the poem's

dedicatee. Despite these dedications to specific and powerful readers, Gower in fact addressed the *Confessio* to all educated readers, both men and women.

*Vox Clamantis* refers to the saint whose name Gower bore, John the Baptist, referred to by all four gospels as “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23) who will prepare the way for the Lord, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3. Gower thus identifies himself with the prophetic voice of John the Baptist as well as the apocalyptic voice of John the Evangelist in the book of Revelation. In keeping with this posture, the *Mirour* and the *Vox* are examples of estates satire, a genre of satire in which the writer addresses and berates each main occupational grouping of society in turn. (For other examples of estates satire, see Chaucer’s *General Prologue*, [pp. 473–93](#), and the Prologue of Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, [pp. 379–82](#).) In the *Vox*, for example, Gower vigorously attacks the peasantry for their part in the English Uprising of 1381.

While Gower wrote as moralist and satirist in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, he changed tack in the *Confessio Amantis*. To be sure, the poem is structured as a moral discourse: the priestly figure Genius hears the confession of the penitent Amans, as if enacting the procedures of the Church’s sacrament of penance (one part of which was a formal, confidential confession to a priest). In seven of the poem’s eight books, Genius hears Amans’s confession concerning a different Deadly Sin—respectively Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, and Lechery. The very names of penitent and confessor themselves suggest, however, that this is no ordinary Christian confession. For Amans (literally “one who loves”) is heard by a “genial” aspect of the psyche, Genius, who is the priest of Venus. Far from condemning Amans for his hopeless subjection to erotic desire, Genius as often as not encourages Amans in his passion, or so it would seem at first. The eighty or so stories Genius tells by way of “correcting” Amans are drawn not from penitential treatises but rather, on the whole, from secular, classical sources, and often from the poetry of Ovid, the Roman poet most identified with love.

But as the *Confessio* progresses, Genius increasingly registers the social and political disasters that result from single-minded pursuit of erotic desire. While never abandoning his “genial” perspective altogether, and while never wishing to wholly repress sexual passion, Genius finally brings Amans around, to the point where Amans reintegrates with the psyche of which he is ideally a part. He finally regains his full identity as “John Gower.” This recovery of identity involves a very moving self-recognition scene in the poem’s finale, in which an aged Gower recognizes his position simultaneously as a lover, a citizen, and a Christian. The poem is not about only one individual, however: Gower’s sexual governance is linked to political governance of the kingdom. Just as Gower must acknowledge yet control the demands of his body, so too must the king both recognize and govern the desires of his subjects.

Many of Genius’s narratives relate stories whose violence entirely overshadows the often pathetic and always hopeless pursuit by Amans of his lady. The narrative of Tereus and Philomela (“Philomene” in Gower’s narrative), drawn from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (6.424–674), is one such frightening text. It tells a story of unremitting domestic violence, relating the “greediness” of rape to the larger concept of greed, the sin treated by Genius in Book 5 of the *Confessio*. A husband (Tereus) rapes and cuts out the tongue of his sister-in-law (Philomela); his wife (Procne) and her sister take their vengeance by murdering and cooking the rapist’s child (Itys). Philomela’s concern is as much for *publication* of the rape as for vengeance. Because her tongue has been cut out, she relies on weaving as a means of writing, to communicate the terror of her experience. Transformed into a chattering bird at the end of the story, she continues to remind humans of Tereus’s disgrace. When Chaucer had recounted the same story in *The Legend of Good Women* (ca. 1386), he omitted the most hair-raising episodes of the Ovidian source. Gower, by contrast, follows the lineaments of Ovid’s narrative fairly closely and does not turn aside from the transformation of suffering women into terrible avengers, as Procne (here “Progne”) murders and butchers her own child. Nor does he

fail to register the horror of rape, as Philomela feels the inescapable weight of Tereus upon her (lines 96–101).

# ***From The Lover's Confession*<sup>1</sup>**

## ***The Tale of Philomene and Tereus***

GENIUS:

Now list,<sup>o</sup> my son, and thou shalt hear,  
So as it hath befall<sup>o</sup> er<sup>o</sup> this  
In loves cause how that it is  
A man to take by<sup>o</sup> ravine<sup>o</sup>  
The preie<sup>o</sup> that is feminine.

5

There was a real<sup>o</sup> noble king,  
And rich of alle worldes thing,  
Which of his propre<sup>o</sup> inheritance  
Athenes had in governance,  
And who so<sup>o</sup> thinke thereupon,  
10 His name was king Pandion.  
Two daughters had he by his wife,  
The which he loved as his life;  
The firste daughter Progne hight,<sup>o</sup>  
And the second, as she well might,  
15 Was cleped<sup>o</sup> faire Philomene,  
To whom fell after muchel tene.<sup>o</sup>  
The father of his purveance<sup>o</sup>  
His daughter Progne would advance  
And gave her unto marriage  
20 A worthy king of high lignage,<sup>o</sup>  
A noble knight eke<sup>o</sup> of his hand,<sup>2</sup>  
So was he kid<sup>o</sup> in every land,  
Of Thrace he highte<sup>o</sup> Tereus;  
The clerk Ovide<sup>3</sup> telleth thus.  
25 This Tereus his wife home lad,<sup>o</sup>



A lusty<sup>o</sup> life with her he had;  
Til it befell upon a tide,<sup>o</sup>  
This Progne, as she lay him beside,  
Bethought her<sup>o</sup> how it mighte be  
30 That she her sister mighte see,  
And to her lord her will<sup>o</sup> she said,  
With goodly wordes and him prayed<sup>o</sup>  
That she to hire<sup>o</sup> mighte go:  
And if it liked him not<sup>o</sup> so,  
35 That then he would himselve wend,<sup>o</sup>  
Or elles<sup>o</sup> by some other send,  
Which might her deare sister greet  
And shape<sup>o</sup> how that they mighten meet.  
Her lord anon<sup>o</sup> to that<sup>o</sup> he heard  
40 Gave his accord, and thus answered:  
"I will," he saide, "for thy sake  
The way after thy sister take  
Myself, and bring her, if I may."  
And she with that, there as he lay,  
45 Began him in her armes clip,<sup>o</sup>  
And kissed him with her softe lip,  
And saide, "Sire, grant mercy."<sup>o</sup>  
And he soon after was ready,  
And took his leave for to go;  
50 In sorry<sup>o</sup> time did he so.  
This Tereus goes forth to ship  
With him and with his fellowship;  
By sea the righte course he nam,<sup>o</sup>  
Into the country til he cam,<sup>o</sup>  
55 Where Philomene was dwelling,  
And of her sister the tiding<sup>o</sup>  
He told, and tho<sup>o</sup> they weren glade,<sup>o</sup>  
And muchel<sup>o</sup> joy of<sup>o</sup> him they made.  
The father and the mother both  
60 To leave their daughter weren loath,<sup>o</sup>  
But if<sup>o</sup> they weren in presence,<sup>o</sup>

And nonetheless at reverence<sup>o</sup>  
Of<sup>o</sup> him that would himself travail,<sup>o</sup>  
They wolden<sup>o</sup> not he sholde fail  
65 Of that he prayed,<sup>o</sup> and gave hire<sup>o</sup> leave:  
And she, that wolde not beleve,<sup>o</sup>  
In all haste made hire<sup>o</sup> yare<sup>o</sup>  
Toward her sister for to fare<sup>o</sup>  
70 With Tereus and forth she went.  
And he, with all his whole intent,<sup>o</sup>  
When she was from her friendes go,<sup>o</sup>  
Assoteth of her love so,<sup>4</sup>  
His eye might he not withhold,  
75 That he ne moste on hire behold;<sup>5</sup>  
And with the sight he gan<sup>o</sup> desire,  
And set his owen<sup>o</sup> heart on fire;  
And fire, when it to tow<sup>o</sup> approacheth,  
To him<sup>o</sup> anon<sup>o</sup> the strength acrocheth,<sup>o</sup>  
80 Till with his<sup>o</sup> heat it be devoured,  
The tow ne may not be succored.<sup>o</sup>  
And so, that tyrant raviner,<sup>o</sup>  
When that she was in his power,  
And he thereto saw time and place,  
85 As he that lost hath alle grace,  
Forgot he was a wedded man,  
And in a rage on her he ran,  
Right as a wolf which takes his prey.  
And she began to cry and pray,  
"O father, o my mother dear,  
90 Now help!" But they ne might it hear,  
And she was of too little might  
Defense against so rude<sup>o</sup> a knight  
To make, when he was so wood<sup>o</sup>  
95 That he no reason understood,  
But held her under in such wise,<sup>o</sup>  
That she ne mighte not arise,

But lay oppressed and disesed,<sup>o</sup>  
As if a goshawk hadde seized  
A bird which dorste<sup>o</sup> not for fere<sup>o</sup>  
100 Remue:<sup>o</sup> and thus this tyrant there  
Beraft<sup>o</sup> hire such thing as men sayn  
May neveremore be yolde<sup>o</sup> again,  
And that was the virginity:  
Of such ravine<sup>o</sup> it was pity.  
105 But when she to herselven<sup>o</sup> cam,<sup>o</sup>  
And of her mischief heede nam,<sup>o</sup>  
And knew how that she was no maid,<sup>o</sup>  
With woeful hearte thus she said:  
"O thou of alle men the worst,  
110 Where was there evere man that dorst<sup>o</sup>  
Do such a deed as thou hast do?<sup>o</sup>  
That day shall fall, I hope so,  
That I shall tell out all my fill,<sup>o</sup>  
And with my speech I shall fulfill<sup>o</sup>  
115 The wide world in breadth and length.  
That<sup>o</sup> thou hast done to me by strength,  
If I among the people dwell,  
Unto the people I shall it tell;  
And if I be withinne wall  
120 Of stones closed, than I shall  
Unto the stones clepe<sup>o</sup> and cry,  
And tellen them thy felony;  
And if I to the woodes wend,<sup>o</sup>  
There shall I tellen tale and end,<sup>o</sup>  
125 And cry it to the birdes out,  
That they shall hear it all about.  
For I so loud it shall rehearse,<sup>o</sup>  
That my voice shall the heavens pierce,  
That it shall sound in goddes<sup>o</sup> ear.  
130 Ha, false man, where is thy fear?  
O more cruel than any beste,<sup>o</sup>  
How hast thou holden thy biheste<sup>o</sup>

Which thou unto my sister madest?  
 O thou, which alle love ungladest,<sup>o</sup>  
 135 And art example of all untrue,  
 Now wolde God<sup>o</sup> my sister knew,  
 Of thine untruth, how that it stood!"  
 And he then as a lion wood<sup>o</sup>  
 With his unhappy handes strong  
 140 Hire<sup>o</sup> caughte by the tresses<sup>o</sup> long,  
 With which he bound there both her armes—  
 That was a feeble<sup>o</sup> deed of armes—  
 And to the ground anon<sup>o</sup> hire<sup>o</sup> cast,  
 And out he clippeth also fast  
 145 Her tongue with a pair of shears,<sup>o</sup>  
 So what with blood and what with tears  
 Out of her eye and of her mouth,  
 He made her faire face uncouth:<sup>o</sup>  
 She lay swounende<sup>o</sup> unto the death,  
 150 There was unnethes<sup>o</sup> any breath;  
 But yet when he her tongue refte,<sup>o</sup>  
 A little part thereof belefte,<sup>o</sup>  
 But she withal no word may soune,<sup>o</sup>  
 But chitre<sup>o</sup> as a bird jargoune.<sup>o</sup>  
 155 And nonetheless that wood<sup>o</sup> hound  
 Her body hent<sup>o</sup> up from the ground,  
 And sent hire there<sup>o</sup> as by his will  
 She should abide in prison still  
 For everemore: but now take heed  
 160 What after fell<sup>o</sup> of this misdeed.  
 When all this mischief was befall,  
 This Tereus—that foule him fall!<sup>o</sup>—  
 Unto his country home he tye;<sup>o</sup>  
 And when he came his palace nigh,<sup>o</sup>  
 165 His wife all ready there him kept.<sup>o</sup>  
 When he hire<sup>o</sup> saw, anon he wept,  
 And that he dide for deceite,  
 For she began to ask him streite,<sup>o</sup>

170 "Where is my sister?" And he said  
That she was dead; and Progne abraid,<sup>o</sup>  
As she that was a woeful wife,<sup>o</sup>  
And stood between her death and life,  
Of that<sup>o</sup> she herde such tiding:<sup>o</sup>  
But for<sup>o</sup> she saw her lord weeping,  
175 She wende<sup>o</sup> not but alle truth,  
And hadde well the more ruth.<sup>o</sup>  
The pearles weren then forsake  
To hire,<sup>6</sup> and blacke clothes take;  
As she that was gentil<sup>o</sup> and kind,  
180 In worship<sup>o</sup> of her sister's mind<sup>o</sup>  
She made a rich enterement,<sup>o</sup>  
For she found non amendement<sup>o</sup>  
To sighen or to sobbe more:  
So was there guile under gore.<sup>7</sup>  
185 Now leave we this king and queen,  
And turn again to Philomene,  
As I began to tellen erst.<sup>o</sup>  
When she came into prison first,<sup>o</sup>  
It thought<sup>o</sup> a kinges daughter strange  
190 To maken so sodein<sup>o</sup> a change  
From wealth unto so great a woe;  
And she began to thinke tho,<sup>o</sup>  
Though she by mouthe nothing prayed,  
Within her hearte thus she said:  
195 "O thou, almighty Jupiter,  
That high sits and lookest fer,<sup>o</sup>  
Thou suffrest many a wrongdoing,  
And yet it is not thy willing.  
To thee there may nothing been hid,  
200 Thou woost<sup>o</sup> how it is me betid:<sup>o</sup>  
I would I hadde not be born,  
For then I hadde not forlorn<sup>o</sup>  
My speech and my virginitee.

205 But, goode lord, all is in thee,<sup>o</sup>  
When thou thereof wolt do<sup>o</sup> vengeance  
And shape my deliverance."  
And ever among this lady wept,  
And thoughte that she nevere kepte<sup>o</sup>  
210 To been a worldes woman more,  
And that she wisheth everemore.  
But oft unto her sister deare  
Her hearte speaks in this manere,  
And said, "Ha, sister, if you knew  
215 Of my estate, you wolde rue,<sup>o</sup>  
I trowe,<sup>o</sup> and my deliverance  
You wolde shape, and do vengeance  
On him that is so false a man:  
And nonetheless, so as I can,  
220 I will you send some tokening,<sup>o</sup>  
Whereof you shall have knowleching<sup>o</sup>  
Of thing, I woot,<sup>o</sup> that shall you loath,<sup>o</sup>  
The which you toucheth<sup>o</sup> and me both."  
And then within a while als tit<sup>o</sup>  
225 She wove a cloth of silk all whit<sup>o</sup>  
With letters and imagery,  
In which was all the felony  
Which Tereus to her hath do;<sup>o</sup>  
And lappede<sup>o</sup> it together tho<sup>o</sup>  
And set her signet<sup>o</sup> thereupon  
230 And sent it unto Progne anon.<sup>o</sup>  
The messenger which forth it bar,<sup>o</sup>  
What it amounteth<sup>o</sup> is not war;<sup>o</sup>  
And nonetheless to Progne he goth<sup>o</sup>  
And prively<sup>o</sup> takes her the cloth,  
235 And went again right as he cam,<sup>o</sup>  
The court of him non heede nam.<sup>o</sup>  
When Progne of Philomene heard,  
She wolde know how that it ferde,<sup>o</sup>  
And openeth that the man hath brought,

240 And woot<sup>o</sup> thereby what hath be wrought<sup>o</sup>  
And what mischief<sup>o</sup> there is befall.<sup>o</sup>  
In swoone then she gan<sup>o</sup> down fall,  
And eft<sup>o</sup> arose and gan to stand,  
245 And eft she took the cloth in hand,  
Beheld the letters and th'images;  
But atte<sup>o</sup> last, "Of such outrages,"  
She says, "weeping is not the boot,"<sup>o</sup>  
And swears, if that she live moot,<sup>o</sup>  
It shall be venged<sup>o</sup> otherwise.  
250 And with that she gan her advise<sup>o</sup>  
How first she might unto hire win<sup>o</sup>  
Her sister, that<sup>o</sup> no man within  
But only they that were swore,<sup>o</sup>  
It sholde know, and shoop<sup>o</sup> therefore  
255 That Tereus nothing it wist;<sup>o</sup>  
And yet right as herselven<sup>o</sup> list,<sup>o</sup>  
Her sister was delivered soon  
Out of prison, and by the moon  
To Progne she was brought by night.  
260 When each of other had a sight,  
In chamber, there<sup>o</sup> they were alone,  
They maden<sup>o</sup> many a pitous moan;<sup>o</sup>  
But Progne most of sorrow made,  
Which saw her sister pale and fade<sup>o</sup>  
265 And speecheless and dishonoured,  
Of that<sup>o</sup> she hadde be defloured;<sup>o</sup>  
And eke<sup>o</sup> upon her lord she thought,  
Of that he so untrewely wrought<sup>o</sup>  
And hadde his espousaile<sup>o</sup> broke.  
270 She made a vow it shall be wroke,<sup>o</sup>  
And with that word she kneeleth down  
Weeping in great devocioun:  
Unto Cupid and to Venus  
She prayed, and saide thenne thus:  
275 "O you, to whom nothing astert<sup>o</sup>

Of love may, for every heart  
You know, as you that been above,  
The god and goddess of love;  
You witen<sup>o</sup> well that evere yit<sup>o</sup>  
280 With all my will and all my wit,  
Since first you shoopen<sup>o</sup> me to wed,  
That I lay with my lord abedde,<sup>o</sup>  
I have be<sup>o</sup> true in my degree,<sup>o</sup>  
285 And evere thoughte for to be,  
And nevere love in other place,  
But all only the king of Thrace,  
Which is my lord and I his wife.  
But now alas this woeful strife!  
That I him thus againward<sup>o</sup> find  
290 The most untrue and most unkind<sup>o</sup>  
That ever in lady armes lay.  
And well I woot<sup>o</sup> that he ne may  
Amend his wrong, it is so great;  
For he too little of me leet,<sup>o</sup>  
295 When he my owne sister took,  
And me that am his wife forsook.”  
Lo, thus to Venus and Cupide  
She prayed, and furthermore she cried  
Unto Apollo the highest,  
300 And said, “O mighty god of rest,  
Thou do vengeance of this debate.  
My sister and all her estate<sup>o</sup>  
Thou woost,<sup>o</sup> and how she hath forlore<sup>o</sup>  
Her maidenhood,<sup>o</sup> and I therefore  
305 In all the world shall bear a blame  
Of that my sister hath a shame,  
That Tereus to her I sent:  
And well thou woost<sup>o</sup> that my intent  
Was all for worship<sup>o</sup> and for good.  
310 O lord that gives the life's food<sup>o</sup>  
To every wight,<sup>o</sup> I pray thee hear



These woeful sisters that been here,  
 And let us not to thee been loath;o  
 We been thine owne women both."  
 315        Thus plaineth Progne and axeth wreche,o  
 And though her sister lacke speche,o  
 To him that alle thinges wooto  
 Her sorrow is not the less hoot:o  
 But he that then had heard them two,  
 320        Him ought have sorrowed everemoo  
 For sorrow which was them between.  
 With signes plainetho Philomene,  
 And Progne says, "It shall be wreke,o  
 That all the world thereof shall speke."  
 325        And Progne thoo sicknesse feigneth,o  
 Whereof unto her lord she plaineth,o  
 And prays she must her chambers keep,o  
 And as hire liketho wake and sleep.  
 And he hire granteth to be so;  
 330        And thus together been they two,  
 That would him but a little good.o  
 Now harko hereafter how it stood  
 Of woeful auntreso that befell:  
 These sisters, that been bothe fello  
 335        (And that was not on them along,o  
 But onliche ono the greate wrong  
 Which Tereus them hadde do)  
 They shoopeno forto venge them tho.o  
 This Tereus by Progne his wife  
 340        A soneo hath, which as his life  
 He loveth, and Ithis he highte:o  
 His mother wisteo well she might  
 Do Tereus no more grief  
 Than slay this child, which was so lief.o  
 345        Thus she, who was, as who sayth,o mad  
 Of woe, which hath her overlad,o

Without insight of motherhead<sup>o</sup>  
Forgot pity and loste dread,  
And in her chamber prively<sup>o</sup>  
350 This child withouten noise or cry  
She slew and hewe<sup>o</sup> him all to pieces.  
And after, with diverse spices  
The flesh, when that it was to hewe,<sup>o</sup>  
She takes, and makes thereof a stew,  
355 With which the father at his mete<sup>o</sup>  
Was served, till he had him eat;  
That he ne wiste<sup>o</sup> how it stood,  
But thus his owene flesh and blood  
Himself devoureth against kind,<sup>o</sup>  
360 As he that was before unkind.<sup>o</sup>  
And then, er<sup>o</sup> that he were arise,  
For<sup>o</sup> that he sholde been agrise,<sup>o</sup>  
To shoven him the child was dead,  
This Philomene took<sup>o</sup> the head  
365 Between two dishes, and all wroth<sup>o</sup>  
Then comen forth the sisters both,  
And setten it upon the board.<sup>o</sup>  
And Progne then began the word,  
And said, "O worst of alle wicke,<sup>o</sup>  
370 Of conscience whom no pricke  
May sterve,<sup>o</sup> lo, what thou hast do!  
Lo, here been now we sisters two;  
O raviner,<sup>o</sup> lo here thy prey,  
With whom so falsliche<sup>o</sup> on the way  
375 Thou hast thy tyrannye wrought.  
Lo, now it is somdel about,<sup>o</sup>  
And bet<sup>o</sup> it shall, for of thy deed  
The world shall evere sing and read  
In remembrance of thy defame:<sup>o</sup>  
380 For thou to love hast done such shame,  
That it shall nevere be foryete."<sup>o</sup>  
With that he sterte<sup>o</sup> up from the mete,<sup>o</sup>

And shoof<sup>o</sup> the board<sup>o</sup> unto the floor,  
And caught a sword anon<sup>o</sup> and swore  
385 That they should of his handes die,  
And they unto the goddes<sup>o</sup> cry  
Begunne with so loud a steven,<sup>o</sup>  
That they were heard unto the heaven;  
And in a twinkling of an eye  
390 The goddes,<sup>o</sup> that the mischief seye,<sup>o</sup>  
Their formes chaungen alle three.  
Each one of them in his degree<sup>o</sup>  
Was turned into birdes kind;<sup>o</sup>  
Diverseliche<sup>o</sup> as men may find,  
395 After th'estate that they were in,  
Their formes were set atwinne.<sup>9</sup>  
And as it telleth in the tale,  
The first into a nightingale  
Was shape, and that was Philomene,  
400 Which in the winter is not seen,  
For thenne been the leaves fall  
And naked been the bushes all.  
For after that she was a brid,<sup>o</sup>  
Her will<sup>o</sup> was evere to been hid,  
405 And forto dwell in privy<sup>o</sup> place,  
Than no man sholde seen her face  
For shame which may not be lassed,<sup>o</sup>  
Of thing that was tofore passed,<sup>o</sup>  
When that she lost her maidenhead:<sup>o</sup>  
410 Forever upon her womanhead,<sup>o</sup>  
Though that the goddes<sup>o</sup> would hire<sup>o</sup> change,  
She thinks, and is the more strange,<sup>o</sup>  
And holds hire close<sup>o</sup> the winters day.  
But when the winter goes away,  
415 And that Nature the goddess  
Will of her owene free<sup>o</sup> largess  
With herbes and with flowers both

The fieldes and the meadows clothe  
And eke<sup>o</sup> the woodes and the greves<sup>o</sup>  
420 Been heled<sup>o</sup> all with greene leaves,  
So that a bird here hide may,  
Between Averil<sup>o</sup> and March and May,  
She that the winter held hire<sup>o</sup> close  
For pure shame and not arose,<sup>o</sup>  
425 When that she sees the bowes thick,  
And that there is no bare stick,  
But all is hid with leaves green,  
To woode comes this Philomene  
And makes her firste yeares<sup>o</sup> flight;  
430 Where, as she singeth day and night,  
And in her song all openly  
She makes her plaint<sup>o</sup> and says, "O why,  
O why ne were I yet<sup>o</sup> a maid?"<sup>o</sup>  
For so these olde wise<sup>o</sup> said,  
435 Which understoode what she meant,  
Her notes been of such intent.<sup>o</sup>  
And eke they said how in her song  
She makes great joy and mirth among,  
And says, "Ha, now I am a brid,<sup>o</sup>  
440 Ha, now my face may been hid:  
Though I have lost my maidenhead,  
Shall no man see my cheekes red."  
Thus medleth<sup>o</sup> she with joye woe  
And with her sorrow mirth also,  
445 So that of loves malady  
She makes diverse melody,  
And says love is a woeful bliss,  
A wisdom which can no man wisse,<sup>o</sup>  
A lusty<sup>o</sup> fever, a wounde soft:  
450 This note she rehearses oft  
To them, who understand her tale.  
Now have I of this nightingale,  
Which erst<sup>o</sup> was cleped<sup>o</sup> Philomene,

455 Told all that ever I wolde mean,<sup>o</sup>  
Both of her form and of her note,  
Whereof men may the story note.<sup>o</sup>  
And of her sister Progne I find,  
How she was turned<sup>o</sup> out of kind<sup>o</sup>  
460 Into a swallow swift of wing,  
Which eke<sup>o</sup> in winter lies swooning,  
There as she may nothing be seen:  
But when the world is waxen<sup>o</sup> green  
And comen is the summer-tide,  
465 Then flies she forth and ginth<sup>o</sup> to chide,  
And chittreth out in her langage<sup>o</sup>  
What falsehood is in marriage,  
And telleth in a manner<sup>o</sup> speech  
Of Tereus' spousebreach.<sup>o</sup>  
470 She will not in the woodes dwell,  
For she would openliche<sup>o</sup> tell;  
And eke for that<sup>o</sup> she was a spouse,  
Among the folk she comes to house,  
To do<sup>o</sup> these wives understand  
The falsehood of their husband,  
475 That they of them beware also,  
For there be many untrue of tho.<sup>o</sup>  
Thus been the sisters birddes both,  
And been toward the men so loath,<sup>o</sup>  
That they ne will of pure shame<sup>o</sup>  
480 Unto no mannes hand be tame;  
For ever it dwelleth in their mind  
Of that they found a man unkind,<sup>o</sup>  
And that was false Tereus.  
If such one be amonges us  
485 I noot,<sup>o</sup> but his condicioun<sup>o</sup>  
Men seyn<sup>o</sup> in every regioun  
Withinne town and eke<sup>o</sup> without  
Now regneth<sup>o</sup> commonly about.  
And nonetheless in remembrance

490 I will declare what vengeance  
The goddes<sup>o</sup> hadden him ordained,  
Of that<sup>o</sup> the sisters hadden plained:<sup>o</sup>  
For anon after he was changed  
And from his owene kinde stranged,<sup>o</sup>  
495 A lappewinge made he was,  
And thus he hoppeth on the grass,  
And on his head there stands upright  
A crest in token<sup>o</sup> he was a knight;  
And yet unto this day men sayth,  
500 A lappewinge hath lore<sup>o</sup> his faith  
And is the bird falsest of all.

Beware my son, er<sup>o</sup> thee so fall;  
For if thou be of such covine,<sup>o</sup>  
To get of<sup>o</sup> love by ravine<sup>o</sup>  
505 Thy lust,<sup>o</sup> it may thee falle<sup>o</sup> thus,  
As it befell of Tereus.

AMANS:  
My father, goddes forebode!<sup>o</sup>  
Me were levere<sup>o</sup> be fortrode<sup>o</sup>  
510 With wild horse and be todraw,<sup>1</sup>  
Er<sup>o</sup> I against love and his law  
Did anything, or<sup>o</sup> loud or still,  
Which were not my lady's will.  
Men say that every love hath dread;<sup>o</sup>  
So follows it that I hire<sup>o</sup> dread,  
515 For I hire love, and who so dreadeth,  
To please his love and serve him needeth.<sup>o</sup>  
Thus may you knowen by this skill<sup>o</sup>  
That no ravine<sup>o</sup> doon I will<sup>o</sup>  
Against her will by such a way;  
520 But while I live, I will obey,  
Abiding<sup>o</sup> on her courtesy,  
If any mercy would her ply.<sup>o</sup>  
Forthy,<sup>o</sup> my father, as of this

525        I woot<sup>o</sup> not I have done amiss:  
But furthermore I you beseech,  
Some other point that you me teach  
And axeth<sup>o</sup> forth, if there be ought,<sup>o</sup>  
That I may be the better taught.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text is drawn from *The English Works of John Gower*, edited by G. C. Macaulay, for the Early English Text Society (1900–1901). Here it has been subject to significant modernization: spelling within the text has been modernized wherever such a change does not interfere with sense or meter.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: With respect to himself (in addition to his high lineage).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Roman poet (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.); Gower's source is his *Metamorphoses* 4.424–674.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Became so besotted with love for her.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Could not keep from looking at her.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, she gave up jewelry.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, deceit under cover. "Gore" is a kind of cloak; the expression is probably proverbial.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In this way, Progne laments and asks for vengeance.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, their forms as birds differed from one another as they had differed in their human estate or condition.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Drawn; to be dragged as a form of punishment.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *listen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seize by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *royal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whoever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forethought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lineage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *known*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *led*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreeable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certain time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if that did not please him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *else*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *embrace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thank you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrowful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *came*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *news*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *glad*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *great* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *were hesitant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attendance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with due respect*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *take the trouble*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wished*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *what he asked* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be left*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *herself* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ready*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *travel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *departed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *began to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *own*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flax (flammable material)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it (fire)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gathers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *its*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *preserved*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ravenger*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rough*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mad*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in such a way*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *distressed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *escape*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deprived*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *restored*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *rape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *herself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *came*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took heed of her misfortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virgin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tell all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the whole story*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repeat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a god's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who makes all love unhappy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I wish by God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cowardly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distorted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fainting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarcely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *removed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was left*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *utter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twitter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chatters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *befell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may evil befall him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *traveled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *near*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awaited*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *directly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *started violently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *news*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *memory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *funeral*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at first*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seemed to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sudden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *far*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened to me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depends on you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wish to do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *token*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be loathsome to you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concerns* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *white* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrapped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wax seal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *means* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aware* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *came* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took no notice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been done* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortune* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *began* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *after* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consider* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *get* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sworn (to silence)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arranged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *herself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desired* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deflowered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wickedly done* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wedding vow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escape* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arranged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in bed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *role* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on the contrary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural and cruel* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prized* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virginity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sustenance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be unfavored* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speech* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forever more* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laments* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenged* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *then* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pretends* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complains* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stay in her bedroom* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it pleases her* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(would do him harm)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chances* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fiercely cunning* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *not their fault* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *on account of* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arranged* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *son* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was named* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knew* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as they say* [Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *motherhood* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secretly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cut* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *all cut up* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *did not know* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contrary to nature* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cruel and unnatural* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *so* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *horrified* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *placed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *angry* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *table* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *evil men* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disturb* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ravenger* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *falsely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *somewhat repaid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *infamy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forgotten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leapt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pushed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *table*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *voice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gods* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortune saw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a bird species*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diversely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bird*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hidden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diminished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before done*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virginity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *womanhood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gods* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reclusive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keeps herself concealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *groves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *April*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *herself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not come out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *annual*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *complaint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *still* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virgin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wise people*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meaning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bird*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mixes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *healthy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *earlier* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remember*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *transformed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her nature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grown*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *openly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repulsed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shyness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural and cruel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *type*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *see*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwells*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on account of what* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamented*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *estranged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *signifying* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treachery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rape* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *forbid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I would rather* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anxiety* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *argument* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rape* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will I commit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waiting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *persuade* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accordingly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything* [Return to reference](#) °

# THOMAS HOCCKLEVE

## ca. 1367–1426

“Debate is now noon bitwix me and my wit,” declares the first-person narrator, one “Thomas,” in line 247 of Thomas Hocckleve’s poem *My Complaint* (1419–20), telling his readers that he is now recovered from mental instability. The text as a whole, however, tells a much more painful story: Hocckleve’s problem is less mental instability and more the fact that his friends think him unstable. Thomas acknowledges that he had a nervous breakdown of sorts five years ago, but now, feeling fully recovered, he remains tortured by his friends’ lack of trust. He’s so distressed by their distrust, in fact, that it is driving him insane.

The real Thomas Hocckleve corresponds closely to the “Thomas” as represented in Hocckleve’s poetry. Hocckleve was a civil servant, working as a skilled clerk in the office of the Privy Seal, which copied and produced documents for the English government. In addition to his bureaucratic tasks, he produced poetic texts of a high order, notably the *Regement of Princes* (1410–13) and the so-called *Series* (ca. 1419–21), a compilation of which *My Complaint* is the first part. He also wrote occasional poems, both subtle petitionary texts (asking for payment) and poetry voicing official policy. He seems to have experienced a period of mental instability in 1414. The detailed evidence for this inference derives only from the *Series*, although it might be relevant that Hocckleve was not paid in fall of 1414.

Hoccleve represents himself in sometimes amusingly, more often painfully, vulnerable ways. He is English poetry's first alienated urban bureaucrat, intellectual, and poet, alienated from his work (for which he is underpaid and paid late, if paid at all) and alienated from his patrons, readers, and friends.



**Patronage.** Thomas Hoccleve, *Regement of Princes*, 1412. Hoccleve presents his poem to Prince Henry. The author is on his knees to his patron, even if the book he presents is less subservient than the image might suggest.

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Being thought less than fully sane is a tricky challenge for both a human being and an author. Staying away from company so as to avoid suspicion merely provokes further suspicion: Thomas's friends will, he reasonably surmises, think him "fallen in again" (line 182). Out in public he overhears the voices of those commenting on his bizarre physical mannerisms; but back home, he retreats to his mirror and searches for signs of instability that he might rectify. In public or alone with his mirror image, Thomas is bounced back and forth by the "peoples imagination" (line 380), what others think or say about him, his public image, subject as it is to the "social media" conditions of early fifteenth-century London. Maybe reading books of consolation is the answer, books that anchor identity in God, not in society. So ends *My Complaint*, but, interestingly, Thomas never gets to the end of that book, and besides, his apparent acceptance of its advice is belied by the complex time sequence of *My Complaint*: he claims to have been pacified by the spiritual book *before* the time of bursting out with the complaint. Only Hoccleve's own text might do the trick here, by reintegrating him with his readers, unless of course they examine his work diagnostically, looking for signs in his poetry of uncured madness.

*My Complaint* is a searing expression of, and attempted self-therapy for, melancholia. This is the "thoughtful malady" (line 21), or what we might call depression. Hoccleve represents the author in a state of paranoid self-scrutiny, his own voice invaded by the distrustful remarks of his acquaintances and readers. The painful predicament of someone who has fallen out of favor and become an outcast within a claustrophobic social scene points forward to early modern court satire. It might also point us to that other striking misfit in late medieval English writing, Hoccleve's contemporary Margery Kempe, whose distinctiveness is either saintly or sad.



# My Complaint<sup>1</sup>

After that harvest<sup>o</sup> inned<sup>o</sup> had his sheaves,  
And that the brown season of Michelmesse<sup>2</sup>  
Was come, and gan<sup>o</sup> the trees rob of her<sup>o</sup> leaves,  
That green had been and in lusty<sup>o</sup> fresshnesse,  
And hem into color of yelownesse  
5 Had dyed<sup>o</sup> and down throwen underfoote,  
That chaunge sank into myn herte<sup>o</sup> roote.

For freshly brought it to my remembrance  
That stableness in this worlde is ther none.  
Ther is nothing but change and variance.<sup>o</sup>  
10 How wealthy a man be or wel begun,<sup>o</sup>  
Endure it shall not. He shall it forgoon.<sup>o</sup>  
Death underfoot shall him thruste adown.<sup>o</sup>  
That is every wightes<sup>o</sup> conclusion,

Which for to weyve<sup>o</sup> is in no mannes might,  
15 How<sup>o</sup> rich he be, strong, lusty,<sup>o</sup> fresh and gay.  
And in the end of November, upon a night,  
Sighinge<sup>o</sup> sore, as I in my bed lay,  
For this and other thoughtes which many a day,  
Before I took, sleep cam noon in myn eye,  
20 So vexed me the thoughtful maladye.<sup>o</sup>

I saw well, sithen<sup>o</sup> I with sickness last  
Was scourged, cloudy hath been the favor  
That shone on me full bright<sup>o</sup> in times past.  
The sun abated,<sup>o</sup> and the darke<sup>o</sup> shower  
25 Hilded<sup>o</sup> down right on me, and in langor<sup>o</sup>  
Me made swim, so that my spirit  
To live no lust<sup>o</sup> had, ne no delight.

30 The grief about myn heart so sore swal<sup>o</sup>  
And bolned<sup>o</sup> ever to and to<sup>o</sup> so sore  
That nedes<sup>o</sup> oute<sup>o</sup> I muste therewithal.<sup>o</sup>  
I thought I nolde<sup>o</sup> kepe it close<sup>o</sup> no more,  
Ne let it in me for to elde<sup>o</sup> and hore,<sup>o</sup>  
And for to preve<sup>o</sup> I cam<sup>o</sup> of a woman,  
35 I burst out on the morrow<sup>o</sup> and thus began.

*Here endeth my prologue and foloweth my compleint.*

Almighty God, as liketh<sup>o</sup> his goodnesse,  
Visiteth<sup>o</sup> folk alday,<sup>o</sup> as men may see,  
With loss of good and bodily sicknesse,  
And among other,<sup>o</sup> he forgot not me.  
Witness upon the wild infirmity  
40 Whiche that I had, as many a man well knew,  
And which me out of myself cast and threw.

It was so knowen to the peple and couthe<sup>o</sup>  
That counseil<sup>o</sup> was it noon, ne not be might.  
How it with me stood was in every mannes mouthe,  
45 And that ful sore<sup>o</sup> my friends affright.<sup>o</sup>  
They for myn health pilgrimages hight,<sup>o</sup>  
And sought hem, some on horse and some on foot,  
God yeld it hem,<sup>o</sup> to gete me my boot.<sup>o</sup>

50 But although the substance of my memory  
Went to play as for a certain space,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet<sup>o</sup> the lord of virtue, the king of glory,  
Of his high might and his benigne grace,  
Made it for to return into the place  
Whence it came,<sup>o</sup> whiche at Alle Hallowmess<sup>3</sup>  
55 Was five year,<sup>o</sup> neither more ne less.

And ever sithen,<sup>o</sup> thanked be God our Lord

Of<sup>o</sup> his good and gracious reconciliation,  
My wit and I have been of such accord<sup>o</sup>  
As we were or<sup>o</sup> the alteration  
60 Of it was, but by my salvation,  
Sith<sup>o</sup> that time have I been sore set on fire  
And lived in great torment and martire.<sup>o</sup>

For though that my wit were home come again,  
Men would it not so understand or take.<sup>o</sup>  
65 With me to deal hadden they disdain.<sup>o</sup>  
A riotous<sup>o</sup> person I was and forsake.<sup>o</sup>  
Min olde frendship was al overshake.<sup>o</sup>  
No wight<sup>o</sup> with me list make daliance.<sup>o</sup>  
70 The world me made a strange countinace,<sup>o</sup>

Which that myn herte sore gan to torment,  
For ofte whan I in Westminster Halle,  
And eke<sup>o</sup> in London, among the press<sup>o</sup> went,  
I saw the cheer abaten<sup>o</sup> and apalle<sup>o</sup>  
Of hem<sup>o</sup> that weren wont<sup>o</sup> me for to call  
75 To company.<sup>o</sup> Her<sup>o</sup> head they cast awry,<sup>o</sup>  
Whan I hem met, as<sup>o</sup> they not me sy.<sup>o</sup>

As said is in the Psalter might I sey,  
'They that me saw, fledden away from me.'<sup>4</sup>  
Forgotten I was all out of mind away,  
80 As he that dead was from<sup>o</sup> heart's charity.<sup>o</sup>  
To a lost vessel likened might I be,  
For many a wight<sup>o</sup> aboute me dwelling<sup>o</sup>  
Heard I me blame and put in dispraising.<sup>o</sup>

Thus spake many one and said by<sup>o</sup> me:  
85 'Although from him his sickness savage<sup>o</sup>  
Withdrawn and passed as for a time be,  
Resort<sup>o</sup> it will, namely<sup>o</sup> in such age  
As he is of,' and thanne my visage<sup>o</sup>



90 Began to glow<sup>o</sup> for the woe and fear.  
Tho<sup>o</sup> wordes, hem unwar,<sup>o</sup> came to myn ear.

'Whan passing<sup>o</sup> heat is,' quod they, 'trusteth<sup>o</sup> this,  
Assail him will again that malady.'  
And yet, parde,<sup>o</sup> they token hem amiss.<sup>o</sup>  
None effect at all took her prophecy.<sup>o</sup>  
95 Many summers been<sup>o</sup> passed sithen<sup>o</sup> remedy  
Of that God of his grace<sup>o</sup> me purveyed.<sup>o</sup>  
Thanked be God, it shoop<sup>o</sup> not as they seyde.

What<sup>o</sup> falle shal,<sup>o</sup> what men so deem<sup>o</sup> or guess,  
To him that woot<sup>o</sup> every hertes secree,<sup>o</sup>  
100 Reserved is. It is a lewednesse<sup>o</sup>  
Men wiser hem pretende<sup>o</sup> than they be,  
And no wight<sup>o</sup> knoweth, be it he or she,  
Whom, how, ne when God will him visite.<sup>o</sup>  
It happeth often when men wene<sup>o</sup> it lite.<sup>o</sup>  
105

Sometime I wende<sup>o</sup> as lite<sup>o</sup> as any man  
For to han fall<sup>o</sup> into that wildenesse,  
But God, whan him liste,<sup>o</sup> may, will and can  
Health withdraw and send a wight<sup>o</sup> sicknesse.  
Though man be wel this day, no sikernes<sup>o</sup>  
110 To him bihight<sup>o</sup> is that it shall endure.  
God hurt now can, and nowe heal and cure.

He suffreth<sup>o</sup> long but at the last he smit.<sup>o</sup>  
Whan that a man is in prosperity,  
To dread a fall coming it is a wit.<sup>o</sup>  
115 Whoso<sup>o</sup> that taketh heed oft may see  
This worldes change and mutability  
In sundry wise,<sup>o</sup> how nedeth not expresse.<sup>o</sup>  
To my matter straight<sup>o</sup> will I me dresse.<sup>o</sup>

120 Men seiden I loked as<sup>o</sup> a wilde steer,<sup>o</sup>

And so my look about I gan to throw.°  
Myn head to high, another said, I beer.°  
'Full buckissh° is his brain, well may I trow.'°  
And said the third, 'And apt is° in the row°  
To sit of hem that a reasonless reed°  
125 Can give: no sadness° is in his heed.'

Changed had I my pace,° some seiden eke,°  
For here and there forth stirte° I as a roe,°  
None abode,° none arrest,° but al brainseke.°  
Another spake and of° me said also,  
130 My feet weren ay waving° to and fro,  
When that I stonde° should and with men talke,  
And that myn eyen° soughten° every halke.°

I leide an ear ay to° as I by went  
And herde al, and thus in myn heart I caste:°  
135 'Of long abidinge here I may me repent.  
Lest that of hastiness I at the laste  
Answer amiss, best is hence hie faste,°  
For if I in this press° amiss me gye,°  
To harm wole it me turn and to folie.'°  
140

And this I deemed° well and knew well eke,°  
Whatso° that ever I should answer or seie,°  
They wolden not han holde° it worth a leke.°  
Forwhy,° as° I had lost my tounge keie,°  
Kepte I me close,° and trussed me my weie,°  
145 Dropping° and heavy and all woe bistad.°  
Small cause had I, methoughte, to be glad.

My spirits laboureden ever ful busily  
To painte countenance,° cheer and look,°  
For° that men spake of me so wondrously,  
150 And for the very shame and fear I qwook.°  
Though° myn herte had be dippid° in the brook

It wet and moist was ynow<sup>o</sup> of my swoot,<sup>o</sup>  
Which was now frosty cold, nowe fiery hoot.<sup>o</sup>

155 And in my chamber at home whan that I was  
Myself alone I in this wise<sup>o</sup> wrought.<sup>o</sup>  
I straight<sup>o</sup> unto my mirror and my glass,<sup>o</sup>  
To look how that me of my chere thought,<sup>o</sup>  
If any<sup>o</sup> other<sup>o</sup> were it than it ought,  
For fain<sup>o</sup> would I, if it not had been right,  
160 Amended<sup>o</sup> it to my cunning<sup>o</sup> and might

Many a saut<sup>o</sup> made I to this mirror,  
Thinking, 'If that I look in this manere  
Amonge folk as I now do, noon<sup>o</sup> error  
Of suspect<sup>o</sup> look may in my face appere.  
165 This countenance,<sup>o</sup> I am sure, and this chere,<sup>o</sup>  
If I it forth<sup>o</sup> use, is nothing<sup>o</sup> reprevable<sup>o</sup>  
To hem that han conceites<sup>o</sup> resonable.'

And therwithal<sup>o</sup> I thoughte thus anoon:<sup>o</sup>  
'Men in her<sup>o</sup> owne cas<sup>o</sup> been blind alday,<sup>o</sup>  
170 As I have herde seie many a day agoon,<sup>o</sup>  
And in that same plight<sup>o</sup> I stonde may.  
How shall I do? Which is the beste way  
My troubled spirit for to bring in rest?  
If I wiste<sup>o</sup> how, fain<sup>o</sup> would I do the best.'  
175

Sithen<sup>o</sup> I recovered was, have I full oft  
Cause had of anger and impacience,  
Where I borne have it easily<sup>o</sup> and soft,<sup>o</sup>  
Suffring<sup>o</sup> wrong be done to me, and offence,  
And not answered again,<sup>o</sup> but kept silence,  
180 Lest that men of me deem<sup>o</sup> would, and sein,  
'See how this man is fallen in<sup>o</sup> again.'

As that I ones<sup>o</sup> from Westminster<sup>5</sup> cam,

Vexed full grievously with thoughtful hete,  
Thus thought I, 'A greet fool I am,  
185 This pavement adaies thus to bete,  
And in and out laboure fast and swete,  
Wondringe and heavinesse to purchase,  
Sithen I stand out of all favor and grace.'

And than thought I on that other side,  
190 'If that I not be seen among the press,  
Men deme will that I myn hede hide,  
And am worse than I am, it is no lees.  
O Lorde, so my spirit was resteless.  
I soughte reste and I not it fonde,  
195 But ay was trouble ready at myn honde.

I may not let a man to imagine  
Far above the moon, if that him liste.  
Thereby the soth he may not determine,  
But by the preef been thinges known and wiste.  
200 Many a doom is wrapped in the miste.  
Man by his dedes and not by his lookes  
Shall knowen be. As it is written in bookes,

By taste of fruit men may wel wite and knowe  
What that it is. Other preef is ther none.  
205 Every man woote well that, as that I trowe.  
Right so, they that deemen my wit is gone,  
As yet this day there deemeth many one  
I am not well, may, as I by hem go,  
Taste and assay if it be so or no.  
210

Uppon a look is harde men hem to ground  
What a man is. Therby the soth is hid.  
Whether his wittes sick been or sound,  
By countenance is it not wist ne kid.  
215 Though a man hard have once been bitid,

God shield<sup>o</sup> it should on him continue alway.  
By communinge<sup>o</sup> is the best assay.<sup>o</sup>

220 I mene, to commune<sup>o</sup> of thinges mene,<sup>o</sup>  
For I am but right lewed,<sup>o</sup> doubtless,  
And ignorant. My cunning<sup>o</sup> is ful lene.<sup>o</sup>  
Yet homely reason<sup>o</sup> know I neverethless.  
Not hope<sup>o</sup> I founden be<sup>o</sup> so reasonless<sup>o</sup>  
As men deemen.<sup>o</sup> Marie,<sup>o</sup> Crist forbede!<sup>o</sup>  
I can<sup>o</sup> no more. Preve<sup>o</sup> may the dede.<sup>o</sup>

225 If a man once falle in drunkenesse,  
Shall he continue therein everemo<sup>o</sup>?  
Nay, though a man do in drinking excesse<sup>o</sup>  
So ferforth<sup>o</sup> that not speak he ne can, ne go,  
And his wits well nigh been refte<sup>o</sup> him fro,  
230 And buried in the cup; he afterward  
Cometh to himself again, else were it<sup>o</sup> hard.

Right so, though that my wit were a pilgrim,  
And wente fer<sup>o</sup> from home, he cam<sup>o</sup> again.  
God me devoided<sup>o</sup> of the grievous venim  
That had infected and wilded<sup>o</sup> my brain.  
235 See how the courteous leche<sup>o</sup> most sovereign  
Unto the sike yeveth<sup>o</sup> medicine  
In need, and him releveth of his grievous pine.<sup>o</sup>

Now let this pass. God woot,<sup>o</sup> many a man  
Semeth ful wise by countenance<sup>o</sup> and chere<sup>o</sup>  
240 Which, and<sup>o</sup> he tasted<sup>o</sup> were what he can,<sup>o</sup>  
Men mighten liken<sup>o</sup> him to a fooles pere,<sup>o</sup>  
And some man looketh in foltisshe manere<sup>o</sup>  
As to the outward doom<sup>o</sup> and jugement,  
That, at the prefe,<sup>o</sup> discreet<sup>o</sup> is and prudent.  
245

But algates,<sup>o</sup> how so<sup>o</sup> be my countenance,

Debate<sup>o</sup> is now noon bitwix<sup>o</sup> me and my wit,  
 Although that there were a disseverance,<sup>o</sup>  
 As for a time, bitwixe me and it.  
 The greater harme is myn, that never yit<sup>o</sup>  
 250 Was I wel lettred,<sup>o</sup> prudent and discreet.<sup>o</sup>  
 Ther never stood yet wise man on my feet.

The soth<sup>o</sup> is this, suche conceit<sup>o</sup> as I had  
 And understanding, al<sup>o</sup> were it but<sup>o</sup> small,  
 Before that my wittes weren unsad,<sup>o</sup>  
 255 Thanked be our Lorde Jhesu Christ of all,<sup>o</sup>  
 Such have I now, but blow<sup>o</sup> is nigh overall<sup>o</sup>  
 The reverse, wherethrough<sup>o</sup> much is my mourning,  
 Which causeth me thus sigh in complaining.

Sithen<sup>o</sup> my good fortune hath changed hir cheer,<sup>o</sup>  
 260 High tyme is me<sup>o</sup> to creep into my grave.  
 To live joylees,<sup>o</sup> what do I here?  
 I in myn herte can no gladness have.  
 I may but small say but if<sup>o</sup> men deem<sup>o</sup> I rave.  
 Sithen<sup>o</sup> other thing than woe may I noon gripe,<sup>o</sup>  
 265 Unto<sup>o</sup> my sepulcher am I now ripe.<sup>o</sup>

My wele,<sup>o</sup> adieu, farewell, my good fortune.  
 Oute of youre tables me planed<sup>o</sup> han ye.  
 Sithen welnigh any wight<sup>o</sup> for to commune<sup>o</sup>  
 With me loathe is, farewell prosperity.  
 270 I am no longer of your livery.  
 Ye have me put out of your retenance.<sup>o</sup>  
 Adieu, my good aventure<sup>o</sup> and good chaunce.<sup>o</sup>

And aswith<sup>o</sup> after, thus bithought I me:<sup>o</sup>  
 275 'If that I in this wise me despair,  
 It is purchase of more adversity.  
 What nedeth it<sup>o</sup> my feeble wit appair,<sup>o</sup>  
 Sith<sup>o</sup> God hath made myn healthe home repair,<sup>o</sup>

280 Blessed be he. And what<sup>o</sup> men deem<sup>o</sup> and speke,  
Suffer<sup>o</sup> it think I and me not on me wreke.<sup>o</sup>

But somdel<sup>o</sup> had I rejoycing amonge,<sup>o</sup>  
And a gladness also in my spirite,  
That though the people took hem<sup>o</sup> miss<sup>o</sup> and  
    wonge,<sup>o</sup>  
Me deeming<sup>o</sup> of my sicknesse not quite,<sup>o</sup>  
285 Yet for they complained<sup>o</sup> the heavy plite<sup>o</sup>  
That they had seen me in with tenderness  
Of hertes cherte,<sup>o</sup> my grief was the less.

In hem putte I no default<sup>o</sup> but oon.<sup>o</sup>  
That I was whole, they not ne deme<sup>o</sup> coude,<sup>o</sup>  
290 And day by day they saw me by hem goon<sup>o</sup>  
In heat and cold, and neither still or lowde<sup>o</sup>  
Knew they me do suspectly.<sup>o</sup> A derke<sup>o</sup> clowde  
Hir<sup>o</sup> sight obscured withinne and withoute,  
And for all that were<sup>o</sup> ay<sup>o</sup> in such a doute.<sup>o</sup>

295 Axed<sup>o</sup> han they full oft esith,<sup>o</sup> and freined<sup>o</sup>  
Of my fellowes of the Privy Seel,<sup>6</sup>  
And prayed hem to telle hem with heart unfained,<sup>o</sup>  
How it stood with me, whether evil or well.  
And they the sothe<sup>o</sup> tolde hem every del,<sup>o</sup>  
300 But they helden her<sup>o</sup> wordes not but lees.<sup>o</sup>  
They mighten as well have holden her peace.<sup>o</sup>

This troublly<sup>o</sup> life hath all too long endured.  
Not have I wist<sup>o</sup> how in my skin to tourne.  
But now myself to myself have ensured<sup>o</sup>  
305 For no such wondring<sup>o</sup> after this to mourne.<sup>o</sup>  
As long as my life shall in me sojourne<sup>o</sup>  
Of such imagining I not ne recche.<sup>o</sup>  
Let hem deem<sup>o</sup> as hem list<sup>o</sup> and speak  
    and drecche.<sup>o</sup>

This other day a lamentacioun  
Of a wooful man in a book<sup>z</sup> I sy,<sup>o</sup>  
310 To whom wordes of consolacioun  
Reason yaf<sup>o</sup> speking effectuelly,<sup>o</sup>  
And well eased myn herte was thereby,<sup>o</sup>  
For when I had a while in the book read,  
315 With the spech of Reason was I well fed.<sup>o</sup>

The heavy<sup>o</sup> man woeful and anguishous<sup>o</sup>  
Complained in this wise, and thus said he:  
'My life is unto me full encombrous,<sup>o</sup>  
For whither or unto what place I flee,  
My wickednesses evere followen me,  
320 As men may see the shadow a body sue,<sup>o</sup>  
And in no manner I may hem eschewe.<sup>o</sup>

'Vexation of spirit and torment  
Lack I right none. I have of hem plenty.  
Wonderly<sup>o</sup> bitter is my taste and scent.<sup>o</sup>  
325 Woe<sup>o</sup> be the time of my nativity.  
Unhappy man, that ever should I be.  
O death, thy stroke a salve<sup>o</sup> is of sweetnesse  
To hem that liven in such wrecchednesse.

'Greater plesance were it me<sup>o</sup> to die,  
330 By many fold<sup>o</sup> than for to live so.  
Sorrows so many in me multiplie  
That my life is to me a very foe.  
Comforted may I not be of my woe.  
Of my distresse see none end I can.  
335 No force<sup>o</sup> how soon I stinte<sup>o</sup> to be a man.'

Thanne spake Reason, 'What meneth all this fare?<sup>o</sup>  
Though wealth be not friendly to thee, yit<sup>o</sup>  
Out of thine herte voide<sup>o</sup> woe and care.'



340 'By what skill, o how, and by what reed o and wit, o  
Said this woeful man, 'might I doon o it?'  
'Wrestle,' quod Resoun, 'ayein o heavynesse o  
Of the worlde, troubles, suffringe and duresse. o

'Biholde how many a man suffreth disease,  
As great as thou and alaway o grettere,  
345 And though it hem o pinche sharply and sieze,  
Yet patiently they it suffer and bere. o  
Think hereon and the less it shall thee dere. o  
Such suffrance is of mannes guilt cleansing, o  
And hem enableth to o joy everlasting.

350 'Woe, heaviness and tribulation  
Common aren o to men all, and profitable.  
Though grievous be mannes temptation,  
It sleeth o man not. To hem that o ben suffrable o  
And to whom Goddes stroke is acceptable  
355 Purveyed o joy is, for God woundeth tho o  
That he ordeined hath to bliss to go.

'Gold purged o is, thou seest, in the furneis, o  
For the finer and cleaner o it shall be.  
Of thy disease the weighte and the peis o  
360 Bear lightly, o for God, to prove o thee,  
Scourged thee hath with sharpe adversite.  
Not grouche o and say, "Why sustain I this?"  
For if thou do, thou thee takest amiss. o

365 'But thus thou shouldest thinke in thine herte,  
And say, "To thee, lord God, I have aguilte o  
So sore o I moot o for myn offences smerte, o  
As I am worthy. o O Lorde I am spilte, o  
But o thou to me thy mercy grante wilte.  
I am ful sure thou mayst it not deny.  
370 Lord, I me repent, and I thee mercy cry.' " o

Longer I thought read have<sup>o</sup> in this book,  
But so it shope<sup>o</sup> that I ne might naught.<sup>o</sup>  
He that it oughte<sup>o</sup> again it to him took,  
Me of his haste unaware.<sup>o</sup> Yet have I caught<sup>o</sup>  
375 Some of the doctrine by Reason taught  
To the man, as above have I said.  
Well thereof<sup>o</sup> I holde me full well apaid,<sup>o</sup>

For evere sithen<sup>o</sup> set have I the less  
By the peoples imagination,  
380 Talkinge this and that of my sickness  
Which came of<sup>o</sup> Goddes visitation.  
Might I have be<sup>o</sup> found in probation<sup>o</sup>  
Not grouching<sup>o</sup> but han take it in souffrance,<sup>o</sup>  
Wholesome and wise had be<sup>o</sup> my  
385 governance.<sup>o</sup>

Farewell my sorrow, I cast it to the cock.  
With patience I henceforth think unpick<sup>o</sup>  
Of such thoughtful disease<sup>o</sup> and woe the lock,  
And let hem<sup>o</sup> out that han me made to sike.<sup>o</sup>  
Hereafter our Lorde God may, if him like,<sup>o</sup>  
390 Make all myn old affeccoun<sup>o</sup> resort,<sup>o</sup>  
And in hope of that will I me comfort.

Thorough<sup>o</sup> Godes just doom<sup>o</sup> and his jugement  
And for my best,<sup>o</sup> now I take and deeme,<sup>o</sup>  
395 Gave that good lorde me my punishment.  
In wealth I took of him none heed or yeme,<sup>o</sup>  
Him for to please and him honor and queme,<sup>o</sup>  
And he me gave a bone on for to gnawe,  
Me to correct and of him to have awe.

He gave wit and he took it away  
400 When that he saw that I it misdispente,<sup>o</sup>

And gave again when it was to his pay<sup>o</sup>  
He granted me my guiltes to repente,  
And hence forward to sette myn entente<sup>o</sup>  
Unto his deity to do plesaunce,<sup>o</sup>  
405 And to amend my sinful governaunce.<sup>o</sup>

Laud<sup>o</sup> and honor and thank unto thee be,  
Lord God, that salve art to all heavinesse.<sup>o</sup>  
Thank of<sup>o</sup> my wealth and myn adversity.  
Thank of myn elde<sup>o</sup> and of my sicknesse.<sup>o</sup>  
410 And thank be to thine infinite goodnesse  
And thy giftes and benefices<sup>o</sup> alle,  
And unto thy mercy and grace I calle.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text is drawn from Thomas Hoccleve, "*My compleinte*" and *Other Poems*, edited by Roger Ellis (2001). Obsolete letter forms have been modernized. Spelling has also been modernized so as to facilitate sense, wherever this does not interfere with meter or rhyme. Ellis's glosses have been preserved, with some modification. Readers should aim to produce an iambic pentameter for each line. Some lines demand variation on that default pattern.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Michaelmas falls on September 29. Note the melancholy inversion of the opening of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (see p. 473).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: All Hallowmas, or All Saints Day, falls on November 1.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Psalm 31; a psalter is a book of psalms and perhaps other devotional material.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Westminster, a city separate from London proper; Hoccleve's workplace as a royal bureaucrat.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Hoccleve was a clerk in the Office of the Privy Seal, one of three great bureaucratic offices, responsible for the production and issuing of many kinds of official documents. Hoccleve himself produced a set, or "Formulary," of almost 900 model Privy Seal documents.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The book can be identified as the *Synonyma* of Isidore of Seville (d. 636).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *autumn* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brought in* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proceeded* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *their* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *died* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heart's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *alteration* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prosperous* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lose* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thrust down* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *person's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *avoid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *however* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vigorous* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sighing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *melancholia* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *very brightly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *diminished* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dark* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poured* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *depression* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *swelled* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *swelled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more and more* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessarily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burst out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *age* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grow gray* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was born* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *next day* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleases* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *visits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *others* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *familiar* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promised* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward them for it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *health* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for a time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *five years ago* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as well agreed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accept* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scorn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dissolute* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *abandoned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shaken off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleased to converse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the face of a stranger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowd*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faces grow dejected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to join them* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *their* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *far from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in my vicinity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *and censure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wild*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *return* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *especially*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *face*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without their knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extreme* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by heaven* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were wrong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *their prophecy was wrong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *by his grace* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shall happen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an ignorance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to pretend themselves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *visit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *little* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to have fallen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promised* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endures* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smites* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mark of wisdom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whoever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *different ways* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to declare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *address myself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *looked like* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ox* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cast* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very like a buck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(he) is fit* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: (*company*)[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *senseless piece of advice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soundness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *step* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moreover*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *started* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roebuck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stopping* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brainsick*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concerning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moving*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stand (still)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sought* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corner (of room)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave an ear to this constantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reflected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to depart quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowd* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misbehave myself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *and (make me) a laughingstock*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *say*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leek*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *therefore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tongue's key*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *private* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took myself off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drooping* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woebegone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *face*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shook*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been plunged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with my sweat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot as fire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *way* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went directly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mirror*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *my expression seemed to me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in any way* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *different*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *improved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *according to my skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leap*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspicious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abroad* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *objectionable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understanding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thereupon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *their* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *situations* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *danger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *calmly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enduring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(to his sickness)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burning thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beat (upon)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncertainty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throng*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prevent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from imagining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proof* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hidden (as) in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proof*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *many a one* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *test* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it is* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for men to determine* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truth* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wits* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *known* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *made public* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *has once experienced hardship* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forbid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *conversation* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *test* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *converse* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ordinary* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *uneducated* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knowledge* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *very slight* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ordinary reasoning* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *think* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to be found* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *judge* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *St. Mary* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forbid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *know* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prove this* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *evermore* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *drink to excess* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *far* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are almost all taken* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *otherwise it would be* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *far* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *returned* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *emptied* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *maddened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sick man gives*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tested* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *like a fool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *external estimation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *when tested* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rational*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all the same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *however*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disagreement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *educated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliberative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thoughts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unstable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearly everywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *look*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for me*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *joyless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grasp*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *removed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *retinue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fortune* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reflected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *need is there* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to weaken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to endure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to avenge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *somewhat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between whiles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amiss*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrongly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judging* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *freed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regretted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found no fault* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: judge [Return to reference](#) °
- °: could [Return to reference](#) °
- °: go [Return to reference](#) °
- °: silent or speaking [Return to reference](#) °
- °: to act suspiciously [Return to reference](#) °
- °: dark [Return to reference](#) °
- °: their [Return to reference](#) °
- °: they were [Return to reference](#) °
- °: always [Return to reference](#) °
- °: uncertainty [Return to reference](#) °
- °: asked [Return to reference](#) °
- °: often [Return to reference](#) °
- °: inquired [Return to reference](#) °
- °: sincere [Return to reference](#) °
- °: truth [Return to reference](#) °
- °: completely [Return to reference](#) °
- °: reckoned their [Return to reference](#) °
- °: nothing but lies [Return to reference](#) °
- °: kept their peace [Return to reference](#) °
- °: troublesome [Return to reference](#) °
- °: known [Return to reference](#) °
- °: guaranteed [Return to reference](#) °
- °: puzzlement [Return to reference](#) °
- °: to be fretful [Return to reference](#) °
- °: remain [Return to reference](#) °
- °: care [Return to reference](#) °
- °: judge [Return to reference](#) °
- °: please [Return to reference](#) °
- °: speculate [Return to reference](#) °
- °: saw [Return to reference](#) °
- °: gave [Return to reference](#) °
- °: to good effect [Return to reference](#) °
- °: by it [Return to reference](#) °
- °: nourished [Return to reference](#) °
- °: depressed [Return to reference](#) °
- °: anguished [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *burdensome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *follow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avoid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amazingly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accursed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ointment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure would it be for me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many times over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *matter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behavior*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strategem* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counsel* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sadnesses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardships*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *them*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purification*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enables them to attain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kills* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those who* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are patient*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *furnace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purer*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *burden* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *act wrongly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done wrong* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grievously* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as I deserve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroyed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beg mercy of you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to have read* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *owned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaware* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfied* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *when tested* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complaining* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *patience* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have been* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *self-control* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to undo* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *melancholia* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *them (my thoughts)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sigh* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *please* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feeling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *return* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *through* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sentence* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *my greatest profit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reckon* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attention* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gratify* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *used it amiss* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *profit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intention* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to please his godhead* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *way of life* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *praise* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sadness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thanks for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *age* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sickness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *benefits* [Return to reference °](#)

# MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRICS

Medieval England was home to a distinctive practice of lyric poetry, quite different from the traditions developed in continental Europe. In southern France, elegantly produced *chansonniers*, or “songbooks,” anthologized the lyric poetry and music by troubadors and trouvères, whose names and, sometimes, biographies were attached to their compositions. It was only late in the fourteenth century that English writers began to develop the kind of aristocratic, formal, and learned lyric that had also been cultivated by the Minnesänger in Germany (German *Minne* corresponds to French *fine amour*—that is, refined or aristocratic love) and by the Italian poets writing in what Dante characterized as the *dolce stil nuovo* (sweet new style). By contrast, Middle English lyrics were often haphazardly copied, sometimes in the midst of other texts such as legal documents and student notes. The overwhelming majority of English lyrics are anonymous. These short, seemingly undistinguished verses testify to a conception among English audiences of lyric as a malleable poetic commons.

In the later fourteenth century, Chaucer, under the influence of French poets, began to write lovers’ complaints, homiletic poetry, and verse letters in the form of ballades, roundels, and other highly stylized lyric types (see [pp. 573–76](#)). In the fifteenth century, John Lydgate, Thomas Hoccleve, and others following Chaucer wrote lyrics of this sort, which were praised for embellishing the English language. These, along with Chaucer’s, were collected in manuscript anthologies that were produced commercially for well-to-do buyers.

Still, Chaucer and those who wrote after him remained familiar with and influenced by the tradition of common, anonymous verses and songs, almost all of which have perished. With one exception, the Middle English lyrics included in this section are the work of anonymous poets and are difficult to date with any precision. Some of these survive in only a single manuscript. The topics and language in these poems are highly conventional, yet the lyrics often seem remarkably fresh and spontaneous. Many are marked by strong accentual rhythms with a good deal of alliteration. Their pleasure comes not from originality or depictions of lived experience but from variations upon expected themes and images. Some were undoubtedly set to music, and in a few cases the music has survived. Perhaps the earliest of those printed here, "The Cuckoo Song," is a canon or round in which the voices follow one another and join together echoing the joyous cry, "Cuckou." The rooster and hen in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* sing "My Lief Is Faren in Londe" in "sweet accord" (line 59). "I Am of Ireland" was undoubtedly accompanied by dancing as well as music.

The joyous return of spring—celebrated in the *reverdie*, or spring song (literally, "regreening")—is the subject of many lyrics. In love lyrics the mating of birds and animals in wild nature often contrasts with the melancholy of unrequited or forsaken human lovers. These lovers are usually male. We know that some women wrote troubador and court poetry, but we do not know whether women composed popular lyrics; women certainly sang popular songs, just as they are portrayed doing in narrative poetry.

# The Cuckoo Song

Sumer is ycomen in,  
Loude sing cuckou!  
Groweth seed and bloweth meed<sup>1</sup>  
And springth the wode<sub>o</sub> now.  
Sing cuckou!

5

Ewe bleteth after lamb,  
Loweth after calve cow,  
Bulloc sterteth,<sub>o</sub> bucke verteth,<sub>o</sub>  
Merye sing cuckou!

10

Cuckou, cuckou,  
Wel singest thou cuckou:  
Ne swik<sub>o</sub> thou never now!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The meadow blossoms. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *wood* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *leaps* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *farts* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cease* [Return to reference °](#)

# Foweles in the Frith

Foweles<sup>o</sup> in the frith,<sup>o</sup>  
The fisses<sup>o</sup> in the flod,<sup>o</sup>  
And I mon<sup>o</sup> waxe wod:<sup>o</sup>  
Mulch sorw<sup>o</sup> I walke with  
For beste<sup>1</sup> of bon and blod.<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Most obviously “best,” but note possible pun on Middle English “beste,” meaning “beast.” So one might translate as “creature.”[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *birds* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forest* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fishes* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *must* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go mad* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *much sorrow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bone and blood* [Return to reference °](#)

# Alison

Bitweene<sup>o</sup> Merch and Averil,  
When spray<sup>o</sup> biginneth to springe,  
The litel fowl hath hire<sup>o</sup> wil<sup>o</sup>  
On hire leod<sup>1</sup> to singe.  
Ich<sup>o</sup> libbe<sup>o</sup> in love-longinge  
5 For semlokest<sup>o</sup> of alle thinge.  
Heo<sup>o</sup> may me blisse bringe:  
    Ich am in hire baundoun.<sup>o</sup>  
    An hendy hap ich habbe yhent,<sup>2</sup>  
Ichoot<sup>o</sup> from hevene it is me sent:  
10 From alle<sup>3</sup> wommen my love is lent,<sup>o</sup>  
And light<sup>o</sup> on Alisoun.

On hew<sup>o</sup> hire heer<sup>o</sup> is fair ynough,  
Hire browe browne, hire yë<sup>o</sup> blake;  
With lossum cheere heo on me lough;<sup>4</sup>  
15 With middel<sup>o</sup> smal and wel ymake.  
But<sup>o</sup> heo me wolle<sup>o</sup> to hire take  
For to been hire owen make,<sup>o</sup>  
Longe to liven ichulle<sup>o</sup> forsake,  
And feye<sup>o</sup> fallen adown.  
20 An hendy hap, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Nightes when I wende<sup>o</sup> and wake,  
Forthy mine wonges waxeth wan:<sup>6</sup>  
Levedy,<sup>o</sup> al for thine sake  
Longinge is ylent me on.<sup>7</sup>  
25 In world nis noon so witer<sup>o</sup> man  
That al hire bountee<sup>o</sup> telle can;  
Hire swire<sup>o</sup> is whittere<sup>o</sup> than the swan,

And fairest may<sup>o</sup> in town.  
 An hendy, etc.  
 30  
 Ich am for wowing<sup>o</sup> al forwake,<sup>o</sup>  
 Wery so<sup>o</sup> water in wore.<sup>8</sup>  
 Lest any reve me<sup>o</sup> my make  
 Ich habbe y-yerned yore.<sup>9</sup>  
 35 Bettere is tholien<sup>o</sup> while<sup>o</sup> sore  
 Than mournen evermore.  
 Geinest under gore,<sup>1</sup>  
 Herkne to my roun:<sup>o</sup>  
 An hendy, etc.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In her language.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A gracious chance I have received.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, all other.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: With lovely face she on me smiled.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The scribe has abbreviated the poem's refrain.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Therefore my cheeks grow pale.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Longing has come upon me.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Perhaps "millpond."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I have been worrying long since.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fairest beneath clothing.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *in the seasons of*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *leaves*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *her*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *pleasure*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *I*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *live*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *seemliest, fairest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *she*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *removed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alights*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hue* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eye*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lady*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whiter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wooing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worn out from waking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprive me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to endure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for a time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *song*[Return to reference](#) °



# My Lief Is Faren in Londe

My lief is faren in londe<sup>1</sup>—  
Allas, why is she so?  
And I am so sore bonde<sup>o</sup>  
I may nat come her to.  
5 She hath myn herte in holde  
Wherever she ride or go<sup>o</sup>—  
With trewe love a thousand folde.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: My beloved has gone away.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *bound*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *walk*[Return to reference °](#)

## **Western Wind**

Westron wind, when will thou blow?  
The small rain down can rain.  
Christ, that my love were in my arms,  
And I in my bed again.

# I Am of Ireland

Ich am of Irlonde,  
And of the holy londe  
Of Irlonde.  
Goode sire, praye ich thee,  
5 For of<sup>o</sup> sainte charitee,  
Com and dance with me  
In Irlonde.

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *sake of* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

# **SIR THOMAS MALORY**

## **ca. 1415–1471**

*Morte Darthur* (Death of Arthur) is the title that William Caxton, the first English printer, gave to Malory's volume, which Caxton described more accurately in his Preface as "the noble histories of King Arthur and of certain of his knights." The volume begins with the mythical story of Arthur's birth. King Uther Pendragon falls in love with the wife of one of his barons. Merlin's magic transforms Uther into the likeness of her husband, and Arthur is born of this union. The volume ends with the destruction of the Round Table and the deaths of Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot, who is Arthur's best knight and the queen's lover. The bulk of the work is taken up with the separate adventures of the knights of the Round Table.

On the evolution of the Arthurian legend, see the headnote to "The Myth of Arthur's Return," [p. 138](#). During the thirteenth century, the stories about Arthur and his knights had been turned into a series of enormously long prose romances in French, and it was these that, as Caxton informed his readers, "Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French and reduced into English."

Little was known about the author until the early twentieth century when scholars began to unearth the criminal record of a Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell in Warwickshire. In 1451 he was arrested for the first time to prevent his doing injury—presumably further injury—to a priory in Lincolnshire, and shortly thereafter he

was accused of a number of criminal acts. These included escaping from prison after his first arrest, twice breaking into and plundering the Abbey of Coombe, extorting money from various persons, and committing rape. Malory pleaded innocent of all charges. The Wars of the Roses—in which Malory, like the formidable earl of Warwick (the “kingmaker”), whom he seems to have followed, switched sides from Lancaster to York and back again—may account for some of his troubles with the law. After a failed Lancastrian revolt, the Yorkist king, Edward IV, specifically excluded Malory from four amnesties he granted to the Lancastrians.

The identification of this Sir Thomas Malory (there is another candidate with the same name) as the author of the *Morte* was strengthened by the discovery in 1934 of a manuscript that differed from Caxton’s text, the only version previously known. The manuscript contained eight separate romances. Caxton, in order to give the impression of a continuous narrative, had welded these together into twenty-one books, subdivided into short chapters with summary chapter headings. Caxton suppressed all but the last of the personal remarks the author had appended to individual tales in the manuscript. At the very end of the book Malory asks “all gentlemen and gentlewomen that readeth this book pray for me while I am alive that God send me good deliverance.” The discovery of the manuscript revealed that at the close of the first tale he had written: “this was drawyn by a knight presoner Sir Thomas Malleoré, that God sende him good recover.” There is strong circumstantial evidence, therefore, that the book from which the Arthurian legends were passed on to future generations to be adapted in literature, art, and film was written in prison by a man whose violent career might seem at odds with the chivalric ideals he professes.

Such a contradiction—if it really is one—should not be surprising. Nostalgia for an ideal past that never truly existed is typical of much historical romance. Like the slave-owning plantation society of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, whose Southern gentlemen cultivate chivalrous manners and respect for gentlewomen, Malory’s Arthurian world is a fiction. In our terms, it cannot even be labeled

“historical,” although the distinction between romance and history is not one that Malory would have made. Only rarely does he voice skepticism about the historicity of his tale; one such example is his questioning of the myth of Arthur’s return. Much of the tragic power of his romance lies in his sense of the irretrievability of past glory in comparison with the sordidness of his own age.

The success of Malory’s retelling owes much to his development of a terse and direct prose style, especially the naturalistic dialogue that keeps his narrative close to earth. And both he and many of his characters are masters of understatement who express themselves, in moments of great emotional tension, with a bare minimum of words.

In spite of its professed dedication to service of women, Malory’s chivalry is primarily devoted to the fellowship and competitions of aristocratic men. Fighting consists mainly of single combats in tournaments, chance encounters, and battles, which Malory never tires of describing in professional detail. Commoners rarely come into view; when they do, the effect can be chilling—as when pillagers by moonlight plunder the corpses of the knights left on the field of Arthur’s last battle. Above all, Malory cherishes an aristocratic male code of honor for which his favorite word is “worship.” Men win or lose “worship” through their actions in war and love.

The most “worshipful” of Arthur’s knights is Sir Lancelot, the “head of all Christian knights,” as he is called in a moving eulogy by his brother, Sir Ector. But Lancelot is compromised by his fatal liaison with Arthur’s queen and torn between the incompatible loyalties that bind him as an honorable knight, on the one hand, to his lord Arthur and, on the other, to his lady Guinevere. Malory loves his character Lancelot even to the point of indulging in the fleeting speculation, after Lancelot has been admitted to the queen’s chamber, that their activities might have been innocent, “for love that time was not as love is nowadays.” But when the jealousy and malice of two wicked knights force the affair into the open, nothing can avert a mighty civil war; the breaking up of the fellowship of the Round Table; and

the death of Arthur himself, which Malory relates with somber magnificence as the passing of a great era.

## ***From Morte Darthur***[1](#)

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The selections here are from the section that Caxton called book 20, chaps. 1–4, 8–10, and book 21, chaps. 3–7, 10–12, with omissions. In the Winchester manuscript this section is titled “The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon” (the death of Arthur without reward or compensation). The text is based on Winchester, with some readings introduced from the Caxton edition; spelling has been modernized and modern punctuation added.[Return to reference](#)  
[1](#)



## [THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE]

In May, when every lusty<sup>2</sup> heart flourisheth and burgeoneth, for as the season is lusty to behold and comfortable,<sup>3</sup> so man and woman rejoiceth and gladdeth of summer coming with his fresh flowers; for winter with his rough winds and blasts causeth lusty men and women to cower and to sit fast by the fire—so this season it befell in the month of May a great anger and unhap that stinted not<sup>4</sup> till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain. And all was long upon two unhappy<sup>5</sup> knights which were named Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred that were brethren unto Sir Gawain.<sup>6</sup> For this Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred had ever a privy<sup>7</sup> hate unto the Queen, Dame Guinevere, and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot.

So it misfortuned Sir Gawain and all his brethren were in King Arthur's chamber, and then Sir Agravain said thus openly, and not in no counsel,<sup>8</sup> that many knights might hear: "I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Lancelot lieth daily and nightly by the Queen. And all we know well that it is so, and it is shamefully suffered of us all<sup>9</sup> that we should suffer so noble a king as King Arthur is to be shamed."

Then spoke Sir Gawain and said, "Brother, Sir Agravain, I pray you and charge you, move no such matters no more afore<sup>1</sup> me, for wit you well, I will not be of your counsel."<sup>2</sup>

"So God me help," said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth,<sup>3</sup> "we will not be known of your deeds."<sup>4</sup>

"Then will I!" said Sir Mordred.

"I lieve<sup>5</sup> you well," said Sir Gawain, "for ever unto all unhappiness, sir, ye will grant.<sup>6</sup> And I would that ye left all this and make you not so busy, for I know," said Sir Gawain, "what will fall of it."<sup>7</sup>

"Fall whatsoever fall may," said Sir Agravain, "I will disclose it to the King."

"Not by my counsel," said Sir Gawain, "for and<sup>8</sup> there arise war and wrack betwixt<sup>9</sup> Sir Lancelot and us, wit you well, brother, there will many kings and great lords hold with Sir Lancelot. Also, brother, Sir Agravain," said Sir Gawain, "ye must remember how often times Sir Lancelot hath rescued the King and the Queen. And the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root<sup>1</sup> had not Sir Lancelot been better than we, and that has he proved himself full oft. And as for my part," said Sir Gawain, "I will never be against Sir Lancelot for<sup>2</sup> one day's deed, when he rescued me from King Carados of the Dolorous<sup>3</sup> Tower and slew him and saved my life. Also, brother, Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred, in like wise Sir Lancelot rescued you both and three score and two<sup>4</sup> from Sir Tarquin. And therefore, brother, methinks such noble deeds and kindness should be remembered."

"Do as ye list,"<sup>5</sup> said Sir Agravain, "for I will layne<sup>6</sup> it no longer." So with these words came in Sir Arthur.

"Now, brother," said Sir Gawain, "stint your noise."<sup>7</sup>

"That will I not," said Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred.

"Well, will ye so?" said Sir Gawain. "Then God speed you, for I will not hear of your tales, neither be of your counsel."

"No more will I," said Sir Gaheris.

"Neither I," said Sir Gareth, "for I shall never say evil by<sup>8</sup> that man that made me knight." And therewithal they three departed making great dole.<sup>9</sup>

"Alas!" said Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth, "now is this realm wholly destroyed and mischieved,<sup>1</sup> and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparbeled."<sup>2</sup>

So they departed, and then King Arthur asked them what noise<sup>3</sup> they made. "My lord," said Sir Agravain, "I shall tell you, for I may keep<sup>4</sup> it no longer. Here is I and my brother Sir Mordred broke<sup>5</sup> unto my brother Sir Gawain, Sir Gaheris, and to Sir Gareth—for this is all, to make it short—how that we know all that Sir Lancelot holdeth your queen, and hath done long; and we be your sister<sup>6</sup> sons, we may suffer it no longer. And all we woot<sup>7</sup> that ye should be above Sir

Lancelot, and ye are the king that made him knight, and therefore we will prove it that he is a traitor to your person."

"If it be so," said the King, "wit<sup>8</sup> you well, he is none other. But I would be loath to begin such a thing but<sup>9</sup> I might have proofs of it, for Sir Lancelot is an hardy knight, and all ye know that he is the best knight among us all. And but if he be taken with the deed,<sup>1</sup> he will fight with him that bringeth up the noise, and I know no knight that is able to match him. Therefore, and<sup>2</sup> it be sooth as ye say, I would that he were taken with the deed."

For, as the French book saith, the King was full loath that such a noise should be upon Sir Lancelot and his queen. For the King had a deeming<sup>3</sup> of it, but he would not hear of it, for Sir Lancelot had done so much for him and for the Queen so many times that, wit you well, the King loved him passingly<sup>4</sup> well.

"My lord," said Sir Agravain, "ye shall ride tomorn<sup>5</sup> on hunting, and doubt ye not, Sir Lancelot will not go with you. And so when it draweth toward night, ye may send the Queen word that ye will lie out all that night, and so may ye send for your cooks. And then, upon pain of death, that night we shall take him with the Queen, and we shall bring him unto you, quick<sup>6</sup> or dead."

"I will well,"<sup>7</sup> said the King. "Then I counsel you to take with you sure fellowship."

"Sir," said Sir Agravain, "my brother, Sir Mordred, and I will take with us twelve knights of the Round Table."

"Beware," said King Arthur, "for I warn you, ye shall find him wight."<sup>8</sup>

"Let us deal!"<sup>9</sup> said Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred.

So on the morn King Arthur rode on hunting and sent word to the Queen that he would be out all that night. Then Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred got to them<sup>1</sup> twelve knights and hid themselves in a chamber in the castle of Carlisle. And these were their names: Sir Colgrevance, Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Guingalen, Sir Meliot de Logres, Sir Petipace of Winchelsea, Sir Galeron of Galway, Sir Melion de la Mountain, Sir Ascamore, Sir Gromore Somyr Jour, Sir

Curselayne, Sir Florence, and Sir Lovell. So these twelve knights were with Sir Mordred and Sir Agravain, and all they were of Scotland, or else of Sir Gawain's kin, or well-willers<sup>2</sup> to his brother.

So when the night came, Sir Lancelot told Sir Bors<sup>3</sup> how he would go that night and speak with the Queen.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "ye shall not go this night by my counsel."

"Why?" said Sir Lancelot.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "I dread me<sup>4</sup> ever of Sir Agravain that waiteth upon<sup>5</sup> you daily to do you shame and us all. And never gave my heart against no going that ever ye went<sup>6</sup> to the queen so much as now, for I mistrust<sup>7</sup> that the King is out this night from the Queen because peradventure he hath lain<sup>8</sup> some watch for you and the Queen. Therefore, I dread me sore of some treason."

"Have ye no dread," said Sir Lancelot, "for I shall go and come again and make no tarrying."

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "that me repents,<sup>9</sup> for I dread me sore that your going this night shall wrath<sup>1</sup> us all."

"Fair nephew," said Sir Lancelot, "I marvel me much why ye say thus, sithen<sup>2</sup> the Queen hath sent for me. And wit you well, I will not be so much a coward, but she shall understand I will<sup>3</sup> see her good grace."

"God speed you well," said Sir Bors, "and send you sound and safe again!"

So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel,<sup>4</sup> that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy. And so he passed on till he came to the Queen's chamber, and so lightly he was had<sup>5</sup> into the chamber. And then, as the French book saith, the Queen and Sir Lancelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list<sup>6</sup> not thereof make no mention, for love that time<sup>7</sup> was not as love is nowadays.

But thus as they were together there came Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred with twelve knights with them of the Round Table, and they

said with great crying and scaring<sup>8</sup> voice: "Thou traitor, Sir Lancelot, now are thou taken!" And thus they cried with a loud voice that all the court might hear it. And these fourteen knights all were armed at all points, as<sup>9</sup> they should fight in a battle.

"Alas!" said Queen Guinevere, "now are we mischieved<sup>1</sup> both!"

"Madam," said Sir Lancelot, "is there here any armor within your chamber that I might cover my body withal? And if there be any, give it me, and I shall soon stint<sup>2</sup> their malice, by the grace of God!"

"Now, truly," said the Queen, "I have none armor neither helm, shield, sword, neither spear, wherefore I dread me sore our long love is come to a mischievous end. For I hear by their noise there be many noble knights, and well I woot they be surely<sup>3</sup> armed, and against them ye may make no resistance. Wherefore ye are likely to be slain, and then shall I be burned! For and<sup>4</sup> ye might escape them," said the Queen, "I would not doubt but that ye would rescue me in what danger that ever I stood in."

"Alas!" said Sir Lancelot, "in all my life thus was I never bestead<sup>5</sup> that I should be thus shamefully slain for lack of mine armor."

But ever in one<sup>6</sup> Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred cried: "Traitor knight, come out of the Queen's chamber! For wit thou well thou art beset so that thou shalt not escape."

"Ah, Jesu mercy!" said Sir Lancelot, "this shameful cry and noise I may not suffer, for better were death at once than thus to endure this pain." Then he took the Queen in his arms and kissed her and said, "Most noblest Christian queen, I beseech you, as ye have been ever my special good lady, and I at all times your poor knight and true unto<sup>7</sup> my power, and as I never failed you in right nor in wrong sithen the first day King Arthur made me knight, that ye will pray for my soul if that I be slain. For well I am assured that Sir Bors, my nephew, and all the remnant of my kin, with Sir Lavain and Sir Urry,<sup>8</sup> that they will not fail you to rescue you from the fire. And therefore, mine own lady, recomfort yourself,<sup>9</sup> whatsoever come of me, that ye go with Sir Bors, my nephew, and Sir Urry and they all will do you all

the pleasure that they may, and ye shall live like a queen upon my lands."

"Nay, Sir Lancelot, nay!" said the Queen. "Wit thou well that I will not live long after thy days. But and<sup>1</sup> ye be slain I will take my death as meekly as ever did martyr take his death for Jesu Christ's sake."

"Well, Madam," said Sir Lancelot, "sith it is so that the day is come that our love must depart,<sup>2</sup> wit you well I shall sell my life as dear as I may. And a thousandfold," said Sir Lancelot, "I am more heavier<sup>3</sup> for you than for myself! And now I had liefer<sup>4</sup> than to be lord of all Christendom that I had sure armor upon me, that men might speak of my deeds ere ever I were slain."

"Truly," said the Queen, "and<sup>5</sup> it might please God, I would that they would take me and slay me and suffer<sup>6</sup> you to escape."

"That shall never be," said Sir Lancelot. "God defend me from such a shame! But, Jesu Christ, be Thou my shield and mine armor!" And therewith Sir Lancelot wrapped his mantel about his arm well and surely; and by then they had gotten a great form<sup>7</sup> out of the hall, and therewith they all rushed at the door. "Now, fair lords," said Sir Lancelot, "leave<sup>8</sup> your noise and your rushing, and I shall set open this door, and then may ye do with me what it liketh you."<sup>9</sup>

"Come off,<sup>1</sup> then," said they all, "and do it, for it availeth thee not to strive against us all. And therefore let us into this chamber, and we shall save thy life until thou come to King Arthur."

Then Sir Lancelot unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open a little, that but one man might come in at once. And so there came striding a good knight, a much<sup>2</sup> man and a large, and his name was called Sir Colgrevice of Gore. And he with a sword struck at Sir Lancelot mightily. And he put aside<sup>3</sup> the stroke and gave him such a buffet<sup>4</sup> upon the helmet that he fell groveling dead within the chamber door. Then Sir Lancelot with great might drew the knight within<sup>5</sup> the chamber door. And then Sir Lancelot, with help of the Queen and her ladies, he was lightly<sup>6</sup> armed in

Colgreivance's armor. And ever stood Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred, crying, "Traitor knight! Come forth out of the Queen's chamber!"

"Sirs, leave<sup>7</sup> your noise," said Sir Lancelot, "for wit you well, Sir Agravain, ye shall not prison me this night. And therefore, and<sup>8</sup> ye do by my counsel, go ye all from this chamber door and make you no such crying and such manner of slander as ye do. For I promise you by my knighthood, and ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall as tomorn appear afore you all and before the King, and then let it be seen which of you all, other else ye all,<sup>9</sup> that will deprove<sup>1</sup> me of treason. And there shall I answer you, as a knight should, that hither I came to the Queen for no manner of mal engine,<sup>2</sup> and that will I prove and make it good upon you with my hands."

"Fie upon thee, traitor," said Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred, "for we will have thee malgré thine head<sup>3</sup> and slay thee, and we list.<sup>4</sup> For we let thee wit we have the choice of<sup>5</sup> King Arthur to save thee other slay thee."

"Ah, sirs," said Sir Lancelot, "is there none other grace with you? Then keep<sup>6</sup> yourself!" And then Sir Lancelot set all open the chamber door and mightily and knightly he strode in among them. And anon<sup>7</sup> at the first stroke he slew Sir Agravain, and after twelve of his fellows. Within a little while he had laid them down cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve knights might stand Sir Lancelot one buffet.<sup>8</sup> And also he wounded Sir Mordred, and therewithal he fled with all his might.

And then Sir Lancelot returned again unto the Queen and said, "Madam, now wit you well, all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe. And therefore, Madam, and it like you<sup>9</sup> that I may have you with me, I shall save you from all manner adventurous<sup>1</sup> dangers."

"Sir, that is not best," said the Queen, "me seemeth, for<sup>2</sup> now ye have done so much harm, it will be best that ye hold you still with this. And if ye see that as tomorn they will put me unto death, then may ye rescue me as ye think best."



"I will well,"<sup>3</sup> said Sir Lancelot, "for have ye no doubt, while I am a man living I shall rescue you." And then he kissed her, and either of them gave other a ring, and so there he left the Queen and went until<sup>4</sup> his lodging.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Merry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pleasant.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Misfortune that ceased not.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: On account of two ill-fated.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gawain and Agravain are sons of King Lot of Orkney and his wife, Arthur's half-sister Morgause. Mordred is the illegitimate son of Arthur and Morgause.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Secret.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Secret manner.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Put up with by all of us.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Before. "Move": propose.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: On your side. "Wit you well": know well, give you to understand.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sons of King Lot (Gawain's brothers).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A party to your doings.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Believe.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: You will consent to all mischief.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Come of it.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: If.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Strife between.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Would have been dead.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: On account of.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dismal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, sixty-two.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You please.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Conceal.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Stop making scandal.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: About.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lamentation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Put to shame.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dispersed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rumor.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Conceal.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Revealed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sister's.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Know.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Know.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Unless[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unless he is caught in the act.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: If.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Suspicion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Exceedingly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tomorrow.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Alive.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Readily agree.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Strong.[Return to reference 8](#)
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- Note 1: Gathered to themselves.[Return to reference 1](#)
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## [WAR BREAKS OUT BETWEEN ARTHUR AND LANCELOT]<sup>5</sup>

Then said King Arthur unto Sir Gawain, "Dear nephew, I pray you make ready in your best armor with your brethren, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to bring my Queen to the fire, there to have her judgment and receive the death."

"Nay, my most noble king," said Sir Gawain, "that will I never do, for wit you well I will never be in that place where so noble a queen as is my lady Dame Guinevere shall take such a shameful end. For wit you well," said Sir Gawain, "my heart will not serve me for to see her die, and it shall never be said that ever I was of your counsel for her death."

"Then," said the King unto Sir Gawain, "suffer<sup>6</sup> your brethren Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth to be there."

"My lord," said Sir Gawain, "wit you well they will be loath to be there present because of many adventures<sup>7</sup> that is like to fall, but they are young and full unable to say you nay."

Then spake Sir Gaheris and the good knight Sir Gareth unto King Arthur: "Sir, ye may well command us to be there, but wit you well it shall be sore against our will. But and<sup>8</sup> we be there by your strait commandment, ye shall plainly<sup>9</sup> hold us there excused—we will be there in peaceable wise and bear none harness of war<sup>1</sup> upon us."

"In the name of God," said the King, "then make you ready, for she shall have soon<sup>2</sup> her judgment."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "that ever I should endure<sup>3</sup> to see this woeful day." So Sir Gawain turned him and wept heartily, and so he went into his chamber.

And then the Queen was led forth without<sup>4</sup> Carlisle, and anon she was dispoiled into<sup>5</sup> her smock. And then her ghostly father<sup>6</sup> was brought to her to be shriven of her misdeeds.<sup>7</sup> Then was there weeping and wailing and wringing of hands of many lords and

ladies, but there were but few in comparison that would bear any armor for to strengthen<sup>8</sup> the death of the Queen.

Then was there one that Sir Lancelot had sent unto that place, which went to espy what time the Queen should go unto her death. And anon as<sup>9</sup> he saw the Queen dispoiled into her smock and shriven, then he gave Sir Lancelot warning. Then was there but spurring and plucking up<sup>1</sup> of horses, and right so they came unto the fire. And who<sup>2</sup> that stood against them, there were they slain—there might none withstand Sir Lancelot. So all that bore arms and withstood them, there were they slain, full many a noble knight. \* \*

\* And so in this rushing and hurling, as Sir Lancelot thrang<sup>3</sup> here and there, it misfortuned him<sup>4</sup> to slay Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, the noble knight, for they were unarmed and unwares.<sup>5</sup> As the French book saith, Sir Lancelot smote Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth upon the brain-pans, wherethrough<sup>6</sup> that they were slain in the field, howbeit<sup>7</sup> Sir Lancelot saw them not. And so were they found dead among the thickest of the press.<sup>8</sup>

Then when Sir Lancelot had thus done, and slain and put to flight all that would withstand him, then he rode straight unto Queen Guinevere and made a kirtle<sup>9</sup> and a gown to be cast upon her, and then he made her to be set behind him and prayed her to be of good cheer. Now wit you well the Queen was glad that she was escaped from death, and then she thanked God and Sir Lancelot.

And so he rode his way with the Queen, as the French book saith, unto Joyous Garde,<sup>1</sup> and there he kept her as a noble knight should. And many great lords and many good knights were sent him, and many full noble knights drew unto him. When they heard that King Arthur and Sir Lancelot were at debate,<sup>2</sup> many knights were glad, and many were sorry of their debate.

Now turn we again unto King Arthur, that when it was told him how and in what manner the Queen was taken away from the fire, and when he heard of the death of his noble knights, and in especial Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, then he swooned for very pure<sup>3</sup> sorrow. And when he awoke of his swoon, then he said: "Alas, that ever I

bore crown upon my head! For now have I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king<sup>4</sup> together. Alas, my good knights be slain and gone away from me. Now within these two days I have lost nigh forty knights and also the noble fellowship of Sir Lancelot and his blood,<sup>5</sup> for now I may nevermore hold them together with my worship.<sup>6</sup> Alas, that ever this war began!

"Now, fair fellows," said the King, "I charge you that no man tell Sir Gawain of the death of his two brethren, for I am sure," said the King, "when he heareth tell that Sir Gareth is dead, he will go nigh out of his mind. Mercy Jesu," said the King, "why slew he Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth? For I dare say, as for Sir Gareth, he loved Sir Lancelot above all men earthly."<sup>7</sup>

"That is truth," said some knights, "but they were slain in the hurling,<sup>8</sup> as Sir Lancelot thrang in the thickest of the press. And as they were unarmed, he smote them and wist<sup>9</sup> not whom that he smote, and so unhappily<sup>1</sup> they were slain."

"Well," said Arthur, "the death of them will cause the greatest mortal war that ever was, for I am sure that when Sir Gawain knoweth hereof that Sir Gareth is slain, I shall never have rest of him<sup>2</sup> till I have destroyed Sir Lancelot's kin and himself both, other else he to destroy me. And therefore," said the King, "wit you well, my heart was never so heavy as it is now. And much more I am sorrier for my good knights' loss<sup>3</sup> than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enough, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company. And now I dare say," said King Arthur, "there was never Christian king that ever held such a fellowship together. And alas, that ever Sir Lancelot and I should be at debate. Ah, Agravain, Agravain!" said the King, "Jesu forgive it thy soul, for thine evil will that thou and thy brother Sir Mordred haddest unto Sir Lancelot hath caused all this sorrow." And ever among these complaints the King wept and swooned.

Then came there one to Sir Gawain and told him how the Queen was led away with<sup>4</sup> Sir Lancelot, and nigh a four-and-twenty knights slain. "Ah, Jesu, save me my two brethren!" said Sir Gawain. "For full

well wist I," said Sir Gawain, "that Sir Lancelot would rescue her, other else he would die in that field. And to say the truth he were not of worship but if he had<sup>5</sup> rescued the Queen, insomuch as she should have been burned for his sake. And as in that," said Sir Gawain, "he hath done but knightly, and as I would have done myself and I had stood in like case. But where are my brethren?" said Sir Gawain. "I marvel that I hear not of them."

Then said that man, "Truly, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth be slain."

"Jesu defend!"<sup>6</sup> said Sir Gawain. "For all this world I would not that they were slain, and in especial my good brother Sir Gareth."

"Sir," said the man, "he is slain, and that is great pity."

"Who slew him?" said Sir Gawain.

"Sir Lancelot," said the man, "slew them both."

"That may I not believe," said Sir Gawain, "that ever he slew my good brother Sir Gareth, for I dare say my brother loved him better than me and all his brethren and the King both. Also I dare say, an<sup>7</sup> Sir Lancelot had desired my brother Sir Gareth with him, he would have been with him against the King and us all. And therefore I may never believe that Sir Lancelot slew my brethren."

"Verily, sir," said the man, "it is noised<sup>8</sup> that he slew him."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "now is my joy gone." And then he fell down and swooned, and long he lay there as he had been dead. And when he arose out of his swoon, he cried out sorrowfully and said, "Alas!" And forthwith he ran unto the King, crying and weeping, and said, "Ah, mine uncle King Arthur! My good brother Sir Gareth is slain, and so is my brother Sir Gaheris, which were two noble knights."

Then the King wept and he both, and so they fell on swooning. And when they were revived, then spake Sir Gawain and said, "Sir, I will go and see my brother Sir Gareth."

"Sir, ye may not see him," said the King, "for I caused him to be interred and Sir Gaheris both, for I well understood that ye would make overmuch sorrow, and the sight of Sir Gareth should have caused your double sorrow."

"Alas, my lord," said Sir Gawain, "how slew he my brother Sir Gareth? Mine own good lord, I pray you tell me."

"Truly," said the King, "I shall tell you as it hath been told me—Sir Lancelot slew him and Sir Gaheris both."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "they bore none arms against him, neither of them both."

"I woot not how it was," said the King, "but as it is said, Sir Lancelot slew them in the thickest of the press and knew them not. And therefore let us shape a remedy for to revenge their deaths."

"My king, my lord, and mine uncle," said Sir Gawain, "wit you well, now I shall make you a promise which I shall hold by my knighthood, that from this day forward I shall never fail<sup>9</sup> Sir Lancelot until that one of us have slain the other. And therefore I require you, my lord and king, dress<sup>1</sup> you unto the wars, for wit you well, I will be revenged upon Sir Lancelot; and therefore, as ye will have my service and my love, now haste you thereto and assay<sup>2</sup> your friends. For I promise unto God," said Sir Gawain, "for the death of my brother Sir Gareth I shall seek Sir Lancelot throughout seven kings' realms, but I shall slay him, other else he shall slay me."

"Sir, ye shall not need to seek him so far," said the King, "for as I hear say, Sir Lancelot will abide me and us all within the castle of Joyous Garde. And much people draweth unto him, as I hear say."

"That may I right well believe," said Sir Gawain, "but my lord," he said, "assay your friends and I will assay mine."

"It shall be done," said the King, "and as I suppose I shall be big<sup>3</sup> enough to drive him out of the biggest tower of his castle."

So then the King sent letters and writs throughout all England, both the length and the breadth, for to summon all his knights. And so unto King Arthur drew many knights, dukes, and earls, that he had a great host, and when they were assembled the King informed them how Sir Lancelot had bereft him his Queen. Then the King and all his host made them ready to lay siege about Sir Lancelot where he lay within Joyous Garde.



## Endnotes

- Note 5: Lancelot and Sir Bors mobilize their friends for the rescue of Guinevere. In the morning Mordred reports the events of the night to Arthur who, against Gawain's strong opposition, condemns the queen to be burned, for "the law was such in those days that whatsoever they were, of what estate or degree, if they were found guilty of treason there should be none other remedy but death."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Allow.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Chance occurrences.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: If.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Openly; "strait": strict.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Armor.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Right away.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Live.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outside.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Undressed down to.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spiritual father, her priest.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For her to be confessed of her sins.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Secure.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As soon as.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Urging forward.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Whoever.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pressed. "Hurling": turmoil.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: He had the misfortune.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Unaware.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Through which.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Although.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Crowd.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Petticoat.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lancelot's castle in England.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Strife.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sheer.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That Christian king ever held.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Kin.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Keep both them and my dignity.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Earthly men.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Turmoil.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Knew.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unluckily.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He will never give me any peace.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The loss of my good knights.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Of honor if he had not.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Forbid.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: If.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Reported.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Give up the pursuit of.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Prepare.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Appeal to.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Strong.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [THE DEATH OF ARTHUR]<sup>4</sup>

So upon Trinity Sunday at night King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and in his dream him seemed that he saw upon a chafflet<sup>5</sup> a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made. And the King thought there was under him, far from him, an hideous deep black water, and therein was all manner of serpents, and worms, and wild beasts, foul and horrible. And suddenly the King thought that the wheel turned upside down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb. And then the King cried as he lay in his bed, "Help, help!"

And then knights, squires, and yeomen awaked the King, and then he was so amazed<sup>6</sup> that he wist<sup>7</sup> not where he was. And then so he awaked<sup>8</sup> until it was nigh day, and then he fell on slumbering again, not sleeping nor thoroughly waking. So the King seemed<sup>9</sup> verily that there came Sir Gawain unto him with a number of fair ladies with him. So when King Arthur saw him, he said, "Welcome, my sister's son. I weened ye had been dead. And now I see thee on-live, much am I beholden unto Almighty Jesu. Ah, fair nephew and my sister's son, what been these ladies that hither be come with you?"

"Sir," said Sir Gawain, "all these be ladies for whom I have foughten for when I was man living. And all these are tho<sup>1</sup> that I did battle for in righteous quarrels, and God hath given them that grace, at their great prayer, because I did battle for them for their right, that they should bring me hither unto you. Thus much hath given me leave God, for to warn you of your death. For and ye fight as tomorn<sup>2</sup> with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned,<sup>3</sup> doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most party of your people on both parties. And for the great grace and goodness that Almighty Jesu hath unto you, and for pity of you and many mo other good men there<sup>4</sup> shall be slain, God hath sent me to you of his special grace to give you

warning that in no wise ye do battle as tomorn, but that ye take a treatise for a month-day.<sup>5</sup> And proffer you largely,<sup>6</sup> so that tomorn ye put in a delay. For within a month shall come Sir Lancelot with all his noble knights and rescue you worshipfully and slay Sir Mordred and all that ever will hold with him."

Then Sir Gawain and all the ladies vanished. And anon the King called upon his knights, squires, and yeomen, and charged them wightly<sup>7</sup> to fetch his noble lords and wise bishops unto him. And when they were come the King told them of his avision,<sup>8</sup> that Sir Gawain had told him and warned him that, and he fought on the morn, he should be slain. Then the King commanded Sir Lucan the Butler<sup>9</sup> and his brother Sir Bedivere the Bold, with two bishops with them, and charged them in any wise to take a treatise for a month-day<sup>1</sup> with Sir Mordred. "And spare not: proffer him lands and goods as much as ye think reasonable."

So then they departed and came to Sir Mordred where he had a grim host of an hundred thousand, and there they entreated<sup>2</sup> Sir Mordred long time. And at the last Sir Mordred was agreed for to have Cornwall and Kent by King Arthur's days,<sup>3</sup> and after that, all England, after the days of King Arthur.

Then were they condescended<sup>4</sup> that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and everich<sup>5</sup> of them should bring fourteen persons. And so they came with this word unto Arthur. Then said he, "I am glad that this is done," and so he went into the field.

And when King Arthur should depart, he warned all his host that, and<sup>6</sup> they see any sword drawn, "Look ye come on fiercely and slay that traitor Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him." In like wise Sir Mordred warned his host that "And ye see any manner of sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you standeth, for in no wise I will not trust for this treatise." And in the same wise said Sir Mordred unto his host, "For I know well my father will be avenged upon me."

And so they met as their pointment<sup>7</sup> was and were agreed and accorded thoroughly. And wine was fetched and they drank together. Right so came an adder out of a little heath-bush, and it stung a knight in the foot. And so when the knight felt him so stung, he looked down and saw the adder. And anon he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought<sup>8</sup> none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beams,<sup>9</sup> trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them<sup>1</sup> together. And King Arthur took his horse and said, "Alas, this unhappy day!" and so rode to his party, and Sir Mordred in like wise.

And never since was there never seen a more dolefuller battle in no Christian land, for there was but rushing and riding, foining<sup>2</sup> and striking; and many a grim word was there spoken of either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle<sup>3</sup> of Sir Mordred many times and did full nobly, as a noble king should do, and at all times he fainted<sup>4</sup> never. And Sir Mordred did his devoir<sup>5</sup> that day and put himself in great peril.

And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted<sup>6</sup> till the noble knights were laid to the cold earth. And ever they fought still till it was near night, and by then was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down.<sup>7</sup> Then was King Arthur wood-wroth<sup>8</sup> out of measure when he saw his people so slain from him. And so he looked about him and could see no mo<sup>9</sup> of all his host, and good knights left no mo on-live, but two knights: the t'one<sup>1</sup> was Sir Lucan the Butler and [the other] his brother Sir Bedivere. And yet they were full sore wounded.

"Jesu, mercy," said the King, "where are all my noble knights become?<sup>2</sup> Alas that ever I should see this doleful day! For now," said King Arthur, "I am come to mine end. But would to God," said he, "that I wist<sup>3</sup> now where were that traitor Sir Mordred that has caused all this mischief."

Then King Arthur looked about and was ware where stood Sir Mordred leaning upon his sword among a great heap of dead men.

"Now give me my spear," said King Arthur unto Sir Lucan, "for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought."

"Sir, let him be," said Sir Lucan, "for he is unhappy.<sup>4</sup> And if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. And, good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawain told you tonight, and yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. And for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this,<sup>5</sup> for, blessed be God, ye have won the field: for yet we been here three on-live, and with Sir Mordred is not one on-live. And therefore if ye leave off now, this wicked day of destiny is past."

"Now, tide<sup>6</sup> me death, tide me life," said the King, "now I see him yonder alone, he shall never escape mine hands. For at a better avail<sup>7</sup> shall I never have him."

"God speed you well!" said Sir Bedivere.

Then the King got his spear in both his hands and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying and saying, "Traitor, now is thy deathday come!"

And when Sir Mordred saw King Arthur he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand, and there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin<sup>8</sup> of his spear, throughout the body more than a fathom.<sup>9</sup> And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death's wound, he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the burr<sup>1</sup> of King Arthur's spear, and right so he smote his father King Arthur with his sword holden in both his hands, upon the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the tay<sup>2</sup> of the brain. And therewith Sir Mordred dashed down stark dead to the earth.

And noble King Arthur fell in a swough<sup>3</sup> to the earth, and there he swooned oftentimes, and Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere oftentimes heaved him up. And so, weakly betwixt them, they led him to a little chapel not far from the seaside, and when the King was there, him thought him reasonably eased. Then heard they people cry in the field. "Now go thou, Sir Lucan," said the King, "and do me to wit<sup>4</sup> what betokens that noise in the field."

So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he yede<sup>5</sup> he saw and harkened by the moonlight

how that pillers<sup>6</sup> and robbers were come into the field to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches and bees<sup>7</sup> and of many a good ring and many a rich jewel. And who that were not dead all out there they slew them for their harness<sup>8</sup> and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the King as soon as he might and told him all what he had heard and seen. "Therefore by my read,"<sup>9</sup> said Sir Lucan, "it is best that we bring you to some town."

"I would it were so," said the King, "but I may not stand, my head works<sup>1</sup> so. Ah, Sir Lancelot," said King Arthur, "this day have I sore missed thee. And alas that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawain me warned in my dream."

Then Sir Lucan took up the King the t'one party<sup>2</sup> and Sir Bedivere the other party; and in the lifting up the King swooned and in the lifting Sir Lucan fell in a swoon that part of his guts fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight's heart burst. And when the King awoke he beheld Sir Lucan how he lay foaming at the mouth and part of his guts lay at his feet.

"Alas," said the King, "this is to me a full heavy<sup>3</sup> sight to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have holpen<sup>4</sup> me that had more need of help than I. Alas that he would not complain him for<sup>5</sup> his heart was so set to help me. Now Jesu have mercy upon his soul."

Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother.

"Now leave this mourning and weeping, gentle knight," said the King, "for all this will not avail me. For wit thou well, and<sup>6</sup> I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore. But my time passeth on fast," said the King. "Therefore," said King Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, "take thou here Excalibur<sup>7</sup> my good sword and go with it to yonder water's side; and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water and come again and tell me what thou sawest there."

"My lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your commandment shall be done, and [I shall] lightly<sup>8</sup> bring you word again."



So Sir Bedivere departed. And by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft<sup>9</sup> was all precious stones. And then he said to himself, "If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss." And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the King and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.

"What saw thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waves and winds."

"That is untruly said of thee," said the King. "And therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief<sup>1</sup> and dear, spare not, but throw it in."

Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand. And yet him thought<sup>2</sup> sin and shame to throw away that noble sword. And so eft<sup>3</sup> he hid the sword and returned again and told the King that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

"What sawest thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waters wap and waves wan."<sup>4</sup>

"Ah, traitor unto me and untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that has been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of this sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee I shall slay thee mine<sup>5</sup> own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead."

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and so he went to the water's side; and there he bound the girdle<sup>6</sup> about the hilts, and threw the sword as far into the water as he might. And there came an arm and an hand above the water and took it and clutched it, and shook it thrice and brandished; and then vanished away the hand with the sword into the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw.



"Alas," said the King, "help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried overlong."

Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back and so went with him to that water's side. And when they were at the water's side, even fast<sup>7</sup> by the bank hovered<sup>8</sup> a little barge with many fair ladies in it; and among them all was a queen; and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

"Now put me into that barge," said the King; and so he did softly. And there received him three ladies with great mourning, and so they set them<sup>9</sup> down. And in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head, and then the queen said, "Ah, my dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught overmuch cold." And anon they rowed fromward the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all tho ladies go froward him.

Then Sir Bedivere cried and said, "Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

"Comfort thyself," said the King, "and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in. For I must into the vale of Avilion<sup>1</sup> to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear nevermore of me, pray for my soul."

But ever the queen and ladies wept and shrieked that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge he wept and wailed and so took the forest, and went<sup>2</sup> all that night. And in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar<sup>3</sup> of a chapel and an hermitage.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

Thus of Arthur I find no more written in books that been authorized,<sup>5</sup> neither more of the very certainty of his death heard I never read,<sup>6</sup> but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens: that one was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan la Fée,<sup>7</sup> the

t'other<sup>8</sup> was the Queen of North Wales, and the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands. \* \* \*

Now more of the death of King Arthur could I never find but that these ladies brought him to his burials,<sup>9</sup> and such one was buried there that the hermit bore witness that sometime was Bishop of Canterbury.<sup>1</sup> But yet the hermit knew not in certain that he was verily the body of King Arthur, for this tale Sir Bedivere, a Knight of the Table Round, made it to be written. Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had<sup>2</sup> by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place. And men say that he shall come again and he shall win the Holy Cross. Yet I will not say that it shall be so, but rather I will say, Here in this world he changed his life. And many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus.*<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 4:  
The pope arranges a truce, Guinevere is returned to Arthur, and Lancelot and his kin leave England to become rulers of France. At Gawain's instigation Arthur invades France to resume the war against Lancelot. Word comes to the king that Mordred has seized the kingdom, and Arthur leads his forces back to England. Mordred attacks them upon their landing, and Gawain is mortally wounded and dies, although not before he has repented for insisting that Arthur fight Lancelot and has written Lancelot to come to the aid of his former lord.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Scaffold. "Him seemed": it seemed to him.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Confused.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Knew.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lay awake.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It seemed to the king.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Those.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: If you fight tomorrow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Decided.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, who there. "Mo": more.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For a month from today. "Treatise": treaty, truce.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Make generous offers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Quickly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dream.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Butler" here is probably only a title of high rank, although it was originally used to designate the officer who had charge of wine for the king's table.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: By any means necessary to make a treaty for the period of a month.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dealt with.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: During King Arthur's lifetime.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Agreed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Each.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: If.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Arrangement.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Meant.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A kind of trumpet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Prepared to come.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lunging.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Battalion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lost heart.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Knightly duty.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stopped.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Upland.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mad with rage.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Others.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That one, the first.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: What has become of all my noble knights?[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Knew.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, unlucky for you.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: That is, with this much accomplished.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Betide.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Advantage.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Thrust.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, six feet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hand guard.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Outer membrane.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swoon.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Let me know.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Walked.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plunderers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Bracelets.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Armor. "All out": entirely.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Advice.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Aches.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: On one side.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sorrowful.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Helped.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Because.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: If.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The sword that Arthur had received as a young man from the Lady of the Lake; it is presumably she who catches it when Bedivere finally throws it into the water.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Quickly.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Handle. "Pommel": rounded knob on the hilt.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Beloved.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: It seemed to him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Again.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The phrase seems to mean "waters wash the shore and waves grow dark."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, with mine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sword belt.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Close.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Waited.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, they sat.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A legendary island, sometimes identified with the earthly paradise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Walked. "Took": took to.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ancient thickets of small trees.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the passage here omitted, Sir Bedivere meets the former bishop of Canterbury, now a hermit, who describes how on the previous night a company of ladies had brought to the chapel a dead body, asking that it be buried. Sir Bedivere exclaims that the dead man must have been King Arthur and vows to spend the rest of his life there in the chapel as a hermit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That have authority.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tell.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The fairy.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The second.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Grave.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Of whom the hermit, who was formerly bishop of Canterbury, bore witness.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Conveyed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here lies Arthur, who was once king and king will be again (Latin).[Return to reference 3](#)

## [THE DEATHS OF LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE]<sup>4</sup>

And thus upon a night there came a vision to Sir Lancelot and charged him, in remission<sup>5</sup> of his sins, to haste him unto Amesbury: "And by then<sup>6</sup> thou come there, thou shalt find Queen Guinevere dead. And therefore take thy fellows with thee, and purvey them of an horse-bier,<sup>7</sup> and fetch thou the corse<sup>8</sup> of her, and bury her by her husband, the noble King Arthur. So this avision<sup>9</sup> came to Lancelot thrice in one night. Then Sir Lancelot rose up ere day and told the hermit.

"It were well done," said the hermit, "that ye made you ready and that ye disobey not the avision."

Then Sir Lancelot took his eight fellows with him, and on foot they yede<sup>1</sup> from Glastonbury to Amesbury, the which is little more than thirty mile, and thither they came within two days, for they were weak and feeble to go. And when Sir Lancelot was come to Amesbury within the nunnery, Queen Guinevere died but half an hour afore. And the ladies told Sir Lancelot that Queen Guinevere told them all ere she passed that Sir Lancelot had been priest near a twelve-month:<sup>2</sup> "and hither he cometh as fast as he may to fetch my corse, and beside my lord King Arthur he shall bury me." Wherefore the Queen said in hearing of them all, "I beseech Almighty God that I may never have power to see Sir Lancelot with my worldly eyes."

"And thus," said all the ladies, "was ever her prayer these two days till she was dead."

Then Sir Lancelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of the service himself, both the *dirige*<sup>3</sup> and on the morn he sang mass. And there was ordained<sup>4</sup> an horse-bier, and so with an hundred torches ever burning about the corse of the Queen, and ever Sir Lancelot with his eight fellows went about<sup>5</sup> the horse-bier, singing and reading many an holy orison,<sup>6</sup> and frankincense upon the corse incensed.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Sir Lancelot and his eight fellows went on foot from Amesbury unto Glastonbury, and when they were come to the chapel and the hermitage, there she had a *dirige* with great devotion.<sup>8</sup> And on the morn the hermit that sometime<sup>9</sup> was Bishop of Canterbury sang the mass of requiem with great devotion, and Sir Lancelot was the first that offered, and then als<sup>1</sup> his eight fellows. And then she was wrapped in cered cloth of Rennes, from the top<sup>2</sup> to the toe, in thirtyfold, and after she was put in a web<sup>3</sup> of lead, and then in a coffin of marble.

And when she was put in the earth Sir Lancelot swooned and lay long still, while<sup>4</sup> the hermit came and awaked him, and said, "Ye be to blame, for ye displease God with such manner of sorrow-making."

"Truly," said Sir Lancelot, "I trust I do not displease God, for He knoweth mine intent—for my sorrow was not, nor is not, for any rejoicing of sin, but my sorrow may never have end. For when I remember of her beaulté and of her noblesse<sup>5</sup> that was both with her king and with her,<sup>6</sup> so when I saw his corse and her corse so lie together, truly mine heart would not serve to sustain my careful<sup>7</sup> body. Also when I remember me how by my defaute and mine orgule<sup>8</sup> and my pride that they were both laid full low, that were peerless that ever was living of Christian people, wit you well," said Sir Lancelot, "this remembered, of their kindness and mine unkindness, sank so to mine heart that I might not sustain myself." So the French book maketh mention.

Then Sir Lancelot never after ate but little meat,<sup>9</sup> nor drank, till he was dead, for then he sickened more and more and dried and dwined<sup>1</sup> away. For the Bishop nor none of his fellows might not make him to eat, and little he drank, that he was waxen by a kibbet<sup>2</sup> shorter than he was, that the people could not know him. For evermore, day and night, he prayed, but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep. Ever he was lying groveling on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, and there was no comfort that the Bishop nor Sir Bors, nor none of his fellows could make him—it availed not.

So within six weeks after, Sir Lancelot fell sick and lay in his bed. And then he sent for the Bishop that there was hermit, and all his true fellows. Then Sir Lancelot said with dreary steven,<sup>3</sup> "Sir Bishop, I pray you give to me all my rights that longeth<sup>4</sup> to a Christian man."

"It shall not need you,"<sup>5</sup> said the hermit and all his fellows. "It is but heaviness of your blood. Ye shall be well mended by the grace of God tomorn."

"My fair lords," said Sir Lancelot, "wit you well my careful body will into the earth; I have warning more than now I will say. Therefore give me my rights."

So when he was houseled and annealed<sup>6</sup> and had all that a Christian man ought to have, he prayed the Bishop that his fellows might bear his body to Joyous Garde. (Some men say it was Alnwick, and some men say it was Bamborough.) "Howbeit," said Sir Lancelot, "me repenteth<sup>7</sup> sore, but I made mine avow sometime that in Joyous Garde I would be buried. And because of breaking<sup>8</sup> of mine avow, I pray you all, lead me thither." Then there was weeping and wringing of hands among his fellows.

So at a season of the night they all went to their beds, for they all lay in one chamber. And so after midnight, against<sup>9</sup> day, the Bishop that was hermit, as he lay in his bed asleep, he fell upon a great laughter. And therewith all the fellowship awoke and came to the Bishop and asked him what he ailed.<sup>1</sup>

"Ah, Jesu mercy," said the Bishop, "why did ye awake me? I was never in all my life so merry and so well at ease."

"Wherefore?" said Sir Bors.

"Truly," said the Bishop, "here was Sir Lancelot with me, with mo<sup>2</sup> angels than ever I saw men in one day. And I saw the angels heave<sup>3</sup> up Sir Lancelot unto heaven, and the gates of heaven opened against him."

"It is but dretching of swevens,"<sup>4</sup> said Sir Bors, "for I doubt not Sir Lancelot aileth nothing but good."<sup>5</sup>



"It may well be," said the Bishop. "Go ye to his bed and then shall ye prove the sooth."

So when Sir Bors and his fellows came to his bed, they found him stark dead. And he lay as he had smiled, and the sweetest savor<sup>6</sup> about him that ever they felt. Then was there weeping and wringing of hands, and the greatest dole they made that ever made men. And on the morn the Bishop did his mass of Requiem, and after the Bishop and all the nine knights put Sir Lancelot in the same horse-bier that Queen Guinevere was laid in tofore that she was buried. And so the Bishop and they all together went with the body of Sir Lancelot daily, till they came to Joyous Garde. And ever they had an hundred torches burning about him.

And so within fifteen days they came to Joyous Garde. And there they laid his corse in the body of the choir,<sup>7</sup> and sang and read many psalters<sup>8</sup> and prayers over him and about him. And ever his visage was laid open and naked, that all folks might behold him; for such was the custom in tho<sup>9</sup> days that all men of worship should so lie with open visage till that they were buried.

And right thus as they were at their service, there came Sir Ector de Maris that had seven year sought all England, Scotland, and Wales, seeking his brother, Sir Lancelot. And when Sir Ector heard such noise and light in the choir of Joyous Garde, he alight and put his horse from him and came into the choir. And there he saw men sing and weep, and all they knew Sir Ector, but he knew not them. Then went Sir Bors unto Sir Ector and told him how there lay his brother, Sir Lancelot, dead. And then Sir Ector threw his shield, sword, and helm from him, and when he beheld Sir Lancelot's visage, he fell down in a swoon. And when he waked, it were hard any tongue to tell the doleful complaints that he made for his brother.

"Ah, Lancelot!" he said, "thou were head of all Christian knights. And now I dare say," said Sir Ector, "thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust<sup>1</sup> knight that ever bore shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse, and

thou were the truest lover, of a sinful man,<sup>2</sup> that ever loved woman, and thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights, and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies, and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest.”<sup>3</sup>

Then there was weeping and dolor out of measure.

Thus they kept Sir Lancelot’s corse aloft fifteen days, and then they buried it with great devotion. And then at leisure they went all with the Bishop of Canterbury to his hermitage, and there they were together more than a month.

Then Sir Constantine that was Sir Cador’s son of Cornwall was chosen king of England, and he was a full noble knight, and worshipfully he ruled this realm. And then this King Constantine sent for the Bishop of Canterbury, for he heard say where he was. And so he was restored unto his bishopric and left that hermitage, and Sir Bedivere was there ever still hermit to his life’s end.

Then Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Gahalantine, Sir Galihud, Sir Galihodin, Sir Blamour, Sir Bleoberis, Sir Villiars le Valiant, Sir Clarrus of Clermount, all these knights drew them to their countries.<sup>4</sup> Howbeit<sup>5</sup> King Constantine would have had them with him, but they would not abide in this realm. And there they all lived in their countries as holy men.

And some English books make mention that they went never out of England after the death of Sir Lancelot—but that was but favor of makers.<sup>6</sup> For the French book maketh mention—and is authorized—that Sir Bors, Sir Ector, Sir Blamour, and Sir Bleoberis went into the Holy Land, whereas Jesu Christ was quick<sup>7</sup> and dead, and anon as they had stablished their lands,<sup>8</sup> for the book saith so Sir Lancelot commanded them for to do ere ever he passed out of this world. There these four knights did many battles upon the miscreants,<sup>9</sup> or Turks, and there they died upon a Good Friday for God’s sake.

Here is the end of the whole book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table, that when they were whole together there was ever an hundred and forty. And here is the end of *The Death of Arthur*.<sup>1</sup>

I pray you all gentlemen and gentlewomen that readeth this book of Arthur and his knights from the beginning to the ending, pray for me while I am alive that God send me good deliverance. And when I am dead, I pray you all pray for my soul.

For this book was ended the ninth year of the reign of King Edward the Fourth, by Sir Thomas Malory, knight, as Jesu help him for His great might, as he is the servant of Jesu both day and night.

1469–70 1485

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Guinevere enters a convent at Amesbury, where Lancelot, returned with his companions to England, visits her, but she commands him never to see her again. Emulating her example, Lancelot joins the bishop of Canterbury and Bedivere in their hermitage, where he takes holy orders and is joined in turn by seven of his fellow knights.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For the remission.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: By the time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Provide them with a horse-drawn hearse.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Body.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Dream.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Went.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nearly twelve months.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Literally, “direct [my way]” (Latin source of modern “dirge”): the first word of the anthem beginning the funeral service.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Prepared.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Around.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Reciting many a prayer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Burned frankincense over the body.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Earnest reverence.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Once.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Also. "Offered": made his donation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Head. "Cloth of Rennes": A shroud made of fine linen smeared with wax, produced at Rennes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Afterward she was put in a sheet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Until.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Her beauty and nobility.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That she and her king both had.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sorrowful.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: My fault and my haughtiness.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Food.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Wasted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Grown by a cubit.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sad voice.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pertains. "Rights": last sacrament of extreme unction.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You shall not need it.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Given communion and extreme unction.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I am sorry.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In order not to break.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Toward.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ailed him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: More.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lift.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Illusion of dreams.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Has nothing wrong with him.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Odor. A sweet scent is a conventional sign in saints' lives of a sanctified death.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The center of the chancel, the place of honor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Psalms.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Those.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Most courteous.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Of any man born in original sin.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Support for the butt of the lance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Withdrew themselves to their home districts.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: However.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The authors' bias.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Living. "Thereas": where.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As soon as they had put their lands in order.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Infidels.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: By the "whole book" Malory refers to the entire work; the *Death of Arthur*, which Caxton made the title of the entire work, refers to the last part of Malory's book.[Return to reference 1](#)

## EVERYMAN after 1485

*Everyman* belongs to the midpoint of the morality play's history. The surviving examples of this genre include only a handful from the fifteenth century (for example, the earliest, *The Pride of Life*, ca. 1400) but more than two dozen from the sixteenth century, dating as late as 1579 (*The Marriage between Wit and Wisdom*). Morality plays apparently originated side by side with the mystery plays (see [p. 247](#)) but were composed individually rather than in cycles and were dominated by allegorical characters. Some morality plays addressed such diverse subjects as social and political satire (*All for Money*, Skelton's *Magnificence*), philosophy of education (*The Marriage of Wit and Science*), Protestant polemic (*The Conflict of Conscience*), prudential morality (*The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality*), and natural science (*The Nature of the Four Elements*). From first to last, however, the dominant theme was the struggle of good and evil for the human soul (*psychomachia*), usually depicted in the life span of a representative figure with a name like "Mankind." *Everyman*, untypically, is devoted entirely to the day of judgment that every individual human being must face eventually. The play represents allegorically the forces—both outside the protagonist and within—that can help save Everyman and those that cannot or that obstruct his salvation.

*Everyman* lacks the broad (even slapstick) humor of many morality plays that portray as clowns the vices that try to lure the

Everyman figure away from salvation. The play does contain a certain grim humor in showing the haste with which the hero's fair-weather friends abandon him when they discover what his problem is. The play inculcates its austere lesson by the simplicity and directness of its language and of its approach. A sense of urgency builds—one by one Everyman's supposed resources fail him as time is running out. Ultimately Knowledge teaches him the lesson that every pre-Reformation Christian must learn in order to be saved (and that every post-Reformation Christian who believed in grace alone had to unlearn): that Good Deeds is his only true friend who will accompany him on his perilous journey.

The play was written near the end of the fifteenth century. It is probably a translation of a Flemish play, although it is possible that the Flemish play is the translation and the English *Everyman* the original.

# Everyman<sup>1</sup>

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

MESSENGER		KNOWLEDGE
GOD		CONFESSION
DEATH		BEAUTY
EVERYMAN		STRENGTH
FELLOWSHIP		DISCRETION
KINDRED		FIVE-WITS
COUSIN		ANGEL
GOODS		DOCTOR
GOOD DEEDS		



HERE BEGINNETH A TREATISE HOW THE HIGH FATHER OF HEAVEN SENDETH DEATH  
TO SUMMON EVERY CREATURE TO COME AND GIVE ACCOUNT OF THEIR LIVES IN THIS  
WORLD, AND IS IN MANNER OF A MORAL PLAY

[*Enter* MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER I pray you all give your audience,<sup>o</sup>  
And hear this matter with reverence,<sup>o</sup>  
By figure<sup>o</sup> a moral play.  
*The Summoning of Everyman* called it is,  
That of our lives and ending shows  
5 How transitory we be all day.<sup>o</sup>  
The matter is wonder precious,  
But the intent of it is more gracious  
And sweet to bear away.  
The story saith: Man, in the beginning  
10 Look well, and take good heed to the ending,  
Be you never so gay.  
You think sin in the beginning full sweet,  
Which in the end causeth the soul to weep,  
When the body lieth in clay.  
15 Here shall you see how fellowship and jollity,  
Both strength, pleasure, and beauty,  
Will fade from thee as flower in May.  
For ye shall hear how our Heaven-King  
Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning.  
20 Give audience and hear what he doth say.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.—*Enter* GOD.]

GOD I perceive, here in my majesty,  
How that all creatures be to me unkind,<sup>o</sup>  
Living without dread in worldly prosperity.  
Of ghostly<sup>o</sup> sight the people be so blind,  
25 Drowned in sin, they know me not for their God.  
In worldly riches is all their mind:

They fear not of my righteousness the sharp rod;  
My law that I showed when I for them died  
They forget clean, and shedding of my blood red.  
30 I hanged between two,<sup>2</sup> it cannot be denied:  
To get them life I suffered to be dead.<sup>o</sup>  
I healed their feet, with thorns hurt was my head.  
I could do no more than I did, truly—  
And now I see the people do clean forsake me.  
35 They use the seven deadly sins damnable,  
As pride, coveitise,<sup>o</sup> wrath, and lechery<sup>3</sup>  
Now in the world be made commendable.  
And thus they leave of angels the heavenly company.  
Every man liveth so after his own pleasure,  
40 And yet of their life they be nothing sure.  
I see the more that I them forbear,  
The worse they be from year to year:  
All that liveth appaireth<sup>o</sup> fast.  
Therefore I will, in all the haste,  
45 Have a reckoning of every man's person.  
For, and<sup>o</sup> I leave the people thus alone  
In their life and wicked tempests,  
Verily they will become much worse than beasts;  
For now one would by envy another up eat.  
50 Charity do they all clean forgeet.  
I hoped well that every man  
In my glory should make his mansion,  
And thereto I had them all elect.<sup>o</sup>  
But now I see, like traitors deject,<sup>o</sup>  
55 They thank me not for the pleasure that I to<sup>o</sup> them  
meant,  
Nor yet for their being that I them have lent.  
I proffered the people great multitude of mercy,  
And few there be that asketh it heartily.<sup>o</sup>  
They be so cumbered<sup>o</sup> with worldly riches  
60 That needs on them I must do justice—

On every man living without fear.  
Where art thou, Death, thou mighty messenger?

[*Enter* DEATH.]

DEATH    Almighty God, I am here at your will,  
Your commandment to fulfill.

65    GOD    Go thou to Everyman,  
And show him, in my name,  
A pilgrimage he must on him take,  
Which he in no wise may escape;  
70    And that he bring with him a sure reckoning  
Without delay or any tarrying.

DEATH    Lord, I will in the world go run over all,°  
And cruelly out-search both great and small.

[*Exit* GOD.]

Everyman will I beset that liveth beastly  
Out of God's laws, and dreadeth not folly.  
75    He that loveth riches I will strike with my dart,  
His sight to blind, and from heaven to depart°  
Except that Almsdeeds be his good friend—  
In hell for to dwell, world without end.  
80    Lo, yonder I see Everyman walking:  
Full little he thinketh on my coming;  
His mind is on fleshly lusts and his treasure,  
And great pain it shall cause him to endure  
Before the Lord, Heaven-King.

[*Enter* EVERYMAN.]

85    Everyman, stand still! Whither art thou going  
Thus gaily? Hast thou thy Maker forget?°

EVERYMAN    Why askest thou?

Why wouldest thou weet?°

DEATH    Yea, sir, I will show you:

90 In great haste I am sent to thee  
 From God out of his majesty.  
 EVERYMAN What! sent to me?  
 DEATH Yea, certainly.  
 Though thou have forgot him here,  
 He thinketh on thee in the heavenly sphere,  
 95 As, ere we depart, thou shalt know.  
 EVERYMAN What desireth God of me?<sup>4</sup>  
 DEATH That shall I show thee:  
 A reckoning he will needs have  
 Without any longer respite.  
 100 EVERYMAN To give a reckoning longer leisure I crave.<sup>o</sup>  
 This blind<sup>o</sup> matter troubleth my wit.<sup>o</sup>  
 DEATH On thee thou must take a long journey:  
 Therefore thy book of count<sup>o</sup> with thee thou bring,  
 For turn again thou cannot by no way.  
 105 And look thou be sure of thy reckoning,  
 For before God thou shalt answer and shew  
 Thy many bad deeds and good but a few—  
 How thou hast spent thy life and in what wise,  
 Before the Chief Lord of Paradise.  
 110 Have ado that we were in that way,<sup>5</sup>  
 For weet<sup>o</sup> thou well thou shalt make none attorney.<sup>6</sup>  
 EVERYMAN Full unready I am such reckoning to give.  
 I know thee not. What messenger art thou?  
 DEATH I am Death that no man dreadeth,<sup>7</sup>  
 115 For every man I 'rest,<sup>o</sup> and no man spareth;  
 For it is God's commandment  
 That all to me should be obedient.  
 EVERYMAN O Death, thou comest when I had thee least  
 in mind.  
 In thy power it lieth me to save:  
 120 Yet of my good<sup>o</sup> will I give thee, if thou will be kind,  
 Yea, a thousand pound shalt thou have—  
 And defer this matter till another day.

DEATH Everyman, it may not be, by no way.  
 I set nought by<sup>8</sup> gold, silver, nor riches,  
 125 Nor by pope, emperor, king, duke, nor princes,  
 For, and<sup>o</sup> I would receive gifts great,  
 All the world I might get.  
 But my custom is clean contrary:  
 I give thee no respite. Come hence and not tarry!  
 130 EVERYMAN Alas, shall I have no longer respite?  
 I may say Death giveth no warning.  
 To think on thee it maketh my heart sick,  
 For all unready is my book of reckoning.  
 But twelve year and I might have a bidding,<sup>9</sup>  
 135 My counting-book I would make so clear  
 That my reckoning I should not need to fear.  
 Wherefore, Death, I pray thee, for God's mercy,  
 Spare me till I be provided of remedy.  
 DEATH Thee availeth not to cry, weep, and pray;  
 140 But haste thee lightly<sup>o</sup> that thou were gone that  
 journey  
 And prove<sup>o</sup> thy friends, if thou can.  
 For weet<sup>o</sup> thou well the tide<sup>o</sup> abideth no man,  
 And in the world each living creature  
 For Adam's sin must die of nature.<sup>1</sup>  
 145 EVERYMAN Death, if I should this pilgrimage take  
 And my reckoning surely make,  
 Show me, for saint<sup>o</sup> charity,  
 Should I not come again shortly?  
 DEATH No, Everyman. And<sup>o</sup> thou be once there,  
 150 Thou mayst never more come here,  
 Trust me verily.  
 EVERYMAN O gracious God in the high seat celestial,  
 Have mercy on me in this most need!  
 Shall I have company from this vale terrestrial  
 155 Of mine acquaintance that way me to lead?  
 DEATH Yea, if any be so hardy

That would go with thee and bear thee company.  
Hie<sup>o</sup> thee that thou were gone to God's  
magnificence,  
Thy reckoning to give before his presence.  
160 What, weenest<sup>o</sup> thou thy life is given thee,  
And thy worldly goods also?  
EVERYMAN I had weened so, verily.  
DEATH Nay, nay, it was but lent thee.  
For as soon as thou art go,  
165 Another a while shall have it and then go therefro,<sup>2</sup>  
Even as thou hast done.  
Everyman, thou art mad! Thou hast thy wits<sup>o</sup> five,  
And here on earth will not amend thy live!<sup>3</sup>  
For suddenly I do come.  
170 EVERYMAN O wretched caitiff! Whither shall I flee  
That I might 'scape this endless sorrow?  
Now, gentle Death, spare me till tomorrow,  
That I may amend me  
With good advisement.<sup>o</sup>  
175 DEATH Nay, thereto I will not consent,  
Nor no man will I respite,  
But to the heart suddenly I shall smite,  
Without any advisement.<sup>o</sup>  
And now out of thy sight I will me hie:  
180 See thou make thee ready shortly,  
For thou mayst say this is the day  
That no man living may 'scape away.

[*Exit* DEATH.]

EVERYMAN Alas, I may well weep with sighs deep:  
Now have I no manner of company  
185 To help me in my journey and me to keep.<sup>o</sup>  
And also my writing<sup>o</sup> is full unready—  
How shall I do now for to excuse me?  
I would to God I had never be geet!<sup>o</sup>

190 To my soul a full great profit it had be.  
For now I fear pains huge and great.  
The time passeth: Lord, help, that all wrought!  
For though I mourn, it availeth nought.  
The day passeth and is almost ago:°  
I wot° not well what for to do.  
195 To whom were I best my complaint to make?  
What and° I to Fellowship thereof spake,  
And showed him of this sudden chance?  
For in him is all mine affiance,°  
200 We have in the world so many a day  
Be good friends in sport and play.  
I see him yonder, certainly.  
I trust that he will bear me company.  
Therefore to him will I speak to ease my sorrow.

[*Enter* FELLOWSHIP.]

205 Well met, good Fellowship, and good morrow!  
FELLOWSHIP Everyman, good morrow, by this day!  
Sir, why lookest thou so piteously?  
If anything be amiss, I pray thee me say,  
That I may help to remedy.  
EVERYMAN Yea, good Fellowship, yea:  
210 I am in great jeopardy.  
FELLOWSHIP My true friend, show to me your mind.  
I will not forsake thee to my life's end  
In the way of good company.  
EVERYMAN That was well spoken, and lovingly!  
215 FELLOWSHIP Sir, I must needs know your heaviness.°  
I have pity to see you in any distress.  
If any have you wronged, ye shall revenged be,  
Though I on the ground be slain for thee,  
Though that I know before that I should die.  
220 EVERYMAN Verily, Fellowship, gramercy.°  
FELLOWSHIP Tush! by thy thanks I set not a stree.°

Show me your grief and say no more.  
 EVERYMAN If I my heart should to you break,<sup>o</sup>  
 And then you to turn your mind fro me,  
 225 And would not me comfort when ye hear me speak,  
 Then should I ten times sorrier be.  
 FELLOWSHIP Sir, I say as I will do, indeed.  
 EVERYMAN Then be you a good friend at need.  
 I have found you true herebefore.  
 230 FELLOWSHIP And so ye shall evermore.  
 For, in faith, and<sup>o</sup> thou go to hell,  
 I will not forsake thee by the way.  
 EVERYMAN Ye speak like a good friend. I believe you  
 well.  
 I shall deserve<sup>o</sup> it, and<sup>o</sup> I may.  
 235 FELLOWSHIP I speak of no deserving, by this day!  
 For he that will say and nothing do  
 Is not worthy with good company to go.  
 Therefore show me the grief of your mind,  
 As to your friend most loving and kind.  
 240 EVERYMAN I shall show you how it is:  
 Commanded I am to go a journey,  
 A long way, hard and dangerous,  
 And give a strait<sup>o</sup> count,<sup>o</sup> without delay,  
 Before the high judge Adonai.<sup>o</sup>  
 245 Wherefore I pray you bear me company,  
 As ye have promised, in this journey.  
 FELLOWSHIP This is matter indeed! Promise is duty—  
 But, and<sup>o</sup> I should take such a voyage on me,  
 I know it well, it should be to my pain.  
 250 Also it maketh me afeard, certain.  
 But let us take counsel here, as well as we can—  
 For your words would fear<sup>o</sup> a strong man.  
 EVERYMAN Why, ye said if I had need,  
 Ye would me never forsake, quick ne dead,  
 255 Though it were to hell, truly.  
 FELLOWSHIP So I said, certainly,



But such pleasures<sup>o</sup> be set aside, the sooth to say.  
 And also, if we took such a journey,  
 When should we again come?  
 260 EVERYMAN Nay, never again, till the day of doom.  
 FELLOWSHIP In faith, then will not I come there!  
 Who hath you these tidings brought?  
 EVERYMAN Indeed, Death was with me here.  
 FELLOWSHIP Now by God that all hath bought,<sup>o</sup>  
 265 If Death were the messenger,  
 For no man that is living today  
 I will not go that loath<sup>o</sup> journey—  
 Not for the father that begat me!  
 EVERYMAN Ye promised otherwise, pardie.<sup>o</sup>  
 270 FELLOWSHIP I wot well I said so, truly.  
 And yet, if thou wilt eat and drink and make good  
 cheer,  
 Or haunt to women the lusty company,<sup>4</sup>  
 I would not forsake you while the day is clear,  
 Trust me verily!  
 275 EVERYMAN Yea, thereto ye would be ready—  
 To go to mirth, solace,<sup>o</sup> and play:  
 Your mind to folly will sooner apply<sup>o</sup>  
 Than to bear me company in my long journey.  
 FELLOWSHIP Now in good faith, I will not that way.  
 280 But, and<sup>o</sup> thou will murder or any man kill,  
 In that I will help thee with a good will.  
 EVERYMAN O that is simple<sup>o</sup> advice, indeed!  
 Gentle fellow, help me in my necessity:  
 We have loved long, and now I need—  
 285 And now, gentle Fellowship, remember me!  
 FELLOWSHIP Whether ye have loved me or no,  
 By Saint John, I will not with thee go!  
 EVERYMAN Yet I pray thee take the labor and do so  
 much for me,  
 290 To bring me forward,<sup>o</sup> for saint charity,

And comfort me till I come without the town.  
FELLOWSHIP Nay, and<sup>o</sup> thou would give me a new  
gown,  
I will not a foot with thee go.  
But, and<sup>o</sup> thou had tarried, I would not have left  
thee so.  
And as now, God speed thee in thy journey!  
295 For from thee I will depart as fast as I may.  
EVERYMAN Whither away, Fellowship? Will thou forsake  
me?  
FELLOWSHIP Yea, by my fay!<sup>o</sup> To God I betake<sup>o</sup> thee.  
EVERYMAN Farewell, good Fellowship! For thee my  
heart is sore.  
Adieu forever—I shall see thee no more.  
300 FELLOWSHIP In faith, Everyman, farewell now at the  
ending:  
For you I will remember that parting is mourning.

[*Exit* FELLOWSHIP.]

EVERYMAN Alack, shall we thus depart<sup>o</sup> indeed—  
Ah, Lady, help!<sup>5</sup>—without any more comfort?  
Lo, Fellowship forsaketh me in my most need!  
305 For help in this world whither shall I resort?  
Fellowship herebefore<sup>o</sup> with me would merry make,  
And now little sorrow for me doth he take.  
It is said, "In prosperity men friends may find  
Which in adversity be full unkind."  
310 Now whither for succor<sup>o</sup> shall I flee,  
Sith<sup>o</sup> that Fellowship hath forsaken me?  
To my kinsmen I will, truly,  
Praying them to help me in my necessity.  
I believe that they will do so,  
315 For kind will creep where it may not go.<sup>6</sup>  
I will go 'say<sup>o</sup>—for yonder I see them—  
Where<sup>o</sup> be ye now my friends and kinsmen.

[*Enter* KINDRED *and* COUSIN.]

KINDRED Here be we now at your commandment:  
Cousin, I pray you show us your intent  
320 In any wise, and not spare.  
COUSIN Yea, Everyman, and to us declare  
If ye be disposed to go anywhither.  
For, weete<sup>o</sup> you well, we will live and die together.  
KINDRED In wealth and woe we will with you hold,  
325 For over his kin a man may be bold.<sup>7</sup>  
EVERYMAN Gramercy,<sup>o</sup> my friends and kinsmen kind.  
Now shall I show you the grief of my mind.  
I was commanded by a messenger  
That is a high king's chief officer:  
330 He bade me go a pilgrimage, to my pain—  
And I know well I shall never come again.  
Also I must give a reckoning strait,<sup>o</sup>  
For I have a great enemy that hath me in wait,<sup>8</sup>  
Which intendeth me to hinder.  
335 KINDRED What account is that which ye must render?  
That would I know.  
EVERYMAN Of all my works I must show  
How I have lived and my days spent;  
Also of ill deeds that I have used  
340 In my time sith<sup>o</sup> life was me lent,  
And of all virtues that I have refused.  
Therefore I pray you go thither with me  
To help me make mine account, for saint<sup>o</sup> charity.  
COUSIN What, to go thither? Is that the matter?  
345 Nay, Everyman, I had liefer fast<sup>9</sup> bread and water  
All this five year and more!  
EVERYMAN Alas, that ever I was bore!<sup>o</sup>  
For now shall I never be merry  
If that you forsake me.  
350 KINDRED Ah, sir, what? Ye be a merry man:

Take good heart to you and make no moan.  
But one thing I warn you, by Saint Anne,  
As for me, ye shall go alone.

- EVERYMAN My Cousin, will you not with me go?  
355 COUSIN No, by Our Lady! I have the cramp in my toe:  
Trust not to me. For, so God me speed,o  
I will deceive you in your most need.  
KINDRED It availeth you not us to 'tice.o  
Ye shall have my maid with all my heart:  
360 She loveth to go to feasts, there to be nice,o  
And to dance, and abroad to start.1  
I will give her leave to help you in that journey,  
If that you and she may agree.  
EVERYMAN Now show me the very effecto of your mind:  
365 Will you go with me or abide behind?  
KINDRED Abide behind? Yea, that will I ando I may!  
Therefore farewell till another day.

[*Exit* KINDRED.]

- EVERYMAN How should I be merry or glad?  
For fair promises men to me make,  
370 But when I have most need they me forsake.  
I am deceived. That maketh me sad.  
COUSIN Cousin Everyman, farewell now,  
For verily I will not go with you;  
Also of mine own an unready reckoning  
375 I have to account—therefore I make tarrying.  
Now God keep thee, for now I go.

[*Exit* COUSIN.]

- EVERYMAN Ah, Jesus, is all come hereto?o  
Lo, fair words maketh fools fain:o  
They promise and nothing will do, certain.  
380 My kinsmen promised me faithfully

For to abide with me steadfastly,  
And now fast away do they flee.  
Even so Fellowship promised me.  
What friend were best me of to provide?  
385 I lose my time here longer to abide.  
Yet in my mind a thing there is:  
All my life I have loved riches;  
If that my Good<sup>o</sup> now help me might,  
He would make my heart full light.  
390 I will speak to him in this distress.  
Where art thou, my Goods and riches?  
GOODS [*within*] Who calleth me? Everyman? What,  
hast thou haste?  
I lie here in corners, trussed and piled so high,  
And in chests I am locked so fast—  
395 Also sacked in bags—thou mayst see with thine eye  
I cannot stir, in packs low where I lie.  
What would ye have? Lightly<sup>o</sup> me say.  
EVERYMAN Come hither, Good, in all the haste thou  
may,  
For of counsel I must desire thee.  
400

[*Enter* GOODS.]

GOODS Sir, and<sup>o</sup> ye in the world have sorrow or  
adversity,<sup>2</sup>  
That can I help you to remedy shortly.  
EVERYMAN It is another disease<sup>o</sup> that grieveth me:  
In this world it is not, I tell thee so.  
I am sent for another way to go,  
405 To give a strait count general  
Before the highest Jupiter<sup>o</sup> of all.  
And all my life I have had joy and pleasure in thee:  
Therefore I pray thee go with me,  
For, peradventure, thou mayst before God Almighty  
410 My reckoning help to clean and purify.

For it is said ever among<sup>o</sup>  
 That money maketh all right that is wrong.  
 GOODS Nay, Everyman, I sing another song:  
 I follow no man in such voyages.  
 415 For, and<sup>o</sup> I went with thee,  
 Thou shouldest fare much the worse for me;  
 For because on me thou did set thy mind,  
 Thy reckoning I have made blotted and blind,<sup>o</sup>  
 That thine account thou cannot make truly—  
 420 And that hast thou for the love of me.  
 EVERYMAN That would grieve me full sore  
 When I should come to that fearful answer.  
 Up, let us go thither together.  
 GOODS Nay, not so, I am too brittle, I may not endure.  
 425 I will follow no man on foot, be ye sure.  
 EVERYMAN Alas, I have thee loved and had great  
 pleasure  
 All my life-days on good and treasure.  
 GOODS That is to thy damnation, without leasing,<sup>o</sup>  
 For my love is contrary to the love everlasting.  
 430 But if thou had me loved moderately during,<sup>o</sup>  
 As to the poor to give part of me,  
 Then shouldest thou not in this dolor be,  
 Nor in this great sorrow and care.  
 EVERYMAN Lo, now was I deceived ere I was ware,  
 435 And all I may wite<sup>o</sup> misspending of time.  
 GOODS What, weenest<sup>o</sup> thou that I am thine?  
 EVERYMAN I had weened so.  
 GOODS Nay, Everyman, I say no.  
 As for a while I was lent thee;  
 440 A season thou hast had me in prosperity.  
 My condition<sup>o</sup> is man's soul to kill;  
 If I save one, a thousand I do spill.<sup>o</sup>  
 Weenest thou that I will follow thee?  
 Nay, from this world, not verily.  
 445 EVERYMAN I had weened otherwise.

GOODS Therefore to thy soul Good is a thief;  
For when thou art dead, this is my guise<sup>o</sup>—  
Another to deceive in the same wise  
As I have done thee, and all to his soul's reproof.<sup>o</sup>  
450 EVERYMAN O false Good, cursed thou be,  
Thou traitor to God, that hast deceived me  
And caught me in thy snare!  
GOODS Marry, thou brought thyself in care,<sup>o</sup>  
Whereof I am glad:  
455 I must needs laugh, I cannot be sad.  
EVERYMAN Ah, Good, thou hast had long my heartily<sup>o</sup>  
love;  
I gave thee that which should be the Lord's above.  
But wilt thou not go with me, indeed?  
I pray thee truth to say.  
460 GOODS No, so God me speed!  
Therefore farewell and have good day.

[*Exit* GOODS.]

EVERYMAN Oh, to whom shall I make my moan  
For to go with me in that heavy<sup>o</sup> journey?  
First Fellowship said he would with me gone:<sup>o</sup>  
465 His words were very pleasant and gay,  
But afterward he left me alone.  
Then spake I to my kinsmen, all in despair,  
And also they gave me words fair—  
They lacked no fair speaking,  
470 But all forsake me in the ending.  
Then went I to my Goods that I loved best,  
In hope to have comfort; but there had I least,  
For my Goods sharply did me tell  
That he bringeth many into hell.  
475 Then of myself I was ashamed,  
And so I am worthy to be blamed:  
Thus may I well myself hate.

Of whom shall I now counsel take?  
I think that I shall never speed<sup>o</sup>  
480 Till that I go to my Good Deed.  
But alas, she is so weak  
That she can neither go<sup>o</sup> nor speak.  
Yet will I venture<sup>o</sup> on her now.  
My Good Deeds, where be you?  
485 GOOD DEEDS [*speaking from the ground*] Here I lie,  
cold in the ground:  
Thy sins hath me sore bound  
That I cannot stear.<sup>o</sup>  
EVERYMAN O Good Deeds, I stand in fear:  
I must you pray of counsel,  
490 For help now should come right well.  
GOOD DEEDS Everyman, I have understanding  
That ye be summoned, account to make,  
Before Messiah of Jer'salem King.  
And you do by me,<sup>3</sup> that journey with you will I take.  
495 EVERYMAN Therefore I come to you my moan to make:  
I pray you that ye will go with me.  
GOOD DEEDS I would full fain,<sup>o</sup> but I cannot stand,  
verily.  
EVERYMAN Why, is there anything on you fall?<sup>o</sup>  
GOOD DEEDS Yea, sir, I may thank you of all:  
500 If ye had perfectly cheered me,  
Your book of count full ready had be.

[GOOD DEEDS *shows him the account book.*]

Look, the books of your works and deeds eke,<sup>o</sup>  
As how they lie under the feet,  
To your soul's heaviness.<sup>o</sup>  
505 EVERYMAN Our Lord Jesus help me!  
For one letter here I cannot see.  
GOOD DEEDS There is a blind<sup>o</sup> reckoning in time of  
distress!



EVERYMAN Good Deeds, I pray you help me in this  
need,  
Or else I am forever damned indeed.  
510 Therefore help me to make reckoning  
Before the Redeemer of all thing  
That King is and was and ever shall.  
GOOD DEEDS Everyman, I am sorry of<sup>o</sup> your fall  
And fain would help you and<sup>o</sup> I were able.  
515 EVERYMAN Good Deeds, your counsel I pray you give  
me.  
GOOD DEEDS That shall I do verily,  
Though that on my feet I may not go;  
I have a sister that shall with you also,  
520 Called Knowledge, which shall with you abide  
To help you to make that dreadful reckoning.

[*Enter* KNOWLEDGE.]

KNOWLEDGE Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy  
guide,  
In thy most need to go by thy side.  
EVERYMAN In good condition I am now in everything,  
And am whole content with this good thing,  
525 Thanked be God my Creator.  
GOOD DEEDS And when she hath brought you there  
Where thou shalt heal thee of thy smart,<sup>o</sup>  
Then go you with your reckoning and your Good  
Deeds together  
For to make you joyful at heart  
530 Before the blessed Trinity.  
EVERYMAN My Good Deeds, gramercy!<sup>o</sup>  
I am well content, certainly,  
With your words sweet.  
KNOWLEDGE Now go we together lovingly  
535 To Confession, that cleansing river.  
EVERYMAN For joy I weep—I would we were there!

But I pray you give me cognition,<sup>o</sup>  
Where dwelleth that holy man Confession?  
540 KNOWLEDGE In the House of Salvation:  
We shall us comfort, by God's grace.

[KNOWLEDGE *leads* EVERYMAN *to* CONFESSION.]

Lo, this is Confession: kneel down and ask mercy,  
For he is in good conceit<sup>o</sup> with God Almighty.  
EVERYMAN [*kneeling*] O glorious fountain that all  
uncleanness doth clarify,<sup>o</sup>  
545 Wash from me the spots of vice unclean,  
That on me no sin may be seen.<sup>4</sup>  
I come with Knowledge for my redemption,  
Redempt<sup>o</sup> with heart and full contrition,  
For I am commanded a pilgrimage to take  
And great accounts before God to make.  
550 Now I pray you, Shrift,<sup>o</sup> mother of Salvation,  
Help my Good Deeds for my piteous exclamation.  
CONFESSION I know your sorrow well, Everyman:  
Because with Knowledge ye come to me,  
I will you comfort as well as I can,  
555 And a precious jewel I will give thee,  
Called Penance, voider<sup>o</sup> of adversity.  
Therewith shall your body chastised be—  
With abstinence and perseverance in God's service.  
Here shall you receive that scourge of me,  
560 Which is penance strong<sup>o</sup> that ye must endure,  
To remember thy Saviour was scourged for thee  
With sharp scourges,<sup>5</sup> and suffered it patiently.  
So must thou ere thou 'scape that painful pilgrimage.  
Knowledge, keep<sup>o</sup> him in this voyage,  
565 And by that time Good Deeds will be with thee.  
But in any wise be secure<sup>o</sup> of mercy—  
For your time draweth fast—and ye will saved be.  
Ask God mercy and he will grant, truly.

570 When with the scourge of penance man doth him<sup>o</sup>  
 bind,  
 The oil of forgiveness then shall he find.  
 EVERYMAN Thanked be God for his gracious work,  
 For now I will my penance begin.  
 This hath rejoiced and lighted my heart,  
 Though the knots be painful and hard within.<sup>6</sup>  
 575 KNOWLEDGE Everyman, look your penance that ye  
 fulfill,  
 What pain that ever it to you be;  
 And Knowledge shall give you counsel at will  
 How your account ye shall make clearly.  
 EVERYMAN O eternal God, O heavenly figure,  
 580 O way of righteousness, O goodly vision,  
 Which descended down in a virgin pure  
 Because he would every man redeem,  
 Which Adam forfeited by his disobedience;  
 O blessed Godhead, elect and high Divine,<sup>o</sup>  
 585 Forgive my grievous offense!  
 Here I cry thee mercy in this presence:  
 O ghostly<sup>o</sup> Treasure, O Ransomer and Redeemer,  
 Of all the world Hope and Conduiter,<sup>o</sup>  
 Mirror of joy, Founder<sup>o</sup> of mercy,  
 590 Which enlumineth<sup>o</sup> heaven and earth thereby,  
 Hear my clamorous complaint, though it late be;  
 Receive my prayers, of thy benignity.  
 Though I be a sinner most abominable,  
 Yet let my name be written in Moses' table.<sup>7</sup>  
 595 O Mary, pray to the Maker of all thing  
 Me for to help at my ending,  
 And save me from the power of my enemy,  
 For Death assaileth me strongly.  
 And Lady, that I may by mean of thy prayer  
 600 Of your Son's glory to be partner—  
 By the means of his passion<sup>o</sup> I it crave.

I beseech you help my soul to save.  
 Knowledge, give me the scourge of penance:  
 My flesh therewith shall give acquittance.◊  
 605 I will now begin, if God give me grace.  
 KNOWLEDGE Everyman, God give you time and space!◊  
 Thus I bequeath you in the hands of our Saviour:  
 Now may you make your reckoning sure.  
 EVERYMAN In the name of the Holy Trinity  
 610 My body sore punished shall be:  
 Take this, body, for the sin of the flesh!  
 Also◊ thou delightest to go gay and fresh,  
 And in the way of damnation thou did me bring,  
 Therefore suffer now strokes of punishing!  
 615 Now of penance I will wade the water clear,  
 To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire.  
 GOOD DEEDS I thank God, now can I walk and go,  
 And am delivered of my sickness and woe.  
 Therefore with Everyman I will go, and not spare:  
 620 His good works I will help him to declare.  
 KNOWLEDGE Now, Everyman, be merry and glad:  
 Your Good Deeds cometh now, ye may◊ not be sad.  
 Now is your Good Deeds whole and sound,  
 Going◊ upright upon the ground.  
 625 EVERYMAN My heart is light, and shall be evermore.  
 Now will I smite faster than I did before.  
 GOOD DEEDS Everyman, pilgrim, my special friend,  
 Blessed be thou without end!  
 For thee is prepartate◊ the eternal glory.  
 630 Ye have me made whole and sound  
 Therefore I will bide by thee in every stound.◊8  
 EVERYMAN Welcome, my Good Deeds! Now I hear thy  
 voice,  
 I weep for very sweetness of love.  
 KNOWLEDGE Be no more sad, but ever rejoice:  
 635 God seeth thy living in his throne above.

Put on this garment to thy behove,<sup>o</sup>  
 Which is wet with your tears—  
 Or else before God you may it miss  
 When ye to your journey's end come shall.  
 640 EVERYMAN Gentle Knowledge, what do ye it call?  
 KNOWLEDGE It is a garment of sorrow;  
 From pain it will you borrow:<sup>o</sup>  
 Contrition it is  
 That getteth forgiveness;  
 645 It pleaseth God passing<sup>o</sup> well.  
 GOOD DEEDS Everyman, will you wear it for your heal?<sup>o</sup>  
 EVERYMAN Now blessed be Jesu, Mary's son,  
 For now have I on true contrition.  
 And let us go now without tarrying.  
 650 Good Deeds, have we clear our reckoning?  
 GOOD DEEDS Yea, indeed, I have it here.  
 EVERYMAN Then I trust we need not fear.  
 Now friends, let us not part in twain.  
 KNOWLEDGE Nay, Everyman, that will we not, certain.  
 655 GOOD DEEDS Yet must thou lead with thee  
 Three persons of great might.  
 EVERYMAN Who should they be?  
 GOOD DEEDS Discretion and Strength they hight,<sup>o</sup>  
 And thy Beauty may not abide behind.  
 660 KNOWLEDGE Also ye must call to mind  
 Your Five-Wits<sup>o</sup> as for your counselors.  
 GOOD DEEDS You must have them ready at all hours.  
 EVERYMAN How shall I get them hither?  
 KNOWLEDGE You must call them all together,  
 665 And they will be here incontinent.<sup>o</sup>  
 EVERYMAN My friends, come hither and be present,  
 Discretion, Strength, my Five-Wits, and Beauty!

[*They enter.*]

BEAUTY Here at your will we be all ready.

What will ye that we should do?  
 670 GOOD DEEDS That ye would with Everyman go  
 And help him in his pilgrimage.  
 Advise you: o will ye with him or not in that voyage?  
 STRENGTH We will bring him all thither,  
 To his help and comfort, ye may believe me.  
 675 DISCRETION So will we go with him all together.  
 EVERYMAN Almighty God, loved o might thou be!  
 I give thee laud that I have hither brought  
 Strength, Discretion, Beauty, and Five-Wits—lack I  
 nought—  
 And my Good Deeds, with Knowledge clear,  
 680 All be in my company at my will here:  
 I desire no more to my business.  
 STRENGTH And I, Strength, will by you stand in  
 distress,  
 Though thou would in battle fight on the ground.  
 FIVE-WITS And though it were through the world round,  
 685 We will not depart for sweet ne sour.  
 BEAUTY No more will I, until death's hour,  
 Whatsoever thereof befall.  
 DISCRETION Everyman, advise you first of all:  
 Go with a good advisement o and deliberation.  
 690 We all give you virtuous o monition o  
 That all shall be well.  
 EVERYMAN My friends, hearken what I will tell;  
 I pray God reward you in his heaven-sphere;  
 Now hearken all that be here,  
 695 For I will make my testament,  
 Here before you all present:  
 In alms half my good o I will give with my hands  
 twain,  
 In the way of charity with good intent;  
 And the other half, still o shall remain,  
 700 I 'queath o to be returned there it ought to be.  
 This I do in despite of the fiend of hell,

To go quit out of his perel,<sup>9</sup>  
 Ever after and this day.  
 KNOWLEDGE Everyman, hearken what I say:  
 705 Go to Priesthood, I you advise,  
 And receive of him, in any wise,<sup>o</sup>  
 The holy sacrament and ointment<sup>o</sup> together;  
 Then shortly see ye turn again hither:  
 We will all abide you here.  
 710 FIVE-WITS Yea, Everyman, hie<sup>o</sup> you that ye ready were.  
 There is no emperor, king, duke, ne baron,  
 That of God hath commission  
 As hath the least priest in the world being:  
 For of the blessed sacraments pure and bening<sup>o</sup>  
 715 He beareth the keys, and thereof hath the cure<sup>o</sup>  
 For man's redemption—it is ever sure—  
 Which God for our souls' medicine  
 Gave us out of his heart with great pine,<sup>o</sup>  
 Here in this transitory life for thee and me.  
 720 The blessed sacraments seven there be:  
 Baptism, confirmation, with priesthood<sup>o</sup> good,  
 And the sacrament of God's precious flesh and  
 blood,  
 Marriage, the holy extreme unction, and penance:  
 These seven be good to have in remembrance,  
 725 Gracious sacraments of high divinity.  
 EVERYMAN Fain<sup>o</sup> would I receive that holy body,  
 And meekly to my ghostly<sup>o</sup> father I will go.  
 FIVE-WITS Everyman, that is the best that ye can do:  
 God will you to salvation bring.  
 730 For priesthood exceedeth all other thing:  
 To us Holy Scripture they do teach,  
 And converteth man from sin, heaven to reach;  
 God hath to them more power given  
 Than to any angel that is in heaven.  
 735 With five words<sup>1</sup> he may consecrate

God's body in flesh and blood to make,  
And handleth his Maker between his hands.  
The priest bindeth and unbindeth all bands,<sup>2</sup>  
Both in earth and in heaven.  
740 Thou ministers<sup>o</sup> all the sacraments seven;  
Though we kiss thy feet, thou were worthy;  
Thou art surgeon that cureth sin deadly;  
No remedy we find under God  
But all only priesthood.<sup>3</sup>  
745 Everyman, God gave priests that dignity  
And setteth them in his stead among us to be.  
Thus be they above angels in degree.

[*Exit* EVERYMAN.]

KNOWLEDGE If priests be good, it is so, surely.  
But when Jesu hanged on the cross with great  
750 smart,<sup>o</sup>  
There he gave out of his blessed heart  
The same sacrament in great torment,  
He sold them not to us, that Lord omnipotent:  
Therefore Saint Peter the Apostle doth say  
That Jesu's curse hath all they  
755 Which God their Saviour do buy or sell,<sup>4</sup>  
Or they for any money do take or tell.<sup>5</sup>  
Sinful priests giveth the sinners example bad:  
Their children sitteth by other men's fires, I have  
heard;  
And some haunteth<sup>o</sup> women's company  
760 With unclean life, as lusts of lechery.  
These be with sin made blind.  
FIVE-WITS I trust to God no such may we find.  
Therefore let us priesthood honor,  
And follow their doctrine for our souls' succor.  
765 We be their sheep and they shepherds be



By whom we all be kept in surety.  
Peace, for yonder I see Everyman come,  
Which hath made true satisfaction.  
GOOD DEEDS    Methink it is he indeed.

770

[*Re-enter* EVERYMAN.]

EVERYMAN    Now Jesu be your alder speed!<sup>6</sup>  
I have received the sacrament for my redemption,  
And then mine extreme unction.  
Blessed be all they that counseled me to take it!  
And now, friends, let us go without longer respite.  
775 I thank God that ye have tarried so long.  
Now set each of you on this rood<sup>o</sup> your hond  
And shortly follow me:  
I go before there<sup>o</sup> I would be. God be our guide!

775

STRENGTH    Everyman, we will not from you go  
775 Till ye have done this voyage long.

DISCRETION    I, Discretion, will bide by you also.

KNOWLEDGE    And though this pilgrimage be never so  
strong,<sup>o</sup>

I will never part you fro.

STRENGTH    Everyman, I will be as sure by thee  
785 As ever I did by Judas Maccabee.<sup>7</sup>

785

EVERYMAN    Alas, I am so faint I may not stand—  
My limbs under me doth fold!

Friends, let us not turn again to this land,  
Not for all the world's gold.

790

For into this cave must I creep  
And turn to earth, and there to sleep.

BEAUTY    What, into this grave, alas?

EVERYMAN    Yea, there shall ye consume,<sup>o</sup> more and  
lass.<sup>8</sup>

BEAUTY    And what, should I smother here?

795

EVERYMAN    Yea, by my faith, and nevermore appear.  
In this world live no more we shall,

But in heaven before the highest Lord of all.

BEAUTY I cross out all this! Adieu, by Saint John—

800 I take my tape in my lap and am gone.<sup>9</sup>

EVERYMAN What, Beauty, whither will ye?

BEAUTY Peace, I am deaf—I look not behind me,  
Not and thou wouldest give me all the gold in thy  
chest.

[*Exit* BEAUTY.]

EVERYMAN Alas, whereto may I trust?

805 Beauty goeth fast away fro me—  
She promised with me to live and die!

STRENGTH Everyman, I will thee also forsake and deny.  
Thy game liketh<sup>o</sup> me not at all.

EVERYMAN Why then, ye will forsake me all?  
Sweet Strength, tarry a little space.

810 STRENGTH Nay, sir, by the rood of grace,  
I will hie me from thee fast,  
Though thou weep till thy heart tobrast.<sup>o</sup>

EVERYMAN Ye would ever bide by me, ye said.

815 STRENGTH Yea, I have you far enough conveyed!<sup>o</sup>  
Ye be old enough, I understand,  
Your pilgrimage to take on hand:  
I repent me that I hither came.

EVERYMAN Strength, you to displease I am to blame,<sup>1</sup>  
Yet promise is debt, this ye well wot.<sup>o</sup>

820 STRENGTH In faith, I care not:  
Thou art but a fool to complain;  
You spend your speech and waste your brain.  
Go, thrust thee into the ground.

[*Exit* STRENGTH.]

825 EVERYMAN I had weened<sup>o</sup> surer I should you have  
found.

He that trusteth in his Strength  
She him deceiveth at the length.  
Both Strength and Beauty forsaketh me—  
Yet they promised me fair and lovingly.

830 DISCRETION Everyman, I will after Strength be gone:  
As for me, I will leave you alone.

EVERYMAN Why Discretion, will ye forsake me?

DISCRETION Yea, in faith, I will go from thee.

For when Strength goeth before,  
I follow after evermore.

835 EVERYMAN Yet I pray thee, for the love of the Trinity,  
Look in my grave once piteously.

DISCRETION Nay, so nigh will I not come.  
Farewell everyone!

[*Exit* DISCRETION.]

840 EVERYMAN O all thing faileth save God alone—  
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion.  
For when Death bloweth his blast  
They all run fro me full fast.

FIVE-WITS Everyman, my leave now of thee I take.  
I will follow the other, for here I thee forsake.

845 EVERYMAN Alas, then may I wail and weep,  
For I took you for my best friend.

FIVE-WITS I will no longer thee keep.°  
Now farewell, and there an end!

[*Exit* FIVE-WITS.]

850 EVERYMAN O Jesu, help, all hath forsaken me!

GOOD DEEDS Nay, Everyman, I will bide with thee:  
I will not forsake thee indeed;

Thou shalt find me a good friend at need.

EVERYMAN Gramercy, Good Deeds! Now may I true  
friends see.

855 They have forsaken me every one—  
I loved them better than my Good Deeds alone.  
Knowledge, will ye forsake me also?  
KNOWLEDGE Yea, Everyman, when ye to Death shall go,  
But not yet, for no manner of danger.  
EVERYMAN Gramercy, Knowledge, with all my heart!  
860 KNOWLEDGE Nay, yet will I not from hence depart  
Till I see where ye shall be come.<sup>2</sup>  
EVERYMAN Methink, alas, that I must be gone  
To make my reckoning and my debts pay,  
For I see my time is nigh spent away.  
865 Take example, all ye that this do hear or see,  
How they that I best loved do forsake me,  
Except my Good Deeds that bideth truly.  
GOOD DEEDS All earthly things is but vanity.  
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion do man forsake,  
870 Foolish friends and kinsmen that fair spake—  
All fleeth save Good Deeds, and that am I.  
EVERYMAN Have mercy on me, God most mighty,  
And stand by me, thou mother and maid, holy Mary!  
GOOD DEEDS Fear not: I will speak for thee.  
875 EVERYMAN Here I cry God mercy!  
GOOD DEEDS Short our end, and 'minish our pain.<sup>3</sup>  
Let us go, and never come again.  
EVERYMAN Into thy hands, Lord, my soul I commend:  
Receive it, Lord, that it be not lost.  
880 As thou me boughtest,<sup>o</sup> so me defend,  
And save me from the fiend's boast,  
That I may appear with that blessed host  
That shall be saved at the day of doom.  
*In manus tuas, of mights most,*  
885 Forever *commendo spiritum meum.*<sup>4</sup>

[EVERYMAN *and* GOOD DEEDS *descend into the grave.*]

KNOWLEDGE Now hath he suffered that we all shall  
endure,

The Good Deeds shall make all sure.

Now hath he made ending,

890 Methinketh that I hear angels sing

And make great joy and melody

Where Everyman's soul received shall be.

ANGEL [*within*] Come, excellent elect<sup>o</sup> spouse to Jesu!<sup>5</sup>

Here above thou shalt go

Because of thy singular virtue.

895 Now the soul is taken the body fro,

Thy reckoning is crystal clear:

Now shalt thou into the heavenly sphere—

Unto the which all ye shall come

900 That liveth well before the day of doom.

[*Enter* DOCTOR.]<sup>6</sup>

DOCTOR This memorial<sup>o</sup> men may have in mind:

Ye hearers, take it of worth,<sup>o</sup> old and young,

And forsake Pride, for he deceiveth you in the end.

And remember Beauty, Five-Wits, Strength, and

Discretion,

905 They all at the last do Everyman forsake,

Save his Good Deeds there doth he take—

But beware, for and<sup>o</sup> they be small,

Before God he hath no help at all—

None excuse may be there for Everyman.

910 Alas, how shall he do than?<sup>o</sup>

For after death amends may no man make,

For then mercy and pity doth him forsake.

If his reckoning be not clear when he doth come,

God will say, "*Ite, maledicti, in ignem eternum!*"<sup>7</sup>

915 And he that hath his account whole and sound,

High in heaven he shall be crowned,

Unto which place God bring us all thither,

That we may live body and soul together.  
 Thereto help, the Trinity!  
 Amen, say ye, for saint<sup>o</sup> charity.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text is based on the earliest printing of the play (no manuscript is known) by John Skot about 1530, as reproduced by W. W. Greg (1904). The spelling has been modernized except where modernization would spoil the rhyme, and modern punctuation has been added. The stage directions have been amplified.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the two thieves between whom Christ was crucified.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The other three deadly sins are envy, gluttony, and sloth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, let's get started at once.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, none to appear in your stead.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That fears nobody.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: I care nothing for.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: If I might have a delay for just twelve years.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Naturally. See Romans 5:12.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Luke 12:19–20.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In thy life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Or frequent the lusty company of women.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An appeal to the Virgin Mary.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: For kinship will creep where it cannot walk (that is, kinsmen will suffer hardship for one another).[Return to](#)

[reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, for a man may make demands of his kinsmen.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Satan lies in ambush for me.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, rather fast on.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To go gadding about.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See John 16:33.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, if you do what I say.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Zechariah 13:1.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See John 19:1.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, to my senses. "Knots": the knots on the scourge (whip) of penance.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Here, the tablet on which are recorded those who have been baptized and have done penance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In order to go free of danger from him.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The five words, *hoc est enim corpus meum* ("For this is my body"; Latin), spoken by the priest when he offers the wafer at communion.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A reference to the power of the keys, inherited by the priesthood from St. Peter, who received it from Christ (Matthew 16:19) with the promise that whatever St. Peter bound or loosed on earth would be bound or loosed in heaven.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Except from priesthood alone.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: To give or receive money for the sacraments is simony, named after Simon, who wished to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost and was cursed by St. Peter. See Acts 8:20.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Or who, for any sacrament, take or count out money.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The prosperer of you all.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Judas Maccabaeus (d. ca. 160 B.C.E.), Jewish leader who successfully led the resistance to Syrian efforts to impose Greek culture on Judaea; see 1 Maccabees.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: More and less (that is, all of you).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I tuck my skirts in my belt and am off.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: I'm to blame for displeasing you.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Till I see where you will come to.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, make our dying quick and diminish our pain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Into your hands, O greatest of powers, I commend my spirit forever (Latin). See Christ's dying words (Luke 23:46).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The soul is often referred to as the bride of Jesus.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Doctor is the learned theologian who explains the meaning of the play.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire (Latin; Matthew 25:41).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *hearing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *respect*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in form*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thoughtless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spiritual*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *allowed myself to die*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *avarice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *degenerates*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *if*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chosen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abased*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sincerely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encumbered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forgotten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *request* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understanding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accounts* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goods* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hasten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suppose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *senses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preparation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ledger* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been begotten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gone by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trust* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many thanks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straw* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *disclose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strict* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accounting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frighten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jokes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loathsome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escort me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *part*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much thanks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entice*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *wanton*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true bent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Goods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *now and then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *illegible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the meanwhile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blame on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suppose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disposition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruin*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an illegible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *esteem*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purify*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confession*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *guard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *divinity*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *can*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *praised*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preparation*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *prediction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goods*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *bequeath*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at all costs*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *haste*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spiritual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *administers*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *escorted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watch over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redeemed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chosen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reminder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prize it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *holy*[Return to reference](#) °

## WHAT THE ANIMALS SAY

Literature written in Britain between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries is crowded with animals. Of course writers of encyclopedias and moralists also focused on animals as sources of knowledge about the natural world and ethical instruction for humans, respectively. Literary animals, by contrast, tell us something very different—much funnier, more skeptical, and more daring.

Works of medieval literature tell us little of serious interest about the reality of the natural world, and for the most part they do not pretend to. Though often zoologically implausible, many works of literature about animals superficially seem to use animals in the same way moralists use them: as prompts to ideal ethical behavior for humans. In fact, however, animal literature points to an ethics that tends to be much more daring than that of the moralists, as it deals much more candidly with the powerful challenges humans face as they attempt to live ethically. The animal literature openly confesses, for example, that humans experience sexual desire, that many of us eat other animals, and that we are likely to ignore ethical advice when we are hungry. The literature frankly recognizes, that is, that we too are animals.

In addition to making adventurous forays into ethics, animal literature also prompts us to think about politics. The need for collective action is all the more urgent and all the more difficult to achieve when considered through the lens of the animal “kingdom.” Much late medieval animal literature is less about animals than about us; it uses animals to think with, and the thoughts it thinks are daring and often refreshing, if sometimes uncomfortable.

Above all, animals in late medieval animal literature talk. When they talk, they obviously blur the boundary between animals and humans, emphasizing that talking animals point to linguistically gifted human counterparts. Thus animal literature tends, paradoxically perhaps, to focus with especial sophistication on

linguistic issues: *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1189–1216) is as much, if not more, interested in *how* to debate as it is in the content of debate; in Robert Henryson's "The Cock and the Jasper" (ca. 1470s) the cock deploys a beautifully crafted rhetoric to disown rhetorical skill; the Swallow in Henryson's "Preaching of the Swallow" (ca. 1470s) subtly deploys university learning to reveal its inability to persuade; Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* (1390s; see [pp. 556–70](#)) challenges the reader to interpret the fable persuasively.

Yet precisely as these animals speak in specifically human ways, authors will take care to remind readers that the speakers are animals, that humans are animals too, and that, therefore, humans may have no stronger claims to elevated philosophical, ethical, and political discourse than do animals. The same vulnerability attends the rhetorically elevated ways in which narrators describe animal action: if it is ridiculous to describe animals as exemplary of higher human aspirations, then maybe the description is no less ridiculous when applied to humans.

The main genre of medieval literary animal story is that of the animal fable. Animal fables, which trace their origin to Aesop (ca. sixth century B.C.E.), are small narratives in which animals act and speak, usually concluding with a sentence-long moral tacked on. They involve many animals, such as frogs, mice, lambs, foxes, birds, wolves, and lions. In later contexts, such stories were used to teach schoolboys both Latin and some commonsense morality (for example, don't overeat; don't overreach; save up for the hard times; justice can be rough and ready, so keep clear of the predators). In the hands of great literary artists such as Chaucer and Henryson, however, these narratives express mordant comedy and truths whose force extends well beyond the elementary classroom.

Beast epic is a much later offshoot from the ancient animal fable tradition. It appears in Europe for the first time in the tenth century in Latin, and in the twelfth century in vernacular languages. Beast epics are groups of interconnected narratives, set in the court of the lion; their single (anti-)hero is Reynard the Fox. They present narratives of dark but vital humor that repeat the same story with

many variations: the rhetorically brilliant fox Reynard almost always outwits all comers by manipulating their greed or vanity. No matter how tight the corner into which Reynard has been backed, we know he'll escape through brilliant narrative control and intimate, intuitive knowledge of his enemies' weaknesses. He exposes not just the arrogance of the greedy but also, and even more damagingly, the hypocrisy of the "civilized" order. Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* is excerpted from larger narratives of this kind, even if the fox in that tale is foiled in his scheme.

Late medieval writers reach for animals in many other genres, too. *The Owl and the Nightingale* belongs to a long medieval tradition of debate poetry, while Chaucer's *Parliament of Birds* (1370s) draws on a great late medieval tradition of Neoplatonic philosophical poetry. This tradition attempted to express the ecological balance of the cosmos, placing the microcosm of humans within the macrocosm of the natural world and planets. Though humans were definitely at the center of that vision, they were in no way conceived as transcendent above the natural world: in order to understand ourselves, these texts tell us, humans need to understand how we are a compact amalgam of the forces and matter that govern the universe. Humans, like the rest of nature, participate in the tense balance of the natural energies that constitute natural systems. We can understand nature because we are made of the same stuff, but for that reason we are dangerously prone to place appetite above understanding. Animals naturally figure powerfully in philosophical Latin fictions such as Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia* (1140s) and Alan of Lille's *Complaint of Nature* (1160s). Vernacular poems such as Chaucer's *Parliament of Birds* rework and question this Latin tradition.

In all the traditions so far considered, humans are humans and animals are animals, even if they are talking animals. Medieval literature also has examples of interspecies crossing, of humans provisionally and painfully locked into animal form. Derived ultimately from the tradition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (before 8 C.E.), these stories are said to be taken from folk culture and the cultural



margins, thereby permitting weird, unscientific, but wonderfully penetrating accounts of human/animal overlaps. Because they merge animal and human, they permit and provoke reflection across the species divide: what might it be like to be an animal? Marie de France's lay *Bisclavret* (late twelfth century) is an especially rich example of this genre.

All these traditions involve narrative and literary surprises, not to say shocks. Animals fail to observe the rules of social or literary decorum that govern human actors. These surprises can be amusing or dark, but they are always revealing about the full scope of what it is to be human.

## MARIE DE FRANCE

For the full headnote on Marie de France (fl. ca. 1180), see [page 159](#). The Germanic term *werewolf* (in this tale “garwaf”; line 4) is a compound word with two equally balanced, juxtaposed elements: “gar”—derived from “wer,” meaning “man”—and “wolf.” Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* tests the degree to which these species categories are indeed balanced, by telling a story derived from the ancient belief in lycanthropy (the transformation of a human into a wolf). Romances (see [pp. 141–42](#)) always involve a movement from civilization to a wild place, and from the wild back to a reformed, strengthened civilization. The wisdom embedded in that narrative structure is that civilization is not a unitary concept; on the contrary, for the civilized order to maintain its balance, it must have commerce with all that threatens it. In testing that claim, romances occasionally involve a species shift from human to animal.

*Bisclavret* not only involves that shift but does so at an extreme limit: the human morphs into one of the most brutal and savage of animals, the wolf. *Bisclavret* therefore puts the binary civilizational claim of romance narrative to the test. Can the human survive transformation into wolf? Or, even further, must the human have commerce with its wolf counterpart to maintain its balance? Binary romance narratives, always moving between tame and wild, express and disguise a shameful secret: civilization *needs* the wild. While the story structure might pretend otherwise, as it returns the protagonist to, and reconfirms the values of, civilization at its end, it has secretly confessed civilization’s dependence on the wild. In this story, the husband clearly needs to be a wolf, for three whole days a week. His marriage is stable as long as this need is not articulated by the couple. Once articulated, the structure of the marriage collapses, since the wife wants nothing to do with the man-wolf and repudiates him.

One might expect a savage, civilization-destroying narrative from here on. And indeed, that expectation is in part confirmed: the wolf is condemned to his wild state, twice he attacks humans, and he is twice on the point of being torn apart as a wild animal. But savagery is not the whole story: the wolf “speaks,” his attacks are targeted, and he otherwise observes court propriety with extreme delicacy. Even when he can retrieve his human form by donning his clothes, he refuses to do so in public. Through his wildness he prompts the mechanisms of human justice. Sometimes the bad manners of a wolf attack in the court itself are necessary to prompt justice. That is one way of reading *Bisclavret*, from the wolf-man’s perspective. From that angle, however, structures of heterosexual marriage turn out to be disposable. The wife is attacked and tortured: she ends up banished, without a nose, and becomes the ancestor of noseless offspring. The husband ends up kissing and hugging the king in the king’s bed. “Civilization,” “justice,” and “human,” then, turn out to have somewhat more restricted referents in this story by a woman author.

# Bisclavret<sup>1</sup>

Since I am undertaking to compose *lais*,  
I don't want to forget Bisclavret;  
In Bréton, the *lai's* name is *Bisclavret*—  
the Normans call it *Garwaf*<sup>2</sup>  
5 In the old days, people used to say—  
and it often actually happened—  
that some men turned into werewolves  
and lived in the woods.  
A werewolf is a savage beast;  
while his fury is on him  
10 he eats men, does much harm,  
goes deep in the forest to live.  
But that's enough of this for now:  
I want to tell you about the Bisclavret.

15 In Brittany there lived a nobleman  
whom I've heard marvelously praised;  
a fine, handsome knight  
who behaved nobly.  
He was close to his lord,  
and loved by all his neighbors.  
20 He had an estimable wife,  
one of lovely appearance;  
he loved her and she him,  
but one thing was very vexing to her:  
during the week he would be missing  
25 for three whole days, and she didn't know  
what happened to him or where he went.  
Nor did any of his men know anything about it.  
One day he returned home  
happy and delighted;

she asked him about it.  
30 "My lord," she said, "and dear love,  
I'd very much like to ask you one thing—  
if I dared;  
but I'm so afraid of your anger  
35 that nothing frightens me more."  
When he heard that, he embraced her,  
drew her to him and kissed her.  
"My lady," he said, "go ahead and ask!  
There's nothing you could want to know,  
40 that, if I knew the answer, I wouldn't tell you."  
"By God," she replied, "now I'm cured!  
My lord, on the days when you go away from me  
I'm in such a state—  
so sad at heart,  
45 so afraid I'll lose you—  
that if I don't get quick relief  
I could die of this very soon.  
Please, tell me where you go,  
where you have been staying.  
50 I think you must have a lover,  
and if that's so, you're doing wrong."  
"My dear," he said, "have mercy on me, for God's  
sake!  
Harm will come to me if I tell you about this,  
because I'd lose your love  
55 and even my very self."  
When the lady heard this  
she didn't take it lightly;  
she kept asking him,  
coaxed and flattered him so much,  
60 that he finally told her what happened to him—  
he hid nothing from her.  
"My dear, I become a werewolf:  
I go off into the great forest,  
in the thickest part of the woods,

65 and I live on the prey I hunt down."  
When he had told her everything,  
she asked further  
whether he undressed or kept his clothes on.<sup>3</sup>  
"Wife," he replied, "I go stark naked."  
70 "Tell me, then, for God's sake, where your clothes  
are."  
"That I won't tell you;  
for if I were to lose them,  
and then be discovered,  
I'd stay a werewolf forever.  
75 I'd be helpless  
until I got them back.  
That's why I don't want their hiding place to be  
known."  
"My lord," the lady answered,  
"I love you more than all the world;  
80 you mustn't hide anything from me  
or fear me in any way:  
that doesn't seem like love to me.  
What wrong have I done? For what sin of mine  
do you mistrust me about anything?  
85 Do the right thing and tell me!"  
She harassed and bedeviled him so,  
that he had no choice but to tell her.  
"Lady," he said, "near the woods,  
beside the road that I use to get there,  
90 there's an old chapel  
that has often done me good service;  
under a bush there is a big stone,  
hollowed out inside;  
I hide my clothes right there  
90 until I'm ready to come home."  
The lady heard this wonder  
and turned scarlet from fear;

she was terrified of the whole adventure.  
Over and over she considered  
100 how she might get rid of him;  
she never wanted to sleep with him again.  
There was a knight of that region  
who had loved her for a long time,  
who begged for her love,  
105 and dedicated himself to serving her.  
She'd never loved him at all,  
nor pledged her love to him,  
but now she sent a messenger for him,  
and told him her intention.  
110 "My dear," she said, "cheer up!  
I shall now grant you without delay  
what you have suffered for;  
you'll meet with no more refusals—  
I offer you my love and my body;  
115 make me your mistress!"  
He thanked her graciously  
and accepted her promise,  
and she bound him to her by an oath.  
Then she told him  
120 how her husband went away and what happened to  
him;  
she also taught him the precise path  
her husband took into the forest,  
and then she sent the knight to get her husband's  
clothes.  
So Bisclavret was betrayed,  
125 ruined by his own wife.  
Since people knew he was often away from home  
they all thought  
this time he'd gone away forever.  
They searched for him and made inquiries  
130 but could never find him,  
so they had to let matters stand.

The wife later married the other knight,  
who had loved her for so long.

135     A whole year passed  
until one day the king went hunting;  
he headed right for the forest  
where Bisclavret was.  
When the hounds were unleashed,  
140     they ran across Bisclavret;  
the hunters and the dogs  
chased him all day,  
until they were just about to take him  
and tear him apart,  
145     at which point he saw the king  
and ran to him, pleading for mercy.  
He took hold of the king's stirrup,  
kissed his leg and his foot.  
The king saw this and was terrified;  
he called his companions.  
150     "My lords," he said, "come quickly!  
Look at this marvel—  
this beast is humbling itself to me.  
It has the mind of a man, and it's begging me for  
mercy!  
155     Chase the dogs away,  
and make sure no one strikes it.  
This beast is rational—he has a mind.  
Hurry up: let's get out of here.  
I'll extend my peace to the creature;  
indeed, I'll hunt no more today!"  
160     Thereupon the king turned away.  
Bisclavret followed him;  
he stayed close to the king, and wouldn't go away;  
he'd no intention of leaving him.  
165     The king led him to his castle;  
he was delighted with this turn of events,  
for he'd never seen anything like it.



He considered the beast a great wonder  
and held him very dear.  
He commanded all his followers,  
170 for the sake of their love for him, to guard Bisclavret  
well,  
and under no circumstances to do him harm;  
none of them should strike him;  
rather, he should be well fed and watered.  
They willingly guarded the creature;  
175 every day he went to sleep  
among the knights, near the king.  
Everyone was fond of him;  
he was so noble and well behaved  
that he never wished to do anything wrong.  
180 Regardless of where the king might go,  
Bisclavret never wanted to be separated from him;  
he always accompanied the king.  
The king became very much aware that the creature  
loved him.  
Now listen to what happened next.  
185 The king held a court;  
to help him celebrate his feast  
and to serve him as handsomely as possible,  
he summoned all the barons  
who held fiefs from him.  
190 Among the knights who went,  
and all dressed up in his best attire,  
was the one who had married Bisclavret's wife.  
He neither knew nor suspected  
that he would find Bisclavret so close by.  
195 As soon as he came to the palace  
Bisclavret saw him,  
ran toward him at full speed,  
sank his teeth into him, and started to drag him  
down.  
He would have done him great damage

200 if the king hadn't called him off,  
and threatened him with a stick.  
Twice that day he tried to bite the knight.  
Everyone was extremely surprised,  
205 since the beast had never acted that way  
toward any other man he had seen.  
All over the palace people said  
that he wouldn't act that way without a reason:  
that somehow or other, the knight had mistreated  
Bisclavret,  
and now he wanted his revenge.  
210 And so the matter rested  
until the feast was over  
and until the barons took their leave of the king  
and started home.  
The very first to leave,  
215 to the best of my knowledge,  
was the knight whom Bisclavret had attacked.  
It's no wonder the creature hated him.  
Not long afterward,  
as the story leads me to believe,  
220 the king, who was so wise and noble,  
went back to the forest  
where he had found Bisclavret,  
and the creature went with him.  
That night, when he finished hunting,  
225 he sought lodging out in the countryside.  
The wife of Bisclavret heard about it,  
dressed herself elegantly,  
and went the next day to speak with the king,  
bringing rich presents for him.  
230 When Bisclavret saw her coming,  
no one could hold him back;  
he ran toward her in a rage.  
Now listen to how well he avenged himself!  
He tore the nose off her face.

235 What worse thing could he have done to her?  
Now men closed in on him from all sides;  
they were about to tear him apart,  
when a wise man said to the king,  
"My lord, listen to me!  
240 This beast has stayed with you,  
and there's not one of us  
who hasn't watched him closely,  
hasn't traveled with him often.  
He's never touched anyone,  
245 or shown any wickedness,  
except to this woman.  
By the faith that I owe you,  
he has some grudge against her,  
and against her husband as well.  
250 This is the wife of the knight  
whom you used to like so much,  
and who's been missing for so long—  
we don't know what became of him.  
Why not put this woman to torture  
255 and see if she'll tell you  
why the beast hates her?  
Make her tell what she knows!  
We've seen many strange things  
happen in Brittany!"  
260 The king took his advice;  
he detained the knight.  
At the same time he took the wife  
and subjected her to torture;  
out of fear and pain  
265 she told all about her husband:  
how she had betrayed him  
and taken away his clothes;  
the story he had told her  
about what happened to him and where he went;  
270 and how after she had taken his clothes

he'd never been seen in his land again.  
She was quite certain  
that this beast was Bisclavret.  
The king demanded the clothes;  
275 whether she wanted to or not  
she sent home for them,  
and had them brought to Bisclavret.  
When they were put down in front of him  
he didn't even seem to notice them;  
280 the king's wise man—  
the one who had advised him earlier—  
said to him, "My lord, you're not doing it right.  
This beast wouldn't, under any circumstances,  
in order to get rid of his animal form,  
285 put on his clothes in front of you;  
you don't understand what this means:  
he's just too ashamed to do it here.  
Have him led to your chambers  
and bring the clothes with him;  
290 then we'll leave him alone for a while.  
If he turns into a man, we'll know about it."  
The king himself led the way  
and closed all the doors on him.  
After a while he went back,  
295 taking two barons with him;  
all three entered the king's chamber.  
On the king's royal bed  
they found the knight asleep.  
The king ran to embrace him.  
300 He hugged and kissed him again and again.  
As soon as he had the chance,  
the king gave him back all his lands;  
he gave him more than I can tell.  
He banished the wife,  
305 chased her out of the country.  
She went into exile with the knight

with whom she had betrayed her lord.  
She had several children  
310 who were widely known  
for their appearance:  
several women of the family  
were actually born without noses,  
and lived out their lives noseless.

315 The adventure that you have heard  
really happened, no doubt about it.  
The *lai* of Bisclavret was made  
so it would be remembered forever.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *The Werewolf*. This translation is by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, *The Lais of Marie de France* (1978).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Werewolf.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, when he became a werewolf.[Return to reference 3](#)

# THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE

*The Owl and the Nightingale* is a brilliant yet largely ignored debate poem, probably from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. The date of the poem turns on the identity of "King Henry," referred to in line 1092 as dead. This is most probably King Henry II (d. 1189), rather than Henry III (1216–1272). The poem is therefore most probably written 1189–1216.

The poem's brilliance consists in pitting against each other two female voices, that of a sophisticated, courtly nightingale and that of a somber, wise owl. These two birds face off directly on a number of fronts, most though not all of which pertain especially to female predicaments in the twelfth century, human or avian (for example, household management; musical skill and effect, both aesthetic and ethical; conduct of amorous affairs; marriage; and spiritual probity).

No victor emerges from the debate, but the whole is both unfailingly lively and highly attentive to the emotional and argumentative strategies of debate itself: the strongest argument will not win unless the debater maintains rhetorical control. The work is also acutely conscious that verbal debate is better for resolving differences than physical violence, into which the birds' debate frequently threatens to tip. Wholly free of authorial moralizing, *The Owl and the Nightingale* addresses its readership without condescension of any kind. The very fact that the poem is written in the vernacular, as well as its subject matter, implies an audience of women. And the poem is often very funny.

The poem consists of 1794 lines, written in four-stress couplets (the verse form adapted from French octosyllabic couplets). The verse is exceptionally energetic, as it captures the live force of vital, speaking, opposed voices.

The debate is presented to us as overheard by the poem's narrator in a field on a summer's day. The fictional situation is similar

to that of *The Canterbury Tales*: a largely passive and wholly nonjudgmental narrator reports oral poetry performed live by nonprofessional yet competitive and gifted individuals. We are not explicitly told the identity of the narrator, and likely author, but the birds themselves give us a strong hint: they twice agree to submit their debate before a trusted arbitrator, one “Master Nicholas of Guilford,” from Portesham in Dorset. That person has not been identified as a historical figure, but we might assume that he is university educated (as his title “master” suggests) and the poem’s author.

Modern readers have ignored the poem for two main reasons. First, written in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, it is an outlier and has virtually no surviving literary context, no comparable texts in English that would highlight its excellence within its period and thereby garner it literary attention. Second, its language (a southern English dialect of so-called early Middle English) is difficult; competence in Old English is required to read this poem in the original with any fluency. The translation here is by Simon Armitage, who also produced the translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* used in this anthology.

The three selections here are lines 1–100, 1043–120, and 1511–634. They focus respectively on (1) the setting of the scene for the lively, confrontational debate between the Owl and the Nightingale; (2) the Owl’s attack on, and the Nightingale’s defense of, the Nightingale’s encouragement of an illicit love, making a clear reference to the features of the story told in Marie de France’s *Laüstic* (see above, [pp. 184–86](#)); and (3) the Owl’s extraordinarily daring defense of the sexual infidelity of battered wives, and her sympathy for lonely wives.

## ***From The Owl and the Nightingale***<sup>\*</sup>

One summer's day I overheard  
a mighty war of words disturb  
a peaceful & secluded dale;  
between an Owl & Nightingale  
5      barbed comments flew, now soft, now loud,  
but always heartfelt, wounding, proud.  
The birds, both swollen up with anger,  
hurled abuse at one another,  
taking turns to slate & curse  
10      what in the other bird was worst,  
with insults being especially strong  
when rubbishing the other's song.<sup>1</sup>  
The Nightingale took up proceedings  
from the corner of a clearing,  
15      perching on a handsome bough  
with blossoms hanging down & round,  
beside a densely knotted hedge  
entwined with reeds & bright green sedge.  
She gloried in that branch; it formed  
20      a kind of stage, & she performed  
the music of her repertoire  
as if she played a pipe or harp,  
as if each bright, melodious note  
were not the product of a throat.  
25      There was, nearby, a tree-stump where  
the Owl intoned her hourly prayers,  
an ancient ivy-covered bole  
the Owl had claimed as her abode.  
The Nightingale clapped eyes on her  
30      & shot the Owl a filthy glare,



disgusted by that horrid creature's  
loathsome, nauseating features.  
"Freak, why don't you disappear?  
It sickens me to see you here.  
Your ugly presence guarantees  
35 to throw my fluting out of key.  
In fact whenever you turn up  
my jaw locks & my heart won't pump.  
As for your tuneless yodelling  
it makes me want to spit, not sing."  
40 The Owl was silent until dusk,  
by which time she was on the cusp  
of rage, her lungs about to burst  
through holding back her angry words,  
her heart about to pop. She yowled,  
45 "How does my music strike you now?  
You tell yourself that I can't sing  
but I'm not one for twittering.  
You ridicule me & you mock,  
snipe from the cover of the copse,  
50 but if you flew that branch of yours  
I'd make you welcome in my claws  
(bring on that day before too long!)  
& then you'd sing a different song!"  
At which the Nightingale remarked,  
55 "As long as I'm alert & sharp  
in open ground or on the wing  
your menace has a hollow ring.  
As long as I keep to the hedge  
your words are simply worthless threats.  
60 I've seen the ruthless way you rip  
those birds who can't escape your grip,  
& how you like to sink your pincers  
into little larks & finches.  
That's why feathered creatures hate you,  
65 drive you from their patch, berate you

with their screams & cries, & why  
they rise & mob you when you fly,  
& why the tiniest of tits  
would gladly tear you bit from bit.  
70 You really are a gruesome sight  
in ways too many to describe:  
your neck's too thin, your trunk's too small,  
your head is bigger than . . . your all!  
Your coal-black eyes are weirdly broad  
75 & look like they've been daubed with woad,  
& glare as if you'd like to feast  
on anyone within your reach.  
Your bill is sharp & bent & hard—  
a flesh-hook with a buckled barb—  
80 that issues—loud & all day long—  
some caterwaul you call a song.  
You threaten me, & say your feet  
will catch & mulch me into meat;  
a frog, though, underneath the mill-wheel,  
85 surely makes a truer Owl meal?  
Snail & mouse & squelchy slug  
are more your right & proper grub.  
You roost by day & fly by night  
which proves that something isn't right.  
90 You are repellent & impure,  
you & those filthy chicks of yours,  
that brood of dirty-looking pests  
you're raising in a filthy nest.  
They soil the den they're living in  
95 until their droppings reach their chins  
then stand about as if they're blind,  
which brings this truism to mind:  
'Accursed be the wretched beast  
that makes its toilet where it feeds.' "

100

\* \* \*

The angry Owl was so provoked  
her eyes grew wider as she spoke.  
1045 "You claim to guard the bower where  
the leaves grow & the flowers flare  
& couples sleep, that sheltered place  
where lovers lie down & embrace.  
But once you sang—I know for sure—  
1050 outside a marriage suite, to lure  
a lady into wicked ways.  
To lead her body to disgrace  
you sang tunes of a shameful sort  
& filled her dreams with carnal thoughts.  
His lordship soon became aware;  
1055 with lime & every type of snare  
he laid his traps to make a catch,  
&, landing at the window's hatch  
you came to justice, being pinned  
& fastened firmly by your shins.<sup>2</sup>  
1060 The punishment your crime would bring:  
wild horses tore you limb from limb.  
So do your worst with maids & wives  
by bringing ruin to their lives;  
your tongue will prove the very trap  
1065 that leaves you floored & in a flap."

The Nightingale, piqued at these words,  
would readily have fought with swords  
& spears if she had been a man,  
but since she had no choice her plan  
1070 involved her sharp & clever tongue.  
"Who speaks well . . . fights well," goes the song;  
she'd wage war with her voice instead.  
"To fight well, sing well," Alfred<sup>3</sup> said.  
"Your talk won't cover me in shame—  
1075 his lordship was the one to blame  
for being jealous of his wife.

His envy could have cost his life  
because his heart began to fail  
when she conversed with other males.  
1080 He locked her in an inner chamber;  
strong & steadfast bounds contained her;  
sorry for her anguish there  
I felt her pain & pitied her  
& kept her cheerful all day long  
1085 by filling every hour with song,  
a tactic which enraged the knight  
who loathed my bones with all his might.  
He tried to make his problem mine  
but was found guilty of the crime:  
1090 on hearing of that man's misdeed  
King Henry,<sup>4</sup> rest in peace, decreed  
the sentence must be banishment,  
a right & proper punishment  
for acts so base & underhand  
1095 committed in a good king's land,  
whereby a tiny Nightingale  
had been dismembered top to tail.  
To bring back honor to my race  
he wiped the smile from that man's face  
1100 & made him pay one hundred pounds  
to me. My chicks, now safe & sound,  
enjoy their new prosperity  
by right, & their security.  
And I, avenged of the offence,  
1105 speak with a strengthened confidence.  
Because of that one incident  
my cheerfulness is permanent  
& as I please I raise my voice  
& no one dares dispute my choice.  
1110 But you, you wretch, you ghoulisg ghost,  
you can't identify a post

or hollow stump to crouch inside  
avoiding those who'd nip your hide.  
For youngsters, serfs, & those who farm,  
1115 & peasant folk, all mean you harm,  
& if they spy you on your perch  
they hope to injure you, or worse,  
& fill their pockets up with stones  
then aim to break your horrid bones."

1120

\* \* \*

The Owl was glad to hear this tale,  
because although the Nightingale  
had started speaking well enough  
her argument had tapered off.  
She said, "From what you have described  
1515 it's clear your sympathies reside  
with girls; they're faultless in your eyes,  
therefore you praise them to the skies.  
But married women, filled with grief,  
all turn to me to seek relief.  
1520 It happens time & time again  
that married life comes under strain,  
because of which the husband strays  
& finds some other love to chase,  
immorally pursuing her  
1525 & tipping out his purse on her,  
abandoning his lawful spouse  
who occupies their lonely house  
in threadbare clothes, among bare walls,  
with very little food at all.  
1530 And out of terror she has learned  
to bite her lip once he's returned,  
though like a lunatic he shouts  
& bawls & throws his weight about.  
All that she does displeases him,  
1535

all that she utters teases him,  
& when she tries to keep the peace  
he's apt to punch her in the teeth.  
The man who misbehaves that way  
can't fail to send his wife astray.  
1540 Because of his abuse at home  
she'll seek out pleasures of her own;  
she'll cuckold him, of course she will,  
but don't say she's responsible.  
And yes, it's usually the case  
1545 she's well brought-up & fair of face,  
so when the husband spends his purse  
outside the home the crime seems worse—  
the mistress of his love affair  
is barely worth one strand of hair  
1550 belonging to his spouse. In life  
such husbands fail to trust their wives:  
no other men must talk to them,  
& if they look at other men  
or speak with other men politely  
1555 husbands think deceit is likely.  
Stifled, then, by lock & key,  
the wives turn to adultery,  
because they're driven to explore  
what was anathema before.  
1560 A curse on those who whine & whinge  
when wives deliver their revenge.  
This is the thing that wives complain  
to me about; I feel their pain  
& sense such overwhelming hurt  
1565 I sometimes think my heart will burst.  
My eyes are sore with bitter tears;  
I pray that Christ our Lord will hear  
their prayers so wives might share their beds  
with decent, honest men instead.  
1570 And now I'll tell you one thing more

that you will have no answer for,  
I'll put your logic in a spin  
& no reply will save your skin.  
1575 So, many merchants, many knights,  
will love their wives & treat them right,  
& many peasants will do too;  
accordingly each wife stays true,  
& does her best to serve her lord  
1580 both in the bedroom & at board  
& eagerly she'll aim to please  
with caring words & thoughtful deeds.  
The husband travels far & wide  
in his endeavors to provide  
1585 for them, & when he ups & leaves  
the steadfast wife at home will grieve;  
she'll sit & sigh when he departs  
because a longing fills her heart  
& anxious for her husband's sake,  
1590 she'll fret by day then lie awake;  
each moment lasts a long, long while,  
& every step feels like a mile.  
Outside, alone, at night, I keep  
a vigil while the world's asleep;  
alert to how bereft she is  
1595 I sing songs for her benefit,  
laments for her unhappiness  
expressing just how sad she is,  
& for this show of sympathy  
she warms to me & welcomes me.  
1600 I strive to help such wives because  
they seek to plot a noble course.  
You've riled my heart to such a stage  
it's almost paralyzed with rage  
& I can barely speak a word,  
1605 but I'll continue, undeterred.  
You say that I'm despised by men,

inspire hostility in them;  
they threaten me with stones & sticks  
then beat & smash my bones to bits  
1610 & when all life in me is lost  
they hang me from a hedge or post  
to scare the magpie & the crow  
in acres where the crops are sown.  
And so, in truth, by shedding blood  
1615 I'm helping out & doing good!  
My death brings people benefit  
which you find painful to admit,  
for once you're shrivelled up & gone  
you are no use to anyone.  
1620 Why you exist I just don't know  
you good-for-nothing so-&-so,  
but even when I cease to live  
I still have something more to give:  
when hunters mount me on a stick  
1625 in woods where trees grow dense & thick  
I serve my purpose as a lure  
for little birds, so I ensure  
men have their share of roasted meat  
by snaring food they like to eat  
1630 You're just as pointless when alert  
as when you're lifeless & inert;  
why bother bringing up a brood—  
alive or dead they do no good."

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note \*: The translation is by Simon Armitage. [Return to reference \\*](#)



- Note 1: The large tradition of medieval debate poetry has roots in classical literature; see Virgil, *Eclogues* 3 and 7.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A possible allusion to Marie de France's lay *Laüstic* (see pp. 184–86).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: King of Wessex (ca. 871–99), to whom a surviving collection of proverbs, frequently cited in *The Owl and the Nightingale* as a source of wisdom, is attributed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Most probably Henry II (d. 1189).[Return to reference 4](#)

## GEOFFREY CHAUCER

For the full headnote on Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340–1400), see [pages 467–69](#).

Chaucer's *Parliament of Birds* is deeply indebted to two classic texts, but a servant to neither. For in both cases, dreaming, desire, and the birds take over.

Chaucer's narrator starts reading a text by the Roman orator and politician Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), Book 6 of his *Republic* (51 B.C.E.), known in the medieval period as *The Dream of Scipio*. The Latin text relates the dream of the Roman general Scipio (d. 129 B.C.E.), who dreams that his grandfather Scipio Africanus takes him on an astral voyage to understand how service to the state will be rewarded in the afterlife, and how pursuit of sensual desire must be repressed by servants of the state as they pursue the Roman military conquest of North Africa.

Later in the poem, the narrator mentions another Latin philosophical text, the late medieval *Complaint of Nature* (1160s) by Alan of Lille. In this text the goddess Nature, whose gown is splendidly embroidered with images of every species of bird, explains to the narrator why human desire, especially homosexual desire, alone in nature deviates from the ideal, fertile, and productive models of the natural order. Alan's *Complaint* ends with the excommunication of homosexual love.

How are these severe Latin texts received in Chaucer's vernacular poem? They enter the dream world and are there rewritten by the desire of the narrator's dreaming psyche. He enters the walled garden of Nature, there to replay Cicero's "common profit," or political good, as the collective "good" of sexual desire as expressed in Nature's parliament, where birds choose their mates on Valentine's Day. And the birds embroidered on the outer garment of Alan's goddess Nature come to life here, irrepressibly debating, singing,

and quacking their way to a collective, ecological resolution of desire. Whereas Alan's natural order is ideally a hierarchical one ruled by cosmic reason, here the hierarchy is invoked only to be questioned in many ways. The aristocratic birds (revealingly, they are birds of prey) may, for example, be sophisticated in their pursuit of a refined and courtly love, but it's the lower birds who, for all their comic, no-nonsense quacking, are better serving the common profit of Nature's ecological order by choosing their mates with admirable dispatch. And when it comes to advising the young aristocratic female bird about the male lover she should choose among the three offering themselves, Nature refuses to recognize the "natural" hierarchy of birth: "If I were Reason, certes, then would I / Counsel you the royal tercel take" (lines 632–33). With this single subjunctive, Chaucer opens up a significant difference between himself and his Neoplatonic poetic and philosophical frames: passionate love may not be rational, but it *is* natural. And natural love can cross the class boundaries of birth, thereby revealing that those boundaries are not in fact natural at all. In this poem, bonding is a matter of election.

This, then, is an account of a new and largely joyous ecology, with immediate implications for humans and human society. Chaucer's Latin source texts promote cosmic, philosophical reason as expressed by patrician figures; his own vernacular poem takes its cue rather from the parliament (literally "the speaking") of birds of all classes.

# The Parliament of Birds<sup>1</sup>

The life so short, the craft so long to learn,<sup>2</sup>  
Th'assay<sup>o</sup> so sharp,<sup>o</sup> so hard the conquering,  
The dreadful<sup>o</sup> joy that always slit so yerne,<sup>3</sup>  
All this mean I by Love,<sup>4</sup> that my feeling  
Astonieth<sup>o</sup> with his wonderful working<sup>5</sup>  
5 So sore<sup>o</sup> ywis,<sup>o</sup> that when I on him think,  
Not wot I<sup>6</sup> well wher<sup>o</sup> that I float or sink.

For all be<sup>o</sup> that I know not love in deed,<sup>o</sup>  
Ne wot<sup>o</sup> how that he quiteth folk their hire,<sup>7</sup>  
10 Yet happeth me<sup>o</sup> full ofte in bokes<sup>o</sup> read  
Of his miracles and his cruel ire;<sup>o</sup>  
There read I well he will be lord and sire,  
I dare not seyn,<sup>o</sup> his strokes<sup>o</sup> been so sore,  
But<sup>o</sup> God save such a lord! I can no more.<sup>8</sup>

15 Of usage what for luste what for lore,<sup>9</sup>  
On bokes rede I ofte, as I you tolde.  
But wherefore that I speak all this? Not yore<sup>o</sup>  
Ago, it happed<sup>o</sup> me for to beholde  
Upon a book, was write with lettres olde;  
And thereupon a certain thing to learn,  
20 The longe day full faste<sup>o</sup> I read and yerne.<sup>o</sup>

For out of olde felde,<sup>o</sup> as men sey,  
Cometh all this newe corn<sup>o</sup> from year to year;  
And out of olde bokes, in good fey,<sup>o</sup>  
Cometh all this newe science<sup>o</sup> that men lere.<sup>o</sup>  
25 But now to purpose as of this matere<sup>1</sup>—  
To rede forth so gan me to delite,<sup>o</sup>

That all that day me thoughte but a lite.<sup>o</sup><sub>2</sub>

30 This book of which I make of mencioun,  
Entitled was all thus, as I shall telle,  
"Tullius<sup>o</sup> of the dream of Scipioun."<sup>2</sup><sub>2</sub>  
Chapitres seven it hadde, of heaven and helle,  
And earth, and soules that therein dwelle,  
Of whiche, as shortly<sup>o</sup> as I can it treat,<sup>o</sup>  
35 Of his sentence<sup>o</sup> I will ye seyn the grete.<sup>o</sup>

First telleth it, when Scipion was come  
In Afrik,<sup>o</sup> how he met Massinisse,  
That him for joy in armes hath ynome.<sup>o</sup>  
Then telleth it their speech and all the blisse<sup>o</sup>  
40 That was betwix<sup>o</sup> them, til the day gan misse;<sup>o</sup>  
And how his ancestor, African so dear,  
Gan in his sleep that night to him appear.

Then telleth it that from a starry place,<sup>o</sup>  
How African hath him Carthage shewed,<sup>o</sup>  
And warned him before of all his grace<sup>o</sup>  
45 And said him,<sup>o</sup> what man, lered other  
    lewed,<sup>o</sup>  
That loveth common profit,<sup>o</sup> well ythewed,<sup>o</sup>  
He should unto a blissful place wende,<sup>o</sup>  
Thereas<sup>o</sup> joy is that last withouten ende.

50 Then asked he, if folk that now ben dead  
Have life and dwelling in another place;  
And African saide, "Ye, withouten dread,"<sup>o</sup>  
And that our present worldes lifes space<sup>3</sup>  
Nis<sup>o</sup> but a manner<sup>o</sup> death, what wey we trace,<sup>4</sup>  
55 And rightful folk shall go, after they die,  
To heaven; and shewed him the galaxy.

Then showed he him the little earth, that here is,

At regard of<sup>o</sup> the hevenes quantity;  
And after showed he him the nine spheres,  
And after that the melody herde he  
60 That cometh of thilke<sup>o</sup> spheres thrice three,<sup>5</sup>  
That well is of music and melody  
In this world here, and cause of harmony.

Then bade he him, since erthe was so lite,<sup>o</sup>  
And full of torment and of harde grace,<sup>o</sup>  
65 That he ne should him in the world delite.  
Then tolde he him, in certain yeres space,<sup>6</sup>  
That every star should come into his place  
There it was first; and all should out of mind<sup>o</sup>  
70 That in this world is done of all mankind.

Then prayed him Scipioun<sup>o</sup> to tell him all  
The way to come into that heavenly blisse;  
And he said, "Know thyself first<sup>o</sup> immortal,<sup>7</sup>  
And look ay<sup>o</sup> busily thou work and wisse<sup>o</sup>  
75 To common profit, and thou shalt not misse<sup>o</sup>  
To comen swiftly to that place dear,<sup>o</sup>  
That full of bliss is and of soules clear.<sup>o</sup>

But breakers of the law, soth to seyne,<sup>o</sup>  
And lecherous folk, after that they be dead,  
80 Shall always whirl about the earth in pain,  
Til many a world be passed, out of dread,<sup>o</sup>  
And then, forgiven all their wicked deed,  
Then shall they come unto that blissful place,  
To which to comen God thee sende his grace!"

85 The day gan failen and the darke night,  
That reveth<sup>o</sup> bestes<sup>o</sup> from their business,<sup>o</sup>  
Berafte me<sup>o</sup> my book for lack of light,  
And to my bed I gan me for to dresse,<sup>o</sup>  
Fulfilled of thought<sup>o</sup> and busy heavinesse;<sup>o</sup>

90 For both I hadde thing which that I nolde,  
And eek<sup>o</sup> I ne had that thing that I wolde.<sup>o</sup>

But finally my spirit, at the last,  
Forweary<sup>o</sup> of my labor all the day,  
Took rest, that made me to slepe faste,<sup>o</sup>  
And in my sleep I mette,<sup>o</sup> as that I lay,  
95 How African, right in the selfe aray<sup>o</sup>  
That Scipioun him saw before that tide,<sup>o</sup>  
Was come and stood right at my bedes side.

The weary hunter sleeping in his bed,  
To woode again his minde goth anoon;<sup>o</sup>  
100 The judge dremeth how his pleas ben sped;<sup>o</sup>  
The carter dremeth how his cart is goon;  
The rich, of gold; the knight fights with his foon;<sup>o</sup>  
The sick met<sup>o</sup> he drinketh of the ton;<sup>o</sup>  
105 The lover met he hath his lady won.<sup>8</sup>

Can I not say if that the cause were  
For<sup>o</sup> I had read of African beforne,  
That made me to met<sup>o</sup> that he stood there;  
But thus said he, "Thou hast thee so well born<sup>o</sup>  
110 In looking of min olde book totorn.<sup>o</sup>  
Of which Macrobie roghte<sup>o</sup> not a lite,<sup>o</sup>  
That somdel<sup>o</sup> of thy labor would I quite!"<sup>o</sup>—

Citherea!<sup>9</sup> thou blissful lady sweete,  
That with thy firebrand dauntest whom thee lest,<sup>o</sup>  
And madest me this sweven<sup>o</sup> for to mete,<sup>o</sup>  
115 Be thou my help in this, for thou mayst best;  
As wisly<sup>o</sup> as I saw thee north-north-west,  
When I began my sweven for to write,<sup>1</sup>  
So give me might to rhyme and ek t'endite!<sup>o</sup>

120 This foresaid African me hente<sup>o</sup> anoon,

And forth with him unto a gate broughte  
Right of a parke, walled of grene stone;  
And over the gate, with letters large ywroghte,<sup>o</sup>  
There weren vers<sup>o</sup> ywriten, as me thoghte,<sup>o</sup>  
On either half,<sup>o</sup> of full great difference,  
125 Of which I shall you say the plain sentence.<sup>o</sup>

"Through me men go into that blissful place  
Of hertes hele<sup>o</sup> and dedly woundes cure;  
Through me men go unto the welle<sup>o</sup> of Grace,  
There green and lusty<sup>o</sup> May shall ever endure;  
130 This is the way to all good aventure;<sup>o</sup>  
Be glad, thou reader, and thy sorrow ofcaste,<sup>o</sup>  
All open am I; passe in, and hie thee faste!"<sup>o</sup>

"Through me men go," then spoke that other side,  
"Unto the mortal strokes of the spear,  
135 Of which Disdain and Danger<sup>o</sup> is the guide,  
There tree shall never fruit nor leves<sup>o</sup> bear.  
This stream you ledeth to the sorrowful were,<sup>o</sup>  
There as the fish in prison is all drie;  
Th'eschewing<sup>o</sup> is only the remedie."<sup>2</sup>

These vers of gold and black ywriten were,  
Of whiche I gan astounded<sup>o</sup> to beholde,  
For with that one increased ay<sup>o</sup> my fear,  
And with that other gan min herte bolde;<sup>o</sup>  
145 That one me het,<sup>o</sup> that other did me colde,<sup>o</sup>  
No wit had I, for<sup>o</sup> error, for to chese<sup>o</sup>  
To entre or flee, or me to save or lese.<sup>o</sup>

Right<sup>o</sup> as, betwixen adamauntes<sup>o</sup> two  
Of even might,<sup>o</sup> a piece of iron yset  
That hath no might to move to ne fro—  
150 For what that one may hale,<sup>o</sup> that other let<sup>o</sup>—  
Ferde<sup>o</sup> I; that niste whether me was bet,<sup>3</sup>



To enter or leave, til African my guide  
Me hente,<sup>o</sup> and shoof<sup>o</sup> in at the gates wide,

155 And said, "It stondeth<sup>o</sup> written in thy face,  
Thin error, though thou tell it not to me;  
But dread the not to come into this place,  
For this writing nis nothing meant by thee,<sup>o</sup>  
Ne by none, but<sup>o</sup> he Loves servant be;  
160 For thou of love hast lost thy taste, I guess,  
As sick man hath of sweet and bitterness.

But nonetheless, although that thou be dull,  
Yet that thou canst not do, yet mayst thou see;  
For many a man that may not stand<sup>o</sup> a pulle,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet liketh him<sup>o</sup> at wrestling for to be,  
165 And demeth yet wher he do bet or he;<sup>4</sup>  
And if thou haddest cunning for t'endite,<sup>o</sup>  
I shal thee shewen matter of to write."<sup>o</sup>

With that my hand he took in his anoon,  
Of which I comfort caught, and went in faste;<sup>o</sup>  
170 But Lord! so I was glad and well begoon!<sup>o</sup>  
For overall, where I min eyen<sup>o</sup> caste,  
Were trees clad with leaves that ay<sup>o</sup> shall laste,  
Each in his kinde,<sup>o</sup> of colour fresh and green  
As emerald, that joye was to seen:  
175

The builder<sup>o</sup> oak, and eek<sup>o</sup> the hardy ash;  
The piler<sup>5</sup> elm, the cofre<sup>o</sup> unto careine;<sup>o</sup>  
The boxtree piper;<sup>6</sup> holm<sup>o</sup> to whippes lash;  
The sailing fir;<sup>7</sup> the cipres, death to pleine;<sup>o</sup>  
The sheter ew,<sup>8</sup> the asp for shaftes pleine<sup>o</sup>;  
180 The olive of peace, and eek<sup>o</sup> the drunken vine,  
The victor palm, the laurer to devine.<sup>o9</sup>

A garden saw I, full of blosmy<sup>o</sup> boughs,

Upon a river, in a grene mead,<sup>o</sup>  
 There as sweetness evermore ynow<sup>o</sup> is,  
 185 With flowers white, blue, yellow, and red;  
 And colde welle-stremes, nothing dead,<sup>o</sup>  
 That swommen full of smale fisshes lighte,  
 With finnes red and scales silver-brighte.

On every bough the birdes heard I sing,  
 190 With voice of angel in their harmonie,  
 Som busied them<sup>o</sup> their birddes<sup>o</sup> forth to bring;  
 The little conies<sup>o</sup> to their play gunne hie.<sup>o</sup>  
 And further all aboute I gan espie  
 195 The dreadful roe, the buck,<sup>1</sup> the hart and hinde<sup>o</sup>  
 Squirrels, and bestes small of gentle kinde.<sup>o</sup>

Of instruments of stringes in accord<sup>o</sup>  
 Heard I so play and ravissing sweetness,  
 That God, that maker is of all and lord  
 Ne heard never better, as I guess;  
 200 Therewith a wind, unnethe<sup>o</sup> it might be less<sup>o</sup>  
 Made in the leves grene a noise so softe  
 Acordaunt to<sup>o</sup> the briddes songe onlofte.<sup>o</sup>

The air of that place so attempre<sup>o</sup> was  
 That never was grevaunce<sup>o</sup> of hot ne cold;  
 205 There wex<sup>o</sup> eek<sup>o</sup> every holsome spice and grass,<sup>o</sup>  
 Ne no man may there wexe<sup>o</sup> sick ne old;  
 Yet was ther joy more than a thousand fold  
 Than man can tell; ne never wolde it night,<sup>o</sup>  
 210 But ay<sup>o</sup> clear day to any mannes sight.

Under a tree, beside a well,<sup>o</sup> I say<sup>o</sup>  
 Cupide<sup>2</sup> our lord his arrows forge and file;  
 And at his feet his bow all ready lay,  
 And Wille<sup>o</sup> his doghter tempered all this while  
 The hedes<sup>o</sup> in the welle, and with her file

215 She couched them after as they should serve,<sup>3</sup>  
Some for to slay, and some to wounde and kerve.°

Then was I war° of Plesaunce anonright,°  
And of Array,° and Lust,<sup>4</sup> and Courtesy,  
And of the Craft° that can and hath the might  
220 To doon° by force a wight° to do folie—  
Disfigurat° was she, I nil not° lie;  
And by himself, under an oak, I guess,  
Saw I Delight, that stood with Gentleness.°

225 I saw Beauty, withouten any attire,  
And Youthe, ful of game and jolity,  
Foolhardiness, Flattery, and Desire,  
Messagerie,° and Mede,° and other three—  
Their names shall not here be told for° me—  
And upon pillars great of jasper° longe°  
230 I saw a temple of brass yfounded stronge.°

About the temple daunceden alway°  
Wommen ynowe,° of whiche some there were  
Faire of herself,° and some of them were gay;°  
In kirtels,<sup>5</sup> all disshevele,° went they there—  
235 That was their office° always, year by year—  
And on the temple, of doves white and faire  
Saw I sittinge many a hundred paire.

Before the temple door full soberly  
240 Dame Peace sat, with a curtain in her hond;  
And by her side, wonder discreetly,°  
Dame Pacience sitting there I fond°  
With face pale, upon an hille of sond;°  
And aldernext,° within and eek withoute,°  
Behest° and Art, and of their folke a route.°  
245

Within the temple, with sighes° hot as fire

I heard a swogh<sup>o</sup> that gan aboute renne;<sup>o</sup>  
Which sighes were engendred with<sup>o</sup> desire,  
That maden every altar for to brenne<sup>o</sup>  
Of newe flame; and well aspied I thenne  
250 That all the cause of sorrow that they drie<sup>o</sup>  
Came of the bitter goddess Jealousy.

The god Priapus saw I,<sup>6</sup> as I wente,  
Within the temple, in sovereign<sup>o</sup> place stonde,  
In such array<sup>o</sup> as when the ass him shente<sup>o</sup>  
255 With cry by night, and with septr<sup>o</sup> in honde;  
Full busily men gan assaye and fonde<sup>o</sup>  
Upon his head to set, of sundry hewe<sup>o</sup>  
Garlands full of flowers fresshe newe.

260 And in a privy corner, in desporte,<sup>o</sup>  
Found I Venus and her porter<sup>o</sup> Richesse,  
That was full noble and hautein of hir porte.<sup>o</sup>  
Dark was that place, but afterward lightness  
I saw a little, unnethe<sup>o</sup> it might be less,  
And on a bed of gold she lay to reste,  
265 Til that the hote sonne gan to weste.<sup>o</sup>

Her gilte<sup>o</sup> hairs with a golden thread  
Ybounden were untressed<sup>o</sup> as she lay,  
And naked from the breast up to the head  
Men might her see; and, sothly<sup>o</sup> for to say,  
270 The remenant was well covered to my pay<sup>o</sup>  
Right with a subtle kerchief<sup>o</sup> of Valence,<sup>7</sup>  
Ther was no thicker cloth of no defence.<sup>8</sup>

The place gave a thousand savours swote,<sup>o</sup>  
And Bachus,<sup>9</sup> god of wine, sat her beside,  
275 And Ceres next,<sup>1</sup> that doth of hunger bote;<sup>2</sup>  
And, as I said, amiddes lay Cipride,<sup>3</sup>  
To whom on knees two yonge folkes cried

To ben their help; but thus I let her lie,  
 And further in the temple I gan espie  
 280  
 That, in dispite of Diane the chaste,<sup>4</sup>  
 Ful many a bowe ybroke<sup>o</sup> hung on the wall  
 Of maidens, such as gan their times waste  
 In her servise; and painted over all  
 Full many a story, of which I touche shall  
 285  
 A fewe, as of Calixte<sup>5</sup> and Athalante,<sup>6</sup>  
 And many a maide, of which the name I wante;<sup>o</sup>  
  
 Semiramus,<sup>7</sup> Candace,<sup>8</sup> and Ercules,<sup>9</sup>  
 Biblis,<sup>1</sup> Dido,<sup>2</sup> Thisbe, and Piramus,<sup>3</sup>  
 290  
 Tristram, Isoude,<sup>4</sup> Paris,<sup>5</sup> and Achilles,<sup>6</sup>  
 Eleine, Cleopatre,<sup>7</sup> and Troilus,<sup>8</sup>  
 Silla,<sup>9</sup> and eek<sup>o</sup> the moder of Romulus<sup>1</sup>—  
 Alle these were painted on that other side,  
 And all their love, and in what plight they died.  
  
 When I was come again unto the place  
 295  
 That I of spoke, that was so sweet and green,  
 Forth walked I then, myselven to solace.<sup>o</sup>  
 Then was I war<sup>o</sup> where that there sat a queen  
 That, as of light the summer sonne sheen  
 Passeth the star, right so over mesure  
 300  
 She fairer was than any creature.  
  
 And in a launde,<sup>o</sup> upon an hill of flowers,  
 Was set this noble goddess of Nature;  
 Of branches were her halles and her bowers,<sup>o</sup>  
 Ywrought<sup>o</sup> after her caste<sup>o</sup> and her measure;  
 305  
 Ne ther nas fowl<sup>o</sup> that cometh of engendrure,<sup>o</sup>  
 That they ne were all prest<sup>o</sup> in her presence,  
 To take her doom<sup>o</sup> and give her audience.<sup>o</sup>

For this was on Seint Valentines day,<sup>2</sup>  
When every bird cometh there to choose his make,<sup>o</sup>  
310 Of every kinde, that men thenke may;  
And that so huge a noise gan they make,  
That earth and air, and tree, and every lake  
So full was, that unnethe<sup>o</sup> was there space  
315 For me to stand, so full was all the place.

And right as Alain,<sup>3</sup> in the Pleint of Kinde,<sup>o</sup>  
Deviseth<sup>o</sup> Nature in array and face,  
In such array men mighten her there finde.  
This noble emperesse, full of grace  
320 Bade every fowl to take his owne place,  
As they were wont<sup>o</sup> always from year to year,  
Seint Valentines day, to stonden there.

That is to say, the foules of ravine<sup>o</sup>  
Were highest set; and thanne foules smale,  
325 That eten as them Nature would encline,<sup>o</sup>  
As worm or thing of whiche I tell no tale;<sup>o</sup>  
And water-foul sat loweste in the dale;  
But fowl that liveth by seed sat on the green,  
And that so fele,<sup>o</sup> that wonder was to seen.

There mighte men the royal eagle find,  
330 That with his sharpe look pearceth the sonne;  
And other egles of a lower kind,<sup>o</sup>  
Of which that clerkes well devisen cunne.<sup>o</sup>  
Ther was the tyrant with his feathers dunne<sup>o</sup>  
335 And greye, I mene the goshawk, that doth pine<sup>o</sup>  
To briddes for his outrageous ravine.<sup>o</sup>

The gentle<sup>o</sup> falcon, that with feet distreineth<sup>o</sup>  
The kinges hand; the hardy sperhawk<sup>o</sup> eke  
The quailles foe; the merlin<sup>o</sup> that paineth

340 Himself full ofte, the larke for to seek;  
There was the dove, with hir eyen<sup>o</sup> meek;  
The jealous swan, ayens<sup>o</sup> her death that singeth;  
The owle eek, that of death the bode<sup>o</sup> bringeth;

The crane giant, with his trumpes soun<sup>e</sup>;  
The thief the chogh;<sup>o</sup> and eek the jangling pie;<sup>o</sup>  
345 The scorning jay; the eles<sup>o</sup> foo, heroun<sup>e</sup>;  
The false lapwing, ful of treachery;  
The starling, that the counseil<sup>o</sup> can bewreie;<sup>o</sup>  
The tame ruddok;<sup>o</sup> and the coward kite;<sup>o</sup>  
The cock, that orloge<sup>o</sup> is of thorpes lite;<sup>o</sup>  
350

The sparrow, Venus son; the nightingale,  
That clepeth<sup>o</sup> forth the grene leves<sup>o</sup> newe;  
The swallow, morder<sup>o</sup> of the flies<sup>o</sup> smale  
That maken hony of flowers fresshe of hewe;<sup>o</sup>  
The wedded turtle,<sup>o</sup> with hir herte trewe;  
355 The peacok, with his angels feathers bright;  
The fesaunt,<sup>o</sup> scorner of the cock by night;

The waker<sup>o</sup> goose; the cuckoo most unkinde;<sup>4</sup>  
The popinjay, ful of delicacy;<sup>o</sup>  
The drake, stroyer<sup>o</sup> of his owne kinde;<sup>o</sup>  
360 The stork, the wreker<sup>o</sup> of avouterie;<sup>o</sup>  
The hote<sup>o</sup> cormeraunt of gluttony;  
The raven wise, the crow with voice of care;<sup>o</sup>  
The thrustle<sup>o</sup> old; the frosty feldefare.<sup>o</sup>

What should I say? of foules every kind  
365 That in this world han feathers and stature,<sup>o</sup>  
Men mighten in that place assembled find  
Before the noble goddess of Nature  
And everich<sup>o</sup> of them did his busy cure<sup>o</sup>  
Benignely<sup>o</sup> to choose or for to take,  
370 By hir acord, his formel<sup>o</sup> or his make.<sup>o</sup>

But to the point—Nature held on hir hond<sup>o</sup>  
A formel eagle, of shape the gentlest<sup>o</sup>  
That ever she among her workes fonde,<sup>o</sup>  
The most benigne and the goodliest;  
375 In her was every vertue at his reste,<sup>o</sup>  
So ferforth,<sup>o</sup> that Nature herself had blisse  
To look on her, and ofte her beak to kisse.

Nature, the vicarie<sup>o</sup> of th'almighty lorde,  
That hot, cold, heavy, light, and moist and dreie<sup>o</sup>  
380 Hath knit with even number of accorde,<sup>o</sup>  
In easy voice gan for to speak and seye,  
"Foules, take heed of my sentence,<sup>o</sup> I pray,  
And, for your ease, in furthering of your<sup>o</sup> need,  
385 As faste as I may speak, I will me speed.<sup>5</sup>

You know well how, Saint Valentines day,  
By my statute and through my governaunce,  
You come for to choose—and flee your way—  
Your makes,<sup>o</sup> as I prick<sup>o</sup> you with plesaunce.<sup>o</sup>  
But nonetheless, my rightful ordenaunce<sup>o</sup>  
390 May I not break, for all this world to win,<sup>o</sup>  
That he that most is worthy shall begin.

The tercel<sup>o</sup> eagle, as that you know full well,  
The foul<sup>o</sup> royal above you in degree,  
395 The wise and worthy, secree,<sup>o</sup> trewe as steel,  
The which I formed have, as you may see,  
In every part as it best liketh me,<sup>o</sup>  
It nedeth not his shape<sup>o</sup> you to devise,<sup>o</sup>  
He shall first choose and speken in his guise.<sup>o</sup>

And after him, by order shall you choose,  
400 After your kind,<sup>o</sup> everich as you liketh,<sup>o</sup>  
And, as your hap<sup>o</sup> is, shall you win or lose;



But which of you that love most entriketh,<sup>o</sup>  
God sende him her that sorest for him siketh."<sup>o</sup>  
And therewithal the tercel gan she call,  
405 And said, "My son the choice is to you fall.

"But nonetheless, on this condition  
Must be the choice of everich that is here,  
That she agree to his election,<sup>o</sup>  
410 Whatso he be<sup>o</sup> that shulde be her fere;<sup>o</sup>  
This is our usage<sup>o</sup> always from year to year;  
And who so may at this time have his grace,<sup>o</sup>  
In blissful time he came into this place."

With head inclined and with full humble chere<sup>o</sup>  
415 This royal tercel spoke and taried not:  
"Unto my sovereign lady, and not my fere,<sup>6</sup>  
I choose, and choose with will and heart and  
thought,  
The formel<sup>o</sup> on your hand so well ywrought,<sup>o</sup>  
Whose I am all and ever will her serve,  
420 Do what hir list,<sup>7</sup> to do me live or sterve.<sup>o</sup>

Beseeching her of mercy and of grace,  
As she that is my lady sovereigne;  
Or let me die present<sup>o</sup> in this place.  
For certes,<sup>o</sup> long I may not live in pain;  
425 For in min heart is corven<sup>o</sup> every vein;  
And haveinge only reward to<sup>8</sup> my truthe<sup>o</sup>  
My dere heart, have on my woe some routhe.<sup>o</sup>

And if that I to her be founde untrue,<sup>o</sup>  
Disobeisaunt,<sup>o</sup> or wilful<sup>o</sup> negligent,  
Avauntour,<sup>o</sup> or in process<sup>o</sup> love a newe,  
430 I pray to you this be my jugement,  
That with<sup>o</sup> these foules I be all torent,<sup>o</sup>  
That ilke<sup>o</sup> day that ever she me finde

To hir untrue, or in my guilt unkinde.°

435 And since that none loveth her so well as I,  
All be she never of love me behette,<sup>9</sup>  
Then oughte she be min through her mercy,  
For other bond can I none on hir knet.°  
For never, for no woe, ne shall I let°  
440 To serven her, how far so that she wende;°  
Sey what you list my tale is at an ende."

Right as the fresshe, rede rose newe  
Ayen° the summer sonne colored is,  
Right so for shame all wexen gan her hewe  
445 Of this formel,° when that she heard all this;  
She neither answered well ne said amiss  
So sore abasshed was she, til that Nature  
Said "Daughter, dread you noght, I you assure."

Another tercel eagle spoke anoon  
450 Of lower kinde,<sup>1</sup> and said, "That shall not be;  
I love her bet° than ye do, by Saint John,  
Or at the least I love as well as ye;  
And longer have her served, in my degree,°  
And if she shulde have loved for long loving,  
455 To me alone had been° the guerdoninge.°

I dare eek seyn, if she me finde false,  
Unkinde, jangler,° or rebel in any wise,°  
Or jealous, do me hongen° by the hals!°  
And but I bear me° in her servise  
460 As well as that my wit can me suffice,  
From point to point,° her honor for to save,  
Take she my life, and all the good I have."

The thridde tercel eagle answerd tho,°  
"Now, sirs, ye seen the little leiser° here;

465 For every foul cryeth out to been ago  
Forth with his make,o or with his lady dear;  
And eek Nature herself ne will not hear,  
For tarrying here, not half that I wold seye;  
And but I speak, I must for sorrow deie.

470 Of long service avaunte I me nothing,o  
But as possible is me to die today  
For woe, as he that hath ben languisshing  
These twenty winter, and well happen may  
A man may serven bet and more to payo  
In half a year, although it were no more,  
475 Than some man doth that hath served full yore.o

I say not this by me,o for I ne can  
Do no servise that may my lady please;  
But I dare seyn, I am hir truest man  
485 As to my dome,2 and faintest would her ease;o  
At shorte wordes, til that death me seize,o  
I will be hers, whether I wake or winke,o  
And true in all that herte may bethinke."

Of all my life, since that day I was born,  
485 So gentle pleao in love or other thing  
Ne herde never no man me beforne,  
Whoso that hadde leisure and cunningo  
For to rehearseo their cheero and their speaking;  
And from the morrow gan this speche laste  
490 Til dounward drew the sonne wonder faste.

The noise of foules for to ben deliveredo  
So loude rang, "Have done and let us wende!"o  
That well wendeo I the wodeo had all toshivered.o  
"Come off!"o they cried, "Allas! you will us shend!"o  
495 When shall your cursed pleading have an end?  
How should a judge either party leve,o

For yea or nay, withouten any preve?"<sup>o</sup>

The goose, the cuckoo, and the duck also  
So criden, "Kek kek!" "Kukkow!" "Quek quek!" hie,<sup>o</sup>  
That through min ears the noise wente tho.<sup>o</sup>  
500 The goose said, "All this nis not worth a flie!  
But I can shape<sup>o</sup> hereof a remedy,  
And I will say my verdict faire and swithe<sup>3</sup>  
For<sup>o</sup> water-foul, whoso be wrath or blithe."<sup>o</sup>

"And I for worm-foul," quod the fool<sup>o</sup> cuckoo,  
505 "And I will, of min owne authority,  
For common profit,<sup>o</sup> take the charge<sup>o</sup> now,  
For to delivere<sup>o</sup> us is great charity."  
"You may abide a while yet, parde<sup>o</sup>!"  
Quod the turtel,<sup>o</sup> "If it be your will  
510 A wight may speak him were as good be still."<sup>4</sup>

"I am a seed-foul, oon<sup>o</sup> the unworthieste  
That wot I well, and little of kunning;<sup>o</sup>  
But bet<sup>o</sup> is that a wightes<sup>o</sup> tonge reste  
Than entermeten him of such doing<sup>5</sup>  
515 Of which he neither rede<sup>o</sup> can nor sing.  
And whoso doth, ful foule himself acloyeth,<sup>o</sup>  
For office uncommitted<sup>6</sup> ofte anyoeth."

Nature, which that alway had an ear  
To murmur of the lewednes<sup>o</sup> behinde,  
520 With facound<sup>o</sup> voice said, "Hold your tonges there!  
And I shall soon, I hope, a counseil<sup>o</sup> finde<sup>o</sup>  
You to delivere, and from this noise<sup>o</sup> unbinde;  
I judge, of every folk men shal one call  
To seyn the verdict for you foules all."  
525

Assented were to this conclusioun  
The briddes alle; and foules of ravine<sup>o</sup>

530 Han chosen first, by plein<sup>o</sup> election,  
The tercelet<sup>o</sup> of the falcon, to define  
All their sentence and, as them list, termine;<sup>7</sup>  
And to Nature him gonnen to present,  
And she accepteth him with glad intent.

The tercelet said then in this manner:  
"Full hard were it to prove by resoun  
535 Who loveth best this gentle formel<sup>o</sup> here;  
For everich<sup>o</sup> hath such replicacioun,<sup>o</sup>  
That none by skilles<sup>o</sup> may be brought adoun;  
I can not seen that arguments availe;  
Then semeth it there moste be bataile."<sup>o</sup>

540 "All ready!" quod these eagles tercels tho.<sup>o</sup>  
"Nay sirs!" quod he, "if that I dorste<sup>o</sup> it say,  
You do me wrong, my tale<sup>o</sup> is not ydo!<sup>o</sup>  
For sirs, ne taketh noght agrief,<sup>o</sup> I prey,  
It may not gon, as you wolde, in this way;  
Ours is the voice that han the charge on honde,<sup>o</sup>  
545 And to the judges dome<sup>o</sup> you moten stonde;<sup>o</sup>

"And therefore, peace! I say, as to my wit  
Me wolde think how that the worthiest  
Of knighthood, and longest hath used it,  
550 Moste of estate,<sup>o</sup> of blood the gentilest,<sup>o</sup>  
Were sittingest<sup>o</sup> for her, if that her leste;<sup>o</sup>  
And of these three she wot<sup>o</sup> herself, I trowe,<sup>o</sup>  
Which that he be, for it is light<sup>o</sup> to knowe."

The water-foules han their heades laid  
555 Together, and of a short avisement,<sup>o</sup>  
When everich had his large golee<sup>o</sup> said,  
They saiden sothly, all by one assent,  
How that "The goose, with hir facounde gent,<sup>o</sup>  
That so desireth to pronounce our need,<sup>o</sup>

560 Shal telle our tale" and preide "God her speed."

And for these water-foules tho<sup>o</sup> began  
The goose to speak, and in her cakeling  
She saide, "Peace! now take keep<sup>o</sup> every man,  
And herkeneth<sup>o</sup> which a reason I shall bring;  
My wit is sharp, I love no tarryinge;  
565 I say, I rede<sup>o</sup> him, though he were my brother,  
But<sup>o</sup> she will love him, let him take another!"

"Lo here! a perfect reason of a goose!"  
Quod the sperhawk; "Never mot she thee!<sup>o</sup>  
Lo, such it is to have a tonge loose!  
570 Now parde,<sup>o</sup> fool, yet were it bet<sup>o</sup> for thee  
Have hold thy peace, than shewen thy nicete!<sup>o</sup>  
It lith not in his wit nor in his will,  
But sooth is said, 'A fool can not be still.' "

575 The laughter arose of gentle<sup>o</sup> foules alle,  
And right anoon the seed-foul chosen had  
The turtel<sup>o</sup> trewe, and gunne her to them calle,  
And preiden<sup>o</sup> her to say the sothe sad<sup>o</sup>  
Of this matter, and asked what she rad;<sup>o</sup>  
And she answered, that plainly her intent  
580 She would it show, and sothly what she meant.

"Nay, God forbide a lover shulde chaunge!"<sup>o</sup>  
The turtle said, and wex<sup>o</sup> for shame all red;  
"Though<sup>o</sup> that his lady evermore be strange,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet let him serve hir, til that he be dead;  
585 For sothe, I praise not the gooses reed;<sup>o</sup>  
For though she died, I would<sup>o</sup> none other make,<sup>o</sup>  
I will ben hers, til that the death me take."

"Well bourded!"<sup>o</sup> quod the duck, "By my hat!  
590 That men should loven always causeles,<sup>o</sup>

Who can a reason find or wit in that?  
Daunceth he merry that is mirthelless?  
Who shoulde recche<sup>o</sup> of that is reccheles?"<sup>o</sup>  
"Quek, quek!" yet seith the duck, full well and faire,  
"There been mo<sup>o</sup> stars, God wot, than a pair!"  
595

"Now fie, churl!"<sup>o</sup> quod the gentle tercelet,<sup>o</sup>  
"Out of the dunghill came that word full right,  
Thou canst noght see what thing is well beset:<sup>o</sup>  
Thou farest by love as owles<sup>o</sup> doon by light,  
The day them blent,<sup>o</sup> but well they see by night;  
600 Thy kind<sup>o</sup> is of so low a wretchedness,  
That what love is, thou canst nat see ne guess."

Tho gan the cuckoo put him forth in press<sup>o</sup>  
For fowl that eteth worm and seide blive,<sup>o</sup>  
"So<sup>o</sup> I," quod he, "may have my make<sup>o</sup> in peace,  
605 I recche not<sup>o</sup> how longe that ye strive;  
Let each of them be solein<sup>o</sup> all their lyve,  
This is my reed,<sup>o</sup> sin<sup>o</sup> they may not acorde;  
This shorte lesson nedeth not recorde."<sup>o</sup>

"Ye! have the glutton filled enough his paunche,<sup>8</sup>  
610 Then are we well!" seid then a merlion;<sup>o</sup>  
"Thou murderer of the heisugge<sup>o</sup> on the branche  
That brought thee forth, thou ruthelless glutton!  
Live thou solein, wormes corruption!<sup>o</sup>  
For no fors is of lack of thy nature;<sup>9</sup>  
615 Go, lewed<sup>o</sup> be thou, while the world may dure!"<sup>o</sup>

"Now peace," quod Nature, "I comaunde here;  
For I have heard all your opinioun,  
And in effect yet be we not the nere;<sup>o</sup>  
But finally, this is my conclusion,  
620 That she herself shall han the election  
Of whom her list,<sup>o</sup> whoso be wrath or blythe,<sup>o</sup>

Him that she cheest,o he shall her have as swithe.o

For since it may not here discussed be  
Who loveth her best, as said the tercelet,  
625 Then will I do her this favor, that she  
Shall have right him on whom her heart is set,  
And he her that his heart hath on hir knet.o  
Thus judge I, Nature, for I may not lie;  
630 To none estate I have none other ye.o

But as for counseil for to chese a make,o  
If I were Reason, certes,o then would I  
Counsel you the royal tercel take,  
As said the tercelet full skilfully,  
635 As for the gentilesto and most worthy,  
Which I have wroughto so well too my plesance;  
That to you ought to been a suffisance."o

With dreadfulo voice the formelo her answered,  
"My rightful lady, goddess of Nature,  
640 Sotho is that I am ever under your yarde,o  
Like as is everiche other creature,  
And mooto be yours while that my life may dure;o  
And therefore granteth me my firste bone,o  
And min intento that will I say well soon."

"I graunte it you," quod she; and right anon  
645 This formel eagle spoke in this degree,o  
"Almighty queen, untoo this year be gon  
I ask respite for to avisen me.o  
And after that to have my choice all free;  
This all and sum, that I will speak and seye;  
650 Ye gete no more, although ye do me deie.o

"I wol not serven Venus ne Cupide  
For sotho as yet, by no manner way."



655 "Now since it may none other wise betide,"  
Quod tho<sup>o</sup> Nature, "here is no more to say;  
Then would I that these foules were away  
Each with his make, for<sup>o</sup> tarrying longer here"—  
And saide them<sup>o</sup> thus, as ye shall after hear.

660 "To you speak I, you terceletts," quod Nature,  
"Beth of good heart and serveth, alle three;  
A year is not so longe to endure,  
And each of you pain him,<sup>o</sup> in his degree,  
For to do well; for, God wot, quit<sup>o</sup> is she  
From you this year; what after so befall<sup>o</sup>,  
665 This entremes<sup>o</sup> is dressed<sup>o</sup> for you alle."

And when this work all brought was to an end  
To every foule Nature gave his make  
By even acorde,<sup>o</sup> and on their way they wend.<sup>o</sup>  
But Lord! the bliss and joye that they make!  
For each gan other in his winges take,  
670 And with their nekkes each gan other winde,<sup>o</sup>  
Thanking always the noble queen of kinde.<sup>o</sup>

But first were chosen foules for to sing,  
As year by year was always the usaunce<sup>o</sup>  
675 To sing a roundel<sup>1</sup> at their departing,  
To do to Nature honor and plesaunce.  
The note,<sup>o</sup> I trowe,<sup>o</sup> ymaked<sup>o</sup> was in Fraunce;  
The wordes were such as you may here find,  
The nexte verse, as I now have in mind.

680 "Now welcome summer, with thy sonne softe,  
That hast this winters weathers overshake,<sup>o</sup>  
And driven away the longe nightes blake!  
"Saint Valentin, that art full high onlofte;<sup>o</sup>—  
Thus singen smale foules for thy sake—  
Now welcom summer, with thy sonne softe,

685 That hast this winters weathers overshake.

“Well han they cause for to gladen ofte,  
 Sith<sup>o</sup> each of them recovered hath his make;  
 Full blissful may they singen when they wake;  
 690 Now welcom summer, with thy sonne softe,  
 That hast this winters weathers overshake,  
 And driven away the longe nightes blake.”<sup>o</sup>  
 And with the shouting, when the song was do,<sup>o</sup>

695 That foules maden at their flight away  
 I woke, and other bokes took me to  
 To read upon, and yet I read alway;  
 In hope, ywis,<sup>o</sup> to read so some day  
 That I shal mete<sup>2</sup> som thing for to fare  
 The bet;<sup>3</sup> and thus to read I will not spare.<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The text has been edited by James Simpson with help from Christopher Cannon and Michelle de Groot. For the principles by which this text has been modernized, see the headnote to Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (p. 470).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Middle English rendering of a Latin proverb (*Ars longa, vita brevis*). Chaucer probably encountered it in the Roman Stoic Seneca’s essay “On the Brevity of Life” (1.1), but Seneca himself was quoting the Greek physician Hippocrates’ *Aphorisms* (1). Chaucer’s translation, “craft,” makes explicit the classical and medieval conception of poetic art as a skill comparable to practical skills like medicine or carpentry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Passes so quickly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, all this refers to love.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Miraculous operation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: I do not know.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Pays people for their service.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Am unable to do anything more.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Habitually, both for enjoyment and edification.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, to come to the point.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *The Dream of Scipio* is the closing episode of Marcus Tullius Cicero's *De re publica*, composed in 51 B.C.E. It is told from the point of view of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Younger, who traveled to Carthage in North Africa as part of his duties as a military tribune. There, he visits King Masinissa, an old friend of his grandfather, Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder (Chaucer calls him "African" here). During his visit, Scipio's grandfather visits him in a dream. Taking him up into the sky, Scipio the Elder shows his grandson the nine planetary spheres of classical cosmography and exhorts him to stoic civic virtue. The *Dream* was known in the Middle Ages through an influential late 4th-century commentary by Macrobius, which uses the Ciceronian text to discourse on a number of topics in natural history, astronomy, and dream theory.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, lifetime.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Whichever path we take.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: According to classical and medieval cosmography, the earth sat at the center of nine planetary spheres, each of which turned at a different rate. Their rotation was believed to generate ethereal music.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, in time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, know first of all that you are immortal. A version of the Delphic maxim "Know thyself."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
Chaucer is alluding to Macrobius's theory of dreams put forth in his commentary on *The Dream of Scipio*. Macrobius proposes that nightmares (*insomnia*) are a category of dream that contain no prophetic significance and instead result from mental reactions to the events of the day. Another category of dream

that Macrobius describes is the oracle (*oraculum*), in which a trusted authority figure appears and offers advice. *The Dream of Scipio* is an oracular dream. Chaucer is also aware of a more refined, 12th-century categorization of nonpredictive dreams, the so-called animal dream, according to which many dreams simply replicate what the dreamer has been doing during the day. Chaucer here is equivocating about what kind of dream the *Parliament of Birds* might be.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Cytherea, another name for Venus, the Roman goddess of love. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Probably an astronomical reference to the position of the planet Venus in the sky when Chaucer began to compose the poem. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The contradictory inscriptions on the gate are reminiscent of the words on the gates to hell in Dante's *Inferno* 3.1–9. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I knew not whether it would be better for me. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, still judges which wrestler does better. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Serviceable for supports. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boxtree for pipe making. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fir tree good for making boats. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Yew tree good for archery equipment. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: These lines associate species of trees with their uses in human crafts. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Timid female and male roe deer. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Cupid, Roman god of love, son of Venus. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, laid them out according to their function. The Italian poet Boccaccio describes this scene in the *Teseida* (7.50–66). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Desire. The word did not always have the pejorative connotation that it does today. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Kirtel, a garment for women or girls, often an outer garment, sometimes worn over a smock or under a mantle, gown, or cloak. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Priapus, a Roman fertility god represented iconographically as a small man with a comically large penis. Chaucer refers to a story in Ovid's *Fasti* (1.415–40), in which Priapus is thwarted in his plans to rape a sleeping nymph when a donkey brays and wakes her. She runs away, and her compatriots, now aware of the situation, mock Priapus and his erection. Boccaccio also recounts the story in the *Teseida* (7.60). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Thin, fine, openwork cloth from Valence (in southern France) or Valenciennes (in northern France), towns known for fine clothmaking. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, there was no thicker cloth to provide defense. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Bacchus, Roman god of wine. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ceres, Roman goddess of the harvest [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, cures hunger. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the center lay Venus. "Cipride" is another name for Venus. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In order to spite Diana the chaste. Diana, Roman goddess of the hunt, archery, and the moon, was associated with strict virginity. She was said to have a retinue of virginal huntresses. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Callisto, a member of Diana's retinue of huntresses. She was raped by Jove and became pregnant; when Diana discovered this, she banished her. Meanwhile, Juno, Jove's wife, turned her and her son into bears. To save them, Jove swept them into the sky, where they became the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.409–507. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Atalanta, a gifted runner who vowed she would never marry unless a man bested her in a footrace. With Venus's help, Hippomenes tricked Atalanta by distracting her during the race

- with golden apples and so married her. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.560–707.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Semiramis, an Assyrian queen, believed to have built Babylon and an emblem of sexual perversion in the Middle Ages. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.59, and Dante, *Inferno* 5.52–60.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Probably Canace, the daughter of the Roman god of wind, Aeolus, whom he forced to commit suicide after she became pregnant by her brother. See Ovid, *Heroides* 11.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Hercules. Though famous for his twelve labors, he died when his wife, attempting to regain his affection, sent him a cloak soaked in the blood of a centaur he had killed, not knowing he had killed the creature with a poisoned arrow. He died in agony when he put on the poison-soaked cloak. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.198–238.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: Byblis, a classical figure who fell in love with her brother and went insane when he rejected her. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.454–655.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: Dido, queen of Carthage. She fell in love with Aeneas and committed suicide when he abandoned her to fulfill his destiny as the founder of Rome. See Virgil, *Aeneid* 4, and Ovid, *Heroides* 7.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Piramus and Thisbe, tragic lovers on whom the story of *Romeo and Juliet* is based. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.55–106.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Tristram and Isoude, tragic adulterous lovers in Arthurian legend. See, for instance, Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan* (12th century), pp. 192–95.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Paris and Helen (here spelled “Eleine”) set off the Trojan War when they eloped. See Ovid, *Heroides* 16 and 17.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Achilles, famous in the Middle Ages for dying of love for Polyxena. See Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, lines 1067–71.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Cleopatra, queen of Egypt. She had love affairs first with Julius Caesar and then with Mark Anthony; she committed suicide after Mark Anthony's death. See Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Troilus, the hero of Chaucer's major poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, died after he was betrayed by his lover, Criseyde, during the Trojan War.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Scylla, daughter of Nisus, king of Megara. When King Minos of Crete besieged the city, she betrayed Megara for love of him. When Minos discovered what she had done, he spurned her in disgust at her unfilial behavior. She was then transformed into a bird. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.1–74.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Rhea Silvia. Romulus was the founder of Rome, who, according to Ovid, was fathered by Mars. She was killed by her uncle after giving birth. See Ovid, *Fasti* 3.9–45.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Saint Valentine's Day, February 14. Saint Valentine was an early Christian martyr; the modern association between Valentine's Day and romantic love almost certainly begins with this poem.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
Alan of Lille, in *The Complaint of Nature*. The 12th-century Latin poem describes Nature allegorically as a goddess of luminous and sensual (though modest) beauty, wearing a golden crown with jewels representing the constellations of the zodiac and the seven planetary spheres. She is dressed in a finely woven garment with shifting colors (representing air) that resolve into images of birds, a mantle representing water covered with images of aquatic animals, and a tunic representing earth with images of land animals, including humankind.  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unnatural. The cuckoo was often a symbol during the Middle Ages of unfaithfulness, fickleness, or dishonesty, due in part to its habit of laying eggs in other birds' nests.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: That is, I will speak as quickly as I can.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Wife. The contrast here is between a sovereign lady, above the speaker in rank, and an espoused wife, who was seen as theologically as well as socially subordinate to her husband.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Regardless of her doing whatever she wants.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Taking only into consideration.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Even though she never vowed her love to me.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lower birth (that is, a less noble species).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: According to my judgment.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Eloquent and without delay.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: If it is *your* (the Cuckoo's) desire that a person might speak, it would be preferable that he stay silent.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For him to interfere in such proceedings.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A fulfilled but unassigned duty.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To declare their collective judgment and, as they wished, conclude.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As long as the glutton has filled his stomach.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: (It would be) no matter if there were none of your kind.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A short poem on two rhymes, with the opening line(s) serving as refrain in the middle and at the end. The form originated in France and was often set to music.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Chaucer puns here on the double meaning of "mete" (both "to meet" and "to dream").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That I shall find (or dream) something so that I may fare better.[Return to reference 3](#)



# Notes

- °: *the attempt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fearful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is bewildered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painfully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in practice* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I chance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *books* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anger* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *say (anything)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chanced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intently* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fields* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delight* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seemed to pass quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Cicero)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *briefly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discuss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meaning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nub* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Africa* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *embraced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drew to a close* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vantage point in the heavens* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *showed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *future fortune* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *told him that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learned or unlearned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the common good* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with integrity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a kind of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in proportion to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *challenging experience* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be forgotten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Scipio asked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *first of all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teach* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fail* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purified* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to tell the truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for many ages, certainly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprives* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *animals* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *their activity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took from me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I prepared myself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mental oppression* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *anxious worry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did not want*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wanted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exhausted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soundly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreamed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cases are succeeding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreams* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barrel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dream*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conducted yourself so well*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tattered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not a little (very much)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a part* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I wish to repay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subdue whom you please*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dream* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to dream*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also to compose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lines of verse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as it seemed to me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *side*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meaning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *health*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasurable*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *chance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cast off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prosper readily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrogant standoffishness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leaves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weir*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avoidance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perplexed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to become emboldened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encouraged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chilled me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for fear of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abandon (myself)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *between magnets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equal strength*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pull on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinders*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pushed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *does not refer to you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor to anyone, unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withstand* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrestling throw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it pleases him*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skill in poetic composition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to write about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well placed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *species*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *serviceable for building* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coffin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bodies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holly bush* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straight lances, arrows* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laurel tree to prophesy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blossoming* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in abundance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extraordinarily alive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occupied themselves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chicks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rabbits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hurried* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *male and female red deer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble nature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in harmony* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lighter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in harmony with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on high* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moderate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discomfort* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *herb* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *become* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *night never fell* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Desire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrowheads* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: pierce [Return to reference](#) °
- °: aware [Return to reference](#) °
- °: immediately [Return to reference](#) °
- °: Adornment [Return to reference](#) °
- °: Craftiness, Cunning [Return to reference](#) °
- °: cause [Return to reference](#) °
- °: person [Return to reference](#) °
- °: deformed [Return to reference](#) °
- °: I will not [Return to reference](#) °
- °: Nobility [Return to reference](#) °
- °: Sending of secret messages [Return to reference](#) °
- °: Gift [Return to reference](#) °
- °: by [Return to reference](#) °
- °: (a green, precious stone) [Return to reference](#) °
- °: tall [Return to reference](#) °
- °: with strong foundations [Return to reference](#) °
- °: danced always [Return to reference](#) °
- °: many women [Return to reference](#) °
- °: by nature [Return to reference](#) °
- °: splendidly dressed [Return to reference](#) °
- °: with hair unbound [Return to reference](#) °
- °: duty [Return to reference](#) °
- °: with remarkable discretion [Return to reference](#) °
- °: found [Return to reference](#) °
- °: sand [Return to reference](#) °
- °: next [Return to reference](#) °
- °: also outside [Return to reference](#) °
- °: Promise [Return to reference](#) °
- °: company [Return to reference](#) °
- °: sighs [Return to reference](#) °
- °: rushing sound [Return to reference](#) °
- °: filled the place [Return to reference](#) °
- °: begotten by [Return to reference](#) °
- °: burn [Return to reference](#) °
- °: suffer [Return to reference](#) °
- °: the preeminent [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *state* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put him to shame* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(penis)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempt and strive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various colours* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amusing themselves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gatekeeper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proud of her bearing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to set* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *golden* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bound, but not arranged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to my liking* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine veil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I lack* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *comfort myself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I noticed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clearing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chambers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constructed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *design* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bird* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *procreation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *receive her judgment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attend to her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Complaint of Nature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *portrays* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *birds of prey* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *prompt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speak not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scholars can well describe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violent predation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holds fast* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brave sparrow hawk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(a small falcon)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *near to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *message* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jackdaw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chattering magpie* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eel's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heron* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betray* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *robin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(a large bird of prey)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *timekeeper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small villages* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *calls* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leaves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *killer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bees* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *color* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turtle dove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pheasant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wakeful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love of luxury* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroyer* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *kin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avenger* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adultery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot; passionate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *song thrush* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *field thrush*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have a body; exist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made it his active business*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with good will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female bird* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noblest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in its (proper) place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to such a degree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vice regent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in balance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supplying what you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *partners* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *incite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *protocols*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for any reason*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *male bird of prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bird*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discreet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleases me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *describe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as he pleases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *species* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *it pleases you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ensnares*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sighs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever bird he is* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *custom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attain his desire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female eagle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to cause me to die*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *here*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fidelity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfaithful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disobedient;* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purposely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *braggart* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the course of time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torn apart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever she goes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *toward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the female eagle blushed deeply)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *according to my rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *should be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *indiscreet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *way* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hang me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless I comport myself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in every detail* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time available* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I boast not at all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more pleasingly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for a long time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with regard to myself* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *most eagerly want to please her* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *takes me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sleep* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble pleading of a case* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time and skill* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reproduce* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expression* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *released* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splintered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finish up* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proof* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loudly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *representing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angry or happy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *public good* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *responsibility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *release*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turtledove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of moderate skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the ignorant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eloquent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disagreement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *birds of prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *full*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *male*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female eagle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *each one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a rejoinder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arguments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *combat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *statement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amiss*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have the matter in hand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decision* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must abide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *social rank* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noblest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *most appropriate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if she so desires*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consultation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throatful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well bred eloquence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliver our opinion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay attention*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listen to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may she prosper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indeed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *better*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turtledove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requested* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *settled truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advised*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vacillate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *became*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *standoffish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counsel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would wish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wittily answered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrequited*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one who is indifferent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peasant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble male eagle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well done*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *owls*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *blinds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nature; species*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *came forward in the crowd*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so long as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I don't care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counsel* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be set down*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merlin (small falcon)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hedge sparrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *detroyer of worms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorant one* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *last*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *she wants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whoever is mad or glad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chooses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fixed on her*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no partiality*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choose a mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noblest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *according to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all you need*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fearful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female eagle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the truth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *governance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *last*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *request*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *wish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *manner*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *until*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to consider the issue*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *put me to death*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to avoid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to them*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *take pains*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *free*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whatever happens afterward*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interval of time* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arranged*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by mutual agreement* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to embrace*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nature*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *custom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tune* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *believe* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *composed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dispelled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *above*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dark*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *done*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *indeed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cease*[Return to reference °](#)

## ROBERT HENRYSON

Robert Henryson (ca. 1425–ca. 1500) is perhaps the greatest of a set of exceptionally accomplished late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Scots poets.

Little is known for certain about Henryson's life. Because he is spoken of as "master," he probably held a master's degree, and evidence points to his having been a schoolmaster in a grammar school founded by monks in the town of Dunfermline, just to the north of Edinburgh. He is the author of three major works: *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Moral Fables*, and *The Testament of Cresseid*. Together, they reveal an author skilled in legal, literary, and philosophical traditions; they also reveal a great and ambitious literary artist capable of trenchant comedy within a larger vision that is dark, austere, and commanding. His intense poem *The Testament of Cresseid*, for example, is a sequel to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. It imagines the fate of Criseyde/Cresseid as she becomes sexually promiscuous in the Greek camp, stricken with both leprosy and, finally, remorse. In sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer's works, this text was routinely printed at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* as its sixth book.

As a schoolmaster, Henryson would have taught schoolboys how to read Latin; one of the texts would have been a collection of animal fables (probably the so-called late twelfth-century elegiac *Romulus*) (see [p. 644](#)). Henryson took up the challenge of these simple school texts to transform them into a work of extraordinary range, from the cute and comic, to the savagely satirical, to the philosophically dark and bleak. He drew on previous works of animal literature (especially Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, in his *The Cock and the Fox*). His particular contribution, however, is to extend the philosophical and rhetorical range of the fables and to press their interpretive challenges to the limit. Fable traditions generally present animals as reduced and recognizable humans, designed to guide



human behavior in simple ways. Not so for Henryson, and not so in this opening fable of the collection, *The Cock and the Jasper*.

Fables can be thought of as the dunghill of literature, the place of worthless scraps and sweepings. Only the moral interpretation, outside and attached to the animal narrative, invests the low story with high significance. *The Cock and the Jasper* begins in precisely the locus of the dunghill in the farmyard. But just as fables might in fact hide rich literary treasure, so too does the cock find a jewel in the filth. And so far from dismissing it, the cock exercises discretion to know both what's for him and what's not (a standard kind of practical advice enjoined by fables). The cock is even a rhetorical master in his crafted apostrophe to the jasper. We might seem to have a complete fable here, since the cock would seem to have persuasively moralized the narrative from within, even before we reach the *Moralitas* in the concluding stanzas.

Animal stories are, however, full of sudden jolts as we shift from the animal to the human perspective. Henryson does not want us to settle for easy treasure and instead surprises us with an unexpected morality in the appended interpretation of the apparently wise cock. As an animal, he might be wise; as a human, he's missed the point of fables.

# The Cock and the Jasper<sup>1</sup>

A cock one time, with feathers pert and bright,  
Canty<sup>o</sup> and bold, although he was dirt poor,  
Rose and flew to a dunghill at first light,  
An early bird, already to the fore,  
5 Scraping away, when the next thing in the stour<sup>o</sup>  
He finds this gemstone under dust and ashes,  
Swept out by chance with sweepings from the  
house.

Giddy young ones, with their minds on nothing  
But swanking in the street and being seen  
Have little interest in their besoming.<sup>o</sup>  
10 They birl the brush<sup>o</sup> to make the floor look clean.  
So precious items dropped are very often  
Swept from the doorstep out into the yard.  
Something like that, in this case, had occurred.

He marvels at the stone and then says he,  
15 'O jewel rare, O rich and noble thing,  
I may have found you, but you're not for me.  
You are a gemstone for a lord or king.  
For you to be interred here in the dung  
Is a great pity, down in the muck and mold,  
20 And you so lovely and worth so much gold.

'And a pity I should find you, who could never  
Make clear hues like yours more sheer and clear  
Nor prove your great worth any worthier:  
Little about you gives me heart or cheer.  
25 Let great lords cherish you and hold you dear.  
Lesser things are better fit to tempt me,

Like corn or hogwash when my gizzard's empty.

30 'I'd rather be here scraping with my nails  
In dust and dirt for dear life, hunting food—  
The dregs and dross and little worms and snails  
Or any grub at all that does me good—  
I'd rather them than gems by the cartload.  
While you, for your part, are uninterested  
35 In anything that I desire or need.

'You don't have corn, and corn is what I covet.  
Your color calms the eye and feeds the sight  
But color's never going to feed my gullet.  
I'm foraging from morning until night  
40 And on the lookout always. But that's it!  
How can I live on looks? It's food I need,  
Not cooked or even hot: I'd eat dry bread.

'But where, gemstone, should be your habitation?  
Where should you dwell but in a royal tower?  
Where should you sit but on a royal crown  
45 Exalted and installed in honor there?<sup>2</sup>  
Arise, Sir Jasper, fairest of the fair,  
Shake off this filth and go where you should be.  
I was not meant for you, nor you for me.'

50 Leaving the jewel lying on the ground,  
This cock went foraging upon his way.  
But when or how or by whom it was found  
I have no sure report, so cannot say.  
But the inner point and import and idea  
Behind the fable in the original  
55 I shall rehearse in plain and homely style.

The properties of this fair gem are seven:  
First, as to color, it is marvelous,  
Like fire partly, partly like the heaven.  
It makes a man strong and victorious,  
60 Preserves him too when things turn dangerous.  
Whoever has this stone, good luck will favor:  
No need for him to fear the fire or water.

This noble jasper, with its changing hue,  
Signifies true wisdom and true learning  
65 Perfected by the exercise of virtue  
And far excelling any earthly thing.  
This is what inclines men to good living  
And makes them glad to strive, and fit to conquer  
70 Every vice and spiritual danger.

Who's to be wealthy, kind, courageous?  
Who is immune to chance and misadventure?  
Who can take charge in home, town-hall or palace  
And be a know-nothing? No one, for sure.  
75 Knowledge is the wealth that will endure,  
That rain won't ruin, nor moth nor rust devour.<sup>3</sup>  
To man's soul it is sustenance forever.

This cock, so obsessed with ordinary corn  
He scorned a jasper, may in his ignorance  
Be likened to a fool, who will scoff and scorn  
80 At learning; impervious, thick, a dunce,  
He takes a scunner at<sup>o</sup> wise arguments,  
The same as a sow that snotters in her gruel,  
And spurns pearls in the trough, preferring swill.<sup>4</sup>

85 Ignoramuses are the enemy  
Of knowledge and of learning, and possess  
No understanding of a thing so worthy,  
So noble it is past all earthly price.

90       The luckiest man is one who spends his days  
In study of the knowledge of the good:  
A man like that fulfils his every need.

95       But now, alas, this jewel is lost and hid;  
No one looks for it, no one pursues  
The study of it. We make our wealth our god<sup>5</sup>  
And turn our souls to paupers, gain to lose.  
But talk of this is like the wind that blows.  
Therefore I conclude. I have said my say.  
Look for the jewel who will, for there it lay.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This translation is by Seamus Heaney, *The Testament of Cresseid & Seven Fables* (2009). Jasper is a stone, quartz or chalcedony, that may be polished and used as a gemstone.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Note the triple apostrophe, characteristic of courtly rhetoric.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Matthew 6:19.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Matthew 7:6 (“neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet”). Henryson quietly points out that the scriptures also use animals to teach by.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Philippians 3:19 (“whose God is their belly”).[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *cheerful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flying dust*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sweeping*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *manipulate the broom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *moral*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *is disgusted by* [Return to reference](#) °

# VOLUME B: The Sixteenth Century and the Early Seventeenth Century



THE NORTON  
ANTHOLOGY  
**ENGLISH**  
LITERATURE

THE  
SIXTEENTH  
CENTURY  
AND  
THE EARLY  
SEVENTEENTH  
CENTURY

**VOLUME B**  
ELEVENTH EDITION



# **THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY (1485–1603)**

# The Sixteenth Century 1485–1603



***The Life and Death of Sir Henry Unton*** (detail), anonymous, ca. 1597. A masque of musicians and dancers performs for a dinner party of Unton's friends. Theatrical life in this period, which often included music and dancing, was not restricted to the playhouse; it extended into other social settings, such as this one.

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1485: Accession of Henry VII inaugurates the Tudor dynasty

- 1509: Accession of Henry VIII
- 1517: Martin Luther's Wittenberg Theses; beginning of the Reformation
- 1534: Henry VIII declares himself head of the English Church
- 1557: Publication of Tottel's *Songs and Sonnets*, containing poems by Sir Thomas Wyatt; Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey; and others
- 1558: Accession of Elizabeth I
- 1576: Building of The Theatre, the first round permanent structure in England for the presentation of plays
- 1588: Defeat of the Spanish Armada
- 1603: Death of Elizabeth I and accession of James I, the first of the Stuart kings

England came late to the Renaissance. It was in the fourteenth century that Italy had begun its "Renaissance," the word meaning "rebirth." What was reborn in Italy was a fascination with its own classical past, including its Latin literature, philosophy, and art. England, however, reached its Renaissance only a century later, and in fact this was a new birth rather than a rebirth. An island, England was slow to adopt Italy's focus on the classics.

As the Renaissance swept across Europe, Latin became the international language: all significant schooling was in Latin, and Latin was the language for international trade. The English language, by contrast, was not very useful. There were those at home who thought it too primitive ever to serve as a suitable medium for serious, elevated, or elegant discourse—or, consequently, writing. One of the first works in this anthology's selection of English Renaissance literature, Thomas More's *Utopia*, for instance, was not first written in English: More, who began his great book in 1515 when he was on a diplomatic mission in the Netherlands, was intending his work for an international intellectual community, and so his language of choice was the European one, Latin. His work, though it became famous throughout Europe, was not even translated into English until the 1550s. Yet by the end of that same century, English had developed and grown beyond recognition: it had been fashioned into the powerful expressive medium whose cadences in the works of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the translators of the Bible continue to thrill readers after more than four centuries.

How did it come about that so many remarkable poems, plays, and prose works were written in English by the end of the sixteenth century? The answer lies in part in the spectacular creativity of a succession of brilliant writers, the best of whom are represented in these pages. Still, a vital literary culture is the product of complex processes, involving thousands of more modest, half-hidden creative acts sparked by a wide range of motives, some of which will briefly be explored over the following pages.

## THE COURT AND THE CITY

The development of the English language in the sixteenth century is linked at least indirectly to the consolidation and strengthening of the English state. Through most of the previous century, the English had been preoccupied by violent clashes between the militarized servants of rival barons and had had limited time and inclination to cultivate rhetorical skills. The social and economic health of the nation had been further damaged by the so-called Wars of the Roses, a vicious, decades-long struggle for royal power between the noble houses of York, whose symbol was a white rose, and Lancaster, whose symbol was a red rose. The struggle was resolved by the establishment of what was called the Tudor dynasty, named for Owen Tudor, an ambitious Welshman who himself had no claim to the throne but who married Catherine of Valois, widow of the Lancastrian king Henry V. Their grandson, the Earl of Richmond, became the first Tudor monarch: he won the crown by leading the army that defeated and killed the reigning Yorkist king, Richard III, at the battle of Bosworth Field. When the victorious Richmond, descendent of the house of Lancaster, was crowned King Henry VII in 1485, he married Elizabeth of the house of York. The result was a Tudor dynasty that united the two rival factions of York and Lancaster. Their union was symbolized in a floral device, the "Tudor rose," which consists of a red rose of Lancaster enclosing a white rose of York.

Because they had been impoverished and divided by their own wars, England's barons could not effectively oppose the new power of the Tudor Crown. Moreover, the leaders of the Church also supported royal power. So Henry VII was able to counter the multiple and competing power structures characteristic of feudal society and impose a much stronger central authority and order on the nation. By the reign of the last Tudor—Henry's granddaughter, Elizabeth I—even though the ruler still needed the consent of Parliament on crucial matters (including the all-important one of

levying taxes), the royal court had concentrated in itself much of the nation's power.

The court was a center of culture as well as power: court entertainments such as theater and masque (a sumptuous, elaborately costumed performance of dance, song, and poetry); court fashions in dress and speech; court tastes in painting, music, and poetry—all shaped the taste and the imagination of the country as a whole. Culture and power were not, in any case, easily separable in Tudor England. In a society with little freedom of speech (as we understand it) and with mass communication limited to word of mouth and the announcing and hanging up of official proclamations (newspapers, called “corantoës,” were not to be published until the 1620s), important public issues were often aired indirectly, through what we might now regard as entertainment.

Whereas in the Middle Ages noblemen had guarded their power by keeping their distance from London and the king, in the Tudor era the route to power lay in proximity to royalty. (One of the coveted positions in the court of Henry VIII was Groom of the Stool, “close stool” being the Tudor term for toilet.) The monarch's chief ministers and favorites dispensed favors to courtiers who competed for offices in the court, the government bureaucracies, the royal household, the army, the Church, and the universities or who sought titles or grants or leases of land. But proximity to royalty had dangers of its own. Festive evenings with the likes of the ruthless Henry VIII were not occasions for relaxation. The court was a place of competition, even paranoia, with an accompanying obsession with secrecy, spying, duplicity, and betrayal.

Tudor courtiers were torn between the needs to protect and to display themselves. For lessons in the art of intrigue, many turned to the Italian Machiavelli's notorious *Il Principe* (The Prince), with its cool guidance on how power may be gained and kept. For advice on the cultivation and display of the self, they could resort to the still more influential Italian book *Il Cortegiano* (The Courtier) by Count Baldassare Castiglione. It was particularly important, Castiglione wrote, to conceal the effort that lay behind elegant

accomplishments, so that they would seem natural. (*Sprezzatura* was the name for this invaluable skill.) In this anxious atmosphere, courtiers became highly practiced at implementing what these Italian writers recommended and at crafting and coining new and graceful words with double or triple meanings. The English language expanded as a result, not least because a habit of Anglifying Latin quickly doubled the number of words available in English (“sweat” *and* “perspiration,” “drink” *and* “beverage”—the frank Anglo-Saxon vying with the ponderous Latin). And, hardly surprisingly, several of the best poets in the period—Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, and others—were courtiers.

Other forces in Tudor England pulled toward a more public sphere. Markets expanded significantly, international trade flourished, and cities throughout the realm experienced a rapid surge in size and importance. London’s population soared, from 60,000 in 1520, to 120,000 in 1550, to 375,000 a century later, making it the largest and fastest-growing city not only in England but in all of Europe. Every year in the first half of the seventeenth century about 10,000 people migrated to London from other parts of England—wages in London tended to be around 50 percent higher than in the rest of the country—and it is estimated that one in eight English people lived in London at some point in their lives. Elderly Londoners in the 1590s could barely recognize the city of their childhood; London’s boom was one factor among many contributing to the sense of a culture moving with increasing swiftness away from its historical roots. That expansion, too, found its voice in literature, in songs celebrating markets and trade, and fueled the import of merchandise from overseas like tobacco and spices.

About a decade before Henry VII won his throne, the art of printing, a German invention, had been introduced into England by William Caxton (ca. 1422–1491). Caxton, who was an author and a translator as well as a printer, attempted to cater to courtly tastes by producing works whose tone was more medieval than modern. As often in an age of alarming novelty, many people looked back to an idealized past. Indeed the great innovations of the Tudor era—

intellectual, governmental, and religious—were all presented, at the time, as attempts to restore ancient traditions. Printing made books cheaper and more plentiful, providing more opportunity to read and more incentive to learn. Though reliable statistics are impossible to come by, literacy seems to have increased during the fifteenth century and still more during the sixteenth as printed texts became more widely accessible. The greater availability of books may also have reinforced the trend toward silent reading, a practice that gradually transformed what had been a communal experience into a more intimate encounter with a text, though communal singing ensured that certain varieties of lyric remained shared—some of which are included in this volume.

Social class often determined writers' attitude to print. As Sir Thomas Smith explained in 1583, "We in England divide our men commonly into four sorts, gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen artificers, and laborers." But while citizens, artificers, and laborers bought and increasingly wrote texts, leading to a flourishing trade in plays, ballads, romances, sermons, jests, and a rich range of other books and pamphlets, court poets were wary of the "stigma of print" that might mark their verse as less exclusive. Among "gentlemen"—the elite—manuscripts retained considerable prestige, and court texts often circulated in notebooks and commonplace books without ever reaching print.



# RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

To Renaissance intellectuals and artists, the achievements of the pagan philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome came to seem compelling, and the medieval submission of the human spirit to penitential discipline gave way to unleashed curiosity, individual self-assertion, and a powerful conviction that man was the measure of all things. In Italy, in the brilliant, intensely competitive, and vital world of the artists Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, the human figure was placed at the center of the Renaissance worldview. "We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal," God tells Adam, in the Florentine Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), "so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer." "As though the maker and molder of thyself": this vision of self-fashioning may be glimpsed too in the works of other artists—the poetry of Petrarch, the sculpture of Donatello, and the statecraft of Lorenzo de' Medici.



**Tudor Schoolroom.** In this woodcut from the sixteenth century, the pupils sit on "forms," or benches, with few if any desks. As an early school statute explains, "When they have to write, let them use their knees for a table." All the lessons, for the different age groups, are taught in the same room: the younger boys (left) are learning their letters, while the students at the upper right are studying music. The schoolmaster, seated, holds a birch, while the usher, or assistant master, is beating a student. The windows of the schoolroom are set high in the walls, to cut down on distractions. Next to the far pillar is an hourglass used in marking time for various lessons. The school's valuable books are kept in a locked chest, behind the schoolmaster.

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But in England it was not until the accession of Henry VIII that the Renaissance began to flower—and not, as in Italy, in painting, sculpture, and architecture. It came rather in the intellectual program and literary vision known as humanism (from the Italian name for an

educator of classical literature, *umanista*). In England, Renaissance humanism was bound up with struggles over the purposes of education and curriculum reform. English humanists, including John Colet (who, as dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, recast its grammar school on humanist principles), Roger Ascham (tutor to Princess Elizabeth), and Sir Thomas Elyot, wrote treatises on education to promote the kind of learning they regarded as the most suitable preparation for public service. That education shifted from training for the Church to the general acquisition of "literature," in the sense both of literacy and of cultural knowledge. For some of the more intellectually ambitious humanists, that knowledge extended to ancient Greek (largely lost in the West between the fourth and thirteenth centuries), whose enthusiastic followers began to challenge the preeminence of Latin.

Still, at the core of the curriculum remained the study of Latin. The purpose was to train the sons (and, very occasionally, daughters) of the nobility and gentry to speak and write good Latin, the language of diplomacy, of the professions, and of all higher learning. Women were primarily educated at home or in other noble houses, where they chiefly learned modern languages, religion, music, and needlework. While women seldom received the thorough training in the ancient languages and classical literature so central to the dominant culture, some, including Elizabeth I and Mary Sidney Herbert—and the daughters of Sir Thomas More—were able to play central roles in the translation and production of literary texts. Through Latin-based training, Elizabethan schoolmasters sought to impart rhetorical elegance, but the books their students laboriously pored over—from the *Sententiae Pueriles* (Maxims for Children) for beginners to the dramatists Terence, Plautus, and Seneca; the poets Virgil and Horace; and the orator Cicero—also offered moral, political, and philosophical wisdom and cultural capital. Though originating in pagan times, ancient truths could, in the opinion of many humanists, be reconciled to the moral vision of Christianity. The result, perplexing for some modern readers, is that pagan gods and goddesses flourish on the pages of even such a devoutly Christian poem as Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

Humanists committed to classical learning were faced with the question of whether to write in Latin or in English. To many learned men, influenced both by the humanist elevation of the classical languages and by a Renaissance desire for eternal fame, national languages seemed unstable and impermanent in a way that Latin did not. Works by English scientists such as William Gilbert, William Harvey, and Francis Bacon easily joined those by such Continental writers as Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Andreas Vesalius in the common linguistic medium of Latin. But throughout Europe, nationalism and the expansion of the reading public were steadily strengthening the power and allure of native languages. The famous English schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster (ca. 1530–1611), teacher of the poet Spenser, captured this emergent sense of national identity when he compared Latin to his native tongue:

Is it not . . . a marvelous bondage, to become servants to one tongue for learning's sake the most of our time, with loss of most time, whereas we may have the very same treasure in our own tongue, with the gain of more time? our own bearing the joyful title of our liberty and freedom, the Latin tongue remembering us of our thralldom and bondage? I love Rome, but London better; I favor Italy, but England more; I honor the Latin, but I worship the English.

These two impulses within learned writers—humanist reverence for the classics and English pride in their native language—gave rise to many distinguished translations throughout the century: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by George Chapman, Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by Sir Thomas North, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Arthur Golding. Translators also sought to make available in English the most notable literary works in the modern languages: Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* by Sir Thomas Hoby, Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (Orlando Mad) by Sir John Harington, and Montaigne's *Essais* by John Florio. The London book trade of the sixteenth century was a thoroughly international affair.



**"How You Ought to Hold Your Pen."** Humanist concern with literacy led to a proliferation of writing books. These books typically explained how to cut and shape a goose quill to make a pen, how to hold that pen (and how not to), and how to write in both "secretary" and "Italian" (italic) hand.

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# THE REFORMATION

Officially, England in the early sixteenth century had a single religion, Catholicism. Because its acknowledged head was the pope in Rome, England was bound to Italy in terms of religion as well as language and culture. The most sacred Catholic ritual was Mass, a ceremony performed in Latin during which the congregation could regularly witness a miracle: the priest held up bread and wine, which his words transformed into the body and blood of God. This act gave the male priests great power, at once spiritual and material, over their largely illiterate flocks—power conveyed through systems of confession, pardons, penance, absolution, indulgences, sacred relics, and ceremonies. The Bible, the church services, and most of the theological discussions were in Latin, which few laypeople could understand. However, religious doctrine and spirituality were mediated to them by the priests, by beautiful church art and music, and by the liturgical ceremonies of daily life: festivals, holy days, baptisms, marriages, exorcisms, and funerals.

In the past, heretical movements had occasionally emerged and were suppressed, but a more serious threat arose in the sixteenth century. In November 1517, an Augustinian monk and a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, named Martin Luther, began to question several of the key doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. What began in November 1517 as an academic disputation grew with amazing speed into a bitter, far-reaching, and bloody revolt that forever ruptured the unity of Western Christendom.

A person of formidable intellectual energy, eloquence, and rhetorical violence, Luther rose up against the ancient Catholic Church, in the name of private conscience enlightened by a personal reading of the scriptures. He maintained that the Church had degenerated and was a corrupt, worldly conspiracy; that it exploited its credulous believers and subverted nonreligious authority; and that the pope and his hierarchy were the servants of Satan. Luther

argued that all people should have direct access to the word of God and be able to make their own analyses of the Bible: he therefore also thought the Bible should be translated out of Latin and into native languages. The movement Luther sparked, the Reformation as it came to be known (because it aimed to *reform* the Catholic Church), was governed by the terms *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*, according to which only the scriptures (not the Church or tradition or the clerical hierarchy) have authority in matters of religion and should determine what an individual must believe and practice; and only the faith of the individual (not good works or the scrupulous observance of religious rituals) can effect a Christian's salvation.

These tenets, heretical in the eyes of the Catholic Church, spread and gathered force, especially in northern Europe, where major leaders like the Swiss pastor Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and the French theologian John Calvin in Geneva, elaborating various and sometimes conflicting doctrinal principles, organized the populace to overturn the existing church and established new institutional structures. In England, in contrast, the Reformation began less with popular discontent and theological disputation than with politics and royal greed. Henry VIII, who had received from Pope Leo X the title Defender of the Faith for writing a diatribe against Luther, craved a legitimate son to succeed to the throne, and his queen, Catherine of Aragon, failed to give him one. (Catherine had borne six children, but only a daughter, Mary, survived infancy.) After lengthy negotiations, the pope, under pressure from Catherine's powerful Spanish family, refused to grant the king the divorce he sought in order to marry Anne Boleyn, who, he hoped, might finally bear him a son.

A series of momentous events followed, as England lurched away from the Church of Rome. In 1531 Henry forced the entire clergy of England to beg pardon for having administered canon law (which governed such matters as divorce), which, he claimed, should be understood as a royal prerogative, not controlled by Rome. Two years later Henry's marriage to Catherine was officially declared null and void and Anne Boleyn was crowned queen. The king was promptly excommunicated by the pope, Clement VII. In the following year, all adult male subjects were required by a parliamentary "Act of

Succession" to accept as "undoubted, true, sincere and perfect" the king's marriage to Anne. Thomas More and John Fisher, the bishop of Rochester, were among the small number who stuck to their Catholic beliefs and refused. The Act of Supremacy, passed later in the year, formally declared the king to be "Supreme Head of the Church in England" and again required an oath to this effect. In 1535 and 1536 further acts made it treasonous to refuse the oath of royal supremacy or, as More had tried to do, to remain silent. Three monks of the Catholic Carthusian order who rejected the oath—"How could the king, a layman," said one of them, "be Head of the Church of England?"—in May 1535 were hanged, drawn (tied to a horse and dragged), and quartered (torn apart by four horses pulling in different directions). A few weeks later Fisher and More were convicted and beheaded. Between 1536 and 1539, under the direction of Henry's powerful secretary of state, Thomas Cromwell, England's Catholic monasteries were suppressed. Their vast wealth was seized by the Crown and transferred, by either gift or sale, to the king's followers.





**The Pope as Antichrist.** In this satirical woodcut, the pope, riding the seven-headed Beast of the Apocalypse, holds in his hand a banner on which he urges his followers to be traitors and kill their princes. His message, carried by three froglike devils, flies into the gaping mouths of a knight, a bishop, and a monk. The devils are a reference to Revelation 16:13: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." From *Fierie Tryall of God's Saints* (1611; author unknown).

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Royal defiance of the authority of Rome was a key element in the English Reformation. But in the same year that Fisher and More were martyred for their adherence to Roman Catholicism, twenty-five Protestants (a label applied to adherents of any form of Christianity that "protested" or rejected Catholicism), members of a sect known as Anabaptists, were also burned for heresy on a single day. Through most of his reign, Henry remained an equal-opportunity persecutor, pitiless to Catholics loyal to Rome and hostile to many of those who espoused Reformation ideas, though these ideas, aided greatly by the printing press, gradually established themselves on English soil.

Having produced only a daughter, Elizabeth, the marriage between Henry and Anne Boleyn ended in disaster: the king had his wife beheaded on charges of treason and adultery. Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour, finally gave birth to the son he craved, and this son, Edward, succeeded to the throne upon the king's death in 1547. Both the ten-year-old Edward and his successive Protectors, the dukes of Somerset and Northumberland, were Protestants. Reformers hastened to transform the English Church accordingly. During Edward's brief reign, Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, formulated the forty-two articles of religion that became the core of English Protestantism and wrote the first *Book of Common Prayer*, which was officially adopted in 1549 as the basis of English worship services.

The sickly Edward VI died in 1553, only six years after his accession to the throne. He was succeeded by his half-sister Mary (Henry VIII's daughter by his first wife, Catherine), who immediately took steps to return her kingdom to Roman Catholicism. Though she was unable to get Parliament to agree to return Church lands seized under Henry VIII, she restored the Catholic Mass, once again affirmed the authority of the pope, and subdued a rebellion that sought to depose her. With her ardently Catholic husband, Philip II, king of Spain, she initiated a series of bloodthirsty religious persecutions—she had almost three hundred Protestants burned “at the stake” (that is, tied to posts and burned)—that earned her (from her enemies) the name “Bloody Mary.” Hundreds of Protestants, including John Jewel and Anne Vaughan Locke, took refuge abroad in cities like Calvin's Geneva. Yet for thousands of English men and women, Mary's reign came as a liberation; the return of old Catholic ornaments to parish churches all over England indicates that they had not been confiscated or destroyed as ordered, but hidden away, in hopes of a return to the true faith.

Mary died childless in 1558, and her younger half-sister, Elizabeth, became queen. Elizabeth's succession had been by no means assured. For if Protestants regarded as invalid Henry VIII's Catholic marriage to Catherine and hence deemed Mary illegitimate, so Catholics regarded as invalid his Protestant marriage to Anne Boleyn and hence deemed *her* daughter illegitimate. Moreover, though Elizabeth outwardly complied with the official Catholic religious observances throughout her sister's reign, Mary and her advisers rightly suspected her of Protestant leanings and set traps for her: her life was often in danger. When Elizabeth ascended the throne, the country's future religious course was once again in question. During her coronation procession, when a girl in an allegorical pageant presented her with a Bible in English translation—banned under Mary's reign—Elizabeth kissed the book, held it up reverently, and laid it to her breast. By this simple yet profound (and carefully choreographed) gesture, Elizabeth signaled England's return to Protestantism, as well as the central role the Book, and books in general, would play in her court.

Many English men and women, of all classes, remained loyal to the old Catholic faith, but English authorities under Elizabeth demanded at least the appearance of conformity to Protestantism. Recusants (those who refused to attend regular Sunday services in their parish churches) were heavily fined. Anyone who wished to receive a university degree, to be ordained as a priest in the Church of England, or to be named as an officer of the state had to swear an oath to the ruler's supremacy as head of the church. Bishops were directed to investigate whether parish clergy had, as commanded, "removed, abolished, and destroyed" all images that were thought superstitious. Commissioners were sent throughout the land to confirm that religious services were following the officially approved liturgy and to investigate any reported backsliding into Catholic practice. At the other extreme were the Protestant exiles who returned to England eager to carry the Reformation much further than it had gone. A minority, whom their enemies called Puritans—for their attempts to "purify" the Church from any vestige of Catholicism—sought to purge the church service of ritual practices deemed to have no basis in scripture, to dress the clergy in simple garb, and to smash "idolatrous" statues, crucifixes, and altarpieces. They also objected to the calendar of "pagan" folk customs, including dancing around the maypole to mark the start of summer, and "mumming"—dressing up in disguise and performing plays and antics at friends' houses—to mark the Christmas period. Throughout her long reign, however, Elizabeth remained cautiously conservative and determined to hold Puritanism as well as Catholicism in check.

In the space of a single lifetime, England's official religion had changed from Roman Catholicism, to Catholicism under the supreme headship of the English king, to a guarded Protestantism, to a more radical Protestantism, to a renewed and aggressive Roman Catholicism, and finally to Protestantism again. Each of these shifts was accompanied by danger, persecution, and death. It was enough to make people wary. Or skeptical. Or extremely agile.

# QUEEN ELIZABETH I

In the last year of Mary's reign, the Scottish minister John Knox, who was a Calvinist—a follower of the extreme French Protestant reformer Calvin—thundered against what he called “the monstrous regiment of women.” After the Protestant Elizabeth came to the throne the following year, Knox and his religious brethren were less inclined to denounce all female rulers; but in England, as elsewhere in Europe, there remained a widespread conviction that women were unsuited to wield power over men. Many men seem to have regarded rational thought as exclusively male; women, they assumed, were led only by their passions. While gentlemen mastered the arts of rhetoric and warfare, gentlewomen were expected to display the virtues of silence and good housekeeping. Among upper-class males, the will to dominate others was acceptable and indeed admired; the same will in women was condemned as a grotesque and dangerous aberration.

Admirers of Queen Elizabeth countered these prejudices by pointing out that history offered inspiring examples of just female rulers—notably Deborah, the biblical prophetess who had judged Israel. In the legal sphere, Crown lawyers advanced the theory of “the king's [or, in this instance, queen's] two bodies.” As England's crowned head, Elizabeth had a mortal “body natural” and an immortal “body politic.” While the queen's natural body was subject to decay and death, the office of monarch was eternal. In political terms, therefore, Elizabeth's sex was a matter of no consequence.

Elizabeth, who had received a fine humanist education and an extended, dangerous lesson in the art of survival, made it immediately clear that she intended to rule in more than name only. Though she assembled a group of trustworthy advisers, foremost among them William Cecil (later created Lord Burghley), she insisted on making many of the crucial decisions herself. Like many Renaissance monarchs, Elizabeth was drawn to the theory that

ultimate power was quite properly concentrated in her person and indeed that God had appointed her to be his deputy in the kingdom. Opposition to her rule, in this view, was against the will of God and therefore blasphemous. Supporters of "absolutism" maintained that God commands that the people obey even wicked rulers (whom he has sent to punish the sinfulness of humankind). Such arguments were routinely made in speeches and political tracts and from the pulpits of churches, where they were incorporated into the *Book of Homilies* that clergymen were required to read out to their congregations.

In reality, Elizabeth's power was not absolute. The government had a network of spies, informers, and agents provocateurs, but it lacked a standing army, a national police force, an efficient system of communication, and an extensive bureaucracy. Above all, the queen had limited financial resources and needed to turn periodically to an independent Parliament, which had the sole right to levy taxes and to grant subsidies. Members of the House of Commons were elected from their towns (known as "boroughs"), not appointed by the monarch, and the queen could not dictate their policies. Under these constraints, Elizabeth ruled through a combination of political maneuvering and imperious command, while establishing an extraordinary, and largely literary, cult of love with her at the center.

"We all loved her," Elizabeth's godson Sir John Harington wrote, with just a touch of irony, a few years after the queen's death, "for she said she loved us." Ambassadors, courtiers, and parliamentarians all submitted to Elizabeth's cult of love, in which the queen's sex was cunningly transformed from a potential liability into a significant asset. Those who approached her generally did so on their knees and were expected to address her with the most extravagant compliments; she in turn spoke, when it suited her to do so, in a comparable language of love. The court favored an atmosphere of romance, with music, dancing, plays, and the elaborate fancy dress entertainments called masques. The queen adorned herself in dazzling clothes and rich jewels. When she went on one of her summer "progresses," ceremonial journeys through her land, she

looked like an exotic, sacred image in a religious cult of love, and her noble hosts virtually bankrupted themselves to lavish upon her the costliest pleasures. England's leading artists, such as the poet Edmund Spenser and the painter Nicholas Hilliard, celebrated Elizabeth's mystery by likening her to the goddesses of mythology and the heroines of the Bible: Diana, Astraea, Cynthia, Deborah. The cultural sources of the cult of Elizabeth were both secular (her courtiers could pine for her as the cruelly chaste mistress celebrated in love poetry) and sacred (the veneration that under Catholicism had been due to the Virgin Mary could now be directed toward England's semidivine queen).

There was a sober, even grim aspect to these poetical fantasies: Elizabeth was brilliant at playing off one dangerous faction against another, now turning her gracious smiles on one favorite, now honoring his hated rival, now suddenly looking elsewhere and raising an obscure upstart to royal favor. And when she was disobeyed or when she felt that her prerogatives had been challenged, she was capable of an anger that, as Harington put it, with a reference to Henry VIII, "left no doubtings whose daughter she was." Thus when Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the queen's glittering favorites, married without her knowledge and consent, he found himself imprisoned in the Tower of London. Or when the controversial Protestant writer John Stubbes published a pamphlet denouncing the queen's proposed marriage to the French Catholic Duke of Anjou, he and his publisher were arrested and had their right hands chopped off. (After receiving the blow, the now prudent Stubbes lifted his hat with his remaining hand just before he fainted and cried, "God save the Queen!")

## THE KINGDOM IN DANGER

Beset by Catholic and Protestant extremists, Elizabeth's careful compromises enabled her realm to avert the massacres and civil wars that poisoned France and other countries on the Continent. But menace was never far off, and there were continual fears of conspiracy, rebellion, and assassination. Suspicion swirled around Elizabeth's second cousin the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, who had been driven from Scotland in 1568 and had taken refuge in England. The presence, under a kind of house arrest, of a Catholic queen with a plausible claim to the English throne was the source of widespread anxiety. There were recurrent rumors that Mary was plotting to seize the English throne. Some of these were real enough, others imaginary, still others fabricated by the secret agents of the government's intelligence service under the direction of Elizabeth's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham. Fears of Catholic conspiracies intensified greatly after imperial armies of Catholic Spain invaded the Netherlands to stamp out Protestant rebels (1567), after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Huguenots (French Protestant followers of Calvin) in France (1572), and after the assassination of Europe's other major Protestant leader, William of Orange (1584).

Elizabeth's life seemed to be in even greater danger after Pope Gregory XIII's proclamation in 1580 that, as she was a great heretic (she had been excommunicated a decade before), her assassination would not constitute a mortal sin. The immediate effect of the proclamation was to make life more difficult for English Catholics, most of whom were loyal to the queen but who fell under grave suspicion. Suspicion was heightened by the presence of English Jesuits, a militant religious order of the Catholic Church, who had been trained abroad and smuggled back into England to serve the Roman Catholic cause. When, after several botched conspiracies had been disclosed, Walsingham unearthed another plot to assassinate Elizabeth in the letters between the Queen of Scots and the Catholic Anthony Babington, the wretched Mary's fate was sealed. After a

public display of indecision and perhaps with genuine regret, Elizabeth signed the death warrant, and her cousin was beheaded.

The long-anticipated military confrontation with Catholic Spain was now unavoidable. Elizabeth learned that Philip II of Spain, her former brother-in-law and onetime suitor, was preparing to send an enormous fleet against her island realm. The Spanish Armada was to sail first to the Netherlands, where a Spanish army would be waiting to embark and invade England. Barring its way was England's small fleet of well-armed and highly maneuverable fighting vessels, backed up by ships from the merchant navy. The Armada reached English waters in July 1588, but, in one of the most famous and decisive naval battles in European history, it was defeated. Then, in what many viewed as an act of God on behalf of Protestant England, the Spanish fleet was dispersed and all but destroyed by violent storms.

As England braced for an invasion that, as it turned out, never materialized, Elizabeth appeared in person to review some of her soldiers who had assembled at Tilbury, on the Thames estuary. Dressed in a white gown and a silver breastplate, she declared that though some among her councillors had urged her not to appear before a large crowd of armed men, she would never fail to trust the loyalty of her faithful and loving subjects. Nor did she fear the Spanish armies. "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman," Elizabeth declared, "but I have the heart and stomach [that is, valor] of a king, and of a king of England too." In this celebrated, widely publicized speech, Elizabeth displayed many of her most memorable qualities: her great personal courage, her subtle blending of magniloquent rhetoric and the language of love, her strategic appropriation of traditionally masculine qualities, and her self-consciously theatrical command of grand public occasions. "We princes," she once remarked, "are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world."





**Armada Portrait.** This portrait of Queen Elizabeth, painted ca. 1588–89, is attributed to George Gower. Through the windows to the left and right can be glimpsed the arrival and then the defeat of the Spanish Armada, wrecked in violent storms. The queen, glowing with the pearls that symbolized her chastity, rests her hand on a globe, her fingers in effect claiming the Americas for her empire.

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# ENGLAND AND THE WORLD

In 1485 most English people would have devoted little thought to their national identity. If asked to describe their sense of belonging, they would probably have spoken of the international community of Christendom and of their local region, such as Kent or Cornwall. The extraordinary events of the Tudor era, from the encounter with the New World to the break with Rome, made many people more aware and proud of their Englishness. At the same time, they began to perceive those who lay outside the national community in new (and often negative) ways. Like most national communities, the English defined themselves largely in terms of what or who they were not. In the wake of the Reformation, the most prominent “others” were those who had until recently been more or less the same—that is, the Catholics of Western Christendom. But other groups were also instrumental in the project of English self-definition.

Elizabethan London had a large population of foreign residents, mainly artisans and merchants and their families, from Portugal, Italy, Spain, Germany, and, above all, France and the Netherlands. Many of these people were Protestant refugees, and they were accorded some legal and economic protection by the government. But they were not always welcomed by the local populace. Throughout the sixteenth century, London was the site of repeated demonstrations and, on occasion, bloody riots against the communities of foreign artisans, who were accused of taking jobs away from Englishmen. There was widespread hostility as well toward other people occupying the same island as England, the Welsh and Scots, and the island opposite, the Irish, whom the English had for centuries been unsuccessfully struggling to subdue. The kings of England claimed to be rulers of Ireland, but in reality they effectively controlled only a small area known as the Pale, extending north from Dublin. The great majority of the Irish population remained stubbornly Catholic and, despite English burning

of villages, destruction of crops, seizure of land, and massacres, fiercely independent.

Medieval England's Jewish population, the recurrent object of persecution, extortion, and massacre, had been officially expelled by King Edward I in 1290—the earliest such mass expulsion in Europe—but Elizabethan England harbored a small number of Jews or Jewish converts to Christianity. They were the objects of suspicion and hostility. Elizabethans appear to have been fascinated by Jews and Judaism but quite uncertain whether the terms referred to a people, a foreign nation, a set of strange practices, a living faith, a defunct religion, a villainous conspiracy, or a messianic inheritance. Protestant Reformers brooded deeply on the Hebraic origins of Christianity; government officials ordered the arrest of those “suspected to be Jews”; villagers paid pennies to traveling fortune-tellers who claimed to be descended from Abraham or masters of kabbalistic mysteries; and London playgoers enjoyed the spectacle of the downfall of the wicked Barabas in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and the forced conversion of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Jews were not officially permitted to resettle in England until the middle of the seventeenth century, and even then their legal status was ambiguous.

Of equal fascination was “the Turk”: Muslims from the Ottoman Empire. The phrase “to turn Turk” originates from this period and signified Christians who converted to Islam, sometimes through enforced slavery, but sometimes by choice. Eager for trade, Queen Elizabeth would not vilify the Ottoman Empire entirely, though she worried about its expansionist aggression (so similar to her own) and was fearful of the compelling nature of its religion. Plays about Muslims stage this conflicted approach. Characters such as Marlowe's Tamberlaine in the play of that name are magnificent, eloquent, and sensual—as well as displaying overweening pride and cruelty.

Sixteenth-century England also had a small African population, brought into the country by mariners and merchants, who worked as servants, entertainers, and craftspeople. Their skin color was the subject of pseudoscientific speculation and theological debate. Some

Elizabethans believed that Africans' blackness resulted from the climate of the regions where they lived, where, as one traveler put it, they were "so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sun, that in many places they curse it when it riseth." Others held that blackness was a curse inherited from their forefather Cush, the son of Ham (who had, according to the first book of the Bible, Genesis, wickedly exposed the nakedness of his drunken father, Noah). George Best, a proponent of this theory of inherited skin color, reported that "I myself have seen an Ethiopian as black as coal brought into England, who taking a fair English woman to wife, begat a son in all respects as black as the father was, although England were his native country, and an English woman his mother: whereby it seemeth this blackness proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man."





**Etching of a Black Woman**, 1645, by Wenceslaus Hollar. The Bohemian-born Hollar lived and worked for most of his career in Antwerp and in London. He drew portraits of many men and

women, including this depiction of a Black woman, probably a servant.

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As the word *infection* suggests, Elizabethans frequently regarded blackness as a physical defect; though some of the Black people who lived in England and Scotland throughout the sixteenth century were accepted, others were treated as exotic curiosities. At his marriage to Anne of Denmark, James VI of Scotland (the son of Mary, Queen of Scots; as James I of England, he succeeded Elizabeth, in 1603) entertained his bride and her family by commanding four naked Black youths to dance before him in the snow. (The youths died of pneumonia shortly afterward.) In 1594, in the festivities celebrating the baptism of James's son, a "Black-Moor" entered pulling an elaborately decorated chariot that was, in the original plan, supposed to be pulled by a lion. In England there was a Black trumpeter in the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII, while Elizabeth, who drafted a proclamation saying that Black people should be deported (though she may never have promulgated it), had at least one male Black servant, and a female servant, perhaps a midget, called Ipolyta the Tartarian (Tartary being the name for much of central and north Asia).

The legal status of slavery in England was ambiguous. In 1569 a man called Cartwright claimed that he should be allowed to beat an enslaved person he had brought over from Russia, but the court ruled "that England was too Pure an Air for Slaves to breathe in." Nevertheless, by the mid-sixteenth century the English had become involved in the profitable trade that carried African slaves to the New World. In 1562 John Hawkins embarked on his first slaving voyage, transporting some three hundred Africans from the Guinea coast to Hispaniola, where they were sold for ten thousand pounds. Elizabeth is reported to have said that this venture was "detestable and would call down the vengeance of Heaven upon the undertakers." She did, however, invest profitably in Hawkins's subsequent voyages and loaned him ships.

Elizabeth also invested in other enterprises that combined aggressive nationalism and the pursuit of profit in enslaved people. In 1493 the pope had divided the New World between the Spanish and the Portuguese by drawing a line from pole to pole (hence Brazil is a Portuguese-speaking country today and the rest of Latin America is Spanish-speaking): the English were not in the picture. But by the end of Edward VI's reign, the Company of Merchant Adventurers had been founded, and Englishmen had begun to explore Asia and North America. Some were looking for new lands in which to live, or new sources of gold, or simply new commodities to be sold. These people were fascinated, worried, and sometimes—they hinted—impressed by their encounters with other nations and cultures that seemed to function so well and without Christianity. Several of these adventurers turned to piracy, preying on Spanish ships that were returning laden with wealth extracted by enslaved natives from Spain's New World possessions. (The pope had ruled that the native peoples were human beings—and hence could be converted to Christianity—but the ruling did nothing to prevent their enslavement and brutal exploitation.) English acts of piracy soon became a private undeclared war, with the queen and her courtiers covertly investing in the raids but accepting no responsibility for them. The greatest of many astounding exploits was the voyage of Francis Drake (1577–80): he sailed through the Strait of Magellan, pillaged Spanish towns on the Pacific, reached as far north as San Francisco, crossed to the Philippines, and returned around the Cape of Good Hope; he came back with a million pounds in treasure, and his investors earned a dividend of 5,000 percent. Queen Elizabeth knighted him on the deck of his ship, *The Golden Hind*. His was the first English voyage to pass through the Magellan Straits from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and only the second circumnavigation in history. Yet, during the circumnavigation, Drake executed his sometime friend and fellow commander Thomas Doughty in dubious circumstances, and abandoned a pregnant Black woman, Maria, on an island in Indonesia.

## WRITERS, PRINTERS, AND PATRONS

Printers, who owned printing presses, and publishers, who had the right to print texts, were all known by one name, “stationer.” A “stationer” might be a man or, sometimes, his widow—for women had the right to take over their dead husband’s business. When in 1557 the Worshipful Company of Stationers, formed in 1403, received a royal charter, the tasks of printers and publishers were defined. Printers were only to print those texts formally licensed by the stationers: for which the publisher would have to pay. In 1559 the process of licensing was further formalized: books had to be approved by either six privy councilors or the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London. There was, then, no notion of the freedom of the press.

Despite the strict regulations of the Stationers’ Company, “scandalous, malicious, schismatical, and heretical” works were never effectively suppressed. Though there were occasional show trials and horrendous punishments—the printer William Carter was hanged for treason in 1584 because he had published a Catholic pamphlet; the Protestant separatists John Penry, Henry Barrow, and John Greenwood were executed in 1593 under a statute that made it a capital offense to “devise and write, print or set forth, any manner of book . . . letter, or writing containing false, seditious, and slanderous matter to the defamation of the Queen’s Majesty”—active censorship was not as frequent or thorough as we might expect.

The censors largely focused their attention on works of history, which often had political implications for the present, and on religious treatises. In this, they shared the public’s taste. Plays and secular poetry occasionally sold well (Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1*, was printed seven times in twenty-five years), but they could not compete with publishing blockbusters such as *The Plain Man’s Pathway* (sixteen editions in twenty-five years), let alone *The Psalms in English Meter* (published 124 times between 1583 and 1608). Publishers were largely interested in profit margins, and the



predominance of devotional texts among the surviving books from the period attests to their greater marketability. The format in which works of literature were usually published is also telling. We normally find plays and poetry in quartos (or octavos), small volumes that had four (or eight) pages printed on each side of a sheet that was then folded twice (or three times) and stitched together with other such folded sheets to form the book. The more imposing folio format (in which the paper was folded only once, at two pages per side of a sheet) tended to be reserved not just for longer works but for those regarded as needing especially respectful treatment. In 1577 Raphael Holinshed's massive history *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* appeared in a woodcut-illustrated folio; ten years later, a second edition was published, again in the large format. In contrast, Edmund Spenser's huge poem *The Faerie Queene* was printed as a quarto both in 1590 and in 1596. A decade after his death, though, as the poet's reputation grew, his epic appeared again (1609), this time as a folio.

Printed books were mainly to be purchased from the bookshops that filled the churchyard of St. Paul's Cathedral. Dissolved chapels—chantries—were taken over by bookshops in the 1540s; church officials leased out their residences near the church's north door to members of the Stationers' Company; and eventually bookstores two stories high and more filled the bays between the cathedral's buttresses. St. Paul's was also the main center of business in the capital. The church itself served as a meeting place and its columns as bulletin boards; publishers would post there, and elsewhere in the city, the title pages of new books as advertisements. Those title pages listed the wholesaler for the work, but customers could have bought popular books too at most of the shops in St. Paul's Yard. The location ensured the trade's connection with the heart of English Protestantism and its values.

It is a mistake, however, to imagine that most texts were printed or that most writers dreamed of print permanence. Poetry in particular frequently circulated in manuscript, copied by reader after reader, often into commonplace books where individual works were categorized by subject rather than author. The texts that have come

down to us in printed form often bear an uncertain relation to authorial manuscripts and were frequently published only after their actual authors were dead. That is because the career of professional writer in sixteenth-century England was almost impossible: there was no such thing as author's copyright, no royalties paid to an author when books were sold, and virtually no notion that anyone could make a decent living through the creation of works of literature. Writers sold their manuscripts to the publisher outright, for what now seem like ridiculously low prices, or kept them for private circulation in manuscript, without ever sending them to the press at all.

Elizabethan writers of exalted social standing, like the Earl of Surrey or Sir Philip Sidney, who thought of themselves as courtiers, statesmen, and landowners, did not view writing as a profession but a social (and political) grace—a deeply pleasurable, exalted form of game. Only people of lower rank, such as Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton, sought careers as writers—or, rather, as civil servants, secretaries, tutors, and clerics; they might take up more or less permanent residence in a noble household or, more casually, offer their literary work to actual or prospective patrons, in the hope of protection, career advancement, or financial reward. Ambitious authors eager to rise from penniless obscurity often looked to the court for notice and encouragement, and sometimes hoped for jobs there too: but their great expectations were not generally met. “A thousand hopes, but all nothing,” wailed John Lyly, alluding to his long wait to be given the exalted office of Master of the Revels, the organizer of royal entertainments, “a hundred promises but yet nothing.”

Financial rewards for writing prose or poetry came mostly in the form of support or gifts from wealthy patrons, who sought to enhance their status and gratify their vanity through the achievements and lavish praises of their clients. Some Elizabethan patrons, though, were well-educated humanists motivated by aesthetic interests, and with them patronage extended beyond financial support to the creation of lively literary and intellectual circles. Poems by Samuel Daniel, as well as prose by Thomas Nashe, bear witness to the sustaining intelligence and sophistication, as well

as the generosity, of their benefactors. But the experience of Robert Greene is equally revealing: he had sixteen different patrons for seventeen books, suggesting that he did not find much favor or support from any one of them. Indeed, a practice grew up, among those who printed texts, of writing different dedications to be inserted into particular copies of a book so that an author in need of money could deceive several patrons into thinking that they in particular had been honored by the volume.

In addition to patronage from the court and great families, the city of London and the only universities at the time, Oxford and Cambridge, also had a substantial impact on the period's literature. London was the center of the book trade, and the home of the public theaters. Before Elizabeth's time, the universities were mainly devoted to educating the clergy, and that remained an important part of their function. But in the second half of the century, the sons of the gentry and the aristocracy began going in increasing numbers to the universities and the Inns of Court (law schools), not to take religious orders or to practice law but to prepare for public service or the management of their estates. Other, less affluent students, such as Marlowe and Spenser, attended Oxford or Cambridge on scholarship. A group of graduates, including Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene, and George Peele, enlivened the literary scene in London in the 1590s, but the precarious lives of these so-called university wits testify to the difficulties they encountered in their attempt to survive by their writing skill. The diary of Philip Henslowe, a leading theatrical manager, has entry after entry showing university graduates who were playwrights for his company in prison or in debt or eking out a meagre existence by adding new passages into old plays.



**Margaret Roper**, Thomas More's eldest child, was educated at home by William Gonnell, who found her so impressive that he suggested she publish a book. More, however, warned that for a woman to publish would be "vain and low." Despite her father's disapproval, Roper did eventually become the first non-royal woman to have one of her translations printed.

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Women had no access to grammar schools, the universities, or the Inns of Court, and tended not to have the education, patronage,

or income to write or publish work. Occasionally, however, women in great houses were privately educated following a model adopted by Sir Thomas More. He had tried having his daughters schooled in Latin alongside his son as an experiment: the result was that his eldest daughter, Margaret, became not only one of the most learned women in the land, but also one of the first to publish a book (a translation of a Latin work by Erasmus, *Precatio Dominica*). Female literacy improved in the sixteenth century more generally, aided by Protestantism with its emphasis on reading scripture, and women translators ultimately made a crucial print contribution to the humanist movement—though they had to show their skills obliquely through the way in which they rendered into English texts by men. Often adopting what was called a “modesty topos,” in which they asked to be forgiven for a lack of rhetorical skill (while actually displaying it, of course), women also still seem to have felt obliged, like Anne Dowriche, to apologize for their sex itself: “if anything . . . fits not your liking, remember, I pray, that it is a woman’s doing.”

## **TUDOR STYLE: ORNAMENT, PLAINNESS, AND WONDER**

Renaissance literature is the product of a rhetorical culture whose members were steeped in the arts of persuasion and trained to process complex verbal signals. (The contemporary equivalent would be the ease with which we deal in movies with complex visual signals, effortlessly processing such devices as fade-out, montage, crosscutting, and morphing.) In 1512, Erasmus published a work called *De copia* that taught its readers how to cultivate “copiousness,” verbal richness, in discourse. The work obligingly provides, as an example, a list of 144 different ways of saying “Thank you for your letter.”

In Renaissance England certain forms or patterns of words known as “figures” (also called “schemes”) were shaped and repeated to confer verbal beauty or heighten expressive power. Figures were usually known by their Greek and Latin names, though in an Elizabethan rhetorical manual, *The Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham made a valiant attempt to give them English equivalents, such as “Hyperbole, or the Overreacher” and “Ironia, or the Dry Mock.” Those who received a grammar school education throughout Europe at almost any point between the Roman Empire and the eighteenth century probably knew by heart the names of up to one hundred such figures, just as they knew by heart their multiplication tables. According to one scholar’s count, William Shakespeare knew and made use of about two hundred.

Lessons from *De copia* and similar rhetorical guides could make for very wordy texts. Elizabethans had a taste for elaborate ornament in language as in clothing, jewelry, and furniture; and if we are to appreciate their accomplishments, it helps to set aside the modern preference, particularly in prose, for simplicity and directness. When, in one of the age’s most fashionable works of prose fiction, John Lyly wishes to explain that the virtues of his

young hero, Euphues, are being offset by his vices, he offers a series of synonymous images: "The freshest colors soonest fade, the teenest [keenest] razor soonest turneth his edge, the finest cloth is soonest eaten with moths." Lyly's multiplication of balanced rhetorical figures sparked a small literary craze known as "Euphuism," which was soon ridiculed by Shakespeare and others for its excesses. Yet such devices were a source of deep-rooted pleasure in rhetorical culture, and most of the greatest Renaissance writers used them to extraordinary effect. Consider, for example, the succession of images in Shakespeare's sonnet 73:

That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west;  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

Here, the perception of decay is carried through a succession of images from winter (or late fall) to twilight to the last glow of a dying fire. Each of these images is sensitively explored, so that, for example, the season is figured by bare boughs that shiver, as if they were human, and then these anthropomorphized tree branches in turn are refigured as the ruined choirs of a church where services were once sung. No sooner is the image of singers in a church choir evoked than these singers are instantaneously transmuted back into the songbirds who, in an earlier season, had sat upon the boughs, while these sweet birds in turn conjure up the poet's own vanished

youth. And this nostalgic gaze extends, at least glancingly, to the chancels of the Catholic abbeys reduced to ruins by Protestant iconoclasm and the dissolution of the monasteries. All of this within the first four lines: here and elsewhere Shakespeare, along with other poets of his time, contrives to give the small compass and tight formal constraints of the sonnet—fourteen lines of rhymed iambic pentameter, with a “volta,” or turn, before the final couplet—remarkable emotional intensity, psychological nuance, and imagistic complexity.

Elizabethans were certainly capable of admiring plainness of speech—in *King Lear* Shakespeare contrasts the severe directness of the virtuous Cordelia to the “glib and oily art” of her wicked sisters—and such poets as George Gascoigne, Thomas Nashe, and, in the early seventeenth century, Ben Jonson, wrote restrained, aphoristic, moralizing lyrics in a plain style whose power depends precisely on the avoidance of figurative verbal games. This power is readily apparent in the wintry sparseness of Nashe’s “A Litany in Time of Plague,” with its grim refrain of “Lord, have mercy on us,” the warning words written on the nailed-shut front doors of those who were dying of the plague:

Wit with his wantonness  
Tasteth death’s bitterness;  
Hell’s executioner  
Hath no ears for to hear  
What vain art can reply.  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord, have mercy on us!

Here linguistic playfulness—the “wit” beloved by Elizabethan culture—is scorned as an ineffectual “vain art” to which the executioner, death, is utterly indifferent.

Even plain poetry referred to or negotiated with more complex poetry, and all poetry was, writes Puttenham, “more delicate to the ear than prose is, because it is more current and slipper upon the tongue [that is, more flowing and easily pronounced], and withal



tunable and melodious, as a kind of Music, and therefore may be termed a musical speech or utterance.” The sixteenth century was an age of superb vocal music. The renowned composers William Byrd, Thomas Morley, and John Dowland, as well as others scarcely less distinguished, wrote a rich profusion of madrigals (part songs for two to eight voices, unaccompanied) and airs (songs for solo voice, generally accompanied by the lute). These works, along with hymns, catches, and other forms of song, enjoyed immense popularity, not only in the royal court, where musical skill was regarded as an important accomplishment, and in aristocratic households, where professional musicians were employed as entertainers, but also in less exalted social circles. Fairgrounds, marketplaces, ale houses, milking sheds—all encouraged group singing of known songs, often with a rousing chorus. Widespread genteel musical literacy is reflected in a splendid array of music for the lute, viol, recorder, harp, and virginal as well as vocal music; popular music is reflected in ballad texts, airs, catches, glees, and rounds—though intriguingly the same music often doubles for both art and popular forms.



**Notation Knives.** These knives have a pre-meal blessing inscribed on one side and a post-meal grace on the other. As each represents a part for a singer, perfect harmony will only occur when a set of knives is “performed” at the same time. Presumably such knives were sung from at banquets, fusing music and feasting with prayer.

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Many sixteenth-century poems were written to be set to music; others were written to already-known tunes. The division between musical lyric and poem was not always clear. In poetry and music, as in gardens, architecture, and dance, Elizabethans had a taste for elaborate, intricate, but perfectly regular designs. They admired form, valued the artist's manifest control of the medium, and took pleasure in the highly patterned surfaces of things. Modern responses to art often show a suspicion of surfaces, impatience with order, the desire to rip away the mask to discover a hidden core: these responses are far less evident in Renaissance aesthetics than is a delight in pattern. Indeed, many writers of the time expressed the faith that the universe itself had in its basic construction the beauty, concord, and harmonious order of a poem or a piece of music. "The world is made by Symmetry and proportion," wrote Thomas Campion, who was both a poet and a composer, "and is in that respect compared to Music, and Music to Poetry." The design of an exquisite work of art is deeply linked in this view to the design of the cosmos.

Such an emphasis on conspicuous pattern might seem to encourage an art as stiff as the starched ruffs that, on special occasions, ladies and gentlemen wore around their necks, but the period's fascination with order came with a profound interest in the movements of the mind and heart. Syntax in the sixteenth century was looser, more flexible than our own, and punctuation less systematic. If the effect is sometimes confusing, it also enabled writers to follow the twists and turns of thought or perception. Consider, for example, Roger Ascham's account, in his book on archery, of a day when he saw the wind blowing the new-fallen snow:

That morning the sun shone bright and clear, the wind was whistling aloft, and sharp according to the time of the year. The snow in the highway lay loose and trodden with horse feet: so as the wind blew, it took the loose snow with it, and made it so slide upon the snow in the field which was hard and crusted by reason of the frost overnight, that thereby I

might see very well, the whole nature of the wind as it blew that day. And I had a great delight and pleasure to mark it, which maketh me now far better to remember it. Sometime the wind would be not past two yards broad, and so it would carry the snow as far as I could see. Another time the snow would blow over half the field at once. Sometime the snow would tumble softly, by and by it would fly wonderful fast. And this I perceived also, that the wind goeth by streams and not whole together. . . . And that which was the most marvel of all, at one time two drifts of snow flew, the one of the West into the East, the other out of the North into the East: And I saw two winds by reason of the snow the one cross over the other, as it had been two highways. . . . The more uncertain and deceivable the wind is, the more heed must a wise Archer give to know the guiles [cunning] of it.

What is delightful here is not only the author's happy moment of sharpened perception but his confidence that this moment—a glimpse of baffling complexity and uncertainty—can be captured in the restless succession of sentences and then neatly summed up in the pithy conclusion. (This effect parallels that of the couplet that sums up the complexities of a Shakespearean sonnet.) A similar confidence emanates from Sir Walter Raleigh's deeply melancholy, deeply ironic address to Death at the close of *The History of the World*, written when he was a prisoner in the Tower of London:

O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words: *Hic jacet!* [Here lies!]

Death is triumphant here, but so is Raleigh's eloquent, just, and mighty language.

The sense of *wonder* in both of these prose passages—as if the world were being seen clearly and distinctly for the first time—characterizes much of the period’s poetry as well. The mood need not always be solemn. For example, one can sense laughter rippling just below the surface of Marlowe’s admiring description of the beautiful maiden Hero’s boots:

Buskins of shells all silvered used she,  
And branched with blushing coral to the knee,  
Where sparrows perched, of hollow pearl and gold,  
Such as the world would wonder to behold;  
Those with sweet water oft her handmaid fills;  
Which, as she went, would chirrup through the bills.

Seashells were beloved by Renaissance collectors because their intricate designs, functionally inexplicable, seemed the work of an ingenious, infinitely playful craftsman. Typically, the shells did not simply stand by themselves in cabinets but were gilded or silvered and then turned into other objects: cups, miniature ships, or, in Marlowe’s fantasy, boots further decorated with coral and mechanical sparrows made of precious materials and designed, as he puts it deliciously, to “chirrup.” The poet knows perfectly well that the boots would be implausible footwear in the real world, but he invites us into an imaginary world in which the heroine’s costume includes a skirt “whereon was many a stain, / Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain” and a veil of “artificial flowers and leaves, / Whose workmanship both man and beast deceives.” The veil reflects an admiration for an art of successful imitation—bees are said to look in vain for honey amid the artificial flowers—but it is cunning illusion rather than realism that excites Marlowe’s wonder. Renaissance poetry is interested not in reality or accuracy but in the magical power of exquisite workmanship to draw its readers into fabricated worlds.

In his *Defense of Poesy*, the most important work of literary criticism in sixteenth-century England, Sidney claims that this magical power is also a moral power. All other arts, he argues, are

constrained by fallen, imperfect nature, but the poet alone is free to range “within the zodiac of his own wit” and create a second nature, superior to the one we are condemned to inhabit: nature’s “world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.” The poet’s golden world in this account is not an escapist fantasy: it is a model to be emulated in actual life. It is difficult to say, of course, how seriously this project of realization was taken—though Sidney’s own battlefield death (he is said, when mortally wounded, to have given his water to a fellow soldier, saying, “Thy necessity is yet greater than mine”)—suggest that he was maintaining to the end the golden ideal of Protestant chivalry. His sister Mary Sidney Herbert advised Queen Elizabeth to model herself on poetry; if the queen could “sing what God doth”—in particular, the psalms that the Sidneys had translated—she would be enabled to “do what men may sing,” that is, perform the triumphant acts that people write poetry about. Other Elizabethan poets too believed that poetry could mark the way to a more virtuous and fulfilled existence. And not only mark the way: poetry, Sidney, his sister, and others argue, has a unique persuasive force that impels readers toward the good they glimpse in its ravishing lines.

This force, attributed to the energy and vividness of figurative language, made poetry a fitting instrument for such high-minded enterprises as moral exhortation, prayer, and praise; for such uplifting narratives as the legends of religious and national heroes and also for such verbal actions as cursing, lamenting, flattering, and seducing. Conventions in the period defined the major literary modes (or “kinds,” as Sidney terms them): pastoral, heroic, lyric, satiric, elegiac, tragic, and comic. They helped shape subject matter, attitude, tone, and values, and in some cases—sonnet, verse epistle, epigram, funeral elegy, and masque, to name a few—they also governed formal structure, meter, style, length, and occasion. We can glimpse some of the ways in which these literary codes worked by looking briefly at two that are, for modern readers, among the least familiar: pastoral and heroic.

In the pastoral mode, the idyllic fictional world is inhabited by shepherds and shepherdesses, often with Greek names, who tend their flocks, fall in love, and engage in friendly singing contests. The

mode celebrated leisure, humility, and contentment, exalting the country life over the city and its business, the military camp and its violence, the court and its burdens of rule. Pastoral songs commonly expressed the joys of the shepherd's life or his disappointment in love. Pastoral dialogues between shepherds might conceal serious, satiric comment on abuses in the great world under the guise of homely, local concerns. There were pastoral funeral elegies, pastoral dramas, pastoral prose fictions called "romances," and even pastoral episodes within epics. The most famous pastoral poem of the period is a song (it was even published as a broadsheet ballad), Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," but the shepherd who woos his potential love with promises of gold buckles, coral clasps, and amber studs serves to remind us that the mode is only superficially of the country and is really sophisticated and urban.

With its rustic characters, simple concerns, and modest scope, the pastoral mode was regarded as situated at the opposite extreme from the heroic, with its values of honor, martial courage, loyalty, leadership, and endurance, as well as its glorification of a nation or people. The chief genre that employed the heroic was the epic: typically a long, ambitious poem in the high style, based on a story from the nation's distant past and imitating Homer and Virgil in structure and motifs. Renaissance poets throughout Europe undertook to honor their nations and their vernacular languages by writing this most prestigious kind of poetry. In sixteenth-century England the major success in heroic poetry is Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Yet the success of *The Faerie Queene* owes much to the fact that the poem is a generic hybrid, in which the conventions of classical epic mingle with those of romance, medieval allegory, pastoral, satire, mythological narrative, comedy, philosophical meditation, and many others in a strange, wonderful blend. The spectacular mixing of genres in Spenser's poem is only an extreme instance of a general Elizabethan indifference to the generic purity admired by writers on the Continent. English poets tended to approach the different genres in the spirit of Sidney's inclusivism: "if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful."

# THE ELIZABETHAN THEATER

While Sidney welcomed the experimental intertwining of genres in his own *Arcadia*, there was one place where he found it absurd: the theater. He condemned the conjunction of high and low characters in “mongrel” tragicomedies that mingled “kings and clowns.” Moreover, he had the belief, whose origin was attributed to Aristotle, that plays should keep to what were called the three “dramatic unities” of action (plays should have one principal action), time (the events in plays should happen within a day), and place (plays should be set in one location). For Sidney, then, the action on the bare stage “where you shall have Asia of the one side and Afric of the other” violated the laws of time and place. “Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers,” he writes in *The Defense of Poesy*, “and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place: and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock.” The irony is that this mocking account, written probably in 1579, anticipates by a few years the stupendous achievements of Marlowe and Shakespeare, whose plays joyously break every rule that Sidney thought it essential to observe.

A permanent, freestanding public theater in England dates only from Shakespeare’s own lifetime. A London playhouse, the Red Lion, is first mentioned in 1567, and James Burbage’s round playhouse, The Theatre, was built in 1576. Before the construction of these theaters, people in late medieval England had mounted elaborate cycles of plays (sometimes called “mystery plays”) in the towns and villages of the land, depicting the great biblical stories, from the creation of the world to Christ’s Passion and its miraculous aftermath. Many of these plays have been lost, but among those that survive are several magnificent and complex works of art. At once civic and religious festivals, the cycles were performed into the reign of Elizabeth, but their close links to popular Catholic piety led Protestant authorities in the later sixteenth century to suppress them.

Early English theater was not restricted to these annual festivals. Performers acted in town halls and the halls of guilds and aristocratic households, on scaffolds erected in town squares and marketplaces, on pageant wagons in the streets, and in innyards. By the fifteenth century, and probably earlier, there were organized companies of players traveling under noble patronage. Such companies earned a precarious living providing amusement, while enhancing the prestige of the patron whose livery they wore and whose protection they enjoyed. (Actors without a patron or another, ordinary trade risked being classified as vagabonds and whipped or branded.) When theatre was professionalized in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the acting companies still attached themselves to a nobleman and remained technically servants. The company for which Christopher Marlowe wrote was the Lord Admiral's Men; Shakespeare wrote for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and so on. The only exception was children's companies, which arose from boy choirs and consisted almost entirely of pre-adolescent boys; they were typically named after their place of performance, like the Children of Paul's and the Blackfriars' Children.

Before the construction of the public theaters, the playing companies often performed short plays called "interludes" that were, in effect, staged dialogues on religious, moral, and political themes. Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece* (ca. 1490–1501), for example, pits a wealthy but dissolute nobleman against a virtuous public servant of humble origins, while John Heywood's *The Play of the Weather* (ca. 1525–33) stages a debate among social rivals, including a gentleman, a merchant, a forest ranger, and two millers. The structure of such plays reflects the training in argumentation that students received in Tudor schools and, in particular, the sustained practice in examining both sides of a difficult question. Some of Shakespeare's amazing ability to look at critical issues from multiple perspectives may be traced back to this practice and the dramatic interludes it helped inspire.

Another major form of theater that flourished in England in the fifteenth century and continued into the sixteenth was the morality play, a dramatization of the spiritual struggle of the Christian soul. As



*Everyman* (included in Volume A, "The Middle Ages") demonstrates, these dramas derived their power from the poignancy and terror of an individual's encounter with death. Often this somber power was supplemented by the extraordinary comic vitality of the evil character, or Vice.

If such plays sound more than a bit like sermons, it is because they were. The Church was a profoundly different institution from the theater, but its professionals shared some of the same rhetorical skills. It would be grossly misleading to regard churchgoing and playgoing as comparable entertainments, but clerical attacks on the theater sometimes make it sound as if ministers thought themselves to be in direct competition with professional players. The players, for their part, were generally too discreet to present themselves in a similar light, yet they almost certainly understood their craft as relating to sermons, with an uneasy blend of emulation and rivalry. When, in 1610, the theater manager Philip Rosseter was reported to have declared that plays were as good as sermons, he was summoned before the bishop of London to recant; but Rosseter had said no more than what many players must have privately thought.



**The “Long View” of London, 1647, by Wenceslaus Hollar.** In this detail from Hollar’s engraving of London, one can glimpse, on the south bank of the Thames, the Globe Theater and an arena for bearbaiting. The labels were accidentally transposed in the original: the Globe is the round structure on the left.

By the later sixteenth century, many churchmen, particularly those with Puritan leanings, were steadfastly opposed to the theater, but some early Protestant Reformers, such as John Bale, tried their hand at writing plays. Thomas Norton, who with a fellow lawyer, Thomas Sackville, wrote the first English tragedy in blank verse, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex* (1561), was also a translator of the great Reformer John Calvin. There is no evidence that Norton felt a tension between his religious convictions and his theatrical interests, nor was his play a private exercise. The five-act tragedy, a grim vision of faction-driven Britain descending into civil war, was

performed at the Inner Temple (one of London's law schools) and subsequently acted before the queen.

*Gorboduc* was closely modeled on the works of the Roman playwright Seneca, and Senecan influence—including violent plots, resounding rhetorical speeches, and ghosts thirsting for blood—remained pervasive in the Elizabethan theater, giving rise to the subgenre we now call revenge tragedy (the term itself is modern), in which a wronged protagonist plots and executes revenge, destroying himself or herself in the process. An early, highly influential example is Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1592); and, despite its unprecedented psychological complexity, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is another instance. A related but distinct kind is the villain tragedy, in which the protagonist is blatantly evil: in his *Poetics*, Aristotle had advised against attempting to use a wicked person as the hero of a tragedy, but Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Macbeth* amply justify the general English indifference to classical rules. Some Elizabethan tragedies, such as *Arden of Feversham* (whose author is unknown), are concerned not with the fall of great men but with domestic violence; others, such as Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, are concerned with "overreachers," larger-than-life heroes who challenge the limits of human possibility. Certain tragedies in the period, such as *Richard III*, intersect with another Elizabethan genre, the history play, in which dramatists staged the great events, most often conspiracies, rebellions, and wars, of the nation. Not all of the events commemorated in history plays were tragic, but they tend to circle around the act that epitomized what for this period was the ultimate challenge to authority: the killing of a king. When the English cut off the head of their king in 1649, they were performing a deed that they had been rehearsing, literally, for most of a century.

English schoolboys would read and occasionally perform comedies by the great Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence. Shortly before midcentury, a schoolmaster, Nicholas Udall, used these as a model for a comedy in English, *Ralph Roister Doister*. At about the same time, another comedy, *Gammar Gurton's Needle*, which put vivid, native English material into classical form, was amusing the students at Cambridge; a song from that play is included in this

volume. From the classical models English playwrights derived some elements of structure and content: plots based on intrigue, division into scenes, and type characters such as the rascally servant and the *miles gloriosus* (cowardly braggart soldier). The latter type appears in *Ralph Roister Doister* and is a remote ancestor of Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff in the two parts of *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. But early plays such as *Gorboduc* and *Ralph Roister Doister* are, in terms of both dramatic structure and style, comparatively crude.

Around 1590, when most commercial theater had come to be concentrated in London, an extraordinary change overcame the English drama, transforming it almost overnight into a vehicle for unparalleled poetic and dramatic expression. Many factors contributed to this transformation, but probably the chief was the eruption onto the scene of Christopher Marlowe. Here are the lines in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (ca. 1592–93) with which Faustus greets the conjured figure of the most beautiful woman who has ever lived, Helen of Troy:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
Her lips sucks forth my soul, see where it flies!  
Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helena! (scene 12, lines 81–87)

Marlowe had mastered a new theatrical language—a superb unrhymed iambic pentameter, or blank verse.

Playacting, whether of tragedies, comedies, or any of the other Elizabethan genres, took its place alongside other forms of public expression and entertainment as well. Perhaps the most important, from the perspective of the theater, were music and dance, because these surrounded the theaters—ballad singers/sellers were situated directly outside—and were repeatedly incorporated into plays. Moreover, virtually all plays in the period, including Shakespeare's,

apparently ended with a jig—a ballad in the form of a dance and song, often comic.

Plays, music, and dancing were by no means the only shows in town. There were jousts, tournaments, royal entries, religious processions, pageants in honor of newly installed civic officials or ambassadors arriving from abroad; wedding masques, court masques, and costumed entertainments known as disguisings or mummings; exhibitions of swordsmanship, mountebanks, folk healers, storytellers, magic shows; bearbaiting, bullbaiting, cockfighting, and other blood sports. For several years, Elizabethan Londoners were delighted by a trained animal—Banks's Horse—that could, it was thought, do arithmetic, answer questions, and dance a brisk galliard. And there was always the grim but compelling spectacle of public shaming, mutilation, and execution.

Most English towns had stocks and whipping posts. Drunks, fraudulent merchants, adulterers, and quarrelers could be placed in carts or mounted backward on asses and paraded through the streets for crowds to jeer and throw refuse at. Women accused of being scolds could be publicly muzzled by an iron device called a branks or tied to a "cucking stool" and dunked in the river. Convicted criminals could have their ears cut off, their noses slit, their bodies branded. Ben Jonson the playwright, for instance, was branded with a "T" on his left thumb, for "Tyburn": the place where he might otherwise have been executed for killing an actor in a duel. Public beheadings and hangings were common. In the worst cases, felons were sentenced to be "hanged by the neck, and being alive cut down, and your privy members to be cut off, and your bowels to be taken out of your belly and there burned, you being alive." In the B text of *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus's limbs are, after his death, "torn asunder" and scattered over the stage, so the audience witnessed the theatrical equivalent of the execution of criminals and traitors that they could have also watched in the flesh, as it were, nearby.

*Doctor Faustus* was performed by the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose Playhouse, one of four major public playhouses that by the mid-1590s were feverishly competing for crowds of spectators. These

playhouses (including Shakespeare's famous Globe, owned by Shakespeare's company, which opened in 1599) each accommodated some two thousand spectators and generally followed the same design: they were round in shape, with an unroofed yard in the center around which stood the people who paid least, the "groundlings" (apprentices, servants, and others of the lower classes) and three rising tiers around the yard for men and women who chose to pay a higher price for places to sit with a roof over their heads. A large platform stage thrust out into the yard, surrounded on three sides by spectators (see the conjectural drawing of an Elizabethan playhouse in the appendixes to this volume). These financially risky ventures relied on admission charges—it was an innovation of this period to have money advanced in the expectation of pleasure rather than offered afterward as a reward—and counted on habitual playgoing.



**Scold's Bridge, or Branks.** First recorded in Scotland, the scold's bridge was a device to humiliate and torture women who were regarded as "riotous" or "troublesome" in speech. The metal gag was designed to inflict maximum pain if the victim attempted to speak. In England, unruly women were also humiliated by being dragged through the streets in chairs known as "cucking stools," to be dunked.

The public playhouses were all located in “liberties”: generally areas outside the city walls or opposite the city on the other side of the Thames; they were thus outside the legal jurisdiction of the city of London, which was generally hostile to dramatic spectacles. Eventually, expensive indoor theaters, lit by candles and patronized by a more select audience, were built; they too were in “liberties,” though often inside the city itself. The Blackfriars Playhouse, for instance—occupied by a boy company and later, when rebuilt nearby, by the King’s Men, Shakespeare’s company—was constructed inside a former monastery and retained its exemption from London’s puritanical rules.

About forty plays might be put on in a season, and typically a different play was performed every day (there were no play runs); thus although popular plays were regularly repeated, a steady supply of new plays was also essential. The fact that many plays had to be learned in a short period of time affected rehearsal, performance, and the way plays were written in the first place. Actors learned their roles not from full copies of plays but from what were called “parts” (they were just part of the play), consisting of the lines that they would speak and a cue of, generally, the one to three words preceding their speeches. Given the time constraints under which they performed, actors focused on learning their parts by heart, but did not always have a full grasp of the whole of the play. Playwrights who were actors, like Shakespeare, wrote with “parts” in mind, and parts were often an aspect of their creative writing and thinking too.

The response to what we now regard as one of the undisputed glories of the age was often hostility. But why? One answer, curiously enough, is traffic: plays drew large audiences, and nearby residents objected to the crowds, the noise, and the crush of carriages. Other, more serious concerns were public health and crime. It was thought that many diseases, including the dreaded bubonic plague, were spread by noxious odors, and the packed playhouses were obvious breeding grounds for infection. (Patrons often tried to protect themselves by sniffing nosegays or stuffing cloves in their nostrils.) And the large crowds drew pickpockets, cutpurses, and other scoundrels. On one memorable afternoon, recalls Shakespeare’s



clown William Kemp, a cutpurse was caught in the act and tied for the duration of the play to one of the posts that held up the canopy above the stage. The theater was, moreover, a well-known haunt of prostitutes and, it was alleged, a place where innocent maids were seduced and respectable matrons corrupted or lured to the taverns, disreputable inns, and brothels that were close at hand.

There were other charges as well. Plays were performed in the afternoon and therefore drew people, especially the young, away from their work. They were schools of idleness, luring apprentices from their trades, law students from their studies, housewives from their kitchens, and potentially pious souls from the sober meditations to which they might otherwise devote themselves. Moralists warned that the theaters were nests of sedition, and religious polemicists, especially Puritans, obsessively focusing on the use of boy actors to play the female parts, charged that theatrical transvestism was ungodly—the Bible held that dressing to deceive as to one's sex was an "abomination"—and that, additionally, it excited illicit sexual desires, both heterosexual and homosexual.

But the playing companies had powerful allies. Queen Elizabeth kept many companies alive by agreeing to the notion that public performance was a necessary "rehearsal" for private performance in front of her at court; a surprisingly large number of women as well as men with money became playhouse investors and shareholders; and people of all classes attended theaters. One theater historian has estimated that between the late 1560s and 1642, when the playhouses were shut down by the English Civil War, well over fifty million visits were paid to the London theater, an astonishing figure for a city that had, by our standards, a very modest population of 220,000 (it is now over 8 million). Plays were performed without the act breaks and intermissions to which we are accustomed; there was little scenery—handheld props often had to substitute (jingling keys for a jailor and hence a jail; a spade for a gravedigger and hence a churchyard)—but costumes were usually costly and elaborate, often hand-me-downs from the nobility or court. The players formed what would now be called repertory companies—that is, they filled the roles of each play from members of their own group, not employing

outsiders beyond “hirelings” who were paid by the day to take on tiny roles. Sometimes principal actors were, like Shakespeare, shareholders in the profits of the company. An actor who was a freeman of the city—a status acquired by completing an apprenticeship in one of the guilds—could take on apprentices, so boys were effectively apprenticed to actors. As a result, boys apprenticed to a livery company like the haberdashers or the goldsmiths might actually be taught acting. They took the women’s parts in plays, at least until their voices changed and sometimes afterwards.

The plays performed might be bought for the company from freelance writers; or, as in Shakespeare’s company, the group might include an actor-playwright who could supply it with some (though by no means all) of its plays. The script remained the property of the company, but a popular play was eagerly sought by readers; and the companies, which sometimes tried to keep their plays from appearing in print, at other times seem to have released them to the press, particularly if a corrupt version had come out already. A market developed for playbooks in print, though major libraries remained wary of accepting them: Thomas Bodley, planning which books should be accepted for Oxford’s new great library, warned against such “riff-raffs” and “baggage books” as almanacs and plays. The status of plays and playwrights started to rise, however, as a result of the fact that people could read and analyze the texts they had seen performed. As an unsigned note to Ben Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* put it in 1600, publishing a play gave readers “leave and leisure to judge with distinction.” We have been doing so ever since.

## **SURPRISED BY TIME**

All of the ways we cut up time into units are inevitably distortions. The dividing line between centuries was not, as far as we can tell, a highly significant one for people in the Renaissance, and many of the most important literary careers cross into the seventeenth century without a self-conscious moment of reflection. But virtually everyone must have been aware, by the end of the 1590s, that the long reign of Queen Elizabeth was nearing its end, and this impending closure occasioned considerable anxiety. Childless, the last of her line, Elizabeth had steadfastly refused to name a successor. She continued to make brilliant speeches, to receive the extravagant compliments of her flatterers, and to exercise her authority—in 1601, she had her favorite, the headstrong Earl of Essex, executed for attempting to raise an insurrection. But, as her seventieth birthday approached, she was clearly, as Raleigh put it, “a lady surprised by time.” She suffered from bouts of ill health and melancholy; her godson Sir John Harington was dismayed to see her pacing through the rooms of her palace, striking at the tapestries with a sword. Her more astute advisers—among them Lord Burghley’s son, Sir Robert Cecil, who had succeeded his father as her principal councillor—secretly entered into correspondence with the likeliest claimant to the throne, James VI of Scotland. Though the English queen had executed his Catholic mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, the Protestant James had continued to exchange polite letters with Elizabeth. It was at least plausible, as officially claimed, that in her dying breath, on March 24, 1603, Elizabeth designated James as her successor. A jittery nation that had feared a possible civil war at her death lit bonfires to welcome its new king. But in just a very few years, the English began to express nostalgia for the rule of “Good Queen Bess” and to look back on her reign as a magnificent high point in the history and culture of their nation.

# THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1485</b> Accession of Henry VII inaugurates Tudor dynasty
	<b>ca. 1504</b> Leonardo da Vinci paints the <i>Mona Lisa</i>
<b>ca. 1505–07</b> Amerigo Vespucci, <i>New World</i> and <i>Four Voyages</i>	<b>1508–12</b> Michelangelo paints Sistine Chapel ceiling
	<b>1509</b> Death of Henry VII; accession of Henry VIII
<b>1511</b> Desiderius Erasmus, <i>Praise of Folly</i>	
	<b>1513</b> James IV of Scotland killed at Battle of Flodden; succeeded by James V
<b>1516</b> Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i> ; Ludovico Ariosto, <i>Orlando</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<i>furioso</i>	
<b>ca. 1517</b> John Skelton, "The Tunning of Elinour Rumming"	<b>1517</b> Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses; beginning of the Reformation in Germany
	<b>1519</b> Cortés invades Mexico; Magellan begins his voyage around the world
<b>1520s–30s</b> Thomas Wyatt's poems circulating in manuscript	<b>1521</b> Pope Leo X names Henry VIII "Defender of the Faith"
<b>1525</b> William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament	
<b>1528</b> Baldassare Castiglione, <i>The Courtier</i>	
	<b>1529–32</b> More is Lord Chancellor
<b>1532</b> Niccolò Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (written 1513)	<b>1532–34</b> Henry VIII divorces Catherine of Aragon to marry

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	Anne Boleyn; Elizabeth I born; Henry declares himself head of the Church of England
	<b>1535</b> More beheaded
<b>1537</b> John Calvin, <i>The Institution of Christian Religion</i>	<b>1537</b> Establishment of Calvin's theocracy at Geneva
	<b>1542</b> Roman Inquisition; James V of Scotland dies, succeeded by infant daughter, Mary
<b>1543</b> Copernicus, <i>On the Revolution of the Spheres</i>	
<b>1547</b> <i>Book of Homilies</i> <b>1549</b> <i>Book of Common Prayer</i>	<b>1547</b> Death of Henry VIII; accession of Protestant Edward VI
	<b>1553</b> Death of Edward VI; failed attempt to put Protestant Lady Jane Grey on throne; accession of Catholic Queen Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1554</b> Execution of seventeen-year-old Lady Jane Grey, along with her husband and father-in-law
	<b>1555–56</b> Archbishop Cranmer and former bishops Latimer and Ridley burned at the stake
<b>1557</b> Tottel's <i>Songs and Sonnets</i> (printing poems by Wyatt, Surrey, and others)	
	<b>1558</b> Mary dies; succeeded by Protestant Elizabeth I
<b>1563</b> John Foxe, <i>Acts and Monuments</i>	
<b>1565</b> Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, <i>Gorboduc</i> , first English blank-verse tragedy (acted in 1561)	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1567</b> Arthur Golding, translation of Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i>	<b>1567–68</b> Mary, Queen of Scots, forced to abdicate; succeeded by her son James VI; Mary imprisoned in England
	<b>1570</b> Elizabeth I excommunicated by Pope Pius V
	<b>1572</b> St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of French Protestants
	<b>1576</b> James Burbage's playhouse, The Theatre, built in London
	<b>1577–80</b> Drake's circumnavigation of the globe
<b>1578</b> John Lyly, <i>Euphues</i>	
<b>1579</b> Edmund Spenser, <i>The Shepheardes Calender</i>	



TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1580</b> Montaigne, <i>Essais</i>	
	<b>1583</b> Irish rebellion crushed
	<b>1584–87</b> Sir Walter Raleigh's earliest attempts to colonize Virginia
	<b>1586–87</b> Mary, Queen of Scots, tried for treason and executed
<b>ca. 1587–90</b> Marlowe's <i>Tamburlaine</i> acted; Shakespeare begins career as actor and playwright	
<b>1588</b> Thomas Hariot, <i>A Brief and True Report of . . . Virginia</i>	<b>1588</b> Failed invasion by the Spanish Armada
<b>1589</b> Richard Hakluyt, <i>The Principal Navigations . . . of the English Nation</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1590</b> Sir Philip Sidney, <i>Arcadia</i> (posthumously published); Spenser, <i>The Faerie Queene</i> , Books 1–3	
<b>1591</b> Sidney, <i>Astrophil and Stella</i> published	
<b>ca. 1592</b> John Donne's earliest poems circulating in manuscript	
<b>1595</b> Sidney, <i>The Defense of Poesy</i> published	<b>1595</b> Raleigh's voyage to Guiana
<b>1596</b> Spenser, <i>The Faerie Queene</i> , Books 4–6 (with Books 1–3)	
<b>1598</b> Ben Jonson, <i>Every Man in His Humor</i>	
	<b>1599</b> Globe Theatre opens

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<p><b>1603</b> Elizabeth I dies; succeeded by James VI of Scotland (as James I), inaugurating the Stuart dynasty</p>

# JOHN SKELTON

## ca. 1460–1529

John Skelton was not a tame poet. There was something wild about him that continues to provoke, baffle, and fascinate readers. It is difficult to fit the varied pieces of his life together: gifted rhetorician, translator, Latin tutor to the young prince who became Henry VIII, disgruntled courtier, political pamphleteer, visionary, biting satirist, and ordained priest. He was also the major English poet of the first quarter of the sixteenth century, with the title of poet laureate from both Oxford and Cambridge. His poetic achievement, remarkable though it is, is equally difficult to place; as C. S. Lewis observes, Skelton had “no real predecessors and no important disciples” in the history of English verse. His poetry draws, to be sure, on a long tradition of medieval anticlerical satire and carnivalesque parody, but Skelton brings to his mature works a fresh, often extremely eccentric voice.

His early works were more routinely conventional—ornate compliments, dutiful elegies, occasional verses, and the like—but in a satire written at the end of the fifteenth century, *The Bowge of Court*, Skelton gave unusually powerful expression to the anxiety of living in the dangerous, viciously competitive precincts of royal power. (The poem’s main character is called “Dread.”) A few years later, whether self-exiled or sent away by his enemies, Skelton was living far from the court: about 1503 he became the rector of the parish church at Diss, in Norfolk, where he remained for some eight

years. By 1512 he had returned to court, having been appointed *orator regius*, or “the king’s orator.” He moved to a house in the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey in 1518 and shortly thereafter, in a series of satires including *Speak, Parrot*; *Colin Clout*; and *Why Come Ye Not to Court?* (1521–22), began vituperative attacks on Cardinal Wolsey, the great prelate-statesman. Wolsey had Skelton briefly imprisoned but released him and promptly hired his services for himself.

Skelton’s poems gain their most startling effects by mixing high and low styles and by playing bawdy and scatological verbal games with some of his culture’s most respected and authoritative texts: the ancient classics, the poetry of Chaucer, the canonical works of logic and rhetoric taught at Oxford and Cambridge, and even the Catholic liturgy. The latter games were not necessarily sacrilegious—the Catholic Church, before the challenge of the Reformation, was capable of tolerating a wide range of expression—but they seem deliberately risk-taking, provocative, and obstreperous, an impression heightened by the way they are written. In the satires, Skelton rejects the ornate rhetorical devices and grandiloquent language that characterized his period’s most ambitious poetry; he writes in short rhymed lines, having from two to five beats, and the lines can keep on rhyming helter-skelter until the resources of the language give out. To many of his poems, with their aggressive and restless energies, this strange verse form is singularly appropriate. “The Tunning of Elinour Rummyng,” for example, is a wonderfully clattering, apparently disordered portrait of an alewife, and the “skeltonics,” as this way of writing has come to be called, contribute to the effect of disorder. The voice of the narrator of the satires has a breathless urgency that was much admired by twentieth-century poets, while to contemporary ears its attention to detail, madcap rhymes, and brash tone are strikingly reminiscent of rap.

The English Reformation, which was set in motion shortly after Skelton’s death, would drastically alter the context in which his work was received. English Protestants later in the century had trouble knowing what to make of the “rude railing rhymers,” as the

Elizabethan critic George Puttenham called Skelton. On the one hand, his satires of Cardinal Wolsey made him ripe for inclusion (with William Langland and others) in the honor roll of supposedly proto-Protestant poets. Yet on the other hand, as a foul-mouthed and frivolous priest, Skelton could serve equally well as an emblem of the alleged corruption of the Catholic clergy. He also became associated with various tales and jests that seemed nostalgically to recall the innocence and "merriment" of pre-Reformation England. (In one of these, Skelton proudly ascends the pulpit to show off his naked illegitimate baby to his astonished parishioners.) For English society, as for English poetry, Skelton quickly came to represent the path not taken.

# Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale<sup>1</sup>

Aye, beshrew<sup>o</sup> you, by my fay,<sup>o</sup>  
These wanton clerks<sup>2</sup> be nice<sup>o</sup> alway,  
Avaunt, avaunt, my popagay!<sup>3</sup>  
"What, will ye do nothing but play?"  
Tilly vally straw,<sup>4</sup> let be I say!  
5      Gup,<sup>5</sup> Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!  
With Mannerly Margery milk and ale.

"By God, ye be a pretty pode,<sup>o</sup>  
And I love you an whole cartload."  
Straw, James Foder, ye play the fode,<sup>o</sup>  
10      I am no hackney<sup>o</sup> for your rod:<sup>o</sup>  
Go watch a bull, your back is broad!  
Gup, Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!  
With Mannerly Margery milk and ale.

Ywis<sup>o</sup> ye deal uncourteously;  
15      What, would ye frumple<sup>o</sup> me? now fie!  
"What, and ye shall not be my pigsny?"<sup>6</sup>  
By Christ, ye shall not, no hardily:  
I will not be japed<sup>o</sup> bodily!  
20      Gup, Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!  
With Mannerly Margery milk and ale.

"Walk forth your way, ye cost me naught;  
Now have I found that<sup>o</sup> I have sought:  
The best cheap flesh that ever I bought."  
Yet, for his love that hath all wrought,  
25      Wed me, or else I die for thought.<sup>o</sup>  
Gup, Christian Clout, your breath is stale!

With Mannerly Margery milk and ale!  
Gup, Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!  
With Mannerly Margery milk and ale.

30

ca. 1495

## Endnotes

1523

- Note 1: The poem is a song for three voices. The seducer's lines are in quotation marks; Margery sings the rest, except the chorus, which is sung by a bass.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Educated men: students, scholars, clergymen.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Popinjay, parrot—that is, vain fellow.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An exclamation of impatience: Nonsense![Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Go on!" (usually addressed to horses).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pig's eye. Here used as a (rough) term of endearment.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *curse* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *faith* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *toad* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deceiver, flatterer* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *horse* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *riding* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rumple, tumble* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tricked, deceived* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that which* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of distress* [Return to reference °](#)



## With Lullay, Lullay, Like a Child

With lullay, lullay, like a child,  
Thou sleepest too long, thou art beguiled.°  
"My darling dear, my daisy flower,  
Let me," quod° he, "lie in your lap."  
"Lie still," quod she, "my paramour,°  
5 Lie still, hardily,° and take a nap."  
His head was heavy, such was his hap,°  
All drowsy dreaming, drowned in sleep,  
That of his love he took no keep.°  
With hey lullay, lullay, like a child,  
10 Thou sleepest too long, thou art beguiled.

With ba, ba, ba! and bas,<sup>1</sup> bas, bas!  
She cherished him, both cheek and chin,  
That he wist° never where he was;  
He had forgotten all deadly sin.  
15 He wanted wit<sup>2</sup> her love to win,  
He trusted her payment and lost all his prey;  
She left him sleeping and stale° away,  
With hey lullay, lullay, like a child,  
20 Thou sleepest too long, thou art beguiled.

The rivers rowth,° the waters wan,  
She sparèd not to wet her feet;  
She waded over, she found a man  
That halsèd° her heartily and kissed her sweet—  
Thus after her cold she caught a heat.  
25 "My lief,"° she said, "routeth° in his bed;  
Ywis° he hath an heavy head."  
With hey lullay, lullay, like a child,  
Thou sleepest too long, thou art beguiled.

30      What dreamest thou, drunkard, drowsy pate?<sup>o</sup>  
          Thy lust and liking<sup>3</sup> is from thee gone.  
          Thou blinkard blowboll,<sup>4</sup> thou wakest too late:  
          Behold thou liest, luggard,<sup>o</sup> alone!  
          Well may thou sigh, well may thou groan,  
          To deal with her so cowardly.  
 35      Ywis, pole-hatchet, she bleared thine eye.<sup>5</sup>

## 1495–1500 **Endnotes**

1527

- Note 1: Kiss. “Ba”: the “by” of *lullaby*. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lacked sufficient intelligence. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Your pleasure and enjoyment. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Blink-eyed drunkard. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Deceived you. “Pole-hatchet”: a soldier who carried a poleax. [Return to reference 5](#)

## **Notes**

- °: *deceived* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quoth, said* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lover* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confidently* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fortune, lot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *care* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knew* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stole* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rough* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *embraced* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lover* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *snores* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *head* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *luggard* [Return to reference °](#)

# ***From The Tunning of Elinour Rumming*<sup>1</sup>**

## ***Secundus Passus*<sup>2</sup>**

Some have no money  
That thither comey,  
For their ale to pay;  
That is a shrewd array!°  
Elinour sweared, "Nay,  
5 Ye shall not bear away  
My ale for nought,  
By Him that me bought."°  
With, "Hey, dog, hey,  
Have these hogs away!"  
10 With, "Get me a staff,  
The swine eat my draff!°  
Strike the hogs with a club,  
They have drunk up my swilling-tub!"°  
For, be there never so much prese,°  
15 These swine go to the high dese;<sup>3</sup>  
The sow with her pigs;  
The boar his tail wrigs,°  
His rump also he frigs°  
Against the high bench!  
20 With, "Fo, there is a stench!  
Gather up, thou wench;  
Seest thou not what is fall?°  
Take up dirt° and all,  
And bear out of the hall:  
25 God give it ill preving°  
Cleanly as evil cheving!"°  
But let us turn plain

There<sup>o</sup> we left<sup>o</sup> again.  
For as ill a patch<sup>o</sup> as that  
30 The hens run in the mash-fat;<sup>o</sup>  
For they go to roost  
Straight over the ale-joust,<sup>o</sup>  
And dung, when it comes,  
In the ale tuns.<sup>o</sup>  
35 Then Elinour taketh  
The mash-bowl, and shaketh  
The hens' dung away,  
And skommeth<sup>o</sup> it in a tray  
Whereas the yeast is,  
40 With her mangy fistis,<sup>o</sup>  
And sometime she blens  
The dung of her hens  
And the ale together;  
And saith, "Gossip,<sup>o</sup> come hither,  
45 This ale shall be thicker,  
And flower<sup>o</sup> the more quicker;  
For I may tell you,  
I learned it of a Jew,  
When I began to brew,  
50 And I have found it true;  
Drink now while it is new;  
And ye may it brook,<sup>4</sup>  
It shall make you look  
Younger than ye be,  
55 Years two or three,  
For ye may prove it by me.  
Behold," she said, "and see  
How bright I am of ble!<sup>o</sup>  
Ich<sup>o</sup> am not cast away,  
60 That can my husband say,  
When we kiss and play  
In lust and in liking;

He calleth me his whiting,<sup>5</sup>  
 His mulling and his miting,  
 65 His nobs<sup>o</sup> and his cony,<sup>o</sup>  
 His sweeting and his honey,  
 With, 'Bas,<sup>o</sup> my pretty bonny,  
 Thou art worth good<sup>o</sup> and money!  
 Thus make I my falyre fonny,<sup>o</sup>  
 70 Till that he dream and dronny,<sup>o</sup>  
 For after all our sport,  
 Then will he rout<sup>o</sup> and snort;  
 Then sweetly together we lie  
 As two pigs in a sty."  
 75 To cease meseemeth best,  
 And of this tale to rest,  
 And for to leave this letter,<sup>o</sup>  
 Because it is no better,  
 And because it is no sweeter;  
 80 We will no farther rhyme  
 Of it at this time,  
 But we will turn plain  
 Where we left again.<sup>6</sup>

## 1517? **Endnotes**

ca. 1545

- Note 1: This rowdy poem—whose heroine really did keep an alehouse in Surrey—recounts Elinour's brewing practices ("tunning") and the social life in her establishment. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Second Section* (Latin). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Go to the dais; that is, take the best place. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: If you can tolerate it. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A small white fish—here a term of endearment, like "mulling" (meaning unclear) and "miting" (mite) in line 65. [Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: That is, go back to where we left off. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *sorry state of affairs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *redeemed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *refuse, dregs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tub for stirring* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crowd* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wriggles* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rub* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *has fallen* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dung* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ill success* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bad luck* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *left off* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poor piece of ground* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mixing vat* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ale pot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *barrels* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skims* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fists* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *friend* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *froth* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complexion* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bunny* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *kiss* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *goods* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make my fellow foolish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laze* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *snore* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *text, subject* [Return to reference °](#)

# SIR THOMAS MORE

## 1478–1535

Sir Thomas More, a brilliant, compelling, and disturbing figure, has been the hero of people who hated each other: the Catholic Church, Communists, and liberals. Each of these groups has also been deeply troubled by aspects of More's life and writings: the Catholic bishops of sixteenth-century Spain and Portugal placed *Utopia* on their list of banned prohibited books; Karl Marx reserved his most bitter scorn for impractical socialists he branded "utopian"; and liberals have noticed uneasily that More embraced the idea of the forced labor camp. Robert Bolt's play (and film) *A Man for All Seasons* celebrates More for his integrity and humanity, while Hilary Mantel's novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* depict him as a dangerous, wily fanatic.

Born in London, More was the son of a prominent lawyer. As a youth he served as a page in the grand household of the archbishop of Canterbury, John Morton, who was also King Henry VII's lord chancellor. At Christmastime, when plays were performed at the archbishop's palace, the boy would join in and improvise a part for himself. This early talent for improvisation characterized More throughout his life, as did a lingering sense that he was never quite at home in any of the parts he played. (In the famous portrait of More by Hans Holbein the Younger—included in the color insert in this volume—More may well have been wearing a hair shirt, designed to lacerate his skin, under his rich robe of office.)



After studying at Oxford, More was trained in the law, but he was torn between law as a career, with its promise of wealth and access to power, and a life of religious devotion. He lived, for a while, as a layman among the ascetic monks in London's Charterhouse; but deciding that he wanted to marry and have a family, he turned toward a career in public affairs. Still, amid his busy engagements in law, diplomacy, and government, More constantly reserved some part of himself for other realms. One of those realms was his growing family, to whom he was a devoted and loving father, though he complained to a friend that it took him away from the life of the mind. Shortly after the completion of his law studies, he gave a series of public lectures on Saint Augustine's monumental work *The City of God*, whose religious vision continued to fascinate him until his death. He also had a passion for ancient literature, the Greek and Latin classics that lay at the heart of the cultural movement known as Renaissance humanism. He shared this passion with his close friend Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1466–1536), the greatest humanist scholar of the Northern Renaissance.

Erasmus and More also shared an ardent Christian piety, a suspicion of the philosophical distinctions drawn by generations of scholastic theologians, a delight in rhetoric, and a lively interest in experimental, unsettling wit. For Erasmus this interest bore fruit in his most enduring work, *Moriae Encomium*—whose punning title meant both *In Praise of More* and *In Praise of Folly* (1511)—which he completed as a guest in More's London house and dedicated to him. More's love of playful, subversive wit culminated in his book *Utopia*, which he began in 1515 while in the Netherlands on a diplomatic mission for Henry VIII and finished the next year. Both works, written in Latin and quickly circulated among humanists throughout Europe, daringly question the period's most cherished assumptions.

*Utopia* follows Plato's *Republic* in proposing a radically communal society, but it also reflects more contemporary influences: communities of monks, which forbade private property and required everyone to labor; emerging market societies, with their emphasis

on education and social mobility and their dislike of inherited privilege and the old warrior aristocracy; the outcries of peasant rebels demanding a more just distribution of wealth; and, explicitly, Amerigo Vespucci's published accounts of his voyages to the newly encountered lands across the Atlantic Ocean. Those voyages revealed countries organized on principles utterly unlike those that governed European societies, and seemingly free of the inequality, economic exploitation, dynastic squabbles, and legal trickery that More observed everywhere around him.

The lands that the Europeans called "America," in honor of Vespucci, had entirely changed the view of the world. Vespucci's letters, part factual, part wild fantasy, helped More imagine an alternative to the familiar social and political order. Book II of *Utopia* (the part of the work More composed first) describes in detail the laws and customs of an imagined country that bears some striking physical resemblances to England. But, in other ways, how unlike England it is! The abolition of money and private property has prevented any attachment to goods and status, and the hated ruling classes—nobles, lawyers, idle priests, rapacious soldiers—have been eliminated. In Utopia, a well-ordered political democracy, education is free and universal. Instead of the misery of oppressed peasants, there are prosperous collective farms. Instead of stench and suffering in crowded, crooked streets, there are gleaming, rational cities, with free hospitals and child care. Since everyone works, no one is overburdened; and there is ample time for all citizens to pursue the arts of peace and the pleasures of the mind and the body.

The picture of England in Book I of *Utopia*—beggars in the streets, convicted small-time thieves hanging from the gallows, hungry farmers displaced from lands fenced off for more profitable sheep rearing, cynical flatterers encouraging the king to embark on imperialistic wars—makes the sharpest contrast imaginable with the ordered and peaceable state described in Book II. Yet Book I is not directly a call for revolutionary social reform. It is a dialogue on the question of whether intellectuals should involve themselves in

politics. The speakers are a traveler named Raphael Hythloday and someone named Thomas More, who closely resembles (but perhaps should not be identified precisely with) the real More. More argues that Hythloday should offer his services as a councillor to one of the great monarchs of Europe. Hythloday replies that kings, who want only flattery from their councillors, would never dream of adopting the policies that might lead to a good society, such as the abandonment of warfare and the abolition of private property. In the dialogue, Hythloday is the detached idealist, unwilling to dirty his hands in a pointless cause; More is the practical one, prepared to compromise with the system and seek to change it from within rather than give up on any possibility of action.

Hythloday's account of his visit to Utopia, which takes place in Book II, is also in some sense a dialogue, a complex meditation on the nature of the ideal commonwealth. The dialogue structure employed throughout *Utopia* not only allows the author some cover for critiques of the social policy of his own country but also encourages the reader to notice the disturbing underside of the imaginary society: Utopia employs slavery, including enslavement for social deviance. There is no variety in dress or housing or cityscape, and no privacy. Citizens are encouraged to value pleasure, but they are constantly monitored, to make sure their pursuit of pleasure doesn't pass the strict bounds set by "nature" or "reason." There are the state guarantees of freedom of thought and toleration of religious diversity, but people who fail to believe in divine providence and the afterlife are regarded as subhuman and, accordingly, not treated as citizens. The Utopians officially despise war, but they nevertheless appear to fight a good many of them. It is very difficult to gauge More's attitude toward his imaginary commonwealth; perhaps he himself could not have said with any absolute certainty what it was.

If there is deep ambivalence in More's attitude toward Utopia, there is no similar ambivalence in the writings on theology, moral philosophy, and religious controversy that occupied much of his life. (A representative excerpt is included in the section "Faith in

Conflict.”) Though his characteristic wit and irony are visible everywhere in these writings, they are part of an increasingly desperate struggle. The struggle was against Lutheranism, which began to make inroads into England precisely during the period of More’s rise to great power. More, an ardent Catholic, hated the main beliefs of the Protestant Reformation and fought their advocates with every means at his disposal, including book burnings, imprisonment, torture, and execution. As Henry VIII’s trusted friend and, finally, lord chancellor (1529–32), he played for a time a significant role in the war on heresy. He resigned his high office when the king, seeking a divorce in order to marry Anne Boleyn, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. When More was required to take the oath for the Act of Succession, acknowledging that the claim to the throne would lie with Henry’s children by his new wife Anne, and to state his approval of the Act of Supremacy, affirming that the king rather than the pope was the supreme head of the Church in England, he declined. He attempted to remain silent on the matter, but the king treated silence as refusal and refusal as treason. More maintained his silence, choosing, as he put it, “to die the king’s good servant, but God’s first.” In 1535 he was beheaded. Four hundred years later he was made Saint Thomas More by the Catholic Church.

Utopia<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**CONCERNING THE BEST STATE OF A  
COMMONWEALTH AND THE NEW ISLAND  
OF UTOPIA**

**A Truly Golden Handbook No Less  
Beneficial Than Entertaining by the Most  
Distinguished and Eloquent Author  
THOMAS MORE Citizen and Undersheriff<sup>2</sup>  
of the Famous City of London**

***Thomas More to Peter Giles,<sup>3</sup> Greetings***

My very dear Peter Giles, I am almost ashamed to be sending you after nearly a year this little book about the Utopian commonwealth, which I'm sure you expected in less than six weeks. For, as you were well aware, I faced no problem in finding my materials, and had no reason to ponder the arrangement of them. All I had to do was repeat what you and I together heard Raphael<sup>4</sup> describe. There was no occasion, either, for labor over the style, since what he said, being extempore and informal, couldn't be couched in fancy terms. And besides, as you know, he's a man not so well versed in Latin as in Greek; so that my language would be nearer the truth, the closer it approached to his casual simplicity. Truth in fact is the only quality at which I should have aimed, or did aim, in writing this book.

I confess, friend Peter, that having all these materials ready to hand left hardly anything at all for me to do. Otherwise, thinking through a topic like this from scratch and disposing it in proper order might have demanded no little time and work even if a man were not entirely deficient in talent and learning. And then if the matter had to be set forth with eloquence, not just factually, there's no way I could have done that, however hard I worked, for however long a time. But now when I was relieved of all these problems, over which I could have sweated forever, there was nothing for me to do but simply write down what I had heard. Well, little as it was, that task was rendered almost impossible by my many other obligations. Most of my day is given to the law—pleading some cases, hearing others,

compromising others, and deciding still others. I have to visit this man because of his official position and that man because of his business; and so almost the whole day is devoted to other people's business and the rest to my own; and then for myself—that is, my studies—there's nothing left.

For when I get home, I have to talk with my wife, chatter with my children, and consult with the servants. All these matters I consider part of my business, since they have to be done, unless a man wants to be a stranger in his own house. Besides, you are bound to bear yourself as agreeably as you can toward those whom nature or chance or your own choice has made the companions of your life. But of course you mustn't spoil them with your familiarity, or by overindulgence turn the servants into your masters. And so, amid these concerns, the day, the month, and the year slip away.

What time do I find to write, then? especially since I still have taken no account of sleeping or even of eating, to which many people devote as much time as to sleep itself, which consumes almost half of our lives.<sup>5</sup> My own time is only what I steal from sleeping and eating. It isn't very much, but it's something, and so I've finally been able to finish *Utopia*, even though belatedly, and I'm sending it to you now. I hope, my dear Peter, that you'll read it over and let me know if you find anything that I've overlooked. Though I'm not really afraid of having forgotten anything important—I wish my judgment and learning were up to my memory, which isn't half bad—still, I don't feel so sure of it that I would swear I've missed nothing.

For my servant John Clement<sup>6</sup> has raised a great doubt in my mind. As you know, he was there with us, for I always want him to be present at conversations where there's profit to be gained. (And one of these days I expect we'll get a fine crop of learning from this young sprout, who's already made excellent progress in Greek as well as Latin.) Anyhow, as I recall matters, Hythloday said the bridge over the Anyder at Amaurot<sup>7</sup> was five hundred yards long; but my John says that is two hundred yards too much—that in fact the river is not more than three hundred yards wide there. So I beg you,

consult your memory. If your recollection agrees with his, I'll yield to the two of you, and confess myself mistaken. But if you don't recall the point, I'll follow my own memory and keep my present figure. For, as I've taken particular pains to avoid having anything false in the book, so, if anything is in doubt, I'd rather say something untrue than tell a lie. In short, I'd rather be honest than clever.

But the whole matter can easily be cleared up if you'll ask Raphael about it—either face to face or else by letter. And I'm afraid you must do this anyway, because of another problem that has cropped up—whether through my fault, or yours, or Raphael's, I'm not sure. For it didn't occur to us to ask, nor to him to say, in what area of the New World Utopia is to be found. I wouldn't have missed hearing about this for a sizable sum of money, for I'm quite ashamed not to know even the name of the ocean where this island lies about which I've written so much. Besides, there are various people here, and one in particular, a devout man and a professor of theology, who very much wants to go to Utopia. His motive is not by any means idle curiosity, a hankering after new sights, but rather a desire to foster and further the growth of our religion, which has made such a happy start there. To do this properly, he has decided to arrange to be sent there by the pope, and even to be named bishop to the Utopians. He feels no particular scruples about applying for this post, for he considers it a holy ambition, arising not from motives of glory or gain, but simply from religious zeal.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore I beg you, my dear Peter, to get in touch with Hythloday—in person if you can, or by letters if he's gone—and make sure that my work contains nothing false and omits nothing true. It would probably be just as well to show him the book itself. If I've made a mistake, there's nobody better qualified to correct me; but even he cannot do it, unless he reads over my book. Besides, you will be able to discover in this way whether he's pleased or annoyed that I have written the book. If he has decided to write out his own story himself, he may not want me to do so; and I should be sorry, too, if, in publicizing the Utopian commonwealth, I had robbed him and his story of the flower of novelty.



But to tell the truth, I'm still of two minds as to whether I should publish the book at all. For the tastes of mortals are so various, the tempers of some are so severe, their minds so ungrateful, their judgments so foolish, that there seems no point in publishing something, even if it's intended for their advantage, that they will receive only with contempt and ingratitude. Better simply to follow one's own natural inclinations, lead a merry life, and ignore the vexing problems of publication. Most people know nothing of learning; many despise it. The clod rejects as too difficult whatever isn't cloddish. The pedant dismisses as mere trifling anything that isn't stuffed with obsolete words. Some readers approve only of ancient authors; many men like only their own writing. Here's a man so solemn he won't allow a shadow of levity, and there's one so insipid of taste that he can't endure the salt of a little wit. Some dullards dread satire as a man bitten by a rabid dog dreads water;<sup>9</sup> some are so changeable that they like one thing when they're seated and another when they're standing.

These people lounge around the taverns, and as they swill their ale pass judgment on the intelligence of writers. With complete assurance they condemn every author by his writings, just as they think best, plucking each one, as it were, by the beard. But they themselves remain safe and, as the proverb has it, out of harm's way. No use trying to lay hold of them; they're shaved so close, there's not so much as a hair of their heads to catch them by.

Finally, some people are so ungrateful that even though they're delighted with a work, they don't like the author any better because of it. They are like rude guests who, after they have stuffed themselves with a splendid dinner, go off, carrying their full bellies homeward without a word of thanks to the host who invited them. A fine task, providing at your own expense a banquet for men of such finicky palates and such various tastes, who will remember and reward you with such thanks!

At any rate, my dear Peter, will you take up with Hythloday the points I spoke of? After I've heard from him, I'll take a fresh look at the whole matter. But since I've already taken the pains to write up

the subject, it's too late to be wise. In the matter of publication, I hope we can have Hythloday's approval; after that, I'll follow the advice of my friends—and especially yours. Farewell, my dear Peter Giles. My regards to your excellent wife. Love me as you have always done; I am more fond of you than ever.

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
More coined the word “Utopia” from Greek *ou* (not) + *topos* (place): “Noplace”; perhaps with a pun on *eu* + *topos*, “Happy” or “Fortunate” Place. The book was written in Latin and published—elaborately titled, as shown—on the European continent under the supervision of More's friend the great Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466–1536). This translation is by Robert M. Adams, as published in the Norton Critical Edition of *Utopia* (3rd ed., 2011), with revisions by George M. Logan.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As an undersheriff, More's principal duty was to serve as a judge in the Sheriff's Court, a city court that heard a wide variety of cases.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Giles (ca. 1486–1533) was both a humanistic scholar and a practical man of affairs, city clerk of Antwerp. Erasmus had recommended him and More to each other, and they met in Antwerp in the summer of 1515; *Utopia* seems to have originated in conversations between them. In the first edition of the book, this letter is called its preface.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the fictitious character Raphael Hythloday. His given name associates him with the archangel Raphael, traditionally a guide and healer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: More's 16th-century biographer Thomas Stapleton says he slept four or five hours a night, rising at 2 A.M.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Clement (d. 1572) had entered More's household by 1514, as servant and pupil. He later became a respected physician.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: From Greek: "made dark or dim." "Hythloday": its first root is surely Greek *hythlos*, "nonsense"; the second part is probably from *daiein*, "to distribute"—hence, together, "nonsense-peddler." "Anyder": waterless (also from Greek).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Tradition has it that this zealous theologian was Rowland Phillips, warden of Merton College, Oxford. But there is no real support for the identification, and the passage may be wholly fabricated.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A late-stage symptom of rabies, which gives the disease its other name, hydrophobia.[Return to reference 9](#)

**THE BEST STATE OF A COMMONWEALTH A  
DISCOURSE BY THE EXTRAORDINARY  
RAPHAEL HYTHLODAY AS RECORDED BY  
THE NOTED THOMAS MORE CITIZEN AND  
UNDERSHERIFF OF LONDON THE FAMOUS  
CITY OF GREAT BRITAIN**

The most invincible king of England, Henry, the eighth of that name, a prince adorned with the royal virtues beyond any other, had recently some differences of no slight import with Charles, the most serene prince of Castille,<sup>1</sup> and sent me into Flanders as his spokesman to discuss and settle them. I was companion and associate to that incomparable man Cuthbert Tunstall,<sup>2</sup> whom the king has recently created master of the rolls, to everyone's great satisfaction. I will say nothing in praise of this man, not because I fear the judgment of a friend might be questioned, but because his integrity and learning are greater than I can describe and too well known everywhere to need my commendation—unless I would, according to the proverb, "light up the sun with a lantern."

Those appointed by the prince to deal with us, all excellent men, met us at Bruges by prearrangement. Their head and leader was the mayor of Bruges, a most distinguished person. But their main speaker and guiding spirit was Georgius de Theimseke, the provost of Cassel, a man eloquent by nature as well as by training, very learned in the law, and most skillful in diplomatic affairs through his ability and long practice. After we had met several times, certain points remained on which we could not come to agreement; so they adjourned the meetings and went to Brussels for some days to learn their prince's pleasure.

Meanwhile, since my business required it, I went to Antwerp.<sup>3</sup> Of those who visited me while I was there, no one was more welcome than Peter Giles. He was a native of Antwerp, a man of high reputation, already appointed to a good position and worthy of the very best: I hardly know whether the young man is more distinguished in learning or in character. Apart from being cultured, virtuous, and courteous to all, with his intimates he is so open-hearted, affectionate, loyal, and sincere that you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere a man comparable to him in all the points of friendship. No one is more modest or more frank; none better combines simplicity with wisdom. His conversation is so pleasant, and so witty without malice, that the ardent desire I felt to see again

my native country, my wife, and my children (from whom I had been separated more than four months) was much eased by his agreeable company and delightful talk.

One day after I had heard mass at Nôtre Dame, the most beautiful and most popular church in Antwerp, I was about to return to my quarters when I happened to see him talking with a stranger, a man of quite advanced years. The stranger had a sunburned face, a long beard, and a cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders; from his appearance and dress, I took him to be a ship's captain. When Peter saw me, he approached and greeted me. As I was about to return his greeting, he drew me aside, and, indicating the stranger, said, "Do you see that fellow? I was just on the point of bringing him to you."

"He would have been very welcome on your behalf," I answered.

"And on his own too, if you knew him," said Peter, "for there is no mortal alive today can tell you so much about unknown peoples and lands; and I know that you're always greedy for such information."

"In that case," said I, "my guess wasn't a bad one, for at first glance I supposed he was a skipper."

"Then you're far off the mark," he replied, "for his sailing has not been like that of Palinurus, but more that of Ulysses, or rather of Plato.<sup>4</sup> This man, who is named Raphael—his family name is Hythloday—knows a good deal of Latin, and is particularly learned in Greek. He studied Greek more than Latin because his main interest is philosophy, and in that field he found that the Romans have left us nothing very valuable except certain works of Seneca and Cicero.<sup>5</sup> Being eager to see the world, he left to his brothers the patrimony to which he was entitled at home (he is a native of Portugal) and took service with Amerigo Vespucci.<sup>6</sup> He was Vespucci's constant companion on the last three of his four voyages, accounts of which are now common reading everywhere; but on the last voyage, he did not return home with the commander. After much persuasion and expostulation he got Amerigo's permission to be one of the twenty-four men who were left in a fort at the farthest point of the last voyage.<sup>7</sup> Being marooned in this way was altogether agreeable

to him, as he was more anxious to pursue his travels than afraid of death. He would often say, 'The man who has no grave is covered by the sky,' and 'The road to heaven is the same length from all places.'<sup>8</sup> Yet this frame of mind would have cost him dear, if God had not been gracious to him. After Vespucci's departure, he traveled through many countries with five companions from the garrison. At last, by strange good fortune, he got, via Ceylon, to Calicut, where he opportunely found some Portuguese ships; and so, beyond anyone's expectation, he returned to his own country."<sup>9</sup>

When Peter had told me this, I thanked him for his great kindness in wishing to introduce me to a man whose conversation he hoped I would enjoy, and then I turned to Raphael. After we had greeted each other and exchanged the usual civilities of strangers upon their first meeting, we all went off to my house. There in the garden we sat down on a bench covered with turf, to talk together.

He told us that when Vespucci sailed away, he and his companions who had stayed behind in the fort often met with the people of the countryside, and by ingratiating speeches gradually won their friendship. Before long they came to dwell with them safely and even affectionately. The prince (I have forgotten his name and that of his country) also gave them his favor, furnishing Raphael and his five companions not only with ample provisions but with means for traveling—rafts when they went by water, wagons when they went by land. In addition, he sent with them a most trusty guide, who was to conduct them to other princes to whom he heartily recommended them. After many days' journey, he said, they came to towns and cities, and to commonwealths that were both very populous and not badly governed.

To be sure, under the equator and as far on both sides of the line as the sun moves, there lie vast empty deserts, scorched with perpetual heat. The whole region is desolate and squalid, grim and uncultivated, inhabited by wild beasts, serpents, and also by men no less wild and dangerous than the beasts themselves. But as you go on, conditions gradually grow milder. The sun is less fierce, the earth greener, the creatures less savage. At last you reach people, cities,

and towns which not only trade among themselves and with their neighbors but even carry on commerce by sea and land with remote countries. After that, he said, they were able to visit different lands in every direction, for he and his companions were welcome as passengers aboard any ship about to make a journey.

The first vessels they saw were flat-bottomed, he said, with sails made of stitched papyrus-reeds or wicker, or elsewhere of leather. Farther on, they found ships with pointed keels and canvas sails, in every respect like our own.<sup>1</sup> The seamen were not unskilled in managing wind and water; but they were most grateful to him, Raphael said, for showing them the use of the compass, of which they had been ignorant. For that reason, they had formerly sailed with great timidity, and only in summer. Now they have such trust in the compass that they no longer fear winter at all, and tend to be overconfident rather than cautious. There is some danger that through their imprudence this device, which they thought would be so advantageous to them, may become the cause of much mischief.

It would take too long to repeat all that Raphael told us he had observed in each place, nor would it make altogether for our present purpose. Perhaps on another occasion we shall tell more about the things that are most profitable, especially the wise and sensible institutions that he observed among the civilized nations. We asked him many eager questions about such things, and he answered us willingly enough. We made no inquiries, however, about monsters, for nothing is less new or strange than they are. Scyllas, ravenous Celaenos, man-eating Lestrygonians,<sup>2</sup> and that sort of monstrosity you can hardly avoid, but well and wisely trained citizens you will hardly find anywhere. While he told us of many ill-considered usages in these new-found nations, he also described quite a few other customs from which our own cities, nations, races, and kingdoms might take example in order to correct their errors. These I shall discuss in another place, as I said. Now I intend to relate only what he told us about the customs and institutions of the Utopians,<sup>3</sup> first recounting the conversation that led him to speak of that commonwealth. Raphael had been talking very sagely about the



faulty arrangements and also the wise institutions found in that hemisphere and this (many of both sorts in each), speaking as shrewdly about the manners and governments of each place he had visited as though he had lived there all his life. Peter was amazed.

"My dear Raphael," he said, "I'm surprised that you don't enter some king's service; for I don't know of a single prince who wouldn't be eager to employ you. Your learning and your knowledge of various countries and peoples would entertain him, while your advice and your supply of examples would be very helpful in the council chamber. Thus you might advance your own interests and be useful at the same time to all your relatives and friends."

"I am not much concerned about my relatives and friends," he replied, "because I consider that I have already done my duty by them. While still young and healthy, I distributed among my relatives and friends the possessions that most men do not part with till they are old and sick (and then only reluctantly, because they can no longer keep them). I think they should be content with this gift of mine, and not expect that for their sake I should enslave myself to any king whatever."

"Well said," Peter replied; "but I do not mean that you should be in servitude to any king, only in his service."

"The difference is only a matter of one syllable," said Raphael.

"All right," said Peter, "but whatever you call it, I do not see any other way in which you can be so useful to your friends or to the general public, in addition to making yourself happier."

"Happier indeed!" exclaimed Raphael. "Would a way of life so absolutely repellent to my spirit make my life happier? As it is now, I live as I please, and I fancy very few courtiers, however splendid, can say that. As a matter of fact, there are so many men soliciting favors from the powerful that it will be no great loss if they have to do without me and a couple of others like me."

Then I said, "It is clear, my dear Raphael, that you seek neither wealth nor power, and indeed I value and revere a man of such a disposition as much as I do the mightiest persons in the world. Yet I think if you would devote your time and energy to public affairs, you

would do a thing worthy of a generous and philosophical nature, even if you did not much like it. You could best perform such a service by joining the council of some great prince and inciting him to just and noble actions (as I'm sure you would): for a people's welfare or misery flows in a stream from their prince, as from a never-failing spring. Your learning is so full, even if it weren't combined with experience, and your experience is so great, even apart from your learning, that you would be an extraordinary counselor to any king in the world."

"You are twice mistaken, my dear More," he replied, "first in me and then in the situation itself. I don't have the capacity you ascribe to me, and if I had it in the highest degree, the public would still not be any better off if I exchanged my contemplative leisure for this kind of action. In the first place, most princes apply themselves to the arts of war, in which I have neither ability nor interest, instead of to the good arts of peace. They are generally more set on acquiring new kingdoms by hook or by crook than on governing well those they already have. Moreover, the counselors of kings are all so wise already that they need no advice from anyone else (or at least that's the way they see it). At the same time, they approve and even flatter the most absurd statements of favorites through whose influence they seek to stand well with the prince. It is only natural, of course, that each man should think his own opinions best: the crow loves his fledgling, and the ape his cub.

"Now in a court composed of people who envy everyone else and admire only themselves, if a man should suggest something he had read of in other ages or seen in practice elsewhere, the other counselors would think their reputation for wisdom was endangered and they would look like simpletons, unless they could find fault with his proposal. If all else failed, they would take refuge in some remark like this: 'The way we're doing it was good enough for our ancestors, and I only hope we're as wise as they were.' And with this deep thought they would take their seats, as though they had said the last word on the subject—implying, of course, that it would be a very dangerous matter if anyone were found to be wiser in any point

than his ancestors were. As a matter of fact, we have no misgivings about neglecting the best examples they have left us; but if something better is proposed, we eagerly seize upon the excuse of reverence for times past and cling to it desperately. Such proud, obstinate, ridiculous judgments I have encountered many times, and once even in England."

"What!" I said. "Were you ever in my country?"

"Yes," he answered, "I spent several months there. It was not long after the revolt of the Cornishmen against the king had been put down, with the miserable slaughter of the rebels.<sup>4</sup> During my stay I was deeply beholden to the reverend father John Cardinal Morton,<sup>5</sup> archbishop of Canterbury, and in addition at that time lord chancellor of England. He was a man, my dear Peter (for More knows about him, and can tell what I'm going to say), as much respected for his wisdom and virtue as for his authority. He was of medium height, not bent over despite his years; his looks inspired respect rather than fear. In conversation, he was not forbidding, though serious and grave. When suitors came to him on business, he liked to test their spirit and presence of mind by speaking to them sharply, though not rudely. He liked to uncover these qualities, which were those of his own nature, as long as they were not carried to the point of effrontery; and he thought such men were best qualified to carry on business. His speech was polished and pointed; his knowledge of the law was great; he had an incomparable understanding and a prodigious memory, for he had improved extraordinary natural abilities by study and practice. At the time when I was in England, the king relied heavily on his advice, and he seemed the chief support of the nation as a whole. He had been taken from school to court when scarcely more than a boy, had devoted all his life to important business, and had acquired from weathering violent changes of fortune and many great perils a supply of practical wisdom, which is not soon lost when so purchased.

"One day when I was dining with him, there was present a layman, learned in the laws of your country, who for some reason

took occasion to praise the rigid execution of justice then being practiced upon thieves. They were being executed everywhere, he said, with as many as twenty at a time being hanged on a single gallows. And then he declared that he could not understand how so many thieves sprang up everywhere, when so few of them escaped hanging. I ventured to speak freely before the cardinal, and said, 'There is no need to wonder: this way of punishing thieves goes beyond the call of justice, and is not, in any case, for the public good. The penalty is too harsh in itself, yet it isn't an effective deterrent. Simple theft<sup>6</sup> is not so great a crime that it ought to cost a man his life, yet no punishment however severe can withhold those from robbery who have no other way to eat. In this matter not only you in England but a good part of the world seem to imitate bad schoolmasters, who would rather whip their pupils than teach them. Severe and terrible punishments are enacted against theft, when it would be much better to enable every man to earn his own living, instead of being driven to the awful necessity of stealing and then dying for it.'

"'Oh, we've taken care of that,' said the fellow. 'There are the trades and there is farming, by which men may make a living unless they choose deliberately to be rogues.'

"'Oh no you don't,' I said, 'you won't get out of it that way. We may disregard for the moment the cripples who come home from foreign and civil wars, as lately from the Cornish battle and before that from your wars with France. These men, who have lost limbs in the service of king and country, are too badly crippled to follow their old trades, and too old to learn new ones. But since wars occur only from time to time, let us, I say, disregard these men, and consider what happens every day. There are a great many noblemen who live idly like drones off the labor of others, their tenants whom they bleed white by constantly raising their rents. (This is the only instance of their tightfistedness, because they are prodigal in everything else, ready to spend their way to the poorhouse.) These noblemen drag around with them a great train of idle servants,<sup>7</sup> who have never learned any trade by which they could earn a living. As

soon as their master dies, or they themselves fall ill, they are promptly turned out of doors, for lords would rather support idlers than invalids, and the son is often unable to maintain as big a household as his father had, at least at first. Those who are turned off soon set about starving, unless they set about stealing. What else can they do? Then when a wandering life has left their health impaired and their clothes threadbare, when their faces look pinched and their garments tattered, men of rank will not care to engage them. And country people dare not do so, for they don't have to be told that one who has been raised softly to idle pleasures, who has been used to swaggering about with sword and buckler, is likely to look down on the whole neighborhood and despise everybody else as beneath him. Such a man can't be put to work with spade and mattock; he will not serve a poor man faithfully for scant wages and sparse diet.'

"But we ought to encourage these men in particular," said the lawyer. 'In case of war the strength and power of our army depend on them, because they have a bolder and nobler spirit than workmen and farmers have.'

"You may as well say that thieves should be encouraged for the sake of wars," I answered, 'since you will never lack for thieves as long as you have men like these. In fact thieves don't make bad soldiers, and soldiers turn out to be pretty good robbers—so nearly are these two ways of life related. But the custom of keeping too many retainers is not peculiar to this nation; it is common to almost all of them. France suffers from an even more grievous plague. Even in peacetime—if you can call it peace—the whole country is crowded with foreign mercenaries, imported on the same principle that you've given for your noblemen keeping idle servants.<sup>8</sup> Wise fools think that the public safety depends on having ready a strong army, preferably of veteran soldiers. They think inexperienced men are not reliable, and they sometimes hunt out pretexts for war, just so they may have trained soldiers and experienced cutthroats—or, as Sallust neatly puts it, that "hand and spirit may not grow dull through lack of practice."<sup>9</sup> But France has learned to her cost how pernicious it is to

feed such beasts. The examples of the Romans, the Carthaginians, the Syrians,<sup>1</sup> and many other peoples show the same thing; for not only their governments but their fields and even their cities were ruined more than once by their own standing armies. Besides, this preparedness is unnecessary: not even the French soldiers, practiced in arms from their cradles, can boast of having often got the best of your raw recruits.<sup>2</sup> I shall say no more on this point, lest I seem to flatter present company. At any rate, neither your town workmen nor your rough farm laborers—except for those whose physiques aren't suited for strength or boldness, or whose spirits have been cowed by inability to feed their families—seem to be much afraid of fighting the idle attendants of noblemen. So you need not fear that retainers, once strong and vigorous (for that's the only sort noblemen deign to corrupt), but now soft and flabby because of their idle, effeminate life, would be weakened if they were taught practical crafts to earn their living, and trained to manly labor. Anyway, I cannot think it's in the public interest to maintain for the emergency of war such a vast multitude of people who trouble and disturb the peace. You never have war unless you choose it, and peace is always more to be considered than war. Yet this is not the only circumstance that makes thieving necessary. There is another one, which, I believe, applies more especially to you Englishmen.'

"What is that?' asked the cardinal.

"Your sheep,' I replied, 'that used to be so meek and eat so little. Now they have become so greedy and fierce that they devour human beings themselves, as I hear.<sup>3</sup> They devastate and depopulate fields, houses, and towns. For in whatever parts of the land the sheep yield the softest and most expensive wool, there the nobility and gentry, yes, and even some abbots—holy men—are not content with the old rents that the land yielded to their predecessors. Living in idleness and luxury, without doing any good to society, no longer satisfies them; they have to do positive harm. For they leave no land free for the plow: they enclose every acre for pasture; they destroy houses and abolish towns, keeping only the churches, and those for sheep-barns. And as if enough of your land

were not already wasted on woods and game-preserves, these worthy men turn all human habitations and cultivated fields back to wilderness. Thus one greedy, insatiable glutton, a frightful plague to his native country, may enclose many thousand acres of land within a single hedge. The tenants are dismissed; some are stripped of their belongings by trickery or brute force, or, wearied by constant harassment, are driven to sell them. By hook or by crook these miserable people—men, women, husbands, wives, orphans, widows, parents with little children, whole families (poor but numerous, since farming requires many hands)—are forced to move out. They leave the only homes familiar to them, and they can find no place to go. Since they cannot afford to wait for a buyer, they sell for a pittance all their household goods, which would not bring much in any case. When that little money is gone (and it's soon spent in wandering from place to place), what remains for them but to steal, and so be hanged—justly, you'd say!—or to wander and beg? And yet if they go tramping, they are jailed as idle vagrants. They would be glad to work, but they can find no one who will hire them. There is no need for farm labor, in which they have been trained, when there is no land left to be planted. One herdsman or shepherd can look after a flock of beasts large enough to stock an area that would require many hands if it were plowed and harvested.

“This enclosing has had the effect of raising the price of food in many places. In addition, the price of raw wool has risen so much that poor people who used to make cloth are no longer able to buy it, and so great numbers are forced from work to idleness. One reason is that after the enlarging of the pasture-land, a murrain killed a great number of sheep—as though God were punishing greed by sending a plague upon the animals, which in justice should have fallen on the owners! But even if the number of sheep should increase greatly, their price will not fall a penny. The reason is that the wool trade, though it can't be called a monopoly, because it isn't in the hands of one single person, is concentrated in few hands (an oligopoly, you might say), and these so rich that the owners are

never pressed to sell until they have a mind to, and that is only when they can get their price.

“For the same reason other kinds of livestock also are priced exorbitantly, the more so because with so many farmhouses being pulled down, and farming in a state of decay, there are not enough people to look after the breeding of animals. These rich men will not breed other animals as they do lambs, but buy them lean and cheap, fatten them in their own pastures, and then sell them at a high price. I don’t think the full impact of this bad system has yet been felt. We know these dealers raise prices where the fattened animals are sold. But when, over a period of time, they keep buying beasts from other localities faster than they can be bred, then as the supply gradually diminishes where they are purchased, a severe shortage is bound to ensue. So your island, which seemed especially fortunate in this matter, will be ruined by the crass avarice of a few. For the high food prices cause everyone to dismiss as many retainers as he can from his household; and what, I ask, can these men do, but rob or beg? And a man of courage is more likely to steal than to cringe.

“To make this hideous poverty and scarcity worse, they exist side by side with wanton luxury.<sup>4</sup> Not only the servants of noblemen, but tradespeople, even some farmers, and people of every social rank are given to ostentatious dress and gluttonous greed. Look at the eating houses, the bawdy houses, and those other places just as bad, the wine bars and alehouses. Look at all the crooked games of chance, dice, cards, backgammon, tennis, bowling, and quoits, in which money slips away so fast. Don’t all these lead their habitués straight to robbery? Banish these blights, make those who have ruined farmhouses and villages restore them, or hand them over to someone who will rebuild. Restrict the right of the rich to buy up anything and everything, and then to exercise a kind of monopoly. Let fewer people be brought up in idleness. Let agriculture be restored and the wool manufacture revived as an honest trade, so there will be useful work for the whole crowd of those now idle—whether those whom poverty has already made into thieves, or



those whom vagabondage and habits of lazy service are converting, just as surely, into the robbers of the future.

“If you do not find a cure for these evils, it is futile to boast of your justice in punishing theft. Your policy may look superficially like justice, but in reality it is neither just nor practical. If you allow young folk to be abominably brought up and their characters corrupted, little by little, from childhood; and if then you punish them as grownups for committing crimes to which their early training has inclined them, what else is this, I ask, but first making them thieves and then punishing them for it?”

“As I was speaking thus, the lawyer had made ready his answer, choosing the usual style of disputants who are better at summing up than at replying, and who like to show off their memory. So he said to me, ‘You have talked very well for a stranger, but you have heard about more things than you have been able to understand correctly. I will make the matter clear to you in a few words. First, I will summarize what you have said; then I will show how you have been misled by ignorance of our customs; finally, I will demolish all your arguments and reduce them to rubble. And so to begin where I promised, on four points you seemed to me—’

“Hold your tongue,’ said the cardinal, ‘for you won’t be finished in a few words, if this is the way you start. We will spare you the trouble of answering now, and reserve the pleasure of your reply till our next meeting, which will be tomorrow, if your affairs and Raphael’s permit it. Meanwhile, my dear Raphael, I am eager to hear why you think theft should not be punished with death, or what other punishment you think would be more in the public interest. For I’m sure even you don’t think it should go unpunished entirely. Even as it is, the fear of death does not restrain evildoers; once they were sure of their lives, as you propose, what force or fear could restrain them? They would look on a lighter penalty as an open invitation to commit more crimes—it would be like offering them a reward.’

“It seems to me, most kind and reverend father,’ I said, ‘that it’s altogether unjust to take someone’s life for taking money. Nothing in the world that fortune can bestow is equal in value to a human life.

If they say the thief suffers not for the money, but for violation of justice and transgression of laws, then this extreme justice should really be called extreme injury.<sup>5</sup> We ought not to approve of these fierce Manlian edicts<sup>6</sup> that invoke the sword for the smallest violations. Neither should we accept the Stoic view that considers all crimes equal,<sup>7</sup> as if there were no difference between killing a man and taking a coin from him. If equity means anything, there is no proportion or relation at all between these two crimes. God has said, "Thou shalt not kill"; shall we kill so readily for the theft of a bit of small change? Perhaps it will be argued that God's commandment against killing does not apply where human law allows it. But then what prevents men from making other laws in the same way—perhaps even laws legalizing rape, adultery, and perjury? God has taken from each person the right not only to kill another, but even to kill himself. If mutual consent to human laws on manslaughter entitles men freely to exempt their agents from divine law and allows them to kill those condemned by human decrees where God has given no precedent, what is this but preferring the law of man to the law of God? The result will be that in every situation men will decide for themselves how far it suits them to observe the laws of God. The law of Moses was harsh and severe, as for an enslaved and stubborn people, but it punished theft with a fine, not death.<sup>8</sup> Let us not think that in his new law of mercy, where he rules us with the tenderness of a father, God has given us greater license to be cruel to one another.

“These are the reasons why I think it is wrong to put thieves to death. But surely everybody knows how absurd and even harmful to the public welfare it is to punish theft and murder alike. If theft carries the same penalty as murder, the thief will be encouraged to kill the victim whom otherwise he would only have robbed. When the punishment is the same, murder is safer, since one conceals both crimes by killing the witness. Thus while we try to terrify thieves with extreme cruelty, we really invite them to kill the innocent.

“As for the usual question of what more suitable punishment can be found, in my judgment it would be much easier to find a better

one than a worse. Why should we question the value of the punishments long used by the Romans, who were most expert in the arts of government? They condemned those convicted of heinous crimes to work, shackled, for life, in stone quarries and mines. But of all the alternatives, I prefer the method which I observed in my Persian travels, among the people commonly called the Polylerites.<sup>9</sup> They are a sizable nation, not badly governed, free and subject only to their own laws, except that they pay annual tribute to the Persian king. Living far from the sea, they are nearly surrounded by mountains. Being contented with the products of their own land, which is by no means unfruitful, they do not visit other nations, nor are they much visited. According to their ancient customs, they do not try to enlarge their boundaries, and easily protect themselves behind their mountains by paying tribute to their overlord. Thus they have no wars and live in a comfortable rather than a showy manner, more contented than renowned or glorious. Indeed, I think they are hardly known by name to anyone but their next-door neighbors.

“In their land, whoever is found guilty of theft must make restitution to the owner, not (as elsewhere) to the prince; they think the prince has no more right to the stolen goods than the thief. If the stolen property has disappeared, its value is repaid from the thief’s possessions. Whatever remains of those is handed over to his wife and children, while the thief himself is sentenced to hard labor.

“Unless their crimes were compounded with atrocities, thieves are neither imprisoned nor shackled, but go freely and unconstrained about their work on public projects. If they shirk and do their jobs slackly, they are not chained, but they are whipped. If they work hard, they are treated without any indignities, except that at night after roll call they are locked up in their dormitories. Apart from constant work, they undergo no discomfort in living. As they work for the public good, they are decently fed out of the public stores, though arrangements vary from place to place. In some districts they are supported by alms. Unreliable as this support may seem, the Polylerites are so compassionate that no way is found more rewarding. In other places, public revenues are set aside for their

support, or a special tax is levied on every individual for their use; and sometimes they do not do public work, but anyone in need of workmen can go to the market and hire some of them by the day at a set rate, a little less than that for free men. If they are lazy, it is lawful to whip them. Thus they never lack for work, and each one of them brings a little profit into the public treasury beyond the cost of his keep.

“They are all dressed in clothes of the same distinctive color. Their hair is not shaved but trimmed close about the ears,<sup>1</sup> and the tip of one ear is cut off. Their friends are allowed to give them food, drink, or clothing, as long as it is of the proper color; but to give them money is death, both to the giver and to the taker. It is just as serious a crime for any free man to take money from them for any reason whatever; and it is also a capital crime for any of these slaves (as the condemned are called) to carry weapons. In each district of the country they are required to wear a special badge. It is a capital crime to throw away the badge, to go beyond one's own district, or to talk with a slave of another district. Plotting escape is no more secure than escape itself: it is death for any other slave to know of a plot to escape, and slavery for a free man. On the other hand, there are rewards for informers—money for a free man, freedom for a slave, and for both of them pardon and amnesty. Thus it can never be safer for them to persist in an illicit scheme than to renounce it.

“Such are their laws and policies in this matter. It is clear how mild and practical they are, for the aim of the punishment is to destroy vices and save men. The criminals are treated so that they become good of necessity, and for the rest of their lives they atone for the wrong they have done before. There is so little danger of relapse that travelers going from one part of the country to another think slaves the most reliable guides, changing them at the boundary of each district. The slaves have no means of committing robbery, since they are unarmed, and any money in their possession is evidence of a crime. If caught, they would be punished, and there is no hope of escape anywhere. Since every bit of a slave's clothing

is unlike the usual clothing of the country, how could a slave escape, unless he fled naked? Even then his cropped ear would give him away. Might not the slaves form a conspiracy against the government? Perhaps. But the slaves of one district could hardly expect to succeed unless they first involved in their plot the slave-gangs of many other districts. And that is impossible, since they are not allowed to meet or talk together or even to greet one another. No one would risk a plot when they all know joining is so dangerous to the participant and betrayal so profitable to the informer. Besides, no one is quite without hope of gaining his freedom eventually if he accepts his punishment in the spirit of obedience and patience, and gives promise of future good conduct. Indeed, every year some are pardoned as a reward for their submissive behavior.'

"When I had finished this account, I added that I saw no reason why this system could not be adopted even in England, and with much greater advantage than the 'justice' which my legal antagonist had praised so highly. But the lawyer replied that such a system could never be established in England without putting the commonwealth in serious peril. And so saying, he shook his head, made a wry face, and fell silent. And all the company sided with him.

"Then the cardinal remarked, 'It is not easy to guess whether this scheme would work well or not, since nobody has yet tried it out. But perhaps when the death sentence has been passed on a thief, the king might reprieve him for a time without right of sanctuary,<sup>2</sup> and thus see how the plan worked. If it turned out well, then he might establish it by law; if not, he could execute immediate punishment on the man formerly condemned. This would be neither less nor more unjust than if the condemned man had been put to death at once, and the experiment would involve no risk. I think vagabonds too might be treated this way, for though we have passed many laws against them, they have had no real effect as yet.'

"When the cardinal had concluded, they all began praising enthusiastically ideas which they had received with contempt when I suggested them; and they particularly liked the idea about vagabonds, because it was the cardinal's addition.

"I don't know whether it is worthwhile telling what followed, because it was silly, but I'll tell it anyhow, for there's no harm in it, and it bears on our subject. There was a hanger-on standing around, who was so good at playing the fool that you could hardly tell him from the real thing. He was constantly making jokes, but so awkwardly that we laughed more at him than at them; yet sometimes a rather clever thing came out, confirming the old proverb that a man who throws the dice often will sooner or later make a lucky cast. One of the company happened to say that in my speech I had taken care of the thieves, and the cardinal had taken care of the vagabonds, so now all that was left to do was to take care of the poor whom sickness or old age had reduced to poverty and kept from earning a living.

"Leave that to me," said the fool, "and I'll set it right at once. These are people I'm eager to get out of my sight, having been so often vexed with them and their woeful complaints. No matter how pitifully they beg for money, they've never whined a single penny out of my pocket. They can't win with me: either I don't want to give them anything, or I haven't anything to give them. Now they're getting wise; they know me so well, they don't waste their breath, but let me pass without a word or a hope—no more, by heaven, than if I were a priest. But I would make a law sending all these beggars to Benedictine monasteries, where the men could become lay brothers,<sup>3</sup> as they're called, and the women could be nuns."

"The cardinal smiled and passed it off as a joke; the rest took it seriously. But a certain friar, a theologian, took such pleasure in this jest at the expense of priests and monks that he too began to make merry, though generally he was grave to the point of sourness. 'Even so, you will not get rid of the beggars,' he began, 'unless you take care of us friars<sup>4</sup> too.'

"You have been taken care of already," retorted the fool. "The cardinal provided for you splendidly when he said vagabonds should be arrested and put to work, for you friars are the greatest vagabonds of all."

"When the company, watching the cardinal closely, saw that he admitted this jest like the other, they all took it up with vigor—except for the friar. He, as you can easily imagine, was stung by the vinegar,<sup>5</sup> and flew into such a rage that he could not keep from abusing the fool. He called him a knave, a slanderer, a sneak, and a 'son of perdition,'<sup>6</sup> quoting the meanwhile terrible denunciations from Holy Scripture. Now the joker began to jest in earnest, for he was clearly on his own ground.

"Don't get angry, good friar," he said, "for it is written, 'In your patience possess ye your souls.'"<sup>7</sup>

"In reply, the friar said, and I quote his very words, 'I am not angry, you gallows-bird, or at least I do not sin, for the psalmist says, 'Be ye angry, and sin not.'"<sup>8</sup>

"At this point the cardinal gently cautioned the friar to calm down, but he answered: 'No, my lord, I speak only from righteous zeal, as I ought to. For holy men have had great zeal. That is why Scripture says, 'the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,'"<sup>9</sup> and we sing in church, "those who mocked Elisha as he went up to the house of God, felt the zeal of the baldhead,"<sup>1</sup> just as this mocker, this rascal, this guttersnipe may very well feel it.'

"Perhaps you mean well," said the cardinal, "but you would act in a holier, and certainly in a wiser way, if you didn't set your wit against a fool's wit and try to spar with a buffoon.'

"No, my lord," he replied, "I would not act more wisely. For Solomon himself, the wisest of men, said, 'Answer a fool according to his folly,'"<sup>2</sup> and that's what I'm doing now. I am showing him the pit into which he will fall if he does not take care. For if the many mockers of Elisha, who was only one bald man, felt the effects of his zeal, how much more effect shall be felt by a single mocker of many friars, who include a great many baldheads! And besides, we have a papal bull,<sup>3</sup> by which all who mock us are excommunicated.'

"When the cardinal saw there was no end to the matter, he nodded to the fool to leave, and turned the conversation to another



subject. Soon after, he rose from table, and, going to hear petitioners, dismissed us.

"Look, my dear More, what a long story I have inflicted on you. I would be quite ashamed, if you had not yourself asked for it, and seemed to listen as if you did not want any part to be left out. Though I ought to have related this conversation more concisely, I did feel bound to recount it, so you might see how those who rejected what I said at first approved of it immediately afterward, when they saw the cardinal did not disapprove. In fact they went so far in their flattery that they indulged and almost took seriously ideas that he tolerated only as the jesting of a fool. From this episode you can see how little courtiers would value me or my advice."

To this I answered, "You have given me great pleasure, my dear Raphael, for everything you've said has been both wise and witty. As you spoke, I seemed to be a child and in my own native land once more, through the pleasant recollection of that cardinal in whose court I was brought up as a lad. Dear as you are to me on other accounts, you cannot imagine how much dearer you are because you honor his memory so highly. Still, my friend Raphael, I don't give up my former opinion: I think if you could overcome your aversion to court life, your advice to a prince would be of the greatest advantage to the public welfare. This, after all, is the chief duty of every good man, including you. Your friend Plato thinks that commonwealths will become happy only when philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers.<sup>4</sup> No wonder we are so far from happiness, when philosophers do not condescend even to assist kings with their counsels."

"They are not so ungracious," Raphael replied, "but that they would gladly do it; in fact, they have already done it in a great many published books, if the rulers would only read their good advice. But doubtless Plato was right in foreseeing that unless kings became philosophical themselves, they would never take the advice of real philosophers, drenched as they are and infected with false values from boyhood on. Plato certainly had this experience with Dionysius



of Syracuse.<sup>5</sup> If I proposed wise laws to some king, and tried to root out of his soul the seeds of evil and corruption, don't you suppose I would be either banished forthwith, or treated with scorn?

"Imagine, if you will, that I am at the court of the king of France.<sup>6</sup> Suppose I were sitting in his royal council, meeting in secret session with the king himself presiding, and all the cleverest councillors were hard at work devising a set of crafty machinations by which the king might keep hold of Milan, recover Naples, which has proved so slippery;<sup>7</sup> then overthrow the Venetians and subdue all Italy; next add Flanders, Brabant, and the whole of Burgundy to his realm, besides some other nations he has in mind to invade. One man urges him to make an alliance with the Venetians for just as long as the king finds it convenient—perhaps to develop a common strategy with them, and even allow them some of the loot, which can be recovered later when things work out according to plan. While one recommends hiring German mercenaries, his neighbor proposes paying the Swiss to stay neutral.<sup>8</sup> A fourth voice suggests soothing the offended divinity of the emperor with an offering of gold.<sup>9</sup> Still another, who is of a different mind, thinks a settlement should be made with the king of Aragon, and that, to cement the peace, he should be allowed to take Navarre<sup>1</sup> from its proper ruler. Meanwhile, someone suggests snaring the prince of Castille into a marriage alliance—a first step would be to buy up some nobles of his court with secret pensions.<sup>2</sup>

"The hardest problem of all is what to do about England. They all agree that peace should be made, and that the alliance, which is weak at best, should be strengthened as much as possible; but while the English are being treated as friends, they should also be suspected as enemies. And so the Scots must be kept in constant readiness, poised to attack the English in case they stir ever so little.<sup>3</sup> Also a banished nobleman with some pretensions to the English throne must be secretly encouraged (there are treaties against doing it openly), and in this way pressure can be brought to

bear on the English king, and a ruler kept in check who can't really be trusted.<sup>4</sup>

"Now in a meeting like this one, where so much is at stake, where so many brilliant men are competing to think up intricate strategies of war, what if an insignificant fellow like me were to get up and advise going on another tack entirely? Suppose I said the king should leave Italy alone and stay at home, because the single kingdom of France all by itself is almost too much for one man to govern well, and the king should not dream of adding others to it? Then imagine I told about the decrees of the Achorians,<sup>5</sup> who live off the island of Utopia toward the southeast. Long ago, these people went to war to gain another realm for their king, who had inherited an ancient claim to it through marriage. When they had conquered it, they soon saw that keeping it was going to be as hard as getting it had been. The seeds of war were constantly sprouting, their new subjects were continually rebelling or being attacked by foreign invaders, the Achorians had to be constantly at war for them or against them, and they saw no hope of ever being able to disband their army. In the meantime, they were being heavily taxed, money flowed out of their kingdom, their blood was being shed for the advantage of others, and peace was no closer than it had ever been. The war corrupted their own citizens by encouraging lust for robbery and murder; and the laws fell into contempt because their king, distracted with the cares of two kingdoms, could give neither one his proper attention.

"When they saw that the list of these evils was endless, the Achorians took counsel together and very courteously offered their king his choice of keeping whichever of the two kingdoms he preferred, because he couldn't rule them both. They were too numerous a people, they said, to be ruled by half a king; and they added that a man would not even hire a muledriver, if he had to divide his services with somebody else. The worthy king was thus obliged to be content with his own realm and give his new one to a friend, who before long was driven out.

“Finally, suppose I told the French king’s council that all this warmongering, by which so many different nations were kept in turmoil as a result of one man’s connivings, would exhaust his treasury and demoralize his people, and yet in the end come to nothing, through some mishap or other.<sup>6</sup> And therefore he should look after his ancestral kingdom, improve it as much as he could, cultivate it in every conceivable way. He should love his people and be loved by them; he should live among them, govern them kindly, and let other kingdoms alone, since his own is big enough, if not too big, for him. How do you think, my dear More, the other councillors would take this speech of mine?”

“Not very well, I’m sure,” said I.

“Well, let’s go on,” he said. “Suppose the councillors of some other king are discussing various schemes for raising money to fill his treasury. One man recommends increasing the value of money when the king pays his debts and devaluing it when he collects his revenues.<sup>7</sup> Thus he can discharge a huge debt with a small payment, and collect a large sum when only a small one is due him. Another suggests a make-believe war, so that money can be raised under pretext of carrying it on; then, when the money is in, he can conclude a ceremonious peace treaty—which the deluded common people will attribute to the piety of their prince and his careful compassion for the lives of his subjects.<sup>8</sup> Another councillor calls to mind some old motheaten laws, antiquated by long disuse, which no one remembers being made and consequently everyone has transgressed. By imposing fines for breaking these laws, the king will get great sums of money, as well as credit for upholding law and order, since the whole procedure can be made to look like justice.<sup>9</sup> Another recommendation is that he forbid under particularly heavy fines a lot of practices that are contrary to the public interest; afterward, he can dispense with his own rules for large sums of money. Thus he pleases the people and makes a double profit, one from the heavy fines imposed on lawbreakers, and the other from selling dispensations. Meanwhile he seems careful of his people’s

welfare, since it is plain he will not allow private citizens to do anything contrary to the public interest, except for a huge price.

"Another councillor proposes that he work on the judges so that they will decide every case in favor of the king. They should be summoned to court often, and invited to debate his affairs in the royal presence. However unjust his claims, one or another of the judges, whether from love of contradiction, or desire to seem original, or simply to serve his own interest, will be bound to find some way of twisting the law in the king's favor. If the judges can be brought to differ, then the clearest matter in the world will be obscured, and the truth itself brought into question. The king is given leverage to interpret the law as he will, and everyone else will acquiesce from shame or fear. The judges will have no hesitation about supporting the royal interest, for there are always plenty of pretexts for giving judgment in favor of the king. Either equity is on his side, or the letter of the law happens to make for him, or the words of the law can be twisted into obscurity—or, if all else fails, he can appeal above the law to the royal prerogative, which is a never-failing argument with judges who know their 'duty.'

"Then all the councillors agree with the famous maxim of Crassus: a king can never have too much gold, because he must maintain an army.<sup>1</sup> Further, that a king, even if he wants to, can do no wrong, for all property belongs to the king, and so do his subjects themselves; a man owns nothing but what the king, in his goodness, sees fit to leave him. The king should in fact leave his subjects as little as possible, because his own safety depends on keeping them from growing insolent with wealth and freedom. For riches and liberty make people less patient to endure harsh and unjust commands, whereas meager poverty blunts their spirits, makes them docile, and grinds out of the oppressed the lofty spirit of rebellion.

"Now at this point, suppose I were to get up again and declare that all these counsels are both dishonorable and ruinous to the king? Suppose I said his honor and his safety alike rest on the people's resources rather than his own? Suppose I said that the

people choose a king for their own sake, not for his, so that by his efforts and troubles they may live in comfort and safety? This is why, I would say, it is the king's duty to take more care of his people's welfare than of his own, just as it is the duty of a shepherd who cares about his job to feed his sheep rather than himself.<sup>2</sup>

"They are absolutely wrong when they say that the people's poverty safeguards public peace—experience shows the contrary. Where will you find more squabbling than among beggars? Who is more eager for revolution than the man who is most discontented with his present position? Who is more reckless about creating disorder than the man who knows he has nothing to lose and thinks he may have something to gain? If a king is so hated or despised by his subjects that he can rule them only by mistreatment, plundering, confiscation, and pauperization of his people, then he'd do much better to abdicate his throne—for under these circumstances, though he keeps the name of authority, he loses all the majesty of a king. A king has no dignity when he exercises authority over beggars, only when he rules over prosperous and happy subjects. This was certainly what that noble and lofty spirit Fabricius<sup>3</sup> meant when he said he would rather be a ruler of rich men than be rich himself.

"A solitary ruler who enjoys a life of pleasure and self-indulgence while all about him are grieving and groaning is acting like a jailer, not a king. Just as an incompetent doctor can cure his patient of one disease only by throwing him into another, so it's an incompetent king who can rule his people only by depriving them of all life's pleasures. Such a king openly confesses that he does not know how to rule free men.

"A king of this stamp should correct his own sloth or arrogance, because these are the vices that cause people to hate or despise him. Let him live on his own income without wronging others, and limit his spending to his income. Let him curb crime, and by wise training of his subjects keep them from misbehavior, instead of letting it breed and then punishing it. Let him not suddenly revive antiquated laws, especially if they have been long forgotten and

never missed. And let him never take money as a fine when a judge would regard an ordinary subject as a low fraud for claiming it.

"Suppose I should then describe for them the law of the Macarians,<sup>4</sup> a people who also live not far from Utopia? On the day that their king first assumes office, he must take an oath confirmed by solemn ceremonies that he will never have in his treasury at any one time more than a thousand pounds in gold, or its equivalent in silver. They say this law was made by an excellent king, who cared more for his country's prosperity than for his own wealth; he established it as a barrier against any king heaping up so much money as to impoverish his people.<sup>5</sup> He thought this sum would enable the king to put down rebellions or repel hostile invasions, but would not tempt him into aggressive adventures. His law was aimed chiefly at keeping the king in check, but he also wanted to ensure an ample supply of money for the daily business transactions of the citizens. Besides, a king who has to distribute all his excess money to the people will not be much disposed to seek out opportunities for extortion. Such a king will be both a terror to evildoers and beloved by the good.—Now, don't you suppose if I set such ideas before men strongly inclined to the contrary, they would turn deaf ears to me?"

"Stone deaf, indeed, there's no doubt about it," I said, "and no wonder! To tell you the truth, I don't think you should offer advice or thrust on people ideas of this sort, that you know will not be listened to. What good can it do? When your listeners are already prepossessed against you and firmly convinced of opposite opinions, how can you win over their minds with such out-of-the-way speeches? This academic philosophy is quite agreeable in the private conversation of close friends, but in the councils of kings, where grave matters are being authoritatively decided, there is no place for it."

"That is just what I was saying," Raphael replied. "There is no place for philosophy in the councils of kings."

"Yes, there is," I said, "but not for this school philosophy which supposes that every topic is suitable for every occasion. There is another philosophy that is better suited for political action, that takes

its cue, adapts itself to the drama in hand, and acts its part neatly and appropriately. This is the philosophy for you to use. Otherwise, when a comedy of Plautus is being played,<sup>6</sup> and the household slaves are cracking trivial jokes together, you propose to come on stage in the garb of a philosopher and repeat Seneca's speech to Nero from the *Octavia*.<sup>7</sup> Wouldn't it be better to take a silent role than to say something wholly inappropriate, and thus turn the play into a tragicomedy? You pervert and ruin a play when you add irrelevant speeches, even if they are better than the original. So go through with the drama in hand as best you can, and don't spoil it all simply because you happen to think of a play by someone else that would be better.

"That's how things go in the commonwealth, and in the councils of princes. If you cannot pluck up bad ideas by the root, if you cannot cure long-standing evils as completely as you would like, you must not therefore abandon the commonwealth. Don't give up the ship in a storm because you cannot hold back the winds. And don't force strange ideas on people who you know have set their minds on a different course from yours. You must strive to influence policy indirectly, handle the situation tactfully, and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make as little bad as possible. For it is impossible to make everything good unless you make all men good, and that I don't expect to see for a long time to come."

"The only result of this," he answered, "will be that while I try to cure others of madness, I'll be raving along with them myself. If I am to speak the truth, I will simply have to talk in the way I have described. For all I know, it may be the business of a philosopher to tell lies, but it certainly isn't mine. Though my advice may be repugnant and irksome to the king's councillors, I don't see why they should consider it eccentric to the point of folly. What if I told them the kind of thing that Plato advocates in his republic, or that the Utopians actually practice in theirs? However superior those institutions might be (and as a matter of fact they are), yet here they would seem inappropriate, because private property is the rule here, and there all things are held in common.



"People who have made up their minds to rush headlong down the opposite road are never pleased with someone who calls them back and tells them they are on the wrong course. But, apart from that, what did I say that could not and should not be said anywhere and everywhere? If we dismiss as out of the question and absurd everything which the perverse customs of men have made to seem alien to us, we shall have to set aside most of the commandments of Christ, even in a community of Christians. Yet he forbade us to dissemble them, and even ordered that what he had whispered to his disciples should be preached openly from the housetops.<sup>8</sup> Most of his teachings differ more radically from the common customs of mankind than my discourse did. But preachers, like the crafty fellows they are, have found that people would rather not change their lives to conform to Christ's rule, and so, just as you suggest, they have accommodated his teaching to the way people live, as if it were a leaden yardstick.<sup>9</sup> At least in that manner they can get the two things to correspond in some way or other. The only real thing they accomplish that I can see is to make people feel more secure about doing evil.

"And this is all that I could accomplish in the councils of princes. For either I would have different ideas from the others, and that would come to the same thing as having no ideas at all, or else I would agree with them, and that, as Mitio says in Terence, would merely confirm them in their madness.<sup>1</sup> When you say I should 'influence policy indirectly,' I simply don't know what you mean; remember, you said I should try hard to handle the situation tactfully, and what can't be made good I should try to make as little bad as possible. In a council, there is no way to dissemble, no way to shut your eyes to things. You must openly approve the worst proposals, and consent to the most vicious policies. A man who went along only halfheartedly even with the worst decisions would immediately get himself a name as a spy and perhaps a traitor. How can one individual do any good when he is surrounded by colleagues who would more readily corrupt the best of men than do any reforming of themselves? Either they will seduce you by their evil



ways or, if you keep yourself honest and innocent, you will be made a screen for the knavery and folly of others. Influencing policy indirectly! You wouldn't have a chance.

"This is why Plato in a very fine comparison declares that wise men are right in keeping clear of public business.<sup>2</sup> They see the people swarming through the streets and getting soaked with rain, and they cannot persuade them to go indoors and get out of the wet. They know if they go out themselves, they can do no good but only get drenched with the rest. So they stay indoors and are content to keep at least themselves dry, since they cannot remedy the folly of others.

"But as a matter of fact, my dear More, to tell you what I really think, as long as you have private property, and as long as money is the measure of all things, it is scarcely ever possible for a commonwealth to be just or happy. For justice cannot exist where all the best things in life are held by the worst people; nor can anyone be happy where property is limited to a few, since even those few are always uneasy, and the many are utterly wretched.

"So I reflect on the wonderfully wise and sacred institutions of the Utopians, who are so well governed with so few laws. Among them virtue has its reward, yet everything is shared equally, and everyone lives in plenty. I contrast them with the many other nations, which are constantly passing new ordinances and yet can never order their affairs satisfactorily. In these other nations, whatever a man can get he calls his own private property; but all the mass of laws old and new don't enable him to secure his own, or defend it, or even distinguish it from someone else's property—as is shown by innumerable and interminable lawsuits, fresh ones every day. When I consider all these things, I become more sympathetic to Plato and do not wonder that he declined to make laws for any people who refused to share their goods equally.<sup>3</sup> Wisest of men, he saw easily that the one and only road to the welfare of all lies through the absolute equality of goods. I doubt whether such equality can ever be achieved where property belongs to individuals. However abundant goods may be, when everyone tries to get as

much as he can for his own exclusive use, a handful of men end up sharing the whole pile, and the rest are left in poverty. The result generally is two sorts of people whose fortunes ought to be interchanged: the rich are rapacious, wicked, and useless, while the poor are unassuming, modest men who work hard, more for the benefit of the public than of themselves.

"Thus I am wholly convinced that unless private property is entirely done away with, there can be no fair or just distribution of goods, nor can the business of mortals be happily conducted. As long as private property remains, by far the largest and the best part of the human race will be oppressed by a heavy and inescapable burden of cares and anxieties. This load, I admit, may be lightened to some extent, but I maintain it cannot be entirely removed. Laws might be made that no one should own more than a certain amount of land or receive more than a certain income. Or laws might be passed to prevent the prince from becoming too powerful and the populace too unruly. It might be made unlawful for public offices to be solicited, or put up for sale, or made burdensome for the officeholder by great expense. Otherwise, officials are tempted to get their money back by fraud or extortion, and only rich men can afford to accept positions which ought to be held by the wise. Laws of this sort, I agree, may have as much effect as poultices continually applied to sick bodies that are past cure. The social evils I mentioned may be alleviated and their effects mitigated for a while, but so long as private property remains, there is no hope at all of effecting a cure and restoring society to good health. While you try to cure one part, you aggravate the disease in other parts. Suppressing one symptom causes another to break out, since you cannot give something to one person without taking it away from someone else."<sup>4</sup>

"But I don't see it that way," I replied. "It seems to me that people cannot possibly live well where all things are in common. How can there be plenty of commodities where every man stops working? The hope of gain will not spur him on; he will rely on others, and become lazy. If men are driven by need, and yet cannot

legally protect what they have gained, what can follow but continual bloodshed and turmoil, especially when respect for magistrates and their authority has been lost? I for one cannot conceive of authority existing among men who are equal to one another in every respect.”<sup>5</sup>

“I’m not surprised,” said Raphael, “that you think of it this way, since you have no idea, or only a false idea, of such a commonwealth. But you should have been with me in Utopia, and seen with your own eyes their manners and customs as I did—for I lived there more than five years, and would never have left, if it had not been to make that new world known to others. If you had seen them, you would frankly confess that you had never seen a people well governed anywhere but there.”

“You will have a hard time persuading me,” said Peter Giles, “that people in that new land are better governed than in the world we know. Our minds are not inferior to theirs, and our governments, I believe, are older. Long experience has helped us develop many conveniences of life, and by good luck we have discovered many other things which human ingenuity could never have hit upon.”

“As for the relative ages of the governments,” Raphael replied, “you might judge more accurately if you had read their histories. If we believe these records, they had cities before there were even people here. What ingenuity has discovered or chance hit upon could have turned up just as well in one place as the other. For the rest, I believe that even if we surpass them in natural intelligence, they leave us far behind in their diligence and zeal to learn.

“According to their chronicles, they had heard nothing of ultra-equatorials (that’s their name for us) until we arrived, except that once, some twelve hundred years ago, a ship which a storm had blown toward Utopia was wrecked on their island. Some Romans and Egyptians were cast ashore, and never departed. Now note how the Utopians profited, through their diligence, from this one chance event. They learned every single useful art of the Roman empire either directly from their guests or indirectly from hints and surmises on which they based their own investigations. What benefits from

the mere fact that on a single occasion some Europeans landed there! If a similar accident has hitherto brought anyone here from their land, the incident has been completely forgotten, as it will perhaps be forgotten in time to come that I was ever in their country. From one such accident they made themselves masters of all our useful inventions, but I suspect it will be a long time before we accept any of their institutions which are better than ours. This willingness to learn is, I think, the really important reason for their being better governed and living more happily than we do, though we are not inferior to them in brains or resources."

"Then let me implore you, my dear Raphael," said I, "to describe that island to us. Do not try to be brief, but explain in order everything relating to their land, their rivers, towns, people, manners, institutions, laws—everything, in short, that you think we would like to know. And you can take it for granted that we want to know everything that we don't know yet."

"There's nothing I'd rather do," he replied, "for these things are fresh in my mind. But it will take quite some time."

"In that case," I said, "let's first go to lunch. Afterward, we shall have all the time we want."

"Agreed," he said. So we went in and had lunch. Then we came back to the same spot, and sat down on the bench. I ordered my servants to take care that no one should interrupt us. Peter Giles and I urged Raphael to keep his promise. When he saw that we were attentive and eager to hear him, he sat silent and thoughtful a moment, and then began as follows.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Later (1519), as Charles V, he became the Holy Roman Emperor. By 1515 he had already (at age fifteen) inherited the Low Countries, and he was soon to become king of Spain. The matters in dispute between him and Henry VIII concerned especially the trade in English wool.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: An admired scholar and influential cleric, Tunstall (1474–1559) was appointed ambassador to Brussels in May 1515 and a year later became master of the rolls (principal clerk of the Chancery Court).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Antwerp and Brussels are about equidistant (sixty miles) from Bruges.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Palinurus—Aeneas’s pilot, who dozed over his steering oar and fell overboard (*Aeneid* 5.833–71)—is an exemplar of the careless traveler; Ulysses, of the person who learns from traveling; and Plato (who made trips to Sicily and Egypt), of the person who travels to learn.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The great orator Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), though not a philosopher, in his writings rehearsed at length the views of the various philosophical schools. Seneca (ca. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) was the foremost Roman Stoic philosopher.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Florentine explorer was sponsored first by the king of Spain and later by the king of Portugal and was reputed to have made four trips to the New World, starting in 1497. Accounts of his voyages published in the opening years of the 16th century were widely circulated and made his exploits more famous than the more substantial explorations of Columbus and Cabot.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reputedly at Cape Frio, east of present-day Rio de Janeiro.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Both these dicta have classical sources: the epic poet Lucan (Seneca’s nephew), *Pharsalia* 7.819; and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.43.104.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thus becoming the first circumnavigator of the globe. (Magellan’s men completed the trip in 1522.) Calicut is a seaport on the west coast of India.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As a matter of fact, the indigenous peoples of South America, when they traveled by water, used canoes made from hollowed logs. In general, More’s depiction is fanciful.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scylla and the Lestrygonians were Homeric bogeys: the former, a six-headed sea monster (*Odyssey* 12.85–101); the

latter, giant cannibals (*Odyssey* 10.80–132). Celaeno, one of the Harpies (birds with women's faces), appears in the *Aeneid* (3.209–18). [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: As J. H. Hexter argues (*More's "Utopia": The Biography of an Idea* [1952], pp. 18–21), it is almost certain that at this point More opened a seam in the original version of *Utopia*—which evidently included only the account of the Utopian commonwealth (now Book II) and the opening pages of what is now Book I—to insert the additions that constitute the remainder of Book I. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Angered by the greedy taxation of Henry VII, an army of Cornishmen marched on London in 1497 but were defeated at the Battle of Blackheath. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Morton (1420–1500) was a distinguished prelate, statesman, and administrator. More's father, following a custom of the age, sent his son to serve as a page for two years (1490–92) in the cardinal's household; the seventy-year-old Morton is said to have been so impressed with the twelve-year-old More that he arranged for his education at Oxford. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Theft is "simple" when not accompanied by violence or intimidation. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Some of these were household servants; others were the last vestiges of the private armies by which, under feudalism, every lord was followed. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Charles VII of France (reigned 1422–61) had tried to establish a national army, but his successors reverted to mercenaries, mostly Swiss infantrymen. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Paraphrasing the *Catiline* (16.3) of the Roman historian Sallust (86–35 B.C.E.). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Romans and Carthaginians both had to fight wars against enslaved gladiators and mercenaries. The victimizers of the Syrians that Hythloday has in mind are probably the Mamelukes, a military caste of foreign extraction that ruled, from the 13th century to the early 16th, a state that included much of the Middle East. [Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Past English victories over the French included Crécy (1346), Poitiers (1356), and Henry V's triumph at Agincourt (1415).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This vivid image introduces Hythloday's treatment of the social dislocation brought about by "enclosure"—the gradual amalgamation and fencing, over a period extending from the 12th century to the 19th, of the open fields of the feudal system: one incentive to the practice was the increasing profitability of the wool trade.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Luxurious living was not, in fact, characteristic of the reign of the parsimonious Henry VII (when Hythloday is supposed to be addressing Cardinal Morton). More is projecting onto the earlier period, perhaps unconsciously, a kind of extravagant display that began in 1509 with the accession of Henry VIII.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Echoing the classical adage *summum ius, summa iniuria*, long cited in discussions of equity.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Proverbially strict, like those imposed by the Roman consul Titus Manlius in the 4th century B.C.E. Manlius executed his own son for disobeying one of them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This view was actually maintained by some of the ancient Stoic philosophers.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Mosaic law is that spelled out in the first verses of Exodus 22. It provides various penalties for theft, but nowhere death. This is contrasted with the "new law" of Christ, under which England is supposed to be operating.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From Greek: "the People of Much Nonsense."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:  
At this point in the text, the early editions have a marginal gloss—in translation, "Yet nowadays the servants of noblemen think such a haircut quite handsome." This is one of a series of some two hundred glosses, which were supplied by Peter Giles after Erasmus shared More's manuscript with him. The glosses range in length from a single word to a full sentence and provide a

valuable record of the response to *Utopia* (especially to Book II, where they are heavily concentrated) by a particularly well-positioned member of the humanist audience for it. The present edition includes a selection of the more pungent glosses, as footnotes.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: In earlier days almost any criminal could take sanctuary in any church and be safe from the law. By More's time the privilege had been considerably abridged.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Men who lived and worked in monasteries (mostly performing menial tasks) but who were not admitted to clerical orders.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Members of a mendicant (begging) order, as opposed to monks, who live, and labor, in a cloister.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Alluding to a phrase in Horace's *Satires* 1.7.32: *italo perfusus aceto*, "soaked in Italian vinegar."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John 17:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Luke 21:19.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Psalms 4:4. The Vulgate Bible translates as *Irascimini* (Be angry) the Hebrew word that is rendered as "Stand in awe" in the King James Version.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Psalms 69:9.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Some children mocked Elisha, son of Elijah the prophet, for his baldness; but he called two bears out of the woods, and they tore the bad children to pieces (2 Kings 23–24). The friar quotes a hymn that was based on this cautionary tale.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Proverbs 26:5. But compare the previous verse: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A formal papal document, named after the seal (Latin *bulia*) that authenticated it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Plato, *Republic* 5.473.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plato is reported to have made three visits to Syracuse (in Sicily), where his attempts to reform the tyrant Dionysius the



Elder, and later his son Dionysius the Younger, were notoriously unsuccessful.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: At the time of writing, Francis I; at the time of Hythloday's supposed visit to England, either Charles VIII (d. 1498) or Louis XII (d. 1515). All three were would-be imperialists with hereditary claims to Milan and Naples, and all three bogged down in the intricacies of Italian political intrigue.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
A marginal gloss at this point says, "Indirectly he discourages the French from seizing Italy." France gained Milan in 1499, lost it in 1512, and regained it at the Battle of Marignano in September 1515. Naples was won in 1495, lost in 1496, won again in 1501, and lost again in 1504. But, as Hythloday goes on to suggest, French territorial ambitions in the period extended almost limitlessly.  
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Among foot soldiers for hire, the Swiss ranked first, the Germans second.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Maximilian of Austria, Holy Roman Emperor, had grandiose schemes (he even dreamed of being pope) but little money. He was always accessible to a bribe.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A small independent enclave astride the Pyrenees, long disputed between Spain and France.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The future emperor Charles V was a great matrimonial and diplomatic catch. (Before he was twenty, he had been engaged ten times.) The question of a French marriage that would unite the two greatest Continental and Catholic powers was continually in the air.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Scots, as traditional enemies of England, were traditional allies of France.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The French had in fact supported various pretenders to the English throne—most recently, Richard de la Pole, the inheritor of the Yorkist claim.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The name arises from Greek *a* (without) and *chora* (place): “the People without a Country.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Francis I lost Milan in 1520 (that is, four years after More wrote this passage) and, in a catastrophic effort to regain it in 1525, was defeated and taken prisoner by Charles V.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Both Henry VII and (after *Utopia* was written) Henry VIII fiddled with the English currency in ways like those suggested here.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Something like this happened in 1492, when Henry VII not only pretended war with France on behalf of Brittany and levied taxes for the war (which was hardly fought) but collected a bribe from Charles VIII for not fighting it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This had been common practice under Henry VII, whose ministers Empson and Dudley enforced many forgotten laws for strictly mercenary purposes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:  
Adapted from Cicero, *On Moral Obligation* 1.8.25. Crassus was a rich Roman who joined with Pompey and Caesar to form the First Triumvirate, which dominated Rome from 60 B.C.E. to Crassus’s death seven years later. Legend has it that he died when a Parthian general, after defeating and capturing Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae, disproved his maxim by pouring molten gold down his throat.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This metaphor is one of the great commonplaces. Ezekiel 34:2 reads: “Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Gaius Fabricius Luscinus, who took part in the wars against Pyrrhus, king of Epirus (280–275 B.C.E.). The saying attributed to him here was actually coined by his colleague Manius Curius Dentatus, but it is quite in his spirit.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: From Greek *makarios*, “blessed,” “happy.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Once again More glances at the previous English monarch, Henry VII, who died the richest prince in Christendom and probably the most hated. He combined unscrupulous greed with skinflint stinginess.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Most of the plays of the Roman comic dramatist Plautus (ca. 250–184 B.C.E.) involve low intrigue: needy young men, expensive prostitutes, senile moneybags, and clever slaves, in predictable combinations.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Latin tragedy *Octavia* involves Seneca as a character and was long thought to have been written by him. In the speech More refers to (lines 440–592), Seneca lectures Nero on the abuses of power. Interestingly, Seneca in fact committed suicide on the orders of Nero (whom he actually had tutored).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Matthew 10:27; Luke 12:3.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A flexible measuring rod of lead was particularly helpful in constructing the many curved moldings used in a kind of building associated, in antiquity, with the Greek isle of Lesbos. This “Lesbian rule” became proverbial as a metaphor for adaptable moral standards.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The allusion is to a comedy—*The Brothers* (lines 145–47)—by the Roman playwright Terence (ca. 190–159 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Republic* 6.496.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Diogenes Laertius (3rd century C.E.) reports that the Arcadians and Thebans united to build a great city and asked Plato to be its legislator. He made communism a condition of his going there, and when the inhabitants would not consent, he declined their offer (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 3.23).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Plato also employs the metaphor of societal disease, and of the statesman as physician (*Republic* 4.425E–426A; *Statesman* 297E–298E; Epistle 7, 330C–331A).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: These objections to communism derive from the critique of the *Republic* in Aristotle's *Politics* 2.1–5. [Return to reference 5](#)

## ***Book II***

### **[THE GEOGRAPHY OF UTOPIA]<sup>1</sup>**

The island of the Utopians is two hundred miles across in the middle part, where it is widest, and is nowhere much narrower than this except toward the two ends, where it gradually tapers. These ends, drawn toward one another as if in a five-hundred-mile circle, make the island crescent-shaped, like a new moon.<sup>2</sup> Between the horns of the crescent, which are about eleven miles apart, the sea enters and spreads into a broad bay. Being sheltered from the wind by the surrounding land, the bay is never rough, but quiet and smooth instead, like a big lake. Thus nearly the whole inner coast is one great harbor, across which ships pass in every direction, to the great advantage of the people. What with shallows on one side and rocks on the other, the entrance into the bay is perilous. Near the middle of the channel, there is one rock that rises above the water, and so presents no danger in itself; on top of it a tower has been built, and there a garrison is kept. Since the other rocks lie underwater, they are very dangerous to navigation. The channels are known only to the Utopians, so hardly any strangers enter the bay without one of their pilots; and even they themselves could not enter safely if they did not direct their course by some landmarks on the coast. If these landmarks were shifted about, the Utopians could easily lure to destruction an enemy fleet coming against them, however big it was.



**Woodcut map of Utopia**, by Ambrosius Holbein (brother of the more famous Hans Holbein the Younger). This map appeared in the two 1518 editions.

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On the outer side of the island there are likewise occasional harbors; but the coast is rugged by nature, and so well fortified that a few defenders could beat off the attack of a strong force. They say (and the appearance of the place confirms this) that their land was not always an island. But Utopus, who conquered the country and gave it his name (it had previously been called Abraxa),<sup>3</sup> and who brought its rude and uncouth inhabitants to such a high level of culture and humanity that they now excel in that regard almost every other people, also changed its geography. After winning the victory at his first landing, he cut a channel fifteen miles wide where their land joined the continent, and caused the sea to flow around the country. He put not only the natives to work at this task, but all his own soldiers too, so that the vanquished would not think the labor a disgrace. With the work divided among so many hands, the project was finished quickly, and the neighboring peoples, who at first had laughed at his folly, were struck with wonder and terror at his success.

There are fifty-four cities on the island, all spacious and magnificent, identical in language, customs, institutions, and laws. So far as the location permits, all of them are built on the same plan and have the same appearance. The nearest are twenty-four miles apart, and the farthest are not so remote that a person cannot go on foot from one to the other in a day.

Once a year each city sends three of its old and experienced citizens to Amaurot to consider affairs of common interest to the island. Amaurot lies at the navel of the land, so to speak, and is convenient to every other district, so it acts as a capital. Every city has enough ground assigned to it so that at least twelve miles of farm land are available in every direction, though where the cities are farther apart, they have much more land.<sup>4</sup> No city wants to enlarge its boundaries,<sup>5</sup> for the inhabitants consider themselves good



tenants rather than landlords. At proper intervals all over the countryside they have built houses and furnished them with farm equipment. These houses are inhabited by citizens who come to the country by turns. No rural household has fewer than forty men and women in it, besides two slaves bound to the land. A master and mistress, serious and mature persons, are in charge of each household. Over every thirty households is placed a single phylarch.<sup>6</sup> Each year twenty persons from each household move back to the city, after completing a two-year stint in the country. In their place, twenty others are sent out from town, to learn farm work from those who have already been in the country for a year and are therefore better skilled in farming. They, in turn, will teach those who come the following year. If all were equally unskilled in farm work, and new to it, they might harm the crops out of ignorance. This custom of alternating farm workers is the usual procedure, so that no one will have to do such hard work unwillingly for more than two years; but many of them, who take a natural pleasure in farm life, are allowed to stay longer.

The farm workers till the soil, feed the animals, hew wood, and take it to the city by land or by water, as is more convenient. They breed an enormous number of chickens by a marvelous method. The farmers, not hens, hatch the eggs, by keeping them in a warm place at an even temperature. As soon as they come out of the shell, the chicks recognize the humans, follow them around, and are devoted to them instead of to their mothers.

They raise very few horses, and those full of mettle, which they keep only to exercise the young people in the art of horsemanship.<sup>7</sup> For all the work of plowing and hauling they use oxen, which they agree are inferior to horses over the short haul, but which can hold out longer under heavy burdens, are less subject to disease (as they suppose), and can be kept with less cost and trouble. Moreover, when oxen are too old for work, they can be used for meat.

Grain they use only to make bread.<sup>8</sup> They drink wine, apple or pear cider, or simple water, which they sometimes boil with honey or licorice, of which they have an abundance. Although they know very



well, down to the last detail, how much food each city and its surrounding district will consume, they produce much more grain and cattle than they need for themselves, and share the surplus with their neighbors. Whatever goods the folk in the country need which cannot be produced there, they request of the town magistrates, and since there is nothing to be paid or exchanged, they get what they want without any trouble. They generally go to town once a month in any case, for the feast day. When harvest time approaches, the phylarchs in the country notify the town magistrates how many hands will be needed. Crews of harvesters come just when they're wanted, and in one day of good weather they can usually get in the whole crop.

### **THEIR CITIES, ESPECIALLY AMAUROT**

If you know one of their cities, you know them all, for they're exactly alike, except where geography itself makes a difference. So I'll describe one of them, and no matter which. But what one rather than Amaurot, the most worthy of all?—since its eminence is acknowledged by the other cities, which send representatives to the annual meeting there; besides which, I know it best, because I lived there for five full years.

Well, then, Amaurot lies up against a gently sloping hill; the town is almost square in shape. From a little below the crest of the hill, it runs down about two miles to the river Anyder, and then spreads out along the river bank for a somewhat greater distance. The Anyder rises from a small spring about eighty miles above Amaurot, but other streams flow into it, two of them being pretty big, so that, as it runs past Amaurot, the river has grown to a width of five hundred yards. It continues to grow even larger until at last, sixty miles farther along, it is lost in the ocean. In all this stretch between the sea and the city, and also for some miles above the city, the river is tidal, ebbing and flowing every six hours with a swift current.<sup>9</sup> When the tide comes in, it fills the whole Anyder with salt water for about thirty miles, driving the fresh water back. Even above that, for several miles farther, the water is brackish; but a little higher up, as it

runs past the city, the water is always fresh, and when the tide ebbs, the river runs clean and sweet all the way to the sea.

The two banks of the river at Amaurot are linked by a bridge, built not on wooden piles but on remarkable stone arches. It is placed at the upper end of the city, farthest removed from the sea, so that ships can sail along the entire length of the city quays without obstruction. There is also another stream, not particularly large, but very gentle and pleasant, which gushes from the hill on which the city is situated, flows down through the center of town, and into the Anyder. The inhabitants have walled around the source of this river, which takes its rise a little outside the town, and joined it to the town proper so that if they should be attacked, the enemy would not be able to cut off the stream or divert or poison it. Water from the stream is carried by tile piping into various sections of the lower town. Where the terrain makes this impractical, they collect rain water in cisterns, which serve just as well.

The town is surrounded by a thick, high wall, with many towers and bastions. On three sides it is also surrounded by a dry ditch, broad and deep and filled with thorn hedges; on its fourth side the river itself serves as a moat. The streets are conveniently laid out for use by vehicles and for protection from the wind. Their buildings are by no means shabby; unbroken rows of houses face each other across the streets along the whole block. The streets are twenty feet wide.<sup>1</sup> Behind each row of houses—at the center of every block and extending the full length of the street—there are large gardens.

Every house has a door to the street and another to the garden. The doors, which are made with two leaves, open easily and swing shut automatically, letting anyone enter who wants to—so there is nothing private anywhere. Every ten years, they change houses by lot. The Utopians are very fond of these gardens of theirs. They raise vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers, so well cared for and flourishing that I have never seen any gardens more productive or elegant than theirs. They keep interested in gardening, partly because they delight in it, and also because of the competition between different blocks, which challenge one another to produce the best gardens.

Certainly you will not easily find anything else in the whole city more useful or more pleasant to the citizens. And this gives reason to think that the founder of the city paid particular attention to the siting of these gardens.

They say that in the beginning the whole city was planned by Utopus himself, but that he left to posterity matters of adornment and improvement such as could not be perfected in one man's lifetime. Their records began 1,760 years ago with the conquest of the island, have been diligently compiled, and are carefully preserved. From these it appears that the first houses were low, like cabins or peasant huts, built out of any sort of timber, with mud-plastered walls and pointed roofs thatched with straw. But now their houses are all three stories high and handsomely constructed; the fronts are faced with fieldstone, quarried rock, or brick, over rubble construction. The roofs are flat, and are covered with a kind of plaster that is cheap but fireproof, and more weather-resistant even than lead.<sup>2</sup> Glass (which is plentiful there) is used in windows to keep out the weather;<sup>3</sup> and they also use thin linen cloth treated with oil or gum so that it lets in more light and keeps out more wind.

### **THEIR OFFICIALS**

Once a year, every group of thirty households elects an official, formerly called the syphogrant,<sup>4</sup> but now called the phylarch. Over every group of ten syphogrants with their households there is another official, once called the tranibor but now known as the head phylarch. All the syphogrants, two hundred in number, elect the governor. They take an oath to choose the man they think best qualified; and then by secret ballot they elect the governor from among four men nominated by the people of the four sections of the city. The governor holds office for life, unless he is suspected of aiming at a tyranny. Though the tranibors are elected annually, they are not changed for light or casual reasons. All their other officials hold office for a single year only.

The tranibors meet to consult with the governor every other day, and more often if necessary: they discuss affairs of state, and settle

any disputes between private parties (there are very few), acting as quickly as possible.<sup>5</sup> The tranibors always invite two syphogrants to the senate chamber, different ones every day. There is a rule that no decision can be made on a matter of public business unless it has been discussed in the senate on three separate days. It is a capital offense to make plans about public business outside of the senate or the popular assembly. The purpose of these rules, they say, is to prevent the governor and the tranibors from conspiring together to alter the government and enslave the people. Therefore all matters which are considered important are first laid before the assembly of the syphogrants. They talk the matter over with the households they represent, debate it with one another, then report their recommendation to the senate. Sometimes a question is brought before the general council of the whole island.

The senate also has a standing rule never to discuss a matter on the day when it is first introduced; all new business is deferred to the next meeting.<sup>6</sup> They do this so that a man will not blurt out the first thought that occurs to him, and then devote all his energies to defending those foolish impulses, instead of considering impartially the public good. They know that some men would rather jeopardize the general welfare than admit to having been heedless and shortsighted—so perverse and preposterous is their sense of pride. They should have had enough foresight at the beginning to speak with prudence rather than haste.

### **THEIR OCCUPATIONS**

Agriculture is the one occupation at which everyone works, men and women alike, with no exceptions. They are trained in it from childhood, partly in the schools, where they learn theory, and partly through field trips to nearby farms, which make something like a game of practical instruction. On these trips they not only watch the work being done, but frequently pitch in and get a workout by doing the jobs themselves.

Besides farm work (which, as I said, everybody performs), each person is taught a particular trade of his own, such as wool-working,

linen-making, masonry, metal-work, or carpentry. There is no other craft that is practiced by any considerable number of them.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the island people wear, and throughout their lives always wear, the same style of clothing, except for the distinction between the sexes, and between married and unmarried persons. Their clothing is attractive, does not hamper bodily movement, and serves for warm as well as cold weather; what is more, each household makes its own.

Every person (and this includes women as well as men) learns a second trade, besides agriculture. As the weaker sex, women practice the lighter crafts, such as working in wool or linen; the heavier jobs are assigned to the men. As a rule, the son is trained to his father's craft, for which most feel a natural inclination. But if anyone is attracted to another occupation, he is transferred by adoption into a family practicing the trade he prefers. Both his father and the authorities make sure that he is assigned to a grave and responsible householder. After someone has learned one trade, if he wants to learn another he gets the same permission. When he has learned both, he pursues whichever he likes better, unless the city needs one more than the other.

The chief and almost the only business of the syphogrants is to manage matters so that no one sits around in idleness, and assure that everyone works hard at his trade. But no one has to exhaust himself with endless toil from early morning to late at night, as if he were a beast of burden. Such wretchedness, really worse than slavery, is the common lot of workmen almost everywhere except Utopia.<sup>8</sup> Of the day's twenty-four hours, the Utopians devote only six to work. They work three hours before noon, when they go to lunch. After lunch they rest for a couple of hours, then go to work for another three hours. Then they have supper, and at eight o'clock (counting the first hour after noon as one) they go to bed, and sleep eight hours.

The other hours of the day, when they are not working, eating, or sleeping, are left to each person's individual discretion, provided that free time is not wasted in roistering or sloth but used properly in

some chosen occupation. Generally these periods are devoted to intellectual activity. For they have an established custom of giving daily public lectures before dawn;<sup>9</sup> attendance at these lectures is required only of those who have been specially chosen to devote themselves to learning, but a great many other people, both men and women, choose voluntarily to attend. Depending on their interests, some go to one lecture, some to another. But if anyone would rather devote his spare time to his trade, as many do who don't care for the intellectual life, this is not discouraged; in fact, such persons are commended as especially useful to the commonwealth.

After supper, they devote an hour to recreation, in their gardens in summer, or during winter in the common halls where they have their meals. There they either play music or amuse themselves with conversation. They know nothing about gambling with dice, or other such foolish and ruinous games.<sup>1</sup> They do play two games not unlike chess. One is a battle of numbers, in which one number captures another. The other is a game in which the vices fight a battle against the virtues. The game is ingeniously set up to show how the vices oppose one another, yet combine against the virtues; then, what vices oppose what virtues, how they try to assault them openly or undermine them insidiously; how the defenses of the virtues can break the strength of the vices or skillfully elude their plots; and finally, by what means one side or the other gains the victory.<sup>2</sup>

But in all this, you may get a wrong impression, if we don't go back and consider one point more carefully. Because they allot only six hours to work, you might think the necessities of life would be in scant supply. This is far from the case. Their working hours are ample to provide not only enough but more than enough of the necessities and even the conveniences of life. You will easily appreciate this if you consider how large a part of the population in other countries exists without doing any work at all. In the first place, hardly any of the women, who are a full half of the population, work;<sup>3</sup> or, if they do, then as a rule their husbands lie snoring in bed. Then there is a great lazy gang of priests and so-called religious.<sup>4</sup>

Add to them all the rich, especially the landlords, who are commonly called gentlemen and nobles. Include with them their retainers, that mob of swaggering bullies. Finally, reckon in with these the sturdy and lusty beggars who go about feigning some disease as an excuse for their idleness. You will certainly find that the things which satisfy our needs are produced by far fewer hands than you had supposed.

And now consider how few of those who do work are doing really essential things. For where money is the standard of everything, many vain, superfluous trades are bound to be carried on simply to satisfy luxury and licentiousness. Suppose the multitude of those who now work were limited to a few trades, and set to producing just those commodities that nature really requires. They would be bound to produce so much that prices would drop and the workmen would be unable to gain a living. But suppose again that all the workers in useless trades were put to useful ones, and that all the idlers (who now guzzle twice as much as the workingmen who make what they consume) were assigned to productive tasks—well, you can easily see how little time would be enough and more than enough to produce all the goods that human needs and conveniences require—yes, and human pleasure too, as long as it's true and natural pleasure.

The experience of Utopia makes this perfectly apparent. In each city and its surrounding countryside barely five hundred of those men and women whose age and strength make them fit for work are exempted from it.<sup>5</sup> Among these are the syphogrants, who by law are free not to work; yet they don't take advantage of the privilege, preferring to set a good example to their fellow citizens. Some others are permanently exempted from work so that they may devote themselves to study, but only on the recommendation of the priests<sup>6</sup> and through a secret vote of the syphogrants. If any of these scholars disappoints their hopes, he becomes a workman again. On the other hand, it happens from time to time that a craftsman devotes his leisure so earnestly to study, and makes such progress as a result, that he is relieved of manual labor and promoted to the class of learned men. From this class of scholars are chosen



ambassadors, priests, tranibors, and the governor himself, who used to be called Barzanes, but in their modern tongue is known as Ademus.<sup>7</sup> Since almost all the rest of the population is neither idle nor occupied in useless trades, it is easy to see why they produce so much in so short a working day.

Apart from all this, in several of the necessary crafts their way of life requires less total labor than does that of people elsewhere. In other countries, building and repairing houses requires the constant work of many men, because what a father has built, his thriftless heir lets fall into ruin; and then his successor has to repair, at great expense, what could easily have been maintained at a very small charge. Further, when a man has built a splendid house at vast cost, someone else may think he has finer taste, let the first house fall to ruin, and then build another one somewhere else for just as much money. But among the Utopians, where everything has been well ordered and the commonwealth properly established, building a brand-new home on a new site is a rare event. They are not only quick to repair damage, but foresighted in preventing it. The result is that their buildings last for a very long time with minimal repairs; and the carpenters and masons sometimes have so little to do that they are set to hewing timber and cutting stone in case some future need for it should arise.

Consider, too, how little labor their clothing requires. Their work clothes are unpretentious garments made of leather, which last seven years. When they go out in public, they cover these rough working-clothes with a cloak. Throughout the entire island, these cloaks are of the same color, which is that of natural wool.<sup>8</sup> As a result, they not only need less wool than people in other countries, but what they do need is less expensive. Even so, they use linen cloth most, because it requires least labor. They like linen cloth to be white and wool cloth to be clean; but they put no price on fineness of texture. Elsewhere a man may not be satisfied with four or five woollen cloaks of different colors and as many silk shirts; or if he's a clotheshorse, even ten are not enough. But there everyone is content with a single cloak, and generally wears it for two years.



There is no reason at all why he should want any others, for if he had them, he would not be better protected against the cold, nor would he appear in any way better dressed.

Since there is an abundance of everything, as a result of everyone working at useful trades and the trades requiring less work, they sometimes assemble great numbers of people to work on the roads, if any of them need repairing. And when there is no need even for this sort of work, then the officials very often proclaim a shorter workday, since they never force their citizens to perform useless labor. The chief aim of their constitution is that, whenever public needs permit, all citizens should be free to withdraw as much time as possible from the service of the body and devote themselves to the freedom and culture of the mind. For in that, they think, is the real happiness of life.

### **SOCIAL RELATIONS**

Now I must explain how the citizens behave toward one another, the nature of their social relations, and how they distribute their goods within the society.

Each city, then, consists of households, the households consisting generally of blood-relations. When the women grow up and are married, they move into their husbands' households. On the other hand, male children and after them grandchildren remain in the family, and are subject to the oldest member, unless his mind has started to fail, in which case the next oldest takes his place. To keep the cities from becoming too large or too small, they take care that there should be no more than six thousand households in each (exclusive of the surrounding countryside), each family containing between ten and sixteen adults.<sup>9</sup> They do not, of course, try to regulate the number of minor children in a family. The limit on adults is easily observed by transferring individuals from a household with too many into a household with not enough. Likewise if a city has too many people, the extra persons serve to make up a shortage of population in other cities. And if the population throughout the entire island exceeds the quota, they enroll citizens out of every city and

plant a colony under their own laws on the mainland near them, wherever the natives have plenty of unoccupied and uncultivated land. Those natives who want to live with the Utopian settlers are taken in. When such a merger occurs, the two peoples gradually and easily blend together, sharing the same way of life and customs, much to the advantage of both. For by their policies the Utopians make the land yield an abundance for all, though previously it had seemed too poor and barren even to support the natives. But if the natives will not join in living under their laws, the Utopians drive them out of the land they claim for themselves, and if they resist make war on them. They think it is perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste, yet forbid the use of it to others who, by the law of nature, ought to be supported from it.

If for any reason one of their cities shrinks so sharply in population that it cannot be made up from other cities without bringing them too under proper strength, the numbers are restored by bringing people back from the colonies. This has happened only twice, they say, in their whole history, both times as a result of a frightful plague. They would rather that their colonies disappeared than that any of the cities on their island should get too small.

But to return to their manner of living. The oldest of every household, as I said, is the ruler. Wives are subject to their husbands, children to their parents, and generally the younger to their elders.<sup>1</sup> Every city is divided into four equal districts, and in the middle of each district is a market for all kinds of commodities. Whatever each household produces is brought here and stored in warehouses, each kind of goods in its own place. Here the head of each household looks for what he or his family needs, and carries off what he wants without any sort of payment or compensation. Why should anything be refused him? There is plenty of everything, and no reason to fear that anyone will claim more than he needs. Why would anyone be suspected of asking for more than is needed, when everyone knows there will never be any shortage? Fear of want, no doubt, makes every living creature greedy and rapacious—and, in addition, man develops these qualities out of sheer pride, pride

which glories in getting ahead of others by a superfluous display of possessions. But this kind of vice has no place whatever in the Utopian way of life.

Next to the marketplace of which I just spoke are the food markets, where people bring all sorts of vegetables, fruit, and bread. Fish, meat, and poultry are also brought there from designated places outside the city, where running water can carry away all the blood and refuse. Bondsmen do the slaughtering and cleaning in these places: citizens are not allowed to do such work. The Utopians feel that slaughtering our fellow creatures gradually destroys the sense of compassion, which is the finest sentiment of which our human nature is capable. Besides, they don't allow anything dirty or filthy to be brought into the city, lest the air become tainted by putrefaction and thus infectious.

Each block has its own spacious halls, equally distant from one another, and each known by a special name. In these halls live the syphogrants. Thirty families are assigned to each hall, to take their meals in common<sup>2</sup>—fifteen live on one side of the hall, fifteen on the other. The stewards of all the halls meet at a fixed time in the market and get food according to the number of persons for whom each is responsible.

But first consideration goes to the sick, who are cared for in public hospitals. Every city has four of these, built at the city limits, slightly outside the walls, and spacious enough to appear like little towns. The hospitals are large for two reasons: so that the sick, however numerous they may be, will not be packed closely and uncomfortably together, and also so that those who have a contagious disease, such as might pass from one to the other, may be isolated. The hospitals are well ordered and supplied with everything needed to cure the patients, who are nursed with tender and watchful care. Highly skilled physicians are in constant attendance. Consequently, though nobody is sent there against his will, there is hardly anyone in the city who would not rather be treated for an illness at the hospital than at home.

When the hospital steward has received the food prescribed for the sick by their doctors, the best of the remainder is fairly divided among the halls according to the number in each, except that special regard is paid to the governor, the high priest, and the tranibors, as well as to ambassadors and foreigners, if there are any. In fact, foreigners are very few; but when they do come, they have certain furnished houses assigned to them.

At the hours of lunch and supper, a brazen trumpet summons the entire syphogranty to assemble in their hall, except for those who are bedridden in the hospitals or at home. After the halls have been served with their quotas of food, nothing prevents an individual from taking food home from the marketplace. They realize that no one would do this without good reason. For while it is not forbidden to eat at home, no one does it willingly, because it is not thought proper; and besides, it would be stupid to take the trouble of preparing a worse meal at home when there is an elegant and sumptuous one near at hand in the hall.

In this hall, slaves do all the particularly dirty and heavy work. But planning the meal, as well as preparing and cooking the food, is carried out by the women alone, with each family taking its turn. Depending on their number, they sit down at three or more tables. The men sit with their backs to the wall, the women on the outside, so that if a woman has a sudden qualm or pain, such as occasionally happens during pregnancy, she may get up without disturbing the others and go off to the nurses.

A separate dining room is assigned to the nurses and infants, with a plentiful supply of cradles, clean water, and a warm fire. Thus the nurses may lay the infants down, or remove their swaddling clothes and let them refresh themselves by playing freely before the fire. Each child is nursed by its own mother, unless death or illness prevents. When that happens, the wives of the syphogrants quickly find a nurse. The problem is not difficult. Any woman who can, gladly volunteers for the job, since everyone applauds her kindness and the child itself regards its nurse as its natural mother.

Children under the age of five sit together in the nursery. All other minors, both boys and girls up to the age of marriage, either wait on table or, if not old and strong enough for that, stand by in absolute silence. Both groups eat whatever is handed to them by those sitting at the table, and have no other set time for their meals.

The syphogrant with his wife sits at the middle of the first table, in the highest part of the dining hall. This is the place of greatest honor, and from this table, which is placed crosswise to the others, the whole gathering can be seen. Two of the eldest sit with them, for they always sit in groups of four; if there is a church in the district, the priest and his wife sit with the syphogrant, so as to preside.<sup>3</sup> On both sides of them sit younger people, next to them older people again, and so through the hall: those of about the same age sit together, yet are mingled with others of a different age. The reason for this, as they explain it, is that the dignity of the aged, and the respect due them, may restrain the younger people from improper freedom of words and gestures, since nothing said or done at table can pass unnoticed by the old, who are present on every side.

Dishes of food are not served down the tables in order from top to bottom, but all the old persons, who are seated in conspicuous places, are served with the best food; and then equal shares are given to the rest. The old people, as they feel inclined, give their neighbors a share of those delicacies which are not plentiful enough to be served to everyone. Thus due respect is paid to seniority, yet everyone enjoys some of the benefits.

They begin every lunch and supper with some reading on a moral topic,<sup>4</sup> but keep it brief lest it become a bore. Taking that as an occasion, the elders introduce proper topics of conversation, which they try not to make gloomy or dull. They never monopolize the conversation with long monologues, but are eager to hear what the young people say. In fact, they deliberately draw them out, in order to discover the natural temper and quality of each one's mind, as revealed in the freedom of mealtime talk.

Their lunches are light, their suppers rather more elaborate, because lunch is followed by work, supper by rest and a night's

sleep, which they think particularly helpful to good digestion. No evening meal passes without music, and the dessert course is never scanted; during the meal, they burn incense and scatter perfume, omitting nothing which will make the occasion festive. For they are somewhat inclined to think that no kind of pleasure is forbidden, provided harm does not come of it.

This is the pattern of life in the city; but in the country, where they are farther removed from neighbors, they all eat in their own homes. No family lacks for food, since, after all, whatever the city-dwellers eat comes originally from those in the country.

### **THE TRAVELS [AND TRADE] OF THE UTOPIANS**

Anyone who wants to visit friends in another city, or simply to see the place itself, can easily obtain permission from his syphogrant and tranibor, unless for some special reason he is needed at home. They travel together in groups, taking a letter from the governor granting leave to travel and fixing a day of return. They are given a wagon and a public slave to drive the oxen and look after them, but unless women are in the company they dispense with the wagon as an unnecessary bother. Wherever they go, though they take nothing with them, they never lack for anything, because they are at home everywhere. If they stay more than a day in one place, each one practices his trade there, and is kindly received by his fellow artisans.

Anyone who takes upon himself to leave his district without permission, and is caught without the governor's letter, is treated with contempt, brought back as a runaway, and severely punished. If he is bold enough to try it a second time, he is made a slave. Anyone who wants to stroll about and explore the extent of his own district is not prevented, provided he first obtains his father's permission and his wife's consent. But wherever he goes in the countryside, he gets no food until he has completed either a morning's or an afternoon's stint of work. On these terms, he may go where he pleases within his own district, yet be just as useful to the city as if he were at home.

So you see there is no chance to loaf or any pretext for evading work; there are no wine bars or alehouses or brothels, no chances for corruption, no hiding places, no spots for secret meetings. Because they live in the full view of all, they are bound to be either working at their usual trades or enjoying their leisure in a respectable way. Such customs must necessarily result in plenty of life's good things, and since they share everything equally, it follows that no one can ever be reduced to poverty or forced to beg.

In the senate at Amaurot (to which, as I said before, three representatives come every year from each city), they survey the island to find out where there are shortages and surpluses, and promptly satisfy one district's shortage with another's surplus. These are outright gifts; those who give receive nothing in return from those to whom they give. Though they give freely to one city, asking nothing in return, they get freely from another to which they gave nothing; and thus the whole island is like a single family.

After they have accumulated enough for themselves—and this they consider to be a full two-years' store, because next year's crop is always uncertain—then they export their surpluses to other countries: great quantities of grain, honey, wool, flax, timber, scarlet and purple dyestuffs, hides, wax, tallow, and leather, as well as livestock. One-seventh of their cargo they give freely to the poor of the importing country, and the rest they sell at moderate prices. In exchange they receive not only such goods as they lack at home (in fact, about the only important thing they lack is iron) but immense quantities of silver and gold. They have been carrying on trade for a long time now, and have accumulated a greater supply of the precious metals than you would believe possible. As a result, they now care very little whether they sell for cash or on credit, and most payments to them actually take the form of promissory notes. However, in all such transactions, they never trust individuals but insist that the foreign city become officially responsible. When the day of payment comes, the city collects the money due from private debtors, puts it into the treasury, and enjoys the use of it till the Utopians claim payment. Most of it, in fact, is never claimed. The Utopians think it hardly right to take what they don't need away from

people who do need it. But if they need to lend some part of the money to another nation, then they call it in—as they do also when they must wage war. This is the only reason that they keep such an immense treasure at home, as a protection against extreme peril or sudden emergency. They use it above all to hire, at extravagant rates of pay, foreign mercenaries, whom they would much rather risk in battle than their own citizens. They know very well that for large enough sums of money many of the enemy's soldiers can themselves be bought off or set at odds with one another, either secretly or openly.<sup>5</sup>

### **[THEIR ATTITUDE TO GOLD AND SILVER]**

For this reason, therefore, they have accumulated a vast treasure; but they do not keep it like a treasure. I'm really quite ashamed to tell you how they do keep it, because you probably won't believe me. I would not have believed it myself if someone had just told me about it; but I was there, and saw it with my own eyes. It is a general rule that the more different anything is from what people are used to, the harder it is to accept. But, considering that all their other customs are so unlike ours, a sensible judge will perhaps not be surprised that they treat gold and silver quite differently from the way we do. After all, they never do use money among themselves, but keep it only for a contingency which may or may not actually arise. So in the meanwhile they take care that no one shall overvalue gold and silver, of which money is made, beyond what the metals themselves deserve. Anyone can see, for example, that iron is far superior to either; men could not live without iron, by heaven, any more than without fire or water. But Nature granted to gold and silver no function with which we cannot easily dispense. Human folly has made them precious because they are rare. In contrast, Nature, like a most indulgent mother, has placed the best things out in the open, like air, water, and the earth itself; but vain and unprofitable things she has hidden away in remote places.

If in Utopia gold and silver were kept locked up in some tower, foolish heads among the common people might concoct a story that



the governor and senate were out to cheat ordinary folk and get some advantage for themselves. They might indeed put the gold and silver into plate-ware and such handiwork, but then in case of necessity the people would not want to give up such articles, on which they had begun to fix their hearts, only to melt them down for soldiers' pay. To avoid all these inconveniences, they thought of a plan which conforms with their institutions as clearly as it contrasts with our own. Unless one has actually seen it working, their plan may seem incredible, because we prize gold so highly and are so careful about protecting it. While they eat from pottery dishes and drink from glass cups, well made but inexpensive, their chamber pots and all their humblest vessels, for use in the common halls and even in private homes, are made of gold and silver.<sup>6</sup> The chains and heavy fetters of slaves are also made of these metals. Finally, criminals who are to bear the mark of some disgraceful act are forced to wear golden rings in their ears and on their fingers, golden chains around their necks, and even golden headbands. Thus they hold gold and silver up to scorn in every conceivable way. As a result, if they had to part with their entire supply of these metals, which other nations give up with as much agony as if they were being disemboweled, the Utopians would feel it no more than the loss of a penny.

They pick up pearls by the seashore, and diamonds and garnets from certain cliffs, but never go out of set purpose to look for them. If they happen to find some, they polish them and give them to the children, who, when they are small, feel proud and pleased with such gaudy decorations. But after, when they grow a bit older, and notice that only babies like such toys, they lay them aside. Their parents don't have to say anything; the children simply put these trifles away out of shame, just as our children when they grow up put away their marbles, baubles, and dolls.

These customs so different from those of other people produce quite different attitudes: this never became clearer to me than it did in the case of the Anemolian<sup>7</sup> ambassadors, who came to Amaurot while I was there. Because they came to discuss important business, the national council had assembled ahead of time, three citizens

from each city. The ambassadors from nearby nations, who had visited Utopia before and knew something of their customs, understood that fine clothing was not respected in that land, silk was despised, and gold a badge of contempt; therefore they always came in the very plainest of their clothes. But the Anemolians, who lived farther off and had had fewer dealings with the Utopians, had heard only that they all dressed alike and very simply; so they took for granted that their hosts had nothing to wear that they didn't put on. Being themselves rather more proud than wise, they decided to dress as resplendently as the very gods, and dazzle the eyes of the poor Utopians by the glitter of their garb.

Consequently the three ambassadors made a grand entry with a suite of a hundred attendants, all in clothing of many colors, and most in silk. Being noblemen at home, the ambassadors were arrayed in cloth of gold, with heavy gold chains on their necks, gold earrings, gold rings on their fingers, and sparkling strings of pearls and gems on their caps. In fact, they were decked out in all the articles which in Utopia are used to punish slaves, shame wrongdoers, or entertain infants. It was a sight to see how they strutted when they compared their finery with the dress of the Utopians, who had poured out into the streets to see them pass. But it was just as funny to see how wide they fell of the mark, and how far they were from getting the consideration they wanted and expected. Except for a very few Utopians who for some special reason had visited foreign countries, all the onlookers considered this pomp and splendor a mark of disgrace. They therefore bowed to the humblest of the party as lords, and took the ambassadors, because of their golden chains, to be slaves, passing them by without any reverence at all. You might have seen children, who had themselves thrown away their pearls and gems, nudge their mothers when they saw the ambassadors' jeweled caps, and say:

"Look at that big lummo, mother, who's still wearing pearls and jewels as if he were a little boy!"

But the mother, in all seriousness, would answer:

"Hush, son, I think he is one of the ambassadors' fools."

Others found fault with the golden chains as useless, because they were so flimsy any slave could break them, and so loose that he could easily shake them off and run away whenever he wanted, footloose and fancy-free. But after the ambassadors had spent a couple of days among the Utopians, they saw the immense amounts of gold which were as thoroughly despised there as they were prized at home. They saw too that more gold and silver went into making the chains and fetters of a single runaway slave than into costuming all three of them. Somewhat ashamed and crestfallen, they put away all the finery in which they had strutted so arrogantly, especially after they had talked with the Utopians enough to learn their customs and opinions.

### **[THEIR PHILOSOPHY]**

The Utopians marvel that any mortal can take pleasure in the dubious sparkle of a little jewel or bright gemstone, when he has a star, or the sun itself, to look at. They are amazed at the foolishness of any man who considers himself a nobler fellow because he wears clothing of specially fine wool. No matter how delicate the thread, they say, a sheep wore it once, and still was nothing but a sheep.<sup>8</sup> They are surprised that gold, a useless commodity in itself, is everywhere valued so highly that man himself, who for his own purposes conferred this value on it, is considered far less valuable than the gold. They do not understand why a dunderhead with no more brains than a post, and who is as depraved as he is foolish, should command a great many wise and good men simply because he happens to have a great pile of gold. Yet if this master should lose his money to the lowest rascal in his household (as can happen by chance, or through some legal trick—for the law can produce reversals as violent as Fortune herself), he would promptly become the servant of his servant, as if he were personally attached to the coins, and a mere appendage to them.<sup>9</sup> Even more than this, the Utopians are appalled at those people who practically worship a rich man, though they neither owe him anything nor are obligated to him in any way. What impresses them is simply that the man is rich. Yet

all the while they know he is so mean and grasping that as long as he lives not a single penny out of that great mound of money will ever come their way.

These and the like attitudes the Utopians have picked up partly from their upbringing, since the institutions of their commonwealth are completely opposed to such folly, and partly from instruction and their reading of good books. For though not many people in each city are excused from labor and assigned to scholarship full-time (these are persons who from childhood have given evidence of excellent character, unusual intelligence, and devotion to learning), every child gets an introduction to good literature, and throughout their lives a large part of the people, men and women alike, spend their leisure time in reading.

They study all the branches of learning in their native tongue, which is not deficient in terminology or unpleasant in sound, and adapts itself as well as any to the expression of thought. Just about the same language is spoken throughout that entire area of the world, though elsewhere it is corrupted to various degrees.

Before we came there, the Utopians had never so much as heard about a single one of those philosophers<sup>1</sup> whose names are so celebrated in our part of the world. Yet in music, dialectic, arithmetic, and geometry they have found out just about the same things as our great men of the past. But while they equal the ancients in almost all subjects, they are far from matching the inventions of our modern logicians.<sup>2</sup> In fact they have not discovered even one of those elaborate rules about restrictions, amplifications, and suppositions which our own young men study in the *Little Logicbook*.<sup>3</sup> They are so far from being able to speculate on "second intentions" that not one of them was able to see "man-in-general,"<sup>4</sup> though I pointed straight at him with my finger, and he is, as you well know, bigger than any giant, maybe even a colossus. On the other hand, they have learned to plot expertly the courses of the stars and the movements of the heavenly bodies. They have devised a number of different instruments by which they compute with the greatest exactness the course and position of the sun, the moon, and the other stars that

are visible in their area of the sky. As for the conjunctions and oppositions of the planets, and that whole deceitful business of divination by the stars, they have never so much as dreamed of it.<sup>5</sup> From long experience in observation, they are able to forecast rains, winds, and other changes in the weather. But as to the causes of the weather, of the tides in the sea and its saltiness, and the origins and nature of the heavens and the earth, they have various opinions. They agree with our ancient philosophers on some matters, but on others, just as the ancients disagreed with one another, so the Utopians differ from all the ancients and yet reach no consensus among themselves.

In matters of moral philosophy, they carry on the same arguments as we do. They inquire into the nature of the good, distinguishing goods of the body from goods of the mind and external goods.<sup>6</sup> They ask whether the name of "good" may be applied to all three, or applies only to goods of the mind. They discuss virtue and pleasure, but their chief concern is what to think of human happiness, and whether it consists of one thing or of more. On this point, they seem overly inclined to the view of those who think that all or most human happiness consists of pleasure.<sup>7</sup> And what is more surprising, they seek support for this comfortable opinion from their religion, which is serious and strict, indeed almost stern and forbidding. For they never discuss happiness without joining to their philosophic rationalism certain principles drawn from religion. Without these religious principles, they think that reason by itself is weak and defective in its efforts to investigate true happiness.

Their religious principles are of this nature: that the soul of man is immortal, and by God's goodness born for happiness; that after this life, rewards are appointed for our virtues and good deeds, punishments for our sins. Though these are indeed religious beliefs, they think that reason leads us to believe and accept them. And they add unhesitatingly that if these beliefs were rejected, no one would be so stupid as not to feel that he should seek pleasure, regardless of right and wrong. His only care would be to keep a lesser pleasure

from standing in the way of a greater one, and to avoid pleasures that are inevitably followed by pain.<sup>8</sup> They think you would have to be actually crazy to pursue harsh and painful virtue, give up the pleasures of life, and suffer pain from which you can expect no advantage. For if there is no reward after death, you have no compensation for having passed your entire existence without pleasure, that is, miserably.

To be sure, they believe happiness is found, not in every kind of pleasure, but only in good and honest pleasure. Virtue itself, they say, draws our nature to this kind of pleasure, as to the supreme good. There is an opposed school which declares that virtue is itself happiness.<sup>9</sup>

They define virtue as living according to nature;<sup>1</sup> and God, they say, created us to that end. When an individual obeys the dictates of reason in choosing one thing and avoiding another, he is following nature. Now the first rule of reason is to love and venerate the Divine Majesty to whom we owe our existence and our capacity for happiness. The second rule of nature is to lead a life as free of anxiety and as full of joy as possible, and to help all one's fellow men toward that end. The most hard-faced eulogist of virtue and the grimmest enemy of pleasure, while they invite us to toil and sleepless nights and self-laceration, still admonish us to relieve the poverty and misfortune of others as best we can. It is especially praiseworthy, they tell us, when we provide for our fellow creatures' comfort and welfare. Nothing is more humane (and humanity is the virtue most proper to human beings) than to relieve the misery of others and, by removing all sadness from their lives, restore them to enjoyment, that is, pleasure. Well, if this is the case, why doesn't nature equally invite us to do the same thing for ourselves? Either a joyful life (that is, one of pleasure) is a good thing, or it isn't. If it isn't, then you should not help anyone to it—indeed, you ought to take it away from everyone you can, as being harmful and deadly to them. But if such a life is good, and if we are supposed, indeed obliged, to help others to it, why shouldn't we first of all seek it for ourselves, to whom we owe no less charity than to anyone else?

When nature prompts you to be kind to your neighbors, she does not mean that you should be cruel and merciless to yourself.<sup>2</sup> Thus they say that nature herself prescribes for us a joyous life, in other words, pleasure, as the goal of our actions; and living according to her prescriptions is to be defined as virtue. But as nature bids mortals to make one another's lives merrier, to the extent that they can, so she warns us constantly not to seek our own advantage in ways that cause misfortune to our fellows. And the reason for this is an excellent one; for no one is placed so far above the rest that he is nature's sole concern: she cherishes alike all those living beings to whom she has granted the same form.

Consequently, the Utopians maintain that one should not only abide by private agreements but also obey all those public laws which control the distribution of vital goods, such as are the very substance of pleasure. Any such laws, provided they have been properly promulgated by a good king, or ratified by a people free of force and fraud, should be observed; and as long as they are observed, to pursue your own interests is prudent; to pursue the public interest as well is pious; but to pursue your own pleasure by depriving others of theirs is unjust. On the other hand, deliberately to decrease one's own pleasure in order to augment that of others is a work of humanity and benevolence which never fails to reward the doer over and above his sacrifice. You may be repaid for your kindness; and in any case you are conscious of having done a good deed. Your mind draws more joy from recalling the affection and good will of those whom you have benefited than your body would have drawn pleasure from the things you gave up. Finally, they believe (as religion easily persuades a well-disposed mind to believe) that God will recompense us, for surrendering a brief and transitory pleasure here, with immense and neverending joy in heaven. And so they conclude, after carefully considering and weighing the matter, that all our actions and the virtues exercised within them look toward pleasure and happiness as their ultimate end.

By pleasure they understand every state or movement of body or mind in which we find delight in accordance with the behests of



nature. They are right in adding that the desire must accord with nature. By simply following our senses and right reason<sup>3</sup> we may discover what is pleasant by nature: it is a delight that does not injure others, that does not preclude a greater pleasure, and that is not followed by pain. But a pleasure which is against nature, and which men call "delightful" only by the emptiest of fictions (as if one could change the real nature of things just by changing their names), does not, they hold, really make for happiness; in fact, they say it often precludes happiness. And the reason is that men whose minds are filled with false ideas of pleasure have no room left for true and genuine delight. As a matter of fact, there are a great many things which have no genuine sweetness in them but are for the most part actually bitter, yet which, through the perverse enticements of evil desires, are considered very great pleasures, and even included among the supreme goals of life.

Among the devotees of this false pleasure, they include those whom I mentioned before, the people who think themselves finer fellows because they wear finer clothes. These people are twice mistaken: first in thinking their clothes better than anyone else's, and then in thinking themselves better because of their clothes. As far as a garment's usefulness goes, what does it matter if it was woven of fine thread or coarse? Yet they act as if they were set apart by Nature herself, rather than their own fantasies; they strut about, and put on airs. Because they have a fancy suit, they think themselves entitled to honors they would never have expected if they were dressed in homespun, and they grow indignant if someone passes them by without showing special respect.

It is the same kind of absurdity to be pleased by empty, ceremonial honors. What true and natural pleasure can you get from someone's bent knee or bared head? Will the creaks in your own knees be eased thereby, or the madness in your head? The phantom of false pleasure is illustrated by others who run mad with delight over their own blue blood, plume themselves on their nobility, and applaud themselves for all their rich ancestors (the only ancestors that count nowadays), and especially for all their ancient family



estates. Even if they don't have the shred of an estate themselves, or if they've squandered every penny of their inheritance, they don't consider themselves a bit less noble.

In the same class the Utopians put those people I described before who are mad for jewelry and gems, and think themselves divinely happy if they find a good specimen, especially of the sort that happens to be fashionable in their country at the time—for stones vary in value from one market to another. The collector will not make an offer for a stone till it's taken out of its gold setting, and even then he will not buy unless the dealer guarantees and gives security that it is a true and genuine stone. What he fears is that his eyes will be deceived by a counterfeit. But if you consider the matter, why should a counterfeit give any less pleasure, when your eyes cannot distinguish it from a real gem? Both should be of equal value to you—as they would be, in fact, to a blind man.<sup>4</sup>

What about those who pile up money not because they want to do anything with the heap, but so they can sit and look at it? Is that true pleasure they experience, or aren't they simply cheated by a show of pleasure? Or what of those with the opposite vice, who hide away gold they will never use and perhaps never even see again? In their anxiety to hold onto it, they actually lose it. For what else happens when you deprive yourself, and perhaps other people too, of a chance to use your gold, by burying it in the ground? And yet when you've hidden your treasure away, you exult over it as if your mind were now free to rejoice. Suppose someone stole it, and you died ten years later, knowing nothing of the theft. During all those ten years, what did it matter whether the money was stolen or not? In either case, it was equally useless to you.

To these false and foolish pleasures they add gambling, which they have heard about, though they've never tried it, as well as hunting and hawking. What pleasure can there be, they wonder, in throwing dice on a table? If there were any pleasure in the action, wouldn't doing it over and over again quickly make one tired of it? What pleasure can there be in listening to the barking and yelping of dogs—Isn't that rather a disgusting noise? Is there any more

pleasure felt when a dog chases a hare than when a dog chases a dog? If what you like is fast running, there's plenty of that in both cases; they're just about the same. But if what you really want is slaughter, if you want to see a living creature torn apart under your eyes—you ought to feel nothing but pity when you see the little hare fleeing from the hound, the weak creature tormented by the stronger, the fearful and timid beast brutalized by the savage one, the harmless hare killed by the cruel dog. The Utopians, who regard this whole activity of hunting as unworthy of free men, have assigned it accordingly, to their butchers, who, as I said before, are all slaves.<sup>5</sup> In their eyes, hunting is the lowest thing even butchers can do. In the slaughterhouse, their work is more useful and honest, since there they kill animals only from necessity; but the hunter seeks merely his own pleasure from the killing and mutilating of some poor little creature. Even in beasts, taking such relish in the sight of death reveals, in the Utopians' opinion, a cruel disposition, or else one that has become so through the constant practice of such brutal pleasures.

Common opinion considers these activities, and countless others like them, to be pleasures; but the Utopians say flatly they have nothing at all to do with real pleasure, since there's nothing naturally pleasant about them. They often please the senses, and in this they are like pleasure, but that does not alter their basic nature. The enjoyment doesn't arise from the experience itself, but only from the perverse habits of the mob, as a result of which they mistake the bitter for the sweet, just as pregnant women, whose taste has been turned awry, sometimes think pitch and tallow taste sweeter than honey. A person's taste may be similarly depraved by disease or by custom, but that does not change the nature of pleasure, or of anything else.

They distinguish several different classes of true pleasure, some being pleasures of the mind and others pleasures of the body. Those of the mind are knowledge and the delight which rises from contemplating the truth, also the gratification of looking back on a well-spent life and the unquestioning hope of happiness to come.

Pleasures of the body they also divide into two classes. The first is that which fills the senses with immediate delight. Sometimes this happens when bodily organs that have been weakened by natural heat are restored with food and drink; sometimes it happens when we eliminate some excess in the body, as when we move our bowels, generate children, or relieve an itch somewhere by rubbing or scratching it. Now and then pleasure arises, not from restoring a deficiency or discharging an excess, but from something that excites our senses with a hidden but unmistakable force, and attracts them to itself. Such is the power of music.

The second kind of bodily pleasure they describe as nothing but the calm and harmonious state of the body, its state of health when undisturbed by any disorder. Health itself, when not oppressed by pain, gives pleasure, without any external excitement at all. Even though it appeals less directly to the senses than the gross gratifications of eating and drinking, many consider this to be the greatest pleasure of all. Most of the Utopians regard it as the foundation and basis of all the pleasures, since by itself alone it can make life peaceful and desirable, whereas without it there is no possibility of any other pleasure. Mere absence of pain, without positive health, they regard as insensibility, not pleasure.

Some have maintained that a stable and tranquil state of health is not really a pleasure, on the grounds that the presence of health cannot be felt except through some external stimulus.<sup>6</sup> The Utopians (who have considered the matter thoroughly) long ago rejected this opinion. On the contrary, they nearly all agree that health is crucial to pleasure. Since pain is inherent in disease, they argue, and pain is the bitter enemy of pleasure, just as disease is the enemy of health, then pleasure must be inherent in quiet good health. You may say pain is not the disease itself, simply an accompanying effect; but they argue that that makes no difference, since the effect is the same either way. For whether health is itself a pleasure or is merely the cause of pleasure (as fire is the cause of heat), the fact remains that those who have stable health must also have pleasure.

When we eat, they say, what happens is that health, which was starting to fade, takes food as its ally in the fight against hunger. While our health gains strength, the simple process of returning vigor gives us pleasure and refreshment. If our health feels delight in the struggle, will it not rejoice when the victory has been won? When at last it is restored to its original strength, which was its aim all through the conflict, will it at once become insensible, and fail to recognize and embrace its own good? The idea that health cannot be felt they consider completely wrong. Every man who's awake, they say, feels that he's in good health—unless he isn't. Is anyone so torpid and dull that he won't admit health is delightfully agreeable to him? And what is delight except pleasure under another name?

Of all the different pleasures, they seek primarily those of the mind, and prize them most highly. The foremost mental pleasure, they believe, arises from the practice of the virtues and the consciousness of a good life. Among the pleasures of the body, they give the first place to health. As for eating and drinking and other delights of that sort, they consider them desirable, but only for the sake of health. They are not pleasant in themselves, but only as ways to withstand the insidious attacks of sickness. A wise man would rather escape sickness altogether than have a good cure for it; he would rather prevent pain than find a palliative for it. And so it would be better not to need this kind of pleasure at all than to be assuaged by it.

Anyone who thinks happiness consists of this sort of pleasure must confess that his ideal life would be one spent in an endless round of hunger, thirst, and itching, followed by eating, drinking, scratching, and rubbing. Who can fail to see that such an existence is not only disgusting but miserable? These pleasures are certainly the lowest of all, as they are the most adulterate—for they never occur except in connection with the pains that are their contraries. Hunger, for example, is linked to the pleasure of eating, and far from equally, since the pain is sharper and lasts longer; it precedes the pleasure, and ends only when the pleasure ends with it. So the Utopians think pleasures of this sort should not be much valued, except insofar as they are necessary to life. Yet they enjoy these pleasures too, and

acknowledge gratefully the kindness of Mother Nature, who coaxes her children with allurements and cajolery to do what in any case they must do from necessity. How wretched life would be if the daily diseases of hunger and thirst had to be overcome by bitter potions and drugs, like some other diseases that afflict us less often!

Beauty, strength, and agility, as special and pleasant gifts of nature, they joyfully accept. The pleasures of sound, sight, and smell they also pursue as the special seasonings of life, recognizing that nature intended these delights to be the particular province of man. No other kind of animal admires the shape and loveliness of the universe, or enjoys odors, except in the way of searching for food, or distinguishes harmonious from dissonant sounds. But in all their pleasures, the Utopians observe this rule, that the lesser pleasure must not interfere with the greater, and that no pleasure shall carry pain with it as a consequence. If a pleasure is dishonorable, they think it will inevitably lead to pain.

Moreover, they think it is crazy for a man to despise beauty of form, to impair his own strength, to grind his energy down to lethargy, to exhaust his body with fasts, to ruin his health, and to scorn all other natural delights, unless by so doing he can better serve the welfare of others or the public good. Then indeed he may expect a greater reward from God. But otherwise for a man to inflict pain on himself does no one any good. He gains, perhaps, the empty and shadowy reputation of virtue; and no doubt he hardens himself against fantastic adversities which may never occur. But such a person the Utopians consider absolutely crazy—cruel to himself, as well as most ungrateful to Nature—as if, to avoid being in her debt, he rejects all her gifts.

This is the way they think about virtue and pleasure. Human reason, they believe, can attain to no surer conclusions than these, unless a revelation from heaven should inspire men with holier notions. In all this, I have no time now to consider whether they are right or wrong, and don't feel obliged to do so. I have undertaken only to describe their principles, not to defend them. But of this I am sure, that whatever you think of their ideas, there is not a more

excellent people or a happier commonwealth anywhere in the whole world.

In body they are nimble and lively, and stronger than you would expect from their stature, though they're by no means tiny. Their soil is not very fertile, nor their climate of the best, but they protect themselves against the weather by temperate living, and improve their soil by industry, so that nowhere do grain and cattle flourish more plentifully, nowhere are people more vigorous, and liable to fewer diseases. There you can see not only that they do all the things farmers usually do to improve poor soil by hard work and technical knowledge, but you can see a forest which they uprooted with their own hands and moved to another site. They did this not so much for the sake of better growth but to make transport easier, by having wood closer to the sea, the rivers, or the cities themselves. For grain is easier than wood to carry by land over a long distance.

### **[THEIR DELIGHT IN LEARNING]**

The people in general are easygoing, cheerful, clever, and like their leisure. When they must, they can stand heavy labor, but otherwise they are not very fond of it. In intellectual pursuits, they are tireless. When they heard from us about the literature and learning of the Greeks (for we thought there was nothing in Latin, except the historians and poets, that they would value), it was wonderful to behold how eagerly they sought to be instructed in Greek. We therefore began to study a little of it with them, at first more to avoid seeming lazy than out of any expectation that they would profit by it. But after a short trial, their diligence convinced us that our efforts would not be wasted. They picked up the forms of the letters so easily, pronounced the language so aptly, memorized it so quickly, and began to recite so accurately that it seemed like a miracle. Most of our pupils were established scholars, of course, picked for their unusual ability and mature minds; and they studied with us, not just of their own free will, but at the command of the senate.<sup>7</sup> Thus in less than three years they had perfect control of the language and could read the best authors fluently, unless the text was corrupt. I

have a feeling they picked up Greek more easily because it was somewhat related to their own tongue. Though their language resembles Persian in most respects, I suspect their race descends from the Greeks, because their language retains some vestiges of Greek in the names of cities and in official titles.

Before leaving on the fourth voyage, I placed on board, instead of merchandise, a good-sized packet of books; for I had resolved not to return at all rather than come home soon. Thus they received from me most of Plato's works and more of Aristotle's, as well as Theophrastus's book *On Plants*, though the latter, I'm sorry to say, was somewhat mutilated.<sup>8</sup> During the voyage I carelessly left it lying around, a monkey got hold of it, and from sheer mischief ripped out a few pages here and there and tore them up. Of the grammarians they have only Lascaris, for I did not take Theodorus with me, nor any dictionary except that of Hesychius; and they have Dioscorides.<sup>9</sup> They are very fond of Plutarch's writings, and delighted with the witty persiflage of Lucian.<sup>1</sup> Among the poets they have Aristophanes, Homer, and Euripides, together with Sophocles in the small typeface of the Aldine edition.<sup>2</sup> Of the historians they possess Thucydides and Herodotus, as well as Herodian.<sup>3</sup>

As for medical books, a comrade of mine named Tricius Apinatus brought with him some small treatises by Hippocrates, and the *Microtechné* of Galen.<sup>4</sup> They were delighted to have these books. Even though there's hardly a country in the world that needs doctors less, medicine is nowhere held in greater honor: they consider it one of the finest and most useful parts of philosophy. They think that when, with the help of philosophy, they explore the secrets of nature they are gratifying not only themselves but the author and maker of nature. They suppose that, like other artists, he created this beautiful mechanism of the world to be admired—and by whom, if not by man, who is alone in being able to appreciate so great a thing? Therefore he is bound to prefer a careful observer and sensitive admirer of his work before one who, like a brute beast, looks on the grand spectacle with a stupid and blockish mind.

**UTOPIENSIVM ALPHABETVM. 13**

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**HORVM VERSVVM AD VERBVM HAEC  
 EST SENTENTIA.**

Vtopus me dux ex non insula fecit insulam.  
 Vna ego terrarum omnium absq; philosophia.  
 Ciuitatem philosophicam expressi mortalibus.  
 Libenter impartio mea, non grauatum accipio meliora.



This sample of the Utopian language, which first appeared in the earliest edition of More's book (1516), reveals affinities with Greek and Latin and has enough internal consistency to suggest that it was worked out with care (evidently by Peter Giles). The stilted Latin quatrain at the end, which purports to be a literal translation, can itself be translated as follows: "Me, once a peninsula, Utopus the king made an island. / Alone among all nations, and without complex abstractions, / I set before men's eyes the philosophical city. / What I give is free; what is better I am not slow to take from others."

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Once stimulated by learning, the minds of the Utopians are wonderfully quick to seek out those various arts which make life more agreeable. Two inventions, to be sure, they owe to us: the art of printing and the manufacture of paper. At least they owe these arts partly to us, though partly to their own ingenuity. While we were showing them the Aldine editions of various works, we talked about papermaking and how letters are printed, though without going into detail, for none of us had had any practical experience of either skill. But with great sharpness of mind they immediately grasped the basic principles. While previously they had written only on vellum, bark, and papyrus, they now undertook to make paper and to print with type. Their first attempts were not altogether successful, but with practice they soon mastered both arts. They became so proficient that, if they had texts of the Greek authors, they would soon have no lack of volumes; but as they have no more than those I mentioned, they have contented themselves with reprinting each in thousands of copies.

Any sightseer coming to their land who has some special intellectual gift, or who has traveled widely and seen many countries, is sure of a warm welcome, for they love to hear what is happening throughout the world. This is why we were received so kindly. Few merchants, however, go there to trade. What could they import except iron—or else gold and silver, which everyone would rather bring home than send abroad? As for the export trade, the Utopians

prefer to do their own transportation, rather than invite strangers to do it. By carrying their own cargos they are able to learn more about foreign countries on all sides, and keep up their skill in navigation.

## **SLAVES<sup>5</sup>**

The only prisoners of war the Utopians enslave are those captured in wars they fight themselves. The children of slaves are not automatically enslaved,<sup>6</sup> nor are slaves obtained from foreign countries. Their slaves are either their own citizens, enslaved for some heinous offense, or else foreigners who were condemned to death in their own land. Most are of the latter sort. Sometimes the Utopians buy them at a very modest rate, more often they ask for them, get them for nothing, and bring them home in considerable numbers. Both kinds of slaves are kept constantly at work, and are always fettered. But the Utopians deal with their own people more harshly than with the others, feeling that their crimes are worse and deserve stricter punishment because they had an excellent education and the best of moral training, yet still couldn't be restrained from wrongdoing. A third class of slaves consists of hardworking penniless drudges from other nations who voluntarily choose to become slaves in Utopia. Such people are treated well, almost as well as citizens, except that they are given a little extra work, on the score that they're used to it. If one of them wants to leave, which seldom happens, no obstacles are put in his way, nor is he sent off emptyhanded.

## **[SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA]**

As I said before, the sick are carefully tended, and nothing is neglected in the way of medicine or diet which might cure them. Everything possible is done to mitigate the pain of those who are suffering from incurable diseases; and visitors do their best to console them by sitting and talking with them. But if the disease is not only incurable but excruciatingly and constantly painful, then the priests and public officials come and urge the invalid not to endure

such agony any longer. They remind him that he is now unfit for any of life's duties, a burden to himself and to others; he has really outlived his own death. They tell him he should not let the disease prey on him any longer, but now that life is simply torture, he should not hesitate to die but should rely on hope for something better. Since life has become a mere prison cell, where he is bitterly tormented, he should free himself, or let others free him, from the rack of living. This would be a wise act, they say, since for him death would put an end not to pleasure but to agony. In addition, he would be obeying the advice of the priests, who are the interpreters of God's will; which ensures that it would be a holy and pious act.<sup>7</sup>

Those who have been persuaded by these arguments either starve themselves to death or, having been put to sleep, are freed from life without any sensation of dying. But they never force this step on a man against his will; nor, if he decides against it, do they lessen their care of him. Under these circumstances, when death is advised by the authorities, they consider self-destruction honorable. But the suicide, who takes his own life without the approval of priests and senate, they consider unworthy either of earth or fire, and throw his body, unburied and disgraced, into a bog.

### **[MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE]**

Women do not marry till they are eighteen, nor men till they are twenty-two. Premarital intercourse, if discovered and proved, brings severe punishment on both man and woman, and the guilty parties are forbidden to marry during their whole lives, unless the governor by his pardon remits the sentence. In addition both the father and mother of the household where the offense occurred suffer public disgrace for having been remiss in their duty. The reason they punish this offense so severely is that they suppose few people would join in married love—with confinement to a single partner, and all the petty annoyances that married life involves—unless they were strictly restrained from a life of promiscuity.

In choosing marriage partners, they solemnly and seriously follow a custom which seemed to us foolish and absurd in the extreme.

Whether she is a widow or a virgin, the woman is shown naked to the suitor by a responsible and respectable matron; and similarly, some respectable man presents the suitor naked to the woman.<sup>8</sup> We laughed at this custom and called it absurd; but they were just as amazed at the folly of all other peoples. When men go to buy a colt, where they are risking only a little money, they are so suspicious that, though the beast is almost bare, they won't close the deal until the saddle and blanket have been taken off, lest there be a hidden sore underneath. Yet in the choice of a mate, which may cause either delight or disgust for the rest of their lives, people are completely careless. They leave all the rest of her body covered up with clothes and estimate the attractiveness of a woman from a mere handsbreadth of her person, the face, which is all they can see. And so they marry, running great risk of bitter discord, if something in either's person should offend the other. Not all people are so wise as to concern themselves solely with character; and even the wise appreciate physical beauty, as a supplement to the virtues of the mind. There's no question but that deformity may lurk under clothing, serious enough to make a man hate his wife when it's too late to be separated from her. If some disfiguring accident occurs after marriage, each person must bear his own fate; but beforehand everyone should be legally protected from deception.

There is extra reason for them to be careful, because in that part of the world they are the only people who practice monogamy. Their marriages are seldom terminated except by death, though they do allow divorce for adultery or for intolerably offensive behavior. A husband or wife who is the aggrieved party in such a divorce is granted permission by the senate to remarry, but the guilty party is considered disreputable and is permanently forbidden to take another mate.<sup>9</sup> They absolutely forbid a husband to put away his wife against her will and without any fault on her part, just because of some bodily misfortune; they think it cruel that a person should be abandoned when most in need of comfort; and they add that old age, since it not only entails disease but is actually a disease itself, needs more than a precarious fidelity.

It happens occasionally that a married couple cannot get along, and have both found other persons with whom they hope to live more harmoniously. After getting the approval of the senate, they may then separate by mutual consent and contract new marriages. But such divorces are allowed only after the senators and their wives have carefully investigated the case. They allow divorce only very reluctantly, because they know that husbands and wives will find it hard to settle down together if each has in mind that a new marriage is easily available.

They punish adulterers with the strictest form of slavery. If both parties were married, they are both divorced, and the injured parties may marry one another, if they want, or someone else. But if one of the injured parties continues to love such an undeserving spouse, the marriage may go on, providing the innocent person chooses to share in the labor to which the slave is condemned. And sometimes it happens that the repentance of the guilty and the devotion of the innocent party move the governor to pity, so that he restores both to freedom. But a second conviction of adultery is punished by death.

### **[PUNISHMENTS AND REWARDS; CUSTOMS AND LAWS]**

No other crimes carry fixed penalties; the senate sets specific penalties for each particular misdeed, as it is considered atrocious or venial. Husbands chastise their wives, and parents their children, unless the offense is so serious that public punishment is called for. Generally, the gravest crimes are punished by slavery, for they think this deters offenders just as much as getting rid of them by immediate capital punishment, and is more beneficial to the commonwealth. In addition, slaves contribute more by their labor than by their death, and they are permanent and visible reminders that crime does not pay. If the slaves rebel against their condition, then, like savage beasts which neither bars nor chains can tame, they are finally put to death. But if they are patient, they are not left altogether without hope. When subdued by long hardships, if they show by their behavior that they regret the crime more than the

punishment, their slavery is lightened or remitted altogether, sometimes by the governor's pardon, sometimes by popular vote.

Attempted seduction is subject to the same penalty as seduction itself. They think that a crime clearly and deliberately attempted is as bad as one committed, and that failure should not confer advantages on a criminal who did all he could to succeed.

They are very fond of fools, and think it contemptible to insult them.<sup>1</sup> There is no prohibition against enjoying their foolishness, and they even regard this as beneficial to the fools. If anyone is so serious and solemn that the foolish behavior and comic patter of a clown do not amuse him, they don't entrust him with the care of such a person, for fear that a man who gets not only no use from a fool but not even any amusement—a fool's only gift—will not treat him kindly.

To mock a person for being deformed or crippled is considered ugly and disfiguring, not to the victim but to the mocker, who stupidly reproaches the cripple for something he cannot help.

They think it a sign of a weak and sluggish character to neglect one's natural beauty, but they consider cosmetics a detestable affectation. From experience they have learned that no physical beauty recommends a wife to her husband so effectually as goodness and respect. Though some men are captured by beauty alone, none are held except by virtue and compliance.

As they deter people from crime by penalties, so they incite them to virtue by public honors. They set up in the marketplace statues of distinguished men who have served their country well, thinking thereby to preserve the memory of their good deeds and to spur on the citizens to emulate the glory of their ancestors.

Any man who campaigns for a public office is disqualified for all of them. They live together harmoniously, and the public officials are never arrogant or unapproachable. Instead, they are called "fathers," and that is the way they behave. Because the officials never extort respect from the people against their will, the people respect them spontaneously, as they should. Not even the governor is distinguished from his fellow citizens by a robe or crown; he is

known only by a sheaf of grain he carries, just as the high priest is distinguished by a wax candle borne before him.<sup>2</sup>

They have very few laws, and their training is such that they need no more. The chief fault they find with other nations is that, even with infinite volumes of laws and interpretations, they cannot manage their affairs properly. They think it completely unjust to bind people by a set of laws that are too many to be read and too obscure for anyone to understand. As for lawyers, a class of men whose trade it is to manipulate cases and multiply quibbles, they exclude them entirely.<sup>3</sup> They think it is better for each man to plead his own case, and say the same thing to the judge that he would tell his lawyer. This makes for less ambiguity, and readier access to the truth. A man speaks his mind without tricky instructions from a lawyer, and the judge examines each point carefully, taking pains to protect simple folk against the false accusations of the crafty. It is hard to find this kind of plain dealing in other countries, where they have such a multitude of incomprehensibly intricate laws. But in Utopia everyone is a legal expert. For the laws are very few, as I said, and they consider the most obvious interpretation of any law to be the fairest. As they see things, all laws are promulgated for the single purpose of teaching every man his duty. Subtle interpretations teach very few, since hardly anybody is able to understand them, whereas the more simple and apparent sense of the law is open to everyone. If laws are not clear, they are useless; for simpleminded men (and most men are of this sort, and need to be told where their duty lies), there might as well be no laws at all as laws which can be interpreted only by devious minds after endless disputes. The dull common man cannot understand this legal chicanery, and couldn't even if he studied it his whole life, since he has to earn a living in the meantime.

### **[FOREIGN RELATIONS]**

Some of the Utopians' free and independent neighbors (many of whom were previously liberated by them from tyranny), having learned to admire Utopian virtues, have made a practice of asking

the Utopians to supply magistrates for them. Some of these magistrates serve one year, others five. When their service is over, they bring them home with honor and praise, and take back new ones to their country. These peoples seem to have settled on an excellent scheme to safeguard the commonwealth. Since the welfare or ruin of a commonwealth depends on the character of its officials, where could they make a more prudent choice than among Utopians, who cannot be tempted by money? For money is useless to them when they go home, as they soon must, and they can have no partisan or factional feelings, since they are strangers in the city over which they rule. Wherever they take root in men's minds, these two evils, greed and faction, are the destruction of all justice—and justice is the strongest bond of any society. The Utopians call these people who have borrowed magistrates from them their *allies*; others whom they have benefited they call simply *friends*.

While other nations are constantly making treaties, breaking them, and renewing them, the Utopians never make any treaties at all. If nature, they say, doesn't bind man adequately to his fellow man, will an alliance do so? If a man scorns nature herself, is there any reason to think he will care about mere words? They are confirmed in this view by the fact that in that part of the world, treaties and alliances between kings are not generally observed with much good faith.

In Europe, of course, the dignity of treaties is everywhere kept sacred and inviolable, especially in those regions where the Christian religion prevails. This is partly because the kings are all so just and virtuous, partly also because of the reverence and fear that everyone feels toward the popes.<sup>4</sup> Just as the popes themselves never promise anything which they do not most conscientiously perform, so they command all other princes to abide by their promises in every way. If someone declines to do so, they compel him to obey by means of pastoral censure and sharp reproof. The popes rightly declare that it would be particularly disgraceful if people who are specifically called "the faithful" acted in bad faith.



But in that new world, which is as distant from ours in customs and way of life as in the distance the equator puts between us, nobody trusts treaties. The greater the formalities, the more numerous and solemn the oaths, the sooner the treaty will be broken. The rulers will easily find some defect in the wording of it, which often enough they deliberately inserted themselves. No treaty can be made so strong and explicit that a government will not be able to worm out of it, breaking in the process both the treaty and its own word. If such craft, deceit, and fraud were practiced in private contracts, the politicians would raise a great outcry against both parties, calling them sacrilegious and worthy of the gallows. Yet the very same politicians think themselves clever fellows when they give this sort of advice to kings. As a consequence, people are apt to think that justice is a humble, plebeian virtue, far beneath the majesty of kings. Or else they conclude that there are two kinds of justice, one which is only for the common herd, a lowly justice that creeps along the ground, hedged in everywhere and encumbered with chains; and the other, which is the justice of princes, much more free and majestic, so that it can do anything it wants and nothing it doesn't want.

This royal practice of keeping treaties badly there is, I suppose, the reason the Utopians don't make any; doubtless if they lived here in Europe they would change their minds. However, they think it a bad idea to make treaties at all, even if they are faithfully observed. A treaty implies that people who are separated by some natural obstacle as slight as a hill or a brook are joined by no bond of nature; it assumes that they are born rivals and enemies, and are right in aiming to destroy one another except insofar as a treaty restrains them. Moreover, they see that treaties do not really promote friendship; for both parties still retain the right to prey upon one another to whatever extent incautious drafting has left the treaty without sufficient provisions against it. The Utopians think, on the other hand, that no one should be considered an enemy who has done you no harm, that the fellowship of nature is as good as a treaty, and that men are united more firmly by good will than by pacts, by their hearts than by their words.

## MILITARY PRACTICES

They despise war as an activity fit only for beasts, yet practiced more by man than by any other creature. Unlike almost every other people in the world, they think nothing so inglorious as the glory won in battle. Yet on certain fixed days, men and women alike carry on vigorous military training, so they will be fit to fight should the need arise. But they go to war only for good reasons: to protect their own land, to protect their friends from an invading army, or to liberate an oppressed people from tyranny and servitude. Out of human sympathy, they not only protect their friends from present danger but sometimes avenge previous injuries; they do this, however, only if they themselves have previously been consulted, have approved the cause, and have demanded restitution in vain. Then and only then they think themselves free to declare war. They take this final step not only when their friends have been plundered but also, and even more fiercely, when their friends' merchants have been subjected to extortion in another country, either on the pretext of laws unjust in themselves or through the perversion of good laws.

This and no other was the cause of the war which the Utopians waged a little before our time on behalf of the Nephelogetes against the Alaopolitans.<sup>5</sup> Under pretext of right, a wrong (as they saw it) had been inflicted on some Nephelogete traders residing among the Alaopolitans. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the quarrel, it developed into a fierce war, into which, apart from the hostile forces of the two parties themselves, the neighboring nations poured their efforts and resources. Some prosperous nations were ruined completely, others badly shaken. One trouble led to another, and in the end the Alaopolitans were crushed and reduced to slavery (since the Utopians weren't involved on their own account) by the Nephelogetes—a people who, before the war, had not been remotely comparable in power to their rivals.

So severely do the Utopians punish wrong done to their friends, even in matters of mere money; but they are not so strict in enforcing their own rights. When they are cheated out of their goods, so long as no bodily harm is done, their anger goes no

further than cutting off trade relations with that nation till restitution is made. The reason is not that they care more for their allies' citizens than for their own, but simply this: when the merchants of their friends are cheated, it is their own property that is lost, but when the Utopians lose something, it comes from the common stock, and is bound to be in plentiful supply at home; otherwise they wouldn't have been exporting it. Hence no one individual even notices the loss. So small an injury, which affects neither the life nor the livelihood of any of their own people, they consider it cruel to avenge by the deaths of many soldiers. On the other hand, if one of their own is maimed or killed anywhere, whether by a government or by a private citizen, they first send envoys to look into the circumstances; then they demand that the guilty persons be surrendered; and if that demand is refused, they are not to be put off, but at once declare war. If the guilty persons are surrendered, their punishment is death or slavery.

The Utopians are not only troubled but ashamed when their forces gain a bloody victory, thinking it folly to pay too high a price even for the best goods. But if they overcome the enemy by skill and cunning, they exult mightily, celebrate a public triumph, and raise a monument as for a hard-won victory. They think they have really acted with manly virtue when they have won a victory such as no animal except man could have won—a victory achieved by strength of understanding. Bears, lions, boars, wolves, dogs, and other wild beasts fight with their bodies, they say; and most of them are superior to us in strength and ferocity; but we outdo them all in shrewdness and rationality.

The only thing they aim at, in going to war, is to secure what would have prevented the declaration of war, if the enemy had conceded it beforehand. Or if they cannot get that, they try to take such bitter revenge on those who have provoked them that they will be afraid ever to do it again. These are their chief aims, which they try to achieve quickly, yet in such a way as to avoid danger rather than to win fame and glory.

As soon as war is declared, therefore, they have their secret agents simultaneously post many placards, each marked with their official seal, in the most conspicuous places throughout the enemy territory. In these proclamations they promise immense rewards to anyone who will kill the enemy's king. They offer smaller but still very substantial sums for killing any of a list of other individuals whom they name. These are the persons whom they regard as most responsible, after the king, for plotting aggression against them. The reward for an assassin is doubled for anyone who succeeds in bringing in one of the proscribed men alive. The same reward, plus a guarantee of personal safety, is offered to any one of the proscribed men who turns against his comrades. As a result, the enemies of the Utopians quickly come to suspect everyone, particularly one another; and the many perils of their situation lead to panic. They know perfectly well that many of them, including their princes, have been betrayed by those in whom they placed complete trust—so effective are bribes as an incitement to crime. Knowing this, the Utopians are lavish in their promises of bounty. Being well aware of the risks their agents must run, they make sure that the payments are in proportion to the peril; thus they not only offer, but actually deliver, enormous sums of gold, as well as large landed estates in very secure locations on the territory of their friends.

Everywhere else in the world, this process of bidding for and buying the life of an enemy is condemned as the cruel villainy of a degenerate mind; but the Utopians consider it good policy, both wise and merciful. In the first place, it enables them to win tremendous wars without fighting any actual battles; and in the second place it enables them, by the sacrifice of a few guilty men, to spare the lives of many innocent persons who would have died in battle, some on their side, some on the enemy's. They pity the mass of the enemy's soldiers almost as much as their own citizens, for they know common people do not go to war of their own accord, but are driven to it by the madness of princes.

If assassination does not work, they sow the seeds of dissension in enemy ranks by inciting the prince's brother or some other member of the nobility to scheme for the crown. If internal discord

dies down, they try to rouse up neighboring peoples against the enemy by reviving forgotten claims to dominion, of which kings always have an ample supply.

When they promise their resources to help in a war, they send money very freely, but commit their own citizens only sparingly. They hold their own people dear, and value them so highly that they would not willingly exchange one of their citizens for an enemy's prince. Since they keep their gold and silver for the purpose of war alone, they spend it without hesitation; after all, they will continue to live just as well even if they expend the whole sum. Besides the wealth they have at home, they have a vast treasure abroad, since, as I said before, many nations owe them money. So they hire mercenary soldiers from all sides, especially the Zapoletes.<sup>6</sup>

These people live five hundred miles to the east of Utopia, and are rude, rough, and fierce. The forests and mountains where they are bred are the kind of country they like: tough and rugged. They are a hard race, capable of standing heat, cold, and drudgery, unacquainted with any luxuries, careless of what houses they live in or what they wear; they don't till the fields but raise cattle instead. Most of them survive by hunting and stealing. These people are born for battle and are always eager for a fight; they seek one out at every opportunity. Leaving their own country in great numbers, they offer themselves for cheap hire to anyone in need of warriors. The only art they know for earning a living is the art of taking life.

They fight with great courage and incorruptible loyalty for the people who pay them, but they will not bind themselves to serve for any fixed period of time. If someone, even the enemy, offers them more money tomorrow, they will take his side; and day after tomorrow, if a trifle more is offered to bring them back, they'll return to their first employers. Hardly a war is fought in which a good number of them are not engaged on both sides. It happens every day that men who are united by ties of blood and have served together in friendship, but who are now separated into opposing armies, meet in battle. Forgetful of kinship and comradeship alike, they furiously run one another through, driven to mutual destruction

for no other reason than that they were hired for paltry pay by opposing princes. They care so much about money that they can easily be induced to change sides for an increase of only a penny a day. They have picked up the habit of avarice, but none of the profit; for what they earn by shedding blood, they quickly squander on debauchery of the most squalid sort.

Because the Utopians give higher pay than anyone else, these people are ready to serve them against any enemy whatever. And the Utopians, who seek out the best possible men for proper uses, hire these, the worst possible men, for improper uses. When the situation requires, they thrust the Zapoletes into the positions of greatest danger by offering them immense rewards. Most of them never come back to collect their pay, but the Utopians faithfully pay off those who do survive, to encourage them to try it again. As for how many Zapoletes get killed, the Utopians never worry about that, for they think they would deserve very well of all mankind if they could exterminate from the face of the earth that entire disgusting and vicious race.

Besides the Zapoletes, they employ as auxiliaries the soldiers of the people for whom they have taken up arms, and then squadrons of their other friends. Last, they add their own citizens, including some man of known bravery to command the entire army. In addition, they appoint two substitutes for him, who hold no rank as long as he is safe. But if the commander is captured or killed, the first of these two substitutes becomes his successor, and in case of a mishap to him, the other. Thus, though the accidents of war cannot be foreseen, they make sure that the whole army will not be disorganized through the loss of their leader.

In each city, soldiers are chosen from those who have volunteered. No one is forced to fight abroad against his will, because they think a man who is naturally fearful will act weakly at best, and may even spread panic among his comrades. But if their own country is invaded, they call everyone to arms, posting the fearful (as long as they are physically fit) on shipboard among braver men, or here and there along fortifications, where there is no place

to run away. Thus shame at failing their countrymen, desperation at the immediate presence of the enemy, and the impossibility of flight often combine to overcome their fear, and they make a virtue out of sheer necessity.

Just as no man is forced into a foreign war against his will, so women are allowed to accompany their men on military service if they want to—not only not forbidden, but encouraged and praised for doing so. Each goes with her husband to the front, and stands shoulder to shoulder with him in the line of battle; in addition, they place around a man his children and blood- or marriage-relations, so that those who by nature have most reason to help one another may be closest at hand for mutual aid. It is a matter of great reproach for either partner to come home without the other, or for a son to return after losing a parent. The result is that if the enemy stands his ground, the hand-to-hand fighting is apt to be long and bitter, ending only when everyone is dead.

As I observed, they take every precaution to avoid having to fight in person, so long as they can bring the war to an end with mercenaries. But when they are forced to take part in battle, they are as bold in the struggle as they were prudent in avoiding it while they could. In the first charge they are not fierce, but gradually as the fighting goes on they grow more determined, putting up a steady, stubborn resistance. Their spirit is so strong that they will die rather than yield ground. They are certain that everyone at home will be provided for, and they have no worries about the future of their families (and that sort of worry often daunts the boldest courage); so their spirit is exalted and unconquerable. Their skill in the arts of war gives them extra confidence; also from childhood they have been trained in sound principles of conduct (which their education and the good institutions of their commonwealth reinforce); and that too adds to their courage. They don't hold life so cheap that they throw it away recklessly, nor so dear as to grasp it avidly at the price of shame, when duty bids them give it up.

At the height of the battle, a band of the bravest young men, who have taken a special oath, devote themselves to seeking out the

opposing general. They attack him directly, they lay secret traps for him, they hit at him from near and far. A long and continuous supply of fresh men keep up the assault as the exhausted drop out. In the end, they rarely fail to kill or capture him, unless he takes to flight.

When they win a battle, it never ends in a massacre, for they would much rather take prisoners than cut throats. They never pursue fugitives without keeping one line of their army drawn up under the colors. They are so careful of this that if they win the victory, with this last reserve force (supposing the rest of their army has been beaten), they would rather let the enemy army escape than pursue fugitives with their own ranks in disorder. They remember what has happened more than once to themselves: that when the enemy seemed to have the best of the day, had routed the main Utopian force and, exulting in their victory, had scattered to pursue the fugitives, a few Utopians held in reserve and watching their opportunity have suddenly attacked the dispersed and scattered enemy at the very moment when he felt safe and had lowered his guard. Thereby they changed the fortune of the day, snatched certain victory out of the enemy's hands, and, though conquered themselves, conquered their conquerors.

It is not easy to say whether they are more crafty in laying ambushes or more cautious in avoiding those laid for them. Sometimes they seem to be on the point of breaking and running when that is the last thing they have in mind; but when they really are ready to retreat, you would never guess it. If they are outnumbered, or if the terrain is unsuitable, they shift their ground silently by night or slip away from the enemy by some stratagem. Or if they have to withdraw by day, they do so gradually, and in such good order that they are as dangerous to attack then as if they were advancing. They fortify their camps very carefully with a deep, broad ditch all around them, the earth being thrown inward to make a wall; the work is done not by workmen but by the soldiers themselves with their own hands. The whole army pitches in, except for an armed guard posted around the rampart to prevent a surprise attack. With so many hands at work, they complete great fortifications, enclosing wide areas with unbelievable speed.



The armor they wear is strong enough to protect them from blows, but does not prevent easy movement of the body; in fact, it doesn't interfere even with their swimming, and part of their military training consists of swimming in armor. For long-range fighting they use arrows, which they fire with great force and accuracy, and from horseback as well as on foot. At close quarters they use not swords but battle-axes, which because of their sharp edge and great weight are lethal weapons, whether used in slashing or thrusting. They are very skillful in inventing machines of war, but conceal them with the greatest care, since if they were made known before they were needed, they might be more ridiculous than useful. Their first consideration in designing them is to make them easy to move and aim.<sup>7</sup>

When the Utopians make a truce with the enemy, they observe it religiously, and will not break it even if provoked. They do not ravage the enemy's territory or burn his crops; indeed, so far as possible, they avoid any trampling of the fields by men or horses, thinking they may need the grain themselves later on. Unless he is a spy, they injure no unarmed man. When cities are surrendered to them, they keep them intact; even when they have stormed a place, they do not plunder it, but put to death the men who prevented surrender, enslave the other defenders, and do no harm to the civilians. If they find any inhabitants who recommended surrender, they give them a share in the property of the condemned, and present their auxiliaries with the rest; for the Utopians themselves never take any booty.

After a war is ended, they collect the cost of it, not from the allies for whose sake they undertook it, but from the conquered. They take as indemnity not only money, which they set aside to finance future wars, but also landed estates, from which they may enjoy forever a substantial annual income. They now have revenues of this sort in many different countries, acquired little by little in various ways, till it now amounts to over seven hundred thousand ducats a year.<sup>8</sup> As managers of these estates, they send abroad some of their own citizens to serve as collectors of revenue. Though they live on the

properties in grand style and conduct themselves like great lords, plenty of income is still left over to be put in the public treasury, unless they choose to give the conquered nation credit. They often do the latter, until they happen to need the money, and even then it's rare for them to call in the entire debt. Some of the estates are given, as I've already described, to those who have risked great dangers on their behalf.

If any prince takes up arms and prepares to invade their land, they immediately attack him in full force outside their own borders. They are most reluctant to wage war on their own soil, and no necessity could ever compel them to admit foreign auxiliaries onto their island.

### **THE RELIGIONS OF THE UTOPIANS**

There are different forms of religion throughout the island, and even in individual cities. Some worship as a god the sun, others the moon, and still others one of the planets. There are some who worship a man of past ages who was conspicuous either for virtue or glory; they consider him not only a god but the supreme god. The vast majority, however, and these by far the wisest, believe nothing of the sort: they believe in a single power, unknown, eternal, infinite, inexplicable, beyond the grasp of the human mind, and diffused throughout the universe, not physically, but in influence. Him they call their parent, and to him alone they attribute the origin, increase, progress, changes, and ends of all things; they do not offer divine honors to any other.

Though the other sects of the Utopians differ from this main group in various particular doctrines, they agree with them in this single head, that there is one supreme power, the maker and ruler of the universe, whom they all call in their native language Mithra.<sup>9</sup> Different people define him differently, and each supposes the object of his worship is that one and only nature to whose divine majesty, by the consensus of all nations, the creation of all things is attributed. But gradually they are coming to forsake this mixture of superstitions, and to unite in that one religion which seems more

reasonable than any of the others. And there is no doubt that the other religions would have disappeared long ago, had not various unlucky accidents that befell certain Utopians who were thinking about changing their religion been interpreted, out of fear, as signs of divine anger, not chance, as if the deity who was being abandoned were avenging an insult against himself.

But after they had heard from us the name of Christ, and learned of his teachings, his life, his miracles, and the no less marvelous constancy of the many martyrs whose blood, freely shed, has drawn many nations far and near into the Christian fellowship, you would not believe how eagerly they assented to it, either through the mysterious inspiration of God, or because Christianity seemed very like the religion already prevailing among them. But I think they were also much influenced by the fact that Christ approved a communal way of life for his disciples, and that among the truest communities of Christians the practice still prevails.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the reason, no small number of them chose to join our communion, and received the holy water of baptism. By that time, two of our group had died, and among us four survivors there was, I am sorry to say, no priest; so, though they received the other sacraments, they still lack those which in our religion can be administered only by priests.<sup>2</sup> They do, however, understand what these are, and earnestly desire them. In fact, they dispute vigorously whether a man chosen from among themselves could legitimately assume the functions of a priest without the dispatch of a Christian bishop. Though they seemed on the point of selecting such a person, they had not yet done so when I left.

Those who have not accepted Christianity make no effort to restrain others from it, nor do they criticize new converts to it. While I was there, only one of the Christians was interfered with. As soon as he was baptized, he took upon himself to preach the Christian religion publicly, with more zeal than discretion. We warned him not to do so, but he soon worked himself up to a pitch where he not only set our religion above the rest but condemned all others as profane in themselves, leading their impious and sacrilegious followers to the

hell-flames they richly deserved. After he had been going on in this style for a long time, they arrested him. He was tried on a charge, not of despising their religion, but of creating a public disorder, convicted, and sentenced to exile. For it is one of their oldest rules that no man's religion, as such, shall be held against him.

Utopus had heard that before his arrival the inhabitants were continually quarreling over religious matters. In fact, he found it was easy to conquer the country because the different sects were too busy fighting one another to oppose him. As soon as he had gained the victory, therefore, he decreed that everyone could cultivate the religion of his choice, and strenuously proselytize for it too, provided he did so quietly, modestly, rationally, and without bitterness toward others. If persuasion failed, no one was allowed to resort to abuse or violence. Anyone who fights wantonly about religion is punished by exile or enslavement.

Utopus laid down these rules not simply for the sake of peace, which he saw was in danger of being destroyed by constant quarrels and implacable hatreds, but also for the sake of religion itself. In matters of religion, he was not at all quick to dogmatize, because he suspected that God perhaps likes diverse and manifold forms of worship and has therefore deliberately inspired different people with different views. On the other hand, he was quite sure that it was arrogant folly for anyone to enforce conformity with his own beliefs on everyone else by means of threats or violence.<sup>3</sup> He supposed that if one religion is really true and the rest false, the true one will sooner or later emerge and prevail by its own natural strength, provided only that men consider the matter reasonably and moderately. But if they try to decide these matters by fighting and rioting, since the worst men are always the most headstrong, the best and holiest religion in the world will be crowded out by blind superstitions, like grain choked out of a field by thorns and briars. So he left the whole matter open, allowing each individual to choose what he would believe. The only exception he made was a solemn and strict law against any person who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the

body, or that the universe is ruled by mere chance rather than divine providence.

Thus the Utopians all believe that after this life vices are to be punished and virtue rewarded; and they consider that anyone who denies this proposition is not even one of the human race, since he has degraded the sublimity of his own soul to the base level of a beast's wretched body. Still less will they count him as one of their citizens, since he would openly despise all the laws and customs of society, if not prevented by fear. Who can doubt that a man who has nothing to fear but the law, and no hope of life beyond the grave, will do anything he can to evade his country's laws by craft or break them by violence, in order to gratify his own private greed?

Therefore a person who holds such views is offered no honors, entrusted with no offices, and given no public responsibility; he is universally regarded as low and torpid. Yet they do not afflict him with punishments, because they are persuaded that no one can choose to believe by a mere act of the will. They do not compel him by threats to dissemble his views, nor do they tolerate in the matter any deceit or lying, which they detest as next door to deliberate malice. The man may not argue with the common people in behalf of his opinion; but in the presence of the priests and other important persons, in private, they not only permit but encourage it. For they are confident that in the end his madness will yield to reason.

There are some others, in fact no small number of them, who err in the opposite direction, in supposing that animals too have immortal souls,<sup>4</sup> though not comparable to ours in excellence, nor destined to equal felicity. These people are not thought to be evil, their opinion is not thought to be wholly unreasonable, and so they are not interfered with.

Almost all the Utopians are absolutely convinced that human bliss after death will be enormous; thus they lament every individual's sickness, but mourn over a death only if the person was torn from life anxiously and unwillingly. Such behavior they take to be a very bad sign, as if the soul, despairing and conscious of guilt, dreaded death through a secret premonition of punishments to come.

Besides, they suppose God can hardly be well pleased with the coming of one who, when he is summoned, does not come gladly but is dragged off reluctantly and against his will. Such a death fills the onlookers with horror, and they carry the corpse out to burial in melancholy silence. There, after begging God to have mercy on his spirit and to pardon his infirmities, they commit his body to the earth. But when someone dies blithely and full of good hope, they do not mourn for him but carry the body cheerfully away, singing and commending the dead man's soul to God. They cremate him in a spirit more of reverence than of grief, and erect a column on which the dead man's honors are inscribed. After they have returned home, they talk of his character and deeds, and no part of his life is mentioned more frequently or more gladly than his joyful death.

They think that recollecting the dead person's goodness helps the living to behave virtuously and is also the most acceptable form of honor to the dead. For they think that dead people are actually present among us, and hear what we say about them, though through the dullness of human sight they are invisible to our eyes. Given their state of bliss, the dead must be able to travel freely where they please, and it would be unkind of them to cast off every desire of revisiting their friends, to whom they had been bound by mutual affection and charity during their lives. Like all other good things, they think that after death charity is increased rather than decreased in good men; and thus they believe the dead come frequently among the living, to observe their words and actions. Hence they go about their business the more confidently because of their trust in such protectors; and the belief that their forefathers are physically present keeps them from any secret dishonorable deed.

Fortune-telling and other vain forms of superstitious divination, such as other peoples take very seriously, they have no part of and consider ridiculous. But they venerate miracles which occur without the help of nature, considering them direct and visible manifestations of the divine power. Indeed, they report that miracles have frequently occurred in their country. Sometimes in great and dangerous crises they pray publicly for a miracle, which they then anticipate with great confidence, and obtain.

They think that the contemplation of nature, and the sense of reverence arising from it, are acts of worship to God. There are some people, however, and not just a few of them, who from religious motives reject learning and pursue no studies; but none of them is the least bit idle. Constant dedication to the offices of charity, these people think, will increase their chances of happiness after death; and so they are always busy in the service of others. Some tend the sick; others repair roads, clean ditches, rebuild bridges, dig turf, sand, or stones; still others fell trees and cut them up, and transport wood, grain, or other commodities into the cities by wagon. They work for private citizens as well as for the public, and work even harder than slaves. They undertake with cheery good will any task that is so rough, hard, and dirty that most people refuse to tackle it because of the toil, boredom, and frustration involved. While constantly engaged in heavy labor themselves, they secure leisure for others, and yet they claim no credit for it. They do not criticize the way other people live, nor do they boast of their own doings. The more they put themselves in the position of slaves, the more highly they are honored by everyone.

These people are of two sects. The first are celibates who abstain not only from sex but also from eating meat, and some of them from any sort of animal food whatever. They reject all the pleasures of this life as harmful, and look forward only to the joys of the life to come, which they hope to deserve by hard labor and all-night vigils. As they hope to attain it soon, they are cheerful and active in the here and now. The other kind are just as fond of hard work, but prefer to marry. They don't despise the comforts of marriage, but think that, as their duty to nature requires work, so their duty to their country requires them to beget children. They avoid no pleasure unless it interferes with their labor, and gladly eat meat, precisely because they think it makes them stronger for any sort of heavy work. The Utopians regard the second sort as more sensible, but the first sort as holier. If they claimed to prefer celibacy to marriage, and a hard life to a comfortable one, on grounds of reason alone, the Utopians would think them absurd. But since these men claim to be motivated by religion, the Utopians respect and revere them. There is no

subject on which they are warier of jumping to conclusions than in this matter of religion. These then are the men whom in their own language they call Buthrescas, a term which may be translated as "the especially religious."

Their priests are of great holiness, and therefore very few. In each city, there are no more than thirteen, one for each church. In case of war, seven of them go out with the army, and seven substitutes are appointed to fill their places for the time being. When the regular priests come back, the substitutes return to their former posts—that is, they serve as assistants to the high priest, until one of the regular thirteen dies, and then one of them succeeds to his position. The high priest is, of course, in authority over all the others. Priests are elected, just like all other officials, by secret popular vote, in order to avoid partisan feeling. After election they are ordained by the college of priests.

They preside over divine worship, attend to religious matters, and act as censors of public morality. For a man to be summoned before them and scolded for not living an honorable life is considered a great disgrace. As the duty of the priests is simply to counsel and advise, so correcting and punishing offenders is the duty of the governor and the other officials, though the priests do exclude from divine service persons whom they find to be extraordinarily wicked. Hardly any punishment is more dreaded than this; the excommunicate incurs great disgrace, and is tortured by the fear of damnation. Not even his body is safe for long, for unless he quickly convinces the priests of his repentance he will be seized and punished by the senate for impiety.

The priests are entrusted with teaching the children and young people.<sup>5</sup> Instruction in morality and virtue is considered just as important as the accumulation of learning. From the very first they try to instill in the pupils' minds, while they are still young and tender, principles which will be useful to preserve the commonwealth. What is planted in the minds of children lives on in the minds of adults, and is of great value in strengthening the



commonwealth: the decline of society can always be traced to vices which arise from wrong attitudes.

Women are not debarred from the priesthood, but only a widow of advanced years is ever chosen, and it doesn't happen often. The wives of the male priests are the very finest women in the whole country.

No official in Utopia is more honored than the priest. Even if one of them commits a crime, he is not brought into a court of law, but left to God and his own conscience. They think it is wrong to lay human hands on a man, however guilty, who has been specially consecrated to God as a holy offering, so to speak. This custom is the easier for them to observe because their priests are very few and very carefully chosen. Besides, it rarely happens that a man selected for his goodness and raised to high dignities wholly because of his moral character will fall into corruption and vice. And even if such a thing should happen, human nature being as changeable as it is, no great harm is to be feared, because the priests are so few and have no power beyond that which derives from their good reputation. In fact, the reason for having so few priests is to prevent the order, which the Utopians now esteem so highly, from being cheapened by numbers.<sup>6</sup> Besides, they think it would be hard to find many men qualified for a dignity for which merely ordinary virtues are not sufficient.

Their priests are esteemed no less highly abroad than at home, which can be seen from the following fact: Whenever their armies join in battle, the Utopian priests are to be found, a little removed from the fray but not far, wearing their sacred vestments and down on their knees. With hands raised to heaven, they pray first of all for peace, and then for victory to their own side, but without much bloodshed on either hand.<sup>7</sup> Should their side be victorious, they rush among the combatants and restrain the rage of their own men against the enemy. If any of the enemy see these priests and call to them, it is enough to save their lives; to touch the flowing robes of a priest will save all their property from confiscation. This custom has brought them such veneration among all peoples, and given them

such genuine authority, that they have saved the Utopians from the rage of the enemy as often as they have protected the enemy from Utopians. Instances of this are well known. Sometimes when the Utopian line has buckled, when the field was lost, and the enemy was rushing in to kill and plunder, the priests have intervened to stop the carnage and separate the armies, and an equitable peace has been concluded. There was never anywhere a tribe so fierce, cruel, and barbarous as not to hold their persons sacrosanct and inviolable.

The Utopians celebrate the first and last days of every month, and likewise of each year, as feast days. They divide the year into months which they measure by the orbit of the moon, just as they measure the year itself by the course of the sun. In their language, the first days are known as the Cynemerns and the last days as the Trapemerns, which is to say "First-feasts" and "Last-feasts."<sup>8</sup> Their churches are beautifully constructed, finely adorned, and large enough to hold a great many people. This is a necessity, since churches are so few. Their interiors are all rather dark, not from architectural ignorance but from deliberate policy; for the priests think that in bright light the congregation's thoughts will go wandering, whereas a dim light tends to concentrate the mind and encourage devotion.

Though there are various religions in Utopia, all of them, even the most diverse, agree in the main point, which is worship of the divine nature; they are like travelers going to one destination by different roads. So nothing is seen or heard in the churches that does not square with all the creeds. If any sect has a special rite of its own, that is celebrated in a private house; the public service is ordered by a ritual which in no way derogates from any of the private services. Therefore in the churches no image of the gods is to be seen, so that each person may be free to form his own image of God according to his own religion, in any shape he pleases. They do not invoke God by any name except Mithra. Whatever the nature of the divine majesty may be, they all agree to refer to it by that single word, and their prayers are so phrased as to accommodate the beliefs of all the different sects.

On the evening of the “Last-feast” they meet in their churches, and while still fasting they thank God for their prosperity during that month or year which is just ending. Next day, which is “First-feast,” they all flock to the churches in the morning, to pray for prosperity and happiness in the month or year which is just beginning. On the day of “Last-feast,” in the home before they go to church, wives kneel before their husbands and children before their parents, to confess their various sins of commission or of negligence and beg forgiveness for their offenses. Thus if any cloud of anger or resentment has arisen in the family, it is dispersed, and they can attend divine services with clear and untroubled minds—for they consider it sacrilege to worship with a rankling conscience. If they are conscious of hatred or anger toward anyone, they do not take part in divine services till they have been reconciled and have cleansed their hearts, for fear of some swift and terrible punishment.

As they enter the church, they separate, men going to the right side and women to the left.<sup>9</sup> Then they take their seats so that the males of each household are placed in front of the head of that household, while the womenfolk are directly in front of the mother of the family. In this way they ensure that everyone’s behavior in public is supervised by the same person whose authority and discipline direct him at home. They take great care that the young are everywhere placed in the company of their elders. For if children were trusted to the care of other children, they might spend in childish foolery the time they should devote to developing a religious fear of the gods, which is the greatest and almost the only incitement to virtue.

They do not slaughter animals in their sacrifices, and do not think that a merciful God, who gave life to all creatures precisely so that they might live, will be gratified with the shedding of blood. They burn incense, scatter perfumes, and display a great number of candles—not that they think these practices profit the divine nature in any way, any more than human prayers do; but they like this harmless kind of worship. They feel that sweet smells, lights, and

other such rituals elevate the mind and lift it with a livelier devotion toward the adoration of God.

When they go to church, the people all wear white. The priest wears robes of various colors, wonderful for their workmanship and decoration, though not of materials as costly as one would suppose. The robes have no gold embroidery nor any precious stones, but are decorated with the feathers of different birds so skillfully woven together that the value of the handiwork far exceeds the cost of the most precious materials.<sup>1</sup> Also, certain symbolic mysteries are hidden in the patterning of the feathers on the robes, the meaning of which is carefully handed down among the priests. These messages serve to remind them of God's benefits toward them, and consequently of the devotion they owe to God, as well as of their duty to one another.

As the priest in his robes appears from the vestibule, the people all fall to the ground in reverence. The stillness is so complete that the scene strikes one with awe, as if a divinity were actually present. After remaining in this posture for some time, they rise at a signal from the priest. Then they sing hymns to the accompaniment of musical instruments, most of them quite different in shape from those in our part of the world. Many of them produce sweeter tones than ours, but others are not even comparable. In one respect, however, they are beyond doubt far ahead of us, because all their music, both vocal and instrumental, renders and expresses natural feelings and perfectly matches the sound to the subject. Whether the words of the hymn are supplicatory, cheerful, troubled, mournful, or angry, the music represents the meaning through the contour of the melody so admirably that it penetrates and inspires the minds of the ardent hearers. Finally, the priest and the people together recite certain fixed forms of prayer, so composed that what they all repeat in unison each individual can apply to himself.

In these prayers, the worshipers acknowledge God to be the creator and ruler of the universe and the author of all good things. They thank God for benefits received, and particularly for the divine favor which placed them in the happiest of commonwealths and

inspired them with religious ideas which they hope are the truest. If they are wrong in this, and if there is some sort of society or religion more acceptable to God, they pray that he will, in his goodness, reveal it to them, for they are ready to follow wherever he leads. But if their form of society is the best and their religion the truest, then they pray that God will keep them steadfast, and bring other mortals to the same way of life and the same religious faith—unless, indeed, there is something in this variety of religions which delights his inscrutable will.

Then they pray that after an easy death God will receive each of them to himself, how soon or how late it is not for them to say. But if God's divine majesty so please, they ask to be brought to him soon, even by the hardest possible death, rather than be kept away from him longer, even by the most fortunate of earthly lives. When this prayer has been said, they prostrate themselves on the ground again; then after a little while they rise and go to lunch. The rest of the day they pass in games and military training.

Now I have described to you as accurately as I could the structure of that commonwealth which I consider not only the best but indeed the only one that can rightfully claim that name. In other places men talk very liberally of the commonwealth, but what they mean is simply their own wealth; in Utopia, where there is no private business, everyone zealously pursues the public business. And in both places people are right to act as they do. For among us, even though the commonwealth may flourish, there are very few who do not know that unless they make separate provision for themselves, they may perfectly well die of hunger. Bitter necessity, then, forces them to think that they must look out for themselves rather than for others, that is, for the people. But in Utopia, where everything belongs to everybody, no one need fear that, so long as the public warehouses are filled, anyone will ever lack for anything he needs. For the distribution of goods is not niggardly; in Utopia no one is poor, there are no beggars, and though no one owns anything, everyone is rich.

For what can be greater riches than to live joyfully and peacefully, free from all anxieties, and without worries about making a living? No man is bothered by his wife's querulous entreaties about money, no man fears poverty for his son, or struggles to scrape up a dowry for his daughter. Everyone can feel secure of his own livelihood and happiness, and of his whole family's as well: wife, sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, great-great-grandsons, and that whole long line of descendants that gentlefolk are so fond of contemplating. Indeed, even those who once worked but can no longer do so are cared for just as well as those who are still working.

Now here I'd like to see anyone try to compare this equity of the Utopians with the so-called justice that prevails among other peoples—among whom let me perish if I can discover the slightest scrap of justice or fairness. What kind of justice is it when a nobleman or a goldsmith or a moneylender, or someone else who makes his living by doing either nothing at all or something completely useless to the commonwealth, gets to live a life of luxury and grandeur, while in the meantime a laborer, a carter, a carpenter, or a farmer works so hard and so constantly that even a beast of burden could scarcely endure it? Although this work of theirs is so necessary that no commonwealth could survive a year without it, they earn so meager a living and lead such miserable lives that beasts of burden would really seem to be better off. Beasts do not have to work every minute, and their food is not much worse; in fact they like it better. And besides, they do not have to worry about their future. But workingmen not only have to sweat and suffer without present reward, but agonize over the prospect of a penniless old age. Their daily wage is inadequate even for their present needs, so there is no possible chance of their saving toward the future.

Now isn't this an unjust and ungrateful commonwealth? It lavishes rich rewards on so-called gentry, goldsmiths, and the rest of that crew, who don't work at all or are mere parasites, purveyors of empty pleasures. And yet it makes no provision whatever for the welfare of farmers and colliers, laborers, carters, and carpenters, without whom the commonwealth would simply cease to exist. After society has taken the labor of their best years, when they are worn

out by age and sickness and utter destitution, then the thankless commonwealth, forgetting all their sleepless nights and great services, throws them out to die a miserable death. What is worse, the rich constantly try to grind out of the poor part of their meager wages, not only by private swindling but by public laws. Before, it appeared to be unjust that people who deserve most from the commonwealth should receive least; but now, by promulgating law, they have palmed injustice off as "legal." When I run over in my mind the various commonwealths flourishing today, so help me God, I can see in them nothing but a conspiracy of the rich, who are fattening up their own interests under the name and title of the commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> They invent ways and means to hang onto whatever they have acquired by sharp practice, and then they scheme to oppress the poor by buying up their toil and labor as cheaply as possible. These devices become law as soon as the rich, speaking for the commonwealth—which, of course, includes the poor as well—say they must be observed.

And yet, when these insatiably greedy and evil men have divided among themselves all the goods which would have sufficed for the entire people, how far they remain from the happiness of the Utopian republic, which has abolished not only money but with it greed! What a mass of trouble was cut away by that one step! What a multitude of crimes was pulled up by the roots! Everyone knows that if money were abolished, fraud, theft, robbery, quarrels, brawls, altercations, seditions, murders, treasons, poisonings, and a whole set of crimes which are avenged but not prevented by the hangman would at once die out. If money disappeared, so would fear, anxiety, worry, toil, and sleepless nights. Even poverty, the one condition which seems more than anything else to need money for its relief, would die away if money were entirely abolished.

Consider, if you will, this example. Take a barren year of failed harvests, when many thousands of people have been carried off by famine. If at the end of the scarcity the barns of the rich were searched, I dare say positively that enough grain would be found in them to have kept all those who died of starvation and disease from

even realizing that a shortage ever existed—if only it had been divided among them. So easily might people get the necessities of life if that cursed money, that marvelous invention which is supposed to provide access to them, were not in fact the only barrier to our getting what we need to live. Even the rich, I'm sure, understand this. They must know that it's better to have enough of what we really need than an abundance of superfluities, much better to escape from our many present troubles than to be burdened with great masses of wealth. And in fact I have no doubt that every man's perception of where his true interest lies, along with the authority of Christ our Savior (whose wisdom could not fail to recognize the best, and whose goodness would not fail to counsel it), would long ago have brought the whole world to adopt Utopian laws, if it were not for one single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others—I mean Pride.

Pride measures her advantages not by what she has but by what others lack. Pride would not condescend even to be made a goddess, if there were no wretches for her to sneer at and domineer over. Her good fortune is dazzling only by contrast with the miseries of others, her riches are valuable only as they torment and tantalize the poverty of others. Pride is a serpent from hell that twines itself around the hearts of men; and it acts like a suckfish<sup>3</sup> in holding them back from choosing a better way of life.

Pride is too deeply fixed in human nature to be easily plucked out. So I am glad that the Utopians at least have been lucky enough to achieve this commonwealth, which I wish all mankind would imitate. The institutions they have adopted have made their community most happy, and, as far as anyone can tell, capable of lasting forever. Now that they have rooted up the seeds of ambition and faction at home, along with most other vices, they are in no danger from internal strife, which alone has been the ruin of many cities that seemed secure. As long as they preserve harmony at home, and keep their institutions healthy, the Utopians can never be overcome or even shaken by all the envious princes of neighboring countries, who have often attempted their ruin, but always in vain.



When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that not a few of the customs and laws he had described as existing among the Utopians were quite absurd. These included their methods of waging war, their religious practices, as well as other customs of theirs, but my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy. This one thing alone takes away all the nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty which (in the popular view) are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth. But I saw Raphael was tired with talking, and I was not sure he could take contradiction in these matters, particularly when I remembered what he had said about certain people who were afraid they might not appear wise unless they found out something to criticize in the ideas of others. So with praise for the Utopian way of life and his account of it, I took him by the hand and led him in to supper. But first I said that we would find some other time for thinking of these matters more deeply, and for talking them over in more detail. And I still hope such an opportunity will present itself someday.

Meanwhile, though he is a man of unquestionable learning, and highly experienced in the ways of the world, I cannot agree with everything he said. Yet I freely confess there are very many things in the Utopian commonwealth that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see.

## 1515–16 **Endnotes**

1516

- Note 1:  
The early editions of *Utopia* include, in Book II, eight section headings. These help in locating the treatment of particular topics in Hythloday's rather sprawling discourse, but since in several instances the headings identify only the *initial* topic of a section, they can also be misleading. In the present edition, they are supplemented by additional headings, enclosed in brackets to identify them as editorial insertions.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The island is similar to England in size, though not at all in shape.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Greek Gnostic Basilides (2nd century C.E.) postulated 365 heavens and called the highest of them Abraxas. The Greek letters that constitute the word have numerical equivalents summing to 365, but what it actually *means* is unknown.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Each consisting of a central metropolis and the surrounding countryside, the Utopian cities recall the ancient Greek city-states.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Marginal gloss: "But today this is the curse of all countries." Although Utopia exists in the present, the glosses repeatedly refer to it as if it belonged to the distant past, like classical Greece and Rome.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From Greek *phylarchos*, "ruler of a tribe."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In fact, horses had long been extinct in the Western Hemisphere, before Europeans imported them.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, they don't, like the English, use it to make beer and ale.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Many of the details of Amaurot—its situation on a tidal river, its stone bridge (next paragraph), though not the location of that bridge—are reminiscent of London.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lavish, by 16th-century standards.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Used in More's time to roof important buildings.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: During More's day in England window glass was not common; oiled cloth and lattices of wicker or wood were more frequent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
The word appears to be constructed from Greek *sophos* (wise)—or perhaps *syphEOS* (of the sty)—plus *gerontes* (old men). The etymology for "tranibor" (below) seems to be *traneis* or *tranos* (clear, plain, distinct) plus *boros* (devouring, gluttonous). There

is no explanation of why Hythloday consistently uses the “older” form of the titles.

[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Marginal gloss: “A quick ending to disputes, which now are endlessly and deliberately prolonged.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Marginal gloss: “Would that the same rule prevailed in our modern councils.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Would not considerable numbers also be employed making such things as pottery, harnesses, bread, and books, as well as in mining and the merchant marine? Presumably all the professionals—doctors, for example—are drawn from the class of scholars.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: For example, in England a law of 1514–15 required workmen to be present at the workplace from daybreak to nightfall in fall and winter and from 5 A.M. to between 7 and 8 P.M. in spring and summer. (There were breaks for meals and, in summer, for a brief afternoon nap.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Renaissance universities got under way early: first lecture was between 5 and 7 A.M.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Marginal gloss: “But now dicing is the sport of princes.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Moral games of this general character were popular with Renaissance educators.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
A strange statement, since in More’s time most women selected, prepared, and cooked the family food; did the family laundry; performed a thousand other routine tasks of domestic drudgery; and were responsible for taking care of the children. In Utopia too they are responsible for at least some of these duties—cooking, child care—in addition to practicing a craft and taking their turn at farmwork.  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, members of the various religious orders.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, are exempted from manual labor. As Hythloday proceeds to explain, in each city those exempted include the 200

syphogrants and the class of scholars, from which is chosen the other exempted individuals: the twenty tranibors, the governor, ambassadors, and the thirteen priests.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Who are in charge of the education of children.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Marginal gloss: "Only the learned hold public office." "Ademus": from Greek for "Without People." "Barzanes": "Son of Zeus" (Hebrew—*bar*—plus Greek).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In a letter to Erasmus of ca. December 4, 1516, More identifies this garment as the habit of a Franciscan friar.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
If an average household includes thirteen adults, and there are 6,000 households per city (not counting those on the surrounding farms), then there are about 78,000 adults per city; allowing for children and slaves, the total population must be well in excess of 100,000, making every Utopian city larger than all but the greatest European cities of the time. Whether More actually made these calculations (or whether there is really much point in making them) is another matter.  
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:  
Utopian women enjoy considerably more equality with men than did their 16th-century European counterparts, but Utopian social relations as a whole exhibit the same patriarchal structure that had always been prevalent in Europe and was sanctioned in classical and biblical texts (for example, Aristotle, *Politics* 1.12.1–2; Ephesians 5:22–6:4) as well as in many later ones.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The institution of the common messes has precedents in ancient Sparta and in the designs for an ideal commonwealth by Plato (*Republic* 3.416E) and Aristotle (*Politics* 7.10.10). It has also been a feature of other communities with a utopian bent—for example, the Israeli kibbutzim.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Marginal gloss: "Priest before prince. But now even bishops act as servants to royalty."[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Humanists were fond of this social custom, the origins of which were part monastic, part classical.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Marginal gloss: "Better to avoid war by bribery or guile than to wage it with great loss of human blood."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Marginal gloss: "O magnificent scorn for gold!" Vespucci had reported Native Americans' indifference to gold and gems.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
From Greek *anemolios*, "windy." The story of the Anemolian ambassadors owes much to "Nigrinus," a dialogue by the Syrian satirist Lucian (2nd century C.E.) in which a rich Roman makes a fool of himself by strolling around Athens in a purple robe. More and Erasmus had published a volume of Latin translations of Lucian (who wrote in Greek) in 1506.  
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Echoing Lucian's "Demonax" (sec. 41).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Alongside this passage and obviously applying to several sentences in it, a marginal gloss proclaims, "How much wiser are the Utopians than the ruck of Christians!"[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As the next sentence indicates, the idea of "philosophy" here is the old, broad one that encompasses learning in general (the sense that survives in the title doctor of philosophy).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Scholastic philosophers, constantly deprecated by humanists.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Probably the *Parva logicalia*, a textbook of logic by Peter of Spain, later Pope John XXI (d. 1277).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Man conceived of as a "universal." "Second intentions": in Scholastic discourse, purely abstract conceptions, derived from "first intentions" (the direct apprehensions of things). The sentence is typical of the way humanists liked to ridicule, in the name of common sense, the Scholastics' abstractions.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Marginal gloss: "Yet these astrologers are revered by Christians to this day."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This threefold classification of goods is associated especially with Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8.2, *Politics* 7.1.3–4).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
That is, the Utopians' primary affinity in moral philosophy is with the hedonistic school founded by Epicurus (341–271 B.C.E.). Compare Vespucci on the Native Americans: "I deem their manner of life to be Epicurean." Contrary to popular opinion, however, Epicurus himself did not mean, by the pursuit of pleasure, mere indiscriminating sensual indulgence: like the Utopians, he placed primary emphasis on the pleasures of a virtuous, rational life.  
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: These rules for choosing among pleasures are attributed to Epicurus (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.129).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This is the position of the Stoics, who asserted that virtue constitutes happiness whether or not it leads to pleasure.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Another Stoic precept.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Marginal gloss: "But now some people cultivate pain as if it were the essence of religion, rather than incidental to performance of a pious duty or the result of natural necessity—and thus to be borne, not pursued."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The power, thought to have been implanted by God in all humankind, to apprehend truth and moral law; conscience.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In *The Praise of Folly*, Erasmus tells a story about More giving his young wife some false gems, which he passed off as being real and highly valuable.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Marginal gloss: "Yet today this is the chosen art of our court-divinities."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This is, especially, the position of Plato: for example, *Republic* 9.583C–585A.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Marginal gloss: "But now clods and blockheads are assigned to learning, while the best minds are corrupted by pleasures."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Theophrastus, Aristotle's pupil, was studied in the Renaissance not as a quaint curiosity but because his views were still current in botany.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Dioscorides (1st century C.E.) wrote a treatise on drugs and herbs that was printed in 1499. The Renaissance scholars Constantine Lascaris and Theodore of Gaza wrote grammars of Greek. The Greek dictionary of Hesychius of Alexandria (5th century C.E.) was published in 1514.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Syrian-born ironist who was admired, translated, and imitated by both More and Erasmus (see p. 86, n. 7). The writings of Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 120 C.E.) referred to presumably include his *Moral Essays* as well as his *Parallel Lives* of eminent Greeks and Romans.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The first printed edition of Sophocles was that of Aldus Manutius in 1502. The house of Aldus, established in Venice toward the end of the 15th century, not only was the first establishment to print Greek texts in Greek type but was responsible for some of the best-designed books in the history of the art.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Thucydides and Herodotus (both 5th century B.C.E.) are the preeminent Greek historians. Herodian (ca. 175–250 C.E.) wrote a history of the Roman emperors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Hippocrates (5th century B.C.E.) and Galen (2nd century C.E.) were the most influential Greek medical writers. The *Microtechne* is a medieval summary of Galen's ideas. The name Tricius Apinatus (like Hythloday) is a learned joke: in classical Italy, Trica and Apina were extinct towns whose names, taken together, were proverbial for trifling, worthless things.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
The institution of slavery—with prisoners of war (civilians as well as combatants) as a major source of the people to be enslaved



—was ubiquitous in the ancient world, including the Greek and Roman civilizations that Utopia resembles in various ways. In Europe, slavery declined in the Middle Ages, being replaced as a source of labor by feudal serfdom, in which individuals were bound to the land rather than to a particular owner. Chattel slavery, however, revived strongly in the European colonies in the New World: the enslavement of Native Americans began with the earliest settlements, in the 1490s, and enslaved people from Africa were imported from Spain to Hispaniola in the Caribbean in 1502.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: This fact sharply distinguishes Utopian slavery from both classical and early modern slavery and medieval serfdom.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In ancient Rome, suicide was regarded as an honorable way out of deep personal or political difficulties, but neither suicide nor euthanasia has ever been acceptable in Catholic Christianity. See Hythloday's earlier reference to God's prohibition of suicide.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Marginal gloss: "Not very modest, but not so imprudent, either."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In Europe, the Catholic Church allowed separation in cases of adultery but did not allow even the aggrieved party to remarry.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: More's household included a fool, Henry Patenson.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Grain and candle evidently symbolize the special function of each ruler: to ensure prosperity and to provide spiritual vision.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Marginal gloss: "The useless crowd of lawyers." More was, of course, one himself.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In fact the crowned heads of Europe and the popes alike were ruthless and casual violators of treaties.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "People Born from the Clouds" versus "Citizens of a Country without People."[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: “Busy sellers.” The Zapoletes resemble the Swiss, who produced the best and most feared mercenaries of Europe (a remnant still survives as the Swiss Guard in the Vatican).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
The military devices of the Utopians represent a patchwork of notions from the common knowledge of the day. Their camps are fortified like Roman ones. Their reliance on archery links them with the English, whose archers had played key roles in the famous victories over the French at Crécy and Agincourt—though the Utopians’ skill in shooting arrows from horseback recalls the ancient Parthians and Scythians. Their “machines” are presumably like Roman dart hurlers, battering rams, and stone throwers, but the emphasis on their portability probably reflects contemporary experience with cannon, which were extremely hard to drag over the muddy roads of the time.  
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Gold coins of this name were minted by several European states. Four ducats of Venice, Burgundy, or Hungary were roughly equivalent to an English pound, and the pound itself was worth several hundred times its value today. The point is that the Utopians’ annual income from the estates is huge.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In ancient Persian religion, Mithra (or Mithras) was the spirit of light.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The communist practice of the early Christians is described in Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–35. Many monastic and ascetic orders still made a practice of abolishing private property for their members.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Of the seven Catholic sacraments, only baptism and matrimony can be conferred by laymen. Priests are created by ordination by a bishop (the Utopian priests are elected; see below).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
This was not the attitude More took a decade after *Utopia*, when, the Reformation schism having begun, he was involved in

the prosecution of Protestant heretics, sometimes to the death. In the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), he wrote that "if it were now doubtful and ambiguous whether the church of Christ were in the right rule of doctrine or not, then were it very necessary to give them all good audience that could and would anything dispute on either party for it or against it, to the end that if we were now in a wrong way, we might leave it and walk in some better." Utopia was in this hypothetical situation; England, in More's view, was not.

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: These Utopians resemble the ancient Pythagoreans, who, as a facet of their doctrine of the transmigration of souls, conceded them to animals.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Presumably the priests only *supervise* the teaching: there are only thirteen of them per city, whereas each city is home to thousands of children.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Marginal gloss: "But what a crowd of them we have!"[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Marginal gloss: "O priests far holier than our own!"[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Greek coinage *Trapemerns* actually means "turning-days"; *Cynemerns* means "dog-days" (or perhaps "starting-days").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Separation of the sexes in church had been customary since the early Christian centuries.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Perhaps related to Vespucci's observation that the Native Americans' wealth "consists of feathers of many-hued birds . . . and of many other things to which we attach no value."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
Marginal gloss: "Reader, note well!" In the text at this point, More may be alluding to the judgment of Saint Augustine in *The City of God* 4.4: "Take away justice, and what are kingdoms but great robber bands?" As a young man, More had given a series of public lectures on Augustine's book.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: A fish (the remora) with a suction plate atop its head, by which it attaches itself to the underbelly of larger fishes or the hulls of ships. Impressed by the tenacity of its grip, the ancients fabled that it could stop ships in their courses. [Return to reference 3](#)

### ***Thomas More to His Friend Peter Giles, Warmest Greetings***<sup>1</sup>

My dear Peter, I was absolutely delighted with the judgment of that very sharp fellow you recall, who posed this dilemma about my *Utopia*: if the story is put forward as fact, he said, then I see a number of absurdities in it; but if it's fiction, then it seems to me that in various respects More's usual good judgment is at fault. I suspect this fellow of being learned, and I see that he's a friend; but whoever he is, I'm much obliged to him. By this frank opinion of his, he has pleased me more than anyone else since the book was published.

For in the first place, either out of fondness for me or for the work itself, he seems to have borne up under the burden of reading the book all the way through—and that not perfunctorily or hastily, the way priests read the divine office—those, at least, who read it at all.<sup>2</sup> No, he read slowly and attentively, noting all the particular points. Then, having singled out certain matters for criticism, and not very many, as a matter of fact, he gives careful and considered approval to the rest. And finally, in the very expressions he uses to criticize me, he implies higher praises than some of those who have put all their energies into compliment. It's easy to see what a high opinion he has of me, when he expresses disappointment over reading something imperfect or inexact—whereas I don't expect, in treating so many different matters, to be able to say more than a few things which aren't totally ridiculous.

Still, I'd like to be just as frank with him as he was with me; and, in fact, I don't see why he should think himself so acute (so "sharp-sighted," as the Greeks would say) just because he's discovered some absurdities in the institutions of Utopia, or caught me putting forth some half-baked ideas about the constitution of a republic. Aren't there any absurdities elsewhere in the world? And did any one of the philosophers who've offered a pattern of a society, a ruler, or even a private household set down everything so well that nothing ought to be changed? Actually, if it weren't for the great respect I retain for certain highly distinguished names, I could easily produce

from each of them a number of notions which I can hardly doubt would be universally condemned as absurd.

But when he wonders whether *Utopia* is fact or fiction, then I find *his* judgment, in turn, sorely at fault. I do not deny that if I'd decided to write about a commonwealth, and a tale of this sort had occurred to me, I might have spread a little fiction, like so much honey, over the truth, to make it more acceptable. But I would certainly have tempered the fiction a little, so that, while it deceived the common folk, I gave hints to the more learned which would enable them to see what I was about. So, if I'd done nothing but give special names to the governor, the river, the city, and the island, which hinted to the learned that the island was nowhere, the city a phantom, the river waterless, and that the governor had no people,<sup>3</sup> that would not have been hard to do, and would have been far more clever than what I actually did. Unless I had a historian's devotion to fact, I am not so stupid as to have used those barbarous and senseless names of Utopia, Anyder, Amaurot, and Ademus.

Still, my dear Giles, I see some people are so suspicious that what we simple-minded and credulous fellows have written down of Hythloday's account can hardly find any credence at all with these circumspect and sagacious persons. I'm afraid my personal reputation, as well as my authority as a historian, may be threatened by their skepticism; so it's a good thing that I can defend myself by saying, as Terence's Mysis says about Glycerium's boy, to confirm his legitimacy, "Praise be to God there were some free women present at his birth."<sup>4</sup> And so it was a good thing for me that Raphael told his story not just to you and me, but to a great many perfectly respectable and serious-minded men. Whether he told them more things, and more important things, I don't know; but I'm sure he told them no fewer and no less important things than he told us.

Well, if these doubters won't believe such witnesses, let them consult Hythloday himself, for he is still alive. I heard only recently from some travelers coming out of Portugal that on the first of last March he was as healthy and vigorous a man as he ever was. Let them get the truth from him—dig it out of him with questions, if they

want. I only want them to understand that I'm responsible for my own work, and my own work alone, not for anyone else's credibility.

Farewell, my dearest Peter, to you, your charming wife, and your clever little girl—to all, my wife sends her very best wishes.

1517

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
This second letter of More to Giles appeared only in the second edition of *Utopia* (Paris, 1517), where it immediately follows Book II. The letter praises a supposedly perspicacious critique of *Utopia* by a “very sharp fellow,” whose identity is unknown—if indeed More didn’t simply invent him.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Priests read the “divine office”—the daily round of prescribed prayers to be recited at set hours—with varying degrees of enthusiasm, according to More.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This is of course precisely what the names do mean.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *The Lady of Andros*, lines 770–71.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **SIR THOMAS WYATT THE ELDER 1503–1542**

Thomas Wyatt made his career in the shifting, dangerous currents of Renaissance courts, whose power struggles, sexual intrigues, and sophisticated tastes shaped his remarkable achievements as a poet. Educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, Wyatt entered the service of Henry VIII, becoming clerk of the king's jewels, a member of diplomatic missions to France and the Low Countries, and, in 1537–39, ambassador to Spain at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The years he spent abroad as a diplomat had a significant impact on his writing, imbuing it with the spirit of Continental Renaissance poetry. Diplomacy, with its veiled threats, rhetorical manipulation, and cynical role-playing, may have had a more indirect impact as well, reinforcing the lessons in self-presentation and self-concealment that Wyatt would have received at the English court.

Life in the orbit of the ruthless, unpredictable Henry VIII was competitive and risky. When, in the late 1530s, Wyatt wrote to his son of the "thousand dangers and hazards, enmities, hatreds, prisonments, despites [insults], and indignations" he had faced, he was not exaggerating. He probably came closest to the executioner's ax when in 1536 he was imprisoned in the Tower of London along with several others accused of having committed adultery with the queen, Anne Boleyn. As his poem "Who List His Wealth and Ease Retain" suggests, Wyatt may have watched from his cell the

execution of the queen and her alleged lovers; but he himself was spared, as he was spared a few years later, when he was again imprisoned in the Tower, on charges of high treason brought by his enemies at court. His death, at the age of thirty-nine, came from a fever.

It is not surprising, given his career, that many of Wyatt's poems, including his satires and his psalm translations, express an intense longing for "steadfastness" and an escape from the corruption, anxiety, and duplicity of the court. The praise, in his verse epistle to John Poins, of a quiet retired life in the country and the harsh condemnation of courtly hypocrisy derive from his own experience. But the eloquent celebration of simplicity and truthfulness can itself be a cunning strategy. Wyatt was a master of the game of poetic self-display. Again and again he represents himself as a plain-speaking and steadfast man, betrayed by the "doubleness" of a fickle mistress or the instability of fortune. At this distance it is impossible to know how much this account corresponds to reality, but we can admire, as Wyatt's contemporaries did, the rhetorical deftness of the performance.

In a move with momentous consequences for English poetry, Wyatt introduced into English the sonnet, a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter with a complex, intertwining rhyme scheme and the development of one or more sustained metaphors or "conceits." For the most part, he took his subject matter from the sonnets of Francesco Petrarca (anglicized as "Petrarch"; 1304–1374), an Italian poet who, over twenty years, wrote obsessive poems about his love for the unattainable "Laura." But while Petrarch's sonnets consist of an "octave," rhyming *abba abba*, followed, after a turn (*volta*) in the sense, by a "sestet" with various rhyme schemes (such as *cd cd cd* and *cde cde*), Wyatt's most common sestet scheme is *cddc ee*. He began the process of changing the Petrarchan sonnet into what was to become the characteristic "English" structure for the sonnet: three quatrains and a closing couplet.

In his freest translations of Petrarchan sonnets, such as "Whoso List to Hunt," Wyatt tends to turn the idealizing of the woman into



disillusionment and complaint. For the lover in Petrarch's poems, love is an ongoing, transcendent experience, extending beyond the boundaries of life itself; for the lover in Wyatt's poems, it is all too transient and embittering. The tone of bitterness carries over to many poems less closely linked to Italian and French models, poems with short stanzas and refrains that associate them with the native English song tradition. Some of Wyatt's songs, to be sure, strike a note of jaunty independence, often tinged with misogyny; but melancholy complaint is rarely very distant. Perhaps the poem that most brilliantly captures his blend of passion, anger, cynicism, longing, and pain is "They Flee from Me."

Wyatt never published a collection of his own poems, and very few of them appeared in print during his lifetime. Carefully crafted pieces in an elaborate and sometimes risky erotic chess game, many of them may have been designed for specific social occasions, to be recited or sometimes set to music and sung to the accompaniment of a lute. In addition to such oral performances, the poems were written out, exchanged, and circulated in manuscript, both within a small, exclusive circle of friends and among those beyond the court who were eager to enjoy the latest poetic fashions.

Contemporaries clearly took pleasure in staging and savoring the drama of sexual relations: the Devonshire Manuscript, one of the chief sources for Wyatt's verse, collects a variety of poetic perspectives on courtship. The miscellany contains not only several male-authored poems in a female voice but also a number of poems probably written by women, along with many more transcribed by female hands. Wyatt was writing within a larger game of social competition and exchange.

In 1557 (fifteen years after Wyatt's death), 97 poems attributed to him were included by the printer Richard Tottel among the 271 poems in his miscellany, *Songs and Sonnets*. By the time this collection was published, Wyatt's deliberately rough, vigorous, and expressive metrical practice was felt to be crude, and Tottel (or perhaps some intermediary) smoothed out the versification. We reprint "They Flee from Me" both in Tottel's "improved" version and

in the version found in the Egerton Manuscript, which contains poems in Wyatt's own hand and corrections he made to scribal copies of his poems.

In the following selections we have divided the poems into three generic groups: sonnets, other lyrics, and finally a satire. Within each of the first two groups, the poems are printed in the order in which they appear in the manuscripts. There is no reason to think that this is a chronological ordering.

# The Long Love That in My Thought Doth Harbor<sup>1</sup>

The long love that in my thought doth harbor,  
And in mine heart doth keep his residence,  
Into my face presseth with bold pretense  
And therein campeth, spreading his banner.<sup>2</sup>  
5 She that me learneth<sup>o</sup> to love and suffer  
And will that my trust and lust's negligence<sup>3</sup>  
Be reined by reason, shame, and reverence,  
With his hardiness taketh displeasure.  
Wherewithal<sup>o</sup> unto the heart's forest he fleeth,  
10 Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,  
And there him hideth, and not appeareth.  
What may I do, when my master feareth,  
But in the field with him to live and die?  
For good is the life ending faithfully.

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Wyatt's version of poem 140 of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* (Scattered Rhymes); his younger friend the Earl of Surrey also translated it (p. 136).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
That is, the speaker's blush. The first four lines of this sonnet introduce the "conceit" (elaborately sustained metaphor) of Love as a warrior who, "with bold pretense" (that is, making bold claim), flaunts his presence by means of the "banner." Elaborate metaphors of this kind are common in Petrarchan (and Elizabethan) love poetry, and often, as in this instance, an entire sonnet will turn on a single conceit.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: That is, my open and careless revelation of my love. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *teaches me* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because of which* [Return to reference °](#)

## Petrarch, Rima 140

### A MODERN PROSE TRANSLATION<sup>[4](#)</sup>

Love, who lives and reigns in my thought and keeps his principal seat in my heart, sometimes comes forth all in armor into my forehead, there camps, and there sets up his banner.

She who teaches us to love and to be patient, and wishes my great desire, my kindled hope, to be reined in by reason, shame, and reverence, at our boldness is angry within herself.

Wherefore Love flees terrified to my heart, abandoning his every enterprise, and weeps and trembles; there he hides and no more appears outside.

What can I do, when my lord is afraid, except stay with him until the last hour? For he makes a good end who dies loving well.

### Endnotes

- Note 4: This and the prose translations of Rime 190, 134, and 189 are by Robert K. Durling. [Return to reference 4](#)

# Whoso List to Hunt<sup>1</sup>

Whoso list<sup>o</sup> to hunt, I know where is an hind,<sup>o</sup>  
But as for me, alas, I may no more.  
The vain travail<sup>o</sup> hath wearied me so sore,<sup>o</sup>  
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.  
5 Yet may I, by no means, my wearied mind  
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore,  
Fainting I follow. I leave off, therefore,  
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.  
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,<sup>o</sup>  
10 As well as I, may spend his time in vain.  
And graven with diamonds in letters plain  
There is written, her fair neck round about,  
“*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar’s I am,  
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.”

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
An adaptation of Petrarch’s Rima 190, perhaps influenced by commentators on Petrarch, who said that *Noli me tangere quia Caesaris sum* (Touch me not, for I am Caesar’s) was inscribed on the collars of Caesar’s hinds, which were then set free and were presumably safe from hunters. Wyatt’s sonnet is usually supposed to refer to Anne Boleyn, in whom Henry VIII became interested in 1526.

[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *cares* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female deer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *labor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorely, seriously* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assure him* [Return to reference](#) °

## **Petrarch, Rima 190**

### **A MODERN PROSE TRANSLATION**

A white doe on the green grass appeared to me, with two golden horns, between two rivers, in the shade of a laurel, when the sun was rising in the unripe season.

Her look was so sweet and proud that to follow her I left every task, like the miser who as he seeks treasure sweetens his trouble with delight.

"Let no one touch me," she bore written with diamonds and topazes around her lovely neck. "It has pleased my Caesar to make me free."

And the sun had already turned at midday; my eyes were tired by looking but not sated, when I fell into the water, and she disappeared.



# I Find No Peace<sup>1</sup>

I find no peace, and all my war is done,  
I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice,  
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise,  
And naught I have, and all the world I seize on.  
5 That<sup>o</sup> looseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison,  
And holdeth me not, yet can I 'scape nowise;  
Nor letteth me live nor die at my devise,<sup>o</sup>  
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.  
Without eyen<sup>o</sup> I see, and without tongue I plain;<sup>o</sup>  
10 I desire to perish, and yet I ask health;  
I love another, and thus I hate myself;  
I feed me in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain.  
Likewise displeaseth me both death and life,  
And my delight is causer of this strife.

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Translated from Petrarch's Rima 134. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *that which* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *my own will* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *eyes* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *complain* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

## **Petrarch, Rima 134**

### **A MODERN PROSE TRANSLATION**

Peace I do not find, and I have no wish to make war; and I fear and hope, and burn and am of ice; and I fly above the heavens and lie on the ground; and I grasp nothing and embrace all the world.

One has me in prison who neither opens nor locks, neither keeps me for his own nor unties the bonds; and Love does not kill and does not unchain me, he neither wishes me alive nor frees me from the tangle.

I see without eyes, and I have no tongue and yet cry out; and I wish to perish and I ask for help; and I hate myself and love another.

I feed on pain, weeping I laugh; equally displeasing to me are death and life. In this state am I, Lady, on account of you.

# My Galley<sup>1</sup>

My galley charged<sup>o</sup> with forgetfulness<sup>2</sup>  
Thorough<sup>o</sup> sharp seas, in winter nights doth pass  
'Tween rock and rock; and eke<sup>o</sup> mine enemy, alas,  
That is my lord, steereth with cruelness;  
And every oar a thought in readiness,  
5 As though that death were light in such a case.<sup>3</sup>  
An endless wind doth tear the sail apace<sup>o</sup>  
Of forced sighs and trusty fearfulness.<sup>o</sup>  
A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,  
Hath done the wearied cords great hinderance;  
10 Wreathed<sup>o</sup> with error and eke with ignorance.  
The stars be hid that led me to this pain.  
Drowned is reason that should me consort,<sup>o</sup>  
And I remain despairing of the port.

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Translated from Petrarch's Rima 189. For Edmund Spenser's adaptation of the same poem, see p. 452.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, obliviousness of everything except love.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As though my destruction would not matter much.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *freighted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *through*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swiftly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear to trust*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twisted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accompany*[Return to reference](#) °

## Petrarch, Rima 189

### A MODERN PROSE TRANSLATION

My ship laden with forgetfulness passes through a harsh sea, at midnight, in winter, between Scylla and Charybdis,<sup>4</sup> and at the tiller sits my lord, rather my enemy;

each oar is manned by a ready, cruel thought that seems to scorn the tempest and the end; a wet, changeless wind of sighs, hopes, and desires breaks the sail;

a rain of weeping, a mist of disdain wet and loosen the already weary ropes, made of error twisted up with ignorance.

My two usual sweet stars are hidden; dead among the waves are reason and skill; so that I begin to despair of the port.

### Endnotes

- Note 4: The monster and the whirlpool that threaten Odysseus's ship on either side of the Strait of Messina, in *Odyssey* 12. [Return to reference 4](#)

## What Vaileth Truth?<sup>1</sup>

What vaileth<sup>o</sup> truth? or by it to take pain,  
To strive by steadfastness for to attain.  
To be just and true and flee from doubleness;  
Sithens all<sup>o</sup> alike, where ruleth craftiness,  
Rewarded is both false and plain?  
5      Soonest he speedeth<sup>o</sup> that most can feign;  
True-meaning heart is had in disdain.  
Against deceit and doubleness,  
What vaileth truth?

Deceived is he by crafty train<sup>o</sup>  
10      That meaneth no guile and doth remain  
Within the trap without redress.<sup>o</sup>  
But for<sup>o</sup> to love, lo, such a mistress,  
Whose cruelty nothing can refrain,<sup>o</sup>  
15      What vaileth truth?

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A rondeau: a difficult French verse form in which the unrhymed refrain “rounds” back to the opening words, and the rest of the poem uses only two rhyme sounds. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *avails* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *since exactly* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *succeeds* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *treachery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restrain*[Return to reference](#) °

# Madam, Withouten Many Words

Madam, withouten many words,  
Once, <sup>o</sup> I am sure, ye will or no.  
And if ye will, then leave your bordes, <sup>o</sup>  
And use your wit <sup>o</sup> and show it so.

5 And with a beck ye shall me call.  
And if of one that burneth alway  
Ye have any pity at all,  
Answer him fair with yea or nay.

10 If it be yea, I shall be fain. <sup>o</sup>  
If it be nay, friends as before.  
Ye shall another man obtain,  
And I mine own and yours no more.

E. MS.

## Notes

- °: *sometime* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jests* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mind* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glad* [Return to reference °](#)



# They Flee from Me

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek  
With naked foot stalking<sup>o</sup> in my chamber.  
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek  
That now are wild and do not remember  
That sometime they put themself in danger  
5 To take bread at my hand; and now they range,  
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise  
Twenty times better; but once in special,  
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,  
10 When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,  
And she me caught in her arms long and small,<sup>o</sup>  
Therewithal<sup>o</sup> sweetly did me kiss  
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

It was no dream, I lay broad waking.  
15 But all is turned, thorough<sup>o</sup> my gentleness,  
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;  
And I have leave to go, of her goodness,  
And she also to use newfangledness.<sup>o</sup>  
20 But since that I so kindly<sup>1</sup> am served,  
I fain would<sup>o</sup> know what she hath deserved.

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Naturally (from *kind*: "nature," but with an ironic suggestion of the modern meaning of "kindly"). In Wyatt's spelling, the word should presumably be pronounced as three syllables. [Return to reference 1](#)

# Notes

- °: *walking softly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slender*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fickleness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would like to*[Return to reference](#) °

# The Lover Showeth How He Is Forsaken of Such as He Sometime Enjoyed

5 They flee from me, that sometime did me seek  
With naked foot stalking within my chamber.  
Once have I seen them gentle, tame, and meek  
That now are wild and do not once remember  
That sometime they have put themselves in danger  
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,  
Busily seeking in continual change.

10 Thankèd be fortune, it hath been otherwise  
Twenty times better; but once especial,  
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,  
When her loose gown did from her shoulders fall,  
And she me caught in her arms long and small,  
And therewithal so sweetly did me kiss  
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

15 It was no dream, for I lay broad awaking.  
But all is turned now, through my gentleness,  
Into a bitter fashion of forsaking;  
And I have leave to go, of her goodness,  
And she also to use newfangledness.  
But since that I unkindly so am served,  
20 How like you this? What hath she now deserved?

TOTTEL, 1557

## My Lute, Awake!

My lute, awake! Perform the last  
Labor that thou and I shall waste,  
And end that I have now begun:  
For when this song is sung and past,  
5 My lute be still, for I have done.

As to be heard where ear is none,  
As lead to grave in marble stone,<sup>1</sup>  
My song may pierce her heart as soon.  
Should we then sigh or sing or moan?  
10 No, no, my lute, for I have done.

The rocks do not so cruelly  
Repulse the waves continually  
As she my suit and affection.  
So that I am past remedy,  
15 Whereby my lute and I have done.

Proud of the spoil that thou hast got  
Of simple hearts, thorough<sup>o</sup> Love's shot,  
By whom, unkind, thou hast them won,  
Think not he hath his bow forgot,  
20 Although my lute and I have done.

Vengeance shall fall on thy disdain  
That makest but game on earnest pain.  
Think not alone under the sun  
Unquit<sup>o</sup> to cause thy lovers plain,<sup>o</sup>  
25 Although my lute and I have done.

Perchance thee lie<sup>2</sup> withered and old

30 The winter nights that are so cold,  
Plaining in vain unto the moon.  
Thy wishes then dare not be told.  
Care then who list,<sup>o</sup> for I have done.

35 And then may chance thee to repent  
The time that thou hast lost and spent  
To cause thy lovers sigh and swoon.  
Then shalt thou know beauty but lent,  
And wish and want as I have done.

40 Now cease, my lute. This is the last  
Labor that thou and I shall waste,  
And ended is that we begun.  
Now is this song both sung and past;  
My lute be still, for I have done.

E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, when sound may be heard with no ear to hear it or when soft lead is able to carve ("grave") hard marble.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Perhaps it may befall you to lie.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *through*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unrevenged* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to complain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *likes*[Return to reference °](#)

# Forget Not Yet

Forget not yet the tried intent  
Of such a truth<sup>o</sup> as I have meant,  
My great travail so gladly spent,  
Forget not yet.

5 Forget not yet when first began  
The weary life ye know since when,  
The suit,<sup>o</sup> the service<sup>1</sup> none tell can,  
Forget not yet.

10 Forget not yet the great essays,<sup>o</sup>  
The cruel wrong, the scornful ways,  
The painful patience in denays,<sup>o</sup>  
Forget not yet.

15 Forget not yet, forget not this,  
How long ago hath been and is  
The mind that never meant amiss,  
Forget not yet.

20 Forget not then thine own approved,  
The which so long hath thee so loved,  
Whose steadfast faith yet never moved,  
Forget not this.

D. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Actions of a lover, often called the lady's "servant." [Return to reference 1](#)

# Notes

- °: *fidelity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pursuit, wooing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trials*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *denials, refusals*[Return to reference](#) °

## Stand Whoso List<sup>1</sup>

Stand whoso list<sup>o</sup> upon the slipper<sup>o</sup> top  
Of court's estates,<sup>o</sup> and let me here rejoice  
And use me quiet without let or stop,<sup>2</sup>  
Unknown in court, that hath such brackish<sup>3</sup> joys.  
In hidden place so let my days forth pass  
5 That when my years be done withouten noise,  
I may die aged after the common trace.<sup>o</sup>  
For him death grippeth right hard by the crop<sup>o</sup>  
That is much known of other, and of himself, alas,  
10 Doth die unknown, dazed, with dreadful<sup>o</sup> face.

A. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A translation of Seneca, *Thyestes*, lines 391–403. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Comport myself quietly without hindrance or impediment. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spoiled by mixture, as of seawater with fresh. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *cares to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slippery* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *high positions* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *way* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *throat* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fearful* [Return to reference °](#)



# Who List His Wealth and Ease Retain<sup>1</sup>

Who list<sup>o</sup> his wealth<sup>o</sup> and ease retain,  
Himself let him unknown contain.<sup>2</sup>  
Press not too fast in at that gate  
Where the return stands by disdain:  
5 For sure, *circa regna tonat.*<sup>3</sup>

The high mountains are blasted oft  
When the low valley is mild and soft.  
Fortune with Health stands at debate.<sup>4</sup>  
The fall is grievous from aloft.  
10 And sure, *circa regna tonat.*

These bloody days have broken my heart.  
My lust,<sup>o</sup> my youth did then depart,  
And blind desire of estate.<sup>o</sup>  
Who hastes to climb seeks to revert.<sup>o</sup>  
15 Of truth, *circa regna tonat.*

The Bell Tower showed me such sight  
That in my head sticks day and night.  
There did I learn out of a grate,<sup>o</sup>  
For all favor, glory, or might,<sup>5</sup>  
20 That yet *circa regna tonat.*

By proof,<sup>o</sup> I say, there did I learn:  
Wit helpeth not defense to yerne,  
Of innocence to plead or prate.<sup>6</sup>  
Bear low<sup>o</sup>, therefore, give God the stern,<sup>7</sup>  
25 For sure, *circa regna tonat.*

B. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem was almost certainly written at the time of Wyatt's imprisonment in 1536, during which he witnessed from the Bell Tower the execution of Anne Boleyn.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, let him keep himself unknown.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "He [that is, Jupiter] thunders around thrones" (Seneca, *Phaedra*, line 1140). The first two stanzas of Wyatt's poem paraphrase lines from that play. "The return stands by disdain": that is, "you will be disdained as you make your (forced) exit."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, fortune and well-being are always at odds.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, whatever one's favor, glory, or might.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, intelligence does not help one earn ("yerne") a defense, [nor does it help] to plead or prattle about one's innocence.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Let God do the steering.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *desires* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *well-being* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *status* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fall back* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *barred window* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *experience* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be humble* [Return to reference °](#)

## Mine Own John Poins<sup>1</sup>

Mine own John Poins, since ye delight to know  
The cause why that homeward I me draw  
(And flee the press of courts, whereso they go,  
Rather than to live thrall under the awe  
Of lordly looks) wrapped within my cloak,  
5 To will and lust<sup>o</sup> learning to set a law;  
It is not for because I scorn or mock  
The power of them to whom Fortune hath lent  
Charge over us, of right to strike the stroke.<sup>2</sup>  
But true it is that I have always meant  
10 Less to esteem them than the common sort,  
Of outward things that judge in their intent,  
Without regard what doth inward resort.  
I grant sometime that of glory the fire  
Doth touch my heart; me list not to report  
15 Blame by honor, and honor to desire.<sup>3</sup>  
But how may I this honor now attain,  
That cannot dye the color black a liar?<sup>4</sup>  
My Poins, I cannot frame my tune to feign,  
To cloak the truth for praise, without desert,  
20 Of them that list<sup>o</sup> all vice for to retain.  
I cannot honor them that sets their part  
With Venus and Bacchus all their life long,<sup>5</sup>  
Nor hold my peace of<sup>o</sup> them although I smart.  
I cannot crouch nor kneel nor do so great a wrong  
25 To worship them like God on earth alone  
That are as wolves these sely<sup>o</sup> lambs among.  
I cannot with my words complain and moan  
And suffer naught,<sup>o</sup> nor smart without complaint,  
Nor turn the word that from my mouth is gone;

30 I cannot speak and look like a saint,  
Use wiles for wit<sup>o</sup> and make deceit a pleasure,  
And call craft<sup>o</sup> counsel, for profit still to paint;<sup>o</sup>  
I cannot wrest the law to fill the coffer,  
35 With innocent blood to feed myself fat,  
And do most hurt where most help I offer.  
I am not he that can allow<sup>o</sup> the state<sup>o</sup>  
Of high Caesar and damn Cato<sup>6</sup> to die,  
That with his death did 'scape out of the gate  
40 From Caesar's hands, if Livy<sup>7</sup> do not lie,  
And would not live where liberty was lost,  
So did his heart the common weal apply.<sup>8</sup>  
I am not he such eloquence to boast  
To make the crow singing as the swan,  
Nor call the lion of coward beasts the most,  
45 That cannot take a mouse as the cat can;  
And he that dieth for hunger of the gold,  
Call him Alexander,<sup>9</sup> and say that Pan  
Passeth<sup>o</sup> Apollo in music many fold;<sup>1</sup>  
Praise Sir Thopas for a noble tale,  
50 And scorn the story that the Knight told;<sup>2</sup>  
Praise him for counsel that is drunk of ale;  
Grin when he laugheth that beareth all the sway,<sup>o</sup>  
Frown when he frowneth, and groan when he is  
pale;  
On other's lust<sup>o</sup> to hang both night and day—  
55 None of these points would ever frame in me;<sup>o</sup>  
My wit<sup>o</sup> is naught:<sup>o</sup> I cannot learn the way;  
And much the less of things that greater be,  
That asken help of colors of device<sup>o</sup>  
To join the mean with each extremity:  
60 With the nearest virtue to cloak alway the vice,  
And, as to purpose likewise it shall fall,<sup>3</sup>  
To press the virtue that it may not rise;  
As drunkenness, good fellowship to call;

65 The friendly foe, with his double face,  
Say he is gentle and courteous therewithal;<sup>o</sup>  
And say that favel<sup>o</sup> hath a goodly grace  
In eloquence; and cruelty to name  
Zeal of justice, and change in time and place;<sup>4</sup>  
And he that suffereth offense<sup>o</sup> without blame,  
70 Call him pitiful,<sup>o</sup> and him true and plain  
That railleth reckless<sup>o</sup> to every man's shame;  
Say he is rude<sup>o</sup> that cannot lie and feign,  
The lecher a lover, and tyranny  
To be the right of a prince's reign.  
75 I cannot, I: no, no, it will not be.  
This is the cause that I could never yet  
Hang on their sleeves that weigh, as thou mayst see,  
A chip of chance more than a pound of wit.  
This maketh me at home to hunt and hawk  
80 And in foul weather at my book to sit;  
In frost and snow then with my bow to stalk.  
No man doth mark<sup>o</sup> whereso I ride or go.  
In lusty leas<sup>o</sup> at liberty I walk,  
And of these news I feel nor weal nor woe,  
85 Save that a clog doth hang yet at my heel.<sup>5</sup>  
No force<sup>o</sup> for that, for it is ordered so  
That I may leap both hedge and dike full well.  
I am not now in France, to judge the wine,  
With sav'ry sauce the delicates<sup>o</sup> to feel;  
90 Nor yet in Spain, where one must him incline,  
Rather than to be, outwardly to seem.  
I meddle not with wits that be so fine;  
Nor Flanders' cheer<sup>6</sup> letteth<sup>o</sup> not my sight to deem  
Of black and white, nor taketh my wit away  
95 With beastliness they, beasts, do so esteem.  
Nor am I not where Christ is given in prey  
For money, poison, and treason—at Rome<sup>7</sup>  
A common practice, used night and day.

But here I am in Kent and Christendom,  
 Among the Muses, where I read and rhyme;  
 Where if thou list, my Poins, for to come,  
 Thou shalt be judge how I do spend my time.

D. MS., E. MS.

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
 Poins was a friend of Wyatt's. This verse epistle of informal satire is based on the tenth satire of the Italian Luigi Alamanni but is personalized and Anglicized in detail by Wyatt. It was apparently written during his banishment from court, in 1536. Lines 1–52 of the poem are missing from the authoritative Egerton Manuscript and are here supplied from the Devonshire Manuscript.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, my retirement from court is not because I scorn the powerful, or their prerogatives of rule and punishment. But I esteem them less than do the "common sort" of people, who judge by externals only (lines 10–13).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, I do not wish to attack honor or to call dishonorable desire honorable.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, cannot pretend that black is not black.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, I cannot honor those who devote their lives to Venus (goddess of love) and Bacchus (god of drinking).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cato the Younger, the famous Roman patriot who committed suicide rather than submit to Caesar.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Titus Livius (59 B.C.E.–17 C.E.), the great Roman historian.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: So much did he devote himself to the common good.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Compare him to Alexander the Great with his towering ambition.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: According to classical mythology, the music of the nature god Pan was far inferior to that of Apollo, patron of music and art.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The silly tale of Sir Thopas, in *The Canterbury Tales*, is told by Chaucer himself, until the Host forces him to stop. *The Knight's Tale* is the most courtly and dignified of the tales.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, as will also be opportune.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, to miscall cruelty zeal for justice, and to rationalize it by appeals to altered circumstances.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, I feel neither happiness nor unhappiness about current political affairs, except that a "clog" (that is, his confinement on parole to his estate) keeps me from traveling far. Note that *news* is a plural in Elizabethan English.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the drinking for which, in the 16th century, Flemings were notorious.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In *Tottel's Miscellany*, published in the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary, these lines were altered as follows: "where *truth* is given in prey / For money, poison, and treason—*of some*."[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *desire*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *desire*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *concerning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *innocent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wickedness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wisdom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *craftiness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deceive*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *approve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exaltation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpasses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wishes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appeal to me* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intellect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worthless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks of rhetoric* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *besides* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flattery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allows offenses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compassionate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recklessly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uneducated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *note* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasant fields* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no matter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delicacies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinders* [Return to reference](#) °



# **HENRY HOWARD, EARL OF SURREY**

## **1517–1547**

The ax that decapitated Surrey at the age of thirty had been hanging over his head for much of his life. In the court of Henry VIII, it was dangerous to be a potential claimant to the throne, and Surrey was descended from kings on both sides of his family. He was brought up at Windsor Castle as the close companion of Henry VIII's illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond, who married Surrey's sister. As the eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk, the chief bulwark of the old Catholic aristocracy against the rising tide of "new men" and the reformed religion, Surrey was the heir not only to the Howard family's great wealth but also to the family's immense pride, its sense at once of noble privilege and of obligation. Like his father and grandfather, he was a brave and able soldier, serving in Henry VIII's French wars as "Lieutenant General of the King on Sea and Land." He was also repeatedly imprisoned for rash behavior, on one occasion for striking a courtier, on another for wandering through the streets of London breaking the windows of sleeping townspeople. In 1541 Surrey used his family connections—his first cousin, Catherine Howard, was queen—to secure the release from the Tower of his close friend the poet Thomas Wyatt, who had been accused of treason. But a year later, Catherine Howard was executed for adultery, like Anne Boleyn before her. Power returned to the rival family of the former queen Jane Seymour, who had died in childbirth giving a son and heir to the aging Henry VIII. Surrey's situation was

already precarious, and his vocal opposition to the Seymours, with their strong Protestant leanings, sealed his fate. Convicted of treason, he had the grim distinction of being Henry's last victim.

Poets and critics of the later sixteenth century, fascinated by Surrey's noble rank and his tragic fate, routinely praised him as one of the very greatest English poets. The full title of Tottel's influential miscellany, published in 1557 (ten years after Surrey's death), is *Songs and Sonnets Written by the Right Honorable Lord Henry Howard Late Earl of Surrey and Other*. The principal "other" here is his older friend Wyatt, with whose poetry Surrey's is closely linked. Poets who circulated their verse in manuscript in a courtly milieu, the two shared a passion for French and Italian poetry, especially for Petrarch's sonnets. Surrey established a form for these that was used by Shakespeare and that has become known as the English sonnet: three quatrains and a couplet, all in iambic pentameter and rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*. Even more significant, he was the first English poet to publish in blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter—a verse form so popular in the succeeding centuries that it has come to seem almost native to the language. The work in which he used his "strange meter," as the publisher called it, was a translation of part of Virgil's *Aeneid*, a Latin epic poem telling the legendary story of Aeneas of Troy and written between 29 and 19 B.C.E. Managing the five-stress line with exceptional skill, Surrey initiated the rhythmic fluency that distinguishes so many Elizabethan lyrics. It is striking that his two great literary innovations, the English sonnet and blank verse, should emerge in the same period that saw radical upheavals in traditional religious and social life. It is possible that he was drawn to Virgil's epic because it offered a model of continuity in the face of disaster. Aeneas cannot prevent the fall of Troy, but, carrying his household gods with him, he leads his followers to a new land, Italy, where his descendants will found a city, the future Rome.

As a conventional love poet Surrey is not very convincing: in 1593 Thomas Nashe wrote sardonically that Surrey "was more in love with his own curious forming fancy" than with this mistress's

face. His verse comes alive when he writes about his deep male friendships ("So Cruel Prison" and the moving epitaph he published on Wyatt), or imagines himself as a woman longing for her absent man ("O Happy Dames").

Our selections from Surrey are divided into two groups: sonnets are followed by lyric and reflective poems.

# The Soote Season<sup>1</sup>

The soote<sup>o</sup> season, that bud and bloom forth brings,  
With green hath clad the hill and eke<sup>o</sup> the vale.  
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;  
The turtle to her make<sup>o</sup> hath told her tale.  
5 Summer is come, for every spray now springs.  
The hart hath hung his old head on the pale;<sup>o</sup>  
The buck in brake<sup>o</sup> his winter coat he flings;  
The fishes float with new repaired scale;  
The adder all her slough<sup>o</sup> away she slings;  
10 The swift swallow pursueth the flies small;  
The busy bee her honey now she mings.<sup>o</sup>  
Winter is worn, that was the flowers' bale.<sup>o</sup>  
And thus I see among these pleasant things,  
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs.

1557

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem is a free adaptation of Petrarch's Rima 310, one of the sonnets written after the death of the poet's beloved. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *sweet, fragrant* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *also* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *turtledove to her mate* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *fence, paling* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *thicket* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *cast-off skin* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *mingles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harm*[Return to reference](#) °

## Petrarch, Rima 310

### A MODERN PROSE TRANSLATION<sup>2</sup>

Zephyrus returns and leads back the fine weather and the flowers and the grass, his sweet family, and chattering Procne and weeping Philomena,<sup>3</sup> and Spring, all white and vermillion;

the meadows laugh and the sky becomes clear again, Jupiter is gladdened looking at his daughter,<sup>4</sup> the air and the waters and the earth are full of love, every animal takes counsel again to love.

But to me, alas, come back heavier sighs, which she draws from my deepest heart, she who carried off to Heaven the keys to it;

and the singing of little birds, and the flowering of meadows, and virtuous gentle gestures in beautiful ladies are a wilderness and cruel, savage beasts.

### Endnotes

- Note 2: This and the prose translation of Rima 164 are by Robert K. Durling.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The swallow and the nightingale, respectively. Zephyrus is the west wind.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jupiter and his daughter Venus are here the planets, in favorable astrological relation.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Love, That Doth Reign and Live Within My Thought<sup>1</sup>

Love, that doth reign and live within my thought,  
And built his seat within my captive breast,  
Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,  
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.  
5 But she that taught me love and suffer pain,  
My doubtful hope and eke<sup>o</sup> my hot desire  
With shamefast<sup>o</sup> look to shadow and refrain,<sup>o</sup>  
Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire.  
And coward Love then to the heart apace<sup>o</sup>  
10 Taketh his flight, where he doth lurk and plain,<sup>o</sup>  
His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.  
For my lord's guilt thus faultless bide<sup>o</sup> I pain,  
Yet from my lord shall not my foot remove:  
Sweet is the death that taketh end by love.

1557

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Compare Surrey's version of Petrarch's Rima 140 with Wyatt's translation of the same original (pp. 122–23; with a modern prose translation). [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *also* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *modest* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *restrain* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *at once* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

- °: *complain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endure*[Return to reference](#) °



# Alas! So All Things Now Do Hold Their Peace<sup>1</sup>

Alas! so all things now do hold their peace,  
Heaven and earth disturbèd in no thing.  
The beasts, the air, the birds their song do cease;  
The nightè's chare<sup>2</sup> the stars about doth bring;  
5 Calm is the sea, the waves work less and less.  
So am not I, whom love, alas, doth wring,  
Bringing before my face the great increase  
Of my desires, whereat I weep and sing,  
In joy and woe, as in a doubtful ease:  
10 For my sweet thoughts sometime do pleasure bring,  
But by and by<sup>o</sup> the cause of my disease<sup>3</sup>  
Gives me a pang that inwardly doth sting,  
When that I think what grief it is, again,  
To live, and lack the thing should rid my pain.

1557

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Adapted from Petrarch's Rima 164.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From Italian *carro* (the Great Bear).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dis-ease; that is, discomfort.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *immediately* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Petrarch, Rima 164**

### **A MODERN PROSE TRANSLATION**

Now that the heavens and the earth and the wind are silent, and  
sleep reins in the beasts and the birds, Night drives her starry car  
about, and in its bed the sea lies without a wave,

I am awake, I think, I burn, I weep; and she who destroys me is  
always before me, to my sweet pain: war is my state, full of sorrow  
and suffering, and only thinking of her do I have any peace.

Thus from one clear living fountain alone spring the sweet and the  
bitter on which I feed; one hand alone heals me and pierces me.

And that my suffering may not reach an end, a thousand times a day  
I die and a thousand am born, so distant am I from health.

## So Cruel Prison How Could Betide<sup>1</sup>

So cruel prison how could betide,<sup>2</sup> alas,  
As proud Windsor, where I in lust<sup>o</sup> and joy  
With a king's son my childish<sup>o</sup> years did pass  
In greater feast than Priam's sons of Troy?<sup>3</sup>

5 Where each sweet place returns a taste full sour:  
The large green courts, where we were wont to  
hove,<sup>o</sup>  
With eyes cast up unto the Maidens' Tower,  
And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love.

10 The stately sales,<sup>o</sup> the ladies bright of hue,  
The dances short, long tales of great delight,  
With words and looks that tigers could but rue,<sup>4</sup>  
Where each of us did plead the other's right.

15 The palm play<sup>o</sup> where, dispoiled<sup>o</sup> for the game,  
With dazed eyes oft we by gleams of love  
Have missed the ball and got sight of our dame,  
To bait<sup>o</sup> her eyes, which kept the leads<sup>5</sup> above.

20 The graveled ground, with sleeves<sup>o</sup> tied on the helm,  
On foaming horse, with swords and friendly hearts,  
With cheer<sup>o</sup> as though the one should overwhelm,  
Where we have fought and chased oft with darts.<sup>o</sup>

With silver drops the meads yet spread<sup>6</sup> for ruth,<sup>o</sup>  
In active games of nimbleness and strength,  
Where we did strain, trailed by swarms of youth,  
Our tender limbs that yet shot up in length.

25 The secret groves which oft we made resound  
Of pleasant plaint and of our ladies' praise,  
Recording soft what grace<sup>o</sup> each one had found,  
What hope of speed,<sup>o</sup> what dread of long delays.

The wild forest, the clothèd holts<sup>o</sup> with green,  
With reins availed<sup>o</sup> and swift ybreathèd horse,  
30 With cry of hounds and merry blasts<sup>o</sup> between,  
Where we did chase the fearful hart a force.<sup>7</sup>

The void<sup>o</sup> walls eke<sup>o</sup> that harbored us each night,  
Wherewith, alas, revive within my breast  
The sweet accord, such sleeps as yet delight,  
35 The pleasant dreams, the quiet bed of rest,

The secret thoughts imparted with such trust,  
The wanton<sup>o</sup> talk, the divers change of play,  
The friendship sworn, each promise kept so just,  
40 Wherewith we passed the winter nights away.

And with this thought, the blood forsakes my face,  
The tears berain my cheeks of deadly hue,  
The which as soon as sobbing sighs, alas,  
Upsuppèd have, thus I my plaint renew:

45 "O place of bliss, renewer of my woes,  
Give me accompt,<sup>o</sup> where is my noble fere,<sup>8</sup>  
Whom in thy walls thou didst each night enclose,  
To other lief,<sup>o</sup> but unto me most dear."

Each stone, alas, that doth my sorrow rue,<sup>o</sup>  
Returns thereto a hollow sound of plaint.  
50 Thus I alone, where all my freedom grew,  
In prison pine with bondage and restraint.

And with remembrance of the greater grief

To banish the less, I find my chief relief.

## 1537 Endnotes

1557

- Note 1: In the summer of 1537 Surrey was imprisoned at Windsor Castle for striking another courtier. The poem recalls his boyhood stay there (1530–32) with Henry Fitzroy, illegitimate son of Henry VIII. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, how could there happen to be. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Priam, king of Troy in the *Iliad*, had fifty sons. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Take pity on, despite tigers' legendary fierceness. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Who was on the lead-covered roof. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, when the dew, like tears, was still on the meadows. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, to run it down. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Companion. Henry Fitzroy had died the year before, at age seventeen. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *pleasure* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *youthful* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *linger* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *halls* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *handball* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stripped* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attract, as in fishing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ladies' favors* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *countenance* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spears* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *favor* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *success*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wooded hills*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slackened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of the horn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *empty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *playful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *account*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °

# Wyatt Resteth Here, That Quick Could Never Rest

Wyatt resteth here, that quick<sup>o</sup> could never rest,  
Whose heavenly gifts, increased by disdain<sup>1</sup>  
And virtue, sank the deeper in his breast:  
Such profit he by envy could obtain.

5 A head where wisdom mysteries<sup>o</sup> did frame,  
Whose hammers beat still in that lively brain  
As on a stith,<sup>o</sup> where that some work of fame  
Was daily wrought to turn to Britain's gain.

10 A visage stern and mild, where both did grow  
Vice to contemn,<sup>o</sup> in virtue to rejoice;  
Amid great storms whom grace assured so  
To live upright and smile at fortune's choice.

15 A hand that taught what might be said in rhyme,  
That reft<sup>o</sup> Chaucer the glory of his wit<sup>2</sup>—  
A mark the which, unperfited<sup>o</sup> for time,  
Some may approach, but never none shall hit.

20 A tongue that served in foreign realms his king;  
Whose courteous talk to virtue did inflame  
Each noble heart: a worthy guide to bring  
Our English youth by travail<sup>o</sup> unto fame.

An eye whose judgment none affect<sup>o</sup> could blind,  
Friends to allure and foes to reconcile,  
Whose piercing look did represent a mind  
With virtue fraught, reposèd, void of guile.

25 A heart where dread yet never so impressed  
To hide the thought that might the truth advance;  
In neither fortune loft nor yet repressed<sup>3</sup>  
To swell in wealth<sup>o</sup> or yield unto mischance.

A valiant corpse<sup>4</sup> where force and beauty met,  
Happy<sup>o</sup>—alas, too happy, but<sup>o</sup> for foes;  
30 Lived and ran the race that Nature set,  
Of manhood's shape, where she the mold did lose.<sup>5</sup>

But to the heavens that simple<sup>o</sup> soul is fled,  
Which left, with such as covet Christ to know,  
35 Witness of faith<sup>6</sup> that never shall be dead,  
Sent for our health,<sup>o</sup> but not received so.

Thus for our guilt, this jewel have we lost;  
The earth his bones, the heavens possess his ghost.<sup>o</sup>

## 1542 **Endnotes**

1542

- Note 1: Hostility (equivalent to “envy” in line 4). That is, he could turn hostility toward him to his advantage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Genius. That is, Wyatt (supposedly) replaced Chaucer as England’s greatest poet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, neither overly elated by good fortune nor downcast by bad.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Body (not, as now, a dead one).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A conventional praise—that Nature, in creating someone, made a masterpiece and then lost the pattern.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, which left with Christians (“such as covet Christ to know”) a testimony of faith.[Return to reference 6](#)



# Notes

- °: *alive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subtle meanings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anvil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bereft*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unperfected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *labor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no partiality*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well-being*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fortunate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innocent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *welfare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °

# O Happy Dames, That May Embrace<sup>1</sup>

O happy dames,<sup>o</sup> that may embrace  
The fruit of your delight,  
Help to bewail the woeful case  
And eke<sup>o</sup> the heavy plight  
Of me, that wanted<sup>o</sup> to rejoice  
5 The fortune of my pleasant choice:  
Good ladies, help to fill my mourning voice.

In ship, freight<sup>o</sup> with remembrance  
Of thoughts and pleasures past,  
He sails that hath in governance  
10 My life while it will last;  
With scalding sighs, for lack of gale,  
Futhering his hope, that is his sail,  
Toward me, the sweet port of his avail.<sup>o</sup>

Alas, how oft in dreams I see  
15 Those eyes that were my food,  
Which sometime so delighted me,  
That yet they do me good;  
Wherewith I wake with his return,  
Whose absent flame did make me burn:  
20 But when I find the lack, Lord how I mourn!

When other lovers in arms across<sup>o</sup>  
Rejoice their chief delight,  
Drowned in tears to mourn my loss  
I stand the bitter night  
25 In my window, where I may see  
Before the winds how the clouds flee.  
Lo, what a mariner love hath made me!

30 And in green waves when the salt flood  
 Doth rise by rage of wind,  
 A thousand fancies in that mood  
 Assail my restless mind.  
 Alas, now drencheth<sup>o</sup> my sweet foe,<sup>2</sup>  
 That with the spoil<sup>o</sup> of my heart did go  
 35 And left me; but, alas, why did he so?  
  
 And when the seas wax calm again,  
 To chase from me annoy,<sup>o</sup>  
 My doubtful hope doth cause me plain,<sup>o</sup>  
 So dread cuts off my joy.  
 40 Thus is my wealth<sup>o</sup> mingled with woe,  
 And of each thought a doubt doth grow:  
 Now he comes! Will he come? Alas, no, no!

1557

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The speaker is a woman. The poem was probably written for Surrey's wife, from whom he was separated while on military duty in France in the 1540s.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A conventional expression for a loved one, going back to medieval love poetry.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *wives*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *loaded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destination*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *embracing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *drowns*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *plunder, booty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to complain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happiness*[Return to reference](#) °

# Faith in Conflict

When, in the late 1520s, the Catholic authorities of England tried to burn all copies of William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament, they were attempting to stop the spread of what they viewed as a dangerous new plague of heresies. The plague was the Protestant Reformation, a movement opposed to crucial aspects of both the belief system and the institutional structure of Roman Catholicism.

The movement had been launched by the German theologian Martin Luther, who in 1517 challenged the authority of the pope and attacked several key doctrines of the Catholic Church. According to Luther, the Church, with its elaborate hierarchical structure centered in Rome, its rich monasteries and convents, and its enormous political influence, had become a hopelessly corrupt conspiracy of cynical priests who manipulated popular superstitions to enrich themselves and amass worldly power. Luther began by vehemently attacking the sale of indulgences—certificates promising the remission of punishments to be suffered in the afterlife by souls sent to “Purgatory” (a place or state where souls could be punished to make amends for their earthly sins before being allowed into heaven). Purgatory, he argued, had no foundation in scripture, which in his view was the only legitimate source of religious truth (*sola scriptura*). Christians would be saved not by scrupulously following the ritual practices fostered by the Catholic Church—observing fast days, reciting the ancient Latin prayers, endowing chantries to say prayers for the dead, invoking the protection of individual saints, and so on—and not even by the performance of good deeds, but by faith and faith alone (*sola fide*).

This challenge spread and gathered force, especially in northern Europe, where major Protestant leaders like the French theologian Jean Calvin (who, after his break with Catholicism, established a theocracy in Geneva) transformed religious institutions and

elaborated various and sometimes conflicting doctrinal principles. Calvin, whose thought came to be particularly influential in England and Scotland, emphasized the obligation of governments to implement God's will in the world. He advanced too the doctrine of predestination, by which, as he put it, "God adopts some to hope of life and sentences others to eternal death." God's "secret election" of the saved troubled Calvin, but his study of the scriptures had led him to conclude that "only a small number, out of an incalculable multitude, should obtain salvation." Some Christians found this idea horrifying. How, they asked, could a loving creator condemn the great majority of his creatures to an eternity of torment? And was it not possible for humans to avert the severe decree through virtuous actions? But for Calvin predestination was a mystery bound up with faith, confidence, and an active engagement in the fashioning of a Christian community.

The Reformation had a direct and powerful impact on those realms where it gained control. Monasteries were sacked, their possessions seized by princes or sold off to the highest bidder; monks and nuns, expelled from their cloisters, were encouraged to break their vows of chastity and find spouses, as Luther and his wife, a former nun, had done. In the great cathedrals and in hundreds of smaller churches and chapels, the elaborate altarpieces, bejeweled crucifixes, crystal reliquaries holding the bones of saints, venerated statues, and paintings were attacked as "idols." Condemned for their Catholic doctrinal content and accused of violating the biblical prohibition on the making of "graven images," they were often defaced or destroyed. Protestant congregations continued, for the most part, to celebrate the most sacred Christian ritual—the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper—but they did so in a profoundly different spirit from the Catholic Church. For them it was a commemoration (in which the bread and wine symbolized Christ) rather than a miracle (in which the bread and wine turned into Christ), and the service was conducted not in the old liturgical Latin but in the local language.

The Reformation was at first vigorously resisted in England. Protestant writings were seized by officials of the Church and the state and burned. Protestants who made their views known were persecuted—driven to flee the country or arrested, put on trial, and burned at the stake. But the situation changed drastically after Henry VIII decided to seek a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn. When the Roman Catholic Church, under pressure from Catherine's powerful family, refused to grant the divorce, Henry defied papal authority, declared himself head of the Church in England, seized the wealth of the monasteries, and unleashed Protestant energies, including fierce bursts of iconoclasm in which many religious images in churches were painted over, broken, or otherwise destroyed. On most doctrinal questions, however, Henry remained an orthodox Catholic, and in the latter part of his reign his clerical authorities renewed the persecution of Protestants.

The turn toward the Reformation was more decisive in the reign (1547–53) of Henry's heir, Edward VI; and the attempt by Edward's successor, Mary (daughter of Henry VIII's first wife, the Catholic Catherine of Aragon), to reimpose Roman Catholicism as the national religion came to an end with her death, in 1558. The long reign (1558–1603) of Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I, firmly established Protestantism as the faith of the Church of England. Reformation doctrine shaped the English liturgy eloquently formulated in the officially sanctioned *Book of Common Prayer* and was reinforced in the series of homilies, or sermons, that ministers were commanded to deliver to their parishioners.

The Reformation did not spread quickly or easily in England. Like Henry VIII himself, most English people in the decades after the break with Rome were far from being full-fledged Protestants. Emotional attachment to the traditional religion ran deep, as did resentment of an aggressively intolerant Protestant officialdom. From the 1530s to the end of the century, a significant number of individuals, including Thomas More and the Jesuit Robert Southwell, were prepared to die for the old faith. Many more, though still a

small minority, stubbornly rejected the new orthodoxy, absenting themselves from obligatory Protestant worship; these recusants, as they were known, were subjected to fines and sometimes worse punishments. A much greater number conformed in public but remained largely untouched by Protestant doctrine.

Though Protestantism and Catholicism were exposed, under different regimes, to brutal persecution, both faiths proved impossible to eradicate. In large part this tenacity arose from the passionate, often suicidal heroism of men and women who felt that their soul's salvation depended on the precise character of their Christianity and who consequently embraced martyrdom rather than repudiate their beliefs. It arose too from a mid-fifteenth-century technological innovation that made it extremely difficult to suppress unwelcome ideas: the printing press. Early Protestants quickly grasped that with a few clandestine presses they could defy the Catholic authorities and flood the country with their texts. "How many printing presses there be in the world," wrote the Protestant polemicist and martyrologist John Foxe, "so many blockhouses there be against the high castle" of the pope in Rome, "so that either the pope must abolish knowledge and printing or printing at length will root him out." By the century's end, it was the outlawed Catholics, as well as the more radical Protestant dissenters known as Puritans, who were using the clandestine press to propagate their beliefs in the face of official persecution.



# THE ENGLISH BIBLE

Protestant insistence that true belief must be based on the Holy Scriptures alone made the translation and dissemination of the Bible in English and other vernacular languages a matter of utmost urgency. Before the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had not always and everywhere opposed vernacular translations of the Bible, but it generally preferred that the populace encounter the scriptures through the interpretations of its priests, trained to read the Latin translation known as the Vulgate. In times of great conflict this preference hardened into outright prohibition of vernacular translation and into persecution and book burning. The late fourteenth-century English translation associated with John Wycliffe was vehemently attacked as heretical, and its suppression led to an edict banning any unauthorized attempt to translate the Bible into English. Throughout the fifteenth century no authorization was granted.

It was in the face of such fierce opposition that zealous Protestants all over Europe set out to put the Bible into the hands of the general populace, rather than the clergy. A remarkable translation of the New Testament by an English follower of Luther named William Tyndale was printed on the Continent and smuggled into England in 1526; Tyndale's translation of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, followed in 1530. Many copies of these translations were seized and destroyed, as was the translator himself, but the printing press made it extremely difficult for authorities to eradicate books for which there was a passionate demand.

Tyndale's translation of the Bible was completed by an associate, Miles Coverdale, whose rendering of the Psalms proved to be particularly influential. Their joint labor was the basis for the Great Bible (1539), a copy of which was ordered to be placed in every church in the kingdom. Four years later, as Henry VIII sought to halt

the tide of reform, a law was passed forbidding women, craftsmen, servants, and laborers from reading the Bible either in public or in private. Yet at this stage it was already too late to get the scriptures out of the hands of the populace. Though there would be further opposition in years to come—innumerable Bible translations were printed under Edward VI, only to be burned during the reign of his half-sister Mary—the English Bible was a force that could not be suppressed, and it became, in its various forms, the single most important book of the sixteenth century.

The persecution of Protestants under the Queen Mary was indirectly responsible for what would become the most scholarly Protestant English Bible, known as the Geneva Bible. This translation was prepared, with extensive, learned, and often fiercely polemical marginal notes, by English exiles in Calvin's Geneva and widely diffused in England after Elizabeth came to the throne. In addition, Elizabethan church authorities ordered a careful revision of the Great Bible, and this version, known as the Bishops' Bible, was the one read in the churches. The success of the Geneva Bible in particular finally prompted those Elizabethan Catholics who now in turn found themselves in exile to bring out a vernacular translation of their own, the Douay-Rheims version, to counter the Protestant readings and glosses.

After Elizabeth's death, in 1603, King James I and his bishops ordered that a revised translation of the entire Bible be undertaken by a group of forty-seven scholars. The result, published in 1611, was the Authorized Version, more popularly known as the King James Bible. This translation, whose diction and rhythms have had an immense influence on English literature, continues to be read and treasured.

In the passage selected here, 1 Corinthians 13, Tyndale's use of the word *love*, echoed by the Geneva Bible, is set against the Catholic *charity*. The latter term gestures toward the religious doctrine of salvation through actions, against the Protestant insistence on salvation by faith alone. It is a sign of the conservative,

moderate Protestantism of the King James Version that it too opts for *charity*.

# **1 Corinthians 13**

### **From *Tyndale's Translation***

Though I spake with the tongues of men and angels, and yet had no love, I were even as sounding brass: or as a tinkling cymbal. And though I could prophesy, and understood all secrets, and all knowledge: yea, if I had all faith, so that I could move mountains out of their places, and yet had no love, I were nothing. And though I bestowed all my goods to feed the poor, and though I gave my body even that I burned, and yet had no love, it profiteth me nothing.

Love suffereth long, and is courteous. Love envieth not. Love doth not forwardly,<sup>1</sup> swelleth not, dealeth not dishonestly, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh not evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity: but rejoiceth in the truth, suffereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth in all things. Though that prophesying fail, other<sup>2</sup> tongues shall cease, or knowledge vanish away, yet love falleth never away.

For our knowledge is unperfect and our prophesying is unperfect. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is unperfect shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I imagined as a child. But as soon as I was a man, I put away childishness. Now we see in a glass, even in a dark<sup>3</sup> speaking: but then shall we see face to face. Now I know unperfectly: but then shall I know even as I am known. Now abideth faith, hope, and love, even these three: but the chief of these is love.

1525, 1535

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Perversely, evilly. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Or. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Obscure, unclear. "Glass": mirror. The metaphor of indirect, imperfect sight seems to derive from Plato's Allegory of

the Cave (*Republic* 7).[Return to reference 3](#)

### **From *The Geneva Bible***

Though I speak with the tongues of men and Angels, and have not love, I am as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I had the gift of prophecy, and knew all secrets and all knowledge, yea, if I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and had not love, I were nothing. And though I feed the poor with all my goods, and though I give my body, that I be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long: it is bountiful: love envieth not: love doth not boast itself: it is not puffed up: It disdaineth not: it seeketh not her own things: it is not provoked to anger: it thinketh not evil: It rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: It suffereth all things: it believeth all things: it hopeth all things: it endureth all things. Love doth never fall away, though that prophesyings be abolished, or the tongues cease, or knowledge vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be abolished. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly:<sup>4</sup> but then shall we see face to face. Now I know in part: but then shall I know even as I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and love, even these three: but the chiefest of these is love.

1560, 1602

not the eye, I am not of the body, is it there-  
fore not of the bodie?  
17 If the whole bodie were an eye, where were  
the hearing? If the whole were hearing,  
where were the smelling?  
18 But nowe hath God disposed the mem-  
bers every one of them in the bodie at his  
owne pleasure.  
19 For if they were all one member, where  
were the bodie?  
20 But nowe are there many members, yet  
but one bodie.  
21 And the eye cannot say vnto the hande, I  
haue no neede of thee: nor the heade againe  
to the feete, I haue no neede of you.  
22 Yea, much rather those members of the  
bodie, which seeme to be more feeble, are  
necessarie.  
23 And vpon those members of the bodie,  
which we thinke most vnholiest, put wee  
more honestie on: and our vncomely partes  
haue more comelines on.  
24 For our comely partes neede it not: but  
God hath tempered the bodie together, and  
hath giuen the more honour to that part  
which lacked,  
25 Least there should be any diuision in the  
bodie: but that the members should haue  
the same care one for another.  
26 Therefore if one member suffer, all suffer  
with it: if one member bee had in honour,  
all the members reioyce with it.  
27 Nowe ye are the body of Christ, and mem-  
bers of his body.  
28 And God hath ordeyned some in the  
Church: as first Apostles, secondly Prophets,  
thirdly teachers, then them that do mira-  
cles: after that, the giftes of healing, hel-  
pers, gouernours, diuersitie of tongues.  
29 Are all Apostles? are all Prophets? are al  
teachers?  
30 Are al doers of miracles? haue al the giftes  
of healing? do al speake with tongues? do  
all interpret?  
31 But desire you the best giftes, and I will  
yet shew you a more excellent way.

1 Though I speake with the tongues of  
men and Angels, and haue not loue,  
I am as sounding brasse, or a tincke-  
ling cymball.  
2 And though I had the gift of prophecy,  
and knewe all secretes and all knowledge,  
yea, if I had all fapth, so that I could re-  
moue mountaynes and had not loue, I  
were nothing.  
3 And though I feede the poore with all  
my goodes, and though I giue my bodie,  
that I be burned, and haue not loue, it pro-  
fiteth me nothing.  
4 Loue suffereth long: it is bountifull: loue  
enuieth not: loue doeth not boast it selfe: it  
is not puffed vp:  
5 It disdaineth not: it seeketh not her owne

things: it is not prouoked to anger: it  
thinketh not euill:  
6 It reioyceth not in iniquitie, but reioyceth  
in the truth:  
7 It suffereth all things: it beareth all things:  
it hopeth all things: it endureth all things.  
8 Loue doeth neuer fall away, though that  
prophecyngs be abolished, or the tongues  
cease, or knowledge vanish away.  
9 For we knowe in part, and we prophesie  
in part.  
10 But when that which is perfect, is come,  
then that which is in part, shall be abol-  
ished.  
11 When I was a childe, I spake as a childe,  
I vnderstoode as a childe, I thought as a  
childe: but when I became a man, I put a-  
way childish things.  
12 For nowe we see through a glasse darke-  
ly: but then shall we see face to face. Nowe  
I knowe in part: but then shall I knowe as  
I am knowne.  
13 And nowe abideth fapth, hope and loue, e-  
uen these three: but the chiefest of these is  
loue.

1 Follow after loue, and couet spiritual  
giftes, & rather that ye may prophetic.  
2 For he that speaketh a strange tongue,  
speaketh not vnto men, but vnto God: for  
no man heareth him: howbeit in the spirit  
he speaketh secret things.  
3 But hee that propheticeth, speaketh vnto  
men to edifying, and to exhortation, and to  
comfort.  
4 He that speaketh strange language, edifi-  
eth him selfe: but he that propheticeth, edi-  
fiethe the Church.  
5 I would that ye all spake strange langua-  
ges, but rather that ye propheticed: for  
greater is hee that propheticeth, then hee  
that speaketh diuers tongues, except he ex-  
pound it, that the Church may receyue edi-  
fication.  
6 And nowe, brethren, if I come vnto you  
speaking diuers tongues, what shall I pro-  
fit you, except I speake to you, either by  
revelation, or by knowledge, or by pro-  
phesyng, or by doctrine?  
7 Whereouer things without life which giue  
a sound, whether it be a pipe or an harpe,  
except they make a distinction in the sounds,  
howe shall it be knowne what is pypped or  
harped?  
8 And also if the trumpet giue an vncer-  
taine sounde, who shall prepare him selfe to  
battel?  
9 So like wise you, by the tongue, except ye  
utter wordes that haue signification, howe  
shall it be vnderstand what is spoken: for  
ye shall speake in the aire.  
10 There are so many kindes of voyces: as  
it cometh to passe in the world, and none  
of them is donne.

And therefore  
vnto the church  
interiorly, as  
pet th. p. 10  
ought to be  
caution and  
serue to the  
edification of  
the church.  
n. 10. 10. 10.  
seemeth to be  
more wise.

o. Were are  
more careful  
to come againe.

p. Every  
one in his  
office for the  
protection of  
the body.

a. For all  
Churches dis-  
perced through-  
out the  
world are his  
members.  
b. Or, every one  
for his parte.  
c. 1. 1. 1.  
d. As Dea-  
cons.  
e. As Elders.

\* Or, do you  
then desire the  
best giftes.

a. If the man  
giue his  
tongues, and  
I had the use  
thereof, and did  
not bestow  
them to profit  
my neighbor,  
it were no  
thing but vain  
babbling.  
b. Faith is  
here taken for  
the gift of dis-  
tinguishing  
voices, which  
the wise  
man haue,  
as 1. 1. 1. 1.  
and also for  
that faith, call-  
ed intellectuall,  
which belee-  
ueth the mighty  
power of  
Christ, but can  
not apprehend  
Gods word  
through him,  
and this was  
his hate,  
1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1.  
and therefore is  
separated from  
charitie, but the  
faith that iustifieth  
in etern. cannot,  
as 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1.

c. Not that it  
suffereth it selfe  
to be abused,  
but indgeth as  
others by all  
loue and hu-  
manitie.  
d. Which may  
be without the  
senser of Gods  
word.  
e. Knowledge  
it selfe shall be  
perfected in  
world to come,  
and not as  
holiness: but  
the manner of  
knowing and  
teaching shall  
cease, when  
we shall be  
face to face  
with God.  
f. That is, im-  
perfectly.  
g. Or, teach-  
ing of God.  
h. Because it  
suffereth both  
here and in  
the life to come:  
but faith and  
hope apper-  
tains onely to  
this life.

CHAP. XIII.  
The exhortation to loue, commendeth the gift of tongues, and other spi-  
ritual giftes. 1. But chiefly prophecyng. 2. The commendation was  
ment to keepe silence in the Church. 3. And the way to good op-  
eration might be observed in the Church.

a. That is to  
say, the  
word of God  
to the edifica-  
tion of the  
Church.  
b. Vnderstand-  
eth him.  
c. As the spi-  
ritual giftes,  
which he hath  
reuealed.

d. For he may  
speak in  
the Church.  
e. Or, he may  
speak in the  
Church.

f. The prophe-  
cie expoundeth  
that which  
God hath re-  
uealed: and the  
doctrine teach-  
eth that  
which he hath  
giuen vs to  
vnderstand.  
g. Or, thus.

11 Except



**A Page from the Geneva Bible, with Commentary; 1583 Edition.** The Geneva Bible includes elaborate marginal notes, often with a sharply Protestant inflection. Some Elizabethan Catholics may have detected such a perspective in one note's anticipation of a redeemed state "where we shal neither nede scholes nor teachers."

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## Endnotes

- Note 4: By means of a mirror, obscurely. [Return to reference 4](#)

### **From *The Douay-Rheims Version***

If I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels, and have not charity,<sup>5</sup> I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy, and knew all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to be meat<sup>6</sup> for the poor, and if I should deliver my body so that I burn, and have not charity, it doth profit me nothing.

Charity is patient, is benign: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely: is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh not evil: rejoiceth not upon iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth: suffereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, beareth all things. Charity never falleth away: whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed. For in part we know, and in part we prophesy. But when that shall come that is perfect, that shall be made void that is in part. When I was a little one, I spake as a little one, I understood as a little one, I thought as a little one. But when I was made a man, I did away the things that belonged to a little one. We see now by a glass in a dark sort: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know as also I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greater of these is charity.

1582

## **Endnotes**

- Note 5: From Latin *caritas*, "love"; but also carrying the modern sense.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Food (in general).[Return to reference 6](#)

**From *The Authorized (King James) Version***

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

## WILLIAM TYNDALE

Educated at Oxford, William Tyndale (ca. 1490–1536) became a lecturer at Cambridge, where he was associated with a group of humanist scholars who met regularly at the White Horse Inn. Having become convinced that salvation depended on direct access to the word of God, he sought official support to undertake a translation of the Bible into English; but English church authorities, concerned about the spread of heresies, blocked this project. In 1524 Tyndale went to Germany, where, with the financial assistance of wealthy London merchants, he completed a translation of the New Testament the following year. Deeply influenced by the writings of Martin Luther and other reformers, he also wrote a series of doctrinal and polemical works, such as *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), that eloquently express the Protestant hope of salvation through faith alone and reject the principles and practices of Roman Catholicism. Because of their bitter assaults on the Catholic Church, Protestants like Tyndale were often accused of fomenting rebellion. *The Obedience of a Christian Man* attempts to answer the charge by insisting on the subject's absolute secular obligation to obey the king. At Anne Boleyn's urging, Henry VIII read it and is reported to have remarked that "this is a book for me and for all kings to read." Notwithstanding this supposed endorsement, English Catholic authorities during Henry's reign managed to lure Tyndale into a trap and had him strangled and burned in Vilvorde, Flanders.

## ***From* The Obedience of a Christian Man**

## [THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS]

\* \* \* For sin we through fragility never so oft, yet as soon as we repent and come into the right way again, and unto the testament<sup>1</sup> which God hath made in Christ's blood, our sins vanish away as smoke in the wind, and as darkness at the coming of light; or as thou castest a little blood, or milk, into the main sea: insomuch that whosoever goeth about to make satisfaction for his sins to God-ward,<sup>2</sup> saying in his heart, This much have I sinned, this much will I do again; or this-wise will I live to make amends withal; or this will I do, to get heaven withal; the same is an infidel, faithless, and damned in his deed-doing, and hath lost his part in Christ's blood; because he is disobedient unto God's testament, and setteth up another of his own imagination, unto which he will compel God to obey. If we love God, we have a commandment to love our neighbor also, as saith John in his epistle;<sup>3</sup> and if we have offended him, to make him amends; or if we have not wherewith, to ask him forgiveness, and to do and suffer all things for his sake, to win him to God, and to nourish peace and unity. But to God-ward Christ is an everlasting satisfaction, and ever sufficient.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Covenant. "Fragility": frailty, moral weakness.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, in his relationship to God.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20–21).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: To the ecclesiastical commissioners who examined Tyndale's works in 1530, this passage was clearly heretical. One of the commissioners, Sir Thomas More, lambasted it as

constituting an encouragement to sin because it made obtaining forgiveness seem such an easy matter.[Return to reference 4](#)

## [SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION]

Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the Scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense, thou canst not but go out of the way.

Neverthelater,<sup>5</sup> the Scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do; but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth, is ever the literal sense, which thou must seek out diligently: as in the English we borrow words and sentences of one thing, and apply them unto another, and give them new significations. We say, "Let the sea swell and rise as high as he will, yet hath God appointed how far he shall go": meaning that the tyrants shall not do what they would, but that only which God hath appointed them to do. "Look ere thou leap": whose literal sense is, "Do nothing suddenly, or without advisement." "Cut not the bough that thou standest upon": whose literal sense is, "Oppress not the commons"; and is borrowed of hewers. When a thing speedeth<sup>6</sup> not well, we borrow speech, and say, "The bishop hath blessed it"; because that nothing speedeth well that they meddle withal. If the porridge be burned too, or the meat over-roasted, we say, "The bishop hath put his foot in the pot," or "The bishop hath played the cook"; because the bishops burn whom they lust,<sup>7</sup> and whosoever displeaseth them. "He is a pontifical fellow"; that is, proud and stately. "He is popish"; that is, superstitious and faithless.

\* \* \*

Beyond all this, when we have found out the literal sense of the Scripture by the process of the text, or by a like text of another place, then go we, and as the Scripture borroweth similitudes of worldly things, even so we again borrow similitudes or allegories of the Scripture, and apply them to our purposes; which allegories are



no sense of the Scripture, but free things besides the Scripture, and altogether in the liberty of the Spirit. \* \* \* This allegory proveth nothing, neither can do. For it is not the Scripture, but an ensample<sup>8</sup> or a similitude borrowed of the Scripture, to declare a text or a conclusion of the Scripture more expressly, and to root it and grave<sup>9</sup> it in the heart. For a similitude, or an ensample, doth print a thing much deeper in the wits of a man than doth a plain speaking, and leaveth behind him as it were a sting to prick him forward, and to awake him withal. Moreover, if I could not prove with an open<sup>1</sup> text that which the allegory doth express, then were the allegory a thing to be jested at, and of no greater value than a tale of Robin Hood.

1527, 1528

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Nevertheless.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Succeeds, prospers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Whomever they please.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Example.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Engrave.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Plain, clear.[Return to reference 1](#)

# THOMAS MORE

As early as 1521, when he became Henry VIII's "theological councillor," Thomas More had played an important role in the official campaign against Luther. Initially writing doctrinal attacks on Protestantism under the king's name, by 1529, when he became lord chancellor of England, More was immersed in the anti-Protestant campaign in his own right. His extremely energetic contributions included written attacks, in English, on Tyndale's Bible translations and other prohibited books and extended to active persecution of those defined as heretics. A few years earlier, in *Utopia*, More had imagined a state that would tolerate a diversity of religious convictions, but that view had vanished in the face of actual dissent. "I find that breed of men absolutely loathsome," More wrote to his friend Erasmus; "I want to be as hateful to them as anyone can possibly be." During his tenure as lord chancellor, several Protestants were imprisoned in More's own house while he tried to persuade them to renounce views unacceptable to Roman Catholic orthodoxy, and six people were burned at the stake for heresy. If More was willing to kill in defense of the doctrines in which he passionately believed, he also proved willing in the end to die for his beliefs.

More had two principal quarrels with Lutheranism: (1) he objected to Luther's denial that Christians could contribute to their own salvation through their good works, and (2) he objected to Luther's view of biblical interpretation. For Luther, scripture preceded and ideally determined the form of the Church; for More, the Church preceded and determined the interpretation of scripture.

In *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), More raises both issues. Departing from the head-on, bitter attacks of his Latin works, More here adopts a different approach: one of the speakers in his *Dialogue* is a young man on friendly terms with More but infatuated with Protestant ideas; the other speaker is a version of More himself. More's aim seems to be less to attack Luther directly than, by using

wit, to dissuade English men and women from embracing Protestantism.

The selection printed here tackles the fundamental issues of biblical interpretation. Who decides on the meaning of scripture: the Church or individual readers? More's interlocutor is in no doubt: scripture is for the most part entirely plain; individual readers have no trouble interpreting it. More strongly counters such simple faith in the plain and literal sense. Everything, he argues (in a passage playing with the consonance of "goose" and "gloss"), requires a commentary. Even to compare one text with another is to gloss it, and any translation of the Bible is itself inevitably a gloss. If commentary is always necessary, then some stable ground for establishing authority over that commentary also becomes necessary. For More that ground is the Catholic Church, whose authority is established by the many centuries of its continued existence and by the consensus of the Church's councils. More casts the young Lutheran's position as that of a single opinionated reader perversely resisting the "common faith" of Christendom.

## ***From A Dialogue Concerning Heresies***

**From Book 1, Chapter 28: \* \* \* *proving the authority of the old interpreters and the infallible authority of the Church* \* \***

\*

“\* \* \* in somewhat, ye say, ye will believe the Church, but not in all. In anything beside Scripture ye will not, nor in the interpretation of Scripture ye will not; and so, where ye said that ye believe the Church in somewhat, in very deed ye believe the Church in right nought. For wherein will ye believe it, if ye believe it not in the interpretation of Scripture? For as touching the text, ye believe the Scripture self, and not the Church.”

“Methinketh,” quod<sup>1</sup> he, “the text is good enough and plain enough, needing no gloss<sup>2</sup> if it be well considered, and every part compared with other.”

“Hard it were,” quod I, “to find anything so plain that it should need no gloss at all.”

“In faith,” quod he, “they make a gloss to some texts that be as plain as it is that twice two make four.”

“Why,” quod I, “needeth that no gloss at all?”

“I trow<sup>3</sup> so,” quod he. “Or else the devil is on it.”

“Iwis,”<sup>4</sup> quod I, “and yet though ye would believe one that would tell you that twice two ganders made always four geese, yet ye would be advised<sup>5</sup> ere ye believed him that would tell you that twice two geese made always four ganders. For therein might ye be deceived. And him would ye not believe at all, that would tell you that twice two geese would always make four horse.”

“Tut,” quod he, “this is a merry<sup>6</sup> matter. They must be all the twice twain always of one kind. But geese and horse be of diverse.”

“Well,” quod I, “then every man that is neither goose nor horse seeth that there is one gloss yet.<sup>7</sup> But now,” quod I, “the geese and the ganders be both of one kind, and yet twice two geese make not always four ganders.”

“A sweet matter,” quod he. “Ye wot<sup>8</sup> what I mean well enough.”

"I think I do," quod I. "But I think if ye bring it forth it will make another gloss to your text, as plain as your text is; and<sup>9</sup> ye will in all Holy Scripture have no gloss at all. And yet will ye have collation made of one text with another, and show how they may be agreed together<sup>1</sup>—as though all that were no gloss."

"Yea," quod he, "but would you that we should believe the Church if it set a gloss that will in no wise<sup>2</sup> agree with the text, but that it appeareth plainly that the text, well considered, saith clean the contrary?"

"To whom doth that appear," quod I, "so plainly, when it appeareth one to you, and to the whole Church another?"

"Yet if I see it so," quod he, "though holy doctors and all the whole Church would tell me the contrary, methinketh I were no more bounden to believe them all, that the Scripture meaneth as they take it, than if they would all tell me that a thing were white which I see myself is black."

"Of late," quod I, "ye would believe the Church in something. And now not only ye would believe it in nothing, but also whereas God would the Church should be your judge, ye would now be judge over the Church. And ye will by your wit<sup>3</sup> be judge whether the Church, in the understanding of Holy Scripture that God hath written to His Church, do judge aright or err. As for your white and black, never shall it be that ye shall see the thing black that all other shall see white. But ye may be sure that if all other see it white, and ye take it for black, your eyen<sup>4</sup> be sore deceived. For the Church will not, I think, agree to call it other than it seemeth to them. And much marvel were it, if ye should in Holy Scripture see better than the old holy doctors and Christ's whole Church."

\* \* \*

- Note 1: Quoth, said. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Interpretation, commentary.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Believe.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Certainly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Warned.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Frivolous.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Still.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Know.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Whereas.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reconciled.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Way.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Intellect.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Eyes.[Return to reference 4](#)

# JOHN CALVIN

Born to middle-class parents in Picardy, France, and trained as a lawyer, Calvin (1509–1564) was steeped in the Greek and Latin learning associated with Renaissance humanism. He acquired as well a knowledge of Hebrew, so that he was powerfully equipped to respond to the call, from Erasmus and others, for a study of the Bible in its original languages. Drawn increasingly toward Protestantism, Calvin left Catholic France for Switzerland, where he eventually established a stern theocratic rule in Geneva. Through his many writings, he also became the principal theologian of the Protestant Reformation, exercising immense influence in England and Scotland as well as on the Continent. His major work, revised in successive Latin and French editions and widely translated, is *The Institution of Christian Religion*. The passage printed here is from Calvin's famous, troubling account of the doctrine of predestination, according to which God has determined before the foundation of the world whom he will save and whom he will damn, regardless of the merits or defects of these individuals. The good deeds that a virtuous person does in life are a sign of having divine "election" (to be saved), not a means to secure salvation. The translation, closely adhering to the Latin original, is by Thomas Norton (1532–1584), a lawyer and member of Parliament and, with Thomas Sackville, the author of the earliest English tragedy in blank verse, *Gorboduc*—first performed in the same year (1561) that Norton's translation of Calvin appeared.



***From* The Institution of Christian Religion,  
written in Latin by Master John Calvin, and  
translated into English according to the  
author's last edition**

**From *Book 3, Chapter 21 Of the eternal election, whereby  
God hath predestinate some to salvation, and other some to  
destruction***

But now whereas the covenant of life<sup>1</sup> is not equally preached to all men, and with them to whom it is preached it doth not either equally or continually find like place,<sup>2</sup> in this diversity the wondrous depth of the judgment of God appeareth. For neither is it any doubt but that this diversity also serveth the free choice of God's eternal election.<sup>3</sup> If it be evident that it is wrought by the will of God that salvation is freely offered to some, and other some are debarred from coming to it, here by and by<sup>4</sup> arise great and hard questions which cannot otherwise be discussed than if the godly minds have that certainly stablished which they ought to hold<sup>5</sup> concerning election and predestination. This is (as many think) a cumbersome<sup>6</sup> question: because they think nothing to be less reasonable than of the common multitude of men some to be foreordained to salvation, other some to destruction. But how they wrongfully encumber themselves shall afterward be evident by the framing of the matter together.<sup>7</sup> Beside that in the very same darkness which maketh men afraid, not only the profitableness of this doctrine but also the most sweet fruit sheweth forth itself. We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation floweth out of the fountain of the free mercy of God, till his eternal election be known to us, which by this comparison brightly setteth forth the grace of God, that he doth not without difference adopt all into the hope of salvation,<sup>8</sup> but giveth to some that which he denieth to other. How much the ignorance of this principle diminisheth of the glory of God, how much it withdraweth from true humility, it is plain to see.

\* \* \*

They which shut the gates, that none may be bold to come to the tasting of this doctrine, do no less wrong to men than to God:

because neither shall any other thing suffice to humble us as we ought to be, neither shall we otherwise feel from our heart how much we are bound<sup>9</sup> to God. Neither yet is there any otherwhere the upholding stay of sound affiance,<sup>1</sup> as Christ himself teacheth, which to deliver us from all fear, and to make us unvanquishable among so many dangers, ambushes, and deadly battles, promiseth that whatsoever he hath received of<sup>2</sup> his Father to keep shall be safe.<sup>3</sup> Whereof we gather that they shall with continual trembling be miserable, whosoever they be that know not themselves to be the proper possession of God; and therefore that they do very ill provide both for themselves and for all the faithful, which, in being blind at these three profits which we have touched,<sup>4</sup> would wish the whole foundation of our salvation to be quite taken from among us. Moreover, hereby the Church appeareth unto us, which otherwise (as Bernard rightly teacheth)<sup>5</sup> were not possible to be found nor to be known among creatures, because both ways in marvelous wise<sup>6</sup> it lieth hidden: within the bosom of blessed predestination, and within the mass of miserable damnation.

But ere I enter into the matter itself, I must beforehand in two sorts speak to two sorts of men.<sup>7</sup> That the entreating<sup>8</sup> of predestination, whereas of itself it is somewhat cumbersome, is made very doubtful, yea, and dangerous, the curiousness of men is the cause: which can by no stops be refrained from wandering into forbidden compasses,<sup>9</sup> and climbing up on high; which, if it may, will leave to God no secret which it will not search and turn over. Into this boldness and importunacy<sup>1</sup> forasmuch as we commonly see many to run headlong, and among those some that are otherwise not evil men, here is fit occasion to warn them what is in this behalf<sup>2</sup> the due measure of their duty. First, therefore, let them remember that when they inquire upon predestination, they pierce into the secret closets<sup>3</sup> of the wisdom of God: whereinto if any man too carelessly and boldly break in, he shall both not attain wherewith to satisfy his curiousness, and he shall enter into a maze whereof he shall find no way to get out again. For neither is it meet<sup>4</sup> that man

should freely search those things which God hath willed to be hidden in himself, and to turn over from very eternity the height of wisdom,<sup>5</sup> which he willed to be honored and not to be conceived, that by it also he mought<sup>6</sup> be marvelous unto us. Those secrets of his will which he hath determined to be opened unto us, he hath disclosed in his Word: and he hath determined, so far as he foresaw to pertain to us and to be profitable for us.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

There be other which, when they have a will to remedy this evil,<sup>8</sup> do command all mention of predestination to be in a manner buried: at the least they teach men to flee from every manner of questioning thereof as from a rock. Although the moderation of these men be herein worthily to be praised, that they judge that mysteries should be tasted of with such sobriety, yet because they descend too much beneath the mean,<sup>9</sup> they little prevail with the wit of man, which doth not lightly suffer<sup>1</sup> itself to be restrained. Therefore, that in this behalf also we may keep a right end,<sup>2</sup> we must return to the Word of the Lord, in which we have a sure rule of understanding. For the Scripture is the school of the Holy Ghost, in which as nothing is left out which is both necessary and profitable to be known, so nothing is taught but that which is behoveful<sup>3</sup> to learn. Whatsoever therefore is uttered in the Scripture concerning predestination, we must beware that we debar not the faithful from it, lest we should seem either enviously<sup>4</sup> to defraud them of the benefit of their God or to blame and accuse the Holy Ghost, who hath published those things which it is in any wise<sup>5</sup> profitable to be suppressed.

\* \* \*

That, therefore, which the Scripture clearly showeth, we say that God by eternal and unchangeable counsel hath once appointed whom in time to come he would take to salvation, and on the other side whom he would condemn to destruction. This counsel as

touching the elect,<sup>6</sup> we say to be grounded upon his free mercy, without any respect of<sup>7</sup> the worthiness of man: but whom he appointeth to damnation, to them by his judgment (which is indeed just and irreprehensible but also incomprehensible) the entry of life is foreclosed. Now in the elect we set vocation to be the testimony<sup>8</sup> of election; and then justification<sup>9</sup> to be another sign of the manifest showing of it, till they come to glory, wherein is the fulfilling of it. But as by vocation and election God marketh his elect, so by shutting out the reprobate<sup>1</sup> either from the knowledge of his name or from the sanctification of his spirit, he doth as it were by these marks open what judgment abideth<sup>2</sup> for them. \* \* \*

1561

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Promise of salvation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Consideration.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Choice; that is, of whom to save.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Immediately.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Believe. “Stablished”: established.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Troublesome.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, from the following discussion.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: He does not extend the hope of salvation equally to all.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Obligated.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Trust, faith. “Stay”: support.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27–29).

### [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, God's free mercy, God's glory, and our true humility.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In a marvelous fashion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I must first speak in two different ways about two sorts of men.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Treating, discussing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Places.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pertinacity, stubborn persistence.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In this regard.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Inner chambers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Fitting.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: And to search out from eternity itself the sublimest wisdom.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Might. "Conceived": understood.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, God has let us know, in the scriptures, as much about these matters as he foresaw would be useful for us to know.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the audacious attempt to learn more about predestination than scripture teaches.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, fall short of the appropriate middle ground ("mean").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Permit. "Wit": intellect.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Keep within proper bounds.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Useful, advantageous.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Out of jealousy; maliciously.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In any way.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Those predestined to salvation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Regard toward.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Evidence. "Vocation": a calling; a predisposition to the religious life.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The state of being justified; that is, freed from the penalty of sin and accounted righteous by God. The underlying scriptural text for this passage is Romans 8:30: "whom he did

predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Those predestined to damnation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Waits. “Open”: reveal.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ANNE ASKEW

In the 1540s, Henry VIII sought to return the English Church to a basically Catholic doctrinal position, and Protestants were subjected to persecution. The outspoken Protestant Anne Askew (1521–1546) was called in for questioning in 1545; the next year, she was tortured on the rack and burned at the stake. Askew's accounts of her two examinations were smuggled out of England by the reformer John Bale, who published them in Germany (1546–47). The texts were later incorporated into John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563).

Vivid first-person accounts like Askew's were intended to bear witness to the astonishing courage and determination of a small group of ardent Protestants, men and women alike, who were willing to die for their convictions. (When the political tides shifted, there were comparable Catholic figures who endured similar trials for their faith.) Though obedience to authority was instilled in Tudor England and though women in particular were expected to be submissive, social norms could be upended by religious conviction. By the time of the examinations Askew describes, she had already repeatedly defied her Catholic husband, who denounced her publicly and had her arrested. Even when showed the instruments of torture, she refused to name any of her associates or to take back any of her beliefs.

The theological controversies over the meaning of the bread and wine taken in church, the "Eucharist," for which Askew and her companions along with many other Protestants and Catholics were willing to lay down their lives, require some explanation. Catholic doctrine held that if the formula of consecration of the bread and wine was correctly spoken by a properly ordained priest, a miraculous "transubstantiation"—in which the bread or Host became the body of Christ and the wine his blood—would occur, whether or not the priest or the communicant was in a state of grace. Indeed,



some Catholic theologians argued that because the bread had objectively been transformed into the body of God, even a mouse nibbling on a consecrated host would be receiving Christ's flesh. In contrast, Protestants argued that an evil priest would not only be damning himself (as Catholics also believed) but would also be turning the Lord's Supper itself into the Devil's Supper.

## ***From The First Examination of Anne Askew***

To satisfy your expectation, good people (sayeth she), this was my first examination in the year of our Lord 1545, and in the month of March. First, Christopher Dare examined me at Saddlers' Hall, being one of the quest,<sup>1</sup> and asked if I did not believe that the sacrament hanging over the altar<sup>2</sup> was the very body of Christ really. Then I demanded<sup>3</sup> this question of him: wherefore Saint Stephen was stoned to death.<sup>4</sup> And he said he could not tell. Then I answered that no more would I assoil<sup>5</sup> his vain question.

Secondly, he said that there was a woman which did testify that I should read<sup>6</sup> how God was not in temples made with hands. Then I showed him the seventh and the seventeenth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, what Stephen and Paul had said therein.<sup>7</sup> Whereupon he asked me how I took those sentences.<sup>8</sup> I answered that I would not throw pearls among swine,<sup>9</sup> for acorns were good enough.

Thirdly, he asked me wherefore I said that I had rather to read five lines in the Bible than to hear five masses in the temple. I confessed that I said no less. Not for the dispraise of either the Epistle or Gospel, but because the one did greatly edify me and the other<sup>1</sup> nothing at all. As Saint Paul doth witness in the fourteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, whereas he doth say: "If the trumpet giveth an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself to the battle?"

Fourthly, he laid unto my charge that I should say: "If an ill<sup>2</sup> priest ministered, it was the Devil and not God." My answer was that I never spake such thing. But this was my saying: "That whatsoever he were which ministered unto me, his ill conditions could not hurt my faith, but in spirit I received nevertheless the body and blood of Christ." He asked me what I said concerning confession. I answered

him my meaning, which was as Saint James sayeth, that every man ought to knowledge<sup>3</sup> his faults to other, and the one to pray for the other.

Sixthly, he asked me what I said to the king's book.<sup>4</sup> And I answered him that I could say nothing to it, because I never saw it.

Seventhly, he asked me if I had the spirit of God in me. I answered if I had not, I was but reprobate or cast away. Then he said he had sent for a priest to examine me, which was there at hand. The priest asked me what I said to the sacrament of the altar.<sup>5</sup> And required much to know therein my meaning. But I desired him again to hold me excused concerning that matter. None other answer would I make him, because I perceived him a papist.<sup>6</sup>

Eighthly, he asked me if I did not think that private masses did help souls departed.<sup>7</sup> And [I] said it was great idolatry to believe more in them than in the death which Christ died for us. Then they had me thence unto my lord mayor and he examined me, as they had before, and I answered him directly in all things as I answered the quest afore. Besides this, my lord mayor laid one thing unto my charge which was never spoken of<sup>8</sup> me but of them. And that was whether a mouse eating the host received God or no. This question did I never ask, but indeed they asked it of me, whereunto I made them no answer, but smiled. Then the bishop's chancellor rebuked me and said that I was much to blame for uttering the Scriptures. For Saint Paul (he said) forbade women to speak or to talk of the word of God. I answered him that I knew Paul's meaning as well as he, which is, 1 Corinthians 14, that a woman ought not to speak in the congregation by the way of teaching. And then I asked him how many women he had seen go into the pulpit and preach? He said he never saw none. Then I said he ought to find no fault in poor women, except<sup>9</sup> they had offended the law. Then my lord mayor commanded me to ward.<sup>1</sup> I asked him if sureties<sup>2</sup> would not serve me, and he made me short answer, that he would take none.

Then was I had to the Counter,<sup>3</sup> and there remained eleven days, no friend admitted to speak with me. But in the meantime there was

a priest sent to me which said that he was commanded of the bishop to examine me and to give me good counsel, which he did not. But first he asked me for what cause I was put in the Counter. And I told him I could not tell. Then he said it was great pity that I should be there without cause, and concluded that he was very sorry for me.

Secondly, he said it was told him that I should deny the sacrament of the altar. And I answered him again that, that<sup>4</sup> I had said, I had said. Thirdly, he asked me if I were shriven.<sup>5</sup> I told him, so that I might have one of these three, that is to say, Doctor Crome, Sir William, or Huntingdon,<sup>6</sup> I was contented, because I knew them to be men of wisdom. "As for you or any other I will not dispraise, because I know ye not."

Then he said, "I would not have you think but that I or another that shall be brought you shall be as honest as they. For if we were not, ye may be sure, the king would not suffer us to preach."

Then I answered by the saying of Solomon, "By communing with the wise, I may learn wisdom: But by talking with a fool, I shall take scathe"<sup>7</sup> (Proverbs 1).

Fourthly, he asked me, if the host should fall and a beast did eat it, whether the beast did receive God or no. I answered, "Seeing ye have taken the pains to ask this question, I desire you also to assoil<sup>8</sup> it yourself. For I will not do it, because I perceive ye come to tempt me." And he said it was against the order of schools that he which asked the question should answer it. I told him I was but a woman and knew not the course of schools.<sup>9</sup> Fifthly, he asked me if I intended to receive the sacrament at Easter or no. I answered that else I were no Christian woman, and that I did rejoyce that the time was so near at hand. And then he departed thence with many fair words.

\* \* \*

In the meanwhile he commanded his archdeacon to common<sup>1</sup> with me, who said unto me, "Mistress, wherefore are ye accused and

thus troubled here before the bishop?"

To whom I answered again and said, "Sir, ask, I pray you, my accusers, for I know not as yet."

Then took he my book out of my hand and said, "Such books as this hath brought you to the trouble you are in. Beware," sayeth he, "beware, for he that made this book and was the author thereof was an heretic, I warrant you, and burnt in Smithfield."<sup>2</sup>

Then I asked him if he were certain and sure that it was true that<sup>3</sup> he had spoken. And he said he knew well the book was of John Frith's making.<sup>4</sup> Then I asked him if he were not ashamed for to judge of the book before he saw it within, or yet knew the truth thereof. I said also that such unadvised and hasty judgment is token apparent of a very slender wit.<sup>5</sup> Then I opened the book and showed it to him. He said he thought it had been another, for he could find no fault therein. Then I desired him no more to be so unadvisedly rash and swift in judgment, till he thoroughly knew the truth; and so he departed from me. \* \* \*

1546–47, 1563

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Inquest. "Saddlers' Hall": belonging to the guild of saddle makers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The holy wafers were sometimes held in a hanging vessel in the shape of a dove, symbolizing the Holy Ghost.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Asked.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stephen was martyred in Jerusalem after proclaiming that God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands" and accusing the priests of the temple of resisting the Holy Ghost and persecuting the prophets (Acts 7:48–60). "Wherefore": why.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Resolve.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Would teach.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Acts 17:24 repeats the assertion of Acts 7 that God does not dwell in temples built by human hands.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Interpreted those pronouncements.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Matthew 7:6.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "The one . . . the other": that is, the Bible . . . the mass.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Wicked.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Acknowledge. See James 5:16.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for Any Christian Man* (1543), with a preface by the king, sought to put a brake on reformers' "sinister understanding of Scripture, presumption, arrogancy, carnal liberty, and contention," by affirming a number of basically Catholic positions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Eucharist.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Follower of the pope; that is, Roman Catholic.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: By shortening their time in Purgatory.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: By.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Unless.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Imprisonment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Guarantors of good behavior.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A London prison.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: What.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Absolved after confessing to a priest.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Reformist preachers. "So": if.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Injury.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Answer.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Rules governing Catholic theological debates; scholastic procedures.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Converse.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Smithfield Market, just outside the London city walls, was a site of public executions until the 17th century.[Return to](#)

[reference 2](#)

- Note 3: What. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *Concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ*, published in that year, was reissued in revised form in 1546, a few weeks before Askew was executed. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Shallow mind. [Return to reference 5](#)

## JOHN FOXE

When the Catholic Mary Tudor became queen, in 1553, and began to persecute Protestants, John Foxe (1516–1587), who had been a fellow at Oxford University and had served as a tutor to the children of noble families, fled to the Continent. The book for which he became famous was already under way: the first version (Strasbourg, 1554) was in Latin and dealt with the persecutions suffered by the early reformers, particularly John Wycliffe and John Hus. But his book grew and grew as Foxe received from England and Scotland accounts of the persecutions, including hideous tortures, being inflicted on the Protestants there. When Elizabeth came to the throne, in 1558, Foxe returned at once to England, and there he translated his Latin volume, adding to it hundreds of stories of those martyred under Queen Mary (many based on eyewitness testimony, some on hearsay and rumor). The English edition was first published in 1563; often called "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," the work was titled *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perilous days, touching matters of the church, wherein are comprehended and described the great persecution and horrible troubles that have been wrought and practiced by the Romish prelates from the year of Our Lord a thousand to the time now present.*





**The Burning of Thomas Cranmer, from Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.** Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, was arrested, tried for treason, and burned at the stake in front of Balliol College, Oxford, on March 21, 1556. Here he stretches his right hand into the fire, since that hand had been responsible for writing (or at least signing) a recantation of his Protestant faith, an apostasy that he repudiated just before his execution. The image also shows Cranmer crying out, "Lord, receive my spirit," traditionally said to be part of the dying words of the first Christian martyr, Saint Stephen.

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Foxe saw life as an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, Christ and Antichrist. Immediately and enormously popular, his book is a compendium of memoirs, stories, personal letters, court records, and the like, rendering the words, acts, and sufferings of some hundreds of martyrs in graphic—if often fictionalized—detail. The final version of the book (1583) is massive—more than six thousand folio pages, containing four million words. Though vehemently criticized by Catholics for its distortions and errors, it helped shape

for generations of men and women across the broad social spectrum a sense of collective identity and destiny. Apart from fanning the flames of anti-Catholic feeling, Foxe had an immense influence on English nationalism. His stories—from the medieval crypto-Protestants burned for heresy to the Protestant martyrs who passed through the fiery trials of the Marian persecutions—portrayed England as the land of a new chosen people, destined to lead the way toward the kingdom of God on earth. Foxe's second edition (1570) was placed, by government order, in churches throughout England.

## ***From Acts and Monuments***

### **[THE DEATH OF ANNE ASKEW]**

Hitherto we have entreated of<sup>1</sup> this good woman; now it remaineth that we touch somewhat as touching her end and martyrdom. She being born of such stock and kindred that she might have lived in great wealth and prosperity, if she would rather have followed the world than Christ, but now she was so tormented, that she could neither live long in so great distress, neither yet by the adversaries be suffered<sup>2</sup> to die in secret. Wherefore the day of her execution was appointed, and she brought into Smithfield<sup>3</sup> in a chair, because she could not go on her feet, by means<sup>4</sup> of her great torments. When she was brought unto the stake she was tied by the middle with a chain that held up her body. When all things were thus prepared to the fire, the king's letters of pardon were brought, whereby to offer her safeguard of her life if she would recant, which she would neither receive neither<sup>5</sup> yet vouchsafe once to look upon. Shaxton<sup>6</sup> also was there present, who, openly that day recanting his opinions, went about with a long oration to cause her also to turn, against whom she stoutly resisted. Thus she being troubled so many manner of ways, and having passed through so many torments, having now ended the long course of her agonies, being compassed in with flames of fire, as a blessed sacrifice unto God, she slept in the Lord, in anno<sup>7</sup> 1546, leaving behind her a singular example of Christian constancy for all men to follow.

1563

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Treated, discussed. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Allowed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See p. 157, n. 2.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Because.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Nor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nicholas Shaxton, formerly bishop of Salisbury.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The year.[Return to reference 7](#)

## ANNE COOKE BACON

It was while he was a student at Oxford University that John Jewel (1522–1571) became devoted to the Protestant cause. But when, later, he advanced to the position of public orator of Oxford, he had to compose a Latin epistle in honor of the Catholic Mary I, who had just ascended to the throne. Because he retained his allegiance to Protestantism, for his own safety he fled to Frankfurt, returning to England only after the Protestant Elizabeth I was crowned.

*An Apology* is a book Jewel wrote, as bishop of Salisbury, against Catholicism and in defense of the establishment of the English Protestant Church. The section provided here, from the end of the book, maintains that English Protestant Reformers are simply bringing back the values of a historic “old” church, in the face of a viciously corrupt Catholicism. In 1609 Archbishop Richard Bancroft ordered that Jewel’s *Apology* be placed in all churches in the land.

Anne Cooke Bacon (ca. 1527–1610), one of the five daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, was said to be the most learned women in England. Married to Nicholas Bacon, privy councillor and lord keeper of the great seal under Queen Elizabeth, Bacon had two children; her younger son was the philosopher Francis Bacon. Bacon knew Jewel and shared his Protestant beliefs. She translated his Latin work as *An Apology or Answer in Defence of the Church of England* in 1564, rendering his Latin text into spare, accessible, and punchy prose.

## ***From John Jewel's An Apology or Answer in Defence of the Church of England***

We have said that we abandon and detest, as plagues and poisons, all those old heresies which either the sacred scriptures, or the ancient councils, have utterly condemned. That we call home again, as much as ever we can, the right<sup>1</sup> discipline of the Church, which our adversaries have quite brought into a poor and weak case.<sup>2</sup> That we punish all licentiousness of life, and unruliness of manners, by the old and long-continued laws, and with as much sharpness<sup>3</sup> as is convenient, and lieth in our power. That we maintain still the state of kingdoms in the same condition and plight wherein we have found them, without any diminishing or alteration, reserving unto our princes their majesties and worldly pre-eminence, safe and without impairing, to our possible power. That we have so gotten ourselves away from that Church—which they had made a den of thieves,<sup>4</sup> and wherein nothing was in good frame,<sup>5</sup> or once like to the Church of God, and which, themselves confessed, had erred many ways, even as Lot in times past gat him<sup>6</sup> out of Sodom, or Abraham out of Chaldea—not upon a desire of contention, but by the warning of God Himself.<sup>7</sup> And that we have searched out of<sup>8</sup> the Holy Bible, which we are sure cannot deceive, one sure form of religion, and have returned again unto the primitive Church of the ancient fathers and Apostles—that is to say, to the first ground<sup>9</sup> and beginning of things, as unto the very foundations and headsprings of Christ's Church. And in very truth we have not tarried<sup>1</sup>—for, in this matter, the authority or consent of the Tridentine council,<sup>2</sup> wherein we saw nothing done uprightly, nor by good order; where also everybody was sworn to the maintenance of one man;<sup>3</sup> where our prince's ambassadors were contemned;<sup>4</sup> where not one of our divines could be heard, and where parts-taking and ambition was openly and

earnestly procured and wrought—but, as the holy fathers in former time, and as our predecessors have commonly done, we have restored our churches by a provincial convocation,<sup>5</sup> and have clean shaken off, as our duty was, the yoke and tyranny of the bishop of Rome,<sup>6</sup> to whom we were not bound; who also had no manner of thing like, neither to Christ, nor to Peter,<sup>7</sup> nor to an Apostle, nor yet like to any bishop at all. Finally, we say, that we agree amongst ourselves touching<sup>8</sup> the whole judgment and chief substance of Christian religion, and with one mouth, and with one spirit, do worship God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1564

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Correct. “Call home”: call to a virtuous life.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Condition.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Keeness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “That church” is the Catholic Church, here compared to the money changers in the temple, to whom Jesus said: “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matthew 21:13).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Order.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Got himself away.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Not because we desired strife, but because God himself gave the order for it (just as Lot got out of Sodom, Genesis 19:1–16, and Abraham out of Canaan, Genesis 12).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Made diligent efforts to find in.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Original foundation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Delayed our beginning.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Council of Trent (1545–63), held in Trento (Latin name, “Tridentum”) in northern Italy. Called to respond to the

Protestant Reformation, it helped launch the Counter-Reformation.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The pope.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Despised.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An assembly of the clergy, called together to deliberate on church matters.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The pope.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Saint Peter was the first bishop of Rome and thus, according to Catholic tradition, the first pope.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Concerning.[Return to reference 8](#)



# BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

The Protestant attack on Catholic rituals and the demand for worship in the vernacular led during the reign of Edward VI to the preparation of an English liturgical book, authorized to be the official and only text for public worship in England. The work was initiated by the Act of Uniformity in 1549, and its principal architect was Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556). Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, was at first careful to translate and shape the old Latin liturgy into a moderate, occasionally ambiguous compromise between Catholic and Protestant positions. His thorough revision in 1552, however, put the *Book of Common Prayer* much more decisively into the Protestant camp. Banned by the Catholic Mary Tudor, during whose reign Cranmer was executed, the *Book of Common Prayer* was restored, with small revisions, by Elizabeth and has remained the basis of Anglican worship ever since. Cranmer was, among his other accomplishments, a brilliant prose stylist, and the cadences of his book have had a profound influence on the English language. The selection, part of the marriage service, is from the version used during the reign of Elizabeth.

# ***From The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies in the Church of England***

## ***From The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony***

\* \* \* At the day appointed for solemnization of matrimony, the persons to be married shall come into the body of the church with their friends and neighbors. And there the priest shall thus say:

Dearly beloved friends, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of his congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate,<sup>1</sup> instituted of God in paradise, in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church:<sup>2</sup> which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee,<sup>3</sup> and is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among all men,<sup>4</sup> and therefore is not to be enterprised<sup>5</sup> nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for the which matrimony was ordained. One was, the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity: into the which holy estate these two persons present

come now to be joined. Therefore if any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

And also speaking to the persons that shall be married, he shall say:

I require and charge you (as you will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed) that if either of you do know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, that ye confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as be coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful.

At which day of marriage, if any man do allege and declare any impediment why they may not be coupled together in matrimony by God's law or the laws of this realm; and will be bound, and sufficient sureties with him, to the parties, or else put in a caution,<sup>7</sup> to the full value of such charges as the persons to be married doth sustain, to prove his allegation: then the solemnization must be deferred unto such time as the truth be tried. If no impediment be alleged, then shall the curate<sup>8</sup> say unto the man,

N.<sup>9</sup> Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health? And forsaking all other, keep thee only to her, so long as you both shall live?

The man shall answer,  
I will.

Then shall the priest say to the woman,

N. Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honor, and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as you both shall live?

The woman shall answer,  
I will.  
Then shall the minister say,

Who giveth this woman to be married unto this man?

And the minister receiving the woman at her father or friend's hands, shall cause the man to take the woman by the right hand, and so either to give their troth<sup>1</sup> to other. The man first saying:

I N. take thee N. to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us depart,<sup>2</sup> according to God's holy ordinance: and thereto I plight thee my troth.

Then shall they loose their hands, and the woman taking again the man by the right hand shall say:

I N. take thee N. to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us depart, according to God's holy ordinance: and thereto I give thee my troth.

Then shall they again loose their hands, and the man shall give unto the woman a ring, laying the same upon the book with the accustomed duty<sup>3</sup> to the priest and clerk. And the priest taking the ring, shall deliver it unto the man, to put it upon the fourth finger

of the woman's left hand. And the man taught by the priest shall say:

With this ring I thee wed: with my body I thee worship: and with all my worldly goods I thee endow. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then the man leaving the ring upon the fourth finger of the woman's left hand, the minister shall say:

O eternal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life: send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy name; that as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together,<sup>4</sup> so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, whereof this ring given and received is a token and pledge, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according unto thy laws: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Then shall the priest join their right hands together, and say:

Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.<sup>5</sup>

Then shall the minister speak unto the people:

Forasmuch as *N.* and *N.* have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands: I pronounce that they be man and wife together. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

And the minister shall add this blessing:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you: the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace that you may so live together in this life that in the world to come you may have life everlasting. Amen.

1559

## Endnotes

- Note 1: State, condition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Compare Ephesians 5:31–32: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He changed water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1–11).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Undertaken.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The church.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Surety.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A clergyman who has charge of a parish.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Name; that is, the minister inserts the man’s given name here.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Truth; that is, pledge.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Part.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Payment. “Book”: Bible.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In Genesis 24–27.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: From Mark 10:9.[Return to reference 5](#)

# BOOK OF HOMILIES

The first Protestant archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, was responsible in 1547 for the publication of the *Book of Homilies*. Hoping to curb the influence of "ignorant preachers" and fearing the spread of unauthorized beliefs, Cranmer brought together twelve sermons that were, by royal and ecclesiastical decree, to be read over and over, in the order in which they were set forth, in parish churches throughout the realm. The *Homilies*, revised and reissued during the reign of Elizabeth, are political as well as religious documents. As the "Homily Against Disobedience" (added in 1570 in the aftermath of a Catholic uprising the preceding year) amply demonstrates, the intention was to teach the English people "to honor God and to serve their king with all humility and subjection, and godly and honestly to behave themselves toward all men." Artfully crafted and tirelessly reiterated, these sermons would have been familiar to almost everyone in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

## ***From An Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion***

\* \* \* How horrible a sin against God and man rebellion is cannot possibly be expressed according unto the greatness thereof. For he that nameth rebellion nameth not a singular, or one only sin, as is theft, robbery, murder, and suchlike, but he nameth the whole puddle and sink<sup>1</sup> of all sins against God and man, against his prince, his country, his countrymen, his parents, his children, his kinfolds, his friends, and against all men universally: all sins, I say, against God and all men heaped together nameth he that nameth rebellion. For concerning the offense of God's majesty, who seeth not that rebellion riseth first by contempt of God and of his holy ordinances and laws, wherein he so straitly<sup>2</sup> commandeth obedience, forbiddeth disobedience and rebellion?<sup>3</sup> And besides the dishonor done by rebels unto God's holy name by their breaking of the oath made to their prince with the attestation of God's name and calling of his majesty to witness, who heareth not the horrible oaths and blasphemies of God's holy name that are used daily amongst rebels, that is either amongst them or heareth the truth of their behavior? Who knoweth not that rebels do not only themselves leave all works necessary to be done upon workdays undone, whiles they accomplish their abominable work of rebellion, and do compel others that would gladly be well occupied to do the same, but also how rebels do not only leave the sabbath day of the Lord unsanctified, the temple and church of the Lord unresorted unto, but also do by their works of wickedness most horribly profane and pollute the sabbath day, serving Satan, and by doing of his work making it the devil's day instead of the Lord's day? Besides that they compel good men that would gladly serve the Lord assembling in his temple and church upon his day, as becometh the Lord's servants, to assemble and meet armed in the field to resist the fury<sup>4</sup> of such rebels. Yea,



and many rebels, lest they should leave any part of God's commandments in the first table of his law<sup>5</sup> unbroken or any sin against God undone, do make rebellion for the maintenance of their images and idols, and of their idolatry committed or to be committed by them, and, in despite of God, cut and tear in sunder his Holy Word, and tread it under their feet, as of late ye know was done.<sup>6</sup>

As concerning the second table of God's law, and all sins that may be committed against man, who seeth not that they be all contained in rebellion? For first, the rebels do not only dishonor their prince, the parent of their country, but also do dishonor and shame their natural parents, if they have any, do shame their kindred and friends, disherit<sup>7</sup> and undo forever their children and heirs. Thefts, robberies, and murders, which of all sins are most loathed of most men, are in no men so much, nor so perniciously and mischievously, as in rebels. For the most arrant thieves and cruelest murderers that ever were, so long as they refrain from rebellion, as they are not many in number, so spreadeth their wickedness and damnation unto a few: they spoil<sup>8</sup> but a few, they shed the blood but of few in comparison. But rebels are the cause of infinite robberies and murders of great multitudes, and of those also whom they should defend from the spoil and violence of other; and, as rebels are many in number, so doth their wickedness and damnation spread itself unto many. And if whoredom and adultery amongst such persons as are agreeable to such wickedness are (as they indeed be) most damnable, what are the forcible oppressions<sup>9</sup> of matrons and men's wives, and the violating and deflowering of virgins and maids, which are most rife with rebels; how horrible and damnable, think you, are they? Now, besides that rebels, by breach of their faith given and oath made to their prince, be guilty of most damnable perjury, it is wondrous to see what false colors and feigned causes, by slanderous lies made upon their prince and the counselors, rebels will devise to cloak their rebellion withal, which is the worst and most damnable of all false-witness-bearing that may be possible. For what should I speak of coveting or desiring of other men's wives, houses, lands,

goods, and servants in rebels, who by their wills would leave unto no man anything of his own?

Thus you see that all God's laws are by rebels violated and broken, and that all sins possible to be committed against God or man be contained in rebellion: which sins, if a man list<sup>1</sup> to name by the accustomed names of the seven capital or deadly sins, as pride, envy, wrath, covetousness, sloth, gluttony, and lechery, he shall find them all in rebellion, and amongst rebels. For first, as ambition and desire to be aloft, which is the property of pride, stirreth up many men's minds to rebellion, so cometh it of a luciferian pride and presumption that a few rebellious subjects should set themselves up against the majesty of their prince, against the wisdom of the counselors, against the power and force of all nobility, and the faithful subjects and people of the whole realm. As for envy, wrath, murder, and desire of blood, and covetousness of other men's goods, lands, and livings, they are the inseparable accidents of all rebels, and peculiar properties<sup>2</sup> that do usually stir up wicked men unto rebellion. Now such as by riotousness, gluttony, drunkenness, excess of apparel, and unthrifty<sup>3</sup> games have wasted their own goods unthriftily, the same are most apt unto and most desirous of rebellion, whereby they trust to come by other men's goods unlawfully and violently. And where other gluttons and drunkards take too much of such meats and drinks as are served to tables, rebels waste and consume in short space all corn in barns, fields, or elsewhere, whole graners,<sup>4</sup> whole storehouses, whole cellars, devour whole flocks of sheep, whole droves of oxen and kine.<sup>5</sup> And as rebels that are married, leaving their own wives at home, do most ungraciously, so much more do unmarried men than any stallions or horses, being now by rebellion set at liberty from correction of laws which bridled them before, which abuse by force other men's wives and daughters, and ravish virgins and maidens most shamefully, abominably, and damnably. Thus all sins, by all names that sins may be named, and by all means that all sins may be committed and wrought, do all wholly upon heaps follow rebellion, and are to be found all together amongst rebels.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Cesspool.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Strictly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Romans 13:1–2: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Violence.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first of the two “tables” (tablets) of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:22): those on the first table specify our obligations to God, those on the second (see the following paragraph) our obligations to one another.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: These wicked deeds were purportedly perpetrated by the Catholic rebels who, in the winter of 1569, rose in the north of England against Queen Elizabeth and in support of her Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots (who had been imprisoned in England since May 1568).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Disinherit.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Despoil, plunder.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Rapes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Wants.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Distinctive characteristics. “Inseparable accidents”: unavoidable accompaniments.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dissolute.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Granaries. “Corn”: grain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cattle.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **ANNE VAUGHAN LOCKE**

Born to parents who served in the court of Henry VIII, Anne Vaughan Locke (ca. 1530–ca. 1590) received a privileged education in languages and became deeply involved in the Protestant Reformation, living among English exiles in Calvinist Geneva during the reign of Mary I and later exerting her influence in England, in part by translating religious works and writing her own. Her verse paraphrase of Psalm 51 is arguably the first English sonnet sequence as well as an early example of the Protestant devotional lyric that led to the religious poetry of John Donne and George Herbert.

# ***From A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner***

## ***Sonnet 4***

Have mercy, Lord, have mercy: for I know  
How much I need thy mercy in this case.  
The horror of my guilt doth daily grow,  
And, growing, wears<sup>1</sup> my feeble hope of grace.  
5 I feel and suffer in my thrallèd<sup>2</sup> breast  
Secret remorse and gnawing of my heart.  
I feel my sin, my sin that hath oppressed  
My soul with sorrow and surmounting smart.<sup>3</sup>  
Draw me to mercy: for so oft as I  
Presume to mercy to direct my sight,  
10 My Chaos<sup>4</sup> and my heap of sin doth lie  
Between me and thy mercy's shining light.  
Whatever way I gaze about for grace,  
My filth and fault are ever in my face.<sup>o</sup>

1560

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: That is, wears down, weakens.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Enthralled, enslaved (to sin).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Exceeding pain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Alluding to the "great gulf" (in Latin, *chaos*) stretching between heaven and hell; see Luke 16:26. In classical mythology, Chaos is vaguely personified as a primordial deity.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **Notes**

- °: *sight*[Return to reference °](#)

## RICHARD HOOKER

Out of the long and bitter controversy over the government of the church in sixteenth-century England emerged one literary masterpiece. It is a work in eight books called *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (that is, the governmental system of the church). The author was the Oxford-educated Richard Hooker (1554–1600), a scholar and minister. In 1585 Hooker was master of the Temple, a royal church in London; one of his subordinates was a Puritan intellectual named Walter Travers (1548–1635). Between them a contentious debate developed on the question of how the Church should be governed. The Puritan view was that no organization or authority in the church was valid unless it was based clearly and specifically on the Bible; the whole hierarchical system of the English Church, with its deacons, priests, bishops, and archbishops, was accordingly wrong, along with its liturgy and most of its rituals. The position Hooker undertook to defend was that the scriptures, or divine revelation, are not the only guide given to Christians for organizing and administering the Church. Another guide is the law of nature, also divinely given, but able to be discerned by the use of human reason unassisted by revelation.

In the book that grew out of his controversy with Travers, Hooker explained how the law of nature affords principles that justify the existing organization and practices of the English Church. Book 1 of *Ecclesiastical Polity* deals with law in general and the several kinds of law; it pictures the entire universe, and also human society, as founded on reason and operating under various natural and divine laws. Book 2 deals with the nature, authority, and adequacy of scripture. Books 3 to 5 explain and defend the rites, ceremonies, worship, and government of the English Church. Books 6, 7, and 8 deal with various embodiments of authority, legitimate and illegitimate—elders, bishops, kings, and popes.

Hooker was a close and effective reasoner; avoiding the fiery invective or impassioned rhetoric that characterized most disputants of his time, he wrote in a calm, reasonable, and judicious manner. His defense of existing ecclesiastical practices went back to fundamental principles, to a philosophy of nature and our place in it, to the subordination of the individual to a larger community and to God. It is this worldview, set forth in what is perhaps the period's most sonorous and quietly elegant prose, that makes *Ecclesiastical Polity* of enduring interest.



## ***From Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity***

### From *Book 1, Chapter 3*

## [ON THE SEVERAL KINDS OF LAW, AND ON THE NATURAL LAW]

I am not ignorant that by law eternal the learned for the most part do understand the order, not which God hath eternally purposed himself in all his works to observe, but rather that which with himself he hath set down as expedient to be kept by all his creatures, according to the several<sup>1</sup> conditions wherewith he hath indued them. They who thus are accustomed to speak apply the name of *Law* unto that only rule of working which superior authority imposeth; whereas we, somewhat more enlarging the sense thereof, term any kind of rule or canon whereby actions are framed<sup>2</sup> a law. Now that law, which as it is laid up in the bosom of God they call *eternal*, receiveth according unto the different kinds of things which are subject unto it different and sundry kinds of names. That part of it which ordereth natural agents,<sup>3</sup> we call usually *nature's* law; that which angels do clearly behold, and without any swerving observe, is a law *celestial* and heavenly; the law of *reason* that which bindeth creatures reasonable in this world, and with which by reason they may most plainly perceive themselves bound; that which bindeth them, and is not known but by special revelation from God, *divine* law; *human* law, that which, out of the law either of reason or of God, men probably<sup>4</sup> gathering to be expedient, they make it a law. All things, therefore, which are as they ought to be, are conformed unto *this second law eternal*, and even those things which to this *eternal* law are not conformable are notwithstanding in some sort ordered by *the first eternal law*. For what good or evil is there under the sun, what action correspondent to or repugnant unto the law which God hath imposed upon his creatures, but in or upon it God doth work according to the law which himself hath eternally purposed to keep, that is to say, the *first law eternal*? So that a

twofold law eternal being thus made, it is not hard to conceive how they both take place in all things. Wherefore to come to the law of nature, albeit thereby we sometimes mean that manner of working which God hath set for each created thing to keep, yet forasmuch as those things are termed most properly natural agents, which keep the law of their kind<sup>5</sup> unwittingly, as the heavens and elements of the world, which can do no otherwise than they do, and forasmuch as we give unto intellectual natures the name of voluntary agents, that so we may distinguish them from the other, expedient it will be that we sever<sup>6</sup> the law of nature observed by the one from that which the other is tied unto. Touching the former, their strict keeping of one tenure statute<sup>7</sup> and law is spoken of by all, but hath in it more than men have as yet attained to know, or perhaps ever shall attain, seeing the travail of wading herein is given of God to the sons of men, that perceiving how much the least thing in the world hath in it more than the wisest are able to reach unto, they may by this means learn humility. Moses in describing the work of creation attributeth speech unto God: "God said, Let there be light, Let there be a firmament; Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place; Let the earth bring forth; Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven."<sup>8</sup> Was this only the intent of Moses, to signify the greatness of God's power by the easiness of his accomplishing such effects without travail, pain, or labor? Surely it seemeth that Moses had herein besides this a further purpose: namely, first to teach that God did not work as a necessary, but a voluntary, agent, intending beforehand and decreeing with himself that which did outwardly proceed from him; secondly, to show that God did then institute a law natural to be observed by creatures, and therefore according to the manner of laws, the institution thereof is described as being established by solemn injunction. His commanding those things to be which are, and to be in such sort as they are, to keep that tenure and course which they do, importeth<sup>9</sup> the establishment of nature's law. This world's first creation, and the preservation since of things created, what is it but only so far forth a manifestation by execution, what the eternal law of God is

concerning things natural? And as it cometh to pass in a kingdom rightly ordered, that after a law is once published, it presently<sup>1</sup> takes effect far and wide, all states<sup>2</sup> framing themselves thereunto; even so let us think it fareth<sup>3</sup> in the natural course of the world: since the time that God did first proclaim the edicts of his law upon it, heaven and earth have hearkened unto his voice, and their labor hath been to do his will. He made a law for the rain. He gave his decree unto the sea, that the waters should not pass his commandment.<sup>4</sup>

Now if Nature should intermit<sup>5</sup> her course and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted<sup>6</sup> motions and by irregular volubility<sup>7</sup> turn themselves any way as it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand<sup>8</sup> and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated<sup>9</sup> of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief, what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay<sup>1</sup> of the whole world? Notwithstanding with nature it cometh sometimes to pass as with art. Let Phidias<sup>2</sup> have rude<sup>3</sup> and obstinate stuff to carve, though his art do that<sup>4</sup> it should, his work will lack that beauty which otherwise in fitter matter it might have had. He that striketh an instrument with skill may cause notwithstanding a very unpleasant sound, if the string whereon he striketh chance to be incapable of harmony. In the matter whereof natural things consist, that of Theophrastus taketh place:<sup>5</sup> "much of it is oftentimes

such as will by no means yield to receive that impression which were best and most perfect." Which defect in the matter of things natural, they who gave themselves unto the contemplation of nature among the heathen observed often; but the true original cause thereof divine malediction,<sup>6</sup> laid for the sin of man upon those creatures which God had made for the use of man. This, being an article of that saving truth which God hath revealed unto his church, was above the reach of their<sup>7</sup> merely natural<sup>8</sup> capacity and understanding. But howsoever these swervings<sup>9</sup> are now and then incident into<sup>1</sup> the course of nature, nevertheless so constantly the laws of nature are by natural agents observed, that no man denieth but those things which nature worketh are wrought either always or for the most part after one and the same manner. \* \* \*

1593

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Different.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Directed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Referring to the mineral, vegetable, and animal agents, traditionally distinguished from human agents by their lack of rationality.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Plausibly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Species, nature.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Distinguish.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Decree establishing the domains of the various creatures and the conditions of service by which they hold these domains.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14. In this period, Moses was generally assumed to be the author of the book of Genesis.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Signifies, implies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Immediately.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Classes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Happens.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Proverbs 8:29. “Pass”: overstep.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Interrupt.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Accustomed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Revolution, rotation. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Stand still.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Deprived.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mainstay, support.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The greatest of ancient Greek sculptors (5th century B.C.E.).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rough, undressed (that is, unprepared).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: What.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
 

That is, “that remark of Theophrastus carries weight.” The Greek philosopher Theophrastus (ca. 370–ca. 285 B.C.E.), Aristotle’s pupil and successor, became best-known among postclassical readers for his *characters*, thirty sketches of different moral types; the quotation is from his *Metaphysics*.  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: God’s curse in Eden, which fell not only on sinful humankind but on the earth as well.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the ancient pagans’.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, unaided by revelation.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Deviations.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Likely to happen in.[Return to reference 1](#)

## **ROBERT SOUTHWELL**

Robert Southwell (1561–1595), the younger son of a prominent Roman Catholic family, went to the English seminary for Catholics at Douai, France, in his youth, and then to Rome, where he entered the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). In 1586 he returned to England to minister to English Catholics. His mission was dangerous because of laws that proscribed Roman Catholic worship and banished priests; in 1592 he was apprehended, imprisoned, tortured, and, three years later, executed as a traitor in the usual grisly manner—by being hanged, disemboweled, and then beheaded. Southwell wrote a good deal of religious prose and verse; the most famous of his lyrics is “The Burning Babe.” Ben Jonson told his friend William Drummond of Hawthornden that if he had written “The Burning Babe” he would have been content to destroy many of his own poems.

## The Burning Babe

As I in hoary winter's night stood shivering in the  
snow,  
Surprised I was with sudden heat which made my  
heart to glow;  
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was  
near,  
A pretty babe all burning bright did in the air appear;  
Who, scorched with excessive heat, such floods of  
5 tears did shed  
As though his floods should quench his flames which  
with his tears were fed.  
"Alas," quoth he, "but newly born in fiery heats I fry,  
o  
Yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel my  
fire but I!  
My faultless breast the furnace is, the fuel wounding  
thorns,  
10 Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke, the ashes  
shame and scorns;  
The fuel justice layeth on, and mercy blows the  
coals,  
The metal in this furnace wrought are men's defiled  
souls,  
For which, as now on fire I am to work them to their  
good,  
So will I melt into a bath to wash them in my blood."  
With this he vanished out of sight and swiftly shrunk  
15 away,  
And straight<sup>1</sup> I callèd unto mind that it was  
Christmas day.



## Endnotes

- Note 1: Straightaway, immediately.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *burn*[Return to reference °](#)

## ROGER ASCHAM

### 1515–1568

When she heard of the death of her former tutor and Latin secretary, Queen Elizabeth is said to have exclaimed, "I would rather have cast ten thousand pounds in the sea than parted from my Ascham."

Educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, one of the great centers of humanism in England, Roger Ascham passionately believed in the study of the Greek and Latin classics, not merely for erudition and aesthetic pleasure but for guidance in moral values and in political activity. He both corresponded widely in Latin with learned men on the Continent and was eager to influence his countrymen, whether they read Latin or not. His important books written in English include *Toxophilus*, a dialogue in praise of archery with the traditional English longbow, and *A Report and Discourse of the State of Germany*, based on his experience as secretary to the English ambassador there in 1550–53. His most famous work in English was *The Schoolmaster*, published two years after his death.

*The Schoolmaster* eloquently opposes the widespread use of corporal punishment in schools. Instilling a love of learning, rather than a fear of physical pain, inspires young children to excel in their studies. Ascham advocates "double translation" as the most effective way of acquiring a sound Latin style: students would translate a passage from Latin to English and then, without consulting the Latin original, translate the English back into Latin; they would then compare their version with the author's. The approach thus

downplays rote learning of the rules of grammar and emphasizes instead a sense of style.

Misused, Ascham's method (which included discouraging students from speaking Latin, for fear that engagement with everyday life would corrupt the linguistic purity of classical antiquity) could, like so many other educational reforms, become torturous. But his ultimate goal was not to make students into gifted imitators but to fashion them ethically and aesthetically. Deeply fearing what he called the "divorce between the tongue and the heart," he believed that education should teach a person to join language and values in a way that achieved what *The Schoolmaster* calls "decorum." Ascham's most despairing vision of a society without this moral decorum comes in his account of a brief trip to Italy, which he viewed as an evil seductress, luring unwitting Englishmen away from their ethical and religious values.

***From The Schoolmaster***<sup>\*</sup>—

From *The First Book for the Youth*

## Endnotes

- Note \*: Another excerpt from *The Schoolmaster*—on Ascham's last conversation with Lady Jane Grey—is found on pp. 210–11. [Return to reference \\*](#)

## [TEACHING LATIN]

There is a way, touched in the first book of Cicero *De oratore*,<sup>1</sup> which, wisely brought into schools, truly taught, and constantly used, would not only take wholly away this butcherly fear in making of Latins<sup>2</sup> but would also, with ease and pleasure and in short time, as I know by good experience, work a true choice and placing of words, a right ordering of sentences, an easy understanding of the tongue, a readiness to speak, a facility to write, a true judgment both of his own and other men's doings, what tongue soever he doth use.

The way is this. After the three concordances<sup>3</sup> learned, as I touched before, let the master read unto him the epistles of Cicero gathered together and chosen out by Sturmius<sup>4</sup> for the capacity of children.

First, let him teach the child, cheerfully and plainly, the cause and matter<sup>5</sup> of the letter; then, let him construe<sup>6</sup> it into English so oft as the child may easily carry away the understanding of it; lastly, parse<sup>7</sup> it over perfectly. This done thus, let the child, by and by,<sup>8</sup> both construe and parse it over again so that it may appear that the child doubteth in nothing that his master taught him before. After this, the child must take a paper book and, sitting in some place where no man shall prompt him, by himself, let him translate into English his former lesson. Then, showing it to his master, let the master take from him his Latin book, and, pausing an hour at the least, then let the child translate his own English into Latin again in another paper book. When the child bringeth it turned into Latin, the master must compare it with Tully's<sup>9</sup> book and lay them both together, and where the child doth well, either in choosing or true placing of Tully's words, let the master praise him and say, "Here ye do well." For I assure you, there is no such whetstone to sharpen a good wit and encourage a will to learning as is praise.

But if the child miss, either in forgetting a word, or in changing a good with a worse, or misordering the sentence, I would not have the master either frown or chide with him, if the child have done his diligence and used no truantship therein. For I know by good experience that a child shall take more profit of two faults gently warned of than of four things rightly hit. For then the master shall have good occasion to say unto him:

*M[omen]*,<sup>1</sup> Tully would have used such a word, not this; Tully would have placed this word here, not there; would have used this case, this number, this person, this degree,<sup>2</sup> this gender; he would have used this mood, this tense, this simple rather than this compound; this adverb here, not there; he would have ended the sentence with this verb, not with that noun or participle, etc.

In these few lines I have wrapped up the most tedious part of grammar and also the ground of almost all the rules that are so busily taught by the master, and so hardly<sup>3</sup> learned by the scholar, in all common schools, which after this sort<sup>4</sup> the master shall teach without all error, and the scholar shall learn without great pain, the master being led by so sure a guide, and the scholar being brought into so plain and easy a way. And therefore we do not contemn<sup>5</sup> rules, but we gladly teach rules, and teach them more plainly, sensibly, and orderly than they be commonly taught in common schools. For when the master shall compare Tully's book with his scholar's translation, let the master, at the first, lead and teach his scholar to join the rules of his grammar book with the examples of his present lesson, until the scholar by himself be able to fetch out of his grammar every rule for every example, so as the grammar book be ever in the scholar's hand and also used of him, as a dictionary, for every present use. This is a lively and perfect way of teaching of rules, where the common way, used in common schools, to read the grammar alone by itself, is tedious for the master, hard for the scholar, cold and uncomfortable to them both.

Let your scholar be never afraid to ask you any doubt,<sup>6</sup> but use discreetly the best allurements ye can to encourage him to the same, lest his overmuch fearing of you drive him to seek some disorderly shift,<sup>7</sup> as to seek to be helped by some other book, or to be prompted by some other scholar, and so go about to beguile you much, and himself more.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Cicero's *On the Orator* (55 B.C.E.) consists of three parts, or books.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, in Latin composition.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Agreement of noun and adjective, verb and noun, relative with antecedent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Johannes Sturm (1507–1589), German scholar and educator.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Occasion and content.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Translate.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Give a grammatical analysis.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Immediately.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Common English name for Marcus Tullius Cicero.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Name (Latin). The teacher will substitute the child's name.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The level of intensity of an adjective or adverb.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With such difficulty.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Method. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Disdain.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Question.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Subterfuge.[Return to reference 7](#)



## [THE ITALIANATE ENGLISHMAN]

\* \* \* But I am afraid that overmany of our travelers into Italy do not eschew the way to Circe's court but go<sup>8</sup> and ride and run and fly thither; they make great haste to come to her; they make great suit<sup>9</sup> to serve her; yea, I could point out some with my finger that never had<sup>1</sup> gone out of England but only to serve Circe in Italy. Vanity and vice and any license to ill-living in England was counted stale and rude<sup>2</sup> unto them. And so, being mules and horses before they went, returned very<sup>3</sup> swine and asses home again; yet everywhere very foxes with subtle and busy heads and, where they may, very wolves with cruel malicious hearts. A marvelous monster which for filthiness of living, for dullness to learning himself, for wiliness in dealing with others, for malice in hurting without cause, should carry at once in one body the belly of a swine, the head of an ass, the brain of a fox, the womb of a wolf. If you think we judge amiss and write too sore against you, hear what the Italian saith of the Englishman, what the master reporteth of the scholar, who uttereth plainly what is taught by him and what is learned by you, saying, *Inglese italianato è un diavolo incarnato*; that is to say, "You remain men in shape and fashion but become devils in life and condition." This is not the opinion of one, for some private spite, but the judgment of all in a common proverb which riseth of that learning and those manners which you gather in Italy—a good schoolhouse of wholesome doctrine, and worthy masters of commendable scholars, where the master had rather defame himself for his teaching than not shame his scholar for his learning: a good nature of the master, and fair conditions of the scholars. And now choose you, you Italian Englishmen, whether you will be angry with us for calling you monsters, or with the Italians for calling you devils, or else with your own selves, that take so much pains and go so far to make yourselves both. If some yet do not well understand what is an Englishman Italianated, I will plainly tell him: he that by living and traveling in Italy bringeth home into England out of Italy the religion,

the learning, the policy,<sup>4</sup> the experience, the manners<sup>5</sup> of Italy. That is to say, for religion, papistry<sup>6</sup> or worse; for learning, less, commonly, than they carried out with them; for policy, a factious heart, a discoursing head, a mind to meddle in all men's matters; for experience, plenty of new mischiefs never known in England before; for manners, variety of vanities and change of filthy living. These be the enchantments of Circe brought out of Italy to mar men's manners in England: much by example of ill life but more by precepts of fond<sup>7</sup> books, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the sooner to corrupt honest manners, dedicated overboldly to virtuous and honorable personages, the easilier to beguile simple and innocent wits. It is pity that those which have authority and charge to allow and disallow books to be printed be no more circumspect herein than they are. Ten sermons at Paul's Cross<sup>8</sup> do not so much good for moving men to true doctrine as one of those books do harm with enticing men to ill-living. Yea, I say farther, those books tend not so much to corrupt honest living as they do to subvert true religion. More papists be made by your merry books of Italy than by your earnest books of Louvain.<sup>9</sup> And because our great physicians do wink at the matter and make no count<sup>1</sup> of this sore, I, though not admitted one of their fellowship, yet having been many years a prentice to God's true religion, and trust to continue a poor journeyman therein all days of my life, for the duty I owe and love I bear both to true doctrine and honest living, though I have no authority to amend the sore myself, yet I will declare my good will to discover<sup>2</sup> the sore to others.

St. Paul saith that sects and ill opinions be the works of the flesh and fruits of sin.<sup>3</sup> This is spoken no more truly for the doctrine than sensibly for the reason. And why? For ill-doings breed ill-thinkings, and of corrupted manners spring perverted judgments. And how? There be in man two special<sup>4</sup> things: man's will, man's mind. Where will inclineth to goodness the mind is bent to truth; where will is carried from goodness to vanity the mind is soon drawn from truth

to false opinion. And so the readiest way to entangle the mind with false doctrine is first to entice the will to wanton living. Therefore, when the busy and open<sup>5</sup> papists abroad could not by their contentious books turn men in England fast enough from truth and right judgment in doctrine, then the subtle<sup>6</sup> and secret papists at home procured bawdy books to be translated out of the Italian tongue, whereby overmany young wills and wits, allured to wantonness, do now boldly contemn all severe books that sound to<sup>7</sup> honesty and godliness. In our forefathers' time, when papistry as a standing pool covered and overflowed all England, few books were read in our tongue, saving certain books of chivalry, as they said, for pastime and pleasure, which, as some say, were made in monasteries by idle monks or wanton canons; as one for example, *Morte Darthur*,<sup>8</sup> the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special points—in open manslaughter and bold bawdry; in which book those be counted the noblest knights that do kill most men without any quarrel and commit foulest adulteries by subtlest shifts:<sup>9</sup> as Sir Lancelot with the wife of King Arthur his master, Sir Tristram with the wife of King Mark his uncle, Sir Lamorak with the wife of King Lot that was his own aunt. This is good stuff for wise men to laugh at or honest men to take pleasure at. Yet I know when God's Bible was banished the court and *Morte Darthur* received into the prince's chamber.<sup>1</sup> \* \* \*

1570

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Walk. Circe was an enchantress in Homer's *Odyssey* who changed men into swine and other animals.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Petition.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Would never have.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unrefined.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: True.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Politics.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Morals.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Catholicism.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Foolish.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An outdoor pulpit near St. Paul's Cathedral where important ministers preached.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Town in Belgium noted in the 16th century for its Catholic university, especially the theological faculty.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Account. "Wink at": shut their eyes to, connive at.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reveal.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Galatians 5:19–21.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, specific to the human species.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Meddlesome and openly declared.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deceitful.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Treat of. "Severe": serious.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir Thomas Malory's collection of Arthurian romances.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Stratagems.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Referring to the prohibition of the Protestant translations of the Bible during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary I (1553–58).[Return to reference 1](#)

## SIR THOMAS HOBY

### 1530–1566

One of the most influential books of the Renaissance was *Il Cortegiano* (The Courtier), published in 1528 in Italian by Count Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) and soon translated into all the major European languages. The English translation, by the humanist and diplomat Sir Thomas Hoby, was not published until 1561 but had been written earlier, probably during the reign of Queen Mary (1553–58), when Hoby was living abroad as a Protestant exile.

Castiglione's book describes, by means of four fictitious dialogues—on successive evenings, among actual men and women living at the court of the duke of Urbino in 1504–08—the qualities of the ideal courtier. Supreme among these qualities is grace, the mysterious attribute that renders a person's speech and actions not merely impressive or accomplished but persuasive, touching, and beautiful. Though few people are born with grace, it is possible to acquire it by the mastery of certain techniques. In a famous passage, one of *The Courtier's* speakers, Count Lodovico Canossa, defines the most important of these techniques as *sprezzatura*, or, as Hoby translates it, "recklessness." *Sprezzatura* is in fact close to the opposite of recklessness, as we ordinarily understand the term; it is a device for manipulating appearances and masking all the tedious memorizing of lines and secret rehearsals that underlie successful social performances. The paradox here is still evident in many social settings: success requires the painstaking mastery of complex codes

of behavior, yet there is no surer recipe for failure than to be seen to be trying too hard.

The most famous passage in *The Courtier* presents an elegant version of an ideal of love that ultimately derives from Plato's *Symposium*. In the ancient Greek original, dating from the late fourth century B.C.E., that ideal is principally focused on the love of men for beautiful boys; in Castiglione's dialogue, the poet and scholar Peter Bembo recasts it as both heterosexual and Christian. Bembo declares that love is not the mere gratification of the senses but is the yearning of the soul after beauty, which is finally identical with the eternal good, as perceived by such holy visionaries as Saint Francis and Saint Paul. Love properly understood is, therefore, a kind of ladder by which the soul progresses from lower to higher things. As he pursues his theme, Bembo becomes more and more enraptured and ends with a vision of the soul ravished by heavenly beauty, purged of the flesh, and admitted to the feast of the angels. One of the spirited ladies in the court, Emilia Pia, plucks his garment and gently reminds him that he also has a body.

***From Castiglione's The Courtier***

## From *Book 1, Sections 25–26*

### [GRACE]

"\* \* \* Perhaps I am able to tell you what a perfect Courtier ought to be, but not to teach you how ye should do to be one. Notwithstanding, to fulfill your request in what I am able, although it be (in manner) in a proverb that *Grace*<sup>1</sup> *is not to be learned*, I say unto you, whoso mindeth to be gracious or to have a good grace in the exercises of the body (presupposing first that he be not of nature unapt) ought to begin betimes, and to learn his principles of cunning<sup>2</sup> men. The which thing how necessary a matter Philip, king of Macedonia,<sup>3</sup> thought it, a man may gather in that his will was that Aristotle, so famous a philosopher, and perhaps the greatest that ever hath been in the world, should be the man that should instruct Alexander, his son, in the first principles of letters. And of men whom we know nowadays, mark how well and with what a good grace Sir Galeazzo Sanseverino, master of the horse to the French king, doth all exercises of the body; and that because, besides the natural disposition of person that is in him, he hath applied all his study to learn of cunning men, and to have continually excellent men about him, and, of every one, to choose the best of that they have skill in. For as in wrestling, in vaulting, and in learning to handle sundry kind of weapons he hath taken for his guide our Master Peter Mount, who (as you know) is the true and only master of all artificial<sup>4</sup> force and sleight, so in riding, in jousting, and in every other feat, he hath always had before his eyes the most perfectest that hath been known to be in those professions.

"He therefore that will be a good scholar, beside the practicing of good things, must evermore set all his diligence to be like his master, and, if it were possible, change himself into him. And when he hath had some entry,<sup>5</sup> it profiteth him much to behold sundry men of that profession; and, governing himself with that good judgment that must always be his guide, go about to pick out, sometime of one



and sometime of another, sundry matters. And even as the bee in the green meadows flieth always about the grass choosing out flowers, so shall our Courtier steal this grace from them that to his seeming have it, and from each one that parcel<sup>6</sup> that shall be most worthy praise. And not do as a friend of ours whom you all know, that thought he resembled much King Ferdinand the Younger, of Aragon, and regarded not to resemble him in any other point but in the often lifting up his head, wrying, therewithal,<sup>7</sup> a part of his mouth, the which custom the king had gotten by infirmity. And many such there are that think they do much, so they resemble a great man in somewhat, and take many times the thing in him that worst becometh him."

"But I, imagining with myself often times how this grace cometh, leaving apart such as have it from above, find one rule that is most general which in this part (methink) taketh place<sup>8</sup> in all things belonging to a man, in word or deed, above all other. And that is to eschew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and dangerous rock, *Affectation* or curiosity,<sup>9</sup> and, to speak a new word, to use in everything a certain Recklessness, to cover art<sup>1</sup> withal, and seem whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it without pain, and, as it were, not minding<sup>2</sup> it. And of this do I believe grace is much derived, for in rare matters and well brought to pass every man knoweth the hardness of them, so that a readiness therein maketh great wonder. And contrariwise to use force and, as they say, to hale by the hair, giveth a great disgrace and maketh everything, how great soever it be, to be little esteemed. Therefore that may be said to be a very<sup>3</sup> art that appeareth not to be art; neither ought a man to put more diligence in anything than in covering it, for in case it be open, it loseth credit clean, and maketh a man little set by.<sup>4</sup> And I remember that I have read in my days that there were some most excellent orators which among other their cares enforced themselves to make every man believe that they had no sight<sup>5</sup> in letters, and dissembling their cunning, made semblant<sup>6</sup> their orations to be made very simply, and rather as nature and truth made them than study and

art, the which if it had been openly known would have put a doubt in the people's mind, for fear lest he beguiled them. You may see then how to show art and such bent<sup>7</sup> study taketh away the grace of everything. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *Grace* had a wide range of meanings for Elizabethans, and many puns were made on the word. It refers especially to a natural, easy manner, and also to that favor of God that can be neither earned nor deserved. "In manner": in the manner of; almost.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Knowing. "Betimes": early.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Philip II (ca. 382–336 B.C.E.), the father of Alexander the Great.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Artful, skillful.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Introduction.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Aspect. "To his seeming": in his opinion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Twisting awry, moreover.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Precedence.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Overfastidiousness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Artifice. "Recklessness": care-lessness; that is, nonchalance. The Italian word, whose sense Hoby's translation does not clearly convey, is *sprezzatura*: a natural, easy grace.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Noticing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: True.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lightly regarded. "Clean": entirely.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Skill, insight.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pretended.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Assiduous.[Return to reference 7](#)

## From *Book 4, Sections 49–73*

### [THE LADDER OF LOVE]

Then the Lord Gaspar:<sup>8</sup> “I remember,” quoth he, “that these lords yester-night, reasoning of the Courtier’s qualities, did allow him to be a lover; and in making rehearsal<sup>9</sup> of as much as hitherto hath been spoken, a man may pick out a conclusion that the Courtier which with his worthiness and credit must incline his prince to virtue<sup>1</sup> must in manner of necessity be aged, for knowledge cometh very seldom-time before years, and specially in matters that be learned with experience. I cannot see, when he is well drawn<sup>2</sup> in years, how it will stand well with him to be a lover, considering, as it hath been said the other night, love frameth not with<sup>3</sup> old men, and the tricks that in young men be gallantness, courtesy, and preciseness<sup>4</sup> so acceptable to women, in them are mere follies and fondness<sup>5</sup> to be laughed at, and purchase him that useth them hatred of women and mocks of others. Therefore, in case this your Aristotle, an old Courtier, were a lover and practiced the feats that young lovers do, as some that we have seen in our days, I fear me he would forget to teach his prince; and peradventure boys would mock him behind his back, and women would have none other delight in him but to make him a jesting-stock.”

Then said the Lord Octavian:<sup>6</sup> “Since all the other qualities appointed to the Courtier are meet<sup>7</sup> for him, although he be old, methink we should not then bar him from this happiness to love.”

“Nay rather,” quoth the Lord Gaspar, “to take this love from him is a perfection over and above, and a making him to live happily out of misery and wretchedness.”

\* \* \*

Then M. Peter<sup>8</sup> after a while's silence, somewhat settling himself as though he should entreat upon a weighty matter, said thus: "My lords, to show that old men may love not only without slander, but otherwhile<sup>9</sup> more happily than young men, I must be enforced to make a little discourse to declare what love is, and wherein consisteth the happiness that lovers may have. Therefore I beseech you give the hearing with needfulness, for I hope to make you understand that it were not unfitting for any man here to be a lover, in case he were fifteen or twenty years elder than M. Morello."<sup>1</sup>

And here, after they had laughed awhile, M. Peter proceeded: "I say, therefore, that according as it is defined of the wise men of old time, love is nothing else but a certain coveting to enjoy beauty;<sup>2</sup> and forsomuch as coveting longeth for nothing but for things known, it is requisite that knowledge go evermore before coveting, which of his own nature willeth the good, but of himself is blind and knoweth it not. Therefore hath nature so ordained that to every virtue<sup>3</sup> of knowledge there is annexed a virtue of longing. And because in our soul there be three manner ways to know, namely, by sense, reason, and understanding:<sup>4</sup> of sense ariseth appetite or longing, which is common to us with brute beasts; of reason ariseth election or choice, which is proper<sup>5</sup> to man; of understanding, by the which man may be partner with angels, ariseth will. Even as therefore the sense knoweth not but sensible matters and that which may be felt, so the appetite or coveting only desireth the same; and even as the understanding is bent but to behold things that may be understood, so is that will only fed with spiritual goods. Man of nature endowed with reason, placed, as it were, in the middle between these two extremities, may, through his choice inclining to sense or reaching to understanding, come nigh to the coveting sometime of the one, sometime of the other part. In these sorts therefore may beauty be coveted; the general name whereof may be applied to all things, either natural or artificial, that are framed in good proportion and due temper,<sup>6</sup> as their nature beareth. But speaking of the beauty that we mean, which is only it that appeareth in bodies, and especially in the face of man, and moveth this fervent coveting

which we call love, we will term it an influence of the heavenly bountifulness, the which for all it stretcheth over all things that be created (like the light of the sun), yet when it findeth out a face well proportioned, and framed with a certain lively agreement of several colors, and set forth with lights and shadows, and with an orderly distance and limits of lines, thereinto it distilleth itself and appeareth most well favored, and decketh out and lighteneth the subject where it shineth with a marvelous grace and glistening,<sup>7</sup> like the sunbeams that strike against beautiful plate of fine gold wrought and set with precious jewels, so that it draweth unto it men's eyes with pleasure, and piercing through them imprinteth himself in the soul, and with an unwonted sweetness all to-stirreth<sup>8</sup> her and delighteth, and setting her on fire maketh her to covet him.

\* \* \*

"Do you believe, M. Morello," quoth then Count Lewis,<sup>9</sup> that beauty is always so good a thing as M. Peter Bembo speaketh of?"

"Not I, in good sooth," answered M. Morello. "But I remember rather that I have seen many beautiful women of a most ill inclination, cruel and spiteful, and it seemeth that, in a manner, it happeneth always so, for beauty maketh them proud, and pride, cruel."

Count Lewis said, smiling: "To you perhaps they seem cruel, because they content you not with it that you would have. But cause M. Peter Bembo to teach you in what sort old men ought to covet beauty, and what to seek at their ladies' hands, and what to content themselves withal; and in not passing out of these bounds ye shall see that they shall be neither proud nor cruel, and will satisfy you with what you shall require."

M. Morello seemed then somewhat out of patience, and said: "I will not know the thing that toucheth<sup>1</sup> me not. But cause you to be taught how the young men ought to covet this beauty that are not so fresh and lusty as old men be."

Here Sir Frederick,<sup>2</sup> to pacify M. Morello and to break their talk, would not suffer Count Lewis to make answer, but interrupting him said: "Perhaps M. Morello is not altogether out of the way in saying that beauty is not always good, for the beauty of women is many times cause of infinite evils in the world—hatred, war, mortality, and destruction, whereof the razing of Troy<sup>3</sup> can be a good witness; and beautiful women for the most part be either proud and cruel, as is said, or unchaste; but M. Morello would find no fault with that. There be also many wicked men that have the comeliness of a beautiful countenance, and it seemeth that nature hath so shaped them because they may be the readier to deceive, and that this amiable look were like a bait that covereth the hook."

Then M. Peter Bembo: "Believe not," quoth he, "but<sup>4</sup> beauty is always good."

Here Count Lewis, because he would return again to his former purpose, interrupted him and said: "Since M. Morello passeth<sup>5</sup> not to understand that which is so necessary for him, teach it me, and show me how old men may come by this happiness of love, for I will not care to be counted old, so it may profit me."

M. Peter Bembo laughed, and said: "First will I take the error out of these gentlemen's mind, and afterward will I satisfy you also." So beginning afresh: "My Lords," quoth he, "I would not that with speaking ill of beauty, which is a holy thing, any of us as profane and wicked should purchase him the wrath of God. Therefore, to give M. Morello and Sir Frederick warning, that they lose not their sight, as Stesichorus did—a pain most meet<sup>6</sup> for whoso dispraiseth beauty—I say that beauty cometh of God and is like a circle, the goodness whereof is the center. And therefore, as there can be no circle without a center, no more can beauty be without goodness. Whereupon doth very seldom an ill<sup>7</sup> soul dwell in a beautiful body. And therefore is the outward beauty a true sign of the inward goodness, and in bodies this comeliness is imprinted, more and less, as it were, for a mark of the soul, whereby she is outwardly known; as in trees, in which the beauty of the buds giveth a testimony of the goodness of the fruit. And the very same happeneth in bodies,

as it is seen that palmisters<sup>8</sup> by the visage know many times the conditions and otherwhile the thoughts of men. And, which is more, in beasts also a man may discern by the face the quality of the courage,<sup>9</sup> which in the body declareth itself as much as it can. Judge you how plainly in the face of a lion, a horse, and an eagle, a man shall discern anger, fierceness, and stoutness; in lambs and doves, simpleness and very innocency; the crafty subtlety in foxes and wolves; and the like, in a manner, in all other living creatures. The foul,<sup>1</sup> therefore, for the most part be also evil, and the beautiful good. Therefore it may be said that beauty is a face pleasant, merry, comely, and to be desired for goodness; and foulness a face dark, ugly,<sup>2</sup> unpleasant, and to be shunned for ill. And in case you will consider all things, you shall find that whatsoever is good and profitable hath also evermore the comeliness of beauty. Behold the state of this great engine of the world,<sup>3</sup> which God created for the health and preservation of everything that was made: the heaven round beset with so many heavenly lights; and in the middle the earth environed with the elements and upheld with the very weight of itself; the sun, that compassing about<sup>4</sup> giveth light to the whole, and in winter season draweth to the lowermost sign,<sup>5</sup> afterward by little and little climbeth again to the other part; the moon, that of him taketh her light, according as she draweth nigh or goeth farther from him; and the other five stars<sup>6</sup> that diversely keep the very same course. These things among themselves have such force by the knitting together of an order so necessarily framed that, with altering them any one jot, they should all be loosed and the world would decay. They have also such beauty and comeliness that all the wits men have cannot imagine a more beautiful matter.

“Think now of the shape of man, which may be called a little world, in whom every parcel of his body is seen to be necessarily framed by art and not by hap,<sup>7</sup> and then the form altogether most beautiful, so that it were a hard matter to judge whether the members (as the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the ears, the arms, the breast, and in like manner the other parts) give either more profit to



the countenance and the rest of the body, or comeliness. The like may be said of all other living creatures. Behold the feathers of fowls, the leaves and boughs of trees, which be given them of nature to keep them in their being, and yet have they withal a very great sightliness. Leave nature, and come to art. What thing is so necessary in sailing vessels as the forepart, the sides, the main yards, the mast, the sails, the stern, oars, anchors, and tacklings? All these things notwithstanding are so well-favored in the eye that unto whoso beholdeth them they seem to have been found out as well for pleasure as for profit. Pillars and great beams uphold high buildings and palaces, and yet are they no less pleasurable unto the eyes of the beholders than profitable to the buildings. When men began first to build, in the middle of temples and houses they reared the ridge of the roof, not to make the works to have a better show, but because the water might the more commodiously avoid<sup>8</sup> on both sides; yet unto profit there was forthwith adjoined a fair sightliness, so that if, under the sky where there falleth neither hail nor rain, a man should build a temple without a reared ridge, it is to be thought that it could have neither a sightly show nor any beauty. Besides other things, therefore, it giveth a great praise to the world in saying that it is beautiful. It is praised in saying the beautiful heaven, beautiful earth, beautiful sea, beautiful rivers, beautiful woods, trees, gardens, beautiful cities, beautiful churches, houses, armies. In conclusion, this comely and holy beauty is a wondrous setting out of everything. And it may be said that good and beautiful be after a sort one self<sup>9</sup> thing, especially in the bodies of men; of the beauty whereof the highest cause, I suppose, is the beauty of the soul; the which, as a partner of the right and heavenly beauty, maketh sightly and beautiful whatever she toucheth, and most of all if the body where she dwelleth be not of so vile a matter that she cannot imprint in it her property.<sup>1</sup> Therefore beauty is the true monument and spoil<sup>2</sup> of the victory of the soul, when she with heavenly influence beareth rule over material and gross nature, and with her light overcometh the darkness of the body. It is not, then, to be spoken that beauty maketh women proud or cruel, although it seem



so to M. Morello. Neither yet ought beautiful women to bear the blame of that hatred, mortality, and destruction which the unbridled appetites of men are the cause of. I will not now deny but it is possible also to find in the world beautiful women unchaste; yet not because beauty inclineth them to unchaste living, for it rather plucketh them from it, and leadeth them into the way of virtuous conditions, through the affinity that beauty hath with goodness; but otherwhile<sup>3</sup> ill bringing-up, the continual provocations of lovers' tokens,<sup>4</sup> poverty, hope, deceits, fear, and a thousand other matters overcome the steadfastness, yea, of beautiful and good women; and for these and like causes may also beautiful men become wicked."

Then said the Lord Cesar:<sup>5</sup> "In case the Lord Gaspar's saying be true of yesternight, there is no doubt but the fair women be more chaste than the foul."

"And what was my saying?" quoth the Lord Gaspar.

The Lord Cesar answered: "If I do well bear in mind, your saying was that the women that are sued to always refuse to satisfy him that sueth to them, but those that are not sued to, sue to others. There is no doubt but the beautiful women have always more suitors, and be more instantly laid at<sup>6</sup> in love, than the foul. Therefore the beautiful always deny, and consequently be more chaste than the foul, which, not being sued to, sue unto others."

M. Peter Bembo laughed, and said: "This argument cannot be answered to."

Afterward he proceeded: "It chanceth also, oftentimes, that as the other senses, so the sight is deceived and judgeth a face beautiful which indeed is not beautiful. And because in the eyes and in the whole countenance of some woman a man beholdeth otherwhile a certain lavish wantonness painted, with dishonest flickerings,<sup>7</sup> many, whom that manner delighteth because it promiseth them an easiness to come by the thing that they covet, call it beauty; but indeed it is a cloaked un-shamefastness,<sup>8</sup> unworthy of so honorable and holy a name."

M. Peter Bembo held his peace, but those lords still were earnest upon him to speak somewhat more of this love and of the way to enjoy beauty aright, and at the last, "Methink," quoth he, "I have showed plainly enough that old men may love more happily than young, which was my drift;<sup>9</sup> therefore it belongeth not to me to enter any farther."

Count Lewis answered: "You have better declared the unluckiness of young men than the happiness of old men, whom you have not as yet taught what way they must follow in this love of theirs; only you have said that they must suffer themselves to be guided by reason, and the opinion of many is that it is impossible for love to stand with reason."

Bembo notwithstanding sought to make an end of reasoning, but the duchess<sup>1</sup> desired him to say on, and he began thus afresh: "Too unlucky were the nature of man, if our soul, in which this so fervent coveting may lightly<sup>2</sup> arise, should be driven to nourish it with that only which is common to her with beasts, and could not turn it to the other noble part,<sup>3</sup> which is proper to her. Therefore, since it is so your pleasure, I will not refuse to reason upon this noble matter. And because I know myself unworthy to talk of the most holy mysteries of Love, I beseech him to lead my thought and my tongue so that I may show this excellent Courtier how to love contrary to the wonted<sup>4</sup> manner of the common ignorant sort; and even as from my childhood I have dedicated all my whole life unto him, so also now that my words may be answerable to the same intent, and to the praise of him. I say, therefore, that since the nature of man in youthful age is so much inclined to sense, it may be granted the Courtier, while he is young, to love sensually; but in case afterward also, in his riper years, he chance to be set on fire with this coveting of love, he ought to be good and circumspect, and heedful that he beguile not himself to be led willfully into the wretchedness that in young men deserveth more to be pitied than blamed, and contrariwise in old men more to be blamed than pitied. Therefore when an amiable countenance of a beautiful woman cometh in his sight, that is accompanied with noble conditions and honest<sup>5</sup>

behaviors, so that, as one practiced in love, he wotteth well that his hue<sup>6</sup> hath an agreement with hers, as soon as he is aware that his eyes snatch that image and carry it to the heart, and that the soul beginneth to behold it with pleasure, and feeleth within herself the influence that stirreth her and by little and little setteth her in heat, and that those lively spirits<sup>7</sup> that twinkle out through the eyes put continually fresh nourishment to the fire, he ought in this beginning to seek a speedy remedy and to raise up reason, and with her to fence the fortress of his heart, and to shut in such wise<sup>8</sup> the passages against sense and appetites that they may enter neither with force nor subtle practice.<sup>9</sup> Thus, if the flame be quenched, the jeopardy is also quenched. But in case it continue or increase, then must the Courtier determine, when he perceiveth he is taken, to shun thoroughly<sup>1</sup> all filthiness of common love, and so enter into the holy way of love with the guide of reason, and first consider that the body where that beauty shineth is not the fountain from whence beauty springeth, but rather because beauty is bodiless and, as we have said, an heavenly shining beam, she loseth much of her honor when she is coupled with that vile subject<sup>2</sup> and full of corruption: because the less she is partner thereof, the more perfect she is, and, clean sundered from it, is most perfect. And as a man heareth not with his mouth, nor smelleth with his ears, no more can he also in any manner wise enjoy beauty, nor satisfy the desire that she stirreth up in our minds, with feeling, but with the sense unto whom beauty is the very butt to level at,<sup>3</sup> namely, the virtue<sup>4</sup> of seeing. Let him lay aside, therefore, the blind judgment of the sense, and enjoy with his eyes the brightness, the comeliness, the loving sparkles, laughters, gestures, and all the other pleasant furnitures<sup>5</sup> of beauty, especially with hearing the sweetness of her voice, the tunableness<sup>6</sup> of her words, the melody of her singing and playing on instruments (in case the woman beloved be a musician); and so shall he with most dainty food feed the soul through the means of these two senses which have little bodily substance in them and be the ministers of reason, without entering farther toward the body with coveting unto any longing otherwise than honest. Afterward, let him

obey, please, and honor with all reverence his woman, and reckon her more dear to him than his own life, and prefer all her commodities<sup>7</sup> and pleasures before his own, and love no less in her the beauty of the mind than of the body. Therefore let him have a care not to suffer her to run into any error, but with lessons and good exhortations seek always to frame her to modesty, to temperance, to true honesty, and so to work that there may never take place in her other than pure thoughts and far wide from all filthiness of vices. And thus in sowing of virtue in the garden of that mind, he shall also gather the fruits of most beautiful conditions, and savor them with a marvelous good relish. And this shall be the right engendering and imprinting of beauty in beauty, the which some hold opinion to be the end<sup>8</sup> of love. In this manner shall our Courtier be most acceptable to his lady, and she will always show herself toward him tractable, lowly,<sup>9</sup> and sweet in language, and as willing to please him as to be beloved of him; and the wills of them both shall be most honest and agreeable, and they consequently shall be most happy."

Here M. Morello: "The engendering," quoth he, "of beauty in beauty aright were the engendering of a beautiful child in a beautiful woman; and I would think it a more manifest token a great deal that she loved her lover, if she pleased him with this than with the sweetness of language that you speak of."

M. Peter Bembo laughed, and said: "You must not, M. Morello, pass your bounds. I may tell you it is not a small token that a woman loveth when she giveth unto her lover her beauty, which is so precious a matter; and by the ways that be a passage to the soul (that is to say, the sight and the hearing) sendeth the looks of her eyes, the image of her countenance, and the voice of her words, that pierce into the lover's heart and give a witness of her love."

M. Morello said: "Looks and words may be, and oftentimes are, false witnesses. Therefore whoso hath not a better pledge of love, in my judgment he is in an ill assurance. And surely I looked<sup>1</sup> still that you would have made this woman of yours somewhat more courteous and free toward the Courtier than my Lord Julian<sup>2</sup> hath

made his; but meseemeth ye be both of the property<sup>3</sup> of those judges that, to appear wise, give sentence against their own."

Bembo said: "I am well pleased to have this woman much more courteous toward my Courtier not young than the Lord Julian's is to the young; and that with good reason, because mine coveteth but honest matters, and therefore may the woman grant him them all without blame. But my Lord Julian's woman, that is not so assured of the modesty of the young man, ought to grant him the honest matters only, and deny him the dishonest. Therefore more happy is mine, that hath granted him whatsoever he requireth, than the other, that hath part granted and part denied. And because<sup>4</sup> you may moreover the better understand that reasonable love is more happy than sensual, I say unto you that selfsame things in sensual ought to be denied otherwhile, and in reasonable granted; because in the one they be honest, and in the other dishonest. Therefore the woman, to please her good lover, besides the granting him merry countenances, familiar and secret talk, jesting, dallying, hand-in-hand, may also lawfully and without blame come to kissing, which in sensual love, according to the Lord Julian's rules, is not lawful. For since a kiss is a knitting together both of body and soul, it is to be feared lest the sensual lover will be more inclined to the part of the body than of the soul; but the reasonable lover wotteth well that although the mouth be a parcel<sup>5</sup> of the body, yet is it an issue for the words that be the interpreters of the soul, and for the inward breath, which is also called the soul; and therefore hath a delight to join his mouth with the woman's beloved with a kiss, not to stir him to any dishonest desire, but because he feeleth that that bond is the opening of an entry to the souls, which, drawn with a coveting the one of the other, pour themselves by turn the one into the other's body, and be so mingled together that each of them hath two souls, and one alone, so framed of them both, ruleth, in a manner, two bodies. Whereupon a kiss may be said to be rather a coupling together of the soul than of the body, because it hath such force in her that it draweth her unto it, and, as it were, separateth her from the body. For this do all chaste lovers covet a kiss as a coupling of

souls together. And therefore Plato,<sup>6</sup> the divine lover, saith that in kissing his soul came as far as his lips to depart out of the body. And because the separating of the soul from the matters of the sense, and the thorough coupling of her with matters of understanding, may be betokened by a kiss, Solomon saith<sup>7</sup> in his heavenly book of ballads, 'Oh that he would kiss me with a kiss of his mouth,' to express the desire he had that his soul might be ravished through heavenly love to the beholding of heavenly beauty in such manner that, coupling herself inwardly with it, she might forsake the body."

They stood all hearkening heedfully to Bembo's reasoning, and after he had stayed<sup>8</sup> a while and saw that none spake, he said: "Since you have made me to begin to show our not-young Courtier this happy love, I will lead him yet somewhat farther forwards; because to stand still at this stay were somewhat perilous for him, considering, as we have oftentimes said, the soul is most inclined to the senses, and for all<sup>9</sup> reason with discourse chooseth well, and knoweth that beauty not to spring of the body, and therefore setteth a bridle to the unhonest desires, yet to behold it always in that body doth oftentimes corrupt the right judgment. And where no other inconvenience ensueth upon it, one's absence from the wight<sup>1</sup> beloved carrieth a great passion with it; because the influence of that beauty when it is present giveth a wondrous delight to the lover and, setting his heart on fire, quickeneth and melteth certain virtues in a trance and congealed in the soul, the which, nourished with the heat of love, flow about and go bubbling nigh the heart, and thrust out through the eyes those spirits which be most fine vapors made of the purest and clearest part of the blood, which receive the image of beauty<sup>2</sup> and deck it with a thousand sundry furnitures. Whereupon the soul taketh a delight, and with a certain wonder is aghast, and yet enjoyeth she it, and, as it were, astonished<sup>3</sup> together with the pleasure, feeleth the fear and reverence that men accustomedly have toward holy matters, and thinketh herself to be in paradise. The lover, therefore, that considereth only the beauty in the body loseth this treasure and happiness as soon as the woman beloved with her departure leaveth the eyes without their

brightness, and consequently the soul as a widow without her joy. For since beauty is far off, that influence of love setteth not the heart on fire, as it did in presence. Whereupon the pores be dried up and withered, and yet doth the remembrance of beauty somewhat stir those virtues of the soul in such wise that they seek to scatter abroad the spirits, and they, finding the ways closed up, have no issue, and still they seek to get out, and so with those shootings enclosed prick the soul and torment her bitterly, as young children when in their tender gums they begin to breed teeth. And hence come the tears, sighs, vexations, and torments of lovers; because the soul is always in affliction and travail and, in a manner, waxeth wood,<sup>4</sup> until the beloved beauty cometh before her once again, and then she is immediately pacified and taketh breath, and, thoroughly bent to it, is nourished with most dainty food, and by her will would never depart from so sweet a sight. To avoid, therefore, the torment of this absence, and to enjoy beauty without passion, the Courtier by the help of reason must full and wholly call back again the coveting of the body to beauty alone, and, in what he can, behold it in itself simple and pure, and frame it within his imagination sundered from all matter, and so make it friendly and loving to his soul, and there enjoy it, and have it with him day and night, in every time and place, without mistrust ever to lose it; keeping always fast in mind that the body is a most diverse<sup>5</sup> thing from beauty, and not only not increaseth but diminisheth the perfection of it. In this wise shall our not-young Courtier be out of all bitterness and wretchedness that young men feel, in a manner continually, as jealousies, suspicions, disdains, angers, desperations, and certain rages full of madness, whereby many times they be led into so great error that some do not only beat the women whom they love, but rid themselves out of their life. He shall do no wrong to the husband, father, brethren, or kinsfolk of the woman beloved. He shall not bring her in slander. He shall not be in case with<sup>6</sup> much ado otherwhile to refrain his eyes and tongue from discovering his desires to others. He shall not take thought<sup>7</sup> at departure or in absence, because he shall evermore carry his precious treasure



about with him shut fast within his heart. And besides, through the virtue of imagination, he shall fashion within himself that beauty much more fair than it is indeed. But among these commodities the lover shall find another yet far greater, in case he will take this love for a stair, as it were, to climb up to another far higher than it. The which he shall bring to pass, if he will go and consider with himself what a strait bond it is to be always in the trouble to behold the beauty of one body alone. And therefore, to come out of this so narrow a room,<sup>8</sup> he shall gather in his thought by little and little so many ornaments that, meddling<sup>9</sup> all beauties together, he shall make a universal concept, and bring the multitude of them to the unity of one alone, that is generally spread over all the nature of man. And thus shall he behold no more the particular beauty of one woman, but an universal, that decketh out all bodies. Whereupon, being made dim with this greater light, he shall not pass upon<sup>1</sup> the lesser, and, burning in a more excellent flame, he shall little esteem it that<sup>2</sup> he set great store by at the first. This stair of love, though it be very noble and such as few arrive at it, yet is it not in this sort to be called perfect, forsomuch as where the imagination is of force to make conveyance, and hath no knowledge but through those beginnings that the senses help her withal, she is not clean purged from gross darkness; and therefore, though she do consider that universal beauty in sunder and in itself alone, yet doth she not well and clearly discern it, nor without some doubtfulness, by reason of the agreement that the fancies have with the body. Wherefore such as come to this love are like young birds almost flush,<sup>3</sup> which for all they flutter a little their tender wings, yet dare they not stray far from the nest, nor commit themselves to the wind and open weather. When our Courtier, therefore, shall be come to this point, although he may be called a good and happy lover, in respect of them that be drowned in the misery of sensual love, yet will I not have him to set his heart at rest, but boldly proceed farther, following the highway, after his guide<sup>4</sup> that leadeth him to the point of true happiness. And thus, instead of going out of his wit<sup>5</sup> with thought, as he must do that will consider the bodily beauty, he may



come into his wit to behold the beauty that is seen with the eyes of the mind, which then begin to be sharp and through-seeing when the eyes of the body lose the flower of their sightliness.

"Therefore the soul, rid of vices, purged with the studies of true philosophy, occupied in spiritual, and exercised in matters of understanding, turning her to the beholding of her own substance, as it were raised out of a most deep sleep, openeth the eyes that all men have and few occupy,<sup>6</sup> and seeth in herself a shining beam of that light which is the true image of the angel-like beauty partened<sup>7</sup> with her, whereof she also partneth with the body a feeble shadow; therefore, waxed blind about earthly matters, is made most quick of sight about heavenly. And otherwhile,<sup>8</sup> when the stirring virtues of the body are withdrawn alone through earnest beholding, either<sup>9</sup> fast bound through sleep, when she is not hindered by them, she feeleth a certain privy<sup>1</sup> smell of the right angel-like beauty, and, ravished with the shining of that light, beginneth to be inflamed, and so greedily followeth after, that in a manner she waxeth drunken and beside herself, for coveting to couple herself with it, having found, to her weening,<sup>2</sup> the footsteps of God, in the beholding of whom, as in her happy end, she seeketh to settle herself. And therefore, burning in this most happy flame, she ariseth to the noblest part of her, which is the understanding, and there, no more shadowed with the dark night of earthly matters, seeth the heavenly beauty; but yet doth she not for all that enjoy it altogether perfectly, because she beholdeth it only in her particular<sup>3</sup> understanding, which cannot conceive the passing<sup>4</sup> great universal beauty; whereupon, not thoroughly satisfied with this benefit, love giveth unto the soul a greater happiness. For like as through the particular beauty of one body he guideth her to the universal beauty of all bodies, even so in the last degree of perfection through particular understanding he guideth her to the universal understanding. Thus the soul kindled in the most holy fire of heavenly love fleeth to couple herself with the nature of angels, and not only clean forsaketh sense, but hath no more need of the discourse of reason, for, being changed into an angel, she understandeth all things that may be understood; and

without any veil or cloud she seeth the main sea of the pure heavenly beauty, and receiveth it into her, and enjoyeth that sovereign happiness that cannot be comprehended of the senses. Since, therefore, the beauties which we daily see with these our dim eyes in bodies subject to corruption, that nevertheless be nothing else but dreams and most thin shadows of beauty, seem unto us so well favored and comely that oftentimes they kindle in us a most burning fire, and with such delight that we reckon no happiness may be compared to it that we feel otherwhile through the only look<sup>5</sup> which the beloved countenance of a woman casteth at us; what happy wonder, what blessed abashment, may we reckon that to be that taketh the souls which come to have a sight of the heavenly beauty? What sweet flame, what sweet incense, may a man believe that to be which ariseth of the fountain of the sovereign and right beauty? Which is the origin of all other beauty, which never increaseth nor diminisheth, always beautiful, and of itself, as well on the one part as on the other, most simple, only like itself, and partner of none other, but in such wise beautiful that all other beautiful things be beautiful because they be partners of the beauty of it.

“This is the beauty unseparable from the high bounty which with her voice calleth and draweth to her all things; and not only to the endowed with understanding giveth understanding, to the reasonable reason, to the sensual sense and appetite to live, but also partaketh with plants and stones, as a print of herself, stirring, and the natural provocation of their properties.<sup>6</sup> So much, therefore, is this love greater and happier than others, as the cause that stirreth it is more excellent. And therefore, as common fire trieth gold and maketh it fine, so this most holy fire in souls destroyeth and consumeth whatsoever is mortal in them, and relieveth and maketh beautiful the heavenly part, which at the first by reason of the sense was dead and buried in them. This is the great fire in the which, the poets write, that Hercules was burned on the top of the mountain Oeta,<sup>7</sup> and, through that consuming with fire, after his death was holy and immortal. This is the fiery bush of Moses;<sup>8</sup> the

divided tongues of fire;<sup>9</sup> the inflamed chariot of Elias;<sup>1</sup> which doubleth grace and happiness in their souls that be worthy to see it, when they forsake this earthly baseness and flee up into heaven. Let us, therefore, bend all our force and thoughts of soul to this most holy light, which showeth us the way which leadeth to heaven; and after it, putting off the affections we were clad withal at our coming down, let us climb up the stairs which at the lowermost step have the shadow of sensual beauty, to the high mansion place where the heavenly, amiable, and right beauty dwelleth, which lieth hid in the innermost secrets of God, lest unhallowed eyes should come to the sight of it; and there shall we find a most happy end for our desires, true rest for our travails, certain remedy for miseries, a most healthful medicine for sickness, a most sure haven in the troublesome storms of the tempestuous sea of this life.

“What tongue mortal is there then, Oh most holy Love, that can sufficiently praise thy worthiness? Thou most beautiful, most good, most wise, art derived of the unity of heavenly beauty, goodness, and wisdom, and therein dost thou abide, and unto it through it, as in a circle, turnest about. Thou the most sweet bond of the world, a mean betwixt heavenly and earthly things, with a bountiful temper bendest the high virtues<sup>2</sup> to the government of the lower, and turning back the minds of mortal men to their beginning, couplest them with it. Thou with agreement bringest the elements in one, and stirrest nature to bring forth that which ariseth and is born for the succession of the life.<sup>3</sup> Thou bringest severed matters into one, to the unperfect givest perfection, to the unlike likeness, to enmity amity, to the earth fruits, to the sea calmness, to the heaven lively light. Thou art the father of true pleasures, of grace, peace, lowliness, and goodwill, enemy to rude wildness and sluggishness—to be short, the beginning and end of all goodness. And forso much as thou delightest to dwell in the flower of beautiful bodies and beautiful souls, I suppose that thy abiding-place is now here among us, and from above otherwhile showest thyself a little to the eyes and minds of them that be worthy to see thee. Therefore vouchsafe, Lord, to hearken to our prayers, pour thyself into our hearts, and

with the brightness of thy most holy fire lighten our darkness, and, like a trusty guide in this blind maze, show us the right way; reform the falsehood of the senses, and after long wandering in vanity give us the right and sound joy. Make us to smell those spiritual savors that relieve the virtues of the understanding, and to hear the heavenly harmony so tunable that no discord of passion take place any more in us. Make us drunken with the bottomless fountain of contentation that always doth delight and never giveth fill, and that giveth a smack<sup>4</sup> of the right bliss unto whoso drinketh of the running and clear water thereof. Purge with the shining beams of thy light our eyes from misty ignorance, that they may no more set by<sup>5</sup> mortal beauty, and well perceive that the things which at the first they thought themselves to see be not indeed, and those that they saw not, to be in effect. Accept our souls that be offered unto thee for a sacrifice. Burn them in the lively flame that wasteth<sup>6</sup> all gross filthiness, that after they be clean sundered from the body they may be coupled with an everlasting and most sweet bond to the heavenly beauty. And we, severed from ourselves, may be changed like right lovers into the beloved, and, after we be drawn from the earth, admitted to the feast of the angels, where, fed with immortal ambrosia and nectar,<sup>7</sup> in the end we may die a most happy and lively death, as in times past died the fathers of old time, whose souls with most fervent zeal of beholding, thou didst hale from the body and coupledst them with God."

When Bembo had hitherto spoken with such vehemency that a man would have thought him, as it were, ravished and beside himself, he stood still without once moving, holding his eyes toward heaven as astonished; when the Lady Emilia,<sup>8</sup> which together with the rest gave most diligent ear to this talk, took him by the plait of his garment and plucking him a little, said: "Take heed, M. Peter, that these thoughts make not your soul also to forsake the body."

"Madam," answered M. Peter, "it should not be the first miracle that love hath wrought in me."

Then the Duchess and all the rest began afresh to be instant<sup>9</sup> upon M. Bembo that he would proceed once more in his talk, and

everyone thought he felt in his mind, as it were, a certain sparkle of that godly love that pricked him, and they all coveted to hear farther; but M. Bembo: "My Lords," quoth he, "I have spoken what the holy fury of love hath, unsought for, indited<sup>1</sup> to me; now that, it seemeth, he inspireth me no more, I wot not what to say. And I think verily that Love will not have his secrets discovered any farther, nor that the Courtier should pass the degree that his pleasure is I should show him, and therefore it is not perhaps lawful to speak any more in this matter."

"Surely," quoth the Duchess, "if the not-young Courtier be such a one that he can follow this way which you have showed him, of right he ought to be satisfied with so great a happiness, and not to envy the younger."

Then the Lord Cesar Gonzaga: "The way," quoth he, "that leadeth to this happiness is so steep, in my mind, that I believe it will be much ado to get to it."

The Lord Gaspar said: "I believe it be hard to get up for men, but impossible for women."

The Lady Emilia laughed, and said: "If you fall so often to offend us, I promise you you shall be no more forgiven."

The Lord Gaspar answered: "It is no offense to you in saying that women's souls be not so purged from passions as men's be, nor accustomed in beholdings,<sup>2</sup> as M. Peter hath said is necessary for them to be that will taste of the heavenly love. Therefore it is not read that ever woman hath had this grace; but many men have had it, as Plato, Socrates, Plotinus,<sup>3</sup> and many other, and a number of our holy fathers, as Saint Francis, in whom a fervent spirit of love imprinted the most holy seal of the five wounds.<sup>4</sup> And nothing but the virtue<sup>5</sup> of love could hale up Saint Paul the Apostle to the sight of those secrets which is not lawful for man to speak of; nor show Saint Stephen the heavens open."<sup>6</sup>

Here answered the Lord Julian: "In this point men shall nothing pass women, for Socrates himself doth confess that all the mysteries of love which he knew were oped unto him by a woman, which was

Diotima.<sup>7</sup> And the angel that with the fire of love imprinted the five wounds in Saint Francis hath also made some women worthy of the same print in our age. You must remember, moreover, that Saint Mary Magdalen<sup>8</sup> had many faults forgiven her, because she loved much; and perhaps with no less grace than Saint Paul was she many times through angelic love haled up to the third heaven. And many other, as I showed you yesterday more at large, that for love of the name of Christ have not passed upon<sup>9</sup> life, nor feared torments, nor any other kind of death how terrible and cruel ever it were. And they were not, as M. Peter will have his Courtier to be, aged, but soft and tender maidens, and in the age when he saith that sensual love ought to be borne withal<sup>1</sup> in men."

The Lord Gaspar began to prepare himself to speak, but the Duchess: "Of this," quoth she, "let M. Peter be judge, and the matter shall stand to his verdict, whether women be not as meet<sup>2</sup> for heavenly love as men. But because the plead<sup>3</sup> between you may happen be too long, it shall not be amiss to defer it until tomorrow."

"Nay, tonight," quoth the Lord Cesar Gonzaga.

"And how can it be tonight?" quoth the Duchess.

The Lord Cesar answered: "Because it is day already," and showed her the light that began to enter in at the clefts of the windows. Then every man arose upon his feet with much wonder, because they had not thought that the reasonings had lasted longer than the accustomed wont, saving only that they were begun much later, and with their pleasantness had deceived so the lords' minds that they wist<sup>4</sup> not of the going away of the hours. And not one of them felt any heaviness of sleep in his eyes, the which often happeneth when a man is up after his accustomed hour to go to bed. When the windows then were opened on the side of the palace that hath his prospect toward the high top of Mount Catri, they saw already risen in the east a fair morning like unto the color of roses, and all stars voided,<sup>5</sup> saving only the sweet governess of the heaven, Venus, which keepeth the bounds of the night and the day, from which appeared to blow a sweet blast that, filling the air with a

biting cold, began to quicken the tunable notes of the pretty birds among the hushing woods of the hills at hand. Whereupon they all, taking their leave with reverence of the Duchess, departed toward their lodgings without torch, the light of the day sufficing.

And as they were now passing out at the great chamber door, the Lord General<sup>6</sup> turned him to the Duchess and said: "Madam, to take up the variance between the Lord Gaspar and the Lord Julian, we will assemble this night with the judge sooner than we did yesterday."

The Lady Emilia answered: "Upon condition that in case my Lord Gaspar will accuse women, and give them, as his wont is, some false report, he will also put us in surety to stand to trial:<sup>7</sup> for I reckon him a wavering starter."<sup>8</sup>

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## Endnotes

- Note 8: Gaspar Pallavicino, a young man whose attitude in the dialogue is usually that of the misogynist.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Reviewing.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The courtier's role in counseling his prince had been discussed in the preceding part of Book 4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Advanced.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Is not suitable to.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Excessive neatness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Foolishness. "In them": that is, in old men.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ottaviano Fregoso, a soldier, later doge of Genoa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Suitable.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), poet, Platonist, grammarian, and historian, later a cardinal. He undertakes to prove that it is suitable for an older courtier to be (in a special sense) a lover.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sometimes.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Morello da Ortona, an elderly courtier and musician. "In case": even if.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The definition derives from Plato's *Symposium*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Power.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Direct intellectual apprehension, without need of reasoning. "Manner": kinds of.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Distinctive.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The right mixture or combination of elements. Bembo's definition of beauty, as of love, derives from Plato.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Glittering, sparkling.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Moves violently. In this passage, "it" and "him" refer to beauty, "her" to the soul.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lodovico Canossa, who had earlier discoursed on grace.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Concerns.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Federico Fregoso, later archbishop of Salerno.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The destruction of Troy by the Greeks, celebrated in Homer's *Iliad*, was caused by the Trojan Paris's abduction of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, anything but that.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cares.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fitting. Stesichorus: "a notable [ancient Greek] poet which lost his sight for writing against Helena, and recanting, had his sight restored him again" [*Hoby's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Evil.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Fortune-tellers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Heart.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ugly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Horribly ugly (apparently first used by Hoby).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mechanism of the universe.[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: Revolving.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Of the zodiac.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the five other planets then known: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: By skill rather than by chance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Escape.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Same.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Attribute, quality.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reward, trophy. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sometimes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Gifts.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cesar Gonzaga, cousin of Castiglione.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Persistently urged.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hints of lewdness.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Immodesty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Purpose. In a passage omitted above, Bembo had argued that old men, whose senses have cooled, find it easier than young men to be guided in love by reason and can therefore more easily avoid the miseries that, he argues, inevitably follow from sensual love.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, the presiding figure in the life of the court and in these dialogues.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Easily, readily.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, reason.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Accustomed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Virtuous (as also several times in the following pages). "Conditions": personal qualities.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Aspect. "Wotteth": knows.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vital, animating powers. See p. 186, n. 2.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In such a way.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Treachery.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thoroughly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the body.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Target to aim at.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Power.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ornaments.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Musical quality.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Conveniences.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Goal.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Modest.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Expected.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Giuliano de' Medici, younger son of Lorenzo the Magnificent. In Book 3, discussing the ideal courtier's female counterpart, he expresses the opinions alluded to here.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nature.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: So that.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Part.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plato's discussion of love in *The Symposium*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Song of Solomon 1:2. "Betokened": symbolized.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Paused.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: And although.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Person.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Love "melts" certain elements ("virtues") that were before "congealed," releasing the vital blood "spirits" that take in the image of beauty through the eyes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Stunned.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Becomes mad, crazy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Very different.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the situation of having.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Be distressed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Space.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Mingling.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Concern himself with.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the thing that.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fledged, fit to fly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, reason.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Mind, intellect.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Use.[Return to reference 6](#)
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- Note 9: Or.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Intimate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thinking, opinion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Individual.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Surpassing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Through the look alone.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, motion ("stirring") and, as we would say, their natural instincts.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "A mountain between Thessalia and Macedonia where is the sepulcher of Hercules" [*Hoby's note*].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto . . . [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "And there appeared unto them [that is, the Apostles] cloven tongues like as to fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:3–4).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The prophet Elijah. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Powers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, for the perpetuation of life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Taste.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Set store by.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Consumes.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The food and drink of the gods in classical mythology.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Emilia Pia, a widow living at court, the faithful companion of the duchess Elisabetta and the mistress of ceremonies of the discussions.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Insistent.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dictated. "Fury": frenzy; enthusiasm of one possessed as by a god.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Contemplations.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Plotinus (205–270 C.E.) was the founder of the Neoplatonic philosophical school of late antiquity—the tradition revived by Bembo and, especially, his predecessor the great Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) is supposed to have received the stigmata, marking on his body the five wounds of Jesus on the Cross.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Power.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Before being stoned to death, Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Saint Paul's vision of the "third heaven" is in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates claims that a wise woman, Diotima, taught him his philosophy of love. "Oped": opened, disclosed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Traditionally though baselessly regarded as a converted prostitute, she became one of Jesus's most faithful followers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cared for.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Put up with.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fitted. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Controversy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Knew.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Vanished.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Francesco Maria della Rovere, nephew and adopted heir of the duke.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, he must give us some pawn (“surety”) to guarantee that he will answer the charge of falsely accusing women. “Wont”: habit.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, one who is likely to “start”—suddenly desert his post.[Return to reference 8](#)

## ISABELLA WHITNEY

### fl. 1566–1573

The poet Isabella Whitney was one of the small number of women in early modern England able to break through the social barriers that inhibited female appearance in print. Making her achievement even more impressive was that she, unlike most of the other women in this volume, apparently started her career not at court but as a maidservant—and, because of slander, she had even been dismissed from that position. That she was the sister of a well-known writer of emblems, Geoffrey Whitney, may have given her entrée to the up-and-coming London printer Richard Jones, who printed a set of her verse epistles on love and inconstancy (*The Copy of a Letter*, 1567), perhaps to help her with her family finances. In 1573 she followed this initial effort with *A Sweet Nosegay or Pleasant Posy: Containing a Hundred and Ten Philosophical Flowers*. This work begins with a series of moral adages adapted from Sir Hugh Plat's *Flowers of Philosophy* (1572). A second section returns to the genre of the epistle, with a collection of letters between family and friends that provide her an opportunity to comment on social and economic problems. The work's third and concluding section is the author's satirical "Will and Testament," included here.

## Will and Testament

The author (though loath to leave the city) upon her friend's procurement is constrained to depart, wherefore she feigneth as she would die and maketh her will and testament, as followeth, with large legacies of such goods and riches which she most abundantly hath left behind her, and thereof maketh London sole executor to see her legacies performed.

### ***A communication which the author had to London, before she made her will***

The time is come I must depart  
from thee, ah famous city.  
I never yet, to rue my smart,<sup>o</sup>  
did find that thou hadst pity.  
Wherefore small cause there is that I  
5 should grieve from thee [to] go.  
But many women foolishly,  
like me, and other mo'e,<sup>o</sup>  
Do such a fixèd fancy set  
on those which least deserve,  
10 That long it is ere<sup>o</sup> wit we get,  
away from them to swerve.<sup>o</sup>  
But time with pity oft will tell  
to those that will her try,  
Whether it best be more to mell,<sup>o</sup>  
15 or utterly defy.  
And now hath time me put in mind  
of thy great cruelty,  
That never once a help would find  
to ease me in distress.  
20 Thou never yet wouldst credit give

to board me for a year,  
Nor with apparel me relieve  
except thou payèd were.  
25 No, no, thou never didst me good,  
nor ever wilt, I know;  
Yet I am in no angry mood,  
but will, or ere I go,  
In perfect love and charity  
30 my testament here write,  
And leave to thee such treasury  
as I in it recite.  
Now stand aside and give me leave  
to write my latest will:  
And see that none you do deceive  
35 of that I leave them till.◊

***The manner of her will, and what she left to London and to  
all those in it at her departing***

I whole in body and in mind,  
but very weak in purse,  
Do make and write my testament  
40 for fear it will be worse.  
And first I wholly do commend  
my soul and body eke◊  
To God the Father and the Son,  
so long as I can speak.  
And after speech, my soul to him,  
45 and body to the grave,  
Till time that all shall rise again,  
their judgment for to have.  
And then I hope they both shall meet  
to dwell for aye◊ in joy  
50 Whereas◊ I trust to see my friends  
released from all annoy.



Thus have you heard touching my soul  
and body what I mean;  
I trust you all will witness bear,  
55 I have a steadfast brain.  
And now let me dispose such things  
as I shall leave behind,  
That those which shall receive the same  
may know my willing mind.  
60 I first of all to London leave,  
because I there was bred,  
Brave<sup>o</sup> buildings rare, of churches store,<sup>o</sup>  
and Paul's to the head.<sup>1</sup>  
Between the same, fair streets there be  
65 and people goodly store;  
Because their keeping craveth<sup>o</sup> cost,  
I yet will leave hem<sup>o</sup> more.  
First for their food, I butchers leave,  
that every day shall kill;  
70 By Thames you shall have brewers store,  
and bakers at your will.  
And such as orders do observe,  
and eat fish thrice a week,<sup>2</sup>  
I leave two streets full fraught therewith;  
75 they need not far to seek.  
Watling Street and Canwick Street  
I full of woolen leave,  
And linen store in Friday Street,  
if they me not deceive.  
80 And those which are of calling such  
that costlier they require,  
I mercers<sup>3</sup> leave, with silk so rich  
as any would desire.  
85 In Cheap,<sup>4</sup> of them they store shall find,  
and likewise in that street  
I goldsmiths leave, with jewels such

as are for ladies meet.<sup>o</sup>  
And plate<sup>o</sup> to furnish cupboards with  
full brave there shall you find,  
90 With purl<sup>o</sup> of silver and of gold  
to satisfy your mind.  
With hoods, bongraces,<sup>o</sup> hats, or caps,  
such store are in that street,  
As if on tone side you should miss,  
95 the tother<sup>5</sup> serves you feat.<sup>o</sup>  
For nets<sup>o</sup> of every kind of sort,  
I leave within the pawn,<sup>6</sup>  
French ruffs, high purls,<sup>o</sup> gorgets,<sup>o</sup> and sleeves  
of any kind of lawn.<sup>o</sup>  
100 For purse or knives, for comb or glass,  
or any needful knack,  
I by the Stocks<sup>7</sup> have left a boy  
will ask you what you lack.  
I hose do leave in Birchin Lane,  
105 of any kind of size,  
For women stitched, for men both trunks  
and those of Gascon guise,<sup>8</sup>  
Boots, shoes, or pantables<sup>o</sup> good store,  
Saint Martin's hath for you;  
110 In Cornwall,<sup>9</sup> there I leave you beds,  
and all that 'longs<sup>o</sup> thereto.  
For women, shall you tailors have:  
by Bow,<sup>1</sup> the chiefest dwell;  
In every lane you some shall find  
115 can do indifferent well.  
And for the men, few streets or lanes,  
but body-makers<sup>o</sup> be,  
And such as make the sweeping cloaks  
with guards<sup>o</sup> beneath the knee.  
120 Artillery<sup>o</sup> at Temple Bar  
and dagges<sup>o</sup> at Tower Hill;

Swords and bucklers of the best  
are nigh the Fleet until.<sup>o</sup>  
Now when thy folk are fed and clad  
125 with such as I have named,  
For dainty mouths and stomachs weak  
some junkets<sup>o</sup> must be framed.  
Wherefore I 'pothecaries<sup>2</sup> leave,  
with banquets in their shop;  
130 Physicians also for the sick,  
diseases for to stop.  
Some roisters<sup>o</sup> still must bide in thee  
and such as cut it out,<sup>o</sup>  
That with the guiltless quarrel will,  
135 to let their blood about.  
For them I cunning surgeons leave,  
some plasters<sup>o</sup> to apply,  
That ruffians may not still be hanged,  
nor quiet persons die.  
140 For salt, oatmeal, candles, soap,  
or what you else do want,  
In many places shops are full,  
I left you nothing scant.<sup>o</sup>  
If they that keep what I you leave  
145 ask money, when they sell it,  
At Mint there is such store it is  
impossible to tell it.  
At Steelyard<sup>3</sup> store of wines there be,  
your dullèd minds to glad,  
150 And handsome men that must not wed  
except they leave their trade.<sup>4</sup>  
They oft shall seek for proper girls,  
and some perhaps shall find  
That need compels or lucre lures  
155 to satisfy their mind.  
And near the same I houses leave

for people to repair,<sup>o</sup>  
To bathe themselves, so to prevent  
infection of the air.  
160 On Saturdays I wish that those  
which all the week do drug<sup>o</sup>  
Shall thither trudge to trim them up  
on Sundays to look smug.<sup>o</sup>  
If any other thing be lacked  
165 in thee, I wish them look;  
For there it is: I little brought,  
but nothing from thee took.  
Now for the people in thee left,  
I have done as I may,  
170 And that the poor, when I am gone,  
have cause for me to pray,  
I will to prisons portions leave,  
what though but very small,  
Yet that they may remember me  
175 occasion be it shall.  
And first the Counter<sup>o</sup> they shall have,  
lest they should go to wrack,<sup>o</sup>  
Some coppers<sup>o</sup> and some honest men  
that sergeants<sup>o</sup> draw aback.  
180 And such as friends will not them bail,  
whose coin is very thin,  
For them I leave a certain hole,  
and little ease within.  
The Newgate<sup>o</sup> once a month shall have  
185 a sessions<sup>o</sup> for his share,  
Lest being heaped,<sup>o</sup> infection might  
procure a further care.  
And at those sessions some shall 'scape  
with burning near the thumb,<sup>o</sup>  
190 And afterward to beg their fees<sup>5</sup>  
till they have got the sum.

And such whose deeds deserveth death,  
and twelve<sup>o</sup> have found the same,  
They shall be drawn up Holborn Hill  
195 to come to further shame.<sup>6</sup>  
Well, yet to such I leave a nag  
shall soon their sorrows cease,  
For he shall either break their necks  
or gallop from the preace.<sup>o</sup>  
200 The Fleet<sup>o</sup> not in their circuit is,  
yet if I give him nought,  
It might procure his curse, ere I  
unto the ground be brought.  
Wherefore I leave some papist old  
205 to underprop his roof,  
And to the poor within the same,  
a box<sup>o</sup> for their behoof.<sup>o</sup>  
What makes you standers-by to smile,  
and laugh so in your sleeve,  
210 I think it is because that I  
to Ludgate<sup>o</sup> nothing give.  
I am not now in case to<sup>o</sup> lie,  
here is no place of jest:  
I did reserve that for myself,  
215 if I my health possessed<sup>o</sup>  
And ever came in credit so  
a debtor for to be,  
When days of payment did approach,  
I thither meant to flee,  
220 To shroud myself amongst the rest  
that choose to die in debt  
Rather than any creditor  
should money from them get.  
Yet 'cause I feel myself so weak  
225 that none me credit dare,  
I here revoke, and do it leave

some bankrupts to his share.°  
To all the bookbinders by Paul's,°  
because I like their art,  
230 They every week shall money have  
when they from books depart.°  
Amongst them all my printer must  
have somewhat to his share;  
I will my friends these books to buy  
235 of him, with other ware.  
For maidens poor, I widowers rich  
do leave, that oft shall dote  
And by that means shall marry them,  
to set the girls afloat.  
240 And wealthy widows will I leave  
to help young gentlemen,  
Which when you° have, in any case  
be courteous to them then.  
And see their plate and jewels eke  
245 may not be marred with rust,  
Nor let their bags too long be full,  
for fear that they do burst.  
To every gate under the walls  
that compass thee about,  
250 I fruitwives° leave to entertain  
such as come in and out.  
To Smithfield<sup>7</sup> I must something leave,  
my parents there did dwell:  
So careless for to be of it,  
255 none would accompt° it well.  
Wherefore it thrice a week shall have  
of horse and neat° good store;  
And in his spittle° blind and lame  
to dwell for evermore.  
260 And Bedlam° must not be forgot,  
for that was oft my walk:

I people there too many leave  
that out of tune do talk.  
At Bridewell<sup>o</sup> there shall beadle be,  
265 and matrons that shall still  
See chalk well-chopped and spinning plied,  
and turning of the mill.  
For such as cannot quiet be,  
but strive for house or land,  
270 At th'Inns of Court<sup>8</sup> I lawyers leave  
to take their cause in hand.  
And also leave I at each Inn  
of Court or Chancery,  
Of gentlemen a youthful rout<sup>o</sup>  
275 full of activity:  
For whom I store of books have left  
at each bookbinder's stall,  
And part of all that London hath  
to furnish them withal.<sup>o</sup>  
280 And when they are with study cloyed,  
to recreate their mind,  
Of tennis courts, of dancing schools,  
and fence<sup>o</sup> they store shall find.  
And every Sunday at the least  
285 I leave, to make them sport,  
In divers places players<sup>o</sup> that  
of wonders shall report.  
Now, London, have I (for thy sake),  
within thee and without,  
290 As comes into my memory  
dispersèd round about  
Such needful things as they should have  
here left now unto thee:  
When I am gone, with conscience  
295 let them dispersèd be.  
And though I nothing namèd have

to bury me withal,  
Consider that above the ground  
annoyance be I shall<sup>o</sup>  
300 And let me have a shrouding sheet  
to cover me from shame,  
And in oblivion bury me  
and never more me name.  
Ringings<sup>o</sup> nor other ceremonies  
305 use you not for cost,<sup>o</sup>  
Nor at my burial make no feast,  
your money were but lost.  
Rejoice in God that I am gone  
out of this vale so vile,  
310 And that of each thing left such store  
as may your wants exile.<sup>9</sup>  
I make thee sole executor, because  
I loved thee best.  
And thee I put in trust to give  
315 the goods unto the rest.  
Because thou shalt a helper need  
in this so great a charge,<sup>o</sup>  
I wish Good Fortune be thy guide, lest  
thou shouldst run at large.  
320 The happy days and quiet times  
they both her servants be,  
Which well will serve to fetch and bring  
such things as need<sup>o</sup> to thee.  
Wherefore (good London) not refuse  
325 for helper her to take:  
Thus being weak and weary both,  
an end here will I make.  
To all that ask what end I made,  
and how I went away,  
330 Thou answer mayst: "like those which here  
no longer tarry may."



And unto all that wish me well  
or rue that I am gone,  
Do me commend, and bid them cease  
335 my absence for to moan.  
And tell them further, if they would  
my presence still have had,  
They should have sought to mend my luck,  
which ever was too bad.  
340 So fare thou well a thousand times,  
God shield thee from thy foe,  
And still make thee victorious  
of those that seek thy woe.  
And though I am persuade that I  
345 shall never more thee see,  
Yet to the last I shall not cease  
to wish much good to thee.  
This twenty of October, I,  
in Anno Domini<sup>1</sup>  
350 A thousand five hundred seventy-three,  
as almanacs descry,<sup>o</sup>  
Did write this will with mine own hand  
and it to London gave,  
In witness of the standers-by,  
355 whose names if you will have,  
Paper, Pen, and Standish<sup>o</sup> were  
at that same present by,  
With Time, who promised to reveal,  
so fast as she could hie,  
360 The same, lest of my nearer kin  
for any thing should vary:<sup>2</sup>  
So finally I make an end,  
no longer can I tarry.

1573

## Endnotes

- Note 1: “And St. Paul’s Cathedral foremost among them.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To encourage the fishing industry, an Act of 1563 ordered that fish was to be eaten three days a week.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dealers in silk and other costly materials.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cheapside Market, near St. Paul’s.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “Tone . . . tother”: the one . . . the other.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The upper walk or gallery of the Royal Exchange.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A market in the center of London.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Two kinds of breeches: trunk-hose (full and baglike) and gaskins (wide breeches).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “Cornwallish ground” in Vintry Ward.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Church of St. Mary Bow.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Apothecaries sold various dainty dishes (“banquets”).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The place of business of the Hanseatic merchants, known for their Rhenish wines.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the men are apprentices, who were not allowed to marry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the discharge fees that prisoners were required to pay.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The road to Tyburn—the place of execution—ran by Holborn Hill.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: West Smithfield, known for its horse market.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Inns of Court and Inns of Chancery trained and housed lawyers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, rejoice that I’ve left you such abundance of everything that you will have no further needs.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the year of the Lord (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Time will hasten ("hie") to reveal the will, lest kinsfolk begin to quarrel over her property.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *pain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *more*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *turn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *associate with*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to them*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ever*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abundance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *requires*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *them*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suitable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *silver-plated dishes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thread or cord*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sunshades*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nicely*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hairnets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ruff pleats* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wimples*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fine linen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overshoes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *belongs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tailors*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ornamental borders*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *weapons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pistols*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *near to Fleet Street*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *milk puddings*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *roisterers, bullies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make a show*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poultices*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resort*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drudge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neat, trim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a debtors' prison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheats*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *police officers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a prison for felons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *court*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overcrowded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *branding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a jury*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *press, crowd*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *another prison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *money box* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *benefit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *debtors' prison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a position to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *retained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to Ludgate's share*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *St. Paul's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sell their books*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the young gentlemen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fruit sellers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *account*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *oxen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hospital*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the lunatic asylum*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a workhouse for the poor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowd*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fencing*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *actors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I shall be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of church bells*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because of the expense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *task*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are needed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inkstand*[Return to reference](#) °

# Women and Power

An act of Parliament in 1544 reaffirmed the long-standing legal prohibition upon the writing of wills by certain groups or classes of people, including persons under the age of twenty-one, idiots, madmen—and wives. Thus for a woman to write her own will, let alone to publish it, was to lay claim to a certain legal, social, and economic independence. Isabella Whitney adopts this stance in order to survey the institutions, occupations, and commodities of London and, in leaving her mock bequests, to articulate a series of sharp criticisms. She writes in the voice of an impoverished gentlewoman who is compelled by her circumstances to leave the city and does so in a mood that mingles regret, complaint, irony, and aggression.

Though Tudor England was a patriarchal society, from 1553 to 1603 it experienced five uninterrupted decades of female rule. What effect did this have on the society's discourse of gender relations? On one level, precious little. Women governed the realm, but Tudor men, with very few exceptions, clung to and reiterated their misogynistic views. None of the royal women introduced in this section showed either an interest in improving the lot of less privileged women in their society or a sense of solidarity with their powerful female peers. Two of them, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, signed the death warrants of the two others, Jane Grey and Mary Stuart (Queen of Scots). In addition, Mary Tudor probably came close to having her half-sister, Elizabeth, executed, and Mary Stuart plotted her cousin Elizabeth's assassination. These women are fascinating because they found themselves thrust into positions of almost unbelievable complexity, challenge, and danger. That one of them—Elizabeth I—not only flourished but also managed to use to her advantage the fact that she was a woman is one of the age's great stories.

Though public affirmations of male superiority continued, condemnations of the female sex could not, under Elizabeth, be quite

so sweeping or absolute as in previous times. When the prominent humanist Sir Thomas Smith thought of how he should describe his country's social order, he declared that "we do reject women, as those whom nature hath made to keep home and to nourish their family and children, and not to meddle with matters abroad, nor to bear office in a city or commonwealth." Then, with a kind of nervous glance over his shoulder, he made an exception of those few in whom "the blood is respected, not the age nor the sex"—for example, the queen.

But even at the top, women could not easily escape being defined by their marital status, sexual behavior, and reproductive potential. Such was the case for Jane Grey, matched to Guildford Dudley as a move in a dangerous political game; for Mary Tudor, with her marriage to a foreign king and her phantom pregnancies; and for Mary Stuart, with her string of disastrous marriages and reputed sexual liaisons. Imagining how the careers of these contemporary women appeared in the eyes of Elizabeth helps explain her choice not to marry.

Before the Reformation, learned and ambitious women had been able, in convents, to gain a modicum of education that offered them scope for both literary expression and the exercise of authority. With the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, however, that option was closed; and as Protestantism gathered strength, the emphasis on marriage further narrowed for women the possibilities of an independent life. Nonetheless, many Tudor women ran households and businesses; others played prominent roles in city life and were influential in regional politics and church appointments. Though in practice many women had more influence and authority than official doctrine acknowledged, that doctrine affirmed the subordination of women in public, private, economic, and spiritual life. Sermon writers and moralists cited alleged scriptural, medical, moral, historical, and philosophical "proofs" of male superiority and urged women to be chaste, silent, and obedient. At the same time, Protestant insistence on scripture as the crucial guide to faith also placed a sharply increased emphasis on literacy, which contributed, over the course of the sixteenth century, to a gradual increase in the

number of women writers. Translation was a field that educated women could enter, as it allowed them to claim to be the mouthpieces of men while giving them a medium for displaying their linguistic and technical skills. The dedicatory matter provided here, in which the translators Anne Cooke Bacon and Mary Tyler address their own “authorship” as well as that of the people they are translating, shows the extent to which women were able to exploit male voices to express their own concerns.



**Women in Charge.** This engraving is from a 1597 cookbook by Switzerland’s first culinary author, Anna Wecker. Intended for a popular, rather than aristocratic readership, the book provides simple, accessible recipes. Of the two women in this picture, the one on the left, proudly supervising her kitchen, is probably Wecker herself.

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Two further dedications join Bacon’s and Tyler’s as early examples of *querelles de femme*. This French term, meaning “the woman question,” was used of a range of European books written from 1500



onward that discussed women's nature, abilities, and status in society—issues particularly pressing in England with Mary I and then Elizabeth I on the throne. Women who defend their right to authorship are participating in the *querelles de femme* debate; here two authors of original texts, Anne Dowriche and Jane Anger, explain why they feel they have the ability and right to write for themselves. Anne Dowriche tells her brother that she can pen an epic poem about the French wars because, though she is a woman, her subject justifies the Protestant Reformation; Jane Anger maintains that she can write as she does because she needs to confront the arrogant men who seduce and subjugate women. Anger's furious text is, however, further contradictory, as it is unclear whether it is genuinely by a woman or is by a man adopting an angry woman's voice and stance. In one way or another, the male voice regularly intrudes into the woman's—but, as these examples show, the reverse is also true.

## MARY I (MARY TUDOR)

Mary Tudor (1516–1558) was the only surviving child of Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon. The king saw his daughter as a useful bargaining chip in international diplomacy—at the age of six she was engaged to be married to her cousin Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and England's chief ally against France—but balked at the thought of leaving his kingdom to a female heir. Blaming Catherine for failing to produce a son, he determined to seek a divorce. The pope's refusal to grant it precipitated the Protestant Reformation in England.

In the years immediately following the royal divorce and the break with Rome, Mary had good reason to believe that her life was in danger. When she refused to take the Oaths of Succession and Supremacy (affirming, respectively, the invalidity of her parents' marriage and her father's supreme authority over the English Church), Henry came close to having her arrested for treason. At length, her own Catholic councillors prevailed on her to sign the oaths rather than lose her life. Sparing her no humiliation, the Privy Council insisted that she add a postscript acknowledging that Henry VIII's marriage to her mother had been "incestuous and unlawful," thus effectively declaring herself a bastard. In his will, however, Henry VIII made Mary second in line for the throne, after her younger half-brother, Edward.

Harassed for harboring priests and attending Mass during Edward's reign, Mary very nearly did not survive the attempt, at its end, to establish as successor the Protestant Jane Grey. But when, somewhat surprisingly, Protestants as well as Catholics rallied firmly to Mary's cause, she ascended the throne, and Jane Grey and her supporters went to the scaffold. The early eagerness of Protestants to accept Henry VIII's legitimate heir as their queen, regardless of her religion, diminished sharply when it became clear that Mary intended to marry a foreign ruler, Philip II of Spain. (Eleven years

her junior, Philip was the son of her childhood fiancé, Charles V.) Sir Thomas Wyatt, son of the poet of the same name, led an uprising in January 1554 to prevent the match. Urged to flee, Mary instead went to the Guildhall in London and made a forceful speech that garnered popular support.

Wyatt's rebellion was subdued a week later, but there would never thereafter be real peace between Mary and her subjects. Her determination to restore the Catholic religion was probably welcomed by the majority, but there was no hope of avoiding confrontation with committed Protestants, and Mary did not attempt to avoid it. Between the beginning of 1555 and the end of her reign in 1558, she had 283 Protestants, from famous bishops to village zealots, executed for heresy. The immediate popular response of horror and resentment, which would soon solidify into the lurid historical legend of "Bloody Mary," had less to do with the number of executions than with the nature of the charge and with the grisly method employed. In reality both Henry VIII and Elizabeth executed many more people in the course of their reigns than did Mary. But Henry and Elizabeth, who were disposed to treat religious dissent as treason, typically had their victims executed as traitors—that is, hanged or beheaded. The pious Mary attempted to stamp out heresy and had *her* victims burned at the stake.

Impelled to marry for political reasons, Mary seemed to fall genuinely in love with her husband, who, however, did not reciprocate her feelings. On two occasions in her reign, she believed and announced herself to be pregnant, but both were phantom pregnancies. The melancholy from which she had always suffered intensified in the later years of her reign, when she grappled with bitter disappointments: many of her subjects incorrigibly heretical, her husband aloof and usually absent, her body apparently incapable of childbearing. In 1558 Mary died, leaving the throne to her Protestant half-sister. The two royal half-sisters are buried in a single tomb in Westminster Abbey.

# Letter to Henry VIII

***To the King's Most Gracious Highness, my father:***<sup>1</sup>

Most humbly prostrate before the feet of Your Most Excellent Majesty, your most humble, faithful, and obedient subject, which hath so extremely offended Your Most Gracious Highness that my heavy and fearful heart dare not presume to call you father, ne<sup>2</sup> Your Majesty hath any cause by my deserts, saving the benignity of your most blessed nature doth surmount all evils, offenses, and trespasses, and is ever merciful and ready to accept the penitent calling for grace in any convenient time. Having received this Thursday at night certain letters from Mr. Secretary,<sup>3</sup> as well advising me to make my humble submission immediately to yourself, which because I durst not without your gracious license presume to do before, I lately sent unto him, as signifying that your most merciful heart and fatherly pity had granted me your blessing, with condition that I should persevere in that I had commenced and begun, and that I should not eftsoons<sup>4</sup> offend Your Majesty by the denial or refusal of any such articles and commandments as it may please Your Highness to address unto me for the perfect trial of mine heart and inward affection. For the perfect declaration of the bottom of my heart and stomach,<sup>5</sup> first, I knowledge<sup>6</sup> myself to have most unkindly and unnaturally offended Your Most Excellent Highness, in that I have not submitted myself to your most just and virtuous laws, and for mine offense therein, which I must confess were in me a thousandfold more grievous than they could be in any other living creature, I put myself wholly and entirely to your gracious mercy; at whose hands I cannot receive that punishment for the same<sup>7</sup> that I have deserved. Secondly, to open my heart to Your Grace in these things which I have hitherto refused to condescend<sup>8</sup> unto, and have now written with mine own hand, sending the same to Your

Highness herewith; I shall never beseech Your Grace to have pity and compassion of me, if ever you shall perceive that I shall privily or apertly<sup>9</sup> vary or alter from one piece of that I have written and subscribed, or refuse to confirm, ratify, or declare the same where Your Majesty shall appoint me. Thirdly, as I have and shall, knowing your excellent learning, virtue, wisdom, and knowledge, put my soul into your direction, and, by the same, hath and will, in all things, from henceforth direct my conscience, so my body I do wholly commit to your mercy and fatherly pity; desiring no state, no condition, nor no manner degree of living, but such as Your Grace shall appoint unto me; knowledging and confessing that my state cannot be so vile as either the extremity of justice would appoint unto me, or as mine offenses have required and deserved. And whatsoever Your Grace shall command me to do, touching any of these points, either for things past, present, or to come, I shall as gladly do the same, as Your Majesty can command me. Most humbly therefore, beseeching your mercy, most gracious sovereign lord and benign father, to have pity and compassion of your miserable and sorrowful child, and with the abundance of your inestimable goodness so to overcome my iniquity towards God, Your Grace, and your whole realm, as I may feel some sensible<sup>1</sup> token of reconciliation, which, God is my judge, I only desire, without other respect.<sup>2</sup> To Whom I shall daily pray for the preservation of Your Highness, with the Queen's Grace,<sup>3</sup> and that it may please Him to send you issue. From Hunsdon, this Thursday, at 11 of the clock at night.

Your Grace's most humble and  
obedient daughter and handmaid,  
Mary

## 1536 **Endnotes**

1830

- Note 1:

After the execution of Anne Boleyn on May 19, 1536, Mary thought that she would quickly be restored to her father's favor. Henry, though, persisted in the demand that he had been making of her for several years: that she acknowledge in writing his supremacy over the English Church, as well as the invalidity of his marriage to her mother. In the weeks after Anne's beheading, Mary's continuing refusal to comply with this demand infuriated Henry to the point that he threatened her (not for the first time) with death. Finally, lambasted by Henry's secretary and principal adviser Thomas Cromwell, who had supported her until the king's rage made him fear for his own safety, and urged to submit even by her Spanish allies, Mary yielded, signing the prescribed articles on a Thursday night in June (either the 15th or the 22nd) and writing her father this supplicatory letter (which may have been drafted by Cromwell).

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Nor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cromwell.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Again.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The stomach, like the heart, was often designated the inward seat of thought and feeling.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Acknowledge.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, for my offense.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Consent.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Secretly or openly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Evident. "As": so that.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Regard.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Jane Seymour, whom Henry had married on May 30 (eleven days after the execution of Anne Boleyn).[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***From An Ambassadorial Dispatch to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V: The Coronation of Mary I*<sup>1</sup>**

Your Highness's own cousin,<sup>2</sup> Queen Mary, now wears the crown of this kingdom. She was crowned on the first day of this month,<sup>3</sup> with the pomp and ceremonies customary here, which are far grander than elsewhere, as I shall briefly show; and according to the rites of the old religion.<sup>4</sup> On the eve of her coronation-day, the queen was removed from the Tower and castle of London to Westminster Palace, where the sovereigns of England are by custom wont to reside in London. She was accompanied by the earls, lords, gentlemen, ambassadors, and officers, all dressed in rich garments. The queen was carried in an open litter covered with brocade. Two coaches followed her: the Lady Elizabeth and the Lady of Cleves<sup>5</sup> rode in one; some of the ladies of the court in the other. The streets were hung with tapestries and strewn with grass and flowers; and many triumphal arches were erected along her way. The next day, coronation-day, the queen went from the Hall of Parliament and Justice to the church,<sup>6</sup> in procession with the bishops and priests in full canonical dress, the streets being again covered with flowers and decked with stuffs.<sup>7</sup> She mounted a scaffolding that was erected at the church for this purpose, and showed herself to the people. The queen's coronation was proclaimed to them and the question asked of them if they were willing to accept her as their queen. All answered: Yes; and the ordinary ceremonies were then gone through, the queen making an offering of silver and silken stuffs. The bishop of Winchester, who officiated, gave her the scepter and the orb, fastened on the spurs, and girt her with the sword; he received the oath, and she was twice anointed and crowned with three crowns. The ceremonies lasted from ten in the morning till five

o'clock in the afternoon. She was carried from the church to the Parliament Hall, where a banquet was prepared. The queen sat on a stone chair<sup>8</sup> covered with brocade, which they say was carried off from Scotland in sign of a victory, and was once used by the kings of Scotland at their crowning; she rested her feet upon two of her ladies, which is also a part of the prescribed ceremonial, and ate thus. She was served by the earls and lords, Knights of the Order<sup>9</sup> and officers, each one performing his own special office. The meats<sup>1</sup> were carried by the Knights of the Bath. These knights are made by the kings on the eve of their coronation and at no other time; and their rank is inferior to the other order. The queen instituted twenty fresh ones. They are called Knights of the Bath because they plunge naked into a bath with the king and kiss his shoulder. The queen being a woman, the ceremony was performed for her by the earl of Arundel, her great master of the household. The earl marshal and the lord steward<sup>2</sup> directed the ceremonies mounted on horseback in the great hall. When the banquet was over, an armed knight rode in upon a Spanish horse and flung down his glove,<sup>3</sup> while one of the kings-of-arms<sup>4</sup> challenged anyone who opposed the queen's rights to pick up the glove and fight the champion in single combat. The queen gave him a gold cup, as it is usual to do. Meanwhile the earls, vassals, and councillors paid homage to her, kissing her on the shoulder; and the ceremonies came to an end without any of the interruptions or troubles that were feared on the part of the Lutherans, who would rejoice in upsetting the queen's reign. They were feared especially because of the Lady Elizabeth, who does not feel sincerely the oath she took at the coronation; she has had intelligence with the king of France, which has been discovered.<sup>5</sup> A remedy is to be sought at the convocation of the estates,<sup>6</sup> which is to take place on the fifth of this month: Elizabeth is to be declared a bastard, having been born during the lifetime of Queen Catherine, mother of the queen. The affairs of the kingdom are unsettled because the vassals and people are prone to scandal, and seekers after novelties; they are strange and troublesome folk.



## 1553 **Endnotes**

1916

- Note 1: Translated from Spanish, in *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, vol. 5, pt. 1.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mary and Charles were first cousins.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: October 1553.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Catholicism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Anne of Cleves, the German noblewoman who had been Henry VIII's fourth wife, was the only one of the six still alive in 1553. Henry had had the marriage annulled after seven months, but Anne had remained in England. "Lady Elizabeth" is Mary's half-sister, the future Elizabeth I.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, from Westminster Hall to Westminster Abbey.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pieces of cloth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The coronation throne—not itself stone, but having the Stone of Scone (taken from Scotland by Edward I in 1292) encased in its seat.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Order of the Garter.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Food in general (not just animal flesh).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Earl of Arundel was both the lord steward and the lord great master of the household. The earl marshal was the Duke of Norfolk.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, threw down the gauntlet. The challenge by the "king's champion" (a hereditary office) was a part of the coronation ritual until 1821.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The title of the three chief heralds of the College of Arms.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: There is, at least now, no evidence of Elizabeth's conniving with the French king. "Intelligence": communication.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: That is, Parliament. Statutes declaring both Mary and Elizabeth illegitimate were already in place; Parliament nullified those pertaining to Mary, but left unrepealed the ones concerning Elizabeth. [Return to reference 6](#)

## **The Oration of Queen Mary in the Guildhall, on the First of February, 1554<sup>1</sup>**

I am come unto you in mine own person, to tell you that which already you see and know; that is, how traitorously and rebelliously a number of Kentishmen have assembled themselves against both us and you. Their pretense (as they said at the first) was for a marriage determined for us: to the which, and to all the articles thereof, ye have been made privy. But since,<sup>2</sup> we have caused certain of our Privy Council to go again unto them, and to demand the cause of this their rebellion: and it appeared then unto our said council that the matter of the marriage seemed to be but a Spanish cloak to cover their pretended purpose against our religion; for that<sup>3</sup> they arrogantly and traitorously demanded to have the governance of our person, the keeping of the Tower,<sup>4</sup> and the placing of our councillors.

Now, loving subjects, what I am, ye right well know. I am your queen, to whom at my coronation, when I was wedded to the realm and laws of the same (the spousal ring whereof I have on my finger, which never hitherto was, nor hereafter shall be, left off), you promised your allegiance and obedience unto me. And that I am the right and true inheritor of the crown of this realm of England, I take all Christendom to witness. My father, as ye all know, possessed the same regal state, which now rightly is descended unto me: and to him always ye showed yourselves most faithful and loving subjects; and therefore I doubt not, but ye will show yourselves likewise to me, and that ye will not suffer a vile traitor to have the order and governance of our person, and to occupy our estate,<sup>5</sup> especially being so vile a traitor as Wyatt is; who most certainly, as he hath abused mine ignorant subjects which be on his side, so doth he intend and purpose the destruction of you, and spoil<sup>6</sup> of your goods.

And this I say to you, on the word of a prince: I cannot tell how naturally the mother loveth the child, for I was never the mother of any; but certainly, if a prince and governor may as naturally and earnestly love her subjects, as the mother doth the child, then assure yourselves that I, being your lady and mistress, do as earnestly and as tenderly love and favor you. And I, thus loving you, cannot but think that ye as heartily and faithfully love me; and then I doubt not but we shall give these rebels a short and speedy overthrow.

As concerning the marriage, ye shall understand that I enterprised not the doing thereof without advice, and that by the advice of all our Privy Council, who so considered and weighed the great commodities<sup>7</sup> that might ensue thereof, that they not only thought it very honorable, but also expedient, both for the wealth<sup>8</sup> of our realm and also of all you our subjects. And as touching myself, I assure you, I am not so bent to my will, neither so precise nor affectionate,<sup>9</sup> that either for mine own pleasure I would choose where I lust,<sup>1</sup> or that I am so desirous as needs<sup>2</sup> I would have one. For God, I thank him, to whom be the praise therefore, I have hitherto lived a virgin, and doubt nothing<sup>3</sup> but with God's grace am able so to live still. But if, as my progenitors have done before, it might please God that I might leave some fruit of my body behind me to be your governor, I trust ye would not only rejoice thereat, but also I know it would be to your great comfort. And certainly, if I either did think or know that this marriage were to the hurt of any of you my commons, or to the impeachment<sup>4</sup> of any part or parcel of the royal state of this realm of England, I would never consent thereunto, neither would I ever marry while I lived. And on the word of a queen I promise you that if it shall not probably<sup>5</sup> appear to all the nobility and commons in the high court of Parliament that this marriage shall be for the high benefit and commodity of the whole realm, then I will abstain from marriage while I live.

And now, good subjects, pluck up your hearts, and like true men stand fast against these rebels, both our enemies and yours, and fear them not; for I assure you, I fear them nothing at all. And I will

leave with you my Lord Howard and my lord treasurer,<sup>6</sup> who shall be assistants with the mayor for your defense.

## 1554**Endnotes**

1563

- Note 1:  
When, in the early months of Mary's reign, it became clear that she intended to marry the heir to the Spanish throne (the future Philip II, son of her cousin Charles V), discontent broke into insurrection. In late January 1554, a sizable army led by the Kentishman Sir Thomas Wyatt II began an advance on London. In the crisis, Mary went to the Guildhall and made this rousing speech to the assembled Londoners. They rallied to her side, and when Wyatt reached the city he found an unreceptive populace. The uprising collapsed, and he and other rebel leaders were executed. The version of Mary's speech given here was printed, with grudging admiration, by the Protestant martyrologist John Foxe, in his *Acts and Monuments*.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Subsequently.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Because.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the Tower of London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Position.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Despoliation, pillage.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Benefits.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Well-being.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nor so fastidious nor willful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Where I please.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: So full of desire that it is necessary.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Not at all.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Injury; discrediting.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plausibly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sir William Paulet, Marquis of Winchester. "My Lord Howard": William Howard, Earl of Warwick.[Return to reference](#)



## **LADY JANE GREY**

Jane Grey (1537–1554) was unlucky in her parents, the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk. They were, by her own account, impossible to please, subjecting her to taunts, threats, and physical abuse whenever she made a minor error in performance or deportment. Much worse for Jane, her mother was a granddaughter of Henry VII with a distant but plausible claim to the English throne. This fact, more than any action of her own, determined the course of Jane's life and death.

In 1553 England was ruled in name by the boy-king Edward VI, but in reality by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland (1504–1553), who as head of state (Lord Protector) stood atop an aggressively Protestant regime. With Edward's health in decline and his Catholic half-sister Mary next in line to the throne, Protestant nobles feared for their future and for England's. For Northumberland, Jane Grey's Protestantism and bloodline offered an elegant solution. At age fifteen, Lady Jane was married to Northumberland's son, Guildford Dudley. Within six weeks of the marriage, Edward VI was dead, having named Jane Grey as his successor. The Privy Council, pressured by Northumberland, denounced Mary Tudor as a bastard and declared Jane queen of England.

Jane's reign lasted a mere nine days, July 9–18. For the first seventy-two hours, there seemed some hope of success; even the hostile ambassadors of Catholic powers were ready to hail Jane as queen. But the nobility and the common people, Protestant as well as Catholic, soon began to shift their allegiance to Mary, who at the time downplayed her religion. Personal connections to Mary's household and local grievances, along with Catholic sympathies, motivated much of the gentry to rally around her. Within weeks Northumberland was defeated, arrested, and executed. Jane, who had briefly reigned from the Tower of London, was now made prisoner there. The victorious Mary initially had no intention of

executing Jane or her young husband, who, she recognized, had been no more than pawns in their parents' political games. But in January 1554 the Duke of Suffolk, Jane's father, joined in an ill-fated rebellion intended to reinstate his daughter on the throne. Mary's councillors convinced her that Jane would pose a danger as long as she remained alive. On the morning of February 12, 1554, Jane watched from a Tower window as her husband, Guildford, went to his public execution; within an hour she too had been beheaded, privately, on Tower Green.

Jane Grey was never really a woman in power. Her ability to command her own destiny, let alone that of others, was hardly greater when she was queen of England than when she was prisoner in the Tower. Yet it is clear from her writings and the testimony of others that Jane possessed a firm, even fiery will. In her brief stint as queen, she shocked her controllers by refusing to allow Guildford to take the title of king and rule jointly with her, and again by insisting that Northumberland, rather than her father, Suffolk, should lead her forces against Mary. Her will was harnessed to a militant and unshakable Protestantism; from an early age she mocked Catholic beliefs. In the Tower, where a politic conversion to Catholicism might well have saved her life, she instead wrote a violent and soon public letter to her onetime tutor Thomas Harding, who had converted, lambasting him as a "seed of Satan." Yet far from being an ignorant bigot, Jane was, though dead at sixteen, among the most learned women of her century; she had mastered Latin and Greek and was a student of Hebrew. She rivaled Elizabeth in intellectual brilliance and—to her fatal cost—exceeded her greatly in religious fervor.



## ***From Roger Ascham's Schoolmaster*<sup>1</sup>**

### **[A TALK WITH LADY JANE]**

\* \* \* One example whether love or fear doth work more in a child for virtue and learning I will gladly report; which may be heard with some pleasure and followed with more profit. Before I went into Germany,<sup>2</sup> I came to Broadgate in Leicestershire to take my leave of that noble Lady Jane Grey, to whom I was exceeding much beholding. Her parents, the duke and the duchess, with all the household, gentlemen and gentlewomen, were hunting in the park. I found her in her chamber reading *Phaedon Platonis*<sup>3</sup> in Greek, and that with as much delight as some gentleman would read a merry tale in Boccaccio.<sup>4</sup> After salutation and duty done, with some other talk, I asked her why she would lose<sup>5</sup> such pastime in the park. Smiling she answered me, "Iwis,<sup>6</sup> all their sport in the park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find in Plato. Alas, good folk, they never felt what true pleasure meant." "And how came you, madam," quoth I, "to this deep knowledge of pleasure, and what did chiefly allure you unto it, seeing not many women, but very few men, have attained thereunto?" "I will tell you," quoth she, "and tell you a truth which perchance ye will marvel at. One of the greatest benefits that ever God gave me is that he sent me so sharp and severe parents and so gentle a schoolmaster. For when I am in presence either of father or mother, whether I speak, keep silence, sit, stand, or go,<sup>7</sup> eat, drink, be merry or sad, be sewing, playing, dancing, or doing anything else, I must do it, as it were, in such weight, measure, and number even so perfectly as God made the world, or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yea, presently sometimes, with pinches, nips, and bobs,<sup>8</sup> and other ways which I will not name for the honor I bear them,<sup>9</sup> so without measure misordered, that I

think myself in hell till time come that I must go to Master Aylmer,<sup>1</sup> who teacheth me so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing whilst I am with him. And when I am called from him, I fall on weeping, because whatsoever I do else but learning is full of grief, trouble, fear, and whole misliking unto me. And thus my book hath been so much my pleasure, and bringeth daily to me more pleasure and more, that in respect of it all other pleasures in very deed be but trifles and troubles unto me." I remember this talk gladly, both because it is so worthy of memory and because also it was the last talk that ever I had, and the last time that ever I saw, that noble and worthy lady.

1570

## Endnotes

- Note 1: On Ascham—the preeminent humanist educational theorist of mid-16th-century England—see p. 171.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In 1550, as secretary of the English ambassador to the emperor Charles V. So Lady Jane was thirteen at the time of the conversation Ascham recounts.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, which recounts the last hours of Socrates and affirms the immortality of the soul.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1348–53), a collection of one hundred "merry," sometimes licentious, tales, not translated into English in Ascham's time.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Miss, forgo.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Truly.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Walk.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Raps, blows. "Presently": on the spot.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Her parents.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: John Aylmer (1521–1594). As a schoolboy he attracted the notice of Jane's father, who provided for his education at

Cambridge and appointed him tutor to his daughters. In 1577 Queen Elizabeth made him bishop of London.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***From A Letter of the Lady Jane to M. H., Late Chaplain to the Duke of Suffolk, Her Father, and Then Fallen from the Truth of God's Most Holy Word***<sup>1</sup>

So oft as I call to mind the dreadful and fearful saying of God, "That he which layeth hold upon the plough, and looketh back, is not meet for the kingdom of heaven,"<sup>2</sup> and, on the other side, the comfortable<sup>3</sup> words of our Savior Christ to all those that, forsaking themselves, do follow him, I cannot but marvel at thee, and lament thy case, which seemed sometime to be the lively member of Christ, but now the deformed imp<sup>4</sup> of the devil; sometime the beautiful temple of God, but now the stinking and filthy kennel of Satan; sometime the unspotted spouse of Christ, but now the unshamefaced paramour of Antichrist; sometime my faithful brother, but now a stranger and apostate; sometime a stout Christian soldier, but now a cowardly runaway. Yea, when I consider these things, I cannot but speak to thee, and cry out upon thee, thou seed of Satan, and not of Judah,<sup>5</sup> whom the devil hath deceived, the world hath beguiled, and the desire of life subverted, and made thee of a Christian an infidel. Wherefore hast thou taken the testament of the Lord in thy mouth? Wherefore hast thou preached the law and the will of God to others? Wherefore hast thou instructed others to be strong in Christ, when thou thyself dost now so shamefully shrink, and so horribly abuse the testament and law of the Lord? when thou thyself preachest not to steal, yet most abominably stealest, not from men but from God, and, committing most heinous sacrilege, robbest Christ thy Lord of his right members, thy body and thy soul, and choosest rather to live miserably with shame to the world, than to die and gloriously with honor to reign with Christ, in whom even in death is life? Why dost thou now show thyself most weak, when

indeed thou oughtest to be most strong? The strength of a fort is unknown before the assault: but thou yieldest thy hold before any battery be made.

O wretched and unhappy man, what art thou, but dust and ashes? and wilt thou resist thy maker that fashioned thee and framed thee? Wilt thou now forsake Him that called thee from the custom gathering among the Romish Antichristians,<sup>6</sup> to be an ambassador and messenger of his eternal word? He that first framed thee, and since thy first creation and birth preserved thee, nourished, and kept thee, yea, and inspired thee with the spirit of knowledge (I cannot say of grace), shall he not now possess thee? Darest thou deliver up thyself to another, being not thine own, but his? How canst thou, having knowledge, or how darest thou neglect the law of the Lord and follow the vain traditions of men, and whereas thou hast been a public professor of his name, become now a defacer of his glory? Wilt thou refuse the true God, and worship the invention of man, the golden calf, the whore of Babylon,<sup>7</sup> the Romish religion, the abominable idol, the most wicked Mass? Wilt thou torment again, rend and tear the most precious body of our Savior Christ, with thy bodily and fleshly teeth?<sup>8</sup> Wilt thou take upon thee to offer up any sacrifice unto God for our sins, considering that Christ offered up himself, as Paul saith, upon the cross, a lively sacrifice once for all? Can neither the punishment of the Israelites (which, for their idolatry, they so oft received), nor the terrible threatenings of the prophets, nor the curses of God's own mouth, fear thee to honor any other god than him? Dost thou so regard Him that spared not his dear and only son for thee, so diminishing, yea, utterly extinguishing his glory, that thou wilt attribute the praise and honor due unto him to the idols, "which have mouths and speak not, eyes and see not, ears and hear not";<sup>9</sup> which shall perish with them that made them?

\* \* \*

Return, return again into Christ's war, and, as becometh a faithful warrior, put on that armor that St. Paul teacheth to be most necessary for a Christian man.<sup>1</sup> And above all things take to you the shield of faith, and be you provoked by Christ's own example to withstand the devil, to forsake the world, and to become a true and faithful member of his mystical body, who spared not his own body for our sins.

Throw down yourself with the fear of his threatened vengeance for this so great and heinous an offense of apostasy; and comfort yourself, on the other part, with the mercy, blood, and promise of him that is ready to turn unto you whensoever you turn unto him. Disdain not to come again with the lost son,<sup>2</sup> seeing you have so wandered with him. Be not ashamed to turn again with him from the swill of strangers<sup>3</sup> to the delicacies of your most benign and loving Father, acknowledging that you have sinned against heaven and earth: against heaven, by staining the glorious name of God and causing his most sincere and pure word to be evil-spoken-of through you; against earth, by offending so many of your weak brethren, to whom you have been a stumbling-block through your sudden sliding. Be not abashed to come home again with Mary,<sup>4</sup> and weep bitterly with Peter,<sup>5</sup> not only with shedding the tears of your bodily eyes, but also pouring out the streams of your heart—to wash away, out of the sight of God, the filth and mire of your offensive fall. Be not abashed to say with the publican,<sup>6</sup> "Lord be merciful unto me a sinner."

Last of all, let the lively remembrance of the last day<sup>7</sup> be always before your eyes, remembering the terror that such shall be in at that time, with the runagates<sup>8</sup> and fugitives from Christ, which, setting more by the world than by heaven, more by their life than by him that gave them life, did shrink, yea did clean fall away, from him that forsook not them; and, contrariwise, the inestimable joys prepared for them that, fearing no peril nor dreading death, have manfully fought and victoriously triumphed over all power of darkness, over hell, death, and damnation, through their most redoubted<sup>9</sup> captain, Christ, who now stretcheth out his arms to

receive you, ready to fall upon your neck and kiss you, and, last of all, to feast you with the dainties and delicacies of his own precious blood: which undoubtedly, if it might stand with his determinate purpose, he would not let<sup>1</sup> to shed again, rather than you should be lost. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honor, praise, and glory everlasting. Amen.

Be constant, be constant; fear not for pain:  
Christ hath redeemed thee, and heaven is thy gain.

## 1553–54 **Endnotes**

1563, 1570

- Note 1:  
Taken from the 2nd edition (1570) of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. In a subsequent edition, "M. H." is identified as "Master Harding"—the eminent theologian Thomas Harding, who was one of Lady Jane's tutors. Like many other English clergymen, Harding had renounced his Protestantism after Mary I made clear her determination to restore Catholicism. Jane wrote to him from her prison in the Tower.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Luke 9:62. "Meet": fit. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Comforting. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Offshoot. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Patriarch of the biblical kingdom of the Hebrews. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the late 1540s, Harding had studied in Catholic Italy. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Revelation 17–19. Protestants often identified her with the Church of Rome. "The golden calf": the idol fashioned by the Israelites while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Alluding to the bitter controversy over transubstantiation: Catholic doctrine holds that although the bread and wine of the Eucharist retain their normal appearance,

they are miraculously transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ; Protestants believe that the identification is symbolic rather than substantive.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Psalm 115.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ephesians 6:11–18.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:10–32).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Prodigal journeyed into a “far country,” where, having “wasted his substance with riotous living,” he “would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Christ’s follower Mary Magdalene, long regarded (though without substantive basis in the Gospels) as a repentant sinner.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: After thrice denying Christ, Peter wept bitterly for his apostasy (Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Luke 18:13. “Publican”: in Christ’s parable of the Pharisee and the publican (tax collector—agent of the hated Roman occupiers), the latter humbles himself before God and is forgiven.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Judgment Day.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Runaways; that is, apostates.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Reverenced; dreaded.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hesitate.[Return to reference 1](#)



## A Letter of the Lady Jane, Sent unto her Father<sup>1</sup>

Father, although it hath pleased God to hasten my death by you, by whom my life should rather have been lengthened; yet can I so patiently take it, as I yield God more hearty thanks for shortening my woeful days than if all the world had been given into my possession, with life lengthened at my own will. And albeit I am well assured of your impatient dolours, redoubled manifold ways, both in bewailing your own woe and especially, as I hear, my unfortunate state, yet, my dear father (if I may without offense rejoice in my own mishaps), meseems in this I may account myself blessed, that washing my hands with the innocency of my fact,<sup>2</sup> my guiltless blood may cry before the Lord, Mercy, mercy to the innocent! And yet, though I must needs acknowledge that, being constrained and, as you wot well enough, continually assayed,<sup>3</sup> in taking upon me I seemed to consent,<sup>4</sup> and therein grievously offended the queen and her laws: yet do I assuredly trust that this mine offense towards God is so much the less in that, being in so royal estate as I was, mine enforced honor never agreed with mine innocent heart. And thus, good father, I have opened unto you the state wherein I presently stand; whose death at hand, although to you perhaps it may seem right woeful, to me there is nothing that can be more welcome than from this vale of misery to aspire to that heavenly throne of all joy and pleasure with Christ our savior. In whose steadfast faith (if it may be lawful for the daughter so to write to the father) the Lord that hitherto hath strengthened you so continue you that at the last we may meet in heaven with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup>

# Endnotes

- Note 1:  
Written shortly before her execution and later published in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Lady Jane's father, the Duke of Suffolk, had been pardoned by Mary I for his involvement in the attempt to put Jane on the throne following the death of Edward VI; Jane herself, though remaining in custody, also had good hopes of being pardoned. But when Suffolk joined in the insurrection of January 1554 against Mary, the queen decided that both must die. Suffolk was executed eleven days after his daughter, on February 23.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Actions. Jane had had to be coerced to accept the crown in July 1553 and was in no way involved in the later uprising.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Assailed; that is, browbeaten. "Wot": know.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, though I accepted the crown only under intense pressure, nonetheless, by accepting it at all I apparently consented to Mary's displacement.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As Foxe noted, this final sentence amounts to an admonition that Suffolk not renounce his Protestantism.[Return to reference 5](#)

## A Prayer of the Lady Jane<sup>1</sup>

O Lord, thou God and Father of my life, hear me, poor and desolate woman, which flieth unto thee only, in all troubles and miseries. Thou, O Lord, art the only defender and deliverer of those that put their trust in thee: and therefore I, being defiled with sin, encumbered with affliction, unquieted with troubles, wrapped in cares, overwhelmed with miseries, vexed with temptations, and grievously tormented with the long imprisonment of this vile mass of clay, my sinful body, do come unto thee, O merciful Savior, craving thy mercy and help, without the which so little hope of deliverance is left that I may utterly despair of any liberty.

Albeit it is expedient, that, seeing our life standeth upon trying,<sup>2</sup> we should be visited sometime with some adversity, whereby we might both be tried whether we be of thy flock or no, and also know thee and ourselves the better, yet thou, that saidst thou wouldst not suffer us to be tempted above our power,<sup>3</sup> be merciful unto me now, a miserable wretch, I beseech thee; which with Solomon<sup>4</sup> do cry unto thee, humbly desiring thee that I may neither be too much puffed up with prosperity, neither too much pressed down with adversity, lest I, being too full, should deny thee, my God, or being too low brought, should despair and blaspheme thee, my Lord and Savior.

O merciful God, consider my misery, best known unto thee; and be thou now unto me a strong tower of defense, I humbly require<sup>5</sup> thee. Suffer me not to be tempted above my power, but either be thou a deliverer unto me out of this great misery, either<sup>6</sup> else give me grace patiently to bear thy heavy hand and sharp correction. It was thy right hand that delivered the people of Israel out of the hands of Pharaoh, which for the space of four hundred years did oppress them and keep them in bondage. Let it, therefore, likewise seem good to thy fatherly goodness to deliver me, sorrowful wretch

(for whom thy son Christ shed his precious blood on the cross), out of this miserable captivity and bondage wherein I am now.

How long wilt thou be absent? forever? O Lord, hast thou forgotten to be gracious, and hast thou shut up thy loving-kindness in displeasure? Wilt thou be no more entreated? Is thy mercy clean gone forever, and thy promise come utterly to an end for evermore?<sup>7</sup> Why dost thou make so long tarrying? Shall I despair of thy mercy, O God? Far be that from me. I am thy workmanship, created in Christ Jesu: give me grace, therefore, to tarry thy leisure, and patiently to bear thy works; assuredly knowing that as thou canst, so thou wilt deliver me when it shall please thee, nothing doubting or mistrusting thy goodness towards me; for thou knowest better what is good for me than I do: therefore do with me in all things what thou wilt, and plague me what way thou wilt. Only in the meantime, arm me, I beseech thee, with thy armor,<sup>8</sup> that I may stand fast, my loins being girded about with verity, having on the breastplate of righteousness and shod with the shoes prepared by the gospel of peace; above all things, taking to me the shield of faith, wherewith I may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and taking the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is thy most holy Word: praying always with all manner of prayer and supplication, that I may refer myself wholly to thy will, abiding thy pleasure and comforting myself in those troubles that it shall please thee to send me; seeing such troubles be profitable for me, and seeing I am assuredly persuaded that it cannot be but well, all that thou doest.

Hear me, O merciful Father, for His sake whom thou wouldst should be a sacrifice for my sins: to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory. Amen.

## 1554 **Endnotes**

1563

- Note 1: Also written shortly before her death.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Trial.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: 1 Corinthians 10:13.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Proverbs 30:7–9.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ask.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Or.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Psalm 77:8.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The allegorical armor of Ephesians 6:11–18. The ensuing passage closely echoes these verses.[Return to reference 8](#)

## A Second Letter to Her Father<sup>[1](#)</sup>

The Lord comfort your grace, and that in his Word, wherein all creatures only are to be comforted. And though it hath pleased God to take away two of your children,<sup>[2](#)</sup> yet think not, I most humbly beseech your grace, that you have lost them, but trust that we, by losing this mortal life, have won an immortal life. And I for my part, as I have honored your grace in this life, will pray for you in another life. Your grace's humble daughter,

Jane Dudley

### 1554 **Endnotes**

1850

- Note 1: Lady Jane inscribed this farewell message in a prayer book, now in the British Library.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, his daughter and son-in-law.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***From Foxe's Acts and Monuments*<sup>1</sup>**

### ***The Words and Behavior of the Lady Jane upon the Scaffold***

These are the words that the Lady Jane spake upon the scaffold, at the hour of her death. First, when she mounted upon the scaffold, she said to the people standing thereabout, "Good people, I am come hither to die, and by a law I am condemned to the same. The fact<sup>2</sup> against the queen's highness was unlawful, and the consenting thereunto by me; but, touching the procurement and desire thereof by me, or on my behalf, I do wash my hands thereof in innocency before God and the face of you, good Christian people, this day." And therewith she wrung her hands, wherein she had her book.<sup>3</sup> Then said she, "I pray you all, good Christian people, to bear me witness that I die a true Christian woman, and that I do look to be saved by no other mean but only by the mercy of God,<sup>4</sup> in the blood of his only Son Jesus Christ; and I confess that when I did know the word of God I neglected the same, loved myself and the world; and therefore this plague and punishment is happily and worthily happened unto me for my sins; and yet I thank God of his goodness that he hath thus given me a time and respite to repent. And now, good people, while I am alive, I pray you assist me with your prayers."<sup>5</sup> And then, kneeling down, she turned her to Feckenham,<sup>6</sup> saying, "Shall I say this psalm?" And he said, "Yea." Then said she the psalm of *Miserere mei Deus*<sup>7</sup> in English, in most devout manner, throughout to the end; and then she stood up, and gave her maiden, Mistress Ellen, her gloves and handkerchief, and her book to Master Brydges.<sup>8</sup> And then she untied her gown, and the hangman pressed upon her to help her off with it;<sup>9</sup> but she, desiring him to let her alone, turned towards her two gentlewomen, who helped her off therewith, and also with her frau's paste<sup>1</sup> and neckerchief, giving her a fair handkerchief to knit about her eyes.

Then the hangman kneeled down and asked her forgiveness, whom she forgave most willingly. Then he willed her to stand upon the straw;<sup>2</sup> which doing, she saw the block. Then she said, "I pray you, dispatch me quickly." Then she kneeled down, saying, "Will you take it off before I lay me down?" And the hangman said, "No, madam." Then tied she the kerchief about her eyes, and feeling for the block she said, "What shall I do? Where is it? Where is it?" One of the standers-by guiding her thereunto, she laid her head down upon the block, and then stretched forth her body and said, "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit";<sup>3</sup> and so finished her life, in the year of our Lord God 1554, the twelfth day of February.

1563

## Endnotes

- Note 1: On the Protestant martyrologist John Foxe (1516–1587), see p. 157.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Act.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Prayer book.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Asserting the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Implicitly challenging the Catholic doctrine of the efficacy of prayers for the *dead*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John de Feckenham, Queen Mary's confessor, who at her behest had tried unsuccessfully, in Lady Jane's last days, to convert her to Catholicism. A gifted and tolerant man, Feckenham was later put in charge of Mary's project of restoring the Benedictine monastery of Westminster Abbey, where he thus became the last abbot.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Psalm 51, which opens "Have mercy upon me, O God."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir John Brydges, lieutenant of the Tower.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The victim's adornments were part of the executioner's fee.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: A type of elaborate headdress worn by married women.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Strown about the execution block to soak up some of the blood.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Echoing Christ's dying words, Luke 23:46.[Return to reference 3](#)

## MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

Mary Stuart (1542–1587) was born on December 8, and within a week, following the death of her father, King James V, she had inherited the throne of Scotland. Remembered as the “Queen of Scots,” she spent very few years in Scotland, never spoke its language as easily as French, and was forced to abdicate at the age of twenty-four.

Determined to foil the ambitions of Henry VIII, who sought to force a union between England and Scotland by having Mary married to his son, Edward, Mary’s guardians sent her at the age of five to the court of France, where she would be brought up. At age fifteen she married Francis, the French dauphin, who became king in 1559. A year later, Francis II died, and at eighteen Mary returned to her own kingdom, Scotland, a land she could barely remember. As a Catholic woman coming to rule over a patriarchal society in which militant Protestantism was gathering force, Mary could hardly hope for a unanimously warm welcome. Her subsequent decisions destroyed whatever chance she may have had of enjoying a peaceful reign. In 1565 she married her vain and erratic cousin, Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley (1546–1567), with whom she was soon deeply unhappy. In 1566 Darnley was implicated in the murder of Mary’s secretary, David Rizzio, who was rumored to be her lover. In 1567 Darnley was murdered in turn, certainly with the connivance of the powerful James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. Soon Mary was married to Bothwell, though her own will in the matter remains unclear. The scandal of this marriage alienated many of her supporters and helped provoke an uprising of the Scottish nobility. Mary was imprisoned at Lochleven Castle and forced to abdicate in favor of her one-year-old son, James. Though she escaped, she failed to rally the Scottish people to her side, and in 1568 she fled across the border into England, where she appealed for help from her cousin Elizabeth.

The arrival on English soil of the twenty-five-year-old Queen of Scots was not welcome news to the Protestant queen Elizabeth I and her wary advisers. As a descendant of Henry VII with a good claim to the English throne, Mary was seen to be a dangerous and destabilizing presence. She was immediately taken prisoner and remained so until her execution at the age of forty-four. She was tried in England in 1568–69 on the charge of murdering her second husband. At this point her Scottish accuser produced the notorious Casket Letters, which had supposedly been discovered in a silver casket seized from an associate of Bothwell's. The casket, it was said, contained eight letters and twelve sonnets, all in French, testifying (if they are authentic) to an adulterous relationship with Bothwell and, more ambiguously, to Mary's involvement in the murder of Darnley. Mary herself was not permitted to inspect the letters, which were withdrawn shortly after being displayed in court and subsequently disappeared, though not before translations of them had been made into English and Scots. The result of the trial was inconclusive; Elizabeth declared that nothing had been proven that would make her "conceive an evil opinion of her good sister"; yet she kept Mary prisoner, moving her from one place of confinement to another for the next nineteen years.

Mary quickly became the focus for the aspirations of discontented Catholics at home and abroad. She conspired with these adherents by means of secret messages, written in ciphers or in invisible ink on white taffeta, smuggled in and out of her prison hidden in such things as beer barrels. The conspiracies were monitored, and to some extent even engineered, by Elizabeth's spymaster, Francis Walsingham, who was setting a trap for the Queen of Scots and English Catholics generally. In 1586 Mary was found to be communicating with a young Englishman named Anthony Babington, who was plotting to assassinate Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne. Babington and his co-conspirators were drawn and quartered, their heads displayed on Tower Bridge. Though she insisted that, as the sovereign queen of another country, she could not be charged with treason against England's queen, Mary was convicted as a traitor and sentenced to death. Elizabeth vacillated for

some time over carrying out the sentence, worrying about the reaction abroad and the precedent involved in executing a monarch. Eventually she was prevailed upon to sign the death warrant, and Mary was beheaded on February 8, 1587. A week later, Elizabeth wrote to the orphaned James VI of Scotland, lamenting the "miserable accident, which far contrary to my meaning hath befallen."



MARIA SCOTIA REGINA ANGLIA ET HYBERNIA VER  
PRINCEPS ET HERES LEGITIMA IACOBI MAGNA BRITAN  
NIA REGIS MATRIS. CUM SVORVM HARESI VEXATAM  
REBELLIONE OPPRESSAM. REFVGY CAUSA VERBO ELI  
REGINA ET COGNATA IN INDIAM ANGLIAM AN  
1568 DESCENDENTEM. 19 AN CAPTIVAM PER  
FIDIA DETINUIT. MILLE CADMVS STRATVIT  
GRVDELI SENATVS ANGLICI SENTENTIA  
HARESI INSTIGANTE. NEQ TRADITVR  
AC 12. KAL. MAR. 1537 A SERVILI  
CARNIFICE OBTVNCAI VR. AN.  
AETAT. REGNIQ. 45

AVLA FODRINGHA

REGINAM SERENISS. REGVM  
FILIAM VXOREM ET MATREM  
ASTANTIBVS COMMISSARIIS  
ET MINISTRIS R. ELI CAR  
NIFEX SECVRI PERCVIT  
AIQ VNO ET ALTERO  
ICTV TRVCVLENTER SAV  
CIATA. TERTIO EI CAPVT  
ABSCINDIT

SIC FVNESTVM ASCENDIT TABVLATVM. REGINA QVONDAM GALLIARVM  
ET SCOTIA FLORENTISSIMA. INVICTO SED PIO ANIMO TIRANNIDEM  
EXPROBRAT. ET PERFIDIAM FIDEM CATHOLICAM PROFITETVR. ROMANA  
ECCLESIA. SE SEMPER FVISSE ET ESSE FILIAM PALAM PLANEQ TESTATVR

**Mary, Queen of Scots**, is shown here in a mourning costume with a prayer book in her left hand and a crucifix in her right. An inset picture under the crucifix depicts her execution. This full-length portrait is dated ca. 1610–40; the artist is unknown.

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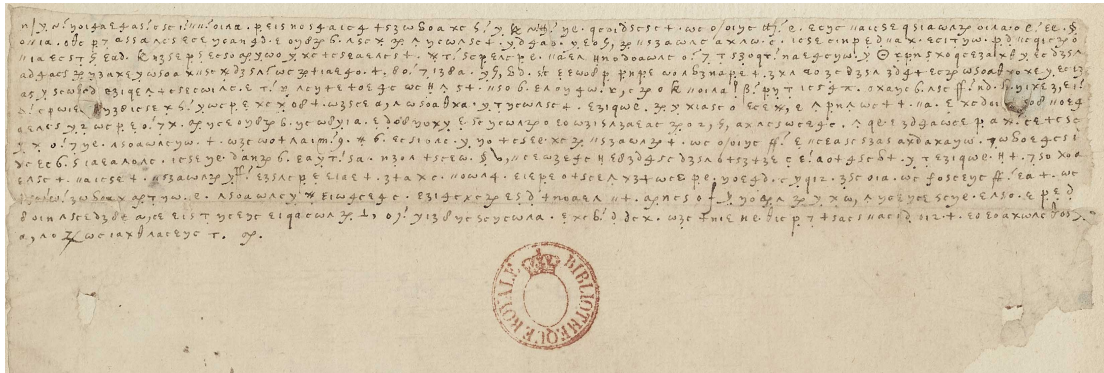
Many of the words that seem to speak to us most eloquently of Mary's self and circumstances are not in fact her own. Throughout her life, Mary encountered no shortage of people—some who were admirers and others deadly foes—who were eager to seize control of her voice. The controversy over the Casket Letters thus crystallizes the more general problem of locating the “real” Mary Stuart. It will probably never be possible to prove whether the letters are products of Mary's own hand or cunning forgeries designed to incriminate her, and indeed it is this impossibility that lends them much of their fascination, opening them up for the endless play of interpretation. Yet if the interpretation of the Casket Letters has become a kind of intellectual game, it began as a matter of life or death. If Mary was in one respect a text with many authors, she was also a singular woman inhabiting a body that, on the orders of another woman, was at last cut in two.

## ***From Casket Letter Number 2<sup>1</sup>***

\* \* \* This day I have wrought<sup>2</sup> till two of the clock upon this bracelet, to put the key in the cleft<sup>3</sup> of it, which is tied with two laces. I have had so little time that it is very ill,<sup>4</sup> but I will make a fairer; and in the meantime take heed that none of those that be here do see it: for all the world would know it, for I have made it in haste in their presence. I go to my tedious talk.<sup>5</sup> You make me dissemble so much that I am afraid thereof with horror; and you make me almost to play the part of a traitor. Remember that if it were not for obeying you, I had rather be dead;<sup>6</sup> my heart bleedeth for it. To be short, he will not come<sup>7</sup> but with condition that I shall promise to be with him as heretofore at bed and board,<sup>8</sup> and that I shall forsake him no more; and upon my word<sup>9</sup> he will do whatsoever I will, and will come, but he hath prayed me to tarry till after tomorrow. \* \* \* But now, to make him trust me, I must feign something unto him; and therefore when he desired me to promise that when he should be whole<sup>1</sup> we should make but one bed, I told him (feigning to believe his fair promises) [that if he]<sup>2</sup> did not change his mind between this time and that, I was contented, so as<sup>3</sup> he would say nothing thereof: for (to tell it between us two) the lords wished no ill to him,<sup>4</sup> but did fear lest (considering the threatenings which he made in case we did agree together) he would make them feel the small account<sup>5</sup> they have made of him, and that he would persuade me to pursue some of them; and for this respect should be in jealousy if at one instant,<sup>6</sup> without their knowledge, I did break a game made to the contrary in their presence.<sup>7</sup> And he said unto me, very pleasant and merry, "Think you that they do the more esteem you therefore? But I am glad that you talk to me of the lords. I hear<sup>8</sup> that you desire now that we shall live a happy life—for if it were otherwise, it could not be but greater inconvenience should



happen to us both than you think. But I will do now whatsoever you will have me do, and will love all those that you shall love, so as you make them to love me also. For, so as they seek not my life, I love them all equally."



**Coded Letter.** Mary, Queen of Scots, was such a threat to the throne that she was imprisoned by Queen Elizabeth I for the last nineteen years of her life. During that time, she was involved in several plots to dethrone her cousin. In the secret, coded letter above, she writes about the poor conditions of her captivity and her hopes for release.

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Thereupon I have willed this bearer to tell you many pretty<sup>9</sup> things; for I have too much to write, and it is late, and I trust him, upon your word. To be short, he<sup>1</sup> will go anywhere upon my word. Alas! and I never deceived anybody; but I remit<sup>2</sup> myself wholly to your will. And send me word what I shall do, and whatever happen to me, I will obey you. Think also if you will not find some invention more secret, by physic,<sup>3</sup> for he is to take physic at Craigmillar, and the baths also, and shall not come forth of<sup>4</sup> long time. To be short, for that that<sup>5</sup> I can learn, he hath great suspicion, and yet nevertheless trusteth upon my word, but not to tell me as yet anything. Howbeit, if you will that I shall avow<sup>6</sup> him, I will know all of him; but I shall never be willing<sup>7</sup> to beguile one who putteth his trust in me. Nevertheless, you may do all.<sup>8</sup> And do not esteem me the less therefore, for you are the cause thereof; for, for my own revenge, I would not do it.



He giveth me certain charges<sup>9</sup> (and those strong) of that that I fear: even to say that his faults be published, but there be that commit some secret faults and fear not to have them spoken of so loudly, and that there is speech of great and small. And even touching the Lady Reres,<sup>1</sup> he said, "God grant that she serve you to your honor," and that men may not think, nor he neither, that mine own power was not in myself,<sup>2</sup> seeing I did refuse his offers. To conclude, for a surety he mistrusteth us of that that you know,<sup>3</sup> and for his life. But in the end, after I had spoken two or three good words to him, he was very merry and glad. I have not seen him this night, for ending<sup>4</sup> your bracelet; but I can find no clasps for it. It is ready thereunto,<sup>5</sup> and yet I fear lest it should bring you ill hap, or that it should be known if you were hurt.<sup>6</sup> Send me word whether you will have it, and more money,<sup>7</sup> and when I shall return, and how far I may speak. \* \* \*

He hath sent to me, and prayeth me to see him rise tomorrow in the morning early. To be short, this bearer shall declare unto you the rest; and if I shall learn anything, I will make every night a memorial<sup>8</sup> thereof. He shall tell you the cause of my stay.<sup>9</sup> Burn this letter, for it is too dangerous; neither is there anything well said in it, for I think upon nothing but upon grief if you be at Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup>

Now if to please you, my dear life, I spare neither honor, conscience, nor hazard, nor greatness, take it in good part, and not according to the interpretation of your false brother-in-law,<sup>2</sup> to whom I pray you give no credit against the most faithful lover that ever you had, or shall have.

See not also her whose feigned tears you ought not more to regard than the true travails which I endure to deserve her place, for obtaining of which, against my own nature I do betray those that could let<sup>3</sup> me. God forgive me, and give you, my only friend,<sup>4</sup> the good luck and prosperity that your humble and faithful lover doth wish unto you: who hopeth shortly to be another thing unto you, for the reward of my pains. I have not made<sup>5</sup> one word, and it is very late, although I should never be weary in writing to you, yet will I

end, after kissing of your hands. Excuse my evil<sup>6</sup> writing, and read it over twice. Excuse also that [I scribbled,<sup>7</sup> for I had yesternight no paper, when I took the paper of a memorial.<sup>8</sup> . . . Remember your friend, and write unto her, and often. Love me al[ways, as I shall do you].<sup>9</sup>

## 1567 **Endnotes**

1571

- Note 1: The English translation was made shortly after the French originals of the Casket Letters were produced at Mary's first trial in England (1568–69).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Worked.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, lock.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Badly made.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, with Darnley. He was lying ill (probably from syphilis, though smallpox was given out as the cause) at Glasgow; Mary had joined him there.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, than play the traitor.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, to Craigmillar Castle, outside Edinburgh. "To be short": in short.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, to live again with him as husband and wife.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, if I give my word to do this.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Well.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The manuscript of the English translation has a tear at this point; the missing words have been inferred from the contemporary Scottish translation.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Provided that.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Darnley—weak, arrogant, and vicious—had many bitter enemies among the other Scottish lords.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Make them suffer for the low estimate.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Suddenly. "Respect": reason.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: At their urging, Mary had authorized a confederacy of nobles to find a way for her to divorce Darnley. "Game": undertaking.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, I am convinced.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Small(er). "This bearer": the bearer of the letter.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Darnley.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Submit.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Medicine (that is, a poisoned drink). "Invention": contrivance. If Mary wrote this sentence, it shows her complicit in the plot to murder Darnley, who was in fact strangled—and the house he was occupying at Kirk O'Field, just outside Edinburgh, blown up—on the night of February 9–10, 1567.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: For a.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As far as.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Assure him by taking a vow. "Howbeit": however.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, without reluctance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, you may command me in all things.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Admonitions. The idea seems to be that Darnley hinted that he might reveal Mary's secrets.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: She was acting as wet nurse to Mary's son, James (later James VI of Scotland and, in 1603, James I of England).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, that I was not acting of my own will.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The thing that you know about. "For a surety": for certain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Because I was finishing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Apart from that.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Recognized if you were wounded (and thus powerless to conceal the bracelet). "Ill hap": misfortune.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, whether you want more money.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Memorandum.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Delay.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Scottish translation makes this clause the beginning of a new sentence, which says, in effect, "If you are in Edinburgh when you receive this, send me word soon."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Presumably the brother of Bothwell's wife, Jean Gordon, who in turn is presumably the person referred to in the following sentence.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Prevent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lover.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Possibly "read"—in which case the meaning is "I have not read over a word."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Poor.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Words torn off the English manuscript here; reading inferred from the Scottish translation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: She apologizes for having had to use paper already used for memoranda.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
Again words torn from the English manuscript are inferred from the Scottish translation. The latter continues with what seem to be the memoranda—to herself or perhaps to the bearer of the letter—mentioned earlier: "Remember zow [you] of the purpois of the Lady Reres. Of the Inglismen. Of his mother. Of the Erle of Argyle. Of the Erle Bothwell. Of the ludgeing [lodging] in Edinburgh."  
[Return to reference 9](#)

## **A Letter to Elizabeth I, May 17, 1568<sup>1</sup>**

Madam my good sister,<sup>2</sup> I believe you are not ignorant how long certain of my subjects, whom from the least of my kingdom I have raised to be the first, have taken upon themselves to involve me in trouble, and to do what it appears they had in view from the first. You know how they purposed to seize me and the late king my husband, from which attempt it pleased God to protect us, and to permit us to expel them from the country, where, at your request, I again afterwards received them; though, on their return, they committed another crime, that of holding me a prisoner, and killing in my presence a servant of mine, I being at the time in a state of pregnancy.<sup>3</sup> It again pleased God that I should save myself from their hands; and, as above said, I not only pardoned them, but even received them into favor. They, however, not yet satisfied with so many acts of kindness, have, on the contrary, in spite of their promises, devised, favored, subscribed to, and aided in a crime<sup>4</sup> for the purpose of charging it falsely upon me, as I hope fully to make you understand. They have, under this pretence, arrayed themselves against me, accusing me of being ill-advised, and pretending a desire of seeing me delivered from bad counsels, in order to point out to me the things that required reformation. I, feeling myself innocent, and desirous to avoid the shedding of blood, placed myself in their hands, wishing to reform what was amiss.<sup>5</sup> They immediately seized and imprisoned me. When I upbraided them with a breach of their promise, and requested to be informed why I was thus treated, they all absented themselves. I demanded to be heard in council, which was refused me. In short, they have kept me without any servants, except two women, a cook, and a surgeon; and they have threatened to kill me, if I did not sign an abdication of my crown, which the fear of immediate death caused me to do,<sup>6</sup> as I

have since proved before the whole of the nobility, of which I hope to afford you evidence.

After this, they again laid hold of me in parliament, without saying why, and without hearing me; forbidding, at the same time, every advocate to plead for me; and, compelling the rest to acquiesce in their unjust usurpation of my rights, they have robbed me of everything I had in the world, not permitting me either to write or to speak, in order that I might not contradict their false inventions.

At last, it pleased God to deliver me,<sup>2</sup> when they thought of putting me to death, that they might make more sure of their power, though I repeatedly offered to answer any thing they had to say to me, and to join them in the punishment of those who should be guilty of any crime. In short, it pleased God to deliver me, to the great content of all my subjects, except Moray, Morton, the Humes, Glencairn, Mar, and Sempill, to whom, after that my whole nobility was come from all parts, I sent to say that, notwithstanding their ingratitude and unjust cruelty employed against me, I was willing to invite them to return to their duty, and to offer them security of their lives and estates, and to hold a parliament for the purpose of reforming every thing. I sent twice. They seized and imprisoned my messengers, and made proclamation, declaring traitors all those who should assist me, and guilty of that odious crime. I demanded that they should name one of them, and I would give him up, and begged them, at the same time, to deliver to me such as should be named to them. They seized upon my officer and my proclamation. I sent to demand a safe-conduct for my Lord Boyd, in order to treat of an accommodation, not wishing, as far as I might be concerned, for any effusion of blood. They refused, saying that those who had not been true to their regent and to my son, whom they denominate king, should leave me and put themselves at their disposal, a thing at which the whole nobility were greatly offended.

Seeing, therefore, that they were only a few individuals, and that my nobility were more attached to me than ever, I was in hope that, in course of time, and under your favor, they would be gradually

reduced; and, seeing that they said they would either retake me or all die, I proceeded toward Dumbarton,<sup>8</sup> passing at the distance of two miles from them, my nobility accompanying me, marching in order of battle between them and me; which they seeing, sallied forth, and came to cut off my way and take me. My people seeing this, and moved by that extreme malice of my enemies, with a view to check their progress, encountered them without order, so that, though they were twice their number, their sudden advance caused them so great a disadvantage that God permitted them to be discomfited, and several killed and taken; some of them were cruelly put to death when taken on their retreat. The pursuit was immediately interrupted, in order to take me on my way to Dumbarton; they stationed people in every direction, either to kill or take me. But God through his infinite goodness has preserved me, and I escaped to my Lord Herries's,<sup>9</sup> who, as well as other gentlemen, have come with me into your country,<sup>1</sup> being assured that, hearing the cruelty of my enemies, and how they have treated me, you will, conformably to your kind disposition and the confidence I have in you, not only receive me for the safety of my life but also aid and assist me in my just quarrel; and I shall solicit other princes to do the same. I entreat you to send to fetch me as soon as you possibly can,<sup>2</sup> for I am in a pitiable condition, not only for a queen, but for a gentlewoman; for I have nothing in the world but what I had on my person when I made my escape, traveling across the country the first day, and not having since ever ventured to proceed except in the night, as I hope to declare before you, if it pleases you to have pity, as I trust you will, upon my extreme misfortune; of which I will forbear complaining, in order not to importune you, and pray to God that he may give to you a happy state of health and long life, and to me patience, and that consolation which I expect to receive from you, to whom I present my humble commendations. From Workington, the 17th of May.

Your most faithful and affectionate good  
sister, and cousin, and escaped prisoner,



1568 **Endnotes**

1844

- Note 1:  
This letter (translated from the French by Agnes Strickland) was written just after Mary, in flight from her Scottish enemies, made her fateful crossing into England. Its account of her troubles is, though not exaggerated, inevitably one-sided. In 1565, Mary's ill-advised marriage to her cousin Lord Darnley had upset the power structure of the nation's factious and violent nobility. A group of nobles rebelled against her, led by Mary's illegitimate half-brother James Stewart, Earl of Moray, who had previously been her key supporter and adviser.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fellow queen.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The servant was David Rizzio, Mary's secretary and confidant. At the time of his murder, Mary was six months pregnant with her only child, the future King James VI. She omits the fact that Darnley was involved in the murder.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The murder of Darnley.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Unhappy about the elevation of Bothwell to the position of Mary's consort (she had married him three months after Darnley's murder, in which he was well known to have been the principal conspirator), the nobles brought an army against the royal couple in June 1567. With their own forces melting away, Bothwell escaped, and Mary surrendered herself to the nobles.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In late July. Her infant son was then crowned king on July 29, in a Protestant church. Moray became regent.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mary escaped from captivity on May 2, 1568.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: In the west of Scotland. The royal army passed near Glasgow, in a deliberate attempt to draw Moray's army, which was smaller, into battle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Herries was a magnate of southwestern Scotland, which remained strongly Catholic.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Crossing the Solway Firth in a fishing boat, Mary and twenty supporters landed in the Cumberland port of Workington on May 16, 1568.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Elizabeth never granted Mary an audience; two days after arriving in England, she was conducted to Carlisle Castle, where her nineteen years of English captivity began.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A royal signature: "R." = "Regina" (Latin for "Queen").[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***From Narrative of the Execution of the Queen of Scots. In a Letter to the Right Honorable Sir William Cecil***<sup>1</sup>

It may please your lordship to be advertised<sup>2</sup> that, according as your honor gave me in command, I have here set down in writing the true order and manner of the execution of the Lady Mary, late queen of Scots, the 8th of February last, in the great hall within the castle of Fotheringhay,<sup>3</sup> together with relation of all such speeches and actions spoken and done by the said queen or any others, and all other circumstances and proceedings concerning the same, from and after the delivery of the said Scottish queen to Thomas Andrews, Esquire, high sheriff for Her Majesty's county of Northampton, unto the end of the said execution: as followeth.

It being certified the 6th of February last to the said queen, by the right honorable the earl of Kent, the earl of Shrewsbury, and also by Sir Amyas Paulet and Sir Drue Drury, her governors,<sup>4</sup> that she was to prepare herself to die the 8th of February next, she seemed not [to] be in any terror, for aught that appeared by any her outward gesture or behavior (other than marveling she should die), but rather with smiling cheer and pleasing countenance digested and accepted the said admonition of preparation to her (as she said) unexpected execution, saying that her death should be welcome unto her, seeing Her Majesty was so resolved, and that that soul were too too far unworthy the fruition of joys of heaven forever, whose body would not in this world be content to endure the stroke of the executioner for a moment. And that spoken, she wept bitterly and became silent.

The said 8th day of February being come, and time and place appointed for the execution, the said queen, being of stature tall, of body corpulent, round-shouldered, her face fat and broad, double-chinned, and hazel-eyed, her borrowed hair auburn, her attire was

this. On her head she had a dressing of lawn edged with bone lace,<sup>5</sup> a pomander chain<sup>6</sup> and an *Angus Dei* about her neck,<sup>7</sup> a crucifix in her hand, a pair of beads at her girdle,<sup>8</sup> with a silver cross at the end of them. A veil of lawn fastened to her caul,<sup>9</sup> bowed out with wire and edged round about with bone lace. Her gown was of black satin painted, with a train and long sleeves to the ground, set with acorn buttons of jet trimmed with pearl, and short sleeves of satin black cut,<sup>1</sup> with a pair of sleeves of purple velvet whole under them. Her kirtle<sup>2</sup> whole, of figured black satin, and her petticoat skirts of crimson velvet, her shoes of Spanish leather with the rough side outward, a pair of green silk garters, her nether stockings<sup>3</sup> worsted colored watchet,<sup>4</sup> clocked<sup>5</sup> with silver, and edged on the tops with silver, and next her leg a pair of jersey<sup>6</sup> hose, white, etc. Thus apparelled, she departed her chamber, and willingly bended her steps towards the place of execution.

As the commissioners and divers other knights were meeting the queen coming forth, one of her servants, called Melvin,<sup>7</sup> kneeling on his knees to his queen and mistress, wringing his hands and shedding tears, used these words unto her: "Ah, Madam, unhappy me: what man on earth was ever before the messenger of so important sorrow and heaviness as I shall be, when I report that my good and gracious queen and mistress is beheaded in England?" This said, tears prevented him of further speaking. Whereupon the said queen, pouring forth her dying tears, thus answered him: "My good servant, cease to lament, for thou hast cause rather to joy than to mourn. For now shalt thou see Mary Stuart's troubles receive their long-expected end and determination. For know (said she), good servant, all the world is but vanity, and subject still to more sorrow than a whole ocean of tears can bewail. But I pray thee (said she), carry this message from me, that I die a true woman to my religion, and like a true queen of Scotland and France. But God forgive them (said she) that have long desired my end and thirsted for my blood, as the hart doth for the water brooks. Oh God (said she), thou that art the author of truth, and truth itself, knowest the inward chamber

of my thought, how that I was ever willing that England and Scotland should be united together. Well (said she), commend me to my son, and tell him that I have not done anything prejudicial to the state and kingdom of Scotland"; and so resolving<sup>8</sup> herself again into tears, said, "Good Melvin, farewell"; and with weeping eyes and her cheeks all besprinkled with tears as they were, kissed him, saying once again, "Farewell, good Melvin, and pray for thy mistress and queen."

And then she turned herself unto the lords, and told them she had certain requests to make unto them. One was, for certain money to be paid to Curle, her servant. Sir Amyas Paulet, knowing of that money, answered to this effect, "it should." Next, that her poor servants might have that with quietness<sup>9</sup> which she had given them by her will, and that they might be favorably entreated,<sup>1</sup> and to send them safely into their countries. "To this (said she) I conjure<sup>2</sup> you." Last, that it would please the lords to permit her poor distressed servants to be present about her at her death, that their eyes and hearts may see and witness how patiently their queen and mistress would endure her execution, and so make relation, when they came into their country, that she died a true constant Catholic to her religion. Then the earl of Kent did answer thus: "Madam, that which you have desired cannot conveniently be granted. For if it should, it were to be feared lest some of them, with speeches or other behavior, would both be grievous to Your Grace and troublesome and displeasing to us and our company, whereof we have had some experience. For if such an access might be allowed, they would not stick to put some superstitious trumpery in practice, and if it were but dipping their handkerchiefs in Your Grace's blood, whereof it were very unmeet<sup>3</sup> for us to give allowance."

"My lord," said the queen of Scots, "I will give my word, although it be but dead, that they shall not deserve any blame in any the actions you have named. But alas, poor souls, it would do them good to bid their mistress farewell; and I hope your mistress" (meaning the queen), "being a maiden queen, will vouchsafe in regard of<sup>4</sup> womanhood that I shall have some of my own people about me at

my death: and I know Her Majesty hath not given you any such strait<sup>5</sup> charge or commission but that you might grant me a request of far greater courtesy than this is, if I were a woman of far meaner calling<sup>6</sup> than the queen of Scots." And then, perceiving that she could not obtain her request without some difficulty, burst out into tears, saying, "I am cousin to your queen, and descended from the blood royal of Henry the Seventh, and a married queen of France, and an anointed queen of Scotland." Then, upon great consultation had betwixt the two earls and the others in commission, it was granted to her what she instantly<sup>7</sup> before earnestly entreated, and desired her to make choice of six of her best-beloved men and women. Then of her men she chose Melvin, her apothecary, her surgeon, and one old man more;<sup>8</sup> and of her women, those two which did lie in her chamber. Then, with an unappalled countenance, without any terror of the place, the persons, or the preparations, she came out of the entry into the hall, stepped up to the scaffold, being two foot high and twelve foot broad, with rails round about, hanged and covered with black, with a low stool, long fair cushion, and a block covered also with black. The stool brought her, she sat down. The earl of Kent stood on the right hand, the earl of Shrewsbury on the other, other knights and gentlemen stood about the rails. The commission for her execution was read (after silence made) by Mr. Beale, clerk of the council;<sup>9</sup> which done, the people with a loud voice said, "God save the Queen!" During the reading of this commission, the said queen was very silent, listening unto it with so careless a regard as if it had not concerned her at all, nay, rather with so merry and cheerful a countenance as if it had been a pardon from Her Majesty for her life; and withal<sup>1</sup> used such a strangeness in her words as if she had not known any of the assembly, nor had been anything seen<sup>2</sup> in the English tongue.

Then Mr. Doctor Fletcher, dean of Peterborough,<sup>3</sup> standing directly before her without<sup>4</sup> the rails, bending his body with great reverence, uttered the exhortation following:

"Madam, the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty (whom God preserve long to reign over us), having (notwithstanding this

preparation for the execution of justice justly to be done upon you for your many trespasses against her sacred person, state, and government) a tender care over your soul, which presently departing out of your body must either be separated in the true faith in Christ or perish forever, doth for Jesus Christ offer unto you the comfortable<sup>5</sup> promises of God, wherein I beseech Your Grace, even in the bowels of Jesus Christ,<sup>6</sup> to consider these three things:

“First, your state past, and transitory glory;

“Secondly, your condition present, of death;

“Thirdly, your estate to come, either in everlasting happiness or perpetual infelicity.

“For the first, let me speak to Your Grace with David the King: Forget, Madam, yourself, and your own people, and your father’s house; forget your natural birth, your regal and princely dignity: so shall the King of Kings have pleasure in your spiritual beauty, etc.<sup>7</sup>

“Madam, even now, Madam, doth God Almighty open you a door into a heavenly kingdom; shut not therefore this passage by the hardening of your heart, and grieve not the Spirit of God, which may seal your hope to a day of redemption.”

The queen three or four times said unto him, “Mr. Dean, trouble not yourself nor me: for know that I am settled in the ancient Catholic and Roman religion, and in defense thereof, by God’s grace, I mind to spend my blood.”

Then said Mr. Dean, “Madam, change your opinion, and repent you of your former wickedness. Settle your faith only upon this ground, that in Christ Jesus you hope to be saved.” She answered again and again, with great earnestness, “Good Mr. Dean, trouble yourself not anymore about this matter, for I was born in this religion, have lived in this religion, and am resolved to die in this religion.”

Then the earls, when they saw how far uncomfortable<sup>8</sup> she was to hear Mr. Dean’s good exhortation, said, “Madam, we will pray for Your Grace with Mr. Dean, that you may have your mind lightened with the true knowledge of God and his word.”

"My lords," answered the queen, "if you will pray with me, I will even from my heart thank you, and think myself greatly favored by you; but to join in prayer with you in your manner, who are not of one<sup>9</sup> religion with me, it were a sin, and I will not."

Then the lords called Mr. Dean again, and bade him say on, or what he thought good else. The dean kneeled and prayed. \* \* \*<sup>1</sup>

All the assembly, save the queen and her servants, said the prayer after Mr. Dean as he spake it, during which prayer the queen sat upon her stool, having her *Agnus Dei*, crucifix, beads, and an office<sup>2</sup> in Latin. Thus furnished with superstitious trumpery, not regarding what Mr. Dean said, she began very fastly<sup>3</sup> with tears and a loud voice to pray in Latin, and in the midst of her prayers, with overmuch weeping and mourning, slipped off her stool, and kneeling presently said diverse other Latin prayers. Then she rose, and kneeled down again, praying in English for Christ's afflicted church, an end of her troubles, for her son, and for the Queen's Majesty, to God for forgiveness of the sins of them in this island: she forgave her enemies with all her heart, that had long sought her blood. This done, she desired all saints to make intercession for her to the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ. Then she began to kiss her crucifix and to cross herself, saying these words: "Even as thy arms, oh Jesu Christ, were spread here upon the cross, so receive me into the arms of mercy." Then the two executioners kneeled down unto her, desiring her to forgive them her death. She answered, "I forgive you with all my heart. For I hope this death shall give an end to all my troubles." They, with her two women helping, began to disrobe her, and then she laid the crucifix upon the stool. One of the executioners took from her neck the *Agnus Dei*, and she laid hold of it, saying she would give it to one of her women, and, withal, told the executioner that he should have money for it.<sup>4</sup> Then they took off her chain. She made herself unready<sup>5</sup> with a kind of gladness, and, smiling, putting on a pair of sleeves with her own hands, which the two executioners before had rudely<sup>6</sup> put off, and with such speed as if she had longed to be gone out of the world.



During the disrobing of this queen, she never altered her countenance, but smiling said she never had such grooms before to make her unready, nor ever did put off her clothes before such a company. At length, unattired and unapparelled to her petticoat and kirtle, the two women burst out into a great and pitiful shrieking, crying, and lamentation, crossed themselves, and prayed in Latin. The queen turned towards them: "Ne criez vous; j'ai promis pour vous";<sup>7</sup> and so crossed and kissed them, and bade them pray for her.

Then with a smiling countenance she turned to her menservants, Melvin and the rest, crossed them, bade them fare well, and pray for her to the last.

One of the women having a Corpus Christi cloth,<sup>8</sup> lapped<sup>9</sup> it up three-corner-wise and kissed it, and put it over the face of her queen, and pinned it fast upon the caul of her head. Then the two women departed. The queen kneeled down upon the cushion resolutely, and without any token of fear of death, said aloud in Latin the Psalm "*In te, Domine, confido.*"<sup>1</sup> Then, groping for the block, she laid down her head, putting her chain over her back with both her hands, which, holding there still,<sup>2</sup> had been cut off, had they not been espied.





**The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.** Though this watercolor image was not painted until some years after Mary's execution, it reflects eyewitness accounts. The minister depicted is likely Dr. Richard Fletcher, dean of Peterborough, who was so nervous that he stammered and never actually delivered his sermon because he was interrupted by Mary herself. Mary wears a Corpus Christi cloth around her head as a blindfold. On the stool beside her is a prayer book, and in her hands a crucifix. Her gentlewomen stand weeping to the left of the scaffold, which is covered in black cloth. On the far left of the image is a bonfire, for burning any cloth or other items with Mary's blood on them so that they could not serve as Catholic relics after her death.

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Then she laid herself upon the block most quietly, and stretching out her arms and legs cried out: "*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*,"<sup>3</sup> three or four times.

At last, while one of the executioners held her straitly<sup>4</sup> with one of his hands, the other gave two strokes with an axe before he did cut off her head, and yet left a little gristle behind.

She made very small noise, no part stirred from the place where she lay. The executioners lifted up the head, and bade God save the Queen. Then her dressing of lawn fell from her head,<sup>5</sup> which appeared as gray as if she had been threescore and ten years old,<sup>6</sup> polled<sup>7</sup> very short. Her face much altered, her lips stirred up and down almost a quarter of an hour after her head was cut off. Then said Mr. Dean: "So perish all the Queen's enemies!" The earl of Kent came to the dead body, and with a loud voice said, "Such end happen to all the Queen's and Gospel's enemies." One of the executioners, plucking off her garters, espied her little dog, which was crept under her clothes, which would not be gotten forth but with force, and afterwards would not depart from the dead corpse, but came and laid between her head and shoulders: a thing much noted. The dog, imbrued in her blood, was carried away and washed, as all things else were that had any blood, save those things which were burned. The executioners were sent away with money

for their fees, not having any one thing that belonged unto her. Afterwards everyone was commanded forth of the hall, saving<sup>8</sup> the sheriff and his men, who carried her up into a great chamber made ready for the surgeons to embalm her; and there she was embalmed.

And thus I hope (my very good lord) I have certifieth Your Honor of all actions, matters, and circumstances as did proceed from her or any other at her death: wherein I dare promise unto your good lordship (if not in some better or worse words than were spoken I am somewhat mistaken), in matter I have not in any whit offended.<sup>9</sup> Howbeit,<sup>1</sup> I will not so justify my duty herein but that<sup>2</sup> many things might well have been omitted, as not worthy noting. Yet because it is your lordship's fault to desire to know all, and so I have certified all, it is an offense pardonable. So, resting at Your Honor's further commandment, I take my leave this 11th of February, 1587.

Your Honor's in all humble service to command,  
R. W.

## 1587 **Endnotes**

1843

- Note 1: Elizabeth's lord high treasurer and principal minister. The author of the letter (of which there are various versions extant) was Robert Wingfield, Cecil's nephew, sent by him to report on the execution.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Informed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Northamptonshire. Mary had been moved to Fotheringhay in September 1586 and was there tried and convicted of treason against Elizabeth (though she was not Elizabeth's subject).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Keepers. The earls of Kent and Shrewsbury were sent by the royal council to oversee the execution. Paulet had been Mary's principal custodian since January 1585; Drury joined him in his charge in November 1586.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Lace that is woven with bobbins made of bone. "Lawn": fine linen.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pomander is a mixture of aromatic substances; a small bag of it was sometimes suspended from a necklace.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A medallion bearing the figure of a lamb: an emblem of Christ. From "Agnus Dei" ("Lamb of God"; Latin), a part of the Mass beginning with those words.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Belt. "Beads": rosary beads.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Close-fitting cap.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Slashed, to reveal the contrasting-colored sleeves beneath.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Outer petticoat.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Nether stockings" means simply "stockings." ("Nether" = "of the legs.")[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Light blue.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Embroidered.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Worsted.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sir Andrew Melville.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dissolving.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Without contestation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Treated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Earnestly entreat.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Unfitting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: For the sake of.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Strict.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Far lower station.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Importunely.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Her aged porter, Didier.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, the royal council.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As well.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: At all fluent.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, of the Anglican cathedral there.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outside.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Comforting, reassuring.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: "In the bowels of Jesus Christ": in the name of Christ's pity. The bowels were regarded as the seat of pity and compassion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The dean paraphrases Psalm 45:10–11, a passage addressed to the bride of a king: "forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Unwilling.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The same.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The dean prays at considerable length, beseeching God to wash away Mary's "blindness and ignorance of heavenly things."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Prayer book.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Steadfastly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A condemned person's adornments were normally perquisites of the executioner.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Undressed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Roughly.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Don't make an outcry; I promised you wouldn't."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The veil (also known as the "pyx cloth") that covered the vessel holding the consecrated Host the Communion. "Corpus Christi": the body of Christ (Latin).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Folded.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Psalm 10 (Vulgate), 11 (King James): "In the Lord put I my trust."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, if her hands had remained there.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Luke 13:46: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit": the words of Christ on the Cross.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tightly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, her headcovering and auburn wig came off in the executioner's hand.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: She was actually forty-four.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cut.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Except. "Forth of": out of.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: That is, though I may not have gotten the speeches word-for-word, I promise that my account is completely accurate in substance.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: However.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, I will concede that.[Return to reference 2](#)

# ELIZABETH I

Elizabeth I (1533–1603), queen of England from 1558 to her death, set her mark indelibly on the age that has come to bear her name. Endowed with intelligence, courage, eloquence, and a talent for self-display, she managed to survive and flourish in a world that would easily have crushed a weaker person. Her birth was a disappointment to her father, Henry VIII, who had hoped for a male heir to the throne, and her prospects were further dimmed when her mother, Anne Boleyn, was executed a few years later on charges of adultery and treason. By an act of Parliament she was ruled illegitimate. At six years old, observers noted, Elizabeth had as much gravity as if she had been forty.

Under distinguished tutors, including the Protestant humanist Roger Ascham, the young princess received a rigorous education, with training in classical and modern languages, history, rhetoric, theology, and moral philosophy. Her own religious orientation was also Protestant, which put her in great danger during the reign of her Catholic older half-sister, Mary. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, interrogated and constantly spied upon, Elizabeth steadfastly professed innocence, loyalty, and a pious abhorrence of heresy. Upon Mary's death, she ascended the throne and quickly made clear that the official religion of the land would be Protestantism.

When she came to the throne, at twenty-five, speculation about a suitable match, already widespread, intensified. It remained for decades at a fever pitch, for the stakes were high. If Elizabeth died childless, the Tudor line would come to an end. The nearest heir was her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, a Catholic whose claim was supported by France and by the papacy, and whose penchant for sexual and political intrigue soon confirmed the worst fears of English Protestants. The obvious way to avert the nightmare was for Elizabeth to marry and produce an heir, and the pressure on her to do so was intense.





**Princess Elizabeth.** This picture depicts Elizabeth at the age of thirteen, standing by the Old Testament, and holding the New. Designed to show her modesty and piety, it equally broadcasts the fact that she is a woman of learning. The portrait dates from

ca. 1546 and may be by Guillim Scrots, an artist from the Netherlands.

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More than the royal succession hinged on the question of the queen's marriage; Elizabeth's perceived eligibility was a vital factor in the complex machinations of international diplomacy. A dynastic marriage between the queen of England and a foreign ruler could forge an alliance sufficient to alter the balance of power in Europe. The English court hosted a steady stream of ambassadors from kings and princelings eager to win the hand of the royal maiden, and Elizabeth played her romantic part with exemplary skill, sighing and spinning the negotiations out for months and even years. Most probably, she never meant to marry any of her numerous foreign (and domestic) suitors. "She is determined," a shrewd Spanish observer wrote to his king, at the moment that Elizabeth ascended to the throne, "to be governed by no one." Marriage would have meant the end of her independence as well as the end of the complex diplomatic game by which she played off one power against another. One day she would seem to be on the verge of accepting a proposal; the next, she would vow never to forsake her virginity. "She is a princess," the French ambassador remarked, "who can act any part she pleases." Ultimately she refused all offers and declared repeatedly that she was wedded to her country.

In the face of deep skepticism about the ability of any woman to rule, Elizabeth strategically blended imperiousness with an elaborate cult of love. Quickly making it clear that she would not be a figurehead, she gathered around her an able group of advisers, but she held firmly to the reins of power, subtly manipulating factional disputes, conducting diplomacy, and negotiating with an often contentious Parliament. Her courtiers and advisers, on their knees, approached the queen, glittering in jewels and gorgeous gowns, and addressed her in extravagant terms that conjoined romantic passion and religious veneration. Artists and poets celebrated her in mythological guise—as Diana, the chaste goddess of the moon; Astraea, the goddess of justice; Gloriana, the queen of the fairies.



Though she could suddenly veer, whenever she chose, toward bluntness and anger, Elizabeth often contrived to transform the language of politics into the language of love. "We all loved her," her godson John Harington wrote, "for she said she loved us."

Throughout her life, Elizabeth took pride in her command of languages (she spoke fluent French and Italian and read Latin and Greek) and in her felicity of expression. Her own writing includes carefully crafted letters and speeches on several state occasions; a number of prayers; prose and verse translations, including works of Horace, Seneca, Plutarch, Boethius, Calvin, and the French Protestant Queen Margaret of Navarre; and a few original poems. The original poems known to be hers deal with actual events in her life. They show her to have been an exceptionally agile, poised, and self-conscious writer, a gifted role-player fully in control of the rhetorical as well as political situation in which she found herself. The texts printed here, occasionally altered in light of variant versions, are from *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (2000).

# Verses Written with a Diamond

***In her imprisonment at Woodstock, these verses she wrote  
with her diamond in a glass window:<sup>1</sup>***

Much suspected by<sup>2</sup> me,  
Nothing proved can be.

*Quod*<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth the prisoner

## 1554–55 **Endnotes**

1563

- Note 1:

This is the heading given to the verses in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. After the insurrection of January 1554 against Mary I, Elizabeth was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Extensive interrogation and investigation yielded against her no firm evidence of treason, but she was transferred to the royal manor at Woodstock in Oxfordshire and held there in close custody for a year.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: About. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Quoth, said. [Return to reference 3](#)

## ***From The Passage of Our Most Dread Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth through the City of London to Westminster on the Day before Her Coronation***<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* Her grace, by holding up her hands and merry countenance to such as stood far off, and most tender and gentle language to those that stood nigh to her grace, did declare herself no less thankfully to receive her people's goodwill than they lovingly offered it unto her. To all that wished her grace well she gave hearty thanks, and to such as bade God save her grace she said again,<sup>2</sup> God save them all, and thanked them with all her heart. So that on either side there was nothing but gladness, nothing but prayer, nothing but comfort. The queen's majesty rejoiced marvelously to see it so exceedingly showed toward her grace which all good princes have ever desired: I mean, so earnest love of subjects, so evidently declared even to her grace's own person being carried in the midst of them. The people, again, were wonderfully ravished with welcoming answers and gestures of their princess, like to the which they had before tried at her first coming to the Tower from Hatfield.<sup>3</sup> This her grace's loving behavior, preconceived in the people's heads, upon these considerations was thoroughly confirmed, and indeed implanted a wonderful hope in them touching her worthy government in the rest of her reign. For in all her passage she did not only show her most gracious love toward the people in general, but also privately. If the baser personages had either offered her grace any flowers or such like as a signification of their goodwill, or moved to her any suit, she most gently, to the common rejoicing of all the lookers-on and private comfort of the party, stayed her chariot<sup>4</sup> and heard their requests. So that if a man should say well, he could not better term the City of London that time than a stage wherein was showed the

wonderful spectacle of a noble-hearted princess toward her most loving people and the people's exceeding comfort in beholding so worthy a sovereign and hearing so princelike a voice. \* \* \*

Out at the windows and penthouses of every house did hang a number of rich and costly banners and streamers, till her grace came to the upper end of Cheap.<sup>5</sup> And there, by appointment, the right worshipful Master Ranulph Cholmley, recorder<sup>6</sup> of the City, presented to the queen's majesty a purse of crimson satin richly wrought with gold, wherein the City gave unto the queen's majesty a thousand marks<sup>7</sup> in gold, as Master Recorder did declare briefly unto the queen's majesty, whose words tended to this end: that the lord mayor, his brethren, and commonality of the City, to declare their gladness and goodwill towards the queen's majesty, did present her grace with that gold, desiring her grace to continue their good and gracious queen and not to esteem the value of the gift, but the mind of the givers. The queen's majesty with both her hands took the purse and answered to him again marvelous pithily, and so pithily that the standers-by, as they embraced entirely her gracious answer, so they marveled at the couching thereof, which was in words, truly reported these:

I thank my lord mayor, his brethren, and you all. And whereas your request is that I should continue your good lady and queen, be ye ensured that I will be as good unto you as ever queen was to her people. No will in me can lack, neither do I trust shall there lack any power. And persuade yourselves that for the safety and quietness of you all I will not spare, if need be, to spend my blood. God thank you all.

Which answer of so noble an hearted princess, if it moved a marvelous shout and rejoicing, it is nothing to be marveled at, since both the heartiness thereof was so wonderful, and the words so jointly<sup>8</sup> knit.

But because princes be set in their seat by God's appointing and therefore they must first and chiefly tender<sup>9</sup> the glory of Him from

whom their glory issueth, it is to be noted in her grace that forsomuch as God hath so wonderfully placed her in the seat of government over this realm, she in all doings doth show herself most mindful of His goodness and mercy showed unto her. And amongst all other, two principal signs thereof were noted in this passage. First in the Tower, where her grace, before she entered her chariot, lifted up her eyes to heaven and said:

O Lord, almighty and everlasting God, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast been so merciful unto me as to spare me to behold this joyful day. And I acknowledge that Thou hast dealt as wonderfully and as mercifully with me as Thou didst with Thy true and faithful servant Daniel, Thy prophet, whom Thou deliveredst out of the den from the cruelty of the greedy and raging lions.<sup>1</sup> Even so was I overwhelmed and only by Thee delivered. To Thee (therefore) only be thanks, honor, and praise forever, amen.

The second was the receiving of the Bible at the Little Conduit<sup>2</sup> in Cheap. For when her grace had learned that the Bible in English<sup>3</sup> should there be offered, she thanked the City therefor, promised the reading thereof most diligently, and incontinent<sup>4</sup> commanded that it should be brought. At the receipt whereof, how reverently did she with both her hands take it, kiss it, and lay it upon her breast, to the great comfort of the lookers-on! God will undoubtedly preserve so worthy a prince, which at His honor so reverently taketh her beginning. For this saying is true and written in the book of truth: he that first seeketh the kingdom of God shall have all other things cast unto him.<sup>5</sup>

Now, therefore, all English hearts and her natural people must needs praise God's mercy, which hath sent them so worthy a prince, and pray for her grace's long continuance amongst us.

# Endnotes

- Note 1:  
By Richard Mulcaster (ca. 1530–1611), who became an authority on the education of children. Elizabeth had succeeded to the throne upon the death of Mary I on November 17, 1558, but her coronation did not take place until January 15, 1559. By custom, the ceremonies began the day before the coronation itself, with the ruler being conducted across the city in procession from the Tower of London to Westminster. See the account of Mary's coronation procession on p. 205.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, said in reply.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Elizabeth had set out from the royal manor at Hatfield (in Hertfordshire) to London on November 23.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wearing a robe made of gold and silver cloth, trimmed with ermine, and overlaid with gold lace, Elizabeth rode in a litter trimmed to the ground with gold damask.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Also known as Cheapside or Westcheap: the chief market street in London. (The name derives from the Old English word for "market.")[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Senior law officer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The mark was valued at two-thirds of a pound sterling, and the pound was worth far more than at present—so this was a very large gift.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Concordantly.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Have regard to.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Daniel 6:16–23.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The smaller of two lead pipe water conduits situated at the west end of Cheap Street.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In contrast to the Latin Bibles of the restored Catholicism of Mary's reign.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Immediately.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Matthew 6:33.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Speech to the House of Commons, January 28, 1563<sup>1</sup>

Williams,<sup>2</sup> I have heard by you the common request of my Commons, which I may well term (methinketh) the whole realm, because they give, as I have heard, in all these matters of Parliament their common consent to such as be here assembled. The weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit<sup>3</sup> and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes, though grievous perhaps to your ears, and boldeneth me to say somewhat in this matter, which I mean only to touch but not presently to answer. For this so great a demand<sup>4</sup> needeth both great and grave advice. I read of a philosopher whose deeds upon this occasion I remember better than his name<sup>5</sup> who always when he was required to give answer in any hard question of school points would rehearse over his alphabet before he would proceed to any further answer therein, not for that he could not presently have answered, but have his wit the riper and better sharpened to answer the matter withal.<sup>6</sup> If he, a common man, but<sup>7</sup> in matters of school took such delay the better to show his eloquent tale, great cause may justly move me in this, so great a matter touching the benefits of this realm and the safety of you all, to defer mine answer till some other time, wherein I assure you the consideration of my own safety (although I thank you for the great care that you seem to have thereof) shall be little in comparison of that great regard that I mean to have of the safety and surety of you all. And although God of late seemed to touch me rather like one that He chastised than one that He punished, and though death possessed almost every



joint of me,<sup>8</sup> so as I wished then that the feeble thread of life, which lasted (methought) all too long, might by Clotho's hand<sup>9</sup> have quietly been cut off, yet desired I not then life (as I have some witnesses here) so much for mine own safety, as for yours. For I know that in exchanging of this reign I should have enjoyed a better reign where residence is perpetual.

There needs no boding of my bane.<sup>1</sup> I know now as well as I did before that I am mortal. I know also that I must seek to discharge myself of that great burden that God hath laid upon me; for of them to whom much is committed, much is required.<sup>2</sup> Think not that I, that in other matters have had convenient<sup>3</sup> care of you all, will in this matter touching the safety of myself and you all be careless. For I know that this matter toucheth me much nearer than it doth you all, who if the worst happen can lose but your bodies. But if I take not that convenient care that it behoveth me to have therein, I hazard to lose both body and soul. And though I am determined in this so great and weighty a matter to defer mine answer till some other time because I will not in so deep a matter wade with so shallow a wit, yet have I thought good to use these few words, as well to show you that I am neither careless nor unmindful of your safety in this case, as I trust you likewise do not forget that by me you were delivered whilst you were hanging on the bough ready to fall into the mud—yea, to be drowned in the dung; neither<sup>4</sup> yet the promise which you have here made concerning your duties and due obedience, wherewith, I assure you, I mean to charge<sup>5</sup> you, as, further, to let you understand that I neither mislike any of your requests herein, nor the great care that you seem to have of the surety and safety of yourselves in this matter.

Lastly, because I will discharge<sup>6</sup> some restless heads in whose brains the needless hammers beat with vain judgment that I should mislike this their petition, I say that of the matter and sum thereof I like and allow very well. As to the circumstances, if any be, I mean upon further advice further to answer. And so I assure you all that

though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all.

1563 **Endnotes**

1921

- Note 1: Because a secure royal succession depended on Elizabeth's marrying and producing an heir, Parliament had been concerned about her single state from the beginning of her reign. The Commons raised the matter with her (not for the first time) in January 1563; the speech printed here is a later, written version of her extemporaneous response. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thomas Williams, speaker of the Parliament. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Intellect. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Question. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: According to the *Moral Essays* of Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 120 C.E.), the philosopher was Athenodorus. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: By that means. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Merely. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Elizabeth had nearly died of smallpox the past October. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Clotho is one of the three Fates of classical mythology, who spin and eventually cut the thread of each individual life. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Prognosticating of my death. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Luke 12:48. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Befitting. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nor. "Mud . . . dung": harsh characterizations of the Roman Catholicism that Mary I had been restoring to England. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Exhort. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Disabuse. [Return to reference 6](#)

## ***From A Speech to a Joint Delegation of Lords and Commons, November 5, 1566***<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* Was I not born in the realm? Were my parents born in any foreign country? Is there any cause I should alienate myself from being careful over this country? Is not my kingdom here? Whom have I oppressed? Whom have I enriched to others' harm? What turmoil have I made in this commonwealth, that I should be suspected to have no regard to the same? How have I governed since my reign? I will be tried by envy itself.<sup>2</sup> I need not to use many words, for my deeds do try me.

Well, the matter whereof they<sup>3</sup> would have made their petition, as I am informed, consisteth in two points: in my marriage and in the limitation of the succession of the crown, wherein my marriage was first placed as for manner<sup>4</sup> sake. I did send them answer by my Council I would marry, although of mine own disposition I was not inclined thereunto. But that was not accepted nor credited, although spoken by their prince. And yet I used so many words that I could say no more. And were it not now I had spoken those words, I would never speak them again. I will never break the word of a prince spoken in public place, for my honor<sup>5</sup> sake. And therefore I say again I will marry as soon as I can conveniently, if God take not him away with whom I mind to marry, or myself, or else some other great let<sup>6</sup> happen. I can say no more except<sup>7</sup> the party were present. And I hope to have children; otherwise I would never marry. A strange order of petitioners, that will make a request and cannot be otherwise ascertained<sup>8</sup> but by the prince's word, and yet will not believe it when it is spoken! But they, I think, that moveth the same will be as ready to dislike him with whom I shall marry as they are now to move it, and then it will appear they nothing meant it. I thought they would have been rather ready to have given me

thanks than to have made any new request for the same. There hath been some that have, ere this, said unto me they never required more than that they might once hear me say I would marry. Well, there was never so great a treason but might be covered under as fair a pretense.

The second point was the limitation of the succession of the crown, wherein was nothing said for my safety, but only for themselves. A strange thing that the foot should direct the head in so weighty a cause, which cause hath been so diligently weighed by us for that<sup>9</sup> it toucheth us more than them. I am sure there was not one of them that ever was a second person,<sup>1</sup> as I have been, and have tasted of the practices against my sister, who I would to God were alive again. I had great occasions to hearken to their motions,<sup>2</sup> of whom some of them are of the Common House. But when friends fall out truth doth appear, according to the old proverb, and were it not for my honor, their knavery should be known. There were occasions in me at that time: I stood in danger of my life, my sister was so incensed against me. I did differ from her in religion and I was sought for divers ways; and so shall never be my successor.

I have conferred before this time with those that are well learned and have asked their opinions touching the limitation of succession, who have been silent—not that by their silence after lawlike manner<sup>3</sup> they have seemed to assent to it, but that indeed they could not tell what to say, considering the great peril to the realm and most danger to myself. But now the matter must needs go trimly and pleasantly, when the bowl runneth all on the one side.<sup>4</sup> And alas, not one amongst them all would answer for us, but all their speeches was for the surety<sup>5</sup> of their country. They would have twelve or fourteen limited in succession, and the mo<sup>6</sup> the better. And those shall be of such uprightness and so divine as in them shall be divinity itself. Kings were wont to honor philosophers, but if I had such<sup>7</sup> I would honor them as angels, that should have such piety in them that they would not seek where they are the second to be the first, and where the third to be the second, and so forth.

It is said I am no divine.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I studied nothing else but divinity till I came to the crown, and then I gave myself to the study of that which was meet<sup>9</sup> for government, and am not ignorant of stories wherein appeareth what hath fallen out for<sup>1</sup> ambition of kingdoms, as in Spain, Naples, Portingal,<sup>2</sup> and at home. And what cocking<sup>3</sup> hath been between the father and the son for the same! You would have a limitation of succession. Truly if reason did not subdue will in me, I would cause you to deal in it, so pleasant a thing it should be unto me. But I stay<sup>4</sup> it for your benefit; for if you should have liberty to treat of it, there be so many competitors—some kinsfolk, some servants, and some tenants; some would speak for their master, and some for their mistress, and every man for his friend—that it would be an occasion of a greater charge than a subsidy.<sup>5</sup> And if my will did not yield to reason, it should be that thing I would gladly desire, to see you deal in it.

Well, there hath been error—I say not errors, for there were too many in the proceeding in this matter. But we will not judge that these attempts were done of any hatred to our person, but even for lack of good foresight. I do not marvel though *Domini Doctores*<sup>6</sup> with you, my lords, did so use themselves therein, since after my brother's<sup>7</sup> death they openly preached and set forth that my sister and I were bastards.<sup>8</sup> Well, I wish not the death of any man, but only this I desire: that they which have been the practitioners herein may before their deaths repent the same and show some open confession of their faults, whereby the scabbed<sup>9</sup> sheep may be known from the whole. As for my own part, I care not for death, for all men are mortal; and though I be a woman, yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had. I am your anointed queen. I will never be by violence constrained to do anything. I thank God I am indeed endued with such qualities that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat, I were able to live in any place of Christendom.

\* \* \*

- Note 1:  
The birth on June 19, 1566, of a son—James—to Mary, Queen of Scots, imparted new urgency to the concern about Elizabeth's unmarried state. Mary was Elizabeth's second cousin and, in the absence of any child of Elizabeth's own, had a strong claim to be her heir; Mary's male child would have an even stronger one. On November 5, a delegation of sixty members of the Lords and Commons met with Elizabeth, to urge her to marry and also to establish formally the line of succession. After the meeting, a member of the delegation wrote down Elizabeth's impromptu response.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, envy itself could not fault my governance.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Parliament, which had planned to submit a written petition to the queen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Manners'.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Honor's.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hindrance. At the time, there were negotiations for a possible match with Archduke Charles of Austria.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Unless.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Assured.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Because.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Next in line to the throne, as Elizabeth had been under her half-sister, Mary I.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To pay heed to their doings.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In accordance with the legal maxim (that silence implies consent).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A metaphorical extension of the preceding clause: in the game of bowls, the ball has a flat place: rolled unskillfully, it

wobbles, bounces, and prematurely stops; rolled well (“all on the one side”), it runs smoothly.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Security.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: More.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, such virtuous potential successors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Theologian.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Relevant to. Elizabeth’s claim that before ascending the throne she studied nothing but theology is an exaggeration, but it is true that she had devoted much effort to the subject, as evidenced by her translations of several religious works.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Happened as a result of.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Portugal. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cockfighting: strife, contention.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stop.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, it would cost more than a tax. Subsidies were tax levies granted to the sovereign to meet special expenses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Doctors of the Lord: her derisive Latin term for the bishops who had supported the petition in the House of Lords.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Edward VI’s.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Presumably in support of the claim of Lady Jane Grey to the throne.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Infected with scab (the skin disease also known as scabies).[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***From A Letter to Mary, Queen of Scots, February 24, 1567<sup>1</sup>***

Madame:

My ears have been so deafened and my understanding so grieved and my heart so affrighted to hear the dreadful news of the abominable murder of your mad husband and my killed cousin<sup>2</sup> that I scarcely yet have the wits to write about it. And inasmuch as my nature compels me to take his death in the extreme, he being so close in blood, so it is that I will boldly tell you what I think of it. I cannot dissemble that I am more sorrowful for you than for him. O madame, I would not do the office of faithful cousin or affectionate friend if I studied rather to please your ears than employed myself in preserving your honor. However, I will not at all dissemble what most people are talking about: which is that you will look through your fingers at<sup>3</sup> the revenging of this deed, and that you do not take measures that touch those who have done as you wished, as if the thing had been entrusted in a way that the murderers felt assurance in doing it.<sup>4</sup> Among the thoughts in my heart I beseech you to want no such thought to stick at this point. Through all the dealings of the world I never was in such miserable haste to lodge and have in my heart such a miserable opinion of any prince as this would cause me do. Much less will I have such of her to whom I wish as much good as my heart is able to imagine or as you were able a short while ago to wish. However, I exhort you, I counsel you, and I beseech you to take this thing so much to heart that you will not fear to touch even him whom you have nearest to you<sup>5</sup> if the thing touches him, and that no persuasion will prevent you from making an example out of this to the world: that you are both a noble princess and a loyal wife. I do not write so vehemently out of doubt that I have, but out of the affection that I bear you in particular. For I am not ignorant that you have no wiser counselors than myself. Thus it is that, when



I remember that our Lord had one Judas out of twelve, and I assure myself that there could be no one more loyal than myself, I offer you my affection in place of this prudence.

\* \* \*

## 1567 **Endnotes**

1900

- Note 1: Written after news reached Elizabeth of the murder of Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, the arrogant and erratic Scottish nobleman whom Mary had ill-advisedly married in 1565.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Darnley, like Mary, was Elizabeth's second cousin and a potential claimant to the throne of England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wink at.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Because Mary and Darnley had been estranged, there were immediately rumors that she had been complicit in his murder.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Evidently an allusion to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, whom Mary married (under much-disputed circumstances) three months after Darnley's death, although Bothwell was known to have been one of the chief conspirators in the murder.[Return to reference 5](#)

# The Doubt of Future Foes<sup>1</sup>

The doubt<sup>o</sup> of future foes exiles my present joy,  
And wit<sup>o</sup> me warns to shun such snares as threatens  
mine annoy.<sup>2</sup>  
For falsehood now doth flow, and subjects' faith doth  
ebb,<sup>3</sup>  
Which should not be, if reason ruled or wisdom  
weaved the web.  
But clouds of toys<sup>o</sup> untried do cloak aspiring minds,  
5 Which turns to rain of late repent, by course of  
changed winds.<sup>4</sup>  
The top of hope supposed, the root of rue<sup>o</sup> shall be,  
And fruitless all their grafted guile,<sup>5</sup> as shortly you  
shall see.  
Their dazzled eyes with pride, which great ambition  
blinds,  
10 Shall be unsealed<sup>o</sup> by worthy wights<sup>o</sup> whose  
foresight falsehood finds.  
The daughter of debate,<sup>6</sup> that discord aye<sup>o</sup> doth  
sow,  
Shall reap no gain where former rule<sup>7</sup> still<sup>o</sup> peace  
hath taught to grow.  
No foreign banished wight shall anchor in this port:  
Our realm brooks no seditious sects—let them  
elsewhere resort.  
15 My rusty sword through rest<sup>8</sup> shall first his edge  
employ  
To poll their tops<sup>9</sup> who seek such change or gape for  
future joy.  
*Vivat Regina*<sup>1</sup>

- Note 1: The poem concerns Mary, Queen of Scots, who in 1568 sought refuge in England from her rebellious subjects.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, threaten to do me harm ("annoy").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the tide of faith (loyalty) is ebbing, yielding to the rising tide of falsehood.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Clouds of tricks not yet tested or detected hide the "aspiring minds" of ambitious foes, but those clouds will turn at last into rains of repentance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The deception ("guile") grafted into them will not bear fruit.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Strife. Mary Stuart also was sometimes called "Mother of Debate," because she was constantly the focus of conspiracies and plots.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Either the reign of Henry VIII or that of Edward VI, which established the Reformation in England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sword rusty from disuse.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Strike off their heads.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Long live the queen (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *fear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intelligence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *regret*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opened* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *men*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *continually*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stable*[Return to reference °](#)

# On Monsieur's Departure<sup>1</sup>

I grieve and dare not show my discontent,  
I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,  
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant,  
I seem stark mute but inwardly do prate.<sup>o</sup>  
5 I am and not, I freeze and yet am burned,  
Since from myself another self I turned.

My care is like my shadow in the sun,  
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,  
Stands and lies by me, doth what I have done.<sup>2</sup>  
10 His too familiar care<sup>3</sup> doth make me rue<sup>o</sup> it.  
No means I find to rid him from my breast,  
Till by the end of things it be suppressed.

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,  
For I am soft and made of melting snow;  
Or be more cruel, love, and so be kind.  
15 Let me or<sup>o</sup> float or sink, be high or low.  
Or let me live with some more sweet content,  
Or die and so forget what love e'er<sup>o</sup> meant.

ca. 1582**Endnotes**

1823

- Note 1: The heading, present in a 17th-century manuscript, identifies the occasion of this poem as the breaking off of marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and the French Duke of Anjou, in 1582.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Does everything I do.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, my own care, which he caused.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *chatter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °

## **A Letter to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, February 10, 1586<sup>1</sup>**

How contemptuously we conceive ourselves to have been used by you, you shall by this bearer<sup>2</sup> understand: whom we have expressly sent unto you to charge you withal. We could never have imagined (had we not seen it fall out<sup>3</sup> in experience) that a man raised up by ourself and extraordinarily favored by us, above any other subject of this land, would have in so contemptible a sort broken our commandment in a cause that so greatly toucheth us in honor. Whereof although you have showed yourself to make but little account in so most undutiful a sort, you may not therefore think that we have so little care of the reparation thereof as we mind to pass so great a wrong in silence unredressed. And therefore our express pleasure and commandment is that, all delays and excuses laid apart, you do presently upon the duty of your allegiance obey and fulfill whatsoever the bearer hereof shall direct you to do in our name.<sup>4</sup> Whereof fail you not, as you will answer the contrary at your uttermost peril.

### 1586**Endnotes**

1935

- Note 1:  
Leicester (ca. 1532–1588) had been the queen's greatest favorite from the beginning of her reign and was for a time her suitor and possibly lover. Sent to the Netherlands to assist the revolt of the Dutch Protestants against Spanish rule, however, he incurred her rage by accepting, without her permission, the offer of the Dutch to make him their absolute governor. They had been without a leader since the assassination of William of Orange, in 1584, and had offered Elizabeth herself the

sovereignty of the United Provinces (which she declined) the preceding summer.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Sir Thomas Heneage, one of Elizabeth's most trusted courtiers. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Happen. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Heneage was instructed to direct Leicester to resign the governorship immediately. Though it was several months before Leicester did so, Elizabeth was by April already addressing him fondly again. [Return to reference 4](#)

## A Letter to Sir Amyas Paulet, August 1586<sup>1</sup>

Amyas, my most careful and faithful servant,

God reward thee treblefold in the double for thy most troublesome charge<sup>2</sup> so well discharged. If you knew, my Amyas, how kindly, besides dutifully, my careful<sup>3</sup> heart accepts your double labors and faithful actions, your wise orders and safe regards performed in so dangerous and crafty<sup>4</sup> a charge, it would ease your troubles' travail and rejoice your heart. In which I charge you to carry this most highest thought: that I cannot balance in any weight of my judgment the value that I prize you at. And suppose no treasure to countervail<sup>5</sup> such a faith, and condemn me in that behalf which I never committed if I reward not such deserts. Yea, let me lack when I have most need if I acknowledge not such a merit with a reward *non omnibus datum*.<sup>6</sup>

But let your wicked mistress know how, with hearty sorrow, her vile deserts compels these orders; and bid her, from me, ask God forgiveness for her treacherous dealing towards the saver of her life many years, to the intolerable peril of her own.<sup>7</sup> And yet not content with so many forgivenesses, must fall again so horribly, far passing a woman's thought, much more a princess', instead of excusing, whereof not one can serve, it being so plainly confessed by the actors<sup>8</sup> of my guiltless death. Let repentance take place; and let not the fiend possess her so as her best part be lost, which I pray with hands lifted up to Him that may both save and spill,<sup>9</sup> with my loving adieu and prayer for thy long life.

Your most assured and loving sovereign in heart,  
by good desert induced, *Elizabeth Regina*.



- Note 1:

Paulet was the keeper of Mary, Queen of Scots. In 1586 a number of her supporters, led by Anthony Babington, plotted to murder Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne. The plot was discovered, and the plotters were executed in September. Mary, who had been complicit with them, was placed under stricter confinement, and then tried for treason.

Elizabeth's letter to Paulet circulated widely in manuscript: to her contemporaries, it was evidently the single best-known of the queen's letters.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Duty, responsibility.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Full of care.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Requiring skill.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To be equal in value to.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Not given to all (Latin).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Elizabeth's own life.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the conspirators.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Destroy.[Return to reference 9](#)

## A Letter to King James VI of Scotland, February 14, 1587

My dear brother,<sup>1</sup>

I would you knew though not felt the extreme dolor that overwhelms my mind for that miserable accident,<sup>2</sup> which far contrary to my meaning hath befallen. I have now sent this kinsman of mine,<sup>3</sup> whom ere now it hath pleased you to favor, to instruct you truly of that which is too irksome for my pen to tell you. I beseech you that—as God and many more know—how innocent I am in this case, so you will believe me that if I had bid aught I would have bid by it.<sup>4</sup> I am not so base minded that fear of any living creature or prince should make me afraid to do that<sup>5</sup> were just or, done, to deny the same. I am not of so base a lineage nor carry so vile a mind; but as not to disguise fits most a king, so will I never dissemble my actions but cause them show even as I meant them. Thus assuring yourself of me that, as I know this was deserved, yet if I had meant it I would never lay it on others' shoulders, no more will I not damnify<sup>6</sup> myself that thought it not. The circumstance it may please you to have of this bearer. And for your part, think you have not in the world a more loving kinswoman nor a more dear friend than myself, nor any that will watch more carefully to preserve you and your estate.<sup>7</sup> And who shall otherwise persuade you, judge them more partial to others than you. And thus in haste, I leave to trouble you, beseeching God to send you a long reign. The 14 of February, 1587.

Your most assured, loving sister and cousin,  
*Elizabeth R.*<sup>8</sup>

# Endnotes

- Note 1: Fellow ruler.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
That is, the execution, six days before, of James's mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. In the aftermath of the Babington plot, Elizabeth decided to have Mary tried and convicted of treason—legally an outrageous charge, since she was not a subject of England. Mary was sentenced to death, and Elizabeth, after much vacillation, signed the warrant for her execution. Once the sentence had been carried out, however, the queen went to great lengths to exculpate herself, even in her own mind, from responsibility for her cousin's death.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sir Robert Carey, related to Elizabeth on her mother's side.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, if I had commanded her death, I would have abided by my decision. ("Bid" is a form of the past participle of both *bid* and *bide*.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the thing that.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Wrong.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Position.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Regína* (Queen; Latin).[Return to reference 8](#)

# Verse Exchange between Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh<sup>1</sup>

## [RALEGH TO ELIZABETH]

Fortune hath taken away my love,  
My life's joy and my soul's heaven above.  
Fortune hath taken thee away, my princess,  
My world's joy and my true fantasy's mistress.

5 Fortune hath taken thee away from me;  
Fortune hath taken all by taking thee.  
Dead to all joys, I only live to woe:  
So is Fortune become my fantasy's foe.

10 In vain, my eyes, in vain ye waste your tears;  
In vain, my sights,<sup>o</sup> the smoke of my despairs,  
In vain you search the earth and heaven above.  
In vain you search, for Fortune keeps my love.

15 Then will I leave my love in Fortune's hand;  
Then will I leave my love in worldlings' band,<sup>o</sup>  
And only love the sorrows due to me—  
Sorrow, henceforth, that shall my princess be—

20 And only joy that Fortune conquers kings.  
Fortune, that rules the earth and earthly things,  
Hath taken my love in spite of virtue's might:  
So blind a goddess did never virtue right.

With wisdom's eyes had but blind Fortune seen,  
Then had my love, my love forever been.  
But love, farewell—though Fortune conquer thee,

No fortune base nor frail shall alter me.

[ELIZABETH TO RALEGH]

Ah, silly Pug,<sup>2</sup> wert thou so sore afraid?  
Mourn not, my Wat,<sup>3</sup> nor be thou so dismayed.  
It passeth fickle Fortune's power and skill  
To force my heart to think thee any ill.  
5 No Fortune base, thou sayest, shall alter thee?  
And may so blind a witch so conquer me?  
No, no, my Pug, though Fortune were not blind,  
Assure thyself she could not rule my mind.  
Fortune, I know, sometimes doth conquer kings,  
10 And rules and reigns on earth and earthly things,  
But never think Fortune can bear the sway  
If virtue watch, and will her not obey.  
Ne<sup>o</sup> chose I thee by fickle Fortune's rede,<sup>o</sup>  
Ne she shall force me alter with such speed  
15 But if<sup>4</sup> to try this mistress' jest with thee.<sup>5</sup>  
Pull up thy heart, suppress thy brackish tears,  
Torment thee not, but put away thy fears.  
Dead to all joys and living unto woe,  
Slain quite by her that ne'er gave wise men blow,  
20 Revive again and live without all dread,  
The less afraid, the better thou shalt speed.<sup>o</sup>

ca. 1587 **Endnotes**

ca. 1600?

- Note 1: This exchange, which exemplifies the poetic banter that sometimes passed between the queen and her favorites, took place about 1587, when Raleigh believed that the rapid rise of the Earl of Essex in Elizabeth's favor entailed a diminution of his own standing with her.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An endearment, which Elizabeth used as her pet name for Raleigh.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Short for Walter.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unless I do it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Since “thee” has nothing to rhyme with, and since the line is hard to construe, it seems likely that there is a line missing before or after this one.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *sighs* (?)[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bond*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *decision*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *succeed*[Return to reference °](#)

## Speech to the Troops at Tilbury<sup>1</sup>

My loving people, I have been persuaded by some that are careful of<sup>2</sup> my safety, to take heed how I committed myself to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery. But I tell you that I would not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear! I have so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects. Wherefore I am come among you at this time but for my recreation and pleasure, being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die amongst you all,<sup>3</sup> to lay down for my God and for my kingdom and for my people mine honor and my blood even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too<sup>4</sup>—and take foul scorn that Parma<sup>5</sup> or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm. To the which, rather than any dishonor shall grow by me, I myself will venter<sup>6</sup> my royal blood; I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of your virtue in the field. I know that already for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns,<sup>7</sup> and I assure you in the word of a prince you shall not fail of them. In the meantime, my lieutenant general<sup>8</sup> shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject; not doubting but by your concord in the camp and valor in the field, and your obedience to myself and my general, we shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God and of my kingdom.

### 1588 **Endnotes**

1654

- Note 1: Delivered by Elizabeth on August 9, 1588, to the land forces assembled at Tilbury (in Essex) to repel the anticipated

invasion of the Spanish Armada, a fleet of warships sent by Philip II. The Armada was defeated at sea and never reached England, a miraculous deliverance and sign of God's special favor to Elizabeth and to England, in the general view.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Anxious about.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In another version of the speech (based, like this one, on an auditor's memory), the sentence up to this point reads: "And therefore I am come amongst you, as you see at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live or die amongst you all."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An allusion to the concept of the king's (or queen's) two bodies, the one natural and mortal, the other an ideal and enduring political construct. "Stomach": valor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma, allied with the king of Spain and expected to join with him in the invasion of England.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Venture, risk.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The crown was an English coin. "Forwardness": eagerness.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Earl of Leicester led the English troops. Elizabeth's great and powerful favorite, he died just a month later.[Return to reference 8](#)



**The “Golden Speech”** A speech to Elizabeth’s last Parliament, delivered November 30, 1601, and here given as recorded by one of the members. The designation “Golden Speech” stems from the headnote to a version of the speech printed near the end of the Puritan interregnum (1659?): “This speech ought to be set in letters of gold, that as well the majesty, prudence, and virtue of this royal queen might in general most exquisitely appear, as also that her religious love and tender respect which she particularly and constantly did bear to her Parliament in unfeigned sincerity might (to the shame and perpetual disgrace and infamy of some of her successors) be nobly and truly vindicated.”

The royal prerogatives included the right to grant or sell “letters patent,” which gave the recipient monopoly control of some branch of commerce. (Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, was given the exclusive right, for a period of thirty years, to license all taverns.) Discontent with the monopolies—which had resulted in higher prices for a wide range of commodities, including such basic ones as salt and starch—came to a head in the Parliament of 1601. Under parliamentary pressure (and in return for a subsidy granted to her treasury), Elizabeth agreed to revoke some of the most obnoxious patents and to allow the courts to rule freely on charges brought against the holders of others. She invited members of Parliament who wished to offer thanks for this largesse to come to her in a body, and on November 30 received about 150 of them at Whitehall Palace. After effusive remarks by the speaker of the House of Commons (Sir John Croke), the queen responded more or less as recorded here. (Elizabeth revised the speech for publication; and none of the surviving versions of it—which differ considerably—was printed earlier than about 1628.)

## The "Golden Speech"<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Speaker, we have heard your declaration and perceive your care of our estate,<sup>2</sup> by falling into the consideration of a grateful acknowledgment of such benefits as you have received; and that your coming is to present thanks unto us, which I accept with no less joy than your loves can have desire to offer such a present.

I do assure you that there is no prince that loveth his subjects better, or whose love can countervail<sup>3</sup> our loves. There is no jewel, be it of never so rich a price, which I set before this jewel—I mean your loves. For I do more esteem it than any treasure or riches: for that we know how to prize, but love and thanks I count unvaluable.<sup>4</sup> And though God hath raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves. This makes me that I do not so much rejoice that God hath made me to be a queen, as to be a queen over so thankful a people. Therefore I have cause to wish nothing more than to content the subjects, and that is a duty which I owe. Neither do I desire to live longer days than that I may see your prosperity, and that is my only desire. And as I am that person that still,<sup>5</sup> yet under God, hath delivered you, so I trust, by the almighty power of God, that I shall be His instrument to preserve you from envy, peril, dishonor, shame, tyranny, and oppression, partly by means of your intended helps, which we take very acceptable because it manifesteth the largeness of your loves and loyalties unto your sovereign.

Of myself I must say this: I never was any greedy, scraping grasper, nor a strait, fast-holding prince, nor yet a waster. My heart was never set on worldly goods, but only for my subjects' good. What you bestow on me, I will not hoard it up, but receive it to bestow on you again. Yea, my own properties I account yours to be expended for your good, and your eyes shall see the bestowing of all for your good. Therefore render unto them from me, I beseech you,

Mr. Speaker, such thanks as you imagine my heart yieldeth but my tongue cannot express.

Mr. Speaker, I would wish you and the rest to stand up, for I shall yet trouble you with longer speech.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Speaker, you give me thanks, but I doubt<sup>7</sup> me that I have more cause to thank you all than you me; and I charge you to thank them of the Lower House<sup>8</sup> from me. For had I not received a knowledge from you, I might have fallen into the lapse of an error only for lack of true information.

Since I was queen yet did I never put my pen to any grant but that upon pretext and semblance made unto me, it was both good and beneficial to the subject in general, though a private profit to some of my ancient servants who had deserved well. But the contrary being found by experience, I am exceedingly beholding to such subjects as would move the same at the first.<sup>9</sup> And I am not so simple to suppose but that there be some of the Lower House whom these grievances never touched; and for them I think they speak out of zeal to their countries<sup>1</sup> and not out of spleen or malevolent affection, as being parties grieved. And I take it exceedingly gratefully from them, because it gives us to know that no respects or interests had moved them other than the minds they bear to suffer<sup>2</sup> no diminution of our honor and our subjects' love unto us, the zeal of which affection, tending to ease my people and knit their hearts unto me, I embrace with a princely care.

For above all earthly treasures I esteem my people's love, more than which I desire not to merit. That my grants should be grievous to my people and oppressions to be privileged under color<sup>3</sup> of our patents, our kingly dignity shall not suffer it. Yea, when I heard it I could give no rest unto my thoughts until I had reformed it.<sup>4</sup> Shall they (think you) escape unpunished that have thus oppressed you and have been disrespectful of their duty and regardless of our honor? No, no, Mr. Speaker, I assure you were it not more for conscience' sake than for any glory or increase of love that I desire, these errors, troubles, vexations, and oppressions done by these varlets and low

persons (not worthy the name of subjects) should not escape without condign punishment. But I perceive they dealt with me like physicians who, ministering a drug, make it more acceptable by giving it a good aromatical savor; or when they give pills, do gild them all over.

I have ever used<sup>5</sup> to set the Last Judgment Day before my eyes and so to rule as I shall be judged, to answer before a higher Judge. To whose judgment seat I do appeal that never thought was cherished in my heart that tended not unto my people's good. And now if my kingly bounties have been abused and my grants turned to the hurts of my people, contrary to my will and meaning, or if any in authority under me have neglected or perverted what I have committed to them, I hope God will not lay their culps<sup>6</sup> and offenses to my charge. Who, though there were danger in repealing our grants, yet what danger would I not rather incur for your good than I would suffer them still to continue?

I know the title of a king is a glorious title, but assure yourself that the shining glory of princely authority hath not so dazzled the eyes of our understanding but that we well know and remember that we also are to yield an account of our actions before the great Judge. To be a king and wear a crown is more glorious to them that see it than it is pleasant to them that bear it. For myself, I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a king or royal authority of a queen as delighted that God hath made me His instrument to maintain His truth and glory, and to defend this kingdom (as I said) from peril, dishonor, tyranny, and oppression.

There will never queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country, care to my subjects, and that will sooner with willingness venture her life for your good and safety, than myself. For it is not my desire to live nor reign longer than my life and reign shall be for your good. And though you have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will be more careful and loving.

Shall I ascribe anything to myself and my sexly<sup>7</sup> weakness? I were not worthy to live then, and of all most unworthy of the

mercies I have had from God, who hath ever yet given me a heart which yet never feared any foreign or home enemy. I speak it to give God the praise as a testimony before you, and not to attribute anything unto myself. For I, O Lord, what am I, whom practices and perils past should not fear?<sup>8</sup> O, what can I do, that I should speak for any glory? God forbid!

This, Mr. Speaker, I pray you deliver unto the House, to whom heartily recommend me. And so I commit you all to your best fortunes and further counsels. And I pray you, Mr. Comptroller, Mr. Secretary,<sup>9</sup> and you of my council, that before these gentlemen depart into their countries,<sup>1</sup> you bring them all to kiss my hand.

## 1601 **Endnotes**

1601 (in a summary version)

- Note 1: We print only the words of the queen, omitting various interpolations as well as the opening remarks by the speaker of the Parliament. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rank, position. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Match. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Invaluable. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Continually. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Up to this point, the assemblage had been kneeling. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fear. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The House of Commons. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, those members of the House of Commons who had raised the issue of monopolies in previous sessions.  
"Beholding": beholden. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Their constituents. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Permit. "Minds": intentions. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pretext. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In fact Elizabeth was extremely slow to respond to the grievances, which had, for example, previously been raised in the Parliament of 1597. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Been accustomed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sins.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Characteristic of my sex. "Ascribe": attribute.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Frighten. "Practices": treacherous schemes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: William Knollys, Earl of Banbury, and Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Districts.[Return to reference 1](#)

## **ANNE COOKE BACON**

Anne Cooke Bacon (ca. 1527–1610) here introduces her translation of the sermons of Bernadino Ochino from Italian to English. In this pointed dedication to her mother, who had clearly argued that learning Italian would not help God's cause, she notes that learning the language has enabled her to translate these holy texts. Thus this short epistle shows defiance in its reverence. Ochino (1487–1564) was a Catholic turned Protestant reformer and Calvinist; through his works Bacon, here at the age of twenty-two, first broadcast her own as well as his powerful Protestant beliefs. This translation paved the way for her later translation of Jewel's *Apology*, included earlier in this volume.

# **To the Right Worshipful and Worthily Beloved Mother, the Lady F., Her Humble Daughter Wisheth Increase of Spiritual Knowledge, with Full Fruition of the Fruits Thereof**

Since the original of whatsoever is or may be converted to any good use in me hath freely proceeded—though as the minister of God—of your ladyship's mere careful and motherly goodness, as well in procuring<sup>1</sup> all things thereunto belonging, as in your many and most Godly exhortations (wherein among the rest it hath pleased you, often, to reprove my vain study in the Italian tongue, accounting the seed thereof to have been sown in baren, unfruitful ground, since God thereby is no whit magnified), I have at the last perceived it my duty to prove how much the understanding of your will could work in me towards the accomplishing of the same. And—for that I have well known your chief delight to rest in the destroying of man his glory, and exalting wholly the glory of God, which may not be unless we acknowledge that He doth foresee and determine, from without beginning, all things, and cannot alter or reward after our deserved works, but remain steadfast, according to his immutable will—I have taken in hand to dedicate unto your Ladyship this small number of sermons for the excellent fruit sake in them contained, proceeding from the happy spirit of the sanctified Barnardine, which treat of the election and predestination of God, with the rest (although not of the self-title) appertaining to the same effect, to the end it might appear that your so many worthy sentences touching the same have not utterly been without some note in my weak memory. And albeit they be not done<sup>2</sup> in such perfection as the dignity of the matter doth require, yet I trust and know ye will accept the humble will of the presenter, not weighing so much the excellency of the translation



—although of right it ought to be such as should not by the grossness<sup>3</sup> thereof deprive the author of his worthiness. But not meaning to take upon me the reach to his high style of theology, and fearing also, lest in enterprising<sup>4</sup> to set forth the brightness of his eloquence I should manifest myself unapt to attain unto the lowest degree thereof, I descend therefore, to the understanding of mine own debility, only requiring that it may please your ladyship to vouchsafe<sup>5</sup> that this my small labor may be allowed at your hands, under whose protection only it is committed, with humble reverence, as yielding some part of the fruit of your motherly admonitions in this my willing service.

Your ladyship's daughter most boundenly<sup>6</sup> obedient. A.C.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Acquiring. "Mere": pure.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, translated.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Coarseness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Attempting.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grant. "Debility": weakness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: According to bounden duty.[Return to reference 6](#)

## MARGARET TYLER

The background of Margaret Tyler (ca. 1540–ca. 1590), translator of Spanish, is unknown. As she dedicates this, her only known printed work, to Lord Thomas Howard, it is assumed she was a servant to his aristocratic family. Her *Mirror of Princely Deeds* is a translation of book 1 of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra, *Espejo de Príncipes y Cavalleros* (1555), a racy romance featuring sorcerers, magic, courageous deeds, and hopeless love; it was regularly reprinted and became a source and model for subsequent English romances. Tyler seems, from the confident dedication supplied here, to have been of mature age when her text, the first romance from a woman's pen in English, came out. She offers here an impassioned defense of women's right to translate stories in addition to pious works, stating that if a woman is allowed to read a story, and be its dedicatee, she should be allowed to translate one too.

## To the Reader

Thou hast here, gentle Reader, the history of Trebatio, an Emperor in Greece, whether a true history of him indeed, or a feigned fable, I wot not,<sup>1</sup> neither did I greatly seek after it in the translation, but by me it is done into English for thy profit and delight. The chief matter therein contained is of exploits of wars, and the parties therein named are especially renowned for their magnanimity and courage. The author's purpose appeareth to be this: to animate thereby, and to set on fire, the lusty<sup>2</sup> courages of young gentlemen to the advancement of their line by ensuing<sup>3</sup> suchlike steps. The first tongue wherein it was penned was the Spanish (in which nation, by common report, the inheritance of all worldly commendation hath to this day rested); the whole discourse in respect of the end not unnecessary, for the variety and continual shift of fresh matter very delightful, in the speeches short and sweet, wise in sentence, and wary in the provision of contrary accidents.<sup>4</sup> For I take the grace thereof to be rather in the reporter's device than in the truth of this report, as I would that I could so well impart with thee that delight which myself findeth in reading the Spanish: but seldom is the tale carried clean<sup>5</sup> from another's mouth.

Such delivery<sup>6</sup> as I have made, I hope thou wilt friendly accept, the rather for that it is a woman's work, though<sup>7</sup> in a story profane and a matter more manlike than becometh my sex. But as for the manliness of the matter, thou knowest that it is not necessary for every trumpeter or drumsler<sup>8</sup> in the war to be a good fighter. They take wage only to incite others, though themselves have privy maims and are thereby recureless.<sup>9</sup> So, gentle reader, if my travail in Englishing this author may bring thee to a liking of the virtues herein commended, and by example thereof in thy princes and country's quarrel to hazard thy person and purchase good name, as for<sup>1</sup> hope of well deserving myself that way, I neither bend myself thereto, nor

yet fear the speech of people if I be found backward.<sup>2</sup> I trust every man holds not the plough which would<sup>3</sup> the ground were tilled, and it is no sin to talk of Robin Hood, though you never shot in<sup>4</sup> his bow. \* \* \* The invention, disposition, trimming, and what else<sup>5</sup> in this story, is wholly another man's, my part none therein but the translation, as it were only in giving entertainment to a stranger before this time unacquainted with our country guise.<sup>6</sup> Marry, the worst perhaps is this: that among so many strangers<sup>7</sup> as daily come over, some more ancient, and some but new set forth, some penning matters of great weight and sadness in divinity or other studies (the profession whereof more nearly beseemeth<sup>8</sup> my years), other some discoursing of matters more easy and ordinary in common talk wherein a gentlewoman may honestly employ her travail, I have notwithstanding made countenance only to<sup>9</sup> this gentleman, whom neither his personage might sufficiently commend itself unto my sex, nor his behavior (being light and soldierlike) might in good order acquaint itself<sup>1</sup> with my years.

So the question now ariseth of my choice, not of my labor, wherefore<sup>2</sup> I preferred this story before matter of more importance. For answer whereto, gentle reader, the truth is that as the first motion to<sup>3</sup> this kind of labor came not from myself, so was this piece of work put upon me by others, and they which first counselled me to fall to work took upon them also to be my taskmasters and overseers lest I should be idle. And yet because the refusal was in my power, I must stand<sup>4</sup> to answer for my easy yielding, and may not be unprovided of excuse, wherein if I should allege for myself that matters of less worthiness by as aged years have been taken in hand, and that daily new devices<sup>5</sup> are published, in songs, sonnets, interludes, and other discourses, and yet are borne out<sup>6</sup> without reproach only to please the humor of some men, I think I should make no good plea therein; for besides that I should find thereby so many known enemies as known men have been authors of such idle conceits, yet would my other adversaries be never the rather quieted. For they would say that as well the one as the other were

all naught, and though peradventure<sup>7</sup> I might passe unknown amongst a multitude, and not be the only gaze or odd party in my ill<sup>8</sup> doing, yet because there is less merit of pardon if the fault be excused as common, I will not make that my defense which cannot help me, and doth hinder other men. But my defense is by example of the best, amongst which many have dedicated their labors, some stories, some of war, some physic, some law, some as concerning government, some divine matters, unto diverse<sup>9</sup> ladies and gentlewomen. And if men may and do bestow such of their travails upon gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their works as they dedicate unto us, and if we may read them, why not farther wade in them to the search of a truth? And then, much more, why not deal by translation in such arguments, especially this kind of exercise, being a matter of more heed than of deep invention or exquisite<sup>1</sup> learning? And they must needs leave this as confessed: that in their dedications they mind<sup>2</sup> not only to borrow names of worthy personages, but the testimonies also for their further credit, which neither the one may demand without ambition, nor the other grant without over-lightness. If women be excluded from the view of such works as appear in their name, or if glory only be sought in our common inscriptions, it mattereth not whether the parties be men or women, whether alive or dead. But to return, whatsoever<sup>3</sup> the truth is, whether that women may not at all discourse in learning (for men lay in<sup>4</sup> their claim to be sole possessioners of knowledge), or whether they may in some manner, that is by limitation or appointment in some kind of learning, my persuasion hath been thus, that it is all one<sup>5</sup> for a woman to pen a story, as for a man to address his story to a woman. But amongst all my ill-willers, some I hope are not so straight<sup>6</sup> that they would enforce me necessarily either not to write or to write of divinity. Whereas neither durst I trust mine own judgment sufficiently, if matter of controversy were handled, nor yet could I find any book in the tongue which would not breed offence to some, but I perceive some may be rather angry to see their Spanish delight turned to an English pastime:<sup>7</sup> they

could well allow the story in Spanish, but they may not afford it so cheap, or they would have it proper<sup>8</sup> to themselves. What natures such men be of, I list<sup>9</sup> not greatly dispute, but my meaning hath been to make other partners of my liking, as I doubt not, gentle reader, but if it shall please thee—after serious matters—to sport thyself<sup>1</sup> with this Spaniard, that thou shalt find in him the just reward of malice and cowardice, with the good speed<sup>2</sup> of honesty and courage, being able to furnish thee with sufficient store<sup>3</sup> of foreign example to both purposes. And as in such matters which have been rather devised to beguile time than to breed matter of sad<sup>4</sup> learning, he hath ever borne away the prize which could season such delights with some profitable reading, so shalt thou have this stranger an honest man when need serveth, and at other times either a good companion to drive out a weary night or a merry jest at thy board.<sup>5</sup>

And thus much concerning this present story: that it is neither unseemly for a woman to deal in, neither greatly requiring a less staid age than mine is. But of these two points gentle reader, I thought to give thee warning, lest perhaps understanding of my name and years, thou mightest be carried into a wrong suspect of my boldness and rashness, from which I would gladly free myself by this plain excuse; and if I may deserve thy good favor by like labor, when the choice is mine own, I will have a special regard<sup>6</sup> of thy liking. So I wish thee well.

Thine to use, M[argaret]. T[yler].

## Endnotes

- Note 1: I do not know.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Vigorous. “Animate”: inspire.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Imitating.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Occurrences.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Absolutely correctly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Translation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Even if.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drummer.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Incurable. "Privy maims": secret wounds.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: As regards. "Hazard": risk or stake.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reluctant. "Bend": incline.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Who wishes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: With. The legendary outlaw hero Robin Hood, the subject of a series of English ballads, was famed for his skill in archery.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: What else should be the case. "Disposition": organization. "Trimming": adornment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Native appearance. "Stranger": foreigner.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Here, foreign books. "Marry": indeed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Becomes, befits.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Favored only.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Familiarize itself. "Light": frivolous. "In good order": decently.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Why.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Suggestion about.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Agree.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ingenious writings.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tolerated.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Perhaps. "Naught": nothing.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Wrong. "Gaze": object of gaze. "Party": participant.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Different.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Careful.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pay attention to, remember. "Leave this as confessed": take it that this is manifest.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Whatsoever.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Exert themselves in.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: It is equal.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Proper.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Diversion.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Exclusively.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Desire.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Divert yourself.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Good success.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Supply. "Furnish": supply.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Serious. "Beguile": wile away.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Table.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Esteem.[Return to reference 6](#)



## ANNE DOWRICHE

Anne Dowriche (1560–after 1613) was a Puritan poet and historian who was married to a minister, Hugh Dowriche, a rector in Honiton, Devon. Her long narrative poem, *The French Historie*, published in 1589, told in gruesome detail the story of the recent French wars of religion—her attempt to justify the Protestant Reformation and vilify Catholicism. The dedication, addressed to her much older brother, Sir Pearse Edgecombe (1536–1607/8), details her joy in writing the poem and expresses the hope that its content will make her work acceptable to him. While she seemingly dismisses her own style and writing ability, the length (2,400 lines) and gore of the text point to her boldness.

## **To the Right Worshipful Her Loving Brother, Master Pearse Edgecombe of Mount Edgecombe in Devon Esquire, Mercy and Peace from Jesus Christ**

Right worshipful and my loving brother, I have heard it often and truly reported that laws may be broken but nature cannot be forgotten. I find the force of this in myself: if I find not the like in you, I blame not your nature, but the contrary crossings of those politic affections that hinder the working of it. When I had ended this present pamphlet, I saw that the simplicity<sup>1</sup> of it required a patron, and the often remembrance of your former courtesies enforced me to make bold<sup>2</sup> with you. Consider not therefore the worthiness of the work, but rather the will of the worker: for though the one may justly be condemned, yet the other deserves to be accepted. This book which proceeds under your protection, if you consider the matter, I assure you it is most excellent and well worth the reading; but if you weigh the manner, I confess it is base and scarce worth the seeing. This is therefore my desire: that the simple attire of this outward form may not discourage you from seeking the comfortable<sup>3</sup> taste of the inward substance. You shall find here many things for comfort worthy the considering, and for policy the observing. This hath been my ordinary exercise for recreation at times of leisure for a long space<sup>4</sup> together. If I were sure that you would but take half so much pleasure in reading it as I have in collecting and disposing<sup>5</sup> it, I should not need any farther to commend it. If you find anything that fits not your liking, remember, I pray, that it is a woman's doing. The thing itself will sufficiently prove this to be true. Thus, committing the patronage of this my recreation unto your protection, and you with my good sister-in-law

your wife, and all your children to the Lord's tuition,<sup>6</sup> I cease to trouble you.

Honiton, the 25 day of July 1589  
Your loving sister *Anne Dowriche*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Unembellished appearance.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Become bold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Comforting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Duration of time. "Exercise": occupation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ordering[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Protection.[Return to reference 6](#)

## JANE ANGER

*Jane Anger her Protection for women. To defend them against the scandalous reports of a late surfeiting lover, and all other like Venerians that complain so to be overcloyed with women's kindness* (1589) announces its content in its title. It was written as a response to a contemporary pamphlet now lost, Thomas Orwin's *Surfeit in Love, with a farwel to the folies of his own fantasy* (1588)—an attack on women. How we assess Anger's work depends on whether it is taken to be a defense of women by an actual woman or an experiment in arguing the women's cause written by a man. In the period, the nature of women (known as the *querelle des femmes*, the "woman question") was often discussed as an intellectual debate, with arguments put forward in favor of or against women, their natures, and their rights. This contribution to the *querelle* may be a powerful offering by a genuine woman—there were women named Jane Anger in early modern England—or by a woman writing under a pseudonym, or by a man taking on an outraged woman's voice. In this dedication, Anger wishes ruin on men who take advantage of women sexually and then complain about them. In her final poem she considers how she has planted her seed of anger in and for women readers.

# To All Women in General, and Gentle Reader[s] Whatsoever

Fie on the falsehood of men, whose minds go oft a-madding,<sup>1</sup> and whose tongues cannot so soon be wagging but straight they fall a-railing. Was there ever any so abused, so slandered, so railed upon, or so wickedly handled undeservedly, as are we women? Will the gods permit it, the goddesses stay<sup>2</sup> their punishing judgments, and we ourselves not pursue their undoings<sup>3</sup> for such devilish practices? O Paul's steeple and Charing Cross!<sup>4</sup> A halter<sup>5</sup> hold all such persons! Let the streams of the channels in London streets<sup>6</sup> run so swiftly as they may be able alone to carry them from that sanctuary. Let the stones be as ice, the soles of their shoes as glass, the ways steep like Etna,<sup>7</sup> and every blast a whirlwind puffed out of Boreas<sup>8</sup> his long throat, that these may hasten their passage to the devils' haven. Shall surfeiters rail on our kindness,<sup>9</sup> you stand still and say nought, and shall not Anger stretch the veins of her brains, the strings of her fingers, and the lists<sup>1</sup> of her modesty, to answer their surfeitings? Yes truly. And herein I conjure<sup>2</sup> all you to aide and assist me in defense of my willingness, which shall make me rest at your commands. Fare you well.

## Endnotes

Your friend. Ja. A.

- Note 1: In a furious or mad way.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Cease.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ruin.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: London landmarks that were in ruins: St. Paul's Cathedral lost its steeple to fire in 1561; Charing Cross had had

its lower statues pulled out and its cross damaged in the 1580s.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Moose.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the gutters, used for carrying away refuse and sewage.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An active volcano in Sicily.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The north wind.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Willingness to be loving. "Surfeiters": liberines.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Limits.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Entreat.[Return to reference 2](#)

## *Eiusdem ad Lectorem, de Authore*<sup>1</sup>

Though sharp the seed by Anger sown  
We all, almost, confess,  
And hard his hap<sup>o</sup> we aye account  
Who Anger doth possess;  
Yet hapless<sup>o</sup> shalt thou, reader, reap  
5 Such fruit from ANGER'S soil  
As may thee please, and ANGER ease  
From long and weary toil—  
Whose pains were took,<sup>o</sup> for thy behoof,<sup>o</sup>  
To till that cloddy ground  
10 Where scarce no place free from disgrace  
Of female sex was found.  
If ought offend, which she doth send,  
Impute<sup>o</sup> it to her mood,  
For ANGER'S rage must that assuage,  
15 As well is understood.  
If to delight aught<sup>o</sup> come in sight  
Then deem it for the best.  
So you your will may well fulfil,  
And she have her request.  
20

1589

## Endnotes

- Note 1: To the reader of the same, from the author (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *luck*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *without (his hard) luck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *efforts were made* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *benefit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attribute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything* [Return to reference](#) °



## **EDMUND SPENSER**

### **1552?–1599**

Edmund Spenser set out, consciously and deliberately, to become the great English poet of his age. In a culture in which most accomplished poetry was written by those who were, or at least professed to be, principally interested in something else—advancement at court, diplomacy, statecraft, or the Church—Spenser's ambition was altogether remarkable, and it is still more remarkable that he succeeded in reaching his goal. Unlike such poets as Wyatt, Surrey, and Sidney, born to privilege and social distinction, Spenser was born—in London, probably in 1552—to parents of modest social class and limited means. He nonetheless received an impressive education, first at the Merchant Taylors' School—under its demanding, humanist headmaster, Richard Mulcaster—and then at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he was enrolled as a "sizar," a student who received financial aid in exchange for waiting on tables and other menial tasks. In the Puritan environment of Cambridge, where the popular preacher Thomas Cartwright was beginning to make the authorities uneasy, Spenser began as a poet by translating some poems for a volume of anti-Catholic propaganda. He also began his friendship with Gabriel Harvey, an eccentric Cambridge don, humanist, and pamphleteer. Their correspondence shows they shared a passionate interest in heightening the power and prestige of poetry written in English.

After receiving the B.A. degree in 1573 and the M.A. in 1576, Spenser served as personal secretary and aide to several prominent men, including both Dr. John Young, bishop of Rochester, and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and the queen's principal favorite. During his employment in Leicester's household, Spenser came to know Sir Philip Sidney and his friend Sir Edward Dyer, courtiers who sought to promote a new English poetry. Spenser's contribution to the movement was *The Shepheardes Calender*, published in 1579 and dedicated to Sidney.

In *The Shepheardes Calender* Spenser used a deliberately archaic language—partly in homage to Chaucer, whose work he praised as a “well of English undefiled,” and partly to achieve a rustic effect, in keeping with the feigned simplicity of pastoral poetry's shepherd singers. Sidney did not entirely approve, and another contemporary, Ben Jonson, growled that Spenser “writ no language.” In the eighteenth century Samuel Johnson described the language of *The Shepheardes Calender* as “studied barbarity.” Johnson's characterization is, in a way, quite accurate, for Spenser was attempting to conjure up a native English style to which he could wed the classical mode of the pastoral. Moreover, because pastoral was traditionally viewed as the prelude in a great poet's career, Spenser was also in effect announcing his extravagant ambition to become England's national poet.

Spenser was a prolific and daring experimenter: the poems of *The Shepheardes Calender* use no fewer than thirteen different metrical schemes. In his later poems, he went on to make further innovations: the best known are the special rhyme scheme of the Spenserian sonnet, the remarkably beautiful adaptation of the Italian *canzone* forms for the *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*, and the great Spenserian stanza of *The Faerie Queene* (eight iambic pentameters followed by a six-foot line, rhymed *ababbcbcc*). Spenser is sometimes called “the poet's poet,” because so many later English poets learned the art of versification from him. In the nineteenth century alone his influence may be seen in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*,

Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes," and Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters."

The year after the publication of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser went to Ireland as secretary and aide to Lord Grey of Wilton, lord deputy of Ireland. Although the poet tried continually to obtain appointments in England (which he revisited on several occasions) and to secure the patronage of the queen, he lived in Ireland nearly to the end of his life, holding various minor government posts and hence participating actively in the English struggle against those who resisted colonial occupation. The grim realities of that struggle—massacres, the burning of miserable hovels and of crops with the deliberate intention of starving the inhabitants, the forced relocation of whole communities, the manipulation of treason charges to facilitate the seizure of lands, the endless repetition of acts of military "justice" calculated to intimidate and break the spirit—may be glimpsed in distorted and on occasion direct form throughout Spenser's writings, along with dreamlike depictions of the beauty of the Irish landscape. Those writings include an anonymously published political tract, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, which was unusual in its time both for its genuine fascination with Irish culture and for the ruthlessness of the policies it prescribed.

Spenser's attitudes toward Ireland and his conduct there raise difficult questions concerning the relationship between literature and colonialism. Are the harsh policies of the *View* echoed, allegorically, in *The Faerie Queene*? What does it mean to admire a poet who might, by modern standards, be judged a war criminal (as his master, Lord Grey, was judged to be, even by notoriously brutal Elizabethan standards)? Does Spenser use his Irish vantage point to launch daring criticisms of Queen Elizabeth and the English form of government? In addition to sharpening racial chauvinism, the experience of Ireland seems to have given English settlers a new perspective on events back home. As one of Spenser's contemporaries remarked, words that would be considered

treasonous in England were common table talk among the Irish settlers.

Spenser was rewarded for his efforts in Ireland with a castle and 3,028 acres of expropriated land at Kilcolman, in the province of Munster. There he was visited by another colonist and poet, the powerful and well-connected Sir Walter Raleigh, to whom Spenser showed the great chivalric epic on which he was at work. With Raleigh's influential backing, Spenser traveled to England and published, in 1590, the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, which made a strong bid for the queen's favor and patronage. He was rewarded with a handsome pension of £50 a year for life, though the queen's principal councillor, Lord Burghley, is said to have grumbled that it was a lot for a song. Soon after, Spenser published a volume of poems called *Complaints*; a pastoral called *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595), commenting wryly on the court life he had observed during his 1590 visit; his sonnet cycle, *Amoretti*; and two wedding poems: "Prothalamion," celebrating the double marriage of aristocratic sisters, and "Epithalamion," celebrating the poet's own marriage to Elizabeth Boyle. The six-book *Faerie Queene* was published in 1596, with some revisions in the first part and a changed ending to Book 3 to provide a bridge to the added books; the two so-called Mutabilitie Cantos and two stanzas of a third canto—perhaps part of an intended seventh book—appeared posthumously, in the 1609 edition.

In 1598 there was an uprising in Munster, and rebels burned down the house in which Spenser lived. The poet fled with his wife; their newborn baby is said to have died in the flames. Spenser was sent to England with messages from the besieged English garrison. He died in Westminster on January 13, 1599, and was buried near his beloved Chaucer in what is now called the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Spenser cannot be put into neatly labeled categories. His work is steeped in classical learning and arcane mysticism, but it is also earthy and practical. A staunch Protestant, influenced by Puritanism, he portrayed the Roman Catholic Church as a demonic villain in *The*

*Faerie Queene*, and yet his understanding of faith and of sin owes much to Catholic thinkers. He is a poet of sensuous images yet also something of an iconoclast, deeply suspicious of the way powerful images (material and verbal) can turn into idols. He is an idealist, drawn to courtesy, gentleness, and exquisite moral refinement, yet also a celebrant of English nationalism, empire, and martial power. He is the author of the most memorable literary idealization of Elizabeth I, yet he fills his poem with coded criticisms of the queen and her court. He is in some ways a backward-looking poet who paid homage to Chaucer, used archaic language, and compared his own age unfavorably with the feudal past. Yet as British epic poet and poet-prophet, he points forward to the poetry of the Romantics and especially to Milton, who himself paid homage to the "sage and serious" Spenser as "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas."

Because it was a deliberate choice on Spenser's part that his language should seem antique, his poetry is always printed in the original spelling and punctuation; but a few of the most confusing punctuation marks have been altered in the present text, and we have sometimes added diacritical marks to indicate pronunciation. Spenser also spells words variably, in such a way as to suggest rhymes to the eye or to suggest etymologies (often incorrect ones). This inconsistency in his spellings is typical of his time; in the sixteenth century, people varied the spelling even of their own names.

**The Shepheardes Calender** Pastoral poetry—with its idea of shepherds among their flocks piping on their flutes and singing beautiful songs of love, sadness, and complaint—was an influential classical form whose most famous practitioners were the Alexandrian poet Theocritus (third century B.C.E.) and the Roman poet Virgil (first century B.C.E.). The singers of the pastoral, or eclogue, were depicted as simple rustics who inhabited a world in which human beings and nature lived in harmony, but the form was always essentially urban and elite: in his series of twelve eclogues, Spenser, a Londoner, was self-consciously assuming a highly conventional literary role. That role enabled him at once to lay claim to the prestige of classical poetry and to insist on his native Englishness, insistently signaled by the deliberately archaic, pseudo-Chaucerian language. The rustic mask also enabled Spenser, in certain of the eclogues, to make sharply satirical comments on religious and political issues of his day, such as Elizabeth's suppression of Puritan clergy in the Church of England, and to reflect on his own marginal social position.

The eclogues of *The Shepheardes Calender* are titled for the months of the year. Each is prefaced by an illustrative woodcut representing the characters and theme of the poem and picturing in the clouds the dominant sign of the zodiac for that month, and each is accompanied by a commentary ascribed to "E. K.," who also wrote an introductory epistle to the work as a whole. E. K., who has not been identified but must have been someone close to Spenser (or, in the opinion of some, Spenser himself), trumpets the arrival of a "new poet" whose skills are conspicuously displayed in the sequence of poems. "October" deals with the place of poetry and the responsibility of the poet in the world, an important theme throughout the *Calender* and in much of Spenser's work.

# ***From The Shepheardes Calender***

## ***To His Booke***

Goe little booke:<sup>1</sup> thy selfe present,  
As child whose parent is unkent:<sup>°</sup>  
To him that is the president<sup>°</sup>  
Of noblesse and of chevalree,  
And if that Envie barke at thee,  
5 As sure it will, for succoure<sup>°</sup> flee  
Under the shadow of his wing,<sup>2</sup>  
And askèd, who thee forth did bring,  
A shepheard's swaine<sup>°</sup> saye did thee sing,  
All as his straying flocke he fedde:  
10 And when his honor has thee redde,<sup>°</sup>  
Crave pardon for my hardyhedde.<sup>°</sup>  
But if that any aske thy name,  
Say thou wert base<sup>°</sup> begot with blame:  
For thy<sup>°</sup> thereof thou takest shame.  
15 And when thou art past jeoparddee,  
Come tell me, what was sayd of mee:  
And I will send more after thee.

IMMERITO.<sup>°</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: A deliberate echo of Chaucer's line "Go litel bok, go litel myn tragedye" (*Troilus and Criseyde* 5.1786).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the protective sponsorship of Sir Philip Sidney, to whom this poem dedicates the book.[Return to reference 2](#)
- °: *unknown*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *pattern*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *seen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boldness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lowly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *therefore*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unworthy*[Return to reference °](#)



**October<sup>3</sup>**



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***Aegloga decima<sup>4</sup>***

## **ARGUMENT**

In Cuddie<sup>5</sup> is set out the perfecte paterne of a Poete, which finding no maintenaunce of his state and studies, complayneth of the comtempte of Poetrie, and the causes thereof: Specially having bene in all ages, and even amongst the most barbarous alwayes of singular account<sup>6</sup> and honor, and being indede so worthy and commendable an arte: or rather no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both: and poured into the witte by a certaine *enthousiasmos* and celestiall inspiration, as the Author hereof els where at large discourseth, in his booke called the English Poete,<sup>7</sup> which booke being lately come to my hands, I mynde<sup>8</sup> also by Gods grace upon further advisement to publish.

PIERS CUDDIE

Cuddie, for shame hold up thy heavye head,  
And let us cast with what delight to chace,  
And weary thys long lingring Phoebus race.<sup>9</sup>  
Whilome thou wont<sup>1</sup> the shepheards laddes to leade,  
In rymes, in ridles, and in bydding base:<sup>2</sup>  
5 Now they in thee, and thou in sleepe art dead.

CUDDIE

Piers, I have pypèd erst<sup>o</sup> so long with payne,<sup>o</sup>  
That all mine Oten reedes<sup>3</sup> bene rent<sup>o</sup> and wore:  
And my poore Muse hath spent her sparèd<sup>o</sup> store,  
Yet little good hath got, and much lesse gayne.  
10 Such pleasaunce makes the Grashopper so poore,  
And ligge so layd,<sup>4</sup> when Winter doth her straine.<sup>o</sup>

The dapper<sup>o</sup> ditties, that I wont<sup>5</sup> devise,  
To feede youthes fancie, and the flocking fry,<sup>6</sup>  
Delighten much: what I the bett for thy?<sup>7</sup>  
15 They han<sup>o</sup> the pleasure, I a sclender prise.<sup>o</sup>  
I beate the bush, the byrds to them doe flye:  
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?

PIERS

Cuddie, the prayse is better, then<sup>o</sup> the price,  
The glory eke<sup>o</sup> much greater then the gayne:  
20 O what an honor is it, to restraine  
The lust<sup>o</sup> of lawlesse youth with good advice:<sup>8</sup>  
Or pricke<sup>o</sup> them forth with pleasaunce of thy vaine<sup>o</sup>  
Whereto thou list<sup>o</sup> their traynèd<sup>o</sup> willes entice.

Soone as thou gynst<sup>o</sup> to sette thy notes in frame,

O how the rurall routes<sup>o</sup> to thee doe cleave:  
25 Seemeth thou dost their soule of sence bereave,<sup>9</sup>  
All as the shepheard, that did fetch his dame  
From Plutoes balefull bowre withouten leave:  
30 His musicks might the hellish hound did tame.<sup>1</sup>

CUDDIE

So praysen babes the Peacocks spotted traine,  
And wondren at bright Argus blazing eye:<sup>2</sup>  
But who rewards him ere<sup>o</sup> the more for thy?<sup>o</sup>  
Or feedes him once the fuller by a graine?  
35 Sike<sup>o</sup> prayse is smoke, that sheddeth<sup>o</sup> in the skye,  
Sike words bene wynd, and wasten soone in vayne.

PIERS

Abandon then the base and viler clowne,<sup>o</sup>  
Lyft up thy selfe out of the lowly dust:  
And sing of bloody Mars,<sup>3</sup> of wars, of giusts.<sup>o</sup>  
40 Turne thee to those, that weld<sup>o</sup> the awful<sup>o</sup> crowne,  
To doubted<sup>o</sup> Knights, whose woundlesse<sup>4</sup> armour  
rusts,  
And helmes unbruzed waxen<sup>o</sup> dayly browne.

There may thy Muse display her fluttryng wing,  
And stretch her selfe at large from East to West:<sup>5</sup>  
45 Whither thou list<sup>o</sup> in fayre Elisa rest,  
Or if thee please in bigger notes to sing,  
Advaunce<sup>o</sup> the worthy whome shee loveth best,  
That first the white beare to the stake did bring.<sup>6</sup>

And when the stubborne stroke of stronger stounds,<sup>o</sup>  
50 Has somewhat slackt<sup>7</sup> the tenor of thy string:  
Of love and lustihead tho<sup>o</sup> mayst thou sing,

And carrol lowde, and leade the Myllers rownde,<sup>8</sup>  
All<sup>o</sup> were Elisa one of thilke same ring.<sup>9</sup>  
So mought our Cuddies name to Heaven sownde.

CUDDIE

55      Indeede the Romish Tityrus,<sup>1</sup> I heare,  
Through his Mecaenas left his Oaten reede,  
Whereon he earst<sup>o</sup> had taught his flocks to feede,  
And laboured lands to yield the timely eare,  
And eft<sup>o</sup> did sing of warres and deadly drede,<sup>o</sup>  
60      So as the Heavens did quake his verse to here.<sup>2</sup>

But ah Mecaenas is yclad in claye,  
And great Augustus long ygoe is dead:  
And all the worthies ligger<sup>o</sup> wrapt in leade,  
That matter made for Poets on to play:  
65      For ever, who in derring doe<sup>3</sup> were drede,<sup>o</sup>  
The loftie verse of hem<sup>o</sup> was lovèd aye.<sup>4</sup>

But after vertue gan for age to stoupe,  
And mighty manhode brought a bedde of<sup>o</sup> ease:<sup>5</sup>  
The vaunting Poets found nought worth a pease,<sup>o</sup>  
70      To put in preace<sup>o</sup> among the learned troupe.  
Tho<sup>o</sup> gan the streames of flowing wittes to cease,  
And sonnebright honour pend in shamefull coupe.<sup>6</sup>

And if that any buddes of Poesie,  
Yet of the old stocke gan to shoote agayne:  
75      Or<sup>o</sup> it mens follies mote<sup>o</sup> be forst to fayne,<sup>o</sup>  
And rolle with rest in rymes of rybaudrye:<sup>o</sup>  
Or as it sprong, it wither must agayne:  
Tom Piper makes us better melodie.<sup>7</sup>

PIERS

O pierlesse Poesye, where is then thy place?  
If nor in Princes pallace thou doe sitt:  
80 (And yet is Princes pallace the most fitt)  
Ne brest of baser birth<sup>8</sup> doth thee embrace.  
Then make thee winges of thine aspyring wit,<sup>o</sup>  
And, whence thou camst, flye backe to heaven  
apace.

CUDDIE

Ah Percy it is all to<sup>o</sup> weake and wanne,  
85 So high to sore,<sup>o</sup> and make so large a flight:  
Her peecèd pyneons bene not so in plight,  
For Colin fittes such famous flight to scanne:<sup>9</sup>  
He, were he not with love so ill bedight,<sup>o</sup>  
Would mount as high, and sing as soote<sup>o</sup> as  
90 Swanne.<sup>1</sup>

PIERS

Ah fon,<sup>o</sup> for love does teach him climbe so hie,  
And lyftes him up out of the loathsome myre:  
Such immortall mirrhor,<sup>2</sup> as he doth admire,  
Would rayse ones mynd above the starry skie.  
95 And cause a caytive corage<sup>3</sup> to aspire,  
For lofty love doth loath a lowly eye.

CUDDIE

All otherwise the state of Poet stands,  
For lordly love is such a Tyranne fell:<sup>o</sup>  
That where he rules, all power he doth expell.  
The vaunted verse a vacant head demaundes,  
100 Ne wont with crabbèd care the Muses dwell:  
Unwisely weaves, that takes two webbes in hand.<sup>4</sup>

Who ever casts<sup>o</sup> to compasse<sup>o</sup> weightye prise,  
And thinks to throwe out thondring words of threate:  
Let powre in lavish cups and thriftie bitts of meate,  
105 For Bacchus fruite is frend to Phoebus wise.<sup>5</sup>  
And when with Wine the braine begins to sweate,  
The numbers<sup>o</sup> flowe as fast as spring doth ryse.

Thou kenst<sup>o</sup> not Percie howe the ryme should rage.  
O if my temples were distaind<sup>o</sup> with wine,  
110 And girt in girlonds of wild Yvie<sup>6</sup> twine,  
How I could reare the Muse on stately stage,  
And teache her tread aloft in buskin<sup>7</sup> fine,  
With queint Bellona<sup>8</sup> in her equipage.<sup>o</sup>

But ah my corage cooles ere it be warme,  
115 For thy,<sup>o</sup> content us in thys humble shade:  
Where no such troublous tydes<sup>o</sup> han us assayde,<sup>o</sup>  
Here we our slender pipes may safely charme.<sup>9</sup>

PIERS

And when my Gates shall han their bellies layd:<sup>1</sup>  
120 *Cuddie* shall have a Kidde to store his farme.

Cuddies Embleme

*Agitante calescimus illo &c.*<sup>2</sup>

1579

## Endnotes

- Note 3:  
When *The Shepheardes Calender* was published, in 1579, each of the twelve eclogues was followed by a commentary (called a

"Glosse") by the mysterious E. K., which contained explications of difficult or archaic words, together with learned discussions of—and disagreements with—Spenser's ideas, imagery, and poetics. Designed to appear authoritative, the commentaries in fact often serve to complicate the process of interpretation. To give the reader some sense of them, we have included several of the individual notes from the "October" Glosse.

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4:

Tenth Eclogue (Latin). An eclogue ("aeglogue") is a short pastoral poem in the form of a dialogue or soliloquy. Spenser's spelling is based on a false etymology (*aix*, "goat" + *logos*, "speech"), signifying, according to E. K., "Goteheards tales." For this eclogue, E. K. identifies as sources Theocritus's *Idyl* 16, which reproves the tyrant Hiero of Syracuse for his neglect of poets, and also Baptista Spagnuoli (1448–1516), called Mantuan (the fifth eclogue). The illustration portrays Cuddie (left) holding a pipe and crowned with a laurel wreath (emblems of a poet). He talks with his fellow shepherd, Piers, in a pastoral landscape, with the court in the background. The astrological sign for October, Scorpio, is at the top of the picture.

[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: E. K. queries "whether by Cuddie be specified the authour selfe, or some other," noting that in "August" he was introduced as singing a song "of Colins making. So that some doubt, that the persons be different." It may be that Cuddie and Piers, along with Colin, present different aspects of Spenser the poet.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Esteem.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: *The English Poete* is evidently a lost work by Spenser. "Enthousiasmos": inspiration. The Greek word originally meant "possessed by a god."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Intend.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, let us see how we may pass this long day pleasantly. In classical mythology, Phoebus was god of the sun.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Formerly you were accustomed. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A popular game; here, perhaps a poetry contest. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The shepherd's pipe, symbol of pastoral poetry. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, lie so subdued. The reference is to the fable of the industrious ant who laid up supplies for winter, and the carefree grasshopper who did not. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Am accustomed to. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "A bold Metaphore, forced from the spawning fishes. For the multitude of young fish be called the frye" [E. K.]. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, how am I the better for that? [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: E. K. compares these lines with *The Laws* 1, in which Plato declares "that the first invention of Poetry was of very vertuous intent." [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, hypnotize them. E. K. cites Plato and Pythagoras for the theory that the mind is made of "a certaine harmonie and musicall nombers," and gives several examples of music's irresistible power over the emotions. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In classical mythology, the three-headed dog Cerberus guards the entrance to Hades. But he let pass Orpheus, "of whom is sayd, that by his excellent skil in Musick and Poetry, he recovered his wife Eurydice from hell" [E. K.]—that is, from "Plutoes balefull bowre." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: E. K. alludes to the myth of Argus of the hundred eyes, who, set by Juno to guard Io, Jupiter's current paramour, was lulled asleep by Mercury's music and then killed. Juno placed his eyes in the tail of her bird, the peacock, whose splendor elicits the praises even of "babes." [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Roman god of war. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Unwounded in warre, doe rust through long peace" [E. K.]. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: E. K. explains this "poeticall metaphore" as indicating the heroic subjects available to Cuddie if he wishes to "showe



his skill in matter of more dignitie, then [that is, than] is the homely Aeglogue." These include "our most gracious sovereign, whom (as before) he calleth Elisa," and also the "noble and valiaunt men" who deserve his praise and have been his patrons.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: "He meaneth (as I guesse) the most honorable and renowned the Erle of Leycester" [E. K.]. Leicester's device was the bear and ragged staff.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "That is when thou chaungest thy verse from stately discourse, to matter of more pleasaunce and delight" [E. K.].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "A kind of daunce" [E. K.].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A "company of dauncers" [E. K.].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Wel known to be Virgile, who by Mecaenas means was brought into the favour of the Emperor Augustus, and by him moved to write in loftier kinde, then he erst had doen" [E. K.]. Maecenas ("Mecaenas") was Virgil's patron and counselor to Augustus, and Tityrus was the shepherd-poet in virgil's *Eclogue* 1.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "In these three verses are the three severall workes of Virgile intended. For in teaching his flocks to feede, is meant his Aeglogues. In labouring of lands, is hys Georgiques. In singing of wars and deadly dreade, is his divine Aeneis figured" [E. K.]. The *Georgics* ("Georgiques") is Virgil's idealizing poem about farm life.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "In manhoode and chevalrie" [E. K.].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "He sheweth the cause, why Poetes were wont be had in such honor of noble men; that is, that by them their worthines and valor shold through theyr famous Posies be commended to al posterities" [E. K.].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "He sheweth the cause of contempt of Poetry to be idlenesse and basenesse of mynd" [E. K.].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Coop, cage. That is, poets found nothing worthy to write of, and the spirit of heroic achievement (sun-bright honor) found expression neither in deeds nor in song.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: "An Ironicall Sarcasmus, spoken in derision of these rude wits, whych make more account of a ryming rybaud, then of skill grounded upon learning and judgment" [E. K.].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "The meaner sort of men" [E. K.].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cuddie explains that the imperfect, patched wings ("peecèd pyneons") of his own poetic powers are not in condition, but that it is proper for ("fittes") Colin to attempt ("scanne") such a high poetic flight.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "It is sayd of the learned that the swan a little before hir death, singeth most pleasantly" [E. K.].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Beauty, which is an excellent object of Poeticall spirites" [E. K.].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "A base and abject minde" [E. K.].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the Muses are not accustomed ("wont") to dwell with those afflicted by love ("crabbèd care"); he is an unwise weaver who takes two pieces of cloth ("webbes") in hand at once.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, let him pour lavish drink but take only a little food, for wine ("Bacchus fruite") promotes poetry ("Phoebus"—Apollo—is the god of poetry).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Worn by followers of Bacchus. "He seemeth here to be ravished with a Poetical furie. For (if one rightly mark) the numbers rise so ful, and the verse groweth so big, that it seemeth he hath forgot the meanenesse of shepherds state and stile" [E. K.].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Buskins are boots worn by actors in classical tragedies—hence a symbol for tragedy.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Strange Bellona; the goddessse of battaile, that is Pallas" [E. K.]. Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, is not normally identified with Bell, the Roman goddess of war, though she was often portrayed in armor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Temper and order" [E.K.].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, when my goats bear their young.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The Latin line, of which Spenser gives the first three words, is from Ovid's *Fasti* 6.5: "There is a god within us; it is from his stirring that we feel warm." E. K. comments, "Hereby is meant, as also in the whole course of this Aeglogue, that Poetry is a divine instinct and unnatural rage passing the reache of comen reason." [Return to reference 2](#)
- °: *up to now* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *care* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *torn* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *saved up* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *constrain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pretty* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meager reward* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *than* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *desires* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spur* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *talent* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *desire* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ensnared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *begin* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crowds* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at all* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *therefore* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *such* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *is dispersed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rustic* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jousts* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awesome* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dreaded* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *choose* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *extol* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *efforts* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *pleasure then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *although*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *afterward* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *danger*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lie*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *held in awe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *them*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to bed by*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pea*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *present for competition*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *must* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feign*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ribaldry*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *too*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soar*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *afflicted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sweet*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fool*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tries* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *verses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knowest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stained*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *equipment; retinue*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *therefore*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *times* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *assaulted*[Return to reference °](#)

**The Faerie Queene** In a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, appended to the first, 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser describes his exuberant, multifaceted poem as an allegory—an extended metaphor or “dark conceit”—and invites us to interpret the characters and adventures in its several books in terms of the particular virtues and vices they enact or come to embody. Thus the Redcrosse Knight in Book 1 is the knight of Holiness (and also Saint George, the patron saint of England); Sir Guyon in Book 2 is the knight of Temperance; the female knight Britomart in Book 3 is the knight of Chastity (“chastity” here meaning chaste love leading to marriage). The heroes of Books 4, 5, and 6 represent Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy. The poem’s general end, Spenser writes, is “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline,” and the individual moral qualities, taken together, constitute the ideal human being.

However, Spenser’s allegory is not as straightforward as the letter to Raleigh might suggest, and the fashioning of identity proves to be anything but simple. Far from being the static embodiments of abstract moral precepts, the knights have a surprisingly complex, altogether human relation to their allegorical identities, identities into which they grow only through painful trial and error in the course of their adventures. These adventures repeatedly take the form of mortal combat with sworn enemies—hence the Christian Redcrosse Knight smites the “Saracen” (that is, Muslim) Sansfoy (literally, “Without faith”)—but the enemies are revealed more often than not to be weirdly dissociated aspects of the knights themselves: when he encounters Sansfoy, Redcrosse has just been faithless to his lady, Una, and his most dangerous enemy ultimately proves to be his own despair. Accordingly, the meaning of the various characters, episodes, and places is richly complex, revealed to us (and to the characters themselves) only by degrees.

The complexity is heightened by the inclusion, in addition to the moral allegory, of a historical allegory to which Spenser calls attention in the letter to Raleigh; there he observes that both the

Faerie Queene and another character, Belpheobe, are representations of Queen Elizabeth. (In fact, they are only two among many oblique representations of Elizabeth.) Throughout the poem there is a dense network of allusions to events, issues, and particular persons in England and the rest of the British Isles—for example, the queen's rival Mary, Queen of Scots, the Spanish Armada, the English Reformation, the controversies over religious images, and the bitter colonial struggles against Irish rebellion. Some of Spenser's characters are identified by conventional symbols and attributes that would have been obvious to readers of his time. For example, they would know immediately that a woman who wears a miter and scarlet clothes and who dwells near the river Tiber represents (in one sense at least) the Roman Catholic Church, which had often been identified by Protestant preachers with the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation. Marginal notes jotted in early copies of *The Faerie Queene* suggest, however, that there was no consensus among Spenser's contemporaries about the precise historical referents of other of the poem's myriad figures. (Sir Walter Raleigh's wife, Bess, for example, seems to have identified many of the virtuous female characters as allegorical representations of herself.) Spenser's poem may be enjoyed as a fascinating story with multiple meanings, a story that works on several levels at once and continually eludes the full and definitive allegorical explanation it constantly promises to deliver.

The poem is also an epic. In moving from *The Shepheardes Calender* to *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser deliberately fashioned himself after the great Roman poet Virgil, who began his poetic career with pastoral poetry and moved on to his epic poem, the *Aeneid*. Spenser was acutely conscious that poets elsewhere in Europe, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy and Camões in Portugal, had already produced works modeled on Virgil's, in celebration of their respective nations. In drawing on the British legends of Saint George and King Arthur, weaving together classical and medieval sources, and adapting whole episodes from Ariosto and Tasso, Spenser was providing his country with the epic it had lacked.

Like Virgil, Spenser is deeply concerned with the dangerous struggles and painful renunciations required to attain the highest goals. The heroic deeds of his brave knights are the achievements of individual aristocratic men and women, not the triumphs of armies or communities united in serving a common purpose—not even the triumph of the virtually invisible royal court of Gloriana, the Faerie Queene. Yet, taken together, the disjointed adventures of these solitary warriors constitute in Spenser's fervent vision the glory of Britain, the collective memory of its heroic past, and the promise of a still more glorious future. And if the Faerie Queene herself is consigned to the margins of the poem that bears her name, she nonetheless is the symbolic embodiment of a shared national destiny, a destiny that reaches beyond mere political success to participate in the ultimate, millennial triumph of good over evil.

If *The Faerie Queene* is thus an epic celebration of Queen Elizabeth, the Protestant faith, and the English nation, it is also a chivalric romance, full of jousting knights and damsels in distress, dragons, witches, enchanted trees, wicked magicians, giants, dark caves, shining castles, and non-Christian "paynims" or heathens (with French names). A clear, pleasant stream may be dangerous, weakening those who drink its water. A pious hermit may prove to be a cunningly disguised villain. Houses, castles, and gardens are often places of education and challenge or of especially dense allegorical significance, as if they possessed special, half-hidden keys to the meaning of the books in which they appear. As a romance, Spenser's poem is designed to produce wonder, to enthrall its readers with sprawling plots, marvelous adventures, heroic characters, ravishing descriptions, and esoteric mysteries.

In addition to enthralling its readers, the poem habitually entraps, misleads, and deludes them. Like Spenser's protagonists, readers are constantly in danger of mistaking hypocritical evil for good, or cunningly disguised foulness for true beauty. *The Faerie Queene* demands vigilance from its readers, and many passages must be reread in light of what follows after. In some sections, such as the dialogue between Redcrosse and Despaire (Book 1, canto 9),

the repeated use of pronouns instead of proper names can lead to confusion as to who is speaking; the effect is intentional, for the promptings of evil are not always easy to disentangle from the voice of conscience.

The whole of *The Faerie Queene* is written in a remarkable nine-line stanza of closely interlocking rhymes (*ababbcbcc*), the first eight lines each with five stresses (iambic pentameter) and the final line with six stresses (iambic hexameter or alexandrine). The stanza gives the work a certain formal regularity, but the various books are composed on quite different structural principles. Book 1 is almost entirely self-contained; it has been called a miniature epic in itself, centering on the adventures of one principal hero, Redcrosse, who at length achieves the quest he undertakes at Una's behest: killing the dragon who has imprisoned her parents and thereby winning her as his bride. The spiritual allegory is similarly self-contained; it presents the Christian struggling heroically against many evils and temptations—doctrinal error, hypocrisy, the Seven Deadly Sins, and despair—to some of which he succumbs before finally emerging triumphant. It shows him separated from the one true faith and, aided by interventions of divine grace, at length reunited with it.

Spenser had outlined a plan for an immense poem twelve or even twenty-four books in length, but he died before he could bring this project anywhere near completion. To some degree a lack of closure characterizes all of *The Faerie Queene*, including the more self-contained of the six finished books, and it is fitting that there survives the fragment of another book, the cantos of Mutabilitie (see below), in which Spenser broods on the tension in nature between systematic order and ceaseless change. The poem as a whole is built around principles that pull tautly against one another: a commitment to a life of constant struggle and a profound longing for rest; a celebration of human heroism and a perception of ineradicable human sinfulness; a vision of evil as a terrifyingly potent force and a vision of evil as mere emptiness and filth; a faith in the supreme value of visionary art and a recurrent suspicion that art is dangerously allied to graven images and deception. That Spenser's



knights never quite reach the havens they seek reflects the irresolvable tensions to which we owe much of the power and beauty of this great, unfinished work.

# ***FROM THE FAERIE QUEENE***

## **A Letter of the Authors<sup>1</sup>**

**EXPOUNDING HIS WHOLE INTENTION IN THE  
COURSE OF THIS WORKE: WHICH FOR THAT IT  
GIVETH GREAT LIGHT TO THE READER, FOR THE  
BETTER UNDERSTANDING IS HEREUNTO ANNEXED**

***To the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh knight,  
Lo. Wardein of the Stanneryes,<sup>2</sup> and her Majesties  
liefetenaunt of the County of Cornewayll***

Sir knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the *Faery Queene*, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit,<sup>3</sup> I have thought good as well for avoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so by you commanded,) to discover unto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes or by-accidents<sup>4</sup> therein occasioned. The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle<sup>5</sup> discipline: Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profite of the ensample:<sup>6</sup> I chose the historye of King Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspition of present

time.<sup>7</sup> In which I have followed all the antique Poets historicall,<sup>8</sup> first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his *Ilias*, the other in his *Odysseis*: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando: and lately Tasso dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo: The other named Politice in his Godfredo.<sup>9</sup> By ensample of which excellent Poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised,<sup>1</sup> the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encouraged, to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king. To some I know this Methode will seeme displeasaunt, which had rather have good discipline<sup>2</sup> delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus clowdily enwrapped in Allegoricall devises. But such, me seeme, should be satisfide with the use of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their showes,<sup>3</sup> and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to commune sence.<sup>4</sup> For this cause is Xenophon preferred before Plato, for that the one in the exquisite depth of his judgment, formed a Commune welth such as it should be, but the other in the person of Cyrus and the Persians fashioned a government such as might best be:<sup>5</sup> So much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule. So have I laboured to doe in the person of Arthure: whome I conceive after his long education by Timon, to whom he was by Merlin delivered to be brought up, so soone as he was borne of the Lady Igrayne, to have seene in a dream or vision the Faery Queen, with whose excellent beauty ravished, he awaking resolved to seeke her out, and so being by Merlin armed, and by Timon throughly<sup>6</sup> instructed, he went to seeke her forth in Faerye land. In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our

soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow<sup>7</sup> her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe express in Belpheobe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent concept of Cynthia,<sup>8</sup> (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.<sup>9</sup>) So in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest,<sup>1</sup> and containeth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the deedes of Arthure applyable to that vertue, which I write of in that booke. But of the xii. other vertues, I make xii. other knights the patrones, for the more variety of the history. Of which these three bookes contain three, The first of the knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I expresse Holynes: The seconde of Sir Guyon, in whome I sette forth Temperaunce: The third of Britomartis a Lady knight, in whome I picture Chastity. But because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupte and as depending upon other antecedents,<sup>2</sup> it needs that ye know the occasion of these three knights severall adventures. For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer.<sup>3</sup> For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the midst,<sup>4</sup> even where it most concerneth him, and there recouring to the thinges forepaste,<sup>5</sup> and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all. The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer, should be the twelfth booke, which is the last, where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii. dayes, uppon which xii. severall dayes, the occasions of the xii. severall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by xii. severall knights, are in these xii books severally handled and discoursed. The first was this. In the beginning of the feaste, there presented him selfe a tall clownishe<sup>6</sup> younge man, who falling before the Queen of Faeries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse: which was

that hee might have the atchievement of any adventure, which during that feaste should happen: that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place. Soone after entred a faire Ladye in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behind her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfes hand. Shee falling before the Queene of Faeries, complained that her father and mother an ancient King and Queene, had bene by an huge dragon many years shut up in a brasen Castle, who thence suffred them not to yssew:<sup>7</sup> and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assygne her some one of her knights to take on him that expleyt. Presently<sup>8</sup> that clownish person upstarting, desired that adventure: whereat the Queene much wondering, and the Lady much gainesaying, yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him that unlesse that armour which she brought, would serve him (that is the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul v. Ephes.<sup>9</sup>) that he could not succeed in that enterprise, which being forthwith put upon him with dewe furnitures<sup>1</sup> thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And eftesoones<sup>2</sup> taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge Courser, he went forth with her on that adventure: where beginneth the first booke, vz.

A gentle knight was pricking on the playne. &c.

The second day ther came in a Palmer<sup>3</sup> bearing an Infant with bloody hands, whose Parents he complained to have bene slayn by an Enchaunteresse called Acrasia: and therefore craved of the Faery Queene, to appoint him some knight, to performe that adventure, which being assigned to Sir Guyon, he presently went forth with that same Palmer: which is the beginning of the second booke and the whole subject thereof. The third day there came in, a Groome who complained before the Faery Queene, that a vile Enchaunter called Busirane had in hand a most faire Lady called Amoretta, whom he

kept in most grievous torment, because she would not yield him the pleasure of her body. Whereupon Sir Scudamour the lover of that Lady presently tooke on him that adventure. But being unable to performe it by reason of the hard Enchauntments, after long sorrow, in the end met with Britomartis, who succoured him, and reskewed his love.

But by occasion hereof, many other adventures are intermedled, but rather as Accidents, then intendments.<sup>4</sup> As the love of Britomart, the overthrow of Marinell, the misery of Florimell, the vertuousnes of Belphebe, the lasciviousnes of Hellenora, and many the like.

Thus much Sir, I have briefly overronne<sup>5</sup> to direct your understanding to the wel-head of the History, that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit,<sup>6</sup> ye may as in a handfull gripe al the discourse, which otherwise may happily<sup>7</sup> seeme tedious and confused. So humbly craving the continuance of your honorable favour towards me, and th' eternall establishment of your happines, I humbly take leave.

23. January, 1589<sup>8</sup>

*Yours most humbly affectionate.*

ED. SPENSER.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Letter was appended—not prefixed—to the 1590 edition of the poem. (It was omitted from the 1596 edition.) We follow the common practice of printing it as a “preface” to the work.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the mining districts of Cornwall and Devon. “Lo.”: Lord.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Obscure or difficult poetic figure.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Secondary matters.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pertaining to a gentleman. “Fashion”: (1) to represent; (2) to educate.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Example. “Then”: than.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, free from current political controversy.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, epic.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Torquato Tasso (1544–1595) published his chivalric romance *Rinaldo* in 1562 and completed the epic *Gerusalemme liberata* (centered on the heroic figure of Count Godfredo) in 1575. Lodovico Ariosto (1474–1533) was author of the epic romance *Orlando furioso*, first published in 1516.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Though Aristotle distinguished between private and public virtues, he did not devise lists of twelve of each. Spenser was in fact relying on more modern philosophers—his friend Lodowick Bryskett and the Italian Alessandro Piccolomini. That Spenser contemplated (as he proceeds to indicate) a poem four times as long as the six books we now have rather staggers the imagination.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Teaching.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, judged according to their appearances.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The notions of the many.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The allusion is to Plato's *Republic* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thoroughly.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Picture, portray.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Raleigh's poem "The Ocean to Cynthia" praised Queen Elizabeth.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In classical mythology, goddess of the moon.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For Aristotle, magnanimity ("magnificence" in Spenser) —greatness of soul—is the ultimate virtue.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Earlier events.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Historian.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Referring to the critical dictum that epic should begin, as the Roman poet Horace said, *in medias res*—"in the middle of things" (*Art of Poetry*, lines 147–48).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Past.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Rustic-looking.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Come forth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Immediately.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The parts (verses 14 to 17) are loins girt about with truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with the gospel of peace, shield of faith "wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked," helmet of salvation, and "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Suitable equipment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Forthwith.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pilgrim.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, there are episodes that are not part of these principal stories.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Run through, summarized.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Conception.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Perhaps.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The date is actually 1590, because until England adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752, the new year began on March 25.[Return to reference 8](#)



# The First Booke of The Faerie Queene

## *Contayning The Legende of the Knight of the Red Crosse, or Of Holinesse*

### 1

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,  
As time her taught, in lowly Shepheards weeds,<sup>1</sup>  
Am now enforst a far unfitter taske,  
For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,<sup>2</sup>  
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle<sup>o</sup> deeds;  
Whose prayes having slept in silence long,<sup>3</sup>  
Me, all too meane,<sup>o</sup> the sacred Muse areeds<sup>o</sup>  
To blazon<sup>o</sup> broad emongst her learned throng:  
Fierce warres and faithfull loves shall moralize<sup>4</sup> my song.

### 2

Helpe then, O holy Virgin chiefe of nine,<sup>5</sup>  
Thy weaker<sup>o</sup> Novice to performe thy will,  
Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne<sup>o</sup>  
The antique rolles, which there lye hidden still,  
Of Faerie knights and fairest Tanaquill,<sup>o</sup>  
Whom that most noble Briton Prince<sup>6</sup> so long  
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,  
That I must rue<sup>o</sup> his undeserved wrong:  
O helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong.

### 3

And thou most dreaded impe<sup>o</sup> of highest Jove,  
Faire Venus sonne,<sup>o</sup> that with thy cruell dart

At that good knight so cunningly didst rove,<sup>o</sup>  
That glorious fire it kindled in his hart,  
Lay now thy deadly Heben<sup>o</sup> bow apart,  
And with thy mother milde come to mine ayde:  
Come both, and with you bring triumphant Mart,<sup>7</sup>  
In loves and gentle jollities arrayd,  
After his murderous spoiles and bloudy rage allayd.

#### 4

And with them eke,<sup>o</sup> O Goddess heavenly bright,  
Mirrour of grace and Majestie divine,  
Great Lady of the greatest Isle, whose light  
Like Phoebus lampe throughout the world doth shine,  
Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne,<sup>o</sup>  
And raise my thoughts too humble and too vile,<sup>o</sup>  
To thinke of that true glorious type<sup>8</sup> of thine,  
The argument<sup>o</sup> of mine afflicted stile:<sup>o</sup>  
The which to heare, vouchsafe, O dearest dred<sup>o</sup> a-while.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Garb. The poet appeared before ("whilome") as a writer of humble pastoral (that is, *The Shepheardes Calender*). These lines are imitated from the verses prefixed to Renaissance editions of Virgil's *Aeneid*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To write heroic poetry, of which the trumpet is a symbol, instead of pastoral poetry symbolized by the humble shepherd's pipe ("Oaten reeds").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This and the preceding line are imitated from the opening of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Provide subjects for moralizing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Scholars have debated whether the reference is to Clio, the Muse of history, or to Calliope, the Muse of epic.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: That is, Arthur, named in canto 9, stanza 6. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mars, god of war and lover of Venus. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Gloriana is the “type” (prefiguration) of Queen Elizabeth. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *noble* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *low* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *counsels* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proclaim* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *too weak* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a chest for papers* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Gloriana* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *offspring* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Cupid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shoot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ebony* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *eyes* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lowly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *subject* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *humble work* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *object of awe* [Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 1***

*The Patron of true Holinesse,  
Foule Errour doth defeate:  
Hypocrisie him to entrappe,  
Doth to his home entreate.*

### **1**

A Gentle Knight was pricking<sup>o</sup> on the plaine,  
Ycladd<sup>9</sup> in mightie armes and silver shielde,  
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,  
The cruell markes of many a bloudy fielde;  
Yet armes till that time did he never wield:  
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,  
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:  
Full jolly<sup>o</sup> knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,  
As one for knightly giusts<sup>o</sup> and fierce encounters fitt.

### **2**

But on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore,  
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,  
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,  
And dead as living ever him adored:<sup>1</sup>  
Upon his shield the like was also scored,<sup>o</sup>  
For soveraine<sup>2</sup> hope, which in his helpe he had:  
Right faithfull true<sup>3</sup> he was in deede and word,  
But of his cheere<sup>4</sup> did seeme too solemne sad;<sup>o</sup>  
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.<sup>o</sup>

### **3**

Upon a great adventure he was bond,  
That greatest Gloriana to him gave,  
That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie Lond,  
To winne him worship,<sup>o</sup> and her grace to have,

Which of all earthly things he most did crave;  
And ever as he rode, his hart did earne<sup>o</sup>  
To prove his puissance<sup>o</sup> in battell brave  
Upon his foe, and his new force to learne;  
Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

#### 4

A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,  
Upon a lowly Asse more white then<sup>o</sup> snow,  
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide  
Under a vele, that wimpled<sup>o</sup> was full low,  
And over all a blacke stole<sup>o</sup> she did throw,  
As one that inly<sup>o</sup> mournd: so was she sad,  
And heavie sat upon her palfrey slow:  
Seemèd in heart some hidden care she had,  
And by her in a line<sup>o</sup> a milke white lambe she lad.

#### 5

So pure an innocent, as that same lambe,  
She was in life and every vertuous lore,  
And by descent from Royall lynage came  
Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore  
Their scepters stretcht from East to Western shore,  
And all the world in their subjection held;  
Till that infernall feend with foule uprore  
Forwasted<sup>o</sup> all their land, and them expeld:  
Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compeld.<sup>o</sup>

#### 6

Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag,  
That lasie seemd in being ever last,  
Or wearièd with bearing of her bag  
Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past,  
The day with cloudes was suddeine overcast,  
And angry Jove an hideous storme of raine

Did poure into his Lemans<sup>5</sup> lap so fast,  
That every wight<sup>o</sup> to shrowd<sup>o</sup> it did constrain,  
And this faire couple eke<sup>o</sup> to shroud themselves were fain.<sup>o</sup>

## 7

Enforst to seeke some covert<sup>o</sup> nigh at hand,  
A shadie grove not far away they spide,  
That promist ayde the tempest to withstand:  
Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride,  
Did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide,  
Not perceable<sup>o</sup> with power of any starre:  
And all within were pathes and alleies wide,  
With footing worne, and leading inward farre:  
Faire harbour that them seemes; so in they entred arre.

## 8

And foorth they passe, with pleasure forward led,  
Joying to heare the birdes sweete harmony,  
Which therein shrouded from the tempest dred,<sup>o</sup>  
Seemd in their song to scorne the cruell sky.  
Much can<sup>o</sup> they prayse the trees, so straight and hy,  
The sayling<sup>6</sup> Pine, the Cedar proud and tall,  
The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar never dry,  
The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all,  
The Aspine good for staves, the Cypresse funerall.<sup>o</sup>

## 9

The Laurell, meed<sup>o</sup> of mightie Conquerours  
And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still,<sup>7</sup>  
The Willow worne of forlorne Paramours,  
The Eugh<sup>o</sup> obedient to the benders will,  
The Birch for shaftes, the Sallow<sup>o</sup> for the mill,  
The Mirrhe sweete bleeding in the bitter wound,  
The warlike Beech, the Ash for nothing ill,

The fruitfull Olive, and the Platane<sup>o</sup> round,  
The carver Holme,<sup>8</sup> the Maple seeldom inward sound.

## 10

Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,  
Untill the blustering storme is overblowne;  
When weening<sup>o</sup> to returne, whence they did stray,  
They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,  
But wander too and fro in wayes unknowne,  
Furthest from end then, when they neerest weene,  
That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:  
So many pathes, so many turnings seene,  
That which of them to take, in diverse doubt they been.

## 11

At last resolving forward still to fare,  
Till that some end they finde or<sup>o</sup> in or out,  
That path they take, that beaten seemed most bare,  
And like to lead the labyrinth about<sup>o</sup>  
Which when by tract<sup>o</sup> they hunted had throughout,  
At length it brought them to a hollow cave,  
Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout  
Eftsoones<sup>o</sup> dismounted from his courser brave,  
And to the Dwarfe a while his needlesse spere<sup>9</sup> he gave.

## 12

"Be well aware,"<sup>o</sup> quoth then that Ladie milde,  
"Least suddaine mischief<sup>o</sup> ye too rash provoke:  
The danger hid, the place unknowne and wilde,  
Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,  
And perill without show: therefore your stroke  
Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made."  
"Ah Ladie," said he, "shame were to revoke<sup>o</sup>  
The forward footing for<sup>o</sup> an hidden shade:  
Vertue gives her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade."

### 13

"Yea but," quoth she, "the perill of this place  
I better wot then<sup>o</sup> you, though now too late  
To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace,  
Yet wisdomes warnes, whilst foot is in the gate,  
To stay the stepe, ere forcèd to retrate.  
This is the wandring wood, this Errours den,  
A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:  
Therefore I read<sup>o</sup> beware." "Fly fly," quoth then  
The fearefull Dwarfe: "this is no place for living men."

### 14

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,<sup>o</sup>  
The youthfull knight could not for ought<sup>o</sup> be staide,  
But forth unto the darksome hole he went,  
And lookèd in: his glistring<sup>o</sup> armor made  
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,  
By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,  
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,  
But th' other halfe did womans shape retaine,  
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.<sup>1</sup>

### 15

And as she lay upon the durtye ground,  
Her huge long taile her den all overspred,  
Yet was in knots and many boughtes<sup>o</sup> upwound,  
Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred  
A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,  
Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, eachone  
Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favorèd:  
Soone as that uncouth<sup>o</sup> light upon them shone,  
Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

### 16



Their dam upstart, out of her den efraide,<sup>o</sup>  
And rushèd forth, hurling her hideous taile  
About her cursèd head, whose folds displaid<sup>o</sup>  
Were stretcht now forth at length without entraile.<sup>o</sup>  
She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle  
Armèd to point,<sup>o</sup> sought backe to turne againe;  
For light she hated as the deadly bale,<sup>o</sup>  
Ay wont<sup>o</sup> in desert darknesse to remain,  
Where plaine none might her see, nor she see any plaine.

## 17

Which when the valiant Elfe<sup>2</sup> perceived, he lept  
As Lyon fierce upon the flying pray,  
And with his trenchand<sup>o</sup> blade her boldly kept  
From turning backe, and forcèd her to stay:  
Therewith enraged she loudly gan to bray,  
And turning fierce, her speckled taile advaunst;  
Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay:<sup>o</sup>  
Who nought aghast, his mightie hand enhaunst:<sup>o</sup>  
The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glaunst.

## 18

Much daunted with that dint,<sup>o</sup> her sence was dazd,  
Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round,  
And all attonce her beastly body raizd  
With doubled forces high above the ground:  
Tho<sup>o</sup> wrapping up her wrethèd sterne<sup>o</sup> arownd,  
Lept fierce upon his shield, and her huge traine<sup>o</sup>  
All suddenly about his body wound,  
That hand or foot to stirre he strove in vaine:  
God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine.

## 19

His Lady sad to see his sore constraint,  
Cride out, "Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee,

Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:  
Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee.”  
That when he heard, in great perplexitie,<sup>3</sup>  
His gall did grate<sup>4</sup> for grieve<sup>o</sup> and high disdain,  
And knitting all his force got one hand free,  
Wherewith he grypt her gorge<sup>o</sup> with so great paine,  
That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.

## 20

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw  
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,  
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,  
Which stunk so vildly, that it forst him slacke  
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:  
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,<sup>5</sup>  
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,  
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:  
Her filthy parbreake<sup>o</sup> all the place defiled has.<sup>6</sup>

## 21

As when old father Nilus<sup>o</sup> gins to swell  
With timely<sup>o</sup> pride above the Aegyptian vale,  
His fattie<sup>o</sup> waves do fertile slime outwell,<sup>o</sup>  
And overflow each plaine and lowly dale:  
But when his later spring gins to avale,<sup>o</sup>  
Huge heapes of mudd he leaves, wherein there breed  
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male  
And partly female of his fruitfull seed;  
Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.<sup>o</sup>

## 22

The same so sore annoyed<sup>o</sup> has the knight,  
That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke,  
His forces faile, ne<sup>o</sup> can no longer fight.

Whose corage when the feend perceived to shrink,  
She poured forth out of her hellish sinke<sup>z</sup>  
Her fruitfull cursèd spawne of serpents small,  
Deformèd monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,  
Which swarming all about his legs did crall,  
And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

### 23

As gentle Shepheard in sweete even-tide,  
When ruddy Phoebus<sup>o</sup> gins to welke<sup>o</sup> in west,  
High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,  
Markes<sup>o</sup> which do byte their hasty supper best;  
A cloud of combrous<sup>o</sup> gnattes do him molest,  
All striving to infixe their feeble stings,  
That from their noyance he no where can rest,  
But with his clownish<sup>o</sup> hands their tender wings  
He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

### 24

Thus ill bestedd,<sup>o</sup> and fearful more of shame,  
Then of the certaine perill he stood in,  
Halfe furious unto his foe he came,  
Resolved in minde all suddenly to win,  
Or soone to lose, before he once would lin;<sup>o</sup>  
And strooke at her with more then manly force,  
That from her body full of filthie sin  
He raft<sup>o</sup> her hatefull head without remorse;  
A streame of cole black bloud forth gushèd from her corse.<sup>o</sup>

### 25

Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent deare  
They saw so rudely<sup>o</sup> falling to the ground,  
Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare,  
Gathred themselves about her body round,  
Weening<sup>o</sup> their wonted entrance to have found

At her wide mouth: but being there withstood  
They flockèd all about her bleeding wound,  
And suckèd up their dying mothers blood,  
Making her death their life, and eke<sup>o</sup> her hurt their good.

## 26

That detestable sight him much amazde,<sup>o</sup>  
To see th'unkindly Impes<sup>o</sup> of heaven accurst,  
Devoure their dam; on whom while so he gazd,  
Having all satisfide their bloudy thirst,  
Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,  
And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end  
Of such as drunke her life, the which them nurst;  
Now needeth him no lenger<sup>o</sup> labour spend,  
His foes have slaine themselves, with whom he should contend.

## 27

His Ladie seeing all, that chaunst, from farre  
Approcht in hast to greet<sup>o</sup> his victorie,  
And said, "Faire knight, borne under happy starre,  
Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye;  
Well worthy be you of that Armorie,<sup>o</sup>  
Wherein ye have great glory wonne this day,  
And proved your strength on a strong enimie,  
Your first adventure: many such I pray,  
And henceforth ever wish, that like succeed it may."

## 28

Then mounted he upon his Steede againe,  
And with the Lady backward sought to wend;<sup>o</sup>  
That path he kept, which beaten was most plaine,  
Ne ever would to any by-way bend,  
But still did follow one unto the end,  
The which at last out of the wood them brought.  
So forward on his way (with God to frend)<sup>o</sup>

He passèd forth, and new adventure sought;  
Long way he travelèd, before he heard of ought.°

## 29

At length they chaunst to meet upon the way  
An agèd Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,<sup>8</sup>  
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie° gray,  
And by his belt his booke he hanging had;  
Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,°  
And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,  
Simple in shew,° and voyde of malice bad,  
And all the way he prayèd, as he went,  
And often knockt his brest, as one that did repent.

## 30

He faire the knight saluted, louting° low,  
Who faire him quited,° as that courteous was:  
And after askèd him, if he did know  
Of straunge adventures, which abroad did pas.  
"Ah my deare Sonne," quoth he, "how should, alas,  
Silly° old man, that lives in hidden cell,  
Bidding his beades° all day for his trespass,  
Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell?  
With holy father sits not with such things to mell.°

## 31

"But if of daunger which hereby doth dwell,  
And homebred evill ye desire to heare,  
Of a straunge man I can you tidings tell,  
That wasteth° all this countrey farre and neare."  
"Of such," said he, "I chiefly do inquere,  
And shall you well reward to shew the place,  
In which that wicked wight his dayes doth weare.°  
For to all knighthood it is foule disgrace,  
That such a cursèd creature lives so long a space."

### 32

"Far hence," quoth he, "in wastfull<sup>o</sup> wilderness  
His dwelling is, by which no living wight<sup>o</sup>  
May ever passe, but thorough<sup>o</sup> great distresse."  
"Now," sayd the Lady, "draweth toward night,  
And well I wote, that of your later<sup>o</sup> fight  
Ye all forwearied be: for what so strong,  
But wanting<sup>o</sup> rest will also want of might?  
The Sunne that measures heaven all day long,  
At night doth baite<sup>o</sup> his steedes the Ocean waves emong.

### 33

"Then with the Sunne take Sir, your timely rest,  
And with new day new worke at once begin:  
Untroubled night they say gives counsell best."  
"Right well Sir knight ye have advisèd bin,"  
Quoth then that agèd man; "the way to win  
Is wisely to advise:<sup>o</sup> now day is spent;  
Therefore with me ye may take up your In<sup>o</sup>  
For this same night." The knight was well content.  
So with that godly father to his home they went.

### 34

A little lowly Hermitage it was,  
Downe in a dale, hard by<sup>o</sup> a forests side,  
Far from resort<sup>o</sup> of people, that did pas  
In travell to and froe: a little wyde<sup>o</sup>  
There was an holy Chappell edifyde,<sup>o</sup>  
Wherein the Hermite dewly wont<sup>o</sup> to say  
His holy things<sup>o</sup> each morne and eventyde:  
Thereby a Christall streame did gently play,  
Which from a sacred fountaine wellèd forth alway.

### 35

Arrived there, the little house they fill,  
Ne looke for entertainment,<sup>o</sup> where none was:  
Rest is their feast, and all things at their will;  
The noblest mind the best contentment has.  
With faire discourse the evening so they pas:  
For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,  
And well could file<sup>o</sup> his tongue as smooth as glas;  
He told of Saintes and Popes, and evermore  
He strowd an *Ave-Mary*<sup>1</sup> after and before.

### 36

The drouping Night thus creepeth on them fast,  
And the sad humour<sup>o</sup> loading their eye liddes,  
As messenger of Morpheus<sup>2</sup> on them cast  
Sweet slombring deaw, the which to sleepe them biddes.  
Unto their lodgings then his guestes he riddes:<sup>o</sup>  
Where when all drownd in deadly sleepe<sup>o</sup> he findes,  
He to his study goes, and there amiddes  
His Magick bookes and artes of sundry kindes,  
He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy mindes.

### 37

Then choosing out few wordes most horrible  
(Let none them read), thereof did verses frame,<sup>o</sup>  
With which and other spellles like terrible,  
He bade awake blacke Plutoes griesly Dame,<sup>3</sup>  
And cursèd heaven, and spake reprochfull shame  
Of highest God, the Lord of life and light;  
A bold bad man, that dared to call by name  
Great Gorgon,<sup>4</sup> Prince of darknesse and dead night,  
At which Cocytus quakes, and Styx is put to flight.

### 38

And forth he cald out of deepe darknesse dred

Legions of Sprights,o the which like little flies<sup>5</sup>  
Fluttering about his ever damnèd hed,  
A-waite whereto their service he applyes,  
To aide his friends, or frayo his enimies:  
Of those he chose out two, the falsest twoo,  
And fittest for to forge true-seeming lyes;  
The one of them he gave a message too,  
The other by him selfe staide other worke to doo.

### 39

He making speedy way through spersèdo ayre,  
And through the world of waters wide and deepe,  
To Morpheus house doth hastily repaire.  
Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,  
And low, where dawning day doth never peepe,  
His dwelling is; there Tethyso his wet bed  
Doth ever wash, and Cynthia<sup>6</sup> stillo doth steepe  
In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed,  
Whiles sado Night over him her mantle black doth spred.

### 40

Whose double gates he findeth lockèd fast,  
The one faire framed of burnisht Yvory,  
The other all with silver overcast;  
And wakefull dogges before them farre do lye,  
Watching to banish Care their enemy,  
Who oft is wonto to trouble gentle Sleepe.  
By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly,  
And unto Morpheus comes, whom drownèd deepe  
In drowsie fit he findes: of nothing he takes keepe.o

### 41

And more, to lulle him in his slumber soft,  
A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe  
And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,o



Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne<sup>o</sup>  
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne:<sup>o</sup>  
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,  
As still<sup>o</sup> are wont t'annoy the wallèd towne,  
Might there be heard: but carelesse<sup>o</sup> Quiet lyes,  
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes.<sup>7</sup>

## 42

The messenger approching to him spake,  
But his wast<sup>o</sup> wordes returnd to him in vaine:  
So sound he slept, that nought mought<sup>o</sup> him awake.  
Then rudely he him thrust, and pusht with paine,<sup>o</sup>  
Whereat he gan to stretch: but he againe  
Shooke him so hard, that forcèd him to speake.  
As one then in a dreame, whose dryer braine<sup>8</sup>  
Is tost with troubled sights and fancies<sup>o</sup> weake,  
He mumbled soft, but would not all his silence breake.

## 43

The Sprite then gan more boldly him to wake,  
And threatned unto him the dreaded name  
Of Hecate:<sup>o</sup> whereat he gan to quake,  
And lifting up his lumpish<sup>o</sup> head, with blame  
Halfe angry askèd him, for what<sup>o</sup> he came.  
"Hither," quoth he, "me Archimago<sup>9</sup> sent,  
He that the stubborne Sprites can wisely tame,  
He bids thee to him send for his intent  
A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent."<sup>o</sup>

## 44

The God obayde, and calling forth straight way  
A diverse<sup>o</sup> dreame out of his prison darke,  
Delivered it to him, and downe did lay  
His heavie head, devoide of carefull carke,<sup>o</sup>

Whose sences all were straight benumbed and starke.<sup>1</sup>  
He backe returning by the Yvorie dore,<sup>2</sup>  
Remounted up as light as chearefull Larke,  
And on his litle winges the dreame he bore  
In hast unto his Lord, where he him left afore.

#### 45

Who all this while with charmes and hidden artes,  
Had made a Lady of that other Spright,  
And framed of liquid ayre her tender partes  
So lively,<sup>o</sup> and so like in all mens sight,  
That weaker<sup>o</sup> sence it could have ravisht<sup>o</sup> quight:  
The maker selfe for all his wondrous witt,  
Was nigh beguiled<sup>o</sup> with so goodly sight:  
Her all in white he clad, and over it  
Cast a blacke stole, most like to seeme for Una<sup>3</sup> fit.<sup>o</sup>

#### 46

Now when that ydle dreame was to him brought  
Unto that Elfin knight he bad him fly,  
Where he slept soundly void of evill thought  
And with false shewes abuse his fantasy,<sup>o</sup>  
In sort as<sup>o</sup> he him schoolèd privily:  
And that new creature borne without her dew,<sup>o</sup>  
Full of the makers guile, with usage sly  
He taught to imitate that Lady trew,  
Whose semblance she did carrie under feigned hew.<sup>o</sup>

#### 47

Thus well instructed, to their worke they hast  
And comming where the knight in slomber lay  
The one upon his hardy head him plast,<sup>o</sup>  
And made him dreame of loves and lustfull play,  
That nigh his manly hart did melt away,

Bathèd in wanton blis and wicked joy:  
Then seemèd him his Lady by him lay,  
And to him playnd,<sup>o</sup> how that false wingèd boy<sup>o</sup>  
Her chast hart had subdewd, to learne Dame pleasures toy.<sup>o</sup>

## 48

And she her selfe of beautie soveraigne Queene,  
Faire Venus seemde unto his bed to bring  
Her, whom he waking evermore did weene<sup>o</sup>  
To be the chastest flowre, that ay<sup>o</sup> did spring  
On earthly braunch, the daughter of a king,  
Now a loose Leman<sup>o</sup> to vile service bound:  
And eke<sup>o</sup> the Graces seemèd all to sing,  
*Hymen iô Hymen*, dauncing all around,  
Whilst freshest Flora her with Yvie girlond crownd.<sup>4</sup>

## 49

In this great passion of unwonted<sup>o</sup> lust,  
Or wonted feare of doing ought amis,  
He started up, as seeming to mistrust<sup>o</sup>  
Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his:  
Lo there before his face his Lady is,  
Under blake stole hyding her bayted hooke,  
And as halfe blushing offred him to kis,  
With gentle blandishment and lovely<sup>o</sup> looke,  
Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took.

## 50

All cleane dismayd to see so uncouth<sup>o</sup> sight,  
And halfe enragèd at her shamelesse guise,  
He thought have slaine her in his fierce despight:<sup>o</sup>  
But hasty heat tempring with sufferance<sup>o</sup> wise,  
He stayde his hand, and gan himselfe advise  
To prove his sense, and tempt<sup>o</sup> her faignèd truth.  
Wringing her hands in wemens pitteous wise,

Tho can<sup>o</sup> she weepe, to stirre up gentle ruth,<sup>o</sup>  
Both for her noble bloud, and for her tender youth.

## 51

And said, "Ah Sir, my liege Lord and my love,  
Shall I accuse the hidden cruell fate,  
And mightie causes wrought in heaven above,  
Or the blind God, that doth me thus amate,<sup>o</sup>  
For<sup>o</sup> hopèd love to winne me certaine hate?  
Yet thus perforce<sup>o</sup> he bids me do, or die.  
Die is my dew:<sup>5</sup> yet rew<sup>o</sup> my wretched state  
You, whom my hard avenging destinie  
Hath made judge of my life or death indifferently.<sup>o</sup>

## 52

"Your owne deare sake forst me at first to leave  
My Fathers kingdome," There she stopt with teares;  
Her swollen hart her speach seemd to bereave,<sup>o</sup>  
And then againe begun, "My weaker yeares  
Captived to fortune and frayle worldly feares,  
Fly to your faith for succour and sure ayde:  
Let me not dye in languor<sup>o</sup> and long teares."  
"Why Dame," quoth he, "what hath ye thus dismayd?  
What frayes<sup>o</sup> ye, that were wont to comfort me affrayd?"

## 53

"Love of your selfe," she said, "and deare<sup>o</sup> constraint  
Lets me not sleepe, but wast the wearie night  
In secret anguish and unpittied plaint,  
Whiles you in carelesse sleepe are drownèd quight."  
Her doubtfull words made that redoubted<sup>6</sup> knight  
Suspect her truth: yet since no'untruth he knew,  
Her fawning love with foule disdainfull spight  
He would not shend,<sup>o</sup> but said, "Deare dame I rew,  
That for my sake unknowne such grieve unto you grew.

## 54

"Assure your selfe, it fell not all to ground;  
For all so deare as life is to my hart,  
I deeme your love, and hold me to you bound;  
Ne let vaine feares procure your needlesse smart,<sup>o</sup>  
Where cause is none, but to your rest depart."  
Not all content, yet seemd she to appease<sup>o</sup>  
Her mournefull plaintes, beguilèd of her art,<sup>o</sup>  
And fed with words, that could not chuse<sup>o</sup> but please,  
So slyding softly forth, she turnd<sup>o</sup> as to her ease.

## 55

Long after lay he musing at her mood,  
Much grieved to thinke that gentle Dame so light,<sup>o</sup>  
For whose defence he was to shed his blood.  
At last dull wearinesse of former fight  
Having yrockt a sleepe his irkesome<sup>7</sup> spright,  
That troublous dreame gan freshly tosse his braine,  
With bowres and beds, and Ladies deare delight:  
But when he saw his labour all was vaine,  
With that misformèd spright<sup>8</sup> he backe returnd againe.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Imitating Chaucerian English, Spenser sometimes uses the prefix *y* as the sign of a past participle. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A compressed reference to Revelation 1:18: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Having greatest power (often applied to medical remedies). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare Revelation 19:11: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True." [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Facial expression; mood.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: His lover's (that is, the earth's).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Either because pine was used for ships or because of the tree's soaring height.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, exudes resin continuously. Spenser in these stanzas imitates Chaucer's catalog of trees in the *Parliament of Fowls*; the convention goes back to Ovid.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Holly or holm oak, both suitable for carving.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Needless because the spear is used only on horseback.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Loathsomeness. The description echoes both classical and biblical monsters (see Revelation 9:7–10).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, knight of Faerie Land.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In both the usual sense and the sense of "entangled condition."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, his gallbladder (considered the seat of anger) was violently disturbed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Alluding (at one level) to books and pamphlets of Catholic propaganda, notably attacks on Queen Elizabeth.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Revelation 16:13: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cesspool (that is, her womb or organ of excretion).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dressed in long black garments.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, it is not fitting for a holy hermit to meddle ("mell") with such things.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hail Mary (Latin); that is, a Catholic prayer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here (as often) Morpheus, the classical god of dreams, is conflated with his father, Somnus, god of sleep.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Proserpine, as patron of witchcraft and wife of Pluto, god of the underworld.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Demogorgon, in some myths the progenitor of all the gods, so powerful that the mention of his name causes hell's rivers (Styx and Cocytus) to tremble.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The simile associates him with Beelzebub (Lord of Flies), the name given to "the prince of the devils."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Diana, as goddess of the moon.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Spenser is imitating descriptions of the caves of Morpheus in Chaucer (*Book of the Duchess*, lines 153–77) and of Somnus in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 11.592–632).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: According to the old physiology, elderly people and other light sleepers had too little moisture in the brain.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name can be construed as meaning both "archmagician" and "architect of images."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Immediately ("straight") benumbed and paralyzed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: According to Homer (*Odyssey* 19.562–67) and Virgil (*Aeneid* 6.893–96), false dreams come through Sleep's ivory gate, true dreams through his gate of horn.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Her name means "one, unity." Elizabethan readers would know the Latin phrase *Una Vera Fides* (One True Faith) and also the proverb "Truth is one."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
The Three Graces of classical mythology were personifications of grace and beauty; here they sing a call to the pleasures of the marriage bed (Hymen was god of marriage). In the March eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, E. K. glossed Flora as "the Goddess of flowres, but indede (as saith Tacitus) a famous harlot."  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, I deserve to die.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Dreaded, but also “doubting again.” “Doubtfull”: fearful; also questionable, arousing doubt.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Tired, but also troublesome.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, with the spirit impersonating Una.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *spurring*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gallant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jousts, tourneys*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *incised*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grave*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dreaded, feared*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *honor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *yearn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *might*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *than*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lying in folds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *long robe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inwardly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *on a leash*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laid waste*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *summoned*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *creature* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *take shelter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *eager*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cover, shelter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *penetrable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fearful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *did*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *funereal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reward*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *yew*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *willow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plane tree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thinking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *out of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *track; tracing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watchful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boldness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coils*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfamiliar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alarmed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coiling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injury*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cutting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defeat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifted up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrath*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vomit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Nile River*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in season*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *rich* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pour forth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subside* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *see* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injuriously affected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sink* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *observes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encumbering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rustic* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *situated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut away* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corpse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with great force* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thinking* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural offspring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *congratulate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *armor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with God as friend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aught, anything* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silvery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *show* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bowing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *responded* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *simple* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saying his prayers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lays waste to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desolate* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *creature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feed; refresh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lodging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *access*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *built*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegant provision*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *polish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavy moisture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leads*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sleep like death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frighten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dispersed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the wife of Ocean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sober*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *notice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aloft, above*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swoon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *free from care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wasted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *effort*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fantasies*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *queen of Hades*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *why*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *senses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diverting, distracting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anxious concerns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifelike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entranced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the way that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnaturally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Cupid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lustful play*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *paramour*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaccustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loving*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange; unseemly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indignation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *patience*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then did* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dismay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *instead of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forcibly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *impartially*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprive her of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightens*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reject*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foiled in her cunning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *returned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frivolous; wanton*[Return to reference](#) °

## **Canto 2**

*The guilefull great Enchaunter parts  
The Redcrosse Knight from Truth:  
Into whose stead faire falshood steps,  
And workes him wofull ruth.*<sup>o</sup>

### **1**

By this the Northerne wagoner<sup>9</sup> had set  
His seven fold teame behind the stedfast starre,<sup>1</sup>  
That was in Ocean waves yet never wet,  
But firme is fixt, and sendeth light from farre  
To all, that in the wide deepe wandring arre:  
And chearefull Chaunticlere<sup>2</sup> with his note shrill  
Had warnèd once, that Phoebus fiery carre<sup>3</sup>  
In hast was climbing up the Easterne hill,  
Full envious that night so long his roome<sup>o</sup> did fill.

### **2**

When those accursèd messengers of hell,  
That feigning dreame, and that faire-forgèd Spright  
Came to their wicked maister, and gan tell  
Their bootelesse<sup>o</sup> paines, and ill succeeding night:  
Who all in rage to see his skilfull might  
Deluded<sup>o</sup> so, gan threaten hellish paine  
And sad Proserpines wrath, them to affright.  
But when he saw his threatning was but vaine,  
He cast about, and searcht his balefull<sup>o</sup> bookes againe.

### **3**

Eftsoones<sup>o</sup> he tooke that miscreated faire,  
And that false other Spright, on whom he spread  
A seeming body of the subtile<sup>o</sup> aire,  
Like a young Squire, in loves and lusty-hed

His wanton dayes that ever loosely led,  
Without regard of armes and dreaded fight:  
Those two he tooke, and in a secret bed,  
Covered with darknesse and misdeeming<sup>o</sup> night,  
Them both together laid, to joy in vaine delight.

#### 4

Forthwith he runnes with feignèd faithfull hast  
Unto his guest, who after troublous sights  
And dreames, gan now to take more sound repast,<sup>o</sup>  
Whom suddenly he wakes with fearefull frights,  
As one aghast with feends or damnèd sprights,  
And to him cals, "Rise rise unhappy Swaine,<sup>o</sup>  
That here wex<sup>o</sup> old in sleepe, whiles wicked wights  
Have knit themselves in Venus shamefull chaine;  
Come see, where your false Lady doth her honour staine."

#### 5

All in amaze he suddenly up start  
With sword in hand, and with the old man went;  
Who soone him brought into a secret part,  
Where that false couple were full closely ment<sup>o</sup>  
In wanton lust and lewd embracèment:  
Which when he saw, he burnt with gealous fire,  
The eye of reason was with rage yblent,<sup>o</sup>  
And would have slaine them in his furious ire,  
But hardly<sup>o</sup> was restrained of<sup>o</sup> that agèd sire.

#### 6

Returning to his bed in torment great,  
And bitter anguish of his guiltie sight,<sup>4</sup>  
He could not rest, but did his stout heart eat,<sup>5</sup>  
And wast his inward gall with deepe despight,<sup>o</sup>  
Yrkesome<sup>o</sup> of life, and too long lingring night.

At last faire Hesperus<sup>6</sup> in highest skie  
Had spent his lampe, and brought forth dawning light,  
Then up he rose, and clad him hastily;  
The Dwarfe him brought his steed: so both away do fly.

## 7

Now when the rosy-fingred Morning faire,  
Weary of aged Tithones<sup>7</sup> saffron bed,  
Had spread her purple robe through deawy aire,  
And the high hils Titan<sup>8</sup> discovered,<sup>9</sup>  
The royall virgin shooke off drowsy-hed,  
And rising forth out of her baser<sup>10</sup> bowre,  
Lookt for her knight, who far away was fled,  
And for her Dwarfe, that wont<sup>11</sup> to wait each houre:  
Then gan she waile and weepe, to see that woefull stowre.<sup>12</sup>

## 8

And after him she rode with so much speede  
As her slow beast could make; but all in vaine:  
For him so far had borne his light-foot steede,  
Prickèd with wrath and fiery fierce disdaine,<sup>13</sup>  
That him to follow was but fruitlesse paine;  
Yet she her weary limbes would never rest,  
But every hill and dale, each wood and plaine  
Did search, sore grievèd in her gentle brest,  
He so ungently left her, whom she lovèd best.

## 9

But subtile<sup>14</sup> Archimago, when his guests  
He saw divided into double parts,  
And Una wandring in woods and forrests,  
Th' end of his drift,<sup>15</sup> he praised his divelish arts  
That had such might over true meaning harts;  
Yet rests not so, but other meanes doth make,  
How he may worke unto her further smarts:<sup>16</sup>



For her he hated as the hissing snake,  
And in her many troubles did most pleasure take.

## 10

He then devisde himselfe how to disguise;  
For by his mightie science<sup>o</sup> he could take  
As many formes and shapes in seeming wise,<sup>o</sup>  
As ever Proteus<sup>8</sup> to himselfe could make:  
Sometime a fowle, sometime a fish in lake,  
Now like a foxe, now like a dragon fell,<sup>o</sup>  
That of himselfe he oft for feare would quake,  
And oft would flie away. O who can tell  
The hidden power of herbes, and might of Magicke spell?

## 11

But now seemde best, the person to put on  
Of that good knight, his late beguiled guest:  
In mighty armes he was yclad anon,  
And silver shield: upon his coward brest  
A bloody crosse, and on his craven crest  
A bounch of haire discoloured diversly:<sup>o</sup>  
Full jolly<sup>o</sup> knight he seemde, and well addrest,<sup>o</sup>  
And when he sate upon his courser free,<sup>o</sup>  
Saint George himself ye would have deemed him to be.

## 12

But he the knight, whose semblaunt<sup>o</sup> he did beare,  
The true Saint George was wandred far away,  
Still flying from<sup>o</sup> his thoughts and gealous feare;  
Will was his guide, and grieve led him astray.  
At last him chaunst to meete upon the way  
A faithlesse Sarazin<sup>9</sup> all armed to point,<sup>o</sup>  
In whose great shield was writ with letters gay  
Sans foy:<sup>1</sup> full large of limbe and every joint

He was, and carèd not for God or man a point.°

### 13

He had a faire companion of his way,  
A goodly Lady clad in scarlot red,  
Purfled° with gold and pearle of rich assay,<sup>2</sup>  
And like a Persian mitre on her hed  
She wore, with crownes and owches° garnishèd,  
The which her lavish lovers to her gave;<sup>3</sup>  
Her wanton° palfrey<sup>4</sup> all was overspred  
With tinsell trappings, woven like a wave,  
Whose bridle rung with golden bells and bosses brave.°

### 14

With faire disport° and courting dalliaunce  
She intertaine her lover all the way:  
But when she saw the knight his speare advaunce,  
She soone left off her mirth and wanton play,  
And bad her knight addresse him to the fray:  
His foe was nigh at hand. He prickt with pride  
And hope to winne his Ladies heart that day,  
Forth spurred fast: adowne his coursers side  
The red blood trickling staid the way, as he did ride.

### 15

The knight of the Redcrosse when him he spide,  
Spurring so hote with rage dispiteous,°  
Gan fairely couch° his speare, and towards ride:  
Soone meete they both, both fell° and furious,  
That daunted° with their forces hideous,  
Their steeds do stagger, and amazèd° stand,  
And eke° themselves too rudely rigorous,°  
Astonied° with the stroke of their owne hand,  
Do backe rebut,° and each to other yeeldeth land.

## 16

As when two rams stird with ambitious pride,  
Fight for the rule of the rich fleecèd flocke,  
Their hornèd fronts so fierce on either side  
Do meete, that with the terrour of the shocke  
Astonied both, stand sencelesse as a blocke,  
Forgetfull of the hanging<sup>o</sup> victory:  
So stood these twaine, unmovèd as a rocke,  
Both staring fierce, and holding idely  
The broken reliques of their former cruelty.

## 17

The Sarazin sore daunted with the buffe  
Snatcheth his sword, and fiercely to him flies;  
Who well it wards,<sup>o</sup> and quyteth<sup>o</sup> cuff with cuff:  
Each others equall puissaunce envies,<sup>o</sup>  
And through their iron sides with cruell spies<sup>o</sup>  
Does seeke to perce: repining courage yields  
No foote to foe. The flashing fier flies  
As from a forge out of their burning shields,  
And streames of purple bloud new dies the verdant fields.

## 18

"Curse on that Crosse," quoth then the Sarazin,  
"That keepes thy body from the bitter fit;<sup>o</sup>  
Dead long ygoe I wote<sup>o</sup> thou haddest bin,  
Had not that charme from thee forwarnèd<sup>o</sup> it:  
But yet I warne thee now assurèd<sup>o</sup> sitt,  
And hide thy head." Therewith upon his crest<sup>o</sup>  
With rigour<sup>o</sup> so outrageöus he smitt,  
That a large share it hewd out of the rest,  
And glauncing downe his shield, from blame him fairely blest.<sup>5</sup>

## 19

Who thereat wondrous wroth, the sleeping spark  
Of native vertue<sup>o</sup> gan eftsoones<sup>o</sup> revive,  
And at his haughtie helmet making mark,<sup>o</sup>  
So hugely<sup>o</sup> stroke, that it the steele did rive,  
And cleft his head. He tumbling downe alive,  
With bloudy mouth his mother earth did kis,  
Greeting his grave: his grudging<sup>o</sup> ghost did strive  
With the fraile flesh; at last it flitted is,  
Whither the soules do fly of men, that live amis.

## 20

The Lady when she saw her champion fall,  
Like the old ruines of a broken towre,  
Staid not to waile his woefull funerall,<sup>o</sup>  
But from him fled away with all her powre;  
Who after her as hastily gan scowre,<sup>o</sup>  
Bidding the Dwarfe with him to bring away  
The Sarazins shield, signe of the conqueroure.  
Her soone he overtooke, and bad to stay,  
For present cause was none of dread her to dismay.<sup>6</sup>

## 21

She turning backe with ruefull<sup>o</sup> countenance,  
Cride, "Mercy mercy Sir vouchsafe to show  
On silly<sup>o</sup> Dame, subject to hard mischaunce,  
And to your mighty will." Her humblesse low  
In so ritch weedes<sup>o</sup> and seeming glorious show,  
Did much emmove his stout heroicke heart,  
And said, "Deare dame, your suddein overthrow  
Much rueth<sup>o</sup> me; but now put feare apart,  
And tell, both who ye be, and who that tooke your part."

## 22

Melting in teares, then gan she thus lament;  
"The wretched woman, whom unhappy howre

Hath now made thrall<sup>o</sup> to your commandement,  
Before that angry heavens list to lowre,<sup>o</sup>  
And fortune false betraide me to your powre,  
Was (O what now availeth that I was!)  
Borne the sole daughter of an Emperour,  
He that the wide West under his rule has,  
And high hath set his throne, where Tiberis doth pas.<sup>7</sup>

## 23

"He in the first flowre of my freshest age,  
Betrothèd me unto the onely haire<sup>o</sup>  
Of a most mighty king, most rich and sage;<sup>8</sup>  
Was never Prince so faithfull and so faire,  
Was never Prince so meeke and debonaire;<sup>o</sup>  
But ere my hopèd day of spousall shone,  
My dearest Lord fell from high honours staire,  
Into the hands of his accursèd fone,<sup>o</sup>  
And cruelly was slaine, that shall I ever mone.

## 24

"His blessèd body spoild of lively breath,  
Was afterward, I know not how, convaide<sup>o</sup>  
And fro<sup>o</sup> me hid: of whose most innocent death  
When tidings came to me unhappy maid,  
O how great sorrow my sad soule assaid.<sup>o</sup>  
Then forth I went his woefull corse to find,  
And many yeares throughout the world I straid,  
A virgin widow, whose deepe wounded mind  
With love, long time did languish as the stricken hind.<sup>o</sup>

## 25

"At last it chauncèd this proud Sarazin  
To meete me wandring, who perforce<sup>o</sup> me led  
With him away, but yet could never win  
The fort, that Ladies hold in soveraigne dread.<sup>o</sup>

There lies he now with foule dishonour dead,  
Who whiles he livde, was callèd proud Sans foy,  
The eldest of three brethren, all three bred  
Of one bad sire, whose youngest is Sans joy,  
And twixt them both was borne the bloody bold Sans loy.<sup>9</sup>

## 26

"In this sad plight, friendlesse, unfortunate,  
Now miserable I Fidessa<sup>o</sup> dwell,  
Craving of you in pitty of my state,  
To do none<sup>o</sup> ill, if please ye not do well."  
He in great passion all this while did dwell,<sup>o</sup>  
More busying his quicke eyes, her face to view,  
Then his dull eares, to heare what she did tell;  
And said, "Faire Lady hart of flint would rew  
The undeservèd woes and sorrowes, which ye shew.

## 27

"Henceforth in safe assuraunce may ye rest,  
Having both found a new friend you to aid,  
And lost an old foe, that did you molest:  
Better new friend than an old foe is<sup>o</sup> said."  
With chaunge of cheare<sup>o</sup> the seeming simple maid  
Let fall her eyen, as shamefast<sup>o</sup> to the earth,  
And yeelding soft, in that she nought gain-said,<sup>o</sup>  
So forth they rode, he feining<sup>o</sup> seemely merth,  
And she coy lookes: so dainty they say maketh derth.<sup>1</sup>

## 28

Long time they thus together traveilèd,  
Till weary of their way, they came at last,  
Where grew two goodly trees, that faire did spred  
Their armes abroad, with gray mosse overcast,  
And their greene leaves trembling with every blast,<sup>o</sup>  
Made a calme shadow far in compasse round:

The fearefull Shepheard often there aghast  
Under them never sat, ne wont<sup>o</sup> there sound  
His mery oaten pipe, but shund th'unlucky ground.

## 29

But this good knight soone as he them can<sup>o</sup> spie,  
For the coole shade him thither hastily got:  
For golden Phoebus now ymounted hie,  
From fiery wheeles of his faire chariot  
Hurlèd his beame so scorching cruell hot,  
That living creature mote<sup>o</sup> it not abide;  
And his new Lady it endured not.  
There they alight, in hope themselves to hide  
From the fierce heat, and rest their weary limbs a tide.<sup>o</sup>

## 30

Faire seemely pleasaunce<sup>o</sup> each to other makes,  
With goodly purposes<sup>o</sup> there as they sit:  
And in his falsèd<sup>o</sup> fancy he her takes  
To be the fairest wight<sup>o</sup> that livèd yit;  
Which to expresse, he bends<sup>o</sup> his gentle wit,<sup>o</sup>  
And thinking of those braunches greene to frame  
A girland for her dainty forehead fit,  
He pluckt a bough; out of whose rift there came  
Small drops of gory bloud, that trickled downe the same.

## 31

Therewith a piteous yelling voyce was heard,  
Crying, "O spare with guilty hands to teare  
My tender sides in this rough rynd<sup>o</sup> embard,<sup>o</sup>  
But fly, ah fly far hence away, for feare  
Least<sup>o</sup> to you hap, that happened to me heare,  
And to this wretched Lady, my deare love,  
O too deare love, love bought with death too deare."  
Astond<sup>o</sup> he stood, and up his haire did hove,<sup>o</sup>

And with that suddein horror could no member move.

### 32

At last whenas the dreadfull passiön  
Was overpast, and manhood well awake,  
Yet musing at the straunge occasiön,  
And doubting much his sence, he thus bespake;  
"What voyce of damnèd Ghost from Limbo<sup>2</sup> lake,  
Or guilefull spright wandring in empty aire,  
Both which fraile men do oftentimes mistake,<sup>o</sup>  
Sends to my doubtfull eares these speaches rare,<sup>o</sup>  
And ruefull plaints, me bidding guiltlesse bloud to spare?"

### 33

Then groning deepe, "Nor<sup>o</sup> damnèd Ghost," quoth he,  
"Nor guilefull sprite to thee these wordes doth speake,  
But once a man Fradubio,<sup>3</sup> now a tree,  
Wretched man, wretched tree; whose nature weake,  
A cruell witch her cursèd will to wreake,  
Hath thus transformed, and plast in open plaines,  
Where Boreas<sup>o</sup> doth blow full bitter bleake,  
And scorching Sunne does dry my secret vaines:  
For though a tree I seeme, yet cold and heat me paines."

### 34

"Say on Fradubio then, or<sup>o</sup> man, or tree,"  
Quoth then the knight, "by whose mischievous arts  
Art thou misshapèd thus, as now I see?  
He oft finds med'cine, who his grieffe imparts;<sup>o</sup>  
But double griefs afflict concealing harts,  
As raging flames who striveth to suppresses."  
"The author then," said he, "of all my smarts,  
Is one Duessa<sup>4</sup> a false sorceresse,  
That many errant<sup>o</sup> knights hath brought to wretchednesse.



### 35

"In prime of youthly yeares, when corage hot  
The fire of love and joy of chevalree  
First kindled in my brest, it was my lot  
To love this gentle Lady, whom ye see,  
Now not a Lady, but a seeming tree;  
With whom as once I rode accompanyde,  
Me chauncèd of a knight encountred bee,  
That had a like faire Lady by his syde,  
Like a faire Lady, but did fowle Duessa hyde.

### 36

"Whose forgèd beauty he did take in hand,<sup>o</sup>  
All other Dames to have exceeded farre,  
I in defence of mine did likewise stand,  
Mine, that did then shine as the Morning starre:  
So both to battell fierce arraungèd arre,  
In which his harder fortune was to fall  
Under my speare: such is the dye<sup>o</sup> of warre:  
His Lady left as a prise martiäll,<sup>o</sup>  
Did yield her comely person, to be at my call.

### 37

"So doubly loved of Ladies unlike<sup>o</sup> faire,  
Th'one seeming such, the other such indeede,  
One day in doubt I cast<sup>o</sup> for to compare,  
Whether<sup>o</sup> in beauties glorie did excede;  
A Rosy girlond was the victors meede:<sup>o</sup>  
Both seemde to win, and both seemde won to bee,  
So hard the discord was to be agreede.  
Fraelissa<sup>5</sup> was as faire, as faire mote bee,  
And ever false Duessa seemde as faire as shee.

### 38

"The wicked witch now seeing all this while  
The doubtfull ballaunce equally to sway,  
What not by right, she cast to win by guile,  
And by her hellish science<sup>o</sup> raisd streight way  
A foggy mist, that overcast the day,  
And a dull blast, that breathing on her face,  
Dimmed her former beauties shining ray,  
And with foule ugly forme did her disgrace:  
Then was she<sup>o</sup> faire alone, when none was faire in place.<sup>6</sup>

### 39

"Then cride she out, 'Fye, fye, deformèd wight,  
Whose borrowed beautie now appeareth plaine  
To have before bewitchèd all mens sight;  
O leave her soone, or let her soone be slaine.'  
Her lothly visage viewing with disdain,  
Eftsoones<sup>o</sup> I thought her such, as she me told,  
And would have kild her; but with faignèd paine,  
The false witch did my wrathfull hand withhold;  
So left her, where she now is turnd to treën mould.<sup>o</sup>

### 40

"Thens forth I tooke Duessa for my Dame,  
And in the witch unweeting<sup>o</sup> joyd long time,  
Ne ever wist,<sup>o</sup> but that she was the same,  
Till on a day (that day is every Prime,<sup>7</sup>  
When Witches wont<sup>o</sup> do penance for their crime)  
I chaunst to see her in her proper hew,<sup>o</sup>  
Bathing her selfe in origane and thyme:<sup>8</sup>  
A filthy foule old woman I did vew,  
That ever to have toucht her, I did deadly rew.<sup>o</sup>

### 41

"Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous,

Were hidd in water, that I could not see,  
But they did seeme more foule and hideous,  
Then<sup>o</sup> womans shape man would beleeeve to bee.  
Thens forth from her most beastly companie  
I gan refraine, in minde to slip away,  
Soone as appeared safe opportunitie:  
For danger great, if not assured decay<sup>o</sup>  
I saw before mine eyes, if I were knowne to stray.

## 42

"The divelish hag by chaunges of my cheare<sup>o</sup>  
Perceived my thought, and drownd in sleepe night,  
With wicked herbes and ointments did besmeare  
My bodie all, through charmes and magicke might,  
That all my senses were bereavèd quight:<sup>o</sup>  
Then brought she me into this desert waste,  
And by my wretched lovers side me pight,<sup>o</sup>  
Where now enclosd in wooden wals full faste,<sup>9</sup>  
Banisht from living wights, our wearie dayes we waste."

## 43

"But how long time," said then the Elfin knight,  
"Are you in this misformèd house to dwell?"  
"We may not chaunge," quoth he, "this evil plight,  
Till we be bathèd in a living well;<sup>1</sup>  
That is the terme prescribèd by the spell."  
"O how," said he, "mote<sup>o</sup> I that well out find,  
That may restore you to your wonted well?"<sup>o</sup>  
"Time and suffisèd fates to former kynd  
Shall us restore,<sup>2</sup> none else from hence may us unbynd."

## 44

The false Duessa, now Fidessa hight,<sup>o</sup>  
Heard how in vaine Fradubio did lament,

And knew well all was true. But the good knight  
Full of sad feare and ghastly dreriment,<sup>o</sup>  
When all this speech the living tree had spent,  
The bleeding bough did thrust into the ground,  
That from the bloud he might be innocent,  
And with fresh clay did close the wooden wound:  
Then turning to his Lady, dead with feare her found.

## 45

Her seeming dead he found with feignèd feare,  
As all unweeting of that well she knew,<sup>3</sup>  
And paynd himselfe with busie care to reare  
Her out of carelesse<sup>o</sup> swowne. Her eylids blew  
And dimmèd sight with pale and deadly hew<sup>o</sup>  
At last she up gan lift: with trembling cheare  
Her up he tooke, too simple and too trew,  
And oft her kist. At length all passèd feare,<sup>4</sup>  
He set her on her steede, and forward forth did beare.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The constellation Boötes, the plowman, who drives a wagon composed of the seven bright stars of Ursa Major (the Big Dipper).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The North Star.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Chanticleer; generic name for a rooster.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Chariot of the sun god, Phoebus Apollo.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Suggesting guilt in both the sight and the seer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Proverbially, jealousy is a monster that eats the heart.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The morning star.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Tithonus is the husband of Aurora, goddess of the dawn.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A sea god who could change his shape at will (*Odyssey* 4.398–424).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Saracen; that is, a Muslim, especially the foes of the Christian knights in the Crusades to the Holy Land; sometimes used generically of any non-Christian.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Without faith, faithless (French).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Proven of rich value.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
The lady's garb associates her with the biblical Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17:3–4): "And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication."  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Riding horse (as distinguished from a warhorse); often, as here, a small saddle horse for a woman.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Preserved him from harm.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, there was no reason for her to be afraid.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Tiber River runs through Rome. The lady is hence associated with the Catholic Church. Her father, she says, is ruler of the west—but Una's father had the rule of both east *and* west (canto 1, stanza 5); historically, the true church once embraced east and west.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The lady claims to have been betrothed to Christ, bridegroom of the Church (Matthew 9:15).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Without law; lawless.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A proverb meaning that disdainfulness makes one more to be coveted; here, that coyness creates unsatisfied desire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A region of hell, traditionally the abode of the unbaptized.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: *Fra* (Italian “in” or “brother”) + *dubbio* (“doubt”). The motif of a man imprisoned in a tree derives from Virgil (*Aeneid* 3.27–42) and is used by Ariosto (*Orlando furioso* 6.26–53).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Double Being. *Due* (Italian “two”) + *esse* (Latin “being”).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Frailty (Italian *Fralezza*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: When nobody else was fair.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Spring; or the first appearance of the new moon.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Oregano and thyme were used to cure scabs and itching.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, imprisoned within the trees.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: With allusion to John 4:14, the “well of water springing up into everlasting life.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, time and the satisfaction of the fates alone can restore us to our former human nature.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, pretending ignorance of what she knew well.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, having overcome all fear.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *mischief*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *useless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foiled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deadly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rarefied*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misleading*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *youth; rustic*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grow*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *mingled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blinded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with difficulty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *malice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tired*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too lowly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affliction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indignation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cunning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *variously colored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gallant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *armed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high-spirited*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likeness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decorated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brooches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unruly, frisky* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handsome studs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diversion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cruel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lower*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dazed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recoil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the balance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fends off* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requites, repays* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power seeks to rival* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *looks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death pangs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prevented* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *securely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *helmet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strength* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *again* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taking aim* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mightily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complaining* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scurry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitiable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *helpless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grieves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chose to frown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heir* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gracious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried away* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afflicted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by violence* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *utmost reverence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Faithful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continue*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it is*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *countenance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if modestly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *objected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *simulating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breeze*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor was accustomed to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courtesy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courteous conversation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *applies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bark* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imprisoned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mislead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neither*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the north wind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expresses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wandering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he maintained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hazard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoil of battle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diversely*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *determined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *which one (of two)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Duessa*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *presently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the form of a tree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unknowingly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in her own shape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demeanor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *planted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well-being*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gloom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unconscious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deathlike appearance*[Return to reference](#) °

### **Canto 3**

*Forsaken Truth long seekes her love,  
And makes the Lyon mylde,  
Marres<sup>o</sup> blind Devotions mart,<sup>o</sup> and fals  
In hand of leachour<sup>o</sup> vylde.*

#### **1**

Nought is there under heav'ns wide hollownesse,<sup>o</sup>  
That moves more deare compassion of mind,  
Then beautie brought t'unworthy<sup>o</sup> wretchednesse  
Through envies snares or fortunes freakes<sup>o</sup> unkind:  
I, whether lately through her brightnesse blind,  
Or through alleageance and fast fealtie,  
Which I do owe unto all woman kind,  
Feele my heart perst<sup>o</sup> with so great agonie,  
When such I see, that all for pittie I could die.

#### **2**

And now it is empassionèd<sup>o</sup> so deepe,  
For fairest Unas sake, of whom I sing,  
That my fraile eyes these lines with teares do steepe,  
To thinke how she through guilefull handeling,<sup>o</sup>  
Though true as touch,<sup>o</sup> though daughter of a king,  
Though faire as ever living wight was faire,  
Though nor in word nor deede ill meriting,  
Is from her knight divorcèd<sup>o</sup> in despaire  
And her due loves derived<sup>o</sup> to that vile witches share.

#### **3**

Yet she most faithfull Ladie all this while  
Forsaken, wofull, solitarie mayd  
Farre from all peoples prease,<sup>o</sup> as in exile,  
In wildernessse and wastfull<sup>o</sup> deserts strayd,

To seeke her knight; who subtilly betrayd  
Through that late vision, which th'Enchaunter wrought,  
Had her abandond. She of nought affrayd,  
Through woods and wastnesse<sup>o</sup> wide him daily sought;  
Yet wishèd tydings none<sup>o</sup> of him unto her brought.

#### 4

One day nigh wearie of the yrkesome way,  
From her unhastie<sup>o</sup> beast she did alight,  
And on the grasse her daintie limbes did lay  
In secret shadow,<sup>o</sup> farre from all mens sight:  
From her faire head her fillet she undight,<sup>5</sup>  
And laid her stole aside. Her angels face  
As the great eye of heaven shynèd bright,  
And made a sunshine in the shadie place;  
Did never mortall eye behold such heavenly grace.

#### 5

It fortunèd<sup>o</sup> out of the thickest wood  
A ramping<sup>o</sup> Lyon rushèd suddainly,  
Hunting full greedie after salvage blood;<sup>o</sup>  
Soone as the royall virgin he did spy,  
With gaping mouth at her ran greedily,  
To have attonce<sup>o</sup> devoured her tender corse;<sup>o</sup>  
But to the pray when as he drew more ny,  
His bloudie rage asswagèd with remorse,  
And with the sight amazd, forgat his furious forse.

#### 6

In stead thereof he kist her wearie feet,  
And lickt her lilly hands with fawning tong,  
As<sup>o</sup> he her wrongèd innocence did weet.<sup>o</sup>  
O how can beautie maister the most strong,  
And simple truth subdue avenging wrong?  
Whose yeelded pride and proud submissiön,

Still dreading death, when she had markèd long,  
Her hart gan melt in great compassiön,  
And drizling teares did shed for pure affectiön.

**7**

"The Lyon Lord of everie beast in field,"  
Quoth she, "his princely puissance<sup>o</sup> doth abate,  
And mightie proud to humble weake does yield,  
Forgetfull of the hungry rage, which late  
Him prickt, in pittie of my sad estate:<sup>o</sup>  
But he my Lyon, and my noble Lord,  
How does he find in cruell hart to hate  
Her that him loved, and ever most adord,  
As the God of my life? why hath he me abhord?"

**8**

Redounding<sup>o</sup> teares did choke th'end of her plaint,  
Which softly ecchoed from the neighbour wood;  
And sad to see her sorrowfull constraint<sup>o</sup>  
The kingly beast upon her gazing stood;  
With pittie calmd, downe fell his angry mood.  
At last in close hart shutting up her paine,  
Arose the virgin borne of heavenly brood,<sup>o</sup>  
And to her snowy Palfrey got againe,  
To seeke her strayèd Champion, if she might attaine.<sup>o</sup>

**9**

The Lyon would not leave her desolate,  
But with her went along, as a strong gard  
Of her chast person, and a faithfull mate  
Of her sad troubles and misfortunes hard:  
Still<sup>o</sup> when she slept, he kept both watch and ward,<sup>o</sup>  
And when she wakt, he waited diligent,  
With humble service to her will prepard:  
From her faire eyes he tooke commaundement,

And ever by her lookes conceivèd her intent.

## 10

Long she thus travelèd through deserts wyde,  
By which she thought her wandring knight shold pas,  
Yet never shew<sup>o</sup> of living wight espyde;  
Till that at length she found the troden gras,  
In which the tract<sup>o</sup> of peoples footing was,  
Under the steepe foot of a mountaine hore;<sup>o</sup>  
The same she followes, till at last she has  
A damzell spyde slow footing her before,<sup>6</sup>  
That on her shoulders sad<sup>o</sup> a pot of water bore.

## 11

To whom approaching she to her gan call,  
To weet,<sup>o</sup> if dwelling place were nigh at hand;  
But the rude<sup>o</sup> wench her answered nought at all,  
She could not heare, nor speake, nor understand;<sup>7</sup>  
Till seeing by her side the Lyon stand,  
With suddaine feare her pitcher downe she threw,  
And fled away: for never in that land  
Face of faire Ladie she before did vew,  
And that dread Lyons looke her cast in deadly<sup>o</sup> hew.

## 12

Full fast she fled, ne ever lookt behynd,  
As if her life upon the wager lay,<sup>o</sup>  
And home she came, whereas her mother blynd  
Sate in eternall night: nought could she say,  
But suddaine catching hold, did her dismay  
With quaking hands, and other signes of feare:  
Who full of ghastly fright and cold affray,<sup>o</sup>  
Gan shut the dore. By this arrivèd there  
Dame Una, wearie Dame, and entrance did requere.<sup>o</sup>

### 13

Which when none yeelded, her unruly Page  
With his rude<sup>o</sup> clawes the wicket<sup>o</sup> open rent,  
And let her in; where of his cruell rage  
Nigh dead with feare, and faint astonishment,<sup>8</sup>  
She found them both in darkesome corner pent;<sup>o</sup>  
Where that old woman day and night did pray  
Upon her beades<sup>o</sup> devoutly penitent;  
Nine hundred *Pater nosters* every day,  
And thrise nine hundred *Aves* she was wont to say.<sup>9</sup>

### 14

And to augment her painefull pennance more,  
Thrise every weeke in ashes she did sit,  
And next her wrinkled skin rough sackcloth wore,<sup>1</sup>  
And thrise three times did fast from any bit:<sup>o</sup>  
But now for feare her beads she did forget.  
Whose needlesse dread for to remove away,  
Faire Una framèd words and count'nance fit:  
Which hardly<sup>o</sup> doen, at length she gan them pray,  
That in their cotage small, that night she rest her may.<sup>2</sup>

### 15

The day is spent, and commeth drowsie night,  
When every creature shrowded is in sleepe;  
Sad Una downe her laies in wearie plight,  
And at her feet the Lyon watch doth keepe:  
In stead of rest, she does lament, and weepe  
For the late<sup>o</sup> losse of her deare lovèd knight,  
And sighes, and grones, and evermore does steepe  
Her tender brest in bitter teares all night,  
All night she thinks too long, and often lookes for light.

### 16

Now when Aldeboran was mounted hie  
Above the shynie Cassiopeias chaire,<sup>3</sup>  
And all in deadly sleepe did drownèd lie,  
One knockèd at the dore, and in would fare;<sup>o</sup>  
He knockèd fast,<sup>o</sup> and often curst, and sware,  
That readie entrance was not at his call:  
For on his backe a heavy load he bare  
Of nightly stelths and pillage severall,<sup>4</sup>  
Which he had got abroad by purchase<sup>o</sup> criminall.

### 17

He was to weete<sup>o</sup> a stout and sturdie thiefe,  
Wont to robbe Churches of their ornaments,  
And poore mens boxes<sup>5</sup> of their due reliefe,  
Which given was to them for good intents;  
The holy Saints of their rich vestiments  
He did disrobe, when all men carelesse slept,  
And spoild the Priests of their habiliments,<sup>o</sup>  
Whiles none the holy things in safety kept;  
Then he by cunning sleights in at the window crept.

### 18

And all that he by right or wrong could find,  
Unto this house he brought, and did bestow  
Upon the daughter of this woman blind,  
Abessa daughter of Corceca<sup>6</sup> slow,  
With whom he whoredome usd, that few did know,  
And fed her fat with feast of offerings,  
And plentie, which in all the land did grow;  
Ne sparèd he to give her gold and rings:  
And now he to her brought part of his stolen things.

### 19

Thus long the dore with rage and threats he bet,<sup>o</sup>



Yet of those fearefull women none durst rize,  
The Lyon frayèd them, him in to let:<sup>7</sup>  
He would no longer stay him to advize,<sup>o</sup>  
But open breakes the dore in furious wize,<sup>o</sup>  
And entring is; when that disdainfull<sup>o</sup> beast  
Encountring fierce, him suddaine doth surprize,  
And seizing<sup>o</sup> cruell clawes on trembling brest,  
Under his Lordly foot him proudly hath suppress.

## 20

Him booteth not resist,<sup>8</sup> nor succour<sup>o</sup> call,  
His bleeding hart is in the vengers hand,  
Who streight<sup>o</sup> him rent in thousand peeces small,  
And quite dismembred hath: the thirstie land  
Drunke up his life; his corse left on the strand.<sup>o</sup>  
His fearefull friends weare out the wofull night,  
Ne dare to weepe, nor seeme to understand  
The heavie hap,<sup>o</sup> which on them is alight,<sup>o</sup>  
Affraid, least to themselves the like mishappen might.<sup>9</sup>

## 21

Now when broad day the world discovered<sup>o</sup> has,  
Up Una rose, up rose the Lyon eke,<sup>o</sup>  
And on their former journey forward pas,  
In wayes unknowne, her wandring knight to seeke,  
With paines farre passing that long wandring Greeke,  
That for his love refusèd deitie;<sup>1</sup>  
Such were the labours of this Lady meeke,  
Still seeking him, that from her still did flie,  
Then furthest from her hope, when most she weenèd nie.<sup>o</sup>

## 22

Soone as she parted thence, the fearefull twaine,  
That blind old woman and her daughter deare

Came forth, and finding Kirkrapine<sup>o</sup> there slaine,  
For anguish great they gan to rend their heare,  
And beat their brests, and naked flesh to teare.  
And when they both had wept and wayld their fill,  
Then forth they ranne like two amazed deare,  
Halfe mad through malice, and revenging will,<sup>o</sup>  
To follow her, that was the causer of their ill.

### 23

Whom overtaking, they gan loudly bray,  
With hollow howling, and lamenting cry,  
Shamefully at her rayling all the way,  
And her accusing of dishonesty,<sup>o</sup>  
That was the flowre of faith and chastity;  
And still amidst her rayling, she<sup>2</sup> did pray,  
That plagues, and mischiefs, and long misery  
Might fall on her, and follow all the way,  
And that in endlesse error<sup>o</sup> she might ever stray.

### 24

But when she saw her prayers nought prevaile,  
She backe returnèd with some labour lost;  
And in the way as she did weepe and waile  
A knight her met in mighty armes embost,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet knight was not for all his bragging bost,<sup>o</sup>  
But subtill Archimag, that Una sought  
By traynes<sup>o</sup> into new troubles to have tost:  
Of that old woman tydings he besought,  
If that of such a Ladie she could tellen ought.<sup>3</sup>

### 25

Therewith she gan her passion to renew,  
And cry, and curse, and raile, and rend her heare,<sup>o</sup>  
Saying, that harlot she too lately knew,  
That causd her shed so many a bitter teare,

And so forth told the story of her feare:  
Much seemèd he to mone her haplesse chaunce,  
And after for that Ladie did inquire;  
Which being taught, he forward gan advaunce  
His fair enchanted steed, and eke his charmèd launce.

## 26

Ere long he came, where Una traveild slow,  
And that wilde Champion wayting<sup>o</sup> her besyde:  
Whom seeing such, for dread he durst not show  
Himselfe too nigh at hand, but turnèd wyde  
Unto an hill; from whence when she him spyde,  
By his like seeming shield, her knight by name  
She weend it was, and towards him gan ryde:  
Approching nigh, she wist<sup>o</sup> it was the same,  
And with faire fearefull humblesse<sup>o</sup> towards him shee came.

## 27

And weeping said, "Ah my long lackèd Lord,  
Where have ye bene thus long out of my sight?  
Much feared I to have bene quite abhord,  
Or ought<sup>o</sup> have done, that ye displeasen might,  
That should as death unto my deare hart light:<sup>4</sup>  
For since mine eye your joyous sight did mis,  
My chearefull day is turnd to chearelesse night,  
And eke my night of death the shadow is;  
But welcome now my light, and shining lampe of blis."

## 28

He thereto meeting<sup>5</sup> said, "My dearest Dame,  
Farre be it from your thought, and fro my will,  
To thinke that knighthood I so much should shame,  
As you to leave, that have me lovèd still,  
And chose in Faery court of meere<sup>o</sup> goodwill,  
Where noblest knights were to be found on earth:

The earth shall sooner leave her kindly<sup>o</sup> skill  
To bring forth fruit, and make eternall derth,<sup>o</sup>  
Then I leave you, my lief<sup>e</sup>,<sup>o</sup> yborne of heavenly berth.

## 29

"And sooth to say, why I left you so long,  
Was for to seeke adventure in strange place,  
Where Archimago said a felon strong  
To many knights did daily worke disgrace;  
But knight he now shall never more deface:<sup>o</sup>  
Good cause of mine excuse; that mote<sup>o</sup> ye please  
Well to accept, and evermore embrace  
My faithfull service, that by land and seas  
Have vowd you to defend, now then your plaint appease."<sup>o</sup>

## 30

His lovely<sup>o</sup> words her seemd due recompence  
Of all her passèd paines: one loving howre  
For many yeares of sorrow can dispence:<sup>o</sup>  
A dram of sweet is worth a pound of sowre:  
She has forgot, how many a wofull stowre<sup>o</sup>  
For him she late endured; she speakes no more  
Of past: true is, that true love hath no powre  
To looken backe; his eyes be fixt before.  
Before her stands her knight, for whom she toyld so sore.

## 31

Much like, as when the beaten marinere,  
That long hath wandred in the Ocean wide,  
Oft soust<sup>o</sup> in swelling Tethys<sup>6</sup> saltish teare,  
And long time having tand his tawney hide  
With blustering breath of heaven, that none can bide,  
And scorching flames of fierce Orions hound,<sup>7</sup>  
Soone as the port from farre he has espide,  
His chearefull whistle merrily doth sound,

And Nereus crownes with cups;<sup>8</sup> his mates him pledg<sup>o</sup> around.

### 32

Such joy made Una, when her knight she found;  
And eke<sup>o</sup> th'enchauter joyous seemd no lesse,  
Then the glad marchant, that does vew from ground  
His ship farre come from watrie wildernessse,  
He hurles out vowes, and Neptune oft doth blesse:  
So forth they past, and all the way they spent  
Discoursing of her dreadfull late distresse,  
In which he askt her, what the Lyon ment:  
Who told her all that fell in journey as she went.<sup>9</sup>

### 33

They had not ridden farre, when they might see  
One pricking<sup>o</sup> towards them with hastie heat,  
Full strongly armd, and on a courser free,<sup>o</sup>  
That through his fiercenesse fomèd all with sweat,  
And the sharpe yron<sup>o</sup> did for anger eat,  
When his hot ryder spurd his chauffèd<sup>o</sup> side;  
His looke was sterne, and seemèd still to threat  
Cruell revenge, which he in hart did hyde,  
And on his shield Sans loy in bloudie lines was dyde.

### 34

When nigh he drew unto this gentle payre  
And saw the Red-crosse, which the knight did beare,  
He burnt in fire, and gan eftsoones<sup>o</sup> prepare  
Himselfe to battell with his couchèd<sup>o</sup> speare.  
Loth was that other, and did faint<sup>o</sup> through feare,  
To taste th'untryed dint<sup>o</sup> of deadly steele;  
But yet his Lady did so well him cheare,  
That hope of new good hap<sup>o</sup> he gan to feele;  
So bent<sup>o</sup> his speare, and spurnd<sup>1</sup> his horse with yron heele.

### 35

But that proud Paynim<sup>o</sup> forward came so fierce,  
And full of wrath, that with his sharp-head speare  
Through vainely crossèd shield<sup>2</sup> he quite did pierce,  
And had his staggering steede not shrunke for feare,  
Through shield and bodie eke he should him beare:<sup>o</sup>  
Yet so great was the puissance<sup>o</sup> of his push,  
That from his saddle quite he did him beare:  
He tombling rudely<sup>o</sup> downe to ground did rush,  
And from his gorèd wound a well of bloud did gush.

### 36

Dismounting lightly from his loftie steed,  
He to him leapt, in mind to reave<sup>o</sup> his life,  
And proudly said, "Lo there the worthie meed<sup>o</sup>  
Of him, that slew Sansfoy with bloudie knife;  
Henceforth his ghost freed from repining strife,  
In peace may passen over Lethe<sup>3</sup> lake,  
When mourning altars purgd<sup>o</sup> with enemies life,  
The blacke infernall Furies<sup>4</sup> doen aslake:<sup>o</sup>  
Life from Sansfoy thou tookst, Sansloy shall from thee take."

### 37

Therewith in haste his helmet gan unlace,  
Till Una cride, "O hold that heavie hand,  
Deare Sir, what ever that thou be in place:<sup>o</sup>  
Enough is, that thy foe doth vanquisht stand  
Now at thy mercy: Mercie not withstand:  
For he is one the truest knight alive,<sup>5</sup>  
Though conquered now he lie on lowly land,<sup>o</sup>  
And whilst him fortune favourd, faire did thrive  
In bloudie field: therefore of life him not deprive."

### 38

Her piteous words might<sup>o</sup> not abate his rage,  
But rudely rending up his helmet, would  
Have slaine him straight: but when he sees his age,  
And hoarie head of Archimago old,  
His hastie hand he doth amazèd hold,  
And halfe ashamed, wondred at the sight:  
For the old man well knew he, though untold,<sup>6</sup>  
In charmes and magicke to have wondrous might,  
Ne ever wont<sup>o</sup> in field, ne in round lists<sup>7</sup> to fight.

### 39

And said, "Why Archimago, lucklesse syre,  
What doe I see? what hard mishap is this,  
That hath thee hither brought to taste mine yre?  
Or thine the fault, or mine the error is,  
In stead of foe to wound my friend amis?"  
He answered nought, but in a traunce still lay,  
And on those guilefull dazèd eyes of his  
The cloud of death did sit. Which doen away,<sup>o</sup>  
He left him lying so, ne would no lenger stay.

### 40

But to the virgin comes, who all this while  
Amasèd stands, her selfe so mockt<sup>o</sup> to see  
By him, who has the guerdon<sup>o</sup> of his guile,  
For so misfeigning her true knight to bee:  
Yet is she now in more perplexitie,<sup>o</sup>  
Left in the hand of that same Paynim bold,  
From whom her booteth not<sup>o</sup> at all to flie;  
Who by her cleanly<sup>o</sup> garment catching hold,  
Her from her Palfrey pluckt, her visage to behold.

### 41

But her fierce servant full of kingly awe<sup>o</sup>  
And high disdaine,<sup>o</sup> whenas his souveraine Dame

So rudely handled by her foe he sawe,  
With gaping jawes full greedy at him came,  
And ramping<sup>o</sup> on his shield, did weene<sup>o</sup> the same  
Have reft away with his sharpe rending clawes:  
But he was stout, and lust did now inflame  
His corage more, that from his griping pawes  
He hath his shield redeemed,<sup>o</sup> and foorth his swerd he drawes.

## 42

O then too weake and feeble was the forse  
Of salvage beast, his puissance to withstand:  
For he was strong, and of so mightie corse,<sup>o</sup>  
As ever wielded speare in warlike hand,  
And feates of armes did wisely<sup>o</sup> understand.  
Eftsoones he percèd through his chaufèd<sup>o</sup> chest  
With thrilling<sup>o</sup> point of deadly yron brand,<sup>o</sup>  
And launcht<sup>o</sup> his Lordly hart: with death opprest  
He roared aloud, whiles life forsooke his stubborne brest.

## 43

Who now is left to keepe the forlorne maid  
From raging spoile<sup>o</sup> of lawlesse victors will?  
Her faithfull gard removed, her hope dismaid,  
Her selfe a yeelded pray to save or spill.<sup>o</sup>  
He now Lord of the field, his pride to fill,  
With foule reproches, and disdainfull spight  
Her vildly<sup>o</sup> entertaines, and will or nill,  
Beares her away upon his courser light:<sup>8</sup>  
Her prayers nought prevaile; his rage is more of might.

## 44

And all the way, with great lamenting paine,  
And piteous plaints she filleth his dull<sup>o</sup> eares,  
That stony hart could riven have in twaine,  
And all the way she wets with flowing teares:



But he enraged with rancor, nothing heares.  
Her servile beast<sup>o</sup> yet would not leave her so,  
But followes her farre off, ne ought<sup>o</sup> he feares,  
To be partaker of her wandring woe,  
More mild in beastly kind,<sup>o</sup> then that her beastly foe.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: She took off her headband.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, walking slowly ahead of her.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Compare Mark 4:11–12: “unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, fainting with amazement.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Her prayers are the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father”) and the Hail Mary.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sackcloth and ashes are symbols of penitence and, like the rosary beads and prayers in stanza 13, are associated with Catholicism.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, that she might rest herself.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The star Aldebaran, in the constellation Taurus, mounts over the constellation Cassiopeia.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, he carried the booty gained from nightly thefts and various kinds of pillage.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A box for alms for the poor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Blind heart. Abessa’s name comes from “abbess,” also *ab* + *esse* (Latin): “from being”; that is, without substance.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, neither of the women dared rise to let him in because the lion terrified (“frayed”) them.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: It does him no good to resist.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: That is, lest the same thing might happen amiss (“mishappen”) to them.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Odysseus, who rejected immortality and the love of the nymph Calypso for his wife, Penelope.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Corceca. (Abessa cannot speak.)[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Anything. That is, if she could tell anything about such a lady.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, be as a deathblow to my loving heart. (“Deare” can also mean heavy or sore.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Answering in like manner.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The wife of Ocean; here, the ocean itself.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sirius, the dog star, symbolizing hot weather (the dog days).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nereus, a benevolent sea god, to whom the mariner in gratitude makes libations.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, she told all that had befallen her on her journey.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Spurred.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The cross on Archimago’s shield was false and did not give him the protection the Redcrosse knight received in his fight with Sansfoy (see canto 2, stanza 18).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The river of forgetfulness in Hades (but Styx, the river at hell’s entrance, would seem more appropriate here; see canto 5, stanza 10).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Spirits of discord and revenge.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, do not withhold mercy, for he is the one truest knight.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, without needing to be told.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Enclosures for fighting tournaments.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Quickly. That is, he treats her basely and quickly bears her away, willing or not, on his horse.[Return to reference 8](#)

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## ***Canto 4***

*To sinfull house of Pride, Duessa  
guides the faithfull knight,  
Where brothers death to wreak<sup>o</sup> Sansjoy  
doth challenge him to fight.*

### **1**

Young knight, what ever that dost armes professe,  
And through long labours hunttest after fame,  
Beware of fraud, beware of ficklenesse,  
In choice, and change of thy deare lovèd Dame,  
Least thou of her beleeve too lightly blame,<sup>9</sup>  
And rash misweening<sup>o</sup> doe thy hart remove:  
For unto knight there is no greater shame,  
Then lightnesse and inconstancie in love;  
That doth this Redcrosse knights ensample<sup>o</sup> plainly prove.

### **2**

Who after that he had faire Una lorne,<sup>o</sup>  
Through light misdeeming<sup>o</sup> of her loialtie,  
And false Duessa in her sted had borne,<sup>o</sup>  
Called Fidess', and so supposd to bee;  
Long with her traveild, till at last they see  
A goodly building, bravely garnishèd,<sup>o</sup>  
The house of mightie Prince it seemd to bee:  
And towards it a broad high way<sup>1</sup> that led,  
All bare through peoples feet, which thither travellèd.

### **3**

Great troupes of people traveild thitherward  
Both day and night, of each degree and place,<sup>o</sup>  
But few returnèd, having scapèd hard,<sup>o</sup>  
With balefull<sup>o</sup> beggerie, or foule disgrace,

Which ever after in most wretched case,  
Like loathsome lazars,o by the hedges lay.  
Thither Duessa bad him bend his pace:o  
For she is wearie of the toilesome way,  
And also nigh consumèd is the lingring day.

#### 4

A stately Pallace built of squarèd bricke,  
Which cunningly was without mortar laid,  
Whose wals were high, but nothing strong, nor thick,  
And golden foileo all over them displaid,  
That purest skye with brightnesse they dismaid:o  
High lifted up were many loftie towres,  
And goodly galleries farre over laid,o  
Full of faire windowes, and delightfull bowres;  
And on the top a Diall told the timely howres.2

#### 5

It was a goodly heapeo for to behould,  
And spake the praises of the workmans wit;o  
But full great pittie, that so faire a mouldo  
Did on so weake foundation ever sit:  
For on a sandie hill,3 that still did flit,o  
And fall away, it mounted was full hie,  
That every breath of heaven shakèd it:  
And all the hinder parts, that few could spie,  
Were ruinous and old, but painted cunningly.

#### 6

Arrivèd there they passèd in forth right;  
For stillo to all the gates stood open wide,  
Yet charge of them was to a Porter highto  
Cald Malvenù,4 who entrance none denide:  
Thence to the hall, which was on every side



With rich array and costly arras dight:<sup>5</sup>  
Infinite sorts of people did abide  
There waiting long, to win the wished sight  
Of her, that was the Lady of that Pallace bright.

## 7

By them they passe, all gazing on them round,  
And to the Presence<sup>6</sup> mount; whose glorious vew  
Their frayle amazed senses did confound:  
In living Princes court none ever knew  
Such endlesse riches, and so sumptuous shew;<sup>o</sup>  
Ne<sup>o</sup> Persia selfe, the nourse<sup>o</sup> of pompous pride  
Like ever saw. And there a noble crew  
Of Lordes and Ladies stood on every side,  
Which with their presence faire, the place much beautifide.

## 8

High above all a cloth of State<sup>o</sup> was spread,  
And a rich throne, as bright as sunny day,  
On which there sate most brave embellished<sup>o</sup>  
With royall robes and gorgeous array,  
A mayden Queene, that shone as Titans<sup>o</sup> ray,  
In glistring gold, and peerelesse pretious stone:  
Yet her bright blazing beautie did assay<sup>o</sup>  
To dim the brightness of her glorious throne,  
As envying her selfe, that too exceeding shone.

## 9

Exceeding shone, like Phoebus fairest childe,  
That did presume<sup>o</sup> his fathers firie wayne,<sup>o</sup>  
And flaming mouthes of steedes unwonted<sup>o</sup> wilde  
Through highest heaven with weaker<sup>o</sup> hand to rayne;  
Proud of such glory and advancement vaine,  
While flashing beames do daze his feeble eyen,<sup>o</sup>  
He leaves the welkin<sup>o</sup> way most beaten plaine,

And rapt<sup>o</sup> with whirling wheelles, inflames the skyen,  
With fire not made to burne, but fairely for to shyne.<sup>7</sup>

## 10

So proud she shynèd in her Princely state,  
Looking to heaven; for earth she did disdayne,  
And sitting high; for lowly<sup>o</sup> she did hate:  
Lo underneath her scornfull feete, was layne  
A dreadfull Dragon with an hideous trayne,<sup>o</sup>  
And in her hand she held a mirrhour bright,<sup>8</sup>  
Wherein her face she often vewèd fayne,<sup>o</sup>  
And in her selfe-loved semblance tooke delight;  
For she was wondrous faire, as any living wight.

## 11

Of griesly<sup>o</sup> Pluto she the daughter was,  
And sad Proserpina the Queene of hell;  
Yet did she thinke her pearelesse worth to pas<sup>o</sup>  
That parentage, with pride so did she swell,  
And thundring Jove, that high in heaven doth dwell,  
And wield<sup>o</sup> the world, she claymèd for her syre,  
Or if that any else did Jove excell:  
For to the highest she did still aspyre,  
Or if ought<sup>o</sup> higher were then that, did it desyre.

## 12

And proud Lucifera men did her call,  
That made her selfe a Queene, and crownd to be,  
Yet rightfull kingdome she had none at all,  
Ne heritage of native soveraintie,  
But did usurpe with wrong and tyrannie  
Upon the scepter, which she now did hold:  
Ne ruld her Realmes with lawes, but pollicie,<sup>o</sup>  
And strong advizement of six wisards old,  
That with their counsels bad her kingdome did uphold.

### 13

Soone as the Elfin knight in presence came,  
And false Duessa seeming Lady faire,  
A gentle Husher,° Vanitie by name  
Made rowme, and passage for them did prepaire:  
So goodly° brought them to the lowest staire  
Of her high throne, where they on humble knee  
Making obeysance,° did the cause declare,  
Why they were come, her royall state to see,  
To prove° the wide report of her great Majestee.

### 14

With loftie eyes, halfe loth to looke so low,  
She thanked them in her disdainefull wise,°  
Ne other grace vouchsafed them to show  
Of Princesse worthy, scarce them bad° arise.  
Her Lordes and Ladies all this while devise°  
Themselves to setten forth to straungers sight:  
Some frounce° their curlèd haire in courtly guise,  
Some prancke° their ruffes, and others trimly dight°  
Their gay attire: each others greater pride does spight.°

### 15

Goodly they all that knight do entertaine,  
Right glad with him to have increast their crew:  
But to Duess' each one himselfe did paine  
All kindnesse and faire courtesie to shew;  
For in that court whylome° her well they knew:  
Yet the stout Faerie mongst the middest° crowd  
Thought all their glorie vaine in knightly vew,  
And that great Princesse too exceeding prowd,  
That to strange° knight no better countenance° allowd.

### 16

Suddein upriseth from her stately place  
The royall Dame, and for her coche doth call:  
All hurtlen<sup>o</sup> forth and she with Princely pace,  
As faire Aurora in her purple pall,<sup>1</sup>  
Out of the East the dawning day doth call:  
So forth she comes: her brightnesse brode<sup>o</sup> doth blaze;  
The heapes of people thronging in the hall,  
Do ride<sup>o</sup> each other, upon her to gaze:  
Her glorious glitterand<sup>o</sup> light doth all mens eyes amaze.

## 17

So forth she comes, and to her coche does clyme,  
Adornèd all with gold, and girlonds gay,  
That seemd as fresh as Flora<sup>o</sup> in her prime,  
And strove to match, in royall rich array,  
Great Junos golden chaire,<sup>o</sup> the which they say  
The Gods stand gazing on, when she does ride  
To Joves high house through heavens bras-pavèd way  
Drawne of faire Pecoocks, that excell in pride,  
And full of Argus eyes their tales dispredden wide.<sup>2</sup>

## 18

But this was drawne of six unequall beasts,  
On which her six sage Counsellours did ryde,  
Taught to obay their bestiall beheasts,<sup>o</sup>  
With like conditions to their kinds applyde:<sup>3</sup>  
Of which the first, that all the rest did guyde,  
Was sluggish Idlenesse the nourse of sin;  
Upon a slouthfull Asse he chose to ryde,  
Arayd in habit blacke, and amis thin,<sup>4</sup>  
Like to an holy Monck, the service to begin.

## 19

And in his hand his Portesse<sup>o</sup> still he bare,

That much was worne, but therein little red,  
For of devotion he had little care,  
Still drownd in sleepe, and most of his dayes ded;  
Scarse could he once uphold his heavie hed,  
To looken, whether it were night or day:  
May seeme the wayne<sup>o</sup> was very evill led,  
When such an one had guiding of the way,  
That knew not, whether right he went, or else astray.

## 20

From worldly cares himselfe he did esloyne,<sup>o</sup>  
And greatly shunnèd manly exercise,  
From every worke he challengèd essoyne,<sup>o</sup>  
For contemplation sake: yet otherwise,  
His life he led in lawlesse riotise;<sup>o</sup>  
By which he grew to grievous malady;  
For in his lustlesse<sup>o</sup> limbs through evill guise<sup>o</sup>  
A shaking fever raignd continually:  
Such one was Idlenesse, first of this company.

## 21

And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,  
Deformèd creature, on a filthie swyne,  
His belly was up-blowne with luxury,<sup>o</sup>  
And eke<sup>o</sup> with fatnesse swollen were his eyne,<sup>o</sup>  
And like a Crane his necke was long and fyne,<sup>5</sup>  
With which he swallowd up excessive feast,  
For want whereof poore people oft did pyne;<sup>o</sup>  
And all the way, most like a brutish beast,  
He spuèd up his gorge,<sup>6</sup> that<sup>o</sup> all did him deteast.

## 22

In greene vine leaves he was right fitly clad;  
For other clothes he could not weare for heat,

And on his head an yvie girland had,<sup>7</sup>  
From under which fast trickled downe the sweat:  
Still as he rode, he somewhat<sup>o</sup> still did eat,  
And in his hand did beare a bouzing<sup>o</sup> can,  
Of which he supt so oft, that on his seat  
His dronken corse<sup>o</sup> he scarce upholden can,  
In shape and life more like a monster, then<sup>o</sup> a man.

## 23

Unfit he was for any worldly thing,  
And eke unhable once<sup>o</sup> to stirre or go,<sup>o</sup>  
Not meet<sup>o</sup> to be of counsell to a king,  
Whose mind in meat and drinke was drownèd so,  
That from his friend he seldome knew his fo:  
Full of diseases was his carcas blew,  
And a dry dropsie through his flesh did flow,  
Which by misdiet daily greater grew:  
Such one was Gluttony, the second of that crew.

## 24

And next<sup>o</sup> to him rode lustfull Lechery,  
Upon a bearded Goat,<sup>8</sup> whose rugged<sup>o</sup> haire,  
And whally<sup>o</sup> eyes (the signe of gelosy,<sup>o</sup>)  
Was like the person selfe, whom he did beare:  
Who rough, and blacke, and filthy did appeare,  
Unseemely man to please faire Ladies eye;  
Yet he of Ladies oft was lovèd deare,  
When fairer faces were bid standen by:<sup>o</sup>  
O who does know the bent of womens fantasy?<sup>o</sup>

## 25

In a greene gowne he clothèd was full faire,  
Which underneath did hide his filthinesse,  
And in his hand a burning hart he bare,  
Full of vaine follies, and new fangleness:<sup>o</sup>

For he was false, and fraught with ficklenesse,  
And learnèd had to love with secret lookes,  
And well could daunce, and sing with ruefulnesse,<sup>o</sup>  
And fortunes tell, and read in loving bookes,<sup>9</sup>  
And thousand other wayes, to bait his fleshly hookes.

## 26

Inconstant man, that lovèd all he saw,  
And lusted after all, that he did love,  
Ne would his looser<sup>o</sup> life be tide to law,  
But joyd weake wemens hearts to tempt and prove<sup>o</sup>  
If from their loyall loves he might them move;  
Which lewdnesse fild him with reprochfull paine  
Of that fowle evill, which all men reprove,<sup>o</sup>  
That rots the marrow, and consumes the braine:  
Such one was Lecherie, the third of all this traine.

## 27

And greedy Avarice by him did ride,  
Upon a Camell loaden all with gold;<sup>1</sup>  
Two iron coffers hong on either side,  
With precious mettall full, as they might hold,  
And in his lap an heape of coine he told;<sup>o</sup>  
For of his wicked pelfe<sup>o</sup> his God he made,  
And unto hell him selfe for money sold;  
Accursèd usurie was all his trade,  
And right and wrong ylike in equall ballaunce waide.<sup>2</sup>

## 28

His life was nigh unto deaths doore yplast,<sup>3</sup>  
And thread-bare cote, and cobled<sup>o</sup> shoes he ware,  
Ne scarce good morsell all his life did tast,  
But both from backe and belly still did spare,  
To fill his bags, and richesse to compare;<sup>o</sup>

Yet chylde ne<sup>o</sup> kinsman living had he none  
To leave them to; but thorough<sup>o</sup> daily care  
To get, and nightly feare to lose his owne,  
He led a wretched life unto him selfe unknowne.

## 29

Most wretched wight, whom nothing might suffise,  
Whose greedy lust<sup>o</sup> did lacke in greatest store,<sup>o</sup>  
Whose need had end, but no end covetise,  
Whose wealth was want, whose plenty made him pore,  
Who had enough, yet wishèd ever more;  
A vile disease, and eke in foote and hand  
A grievous gout tormented him full sore,  
That well he could not touch, nor go,<sup>o</sup> nor stand:  
Such one was Avarice, the fourth of this faire band.

## 30

And next to him malicious Envie rode,  
Upon a ravenous wolfe, and still<sup>o</sup> did chaw  
Betweene his cankred<sup>o</sup> teeth a venemous tode,  
That all the poison ran about his chaw;<sup>o</sup>  
But inwardly he chawèd his owne maw<sup>o</sup>  
At neighbours wealth, that made him ever sad;  
For death it was, when any good he saw,  
And wept, that cause of weeping none he had,  
But when he heard of harme, he wexèd<sup>o</sup> wondrous glad.

## 31

All in a kirtle of discoloured say<sup>4</sup>  
He clothèd was, ypainted full of eyes;  
And in his bosome secretly there lay  
An hatefull Snake,<sup>5</sup> the which his taile uptyes  
In many folds, and mortall sting implies.<sup>o</sup>  
Still as he rode, he gnasht his teeth, to see  
Those heapes of gold with griple Covetyse,<sup>o</sup>



And grudgèd at the great felicitie  
Of proud Lucifera, and his owne companie.

### 32

He hated all good workes and vertuous deeds,  
And him no lesse, that any like did use,<sup>o</sup>  
And who with gracious bread the hungry feeds,  
His almes for want of faith he doth accuse;<sup>6</sup>  
So every good to bad he doth abuse:<sup>o</sup>  
And eke the verse of famous Poets witt  
He does backebite, and spightfull poison spues  
From leprous mouth on all, that ever writt:  
Such one vile Envie was, that fite in row did sitt.

### 33

And him beside rides fierce revenging Wrath,  
Upon a Lion, loth for to be led;  
And in his hand a burning brond<sup>o</sup> he hath,  
The which he brandisheth about his hed;  
His eyes did hurle forth sparkles fiery red,  
And starèd sterne on all, that him beheld,  
As ashes pale of hew and seeming ded;  
And on his dagger still<sup>o</sup> his hand he held,  
Trembling through hasty rage, when choler<sup>o</sup> in him sweld.

### 34

His ruffin<sup>o</sup> raiment all was staine with blood,  
Which he had spilt, and all to rags yrent,<sup>o</sup>  
Through unadvisèd rashnesse woxen wood,<sup>o</sup>  
For of his hands he had no government,<sup>o</sup>  
Ne cared for<sup>o</sup> bloud in his avengement:<sup>o</sup>  
But when the furious fit was overpast,  
His cruell facts<sup>o</sup> he often would repent;  
Yet wilfull man he never would forecast,  
How many mischieves should ensue his heedlesse hast.<sup>7</sup>

### 35

Full many mischiefes follow cruell Wrath;  
Abhorred bloudshed, and tumultuous strife,  
Unmanly murder, and unthrifty scath,<sup>8</sup>  
Bitter despight,<sup>o</sup> with rancours rusty knife,  
And fretting grieve the enemy of life;  
All these, and many evils moe<sup>o</sup> haunt ire,<sup>o</sup>  
The swelling Splene,<sup>9</sup> and Frenzy raging rife,  
The shaking Palsey, and Saint Fraunces fire:<sup>1</sup>  
Such one was Wrath, the last of this ungoldly tire.<sup>o</sup>

### 36

And after all, upon the wagon beame  
Rode Sathan,<sup>o</sup> with a smarting whip in hand,  
With which he forward lasht the laesie teme,  
So oft as Slowth<sup>o</sup> still in the mire did stand.  
Huge routs<sup>o</sup> of people did about them band,  
Showting for joy, and still before their way  
A foggy mist had covered all the land;  
And underneath their feet, all scattered lay  
Dead sculs and bones of men, whose life had gone astray.

### 37

So forth they marchen in this goodly sort,<sup>o</sup>  
To take the solace<sup>o</sup> of the open aire,  
And in fresh flowring fields themselves to sport;  
Emongst the rest rode that false Lady faire,  
The fowle Duessa, next unto the chaire  
Of proud Lucifera, as one of the traine:  
But that good knight would not so nigh repaire,<sup>o</sup>  
Him selfe estraunging from their joyaunce<sup>o</sup> vaine,  
Whose fellowship seemd far unfit for warlike swaine.<sup>o</sup>

### 38

So having solacèd themselves a space  
With pleasaunce of the breathing<sup>o</sup> fields yfed,  
They backe returnèd to the Princely Place;  
Whereas an errant knight in armes yclod,<sup>o</sup>  
And heathnish shield, wherein with letters red  
Was writ Sans joy, they new arrivèd find:  
Enflamed with fury and fiers hardy-hed,<sup>o</sup>  
He seemd in hart to harbour thoughts unkind,  
And nourish bloody vengeance in his bitter mind.

### 39

Who when the shamèd shield<sup>2</sup> of slaine Sans foy  
He spied with that same Faery champions page,<sup>o</sup>  
Bewraying<sup>o</sup> him, that did of late destroy  
His eldest brother, burning all with rage  
He to him leapt, and that same envious gage<sup>o</sup>  
Of victors glory from him snatcht away:  
But th'Elfin knight, which ought that warlike wage,<sup>3</sup>  
Disdaind to loose the meed<sup>o</sup> he wonne in fray,<sup>o</sup>  
And him rencountring<sup>o</sup> fierce, reskewd the noble pray.

### 40

Therewith they gan to hurtlen<sup>o</sup> greedily,  
Redoubted battaile ready to darrayne,<sup>o</sup>  
And clash their shields, and shake their swords on hy,  
That with their sturre<sup>o</sup> they troubled all the traine;  
Till that great Queene upon eternall paine  
Of high displeasure, that ensewen<sup>o</sup> might,  
Commaunded them their fury to refraine,  
And if that either to that shield had right,  
In equall lists<sup>4</sup> they should the morrow next it fight.

### 41

“Ah dearest Dame,” quoth then the Paynim<sup>o</sup> bold,

"Pardon the errour of enraged wight,<sup>o</sup>  
Whom great grieve made forget the raine to hold  
Of reasons rule, to see this recreant<sup>o</sup> knight,  
No knight, but treachour<sup>o</sup> full of false despight<sup>o</sup>  
And shamefull treason, who through guile<sup>o</sup> hath slayn  
The prowest<sup>o</sup> knight, that ever field did fight,  
Even stout Sans foy (O who can then refrayn?)  
Whose shield he beares renverst, the more to heape disdayn.

## 42

"And to augment the glorie of his guile,  
His<sup>o</sup> dearest love the faire Fidessa loe  
Is there possessèd of<sup>5</sup> the traytour vile,  
Who reapes the harvest sown by his foe,  
Sown in bloody field, and bought with woe:  
That<sup>o</sup> brothers hand shall dearely well requight  
So be, O Queene, you equall favour showe."<sup>6</sup>  
Him litle answerd th'angry Elfin knight:  
He never meant with words, but swords to plead his right.

## 43

But threw his gauntlet as a sacred pledge,  
His cause in combat the next day to try:  
So been they parted both, with harts on edge,  
To be avenged each on his enemy.  
That night they pas in joy and jollity,  
Feasting and courting both in bowre and hall;<sup>7</sup>  
For Steward was excessive Gluttonie,  
That of his plenty pourèd forth to all;  
Which doen,<sup>o</sup> the Chamberlain<sup>8</sup> Slowth did to rest them call.

## 44

Now whenas darkesome night had all displayd  
Her coleblacke curtein over brightest skye,

The warlike youthes on dayntie<sup>o</sup> couches layd,  
Did chace away sweet sleepe from sluggish eye,  
To muse on meanes of hopèd victory.  
But whenas Morpheus<sup>9</sup> had with leaden mace  
Arrested all that courtly company,  
Up-rose Duessa from her resting place,  
And to the Paynims lodging comes with silent pace.

#### 45

Whom broad awake she finds, in troublous fit,<sup>o</sup>  
Forecasting, how his foe he might annoy,<sup>o</sup>  
And him amoves<sup>o</sup> with speaches seeming fit:  
"Ah deare Sans joy, next dearest to Sans foy,  
Cause of my new griefe, cause of my new joy,  
Joyous, to see his ymage in mine eye,  
And greeved, to thinke how foe did him destroy,  
That was the flowre of grace and chevalrye;  
Lo his Fidessa to thy secret faith I flye."

#### 46

With gentle wordes he can<sup>o</sup> her fairely<sup>o</sup> greet,  
And bad say on the secret of her hart.  
Then sighing soft, "I learne that litle sweet  
Oft tempred is," quoth she, "with muchell<sup>o</sup> smart:  
For since my brest was launcht with lovely dart<sup>1</sup>  
Of deare Sansfoy, I never joyèd howre,<sup>o</sup>  
But in eternall woes my weaker<sup>o</sup> hart  
Have wasted, loving him with all my powre,  
And for his sake have felt full many an heavie stowre.<sup>o</sup>

#### 47

"At last when perils all I weenèd past,  
And hoped to reape the crop of all my care,  
Into new woes unweeting<sup>o</sup> I was cast,  
By this false faytor,<sup>o</sup> who unworthy ware<sup>o</sup>

His worthy shield, whom he with guilefull snare  
Entrappèd slew, and brought to shamefull grave.  
Me silly<sup>o</sup> maid away with him he bare,  
And ever since hath kept in darksome cave,  
For that I would not yeeld, that<sup>o</sup> to Sans foy I gave.

#### 48

"But since faire Sunne hath sperst<sup>o</sup> that lowring clowd,  
And to my loathèd life now shewes some light,  
Under your beames I will me safely shrowd,<sup>o</sup>  
From dreaded storme of his disdainfull spight:  
To you th'inheritance belongs by right  
Of brothers prayse, to you eke longs<sup>o</sup> his love.  
Let not his love, let not his restlesse spright<sup>o</sup>  
Be unrevenged, that calles to you above  
From wandring Stygian<sup>2</sup> shores, where it doth endlesse move."

#### 49

Thereto said he, "Faire Dame be nought dismaid  
For sorrowes past; their grieve is with them gone:  
Ne yet of present perill be affraid;  
For needlesse feare did never vantage<sup>o</sup> none,  
And helplesse hap it booteth not to mone.<sup>3</sup>  
Dead is Sans-foy, his vitall<sup>o</sup> paines are past,  
Though greevèd ghost for vengeance deepe do grone:  
He lives, that shall him pay his dewties<sup>o</sup> last,  
And guiltie Elfin bloud shall sacrifice in hast."

#### 50

"O but I feare the fickle freakes,"<sup>o</sup> quoth shee,  
"Of fortune false, and oddes of armes<sup>4</sup> in field."  
"Why dame," quoth he, "what oddes can ever bee,  
Where both do fight alike, to win or yield?"  
"Yea but," quoth she, "he beares a charmèd shield,

And eke enchanted armes, that none can perce,  
Ne none can wound the man, that does them wield."  
"Charmd or enchanted," answerd he then ferce,  
"I no whit reck,<sup>5</sup> ne you the like need to reherce."

## 51

"But faire Fidessa, sithens<sup>o</sup> fortunes guile,  
Or enimies powre hath now captivèd you,  
Returne from whence ye came, and rest a while  
Till morrow next, that I the Elfe subdew,  
And with Sans-foyes dead dowry you endew."<sup>6</sup>  
"Ay me, that is a double death," she said,  
"With proud foes sight my sorrow to renew:  
Where ever yet I be, my secrete aid  
Shall follow you." So passing forth she him obaid.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Lest you too readily believe accusations about her.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction" (Matthew 7:13).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A sundial measured the hours of the day.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Matthew 7:26–27: "A foolish man . . . built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unwelcome. In courtly love allegories, the porter is often called Bienvenu or Bel-accueil (Welcome).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Decorated with costly wall hangings.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Presence chamber, where a sovereign receives guests.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Phaëthon tried to drive the chariot of his father, Phoebus, the sun god, but set the skies on fire and fell.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pride and figures associated with her in Renaissance literature and art often hold a mirror, emblematic of self-love.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Each despises the others' greater pride.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Goddess of dawn, in her crimson robe ("purple pall").[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Peacocks, with their tails outspread ("dispredden wide"), are a symbol of pride. The hundred-eyed monster Argus was set by Juno to watch Io, one of Jupiter's loves. When Mercury killed Argus, his eyes were put in the peacock's tail feathers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, each bestial rider gave commands to his beast appropriate to its particular nature: the beasts and riders are suited to each other. This procession of the Seven Deadly Sins—of which Pride is queen—had a long tradition in medieval art and literature (see also Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*, scene 5, lines 272–328).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Idleness wears the gown ("habit") and hood or amice ("amis") of a monk. Traditionally, Idleness led the procession of the deadly sins.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thin. The crane is a common symbol of gluttony because its long, thin neck allows extended pleasure in swallowing.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Vomited up what he had swallowed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He resembles the drunken satyr Silenus, foster father of Bacchus, god of wine. Ivy is sacred to Bacchus.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Traditional symbol of lust.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Either manuals on the art of love (for example, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*) or more ordinary erotica.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: The camel as a symbol of avarice is based on Matthew 19:24: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, he made no distinction between right and wrong.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Avarice was proverbially associated with old age.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Robe or gown of many-colored cloth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Traditional attribute of envy.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Envy perversely discounts others' good works by attributing them to a selfish motive: the desire to compensate (in God's eyes) for lack of faith.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, he never would foresee ("forecast") the calamities his careless haste caused.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, inhuman murder and destructive harm.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In Renaissance physiology, the spleen was regarded as the seat of ill-humor.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Presumably Saint Anthony's fire: erysipelas, or the flaming itch; appropriate to Wrath.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Carrying a shield upside down, with the heraldic arms reversed, was a great insult (see stanza 41, line 9).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The knight (Redcrosse) who owned ("ought") that spoil of war ("warlike wage").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, in impartial formal combat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Possessed by (that is, sexually).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, if, O Queen, you show impartiality ("equal favour").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, feasting in hall, courting in bowers (inner apartments, bedrooms).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The court attendant in charge of the bedchambers.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Here, the god of sleep (see canto 1, stanza 36, n. 2).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, since my breast was pierced with the arrow of love.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, from wandering on the banks of the river Styx, in Hades.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, it does not help to moan over that which is beyond help ("helplesse hap").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Advantage of superior arms.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: I do not care at all.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, endow you with the legacy of the dead Sansfoy.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *avenge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misjudgment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *example*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forsaken*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misjudging*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *taken as companion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *adorned*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rank*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with difficulty*[Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *direct his steps*[Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *placed above*[Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *skill*[Return to reference °](#)
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- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *committed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *show*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *handsomely clad*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *tail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *make ready*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *arrange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thickest*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *favor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rush*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *climb up on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glittering*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *breviary, prayer book*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *withdraw*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *feeble* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *starve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *something*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drinking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fit*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *try*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *roughly mended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acquire*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *desire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plenty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *infected*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *waxed, grew*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *grasping Avarice*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *crowds*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *troubled mood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arouses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courteously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *for an hour*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unknowing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imposter* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *rites*[Return to reference](#) °
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## ***Canto 5***

*The faithfull knight in equall field  
subdewes his faithlesse foe,  
Whom false Duessa saves, and for  
his cure to hell does goe.*

### **1**

The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought,  
And is with child of<sup>o</sup> glorious great intent,  
Can never rest, untill it forth have brought  
Th'eternall brood of glorie excellent:<sup>7</sup>  
Such restlesse passion did all night torment  
The flaming corage<sup>o</sup> of that Faery knight,  
Devizing, how that doughtie<sup>o</sup> turnament  
With greatest honour he atchieven might;  
Still did he wake, and still did watch for dawning light.

### **2**

At last the golden Orientall gate  
Of greatest heaven gan to open faire,  
And Phoebus<sup>8</sup> fresh, as bridegrome to his mate,  
Came dauncing forth, shaking his deawie haire:  
And hurld his glistring beames through gloomy aire.  
Which when the wakeful Elfe perceived, streight way  
He started up, and did him selfe prepaire,  
In sun-bright armes, and battailous<sup>o</sup> array:  
For with that Pagan proud he combat will that day.

### **3**

And forth he comes into the commune hall,  
Where earely waite him many a gazing eye,  
To weet<sup>o</sup> what end to straunger knights may fall.<sup>o</sup>  
There many Minstrales maken melody,



To drive away the dull melancholy,  
And many Bardes, that to the trembling chord  
Can tune their timely<sup>o</sup> voyces cunningly,  
And many Chroniclers, that can record  
Old loves, and warres for ladies doen<sup>o</sup> by many a Lord.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4

Soone after comes the cruell Sarazin,<sup>o</sup>  
In woven maile all armèd warily,  
And sternly lookes at him, who not a pin  
Does care for looke of living creatures eye.  
They bring them wines of Greece and Araby,  
And daintie spices fetcht from furthest Ynd,<sup>o</sup>  
To kindle heat of courage privily:<sup>o</sup>  
And in the wine a solemne oth they bynd  
T'observe the sacred lawes of armes, that are assynd.

#### 5

At last forth comes that far renownèd Queene,  
With royall pomp and Princely majestie;  
She is ybrought unto a palèd<sup>o</sup> greene,  
And placèd under stately canapee,<sup>o</sup>  
The warlike feates of both those knights to see.  
On th'other side in all mens open view  
Duessa placèd is, and on a tree  
Sans-foy his shield is hangd with bloudy hew:  
Both those the lawrell girlonds<sup>1</sup> to the victor dew.

#### 6

A shrilling trompet sownded from on hye,  
And unto battaill bad<sup>o</sup> them selves addresse:  
Their shining shieldes about their wrestes<sup>o</sup> they tye,  
And burning blades about their heads do blesse,<sup>o</sup>  
The instruments of wrath and heavinesse:<sup>o</sup>  
With greedy force each other doth assayle,

And strike so fiercely, that they do impresse  
Deepe dinted furrowes in the battred mayle;  
The yron walles to ward their blowes are weake and fraile.<sup>2</sup>

## 7

The Sarazin was stout,<sup>o</sup> and wondrous strong,  
And heaped blowes like yron hammers great:  
For after bloud and vengeance he did long.  
The knight was fiers,<sup>o</sup> and full of youthly heat:  
And doubled strokes, like dreaded thunders threat:  
For all for prayse and honour he did fight.  
Both stricken strike, and beaten both do beat,  
That from their shields forth flyeth firie light,  
And helmets hewen deepe, shew marks of eithers might.

## 8

So th'one for wrong, the other strives for right:  
As when a Gryfon<sup>3</sup> seized<sup>o</sup> of his pray,  
A Dragon fiers encountreth in his flight,  
Through widest ayre making his ydle<sup>o</sup> way,  
That would his rightfull ravine<sup>o</sup> rend away:  
With hideous horror both together smight,  
And souce<sup>o</sup> so sore, that they the heavens affray:<sup>o</sup>  
The wise Southsayer<sup>o</sup> seeing so sad sight,  
Th'amazed vulgar tels of warres and mortall fight.

## 9

So th'one for wrong, the other strives for right,  
And each to deadly shame would drive his foe:  
The cruell steele so greedily doth bight  
In tender flesh, that streames of bloud down flow,  
With which the armes, that earst<sup>o</sup> so bright did show,  
Into a pure vermillion now are dyde:  
Great ruth<sup>o</sup> in all the gazers harts did grow,  
Seeing the gorèd woundes to gape so wyde,

That victory they dare not wish to either side.

## 10

At last the Paynim chaunst to cast his eye,  
His suddein<sup>o</sup> eye, flaming with wrathfull fyre,  
Upon his brothers shield, which hong thereby:  
Therewith redoubled was his raging yre,<sup>o</sup>  
And said, "Ah wretched sonne of wofull syre,  
Doest thou sit wayling by black Stygian lake<sup>o</sup>  
Whilest here thy shield is hangd for victors hyre,<sup>o</sup>  
And sluggish german<sup>4</sup> doest thy forces slake,<sup>o</sup>  
To after-send his foe, that him may overtake?

## 11

"Goe caytive<sup>o</sup> Elfe, him quickly overtake,  
And soone redeeme from his long wandring woe;  
Goe guiltie ghost, to him my message make,  
That I his shield have quit<sup>o</sup> from dying foe."  
Therewith upon his crest he stroke him so,  
That twise he reelèd, readie twise to fall;  
End of the doubtfull battell deemèd tho<sup>o</sup>  
The lookers on,<sup>5</sup> and lowd to him gan call  
The false Duessa, "Thine the shield, and I, and all."

## 12

Soone as the Faerie heard his Ladie speake,  
Out of his swowning dreame he gan awake,  
And quickning<sup>o</sup> faith, that earst was woxen<sup>o</sup> weake,  
The creeping deadly cold away did shake:  
Tho moved with wrath, and shame, and Ladies sake,<sup>o</sup>  
Of all attonce he cast<sup>o</sup> avengd to bee,  
And with so'exceeding furie at him strake,  
That forcèd him to stoupe upon his knee;  
Had he not stoupèd so, he should have cloven bee.

### 13

And to him said, "Goe now proud Miscreant,<sup>o</sup>  
Thy selfe thy message doe<sup>o</sup> to german deare,  
Alone he wandring thee too long doth want:  
Goe say, his foe thy shield with his doth beare."  
Therewith his heavie hand he high gan reare,  
Him to have slaine; when loe a darkesome clowd  
Upon him fell: he no where doth appeare,  
But vanisht is. The Elfe him cals alowd,  
But answer none receives: the darknes him does shrowd.<sup>6</sup>

### 14

In haste Duessa from her place arose,  
And to him running said, "O prowest<sup>o</sup> knight,  
That ever Ladie to her love did chose,  
Let now abate the terror of your might,  
And quench the flame of furious despight,<sup>o</sup>  
And bloudie vengeance; lo th'infernall powres  
Covering your foe with cloud of deadly night,  
Have borne him hence to Plutoes balefull bowres.<sup>o</sup>  
The conquest yours, I yours, the shield, and glory yours."

### 15

Not all so satisfide, with greedie eye  
He sought all round about, his thirstie blade  
To bath in bloud of faithlesse enemy;  
Who all that while lay hid in secret shade:  
He standes amazèd, how he thence should fade.  
At last the trumpets Triumph sound on hie,  
And running Heralds humble homage made,  
Greeting him goodly<sup>o</sup> with new victorie,  
And to him brought the shield, the cause of enmitie.

### 16

Wherewith he goeth to that soveraine Queene,  
And falling her before on lowly knee,  
To her makes present of his service seene;<sup>o</sup>  
Which she accepts, with thanks, and goodly gree,<sup>o</sup>  
Greatly advauncing<sup>o</sup> his gay chevalree.  
So marcheth home, and by her takes the knight,  
Whom all the people follow with great glee,  
Shouting, and clapping all their hands on hight,<sup>o</sup>  
That all the aire it fils, and flyes to heaven bright.

## 17

Home is he brought, and laid in sumptuous bed:  
Where many skilfull leaches<sup>o</sup> him abide,<sup>o</sup>  
To salve<sup>o</sup> his hurts, that yet still freshly bled.  
In wine and oyle they wash his woundès wide,  
And softly can embalme<sup>o</sup> on every side.  
And all the while, most heavenly melody  
About the bed sweet musicke did divide,<sup>o</sup>  
Him to beguile of<sup>o</sup> grieve and agony:  
And all the while Duessa wept full bitterly.

## 18

As when a wearie traveller that strays  
By muddy shore of broad seven-mouthèd Nile,  
Unweeting<sup>o</sup> of the perillous wandring wayes,  
Doth meet a cruell craftie Crocodile,  
Which in false grieve hyding his harmefull guile,  
Doth weepe full sore, and sheddeth tender teares:<sup>7</sup>  
The foolish man, that pitties all this while  
His mournefull plight, is swallowed up unwares,<sup>o</sup>  
Forgetfull of his owne, that mindes anothers cares.

## 19

So wept Duessa untill eventide,  
That shyning lampes in Joves high house were light:<sup>8</sup>

Then forth she rose, ne lenger<sup>o</sup> would abide,  
But comes unto the place, where th'Hethen knight  
In slombring swownd nigh voyd of vitall spright,<sup>9</sup>  
Lay covered with inchaunted cloud all day:  
Whom when she found, as she him left in plight,<sup>1</sup>  
To wayle his woefull case she would not stay,  
But to the easterne coast of heaven makes speedy way.

## 20

Where griesly<sup>o</sup> Night, with visage deadly sad,  
That Phoebus chearefull face durst never vew,  
And in a foule blacke pitchie mantle clad,  
She findes forth comming from her darkesome mew,<sup>o</sup>  
Where she all day did hide her hated hew.<sup>o</sup>  
Before the dore her yron charet<sup>o</sup> stood,  
Alreadie harnessèd for journey new;  
And cole blacke steedes yborne of hellish brood,  
That on their rustie bits did champ, as<sup>o</sup> they were wood.<sup>o</sup>

## 21

Who when she saw Duessa sunny bright,  
Adorned with gold and jewels shining cleare,<sup>o</sup>  
She greatly grew amazèd at the sight,  
And th'unacquainted<sup>o</sup> light began to feare:  
For never did such brightnesse there appeare,  
And would have backe retyred to her cave,  
Untill the witches speech she gan to heare,  
Saying, "Yet O thou dreaded Dame, I crave  
Abide,<sup>o</sup> till I have told the message, which I have."

## 22

She stayd, and foorth Duessa gan proceede,  
"O thou most auncient Grandmother of all,<sup>2</sup>  
More old then Jove, whom thou at first didst breede,

Or that great house of Gods caelestiall,  
Which wast begot in Daemogorgons hall,  
And sawst the secrets of the world unmade,<sup>o</sup>  
Why suffredst thou thy Nephewes<sup>o</sup> deare to fall  
With Elfin sword, most shamefully betrade?  
Lo where the stout Sansjoy doth sleepe in deadly shade.

## 23

"And him before, I saw with bitter eyes  
The bold Sansfoy shrink underneath his speare;  
And now the pray of fowles in field he lyes,  
Nor wayld of<sup>o</sup> friends, nor laid on groning beare,<sup>3</sup>  
That whylome<sup>o</sup> was to me too dearely deare.  
O what of Gods then boots it<sup>o</sup> to be borne,  
If old Aveugles sonnes so evill heare?<sup>4</sup>  
Or who shall not great Nightès children scorne,  
When two of three her Nephews are so fowle forlorne?<sup>o</sup>

## 24

"Up then, up dreary Dame, of darknesse Queene,  
Go gather up the reliques<sup>o</sup> of thy race,  
Or else goe them avenge, and let be seene,  
That dreaded Night in brightest day hath place,  
And can the children of faire light deface."<sup>o</sup>  
Her feeling speeches some compassion moved  
In hart, and chaunge in that great mothers face:  
Yet pittie in her hart was never proved<sup>o</sup>  
Till then: for evermore she hated, never loved.

## 25

And said, "Deare daughter rightly may I rew  
The fall of famous children borne of mee,  
And good successes, which their foes ensew:<sup>o</sup>  
But who can turne the streame of destinee,  
Or breake the chayne of strong necessitee,

Which fast is tyde to Joves eternall seat?<sup>5</sup>  
The sonnes of Day he favoureth, I see,  
And by my ruines thinkes to make them great:  
To make one great by others losse, is bad excheat.<sub>o</sub>

## 26

"Yet shall they not escape so freely all;  
For some shall pay the price of others guilt:  
And he the man that made Sansfoy to fall,  
Shall with his owne bloud price<sub>o</sub> that he hath spilt.  
But what art thou, that telst of Nephews kilt?"  
"I that do seeme not I, Duessa am,"  
Quoth she, "how ever now in garments gilt,  
And gorgeous gold arayd I to thee came:  
Duessa I, the daughter of Deceipt and Shame."

## 27

Then bowing downe her agèd backe, she kist  
The wicked witch, saying; "In that faire face  
The false resemblance of Deceipt, I wist<sub>o</sub>  
Did closely<sub>o</sub> lurke; yet so true-seeming grace  
It carried, that I scarce in darkesome place  
Could it discerne, though I the mother bee  
Of falshood, and root of Duessaes race.  
O welcome child, whom I have longd to see,  
And now have seene unwares.<sub>o</sub> Lo now I go with thee."

## 28

Then to her yron wagon she betakes,  
And with her beares the fowle welfavourd witch:  
Through mirkesome<sub>o</sub> aire her readie way she makes.  
Her twyfold Teme,<sup>6</sup> of which two blacke as pitch,  
And two were browne, yet each to each unlich,<sub>o</sub>  
Did softly swim away, ne ever stampe,  
Unlesse she chaunst their stubborne mouths to twitch;



Then foming tarre,<sup>o</sup> their bridles they would champe,  
And trampling the fine element,<sup>o</sup> would fiercely rampe.<sup>o</sup>

## 29

So well they sped, that they be come at length  
Unto the place, whereas the Paynim lay,  
Devoid of outward sense, and native strength,  
Coverd with charmed cloud from vew of day,  
And sight of men, since his late<sup>o</sup> luckelesse fray.  
His cruell wounds with cruddy<sup>o</sup> bloud congealed,  
They binden up so wisely,<sup>o</sup> as they may,  
And handle softly, till they can be healed:  
So lay him in her charet, close in night concealed.

## 30

And all the while she stood upon the ground,  
The wakefull dogs did never cease to bay,  
As giving warning of th'unwonted<sup>o</sup> sound,  
With which her yron wheelles did them affray,  
And her darke griesly<sup>o</sup> looke them much dismay;  
The messenger of death, the ghastly Owle  
With drearie shriekes did also her bewray;<sup>o</sup>  
And hungry Wolves continually did howle,  
At her abhorred face, so filthy and so fowle.

## 31

Thence turning backe in silence soft they stole,  
And brought the heavie corse<sup>o</sup> with easie pace  
To yawning gulfe of deepe Avernus hole.<sup>7</sup>  
By that same hole an entrance darke and bace<sup>o</sup>  
With smoake and sulphure hiding all the place,  
Descends to hell: there creature never past,  
That backe returnèd without heavenly grace;  
But dreadfull Furies, which their chaines have brast,<sup>o</sup>  
And damnèd sprights sent forth to make ill<sup>o</sup> men aghast.

### 32

By that same way the direfull dames doe drive  
Their mournefull charet, fild<sup>o</sup> with rusty blood,  
And downe to Plutoes house are come bilive:<sup>o</sup>  
Which passing through, on every side them stood  
The trembling ghosts with sad amazèd mood,  
Chattring their yron teeth, and staring wide  
With stonie eyes; and all the hellish brood  
Of feends infernall flockt on every side,  
To gaze on earthly wight, that with the Night durst ride.

### 33

They pas the bitter waves of Acheron,  
Where many soules sit wailing woefully,  
And come to fiery flood of Phlegeton,<sup>8</sup>  
Whereas the damnèd ghosts in torments fry,  
And with sharpe shrilling shriekes doe bootlesse<sup>o</sup> cry,  
Cursing high Jove, the which them thither sent.  
The house of endlesse paine is built thereby,  
In which ten thousand sorts of punishment  
The cursèd creatures doe eternally torment.

### 34

Before the threshold dreadfull Cerberus<sup>9</sup>  
His three deformèd heads did lay along,<sup>o</sup>  
Curlèd with thousand adders venemous,  
And lillèd<sup>o</sup> forth his bloudie flaming tong:  
At them he gan to reare his bristles strong,  
And felly gnarre,<sup>o</sup> untill dayes enemy  
Did him appease; then downe his taile he hong  
And suffered them to passen quietly:  
For she in hell and heaven had power equally.

### 35

There was Ixion turnèd on a wheele,  
For daring tempt the Queene of heaven to sin;  
And Sisyphus an huge round stone did reele<sup>o</sup>  
Against an hill, ne<sup>o</sup> might from labour lin;<sup>o</sup>  
There thirstie Tantalus hong by the chin;  
And Tityus fed a vulture on his maw;<sup>o</sup>  
Typhoeus joynts were stretchèd on a gin,<sup>o</sup>  
Theseus condemned to endlesse slouth<sup>o</sup> by law,  
And fifty sisters water in leake vessels draw.<sup>1</sup>

### 36

They all beholding worldly<sup>o</sup> wights in place,<sup>o</sup>  
Leave off their worke, unmindfull of their smart,<sup>o</sup>  
To gaze on them; who forth by them doe pace,  
Till they be come unto the furthest part:  
Where was a Cave ywrought by wondrous art,  
Deepe, darke, uneasie,<sup>o</sup> dolefull, comfortlesse,  
In which sad Aesculapius<sup>o</sup> farre a part  
Emprisond was in chaines remedillesse,<sup>o</sup>  
For that Hippolytus rent corse<sup>o</sup> he did redresse.<sup>o</sup>

### 37

Hippolytus a jolly<sup>o</sup> huntsman was,  
That wont<sup>o</sup> in charet chace the foming Bore;  
He all his Peeres in beautie did surpas,  
But Ladies love as losse of time forbore:  
His wanton stepdame<sup>2</sup> lovèd him the more,  
But when she saw her offred sweets refused  
Her love she turnd to hate, and him before  
His father fierce of treason false accused,  
And with her gealous<sup>o</sup> termes his open eares abused.

### 38

Who all in rage his Sea-god syre<sup>o</sup> besought,  
Some cursèd vengeance on his sonne to cast:

From surging gulf two monsters straight<sup>o</sup> were brought,  
With dread whereof his chasing steedes aghast,  
Both charet swift and huntsman overcast.  
His goodly corps on ragged cliffs yrent,<sup>o</sup>  
Was quite dismembred, and his members chast  
Scattered on every mountaine, as he went,  
That of Hippolytus was left no monument.<sup>3</sup>

### 39

His cruell stepdame seeing what was donne,  
Her wicked dayes with wretched knife did end,  
In death avowing th'innocence of her sonne.  
Which hearing his rash Syre, began to rend  
His haire, and hastie tongue, that did offend:  
Tho<sup>o</sup> gathering up the relicks of his smart<sup>4</sup>  
By Dianes meanes, who was Hippolyts frend,  
Them brought to Aesculape, that by his art  
Did heale them all againe, and joynèd every part.

### 40

Such wondrous science in mans wit to raine  
When Jove avizd,<sup>o</sup> that could the dead revive,  
And fates expired<sup>5</sup> could renew againe,  
Of endlesse life he might him not deprive,  
But unto hell did thrust him downe alive,  
With flashing thunderbolt ywounded sore:  
Where long remaining, he did alwaies strive  
Himselfe with salves to health for to restore,  
And slake the heavenly fire, that raged evermore.

### 41

There auncient Night arriving, did alight  
From her nigh wearie waine,<sup>6</sup> and in her armes  
To Aesculapius brought the wounded knight:

Whom having softly disarayd of armes,  
Tho gan to him discover<sup>o</sup> all his harmes,  
Beseeching him with prayer, and with praise,  
If either salves, or oyles, or herbes, or charmes  
A fordonne<sup>o</sup> wight from dore of death mote raise,  
He would at her request prolong her nephews daies.

## 42

"Ah Dame," quoth he, "thou temptest me in vaine,  
To dare the thing, which daily yet I rew,  
And the old cause of my continued paine  
With like attempt to like end to renew.  
Is not enough, that thrust from heaven dew<sup>z</sup>  
Here endlesse penance for one fault I pay,  
But that redoubled crime with vengeance new  
Thou biddest me to eeke?<sup>o</sup> Can Night defray<sup>o</sup>  
The wrath of thundring Jove, that rules both night and day?"

## 43

"Not so," quoth she; "but sith<sup>o</sup> that heavens king  
From hope of heaven hath thee excluded quight,  
Why fearest thou, that canst not hope for thing,<sup>o</sup>  
And fearest not, that more thee hurten might,  
Now in the powre of everlasting Night?  
Goe to then, O thou farre renownèd sonne  
Of great Apollo, shew thy famous might  
In medicine, that else<sup>o</sup> hath to thee wonne  
Great paines, and greater praise, both never to be donne."<sup>o</sup>

## 44

Her words prevaild: And then the learnèd leach<sup>o</sup>  
His cunning hand gan to his wounds to lay,  
And all things else, the which his art did teach:  
Which having seene, from thence arose away  
The mother of dread darknesse, and let stay

Aveugles sonne there in the leaches cure,<sup>o</sup>  
And backe returning tooke her wonted<sup>o</sup> way,  
To runne her timely race,<sup>o</sup> whilst Phoebus pure  
In westerne waves his wearie wagon did recure.<sup>o</sup>

#### 45

The false Duesse leaving noyous<sup>o</sup> Night,  
Returnd to stately pallace of dame Pride;  
Where when she came, she found the Faery knight  
Departed thence, albe<sup>o</sup> his woundès wide  
Not throughly heald, unreadie were to ride.  
Good cause he had to hasten thence away;  
For on a day his wary Dwarfe had spide,  
Where in a dongeon deepe huge numbers lay  
Of caytive<sup>o</sup> wretched thrals,<sup>o</sup> that waylèd night and day.

#### 46

A ruefull sight, as could be seene with eie;  
Of whom he learnèd had in secret wise  
The hidden cause of their captivitie,  
How mortgaging their lives to Covetise,  
Through wastfull<sup>o</sup> Pride, and wanton Riotise,  
They were by law of that proud Tyrannesse<sup>8</sup>  
Provokt with Wrath, and Envies false surmise,  
Condemnèd to that Dongeon mercillesse,  
Where they should live in woe, and die in wretchednesse.

#### 47

There was that great proud king of Babylon<sup>9</sup>  
That would compell all nations to adore,  
And him as onely God to call upon,  
Till through celestiall doome<sup>o</sup> throwne out of dore,  
Into an Oxe he was transformed of yore:  
There also was king Croesus,<sup>1</sup> that enhaunst<sup>o</sup>

His heart too high through his great riches store;  
And proud Antiochus,<sup>2</sup> the which advaunst  
His cursèd hand gainst God, and on his altars daunst.<sup>o</sup>

#### 48

And them long time before, great Nimrod was,  
That first the world with sword and fire warrayd;<sup>o</sup>  
And after him old Ninus<sup>3</sup> farre did pas<sup>o</sup>  
In princely pompe, of<sup>o</sup> all the world obayd;  
There also was that mightie Monarch layd  
Low under all, yet above all in pride,  
That name of native<sup>o</sup> syre did fowle upbrayd,  
And would as Ammons sonne be magnifide,  
Till scornd of God and man a shamefull death he dide.<sup>4</sup>

#### 49

All these together in one heape were throwne,  
Like carkases of beasts in butchers stall.  
And in another corner wide<sup>o</sup> were strowne  
The antique ruines of the Romaines fall:  
Great Romulus the Grandsyre of them all,  
Proud Tarquin, and too lordly Lentulus,  
Stout Scipio, and stubbornne Hanniball,  
Ambitious Sylla, and sterne Marius,  
High Caesar, great Pompey, and fierce Antonius.<sup>5</sup>

#### 50

Amongst these mighty men were wemen mixt,  
Proud wemen, vaine, forgetfull of their yoke:<sup>o</sup>  
The bold Semiramis,<sup>o</sup> whose sides transfixt  
With sonnes owne blade, her fowle reproches spoke;  
Faire Sthenoboea,<sup>6</sup> that her selfe did choke  
With wilfull cord, for wanting<sup>o</sup> of her will;  
High minded Cleopatra, that with stroke

Of Aspes sting her selfe did stoutly<sup>o</sup> kill:  
And thousands moe the like, that did that dongeon fill.

## 51

Besides the endlesse routs<sup>o</sup> of wretched thralles,  
Which thither were assembled day by day,  
From all the world after their wofull falles,  
Through wicked pride, and wasted wealthes decay.  
But most of all, which in that Dongeon lay  
Fell from high Princes courts, or Ladies bowres,  
Where they in idle pompe, or wanton play,  
Consumèd had their goods, and thriftlesse howres,  
And lastly throwne themselves into these heavy stowres.<sup>o</sup>

## 52

Whose case wheneas the carefull<sup>o</sup> Dwarfe had tould,  
And made ensample of their mournfull sight  
Unto his maister, he no lenger would  
There dwell in perill of like painefull plight,  
But early rose, and ere that dawning light  
Discovered had the world to heaven wyde,  
He by a privie Posterne<sup>o</sup> tooke his flight,  
That of no envious eyes he mote be spyde:  
For doubtlesse death ensewd, if any him descryde.<sup>o</sup>

## 53

Scarse could he footing find in that fowle way,  
For many corses, like a great Lay-stall<sup>o</sup>  
Of mured men which therein strowèd lay,  
Without remorse, or decent funerall:  
Which all through that great Princesse pride did fall  
And came to shamefull end. And them beside  
Forth ryding underneath the castell wall,  
A donghill of dead carkases he spide,  
The dreadfull spectacle of that sad house of Pride.<sup>z</sup>



## Endnotes

- Note 7: That good must be manifested in action, not in mere intent, is an important Renaissance commonplace.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the sun. See Psalm 19:4–5: “In them hath he set a Tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Minstrels play the music on their instruments; bards sing the words; chroniclers—historians, epic poets—write of love and war.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Laurel wreaths were awarded to the victor of a joust.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, their armor is too frail to withstand such blows.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A legendary monster, half-eagle, half-lion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Kinsman; here, brother.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the onlookers then thought this would end the battle, heretofore in doubt.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The device of a god rescuing a hero in danger by hiding him in a cloud has parallels in *Iliad* 3.380, *Aeneid* 5.810–12, and *Gerusalemme liberata* 7.44–45.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Medieval bestiaries popularized the legend of the hypocritical crocodile’s tears.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, when (“that”) the stars came out.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nearly (“nigh”) devoid of life.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, in the same desperate state in which she had left him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: By tradition, Night was eldest of the gods, existing before the world was formed and the Olympian gods were begotten in the hall of Demogorgon (Chaos).[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Bier attended by mourners (thus “groning”).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, are so badly thought of. Aveugle (Blind) is the son of Night and father of Sansfoy, Sansjoy, and Sansloy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The golden chain that binds the entire universe. The image goes back as far as Homer (*Iliad* 8.18–27).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Twofold team of horses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In classical mythology Avernus is hell, where Pluto (stanza 32) reigns.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Acheron and Phlegeton are rivers in hell.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The three-headed dog that guards hell. Stanzas 31–35 recall Aeneas’s descent into hell (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.200, 239–40).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:
 

Ixion was being punished for attempting to seduce Juno; Sisyphus, for refusing to pray to the gods; Tantalus, for stealing the gods’ nectar; Tityus, for his attempted assault on Apollo’s mother, Leto; the monster Typhoeus, for creating destructive winds; Theseus, for stealing Persephone from Hades; and forty-nine of the fifty daughters of King Danaus, for having killed their husbands on their wedding night. Tantalus stood chin-deep in water that receded whenever he tried to drink—hence he is “thirstie.” Ovid, Virgil, and Homer are Spenser’s sources here.

[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Phaedra, the wife of his father, Theseus.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, no trace of identity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, his son’s remains, which caused his grief.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The completed term of life as fixed by the Fates.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the horses of Night’s chariot (“waine”) are nearly exhausted.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The proper (“dew”) place for a god.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lucifera. The noble sinners named in stanzas 47–50 exemplify a theme common in Renaissance morality, the fall of princes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3–4).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: King of Lydia, famous for his riches.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: King of Syria, who desecrated the Jewish temple of Jerusalem (1 Maccabees 1:20–24).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In classical mythology, Ninus was founder of Nineveh, archetype of the wicked city (see the book of Jonah). Nimrod, identified as the first tyrant, caused the Tower of Babel to be built in defiance of God (Genesis 10:9–10, 11:1–9).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The reference is to Alexander the Great, whose “shameful death” came ten days after he fell ill at a drinking party. The son of Philip II of Macedon, Alexander was occasionally worshipped as the son of Jupiter Ammon.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Romulus was the founder of Rome; Tarquin, a Roman tyrant; Lentulus, a conspirator with Catiline to overthrow the Republic; Scipio, a Roman general, conqueror of Carthage; Hannibal, a Carthaginian general; Sulla, a Roman civil war general; Marius, Sulla’s rival. The figures in the final line are Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great, and Mark Antony.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Queen of King Proteus of Argos; she lusted after her brother-in-law Bellerophon.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Named in the argument of canto 4, but in the poem itself, only now, after we have been shown what the name means.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *pregnant with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heart; mind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worthy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warlike* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *befall* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *measured* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *done* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Saracen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *India* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *within* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fenced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *canopy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bade* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrists* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brandish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bold* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high-spirited* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in possession* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *casual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plunder* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strike* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *startle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soothsayer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at first* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anger* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the river Styx* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slacken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servile* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rescued* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *life-restoring* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *grown*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *determined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misbeliever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bravest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Hades*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *respectfully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extolling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aloud*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctors* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anoint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carefully did anoint*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *descanted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *divert from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaware*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpectedly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grim, horrible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *den*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shape; color*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chariot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brightly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfamiliar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before it was made*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grandsons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamented by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is it worth*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *wretchedly lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remnants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *known*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exchange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpectedly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *murky; dense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unlike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black froth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the air* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rear up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clotted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skillfully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unusual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horrid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *low*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burst*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defiled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly; alive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without avail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at full length*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lolloped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *savagely snarl*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roll*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *liver*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rack*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *sloth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mortal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking ease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *god of medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beyond any remedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *body* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gallant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *used to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arousing jealousy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Poseidon (Neptune)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discovered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *already*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her nightly journey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refresh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *captive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slaves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *causing desolation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *exalted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *danced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ravaged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lying apart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *duty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wife of Ninus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bravely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disasters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret back door*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *descried, observed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burial place; rubbish heap*[Return to reference](#) °



## **Canto 6**

*From lawlesse lust by wondrous grace  
fayre Una is releast:  
Whom salvage<sup>o</sup> nation does adore,  
and learnes her wise beheast.<sup>o</sup>*

### **1**

As when a ship, that flyes faire under saile,  
An hidden rocke escapèd hath unwares,<sup>o</sup>  
That lay in waite her wrack for to bewaile,<sup>8</sup>  
The Marriner yet halfe amazèd stares  
At perill past, and yet in doubt ne dares  
To joy at his foole-happie oversight:<sup>o</sup>  
So doubly is distrest twixt joy and cares  
The dreadlesse<sup>o</sup> courage of this Elfin knight,  
Having escapt so sad ensamples in his sight.

### **2**

Yet sad he was that his too hastie speed  
The faire Duesse' had forst him leave behind;  
And yet more sad, that Una his deare dreed<sup>o</sup>  
Her truth had staine with treason so unkind;<sup>o</sup>  
Yet crime in her could never creature find,  
But for his love, and for her owne selfe sake,  
She wandred had from one to other Ynd,<sup>9</sup>  
Him for to seeke, ne ever would forsake,  
Till her unwares the fierce Sansloy did overtake.

### **3**

Who after Archimagoes fowle defeat,  
Led her away into a forrest wilde,  
And turning wrathfull fire to lustfull heat,  
With beastly sin thought her to have defilde,

And made the vassall of his pleasures vilde.°  
Yet first he cast by treatie,° and by traynes,°  
Her to perswade, that stubborne fort to yilde:  
For greater conquest of hard love he gaynes,  
That workes it to his will, then° he that it constraines.°

#### 4

With fawning wordes he courted her a while,  
And looking lovely,° and oft sighing sore,  
Her constant hart did tempt with diverse guile:  
But wordes, and lookes, and sighes she did abhore,  
As rocke of Diamond stedfast evermore.<sup>1</sup>  
Yet for to feed his fyrie lustfull eye,  
He snatcht the vele, that hong her face before;  
Then gan her beautie shine, as brightest skye,  
And burnt his beastly hart t'efforce° her chastitye.

#### 5

So when he saw his flatt'ring arts to fayle,  
And subtile engines bet from batteree,<sup>2</sup>  
With greedy force he gan the fort assayle,  
Whereof he weend° possessèd soone to bee,  
And win rich spoile of ransackt chastetee.  
Ah heavens, that do this hideous act behold,  
And heavenly virgin thus outragèd see,  
How can ye vengeance just so long withhold,  
And hurle not flashing flames upon that Paynim bold?

#### 6

The pitteous maiden careful° comfortlesse,  
Does throw out thrilling° shriekes, and shrieking cries,  
The last vaine helpe of womens great distresse,  
And with loud plaints importuneth the skyes,  
That molten starres do drop like weeping eyes;  
And Phoebus flying so most shamefull sight,

His blushing face in foggy cloud implies,<sup>o</sup>  
And hides for shame. What wit of mortall wight  
Can now devise to quit a thrall<sup>o</sup> from such a plight?

## 7

Eternall providence exceeding<sup>o</sup> thought,  
Where none appears can make her selfe a way:  
A wondrous way it for this Lady wrought,  
From Lyons clawes to pluck the gripèd<sup>o</sup> pray.  
Her shrill outcryes and shriekes so loud did bray,  
That all the woodes and forestes did resownd;  
A troupe of Faunes and Satyres<sup>3</sup> far away  
Within the wood were dauncing in a rownd,  
Whiles old Sylvanus<sup>4</sup> slept in shady arber sownd.

## 8

Who when they heard that pitteous strained voice,  
In hast forsooke their rurall meriment,  
And ran towards the far rebownded<sup>o</sup> noyce,  
To weet,<sup>o</sup> what wight so loudly did lament.  
Unto the place they come incontinent:<sup>o</sup>  
Whom when the raging Sarazin espide,  
A rude, misshapen, monstrous rablement,  
Whose like he never saw, he durst not bide,  
But got his ready steed, and fast away gan ride.

## 9

The wyld woodgods arrivèd in the place,  
There find the virgin dolefull desolate,  
With ruffled rayments, and faire blubbred<sup>o</sup> face,  
As her outrageous foe had left her late,<sup>o</sup>  
And trembling yet through feare of former hate;  
All stand amazèd at so uncouth<sup>o</sup> sight,  
And gin to pittie her unhappie state,  
All stand astonied<sup>o</sup> at her beautie bright,

In their rude<sup>o</sup> eyes unworthie<sup>o</sup> of so wofull plight.

## 10

She more amazed, in double dread doth dwell;  
And every tender part for feare does shake:  
As when a greedie Wolfe through hunger fell<sup>o</sup>  
A seely<sup>o</sup> Lambe farre from the flocke does take,  
Of whom he meanes his bloudie feast to make,  
A Lyon spyes fast running towards him,  
The innocent pray in hast he does forsake,  
Which quit<sup>o</sup> from death yet quakes in every lim  
With chaunge of feare, to see the Lyon looke so grim.<sup>o</sup>

## 11

Such fearefull fit assaid<sup>o</sup> her trembling hart,  
Ne word to speake, ne joynt to move she had:  
The salvage<sup>o</sup> nation feeles her secret smart,  
And read her sorrow in her count'nance sad;  
Their frowning forheads with rough hornes yclad,  
And rusticke horror<sup>o</sup> all a side doe lay,  
And gently grenning,<sup>o</sup> shew a semblance<sup>o</sup> glad  
To comfort her, and feare to put away,  
Their backward bent knees teach her humbly to obey.<sup>5</sup>

## 12

The doubtfull Damzell dare not yet commit  
Her single person to their barbarous truth,<sup>6</sup>  
But still twixt feare and hope amazd does sit,  
Late learnd<sup>o</sup> what harme to hastie trust ensu'th:  
They in compassion of her tender youth,  
And wonder of her beautie soveraine,<sup>o</sup>  
Are wonne with pittie and unwonted ruth,<sup>o</sup>  
And all prostrate upon the lowly plaine,  
Do kisse her feete, and fawne on her with count'nance faine.<sup>o</sup>

### 13

Their harts she ghesseeth by their humble guise,<sup>o</sup>  
And yieldees her to extremitie of time;<sup>7</sup>  
So from the ground she fearelesse doth arise,  
And walketh forth without suspect<sup>o</sup> of crime:  
They all as glad, as birdes of joyous Prime,<sup>o</sup>  
Thence lead her forth, about her dauncing round,  
Shouting, and singing all a shepheards ryme,  
And with greene braunches strowing all the ground,  
Do worship her, as Queene, with olive girlond cround.

### 14

And all the way their merry pipes they sound,  
That all the woods with doubled Eccho ring,  
And with their hornèd feet do weare the ground,  
Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant Spring.  
So towards old Sylvanus they her bring;  
Who with the noyse awakèd, commeth out,  
To weet<sup>o</sup> the cause, his weake steps governing,  
And agèd limbs on Cypresse stadle<sup>o</sup> stout,  
And with an yvie twyne his wast is girt about.

### 15

Far off he wonders, what them makes so glad,  
Or Bacchus merry fruit they did invent,<sup>8</sup>  
Or Cybeles franticke rites<sup>9</sup> have made them mad;  
They drawing nigh, unto their God present  
That flowre of faith and beautie excellent.  
The God himselfe vewing that mirrhour rare,<sup>1</sup>  
Stood long amazd, and burnt in his intent;<sup>2</sup>  
His owne faire Dryope now he thinkes not faire,  
And Pholoe fowle, when her to this he doth compaire.<sup>3</sup>

### 16

The woodborne people fall before her flat,  
And worship her as Goddesses of the wood;  
And old Sylvanus selfe bethinkèd not,<sup>o</sup> what  
To thinke of wight so faire, but gazing stood,  
In doubt to deeme her borne of earthly brood;  
Sometimes Dame Venus selfe he seemes to see,  
But Venus never had so sober mood;  
Sometimes Diana he her takes to bee,  
But misseth bow, and shaftes, and buskins<sup>o</sup> to her knee.

### 17

By view of her he ginneth to revive  
His ancient love, and dearest Cyparisse,<sup>4</sup>  
And calles to mind his pourtraiture alive,<sup>5</sup>  
How faire he was, and yet not faire to<sup>o</sup> this,  
And how he slew with glauncing dart amisse  
A gentle Hynd, the which the lovely boy  
Did love as life, above all worldly blisse;  
For grieve whereof the lad n'ould<sup>o</sup> after joy,  
But pynd away in anguish and selfe-wild annoy.<sup>o</sup>

### 18

The wooddy Nymphes, faire Hamadryades<sup>6</sup>  
Her to behold do thither runne apace,  
And all the troupe of light-foot Naiades,<sup>o</sup>  
Flocke all about to see her lovely face:  
But when they viewèd have her heavenly grace,  
They envie her in their malicious mind,  
And fly away for feare of fowle disgrace:  
But all the Satyres scorne their woody kind,<sup>o</sup>  
And henceforth nothing faire, but her on earth they find.

### 19

Glad of such lucke, the luckelesse lucky maid,

Did her content to please their feeble eyes,  
And long time with that salvage people staid,  
To gather breath in many miseries.  
During which time her gentle wit she plyes,  
To teach them truth, which worshipt her in vaine,  
And made her th'Image of Idolatryes;<sup>7</sup>  
But when their bootlesse<sup>o</sup> zeale she did restraints  
From her own worship, they her Asse would worship fayn.<sup>o</sup>

## 20

It fortunèd a noble warlike knight  
By just occasion to that forrest came,  
To seeke his kindred, and the lignage right,<sup>o</sup>  
From whence he took his well deservèd name:  
He had in armes abroad wonne muchell<sup>o</sup> fame,  
And fild far landes with glorie of his might,  
Plaine, faithfull, true, and enemy of shame,  
And ever loved to fight for Ladies right,  
But in vaine glorious frayes<sup>o</sup> he litle did delight.

## 21

A Satyres sonne yborne in forrest wyld,  
By straunge adventure as it did betyde,<sup>o</sup>  
And there begotten of a Lady myld,  
Faire Thyamis the daughter of Labryde,<sup>8</sup>  
That was in sacred bands of wedlocke tyde  
To Therion,<sup>9</sup> a loose unruly swayne;  
Who had more joy to raunge the forrest wyde,  
And chase the salvage beast with busie payne,<sup>o</sup>  
Then serve his Ladies love, and wast<sup>o</sup> in pleasures vayne.

## 22

The forlorne mayd did with loves longing burne,  
And could not lacke<sup>o</sup> her lovers company,

But to the wood she goes, to serve her turne,  
And seeke her spouse, that from her still<sup>o</sup> does fly,  
And followes other game and venery:<sup>1</sup>  
A Satyre chaunst her wandring for to find,  
And kindling coles of lust in brutish eye,  
The loyall links of wedlocke did unbind,  
And made her person thrall unto his beastly kind.

## 23

So long in secret cabin there he held  
Her captive to his sensuall desire,  
Till that with timely<sup>o</sup> fruit her belly sweld,  
And bore a boy unto that salvage sire:  
Then home he suffred her for to retire,<sup>o</sup>  
For ransome leaving him the late borne childe;  
Whom till to ryper yeares he gan aspire,<sup>o</sup>  
He noursled<sup>o</sup> up in life and manners wilde,  
Emongst wild beasts and woods, from lawes of men exile.

## 24

For all he taught the tender ymp,<sup>o</sup> was but  
To banish cowardize and bastard<sup>o</sup> feare;  
His trembling hand he would him force to put  
Upon the Lyon and the rugged Beare,  
And from the she Beares teats her whelps to teare;  
And eke<sup>o</sup> wyld roring Buls he would him make  
To tame, and ryde their backes not made to beare;  
And the Robuckes<sup>2</sup> in flight to overtake,  
That every beast for feare of him did fly and quake.

## 25

Thereby so fearelesse, and so fell<sup>o</sup> he grew,  
That his owne sire and maister of his guise<sup>o</sup>  
Did often tremble at his horrid vew,<sup>o</sup>  
And oft for dread of hurt would him advise,



The angry beasts not rashly to despise,  
Nor too much to provoke; for he would learne<sup>o</sup>  
The Lyon stoup to him in lowly wise,  
(A lesson hard) and make the Libbard<sup>o</sup> sterne  
Leave roaring, when in rage he for revenge did earne.<sup>o</sup>

## 26

And for to make his powre approvèd<sup>o</sup> more,  
Wyld beasts in yron yokes he would compell;  
The spotted Panther, and the tuskèd Bore,  
The Pardale<sup>o</sup> swift, and the Tigre cruell;  
The Antelope, and Wolfe both fierce and fell;<sup>o</sup>  
And them constraine in equall teme<sup>3</sup> to draw.  
Such joy he had, their stubborne harts to quell,  
And sturdie courage tame with dreadfull aw,  
That his beheast they fearèd, as a tyrans law.

## 27

His loving mother came upon a day  
Unto the woods, to see her little sonne;  
And chaunst unwares<sup>o</sup> to meet him in the way,  
After his sportes, and cruell pastime donne,  
When after him a Lyonesse did runne,  
That roaring all with rage, did lowd requere<sup>o</sup>  
Her children deare, whom he away had wonne:<sup>o</sup>  
The Lyon whelpes she saw how he did beare,  
And lull in rugged armes, withouten childish feare.

## 28

The fearefull Dame all quakèd at the sight,  
And turning backe, gan fast to fly away,  
Untill with love revokt<sup>o</sup> from vaine affright,  
She hardly<sup>o</sup> yet perswaded was to stay,  
And then to him these womanish words gan say;  
"Ah Satyrane,<sup>4</sup> my dearling, and my joy,

For love of me leave off this dreadfull play;  
To dally thus with death, is no fit toy,  
Go find some other play-fellowes, mine own sweet boy."

## 29

In these and like delights of bloudy game  
He traynèd was, till ryper yeares he raught,o  
And there abode, whilst any beast of name  
Walkt in that forest, whom he had not taught  
To feare his force: and then his courage haughto  
Desird of forreine foemen to be knowne;  
And far abroad for straunge adventures sought:  
In which his might was never overthrowne,  
But through all Faery lond his famous worth was blown.o

## 30

Yet evermore it was his manner faire,  
After long labours and adventures spent,  
Unto those native woods for to repaire,o  
To see his sire and ofspringo auncient.  
And now he thither came for like intent;  
Where he unwares the fairest Una found,  
Straunge Lady, in so straunge habiliment,o  
Teaching the Satyres, which her sat around,  
Trew sacred lore, which from her sweet lips did redound.o

## 31

He wondred at her wisdom heavenly rare,  
Whose like in womens wit he never knew;  
And when her curteous deeds he did compare,  
Gan her admire, and her sad sorrowes rew,o  
Blaming of Fortune, which such troubles threw,  
And joyd to make prooffe of her crueltie  
On gentle Dame, so hurtlesse,o and so trew:  
Thenceforth he kept her goodly company,

And learnd her discipline<sup>o</sup> of faith and veritie.

### 32

But she all vowd<sup>o</sup> unto the Redcrosse knight,  
His wandring perill closely<sup>o</sup> did lament,  
Ne in this new acquaintaunce could delight,  
But her deare<sup>o</sup> heart with anguish did torment,  
And all her wit in secret counsels spent,  
How to escape. At last in privie wise<sup>o</sup>  
To Satyrane she shewèd her intent;  
Who glad to gain such favour, gan devise,  
How with that pensive Maid he best might thence arise.<sup>o</sup>

### 33

So on a day when Satyres all were gone,  
To do their service to Sylvanus old,  
The gentle virgin left behind alone  
He led away with courage stout and bold.  
Too late it was, to Satyres to be told,  
Or ever hope recover her againe:  
In vaine he seekes that having cannot hold.  
So fast he carried her with carefull paine,<sup>o</sup>  
That they the woods are past, and come now to the plaine.

### 34

The better part now of the lingring day,  
They traveild had, when as they farre espide  
A wearie wight forwandring<sup>o</sup> by the way,  
And towards him they gan in hast to ride,  
To weet of newes, that did abroad betide,  
Or tydings of her knight of the Redcrosse.  
But he them spying, gan to turne aside,  
For feare as seemd, or for some feignèd losse;<sup>o</sup>  
More greedy they of newes, fast towards him do crosse.

### 35

A silly<sup>o</sup> man, in simple weedes forworne,<sup>o</sup>  
And soild with dust of the long drièd way;  
His sandales were with toilesome travell torne,  
And face all tand with scorching sunny ray,  
As<sup>o</sup> he had traveild many a sommers day,  
Through boyling sands of Arabie and Ynde;<sup>o</sup>  
And in his hand a Jacobs staffe,<sup>o</sup> to stay  
His wearie limbes upon: and eke behind,  
His scrip<sup>o</sup> did hang, in which his needments he did bind.

### 36

The knight approching nigh, of him inquerd  
Tydings of warre, and of adventures new;  
But warres, nor new adventures none he herd.  
Then Una gan to aske, if ought<sup>o</sup> he knew,  
Or heard abroad of that her champion trew,  
That in his armour bare a croslet<sup>o</sup> red.  
"Aye me, Deare dame," quoth he, "well may I rew  
To tell the sad sight, which mine eies have red:<sup>o</sup>  
These eyes did see that knight both living and eke ded."

### 37

That cruell word her tender hart so thrild,<sup>o</sup>  
That suddein cold did runne through every vaine,  
And stony horror all her sences fild  
With dying fit,<sup>o</sup> that downe she fell for paine.  
The knight her lightly<sup>o</sup> reared up againe,  
And comforted with curteous kind reliefe:  
Then wonne from death, she bad him tellen plaine  
The further processe<sup>o</sup> of her hidden grieve;  
The lesser pangs can beare, who hath endured the chiefe.

### 38

Then gan the Pilgrim thus, "I chaunst this day,  
This fatall day, that shall I ever rew,<sup>o</sup>  
To see two knights in travell on my way  
(A sory<sup>o</sup> sight) arraunged<sup>o</sup> in battell new,  
Both breathing vengeaunce, both of wrathfull hew:  
My fearefull flesh did tremble at their strife,  
To see their blades so greedily imbrew,<sup>5</sup>  
That drunke with bloud, yet thirsted after life:  
What more? the Redcrosse knight was slaine with Paynim knife."

### 39

"Ah dearest Lord," quoth she, "how might that bee,  
And he the stoutest<sup>o</sup> knight, that ever wonne?"<sup>o</sup>  
"Ah dearest dame," quoth he, "how might I see  
The thing, that might not be, and yet was donne?"  
"Where is," said Satyrane, "that Paynims sonne,  
That him of life, and us of joy hath reft?"  
"Not far away," quoth he, "he hence doth wonne<sup>o</sup>  
Foreby<sup>o</sup> a fountaine, where I late him left  
Washing his bloody wounds, that through<sup>o</sup> the steele were cleft."

### 40

Therewith the knight thence marchèd forth in hast,  
Whiles Una with huge heavinesse<sup>o</sup> opprest,  
Could not for sorrow follow him so fast;  
And soone he came, as he the place had ghest,  
Whereas that Pagan proud him selfe did rest,  
In secret shadow by a fountaine side:  
Even he it was, that earst<sup>o</sup> would have supprest<sup>o</sup>  
Faire Una: whom when Satyrane espide,  
With fowle reprochfull words he boldly him defide.

### 41

And said, "Arise thou cursèd Miscreaunt,<sup>o</sup>  
That hast with knightlesse guile and trecherous train<sup>6</sup>

Faire knighthood fowly shamed, and doest vaunt<sup>o</sup>  
That good knight of the Redcrosse to have slain:  
Arise, and with like treason now maintain<sup>o</sup>  
Thy guilty wrong, or else thee guilty yield."  
The Sarazin this hearing, rose amain,<sup>o</sup>  
And catching up in hast his three square<sup>o</sup> shield,  
And shining helmet, soone him buckled to the field.

## 42

And drawing nigh him said, "Ah misborne Elfe,<sup>z</sup>  
In evill houre thy foes thee hither sent,  
Anothers wrongs to wreake upon thy selfe:  
Yet ill thou blamest me, for having blent<sup>o</sup>  
My name with guile and traiterous intent;  
That Redcrosse knight, perdie,<sup>o</sup> I never slew,  
But had he beene, where earst his armes were lent,  
Th'enchaunter vaine his errour should not rew:  
But thou his errour shalt, I hope now proven trew."<sup>8</sup>

## 43

Therewith they gan, both furious and fell,<sup>o</sup>  
To thunder blowes, and fiersly to assaile  
Each other bent<sup>o</sup> his enemy to quell,<sup>o</sup>  
That with their force they perst<sup>o</sup> both plate and maile,  
And made wide furrowes in their fleshs fraile,  
That it would pittie<sup>o</sup> any living eie.  
Large floods of bloud adowne their sides did raile:<sup>o</sup>  
But floods of bloud could not them satisfie:  
Both hungred after death: both chose to win, or die.

## 44

So long they fight, and fell revenge pursue,  
That fainting<sup>o</sup> each, themselves to breathen let,  
And oft refreshèd, battell oft renue:  
As when two Bores with rancling malice met,

Their gory sides fresh bleeding fiercely fret,  
Til breathlesse both them selves aside retire,  
Where foming wrath, their cruell tuskes they whet,  
And trample th'earth, the whiles they may respire;  
Then backe to fight againe, new breathèd and entire.

#### 45

So fiersly, when these knights had breathèd once,  
They gan to fight returne, increasing more  
Their puissant force, and cruell rage attonce,  
With heapèd strokes more hugely, then before,  
That with their drerie wounds and bloody gore  
They both deformèd, scarcely could be known.  
By this sad Una fraught with anguish sore,  
Led with their noise, which through the aire was thrown,  
Arrived, where they in erth their fruitles bloud had sown.

#### 46

Whom all so soone as that proud Sarazin  
Espide, he gan revive the memory  
Of his lewd lusts, and late attempted sin,  
And left the doubtfull battell hastily,  
To catch her, newly offred to his eie:  
But Satyrane with strokes him turning, staid,  
And sternely bad him other businesse plie,  
Then hunt the steps of pure unspotted Maid:  
Wherewith he all enraged, these bitter speeches said.

#### 47

"O foolish faeries sonne, what furie mad  
Hath thee incenst, to hast thy dolefull fate?  
Were it not better, I that Lady had,  
Then that thou hadst repented it too late?  
Most sencelesse man he, that himselfe doth hate,  
To love another. Lo then for thine ayd

Here take thy lovers token on thy pate."  
So they to fight; the whiles the royall Mayd  
Fled farre away, of that proud Paynim sore afrayd.

## 48

But that false Pilgrim, which that leasing<sup>o</sup> told,  
Being in deed old Archimage, did stay  
In secret shadow, all this to behold,  
And much rejoycèd in their bloudy fray:  
But when he saw the Damsell passe away  
He left his stond,<sup>o</sup> and her pursewd apace,  
In hope to bring her to her last decay.<sup>o</sup>  
But for to tell her lamentable cace,  
And eke<sup>o</sup> this battels end, will need another place.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, cause the shipwreck and thereby cause it to be bewailed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, she would have wandered from the East to the West Indies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The diamond, because of its hardness, was an emblem of fidelity.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, beaten ("bet") from their fruitless assault ("batteree") on her unmovable virtue.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Woodland deities with men's bodies above the waist and goats' bodies below, noted for their sensuality.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roman god of the woods, who is traditionally associated with fauns.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, teach their knees, bent backward like a goat's, to obey her.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, her solitary self to their wild allegiance ("barbarous truth").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, necessity of the time.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: That is, whether ("or") they did find ("invent") wine grapes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Orgiastic dances in worship of Cybele, goddess of the powers of nature.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Una, in the sense that she is a paragon, a perfect reflection of heavenly faith and beauty.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Glowed with intense concentration.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dryope and Pholoe were nymphs loved by Faunus and Pan. For Spenser, the names *Faunus*, *Pan*, and *Sylvanus* were apparently interchangeable.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A fair youth, beloved of Sylvanus, turned into a cypress tree.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, his appearance when alive.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spirits of trees, whose lives ended when the tree they inhabited died.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The idol of their idolatries.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The name means "turbulence." Thyamis means "passion."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name means "wild beast."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hunting; also sexual play.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A species of deer noted for its speed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Side by side, yoked together in a team.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, like a satyr.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Soak themselves in blood.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deceit. "Knightlesse": unknightly.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Base-born knight of Faerie Land ("Elfe").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, had Redcrosse been wearing his arms, the enchanter Archimago would not have to regret his error in fighting me. But you will now repeat that error and that regret.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: In fact Spenser never tells how the battle ended. But Satyrane reappears in Book 3.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *wild; of the woods*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bidding*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unexpectedly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lucky ignorance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fearless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *object of reverence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unnatural*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vile*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *persuasion* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *than* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forces*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lovingly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *violate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thought*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *full of cares*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *piercing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *buries*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *release a captive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *transcending*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grasped*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *re-echoed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *learn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flooded with tears*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shortly before*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strange*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stupified*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rustic* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undeserving*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innocent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rescued*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *savage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assailed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wild; uncivilized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough, rugged looks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grinning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently taught*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supreme*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaccustomed pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspicion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *springtime*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *staff*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cannot decide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soft boots*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compared to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *self-willed suffering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *water nymphs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woodborn race*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *useless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *willingly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frays, fights*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painstaking care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *live idly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be without*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ripening*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grow up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *child*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *base*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teacher of his behavior*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leopard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yearn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demonstrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female leopard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *savage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpectedly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recalled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with difficulty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reached*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *origin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teachings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entirely promised*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loving*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *privately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painstaking care*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *wandering far and wide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretended harm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *simple* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worn out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *India*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pilgrim's staff*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aught, anything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small cross*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beheld*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pierced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deathlike swoon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *account*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rue, regret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grievous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drawn up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bravest; strongest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *infidel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *triangular*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God (pardieu)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *determined* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kill*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *pierced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bring pity to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *weakening*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fresh*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mighty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gory*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disfigured*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *burdened*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undecided*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *take on*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *than*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lie*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her death*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 7***

*The Redcrosse knight is captive made  
By Gyaunt proud opprest,  
Prince Arthur meets with Una greatly  
with those newes distrest.*

### **1**

What man so wise, what earthly wit so ware,  
As to descry the crafty cunning traine,  
By which deceit doth maske in visour faire,  
And cast her colours dyed deepe in graine,  
To seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faine,  
And fitting gestures to her purpose frame,  
The guiltlesse man with guile to entertaine?  
Great maistresse of her art was that false Dame,  
The false Duessa, clogd with Fidessaes name.

### **2**

Who when returning from the dreary Night,  
She found not in that perilous house of Pryde,  
Where she had left, the noble Redcrosse knight,  
Her hoped pray, she would no longer bide,  
But forth she went, to seeke him far and wide.  
Ere long she found, whereas he wearie sate,  
To rest him selfe, foreby a fountaine side,  
Disarmed all of yron-coted Plate,  
And by his side his steed the grassy forage ate.

### **3**

He feedes upon the cooling shade, and bayes  
His sweatie forehead in the breathing wind,  
Which through the trembling leaves full gently plays  
Wherein the cherefull birds of sundry kind

Do chaunt sweet musick, to delight his mind:  
The Witch approaching gan him fairely<sup>o</sup> greet,  
And with reproch of carelesnesse<sup>o</sup> unkind  
Upbrayd, for leaving her in place unmeet,<sup>o</sup>  
With fowle words tempring<sup>o</sup> faire, soure gall with hony sweet.

#### 4

Unkindnesse past, they gan of solace treat,<sup>o</sup>  
And bathe in pleasaunce of the joyous shade,  
Which shielded them against the boyling heat,  
And with greene boughes decking a gloomy glade,  
About the fountaine like a girland made;  
Whose bubbling wave did ever freshly well,  
Ne ever would through fervent<sup>o</sup> sommer fade:<sup>o</sup>  
The sacred Nymph, which therein wont<sup>o</sup> to dwell,  
Was out of Dianes favour, as it then befell.

#### 5

The cause was this: one day when Phoebe<sup>2</sup> fayre  
With all her band was following the chace,<sup>o</sup>  
This Nymph, quite tyred with heat of scorching ayre  
Sat downe to rest in midst of the race:  
The goddessse wroth<sup>o</sup> gan fowly her disgrace,  
And bad the waters, which from her did flow,  
Be such as she her selfe was then in place.<sup>o</sup>  
Thenceforth her waters waxed dull and slow,  
And all that drunke thereof, did faint and feeble grow.

#### 6

Hereof this gentle knight unweeting<sup>o</sup> was,  
And lying downe upon the sandie graile,<sup>o</sup>  
Drunke of the streame, as cleare as cristall glas;  
Eftsoones<sup>o</sup> his manly forces gan to faile,  
And mightie strong was turnd to feeble fraile.  
His chaunged powres at first themselves not felt,



Till crudled<sup>o</sup> cold his corage<sup>o</sup> gan assaile,  
And chearefull<sup>o</sup> bloud in faintnesse chill did melt,  
Which like a fever fit through all his body swelt.<sup>o</sup>

## 7

Yet goodly court he made still to his Dame,  
Poured out in loosnesse<sup>3</sup> on the grassy grownd,  
Both carelesse of his health, and of his fame:<sup>o</sup>  
Till at the last he heard a dreadfull sownd,  
Which through the wood loud bellowing, did rebownd,  
That all the earth for terrour seemed to shake,  
And trees did tremble. Th'Elfe therewith astownd,<sup>o</sup>  
Upstartd lightly<sup>o</sup> from his looser make,<sup>4</sup>  
And his unready weapons gan in hand to take.

## 8

But ere he could his armour on him dight,<sup>o</sup>  
Or get his shield, his monstrous enemy  
With sturdie steps came stalking in his sight,  
An hideous Geant horrible and hye,  
That with his talnesse seemd to threat the skye,  
The ground eke<sup>o</sup> gronèd under him for dreed;<sup>o</sup>  
His living like saw never living eye,  
Ne durst behold: his stature did exceed  
The hight of three the tallest sonnes of mortall seed.

## 9

The greatest Earth his uncouth<sup>o</sup> mother was,  
And blustring Aeolus his boasted sire,<sup>5</sup>  
Who with his breath, which through the world doth pas,  
Her hollow womb did secretly inspire,<sup>o</sup>  
And fild her hidden caves with stormie yre,<sup>o</sup>  
That she conceived; and trebling the dew time,  
In which the wombes of women do expire,<sup>o</sup>

Brought forth this monstrous masse of earthly slime,  
Puft up with emptie wind, and fild with sinfull crime.

## 10

So growen great through arrogant delight  
Of th'high descent, whereof he was yborne,  
And through presumption of his matchlesse might,  
All other powres and knighthood he did scorne.  
Such now he marcheth to this man forlorne,<sup>o</sup>  
And left to losse:<sup>o</sup> his stalking steps are stayde<sup>o</sup>  
Upon a snaggy Oke,<sup>6</sup> which he had torne  
Out of his mothers bowelles, and it made  
His mortall<sup>o</sup> mace, wherewith his foemen he dismayde.<sup>7</sup>

## 11

That when the knight he spide, he gan advance  
With huge force and insupportable mayne,<sup>o</sup>  
And towards him with dreadfull fury praunce;<sup>o</sup>  
Who haplesse,<sup>o</sup> and eke hopelesse, all in vaine  
Did to him pace, sad battaile to darrayne,<sup>o</sup>  
Disarmd, disgrast, and inwardly dismayde,  
And eke so faint in every joynt and vaine,  
Through that fraile<sup>o</sup> fountaine, which him feeble made,  
That scarsely could he weeld his bootlesse<sup>o</sup> single blade.

## 12

The Geaunt strooke so maynly<sup>o</sup> mercillesse,  
That could have overthrowne a stony towre,  
And were not heavenly grace, that him did blesse,  
He had beene pouldred<sup>o</sup> all, as thin as flowre:  
But he was wary of that deadly stowre,<sup>o</sup>  
And lightly<sup>o</sup> lept from underneath the blow:  
Yet so exceeding was the villeins powre,  
That with the wind it did him overthrow,  
And all his sences stound,<sup>o</sup> that still he lay full low.

### 13

As when that divelish yron Engin<sup>o</sup> wrought  
In deepest Hell, and framd by Furies skill,  
With windy Nitre and quick Sulphur fraught,<sup>8</sup>  
And ramd with bullet round, ordaind to kill,  
Conceiveth fire, the heavens it doth fill  
With thundring noyse, and all the ayre doth choke,  
That none can breath, nor see, nor heare at will,  
Through smouldry cloud of duskish stincking smoke,  
That th'onely breath him daunts,<sup>9</sup> who hath escapt the stroke.

### 14

So daunted when the Geaunt saw the knight,  
His heavie hand he heaved up on hye,  
And him to dust thought to have battred quight,  
Untill Duessa loud to him gan crye;  
"O great Orgoglio,<sup>1</sup> greatest under skye,  
O hold thy mortall hand for Ladies sake,  
Hold for my sake, and do him not to dye,<sup>o</sup>  
But vanquisht thine eternall bondslave make,  
And me thy worthy meed unto thy Leman take."<sup>2</sup>

### 15

He hearkned, and did stay<sup>o</sup> from further harmes,  
To gayne so goodly guerdon,<sup>o</sup> as she spake:  
So willingly she came into his armes,  
Who her as willingly to grace<sup>o</sup> did take,  
And was possessèd of his new found make.<sup>o</sup>  
Then up he tooke the slombred<sup>o</sup> sencelesse corse,  
And ere he could out of his swowne awake,  
Him to his castle brought with hastie forse,  
And in a Dongeon deepe him threw without remorse.

### 16

From that day forth Duessa was his deare,  
And highly honourd in his haughtie eye,  
He gave her gold and purple pall<sup>o</sup> to weare,  
And triple crowne set on her head full hye,<sup>3</sup>  
And her endowd with royall majesty:  
Then for to make her dreaded more of men,  
And peoples harts with awfull terrour tye,<sup>o</sup>  
A monstrous beast ybred in filthy fen<sup>o</sup>  
He chose, which he had kept long time in darksome den.

## 17

Such one it was, as that renownèd Snake  
Which great Alcides in Stremona slew,  
Long fostred in the filth of Lerna lake,<sup>4</sup>  
Whose many heads out budding ever new,  
Did breed<sup>o</sup> him endlesse labour to subdew:  
But this same Monster much more ugly was;  
For seven great heads out of his body grew,  
An yron brest, and backe of scaly bras,  
And all embrewd<sup>o</sup> in bloud, his eyes did shine as glas.

## 18

His tayle was stretchèd out in wondrous length,  
That to the house of heavenly gods it raught,<sup>o</sup>  
And with extorted powre, and borrowed strength,  
The ever-burning lamps<sup>o</sup> from thence it brought,  
And proudly threw to ground, as things of nought;  
And underneath his filthy feet did tread  
The sacred things, and holy heasts foretaught.<sup>5</sup>  
Upon this dreadfull Beast with sevenfold head  
He set the false Duessa, for more aw and dread.

## 19

The wofull Dwarfe, which saw his maisters fall,

Whiles he had keeping of his grasing steed,  
And valiant knight become a caytive<sup>o</sup> thrall,  
When all was past, tooke up his forlorne weed,<sup>o</sup>  
His mightie armour, missing most at need;  
His silver shield, now idle maisterlesse;  
His poynant<sup>o</sup> speare, that many made to bleed,  
The ruefull moniments<sup>o</sup> of heavinesse,<sup>o</sup>  
And with them all departes, to tell his great distresse.

## 20

He had not travaild long, when on the way  
He wofull Ladie, wofull Una met,  
Fast flying from the Paynims greedy pray,<sup>o</sup>  
Whilest Satyrane him from pursuit did let:<sup>o</sup>  
Who when her eyes she on the Dwarfe had set,  
And saw the signes, that deadly tydings spake,  
She fell to ground for sorrowfull regret,<sup>o</sup>  
And lively breath her sad brest did forsake,  
Yet might her pitteous hart be seene to pant and quake.

## 21

The messenger of so unhappie newes  
Would faine<sup>o</sup> have dyde: dead was his hart within,  
Yet outwardly some little comfort shewes:  
At last recovering hart, he does begin  
To rub her temples, and to chaufe<sup>o</sup> her chin,  
And every tender part does tosse and turne:  
So hardly he the flitted life does win,  
Unto her native prison to retourne:<sup>6</sup>  
Then gins her grievèd ghost<sup>o</sup> thus to lament and mourne.

## 22

"Ye dreary instruments of dolefull sight,  
That doe this deadly spectacle behold,  
Why do ye lenger<sup>o</sup> feed on loathèd light,

Or liking find to gaze on earthly mould,<sup>7</sup>  
Sith<sup>o</sup> cruell fates the carefull<sup>o</sup> threeds unfould,  
The which my life and love together tyde?  
Now let the stony dart of senselesse cold<sup>o</sup>  
Perce to my hart, and pas through every side,  
And let eternall night so sad sight fro me hide.

## 23

“O lightsome day, the lampe of highest Jove,  
First made by him,<sup>8</sup> mens wandring wayes to guyde,  
When darknesse he in deepest dongeon drove,  
Henceforth thy hated face for ever hyde,  
And shut up heavens windowes shyning wyde:  
For earthly sight can nought but sorrow breed,  
And late<sup>o</sup> repentance, which shall long abyde.  
Mine eyes no more on vanitie shall feed,  
But seelèd up with death, shall have their deadly meed.”<sup>o</sup>

## 24

Then downe againe she fell unto the ground;  
But he her quickly reared up againe:  
Thrise did she sinke adowne in deadly swownd,  
And thrise he her revived with busie paine:<sup>o</sup>  
At last when life recovered had the raine,<sup>o</sup>  
And over-wrestled his strong enemy,  
With foltring<sup>o</sup> tong, and trembling every vaine,  
“Tell on,” quoth she, “the wofull Tragedie,  
The which these reliques<sup>o</sup> sad present unto mine eie.

## 25

“Tempestuous fortune hath spent all her spight,  
And thrilling<sup>o</sup> sorrow throwne his utmost dart;  
Thy sad tongue cannot tell more heavy plight,  
Then that I feele, and harbour in mine hart:  
Who hath endured the whole, can beare each part.

If death it be, it is not the first wound,  
That launchèd<sup>o</sup> hath my brest with bleeding smart.  
Begin, and end the bitter balefull stound;<sup>o</sup>  
If lesse, then that<sup>o</sup> I feare, more favour I have found."

## 26

Then gan the Dwarfe the whole discourse<sup>o</sup> declare,  
The subtill traines<sup>o</sup> of Archimago old;  
The wanton loves of false Fidessa faire,  
Bought with the bloud of vanquisht Paynim bold:  
The wretched payre transformed to treen mould;<sup>o</sup>  
The house of Pride, and perils round about;  
The combat, which he with Sansjoy did hould;  
The lucklesse conflict with the Gyant stout,  
Wherein captived, of life or death he stood in doubt.

## 27

She heard with patience all unto the end,  
And strove to maister sorrowfull assay,<sup>o</sup>  
Which greater grew, the more she did contend,  
And almost rent her tender hart in tway;<sup>o</sup>  
And love fresh coles unto her fire did lay:  
For greater love, the greater is the losse.  
Was never Ladie lovèd dearer day,<sup>9</sup>  
Then she did love the knight of the Redcrosse;  
For whose deare sake so many troubles her did tosse.

## 28

At last when fervent sorrow slakèd was,  
She up arose, resolving him to find  
Alive or dead: and forward forth doth pas,  
All<sup>o</sup> as the Dwarfe the way to her assynd:<sup>o</sup>  
And evermore in constant carefull<sup>o</sup> mind  
She fed her wound with fresh renewèd bale;<sup>o</sup>  
Long tost with stormes, and bet<sup>o</sup> with bitter wind,

High over hils, and low adowne the dale,  
She wandred many a wood, and measurd many a vale.

## 29

At last she chauncèd by good hap to meet  
A goodly knight, faire marching by the way  
Together with his Squire, arayèd meet:°  
His glitterand° armour shinèd farre away,  
Like glauncing° light of Phoebus brightest ray;  
From top to toe no place appearèd bare,  
That deadly dint° of steele endanger may:  
Athwart his brest a bauldrick<sup>1</sup> brave° he ware,  
That shynd, like twinkling stars, with stons most pretious rare.

## 30

And in the midst thereof one pretious stone  
Of wondrous worth, and eke of wondrous might,°  
Shapt like a Ladies head, exceeding shone,  
Like Hesperus° emongst the lesser lights,°  
And strove for to amaze the weaker sights;  
Thereby his mortall blade full comely hong  
In yvory sheath, ycarved with curious slights;°  
Whose hilts were burnisht gold, and handle strong  
Of mother pearle, and buckled with a golden tong.°

## 31

His haughtie helmet, horrid° all with gold,  
Both glorious brightnesse, and great terrour bred;  
For all the crest a Dragon did enfold  
With greedie pawes, and over all did spred  
His golden wings: his dreadfull hideous hed  
Close couchèd on the bever,° seemed to throw  
From flaming mouth bright sparkles fierie red,  
That suddeine horror to faint harts did show;  
And scaly tayle was stretcht adowne his backe full low.



### 32

Upon the top of all his loftie crest,<sup>o</sup>  
A bunch of haire discolourd<sup>o</sup> diversly,  
With sprinckled pearle, and gold full richly drest,  
Did shake, and seemed to daunce for jollity,  
Like to an Almond tree ymounted hye  
On top of greene Selinis<sup>2</sup> all alone,  
With blossomes brave bedeckèd daintily;  
Whose tender locks do tremble every one  
At every little breath, that under heaven is blowne.

### 33

His warlike shield all closely covered was,  
Ne might of mortall eye be ever seene;  
Not made of steele, nor of enduring bras,  
Such earthly mettals soone consumèd bene:<sup>o</sup>  
But all of Diamond perfect pure and cleene<sup>o</sup>  
It framèd was, one massie entire mould,<sup>3</sup>  
Hewen out of Adamant rocke with engines<sup>o</sup> keene,  
That point of speare it never percen could,  
Ne dint<sup>o</sup> of direfull sword divide the substance would.

### 34

The same to wight<sup>o</sup> he never wont disclose,  
But<sup>o</sup> when as monsters huge he would dismay,  
Or daunt unequall armies of his foes,  
Or when the flying heavens he would affray;<sup>4</sup>  
For so exceeding shone his glistring ray,  
That Phoebus golden face it did attaint,<sup>o</sup>  
As when a cloud his beames doth over-lay;  
And silver Cynthia<sup>o</sup> wexèd pale and faint,  
As when her face is staynd with magicke arts constraint.<sup>5</sup>

### 35

No magicke arts hereof had any might,  
Nor bloudie wordes of bold Enchaunters call,  
But all that was not such, as seemd in sight,  
Before that shield did fade, and suddeine fall:  
And when him list<sup>o</sup> the raskall routes<sup>o</sup> appall,  
Men into stoncs therewith he could transmew,<sup>o</sup>  
And stoncs to dust, and dust to nought at all;  
And when him list the prouder lookcs subdew,  
He would thcm gazing blind, or turne to other hew.<sup>o</sup>

### 36

Ne let it seeme, that credence this exceeds,  
For he that made the same, was knowne right well  
To have done much more admirable<sup>o</sup> deedcs.  
It Merlin was, which whylome<sup>o</sup> did excell  
All living wightcs in might of magicke spell:  
Both shield, and sword, and armour all he wrought  
For this young Prince,<sup>6</sup> when first to armes he fell;<sup>o</sup>  
But when he dyde, the Faerie Queene it brought  
To Faerie lond, where yet it may be seene, if sought.

### 37

A gentle<sup>o</sup> youth, his dearely lovèd Squire  
His speare of heben<sup>o</sup> wood behind him bare,  
Whose harmefull head, thrice heated in the fire,  
Had riven many a brest with pikehead<sup>o</sup> square;<sup>o</sup>  
A goodly person, and could menage<sup>o</sup> faire  
His stubborne steed with curbèd canon bit,<sup>7</sup>  
Who under him did trample as the aire,  
And chauf<sup>t</sup>,<sup>o</sup> that any on his backe should sit;  
The yron rowels<sup>o</sup> into frothy fome he bit.

### 38

When as this knight nigh to the Ladie drew,  
With lovely court<sup>o</sup> he gan her entertaine;

But when he heard her answers loth, he knew  
Some secret sorrow did her heart distraine:<sup>o</sup>  
Which to allay, and calme her storming paine,  
Faire feeling words he wisely gan display,<sup>o</sup>  
And for her humour fitting purpose faine,<sup>8</sup>  
To tempt<sup>o</sup> the cause it selfe for to bewray;<sup>o</sup>  
Wherewith emmowed, these bleeding words she gan to say.

### 39

"What worlds delight, or joy of living speach  
Can heart, so plunged in sea of sorrowes deepe,  
And heaped with so huge misfortunes, reach?  
The carefull<sup>o</sup> cold beginneth for to creepe,  
And in my heart his yron arrow steepe,  
Soone as I thinke upon my bitter bale:<sup>o</sup>  
Such helplesse harmes yts better hidden keepe,  
Then rip up<sup>o</sup> grieve, where it may not availe,  
My last left comfort is, my woes to weepe and waile."

### 40

"Ah Ladie deare," quoth then the gentle knight,  
"Well may I weene,<sup>o</sup> your grieve is wondrous great;  
For wondrous great grieve groneth in my spright,<sup>o</sup>  
Whiles thus I heare you of your sorrowes treat.  
But wofull Ladie let me you intrete,  
For to unfold the anguish of your hart:  
Mishaps are maistred by advice discrete,  
And counsell mittigates the greatest smart;  
Found never helpe, who never would his hurts impart."<sup>9</sup>

### 41

"O but," quoth she, "great grieve will not be tould,  
And can more easily be thought, then said."  
"Right so"; quoth he, "but he, that never would,

Could never: will to might gives greatest aid."<sup>1</sup>  
"But grief," quoth she, "does greater grow displaid,<sup>o</sup>  
If then it find not helpe, and breedes despaire."  
"Despaire breedes not," quoth he, "where faith is staid."<sup>o</sup>  
"No faith so fast," quoth she, "but flesh does paire."<sup>o</sup>  
"Flesh may empaire," quoth he, "but reason can repaire."

## 42

His goodly reason, and well guided speach  
So deepe did settle in her gracious thought,  
That her perswaded to disclose the breach,<sup>o</sup>  
Which love and fortune in her heart had wrought,  
And said; "Faire Sir, I hope good hap<sup>o</sup> hath brought  
You to inquire the secrets of my griefe,  
Or<sup>o</sup> that your wisdom will direct my thought,  
Or that your prowesse can me yield reliefe:  
Then heare the storie sad, which I shall tell you brieve.

## 43

"The forlorne<sup>o</sup> Maiden, whom your eyes have seene  
The laughing stocke of fortunes mockeries,  
Am th'only daughter of a King and Queene,  
Whose parents deare, whilest equall destinies  
Did runne about,<sup>2</sup> and their felicities  
The favourable heavens did not envy,  
Did spread their rule through all the territories,  
Which Phison and Euphrates floweth by,  
And Gehons golden waves doe wash continually."<sup>3</sup>

## 44

"Till that their cruell cursèd enemy,  
An huge great Dragon horrible in sight,  
Bred in the loathly lakes of Tartary,<sup>o</sup>  
With murderous ravine,<sup>o</sup> and devouring might

Their kingdome spoild,<sup>o</sup> and countrey wasted quight:  
Themselves, for feare into his jawes to fall,  
He forst to castle strong to take their flight,  
Where fast embard<sup>o</sup> in mightie brasen wall,  
He has them now foure yeres besiegd to make them thrall.

#### 45

"Full many knights adventurous and stout  
Have enterprizd that Monster to subdew;  
From every coast<sup>o</sup> that heaven walks about,  
Have thither come the noble Martiall crew,  
That famous hard atchievements still pursew,  
Yet never any could that girlond win,  
But all still shronke,<sup>o</sup> and still he greater grew:  
All they for want of faith, or guilt of sin,  
The pitteous pray of his fierce crueltie have bin.

#### 46

"At last yledd<sup>o</sup> with farre reported praise,  
Which flying fame throughout the world had spread,  
Of doughtie<sup>o</sup> knights, whom Faery land did raise,  
That noble order hight<sup>o</sup> of Maidenhed,<sup>4</sup>  
Forthwith to court of Gloriane I sped,  
Of Gloriane great Queene of glory bright,  
Whose kingdomes seat Cleopolis<sup>5</sup> is red,<sup>o</sup>  
There to obtaine some such redoubted knight,  
That Parents deare from tyrants powre deliver might.

#### 47

"It was my chance (my chance was faire and good)  
There for to find a fresh unprovèd<sup>o</sup> knight,  
Whose manly hands imbrewed in guiltie blood  
Had never bene,<sup>6</sup> ne ever by his might  
Had throwne to ground the unregarded<sup>o</sup> right:

Yet of his prowesse prooffe he since hath made  
(I witnesse am) in many a cruell fight;  
The groning ghosts of many one dismaide<sup>o</sup>  
Have felt the bitter dint<sup>o</sup> of his avenging blade.

#### 48

"And ye the forlorne reliques of his powre,  
His byting sword, and his devouring speare,  
Which have endured many a dreadfull stowre,<sup>o</sup>  
Can speake his prowesse, that did earst<sup>o</sup> you beare,  
And well could rule: now he hath left you heare,  
To be the record of his ruefull losse,  
And of my dolefull disaventurous deare:<sup>o</sup>  
O heavie record of the good Redcrosse,  
Where have you left your Lord, that could so well you tosse?<sup>o</sup>

#### 49

"Well hopèd I, and faire beginnings had,  
That he my captive langour should redeeme,<sup>z</sup>  
Till all unweeting,<sup>o</sup> an Enchaunter bad  
His sence abusd, and made him to misdeeme<sup>o</sup>  
My loyalty, not such as it did seeme;  
That rather death desire, then such despight.<sup>8</sup>  
Be judge ye heavens, that all things right esteeme,<sup>o</sup>  
How I him loved, and love with all my might,  
So thought I eke of him, and thinke I thought aright.

#### 50

"Thenceforth me desolate he quite forsooke,  
To wander, where wilde fortune would me lead,  
And other bywaies he himselfe betooke,  
Where never foot of living wight did tread,  
That brought not backe the balefull body dead;<sup>o</sup>  
In which him chauncèd false Duessa meete,

Mine onely foe, mine onely deadly dread,<sup>9</sup>  
Who with her witchcraft and misseeming<sup>o</sup> sweete,  
Inveigled him to follow her desires unmeete.<sup>o</sup>

## 51

“At last by subtill sleights she him betraid  
Unto his foe, a Gyant huge and tall,  
Who him disarmèd, dissolute,<sup>o</sup> dismaid,  
Unwares surprisèd and with mightie mall<sup>o</sup>  
The monster mercillesse him made to fall,  
Whose fall did never foe before behold;  
And now in darkesome dungeon, wretched thrall,  
Remedillesse, for aie<sup>1</sup> he doth him hold;  
This is my cause of grieve, more great, then may be told.”

## 52

Ere she had ended all, she gan to faint:<sup>o</sup>  
But he her comforted and faire bespake,  
“Certès,<sup>o</sup> Madame, ye have great cause of plaint,  
That stoutest heart, I weene, could cause to quake.  
But be of cheare, and comfort to you take:  
For till I have acquit<sup>o</sup> your captive knight,  
Assure your selfe, I will you not forsake.”  
His chearefull words revived her chearelesse spright,  
So forth they went, the Dwarfe them guiding ever right.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, Deceit disposes her colors, thoroughly dyed, so as to seem like Truth.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Diana, goddess of the moon and of chastity.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spread out in lewdness (“loosnesse”); sexually expended.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Too licentious (“looser”) companion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Aeolus was keeper of the winds. The giant’s descent from Earth and Wind links him to earthquakes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, he uses as walking stick a knotty (“snaggy”) oak tree.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In its usual sense, but also “dis-made, dissolved.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Filled (“fraught”) with gunpowder (“Nitre” and “Sulphur”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, so that the blast or smell alone (“onely”) overcomes him.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pride, haughtiness, disdain (Italian).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, take me, your worthy reward, as your mistress.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Duessa is attired like the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17:3–4. The triple crown is that of the papacy (see canto 2, stanzas 13 and 22).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
The nine-headed Lernean hydra slain by Hercules (Alcides). Orgoglio’s seven-headed monster recalls the red dragon of Revelation 12:3–9: “behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth . . . [he is] that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.” Many Protestants associated the Beast with the Roman Church.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Doctrines (“holy heasts”) previously taught.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, with such difficulty (“so hardly”) he persuades (“does win”) the life back to her body (“native prison”).[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: That is, or find it pleasure to gaze on earthly form ("mould").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An allusion to Genesis 1:3: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, there was never a lady who loved life ("day") more dearly than she loved Redcrosse.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sash worn over the shoulder to support the sword.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Town associated with the palm awarded to victors (Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.705).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The shield was made of one solid piece of diamond, unflawed, unpierceable, translucent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, when he would frighten ("affray") the revolving constellations.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Magicians were said to be able to cause an eclipse of the moon.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The reference to Merlin indicates that the prince is Arthur (who had been mentioned in the canto's prefatory quatrain). In the *Letter to Raleigh*, he is identified with "magnificence," understood as the perfection of all the virtues and containing them all.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A smooth, round bit.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, suited his manner to her mood.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, he never found help who would not tell his sorrows.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, he that fails to will something cannot do it: willing gives the greatest help to one's power ("might").[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, while the impartial fates ran their course.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Phison, Euphrates, and Gehon, along with the Tigris, were the rivers of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:11–14).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The type or analogue of the Order of the Garter. Its emblem shows Saint George killing the dragon, and its star is

the Red Cross.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The name means "famous city."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, his strong hands had never been guiltily stained ("imbrewed") with blood.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, relieve my state, captive to sadness.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, I, who prefer death to such treachery ("despight").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, the only object of my mortal fear.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, forever ("for aie") without hope of rescue ("remedillesse").[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *overwhelmed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wary*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perceive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *guile*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a mask*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feign, imitate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *engage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beside*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bathes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *courteously*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *indifference*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unfitting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mingling*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasure speak*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dry up*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hunt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *angered*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *congealing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vigor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lively*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amazed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vile; strange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breathe into*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ire, anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bring forth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abandoned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destruction* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supported*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death-dealing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *irresistible power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unlucky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *engage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enfeebling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *useless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mightily*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *peril*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cannon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not cause him to die*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refrain*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unconscious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crimson robe of royalty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marsh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cause*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stained*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *prevent*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chafe, rub*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rule*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faltering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *piercing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pierced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time (of sorrow)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than what*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *story*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wiles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shape of a tree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affliction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *full of care; sorrowful*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *glittering*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *stroke*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *powers*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *designs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pin*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *top of helmet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dyed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been: be, are*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tools*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creature*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *wanted to* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *marvelous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *came*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *stout*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fretted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ends of the bit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kind courtesy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afflict*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *plundered*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *quailed*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *untried*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *blow*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *improper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enfeebled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *club*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grow weak; lose heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *freed*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Canto 8***

*Faire virgin to redeeme her deare  
brings Arthur to the fight:  
Who slayes the Gyant, wounds the beast,  
and strips Duessa quight.*

### **1**

Ay me, how many perils doe enfold  
The righteous man, to make him daily fall?  
Were not, that heavenly grace doth him uphold,  
And stedfast truth acquite<sup>o</sup> him out of all.  
Her love is firme, her care continuall,  
So oft as he through his owne foolish pride,  
Or weaknesse is to sinfull bands<sup>o</sup> made thrall:  
Else should this Redcrosse knight in bands have dyde,  
For whose deliverance she this Prince doth thither guide.

### **2**

They sadly traveild thus, untill they came  
Nigh to a castle builded strong and hie:  
Then cryde the Dwarfe, "lo yonder is the same,  
In which my Lord my liege doth lucklesse lie,  
Thrall to that Gyants hatefull tyrannie:  
Therefore, deare Sir, your mightie powres assay."<sup>o</sup>  
The noble knight alighted by and by<sup>o</sup>  
From loftie steede, and bad the Ladie stay,  
To see what end of fight should him befall that day.

### **3**

So with the Squire, th'admirer of his might,  
He marchèd forth towards that castle wall;  
Whose gates he found fast shut, ne living wight  
To ward<sup>o</sup> the same, nor answere commers call.



Then tooke that Squire an horne of bugle<sup>o</sup> small,  
Which hong adowne his side in twisted gold,  
And tassels gay. Wyde wonders over all<sup>o</sup>  
Of that same hornes great vertues<sup>o</sup> weren told,<sup>2</sup>  
Which had approvèd<sup>o</sup> bene in uses manifold.

#### 4

Was never wight, that heard that shrilling sound,  
But trembling feare did feele in every vaine;  
Three miles it might be easie heard around,  
And Ecchoes three answered it selfe againe:  
No false enchauntment, nor deceitfull traine<sup>o</sup>  
Might once abide the terror of that blast,  
But presently<sup>o</sup> was voide and wholly vaine:  
No gate so strong, no locke so firme and fast,  
But with that percing noise flew open quite, or brast.<sup>o</sup>

#### 5

The same before the Geants gate he blew,  
That all the castle quakèd from the ground,  
And every dore of freewill open flew.  
The Gyant selfe dismaièd with that sownd,  
Where he with his Duessa dalliance<sup>o</sup> fownd,  
In hast came rushing forth from inner bowre,  
With staring<sup>o</sup> countenance sterne, as one astownd,  
And staggering steps, to weet, what suddein stowre<sup>o</sup>  
Had wrought that horror strange, and dared his dreaded powre.

#### 6

And after him the proud Duessa came,  
High mounted on her manyheaded beast,  
And every head with fyrie tongue did flame,  
And every head was crownèd on his creast,  
And bloudie mouthèd with late cruell feast.  
That when the knight beheld, his mightie shild

Upon his manly arme he soone addrest,<sup>o</sup>  
And at him fiercely flew, with courage fild,  
And eger greedinesse<sup>o</sup> through every member thrild.

## 7

Therewith the Gyant buckled him to fight,  
Inflamed with scornfull wrath and high disdaine,<sup>o</sup>  
And lifting up his dreadfull club on hight,  
All armed with ragged snubbes<sup>o</sup> and knottie graine,  
Him thought at first encounter to have slaine.  
But wise and warie was that noble Pere,<sup>o</sup>  
And lightly leaping from so monstrous maine,<sup>o</sup>  
Did faire<sup>o</sup> avoide the violence him nere;  
It bootèd nought, to thinke, such thunderbolts to beare.<sup>3</sup>

## 8

Ne shame he thought to shunne so hideous might:  
The idle<sup>o</sup> stroke, enforcing furious way,  
Missing the marke of his misaymèd sight  
Did fall to ground, and with his<sup>o</sup> heavie sway<sup>o</sup>  
So deeply dinted in the driven clay,  
That three yardes deepe a furrow up did throw:  
The sad earth wounded with so sore assay,<sup>o</sup>  
Did grone full grievous underneath the blow,  
And trembling with strange feare, did like an earthquake show.

## 9

As when almightie Jove in wrathfull mood,  
To wreake<sup>o</sup> the guilt of mortall sins is bent,<sup>o</sup>  
Hurles forth his thundring dart with deadly food,<sup>o</sup>  
Enrold in flames, and smouldring dreriment,<sup>o</sup>  
Through riven cloudes and molten firmament;  
The fierce threeforkèd engin<sup>o</sup> making way,  
Both loftie towres and highest trees hath rent,  
And all that might his angrie passage stay,

And shooting in the earth, casts up a mount of clay.

## 10

His boystrous<sup>o</sup> club, so buried in the ground,  
He could not rearen up againe so light,<sup>o</sup>  
But that the knight him at advantage found,  
And whiles he strove his combred clubbe to quight<sup>4</sup>  
Out of the earth, with blade all burning bright  
He smote off his left arme, which like a blocke  
Did fall to ground, deprived of native might;  
Large streames of bloud out of the trunckèd stocke<sup>o</sup>  
Forth gushèd, like fresh water streame from riven rocke.<sup>5</sup>

## 11

Dismaièd with so desperate deadly wound,  
And eke<sup>o</sup> impatient of unwonted paine,<sup>6</sup>  
He loudly brayd with beastly yelling sound,  
That all the fields rebellowèd againe;  
As great a noyse, as when in Cymbrian<sup>7</sup> plaine  
An heard of Bulles, whom kindly<sup>o</sup> rage doth sting,  
Do for the milkie mothers want complaine,<sup>8</sup>  
And fill the fields with troublous bellowing,  
The neighbour woods around with hollow murmur ring.

## 12

That when his deare Duessa heard, and saw  
The evill stownd, that daungerd her estate,<sup>9</sup>  
Unto his aide she hastily did draw  
Her dreadfull beast, who swolne with bloud of late  
Came ramping<sup>o</sup> forth with proud presumptuous gate,<sup>o</sup>  
And threatned all his heads like flaming brands.<sup>o</sup>  
But him the Squire made quickly to retrate,  
Encountring fierce with single<sup>o</sup> sword in hand,  
And twixt him and his Lord did like a bulwarke stand.

### 13

The proud Duessa full of wrathfull spight,  
And fierce disdaine, to be affronted so,  
Enforst her purple<sup>o</sup> beast with all her might  
That stop<sup>o</sup> out of the way to overthroe,  
Scorning the let<sup>o</sup> of so unequall foe:  
But nathemore<sup>o</sup> would that courageous swayne  
To her yeeld passage, gainst his Lord to goe,  
But with outrageous<sup>o</sup> strokes did him restraine,  
And with his bodie bard the way atwixt them twaine.

### 14

Then tooke the angrie witch her golden cup,  
Which still<sup>o</sup> she bore, replete with magick artes;<sup>1</sup>  
Death and despayre did many thereof sup,  
And secret poyson through their inner parts,  
Th'eternall bale<sup>o</sup> of heaue wounded harts;  
Which after charmes and some enchauntments said,  
She lightly sprinkled on his weaker<sup>o</sup> parts;  
Therewith his sturdie courage soone was quayd,<sup>o</sup>  
And all his senses were with suddeine dread dismayd.

### 15

So downe he fell before the cruell beast,  
Who on his necke his bloudie clawes did seize,  
That life nigh crusht out of his panting brest:  
No powre he had to stirre, nor will to rize.  
That when the carefull<sup>o</sup> knight gan well advise,<sup>o</sup>  
He lightly<sup>o</sup> left the foe, with whom he fought,  
And to the beast gan turne his enterprise;  
For wondrous anguish in his hart it wrought,  
To see his lovèd Squire into such thraldome<sup>o</sup> brought.

### 16

And high advauncing<sup>o</sup> his bloud-thirstie blade,  
Stroke one of those deformèd heads so sore,<sup>2</sup>  
That of his puissance<sup>o</sup> proud ensample made;  
His monstrous scalpe<sup>o</sup> downe to his teeth it tore  
And that misformèd shape mis-shapèd more:  
A sea of bloud gusht from the gaping wound,  
That her gay garments staynd with filthy gore,  
And overflowèd all the field around;  
That over shoes<sup>3</sup> in bloud he waded on the ground.

## 17

Thereat he roarèd for exceeding paine,  
That to have heard, great horror would have bred,<sup>o</sup>  
And scourging th'emptie ayre with his long traine,<sup>o</sup>  
Through great impatience of his grievèd hed<sup>4</sup>  
His gorgeous ryder from her loftie sted<sup>o</sup>  
Would have cast downe, and trod in durtie myre,  
Had not the Gyant soone her succourèd;<sup>o</sup>  
Who all enraged with smart<sup>o</sup> and franticke yre,<sup>o</sup>  
Came hurtling in full fierce, and forst the knight retyre.

## 18

The force, which wont<sup>o</sup> in two to be disperst,  
In one alone left hand<sup>5</sup> he now unites,  
Which is through rage more strong then both were erst;<sup>o</sup>  
With which his hideous club aloft he dites,<sup>o</sup>  
And at his foe with furious rigour<sup>o</sup> smites,  
That strongest Oake might seeme to overthrow:  
The stroke upon his shield so heavie lites,  
That to the ground it doubleth him full low:  
What mortall wight could ever beare so monstrous blow?

## 19

And in his fall his shield, that covered was,

Did loose his vele<sup>o</sup> by chaunce, and open flew:  
The light whereof, that heavens light did pas,<sup>o</sup>  
Such blazing brightnesse through the aier threw,  
That eye mote not the same endure to vew.  
Which when the Gyaunt spyde with staring eye,  
He downe let fall his arme, and soft withdrew  
His weapon huge, that heavèd was on hye  
For to have slaine the man, that on the ground did lye.

## 20

And eke the fruitfull-headed<sup>o</sup> beast, amazed  
At flashing beames of that sunshiny shield,  
Became starke blind, and all his senses dazed,  
That downe he tumbled on the durty field,  
And seemed himselfe as conquerèd to yield.  
Whom when his maistresse proud perceived to fall,  
Whiles yet his feeble feet for faintnesse reeld,  
Unto the Gyant loudly she gan call,  
"O helpe Orgoglio, helpe, or else we perish all."

## 21

At her so pitteous cry was much amoooved  
Her champion stout, and for to ayde his frend,<sup>o</sup>  
Againe his wonted<sup>o</sup> angry weapon prooved:<sup>o</sup>  
But all in vaine: for he has read his end  
In that bright shield, and all their forces spend  
Themselves in vaine: for since that glauncing<sup>o</sup> sight,  
He hath no powre to hurt, nor to defend;  
As where th'Almighties lightning brond<sup>o</sup> does light,  
It dimmes the dazèd eyen, and daunts the senses quight.

## 22

Whom when the Prince, to battell new addrest,  
And threatning high his dreadfull stroke did see,  
His sparkling blade about his head he blest,<sup>o</sup>

And smote off quite his right leg by the knee,  
That downe he tumbled; as an agèd tree,  
High growing on the top of rocky clift,  
Whose hartstrings with keene steele nigh hewen be,  
The mightie trunck halfe rent, with ragged rift<sup>o</sup>  
Doth roll adowne the rocks, and fall with fearefull drift.<sup>o</sup>

## 23

Or as a Castle reared high and round,  
By subtile engins and malicious slight<sup>6</sup>  
Is underminèd from the lowest ground,  
And her foundation forst,<sup>o</sup> and feebled quight,  
At last downe falles, and with her heapèd hight  
Her hastie ruine does more heavie make,  
And yields it selfe unto the victours might;  
Such was this Gyaunts fall, that seemed to shake  
The stedfast globe of earth, as<sup>o</sup> it for feare did quake.

## 24

The knight then lightly<sup>o</sup> leaping to the pray,  
With mortall steele him smot againe so sore,  
That headlesse his unweldy bodie lay,  
All wallowd in his owne fowle bloudy gore,  
Which flowèd from his wounds in wondrous store.<sup>o</sup>  
But soone as breath out of his breast did pas,  
That huge great body, which the Gyaunt bore,  
Was vanisht quite, and of that monstrous mas  
Was nothing left, but like an emptie bladder was.

## 25

Whose grievous fall, when false Duessa spide,  
Her golden cup she cast unto the ground,  
And crownèd mitre<sup>7</sup> rudely<sup>o</sup> threw aside;  
Such percing grieve her stubborne hart did wound,  
That she could not endure that dolefull stound,<sup>o</sup>

But leaving all behind her, fled away:  
The light-foot Squire her quickly turned around,  
And by hard meanes enforcing her to stay,  
So brought unto his Lord, as his deserved pray.

## 26

The royall Virgin, which beheld from farre,  
In pensive<sup>o</sup> plight, and sad perplexitie,  
The whole achievement of this doubtfull warre,<sup>8</sup>  
Came running fast to greet his victorie,  
With sober gladnesse, and myld modestie,  
And with sweet joyous cheare<sup>o</sup> him thus bespake;  
"Faire braunch of noblesse, flowre of chevalrie,  
That with your worth the world amazed make,  
How shall I quite<sup>o</sup> the paines, ye suffer for my sake?

## 27

"And you<sup>o</sup> fresh bud of vertue springing fast,  
Whom these sad eyes saw nigh unto deaths dore,  
What hath poore Virgin for such perill past,  
Wherewith you to reward? Accept therefore  
My simple selfe, and service evermore;  
And he that high does sit, and all things see  
With equall<sup>o</sup> eyes, their merites to restore,<sup>o</sup>  
Behold what ye this day have done for mee,  
And what I cannot quite,<sup>o</sup> requite with usuree.<sup>o</sup>

## 28

"But sith<sup>o</sup> the heavens, and your faire handeling<sup>o</sup>  
Have made you maister of the field this day,  
Your fortune maister eke with governing,<sup>9</sup>  
And well begun end all so well, I pray,  
Ne let that wicked woman scape away;  
For she it is, that did my Lord bethrall,  
My dearest Lord, and deepe in dongeon lay,



Where he his better dayes hath wasted all.<sup>1</sup>  
O heare, how piteous he to you for ayd does call."

## 29

Forthwith he gave in charge unto his Squire,  
That scarlot whore to keepen carefully;  
Whiles he himselfe with greedie<sup>o</sup> great desire  
Into the Castle entred forcibly,  
Where living creature none he did espye;  
Then gan he lowdly through the house to call:  
But no man cared to answere to his crye.  
There raignd a solemne silence over all,  
Nor voice was heard, nor wight was seene in bowre or hall.

## 30

At last with creeping crooked pace forth came  
An old old man, with beard as white as snow,  
That on a staffe his feeble steps did frame,<sup>o</sup>  
And guide his wearie gate<sup>o</sup> both too and fro:  
For his eye sight him failèd long ygo,  
And on his arme a bounch of keyes<sup>2</sup> he bore,  
The which unusèd, rust did overgrow:  
Those were the keyes of every inner dore,  
But he could not them use, but kept them still in store.

## 31

But very uncouth<sup>o</sup> sight was to behold,  
How he did fashion his untoward<sup>o</sup> pace,  
For as he forward mooved his footing old,  
So backward still was turned his wrinckled face,  
Unlike to men, who ever as they trace,<sup>o</sup>  
Both feet and face one way are wont to lead.  
This was the auncient keeper of that place,  
And foster father of the Gyant dead;  
His name Ignaro<sup>o</sup> did his nature right aread.<sup>o</sup>

### 32

His reverend haire and holy gravitie  
The knight much honord, as beseemèd well,<sup>o</sup>  
And gently<sup>o</sup> askt, where all the people bee,  
Which in that stately building wont to dwell.  
Who answerd him full soft, he could not tell.  
Againe he askt, where that same knight was layd,  
Whom great Orgoglio with his puissaunce fell<sup>o</sup>  
Had made his caytive<sup>o</sup> thrall; againe he sayde,  
He could not tell: ne ever other answere made.

### 33

Then askèd he, which way he in might pas:  
He could not tell, againe he answerèd.  
Thereat the curteous knight displeasèd was,  
And said, "Old sire, it seemes thou hast not red<sup>o</sup>  
How ill it sits with<sup>o</sup> that same silver hed  
In vaine to mocke, or mockt in vaine to bee:  
But if thou be, as thou art pourtrahèd  
With natures pen, in ages grave degree,  
Aread<sup>o</sup> in graver wise, what I demaund<sup>o</sup> of thee."

### 34

His answere likewise was, he could not tell.  
Whose sencelesse speach, and doted<sup>o</sup> ignorance  
When as the noble Prince had markèd well,  
He ghest his nature by his countenance,  
And calmd his wrath with goodly temperance.  
Then to him stepping, from his arme did reach  
Those keyes, and made himselfe free enterance.  
Each dore he opened without any breach;<sup>o</sup>  
There was no barre to stop, nor foe him to empeach.<sup>o</sup>

### 35

There all within full rich arayd he found,  
With royal arras<sup>o</sup> and resplendent gold,  
And did with store of every thing abound,  
That greatest Princes presence<sup>o</sup> might behold.  
But all the floore (too filthy to be told)  
With bloud of guiltlesse babes, and innocents trew,<sup>3</sup>  
Which there were slaine, as sheepe out of the fold,  
Defilèd was, that dreadfull was to vew,  
And sacred ashes over it was strowèd<sup>o</sup> new.

### 36

And there beside of marble stone was built  
An Altare, carved with cunning imagery,<sup>4</sup>  
On which true Christians bloud was often spilt,  
And holy Martyrs often doen to dye,<sup>o</sup>  
With cruell malice and strong tyranny:  
Whose blessed sprites from underneath the stone  
To God for vengeance cryde continually,<sup>5</sup>  
And with great grieve were often heard to grone,  
That hardest heart would bleede, to heare their piteous mone.

### 37

Through every rowme he sought, and every bowr,  
But no where could he find that wofull thrall:  
At last he came unto an yron doore,  
That fast was lockt, but key found not at all  
Emongst that bounch, to open it withall;  
But in the same a little grate was pight,<sup>o</sup>  
Through which he sent his voyce, and lowd did call  
With all his powre, to weet,<sup>o</sup> if living wight  
Were housèd therewithin, whom he enlargen<sup>o</sup> might.

### 38

Therewith an hollow, dreary, murmuring voyce

These piteous plaints and dolours<sup>o</sup> did resound;  
"O who is that, which brings me happy choyce  
Of death,<sup>6</sup> that here lye dying every stound,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet live perforce in balefull<sup>o</sup> darkenesse bound?  
For now three Moones have changèd thrice their hew,<sup>o</sup>  
And have beene thrice hid underneath the ground,  
Since I the heavens chearefull face did vew,  
O welcome thou, that doest of death bring tydings trew."

### 39

Which when that Champion heard, with percing point  
Of pittie deare<sup>o</sup> his hart was thrillèd<sup>o</sup> sore,  
And trembling horror ran through every joynt,  
For ruth<sup>o</sup> of gentle knight so fowle forlore:<sup>o</sup>  
Which shaking off, he rent<sup>o</sup> that yron dore,  
With furious force, and indignation fell;<sup>o</sup>  
Where entred in, his foot could find no flore,  
But all a deepe descent, as darke as hell,  
That breathèd ever forth a filthie banefull smell.

### 40

But neither darkenesse fowle, nor filthy bands,<sup>o</sup>  
Nor noyous<sup>o</sup> smell his purpose could withhold,  
(Entire<sup>o</sup> affection hateth nicer<sup>o</sup> hands)  
But that with constant zeale, and courage bold,  
After long paines and labours manifold,  
He found the meanes that Prisoner up to reare;  
Whose feeble thighs, unable to uphold  
His pinèd<sup>o</sup> corse, him scarce to light could beare,  
A ruefull spectacle of deathe and ghastly drere.<sup>o</sup>

### 41

His sad dull eyes deepe sunck in hollow pits,  
Could not endure th'unwonted<sup>o</sup> sunne to view;  
His bare thin cheekes for want of better bits,<sup>o</sup>

And empty sides deceived<sup>o</sup> of their dew,  
Could make a stony hart his hap to rew;<sup>o</sup>  
His rawbone armes, whose mighty brawnèd bowrs<sup>o</sup>  
Were wont to rive steele plates, and helmets hew,  
Were cleane consumed, and all his vitall powres  
Decayd, and all his flesh shronk up like withered flowres.

## 42

Whom when his Lady saw, to him she ran  
With hasty joy: to see him made her glad,  
And sad to view his visage pale and wan,  
Who earst<sup>o</sup> in flowres of freshest youth was clad.  
Tho<sup>o</sup> when her well of teares she wasted<sup>o</sup> had,  
She said, "Ah dearest Lord, what evill starre  
On you hath fround, and poud his influence bad,  
That of your selfe ye thus berobbèd arre,  
And this misseeming hew<sup>o</sup> your manly looks doth marre?

## 43

"But welcome now my Lord, in wele<sup>o</sup> or woe,  
Whose presence I have lackt to long a day;  
And fie on Fortune mine avowèd foe,  
Whose wrathfull wreakes<sup>o</sup> them selves do now alay.  
And for these wrongs shall treble penaunce pay  
Of treble good: good growes of evils priefe."<sup>7</sup>  
The chearelesse man, whom sorrow did dismay,<sup>o</sup>  
Had no delight to treaten<sup>o</sup> of his grieve;  
His long endured famine needed more reliefe.

## 44

"Faire Lady," then said that victorious knight,<sup>o</sup>  
"The things, that grievous were to do, or beare,  
Them to renew,<sup>o</sup> I wote,<sup>o</sup> breeds no delight;  
Best musicke breeds delight in loathing eare:  
But th'onely good, that growes of passèd feare,

Is to be wise, and ware<sup>o</sup> of like agein.  
This dayes ensample hath this lesson deare  
Deepe written in my heart with yron pen,  
That blisse may not abide in state of mortall men.

#### 45

"Henceforth sir knight, take to you wonted strength,  
And maister these mishaps with patient might;  
Loe<sup>o</sup> where your foe lyes stretcht in monstrous length,  
And loe that wicked woman in your sight,  
The roote of all your care, and wretched plight,  
Now in your powre, to let her live, or dye."  
"To do her dye," quoth Una, "were despight,<sup>8</sup>  
And shame t'avenge so weake an enemy;  
But spoile<sup>o</sup> her of her scarlot robe, and let her fly."

#### 46

So as she bad, that witch they disaraid,  
And robd of royall robes, and purple pall,<sup>o</sup>  
And ornaments that richly were displaid;  
Ne sparèd they to strip her naked all.  
Then when they had despoild her tire<sup>o</sup> and call,<sup>o</sup>  
Such as she was, their eyes might her behold,  
That her misshapèd parts did them appall,  
A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill favoured, old,  
Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told.

#### 47

Her craftie head was altogether bald,  
And as in hate of honorable eld,<sup>o</sup>  
Was overgrowne with scurfe<sup>o</sup> and filthy scald;<sup>9</sup>  
Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,<sup>o</sup>  
And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;  
Her drièd dugs,<sup>o</sup> like bladders lacking wind,  
Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;<sup>o</sup>

Her wrizled<sup>o</sup> skin as rough, as maple rind,  
So scabby was, that would have loathd<sup>o</sup> all womankind.

#### 48

Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,<sup>o</sup>  
My chaster<sup>o</sup> Muse for shame doth blush to write;  
But at her rompe she growing had behind  
A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;<sup>o</sup>  
And eke her feete most monstrous were in sight;  
For one of them was like an Eagles claw,  
With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,  
The other like a Beares uneven<sup>o</sup> paw:  
More ugly shape yet never living creature saw.<sup>1</sup>

#### 49

Which when the knights beheld, amazd they were,  
And wondred at so fowle deformèd wight.  
"Such then," said Una, "as she seemeth here,  
Such is the face of falshood, such the sight  
Of fowle Duessa, when her borrowed light  
Is laid away, and counterfesaunce<sup>o</sup> knowne."  
Thus when they had the witch disrobèd quight,  
And all her filthy feature<sup>o</sup> open showne,  
They let her goe at will, and wander wayes unknowne.

#### 50

She flying fast from heavens hated face,  
And from the world that her discovered<sup>o</sup> wide,  
Fled to the wastfull<sup>o</sup> wildernesses apace,  
From living eyes her open shame to hide,  
And lurkt in rocks and caves long unespide.  
But that faire crew<sup>o</sup> of knights, and Una faire  
Did in that castle afterwards abide,  
To rest them selves, and weary powres repaire,  
Where store they found of all, that dainty<sup>o</sup> was and rare.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Marvelous tales ("Wyde wonders") told of the horn connect it with the horn of the legendary French hero Roland and the ram's horn of Joshua, with which he razed the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:5).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, it was useless to think of withstanding such blows.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Strove to release his encumbered club.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare Exodus 17:6, where Moses smites the rock and water flows forth.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, unable to bear ("impatient of") this unfamiliar ("unwonted") pain.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Jutland, once called the Cimbric peninsula.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, mourn the cows' absence.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, the peril ("stownd") that endangered her state.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An allusion to the golden cup of the woman in Revelation 17:4, which is "full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication"; the chalice of the Roman Church; and the cup of Circe, the sorceress who turned men into beasts (in *Odyssey* 10).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "I saw one of his [that is, the beast's] heads as it were wounded to death" (Revelation 13:3).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, deeply immersed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, through inability to endure ("impatience") his afflicted ("grievèd") head.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, in the one hand left to him.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Clever machines of war ("engins") and evil strategy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An allusion to the pope's triple tiara.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: That is, the final outcome, which had been in doubt, of this battle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Secure your good fortune also by prudent management.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, he has consumed ("wasted") there his best days.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19). See also Matthew 23:13 and Luke 11:52.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Probably alluding to Herod's massacre of the Innocents (Matthew 2:16), who were traditionally viewed as the first martyrs for Christ.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Skillfully wrought images.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
 "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9–10).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the chance or right to choose death.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Fortune will now make amends for his wrongs with triple benefits, as good comes from evils endured ("priefe").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, to cause her to die would be spiteful.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A scabby disease of the scalp.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The passage alludes to Revelation 17:16: "these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked." The animals associated with Duessa were emblematic: foxes of cunning, eagles and bears of rapacity, cruelty, and brutality.[Return to reference 1](#)

# Notes

- °: *deliver*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bonds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put to trial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wild ox*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *powers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demonstrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burst*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amorous play*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glaring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disturbance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eagerness for battle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indignation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snags*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *useless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hatred (feud)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smothering darkness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weapon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *massive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *truncated stump*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rearing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarlet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obstacle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hindrance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *never the more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exceedingly fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quelled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watchful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *observe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slavery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifting up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strength*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skull*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *produced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *used*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raises*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its covering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many-headed*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *lover* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *usual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tried* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flashing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *firebrand* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brandished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *split* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impact* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shattered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abundance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violently* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anxious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *countenance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Squire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impartial* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conduct* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eager* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *support* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gait* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awkward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Ignorance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seemed proper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courteously* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce power* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *captive* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *recognized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *answer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forcing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tapestry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strewn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put to death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set free*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extreme* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pierced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grievously lost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burst open*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bonds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noxious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too fastidious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wasted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow, wretchedness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaccustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to pity his lot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brawny muscles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *then* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expended* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unseemly appearance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weal, well-being* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punishments* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnerve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speak* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Arthur* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recall* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *look* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despoil, strip* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarlet cloak* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *robe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caul, headdress* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *age* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scabs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fallen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breasts* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *welled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrinkled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revolted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *womankind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too chaste* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exposed to view* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desolate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *company* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *precious* [Return to reference](#) °

## **Canto 9**

*His loves and lineage<sup>o</sup> Arthur tells:  
The knights knit friendly bands:<sup>o</sup>  
Sir Trevisan flies from Despayre,  
Whom Redcrosse knight withstands.*

### **1**

O goodly golden chaine,<sup>2</sup> wherewith yfere<sup>o</sup>  
The vertues linkèd are in lovely wize:<sup>o</sup>  
And noble minds of yore allyèd were,  
In brave poursuit of chevalrous emprize,<sup>o</sup>  
That none did others safety despize,<sup>o</sup>  
Nor aid envy<sup>o</sup> to him, in need that stands,  
But friendly each did others prayse devize  
How to advaunce with favourable hands,  
As this good Prince redeemd the Redcrosse knight from bands.

### **2**

Who when their powres, empaired through labour long,  
With dew repast<sup>o</sup> they had recured<sup>o</sup> well,  
And that weake captive wight now wexèd<sup>o</sup> strong,  
Them list<sup>o</sup> no lenger there at leasure dwell,  
But forward fare, as their adventures fell,  
But ere they parted, Una faire besought  
That straunger knight his name and nation tell;  
Least<sup>o</sup> so great good, as he for her had wrought,  
Should die unknown, and buried be in thanklesse thought.

### **3**

“Faire virgin,” said the Prince, “ye me require  
A thing without the compas of<sup>o</sup> my wit:  
For both the lignage and the certain Sire,  
From which I sprong, from me are hidden yit.<sup>o</sup>”

For all so soone as life did me admit  
Into this world, and shewèd heavens light,  
From mothers pap I taken was unfit:°  
And streight delivered to a Faery knight,  
To be upbrought in gentle thewes° and martiall might.

#### 4

“Unto old Timon<sup>3</sup> he me brought bylive,°  
Old Timon, who in youthly yeares hath beene  
In warlike feates th’expertest man alive,  
And is the wisest now on earth I weene;  
His dwelling is low in a valley greene,  
Under the foot of Rauran mossy hore,°  
From whence the river Dee as silver cleene°  
His tombling billowes rolls with gentle rore:⁴  
There all my dayes he traind me up in vertuous lore.

#### 5

“Thither the great Magicien Merlin came,  
As was his use,° ofttimes to visit me:  
For he had charge my discipline° to frame,°  
And Tutours nouriture° to oversee.  
Him oft and oft I askt in privitie,  
Of what loines and what lignage I did spring:  
Whose aunswere bad me still assurèd bee,  
That I was sonne and heire unto a king,  
As time in her just terme° the truth to light should bring.”

#### 6

“Well worthy impe,”° said then the Lady gent,°  
“And Pupill fit for such a Tutours hand.  
But what adventure, or what high intent  
Hath brought you hither into Faery land,  
Aread° Prince Arthur,⁵ crowne of Martiall band?”



"Full hard it is," quoth he, "to read<sup>o</sup> aright  
The course of heavenly cause, or understand  
The secret meaning of th'eternall might,  
That rules mens wayes, and rules the thoughts of living wight.

## 7

"For whither he through fatall deepe foresight,<sup>6</sup>  
Me hither sent, for cause to me unghest,<sup>o</sup>  
Or that fresh bleeding wound, which day and night  
Whilome<sup>o</sup> doth rangle in my riven<sup>o</sup> brest,  
With forcèd fury following his behest,<sup>o</sup>  
Me hither brought by wayes yet never found,  
You to have helpt I hold my selfe yet blest."  
"Ah curteous knight," quoth she, "what secret wound  
Could ever find,<sup>o</sup> to grieve the gentlest hart on ground?"

## 8

"Deare Dame," quoth he, "you sleeping sparkes awake,  
Which troubled once, into huge flames will grow,  
Ne ever will their fervent fury slake  
Till living moysture into smoke do flow,  
And wasted<sup>o</sup> life do lye in ashes low.  
Yet sithens<sup>o</sup> silence lesseneth not my fire,  
But told it flames, and hidden it does glow,  
I will revele, what ye so much desire:  
Ah Love, lay downe thy bow, the whiles I may respire.<sup>o</sup>

## 9

"It was in freshest flowre of youthly yeares,  
When courage first does creepe in manly chest,  
Then first the coale of kindly<sup>o</sup> heat appeares  
To kindle love in every living brest;  
But me had warnd old Timons wise behest,  
Those creeping flames by reason to subdew,  
Before their rage grew to so great unrest,

As miserable lovers use<sup>o</sup> to rew,  
Which still wex<sup>o</sup> old in woe, whiles woe still wexeth new.

## 10

“That idle name of love, and lovers life,  
As<sup>o</sup> losse of time, and vertues enemy  
I ever scornd, and joyd to stirre up strife,  
In midst of their mournfull Tragedy,  
Ay<sup>o</sup> wont to laugh, when them I heard to cry,  
And blow the fire, which them to ashes brent:<sup>o</sup>  
Their God himselfe, grieved at my libertie,  
Shot many a dart at me with fiers intent,  
But I them warded all with wary government.<sup>z</sup>

## 11

“But all in vaine: no fort can be so strong,  
Ne fleshly brest can armèd be so sound,  
But will at last be wonne with battrie<sup>o</sup> long,  
Or unawares at disavantage found;  
Nothing is sure, that growes on earthly ground:  
And who most trustes in arme of fleshly might,  
And boasts, in beauties chaine not to be bound,  
Doth soonest fall in disaventrous<sup>o</sup> fight,  
And yeeldes his caytive<sup>o</sup> neck to victours most<sup>o</sup> despight.

## 12

“Ensample make of him your haplesse joy,<sup>o</sup>  
And of my selfe now mated,<sup>o</sup> as ye see;  
Whose prouder<sup>o</sup> vaunt that proud avenging boy  
Did soone pluck downe, and curbd my libertie.  
For on a day prickt<sup>o</sup> forth with jollitie  
Of looser<sup>o</sup> life, and heat of hardiment,<sup>o</sup>  
Raunging the forest wide on courser<sup>o</sup> free,  
The fields, the floods, the heavens with one consent  
Did seeme to laugh on me, and favour mine intent.

### 13

"For-wearied<sup>o</sup> with my sports, I did alight  
From loftie steed, and downe to sleepe me layd;  
The verdant<sup>o</sup> gras my couch did goodly dight,<sup>o</sup>  
And pillow was my helmet faire displayd:  
Whiles every sence the humour sweet embayd,<sup>8</sup>  
And slombring soft my hart did steale away,  
Me seemèd, by my side a royall Mayd  
Her daintie limbes full softly down did lay:  
So faire a creature yet saw never sunny day.

### 14

"Most goodly glee<sup>o</sup> and lovely blandishment<sup>o</sup>  
She to me made, and bad me love her deare,  
For dearely sure her love was to me bent,<sup>o</sup>  
As when just time expired<sup>9</sup> should appeare.  
But whether dreames delude, or true it were,  
Was never hart so ravisht with delight,  
Ne living man like words did ever heare,  
As she to me delivered all that night;  
And at her parting said, She Queene of Faeries hight.<sup>1</sup>

### 15

"When I awoke, and found her place devoyd,<sup>o</sup>  
And nought but pressèd gras, where she had lyen,  
I sorrowed all so much, as earst<sup>o</sup> I joyd,  
And washèd all her place with watry eyen.  
From that day forth I loved that face divine;  
From that day forth I cast<sup>o</sup> in carefull<sup>o</sup> mind,  
To seeke her out with labour, and long tyne,<sup>o</sup>  
And never vowd<sup>o</sup> to rest, till her I find,  
Nine monethes I seeke in vaine yet ni'll<sup>o</sup> that vow unbind."

### 16

Thus as he spake, his visage wexed pale,  
And chaunge of hew great passion did bewray;  
Yet still he strove to cloke his inward bale,  
And hide the smoke, that did his fire display,  
Till gentle Una thus to him gan say;  
"O happy Queene of Faeries, that hast found  
Mongst many, one that with his prowess may  
Defend thine honour, and thy foes confound:  
True Loves are often sown, but seldom grow on ground."

## 17

"Thine, O then," said the gentle Redcrosse knight,  
"Next to that Ladies love shalbe the place,  
O fairest virgin, full of heavenly light,  
Whose wondrous faith, exceeding earthly race,  
Was firmest fixt in mine extremest case.  
And you, my Lord, the Patrone of my life,  
Of that great Queene may well gaine worthy grace:  
For onely worthy you through prowes priefe  
Yf living man mote worthy be, to be her liefe."

## 18

So diversly discoursing of their loves,  
The golden Sunne his glistring head gan shew,  
And sad remembraunce now the Prince amoves,  
With fresh desire his voyage to pursew:  
Als Una earnd her traveill to renew.  
Then those two knights, fast friendship for to bynd,  
And love establish each to other trew,  
Gave goodly gifts, the signes of gratefull mynd,  
And eke as pledges firme, right hands together joynd.

## 19

Prince Arthur gave a boxe of Diamond sure,  
Embowd with gold and gorgeous ornament,

Wherein were closd few drops of liquor pure,  
Of wondrous worth, and vertue<sup>o</sup> excellent,  
That any wound could heale incontinent:<sup>o</sup>  
Which to requite, the Redcrosse knight him gave  
A booke, wherein his Saveours testament  
Was writ with golden letters rich and brave;<sup>o</sup>  
A worke of wondrous grace, and able soules to save.

## 20

Thus beene they parted, Arthur on his way  
To seeke his love, and th'other for to fight  
With Unas foe, that all her realme did pray.<sup>o</sup>  
But she now weighing the decayed plight,  
And shrunkn synewes of her chosen knight,  
Would not a while her forward course pursew,  
Ne bring him forth in face of dreadfull fight,  
Till he recovered had his former hew:<sup>o</sup>  
For him to be yet weake and wearie well she knew.

## 21

So as they traveild, lo they gan espy  
An armed knight towards them gallop fast,  
That seemed from some feared foe to fly,  
Or other griesly thing, that him agast.<sup>o</sup>  
Still<sup>o</sup> as he fled, his eye was backward cast,  
As if his feare still followed him behind;  
Als flew his steed, as he his bands had brast,<sup>o</sup>  
And with his winged heeles did tread the wind,  
As he had beene a fole of Pegasus his kind.<sup>2</sup>

## 22

Nigh as he drew, they might<sup>o</sup> perceive his head  
To be unarmd, and curld uncombèd heares  
Upstaring<sup>o</sup> stiffe, dismayd with uncouth<sup>o</sup> dread;  
Nor drop of bloud in all his face appeares

Nor life in limbe: and to increase his feares,  
In fowle reproch<sup>o</sup> of knighthoods faire degree,<sup>o</sup>  
About his neck an hempen rope he weares,  
That with his glistring armes does ill agree;  
But he of rope or armes has now no memoree.

### 23

The Redcrosse knight toward him crossèd fast,  
To weet,<sup>o</sup> what mister<sup>o</sup> wight was so dismayd:  
There him he finds all sencelesse and aghast,  
That of him selfe he seemd to be afrayd;  
Whom hardly<sup>o</sup> he from flying forward stayd,  
Till he these wordes to him deliver might;  
"Sir knight, aread<sup>o</sup> who hath ye thus arayd,  
And eke from whom make ye this hasty flight:  
For never knight I saw in such misseeming<sup>o</sup> plight."

### 24

He answerd nought at all, but adding new  
Feare to his first amazment, staring wide  
With stony eyes, and hartlesse hollow hew,<sup>3</sup>  
Astonisht stood, as one that had aspide  
Infernall furies, with their chaines untide.  
Him yet againe, and yet againe bespake  
The gentle knight; who nought to him replide,  
But trembling every joynt did inly quake,  
And foltring tongue at last these words seemd forth to shake.

### 25

"For Gods deare love, Sir knight, do me not stay;  
For loe he comes, he comes fast after mee."  
Eft<sup>o</sup> looking backe would faine have runne away;  
But he him forst to stay, and tellen free  
The secret cause of his perplexitie:<sup>o</sup>  
Yet nathemore<sup>o</sup> by his bold hartie speach,

Could his bloud-frozen hart emboldned bee,  
But through his boldnesse rather feare did reach,  
Yet forst, at last he made through silence suddein breach.

## 26

"And am I now in safetie sure," quoth he,  
"From him, that would have forcèd me to dye?  
And is the point of death now turnd fro mee,  
That I may tell this haplesse history?"<sup>o</sup>  
"Feare nought:" quoth he, "no daunger now is nye."  
"Then shall I you recount a ruefull cace,"<sup>o</sup>  
Said he, "the which with this unlucky eye  
I late beheld, and had not greater grace  
Me reft<sup>o</sup> from it, had bene partaker of the place."<sup>4</sup>

## 27

"I lately chaunst (Would I had never chaunst)  
With a faire knight to keepen companee,  
Sir Terwin<sup>5</sup> hight,<sup>o</sup> that well himselfe advaunst  
In all affaires, and was both bold and free,  
But not so happie as mote happie bee:  
He loved, as was his lot, a Ladie gent,<sup>o</sup>  
That him againe<sup>o</sup> loved in the least degree:  
For she was proud, and of too high intent,<sup>o</sup>  
And joyd to see her lover languish and lament.

## 28

"From whom returning sad and comfortlesse,<sup>o</sup>  
As on the way together we did fare,  
We met that villen (God from him me blesse<sup>o</sup>)  
That cursèd wight, from whom I scapt whyleare,<sup>o</sup>  
A man of hell, that cals himselfe Despaire;<sup>6</sup>  
Who first us greets, and after faire areedes<sup>o</sup>  
Of tydings strange, and of adventures rare:

So creeping close, as Snake in hidden weedes,  
Inquireth of our states, and of our knightly deedes.

## 29

"Which when he knew, and felt our feeble harts  
Embost<sup>o</sup> with bale,<sup>o</sup> and bitter byting griefe,  
Which love had launchèd<sup>o</sup> with his deadly darts,  
With wounding words and termes of foule reprimede,<sup>o</sup>  
He pluckt from us all hope of due reliefe,  
That earst<sup>o</sup> us held in love of lingring life;  
Then hopelesse hartlesse, gan the cunning thiefe  
Perswade us die, to stint<sup>o</sup> all further strife:  
To me he lent this rope, to him a rustie<sup>o</sup> knife.

## 30

"With which sad instrument of hastie death,  
That wofull lover, loathing lenger<sup>o</sup> light,  
A wide way made to let forth living breath.  
But I more fearefull, or more luckie wight,  
Dismayd with that deformèd dismall sight,  
Fled fast away, halfe dead with dying feare:<sup>o</sup>  
Ne yet assur'd of life by you, Sir knight,  
Whose like infirmitie like chaunce may beare:  
But God you never let his charmèd speeches heare."<sup>7</sup>

## 31

"How may a man," said he, "with idle speach  
Be wonne, to spoyle<sup>o</sup> the Castle of his health?"  
"I wote,"<sup>o</sup> quoth he, "whom triall<sup>o</sup> late did teach,  
That like would not<sup>8</sup> for all this worldes wealth:  
His subtill tongue, like dropping honny, mealt<sup>th</sup><sup>o</sup>  
Into the hart, and searcheth every vaine,  
That ere one be aware, by secret stealth  
His powre is reft,<sup>o</sup> and weaknesse doth remaine.  
O never Sir desire to try<sup>o</sup> his guilefull traine."<sup>o</sup>



### 32

"Certès,"<sup>o</sup> said he, "hence shall I never rest,  
Till I that treachours art have heard and tride;  
And you Sir knight, whose name mote<sup>o</sup> I request,  
Of grace<sup>o</sup> do me unto his cabin<sup>o</sup> guide."  
"I that hight<sup>o</sup> Trevisan,"<sup>o</sup> quoth he, "will ride  
Against my liking backe, to doe you grace:<sup>o</sup>  
But nor for gold nor glee<sup>1</sup> will I abide  
By you, when ye arrive in that same place;  
For lever<sup>o</sup> had I die, then<sup>o</sup> see his deadly face."

### 33

Ere long they come, where that same wicked wight  
His dwelling has, low in an hollow cave,  
Farre underneath a craggie clift ypight,<sup>o</sup>  
Darke, dolefull, drearie, like a greedie grave,  
That still<sup>o</sup> for carrion carcasses doth crave:  
On top whereof aye<sup>o</sup> dwelt the ghastly Owle,<sup>2</sup>  
Shrieking his balefull note, which ever drave  
Farre from that haunt all other chearefull fowle;  
And all about it wandring ghostes did waile and howle.

### 34

And all about old stockes<sup>o</sup> and stubs of trees,  
Whereon nor fruit, nor leafe was ever seene,  
Did hang upon the ragged rocky knees;<sup>o</sup>  
On which had many wretches hangèd beene,  
Whose carcasses were scattered on the greene,  
And throwne about the cliffs. Arrivèd there,  
That bare-head knight for dread and dolefull teene,<sup>o</sup>  
Would faine<sup>o</sup> have fled, ne durst approachen neare,  
But th' other forst him stay, and comforted in feare.

### 35

That darkesome cave they enter, where they find  
That cursèd man, low sitting on the ground,  
Musing full sadly in his sullein<sup>o</sup> mind;  
His griesie<sup>o</sup> lockes, long growen, and unbound,  
Disordred hong about his shoulders round,  
And hid his face; through which his hollow eyne  
Lookt deadly dull, and starèd as astound;<sup>o</sup>  
His raw-bone cheekes through penurie and pine,<sup>o</sup>  
Were shronke into his jawes, as<sup>o</sup> he did never dine.

### 36

His garment nought but many ragged clouts,<sup>o</sup>  
With thornes together pind and patchèd was,  
The which his naked sides he wrapt abouts;  
And him beside there lay upon the gras  
A drearie corse,<sup>o</sup> whose life away did pas,  
All wallowd in his owne yet luke-warme blood,  
That from his wound yet wellèd fresh alas;  
In which a rustie knife fast fixèd stood,  
And made an open passage for the gushing flood.

### 37

Which piteous spectacle, approving<sup>o</sup> trew  
The wofull tale that Trevisan had told,  
When as the gentle Redcrosse knight did vew,  
With firie zeale he burnt in courage bold,  
Him to avenge, before his bloud were cold,  
And to the villein said, "Thou agèd damnèd wight,  
The author of this fact,<sup>o</sup> we here behold,  
What justice can but judge against thee right,  
With thine owne bloud to price<sup>o</sup> his bloud, here shed in sight?"

### 38

"What franticke fit," quoth he, "hath thus distraught  
Thee, foolish man, so rash a doome<sup>o</sup> to give?

What justice ever other judgement taught,  
But he should die, who merites not to live?  
None else to death this man despayring drive,<sup>o</sup>  
But his owne guiltie mind deserving death.  
Is then unjust to each his due to give?  
Or let him die, that loatheth living breath?  
Or let him die at ease, that liveth here uneath?<sup>o</sup>

### 39

"Who travels by the wearie wandring way,  
To come unto his wishèd home in haste,  
And meetes a flood, that doth his passage stay,  
Is not great grace to helpe him over past,  
Or free his feet, that in the myre sticke fast?  
Most envious man, that grieves at neighbours good,  
And fond,<sup>o</sup> that joyest in the woe thou hast,  
Why wilt not let him passe, that long hath stood  
Upon the banke, yet wilt thy selfe not passe the flood?

### 40

"He there does now enjoy eternall rest  
And happie ease, which thou doest want and crave,  
And further from it daily wanderest:  
What if some litle paine the passage have,  
That makes fraile flesh to feare the bitter wave?  
Is not short paine well borne, that brings long ease,  
And layes the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?  
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please."<sup>3</sup>

### 41

The knight much wondred at his suddeine wit,<sup>o</sup>  
And said, "The terme of life is limited,  
Ne may a man prolong, nor shorten it;  
The souldier may not move from watchfull sted,<sup>4</sup>

Nor leave his stand, untill his Captaine bed."<sup>o</sup>  
"Who life did limit by almightie doome,"  
Quoth he, "knowes best the termes established;  
And he, that points the Centonell his roome,"<sup>o</sup>  
Doth license him depart at sound of morning droome.<sup>5</sup>

## 42

"Is not his deed, what ever thing is donne,  
In heaven and earth? did not he all create  
To die againe? all ends that was begonne.  
Their times in his eternall booke of fate  
Are written sure, and have their certaine<sup>o</sup> date.  
Who then can strive with strong necessitie,  
That holds the world in his still chaunging state,  
Or shunne the death ordaynd by destinie?  
When houre of death is come, let none aske whence, nor why.

## 43

"The lenger<sup>o</sup> life, I wote<sup>o</sup> the greater sin,  
The greater sin, the greater punishment:  
All those great battels, which thou boasts to win,  
Through strife, and bloud-shed, and avengement,  
Now praysd, hereafter deare<sup>o</sup> thou shalt repent:  
For life must life, and bloud must bloud repay.<sup>6</sup>  
Is not enough thy evill life forespent?<sup>o</sup>  
For he, that once hath missed the right way,  
The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray.

## 44

"Then do no further goe, no further stray,  
But here lie downe, and to thy rest betake,  
Th'ill to prevent, that life ensewen may.<sup>7</sup>  
For what hath life, that may it lovèd make,  
And gives not rather cause it to forsake?

Feare, sicknesse, age, losse, labour, sorrow, strife,  
Paine, hunger, cold, that makes the hart to quake;  
And ever fickle fortune rageth rife,<sup>o</sup>  
All which, and thousands mo<sup>o</sup> do make a loathsome life.

#### 45

"Thou wretched man, of death hast greatest need,  
If in true ballance thou wilt weigh thy state:  
For never knight, that darèd warlike deede,  
More lucklesse disaventures<sup>o</sup> did amate:<sup>o</sup>  
Witnesse the dongeon deepe, wherein of late  
Thy life shut up, for death so oft did call;  
And though good lucke prolongedè hath thy date,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet death then, would the like mishaps forestall,  
Into the which hereafter thou maiest happen fall.<sup>o</sup>

#### 46

"Why then doest thou, O man of sin, desire  
To draw thy dayes forth to their last degree?  
Is not the measure of thy sinfull hire<sup>o</sup>  
High heaped up with huge iniquitie,  
Against the day of wrath,<sup>o</sup> to burden thee?  
Is not enough that to this Ladie milde  
Thou falsèd<sup>o</sup> hast thy faith with perjurie,<sup>o</sup>  
And sold thy selfe to serve Duessa vilde,<sup>o</sup>  
With whom in all abuse thou hast thy selfe defilde?

#### 47

"Is not he just, that all this doth behold  
From highest heaven, and beares an equall<sup>o</sup> eye?  
Shall he thy sins up in his knowledge fold,<sup>o</sup>  
And guiltie be of thine impietie?  
Is not his law, Let every sinner die:<sup>8</sup>  
Die shall all flesh? what then must needs be donne,  
Is it not better to doe willinglie,

Then<sup>o</sup> linger, till the glasse<sup>o</sup> be all out ronne?  
Death is the end of woes: die soone, O faeries sonne.”

#### 48

The knight was much enmovèd with his speach,  
That as a swords point through his hart did perse,  
And in his conscience made a secret breach,<sup>o</sup>  
Well knowing true all, that he did rehearse,<sup>o</sup>  
And to his fresh remembrance did reverse<sup>o</sup>  
The ugly vew of his deformèd crimes,  
That all his manly powres it did disperse,  
As he were charmèd with inchaunted rimes,  
That oftentimes he quakt, and fainted<sup>o</sup> oftentimes.

#### 49

In which amazement, when the Miscreant<sup>o</sup>  
Perceivèd him to waver weake and fraile,  
Whiles trembling horror did his conscience dant,<sup>o</sup>  
And hellish anguish<sup>o</sup> did his soule assaile,  
To drive him to despaire, and quite to quaile,<sup>o</sup>  
He shewed him painted in a table<sup>o</sup> plaine,  
The damnèd ghosts, that doe in torments waile,  
And thousand feends that doe them endlesse paine  
With fire and brimstone, which for ever shall remaine.

#### 50

The sight whereof so throughly him dismaid,  
That nought but death before his eyes he saw,  
And ever burning wrath before him laid,  
By righteous sentence of th’Almighties law:  
Then gan the villein him to overcraw,<sup>o</sup>  
And brought unto him swords, ropes, poison, fire,  
And all that might him to perdition draw;  
And bad him choose, what death he would desire:  
For death was due to him, that had provokt Gods ire.

## 51

But when as none of them he saw him take,  
He to him raught<sup>o</sup> a dagger sharpe and keene,  
And gave it him in hand: his hand did quake,  
And tremble like a leafe of Aspin greene,  
And troubled bloud through his pale face was seene  
To come, and goe with tydings from the hart,  
As it a running messenger had beene.  
At last resolved to worke his finall smart,<sup>o</sup>  
He lifted up his hand, that backe againe did start.

## 52

Which when as Una saw, through every vaine  
The crudled<sup>o</sup> cold ran to her well of life,<sup>o</sup>  
As in a swowne: but soone relived<sup>o</sup> againe,  
Out of his hand she snatcht the cursèd knife,  
And threw it to the ground, enraged rife,<sup>o</sup>  
And to him said, "Fie, fie, faint harted knight,  
What meanest thou by this reprochfull<sup>o</sup> strife?  
Is this the battell, which thou vauntst to fight  
With the fire-mouthèd Dragon, horrible and bright?

## 53

"Come, come away, fraile, feeble, fleshly wight,  
Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly hart,  
Ne divelish thoughts dismay thy constant spright.<sup>o</sup>  
In heavenly mercies hast thou not a part?  
Why shouldst thou then despeire, that chosen<sup>9</sup> art?  
Where justice growes, there grows eke<sup>o</sup> greater grace,  
The which doth quench the brond<sup>o</sup> of hellish smart,  
And that accurst hand-writing<sup>1</sup> doth deface.<sup>o</sup>  
Arise, Sir knight arise, and leave this cursèd place."

## 54

So up he rose, and thence amounted<sup>o</sup> streight.  
Which when the carle<sup>o</sup> beheld, and saw his guest  
Would safe depart, for<sup>o</sup> all his subtill sleight,  
He chose an halter<sup>o</sup> from among the rest,  
And with it hung himselfe, unbid<sup>o</sup> unblest.  
But death he could not worke himselfe thereby;  
For thousand times he so himselfe had drest,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet nathelesse it could not doe<sup>o</sup> him die,  
Till he should die his last, that is eternally.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The golden chain of love or concord that binds the world and the human race together (compare canto 5, stanza 25, n. 5).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The name means "honor."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The hill Rauran is in Wales. The river Dee flows in, and forms part of the boundary of, Wales. The Tudors (Queen Elizabeth's family) were originally Welsh, and the legends of Arthur had their beginnings in the Celtic mythology of early Wales.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Arthur had been named in the quatrains that precede cantos 7 and 8, but not previously in the body of the text.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, whether God ("th'eternall might") sent me here through foresight ordained by fate ("fatall").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, self-control. The descriptions here of Cupid's archery and of the siege of the castle of chastity (in the next stanza) have many echoes from the medieval courtly love tradition.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, while the dew ("humour") of sleep pervaded ("embayd") every sense.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A fitting length of time having passed.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Was called. In the background are many folktales and ballads of a hero bewitched by a fairy. Spenser's letter to Raleigh identifies Gloriana allegorically with glory and with Queen Elizabeth. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, as if he had been a foal of a horse like Pegasus, the flying horse of classical mythology. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, with blanched, bloodless countenance. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, shared the same fate. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: His name may connote weariness or fatigue ("terwyn"). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Despair is the ultimate Christian sin, denying the possibility of divine mercy and grace. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, may God never let you hear his mesmerizing ("charmèd") speeches. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, would not do the like again. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The meaning is uncertain, but may be "flight" or "dread." [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Beauty. That is, not for anything in the world. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Traditionally a messenger of death. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Despaire's arguments on behalf of suicide as against a painful life are derived, like those of Hamlet in his third soliloquy (*Hamlet* 3.1.58–90), principally from Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, other ancient Stoics, and Old Testament statements on divine justice. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The sentry post assigned him. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Drum, with a pun on *doom*. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An echo of Genesis 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, to prevent the evil that will ensue in the rest of your life. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Despaire cites only half of the scripture verse: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through

- Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” This is one of several similar passages in the epistles of Saint Paul that form the basis of the theological doctrine of predestination.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: An echo of Colossians 2:14: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances [that is, the Old Testament law] that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *lineage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bonds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *together*[Return to reference 9](#)
- °: *manner*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *adventure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disregard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *begrudge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rest* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *restored*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *waxed, grown*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *they cared*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beyond the reach of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *still*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *not yet weaned*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *manners*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gray*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *custom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *education* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *direct*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *tutor's upbringing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *due course*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offspring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discern*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unknown*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all the while* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *succeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consumed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take breath*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as being*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *siege*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disastrous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *captive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greatest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Redcrosse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too proud*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spurred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too loose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boldness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warhorse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *utterly wearied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *green* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entertainment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compliment*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *given*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *empty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *previously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care-filled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vowed never*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *protector*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demonstration of prowess*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glittering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yearned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *true*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prey on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *could*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bristling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disgrace* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kind of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with difficulty*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *declare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unseemly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *again*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *story of misfortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitiable event*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *named*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desolate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a while before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tells*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exhausted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pierced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insult, scorn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bloodstained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear of death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experience*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *melts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken by force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treachery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cave*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *am called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a favor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rather*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stumps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crags*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gray*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if stunned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *starvation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scraps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bloody corpse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confirming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in hardship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quick intelligence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *station*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fixed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bitterly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *already spent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *widely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mishaps*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *daunt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *span of life*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen to fall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *service to sin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Judgment Day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betrayed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *oath-breaking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impartial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cover up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hourglass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recount*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bring back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lost heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misbeliever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daunt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear of hell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be dismayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *picture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exult over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reached*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *congealing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deeply*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deserving reproach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *firebrand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blot out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mounted his horse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *churl*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in spite of*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *noose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unprayed for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make*[Return to reference](#) °



## **Canto 10**

*Her faithfull knight faire Una brings  
to house of Holinesse,  
Where he is taught repentance, and  
the way to heavenly blesse.◊*

### **1**

What man is he, that boasts of fleshly might,  
And vaine assurance of mortality,◊  
Which all so soone, as it doth come to fight,  
Against spirituall foes, yeelds by and by,◊  
Or from the field most cowardly doth fly?  
Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,  
That thorough◊ grace hath gainèd victory.  
If any strength we have, it is to ill,  
But all the good is Gods, both power and eke◊ will.◊

### **2**

By that, which lately hapned, Una saw,  
That this her knight was feeble, and too faint;  
And all his sinews woxen weake and raw,◊  
Through long enprisonment, and hard constraint,◊  
Which he endurèd in his late restraint,  
That yet he was unfit for bloudie fight:  
Therefore to cherish◊ him with diets daint,◊  
She cast◊ to bring him, where he chearen◊ might,  
Till he recovered had his◊ late decayèd plight.

### **3**

There was an auntient house not farre away,  
Renowmd throughout the world for sacred lore,  
And pure unspotted life: so well they say  
It governd was, and guided evermore,

Through wisdom of a matrone grave and hore;<sup>o</sup>  
Whose onely joy was to relieve the needes  
Of wretched soules, and helpe the helpelesse pore:  
All night she spent in bidding of her bedes,<sup>o</sup>  
And all the day in doing good and godly deedes.

#### 4

Dame Caelia<sup>o</sup> men did her call, as thought  
From heaven to come, or thither to arise,  
The mother of three daughters, well upbrought  
In goodly thewes,<sup>o</sup> and godly exercise:<sup>o</sup>  
The eldest two most sober, chast, and wise,  
Fidelia and Speranza virgins were,  
Though spoused,<sup>o</sup> yet wanting<sup>o</sup> wedlocks solemnize;<sup>3</sup>  
But faire Charissa to a lovely fere<sup>o</sup>  
Was linckèd, and by him had many pledges dere.<sup>4</sup>

#### 5

Arrivèd there, the dore they find fast lockt;  
For it was warely watchèd night and day,  
For feare of many foes: but when they knockt,  
The Porter opened unto them streight way:  
He was an agèd syre, all hory gray,  
With lookes full lowly cast, and gate<sup>o</sup> full slow,  
Wont<sup>o</sup> on a staffe his feeble steps to stay,  
Hight Humilta.<sup>o</sup> They passe in stouping low;  
For streight and narrow was the way, which he did show.<sup>5</sup>

#### 6

Each goodly thing is hardest to begin,  
But entred in a spacious court they see,  
Both plaine, and pleasant to be walkèd in,  
Where them does meete a francklin<sup>6</sup> faire and free,  
And entertaines with comely courteous glee,

His name was Zele,<sup>o</sup> that him right well became,  
For in his speeches and behaviour hee  
Did labour lively to expresse the same,  
And gladly did them guide, till to the Hall they came.

## 7

There fairely them receives a gentle Squire,  
Of milde demeanure, and rare courtesie,  
Right cleanly clad in comely sad<sup>o</sup> attire;  
In word and deede that shewed great modestie,  
And knew his good<sup>o</sup> to all of each degree,  
Hight Reverence. He them with speeches meet<sup>o</sup>  
Does faire entreat; no courting nicetie,<sup>z</sup>  
But simple true, and eke unfainèd sweet,  
As might become a Squire so great persons to greet.

## 8

And afterwards them to his Dame he leades,  
That agèd Dame, the Ladie of the place:  
Who all this while was busie at her beades:  
Which doen, she up arose with seemely grace,  
And toward them full matronely<sup>8</sup> did pace.  
Where when that fairest Una she beheld,  
Whom well she knew to spring from heavenly race,  
Her hart with joy unwonted<sup>o</sup> inly sweld,<sup>o</sup>  
As feeling wondrous comfort in her weaker eld.<sup>o</sup>

## 9

And her embracing said, "O happie earth,  
Whereon thy innocent feet doe ever tread,  
Most vertuous virgin borne of heavenly berth,  
That to redeeme thy woefull parents head,  
From tyrans rage, and ever-dying dread,<sup>o</sup>  
Hast wandred through the world now long a day<sup>o</sup>  
Yet ceasest not thy wearie soles to lead,

What grace hath thee now hither brought this way?  
Or doest<sup>o</sup> thy feeble feet unweeting<sup>o</sup> hither stray?

## 10

"Strange thing it is an errant<sup>o</sup> knight to see  
Here in this place, or any other wight,  
That hither turnes his steps. So few there bee,  
That chose the narrow path, or seeke the right:  
All keepe the broad high way, and take delight  
With many rather for to go astray,  
And be partakers of their evill plight,  
Then with a few to walke the Tightest way;<sup>9</sup>  
O foolish men, why haste ye to your owne decay?"

## 11

"Thy selfe to see, and tyred limbs to rest,  
O matrone sage," quoth she, "I hither came,  
And this good knight his way with me addrest,<sup>o</sup>  
Led with thy prayes and broad-blazèd fame,  
That up to heaven is blowne."<sup>1</sup> The auncient Dame  
Him goodly greeted in her modest guise,  
And entertaynd them both, as best became,  
With all the court'sies,<sup>o</sup> that she could devise,  
Ne wanted ought,<sup>o</sup> to shew her bounteous or wise.

## 12

Thus as they gan of sundry things devise,<sup>o</sup>  
Loe two most goodly virgins came in place,  
Ylinkèd arme in arme in lovely wise,<sup>o</sup>  
With countenance demure, and modest grace,  
They numbred even steps and equall pace:  
Of which the eldest, that Fidelia hight,  
Like sunny beames threw from her Christall face,  
That could have dazd<sup>o</sup> the rash beholders sight,  
And round about her head did shine like heavens light.

### 13

She was araièd<sup>o</sup> all in lilly white,  
And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,  
With wine and water<sup>2</sup> fild up to the hight,  
In which a Serpent<sup>3</sup> did himselfe enfold,  
That horreur made to all, that did behold;  
But she no whit did chaunge her constant mood:<sup>o</sup>  
And in her other hand she fast did hold  
A booke,<sup>4</sup> that was both signd and seald with blood,  
Wherein darke<sup>o</sup> things were writ, hard to be understood.<sup>5</sup>

### 14

Her younger sister, that Speranza hight,  
Was clad in blew, that her beseemèd<sup>o</sup> well;  
Not all so chearefull seemèd she of sight,<sup>o</sup>  
As was her sister; whether dread<sup>o</sup> did dwell,  
Or anguish in her hart, is hard to tell:  
Upon her arme a silver anchor<sup>6</sup> lay,  
Whereon she leanèd ever, as befell:<sup>o</sup>  
And ever up to heaven, as she did pray,  
Her stedfast eyes were bent, ne swarvèd other way.

### 15

They seeing Una, towards her gan wend,<sup>o</sup>  
Who them encounters<sup>o</sup> with like courtesie;  
Many kind speeches they betwene them spend,  
And greatly joy each other well to see:  
Then to the knight with shamefast<sup>o</sup> modestie  
They turne themselves, at Unas meeke request,  
And him salute with well beseeming glee;<sup>o</sup>  
Who faire them quites,<sup>o</sup> as him beseemèd best,  
And goodly gan discourse of many a noble gest.<sup>o</sup>

### 16

Then Una thus; "But she your sister deare,  
The deare Charissa where is she become?<sup>o</sup>  
Or wants<sup>o</sup> she health, or busie is elsewhere?"  
"Ah no," said they, "but forth she may not come:  
For she of late is lightned of her wombe,  
And hath encreast the world with one sonne more,<sup>7</sup>  
That her to see should be but troublesome."  
"Indeede," quoth she, "that should her trouble sore,  
But thank be God, that her encrease so evermore."<sup>8</sup>

## 17

Then said the agèd Caelia, "Deare dame,  
And you good Sir, I wote<sup>o</sup> that of your toyle,  
And labours long, through which ye hither came,  
Ye both forwearied<sup>o</sup> be: therefore a whyle  
I read<sup>o</sup> you rest, and to your bowres recoyle."<sup>9</sup>  
Then callèd she a Groome, that forth him led  
Into a goodly lodge, and gan despoile<sup>o</sup>  
Of puissant armes, and laid in easie<sup>o</sup> bed;  
His name was meeke Obedience rightfully arèd.<sup>o</sup>

## 18

Now when their wearie limbes with kindly<sup>o</sup> rest,  
And bodies were refresht with due repast,<sup>o</sup>  
Faire Una gan Fidelia faire request,  
To have her knight into her schoolehouse plaste,<sup>o</sup>  
That of her heavenly learning he might taste,  
And heare the wisdom of her words divine.  
She graunted, and that knight so much agraste,<sup>o</sup>  
That she him taught celestiall discipline,<sup>o</sup>  
And opened his dull eyes, that light mote in them shine.

## 19

And that her sacred Booke, with bloud<sup>o</sup> ywrit,

That none could read, except she did them teach,  
She unto him disclosed every whit,<sup>o</sup>  
And heavenly documents<sup>o</sup> thereout did preach,  
That weaker wit<sup>o</sup> of man could never reach,  
Of God, of grace, of justice, of free will,  
That wonder was to heare her goodly speach:  
For she was able, with her words to kill,  
And raise againe to life the hart, that she did thrill.<sup>o</sup>

## 20

And when she list<sup>o</sup> poure out her larger spright,<sup>o</sup>  
She would commaund the hastie Sunne to stay,  
Or backward turne his course from heavens hight;  
Sometimes great hostes of men she could dismay,  
Dry-shod to passe, she parts the flouds in tway;<sup>o</sup>  
And eke huge mountaines from their native seat  
She would commaund, themselves to beare away,  
And throw in raging sea with roaring threat.  
Almightie God her gave such powre, and puissance great.<sup>1</sup>

## 21

The faithfull knight now grew in litle space,<sup>o</sup>  
By hearing her, and by her sisters lore,  
To such perfection of all heavenly grace,  
That wretched world he gan for to abhore,<sup>2</sup>  
And mortall life gan loath, as thing forelore,<sup>o</sup>  
Greeved with remembrance of his wicked wayes,  
And prickt with anguish of his sinnes so sore,  
That he desirde to end his wretched dayes:  
So much the dart of sinfull guilt the soule dismayes.

## 22

But wise Speranza gave him comfort sweet,  
And taught him how to take assurèd hold  
Upon her silver anchor, as was meet;

Else had his sinnes so great, and manifold  
Made him forget all that Fidelia told.  
In this distressed doubtful<sup>o</sup> agonie,  
When him his dearest Una did behold,  
Disdeining life, desiring leave to die,  
She found her selfe assayld with great perplexitie.<sup>o</sup>

## 23

And came to Caelia to declare her smart,<sup>o</sup>  
Who well acquainted with that commune<sup>o</sup> plight,  
Which sinfull horror<sup>o</sup> workes in wounded hart,  
Her wisely comforted all that she might,  
With goodly counsell and advisement right;  
And streightway sent with carefull diligence,  
To fetch a Leach,<sup>o</sup> the which had great insight  
In that disease of grievèd<sup>o</sup> consciënce,  
And well could cure the same; His name was Patiënce.

## 24

Who comming to that soule-diseased knight,  
Could hardly<sup>o</sup> him intreat, to tell his grieve:  
Which knowne, and all that noyd<sup>o</sup> his heavie spright  
Well searcht,<sup>o</sup> eftsoones<sup>o</sup> he gan apply reliefe  
Of salves and med'cines, which had passing priefe,<sup>3</sup>  
And thereto added words of wondrous might:  
By which to ease he him recured<sup>o</sup> briefe,<sup>o</sup>  
And much asswaged the passion<sup>o</sup> of his plight,  
That he his paine endured, as seeming now more light.

## 25

But yet the cause and root of all his ill,  
Inward corruption, and infected sin,<sup>4</sup>  
Not purged nor heald, behind remainèd still,  
And festring sore did rankle yet within,  
Close<sup>o</sup> creeping twixt the marrow and the skin.



Which to extirpe,<sup>o</sup> he laid him privily  
Downe in a darkesome lowly place farre in,  
Whereas<sup>o</sup> he meant his corrosives to apply,  
And with streight<sup>o</sup> diet tame his stubborne malady.

## 26

In ashes and sackcloth<sup>5</sup> he did array  
His daintie corse,<sup>o</sup> proud humors<sup>6</sup> to abate,  
And dieted with fasting every day,  
The swelling of his wounds to mitigate,  
And made him pray both earely and eke late:  
And ever as superfluous flesh did rot  
Amendment readie still at hand did wayt,  
To pluck it out with pincers firie whot,<sup>o</sup>  
That soone in him was left no one corrupted jot.

## 27

And bitter Penance with an yron whip,  
Was wont him once to disple<sup>o</sup> every day:  
And sharpe Remorse his hart did pricke and nip,  
That drops of bloud thence like a well did play;  
And sad Repentance usèd to embay<sup>o</sup>  
His bodie in salt water smarting sore,  
The filthy blots of sinne to wash away.<sup>7</sup>  
So in short space they did to health restore  
The man that would not live, but earst<sup>o</sup> lay at deathes dore.

## 28

In which his torment often was so great,  
That like a Lyon he would cry and rore,  
And rend his flesh, and his owne synewes eat.  
His own deare Una hearing evermore  
His ruefull shriekes and gronings, often tore  
Her guiltlesse garments, and her golden heare,

For pittie of his paine and anguish sore;  
Yet all with patience wisely she did beare;  
For well she wist, his crime could else be never cleare.°

### 29

Whom thus recovered by wise Patiënce,  
And trew Repentance they to Una brought:  
Who joyous of his curèd consciënce,  
Him dearely kist, and fairely° eke besought  
Himselfe to chearish,° and consuming thought  
To put away out of his carefull° brest.  
By this° Charissa, late° in child-bed brought,  
Was woxen° strong, and left her fruitfull nest;  
To her faire Una brought this unacquainted guest.

### 30

She was a woman in her freshest age,  
Of wondrous beauty, and of bountie° rare,  
With goodly grace and comely personage,°  
That was on earth not easie to compare;°  
Full of great love, but Cupids wanton snare  
As hell she hated, chast in worke and will;  
Her necke and breasts were ever open bare,  
That ay° thereof her babes might sucke their fill;  
The rest was all in yellow robes arayèd still.⁸

### 31

A multitude of babes about her hong,  
Playing their sports, that joyd her to behold,  
Whom still she fed, whiles they were weake and young,  
But thrust them forth° still, as they wexèd old:  
And on her head she wore a tyre° of gold,  
Adornd with gemmes and owches° wondrous faire,  
Whose passing° price uneath° was to be told;  
And by her side there sate a gentle paire

Of turtle doves,<sup>9</sup> she sitting in an yvorie chaire.

### 32

The knight and Una entring, faire her greet,  
And bid her joy of that her happie brood;  
Who them requites with court'sies seeming meet,<sup>o</sup>  
And entertaines with friendly chearefull mood.  
Then Una her besought, to be so good,  
As in her vertuous rules to schoole her knight,  
Now after all his torment well withstood,  
In that sad<sup>o</sup> house of Penance, where his spright  
Had past<sup>o</sup> the paines of hell, and long enduring night.

### 33

She was right joyous of her just request,  
And taking by the hand that Faeries sonne,  
Gan him instruct in every good behest,<sup>o</sup>  
Of love, and righteousness, and well to donne,<sup>o</sup>  
And wrath, and hatred warely<sup>o</sup> to shonne,  
That drew on men Gods hatred, and his wrath,  
And many soules in dolours<sup>o</sup> had fordonne:<sup>o</sup>  
In which when him she well instructed hath,  
From thence to heaven she teacheth him the ready<sup>o</sup> path.

### 34

Wherein his weaker<sup>o</sup> wandring steps to guide,  
An auncient matrone she to her does call,  
Whose sober looks her wisdom well descride:<sup>o</sup>  
Her name was Mercie, well knowne over all,  
To be both gracious, and eke liberall:  
To whom the carefull charge of him she gave,  
To lead aright, that he should never fall  
In all his wayes through this wide worldès wave,<sup>o</sup>  
That Mercy in the end his righteous soule might save.

### 35

The godly Matrone by the hand him beares<sup>o</sup>  
Forth from her<sup>o</sup> presence, by a narrow way,  
Scattered with bushy thornes, and ragged breares,<sup>o</sup>  
Which still before him she removed away,  
That nothing might his ready passage stay:<sup>o</sup>  
And ever when his feet encombred were,  
Or gan to shrink, or from the right to stray,  
She held him fast, and firmly did upbeare,  
As carefull Nourse her child from falling oft does reare.

### 36

Eftsoones unto an holy Hospitall,<sup>o</sup>  
That was fore<sup>o</sup> by the way, she did him bring,  
In which seven Bead-men<sup>o</sup> that had vowed all  
Their life to service of high heavens king  
Did spend their dayes in doing godly thing:  
Their gates to all were open evermore,  
That by the wearie way were traveiling,  
And one sate wayting ever them before,  
To call in commers-by, that needy were and pore.<sup>1</sup>

### 37

The first of them that eldest was, and best,<sup>o</sup>  
Of all the house had charge and government,  
As Guardian and Steward of the rest:  
His office<sup>o</sup> was to give entertainment  
And lodging, unto all that came, and went:  
Not unto such, as could him feast againe,<sup>o</sup>  
And double quite,<sup>o</sup> for that he on them spent,  
But such, as want of harbour<sup>o</sup> did constraine:<sup>o</sup>  
Those for Gods sake his dewty was to entertaine.

### 38

The second was as Almner<sup>2</sup> of the place,  
His office was, the hungry for to feed,  
And thristy give to drinke, a worke of grace:  
He feard not once him selfe to be in need,  
Ne cared to hoord for those, whom he did breede:°  
The grace of God he layd up still in store,  
Which as a stocke° he left unto his seede;°  
He had enough, what need him care for more?  
And had he lesse, yet some he would give to the pore.

### 39

The third had of their wardrobe custodie,  
In which were not rich tyres,° nor garments gay,  
The plumes of pride, and wings of vanitie,  
But clothes meet to keepe keene could° away,  
And naked nature seemely° to aray;  
With which bare wretched wights he dayly clad,  
The images of God in earthly clay;  
And if that no spare clothes to give he had,  
His owne coate he would cut, and it distribute glad.

### 40

The fourth appointed by his office was,  
Poore prisoners to relieve with gracious ayd,  
And captives to redeeme with price of bras,°  
From Turkes and Sarazins, which them had stayd;°  
And though they faultie were, yet well he wayd,°  
That God to us forgiveth every howre  
Much more then that, why° they in bands° were layd,  
And he that harrowd hell<sup>3</sup> with heavie stowre,°  
The faultie° soules from thence brought to his heavenly bowre.

### 41

The fift had charge sicke persons to attend,  
And comfort those, in point of death which lay;

For them most needeth comfort in the end,  
When sin, and hell, and death do most dismay  
The feeble soule departing hence away.  
All is but lost, that living we bestow,<sup>o</sup>  
If not well ended at our dying day.  
O man have mind of that last bitter throw;<sup>o</sup>  
For as the tree does fall, so lyes it ever low.<sup>4</sup>

## 42

The sixt had charge of them now being dead,  
In seemely sort their corses to engrave,<sup>o</sup>  
And deck with dainty flowres their bridall bed,  
That to their heavenly spouse<sup>o</sup> both sweet and brave<sup>o</sup>  
They might appeare, when he their soules shall save.  
The wondrous workemanship of Gods owne mould,<sup>5</sup>  
Whose face he made, all beasts to feare,<sup>o</sup> and gave  
All in his hand,<sup>6</sup> even dead we honour should.  
Ah dearest God me graunt, I dead be not defould.<sup>o</sup>

## 43

The seventh now after death and buriall done,  
Had charge the tender Orphans of the dead  
And widowes ayd, least<sup>o</sup> they should be undone:  
In face of judgement<sup>o</sup> he their right would plead,  
Ne ought<sup>o</sup> the powre of mighty men did dread  
In their defence, nor would for gold or fee<sup>o</sup>  
Be wonne their rightfull causes downe to tread:  
And when they stood in most necessitee,  
He did supply their want, and gave them ever free.<sup>7</sup>

## 44

There when the Elfin knight arrivèd was,  
The first and chieftest of the seven, whose care  
Was guests to welcome, towardes him did pas:

Where seeing Mercie, that his steps up bare,<sup>o</sup>  
And alwayes led, to her with reverence rare<sup>o</sup>  
He humbly louted<sup>o</sup> in meeke lowlinesse,  
And seemely welcome for her did prepare:  
For of their order she was Patronesse,  
Albe<sup>o</sup> Charissa were their chiefest founderesse.

#### 45

There she awhile him stayes, him selfe to rest,  
That to the rest more able he might bee:  
During which time, in every good behest<sup>o</sup>  
And godly worke of Almes and charitee  
She him instructed with great industree;  
Shortly therein so perfect he became,  
That from the first unto the last degree,  
His mortall life he learnèd had to frame  
In holy righteousness, without rebuke or blame.

#### 46

Thence forward by that painfull way they pas,  
Forth to an hill, that was both steepe and hy;  
On top whereof a sacred chappell was,  
And eke a litle Hermitage thereby,  
Wherein an agèd holy man did lye,<sup>o</sup>  
That day and night said his devotiön,  
Ne other worldly busines did apply;<sup>8</sup>  
His name was heavenly Contemplatiön;  
Of God and goodnesse was his meditatiön.

#### 47

Great grace that old man to him given had;  
For God he often saw from heavens hight,  
All<sup>o</sup> were his earthly eyen both blunt<sup>o</sup> and bad,  
And through great age had lost their kindly<sup>o</sup> sight,  
Yet wondrous quick and persant<sup>o</sup> was his spright,<sup>o</sup>

As Eagles eye, that can behold the Sunne:<sup>9</sup>  
That hill they scale with all their powre and might,  
That his frayle thighes nigh<sup>o</sup> wearie and fordonne<sup>o</sup>  
Gan faile, but by her helpe the top at last he wonne.

#### 48

There they do finde that godly agèd Sire,  
With snowy lockes adowne his shoulders shed,  
As hoarie frost with spangles doth attire  
The mossy braunches of an Oke halfe ded.  
Each bone might through his body well be red,<sup>o</sup>  
And every sinew seene through<sup>o</sup> his long fast:  
For nought he cared his carcas long unfed;  
His mind was full of spirituall repast,  
And pynd<sup>o</sup> his flesh, to keepe his body low<sup>o</sup> and chast.

#### 49

Who when these two approching he aspide,  
At their first presence grew agrievèd sore,<sup>1</sup>  
That forst him lay his heavenly thoughts aside;  
And had he not that Dame respected more,<sup>o</sup>  
Whom highly he did reverence and adore,  
He would not once have movèd for the knight.  
They him saluted standing far afore;<sup>o</sup>  
Who well them greeting, humbly did requight,<sup>o</sup>  
And askèd, to what end they clomb<sup>o</sup> that tedious height.

#### 50

“What end,” quoth she, “should cause us take such paine,  
But that same end, which every living wight  
Should make his marke,<sup>o</sup> high heaven to attaine?  
Is not from hence the way, that leadeth right  
To that most glorious house, that glistreth<sup>o</sup> bright  
With burning starres, and everliving fire,  
Whereof the keyes are to thy hand behight<sup>o</sup>



By wise Fidelia? she doth thee require,  
To shew it to this knight, according<sup>o</sup> his desire."

## 51

"Thrise happy man," said then the father grave,  
"Whose staggering steps thy<sup>o</sup> steady hand doth lead,  
And shewes the way, his sinfull soule to save.  
Who better can the way to heaven aread<sup>o</sup>  
Then thou thy selfe, that was both borne and bred  
In heavenly throne, where thousand Angels shine?  
Thou doest the prayers of the righteous sead<sup>o</sup>  
Present before the majestie divine,  
And his avenging wrath to clemencie incline.

## 52

"Yet since thou bidst, thy pleasure shalbe donne.  
Then come thou man of earth,<sup>2</sup> and see the way,  
That never yet was seene of Faeries sonne,  
That never leads the traveiler astray,  
But after labours long, and sad delay,  
Brings them to joyous rest and endlesse blis.  
But first thou must a season fast and pray,  
Till from her bands the spright assoilèd<sup>o</sup> is,  
And have her strength recured<sup>o</sup> from fraile infirmitis."

## 53

That done, he leads him to the highest Mount;  
Such one, as that same mighty man<sup>o</sup> of God,  
That bloud-red billowes like a wallèd front  
On either side disparted<sup>o</sup> with his rod,  
Till that his army dry-foot through them yod,<sup>o</sup>  
Dwelt fortie dayes upon; where writ in stone  
With bloody letters by the hand of God,  
The bitter doome of death and balefull mone<sup>3</sup>  
He did receive, whiles flashing fire about him shone.

## 54

Or like that sacred hill, whose head full hie,  
Adorn'd with fruitfull Olives all arownd,  
Is, as it were for endlesse memory  
Of that deare Lord, who oft thereon was fownd,  
For ever with a flowring girlond crownd:  
Or like that pleasaunt Mount, that is for ay<sup>o</sup>  
Through famous Poets verse each where<sup>o</sup> renown'd,  
On which the thrise three learned Ladies play  
Their heavenly notes, and make full many a lovely lay.<sup>4</sup>

## 55

From thence, far off he unto him did shew  
A litle path, that was both steepe and long,  
Which to a goodly Citie led his vew;  
Whose wals and towres were builded high and strong  
Of perle and precious stone,<sup>5</sup> that earthly tong  
Cannot describe, nor wit of man can tell;  
Too high a ditty<sup>o</sup> for my simple song;  
The Citie of the great king hight<sup>o</sup> it well,  
Wherein eternall peace and happinesse doth dwell.

## 56

As he thereon stood gazing, he might<sup>o</sup> see  
The blessed Angels to and fro descend  
From highest heaven, in gladsome companee,  
And with great joy into that Citie wend,<sup>o</sup>  
As commonly<sup>o</sup> as friend does with his frend.<sup>6</sup>  
Whereat he wondred much, and gan enquire,  
What stately building durst so high extend  
Her loftie towres unto the starry sphere,  
And what unknownen nation there empeopled were.<sup>o</sup>

## 57

“Faire knight,” quoth he, “Hierusalem that is,  
The new Hierusalem, that God has built  
For those to dwell in, that are chosen his,  
His chosen people purged from sinfull guilt,  
With pretious bloud, which cruelly was spilt  
On cursèd tree, of that unspotted lam,<sup>7</sup>  
That for the sinnes of all the world was kilt:  
Now are they Saints all in that Citie sam,<sup>o</sup>  
More deare unto their God, then younglings to their dam.”<sup>8</sup>

## 58

“Till now,” said then the knight, “I weened<sup>o</sup> well,  
That great Cleopolis,<sup>9</sup> where I have beene,  
In which that fairest Faerie Queene doth dwell,  
The fairest Citie was, that might be seene;  
And that bright towre all built of christall cleene,<sup>o</sup>  
Panthea,<sup>1</sup> seemd the brightest thing, that was:  
But now by prooffe<sup>o</sup> all otherwise I weene;  
For this great Citie that<sup>2</sup> does far surpas,  
And this bright Angels towre quite dims that towre of glas.”

## 59

“Most trew,” then said the holy agèd man;  
“Yet is Cleopolis for earthly frame,<sup>o</sup>  
The fairest peece,<sup>o</sup> that eye beholden can:  
And well beseemes<sup>o</sup> all knights of noble name,  
That covet in th’immortall booke of fame  
To be eternizèd, that same to haunt,<sup>o</sup>  
And doen their service to that soveraigne Dame,  
That glorie does to them for guerdon<sup>o</sup> graunt:  
For she is heavenly borne, and heaven may justly vaunt.”<sup>3</sup>

## 60

“And thou faire ymp,<sup>o</sup> sprong out from English race,

How ever now accompted<sup>o</sup> Elfins sonne,  
Well worthy doest thy service for her grace,<sup>o</sup>  
To aide a virgin desolate foredonne.<sup>o</sup>  
But when thou famous victorie hast wonne,  
And high emongst all knights hast hong thy shield,  
Thenceforth the suit<sup>o</sup> of earthly conquest shonne,<sup>o</sup>  
And wash thy hands from guilt of bloudy field:  
For bloud can nought but sin, and wars but sorrowes yield.

## 61

"Then seeke this path, that I to thee presage,<sup>o</sup>  
Which after all to heaven shall thee send;  
Then peaceably thy painefull<sup>o</sup> pilgrimage  
To yonder same Hierusalem do bend,  
Where is for thee ordaind a blessèd end:  
For thou emongst those Saints, whom thou doest see,  
Shalt be a Saint, and thine owne nations frend  
And Patrone: thou Saint George shalt callèd bee,  
Saint George of mery England, the signe of victoree."<sup>4</sup>

## 62

"Unworthy wretch," quoth he, "of so great grace,  
How dare I thinke such glory to attaine?"  
"These that have it attained, were in like cace,"  
Quoth he, "as wretched, and lived in like paine."  
"But deeds of armes must I at last be faine,<sup>o</sup>  
And Ladies love to leave so dearly bought?"  
"What need of armes, where peace doth ay<sup>o</sup> remaine,"  
Said he, "and battailes none are to be fought?  
As for loose<sup>o</sup> loves are<sup>o</sup> vaine, and vanish into nought."

## 63

"O let me not," quoth he, "then turne againe  
Backe to the world, whose joyes so fruitlesse are;  
But let me here for aye in peace remaine,

Or streight way on that last long voyage fare,<sup>o</sup>  
That nothing may my present hope empare."<sup>o</sup>  
"That may not be," said he, "ne maist thou yit  
Forgo that royall maides bequeathèd care,<sup>o</sup>  
Who did her cause into thy hand commit,  
Till from her cursèd foe thou have her freely quit."<sup>o</sup>

## 64

"Then shall I soone," quoth he, "so God me grace,  
Abet<sup>o</sup> that virgins cause disconsolate,  
And shortly backe returne unto this place  
To walke this way in Pilgrims poore estate.  
But now aread,<sup>o</sup> old father, why of late  
Didst thou behight<sup>o</sup> me borne of English blood,  
Whom all a Faeries sonne doen nominate?"<sup>o</sup>  
"That word shall I," said he, "avouchen<sup>o</sup> good,  
Sith<sup>o</sup> to thee is unknowne the cradle of thy brood."<sup>5</sup>

## 65

"For well I wote,<sup>o</sup> thou springst from ancient race  
Of Saxon kings, that have with mightie hand  
And many bloudie battailes fought in place<sup>o</sup>  
High reard their royall throne in Britane land,  
And vanquisht them,<sup>o</sup> unable to withstand:  
From thence a Faerie thee unweeting reft,<sup>o</sup>  
There as thou slepst in tender swadling band,  
And her base Elfin brood<sup>o</sup> there for thee left.  
Such men do Chaungelings call, so chaungd by Faeries theft.

## 66

"Thence she thee brought into this Faerie lond,  
And in an heapèd furrow did thee hyde,  
Where thee a Ploughman all unweeting fond,<sup>o</sup>  
As he his toylesome teme<sup>o</sup> that way did guyde,  
And brought thee up in ploughmans state to byde,

Whereof Georgos he thee gave to name;<sup>6</sup>  
Till prickt<sup>o</sup> with courage, and thy forces pryde,  
To Faery court thou cam'st to seeke for fame,  
And prove thy puissaunt<sup>o</sup> armes, as seemes thee best became."<sup>7</sup>

## 67

"O holy Sire," quoth he, "how shall I quight<sup>o</sup>  
The many favours I with thee have found,  
That hast my name and nation red<sup>o</sup> aright,  
And taught the way that does to heaven bound?"<sup>o</sup>  
This said, adowne he looked to the ground,  
To have returnd, but dazed<sup>o</sup> were his eyne,  
Through passing<sup>o</sup> brightnesse, which did quite confound  
His feeble sence, and too exceeding shyne.  
So darke are earthly things compard to things divine.

## 68

At last whenas<sup>o</sup> himselfe he gan to find,<sup>o</sup>  
To Una back he cast him to retire;<sup>o</sup>  
Who him awaited still with pensive<sup>o</sup> mind.  
Great thanks and goodly meed<sup>o</sup> to that good syre,  
He thence departing gave for his paines hyre.<sup>o</sup>  
So came to Una, who him joyd to see,  
And after litle rest, gan him desire,  
Of her adventure mindfull for to bee.  
So leave they take of Caelia, and her daughters three.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9); "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Solemnization.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, many children. The daughters' names mean Faith, Hope, and Charity; compare the three Saracens: Sansfoy, Sansjoy, and Sansloy. This canto draws heavily on scriptural references, especially 1 Corinthians 13:13: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Many aspects of the House of Holiness oppose their counterparts in the House of Pride (canto 4).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Alluding to Matthew 7:13–14: see stanza 10, n. 9.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Freeholder, landowner.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He treats them courteously ("faire"); no courtly affectation ("nicetie").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Like a matron, that is, a woman in charge of an establishment.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An echo of Matthew 7:13–14: "Broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: . . . strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, your praises and fame are widely celebrated ("blazèd"), reaching ("blowne") up to heaven.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Signifying the sacrament of Communion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A symbol of the crucified Christ (of whom the serpent lifted up by Moses, Numbers 21:9, is a recognized "type" or prefiguration).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the New Testament.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See 2 Peter 3:16, which notes that in the epistles of the apostle Paul "are some things hard to be understood."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The iconographic symbol of hope.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Charity, the fruitful virtue, is often depicted as a mother with many children.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: That is, God be thanked, who continually increases her thus.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Retire to your rooms.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:  
Joshua made the sun stand still (Joshua 10:12); Hezekiah made it turn backward (2 Kings 20:10). With 300 men Gideon was victorious over the Midianite hosts (Judges 7:7). Moses led the Israelites through the parted waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21–31). Faith, said Christ, can move mountains (Matthew 21:21). All these are miracles of faith.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, he began to abhor the world.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Which had extraordinary power.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Apparently, the effects of original sin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Symbols of penitence.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the bodily fluids that conduce to pride. In Renaissance physiology, the proportions of the various fluids (“humors”) determine one’s temperament.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:2).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Always. Her yellow (saffron) robe is the color of marriage, fertility, and maternity. Her chaste, fruitful love (Christian *agapē*) is opposed to “Cupid’s wanton snare” (*erōs*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Emblem of true love and faithful marriage.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, one beadsman sat in front of the gates, to call in needy wayfarers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An almoner distributed charity (*alms*) to the poor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Christ, who journeyed to hell to deliver those good people who lived before his time, according to a story popular in the Middle Ages. It originated in the apocryphal gospel of



Nicodemus (compare *Piers Plowman*, Passus 18).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: "In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Ecclesiastes 11:3).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The human body is God's own image ("mould") and a "mould" of God's making (see Genesis 1:26–30, 2:7).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered" (Genesis 9:2).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Always freely. The seven beadsmen here correspond to, and perform, the seven works of charity, or corporal mercy: lodging the homeless, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, redeeming the captive, comforting the sick, burying the dead, and succoring the orphan.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, he did not attend to any worldly activities.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The eagle able to gaze directly at the sun is the symbol of Saint John the Divine, whose visions are recorded in Revelation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, he was at first sorely grieved at their arrival.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to humankind's formation from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7) and also to the knight's name (see stanza 66 and n. 6).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the Ten Commandments ("bloudy letters") carried with them the judgment ("doome") of death and pain, causing sorrowful moans ("balefull mone").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Song. The mountain is successively compared to Mount Sinai, where Moses, after parting the "bloud-red billowes" (stanza 53) of the Red Sea, received the tablets of the Ten Commandments; to the Mount of Olives, associated with Christ; and to Mount Parnassus, where the Nine Muses of the arts and learning dwelt.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Compare Revelation 21:10–21.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare Jacob's ladder, which "reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:12).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Christ (the lamb of God), whose death on the Cross ("cursèd tree") purged the guilt of sin from "His chosen people."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Than offspring to their mother. The New Jerusalem is described in Revelation 21–22; compare "the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it" (21:24).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: City of Fame; in the historical allegory, London or Westminster.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reminiscent of the temple of glass in Chaucer's *House of Fame*; perhaps intended to allude to Westminster Abbey as pantheon of the English great.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the New Jerusalem far surpasses Cleopolis ("that").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, may justly boast ("vaunt") that heaven is her home.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Spenser's conception of Saint George, patron saint of England, draws on the *Legenda Aurea* (*The Golden Legend*, a medieval manual of ecclesiastical lore, translated into English by William Caxton in 1487) and on pictures, tapestries, pageants, and folklore.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The place from which your race derives.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, as a name. "Georgos": farmer (Greek); compare Virgil's *Georgics*, on farming.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: As best suited you.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *bliss*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mortal life*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affliction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foster* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be cheered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from his*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hoar, venerable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saying prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Heavenly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *habits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betrothed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loving mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called Humility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Zeal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sober*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proper respect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaccustomed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swelled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak age*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constant fear of death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many a long day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unwittingly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wandering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *directed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courtesies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor lacked anything*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *talk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loving fashion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dazzled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obscure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suited*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as was fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *humble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appropriate joy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requisites*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gone to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *utterly weary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counsel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disrobe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *comfortable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *instruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the blood of Christ*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctrines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak mind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pierce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chose to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greater power*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *two*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fearful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horror of sin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doctor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distressed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with difficulty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *troubled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *probed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restored quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suffering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *extirpate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handsome body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discipline*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bathe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cleansed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courteously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheer; cherish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care-full*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by this time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grown*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goodness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rival*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *weaned them*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *headdress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jewels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpassing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scarcely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appropriate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *solemn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passed through*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *right action*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroyed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *direct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made known*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expanse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leads*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Charissa's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *briers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hospice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *men of prayer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chiefest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *duty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *host in return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shelter* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *afflict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *his children*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resource* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *children*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decently*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *payment of money*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *held captive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for which* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bonds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sinful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *store up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throes of death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bodies to bury*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Christ* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frighten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defiled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in court*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor at all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bribe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supported*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncommon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bowed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *live*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *piercing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *almost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exhausted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *starved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greatly*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *respond*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *had climbed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glistens*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entrusted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *granting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mercy's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *direct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit released*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *Moses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parted asunder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *everywhere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subject*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *could*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proceed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *familiarly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwelt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experience*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *frequent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *youth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accounted*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *undone*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *pursuit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shun* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *show prophetically* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laborious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *content (to leave)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *they are* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *travel* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *charge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *released* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maintain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *name* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the ancient Britons* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly stole* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offspring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inadvertently found* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *team of oxen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spurred* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *powerful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repay* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dazzled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpassing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *when* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recover* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolved to return* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anxious* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *gift* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward* [Return to reference](#) °

## ***Canto 11***

*The knight with that old Dragon fights  
two dayes incessantly:  
The third him overthrowes, and gayns  
most glorious victory.*

### **1**

High time now gan it wex<sub>o</sub> for Una faire,  
To thinke of those her captive Parents deare,  
And their forwasted kingdome to repaire:<sup>8</sup>  
Whereto whenas they now approachèd neare,  
With hartie<sub>o</sub> words her knight she gan to cheare,  
And in her modest manner thus bespake;  
"Deare knight, as deare, as ever knight was deare,  
That all these sorrowes suffer for my sake,  
High heaven behold the tedious toyle, ye for me take.

### **2**

"Now are we come unto my native soyle,  
And to the place, where all our perils dwell;  
Here haunts that feend,<sub>o</sub> and does his dayly spoyle,  
Therefore henceforth be at your keeping well,<sub>o</sub>  
And ever ready for your foeman fell.<sub>o</sub>  
The sparke of noble courage now awake,  
And strive your excellent selfe to excell;  
That shall ye evermore renownèd make,  
Above all knights on earth, that batteill undertake."

### **3**

And pointing forth, "lo yonder is," said she,  
"The brasen towre in which my parents deare  
For dread of that huge feend emprisond be,  
Whom I from far see on the walles appeare,

Whose sight my feeble soule doth greatly cheare:  
And on the top of all I do espye  
The watchman wayting tydings glad to heare,  
That O my parents might I happily  
Unto you bring, to ease you of your misery."

#### 4

With that they heard a roaring hideous sound,  
That all the ayre with terrour fillèd wide,  
And seemd uneath<sup>o</sup> to shake the stedfast ground.  
Eftsoones<sup>o</sup> that dreadfull Dragon they espide,  
Where stretcht he lay upon the sunny side  
Of a great hill, himselfe like a great hill.  
But all so soone, as he from far descride  
Those glistring armes, that heaven with light did fill,  
He rousd himselfe full blith,<sup>o</sup> and hastned them untill.<sup>o</sup>

#### 5

Then bad<sup>o</sup> the knight his Lady yede<sup>o</sup> aloofe,  
And to an hill her selfe withdraw aside,  
From whence she might behold that battailles proof<sup>o</sup>  
And eke<sup>o</sup> be safe from daunger far descryde:<sup>o</sup>  
She him obayd, and turnd a little wyde.<sup>o</sup>  
Now O thou sacred Muse, most learnèd Dame,  
Faire ympe<sup>o</sup> of Phoebus, and his agèd bride,<sup>9</sup>  
The Nourse of time, and everlasting fame,  
That warlike hands ennoblest with immortall name;

#### 6

O gently come into my feeble brest,  
Come gently, but not with that mighty rage,  
Wherewith the martiall troupes thou doest infest,<sup>o</sup>  
And harts of great Heroes doest enrage,  
That nought their kindled courage may aswage,<sup>o</sup>  
Soone as thy dreadfull trompe<sup>o</sup> begins to sownd;

The God of warre with his fiers equipage<sup>o</sup>  
Thou doest awake, sleepe never he so sownd,  
And scarèd nations doest with horroure sterne astown.<sup>o</sup>

**7**

Faire Goddesses lay that furious fit<sup>o</sup> aside,  
Till I of warres and bloudy Mars do sing,<sup>1</sup>  
And Briton fields with Sarazin<sup>o</sup> bloud bedyde,<sup>o</sup>  
Twixt that great faery Queene and Paynim<sup>o</sup> king,  
That with their horroure heaven and earth did ring,  
A worke of labour long, and endlesse prayse:  
But now a while let downe that haughtie string,  
And to my tunes thy second tenor rayse,<sup>2</sup>  
That I this man of God his godly armes may blaze.<sup>o</sup>

**8**

By this the dreadfull Beast drew nigh to hand,  
Halfe flying, and halfe footing<sup>o</sup> in his hast,  
That with his largenesse measurèd much land,  
And made wide shadow under his huge wast;<sup>o</sup>  
As mountaine doth the valley overcast.  
Approching nigh, he reared high afore  
His body monstrous, horrible, and vast,  
Which to increase his wondrous greatnesse more,  
Was swolne with wrath, and poyson, and with bloudy gore.

**9**

And over, all with brasen scales was armd,  
Like plated coate of steele, so couchèd neare,<sup>o</sup>  
That nought mote perce,<sup>3</sup> ne might his corse<sup>o</sup> be harmd  
With dint of sword, nor push of pointed speare;  
Which as an Eagle, seeing pray appeare,  
His aery Plumes doth rouze,<sup>o</sup> full rudely dight,<sup>o</sup>  
So shakèd he, that horroure was to heare,

For as the clashing of an Armour bright,  
Such noyse his rouzèd scales did send unto the knight.

## 10

His flaggy<sup>o</sup> wings when forth he did display,  
Were like two sayles, in which the hollow wynd  
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way:  
And eke the pennes, that did his pineons bynd,  
Were like mayne-yards, with flying canvas lynd,<sup>4</sup>  
With which whenas him list<sup>o</sup> the ayre to beat,  
And there by force unwonted<sup>o</sup> passage find,  
The cloudes before him fled for terrour great,  
And all the heavens stood still amazed with his threat.

## 11

His huge long tayle wound up in hundred foldes,  
Does overspred his long bras-scaly backe,  
Whose wreathèd boughts<sup>o</sup> when ever he unfolde,  
And thicke entangled knots adown does slacke,  
Bespotted as with shields<sup>o</sup> of red and blacke,  
It sweepeth all the land behind him farre,  
And of three furlongs<sup>5</sup> does but litle lacke;  
And at the point two stings in-fixèd arre,  
Both deadly sharpe, that sharpest steele exceeden farre.

## 12

But stings and sharpest steele did far exceed<sup>o</sup>  
The sharpnesse of his cruell rending clawes;  
Dead was it sure, as sure as death in deed,<sup>o</sup>  
What ever thing does touch his ravenous pawes,  
Or what within his reach he ever drawes.  
But his most hideous head my tounge to tell  
Does tremble: for his deepe devouring jawes  
Wide gapèd, like the griesly<sup>o</sup> mouth of hell,  
Through which into his darke abisse all ravin<sup>o</sup> fell.

### 13

And that<sup>o</sup> more wondrous was, in either jaw  
Three ranckes of yron teeth enraungèd<sup>o</sup> were,  
In which yet trickling bloud and gobbets raw<sup>o</sup>  
Of late<sup>o</sup> devourèd bodies did appeare,  
That sight thereof bred cold congealèd feare:  
Which to increase, and all at once to kill,  
A cloud of smothering smoke and sulphur seare<sup>o</sup>  
Out of his stinking gorge<sup>o</sup> forth steemèd still,  
That all the ayre about with smoke and stench did fill.

### 14

His blazing eyes, like two bright shining shields,  
Did burne with wrath, and sparkled living fyre;  
As two broad Beacons, set in open fields,  
Send forth their flames farre off to every shyre,<sup>o</sup>  
And warning give, that enemies conspyre,  
With fire and sword the region to invade;  
So flamed his eyne<sup>o</sup> with rage and rancorous yre:<sup>o</sup>  
But farre within, as in a hollow glade,  
Those glaring lampes were set, that made a dreadfull shade.

### 15

So dreadfully he towards him did pas,  
Forelifting up aloft his speckled brest,  
And often bounding on the brusèd gras,  
As for great joyance of his newcome guest.  
Eftsoones he gan advance his haughtie crest,  
As chauffèd<sup>o</sup> Bore his bristles doth upreare,  
And shoke his scales to battell readie drest;<sup>o</sup>  
That made the Redcrosse knight nigh quake for feare,  
As bidding bold defiance to his foeman neare.

### 16

The knight gan fairely couch<sup>o</sup> his steadie speare,  
And fiercely ran at him with rigorous<sup>o</sup> might:  
The pointed steele arriving rudely<sup>o</sup> theare,  
His harder hide would neither perce, nor bight,  
But glauncing by forth passèd forward right;  
Yet sore amovèd with so puissant push,  
The wrathfull beast about him turnèd light,<sup>o</sup>  
And him so rudely passing by, did brush  
With his long tayle, that horse and man to ground did rush.

### 17

Both horse and man up lightly rose againe,  
And fresh encounter towards him addrest:  
But th'idle<sup>o</sup> stroke yet backe recoyld in vaine,  
And found no place his<sup>o</sup> deadly point to rest.  
Exceeding rage enflamed the furious beast,  
To be avengèd of so great despight;<sup>o</sup>  
For never felt his imperceable brest  
So wondrous force, from hand of living wight;  
Yet had he proved<sup>o</sup> the powre of many a puissant knight.

### 18

Then with his waving wings displayèd wyde,  
Himselfe up high he lifted from the ground,  
And with strong flight did forcibly divide  
The yielding aire, which nigh<sup>o</sup> too feeble found  
Her flitting<sup>o</sup> partes, and element unsound,<sup>o</sup>  
To beare so great a weight: he cutting way  
With his broad sayles, about him soarèd round:  
At last low stouping with unweldie sway,<sup>o</sup>  
Snatcht up both horse and man, to beare them quite away.

### 19

Long he them bore above the subject plaine,<sup>o</sup>  
So farre as Ewghen<sup>o</sup> bow a shaft may send,



Till struggling strong did him at last constraine,  
To let them downe before his flightès end:  
As hagard hauke presuming to contend  
With hardie fowle, above his hable might,o  
His wearie pounceso all in vaine doth spend,  
To trusseo the pray too heaue for his flight;  
Which comming downe to ground, does free it selfe by fight.

## 20

He so disseizèd of his gryping grosse,6  
The knight his thrilanto speare againe assayd  
In his bras-plated body to embosse,o  
And three mens strength unto the stroke he layd;  
Wherewith the stiffe beame quakèd, as affrayd,  
And glauncing from his scaly necke, did glyde  
Close under his left wing, then broad displayd.  
The percing steele there wrought a wound full wyde,  
That with the uncoutho smart the Monster lowdly cryde.

## 21

He cryde, as raging seas are wonto to rore,  
When wintry storme his wrathfull wrecko does threat,  
The rolling billowes beat the ragged shore,  
Aso they the earth would shouldero from her seat,  
And greedie gulfeo does gape, as he would eat  
His neighbour elemento in his revenge:  
Then gin the blustering brethreno boldly threat,  
To move the world from off his stedfast henge,o  
And boystrous battell make, each other to avenge.o

## 22

The steely head stucke fast still in his flesh,  
Till with his cruell clawes he snatcht the wood,  
And quite a sunder broke. Forth flowèd fresh  
A gushing river of blacke goarieo blood,

That drownèd all the land, whereon he stood;  
The stream thereof would drive a water-mill.  
Trebly augmented was his furious mood  
With bitter sense of his deepe rooted ill,<sup>o</sup>  
That flames of fire he threw forth from his large nosethrill.<sup>o</sup>

## 23

His hideous taylor then hurlèd he about,  
And therewith all enwrapt the nimble thy<sup>o</sup>  
Of his froth-fomy steed, whose courage stout  
Striving to loose the knot, that fast him tyes,  
Himselfe in streighter<sup>o</sup> bandes too rash implies,<sup>7</sup>  
That to the ground he is perforce<sup>o</sup> constaynd  
To throw his rider: who can<sup>o</sup> quickly ryse  
From off the earth, with durty bloud distaynd,<sup>o</sup>  
For that reprochfull fall right fowly he disdaynd.<sup>o</sup>

## 24

And fiercely tooke his trenchand<sup>o</sup> blade in hand,  
With which he stroke so furious and so fell,<sup>o</sup>  
That nothing seemd the puissance could withstand:  
Upon his crest the hardned yron fell,  
But his more hardned crest was armd so well,  
That deeper dint therein it would not make;<sup>8</sup>  
Yet so extremely did the buffe<sup>o</sup> him quell,<sup>o</sup>  
That from thenceforth he shund the like to take,  
But when he saw them come, he did them still forsake.<sup>o</sup>

## 25

The knight was wrath to see his stroke beguyld,<sup>o</sup>  
And smote againe with more outrageous might;  
But backe againe the sparckling steele recoyld,  
And left not any marke, where it did light;  
As if in Adamant rocke it had bene pight.<sup>o</sup>  
The beast impatient of his smarting wound,

And of so fierce and forcible despight,<sup>o</sup>  
Thought with his wings to stye<sup>o</sup> above the ground;  
But his late wounded wing unserviceable found.

## 26

Then full of grieve and anguish vehement,  
He lowdly brayd, that like was never heard,  
And from his wide devouring oven sent  
A flake of fire, that flashing in his beard,  
Him all amazd, and almost made affeard;  
The scorching flame sore swingèd<sup>o</sup> all his face,  
And through his armour all his bodie seard,  
That he could not endure so cruell cace,<sup>o</sup>  
But thought his armes to leave, and helmet to unlace.

## 27

Not that great Champion of the antique world,<sup>o</sup>  
Whom famous Poetes verse so much doth vaunt,  
And hath for twelve huge labours high extold,  
So many furies and sharpe fits did haunt,  
When him the poysoned garment did enchaunt  
With Centaures bloud, and bloudie verses charmed,  
As did this knight twelve thousand dolours<sup>o</sup> daunt,  
Whom fyrie steele now burnt, that earst<sup>o</sup> him armed,  
That erst him goodly armed, now most of all him harmed.<sup>9</sup>

## 28

Faint, wearie, sore, emboylèd,<sup>o</sup> grievèd, brent<sup>o</sup>  
With heat, toyle, wounds, armes, smart, and inward fire  
That never man such mischiefes<sup>o</sup> did torment;  
Death better were, death did he oft desire,  
But death will never come, when needes require.  
Whom so dismayd when that his foe beheld,  
He cast to suffer<sup>o</sup> him no more respire,<sup>o</sup>  
But gan his sturdie sterne<sup>o</sup> about to weld,<sup>o</sup>

And him so strongly stroke, that to the ground him feld.

## 29

It fortunèd (as faire it then befell)  
Behind his backe unweeting, <sup>o</sup> where he stood,  
Of auncient time there was a springing well,  
From which fast trickled forth a silver flood,  
Full of great vertues, <sup>o</sup> and for med'cine good.  
Whylome, <sup>o</sup> before that cursèd Dragon got  
That happie land, and all with innocent blood  
Defyld those sacred waves, it rightly hot <sup>o</sup>  
The Well of Life, <sup>1</sup> ne yet his vertues had forgot.

## 30

For unto life the dead it could restore,  
And guilt of sinfull crimes cleane wash away,  
Those that with sicknesse were infected sore,  
It could recure, and agèd long decay  
Renew, as one were borne that very day.  
Both Silo this, and Jordan did excell,  
And th'English Bath, and eke the german Spau,  
Ne can Cephise, nor Hebrus match this well:  
Into the same the knight backe overthrown, fell. <sup>2</sup>

## 31

Now gan the golden Phoebus for to steepe  
His fierie face in billowes of the west,  
And his faint steedes watred in Ocean deepe,  
Whiles from their journall <sup>o</sup> labours they did rest,  
When that infernall Monster, having kest <sup>o</sup>  
His wearie foe into that living well,  
Can <sup>o</sup> high advaunce his broad discoloured brest,  
Above his wonted pitch, <sup>o</sup> with countenance fell, <sup>o</sup>  
And clapt his yron wings, as victor he did dwell. <sup>o</sup>

### 32

Which when his pensive<sup>o</sup> Ladie saw from farre,  
Great woe and sorrow did her soule assay,<sup>o</sup>  
As weening<sup>o</sup> that the sad end of the warre,  
And gan to highest God entirely<sup>o</sup> pray,  
That feared<sup>o</sup> chaunce<sup>o</sup> from her to turne away;  
With folded hands and knees full lowly bent  
All night she watcht, ne once adowne would lay  
Her daintie limbs in her sad dreriment,<sup>o</sup>  
But praying still did wake, and waking did lament.

### 33

The morrow next gan early to appeare,  
That<sup>o</sup> Titan<sup>o</sup> rose to runne his daily race;  
But early ere the morrow next gan reare  
Out of the sea faire Titans deawy face,  
Up rose the gentle virgin from her place,  
And lookèd all about, if she might spy  
Her lovèd knight to move<sup>o</sup> his manly pace:  
For she had great doubt of his safety,  
Since late she saw him fall before his enemy.

### 34

At last she saw, where he upstarted brave  
Out of the well, wherein he drenchèd lay;  
As Eagle fresh out of the Ocean wave,  
Where he hath left his plumes all hoary gray,  
And deckt himselfe with feathers youthly gay,  
Like Eyas hauke<sup>o</sup> up mounts unto the skies,  
His newly budded pineons to assay,<sup>o</sup>  
And marveiles at himselfe, still as he flies:  
So new this new-borne knight to battell new did rise.

### 35

Whom when the damnèd feend so fresh did spy,  
No wonder if he wondred at the sight,  
And doubted, whether his late enemy  
It were, or other new supplièd knight.  
He, now to prove<sup>o</sup> his late renewèd might,  
High brandishing his bright deaw-burning blade,  
Upon his crested scalpe so sore did smite,  
That to the scull a yawning wound it made:  
The deadly dint<sup>o</sup> his dullèd senses all dismaid.

### 36

I wote<sup>o</sup> not, whether the revenging steele  
Were hardnèd with that holy water dew,  
Wherein he fell, or sharper edge did feele,  
Or his baptizèd hands now greater<sup>o</sup> grew;  
Or other secret vertue<sup>o</sup> did ensew;  
Else never could the force of fleshly arme,  
Ne molten mettall in his bloud embrew:<sup>o</sup>  
For till that stownd<sup>o</sup> could never wight him harme,  
By subtilty, nor slight,<sup>o</sup> nor might, nor mighty charme.

### 37

The cruell wound enragèd him so sore,  
That loud he yellèd for exceeding paine;  
As hundred ramping<sup>o</sup> Lyons seemed to rore,  
Whom ravenous hunger did thereto constraine:  
Then gan he tosse aloft his stretchèd traine,<sup>o</sup>  
And therewith scourge the buxome<sup>o</sup> aire so sore,  
That to his force to yeelden it was faine;<sup>o</sup>  
Ne ought his sturdie strokes might stand afore,<sup>3</sup>  
That high trees overthrew, and rocks in peeces tore.

### 38

The same advauncing high above his head,  
With sharpe intended<sup>o</sup> sting so rude<sup>o</sup> him smot,

That to the earth him drove, as stricken dead,  
Ne living wight would have him life behot:<sup>4</sup>  
The mortall sting his angry needle shot  
Quite through his shield, and in his shoulder seasd,  
Where fast it stucke, ne would there out be got:  
The griefe<sup>o</sup> thereof him wondrous sore diseasd,<sup>o</sup>  
Ne might his ranckling paine with patience be appeasd.

### 39

But yet more mindfull of his honour deare,  
Then<sup>o</sup> of the grievous smart, which him did wring,<sup>o</sup>  
From loathèd soile he can<sup>o</sup> him lightly reare,  
And strove to loose the farre infixèd sting:  
Which when in vaine he tryde with struggeling,  
Inflamed with wrath, his raging blade he heft,<sup>o</sup>  
And strooke so strongly, that the knotty string  
Of his huge taile he quite a sunder cleft,  
Five joynts thereof he hewd, and but the stump him left.

### 40

Hart cannot thinke, what outrage,<sup>o</sup> and what cries,  
With foule enfouldred<sup>5</sup> smoake and flashing fire,  
The hell-bred beast threw forth unto the skyes,  
That all was coverèd with darknesse dire:  
Then fraught<sup>o</sup> with rancour, and engorgèd<sup>o</sup> ire,  
He cast at once him to avenge for all,  
And gathering up himselfe out of the mire,  
With his uneven wings did fiercely fall  
Upon his sunne-bright shield, and gript it fast withall.

### 41

Much was the man encombred with his hold,  
In feare to lose his weapon in his paw,  
Ne wist<sup>o</sup> yet, how his talents<sup>o</sup> to unfold;

Nor harder was from Cerberus<sup>6</sup> greedie jaw  
To plucke a bone, then from his cruell claw  
To reave<sup>o</sup> by strength the gripèd gage<sup>o</sup> away:  
Thrise he assayd<sup>o</sup> it from his foot to draw,  
And thrise in vaine to draw it did assay,  
It bootèd nought to thinke, to robbe him of his pray.

## 42

Tho<sup>o</sup> when he saw no power might prevaile,  
His trustie sword he cald to his last aid,  
Wherewith he fiercely did his foe assaile,  
And double blowes about him stoutly laid,  
That glauncing fire out of the yron plaid;  
As sparckles from the Andvile<sup>o</sup> use to fly,  
When heavie hammers on the wedge are swaid;<sup>o</sup>  
Therewith at last he forst him to unty<sup>o</sup>  
One of his grasping feete, him to defend thereby.

## 43

The other foot, fast fixèd on his shield,  
Whenas no strength, nor stroks mote<sup>o</sup> him constraine  
To loose, ne yet the warlike pledge to yield,  
He smot thereat with all his might and maine,<sup>o</sup>  
That nought so wondrous puissance might sustaine;  
Upon the joynt the lucky steele did light,  
And made such way, that hewd it quite in twaine;  
The paw yet missèd not his minisht<sup>o</sup> might,  
But hong still on the shield, as it at first was pight.<sup>o</sup>

## 44

For griefe<sup>o</sup> thereof, and divelish despight,  
From his infernall founnace forth he threw  
Huge flames, that dimmèd all the heavens light,  
Enrold in duskish smoke and brimstone blew;  
As burning Aetna<sup>7</sup> from his boyling stew<sup>o</sup>



Doth belch out flames, and rockes in peeces broke,  
And ragged ribs of mountaines molten new  
Enwrapt in coleblacke clouds and filthy smoke,  
That all the land with stench, and heaven with horror choke.

#### 45

The heate whereof, and harmefull pestilence  
So sore him noyd,<sup>o</sup> that forst him to retire  
A little backward for his best defence,  
To save his bodie from the scorching fire,  
Which he from hellish entrailes did expire.<sup>o</sup>  
It chaunst (eternall God that chaunce did guide)  
As he recoylèd backward, in the mire  
His nigh forwearied<sup>o</sup> feeble feet did slide,  
And downe he fell, with dread of shame sore terrifide.

#### 46

There grew a goodly tree him faire beside,  
Loaden with fruit and apples rosie red,  
As they in pure vermilion had beene dide,  
Whereof great vertues over all were red:<sup>o</sup>  
For happie life to all, which thereon fed,  
And life eke everlasting did befall:  
Great God it planted in that blessed sted<sup>o</sup>  
With his almightie hand, and did it call  
The Tree of Life, the crime of our first fathers fall.<sup>8</sup>

#### 47

In all the world like was not to be found,  
Save in that soile, where all good things did grow,  
And freely sprong out of the fruitfull ground,  
As incorrupted Nature did them sow,  
Till that dread Dragon all did overthrow.  
Another like faire tree eke grew thereby,  
Whereof who so did eat, eftsoones<sup>o</sup> did know

Both good and ill: O mornefull memory:  
That tree through one mans fault hath doen us all to dy.°

#### 48

From that first tree forth flowd, as from a well,  
A trickling streame of Balme, most soveraine°  
And daintie deare,° which on the ground still fell,  
And overflowèd all the fertill plaine,  
As it had deawèd bene with timely° raine:  
Life and long health that gracious° ointment gave,  
And deadly woundes could heale, and reare° againe  
The senselesse corse appointed° for the grave.  
Into that same he fell: which did from death him save.°

#### 49

For nigh thereto the ever damnèd beast  
Durst not approch, for he was deadly made,°  
And all that life preservèd, did detest:  
Yet he it oft adventured° to invade.  
By this the drouping day-light gan to fade,  
And yeeld his roome° to sad succeeding° night,  
Who with her sable mantle gan to shade  
The face of earth, and wayes of living wight,  
And high her burning torch set up in heaven bright.

#### 50

When gentle Una saw the second fall  
Of her deare knight, who wearie of long fight,  
And faint through losse of bloud, moved not at all,  
But lay as in a dreame of deepe delight,  
Besmeard with pretious Balme, whose vertuous might  
Did heale his wounds, and scorching heat alay,°  
Againe she stricken was with sore affright,  
And for his safetie gan devoutly pray;  
And watch the noyous° night, and wait for joyous day.

## 51

The joyous day gan early to appeare,  
And faire Aurora from the deawy bed  
Of agèd Tithone gan her selfe to reare,<sup>2</sup>  
With rosie cheekes, for shame as blushing red;  
Her golden lockes for haste were loosely shed  
About her eares, when Una her did marke  
Clymbe to her charet,<sup>o</sup> all with flowers spred,  
From heaven high to chase the chearelesse darke;  
With merry note her loud salutes the mounting larke.

## 52

Then freshly up arose the doughtie<sup>o</sup> knight,  
All healèd of his hurts and woundès wide,  
And did himselfe to battell readie dight;<sup>o</sup>  
Whose early foe awaiting him beside  
To have devourd, so soone as day he spyde,  
When now he saw himselfe so freshly reare,  
As if late fight had nought him damnifyde,<sup>o</sup>  
He woxe<sup>o</sup> dismayd, and gan his fate to feare;  
Nathlesse<sup>o</sup> with wonted<sup>o</sup> rage he him advauncèd neare.

## 53

And in his first encounter, gaping wide,  
He thought attonce him to have swallowed quight,  
And rusht upon him with outrageous pride;  
Who him r'encountring fierce, as hauke in flight,  
Perforce rebutted<sup>o</sup> backe. The weapon bright  
Taking advantage of his open jaw,  
Ran through his mouth with so importune<sup>o</sup> might,  
That deepe emperst his darksome hollow maw,<sup>o</sup>  
And back retyrd,<sup>3</sup> his life bloud forth with all did draw.

## 54

So downe he fell, and forth his life did breath,  
That vanisht into smoke and cloudès swift;  
So downe he fell, that th'earth him underneath  
Did grone, as feeble so great load to lift;  
So downe he fell, as an huge rockie clift,  
Whose false<sup>o</sup> foundation waves have washt away,  
With dreadfull poyse<sup>o</sup> is from the mayneland rift,<sup>o</sup>  
And rolling downe, great Neptune doth dismay;  
So downe he fell, and like an heapèd mountaine lay.

## 55

The knight himselfe even trembled at his fall,  
So huge and horrible a masse it seemed;  
And his deare Ladie, that beheld it all,  
Durst not approach for dread, which she misdeemed,<sup>o</sup>  
But yet at last, when as the direfull feend  
She saw not stirre, off-shaking vaine affright,  
She nigher drew, and saw that joyous end:  
Then God she prayisd, and thankd her faithfull knight,  
That had atchiev'd so great a conquest by his might.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, to restore their kingdom, laid waste (by the dragon).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Mnemosyne (memory), mother of the Muses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Perhaps a reference to a projected but unwritten book of *The Faerie Queene*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The high-pitched ("haughtie") mode would be appropriate to a large-scale epic war; a lower pitch ("second tenor") suits this present battle.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nothing might pierce.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the ribs of his wings were like the massive spars (main yards) to which a ship's mainsail is affixed.[Return to](#)

[reference 4](#)

- Note 5: That is, three-eighths of a mile.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Freed from his formidable grip.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, too quickly entangles.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, it could not make a deep gash there.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Redcrosse's fire baptism is compared with the burning shirt of Nessus, which killed Hercules. His "twelve huge labours" are paralleled to the knight's "twelve thousand dolours."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An allusion to Revelation 22:1–2: "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The Well of Life, with its powers of renewal, is successively compared with waters of the Bible, of England and Europe, and of classical antiquity. In the pool of Siloam ("Silo"), a blind man was cured by Christ (John 9:7). Water of the river Jordan cured Naaman of leprosy (2 Kings 5:14) and Christ was baptized therein (Matthew 3:16). The towns of Bath and Spa ("Spau") were famed for their medicinal waters. Cephise and Hebrus, in Greece, were rivers noted for purifying and healing powers.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, neither could anything ("ought") stand before his violent ("sturdie") strokes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Promised. That is, no one would have thought he could survive the blow.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Black as a thundercloud.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The dog that guards the mouth of Hades.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mount Etna, an active volcano in Sicily.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Genesis 2:9 describes the Tree of Life and also the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, both of which God planted in the Garden of Eden. The “crime of our first fathers fall” is that Adam, in eating of the second and being banished from Eden, separated himself—and (according to Christian doctrine) his descendants—from the first. The Tree of Life appears again in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The healing balm flowing from the Tree of Life is understood to be Christ’s blood, shed to redeem humankind from eternal damnation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Compare Revelation 2:7: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life” and 2:11: “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (that is, the eternal death, of the soul).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Aurora is goddess of the dawn. Tithonus is her husband (“agèd” because he was granted everlasting life without everlasting youth).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, on being drawn back.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *grow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bold*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fiend*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be well on your guard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *almost*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *joyfully* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *toward*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bade* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *observed from afar*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *aside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *child*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arouse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trumpet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *military equipment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Saracen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dyed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pagan*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proclaim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *girth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed so closely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shake* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruggedly arrayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drooping*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he chose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaccustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coils*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scales*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were far exceeded by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in its effect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horrid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prey; booty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arranged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chunks of unswallowed food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *eyes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ire, anger*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *angry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *level*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roughly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *useless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *tested*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *tighter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of necessity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *daily*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *sinister*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *did*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heaved*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *nevertheless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *usual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violent* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *insecure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falling weight* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *split* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misjudged* [Return to reference](#) °

## **Canto 12**

*Faire Una to the Redcrosse knight  
betrouthèd is with joy:  
Though false Duessa it to barre  
her false sleights doe imploy.*

### **1**

Behold I see the haven nigh at hand,  
To which I meane my wearie course to bend;  
Vere the maine shete, and beare up with the land,<sup>4</sup>  
The which afore is fairely to be kend,<sup>o</sup>  
And seemeth safe from stormes, that may offend;  
There this faire virgin wearie of her way  
Must landed be, now at her journeyes end:  
There eke<sup>o</sup> my feeble barke<sup>o</sup> a while may stay,  
Till merry<sup>o</sup> wind and weather call her thence away.

### **2**

Scarsely had Phoebus in the glooming East<sup>o</sup>  
Yet harnessèd his firie-footed teeme,  
Ne reard above the earth his flaming creast,<sup>o</sup>  
When the last deadly smoke aloft did steeme,  
That signe of last outbreathèd life did seeme  
Unto the watchman on the castle wall;  
Who thereby dead that balefull<sup>o</sup> Beast did deeme,  
And to his Lord and Ladie lowd gan call,  
To tell, how he had seene the Dragons fatall fall.

### **3**

Uprose with hastie joy, and feeble speed  
That agèd Sire, the Lord of all that land,  
And lookèd forth, to weet,<sup>o</sup> if true indeede  
Those tydings were, as he did understand,

Which whenas true by tryall he out fond,  
He bad<sup>o</sup> to open wyde his brazen gate,  
Which long time had bene shut, and out of hond<sup>o</sup>  
Proclaymèd joy and peace through all his state;  
For dead now was their foe, which them forrayèd late.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4

Then gan triumphant Trompets sound on hie,  
That sent to heaven the ecchoed report  
Of their new joy, and happie victorie  
Gainst him, that had them long opprest with tort,<sup>o</sup>  
And fast imprisonèd in siegèd fort.  
Then all the people, as in solemne feast,  
To him assembled with one full consort,<sup>o</sup>  
Rejoycing at the fall of that great beast,  
From whose eternall bondage now they were releast.

#### 5

Forth came that auncient Lord and agèd Queene,  
Arayd in antique robes downe to the ground,  
And sad habiliments right well beseene;<sup>6</sup>  
A noble crew about them waited round  
Of sage and sober Peres,<sup>o</sup> all gravely gownd;  
Whom farre before did march a goodly band  
Of tall young men, all hable armes to sownd,<sup>7</sup>  
But now they laurell braunches bore in hand;  
Glad signe of victorie and peace in all their land.

#### 6

Unto that doughtie Conquerour they came,  
And him before themselves prostrating low,  
Their Lord and Patrone<sup>o</sup> loud did him proclame,  
And at his feet their laurell boughes did throw.  
Soone after them all dauncing on a row

The comely virgins came, with girlands dight,<sup>o</sup>  
As fresh as flowres in meadow greene do grow,  
When morning dew upon their leaves doth light:  
And in their hands sweet Timbrels<sup>o</sup> all upheld on hight.

## 7

And them before, the fry<sup>o</sup> of children young  
Their wanton<sup>o</sup> sports and childish mirth did play,  
And to the Maydens sounding tymbrels sung  
In well attuned notes, a joyous lay,<sup>o</sup>  
And made delightfull musicke all the way,  
Untill they came, where that faire virgin stood;  
As faire Diana<sup>o</sup> in fresh sommers day  
Beholds her Nymphes, enraunged<sup>o</sup> in shadie wood,  
Some wrestle, some do run, some bathe in christall flood.

## 8

So she beheld those maydens meriment  
With chearefull vew; who when to her they came,  
Themselves to ground with gracious humblesse<sup>o</sup> bent,  
And her adored by honorable name,<sup>o</sup>  
Lifting to heaven her everlasting fame:  
Then on her head they set a girland greene,  
And crownèd her twixt earnest and twixt game:<sup>o</sup>  
Who in her selfe-resemblance well beseene,<sup>8</sup>  
Did seeme such, as she was, a goodly maiden Queene.

## 9

And after all, the raskall many<sup>o</sup> ran,  
Heapèd together in rude rablement,<sup>o</sup>  
To see the face of that victorious man:  
Whom all admirèd,<sup>o</sup> as from heaven sent,  
And gazd upon with gaping wonderment.  
But when they came, where that dead Dragon lay,  
Stretcht on the ground in monstrous large extent,

The sight with idle<sup>o</sup> feare did them dismay,  
Ne durst approach him nigh, to touch, or once assay.<sup>o</sup>

## 10

Some feard, and fled; some feard and well it faynd;<sup>o</sup>  
One that would wiser seeme, then all the rest,  
Warnd him not touch, for yet perhaps remaynd  
Some lingring life within his hollow brest,  
Or in his wombe might lurke some hidden nest  
Of many Dragonets,<sup>o</sup> his fruitfull seed;  
Another said, that in his eyes did rest  
Yet sparckling fire, and bad thereof take heed;  
Another said, he saw him move his eyes indeed.

## 11

One mother, when as her foolehardie chyld  
Did come too neare, and with his talants<sup>o</sup> play,  
Halfe dead through feare, her litle babe revyld,<sup>o</sup>  
And to her gossips<sup>o</sup> gan in counsell<sup>o</sup> say;  
"How can I tell, but that his talants may  
Yet scratch my sonne, or rend his tender hand?"  
So diversly themselves in vaine they fray;<sup>o</sup>  
Whiles some more bold, to measure him nigh stand,  
To prove<sup>o</sup> how many acres he did spread of land.

## 12

Thus flockèd all the folke him round about,  
The whiles that hoarie<sup>o</sup> king, with all his traine,  
Being arrivèd, where that champion stout  
After his foes defeasance<sup>o</sup> did remaine,  
Him goodly greetes, and faire does entertaine,  
With princely gifts of yvorie and gold,  
And thousand thanks him yeelds for all his paine.  
Then when his daughter deare he does behold,  
Her dearely doth imbrace, and kisseth manifold.<sup>o</sup>



### 13

And after to his Pallace he them brings,  
With shaumes, and trompets, and with Clarions<sup>9</sup> sweet;  
And all the way the joyous people sings,  
And with their garments strowes the paved street:  
Whence mounting up, they find purveyance<sup>o</sup> meet  
Of all, that royall Princes court became,<sup>o</sup>  
And all the floore was underneath their feet  
Bespred with costly scarlot of great name,<sup>o</sup>  
On which they lowly sit, and fitting purpose frame.<sup>1</sup>

### 14

What needs me tell their feast and goodly guize,<sup>o</sup>  
In which was nothing riotous nor vaine?  
What needs of daintie dishes to devize,<sup>o</sup>  
Of comely<sup>o</sup> services, or courtly trayne?<sup>o</sup>  
My narrow leaves cannot in them containe  
The large discourse<sup>o</sup> of royall Princes state.  
Yet was their manner then but bare and plaine:  
For th'antique world excesse and pride did hate;  
Such proud luxurious pompe is swollen up but late.<sup>o</sup>

### 15

Then when with meates and drinkes of every kinde  
Their fervent appetites they quenched had,  
That auncient Lord gan fit occasion finde,  
Of straunge adventures, and of perils sad,<sup>o</sup>  
Which in his travell him befallen had,  
For to demaund<sup>o</sup> of his renownèd guest:  
Who then with utt'rance grave, and count'nance sad,  
From point to point,<sup>o</sup> as is before exprest,  
Discourst his voyage long, according<sup>o</sup> his request.

### 16

Great pleasure mixt with pittifull<sup>o</sup> regard,  
That godly King and Queene did passionate,<sup>o</sup>  
Whiles they his pittifull<sup>o</sup> adventures heard,  
That oft they did lament his lucklesse state,  
And often blame the too importune<sup>o</sup> fate,  
That heapd on him so many wrathfull wreaques:<sup>o</sup>  
For never gentle knight, as he of late,  
So tossèd was in fortunes cruell freakes;<sup>o</sup>  
And all the while salt teares bedewd the hearers cheeks.

## 17

Then said that royall Pere in sober wise:  
"Deare Sonne, great beene the evils, which ye bore  
From first to last in your late enterprise,  
That I note,<sup>o</sup> whether prayse, or pittie more:  
For never living man, I weene,<sup>o</sup> so sore  
In sea of deadly daungers was distrest;  
But since now safe ye seised<sup>o</sup> have the shore,  
And well arrivèd are (high God be blest),  
Let us devize<sup>o</sup> of ease and everlasting rest."

## 18

"Ah dearest Lord," said then that doughty knight,  
"Of ease or rest I may not yet devize;  
For by the faith, which I to armes have plight,<sup>o</sup>  
I bounden am streight<sup>o</sup> after this emprize,<sup>o</sup>  
As that your daughter can ye well advize,  
Backe to returne to that great Faerie Queene,  
And her to serve six yeares in warlike wize,<sup>o</sup>  
Gainst that proud Paynim king, that workes her teene:<sup>o</sup>  
Therefore I ought<sup>o</sup> crave pardon, till I there have beene."<sup>2</sup>

## 19

"Unhappie falles that hard necessitie,"  
Quoth he, "the troubler of my happie peace,

And vowèd foe of my felicitie;  
Ne<sup>o</sup> I against the same can justly preace:<sup>o</sup>  
But since that band<sup>o</sup> ye cannot now release,  
Nor doen undo (for vowes may not be vaine),<sup>3</sup>  
Soone as the terme of those six yeares shall cease,  
Ye then shall hither backe returne againe,  
The marriage to accomplish vovd betwixt you twain.

## 20

“Which for my part I covet to performe,  
In sort as<sup>o</sup> through the world I did proclame,  
That who so kild that monster most deforme,<sup>o</sup>  
And him in hardy battaile overcame,  
Should have mine onely daughter to his Dame,<sup>o</sup>  
And of my kingdome heire apparaunt bee:  
Therefore since now to thee pertienes<sup>o</sup> the same,  
By dew desert of noble chevalree,  
Both daughter and eke kingdome, lo I yield to thee.”

## 21

Then forth he callèd that his daughter faire,  
The fairest Un’ his onely daughter deare,  
His onely daughter, and his onely heyre;  
Who forth proceeding with sad<sup>o</sup> sober cheare,<sup>o</sup>  
As bright as doth the morning starre appeare  
Out of the East, with flaming lockes bedight,<sup>o</sup>  
To tell that dawning day is drawing neare,  
And to the world does bring long wishèd light;  
So faire and fresh that Lady shewd her selfe in sight.

## 22

So faire and fresh, as freshest flowre in May;  
For she had layd her mournfull stole<sup>4</sup> aside,  
And widow-like sad wimple<sup>o</sup> throwne away,  
Wherewith her heavenly beautie she did hide,

Whiles on her wearie journey she did ride;  
And on her now a garment she did weare,  
All lilly white, withoutten spot, or pride,<sup>o</sup>  
That seemed like silke and silver woven neare,<sup>o</sup>  
But neither silke nor silver therein did appeare.<sup>5</sup>

## 23

The blazing brightnesse of her beauties beame,  
And glorious light of her sunshyny face<sup>6</sup>  
To tell, were as to strive against the streame.  
My ragged rimes are all too rude and bace,  
Her heavenly lineaments for to enchace.<sup>o</sup>  
Ne wonder; for her owne deare lovèd knight,  
All<sup>o</sup> were she dayly with himselfe in place,  
Did wonder much at her celestiall sight:  
Oft had he seene her faire, but never so faire dight.<sup>o</sup>

## 24

So fairely dight, when she in presence came,  
She to her Sire made humble reverence,  
And bowèd low, that her right well became,  
And added grace unto her excellence:  
Who with great wisdom, and grave eloquence  
Thus gan to say. But eare<sup>o</sup> he thus had said,  
With flying speede, and seeming great pretence,<sup>o</sup>  
Came running in, much like a man dismaid,  
A Messenger with letters, which his message said.

## 25

All in the open hall amazèd stood,  
At suddeinnesse of that unwarie<sup>o</sup> sight,  
And wondred at his breathlesse hastie mood.  
But he for nought would stay his passage right<sup>o</sup>  
Till fast<sup>o</sup> before the king he did alight;  
Where falling flat, great humblesse he did make,

And kist the ground, whereon his foot was pight;°  
Then to his hands that writ° he did betake,°  
Which he disclosing, red thus, as the paper spake.

## 26

“To thee, most mighty king of Eden faire,  
Her greeting sends in these sad lines addrest,  
The wofull daughter, and forsaken heire  
Of that great Emperour of all the West;  
And bids thee be advized for the best,  
Ere thou thy daughter linck in holy band  
Of wedlocke to that new unknownen guest:  
For he already plighted his right hand  
Unto another love, and to another land.

## 27

“To me sad mayd, or rather widow sad,  
He was affiauncèd long time before,  
And sacred pledges he both gave, and had,  
False erraunt knight, infamous, and forswore:  
Witnesse the burning Altars, which° he swore,  
And guiltie heavens of° his bold perjury,  
Which though he hath polluted oft of yore,  
Yet I to them for judgement just do fly,  
And them conjure° t’avenge this shamefull injury.

## 28

“Therefore since mine he is, or° free or bond,°  
Or false or trew, or living or else dead,  
Withhold, O soveraine Prince, your hasty hond°  
From knitting league with him, I you aread;°  
Ne wene° my right with strength adowne to tread,  
Through weakenesse of my widowhed, or woe:  
For truth is strong, her rightfull cause to plead,  
And shall find friends, if need requireth soe,

So bids thee well to fare, Thy neither friend, nor foe, Fidessa."

## 29

When he these bitter byting words had red,  
The tydings straunge did him abashèd make,  
That still he sate long time astonishèd  
As in great muse,o ne word to creature spake.  
At last his solemne silence thus he brake,  
With doubtfull eyes fast fixèd on his guest:  
"Redoubtedo knight, that for mine onely sake<sup>7</sup>  
Thy life and honour late adventurst,  
Let nought be hid from me, that ought to be exprest.

## 30

"What meane these bloudy vowes, and idle threats,  
Throwne out from womanish impatient mind?  
What heavens? what altars? what enragèd heates  
Here heapèd up with termes of love unkind,o  
My conscience cleare with guilty bandso would bind?  
High God be witnesse, that I guiltlesse ame.  
But if your selfe, Sir knight, ye faultieo find,  
Or wrappèd be in loves of former Dame,  
With crime do not it cover, but disclose the same."

## 31

To whom the Redcrosse knight this answere sent,  
"My Lord, my King, be nought hereat dismayd,  
Till well ye wote by grave intendiment,o  
What woman, and wherefore doth me upbrayd  
With breach of love, and loyalty betrayd.  
It was in my mishaps, as hitherward  
I lately traveild, that unwares I strayd  
Out of my way, through perils straunge and hard;  
That day should faile me, ere I had them all declard.

### 32

"There did I find, or rather I was found  
Of this false woman, that Fidessa hight,<sup>o</sup>  
Fidessa hight the falsest Dame on ground,  
Most false Duessa, royall richly dight,  
That easie was t'invegle weaker<sup>o</sup> sight:  
Who by her wicked arts, and wylie skill,  
Too false and strong for earthly skill or might,  
Unwares me wrought unto her wicked will,  
And to my foe betrayd, when least I feared ill."

### 33

Then steppèd forth the goodly royall Mayd,  
And on the ground her selfe prostrating low,  
With sober countenance thus to him sayd:  
"O pardon me, my soveraigne Lord, to show  
The secret treasons, which of late I know  
To have bene wrought by that false sorceresse.  
She onely she it is, that earst<sup>o</sup> did throw  
This gentle knight into so great distresse,  
That death him did awaite in dayly wretchednesse.

### 34

"And now it seemes, that she subornèd hath  
This craftie messenger with letters vaine,  
To worke new woe and improvided scath,<sup>o</sup>  
By breaking of the band<sup>o</sup> betwixt us twaine;  
Wherein she usèd hath the practicke paine<sup>o</sup>  
Of this false footman, clokt with simplenesse,  
Whom if ye please for to discover plaine,  
Ye shall him Archimago find, I ghesse,  
The falsest man alive; who tries<sup>o</sup> shall find no lesse."

### 35

The king was greatly movèd at her speach,  
And all with suddein indignation fraight,<sup>o</sup>  
Bad<sup>o</sup> on that Messenger rude<sup>o</sup> hands to reach.  
Eftsoones<sup>o</sup> the Gard, which on his state did wait,  
Attacht<sup>o</sup> that faylor<sup>o</sup> false, and bound him strait:  
Who seeming sorely chauffèd<sup>o</sup> at his band,  
As chainèd Beare, whom cruell dogs do bait,  
With idle force did faine<sup>o</sup> them to withstand,  
And often semblaunce made to scape out of their hand.

### 36

But they him layd full low in dungeon deepe,  
And bound him hand and foote with yron chains.  
And with continuall watch did warely<sup>o</sup> keepe;  
Who then would thinke, that by his subtile trains<sup>o</sup>  
He could escape fowle death or deadly paines?<sup>8</sup>  
Thus when that Princes wrath was pacifide,  
He gan renew the late forbidden banes,<sup>9</sup>  
And to the knight his daughter deare he tyde,  
With sacred rites and vowes for ever to abyde.

### 37

His owne two hands the holy knots did knit,  
That none but death for ever can devide;  
His owne two hands, for such a turne<sup>o</sup> most fit,  
The housling<sup>o</sup> fire did kindle and provide,  
And holy water thereon sprinckled wide;<sup>1</sup>  
At which the bushy Teade<sup>o</sup> a groome did light,  
And sacred lampe in secret chamber hide,  
Where it should not be quenched day nor night,  
For feare of evill fates, but burnen ever bright.

### 38

Then gan they sprinckle all the posts with wine,



And made great feast to solemnize that day;  
They all perfumde with frankencense divine,  
And precious odours fetcht from far away,  
That all the house did sweat with great aray:  
And all the while sweete Musicke did apply  
Her curious<sup>o</sup> skill, the warbling notes to play,  
To drive away the dull Melancholy;  
The whiles one sung a song of love and jollity.

### 39

During the which there was an heavenly noise  
Heard sound through all the Pallace pleasantly,  
Like as it had bene many an Angels voice,  
Singing before th'eternall majesty,  
In their trinall triplicities<sup>2</sup> on hye;  
Yet wist<sup>o</sup> no creature, whence that heavenly sweet<sup>o</sup>  
Proceeded, yet each one felt secretly<sup>o</sup>  
Himselfe thereby reft of his senses meet,<sup>o</sup>  
And ravishèd with rare impression in his sprite.<sup>3</sup>

### 40

Great joy was made that day of young and old,  
And solemne feast proclaimd throughout the land,  
That their exceeding merth may not be told:  
Suffice it heare by signes to understand  
The usuall joyes at knitting of loves band.  
Thrise happy man the knight himselfe did hold,  
Possessèd of his Ladies hart and hand,  
And ever, when his eye did her behold,  
His heart did seeme to melt in pleasures manifold.

### 41

Her joyous presence and sweet company  
In full content he there did long enjoy,  
Ne wicked envie, ne vile gealosy

His deare delights were able to annoy:  
Yet swimming in that sea of blisfull joy,  
He nought forgot, how he whilome<sup>o</sup> had sworne,  
In case he could that monstrous beast destroy,  
Unto his Faerie Queene backe to returne:  
The which he shortly did, and Una left to mourne.

## 42

Now strike your sailes ye jolly Mariners,  
For we be come unto a quiet rode,<sup>o</sup>  
Where we must land some of our passengers,  
And light this wearie vessell of her lode.  
Here she a while may make her safe abode,  
Till she repaired have her tackles spent,<sup>o</sup>  
And wants supplide. And then againe abroad  
On the long voyage whereto she is bent:  
Well may she speede and fairely finish her intent.

1590, 1596

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Release the mainsail line and sail toward the land. The nautical metaphor echoes many classical authors and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (2.1–7).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Had recently ravaged.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, sober, appropriate ("right well beseeene") attire.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Able to fight with weapons.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, looking appropriately like herself.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Trumpet calls. "Shaumes": the shawm was the medieval and Renaissance predecessor of the oboe.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Make seemly conversation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The final Christian triumph, the marriage of Christ and the true Church, will be achieved only at the end of time.

Meanwhile, the struggle against evil (and the Roman Church) continues.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: That is, you cannot undo what is done ("doen"), for vows may not be (made) vain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Her black robe (canto 1, stanza 4).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Revelation 19:7–8).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Revelation 21:9, 11 describes the New Jerusalem as "the bride, the Lamb's wife . . . her light was like unto a stone most precious."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For my sake alone.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Revelation 20:2–3).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Banns; that is, proclamation or public notice of an intended marriage. Una and Redcrosse are now betrothed; the consummation of their marriage is postponed.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Marriages in ancient times were solemnized with sacramental fire and water.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The nine angelic orders, divided into three groups of three, the whole hierarchy corresponding to the nine spheres of the universe. The music heard in this stanza is the music of the spheres, not audible on earth since the Fall.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spirit. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come" (Revelation 19.7). In Revelation, the marriage of Christ and the New Jerusalem signals the general redemption.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *recognized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favorable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bade*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straightaway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defender*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adorned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tambourines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crowd*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *playful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *song*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *goddess of the hunt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ranged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *humility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with titles of honor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *half in fun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rabble throng*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confusion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wondered at*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *baseless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *venture to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *young dragons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scolded*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *women friends* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *private* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frighten* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *determine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gray-haired* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defeat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many times* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provisions* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suited* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *famous scarlet cloth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behavior* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *becoming* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assembly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *full description* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just recently* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inquire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from first to last* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *granting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sympathetic* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feel and express* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deserving pity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *severe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vengeful injuries* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whims* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know not* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reached* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enterprise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *nor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *press, contend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obligation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hideous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wife* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belongs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *countenance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bedecked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *veil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ornament* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tightly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adorn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrayed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ere* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purpose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *direct* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *document* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliver* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by which* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *and heavens polluted by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *implore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bound* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hand* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amazement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honored* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bonds of guilt* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *guilty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *serious investigation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceive too weak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpected harm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bond*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treacherous skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *investigates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *filled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bade* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harsh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrested* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impostor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feign*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vigilantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *act*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sacramental*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nuptial torch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intricate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inwardly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harbor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worn out*[Return to reference](#) °

**Mutabilitie Cantos** In 1609, in an edition of *The Faerie Queene* published ten years after Spenser's death, two cantos and a two-stanza fragment of a third one appeared for the first time. If they actually are, as their editor's note suggests, part of an uncompleted book of the poem, centered on the virtue of constancy, they constitute a longer digression from the main story than any in the other books. The cantos give Spenser's reflections on change and permanence in the world—a subject that fascinated and disturbed him and his contemporaries. How is it possible to secure any stable meaning in a world that is forever in flux? Where can beauty and truth be found in the midst of relentless strife? In a great trial scene, the Goddess of Nature rules against Mutabilitie in favor of Jove's principle of underlying order. But in the moving two-stanza fragment, the poet discloses his longing for eternal rest in the changeless realm of heaven.



## Two Cantos of *Mutabilitie*:

Which, both for Forme and Matter, appeare to be parcell of  
some following Booke of the Faerie Queene

(∴)

*Under the Legend  
of  
Constance.*

### *Canto 6*

*Proud Change (not pleasd, in mortall things,  
beneath the Moone, to raigne)<sup>1</sup>  
Pretends,<sup>o</sup> as well of Gods, as Men  
to be the Soveraine.*

#### 1

What man that sees the ever-whirling wheele  
Of Change, the which all mortall things doth sway,<sup>o</sup>  
But that therby doth find, and plainly feelee,  
How Mutability in them doth play  
Her cruell sports, to many mens decay?<sup>o</sup>  
Which that to all may better yet appeare,  
I will rehearse<sup>o</sup> that whylome<sup>o</sup> I heard say,  
How she at first her selfe began to reare,  
Gainst all the Gods, and th'empire sought from them to beare.

#### 2

But first, here falleth fittest to unfold  
Her antique race and lineage ancient,  
As I have found it registred of old,

In Faery Land mongst records permanent:  
She was, to weet,<sup>o</sup> a daughter by descent  
Of those old Titans,<sup>2</sup> that did whylome strive  
With Saturnes sonne for heavens regiment.<sup>o</sup>  
Whom, though high Jove of kingdome did deprive,  
Yet many of their stemme<sup>o</sup> long after did survive.

### 3

And many of them, afterwards obtained  
Great power of Jove, and high authority;  
As Hecate,<sup>3</sup> in whose almighty hand,  
He plac't all rule and principality,  
To be by her disposèd diversly,  
To Gods, and men, as she them list<sup>o</sup> divide:  
And drad<sup>o</sup> Bellona,<sup>4</sup> that doth sound on hie  
Warres and allarums unto Nations wide,  
That makes both heaven and earth to tremble at her pride.

### 4

So likewise did this Titanesse aspire,  
Rule and dominion to her selfe to gaine;  
That as a Goddesse, men might her admire,<sup>o</sup>  
And heavenly honours yield, as to them twaine.<sup>5</sup>  
And first, on earth she sought it to obtaine;  
Where she such prooffe and sad<sup>o</sup> examples shewed  
Of her great power, to many ones great paine,  
That not men onely (whom she soone subdued)  
But eke<sup>o</sup> all other creatures, her bad dooings rewed.<sup>o</sup>

### 5

For, she the face of earthly things so changed,  
That all which Nature had establisht first  
In good estate,<sup>o</sup> and in meet<sup>o</sup> order ranged,  
She did pervert,<sup>o</sup> and all their statutes burst:

And all the worlds faire frame (which none yet durst  
Of Gods or men to alter or misguide)  
She altered quite, and made them all accurst  
That God had blest; and did at first provide  
In that still<sup>o</sup> happy state for ever to abide.

## 6

Ne<sup>o</sup> shee the lawes of Nature onely brake,  
But eke of Justice, and of Policie;<sup>o</sup>  
And wrong of right, and bad of good did make,  
And death for life exchanged foolishlie:  
Since which, all living wights<sup>o</sup> have learned to die,  
And all this world is woxen<sup>o</sup> daily worse.  
O pittious worke of Mutabilitie!  
By which, we all are subject to that curse,  
And death in stead of life have suckèd from our Nurse.<sup>o</sup>

## 7

And now, when all the earth she thus had brought  
To her behest,<sup>o</sup> and thrallèd to her might,  
She gan to cast<sup>o</sup> in her ambitious thought,  
T'attempt<sup>o</sup> the empire of the heavens hight,  
And Jove himselfe to shoulder from his right.  
And first, she past the region of the ayre,  
And of the fire,<sup>6</sup> whose substance thin and slight,  
Made no resistance, ne could her contraire,<sup>o</sup>  
But ready passage to her pleasure did prepaire.

## 8

Thence, to the Circle of the Moone<sup>7</sup> she clambe,  
Where Cynthia<sup>8</sup> raignes in everlasting glory,  
To whose bright shining palace straight she came,  
All fairely deckt with heavens goodly story;<sup>9</sup>  
Whose silver gates (by which there sate an hory

Old aged Sire, with hower-glasse in hand,  
Hight<sup>o</sup> Tyme) she entred, were he lief or sorry:<sup>1</sup>  
Ne staide till she the highest stage<sup>o</sup> had scand,<sup>o</sup>  
Where Cynthia did sit, that never still did stand.<sup>o</sup>

## 9

Her sitting on an Ivory throne shee found,  
Drawne of two steeds, th'one black, the other white,  
Environd with tenne thousand starres around,  
That duly her attended day and night;  
And by her side, there ran her Page, that hight  
Vesper, whom we the Evening-starre intend:<sup>o</sup>  
That with his Torche, still twinkling like twilight,  
Her lightened all the way where she should wend,<sup>o</sup>  
And joy to weary wandring travellers did lend:

## 10

That when the hardy Titanesse beheld  
The goodly building of her Palace bright,  
Made of the heavens substance, and up-held  
With thousand Crystall pillors of huge hight,  
Shee gan to burne in her ambitious spright,<sup>o</sup>  
And t'evnie her that in such glorie rained.  
Eftsoones she cast<sup>2</sup> by force and tortious<sup>o</sup> might,  
Her to displace; and to her selfe to have gained  
The kingdome of the Night, and waters by her wained.<sup>o</sup>

## 11

Boldly she bid the Goddesse downe descend,  
And let her selfe into that Ivory throne;  
For, shee her selfe more worthy thereof wend,<sup>o</sup>  
And better able it to guide alone:  
Whether to men, whose fall she did bemone,  
Or unto Gods, whose state she did maligne,<sup>o</sup>  
Or to th'infernall Powers, her need give lone

Of her faire light, and bounty most benigne,  
Her selfe of all that rule shee deemèd most condigne.°

## 12

But shee that had to her that soveraigne seat  
By highest Jove assigned, therein to beare  
Nights burning lamp, regarded not her threat,  
Ne yielded ought for favour or for feare;  
But with sterne countenance and disdainfull cheare,°  
Bending her hornèd browes,³ did put her back:  
And boldly blaming her for comming there,  
Bade her attonce from heavens coast to pack,°  
Or at her perill bide the wrathfull Thunders wrack.°

## 13

Yet nathemore° the Giantesse forbare:  
But boldly preacing-on,° raught forth her hand  
To pluck her downe perforce° from off her chaire;  
And there-with lifting up her golden wand,  
Threatned to strike her if she did with-stand.  
Where-at the starres, which round about her blazed,  
And eke the Moones bright wagon,° still did stand,  
All beeing with so bold attempt amazed,  
And on her uncouth habit⁴ and sterne looke still gazed.

## 14

Meane-while, the lower World, which nothing knew  
Of all that chauncèd here, was darkned quite;  
And eke the heavens, and all the heavenly crew  
Of happy wights, now unpurvaide° of light,  
Were much afraid, and wondred at that sight;  
Fearing least° Chaos broken had his chaine,  
And brought againe on them eternall night:  
But chiefly Mercury, that next doth raigne,⁵

Ran forth in haste, unto the king of Gods to plaine.°

## 15

All ran together with a great out-cry,  
To Joves faire Palace, fixt in heavens hight;  
And beating at his gates full earnestly,  
Gan call to him aloud with all their might,  
To know what meant that suddaine lack of light.  
The father of the Gods when this he heard,  
Was troubled much at their so strange affright,  
Doubting least° Typhon<sup>6</sup> were againe upreared,  
Or other his old foes, that once him sorely feared.°

## 16

Eftsoones the sonne of Maia° forth he sent  
Downe to the Circle of the Moone, to knowe  
The cause of this so strange astonishment,  
And why shee did her wonted° course forslowe;°  
And if that any were on earth belowe  
That did with charmes or Magick her molest,  
Him to attache,° and downe to hell to throwe:  
But, if from heaven it were, then to arrest  
The Author, and him bring before his presence prest.°

## 17

The wingd-foot God, so fast his plumes did beat,  
That soone he came where-as the Titanesse  
Was striving with faire Cynthia for her seat:  
At whose strange sight, and haughty hardinesse,°  
He wondred much, and feared her no lesse.  
Yet laying feare aside to doe his charge,°  
At last, he bade her (with bold stedfastnesse)  
Ceasse to molest the Moone to walke at large,<sup>7</sup>  
Or come before high Jove, her dooings to discharge.°

## 18

And there-with-all, he on her shoulder laid  
His snaky-wreathèd Mace,<sup>8</sup> whose awfull power  
Doth make both Gods and hellish fiends affraid:  
Where-at the Titanesse did sternely lower,<sup>o</sup>  
And stoutly answered, that in evill hower  
He from his Jove such message to her brought,  
To bid her leave faire Cynthias silver bower;  
Sith<sup>o</sup> shee his Jove and him esteemèd nought,  
No more then<sup>o</sup> Cynthia's selfe; but all their kingdoms sought.

## 19

The Heavens Herald staid not to reply,  
But past away, his doings to relate  
Unto his Lord; who now in th'highest sky,  
Was placed in his principall Estate,<sup>o</sup>  
With all the Gods about him congregate:  
To whom when Hermes had his message told,  
It did them all exceedingly amate,<sup>o</sup>  
Save Jove; who, changing nought his count'nance bold,  
Did unto them at length these speeches wise unfold;

## 20

"Harken to mee awhile yee heavenly Powers;  
Ye may remember since th'Earths cursèd seed  
Sought to assaile the heavens eternall towers,  
And to us all exceeding feare did breed:  
But how we then defeated all their deed,  
Yee all doe knowe, and them destroied quite;  
Yet not so quite, but that there did succeed  
An off-spring of their bloud, which did alite  
Upon the fruitfull earth, which doth us yet despite.<sup>o</sup>

## 21

"Of that bad seed is this bold woman bred,  
That now with bold presumption doth aspire  
To thrust faire Phoebe<sup>9</sup> from her silver bed,  
And eke our selves from heavens high Empire,  
If that her might were match to her desire:  
Wherefore, it now behoves us to advise<sup>o</sup>  
What way is best to drive her to retire;  
Whether by open force, or counsell wise,  
Areed<sup>o</sup> ye sonnes of God, as best ye can devise."

## 22

So having said, he ceast; and with his brow  
(His black eye-brow, whose doomefull dreaded beck<sup>1</sup>  
Is wont to wield<sup>o</sup> the world unto his vow,<sup>o</sup>  
And even the highest Powers of heaven to check)  
Made signe to them in their degrees to speake:  
Who straight gan cast<sup>2</sup> their counsell grave and wise.  
Mean-while, th'Earths daughter, thogh she nought did reck<sup>3</sup>  
Of Hermes message; yet gan now advise,  
What course were best to take in this hot bold emprize.<sup>o</sup>

## 23

Eftsoones she thus resolved; that whil'st the Gods  
(After returne of Hermes Embassie)  
Were troubled, and amongst themselves at ods,  
Before they could new counsels re-allie,<sup>o</sup>  
To set upon them in that extasie;<sup>o</sup>  
And take what fortune time and place would lend:  
So, forth she rose, and through the purest sky  
To Joves high Palace straight cast<sup>o</sup> to ascend,  
To prosecute her plot: Good on-set boads good end.

## 24

Shee there arriving, boldly in did pass;



Where all the Gods she found in counsell close,<sup>o</sup>  
All quite unarmed, as then their manner was.  
At sight of her they suddaine all arose,  
In great amaze,<sup>o</sup> ne wist<sup>o</sup> what way to chose.  
But Jove, all fearelesse, forc't them to aby;<sup>o</sup>  
And in his souveraine throne, gan straight dispose<sup>o</sup>  
Himselfe more full of grace and Majestie,  
That mote encheare<sup>o</sup> his friends, and foes mote terrifie.

## 25

That, when the haughty Titanesse beheld,  
All<sup>o</sup> were she fraught with pride and impudence,  
Yet with the sight thereof was almost queld;  
And inly quaking, seemed as<sup>o</sup> reft of sense,  
And voyd of speech in that drad<sup>o</sup> audience;  
Until that Jove himself, her selfe bespake:  
"Speake thou fraile woman, speake with confidence,  
Whence art thou, and what doost thou here now make?<sup>o</sup>  
What idle errand hast thou, earths mansion to forsake?"

## 26

Shee, halfe confusèd with his great commaund,  
Yet gathering spirit of her natures pride,  
Him boldly answered thus to his demaund:  
"I am a daughter, by the mothers side,  
Of her that is Grand-mother magnifide<sup>o</sup>  
Of all the Gods, great Earth, great Chaos child:<sup>4</sup>  
But by the fathers (be it not envie<sup>o</sup>)  
I greater am in bloud (whereon I build<sup>o</sup>)  
Then all the Gods, though wrongfully from heaven exiled.

## 27

"For, Titan (as ye all acknowledge must)  
Was Saturnes elder brother by birth-right;  
Both, sonnes of Uranus: but by unjust

And guilefull meanes, through Corybantes slight,<sup>o</sup>  
The younger thrust the elder from his right:<sup>5</sup>  
Since which, thou Jove, injuriously<sup>o</sup> hast held  
The Heavens rule from Titans sonnes by might;  
And them to hellish dungeons downe hast feld:  
Witnesse ye Heavens the truth of all that I have teld."

## 28

Whil'st she thus spake, the Gods that gave good eare  
To her bold words, and markèd well her grace,  
Beeing of stature tall as any there  
Of all the Gods, and beautifull of face,  
As any of the Goddesses in place,<sup>o</sup>  
Stood all astonied, like a sort<sup>o</sup> of Steeres;  
Mongst whom, some beast of strange and forraine race,  
Unwares<sup>o</sup> is chaunc't, far straying from his peeres:  
So did their ghastly gaze bewray<sup>o</sup> their hidden feares.

## 29

Till having pauzed awhile, Jove thus bespake;  
"Will never mortall thoughts cease to aspire,  
In this bold sort, to Heaven claime to make,  
And touch celestiall seates with earthly mire?  
I would have thought, that bold Procrustes<sup>6</sup> hire,<sup>o</sup>  
Or Typhons fall, or proud Ixions paine,  
Or great Prometheus, tasting of our ire,  
Would have suffized, the rest for to restraine;  
And warned all men by their example to refraine:

## 30

"But now, this off-scum of that cursèd fry,<sup>o</sup>  
Dare to renew the like bold enterprize,  
And challenge<sup>o</sup> th'heritage of this our skie;  
Whom what should hinder, but that we likewise  
Should handle as the rest of her allies,

And thunder-drive to hell?" With that, he shooke  
His Nectar-deawèd locks,<sup>7</sup> with which the skyes  
And all the world beneath for terror quooke,<sup>6</sup>  
And eft<sup>5</sup> his burning levin-brond<sup>8</sup> in hand he tooke.

### 31

But, when he lookèd on her lovely face,  
In which, faire beames of beauty did appeare,  
That could the greatest wrath soone turne to grace  
(Such sway<sup>4</sup> doth beauty even in Heaven beare)  
He staide his hand: and having changed his cheare,<sup>3</sup>  
He thus againe in milder wise began;  
"But ah! if Gods should strive with flesh yfere,<sup>2</sup>  
Then shortly should the progeny of Man  
Be rooted out, if Jove should doe still<sup>1</sup> what he can:

### 32

"But thee faire Titans child, I rather weene,<sup>8</sup>  
Through some vaine errour or inducement light,<sup>7</sup>  
To see that<sup>6</sup> mortall eyes have never seene;  
Or through ensample<sup>5</sup> of thy sisters might,  
Bellona; whose great glory thou doost spight,<sup>4</sup>  
Since thou hast seene her dreadfull power belowe,  
Mongst wretched men (dismaide with her affright)<sup>9</sup>  
To bandie Crownes, and Kingdomes to bestowe:  
And sure thy worth, no lesse then hers doth seem to showe.

### 33

"But wote<sup>3</sup> thou this, thou hardy Titanesse,  
That not the worth of any living wight  
May challenge ought in Heavens interesse,<sup>1</sup>  
Much lesse the Title of old Titans Right:  
For, we by Conquest of our sovaine might,  
And by eternall doome of Fates decree,

Have wonne the Empire of the Heavens bright;  
Which to our selves we hold, and to whom wee  
Shall worthy deeme partakers of our blisse to bee.

### 34

"Then ceasse thy idle claime thou foolish gerle,  
And seeke by grace and goodnesse to obtaine  
That place from which by folly Titan fell;  
There-to thou maist perhaps, if so thou faine<sup>o</sup>  
Have Jove thy gracious Lord and Soveraigne."  
So, having said, she thus to him replide;  
"Ceasse Saturnes sonne, to seeke by proffers vaine  
Of idle hopes t'allure mee to thy side,  
For to betray my Right, before I have it tride.

### 35

"But thee, O Jove, no equall<sup>o</sup> Judge I deeme  
Of my desert, or of my dewfull<sup>o</sup> Right;  
That in thine owne behalfe maist partiall seeme:  
But to the highest him, that is behight<sup>o</sup>  
Father of Gods and men by equall might;<sup>2</sup>  
To weet, the God of Nature, I appeale."  
There-at Jove wexèd<sup>o</sup> wroth, and in his spright<sup>o</sup>  
Did inly grudge, yet did it well conceale;  
And bade Dan Phoebus Scribe<sup>3</sup> her Appellation<sup>o</sup> seale.

### 36

Eftsoones the time and place appointed were,  
Where all, both heavenly Powers, and earthly wights,  
Before great Natures presence should appeare,  
For triall of their Titles and best Rights:  
That was, to weet, upon the highest hights  
Of Arlo-hill<sup>4</sup> (Who knowes not Arlo-hill?)  
That is the highest head (in all mens sights)

Of my old father Mole, whom Shepheards quill  
Renowmèd hath with hymnes fit for a rurall skill.

### 37

And, were it not ill fitting for this file,<sup>5</sup>  
To sing of hilles and woods, mongst warres and Knights,  
I would abate the sternenesse of my stile,  
Mongst these sterne stounds<sup>o</sup> to mingle soft delights;  
And tell how Arlo through Dianaes spights  
(Beeing of old the best and fairest Hill  
That was in all this holy-Islands<sup>6</sup> hights)  
Was made the most unpleasant, and most ill.<sup>o</sup>  
Meane while, O Clio, lend Calliope<sup>7</sup> thy quill.

### 38

Whylome,<sup>o</sup> when Ireland florishèd in fame  
Of wealths and goodnesse, far above the rest  
Of all that beare the British Islands name,  
The Gods then used<sup>8</sup> (for pleasure and for rest)  
Oft to resort there-to, when seemed them best:  
But none of all there-in more pleasure found,  
Then Cynthia;<sup>9</sup> that is soveraine Queene profest<sup>o</sup>  
Of woods and forrests, which therein abound,  
Sprinkled with wholsom waters, more then most on ground.

### 39

But mongst them all, as fittest for her game,<sup>o</sup>  
Either for chace of beasts with hound or boawe,  
Or for to shroude in shade from Phoebus flame,  
Or bathe in fountaines that doe freshly flowe,  
Or<sup>o</sup> from high hilles, or from the dales belowe,  
She chose this Arlo; where shee did resort  
With all her Nymphes enrangèd on<sup>o</sup> a rowe,  
With whom the woody Gods did oft consort:<sup>o</sup>

For, with the Nymphes, the Satyres love to play and sport.<sup>1</sup>

#### 40

Amongst the which, there was a Nymph that hight  
Molanna; daughter of old father Mole,  
And sister unto Mulla,<sup>2</sup> faire and bright:  
Unto whose bed false Bregog whylome stole,  
That Shepheard Colin dearely did condole,<sup>o</sup>  
And made her lucklesse loves well knowne to be.  
But this Molanna, were she not so shole,<sup>o</sup>  
Were no lesse faire and beautifull then shee:  
Yet as she is, a fairer flood may no man see.

#### 41

For, first, she springs out of two marble Rocks,  
On which, a grove of Oakes high mounted growes,  
That as a girlond seemes to deck the locks  
Of som faire Bride, brought forth with pompous<sup>3</sup> showes  
Out of her bowre,<sup>o</sup> that many flowers strowes:  
So, through the flowry Dales she tumbling downe,  
Through many woods, and shady coverts<sup>o</sup> flowes  
(That on each side her silver channell crowne)  
Till to the Plaine she come, whose Valleyes shee doth drowne.

#### 42

In her sweet streames, Diana usèd oft  
(After her sweatie chace and toilesome play)  
To bathe her selfe; and after, on the soft  
And downy grasse, her dainty limbes to lay  
In covert<sup>o</sup> shade, where none behold her may:  
For, much she hated sight of living eye.  
Foolish God Faunus, though full many a day  
He saw her clad, yet longèd foolishly  
To see her naked mongst her Nymphes in privity.<sup>4</sup>

### 43

No way he found to compasse<sup>o</sup> his desire,  
But to corrupt Molanna, this her maid,  
Her to discover<sup>o</sup> for some secret hire:<sup>o</sup>  
So, her with flattering words he first assaid;  
And after, pleasing gifts for her purvaid,<sup>o</sup>  
Queene-apples,<sup>5</sup> and red Cherries from the tree,  
With which he her allurèd and betraid,  
To tell what time he might her Lady see  
When she her selfe did bathe, that he might secret<sup>o</sup> bee.

### 44

There-to hee promist, if she would him pleasure  
With this small boone, to quit<sup>o</sup> her with a better;  
To weet, that where-as she had out of measure  
Long loved the Fanchin, who by nought did set her,<sup>6</sup>  
That he would undertake, for this to get her  
To be his Love, and of him likèd well:  
Besides all which, he vowed to be her debter  
For many moe<sup>o</sup> good turnes then he would tell;  
The least of which, this little pleasure should excell.

### 45

The simple maid did yield to him anone;<sup>o</sup>  
And eft him placèd where he close<sup>7</sup> might view  
That<sup>o</sup> never any saw, save onely one;  
Who, for his hire to so foole-hardy dew,<sup>o</sup>  
Was of his hounds devoured in Hunters hew.<sup>8</sup>  
Tho,<sup>o</sup> as her manner was on sunny day,  
Diana, with her Nymphes about her, drew  
To this sweet spring; where, doffing her array,  
She bathed her lovely limbes, for Jove a likely pray.<sup>o</sup>

### 46

There Faunus saw that pleased much his eye,  
And made his hart to tickle<sup>o</sup> in his brest,  
That for great joy of some-what he did spy,  
He could him not containe in silent rest;  
But breaking forth in laughter, loud profest  
His foolish thought. A foolish Faune indeed,  
That couldst not hold thy selfe so<sup>o</sup> hidden blest,  
But wouldest needs thine owne conceit<sup>9</sup> areed.<sup>o</sup>  
Babblers unworthy been of so divine a meed.<sup>o</sup>

#### 47

The Goddesse, all abashed with that noise,  
In haste forth started from the guilty brooke;  
And running straight where-as she heard his voice,  
Enclosed the bush about, and there him tooke,  
Like darrèd<sup>1</sup> Larke; not daring up to looke  
On her whose sight before so much he sought.  
Thence, forth they drew him by the hornes, and shooke  
Nigh all to peeces, that they left him nought;<sup>o</sup>  
And then into the open light they forth him brought.

#### 48

Like as an huswife, that with busie care  
Thinks of her Dairie to make wondrous gaine,  
Finding where-as some wicked beast unware<sup>o</sup>  
That breakes into her Dayr'house, there doth draine  
Her creaming pannes, and frustrate all her paine;<sup>o</sup>  
Hath in some snare or gin<sup>o</sup> set close behind,  
Entrappèd him, and caught into her traine,<sup>o</sup>  
Then thinks what punishment were best assigned,  
And thousand deathes deviseth in her vengefull mind:

#### 49

So did Diana and her maydens all  
Use silly Faunus, now within their baile:<sup>o</sup>



They mocke and scorne him, and him foule miscall;°  
Some by the nose him pluckt, some by the taile,  
And by his goatish beard some did him haile:°  
Yet he (poore soule) with patience all did beare;  
For, nought against their wils might countervale:°  
Ne ought he said what ever he did heare;  
But hanging downe his head, did like a Mome° appeare.

## 50

At length, when they had flouted him their fill,  
They gan to cast° what penance him to give.  
Some would have gelt° him, but that same would spill²  
The Wood-gods breed, which must for ever live:  
Others would through the river him have drive,°  
And duckèd deepe: but that seemed penance light;  
But most agreed and did this sentence give,  
Him in Deares skin to clad; and in that plight,°  
To hunt him with their hounds, him selfe save how hee might.

## 51

But Cynthia's selfe, more angry then the rest,  
Thought not enough, to punish him in sport,  
And of her shame to make a gamesome° jest;  
But gan examine him in straighter° sort,  
Which of her Nymphes, or other close consort,°  
Him thither brought, and her to him betraid?  
He, much affeard, to her confessèd short,°  
That 'twas Molanna which her so bewraid.°  
Then all attonce their hands upon Molanna laid.

## 52

But him (according as they had decreed)  
With a Deeres-skin they covered, and then chast  
With all their hounds that after him did speed;  
But he more speedy, from them fled more fast

Then any Deere: so sore him dread aghast.<sup>o</sup>  
They after followed all with shrill out-cry,  
Shouting as they the heavens would have brast:<sup>o</sup>  
That all the woods and dales where he did flie,  
Did ring againe, and loud reeccho to the skie.

### 53

So they him followed till they weary were;  
When, back returning to Molann' againe,  
They, by commaund'ment of Diana, there  
Her whelmed with stones.<sup>3</sup> Yet Faunus (for her paine)<sup>o</sup>  
Of her belovèd Fanchin did obtaine,  
That her he would receive unto his bed.  
So now her waves passe through a pleasant Plaine,  
Till with the Fanchin she her selfe doe wed,  
And (both combined) themselves in one faire river spred.

### 54

Nath'lesse,<sup>o</sup> Diana, full of indignatiön,  
Thence-forth abandond her delicious brooke;  
In whose sweet streame, before that bad occasiön,  
So much delight to bathe her limbes she tooke:  
Ne onely her,<sup>o</sup> but also quite forsooke  
All those faire forrests about Arlo hid,  
And all that Mountaine, which doth over-looke  
The richest champion that may else be rid,<sup>4</sup>  
And the faire Shure,<sup>5</sup> in which are thousand Salmons bred.

### 55

Them all, and all that she so deare did way,<sup>o</sup>  
Thence-forth she left; and parting from the place,  
There-on an heavy haplesse curse did lay,  
To weet, that Wolves, where she was wont to space,<sup>o</sup>  
Should harboured be, and all those Woods deface,

And Thieves should rob and spoile<sup>6</sup> that Coast<sup>o</sup> around.  
Since which, those Woods, and all that goodly Chase,<sup>7</sup>  
Doth to this day with Wolves and Thieves abound:  
Which too-too true that lands in-dwellers since have found.

### ***Canto 7***

*Pealing,<sup>o</sup> from Jove, to Natur's Bar,  
bold Alteration<sup>o</sup> pleades  
Large<sup>o</sup> Evidence: but Nature soone  
her righteous Doome areads.<sup>8</sup>*

#### **1**

Ah! whither doost thou now thou greater<sup>o</sup> Muse<sup>9</sup>  
Me from these woods and pleasing forrests bring?  
And my fraile spirit (that dooth oft refuse  
This too high flight, unfit for her weake wing)  
Lift up aloft, to tell of heavens King  
(Thy souveraine Sire)<sup>1</sup> his fortunate successe,  
And victory, in bigger<sup>o</sup> noates to sing,  
Which he obtained against that Titanesse,  
That him of heavens Empire sought to dispossesse.

#### **2**

Yet sith<sup>o</sup> I needs must follow thy behest,  
Doe thou my weaker<sup>o</sup> wit with skill inspire,  
Fit for this turne;<sup>o</sup> and in my feeble brest  
Kindle fresh sparks of that immortall fire,  
Which learnèd minds inflameth with desire  
Of heavenly things: for, who but thou alone,  
That art yborne of heaven and heavenly Sire,  
Can tell things doen in heaven so long ygone;  
So farre past memory of man that may be knowne.

#### **3**

Now, at the time that was before agreed,  
The Gods assembled all on Arlo hill;  
As well those that are sprung of heavenly seed,  
As those that all the other world<sup>o</sup> doe fill,  
And rule both sea and land unto their will:  
Onely th'infernall Powers might not appeare;  
Aswell for horror of their count'naunce ill,  
As for th'unruly fiends which they did feare;<sup>2</sup>  
Yet Pluto and Proserpina were present there.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4

And thither also came all other creatures,  
What-ever life or motion doe retaine,  
According to their sundry kinds of features;  
That Arlo scarsly could them all containe;  
So full they fillèd every hill and Plaine:  
And had not Natures Sergeant (that is Order)  
Them well disposèd by his busie paine,<sup>o</sup>  
And raungèd<sup>o</sup> farre abroad in every border,  
They would have causèd much confusion and disorder.

#### 5

Then forth issewed (great goddesse) great dame Nature,  
With goodly port<sup>o</sup> and gracious Majesty;  
Being far greater and more tall of stature  
Then any of the gods or Powers on hie:  
Yet certes<sup>o</sup> by her face and physnomy,<sup>o</sup>  
Whether she man or woman inly were,  
That could not any creature well descry:  
For, with a veile that wimples<sup>o</sup> every where,  
Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.

#### 6

That some doe say was so by skill devized,  
To hide the terror of her uncouth hew,<sup>o</sup>

From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized;<sup>o</sup>  
For that her face did like a Lion shew,  
That eye of wight could not indure to view:  
But others tell that it so beautious was,  
And round about such beames of splendor threw,  
That it the Sunne a thousand times did pass,<sup>o</sup>  
Ne<sup>o</sup> could be seene, but<sup>o</sup> like an image in a glass.

## 7

That well may seemen true: for, well I weene  
That this same day, when she on Arlo sat,<sup>o</sup>  
Her garment was so bright and wondrous sheene,<sup>o</sup>  
That my fraile wit cannot devize to what  
It to compare, nor finde like stuffe<sup>o</sup> to that,  
As those three sacred Saints, though else most wise,  
Yet on mount Thabor quite their wits forgat,  
When they their glorious Lord in strange disguise  
Transfigured sawe; his garments so did daze<sup>o</sup> their eyes.<sup>4</sup>

## 8

In a fayre Plaine upon an equall<sup>o</sup> Hill,  
She placèd was in a paviliön;  
Not such as Craftes-men by their idle<sup>o</sup> skill  
Are wont for Princes states<sup>o</sup> to fashiön:  
But th'earth her self of her owne motiön,  
Out of her fruitfull bosome made to growe  
Most dainty trees; that, shooting up anon,<sup>o</sup>  
Did seeme to bow their bloosming<sup>o</sup> heads full lowe,  
For homage unto her, and like a throne did shew.<sup>o</sup>

## 9

So hard it is for any living wight,  
All her array and vestiments to tell,  
That old Dan<sup>o</sup> Geffrey (in whose gentle spright  
The pure well head of Poesie did dwell)

In his *Foules parley* durst not with it mel,<sup>o</sup>  
But it transferd<sup>o</sup> to Alane, who he thought  
Had in his *Plaint of kindes* described it well:<sup>5</sup>  
Which who will read set forth so as it ought,  
Go seek he out that Alane where he may be sought.

## 10

And all the earth far underneath her feete  
Was dight<sup>o</sup> with flowres, that voluntary grew  
Out of the ground, and sent forth odours sweet,  
Tenne thousand mores<sup>o</sup> of sundry sent and hew,  
That might delight the smell, or please the view:  
The which, the Nymphes, from all the brooks thereby  
Had gathered, which they at her foot-stoole threw;  
That richer seemed then any tapestry,  
That Princes bowres adorne with painted imagery.

## 11

And Mole<sup>6</sup> himself, to honour her the more,  
Did deck himself in freshest faire attire,  
And his high head, that seemeth alwaies hore<sup>o</sup>  
With hardned frosts of former winters ire,  
He with an Oaken girlond now did tire,<sup>o</sup>  
As if the love of some new Nymph late seene,  
Had in him kindled youthfull fresh desire,  
And made him change his gray attire to greene;  
Ah gentle Mole! such joyance hath thee well beseene.<sup>7</sup>

## 12

Was never so great joyance since the day,  
That all the gods whylome assembled were,  
On Haemus hill in their divine array,  
To celebrate the solemne<sup>o</sup> bridall cheare,  
Twixt Peleus, and dame Thetis<sup>8</sup> pointed<sup>o</sup> there;

Where Phoebus self, that god of Poets hight,  
They say did sing the spousall hymne full cleere,  
That all the gods were ravisht with delight  
Of his celestiall song, and Musicks wondrous might.

### 13

This great Grandmother of all creatures bred  
Great Nature, ever young yet full of eld,<sup>o</sup>  
Still<sup>o</sup> mooving, yet unmoved from her sted;<sup>o</sup>  
Unseene of any, yet of all beheld;  
Thus sitting in her throne as I have teld,  
Before her came dame Mutabilite;  
And being lowe before her presence feld,<sup>o</sup>  
With meek obaysance and humilitie,  
Thus gan her plaintif Plea, with words to amplifie;

### 14

"To thee O greatest goddesse, onely<sup>o</sup> great,  
An humble suppliant loe, I lowely fly  
Seeking for Right, which I of thee entreat;  
Who Right to all dost deale indifferently,<sup>o</sup>  
Damning all Wrong and tortious<sup>o</sup> Injurie,  
Which any of thy creatures doe to other  
(Oppressing them with power, unequally)<sup>o</sup>  
Sith of them all thou are the equall<sup>o</sup> mother,  
And knittest each to each, as brother unto brother.

### 15

"To thee therefore of this same Jove I plaine,  
And of his fellow gods that faine<sup>o</sup> to be,  
That challenge<sup>o</sup> to themselves the whole worlds raigin;  
Of which, the greatest part is due to me,  
And heaven it selfe by heritage in Fee:<sup>o</sup>  
For, heaven and earth I both alike do deeme,<sup>o</sup>  
Sith heaven and earth are both alike to thee;

And, gods no more then men thou doest esteeme:  
For, even the gods to thee, as men to gods do seeme.

## 16

"Then weigh, O soveraigne goddesses, by what right  
These gods do claime the worlds whole soverainty;  
And that<sup>o</sup> is onely dew unto thy might  
Arrogate to themselves ambitiously:  
As for the gods owne principality,<sup>o</sup>  
Which Jove usurpes unjustly; that to be  
My heritage, Jove's self cannot deny,  
From my great Grandsire Titan, unto mee,  
Derived by dew descent; as is well knowne to thee.

## 17

"Yet mauger<sup>o</sup> Jove, and all his gods beside,  
I doe possesse the worlds most regiment;<sup>o</sup>  
As, if ye please it into parts divide,  
And every parts inholders<sup>o</sup> to convent,<sup>o</sup>  
Shall to your eyes appeare incontinent.<sup>o</sup>  
And first,<sup>9</sup> the Earth (great mother of us all)  
That only<sup>o</sup> seems unmoved and permanent,  
And unto Mutability not thrall;  
Yet is she changed in part, and eeke<sup>o</sup> in generall.

## 18

"For, all that from her springs, and is ybredde,  
How-ever fayre it flourish for a time,  
Yet see we soone decay; and, being dead,  
To turne again unto their earthly slime:  
Yet, out of their decay and mortall crime,<sup>1</sup>  
We daily see new creatures to arise;  
And of their Winter spring another Prime,<sup>o</sup>  
Unlike in forme, and changed by strange disguise:  
So turne they still about, and change in restlesse wise.



## 19

“As for her tenants; that is, man and beasts,  
The beasts we daily see massacred dy,  
As thralls and vassalls unto mens beheasts:  
And men themselves doe change continually,  
From youth to eld, from wealth to poverty,  
From good to bad, from bad to worst of all.  
Ne doe their bodies only flit and fly:  
But eeke their minds (which they immortal call)  
Still change and vary thoughts, as new occasions fall.

## 20

“Ne is the water in more constant case;  
Whether those same on high, or these belowe.<sup>2</sup>  
For, th’Ocean moveth stil, from place to place;  
And every River still doth ebbe and flowe:  
Ne any Lake, that seems most still and slowe,  
Ne Poole so small, that can his smoothnesse holde,  
When any winde doth under heaven blowe;  
With which, the clouds are also tost and rolled;  
Now like great Hills; and, streight, like sluces, them unfold.<sup>3</sup>

## 21

“So likewise are all watry living wights  
Still tost, and turnèd, with continuall change,  
Never abyding in their stedfast plights.<sup>o</sup>  
The fish, still floting,<sup>o</sup> doe at randon<sup>o</sup> range,  
And never rest; but evermore exchange  
Their dwelling places, as the streames them carrie:  
Ne have the watry foules a certaine grange,<sup>o</sup>  
Wherein to rest, ne in one stead<sup>o</sup> do tarry;  
But flitting still doe flie, and still their places vary.

## 22

"Next is the Ayre: which who feels not by sense  
(For, of all sense it is the middle meane<sup>4</sup>)  
To flit still? and, with subtill influence<sup>o</sup>  
Of his thin spirit, all creatures to maintaine,  
In state of life? O weake life! that does leane  
On thing so tickle<sup>o</sup> as th'unsteady ayre;  
Which every howre is changed, and altred cleane<sup>o</sup>  
With every blast that bloweth fowle or faire:  
The faire doth it prolong; the fowle doth it impaire.

## 23

"Therein the changes infinite beholde,  
Which to her creatures every minute chaunce;  
Now, boyling hot: streight, friezing deadly cold:  
Now, faire sun-shine, that makes all skip and daunce:  
Streight, bitter storms and balefull countenance,  
That makes them all to shiver and to shake:  
Rayne, hayle, and snowe do pay them sad penance,  
And dreadfull thunder-claps (that make them quake)  
With flames and flashing lights that thousand changes make.

## 24

"Last is the fire: which, though it live for ever,  
Ne can be quenched quite;<sup>o</sup> yet, every day,  
We see his parts, so soone as they do sever,  
To lose their heat, and shortly to decay;  
So, makes himself his owne consuming pray.  
Ne any living creatures doth he breed:  
But all, that are of others bredd, doth slay;  
And, with their death, his cruell life dooth feed;  
Nought leaving, but their barren ashes, without seede.

## 25

"Thus, all these fower<sup>o</sup> (the which the ground-work bee  
Of all the world, and of all living wights)

To thousand sorts of Change we subject see:  
Yet are they changed (by other wondrous slights<sup>o</sup>)  
Into themselves,<sup>o</sup> and lose their native might;  
The Fire to Aire, and th'Ayre to Water sheere,<sup>o</sup>  
And Water into Earth: yet Water fights  
With Fire, and Aire with Earth approaching neere:  
Yet all are in one body, and as one appeare.

## 26

"So, in them all raignes Mutabilitie;  
How-ever these, that Gods themselves do call,  
Of them doe claime the rule and soverainty:  
As, Vesta, of the fire aethereall;  
Vulcan, of this, with us so usuall;  
Ops,<sup>5</sup> of the earth; and Juno of the Ayre;  
Neptune, of Seas; and Nymphes, of Rivers all.  
For, all those Rivers to me subject are:  
And all the rest, which they usurp, be all my share.

## 27

"Which to approven<sup>o</sup> true, as I have told,  
Vouchsafe, O goddesse, to thy presence call  
The rest which doe the world in being hold:  
As, times and seasons of the yeare that fall:  
Of all the which, demand<sup>o</sup> in generall,  
Or judge thy selfe, by verdit<sup>o</sup> of thine eye,  
Whether to me they are not subject all."  
Nature did yeeld thereto; and by-and-by,<sup>o</sup>  
Bade Order call them all, before her Majesty.

## 28

So, forth issewed the Seasons of the yeare;  
First, lusty<sup>o</sup> Spring, all dight in leaves of flowres  
That freshly budded and new bloosmes<sup>o</sup> did beare  
(In which a thousand birds had built their bowres

That sweetly sung, to call forth Paramours<sup>o</sup>):  
And in his hand a javelin he did beare,  
And on his head (as fit for warlike stoures<sup>o</sup>)  
A guilt<sup>o</sup> engraven morion<sup>o</sup> he did weare;  
That as some did him love, so others did him feare.

## 29

Then came the jolly Sommer, being dight  
In a thin silken cassock<sup>o</sup> coloured greene,  
That was unlynèd all, to be more light:  
And on his head a girland well beseene<sup>6</sup>  
He wore, from which as he had chauffèd<sup>o</sup> been  
The sweat did drop; and in his hand he bore  
A boawe and shaftes, as he in forrest greene  
Had hunted late the Libbard<sup>o</sup> or the Bore,  
And now would bathe his limbes, with labor heated sore.<sup>o</sup>

## 30

Then came the Autumne all in yellow clad,  
As though he joyèd in his plentious store,  
Laden with fruits that made him laugh, full glad  
That he had banisht hunger, which to-fore<sup>o</sup>  
Had by the belly oft him pinchèd sore.  
Upon his head a wreath that was enrold<sup>o</sup>  
With eares of corne,<sup>o</sup> of every sort he bore:  
And in his hand a sickle he did holde,  
To reape the ripened fruits the which the earth had yold.<sup>o</sup>

## 31

Lastly, came Winter cloathèd all in frize.<sup>7</sup>  
Chattering his teeth for cold that did him chill,  
Whil'st on his hoary beard his breath did freese;  
And the dull drops that from his purpled bill<sup>o</sup>  
As from a limbeck<sup>o</sup> did adown distill.  
In his right hand a tippèd<sup>o</sup> staffe he held,

With which his feeble steps he stayèd still:°  
For, he was faint with cold, and weak with eld;  
That scarce his loosèd limbes he hable was to weld.°

### 32

These, marching softly,° thus in order went,  
And after them, the Monthes all riding came;  
First, sturdy° March<sup>8</sup> with brows full sternly bent,  
And armèd strongly, rode upon a Ram,  
The same which over Hellespontus swam:°  
Yet in his hand a spade he also hent,°  
And in a bag all sorts of seeds ysame,°  
Which on the earth he strowèd as he went,  
And fild her womb with fruitfull hope of nourishment.

### 33

Next came fresh Aprill full of lustyhed,°  
And wanton as a Kid whose home new buds:  
Upon a Bull he rode, the same which led  
Europa floting through th'Argolick fluds:°  
His homes were gilden all with golden studs,  
And garnishèd with garlonds goodly dight  
Of all the fairest flowres and freshest buds  
Which th'earth brings forth, and wet he seemed in sight.  
With waves, through which he waded for his loves delight.

### 34

Then came faire May, the fayrest mayd on ground,  
Deckt all with dainties of her seasons pryde,  
And throwing flowres out of her lap around:  
Upon two brethrens shoulders she did ride,  
The twinnes of Leda;° which on eyther side  
Supported her like to their souveraine Queene.  
Lord! how all creatures laught, when her they spide,

And leapt and daunc't as they had ravisht<sup>o</sup> beene!  
And Cupid selfe about her fluttred all in greene.

### 35

And after her, came jolly June, arrayd  
All in greene leaves, as he a Player<sup>3</sup> were;  
Yet in his time, he wrought<sup>o</sup> as well as playd,  
That by his plough-yrons<sup>o</sup> mote right well appeare:  
Upon a Crab he rode, that him did beare  
With crooked crawling steps an uncouth pase,  
And backward yode,<sup>o</sup> as Bargemen<sup>o</sup> wont to fare  
Bending their force contrary to their face,  
Like that ungracious crew which faines demurest grace.<sup>4</sup>

### 36

Then came hot July boyling like to fire,  
That all his garments he had cast away:  
Upon a Lyon raging yet with ire  
He boldly rode and made him to obay:  
It was the beast that whylome did forray<sup>o</sup>  
The Nemaean forrest, till th'Amphytrionide<sup>5</sup>  
Him slew, and with his hide did him array;  
Behinde his back a sithe,<sup>o</sup> and by his side  
Under his belt he bore a sickle<sup>6</sup> circling wide.

### 37

The sixth was August, being rich arrayd  
In garment all of gold downe to the ground:  
Yet rode he not, but led a lovely Mayd  
Forth by the lilly hand, the which was cround  
With eares of corne, and full her hand was found;  
That was the righteous Virgin,<sup>7</sup> which of old  
Lived here on earth, and plenty made abound;  
But, after Wrong was loved and Justice solde,

She left th'unrighteous world and was to heaven extold.°

### 38

Next him, September marchèd eeke on foote;  
Yet was he heavy laden with the spoyle  
Of harvests riches, which he made his boot,°  
And him enricht with bounty of the soyle:  
In his one hand, as fit for harvests toyle,  
He held a knife-hook; and in th'other hand  
A paire of waights, with which he did assoyle°  
Both more and lesse, where it in doubt did stand,  
And equal° gave to each as Justice duly scanned.°

### 39

Then came October full of merry glee:  
For, yet his noule was totty of the must,<sup>8</sup>  
Which he was treading in the wine-fats see,<sup>9</sup>  
And of the joyous oyle, whose gentle gust°  
Made him so frolick and so full of lust:°  
Upon a dreadful Scorpion he did ride,  
The same which by Dianaes doom° unjust  
Slew great Orion:<sup>1</sup> and eeke by his side  
He had his ploughing share, and coulter<sup>2</sup> ready tyde.

### 40

Next was November, he full grosse and fat,  
As fed with lard, and that right well might seeme;  
For, he had been a fattening° hogs of late,  
That yet his browes with sweat, did reek and steem,  
And yet the season was full sharp° and breem;°  
In planting eeke he took no small delight:  
Whereon he rode, not easie was to deeme;°  
For it a dreadfull Centaure was in sight,  
The seed of Saturne, and faire Naïs, Chiron<sup>3</sup> hight.

## 41

And after him, came next the chill December:  
Yet he through merry feasting which he made,  
And great bonfires, did not the cold remember;  
His Saviours birth his mind so much did glad:  
Upon a shaggy-bearded Goat he rade,<sup>o</sup>  
The same wherewith Dan Jove in tender yeares,  
They say, was nourisht by th'Idaeon mayd;<sup>4</sup>  
And in his hand a broad deepe boawle he beares;  
Of which, he freely drinks an health to all his peeres.

## 42

Then came old January, wrapped well  
In many weeds<sup>o</sup> to keep the cold away;  
Yet did he quake and quiver like to quell,<sup>o</sup>  
And blowe his nayles to warme them if he may:  
For, they were numbd with holding all the day  
An hatchet keene, with which he fellèd wood,  
And from the trees did lop the needlesse spray:<sup>o</sup>  
Upon an huge great Earth-pot steane<sup>5</sup> he stood;  
From whose wide mouth, there flowèd forth the Romane floud.<sup>6</sup>

## 43

And lastly, came cold February, sitting  
In an old wagon, for he could not ride;  
Drawne of two fishes<sup>o</sup> for the season fitting,  
Which through the flood before<sup>7</sup> did softly slyde  
And swim away: yet had he by his side  
His plough and harnesse fit to till the ground,  
And tooles to prune the trees, before the pride<sup>o</sup>  
Of hasting Prime<sup>o</sup> did make them burgein<sup>o</sup> round:  
So past the twelve Months forth, and their dew places found.

## 44



And after these, there came the Day, and Night,  
Riding together both with equall pase,  
Th'one on a Palfrey<sup>o</sup> blacke, the other white;  
But Night had covered her uncomely face  
With a blacke veile, and held in hand a mace,  
On top whereof the moon and stars were pight,<sup>o</sup>  
And sleep and darknesse round about did trace:<sup>o</sup>  
But Day did beare, upon his scepters hight,  
The goodly Sun, encompass all with beamès bright.

#### 45

Then came the Howres, faire daughters of high Jove,  
And timely<sup>8</sup> Night, the which were all endewed  
With wondrous beauty fit to kindle love;  
But they were Virgins all, and love eschewed,  
That might forslack<sup>9</sup> the charge to them fore-shewed  
By mighty Jove; who did them Porters make  
Of heavens gate (whence all the gods issued)  
Which they did dayly watch, and nightly wake<sup>o</sup>  
By even turnes, ne ever did their charge forsake.

#### 46

And after all came Life, and lastly Death;  
Death with most grim and griesly visage seene,  
Yet is he nought but parting of the breath;  
Ne ought to see, but like a shade to weene,<sup>o</sup>  
Unbodièd, unsouled, unheard, unseene.  
But Life was like a faire young lusty boy,  
Such as they faine Dan Cupid to have beene,  
Full of delightfull health and lively joy,  
Deckt all with flowres, and wings of gold fit to employ.

#### 47

When these were past, thus gan the Titanesse:  
"Lo, mighty mother, now be judge and say,

Whether in all thy creatures more or lesse  
Change doth not raig and beare the greatest sway:  
For, who sees not, that Time on all doth pray?°  
But Times do change and move continually.  
So nothing here long standeth in one stay:  
Wherefore, this lower world who can deny  
But to be subject still° to Mutabilitie?"

## 48

Then thus gan Jove: "Right true it is, that these  
And all things else that under heaven dwell  
Are chaunged of Time, who doth them all disseise°  
Of being: But, who is it (to me tell)  
That Time himselfe doth move and still compell  
To keepe his course? Is not that namely wee  
Which poure that vertue° from our heavenly cell,  
That moves them all, and makes them changèd be?  
So them we gods doe rule, and in them also thee."

## 49

To whom, thus Mutability: "The things  
Which we see not how they are moved and swayd,  
Ye may attribute to your selves as Kings,  
And say they by your secret powre are made:  
But what we see not, who shall us perswade?  
But were they so, as ye them faine to be,  
Moved by your might, and ordred by your ayde;  
Yet what if I can prove, that even yee  
Your selves are likewise changed, and subject unto mee?"

## 50

"And first, concerning her that is the first,<sup>1</sup>  
Even you faire Cynthia, whom so much ye make  
Joves dearest darling, she was bred and nurst  
On Cynthus hill,<sup>2</sup> whence she her name did take:

Then is she mortall borne, how-so<sup>o</sup> ye crake;<sub>o</sub>  
Besides, her face and countenance every day  
We changèd see, and sundry forms partake,  
Now hornd, now round, now bright, now brown<sup>o</sup> and gray:  
So that 'as changefull as the Moone' men use<sup>o</sup> to say.

## 51

"Next, Mercury, who though he lesse appeare  
To change his hew, and alwayes seeme as one;  
Yet, he his course doth altar every yeare,  
And is of late far out of order gone:<sup>3</sup>  
So Venus eeke, that goodly Paragone,<sup>o</sup>  
Though faire all night, yet is she darke all day;  
And Phoebus self, who lightsome is alone,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet is he oft eclipsed by the way,<sup>o</sup>  
And fills the darkned world with terror and dismay.

## 52

"Now Mars that valiant man is changèd most:  
For, he some times so far runs out of square,  
That he his way doth seem quite to have lost,  
And cleane without<sup>o</sup> his usuall sphere to fare;  
That even these Star-gazers stonisht are  
At sight thereof, and damne their lying bookes:  
So likewise, grim Sir Saturne oft doth spare<sup>o</sup>  
His sterne aspect,<sup>4</sup> and calme his crabbèd<sup>o</sup> lookes:  
So many turning cranks<sup>o</sup> these have, so many crookes.

## 53

"But you Dan Jove, that only constant are,  
And King of all the rest, as ye do clame,  
Are you not subject eeke to this misfare?<sup>o</sup>  
Then let me aske you this withouten blame,  
Where were ye borne? some say in Crete by name,  
Others in Thebes, and others other-where;

But wheresoever they comment<sup>o</sup> the same,  
They all consent that ye begotten were,  
And borne here in this world, ne other<sup>5</sup> can appeare.

## 54

“Then are ye mortall borne, and thrall to me,  
Unless the kingdome of the sky yee make<sup>o</sup>  
Immortall, and unchangeable to bee;  
Besides, that power and vertue<sup>6</sup> which ye spake,  
That ye here worke, doth many changes take,  
And your owne natures change: for, each of you  
That vertue have, or<sup>o</sup> this, or that to make,  
Is checkt and changed from his nature trew,  
By others opposition or obliquid view.<sup>7</sup>

## 55

“Besides, the sundry motions of your Spheares,<sup>8</sup>  
So sundry waies and fashions as clerkes<sup>o</sup> faine,  
Some in short space, and some in longer yeares;  
What is the same but alteration plaine?  
Onely the starrie skie<sup>9</sup> doth still remaine:<sup>o</sup>  
Yet do the Starres and Signes therein still move,  
And even it self is moved, as wizards saine.<sup>o</sup>  
But all that moveth, doth mutation love:  
Therefore both you and them to me I subject prove.

## 56

“Then since within this wide great Universe  
Nothing doth firme and permanent appeare,  
But all things tost and turned by transverse:<sup>o</sup>  
What then should let,<sup>o</sup> but I aloft should reare  
My Trophee, and from all, the triumph beare?  
Now judge then (O thou greatest goddesse trew!)  
According as thy selfe doest see and heare,

And unto me addoom that<sup>o</sup> is my dew;  
That is the rule of all, all being ruled by you."

## 57

So having ended, silence long ensewed,  
Ne<sup>o</sup> Nature to or fro<sup>1</sup> spake for a space,  
But with firme eyes affixt, the ground still viewed.  
Meane while, all creatures, looking in her face,  
Expecting<sup>o</sup> th'end of this so doubtfull case,  
Did hang in long suspence what would ensew,  
To whether<sup>o</sup> side should fall the soveraigne place:  
At length, she looking up with chearefull view,  
The silence brake, and gave her doome in speeches<sup>o</sup> few.

## 58

"I well consider all that ye have sayd,  
And find that all things steadfastnes doe hate  
And changèd be: yet being rightly wayd<sup>o</sup>  
They are not changèd from their first estate;<sup>o</sup>  
But by their change their being doe dilate:<sup>2</sup>  
And turning to themselves at length againe,  
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:  
Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne;  
But they raigne over change, and doe their states maintaine.

## 59

"Cease therefore daughter further to aspire,  
And thee content thus to be ruled by me:  
For thy decay<sup>o</sup> thou seekst by thy desire;  
But time shall come that all shall changèd bee,  
And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see."<sup>3</sup>  
So was the Titaness put downe and whist,<sup>o</sup>  
And Jove confirmed in his imperiall see.<sup>o</sup>  
Then was that whole assembly quite dismiss,

And Natur's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist.<sup>o</sup>

***The 8 Canto, unperfite.*<sup>o</sup>**

**1**

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,<sup>o</sup>  
Of Mutability, and well it way:<sup>o</sup>  
Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were  
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,  
In all things else she beares the greatest sway.  
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,<sup>o</sup>  
And love of things so vaine to cast away;  
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,  
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

**2**

Then gin<sup>o</sup> I thinke on that which Nature sayd,  
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,  
But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd  
Upon the pillours of Eternity,  
That is contrayr to<sup>o</sup> Mutabilitie:  
For, all that moveth, doth in Change delight:  
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally  
With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:  
O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight.<sup>4</sup>

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## Endnotes

- Note 1: The old cosmology held that change occurred only in the sublunary realm.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Titans were the sons and daughters of sky and earth; their king was Cronus (Time). Jove, Cronus's son, dethroned him and established the rule of the gods. But some descendants of the original Titans, such as Prometheus and

Hecate, survived. Spenser invents another, a Titaness called Mutabilitie.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: A goddess of Hades but also often associated with the powerful and generally benevolent goddess Artemis (in Rome, Diana). Her name is pronounced *HEK-a-tee*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roman goddess of war.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Those two; that is, Hecate and Bellona.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The highest sublunary region.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The transparent sphere that, in the Ptolemaic cosmology, revolved around the earth, carrying the moon along. (The sun, the other known planets, and, collectively, the fixed stars were similarly carried by *their* spheres.)[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cynthia, Diana, or Phoebe, the moon goddess, often associated with Queen Elizabeth.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, the constellations.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, whether he liked it or not.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Soon, she resolved.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cynthia's bent brows are the horns of the crescent moon.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Strange behavior.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the Ptolemaic system the sphere of Mercury was next beyond that of the moon. In mythology Mercury was the messenger of the gods. In stanza 19, his Greek name, Hermes, is used. "Chaos": in Greek mythology, the first created being—the scarcely personified, profoundly unordered primordial soup.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A giant who had rebelled against Jove.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, stop interfering with the moon's free movement.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the caduceus, Mercury's rod, which could bring spirits from the underworld.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The moon as the twin sister of Phoebus Apollo, the sun god.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, his awesome nod of judgment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Deliver. "Straight": straightaway.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Care. "Earth's daughter": that is, Mutability.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Earth is the offspring of Chaos, in Hesiod and later mythologies.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
In this variant myth, Titan, eldest son of Uranus, abdicated in favor of his younger brother Saturn on condition that Saturn would eat all his own male children, thus assuring the succession would eventually revert to Titan's line. When Jove was born to Rhea, Saturn's wife, she gave Saturn a stone to swallow instead of the baby, and her attendants, the Corybantes, beat on their shields to drown out the baby's cries. Eventually Jove deposed his father.  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
Procrustes was a robber who waylaid strangers and made them fit his bed by cutting or stretching them. (Spenser includes him among those punished by Jove, though the standard version of the myth has Theseus in that role.) Typhon was a hundred-headed monster overthrown by Jove. Ixion tried to seduce Jove's wife and was punished by being bound to a wheel of fire in hell. Prometheus stole fire from heaven and gave it to humankind, for which Jove punished him by chaining him to a cliff where an eagle fed on his liver, which grew back every night.  
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, his locks were sprinkled with a fragrant balm. "Nectar" more often referred to the drink of the gods.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lightning bolt.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Through fear of her.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: That is, no living person, however worthy, can claim any title to power or authority in heaven.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, who is called father of gods and humans, with equal authority over both. Androgynous Nature is here male, but in the following canto female.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Evidently Spenser makes Phoebus Apollo the secretary ("Scribe") of the gods because he is the god of poetry.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Galtymore, a peak of the mountain range Spenser calls "my old father Mole," near Kilcolman Castle, where he lived in Ireland. The last two lines of the stanza refer to Spenser's praise of Mole in his pastoral eclogue *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thread (of the story).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ireland is called the "holy-Island" because, according to legend, Christianity first found a foothold there and thence spread to the rest of the British Isles.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Calliope is the Muse of epic poetry. Clio is the Muse of history.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Were accustomed to.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, as Diana, goddess of forests, fond of hunting.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Nymphs in Greek mythology were minor female deities of streams, springs, trees, and other parts of nature. Satyrs were minor male gods of the woods, given to drinking and sensual pleasure. The Romans identified them with their goat-footed fauns; hence "Faunus" (stanza 42) and "Faune" (stanza 46).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The river Awbeg, whose joining with the river Bregog is told in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. The Molanna is the shallow, rocky river Behanna.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Magnificent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Privacy. Spenser here adapts the classical story of Actaeon with local Irish geographical references. Actaeon while hunting happened to see Diana bathing; he was turned into a

stag and pursued and killed by his own hounds.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Noted for their redness and early ripening.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, who cared nothing for her. Fanchin is the river Funsheon.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Secretly; close up.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, as a due reward to one so foolhardy, he was devoured by his hunting dogs in the slaughter (“hew”) that follows a hunt.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thought; vanity or pride.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Paralyzed with fear.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Destroy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This overwhelming with stones accounts for the shallowness of the river, mentioned in stanza 40.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The richest plain to be seen anywhere.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The river Suir.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Despoil.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hunting ground.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Proclaims her righteous judgment.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Calliope, though possibly Clio. See canto 6, stanza 37 and n. 7.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Jove fathered the Muses on the Titaness Mnemosyne (Memory).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Meaning either that the infernal powers controlled the fiends by fear or that the heavenly and earthly powers feared *them*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: King and queen of the Underworld.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured on a mountain (traditionally Mount Tabor, in Galilee). See Matthew 17:1–8.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Chaucer, in his *Parliament of Fowls*, lines 316–18, refers to Alain de Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae* as Aley’s *Pleynt of Kynde*

(Complaint of Nature).[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: See canto 6, stanza 36 and n. 4.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Well becomes you.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mortal king and sea goddess, the parents of Achilles. Haemus is a mountain in Thrace. (But in the standard accounts the wedding is said to have taken place on Mount Pelion, in Greece.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In what follows, Mutabilitie argues the ubiquity of change in each of the traditional four elements (see stanza 25): earth, water, air, and fire. The most notable sources are Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15, and Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, death and disintegration.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As in Genesis 1:7, where God divides “the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Open. “Streight”: immediately.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The conductor or medium.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Roman goddess of plenty and fertility, who rules over earth. Vesta, goddess of the hearth, is assigned by Spenser to rule over the fire that is above the air. Vulcan, the blacksmith god, rules over earthly fire (“this, with us so usuall”).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Seen to look well; attractive.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A coarse woolen cloth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the Julian calendar (used in England until 1752), the year began on March 25.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A ram, sometimes identified as Jove in one of the many forms he took for purposes of ravishment or seduction, carried Helle through the air. But she fell off into a body of water that has since borne her name: the Hellespont.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Argolic Gulf of the Aegean Sea. The bull was Jupiter in disguise. He swam with Europa from the ancient Middle Eastern city of Tyre to Crete, off the southern coast of the continent that was supposedly named after her.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Castor and Pollux (the zodiacal sign of Gemini). Each month brings its zodiacal sign to the conference.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Actor. Actors appearing as wild or savage men were attired in leafy costumes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Like those who, in excessive and false politeness, walk backward as they leave a room.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, Hercules, whose mother was the wife of King Amphitryon (though his father was Jupiter). Strangling the supernaturally powerful lion that had terrorized the region of Nemea in Greece was the first of Hercules' Twelve Labors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: July both mows (with his scythe) and reaps.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Astraea, the goddess of justice. After leaving earth—in despair—she became the constellation Virgo.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, his head was unsteady from the new wine.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Wine vats' sea.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: According to one myth Orion boasted that he could kill anything that came from the earth. Indignant at his arrogance Diana sent a scorpion that stung and killed him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The iron blade of a plow, which makes a vertical cut in the soil ahead of the plowshare, which cuts the furrow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He was stellified as the zodiacal sign Sagittarius,[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The nymph Amalthea, of Mount Ida in Crete. Jove was saved by his mother, Rhea, from being eaten by Cronus, his father. He was brought up in Crete and suckled by a goat identified with the zodiacal sign Capricorn.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Urn; here standing for the constellation Aquarius.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the Tiber River.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, the water flowing from Aquarius's urn.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Temporal, belonging to time; in contrast to "high Jove," who is immortal.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cause (them) to neglect.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The moon is first because its orbit is closest to the earth.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mount Cynthus, on the Greek isle Delos.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The actual orbits of Mercury and the other planets were not accurately predictable by the Ptolemaic (earth-centric) astronomical model.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Punning on the astrological sense of "aspect" as the relative position of planets, which supposedly affects their influence. Saturn often runs so far out of his course that his generally baleful influence is lessened.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Nor anything else.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Power; that is, the paired words are synonymous.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Referring to the fundamental idea of astrology: that each planet has a "vertue" (power) that it sheds on earth, but that the effect depends on its position and the position of other planets. "Opposition" and "obliquity" are technical terms for the relative position of celestial bodies. "Obliquid" (found only here) is a coinage from *oblique*, presumably for the sake of the meter.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See canto 6, stanza 8, n. 7.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The crystalline sphere that bore all the fixed stars, beyond the spheres of the moon, sun, and planets.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For or against.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Expand, as they fulfill their natures.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare 1 Corinthians 15:51, 54: "we shall all be changed. . . . when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then

shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Spenser here confuses, perhaps intentionally, the Hebrew word for "armies, hosts" (*Sabaoth*) with that for "rest" (*Sabbath*).[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *claims*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rule*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destruction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *relate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to wit, in fact*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rule*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *race*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chose to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dreaded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wonder at*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grievous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rued*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *condition* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overturn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *continually*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *government*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *creatures*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grown*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Nature*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bidding*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *resolve*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attack*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *withstand*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *level*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mounted to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *journey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrongful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weened, thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *envy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worthy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aspect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not at all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advancing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chariot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fearing that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mercury*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seize*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boldness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assigned task*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *account for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scowl*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *position of state*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *dismay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disdain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consider*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sway* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enterprise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form again*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *astonishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bewilderment* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glorified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begrudged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *base my claim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trickery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrongfully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *present*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *herd*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpectedly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lay claim to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quaked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mood*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suppose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *example*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *envy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impartial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *due*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waxed, grew* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appeal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clashes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acknowledged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recreation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arranged in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sexually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keenly bewailed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shallow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chamber*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thickets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accomplish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hidden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *that which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *due*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proper prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be thrilled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make known*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good for nothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unexpected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *effort*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trap*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snare*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power, custody*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pull*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consider*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *castrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forced to go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sportive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stricter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secret confederate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *betrayed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burst*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trouble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nonetheless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the brook*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *esteem*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roam*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *region*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appealing*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *Mutabilitie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *copious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very great*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *louder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too weak*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *covered in folds*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *terrified*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *nor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fabric*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dazzle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *level-topped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *canopied thrones*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blossoming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Master, Sir*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meddle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *referred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hoary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attire*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *sacred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appointed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *age*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prostrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uniquely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impartially*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrongful*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *impartial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feign*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *claim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolute possession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adjudge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sovereignty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rule*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inhabitants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *convene*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conditions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swimming* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *random*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abode*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flowing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncertain; changeable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *altogether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entirely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *four*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devices*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *into one another*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *verdict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vigorous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blossoms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lovers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encounters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gilded* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *helmet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cloak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leopard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *severely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enfolded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yielded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alembic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with metal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wield; move*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slowly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stern; surly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grasped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vigor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enraptured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *worked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ploughshares*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *went* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rowers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ravage*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *scythe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raised*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *booty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *determine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equitably* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lustiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fattening*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *determine*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *clothes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twigs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Pisces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bud*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saddle horse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conceive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprive*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *howsoever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *model of excellence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alone is radiant*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *in his course*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restrain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harsh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twists*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *going astray*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *claim to be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learned men*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remains constant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wise men say*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turned away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge that which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awaiting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *phrases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weighed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *state, condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *downfall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silenced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throne*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfinished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *earlier*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weigh, consider*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncertain; changeable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the opposite of*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***From Amoretti***



# 1

Happy ye leaves<sup>1</sup> when as those lilly hands,  
Which hold my life in their dead doing<sup>o</sup> might,  
Shall handle you and hold in loves soft bands,<sup>o</sup>  
Lyke captives trembling at the victors sight.  
5 And happy lines, on which with starry light,  
Those laming<sup>o</sup> eyes will deigne sometimes to  
look  
And reade the sorrowes of my dying spright,<sup>o</sup>  
Written with teares in harts close<sup>o</sup> bleeding book.  
And happy rymes bath'd in the sacred brooke  
10 Of Helicon<sup>2</sup> whence she derivèd is,  
When ye behold that Angels blessèd looke,  
My soules long lackèd foode, my heavens blis.  
Leaves, lines, and rymes, seeke her to please alone,  
Whom if ye please, I care for other none.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, of the book: pages. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The "sacred brooke" is Hippocrene, which flows from Mount Helicon, the mountain sacred to the Muses. [Return to reference 2](#)
- °: *killing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bonds* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flashing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spirit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secret* [Return to reference °](#)

Lyke as a ship that through the Ocean wyde,  
 By conduct of some star doth make her way,  
 Whenas a storme hath dimd her trusty guyde,  
 Out of her course doth wander far astray:  
 5 So I whose star, that wont<sup>o</sup> with her bright ray  
 Me to direct, with cloudes is overcast,  
 Doe wander now in darknesse and dismay,  
 Through hidden perils round about me plast.<sup>o</sup>  
 Yet hope I well, that when this storme is past  
 10 My Helice<sup>4</sup> the lodestar<sup>o</sup> of my lyfe  
 Will shine again, and looke on me at last,  
 With lovely light to cleare my cloudy grief.  
 Till then I wander carefull<sup>o</sup> comfortlesse,  
 In secret sorow and sad pensivenesse.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: An adaptation of Petrarch's Rima 189. See p. 125 for Sir Thomas Wyatt's verse translation of the sonnet, as well as a modern prose translation of it. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A name for the Big Dipper (after the nymph who, in classical mythology, was transformed into it). [Return to reference 4](#)
- °: *was accustomed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *placed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *guiding star* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *full of cares* [Return to reference °](#)

What guyle is this, that those her golden tresses,  
 She doth attyre under a net of gold:  
 And with sly<sup>o</sup> skill so cunningly them dresses,  
 That which is gold or heare,<sup>o</sup> may scarce be told?  
 5 Is it that mens frayle eyes, which gaze too bold,  
 She may entangle in that golden snare:  
 And being caught may craftily enfold  
 Theyr weaker harts, which are not wel aware?<sup>o</sup>  
 Take heed therefore, myne eyes, how ye doe stare  
 Henceforth too rashly on that guilefull net,  
 10 In which if ever ye entrappèd are,  
 Out of her bands ye by no means shall get.  
 Fondnesse<sup>o</sup> it were for any being free,  
 To covet fetters, though they golden bee.

## Endnotes

- <sup>o</sup>: *clever*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *hair*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *wary*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *foolishness*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

Of this worlds Theatre in which we stay,  
 My love like the Spectator ydly sits  
 Beholding me that all the pageants<sup>o</sup> play,  
 Disguysing diversly my troubled wits.  
 Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,  
 5 And mask in myrth lyke to a Comedy:  
 Soone after when my joy to sorrow flits,  
 I waile and make my woes a Tragedy.  
 Yet she beholding me with constant<sup>o</sup> eye,  
 Delights not in my merth nor rues my smart:<sup>o</sup>  
 10 But when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry  
 She laughes and hardens evermore her hart.  
 What then can move her? if nor merth nor mone,<sup>o</sup>  
 She is no woman, but a sencelesse stone.

## Endnotes

- <sup>o</sup>: *dramatic scenes* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *unmoved* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *pities my hurt* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *moan* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

Comming to kisse her lyps (such grace I found)  
 Me seemd I smelt a gardin of sweet flowres  
 That dainty odours from them threw around,  
 For damzels fit to decke their lovers bowres.  
 5 Her lips did smell lyke unto Gillyflowers,<sup>o</sup>  
 Her ruddy cheeks lyke unto Roses red;  
 Her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures,<sup>6</sup>  
 Her lovely eyes like Pincks but newly spred,  
 Her goodly bosome lyke a Strawberry bed,  
 10 Her neck lyke to a bounch of Cullambynes;  
 Her brest lyke lillyes, ere theyr leaves be shed,  
 Her nipples lyke yong blossomd Jessemynes.<sup>o</sup>  
 Such fragrant flowres doe give most odorous smell,  
 But her sweet odour did them all excell.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Much of the imagery of this sonnet is imitated from the Song of Solomon 4:10–16. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Unidentified flower, evidently white. [Return to reference 6](#)
- °: *carnations* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jasmynes* [Return to reference °](#)

Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace,  
 Seeing the game from him escapt away,  
 Sits downe to rest him in some shady place,  
 With panting hounds beguiled<sup>o</sup> of their pray:  
 So after long pursuit and vaine assay,<sup>o</sup>  
 5 When I all weary had the chace forsooke,  
 The gentle deare returnd the selfe-same way,  
 Thinking to quench her thirst at the next<sup>o</sup> brooke.  
 There she beholding me with mylder looke,  
 Sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide:  
 10 Till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke,  
 And with her owne goodwill hir fymely tyde.  
 Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld,  
 So goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 7: An imitation of Petrarch's Rima 190, but with a very different ending. Compare Sir Thomas Wyatt's adaptation ("Whoso List to Hunt") of the same sonnet, and the prose translation of the Petrarchan original appended to it, on p. 123.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Entrapped; won over.[Return to reference 8](#)
- °: *deluded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attempt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nearby*[Return to reference °](#)

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,<sup>o</sup>  
 But came the waves and washèd it away:  
 Agayne I wrote it with a second hand,  
 But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.

<sup>o</sup>  
 5 "Vayne man," sayd she, "that doest in vaine assay,<sup>o</sup>  
 A mortall thing so to immortalize,  
 For I my selve shall lyke to this decay,  
 And eek<sup>o</sup> my name bee wypèd out lykewize."  
 "Not so," quod<sup>o</sup> I, "let baser things devize<sup>o</sup>  
 10 To dy in dust, but you shall live by fame:  
 My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,  
 And in the heavens wryte your glorious name.  
 Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,  
 Our love shall live, and later life renew."

## Endnotes

- °: *shore*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prey*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attempt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *said*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contrive*[Return to reference °](#)

Men call you fayre, and you doe credit<sup>o</sup> it,  
 For that your selfe ye dayly such doe see:  
 But the trew fayre,<sup>o</sup> that is the gentle wit,<sup>o</sup>  
 And vertuous mind, is much more prayd of<sup>o</sup> me.  
 For all the rest, how ever fayre it be,  
 5 Shall turne to nought and loose that glorious hew:  
<sup>o</sup>  
 But onely that is permanent and free  
 From frayle corruption, that doth flesh ensew.<sup>o</sup>  
 That is true beautie: that doth argue<sup>o</sup> you  
 To be divine and borne of heavenly seed:  
 10 Deriv'd from that fayre Spirit,<sup>o</sup> from whom al true  
 And perfect beauty did at first proceed.  
 He onely fayre, and what he fayre hath made:  
 All other fayre, lyke flowres, untymely fade.

1595

## Endnotes

- °: *believe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beauty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intelligence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outlast* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God* [Return to reference](#) °



# Epithalamion

Ye learned sisters<sup>o</sup> which have oftentimes  
Beene to me ayding, others to adorne:<sup>1</sup>  
Whom ye thought worthy of your gracefull rymes,  
That even the greatest did not greatly scorne  
To heare theyr names sung in your simple layes,<sup>o</sup>  
5 But joyed in theyr prayse.  
And when ye list<sup>o</sup> your owne mishaps to mourne,  
Which death, or love, or fortunes wreck did rayse,  
Your string could soone to sadder tenor<sup>o</sup> turne,  
And teach the woods and waters to lament  
10 Your dolefull dreriment.<sup>o</sup>  
Now lay those sorrowfull complaints aside,  
And having all your heads with girland crownd,  
Helpe me mine owne loves prayes to resound,  
Ne<sup>o</sup> let the same of<sup>o</sup> any be envie:  
15 So Orpheus did for his owne bride,<sup>2</sup>  
So I unto my selfe alone will sing,  
The woods shall to me answer and my eccho ring.

Early before the worlds light giving lampe,  
His golden beame upon the hils doth spred,  
20 Having disperst the nights unchearefull dampe,  
Doe ye awake, and with fresh lustyhed<sup>o</sup>  
Go to the bowre<sup>o</sup> of my beloved love,  
My truest turtle dove,  
Bid her awake; for Hymen<sup>3</sup> is awake,  
25 And long since ready forth his maske to move,  
With his bright Tead<sup>4</sup> that flames with many a flake,<sup>o</sup>  
And many a bachelor to waite on him,  
In theyr fresh garments trim.

30 Bid her awake therefore and soone her dight,<sup>o</sup>  
For lo the wishèd day is come at last,  
That shall for al the paynes and sorrowes past,  
Pay to her usury<sup>o</sup> of long delight:  
And whylest she doth her dight,  
35 Doe ye to her of joy and solace<sup>o</sup> sing,  
That all the woods may answer and your Eccho ring.

Bring with you all the Nymphes that you can heare<sup>o</sup>  
Both of the rivers and the forrests greene:  
And of the sea that neighbours to her neare,  
Al with gay girlands goodly wel beseene.<sup>o</sup>  
40 And let them also with them bring in hand,  
Another gay girland  
For my fayre love of lillyes and of roses,  
Bound truelove wize<sup>o</sup> with a blew silke riband.  
And let them make great store<sup>o</sup> of bridale poses,<sup>o</sup>  
45 And let them eeke<sup>o</sup> bring store of other flowers  
To deck the bridale bowers.  
And let the ground whereas<sup>o</sup> her foot shall tread,  
For feare the stones her tender foot should wrong  
Be strewed with fragrant flowers all along,  
50 And diapred lyke the discolored mead.<sup>5</sup>  
Which done, doe at her chamber dore awayt,  
For she will waken strayt,<sup>o</sup>  
The whiles doe ye this song unto her sing,  
The woods shall to you answer and your Eccho ring.  
55

Ye Nymphes of Mulla<sup>6</sup> which with careful heed,  
The silver scaly trouts doe tend full well,  
And greedy pikes which use<sup>o</sup> therein to feed,  
(Those trouts and pikes all others doo excell)  
And ye likewise which keepe the rushy lake,<sup>o</sup>  
60 Where none doo fishes take,  
Bynd up the locks the which hang scatterd light,  
And in his waters which your mirror make,

Behold your faces as the christall bright,  
That when you come whereas<sup>o</sup> my love doth lie,  
65 No blemish she may spie.  
And eke ye lightfoot mayds which keepe the deere,<sup>7</sup>  
That on the hoary<sup>o</sup> mountayne use to towre,<sup>8</sup>  
And the wylde wolves which seeke them to devoure,  
With your steele darts<sup>o</sup> doo chace from comming  
70 neer,  
Be also present heere,  
To helpe to decke her and to help to sing,  
That all the woods may answer and your eccho ring.

Wake now my love, awake; for it is time,  
The Rosy Morne long since left Tithones bed,<sup>9</sup>  
75 All ready to her silver coche<sup>o</sup> to clyme,  
And Phoebus<sup>o</sup> gins<sup>o</sup> to shew his glorious hed.  
Hark how the cheerefull birds do chaunt theyr laies  
And carroll of loves praise.  
The merry Larke hir mattins<sup>o</sup> sings aloft,  
80 The thrush replyes, the Mavis descant<sup>1</sup> playes,  
The Ouzell shrills, the Ruddock<sup>2</sup> warbles soft,  
So goodly all agree with sweet consent,<sup>o</sup>  
To this dayes merriment.  
Ah my deere love why doe ye sleepe thus long,  
85 When meeter<sup>o</sup> were that ye should now awake,  
T'awayt the comming of your joyous make,<sup>o</sup>  
And hearken to the birds lovelearnèd song,  
The deawy leaves among.  
For they of joy and pleasance to you sing,  
90 That all the woods them answer and theyr eccho  
ring.

My love is now awake out of her dreame,  
And her fayre eyes like stars that dimmèd were

With darksome cloud, now shew<sup>o</sup> theyr goodly  
beams  
More bright then<sup>o</sup> Hesperus<sup>o</sup> his head doth rere.  
95 Come now ye damzels, daughters of delight,  
Helpe quickly her to dight,<sup>o</sup>  
But first come ye fayre houres<sup>3</sup> which were begot  
In Joves sweet paradise, of Day and Night,  
Which doe the seasons of the yeare allot,  
100 And al that ever in this world is fayre  
Doe make and still<sup>o</sup> repayre.  
And ye three handmayds of the Cyprian Queene,<sup>4</sup>  
The which doe still adorne her beauties pride,  
Helpe to addorne my beautifulest bride:  
105 And as ye her array, still throw betweene<sup>o</sup>  
Some graces to be seene,  
And as ye use<sup>o</sup> to Venus, to her sing,  
The whiles the woods shal answer and your eccho  
ring.

Now is my love all ready forth to come,  
110 Let all the virgins therefore well awayt,  
And ye fresh boyes that tend upon her groome  
Prepare your selves; for he is comming strayt.<sup>o</sup>  
Set all your things in seemely good aray<sup>o</sup>  
Fit for so joyfull day,  
115 The joyfulst day that ever sunne did see.  
Faire Sun, shew forth thy favourable ray,  
And let thy lifull<sup>o</sup> heat not fervent<sup>o</sup> be  
For feare of burning her sunshyny face,  
Her beauty to disgrace.<sup>o</sup>  
120 O fayrest Phoebus, father of the Muse,<sup>5</sup>  
If ever I did honour thee aright,  
Or sing the thing, that mote<sup>o</sup> thy mind delight,  
Doe not thy servants simple boone<sup>o</sup> refuse,  
But let this day let this one day be myne,  
125

Let all the rest be thine.  
Then I thy soverayne prayses loud wil sing,  
That all the woods shal answer and theyr eccho ring.

Harke how the Minstrels gin to shrill aloud  
Their merry Musick that resounds from far,  
130 The pipe, the tabor,<sup>o</sup> and the trembling Croud,<sup>6</sup>  
That well agree withouten breach or jar.<sup>o</sup>  
But most of all the Damzels doe delite,  
When they their tymbrels<sup>o</sup> smyte,  
And thereunto doe daunce and carrol sweet,  
135 That all the sences they doe ravish quite,  
The whyles the boyes run up and downe the street,  
Crying aloud with strong confusèd noyce,  
As if it were one voyce.

*Hymen*<sup>7</sup> *iô Hymen, Hymen* they do shout,  
140 That even to the heavens theyr shouting shrill  
Doth reach, and all the firmament doth fill,  
To which the people standing all about,  
As in approvance doe thereto applaud  
And loud advance her laud,<sup>o</sup>  
145 And evermore they *Hymen Hymen* sing,  
That all the woods them answer and theyr eccho  
ring.

Loe where she comes along with portly<sup>o</sup> pace,  
Lyke Phoebe from her chamber of the East,  
Arysing forth to run her mighty race,<sup>8</sup>  
150 Clad all in white, that seemes<sup>o</sup> a virgin best.  
So well it her beseems that ye would weene<sup>o</sup>  
Some angell she had beene.  
Her long loose yellow locks lyke golden wyre,  
Sprinckled with perle, and perling flowres a tweene,<sup>9</sup>  
155 Doe lyke a golden mantle her attyre,  
And being crownèd with a girland greene,

Seeme lyke some mayden Queene.  
Her modest eyes abashèd to behold  
So many gazers, as on her do stare,  
160 Upon the lowly ground affixèd are.  
Ne dare lift up her countenance too bold,  
But blush to heare her prayses sung so loud,  
So farre from being proud.  
Nathlesse doe ye still loud her prayses sing,  
165 That all the woods may answer and your eccho ring.

Tell me ye merchants daughters did ye see  
So fayre a creature in your towne before,  
So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she,  
Adornd with beautyes grace and vertues store,<sup>o</sup>  
170 Her goodly eyes lyke Saphyres shining bright,  
Her forehead yvory white,  
Her cheekes lyke apples which the sun hath rudded,  
<sup>o</sup>  
Her lips lyke cherries charming men to byte,  
Her brest like to a bowle of creame uncruddled,<sup>o</sup>  
175 Her paps<sup>o</sup> lyke lyllies budded,  
Her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre,  
And all her body like a pallace fayre,  
Ascending uppe with many a stately stayre,  
Ascending uppe with many a stately stayre,  
180 To honors seat and chastities sweet bowre.<sup>1</sup>  
Why stand ye still ye virgins in amaze,  
Upon her so to gaze,  
Whiles ye forget your former lay to sing,  
To which the woods did answer and your eccho ring.

But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,  
185 The inward beauty of her lively spright,<sup>o</sup>  
Garnisht with heavenly guifts of high degree,  
Much more then would ye wonder at that sight,  
And stand astonisht lyke to those which red<sup>o</sup>  
Medusaes mazeful hed.<sup>2</sup>

190 There dwels sweet love and constant chastity,  
Unspotted fayth<sup>o</sup> and comely womanhood,  
Regard of honour and mild modesty,  
There vertue raynes as Queene in royal throne,  
And giveth lawes alone.  
195 The which the base<sup>o</sup> affections doe obay,  
And yeeld theyr services unto her will,  
Ne thought of thing uncomely ever may  
Thereto approach to tempt her mind to ill.  
Had ye once seene these her celestial treasures,  
200 And unrevealèd pleasures,  
Then would ye wonder and her prayses sing,  
That all the woods should answer and your Echo  
ring.

Open the temple gates unto my love,  
205 Open them wide that she may enter in,<sup>3</sup>  
And all the postes adorne as doth behove,<sup>4</sup>  
And all the pillours deck with girlands trim,  
For to recyve this Saynt with honour dew,  
That commeth in to you.  
With trembling steps and humble reverence,  
210 She commeth in, before th'almighties vew,  
Of her ye virgins learne obedience,  
When so ye come into those holy places,  
To humble your proud faces:  
Bring her up to th'high altar, that she may  
215 The sacred ceremonies there partake,  
The which do endless matrimony make,  
And let the roring<sup>o</sup> Organs loudly play  
The praises of the Lord in lively notes,  
The whiles with hollow<sup>o</sup> throates  
220 The Choristers the joyous Antheme sing,  
That all the woods may answere and theyr eccho  
ring.

Behold whiles she before the altar stands  
Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes  
And blesseth her with his two happy hands,  
225 How the red roses flush up in her cheekes,  
And the pure snow with goodly vermill<sup>o</sup> stayne,  
Like crimson dyde in grayne,<sup>o</sup>  
That even th'Angels which continually,  
About the sacred Altare doe remaine,  
230 Forget their service and about her fly,  
Ofte peeping in her face that seemes more fayre,  
The more they on it stare.  
But her sad<sup>o</sup> eyes still<sup>o</sup> fastened on the ground,  
Are governèd with goodly modesty,  
235 That suffers<sup>o</sup> not one looke to glaunce awry,  
Which may let in a little thought unsownd.<sup>o</sup>  
Why blush ye love to give to me your hand,  
The pledge of all our band?<sup>o</sup>  
Sing ye sweet Angels, Alleluya sing,  
240 That all the woods may answeare and your eccho  
ring.

Now al is done; bring home the bride againe,  
Bring home the triumph of our victory,  
Bring home with you the glory of her gaine,<sup>5</sup>  
With joyance bring her and with jollity.  
245 Never had man more joyfull day then this,  
Whom heaven would heape with blis.  
Make feast therefore now all this live long day,  
This day for ever to me holy is,  
Poure out the wine without restraint or stay,<sup>o</sup>  
250 Poure not by cups, but by the belly<sup>o</sup> full,  
Poure out to all that wull,<sup>o</sup>  
And sprinkle all the postes and wals with wine,  
That they may sweat, and drunken be withall.  
Crowne ye God Bacchus<sup>o</sup> with a coronall,<sup>o</sup>



255 And Hymen also crowne with wreathes of vine,  
And let the Graces daunce unto the rest;  
For they can doo it best:  
The whiles the maydens doe theyr carroll sing,  
260 To which the woods shall answer and theyr eccho  
ring.

Ring ye the bells, ye young men of the towne,  
And leave your wonted<sup>o</sup> labors for this day:  
This day is holy; doe ye write it downe,  
That ye for ever it remember may.  
This day the sunne is in his chieftest hight,  
265 With Barnaby the bright,<sup>6</sup>  
From whence declining daily by degrees,  
He somewhat loseth of his heat and light,  
When once the Crab<sup>7</sup> behind his back he sees.  
But for this time it ill ordainèd was,  
270 To chose the longest day in all the yeare,  
And shortest night, when longest fitter weare:  
Yet never day so long, but late<sup>o</sup> would passe.  
Ring ye the bells, to make it weare away,  
And bonefiers<sup>o</sup> make all day,  
275 And daunce about them, and about them sing:  
That all the woods may answer, and your eccho ring.

Ah when will this long weary day have end,  
And lende me leave to come unto my love?  
How slowly do the houres theyr numbers<sup>8</sup> spend?  
280 How slowly does sad Time his feathers move?<sup>9</sup>  
Hast<sup>o</sup> thee O fayrest Planet to thy home  
Within the Westernne fome:  
Thy tyred steedes long since have need of rest.<sup>1</sup>  
Long though it be, at last I see it gloome,<sup>o</sup>  
285 And the bright evening star with golden creast<sup>o</sup>  
Appeare out of the East.

Fayre childe of beauty, glorious lampe of love  
That all the host of heaven in rankes doost lead,  
And guydest lovers through the nightès dread,  
290 How chearefully thou lookest from above,  
And seemst to laugh atweene thy twinkling light  
As joying in the sight  
Of these glad many which for joy doe sing,  
That all the woods them answer and theyr echo ring.  
295

Now ceasse ye damsels your delights forepast;°  
Enough is it, that all the day was youres:  
Now day is doen, and night is nighing° fast:  
Now bring the Bryde into the brydall boures.  
Now night is come, now soone her disaray,°  
300 And in her bed her lay;  
Lay her in lillies and in violets,  
And silken courteins over her display,°  
And odourd° sheetes, and Arras° coverlets.  
Behold how goodly my faire love does ly  
305 In proud humility;  
Like unto Maia,<sup>2</sup> when as Jove her tooke,  
In Tempe,<sup>3</sup> lying on the flowry gras,  
Twixt sleepe and wake, after she weary was,  
With bathing in the Acidalian brooke.<sup>4</sup>  
310 Now it is night, ye damsels may be gon,  
And leave my love alone,  
And leave° likewise your former lay to sing:  
The woods no more shall answere, nor your echo  
ring.

Now welcome night, thou night so long expected,  
315 That long daies labour doest at last defray,°  
And all my cares, which cruell love collected,  
Hast sumd° in one, and cancellèd<sup>5</sup> for aye:°  
Spread thy broad wing over my love and me,

320 That no man may us see,  
And in thy sable<sup>o</sup> mantle us enwrap,  
From feare of perrill and foule horror free.  
Let no false treason seeke us to entrap,  
Nor any dread disquiet once annoy<sup>o</sup>  
The safety of our joy:  
325 But let the night be calme and quiet some,  
Without tempestuous storms or sad afray:<sup>o</sup>  
Lyke as when Jove with fayre Alcmena<sup>6</sup> lay,  
When he begot the great Tirynthian groome:  
Or lyke as when he with thy selfe<sup>7</sup> did lie,  
330 And begot Majesty.  
And let the mayds and yongmen cease to sing:  
Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr Eccho ring.

Let no lamenting cryes, nor dolefull teares,  
Be heard all night within nor yet without:  
335 Ne let false whispers, breeding hidden feares,  
Breake gentle sleepe with misconceivèd dout.<sup>o</sup>  
Let no deluding dreames, nor dreadful sights  
Make sudden sad affrights;  
Ne let housefyres, nor lightnings helpelesse<sup>o</sup> harmes,  
340 Ne let the Pouke,<sup>8</sup> nor other evill sprights,  
Ne let mischivous witches with theyr charmes,  
Ne let hob Goblins, names whose sence we see not,  
Fray<sup>o</sup> us with things that be not.  
Let not the shrieck Oule, nor the Storke be heard:  
345 Nor the night Raven that still<sup>o</sup> deadly yels,<sup>9</sup>  
Nor damnèd ghosts cald up with mighty spels,  
Nor griesly<sup>o</sup> vultures make us once affeard:  
Ne let th'unpleasant Quayre of Frogs still croking  
Make us to wish theyr choking.  
350 Let none of these theyr drery accents sing;  
Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr eccho ring.

But let stil Silence trew night watches keepe,  
That sacred peace may in assurance rayne,  
And tymely Sleep, when it is tyme to sleepe,  
355 May poure his limbs forth on your pleasant playne,  
The whiles an hundred little winged loves,<sup>o</sup>  
Like divers fethered doves,  
Shall fly and flutter round about your bed,  
And in the secret darke, that none reproves,  
360 Their prety stealthes shal worke, and snares shal  
spread  
To filch away sweet snatches of delight,  
Conceald through covert night.  
Ye sonnes of Venus, play your sports at will,  
For greedy pleasure, carelesse of your toyes,<sup>o</sup>  
365 Thinks more upon her paradise of joyes,  
Then<sup>o</sup> what ye do, albe it<sup>o</sup> good or ill.  
All night therefore attend your merry play,  
For it will soone be day:  
Now none doth hinder you, that say or sing,  
370 Ne will the woods now answer, nor your Eccho ring.

Who is the same, which at my window peepes?  
Or whose is that faire face, that shines so bright,  
Is it not Cinthia,<sup>1</sup> she that never sleepes,  
But walkes about high heaven al the night?  
375 O fayrest goddesse, do thou not envy  
My love with me to spy:  
For thou likewise didst love, though now unthought,<sup>o</sup>  
And for a fleece of woll,<sup>o</sup> which privily,  
The Latmian shephard<sup>2</sup> once unto thee brought,  
380 His pleasures with thee wrought.  
Therefore to us be favorable now;  
And sith<sup>o</sup> of wemens labours thou hast charge,<sup>3</sup>  
And generation goodly dost enlarge,  
Encline thy will t'effect our wishfull vow,

385 And the chaste wombe informe<sup>o</sup> with timely seed,  
That may our comfort breed:  
Till which we cease our hopefull hap<sup>o</sup> to sing,  
Ne let the woods us answer, nor our Eccho ring.

390 And thou great Juno, which with awful<sup>o</sup> might  
The lawes of wedlock still dost patronize,<sup>o</sup>  
And the religion<sup>o</sup> of the faith first plight<sup>o</sup>  
With sacred rites hast taught to solemnize:  
And eeke<sup>o</sup> for comfort often callèd art  
Of women in their smart,<sup>o</sup>  
395 Eternally bind thou this lovely band,<sup>o</sup>  
And all thy blessings unto us impart.  
And thou glad Genius,<sup>4</sup> in whose gentle hand,  
The bridale bowre and geniall bed remaine,  
Without blemish or staine,  
400 And the sweet pleasures of theyr loves delight  
With secret ayde doest succour<sup>o</sup> and supply,  
Till they bring forth the fruitfull progeny,  
Send us the timely fruit of this same night.  
And thou fayre Hebe,<sup>5</sup> and thou Hymen free,  
405 Grant that it may so be.  
Til which we cease your further prayse to sing,  
Ne any woods shall answer, nor your Eccho ring.

And ye high heavens, the temple of the gods,  
410 In which a thousand torches flaming bright  
Doe burne, that to us wretched earthly clods,  
In dreadful darknesse lend desired light;  
And all ye powers which in the same remayne,  
More then we men can fayne,<sup>o</sup>  
415 Poure out your blessing on us plentiously,  
And happy influence upon us raine,  
That we may raise a large posterity,  
Which from the earth, which they may long  
possesse,

With lasting happinesse,  
Up to your haughty<sup>o</sup> pallaces may mount,  
420 And for the guerdon<sup>o</sup> of theyr glorious merit  
May heavenly tabernacles there inherit,  
Of blessed Saints for to increase the count.  
So let us rest, sweet love, in hope of this,  
425 And cease till then our tymely joyes to sing,  
The woods no more us answer, nor our eccho ring.

Song made in lieu of many ornaments,  
With which my love should duly have bene dect,<sup>o</sup>  
Which cutting off through hasty accidents,  
Ye would not stay your dew time to expect,<sup>o</sup>  
430 But promist both to recompens,  
Be unto her a goodly ornament,  
And for short time an endlesse monument.<sup>6</sup>

1595

## Endnotes

- Note 1: To write poems in praise of others.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Orpheus, archetype of the poet in classical antiquity, was famous for his love for his wife, Eurydice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The god of marriage, who leads a “maske” or procession at weddings.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A ceremonial torch, associated with marriages since classical times.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ornamented like the many-colored meadow.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A river near Spenser’s home in Ireland.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: All wild animals, kept by the woodland nymphs.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A falconry term meaning to occupy heights.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Song of Solomon 2:10–13: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come.” In classical myth, Tithonus is the aged husband of Aurora, the dawn.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A melody or counterpoint written above a musical theme—a soprano obbligato. “Mavis”: the song thrush.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The European robin. “Ouzell”: the blackbird (which sings in England). The birds’ concert is a convention of medieval love poetry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Hours, or Horae, are Olympian deities who attend to natural growth and to social order. They were traditionally the daughters of Jove and the Titaness Themis, but in the Mutabilitie Cantos of *The Faerie Queene* (above), Spenser says Jove fathered them on Night.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Venus. “Three handmayds”: the Graces, representing brightness, joy, and abundance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Phoebus Apollo, god of the sun, was also god of music and poetry, but he was not normally regarded as the father of the Nine Muses (Zeus was).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Primitive fiddle. Spenser here designates Irish, not classical, instruments and music for the classical masque or ballet.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The name of the classical god of marriage, used as a conventional exclamation at weddings in ancient Greece.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Phoebe is the moon, a virgin like the bride; the reference to her anticipates the night.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Between. “Perling”: winding.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The head, where the higher faculties are. The catalog of qualities is a convention in love poetry (compare Song of Solomon 4–8).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Medusa, one of the Gorgons, had serpents instead of hair (hence a “mazeful hed”): to stone.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Psalms 24:7: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: As is proper. The doorposts were trimmed for weddings in classical times, and the custom was often referred to in classical and later love poetry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the glory of gaining her.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Saint Barnabas’s Day, at the time of the summer solstice.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The constellation Cancer between Gemini and Leo. The sun, passing through the zodiac, leaves the Crab behind toward the end of July.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the number of minutes or the numbers depicted on a clock.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In traditional iconography, Time is winged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The sun’s chariot completes its daily course in the western sea (“fome”).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The eldest and most beautiful of the seven daughters of Atlas. (They were stellified as the Pleiades.) Jove fathered Mercury on her.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Vale of Tempe in Thessaly (not, however, traditionally the site of Jove’s encounter with Maia).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Associated with Venus.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Annulled or rendered void (as with a debt); compensated for.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The mother of Hercules (“the great Tirynthian groome”). Jove made that first night last as long as three.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Night. This is Spenser’s own myth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Puck, Robin Goodfellow—here more powerful and evil than Shakespeare made him in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: The owl and the night raven were birds of ill omen. The stork, in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, is called an avenger of adultery.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cynthia (or Diana) is goddess of the moon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Endymion, beloved of the moon. The "fleece of woll," however, comes from another story—that of Pan's enticement of the moon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Diana is, as Lucina, patroness of births. The "labours" are, of course, those of childbirth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God of generation and birth. "Geniall": a puns on his name having both the usual sense and the sense of *generative*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Goddess of youth and freedom.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The envoy (brief final stanza addressed to the poem itself) is traditionally apologetic in tone: the poem is offered as a substitute for presents ("ornaments") that did not arrive in time for the wedding. But this elaborate poem is itself a "goodly ornament," for it stands as a timeless monument of art to the passing day that it celebrates.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *the Muses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *songs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mood*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vigor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bedchamber*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spark*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dress*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interest*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *can hear you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beautified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in a love knot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abundance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *posies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straightaway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bordered by rushes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gray; venerable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun god* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begins*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmony*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *show*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evening star*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continuously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at intervals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straightaway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *order*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *life-giving* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *might*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *request*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small drum*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *discord*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tambourines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *praise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beseems, suits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *think*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abundance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made red*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncurded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breasts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living spirit, soul*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fidelity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lower*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resounding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fully open*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vermilion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fast color*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *serious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flawed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bond, tie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *limit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wineskin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *want it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *god of wine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *garland*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *usual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at last*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bonfires*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begin to darken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *previous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *approaching*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *undress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spread*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfumed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tapestry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cease*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *combined* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interfere with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *groundless fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without remedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrify*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *horrid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cupids (or amoretti)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *amorous dallying*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *than* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *albeit, although*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not thought of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give life to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fortune we hope for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awesome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watch over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sanctity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pledged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *also*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(labor) pains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bond*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lofty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *adorned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *await* [Return to reference](#) °

# Commonplace Book

Many of the authors in this volume—including, famously, Elizabeth I—recorded their writings, and those of other people, in “commonplace books.” These were personal anthologies, written out and organized by their compilers under subject headings (or “places,” in the sense of the Greek *topoi*, or “topics”). Essentially handwritten scrapbooks, commonplace books combined favorite passages, revered bits of text, and observations needing further thought; they at once provided an account and a summary of their owners’ reading, a handy guide for conversation, and a template for imitation. As commonplace books were generally written in one hand, they gave a sameness and unity to vastly different material, which might have its source in printed texts, manuscripts, and sometimes oral exchanges. And compilers often further personalized the snippets they had chosen to record by adding their own words to them or making other changes. That is why the “same” texts preserved in more than one commonplace book often differ. Thus several selections in the commonplace book here—including Sir John Harington’s “A Certain Man,” Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” and Robert Wisdome’s “A Religious Use of Taking Tobacco”—exist in variant forms, which may be explained by authorial revision or by the commonplace book culture. Commonplace books make it hard to know what the “real author” or the “real text” is and, indeed, whether those are the correct questions to ask.

Though Erasmus had set down rules for possessing and organizing commonplace books, which he thought essential to the education of the humanist, surviving commonplace books seldom have educational improvement as their (only) goal. Some are funny, some bawdy, some practical, and some mixtures of all of these. What follows, a commonplace book compiled by the Norton anthology editors from a range of early modern sources, reflects the

mingled seriousness and humor typical of many commonplace books: it shows writers of the period being frank, annoyed, and humorous as well as decorous and pastoral. The headings chosen, too, are editorial, and are arranged in alphabetical order, and it will be clear that several poems could easily have been slotted into other “places” and put into dialogue with other texts.

Of the poems and prose in this section, some are sourced from commonplace books of the time; others are taken from print or manuscript texts regularly quoted in commonplace books; and still others have been commonplace by the Norton editors. As sixteenth-century commonplace books ranged over oral, sung, and written texts, so this commonplace book includes all three types, setting the voices of the literate by those of the illiterate (who often recorded their thoughts in popular song), working men and women by courtiers, the young by the old, the ill by the well, and the successful by the unsuccessful. As often happens in commonplace books, some of the texts here are anonymous, meaning that the sex, race, and age of their writers cannot always be determined. As with any commonplace book, this one contains texts that are not easily datable, so some may not fit exactly into the period of this volume.

Commonplace books reveal as well as dictate the active way in which individuals read in the period: they show how some readers were “collectors,” searching texts for discrete passages to add to their compilations. Some of the extraordinary literary exuberance included in this volume—the rhymes, the puns, the conceits, the sententiae, the proverbial wisdom, the euphuisms—may have been written to be excerpted: written, that is to say, with commonplace books and their construction in mind.

# AGING



**George Gascoigne** The son of a respectable country gentleman, Gascoigne (1534/5–1577) lived a turbulent life. Having squandered his inheritance in an attempt to establish himself at court, he failed both as a lawyer and as a soldier and was constantly in search of occupation and patronage. As part of this search, his writing, which included courtly entertainments, plays, literary criticism, moral tracts, a hunting treatise, military reportage, and a brilliant work of prose fiction as well as many poems, won him considerable esteem. But the esteem was not unmixed—some of his work was criticized as obscene—and Gascoigne seems to have died, as he lived, in financial straits. In this grown-up lullaby, the aging Gascoigne sings farewell to his youth and sexual energy—or does he?

## The Lullaby of a Lover

Sing lullaby, as women do,  
Wherewith they bring their babes to rest,  
And lullaby can I sing too,  
As womanly as can the best.  
5 With lullaby they still the child,  
And if I be not much beguiled,o  
Full many wantono babes have I,  
Which must be stilled with lullaby.

First, lullaby my youthful years,  
It is now time to go to bed,  
10 For crooked age and hoary hairs  
Have won the haveno within my head.  
With lullaby then, youth, be still,  
With lullaby content thy will,1  
15 Since courage quails and comes behind,  
Go sleep, and so beguile thy mind.

Next, lullaby my gazing eyes,  
Which wonted wereo to glance apace:o  
For every glasso may now suffice  
20 To show the furrows in my face.  
With lullaby then winko awhile,  
With lullaby your looks beguile.  
Let no fair face nor beauty bright  
Entice you efto with vain delight.

And lullaby my wanton will,  
25 Let reason's rule now rein thy thought,  
Since all too late I find by skillo  
How dear I have thy fancies bought.

30 With lullaby now take thine ease,  
 With lullaby thy doubts appease.  
 For trust to this, if thou be still,  
 My body shall obey thy will.

35 Eke<sup>o</sup> lullaby my loving boy,  
 My little Robin,<sup>o</sup> take thy rest.  
 Since age is cold and nothing coy,<sup>o</sup>  
 Keep close thy coin, for so is best.  
 With lullaby be thou content,  
 With lullaby thy lusts relent.<sup>o</sup>  
 Let others pay which hath mo<sup>o</sup> pence;  
 40 Thou art too poor for such expense.<sup>2</sup>

45 Thus lullaby, my youth, mine eyes,  
 My will, my ware,<sup>o</sup> and all that was.  
 I can no mo delays devise,  
 But welcome pain, let pleasure pass.  
 With lullaby now take your leave,  
 With lullaby your dreams deceive,  
 And when you<sup>3</sup> rise with waking eye,  
 Remember then this lullaby.  
*Ever or never.*

1573, 1575

## Endnotes

- Note 1: With an overtone from the common 16th-century sense of “will” as “sexual desire.” “Courage” (line 15): vigor, but also sexual desire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Punning on “expense” as ejaculation; compare Shakespeare, sonnet 129, line 1 (p. 637, below). Each ejaculation was thought to shorten life by a day—a cost that, Gascoigne suggests, old age cannot afford.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: That is, youth, eyes, will, and ware in the first lines of the stanza: despite the lullaby, they won't sleep long.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *deceived*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unruly (but with sexual overtones)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *come to harbor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *were accustomed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unhesitatingly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mirror*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *close your eyes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *again*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *experience*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *his penis*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *not at all lascivious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *relinquish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *more*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *genitals*[Return to reference °](#)

**Michael Drayton** The son of a Warwickshire butcher or tanner, Drayton (1563–1631) had a long and productive career as a professional writer. He collaborated on plays and wrote scriptural paraphrases, pastorals, satires, odes, poetic epistles, verse legends, and a historical epic. His masterpiece is *Poly-Olbion*, a 15,000-line historical-geographical poem celebrating all the counties of England and Wales. He contributed as well to the period's vogue for sonnets, publishing a sequence of fifty-one sonnets called *Idea's Mirror* (1594), which, following substantial revision, he republished as *Idea*. In this poem he takes malicious delight in what time will do to the woman who has rejected him.

# There's Nothing Grieves Me, But That Age Should Haste

There's nothing grieves me, but that<sup>o</sup> age should  
haste,  
That<sup>o</sup> in my days I may not see thee old;  
That where those two clear, sparkling eyes are  
placed,  
Only two loopholes then I might behold;  
That lovely archèd, ivory, polished brow  
5 Defaced with wrinkles that I might but see;  
Thy dainty hair, so curled and crispèd now,  
Like grizzled moss upon some agèd tree;  
Thy cheek, now flush with roses, sunk and lean;  
Thy lips, with age as any wafer thin;  
10 Thy pearly teeth out of thy head so clean,<sup>o</sup>  
That when thou feed'st, thy nose shall touch thy  
chin.  
These lines that now thou scorn'st, which should  
delight thee,  
Then would I make thee read, but to despite<sup>o</sup>  
thee.

1594**Notes**

1619

- <sup>o</sup>: *the possibility that*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *with the result that*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *entirely*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *spite*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

**Samuel Daniel** A poet, playwright, historian, and translator, Daniel (1562/3–1619) was a member of the circle of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and he later held various offices in the household of Anne of Denmark, James I's queen. He wrote tragedies, court masques, a historical epic, a prose history of England, a defense of rhyme, several fine verse epistles, a verse dialogue on the purpose of writing poetry, a popular "complaint" poem in which the ghost of a king's mistress laments her fate, and one of the best Elizabethan sonnet sequences, *Delia*. This poem imagines the aging of the woman who has rejected him. Will she feel pity then?

## When Men Shall Find Thy Flower, Thy Glory, Pass

When men shall find thy flower, thy glory, pass,  
And thou, with careful<sup>o</sup> brow sitting alone,  
Receivèd hast this message from thy glass,<sup>o</sup>  
That tells thee truth, and says that all is gone,  
5 Fresh shalt thou see in me the wounds thou  
madest,  
Though spent thy flame, in me the heat remaining:  
I that have loved thee thus before thou fadest,  
My faith shall wax,<sup>o</sup> when thou art in thy waning.  
The world shall find this miracle in me,  
10 That fire can burn when all the matter's spent;  
Then, what my faith hath been thyself shall see,  
And that thou wast unkind thou may'st repent.  
Thou may'st repent that thou hast scorned my  
tears,  
When winter snows upon thy golden hairs.

1592

### Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *full of care; sorrowful*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *mirror*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *fidelity shall increase*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>



**Anonymous** Sir Henry Lee (1533–1611), Master of the Armory, served as the Queen's Champion, defending her honor against all comers, at annual tournaments or jousts, from 1559 to 1590. He retired, at the age of fifty-seven, in favor of the Earl of Cumberland. On that occasion this lyric was sung by Robert Hales, the queen's lutenist, on behalf of Lee. The authorship, sometimes ascribed to George Peele because the poem was first printed at the end of his *Polyhymnia*, is uncertain. It may be by Lee himself.

# The Queen's Champion Retires

His golden locks time hath to silver turned;  
O time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing!  
His youth 'gainst time and age hath ever spurned,  
But spurned in vain; youth waneth by increasing:<sup>1</sup>  
Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;  
5 Duty, faith, love are roots, and ever green.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees;  
And lovers' sonnets turned to holy psalms;  
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees  
And feed on prayers, which are age's alms:<sup>2</sup>  
10 But though from court to cottage he depart,  
His saint<sup>3</sup> is sure of his unspotted heart.

And when he saddest<sup>4</sup> sits in homely cell,<sup>o</sup>  
He'll teach his swains this carol for a song:  
"Blessed be the hearts that wish my sovereign well;  
15 Cursed be the souls that think her any wrong."  
Goddess,<sup>5</sup> allow this aged man his right  
To be your beadsman<sup>6</sup> now, that was your knight.

1590

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, paradoxically, as one's growth increases, one's youth decreases. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, prayers are the only alms a retired, aged man can give. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ladylove. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: In a serious mood (not “melancholy”).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Queen Elizabeth, often honored as the moon goddess Diana (Cynthia).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: One who offers prayers on behalf of someone.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *humble dwelling*[Return to reference °](#)

**BAWDY**

**Anonymous** These lyrics are sometimes said to be by Thomas Morley (1557–1642), who published them in *Airs* (1600), along with a musical setting. They purportedly give the “cry” of a peddler selling goods for the female market—in particular, a “dog” with “a hole in his head”: a fillable dildo with an opening at its top.

# Will Ye Buy a Fine Dog?

Will ye buy a fine dog, with a hole in his head<sup>1</sup>  
With a dildo, dildo, dildo;  
Muffs, cuffs, rebatoes,<sup>o</sup> and fine sister's thread,<sup>2</sup>  
With a dildo, with a dildo, with a dildo?

5 I stand not on points,<sup>3</sup> pins, periwigs,  
Combs, glasses,  
Gloves, garters; girdles,  
Busks<sup>o</sup> for the brisk<sup>o</sup> lasses,

10 But I have other dainty tricks,  
Sleekstones<sup>4</sup> and potting sticks,<sup>o</sup>  
With a dildo, with a dildo, diddle dildo.

And for a need my pretty pods,<sup>o</sup>  
Amber,<sup>5</sup> civet, and musk cods,<sup>o</sup>  
With a dildo, with a dildo, diddle, diddle dildo!

1600

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A dildo that could be filled with warm liquid, which could be shot out at the appropriate moment. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bleached thread. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I do not view as important. "Points": tagged cords used for fastening garments The whole phrase is also a pun on "to stand upon points" (that is, to be scrupulous about punctuation). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Smooth stones used for polishing. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Ambergris, a waxy substance originating in the intestines of sperm whales; it was used in manufacturing perfumes, as were the secretions of African civets and male musk deers. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *wired lace collars* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *headdresses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lively* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stirrers* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bags* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(scent) glands* [Return to reference °](#)

**Anonymous** This poem, in riddle form, is from a commonplace book in the Houghton Library, Harvard, which contains verses from the 1590s through the 1630s. Authorship and date are unknown.



# On a Maidenhead

Yes, that a maidenhead we call:  
A thing<sup>o</sup> by standing makes it fall.  
At fifteen rare, at eighteen strange,  
Which both do lose<sup>1</sup> when they it change;<sup>o</sup>  
5 A thing oft smothered in a bed,  
Which few have now, which all have had;  
A thing which lasses bears about  
Till putting in doth put it out.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: They lose the status both of being maidens and of having a hymen. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *that is, a penis* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *replace it* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

**CARPE DIEM**

**Thomas Lodge** The London-born Lodge (1558–1625) was educated at Oxford, studied law, and eventually became a physician. He sailed in 1591 on a disastrous voyage to the New World, which he was fortunate to survive. In a career complicated by his lifelong Catholicism in a time of persecution, he tried his hand at writing poems, literary tracts, plays, translations, and prose fictions (one of which became the source of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*). This is one of several poems interspersed in Lodge's romance *The Famous, True, and Historical Life of Robert, Second Duke of Normandy* (1591).

# Pluck the Fruit and Taste the Pleasure

Pluck the fruit and taste the pleasure,  
Youthful lordings,<sup>o</sup> of delight,  
Whilst occasion gives you seizure,<sup>1</sup>  
Feed your fancies and your sight:  
After death when you are gone,  
5 Joy and pleasure is there none.

Here on earth no thing is stable,  
Fortune's changes well are known,  
Whilst as youth doth then enable,  
Let your seeds of joy be sown:  
10 After death when you are gone,  
Joy and pleasure is there none.

Feast it freely with your lovers,  
Blithe and wanton sweets do fade,  
Whilst that lovely Cupid hovers  
15 Round about this lovely shade:  
Sport it freely one to one,  
After death is pleasure none.

Now the pleasant spring allureth,  
And both place and time invites:  
20 Out alas,<sup>2</sup> what heart endureth  
To disclaim<sup>o</sup> his sweet delights?  
After death when we are gone,  
Joy and pleasure is there none.

1591

## Endnotes

- Note 1: While you have the opportunity to seize it.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Out” simply intensifies “alas.”[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *gentlemen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *renounce; relinquish*[Return to reference °](#)

**DEATH**

**Fulke Greville** The wealthy Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554–1628), was educated at Cambridge, traveled widely on the Continent, served in Parliament, and was a successful courtier under Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I. Never married, he wrote some conventional love poetry addressed to a woman he called Caelica, but his most passionate expressions of love were for his friend Sir Philip Sidney, whose death, in 1586, he never ceased to mourn. In addition to a number of powerful, brooding short poems, Greville wrote long philosophical verse treatises, several politically charged closet dramas, and a moving biography of Sidney. The end of Greville's life was grimly in keeping with his general pessimism: he was fatally stabbed by a longtime servant who then killed himself.

# You That Seek What Life Is in Death

You that seek what life is in death,  
Now find it air that once was breath.  
New names unknown, old names gone:  
Till time end bodies, but souls none.  
5       Reader! then make time while you be  
      But<sup>o</sup> steps to your eternity.

ca. 1586

## Notes

1633

- <sup>o</sup>: *only* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)



**Emma Foxe** This epitaph is on a brass grave monument in St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, dated 1570. Written in the voice of Emma Foxe, it may have been penned by her before death, or by a family member afterward, imagining what she might say from the grave. The verse is accompanied by images, also in brass, showing Emma Foxe, her seven sons and seven daughters.

# To You That Life Possess

To you that life possess  
Great troubles do befall,°  
Where we that sleep by death  
Do feel no harm at all.  
5 An honest life doth bring  
A joyful death at last,  
And life again begins  
When death is overpassed.°  
  
My loving Foxe farewell:  
God guide thee with his grace;  
10 Prepare thyself to come  
And I will give thee place.°  
My children all adieu,  
And be right° sure of this:  
15 You shall be brought to dust  
As Emma Foxe your mother is.

1570

## Notes

- °: *belong*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overcome, ended*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make room for you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *totally*[Return to reference °](#)

## **Sir Walter Raleigh**

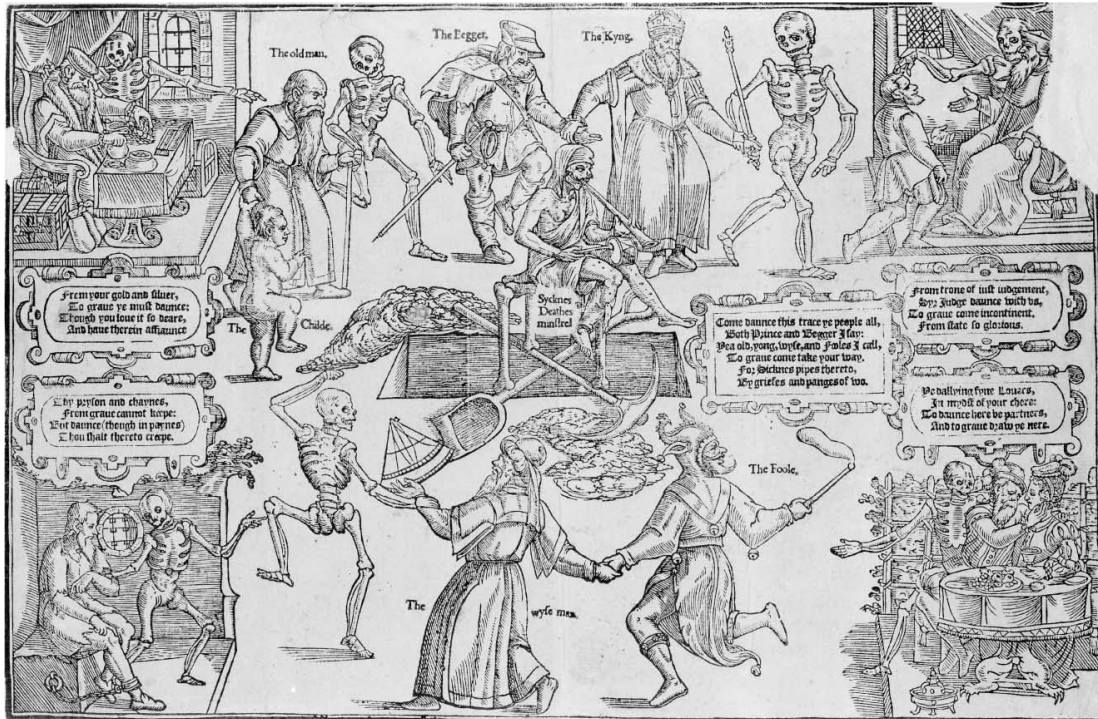
Raleigh wrote *The History of the World* (1614) during his long years in the Tower awaiting execution. He began it with the Creation and ended it, here, with death. The work emphasized the providential punishment of evil princes and projected a treatment of English history—although not of recent events, because, he declared, he who follows truth too closely at the heels might get kicked in the teeth. The work was to have been dedicated to Henry, Prince of Wales, Raleigh's most powerful friend and supporter, who declared, "Only my father would keep such a bird in a cage." But Henry died in 1612, and the dispirited Raleigh broke off his narrative at 168 B.C.E. In this conclusion, Raleigh considers the tremendous leveling power of death.

# ***From The History of the World***

## **[CONCLUSION: ON DEATH]**

It is \* \* \* Death alone that can suddenly make man to know himself. He tells the proud and insolent that they are but abjects,<sup>1</sup> and humbles them at the instant; makes them cry, complain, and repent; yea, even to hate their forepassed<sup>2</sup> happiness. He takes the account<sup>3</sup> of the rich, and proves him a beggar, a naked beggar, which hath interest in nothing but in the gravel that fills his mouth. He holds a glass<sup>4</sup> before the eyes of the most beautiful, and makes them see therein their deformity and rottenness, and they acknowledge it.

O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words: *Hic jacet!*<sup>5</sup>



**The Dance and Song of Death.** This engraving, which shows skeletons dancing people of all ranks to their death, depicts a wide range of society: the king and the beggar; the old man and the child; the wise man and the fool. In the middle, Sickness sits over a grave on a chair of bones and plays the music. At the corners are (left) a miser and a prisoner and (right) a judge and a pair of lovers; they too are summoned to join the dance by prancing skeletons.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Castoffs. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bygone. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Estimate, measure. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Mirror. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here lies (Latin); often carved on tombstones. [Return to reference 5](#)

**DRINK**

**William Stevenson/John Still** This drinking song appears in the play *Gammer Gurtons Needle*, published in 1575 and first performed sometime between 1553 and 1562. It was put on at Cambridge and may have been written by William Stevenson (1530–1575), a clergyman, or John Still (1543–1608), master of St. John's and Trinity College, Cambridge, and bishop of Bath and Wells. The text is assumed to be about poverty, which is relieved and cheered by drink, but the song's topic also naturally fits its student environment.

## Jolly Good Ale and Old

Back and side go bare, go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold.  
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
Whether it be new or old.

5 I cannot eat but little meat,  
My stomach is not good;  
But sure I think that I can drink  
With him that wears a hood.<sup>1</sup>  
Though I go bare, take ye no care,<sup>o</sup>  
I am nothing a-cold:  
10 I stuffed my skin, so full within  
Of jolly good ale and old.

Back and side go bare, go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold.  
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
15 Whether it be new or old.

I love no roast, but a nut-brown toast  
And a crab laid in the fire,<sup>2</sup>  
A little bread shall do me stead,<sup>o</sup>  
Much bread I not desire.  
20 No frost nor snow, no wind I trow<sup>o</sup>  
Can hurt me if I would,<sup>o</sup>  
I am so wrapped, and thoroughly lapped  
Of jolly good ale and old.

25 Back and side go bare, go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold.  
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,



Whether it be new or old.

And Tib, my wife, that as her life  
Loveth well good ale to seek,  
30 Full oft drinks she, till ye may see  
The tears run down her cheeks.  
Then doth she troll<sup>o</sup> to me the bowl  
Even as a malt-worm<sup>3</sup> should,  
And saith "sweetheart, I took my part  
35 Of this jolly good ale and old."

Back and side go bare; go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold.  
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
Whether it be new or old.

40  
Now let them drink till they nod and wink,<sup>o</sup>  
Even as good fellows<sup>o</sup> should do.  
They shall not miss,<sup>o</sup> to have the bliss,  
Good ale doth bring men to.  
And all poor souls that have scoured<sup>o</sup> bowls  
45 Or have them lustily<sup>o</sup> trolled,  
God save the lives of them and their wives  
Whether they be young or old.

Back and side go bare, go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold.  
50 But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,  
Whether it be new or old.

ca. 1553 **Endnotes**

1575

- Note 1: Hoods were worn by authority figures: civic officials, clergymen, and university graduates. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Toasted bread and (crab) apples were usual additions to ale, particularly when it was served hot. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: A heavy drinker (literally, a weevil that infests malt). [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *don't you worry* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suffice me* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *believe* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *even if I wished it* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pass* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *close their eyes (fall asleep)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *drinking companions* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fail* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cleared out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gladly* [Return to reference °](#)

**Thomas Dekker** This verse is printed at the end of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600), a play by Dekker (1572–1632), a man-about-town who apparently supported himself through writing. The “toast” drunk in the second and fourth stanza, which is to be repeated “as often as there are men to drink,” and the fact that the final stanza is preceded by the stage direction “when all have drunk, this verse” show this to be an action poem in which ale is consumed throughout the performance.

# Troll the Bowl, the Jolly Nut-Brown Bowl

Cold's the wind and wet's the rain,  
Saint Hugh<sup>1</sup> be our good speed.<sup>o</sup>  
Ill is the weather that bringeth no gain,  
Nor helps good hearts in need.

5 Troll<sup>o</sup> the bowl, the jolly nut-brown bowl,<sup>2</sup>  
And here, kind mate, to thee.<sup>3</sup>  
Let's sing a dirge<sup>o</sup> for Saint Hugh's soul,  
And down it merrily!

10 Down-a-down, hey down-a-down,  
Hey derry derry down-a-down,<sup>4</sup>  
Ho well done, to me let come,  
Ring compass,<sup>5</sup> gentle joy.<sup>o</sup>

15 Troll the bowl, the jolly nut-brown bowl,  
And here, kind<sup>6</sup> mate, to thee.  
Let's sing a dirge for Saint Hugh's soul,  
And down it merrily!

20 Cold's the wind and wet's the rain,<sup>7</sup>  
Saint Hugh be our good speed.  
Ill is the weather that bringeth no gain,  
Nor helps good hearts in need.

ca. 1600

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Patron saint of shoemakers (also sick people and swans), the subjects of the play in which this is sung.[Return to](#)

### [reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Wide-mouthed drinking vessel.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A drinking toast meaning “here’s to you, kind friend.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nonsense to be sung while the drink is being consumed or “downed.” This line is followed by a stage direction “close with the tenor boy,” indicating that the largest bell is to be rung.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This has been glossed as meaning “ring the full range—compass—of notes”; it seems rather to mean something along the lines of “keep circulating.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the text, this verse is not completed. It stops here with “etc” followed by the stage direction “as often as there be men to drink,” indicating that this verse should be repeated until the bowl is empty.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This verse is preceded by the stage direction “at last, when all have drunk, this verse.”[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *success, luck*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pass round*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lament*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sweetheart*[Return to reference °](#)

# EXECUTION

**Chidiock Tichborne** Tichborne (1562–1586) was part of the Babington conspiracy to assassinate Queen Elizabeth and her chief ministers; release Mary, Queen of Scots, from her long captivity; and promote an uprising of English Catholics to coincide with a Spanish invasion. The detection of this plot by Walsingham, and the proof of Mary's complicity in it, finally cost the Scottish queen her life. Tichborne, one of six conspirators assigned to kill Elizabeth, pled guilty at his trial and was executed. His "Elegy" was published in a volume called *Verses of Praise and Joy Written upon Her Majesty's Preservation*; it was later set to music by three different composers.

# Tichborne's Elegy

## *Written with His Own Hand in the Tower Before His Execution*

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,  
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,  
My crop of corn<sup>o</sup> is but a field of tares,<sup>o</sup>  
And all my good is but vain hope of gain;  
The day is past, and yet I saw no sun,  
5 And now I live, and now my life is done.

My tale was heard and yet it was not told,  
My fruit is fallen and yet my leaves are green,  
My youth is spent and yet I am not old,  
I saw the world and yet I was not seen;  
10 My thread is cut and yet it is not spun,  
And now I live, and now my life is done.

I sought my death and found it in my womb,  
I looked for life and saw it was a shade,<sup>o</sup>  
I trod the earth and knew it was my tomb,  
15 And now I die, and now I was but made;  
My glass<sup>o</sup> is full, and now my glass is run,  
And now I live, and now my life is done.

1586

## Notes

- °: *grain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weeds* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ghost* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *hourglass*[Return to reference](#) °

**Sir Walter Raleigh** Raleigh (1552–1618) called his son by his own name, Walter; writing to him was by extension writing about himself. Here he cautions the younger Walter (1593–1618), a wild “wag,” to avoid the gallows—a genuine concern, given that the poem’s author was himself executed. Raleigh embraced the manuscript circulation of his poems at court but actively opposed appearing as a poet in print—in one case he forced a printer to recall a volume and paste a slip of paper over his initials. That makes it difficult to put the copies that circulated in manuscript, often in commonplace books, in any reliably chronological order or to date them. This poem may date to around 1600, in which case it is addressed to a naughty child; it may date from later, in which case the “wag” is engaging in adult bad behavior.

# Sir Walter Raleigh to His Son<sup>1</sup>

Three things there be that prosper up apace  
And flourish, whilst they grow asunder far,  
But on a day, they meet all in one place,  
And when they meet, they one another mar;  
And they be these: the wood, the weed,<sup>o</sup> the wag.  
5 The wood is that which makes the gallow tree;  
The weed is that which strings the hangman's bag;<sup>2</sup>  
The wag, my pretty knave, betokeneth<sup>o</sup> thee.  
Mark well, dear boy, whilst these assemble not,  
Green springs the tree, hemp grows, the wag is wild,  
10 But when they meet, it makes the timber rot,  
It frets the halter,<sup>o</sup> and it chokes the child.  
Then bless thee, and beware, and let us pray  
We part not with thee at this meeting day.

ca. 1600

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The sonnet has this title in one of the manuscripts in which it appears.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, when woven into rope, the hemp secures the hangman's hood ("bag") to the condemned person's neck.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *hemp*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *signifies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tightens the noose*[Return to reference °](#)

**Sir Walter Raleigh** Against orders, men under Raleigh's command in Guiana had attacked a Spanish outpost. His son Walter was killed in the attack, which proved fatal to Raleigh as well, since King James I was determined to repair the breach with Spain. Raleigh, who had had an earlier sentence of execution stayed, was resented. The seventeenth-century story, which may be true, was that Raleigh inscribed this poem in his Bible the night before he was beheaded. The epitaph, a version of the last stanza of his "Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk" ([p. 502](#) in this volume), completes its brave acknowledgment of death with the trust—or hope—that Raleigh will be resurrected on Judgment Day.

## **The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself**

Even such is time, which takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,  
And pays us but with age and dust;  
Who in the dark and silent grave,  
When we have wandered all our ways,  
5 Shuts up the story of our days:  
And from which earth, and grave, and dust  
The Lord shall raise me up, I trust.

1628

# **FOREIGNERS**

**Anonymous** The content of this “libel” (a defamatory writing put up in public) is recorded in a manuscript book (ca. 1599–1601) of letters, orations, and various other texts transcribed by John Mansell (1580–1631), a churchman, theologian, philosopher, and later president of Queens’ College, Cambridge. The libel itself is apparently about Protestant asylum seekers fleeing religious persecution in the Netherlands; records of the Privy Council attest that it was first hung up, in manuscript, in the churchyard of the so-called Dutch church where the refugees prayed. But Mansell mistitles the work “A libel fixed upon the French Church Wall in London,” showing how easy it was to confuse one despised people with another. Said to be in the hand of “Tamberlaine,” the name of the title character of two plays by Christopher Marlowe, the poem got Marlowe in trouble with the authorities, who saw him as one of the instigators of anti-alien riots in Southwark in 1593, of which this libel was a part. He is unlikely, though, to have “hidden” his authorship under so obvious a name. “Tamberlaine” probably indicates instead the character as depicted in Marlowe’s plays, who cruelly annihilated his enemies. Foreigners (“strangers”), often economic migrants from elsewhere in Europe, were crucial to English commercial expansion, but could be feared and hated. Here they are accused of buying goods and selling them at a higher price, producing better merchandise, being spies, causing rents to increase, having more than one trade, and pretending to be Protestants.

# The Dutch Libel

Ye strangers<sup>o</sup> that do inhabit in this land,  
Note this same writing; do it understand.  
Conceit<sup>o</sup> it well—for safeguard<sup>o</sup> of your lives,  
Your goods, your children and your dearest wives.  
5 Your Machiavellian merchant spoils<sup>o</sup> the state,<sup>1</sup>  
Your usury doth leave us all for dead,  
Your artifex<sup>o</sup> and craftsman works our fate  
And, like the Jews, you eat us up as bread.<sup>2</sup>  
The merchant doth ingross<sup>o</sup> all kind of wares;  
10 Forestalls the markets wheresoe'er he goes;<sup>3</sup>  
Sends forth his wares by peddlers to the fairs;  
Retails at home; and with his horrible shows  
Undoeth thousands.

In baskets your wares trot up and down  
15 Carried the streets by the country nation.<sup>4</sup>  
You are intelligencers<sup>o</sup> to the state and crown  
And in your hearts do wish an alteration.<sup>5</sup>  
You transport goods, and bring us gauds<sup>o</sup> good  
store,  
Our lead, our vittle, our ordinance and what not,<sup>6</sup>  
That Egypt's plagues vexed not th'Egyptians more  
20 Than you do us;<sup>7</sup> then death shall be your lot.  
No prize<sup>o</sup> comes in but you make claim thereto,  
And every merchant hath three trades at least,  
And cutthroat-like in selling, you undo  
Us all, and with our store continually you feast.  
25 We cannot suffer long.

Our poor artificers<sup>o</sup> do starve and die



For that they cannot now be set on work.<sup>o</sup>  
And for<sup>o</sup> your work, more curious<sup>o</sup> to the eye,  
In chambers twenty in one house will lurk—  
30 Raising of rents was never known before—  
Living far better than at native home;  
And our poor souls are clean thrust out of door  
And to the wars are sent abroad to roam  
To fight it out for France and Belgia  
35 And die like dogs as sacrifice for you.<sup>8</sup>  
Expect you therefore such a fatal day  
Shortly on you and yours for to ensue  
As never was seen.

Since words nor threats nor any other thing  
40 Can make you to avoid this certain ill,  
We'll cut your throats in your temples praying:  
Not Paris massacre<sup>9</sup> so much blood did spill  
As we will do just vengeance on you all  
In counterfeiting religion for your flight,  
45 When 'tis well known you are loath for to be thrall.<sup>o1</sup>  
Your coin and you as countries cause to flight.<sup>2</sup>  
With Spanish gold you all are infected<sup>3</sup>  
And with that gold our nobles wink at feats.<sup>4</sup>  
Nobles said I? Nay, men to be rejected:  
50 Upstarts that enjoy the noblest seats,  
That wound their country's breast for lucre's<sup>o</sup> sake,  
And wrong our gracious queen and subjects good  
By letting strangers make our hearts to ache,<sup>5</sup>  
For which our swords are whet to shed their blood.  
55 And, for a truth, let it be understood:  
Fly,<sup>o</sup> fly and never return.

Per.<sup>o</sup> Tamberlaine

## Endnotes

- Note 1: “Machiavellian” may suggest being unscrupulous or cunning, as Niccolò Machiavelli, the Italian diplomat and author of *The Prince*, was popularly thought to have been. It is also a shorthand way of insulting Italians.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This may allude to accusations that Jews ate Christian babies and desecrated the Church’s consecrated host—the Communion bread—or may simply refer to “Jewish bread” (matzoh).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Forestalling* was to buy up goods privately, before they reached the markets; the claim is that the merchants are getting the goods through underhanded means and selling them at profit.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Either “your wares are carried by countrymen” or, if the word is in fact *contrary*, “you, of a different nation, carry your wares around.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The implication is that the foreigners spy for the state, while in fact desiring a change of government.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lead, food, and furniture and “what not” are the goods that are transported and replaced with (or perhaps made into, or sold as) “gawds” from abroad that are then retailed back in England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See Exodus 7–10, which describes ten natural disasters visited by God on Pharaoh to convince him to let the enslaved Israelites leave Egypt.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: English soldiers often went to the Continent to fight and die on behalf of foreign Protestants—a reference to the queen’s engagement in the struggle against the Spanish, or to the Dutch wars, which extended into France and Belgium. See “Soldiers Song,” below.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The massacre of French Huguenots in Paris on Saint Bartholomew’s Day, 1572.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The claim is that the foreigners have falsely pretended a passion for Protestantism in order to be welcomed into England.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An obscure sentence. "Flight" here rhymes with itself, suggesting eye-skip: other transcription errors are possible. As it stands, the point seems to be that you and your coins set flight to the country's cause. But the line may in fact be something like "as [or 'our'] countries/country's cause to fight"; "as [or 'our'] countries/country's cause to [or 'do'] slight."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spanish coins were in circulation everywhere.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Close their eyes at your deeds; that is, turn a blind eye to what you do. The Spanish treasure fleet had brought large quantities of gold and silver from the New World to Europe, causing inflation throughout western Europe.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, English noblemen are protecting immigrants and profiting by so doing.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *foreigners*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *understand* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *protection*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *despoils, strips*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artificers, artisans*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *buys up wholesale*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *playthings, showy ornaments*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *payment, duty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artisans*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *put to work*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skillful, elaborate*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *to be in bondage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *money's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *run away hurriedly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by the hand of*[Return to reference](#) °

**William Shakespeare** This is a speech from the manuscript play of *Sir Thomas More* (ca. 1591–93), which is written in five anonymous hands: A, B, C, D, and E. Hand D, and the author of this speech, is thought to be Shakespeare. This section of the play depicts a riot against foreigners that occurred in London on May 1, 1517, a day that came to be called “Evil May Day.” As it is clearly also a reference to the more recent anti-immigrant unrest in the 1590s (see headnote to “The Dutch Libel”), the text was thought incendiary and was censored; the Master of the Revels, Sir Edmund Tilney, declared that the play should be altered to “leave out the insurrection wholly and the cause thereof.” There is no proof that the play ever made it to the stage. In this speech, More pleads with the rioters for tolerance and asks them to consider how they would feel if they themselves were immigrants.

## ***From Sir Thomas More***

Grant them<sup>1</sup> removed, and grant that this your noise  
Hath chid down<sup>o</sup> all the majesty of England.  
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,  
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,  
Plodding to th'ports and coasts for transportation,  
5 And that you sit as kings in your desires,  
Authority quite silenced by your brawl,  
And you in ruff of your opinions clothed;<sup>2</sup>  
What had you got? I'll tell you. You had taught  
How insolence and strong hand should prevail;  
10 How order should be quelled; and by this pattern  
Not one of you should live an agèd man,  
For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,  
With selfsame hand, self-reasons, and self-right,  
Would shark<sup>o</sup> on you, and men like ravenous fishes  
15 Would feed on one another.  
You'll put down<sup>o</sup> strangers,  
Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses,  
And lead the majesty of law in lyam,<sup>o</sup>  
To slip him like a hound.<sup>3</sup> Say now the king  
20 (As he is clement<sup>o</sup> if th'offender mourn)  
Should so much come too short of your great  
trespass  
As but to banish you,<sup>4</sup> whither would you go?  
What country, by the nature of your error,  
Should give you harbor? Go you to France or  
25 Flanders,  
To any German province, to Spain or Portugal,  
Nay, anywhere that not adheres to England,

Why, you must needs be strangers. Would you be  
pleased  
To find a nation of such barbarous temper  
That, breaking out in hideous violence,  
30 Would not afford you an abode on earth;  
Whet their detested knives against your throats;  
Spurn you like dogs and, like as if that God  
Owed<sup>o</sup> not nor made not you, nor that the  
claimants<sup>o</sup>  
35 Were not all appropriate to your comforts  
But chartered unto<sup>o</sup> them? What would you think  
To be thus used? This is the strangers' case,<sup>o</sup>  
And this your mountainish inhumanity.

ca. 1590

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Let us suppose that the strangers (that is, foreigners).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Wearing the ruffled collar (that is, pride) of your notions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, as if the law were a dog, you'll lead it and then release it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: If the king should, through kindness, fail to punish your great wrong as it deserves, and merely banish you.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *silenced*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *prey*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *subdue*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *a leash for hounds*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *merciful*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *owned* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *benefits claimed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reserved to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *situation*[Return to reference](#) °



# IMAGINATION

**Fulke Greville** The hundredth sonnet from *Caelica* (1633), this poem considers the frightening visions that the “inward” eye reveals in the dark.

# In Night When Colors All to Black Are Cast

In night when colors all to black are cast,  
Distinction lost, or gone down with the light,  
The eye a watch to inward senses placed,  
Not seeing, yet still having power of sight,  
Gives vain alarums to the inward sense,  
5 Where fear stirred up with witty tyranny<sup>o</sup>  
Confounds all powers and thorough self-offense<sup>o</sup>  
Doth forge and raise impossibility:  
Such as in thick depriving darknesses  
Proper reflections of the error be,  
10 And images of self-confusednesses,  
Which hurt imaginations only see;  
And from this nothing seen tells news of devils,  
Which but expressions be of inward evils.

ca. 1580–1600 **Notes**

1633

- <sup>o</sup>: *of imaginings* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *through self-injury* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

**Michael Drayton** From the sonnet cycle *Ideas Mirror* (1594), this poem compares the “things” (women) who will be forgotten with one who will survive—because Drayton has preserved her in verse.

# How Many Paltry, Foolish, Painted Things

How many paltry, foolish, painted things,  
That now in coaches trouble every street,  
Shall be forgotten, whom no poet sings,  
Ere they be well wrapped in their winding sheet?°  
Where° I to thee eternity shall give,  
5 When nothing else remaineth of these days;  
And queens hereafter shall be glad to live  
Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise.  
Virgins and matrons, reading these my rhymes,  
Shall be so much delighted with thy story  
10 That they shall grieve they lived not in these times,  
To have seen thee, their sex's only glory:  
So shalt thou fly above the vulgar° throng,  
Still to survive in my immortal song.

1619

## Notes

- °: *shroud* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whereas* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *common* [Return to reference °](#)

**LYING**

**Sir Walter Raleigh** This poem circulated anonymously and in manuscript—but a series of “answer poems,” often angry about it, reveal that the text was popularly understood to be by Raleigh. In this relentless, frantic poem, the author “gives the lie to” (accuses of lying—a phrase typically used when challenging someone to a duel) institutions such as the church and the court, types of people held in high esteem, and a manic list of intangibles, from wit to aging.

# The Lie

Go, soul, the body's guest,  
Upon a thankless errand;  
Fear not to touch<sup>o</sup> the best;  
The truth shall be thy warrant.  
5 Go, since I needs must die,  
And give the world the lie.<sup>1</sup>

Say to the court, it glows  
And shines like rotten wood;<sup>o</sup>  
Say to the church, it shows  
What's good, and doth no good.  
10 If church and court reply,  
Then give them both the lie.

Tell potentates they live  
Acting by others' action;  
Not loved unless they give,  
15 Not strong but by a faction.  
If potentates reply,  
Give potentates the lie.

Tell men of high condition,  
That manage the estate,<sup>o</sup>  
20 Their purpose is ambition,  
Their practice only hate.  
And if they once reply,  
Then give them all the lie.  
Tell them that brave it<sup>o</sup> most,  
25 They beg for more by spending,  
Who, in their greatest cost,  
Seek nothing but commending.<sup>o</sup>



30 And if they make reply,  
Then give them all the lie.

Tell zeal it wants<sup>o</sup> devotion;  
Tell love it is but lust;  
Tell time it is but motion;  
Tell flesh it is but dust.  
35 And wish them not reply,  
For thou must give the lie.

Tell age it daily wasteth;<sup>o</sup>  
Tell honor how it alters;  
Tell beauty how she blasteth;<sup>o</sup>  
Tell favor how it falters.  
40 And as they shall reply,  
Give every one the lie.

Tell wit<sup>o</sup> how much it wrangles  
In tickle points of niceness;<sup>o</sup>  
Tell wisdom she entangles  
45 Herself in overwiseness.  
And when they do reply,  
Straight give them both the lie.

Tell physic<sup>o</sup> of her boldness;<sup>o</sup>  
Tell skill it is pretension;  
50 Tell charity of coldness;  
Tell law it is contention.  
And as they do reply,  
So give them still the lie.

Tell fortune of her blindness;  
55 Tell nature of decay;  
Tell friendship of unkindness;  
Tell justice of delay.  
And if they will reply,

60           Then give them all the lie.  
           Tell arts<sup>2</sup> they have no soundness,  
           But vary by esteeming;<sup>3</sup>  
           Tell schools<sup>4</sup> they want profoundness,  
           And stand too much on seeming.  
 65           If arts and schools reply,  
           Give arts and schools the lie.  
           Tell faith<sup>o</sup> it's fled the city;  
           Tell how the country erreth;  
           Tell manhood shakes off pity;  
 70           Tell virtue least preferreth.<sup>o</sup>  
           And if they do reply,  
           Spare not to give the lie.  
           So when thou hast, as I  
           Commanded thee, done blabbing,<sup>o</sup>  
 75           Although to give the lie  
           Deserves no less than stabbing,  
           Stab at thee he that will,  
           No stab thy soul can kill.

ca. 1592 **Endnotes**

1608

- Note 1: "give . . . the lie": accuse of lying. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The seven liberal arts, the basis of the academic curriculum. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, seem good or bad according to different tastes or judgments. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The various philosophical traditions. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *speak of; censure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with phosphorescence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *state*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *live ostentatiously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *others' approval*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decays*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withers away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intellect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in trivial distinctions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *presumption*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faithfulness, fidelity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advances*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealing secrets*[Return to reference](#) °

**LOVE: HAPPY**

**John Davies of Hereford** Always associated in print with his birthplace in the historic Welsh Marches, an area on the border between England and Wales, in order to avoid confusion with a contemporary poet of the same name, John Davies of Hereford (1564/5–1618) moved to London to work as a writing master, tutoring members of the nobility in penmanship. At the same time, he produced scores of poems, including religious and moral treatises, love sonnets, satires, eclogues, and his best-known work, a collection of epigrams (short, pointed poems), many of them addressed to the era's most prominent writers.

# If There Were (Oh!) an Hellespont of Cream

The author loving these homely meats specially, viz., cream, pancakes, buttered pippin pies<sup>1</sup> (laugh, good people), and tobacco, writ to that worthy and virtuous gentlewoman whom he calleth mistress, as followeth:

If there were (oh!) an Hellespont<sup>2</sup> of cream  
Between us, milk-white mistress, I would swim  
To you, to show to both my love's extreme,  
Leander-like<sup>3</sup>—yea, dive from brim to brim.  
But met I with a buttered pippin pie  
5 Floating upon't, that would I make my boat,  
To waft me to you without jeopardy,  
Though seasick I might be while it did float.  
Yet if a storm should rise, by night or day,  
Of sugar snows and hail of caraways,<sup>4</sup>  
10 Then, if I found a pancake in my way,<sup>5</sup>  
It, like a plank, should bring me to your quays:<sup>6</sup>  
Which having found, if they tobacco kept,  
The smoke should dry me well, before I slept.

1611

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Apple pies. "Meats": foods (not just flesh). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The ancient name for the Dardanelles, the strait linking the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara. One to five miles

wide, it divides Europe from Asia.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: According to a late classical legend, Leander swam the Hellespont to reach his ladylove, Hero. See Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" (p. 563).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Caraway seeds; here, in sweets.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: On my route.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Or "keys": banks or landing stages strengthened for loading or unloading ships. Here, alluding to the breasts of his "milk-white mistress."[Return to reference 6](#)

**Thomas Campion** After three years at Cambridge, Campion (1567–1620) studied law before finally settling on medicine. A composer, a writer of court masques, and a poet, he wrote his first poetic compositions in Latin, and he remained interested in the possibility of applying the classical principles of quantitative versification to English. His most memorable achievements arose from the fact that he was both poet and composer: his aim, he wrote, was “to couple my words and notes lovingly together.” This poem and the two lyrics that follow appeared, with musical settings, in *A Book of Airs*, which contains Campion’s first work as a composer. This piece is imitated and partly translated from a poem by Catullus (87–ca. 54 B.C.E.), the Latin lyric poet who often celebrated the charms of an unidentified married woman he called Lesbia.



# My Sweetest Lesbia

My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love,  
And though the sager sort our deeds reprove,  
Let us not weigh<sup>o</sup> them: heav'n's great lamps do  
dive  
Into their west, and straight<sup>o</sup> again revive,  
But soon as once set is our little light,  
5 Then must we sleep one ever-during<sup>o</sup> night.

If all would lead their lives in love like me,  
Then bloody swords and armor should not be;  
No drum nor trumpet peaceful sleeps should move,<sup>o</sup>  
Unless alarm<sup>o</sup> came from the camp of love.  
10 But fools do live, and waste their little light,  
And seek with pain their ever-during night.

When timely death my life and fortune ends,  
Let not my hearse<sup>o</sup> be vexed with mourning friends,  
But let all lovers, rich in triumph, come  
15 And with sweet pastimes grace my happy tomb;  
And Lesbia, close up thou my little light,  
And crown with love my ever-during night.

1601

## Notes

- °: *heed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *everlasting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disturb*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the call to arms*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bier*[Return to reference °](#)

**Thomas Campion** Published in *A Book of Airs* (1601),  
Campion's song about women and class compares the demands of  
court "ladies" with the availability of the country maid Amaryllis.

# I Care Not for These Ladies

I care not for these ladies  
That must be wooed and prayed;  
Give me kind Amaryllis,<sup>1</sup>  
The wanton country<sup>2</sup> maid.  
Nature art<sup>o</sup> disdaineth;  
5 Her beauty is her own.  
    Her when we court and kiss,  
    She cries "Forsooth,<sup>o</sup> let go!"  
    But when we come where comfort is,  
    She never will say no.  
10  
If I love Amaryllis,  
She gives me fruit and flowers;  
But if we love these ladies,  
We must give golden showers.  
Give them gold that sell love,  
15 Give me the nut-brown<sup>o</sup> lass  
    Who when we court and kiss,  
    She cries "Forsooth, let go!"  
    But when we come where comfort is,  
    She never will say no.  
20  
These ladies must have pillows,  
And beds by strangers wrought.<sup>o</sup>  
Give me a bower of willows,  
Of moss and leaves unbought,  
And fresh Amaryllis,  
25 With milk and honey fed,  
    Who when we court and kiss,  
    She cries "Forsooth, let go!"  
    But when we come where comfort is,

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In classical and later pastoral poetry, a conventional name for a shepherdess. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Probably with an obscene pun. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *artifice* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *truly!* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sun-tanned* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imported* [Return to reference °](#)

**Thomas Campion** Love, in this song from Campion's *Third and Fourth Book of Aires* (1617), is presented as a way of passing the long winter nights.

## Now Winter Nights Enlarge

Now winter nights enlarge  
The number of their hours,  
And clouds their storms discharge  
Upon the airy towers.  
Let now the chimneys blaze  
5 And cups o'erflow with wine,  
Let well-tuned words amaze  
With harmony divine.  
Now yellow waxen lights  
Shall wait on honey Love,  
10 While youthful revels, masques,<sup>o</sup> and courtly sights  
Sleep's leaden spells remove.

This time doth well dispense  
With<sup>1</sup> lovers' long discourse;  
Much speech hath some defense,  
15 Though beauty no remorse.  
All do not all things well:  
Some measures<sup>2</sup> comely<sup>o</sup> tread,  
Some knotted riddles tell,  
Some poems smoothly read.  
20 The Summer hath his joys,  
And Winter his delights;  
Though Love and all his pleasures are but toys,<sup>o</sup>  
They shorten tedious nights.

1617

## Endnotes

- Note 1: "Dispense / With": permit, allow. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Dances; also poetic rhythms. “Some”: that is, some people. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *masked balls* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trifles* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Richard Barnfield**

Barnfield (1574–1620) was sometimes thought to have been the “rival poet” of Shakespeare’s sonnets. His first work, *The Affectionate Shepherd* (1594), a pastoral account of “the love of a shepherd to a boy,” was criticized for its homoeroticism. As these later sonnets show, gay love remained a focus of much of his writing.



# ***From Cynthia*<sup>1</sup>**

## ***Sonnet 9***

Diana (on a time) walking the wood  
To sport herself, of her fair train forlorn,<sup>2</sup>  
Chanced for to prick her foot against a thorn,  
And from thence issued out a stream of blood.  
No sooner she was vanished out of sight,  
5 But love's fair queen<sup>o</sup> came there away by chance,  
And having of this hap<sup>o</sup> a glimm'ring glance,  
She put the blood into a crystal<sup>o</sup> bright.  
When being now come unto Mount Rhodope,<sup>3</sup>  
10 With her fair hands she forms a shape of snow,  
And blends it with this blood; from whence doth  
grow  
A lovely creature, brighter than the day.  
And being christened in fair Paphos'<sup>4</sup> shrine,  
She called him Ganymede,<sup>5</sup> as all divine.

## ***Sonnet 11***

Sighing, and sadly sitting by my love,  
He asked the cause of my heart's sorrowing,  
Conjuring me by heaven's eternal king  
To tell the cause which me so much did move.  
Compelled (quoth I), to thee will I confess  
5 Love is the cause, and only love it is  
That doth deprive me of my heavenly bliss;  
Love is the pain that doth my heart oppress.  
And what is she (quoth he) whom thou dost love?  
Look in this glass<sup>o</sup> (quoth I), there shalt thou see

10           The perfect form of my felicity.  
When, thinking that it would strange magic prove,<sup>o</sup>  
He opened it: and taking off the cover,  
He straight perceived himself to be my lover.

1595

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Cynthia, or Diana, was the chaste huntress goddess, and moon goddess, of classical mythology.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Left without her fair retinue (of wood nymphs).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In frigid Thrace, and associated with Diana.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A city in Cyprus, sacred to Venus.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A Trojan boy, said to be the most beautiful of mortals. Enamored of him, Zeus brought Ganymede away to Olympus, where he was deified and became cupbearer to the gods.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *Venus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accident, happenstance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vessel of crystal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mirror*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *show*[Return to reference °](#)

**LOVE: UNHAPPY**

**Michael Drayton**

From *Ideas Mirror*, a sequence that Drayton began writing in 1594, this poem puns throughout on the homonyms *aye* (yes) and *I*. Especially in the sonnet's final couplet, a nearly limitless number of interpretations can be produced by varying the punctuation—including the quotation marks, all of which are editorial—and letting the mind play freely with the homonyms.

# Nothing but "No" and "I" and "I" and "No"?

Nothing but "No" and "I" and "I" and "No"?  
How falls it out<sup>o</sup> so strangely you reply?  
I tell ye (fair), I'll not be answered so,  
With this affirming "No," denying "I."  
5 I say, "I love"; you slightly<sup>o</sup> answer, "I."  
I say, "You love"; you pule me out<sup>1</sup> a "No."  
I say, "I die"; you echo me with "I."  
"Save me," I cry; you sigh me out a "No."  
Must Woe and I have nought but "No" and "I"?  
No I am I, if I no more can have.  
10 Answer no more: with silence make reply,  
And let me take myself what I do crave.  
Let "No" and "I" with I and you be so,  
Then answer "No" and "I" and "I" and "No."  
1599, 1619

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Peevishly answer me with.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *how does it happen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *indifferently; carelessly*[Return to reference °](#)

**George Gascoigne** This poem appears at the end of Gascoigne's evidently autobiographical novella, *The Adventures of Master F. J.* (1573), which mixes prose and verse; it is occasioned by a conversation between F. J. and his mistress, the wife of his host in Italy. F. J. accuses her of betraying him with her male secretary, "and she . . . denied it, until at last being still urged with such evident tokens [that is, clear proofs] as he alleged, she gave him this bone to gnaw upon: And if I did so (quoth she), what then? Whereunto F. J. made none answer, but departed. . . . And when he was in place solitary, he compiled these following [verses], for a final end of the matter."

## And If I Did, What Then?

"And if I did, what then?  
Are you aggrieved therefore?  
The sea hath fish for every man,  
And what would you have more?"

5 Thus did my mistress once  
Amaze<sub>o</sub> my mind with doubt,  
And popped a question, for the nonce,<sub>o</sub>  
To beat my brains about.

10 Whereto I thus replied,  
"Each fisherman can wish  
That all the sea at every tide  
Were his alone to fish.

15 "And so did I (in vain);  
But since it may not be,  
Let such<sub>o</sub> fish there as find the gain,  
And leave the loss for me.

20 "And with such luck and loss,  
I will content myself,  
Till tides of turning time may toss  
Such fishers on the shelf.<sub>o</sub>

"And when they stick on sands,  
That every man may see,  
Then will I laugh and clap my hands,  
As they do now at me."

# Notes

- °: *stupefy; perplex*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on purpose; expressly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *such men*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to one side*[Return to reference](#) °



**Michael Drayton** The conceit of this sonnet is to draw a parallel between being actually ill and being “lovesick.”

## As in Some Countries Far Remote from Hence

As in some countries far remote from hence,  
The wretched creature destinèd to die,  
Having the judgment due to his offense,  
By surgeons begg'd their art<sup>o</sup> on him to try,  
Which<sup>o</sup> on the living work without remorse,  
5 First make incision on each mast'ring vein,<sup>o</sup>  
Then stanch the bleeding, then transpierce the  
corse,<sup>o</sup>  
And with their balms recure<sup>o</sup> the wounds again,  
Then poison, and with physic<sup>o</sup> him restore,  
Not that they fear the hopeless man to kill,  
10 But their experience to increase the more:  
Ev'n so my mistress works upon my ill,<sup>o</sup>  
By curing me and killing me each hour  
Only to show her beauty's sov'reign power.

1605

### Notes

- °: *skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *major blood vessel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pierce the body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medical treatment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *illness (love's pangs)*[Return to reference](#) °

**Sir Walter Raleigh** A series of “vicious bitter” descriptions of “false” love, this poem was set to music by William Byrd in *Psalms, Sonnets and Songs* (1588): as ever, what is a poem and what a song, who is author and who is composer, is hard to disentangle.

## Farewell, False Love

Farewell, false love, the oracle<sup>o</sup> of lies,  
A mortal foe and enemy to rest;  
An envious boy, from whom all cares arise,  
A bastard vile, a beast with rage possessed;  
5 A way of error, a temple full of treason,  
In all effects contrary unto reason.

A poisoned serpent covered all with flowers,  
Mother of sighs and murtherer<sup>o</sup> of repose,  
A sea of sorrows from whence are drawn such  
showers  
10 As moisture lends to every grief that grows;  
A school of guile, a net of deep deceit,  
A gilded hook that holds a poisoned bait.

A fortress foiled<sup>o</sup> which reason did defend,  
A siren song, a fever of the mind,  
15 A maze wherein affection finds no end,  
A raging cloud that runs before the wind,  
A substance like the shadow of the sun,  
A goal of grief for which the wisest run.

A quenchless fire, a nurse of trembling fear,  
20 A path that leads to peril and mishap;  
A true retreat of sorrow and despair,  
An idle boy that sleeps in pleasure's lap,  
A deep distrust of that which certain seems,  
A hope of that which reason doubtful deems.

25 Sith<sup>o</sup> then thy trains<sup>o</sup> my younger years betrayed,  
And for my faith<sup>o</sup> ingratitude I find,  
And sith repentance hath my wrongs bewrayed<sup>o</sup>

Whose course was ever contrary to kind<sup>o</sup>—  
False love, desire, and beauty frail, adieu!  
Dead is the root whence all these fancies grew.

30

1588



**The Marriage Balance.** Love or worth? Cupid and a man are set on one side of the balance; money and a woman, probably a widow—she wears black—are set on the other. They are not equally balanced, and money appears to win out over love. Marriages were often strategic in the period, hence the many texts about unattainable love.

---

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: authoritative source [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: murderer [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

- °: *overthrown*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faithfulness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nature*[Return to reference](#) °

# **PASTORAL LOVE**

**Christopher Marlowe** This pastoral lyric of invitation is one of the most famous Elizabethan songs. First published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), a book of poems attributed to Shakespeare, its author has long been recognized as Marlowe. The poem exists in several different manuscript and print forms and media (including as a single-sheet ballad text). Many poets have written replies to it; the best known of them, by Sir Walter Raleigh, follows.



# The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Come live with me and be my love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove<sup>o</sup>  
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,  
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

5 And we will sit upon the rocks,  
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow rivers to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

10 And I will make thee beds of roses  
And a thousand fragrant posies,<sup>o</sup>  
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle<sup>o</sup>  
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

15 A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;  
Fair lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold;

20 A belt of straw and ivy buds,  
With coral clasps and amber studs:  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing  
For thy delight each May morning:  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me and be my love.

1599, 1600

# Notes

- °: *test, experience*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bouquets (also of poems)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dress*[Return to reference °](#)

## **Sir Walter Raleigh**

The “nymph’s reply” is an answer to the preceding poem.

# The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

If all the world and love were young,  
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,  
These pretty pleasures might me move  
To live with thee and be thy love.

5 Time drives the flocks from field to fold  
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold,  
And Philomel<sup>o</sup> becometh dumb;  
The rest complains of cares to come.

10 The flowers do fade, and wanton fields  
To wayward winter reckoning yields;<sup>o</sup>  
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,  
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

15 Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,  
Thy cap, thy kirtle,<sup>o</sup> and thy posies<sup>o</sup>  
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten—  
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

20 Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,  
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,  
All these in me no means can move  
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,  
Had joys no date<sup>o</sup> nor age no need,  
Then these delights my mind might move  
To live with thee and be thy love.

# Notes

- °: *the nightingale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *renders an account*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dress* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bouquets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ending*[Return to reference](#) °

# PLAGUE

**Thomas Nashe** This poem is from the play *A Pleasant Comedy Called Summer's Last Will and Testament*, acted before the archbishop of Canterbury in his palace at Croydon in 1592 and published in 1600. Composed during an outbreak of the bubonic plague, "A Litany" is a contemplation about death from the perspective of a plague sufferer ("Lord have mercy on us" was written on the door of plague-ridden households). Literally, a litany is a form of public prayer in which each of a series of supplications by the clergy is followed by a response from the congregation, with the same formula of response being repeated several times.

## A Litany in Time of Plague

Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss,  
This world uncertain is;  
Fond<sup>o</sup> are life's lustful<sup>o</sup> joys,  
Death proves them all but toys,<sup>o</sup>  
5 None from his darts<sup>o</sup> can fly;  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord, have mercy on us!

Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy you health;  
10 Physic himself<sup>o</sup> must fade,  
All things to end are made.  
The plague full swift goes by;  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord, have mercy on us!

Beauty is but a flower  
15 Which wrinkles will devour;  
Brightness falls from the air,  
Queens have died young and fair,  
Dust hath closed Helen's<sup>o</sup> eye.  
I am sick, I must die.  
20 Lord, have mercy on us!

Strength stoops unto the grave,  
Worms feed on Hector<sup>1</sup> brave;  
Swords may not fight with fate,  
Earth still holds ope her gate.  
25 "Come, come!" the bells<sup>2</sup> do cry.  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord, have mercy on us!



30 Wit with his wantonness  
 Tasteth death's bitterness;  
 Hell's executioner  
 Hath no ears for to hear  
 What vain art<sup>o</sup> can reply.  
 I am sick, I must die.  
 Lord, have mercy on us!  
 35  
 Haste, therefore, each degree,<sup>o</sup>  
 To welcome destiny;  
 Heaven is our heritage,  
 Earth but a player's stage;  
 Mount we unto the sky.  
 40 I am sick, I must die.  
 Lord, have mercy on us!

## 1592 Endnotes

1600

- Note 1: The greatest of the Trojan warriors—killed, nevertheless, by Achilles.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The “passing bell” that was tolled in the parish church to solicit prayers for the dying.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *foolish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lusty* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trifles* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arrows* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine itself* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Helen of Troy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skill* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *social rank* [Return to reference °](#)

**John Davies of Hereford** The following extract is from Davies' long poem *The Triumph of Death*, published in 1609. It is about the 1603 outbreak of plague, which killed one in five Londoners.

# ***From The Triumph of Death***

\* \* \*

At London, sink of sin, as at the fount,<sup>o</sup>  
This all-confounding pestilence began,  
According to that plague's most woeful wont,<sup>o</sup>  
From whence it, flowing, all the realm o'erran.

5 Which to prevent, at first, they pesterèd  
Pesthouses<sup>1</sup> with their murrain-tainted<sup>o</sup> sick,  
But though from them, and thence,<sup>o</sup> the healthy  
fled,  
They, ere suspected, mortified<sup>o</sup> the quick.<sup>o</sup>

10 Those so infected, being ignorant  
That so they are, converse with whomsoe'er  
Whose open shops and houses all do haunt,<sup>2</sup>  
And find most danger where they least do fear.

15 And so not knowing sick folk from the sound  
(For such ill air's not subject to the sense)  
They one with other do themselves confound,<sup>3</sup>  
And so confound all with a pestilence.

\* \* \*

20 The king himself—O wretched times the while!—  
From place to place to save himself did fly;<sup>4</sup>  
Which from himself himself did seek t'exile,  
Who (as amaz'd) not safe knew where to lie.<sup>5</sup>  
It's hard with subjects when the sovereign

Hath no place free from plagues his head to hide;  
And hardly can we say the King doth reign  
That nowhere for just fear can well abide.

25 For nowhere comes he but death follows him  
Hard at the heels, and reacheth at his head;  
So sinks all sports<sup>o</sup> that would like triumphs swim,  
For what life have we when we all are dead:

30 Dead in our spirits, to see our neighbors die;  
To see our king so shift his life to save;  
And with his council all conclusions try<sup>6</sup>  
To keep themselves from th'insatiate<sup>o</sup> grave.

35 For hardly could one man another meet,  
That in his bosom brought not odious death;  
It was confusion but a friend to greet.<sup>o</sup>  
For, like a fiend, he banèd<sup>o</sup> with his breath.

40 The wildest wastes, and places most remote  
From man's repair<sup>o</sup> are now the most secure;  
Happy is he that there doth find a cote<sup>o</sup>  
To shroud his head from this plague's smoking  
shower.

A beggar's home, though dwelling in a ditch,  
If far from London it were situate,  
He might rent out, if pleased him, to the rich,  
That now as Hell their London homes do hate.

\* \* \*

1609

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Special hospitals for people with infectious diseases.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Are frequented by everyone.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: They confuse sick and well (sound) together.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: King James came to the throne in 1603 as London was overcome with plague, delaying his coronation for some months—and “the Coronation being happily over,” notes his proclamation of the time, “the King hereby commands all persons not detained at Court to depart at once.” He took his own advice and fled once more.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As he, panicked, did not know where he could safely rest, he attempted to exile himself from himself.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Experiment with all kinds of solutions.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *source*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *habit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *death-contaminated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *from there*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *killed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *living*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recreations*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *never satisfied*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *simply to greet a friend*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poisoned*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abode, haunt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shed, stall*[Return to reference °](#)

# **SIMPLE LIFE**

**Thomas Campion** This piece praises, in idealized form, the realities of English rustic life—a contrast to the pastoral poetry of so much of this volume. It appears, with its music, in Campion's *Two Books of Aires* (1613).

## Jack and Joan, They Think No Ill

Jack and Joan, they think no ill,  
But loving live, and merry still;<sup>o</sup>  
Do their weekdays' work, and pray  
Devotely<sup>o</sup> on the holyday;  
Skip and trip it<sup>o</sup> on the green,  
5 And help to choose the summer queen;  
Lash out,<sup>o</sup> at a country feast,  
Their silver penny with the best.

Well can they judge of nappy<sup>o</sup> ale,  
And tell at large a winter tale;<sup>1</sup>  
10 Climb up to the apple loft,  
And turn the crabs<sup>o</sup> till they be soft.  
Tib<sup>2</sup> is all the father's joy,  
And little Tom the mother's boy.  
All their pleasure is content;  
15 And care, to pay their yearly rent.<sup>3</sup>

Joan can call by name her cows,  
And deck her windows with green boughs;  
She can wreaths and tutties<sup>o</sup> make,  
And trim with plums a bridal cake.  
20 Jack knows what brings gain or loss,  
And his long flail<sup>4</sup> can stoutly toss;  
Makes the hedge, which others<sup>5</sup> break,  
And ever thinks what he doth speak.<sup>6</sup>

Now you courtly dames and knights,  
25 That study only strange<sup>7</sup> delights,  
Though you scorn the homespun gray,



And revel in your rich array;  
 Though your tongues dissemble deep,  
 And can your heads from danger keep;  
 Yet, for all your pomp and train,<sup>8</sup>  
 Securer lives the silly<sup>o</sup> swain.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: An idle tale, old wives' tale (as in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Used as a typical name for a woman or girl of lower social status.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, their only care is to pay their rent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A long-handled wooden tool for thrashing grain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Aristocrats, while hunting on horseback.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, always says what he truly thinks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: With the connotation of "foreign," "from elsewhere." "Study": devote (yourselves) to.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: (1) Attendants; (2) guile.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *devoutly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *caper; dance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *squander*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heady, strong*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crab apples (roasting)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nosegays*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *simple; lowly*[Return to reference °](#)

**TIME**

**Robert Greene** Greene (1558–1592) was a popular writer of prose and romantic comedies for the stage. Probably the first professional author, he was known for his vicious critiques of colleagues, including Shakespeare. The many stories told of and by him—that he abandoned his wife and son; had another son by a mistress who was sister to a famous criminal, whom he called “Infortunatus”; and died of a “surfeit of pickle herring and Rhenish wine”—have led to speculation that he might have been the model for Shakespeare’s Falstaff. This verse is sung to a lute by a woman, Doralicia, in one of his prose works, *Arbusto: The Anatomy of Fortune* (1584). It argues that everything can change in time, including one’s affections.

## Doralicia's Ditty

In time we see that silver drops  
The craggy stones make soft;  
The slowest snail in time we see,  
Doth creep and clime aloft.

5      With feeble puffs the tallest pine  
In tract of time doth fall;  
The hardest heart in time doth yield  
To Venus' luring call.

10     Where chilling frost a-late did nip  
There flasheth now a fire;  
Where deep disdain bred noisome<sup>o</sup> hate  
There kindleth now desire.

15     Time causeth hope to have his hap;<sup>o</sup>  
What care in time not eased?  
In time I loathed that now I love,  
In both content and pleased.

1584

## Notes

- °: *offensive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(good) outcome* [Return to reference °](#)

**John Dowland** Set to music by Dowland (1563–1626) in his *Book of Songs or Aires* (1603), this lyric is likely to be by its composer. Musicians are interested in time from a practical perspective—but this poem, about working hard but being rejected at court, seems particularly personal. An “obstinate Papist,” as Queen Elizabeth called him, Dowland was, throughout his life, ill-treated for reasons of his faith. He left England to seek employment in a more forgiving country, becoming court lutenist, singer, and composer for Christian IV of Denmark; when he returned, he was taken into the court of James I. Yet Dowland never seems to have stopped feeling like an outsider, and his melancholy verses and music apparently mirror his frustration.

# It Was a Time When Silly Bees Could Speak

It was a time when silly<sup>o</sup> bees could speak,  
And in that time I was a silly bee  
Who fed on time until my heart gan<sup>o</sup> break,  
Yet never found the time would favor me.  
5 Of all the swarm I only did not thrive,  
Yet brought I wax and honey to the hive.

Then thus I buzzed when time no sap would give,  
"Why should this blessed time to me be dry,  
Sith by this time the lazy drone<sup>o</sup> doth live,  
10 The wasp, the worm, the gnat, the butterfly?"  
Mated<sup>o</sup> with grief, I kneelèd on my knees,  
And thus complained unto the king of bees:

"My liege, gods grant thy time may never end,  
And yet vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> to hear my plaint<sup>o</sup> of time,  
Which fruitless flies have found to have a friend,<sup>o</sup>  
15 And I cast down when atomies<sup>o</sup> do clime."  
The king replied but thus, "peace, peevish<sup>o</sup> bee,  
Th'art bound to serve the time, the time not thee."

1603

## Notes

- °: *foolish; lowly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *began to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *male bee* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overcome* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grant* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *complaint*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to be a friend*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *motes in the sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference °](#)

**Sir Walter Raleigh** This poem is divided into halves: three stanzas are on Nature's creation of the visually perfect (but hard-hearted) woman; three stanzas are on Time and how it destroys her. Raleigh adapted the final stanza when writing his own epitaph on the night before his execution (see [p. 479](#)).



## Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk

5 Nature, that washed her hands in milk,  
And had forgot to dry them,  
Instead of earth took snow and silk,  
At Love's request to try them,  
If she a mistress could compose  
To please Love's fancy out of those.

10 Her eyes he would should be of light,  
A violet breath, and lips of jelly;  
Her hair not black, nor overbright,  
And of the softest down her belly;  
As for her inside he'd have it  
Only of wantonness<sup>o</sup> and wit.

15 At Love's entreaty such a one  
Nature made, but with her beauty  
She hath framed a heart of stone;  
So as Love, by ill destiny,  
Must die for her whom Nature gave him,  
Because her darling would not save him.

20 But Time (which Nature doth despise,  
And rudely gives her love the lie,  
Makes Hope a fool, and Sorrow wise)  
His hands do neither wash nor dry;  
But being made of steel and rust,  
Turns snow and silk and milk to dust.

25 The light, the belly, lips, and breath,  
He dims, discolors, and destroys;  
With those he feeds but fills not death,

Which sometimes were the food of joys.  
Yea, Time doth dull each lively wit,  
And dries all wantonness with it.

30

Oh, cruel Time! which takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,  
And pays us but with age and dust;  
Who in the dark and silent grave  
When we have wandered all our ways  
Shuts up the story of our days.

35

1902

## Notes

- °: *playfulness* [Return to reference °](#)

**William Shakespeare** The narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) is about an aristocratic Roman woman who was raped by the heir to the throne, Tarquin, and subsequently committed suicide. The revolt against the Tarquin family, led by Lucrece's husband and family, led to the founding of the Roman Republic (traditionally dated to 509 B.C.E.). In this excerpt, the violated Lucrece considers how our destinies are shaped by time. Time solves problems, but often by obliterating them entirely.

## ***From The Rape of Lucrece***

\* \* \*

Time's glory is to calm contending kings,  
To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light,  
940 To stamp the seal of time in agèd things,  
To wake the morn and sentinel<sup>o</sup> the night,  
To wrong the wronger till he render right,  
To ruinate proud buildings with thy hours,  
945 And smear with dust their glittering golden  
towers;

To fill with wormholes stately monuments,  
To feed oblivion with decay of things,  
To blot old books and alter their contents,  
To pluck the quills from ancient ravens' wings,  
950 To dry the old oak's sap and cherish springs,  
To spoil antiquities of hammered steel,  
And turn the giddy round of Fortune's wheel;

To show the beldam<sup>o</sup> daughters of her daughter,  
To make the child a man, the man a child,  
955 To slay the tiger that doth live by slaughter,  
To tame the unicorn and lion wild,  
To mock the subtle in themselves beguiled,<sup>1</sup>  
To cheer the ploughman with increaseful crops,  
And waste<sup>o</sup> huge stones with little water drops.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The cunning who have been taken in by their own schemes. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *guard* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *old woman* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wear away* [Return to reference °](#)

# TOBACCO

**Robert Wisdome** Wisdome (d. 1568) was a Protestant preacher, exiled under Mary Tudor but, under Elizabeth I, made archdeacon of Ely. His published verse is religious, but this poem, preserved in manuscript and not possible to date, shows his interest in worldly pleasures. A reworked version, "Tobacco's but an Indian weed," sometimes attributed to George Wither, was sung as a ballad and made its way to Virginia with the early settlers.

# A Religious Use of Taking Tobacco

The Indian<sup>o</sup> weed witherèd quite—  
Green at morn, cut down at night—  
Shows thy decay; all flesh is hay:  
Thus think, then drink<sup>o</sup> tobacco.<sup>1</sup>

5 And when the smoke ascends on high,  
Think thou behold'st the vanity  
Of worldly stuff, gone with a puff:  
Thus think, then drink tobacco.

10 The ashes that are left behind  
May serve to put thee still in mind  
That unto dust return thou must:  
Thus think, then drink tobacco.

before 1568 **Endnotes**

1896

- Note 1: Smoke was inhaled and swallowed rather than puffed out. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *Native American* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *smoke* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)



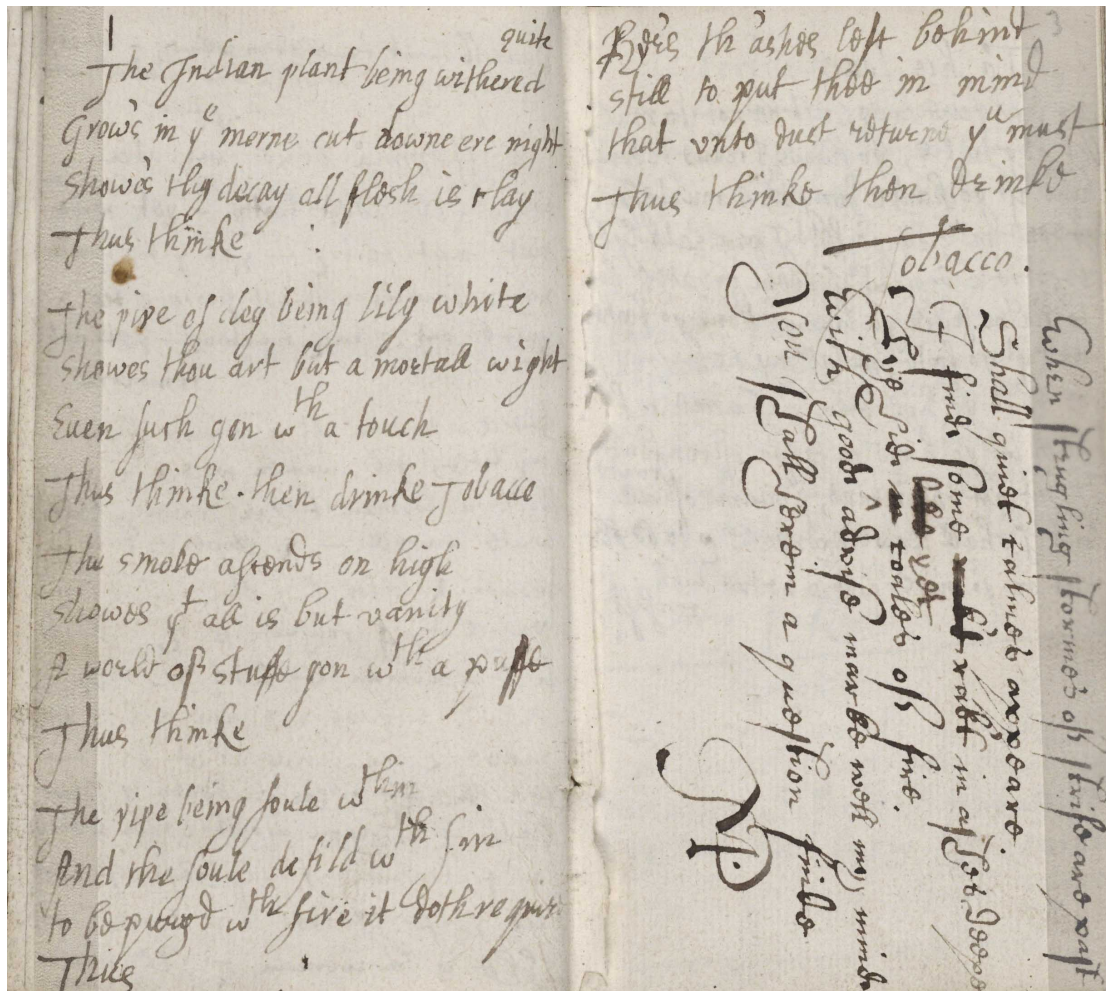
**Tobias Hume** This poem appears in *The First Part of Aires, French, Polish, and Others* (1605), by Hume (ca. 1579–1645), a Scottish composer and mercenary who served as officer with both the Swedish and the Russian armies. He was known for his lighthearted rhymes and musical pranks: here, for example, he argues that tobacco and love are alike.

# Tobacco

Tobacco, tobacco,  
Sing sweetly for tobacco,  
Tobacco is like love,  
O love it,  
For you see I will prove it.  
5

Love maketh lean the fat men's tumor,<sup>o</sup>  
So doth tobacco;  
Love still dries up the wanton<sup>o</sup> humor,  
So doth tobacco;  
Love makes men sail from shore to shore,  
10 So doth tobacco;  
'Tis fond<sup>o</sup> love often makes men poor.  
So doth tobacco;  
Love makes men scorn all coward fears,  
So doth tobacco;  
15 Love often sets men by the ears,<sup>o</sup>  
So doth tobacco.

Tobacco, tobacco,  
Sing sweetly for tobacco.  
Tobacco is like love,  
20 O love it,  
For you see I have proved it.



This commonplace book held in the Beinecke Rare Books Library, Yale University, shows a text that descends from Wisdome's poem about tobacco. In this new form, it is often attributed to George Wither.

## Notes

- °: swollen condition [Return to reference](#) °
- °: unruly; promiscuous [Return to reference](#) °
- °: foolish [Return to reference](#) °
- °: causes men to quarrel [Return to reference](#) °

**TRADE**

**Robert Wilson** The song of the broom seller is found in *The Three Ladies of London* (1584), a play by the clown and playwright Wilson (active 1572–1600). It may be by him or may originate in a lost ballad entered into the Stationer's Register in 1563–64 called "Buy, Brooms, Buy." Because the text is directed to "maidens" with money or goods to barter, and is sung in the play by a woman, Conscience, it offers a glimpse into female trade and social relationships of the period.

# New Brooms

New brooms, green brooms, will you buy any?  
Come maidens, come quickly, let me take a penny.

My brooms are not steeped,<sup>o</sup>  
but very well bound;  
My brooms be not crooked,  
5 but smooth cut and round.  
I wish it should please you  
to buy of my broom;  
Then would it well ease me  
if market were done.<sup>1</sup>  
10 Have you any old boots,  
or any old shoon,<sup>o</sup>  
Pouch-rings,<sup>o</sup> or buskins,  
to cope<sup>o</sup> for new broom?  
15 If so you have, maidens,  
I pray you bring hither,  
That you and I friendly  
may bargain together.

New brooms, green brooms, will you buy any:  
Come maidens, come quickly, let me take a penny.

20

1584

## Endnotes

- Note 1: When the market is finished. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *soft* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shoes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rings for fastening purses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barter* [Return to reference](#) °

**Robert Wilson** This dialogue song, in which potential male servants beg for hire—and are firmly rejected by the distrustful woman called Conscience—is from Wilson's play *The Three Ladies of London* (1584). The characters in this play are depicted by their names: the men in this scene are called Fraud, Dissimulation, Usury, Simony, and Simplicity; the women are called Lucre, Love, and Conscience.



# Hunting for Hire

*Good ladies, take pity and grant our desire.*

Speak boldly and tell me what is't you require.

*Your service,<sup>o</sup> good ladies, is that we do crave.*

We like not nor list<sup>o</sup> not such servants to have.

5 *If you entertain us, we trusty will be—  
But if you refrain us, then most unhappy—  
We will come, we will run, we will bend at your beck.  
o  
—  
We will ply,<sup>1</sup> we will hie,<sup>o</sup> for fear of a check.<sup>o</sup>*

You do feign,<sup>o</sup> you do flatter, you do lie, you do  
prate;<sup>o</sup>

10 You will steal, you will rob, you will kill in your  
hate.

I deny you, I defy you, then cease of your talking,  
I refrain you,<sup>o</sup> I disdain you, therefore get you  
walking.

1584

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Apply ourselves. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *to serve you* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *desire* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *when you beckon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hurry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reprimand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chatter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shun you*[Return to reference](#) °

**Anonymous** The three poems that follow are all from *Deuteromelia* (1609), a song collection by the composer Thomas Ravenscroft (1588–1635). Ravenscroft was a boy chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral who went on to become a composer in his own right. He also published song collections, which seem to have mingled popular oral music—street cries, songs of trade—with songs of his own. This song, which gathers the street cries of a variety of London vendors, may be by Ravenscroft or may be traditional. In it, we see female and male traders who are made happy or unhappy by their jobs. The poorest people are here said to be the happiest.

# Cries of London

Who liveth so merry in all this land  
As doth the poor widow that selleth the sand?  
And ever she singeth, as I can guess,  
"Will you buy any sand, any sand, mistress?"

5 The broom-man<sup>o</sup> maketh his living most sweet  
With carrying of brooms from street to street.  
Who would desire a pleasanter thing  
Than all the day long to do nothing but sing?

10 The chimney-sweeper all the long day  
He singeth and sweepeth the soot away.  
Yet when he comes home, although he be  
weary,  
With his sweet wife he maketh full merry.

15 The cobbler he sits cobbling till noon,  
And cobbleth his shoes till they be done.  
Yet doth he not fear, and so doth say,  
For he knows his work will soon decay.

20 The merchantman doth sail on the seas,  
And lie on the shipboard with little ease,  
Always in doubt<sup>o</sup> the rock is near—  
How can he be merry and make good cheer?

25 The husbandman<sup>o</sup> all day goeth to plow,  
And when he comes home he serveth<sup>o</sup> his sow.  
He moileth<sup>o</sup> and toileth all the long year,  
How can he be merry and make good cheer?

The serving-man waiteth<sup>o</sup> from street to street,

30                   With blowing his nails and beating his feet,<sup>1</sup>  
                       And serveth for forty shillings a year,  
                       That 'tis impossible to make good cheer.  
  
                       Who liveth so merry and maketh such sport  
                       As those that be of thy poorest sort?  
                       The poorest sort, wheresoever they be,  
                       They gather together by one, two, and three,  
 35                   And every man will spend his penny:  
                       What makes such a shot<sup>o</sup> among a great many?  
                       <sup>2</sup>

ca. 1609

“Soldier’s Song” was probably gathered by Ravenscroft, as it concerns mercenaries returning from the Dutch Revolt (1566/8–1648) against the Spaniards. The French imprecation suggests the soldiers have been fighting alongside the French and have learned some of their phrases. The text combines bravado and desperation: these penniless fighters have returned home desperate for money and drink; the song contains a threat that they may do mischief to those who will not help them.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Typical actions of someone who is cold.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In this final stanza the poorest are gathered in the alehouse spending their hard-earned money.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *street sweeper*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suspecting*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *farmer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tends to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *works hard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attends*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *payment*[Return to reference °](#)

# Soldiers' Song

We be soldiers three,  
*Pardonnez-moi je vous en prie,*<sup>1</sup>  
Lately come forth of the low country,  
With never a penny of money.

5 Here, goodfellow,<sup>o</sup> I drink to thee,  
*Pardonnez-moi je vous en prie,*  
To all goodfellows wherever they be,  
With never a penny of money.

10 And he that will not pledge me<sup>2</sup> this,  
*Pardonnez-moi je vous en prie,*  
Pays for the shot,<sup>3</sup> whatever it is,  
With never a penny of money.

15 Charge it<sup>o</sup> again, boy, charge it again,  
*Pardonnez-moi je vous en prie,*  
As long as there is any ink in thy pen<sup>4</sup>  
With never a penny of money.

ca. 1609

"Mariners' Song" may be a companion piece by Ravenscroft to match "Soldiers' Song," though it may be traditional.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Excuse me if you please (French). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Drink with me as a sign of friendship. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Pays the bill, or, alternatively, pays for the drink—though there is a threat, too, of actual shooting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Presumably to record the debt.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *drinking companion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *refill it*[Return to reference °](#)



# Mariners' Song

We be three poor mariners  
Newly come from the seas;  
We spend our lives in jeopardy  
Whiles others live at ease.  
5 Shall we go dance the round  
And shall we go dance the round?  
And he that is a bully boy,<sup>o</sup> come pledge me on the  
ground.<sup>1</sup>

We care not for those martial men  
That do our states disdain;  
10 But we care for those merchantmen  
Which do our states maintain.<sup>2</sup>  
To them we dance this round  
Around; to them we dance this round.  
And he that is a bully boy, come pledge me on the  
ground.

ca. 1609

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Drink a toast to me. The term "ground" mingles a physical place and music: the ground was the plainsong or melody. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because the merchants trade in ships, they maintain mariners. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *good young man* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

**WOMEN**

**Sir John Harington, Lady Mary Cheke** This poetic exchange is recorded in a commonplace book of about 1630, kept by Robert Bishop (dates unknown). It consists of a poem by Harington (1561–1612)—published, but in a different form, in 1618—that claims that there once was a “certain” man but has never been a certain woman, not even in the Bible (the joke conflates several senses of *certain*: “particular,” “clear,” “able to be relied on,” and “knowing one’s own mind”). The reply, by Cheke (ca. 1532–1616), lady of the privy chamber to Elizabeth I, takes the form of an answer poem: it turns the table on the first poem and corrects it (in a literal but also figurative sense, as, Cheke points out, the phrase “certain woman” *is* in the Bible). By making Harington’s statement into the first part of a dialogue, Cheke upstages him to “win” what she has ingeniously rendered a dispute.

## SIR JOHN HARINGTON: A Certain Man

It was not certain when a certain preacher—  
That having never learned would be<sup>o</sup> a teacher—  
And having thus in Latin read his text  
Of "Erat quidam homo", much perplexed,  
He seemed the same with diligence to scan<sup>o</sup>  
5 In English thus, " 'There was *a certain* man'.<sup>1</sup>  
And now", said he, "good people mark you this,  
He saith *there was*, he doth not say *there is*,  
For in this age of ours, it is most certain,  
Of promise, word, deed, oath, there's no man  
10 certain,  
Yet by my text it's clearly brought to pass<sup>o</sup>  
That surely once a certain man there was.  
But this I think, in all the bible no man  
Can find this text: 'there was a certain woman.' "  
before 1612

### Endnotes

- Note 1: That no such line appears in the Vulgate (Latin) Bible undercuts Harington's story. The preacher is probably looking at "Homo quidam erat dives" (There was a certain rich man; Luke 16:19).[Return to reference 1](#)

### Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *wanted to be*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *interpreted*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *brought about*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## LADY MARY CHEKE: The Reply

That no man yet could in the Bible find  
A certain woman argues men all blind:  
Blind as the preacher who had little learning,  
The certain cause of his so ill<sup>o</sup> discerning.  
A certain woman of the multitude  
5 Said "blessed be the paps<sup>o</sup> that gave our savior  
food".<sup>2</sup>  
A certain woman, too, a millstone<sup>3</sup> threw  
And from the wall Abimelech she slew.<sup>4</sup>  
Nay more. By men though it be oversaid,<sup>o</sup>  
The text records there was a certain maid,  
10 Which proves directly certain women then,  
And certain too, more certain far then men.<sup>5</sup>  
Your preacher, then, may well stand much perplexed  
To see how grossly he belied<sup>o</sup> the text,  
And blush that's sermon was no better suited  
15 Than by a woman thus to be confuted.<sup>o</sup>  
Yet, for his comfort, one true note he made  
When "there is now no certain man" he said.

before 1612

## Endnotes

- Note 2: See Luke 11:27. Cheke's poem corrects Harington's by pointing out that in the Bible the phrase "a certain woman/girl" can in fact be found, and once again plays on "certain."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Large flat stone used for grinding grain.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: See Judges 9:53.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the Bible says “certain women” even more often than it says “certain men.”[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *poorly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *breasts*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mentioned previously*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gave a false impression of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proved wrong*[Return to reference °](#)

**Lady Anne Southwell** Southwell (1574–1636)  
recorded this poem in a commonplace book dated 1636. The book  
contained verse that she wrote throughout her life.

# All Married Men Desire to Have Good Wives

All married men desire to have good wives,  
But few give good example by their lives.  
They are our head; they would have us their heels.<sup>1</sup>  
This makes the good wife kick; the goodman<sup>o</sup> reels.<sup>o</sup>  
When God brought Eve to Adam for a bride,  
5 The text says she was ta'en from out man's side,  
A symbol of that side whose sacred blood  
Flowed for his spouse: the church's saving good.<sup>2</sup>  
This is a mystery<sup>o</sup> perhaps too deep  
For blockish<sup>o</sup> Adam that was fallen asleep.

10

before 1637

## Endnotes

- Note 1: See 1 Corinthians 11:3: "the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: For this creation story, see Genesis 2:21–22. John 19:34 describes the blood and water that flowed from the pierced side of Christ on the Cross; here, as often, his spouse is the church. The notion of a "saving good"—that a good act might indicate status as one of the "elect" destined for heaven—is associated with Protestantism.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *husband* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recoils* [Return to reference °](#)



- °: *religious truth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stupid*[Return to reference](#) °

## JOHN LYLY 1554–1606

John Lyly was the grandson of William Lily, the author of the standard Latin grammar that every English schoolboy studied. After receiving an M.A. degree at Oxford, Lyly went to London, where his prose romance *Euphues* (1578) enjoyed an instant success. He later wrote several elegant, sophisticated plays acted at court by the children's companies and served several terms as a member of Parliament, though his hopes of obtaining a lucrative court appointment were disappointed.

The title *Euphues*, taken from the name of that book's hero, is Greek for "of good natural parts, graceful, witty"; the subtitle, *Anatomy of Wit*, means something like "analysis of the mental faculties." The plot of the work involves a young man who leaves university for the temptations of the city, falls in love, betrays his best friend, is in turn betrayed, repents, and thereafter ladles out great quantities of moral wisdom. But the story is secondary to the prose style, which has come to be known as "euphuism" and which greatly influenced a generation of writers eager to follow the fashion the book established. The style has two distinctive features: a sentence structure based on comparison and antithesis; and a wealth of verbal embellishments, including proverbs, incidents from history and poetry, and fanciful similes drawn from contemporary science, classical texts, or the author's own imagination. Euphuism became a rage for a while, especially at court. The style may have

been particularly popular among court women: in 1632 the publisher of Lyly's *Six Court Comedies* informed his readers that "all our ladies were then his [Euphues's or Lyly's] scholars, and the beauty in court who could not parley Euphuism was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French." When it started to fall out of fashion, euphuism was criticized by Sidney, parodied by Shakespeare, and mocked by Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson. Although it did not last, Lyly's highly self-conscious, overwrought style is an example of the Elizabethan fascination with ornate language and artifice.

# ***From Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit***

## **[EUPHUES INTRODUCED]**

There dwelt in Athens a young gentleman of great patrimony, and of so comely a personage, that it was doubted<sup>1</sup> whether he were more bound to Nature for the lineaments of his person, or to Fortune for the increase of his possessions. But Nature impatient of comparisons, and as it were disdainning a companion or copartner in her working, added to this comeliness of his body such a sharp capacity of mind, that not only she proved Fortune counterfeit, but was half of that opinion that she herself was only current.<sup>2</sup> This young gallant, of more wit<sup>3</sup> than wealth, and yet of more wealth than wisdom, seeing himself inferior to none in pleasant conceits,<sup>4</sup> thought himself superior to all in honest conditions, insomuch that he deemed himself so apt to all things, that he gave himself almost to nothing, but practicing of those things commonly which are incident to these sharp wits, fine phrases, smooth quipping, merry taunting, using jesting without mean,<sup>5</sup> and abusing mirth without measure. As therefore the sweetest rose hath his prickles, the finest velvet his brack,<sup>6</sup> the fairest flower his bran,<sup>7</sup> so the sharpest wit hath his wanton will, and the holiest head his wicked way. And true it is that some men write and most men believe, that in all perfect shapes, a blemish bringeth rather a liking every way to the eyes, than a loathing any way to the mind. Venus had her mole in her cheek which made her more amiable: Helen<sup>8</sup> her scar on her chin which Paris called *cos amoris*, the whetsone of love. Aristippus his wart, Lycurgus<sup>9</sup> his wen: So likewise in the disposition of the mind, either virtue is over-shadowed with some vice, or vice overcast with some virtue. Alexander valiant in war, yet given to wine. Tully eloquent in his glozes, yet vainglorious: Solomon wise, yet too too

wanton: David holy but yet an homicide:<sup>1</sup> none more witty than Euphues, yet at the first none more wicked. The freshest colors soonest fade, the teenest<sup>2</sup> razor soonest turneth his edge, the finest cloth is soonest eaten with moths, and the cambric sooner stained than the coarse canvas: which appeared well in this Euphues, whose wit being like wax apt to receive any impression, and having the bridle in his own hands, either to use the rein or the spur, disdaining counsel, leaving his country, loathing his old acquaintance, thought either by wit to obtain some conquest, or by shame to abide<sup>3</sup> some conflict, and leaving the rule of reason, rashly ran unto destruction. Who preferring fancy before friends, and his present humor<sup>4</sup> before honor to come, laid reason in water being too salt for his taste, and followed unbridled affection, most pleasant for his tooth.<sup>5</sup> When parents have more care how to leave their children wealthy than wise, and are more desirous to have them maintain the name than the nature of a gentleman; when they put gold into the hands of youth, where they should put a rod under their girdle,<sup>6</sup> when instead of awe they make them past grace, and leave them rich executors of goods, and poor executors of godliness, then is it no marvel that the son, being left rich by his father's will, become retchless by his own will.<sup>7</sup>

It hath been an old-said saw,<sup>8</sup> and not of less truth than antiquity, that wit is the better if it be the dearer bought: as in the sequel of this history<sup>9</sup> shall most manifestly appear. It happened this young imp<sup>1</sup> to arrive at Naples (a place of more pleasure than profit, and yet of more profit than piety), the very walls and windows whereof shewed it rather to be the Tabernacle of Venus than the Temple of Vesta.<sup>2</sup>

There was all things necessary and in readiness that might either allure the mind to lust or entice the heart to folly, a court more meet<sup>3</sup> for an atheist than for one of Athens, for Ovid than for Aristotle, for a graceless lover than for a godly liver: more fitter for Paris than Hector, and meeter for Flora than Diana.<sup>4</sup>

Here my youth (whether for weariness he could not, or for wantonness would not, go any further) determined to make his abode: whereby it is evidently seen that the fleetest fish swalloweth the delicatest bait, that the highest soaring hawk traineth<sup>5</sup> to the lure, and that the wittiest sconce<sup>6</sup> is inveigled with the sudden view or alluring vanities.

Here he wanted<sup>7</sup> no companions which courted him continually with sundry kinds of devices, whereby they might either soak<sup>8</sup> his purse to reap commodity, or soothe his person to win credit, for he had guests and companions of all sorts.

There frequented to this lodging and mansion house as well the spider to suck poison of his fine wit as the bee to gather honey, as well the drone as the dove, the fox as the lamb, as well Damocles<sup>9</sup> to betray him as Damon<sup>1</sup> to be true to him: yet he behaved himself so warily, that he singled his game<sup>2</sup> wisely. He could easily discern Apollo's music from Pan his pipe,<sup>3</sup> and Venus's beauty from Juno's bravery,<sup>4</sup> and the faith of Laelius<sup>5</sup> from the flattery of Aristippus, he welcomed all but trusted none, he was merry but yet so wary that neither the flatterer could take advantage to entrap him in his talk nor the wisest any assurance of his friendship: who being demanded of<sup>6</sup> one what countryman he was, he answered, "What countryman am I not? If I be in Crete, I can lie, if in Greece I can shift, if in Italy I can court it:<sup>7</sup> if thou ask whose son I am also, I ask thee whose son I am not. I can carouse with Alexander, abstain with Romulus, eat with the Epicure, fast with the Stoic, sleep with Endymion, watch with Chrysippus,"<sup>8</sup> using these speeches and other like. An old gentleman in Naples seeing his pregnant wit,<sup>9</sup> his eloquent tongue somewhat taunting, yet with delight, his mirth without measure yet not without wit, his sayings vainglorious yet pithy, began to bewail his nurture and to muse at his nature, being incensed against the one as most pernicious, and enflamed with the other as most precious: for he well knew that so rare a wit would in time either breed an intolerable trouble or bring an incomparable treasure to the common weal:<sup>1</sup> at the one he greatly pitied, at the other he rejoiced.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Doubtful, uncertain.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Genuine.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Intellect.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Witty expressions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Moderation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Break, flaw.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Husk.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Greek queen whom Paris abducted to Troy: the most beautiful woman in the world.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The legendary lawgiver of Sparta. Aristippus was a disciple of Socrates and traditionally the founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy, which taught that life's goal is pleasure.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The biblical King David loved Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, killed so he could marry her. Alexander the Great killed his friend Clitus in a drunken brawl. Tully (Marcus Tullius Cicero) was the great Roman orator, famous for his "glozes" (flattering speeches). Solomon, David's son, was famous both for his wisdom and for his many wives.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Keenest.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Stand firm in.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Whimsy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Taste. "Affection": passion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, whip them. "Girdle": belt.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Appetite, the opposite of reason. "Retchless": reckless.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Saying, proverb.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Rest of this story.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Novice.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Symbolizing chastity, in contrast to Venus.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fitting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Diana was the goddess of chastity. Ovid was famous for his love poems, Aristotle for his profound philosophical works. Paris was the lover of Helen, in contrast to his brother Hector, the greatest Trojan warrior. Flora was a fertility goddess whose annual celebrations were noted for lasciviousness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Is attracted to.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Head, brain.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Lacked.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drain.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Famous as a flatterer of Dionysius, who gave him a gorgeous banquet but made him sit with a sword suspended over his head by a single hair, to show how dangerous eminence is.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Famous in classical legend as the friend of Pythias, so loyal to him that he offered to be executed in his place.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Separated his target animal from the herd—that is, made distinctions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In classical myth, Apollo's music was much superior to that which Pan, god of the wild spaces, produced on his pipes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Splendid attire.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Laelius was famous as the faithful friend of Scipio Africanus the Younger.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Asked by.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Inhabitants of the island of Crete early had a reputation as liars. Lyly is elaborating or inventing when he says that the Greeks "shift" (practice or live by deceit) and that the Italians "court it" (behave in a courtly manner).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
Chrysippus was a celebrated Stoic philosopher, so devoted to study that he would "watch" (stay up all night) with his books.



Romulus was the legendary founder and first king of Rome. Exposed as an infant with his twin brother, Remus, he was rescued and suckled by a she-wolf and became a symbol of abstinence. The followers of Epicurus (Epicureans) were thought to care for nothing but pleasure. The austere Stoics venerated duty. Endymion was a youth in Greek legend renowned for his beauty and his eternal sleep on Mount Latmus, where the moon goddess fell in love with him.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Fertile mind. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Commonwealth. [Return to reference 1](#)

## **SIR PHILIP SIDNEY**

### **1554–1586**

Sir Philip Sidney's face was "spoiled with pimples," Ben Jonson remarked in 1619, distancing himself from the virtual cult that had arisen in the years after Sidney's death. Knight, soldier, poet, friend, and patron, Sidney seemed to most Elizabethans to embody all the traits of character and personality they admired: he was Castiglione's perfect courtier come to life. When he was killed in battle in the Low Countries at the age of thirty-two, fighting for the Protestant cause against the hated Spanish, all England mourned. Stories, not all necessarily true, immediately began to circulate about his gallantry on the battlefield—grievously wounded, he gave his water to a dying foot soldier with the words "Thy necessity is yet greater than mine"—and about his astonishing self-composure as he himself lay dying: suffering from his putrifying, gangrenous wound, Sidney composed a song and had it sung by his deathbed. When his corpse was brought back to England for burial, the spectacular funeral procession, one of the most elaborate ever staged, almost bankrupted his father-in-law, Francis Walsingham, the wealthy head of Queen Elizabeth's secret service.

Philip Sidney's father was Sir Henry Sidney, thrice lord deputy (governor) of Ireland, and his mother was a sister of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the most spectacular and powerful of all the queen's favorites. He entered Shrewsbury School in 1564, at the age of ten, on the same day as Fulke Greville, who became his lifelong

friend and his biographer. Greville wrote of Sidney, "Though I lived with him and knew him from a child, yet I never knew him other than a man—with such staidness of mind, lovely and familiar gravity, as carried grace and reverence above greater years." He attended Oxford but left without taking a degree; he completed his education by extended travels on the Continent. There he met many of the most important people of the time, from kings and queens to philosophers, theologians, and poets. In France he witnessed the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, which began in Paris on August 24, 1572, and raged through France for more than a month, as Catholic mobs incited by Queen Catherine de Médicis slaughtered perhaps fifty thousand Huguenots (French Protestants). This experience undoubtedly strengthened Sidney's ardent Protestantism. In an intense correspondence with his mentor, the humanist reformer Hubert Languet of Burgundy, France, he brooded on how he could help save Europe from what he viewed as the Roman Catholic menace.

Languet and his associates clearly hoped that this brilliant and wonderfully well-connected young Englishman would be able to steer English royal policy toward active intervention in Europe's wars of religion. Yet when he returned to England, Sidney found the direct path to heroic action blocked by the caution and hard-nosed realism of Queen Elizabeth and her principal advisers. Though she sent him on some modest diplomatic missions, the queen clearly regarded the zealous young man with considerable skepticism. As a prominent courtier with literary interests, Sidney actively encouraged authors such as Edward Dyer, Greville, and, most important, Edmund Spenser, who dedicated *The Shepheardes Calender* to him as "the president [chief exemplar] of noblesse and of chevalree." But he clearly longed to be something more than an influential patron of letters. In 1580 his Protestant convictions led him publicly to oppose Queen Elizabeth's projected marriage to the Catholic Duke of Anjou. The queen, who hated interference with her diplomatic maneuvers, angrily dismissed Sidney from the court.

He retired to Wilton, the estate of his beloved and learned sister, Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and there he wrote a long, elaborate epic romance in prose, called *Arcadia*. Sidney's claim, made with studied nonchalance, that the work was written on the spur of the moment for his sister's private entertainment is belied by its considerable literary, political, and moral ambitions, qualities that were reinforced and intensified in the extensive revisions he began to make to it in 1582. Our selection is from this revised version, which scholars call the *New Arcadia*.

In addition to *Arcadia*, which inspired many imitations, including the *Urania* of Sidney's niece, Lady Mary Wroth, two other influential works by Sidney have had still more lasting importance. One of these, *The Defense of Poesy*, is the major work of literary criticism produced in the English Renaissance. In this long essay Sidney eloquently defends poetry (his term for all imaginative literature) against its attackers and, in the process, greatly exalts the role of the poet, the freedom of the imagination, and the moral value of fiction. Perhaps Sidney's finest literary achievement is *Astrophil and Stella* (Starlover and Star), the first of the great Elizabethan sonnet cycles. The principal focus of these sonnets is not a sequence of events or an unfolding relationship. Rather, they explore the lover's state of mind and soul—the contradictory impulses, intense desires, and frustrations that haunt him.

In his guise as a lovelorn sonneteer, Sidney repeatedly insists that the thought of his beloved drives all more mundane matters from his mind. Yet a number of the sonnets betray a continuing preoccupation with matters of politics and foreign policy. Neither love nor literature could distract Sidney for long from what he took to be his destined role. In 1585 he tried to join Sir Francis Drake's West Indian expedition but was prevented by the queen; instead, she appointed him governor of Flushing in the Netherlands, where as a volunteer and knight-errant he engaged in several vicious skirmishes in the war against Spain. At Zutphen on September 13, 1586, leading a charge against great odds, Sidney was wounded in

the thigh, shortly after he had thrown away his thigh armor in an ill-fated chivalric gesture. He died twenty-six days later.

In keeping with the norms of his class, Sidney did not publish any of his major literary works himself. His ambition, continually thwarted, was to be a man of action whose deeds would affect his country's destiny. Yet he was the author of the most ambitious work of prose fiction, the most important piece of literary criticism, and the most influential sonnet cycle of the Elizabethan Age.

## **The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia**     Sidney

wrote his epic romance in two forms, which scholars have dubbed the *Old Arcadia* and the *New Arcadia*. Shortly after the *Old Arcadia* was completed, in five "books," Sidney began to recast and greatly expand it, but he broke off in midsentence and left the revision unfinished. This revised fragment, almost three books, is known as the *New Arcadia*; it was published after his death, in 1590. In 1593 Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, herself a gifted writer, made some small changes to the *New Arcadia* and the last two books of the *Old*, stitched them together, and published them as a single text. (The complete *Old Arcadia*, as Sidney had left it in manuscript, was not rediscovered and published until the twentieth century.) Both Sidney's original version and his revision are full of oracles, princes in disguise, mistaken identity, melodramatic incidents, and tangled love situations, but the *New Arcadia* has a much more labyrinthine, interwoven plot, as well as a more consistently elevated tone of moral and heroic high seriousness. Some episodes are of political interest, and Sidney clearly put into the work more of his serious thought on statecraft (the responsibilities of a king or queen, the evils of rebellion, and the duties of ministers, judges, and advisers of state) than his claim that the *Arcadia* was mere entertainment suggests. Many poems—pastoral eclogues and songs—are interspersed throughout the narrative; they represent Sidney's experiments with diverse lyric kinds and verse forms.

# ***From The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia<sup>1</sup>***

***From The First Book***

## **[THE ABSENT URANIA]**

It was in the time that the earth begins to put on her new apparel against the approach of her lover, and that the sun, running a most even course, becomes an indifferent arbiter between the night and the day, when the hopeless shepherd Strephon was come to the sands which lie against the island of Cithera; where viewing the place with a heavy kind of delight, and sometimes casting his eyes to the isleward, he called his friendly rival, the pastor<sup>2</sup> Klaius, unto him; and setting first down in his darkened countenance a doleful copy of what he would speak,

“O my Klaius,” said he, “hither we are now come to pay the rent for which we are so called unto by over-busy remembrance—remembrance, restless remembrance, which claims not only this duty of us but for it will have us forget ourselves. I pray you, when we were amid our flock, and that of other shepherds some were running after their sheep strayed beyond their bounds, some delighting their eyes with seeing them nibble upon the short and sweet grass, some medicining their sick ewes, some setting a bell for an ensign of a sheepish squadron,<sup>3</sup> some with more leisure inventing new games of exercising their bodies and sporting their wits; did remembrance grant us any holiday either for pastime or devotion—nay either for necessary food or natural rest—but that still it forced our thoughts to work upon this place where we last (alas, that the word *last* should so long last) did gaze our eyes upon her ever-flourishing beauty? Did it not still cry within us ‘Ah, you base-minded

wretches, are your thoughts so deeply bemired in the trade or ordinary worldeings, as for respect of gain some paltry wool may yield you, to let so much time pass without knowing perfectly her estate, especially in so troublesome a season; to leave that shore unsaluted from whence you may see to the island where she dwelleth; to leave those steps unkissed wherein Urania printed the farewell of all beauty?’

“Well, then, remembrance commanded; we obeyed, and here we find that as our remembrance came ever clothed unto us in the form of this place, so this place gives new heat to the fever of our languishing remembrance. . . .” \* \* \*

[*Klaius*] “. . . Hath not the only love<sup>4</sup> of her made us, being silly ignorant shepherds, raise up our thoughts above the ordinary level of the world, so as great clerks<sup>5</sup> do not disdain our conference? Hath not the desire to seem worthy in her eyes made us, when others were sleeping, to sit viewing the course of the heavens; when others were running at base,<sup>6</sup> to run over learned writings; when others mark<sup>7</sup> their sheep, we mark ourselves? Hath not she thrown reason upon our desires and, as it were, given eyes unto Cupid?<sup>8</sup> Hath in any but in her, love-fellowship maintained friendship between rivals, and beauty taught the beholders chastity?”

### [THE COUNTRY OF ARCADIA]

\* \* \* The third day after, in the time that the morning did strew roses and violets in the heavenly floor against the coming of the sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which could in most dainty variety recount their wrong-caused sorrow)<sup>9</sup> made them put off their sleep, and rising from under a tree (which that night had been their pavilion) they went on their journey, which by and by welcomed Musidorus’ eyes, wearied with the wasted soil of Laconia,<sup>1</sup> with delightful prospects.

There were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees; humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with refreshing of silver rivers; meadows enameled<sup>2</sup> with all sorts of eye-



pleasing flowers; thickets, which, being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so to by the cheerful deposition<sup>3</sup> of many well-tuned birds; each pasture stored with sheep feeding with sober security, while the pretty lambs with bleating oratory craved the dams' comfort; here a shepherd's boy piping as though he should never be old; there a young shepherdess knitting and withal singing, and it seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work and her hands kept time to her voice's music. As for the houses of the country—for many houses came under their eye—they were all scattered, no two being one by the other, and yet not so far off as that it barred mutual succour: a show, as it were, of an accompanable solitariness and of a civil wildness.<sup>4</sup>

"I pray you," said Musidorus, then first unsealing his long silent lips, "what countries be these we pass through which are so divers in show, the one wanting no store,<sup>5</sup> the other having no store but of want?"

"The country," answered Klaius, "where you were cast ashore and now are passed through is Laconia, not so poor by the barrenness of the soil (though in itself not passing fertile) as by a civil war, which being these two years within the bowels of that estate between the gentlemen and the peasants (by them named Helots)<sup>6</sup> hath in this sort as it were disfigured the face of nature, and made it so unhospital<sup>7</sup> as now you have found it: the towns neither of the one side nor the other willingly opening their gates to strangers, nor strangers willingly entering for fear of being mistaken.

"But this country where now you set your foot is Arcadia;<sup>8</sup> and even hard by is the house of Kalandar whither we lead you: this country being thus decked with peace and (the child of peace) good husbandry. These houses you see so scattered are of men as we two are that live upon the commodity of their sheep, and therefore in the division of the Arcadian estate are termed shepherds: a happy people, wanting little because they desire not much."

"What cause then," said Musidorus, "made you venture to leave this sweet life and put yourself in yonder unpleasant and dangerous realm?"

"Guarded with poverty," answered Strephon, "and guided with love."

### [KALANDER TELLS ABOUT BASILIUS]

Which Kalander perceiving, "Well," said he, "my dear guest, I know your mind and I will satisfy it. Neither will I do it like a niggardly answerer, going no further than the bounds of the question; but I will discover<sup>9</sup> unto you as well that wherein my knowledge is common with others as that which by extraordinary means is delivered unto me, knowing so much in you (though not long acquainted) that I shall find your ears faithful treasurers." So then sitting down in two chairs and sometimes casting his eye to the picture,<sup>1</sup> he thus spake:

"This country Arcadia among all the provinces of Greece hath ever been had in singular reputation; partly for the sweetness of the air and other natural benefits, but principally for the well-tempered minds of the people who (finding that the shining title of glory, so much affected by other nations, doth indeed help little to the happiness of life) are the only people which, as by their justice and providence give neither cause nor hope to their neighbors to annoy them, so are they not stirred with false praise to trouble others' quiet, thinking it a small reward for the wasting of their own lives in ravening<sup>2</sup> that their posterity should long after say they had done so. Even the Muses<sup>1</sup> seem to approve their good determination by choosing this country for their chief repairing<sup>3</sup> place, and by bestowing their perfections so largely here that the very shepherds have their fancies lifted to so high conceits<sup>4</sup> that the learned of other nations are content both to borrow their names and imitate their cunning.

"Here dwelleth and reigneth this prince (whose picture you see) by name Basilius;<sup>5</sup> a prince of sufficient skill to govern so quiet a country, where the good minds of the former princes had set down good laws, and the well-bringing up of the people did serve as a most sure bond to hold them. But to be plain with you, he excels in

nothing so much as in the zealous love of his people, wherein he doth not only pass all his own foregoers but, as I think, all the princes living. Whereof the cause is that though he exceed not in the virtues which get admiration, as depth of wisdom, height of courage, and largeness of magnificence, yet is he notable in those which stir affection, as truth of word, meekness, courtesy, mercifulness, and liberality.

“He, being already well stricken in years, married a young princess named Gynecia,<sup>6</sup> daughter to the king of Cyprus, of notable beauty as by her picture you see: a woman of great wit, and in truth of more princely virtues than her husband; of most unspotted chastity, but of so working a mind and so vehement spirits as a man may say it was happy<sup>7</sup> she took a good course, for otherwise it would have been terrible.

“Of these two are brought into the world two daughters, so beyond measure excellent in all the gifts allotted to reasonable creatures that we may think they were born to show that nature is no stepmother to that sex, how much soever some men, sharp-witted only in evil speaking, have sought to disgrace them. The elder is named Pamela, by many men not deemed inferior to her sister. For my part, when I marked them both, methought there was (if at least such perfections may receive the word of more) more sweetness in Philoclea but more majesty in Pamela: methought love played in Philoclea’s eyes and threatened in Pamela’s; methought Philoclea’s beauty only persuaded, but so persuaded as all hearts must yield; Pamela’s beauty used violence, and such violence as no heart could resist. And it seems that such proportion is between their minds: Philoclea so bashful, as though her excellencies had stolen into her before she was aware; so humble, that she will put all pride out of countenance; in sum, such proceeding as will stir hope but teach good manners. Pamela of high thoughts, who avoids not pride with not knowing her excellencies, but by making that one of her excellencies, to be void of pride; her mother’s wisdom, greatness, nobility, but—if I can guess aright—knit with a more constant temper. Now then, our Basilius—being so publicly

happy as to be a prince, and so happy in that happiness as to be a beloved prince, and so in his private blessed as to have so excellent a wife and so over-excellent children—hath of late taken a course which yet makes him more spoken of than all these blessings. For, having made a journey to Delphos<sup>8</sup> and safely returned, within short space he brake up his court and retired himself, his wife and children, into a certain forest hereby which he calleth his desert; wherein, besides a house appointed for stables and lodgings for certain persons of mean calling who do all household services, he hath builded two fine lodges. In the one of them himself remains with his younger daughter Philoclea—which was the cause they three were matched together in this picture—without having any other creature living in that lodge with him.

“Which though it be strange, yet not strange as the course he hath taken with the princess Pamela whom he hath placed in the other lodge; but how think you accompanied? Truly with none other but one Dametas, the most arrant doltish clown that I think ever was without the privilege of a bauble,<sup>9</sup> with his wife Miso and daughter Mopsa, in whom no wit can devise anything wherein they may pleasure her but to exercise her patience and to serve for a foil of her perfections.”

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
These sections are from [chapters 1, 2, and 3](#) of the *New Arcadia*. The opening section presents Strephon and Klaius, two Arcadian shepherds, lamenting the loss of Urania, a shepherdess whom both love and a figure of Neoplatonic beauty. The next section portrays one of the two young heroes of the work, the shipwrecked Musidorus, being led into the land of Arcadia by the shepherds (who are also the singers of the song “Ye Goat-herd Gods”). They bring him to the house of the wise and noble Kalandar, who introduces the central plot of

Sidney's romance in the curious situation of King Basilius and his family.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Shepherd. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, tying a bell on the leader of the flock. "Ensign": standard-bearer. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Love alone. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Scholars. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The country game of Prisoner's Base. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Consider. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The god of Love is traditionally blind. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sorrows caused by wrongs. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The ancient name of the southeastern district of the Greek Peloponnese, which includes Sparta; much of it is hilly, rugged, and barren. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adorned with varied colors, like enamelwork. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Testimony. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Accompanable [that is, sociable] solitariness" and "civil [that is, civilized] wildness" are oxymorons, figures of flat contradiction. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Abundance. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: State-owned serfs in Sparta, probably the original inhabitants of Laconia. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Inhospitable. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A country in the middle of the Peloponnese, surrounded by mountains and very fertile; beginning with classical Greek and Latin bucolic poetry, it was represented as a paradise. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Disclose, reveal. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The picture of Basilius, as we learn below. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Plundering. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 1: The nine goddesses who preside over the different kinds of poetry and the several arts and sciences.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 3: Revivifying.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Conceptions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Greek word for "king."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Greek word for "woman."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fortunate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To consult the famous oracle of Apollo there.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Jester's baton (which would explain and excuse his folly).[Return to reference 9](#)

**From *Book Two***

## CHAPTER 1<sup>1</sup>

In these pastoral pastimes<sup>2</sup> a great number of days were sent to follow their flying predecessors, while the cup of poison<sup>3</sup> (which was deeply tasted of this noble company) had left no sinew of theirs without mortally searching into it; yet never manifesting his venomous work, till once that the night (parting away angry that she could distill no more sleep into the eyes of lovers) had no sooner given place to the breaking out of the morning light and the sun bestowed his beams upon the tops of the mountains, but that the woeful Gynecia (to whom rest was no ease) had left her loathed lodging and gotten herself into the solitary places those deserts<sup>4</sup> were full of, going up and down with such unquiet motions as a grieved and hopeless mind is wont to bring forth. There appeared unto the eyes of her judgment the evils she was like to run into, with ugly infamy waiting upon them: she felt the terrors of her own conscience; she was guilty of a long exercised virtue which made this vice the fuller of deformity. The uttermost of the good she could aspire unto was a mortal wound to her vexed spirits; and lastly, no small part of her evils was that she was wise to see her evils. Insomuch that, having a great while thrown her countenance ghastly about her<sup>5</sup> (as if she had called all the powers of the world to be witness of her wretched estate), at length casting up her watery eyes to heaven:

“O sun,” said she, “whose unspotted light directs the steps of mortal mankind, art thou not ashamed to impart the clearness of thy presence to such a dust-creeping worm as I am? O you heavens, which continually keep the course allotted unto you, can none of your influences prevail so much upon the miserable Gynecia as to make her preserve a course so long embraced by her? O deserts, deserts, how fit a guest am I for you, since my heart can people you with wild ravenous beasts, which in you are wanting! O virtue, where dost thou hide thyself? What hideous thing is this which doth



eclipse thee? Or is it true that thou wert never but a vain name and no essential thing, which hast thus left thy professed servant when she had most need of thy lovely presence? O imperfect proportion of reason, which can too much foresee and too little prevent! Alas, alas," said she, "if there were but one hope for all my pains or but one excuse for all my faultiness! But wretch that I am, my torment is beyond all succor, and my evil-deserving doth exceed my evil fortune. For nothing else did my husband take this strange resolution to live so solitarily, for nothing else have the winds delivered this strange guest to my country, for nothing else have the destinies reserved my life to this time, but that only I, most wretched I, should become a plague to myself and a shame to womankind. Yet if my desire, how unjust soever it be, might take effect, though a thousand deaths followed it and every death were followed with a thousand shames, yet should not my sepulcher receive me without some contentment. But alas, though sure I am that Zelmane is such as can answer my love, yet as sure I am that this disguising must needs come for some foretaken conceit.<sup>6</sup> And then, wretched Gynecia, where canst thou find any small ground-plot for hope to dwell upon? No, no, it is Philoclea his heart is set upon; it is my daughter I have borne to supplant me. But if it be so, the life I have given thee, ungrateful Philoclea, I will sooner with these hands bereave thee of than my birth<sup>7</sup> shall glory she hath bereaved me of my desires. In shame there is no comfort but to be beyond all bounds of shame."

Having spoken thus, she began to make a piteous war with her fair hair, when she might hear not far from her an extremely doleful voice, but so suppressed with a kind of whispering note that she could not conceive the words distinctly. But as a lamentable tune is the sweetest music to a woeful mind, she drew thither near-away<sup>8</sup> in hope to find some companion of her misery; and as she paced on she was stopped with a number of trees so thickly placed together that she was afraid she should, with rushing through, stop the speech of the lamentable party which she was so desirous to understand. And therefore sitting her down as softly as she could

(for she was now in distance to hear) she might first perceive a lute excellently well played upon, and then the same doleful voice accompanying it with these verses:

In vain, mine eyes, you labor to amend  
With flowing tears your fault of hasty sight;  
Since to my heart her shape you so did send,  
That her I see, though you did lose your light.

In vain, my heart, now you with sight are burned,  
With sighs you seek to cool your hot desire;  
Since sighs, into mine inward furnace turned,  
For bellows serve to kindle more the fire.

Reason in vain, now you have lost my heart,  
My head you seek, as to your strongest fort;  
Since there mine eyes have played so false a part,  
That to your strength your foes have sure resort.  
Then since in vain I find were all my strife,  
To this strange death I vainly yield my life.

The ending of the song served but for a beginning of new complaints, as if the mind, oppressed with too heavy a burden of cares, was fain to discharge itself of all sides and, as it were, paint out the hideousness of the pain in all sorts of colors. For the woeful person (as if the lute had evil<sup>9</sup> joined with the voice) threw it to the ground with suchlike words:

"Alas, poor lute, how much art thou deceived to think that in my miseries thou could'st ease my woes, as in my careless<sup>1</sup> times thou wast wont to please my fancies! The time is changed, my lute, the time is changed; and no more did my joyful mind then receive everything to a joyful consideration than my careful<sup>2</sup> mind now makes each thing taste like the bitter juice of care. The evil is inward, my lute, the evil is inward; which all thou dost doth serve but to make me think more freely of, and the more I think, the more

cause I find of thinking, but less of hoping. And alas, what is then thy harmony but the sweetmeats of sorrow? The discord of my thoughts, my lute, doth ill agree to the concord of thy strings; therefore be not ashamed to leave thy master, since he is not afraid to forsake himself."

And thus much spoken, instead of a conclusion was closed up with so hearty a groaning that Gynecia could not refrain to show herself, thinking such griefs could serve fitly for nothing but her own fortune. But as she came into the little arbor of this sorrowful music, her eyes met with the eyes of Zelmane, which was the party that thus had indicted herself of misery, so that either of them remained confused with a sudden astonishment, Zelmane fearing lest she had heard some part of those complaints which she had risen up that morning early of purpose to breathe out in secret to herself. But Gynecia a great while stood still with a kind of dull amazement, looking steadfastly upon her. At length returning to some use of herself, she began to ask Zelmane what cause carried her so early abroad. But, as if the opening of her mouth to Zelmane had opened some great floodgate of sorrow whereof her heart could not abide the violent issue, she sank to the ground with her hands over her face, crying vehemently, "Zelmane, help me, O Zelmane have pity on me!"

Zelmane ran to her, marveling what sudden sickness had thus possessed her; and beginning to ask her the cause of her pain and offering her service to be employed by her, Gynecia opening her eyes wildly upon her, pricked with the flames of love and the torments of her own conscience, "O Zelmane, Zelmane," said she, "dost thou offer me physic,<sup>3</sup> which art my only poison? Or wilt thou do me service, which hast already brought me into eternal slavery?"

Zelmane then knowing well at what mark she shot, yet loth to enter into it, "Most excellent lady," said she, "you were best retire yourself into your lodging, that you the better may pass this sudden fit."

"Retire myself?" said Gynecia, "If I had retired myself into myself when thou (to me unfortunate guest) camest to draw me from

myself, blessed had I been, and no need had I had of this counsel. But now, alas, I am forced to fly to thee for succor whom I accuse of all my hurt, and make thee judge of my cause, who art the only author of my mischief."

Zelmane the more astonished, the more she understood her, "Madam," said she, "whereof do you accuse me that I will not clear myself? Or wherein may I stead<sup>4</sup> you that you may not command me?"

"Alas!" answered Gynecia, "What shall I say more? Take pity of me, O Zelmane, but not as Zelmane, and disguise not with me in words, as I know thou dost in apparel."

Zelmane was much troubled with that word, finding herself brought to this strait. But as she was thinking what to answer her, they might see old Basilius pass hard by them without ever seeing them, complaining likewise of love very freshly, and ending his complaint with this song, love having renewed both his invention and voice:

Let not old age disgrace my high desire,  
O heavenly soul in human shape contained:  
Old wood inflamed doth yield the bravest<sup>5</sup> fire,  
When younger doth in smoke his virtue<sup>6</sup> spend.

Ne let white hairs which on my face do grow  
Seem to your eyes of a disgraceful hue,  
Since whiteness doth present the sweetest show,<sup>7</sup>  
Which makes all eyes do homage unto you.

Old age is wise and full of constant truth;  
Old age well stayed from ranging humor<sup>8</sup> lives;  
Old age hath known whatever was in youth;  
Old age o'ercome, the greater honor gives.  
And to old age since you yourself aspire,  
Let not old age disgrace my high desire.

Which being done, he looked very curiously<sup>9</sup> upon himself, sometimes fetching a little skip as if he had said his strength had not yet forsaken him.

But Zelmane, having in this time gotten some leisure to think for an answer, looking upon Gynecia as if she thought she did her some wrong, "Madam," said she, "I am not acquainted with those words of disguising; neither is it the profession of an Amazon; neither are you a party with whom it is to be used. If my service may please you, employ it, so long as you do me no wrong in misjudging of me."

"Alas, Zelmane," said Gynecia, "I perceive you know full little how piercing the eyes are of a true lover. There is no one beam of those thoughts you have planted in me but is able to discern a greater cloud than you do go in. Seek not to conceal yourself further from me, nor force not the passion of love into violent extremities."

Now was Zelmane brought to an exigent,<sup>1</sup> when the king, turning his eyes that way through the trees, perceived his wife and mistress<sup>2</sup> together; so that framing the most lovely<sup>3</sup> countenance he could, he came straightway towards them, and at the first word, thanking his wife for having entertained Zelmane, desired her she would now return into the lodge, because he had certain matters of estate<sup>4</sup> to impart to the Lady Zelmane. The queen, being nothing troubled with jealousy in that point, obeyed the king's commandment, full of raging agonies, and determinately bent<sup>5</sup> that as she would seek all loving means to win Zelmane, so she would stir up terrible tragedies rather than fail of her intent. And so went she from them to the lodge-ward;<sup>6</sup> with such a battle in her thoughts and so deadly an overthrow given to her best resolutions that even her body (where the field was fought) was oppressed withal, making a languishing sickness wait upon the triumph of passion,<sup>7</sup> which the more it prevailed in her, the more it made her jealousy watchful both over her daughter and Zelmane, having ever one of them entrusted to her own eyes.<sup>8</sup>

But as soon as Basilius was rid of his wife's presence, falling down on his knees, "O lady," said he, "which hast only had the

power to stir up again those flames which had so long lain dead in me, see in me the power of your beauty, which can make old age come to ask counsel of youth, and a prince unconquered to become a slave to a stranger. And when you see that power of yours, love that at least in me, since it is yours, although of me you see nothing to be loved."

"Worthy prince," answered Zelmane, taking him up from his kneeling, "both your manner and your speech are so strange unto me as I know not how to answer it better than with silence."

"If silence please you," said the king, "it shall never displease me, since my heart is wholly pledged to obey you. Otherwise, if you would vouchsafe mine ears such happiness as to hear you, they shall convey your words to such a mind which is with the humblest degree of reverence to receive them."

"I disdain not to speak to you, mighty prince," said Zelmane, "but I disdain to speak to any matter which may bring my honor into question."

And therewith, with a brave counterfeited scorn she departed from the king, leaving him not so sorry for his short answer as proud in himself that he had broken<sup>9</sup> the matter. And thus did the king, feeding his mind with those thoughts, pass great time in writing verses and making more of himself than he was wont to do, that, with a little help, he would have grown into a pretty kind of dotage.

But Zelmane, being rid of this loving but little loved company, "Alas," said she, "poor Pyrocles, was there ever one but I that had received wrong and could blame nobody, that having more than I desire, am still in want of that I would?<sup>1</sup> Truly, love, I must needs say thus much on thy behalf: thou hast employed my love there where all love is deserved, and for recompense hast sent me more love than ever I desired. But what wilt thou do, Pyrocles? Which way canst thou find to rid thee of thy intricate troubles? To her whom I would be known to, I live in darkness; and to her am revealed from whom I would be most secret. What shift<sup>2</sup> shall I find against the diligent love of Basilius? What shield against the violent passions of Gynecia? And if that be done, yet how am I the nearer to quench

the fire that consumes me? Well, well, sweet Philoclea, my whole confidence must be builded in thy divine spirit, which cannot be ignorant of the cruel wound I have received by you."

## 1578–83 **Endnotes**

1593

- Note 1: Before this chapter, Pyrocles, prince of Macedon, has fallen in love with Philoclea, daughter of Basilius and Gynecia, the king and queen of Arcadia. To gain entrance to the royal household, he has disguised himself as a woman, the Amazon Zelmane. To his dismay, though, both Basilius and Gynecia (who sees through his disguise) have fallen in love with him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The reference is to the elaborate entertainment, featuring a series of pastoral songs, that had concluded Book One.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, love.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Uninhabited regions. In consequence of an oracle, Basilius has taken the royal family to live in "a certain forest which he calleth his desert."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Looked about her in a frightful manner.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With some prior purpose.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Offspring.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Near to it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Badly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Carefree.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Full of care.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Medicine.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Be of use to.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Most splendid.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Power. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Appearance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Caprice. "Stayed": settled.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Carefully, attentively.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Crisis.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the woman who rules his heart.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Loving.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: State.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Resolutely determined.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Toward the lodge.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Attend upon passion's victory procession.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Always having one of them in her sight.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Broached.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Of the thing I desire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Evasion, stratagem.[Return to reference 2](#)



**The Defense of Poesy** In 1579 Sidney found himself the unwilling dedicatee of a small book titled *The School of Abuse*. Its author, the playwright-turned-moralist Stephen Gosson, attacked poets and actors from a rigidly pious perspective that called into question the morality of any fiction making. Sidney may have shared in the author's militant Protestantism, but he took a very different view of the poet's art, both more sympathetic and more complex. He did not specifically answer Gosson's polemic, but he must have had it in mind when he composed, perhaps in the same year, a major piece of critical prose that was published after his death under two titles, *The Defense of Poesy* and *An Apology for Poetry*. Probably written in 1579 though not published until 1595, *The Defense of Poesy* is an eloquent argument for the dignity, social efficacy, and moral value of imaginative literature in verse or prose.

Sidney gives this argument the underlying form of a classical oration, as if he were a lawyer in ancient Rome defending his client against defamatory accusations. The great masters of Roman rhetoric, Cicero and Quintilian, prescribed a set structure for such orations, and as our footnotes indicate in detail, Sidney adapts his defense to this structure.

Sidney responds to old charges against poetic fictions—charges of irresponsibility and unreality—that had been revived in his own time most strenuously by Puritan moralists. The *Defense* argues both that the poet, liberated from the world, is free to range “within the zodiac of his own wit” and that poetry actively intervenes in the world and transforms it for the better. After slyly putting himself down in the introduction, Sidney points out the antiquity of poetry, its high standing in the biblical and classical worlds, and its universality; also, he cites the names given to poets—*vates* (prophet) by the Romans, and *poiētēs* (maker) by the Greeks—as evidence of their ancient dignity. But he bases his defense essentially on the special status of the poetic imagination. While all arts, from astronomy to music to medicine, depend ultimately on nature as their object, poetry, he claims, is uniquely free: “Only the poet,

disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature."

This freedom, Sidney argues, enables the poet to present virtues and vices in a livelier and more affecting way than nature does, as it teaches, delights, and moves the reader at the same time. The poet is superior to both the philosopher and the historian, because he is more concrete than the one and more universal than the other. The *Defense* also refutes the claim of the Greek philosopher Plato that poets are liars, by arguing that the poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth," and it denies as well the Platonic charge that poetry arouses base desires. Tragedy, for example, "openeth the greatest wounds," in Sidney's account, "and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue," thereby making "kings fear to be tyrants." Surveying the English literary scene of his own century, Sidney finds little to praise except for Surrey's lyrics, the moralizing verse narratives of the popular midcentury collection *A Mirror for Magistrates*, and Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*; the drama he faults for "mingling kings and clowns" and for unrealistic distortions of time and space. (The great, sprawling plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare, which triumphantly violated many of Sidney's cherished principles, lay just ahead.) The *Defense* ends with a mock conjuration and a playful curse, reminders of the magical power of poetry, a power that lurks beneath both Sidney's idealism and his precepts.

## ***From The Defense of Poesy***

### **[THE POET AS PROPHET AND CREATOR]**

Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words *vaticinium* and *vaticinari*<sup>1</sup> is manifest: so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge. And so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the chanceable hitting upon any such verses great foretokens of their following fortunes were placed. Whereupon grew the word of *Sortes Virgilianae*,<sup>2</sup> when by sudden opening Virgil's book they lighted upon any verse of his making, whereof the histories of the emperors' lives are full: as of Albinus,<sup>3</sup> the governor of our island, who in his childhood met with this verse

Arma amens capio nec sat rationis in armis<sup>4</sup>

and in his age performed it. Which, although it were a very vain and godless superstition, as also it was to think spirits were commanded by such verses—whereupon this word charms, derived of *carmina*,<sup>5</sup> cometh—so yet serveth it to show the great reverence those wits<sup>6</sup> were held in; and altogether not without ground, since both the oracles of Delphos and Sibylla's prophecies<sup>7</sup> were wholly delivered in verses. For that same exquisite observing of number and measure in the words, and that high flying liberty of conceit<sup>8</sup> proper to the poet, did seem to have some divine force in it.

And may not I presume a little further, to show the reasonableness of this word *vates*, and say that the holy David's<sup>9</sup> Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men, both ancient and modern. But even

the name of Psalms will speak for me, which being interpreted, is nothing but songs; then that it is fully written in meter, as all learned Hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found;<sup>1</sup> lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely<sup>2</sup> poetical: for what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias*,<sup>3</sup> when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost<sup>4</sup> he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? But truly now having named him, I fear me I seem to profane that holy name, applying it to poetry, which is among us thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation. But they that with quiet judgments will look a little deeper into it, shall find the end and working of it such as, being rightly applied, deserveth not to be scourged out of the Church of God.

But now let us see how the Greeks named it, and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him a "poet," which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word *poiein*, which is, to make: wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker:<sup>5</sup> which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by any partial<sup>6</sup> allegation.

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they<sup>7</sup> could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, set down what order nature hath taken therein. So doth the geometrician and arithmetician in their diverse sorts of quantities. So doth the musician in times tell you which by nature agree,<sup>8</sup> which not. The natural philosopher thereon<sup>9</sup> hath his name, and the moral philosopher standeth upon<sup>1</sup> the natural virtues, vices, or passions of

man; and follow nature (saith he) therein, and thou shalt not err. The lawyer saith what men have determined; the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech; and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are compassed within the circle of a question according to the proposed matter.<sup>2</sup> The physician weigheth<sup>3</sup> the nature of man's body, and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural,<sup>4</sup> yet doth he indeed build upon the depth of nature. Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies,<sup>5</sup> and suchlike: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.<sup>6</sup> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.<sup>7</sup>

But let those things alone, and go to man—for whom as the other things are, so it seemeth in him her uttermost cunning is employed—and know whether she have brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes, so constant a friend as Pylades, so valiant a man as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus,<sup>8</sup> so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas. Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction;<sup>9</sup> for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit<sup>1</sup> of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that *idea* is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are

wont<sup>2</sup> to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature:<sup>3</sup> which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings—with no small arguments to the incredulous<sup>4</sup> of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will<sup>5</sup> keepeth us from reaching unto it. But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted. This much (I hope) will be given me, that the Greeks with some probability of reason gave him<sup>6</sup> the name above all names of learning.

Now let us go to a more ordinary opening<sup>7</sup> of him, that the truth may be the more palpable: and so I hope, though we get not so unmatched a praise as the etymology of his names will grant, yet his very description, which no man will deny, shall not justly be barred from a principal commendation.

### [DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF POETRY]

Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*<sup>8</sup>—that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight.<sup>9</sup>

Of this have been three general kinds. The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns;<sup>1</sup> and the writer of Job: which, beside other,

the learned Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius<sup>2</sup> do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture. Against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence. (In this kind, though in a full wrong divinity, were Orpheus, Amphion, Homer in his Hymns,<sup>3</sup> and many other, both Greeks and Romans.) And this poesy must be used by whosoever will follow St. James's counsel in singing psalms when they are merry;<sup>4</sup> and I know is used with the fruit of comfort by some, when, in sorrowful pangs of their death-bringing sins, they find the consolation of the never-leaving goodness.

The second kind is of them that deal with matters philosophical, either moral, as Tyrtaeus, Phocylides, Cato;<sup>5</sup> or natural, as Lucretius and Virgil's *Georgics*; or astronomical, as Manilius and Pontanus; or historical, as Lucan:<sup>6</sup> which who mislike, the fault is in their judgment quite out of taste, and not in the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge.

But because this second sort is wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention, whether they properly be poets or no let grammarians dispute, and go to the third, indeed right<sup>7</sup> poets, of whom chiefly this question ariseth: betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner<sup>8</sup> sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who having no law but wit,<sup>9</sup> bestow that in colors upon you which is fittest for the eye to see: as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in herself another's fault,<sup>1</sup> wherein he painteth not Lucretia, whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue. For these third<sup>2</sup> be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed *vates*, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understandings with<sup>3</sup> the fore-described name of poets. For these indeed do merely<sup>4</sup> make to imitate, and imitate

both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved—which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want<sup>5</sup> there not idle tongues to bark at them.

These be subdivided into sundry more special denominations. The most notable be the heroic,<sup>6</sup> lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac,<sup>7</sup> pastoral, and certain others, some of these being termed according to the matter they deal with, some by the sorts of verses they liked best to write in; for indeed the greatest part of poets have appareled their poetical inventions in that numbrous<sup>8</sup> kind of writing which is called verse—indeed but appareled, verse being but an ornament and no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets. For Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently as to give us *effigiem iusti imperii*, the portraiture of a just empire, under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero saith of him), made therein an absolute heroical poem. So did Heliodorus in his sugared invention of that picture of love in Theagenes and Chariclea;<sup>9</sup> and yet both these wrote in prose: which I speak to show that it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet—no more than a long gown maketh an advocate,<sup>1</sup> who though he pleaded in armor should be an advocate and no soldier. But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note<sup>2</sup> to know a poet by; although indeed the senate of poets hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all,<sup>3</sup> so in manner to go beyond them: not speaking (table-talk fashion or like men in a dream) words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peising<sup>4</sup> each syllable of each word by just proportion according to the dignity of the subject.

### **[POETRY VERSUS PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY]**



Now therefore it shall not be amiss first to weigh this latter sort of poetry by his works, and then by his parts; and if in neither of these anatomies he be condemnable, I hope we shall obtain a more favorable sentence.<sup>5</sup>

This purifying of wit—this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit<sup>6</sup>—which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.

This, according to the inclination of the man, bred many-formed<sup>7</sup> impressions. For some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge, and no knowledge to be so high or heavenly as acquaintance with the stars, gave themselves to astronomy; others, persuading themselves to be demigods if they knew the causes of things, became natural and supernatural philosophers; some an admirable delight drew to music; and some the certainty of demonstration to the mathematics. But all, one and other, having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence.

But when by the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch,<sup>8</sup> that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart, then lo, did proof, the overruler of opinions, make manifest that all these are but serving sciences, which, as they have each a private<sup>9</sup> end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architectonike*,<sup>1</sup> which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only—even as the saddler's next<sup>2</sup> end is to make a good saddle, but his further end to serve a nobler faculty, which is horsemanship, so the horseman's to soldiery, and the soldier not only to have the skill, but to perform the practice of a soldier. So

that, the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest.

Wherein, if we can, show we the poet's nobleness, by setting him before his other competitors. Among whom as principal challengers step forth the moral philosophers, whom, methinketh, I see coming towards me with a sullen gravity, as though they could not abide vice by daylight, rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things, with books in their hands against glory, whereto they set their names, sophistically<sup>3</sup> speaking against subtlety, and angry with any man in whom they see the foul fault of anger. These men casting largess as they go, of definitions, divisions, and distinctions,<sup>4</sup> with a scornful interrogative do soberly ask whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to virtue as that which teacheth what virtue is; and teach it not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making known his enemy, vice, which must be destroyed, and his cumbersome<sup>5</sup> servant, passion, which must be mastered; by showing the generalities that containeth it, and the specialities that are derived from it; lastly, by plain setting down how it extendeth itself out of the limits of a man's own little world to the government of families and maintaining of public societies.

The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself<sup>6</sup> (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay; having much ado to accord differing writers and to pick truth out of their partiality;<sup>7</sup> better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age, and yet better knowing how this world goeth than how his own wit runneth; curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties; a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table talk, denieth, in a great chafe,<sup>8</sup> that any man for teaching of virtue and virtuous actions is comparable to him. "I am *testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*."<sup>9</sup> "The philosopher," saith he, "teacheth a disputative virtue, but I do an

active. His virtue is excellent in the dangerless Academy of Plato, but mine showeth forth her honorable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt.<sup>1</sup> He teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations, but I only bid you follow the footing of them that have gone before you. Old-aged experience goeth beyond the fine-witted philosopher, but I give the experience of many ages. Lastly, if he make the songbook, I put the learner's hand to the lute; and if he be the guide, I am the light." Then would he allege you innumerable examples, confirming story by stories, how much the wisest senators and princes have been directed by the credit of history, as Brutus, Alphonsus of Aragon,<sup>2</sup> and who not, if need be? At length the long line of their disputation maketh a point<sup>3</sup> in this, that the one giveth the precept, and the other<sup>4</sup> the example.

Now whom shall we find (since the question standeth for the highest form in the school of learning) to be moderator?<sup>5</sup> Truly, as me seemeth, the poet; and if not a moderator, even the man that ought to carry the title from them both, and much more from all other serving sciences. Therefore compare we the poet with the historian and with the moral philosopher; and if he go beyond them both, no other human skill can match him. For as for the divine,<sup>6</sup> with all reverence it is ever to be excepted, not only for having his scope as far beyond any of these as eternity exceedeth a moment, but even for passing<sup>7</sup> each of these in themselves. And for the lawyer, though *Ius*<sup>8</sup> be the daughter of Justice, and justice the chief of virtues, yet because he seeketh to make men good rather *formidine poenae* than *virtutis amore*;<sup>9</sup> or, to say righter, doth not endeavor to make men good, but that their evil hurt not others; having no care, so he be a good citizen, how bad a man he be: therefore as our wickedness maketh him<sup>1</sup> necessary, and necessity maketh him honorable, so is he not in the deepest truth to stand in rank with these<sup>2</sup> who all endeavor to take naughtiness away and plant goodness even in the secretest cabinet<sup>3</sup> of our souls. And these four are all that any way deal in that consideration of men's

manners,<sup>4</sup> which being the supreme knowledge, they that best breed it deserve the best commendation.

The philosopher, therefore, and the historian are they which would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by example. But both, not having both, do both halt.<sup>5</sup> For the philosopher, setting down with thorny arguments the bare rule, is so hard of utterance and so misty to be conceived, that one that hath no other guide but him shall wade in him till he be old before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest.<sup>6</sup> For his knowledge standeth so upon the abstract and general, that happy<sup>7</sup> is that man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he doth understand. On the other side, the historian, wanting<sup>8</sup> the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine.

Now doth the peerless poet perform both: for whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in someone by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth. For as in outward things, to a man that had never seen an elephant or a rhinoceros, who should tell him most exquisitely<sup>9</sup> all their shapes, color, bigness, and particular marks, or of a gorgeous palace the architecture, with declaring the full beauties, might well make the hearer able to repeat, as it were by rote, all he had heard, yet should never satisfy his inward conceit<sup>1</sup> with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge; but the same man, as soon as he might see those beasts well painted, or that house well in model, should straightways grow, without need of any description, to a judicial<sup>2</sup> comprehending of them: so no doubt the philosopher with his learned definitions—be it of virtue, vices, matters of public policy or private government<sup>3</sup>—replenisheth the

memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom, which, notwithstanding, lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth<sup>4</sup> by the speaking picture of poesy.

Tully<sup>5</sup> taketh much pains, and many times not without poetical helps, to make us know the force love of our country hath in us. Let us but hear old Anchises speaking in the midst of Troy's flames, or see Ulysses in the fullness of all Calypso's delights bewail his absence from barren and beggarly Ithaca.<sup>6</sup> Anger, the Stoics said, was a short madness:<sup>7</sup> let but Sophocles bring you Ajax on a stage, killing or whipping sheep and oxen, thinking them the army of Greeks,<sup>8</sup> with their chieftains Agamemnon and Menelaus, and tell me if you have not a more familiar insight into anger than finding in the schoolmen his *genus* and difference.<sup>9</sup> See whether wisdom and temperance in Ulysses and Diomedes, valor in Achilles, friendship in Nisus and Euryalus,<sup>1</sup> even to an ignorant man carry not an apparent shining;<sup>2</sup> and, contrarily, the remorse of conscience in Oedipus, the soon repenting pride in Agamemnon, the self-devouring cruelty in his father Atreus, the violence of ambition in the two Theban brothers, the sour-sweetness of revenge in Medea;<sup>3</sup> and, to fall lower, the Terentian Gnatho and our Chaucer's Pandar<sup>4</sup> so expressed that we now use their names to signify their trades: and finally, all virtues, vices, and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them.

But even in the most excellent determination of goodness, what philosopher's counsel can so readily direct a prince, as the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon; or a virtuous man in all fortunes, as Aeneas in Virgil; or a whole commonwealth, as the way of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*? I say the way, because where Sir Thomas More erred, it was the fault of the man and not of the poet, for that way of patterning a commonwealth was most absolute,<sup>5</sup> though he perchance hath not so absolutely performed it. For the question is, whether the feigned image of poetry or the regular instruction of philosophy hath the

more force in teaching: wherein if the philosophers have more rightly showed themselves philosophers than the poets have attained to the high top of their profession, as in truth

Mediocribus esse poetis,  
Non dii, non homines, non concessere columnae;<sup>6</sup>

it is, I say again, not the fault of the art, but that by few men that art can be accomplished.

Certainly, even our Savior Christ could as well have given the moral commonplaces of uncharitableness and humbleness as the divine narration of Dives and Lazarus; or of disobedience and mercy, as that heavenly discourse of the lost child and the gracious father;<sup>7</sup> but that His through-searching wisdom knew the estate<sup>8</sup> of Dives burning in hell, and of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, would more constantly (as it were) inhabit both the memory and judgment. Truly, for myself, meseems I see before mine eyes the lost child's disdainful prodigality, turned to envy a swine's dinner: which by the learned divines are thought not historical acts,<sup>9</sup> but instructing parables.

For conclusion, I say the philosopher teacheth, but he teacheth obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him, that is to say, he teacheth them that are already taught; but the poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs, the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher, whereof Aesop's tales give good proof: whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal<sup>1</sup> tales of beasts, make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from these dumb speakers.

But now may it be alleged that if this imagining of matters be so fit for the imagination, then must the historian needs surpass, who bringeth you images of true matters; such as indeed were done, and not such as fantastically or falsely may be suggested to have been done. Truly, Aristotle himself, in his discourse of poesy, plainly determineth this question, saying that poetry is *philosophoterion* and

*spoudaioteron*, that is to say, it is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history.<sup>2</sup> His reason is, because poesy dealeth with *katholou*, that is to say, with the universal consideration, and the history with *kathekaston*, the particular: now, saith he, the universal weighs what is fit to be said or done, either in likelihood or necessity (which the poesy considereth in his imposed names), and the particular only marks whether Alcibiades did, or suffered, this or that.<sup>3</sup> Thus far Aristotle: which reason of his (as all his) is most full of reason. For indeed, if the question were whether it were better to have a particular act truly or falsely set down, there is no doubt which is to be chosen, no more than whether you had rather have Vespasian's<sup>4</sup> picture right as he was, or, at the painter's pleasure, nothing resembling. But if the question be for your own use and learning, whether it be better to have it set down as it should be, or as it was, then certainly is more doctrinable<sup>5</sup> the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon than the true Cyrus in Justin, and the feigned Aeneas in Virgil than the right Aeneas in Dares Phrygius:<sup>6</sup> as to a lady that desired to fashion her countenance to the best grace, a painter should more benefit her to portraiture a most sweet face, writing Canidia upon it, than to paint Canidia as she was, who, Horace sweareth, was full ill-favored.<sup>7</sup>

If the poet do his part aright, he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus,<sup>8</sup> and suchlike, nothing that is not to be shunned; in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed; where the historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern, but, as in Alexander or Scipio himself,<sup>9</sup> show doings, some to be liked, some to be disliked. And then how will you discern what to follow but by your own discretion, which you had without reading Quintus Curtius? And whereas a man may say, though in universal consideration of doctrine the poet prevaieth, yet that the history,<sup>1</sup> in his saying such a thing was done, doth warrant a man more in that he shall follow<sup>2</sup>—the answer is manifest: that, if he stand upon that was (as if he should argue, because it rained yesterday, therefore it should rain today), then



indeed hath it some advantage to a gross conceit;<sup>3</sup> but if he know an example only informs a conjectured likelihood, and so go by reason,<sup>4</sup> the poet doth so far exceed him<sup>5</sup> as he is to frame his example to that which is most reasonable (be it in warlike, politic, or private matters), where the historian in his bare "was" hath many times that which we call fortune to overrule the best wisdom. Many times he must tell events whereof he can yield no cause; or, if he do, it must be poetically.

For that a feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example (for as for to move, it is clear, since the feigned may be tuned to the highest key of passion), let us take one example wherein an historian and a poet did concur. Herodotus and Justin do both testify that Zopyrus, King Darius' faithful servant, seeing his master long resisted by the rebellious Babylonians, feigned himself in extreme disgrace of his king: for verifying of which, he caused his own nose and ears to be cut off, and so flying to the Babylonians was received, and for his known valor so sure credited, that he did find means to deliver them over to Darius.<sup>6</sup> Much like matter doth Livy record of Tarquinius and his son. Xenophon excellently feigneth such another stratagem performed by Abradatas in Cyrus' behalf. Now would I fain know, if occasion be presented unto you to serve your prince by such an honest dissimulation, why you do not as well learn it of Xenophon's fiction as of the other's verity; and truly so much the better, as you shall save your nose by the bargain: for Abradatas did not counterfeit so far. So then the best of the historian is subject to the poet; for whatsoever action, or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or war stratagem the historian is bound to recite, that may the poet (if he list)<sup>7</sup> with his imitation make his own, beautifying it both for further teaching and more delighting, as it please him: having all, from Dante's heaven to his hell, under the authority of his pen. Which if I be asked what poets have done so, as I might well name some, so yet say I, and say again, I speak of the art, and not of the artificer.

Now, to that which commonly is attributed to the praise of history, in respect of the notable learning is got by marking the



success,<sup>8</sup> as though therein a man should see virtue exalted and vice punished—truly that commendation is particular to poetry, and far off from history. For indeed poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colors, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamored of her. Well may you see Ulysses in a storm,<sup>9</sup> and in other hard plights; but they are but exercises of patience and magnanimity, to make them shine the more in the near-following prosperity. And of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer<sup>1</sup> answered to one that misliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them. But the history, being captived to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror<sup>2</sup> from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness. For see we not valiant Miltiades<sup>3</sup> rot in his fetters? The just Phocion<sup>4</sup> and the accomplished Socrates put to death like traitors? The cruel Severus<sup>5</sup> live prosperously? The excellent Severus<sup>6</sup> miserably murdered? Sulla and Marius<sup>7</sup> dying in their beds? Pompey and Cicero<sup>8</sup> slain then when they would have thought exile a happiness? See we not virtuous Cato driven to kill himself,<sup>9</sup> and rebel Caesar so advanced that his name yet, after 1600 years, lasteth in the highest honor? And mark but even Caesar's own words of the aforementioned Sulla (who in that only did honestly, to put down his dishonest tyranny), *litteras nescivit*, as if want of learning caused him to do well.<sup>1</sup> He meant it not by<sup>2</sup> poetry, which, not content with earthly plagues, deviseth new punishments in hell for tyrants, nor yet by philosophy, which teacheth *occidendos esse*;<sup>3</sup> but no doubt by skill in history, for that indeed can afford you Cypselus, Periander, Phalaris, Dionysius,<sup>4</sup> and I know not how many more of the same kennel, that speed<sup>5</sup> well enough in their abominable injustice of usurpation.

I conclude, therefore, that he<sup>6</sup> excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good: which setting forward, and moving to well-doing, indeed setteth the laurel crown

upon the poets as victorious, not only of the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable.<sup>7</sup>

For suppose it be granted (that which I suppose with great reason may be denied) that the philosopher, in respect of his methodical proceeding, doth teach more perfectly than the poet, yet do I think that no man is so much *philophilosophos*<sup>8</sup> as to compare the philosopher in moving with the poet. And that moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching. For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? And what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis*<sup>9</sup> must be the fruit. And how *praxis* cannot be, without being moved to practice, it is no hard matter to consider.

The philosopher sheweth you the way, he informeth you of the particularities, as well of the tediousness of the way, as of the pleasant lodging you shall have when your journey is ended, as of the many by-turnings that may divert you from your way. But this is to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness;<sup>1</sup> which constant desire whosoever hath in him, hath already passed half the hardness of the way, and therefore is beholding to the philosopher but for the other half. Nay truly, learned men have learnedly thought that where once reason hath so much overmastered passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher's book; since in nature<sup>2</sup> we know it is well to do well, and what is well, and what is evil, although not in the words of art which philosophers bestow upon us; for out of natural conceit<sup>3</sup> the philosophers drew it. But to be moved to do that which we know, or to be moved with desire to know, *hoc opus, hic labor est.*<sup>4</sup>

Now therein of all sciences (I speak still of human,<sup>5</sup> and according to the human conceit) is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your

journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you may long to pass further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue—even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste, which, if one should begin to tell them the nature of *aloes* or *rhabarbarum*<sup>6</sup> they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth.<sup>7</sup> So is it in men (most of which are childish in the best things, till they be cradled in their graves): glad will they be to hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas; and, hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valor, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically, set out, they would swear they be brought to school again.

That imitation whereof poetry is hath the most conveniency<sup>8</sup> to nature of all other, insomuch that, as Aristotle saith, those things which in themselves are horrible, as cruel battles, unnatural monsters, are made in poetical imitation delightful.<sup>9</sup> Truly, I have known men that even with reading *Amadis de Gaule*<sup>1</sup> (which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesy) have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage. Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back, that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act? Whom doth not these words of Turnus move, the tale of Turnus having planted his image in the imagination,

Fugientem haec terra videbit?

Usque adeone mori miserum est?<sup>2</sup>

Where the philosophers, as they scorn to delight, so much they be content little to move—saving wrangling whether *virtus*<sup>3</sup> be the chief or the only good, whether the contemplative or the active life do excell—which Plato and Boethius well knew, and therefore made Mistress Philosophy very often borrow the masking raiment of poesy.<sup>4</sup> For even those hard-hearted evil men who think virtue a school name, and know no other good but *indulgere genio*,<sup>5</sup> and therefore despise the austere admonitions of the philosopher, and feel not the inward reason they stand upon, yet will be content to be delighted—which is all the good-fellow poet seemeth to promise—and so steal<sup>6</sup> to see the form of goodness (which seen they cannot but love) ere themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries.

Infinite proofs of the strange effects of this poetical invention might be alleged; only two shall serve, which are so often remembered as I think all men know them. The one of Menenius Agrippa,<sup>7</sup> who, when the whole people of Rome had resolutely divided themselves from the senate, with apparent show of utter ruin, though he were (for that time) an excellent orator, came not among them upon trust of figurative speeches or cunning insinuations, and much less with far-fet<sup>8</sup> maxims of philosophy, which (especially if they were Platonic) they must have learned geometry before they could well have conceived;<sup>9</sup> but forsooth he behaves himself like a homely and familiar poet. He telleth them a tale, that there was a time when all the parts of the body made a mutinous conspiracy against the belly, which they thought devoured the fruits of each other's labor; they concluded they would let so unprofitable a spender starve. In the end, to be short (for the tale is notorious, and as notorious that it was a tale), with punishing the belly they plagued themselves. This applied by him wrought such effect in the people, as I never read that only words brought forth but then<sup>1</sup> so sudden and so good an alteration; for upon reasonable conditions a perfect reconciliation ensued. The other is of Nathan the prophet, who, when the holy David had so far forsaken God as

to confirm adultery with murder,<sup>2</sup> when he was to do the tenderest office of a friend in laying his own shame before his eyes, sent by God to call again so chosen a servant, how doth he it but by telling of a man whose beloved lamb was ungratefully<sup>3</sup> taken from his bosom? The application most divinely true, but the discourse itself feigned; which made David (I speak of the second and instrumental cause<sup>4</sup>) as in a glass see his own filthiness, as that heavenly psalm of mercy<sup>5</sup> well testifieth.

By these, therefore, examples and reasons, I think it may be manifest that the poet, with that same hand of delight, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth. And so a conclusion<sup>6</sup> not unfitly ensue: that, as virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so poetry, being the most familiar<sup>7</sup> to teach it, and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman.

### **[CONCLUSION]**

So that since the ever-praiseworthy Poesy is full of virtue-breeding delightfulness, and void of no gift that ought to be in the noble name of learning;<sup>8</sup> since the blames laid against it are either false or feeble; since the cause why it is not esteemed in England is the fault of poet-apes,<sup>9</sup> not poets; since, lastly, our tongue is most fit to honor poesy, and to be honored by poesy; I conjure you all that have had the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine, even in the name of the nine Muses, no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poesy; no more to laugh at the name of poets, as though they were next inheritors to fools; no more to jest at the reverent title of a rhymers; but to believe, with Aristotle, that they were the ancient treasurers of the Grecians' divinity; to believe, with Bembus, that they were first bringers-in of all civility; to believe, with Scaliger, that no philosopher's precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the reading of Virgil; to believe, with Clauserus, the translator of Cornutus, that it pleased the heavenly Deity, by Hesiod<sup>1</sup> and Homer,

under the veil of fables, to give us all knowledge, logic, rhetoric, philosophy natural and moral, and *quid non?*;<sup>2</sup> to believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused; to believe, with Landino,<sup>3</sup> that they are so beloved of the gods that whatsoever they write proceeds of a divine fury;<sup>4</sup> lastly, to believe themselves, when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses. Thus doing, your name shall flourish in the printers' shops; thus doing, you shall be of kin to many a poetical preface; thus doing, you shall be most fair, most rich, most wise, most all, you shall dwell upon superlatives; thus doing, though you be *libertino patre natus*,<sup>5</sup> you shall suddenly grow *Herculea proles*,<sup>6</sup>

Si quid mea carmina possunt;<sup>7</sup>

thus doing, your soul shall be placed with Dante's Beatrice, or Virgil's Anchises.<sup>8</sup> But if (fie of such a but) you be born so near the dull-making cataract of Nilus that you cannot hear the planet-like<sup>9</sup> music of poetry; if you have so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry, or rather, by a certain rustical disdain, will become such a mome as to be a Momus<sup>1</sup> of poetry; then, though I will not wish unto you the ass's ears of Midas,<sup>2</sup> nor to be driven by a poet's verses, as Bubonax<sup>3</sup> was, to hang himself, nor to be rhymed to death, as is said to be done in Ireland;<sup>4</sup> yet thus much curse I must send you, in the behalf of all poets, that while you live, you live in love, and never get favor for lacking skill of a sonnet;<sup>5</sup> and, when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph.

- Note 1: "Prophecy" and "to prophesy." [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Virgilian lots; that is, accepting as prophecy a line of Virgil chosen by a random (“chanceable”) opening of the *Aeneid*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Roman governor of Britain, declared emperor by his troops in 193 c.e. but defeated and killed four years later.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Frantic, I take up arms, yet there is little purpose in arms (*Aeneid* 2.314).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Songs, poems.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Talented people (that is, the poets).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Pythia (priestess) at Delphi in Greece proclaimed Apollo’s oracles. Sibylla (Sibyl) was a general name given to various prophetesses in Greek and Roman culture.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Imaginative conception.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The biblical King David, commonly identified in the Renaissance as author of the book of Psalms in its entirety.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Many Renaissance scholars who knew some Hebrew (“Hebricians”) thought the Psalms were written in verse forms approximating classical Greek and Latin meters.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Entirely.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Personifications. “Changing of persons”: shifts in narrative perspective, between first- and third-person expressions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Indeed. “Poesy”: art of making poetry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A common word for *poet* in 16th-century England. “Met with”: agreed with.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Biased. “Marking”: noting.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The several arts. The following argument owes much to the *Poetics* (1561) of the Renaissance Italian theorist Julius Caesar Scaliger.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: Which rhythms are naturally consonant.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, from nature. “Natural philosopher”: scientist.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Takes as subject matter.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The rules of those arts (“artificial rules”) are always limited in their application to questions pertaining to the subject at hand.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Considers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outside the physical world—entirely mental. “Metaphysic”: metaphysician.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Avenging deities who punish crimes both in this world and after death. “Heroes”: in the Greek sense, part human, part divine. “Cyclops”: one-eyed giants (the correct plural is “Cyclopes”) in Homer’s *Odyssey*. “Chimeras”: fire-breathing monsters with lion’s head, goat’s body, and serpent’s tail.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Intellect.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A reference to the classical tradition of “The Four Ages of Man”—the idea that the world has declined from the first and perfect Golden Age, through the Silver, Brass (or Bronze), and Iron ages. “Her”: Nature’s.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cyrus the Great of Persia, exemplary hero of Xenophon’s prose romance, the *Cyropaedia* (4th century B.C.E.). Theagenes, hero of Heliodorus’s Greek prose romance, *Aethiopica* (3rd or 4th century C.E.). Pylades, friend of the Greek hero Orestes. Orlando, hero especially of Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* (1516).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The works of nature are real (“essential”); those of the poet are fiction.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Imaginative plan; conception.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Accustomed. “Imaginative”: fanciful.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Physical nature.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, skeptics.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Will corrupted in the Fall by original sin. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, poesy. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Analysis or explanation. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Poetics* 1.2. This begins what Sidney labels the *propositio*—the third part of a judicial oration as Thomas Elyot explains it in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1553), “a pithy sentence, comprehending in a small room the sum of the whole matter.” It is followed by the *divisio*, in which the subject is divided into its parts and the orator clarifies which of these are in dispute. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The primary authorities for the commonplace notions that a poem is a “speaking picture” and that the end of poetry is “to teach and delight” are, respectively, Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 120 C.E.), especially in *How to Study Poetry* 17–18, and Horace (65–8 B.C.E.), *Art of Poetry* 343–44. The compounded definition, as well as the threefold classification of poets that follows, stems from Scaliger. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Exodus 15:1–18; Deuteronomy 32:1–44; Judges 5. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Two scholars who published a Protestant Latin translation of the Bible, in 1579. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Homeric Hymns are a collection of ancient Greek poems addressed to various gods and formerly attributed to Homer. Similarly, Orpheus (the archetypal poet of Greek mythology) was thought to be the author of a group of poems that expound the beliefs of a Greek mystery-religion. The lyre playing of Amphion (a son of Zeus) moved stones to form themselves into the walls of Thebes. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (James 5:13). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Roman Marcus Cato was the author of *Disticha de moribus*, an immensely popular collection, in verse and prose, of moral maxims. Tyrtaeus and Phocylides are among the Greek poets Sidney has previously mentioned. [Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Lucan wrote *De bello civili* (On the Civil War; also known as the *Pharsalia*), an epic poem on the struggle between Caesar and Pompey. Lucretius wrote a philosophical poem, *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things). Virgil's *Georgics* exalts the life and work of the farmer. Manilius wrote a long poem titled *Astronomica*. The 15th-century Italian writer Pontanus—the only postclassical poet in this list—was the author of another celebrated astronomical poem, *Urania*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Justly entitled to the name.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lower.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Creative imagination.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A notable exemplar of chastity and honor, the Roman matron Lucretia committed suicide after being raped by the son of King Tarquinius Superbus.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the right poets.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Waited on . . . with": distinguished by.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Only.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lack. "Scope": aim.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Epic.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Two genres are named after their Greek and Latin verse forms. "Iambic": associated with directly vituperative poetry (as distinguished from the irony of satire). "Elegiac": poetry written in the "elegiac couplet," which was used especially for reflective, lamenting, or erotic poetry.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, in numbers, poetic meters.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The heroine of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lawyer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The true distinguishing characteristics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: All others, in all respects.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Weighing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Judgment. "Works": effects. "Anatomies": analyses. Here Sidney moves to the central and longest part of the judicial oration, the *confirmatio* or *examinatio*, in which the speaker

develops the arguments in support of his (or her) position.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Conceptual power. “Wit”: intellect; understanding. “Enabling”: strengthening.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Manifold. “Inclination”: natural disposition.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As Plato (*Theaetetus* 174) reported of the philosopher and astronomer Thales.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Particular.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The “chief art,” to which all others are subordinate. The term is Aristotle’s (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nearest.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Subtly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, bountiful gifts of scholastic terms and arguments.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Obstructive; troublesome.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Basing his authority.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Bias. “Accord”: reconcile.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Temper.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “I am the witness of times, the light of truth, the life of memory, the teacher of life, the messenger of antiquity” (Cicero, *De oratore* 2.9.36).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: At Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415), the English defeated the French. At Marathon, the Greeks defeated the Persians (490 B.C.E.). At Pharsalia, Caesar defeated Pompey (48 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Alfonso V of Aragon (1396–1458) carried the histories of Livy and Caesar into battle with him. Marcus Brutus was inspired to rise up against Caesar by the history of his great republican ancestor, Junius Brutus, who expelled the Tarquin kings.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Comes to a full stop.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The historian. “The one”: the philosopher.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Judge, arbitrator. Sidney images the rival claims of philosophy and history as a formal academic disputation—a standard exercise at the time—engaging the top class (“highest form”) in the “school of learning.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The theologian.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Surpassing.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The system of law (Latin).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Through fear of punishment than love of virtue. The distinction is from Horace, *Epistles* 1.16.52–53.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the lawyer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The moral philosopher, historian, and poet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Most private chamber. “Naughtiness”: wickedness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Moral conduct.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Limp (having, after all, only one leg each).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Virtuous.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fortunate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Not having.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Discriminatingly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Conception.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Judicious.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Individual conduct (as opposed to “public policy”).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Given form or shape.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A common English name for Cicero (Marcus Tullius Cicero).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: All the charms of the lovely nymph Calypso, and the promise of immortality with her, could not make Odysseus forget his home on the Greek isle of Ithaca (*Odyssey* 5.149–224). Anchises, the father of Aeneas, laments his destroyed homeland in *Aeneid* 2.638–49.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The formulation is Horace’s (*Epistles* 1.2.62).[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: In fact, Sophocles's *Ajax* does not portray its protagonist's mad actions on the stage but has them reported by Menelaus (lines 1052–61).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the logic of the Scholastic philosophers ("schoolmen"), "differences" are the attributes that distinguish among the species in a genus.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: All are figures in the story of the Trojan War, as recounted in the *Iliad* and, for the faithful friends Nisus and Euryalus, the *Aeneid* (9.176–449).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An evident splendor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: All are figures from Greek and Roman tragedy. "The two Theban brothers": Eteocles and Polynices, twin sons of Oedipus, who killed each other in battle. (For Atreus—the father of Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks against Troy—see p. 535, n. 8).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The common noun *pander* derives from Pandarus, the go-between in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Similarly, Gnatho—a figure in the *Eunuch* of the Roman comic dramatist Terence—became a type-name for a fawning parasite.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Perfect. Sidney approves of More's casting a work of political philosophy as an account of a voyage to a fictional country, but he does not want to be thought of as endorsing all features of the Utopian commonwealth (especially, one surmises, its communism).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "That poets be middling, neither gods, nor men, nor booksellers ever allowed" (Horace, *Art of Poetry* 372–73).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32); for the parable of the rich Dives and the beggar Lazarus, see Luke 16:19–31.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Condition.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Records.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, in the form of.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Poetics* 9.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Alcibiades, an Athenian politician and disciple of Socrates, died in 404 B.C.E.—twenty years before Aristotle’s birth. Sidney’s summary of Aristotle’s passage is accurate, with the important exception that he imposes the notion that Aristotelian universals have a morally prescriptive force, weighing “what is *fit* to be said or done.” Aristotle says only that “by a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Vespasian was emperor of Rome 69–79 C.E.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Instructive.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mentioned in the *Iliad*, Dares Phrygius was the supposed author of an eyewitness account of the Trojan War. Justin was a Roman historian of the 2nd or 3rd century C.E. who wrote an abridgment of a now-lost universal history by one Trogus.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For the lost looks of the witch Canidia, see Horace, *Epodes* 5.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Figures from Greek mythology. In one version of his story, Tantalus served up his son at a banquet for the gods; similarly, his grandson Atreus served his brother’s children to him.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Alexander the Great was often represented—for example, by the Roman historian Quintus Curtius—as having been corrupted by power; and even Scipio Africanus—the conqueror of Hannibal and one of the most unreservedly admired Romans—was, in his later years, accused of political misconduct. “Cannot be liberal . . . of”: is not at liberty to give.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The historian. “Doctrine”: instruction.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, provides more reliable assurance as to what course one should follow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, to a person of indiscriminating intelligence.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, if a person is sufficiently sophisticated to understand that reason is a better guide than example.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the historian.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
Darius I was king of Persia 521–486 B.C.E. The story of his faithful servant Zopyrus was told in Herodotus's *Histories* 3.153–60 and repeated in Justin's *Histories* 1.10. Somewhat similar stories (see the two following sentences) are recounted by the Roman historian Livy (concerning the last of the Tarquin kings and his son) in *From the Foundation of the City* 1.53–54 and in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* 6.1.38–44, 6.3.14–20 (though about Cyrus and one Araspas—not, as Sidney has it, Abradatas).  
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Likes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Outcome.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In *Odyssey* 5.291–387.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Euripides (as reported by Plutarch, *How to Study Poetry* 4).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, a deterrent.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Athenian general and architect of victory at Marathon over the Persians, later imprisoned by the Athenians.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Athenian general and statesman executed for treason because he opposed ill-advised opposition to Athens' Macedonian conquerors.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus, noted for ruthlessness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Emperor Alexander Severus, a reformer slain by his troops.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Political rivals who brought unrest and destruction to Rome for two decades.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The great orator, killed at Mark Antony's command. Pompey the Great, defeated by Caesar at Pharsalia and slain in Egypt.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: Cato the Younger committed suicide after his party failed to defeat Caesar.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: When Sulla resigned (“put down”) his dictatorship, Caesar joked that he was illiterate (*litteras nescivit*), since he left the *dictatura* (which means both “dictatorship” and “dictation”) to others.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: With reference to.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: They [tyrants] must be killed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Four famous tyrants of the classical world: the first two were from Corinth, Phalaris was from Agrigentum, and Dionysus the Elder was from Syracuse.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Succeed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, poetry.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Arguable.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A lover of philosophers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Not knowing but doing (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Painstaking effort.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Considering that by nature.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Natural understanding, as opposed to the philosophers’ special vocabulary (“words of art”).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This is the task, this is the work to be done (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.129).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As opposed to divine. “Sciences”: branches of learning.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Two bitter purgatives: aloe and rhubarb.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, would rather have their ears boxed than take the medicine.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Congruity; suitability.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Poetics* 4.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A chivalric romance of Spanish origin, which became extremely popular in a French translation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Aeneid* 12.645–46: “Shall this land see Turnus in flight? Is it so bad a thing to die?” The Italian king Turnus is Aeneas’s worthy rival, killed by the epic hero in the poem’s closing lines.



Aeneas carries his father, Anchises, away from burning Troy in 2.705–44.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Virtue. “Saving”: except. The (satiric) point is that wrangling over standard philosophical questions is unlikely to move anyone other than the wrangling philosophers themselves.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In an earlier passage not included here, Sidney argued that the beauty of Plato’s work depended on “poetry” (that is, fiction). The *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius (476–524 C.E.) is cast as a dialogue between himself and Lady Philosophy, and alternates prose and verse.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To follow one’s natural inclination.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, come accidentally.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Roman consul in 503 B.C.E. The story of his parable was first related by Livy, *From the Foundation of the City* 2.32.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Far-fetched.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A medieval tradition held that over the door of Plato’s Academy was written: “No man untaught in geometry should enter.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Except on that occasion. “Only words”: words alone.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: By killing the husband of his mistress, Bathsheba. For the deed, and Nathan’s rebuke, see 2 Samuel 11–12.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cruelly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The *first* cause was God’s intention to bring David to repentance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Psalm 51, in which David pleads for God’s mercy. “Glass”: mirror.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, to the argument weighing poetry by its “works.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Congenial, suitable. “End”: aim, objective.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: This final paragraph constitutes the *peroratio* of Sidney’s judicial oration: though it includes a brief recapitulation of

arguments, the main function of the peroration is, like that of the exordium, to work on the audience's feelings, leaving it well-disposed toward the speaker and the speaker's client.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: False poets, who mimic ("ape") the real ones.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Early Greek poet whose *Theogony* recounts myths of the birth and warfare of the gods and the origin of the world. For Aristotle, compare *Metaphysics* 3.4.12. Bembus (Pietro Bembo) was an Italian cardinal and grammarian. For Scaliger, see p. 526, n. 7. Conrad Clauser was a German scholar who translated a Greek treatise by Cornutus, a Stoic pedagogue of Nero's time.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: What not?[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Christoforo Landino, Florentine humanist who developed this argument in his edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1481).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Divinely inspired frenzy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Born of a freed-slave father (Horace, *Satires* 1.6.6).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Offspring of Hercules.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: If my songs are of any avail (*Aeneid* 9.446).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, in Paradise with Dante's beloved or in the Elysian Fields with Aeneas's honored father.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Resembling the music of the spheres, most beautiful of all music. According to Cicero (*Dream of Scipio* 5), the noise of the waterfalls in the upper Nile deafened those who lived nearby.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: God of ridicule, son of Night; hence, a critic. "Mome": dunce.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He was given ass's ears because he preferred Pan's music to Apollo's (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.146–79).[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Bupalus, an ancient Greek sculptor who, according to an apocryphal story, hanged himself when his works were satirized by the poet Hipponax. Sidney fuses the two names.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Irish bards were thought to be able to cause death with their rhymed charms.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Because you are unable to write a sonnet.[Return to reference 5](#)

**Astrophil and Stella** Sidney was a jealous protector of his privacy. "I assure you before God," he had written once in an angry letter to his father's private secretary, Molyneux, "that if ever I know you do so much as read any letter I write to my father, without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you. And trust to it, for I speak it in earnest." Yet in *Astrophil and Stella* he seems to hold up a mirror to every nuance of his emotional being. For its original coterie audience, Sidney's sonnet sequence must have been an elaborate game of literary masks, psychological risk-taking, and open secrets. The loosely linked succession of 108 sonnets and eleven songs, with its dazzling display of technical virtuosity, provides tantalizing glimpses of identifiable characters and, still more, a sustained and remarkably intimate portrait of the poet's inner life.

Much biographical speculation has centered on Sidney's ambiguous relationship with Penelope Devereux, the supposed original of Stella. A marriage between the two had been proposed in 1576 and was talked about for some years, but in 1581 she married Lord Robert Rich, and two years later Sidney also married. (At their high social rank, marriages were negotiated in the interests of the powerful families involved, not of the individuals.) Some of the sonnets contain sly puns on the name *Rich*, and it seems likely that there are autobiographical elements in the shadowy narrative sketched by the work. At the same time, however, the "plot" of the sequence—full of trials, setbacks, much suffering on the part of the lover, and occasional encouragement on the part of the lady—is highly conventional, derived from Petrarch and his many Italian, French, and Spanish imitators.

Poets in this tradition undertook to produce an anatomy of love, displaying its shifting and often contradictory states: hope and despair, tenderness and bitterness, exultation and modesty, bodily desire and spiritual transcendence. Sidney, in the role of Astrophil, protests that he uses no standard conventional phrases, that his verse is original and comes from his heart. This protest is itself

conventional, and yet Sidney manages to infuse his sonnets with an extraordinary vigor and freshness. Certain of the sonnets have, within their narrow fourteen-line bounds, the force of the drama: "Fly, fly, my friends, I have my death-wound, fly" or "What, have I thus betrayed my liberty?" Others, in their grappling with insistent desire, have the probing, psychological resonance of private confession: "With what sharp checks I in myself am shent" or "Who will in fairest book of Nature know." Still others ask crucial questions about the whole project of self-representation: "Stella oft sees the very face of woe." Virtually all of them manifest the exceptional *energia*—forcibleness—that Sidney, in *The Defense of Poesy*, says is the key ingredient of good love poetry.

## ***From Astrophil and Stella***

***1***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Loving in truth, and fain<sup>[o](#)</sup> in verse my love to show,  
That the dear She might take some pleasure of my  
    pain,  
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make  
    her know,  
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,  
    I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of  
5     woe,  
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,  
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would  
    flow  
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned  
    brain.  
    But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's  
    stay;<sup>[2](#)</sup>  
10    Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's  
    blows,  
And others' feet still<sup>[o](#)</sup> seemed but strangers in my  
    way.  
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my  
    throes,  
    Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,  
    "Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and  
    write."

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: One of six sonnets in the sequence written in hexameters.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, lacking the support of Invention, his words moved haltingly.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *desirous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *continually*[Return to reference °](#)

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbèd<sup>3</sup> shot  
 Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will  
 bleed,  
 But known worth did in mine<sup>4</sup> of time proceed,  
 Till by degrees it had full conquest got.  
 I saw and liked, I liked but lovèd not,  
 5 I loved, but straight did not<sup>5</sup> what Love decreed;  
 At length to Love's decrees, I, forced, agreed,  
 Yet with repining<sup>o</sup> at so partial<sup>o</sup> lot.  
 Now even that footstep of lost liberty  
 10 Is gone, and now like slave-born Muscovite,<sup>6</sup>  
 I call it praise to suffer tyranny;  
 And now employ the remnant of my wit<sup>o</sup>  
 To make myself believe that all is well,  
 While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Ineffectual or at random.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tunnel dug to undermine a besieged fortress.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Did not immediately do.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Inhabitant of Muscovy, Russian principality ruled from Moscow; 16th-century travel books describe Muscovites as contented slaves.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *complaining* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unfair* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mind* [Return to reference °](#)



You that do search for every purling<sup>o</sup> spring  
 Which from the ribs of old Parnassus<sup>7</sup> flows,  
 And every flower,<sup>8</sup> not sweet perhaps, which  
 grows  
 Near therabout, into your poesy<sup>9</sup> wring;  
 You that do dictionary's method bring  
 5     Into your rhymes, running in rattling rows;  
 You that poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes  
 With new-born sighs and denizenèd wit<sup>o</sup> do sing:  
 You take wrong ways, those far-fet<sup>o</sup> helps be such  
 10     As do bewray a want of inward touch,<sup>1</sup>  
 And sure at length stolen goods do come to light.  
 But if (both for your love and skill) your name  
 You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,  
 Stella behold, and then begin to indite.<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Mountain near Delphi in Greece, sacred to the Muses.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Also, poetic figures ("flowers of rhetoric").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Also, a nosegay (posy).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reveal a lack of innate talent.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *murmuring*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *naturalized ingenuity*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *far-fetched*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *compose, write*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

With what sharp checks<sup>o</sup> I in myself am shent,<sup>o</sup>  
 When into Reason's audit I do go,  
 And by just counts myself a bankrout<sup>o</sup> know  
 Of all those goods, which heaven to me hath lent:  
 Unable quite to pay even Nature's rent,  
 5 Which unto it by birthright I do owe;  
 And which is worse, no good excuse can show,  
 But that my wealth I have most idly spent.  
 My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth  
 toys,<sup>2</sup>  
 10 My wit<sup>o</sup> doth strive those passions to defend,  
 Which for reward spoil it with vain annoys.<sup>o</sup>  
 I see my course to lose myself doth bend:<sup>o</sup>  
 I see and yet no greater sorrow take,  
 Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Trifles; that is, these poems. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: rebukes [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: shamed [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: bankrupt [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: intellect [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: troubles [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: turn [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

Fly, fly, my friends, I have my death-wound, fly;  
 See there that boy, that murth'ring<sup>o</sup> boy, I say,  
 Who like a thief hid in dark bush doth lie  
 Till bloody bullet get him wrongful prey.

5        So tyrann<sup>o</sup> he no fitter place could spy,  
 Nor so fair level<sup>o</sup> in so secret stay,<sup>o</sup>  
 As that sweet black<sup>o</sup> which veils the heav'nly eye;  
 There himself with his shot he close<sup>o</sup> doth lay.  
 Poor passenger,<sup>o</sup> pass now thereby I did,  
 And stayed, pleased with the prospect of the place,  
 10        While that black hue from me the bad guest hid:  
 But straight I saw motions of lightning grace,  
 And then descried<sup>o</sup> the glist'ring<sup>o</sup> of his dart;<sup>o</sup>  
 But ere I could fly thence, it pierced my heart.

## Notes

- °: *murdering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tyrant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aim* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stopping place* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pupil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secretly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passerby* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glittering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrow* [Return to reference](#) °

Because I oft, in dark abstracted guise,  
 Seem most alone in greatest company,  
 With dearth of words, or answers quite awry,  
 To them that would make speech of speech arise,  
 They deem, and of their doom<sup>o</sup> the rumor flies,  
 5 That poison foul of bubbling pride doth lie  
 So in my swelling breast that only I<sup>o</sup>  
 Fawn on myself, and others do despise.  
 Yet pride, I think, doth not my soul possess,  
 Which looks too oft in his unflatt'ring glass;<sup>o</sup>  
 10 But one worse fault, ambition, I confess,  
 That makes me oft my best friends overpass,<sup>o</sup>  
 Unseen, unheard, while thought to highest place  
 Bends all his powers, even unto Stella's grace.<sup>o</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: judgment [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *that I do nothing but* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: mirror [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *pass by, ignore* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *beauty, elegance; favor* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

You that with allegory's curious frame<sup>o</sup>  
 Of others' children changelings use<sup>o</sup> to make,  
 With me those pains for God's sake do not take:  
 I list not<sup>o</sup> dig so deep for brazen fame.  
 When I say Stella, I do mean the same  
 5 Princess of beauty for whose only sake  
 The reins of love I love, though never slake,<sup>o</sup>  
 And joy therein, though nations count it shame.  
 I beg no subject to use eloquence,<sup>3</sup>  
 Nor in hid ways to guide philosophy;  
 10 Look at my hands for no such quintessence,<sup>4</sup>  
 But know that I in pure simplicity  
 Breathe out the flames which burn within my  
 heart,  
 Love only reading unto me this art.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: That is, I don't ask for a topic simply as an excuse to display my rhetorical skills.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The mysterious "fifth element" of matter (supplementary to earth, air, fire, and water), which alchemists labored to extract.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *intricate contrivance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I don't care to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slack*[Return to reference °](#)

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies,  
 How silently, and with how wan a face!  
 What, may it be that even in heavenly place  
 That busy archer<sup>o</sup> his sharp arrows tries?  
 5 Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes  
 Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;  
 I read it in thy looks: thy languished grace,  
 To me that feel the like, thy state describes.<sup>o</sup>  
 Then even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,  
 10 Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?<sup>o</sup>  
 Are beauties there as proud as here they be?  
 Do they above love to be loved, and yet  
 Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?  
 Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?<sup>5</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 5: That is, is the lady's ingratitude considered virtue in heaven (as here)? Also, is the lover's virtue (fidelity) considered distasteful in heaven (as here)? [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *Cupid* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *reveals* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *lack of intelligence* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

Come, let me write. "And to what end?" To ease  
 A burdened heart. "How can words ease, which  
 are  
 The glasses<sup>o</sup> of thy daily vexing care?"  
 Oft cruel fights well pictured forth do please.  
 "Art<sup>o</sup> not ashamed to publish thy disease?"  
 5 Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare.  
 "But will not wise men think thy words fond  
 ware?"<sup>o</sup>  
 Then be they close,<sup>6</sup> and so none shall displease.  
 "What idler thing, than speak and not be hard?"<sup>o</sup>  
 What harder thing than smart,<sup>o</sup> and not to speak?  
 10 Peace, foolish wit;<sup>o</sup> with wit my wit is marred.  
 Thus while I write I doubt<sup>o</sup> to write, and wreak<sup>o</sup>  
 My harms on Ink's poor loss: perhaps some find  
 Stella's great powers, that so confuse my mind.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Let them (my words) be kept private.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *mirrors*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *are you*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *foolish trinkets*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *heard*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *feel pain*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *reason; intellect*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *hesitate; fear*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *avenge*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance  
 Guided so well that I obtained the prize,  
 Both by the judgment of the English eyes  
 And of some sent from that sweet enemy France;<sup>7</sup>  
 5     Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance;<sup>8</sup>  
       Townfolks my strength; a daintier<sup>o</sup> judge applies  
       His praise to sleight,<sup>9</sup> which from good use<sup>o</sup> doth  
       rise;  
 Some lucky wits impute it but to chance;  
       Others, because of both sides I do take  
 10     My blood from them who did excel in this,<sup>1</sup>  
       Think Nature me a man of arms did make.  
 How far they shoot awry! The true cause is,  
       Stella looked on, and from her heavenly face  
       Sent forth the beams which made so fair my race.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Sidney took part in several jousting tournaments between 1579 and 1585 with French spectators present, but the one in May 1581 was devised specifically to entertain French commissioners.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, put forward as the reason for my triumph.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Skill, dexterity.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sidney's father and grandfather and his maternal uncles, the earls of Leicester and Warwick, were frequent participants in tournaments.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Course in a tournament.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes



- °: *more discerning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experience*[Return to reference](#) °

Stella oft sees the very face of woe  
 Painted in my beclouded stormy face,  
 But cannot skill to<sup>o</sup> pity my disgrace,<sup>o</sup>  
 Not though thereof the cause herself she know.<sup>3</sup>  
 Yet hearing late a fable which did show,  
 5 Of lovers never known, a grievous case,  
 Pity thereof gate<sup>o</sup> in her breast such place  
 That, from that sea derived, tears' spring did flow.  
 Alas, if fancy,<sup>o</sup> drawn by imaged things,  
 10 Though false, yet with free scope more grace<sup>o</sup> doth  
 breed  
 Than servant's wrack, where new doubts honor  
 brings,<sup>4</sup>  
 Then think, my dear, that you in me do read  
 Of lover's ruin some sad tragedy:  
 I am not I; pity the tale of me.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: That is, even though she knows she herself is the cause of it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, than the ruin of her lover ("servant"), caused by the new scruples ("doubts") her honor brings up.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *is unable to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misfortune* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *got* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fantasy* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *favor* [Return to reference](#) °

What, have I thus betrayed my liberty?  
 Can those black beams such burning marks<sup>°</sup>  
 engrave  
 In my free side? or am I born a slave,  
 Whose neck becomes<sup>°</sup> such yoke of tyranny?  
 Or want<sup>°</sup> I sense to feel my misery?  
 5 Or sprite,<sup>°</sup> disdain of such disdain to have?  
 Who for long faith, though daily help I crave,  
 May get no alms but scorn of beggary.<sup>5</sup>  
 Virtue awake! Beauty but beauty is;  
 I may, I must, I can, I will, I do  
 10 Leave following that which it is gain to miss.  
 Let her go. Soft, but here she comes. Go to,<sup>6</sup>  
 Unkind, I love you not. O me, that eye  
 Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.<sup>°</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 5: That is, scorn for [my] begging.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An emphatic expression, like "I tell you."[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *brands of slavery*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *is suited to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contradict my tongue*[Return to reference °](#)

I on my horse, and Love on me doth try  
 Our horsemanships, while by strange work I prove  
 A horseman to my horse, a horse to Love;  
 And now man's wrongs in me, poor beast, descry.<sup>°</sup>  
 The reins wherewith my rider doth me tie  
 5 Are humbled thoughts, which bit of reverence  
 move,  
 Curbed in with fear, but with gilt boss<sup>°</sup> above  
 Of hope, which makes it seem fair to the eye.  
 The wand<sup>°</sup> is will; thou, Fancy, saddle art,<sup>7</sup>  
 10 Girt fast by Memory; and while I spur  
 My horse, he spurs with sharp desire my heart;  
 He sits me fast,<sup>°</sup> however I do stir,  
 And now hath made me to his hand so right  
 That in the manage<sup>8</sup> myself takes delight.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: That is, you, Fancy (imagination), are the saddle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Training or handling of a horse.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *discover*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gold stud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whip*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tightly*[Return to reference °](#)

Because I breathe not love to every one,  
 Nor do not use set colors for to wear,<sup>9</sup>  
 Nor nourish special locks of vowed hair,<sup>1</sup>  
 Nor give each speech a full point<sup>2</sup> of a groan,  
 The courtly nymphs, acquainted with the moan  
 5 Of them who in their lips Love's standard<sup>o</sup> bear,  
 "What, he?" say they of me, "now I dare swear  
 He cannot love; no, no, let him alone!"  
 And think so still, so<sup>3</sup> Stella know my mind.  
 Profess indeed I do not Cupid's art;  
 10 But you, fair maids, at length this true shall find,  
 That his right badge<sup>4</sup> is but worn in the heart:  
 Dumb swans, not chatt'ring pies,<sup>o</sup> do lovers  
 prove;<sup>5</sup>  
 They love indeed, who quake to say they love.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Am not accustomed to wear colors associated with a particular woman.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, lovelocks: long, flowing locks characteristic of amorous courtiers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Final punctuation, period.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Go on thinking so, provided only that.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: True badge, livery.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Prove to be (true) lovers.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *ensign*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *magpies* [Return to reference °](#)

Fie, school of Patience, fie, your lesson is  
 Far far too long to learn it without book:°  
 What, a whole week without one piece of look,<sup>6</sup>  
 And think I should not your large precepts miss?°  
 When I might read those letters fair of bliss,  
 5 Which in her face teach virtue, I could brook°  
 Somewhat thy leaden counsels, which I took  
 As of a friend that meant not much amiss.  
 But now that I, alas, do want° her sight,  
 What, dost thou think that I can ever take  
 10 In thy cold stuff a phlegmatic° delight?  
 No, Patience, if thou wilt my good, then make  
 Her come and hear with patience my desire,  
 And then with patience bid me bear my fire.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Without the briefest glimpse of her.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *by memory*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forget*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bear*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sluggish*[Return to reference °](#)



O joy, too high for my low style to show,  
 O bliss, fit for a nobler state than me!  
 Envy, put out thine eyes, least<sup>o</sup> thou do see  
 What oceans of delight in me do flow.  
 5 My friend, that oft saw through all masks my woe,  
 Come, come, and let me pour myself on thee:  
 Gone is the winter of my misery;  
 My spring appears; O see what here doth grow.  
 For Stella hath, with words where faith doth shine,  
 10 Of her high heart given me the monarchy:  
 I, I, O I may say that she is mine.  
 And though she give but thus conditionly  
 This realm of bliss, while virtuous course I take,  
 No kings be crowned but<sup>o</sup> they some covenants<sup>z</sup>  
 make.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Solemn coronation oaths taken by English monarchs, promising to protect the laws and the people. [Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *lest* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *unless* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

Who will in fairest book of Nature know  
 How Virtue may best lodged in beauty be,  
 Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,  
 Stella, those fair lines, which true goodness show.  
 There shall he find all vices' overthrow,  
 5 Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty  
 Of reason, from whose light those night-birds<sup>8</sup> fly;  
 That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.  
 And not content to be Perfection's heir  
 Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,  
 10 Who mark<sup>o</sup> in thee what is in thee most fair.<sup>9</sup>  
 So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,  
 As fast<sup>o</sup> thy Virtue bends that love to good;  
 "But, ah," Desire still cries, "give me some food."

## Endnotes

- Note 8: The owl, for example, was an emblem of various vices.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, her virtue, which is fairer even than her beauty.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *perceive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at the same rate*[Return to reference °](#)

Desire, though thou my old companion art,  
 And oft so clings to my pure Love that I  
 One from the other scarcely can descry,<sup>o</sup>  
 While each doth blow the fire of my heart,  
 Now from thy fellowship I needs must part:  
 5     Venus is taught with Dian's<sup>1</sup> wings to fly;  
       I must no more in thy sweet passions lie;  
 Virtue's gold now must head my Cupid's dart.  
       Service and honor, wonder with delight,  
 10    Fear to offend, will worthy to appear,<sup>2</sup>  
       Care shining in mine eyes, faith in my sprite:<sup>o</sup>  
 These things are left me by my only dear.  
       But thou, Desire, because thou wouldst have all,  
       Now banished art. But yet alas how shall?

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Diana, goddess of the moon and patron of chastity. Venus, goddess of beauty and love, mother of Cupid. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The phrase can mean either "the wish to appear worthy" or "desire that is worthy to appear [that is, not shameful]." [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *distinguish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spirit* [Return to reference °](#)

I never drank of Aganippe well,<sup>3</sup>  
 Nor ever did in shade of Tempe<sup>4</sup> sit;  
 And Muses scorn with vulgar<sup>o</sup> brains to dwell;  
 Poor layman I, for sacred rites unfit.

5       Some do I hear of poets' fury<sup>o</sup> tell,  
 But God wot,<sup>o</sup> wot not what they mean by it;  
 And this I swear by blackest brook of hell,<sup>5</sup>  
 I am no pick-purse of another's wit.

10       How falls it then that with so smooth an ease  
 My thoughts I speak, and what I speak doth flow  
 In verse, and that my verse best wits doth please?  
 Guess we the cause. "What, is it thus?" Fie no.  
 "Or so?" Much less. "How then?" Sure thus it is:  
 My lips are sweet, inspired with Stella's kiss.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 3: The fountain at the foot of Mount Helicon in Greece, sacred to the Muses.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Valley beside Mount Olympus, sacred to Apollo, the god of poetry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The most binding of all oaths were those sworn by the river Styx.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A kiss he stole from Stella when he caught her napping (Second Song).[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *common*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inspiration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knows*[Return to reference °](#)

O kiss, which dost those ruddy gems impart,  
 Or<sup>o</sup> gems, or fruits of new-found Paradise,  
 Breathing all bliss and sweet'ning to the heart,  
 Teaching dumb lips a nobler exercise!

5 O kiss, which souls, even souls, together ties  
 By links of Love, and only Nature's art,  
 How fain<sup>o</sup> would I paint thee to all men's eyes,  
 Or of thy gifts at least shade out<sup>o</sup> some part.

But she forbids, with blushing words she says  
 She builds her fame on higher-seated praise.  
 10 But my heart burns, I cannot silent be.

Then since (dear life) you fain would have me  
 peace,<sup>7</sup>

And I, mad with delight, want wit<sup>8</sup> to cease,  
 Stop you my mouth with still still kissing me.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: You want me to be silent.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lack the mental faculties.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *either*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sketch*[Return to reference °](#)

### ***Fourth Song***<sup>9</sup>

Only joy, now here you are,  
Fit to hear and ease my care;  
Let my whispering voice obtain  
Sweet reward for sharpest pain:  
Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
5 "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."

Night hath closed all in her cloak,  
Twinkling stars love-thoughts provoke,  
Danger hence good care doth keep,  
Jealousy itself doth sleep:  
10 Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
"No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."

Better place no wit can find,  
Cupid's yoke to loose or bind;  
These sweet flowers on fine bed, too,  
15 Us in their best language woo:  
Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
"No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."

This small light the moon bestows  
Serves thy beams but to disclose,  
20 So to raise my hap<sup>o</sup> more high;  
Fear not else, none can us spy:  
Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
"No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."

That you heard was but a mouse,  
25 Dumb sleep holdeth all the house;  
Yet asleep methinks they say,  
"Young folks, take time while you may."  
Take me to thee, and thee to me.

30 "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."  
 Niggard<sup>o</sup> Time threats, if we miss  
 This large offer of our bliss,  
 Long stay<sup>o</sup> ere he grant the same;  
 Sweet, then, while each thing doth frame,<sup>o</sup>  
 35 Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
 "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."  
 Your fair mother is abed,  
 Candles out, and curtains spread;  
 She thinks you do letters write:  
 40 Write, but first let me indite:<sup>o</sup>  
 Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
 "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."  
 Sweet, alas, why strive you thus?  
 Concord better fitteth us.  
 45 Leave to Mars the force of hands;  
 Your power in your beauty stands:  
 Take me to thee, and thee to me.  
 "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."  
 Woe to me, and do you swear  
 50 Me to hate? But I forbear.<sup>o</sup>  
 Cursèd be my destines<sup>o</sup> all,  
 That brought me so high to fall:  
 Soon with my death I will please thee.  
 "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be."

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Like Petrarch, Sidney intersperses songs (eleven of them, in various verse forms) in his sequence. Some of them incorporate Stella's voice. This song appears between sonnets 85 and 86. [Return to reference 9](#)

# Notes

- °: *good fortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stingy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *serve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dictate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fates*[Return to reference](#) °



When I was forced from Stella ever dear,  
 Stella, food of my thoughts, heart of my heart,  
 Stella, whose eyes make all my tempests clear,  
 By iron laws of duty to depart,  
 5     Alas, I found that she with me did smart:<sup>°</sup>  
 I saw that tears did in her eyes appear;  
 I saw that sighs her sweetest lips did part,  
 And her sad words my saddened sense did hear.  
 For me, I wept to see pearls scattered so,  
 I sighed her sighs, and wailed for her woe,  
 10     Yet swam in joy, such love in her was seen.  
 Thus while th' effect most bitter was to me,  
 And nothing than the cause more sweet could be,  
 I had been<sup>°</sup> vexed, if vexed I had not been.

## Notes

- °: *suffer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *would have been*[Return to reference °](#)

Now that of absence the most irksome night  
 With darkest shade doth overcome my day,  
 Since Stella's eyes, wont<sup>o</sup> to give me my day,  
 Leaving my hemisphere, leave me in night,  
 5 Each day seems long, and longs for long-stayed<sup>o</sup>  
 night,  
 The night, as tedious, woos th' approach of day;  
 Tired with the dusty toils of busy day,  
 Languished with horrors of the silent night,  
 Suffering the evils both of the day and night,  
 10 While no night is more dark than is my day,  
 Nor no day hath less quiet than my night,  
 With such bad mixture of my night and day  
 That, living thus in blackest winter night,  
 I feel the flames of hottest summer day.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A sonnet with only two rhyme words, *night* and *day*.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *accustomed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *long-delayed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

Stella, while now by Honor's cruel might  
 I am from<sup>◦</sup> you, light of my life, mis-led,  
 And that fair you, my sun, thus overspread  
 With absence' veil, I live in Sorrow's night,  
 5 If this dark place yet shew,<sup>◦</sup> like candlelight,  
 Some beauty's piece,<sup>2</sup> as amber-colored head,  
 Milk hands, rose cheeks, or lips more sweet, more  
 red,  
 Or seeing jets,<sup>3</sup> black, but in blackness bright,  
 They please I do confess, they please mine eyes;  
 But why? because of you they models be;  
 10 Models such be wood-globes of glist'ring<sup>◦</sup> skies.<sup>4</sup>  
 Dear, therefore be not jealous over me,  
 If you hear that they seem my heart to move:  
 Not them, O no, but you in them I love.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Some beauties in other women.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, jet-black eyes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wooden globes of the heavens, with painted constellations and planets.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- ◦: *away from*[Return to reference ◦](#)
- ◦: *show*[Return to reference ◦](#)
- ◦: *glittering*[Return to reference ◦](#)

O absent presence, Stella is not here;  
 False flattering Hope, that with so fair a face  
 Bare me in hand, ° that in this orphan place  
 Stella, I say my Stella, should appear.  
 5 What say'st thou now? Where is that dainty cheer °  
 Thou told'st mine eyes should help their famished  
 case?  
 But thou art gone, now that self-felt disgrace  
 Dost make me most to wish thy comfort near.  
 But here I do store ° of fair ladies meet,  
 Who may with charm of conversation sweet  
 10 Make in my heavy mold ° new thoughts to grow:  
 Sure they prevail as much with me, as he  
 That bade his friend, but then new-maimed, to be  
 Merry with him, and not think of his woe.

## Notes

- °: *deceived me* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *countenance; food* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abundance* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *earth* [Return to reference °](#)

When Sorrow (using mine own fire's might)  
 Melts down his lead into my boiling breast,  
 Through that dark furnace to my heart oppressed  
 There shines a joy from thee, my only light;  
 But soon as thought of thee breeds my delight,  
 5 And my young soul flutters to thee, his nest,  
 Most rude Despair, my daily unbidden guest,  
 Clips straight<sup>o</sup> my wings, straight wraps me in his  
 night,  
 And makes me then bow down my head and say,  
 10 "Ah, what doth Phoebus'<sup>o</sup> gold that wretch avail,  
 Whom iron doors do keep from use of day?"  
 So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevail,  
 That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,  
 And in my joys for thee my only annoy.<sup>o</sup>

## 1582? Endnotes

1591, 1598

- Note 5: In many sonnet sequences, as here, the final poem brings no resolution. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *immediately* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *god of the sun* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trouble, pain* [Return to reference °](#)

## MARY (SIDNEY) HERBERT, COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE 1562–1621

When her brother, the celebrated courtier and author Philip Sidney, died in 1586, Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke, became the custodian not only of his writings but also of his last name. Though her marriage in 1577 to Henry Herbert, the second Earl of Pembroke, represented a great social advance for her family—her offspring would be among the nation's tiny hereditary nobility—throughout her life the Countess of Pembroke held on to her identity as a Sidney.

She had good reason to do so. The Sidneys were celebrated for their generous support of poets, clergymen, alchemists, naturalists, scientists, and musicians. The Pembroke country estate, Wilton, quickly became a gathering place for thinkers who enjoyed the countess's patronage and shared her staunch Protestant convictions and her literary interests. Books, pamphlets, and scores of poems in the 1590s and thereafter were dedicated to her, as well as to her brother Robert (whose country house, Penshurst, is praised in a well-known poem by Ben Jonson). Nicholas Breton and Samuel Daniel in particular benefited from her support, as did her niece, goddaughter, and frequent companion, Mary Wroth.

In one of the dedicatory poems to *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Aemilia Lanyer praises Mary Sidney not only for her generosity

toward poets but also for those “works that are more deep and more profound.” These include her translations: she joins Anne Bacon, Margaret Tyler, and Anne Locke as a notable female translator of the era. Part of her translation of Robert Garnier’s neoclassical French tragedy *Marc Antoine* is provided below; she also translated the religious tract *A Discourse of Life and Death* by the French Protestant Philippe de Mornay. She knew Italian too: her translation of Petrarch’s *Triumph of Death* was the first in English to maintain the original *terza rima* (a particularly challenging rhyme scheme for an English versifier). She also dared to write in her own voice. Two of her main themes are her love for her brother Philip Sidney and for Queen Elizabeth—among her original poems was a powerful elegy for Philip and a short pastoral entertainment for the queen; both themes come together in the text provided below, “To the Thrice-Sacred Queen Elizabeth,” in which the psalms she co-wrote with her now dead brother are dedicated to the queen.

Mary Sidney was best known for having prepared a composite edition of Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* and for contributing the larger number (107) of the verse translations of the 150 biblical psalms that her brother had begun. Her very free renderings re-create the psalms as English poems, using an amazing variety of stanzaic and metrical patterns and some strikingly effective images. Widely circulated in manuscript, this influential collection was an important bridge between the many metrical paraphrases of psalms in this period and the works of the great religious lyric poets of the seventeenth century, especially George Herbert. Donne’s poem “Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke His Sister” testifies to that importance: “They tell us *why*, and teach us *how* to sing.”

## **To the Thrice-Sacred Queen Elizabeth** In

this complex poem, preserved in two manuscripts, Mary Sidney dedicates her completed translation of the psalms, begun by her brother Philip Sidney, to Queen Elizabeth. She mourns her brother while also maintaining that he and she together have, through their translations, made the psalms and their writer, King David, English. She praises Queen Elizabeth and King David both as artists and as rulers and celebrates the queen's—and England's—political and international successes.



# To the Thrice-Sacred Queen Elizabeth

Even now, that care which on thy crown attends<sup>1</sup>—  
And with thy happy greatness daily grows—  
Tells me, thrice-sacred queen, my muse offends,  
And of respect to thee the line outgoes.<sup>2</sup>  
One instant will (or willing) can she<sup>o</sup> lose  
5 I say not reading, but receiving rhymes,<sup>3</sup>  
On whom in chief dependeth to dispose<sup>o</sup>  
What Europe acts<sup>o</sup> in these most active times?

Yet dare I so: as humbleness may dare  
Cherish some hope<sup>o</sup> they<sup>o</sup> shall acceptance find;  
10 Not weighing less thy state, lighter thy care,  
But knowing more thy grace, abler thy mind.  
What heavenly powers thee highest throne  
assigned,<sup>4</sup>  
Assigned thee goodness suiting that degree,<sup>o</sup>  
And by thy strength thy burthen so defined,  
15 To others toil, is exercise to thee.<sup>5</sup>

Cares, though still great, cannot be greatest still,  
Business must ebb, though leisure never flow.  
Then these the posts of duty and goodwill  
20 Shall press<sup>o</sup> to offer what their senders owe;<sup>6</sup>  
Which once in two, now in one subject go,<sup>7</sup>  
The poorer left, the richer reft away:<sup>o</sup>  
Who better might (oh "might"! ah word of woe)<sup>8</sup>  
Have given for me what I for him defray.<sup>o</sup>

How can I name whom sighing sighs extend,<sup>o</sup>  
25 And not unstop my tears' eternal spring?

But he did warp, I weaved,<sup>9</sup> this web to end;  
The stuff<sup>o</sup> not ours,<sup>1</sup> our work no curious<sup>o</sup> thing;  
Wherein yet well we thought the Psalmist King—<sup>2</sup>  
Now English denizenèd,<sup>o</sup> though Hebrew born—  
30 Would to thy music undispleasèd<sup>o</sup> sing,  
Oft having worse, without repining,<sup>o</sup> worn.

And I the cloth in both our names present,  
A livery robe<sup>3</sup> to be bestowed by thee:  
Small parcel of<sup>o</sup> that undischargèd<sup>o</sup> rent,  
35 From which nor pains, nor payments can us free.  
And yet enough to cause our neighbours see  
We will our best, though scantèd<sup>o</sup> in our will:  
And those nigh<sup>o</sup> fields where sown thy favors be  
Unwealthy do, not else unworthy, till.<sup>o</sup>  
40

For in our work what bring we but thine own?  
What English is, by many names, is thine.  
There humble laurels,<sup>o</sup> in thy shadows grown  
To garland others, would themselves repine.<sup>o</sup>  
45 Thy breast the cabinet, thy seat the shrine  
Where Muses hang their vowèd memories:  
Where wit, where art, where all that is divine  
Conceivèd best, and best defended lies.

Which if men did not (as they do) confess,  
And wronging worlds would otherwise consent:  
50 Yet here who minds<sup>o</sup> so meet<sup>o</sup> a patroness  
For authors' state or writing's argument?  
A king should only to a queen be sent.  
God's lovèd choice unto his chosen love:  
Devotion to devotion's president:  
55 What all applaud, to her whom none reprove.<sup>4</sup>

And who sees ought, but sees how justly square<sup>o</sup>  
His haughty ditties<sup>o</sup> to thy glorious days?

How well beseeming thee his triumphs are?  
 His hope, his zeal, his prayer, plaint,<sup>o</sup> and praise,  
 60 Needless thy person to their height to raise;  
 Less need to bend them down to thy degree;  
 These holy garments each good soul assays,<sup>o</sup>  
 Some sorting<sup>o</sup> all, all sort to none but thee.

For even thy rule is painted<sup>o</sup> in his reign:  
 65 Both clear in right; both nigh<sup>o</sup> by wrong oppressed;  
 And each at length (man crossing<sup>o</sup> God in vain)  
 Possessed of place, and each in peace possessed.  
 Proud Philistines did interrupt his rest;  
 70 The foes of Heaven no less have been thy foes.<sup>5</sup>  
 He with great conquest; thou with greater blessed;  
 Thou sure to win; and he secure to lose.

Thus hand in hand with him thy glories walk.  
 But who can trace them where alone they go?  
 75 Of thee two hemispheres on honor talk,<sup>6</sup>  
 And lands and seas thy trophies jointly show.  
 The very winds did on thy party blow,  
 And rocks in arms thy foemen eft<sup>o</sup> defy.<sup>7</sup>  
 But soft my muse: thy pitch is earthly low;  
 80 Forbear this heaven where only eagles fly.

Kings on a queen enforced their states to lay;  
 Mainlands for empire waiting on an isle;  
 Men drawn by worth a woman to obey;  
 One moving all, herself unmoved the while:  
 85 Truth's restitution,<sup>o</sup> vanity exile,  
 Wealth sprung of want, war held without annoy,<sup>o</sup>  
 Let subject be of some inspirèd style,  
 Till then the object of her subjects' joy.

Thy<sup>8</sup> utmost<sup>o</sup> can but offer to her sight  
 Her handmaid's task,<sup>9</sup> which most her will endears;

90 And pray unto thy pains life from that light<sup>1</sup>  
 Which lively lightsome<sup>o</sup> court and kingdom cheers,  
 What wish she may (far past her living peers  
 And rival still to Judah's faithful king<sup>o</sup>)  
 In more than he and more triumphant years,  
 95 Sing what God doth, and do what men may sing.

1599

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Trouble that accompanies having a crown.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The poetic line exceeds its bounds (that is, meter is broken).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Can she, or will she, lose a single instant receiving (I won't say reading) rhymes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The heavenly powers that appointed you to the highest throne.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: What is drudgery to others is customary to you.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: These poems will offer you what we, the senders of these poems, owe you: duty and goodwill.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Because Philip Sidney, her brother and co-translator, is dead.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A reference to Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* 33: "I might! Unhappy word: O me, I might . . ." [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He laid the lengthwise and I the crosswise yarns.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Because the original biblical text is by David.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: David, original author of the psalms.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Uniform worn by household retainers.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The king here is King David (God's loved choice, devotion, and the one whom all applaud); it is appropriate to send his psalms to a queen (God's chosen, the patron of devotion, the one whom none reprove).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Just as the Philistines (the enemies of the Israelites in the Bible) warred against David, so the enemies of heaven (that is, the Spanish) have opposed you.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Land and sea, but also the Old and New worlds[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A reference to the defeat in 1588 of the Spanish Armada, which was damaged when the wind changed and drove the ships against the rocks.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sidney is still addressing her muse.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Herbert's task as a servant (translating the psalms).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Queen Elizabeth.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *that is, the queen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *control*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *does*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nurse the hope* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the poems*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *station, rank*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *push forward*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plucked away*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pay for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *belong*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *material* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ingenious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *naturalized*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pleasingly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complaining*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *part of* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *not paid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diminished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *near*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cultivate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the crown given to victors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recalls* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suitable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmonize; fit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lofty songs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tries on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *represented; prefigured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *closely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opposing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *again*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restoration*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greatest skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *David*[Return to reference](#) °

## Psalm 52

Tyrant, why swell'st thou thus,  
Of mischief vaunting?  
Since help from God to us  
Is never wanting.

5      Lewd<sup>o</sup> lies thy tongue contrives,  
Loud lies it soundeth;  
Sharper than sharpest knives  
With lies it woundeth.

10      Falsehood thy wit<sup>o</sup> approves,  
All truth rejected:  
Thy will all vices loves,  
Virtue neglected.

15      Not words from cursèd thee,  
But gulfs<sup>o</sup> are pourèd;  
Gulfs wherein daily be  
Good men devourèd.

20      Think'st thou to bear it<sup>o</sup> so?  
God shall displace thee;  
God shall thee overthrow,  
Crush thee, deface<sup>o</sup> thee.

The just shall fearing see  
These fearful chances,  
And laughing shoot at thee  
With scornful glances.

25      Lo, lo, the wretched wight,<sup>o</sup>  
Who, God disdaining,

His mischief made his might,  
His guard his gaining.°

30 I as an olive tree  
Still green shall flourish:  
God's house the soil shall be  
My roots to nourish.

35 My trust on his true love  
Truly attending,  
Shall never thence remove,  
Never see ending.

40 Thee will I honor still,  
Lord, for this justice;  
There fix my hopes I will  
Where thy saints' trust is.

Thy saints trust in thy name,  
Therein they joy them:  
Protected by the same,  
Nought° can annoy° them.

## Notes

- °: *vile*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abysses, yawning chasms*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bear it off, triumph*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destroy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *creature*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *riches*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nothing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harm*[Return to reference °](#)



## Psalm 119: O<sup>1</sup>

Oh, what a lantern, what a lamp of light  
Is thy pure Word to me  
To clear my paths and guide my goings right!  
I swear,<sup>o</sup> and swear again,  
5 I of the statutes will observer be,  
Thou<sup>o</sup> justly dost ordain.

The heavy weights of grief oppress me sore:<sup>o</sup>  
Lord, raise me by thy Word,  
As thou to me didst promise heretofore.  
And this unforcèd praise  
10 I for an off'ring bring, accept, O Lord,  
And show to me thy ways.

What if my life lie naked<sup>2</sup> in my hand,  
To every chance exposed?  
Should I forget what thou dost me command?  
15 No, no, I will not stray  
From thy edicts, though round about enclosed  
With snares the wicked lay.

Thy testimonies, as mine heritage,  
I have retainèd still,  
205 And unto them my heart's delight engage—  
My heart which still doth bend,  
And only bend to do what thou dost will,  
And do it to the end.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The 176 lines of Psalm 119 are divided into twenty-two sections of eight verses each, with the sections headed by, and their initial verses beginning with, successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Mary Sidney adopts the analogous procedure in English and also uses a different stanzaic form for each of the twenty-two sections.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, exposed to danger.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *swore*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *which you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sorely, severely*[Return to reference °](#)

## Psalm 139

O Lord, in me there lieth nought  
But to thy search revealed lies:  
For when I sit  
Thou markest it;°  
No less thou notest when I rise;  
5 Yea, closest closet° of my thought  
Hath open windows to thine eyes.

Thou walkest with me when I walk;  
When to my bed for rest I go,  
I find thee there,  
10 And everywhere:  
Not youngest thought in me doth grow,  
No, not one word I cast° to talk  
But yet unuttered thou dost know.

If forth I march, thou goest before,  
15 If back I turn, thou com'st behind:  
So forth nor back  
Thy guard I lack,  
Nay, on me too thy hand I find.  
Well I thy wisdom may adore,  
20 But never reach with earthy mind.

To shun thy notice, leave thine eye,  
O whither might I take my way?  
To starry sphere?  
Thy throne is there.  
25 To dead men's undelightsome stay?°  
There is thy walk, and there to lie  
Unknown° in vain I should assay.°

O sun, whom light nor flight can match,  
Suppose thy lightful flightful wings  
30       Thou lend to me,  
          And I could flee  
          As far as thee the ev'ning brings:  
Even led to west he would me catch,  
35       Nor should I lurk<sup>o</sup> with western things.

Do thou thy best, O secret night,  
In sable veil to cover me:  
Thy sable veil  
Shall vainly fail;  
40       With day unmasked my night shall be,  
For night is day and darkness light,  
O father of all lights, to thee.

Each inmost piece in me is thine:  
While yet I in my mother dwelt,  
All that me clad  
45       From thee I had.  
Thou in my frame<sup>o</sup> hast strangely dealt:  
Needs in my praise thy works must shine,  
So inly them my thoughts have felt.

Thou, how my back was beam-wise laid,  
50       And raft'ring of my ribs, dost know;  
          Know'st every point  
          Of bone and joint,  
How to this whole these parts did grow,  
In brave<sup>o</sup> embroid'ry fair arrayed,  
55       Though wrought in shop both dark and low.

Nay, fashionless, ere form I took,  
Thy all and more beholding eye  
My shapeless shape

60            Could not escape:  
              All these, with times appointed by,<sup>1</sup>  
              Ere one had being, in the book  
              Of thy foresight enrolled did lie.

              My God, how I these studies prize,  
              That do thy hidden workings show!  
65            Whose sum is such  
              No sum so much:  
              Nay, summed as<sup>o</sup> sand they sumless grow.  
              I lie to sleep, from sleep I rise,  
              Yet still<sup>o</sup> in thought with thee I go.

70            My God, if thou but one<sup>2</sup> wouldst kill,  
              Then straight would leave my further chase<sup>3</sup>  
              This cursèd brood  
              Inured to blood,  
              Whose graceless taunts at thy disgrace  
75            Have aimèd oft, and hating still  
              Would with proud lies thy truth outface.<sup>o</sup>

              Hate not I them, who thee do hate?  
              Thine, Lord, I will the censure be.<sup>4</sup>  
              Detest I not  
80            The cankered knot  
              Whom I against thee banded see?  
              O Lord, thou know'st in highest rate  
              I hate them all as foes to me.

              Search me, my God, and prove my heart,  
85            Examine me, and try<sup>o</sup> my thought;  
              And mark in me  
              If ought<sup>o</sup> there be  
              That hath with cause their anger wrought.  
              If not (as not) my life's each part,  
90            Lord, safely guide from danger brought.

- Note 1: With appropriate times indicated (for each step of the work of creation). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Only one (wicked man). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Then immediately [the wicked] would stop pursuing me. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, I leave it to you to censure them. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *you note it* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *most secret private chamber* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *resolve* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *place* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(to thee)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attempt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hide* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *form* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *like* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *defy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *test* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aught, anything* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (Mary Sidney's *Tragedie of Antonie*)**

Mary Sidney's decision to translate a French play into English is a testament to her own approach and beliefs—in the face of those of her brother, Philip Sidney, whose *Defense of Poesy* is ambivalent about the theater. She picked a drama, Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578), that had a strong female heroine and translated it into the homely iambic pentameter of conventional staged English dramas (the French text, by contrast, is in twelve-syllable lines called "alexandrines"). Though her play was unperformed, it was made to be in dialogue with other printed dramas of the time. A popular text (printed in 1592 as *Antonius, a tragedie*; reprinted in 1595 as *The Tragedie of Antonie*), this was the first play to be published under a woman's name. It directly influenced Samuel Daniel, whose *Cleopatra* (1594) was written as a sequel to it—and probably also Shakespeare, whose emotional characterization of Antony and Cleopatra in the play of that name echoes Mary Sidney's own.

## ***From Robert Garnier's Marc Antoine***

ERAS All things do yield to force of lovely face.

CLEOPATRA My face, too lovely, caused my wretched case.<sup>o</sup>

My face hath so entrapped, so cast us down,  
That for his conquest Caesar<sup>1</sup> may it thank,  
Causing that Antony one army lost;  
5 The other<sup>o</sup> wholly did to Caesar yield.  
For not enduring (so his amorous sprite<sup>o</sup>  
Was with my beauty fired) my shameful flight,  
Soon as he saw—from rank<sup>o</sup> wherein he stood  
In hottest fight—my gallies<sup>o</sup> making sail,  
10 Forgetful of his charge<sup>o</sup> (as if his soul  
Unto his lady's soul had been enchained)  
He left his men, who so courageously  
Did leave their lives to gain him victory,  
And careless both of fame and army's loss,  
15 My oarèd gallies followed with his ships,  
Companion of my flight, by this base part  
Blasting<sup>o</sup> his former flourishing renown.

ERAS Are you therefore cause of his overthrow?

20 CLEOPATRA I am sole cause: I did it, only I.

1592, 1595

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Octavius Caesar, grandnephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, was brother to Octavia, wife of Antony. Octavius Caesar instigated the battles that are the subject of this play partly because Antony continued his love affair with Cleopatra, despite being married to Octavia.[Return to reference 1](#)



# Notes

- °: *situation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that is, army*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *battalion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warships*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *responsibility*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroying*[Return to reference](#) °

# CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

## 1564–1593

The son of a Canterbury shoemaker, Christopher Marlowe was born two months before William Shakespeare. In 1580 he went to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, on a scholarship that was ordinarily awarded to students preparing for the ministry. He held the scholarship for the maximum time, six years, but did not take holy orders. Instead, he began to write plays. When he applied for his master of arts degree in 1587, the university was about to deny it to him on the grounds that he intended to go abroad to join the dissident English Catholics at Rheims. But the Privy Council intervened and requested that because Marlowe had done the queen "good service" he be granted his degree at the next commencement. "It is not Her Majesty's pleasure," the government officials added, "that anyone employed as he had been in matters touching the benefit of his country should be defamed by those that are ignorant in the affairs he went about." Although much sensational information about Marlowe has been discovered in modern times, we are still largely "ignorant in the affairs he went about." The likeliest possibility is that he served as a spy or an agent provocateur against English Catholics who were conspiring to overthrow the Protestant regime.

Before he left Cambridge, Marlowe had probably already drafted his tremendously successful play *Tamburlaine*. *Tamburlaine* dramatizes the exploits of a fourteenth-century Mongol warrior who

rose from humble origins to conquer a huge territory that extended from the Black Sea to Delhi. Marlowe's hero is the vehicle for the expression of boundless energy and ambition, the impulse to strive ceaselessly for absolute dominance. Tamburlaine's conquests are achieved not only by force of arms but also by his extraordinary mastery of language, his "high astounding terms." The English theater audience had never before heard such resonant, immensely energetic blank verse. The great period of Elizabethan drama was launched by what Ben Jonson called "Marlowe's mighty line."

From the time of his first theatrical success, when he was twenty-three, Marlowe had only six years to live. It is remarkable how much he managed to accomplish in so brief and turbulent a time. (Had Shakespeare died in the same year, we would scarcely remember him.) In a raw new entertainment industry, with no strong English models to imitate, Marlowe produced a succession of brilliant plays. In a culture devoted to recovering the ancient classics, he was the first English translator of Ovid's erotic poems, the *Amores*, poems deemed so scandalous that the authorities ordered all copies of his translation burned. In a literary environment that produced many fine lyrics, he was the author of the lyric poem most widely celebrated by his contemporaries, "Come Live with Me and Be My Love." And in an age of wonderful long love poems, he was the author of one of the most wonderful of them all, *Hero and Leander*.

In 1591 Marlowe lived in London with the playwright Thomas Kyd, who later, under torture, gave information to the Privy Council accusing his former roommate of atheism and treason. On May 30, 1593, an informer named Richard Baines submitted a note to the council that, on the evidence of Marlowe's own alleged utterances, branded him with atheism, sedition, and homosexuality. Four days later, at an inn in the London suburb of Deptford, Marlowe was killed by a dagger thrust, purportedly in an argument over the bill. Modern scholars have discovered that the murderer and the others present in the room at the inn had connections to the world of spies, double agents, and swindlers to which Marlowe himself was in some way

linked. Those who were arrested in connection with the murder were briefly held and then quietly released.

**Hero and Leander** Marlowe's mythological poem is a free and original treatment of a classic tale about two ill-fated lovers. The story derives from a version by the Alexandrian poet Musaeus (ca. fifth century C.E.), but in its blend of poignancy and irony *Hero and Leander* is closer to that of the Roman poet Ovid, who briefly recounts the story in two epistles of his *Heroides*.

*Hero and Leander* is a rich and elusive poem: it is comic, decorative, cruel; now swiftly narrative, now digressive; playful and yet, in a light way, philosophical. Filled with free-floating erotic energy, both heterosexual and homosexual, it at once celebrates the power of language and calls attention to its irresponsibility and deceptiveness. The characters are evidently not intended to be consistent or psychologically credible; they inhabit a world of fancy, of strange contrasts between innocence and the wild riot of amorous intrigues among the gods that is Ovid's subject matter. Hero is paradoxically a nun vowed to chastity and a devotee of Venus, the love goddess; Leander is both a sharp, sophisticated seducer and a sexual innocent. The deadpan asides, with their irony, hyperbole, and cynicism mingling with exuberant delight in the body's instinctual freedom, heighten the poem's elusiveness, its cunning evasion of all fixed categories.

*Hero and Leander* cannot be precisely dated. Marlowe's translations of Ovid, to which the poem is closely related in spirit, are generally thought to be from the later 1580s. But, alternatively, Marlowe may have been participating in a vogue for brief erotic epics (epyllia, as they are sometimes called) that dates from the early 1590s, when Shakespeare composed his contribution to the genre, *Venus and Adonis*. Most striking, in either case, is the capacity for innovation. Just as Marlowe's plays displayed an unprecedented dramatic power in their blank verse, *Hero and Leander* manifested for the first time the sophisticated eloquence and tonal range of the heroic couplet.

Marlowe left his poem unfinished; George Chapman, the playwright and translator of Homer, undertook to complete it.

Chapman's moralizing, weightily philosophical continuation was published in 1598, shortly after Marlowe's fragment. The work is printed here without Chapman's additions.

## Hero and Leander

On Hellespont,<sup>1</sup> guilty of true-loves'° blood,  
In view and opposite, two cities stood,  
Sea-borderers, disjoined by Neptune's might;  
The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight.°  
5 At Sestos Hero dwelt; Hero the fair,  
Whom young Apollo courted for her hair,  
And offered as a dower his burning throne,  
Where she should sit for men to gaze upon.  
The outside of her garments were of lawn,<sup>2</sup>  
10 The lining purple silk, with gilt stars drawn;  
Her wide sleeves green, and bordered with a grove  
Where Venus in her naked glory strove  
To please the careless and disdainful eyes  
Of proud Adonis, that before her lies,<sup>3</sup>  
15 Her kirtle° blue, whereon was many a stain,  
Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain.<sup>4</sup>  
Upon her head she wore a myrtle wreath,  
From whence her veil reached to the ground  
beneath.  
Her veil was artificial flowers and leaves,  
Whose workmanship both man and beast deceives;  
20 Many would praise the sweet smell as she passed,  
When 'twas the odor which her breath forth cast;  
And there for honey, bees have sought in vain,  
And, beat from thence, have lighted there again.  
About her neck hung chains of pebble-stone,  
25 Which, lightened° by her neck, like diamonds shone.  
She wore no gloves, for neither sun nor wind  
Would burn or parch her hands, but to her mind°  
Or° warm or cool them, for they took delight

To play upon those hands, they were so white.  
30 Buskins<sup>o</sup> of shells all silvered usèd she,  
And branched with blushing coral to the knee,  
Where sparrows perched, of hollow pearl and gold,  
Such as the world would wonder to behold;  
Those with sweet water oft her handmaid fills,  
35 Which, as she went,<sup>o</sup> would chirrup through the bills.  
Some say, for her the fairest Cupid pined,  
And looking in her face, was strooken blind.  
But this is true: so like was one the other,  
As he imagined Hero was his mother;<sup>o</sup>  
40 And oftentimes into her bosom flew,  
About her naked neck his bare arms threw,  
And laid his childish head upon her breast,  
And with still<sup>o</sup> panting rocked, there took his rest.  
So lovely fair was Hero, Venus' nun,<sup>5</sup>  
45 As Nature wept, thinking she was undone,  
Because she took more from her than she left  
And of such wondrous beauty her bereft;  
Therefore, in sign her<sup>o</sup> treasure suffered wrack,<sup>o</sup>  
Since Hero's time hath half the world been black.  
50 Amorous Leander, beautiful and young  
(Whose tragedy divine Musaeus<sup>6</sup> sung),  
Dwelt at Abydos; since him dwelt there none  
For whom succeeding times make greater moan.  
His dangling tresses that were never shorn,  
55 Had they been cut and unto Colchos<sup>7</sup> borne,  
Would have allured the vent'rous youth of Greece  
To hazard more than for the Golden Fleece.  
Fair Cynthia<sup>o</sup> wished his arms might be her sphere;<sup>o</sup>  
Grief makes her pale, because she moves not there.  
60 His body was as straight as Circe's wand;<sup>8</sup>  
Jove might have sipped out nectar from his hand.  
Even as delicious meat is to the taste,  
So was his neck in touching, and surpassed



65 The white of Pelops' shoulder.<sup>9</sup> I could tell ye  
How smooth his breast was, and how white his belly,  
And whose immortal fingers did imprint  
That heavenly path, with many a curious dint,<sup>o</sup>  
That runs along his back; but my rude<sup>o</sup> pen  
Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men,  
70 Much less of powerful gods; let it suffice  
That my slack<sup>o</sup> muse sings of Leander's eyes,  
Those orient<sup>o</sup> cheeks and lips, exceeding his  
That leapt into the water for a kiss  
Of his own shadow,<sup>o</sup> and despising many,  
75 Died ere he could enjoy the love of any.<sup>1</sup>  
Had wild Hippolytus<sup>2</sup> Leander seen,  
Enamored of his beauty had he been;  
His presence made the rudest peasant melt,  
That in the vast uplandish country dwelt;  
80 The barbarous Thracian soldier, moved with nought,  
Was moved with him, and for his favor sought.  
Some swore he was a maid in man's attire,  
For in his looks were all that men desire:  
A pleasant smiling cheek, a speaking<sup>o</sup> eye,  
85 A brow for love to banquet royally;  
And such as knew he was a man, would say,  
"Leander, thou art made for amorous play;  
Why art thou not in love, and loved of<sup>o</sup> all?  
Though thou be fair, yet be not thine own thrall."<sup>o</sup>  
90 The men of wealthy Sestos every year,  
For his sake whom their goddess held so dear,  
Rose-cheeked Adonis, kept a solemn feast.  
Thither resorted many a wandering guest  
To meet their loves; such as had none at all  
95 Came lovers home from this great festival;  
For every street, like to a firmament,  
Glistened<sup>o</sup> with breathing stars, who, where they  
went,

Frighted the melancholy earth, which deemed  
Eternal heaven to burn, for so it seemed  
100 As if another Phaëton<sup>3</sup> had got  
The guidance of the sun's rich chariot.  
But far above the loveliest, Hero shined,  
And stole away th' enchanted gazer's mind;  
For like sea nymphs' inveigling harmony,  
105 So was her beauty to the standers by.  
Nor that night-wandering pale and watery star<sup>o</sup>  
(When yawning dragons draw her thirling<sup>4</sup> car<sup>o</sup>  
From Latmos' mount<sup>5</sup> up to the gloomy sky,  
Where, crowned with blazing light and majesty,  
110 She proudly sits) more over-rules<sup>o</sup> the flood<sup>o</sup>  
Than she the hearts of those that near her stood.  
Even as when gaudy nymphs pursue the chase,<sup>o</sup>  
Wretched Ixion's shaggy-footed race,<sup>6</sup>  
Incensed with savage heat, gallop amain  
115 From steep pine-bearing mountains to the plain,  
So ran the people forth to gaze upon her,  
And all that viewed her were enamored on her.  
And as in fury of a dreadful fight,  
Their fellows being slain or put to flight,  
120 Poor soldiers stand with fear of death dead-strooken,  
So at her presence all, surprised and taken,  
Await the sentence of her scornful eyes;  
He whom she favors lives, the other dies.  
There might you see one sigh, another rage,  
125 And some, their violent passions to assuage,  
Compile sharp satires; but alas, too late,  
For faithful love will never turn to hate.  
And many, seeing great princes were denied,  
Pined as they went, and thinking on her, died.  
130 On this feast day, oh, cursèd day and hour!  
Went Hero thorough<sup>o</sup> Sestos, from her tower  
To Venus' temple, where unhappily,

As after chanced, they did each other spy.  
So fair a church as this had Venus none;  
135 The walls were of discolored<sup>o</sup> jasper stone,  
Wherein was Proteus<sup>7</sup> carved, and o'erhead  
A lively<sup>o</sup> vine of green sea-agate spread,  
Where, by one hand, light-headed Bacchus<sup>8</sup> hung,  
And with the other, wine from grapes out-wrung.  
140 Of crystal shining fair the pavement was;  
The town of Sestos called it Venus' glass;<sup>o</sup>  
There might<sup>o</sup> you see the gods in sundry shapes,  
Committing heady<sup>o</sup> riots, incest, rapes:  
For know that underneath this radiant floor  
145 Was Danaë's<sup>9</sup> statue in a brazen tower,  
Jove slyly stealing from his sister's<sup>1</sup> bed  
To dally with Idalian Ganymed,<sup>2</sup>  
And for his love Europa bellowing loud,<sup>3</sup>  
And tumbling with the rainbow in a cloud;<sup>4</sup>  
150 Blood-quaffing Mars heaving the iron net  
Which limping Vulcan and his Cyclops set;<sup>5</sup>  
Love kindling fire to burn such towns as Troy;  
Sylvanus weeping for the lovely boy<sup>6</sup>  
That now is turned into a cypress tree,  
155 Under whose shade the wood-gods love to be.  
And in the midst a silver altar stood;  
There Hero sacrificing turtles'<sup>7</sup> blood,  
Vailed<sup>o</sup> to the ground, veiling her eyelids close,  
And modestly they opened as she rose;  
160 Thence flew love's arrow with the golden head,<sup>8</sup>  
And thus Leander was enamored.  
Stone still he stood, and evermore he gazed,  
Till with the fire that from his countenance blazed,  
Relenting Hero's gentle heart was strook;  
165 Such force and virtue<sup>o</sup> hath an amorous look.  
It lies not in our power to love or hate,

For will in us is overruled by fate.  
When two are stripped, long ere the course<sup>o</sup> begin  
We wish that one should lose, the other win;  
170 And one especially do we affect<sup>o</sup>  
Of two gold ingots, like in each respect.  
The reason no man knows, let it suffice,  
What we behold is censured<sup>o</sup> by our eyes.  
Where both deliberate, the love is slight;  
175 Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?<sup>9</sup>  
He kneeled, but unto her devoutly prayed.  
Chaste Hero to herself thus softly said,  
"Were I the saint he worships, I would hear him,"  
And as she spake those words, came somewhat near  
180 him.  
He started up; she blushed as one ashamed,  
Wherewith Leander much more was inflamed.  
He touched her hand; in touching it she trembled:  
Love deeply grounded hardly<sup>o</sup> is dissembled.  
These lovers parlèd<sup>o</sup> by the touch of hands;  
185 True love is mute, and oft amazèd stands.  
Thus while dumb signs their yielding hearts  
entangled,  
The air with sparks of living fire was spangled,  
And Night, deep drenched in misty Acheron,<sup>1</sup>  
Heaved up her head, and half the world upon  
190 Breathed darkness forth. (Dark night is Cupid's day.)  
And now begins Leander to display  
Love's holy fire, with words, with sighs and tears,  
Which like sweet music entered Hero's ears,  
And yet at every word she turned aside  
195 And always cut him off as he replied.  
At last, like to a bold sharp sophister,<sup>2</sup>  
With cheerful hope thus he accosted<sup>o</sup> her:  
"Fair creature, let me speak without offense;  
200 I would my rude<sup>o</sup> words had the influence

To lead thy thoughts as thy fair looks do mine;  
Then shouldst thou be his prisoner, who is thine.  
Be not unkind and fair—misshapen stuff<sup>o</sup>  
Are of behavior boisterous and rough.  
O shun me not, but hear me ere you go;  
205 God knows I cannot force<sup>o</sup> love, as you do.  
My words shall be as spotless as my youth,  
Full of simplicity and naked truth.  
This sacrifice, whose sweet perfume descending  
From Venus' altar to your footsteps bending,<sup>o</sup>  
210 Doth testify that you exceed her far  
To whom you offer and whose nun you are.  
Why should you worship her? Her you surpass  
As much as sparkling diamonds flaring<sup>o</sup> glass.  
A diamond set in lead his worth retains;  
215 A heavenly nymph, beloved of human swains,<sup>o</sup>  
Receives no blemish but oftentimes more grace;  
Which makes me hope, although I am but base—  
Base in respect of<sup>o</sup> thee, divine and pure—  
Dutiful service may thy love procure;  
220 And I in duty will excel all other,  
As thou in beauty dost exceed Love's mother.<sup>o</sup>  
Nor heaven, nor thou, were made to gaze upon;  
As heaven preserves all things, so save thou one.  
A stately builded ship, well rigged and tall,  
225 The ocean maketh more majestic:  
Why vowest thou then to live in Sestos here,  
Who on Love's seas more glorious wouldst appear?  
Like untuned golden strings all women are,  
Which, long time lie untouched, will harshly jar.<sup>3</sup>  
230 Vessels of brass, oft handled, brightly shine;  
What difference betwixt the richest mine<sup>o</sup>  
And basest mold,<sup>o</sup> but use? for both not used  
Are of like worth. Then treasure is abused  
When misers keep it; being put to loan,  
235

In time it will return us two for one.  
Rich robes themselves and others do adorn;  
Neither themselves nor others, if not worn.  
Who builds a palace and rams up the gate  
Shall see it ruinous and desolate.  
240 Ah, simple Hero, learn thyself to cherish;  
Lone women, like to empty houses, perish.  
Less sins the poor rich man that starves himself  
In heaping up a mass of drossy pelf,<sup>o</sup>  
245 Than such as you: his golden earth remains,  
Which after his decease some other gains.  
But this fair gem, sweet in the loss alone,  
When you fleet hence can be bequeathed to none.  
Or if it could, down from th' enameled<sup>o</sup> sky  
All heaven would come to claim this legacy,  
250 And with intestine<sup>o</sup> broils the world destroy  
And quite confound Nature's sweet harmony.  
Well therefore by the gods decreed it is,  
We human creatures should enjoy that bliss.  
One is no number;<sup>4</sup> maids are nothing then  
255 Without the sweet society of men.  
Wilt thou live single still? One shalt thou be,  
Though never-singling Hymen<sup>5</sup> couple thee.  
Wild savages, that drink of running springs,  
Think water far excels all earthly things;  
260 But they that daily taste neat<sup>o</sup> wine despise it.  
Virginitie, albeit<sup>o</sup> some highly prize it,  
Compared with marriage, had you tried them both,  
Differs as much as wine and water doth.  
Base bullion for the stamp's sake<sup>6</sup> we allow:<sup>o</sup>  
265 Even so for men's impression do we you;  
By which alone, our reverend fathers<sup>7</sup> say,  
Women receive perfection every way.  
This idol which you term Virginitie,  
Is neither essence,<sup>o</sup> subject to the eye,

270 No, nor to any one exterior sense,  
 Nor hath it any place of residence,  
 Nor is 't of earth or mold<sup>o</sup> celestial,  
 Or capable of any form at all.  
 Of that which hath no being do not boast:  
 275 Things that are not at all are never lost.  
 Men foolishly do call it virtuous:  
 What virtue is it that is born with us?<sup>8</sup>  
 Much less can honor be ascribed thereto:  
 Honor is purchased by the deeds we do.  
 280 Believe me, Hero, honor is not won  
 Until some honorable deed be done.  
 Seek you for chastity, immortal fame,  
 And know that some have wronged Diana's name?<sup>9</sup>  
 Whose name is it, if she be false or not,  
 285 So she be fair, but some vile tongues will blot?  
 But you are fair, aye me! so wondrous fair,  
 So young, so gentle, and so debonair,<sup>o</sup>  
 As Greece will think, if thus you live alone,  
 Some one or other keeps you as his own.  
 290 Then, Hero, hate me not, nor from me fly  
 To follow swiftly-blasting<sup>o</sup> infamy.  
 Perhaps thy sacred priesthood makes thee loath.  
 Tell me, to whom madest thou that heedless oath?"  
 "To Venus," answered she, and as she spake,  
 295 Forth from those two tralucent cisterns<sup>o</sup> brake  
 A stream of liquid pearl, which down her face  
 Made milk-white paths whereon the gods might  
 trace<sup>o</sup>  
 To Jove's high court. He thus replied: "The rites  
 In which Love's beauteous empress most delights  
 300 Are banquets, Doric music,<sup>1</sup> midnight revel,  
 Plays, masques, and all that stern age counteth evil.  
 Thee as a holy idiot doth she scorn;  
 For thou, in vowing chastity, hast sworn

305 To rob her name and honor, and thereby  
Commit'st a sin far worse than perjury—  
Even sacrilege against her Deity,  
Through regular and formal purity.  
To expiate which sin, kiss and shake hands;  
Such sacrifice as this Venus demands.”  
310 Thereat she smiled and did deny him so  
As, put<sup>o</sup> thereby, yet might he hope for mo.<sup>o</sup>  
Which makes him quickly reinforce his speech  
And her in humble manner thus beseech:  
315 “Though neither gods nor men may thee deserve,  
Yet for her sake whom you have vowed to serve,  
Abandon fruitless, cold Virginity,  
The gentle Queen of Love's sole enemy.  
Then shall you most resemble Venus' nun,  
When Venus' sweet rites are performed and done.  
320 Flint-breasted Pallas<sup>2</sup> joys in single life,  
But Pallas and your mistress are at strife.  
Love, Hero, then, and be not tyrannous,  
But heal the heart that thou hast wounded thus,  
Nor stain thy youthful years with avarice;<sup>3</sup>  
325 Fair fools delight to be accounted nice.<sup>o</sup>  
The richest corn<sup>o</sup> dies, if it be not reaped;  
Beauty alone is lost, too warily kept.”  
These arguments he used, and many more,  
Wherewith she yielded, that was won before.  
330 Hero's looks yielded, but her words made war:  
Women are won when they begin to jar.<sup>o</sup>  
Thus, having swallowed Cupid's golden hook,  
The more she strived, the deeper was she strook.  
Yet, evilly<sup>o</sup> feigning anger, strove she still  
335 And would be thought to grant against her will.  
So having paused a while, at last she said:  
“Who taught thee rhetoric to deceive a maid?  
Aye me, such words as these should I abhor,



And yet I like them for the orator.”  
340 With that, Leander stooped to have embraced her,  
But from his spreading arms away she cast her,  
And thus bespake him: “Gentle youth, forbear  
To touch the sacred garments which I wear.  
“Upon a rock, and underneath a hill,  
345 Far from the town, where all is whist<sup>o</sup> and still,  
Save that the sea, playing on yellow sand,  
Sends forth a rattling murmur to the land,  
Whose sound allures the golden Morpheus<sup>4</sup>  
In silence of the night to visit us,  
350 My turret stands, and there, God knows, I play  
With Venus’ swans and sparrows<sup>5</sup> all the day.  
A dwarfish beldame<sup>o</sup> bears me company,  
That hops about the chamber where I lie  
And spends the night, that might be better spent,  
355 In vain discourse and apish<sup>o</sup> merriment.  
Come thither.” As she spake this, her tongue tripped,  
For unawares “Come thither” from her slipped;  
And suddenly her former color changed  
And here and there her eyes through anger ranged.  
360 And like a planet, moving several<sup>o</sup> ways,<sup>6</sup>  
At one self<sup>o</sup> instant, she, poor soul, assays,<sup>o</sup>  
Loving, not to love at all, and every part  
Strove to resist the motions of her heart;  
And hands so pure, so innocent, nay, such  
365 As might have made heaven stoop to have a touch,  
Did she uphold to Venus, and again  
Vowed spotless chastity, but all in vain.  
Cupid beat down her prayers with his wings;  
Her vows above the empty air he flings.  
370 All deep enraged, his sinewy<sup>o</sup> bow he bent,  
And shot a shaft that burning from him went,  
Wherewith she, strooken, looked so dolefully  
As made Love sigh to see his tyranny.

375 And as she wept, her tears to pearl he turned,  
And wound them on his arm, and for her mourned.  
Then towards the palace of the Destinies,<sup>o</sup>  
Laden with languishment and grief, he flies,  
And to those stern nymphs humbly made request  
Both might enjoy each other and be blessed.  
380 But with a ghastly dreadful countenance,  
Threatening a thousand deaths at every glance,  
They answered Love, nor would vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> so much  
As one poor word, their hate to him was such.  
Harken a while, and I will tell you why:  
385 Heaven's wingèd herald, Jove-born Mercury,  
The selfsame day that he asleep had laid  
Enchanted Argus,<sup>7</sup> spied a country maid  
Whose careless hair, instead of pearl t' adorn it,  
Glistered with dew, as one that seemed to scorn it;<sup>8</sup>  
390 Her breath as fragrant as the morning rose,  
Her mind pure, and her tongue untaught to glose.<sup>o</sup>  
Yet proud she was, for lofty pride that dwells  
In towered courts is oft in shepherds' cells,<sup>o</sup>  
And too-too well the fair vermilion knew,  
395 And silver tincture of her cheeks, that drew  
The love of every swain.<sup>o</sup> On her, this god  
Enamored was, and with his snaky rod<sup>9</sup>  
Did charm her nimble feet and made her stay;  
The while upon a hillock down he lay,  
400 And sweetly on his pipe began to play,  
And with smooth speech, her fancy to assay,<sup>o</sup>  
Till in his twining arms he locked her fast,  
And then he wooed with kisses, and at last,  
As shepherds do, her on the ground he laid,  
405 And tumbling in the grass, he often strayed  
Beyond the bounds of shame, in being bold  
To eye those parts which no eye should behold;  
And, like an insolent commanding lover,

Boasting his parentage, would needs discover  
410 The way to new Elysium;<sup>1</sup> but she,  
Whose only dower was her chastity,  
Having striven in vain, was now about to cry  
And crave the help of shepherds that were nigh.  
Herewith he stayed his fury,<sup>o</sup> and began  
415 To give her leave to rise. Away she ran;  
After went Mercury, who used such cunning  
As she, to hear his tale, left off her running.  
Maids are not won by brutish force and might,  
But speeches full of pleasure and delight.  
420 And knowing Hermes<sup>2</sup> courted her, was glad  
That she such loveliness and beauty had  
As could provoke his liking, yet was mute,  
And neither would deny nor grant his suit.  
Still vowed he love; she, wanting<sup>o</sup> no excuse  
425 To feed him with delays, as women use,<sup>o</sup>  
Or thirsting after immortality  
(All women are ambitious naturally),  
Imposed upon her lover such a task  
As he ought not perform, nor yet she ask.  
430 A draft of flowing nectar she requested,  
Wherewith the king of gods and men is feasted.  
He, ready to accomplish what she willed,  
Stole some from Hebe (Hebe Jove's cup filled)  
And gave it to his simple rustic love,  
435 Which being known (as what is hid from Jove?)  
He inly stormed and waxed more furious  
Than for the fire filched by Prometheus,  
And thrusts him down from heaven. He, wandering  
here,  
In mournful terms,<sup>o</sup> with sad and heavy cheer,<sup>o</sup>  
440 Complained to Cupid. Cupid, for his sake,  
To be revenged on Jove did undertake;  
And those on whom heaven, earth, and hell relies

(I mean the adamantine<sup>3</sup> Destinies)  
He wounds with love and forced them equally  
445 To dote upon deceitful Mercury.  
They offered him the deadly fatal knife  
That shears the slender threads of human life;<sup>4</sup>  
At his fair feathered feet the engines<sup>o</sup> laid  
Which th' earth from ugly Chaos' den upweighed.<sup>5</sup>  
450 These he regarded not, but did entreat  
That Jove, usurper of his father's seat,  
Might presently<sup>o</sup> be banished into hell  
And agèd Saturn in Olympus dwell.  
They granted what he craved,<sup>o</sup> and once again  
455 Saturn and Ops began their golden reign.  
Murder, rape, war, lust, and treachery  
Were with Jove closed in Stygian empery.<sup>o</sup>  
But long this blessed time continued not;  
As soon as he his wishèd purpose got,  
460 He, reckless of his promise, did despise  
The love of th' everlasting Destinies.  
They seeing it, both Love and him abhorred,  
And Jupiter unto his place restored.<sup>6</sup>  
And but that Learning, in despite of Fate,  
465 Will mount aloft and enter heaven gate,  
And to the seat of Jove itself advance,  
Hermes had slept in hell with Ignorance.  
Yet as a punishment they added this,  
That he and Poverty should always kiss.<sup>7</sup>  
470 And to this day is every scholar poor;  
Gross gold from them runs headlong to the boor.<sup>o</sup>  
Likewise the angry sisters, thus deluded,  
To venge themselves on Hermes, have concluded  
That Midas' brood<sup>8</sup> shall sit in Honor's chair,  
475 To which the Muses' sons are only heir.  
And fruitful wits<sup>o</sup> that inaspiring<sup>9</sup> are  
Shall discontent run into regions far;

And few great lords in virtuous deeds shall joy,  
But be surprised with<sup>o</sup> every garish toy,<sup>o</sup>  
480 And still<sup>o</sup> enrich the lofty servile clown,<sup>o</sup>  
Who, with encroaching guile, keeps learning down.  
Then muse not<sup>o</sup> Cupid's suit no better sped,  
Seeing in their loves the Fates were injured.

By this, sad Hero, with love unacquainted,  
485 Viewing Leander's face, fell down and fainted.  
He kissed her and breathed life into her lips,  
Wherewith, as one displeased, away she trips.  
Yet as she went, full often looked behind,  
And many poor excuses did she find  
490 To linger by the way, and once she stayed  
And would have turned again, but was afraid  
In offering parley to be counted light.<sup>o</sup>  
So on she goes, and in her idle flight  
Her painted fan of curlèd plumes let fall,  
495 Thinking to train<sup>o</sup> Leander therewithal.  
He, being a novice, knew not what she meant,  
But stayed, and after her a letter sent,  
Which joyful Hero answered in such sort  
As he had hope to scale the beauteous fort  
500 Wherein the liberal Graces<sup>1</sup> locked their wealth,  
And therefore to her tower he got by stealth.  
Wide open stood the door; he need not climb,  
And she herself before the pointed<sup>o</sup> time  
Had spread the board,<sup>o</sup> with roses strewed the  
505 room,  
And oft looked out, and mused<sup>o</sup> he did not come.  
At last he came; O who can tell the greeting  
These greedy lovers had at their first meeting?  
He asked, she gave, and nothing was denied;  
Both to each other quickly were affied.<sup>o</sup>  
510 Look how<sup>o</sup> their hands, so were their hearts united,  
And what he did, she willingly requited.

(Sweet are the kisses, the embracements sweet,  
When like desires and affections meet,  
For from the earth to heaven is Cupid raised,  
515 Where fancy is in equal balance peised.°)  
Yet she this rashness suddenly repented  
And turned aside and to herself lamented,  
As if her name and honor had been wronged  
By being possessed of him for whom she longed.  
520 Ay, and she wished, albeit not from her heart,  
That he would leave her turret and depart.  
The mirthful god of amorous pleasure smiled  
To see how he this captive nymph beguiled,°  
For hitherto he did but fan the fire  
525 And kept it down that it might mount the higher.  
Now waxed she jealous° lest his love abated,  
Fearing her own thoughts made her to be hated.  
Therefore unto him hastily she goes  
And, like light Salmacis,² her body throws  
530 Upon his bosom where, with yielding eyes,  
She offers up herself a sacrifice  
To slake his anger, if he were displeased.  
O what god would not therewith be appeased?  
Like Aesop's cock,³ this jewel he enjoyed,  
535 And as a brother with his sister toyed,  
Supposing nothing else was to be done,  
Now he her favor and good will had won.  
But know you not that creatures wanting sense°  
By nature have a mutual appetite,⁴  
540 And wanting organs to advance a step,  
Moved by love's force, unto each other leap?  
Much more in subjects having intellect  
Some hidden influence breeds like effect.  
Albeit Leander, rude° in love and raw,  
545 Long dallying with Hero, nothing saw  
That might delight him more, yet he suspected

Some amorous rites or other were neglected.  
Therefore unto his body, hers he clung;  
She, fearing on the rushes<sup>5</sup> to be flung,  
550 Strived with redoubled strength; the more she  
strived,  
The more a gentle, pleasing heat revived,  
Which taught him all that elder lovers know.  
And now the same gan so to scorch and glow,  
As, in plain terms, yet cunningly,<sup>o</sup> he craved<sup>o</sup> it.  
555 (Love always makes those eloquent that have it.)  
She, with a kind of granting, put him by it,  
And, ever as he thought himself most nigh it,  
Like to the tree of Tantalus,<sup>6</sup> she fled,  
And, seeming lavish, saved her maidenhead.  
560 Ne'er king more sought to keep his diadem  
Than Hero this inestimable gem.  
Above our life we love a steadfast friend;  
Yet, when a token of great worth we send,  
We often kiss it, often look thereon,  
565 And stay the messenger that would be gone.  
No marvel then, though Hero would not yield  
So soon to part from that she dearly held.  
Jewels being lost are found again, this never;  
'Tis lost but once, and once lost, lost forever.  
570 Now had the Morn espied her lover's steeds,<sup>7</sup>  
Whereat she starts, puts on her purple weeds,<sup>o</sup>  
And, red for anger that he stayed so long,  
All headlong throws herself the clouds among.  
And now Leander, fearing to be missed,  
575 Embraced her suddenly, took leave, and kissed;  
Long was he taking leave, and loath to go,  
And kissed again, as lovers use<sup>o</sup> to do.  
Sad Hero wrung him by the hand and wept,  
Saying, "Let your vows and promises be kept."  
580 Then, standing at the door, she turned about,

As loath to see Leander going out.  
And now the sun that through th' horizon peeps,  
As pitying these lovers, downward creeps,  
So that in silence of the cloudy night,  
585 Though it was morning, did he take his flight.  
But what the secret trusty night concealed,  
Leander's amorous habit<sup>o</sup> soon revealed.  
With Cupid's myrtle<sup>8</sup> was his bonnet<sup>o</sup> crowned;  
About his arms the purple riband<sup>o</sup> wound  
590 Wherewith she wreathed her largely spreading hair;  
Nor could the youth abstain but he must wear  
The sacred ring wherewith she was endowed  
When first religious chastity she vowed;  
Which made his love through Sestos to be known,  
595 And thence unto Abydos sooner blown  
Than he could sail, for incorporeal Fame,  
Whose weight consists in nothing but her name,  
Is swifter than the wind, whose tardy plumes  
Are reeking water and dull earthly fumes.<sup>9</sup>  
600 Home when he came, he seemed not to be there,  
But like exilèd air thrust from his sphere,  
Set in a foreign place, and straight from thence,  
Alcides-like,<sup>1</sup> by mighty violence  
He would have chased away the swelling main<sup>o</sup>  
605 That him from her unjustly did detain.  
Like as the sun in a diameter<sup>2</sup>  
Fires and inflames objects removèd far,  
And heateth kindly, shining lat'rally,<sup>3</sup>  
So beauty sweetly quickens<sup>o</sup> when 'tis nigh,  
610 But being separated and removed,  
Burns where it cherished, murders where it loved.  
Therefore, even as an index to a book,  
So to his mind was young Leander's look.  
O none but gods have power their love to hide:  
615 Affection by the count'nance is descried.<sup>o</sup>



The light of hidden fire itself discovers,  
And love that is concealed betrays<sup>o</sup> poor lovers.  
His secret flame apparently<sup>o</sup> was seen;  
Leander's father knew where he had been,  
620 And for the same mildly rebuked his son,  
Thinking to quench the sparkles new begun.  
But love, resisted once, grows passionate,  
And nothing more than counsel lovers hate.  
For as a hot, proud horse highly disdains  
625 To have his head controlled, but breaks the reins,  
Spits forth the ringled<sup>o</sup> bit, and with his hooves  
Checks<sup>o</sup> the submissive ground; so he that loves,  
The more he is restrained, the worse he fares.  
What is it now but mad Leander dares?<sup>4</sup>  
630 "O Hero, Hero!" thus he cried full oft,  
And then he got him to a rock aloft,  
Where, having spied her tower, long stared he on 't  
And prayed the narrow toiling Hellespont  
To part in twain, that he might come and go;  
635 But still the rising billows answered "No!"  
With that he stripped him to the ivory skin,  
And crying, "Love, I come!" leapt lively in.  
Whereat the sapphire-visaged god<sup>o</sup> grew proud,<sup>5</sup>  
And made his capering Triton<sup>6</sup> sound aloud;  
640 Imagining that Ganimed,<sup>7</sup> displeased,  
Had left the heavens, therefore on him seized.  
Leander strived; the waves about him wound  
And pulled him to the bottom, where the ground  
Was strewn with pearl, and in low coral groves  
645 Sweet singing mermaids sported with their loves  
On heaps of heavy gold and took great pleasure  
To spurn in careless sort<sup>o</sup> the shipwreck treasure;  
For here the stately azure palace stood  
Where kingly Neptune and his train<sup>o</sup> abode.  
650 The lusty god embraced him, called him love,

And swore he never should return to Jove.  
But when he knew it was not Ganimed,  
For under water he was almost dead,  
He heaved him up, and looking on his face,  
655 Beat down the bold waves with his triple mace,<sup>8</sup>  
Which mounted up, intending to have kissed him,  
And fell in drops like tears because they missed him.  
Leander being up, began to swim,  
And, looking back, saw Neptune follow him;  
660 Whereat aghast, the poor soul gan to cry,  
"O let me visit Hero ere I die!"  
The god put Helle's bracelet<sup>9</sup> on his arm,  
And swore the sea should never do him harm.  
He clapped his plump cheeks, with his tresses  
665 played,  
And, smiling wantonly, his love bewrayed.<sup>o</sup>  
He watched his arms, and as they opened wide,  
At every stroke betwixt them he would slide  
And steal a kiss, and then run out and dance  
And, as he turned, cast many a lustful glance  
670 And throw him gaudy toys to please his eye,  
And dive into the water and there pry  
Upon his breast, his thighs, and every limb,  
And up again and close beside him swim,  
And talk of love. Leander made reply,  
675 "You are deceived; I am no woman, I."  
Thereat smiled Neptune, and then told a tale  
How that a shepherd, sitting in a vale,  
Played with a boy so lovely fair and kind,  
As for his love both earth and heaven pined;  
680 That of the cooling river durst not drink,  
Lest water nymphs should pull him from the brink;  
And when he sported in the fragrant lawns,  
Goat-footed satyrs and up-staring fawns<sup>1</sup>  
685 Would steal him thence. Ere half this tale was done

"Ay me!" Leander cried, "th' enamored sun  
That now should shine on Thetis' glassy bower<sup>2</sup>  
Descends upon my radiant Hero's tower.  
O that these tardy arms of mine were wings!"  
And as he spake, upon the waves he springs.  
690 Neptune was angry that he gave no ear,  
And in his heart revenging malice bare.  
He flung at him his mace, but as it went  
He called it in, for love made him repent.  
The mace returning back, his own hand hit,  
695 As meaning to be venged for darting it.  
When this fresh bleeding wound Leander viewed,  
His color went and came, as if he rued<sup>o</sup>  
The grief<sup>o</sup> which Neptune felt. In gentle breasts  
Relenting thoughts, remorse, and pity rests;  
700 And who have hard hearts and obdurate minds  
But vicious, harebrained, and illit'rate hinds?<sup>o</sup>  
The god, seeing him with pity to be moved,  
Thereon concluded that he was beloved.  
(Love is too full of faith, too credulous,  
705 With folly and false hope deluding us.)  
Wherefore Leander's fancy to surprise,<sup>o</sup>  
To the rich ocean for gifts he flies.  
'Tis wisdom to give much; a gift prevails  
When deep persuading oratory fails.  
710 By this<sup>o</sup> Leander, being near the land,  
Cast down his weary feet and felt the sand.  
Breathless albeit he were, he rested not  
Till to the solitary tower he got,  
And knocked and called; at which celestial noise  
715 The longing heart of Hero much more joys  
Than nymphs and shepherds when the timbrel<sup>o</sup>  
rings,  
Or crooked<sup>3</sup> dolphin when the sailor sings.  
She stayed not for her robes, but straight arose

720 And, drunk with gladness, to the door she goes;  
Where, seeing a naked man, she screeched for fear  
(Such sights as this to tender maids are rare)  
And ran into the dark herself to hide.  
Rich jewels in the dark are soonest spied.  
Unto her was he led, or rather drawn  
725 By those white limbs which sparkled through the  
lawn.°  
The nearer that he came, the more she fled,  
And, seeking refuge, slipped into her bed.  
Whereon Leander sitting, thus began,  
Through numbing cold, all feeble, faint, and wan:  
730 "If not for love, yet, love, for pity's sake  
Me in thy bed and maiden bosom take;  
At least vouchsafe° these arms some little room,  
Who, hoping to embrace thee, cheerly° swum.  
This head was beat with many a churlish billow,  
735 And therefore let it rest upon thy pillow."  
Herewith affrighted Hero shrunk away  
And in her lukewarm place Leander lay;  
Whose lively heat, like fire from heaven fet,°  
Would animate gross clay, and higher set  
740 The drooping thoughts of base declining souls  
Than dreary° Mars° carousing nectar bowls.  
His hands he cast upon her like a snare;  
She, overcome with shame and sallow fear,  
Like chaste Diana when Actaeon<sup>4</sup> spied her,  
745 Being suddenly betrayed, dived down to hide her,  
And as her silver body downward went,  
With both her hands she made the bed a tent,  
And in her own mind thought herself secure,  
O'ercast with dim and darksome coverture.  
750 And now she lets him whisper in her ear,  
Flatter, entreat, promise, protest, and swear;  
Yet ever as he greedily assayed°

To touch those dainties, she the Harpy<sup>5</sup> played,  
And every limb did, as a soldier stout,  
755 Defend the fort and keep the foeman out.  
For though the rising ivory mount he scaled,  
Which is with azure circling lines empaled,<sup>o</sup>  
Much like a globe (a globe may I term this,  
By which love sails to regions full of bliss),  
760 Yet there with Sisyphus<sup>6</sup> he toiled in vain,  
Till gentle parley did the truce obtain.<sup>7</sup>  
Wherein Leander on her quivering breast,  
Breathless spoke something, and sighed out the  
rest;  
Which so prevailed, as he, with small ado,  
765 Enclosed her in his arms and kissed her, too.  
And every kiss to her was as a charm,  
And to Leander as a fresh alarm,<sup>o</sup>  
So that the truce was broke, and she, alas,  
Poor silly<sup>o</sup> maiden, at his mercy was.  
770 Love is not full of pity, as men say,  
But deaf and cruel, where he means to prey.  
Even as a bird which in our hands we wring  
Forth plungeth and oft flutters with her wing,  
She trembling strove; this strife of hers, like that  
775 Which made the world,<sup>8</sup> another world begat  
Of unknown joy. Treason was in her thought,  
And cunningly to yield herself she sought.  
Seeming not won, yet won she was, at length.  
(In such wars women use but half their strength.)  
780 Leander now, like Theban Hercules,  
Entered the orchard of th' Hesperides,  
Whose fruit none rightly can describe but he  
That pulls or shakes it from the golden tree.<sup>9</sup>  
And now she wished this night were never done,  
785 And sighed to think upon th' approaching sun,  
For much it grieved her that the bright daylight

Should know the pleasure of this blessed night,  
And them like Mars and Erycine<sup>1</sup> displayed,  
Both in each other's arms chained as they laid.  
790 Again she knew not how to frame her look  
Or speak to him who in a moment took  
That which so long so charily<sup>o</sup> she kept;  
And fain<sup>o</sup> by stealth away she would have crept  
And to some corner secretly have gone,  
795 Leaving Leander in the bed alone.  
But as her naked feet were whipping out,  
He on the sudden clinged her so about  
That mermaid-like unto the floor she slid:  
One half appeared, the other half was hid.  
800 Thus near the bed she blushing stood upright;  
And from her countenance behold ye might  
A kind of twilight break, which through the hair,  
As from an orient<sup>o</sup> cloud, glims<sup>o</sup> here and there,  
And round about the chamber this false morn  
805 Brought forth the day before the day was born.  
So Hero's ruddy cheek Hero betrayed,  
And her all naked to his sight displayed,  
Whence his admiring eyes more pleasure took  
Than Dis<sup>2</sup> on heaps of gold fixing his look.  
810 By this Apollo's golden harp began  
To sound forth music to the Ocean,  
Which watchful Hesperus<sup>3</sup> no sooner heard  
But he the day's bright-bearing car prepared,  
And ran before, as harbinger of light,  
815 And with his flaring beams mocked ugly Night  
Till she, o'ercome with anguish, shame, and rage,  
Danged<sup>o</sup> down to hell her loathsome carriage.

*Desunt nonnulla.<sup>o</sup>*

1598

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Dardanelles, in Turkey, a strait that forms part of the boundary between Europe and Asia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A kind of fine linen or thin cambric.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Venus's love for the young hunter Adonis and his death in a boar hunt are recounted by Ovid, and by Shakespeare in *Venus and Adonis*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The extravagant claim is made that many "wretched lovers" had committed suicide at her feet because Hero would not have them.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The connotations of these two words are contradictory. Hero is a maiden in attendance at the temple of Venus, who is, of course, the goddess of physical love.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The author of the Greek poem on which *Hero and Leander* is remotely based. Though he lived in late antiquity (ca. 5th century C.E.), he was sometimes confused with a legendary early Musaeus, supposed son of Orpheus; hence Marlowe calls him "divine."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The country in Asia where the Argonauts ("the vent'rous youth of Greece"; line 57) found the Golden Fleece.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The wand with which Circe, in the *Odyssey*, turned men into beasts.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Pelops, according to Ovid, had a shoulder of ivory.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An allusion to Narcissus.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Like Adonis, he preferred hunting to love.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A son of the sun god, he drove his father's chariot erratically across the sky and almost burned up the world.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Flying like a spear.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The mountain where the moon visited her lover, Endymion. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The centaurs, fathered by Ixion on a cloud. For his presumption in loving Juno, Ixion was chained to a wheel,

hence “wretched.”[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A sea god, who could change his shape at will.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: God of wine and revelry.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Imprisoned in a tower, Danaë was visited by Jove in the form of a shower of gold.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Juno’s. She was Jove’s wife.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ganymede was a beautiful youth whom Jove kidnapped from Mount Ida, hence “Idalian.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To abduct Europa, Jove took the form of a bull.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jove as Jupiter Pluvius, god of rain, frolicking with Iris, goddess of the rainbow. But no such tryst is found in classical mythology.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Vulcan used a net to trap Venus (his wife) and Mars, “blood-quaffing” god of war, in the act of love. “Cyclops”: probably plural; members of this one-eyed race worked as Vulcan’s assistants.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cyparissus, beloved of the wood god Sylvanus.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Turtledoves, symbolic of constancy in love.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The “golden head” of some of Cupid’s arrows produced love; he had others, of lead, that produced dislike.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shakespeare quotes this famous line in *As You Like It* (3.5.83).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: One of the rivers of Hades.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A sophist is a person skilled in arguments, especially specious ones.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, instruments not played will be out of tune and harsh.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A traditional concept, going back to Aristotle.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: God of marriage. "Never-singling": that is, one who never separates, but always joins.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: For the impression that makes metal ("bullion") into a coin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ancient philosophers, like Aristotle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, a virtue is not a virtue unless it is acquired.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, no fame for chastity is secure. Even Diana, goddess of chastity, has been slandered.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A solemn, military mode. Leander would more appropriately have said "Lydian" (as in Milton's "L'Allegro," line 136); Lydian music was soft and sensual.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Athena, a rival goddess of war and wisdom, usually portrayed in armor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, by hoarding the treasure of her beauty.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God of sleep. "Golden slumbers" was a common expression.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Venus was often portrayed in a chariot drawn by swans, and sparrows were associated with her because of their traditionally reputed lechery.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Ptolemaic astronomy each planet moved in its own orbit or sphere but was also carried along in the motion of the surrounding spheres.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mercury (or Hermes), the messenger god with winged feet, put to sleep Argus, the hundred-eyed monster whom Juno had placed as a guard over Io, with whom her husband, Jupiter, was in love. The myth that follows is Marlowe's invention.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, pearl or other jewelry.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The caduceus (now the symbol of medicine).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In classical mythology, the paradisaal home of the favored dead; also known as the Islands of the Blessed.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Marlowe uses the names Mercury and Hermes interchangeably, according to the requirements of meter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of extreme hardness (so called because the Destinies'—or Fates'—decrees were irrevocable).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: According to classical mythology, the Fates spun and cut the thread that measures each life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Fates also controlled the supports that had held up ("upweighed") the earth since it arose out of Chaos, the yawning abyss from which all things came.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
The story in lines 451–64 may be summarized as follows: Mercury scorns the gifts offered by the Fates but asks instead that Jove be dethroned (Jove had overthrown his father, Saturn, who ruled heaven during the Golden Age). Mercury persuades the Fates to reverse this revolution, so Saturn and his wife, Ops, return to Olympus and Jove is thrust down into "Stygian empery" (line 458), or Hades. During the Golden Age there was no murder, rape, war, lust, or treachery; these came in with Jove, so when he is sent to Hades they go with him. But this second Golden Age did not last long, because once he got what he wanted, Mercury forgot the Destinies and they restored Jove.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mercury, the god of learning, would have slept in hell with Ignorance were it not that Learning is so divine that it always mounts up, even to heaven, the "seat of Jove." But it was not beyond the Fates' power to make Learning and Poverty go together, which they decreed in revenge for Mercury's neglect.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The rich, because everything Midas touched turned to gold; also the stupid, because Midas, judging a musical contest between Apollo and Pan, preferred the latter, against all sensible opinion.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Not ambitious for riches or power.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Three goddesses, embodying aspects of beauty.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: An amorous nymph in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Aesop's fable, a cock, scratching in the barnyard, uncovers a jewel but prefers a barley corn.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Attraction, as iron to a magnet.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Reeds used as carpeting in Elizabethan homes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Punished in Hades by constantly reaching for fruit from a tree that eluded him and by trying to drink water that also escaped him.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The horses that pull the chariot of the sun.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A plant sacred to Venus or Cupid, symbolic of love.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, are mist and smoke.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Like Hercules, with brute force. ("Alcides" is a patronymic of Hercules, derived from the name of his step-grandfather, Alcaeus.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, shining straight down at noon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, when it is lower in the sky. The idea is that the sun, paradoxically, causes harm only when it appears to be farthest away (at the zenith). Beauty, Marlowe goes on to claim, works the same way.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, what is there now Leander dares not do?[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The primary sense is probably "became sexually aroused."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A subordinate sea god who blew on a conch shell.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See p. 566, n. 2.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The three-pronged fork carried by Neptune.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Helle was the daughter of King Athamas of Thebes. To escape a cruel stepmother, she fled on a winged, golden-fleeced ram but fell off into the Hellespont, which was named for her.

Marlowe apparently invented the detail of the bracelet.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Woodland spirits, who prophesied by looking up to the heavens.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the sea. Thetis was a sea nymph, mother of the hero Achilles.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “Crooked” because of the undulating path of the dolphin in the water. The musician Arion was saved from drowning by a dolphin charmed by his music.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A hunter who happened on Diana bathing. She turned him into a stag, and he was killed by his own hounds.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A monster, half-bird, half-woman, who snatches away banquets in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Condemned in Hades endlessly to roll a stone uphill.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:

In both the authoritative early printings of the poem (1598), the lines here numbered 775–84 follow at this point (that is, they precede the lines here numbered 763–74). Like almost all modern editors, though, we have adopted the rearrangement first made in 1910 by Tucker Brooke, in his edition of Marlowe’s *Works*. The original order, Brooke thought, did not make good sense; he hypothesized that two sheets of Marlowe’s manuscript had been accidentally reversed by the time (five years after his death) the poem was printed. Students may, though, want to read the passage both ways and make up their own minds as to which order is preferable.

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The Greek philosopher Empedocles held that creation was the result of love and strife acting in opposition to each other and alternately ruling the universe.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: One of Hercules’ labors was to get the golden apples of the Hesperides, guarded by a dragon. Hercules was born in Thebes.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A name for Venus, who was caught in bed with Mars by her husband, Vulcan, who enmeshed them in a fine chain net.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pluto, god of the underworld and of wealth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The evening star; one would expect Lucifer, the morning star.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *sweethearts*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *called*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *long dress*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *illuminated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as she wished*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boots*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *walked*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Venus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *continual*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Nature's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destruction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the moon* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *orbit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exquisite indentation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crude*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dull*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shining*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reflection*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expressive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *captive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glittered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the moon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chariot*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *rules over* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tide* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hunt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many-colored* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifelike* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *looking glass* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *could* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passionate; violent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bowed down* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *race* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fancy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with difficulty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spoke* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *addressed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *persons* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compel* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glaring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *youths* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in comparison with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Venus* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ore* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *earth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many-colored* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *internal, civil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undiluted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *although* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *approve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *something real* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gracious* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *-blighting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *translucent eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put off* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shy, reluctant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dispute*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *badly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *old hag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *different*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one and the same* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Fates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *huts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rustic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as women usually do*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *condition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *countenance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contrivances*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requested*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *realm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorant clod*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *minds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *captivated by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trifle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *ignorant person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *don't be surprised*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immodest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appointed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set the table*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wondered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *engaged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weighed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possessively fearful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking intelligence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *untutored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skillfully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asked for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ribbon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sea*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gives life*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gives away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *openly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with rings at the ends*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stamps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Neptune, god of the sea*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attendants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regretted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rustics*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to capture his love*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *by this time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tambourine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine linen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fetches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bloody* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *god of war*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surrounded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call to battle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innocent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carefully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gleams*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hurled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *something is lacking*[Return to reference](#) °

**Doctor Faustus** Each of Marlowe's tragic heroes, like the playwright himself, is an overreacher, striving to get beyond conventional boundaries. Marlowe's Faustus seeks the mastery and voluptuous pleasure that come from forbidden knowledge. To achieve his goal Faustus must make—or chooses to make—a bargain with Lucifer. This is an old folklore motif, but it would have been taken seriously in a time when belief in the reality of devils was almost universal. The story's power over its original audience is vividly suggested by the numerous accounts of uncanny events at performances of the play: strange cracking noises in the theater or the extra devil who suddenly appeared when the actors were counted, causing hysteria.

In the opening soliloquy, Doctor Faustus bids farewell to each of his studies—logic, medicine, law, and divinity—as things he has mastered and found unfulfilling. He turns instead to black magic, but the devil exacts a fearful price in exchange: the eternal damnation of Faustus's soul. Whether Faustus freely chooses to pay this price, in order to acquire hidden knowledge, or he is predestined to do so, is unclear. Renaissance theologians fiercely debated the question of fate versus free will, and their arguments are reflected in the play. Faustus's fall is caused by the same pride and ambition that caused the fall of the angels in heaven and of humankind in the garden of Eden. But it is characteristic of Marlowe that he makes this catastrophic aspiration nonetheless a magnificent human venture.

The immediate source of the play is a German narrative called, in its English translation, *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*. That source supplies Marlowe's drama with the scenes of horseplay and low practical joking that contrast so markedly with the passages of huge ambition. It is quite possible that these comic scenes are the work of a collaborator; but no other Elizabethan could have written the first scene (with its brilliant representation of the insatiable aspiring mind of the hero), the ecstatic address to Helen of Troy, or the searing scene of Faustus's last hour. And though compared with these

celebrated passages the comic scenes often seem crude, they too contribute to the overarching vision of Faustus's fate: the half-trivial, half-daring exploits, the alternating states of bliss and despair, the questions that are not answered and the answers that bring no real satisfaction, the heroic wanderings that lead nowhere.

Marlowe's play exists in two very different forms: the A text (1604) and the much longer B text (1616). Even the earlier version dates from some fifteen years after the play was actually written and contains later interpolations. The B text almost certainly incorporates additions by other hands and was also revised to conform to the severe censorship statutes of 1606. We use Roma Gill's edition, based on the A text. Following the play are parallel versions of a key scene that will enable the reader to compare the two texts.

# The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE<sup>1</sup>

CHORUS

DR. JOHN FAUSTUS

WAGNER, *his servant, a student*

VALDES

*his friends, magicians*

CORNELIUS

BELZEBUB

OLD MAN

CLOWN

ROBIN

*ostlers at an inn*

RAFE

VINTNER

HORSE-COURSER

THE POPE

THE CARDINAL OF LORRAINE

CHARLES V, EMPEROR OF GERMANY

A KNIGHT *at the* EMPEROR *'s court*

DUKE OF VANHOLT

DUCHESS OF VANHOLT

THREE SCHOLARS

GOOD ANGEL

EVIL ANGEL

MEPHASTOPHILIS

LUCIFER

*Spirits presenting*

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

PRIDE

COVETOUSNESS

WRATH

ENVY

GLUTTONY

SLOTH

LECHERY

ALEXANDER THE GREAT *and his* PARAMOUR

HELEN OF TROY

ATTENDANTS, FRIARS, *and* DEVILS

## Endnotes

- Note 1: There is no list of characters in the A text. The one here is an editorial construction. [Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Prologue***

[*Enter* CHORUS.]<sup>2</sup>

CHORUS Not marching now in fields of Thrasimene,  
Where Mars<sup>3</sup> did mate<sup>o</sup> the Carthaginians,  
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love,  
In courts of kings where state<sup>o</sup> is overturned,  
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds,  
5 Intends our Muse to vaunt his heavenly verse:  
Only this (Gentlemen) we must perform,  
The form of Faustus' fortunes good or bad.  
To patient judgments we appeal our plaud,<sup>o</sup>  
And speak for Faustus in his infancy:  
10 Now is he born, his parents base of stock,  
In Germany, within a town called Rhodes;<sup>4</sup>  
Of riper years to Wittenberg<sup>5</sup> he went,  
Whereas<sup>o</sup> his kinsmen chiefly brought him up.  
So soon he profits in divinity,<sup>o</sup>  
15 The fruitful plot of scholarism graced,  
That shortly he was graced with doctor's name,<sup>6</sup>  
Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes<sup>7</sup>  
In heavenly matters of theology.  
Till, swollen with cunning,<sup>o</sup> of a self-conceit,  
20 His waxen wings did mount above his reach,  
And melting heavens conspired his overthrow.<sup>8</sup>  
For falling to a devilish exercise,  
And gluttoned more with learning's golden gifts,  
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy:<sup>o</sup>  
25 Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,  
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.<sup>9</sup>  
And this the man<sup>1</sup> that in his study sits. [*Exit.*]

## **Endnotes**

- Note 2: A single actor who recited a prologue to an act or a whole play, and occasionally delivered an epilogue.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: God of war. The battle of Lake Trasimene (217 B.C.E.) was one of the Carthaginian leader Hannibal's great victories.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roda, or Stadtroda, in Germany.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The famous university where Martin Luther studied, as did Shakespeare's Hamlet and Horatio.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The lines play on two senses of *graced*: he so (1) adorned the place ("plot") of scholarship—that is, the university—that shortly he was (2) honored with a doctor's degree.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Referring to formal disputations, academic exercises that occupied the place now held by examinations.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Greek myth, Icarus flew too near the sun on wings of feathers and wax made by his father, Daedalus; the wax melted, and he fell into the sea and drowned.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The salvation of his soul.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Apparently a cue for the Chorus to draw aside the curtain to the enclosed space at the rear of the stage.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *join with*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *political power*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *applause*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *where*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *theology*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *black magic*[Return to reference °](#)



## SCENE 1

[Enter FAUSTUS in his study.]

FAUSTUS   Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin  
To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess:  
Having commenced, be a divine in show,<sup>2</sup>  
Yet level<sup>o</sup> at the end of every art,  
And live and die in Aristotle's works.  
5   Sweet *Analytics*,<sup>3</sup> 'tis thou hast ravished me.  
    *Bene disserere est finis logices.*<sup>4</sup>  
Is to dispute well logic's chiefest end?  
Affords this art no greater miracle?  
Then read no more, thou hast attained the end;  
10   A greater subject fitteth Faustus' wit.<sup>o</sup>  
    Bid *on kai me on*<sup>5</sup> farewell; Galen<sup>6</sup> come:  
    Seeing, *ubi desinit philosophus, ibi incipit medicus.*<sup>7</sup>  
Be a physician, Faustus, heap up gold,  
And be eternized for some wondrous cure.  
15   *Summum bonum medicinae sanitas.*<sup>8</sup>  
The end of physic<sup>o</sup> is our body's health.  
Why Faustus, hast thou not attained that end?  
Is not thy common talk found aphorisms?<sup>9</sup>  
Are not thy bills<sup>o</sup> hung up as monuments,  
20   Whereby whole cities have escaped the plague,  
And thousand desperate maladies been eased?  
Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man.  
Couldst thou make men to live eternally,  
Or, being dead, raise them to life again,  
25   Then this profession were to be esteemed.  
Physic farewell! Where is Justinian?<sup>1</sup>  
    *Si una eademque res legatur duobus,*  
    *Alter rem alter valorem rei, etc.*<sup>2</sup>  
30   A pretty case of paltry legacies.<sup>3</sup>

Such is the subject of the Institute  
And universal Body of the Law:  
This study fits a mercenary drudge  
Who aims at nothing but external trash!  
35 Too servile and illiberal for me.  
When all is done, divinity is best.  
Jerome's Bible,<sup>4</sup> Faustus, view it well:  
*Stipendium peccati mors est.*<sup>5</sup> ha! *Stipendium, etc.*  
The reward of sin is death? That's hard.  
40 *Si pecasse negamus, fallimur, et nulla est in nobis*  
*veritas.*<sup>6</sup>  
If we say that we have no sin,  
We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.  
Why then belike<sup>o</sup> we must sin,  
And so consequently die.  
45 Ay, we must die an everlasting death.  
What doctrine call you this? *Che sarà, sarà:*  
What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu!  
These metaphysics<sup>o</sup> of magicians  
And necromantic books are heavenly!  
50 Lines, circles, schemes, letters, and characters!  
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.  
O what a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honor, of omnipotence  
Is promised to the studious artisan!<sup>7</sup>  
55 All things that move between the quiet<sup>o</sup> poles  
Shall be at my command: emperors and kings  
Are but obeyed in their several<sup>o</sup> provinces,  
Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this  
60 Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man:  
A sound magician is a mighty god.  
Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity.  
[Enter WAGNER.]  
Wagner, commend me to my dearest friends,

65 The German Valdes and Cornelius,  
Request them earnestly to visit me.  
WAGNER I will, sir. [*Exit.*]  
FAUSTUS Their conference will be a greater help to  
me  
Than all my labors, plod I ne'er so fast.  
[*Enter the GOOD ANGEL and the EVIL ANGEL.*]  
70 GOOD ANGEL O Faustus, lay that damnèd book aside,  
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul  
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head:  
Read, read the Scriptures; that is blasphemy.  
EVIL ANGEL Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art,  
Wherein all nature's treasury is contained:  
75 Be thou on earth as Jove<sup>8</sup> is in the sky,  
Lord and commander of these elements. [*Exeunt.*]  
FAUSTUS How am I gluttèd with conceit<sup>o</sup> of this!  
Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,  
Resolve me of all ambiguities,  
80 Perform what desperate<sup>o</sup> enterprise I will?  
I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,<sup>9</sup>  
And search all corners of the new-found world  
For pleasant fruits and princely delicacies.  
85 I'll have them read me strange philosophy,  
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;  
I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,  
And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg;<sup>1</sup>  
I'll have them fill the public schools<sup>2</sup> with silk,  
90 Wherewith the students shall be bravely<sup>o</sup> clad.  
I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring,  
And chase the Prince of Parma<sup>3</sup> from our land,  
And reign sole king of all our provinces.  
Yea, stranger engines for the brunt of war  
95 Than was the fiery keel at Antwerp's bridge,<sup>4</sup>  
I'll make my servile spirits to invent.

Come German Valdes and Cornelius,  
And make me blest with your sage conference.

[*Enter* VALDES *and* CORNELIUS.]

100 Valdes, sweet Valdes, and Cornelius,  
Know that your words have won me at the last  
To practise magic and concealèd<sup>o</sup> arts;  
Yet not your words only, but mine own fantasy,<sup>o</sup>  
That will receive no object<sup>5</sup> for my head,  
But ruminates on necromantic skill.  
105 Philosophy is odious and obscure,  
Both law and physic are for petty wits;  
Divinity is basest of the three,  
Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile.  
'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me.  
110 Then, gentle friends, aid me in this attempt,  
And I, that have with concise syllogisms  
Graveled<sup>o</sup> the pastors of the German church  
And made the flowering pride of Wittenberg  
Swarm to my problems<sup>6</sup> as the infernal spirits  
115 On sweet Musaeus when he came to hell,<sup>7</sup>  
Will be as cunning as Agrippa was,  
Whose shadows made all Europe honor him.<sup>8</sup>  
VALDES Faustus, these books, thy wit,<sup>o</sup> and our  
experience  
Shall make all nations to canonize us.  
120 As Indian Moors<sup>9</sup> obey their Spanish lords,  
So shall the spirits of every element  
Be always serviceable to us three.  
Like lions shall they guard us when we please,  
Like Almaine rutters<sup>o</sup> with their horsemen's staves,  
125 Or Lapland giants trotting by our sides;  
Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,  
Shadowing<sup>o</sup> more beauty in their airy brows  
Than in the white breasts of the Queen of Love.  
From Venice shall they drag huge argosies,<sup>o</sup>

130 And from America the golden fleece  
That yearly stuffs old Philip's treasury,<sup>1</sup>  
If learned Faustus will be resolute.  
FAUSTUS Valdes, as resolute am I in this  
As thou to live, therefore object it not.<sup>2</sup>  
135 CORNELIUS The miracles that magic will perform  
Will make thee vow to study nothing else.  
He that is grounded in astrology,  
Enriched with tongues,<sup>o</sup> well seen<sup>o</sup> in minerals,  
Hath all the principles magic doth require:  
140 Then doubt not, Faustus, but to be renowned  
And more frequented<sup>o</sup> for this mystery<sup>o</sup>  
Than heretofore the Delphian oracle.<sup>3</sup>  
The spirits tell me they can dry the sea,  
And fetch the treasure of all foreign wrecks,  
145 Ay, all the wealth that our forefathers hid  
Within the massy<sup>o</sup> entrails of the earth.  
Then tell me, Faustus, what shall we three want?<sup>o</sup>  
FAUSTUS Nothing, Cornelius. O this cheers my soul!  
Come, show me some demonstrations magical,  
150 That I may conjure in some lusty<sup>o</sup> grove,  
And have these joys in full possession.  
VALDES Then haste thee to some solitary grove,  
And bear wise Bacon's and Abanus<sup>4</sup> works,  
The Hebrew Psalter, and New Testament;  
155 And whatsoever else is requisite  
We will inform thee ere our conference cease.  
CORNELIUS Valdes, first let him know the words of  
art,<sup>5</sup>  
And then, all other ceremonies learned,  
Faustus may try his cunning by himself.  
160 VALDES First I'll instruct thee in the rudiments,  
And then wilt thou be perfecter<sup>o</sup> than I.  
FAUSTUS Then come and dine with me, and after  
meat

We'll canvass every quiddity<sup>o</sup> thereof:  
For ere I sleep, I'll try what I can do.  
165 This night I'll conjure,<sup>o</sup> though<sup>o</sup> I die therefore.  
[Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 2: In external appearance. "Commenced": graduated, that is, received the doctor's degree.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The title of two treatises on logic by Aristotle.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: To carry on a disputation well is the end [or purpose] of logic (Latin). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Being and not being (Greek); here standing for philosophical studies in general.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The supreme ancient authority on medicine (2nd century C.E.).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Where the philosopher leaves off the physician begins (Latin). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Latin is translated in the following line.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, generally accepted wisdom.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Roman emperor and authority on law (483–565 C.E.). The Latin passages that follow paraphrase Justinian's *Institutiones*, a manual included in his *Corpus Iuris* (Body of the Law); see lines 32–33.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: If something is bequeathed to two persons, one shall have the thing itself, the other something of equal value.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A father cannot disinherit his son unless . . .[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Latin translation, or Vulgate, of Saint Jerome (ca. 340–420 C.E.).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Romans 6:23. But Faustus reads only part of the scripture verse: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: I John 1:8 (translated in the following two lines).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A practitioner of an art; here, necromancy.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: God—a common substitution in Elizabethan drama.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Pearl of Orient—the especially lustrous pearl from the seas around India.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Wittenberg is in fact on the Elbe River.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The university lecture rooms.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Duke of Parma, the Spanish governor-general of the Low Countries from 1579 to 1592. In 1588 he commanded the Spanish Armada in its failed attempt to invade England.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A reference to the burning ship sent by the Protestant Netherlands in 1585 against the barrier on the river Scheldt that Parma had built as a part of the blockade of Antwerp.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That will pay no attention to physical reality.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Questions posed for public academic disputation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Musaeus was a legendary singer, supposed son of Orpheus; it was, however, Orpheus who charmed the denizens of hell with his music.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cornelius Agrippa, German author of *The Vanity and Uncertainty of Arts and Sciences* (1530), was popularly believed to have had the power of calling up the "shadows" or shades of the dead.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Dark-skinned Native Americans. ("India" in the period could refer to either the East Indies or the West Indies.)[Return](#)

[to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Comparing the treasures Philip II of Spain received from the Americas to the Golden Fleece taken, in Greek mythology, from Colchis by Jason and the Argonauts. (Evidently the Venetian argosies put Marlowe in mind of Jason's ship, the *Argo*.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, do not make an issue of my resolve.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The oracle of Apollo at Delphi in Greece.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roger Bacon, the 13th-century friar and scientist popularly thought to be a magician, and Pietro d'Abano, 13th-century alchemist.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the technical terms.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *aim*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intellect*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prescriptions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in all likelihood*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *occult lore*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unmoving*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *filled with the idea*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reckless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendidly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *occult*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imagination*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confounded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intellect*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *German horsemen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harboring*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *merchant ships*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *languages* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expert* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *visited* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *craft* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *massive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more accomplished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *essential feature* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *call up spirits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if* [Return to reference](#) °

## SCENE 2

[*Enter two* SCHOLARS.]

1 SCHOLAR I wonder what's become of Faustus,  
that was wont to  
make our schools ring with *sic probo*.<sup>6</sup>

2 SCHOLAR That shall we know; for see, here comes  
his boy.<sup>7</sup>

[*Enter* WAGNER.]

1 SCHOLAR How now, sirra,<sup>8</sup> where's thy master?

WAGNER God in heaven knows.

5

2 SCHOLAR Why, dost not thou know?

WAGNER Yes I know, but that follows not.

1 SCHOLAR Go to,<sup>9</sup> sirra, leave your jesting, and tell  
us where he is.

WAGNER That follows not necessary by force of  
argument, that you,  
being licentiates,<sup>1</sup> should stand upon't; therefore  
acknowledge  
your error, and be attentive.

10

2 SCHOLAR Why, didst thou not say thou knew'st?

WAGNER Have you any witness on't?

1 SCHOLAR Yes, sirra, I heard you.

WAGNER Ask my fellow if I be a thief.<sup>2</sup>

15

2 SCHOLAR Well, you will not tell us.

WAGNER Yes sir, I will tell you; yet if you were not  
dunces you would  
never ask me such a question. For is not he  
*corpus naturale*? And is  
not that *mobile*?<sup>3</sup> Then wherefore should you ask  
me such a question?

20

But that I am by nature phlegmatic,<sup>4</sup> slow to  
wrath and prone

to lechery—to love I would say—it were not for  
you to come within  
forty foot of the place of execution,<sup>5</sup> although I do  
not doubt to see  
you both hanged the next sessions.<sup>6</sup> Thus having  
triumphed over  
you, I will set my countenance like a precisian,<sup>7</sup>  
and begin to speak  
thus: Truly, my dear brethren, my master is within  
25 at dinner with  
Valdes and Cornelius, as this wine, if it could  
speak, it would  
inform your worships. And so the Lord bless you,  
preserve you, and  
keep you, my dear brethren, my dear brethren.  
[Exit.]

1 SCHOLAR Nay then, I fear he is fallen into that  
damned art, for  
which they two are infamous through the world.  
30 2 SCHOLAR Were he a stranger, and not allied to  
me, yet should I  
grieve for him. But come, let us go and inform the  
rector,<sup>8</sup> and see  
if he by his grave counsel can reclaim him.  
1 SCHOLAR O but I fear me nothing can reclaim  
him.  
2 SCHOLAR Yet let us try what we can do.  
35 [Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Thus I prove; a phrase in scholastic disputation. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In this case, a poor student acting as a servant to earn his living. [Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A variant of “sir,” used condescendingly.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Come on![Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Graduate students.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the testimony of your companion (“fellow”) is worth no more than one thief’s testimony for another.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Corpus naturale et mobile* (matter natural and movable) was a scholastic definition of the subject matter of physics. Wagner is here parodying the language of learning at the university.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dominated by the phlegm, one of the four humors (bodily fluids) whose relative proportions were thought to determine a person’s physical and psychological qualities.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, if I were not slow to anger, it would be fatally dangerous for you to come near me.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:ittings of a court.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Puritan. The rest of his speech is in the style of the Puritans. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The head of a German university.[Return to reference 8](#)

### SCENE 3

[Enter FAUSTUS to conjure.]

FAUSTUS Now that the gloomy shadow of the earth,  
Longing to view Orion's drizzling look,<sup>9</sup>  
Leaps from th'antarctic world unto the sky,  
And dims the welkin<sup>o</sup> with her pitchy breath,  
Faustus, begin thine incantations,  
5 And try if devils will obey thy hest,<sup>o</sup>  
Seeing thou hast prayed and sacrificed to them.  
Within this circle<sup>1</sup> is Jehovah's name,  
Forward and backward anagrammatized;  
Th'bbreviated names of holy saints,  
10 Figures of every adjunct<sup>2</sup> to the heavens,  
And characters of signs and erring stars,<sup>3</sup>  
By which the spirits are enforced to rise.  
Then fear not Faustus, but be resolute,  
And try the uttermost magic can perform.  
15 *Sint mihi dei Acherontis propitii! Valeat numen triplex*  
*Jehovae!*  
*Ignei, aerii, aquatici, terreni spiritus salvete! Orientis*  
*princeps,*  
*inferni ardentis monarcha, et Demogorgon,<sup>5</sup>*  
*propitiamus vos ut appareat et surgat*  
*Mephastophilis. Quid tu moraris? Per Jehovah,*  
*Gehennam, et consecratam aquam quam nunc*  
20 *spargo, signumque*  
*crucis quod nunc facio, et per vota nostra, ipse nunc*  
*surgat nobis*  
*dicatus Mephastophilis.<sup>6</sup>*

[Enter a DEVIL.]

I charge thee to return and change thy shape,  
Thou art too ugly to attend on me;  
Go and return an old Franciscan friar,

25       [*Exit* DEVIL.]  
 That holy shape becomes a devil best.  
 I see there's virtue<sup>o</sup> in my heavenly words!  
 Who would not be proficient in this art?  
 How pliant is this Mephastophilis,  
 Full of obedience and humility,  
 30       Such is the force of magic and my spells.  
 Now Faustus, thou art conjurer laureate<sup>o</sup>  
 That canst command great Mephastophilis.  
*Quin redis, Mephastophilis, fratris imagine!*<sup>7</sup>  
           [*Enter* MEPHASTOPHILIS.]  
 35       MEPHASTOPHILIS   Now Faustus, what would'st thou have  
           me do?  
           FAUSTUS   I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,  
                     To do whatever Faustus shall command,  
                     Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,  
                     Or the ocean to overwhelm the world.  
 40       MEPHASTOPHILIS   I am a servant to great Lucifer,  
           And may not follow thee without his leave;  
           No more than he commands must we perform.  
           FAUSTUS   Did not he charge thee to appear to me?  
           MEPHASTOPHILIS   No, I came now hither of mine own  
                                 accord.  
 45       FAUSTUS   Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee?  
           Speak!  
           MEPHASTOPHILIS   That was the cause, but yet *per*  
                                 *accidens*,<sup>8</sup>  
           For when we hear one rack<sup>9</sup> the name of God,  
           Abjure<sup>o</sup> the Scriptures, and his savior Christ,  
           We fly in hope to get his glorious soul;  
           Nor will we come unless he use such means  
 50       Whereby he is in danger to be damned:  
           Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring  
           Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity,  
           And pray devoutly to the prince of hell.

55 FAUSTUS So Faustus hath already done, and holds  
this principle:  
There is no chief but only Belzebub,  
To whom Faustus doth dedicate himself.  
This word damnation terrifies not him,  
For he confounds hell in Elysium:  
60 His ghost be with the old philosophers.<sup>1</sup>  
But leaving these vain trifles of men's souls,  
Tell me, what is that Lucifer thy lord?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Arch-regent and commander of all  
spirits.  
FAUSTUS Was not that Lucifer an angel once?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Yes Faustus, and most dearly loved  
65 of God.  
FAUSTUS How comes it then that he is prince of  
devils?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS O, by aspiring pride and insolence,  
For which God threw him from the face of heaven.  
FAUSTUS And what are you that live with Lucifer?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,  
70 Conspired against our God with Lucifer,  
And are forever damned with Lucifer.  
FAUSTUS Where are you damned?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS In hell.  
FAUSTUS How comes it then that thou art out of hell?  
75 MEPHASTOPHILIS Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?<sup>2</sup>  
80 O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,<sup>o</sup>  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul.  
FAUSTUS What, is great Mephistophilis so passionate  
For being deprived of the joys of heaven?  
Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude,  
85

And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess.  
 Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer:  
 Seeing Faustus hath incurred eternal death  
 By desp'rate thoughts against Jove's deity,  
 Say he surrenders up to him his soul,  
 90 So<sup>o</sup> he will spare him four and twenty years,  
 Letting him live in all voluptuousness,  
 Having thee ever to attend on me,  
 To give me whatsoever I shall ask,  
 To tell me whatsoever I demand,  
 95 To slay mine enemies and aid my friends,  
 And always be obedient to my will.  
 Go, and return to mighty Lucifer,  
 And meet me in my study at midnight  
 And then resolve me of thy master's mind.<sup>3</sup>  
 100 MEPHASTOPHILIS I will, Faustus. [*Exit.*]  
 FAUSTUS Had I as many souls as there be stars,  
 I'd give them all for Mephastophilis.  
 By him I'll be great emperor of the world,  
 And make a bridge through the moving air  
 105 To pass the ocean with a band of men;  
 I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore,  
 And make that land continent to<sup>o</sup> Spain,  
 And both contributory to my crown.  
 The emperor<sup>o</sup> shall not live but by my leave,  
 110 Nor any potentate of Germany.  
 Now that I have obtained what I desire,  
 I'll live in speculation<sup>o</sup> of this art  
 Till Mephastophilis return again. [*Exit.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The constellation Orion appears at the beginning of winter. The phrase is a reminiscence of Virgil.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: The magic circle drawn on the ground, within which the magician would be safe from the spirits he conjured.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Heavenly body thought to be joined to the solid firmament of the sky.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The moving planets. "Characters of signs": signs of the zodiac and the planets.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lord of the Flies; an ancient Phoenician deity. In Matthew 12:24 he is called "the prince of the devils."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Renaissance versions of classical mythology, a mysterious primeval god.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
Faustus's Latin conjures the devils: "May the gods of the lower regions favor me! Farewell to the Trinity! Hail, spirits of fire, air, water, and earth! Prince of the East, Belzebub, monarch of burning hell, and Demogorgon, we pray to you that Mephistophilis may appear and rise. What are you waiting for? By Jehovah, Gehenna, and the holy water that I now sprinkle, and the sign of the cross that I now make, and by our vows, may Mephistophilis himself now rise to serve us."  
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Return, Mephistophilis, in the shape of a friar.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The immediate, not ultimate, cause.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Torture; here, by anagrammatizing.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Faustus considers hell to be the Elysium of the classical philosophers, not the Christian hell of torment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This is the punishment of loss of God's presence, which is supposed to be the greatest torment of hell.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, give me his decision.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preeminent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repudiate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *questions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on condition that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *connected to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Holy Roman Emperor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contemplation*[Return to reference](#) °

## SCENE 4

[Enter WAGNER and the CLOWN.<sup>4</sup>]

WAGNER Sirra boy, come hither.

CLOWN How, boy? Zounds,<sup>5</sup> boy! I hope you have seen many boys

with such pickadevants as I have. Boy, quotha!<sup>6</sup>

WAGNER Tell me, sirra, hast thou any comings in?<sup>7</sup>

CLOWN Ay, and goings out too; you may see else.<sup>8</sup>

5 WAGNER Alas poor slave, see how poverty jesteth in his nakedness!

The villain is bare, and out of service,<sup>9</sup> and so hungry that I know

he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw.

10 CLOWN How, my soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton though

'twere blood raw? Not so good, friend; by'rlady,<sup>1</sup> I had need have it

well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear.

WAGNER Well, wilt thou serve me, and I'll make thee go like *qui mihi discipulus*?<sup>2</sup>

CLOWN How, in verse?

15 WAGNER No, sirra; in beaten silk and stavesacre.<sup>3</sup>

CLOWN How, how, knavesacre?<sup>4</sup> Ay, I thought that was all the land

his father left him! Do ye hear, I would be sorry to rob you of your living.

WAGNER Sirra, I say in stavesacre.

20 CLOWN Oho, oho, stavesacre! Why then belike, if I were your man,

I should be full of vermin.

WAGNER So thou shalt, whether thou be'st with me or  
no. But sirra,  
leave your jesting, and bind yourself presently unto  
me for seven  
25 years, or I'll turn all the lice about thee into  
familiar<sup>5</sup>, and they  
shall tear thee in pieces.

CLOWN Do you hear, sir? You may save that labor: they  
are too  
familiar with me already—zounds, they are as bold  
with my flesh as if  
they had paid for my meat and drink.

WAGNER Well, do you hear, sirra? Hold, take these  
30 guilders.<sup>6</sup>

CLOWN Gridirons; what be they?

WAGNER Why, French crowns.<sup>7</sup>

CLOWN 'Mass, but for the name of French crowns a  
man were  
as good have as many English counters!<sup>8</sup> And what  
should I do with  
these?

35 WAGNER Why, now, sirra, thou art at an hour's warning  
whensoever  
or wheresoever the devil shall fetch thee.

CLOWN No, no, here take your gridirons again.

WAGNER Truly I'll none of them.

CLOWN Truly but you shall.

40 WAGNER Bear witness I gave them him.

CLOWN Bear witness I give them you again.

WAGNER Well, I will cause two devils presently to fetch  
thee away.

Baliol<sup>9</sup> and Belcher!

45 CLOWN Let your Baliol and your Belcher come here,  
and I'll knock<sup>1</sup>

them, they were never so knocked since they were  
devils! Say I  
should kill one of them, what would folks say? "Do  
ye see yonder  
tall fellow in the round slop?<sup>2</sup> He has killed the  
devil!" So I should  
be called "Killdevil" all the parish over.

*[Enter two DEVILS, and the CLOWN runs up and down  
crying.]*

50 WAGNER Baliol and Belcher, spirits, away! *[Exeunt  
DEVILS.]*

CLOWN What, are they gone? A vengeance on them!  
They have vile  
long nails. There was a he devil and a she devil. I'll  
tell you how you  
shall know them: all he devils has horns,<sup>3</sup> and all she  
devils has  
clefts and cloven feet.

WAGNER Well, sirra, follow me.

55 CLOWN But do you hear? If I should serve you, would  
you teach me  
to raise up Banios and Belcheos?

WAGNER I will teach thee to turn thyself to anything, to  
a dog, or a  
cat, or a mouse, or a rat, or anything.

60 CLOWN How! A Christian fellow to a dog or a cat, a  
mouse or a rat?  
No, no, sir, if you turn me into anything, let it be in  
the likeness of  
a little pretty frisking flea, that I may be here, and  
there, and everywhere.  
O I'll tickle the pretty wenches' plackets!<sup>4</sup> I'll be  
amongst  
them, i'faith.<sup>5</sup>

WAGNER Well, sirra, come.

65 CLOWN But do you hear, Wagner . . . ?  
 WAGNER How? Baliol and Belcher!  
 CLOWN O Lord I pray, sir, let Banio and Belcher go  
 sleep.  
 WAGNER Villain, call me Master Wagner; and let thy left  
 eye be  
 70 diametrically fixed upon my right heel, with *quasi*  
*vestigias nostras*  
 insistere.<sup>6</sup>  
 [Exit.]  
 CLOWN God forgive me, he speaks Dutch fustian!<sup>7</sup> Well,  
 I'll follow  
 him, I'll serve him; that's flat.  
 [Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Not a court jester (as in some of Shakespeare's plays) but an older stock character, a rustic buffoon.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: God's wounds; an oath.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Says he. The point of the clown's retort is that he is a man and wears a beard. "Pickadevants": small, pointed beards.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Income, but the clown then puns on the literal meaning.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, if you don't believe me.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Out of a job.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: By Our Lady; an oath.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: You who are my pupil (the opening phrase of a poem on how students should behave, from Lily's *Latin Grammar*, ca. 1509). Wagner means "like a proper servant of a learned man."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A preparation from delphinium seeds, used for killing vermin.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Wordplay, here and in the following lines.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Familiar spirits, demons. "Bind yourself": that is, as apprentice. "Presently": immediately.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Coins. "Hold": here.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The coins, legal tender in England at this period, were easily counterfeited.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Worthless tokens. " 'Mass": by the Mass.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Probably a corruption of Belial.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Beat.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Baggy pants. "Tall": fine.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Traditional mark both of devils and of cuckolded husbands.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Slits in garments—but with an obvious sexual allusion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In faith; an oath.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A pedantic way of saying "Follow my footsteps." "Diametarily": diametrically.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Gibberish.[Return to reference 7](#)

## SCENE 5

[*Enter* FAUSTUS *in his study.*]

FAUSTUS Now Faustus, must thou needs be damned,  
And canst thou not be saved.

What boots<sup>o</sup> it then to think of God or heaven?

Away with such vain fancies, and despair,

Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub.

5

Now go not backward: no, Faustus, be resolute;

Why waverest thou? O, something soundeth in mine  
ears:

"Abjure this magic, turn to God again."

Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.

To God? He loves thee not:

10

The god thou servest is thine own appetite,

Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub.

To him I'll build an altar and a church,

And offer lukewarm blood of newborn babes.

[*Enter* GOOD ANGEL *and* EVIL.]

15

GOOD ANGEL Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable<sup>o</sup>  
art.

FAUSTUS Contrition, prayer, repentance: what of  
them?

GOOD ANGEL O they are means to bring thee unto  
heaven.

EVIL ANGEL Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy,

That makes men foolish that do trust them most.

20

GOOD ANGEL Sweet Faustus, think of heaven, and  
heavenly things.

EVIL ANGEL No, Faustus, think of honor and of  
wealth. [*Exeunt.*]

FAUSTUS Of wealth!

Why, the signory<sup>o</sup> of Emden<sup>8</sup> shall be mine,

When Mephistophilis shall stand by me.



25       What god can hurt thee, Faustus? Thou art safe,  
Cast no more doubts. Come, Mephastophilis,  
And bring glad tidings from great Lucifer.  
Is't not midnight? Come, Mephastophilis:  
*Veni, veni, Mephastophile!*<sup>9</sup>  
          [*Enter* MEPHASTOPHILIS.]  
Now tell, what says Lucifer thy lord?  
30       MEPHASTOPHILIS   That I shall wait on Faustus whilst he  
          lives,  
So<sup>o</sup> he will buy my service with his soul.  
FAUSTUS   Already Faustus hath hazarded that for  
          thee.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS   But Faustus, thou must bequeath it  
          solemnly,  
And write a deed of gift with thine own blood,  
35       For that security<sup>o</sup> craves great Lucifer.  
If thou deny it, I will back to hell.  
FAUSTUS   Stay, Mephastophilis, and tell me,  
What good will my soul do thy lord?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS   Enlarge his kingdom.  
40       FAUSTUS   Is that the reason he tempts us thus?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS   *Solamen miseris socios habuisse*  
          *doloris.*<sup>1</sup>  
FAUSTUS   Have you any pain that tortures others?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS   As great as have the human souls of  
          men.  
But tell me Faustus, shall I have thy soul?  
45       And I will be thy slave and wait on thee,  
And give thee more than thou hast wit to ask.  
FAUSTUS   Ay Mephastophilis, I give it thee.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS   Then stab thine arm courageously,  
And bind thy soul, that at some certain day  
50       Great Lucifer may claim it as his own,  
And then be thou as great as Lucifer.  
FAUSTUS   Lo Mephastophilis, for love of thee,

I cut my arm, and with my proper<sup>o</sup> blood  
Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's,  
55 Chief lord and regent of perpetual night.  
View here the blood that trickles from mine arm,  
And let it be propitious for my wish.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS But Faustus, thou must write it  
In manner of a deed of gift.  
60 FAUSTUS Ay, so I will; but, Mephastophilis,  
My blood congeals and I can write no more.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS I'll fetch thee fire to dissolve it  
straight. [*Exit.*]  
FAUSTUS What might the staying of my blood  
portend?  
Is it unwilling I should write this bill?<sup>o</sup>  
65 Why streams it not, that I may write afresh:  
"Faustus gives to thee his soul"? Ah, there it stayed!  
Why should'st thou not? Is not thy soul thine own?  
Then write again: "Faustus gives to thee his soul."  
[*Enter* MEPHASTOPHILIS *with a chafer*<sup>o</sup> of coals. ]  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Here's fire, come Faustus, set it on.  
70 FAUSTUS So, now the blood begins to clear again.  
Now will I make an end immediately.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS O what will not I do to obtain his  
soul!  
FAUSTUS *Consummatus est*,<sup>2</sup> this bill is ended,  
And Faustus hath bequeathed his soul to Lucifer.  
75 But what is this inscription on mine arm?  
*Homo fuge.*<sup>o</sup> Whither should I fly?  
If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.  
My senses are deceived, here's nothing writ;  
I see it plain, here in this place is writ,  
80 *Homo fuge!* Yet shall not Faustus fly.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his  
mind. [*Exit.*]

[Enter with DEVILS, giving crowns and rich  
apparel to FAUSTUS, and dance, and then depart.]

FAUSTUS Speak, Mephastophilis, what means this  
show?

MEPHASTOPHILIS Nothing, Faustus, but to delight thy  
mind withal,

85 And to show thee what magic can perform.

FAUSTUS But may I raise up spirits when I please?

MEPHASTOPHILIS Ay, Faustus, and do greater things  
than these.

FAUSTUS Then there's enough for a thousand souls!  
Here, Mephastophilis, receive this scroll,  
90 A deed of gift of body and of soul:

But yet conditionally, that thou perform  
All articles prescribed between us both.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Faustus, I swear by hell and Lucifer  
To effect all promises between us made.

95 FAUSTUS Then hear me read them. On these  
conditions following:

*First, that Faustus may be a spirit<sup>3</sup> in form and  
substance.*

*Secondly, that Mephastophilis shall be his servant,  
and at his  
command.*

*Thirdly, that Mephastophilis shall do for him, and  
bring him  
whatsoever.*

100 *Fourthly, that he shall be in his chamber or house  
invisible.*

*Lastly, that he shall appear to the said John Faustus  
at all times, in  
what form or shape soever he please.*

*I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, doctor, by these  
presents,<sup>4</sup> do give*

*both body and soul to Lucifer, Prince of the East, and  
his minister*

*Mephastophilis; and furthermore grant unto them  
that, four and*

*twenty years being expired, the articles above-  
written inviolate, full*

*power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body  
and soul, flesh,*

*blood, or goods, into their habitation wheresoever.*

*By me John Faustus.*

110 MEPHASTOPHILIS Speak, Faustus: do you deliver this  
as your deed?

FAUSTUS Ay, take it; and the devil give thee good  
on't.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Now, Faustus, ask what thou wilt.

FAUSTUS First will I question with thee about hell:

Tell me, where is the place that men call hell?

115 MEPHASTOPHILIS Under the heavens.

FAUSTUS Ay, but whereabouts?

MEPHASTOPHILIS Within the bowels of these elements,  
Where we are tortured and remain for ever.

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed

120 In one self place; for where we are is hell,

And where hell is, there must we ever be.

And to conclude, when all the world dissolves,

And every creature shall be purified,

All places shall be hell that is not heaven.

125 FAUSTUS Come, I think hell's a fable.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Ay, think so still, till experience change  
thy mind.

FAUSTUS Why? think'st thou then that Faustus shall be  
damned?

MEPHASTOPHILIS Ay, of necessity, for here's the scroll  
Wherein thou hast given thy soul to Lucifer.

130 FAUSTUS Ay, and body too; but what of that?

Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond<sup>o</sup> to imagine

That after this life there is any pain?  
 Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS But Faustus, I am an instance to  
 prove the  
 contrary:  
 135 For I am damned, and am now in hell.  
 FAUSTUS How, now in hell? Nay, and this be hell, I'll  
 willingly be  
 damned here! What? walking, disputing, etc. . . . But  
 leaving off  
 this, let me have a wife, the fairest maid in Germany,  
 for I am  
 wanton and lascivious, and cannot live without a  
 140 wife.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS How, a wife? I prithee Faustus, talk not  
 of a wife.<sup>5</sup>  
 FAUSTUS Nay sweet Mephistophilis, fetch me one, for I  
 will have one.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Well, thou wilt have one; sit there till  
 I come.  
 I'll fetch thee a wife in the devil's name. [*Exit.*]  
 145 [*Enter with a DEVIL dressed like a woman, with*  
*fireworks.*]  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Tell, Faustus, how dost thou like thy  
 wife?  
 FAUSTUS A plague on her for a hot whore!  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Tut, Faustus, marriage is but a  
 ceremonial toy;  
 If thou lovest me, think no more of it.  
 I'll cull thee out the fairest courtesans  
 150 And bring them every morning to thy bed:  
 She whom thine eye shall like, thy heart shall have,  
 Be she as chaste as was Penelope,<sup>6</sup>  
 As wise as Saba,<sup>7</sup> or as beautiful  
 As was bright Lucifer before his fall.  
 155

Hold, take this book, peruse it thoroughly:  
The iterating<sup>o</sup> of these lines brings gold;  
The framing<sup>o</sup> of this circle on the ground  
Brings whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and lightning.  
Pronounce this thrice devoutly to thyself,  
160 And men in armor shall appear to thee,  
Ready to execute what thou desirest.  
FAUSTUS Thanks, Mephastophilis, yet fain would I  
have a book wherein I might behold all spells and  
incantations, that I might  
raise up spirits when I please.  
165 MEPHASTOPHILIS Here they are in this book. [*There  
turn to them.*]  
FAUSTUS Now would I have a book where I might see  
all characters and planets of the heavens, that I  
might know their motions and dispositions.<sup>8</sup>  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Here they are too. [*Turn to them.*]  
170 FAUSTUS Nay, let me have one book more, and then I  
have done, wherein I might see all plants, herbs,  
and trees that grow upon the earth.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Here they be.  
FAUSTUS O thou art deceived!  
175 MEPHASTOPHILIS Tut, I warrant<sup>9</sup> thee. [*Turn to  
them.*]  
FAUSTUS When I behold the heavens, then I repent,  
And curse thee, wicked Mephastophilis,  
Because thou hast deprived me of those joys.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Why Faustus,  
180 Think'st thou that heaven is such a glorious thing?  
I tell thee 'tis not half so fair as thou,  
Or any man that breathes on earth.  
FAUSTUS How prov'st thou that?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS It was made for man, therefore is man  
185 more excellent.

FAUSTUS If it were made for man, 'twas made for me:

I will renounce this magic, and repent.

[*Enter* GOOD ANGEL *and* EVIL ANGEL.]

GOOD ANGEL Faustus, repent, yet<sup>o</sup> God will pity thee.

EVIL ANGEL Thou art a spirit,<sup>o</sup> God cannot pity thee.

190 FAUSTUS Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit?  
Be I a devil, yet God may pity me.

Ay, God will pity me if I repent.

EVIL ANGEL Ay, but Faustus never shall repent.

[*Exeunt.*]

195 FAUSTUS My heart's so hardened I cannot repent!  
Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,  
But fearful echoes thunders in mine ears,  
"Faustus, thou are damned"; then swords and  
knives,

Poison, guns, halters,<sup>o</sup> and envenomed steel  
Are laid before me to dispatch myself:  
And long ere this I should have slain myself,  
200 Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair.

Have I not made blind Homer sing to me  
Of Alexander's<sup>1</sup> love, and Oenon's death?  
And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes  
205 With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,<sup>2</sup>  
Made music with my Mephistophilis?

Why should I die then, or basely despair?  
I am resolved! Faustus shall ne'er repent.  
Come, Mephistophilis, let us dispute again,  
And argue of divine astrology.  
210 Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon?  
Are all celestial bodies but one globe,  
As is the substance of this centric earth?<sup>3</sup>

MEPHISTOPHILIS As are the elements, such are the  
spheres,  
215 Mutually folded in each other's orb.

And, Faustus, all jointly move upon one axletree  
Whose terminè<sup>o</sup> is termed the world's wide pole,  
Nor are the names of Saturn, Mars, or Jupiter  
Feigned, but are erring stars.<sup>4</sup>

220 FAUSTUS But tell me, have they all one motion, both  
*situ et tempore*?<sup>5</sup>

MEPHASTOPHILIS All jointly move from east to west in  
four-and-twenty hours upon the poles of the  
world, but differ in their motion upon the poles of  
the zodiac.<sup>6</sup>

FAUSTUS Tush, these slender trifles Wagner can  
decide!

225 Hath Mephistophilis no greater skill?  
Who knows not the double motion of the planets?  
The first is finished in a natural day, the second thus:  
as Saturn in  
thirty years; Jupiter in twelve; Mars in four; the Sun,  
Venus, and  
Mercury in a year; the Moon in twenty-eight days.

Tush, these are  
230 freshmen's suppositions. But tell me, hath every  
sphere a dominion  
or *intelligentia*?<sup>7</sup>

MEPHASTOPHILIS Ay.

FAUSTUS How many heavens or spheres are there?

MEPHASTOPHILIS Nine: the seven planets, the firmament,  
and the  
235 empyreal heaven.<sup>8</sup>

FAUSTUS Well, resolve me then in this question: why  
have we not  
conjunctions, oppositions,<sup>9</sup> aspects, eclipses, all at  
one time, but  
in some years we have more, in some less?

MEPHASTOPHILIS *Per inaequalem motum respectu  
totius.*<sup>1</sup>



240 FAUSTUS Well, I am answered. Tell me who made the world?

MEPHASTOPHILIS I will not.

FAUSTUS Sweet Mephistophilis, tell me.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Move<sup>o</sup> me not, for I will not tell thee.

FAUSTUS Villain, have I not bound thee to tell me anything?

245 MEPHASTOPHILIS Ay, that is not against our kingdom; but this is.

Think thou on hell, Faustus, for thou art damned.

FAUSTUS Think, Faustus, upon God, that made the world.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Remember this. [*Exit.*]

250 FAUSTUS Ay, go accursèd spirit, to ugly hell,  
'Tis thou hast damned distressèd Faustus' soul:  
Is't not too late?

[*Enter* GOOD ANGEL *and* EVIL.]

EVIL ANGEL Too late.

GOOD ANGEL Never too late, if Faustus will repent.

EVIL ANGEL If thou repent, devils shall tear thee in pieces.

255 GOOD ANGEL Repent, and they shall never raze<sup>o</sup> thy skin.

[*Exeunt.*]

FAUSTUS Ah Christ my Savior! seek to save  
Distressèd Faustus' soul!

[*Enter* LUCIFER, BELZEBUB, *and* MEPHASTOPHILIS.]

LUCIFER Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just.  
There's none but I have interest in the same.

260 FAUSTUS O who art thou that look'st so terrible?

LUCIFER I am Lucifer, and this is my companion  
prince in hell.

FAUSTUS O Faustus, they are come to fetch away thy  
soul!

LUCIFER We come to tell thee thou dost injure us.  
Thou talk'st of Christ, contrary to thy promise.

265      Thou should'st not think of God; think of the devil,  
And his dam<sup>2</sup> too.

FAUSTUS    Nor will I henceforth: pardon me in this,  
And Faustus vows never to look to heaven,  
Never to name God, or to pray to him,  
270      To burn his Scriptures, slay his ministers,  
And make my spirits pull his churches down.

LUCIFER    Do so, and we will highly gratify thee.  
Faustus, we are  
come from hell to show thee some pastime; sit  
down, and thou  
shalt see all the Seven Deadly Sins<sup>3</sup> appear in their  
proper shapes.

275      FAUSTUS    That sight will be as pleasing unto me as  
Paradise was to  
Adam, the first day of his creation.

LUCIFER    Talk not of Paradise, nor creation, but mark  
this show;  
talk of the devil and nothing else. Come away.

[*Enter the* SEVEN DEADLY SINS.]

Now Faustus, examine them of their several names  
and  
dispositions.

280      FAUSTUS    What art thou, the first?

PRIDE    I am Pride: I disdain to have any parents. I am  
like to Ovid's  
flea, I can creep into every corner of a wench:  
sometimes like a  
periwig,<sup>4</sup> I sit upon her brow; or like a fan of  
feathers, I kiss her lips.

285      Indeed I do—what do I not! But fie, what a scent<sup>5</sup> is  
here? I'll not  
speak another word, except the ground were  
perfumed and covered  
with cloth of arras.<sup>6</sup>

FAUSTUS What art thou, the second?  
 COVETOUSNESS I am Covetousness, begotten of an old  
 churl<sup>7</sup> in an  
 290 old leathern bag; and might I have my wish, I would  
 desire that this  
 house, and all the people in it, were turned to gold,  
 that I might  
 lock you up in my good chest. O my sweet gold!  
 FAUSTUS What art thou, the third?  
 WRATH I am Wrath. I had neither father nor mother: I  
 leaped out of  
 295 a lion's mouth when I was scarce half an hour old,  
 and ever since  
 I have run up and down the world with this case<sup>8</sup> of  
 rapiers, wounding  
 myself when I had nobody to fight withal. I was born  
 in hell—and  
 look to it, for some of you<sup>9</sup> shall be my father.  
 FAUSTUS What art thou, the fourth?  
 300 ENVY I am Envy, begotten of a chimney-sweeper and  
 an oyster-wife.  
 I cannot read, and therefore wish all books were  
 burnt; I am lean  
 with seeing others eat—O that there would come a  
 famine through  
 all the world, that all might die, and I live alone;  
 then thou should'st  
 see how fat I would be! But must thou sit and I  
 stand? Come down,  
 with a vengeance!  
 305 FAUSTUS Away, envious rascal! What art thou, the  
 fifth?  
 GLUTTONY Who, I sir? I am Gluttony. My parents are all  
 dead, and

the devil a penny they have left me but a bare  
 pension, and that is  
 thirty meals a day and ten bevers<sup>1</sup>—a small trifle to  
 suffice nature.

310 O, I come of a royal parentage: my grandfather was  
 a gammon<sup>2</sup> of  
 bacon, my grandmother a hogshead of claret wine;  
 my godfathers  
 were these: Peter Pickled-Herring, and Martin  
 Martlemas-Beef.<sup>3</sup>

O but my godmother! She was a jolly gentlewoman,  
 and well-beloved  
 in every good town and city; her name was Mistress  
 Margery

315 March-Beer.<sup>4</sup> Now, Faustus, thou hast heard all my  
 progeny;<sup>5</sup> wilt  
 thou bid me to supper?

FAUSTUS No, I'll see thee hanged; thou wilt eat up all  
 my victuals.

GLUTTONY Then the devil choke thee!

FAUSTUS Choke thyself, Glutton. What art thou, the  
 sixth?

320 SLOTH I am Sloth; I was begotten on a sunny bank,  
 where I have lain  
 ever since—and you have done me great injury to  
 bring me from  
 thence. Let me be carried thither again by Gluttony  
 and Lechery.

I'll not speak another word for a king's ransom.

FAUSTUS What are you, Mistress Minx, the seventh  
 and last?

325 LECHERY Who, I sir? I am one that loves an inch of raw  
 mutton better  
 than an ell of fried stockfish;<sup>6</sup> and the first letter of  
 my name begins

with Lechery.  
 LUCIFER Away! To hell, to hell! [*Exeunt the SINS.*]  
 Now Faustus, how dost thou like this?  
 FAUSTUS O this feeds my soul!  
 330 LUCIFER Tut, Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.  
 FAUSTUS O might I see hell, and return again, how  
 happy were  
 I then!  
 LUCIFER Thou shalt; I will send for thee at midnight. In  
 meantime,  
 335 take this book, peruse it thoroughly, and thou shalt  
 turn thyself  
 into what shape thou wilt.  
 FAUSTUS Great thanks, mighty Lucifer; this will I keep  
 as chary<sup>7</sup>as  
 my life.  
 LUCIFER Farewell, Faustus; and think on the devil.  
 FAUSTUS Farewell, great Lucifer; come,  
 340 Mephastophilis.  
 [*Exeunt OMNES.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 8: A wealthy German trade center.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Come, come, Mephastophilis![Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Misery loves company.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: It is finished. A blasphemy, because these are the words of Christ on the Cross (John 19:30).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, have the supernatural powers of a spirit.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legal articles.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mephastophilis cannot produce a wife for Faustus because marriage is a sacrament.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The wife of Ulysses, famed for chastity and fidelity.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The queen of Sheba, who tested Solomon's wisdom with "hard questions" (1 Kings 10).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Relationships to other planets. "Characters": occult symbols.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Assure.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alexander is another name for Paris, the lover of Oenone; later he deserted her and abducted Helen, causing the Trojan War. Oenone refused to heal the wounds Paris received in battle, and when he died of them, she killed herself in remorse.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The legendary musician Amphion, whose harp caused stones, of themselves, to form the walls of Thebes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Faustus asks whether all the apparently different heavenly bodies really form "one globe" like the earth. Mephastophilis answers that like the elements, which are separate but combined, the heavenly bodies are separate but their spheres are enfolded, and they move (according to the ancient Ptolemaic cosmology) on a single axle.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: It is appropriate to give individual names to Saturn, Mars, Jupiter, and the other planets—which are called wandering, or "erring" stars. The fixed stars were in the eighth sphere (the firmament, or crystalline sphere).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In position and in time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The common axle on which all the spheres revolve.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An angel, or intelligence, thought to be the source of motion in each sphere.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The ninth sphere was the immovable empyrean.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: When two planets are most remote from each other. "Conjunctions": the apparent joinings of two planets. These are two of the planetary "aspects" (relative positions) that figure in astrology.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Because of their unequal movements in respect of the whole.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mother. "The devil and his dam" was a common colloquial expression.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth, called deadly because they lead to spiritual death. All other sins are said to grow out of them (compare the procession of the Seven Deadly Sins in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, canto 4, stanzas 16–37).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wig. "Ovid's flea": a salacious medieval poem "Carmen de pulice" (Song of the Flea) was attributed to Ovid.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Stink.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Arras in Flanders exported fine cloth used for tapestry hangings. "Except": unless.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Miser.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pair.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, some in the audience.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Snacks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The lower side of pork, including the leg.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Meat, salted to preserve it during the winter, was prepared around Martinmas (November 11).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A rich ale, made in March.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lineage.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dried cod, associated with sexual coldness and impotence. "Mutton": frequently a bawdy term in Elizabethan English; here, the penis. "Ell": forty-five inches.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Carefully.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *avails*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *accursed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lordship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guarantee*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contract*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a portable grate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *O man, fly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repeating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drawing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *still*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evil spirit, devil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hangman's nooses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *urge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *graze*[Return to reference](#) °



## SCENE 6

[Enter ROBIN *the ostler*<sup>8</sup> *with a book in his hand.*]

ROBIN O this is admirable! here I ha' stolen one of  
Doctor Faustus'  
conjuring books, and i'faith I mean to search some  
circles<sup>9</sup> for my  
own use: now will I make all the maidens in our  
parish dance at  
my pleasure stark naked before me, and so by that  
means I shall  
see more than ere I felt or saw yet.

5

[Enter RAFE *calling* ROBIN.]

RAFE Robin, prithee come away, there's a gentleman  
tarries<sup>1</sup> to have  
his horse, and he would have his things rubbed and  
made clean.  
He keeps such a chafing<sup>2</sup> with my mistress about it,  
and she has  
sent me to look thee out. Prithee, come away.

10

ROBIN Keep out, keep out; or else you are blown up,  
you are dismembered,  
Rafe. Keep out, for I am about a roaring<sup>3</sup> piece of  
work.

RAFE Come, what dost thou with that same book?  
Thou canst not read!

15

ROBIN Yes, my master and mistress shall find that I can  
read—he  
for his forehead,<sup>4</sup> she for her private study. She's  
born to bear with  
me,<sup>5</sup> or else my art fails.

RAFE Why Robin, what book is that?

ROBIN What book? Why the most intolerable<sup>6</sup> book for  
conjuring

that ere was invented by any brimstone devil.  
RAFE Canst thou conjure with it?  
20 ROBIN I can do all these things easily with it: first, I  
can make thee  
drunk with 'ipocrase<sup>7</sup> at any tavern in Europe for  
nothing, that's  
one of my conjuring works.  
RAFE Our master parson says that's nothing.  
25 ROBIN True, Rafe! And more, Rafe, if thou hast any  
mind to Nan  
Spit, our kitchen maid, then turn her and wind her to  
thy own  
use, as often as thou wilt, and at midnight.  
RAFE O brave Robin! Shall I have Nan Spit, and to mine  
own use?  
On that condition I'll feed thy devil with horsebread  
as long as he  
30 lives, of free cost.<sup>8</sup>  
ROBIN No more, sweet Rafe; let's go and make clean  
our boots  
which lie foul upon our hands, and then to our  
conjuring in the  
devil's name. [*Exeunt.*]

## CHORUS 2

[*Enter WAGNER solus.*]  
WAGNER Learned Faustus,  
To know the secrets of astronomy  
Graven in the book of Jove's high firmament,  
Did mount himself to scale Olympus<sup>9</sup> top.  
Being seated in a chariot burning bright,  
5 Drawn by the strength of yokèd dragons' necks.  
He now is gone to prove cosmography,<sup>1</sup>  
And, as I guess, will first arrive at Rome

To see the pope, and manner of his court,  
 And take some part of holy Peter's feast,<sup>2</sup>  
 That to this day is highly solemnized [*Exit* WAGNER.]

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Hostler, stablehand. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Magicians' circles, but with a sexual innuendo. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Is waiting. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scolding. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dangerous. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Robin intends to give his master horns—cuckold him. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, bear his weight, or bear him a child. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Irresistible. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Robin's pronunciation of "hippocras," a spiced wine. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Free of charge. "Horsebread": fodder. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The home of the gods in Greek mythology. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To test the accuracy of maps. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Saint Peter's feast is June 29. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 7

[*Enter* FAUSTUS *and* MEPHASTOPHILIS.]

FAUSTUS Having now, my good Mephastophilis,  
Passed with delight the stately town of Trier,<sup>3</sup>  
Environed round with airy mountain tops,  
With walls of flint, and deep entrenched lakes,<sup>o</sup>  
Not to be won by any conquering prince;  
5 From Paris next, coasting<sup>o</sup> the realm of France,  
We saw the river Main fall into Rhine,  
Whose banks are set with groves of fruitful vines;  
Then up to Naples, rich Campania,  
With buildings fair and gorgeous to the eye,  
10 The streets straight forth, and paved with finest  
brick,  
Quarters the town in four equivalents;  
There saw we learned Maro's<sup>4</sup> golden tomb,  
The way<sup>o</sup> he cut, an English mile in length,  
Thorough<sup>o</sup> a rock of stone in one night's space.  
15 From thence to Venice, Padua, and the rest,  
In midst of which a sumptuous temple<sup>o</sup> stands  
That threatens the stars with her aspiring top.  
Thus hitherto hath Faustus spent his time.  
But tell me now, what resting place is this?  
20 Hast thou, as erst<sup>o</sup> I did command,  
Conducted me within the walls of Rome?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Faustus, I have; and because we will  
not be  
unprovided, I have taken up his holiness' privy  
chamber<sup>5</sup> for our use.  
FAUSTUS I hope his holiness will bid us welcome.  
25 MEPHASTOPHILIS Tut, 'tis no matter, man, we'll be bold  
with his good  
cheer.<sup>6</sup>

And now, my Faustus, that thou may'st perceive  
What Rome containeth to delight thee with,  
Know that this city stands upon seven hills  
30 That underprop the groundwork of the same;  
Just through the midst runs flowing Tiber's stream,  
With winding banks, that cut it in two parts;  
Over the which four stately bridges lean,  
That makes safe passage to each part of Rome.  
35 Upon the bridge called Ponte Angelo  
Erected is a castle passing<sup>7</sup> strong,  
Within whose walls such store of ordnance are  
And double cannons, framed of carved brass,  
As match the days within one complete year—  
40 Besides the gates and high pyramides<sup>8</sup>  
Which Julius Caesar brought from Africa.

FAUSTUS Now by the kingdoms of infernal rule,  
Of Styx, Acheron, and the fiery lake  
Of ever-burning Phlegethon,<sup>8</sup> I swear  
45 That I do long to see the monuments  
And situation of bright-splendent Rome.  
Come therefore, let's away.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Nay, Faustus, stay. I know you'd fain  
see the pope,  
And take some part of holy Peter's feast,  
50 Where thou shalt see a troop of bald-pate friars,  
Whose *summum bonum*<sup>9</sup> is in belly-cheer.

FAUSTUS Well, I am content to compass<sup>1</sup> then some  
sport,  
And by their folly make us merriment.  
Then charm me that I may be invisible, to do what I  
55 please unseen of any whilst I stay in Rome.

MEPHASTOPHILIS [*casts a spell on him*] So Faustus,  
now do what thou wilt, thou shalt not be  
discerned.

[*Sound a sennet; <sup>2</sup> enter the POPE and the  
CARDINAL OF LORRAINE to the banquet, with FRIARS  
attending.*]

POPE My lord of Lorraine, will't please you draw  
near?

60 FAUSTUS Fall to; and the devil choke you and<sup>3</sup> you  
spare.

POPE How now, who's that which spake? Friars, look  
about.

1 FRIAR Here's nobody, if it like<sup>4</sup> your holiness.

POPE My lord, here is a dainty dish was sent to me  
from the bishop of Milan.

FAUSTUS I thank you, sir. [*Snatch it.*]

65 POPE How now, who's that which snatched the meat  
from me? Will  
no man look? My lord, this dish was sent me from  
the cardinal of  
Florence.

FAUSTUS You say true? I'll have't. [*Snatch it.*]

70 POPE What, again! My lord, I'll drink to your grace.

FAUSTUS I'll pledge<sup>5</sup> your grace. [*Snatch the cup.*]

LORRAINE My lord, it may be some ghost newly crept  
out of purgatory  
come to beg a pardon of your holiness.

POPE It may be so; friars, prepare a dirge<sup>6</sup> to lay the  
fury of this ghost.

75 Once again my lord, fall to. [*The POPE crosseth  
himself.*]

FAUSTUS What, are you crossing of your self? Well, use  
that trick  
no more, I would advise you.  
[*Cross again.*]

FAUSTUS Well, there's the second time; aware<sup>7</sup> the  
third! I give you  
fair warning.

[*Cross again, and FAUSTUS hits him a box of the ear, and they all run away.*]

80 Come on, Mephastophilis, what shall we do?  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Nay, I know not; we shall be cursed  
 with bell,  
 book, and candle.<sup>8</sup>

FAUSTUS How! Bell, book, and candle; candle, book,  
 and bell,  
 Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell.  
 Anon you shall hear a hog grunt, a calf bleat, and an  
 85 ass bray,  
 Because it is St. Peter's holy day.  
 [*Enter all the FRIARS to sing the Dirge.*]

1 FRIAR Come brethren, let's about our business with  
 good devotion.  
 [*Sing this.*]  
 Cursed be he that stole away His Holiness' meat  
 from the table.  
*Maledicat Dominus.*<sup>9</sup>

90 Cursed be he that struck His Holiness a blow on the  
 face.  
*Maledicat Dominus.*  
 Cursed be he that took Friar Sandelo a blow on the  
 pate.  
*Maledicat Dominus.*  
 Cursed be he that disturbeth our holy dirge.  
*Maledicat Dominus.*

95 Cursed be he that took away His Holiness' wine.  
*Maledicat dominus.*  
*Et omnes sancti.*<sup>1</sup> Amen.  
 [*Beat the FRIARS, and fling fireworks among them, and so Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Treves (in Prussia).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Virgil's. In medieval legend the Roman poet Virgil was considered a magician whose powers produced a tunnel on the promontory of Posilippo at Naples, near his tomb.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Private quarters.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Entertainment.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Surpassingly. Actually the castle is on the bank, not the bridge.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Classical names for rivers of the underworld.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The greatest good; often refers to God.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Take part in.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A set of notes on the trumpet or cornet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: If. "Fall to": start eating.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Please.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Toast.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A requiem mass. But what actually follows is a litany of curses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Beware.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The traditional paraphernalia for cursing and excommunication.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: May the Lord curse him.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And all the saints (also curse him).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *moats*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *traversing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tunnel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *through*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *St. Mark's in Venice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *earlier*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *obelisks* [Return to reference °](#)

## SCENE 8

[*Enter* ROBIN *and* RAFE *with a silver goblet.*]

ROBIN Come, Rafe, did not I tell thee we were forever  
made by this  
Doctor Faustus' book? *Ecce signum!*<sup>2</sup> Here's a simple  
purchase for  
horsekeepers: our horses shall eat no hay as long as  
this lasts.

[*Enter the* VINTNER.]

RAFE But Robin, here comes the vintner.

5 ROBIN Hush, I'll gull<sup>3</sup> him supernaturally! Drawer,<sup>4</sup> I  
hope all is  
paid; God be with you. Come, Rafe.

VINTNER Soft, sir, a word with you. I must yet have a  
goblet paid  
from you ere you go.

ROBIN I, a goblet, Rafe? I, a goblet? I scorn you: and  
you are but a  
etc.<sup>5</sup> . . . I, a goblet? Search me.

10 VINTNER I mean so, sir, with your favor. [*Searches*  
ROBIN..]

ROBIN How say you now?

VINTNER I must say somewhat to your fellow; you,  
sir!

RAFE Me, sir? Me, sir? Search your fill. Now sir, you  
may be ashamed  
to burden honest men with a matter of truth.

15 VINTNER [*searches* RAFE] Well, t'one of you hath this  
goblet about  
you.

ROBIN You lie, drawer; 'tis afore me. Sirra you, I'll  
teach ye to

impeach<sup>6</sup> honest men: [*to* RAFE] stand by. [*to the*  
 VINTNER] I'll scour  
 20 you for a goblet—stand aside, you were best—I  
 charge you in the  
 name of Belzebub—look to the goblet, Rafe!  
 VINTNER What mean you, sirra?  
 ROBIN I'll tell you what I mean: [*he reads*]  
*Sanctobulorum*  
*Periphrasticon*—nay, I'll tickle you, vintner—look to  
 the goblet,  
 Rafe— *Polypragmos Belseborams framanto*  
 25 *pacostiphos tostis*  
*Mephastophilis, etc.*<sup>7</sup> . . .  
 [*Enter* MEPHASTOPHILIS: *sets squibs*<sup>8</sup> *at their*  
*backs: they run about.*]  
 VINTNER *O nomine Domine!*<sup>9</sup> What mean'st thou,  
 Robin? Thou  
 hast no goblet.  
 RAFF *Peccatum peccatorum!*<sup>1</sup> Here's thy goblet,  
 good vintner.  
 30 ROBIN *Misericordia pro nobis!*<sup>2</sup> What shall I do? Good  
 devil, forgive me now, and I'll never rob thy library  
 more.  
 [*Enter to them* MEPHASTOPHILIS.]  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Vanish, villains, th'one like an ape,  
 another like a  
 bear, the third an ass, for doing this enterprise.  
 [*Exit* VINTNER.]  
 Monarch of hell, under whose black survey  
 Great potentates do kneel with awful fear;  
 35 Upon whose altars thousand souls do lie;  
 How am I vexèd with these villains' charms!  
 From Constantinople am I hither come,  
 Only for pleasure of these damnèd slaves.

40 ROBIN How, from Constantinople? You have had a  
great journey!  
Will you take sixpence in your purse to pay for your  
supper, and be  
gone?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Well, villains, for your presumption, I  
transform thee into an ape, and thee into a dog; and  
so begone! [*Exit.*]  
45 ROBIN How, into an ape? That's brave:<sup>3</sup> I'll have fine  
sport with the boys; I'll get nuts and apples enow.<sup>4</sup>  
RAFE And I must be a dog.  
ROBIN I'faith, thy head will never be out of the  
potage<sup>5</sup> pot.  
[*Exeunt.*]

### CHORUS 3

[*Enter* CHORUS.<sup>6</sup>]  
CHORUS When Faustus had with pleasure ta'en the  
view  
Of rarest things, and royal courts of kings,  
He stayed his course, and so returnèd home;  
Where such as bare his absence but with grief—  
5 I mean his friends and nearest companions—  
Did gratulate his safety with kind words.  
And in their conference of what befell,  
Touching his journey through the world and air,  
They put forth questions of astrology,  
Which Faustus answered with such learnèd skill  
10 As they admired and wondered at his wit.  
Now is his fame spread forth in every land:  
Amongst the rest the emperor is one,  
Carolus the Fifth,<sup>7</sup> at whose palace now  
Faustus is feasted 'mongst his noblemen.  
15 What there he did in trial<sup>8</sup> of his art

I leave untold: your eyes shall see performed.  
[Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Behold the proof.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Trick.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wine drawer. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The actor might ad lib abuse at this point.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Accuse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dog-Latin, as Robin attempts to conjure from Faustus's book.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Firecrackers. Evidently Mephistophilis is onstage only long enough to set off the firecrackers and is not seen by Robin, Rafe, or the vintner. He then reenters at line 32.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the name of the Lord. The Latin invocations are used in swearing.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sin of sins![Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Have mercy on us![Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Splendid.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Enough.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Porridge.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, Wagner.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (reigned 1519–56).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *demonstration*[Return to reference °](#)

## SCENE 9

*[Enter EMPEROR, FAUSTUS, and a KNIGHT, with Attendants.]*

EMPEROR Master Doctor Faustus, I have heard strange report of thy knowledge in the black art, how that none in my empire, nor in the whole world, can compare with thee for the rare effects of magic.

They say thou hast a familiar spirit, by whom thou canst accomplish  
5        what thou list! This therefore is my request: that thou let me see some proof of thy skill, that mine eyes may be witnesses to confirm what mine ears have heard reported. And here I swear to thee, by the honor of mine imperial crown, that whatever thou dost, thou shalt be in no ways prejudiced or endamaged.

10        KNIGHT *[aside]* I'faith, he looks much like a conjuror.

FAUSTUS My gracious sovereign, though I must confess myself far inferior to the report men have published, and nothing answerable to<sup>8</sup> the honor of your imperial majesty, yet for that love and duty binds me thereunto, I am content to do whatsoever your majesty shall command me.

15        EMPEROR Then Doctor Faustus, mark what I shall say. As I was

sometime solitary set within my closet,<sup>9</sup> sundry  
thoughts arose  
about the honor of mine ancestors—how they had  
won by prowess  
such exploits, got such riches, subdued so many  
kingdoms, as we  
that do succeed, or they that shall hereafter possess  
20 our throne,  
shall (I fear me) never attain to that degree of high  
renown and  
great authority. Amongst which kings is Alexander  
the Great,<sup>1</sup>  
chief spectacle of the world's pre-eminence:  
The bright shining of whose glorious acts  
Lightens the world with his reflecting beams;  
25 As when I hear but motion<sup>o</sup> made of him,  
It grieves my soul I never saw the man.  
If therefore thou, by cunning of thine art,  
Canst raise this man from hollow vaults below,  
Where lies entombed this famous conqueror,  
30 And bring with him his beauteous paramour,<sup>2</sup>  
Both in their right shapes, gesture, and attire  
They used to wear during their time of life,  
Thou shalt both satisfy my just desire  
And give me cause to praise thee whilst I live.  
35 FAUSTUS My gracious lord, I am ready to accomplish  
your request,  
so far forth as by art and power of my spirit I am  
able to perform.  
KNIGHT [*aside*] I'faith, that's just nothing at all.  
FAUSTUS But, if it like your grace, it is not in my ability  
to present  
40 before your eyes the true substantial bodies of those  
two deceased  
princes, which long since are consumed to dust.

KNIGHT [*aside*] Ay, marry,<sup>3</sup> master doctor, now  
there's a sign of  
grace in you, when you will confess the truth.

FAUSTUS But such spirits as can lively resemble  
Alexander and his  
paramour shall appear before your grace, in that  
45 manner that they  
best lived in, in their most flourishing estate:<sup>4</sup> which  
I doubt not  
shall sufficiently content your imperial majesty.

EMPEROR Go to, master doctor, let me see them  
presently.<sup>5</sup>

KNIGHT Do you hear, master doctor? You bring  
Alexander and his  
paramour before the emperor!

50 FAUSTUS How then, sir?

KNIGHT I'faith, that's as true as Diana turned me to  
a stag.

FAUSTUS No sir; but when Actaeon died, he left the  
horns<sup>6</sup> for you!  
Mephastophilis, begone.

[*Exit* MEPHASTOPHILIS.]

KNIGHT Nay, and <sup>7</sup> you go to conjuring I'll be gone.

55 [*Exit* KNIGHT.]

FAUSTUS I'll meet with you anon<sup>8</sup> for interrupting me  
so. Here they  
are, my gracious lord.

[*Enter* MEPHASTOPHILIS *with* ALEXANDER *and* his  
PARAMOUR.]

EMPEROR Master doctor, I heard this lady, while she  
lived, had a  
wart or mole in her neck; how shall I know whether  
it be so or no?

FAUSTUS Your highness may boldly go and see.

60 [*The* EMPEROR *examines the lady's neck.*]



EMPEROR Sure, these are no spirits, but the true  
substantial bodies  
of those two deceased princes.

[*Exit* ALEXANDER (*and his* PARAMOUR ).]

FAUSTUS Will't please your highness now to send for the  
knight  
that was so pleasant with me here of late?

EMPEROR One of you call him forth.

65 [Enter the KNIGHT with a pair of horns on his  
head.]

How now, sir knight? Why, I had thought thou hadst  
been a

bachelor, but now I see thou hast a wife that not  
only gives thee horns

but makes thee wear them! Feel on thy head.

KNIGHT Thou damnèd wretch and execrable<sup>o</sup> dog,

70 Bred in the concave of some monstrous rock,

How dar'st thou thus abuse a gentleman?

Villain, I say, undo what thou hast done.

FAUSTUS O not so fast, sir, there's no haste but  
good.<sup>9</sup> Are you

remembered<sup>1</sup> how you crossed me in my conference  
with the

emperor? I think I have met with you for it.

75 EMPEROR Good master doctor, at my entreaty release  
him; he hath  
done penance sufficient.

FAUSTUS My gracious lord, not so much for the injury  
he offered me

here in your presence, as to delight you with some  
mirth, hath

80 Faustus worthily requited this injurious knight; which  
being all I desire,

I am content to release him of his horns. And, sir  
knight, hereafter



- Note 8: Shortly. "Meet with": be revenged on. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A proverb: no point hurrying, unless it's to good effect. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Have you forgotten. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Immediately. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *mention* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *detestable* [Return to reference °](#)

## SCENE 10

[*Enter a* HORSE-COURSER.<sup>3</sup>]

HORSE-COURSER I have been all this day seeking one  
Master

Fustian: 'Mass,<sup>4</sup> see where he is! God save you,  
master doctor.

FAUSTUS What, horse-courser: you are well met.

HORSE-COURSER Do you hear, sir; I have brought you  
forty dollars<sup>5</sup>  
for your horse.

5 FAUSTUS I cannot sell him so: if thou lik'st him for fifty,  
take him.

HORSE-COURSER Alas sir, I have no more. I pray you  
speak for me.

MEPHASTOPHILIS I pray you let him have him; he is an  
honest  
fellow, and he has a great charge<sup>6</sup>—neither wife nor  
child.

10 FAUSTUS Well, come, give me your money; my boy will  
deliver him  
to you. But I must tell you one thing before you have  
him: ride him  
not into the water at any hand.<sup>7</sup>

HORSE-COURSER Why sir, will he not drink of all  
waters?

15 FAUSTUS O yes, he will drink of all waters, but ride him  
not into the  
water. Ride him over hedge or ditch, or where thou  
wilt, but not  
into the water.

HORSE-COURSER Well sir. Now am I made man  
forever: I'll

not leave my horse for forty! If he had but the  
quality of hey ding ding,  
hey ding ding,<sup>8</sup> I'd make a brave living on him! He  
has a buttock  
as slick as an eel. Well, God b'y,<sup>9</sup> sir; your boy will  
20 deliver him me.  
But hark ye sir, if my horse be sick, or ill at ease, if I  
bring his  
water<sup>1</sup> to you, you'll tell me what it is?  
[*Exit* HORSE-COURSER.]

FAUSTUS Away, you villain! What, dost think I am a  
horse-doctor?  
What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to  
die?  
Thy fatal time<sup>o</sup> doth draw to final end.  
25 Despair doth drive distrust unto my thoughts.  
Confound these passions with a quiet sleep:  
Tush, Christ did call the thief upon the cross.<sup>2</sup>  
Then rest thee, Faustus, quiet in conceit.<sup>o</sup>  
[*Sleep in his chair.*]  
[*Enter* HORSE-COURSER *all wet, crying.*]

HORSE-COURSER Alas, alas, Doctor Fustian, quotha?<sup>3</sup>  
30 'Mass,  
Doctor Lopus<sup>4</sup> was never such a doctor! H'as given  
me a purgation,  
h'as purged me of forty dollars! I shall never see  
them more. But  
yet, like an ass as I was, I would not be ruled by  
him; for he bade  
me I should ride him into no water. Now I, thinking  
my horse had  
35 had some rare quality that he would not have had  
me known of, I,  
like a vent'rous<sup>5</sup> youth, rid him into the deep pond at  
the town's

end. I was no sooner in the middle of the pond, but  
 my horse  
 vanished away, and I sat upon a bottle<sup>6</sup> of hay,  
 never so near drowning  
 in my life! But I'll seek out my doctor, and have my  
 forty dollars  
 again, or I'll make it the dearest<sup>7</sup> horse. O, yonder is  
 40 his  
 snipper-snapper!<sup>8</sup> Do you hear, you hey-pass,<sup>9</sup>  
 where's your master?  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Why, sir, what would you? You cannot  
 speak with  
 him.  
 HORSE-COURSER But I will speak with him.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Why, he's fast asleep; come some  
 45 other time.  
 HORSE-COURSER I'll speak with him now, or I'll break his  
 glasswindows<sup>1</sup> about his ears.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS I tell thee, he has not slept this eight  
 nights.  
 HORSE-COURSER And he have not slept this eight weeks  
 I'll speak  
 with him.  
 50 MEPHASTOPHILIS See where he is, fast asleep.  
 HORSE-COURSER Ay, this is he; God save ye, master  
 doctor, master  
 doctor, master Doctor Fustian, forty dollars, forty  
 dollars for a  
 bottle of hay!  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Why, thou seest he hears thee not.  
 55 HORSE-COURSER So ho ho; so ho ho.<sup>2</sup> [*Halloo in his ear.*]  
 No, will you  
 not wake? I'll make you wake ere I go. [*Pull him by  
 the leg, and pull  
 it away.*] Alas, I am undone! What shall I do?

FAUSTUS O my leg, my leg! Help, Mephastophilis! Call  
 the officers!  
 My leg, my leg!  
 60 MEPHASTOPHILIS Come villain, to the constable.  
 HORSE-COURSER O Lord, sir! Let me go, and I'll give you  
 forty dollars  
 more.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Where be they?  
 HORSE-COURSER I have none about me: come to my  
 65 ostry<sup>3</sup> and I'll  
 give them you.  
 MEPHASTOPHILIS Begone quickly!  
 [HORSE-COURSER *runs away.*]  
 FAUSTUS What, is he gone? Farewell he: Faustus has his  
 leg again,  
 and the horse-courser—I take it—a bottle of hay for  
 his labor!  
 Well, this trick shall cost him forty dollars more.  
 70 [Enter WAGNER.]  
 How now, Wagner, what's the news with thee?  
 WAGNER Sir, the duke of Vanholt<sup>4</sup> doth earnestly  
 entreat your  
 company.  
 FAUSTUS The duke of Vanholt! An honorable gentleman,  
 to whom  
 I must be no niggard of my cunning.<sup>5</sup> Come,  
 75 Mephastophilis, let's  
 away to him. [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Horse trader, traditionally a sharp bargainer or cheat.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By the Mass. "Fustian": the horse-courser's comic mistake for Faustus's name.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Common German coins.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Burden.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: On any account.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, he wishes his horse were a stallion, not a gelding, so he could put him to stud.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Good-bye (contracted from “God be with you”).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Urine.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Luke 23:39–43 one of the two thieves crucified with Jesus is promised paradise. “Tush”: a scoffing exclamation.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He said.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In February 1594 Roderigo Lopez, the queen’s personal physician, was executed for plotting to poison her. Obviously Marlowe, who died in 1593, did not write the line.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Adventurous.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bundle. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Most expensive.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Insignificant youth; a whipper-snapper.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A conjurer’s phrase. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Spectacles.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The huntsman’s cry, when he sights the quarry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hostelry, inn.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The duchy of Anhalt, in central Germany.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, must generously display my skill.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *time allotted by fate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in mind*[Return to reference °](#)



## SCENE 11

[FAUSTUS *and* MEPHASTOPHILIS *return to the stage.*  
*Enter to them the* DUKE *and the* DUCHESS; *the* DUKE  
*speaks.*]

DUKE Believe me, master doctor, this merriment hath  
much pleased me.

FAUSTUS My gracious lord, I am glad it contents you so  
well: but it  
may be, madam, you take no delight in this; I have  
heard that

5 great-bellied<sup>6</sup> women do long for some dainties or  
other—what is  
it, madam? Tell me, and you shall have it.

DUCHESS Thanks, good master doctor; and for I see your  
courteous

intent to pleasure me, I will not hide from you the  
thing my heart

desires. And were it now summer, as it is January  
and the dead of

10 winter, I would desire no better meat than a dish of  
ripe grapes.

FAUSTUS Alas madam, that's nothing! Mephastophilis,  
begone! [*Exit*

MEPHASTOPHILIS.] Were it a greater thing than this, so  
it would

content you, you should have it. [*Enter*

MEPHASTOPHILIS *with the*

*grapes.*] Here they be, madam; will't please you  
taste on them?

15 DUKE Believe me, master doctor, this makes me wonder  
above the  
rest: that being in the dead time of winter, and in the  
month of

January, how you should come by these grapes?  
FAUSTUS If it like<sup>7</sup> your grace, the year is divided into two  
circles over  
the whole world, that when it is here winter with us,  
in the contrary  
20 circle it is summer with them, as in India, Saba,<sup>8</sup> and  
farther  
countries in the east; and by means of a swift spirit  
that I have, I had  
them brought hither, as ye see. How do you like  
them, madam;  
be they good?  
DUCHESS Believe me, master doctor, they be the best  
grapes that ere  
I tasted in my life before.  
25 FAUSTUS I am glad they content you so, madam.  
DUKE Come, madam, let us in, where you must well  
reward this  
learned man for the great kindness he hath showed  
to you.  
DUCHESS And so I will, my lord; and whilst I live, rest  
beholding for  
this courtesy.  
30 FAUSTUS I humbly thank your grace.  
DUKE Come, master doctor, follow us, and receive  
your reward.

[*Exeunt.*]

#### CHORUS 4

[*Enter WAGNER solus.*]

WAGNER I think my master means to die shortly,  
For he hath given to me all his goods.  
And yet methinks, if that death were near,  
He would not banquet, and carouse, and swill

5        Amongst the students, as even now he doth,  
Who are at supper with such belly-cheer<sup>°</sup>  
As Wagner ne'er beheld in all his life.  
See where they come: belike the feast is ended.  
[*Exit.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Pregnant.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Please.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The biblical kingdom of Sheba, in southwestern Arabia.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *gluttony*[Return to reference °](#)

## SCENE 12

[*Enter* FAUSTUS (*and* MEPHASTOPHILIS), *with two or three* SCHOLARS.]

1 SCHOLAR Master Doctor Faustus, since our  
conference about  
fair ladies, which was the beautifulest in all the  
world, we have  
determined with ourselves that Helen of Greece was  
the  
admirablest lady that ever lived. Therefore, master  
doctor, if you will do  
us that favor as to let us see that peerless dame of  
5 Greece, whom  
all the world admires for majesty, we should think  
ourselves much  
beholding unto you.

FAUSTUS Gentlemen, for that I know your friendship is  
unfeigned,  
And Faustus' custom is not to deny  
The just requests of those that wish him well,  
10 You shall behold that peerless dame of Greece,  
No otherways for pomp and majesty  
Than when Sir Paris crossed the seas with her  
And brought the spoils to rich Dardania.°  
Be silent then, for danger is in words.

15 [Music sounds, and HELEN passeth over the stage.]

2 SCHOLAR Too simple is my wit to tell her praise,  
Whom all the world admires for majesty.

3 SCHOLAR No marvel though the angry Greeks  
pursued  
With ten years' war the rape° of such a queen,  
Whose heavenly beauty passeth all compare.

20

1 SCHOLAR Since we have seen the pride of Nature's  
works

And only paragon of excellence,  
Let us depart; and for this glorious deed  
Happy and blest be Faustus evermore.

25 FAUSTUS Gentlemen, farewell; the same I wish to  
you.

[*Exeunt* SCHOLARS.]

[*Enter an* OLD MAN.]

OLD MAN Ah Doctor Faustus, that I might prevail  
To guide thy steps unto the way of life,  
By which sweet path thou may'st attain the goal  
That shall conduct thee to celestial rest.  
30 Break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears,  
Tears falling from repentant heaviness<sup>o</sup>  
Of thy most vile and loathsome filthiness,  
The stench whereof corrupts the inward soul  
With such flagitious<sup>o</sup> crimes of heinous sins,  
35 As no commiseration may expel  
But mercy, Faustus, of thy savior sweet,  
Whose blood alone must wash away thy guilt.

FAUSTUS Where art thou, Faustus? Wretch, what hast  
thou done!  
Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die!  
Hell calls for right, and with a roaring voice  
40 Says, "Faustus, come: thine hour is come!"

[MEPHASTOPHILIS *gives him a dagger.*]

And Faustus will come to do thee right.

OLD MAN Ah stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate  
steps!

45 I see an angel hovers o'er thy head  
And with a vial full of precious grace  
Offers to pour the same into thy soul!  
Then call for mercy, and avoid despair.

FAUSTUS Ah my sweet friend, I feel thy words  
To comfort my distressed soul;

50 Leave me awhile to ponder on my sins.  
OLD MAN I go, sweet Faustus; but with heavy cheer,<sup>o</sup>  
Fearing the ruin of thy hopeless soul. [*Exit.*]  
FAUSTUS Accursèd Faustus, where is mercy now?  
I do repent, and yet I do despair:  
55 Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast!  
What shall I do to shun the snares of death?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Thou traitor, Faustus: I arrest thy  
soul  
For disobedience to my sovereign lord.  
Revolt,<sup>9</sup> or I'll in piecemeal tear thy flesh.  
60 FAUSTUS Sweet Mephistophilis, entreat thy lord  
To pardon my unjust presumption;  
And with my blood again I will confirm  
My former vow I made to Lucifer.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Do it then quickly, with unfeignèd  
heart,  
Lest greater danger do attend thy drift.<sup>o</sup>  
65 FAUSTUS Torment, sweet friend, that base and  
crooked age<sup>o</sup>  
That durst<sup>o</sup> dissuade me from thy Lucifer,  
With greatest torments that our hell affords.  
MEPHASTOPHILIS His faith is great, I cannot touch his  
soul,  
70 But what I may afflict his body with  
I will attempt—which is but little worth.  
FAUSTUS One thing, good servant, let me crave of  
thee,  
To glut the longing of my heart's desire:  
That I might have unto<sup>o</sup> my paramour  
75 That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,  
Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean  
These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,  
And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.

MEPHASTOPHILIS Faustus, this, or what else thou shalt  
 desire,  
 Shall be performed in twinkling of an eye.  
 80 [*Enter* HELEN.]  
 FAUSTUS Was this the face that launched a thousand  
 ships,  
 And burnt the topless<sup>1</sup> towers of Ilium?<sup>o</sup>  
 Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
 Her lips sucks forth my soul, see where it flies!  
 Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
 85 Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,  
 And all is dross that is not Helena!  
 [*Enter* OLD MAN.]  
 I will be Paris, and for love of thee,  
 Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked;  
 And I will combat with weak Menelaus,<sup>o</sup>  
 90 And wear thy colors on my plumèd crest;  
 Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,<sup>2</sup>  
 And then return to Helen for a kiss.  
 O thou art fairer than the evening air  
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars,  
 95 Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter  
 When he appeared to hapless Semele;<sup>3</sup>  
 More lovely than the monarch of the sky  
 In wanton Arethusa's azured arms;<sup>4</sup>  
 And none but thou shalt be my paramour.  
 100 [*Exeunt* (FAUSTUS *and* HELEN).]  
 OLD MAN Accursèd Faustus, miserable man,  
 That from thy soul exclud'st the grace of heaven  
 And fliest the throne of His tribunal seat!  
 [*Enter the* DEVILS.]  
 Satan begins to sift me with his pride,<sup>5</sup>  
 As in this furnace God shall try my faith.  
 105 My faith, vile hell, shall triumph over thee!  
 Ambitious fiends, see how the heavens smiles

At your repulse, and laughs your state<sup>o</sup> to scorn.  
Hence hell, for hence I fly unto my God.

[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Turn back (to your allegiance to Lucifer).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Immeasurably high; matchless.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Achilles could be wounded only in his heel—where he was shot by Paris.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Theban girl, loved by Jupiter and destroyed by the fire of his lightning when he appeared to her in his full splendor.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Arethusa was the nymph of a fountain, as well as the fountain itself; she excited the passion of the river god Alpheus, who was by some accounts related to the sun.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To test me with his strength.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *Troy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abduction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grief*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *villainous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heavy heart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aged man*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dared to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Troy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Helen's husband*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *royal power*[Return to reference °](#)



### SCENE 13

[*Enter* FAUSTUS *with the* SCHOLARS.]

FAUSTUS Ah gentlemen!

1 SCHOLAR What ails Faustus?

FAUSTUS Ah my sweet chamber-fellow, had I lived with thee, then

had I lived still;<sup>6</sup> but now I die eternally. Look,  
comes he not, comes  
he not?

5 2 SCHOLAR What means Faustus?

3 SCHOLAR Belike he is grown into some sickness by  
being  
oversolitary.

1 SCHOLAR If it be so, we'll have physicians to cure him;  
'tis but a

10 surfeit:<sup>7</sup> never fear, man.

FAUSTUS A surfeit of deadly sin, that hath damned both  
body and  
soul.

2 SCHOLAR Yet Faustus, look up to heaven;  
remember God's  
mercies are infinite.

15 FAUSTUS But Faustus' offense can ne'er be pardoned!

The serpent  
that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. Ah  
gentlemen,  
hear me with patience, and tremble not at my  
speeches, though  
my heart pants and quivers to remember that I have  
been a  
student here these thirty years—O would I had never  
seen

Wittenberg, never read book—and what wonders I  
 have done, all  
 Wittenberg can witness—yea, all the world; for  
 which Faustus  
 hath lost both Germany and the world—yea, heaven  
 itself—heaven,  
 the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the  
 kingdom of  
 joy; and must remain in hell forever—hell, ah, hell  
 forever! Sweet  
 25 friends, what shall become of Faustus, being in hell  
 forever?  
 3 SCHOLAR Yet Faustus, call on God.  
 FAUSTUS On God, whom Faustus hath abjured? On  
 God, whom  
 Faustus hath blasphemed? Ah, my God—I would  
 weep, but the  
 devil draws in my tears! Gush forth blood, instead of  
 tears—yea,  
 30 life and soul! O, he stays my tongue! I would lift up  
 my hands, but  
 see, they hold them, they hold them!  
 ALL Who, Faustus?  
 FAUSTUS Lucifer and Mephistophilis! Ah gentlemen, I  
 gave them  
 my soul for my cunning.  
 ALL God forbid!  
 35 FAUSTUS God forbade it indeed, but Faustus hath done  
 it: for the  
 vain pleasure of four-and-twenty years hath Faustus  
 lost eternal  
 joy and felicity. I writ them a bill<sup>8</sup> with mine own  
 blood, the date  
 is expired, the time will come, and he will fetch me.

1 SCHOLAR Why did not Faustus tell us of this before,  
that divines  
might have prayed for thee?

FAUSTUS Oft have I thought to have done so, but the  
devil

threatened to tear me in pieces if I named God, to  
fetch both body and  
soul if I once gave ear to divinity; and now 'tis too  
late. Gentlemen,

away, lest you perish with me!

45 2 SCHOLAR O what shall we do to save Faustus?

3 SCHOLAR God will strengthen me. I will stay with  
Faustus.

1 SCHOLAR Tempt not God, sweet friend, but let us into  
the next  
room, and there pray for him.

50 FAUSTUS Ay, pray for me, pray for me; and what noise  
soever ye  
hear, come not unto me, for nothing can rescue me.

2 SCHOLAR Pray thou, and we will pray, that God may  
have mercy  
upon thee.

FAUSTUS Gentlemen, farewell. If I live till morning, I'll  
visit you; if  
not, Faustus is gone to hell.

55 ALL Faustus, farewell.

[*Exeunt* SCHOLARS.]

[*The clock strikes eleven.*]

FAUSTUS Ah Faustus,  
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually.  
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
60 That time may cease, and midnight never come.  
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make  
Perpetual day, or let this hour be but  
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,

65 That Faustus may repent and save his soul.  
*O lente, lente currite noctis equi!*<sup>9</sup>  
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,  
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.  
O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?  
70 See, see where Christ's blood streams in the  
firmament!<sup>o</sup>  
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my  
Christ—  
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;  
Yet will I call on him—O spare me, Lucifer!  
Where is it now? 'Tis gone: and see where God  
Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows!  
75 Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,  
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God.  
No, no?  
Then will I headlong run into the earth:  
Earth, gape! O no, it will not harbor me.  
80 You stars that reigned at my nativity,  
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,  
Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist  
Into the entrails of yon laboring cloud,  
That when you vomit forth into the air  
85 My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,  
So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.<sup>1</sup>  
[*The watch strikes.*]  
Ah, half the hour is past: 'twill all be past anon.<sup>o</sup>  
O God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,  
Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed  
90 me,  
Impose some end to my incessant pain:  
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,  
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved.  
O no end is limited to damnèd souls!  
Why wert thou not a creature wanting<sup>o</sup> soul?  
95

Or why is this immortal that thou hast?  
 Ah, Pythagoras' *metempsychosis*<sup>2</sup>—were that true,  
 This soul should fly from me, and I be changed  
 Unto some brutish beast:  
 100 All beasts are happy, for when they die,  
 Their souls are soon dissolved in elements;  
 But mine must live still<sup>o</sup> to be plagued in hell.  
 Cursed be the parents that engendered me!  
 No, Faustus, curse thy self, curse Lucifer,  
 105 That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.  
     *[The clock striketh twelve.]*  
 O it strikes, it strikes! Now body, turn to air,  
 Or Lucifer will bear thee quick<sup>o</sup> to hell.  
     *[Thunder and lightning.]*  
 O soul, be changed into little water drops  
 And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.  
 My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!  
 110      *[Enter DEVILS.]*  
 Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile!  
 Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!  
 I'll burn my books—ah, Mephastophilis!  
     *[Exeunt with him.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Always. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Indigestion caused by overeating. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Document. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Slowly, slowly run, O horses of the night (adapted from a line in Ovid's *Amores*). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Faustus wants to be drawn up into a cloud, which would compact his body into a thunderbolt so that his soul, thus purified, might ascend to heaven. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pythagoras's doctrine of the transmigration of souls. [Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shortly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alive*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Epilogue***

[*Enter* CHORUS.]

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burnèd is Apollo's laurel bough,<sup>3</sup>  
That sometime grew within this learnèd man.  
Faustus is gone! Regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune<sup>o</sup> may exhort the wise  
5 Only to wonder at<sup>4</sup> unlawful things:  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits<sup>o</sup>  
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

[*Exit.*]

*Terminat hora diem, terminat author opus.*<sup>5</sup>

1604, 1616

## **Endnotes**

- Note 3: The laurel crown of Apollo symbolizes (among other things) learning and wisdom.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Be content simply to observe with awe.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The hour ends the day, the author ends his work. This motto was probably added by the printer.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **Notes**

- °: *devilish fate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aspiring minds*[Return to reference °](#)

**The Two Texts of *Doctor Faustus*** The following excerpts enable readers to compare a sample passage (from Scene 12) of the A text (1604) with the corresponding passage of the B text (1616). (On the two texts, see [p. 581](#).) Here the differences in tone and content in the two versions of the Old Man's speech may signal different attitudes toward the finality of Faustus's damnation.



## Doctor Faustus, A Text

[*Enter an* OLD MAN.]

OLD MAN    Ah Doctor Faustus, that I might prevail  
To guide thy steps unto the way of life,  
By which sweet path thou may'st attain the goal  
That shall conduct thee to celestial rest.  
5    Break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears,  
Tears falling from repentant heaviness<sup>o</sup>  
Of thy most vile and loathsome filthiness,  
The stench whereof corrupts the inward soul  
With such flagitious<sup>o</sup> crimes of heinous sins  
As no commiseration may expel  
10    But mercy, Faustus, of thy savior sweet,  
Whose blood alone must wash away thy guilt.  
FAUSTUS    Where art thou, Faustus? Wretch, what hast  
thou done!  
Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die!  
Hell calls for right, and with a roaring voice  
15    Says, "Faustus, come: thine hour is come!"  
          [MEPHASTOPHILIS *gives him a dagger.*]  
And Faustus will come to do thee right.  
OLD MAN    Ah stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate  
steps!  
I see an angel hovers o'er thy head  
And with a vial full of precious grace  
20    Offers to pour the same into thy soul!  
Then call for mercy, and avoid despair.  
FAUSTUS    Ah my sweet friend, I feel thy words  
To comfort my distressed soul;  
Leave me awhile to ponder on my sins.  
25    OLD MAN    I go, sweet Faustus; but with heavy cheer,<sup>o</sup>  
Fearing the ruin of thy hopeless soul.    [*Exit.*]

30

FAUSTUS Accursèd Faustus, where is mercy now?  
I do repent, and yet I do despair:  
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast!  
What shall I do to shun the snares of death?  
MEPHASTOPHILIS Thou traitor, Faustus: I arrest thy  
soul  
For disobedience to my sovereign lord.  
Revolt,<sup>1</sup> or I'll in piecemeal tear thy flesh.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Turn back (to your allegiance to Lucifer).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *grief*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *villainous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heavy heart*[Return to reference °](#)

## Doctor Faustus, B Text

[*Enter an* OLD MAN.]

OLD MAN O gentle Faustus, leave this damnèd art,  
This magic that will charm thy soul to hell  
And quite bereave thee of salvation.  
Though thou hast now offended like a man,  
Do not persèver<sup>o</sup> in it like a devil.  
5 Yet, yet, thou hast an amiable<sup>o</sup> soul,  
If sin by custom grow not into nature.  
Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late;  
Then thou art banished from the sight of heaven.  
No mortal can express the pains of hell.  
10 It may be this my exhortatiön  
Seems harsh and all unpleasant; let it not,  
For, gentle son, I speak it not in wrath  
Or envy of<sup>o</sup> thee, but in tender love  
And pity of thy future misery.  
15 And so have hope that this my kind rebuke,  
Checking<sup>o</sup> thy body, may amend thy soul.  
FAUSTUS Where art thou, Faustus? Wretch, what hast  
thou done?  
Hell claims his right, and with a roaring voice  
Says, "Faustus, come; thine hour is almost come";  
20 And Faustus now will come to do thee right.  
[MEPHOSTOPHILIS *gives him a dagger.*]  
OLD MAN O stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate  
steps.  
I see an angel hover o'er thy head,  
And with a vial full of precious grace  
Offers to pour the same into thy soul.  
25 Then call for mercy and avoid despair.  
FAUSTUS O friend, I feel thy words

To comfort my distressed soul.  
 Leave me a while to ponder on my sins.  
 30 OLD MAN Faustus, I leave thee, but with grief of  
     heart,  
 Fearing the enemy of thy hapless soul.[*Exit.*]  
 FAUSTUS Accursèd Faustus, wretch, what hast thou  
     done?  
 I do repent, and yet I do despair.  
 Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast.  
 What shall I do to shun the snares of death?  
 35 MEPHOSTOPHILIS Thou traitor, Faustus, I arrest thy  
     soul  
 For disobedience to my sovereign lord.  
 Revolt,<sup>1</sup> or I'll in piecemeal tear thy flesh.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Turn back (to your allegiance to Lucifer).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *persevere*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worthy of (divine) love*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ill will toward*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rebuking*[Return to reference °](#)

# **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

## **1564–1616**

William Shakespeare was born in the small market town of Stratford-upon-Avon in April (probably April 23) 1564. His father, a successful glovemaker, landowner, moneylender, and dealer in agricultural commodities, was elected to several important posts in local government but later suffered financial and social reverses, possibly as a result of adherence to the Catholic faith. Shakespeare, between the ages of seven and fourteen, almost certainly attended the free Stratford grammar school, where he would have acquired a reasonably impressive education, including a respectable knowledge of Latin, but he did not proceed to Oxford or Cambridge. There are legends about Shakespeare's youth but no documented facts. The first unambiguous record we have of his life after his christening is that of his marriage, in 1582, at age eighteen, to Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. A daughter, Susanna, was born six months later, in 1583, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, in 1585. We possess no information about his activities for the next seven years, but by 1592 he was in London as an actor and apparently already well known as a playwright, for a rival dramatist, Robert Greene, refers to him resentfully in *A Groatsworth of Wit* as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers."

At this time, there were several companies of professional actors in London and in the provinces. What links Shakespeare had with one or more of them before 1592 are conjectural, but we do know of

his long and fruitful connection, established by 1594, with the most successful troupe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men; later, when James I came to the throne, they became the King's Men. Shakespeare not only acted with this company but eventually became a leading shareholder (he had shares in the company), householder (he had shares in the theatrical buildings), and the principal playwright. Then as now, making a living in the professional theater was not easy: competition among the repertory companies was stiff; civic officials and religious moralists regarded playacting as a sinful, time-wasting nuisance and tried to ban it altogether; government officials exercised censorship over the contents of the plays; and periodic outbreaks of bubonic plague led to temporary closing of the London theaters. But Shakespeare's company, which included some of the most famous actors of the day, nonetheless thrived and in 1599 began to perform in the Globe, a fine, round open-air theater that the company built for itself on the south bank of the Thames. The company also performed frequently at court and, after 1608, at Blackfriars, an oblong private indoor London theater. Already by 1597 Shakespeare had so prospered that he was able to purchase New Place, a handsome house in Stratford-upon-Avon; he could now call himself a gentleman, as his father had (probably with the financial assistance of his successful playwright son) been granted a coat of arms the previous year. Shakespeare's wife and daughters (his son, Hamnet, having died in 1596) resided in Stratford-upon-Avon, while the playwright, living in rented rooms in London, pursued his career. Shortly after writing *The Tempest* (ca. 1611), he retired from direct involvement in the theater and returned to Stratford, buying one of the largest houses there. In March 1616, he signed his will; he died a month later, leaving the bulk of his estate to his daughter Susanna.

Shakespeare began his career as a playwright, probably in the early 1590s, by writing comedies and history plays. The earliest of these histories (in which he may have had one or more collaborators), generally based on accounts of English kings written by Raphael Holinshed and other sixteenth-century chroniclers, seem theatrically vital but crude, as does an early attempt at tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*. But by the later 1590s Shakespeare had created a

sequence of profoundly searching and ambitious history plays—*Richard II*, the first and second parts of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*—which together explore the death throes of feudal England and the birth of the modern nation-state ruled by a charismatic monarch. In the same years he wrote a succession of romantic comedies (*The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*) whose poetic richness and emotional complexity remain unmatched.

*Twelfth Night* may originally have been written in the same year as *Hamlet* (ca. 1601), which initiated an outpouring of great tragic dramas: *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. These plays, written from 1601 to 1607, seem to mark a major shift in sensibility, an existential and metaphysical darkening that many readers think originated in personal anguish. Whatever the truth of this speculation—and we have no direct, personal testimony either to support or to undermine it—there appears to have occurred in the same period a shift as well in Shakespeare's comic sensibility. The comedies written between 1601 and 1604, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, are sufficiently different from the earlier comedies—more biting in tone, more uneasy with comic conventions, more ruthlessly questioning of the values of the characters and the resolutions of the plots—that some modern scholars have classified them as "problem plays" or "dark comedies." Another group of plays, among the last that Shakespeare wrote, seem similarly to define a distinct category. *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, written between 1608 and 1611, when Shakespeare had developed a remarkably fluid, dreamlike sense of plot and a poetic style that could veer, apparently effortlessly, from the tortured to the ineffably sweet, are now commonly known as the "romances." These plays share an interest in the moral and emotional life less of the adolescents who dominate the earlier comedies than of their parents. The romances are deeply concerned with patterns of loss and recovery, suffering and redemption, despair and renewal. They have seemed to many critics to constitute a self-conscious conclusion to a career that opened with histories and comedies and passed through

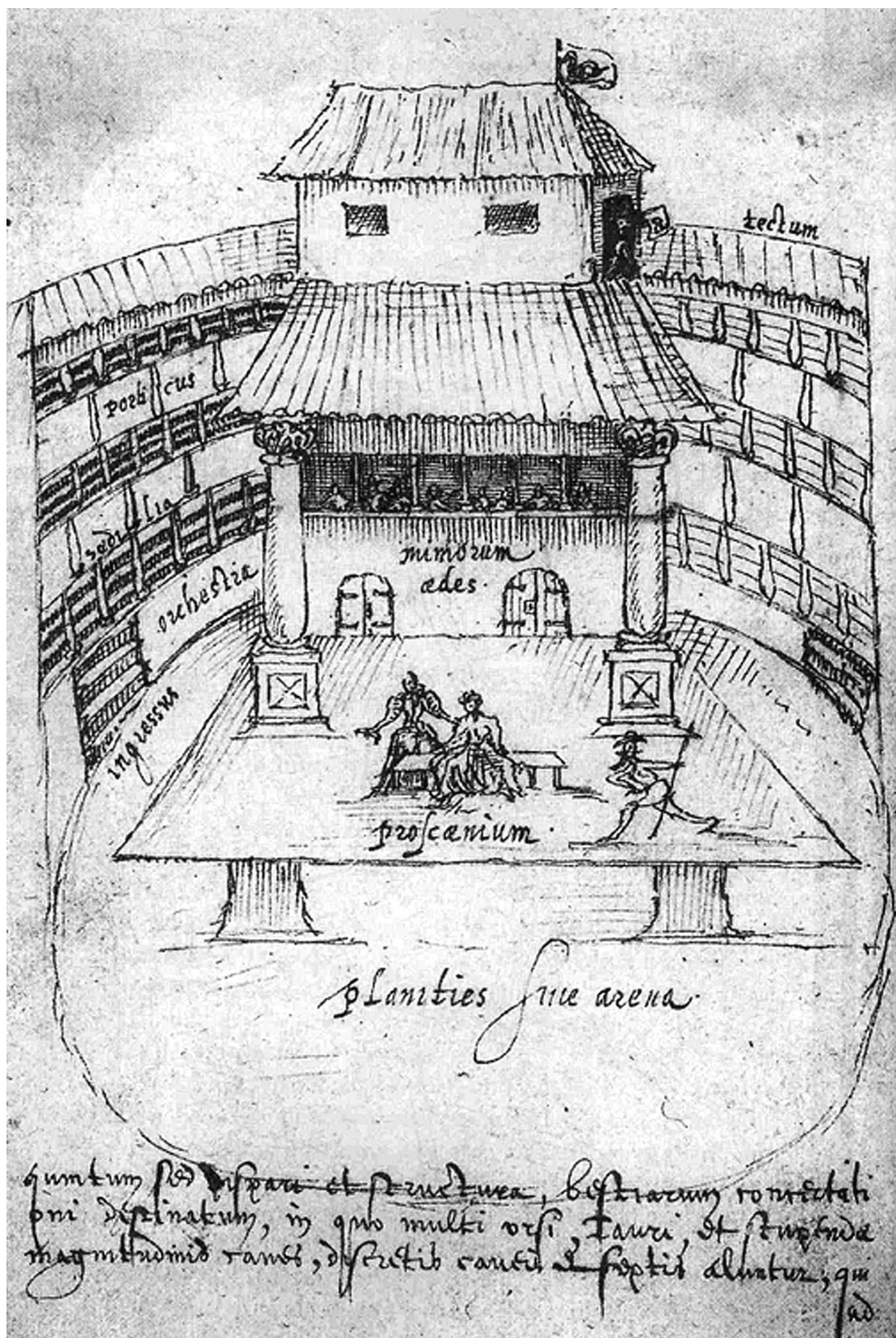
the dark and tormented tragedies. They are, though, also written after the company's acquisition of the new, Blackfriars playhouse—which was more exclusive and expensive than the Globe—and reflect, too, the tastes of the elevated courtly audience the company was now expecting. In a few of the late plays, Shakespeare worked, as he apparently had at the beginning of his professional life, with collaborators. Perhaps he thought of himself as handing over his vocation to a new generation.

Shakespeare evinced no interest in preserving for posterity the sum of his writings, let alone in clarifying the chronology of his works or in specifying which plays he wrote alone and which with collaborators. He wrote plays for performance by his company, and his scripts existed in his own handwritten manuscripts or in scribal copies, in actors' separate part scripts, in playhouse promptbooks, and probably in pirated texts based on shorthand reports of a performance or, possibly, on reconstructions from memory by a spectator. None of these manuscript versions has survived, with the exception, perhaps, of some of the *Thomas More* passages, one of which is included in this volume ([p. 482](#)). Eighteen of his plays were published during his lifetime in the small-format, inexpensive books called quartos; to these were added eighteen other plays, never before printed, in the large, expensive folio volume of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (1623), published seven years after his death. This First Folio, compiled by two of his friends and fellow actors, John Heminges and Henry Condell, is prefaced by a Ben Jonson poem, in which Shakespeare is hailed as “not of an age, but for all time.”

That Shakespeare is “for all time” does not mean that he did not also belong to his own age. It is possible to see where Shakespeare adapted the techniques of his contemporaries and where, crucially, he differed from them. Shakespeare rarely invented the plots of his dramas, preferring to work, often quite closely, with stories he found ready-made in histories, novellas, narrative poems, or other plays. The religious mystery plays and the allegorical morality plays still popular during his childhood taught him that dramas worth seeing must get at something central to the human condition, that they



should embody as well as narrate the crucial actions, and that they could reach not only a coterie of the educated elite but also the great mass of ordinary people. From these and other theatrical models, Shakespeare learned how to construct plays around the struggle for the soul of a protagonist, how to create theatrically compelling and subversive figures of wickedness, and how to focus attention on his characters' psychological, moral, and spiritual lives as well as on their outward behavior.



**Sketch of the Swan Theater.** This drawing by Arend van Buchell (ca. 1596), based on the observations of Johannes De Witt, shows features of a public playhouse in Shakespeare's time. Resembling the courtyard of an Elizabethan inn, the Swan had three galleries for the audience, and probably additional room for audience members in the gallery at the back of the stage, above the tiring-house (dressing room). The stage itself had two doors for players' entrances and exits, and the roof over the stage was supported by pillars. The flag flying from the roof signals that a play is to be performed that day, and a trumpeter announces the beginning of the performance (though the sketch shows a performance already under way). De Witt labeled parts of the sketch using Latin names derived from the Roman theater.

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The authors of the morality plays thought they could enhance the broad impact they sought to achieve by stripping their characters of all incidental distinguishing traits and getting to their essences. They believed that their audiences would thereby not be distracted by the irrelevant details of individual identities. Shakespeare grasped that the spectacle of human destiny was in fact vastly more compelling when it was attached not to generalized abstractions but to particular people, people whom he realized with an unprecedented intensity of individuation: not Youth but Viola, not Everyman but Lear. No other writer of his time was able to create and enter into the interior worlds of so many characters, conveying again and again a sense of unique and irreducible selfhood. In the plays of Shakespeare's brilliant contemporary Marlowe, the protagonist overwhelms virtually all the other characters; in Shakespeare, by contrast, even relatively minor characters—Gonzalo in *The Tempest*, for example, or Emilia in *Othello*—make astonishingly powerful claims on the audience's attention. The Romantic critic William Hazlitt observed that Shakespeare had the power to multiply himself marvelously. His plays convey the sense of an inexhaustible imaginative generosity.

Shakespeare was singularly alert to the fantastic vitality of the English language. His immense vocabulary bears witness to an

uncanny ability to absorb terms from a wide range of pursuits and to transform them into intimate registers of thought and feeling. He had a seemingly boundless capacity to generate metaphors, and he was virtually addicted to wordplay. Double meanings, verbal echoes, and submerged associations ripple through every passage, deepening the reader's enjoyment and understanding, though sometimes at the expense of a single clear sense. The eighteenth-century critic Samuel Johnson complained with some justice that the quibble, the pun, was "the fatal Cleopatra for which Shakespeare lost the world and was content to lose it." For the power that continually discharges itself throughout his plays and poems, at once constituting and unsettling everything it touches, is the power of language.

Historical accuracy is rarely a concern for Shakespeare. His ancient Romans wear doublets, throw caps into the air and use Christian oaths: to this extent he pulled everything he touched into his contemporary existence. But at the same time he was not a social realist; other writers in this period are better at conveying the precise details of the daily lives of shoemakers, alchemists, and judges. The settings of his plays are rarely realistic representations of particular historical times and places; instead, they function as imaginative displacements into alternative worlds that remain strangely familiar.

Though on occasion he depicts ghosts, demons, and other supernatural figures, the universe Shakespeare conjures up seems resolutely human-centered and secular: the torments and joys that most deeply matter are found in this world, not in the next. Attempts to claim him for one or another religious system have proven unconvincing, as have attempts to assign him a specific political label. Activists and ideologues of all political stripes have viewed him as an ally: he has been admiringly quoted by kings and by revolutionaries, by fascists, liberal democrats, socialists, republicans, and communists. At once an agent of civility and an agent of subversion, Shakespeare seems to have been able to view society simultaneously as an insider and as an outsider. His plays can be interpreted and performed—with deep conviction and compelling power—in utterly contradictory ways. The centuries-long

accumulation of these interpretations and performances, far from exhausting Shakespeare's aesthetic appeal, seems only to have enhanced its enduring freshness.

**Sonnets** In Elizabethan England aristocratic patronage, with the money, protection, and prestige it alone could provide, was probably a professional writer's most important asset. This patronage, or at least Shakespeare's quest for it, is most visible in his dedication, in 1593 and 1594, of his narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, to the wealthy young nobleman Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton. What return the poet got for his exquisite offerings is unknown. We do know that among wits and gallants the poems won Shakespeare a reputation as an immensely stylish and accomplished poet. This reputation was enhanced by manuscript circulation of his sonnets, which were mentioned admiringly in print more than ten years before they were published, in 1609 (apparently without his personal supervision and perhaps without his consent).

Shakespeare's sonnets are quite unlike the other sonnet sequences of his day, notably in his almost unprecedented choice of a beautiful young man (rather than a lady) as the principal object of praise, love, and idealizing devotion and in his portrait of a dark, sensuous, and sexually promiscuous mistress (rather than the usual chaste and aloof blond beauty). Nor are the moods confined to what the Renaissance thought were those of the despairing Petrarchan lover: they include delight, pride, melancholy, shame, disgust, and fear. Shakespeare's sequence suggests a story, although the details are vague, and there is even doubt whether the sonnets as published are in an order established by the poet himself. Certain motifs are evident: an introductory series (1 to 17) celebrates the beauty of a young man and urges him to marry and beget children who will bear his image. The subsequent long sequence (18 to 126), passionately focused on the beloved young man, develops as a dominant motif the transience and destructive power of time, countered only by the force of love and the permanence of poetry. The remaining sonnets focus chiefly on the so-called Dark Lady as an alluring but degrading object of desire. Some sonnets (like 144) intimate a love triangle involving the speaker, the male friend, and

the woman; others take note of a rival poet (sometimes identified as George Chapman or Christopher Marlowe). The biographical background of the sonnets has inspired a mountain of speculation, but very little of it has any factual support.

Though there are many variations, Shakespeare's most frequent rhyme scheme in the sonnets is *abab cdcd efef gg*. This so-called Shakespearean pattern often (though not always) calls attention to three distinct quatrains (each of which may develop a separate metaphor), followed by a closing couplet that may either confirm or pull sharply against what has gone before. Startling shifts in direction may occur in lines other than the closing ones; consider, for example, the twists and turns in the opening lines of sonnet 138: "When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her, though I know she lies." Shakespeare's sonnets as a whole are strikingly intense, conveying a sense of high psychological and moral stakes. They are also remarkably dense, written with a daunting energy, concentration, and compression. Often the main idea of the poem may be grasped quickly, but the precise movement of thought and feeling, the links between the shifting images, and the syntax, tone, and rhetorical structure prove immensely challenging. These are poems that famously reward rereading.

## Sonnets

*To the Only Begetter of These Ensuing Sonnets* Mr. W. H. All  
Happiness and That Eternity Promised By Our Ever-Living  
Poet Wisheth The Well-Wishing Adventurer in Setting Forth T. T.<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
This odd dedication bears the initials of the publisher, Thomas Thorpe. The W. H. addressed here may or may not be the male

friend addressed in sonnets 1 to 126. Leading candidates for that role are Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, the dedicatee of *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), and William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, a dedicatee of the First Folio. But there is no hard evidence to support these or other suggested identifications of the male friend or of the so-called Dark Lady; these sonnet personages may or may not have had real-life counterparts.

Since all the sonnets save two were first published in 1609, we do not repeat the date after each one. Numbers 138 and 144 were first published in 1599, in a verse miscellany called *The Passionate Pilgrim*.

[Return to reference 1](#)



# 1

From fairest creatures we desire increase,  
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,  
But as the ripper should by time decease,  
His tender heir might bear his memory;  
5 But thou, contracted<sup>2</sup> to thine own bright eyes,  
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial<sup>3</sup> fuel,  
Making a famine where abundance lies,  
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.  
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament  
10 And only<sup>4</sup> herald to the gaudy spring,  
Within thine own bud buriest thy content<sup>5</sup>  
And, tender churl,<sup>6</sup> mak'st waste in niggarding.<sup>o</sup>  
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,  
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee<sup>7</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Betrothed; also, withdrawn into.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of your own substance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Principal, with overtones of single, solitary.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: What you contain (potential for fatherhood), also what would content you (marriage and fatherhood).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gentle boor (an oxymoron).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "This . . . thee": be a glutton by causing what is owed to the world (your posterity) to be consumed by the grave and within yourself.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *hoarding* [Return to reference °](#)

### 3

Look in thy glass<sup>o</sup> and tell the face thou viewest  
Now is the time that face should form another,  
Whose fresh repair<sup>o</sup> if now thou not renewest,  
Thou dost beguile<sup>o</sup> the world, unbless some mother.  
5 For where is she so fair whose uneared<sup>o</sup> womb  
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?  
Or who is he so fond<sup>o</sup> will be the tomb  
Of his self-love, to stop posterity?  
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee  
10 Calls back the lovely April of her prime;  
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,  
Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.  
But if thou live rememb'ed not to be,<sup>8</sup>  
Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: But if you live to be forgotten.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *mirror*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *state*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *cheat*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *unplowed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *foolish*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## 12

When I do count the clock that tells the time  
And see the brave<sup>o</sup> day sunk in hideous night,  
When I behold the violet past prime  
And sable curls all silvered o'er with white,  
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,  
5 Which erst<sup>o</sup> from heat did canopy the herd  
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves  
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard:  
Then of thy beauty do I question make<sup>o</sup>  
10 That thou among the wastes of time must go,  
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,  
And die as fast as they see others grow,  
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make  
defense  
Save breed,<sup>o</sup> to brave<sup>o</sup> him when he takes thee  
hence.

## Notes

- °: *splendid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speculate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offspring* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defy* [Return to reference](#) °

When I consider every thing that grows  
 Holds<sup>o</sup> in perfection but a little moment;  
 That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows<sup>9</sup>  
 Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;<sup>1</sup>  
 When I perceive that men as plants increase,  
 5      Cheered and checked<sup>2</sup> even by the selfsame sky,  
       Vaunt<sup>3</sup> in their youthful sap, at height decrease,  
       And wear their brave state out of memory;<sup>4</sup>  
       Then the conceit<sup>o</sup> of this inconstant stay  
 10      Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,  
       Where wasteful Time debateth<sup>5</sup> with Decay  
       To change your day of youth to sullied<sup>o</sup> night,  
       And all in war with Time for love of you,  
       As he takes from you, I ingraft<sup>6</sup> you new.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: (1) Appearances, (2) performances. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the stars secretly affect human actions. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Encouraged and reproached or stopped. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Exult, display themselves. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wear their showy splendor out and are forgotten. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: (1) Fights, (2) joins forces. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Renew by grafting; implant beauty again (by my verse). [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *remains* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *conception* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soiled, blackened* [Return to reference °](#)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
 5 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.<sup>7</sup>  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;<sup>°</sup>  
 10 Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:<sup>°</sup>  
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
 So long lives this,<sup>8</sup> and this gives life to thee.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Stripped of gay apparel.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the poem. The boast of immortality for one's verse was a convention going back to the Greek and Roman classics.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *ownest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are grafted*[Return to reference °](#)

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,  
 And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;  
 Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,  
 And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;<sup>9</sup>  
 Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,  
 5 And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,  
 To the wide world and all her fading sweets,  
 But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:  
 O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,  
 Nor draw no lines there with thine antique<sup>1</sup> pen;  
 10 Him in thy course untainted<sup>2</sup> do allow,  
 For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.  
 Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,  
 My love shall in my verse ever live young.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: In full vigor of life (a hunting term). The phoenix was a mythical bird that lived five hundred years, then died in flames to rise again from its ashes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: (1) Old, (2) fantastic (antic).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: (1) Undeiled, (2) untouched by a weapon (a term from jousting).[Return to reference 2](#)



A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted<sup>3</sup>  
 Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;<sup>4</sup>  
 A woman's gentle heart but not acquainted  
 With shifting change as is false women's fashion;  
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,<sup>5</sup>  
 5 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;  
 A man in hue all hues<sup>5</sup> in his controlling,  
 Which steals men's eyes and women's souls  
 amazeth.  
 And for a woman wert thou first created,  
 10 Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,<sup>6</sup>  
 And by addition me of thee defeated,  
 By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.  
 But since she pricked<sup>7</sup> thee out for women's  
 pleasure,  
 Mine be thy love, and thy love's use<sup>8</sup> their  
 treasure.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: That is, not made up with cosmetics.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: (1) Strong feeling, (2) poem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Hue" probably means appearance or form. In the first edition, "hues" is spelled "*Hews*," which some have taken as indicating a pun on a proper name. It has also been suggested that "man in" is a copyist's or compositor's misreading of "maiden."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: (1) Crazy, (2) infatuated.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Marked, with obvious sexual pun.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: (1) Sexual enjoyment, (2) interest (as in usury). [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *roving* [Return to reference °](#)

As an unperfect actor on the stage  
 Who with his fear is put besides<sup>o</sup> his part,  
 Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage  
 Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart,  
 5 So I, for fear of trust,<sup>o</sup> forget to say  
 The perfect ceremony of love's rite,<sup>9</sup>  
 And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,  
 O'er-charged<sup>o</sup> with burden of mine own love's might.  
 O let my books be then the eloquence  
 10 And dumb presagers<sup>o</sup> of my speaking breast,  
 Who plead for love, and look for recompense  
 More than that tongue that more hath more  
 expressed.<sup>1</sup>  
 O learn to read what silent love hath writ;  
 To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.<sup>o</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The first edition has "right," suggesting love's due as well as love's ritual ("rite").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: More than that (rival) speaker who has more often said more.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *forgets*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *lack of confidence*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *overweighed*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *mute presenters*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *intelligence*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

When, in disgrace<sup>o</sup> with Fortune and men's eyes,  
 I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,  
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless<sup>o</sup> cries,  
 And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
 5 Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,<sup>2</sup>  
 Desiring this man's art<sup>o</sup> and that man's scope,<sup>o</sup>  
 With what I most enjoy contented least;  
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
 10 Haply I think on thee, and then my state<sup>3</sup>  
 (Like to the lark at break of day arising  
 From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth  
 brings  
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: That is, I wish I had one man's looks, another man's friends. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Condition, state of mind; but in line 14 there is a pun on *state* meaning chair of state, throne. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *disfavor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *futile* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skill* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ability* [Return to reference °](#)

When to the sessions<sup>4</sup> of sweet silent thought  
 I summon up remembrance of things past,  
 I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
 And with old woes new wail<sup>o</sup> my dear time's waste:  
 5 Then can I drown an eye (unused to flow)  
 For precious friends hid in death's dateless<sup>o</sup> night,  
 And weep afresh love's long since canceled woe,  
 And moan th' expense<sup>o</sup> of many a vanished sight:  
 Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,<sup>o</sup>  
 10 And heavily from woe to woe tell<sup>o</sup> o'er  
 The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,  
 Which I new pay as if not paid before.  
 But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
 All losses are restored and sorrows end.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Sitzings of court. "Summon up" (next line) continues the metaphor. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *bewail anew* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *endless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *loss* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *former* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *count* [Return to reference °](#)

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
 Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,<sup>o</sup>  
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;  
 Anon<sup>o</sup> permit the basest<sup>o</sup> clouds to ride  
 5 With ugly rack<sup>o</sup> on his celestial face,  
 And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
 Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.  
 Even so my sun one early morn did shine  
 With all triumphant splendor on my brow;  
 10 But out, alack,<sup>o</sup> he was but one hour mine;  
 The region<sup>o</sup> cloud hath masked him from me now.  
 Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth:  
 Suns of the world may stain<sup>o</sup> when heaven's sun  
 staineth.

## Notes

- °: *sunlight* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(but) soon* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *darkest* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cloudy mask* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *alas* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *high* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *darken* [Return to reference °](#)

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:  
 Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud.  
 Clouds and eclipses stain<sup>o</sup> both moon and sun,  
 And loathsome canker<sup>o</sup> lives in sweetest bud.  
 5 All men make faults, and even I in this,  
 Authorizing thy trespass with compare,<sup>o</sup>  
 Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,<sup>o</sup>  
 Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;  
 For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense<sup>o</sup>—  
 Thy adverse party is thy advocate—  
 10 And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence.  
 Such civil war is in my love and hate  
 That I an accessory needs must be  
 To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

## Notes

- °: *dim*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rose worm*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *comparisons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *palliating your offense*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reason*[Return to reference °](#)

Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
 Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme;  
 But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
 Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.<sup>5</sup>  
 When wasteful war shall statues overturn,  
 5 And broils<sup>°</sup> root out the work of masonry,  
 Nor Mars his<sup>°</sup> sword nor war's quick fire shall burn  
 The living record of your memory.  
 'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity<sup>6</sup>  
 Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room  
 10 Even in the eyes of all posterity  
 That wear this world out to the ending doom.<sup>°</sup>  
 So, till the judgment that yourself arise,<sup>7</sup>  
 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: That is, than in a stone tomb or effigy that slovenly time wears away and covers with dust.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The enmity of oblivion, of being forgotten.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Until you rise from the dead on Judgment Day.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *battles*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *neither Mars's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Judgment Day*[Return to reference °](#)



Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
 So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
 Each changing place with that which goes before,  
 In sequent toil all forwards do contend.<sup>8</sup>  
 5 Nativity, once in the main<sup>o</sup> of light,  
 Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,  
 Crooked<sup>o</sup> eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
 And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.  
 Time doth transfix the flourish<sup>9</sup> set on youth,  
 10 And delves the parallels<sup>1</sup> in beauty's brow,  
 Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
 And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.  
 And yet to times in hope<sup>o</sup> my verse shall stand,  
 Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Toiling and following each other, all struggle to move forward.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Destroy the embellishment. To "flourish" is also to blossom.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Digs the parallel furrows (wrinkles).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *broad expanse*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pernicious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *future times*[Return to reference °](#)

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,  
 And all my soul, and all my every part;  
 And for this sin there is no remedy,  
 It is so grounded inward in my heart.  
 Methinks no face so gracious<sup>o</sup> is as mine,  
 5 No shape so true,<sup>o</sup> no truth of such account,  
 And for myself mine own worth do define  
 As<sup>o</sup> I all other<sup>o</sup> in all worths surmount.  
 But when my glass<sup>o</sup> shows me myself indeed,  
 Beated and chapped with tanned antiquity,  
 10 Mine own self-love quite contrary<sup>o</sup> I read;  
 Self so self-loving were iniquity.  
 'Tis thee, my self,<sup>o</sup> that for<sup>o</sup> myself I praise,  
 Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *pleasing* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *perfect* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *as if* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *others* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *mirror* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *differently* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *you, my other self* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *as* [Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

Since<sup>2</sup> brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless  
 sea,  
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,  
 How with this rage<sup>o</sup> shall beauty hold a plea,  
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower?  
 O how shall summer's honey breath hold out  
 5 Against the wrackful<sup>o</sup> siege of batt'ring days,  
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout,  
 Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?  
 O fearful meditation! Where, alack,  
 10 Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest<sup>3</sup> he hid?  
 Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?  
 Or who his spoil<sup>o</sup> of beauty can forbid?  
 O none, unless this miracle have might,  
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: That is, since there is neither.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, from being coffered up by Time.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *destructive power*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destructive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ravaging*[Return to reference °](#)

No longer mourn for me when I am dead  
 Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell<sup>4</sup>  
 Give warning to the world that I am fled  
 From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.  
 5 Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
 The hand that writ it; for I love you so,  
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,  
 If thinking on me then should make you woe.  
 O, if, I say, you look upon this verse  
 10 When I perhaps compounded am with clay,  
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,<sup>o</sup>  
 But let your love even with my life decay;  
 Lest the wise world should look into your moan,  
 And mock you with me after I am gone.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: The bell was tolled to announce the death of a member of the parish—one stroke for each year of his or her life.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *repeat*[Return to reference °](#)

That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
 Bare ruined choirs,<sup>5</sup> where late<sup>o</sup> the sweet birds  
 sang.

5 In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
 As after sunset fadeth in the west;  
 Which by and by black night doth take away,  
 Death's second self that seals up all in rest.  
 In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
 10 As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
 Consumed with that which it was nourished by.<sup>6</sup>  
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more  
 strong,  
 To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: The part of a church where divine service was sung.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Choked by the ashes of that which once nourished its flame.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *lately*[Return to reference °](#)

But be contented; when that fell<sup>7</sup> arrest  
 Without all bail shall carry me away,  
 My life hath in this line some interest,<sup>8</sup>  
 Which for memorial still<sup>o</sup> with thee shall stay.  
 When thou reviewest this, thou dost review  
 5 The very part was<sup>o</sup> consecrate to thee.  
 The earth can have but earth, which is his due;  
 My spirit is thine, the better part of me.  
 So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,  
 The prey of worms, my body being dead,  
 10 The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,<sup>9</sup>  
 Too base of<sup>o</sup> thee to be rememberèd.  
 The worth of that is that which it contains,<sup>1</sup>  
 And that is this, and this with thee remains.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Cruel. Hamlet says, "this fell sergeant / Death is strict in his arrest" (5.2.278–79).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Share, participation. "In this line": that is, in this poetry.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Death's weapon (like Time's scythe).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the only value of the body is that it contains the spirit.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *which was*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by*[Return to reference °](#)

O, how I faint<sup>o</sup> when I of you do write,  
 Knowing a better spirit<sup>2</sup> doth use your name,  
 And in the praise thereof spends all his might,  
 To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your fame!  
 5 But since your worth, wide as the ocean is,  
 The humble as<sup>o</sup> the proudest sail doth bear,  
 My saucy bark,<sup>o</sup> inferior far to his,  
 On your broad main<sup>o</sup> doth willfully<sup>o</sup> appear.  
 Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat  
 Whilst he upon your soundless<sup>o</sup> deep doth ride;  
 10 Or, being wrecked, I am a worthless boat,  
 He of tall building<sup>3</sup> and of goodly pride.<sup>o</sup>  
 Then if he thrive and I be cast away,  
 The worst was this: my love was my decay.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A rival poet. See the headnote, p. 624.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tall, strong build.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *get discouraged*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as well as*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impudent boat*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *waters* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boldly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bottomless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *magnificence*[Return to reference °](#)

Farewell: thou art too dear<sup>4</sup> for my possessing,  
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.<sup>o</sup>  
 The charter<sup>o</sup> of thy worth gives thee releasing;<sup>5</sup>  
 My bonds in thee are all determinate.<sup>o</sup>  
 5 For how do I hold thee but by thy granting,  
 And for that riches where is my deserving?  
 The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,<sup>o</sup>  
 And so my patent<sup>o</sup> back again is swerving.<sup>6</sup>  
 Thy self thou gav'st, thy own worth then not  
 knowing,  
 10 Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;<sup>o</sup>  
 So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,<sup>o</sup>  
 Comes home again, on better judgment making.<sup>7</sup>  
 Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter:  
 In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: (1) Expensive, (2) beloved. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Releases you (from love's bonds). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, reverting to you. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, when you realize your error. [Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *value* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deed; contract for property* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expired* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *absent* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *title* [Return to reference °](#)



- °: *overestimating* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *based on error* [Return to reference](#) °

They that have power to hurt and will do none,  
 That do not do the thing they most do show,<sup>8</sup>  
 Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,  
 Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow;  
 They rightly do inherit heaven's graces  
 5 And husband nature's riches from expense;<sup>9</sup>  
 They are the lords and owners of their faces,  
 Others but stewards of their excellence.  
 The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,  
 10 Though to itself it only live and die,<sup>1</sup>  
 But if that flower with base infection meet,  
 The basest weed outbraves<sup>°</sup> his dignity:  
 For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;  
 Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Seem to do, or seem capable of doing. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, they do not squander nature's gifts. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Even if it lives and dies in apparent isolation (unpollinated). [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *surpasses* [Return to reference °](#)

How like a winter hath my absence been  
 From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!  
 What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!  
 What old December's bareness everywhere!  
 5 And yet this time removed<sup>2</sup> was summer's time,  
 The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,  
 Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,<sup>3</sup>  
 Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease.  
 Yet this abundant issue<sup>o</sup> seemed to me  
 10 But hope of orphans and unfathered fruit;  
 For summer and his pleasures wait<sup>o</sup> on thee,  
 And, thou away, the very birds are mute;  
 Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer<sup>o</sup>  
 That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: That is, when I was absent. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spring, which has engendered the lavish crop ("wanton burthen") that autumn is now left to bear. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *outgrowth* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attend* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *such a dismal mood* [Return to reference °](#)

From you have I been absent in the spring,  
 When proud-pied<sup>4</sup> April, dressed in all his trim,  
 Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,  
 That heavy Saturn<sup>o</sup> laughed and leapt with him.  
 5 Yet nor<sup>o</sup> the lays<sup>o</sup> of birds, nor the sweet smell  
 Of different flowers in odor and in hue  
 Could make me any summer's story tell,  
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew;  
 Nor did I wonder at<sup>o</sup> the lily's white,  
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;  
 10 They were but sweet, but figures<sup>o</sup> of delight,  
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.  
 Yet seemed it winter still, and, you away,  
 As with your shadow I with these did play.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Magnificent in many colors.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *god of melancholy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *neither* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *songs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *admire*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *merely emblems*[Return to reference °](#)

Let not my love be called idolatry,  
 Nor my beloved as an idol show,  
 Since all alike my songs and praises be  
 To one, of one, still <sup>o</sup> such, and ever so.  
 Kind is my love today, tomorrow kind,  
 5 Still constant in a wondrous excellence.  
 Therefore my verse, to constancy confined,  
 One thing expressing, leaves out difference. <sup>o</sup>  
 "Fair, kind, and true" is all my argument, <sup>o</sup>  
 "Fair, kind, and true" varying to other words,  
 10 And in this change is my invention spent, <sup>5</sup>  
 Three themes in one, which wondrous scope  
 affords.  
 Fair, kind, and true have often lived alone, <sup>o</sup>  
 Which three till now never kept seat <sup>o</sup> in one.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: And in varying the words alone my inventiveness is expended. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: continually [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: variety [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: theme [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: separately [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: dwelt permanently [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

When in the chronicle of wasted<sup>o</sup> time  
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights,<sup>o</sup>  
 And beauty making beautiful old rhyme  
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,  
 5 Then, in the blazon<sup>6</sup> of sweet beauty's best,  
 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
 I see their antique pen would have expressed  
 Even such a beauty as you master now.  
 So all their praises are but prophecies  
 10 Of this our time, all you prefiguring;  
 And, for they looked but with divining eyes,<sup>7</sup>  
 They had not skill enough your worth to sing:  
 For we, which now behold these present days,  
 Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Catalog of excellencies.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Because ("for") they were able only ("but") to foresee prophetically.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *past*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *persons*[Return to reference °](#)

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul  
 Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,<sup>8</sup>  
 Can yet the lease of my true love control,  
 Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.<sup>9</sup>  
 5 The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,  
 And the sad augurs mock their own presage;<sup>1</sup>  
 Incertainties now crown themselves assured,  
 And peace<sup>2</sup> proclaims olives of endless age.  
 Now with the drops of this most balmy time  
 10 My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,<sup>o</sup>  
 Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,  
 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:  
 And thou in this shalt find thy monument,  
 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.  
 o  
 —

## Endnotes

- Note 8: This sonnet refers to contemporary events and the prophecies, common in Elizabethan almanacs, of disaster.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, can yet put an end to my love, which I thought doomed to early forfeiture.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The "mortal moon" is probably Queen Elizabeth; her "eclipse" could be either her death (March 1603) or, perhaps, her "climacteric" year, her sixty-third (thought meaningful because the product of two "significant" numbers, 7 and 9), which ended in September 1596. The sober astrologers ("sad augurs") now ridicule their own predictions ("presage") of catastrophe, because they turned out to be false.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Perhaps referring to the peace treaty signed with Spain by Elizabeth's successor, James I, or, if the sonnet refers to the time of Elizabeth's climacteric, to an earlier treaty between England and France. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *submits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wasted away* [Return to reference](#) °



Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there  
 And made myself a motley<sup>o</sup> to the view,  
 Gored<sup>3</sup> mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most  
 dear,  
 Made old offenses of affections<sup>o</sup> new.  
 Most true it is that I have looked on truth<sup>o</sup>  
 5 Askance and strangely;<sup>4</sup> but, by all above,  
 These blenches<sup>o</sup> gave my heart another youth,  
 And worse essays<sup>5</sup> proved thee my best of love.  
 Now all is done, have what shall have no end:  
 Mine appetite I never more will grind<sup>o</sup>  
 10 On newer proof,<sup>o</sup> to try<sup>o</sup> an older friend,  
 A god in love, to whom I am confined.  
 Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,<sup>6</sup>  
 Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Wounded, pierced. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Obliquely or asquint, and coldly (like a stranger). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Trials of worse relationships. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the next best thing to the Christian heaven. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *fool, jester* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *passions* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fidelity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *turnings aside* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *whet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experiences* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test*[Return to reference](#) °

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
 Admit impediments;<sup>7</sup> love is not love  
 Which alters when it alteration finds,  
 Or bends with the remover to remove:  
 5 O, no, it is an ever-fixèd mark,<sup>8</sup>  
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
 It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height<sup>9</sup> be  
     taken.  
 Love's not Time's fool,<sup>°</sup> though rosy lips and cheeks  
 10 Within his<sup>1</sup> bending sickle's compass come;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.<sup>°</sup>  
     If this be error and upon me proved,  
     I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: From the Anglican marriage service: "If either of you do know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together . . ." [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Seamark, such as a lighthouse or a beacon. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The star's value is incalculable, although its altitude may be known and used for navigation. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Time's (as also in line 11). [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *plaything* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brink of Judgment Day* [Return to reference °](#)

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power  
 Dost hold Time's fickle glass,<sup>3</sup> his sickle, hour;<sup>o</sup>  
 Who hast by waning grown and therein show'st<sup>o</sup>  
 Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow'st;  
 If Nature (sovereign mistress over wrack<sup>o</sup>)  
 5 As thou goest onwards still will pluck thee back,  
 She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill  
 May Time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.  
 Yet fear her, O thou minion<sup>o</sup> of her pleasure,  
 She may detain, but not still<sup>o</sup> keep, her treasure!  
 10 Her audit<sup>o</sup> (though delayed) answered must be,  
 And her quietus<sup>o</sup> is to render<sup>o</sup> thee.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: This poem—not a sonnet but six couplets—is an envoy (a closing summary or commentary) marking the end of the sequence addressed to a beloved young man (see the headnote) and formally signaling a change in tone and subject matter in the remaining sonnets.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mirror, fickle because as the subject ages, the mirror reflects a changed image.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *hourglass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in contrast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accounting*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *settlement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surrender* [Return to reference](#) °

In the old age black was not counted fair,<sup>4</sup>  
 Or, if it were, it bore not beauty's name;  
 But now is black beauty's successive heir,<sup>5</sup>  
 And beauty slandered with a bastard shame:<sup>o</sup>  
 For since each hand hath put on nature's power,  
 5 Fairing the foul with art's false borrowed face,<sup>o</sup>  
 Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,<sup>6</sup>  
 But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.  
 Therefore my mistress' brows are raven black,  
 Her eyes so suited,<sup>o</sup> and they mourners seem  
 10 At<sup>o</sup> such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,<sup>7</sup>  
 Sland'ring creation with a false esteem:  
 Yet so they mourn, becoming of<sup>o</sup> their woe,  
 That every tongue says beauty should look so.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Beautiful, equated with blond hair and coloring. "Old": former. "Black": dark hair and coloring, equated with ugliness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Heir in line of succession.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Shrine. The next line suggests that natural (unpainted) beauty is now discredited.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, nevertheless possess the appearance of beauty.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *declared illegitimate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with cosmetics*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *also black*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gracing* [Return to reference](#) °

How oft when thou, my music, music play'st  
 Upon that blessèd wood<sup>8</sup> whose motion sounds  
 With thy sweet fingers when thou gently sway'st<sup>o</sup>  
 The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,<sup>9</sup>  
 5 Do I envý those jacks<sup>1</sup> that nimble leap  
 To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,  
 Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,  
 At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand.  
 To be so tickled they would change their state<sup>2</sup>  
 10 And situation<sup>3</sup> with those dancing chips,  
 O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,  
 Making dead wood more blessed than living lips.  
 Since saucy jacks<sup>4</sup> so happy are in this,  
 Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Keys of the spinet or virginal. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The harmony from the strings that overcomes my ear with delight. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The keys (actually, "jacks" are the plectra that pluck the strings when activated by the keys). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Their place in the order of things. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Physical location. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: With a quibble on the sense "impertinent fellows." [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *govern* [Return to reference °](#)



Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
 Is lust in action;<sup>5</sup> and till action, lust  
 Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,  
 Savage, extreme, rude,<sup>o</sup> cruel, not to trust;  
 Enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight;<sup>o</sup>  
 5 Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,  
 Past reason hated as a swallowed bait  
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad:  
 Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;  
 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
 10 A bliss in proof,<sup>6</sup> and proved, a very<sup>o</sup> woe;  
 Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.  
 All this the world well knows; yet none knows well  
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: The word order here is inverted and slightly obscures the meaning. Lust, when put into action, expends "spirit" (life, vitality; also semen) in a "waste" (desert; also with a pun on *waist*) of shame.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A bliss during the experience.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *brutal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *true*[Return to reference °](#)

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;<sup>7</sup>  
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
 I have seen roses damasked,<sup>o</sup> red and white,  
 5 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
 And in some perfumes is there more delight  
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.<sup>8</sup>  
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
 10 I grant I never saw a goddess go;<sup>o</sup>  
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.  
 And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare<sup>o</sup>  
 As any she belied<sup>o</sup> with false compare.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: An anti-Petrarchan sonnet. All of the details commonly attributed by other Elizabethan sonneteers to their ladies (for example, in Spenser's *Amoretti* 64; see p. 453) are here denied to the poet's mistress.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Not with our pejorative sense, but simply "emanates."[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *dappled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *walk*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *admirable; extraordinary*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misrepresented*[Return to reference °](#)

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,<sup>9</sup>  
 And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in overplus;  
 More than enough am I that vex thee still,<sup>o</sup>  
 To thy sweet will making addition thus.  
 Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,  
 5 Not once vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> to hide my will in thine?  
 Shall will in others seem right gracious,  
 And in<sup>o</sup> my will no fair acceptance shine?  
 The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,  
 And in abundance addeth to his store,<sup>o</sup>  
 10 So thou being rich in *Will* add to thy *Will*  
 One will of mine to make thy large *Will* more.  
 Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;<sup>1</sup>  
 Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: (1) Wishes, (2) carnal desire, (3) the male and female sexual organs, (4) one or more lovers—evidently including Shakespeare—named Will. This is one of several sonnets punning on the word. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, do not kill with unkindness any of your wooers. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *consent* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in the case of* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plenty* [Return to reference °](#)

When my love swears that she is made of truth,<sup>2</sup>  
 I do believe her, though I know she lies,<sup>3</sup>  
 That she might think me some untutored youth,  
 Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties.  
 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,  
 5 Although she knows my days are past the best,<sup>4</sup>  
 Simply<sup>°</sup> I credit her false-speaking tongue:  
 On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.  
 But wherefore says she not she is unjust?<sup>°</sup>  
 And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
 10 Oh, love's best habit<sup>°</sup> is in seeming trust,  
 And age in love loves not to have years told.<sup>°</sup>  
 Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
 And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: (1) Is utterly honest, (2) is faithful.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With the obvious sexual pun (as also in lines 13–14).  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Shakespeare was thirty-five or younger when he wrote this sonnet (it first appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, 1599).[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *like a simpleton*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unfaithful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clothing, guise*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *counted*[Return to reference °](#)

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,<sup>5</sup>  
 Which like two spirits do suggest me still:<sup>o</sup>  
 The better angel is a man right fair,  
 The worser spirit a woman colored ill.<sup>o</sup>  
 To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
 5 Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
 And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
 Wooing his purity with her foul pride.<sup>6</sup>  
 And whether that my angel be turned fiend  
 Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
 10 But being both from<sup>o</sup> me, both to each<sup>o</sup> friend,  
 I guess one angel in another's hell.  
 Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
 Till my bad angel fire my good one out.<sup>7</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 5: I have two beloveds, one bringing me comfort and the other despair.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: (1) Vanity, (2) sexuality.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, until she infects him with venereal disease.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *tempt me constantly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dark*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *away from* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *each other*[Return to reference °](#)

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,  
 Lord of<sup>8</sup> these rebel powers that thee array,<sup>9</sup>  
 Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,  
 Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?  
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,  
 5 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?  
 Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,  
 Eat up thy charge?<sup>1</sup> Is this thy body's end?<sup>o</sup>  
 Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,  
 10 And let that pine to aggravate thy store;<sup>2</sup>  
 Buy terms<sup>o</sup> divine in selling hours of dross;<sup>o</sup>  
 Within be fed, without be rich no more.  
 So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,  
 And death once dead, there's no more dying then.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: "Lord of" is an emendation. The 1609 edition repeats the last three words of line 1. Other suggestions are "Thrall to," "Starved by," "Pressed by," and leaving the repetition but dropping "that thee" in line 2. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The rebellious body that clothes you. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: (1) Your expense, (2) the thing you were responsible for (that is, the body). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Let "that" (that is, the body) deteriorate to increase ("aggravate") the soul's riches ("thy store"). [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *destiny; purpose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *long periods* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rubbish*[Return to reference](#) °

My love is as a fever, longing still<sup>o</sup>  
 For that which longer nurseth<sup>3</sup> the disease,  
 Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,<sup>o</sup>  
 Th' uncertain sickly appetite<sup>4</sup> to please.  
 5 My reason, the physician to my love,  
 Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,  
 Hath left me, and I desperate now approve  
 Desire is death, which physic did except.<sup>5</sup>  
 Past cure I am, now reason is past care,<sup>6</sup>  
 And frantic mad with evermore unrest;  
 10 My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,  
 At random from the truth, vainly expressed:<sup>7</sup>  
 For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee  
 bright,  
 Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: (1) Nourishes, (2) takes care of.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: (1) Desire for food, (2) lust.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, I learn by experience that desire, which rejected reason's medicine, is death.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, medical care (of me). The line is a version of the proverb "past cure, past care."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Wide of the mark and senselessly uttered.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *continually*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *maintain the illness*[Return to reference °](#)



In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,<sup>8</sup>  
 But thou art twice forsworn to me love swearing:  
 In act thy bed-vow<sup>o</sup> broke, and new faith torn  
 In vowing new hate after new love bearing.<sup>9</sup>  
 But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee  
 5 When I break twenty? I am perjured most,  
 For all my vows are oaths but to misuse<sup>o</sup> thee,  
 And all my honest faith in thee is lost.  
 For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,  
 Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy,  
 10 And to enlighten thee gave eyes to blindness,<sup>1</sup>  
 Or made them swear against the thing they see.  
 For I have sworn thee fair—more perjured eye<sup>o</sup>  
 To swear against the truth so foul a lie.

1609

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, am breaking loving vows to another.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The object of the “new faith” followed by “new hate” could be either the speaker’s young friend or the speaker himself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And to make you fair (or give you insight), I looked blindly on your failings (or pretended to see what I couldn’t).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *to husband (or lover)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deceive; misrepresent*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: (*punning on "I"*)[Return to reference](#) °

**Othello** *Othello* (1603–04), one of a succession of tragic masterpieces that Shakespeare wrote in the early years of the seventeenth century, is unrivaled in its excruciating intensity. With its almost clinical account of a malevolent assault on love and beauty, the play has for centuries aroused in audiences the paradoxical blend of pleasure and acute discomfort characteristic of great tragedy. The performance history of *Othello* includes anecdotes of spectators attempting to intervene by angrily denouncing the villain, shouting advice to the deceived hero, or even rushing onstage to save the doomed heroine. If such stories reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of theater, they also disclose Shakespeare's brilliant exploitation of the gap between the performers and the audience. We see what is happening; we understand where it is leading; we urgently want to prevent the catastrophe—but, as in a nightmare, we are powerless to do so. *Othello* is a prime instance of what a twentieth-century writer, Antonin Artaud, called "the theater of cruelty."

This cruelty is intensified by the fact that the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy is woven from some of the elements of the joyous comedies in which he had already distinguished himself. *Othello* begins with a miniature version of the traditional comedy of sexual fulfillment. Refusing to allow his daughter to elope with the man of her choosing, an angry father, wellborn, wealthy, and powerful, lodges a formal complaint before the authorities. His daughter, he alleges, has been seduced by means of witchcraft; otherwise, she would never have been attracted to someone so far below her in social class and culture. At first the authorities—the senators of the Venetian Republic—seem inclined to agree, but after hearing testimony from the couple in question, Othello and Desdemona, they dismiss the father's complaint. The rigid hold of the older generation over the desires of the next is broken, paternal possessiveness is defeated, and romantic love triumphs over familial bonds. And lest this triumph should seem to threaten the social order, the romantic couple is legitimated by marriage, the newlywed

husband makes clear his devotion to serving the state in its war against the Ottoman Turks, and the spouse who at first seemed socially unsuitable turns out to be the equal of his amorous conquest. "I fetch my life and being," Othello declares, "From men of royal siege" (1.2.21–22). All's well that ends well.

But, of course, it does not end well. Disturbing elements, also with roots in comedy, have already begun to surface in the first scenes. One of these is the familiar farce of January and May: the old man married to the much younger wife who is courted by handsome, unscrupulous suitors. Another is what we might call the comedy of fantastical passion: the person who awakens from the trance of love to find that the object of desire is in fact ridiculous. Still another is the braggart soldier, the preening, self-promoting hero who is revealed to be an empty shell. And yet another is the mocking of the alien, the collective ridiculing of an outsider who hopes to be accepted but whom the natives despise as outlandish, gullible, and grotesque.

There is one person who is particularly sensitive to all of these cruel comic undertones: Othello's devious, resentful third-in-command, Iago. Unable to derail Othello's elopement, Iago seizes on potentially destructive versions of Othello and Desdemona's story. Desdemona fell in love with Othello merely for his bragging, he tells the lovesick Roderigo, but she will soon realize her mistake and long for someone younger, more handsome, more appropriate. When Roderigo doubts that Desdemona can be so easily seduced—"I cannot believe that in her; she's full of most blessed condition"—Iago replies with the cynic's tough, deflating realism: "Blessed fig's-end! The wine she drinks is made of grapes" (2.1.246–49).

The problem for Iago, though, is that none of these conventional comic scenarios seems very promising. Desdemona shows no sign of restlessness with her choice, nor does she register any discomfort with the age difference between herself and her husband. Othello's martial heroism is the real thing, attested to by everyone and elegantly manifested in the serene self-confidence with which he greets the armed followers of his irate father-in-law: "Keep up your

bright swords, for the dew will rust them" (1.2.59). It is true that he initially allured Desdemona with exotic tales from what he calls "the story of my life" (1.3.128), but the bond between them is anything but superficial: consecrating her "soul and fortunes" to her husband, she declares that her "heart's subdued / Even to the very quality of my lord" (1.3.252, 248–49).



**"Men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders"** (*Othello* 1.3.143–44), in an engraving by Jodocus Hondius from a 1599 edition of Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana*. These creatures, known as Blemmyes or Ewaipanoma, are reported as well in *Mandeville's Travels*.

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The strongest weapon in Iago's arsenal is racism, the contempt and revulsion with which many Europeans in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance routinely stigmatized dark skin and African features. This attitude is also reflected in a document issued by Queen Elizabeth in 1601, complaining about the "great numbers of . . .

Blackamoors" who "are crept into this realm." Denouncing these unwelcome people as "infidels, having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel," the queen authorized their deportation (though it is not clear that any such expulsion was carried out). In the tragedy Shakespeare wrote only a few years after this order, his hero is a Moor, whether that refers to an origin in North Africa or in sub-Saharan Africa, and this identity is enough to trigger the vile abuse Iago and Roderigo shout in the darkness in the first moments of the play. Othello is an "old black ram," "a Barbary horse" (1.1.85, 108).

But even this weapon seems blunted. Othello is not a religious outsider, but a Christian. He is the valiant commander to whom the state of Venice turns when it needs to defend its strategic outpost Cyprus against the great Muslim enemy, the Turks. Racial slurs in this play are the hallmarks of viciousness, not the collective judgment of the community. As for Desdemona, her declaration that she "saw Othello's visage in his mind" (1.3.250) suggests, among other things, that her husband's skin is not relevant to the great love that unites them.

How then does Iago do it? How does he succeed in undermining Othello's absolute faith in his wife and in shattering what seems an unshakable bond? Shakespeare depicts the destruction in one of the greatest scenes he ever wrote, a quiet conversation between the two men. The Turkish threat has vanished, blown away by a storm; Othello and Desdemona have been safely reunited in Cyprus; and though a drunken brawl in the night (cunningly instigated by Iago) has temporarily disgraced Othello's lieutenant Cassio, all the significant obstacles to harmony both public and private have been resolved. At this moment of almost perfect security, Iago injects the fatal poison of jealousy into Othello by little more than the intonation of the simple word "indeed" (3.3.101). Without leveling any direct accusation or offering a shred of evidence, with only a succession of apparently naive questions and broken phrases, Iago manages to insert himself into and remake—indeed, destroy—Othello's whole world.

Othello is not naive. He grasps that the verbal feints and dodges Iago is performing could “in a false disloyal knave” (3.3.124) be tricks designed to take in the gullible. But he knows Iago well, he thinks, and has confidence in his honesty. Tormented by the unbearable pain of aroused jealousy, Othello demands “ocular proof” (3.3.361) of Desdemona’s adultery with Cassio. Iago, who has been promoted to lieutenant in Cassio’s place, then embarks on a devious set of deceptions, centered on an embroidered handkerchief, a gift from Othello, that Desdemona has inadvertently mislaid. “Trifles light as air,” Iago gleefully observes, “Are to the jealous confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ” (3.3.323–25).

What is Iago’s motive? Why should he want to destroy Othello, on whom his livelihood depends, and Desdemona, whom his own wife, Emilia, serves as lady’s maid? Early in the play Iago presents himself as someone with an eye only for his own interests: “not I for love and duty, / But seeming so, for my peculiar end” (1.1.56–57). But it is difficult to make out how ruining his commander could help Iago. What is his peculiar—that is, personal—end?

As was his usual practice, Shakespeare did not make up the plot of his play from scratch but instead adapted it—in this case, from a short story by the sixteenth-century Italian writer Giraldi Cinthio. In Cinthio’s account the villain’s pathology is reasonably clear. Having fallen ardently in love with Desdemona, he tried to seduce her. When he did not succeed, the love he felt for the general’s wife turned into violent loathing, and he set about to destroy her. Shakespeare discards this motivation. His villain does not dream of possessing Othello’s wife, nor is she the particular object of his hatred. To be sure, there is a moment in which Iago seems to be heading in this direction—“Now I do love her too” (2.1.287), he declares in one of his sinister soliloquies—yet he immediately veers away from it toward a farrago of other explanations. Iago’s repeated attempts to account for his obsessive, unappeasable hatred of Othello are famously unconvincing. Coleridge called them “the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity.” Near the play’s end, when he has come to understand that he has been duped into murdering his innocent, loving wife and that his life has been destroyed in the cruelest

imaginable way, Othello asks why Iago “hath thus ensnared my soul and body?” Iago’s spare, monosyllabic reply—his last utterance in the play—is a refusal to apologize or explain: “What you know, you know. / From this time forth I never will speak word” (5.2.307–9).

But why does Othello succumb? Why should a passion on which he has staked his whole being—“when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again” (3.3.91–92)—prove so fragile? Why should he doubt the faith of a woman so obviously single-minded in her devotion to him and so absolute in her love? The answer in part seems to lie in the terrible vulnerability of trust. As Iago coolly observes, Othello “[i]s of a constant, loving, noble nature” (2.1.285). That nature is bound up with his capacity to cherish his friends, rely on his subordinates, and, above all, open his whole soul to his wife: “My life upon her faith!” (1.3.293). But such openness makes it possible for Iago to penetrate Othello’s psychic defenses and refashion his perceptions.

Though Iago has a coarse and reductive account of human nature, he is a brilliant improviser, able to employ whatever comes to hand to shape illusions and to manipulate those around him like puppets in a theatrical performance of his making. He bustles about using people without a trace of moral restraint, shame, or decency, and he has the peculiar liberty of complete fraudulence: “I am not what I am” (1.1.62). In the end, he is exposed—by the wife whom he despises, abuses, and finally murders—but not before he has ruined whatever seemed most beautiful and precious in his world. Such is the power of cunning lies and twisted hatred over someone “that loved not wisely but too well” (5.2.349).

But perhaps this characterization of himself, offered by Othello just before his suicide, is not quite right, or at least not complete. Perhaps there is something disturbing in his love—some strain of anxiety about the future, about sexual pleasure, about his capacity for happiness—that Iago senses he can exploit. “If it were now to die,” Othello has declared at the height of his joy,

’Twere now to be most happy; for I fear  
My soul hath her content so absolute



That not another comfort like to this  
Succeeds in unknown fate. (2.1.187–91)

Desdemona attempts to offer reassurance—"The heavens forbid / But that our loves and comforts should increase / Even as our days do grow" (2.1.191–93)—but the malevolent worm of Iago's doubt is more powerful than her generous embrace. Or is it? Desdemona struggles in her last breath to commend herself to her "kind lord" (5.2.128), and Othello, desperately attempting to reestablish a moral order by executing himself, dies kissing the wife whose innocence he knows he has fatally wronged. Readers and audiences have, for more than four centuries, pondered how much these final gestures offer a glimpse of redemption through boundless love.

# **The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice\***

## **THE NAMES OF THE ACTORS<sup>1</sup>**

OTHELLO, the Moor [and General of the Venetian forces]

BRABANTIO, father to Desdemona [and a Venetian Senator]

CASSIO, an honorable lieutenant [to Othello]

IAGO, a villain [and Othello's standard-bearer or ensign]

RODERIGO, a gulled<sup>o</sup> gentleman

DUKE of Venice

SENATORS

MONTANO, Governor of Cyprus

GENTLEMEN of Cyprus

LODOVICO and GRATIANO, two Noble Venetians [and kinsmen to Brabantio]

SAILORS

OFFICERS

CLOWN

DESDEMONA, wife to Othello

EMILIA, wife to Iago

BIANCA, a courtesan

MESSENGERS

MUSICIANS

## Endnotes

- Note \*:  
*Othello* exists in two early texts, both of which have a claim to authority: a version published in the small, inexpensive quarto format in 1622 (Q) and a version published in the great First Folio of 1623 (F). There are many small and some substantial differences between them, including 160 lines that are found only in F. The text printed here is adapted from the Norton Critical Edition of *Othello*, edited by Edward Pechter. Like most modern editors of the play, Pechter bases his text on F, corrected by some readings from Q. Significant departures from Pechter's text have been footnoted.  
[Return to reference \\*](#)
- Note 1: The list of characters (with its misleading title) is reproduced from the First Folio, with some bracketed additions.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *deceived*[Return to reference °](#)

## 1.1

*Enter* RODERIGO *and* IAGO.<sup>1</sup>

RODERIGO Tush, never tell me!<sup>2</sup> I take it much  
unkindly

That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse  
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

IAGO 'Sblood,<sup>o</sup> but you'll not hear me! If ever I did  
dream

Of such a matter, abhor me.

5 RODERIGO Thou told'st me  
Thou didst hold him in thy hate.

IAGO Despise me  
If I do not. Three great ones of the city,  
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,  
Off-capped<sup>o</sup> to him; and by the faith of man  
I know my price; I am worth no worse a place.  
10 But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,  
Evades them with a bombast circumstance,<sup>3</sup>  
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war,<sup>o</sup>  
Non-suits<sup>o</sup> my mediators. For "Certes,"<sup>o</sup> says he,  
"I have already chose my officer." And what was he?

15 Forsooth, a great arithmetician,<sup>4</sup>  
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,  
A fellow almost damned in a fair wife,<sup>5</sup>  
That<sup>o</sup> never set a squadron in the field,  
Nor the division<sup>o</sup> of a battle<sup>o</sup> knows  
20 More than a spinster<sup>o</sup>—unless the bookish theorick,<sup>o</sup>  
Wherein the tonguè consuls can propose<sup>6</sup>  
As masterly as he. Mere prattle without practice  
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had th'election  
And I—of whom his eyes had seen the proof  
25 At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,

Christened and heathen—must be beleed<sup>o</sup> and  
calmed<sup>7</sup>

By debtor and creditor. This counter-caster,<sup>8</sup>  
He in good time<sup>o</sup> must his lieutenant be,  
And I—God bless the mark!<sup>o</sup>—his Moorship's  
30 ancient.<sup>9</sup>

RODERIGO By heaven, I rather would have been his  
hangman.

IAGO Why, there's no remedy. 'Tis the curse of  
service;

Preferment goes by letter and affection,<sup>1</sup>  
And not by old gradation,<sup>o</sup> where each second  
Stood heir to th'first. Now, sir, be judge yourself  
35 Whether I in any just term am affined<sup>o</sup>  
To love the Moor.<sup>2</sup>

RODERIGO I would not follow him then.

IAGO O, sir, content you.<sup>o</sup>

I follow him to serve my turn upon him.

We cannot all be masters, nor all masters  
40 Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark  
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave  
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,  
Wears out his time much like his master's ass,  
For naught but provender;<sup>o</sup> and when he's old—  
45 cashiered.<sup>o</sup>

Whip me<sup>o</sup> such honest knaves! Others there are  
Who, trimmed<sup>o</sup> in forms and visages of duty,  
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves  
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,  
Do well thrive by them; and when they have lined  
50 their coats,

Do themselves homage. These fellows have some  
soul,

And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,  
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.  
In following him, I follow but myself.  
55 Heaven is my judge, not I for<sub>o</sub> love and duty,  
But seeming so, for my peculiar<sub>o</sub> end.  
For when my outward action doth demonstrate  
The native act and figure<sub>3</sub> of my heart  
In complement extern,<sub>o</sub> 'tis not long after  
60 But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve  
For daws<sub>o</sub> to peck at. I am not what I am.  
RODERIGO What a full fortune does the thick-lips  
owe<sub>o</sub>  
If he can carry't thus!  
IAGO Call up her father,  
Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight.  
65 Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,  
And though he in a fertile climate dwell,  
Plague him with flies. Though that his joy be joy,  
Yet throw such chances of vexation on't,  
As it may lose some color.  
70 RODERIGO Here is her father's house. I'll call aloud.  
IAGO Do, with like timorous accent<sub>o</sub> and dire yell  
As when, by night and negligence, the fire  
Is spied in populous cities.  
RODERIGO What ho, Brabantio! Signor Brabantio, ho!  
75 IAGO Awake! What ho, Brabantio! Thieves, thieves!  
Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!  
Thieves, thieves!  
[Enter] BRABANTIO *above at a window.*  
BRABANTIO What is the reason of this terrible  
summons?  
What is the matter there?  
80 RODERIGO Signor, is all your family within?  
IAGO Are your doors locked?  
BRABANTIO Why? Wherefore ask  
you this?

IAGO 'Swounds, o sir, you're robbed! For shame, put on  
 your gown!  
 Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul.  
 Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
 85 Is tupping o your white ewe. Arise, arise!  
 Awake the snorting o citizens with the bell,  
 Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.  
 Arise, I say!  
 BRABANTIO What, have you lost your wits?  
 RODERIGO Most reverend signor, do you know my  
 90 voice?  
 BRABANTIO Not I; what are you?  
 RODERIGO My name is Roderigo.  
 BRABANTIO The worser welcome!  
 I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors;  
 In honest plainness thou hast heard me say  
 My daughter is not for thee. And now in madness,  
 95 Being full of supper and distemp'ring o draughts,  
 Upon malicious bravery, o dost thou come  
 To start o my quiet.  
 RODERIGO Sir, sir, sir—  
 BRABANTIO But thou must needs be sure,  
 My spirits and my place o have in their power  
 100 To make this bitter to thee.  
 RODERIGO Patience, good sir.  
 BRABANTIO What tell'st thou me of robbing? This is  
 Venice;  
 My house is not a grange. o  
 RODERIGO Most grave Brabantio,  
 In simple and pure soul, I come to you.  
 IAGO 'Swounds, sir, you are one of those that will  
 105 not  
 serve God if the devil bid you. Because we come to  
 do you  
 service and you think we are ruffians, you'll have  
 your

daughter covered with a Barbary horse;<sup>4</sup> you'll have  
your nephews<sup>o</sup> neigh to you; you'll have coursers for  
cousins and jennets for germans.<sup>5</sup>

110 BRABANTIO What profane wretch art thou?  
IAGO I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your  
daughter  
and the Moor are making the beast with two backs.<sup>o</sup>

BRABANTIO Thou art a villain.  
IAGO You are a senator.

115 BRABANTIO This thou shalt answer.<sup>o</sup> I know thee,  
Roderigo.  
RODERIGO Sir, I will answer anything. But I beseech  
you,  
If't be your pleasure, and most wise consent—<sup>6</sup>  
As partly I find it is—that your fair daughter,  
At this odd-even<sup>o</sup> and dull watch o'th' night,  
120 Transported with no worse nor better guard  
But with a knave of common<sup>o</sup> hire, a gondolier,  
To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor—  
If this be known to you, and your allowance,<sup>o</sup>  
We then have done you bold and saucy wrongs.  
125 But if you know not this, my manners tell me  
We have your wrong rebuke. Do not believe  
That from<sup>o</sup> the sense of all civility  
I thus would play and trifle with your reverence.  
Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,  
130 I say again, hath made a gross revolt,  
Tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes  
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger<sup>7</sup>  
Of here and everywhere. Straight<sup>o</sup> satisfy yourself.  
If she be in her chamber or your house,  
135 Let loose on me the justice of the state  
For thus deluding you.  
BRABANTIO Strike on the tinder,<sup>o</sup> ho!  
Give me a taper,<sup>o</sup> call up all my people!



This accident<sup>o</sup> is not unlike my dream;  
Belief of it oppresses me already.  
140 Light, I say, light! *Exit [above].*  
IAGO Farewell, for I must leave you.  
It seems not meet<sup>o</sup> nor wholesome to my place  
To be producted<sup>o</sup>—as, if I stay, I shall—  
Against the Moor. For I do know the state,  
However this may gall him with some check,<sup>o</sup>  
145 Cannot with safety cast<sup>o</sup> him; for he's embarked<sup>o</sup>  
With such loud<sup>o</sup> reason to the Cyprus wars,  
Which even now stands in act,<sup>o</sup> that, for their souls,  
Another of his fathom<sup>o</sup> they have none  
To lead their business. In which regard,  
150 Though I do hate him as I do hell pains,  
Yet for necessity of present life  
I must show out a flag and sign of love,  
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find  
him,  
Lead to the Sagittary<sup>8</sup> the raised search,<sup>o</sup>  
155 And there will I be with him. So farewell.  
*Exit.*  
*Enter [below] BRABANTIO in his nightgown, with  
servants and torches*  
BRABANTIO It is too true an evil. Gone she is,  
And what's to come of my despised time<sup>o</sup>  
Is naught but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,  
Where didst thou see her?—O unhappy girl!—  
160 With the Moor, say'st thou?—Who would be a father?  
—  
How didst thou know 'twas she?—O, she deceives  
me  
Past thought!—What said she to you?— [*to servants*]  
Get more tapers,  
Raise all my kindred! [*Exit one or  
more.*]

[to RODERIGO] Are they married, think you?  
 RODERIGO Truly, I think they are.  
 165 BRABANTIO O heaven! How got she out? O treason of  
 the blood!  
 Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds  
 By what you see them act. Is there not charms<sup>o</sup>  
 By which the property<sup>o</sup> of youth and maidhood<sup>o</sup>  
 May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,  
 170 Of some such thing?  
 RODERIGO Yes, sir, I have indeed.  
 BRABANTIO [to servants] Call up my brother.  
 [to RODERIGO] O, would you had had  
 her!  
 [to servants] Some one way, some another.  
 [Exit one or more.]  
 [to RODERIGO] Do you know  
 Where we may apprehend her and the Moor?  
 RODERIGO I think I can discover him, if you please  
 175 To get good guard and go along with me.  
 BRABANTIO Pray you lead on. At every house I'll call;  
 I may command<sup>o</sup> at most.—Get weapons, ho!  
 And raise some special officers of night.—  
 On, good Roderigo; I will deserve<sup>o</sup> your pains.  
 180 *Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1.1: Location: A street in Venice.[Return to reference 1.1](#)
- Note 1: Iago's name may be related to that of Santiago Matamoros (Saint James the Moor-Slayer), the patron saint of Spain.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Expressive of annoyance, disbelief.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With an inflated circumlocution. "Bombast": cotton padding in clothes, a metaphor picked up by "stuffed" (line 13) and perhaps "Non-suits" (line 14).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Implying that Cassio's knowledge of war is purely theoretical.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Obscure. Cassio has not yet met Bianca and is unmarried (although in Shakespeare's source he is married). Perhaps Shakespeare's error, a reference to Cassio as a ladies' man, or an oblique anticipation of the main plot.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In which the glib senators can debate. In Q the senators are not "tongued" but "togaed," that is, toga-wearing.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Becalmed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pejorative term for an accountant (Cassio), as is "debitor and creditor."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A variant form of ensign. Iago is something like a standard-bearer or third-in-command. He clearly ranks below "lieutenant" Cassio, the second-in-command. This reference to "his Moorship" is also the first indication of the person about whom Iago has been complaining.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Promotion comes through connections and favoritism.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
A Muslim of the mixed Berber and Arab people inhabiting northwest Africa. This term, like the comparison of Othello to a "Barbary horse" (an Arab, line 108), formerly led to the denial of Othello's blackness. But the passages describing Othello's appearance—"thick-lips," "black ram," "sooty bosom," "black Othello," "I am black," "black / As mine own face" (1.1.63, 85; 1.2.70; 2.3.29; 3.3.265, 388–89)—seem to have greater weight. In the Renaissance, "Moor" often meant sub-Saharan African.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The innate operation (or motivation) and shape (or nature).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Horse from northwest coastal Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Close relatives. "Coursers": strong horses. "Cousins": kinsmen. "Jennets": small Spanish horses.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Lines 118–34 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In a vagrant and vagabond foreigner.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Perhaps indicating an inn named for the astrological sign Sagittarius, where Othello and Desdemona are staying. It may also suggest Othello himself, because Sagittarius is depicted as a centaur (a mythological being part man, part horse), and Iago has already likened Othello to a “Barbary horse.”[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *by Christ's blood*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *took off their caps*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *military jargon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *denies* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *who*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ordering* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *battalion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *housewife* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *learning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *without wind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *indeed (scornful)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *God help us*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *traditional seniority*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *am bound in any just way*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be content*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *animal feed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fired*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the hell with*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outwardly decorated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I am not driven by*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *personal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outward appearance*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *crowlike birds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frightening tone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by Christ's wounds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *copulating with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *snoring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destabilizing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defiance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *upset*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *country house*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grandsons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *copulating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *account for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *late (around midnight)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *public*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allowed by you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in opposition to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a light*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *candle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *event*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *presented as witness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reprimand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dismiss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *committed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *urgent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are taking place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caliber*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awakened searchers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifetime*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attribute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virginity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demand help*[Return to reference](#) °

- $\circ$ : *reward* [Return to reference  \$\circ\$](#)

## 1.2

*Enter OTHELLO, IAGO, [and] attendants with torches.*

5 IAGO Though in the trade of war I have slain men,  
Yet do I hold it very stuff<sup>o</sup> o'th' conscience  
To do no contrived<sup>o</sup> murder. I lack iniquity,  
Sometime, to do me service. Nine or ten times  
I had thought t'have yerked him<sup>o</sup> here, under the  
ribs.

OTHELLO 'Tis better as it is.

IAGO Nay, but he prated  
And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms  
Against your honor  
That, with the little godliness I have,  
10 I did full hard forbear him.<sup>1</sup> But I pray you, sir,  
Are you fast<sup>o</sup> married? Be assured of this,  
That the magnifico<sup>o</sup> is much beloved,  
And hath in his effect a voice potential<sup>o</sup>  
As double as the duke's. He will divorce you,  
Or put upon you what restraint or grievance  
15 The law, with all his might to enforce it on,  
Will give him cable.<sup>o</sup>

OTHELLO Let him do his spite.  
My services, which I have done the signory,<sup>o</sup>  
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know<sup>o</sup>—  
Which, when I know that boasting is an honor,  
20 I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being  
From men of royal siege;<sup>o</sup> and my demerits<sup>o</sup>  
May speak unbonneted<sup>2</sup> to as proud a fortune  
As this that I have reached. For know, Iago,  
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,  
25 I would not my unhoused<sup>o</sup> free condition  
Put into circumscription and confine

For the seas' worth. But look, what lights come yond?

*Enter CASSIO, with officers and torches.*

IAGO Those are the raised father and his friends.  
You were best go in.

30 OTHELLO Not I; I must be found.  
My parts,o my title, and my perfect soul<sup>3</sup>  
Shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?

IAGO By Janus,o I think no.

OTHELLO The servants of the duke? And my  
lieutenant?  
35 The goodness of the night upon you, friends.  
What is the news?

CASSIO The duke does greet you,  
general,  
And he requires your haste-post-haste appearance  
Even on the instant.

OTHELLO What is the matter, think you?

CASSIO Something from Cyprus, as I may divine.  
40 It is a business of some heat.o The galleys  
Have sent a dozen sequento messengers  
This very night at one another's heels,  
And many of the consuls, raised and met,  
Are at the duke's already. You have been hotly called  
for;

45 When, being not at your lodging to be found,  
The senate hath sent abouto three several quests  
To search you out.

OTHELLO 'Tis well I am found by you.  
I will but spend a word here in the house  
And go with you. [*Exit.*]

CASSIO Ancient, what makes he here?

50 IAGO Faith, he tonight hath boarded a land-carrack.<sup>4</sup>  
If it prove lawful prize, he's made forever.

CASSIO I do not understand.



IAGO He's married.  
 CASSIO To who?  
 IAGO Marry,<sup>o</sup> to— [*Enter* OTHELLO.]  
 Come, captain, will you go?  
 OTHELLO Have  
 with you.<sup>o</sup>  
 CASSIO Here comes another troop to seek for you.  
*Enter* BRABANTIO [*and*]. RODERIGO, *with officers*  
*and torches.*  
 IAGO It is Brabantio; general, be advised,  
 55 He comes to bad intent.  
 OTHELLO Holla, stand there!  
 RODERIGO Signor, it is the Moor.  
 BRABANTIO Down with him,  
 thief!  
 [*They draw on both sides.*]  
 IAGO You, Roderigo? Come, sir, I am for you.  
 OTHELLO Keep up<sup>o</sup> your bright swords, for the dew will  
 rust them.  
 60 Good signor, you shall more command with years  
 Than with your weapons.  
 BRABANTIO O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed  
 my daughter?  
 Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;  
 For I'll refer me to all things of sense,<sup>5</sup>  
 If she in chains of magic were not bound,  
 65 Whether a maid, so tender, fair, and happy,  
 So opposite to marriage that she shunned  
 The wealthy curlèd darlings of our nation,  
 Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,  
 Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom  
 70 Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight.  
 Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense<sup>6</sup>  
 That thou hast practiced on her with foul charms,  
 Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals

75 That weakens motion.° I'll have't disputed on;<sup>7</sup>  
 'Tis probable and palpable to thinking.  
 I therefore apprehend and do attach° thee  
 For an abuser of the world, a practicer  
 Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.°  
 80 Lay hold upon him; if he do resist,  
 Subdue him at his peril!  
 OTHELLO Hold your hands,  
 Both you of my inclining° and the rest.  
 Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it  
 Without a prompter. Where will you that I go  
 To answer this your charge?  
 85 BRABANTIO To prison, till fit time  
 Of law and course of direct session  
 Call thee to answer.  
 OTHELLO What if I do obey?  
 How may the duke be therewith satisfied,  
 Whose messengers are here about my side  
 Upon some present business of the state  
 90 To bring me to him?  
 OFFICER 'Tis true, most worthy signor.  
 The duke's in council, and your noble self  
 I am sure is sent for.  
 BRABANTIO How? The duke in council?  
 In this time of the night? Bring him away.°  
 Mine's not an idle cause. The duke himself,  
 95 Or any of my brothers of the state,  
 Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own;  
 For if such actions may have passage free,  
 Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.  
*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1.2: Location: Another street in Venice, before Othello's lodgings.[Return to reference 1.2](#)
- Note 1: I barely restrained myself from attacking him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Without deference; modestly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: My clear conscience.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A carrack is a large merchant ship.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For I'll ask, relying on common sense.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: If it is not patently obvious. Lines 72–77 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Argued by experts.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *essence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *premeditated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stabbed (Roderigo)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *legitimately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(Brabantio)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *powerful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scope*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Venetian government*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *not publicly known*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rank*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deserts*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unconfined*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *qualities*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *two-faced Roman god*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *urgency*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *successive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by Mary (a mild oath)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *let's go*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *put away*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *natural inclination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prohibited and illegal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *following*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *along*[Return to reference](#) °

### 1.3

*Enter* DUKE *and* SENATORS *set at a table, with lights and* OFFICERS.

DUKE There's no composition in this news  
That gives them credit.<sup>1</sup>

FIRST SENATOR Indeed, they are  
disproportioned;<sup>o</sup>  
My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.

DUKE And mine a hundred forty.

SECOND SENATOR And mine two  
hundred.

5 But though they jump not on a just account<sup>o</sup>—  
As in these cases where the aim reports  
'Tis oft with difference<sup>2</sup>—yet do they all confirm  
A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.

DUKE Nay, it is possible enough to judgment;  
10 I do not so secure me in the error  
But the main article I do approve  
In fearful sense.<sup>3</sup>

SAILOR [*within*] What ho! what ho! what ho!  
*Enter* SAILOR.

OFFICER A messenger from the galleys.

DUKE Now, what's  
the business?

SAILOR The Turkish preparation<sup>o</sup> makes for Rhodes.  
15 So was I bid report here to the state  
By Signor Angelo.<sup>4</sup>

DUKE How say you by this change?

FIRST SENATOR This cannot be  
By no assay<sup>o</sup> of reason. 'Tis a pageant  
To keep us in false gaze. When we consider  
20 Th' importancy of Cyprus to the Turk,  
And let ourselves again but understand

That, as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,  
So may he with more facile question bear it,<sup>5</sup>  
For that it stands not in such warlike brace,  
But altogether lacks th'abilities  
25 That Rhodes is dressed in—if we make thought of  
this,

We must not think the Turk is so unskillful  
To leave that latest<sup>o</sup> which concerns him first,  
Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain  
To wake and wage<sup>o</sup> a danger profitless.

30 DUKE Nay, in all confidence, he's not for Rhodes.

OFFICER Here is more news.

*Enter a MESSENGER.*

MESSENGER The Ottomites,<sup>o</sup> reverend and gracious,<sup>6</sup>  
Steering with due course toward the isle of Rhodes,  
Have there injointed them with an after<sup>o</sup> fleet.

35 FIRST SENATOR Ay, so I thought. How many, as you  
guess?

MESSENGER Of thirty sail; and now they do re-stem<sup>o</sup>  
Their backward course, bearing with frank  
appearance

Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signor Montano,  
Your trusty and most valiant servitor,  
40 With his free duty recommends you thus,<sup>7</sup>  
And prays you to believe him.

DUKE 'Tis certain then for Cyprus.

Marcus Luccicos<sup>8</sup>—is not he in town?

FIRST SENATOR He's now in Florence.

45 DUKE Write from us to him post-post-haste.  
Dispatch!

FIRST SENATOR Here comes Brabantio and the valiant  
Moor.

*Enter BRABANTIO, OTHELLO, CASSIO, IAGO, RODERIGO,  
and OFFICERS.*

DUKE Valiant Othello, we must straight<sup>o</sup> employ you

Against the general enemy<sup>o</sup> Ottoman.  
 50 [to BRABANTIO] I did not see you; welcome, gentle<sup>o</sup>  
 signor.  
 We lacked your counsel and your help tonight.  
 BRABANTIO So did I yours. Good your grace, pardon  
 me.  
 Neither my place<sup>o</sup> nor aught I heard of business  
 Hath raised me from my bed; nor doth the general  
 care  
 55 Take hold on me. For my particular grief  
 Is of so floodgate and o'erbearing nature  
 That it engluts and swallows other sorrows,  
 And it is still itself.<sup>9</sup>  
 DUKE Why, what's the matter?  
 BRABANTIO My daughter, O my daughter!  
 SENATOR Dead?  
 BRABANTIO Ay, to  
 me.  
 60 She is abused,<sup>o</sup> stol'n from me and corrupted  
 By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;<sup>o</sup>  
 For nature so preposterously to err,  
 Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,  
 Sans<sup>o</sup> witchcraft could not.  
 65 DUKE Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding  
 Hath thus beguiled your daughter of herself  
 And you of her, the bloody book of law  
 You shall yourself read in the bitter letter  
 After your own sense; yea, though our proper son  
 Stood in your action.<sup>1</sup>  
 70 BRABANTIO Humbly I thank your grace.  
 Here is the man, this Moor, whom now it seems  
 Your special mandate for the state affairs  
 Hath hither brought.  
 ALL We are very sorry for't.

DUKE [*to* OTHELLO]    What in your own part can you say  
to this?

BRABANTIO    Nothing, but this is so.

75

OTHELLO    Most potent, grave, and reverend signors,  
My very noble and approved good masters:

That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter  
It is most true; true I have married her.

80

The very head and front<sup>o</sup> of my offending  
Hath this extent, no more. Rude<sup>o</sup> am I in my speech,  
And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace;

85

For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith<sup>o</sup>  
Till now some nine moons wasted,<sup>o</sup> they have used  
Their dearest<sup>o</sup> action in the tented field;

And little of this great world can I speak  
More than pertains to feats of broils<sup>o</sup> and battle,  
And therefore little shall I grace my cause  
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious  
patience,

90

I will a round<sup>o</sup> unvarnished tale deliver,  
Of my whole course of love: what drugs, what  
charms,

What conjuration and what mighty magic—  
For such proceeding I am charged withal<sup>o</sup>—  
I won his daughter.

95

BRABANTIO                    A maiden never bold;  
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion  
Blushed at herself<sup>2</sup> and she—in spite of nature,  
Of years, of country, credit,<sup>o</sup> everything—  
To fall in love with what she feared to look on?

100

It is a judgment maimed and most imperfect  
That will confess perfection so could err  
Against all rules of nature, and must<sup>o</sup> be driven  
To find out practices of cunning hell  
Why this should be. I therefore vouch again  
That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,<sup>o</sup>



105 Or with some dram conjured<sup>o</sup> to this effect,  
He wrought upon her.

DUKE To vouch this is no proof,  
Without more wider and more overt test  
Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods  
Of modern seeming do prefer against him.<sup>3</sup>

110 SENATOR But, Othello, speak;  
Did you by indirect and forced courses<sup>o</sup>  
Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?  
Or came it by request and such fair question<sup>o</sup>  
As soul to soul affordeth?

OTHELLO I do beseech you  
115 Send for the lady to the Sagittary,  
And let her speak of me before her father.  
If you do find me foul in her report,  
The trust, the office I do hold of you,  
Not only take away, but let your sentence  
Even fall upon my life.

120 DUKE [to OFFICERS] Fetch Desdemona hither.

OTHELLO Ancient, conduct them; you best know the  
place.

*Exit [IAGO and] two or three [attendants].*

And till she come, as truly as to heaven  
I do confess the vices of my blood,<sup>o</sup>  
So justly to your grave ears I'll present  
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love  
125 And she in mine.

DUKE Say it, Othello.

OTHELLO Her father loved me, oft invited me,  
Still<sup>o</sup> questioned me the story of my life  
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes  
That I have past.

130 I ran it through, even from my boyish days  
To th'very moment that he bade me tell it;  
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,<sup>o</sup>

Of moving accidents<sup>o</sup> by flood and field,  
Of hair-breadth scapes i'th' imminent-deadly  
135 breach,<sup>4</sup>  
Of being taken by the insolent foe  
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence  
And portance<sup>o</sup> in my traveler's history;  
Wherein of antars<sup>o</sup> vast and deserts idle,  
140 Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch  
heaven,  
It was my hint<sup>o</sup> to speak—such was my process<sup>o</sup> —  
And of the cannibals that each other eat,  
The anthropophagi,<sup>5</sup> and men whose heads  
Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to  
hear  
145 Would Desdemona seriously incline,  
But still the house affairs would draw her thence,  
Which ever as<sup>o</sup> she could with haste dispatch  
She'd come again and with a greedy ear  
Devour up my discourse; which I, observing,  
150 Took once a pliant<sup>o</sup> hour and found good means  
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart  
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,<sup>o</sup>  
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,  
But not intentively.<sup>o</sup> I did consent  
And often did beguile her of her tears  
155 When I did speak of some distressful stroke  
That my youth suffered. My story being done,  
She gave me for my pains a world of kisses;<sup>6</sup>  
She swore in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing<sup>o</sup>  
strange,  
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.  
160 She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished  
That heaven had made her such a man.<sup>7</sup> She  
thanked me  
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,

I should but teach him how to tell my story,  
 And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.  
 165 She loved me for the dangers I had past,  
 And I loved her that she did pity them.  
 This only is the witchcraft I have used.  
 Here comes the lady; let her witness it.  
     *Enter DESDEMONA, IAGO, [and] attendants.*  
 DUKE I think this tale would win my daughter too.  
 170 Good Brabantio, take up this mangled matter at the  
     best.°  
 Men do their broken weapons rather use,  
 Than their bare hands.  
 BRABANTIO I pray you hear her speak.  
 If she confess that she was half the wooer,  
 Destruction on my head if my bad blame  
 175 Light on the man. Come hither, gentle mistress.  
 Do you perceive in all this noble company  
 Where most you owe obedience?  
 DESDEMONA My noble father,  
 I do perceive here a divided duty.  
 To you I am bound for life and education;  
 180 My life and education both do learn° me  
 How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;  
 I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;  
 And so much duty as my mother showed  
 To you, preferring you before her father,  
 185 So much I challenge° that I may profess  
 Due to the Moor my lord.  
 BRABANTIO God be with you; I have  
     done.  
 Please it° your grace, on to the state affairs;  
 I had rather to adopt a child than get° it.  
 Come hither, Moor.  
 190 I here do give thee that° with all my heart  
 Which, but° thou hast already, with all my heart

I would keep from thee. [*to DESDEMONA*] For your  
 sake, jewel,  
 I am glad at soul I have no other child,  
 For thy escape would teach me tyranny  
 195 To hang clogs<sup>8</sup> on them. I have done, my lord.  
 DUKE Let me speak like yourself and lay a  
 sentence<sup>o</sup>  
 Which, as a grise<sup>o</sup> or step, may help these lovers  
 Into your favor.  
 When remedies are past, the griefs are ended  
 200 By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.<sup>9</sup>  
 To mourn a mischief that is past and gone  
 Is the next way to draw new mischief on.  
 What cannot be preserved, when fortune takes,  
 205 Patience her injury a mockery makes.<sup>1</sup>  
 The robbed that smiles steals something from the  
 thief;  
 He robs himself that spends a bootless<sup>o</sup> grief.  
 BRABANTIO So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile:  
 We lose it not, so long as we can smile.  
 He bears the sentence<sup>o</sup> well that nothing bears  
 210 But the free comfort which from thence he hears.  
 But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow  
 That, to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow.  
 These sentences, to sugar or to gall,<sup>o</sup>  
 Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.  
 215 But words are words; I never yet did hear  
 That the bruised heart was piercèd<sup>2</sup> through the ear.  
 I humbly beseech you proceed to th'affairs of state.  
 DUKE The Turk with a most mighty preparation  
 makes for  
 220 Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best  
 known  
 to you; and though we have there a substitute of  
 most

allowed sufficiency,<sup>o</sup> yet opinion, a more sovereign  
 mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on  
 you.<sup>3</sup> You  
 must therefore be content to slubber<sup>o</sup> the gloss of  
 your  
 new fortunes with this more stubborn<sup>o</sup> and  
 225 boisterous  
 expedition.  
 OTHELLO The tyrant custom, most grave senators,  
 Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war  
 My thrice-driven<sup>o</sup> bed of down. I do agnize<sup>o</sup>  
 A natural and prompt alacrity  
 230 I find in hardness,<sup>o</sup> and do undertake  
 This present wars against the Ottomites.  
 Most humbly, therefore, bending to your state,<sup>o</sup>  
 I crave fit disposition for my wife,  
 Due reference of place, and exhibition,<sup>4</sup>  
 235 With such accommodation and besort<sup>o</sup>  
 As levels with her breeding.  
 DUKE Why, at her father's.  
 BRABANTIO I will not have it so.  
 OTHELLO Nor I.  
 DESDEMONA Nor would I there reside,  
 To put my father in impatient thoughts  
 240 By being in his eye. Most gracious duke,  
 To my unfolding<sup>o</sup> lend your prosperous<sup>o</sup> ear,  
 And let me find a charter<sup>o</sup> in your voice  
 T'assist my simpleness.  
 DUKE What would you, Desdemona?  
 245 DESDEMONA That I love the Moor to live with him,  
 My downright violence and storm of fortunes<sup>5</sup>  
 May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued  
 Even to the very quality<sup>6</sup> of my lord.  
 I saw Othello's visage in his mind,  
 250 And to his honors and his valiant parts<sup>o</sup>

Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate;  
 So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,  
 A moth of peace, and he go to the war,  
 The rites<sup>o</sup> for why I love him are bereft me,  
 255 And I a heavy interim shall support  
 By his dear absence. Let me go with him.  
 OTHELLO [*to the DUKE*] Let her have your voice.  
 Vouch with me, heaven, I therefor beg it not  
 To please the palate of my appetite,  
 260 Nor to comply with heat<sup>o</sup> (the young affects<sup>7</sup>  
 In me defunct) and proper<sup>o</sup> satisfaction,  
 But to be free<sup>o</sup> and bounteous to her mind;  
 And heaven defend your good souls that you think  
 I will your serious and great business scant  
 265 When she is with me. No, when light-winged toys<sup>o</sup>  
 Of feathered Cupid seel<sup>o</sup> with wanton dullness  
 My speculative and officed instruments,<sup>8</sup>  
 That my disports<sup>o</sup> corrupt and taint my business,  
 Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,  
 270 And all indign<sup>o</sup> and base adversities  
 Make head against my estimation.<sup>9</sup>  
 DUKE Be it as you shall privately determine,  
 Either for her stay or going. Th'affair cries haste,  
 And speed must answer it.  
 275 SENATOR You must away tonight.  
 DESDEMONA Tonight, my lord?  
 DUKE This night.<sup>1</sup>  
 OTHELLO With all my  
 heart.  
 DUKE At nine i'th' morning here we'll meet again.  
 Othello, leave some officer behind,  
 And he shall our commission bring to you,  
 280 And such things else of quality and respect<sup>o</sup>  
 As doth import<sup>o</sup> you.

OTHELLO                      So please your grace, my  
ancient;

285 A man he is of honesty<sup>2</sup> and trust.  
To his conveyance I assign my wife,  
With what else needful your good grace shall think  
To be sent after me.

DUKE Let it be so.  
Good night to every one. [*to BRABANTIO*] And, noble  
signor,  
If virtue no delighted<sup>o</sup> beauty lack,  
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

[*Exit* DUKE.]

290 SENATOR Adieu, brave Moor; use Desdemona well.  
BRABANTIO Look to her, o Moor, if thou hast eyes to  
see:

She has deceived her father, and may thee.

*Exeunt* [BRABANTIO, CASSIO, SENATORS, *and* OFFICERS.]

OTHELLO My life upon her faith!—Honest Iago,  
My Desdemona must I leave to thee.  
I prithee let thy wife attend on her,  
And bring them after in the best advantage.  
Come, Desdemona; I have but an hour  
Of love, of worldly matter and direction  
To spend with thee. We must obey the time.

*Exeunt* [OTHELLO *the*] Moor and DESDEMONA.

RODERIGO Iago?

300 IAGO What say'st thou, noble heart?

RODERIGO What will I do, think'st thou?

IAGO Why, go to bed and sleep.

RODERIGO I will incontinently<sup>o</sup> drown myself.

305 IAGO If thou dost, I shall never love thee after. Why,  
thou  
silly gentleman?

RODERIGO It is silliness to live when to live is  
torment; and

then have we a prescription<sup>4</sup> to die when death is  
our  
physician.

310 IAGO O villainous!° I have looked upon the world for  
four  
times seven years, and since I could distinguish  
betwixt  
a benefit and an injury, I never found man that knew  
how  
to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown  
myself for  
the love of a guinea-hen,° I would change my  
humanity  
with a baboon.

315 RODERIGO What should I do? I confess it is my  
shame to  
be so fond, but it is not in my virtue° to amend it.

IAGO Virtue? A fig!° 'Tis in ourselves that we are  
thus or  
thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our  
wills  
320 are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow  
lettuce, set hyssop° and weed up thyme, supply it  
with one  
gender° of herbs or distract it with many, either to  
have it  
sterile with idleness° or manured with industry, why,  
the  
power and corrigible authority° of this lies in our  
wills. If  
325 the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason  
to  
poise° another of sensuality, the blood and baseness  
of  
our natures would conduct us to most preposterous



conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging  
 motions,<sup>o</sup>  
 our carnal stings or unbitted<sup>o</sup> lusts; whereof I take  
 this  
 that you call love to be a sect or scion.<sup>o</sup>  
 330 RODERIGO It cannot be.  
 IAGO It is merely a lust of the blood and a  
 permission of  
 the will. Come, be a man! Drown thyself? Drown  
 cats and  
 blind puppies. I have professed me thy friend, and I  
 confess  
 me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable<sup>o</sup>  
 335 toughness. I could never better stead<sup>o</sup> thee than  
 now.  
 Put money in thy purse. Follow thou the wars; defeat  
 thy  
 favor with an usurped beard.<sup>5</sup> I say, put money in  
 thy  
 purse. It cannot be long that Desdemona should  
 continue her love to the Moor—put money in thy  
 340 purse—  
 nor he his to her. It was a violent commencement<sup>6</sup> in  
 her, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration<sup>7</sup>  
 —  
 put but money in thy purse. These Moors are  
 changeable  
 in their wills—fill thy purse with money. The food  
 that to him now is as luscious as locusts<sup>8</sup> shall be to  
 345 him  
 shortly as bitter as coloquintida.<sup>9</sup> She must change  
 for  
 youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find  
 the error of her choice. Therefore, put money in thy  
 purse. If thou wilt needs<sup>o</sup> damn thyself, do it a more

350 delicate way than drowning—make all the money  
thou  
canst. If sanctimony<sup>o</sup> and a frail vow betwixt an  
erring<sup>1</sup>  
barbarian and a super-subtle<sup>o</sup> Venetian be not too  
hard  
for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy  
her. Therefore make money. A pox of drowning  
thyself;  
355 it is clean out of the way.<sup>o</sup> Seek thou rather to be  
hanged  
in compassing<sup>o</sup> thy joy than to be drowned and go  
without her.  
RODERIGO Wilt thou be fast<sup>o</sup> to my hopes, if I  
depend on  
the issue?<sup>o</sup>  
IAGO Thou art sure of me—go make money. I have  
360 told  
thee often, and I retell thee again and again, I hate  
the  
Moor. My cause is hearted;<sup>o</sup> thine hath no less  
reason.  
Let us be conjunctive<sup>o</sup> in our revenge against him. If  
thou  
canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me  
a  
365 sport. There are many events in the womb of time  
which  
will be delivered. Traverse,<sup>o</sup> go, provide thy money.  
We  
will have more of this tomorrow. Adieu.  
RODERIGO Where shall we meet i'th' morning?  
IAGO At my lodging.  
RODERIGO I'll be with thee betimes.<sup>o</sup>  
370 IAGO Go to, farewell. Do you hear, Roderigo?

RODERIGO I'll sell all my land. *Exit.*  
 IAGO Thus do I ever make my fool my purse;  
 For I mine own gained knowledge should profane  
 If I would time expend with such a snipe<sup>o</sup>  
 375 But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor,  
 And it is thought abroad<sup>o</sup> that 'twixt my sheets  
 H'as done my office. I know not if't be true,  
 But I for mere suspicion in that kind  
 Will do<sup>o</sup> as if for surety. He holds<sup>o</sup> me well;  
 380 The better shall my purpose work on him.  
 Cassio's a proper<sup>o</sup> man. Let me see now . . .  
 To get his place and to plume up<sup>o</sup> my will  
 In double knavery—how? how? Let's see . . .  
 After some time, to abuse Othello's ears  
 385 That he is too familiar with his wife.<sup>2</sup>  
 He hath a person and a smooth dispose<sup>o</sup>  
 To be suspected, framed<sup>o</sup> to make women false.  
 The Moor is of a free<sup>o</sup> and open nature  
 That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,  
 390 And will as tenderly<sup>o</sup> be led by th'nose  
 As asses are. . . .  
 I have't! It is engendered! Hell and night  
 Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's  
 light. *Exit.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1.3: Location: A Venetian council room.[Return to reference 1.3](#)
- Note 1: The reports lack the consistency that would make them believable.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Where . . . difference": where the reports are estimates, there are often discrepancies among them.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: "I do not . . . sense": I am not so reassured by the discrepancies as to dismiss the main concern—the approach of a Turkish fleet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not mentioned elsewhere in the play, Angelus Sorianus was a Venetian sea captain who received the Venetian ambassador bearing from Constantinople the Turkish ultimatum to surrender Cyprus, shortly before its capture by the Turks in 1571.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: So also can the Turkish fleet more easily win it.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addressed to the senators.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: With his freely given loyalty reports to you thus.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Not mentioned elsewhere in the play.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That it (my grief) can incorporate other sorrows without being affected.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, you yourself shall interpret the law as you see fit, even if my own son was the one you accuse.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Her . . . herself": she blushed at herself at the slightest provocation.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Without . . . him": without fuller and more direct testimony than mere appearances and conjecture based on currently popular beliefs against him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the immediately life-threatening gaps in a fortification.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Man-eaters. The term is from the ancient Roman writer Pliny the Elder. Shakespeare was also indebted to the travel literature of the Middle Ages (*The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*) and the Renaissance (Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*, among others).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: F reads "kisses," Q "sighs." It is hard to explain "kisses" as a textual error.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Made such a man for her; made her into such a man.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Blocks of wood tied to criminals' legs to keep them from escaping.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: By seeing those things come to pass that caused grief in anticipation. The duke paints the moral in rhyming couplets, to which Brabantio replies in kind.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Patience laughs at what cannot be helped (and thus reduces the "injury").[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Surgically lanced (and presumably cured).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Opinion . . . you": public opinion, which determines what gets done, finds greater security with you.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Proper accommodation and maintenance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: My outright defiance of custom.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Essential nature. In the Quarto, Desdemona says that her heart is subdued to Othello's "utmost pleasure."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The youthful desires.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: My duty-bound faculties of sense.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Raise an army against my good reputation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This exchange between Desdemona and the Duke is only in Q.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The first of many references to Iago's "honesty."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: And bring them along at the most favorable moment.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Right; doctor's order.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Disguise your appearance with a fake beard.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An abruptly begun affair.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A correspondingly abrupt separation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A sweet, exotic fruit, perhaps carob or honeysuckle.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Colocynth, a purgative—one of Iago’s many references to the digestive tract.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A wandering.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “He” is Cassio (as in line 387), but “his” refers to Othello.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *inconsistent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *don’t exactly agree*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *battle-ready fleet*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *test*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *last*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *risk*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Ottoman Turks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *joined with another*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *retrace*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(of all Christendom)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noble*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *official duty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deluded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quacks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *without*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *height and breadth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unpolished*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strength*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nine months ago*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *most valued*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *combats*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(we therefore) must*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *passions*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *enchanted dose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *means*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conversation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sins of passion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *events*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *events*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conduct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occasion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *story*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whenever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *convenient*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *relate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continuously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exceptionally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make the best of this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *teach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assert*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if it pleases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beget*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that which*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw a moral*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *step*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pointless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saying; judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *both sweet and bitter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *known ability* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soil* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rougher*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sifted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acknowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *authority*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suitable attendance*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *proposal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *receptive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an authorization* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *qualities* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(of love); (of war?)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sexual passion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *personal; fitting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *liberal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diversions* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sexual pleasures* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undignified* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weight and importance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concern* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delightful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watch her carefully* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absurd* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woman* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *native ability* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(an obscenity)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mint herb* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noncultivation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ability to decide* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counterweigh* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appetites* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrestrained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offshoot* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *durable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *help* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if you must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holy rite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *highly sensitive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of no use* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encompassing* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *duty-bound*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heartfelt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joined* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go (to arms)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *early*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rumored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *act* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *esteems*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handsome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gratify*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *liberal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily*[Return to reference](#) °

## 2.1

*Enter* MONTANO *and two* GENTLEMEN [*one above*].

MONTANO What from the cape can you discern at sea?

FIRST GENTLEMAN Nothing at all; it is a high-wrought flood.<sup>o</sup>

I cannot 'twixt the heaven and the main<sup>o</sup>  
Descry<sup>o</sup> a sail.

5 MONTANO Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land;  
A fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements  
If it hath ruffianed<sup>o</sup> so upon the sea,  
What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,  
Can hold the mortise?<sup>1</sup> What shall we hear of this?

10 SECOND GENTLEMAN A segregation<sup>o</sup> of the Turkish fleet:  
For do but stand upon the foaming shore,  
The chidden billow<sup>2</sup> seems to pelt the clouds;  
The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,  
Seems to cast water on the burning Bear  
And quench the guards of th'ever-fixèd pole.<sup>3</sup>  
15 I never did like molestation view<sup>o</sup>  
On the enchafed<sup>o</sup> flood.

MONTANO If that the Turkish fleet  
Be not ensheltered and embayed, they are drowned;  
It is impossible to bear it out.

*Enter a* THIRD GENTLEMAN.

20 THIRD GENTLEMAN News, lads! Our wars are done.  
The desperate tempest hath so banged the Turks  
That their designment<sup>o</sup> halts. A noble ship of Venice  
Hath seen a grievous wrack and sufferance<sup>o</sup>  
On most part of their fleet.

MONTANO How? Is this true?  
 25 THIRD GENTLEMAN The ship is here put in,  
 A Veronnesa.<sup>4</sup> Michael Cassio,  
 Lieutenant to the warlike Moor, Othello,  
 Is come on shore; the Moor himself at sea,  
 And is in full commission here for Cyprus.  
 30 MONTANO I am glad on't—'tis a worthy governor.  
 THIRD GENTLEMAN But this same Cassio, though he speak  
 of comfort  
 Touching the Turkish loss, yet he looks sadly<sup>o</sup>  
 And prays the Moor be safe; for they were parted  
 With foul and violent tempest.  
 MONTANO Pray heavens he be,  
 35 For I have served him, and the man commands  
 Like a full soldier. Let's to the seaside—ho!—  
 As well to see the vessel that's come in  
 As to throw out our eyes for brave Othello,  
 Even till we make the main and th'aerial blue  
 An indistinct regard.<sup>5</sup>  
 40 THIRD GENTLEMAN Come, let's do so;  
 For every minute is expectancy  
 Of more arrivance.  
*Enter CASSIO.*  
 CASSIO Thanks, you the valiant of the warlike isle,  
 That so approve the Moor! O, let the heavens  
 Give him defense against the elements,  
 45 For I have lost him on a dangerous sea.  
 MONTANO Is he well shipped?  
 CASSIO His bark is stoutly timbered, and his pilot  
 Of very expert and approved allowance;<sup>o</sup>  
 Therefore my hopes, not surfeited to death,<sup>o</sup>  
 50 Stand in bold cure.<sup>o</sup>  
 VOICES [*within*] A sail! a sail! a sail!  
 CASSIO What noise?  
 GENTLEMAN The town is empty; on the brow o'th' sea

Stand ranks of people, and they cry "A sail!"

55 CASSIO My hopes do shape him for<sup>o</sup> the governor.  
[A shot.]

SECOND GENTLEMAN They do discharge their shot of  
courtesy—

Our friends, at least.

CASSIO I pray you, sir, go forth  
And give us truth who 'tis that is arrived.

SECOND GENTLEMAN I shall. *Exit.*

60 MONTANO But, good lieutenant, is your general  
wived?

CASSIO Most fortunately: he hath achieved a maid  
That paragon<sup>o</sup>s description and wild fame,  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning<sup>o</sup> pens,  
And in th'essential vesture of creation  
Does tire the engineer.<sup>6</sup>

*Enter* SECOND GENTLEMAN.

65 How now? Who has put in?  
SECOND GENTLEMAN 'Tis one Iago, ancient to the  
general.

CASSIO He's had most favorable and happy speed:  
Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,  
The guttered<sup>o</sup> rocks and congregated<sup>o</sup> sands,  
70 Traitors ensteeped<sup>o</sup> to enclog the guiltless keel,  
As having sense of beauty, do omit<sup>o</sup>  
Their mortal<sup>o</sup> natures, letting go safely by  
The divine Desdemona.

MONTANO What is she?

CASSIO She that I spake of, our great captain's  
captain,  
75 Left in the conduct of the bold Iago,  
Whose footing here anticipates our thoughts  
A se'night's speed.<sup>7</sup> Great Jove, Othello guard,  
And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath,  
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,



I find it still<sup>o</sup> when I have leave to sleep.  
 Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,  
 105 She puts her tongue a little in her heart<sup>9</sup>  
 And chides with thinking.  
 EMILIA You have little cause to say so.  
 IAGO Come on! come on! You are pictures<sup>1</sup> out of  
 door,  
 110 Bells<sup>o</sup> in your parlors, wildcats in your kitchens,  
 Saints<sup>o</sup> in your injuries, devils being offended,  
 Players in your huswifery, and huswives<sup>2</sup> in your  
 beds.  
 DESDEMONA O, fie upon thee, slanderer!  
 IAGO Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk:  
 You rise to play and go to bed to work.  
 115 EMILIA You shall not write my praise.  
 IAGO No, let me not.  
 DESDEMONA What wouldst write of me, if thou shouldst  
 praise me?  
 IAGO O, gentle lady, do not put me to't,  
 For I am nothing if not critical.  
 DESDEMONA Come on, assay.<sup>o</sup> There's one gone to  
 120 the harbor?  
 IAGO Ay, madam.  
 DESDEMONA I am not merry, but I do beguile<sup>o</sup>  
 The thing I am<sup>o</sup> by seeming otherwise.—  
 Come, how wouldst thou praise me?  
 IAGO I am about it, but indeed my invention  
 125 Comes from my pate as birdlime<sup>3</sup> does from frieze.<sup>o</sup>  
 It plucks out brains and all. But my muse labors,<sup>o</sup>  
 And thus she is delivered:  
 "If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit,  
 The one's for use, the other useth it."<sup>4</sup>  
 130 DESDEMONA Well praised! How if she be black and  
 witty?  
 IAGO "If she be black,<sup>5</sup> and thereto have a wit,

She'll find a white that shall her blackness fit."<sup>6</sup>  
 DESDEMONA Worse and worse!  
 EMILIA How if fair and foolish?  
 135 IAGO "She never yet was foolish that was fair,  
 For even her folly<sup>o</sup> helped her to an heir."  
 DESDEMONA These are old fond<sup>o</sup> paradoxes, to make  
 fools  
 laugh i'th' alehouse. What miserable praise hast thou  
 for  
 her that's foul<sup>o</sup> and foolish?  
 140 IAGO "There's none so foul and foolish thereunto,<sup>o</sup>  
 But does foul<sup>o</sup> pranks which fair and wise ones do."  
 DESDEMONA O, heavy ignorance! Thou praisest the  
 worst  
 best. But what praise couldst thou bestow on a  
 deserving  
 woman indeed? One that in the authority of her  
 145 merit did justly put on the vouch<sup>z</sup> of very malice  
 itself.  
 IAGO "She that was ever fair, and never proud,  
 Had tongue at will, and yet was never loud,  
 Never lacked gold, and yet went never gay,<sup>o</sup>  
 150 Fled from her wish, and yet said "now I may";<sup>8</sup>  
 She that, being angered, her revenge being nigh,  
 Bade her wrong stay<sup>o</sup> and her displeasure fly;  
 She that in wisdom never was so frail  
 To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail;<sup>9</sup>  
 She that could think, and ne'er disclose her mind,  
 155 See suitors following, and not look behind:  
 She was a wight (if ever such wights were) . . ."  
 DESDEMONA To do what?  
 IAGO "To suckle fools and chronicle small beer."<sup>1</sup>  
 DESDEMONA O, most lame and impotent conclusion!  
 160 Do  
 not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband.

How say you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane and liberal<sup>o</sup> counselor?

CASSIO He speaks home, madam. You may relish him

more in<sup>o</sup> the soldier than in the scholar.

165 IAGO [*aside*] He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said,<sup>o</sup>

whisper! With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do! I will gyve<sup>o</sup>

thee in thine own courtship.<sup>o</sup>—You say true, 'tis so indeed.—If such tricks as these strip you out of your  
170 lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your

three fingers so oft,<sup>2</sup> which now again you are most apt

to play the sir<sup>o</sup> in. Very good! well kissed and excellent

courtesy!—'Tis so indeed.—Yet again, your fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster pipes<sup>o</sup> for your  
175 sake!

*Trumpets within*

The Moor! I know his trumpet.

CASSIO 'Tis truly so.

DESDEMONA Let's meet him and receive him.

CASSIO Lo, where he comes.

*Enter OTHELLO and attendants.*

OTHELLO O, my fair warrior!

DESDEMONA My dear Othello!

180 OTHELLO It gives me wonder great as my content  
To see you here before me. O! my soul's joy,  
If after every tempest come such calms,  
May the winds blow till they have wakened death,  
And let the laboring bark<sup>o</sup> climb hills of seas  
185 Olympus-high,<sup>3</sup> and duck again as low



As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,<sup>4</sup>  
 'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear  
 My soul hath her content so absolute  
 That not another comfort like to this  
 190 Succeeds<sup>o</sup> in unknown fate.<sup>o</sup>  
 DESDEMONA The heavens forbid  
 But that our loves and comforts should increase  
 Even as our days do grow.  
 OTHELLO Amen to that, sweet  
 powers!  
 I cannot speak enough of this content;  
 It stops me here; it is too much of joy.  
 195 And this, and this— *They kiss.*  
 the greatest discords be  
 That e'er our hearts shall make!  
 IAGO [*aside*] O, you are well  
 tuned now;  
 But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,<sup>5</sup>  
 As honest as I am.  
 OTHELLO Come, let us to the castle.  
 News, friends; our wars are done. The Turks are  
 200 drowned.  
 How does my old acquaintance of this isle?—  
 Honey, you shall be well desired<sup>o</sup> in Cyprus;  
 I have found great love amongst them. O, my sweet,  
 I prattle out of fashion, and I dote  
 In mine own comforts. I prithee, good Iago,  
 205 Go to the bay and disembark my coffers.<sup>o</sup>  
 Bring thou the master<sup>o</sup> to the citadel;  
 He is a good one, and his worthiness  
 Does challenge<sup>o</sup> much respect. Come, Desdemona;  
 Once more well met at Cyprus.  
 210 *Exit* OTHELLO *and* DESDEMONA [*and all but* IAGO *and*  
 RODERIGO].

IAGO [*to a departing attendant*] Do thou meet me  
 presently  
 at the harbor. [*to RODERIGO*] Come hither. If thou  
 be'st valiant—as they say base<sup>o</sup> men, being in love,  
 have  
 then a nobility in their natures more than is native to  
 them—list<sup>o</sup> me. The lieutenant tonight watches on  
 215 the  
 court of guard.<sup>6</sup> First I must tell thee this:  
 Desdemona is  
 directly in love with him.  
 RODERIGO With him? Why, 'tis not possible.  
 IAGO Lay thy finger thus,<sup>o</sup> and let thy soul be  
 instructed.  
 220 Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor,  
 but<sup>o</sup> for bragging and telling her fantastical lies. To  
 love  
 him still for prating, let not thy discreet heart think it.  
 Her eye must be fed. And what delight shall she  
 have to  
 look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with  
 the  
 act of sport, there should be—again to enflame it,  
 225 and  
 to give satiety a fresh appetite—loveliness in favor,<sup>o</sup>  
 sympathy in years, manners, and beauties, all which  
 the  
 Moor is defective in. Now for want of these required  
 conveniences,<sup>o</sup> her delicate tenderness will find itself  
 230 abused,<sup>o</sup> begin to heave the gorge,<sup>7</sup> disrelish and  
 abhor  
 the Moor. Very nature will instruct her in it and  
 compel  
 her to some second choice. Now, sir, this granted—  
 as it

is a most pregnant<sup>o</sup> and unforced position—who  
stands  
so eminent in the degree of<sup>8</sup> this fortune as Cassio  
does?—a knave very voluble,<sup>o</sup> no further  
235       conscionable<sup>9</sup>  
than in putting on the mere form of civil and humane  
seeming for the better compass<sup>o</sup> of his salt<sup>1</sup> and  
most  
hidden loose affection. Why none! why none! A  
slipper<sup>o</sup>  
and subtle knave, a finder of occasion, that has an  
eye  
240       can stamp and counterfeit advantages,<sup>2</sup> though true  
advantage never present itself. A devilish knave!  
Besides,  
the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those  
requisites in him that folly<sup>o</sup> and green minds look  
after. A <sup>o</sup>  
pestilent complete knave! And the woman hath  
found  
him already.  
245       RODERIGO I cannot believe that in her; she's full of  
most  
blessed condition.  
IAGO   Blessed fig's-end!<sup>o</sup> The wine she drinks is  
made of  
grapes. If she had been blessed, she would never  
have  
250       loved the Moor. Blessed pudding!<sup>o</sup> Didst thou not see  
her paddle with the palm of his hand? Didst not  
mark  
that?  
RODERIGO   Yes, that I did, but that was but courtesy.  
IAGO   Lechery, by this hand! an index and obscure<sup>o</sup>

255 prologue to the history<sup>o</sup> of lust and foul thoughts.<sup>3</sup>  
They  
met so near with their lips that their breaths  
embraced  
together. Villainous thoughts, Roderigo: when these  
mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes  
the  
master and main exercise,<sup>4</sup> th'incorporate<sup>o</sup>  
conclusion.

260 Pish! But, sir, be you ruled by me. I have brought  
you  
from Venice. Watch you tonight. For the command,  
I'll  
lay't upon you.<sup>5</sup> Cassio knows you not. I'll not be far  
from  
you. Do you find some occasion to anger Cassio,  
either by  
speaking too loud or tainting<sup>o</sup> his discipline, or from  
what  
other course you please, which the time shall more  
265 favorably minister.<sup>o</sup>

RODERIGO Well.

IAGO Sir, he's rash and very sudden in choler, and  
haply<sup>o</sup>  
may strike at you. Provoke him that he may; for  
even out  
of that will I cause these of Cyprus to mutiny; whose  
270 qualification shall come into no true taste again<sup>6</sup> but  
by  
the displanting of Cassio. So shall you have a shorter  
journey to your desires by the means I shall then  
have to  
prefer<sup>o</sup> them, and the impediment most profitably  
removed without the which there were no  
275 expectation of

our prosperity.

RODERIGO I will do this if you can bring it to any opportunity.

IAGO I warrant thee. Meet me by and by at the citadel. I

must fetch his necessaries<sup>7</sup> ashore. Farewell.

280

RODERIGO Adieu. *Exit.*

IAGO That Cassio loves her, I do well believ't;  
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit.<sup>o</sup>  
The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,

285

Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,  
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona

A most dear<sup>o</sup> husband. Now I do love her too,  
Not out of absolute lust (though peradventure  
I stand accountant<sup>o</sup> for as great a sin),

290

But partly led to diet<sup>o</sup> my revenge,  
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor  
Hath leaped into my seat<sup>o</sup>—the thought whereof  
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards,<sup>o</sup>  
And nothing can or shall content my soul

295

Till I am evened with him, wife for wife;  
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor  
At least into a jealousy so strong  
That judgment cannot cure; which thing to do,  
If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trace

300

For his quick hunting, stand the putting on,<sup>8</sup>  
I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,<sup>o</sup>  
Abuse<sup>o</sup> him to the Moor in the rank garb<sup>o</sup>  
(For I fear Cassio with my nightcap<sup>o</sup> too),

305

Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me  
For making him egregiously an ass  
And practicing upon<sup>o</sup> his peace and quiet  
Even to madness. 'Tis here,<sup>o</sup> but yet confused;  
Knavery's plain face is never seen till used. *Exit.*

## Endnotes

- Note 2.1: Location: A seaport in Cyprus; outdoors near the harbor.[Return to reference 2.1](#)
- Note 1: "What . . . mortise": what ship (with "ribs of oak") can hold its joints ("mortise") together when "mountains" of water pour on it?[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The surging ocean, rebuked ("chidden") by the wind (or repulsed by the land).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The "burning Bear" is the constellation Ursa Minor; the "guards" are probably two stars in the constellation that point in a line to the polestar, also in Ursa Minor.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Meaning unclear: either a ship originally from Verona, though now used by the Venetians; or perhaps a particular *kind* of ship.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Even . . . regard": until we can't distinguish sea from sky.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "In . . . engineer": whose natural beauty exhausts the poet's capacity to invent praise.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Whose arrival predates our expectations by a week.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Perhaps both a defense of Emilia and a prod for her to speak.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: She keeps her (critical) thoughts to herself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Models of silent propriety. In this speech Iago shifts from Emilia to women generally.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pronounced *hussies* and thus carrying opposed suggestions: wanton; businesslike, charily husbanding sexual favors (compare line 115). "Players in your huswifery": deceptive in managing household expenses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sticky substance used to trap small birds.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, intelligence makes use of beauty.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dark-haired or dark-complexioned.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With sexual double entendre. "White": fair-skinned person (with a pun on *wight*, "person").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Compel the approval.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Voluntarily withstood temptation even when given the choice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To make an unworthy exchange.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, to breastfeed babies and keep track of trivial domestic goods.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: It would have been better for you not to have blown her so many kisses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mount Olympus, home of the Greek gods and hence too high for mortals.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: To perish, but also evoking the very common sense "to have an orgasm."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: I'll untune (by loosening) the "pegs" that hold the strings of the musical instrument taut.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, Cassio is in charge of the watch at the guardhouse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Feel nausea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As next in line for.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: No more ethical.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lewd.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Who can (like a counterfeiter) create his own opportunities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The analogy is to a dirty book. "Index": table of contents. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: When these intimacies have cleared the way, the main event follows close behind. Here, the analogy is to an official procession.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Stand watch tonight. I'll see that you receive orders.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Who will not be adequately appeased.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Othello's possessions. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "If . . . on": if Roderigo, whom I follow (?), harness (?), is successfully set on the hunt when incited. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *very rough sea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *discern* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *raged* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separation* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *see such a tumult* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *raging* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plan* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *damage* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *seriously* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *known ability* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *not excessive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *likely to be rewarded* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make it out to be* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stands above* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *praise-giving* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jagged* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accumulated* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *underwater* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forgo* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deadly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noisy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *martyrs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *essay, try* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disguise* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(worried for Othello)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *coarse wool cloth* [Return to reference °](#)



- °: *(in childbirth)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishness; lechery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ugly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to boot* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lascivious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lavishly clothed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sense of injury end* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outspoken* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well done* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shackle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courtliness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentleman* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enema tubes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small ship* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will follow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *future* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *welcomed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trunks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *captain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deserve* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lowly born* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *listen to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be silent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *looks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compatibilities* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revolted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obvious; (sexual)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *facile* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *achievement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slippery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wantonness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *damnably* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(obscene)* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *sausage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encoded* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *story* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the flesh* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insulting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provide*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promote*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likely and believable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affectionate; costly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accountable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slept with my wife*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innards*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at my mercy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slander* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gross manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(as sexual rival)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undermining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *my plan is here*[Return to reference](#) °

## 2.2

*Enter OTHELLO 's HERALD with a proclamation.*

HERALD [*reads*] "It is Othello's pleasure, our noble  
and  
valiant general, that upon certain tidings now arrived  
importing the mere perdition<sup>o</sup> of the Turkish fleet,  
every  
man put himself into triumph—some to dance, some  
to  
make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels  
5 his  
addition<sup>o</sup> leads him. For besides these beneficial  
news, it  
is the celebration of his nuptial." So much was his  
pleasure  
should be proclaimed. All offices<sup>o</sup> are open, and  
there is full liberty of feasting from this present hour  
of  
10 five till the bell have told eleven. Heaven bless the  
isle of  
Cyprus and our noble general Othello! *Exit.*

## Endnotes

- Note 2.2: Location: A street in Cyprus. [Return to reference 2.2](#)
- °: *entire loss* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inclination* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *storehouses* [Return to reference °](#)

## 2.3

*Enter* OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, CASSIO, *and attendants*.

OTHELLO Good Michael, look you to the guard tonight.  
Let's teach ourselves that honorable stop,<sup>o</sup>  
Not to outsport<sup>o</sup> discretion.

5 CASSIO Iago hath direction what to do;  
But notwithstanding, with my personal eye  
Will I look to't.

OTHELLO Iago is most honest.  
Michael, goodnight. Tomorrow with your earliest  
Let me have speech with you.—Come, my dear love.  
The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue,  
10 That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you.<sup>1</sup>  
Goodnight.

*Exit* [OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, *and attendants*].

*Enter* IAGO.

CASSIO Welcome, Iago; we must to the watch.

IAGO Not this hour, lieutenant; 'tis not yet ten o'th'  
clock.

15 Our general cast<sup>o</sup> us thus early for the love of his  
Desdemona, who let us not therefore blame: he hath  
not yet  
made wanton the night with her, and she is sport for  
Jove.

CASSIO She's a most exquisite lady.

IAGO And, I'll warrant her, full of game.

20 CASSIO Indeed, she's a most fresh and delicate  
creature.

IAGO What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a  
parley<sup>o</sup>  
to provocation.

CASSIO An inviting eye; and yet, methinks, right  
modest.

IAGO And when she speaks, is it not an alarum<sup>o</sup> to  
love?

25 CASSIO She is indeed perfection.

IAGO Well, happiness to their sheets! Come,  
lieutenant, I  
have a stoup<sup>o</sup> of wine, and here without are a  
brace<sup>o</sup> of  
Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure<sup>2</sup> to  
the  
health of black Othello.

30 CASSIO Not tonight, good Iago. I have very poor and  
unhappy brains for drinking. I could well wish  
courtesy  
would invent some other custom of entertainment.

IAGO O, they are our friends; but one cup; I'll drink  
for  
you.

35 CASSIO I have drunk but one cup tonight, and that  
was  
craftily qualified<sup>o</sup> too; and behold what innovation<sup>3</sup> it  
makes here. I am unfortunate in the infirmity and  
dare  
not task my weakness with any more.

IAGO What, man! 'Tis a night of revels—the gallants  
desire it.

40 CASSIO Where are they?

IAGO Here at the door; I pray you call them in.

CASSIO I'll do't, but it dislikes me.<sup>o</sup>

*Exit.*

45 IAGO If I can fasten but one cup upon him  
With that which he hath drunk tonight already,  
He'll be as full of quarrel and offense  
As my young mistress' dog. Now my sick fool,  
Roderigo,  
Whom love hath turned almost the wrong side out,

To Desdemona hath tonight caroused  
Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch.<sup>4</sup>  
50 Three else of Cyprus (noble swelling<sub>o</sub> spirits,  
That hold their honors in a wary distance,<sup>5</sup>  
The very elements<sub>o</sub> of this warlike isle)  
Have I tonight flustered with flowing cups,  
And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock of  
55 drunkards  
Am I to put our Cassio in some action  
That may offend the isle. But here they come.  
*Enter CASSIO, MONTANO, and GENTLEMEN [with wine].*  
If consequence do but approve my dream,<sup>6</sup>  
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.<sub>o</sub>  
CASSIO 'Fore God, they have given me a rouse<sub>o</sub>  
60 already.  
MONTANO Good faith, a little one; not past a pint, as  
I am  
a soldier.  
IAGO Some wine, ho!  
[Sings]  
And let me the cannikin<sub>o</sub> clink, clink,  
And let me the cannikin clink.  
65 A soldier's a man,  
O man's life's but a span,  
Why then, let a soldier drink.  
Some wine, boys!  
CASSIO 'Fore God, an excellent song!  
70 IAGO I learned it in England, where indeed they are  
most  
potent in potting.<sup>7</sup> Your Dane, your German, and  
your  
swag<sub>o</sub>-bellied Hollander—drink, ho!—are nothing to  
your English.  
CASSIO Is your Englishman so exquisite in his  
75 drinking?

IAGO Why, he drinks you with facility your Dane  
 dead  
 drunk. He sweats not to overthrow your Almaine.°  
 He  
 gives your Hollander a vomit ere the next pottle° can  
 be  
 filled.

80 CASSIO To the health of our general!  
 MONTANO I am for it, lieutenant, and I'll do you  
 justice.⁸

IAGO O sweet England!  
 [*Sings*]  
 King Stephen was and-a worthy peer,  
 His breeches cost him but a crown;⁹  
 He held them sixpence all too dear,  
 85 With that he called the tailor lown.°  
 He was a wight of high renown,  
 And thou art but of low degree;  
 'Tis pride° that pulls the country down,  
 And take thy auld cloak about thee.

90 Some wine, ho!  
 CASSIO 'Fore God, this is a more exquisite song than  
 the  
 other.

IAGO Will you hear't again?

95 CASSIO No, for I hold him to be unworthy of his  
 place  
 that does those things. Well, God's above all, and  
 there  
 be souls must be saved, and there be souls must not  
 be  
 saved.¹

IAGO It's true, good lieutenant.

100 CASSIO For mine own part—no offense to the  
 general,

nor any man of quality<sup>o</sup>—I hope to be saved.

IAGO And so do I too, lieutenant.

CASSIO Ay; but by your leave, not before me. The  
lieutenant

105 is to be saved before the ancient. Let's have no more  
of this. Let's to our affairs. God forgive us our sins.  
Gentlemen, let's look to our business. Do not think,  
gentlemen, I am drunk. This is my ancient, this is my  
right

hand, and this is my left. I am not drunk now. I can  
stand well enough, and I speak well enough.

GENTLEMAN Excellent well.

110 CASSIO Why, very well then. You must not think,  
then,

that I am drunk. *Exit.*

MONTANO To th'platform, masters; come, let's set the  
watch. *[Exeunt some*

GENTLEMEN.]

115 IAGO *[to MONTANO]* You see this fellow that is gone  
before:

He's a soldier fit to stand by Caesar  
And give direction. And do but see his vice:

'Tis to his virtue a just equinox,<sup>o</sup>

The one as long as th'other. 'Tis pity of him;

120 I fear the trust Othello puts him in

On some odd time of his infirmity

Will shake this island.

MONTANO But is he often thus?

IAGO 'Tis evermore his prologue to his sleep.

He'll watch the horologe a double set<sup>2</sup>

If drink rock not his cradle.

125 MONTANO It were well  
The general were put in mind of it.

Perhaps he sees it not, or his good nature

Prizes the virtue that appears in Cassio



And looks not on his evils. Is not this true?

*Enter* RODERIGO.

130 IAGO [*aside*] How now, Roderigo?  
I pray you after the lieutenant—go! *Exit*

RODERIGO.

MONTANO And 'tis great pity that the noble Moor  
Should hazard such a place as his own second  
With one of an ingraft<sup>o</sup> infirmity.  
It were an honest action to say so  
135 To the Moor.

IAGO Not I, for this fair island.  
I do love Cassio well and would do much  
To cure him of this evil.

VOICES [*within*] Help, help!<sup>3</sup>

But hark, what noise?

*Enter* CASSIO, *pursuing* RODERIGO.

140 CASSIO 'Swounds, you rogue! you rascal!

MONTANO What's the matter, lieutenant?

CASSIO A knave teach me my duty? I'll beat the  
knave

into a twiggen<sup>o</sup> bottle.

RODERIGO Beat me?

145 CASSIO Dost thou prate, rogue? [*Attacks*  
RODERIGO.]

MONTANO Nay, good lieutenant! I pray you, sir, hold  
your  
hand.

CASSIO Let me go, sir, or I'll knock you o'er the  
mazzard.<sup>o</sup>

MONTANO Come, come; you're drunk!

150 CASSIO Drunk? [*CASSIO and*  
MONTANO *fight.*]

IAGO [*aside to* RODERIGO] Away, I say! Go out and  
cry a  
mutiny.

[*Exit* RODERIGO.]

Nay, good lieutenant! God's will, gentlemen!  
Help ho! Lieutenant! Sir—Montano—Sir!  
Help, masters! Here's a goodly watch indeed!

155

*A bell rung.*

Who's that which rings the bell? Diablo, <sup>o</sup> ho!  
The town will rise. God's will, lieutenant, hold!  
You'll be ashamed forever.

*Enter* OTHELLO *and attendants.*

OTHELLO What is the matter here?

160

MONTANO 'Swounds, I bleed still; I am hurt to  
th'death.

[*Attacks* CASSIO] He dies.

OTHELLO Hold, for your lives!

IAGO Hold, ho! Lieutenant—Sir—Montano—  
gentlemen!

Have you forgot all place of sense and duty?  
Hold! The general speaks to you. Hold, for shame!

165

OTHELLO Why, how now, ho? From whence ariseth  
this?

Are we turned Turks? and to ourselves do that  
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?<sup>o</sup>  
For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl!

170

He that stirs next, to carve for his own rage,<sup>o</sup>  
Holds his soul light; he dies upon his motion.  
Silence that dreadful bell—it frights the isle  
From her propriety. What is the matter, masters?  
Honest Iago, that looks dead with grieving,  
Speak. Who began this? On thy love, I charge thee.

175

IAGO I do not know. Friends all, but now, even now,  
In quarter<sup>o</sup> and in terms like bride and groom  
Divesting them<sup>o</sup> for bed; and then, but now,  
As if some planet<sup>o</sup> had unwitted men,  
Swords out and tilting one at other's breasts  
180 In opposition bloody. I cannot speak  
Any beginning to this peevish odds,<sup>o</sup>

And would in action glorious I had lost  
 Those legs that brought me to a part of it.  
 185 OTHELLO How comes it, Michael, you are thus  
       forgot?  
 CASSIO I pray you pardon me; I cannot speak.  
 OTHELLO Worthy Montano, you were wont<sup>o</sup> to be  
       civil;  
 The gravity and stillness of your youth  
 The world hath noted, and your name is great  
 In mouths of wisest censure.<sup>o</sup> What's the matter,  
 190 That you unlace your reputation thus  
 And spend your rich opinion<sup>o</sup> for the name  
 Of a night brawler? Give me answer to it.  
 MONTANO Worthy Othello, I am hurt to danger.  
 Your officer, Iago, can inform you—  
 195 While I spare speech, which something now offends  
       me<sup>4</sup>—  
 Of all that I do know; nor know I aught  
 By me that's said or done amiss this night,  
 Unless self-charity<sup>o</sup> be sometimes a vice,  
 And to defend ourselves it be a sin  
 200 When violence assails us.  
 OTHELLO Now, by heaven,  
 My blood begins my safer guides to rule,  
 And passion, having my best judgment collied,<sup>o</sup>  
 Assays<sup>o</sup> to lead the way. 'Swounds, if I stir  
 Or do but lift this arm, the best of you  
 205 Shall sink in my rebuke. Give me to know  
 How this foul rout began, who set it on;  
 And he that is approved<sup>o</sup> in this offense,  
 Though he had twinned with me, both at a birth,  
 Shall lose me. What! in a town of war,  
 210 Yet<sup>o</sup> wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear,  
 To manage<sup>o</sup> private and domestic quarrel?  
 In night, and on the court and guard of safety?<sup>5</sup>

'Tis monstrous. Iago, who began't?  
MONTANO If partially affined,<sup>o</sup> or leagued in office,  
215 Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,  
Thou art no soldier.  
IAGO Touch me not so near.  
I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth  
Than it should do offense to Michael Cassio;  
Yet I persuade myself to speak the truth  
220 Shall nothing wrong him. This it is, general:  
Montano and myself being in speech,  
There comes a fellow crying out for help,  
And Cassio following him with determined sword  
To execute upon<sup>o</sup> him. Sir, this gentleman  
225 Steps in to Cassio and entreats his pause;  
Myself the crying fellow did pursue,  
Lest by his clamor—as it so fell out—  
The town might fall in fright. He, swift of foot,  
Outran my purpose; and I returned, the rather  
230 For that I heard the clink and fall of swords  
And Cassio high in oath, which till tonight  
I ne'er might say before. When I came back—  
For this was brief—I found them close together  
At blow and thrust, even as again they were  
235 When yourself did part them.  
More of this matter cannot I report.  
But men are men: the best sometimes forget.  
Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,  
As men in rage strike those that wish them best,  
240 Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received  
From him that fled some strange indignity  
Which patience could not pass.<sup>o</sup>  
OTHELLO I know, Iago,  
Thy honesty and love doth mince<sup>o</sup> this matter,  
Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee,  
245 But never more be officer of mine.—  
*Enter DESDEMONA, attended.*

Look if my gentle love be not raised up!—  
I'll make thee an example.

DESDEMONA What is the matter, dear?

OTHELLO All's well,  
sweeting;

250 Come away to bed. [*To MONTANO*] Sir, for your hurts  
Myself will be your surgeon. Lead him off.

[*Exeunt attendants with MONTANO.*]

Iago, look with care about the town,  
And silence those whom this vile brawl distracted.  
Come, Desdemona; 'tis the soldier's life  
To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife.

255 *Exeunt* [OTHELLO the] *Moor*, DESDEMONA, and  
*attendants.*

IAGO What, are you hurt, lieutenant?

CASSIO Ay, past all surgery.

IAGO Marry, God forbid!

CASSIO Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have  
lost

260 my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of  
myself, and  
what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my  
reputation!

IAGO As I am an honest man, I had thought you  
had  
received some bodily wound; there is more sense in  
that  
than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most  
false

265 imposition, <sup>o</sup> oft got without merit and lost without  
deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless  
you

repute yourself such a loser. What, man! there are  
more

ways to recover the general again. You are but now  
cast in

his mood, a punishment more in policy<sup>6</sup> than in  
malice,  
270 even so as one would beat his offenseless dog to  
affright  
an imperious lion. Sue to<sup>o</sup> him again, and he's yours.  
CASSIO I will rather sue to be despised than to  
deceive  
so good a commander with so slight, so drunken,  
and so  
indiscreet an officer. Drunk? And speak parrot?<sup>o</sup> And  
squabble? Swagger? Swear? And discourse fustian<sup>o</sup>  
275 with  
one's own shadow? O, thou invisible spirit of wine! if  
thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee  
devil.  
IAGO What was he that you followed with your  
sword?  
What had he done to you?  
CASSIO I know not.  
280 IAGO Is't possible?  
CASSIO I remember a mass of things, but nothing  
distinctly; a quarrel, but nothing wherefore.<sup>o</sup> O God!  
that  
men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal  
away  
285 their brains! that we should with joy, pleasance,  
revel,  
and applause transform ourselves into beasts!  
IAGO Why, but you are now well enough. How came  
you  
thus recovered?  
CASSIO It hath pleased the devil drunkenness to give  
290 place to the devil wrath; one unperfectness shows  
me  
another, to make me frankly despise myself.

IAGO Come, you are too severe a moraler. As the  
time,  
the place, and the condition of this country stands, I  
could heartily wish this had not befallen; but since it  
is  
as it is, mend it for your own good.

295 CASSIO I will ask him for my place again. He shall  
tell me  
I am a drunkard. Had I as many mouths as Hydra,<sup>7</sup>  
such  
an answer would stop them all. To be now a sensible  
man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast!—O,  
strange!  
Every inordinate cup is unblessed, and the ingredient  
300 is  
a devil.

IAGO Come, come; good wine is a good familiar  
creature  
if it be well used. Exclaim no more against it. And,  
good  
lieutenant, I think you think I love you.

CASSIO I have well approved<sup>o</sup> it, sir—I drunk?

305 IAGO You or any man living may be drunk at a time,  
man.  
I tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is  
now  
the general. I may say so in this respect, for that he  
hath devoted and given up himself to the  
contemplation,  
mark, and devotement<sup>o</sup> of her parts<sup>8</sup> and graces.

310 Confess  
yourself freely to her; importune her help to put you  
in  
your place again. She is of so free,<sup>o</sup> so kind, so apt,  
so

blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her  
 goodness  
 not to do more than she is requested. This broken  
 joint  
 315 between you and her husband entreat her to  
 splinter,<sup>9</sup>  
 and my fortunes against any lay<sup>o</sup> worth naming, this  
 crack of your love shall grow stronger than it was  
 before.  
 CASSIO You advise me well.  
 IAGO I protest,<sup>o</sup> in the sincerity of love and honest  
 kindness.  
 320 CASSIO I think it freely; and betimes<sup>o</sup> in the morning  
 I  
 will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake  
 for  
 me. I am desperate of my fortunes if they check<sup>o</sup>  
 me.  
 IAGO You are in the right. Good night, lieutenant; I  
 must  
 to the watch.  
 325 CASSIO Good night, honest Iago. *Exit*  
 CASSIO.  
 IAGO And what's he then that says I play the villain,  
 When this advice is free I give and honest,  
 Probal<sup>o</sup> to thinking, and indeed the course  
 To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy  
 330 Th'inclining<sup>o</sup> Desdemona to subdue  
 In any honest suit: she's framed as fruitful<sup>o</sup>  
 As the free elements; and then for her  
 To win the Moor, were't to renounce his baptism,  
 All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,  
 335 His soul is so enfettered to her love  
 That she may make, unmake, do what she list,  
 Even as her appetite<sup>o</sup> shall play the god



With his weak function.° How am I then a villain  
To counsel Cassio to this parallel° course  
340 Directly to his good? Divinity° of hell!  
When devils will the blackest sins put on,  
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,  
As I do now. For whiles this honest fool  
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,  
345 And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,  
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear:  
That she repeals him° for her body's lust,  
And by how much she strives to do him good  
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.  
350 So will I turn her virtue into pitch,<sup>1</sup>  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all.

*Enter* RODERIGO.

How now, Roderigo?  
355 RODERIGO I do follow here in the chase, not like a  
hound  
that hunts, but one that fills up the cry.° My money  
is  
almost spent; I have been tonight exceedingly well  
cudgeled; and I think the issue will be I shall have so  
much° experience for my pains, and so, with no  
money

at all and a little more wit, return again to Venice.  
360 IAGO How poor are they that have not patience!  
What wound did ever heal but by degrees?  
Thou know'st we work by wit and not by witchcraft,  
And wit depends on dilatory° time.  
Does't not go well? Cassio hath beaten thee,  
365 And thou by that small hurt hath cashiered° Cassio.  
Though other things grow fair against the sun,  
Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe.<sup>2</sup>  
Content thyself awhile. By the Mass,° 'tis morning!

370 Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.  
 Retire thee; go where thou art billeted.  
 Away! I say; thou shalt know more hereafter.  
 Nay, get thee gone! *Exit*  
 RODERIGO.

Two things are to be done:  
 My wife must move for Cassio to her mistress—  
 I'll set her on—

375 Myself a while to draw the Moor apart  
 And bring him jump<sup>o</sup> when he may Cassio find  
 Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way!  
 Dull not device by coldness and delay.<sup>3</sup>  
*Exit.*

## Endnotes

- Note 2.3: Location: The citadel at Cyprus.[Return to reference 2.3](#)
- Note 1: That is, we haven't yet consummated our marriage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Would like to drink.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Disorder.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Caroused . . . watch": consumed drink to the bottom of the tankard; and he's assigned guard duty.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Who are touchy about their honor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: If events turn out as I hope.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Most adept at drinking.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Match your drinking.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A coin (worth 60 pence).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Referring to the doctrine of predestination, the belief held by Calvinist Protestants that some souls are destined from all eternity to be saved and others to be damned.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He'll stay up twice around the clock.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The offstage shouts for help are only in Q.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Somewhat now pains me.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: And at the place where safety and security are at stake (on the night watch).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Cast . . . policy”: dismissed in anger—a matter of policy (of public example).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A mythical serpent with many heads, who grew two more when one was cut off.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Qualities.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Heal with a splint.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Black, sticky substance used as a snare.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, although others may appear to be prospering, your plan will be successful soonest because it was set in motion first.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Don’t let sluggishness and slowness to act weaken the plot.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *self-restraint*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pass the limits of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dismissed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(military) call*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a call (to arms)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *two quarts* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pair*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *well diluted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I don’t like it*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *typical residents*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *current*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *full draft*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *drinking vessel*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *hanging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *German* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tankard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lout*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ostentatious clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of equal size*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ingrained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wicker-cased*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the devil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(by raising a storm)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draw a sword in anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *under control*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *getting undressed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *astrological influence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silly quarrel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care of oneself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darkened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proven guilty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *still*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carry on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *biased (for Cassio)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to attack*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *let pass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *minimize*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *artificial notion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *petition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rant on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nonsense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *but not why*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tested*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *observation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wager* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insist* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *early* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well-disposed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wishes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faculties* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suitable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *theology* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appeals for him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a pack follower* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only this much* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gradually unfolding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dismissed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(a mild oath)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exactly* [Return to reference](#) °

### 3.1

*Enter* CASSIO, MUSICIANS, *and* CLOWN.

CASSIO Masters, play here—I will content<sup>o</sup> your pains—

Something that's brief; and bid "Good morrow, general."

CLOWN Why, masters, have your instruments been in

Naples, that they speak i'th' nose thus?<sup>1</sup>

5 MUSICIAN How, sir? how?

CLOWN Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?<sup>2</sup>

MUSICIAN Ay, marry, are they, sir.

CLOWN O, thereby hangs a tail!

MUSICIAN Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

10 CLOWN Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know.

But, masters, here's money for you; and the general so

likes your music that he desires you for love's sake to make no more noise with it.

MUSICIAN Well, sir, we will not.

15 CLOWN If you have any music that may not<sup>o</sup> be heard, to't

again. But, as they say, to hear music the general does

not greatly care.

MUSICIAN We have none such, sir.

CLOWN Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I'll away.

20 Go! Vanish into air, away! *Exeunt*

MUSICIANS.

CASSIO Dost thou hear, mine honest friend?

CLOWN No, I hear not your honest friend: I hear you.

CASSIO Prithee keep up thy quillets.<sup>3</sup> There's a poor piece of gold for thee. If the gentlewoman that attends the general be stirring, tell her there's one Cassio  
25 entreats

her a little favor of speech. Wilt thou do this?

CLOWN She is stirring, sir. If she will stir hither, I shall

seem<sup>o</sup> to notify unto her.

CASSIO Do, good my friend.

*Exit*

CLOWN.

*Enter* IAGO In happy time,<sup>o</sup> Iago.

IAGO You have not been abed then?

30

CASSIO Why, no; the day had broke before we parted.

I have made bold, Iago, to send in to your wife.

My suit to her is that she will to virtuous Desdemona Procure me some access.

IAGO I'll send her to you presently;<sup>o</sup>

35

And I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor Out of the way, that your converse and business May be more free.

CASSIO I humbly thank you for't.

*Exit*

[IAGO].

I never knew A Florentine more kind and honest.

*Enter* EMILIA

40

EMILIA Good morrow, good lieutenant. I am sorry For your displeasure, but all will sure<sup>o</sup> be well. The general and his wife are talking of it, And she speaks for you stoutly. The Moor replies That he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus

45       And great affinity,<sup>o</sup> and that in wholesome wisdom  
           He might not but refuse you; but he protests he  
           loves you  
           And needs no other suitor but his likings  
           To bring you in again.

          CASSIO                               Yet I beseech you,  
           If you think fit, or that it may be done,  
           Give me advantage of some brief discourse  
 50       With Desdemon alone.

          EMILIA                               Pray you come in.  
           I will bestow you where you shall have time  
           To speak your bosom<sup>o</sup> freely.

          CASSIO                               I am much bound to  
           you.  
           *Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 3.1: Location: Outside Othello and Desdemona's room.[Return to reference 3.1](#)
- Note 1: That they sound so nasal; perhaps a reference to venereal disease, often associated with Naples, or a phallic or anal joke.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The exchange that follows depends on the connections among wind instruments, flatulence, and "tale/tail."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pack up your puns.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *reward*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cannot*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arrange*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *well met*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *surely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well connected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heart* [Return to reference](#) °

## 3.2

*Enter* OTHELLO, IAGO, *and* GENTLEMEN

OTHELLO These letters give, Iago, to the pilot,  
And by him do my duties<sup>o</sup> to the senate.  
That done, I will be walking on the works;<sup>o</sup>  
Repair<sup>o</sup> there to me.

IAGO Well, my good lord; I'll do't.

5

OTHELLO This fortification, gentlemen, shall we  
see't?

GENTLEMAN We'll wait upon your lordship.

*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 3.2: Location: The citadel.[Return to reference 3.2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *send my respects*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *fortifications*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *come*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

### 3.3

*Enter* DESDEMONA, CASSIO, *and* EMILIA.

DESDEMONA Be thou assured, good Cassio, I will do  
All my abilities in thy behalf.

EMILIA Good madam, do. I warrant it grieves my  
husband

As if the cause were his.

5 DESDEMONA O, that's an honest fellow. Do not  
doubt, Cassio,

But I will have my lord and you again  
As friendly as you were.

CASSIO Bounteous madam,  
Whatever shall become of Michael Cassio,  
He's never anything but your true servant.

10 DESDEMONA I know't; I thank you. You do love my  
lord;

You have known him long; and be you well assured  
He shall in strangeness stand no farther off  
Than in a politic distance.<sup>1</sup>

CASSIO Ay, but, lady,  
That policy may either last so long,  
Or feed upon such nice and wat'rish diet,  
15 Or breed itself so out of circumstances,<sup>2</sup>  
That—I being absent, and my place supplied<sup>o</sup>—  
My general will forget my love and service.

DESDEMONA Do not doubt<sup>o</sup> that. Before Emilia here,  
I give thee warrant<sup>o</sup> of thy place. Assure thee,  
20 If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it  
To the last article. My lord shall never rest:  
I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;<sup>3</sup>  
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shift;<sup>o</sup>  
I'll intermingle everything he does  
25 With Cassio's suit. Therefore be merry, Cassio,

For thy solicitor<sup>o</sup> shall rather die  
Than give thy cause away.<sub>o</sub>

*Enter* OTHELLO *and* IAGO.

EMILIA Madam, here comes my lord.

CASSIO Madam, I'll take my leave.

30

DESDEMONA Why, stay and hear me speak.

CASSIO Madam, not now: I am very ill at ease,  
Unfit for mine own purposes.

DESDEMONA Well, do your discretion. *Exit*

CASSIO.

IAGO Ha! I like not that.

OTHELLO What dost thou say?

35

IAGO Nothing, my lord; or if . . . I know not what.

OTHELLO Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?

IAGO Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it  
That he would steal away so guilty-like,  
Seeing your coming.

OTHELLO I do believe 'twas he.

40

DESDEMONA How now, my lord?

I have been talking with a suitor here,  
A man that languishes in your displeasure.

OTHELLO Who is't you mean?

DESDEMONA Why, your lieutenant, Cassio. Good my  
45 lord,

If I have any grace or power to move you,  
His present reconciliation take;<sup>o</sup>

For if he be not one that truly loves you,  
That errs in ignorance and not in cunning,<sup>o</sup>

I have no judgment in an honest face.

50

I prithee call him back.

OTHELLO Went he hence now?

DESDEMONA Yes, faith; so humbled  
That he hath left part of his grief with me  
To suffer with him. Good love, call him back.

OTHELLO Not now, sweet Desdemon; some other  
55 time.

DESDEMONA But shall't be shortly?  
 OTHELLO The sooner,  
 sweet, for you.  
 DESDEMONA Shall't be tonight, at supper?  
 OTHELLO No, not  
 tonight.  
 DESDEMONA Tomorrow dinner<sup>o</sup> then?  
 OTHELLO I shall not dine  
 at home;  
 I meet the captains at the citadel.  
 DESDEMONA Why then, tomorrow night, on Tuesday  
 60 morn,  
 On Tuesday noon or night, on Wednesday morn.  
 I prithee name the time, but let it not  
 Exceed three days. In faith, he's penitent;  
 And yet his trespass, in our common reason<sup>o</sup>—  
 65 Save that, they say, the wars must make example  
 Out of her<sup>o</sup> best—is not almost a fault  
 T'incur a private check.<sup>4</sup> When shall he come?  
 Tell me, Othello. I wonder in my soul  
 What you would ask me that I should deny,  
 Or stand so mamm'ring<sup>o</sup> on? What? Michael Cassio,  
 70 That came a-wooing with you? and so many a time,  
 When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,  
 Hath ta'en your part—to have so much to do  
 To bring him in?<sup>o</sup> By'r Lady, I could do much<sup>5</sup>—  
 OTHELLO Prithee, no more. Let him come when he  
 75 will:  
 I will deny thee nothing.  
 DESDEMONA Why, this is not a boon;  
 'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,  
 Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,  
 Or sue to you to do a peculiar<sup>o</sup> profit  
 To your own person. Nay, when I have a suit  
 80 Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,

It shall be full of poise<sup>o</sup> and difficult weight,  
And fearful to be granted.

OTHELLO I will deny thee nothing.  
Whereon I do beseech thee grant me this,  
To leave me but a little to myself.

85 DESDEMONA Shall I deny you? No. Farewell, my lord.

OTHELLO Farewell, my Desdemona; I'll come to thee  
straight.<sup>o</sup>

DESDEMONA Emilia, come. [*to* OTHELLO] Be as your  
fancies teach<sup>o</sup> you.

Whate'er you be, I am obedient.

*Exeunt* DESDEMONA *and* EMILIA.

90 OTHELLO Excellent wretch!<sup>o</sup> Perdition catch my soul  
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,  
Chaos is come again.

IAGO My noble lord . . .

OTHELLO What dost thou say, Iago?

IAGO Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,  
Know of your love?

95 OTHELLO He did, from first to last.  
Why dost thou ask?

IAGO But for a satisfaction of my thought,  
No further harm.

OTHELLO Why of thy thought, Iago?

IAGO I did not think he had been acquainted with  
her.

100 OTHELLO O yes, and went between us very oft.

IAGO Indeed?

OTHELLO Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught  
in that?

Is he not honest?

IAGO Honest, my lord?

105 OTHELLO Honest? Ay, honest.

IAGO My lord, for aught I know.

OTHELLO What dost thou think?

IAGO Think, my lord?

OTHELLO "Think, my lord?" By heaven, thou echo'st  
me  
As if there were some monster in thy thought  
110 Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean  
something:  
I heard thee say even now thou lik'st not that,  
When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?  
And when I told thee he was of my counsel,o  
Of my whole course of wooing, thou cried'st  
115 "Indeed?"  
And didst contract and purse thy brow together  
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain  
Some horrible conceit.o If thou dost love me,  
Show me thy thought.  
IAGO My lord, you know I love you.  
OTHELLO I think thou dost;  
120 And foro I know thou'rt full of love and honesty,  
And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them  
breath,  
Therefore these stopso of thine fright me the more:  
For such things in a false disloyal knave  
Are tricks of custom;o but in a man that's just,  
125 They're close dilations,<sup>6</sup> working from the heart  
That passion cannot rule.o  
IAGO For Michael Cassio,  
I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.  
OTHELLO I think so too.  
IAGO Men should be what they  
seem,  
Or those that be not, would they might seem none.<sup>7</sup>  
130 OTHELLO Certain, men should be what they seem.  
IAGO Why then, I think Cassio's an honest man.  
OTHELLO Nay, yet there's more in this.  
I prithee speak to me as to thy thinkings,

135





But he that filches from me my good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches him  
And makes me poor indeed.

OTHELLO                      By heaven, I'll know thy  
thoughts!

165 IAGO    You cannot, if my heart were in your hand,  
Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.

OTHELLO    Ha?

IAGO                      O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!  
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on.<sup>1</sup> That cuckold lives in bliss  
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;<sup>2</sup>  
170 But O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er  
Who dotes yet doubts, suspects yet strongly loves!

OTHELLO    O misery!

IAGO    Poor and content is rich, and rich enough,  
But riches fineless<sup>o</sup> is as poor as winter  
175 To him that ever fears he shall be poor.  
Good God, the souls of all my tribe defend  
From jealousy!

OTHELLO                      Why, why is this?  
Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,  
To follow still the changes of the moon<sup>o</sup>  
180 With fresh suspicions? No! To be once in doubt  
Is once to be resolved.<sup>o</sup> Exchange me for a goat  
When I shall turn the business of my soul  
To such exsufflicate and blowed<sup>o</sup> surmises,  
Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous  
185 To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,  
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances:  
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.  
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw  
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,<sup>o</sup>  
190 For she had eyes and chose me. No, Iago,  
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;

And on the proof there is no more but this:  
 Away at once with love or jealousy!  
 195 IAGO I am glad of this; for now I shall have reason  
 To show the love and duty that I bear you  
 With franker spirit. Therefore, as I am bound,  
 Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.  
 Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;  
 200 Wear your eyes thus: not jealous, nor secure.  
 I would not have your free and noble nature  
 Out of self-bounty be abused.<sup>3</sup> Look to't.  
 I know our country disposition well:  
 In Venice they do let God see the pranks  
 205 They dare not show their husbands; their best  
 conscience  
 Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.  
 OTHELLO Dost thou say so?  
 IAGO She did deceive her father, marrying you,  
 And when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks,  
 She loved them most.  
 OTHELLO And so she did.  
 210 IAGO Why, go to<sup>o</sup>  
 then.  
 She that, so young, could give out such a seeming  
 To seel her father's eyes up close as oak,<sup>4</sup>  
 He thought 'twas witchcraft . . . ; but I am much to  
 blame.  
 I humbly do beseech you of your pardon  
 For too much loving you.  
 215 OTHELLO I am bound to thee  
 forever.  
 IAGO I see this hath a little dashed your spirits.  
 OTHELLO Not a jot, not a jot.  
 IAGO I'faith, I fear it has.  
 I hope you will consider what is spoke  
 Comes from my love. But I do see you're moved.

220 I am to pray you not to strain my speech  
 To grosser issues<sup>o</sup> nor to larger reach  
 Than to suspicion.  
 OTHELLO I will not.  
 IAGO Should you do so, my lord,  
 My speech should fall into such vile success  
 Which my thoughts aimed not. Cassio's my worthy  
 225 friend—  
 My lord, I see you're moved.  
 OTHELLO No, not much moved;  
 I do not think but Desdemona's honest.  
 IAGO Long live she so! and long live you to think  
 so!  
 OTHELLO And yet how nature, erring from itself—  
 IAGO Ay, there's the point! as to be bold with you,  
 230 Not to affect<sup>o</sup> many proposed matches  
 Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
 Whereto we see in all things nature tends—  
 Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,  
 Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural.  
 235 But, pardon me, I do not in position<sup>o</sup>  
 Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear  
 Her will,<sup>o</sup> recoiling<sup>o</sup> to her better judgment,  
 May fall to match you with her country forms,<sup>5</sup>  
 And happily<sup>o</sup> repent.  
 OTHELLO Farewell, farewell.  
 240 If more thou dost perceive, let me know more.  
 Set on thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago.  
 IAGO [*going*] My lord, I take my leave.  
 OTHELLO Why did I marry? This honest creature,  
 doubtless,  
 Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.  
 245 IAGO [*returning*] My lord, I would I might entreat  
 your  
 honor

To scan this thing no farther; leave it to time.  
Although 'tis fit that Cassio have his place  
(For sure he fills it up with great ability),  
Yet if you please to hold him off awhile,  
250 You shall by that perceive him and his means.<sup>6</sup>  
Note if your lady strain his entertainment<sup>o</sup>  
With any strong or vehement importunity;  
Much will be seen in that. In the meantime  
Let me be thought too busy<sup>o</sup> in my fears  
255 (As worthy cause I have to fear I am),  
And hold her free,<sup>o</sup> I do beseech your honor.  
OTHELLO Fear not my government.<sup>o</sup>  
IAGO I once more take my leave.  
*Exit.*  
OTHELLO This fellow's of exceeding honesty,  
260 And knows all qualities<sup>o</sup> with a learned spirit  
Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,<sup>o</sup>  
Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,  
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind  
To prey at fortune.<sup>7</sup> Haply for<sup>o</sup> I am black,  
265 And have not those soft parts of conversation<sup>o</sup>  
That chamberers<sup>o</sup> have, or for I am declined  
Into the vale of years—yet that's not much—  
She's gone, I am abused,<sup>o</sup> and my relief  
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage!  
270 That we can call these delicate creatures ours  
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad  
And live upon the vapor of a dungeon  
Than keep a corner in the thing I love  
For others' uses. Yet 'tis the plague of great ones:  
275 Prerogatives<sup>o</sup> are they less than the base;<sup>o</sup>  
'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death;  
Even then this forkèd plague is fated to us  
When we do quicken.<sup>8</sup>

*Enter* DESDEMONA *and* EMILIA.

Look where she comes!  
 If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself;  
 280 I'll not believe't.

DESDEMONA How now, my dear Othello?  
 Your dinner, and the generous<sup>o</sup> islanders  
 By you invited, do attend<sup>o</sup> your presence.

OTHELLO I am to blame.

DESDEMONA Why do you speak so  
 faintly?  
 Are you not well?

285 OTHELLO I have a pain upon my forehead, here.<sup>o</sup>

DESDEMONA Faith, that's with watching;<sup>o</sup> 'twill away  
 again.  
 Let me but bind it hard, within this hour  
 It will be well.

OTHELLO Your napkin<sup>o</sup> is too little;  
 [*The handkerchief is dropped.*]  
 Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.

290 DESDEMONA I am very sorry that you are not well.  
*Exeunt* OTHELLO *and* DESDEMONA.

EMILIA I am glad I have found this napkin;  
 This was her first remembrance<sup>o</sup> from the Moor.  
 My wayward husband hath a hundred times  
 Wooed me to steal it. But she so loves the token  
 295 (For he conjured her<sup>o</sup> she should ever keep it)  
 That she reserves it evermore about her  
 To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out,<sup>o</sup>  
 And giv't Iago; what he will do with it  
 Heaven knows, not I:

300 I nothing<sup>o</sup> but to please his fantasy.  
*Enter* IAGO.

IAGO How now? What do you here alone?

EMILIA Do not you chide; I have a thing for you.

IAGO You have a thing for me? It is a common  
 thing<sup>9</sup>—

305 EMILIA Ha?  
 IAGO To have a foolish wife.  
 EMILIA O, is that all? What will you give me now  
 For that same handkerchief?  
 IAGO What handkerchief?  
 EMILIA What handkerchief?  
 Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona,  
 310 That which so often you did bid me steal.  
 IAGO Hast stolen it from her?  
 EMILIA No, faith; she let it drop by negligence,  
 And to th'advantage<sup>o</sup> I, being here, took't up.  
 Look, here 'tis.  
 IAGO A good wench! Give it me.  
 315 EMILIA What will you do with't, that you have been so  
 earnest  
 To have me filch it?  
 IAGO [*taking it*] Why, what is that to you?  
 EMILIA If it be not for some purpose of import,  
 Giv't me again. Poor lady, she'll run mad  
 When she shall lack it.  
 IAGO Be not acknown on't;<sup>o</sup>  
 320 I have use for it. Go—leave me! *Exit*  
 EMILIA.  
 I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin  
 And let him find it. Trifles light as air  
 Are to the jealous confirmations strong  
 As proofs of holy writ. This may do something.  
 325 The Moor already changes with my poison:  
 Dangerous conceits<sup>o</sup> are in their natures poisons,  
 Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,  
 But with a little act<sup>o</sup> upon the blood  
 Burn like the mines of sulphur.<sup>1</sup>  
*Enter* OTHELLO. I did say so—  
 330 Look where he comes! Not poppy nor mandragora<sup>2</sup>  
 Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world

Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
Which thou owedst<sup>o</sup> yesterday.

OTHELLO Ha! ha! false to me?

IAGO Why, how now, general? No more of that!

335 OTHELLO Avaunt! be gone! Thou hast set me on the  
rack.

I swear 'tis better to be much abused<sup>o</sup>  
Than but to know't a little.

IAGO How now, my lord?

OTHELLO What sense had I of her stol'n hours of  
lust?

I saw't not, thought it not; it harmed not me;  
340 I slept the next night well, fed well, was free and  
merry;

I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips.

He that is robbed, not wanting<sup>o</sup> what is stol'n,  
Let him not know't, and he's not robbed at all.

IAGO I am sorry to hear this.

345 OTHELLO I had been happy if the general camp,  
Pioneers<sup>o</sup> and all, had tasted her sweet body,  
So<sup>o</sup> I had nothing known. O, now forever

Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!  
Farewell the plumèd troops and the big wars  
350 That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell!

Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,<sup>o</sup>  
The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner and all quality,<sup>o</sup>

Pride,<sup>o</sup> pomp, and circumstance<sup>o</sup> of glorious war!  
355 And O you mortal engines<sup>o</sup> whose rude throats  
Th'immortal Jove's dread clamors<sup>o</sup> counterfeit,  
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

IAGO Is't possible, my lord?

360 OTHELLO [*grabs IAGO by the throat*] Villain, be sure  
thou prove my love a whore!

Be sure of it, give me the ocular proof,  
Or by the worth of mine eternal soul,

Thou hadst been better have been born a dog  
Than answer my waked wrath.

IAGO Is't come to this?

365 OTHELLO Make me to see't, or at the least so prove  
it

That the probation<sup>o</sup> bear no hinge nor loop  
To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life!

IAGO My noble lord—

370 OTHELLO If thou dost slander her and torture me,  
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;  
On horror's head horrors accumulate;  
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed;  
For nothing canst thou to damnation add  
Greater than that.

IAGO O grace! O heaven forgive me!  
Are you a man? Have you a soul? or sense?  
375 God buy you; take mine office.<sup>3</sup> O wretched fool,<sup>o</sup>  
That lov'st to make thine honesty a vice!<sup>o</sup>  
O monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world:  
To be direct and honest is not safe.

380 I thank you for this profit,<sup>o</sup> and from hence  
I'll love no friend, sith<sup>o</sup> love breeds such offense.

OTHELLO Nay, stay; thou shouldst be honest.

IAGO I should be wise; for honesty's a fool  
And loses that<sup>o</sup> it works for.

385 OTHELLO By the world,<sup>4</sup>  
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;  
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.  
I'll have some proof. My name, that was as fresh  
As Dian's<sup>5</sup> visage, is now begrimed and black  
As mine own face. If there be cords or knives,  
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,  
390 I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied!

IAGO I see you are eaten up with passion;  
I do repent me that I put it to you.





That gave thee to the Moor!"

OTHELLO O monstrous! monstrous!

IAGO Nay, this was  
but his dream.

OTHELLO But this denoted a foregone conclusion;  
'Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream.<sup>8</sup>

430 IAGO And this may help to thicken other proofs  
That do demonstrate thinly.

OTHELLO I'll tear her all to  
pieces!

IAGO Nay, yet be wise; yet we see nothing done;  
She may be honest yet. Tell me but this:  
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief  
Spotted with strawberries in your wife's hand?

435 OTHELLO I gave her such a one; 'twas my first gift.

IAGO I know not that; but such a handkerchief—  
I am sure it was your wife's—did I today  
See Cassio wipe his beard with.

OTHELLO If it be that—

440 IAGO If it be that, or any that was hers,  
It speaks against her with the other proofs.

OTHELLO O that the slave<sup>o</sup> had forty thousand lives!  
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.  
Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago:  
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.  
445 'Tis gone.

Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!  
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne<sup>o</sup>  
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,<sup>o</sup>  
For 'tis of aspics'<sup>o</sup> tongues!

IAGO Yet be content.

450 OTHELLO O, blood! blood! blood!

IAGO Patience, I say; your mind may change.

OTHELLO Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,<sup>o</sup>  
Whose icy current and compulsive course

455 Ne'er keeps retiring ebb but keeps due on  
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,<sup>9</sup>  
Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace  
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,  
Till that a capable<sup>o</sup> and wide revenge  
Swallow them up. OTHELLO  
*kneels.*

460 Now, by yond marble heaven,  
In the due reverence of a sacred vow,  
I here engage my words.  
IAGO Do not rise yet. IAGO  
*kneels.*

Witness, you ever-burning lights above,  
You elements that clip<sup>o</sup> us round about,  
Witness that here Iago doth give up  
465 The execution<sup>o</sup> of his wit, hands, heart,  
To wronged Othello's service. Let him command,  
And to obey shall be in me remorse,<sup>o</sup>  
What bloody business ever.<sup>o</sup> [ *They*  
*rise.*]

OTHELLO I greet thy love,  
Not with vain thanks but with acceptance bounteous,  
470 And will upon the instant put thee to't.<sup>o</sup>  
Within these three days let me hear thee say  
That Cassio's not alive.

IAGO My friend is dead;  
'Tis done at your request. But let her live.  
OTHELLO Damn her, lewd minx!<sup>o</sup> O, damn her! damn  
475 her!

Come, go with me apart; I will withdraw  
To furnish me with some swift means of death  
For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

IAGO I am your own forever.  
*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 3.3: Location: The citadel's garden.[Return to reference 3.3](#)
- Note 1: He will distance himself from you only as much as good diplomacy requires.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Or feed . . . circumstances": or persist based on such unimportant and poor justifications, or continue by chance.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I'll keep him awake until he obeys me, and talk to him beyond his endurance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Is barely worth even private criticism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Do much to make you regret your reluctance (?).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, involuntary revelations of interior, close-kept secrets.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Or . . . none": if only those who are not what they seem didn't seem to be what they are not.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, I am not obligated to reveal my inner thoughts, something about which even slaves have a choice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Uncleanly . . . lawful": illegitimate thoughts meet in court ("leets") from time to time (on "law-days") and debate (in court "sessions") with legitimate ones.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, tortures, as it consumes, the heart of the jealous person.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Who, knowing it is his fate to be cuckolded, doesn't love his wife.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Be deceived on account of your own goodness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Perhaps: to cover ("seel" means "to blind") her father's eyes as tightly as oak (a fine-grained wood).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: May happen to compare you with Venetian standards.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Method (for restoring himself to favor).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: “Though . . . fortune”: even if what tied her (“jesses” are leg straps put on a hawk) were my own heartstrings, I’d set her loose downwind forever to hunt on her own.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “Even . . . quicken”: the “plague” of horns (imagined to grow from the forehead of a cuckold) is our fate as soon as we live.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It is a vagina (“thing”) available to all.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pliny the Elder (23/24–79 C.E.) describes two islands of sulfur between mainland Italy and Sicily that were rumored to be always on fire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A sleep-inducing substance made from the mandrake root.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Good-bye, I resign my official position (ensign).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Othello’s speech (lines 384–91) does not appear in Q.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Diana, goddess of chastity and of the (pale) moon. The Second Quarto (1630) replaces “My” (line 387) with “Her,” a plausible but arguably less powerful reading that lacks textual authority.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As lecherous as wolves in heat.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: If inference and strong circumstantial evidence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Q gives this line to Iago.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Propontic was the body of water bounded by the straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles (Hellespont), the latter strait leading to the Aegean.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *filled*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assurance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confessional*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advocate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accept him now*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not knowingly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *midday meal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *normal judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(war's)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hesitating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *into favor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *particular*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *balanced judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as your whims lead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(affectionate)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in my confidence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reluctances*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *habitual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Othello)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mistaken*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *incoherent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boundless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to renew endlessly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to be finally settled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inflated and blown up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *or fear of her betrayal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that's it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greater conclusions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *argument*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *desire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *submitting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *urge his reception* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meddlesome* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe her innocent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *self-conduct* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(human) types* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wild (from falconry)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy manners* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gallants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *privileged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lowborn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(from cuckold's horns)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from lack of sleep* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handkerchief* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keepsake* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made her swear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *embroidery copied* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intend nothing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taking the occasion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *don't let it be known* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ideas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *effect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *owned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mistreated; deceived* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *missing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manual laborers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trumpet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aspects* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magnificence* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *ceremony*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deadly cannons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thunderclaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proof*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(to himself)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profitable lesson*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *since*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *observer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *share a pillow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *other* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lustful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sustainable; valid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *task*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prodded on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grip*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an earlier event*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reasonable fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Cassio)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rule of the heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poisonous snakes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Black Sea*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *capacious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *embrace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity (for Othello)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately test it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wanton*[Return to reference](#) °



### 3.4

*Enter* DESDEMONA, EMILIA, *and* CLOWN.

DESDEMONA Do you know, sirrah,<sup>1</sup> where Lieutenant Cassio lies?

CLOWN I dare not say he lies anywhere.

DESDEMONA Why, man?

5 CLOWN He's a soldier, and for me to say a soldier lies, 'tis stabbing.

DESDEMONA Go to; where lodges he?

CLOWN To tell you where he lodges is to tell you where I lie.

10 DESDEMONA Can anything be made of this?

CLOWN I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging and say he lies here or he lies there were to lie in mine own throat.<sup>o</sup>

DESDEMONA Can you inquire him out and be edified by report?

15 CLOWN I will catechize the world for him—that is, make questions and by them answer.

DESDEMONA Seek him, bid him come hither. Tell him I have moved<sup>o</sup> my lord on his behalf and hope all will be well.

20 CLOWN To do this is within the compass<sup>o</sup> of man's wit,

and therefore I will attempt the doing it. *Exit*

CLOWN.

DESDEMONA Where should<sup>o</sup> I lose the handkerchief,  
Emilia?

EMILIA I know not, madam.

25

DESDEMONA Believe me, I had rather have lost my  
purse

Full of crusadoes,<sup>o</sup> and but<sup>o</sup> my noble Moor  
Is true of mind and made of no such baseness  
As jealous creatures are, it were enough  
To put him to ill-thinking.

EMILIA Is he not jealous?

30

DESDEMONA Who, he? I think the sun where he was  
born

Drew all such humors from him.<sup>2</sup>

*Enter* OTHELLO.

EMILIA Look where he  
comes.

DESDEMONA [*aside*] I will not leave him now till  
Cassio be

Called to him.—How is't with you, my lord?

35

OTHELLO Well, my good lady. [*Aside*] O, hardness to  
dissemble!—

How do you, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA Well, my good lord.

OTHELLO Give me your hand. This hand is moist, my  
lady.

DESDEMONA It hath felt no age nor known no  
sorrow.

OTHELLO This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.<sup>3</sup>

40

Hot, hot and moist. This hand of yours requires  
A sequester from liberty: fasting and prayer,  
Much castigation, exercise devout;  
For here's a young and sweating devil here  
That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,

A frank<sup>o</sup> one.

45 DESDEMONA You may indeed say so,  
 For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart.  
 OTHELLO A liberal hand. The hearts of old gave  
 hands,  
 But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.<sup>4</sup>

DESDEMONA I cannot speak of this. Come now, your  
 promise.

50 OTHELLO What promise, chuck?<sup>o</sup>  
 DESDEMONA I have sent to bid Cassio come speak  
 with you.  
 OTHELLO I have a salt and sorry rheum<sup>o</sup> offends  
 me;  
 Lend me thy handkerchief.

DESDEMONA Here, my lord.

OTHELLO That which I gave you.

DESDEMONA I have it not about  
 me.

55 OTHELLO Not?  
 DESDEMONA No, faith, my lord.  
 OTHELLO That's a fault. That  
 handkerchief  
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give.  
 She was a charmer<sup>o</sup> and could almost read  
 The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept  
 it,

60 'Twould make her amiable<sup>o</sup> and subdue my father  
 Entirely to her love; but if she lost it  
 Or made a gift of it, my father's eye  
 Should hold her loathèd, and his spirits should hunt  
 After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,  
 And bid me, when my fate would have me wived,  
 65 To give it her.<sup>o</sup> I did so; and—take heed on't!—  
 Make it a darling like your precious eye.  
 To lose't or give't away were such perdition<sup>o</sup>

As nothing else could match.

DESDEMONA

Is't possible?

70

OTHELLO 'Tis true. There's magic in the web of it:  
A sibyl<sup>o</sup> that had numbered in the world

The sun to course two hundred compasses,<sup>5</sup>

In her prophetic fury<sup>o</sup> sewed the work;

The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,

75

And it was dyed in mummy,<sup>6</sup> which the skillful  
Conserved of<sup>o</sup> maidens' hearts.

DESDEMONA

I'faith? Is't true?

OTHELLO Most veritable; therefore look to't well.

DESDEMONA Then would to God that I had never  
seen't!

OTHELLO Ha? wherefore?

80

DESDEMONA Why do you speak so startingly and  
rash?<sup>o</sup>

OTHELLO Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is't out  
o'th'way?

DESDEMONA Heaven bless us!

OTHELLO Say you?

DESDEMONA It is not lost; but what an if<sup>o</sup> it were?

OTHELLO How?

85

DESDEMONA I say it is not lost.

OTHELLO Fetch't, let me see't!

DESDEMONA Why, so I can; but I will not now.

This is a trick to put me from my suit.

Pray you let Cassio be received again.

90

OTHELLO Fetch me the handkerchief, my mind  
misgives—

DESDEMONA Come, come!

You'll never meet a more sufficient<sup>o</sup> man—

OTHELLO The handkerchief!

DESDEMONA I pray, talk me of  
Cassio.

OTHELLO The handkerchief!<sup>7</sup>

95 DESDEMONA A man that all his time  
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,  
Shared dangers with you—  
OTHELLO The handkerchief!  
DESDEMONA I'faith, you are to blame.  
OTHELLO 'Swounds! *Exit*  
OTHELLO.  
100 EMILIA Is not this man jealous?  
DESDEMONA I ne'er saw this before.  
Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief;  
I am most unhappy in the loss of it.  
EMILIA 'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.<sup>8</sup>  
They are all but<sup>o</sup> stomachs, and we all but food;  
105 They eat us hungerly, and when they are full  
They belch us.  
*Enter IAGO and CASSIO.*  
Look you, Cassio and my husband.  
IAGO There is no other way; 'tis she must do't;  
And lo the happiness!<sup>9</sup> go and importune her.  
DESDEMONA How now, good Cassio, what's the news  
110 with you?  
CASSIO Madam, my former suit. I do beseech you  
That by your virtuous means I may again  
Exist and be a member of his love  
Whom I, with all the office<sup>o</sup> of my heart,  
115 Entirely honor. I would not be delayed.  
If my offense be of such mortal<sup>o</sup> kind  
That nor<sup>o</sup> my service past nor present sorrows  
Nor purposed merit in futurity  
Can ransom me into his love again,  
But to know so<sup>o</sup> must be my benefit;  
120 So<sup>o</sup> shall I clothe me in a forced content  
And shut<sup>o</sup> myself up in some other course  
To fortune's alms.  
DESDEMONA Alas, thrice-gentle Cassio,

My advocacy is not now in tune.<sup>1</sup>  
 125 My lord is not my lord, nor should I know him,  
 Were he in favor<sup>o</sup> as in humor<sup>o</sup> altered.  
 So help me every spirit sanctified  
 As I have spoken for you all my best  
 And stood within the blank<sup>2</sup> of his displeasure  
 For my free speech. You must awhile be patient.  
 130 What I can do I will, and more I will  
 Than for myself I dare. Let that suffice you.  
 IAGO Is my lord angry?  
 EMILIA He went hence but now,  
 And certainly in strange unquietness.  
 IAGO Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon  
 135 When it hath blown his ranks into the air  
 And, like the devil, from his very arm  
 Puffed his own brother<sup>3</sup>—and is he angry?  
 Something of moment then. I will go meet him;  
 There's matter in't indeed if he be angry.  
 140 DESDEMONA I prithee do so. *Exit*  
 [IAGO].  
 Something sure of state<sup>4</sup>—  
 Either from Venice, or some unhatched practice<sup>o</sup>  
 Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him—  
 Hath puddled his clear spirit; and in such cases  
 Men's natures wrangle with inferior things,  
 145 Though great ones are their object. 'Tis even so.  
 For let our finger ache, and it endues<sup>o</sup>  
 Our other, healthful members even to a sense  
 Of pain. Nay, we must think men are not gods,  
 Nor of them look for such observancy<sup>o</sup>  
 150 As fits the bridal.<sup>o</sup>—Beshrew me<sup>o</sup> much, Emilia.  
 I was, unhandsome<sup>o</sup> warrior as I am,  
 Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;  
 But now I find I had suborned the witness,  
 And he's indicted falsely.<sup>5</sup>

155 EMILIA Pray heaven it be  
 State matters, as you think, and no conception  
 Nor no jealous toy<sup>o</sup> concerning you.  
 DESDEMONA Alas the day! I never gave him cause.  
 EMILIA But jealous souls will not be answered so;  
 They are not ever jealous for the cause,  
 160 But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster  
 Begot upon itself, born on itself.  
 DESDEMONA Heaven keep the monster from Othello's  
 mind!  
 EMILIA Lady, amen!  
 DESDEMONA I will go seek him; Cassio, walk here  
 165 about.  
 If I do find him fit, I'll move your suit  
 And seek to effect it to my uttermost.  
 CASSIO I humbly thank your ladyship.  
*Exeunt* DESDEMONA and EMILIA.  
*Enter* BIANCA.<sup>6</sup>  
 BIANCA Save you,<sup>o</sup> friend Cassio!  
 CASSIO What make<sup>o</sup> you from  
 home?  
 How is't with you, my most fair Bianca?  
 170 I'faith, sweet love, I was coming to your house.  
 BIANCA And I was going to your lodging, Cassio.  
 What? keep a week away? seven days and nights?  
 Eightscore-eight hours? And lovers' absent hours  
 More tedious than the dial eightscore times!<sup>7</sup>  
 175 O weary reckoning!<sup>o</sup>  
 CASSIO Pardon me, Bianca;  
 I have this while with leaden thoughts been pressed,  
 But I shall in a more continue<sup>o</sup> time  
 Strike off<sup>o</sup> this score of absence. Sweet Bianca,  
 [*Gives her* DESDEMONA'S *handkerchief.*]  
 Take me this work out.<sup>o</sup>  
 180

BIANCA O, Cassio! whence came  
 this?  
 This is some token from a newer friend;  
 To the felt absence now I feel a cause.  
 Is't come to this? Well, well.  
 CASSIO Go to,<sup>o</sup> woman!  
 Throw your vile guesses in the devil's teeth,  
 From whence you have them. You are jealous now  
 185 That this is from some mistress some remembrance;  
 No, by my faith, Bianca.  
 BIANCA Why, whose is it?  
 CASSIO I know not neither; I found it in my  
 chamber.  
 I like the work well; ere it be demanded,<sup>o</sup>  
 190 As like<sup>o</sup> enough it will, I would have it copied.  
 Take it and do't, and leave me for this time.  
 BIANCA Leave you? Wherefore?  
 CASSIO I do attend here on the general,  
 And think it no addition,<sup>o</sup> nor my wish,  
 To have him see me womaned.  
 195 BIANCA Why, I pray you?  
 CASSIO Not that I love you not.  
 BIANCA But that you do not  
 love me.  
 I pray you bring me on the way a little,  
 And say if I shall see you soon at night.  
 CASSIO 'Tis but a little way that I can bring you,  
 For I attend here; but I'll see you soon.  
 200 BIANCA 'Tis very good—I must be circumstanced.<sup>8</sup>  
*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 3.4: Location: Before the citadel.[Return to reference 3.4](#)
- Note 1: A form of address to an inferior.[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: As if the African sun dried up the bodily fluids (“humors”) that produce jealousy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This demonstrates fertility (perhaps, by implication, lust) and a generous (hinting at “loose”) heart. A moist hand was thought to be a sign of active desire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, these days the joining of hands doesn’t signify the joining of hearts.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “That . . . compasses”: who was two hundred years old.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fluid drained from mummified bodies, supposedly magical.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Desdemona’s “I pray, talk me of Cassio” and Othello’s “The handkerchief!” are only in Q.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, it doesn’t take long to see what a man is.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: What a happy coincidence (seeing Desdemona).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: My advocacy isn’t working properly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The “blank” was the white spot at the center of a target.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Blew up his own brother (and Othello wasn’t angry even then).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Surely some official business.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Made the witness lie and so accused Othello falsely.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Bianca” means “white” in Italian—an ironic reversal of conventional color imagery, given that Bianca is a “customer” (courtesan, 4.1.119).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: “Lovers’ . . . times”: each hour lovers are parted is eightscore (160) times more tedious than normal clock time.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Content with what circumstances offer.[Return to reference 8](#)

# Notes

- °: *lie outrageously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *petitioned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scope*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *did*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gold coins* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(sexually) open*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woodchuck (affectionate)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *badly watering eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorceress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desirable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to my wife*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loss; damnation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *female prophet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rapture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preserved out of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitfully and urgently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an if = if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complete*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nothing but*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *duty; loyal service*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deadly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neither*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even to know this*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if so*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfinished plot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *induces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *careful attention*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wedding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(mild curse)*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *unskilled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God save you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *calculating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *copy this embroidery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stop it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sought out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(to my cause)*[Return to reference](#) °

## 4.1

*Enter* OTHELLO *and* IAGO.

IAGO Will you think so?

OTHELLO Think so, Iago?

IAGO What,  
To kiss in private?

OTHELLO An unauthorized kiss!

IAGO Or to be naked with her friend in bed  
An hour or more, not meaning any harm?

5 OTHELLO Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?  
It is hypocrisy against the devil.<sup>1</sup>  
They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,  
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt  
heaven.<sup>2</sup>

IAGO If they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip;<sup>o</sup>  
But if I give my wife a handkerchief—

10 OTHELLO What then?

IAGO Why then, 'tis hers, my lord; and being hers,  
She may, I think, bestow't on any man.

OTHELLO She is protectress of her honor too;  
May she give that?

15 IAGO Her honor is an essence that's not seen;  
They<sup>o</sup> have it very oft that have it not.  
But for the handkerchief—

OTHELLO By heaven, I would most gladly have  
forgot it!

20 Thou said'st—O, it comes o'er my memory  
As doth the raven o'er the infectious<sup>o</sup> house,<sup>3</sup>  
Boding to all!—he had my handkerchief.

IAGO Ay, what of that?

OTHELLO That's not so good now.

IAGO What if I had said I had seen him do you  
wrong?

25 Or heard him say—as knaves be such abroad<sup>4</sup>  
 Who (having by their own importunate suit  
 Or voluntary dotage<sup>o</sup> of some mistress  
 Convinced or supplied<sup>o</sup> them) cannot choose  
 But they must blab—  
 OTHELLO Hath he said anything?  
 30 IAGO He hath, my lord, but be you well assured,  
 No more than he'll unswear.  
 OTHELLO What hath he said?  
 IAGO Faith, that he did . . . I know not what he did.  
 OTHELLO What? What?  
 IAGO Lie . . .  
 OTHELLO With her?  
 IAGO With her, on her; what you  
 will.  
 35 OTHELLO Lie with her? lie on her? We say lie on her  
 when  
 they belie<sup>o</sup> her. Lie with her? 'Swounds, that's  
 fulsome.<sup>o</sup>—Handkerchief! confessions!  
 handkerchief!—To<sup>5</sup>  
 confess, and be hanged for his labor. First to be  
 hanged,  
 and then to confess: I tremble at it. Nature would  
 not  
 invest herself in such shadowing passion without  
 40 some  
 instruction.<sup>6</sup> It is not words that shakes me thus.  
 Pish!  
 Noses, ears, and lips! Is't possible? Confess?  
 Handkerchief? O devil! *Falls in a trance.*  
 IAGO Work on;  
 45 My medicine works! Thus credulous fools are caught,  
 And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,  
 All guiltless, meet reproach.—What ho! my lord!  
 My lord, I say! Othello!

*Enter* CASSIO.

How now, Cassio?

CASSIO What's the matter?

50 IAGO My lord is fallen into an epilepsy.  
This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.

CASSIO Rub him about the temples.

IAGO No, forbear.

The lethargy<sup>o</sup> must have his<sup>o</sup> quiet course;  
If not, he foams at mouth and by and by  
Breaks out to savage madness. Look, he stirs.  
55 Do you withdraw yourself a little while;  
He will recover straight.<sup>o</sup> When he is gone,  
I would on great occasion<sup>o</sup> speak with you.

[*Exit* CASSIO.]

How is it, general? Have you not hurt your head?<sup>7</sup>

OTHELLO Dost thou mock me?

60 IAGO I mock you not, by  
heaven.

Would you would bear your fortune like a man!

OTHELLO A hornèd man's a monster and a beast.

IAGO There's many a beast then in a populous city,  
And many a civil<sup>o</sup> monster.

OTHELLO Did he confess it?

65 IAGO Good sir, be a man:  
Think every bearded fellow that's but yoked  
May draw with you.<sup>8</sup> There's millions now alive  
That nightly lie in those unproper beds  
Which they dare swear peculiar.<sup>9</sup> Your case is better.  
O, 'tis the spite of hell, the fiend's arch-mock,<sup>o</sup>  
70 To lip<sup>o</sup> a wanton in a secure<sup>o</sup> couch  
And to suppose her chaste. No, let me know;  
And knowing what I am,<sup>o</sup> I know what she shall be.

OTHELLO O, thou art wise, 'tis certain.

IAGO Stand you a  
while

apart,  
Confine yourself but in a patient list.°  
75 Whilst you were here, o'er-whelmèd with your grief—  
A passion most unsuited such a man—  
Cassio came hither. I shifted him away  
And laid good 'scuses upon your ecstasy,°  
80 Bade him anon return and here speak with me,  
The which he promised. Do but encave° yourself,  
And mark the fleers,° the gibes, and notable scorns  
That dwell in every region of his face;  
For I will make him tell the tale anew:  
Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when  
85 He hath and is again to cope° your wife.  
I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience!  
Or I shall say you're all in all in spleen,°  
And nothing of a man.

OTHELLO Dost thou hear, Iago?  
I will be found most cunning in my patience;  
90 But—dost thou hear?—most bloody.

IAGO That's not  
amiss,

But yet keep time° in all. Will you withdraw?

[OTHELLO *withdraws*.]

Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,  
A huswife° that by selling her desires  
Buys herself bread and cloth. It is a creature  
95 That dotes on Cassio—as 'tis the strumpet's plague  
To beguile many and be beguiled by one.  
He, when he hears of her, cannot restrain  
From the excess of laughter. Here he comes.

*Enter* CASSIO.

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;  
100 And his unbookish° jealousy must conster°  
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviors  
Quite in the wrong. How do you, lieutenant?  
CASSIO The worser that you give me the addition°

Whose want even kills me.  
105 IAGO Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure on't.  
Now if this suit lay in Bianca's power,  
How quickly should you speed!  
CASSIO Alas, poor caitiff!°  
OTHELLO Look how he laughs already!  
IAGO I never knew woman love man so.  
110 CASSIO Alas, poor rogue! I think, i'faith, she loves  
me.  
OTHELLO Now he denies it faintly and laughs it out.  
IAGO Do you hear, Cassio?  
OTHELLO Now he importunes him  
To tell it o'er. Go to! well said, well said!  
IAGO She gives it out that you shall marry her.  
115 Do you intend it?  
CASSIO Ha, ha, ha!  
OTHELLO Do ye triumph, Roman?<sup>1</sup> do you triumph?  
CASSIO I marry? What! a customer?° Prithee bear  
some  
charity to my wit;° do not think it so unwholesome.  
120 Ha, ha,  
ha!  
OTHELLO So, so, so, so! they laugh that wins.  
IAGO Faith, the cry goes that you marry her.  
CASSIO Prithee say true.  
IAGO I am a very villain else.°  
125 OTHELLO Have you scored° me? Well.  
CASSIO This is the monkey's own giving out.<sup>2</sup> She is  
persuaded I will marry her out of her own love and  
flattery,  
not out of my promise.  
OTHELLO Iago beckons me; now he begins the  
130 story.  
[OTHELLO *draws closer.*]



CASSIO She was here even now; she haunts me in  
every  
place. I was the other day talking on the sea-bank  
with  
certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble<sup>o</sup>  
and  
falls me thus about my neck—  
OTHELLO Crying "O dear Cassio!" as it were: his  
135 gesture  
imports<sup>o</sup> it.  
CASSIO So hangs and lolls and weeps upon me, so  
shakes  
and pulls me. Ha, ha, ha!  
OTHELLO Now he tells how she plucked him to my  
chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but not that  
140 dog I shall  
throw it to.<sup>3</sup>  
CASSIO Well, I must leave her company.  
IAGO Before me! look where she comes!  
*Enter* BIANCA.  
CASSIO 'Tis such another fitchew!<sup>4</sup> marry, a  
perfumed one!  
What do you mean by this haunting of me?  
145 BIANCA Let the devil and his dam<sup>o</sup> haunt you! What  
did  
you mean by that same handkerchief you gave me  
even  
now? I was a fine fool to take it. I must take out<sup>o</sup>  
the  
work? A likely piece of work,<sup>5</sup> that you should find it  
in  
your chamber and know not who left it there! This is  
150 some minx's token, and I must take out the work?  
There,

give it your hobby-horse!° Wheresoever you had it,  
 I'll  
 take out no work on't.  
 CASSIO How now, my sweet Bianca?  
 How now? how now?  
 155 OTHELLO By heaven, that should° be my  
 handkerchief!  
 BIANCA If you'll come to supper tonight, you may; if  
 you  
 will not, come when you are next prepared for.6  
*Exit.*  
 IAGO After her, after her!  
 CASSIO Faith, I must; she'll rail in the streets else.  
 160 IAGO Will you sup there?  
 CASSIO Faith, I intend so.  
 IAGO Well, I may chance to see you, for I would  
 very fain  
 speak with you.  
 CASSIO Prithee come, will you?  
 165 IAGO Go to; say no more.  
*Exit CASSIO.*  
 OTHELLO [*comes forward*] How shall I murder him,  
 Iago?  
 IAGO Did you perceive how he laughed at his vice?  
 OTHELLO O Iago!  
 IAGO And did you see the handkerchief?  
 170 OTHELLO Was that mine?  
 IAGO Yours, by this hand! and to see how he prizes  
 the  
 foolish woman, your wife! She gave it him, and he  
 hath  
 given it his whore.  
 OTHELLO I would have him nine years a-killing!7—A  
 175 fine  
 woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman!

IAGO Nay, you must forget that.  
 OTHELLO Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned  
 tonight, for she shall not live! No, my heart is turned  
 to  
 180 stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand.—O, the world  
 hath not a sweeter creature! She might lie by an  
 emperor's  
 side and command him tasks.  
 IAGO Nay, that's not your way.◊  
 OTHELLO Hang her!—I do but say what she is: so  
 delicate  
 185 with her needle; an admirable musician (O, she will  
 sing  
 the savageness out of a bear!); of so high and  
 plenteous  
 wit and invention!◊  
 IAGO She's the worse for all this.  
 OTHELLO O, a thousand, a thousand times!—And  
 then of  
 190 so gentle◊ a condition!  
 IAGO Ay, too gentle.◊  
 OTHELLO Nay, that's certain.—But yet the pity of it,  
 Iago!  
 O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!  
 IAGO If you are so fond◊ over her iniquity, give her  
 patent◊  
 195 to offend; for if it touch not you, it comes near  
 nobody.  
 OTHELLO I will chop her into messes!◊ Cuckold me!  
 IAGO O, 'tis foul in her.  
 OTHELLO With mine officer!  
 IAGO That's fouler.  
 200 OTHELLO Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll  
 not  
 expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty  
 unprovide

my mind<sup>o</sup> again. This night, Iago.

IAGO Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed,  
even  
the bed she hath contaminated.

205 OTHELLO Good, good! The justice of it pleases. Very  
good!

IAGO And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker.<sup>o</sup> You  
shall  
hear more by midnight.

OTHELLO Excellent good!  
*A trumpet [within].*  
What trumpet is that same?

210 IAGO I warrant something from Venice.  
*Enter* LODOVICO, DESDEMONA, *and attendants.*  
'Tis Lodovico; this comes from the duke.  
See, your wife's with him.

LODOVICO God save you, worthy general.

215 OTHELLO With all my heart,<sup>o</sup> sir.

LODOVICO The duke and the senators of Venice  
greet you.  
*[Gives him a letter.]*

OTHELLO I kiss the instrument<sup>o</sup> of their pleasures.<sup>o</sup>  
*[Opens the letter and reads.]*

DESDEMONA And what's the news, good cousin  
Lodovico?

IAGO I am very glad to see you, signor.  
Welcome to Cyprus.

220 LODOVICO I thank you. How does Lieutenant Cassio?

IAGO Lives, sir.

DESDEMONA Cousin, there's fallen between him and  
my lord  
An unkind<sup>o</sup> breach; but you shall make all well.

225 OTHELLO Are you sure of that?

DESDEMONA My lord?

OTHELLO *[reads]* "This fail you not to do, as you will  
..."

LODOVICO He did not call: he's busy in the paper.  
Is there division 'twixt my lord and Cassio?

230 DESDEMONA A most unhappy one; I would do much  
T'atone<sup>o</sup> them, for the love I bear to Cassio.

OTHELLO Fire and brimstone!

DESDEMONA My lord?

OTHELLO Are you wise?

DESDEMONA What, is he angry?

LODOVICO May be the letter  
moved him;  
For, as I think, they do command him home,  
Deputing Cassio in his government.<sup>o</sup>

235 DESDEMONA By my troth, I am glad on't.

OTHELLO Indeed!

DESDEMONA My  
lord?

OTHELLO I am glad to see you mad.<sup>8</sup>

DESDEMONA Why, sweet  
Othello?

OTHELLO Devil! [*Strikes her.*]

DESDEMONA I have not deserved this.

240 LODOVICO My lord, this would not be believed in  
Venice,  
Though I should swear I saw't. 'Tis very much;<sup>o</sup>  
Make her amends—she weeps.

OTHELLO O devil, devil!  
If that the earth could teem with<sup>o</sup> woman's tears,  
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.<sup>9</sup>  
Out of my sight!

DESDEMONA I will not stay to offend you.

245 LODOVICO Truly obedient lady!  
I do beseech your lordship call her back.

OTHELLO Mistress!

DESDEMONA My lord?

OTHELLO What would you<sup>o</sup> with her, sir?

250 LODOVICO Who, I, my  
lord?

OTHELLO    Ay, you did wish that I would make her  
turn. 

Sir, she can turn, and turn,<sup>o</sup> and yet go on  
And turn again. And she can weep, sir, weep.  
And she's obedient; as you say, obedient,  
Very obedient.—Proceed you in your tears.—  
Concerning this, sir—O well-painted passion!—  
I am commanded home.—Get you away!  
I'll send for you anon.—Sir, I obey the mandate  
And will return to Venice.—Hence, avaunt!<sup>o</sup>

[*Exit* DESDEMONA.]

260 Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, tonight  
I do entreat that we may sup together.  
You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus.—Goats and  
monkeys!<sup>1</sup>

*Exit.*

LODOVICO Is this the noble Moor whom our full  
senate  
Call all-in-all sufficient? Is this the nature  
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue  
The shot of accident nor dart of chance  
Could neither graze nor pierce?

IAGO He is much changed.

LODOVICO    Are his wits safe? Is he not light of brain?

IAGO    He's that he is; I may not breathe my  
               censure.

270      What he might be—if what he might he is not—  
I would to heaven he were.

LODOVICO                      What! Strike his wife?

IAGO 'Faith, that was not so well; yet would I knew  
That stroke would prove the worst.

LODOVICO Is it his use?<sup>o</sup>

Or did the letters work upon his blood—  
And new create his fault?

IAGO                                      Alas, alas!

It is not honesty in me to speak  
What I have seen and known. You shall observe him,  
And his own courses will denote him so  
That I may save my speech. Do but go after  
And mark how he continues.

LODOVICO    I am sorry that I am deceived in him.  
*Exeunt.*

IAGO                                  Alas, alas!

It is not honesty in me to speak  
What I have seen and known. You shall observe him,  
And his own courses<sup>o</sup> will denote him so  
That I may save my speech. Do but go after  
And mark how he continues.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Who lie in beds that don't belong entirely to them but that they would swear are exclusively their own.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Othello draws on associations either with Rome's imperial successes (and subsequent collapse) or with the Roman practice of holding celebratory processions (called triumphs) for military victors.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, this is Bianca's own story.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, I'm envisioning my revenge, but the time is not yet quite right.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Polecat, associated with prostitutes because of its bad smell and supposed lecherousness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An implausible story.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Come next time I prepare for you (never).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I would like to spend nine years killing him.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Othello is pleased that Desdemona is rejoicing in Cassio's promotion and thus revealing their adulterous affair, which she would be "mad" to do in public and in front of him.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Each drop would cause the earth to conceive a crocodile (crocodiles proverbially wept false tears for their victims).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Symbols of lust.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *an excusable sin*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *they are reputed to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plague-infested*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *doting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *seduced or satisfied*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slander* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nauseating*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *trance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *important matters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *city-dwelling* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devil's greatest mock* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kiss* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an unsuspected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(a cuckold)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boundary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for your fit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hide* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sneers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *copulate with* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *completely impulsive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maintain control* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hussy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *construe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *title* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wretch* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courtesan* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sense* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if it's not true* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scored off* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *toy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indicates* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mother* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *copy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mountable woman* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *must* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the way to think)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagination* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *highly born* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generous (sexually)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *license*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pieces of food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weaken my resolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *murderer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thank you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bearer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to reconcile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *official position*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *going too far*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *become pregnant by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do you wish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(sexually)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *custom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *actions*[Return to reference](#) °

## 4.2

*Enter* OTHELLO *and* EMILIA.

OTHELLO You have seen nothing then?

EMILIA Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect.

OTHELLO Yes, you have seen Cassio and she together.

EMILIA But then I saw no harm, and then I heard  
Each syllable that breath made up between them.

5 OTHELLO What, did they never whisper?

EMILIA Never, my  
lord.

OTHELLO Nor send you out o'th' way?

EMILIA Never.

OTHELLO To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask, nor  
nothing?

EMILIA Never, my lord.

10 OTHELLO That's strange.

EMILIA I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,  
Lay down my soul at stake. If you think other,  
Remove your thought; it doth abuse your bosom.  
If any wretch have put this in your head,

15 Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse,<sup>1</sup>

For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,  
There's no man happy. The purest of their wives  
Is foul as slander.

OTHELLO Bid her come hither—go. *Exit*

EMILIA.

20 She says enough; yet she's a simple bawd  
That cannot say as much.<sup>2</sup> This is a subtle whore:  
A closet lock and key<sup>o</sup> of villainous secrets;  
And yet she'll kneel and pray; I have seen her do't.

*Enter* DESDEMONA *and* EMILIA.

DESDEMONA My lord, what is your will?

OTHELLO Pray you,  
 chuck,  
 come hither.  
 DESDEMONA What is your pleasure?  
 25 OTHELLO Let me see your  
 eyes.  
 Look in my face.  
 DESDEMONA What horrible fancy's this?  
 OTHELLO [*to EMILIA*] Some of your function,<sup>3</sup>  
 mistress:  
 Leave procreants<sup>o</sup> alone and shut the door;  
 Cough or cry "hem" if anybody come.  
 Your mystery, your mystery!<sup>o</sup> Nay, dispatch! *Exit*  
 30 EMILIA.  
 DESDEMONA Upon my knees, what doth your speech  
 import?  
 I understand a fury in your words,  
 But not the words.  
 OTHELLO Why? What art thou?  
 DESDEMONA Your wife, my lord, your true and loyal  
 wife.  
 35 OTHELLO Come, swear it! damn thyself!  
 Lest, being<sup>o</sup> like one of heaven, the devils  
 themselves  
 Should fear to seize thee. Therefore be double-  
 damned:  
 Swear thou art honest!  
 DESDEMONA Heaven doth truly know it.  
 OTHELLO Heaven truly knows that thou art false as  
 hell.  
 40 DESDEMONA To whom, my lord? With whom? How  
 am I false?  
 OTHELLO Ah, Desdemon! away, away, away!  
 DESDEMONA Alas the heavy day! Why do you weep?  
 Am I the motive of these tears, my lord?

45 If haply<sup>o</sup> you my father do suspect  
An instrument of this your calling back,  
Lay not your blame on me. If you have lost him,  
I have lost him too.

OTHELLO Had it pleased heaven  
To try me with affliction, had they rained  
All kind of sores and shames on my bare head,  
Steeped me in poverty to the very lips,  
50 Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,  
I should have found in some place of my soul  
A drop of patience. But, alas, to make me  
The fixèd figure for the time of scorn  
To point his slow and moving finger at!<sup>4</sup>  
55 Yet could I bear that too—well, very well;  
But there where I have garnered<sup>o</sup> up my heart,  
Where either I must live or bear no life,  
The fountain from the which my current runs  
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence,  
60 Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads  
To knot and gender<sup>5</sup> in!—Turn thy complexion there,  
Patience,<sup>6</sup> thou young and rose-lipped cherubin;  
Ay, here look grim as hell!

65 DESDEMONA I hope my noble lord esteems me  
honest.

OTHELLO O, ay, as summer flies are in the shambles,  
<sup>o</sup>  
That quicken even with blowing.<sup>7</sup> O thou weed,  
Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet  
That the sense aches at thee,  
Would thou hadst never been born!

70 DESDEMONA Alas, what ignorant sin have I  
committed?

OTHELLO Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,  
Made to write "whore" upon? What committed?  
Committed?<sup>8</sup> O, thou public commoner!<sup>o</sup>

75 I should make very forges of my cheeks  
 That would to cinders burn up modesty  
 Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed?  
 Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks;  
 The bawdy wind that kisses all it meets  
 Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth  
 80 And will not hear't. What committed?  
 DESDEMONA By heaven, you do me wrong!  
 OTHELLO Are not you a strumpet?  
 DESDEMONA No, as I am a  
 Christian!  
 If to preserve this vessel for my lord  
 From any other foul unlawful touch  
 85 Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.  
 OTHELLO What, not a whore?  
 DESDEMONA No, as I shall be saved!  
 OTHELLO Is't possible?  
 DESDEMONA O, heaven forgive us!  
 OTHELLO I cry you mercy  
 then.  
 I took you for that cunning whore of Venice  
 90 That married with Othello.—You! Mistress!  
 That have the office opposite to Saint Peter  
 And keeps the gate of hell. You, you!  
*Enter EMILIA.*  
 Ay, you.  
 We have done our course; [giving her money]  
 there's money for your pains;  
 I pray you turn the key and keep our counsel.  
 95 *Exit.*  
 EMILIA Alas, what does this gentleman conceive?  
 How do you, madam? how do you, my good lady?  
 DESDEMONA Faith, half asleep.  
 EMILIA Good madam, what's the matter with my  
 lord?  
 DESDEMONA With who?

100 EMILIA Why, with my lord, madam.  
 DESDEMONA Who is thy lord?  
 EMILIA He that is yours, sweet lady.  
 DESDEMONA I have none. Do not talk to me, Emilia;  
 I cannot weep, nor answers have I none  
 But what should go by water.° Prithee tonight  
 Lay on my bed my wedding sheets, remember;  
 105 And call thy husband hither.  
 EMILIA Here's a change indeed!  
*Exit.*  
 DESDEMONA 'Tis meet° I should be used so, very meet.  
 How have I been behaved that he might stick  
 The small'st opinion on my least misuse?°  
*Enter IAGO and EMILIA.*  
 110 IAGO What is your pleasure, madam? How is't with you?  
 DESDEMONA I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes  
 Do it with gentle means and easy tasks.  
 He might have chid me so; for in good faith  
 I am a child to chiding.  
 IAGO What is the matter, lady?  
 115 EMILIA Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhored her,°  
 Thrown such despite° and heavy terms upon her,  
 That true hearts cannot bear it.  
 DESDEMONA Am I that name, Iago?  
 IAGO What name, fair lady?  
 DESDEMONA Such as she said my lord did say I was.  
 120 EMILIA He called her whore. A beggar in his drink  
 Could not have laid such terms upon his callet.°  
 IAGO Why did he so?

DESDEMONA I do not know; I am sure I am none  
such.

IAGO Do not weep, do not weep. Alas the day!

125 EMILIA Hath she forsook so many noble matches,  
Her father and her country and her friends,  
To be called whore? Would it not make one weep?

DESDEMONA It is my wretched fortune.

IAGO Beshrew<sup>o</sup>  
him for't!  
How comes this trick<sup>o</sup> upon him?

DESDEMONA Nay, heaven doth  
know.

130 EMILIA I will be hanged if some eternal villain,  
Some busy<sup>o</sup> and insinuating rogue,  
Some cogging,<sup>o</sup> cozening<sup>o</sup> slave, to get some office,  
Have not devised this slander. I will be hanged else.

IAGO Fie! there is no such man; it is impossible.

135 DESDEMONA If any such there be, heaven pardon  
him.

EMILIA A halter<sup>o</sup> pardon him, and hell gnaw his  
bones!  
Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her  
company?  
What place? what time? what form? what likelihood?  
The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave,  
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow.

140 O heaven, that such companions thou'dst unfold,<sup>o</sup>  
And put in every honest hand a whip  
To lash the rascals naked through the world  
Even from the east to th' west!

IAGO Speak within door.<sup>o</sup>

145 EMILIA O, fie upon them! Some such squire<sup>o</sup> he was  
That turned your wit the seamy side without<sup>o</sup>  
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

IAGO You are a fool; go to.



DESDEMONA O God,<sup>1</sup> Iago,  
 What shall I do to win my lord again?  
 Good friend, go to him; for by this light of heaven,  
 150 I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel:<sup>2</sup>  
 If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,  
 Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,  
 Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense  
 Delighted them in any other form,<sup>3</sup>  
 155 Or that I do not yet,<sup>o</sup> and ever did,  
 And ever will (though he do shake me off  
 To beggarly divorcement) love him dearly—  
 Comfort forswear me!<sup>o</sup> Unkindness may do much,  
 And his unkindness may defeat my life,  
 160 But never taint my love. [*She rises.*]  
 I cannot say "whore."  
 It does abhor<sup>4</sup> me now I speak the word.  
 To do the act that might the addition<sup>o</sup> earn,  
 Not the world's mass of vanity<sup>o</sup> could make me.  
 IAGO I pray you be content; 'tis but his humor;<sup>o</sup>  
 165 The business of the state does him offense.  
 DESDEMONA If 'twere no other—  
 IAGO It is but so, I  
 warrant.  
 [*Trumpets within.*]  
 Hark how these instruments summon to supper.  
 The messengers of Venice stays the meat;<sup>o</sup>  
 Go in, and weep not; all things shall be well.  
 170 *Exeunt* DESDEMONA and EMILIA.  
*Enter* RODERIGO.  
 How now, Roderigo?  
 RODERIGO I do not find that thou deal'st justly with  
 me.  
 IAGO What in the contrary?  
 RODERIGO Every day thou doff'st me with some  
 device,<sup>5</sup>

175 Iago, and rather, as it seems to me now, keep'st  
from me  
all conveniency<sup>o</sup> than suppliest me with the least  
advantage  
of hope. I will indeed no longer endure it. Nor am I  
yet persuaded to put up in peace what already I  
have  
foolishly suffered.

180 IAGO Will you hear me, Roderigo?  
RODERIGO Faith, I have heard too much; and your  
words  
and performances are no kin together.

IAGO You charge me most unjustly.

RODERIGO With naught but truth. I have wasted  
myself  
185 out of my means. The jewels you have had from me  
to  
deliver Desdemona would half have corrupted a  
votarist.<sup>o</sup>  
You have told me she hath received them, and  
returned  
me expectations and comforts of sudden respect and  
acquaintance, but I find none.

IAGO Well, go to, very well.

190 RODERIGO "Very well"! "go to"! I cannot go to,<sup>o</sup>  
man, nor  
'tis not very well. Nay, I think it is scurvy, and begin  
to  
find myself fopped<sup>o</sup> in it.

IAGO Very well.

195 RODERIGO I tell you 'tis not very well. I will make  
myself  
known to Desdemona. If she will return me my  
jewels, I  
will give over my suit and repent my unlawful  
solicitation.

If not, assure yourself I will seek satisfaction of you.

200 IAGO You have saido now.

RODERIGO Ay, and said nothing but what I protest intendment of doing.

IAGO Why, now I see there's mettle in thee, and even from this instant do build on thee a better opinion than  
205 ever before. Give me thy hand, Roderigo. Thou hast taken against me a most just exception, but yet I protest I have dealt most directly in thy affair.

RODERIGO It hath not appeared.

IAGO I grant indeed it hath not appeared, and your suspicion  
210 is not without wit and judgment. But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed which I have greater reason to believe now than ever—I mean purpose, courage, and valor—this night show it. If thou the next night following enjoy not Desdemona, take me from this world

215 with treachery and devise engines foro my life.

RODERIGO Well, what is it? Is it within reason and compass?o

IAGO Sir, there is especial commission come from Venice to depute Cassio in Othello's place.

220 RODERIGO Is that true? Why, then Othello and Desdemona return again to Venice.

IAGO O no; he goes into Mauritania<sup>6</sup> and taketh  
 away  
 with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be  
 lingered here by some accident; wherein none can  
 be so  
 determinate<sup>o</sup> as the removing of Cassio.  
 225 RODERIGO How do you mean "removing" him?  
 IAGO Why, by making him incapable of Othello's  
 place—  
 knocking out his brains.  
 RODERIGO And that you would have me to do.  
 IAGO Ay, if you dare do yourself a profit and a right.  
 230 He  
 sups tonight with a harlotry, and thither will I go to  
 him.  
 He knows not yet of his honorable fortune.<sup>o</sup> If you  
 will  
 watch his going thence, which I will fashion<sup>o</sup> to fall  
 out  
 between twelve and one, you may take him at your  
 pleasure.  
 I will be near to second your attempt, and he shall  
 235 fall between us. Come, stand not amazed at it, but  
 go  
 along with me. I will show you such a necessity in  
 his  
 death that you shall think yourself bound to put it on  
 him. It is now high suppertime, and the night grows  
 to  
 waste. About it!  
 240 RODERIGO I will hear further reason for this.  
 IAGO And you shall be satisfied.  
*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 4.2: Location: The citadel.[Return to reference 4.2](#)
- Note 1: In Genesis, the curse that God laid on the serpent who deceived Eve.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Yet it would be a simpleminded go-between who couldn't say as much as she did.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fulfill your bawd's function by guarding the door.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The designated object of scorn for this scornful time to point (as on a clock face) its slowly moving hand at.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To couple and engender.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Change color at the thought of that, Patience.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Who come to life (or bring their offspring to life and hence make the meat foul) as soon as the eggs are deposited. The point seems to be the speed of breeding, inferred from Desdemona's supposed infidelity.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lines 74–77 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "That . . . misuse": that would cause him to suspect even slightly the least fault (?).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The folio reads "Alas," in keeping with the censorship of oaths that led to many changes from the quarto text. Q's reading here, "O Good," is probably a misprint for "O God."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lines 151–64 (beginning with "Here") do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Took pleasure in anyone but him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Fill me with abhorrence; make me abhorrent, with a pun on "ab-whore."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You put me off with some trick.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Country in the western Sahara.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *a hider*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *copulators*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slaughterhouse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prostitute*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *closes its eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promiscuous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *within a cave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I beg your pardon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *business*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appear in tears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called her a whore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *behavior*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meddling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceiving* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hangman's noose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more softly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fellow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wrong side out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *still*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deny me divine solace*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *label*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all worldly splendor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mood*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are waiting to eat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nun*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *succeed sexually* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made a fool* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plots against* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possibility* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *effectual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *his promotion* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arrange* [Return to reference](#) °

### 4.3

*Enter* OTHELLO, LODOVICO, DESDEMONA, EMILIA, *and attendants*.

LODOVICO I do beseech you, sir, trouble yourself no further.

OTHELLO O, pardon me; 'twill do me good to walk.

LODOVICO [*to* DESDEMONA] Madam, good night. I humbly thank your ladyship.

DESDEMONA Your honor is most welcome.

OTHELLO Will you walk, sir?

O, Desdemona—

5

DESDEMONA My lord?

OTHELLO Get you to bed on th' instant. I will be returned

forthwith. Dismiss your attendant there. Look't be done.

DESDEMONA I will, my lord.

*Exeunt* [OTHELLO *with* LODOVICO *and attendants*].

10

EMILIA How goes it now? He looks gentler than he did.

DESDEMONA He says he will return incontinent,<sup>o</sup> And hath commanded me to go to bed, And bid me to dismiss you.

EMILIA Dismiss me?

DESDEMONA It was his bidding; therefore, good Emilia,

15

Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu. We must not now displease him.

EMILIA I would you had never seen him.

DESDEMONA So would not I: my love doth so approve him



That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—  
Prithee unp<sup>1</sup>in me—have grace and favor in them.

[EMILIA *helps* DESDEMONA *undress.*]

EMILIA I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.

DESDEMONA All's one. o Good faith, how foolish are our minds!

If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me  
In one of these same sheets.

EMILIA                                    Come, come—you  
talk.

25 DESDEMONA My mother had a maid called Barbary;  
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad  
And did forsake her. She had a Song of "Willow"—  
An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune—  
And she died singing it. That song tonight  
30 Will not go from my mind; I<sup>2</sup> have much to do  
But to<sup>3</sup> go hang my head all at one side  
And sing it, like poor Barbary. Prithee dispatch.<sup>o</sup>

EMILIA Shall I go fetch your nightgown?

DESDEMONA me here. No. Unpin

This Lodovico is a proper man.

EMILIA     A very handsome man.

35 DESDEMONA He speaks well.

EMILIA I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot

to Palestine for a touch of his nether<sup>o</sup> lip.

DESDEMONA [*sings*]

40 The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,  
Sing all a green willow;<sup>4</sup>  
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,  
Sing willow, willow, willow.

The fresh streams ran by her and murmured her  
 moans,  
 Sing willow, willow, willow;  
 Her salt tears fell from her and softened the  
 45 stones,  
 Sing willow—  
 [to EMILIA] Lay by these.°  
 [sings]  
 willow, willow.  
 [to EMILIA] Prithee hie° thee—he'll come anon.°  
 [sings]  
 Sing all a green willow must be my garland.  
 50 Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve.  
 Nay, that's not next. Hark, who is't that knocks?  
 EMILIA It's the wind.  
 DESDEMONA [sings]  
 I called my love false love, but what said he  
 then?⁵  
 Sing willow, willow, willow;  
 55 If I court more women, you'll couch with more  
 men.  
 [to EMILIA] So, get thee gone, good night. Mine eyes  
 do  
 itch—  
 Doth that bode° weeping?  
 EMILIA 'Tis neither here nor  
 there.  
 DESDEMONA I have heard it said so. O, these men,  
 these men!⁶  
 60 Dost thou in conscience think—tell me, Emilia—  
 That there be women do abuse their husbands  
 In such gross kind?°  
 EMILIA There be some such, no  
 question.

DESDEMONA Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the  
 world?  
 EMILIA Why, would not you?  
 DESDEMONA No, by this heavenly  
 light!  
 EMILIA Nor I neither, by this heavenly light:  
 65 I might do't as well i'th' dark.  
 DESDEMONA Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the  
 world?  
 EMILIA The world's a huge thing: it is a great price  
 for a  
 small vice.  
 DESDEMONA In troth, I think thou wouldst not.  
 70 EMILIA In troth, I think I should—and undo't when I  
 had  
 done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint  
 ring,<sup>7</sup> nor for measures of lawn,<sup>o</sup> nor for gowns,  
 petticoats,  
 nor caps, nor any petty exhibition.<sup>o</sup> But for all the  
 whole world—'Uds<sup>o</sup> pity! who would not make her  
 75 husband  
 a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture  
 purgatory for't.  
 DESDEMONA Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong  
 for  
 the whole world!  
 EMILIA Why, the wrong is but a wrong i'th' world;  
 80 and  
 having the world for your labor, 'tis a wrong in your  
 own  
 world, and you might quickly make it right.  
 DESDEMONA I do not think there is any such woman.  
 EMILIA Yes, a dozen; and as many to'th' vantage as  
 85 would store the world they played for.<sup>8</sup>  
 But I do think it is their husbands' faults<sup>9</sup>

If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties<sup>o</sup>  
 And pour our treasures into foreign laps;<sup>1</sup>  
 Or else break out in peevish jealousies,  
 Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,  
 90 Or scant our former having in despite.<sup>2</sup>  
 Why, we have galls;<sup>o</sup> and though we have some  
 grace,<sup>3</sup>  
 Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know  
 Their wives have sense like them. They see, and  
 smell,  
 95 And have their palates both for sweet and sour,  
 As husbands have. What is it that they do  
 When they change us for others? Is it sport?  
 I think it is. And doth affection<sup>o</sup> breed it?  
 I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?  
 100 It is so too. And have not we affections,  
 Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?  
 Then let them use us well; else let them know,  
 The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.  
 DESDEMONA Good night, good night. God me such  
 uses<sup>o</sup>  
 send,  
 105 Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad, mend!<sup>4</sup>  
*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 4.3: Location: Scene continues. [Return to reference 4.3](#)
- Note 1: To “unpin” a woman was to undo her dress, by the removal of pins. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lines 30–52 (“I . . . next”) do not appear in Q. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I can barely bring myself not to. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A conventional symbol of disappointed love. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Lines 54–56 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lines 59–62 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A cheap ring in separable halves.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: And as many more as it would take to populate the world they gained by doing it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lines 86–103 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And give the semen that belongs to us to other women.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Or reduce our allowances out of spite.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Capacity for goodness, forgiveness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not to take bad behavior as an example to be followed, but to learn from it what to avoid.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it doesn't matter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make haste*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lower*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *put these things aside*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hurry*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *straightaway*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foretell*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fashion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *linen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gift*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *God's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *marital duties*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tempers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lust*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *habits*[Return to reference °](#)

## 5.1

*Enter* IAGO *and* RODERIGO.

IAGO Here, stand behind this bulk, o straight<sup>1</sup> will he come.

Wear thy good rapier bare, and put it home. o  
Quick, quick, fear nothing! I'll be at thy elbow.  
It makes us or it mars us; think on that  
And fix most firm thy resolution.

5 RODERIGO Be near at hand; I may miscarry in't.

IAGO Here, at thy hand. Be bold, and take thy stand.

*[Stands aside.]*

RODERIGO I have no great devotion to the deed,  
And yet he hath given me satisfying reasons;  
'Tis but a man gone. Forth my sword: he dies!

10 IAGO I have rubbed this young quat o almost to the sense, <sup>2</sup>

And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio  
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,  
Every way makes my gain. Live Roderigo, o  
He calls me to a restitution large  
15 Of gold and jewels that I bobbed from him o  
As gifts to Desdemona.

It must not be. If Cassio do remain,  
He hath a daily beauty in his life  
That makes me ugly; and besides, the Moor  
20 May unfold o me to him; there stand I in much peril.  
No, he must die. But so—I hear him coming.

*Enter* CASSIO

RODERIGO I know his gait; 'tis he. Villain, thou diest!

*[Thrusts at* CASSIO.*]*

CASSIO That thrust had been mine enemy indeed,  
25 But that my coat is better o than thou know'st.

I will make proof of o thine. [Wounds RODERIGO.]

RODERIGO

O, I am slain!

[IAGO wounds CASSIO in the leg and exits.]

CASSIO I am maimed forever! Help, ho! murder!  
murder!

*Enter* OTHELLO.

OTHELLO The voice of Cassio. Iago keeps his word.

RODERIGO O, villain that I am!

OTHELLO It is even so.

CASSIO O, help ho! light! a surgeon!

30

OTHELLO 'Tis he. O brave Iago, honest and just,  
That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong!  
Thou teachest me. Minion, o your dear lies dead,  
And your unblest fate hies. o Strumpet, I come.  
Forth of o my heart those charms, thine eyes, are  
35 blotted.

Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be  
spotted.

*Exit* OTHELLO.

*Enter* LODOVICO and GRATIANO.

CASSIO What ho! no watch? no passage? o Murder,  
murder!

GRATIANO 'Tis some mischance; the voice is very  
direful.

CASSIO O help!

LODOVICO Hark!

40

RODERIGO O wretched villain!

LODOVICO Two or three groan. 'Tis heavy o night;  
These may be counterfeits; let's think't unsafe  
To come into o the cry without more help.

45

RODERIGO Nobody come? Then shall I bleed to  
death.

*Enter* IAGO with a light.

LODOVICO Hark.

GRATIANO Here's one comes in his shirt, with light  
and

weapons.

IAGO Who's there? Whose noise is this that cries on murder?

LODOVICO We do not know.

IAGO Do not you hear a cry?

CASSIO Here, here! for heaven's sake, help me!

50 IAGO What's the matter?

GRATIANO This is Othello's ancient, as I take it.

LODOVICO The same indeed, a very valiant fellow.

IAGO What are you here that cry so grievously?

CASSIO Iago? O, I am spoiled, undone by villains! Give me some help.

55 IAGO O me, lieutenant! What villains have done this?

CASSIO I think that one of them is hereabout And cannot make away.

IAGO O treacherous villains!

[*to* LODOVICO *and* GRATIANO] What are you there?

Come

in, and give some help.

60 RODERIGO O, help me there!

CASSIO That's one of them.

IAGO O murd'rous slave! O villain!

[*Stabs* RODERIGO.]

RODERIGO O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!

IAGO Kill men i'th' dark?—Where be these bloody thieves?—

How silent is this town!—Ho, murder, murder!—

65 [*to* LODOVICO *and* GRATIANO] What may you be? Are you of good or evil?

LODOVICO As you shall prove us, praise us.

IAGO Signor Lodovico?

LODOVICO He, sir.



IAGO I cry you mercy. Here's Cassio hurt by villains.  
 GRATIANO Cassio?  
 70 IAGO How is't, brother?  
 CASSIO My leg is cut in two.  
 IAGO Marry, heaven forbid!  
 Light, gentlemen. I'll bind it with my shirt.  
*Enter BIANCA.*  
 BIANCA What is the matter, ho? Who is't that cried?  
 IAGO Who is't that cried?  
 BIANCA O, my dear Cassio!  
 75 My sweet Cassio! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!  
 IAGO O notable strumpet! Cassio, may you suspect  
 Who they should be that have thus mangled you?  
 CASSIO No.  
 GRATIANO I am sorry to find you thus; I have been  
 80 to seek  
 you.  
 IAGO Lend me a garter.<sup>3</sup> So . . . O for a chair<sup>o</sup>  
 To bear him easily hence!  
 BIANCA Alas, he faints! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!  
 IAGO Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash  
 To be a party in this injury.—  
 85 Patience awhile, good Cassio.—Come, come!  
 Lend me a light. Know we this face or no?  
 Alas! my friend and my dear countryman,  
 Roderigo! No—yes, sure! O heaven, Roderigo!  
 GRATIANO What, of Venice?  
 IAGO Even he, sir. Did you  
 90 know him?  
 GRATIANO Know him? Ay.  
 IAGO Signor Gratiano? I cry your gentle pardon.  
 These bloody accidents must excuse my manners  
 That so neglected you.  
 GRATIANO I am glad to see you.  
 IAGO How do you, Cassio? O, a chair, a chair!  
 95

GRATIANO Roderigo?

IAGO He, he, 'tis he. [*Enter attendants with a litter.*]

O, that's well said, the chair.  
Some good man bear him carefully from hence;  
I'll fetch the general's surgeon.—For you, mistress,  
Save you your labor.—He that lies slain here, Cassio,  
100 Was my dear friend. What malice was between you?

CASSIO None in the world, nor do I know the man.

IAGO [*to* BIANCA] What, look you pale? [*To attendants*] O,  
bear him out o'th'air.<sup>4</sup>

[*Exeunt attendants with CASSIO in the litter and with RODERIGO 's body.*]

Stay you, good gentlemen.—Look you pale,  
mistress?—

Do you perceive the gastness<sup>o</sup> of her eye?—  
105 Nay, if you stare, we shall hear more anon.—  
Behold her well; I pray you look upon her.  
Do you see, gentlemen? Nay, guiltiness will speak  
Though tongues were out of use.

*Enter* EMILIA.

EMILIA Alas, what is the matter? what is the matter,  
110 husband?

IAGO Cassio hath here been set on in the dark  
By Roderigo and fellows that are scaped.  
He's almost slain, and Roderigo quite dead.

EMILIA Alas, good gentleman! alas, good Cassio!

IAGO This is the fruits of whoring. Prithee, Emilia,  
115 Go know of Cassio where he supped tonight.—  
What, do you shake at that?

BIANCA He supped at my house, but I therefore  
shake not.

IAGO O did he so? I charge you go with me.

EMILIA O fie upon thee, strumpet!  
120

BIANCA I am no strumpet, but of life as honest  
 As you that thus abuse me.

EMILIA As I? Fie upon thee!

IAGO Kind gentlemen, let's go see poor Cassio  
 dressed.<sup>5</sup>—

Come, mistress, you must tell's another tale.  
 Emilia, run you to the citadel

125 And tell my lord and lady what hath happed.  
 [Exit EMILIA.]

Will you go on afore? Exeunt [all but  
 IAGO].

This is the night  
 That either makes me or fordoes<sup>o</sup> me quite. [Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 5.1: Location: A street in Cyprus.[Return to reference 5.1](#)
- Note 1: Right away.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To the quick.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A band worn as a sash or belt. Iago wants to use one as a tourniquet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Out of the open air (thought to be bad for wounds).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, see his wound dressed.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: shop stall[Return to reference °](#)
- °: drive it into him[Return to reference °](#)
- °: pimple[Return to reference °](#)
- °: if Roderigo lives[Return to reference °](#)
- °: defrauded him of[Return to reference °](#)
- °: reveal[Return to reference °](#)
- °: thicker; more armored[Return to reference °](#)
- °: test[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *hussy (Desdemona)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *damnation hurries on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *out of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passerby*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go near*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *litter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terror*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undoes*[Return to reference](#) °

## 5.2

*Enter* OTHELLO *with a light*, DESDEMONA *in her bed*  
*[asleep]*.

OTHELLO It is the cause,<sup>1</sup> it is the cause, my soul.  
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.  
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,  
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,  
And smooth as monumental alabaster.<sup>o</sup>  
5 Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.  
Put out the light, and then put out the light.<sup>2</sup>  
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,<sup>o</sup>  
I can again thy former light restore,  
Should I repent me. But once put out thy light,  
10 Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,<sup>3</sup>  
I know not where is that Promethean heat<sup>4</sup>  
That can thy light relume.<sup>o</sup> When I have plucked thy  
rose  
I cannot give it vital growth again;  
It needs must wither. I'll smell thee on the tree.  
15 *[He smells, then kisses her.]*  
O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword! One more; one more.  
*[He kisses her.]*  
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee  
And love thee after. One more, and that's the last.  
*He kisses her.*  
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,  
20 But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly:  
It strikes where it doth love.<sup>5</sup> She wakes.  
DESDEMONA Who's there? Othello?  
OTHELLO Ay, Desdemona.  
DESDEMONA Will you come to bed, my lord?  
OTHELLO Have you prayed tonight, Desdemon?

25 DESDEMONA Ay,  
 my lord.  
 OTHELLO If you bethink yourself of any crime  
 Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,  
 Solicit<sup>o</sup> for it straight.  
 DESDEMONA Alack, my lord, what may you mean by  
 that?  
 30 OTHELLO Well, do it, and be brief; I will walk by.  
 I would not kill thy unprepared spirit.  
 No, heavens forfend! I would not kill thy soul.  
 DESDEMONA Talk you of killing?  
 OTHELLO Ay, I do.  
 DESDEMONA Then heaven  
 Have mercy on me!  
 OTHELLO Amen, with all my heart!  
 DESDEMONA If you say so, I hope you will not kill  
 35 me.  
 OTHELLO Humh.  
 DESDEMONA And yet I fear you, for you're fatal then  
 When your eyes roll so. Why I should fear, I know  
 not,  
 Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I fear.  
 OTHELLO Think on thy sins.  
 DESDEMONA They are loves I bear to  
 40 you.  
 OTHELLO Ay, and for that thou diest.  
 DESDEMONA That death's unnatural that kills for  
 loving.  
 Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?  
 Some bloody passion shakes your very frame.  
 These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,  
 45 They do not point on me.  
 OTHELLO Peace, and be still.  
 DESDEMONA I will so. What's the matter?  
 OTHELLO That  
 handkerchief,

Which I so loved and gave thee, thou gav'st to  
Cassio.

DESDEMONA No, by my life and soul! Send for the  
man

And ask him.

50 OTHELLO Sweet soul, take heed; take heed of  
perjury;

Thou art on thy deathbed.

DESDEMONA Ay, but not yet to die.

OTHELLO Presently.°

Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;

55 For to deny each article with oath  
Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception  
That I do groan withal.° Thou art to die.

DESDEMONA Then Lord have mercy on me!

OTHELLO I say  
amen.

60 DESDEMONA And have you mercy too! I never did  
Offend you in my life, never loved Cassio  
But with such general warranty of heaven  
As I might love. I never gave him token.

OTHELLO By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's  
hand!

65 O perjured woman! thou dost stone° my heart,  
And makes me call what I intend to do  
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.  
I saw the handkerchief.

DESDEMONA He found it then.  
I never gave it him. Send for him hither.  
Let him confess a truth.

OTHELLO He hath confessed.

DESDEMONA What, my lord?

70 OTHELLO That he hath used thee.

DESDEMONA How? unlawfully?

OTHELLO

Ay.

DESDEMONA He will not say so.

OTHELLO No, his mouth is  
stopped.

Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't.

DESDEMONA O, my fear interprets! What, is he dead?

75 OTHELLO Had all his hairs been lives, my great  
revenge

Had stomach for them all.

DESDEMONA [*weeping*] Alas, he is betrayed and I  
undone!

OTHELLO Out, strumpet! Weep'st thou for him to my  
face?

DESDEMONA O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

80 OTHELLO [*attacking her*] Down, strumpet!

DESDEMONA Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!

OTHELLO Nay, if you strive—

DESDEMONA But half an hour!

OTHELLO Being done, there is no  
pause.<sup>7</sup>

DESDEMONA But while I say one prayer!

OTHELLO It is too late.

*Smothers her.*

85 DESDEMONA O Lord, Lord, Lord!

EMILIA *calls within* My lord, my lord! What ho! My  
lord,  
my lord!

OTHELLO What noise is this? Not dead? not yet quite  
dead?

I that am cruel am yet merciful;

I would not have thee linger in thy pain.

So, so.

90 EMILIA *within* What ho? my lord, my lord!



OTHELLO

Who's

there?

EMILIA [*within*] O good my lord, I would speak a word with you.

OTHELLO [*calling*] Yes.—'Tis Emilia.—[*calling*] By and by.◊—She's dead.

'Tis like she comes to speak of Cassio's death.

95 The noise was high.◊ Ha, no more moving?  
Still as the grave. Shall she come in? Were't good?  
I think she stirs again. No. What's best to do?  
If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife.  
My wife, my wife! What wife? I have no wife.

100 O insupportable! O heavy hour!  
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon, and that th'affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration.8

EMILIA [*within*] I do beseech you  
That I may speak with you. O good my lord!

105 OTHELLO I had forgot thee. O, come in, Emilia.  
Soft,◊ by and by; let me the curtains draw.

[*He closes the bed curtains.*]

Where art thou? What's the matter with thee now?

[*He unlocks the door.*] Enter EMILIA.

EMILIA O my good lord, yonder's foul murders done!

OTHELLO What? now?

110 EMILIA But◊ now, my lord.

OTHELLO It is the very error◊ of the moon;  
She comes more nearer earth than she was wont  
And makes men mad.

EMILIA Cassio, my lord, hath killed  
A young Venetian called Roderigo.

115 OTHELLO Roderigo killed? and Cassio killed?

EMILIA No, Cassio is not killed.

OTHELLO Not Cassio killed? Then murder's out of  
 tune,  
 And sweet revenge grows harsh.  
 DESDEMONA O falsely, falsely murdered!  
 EMILIA O Lord! what cry is that?  
 120 OTHELLO That? What?  
 EMILIA Out and alas! that was my lady's voice.  
       *[She opens the bed curtains.]*  
 Help, help ho, help! O, lady, speak again!  
 Sweet Desdemona, O sweet mistress, speak!  
 DESDEMONA A guiltless death I die.  
 125 EMILIA O, who hath done this deed?  
 DESDEMONA Nobody. I myself. Farewell.  
 Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!  
       *She dies.*  
 OTHELLO Why, how should she be murdered?  
 EMILIA Alas, who  
       knows?  
 OTHELLO You heard her say herself it was not I.  
 130 EMILIA She said so; I must needs report the truth.  
 OTHELLO She's like a liar gone to burning hell!  
 'Twas I that killed her!  
 EMILIA O, the more angel she,  
 And you the blacker devil!  
 OTHELLO She turned to folly,<sup>o</sup> and she was a whore.  
 135 EMILIA Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil.  
 OTHELLO She was false as water.  
 EMILIA Thou art rash as  
       fire to say  
 That she was false. O, she was heavenly true!  
 OTHELLO Cassio did top her. Ask thy husband else.<sup>o</sup>  
 O, I were damned beneath all depth in hell  
 140 But that I did proceed upon just grounds  
 To this extremity! Thy husband knew it all.  
 EMILIA My husband?  
 OTHELLO Thy husband.

145 EMILIA That she was false to wedlock?  
 OTHELLO Ay, with Cassio. Had she been true,  
 If heaven would make me such another world  
 Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,<sup>o</sup>  
 I'd not have sold her for it.  
 EMILIA My husband?  
 150 OTHELLO Ay, 'twas he that told me on her first.  
 An honest man he is, and hates the slime  
 That sticks on filthy deeds.  
 EMILIA My husband?  
 OTHELLO What needs this iteration,<sup>o</sup> woman?  
 I say, thy husband.  
 155 EMILIA O mistress, villainy hath made mocks with<sup>o</sup>  
 love!<sup>9</sup>  
 My husband say she was false?  
 OTHELLO He, woman;  
 I say, thy husband; dost understand the word?  
 My friend, thy husband; honest, honest Iago.  
 EMILIA If he say so, may his pernicious soul  
 Rot half a grain a day! He lies to th'heart.  
 160 She was too fond of her most filthy bargain.<sup>1</sup>  
 OTHELLO Ha?  
 EMILIA Do thy worst.  
 This deed of thine is no more worthy heaven  
 Than thou wast worthy her.  
 OTHELLO Peace, you were best!<sup>o</sup>  
 165 EMILIA Thou hast not half that power to do me  
 harm  
 As I have to be hurt. O gull,<sup>o</sup> O dolt!  
 As ignorant as dirt! Thou hast done a deed—  
 [*He draws his sword.*]  
 I care not for thy sword; I'll make thee known,  
 Though I lost twenty lives. Help, help, ho, help!  
 170 The Moor hath killed my mistress! Murder, murder!  
*Enter MONTANO, GRATIANO, IAGO, and others.*

MONTANO What is the matter? How now, general?  
 EMILIA O, are you come, Iago? You have done well,  
 That men must lay their murders on your neck.  
 GRATIANO What is the matter?  
 175 EMILIA [*to* IAGO] Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a  
 man.  
 He says thou told'st him that his wife was false.  
 I know thou didst not; thou'rt not such a villain.  
 Speak, for my heart is full.  
 IAGO I told him what I thought, and told no more  
 180 Than what he found himself was apt and true.  
 EMILIA But did you ever tell him she was false?  
 IAGO I did.  
 EMILIA You told a lie, an odious damnèd lie!  
 Upon my soul, a lie! a wicked lie!  
 185 She false with Cassio? Did you say with Cassio?  
 IAGO With Cassio, mistress! Go to, charm<sup>o</sup> your  
 tongue!  
 EMILIA I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to  
 speak:  
 My mistress here lies murdered in her bed—<sup>2</sup>  
 ALL O heavens forfend!—  
 190 EMILIA [*to* IAGO] And your reports have set the  
 murder on.  
 OTHELLO Nay, stare not, masters; it is true indeed.  
 GRATIANO 'Tis a strange truth.  
 MONTANO O monstrous act!  
 EMILIA Villainy, villainy, villainy!  
 195 I think upon't, I think I smell't. O villainy!  
 I thought so then.—I'll kill myself for grief!  
 O villainy! villainy!  
 IAGO What, are you mad? I charge you get you  
 home!  
 EMILIA Good gentlemen, let me have leave to  
 200 speak.

'Tis proper I obey him, but not now.  
Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home.

OTHELLO O! O! O!

*Falls on the bed.*

EMILIA Nay, lay thee down and roar,  
For thou hast killed the sweetest innocent  
205 That e'er did lift up eye.°

OTHELLO [*rising*] O, she was foul!  
[*to GRATIANO*] I scarce did know you, uncle. There lies  
your niece,  
Whose breath, indeed, these hands have newly  
stopped.

I know this act shows° horrible and grim.

GRATIANO Poor Desdemon, I am glad thy father's  
210 dead;

Thy match° was mortal to him, and pure grief  
Shore his old thread in twain.³ Did he live now,  
This sight would make him do a desperate turn;°  
Yea, curse his better angel from his side  
And fall to reprobance.⁴

215 OTHELLO 'Tis pitiful; but yet Iago knows  
That she with Cassio hath the act of shame  
A thousand times committed. Cassio confessed it,  
And she did gratify his amorous works  
With that recognizance° and pledge of love  
220 Which I first gave her. I saw it in his hand;  
It was a handkerchief, an antique token  
My father gave my mother.

EMILIA O God! O heavenly God!

IAGO 'Swounds, hold your  
peace!

225 EMILIA 'Twill out, 'twill out! I peace?  
No, I will speak as liberal as the north;⁵  
Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,  
All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak!

IAGO Be wise, and get you home.  
 [IAGO *threatens* EMILIA *with his sword.*]  
 EMILIA I will not!  
 GRATIANO Fie! Your sword upon a woman?  
 230 EMILIA O thou dull Moor, that handkerchief thou  
 speak'st of  
 I found by fortune and did give my husband;  
 For often with a solemn earnestness—  
 More than indeed belonged to such a trifle—  
 He begged of me to steal't.  
 IAGO Villainous whore!  
 235 EMILIA She give it Cassio? No, alas, I found it,  
 And I did giv't my husband.  
 IAGO Filth, thou liest!  
 EMILIA By heaven, I do not! I do not, gentlemen.—  
 O murderous coxcomb!◊ What should such a fool  
 Do with so good a wife?  
 240 OTHELLO Are there no stones◊ in  
 heaven  
 But what serves for the thunder? Precious◊ villain!  
*The Moor runs at* IAGO. [MONTANO disarms  
 OTHELLO.]  
 IAGO [*stabs*] *his wife.*  
 GRATIANO The woman falls; sure he hath killed his  
 wife.  
 EMILIA Ay, ay. O lay me by my mistress' side. *Exit*  
 IAGO.  
 GRATIANO He's gone, but his wife's killed.  
 245 MONTANO 'Tis a notorious villain. Take you this  
 weapon,  
 Which I have here recovered from the Moor.  
 Come, guard the door without; let him not pass,  
 But kill him rather. I'll after that same villain,  
 For 'tis a damnèd slave.  
*Exeunt* MONTANO, GRATIANO [*and all but* OTHELLO  
*and* EMILIA].

OTHELLO I am not valiant neither,  
 But every puny whipster<sup>o</sup> gets my sword.  
 250 But why should honor outlive honesty?<sup>6</sup>  
 Let it go all.

EMILIA What did thy song bode, lady?<sup>7</sup>  
 Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan,  
 And die in music. [*Sings*] "Willow, willow, willow."  
 Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor.  
 255 So come my soul to bliss as I speak true!  
 So speaking as I think, alas, I die. *She dies.*

OTHELLO I have another weapon in this chamber;  
 It was a sword of Spain, the ice-brook's temper.<sup>o</sup>  
 O, here it is.—Uncle, I must come forth.  
 260 GRATIANO [*within*] If thou attempt it, it will cost thee  
 dear;  
 Thou hast no weapon and perforce must suffer.

OTHELLO Look in upon me then and speak with me,  
 Or, naked<sup>o</sup> as I am, I will assault thee.  
 [*Enter* GRATIANO.]

GRATIANO What is the matter?

OTHELLO Behold, I have a  
 265 weapon;  
 A better never did itself sustain  
 Upon a soldier's thigh. I have seen the day  
 That with this little arm and this good sword  
 I have made my way through more impediments  
 Than twenty times your stop.<sup>o</sup> But O, vain boast!  
 270 Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now.  
 Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed.<sup>8</sup>  
 Here is my journey's end, here is my butt<sup>o</sup>  
 And very seamark<sup>o</sup> of my utmost sail.  
 Do you go back dismayed? 'Tis a lost<sup>o</sup> fear.  
 275 Man but a rush<sup>o</sup> against Othello's breast  
 And he retires.<sup>o</sup> Where should Othello go?  
 [*to* DESDEMONA] Now, how dost thou look now? O

ill-starred wench,  
Pale as thy smock. When we shall meet at count,<sup>o</sup>  
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,  
280 And fiends will snatch at it.

[*He touches her.*]

Cold, cold, my girl?  
Even like thy chastity. O cursèd, cursèd slave!  
Whip me, ye devils,  
From the possession of this heavenly sight!  
Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulfur,  
285 Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!  
O Desdemon! dead Desdemon; dead. O, O!

*Enter* LODOVICO, CASSIO *in a chair*, MONTANO, and  
IAGO, *with* OFFICERS.

LODOVICO Where is this rash and most unfortunate  
man?

OTHELLO That's he that was Othello; here I am.

LODOVICO Where is that viper? Bring the villain  
290 forth.

OTHELLO I look down towards his feet,<sup>9</sup> but that's a  
fable;

If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.

[*Wounds* IAGO.]

LODOVICO Wrench his sword from him.

IAGO I bleed, sir, but not  
killed.

OTHELLO I am not sorry, neither; I'd have thee live,  
For in my sense<sup>o</sup> 'tis happiness to die.

LODOVICO O thou Othello, that was once so good,  
295 Fallen in the practice<sup>o</sup> of a cursèd slave,  
What shall be said to thee?

OTHELLO Why, anything:  
An honorable murderer, if you will;  
For naught I did in hate, but all in honor.

300



LODOVICO This wretch hath part confessed his  
 villainy.  
 Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?  
 OTHELLO Ay.  
 CASSIO Dear general, I never gave you cause.  
 OTHELLO I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.  
 305 Will you, I pray, demand<sup>o</sup> that demi-devil  
 Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?  
 IAGO Demand me nothing. What you know, you  
 know.  
 From this time forth I never will speak word.  
 LODOVICO What, not to pray?  
 GRATIANO Torments<sup>o</sup> will ope your  
 310 lips.  
 OTHELLO Well, thou dost best.  
 LODOVICO Sir, you shall understand what hath  
 befall'n,  
 Which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter  
 Found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo,  
 And here another. The one of them imports  
 315 The death of Cassio, to be undertook  
 By Roderigo.  
 OTHELLO O villain!  
 CASSIO Most heathenish and most gross!  
<sup>o</sup>  
 LODOVICO Now here's another discontented paper  
 Found in his pocket too; and this, it seems,  
 320 Roderigo meant t'have sent this damnèd villain,  
 But that, belike,<sup>o</sup> Iago in the interim  
 Came in and satisfied him.  
 OTHELLO O thou pernicious caitiff!  
<sup>o</sup>—  
 How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief  
 That was my wife's?  
 CASSIO I found it in my chamber;  
 325 And he himself confessed it, but even now,

That there he dropped it for a special purpose  
Which wrought to his desire.

OTHELLO O fool, fool, fool!

CASSIO There is besides in Roderigo's letter  
How he upbraids Iago that he made him  
330 Brave<sup>o</sup> me upon the watch, whereon it came  
That I was cast;<sup>o</sup> and even but now he spake,  
After long seeming dead, Iago hurt him,  
Iago set him on.

LODOVICO [*to* OTHELLO] You must forsake this room  
335 and  
go with us.

Your power and your command is taken off,  
And Cassio rules in Cyprus. For this slave,  
If there be any cunning cruelty  
That can torment him much and hold him<sup>o</sup> long,  
It shall be his. You shall close<sup>o</sup> prisoner rest  
340 Till that the nature of your fault be known  
To the Venetian state. [*to officers*] Come, bring  
away.

OTHELLO Soft you;<sup>o</sup> a word or two before you go.  
I have done the state some service, and they  
know't;

345 No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;  
Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,  
350 Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,  
Like the base Judean,<sup>1</sup> threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe, of one whose subdued<sup>o</sup>  
eyes,

Albeit unused to the melting mood,  
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees  
355

Their medicinable gum.◦ Set you down this;  
 And say besides that in Aleppo once,  
 Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk  
 Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
 I took by th'throat the circumcised dog  
 And smote him—thus!  
*He stabs himself.*  
 LODOVICO O bloody period!◦  
 GRATIANO All that is spoke is  
 marred.  
 OTHELLO [*to* DESDEMONA] I kissed thee ere I killed  
 thee.  
 No way but this,  
 Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.  
*He [kisses DESDEMONA and] dies.*  
 CASSIO This did I fear, but thought he had no  
 weapon;  
 For he was great of heart.  
 LODOVICO [*to* IAGO] O Spartan dog,<sup>2</sup>  
 More fell◦ than anguish, hunger, or the sea,  
 Look on the tragic loading of this bed:  
 This is thy work. The object poisons sight;  
 Let it be hid. Gratiano, keep the house  
 And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,  
 For they succeed on you. [*to* CASSIO] To you, lord  
 governor,  
 Remains the censure◦ of this hellish villain;  
 The time, the place, the torture—O, enforce it!  
 Myself will straight aboard, and to the state  
 This heavy act with heavy heart relate.  
*Exeunt.*

- Note 5.2: Location: Desdemona and Othello's bedroom.[Return to reference 5.2](#)
- Note 1: That is, Desdemona's infidelity is the "cause" of—the thing that demands—justice, which Othello sees himself as being required to execute.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This and the following lines compare the light of Othello's lamp or torch to Desdemona's "light" of life.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: You most cleverly wrought example of nature's surpassing work.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Life-giving fire. In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from heaven to give it to humankind; in a different tradition, he is credited with animating humankind from clay.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Hebrews 12:6: "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cannot change the strong conviction I have of your guilt (or the firm plan to kill you), which makes me groan so. The metaphor is from childbirth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Now that I've started, there's no stopping.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Should gape at the change. Earthquakes were associated with eclipses.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lines 155–58 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, her marriage, or her husband.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lines 189–98 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cut the thread of his life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Suicide, the unforgivably sinful act of despair.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As freely as the north wind.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Why should military reputation outlive integrity?[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Lines 252–54 ("What . . . willow.' ") do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lines 272–78 do not appear in Q.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: To look for the devil's cloven feet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Probably alludes to Judas Iscariot, betrayer of Jesus. "Base Indian," in the quarto, suggests naive gullibility rather than malice.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A bloodhound; hence a relentless, bloodthirsty man. Also, the people of ancient Sparta were reputed to be inhumane and unfeeling.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *stone used in tombs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *light that serves me*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *relight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ask forgiveness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harden*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in a moment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *commotion was loud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quiet*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *just*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deviation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wantonness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *if you doubt it*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *topaz*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *repetition*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *it would be best for you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fool*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *silence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(to heaven)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *appears*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *marriage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *act*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *token*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fool*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *thunderbolts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolute*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insignificant person*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tempered in icy water*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unarmed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power to stop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beacon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an unnecessary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aim even a reed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falls back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Judgment Day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *state of feeling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tortures*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *monstrous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *most likely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wretch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dismissed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(alive)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tightly confined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(by grief)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *myrrh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conclusion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cruel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sentence*[Return to reference](#) °

**The Tempest** The title of this play, *The Tempest*, has its roots in the Latin *tempestas*, meaning “storm,” as well as *tempus*, or “time”—it is a storm/time drama. The storm is present in the opening stage direction, its sounds preceding any of the words of the play: “A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard.” In the fiction, it is this storm that brings a shipload of dignitaries, on their way back from a wedding in Tunis in Africa, crashing onto a magical island. But the plot and relationships that form the rest of the drama are in their own way also tempestuous: Prospero meets again the brother who stole his dukedom and banished him, and survives an attempt on his life. His daughter, Miranda, sees a man for the first time, falls in love, and becomes engaged. Ferdinand, mourning the death of his father at sea, falls for Miranda before learning that his father miraculously lives. Ariel yearns for freedom from servitude and receives it. In private theaters like Blackfriars—the expensive indoor theater owned by Shakespeare’s company, for which this play was written—play titles were suspended on “title boards.” The word “tempest” would have hung throughout the performance, its meaning changing from literal to figurative as the play progressed.

That the play is equally about time is demonstrated by its conformity—unusual for a Shakespearean drama—to the “unities” of time, place, and action suggested in Aristotle’s *Poetics*: it happens in real time (between 2 and 6 P.M. in a single afternoon), is staged in one place (a magical island), and concerns—if not analyzed too closely—one action (the tempest and its aftermath). But Shakespeare is usually playful with rules, and this work is no exception. Ferdinand, falling in love with Miranda, says that “ ’tis fresh morning with me / When you are by at night” (3.1.33–34), though, given the play’s time constraints, he has never seen her in the morning or the evening. The story of the drama is beyond time, as is to be expected in a world in which shattered ships can be made instantly whole, wet clothes instantly dry, and swords freeze midstroke. Yet when Prospero, at the end of the play, declares that

he will “retire me to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave” (5.1.312–13), he acknowledges that, magician though he may be, time has aged him, and he must prepare for death. This play, then, simultaneously explores stage, magic, and biological time.

Published for the first time in Shakespeare’s 1623 folio, seven years after the playwright’s death, *The Tempest* is somewhat easy to date. For a start, we know it to have been performed at court in 1611, and again in 1612–13, when it was one of the fourteen plays put on by Shakespeare’s company for the betrothal of King James’s daughter Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector Palatine of Germany. Indeed, the single version of *The Tempest* that has come down to us contains details that may have been added specifically for that royal wedding: its “betrothal masque,” featuring Juno, goddess of marriage and childbirth, as well as Iris and Ceres, goddesses of fruitfulness, is particularly suited to a noble marriage, which depended on fertility to ensure the continuance of bloodlines. But the play itself was probably first written around 1609/10; its plot, with its fearful storm and its wrecked seafarers finding themselves on a fertile but troubling island, closely resembles tales of the shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* onto the Bermudas in 1609, told vividly in this volume by William Strachey. Sometimes Strachey’s own account is said to be behind *The Tempest*, though it is just as likely that Shakespeare learned the story from returning mariners. The play’s pointed reference to the “still-vexed Bermudas” (1.2.229) ensures that those islands, and their storms, are at the forefront of the audience’s mind, even if—given that the wedding guests are sailing from Africa to Italy—Prospero’s actual island must itself be in the Mediterranean.

The play also touches on different narratives of colonialist expansion. We learn that when Prospero had originally arrived on the island he had been helped by Caliban, who had shown him where the fresh water was, and what berries he could eat. Later, however, Prospero had enslaved Caliban; indeed, he generally calls him “slave” instead of using his name. And while he is kinder to



Ariel, Prospero has also enslaved that native island spirit; Ariel does his “master” Prospero’s magical bidding in order to win his longed-for freedom. In these respects, Prospero is a prototypical colonial enslaver. But Shakespeare confuses the narrative by his depiction of Caliban as a victimizer as well as a victim: he is a would-be rapist and killer (he falls victim to the drunken clowns, Stephano and Trinculo, because he thinks they can help him murder Prospero); and his very name seems intended to hint at the word “cannibal.” Moreover, though Caliban maintains that “this island’s mine” (1.2.331), his own right to it is dependent on an earlier act of colonization: his mother, the witch Sycorax, had claimed the island on her arrival and had herself made Ariel a slave, imprisoning him in a cloven pine when he refused to do her bidding. The strange parallels between Prospero and Sycorax may recall English and Spanish competing claims and bad behavior—as in Raleigh’s account of his “discovery” of Guiana in this volume. The play portrays the problems of contentions over ownership for other people’s land and people. At the end of the play, Ariel is finally freed by Prospero: but what will, or should, happen to Caliban?

*The Tempest* shares with Shakespeare’s other late plays—or “romances,” as they are often called—a set of themes: *The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest* are all tragicomedies, meaning that they explore tragic issues but have happy endings; they all feature redemption and forgiveness, and all end with long-separated families coming together; they are all about fathers with daughters of marriageable age; they all contain fantastical plots, lengthy passages of narration, and extraordinarily lyrical poetry. They are also all highly musical. This was partly for practical reasons. Blackfriars, which Shakespeare’s company was able to use from 1608 on, was an enclosed, wooden indoor space, with fine acoustics. And Shakespeare’s company, which became the King’s Men in 1603—technically, servants to King James—now also had access to the court’s leading composers. Robert Johnson (1583–1633), lutenist to Prince Henry, King James’s son, wrote the music for *The Tempest*. The result is a play in which, like the other late

plays, some of the most evocative passages had musical settings and were intended to be sung rather than spoken. Ferdinand is not told that his father has drowned, but instead hears a song about how a drowned man is metamorphosed into something rich and strange: "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (1.2.397). The song's refrain is the sound of a death knell—the bell rung for a funeral—rung under the water by sea nymphs.

But the play also picks up on ideas and themes from the period's earlier drama. Prospero recalls Doctor Faustus. His magic, which comes from books, gives him a sense that he has godlike powers: "I have bedimmed / The noontide sun"; "Graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers" (5.1.41–42, 48–49). When, at the play's close, he determines to burn his books and drown his magic staff, he rejects not just magic but also the claims of earlier drama, and perhaps the theater itself. This play, which some see as the last written solely by Shakespeare, has often been described as Shakespeare's own farewell to the stage. Certainly *The Tempest*, with its interest in the limitations of knowledge, in the abuse—but also the abusing nature—of power, and in the nature and purpose of art, gathers together many of the preoccupations of Shakespeare's writing career and brings them to a haunting conclusion. At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero tells the spectators that he will remain trapped on the island unless released by their applause: "As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free" (Epilogue 19–20). The epilogue may suggest that we, the audience, have found Prospero, a noble magician and magus, imprisoned on an island, and can now decide whether to continue his confinement or, in light of his good deeds, free him. Alternatively, the epilogue suggests that we are enslavers and, at that same shocking moment of discovery, that we can right our wrongs by forgiving and applauding Prospero, the play, and, by extension, Shakespeare.

# **The Tempest**

## **THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY**

PROSPERO, the right Duke of Milan

MIRANDA, daughter to Prospero

ANTONIO, his brother, the usurping Duke of Milan

ALONSO, King of Naples

SEBASTIAN, his brother

FERDINAND, son to Alonso

GONZALO, an honest old councillor

ADRIAN and FRANCISCO, lords

ARIEL, an airy spirit

CALIBAN, a savage and deformed slave

TRINCULO, a jester

STEFANO, a drunken butler

MASTER of a ship

BOATSWAIN

MARINERS

SPIRITS *appearing as*

IRIS

CERES

JUNO

Nymphs

Reapers

***THE SCENE: An uninhabited island.***

**1.1**

*A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard.*

*Enter a ship[ 's] MASTER and a BOATSWAIN.*<sup>1</sup>

MASTER Boatswain!

BOATSWAIN Here, Master. What cheer?

MASTER Good,<sup>2</sup> speak to th' mariners. Fall to't yarely,<sup>o</sup> or

we run ourselves aground. Bestir, bestir! *Exit.*

*Enter* MARINERS.

5 BOATSWAIN Heigh, my hearts!<sup>o</sup> Cheerly, cheerly, my hearts!

Yare, yare! Take in the topsail.<sup>3</sup> Tend<sup>o</sup> to th' Master's whistle.

[*to the storm*] Blow till thou burst thy wind, if room enough!<sup>4</sup>

*Enter* ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, ANTONIO, FERDINAND, GONZALO, *and others.*

ALONSO Good Boatswain, have care. Where's the Master?

10 [*to the* MARINERS] Play the men!<sup>o</sup>

BOATSWAIN I pray now, keep below.

ANTONIO Where is the Master, Boatswain?

BOATSWAIN Do you not hear him? You mar our labor. Keep

your cabins: you do assist the storm!

15 GONZALO Nay, good,<sup>o</sup> be patient.

BOATSWAIN When the sea is. Hence! What cares these

roarers for the name of king?<sup>5</sup> To cabin! Silence! Trouble

us not.

GONZALO     Good, yet remember whom thou hast  
              aboard.

20     BOATSWAIN     None that I more love than myself. You  
              are a  
councillor:<sup>6</sup> if you can command these elements to  
              silence  
and work the peace of the present,<sup>7</sup> we will not  
              hand<sup>o</sup> a rope  
more. Use your authority! If you cannot, give thanks  
              you  
have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your  
              cabin  
25     for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap.<sup>o</sup> [*to the*  
              MARINERS]  
Cheerly, good hearts! [*to GONZALO*] Out of our way, I  
              say!

*Exit* [BOATSWAIN *with* MARINERS].

GONZALO     I have great comfort from this fellow.  
              Methinks

              he hath no drowning mark<sup>8</sup> upon him; his  
              complexion is  
perfect gallows.<sup>9</sup> Stand fast, good Fate, to his  
              hanging;  
30     make the rope of his destiny our cable,<sup>1</sup> for our own  
              doth  
little advantage.<sup>o</sup> If he be not born to be hanged,  
              our  
case is miserable.

*Exeunt* [GONZALO, ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, ANTONIO, *and*  
              FERDINAND].

*Enter* BOATSWAIN.

BOATSWAIN     Down with the topmast!<sup>2</sup> Yare! Lower,  
              lower!

Bring her to try with main-course.<sup>3</sup> (*A cry within.*) A  
plague  
upon this howling! They are louder than the weather  
35 or  
our office.<sup>4</sup>

*Enter* SEBASTIAN, ANTONIO, *and* GONZALO.  
Yet again? What do you here? Shall we give o'er<sup>o</sup>  
and  
drown? Have you a mind to sink?  
SEBASTIAN A pox o' your throat, you bawling,  
blasphemous, incharitable dog!  
40 BOATSWAIN Work you, then.  
ANTONIO Hang, cur! Hang, you whoreson insolent  
noise-maker! We are less afraid to be drowned than thou  
art.

GONZALO I'll warrant him from drowning,<sup>5</sup> though<sup>o</sup>  
the  
ship were no stronger than a nutshell and as leaky  
45 as an  
unstanch'd<sup>o</sup> wench.

BOATSWAIN Lay her a-hold, a-hold! Set her two  
courses!<sup>6</sup>

Off to sea again! Lay her off!

*Enter* MARINERS, *wet.*

MARINERS All lost! To prayers, to prayers! All lost!

[*Exeunt* MARINERS.]

BOATSWAIN What, must our mouths be cold?<sup>7</sup>  
50 GONZALO The King and Prince at prayers! Let's  
assist

them, for our case is as theirs.

SEBASTIAN I'm out of patience.

ANTONIO We are merely<sup>o</sup> cheated of our lives by  
drunkards.

55 This wide-chopped<sup>o</sup> rascal—would thou mightst  
 lie drowning the washing of ten tides!<sup>8</sup>  
 GONZALO He'll be hanged yet, though every drop of  
 water  
 swear against it and gape at widest to glut<sup>o</sup> him.  
*A confused noise within.*  
 MARINERS [*within*] Mercy on us! We split, we split!  
 Fare  
 well, my wife and children! Farewell, brother! We  
 60 split,  
 we split, we split!  
*[Exit BOATSWAIN.]*  
 ANTONIO Let's all sink wi'th' King.  
 SEBASTIAN Let's take leave of him. *Exit [with*  
 ANTONIO].  
 GONZALO Now would I give a thousand furlongs of  
 sea for  
 65 an acre of barren ground: long heath, brown furze,<sup>9</sup>  
 anything.  
 The wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry  
 death. *Exit.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1.1: Location: A ship at sea.[Return to reference 1.1](#)
- Note 1: The Boatswain probably enters after the shipmaster calls him; the latter is perhaps on the upper stage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Acknowledging the Boatswain's presence; or perhaps short for "good man."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To reduce the surface area of the sail and thereby lessen the force of the wind pushing the ship toward the island.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Blow as hard as you like, as long as we have room between the ship and the rocks.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: “Roarers,” referring here to the waves, was also a term for riotous people.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Member of the king’s council; also an adviser or persuader.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Of the present circumstances.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Birthmark whose position was held to portend death by drowning. “He that was born to be hanged will never be drowned” was proverbial.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: His physiognomy, or appearance, shows that he will certainly be hanged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anchor cable (an anchor is actually useless in a storm).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To reduce the top weight of the ship and make it more stable.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Bring the ship close to the wind, sailing only with the mainsail.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Duties (in shouting orders).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: I’ll guarantee him against drowning.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Set the foresail in addition to the mainsail.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To be cold in the mouth—to be dead—was proverbial; may also suggest that the mariners warm their mouths with liquor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pirates were hanged on the shore at low-water mark and left there for the ebbing and flowing of three tides.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Heather and gorse—both shrubs that grow in poor soil.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *promptly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hearties* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attend*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *act like men*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good man*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *freely menstruating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *utterly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *large-mouthed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its widest to swallow*[Return to reference](#) °

## 1.2

*Enter* PROSPERO *and* MIRANDA.

MIRANDA<sup>1</sup> If by your art,<sup>2</sup> my dearest father, you have  
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.  
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch  
But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's<sup>o</sup> cheek,  
Dashes the fire out. Oh, I have suffered  
5 With those that I saw suffer: a brave<sup>o</sup> vessel—  
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her—  
Dashed all to pieces! Oh, the cry did knock  
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.  
Had I been any god of power, I would  
10 Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere<sup>o</sup>  
It should the good ship so have swallowed and  
The fraughting souls<sup>3</sup> within her.

PROSPERO<sup>4</sup> Be collected.  
No more amazement.<sup>o</sup> Tell your piteous<sup>o</sup> heart  
There's no harm done.

MIRANDA Oh, woe the day!

PROSPERO No harm.  
15 I have done nothing but in care of thee—  
Of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter—who  
Art ignorant of what thou art, naught knowing  
Of whence I am, nor that I am more better<sup>o</sup>  
20 Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell<sup>5</sup>  
And thy no greater father.

MIRANDA More to know  
Did never meddle with<sup>o</sup> my thoughts.

PROSPERO 'Tis time  
I should inform thee farther. Lend thy hand  
And pluck my magic garment from me.—

*[She helps him remove the cloak, and he puts it  
aside.]*

—So,  
Lie there, my art. —Wipe thou thine eyes; have  
25 comfort.  
The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touched  
The very virtue of compassion in thee,  
I have with such provision<sup>o</sup> in mine art  
So safely ordered that there is no soul—  
No, not so much perdition<sup>o</sup> as an hair  
30 Betid<sup>o</sup> to any creature in the vessel  
Which<sup>o</sup> thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink. Sit  
down,  
For thou must now know farther.

MIRANDA You have often  
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopped  
And left me to a bootless inquisition,<sup>o</sup>  
35 Concluding, "Stay: not yet."

PROSPERO The hour's now come;  
The very minute bids thee ope<sup>o</sup> thine ear.  
Obey, and be attentive. Canst thou remember  
A time before we came unto this cell?  
I do not think thou canst, for then thou wast not  
40 Out<sup>o</sup> three years old.

MIRANDA Certainly, sir, I can.

PROSPERO By what? By any other house or person?  
Of anything the image tell me that  
Hath kept with thy remembrance.

MIRANDA 'Tis far off,  
And rather like a dream than an assurance<sup>o</sup>  
45 That my remembrance warrants.<sup>o</sup> Had I not  
Four or five women once that tended me?

PROSPERO Thou hadst, and more, Miranda. But how  
is it  
That this lives in thy mind? What seest thou else  
In the dark backward<sup>o</sup> and abysm of time?  
50 If thou rememb'rest aught<sup>o</sup> ere thou cam'st here,  
How thou cam'st here thou mayst.

MIRANDA  
not.

But that I do

PROSPERO Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year  
since,

Thy father was the Duke of Milan<sup>6</sup> and  
A prince of power.

55 MIRANDA Sir, are not you my father?

PROSPERO Thy mother was a piece<sup>o</sup> of virtue,<sup>o</sup> and  
She said thou wast my daughter, and thy father  
Was Duke of Milan, and his only heir  
And princess no worse issued.<sup>o</sup>

60 MIRANDA O the heavens!  
What foul play had we that we came from thence?  
Or blessed<sup>o</sup> was't we did?

PROSPERO Both, both, my girl.  
By foul play, as thou say'st, were we heaved thence,  
But blessedly holp<sup>o</sup> hither.

MIRANDA Oh, my heart bleeds  
To think o'th' teen<sup>o</sup> that I have turned you to,  
Which is from<sup>o</sup> my remembrance! Please you,  
65 farther.

PROSPERO My brother and thy uncle, called Antonio

—  
I pray thee mark me, that a brother should  
Be so perfidious!—he whom next<sup>o</sup> thyself  
Of all the world I loved, and to him put  
The manage<sup>o</sup> of my state, as at that time  
70 Through all the signories<sup>o</sup> it was the first  
And Prospero the prime<sup>o</sup> duke, being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal arts<sup>7</sup>  
Without a parallel. Those being all my study,  
The government I cast upon my brother  
75 And to my state grew stranger, being transported<sup>8</sup>  
And rapt in secret studies. Thy false uncle—  
Dost thou attend me?

MIRANDA                      Sir, most heedfully.

PROSPERO    Being once perfected how to grant suits,<sup>9</sup>  
How to deny them, who t'advance, and who  
80 To trash for overtopping,<sup>1</sup> new created  
The creatures<sup>o</sup> that were mine, I say, or changed  
'em,  
Or else new formed 'em;<sup>2</sup> having both the key<sup>o</sup>  
Of officer and office, set all hearts i'th' state  
To what tune pleased his ear, that<sup>o</sup> now he was  
85 The ivy which had hid my princely trunk  
And sucked my verdure<sup>o</sup> out on't. Thou attend'st  
not.

MIRANDA     O good sir, I do.

PROSPERO I pray thee, mark me.  
I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated  
To closeness<sup>o</sup> and the bettering of my mind  
90 With that which, but<sup>o</sup> by being so retired,  
O'er-prized all popular rate,<sup>3</sup> in my false brother  
Awaked an evil nature; and my trust,  
Like a good parent,<sup>4</sup> did beget of him  
A falsehood in its contrary<sup>o</sup> as great  
95 As my trust was, which had indeed no limit,  
A confidence sans<sup>o</sup> bound. He being thus lorded  
Not only with what my revenue yielded,  
But what my power might else exact, like one  
Who, having into truth by telling of it,  
100 Made such a sinner of his memory  
To credit his own lie,<sup>5</sup> he did believe  
He was indeed the duke, out o'th'<sup>o</sup> substitution  
And executing<sup>o</sup> th'outward face<sup>o</sup> of royalty  
With all prerogative. Hence his ambition growing—  
105 Dost thou hear?

MIRANDA                    Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.

PROSPERO To have no screen between this part he  
played

And him he played it for, he needs will be  
Absolute Milan.<sup>6</sup> Me,<sup>o</sup> poor man, my library  
Was dukedom large enough. Of temporal royalties<sup>o</sup>  
110 He thinks me now incapable; confederates,<sup>o</sup>  
So dry<sup>o</sup> he was for sway,<sup>o</sup> wi'th' King of Naples  
To give him annual tribute, do him homage,  
Subject his coronet to his crown,<sup>7</sup> and bend  
The dukedom yet unbowed—alas, poor Milan!—  
115 To most ignoble stooping.<sup>8</sup>

MIRANDA O the heavens!

PROSPERO Mark his condition<sup>o</sup> and th'event;<sup>o</sup> then  
tell me

If this might be a brother.

MIRANDA I should sin  
To think but<sup>o</sup> nobly of my grandmother.  
Good wombs have borne bad sons.<sup>9</sup>

PROSPERO Now the  
120 condition.

This King of Naples, being an enemy  
To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit;  
Which was that he, in lieu o'th' premises<sup>1</sup>  
Of homage and I know not how much tribute,  
Should presently extirpate me and mine  
125 Out of the dukedom and confer fair Milan,  
With all the honors, on my brother. Whereon,  
A treacherous army levied, one midnight  
Fated to th' purpose did Antonio open  
The gates of Milan, and i'th' dead of darkness,  
130 The ministers<sup>o</sup> for th' purpose hurried thence  
Me and thy crying self.

MIRANDA Alack, for pity!  
I, not remembering how I cried out then,  
Will cry it o'er again; it is a hint<sup>o</sup>  
That wrings mine eyes to't.

PROSPERO Hear a little further,

135 And then I'll bring thee to the present business  
Which now's upon's, without the which this story  
Were most impertinent.°

MIRANDA Wherefore did they not  
That hour destroy us?

PROSPERO Well demanded, wench:<sup>2</sup>  
My tale provokes that question. Dear, they durst not,  
140 So dear the love my people bore me, nor set  
A mark so bloody on the business, but  
With colors fairer painted their foul ends.  
In few,° they hurried us aboard a bark,°  
Bore us some leagues to sea, where they prepared  
145 A rotten carcass of a butt,<sup>3</sup> not rigged,  
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast—the very rats  
Instinctively have quit it. There they hoist us  
To cry to th' sea that roared to us; to sigh  
To th' winds, whose pity, sighing back again,  
150 Did us but loving wrong.<sup>4</sup>

MIRANDA Alack, what trouble  
Was I then to you!

PROSPERO Oh, a cherubin  
Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile,  
Infusèd with a fortitude from heaven,  
When I have decked° the sea with drops° full salt,  
155 Under my burden groaned,<sup>5</sup> which° raised in me  
An undergoing stomach° to bear up  
Against what should ensue.

MIRANDA How came we ashore?

PROSPERO By Providence divine.  
Some food we had and some fresh water that  
160 A noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,  
Out of his charity—who being then appointed  
Master of this design—did give us, with  
Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessities,



165 Which since have steaded<sup>o</sup> much. So, of his  
 gentleness,<sup>6</sup>  
 Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me  
 From mine own library with volumes that  
 I prize above my dukedom.  
 MIRANDA Would I might  
 But ever see that man.  
 PROSPERO Now I arise.<sup>7</sup>  
 Sit still,<sup>o</sup> and hear the last of our sea-sorrow.  
 170 Here in this island we arrived, and here  
 Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit<sup>o</sup>  
 Than other princes<sup>8</sup> can, that have more time  
 For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful.<sup>o</sup>  
 MIRANDA Heavens thank you for't. And now I pray  
 175 you, sir,  
 For still 'tis beating in my mind, your reason  
 For raising this sea-storm?  
 PROSPERO Know thus far forth:  
 By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,  
 Now my dear lady,<sup>9</sup> hath mine enemies  
 Brought to this shore; and by my prescience  
 180 I find my zenith<sup>1</sup> doth depend upon  
 A most auspicious star,<sup>2</sup> whose influence  
 If now I court not but omit,<sup>o</sup> my fortunes  
 Will ever after droop. Here cease more questions.  
 Thou art inclined to sleep. 'Tis a good dullness,<sup>o</sup>  
 185 And give it way. I know thou canst not choose.  
 [MIRANDA *sleeps.*]  
 [to ARIEL] Come away,<sup>o</sup> servant, come! I am ready  
 now.  
 Approach, my Ariel.<sup>3</sup> Come!  
*Enter ARIEL.*  
 ARIEL All hail, great master; grave sir, hail! I come  
 To answer thy best pleasure, be't to fly,  
 190 To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride

On the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding task  
Ariel and all his quality.o

PROSPERO                      Hast thou, spirit,  
Performed to point<sup>o</sup> the tempest that I bade thee?

ARIEL To every article.

195 I boarded the King's ship. Now on the beak,<sup>o</sup>  
Now in the waist,<sup>o</sup> the deck,<sup>o</sup> in every cabin,  
I flamed amazement.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes I'd divide  
And burn in many places;<sup>5</sup> on the topmast,  
The yards, and bowsprit would I flame distinctly,  
200 Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors  
O'th' dreadful thunderclaps, more momentary  
And sight-outrunning<sup>o</sup> were not. The fire and cracks  
Of sulfurous<sup>6</sup> roaring the most mighty Neptune  
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,  
205 Yea, his dread trident shake.

PROSPERO                                      My brave spirit!  
Who was so firm, so constant, that this coilo  
Would not infect his reason?

ARIEL    Not a soul  
But felt a fever of the mad<sup>o</sup> and played  
Some tricks of desperation. All but mariners  
Plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel,  
Then all afire with me; the King's son Ferdinand,  
With hair upstaring<sup>o</sup>—then like reeds, not hair—  
Was the first man that leapt, cried, "Hell is empty,  
And all the devils are here!"

215 PROSPERO Why, that's my spirit.  
But was not this nigh shore?

ARIEL                               Close by, my master.

PROSPERO But are they, Ariel, safe?

[illegible]

On their sustaining<sup>7</sup> garments not a blemish,  
But fresher than before; and, as thou bad'st<sup>o</sup> me,

220 In troops<sup>o</sup> I have dispersed them 'bout the isle.  
The King's son have I landed by himself,  
Whom I left cooling of<sup>o</sup> the air with sighs  
In an odd angle<sup>o</sup> of the isle, and sitting,  
His arms in this sad knot.<sup>8</sup>

PROSPERO Of the King's ship,  
225 The mariners, say how thou hast disposed,  
And all the rest o'th' fleet.

ARIEL Safely in harbor  
Is the King's ship; in the deep nook where once  
Thou called'st me up at midnight to fetch dew  
From the still-vexed<sup>o</sup> Bermudas, there she's hid;  
The mariners all under hatches stowed,  
230 Who, with<sup>o</sup> a charm joined to<sup>o</sup> their suffered labor,  
I have left asleep; and for the rest o'th' fleet,  
Which I dispersed, they all have met again  
And are upon the Mediterranean float,<sup>o</sup>  
Bound sadly home for Naples,  
235 Supposing that they saw the King's ship wrecked  
And his great person perish.

PROSPERO Ariel, thy charge  
Exactly is performed; but there's more work.  
What is the time o'th' day?

ARIEL Past the mid-season.<sup>o</sup>

PROSPERO At least two glasses.<sup>o</sup> The time twixt six  
240 and now  
Must by us both be spent most preciously.

ARIEL Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me  
pains,<sup>o</sup>

Let me remember<sup>o</sup> thee what thou hast promised,  
Which is not yet performed me.

PROSPERO How now? Moody?  
What is't thou canst demand?

ARIEL My liberty.

245 PROSPERO Before the time be out? No more.

ARIEL

I

prithce,

Remember I have done thee worthy service,  
Told thee no lies, made no mistakings, served  
Without or<sup>o</sup> grudge or grumblings. Thou did promise  
To bate<sup>o</sup> me a full year.

250 PROSPERO Dost thou forget  
From what a torment I did free thee?

ARIEL No.

PROSPERO Thou dost, and think'st it much to tread  
the ooze  
Of the salt deep,  
To run upon the sharp wind of the north,  
To do me business in the veins<sup>9</sup> o'th' earth  
255 When it is baked<sup>o</sup> with frost.

ARIEL I do not, sir.

PROSPERO Thou liest, malignant thing! Hast thou  
forgot

The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy  
Was grown into a hoop?<sup>o</sup> Hast thou forgot her?

ARIEL No, sir.

PROSPERO Thou hast. Where was she born?  
260 Speak. Tell me.

ARIEL Sir, in Algiers.

PROSPERO Oh, was she so? I must  
Once in a month recount what thou hast been,  
Which thou forgett'st. This damned witch Sycorax,  
For mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible  
To enter human hearing, from Algiers,  
265 Thou know'st, was banished. For one thing she did  
They would not take her life.<sup>1</sup> Is not this true?

ARIEL Ay, sir.

PROSPERO This blue-eyed<sup>2</sup> hag was hither brought  
with child  
And here was left by th' sailors. Thou, my slave,  
270

As thou report'st thyself, was then her servant;  
And for<sub>o</sub> thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy<sub>3</sub> and abhorred commands,  
Refusing her grand hests,<sub>o</sub> she did confine thee,  
By help of her more potent ministers,<sub>o</sub>  
275 And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine; within which rift  
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years, within which space she died  
And left thee there, where thou didst vent thy  
280 groans  
As fast as millwheels strike.<sub>o</sub> Then was this island—  
Save for the son that she did litter<sub>o</sub> here,  
A freckled whelp, hag-born—not honored with  
A human shape.

ARIEL Yes, Caliban her son.  
285 PROSPERO Dull thing, I say so:<sub>4</sub> he, that Caliban  
Whom now I keep in service. Thou best know'st  
What torment I did find thee in: thy groans  
Did make wolves howl, and penetrate<sub>o</sub> the breasts  
Of ever-angry bears. It was a torment  
To lay upon the damned, which Sycorax  
290 Could not again undo. It was mine art,  
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape  
The pine and let thee out.

ARIEL I thank thee, master.  
PROSPERO If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an  
oak  
And peg thee in his<sub>o</sub> knotty entrails till  
295 Thou hast howled away twelve winters.

ARIEL Pardon,  
master.  
I will be correspondent<sub>o</sub> to command  
And do my spriting gently.<sub>o</sub>

PROSPERO Do so, and after two  
 days  
 I will discharge thee.<sup>5</sup>  
 ARIEL That's my noble master!  
 What shall I do? Say what, what shall I do?  
 300 PROSPERO Go make thyself like a nymph o'th' sea.  
 Be subject  
 To no sight but thine and mine, invisible  
 To every eyeball else.<sup>6</sup> Go, take this shape<sup>o</sup>  
 And hither come in't. Go! Hence with diligence.  
*Exit [ARIEL].*  
 305 [*to MIRANDA*] Awake, dear heart, awake! Thou hast  
 slept well.  
 Awake.  
 MIRANDA The strangeness of your story put  
 Heaviness<sup>o</sup> in me.  
 PROSPERO Shake it off. Come on;  
 We'll visit Caliban, my slave, who never  
 Yields us kind answer.  
 MIRANDA 'Tis a villain, sir,  
 I do not love to look on.  
 310 PROSPERO But, as 'tis,  
 We cannot miss<sup>o</sup> him. He does make our fire,  
 Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices<sup>o</sup>  
 That profit us. What ho! Slave! Caliban!  
 Thou earth, thou: speak!  
 CALIBAN (*within*) There's wood enough  
 within.  
 315 PROSPERO Come forth, I say! There's other business  
 for thee.  
 Come, thou tortoise! When?  
*Enter ARIEL like a water nymph.*  
 —Fine apparition! My quaint<sup>7</sup> Ariel,  
 Hark in thine ear.  
*[He whispers.]*

ARIEL My lord, it shall be done. *Exit.*  
 PROSPERO Thou poisonous slave, got<sub>o</sub> by the devil<sup>8</sup>  
 himself  
 Upon thy wicked dam,<sub>o</sub> come forth!  
 320 *Enter* CALIBAN.  
 CALIBAN As wicked dew as e'er my mother brushed<sup>9</sup>  
 With raven's feather from unwholesome fen<sub>o</sub>  
 Drop on you both! A southwest<sup>1</sup> blow on ye  
 And blister you all o'er!  
 PROSPERO For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have  
 325 cramps,  
 Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins<sup>2</sup>  
 Shall forth at vast of<sub>o</sub> night that they may work  
 All exercise on thee;<sub>3</sub> thou shalt be pinched  
 As thick as honeycomb,<sup>4</sup> each pinch more stinging  
 Than bees that made 'em.<sub>o</sub>  
 CALIBAN I must eat my dinner.  
 330 This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,  
 Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first  
 Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst  
 give me  
 Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
 To name the bigger light and how the less<sup>5</sup>  
 335 That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee  
 And showed thee all the qualities o'th' isle:  
 The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and  
 fertile.  
 Cursèd be I that did so! All the charms<sub>o</sub>  
 Of Sycorax—toads, beetles, bats—light on you!  
 340 For I am all the subjects that you have,  
 Which first was mine own king; and here you sty  
 me<sub>o</sub>  
 In this hard rock whiles you do keep from me  
 The rest o'th' island.  
 PROSPERO Thou most lying slave,

345 Whom stripes<sup>o</sup> may move, not kindness. I have  
used<sup>o</sup> thee,  
Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee  
In mine own cell till thou didst seek to violate  
The honor of my child.

CALIBAN Oh ho, oh ho! Would't had  
been done!

Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else  
This isle with Calibans.

350 MIRANDA<sup>6</sup> Abhorred slave,  
Which any print<sup>o</sup> of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of<sup>o</sup> all ill. I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each  
hour

One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning but wouldst gabble like  
355 A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known. But thy vile  
race,<sup>o</sup>

Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good  
natures

Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou  
Deservedly confined into this rock,  
360 Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

CALIBAN You taught me language, and my profit  
on't

Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you<sup>7</sup>  
For learning me your language!

365 PROSPERO Hag-seed,<sup>o</sup> hence!  
Fetch us in fuel; and be quick, thou'rt best,  
To answer other business.<sup>o</sup> Shrugg'st thou, malice?  
If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly  
What I command, I'll rack thee with old<sup>8</sup> cramps,  
Fill all thy bones with aches,<sup>9</sup> make thee roar,  
That beasts shall tremble at thy din.



370 CALIBAN No, pray thee.  
 [aside] I must obey. His art is of such power  
 It would control my dam's god Setebos<sup>1</sup>  
 And make a vassal of him.  
 PROSPERO So, slave, hence.  
*Exit* CALIBAN.  
*Enter* FERDINAND , and ARIEL , invisible, playing  
 and singing.<sup>2</sup>  
 ARIEL [*sings*] Come unto these yellow sands,  
 And then take hands.  
 375 Curtsied when you have, and kissed,  
 The wild waves whist.<sup>3</sup>  
 Foot it featly<sup>o</sup> here and there,  
 And sweet sprites bear<sup>o</sup>  
 The burden.<sup>4</sup>  
 380 SPIRITS [*within, sing the*] (*burden dispersedly*)  
 Hark, hark! Bow-wow!  
 The watch-dogs bark: bow-wow!  
 ARIEL Hark, hark. I hear  
 The strain of strutting Chanticleer<sup>o</sup>  
 Cry cock-a-diddle-dow.  
 385 FERDINAND Where should this music be? I'th' air or  
 th'earth?  
 It sounds no more; and sure it waits<sup>o</sup> upon  
 Some god o'th' island. Sitting on a bank,  
 Weeping again the King my father's wreck,  
 This music crept by me upon the waters,  
 390 Allaying both their fury and my passion<sup>o</sup>  
 With its sweet air.<sup>o</sup> Thence I have followed it,  
 Or it hath drawn me rather; but 'tis gone.  
 No, it begins again.  
 ARIEL [*sings*] Full fathom five thy father lies;  
 395 Of his bones are coral made;  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
 Nothing of him that doth fade,

But doth suffer a sea-change  
 Into something rich and strange.  
 400 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.  
 SPIRITS [*within, sing the*] (*burden*) Ding dong.  
 ARIEL Hark, now I hear them.  
 SPIRITS [*within*] Ding dong, bell.  
 FERDINAND The ditty does remember<sup>5</sup> my drowned  
 father.  
 405 This is no mortal<sup>o</sup> business, nor no sound  
 That the earth owes.<sup>o</sup> I hear it now above me.  
 PROSPERO [*to MIRANDA*] The fringed curtains of thine  
 eye advance<sup>o</sup>  
 And say what thou seest yond.  
 MIRANDA What is't? A spirit?  
 Lord, how it looks about. Believe me, sir,  
 It carries a brave<sup>o</sup> form. But 'tis a spirit.  
 410 PROSPERO No, wench, it eats and sleeps and hath  
 such  
 senses  
 As we have—such. This gallant<sup>o</sup> which thou seest  
 Was in the wreck; and but<sup>o</sup> he's something<sup>o</sup> stained  
 With grief—that's beauty's canker<sup>6</sup>—thou mightst call  
 him  
 415 A goodly person. He hath lost his fellows  
 And strays about to find 'em.  
 MIRANDA I might call him  
 A thing divine, for nothing natural  
 I ever saw so noble.  
 PROSPERO [*aside*]<sup>7</sup> It<sup>o</sup> goes on, I see,  
 As my soul prompts it. [*to ARIEL*] Spirit, fine spirit, I'll  
 free  
 thee  
 Within two days for this.  
 420 FERDINAND Most sure, the goddess  
 On whom these airs attend!<sup>8</sup> Vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> my prayer

May know if you remain<sup>o</sup> upon this island,  
 And that you will some good instruction give  
 How I may bear me<sup>o</sup> here. My prime request,  
 Which I do last pronounce, is—O you wonder!<sup>9</sup>—  
 425 If you be maid<sup>1</sup> or no?  
 MIRANDA No wonder, sir,  
 But certainly a maid.  
 FERDINAND My language? Heavens!  
 I am the best<sup>2</sup> of them that speak this speech,  
 Were I but where 'tis spoken.  
 PROSPERO How? The best?  
 What wert thou if the King of Naples heard thee?  
 430 FERDINAND A single<sup>3</sup> thing, as I am now, that  
                   wonders  
 To hear thee speak of Naples. He does hear me,<sup>4</sup>  
 And that he does I weep. Myself am Naples,<sup>o</sup>  
 Who with mine eyes, never since at ebb,<sup>o</sup> beheld  
 The King my father wrecked.  
 MIRANDA Alack, for mercy!  
 435 FERDINAND Yes, faith, and all his lords, the Duke of  
                   Milan  
 And his brave son<sup>5</sup> being twain.  
 PROSPERO [*aside*] The Duke of Milan  
 And his more braver daughter could control<sup>6</sup> thee  
 If now 'twere fit to do't. At the first sight  
 They have changed eyes.<sup>7</sup> [*to* ARIEL] Delicate<sup>o</sup> Ariel,  
 440 I'll set thee free for this! [*to* FERDINAND] A word, good  
                   sir.  
 I fear you have done yourself some wrong.<sup>8</sup> A word.  
 MIRANDA Why speaks my father so ungently?<sup>o</sup> This  
 Is the third man that e'er I saw, the first  
 That e'er I sighed for. Pity move my father  
 445 To be inclined my way.  
 FERDINAND Oh, if a virgin,

And your affection not gone forth,<sup>9</sup> I'll make you  
The Queen of Naples.

PROSPERO Soft, sir! One word more.  
[*aside*] They are both in either's powers. But this  
swift business

450 I must uneasy<sub>o</sub> make, lest too light<sup>1</sup> winning  
Make the prize light. [*to* FERDINAND] One word more! I  
charge thee

That thou attend me. Thou dost here usurp  
The name thou ow'st<sub>o</sub> not, and hast put thyself  
Upon this island as a spy to win it  
From me, the lord on't.<sub>o</sub>

455 FERDINAND No, as I am a man.  
MIRANDA There's nothing ill can dwell in such a  
temple.<sup>2</sup>

If the ill spirit have so fair a house,  
Good things will strive to dwell with't.

PROSPERO [*to* FERDINAND] Follow me.  
[*to* MIRANDA] Speak not you for him: he's a traitor.  
[*to* FERDINAND] Come!

460 I'll manacle thy neck and feet together.  
Sea-water shalt thou drink; thy food shall be  
The fresh-brook mussels,<sup>3</sup> withered roots, and husks  
Wherein the acorn cradled. Follow!

FERDINAND No.  
I will resist such entertainment<sub>o</sub> till  
Mine enemy has more power.

*He draws [his sword], and is charmed from  
moving.*

465 MIRANDA O dear father,  
Make not too rash a trial of him, for  
He's gentle and not fearful.<sup>4</sup>

PROSPERO What, I say,  
My foot<sub>o</sub> my tutor? [*to* FERDINAND] Put thy sword up,  
traitor,

Who mak'st a show but dar'st not strike, thy  
 conscience  
 Is so possessed with guilt. Come from thy ward,<sup>o</sup>  
 470 For I can here disarm thee with this stick<sup>o</sup>  
 And make thy weapon drop.  
 MIRANDA Beseech you, father—  
 PROSPERO Hence! Hang not on my garments.  
 MIRANDA Sir, have pity.  
 I'll be his surety.  
 PROSPERO Silence! One word more  
 Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What,  
 475 An advocate for an imposter? Hush!  
 Thou think'st there is no more such shapes<sup>o</sup> as he,  
 Having seen but him and Caliban. Foolish wench,  
 To<sup>o</sup> th' most of men this is a Caliban,  
 And they to him are angels.  
 MIRANDA My affections  
 480 Are then most humble. I have no ambition  
 To see a goodlier man.  
 PROSPERO [*to* FERDINAND] Come on, obey.  
 Thy nerves<sup>o</sup> are in their infancy again,  
 And have no vigor in them.  
 FERDINAND So they are.  
 My spirits,<sup>o</sup> as in a dream, are all bound up.  
 485 My father's loss, the weakness which I feel,  
 The wreck of all my friends, nor this man's threats  
 To whom I am subdued, are but light to me,  
 Might I but through my prison once a day  
 Behold this maid. All corners else o'th' earth  
 490 Let liberty make use of; space enough  
 Have I in such a prison.  
 PROSPERO [*aside*] It works. [*to* FERDINAND]  
 Come on!  
 [*to* ARIEL] Thou hast done well, fine Ariel. [*to*  
 FERDINAND] Follow me.  
 [*to* ARIEL] Hark what thou else shalt do me.

MIRANDA [*to* FERDINAND] Be of comfort;  
 My father's of a better nature, sir,  
 495 Than he appears by speech. This is unwonted<sup>o</sup>  
 Which now came from him.  
 PROSPERO [*to* ARIEL] Thou shalt be as free  
 As mountain winds; but then<sup>o</sup> exactly do  
 All points of my command.  
 ARIEL To th' syllable.  
 500 PROSPERO [*to* FERDINAND] Come, follow. [*to* MIRANDA]  
 Speak not for him. *Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1.2: Location: The rest of the play is set in various parts of Prospero's island. [Return to reference 1.2](#)
- Note 1: "Miranda" in Latin means "admirable" or "wondering." Miranda uses the formal "you," contrasting with Prospero's more familiar "thou." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Skill; magic; learning; science. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Souls constituting the freight; perhaps also suggesting "burdened." [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Prospero" in Italian and Spanish means "fortunate" or "prosperous." [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Suggesting a hermit's or a poor man's dwelling. "Full": very. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pronounced with stress on the first syllable. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: As opposed to the "mechanical arts," the "liberal arts" encompassed the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Enraptured, with suggestions of "conveyed to another place." "Grew stranger": grew alienated from; became a foreigner to. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Having mastered the handling of formal requests.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For rising too high. "Trash": restrain, hold back (as by a leash).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Changed . . . formed 'em": changed the duties and allegiance of existing officials, or created new ones.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Became too precious for the people to value or understand.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From the colloquial "Good parents breed bad children."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Like one . . . lie": like someone who comes to believe his own repeatedly stated lie. "To": So as to.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "To have . . . Milan": He wanted to be the Duke of Milan in actual fact, rather than merely exercising power as the Duke's proxy. "Screen": partition, barrier.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Subject Antonio's coronet to Alonso's crown. "Coronet": a lesser crown indicating the wearer's inferiority to the sovereign.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "And bend . . . stooping": by making Milan, previously free, a tributary subject of Naples.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Antonio's character need not imply that his mother was a bad parent (see line 94).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In return for the conditions agreed upon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A young woman; also, term of endearment to wife, daughter, or sweetheart.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cask or tub: here, deprecatory for "boat."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The winds, responding sympathetically to our sighs, only blew us farther out to sea.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The secondary sense provides an image of giving birth.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nobility; kindness.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Referring to the action of standing; or to Prospero's rising fortunes (as in lines 179–84). The former might visually reinforce the latter, especially if Prospero also resumes his magical powers by putting on his cloak.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A generic plural for "princes and princesses."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Traditional characterization of Fortune as a woman changeable in her affections.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Highest point, as of a star in the sky.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Referring to the belief that celestial bodies had astrological influence on people and events.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ariel's name, along with sounding like "airy," also means in Hebrew "lion of God." The name appears as that of a magical spirit in various occult texts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: I appeared as flames, causing terror.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The phosphorescent effect of St. Elmo's fire, caused in a thunderstorm by the charge of static electricity that builds up particularly around metal projections.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sulfur was popularly associated with thunder and lightning.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Buoying up, and thus suggesting "life-giving."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Folded sadly, like this (folded arms implied sorrow).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Mineral veins or subterranean rivers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "For . . . life": Only because she got pregnant. Capital sentences were commuted for pregnant women; ordinarily, condemned witches were either hanged or burned at the stake.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The description of Sycorax as "blue-eyed" has puzzled many readers, and editors have proposed a variety of emendations and interpretations.[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: Difficult for Ariel, whose element is air; also, grossly material, coarse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: You dullard, that's just what I said.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Prospero reduces this to within two days at lines 419–20 and actually releases Ariel in about four hours' time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Be . . . else": Ariel may wear a conventional costume, indicating his invisibility to other characters onstage.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The term could simultaneously mean "ingenious," "curious in appearance," and "elegant."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Not merely an insult, but also an allusion to Caliban's birth from the devil (incubus) and witch.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Brushed up, collected. Dew was a common ingredient of magical potions.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A southerly wind was considered plague-bearing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hedgehogs; but here spirits disguised as hedgehogs.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In order that they may perform their habitual activity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The pinch marks will be as closely packed as, and of similar texture to, the cells of a honeycomb.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Genesis 1:16: "God then made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the less light to rule the night."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: For roughly two and a half centuries, editors reassigned this speech to Prospero, finding it inappropriate for Miranda.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The plague that gives red sores destroy, kill you.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As of aged people; long-accustomed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As a noun, this was probably pronounced "aitches."[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A name found in travel narratives as a god of the Patagonians.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This probably does not imply that Ferdinand enters first, even though such a staging is possible if Ferdinand is bewildered as to where this music is coming from. Ariel is invisible to all but Prospero and the audience. He is probably still dressed as a water nymph.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Become hushed and attentive.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Burden" is a technical term from Renaissance music meaning "refrain" or "undersong," but its other associations may lend extra significance to Ariel's use of the word in this song.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Commemorate. "Ditty": the words of the song.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cankerworm; caterpillar ("beauty" being seen as a flower); spreading sore.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Prospero's asides here and at lines 437, 449, and 492 may be either private utterances or addressed to Ariel. If the former, Ariel may nevertheless hear them; Prospero speaks to Ariel after all these instances. Their import may well be purposefully enigmatic.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Probably spoken aside, but possibly an invocation. "Most sure, the goddess": an echo of Aeneas's reaction to seeing Venus after his shipwreck, "o dea certe" (*Aeneid* 1.328). "Airs": Ariel's melodies.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Miracle, punning on the meaning of Miranda's name.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unmarried virgin; made (human).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Highest in rank, assuming he has succeeded his father.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Weak and helpless; solitary; one and the same.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "He" and "me" both refer to Ferdinand. Presuming his father to be dead, Ferdinand takes himself to be the new king of Naples (and as such, he hears himself speaking). Alternatively,

Ferdinand thinks his father's spirit hears him.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The only instance in which Antonio is mentioned as having a son.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Challenge; take to task; exercise power over.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Exchanged loving glances; fallen in love at first sight.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Euphemistic for "told a lie about yourself."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Given over to someone else.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Easy; playing on the meanings of "little valued" and also "promiscuous" in line 451.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A common metaphor for the body; also, a conventional Renaissance notion that moral qualities were physically manifest.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Freshwater mussels are inedible.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: He's noble and, therefore, not cowardly. Alternatively, not fearsome.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sky's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *consternation* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pitying*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *higher in rank*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intrude upon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foresight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *loss*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *happened*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *profitless inquiry*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *open*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a certainty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guarantees is true*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *past*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect example* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chastity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *no less nobly born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *providential*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *helped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow; trouble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *out of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *after*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lordships*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foremost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dependents*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *control*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vitality; power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seclusion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inverse qualities*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as a consequence of the*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *portraying* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *image*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as for me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rule*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(he) plots*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thirsty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treaty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything but*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agents*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *an occasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *irrelevant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *short* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covered; adorned* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Miranda's smile)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a courage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been useful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continue to sit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profit more*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disregard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drowsiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *come here*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cohorts; faculties*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in detail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *midship* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quicker than the eye*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turmoil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *such as madmen feel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *standing on end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commanded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *groups*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cooling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever-stormy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by virtue of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *billow; sea*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hourglasses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tasks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remind*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remit; excuse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dried and hardened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bent over with age*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agents; slaves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hit the water*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give birth to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arouse sympathy in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compliant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *graciously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance; disguise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sleepiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avoid; do without*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *capacities; duties*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmful, foul mother*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bog*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *during the boundless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(honeycomb cells)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spells*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pen me up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lashes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *susceptible to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hereditary nature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offspring of a hag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perform other tasks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dance nimbly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirits sing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a rooster*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attends*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grief*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *melody*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *human*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *owns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid; gallant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine gentleman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *somewhat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(my plan)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conduct myself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *King of Naples*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ceasing to flow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *graceful; artful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discourteously*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *difficult*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treatment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inferior*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defensive stance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magician's wand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forms; men*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compared to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sinews*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mental powers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unusual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *until then*[Return to reference](#) °

## 2.1

*Enter* ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, ANTONIO, GONZALO, ADRIAN,  
*and* FRANCISCO.

GONZALO    Beseech you, sir, be merry. You have  
              cause—

So have we all—of joy; for our escape  
Is much beyond our loss. Our hint<sup>o</sup> of woe  
Is common: every day some sailor's wife,  
The masters of some merchant, and the merchant<sup>1</sup>  
Have just<sup>o</sup> our theme of woe. But for the miracle—  
I mean our preservation—few in millions  
Can speak like us. Then wisely, good sir, weigh  
Our sorrow with<sup>o</sup> our comfort.

ALONSO Prithee, peace.<sup>2</sup>

10 SEBASTIAN [*to* ANTONIO] He receives comfort like cold  
porridge.◦

ANTONIO [*to* SEBASTIAN]    The visitor<sup>3</sup> will not give him  
o'er  
so.<sub>o</sub>

SEBASTIAN     Look, he's winding up the watch of his  
                     wit; by  
                     and by it will strike.

15 GONZALO [*to* ALONSO] Sir—

SEBASTIAN One. Tell. [o](#)

GONZALO When every grief is entertained<sup>o</sup> that's offered,

comes to th'entertainer<sup>4</sup>—

SEBASTIAN     A dollar.<sup>5</sup>

GONZALO    Dolor<sup>o</sup> comes to him, indeed. You have  
spoken

truer than you purposed.

SEBASTIAN     You have taken it wiselier than I meant  
you



should.

25 GONZALO [*to* ALONSO] Therefore, my lord—  
 ANTONIO Fie, what a spendthrift is he of his tongue!  
 ALONSO I prithee, spare.<sup>5</sup>  
 GONZALO Well, I have done. But yet—  
 SEBASTIAN He will be talking.

30 ANTONIO Which of he or Adrian, for a good wager,  
 first  
 begins to crow?<sup>6</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN The old cock.  
 ANTONIO The cockerel.<sup>7</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN Done. The wager?

35 ANTONIO A laughter.<sup>8</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN A match.  
 ADRIAN Though this island seem to be desert<sup>9</sup>—  
 ANTONIO Ha, ha, ha!  
 SEBASTIAN So, you're paid.<sup>9</sup>

40 ADRIAN Uninhabitable and almost inaccessible—  
 SEBASTIAN Yet—  
 ADRIAN Yet—  
 ANTONIO He could not miss't.  
 ADRIAN It must needs be of subtle, tender, and  
 delicate<sup>1</sup>  
 temperance.<sup>2</sup>

45 ANTONIO Temperance was a delicate wench.<sup>2</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN Ay, and a subtle, as he most learnedly  
 delivered.<sup>3</sup>

ADRIAN The air breathes upon us here most  
 sweetly.

SEBASTIAN As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.  
 ANTONIO Or as 'twere perfumed by a fen.<sup>4</sup>

50 GONZALO Here is everything advantageous to life.  
 ANTONIO True, save<sup>5</sup> means to live.  
 SEBASTIAN Of that there's none, or little.  
 GONZALO How lush and lusty<sup>6</sup> the grass looks! How

green!

55 ANTONIO The ground indeed is tawny.

SEBASTIAN With an eye<sup>4</sup> of green in't.

ANTONIO He misses not much.

SEBASTIAN No, he doth but mistake the truth totally.

60 GONZALO But the rarity<sup>5</sup> of it is, which is indeed  
almost  
beyond credit—

SEBASTIAN As many vouched<sup>o</sup> rarities are.

GONZALO That our garments being, as they were,  
drenched  
in the sea, hold notwithstanding their freshness and  
gloss, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt

65 water.

ANTONIO If but one of his pockets<sup>6</sup> could speak,  
would it  
not say he lies?

SEBASTIAN Ay, or very falsely pocket up his report.<sup>7</sup>

GONZALO Methinks our garments are now as fresh  
as  
when we put them on first in Africa, at the marriage

70 of  
the King's fair daughter Claribel to the King of Tunis.

SEBASTIAN 'Twas a sweet marriage, and we prosper  
well  
in our return.

ADRIAN Tunis was never graced before with such a  
paragon  
to<sup>o</sup> their queen.

75 GONZALO Not since widow Dido's<sup>8</sup> time.

ANTONIO Widow?<sup>9</sup> A pox o' that! How came that  
"widow"  
in? Widow Dido!

SEBASTIAN What if he had said "widower Aeneas"  
too?

80 Good Lord, how you take<sup>o</sup> it!  
 ADRIAN "Widow Dido," said you? You make me  
 study of<sup>o</sup>  
 that: she was of Carthage, not of Tunis.  
 GONZALO This Tunis, sir, was Carthage.<sup>1</sup>  
 ADRIAN Carthage?  
 GONZALO I assure you, Carthage.  
 85 ANTONIO His word is more than the miraculous  
 harp.<sup>2</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN He hath raised the wall, and houses too.  
 ANTONIO What impossible matter will he make easy  
 next?  
 SEBASTIAN I think he will carry this island home in  
 his  
 pocket and give it his son for an apple.  
 90 ANTONIO And sowing the kernels<sup>o</sup> of it in the sea,  
 bring  
 forth more islands.  
 GONZALO Ay.<sup>3</sup>  
 ANTONIO Why, in good time.  
 GONZALO [*to* ALONSO] Sir, we were talking, that our  
 95 garments  
 seem now as fresh as when we were at Tunis at  
 the marriage of your daughter, who is now queen.  
 ANTONIO And the rarest that e'er came there.  
 SEBASTIAN Bate,<sup>4</sup> I beseech you, widow Dido.  
 ANTONIO Oh, widow Dido? Ay, widow Dido.  
 100 GONZALO Is not, sir, my doublet as fresh as the first  
 day I  
 wore it? I mean, in a sort.<sup>5</sup>  
 ANTONIO That "sort" was well fished for.  
 GONZALO When I wore it at your daughter's  
 marriage.  
 ALONSO You cram these words into mine ears  
 105 against

The stomach of my sense.<sup>6</sup> Would I had never  
 Married my daughter there; for coming thence  
 My son is lost, and, in my rate,<sup>o</sup> she too,  
 Who is so far from Italy removed  
 I ne'er again shall see her. O thou mine heir  
 110 Of Naples and of Milan, what strange fish  
 Hath made his meal on thee?  
 FRANCISCO Sir, he may live.  
 I saw him beat the surges under him  
 And ride upon their backs. He trod the water  
 Whose enmity he flung aside, and breasted  
 115 The surge, most swol'n, that met him. His bold head  
 'Bove the contentious waves he kept, and oared  
 Himself with his good arms in lusty<sup>o</sup> stroke  
 To th' shore, that o'er his wave-worn basis bowed,<sup>z</sup>  
 As<sup>o</sup> stooping to relieve him. I not<sup>o</sup> doubt  
 120 He came alive to land.  
 ALONSO No, no, he's gone.  
 SEBASTIAN Sir, you may thank yourself for this great  
 loss,  
 That would not bless our Europe with your daughter,  
 But rather loose<sup>o</sup> her to an African,  
 Where she, at least, is banished from your eye,  
 125 Who<sup>o</sup> hath cause to set the grief on't.  
 ALONSO Prithee,  
 peace.  
 SEBASTIAN You were kneeled to and importuned  
 otherwise<sup>8</sup>  
 By all of us; and the fair soul herself  
 Weighed, between loathness and obedience, at  
 Which end o'th' beam should bow.<sup>9</sup> We have lost  
 130 your son,  
 I fear, forever. Milan and Naples have  
 More widows in them of this business' making  
 Than we bring men to comfort them. The fault's



Without sweat or endeavor. Treason, felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine<sup>o</sup>  
160 Would I not have; but nature should bring forth  
Of it own kind, all foison,<sup>o</sup> all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people.

SEBASTIAN No marrying<sup>9</sup> 'mong his subjects?

ANTONIO None, man, all idle: whores and knaves.

165 GONZALO I would with such perfection govern, sir,  
T'excel the golden age.<sup>1</sup>

SEBASTIAN Save<sup>o</sup> his majesty!

ANTONIO Long live Gonzalo!

GONZALO And do you mark me, sir?

ALONSO Prithee, no more. Thou dost talk nothing to  
170 me.

GONZALO I do well believe your highness, and did it  
to  
minister occasion<sup>2</sup> to these gentlemen, who are of  
such  
sensible<sup>o</sup> and nimble lungs that they always use<sup>o</sup> to  
laugh  
at nothing.

ANTONIO 'Twas you we laughed at.

175 GONZALO Who in this kind of merry fooling am  
nothing  
to you. So you may continue, and laugh at nothing  
still.

ANTONIO What a blow was there given!

SEBASTIAN An it had not fallen flatlong.<sup>3</sup>

180 GONZALO You are gentlemen of brave mettle;<sup>4</sup> you  
would  
lift the moon out of her sphere if she would continue  
in  
it five weeks without changing.<sup>5</sup>

*Enter ARIEL [invisible,] playing solemn music.*

SEBASTIAN We would so, and then go a-bat-fowling.<sup>6</sup>



ANTONIO Do you not hear me speak?  
 SEBASTIAN I do, and surely  
 210 It is a sleepy language, and thou speak'st  
 Out of thy sleep. What is it thou didst say?  
 This is a strange repose, to be asleep  
 With eyes wide open; standing, speaking, moving,  
 And yet so fast asleep.  
 ANTONIO Noble Sebastian,  
 215 Thou lett'st thy fortune sleep—die rather; wink'st<sup>o</sup>  
 Whiles thou art waking.  
 SEBASTIAN Thou dost snore distinctly;<sup>o</sup>  
 There's meaning in thy snores.  
 ANTONIO I am more serious than my custom. You  
 Must be so too, if heed<sup>o</sup> me; which to do  
 Trebles thee o'er.<sup>8</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN Well, I am standing water.<sup>9</sup>  
 220 ANTONIO I'll teach you how to flow.  
 SEBASTIAN Do so. To ebb  
 Hereditary sloth<sup>1</sup> instructs me.  
 ANTONIO Oh!  
 If you but knew how you the purpose cherish  
 Whiles thus you mock it;<sup>2</sup> how in stripping it  
 You more invest<sup>o</sup> it. Ebbing<sup>o</sup> men, indeed,  
 225 Most often do so near the bottom run  
 By their own fear or sloth.  
 SEBASTIAN Prithee, say on.  
 The setting<sup>o</sup> of thine eye and cheek proclaim  
 A matter<sup>o</sup> from thee; and a birth, indeed,  
 Which throes<sup>3</sup> thee much to yield.  
 230 ANTONIO Thus, sir:  
 [*indicating* GONZALO] Although this lord of weak  
 remembrance,<sup>o</sup> this,  
 Who shall be of as little memory<sup>o</sup>  
 When he is earthed,<sup>o</sup> hath here almost persuaded—  
 For he's a spirit of persuasion, only



235 Professes<sup>4</sup> to persuade—the King his son's alive,  
'Tis as impossible that he's undrowned  
As he that sleeps here swims.

SEBASTIAN I have no hope  
That he's undrowned.

ANTONIO Oh, out of that no hope  
What great hope have you! No hope that way<sup>o</sup> is  
Another way so high a hope that even  
240 Ambition cannot pierce a wink<sup>o</sup> beyond,  
But doubt discovery there.<sup>5</sup> Will you grant with me  
That Ferdinand is drowned?

SEBASTIAN He's gone.

ANTONIO Then tell me,  
Who's the next heir of Naples?

SEBASTIAN Claribel.

ANTONIO She that is Queen of Tunis; she that dwells  
245 Ten leagues beyond man's life;<sup>o</sup> she that from  
Naples

Can have no note,<sup>o</sup> unless the sun were post<sup>o</sup>—  
The man i'th' moon's too slow—till newborn chins  
Be rough and razorable; she that from<sup>o</sup> whom  
250 We all were sea-swallowed, though some cast  
again,<sup>6</sup>

And by that destiny to perform an act  
Whereof what's past is prologue, what to come  
In yours and my discharge.<sup>o</sup>

SEBASTIAN What stuff is this? How  
say you?

'Tis true my brother's daughter's Queen of Tunis;  
So is she heir of Naples, twixt which regions  
255 There is some space.

ANTONIO A space whose ev'ry cubit<sup>o</sup>  
Seems to cry out, "How shall that Claribel  
Measure us<sup>o</sup> back to Naples? Keep<sup>o</sup> in Tunis,  
And let Sebastian wake."<sup>o</sup> Say this were death

260 That now hath seized them: why, they were no  
       worse  
 Than now they are. There be that<sup>o</sup> can rule Naples  
 As well as he that sleeps; lords that can prate  
 As amply and unnecessarily  
 As this Gonzalo; I myself could make  
 265 A chough of as deep chat.<sup>7</sup> Oh, that you bore  
 The mind that I do! What a sleep were this  
 For your advancement! Do you understand me?  
 SEBASTIAN     Methinks I do.  
 ANTONIO                                     And how does your  
       content  
 Tender<sup>o</sup> your own good fortune?  
 SEBASTIAN                                     I remember  
 You did supplant your brother Prospero.  
 270 ANTONIO                                     True:  
 And look how well my garments sit upon me,  
 Much feater<sup>o</sup> than before. My brother's servants  
 Were then my fellows; now they are my men.  
 SEBASTIAN     But for your conscience?  
 ANTONIO     Ay, sir, where lies that? If 'twere a kibe,<sup>8</sup>  
 275 'Twould put me to<sup>o</sup> my slipper; but I feel not  
 This deity in my bosom. Twenty consciences  
 That stand twixt me and Milan, candied<sup>9</sup> be they,  
 And melt ere they molest. Here lies your brother,  
 No better than the earth he lies upon  
 280 If he were that which now he's like—that's dead—  
 Whom I with this obedient steel,<sup>o</sup> three inches of it,  
 Can lay to bed forever; whiles you, doing thus,  
 To the perpetual wink for aye<sup>o</sup> might put  
 This ancient morsel, this Sir Prudence, who  
 285 Should not upbraid our course. For all the rest,  
 They'll take suggestion<sup>o</sup> as a cat laps milk;  
 They'll tell the clock<sup>o</sup> to any business that  
 We say befits the hour.

SEBASTIAN Thy case, dear friend,  
 Shall be my precedent. As thou gott'st Milan,  
 290 I'll come by Naples. Draw thy sword: one stroke  
 Shall free thee from the tribute which thou payest,  
 And I the King shall love thee.

ANTONIO Draw together;  
 And when I rear my hand, do you the like  
 To fall it on Gonzalo.

SEBASTIAN Oh, but one word.  
 295 *Enter ARIEL, [invisible,] with music and song.*

ARIEL My master through his art foresees the  
 danger  
 That you his friend are in, and sends me forth—  
 For else<sub>o</sub> his project dies—to keep them<sup>1</sup> living.  
 [He] sings in Gonzalo's ear.  
 While you here do snoring lie,  
 Open-eyed conspiracy  
 300 His time<sub>o</sub> doth take.  
 If of life you keep a care,  
 Shake off slumber and beware.  
 Awake, awake!

ANTONIO Then let us both be sudden.  
 305 [ANTONIO and SEBASTIAN draw their swords.]

GONZALO [waking] Now, good angels preserve the  
 King.  
 [He wakes ALONSO.]

ALONSO Why, how now? Ho! Awake! Why are you<sub>o</sub>  
 drawn?  
 Wherefore this ghastly<sub>o</sub> looking?

GONZALO What's the matter?

SEBASTIAN Whiles we stood here securing<sub>o</sub> your  
 repose,  
 Even now we heard a hollow burst of bellowing,  
 310 Like bulls, or rather lions. Did't not wake you?  
 It struck mine ear most terribly.

ALONSO I heard nothing.

ANTONIO Oh, 'twas a din to fright a monster's ear,  
To make an earthquake: sure it was the roar  
Of a whole herd of lions.

315 ALONSO Heard you this, Gonzalo?

GONZALO Upon mine honor, sir, I heard a humming,  
And that a strange one too, which did awake me.  
I shook you, sir, and cried.° As mine eyes opened,  
I saw their weapons drawn. There was a noise,  
320 That's verily.° 'Tis best we stand upon our guard,  
Or that we quit this place. Let's draw our weapons.

ALONSO Lead off this ground, and let's make further  
search  
For my poor son.

GONZALO Heavens keep him from these  
beasts,  
For he is sure i'th' island.

ALONSO Lead away.

325 ARIEL<sup>2</sup> Prospero my lord shall know what I have done.  
So, King, go safely on to seek thy son. *Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The chief of and its owner. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sebastian takes this as "pease," as in "pease porridge." [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Antonio compares Gonzalo with one who visits and comforts the sick and distressed. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: There comes to the person who accepts that grief. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: English name for the German thaler. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Which of the two will first begin to speak ("crow")? [Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: "The young cock crows as the old hears" was proverbial. "Old cock" refers to Gonzalo and "cockerel" to Adrian.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: From the proverb "He laughs that wins."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Antonio's laugh is his prize.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Exquisite, but in Antonio's usage (line 46), "given to pleasure." "Subtle": fine, but in Sebastian's usage (line 47), "sexually expert" or "crafty."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Antonio takes "Temperance" to be the name of a girl.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Learnedly delivered" was a popular phrase among Puritans who wanted to appear pious.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A tinge. In Antonio's reply, an "eye of green" refers to Gonzalo's optimistic capacity to see green.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Exceptional quality; but in Sebastian's usage (line 62), "uncommon thing."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Seen as the garments' "mouth"; also implying that Gonzalo's pockets are stained.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The evidence of stained pockets would confute Gonzalo's words and reputation for honesty. "Pocket up": suppress, or keep silent; also, receive unprotestingly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Queen of ancient Carthage, whose tragic love affair with Aeneas is related in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Antonio picks on this designation for a woman abandoned by her lover as being either irrelevant or conspicuously prudish. Dido, however, was in fact a widow when she met Aeneas.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The city of Tunis was actually built ten miles from the site of Carthage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A reference to Amphion's harp; at its music the walls (but not the houses) of Thebes arose.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Affirming his belief that Tunis was Carthage; Antonio mocks the length of time this took.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Except (as a verb); don't mention.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Comparatively speaking; Antonio plays on “drawing lots.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The image is of one being force-fed words against the appetite (“stomach”) for hearing them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That extended out and drooped over the foot of the cliff, which had been eroded by waves.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To act differently.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Weighed loathness to marry against obedience to her father to find out which end of the scales’ beam would sink.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the most grievous, or costliest, part of the loss is also my own.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “To rub the sore” was proverbial. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A soothing remedy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Had I responsibility for colonization of the island; but also interpreted as “planting” by Antonio and Sebastian.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cited as wild plants prone to grow on uncultivated land; but dock is a traditional soother of nettle stings, and mallow roots were used to make soothing ointment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: I would advance the opposite to what would be usual. This speech is based on a passage in John Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s essay “Of Cannibals.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Inheritance of property.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Idleness proverbially begets lust.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Seen as irrelevant to sexually innocent people; also a form of contract.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In classical mythology, the earliest of the ages—a time without strife, labor, or injustice, when abundant food grew without cultivation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Afford opportunity.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: If it had not fallen on the flat, harmless side of the sword.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Courage; punning on “metal,” as of a sword blade.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: You would even steal the moon, if she were to stand still in her orbit ("sphere").[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Trapping birds by using light to attract them and bats to strike them down; may also mean swindling and victimizing the simple.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I will not put my sound judgment at risk so foolishly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Makes you three times as great.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Between tides, and thus open to suggestion; also, associated with being slothful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Inherited laziness, or the slowness to attain prosperity arising from being born a younger brother.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: If you only understood that your mockery reveals how great your aspirations really are; also, the hereditary position you mock is actually to your advantage. "Cherish": hold dear; cultivate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Which puts in agony, as in childbirth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Only / Professes": his sole vocation is.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Doubt that there is anything to achieve beyond the high hope of the crown.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Regurgitated, cast ashore; also, possibly, theatrical role-playing.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I could train a jackdaw (known for imitating speech) to speak as profoundly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chilblain; sore on the heel.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Turned to sugar; crystallized in sugar.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Gonzalo and Alonso.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ariel's following lines are spoken as the other characters depart; he probably exits in another direction.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 2.1: **2.1**[Return to reference 2.1](#)

# Notes

- °: *occasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exactly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *against*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leave him alone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keep count*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harbored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spare your words*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uninhabited*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *climate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bog*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tender and luxuriant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alleged; accepted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fuss about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *examine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consideration*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vigorous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *do not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lose; release*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Claribel)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(appropriate time)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surgeonlike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *commerce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *writing; erudition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boundary*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tillage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *for communal use*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weapon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plenty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God save*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sensitive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tired; serious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *neglect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consensus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity speaks to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awake*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shut your eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meaningfully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if you heed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fixed look*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *something important*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *memory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as little remembered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *buried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(that he's not drowned)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *catch a glimpse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifetime journey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *information* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *messenger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *returning from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *performance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *about 18 to 22 inches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the cubits)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(to his opportunity)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *those that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regard; care for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more trimly*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *make me wear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sword*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sleep forever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prompting to evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chime; agree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *your weapons*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fearful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guarding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the truth*[Return to reference](#) °

## 2.2

*Enter CALIBAN with a burden of wood.*

CALIBAN All the infections that the sun sucks up  
From bogs, fens, flats, o on Prosper fall, and make  
him

By inchmeal o a disease!

*A noise of thunder heard.* <sup>1</sup>

His spirits hear me,  
And yet I needs must curse. But they'll nor pinch,  
5 Fright me with urchin-shows, <sup>2</sup> pitch me i'th' mire,  
Nor lead me like a firebrand in the dark  
Out of my way, unless he bid 'em. But  
For every trifle are they set upon me;  
Sometime like apes that mow o and chatter at me  
And after bite me; then like hedgehogs, which  
10 Lie tumbling in my barefoot way and mount  
Their pricks at my footfall; sometime am I  
All wound with o adders, who with cloven tongues  
Do hiss me into madness.

*Enter TRINCULO.* <sup>3</sup>

Lo, now, lo!  
Here comes a spirit of his, and to torment me  
15 For bringing wood in slowly. I'll fall flat.  
Perchance he will not mind o me.  
TRINCULO Here's neither bush nor scrub to bear off o  
any  
weather at all, and another storm brewing: I hear it  
sing  
20 i'th' wind. Yond same black cloud, yond huge one,  
looks  
like a foul bombard <sup>4</sup> that would shed his liquor. If it

should thunder as it did before, I know not where to  
hide  
my head. Yond same cloud cannot choose but fall by  
pailfuls. [*He sees* CALIBAN.] What have we here? A  
man or a  
fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a  
25 very  
ancient and fishlike smell; a kind of not-of-the-  
newest  
poor-john.<sup>5</sup> A strange fish. Were I in England now,  
as once  
I was, and had but this fish painted,<sup>6</sup> not a holiday  
fool  
there but would give a piece of silver. There would  
this  
30 monster make a man;<sup>7</sup> any strange beast there  
makes a  
man. When they will not give a doit<sup>8</sup> to relieve a  
lame  
beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian.<sup>8</sup>  
Legged  
like a man, and his fins like arms. Warm, o' my troth!  
I do  
now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer: this is no  
fish,  
35 but an islander that hath lately suffered by a  
thunderbolt.  
[*Thunder.*] Alas, the storm is come again. My best  
way is  
to creep under his gaberdine; there is no other  
shelter  
hereabout. Misery acquaints a man with strange  
bedfellows.  
I will here shroud<sup>9</sup> till the dregs<sup>9</sup> of the storm  
be past.

40                   [*He crawls under Caliban's cloak.*]  
                  *Enter STEFANO singing.*  
STEFANO    I shall no more to sea, to sea,  
                  Here shall I die ashore.  
This is a very scurvy tune to sing at a man's funeral.  
Well, here's my comfort.  
                  [*He*] *drinks* [*and*] *sings.*  
                  The master, the swabber, the boatswain and  
45            I,  
                  The gunner and his mate,  
                  Loved Moll, Meg, and Marian, and Margery,  
                  But none of us cared for Kate.  
                  For she had a tongue with a tang,<sup>o</sup>  
                  Would cry to a sailor, "Go hang!"  
50            She loved not the savor of tar nor of pitch,  
                  Yet a tailor might scratch her where'er she  
                  did itch.<sup>1</sup>  
                  Then to sea, boys, and let her go hang!  
This is a scurvy tune, too; but here's my comfort.  
                  [*He*] *drinks.*  
55    CALIBAN    Do not torment me! Oh!  
STEFANO    What's the matter?<sup>o</sup> Have we devils here?  
                  Do  
                  you put tricks upon 's with savages and men of Ind?<sup>o</sup>  
                  Ha? I have not scaped drowning to be afeared now  
                  of  
                  your four legs; for it hath been said, "As proper a  
                  man as  
60            ever went on four legs<sup>2</sup> cannot make him give  
                  ground";  
                  and it shall be said so again, while Stefano breathes  
                  at'<sup>o</sup>  
                  nostrils.  
CALIBAN    The spirit torments me! Oh!

STEFANO    This is some monster of the isle with four  
             legs  
65    who hath got, as I take it, an ague.<sup>o</sup> Where the devil  
             should he learn our language? I will give him some  
             relief  
             if it be but for that. If I can recover<sup>o</sup> him and keep  
             him  
             tame and get to Naples with him, he's a present for  
             any  
             emperor that ever trod on neat's leather.<sup>o</sup>  
70    CALIBAN    Do not torment me, prithee! I'll bring my  
             wood  
             home faster.  
STEFANO    He's in his fit now, and does not talk after<sup>o</sup>  
             the  
             wisest. He shall taste of my bottle. If he have never  
             drunk  
             wine afore, it will go near to<sup>o</sup> remove his fit. If I can  
             recover  
75    him and keep him tame, I will not take too much for  
             him.<sup>3</sup>  
             He shall pay for him that hath<sup>o</sup> him, and that  
             soundly.  
CALIBAN    Thou dost me yet but little hurt; thou wilt  
             anon,  
             I know it by thy trembling. Now Prosper works upon  
             thee.  
STEFANO    Come on your ways.<sup>o</sup> Open your mouth:  
             here is  
80    that which will give language to you, cat.<sup>4</sup> Open your  
             mouth: this will shake<sup>o</sup> your shaking, I can tell you,  
             and  
             that soundly. [CALIBAN *drinks.*] You cannot tell who's  
             your friend. Open your chaps again.

TRINCULO I should know that voice. It should be—  
but he  
is drowned, and these are devils. Oh, defend me!

85 STEFANO Four legs and two voices: a most delicate<sup>o</sup>  
monster!  
His forward voice now is to speak well of his friend;  
his backward voice is to utter foul speeches and to  
detract.  
If all the wine in my bottle will recover him,<sup>5</sup> I will  
help  
his ache. Come. [CALIBAN *drinks.*] Amen.<sup>o</sup> I will pour  
90 some  
in thy other mouth.  
TRINCULO Stefano!  
STEFANO Doth thy other mouth call me? Mercy,  
mercy!  
This is a devil and no monster. I will leave him; I  
have  
no long spoon.<sup>6</sup>

95 TRINCULO Stefano? If thou beest Stefano, touch me  
and  
speak to me, for I am Trinculo—be not afeard—thy  
good friend Trinculo.  
STEFANO If thou beest Trinculo, come forth: I'll pull  
thee by  
100 the lesser legs. If any be Trinculo's legs, these are  
they. [*He  
pulls him out.*] Thou art very<sup>o</sup> Trinculo indeed! How  
can'st thou to be the siege<sup>o</sup> of this mooncalf?<sup>7</sup> Can  
he  
vent<sup>o</sup> Trinculos?  
TRINCULO I took him to be killed with a  
thunderstroke.  
But art thou not drowned, Stefano? I hope now thou  
105

art not drowned. Is the storm overblown? I hid me  
under  
the dead mooncalf's gaberdine, for fear of the storm.  
And art thou living, Stefano? O Stefano, two  
Neapolitans  
scaped!

110 STEFANO Prithee, do not turn me about, my  
stomach is  
not constant.

CALIBAN [*aside*] These be fine things, an if<sup>o</sup> they be  
not  
sprites. That's a brave<sup>o</sup> god, and bears celestial  
liquor. I  
will kneel to him.

115 STEFANO How didst thou scape? How cam'st thou  
hither?

Swear by this bottle how thou cam'st hither. I  
escaped  
upon a butt of sack<sup>8</sup> which the sailors heaved  
o'erboard,  
by this bottle, which I made of the bark of a tree,  
with  
mine own hands, since I was cast ashore.

120 CALIBAN I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true  
subject,  
for the liquor is not earthly.

STEFANO Here. Swear then how thou escaped'st.

TRINCULO Swum ashore, man, like a duck. I can  
swim  
like a duck, I'll be sworn.

125 STEFANO [*giving* TRINCULO *the bottle*] Here, kiss the  
Book.<sup>9</sup>

Though thou canst swim like a duck, thou art made  
like  
a goose.<sup>1</sup>



TRINCULO O Stefano, hast any more of this?  
 STEFANO The whole butt, man. My cellar is in a rock  
 by  
 130 the seaside, where my wine is hid. [*to* CALIBAN] How  
 now, mooncalf, how does thine ague?  
 CALIBAN Hast thou not dropped from heaven?  
 STEFANO Out o'th' moon I do assure thee. I was the  
 man  
 i'th' moon, when time was.<sup>o</sup>  
 135 CALIBAN I have seen thee in her, and I do adore  
 thee.  
 My mistress<sup>o</sup> showed me thee, and thy dog, and thy  
 bush.<sup>2</sup>  
 STEFANO [*giving the bottle to* CALIBAN] Come, swear  
 to  
 that: kiss the Book. I will furnish it anon with new  
 contents.  
 Swear.  
 140 TRINCULO By this good light,<sup>o</sup> this is a very shallow  
 monster.  
 I afeared of him? A very weak monster. The man  
 i'th' moon? A most poor credulous  
 monster. Well drawn,<sup>o</sup> monster, in good sooth.  
 CALIBAN I'll show thee every fertile inch o'th' island,  
 and  
 I will kiss thy foot. I prithee, be my god.  
 145 TRINCULO By this light, a most perfidious and  
 drunken  
 monster! When 's god's asleep he'll rob his bottle.  
 CALIBAN I'll kiss thy foot. I'll swear myself thy  
 subject.  
 STEFANO Come on, then: down and swear.  
 150 TRINCULO I shall laugh myself to death at this  
 puppy-

headed monster. A most scurvy monster. I could find  
in

my heart to beat him—

STEFANO [*to* CALIBAN] Come, kiss.

TRINCULO —but that the poor monster's in drink. <sup>o</sup>

An

abominable monster.

155 CALIBAN I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck  
thee berries;

I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.

A plague upon the tyrant that I serve!

I'll bear him no more sticks but follow thee,

Thou wondrous man.

160 TRINCULO A most ridiculous monster, to make a  
wonder

of a poor drunkard.

CALIBAN I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs <sup>o</sup>  
grow;

And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts, <sup>o</sup>

165 Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how  
To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee  
To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
Young scamels <sup>3</sup> from the rock. Wilt thou go with  
me?

STEFANO I prithee now lead the way without any  
more

170 talking. Trinculo, the King and all our company else  
being

drowned, we will inherit here. [*to* CALIBAN] Here, bear  
my bottle. —Fellow Trinculo, we'll fill him <sup>o</sup> by and by  
again.

CALIBAN (*sings drunkenly*) <sup>4</sup> Farewell, master;  
farewell,

farewell.

175 TRINCULO A howling monster, a drunken monster.

CALIBAN [*continuing to sing*] No more dams I'll  
 make for<sup>o</sup>  
 fish,  
 Nor fetch in firing<sup>o</sup>  
 At requiring,  
 180 Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish,  
 'Ban, 'Ban, Ca-Caliban  
 Has a new master: get a new man.<sup>5</sup>  
 Freedom, high-day;<sup>o</sup> high-day, freedom; freedom,  
 high-  
 day, freedom!  
 185 STEFANO O brave<sup>o</sup> monster, lead the way! *Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Caliban takes this as a response to his curse.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: With the sight of hedgehog-like spirits.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Trinculo is probably dressed in traditional fool's motley (many-colored garment).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Large leather drinking vessel; stone-throwing military engine.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dried hake, a poor person's staple.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: On a sign to attract spectators.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Make a fortune for a man; become a man.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An allusion to exhibitions of Native Americans in London.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Last drinks, as from the bottom of a "bombard" of wine.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Implying sexual desire and gratification. Tailors were often mocked for supposed lack of virility.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Comically varying "on two legs" (upright); also suggesting "on crutches."[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: No sum can be too high for him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Ale will make a cat speak" was proverbial.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: If it takes all the wine in my bottle to cure him.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From the proverbial "He should have a long spoon that sups with the devil."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Deformed creature; miscarriage, owing to the supposed detrimental influence of the moon.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cask of Spanish or Canary wine.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Confirming an oath by kissing the Bible; or the proverbial "Kiss the cup" ("Drink").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Probably alluding to Trinculo's outstretched neck with the bottle as a beak; also, a byword for giddiness and unsteadiness on the feet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A dog and a thornbush were traditional attributes of the man in the moon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Shakespeare may have invented this exotic word, which appears nowhere else in the English language, but it seems more likely that "scamel" was the result of an error in transmission.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This stage direction may be misplaced and may actually refer to the following song, "No more dams."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Addressed to the old master, Prospero.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 2.2: **2.2**[Return to reference 2.2](#)

## Notes

- °: *marshes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inch by inch*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grimace*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entwined by*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *notice*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *ward off* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small coin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take cover* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what's going on?* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *India* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at the* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a fit of fever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cure* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cowhide; shoes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the manner of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *almost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gets* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *come on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dislodge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exquisitely made* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enough* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *actual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excrement* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defecate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an if = if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellent; fine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *once upon a time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Miranda)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sun* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drunk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drunk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crab apples* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *edible tubers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to trap* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *firewood* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *holiday* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellent; fine* [Return to reference](#) °

### 3.1

*Enter FERDINAND, bearing a log.*

FERDINAND    There be some sports are painful, and  
                  their labor

Delight in them sets off.<sup>1</sup> Some kinds of baseness  
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters  
Point to rich ends. This my mean<sup>o</sup> task

5 Would be as heavy to me as odious, but<sup>o</sup>  
The mistress which I serve quickens<sup>o</sup> what's dead  
And makes my labors pleasures. Oh, she is

Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed,  
And he's composed of harshness. I must remove

10      Some thousands of these logs and pile them up,  
Upon a soreo injunction. My sweet mistress

Weeps when she sees me work and says such  
baseness

Had never like executor. I forget;

But these sweet thoughts do even refresh my labors,  
Most busil'est, <sup>2</sup> when I do it. <sup>o</sup>

*Enter MIRANDA, and PROSPERO [unseen].*

MIRANDA                                Alas now, pray you,

15 Work not so hard. I would the lightning had  
Burnt up those logs that you are enjoined to pile.

Pray set it down and rest you. When this burns  
'Twill weep<sup>3</sup> for having wearied you. My father

Is hard at study. Pray now, rest yourself.

20 He's safeo for these three hours.

FERDINAND O most dear  
mistress,

The sun will set before I shall discharge  
What I must strive to do.

MIRANDA                                If you'll sit down  
I'll bear your logs the while. Pray give me that:

I'll carry it to the pile.

25 FERDINAND No, precious creature,  
I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,  
Than you should such dishonor undergo  
While I sit lazy by.

MIRANDA It would become me  
As well as it does you; and I should do it  
30 With much more ease, for my goodwill is to it,  
And yours it is against.

PROSPERO [*aside*] Poor worm, thou art  
infected:<sup>4</sup>

This visitation<sup>5</sup> shows it.

MIRANDA You look wearily.

FERDINAND No, noble mistress, 'tis fresh morning  
with me

When you are by at night. I do beseech you,  
Chiefly that I may set it in my prayers,  
35 What is your name?

MIRANDA Miranda. —O my father,  
I have broke your hest<sup>o</sup> to say so!

FERDINAND Admired<sup>6</sup> Miranda!  
Indeed the top of admiration, worth  
What's dearest to the world. Full many a lady  
I have eyed with best regard, and many a time  
40 Th' harmony of their tongues hath into bondage  
Brought my too diligent<sup>o</sup> ear. For several virtues  
Have I liked several<sup>o</sup> women; never any  
With so full soul but some defect in her  
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed<sup>o</sup>  
45 And put it to the foil.<sup>7</sup> But you, O you,  
So perfect and so peerless, are created  
Of every creature's best.

MIRANDA I do not know  
One of my sex; no woman's face remember  
Save, from my glass,<sup>o</sup> mine own. Nor have I seen

50 More that I may call men than you, good friend,  
And my dear father. How features are abroad<sup>8</sup>  
I am skillless<sup>o</sup> of; but by my modesty,<sup>o</sup>  
The jewel in my dower,<sup>o</sup> I would not wish  
Any companion in the world but you,  
55 Nor can imagination form a shape  
Besides<sup>o</sup> yourself to like of. But I prattle  
Something<sup>o</sup> too wildly, and my father's precepts  
I therein do forget.

FERDINAND I am in my condition<sup>o</sup>  
A prince, Miranda; I do think a king—  
60 I would<sup>o</sup> not so!—and would no more endure  
This wooden slavery<sup>9</sup> than to suffer  
The flesh fly<sup>1</sup> blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak:  
The very instant that I saw you did  
My heart fly to your service, there resides  
65 To make me slave to it, and for your sake  
Am I this patient log-man.

MIRANDA Do you love me?

FERDINAND O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this  
sound,  
And crown what I profess with kind event<sup>o</sup>  
If I speak true! If hollowly,<sup>o</sup> invert  
70 What best is boded<sup>o</sup> me to mischief!<sup>o</sup> I,  
Beyond all limit of what<sup>o</sup> else i'th' world,  
Do love, prize, honor you.

MIRANDA I am a fool  
To weep at what I am glad of.

PROSPERO [*aside*] Fair encounter  
Of two most rare affections. Heavens rain grace  
75 On that which breeds between 'em.

FERDINAND Wherefore weep  
you?

MIRANDA At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer  
What I desire to give, and much less take



What I shall die to want.<sup>2</sup> But this is trifling,  
 And all the more it seeks to hide itself  
 80 The bigger bulk it shows.<sup>3</sup> Hence, bashful cunning,<sup>o</sup>  
 And prompt me, plain and holy innocence!  
 I am your wife if you'll marry me;  
 If not, I'll die your maid.<sup>o</sup> To be your fellow<sup>o</sup>  
 85 You may deny me, but I'll be your servant  
 Whether you will or no.  
 FERDINAND My mistress,<sup>o</sup> dearest,  
 And I thus humble ever.  
 MIRANDA My husband, then?  
 FERDINAND Ay, with a heart as  
 willing<sup>o</sup>  
 As bondage e'er of freedom. Here's my hand.<sup>4</sup>  
 90 MIRANDA And mine, with my heart in't. And now  
 farewell  
 Till half an hour hence.  
 FERDINAND A thousand thousand!<sup>o</sup>  
*Exeunt* [FERDINAND and MIRANDA, separately].  
 PROSPERO So glad of this as they I cannot be,  
 Who are surprised withal;<sup>o</sup> but my rejoicing  
 At nothing can be more. I'll to my book,<sup>o</sup>  
 95 For yet ere supertime must I perform  
 Much business appertaining.  
*Exit.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The greater effort invested amounts to more pleasure; the labor of painful activities ("sports") is offset by whatever delight we take in them.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Most busily (giving a double superlative).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: By exuding drops of resin.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Afflicted with lovesickness. "Worm": an expression of tenderness; but a worm was often thought to carry disease.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Suggesting a pastoral or charitable visit to the sick; or perhaps indicating a visit by the plague—here, lovesickness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Playing on the meaning of Miranda's name.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Foiled it, or made it ineffectual; challenged it, as in a fencing match (see "quarrel" in line 45).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: What people look like elsewhere.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The log as a symbol of Prospero's oppression.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Species of fly that deposits its eggs ("blows") in dead flesh.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Miranda is not at liberty to bestow her virginity or to obtain the consummation that she desires and lacks.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An image of secret pregnancy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "I am your wife . . . hand" (lines 83–89): such an exchange could actually have constituted a marriage ceremony. In Shakespeare's time, weddings did not need to be witnessed and performed in a church to be valid (compare 4.1.14–19).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 3.1: **3.1**[Return to reference 3.1](#)

## Notes

- °: *lowly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *except that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *enlivens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harsh*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(labor)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *we are safe from him*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disobeyed your command*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *attentive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *owned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mirror*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virginity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dowry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *other than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *somewhat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wish it were*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favorable outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falsely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foretold to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misfortune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatsoever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *artful shyness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *virgin; servant* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweetheart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desirous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(farewells)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overwhelmed by all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *book of magic*[Return to reference](#) °

## 3.2

*Enter* CALIBAN, STEFANO, *and* TRINCULO.

STEFANO Tell not me. When the butt is out we will  
drink

water, not a drop before. Therefore bear up and  
board 'em.<sup>1</sup>

—Servant monster, drink to me!

TRINCULO "Servant monster"? The folly<sup>o</sup> of this  
island!

5 They say there's but five upon this isle. We are three  
of  
them; if th'other two be brained<sup>o</sup> like us, the state  
totters.

STEFANO Drink, servant monster, when I bid thee.  
Thy eyes are almost set<sup>o</sup> in thy head.

TRINCULO Where should they be set<sup>o</sup> else? He were  
a

10 brave monster indeed if they were set in his tail.

STEFANO My man-monster hath drowned his tongue  
in

sack. For my part, the sea cannot drown me. I  
swam, ere

I could recover the shore, five and thirty leagues,<sup>o</sup>  
off and

on.<sup>2</sup> By this light, thou shalt be my lieutenant,  
monster, or

15 my standard.<sup>3</sup>

TRINCULO Your lieutenant, if you list;<sup>o</sup> he's no  
standard.

STEFANO We'll not run, Monsieur Monster.

TRINCULO Nor go<sup>o</sup> neither, but you'll lie<sup>4</sup> like dogs  
and

yet say nothing neither.  
 20 STEFANO Mooncalf, speak once in thy life, if thou  
     beest a  
     good mooncalf.  
 CALIBAN How does thy honor? Let me lick thy shoe.  
 I'll not serve him; he is not valiant.  
 TRINCULO Thou liest, most ignorant monster; I am  
     in case<sup>o</sup>  
 25 to jostle a constable. Why, thou debauched fish  
     thou,  
     was there ever man a coward that hath drunk so  
     much  
     sack as I do today? Wilt thou tell a monstrous lie,  
     being  
     but half a fish and half a monster?  
 CALIBAN Lo, how he mocks me. Wilt thou let him,  
     my lord?  
 TRINCULO "Lord," quoth he? That a monster should  
 30 be  
     such a natural!<sup>5</sup>  
 CALIBAN Lo, lo again! Bite him to death, I prithee.  
 STEFANO Trinculo, keep a good tongue in your head.  
     If  
     you prove a mutineer, the next tree!<sup>o</sup> The poor  
     monster's  
     my subject, and he shall not suffer indignity.  
 35 CALIBAN I thank my noble lord. Wilt thou be pleased  
     To hearken once again to the suit I made to thee?  
 STEFANO Marry, will I. Kneel and repeat it. I will  
     stand,  
     and so shall Trinculo.  
         *Enter ARIEL invisible.*  
 CALIBAN As I told thee before, I am subject to a  
 40 tyrant,  
     A sorcerer, that by his cunning hath

Cheated me of the island.

ARIEL

Thou liest.

CALIBAN [*to* TRINCULO] Thou liest, thou jesting  
monkey, thou!

I would my valiant master would destroy thee.  
I do not lie.

45

STEFANO Trinculo, if you trouble him any more in 's  
tale,

by this hand, I will supplant<sup>o</sup> some of your teeth.

TRINCULO Why, I said nothing.

STEFANO Mum, then, and no more. —Proceed.

50

CALIBAN I say by sorcery he got this isle;  
From me he got it. If thy greatness will  
Revenge it on him—for I know thou dar'st,  
But this thing<sup>6</sup> dare not—

STEFANO That's most certain.

55

CALIBAN Thou shalt be lord of it, and I'll serve thee.

STEFANO How now shall this be compassed?<sup>o</sup> Canst  
thou

bring me to the party?<sup>o</sup>

CALIBAN Yea, yea, my lord. I'll yield him thee  
asleep,

Where thou mayst knock a nail into his head.<sup>7</sup>

60

ARIEL Thou liest; thou canst not.

CALIBAN What a pied ninny's<sup>o</sup> this! Thou scurvy  
patch!<sup>o</sup>

I do beseech thy greatness give him blows  
And take his bottle from him. When that's gone,  
He shall drink naught but brine, for I'll not show him  
Where the quick freshes<sup>o</sup> are.

65

STEFANO Trinculo, run into no further danger.

Interrupt

the monster one word further and, by this hand, I'll  
turn

my mercy out o'doors and make a stockfish of thee.<sup>8</sup>

TRINCULO Why, what did I? I did nothing. I'll go  
 farther off.  
 STEFANO Didst thou not say he lied?  
 70 ARIEL Thou liest.  
 STEFANO Do I so?  
 [*He beats* TRINCULO.]  
 Take thou that! As you like this, give me the lie<sup>o</sup>  
 another time.  
 TRINCULO I did not give the lie! Out o'your wits, and  
 75 hearing too? A pox o'your bottle. This can sack and  
 drinking do. A murrain<sup>o</sup> on your monster, and the  
 devil  
 take your fingers!  
 CALIBAN Ha, ha, ha!  
 STEFANO Now forward with your tale. —Prithee  
 80 stand  
 further off.  
 CALIBAN Beat him enough. After a little time I'll beat  
 him  
 too.  
 STEFANO Stand farther. —Come, proceed.  
 CALIBAN Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him  
 85 I'th' afternoon to sleep. There<sup>o</sup> thou mayst brain  
 him,  
 Having first seized his books; or with a log  
 Batter his skull, or paunch<sup>o</sup> him with a stake,  
 Or cut his weasand<sup>o</sup> with thy knife. Remember  
 First to possess his books, for without them  
 90 He's but a sot<sup>o</sup> as I am, nor hath not  
 One spirit to command—they all do hate him  
 As rootedly as I. Burn but his books.  
 He has brave utensils,<sup>9</sup> for so he calls them,  
 Which, when he has a house, he'll deck withal.  
 95 And that most deeply to consider is  
 The beauty of his daughter. He himself

100        Calls her a nonpareil.° I never saw a woman  
              But only Sycorax my dam and she;  
              But she as far surpasseth Sycorax  
              As great'st does least.  
 STEFANO                                Is it so brave° a lass?  
 CALIBAN    Ay, lord. She will become thy bed, I  
              warrant,  
              And bring thee forth brave brood.  
 STEFANO    Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter  
              and I  
 105        will be king and queen—save° our graces—and  
              Trinculo  
              and thyself shall be viceroys. Dost thou like the plot,  
              Trinculo?  
 TRINCULO    Excellent.  
 STEFANO    Give me thy hand. I am sorry I beat thee.  
              But  
 110        while thou liv'st, keep a good tongue in thy head.  
 CALIBAN    Within this half hour will he be asleep.  
              Wilt thou destroy him then?  
 STEFANO                                Ay, on mine honor.  
 ARIEL [*aside*]    This will I tell my master.  
 CALIBAN    Thou mak'st me merry. I am full of  
              pleasure;  
 115        Let us be jocund. Will you troll° the catch°  
              You taught me but whilere?°  
 STEFANO    At thy request, monster, I will do reason,  
              any °  
              reason. Come on, Trinculo, let us sing.  
              (*Sings.*)<sup>1</sup>                Flout 'em, and scout 'em  
    And scout°'em, and flout 'em.  
 120                                Thought is free.  
 CALIBAN    That's not the tune.  
              ARIEL *plays the tune on a tabor and pipe.*<sup>2</sup>  
 STEFANO    What is this same?



TRINCULO This is the tune of our catch, played by  
 the  
 picture of Nobody.<sup>3</sup>  
 125 STEFANO If thou beest a man, show thyself in thy  
 likeness. If thou beest a devil, take't as thou list.<sup>o</sup>  
 TRINCULO Oh, forgive me my sins!  
 STEFANO He that dies pays all debts.<sup>4</sup> I defy thee!  
 Mercy  
 upon us!<sup>5</sup>  
 130 CALIBAN Art thou afeard?  
 STEFANO No, monster, not I.  
 CALIBAN Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds and sweet airs<sup>o</sup> that give delight and hurt  
 not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 135 Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,  
 That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
 Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked  
 140 I cried to dream again.  
 STEFANO This will prove a brave kingdom to me,  
 where I  
 shall have my music for nothing.<sup>6</sup>  
 CALIBAN When Prospero is destroyed.  
 STEFANO That shall be by and by:<sup>o</sup> I remember the  
 145 story.  

[Exit ARIEL playing  
 music.]

 TRINCULO The sound is going away; let's follow it,  
 and  
 after do our work.  
 STEFANO Lead, monster, we'll follow. I would I could  
 see  
 this taborer: he lays it on.<sup>7</sup>

*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Force a way aboard, continuing the terminology of naval warfare; take onboard (drink). "Bear up": sail to the attack.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tacking away from and toward the shore.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Standard-bearer; but in Trinculo's reply, "one who can stand up."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lie (down); tell lies; excrete.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An idiot, punning on the idea that monsters were unnatural.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Trinculo; or perhaps Caliban himself.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: As Jael murdered the sleeping the Sisera in Judges 4:21 and 5:26.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Proverbial allusion to the beating of dried fish before cooking it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Perhaps confusing implements for magic and household goods.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The stage direction suggests that the others cannot manage the catch and remain in bewildered silence. But Trinculo, and perhaps Caliban, may attempt to join in.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The tabor was a small drum slung on the left-hand side of the body; the tabor pipe was a long narrow pipe played with the left hand. The combination was associated with rustic dances and merrymaking.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Nobody" was a character in a comedy who was depicted on the title page of the printed text. Large breeches up

- to his neck made him appear to have no trunk.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Varying the proverbial “Death pays all debts.”[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Stefano’s defiance comically collapses.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: James I spent large sums on court music, but not typically of the popular kind Ariel now plays.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: He sets himself to his music vigorously. Stefano deserts Caliban in order to follow the music. Trinculo and Caliban in turn follow Stefano.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 3.2: **3.2**[Return to reference 3.2](#)

## Notes

- °: *absurdity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have brains* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fixed by drunkenness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *placed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *about 100 miles* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *walk* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prepared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(for a gallows)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *uproot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accomplished* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *person concerned* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fool in motley* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jester; idiot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fast-flowing springs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call me a liar* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plague* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *then* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disembowel* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *windpipe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stupid fool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one without equal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *excellent; fine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God save*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *round; song*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a short time ago*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything reasonable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mock*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tunes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very soon*[Return to reference](#) °

### 3.3

*Enter* ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, ANTONIO, GONZALO, ADRIAN,  
*and* FRANCISCO.

GONZALO By'r lakin,<sup>1</sup> I can go no further, sir.  
My old bones aches. Here's a maze trod indeed  
Through forthrights and meanders.° By your  
patience,  
I needs must rest me.

ALONSO Old lord, I cannot blame thee,  
Who am myself attached° with weariness  
5 To th' dulling of my spirits. Sit down and rest.  
Even° here I will put off my hope, and keep it  
No longer for° my flatterer: he is drowned  
Whom thus we stray to find, and the sea mocks  
Our frustrate° search on land. Well, let him go.

10 ANTONIO [*aside to* SEBASTIAN ] I am right glad that  
he's so out of hope.

Do not, for° one repulse, forgo the purpose  
That you resolved t'effect.

SEBASTIAN [*aside to* ANTONIO] The next advantage  
Will we take throughly.°

ANTONIO [*aside to* SEBASTIAN] Let it be tonight;  
15 For now they are oppressed with travail,° they  
Will not nor cannot use such vigilance  
As when they are fresh.

SEBASTIAN [*aside to* ANTONIO] I say tonight: no more.  
*Solemn and strange music.* [*Enter*] PROSPERO on  
the top,<sup>2</sup> invisible.

ALONSO What harmony is this? My good friends,  
hark!

GONZALO Marvelous sweet music.

*Enter several strange shapes, bringing a  
banquet; and dance about it with gentle actions*

*of salutations, and inviting the King etc. to eat,  
they depart.*

20 ALONSO Give us kind keepers,<sup>o</sup> heavens! What were  
these?

SEBASTIAN A living drollery.<sup>3</sup> Now I will believe  
That there are unicorns; that in Arabia  
There is one tree, the phoenix' throne, one phoenix<sup>4</sup>  
At this hour reigning there.

ANTONIO I'll believe both;  
And what does else want credit,<sup>o</sup> come to me,  
25 And I'll be sworn 'tis true. Travelers ne'er did lie,<sup>5</sup>  
Though fools at home condemn 'em.

GONZALO If in Naples  
I should report this now, would they believe me?  
If I should say I saw such islanders—  
30 For certes<sup>o</sup> these are people of the island—  
Who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet note  
Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of  
Our human generation you shall find  
Many, nay, almost any.

PROSPERO [*aside*] Honest lord,  
35 Thou hast said well; for some of you there present  
Are worse than devils.

ALONSO I cannot too much muse<sup>o</sup>  
Such shapes, such gesture, and such sound,  
expressing—  
Although they want the use of tongue<sup>o</sup>—a kind  
Of excellent dumb discourse.

PROSPERO [*aside*] Praise in departing.<sup>6</sup>

FRANCISCO They vanished strangely.

40 SEBASTIAN No matter,  
since

They have left their viands<sup>o</sup> behind; for we have  
stomachs.<sup>o</sup>

Wilt please you taste of what is here?

ALONSO

Not I.

GONZALO Faith, sir, you need not fear. When we  
were boys,

45 Who would believe that there were mountaineers,<sup>o</sup>  
Dewlapped like bulls, whose throats had hanging at  
'em

Wallets<sup>o</sup> of flesh? Or that there were such men  
Whose heads stood in their breasts?<sup>7</sup> Which now we  
find

Each putter-out of five for one<sup>8</sup> will bring us  
Good warrant of.

ALONSO I will stand to and feed;<sup>o</sup>

50 Although my last, no matter, since I feel  
The best is past. Brother, my lord the duke,  
Stand to and do as we.

[ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, and ANTONIO approach the  
table.] Thunder and lightning.

Enter ARIEL, like a harpy;<sup>9</sup> claps his wings upon  
the table, and with a quaint device<sup>o</sup> the banquet  
vanishes.<sup>1</sup>

55 ARIEL You are three men of sin, whom destiny—  
That hath to<sup>o</sup> instrument this lower world  
And what is in't—the never-surfeited sea  
Hath caused to belch up you, and on this island,  
Where man doth not inhabit—you 'mongst men  
Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad;  
And even with suchlike valor<sup>2</sup> men hang and drown  
Their proper selves.<sup>o</sup>

[ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, and ANTONIO draw their  
swords.]<sup>3</sup>

60 You fools, I and my fellows  
Are ministers of fate. The elements  
Of whom your swords are tempered<sup>4</sup> may as well  
Wound the loud winds, or with bemocked-at stabs  
Kill the still-closing<sup>5</sup> waters, as diminish

65 One dowl<sup>o</sup> that's in my plume.<sup>o</sup> My fellow ministers  
Are like<sup>o</sup> invulnerable. If you could hurt,  
Your swords are now too massy<sup>o</sup> for your strengths  
And will not be uplifted. But remember—  
For that's my business to you—that you three  
70 From Milan did supplant good Prospero;  
Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,  
Him and his innocent child; for which foul deed  
The powers, delaying not forgetting,<sup>6</sup> have  
Incensed the seas and shores—yea, all the  
creatures<sup>7</sup>—  
Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,  
75 They have bereft; and do pronounce by me  
Ling'ring perdition<sup>8</sup>—worse than any death  
Can be at once—shall step by step attend  
You and your ways; whose<sup>9</sup> wraths to guard you  
from,  
80 Which here in this most desolate<sup>1</sup> isle else falls  
Upon your heads, is nothing<sup>o</sup> but heart's sorrow  
And a clear life<sup>o</sup> ensuing.  
*He vanishes<sup>2</sup> in thunder; then, to soft music,  
enter the shapes again, and dance with mocks  
and mows,<sup>o</sup> and [then exeunt], carrying out the  
table.*  
PROSPERO [*aside*] Bravely the figure of this harpy  
hast thou  
Performed, my Ariel; a grace it had, devouring.<sup>3</sup>  
Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated<sup>o</sup>  
85 In what thou hadst to say. So with good life<sup>4</sup>  
And observation strange<sup>5</sup> my meaner ministers<sup>o</sup>  
Their several kinds<sup>o</sup> have done.<sup>o</sup> My high charms  
work,  
And these mine enemies are all knit up  
In their distractions. They now are in my power;  
90 And in these fits I leave them, while I visit



Young Ferdinand, whom they suppose is drowned,  
 And his and mine loved darling. [*Exit.*]

GONZALO I'th' name of something holy, sir, why  
 stand you  
 In this strange stare?

95 ALONSO Oh, it is monstrous,  
 monstrous!

Methought the billows spoke and told me of it,  
 The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,  
 That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounced  
 The name of Prosper. It did bass my trespass.<sup>6</sup>  
 100 Therefore<sup>o</sup> my son i'th' ooze is bedded, and  
 I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,  
 And with him there lie mudded. [*Exit.*]

SEBASTIAN But one fiend at a  
 time,  
 I'll fight their legions o'er!<sup>o</sup>

ANTONIO I'll be thy second.  
*Exeunt* [SEBASTIAN *and* ANTONIO].

GONZALO All three of them are desperate:<sup>o</sup> their  
 great guilt,  
 105 Like poison given to work<sup>o</sup> a great time after,  
 Now gins to bite the spirits. I do beseech you  
 That are of suppler joints, follow them swiftly,  
 And hinder them from what this ecstasy<sup>o</sup>  
 May now provoke them to.

ADRIAN Follow, I pray you.  
*Exeunt.*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Ladykin: a colloquial form of reference to the Virgin Mary.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A small acting area above the upper stage.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: A puppet show with live actors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The unicorn and phoenix, a bird, were two mythological creatures that sometimes figured in travelers' tales. Only one phoenix was said to exist in the world at any one time.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Proverbially, "A traveler may lie with authority."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Reserve your praise until the end of the event.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Such headless people were described by classical writers, including Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 5.8), as located in North Africa.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A traveler could profit from a voyage by laying down a sum with a broker before departing and undertaking to bring back evidence of having reached his destination; if successful, he was repaid fivefold.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A mythological monster with a vulture's wings and claws and a woman's face. Aeneas and his companions encountered these harpies, who stole their meals and threatened to punish them with slow starvation. "Thunder and lightning": both spectacular and functional for disguising the mechanics of the "quaint device."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The simplest effective staging is by means of a rotating tabletop with the vessels of the banquet fixed to its surface. Leg-to-leg planks supporting the tabletop or a hanging cloth would conceal the vanished banquet. The harpy's wings would hide the mechanics from the audience, and clapping them would provide a visual distraction.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fearlessness that comes from madness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ariel perhaps ascends beyond their reach here. Aeneas's companions, like Alonso here, similarly attempted to kill the harpies with swords.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Compounded and hardened. Metal was sometimes thought of as being compounded of earth and fire, here contrasted with winds and waters.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Self-healing, since they close immediately once parted.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Related to the proverb “God stays long but strikes at last.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Compare Genesis 1:21: “Then God created . . . everything living and moving.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Slow starvation; hell on earth of spiritual suffering. The phrase is first the object of “pronounce” and then the subject of “shall . . . attend.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, “the powers” in line 73.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Joyless, wretched; barren, deserted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ariel is raised out of sight into the canopy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In clapping his wings, Ariel has created the illusion of having devoured the banquet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Convincingly; with vitality. “So”: in the same way.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Remarkable attention to the requirements of their parts, or instructions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The thunder proclaimed my sin (“trespass”) in a bass voice, or with a bass background; perhaps, wordplay on the “utter baseness” of trespass.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 3.3: **3.3**[Return to reference 3.3](#)

## Notes

- °: *direct and winding paths*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *seized*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exactly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *on account of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thoroughly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *journey; effort*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *guardian angels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack belief*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marvel at*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *language*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good appetites*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mountain dwellers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pouches*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begin eating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an ingenious mechanism*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as its*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *themselves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *featherlet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plumage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *similarly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there is no alternative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a life innocent of sin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grimaces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *omitted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lesser spirits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various roles* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *performed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from beginning to end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in despair; reckless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take effect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *madness*[Return to reference](#) °

## 4.1

*Enter* PROSPERO, FERDINAND, *and* MIRANDA.

PROSPERO [*to* FERDINAND] If I have too austere-  
ly punished you,  
Your compensation makes amends, for I  
Have given you here a third<sup>1</sup> of mine own life—  
Or that for which I live—who<sup>o</sup> once again  
I tender<sup>o</sup> to thy hand. All thy vexations  
5 Were but my trials of thy love, and thou  
Hast strangely<sup>o</sup> stood the test. Here, afore heaven,  
I ratify this my rich gift. O Ferdinand,  
Do not smile at me that I boast her off,<sup>o</sup>  
For thou shalt find she will outstrip all praise  
10 And make it halt<sup>o</sup> behind her.

FERDINAND I do believe it against an oracle.<sup>2</sup>

PROSPERO Then, as my guest, and thine own  
acquisition  
Worthily purchased,<sup>o</sup> take my daughter. But  
If thou dost break her virgin-knot<sup>o</sup> before  
15 All sanctimonious<sup>o</sup> ceremonies may  
With full and holy rite be ministered,  
No sweet aspersion<sup>o</sup> shall the heavens let fall  
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,  
Sour-eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew  
20 The union of your bed with weeds<sup>3</sup> so loathly  
That you shall hate it both. Therefore take heed,  
As Hymen's<sup>4</sup> lamps shall light you.

FERDINAND As I hope  
For quiet days, fair issue,<sup>o</sup> and long life,  
With such love as 'tis now, the murkiest den,<sup>o</sup>  
25 The most opportune place, the strong'st suggestion<sup>o</sup>  
Our worser genius can,<sup>5</sup> shall never melt

Mine honor into lust, to take away  
The edge<sup>o</sup> of that day's celebration  
When I shall think or<sup>o</sup> Phoebus' steeds are  
30 foundered,<sup>6</sup>  
Or night kept chained below.  
PROSPERO Fairly spoke.  
Sit then and talk with her: she is thine own.  
—What,<sup>o</sup> Ariel! My industrious servant, Ariel!  
*Enter* ARIEL.  
ARIEL What would my potent master? Here I am.  
PROSPERO Thou and thy meaner<sup>o</sup> fellows your last  
35 service  
Did worthily perform, and I must use you  
In such another trick. Go bring the rabble<sup>7</sup>  
O'er whom I give thee pow'r here to this place.  
Incite them to quick motion, for I must  
Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple  
40 Some vanity<sup>8</sup> of mine art. It is my promise,  
And they expect it from me.  
ARIEL Presently?<sup>o</sup>  
PROSPERO Ay, with a twink.<sup>9</sup>  
ARIEL Before you can say "come" and "go,"  
45 And breathe twice and cry "so, so,"  
Each one tripping on his toe,  
Will be here with mop and mow.<sup>1</sup>  
Do you love me, master? No?  
PROSPERO Dearly, my delicate Ariel. Do not  
approach  
Till thou dost hear me call.  
ARIEL Well; I conceive.<sup>o</sup>  
50 *Exit.*  
PROSPERO [*to* FERDINAND] Look thou be true;<sup>2</sup> do not  
give dalliance  
Too much the rein.<sup>3</sup> The strongest oaths are straw  
To th' fire i'th' blood. Be more abstemious,

Or else good night your vow.

FERDINAND I warrant you, sir,  
The white cold virgin snow upon my heart  
55 Abates the ardor of my liver.<sup>4</sup>

PROSPERO Well.  
—Now come, my Ariel: bring a corollary<sup>o</sup>  
Rather than want<sup>o</sup> a spirit. Appear, and pertly.<sup>o</sup>

*Soft music.*

No tongue, all eyes! Be silent!

*Enter* IRIS.<sup>5</sup>

60 IRIS Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas<sup>6</sup>  
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches,<sup>7</sup> oats, and peas;  
Thy turfy mountains where live nibbling sheep,  
And flat meads<sup>o</sup> thatched with stover,<sup>8</sup> them to  
keep;

Thy banks with pionèd and twillèd<sup>9</sup> brims,  
Which spongy<sup>o</sup> April at thy hest betrim<sup>1</sup>  
65 To make cold nymphs chaste crowns; and thy  
broom-groves,<sup>2</sup>  
Whose shadow the dismissed bachelor<sup>o</sup> loves,  
Being lass-lorn; thy poll-clipped vineyard,<sup>3</sup>  
And thy sea-marge,<sup>o</sup> sterile and rocky-hard,  
70 Where thou thyself dost air<sup>o</sup>—the queen o'th' sky,<sup>4</sup>  
Whose wat'ry arch<sup>o</sup> and messenger am I,  
Bids thee leave these, and with her sovereign grace,  
Here on this grass-plot,<sup>5</sup> in this very place  
To come and sport. Her peacocks fly amain.<sup>6</sup>  
Approach, rich Ceres, her to entertain.

75 *Enter* CERES.<sup>7</sup>

CERES Hail, many-colored messenger, that ne'er  
Dost disobey the wife of Jupiter;<sup>o</sup>  
Who with thy saffron wings upon my flowers  
Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,  
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown

80 My bosky<sup>8</sup> acres and my unshrubbed down,  
 Rich scarf<sup>9</sup> to my proud earth. Why hath thy queen  
 Summoned me hither to this short-grassed green?  
 IRIS A contract of true love to celebrate  
 85 And some donation freely to estate<sup>o</sup>  
 On the blessed lovers.  
 CERES Tell me, heavenly bow,<sup>o</sup>  
 If Venus or her son,<sup>1</sup> as<sup>o</sup> thou dost know,  
 Do now attend the Queen? Since they did plot  
 The means that dusky Dis<sup>2</sup> my daughter got,  
 Her and her blind boy's scandaled<sup>o</sup> company  
 90 I have forsworn.  
 IRIS Of her society  
 Be not afraid. I met her deity  
 Cutting the clouds towards Paphos,<sup>3</sup> and her son  
 Dove-drawn<sup>4</sup> with her. Here thought they to have  
 done  
 95 Some wanton charm upon<sup>5</sup> this man and maid,  
 Whose vows are that no bed-right<sup>6</sup> shall be paid  
 Till Hymen's torch be lighted;<sup>7</sup> but in vain.  
 Mars's hot minion<sup>o</sup> is returned again;  
 Her waspish-headed<sup>8</sup> son has broke his arrows,  
 Swears he will shoot no more but play with  
 100 sparrows,<sup>9</sup>  
 And be a boy right out.<sup>o</sup>  
 JUNO *descends.*<sup>1</sup>  
 CERES Highest queen of state,  
 Great Juno comes; I know her by her gait.<sup>o</sup>  
 JUNO How does my bounteous sister? Go with me  
 To bless this twain that they may prosperous be  
 And honored in their issue.  
 105 [JUNO and CERES] *sing.*<sup>2</sup>  
 Honor, riches, marriage-blessing,  
 Long continuance and increasing,



Hourly joys be still<sup>o</sup> upon you,  
 Juno sings her blessings on you.

110 CERES      Earth's increase and foison<sup>o</sup> plenty,  
 Barns and garner<sup>o</sup> never empty,  
 Vines with clust'ring bunches growing,  
 Plants with goodly burden bowing;  
 Spring come to you at the farthest,  
 115 In the very end of harvest.<sup>3</sup>  
 Scarcity and want shall shun you,  
 Ceres' blessing so is on you.

FERDINAND      This is a most majestic vision, and  
 Harmonious charmingly.<sup>4</sup> May I be bold<sup>o</sup>  
 To think these spirits?

120 PROSPERO      Spirits, which by mine art  
 I have from their confines<sup>5</sup> called to enact  
 My present fancies.

FERDINAND      Let me live here ever!  
 So rare a wondered<sup>o</sup> father and a wise<sup>6</sup>  
 Makes this place paradise.

        JUNO *and* CERES *whisper, and send* IRISON  
         *employment.*

PROSPERO      Sweet<sup>o</sup> now, silence.  
 Juno and Ceres whisper seriously.

125 There's something else to do. Hush and be mute,  
 Or else our spell is marred.

IRIS      You nymphs called naiads of the wind'ring<sup>7</sup>  
         brooks,  
 With your sedged crowns<sup>o</sup> and ever-harmless looks,  
 Leave your crisp channels, and on this green land  
 130 Answer your summons; Juno does command.  
 Come, temperate nymphs, and help to celebrate  
 A contract of true love. Be not too late.

*Enter certain Nymphs.*  
 —You sunburned sicklemen<sup>o</sup> of August weary,  
 Come hither from the furrow and be merry;

135        Make holiday; your rye-straw hats put on,  
And these fresh nymphs encounter every one  
In country footing.

*Enter certain Reapers, properly habited.<sup>8</sup> They  
join with the Nymphs in a graceful dance,  
towards the end whereof PROSPERO starts  
suddenly and speaks, after which, to a strange,  
hollow, and confused noise, they heavily  
vanish.<sup>9</sup>*

140        PROSPERO    I had forgot that foul conspiracy  
Of the beast Caliban and his confederates  
Against my life. The minute of their plot  
Is almost come. [*to the Spirits*] Well done. Avoid;<sup>o</sup>  
no more!

FERDINAND    This is strange: your father's in some  
passion  
That works<sup>o</sup> him strongly.

145        MIRANDA                    Never till this day  
Saw I him touched with anger so distempered.<sup>o</sup>  
PROSPERO    You do look, my son, in a movèd sort,<sup>o</sup>  
As if you were dismayed. Be cheerful, sir.

Our revels<sup>1</sup> now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you,<sup>o</sup> were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air;  
150        And like the baseless fabric<sup>2</sup> of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe<sup>3</sup> itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit,<sup>4</sup> shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
155        Leave not a rack<sup>o</sup> behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on,<sup>o</sup> and our little life  
Is rounded<sup>5</sup> with a sleep. Sir, I am vexed.

Bear with my weakness: my old brain is troubled.  
Be not disturbed with my infirmity.  
160        If you be pleased, retire into my cell

And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk  
To still my beating mind.

FERDINAND *and* MIRANDA We wish your peace.  
*Exeunt.*

PROSPERO Come with a thought.<sup>6</sup> I thank thee,  
Ariel. Come.

*Enter* ARIEL.

ARIEL Thy thoughts I cleave to. What's thy  
pleasure?

165 PROSPERO Spirit,  
We must prepare to meet with Caliban.

ARIEL Ay, my commander. When I presented<sup>7</sup> Ceres  
I thought to have told thee of it, but I feared  
Lest I might anger thee.

170 PROSPERO Say again, where didst thou leave these  
varlets?<sup>8</sup>

ARIEL I told you, sir, they were red hot with  
drinking;

So full of valor that they smote the air  
For breathing in their faces, beat the ground  
For kissing of their feet; yet always bending<sup>9</sup>  
Towards their project. Then I beat my tabor,<sup>10</sup>  
175 At which like unbacked<sup>11</sup> colts they pricked their ears,  
Advanced<sup>12</sup> their eyelids, lifted up their noses  
As<sup>13</sup> they smelt music. So I charmed their ears  
That calf-like they my lowing<sup>14</sup> followed through  
Toothed briars, sharp furzes, pricking gorse,<sup>15</sup> and  
180 thorns,

Which entered their frail shins. At last I left them  
I'th' filthy-mantled<sup>16</sup> pool beyond your cell,  
There dancing up to th' chins, that<sup>17</sup> the foul lake  
O'erstunk<sup>18</sup> their feet.

PROSPERO This was well done, my  
bird.<sup>19</sup>

Thy shape invisible retain thou still.

185 The trumpery<sup>o</sup> in my house, go bring it hither  
For stale<sup>o</sup> to catch these thieves.

ARIEL I go, I go. *Exit.*

PROSPERO A devil, a born devil, on whose nature  
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,  
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;  
190 And, as with age his body uglier grows,  
So his mind cankers.<sup>o</sup> I will plague them all,  
Even to roaring.

*Enter ARIEL, laden with glistering apparel, etc.*  
—Come, hang them on this line.<sup>1</sup>

*Enter CALIBAN, STEFANO, and TRINCULO, all wet.*

CALIBAN Pray you tread softly, that the blind mole  
may not  
Hear a foot fall. We now are near his cell.

195 STEFANO Monster, your fairy, which you say is a  
harmless fairy, has done little better than played  
the jack<sup>o</sup> with us.

TRINCULO Monster, I do smell<sup>o</sup> all horse-piss, at  
which my nose is in great indignation.

STEFANO So is mine. Do you hear, monster? If I  
200 should take a displeasure against you, look you—

TRINCULO Thou wert but a lost monster.

CALIBAN Good my lord, give me thy favor still.  
Be patient, for the prize I'll bring thee to  
205 Shall hoodwink<sup>2</sup> this mischance. Therefore speak  
softly;  
All's hushed as midnight yet.

TRINCULO Ay, but to lose our bottles in the pool!

STEFANO There is not only disgrace and dishonor in  
that, monster, but an infinite loss.

TRINCULO That's more to me than my wetting. Yet  
210 this is your harmless fairy, monster.

STEFANO I will fetch off<sup>3</sup> my bottle, though I be o'er  
ears<sup>o</sup> for my labor.

215 CALIBAN Prithee, my king, be quiet. Seest thou  
here:  
This is the mouth o'th' cell. No noise, and enter.  
Do that good mischief which may make this island  
Thine own forever, and I, thy Caliban,  
For aye<sup>o</sup> thy foot-licker.

220 STEFANO Give me thy hand. I do begin to have  
bloody thoughts.

TRINCULO O King Stefano, O peer! O worthy  
Stefano, look what a wardrobe here is for thee.<sup>4</sup>

CALIBAN Let it alone, thou fool. It is but trash.

225 TRINCULO Oh ho, monster! We know what belongs  
to a frippery.<sup>o</sup> O King Stefano!

STEFANO Put off that gown, Trinculo: by this hand,  
I'll have that gown.

TRINCULO Thy grace shall have it.

230 CALIBAN The dropsy<sup>5</sup> drown this fool! What do you  
mean  
To dote thus on such luggage?<sup>o</sup> Let't alone  
And do the murder first. If he awake,  
From toe to crown he'll fill our skins with pinches,  
Make us<sup>o</sup> strange stuff.

235 STEFANO Be you quiet, monster. Mistress line, is not  
this my jerkin?<sup>o</sup> Now is the jerkin under the line.<sup>6</sup>  
Now, jerkin, you are like to lose your hair and  
prove a bald jerkin.<sup>7</sup>

TRINCULO Do, do! We steal by line and level,<sup>8</sup> an't  
like<sup>o</sup> your grace.

240 STEFANO I thank thee for that jest. Here's a garment  
for't. Wit shall not go unrewarded while I am king  
of this country. "Steal by line and level" is an  
excellent pass of pate.<sup>9</sup> There's another garment  
for't.

TRINCULO Monster, come, put some lime upon your  
fingers<sup>1</sup> and away with the rest.

245 CALIBAN I will have none on't. We shall lose our  
time  
And all be turned to barnacles,<sup>2</sup> or to apes  
With foreheads villainous<sup>o</sup> low.  
STEFANO Monster, lay to<sup>o</sup> your fingers. Help to bear  
this away, where my hogshead of wine is, or I'll  
turn you out of my kingdom. Go to, carry this.

250 TRINCULO And this.  
STEFANO Ay, and this.  
*A noise of hunters heard. Enter diverse<sup>o</sup> SPIRITS  
in shape of dogs and hounds, hunting them  
about, PROSPERO and ARIEL setting them on.*  
PROSPERO Hey, Mountain, hey!  
ARIEL Silver! There it goes, Silver!

255 PROSPERO Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Hark,  
hark!  
[CALIBAN, STEFANO, and TRINCULO are chased off by  
SPIRITS.]  
[to ARIEL] Go, charge my goblins that they grind their  
joints  
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews  
With agèd cramps, and more pinch-spotted<sup>3</sup> make  
them  
Than pard or cat o'mountain.<sup>4</sup>

260 ARIEL Hark, they roar!  
PROSPERO Let them be hunted soundly.<sup>o</sup> At this hour  
Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.  
Shortly shall all my labors end, and thou  
Shalt have the air at freedom. For a little,  
Follow and do me service. *Exeunt.*

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## Endnotes

- Note 1: Miranda. The usual poetic conceit was a half;  
commentators variously conjecture the other third to be his

- dukedom, his books, or his late wife.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I would believe it even if an oracle said otherwise.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Weeds in place of the flowers traditionally strewn on the marriage bed; wordplay on both “marriage bed” and “seedbed.”[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Classical god of marriage.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Is capable of. “Worser genius”: evil spirit corresponding to a guardian angel.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Collapsed and made lame. “Phoebus’ steeds”: the mythological horses that drew the chariot of the sun. Ferdinand anticipates that on his wedding day he will, in his impatience, think that the night will never come.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Troupe of lesser spirits. “Trick”: theatrical device, or clever artifice.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Trifle; conceit; illusion; display.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: In the twinkling of an eye.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: With derisive and grimacing gestures.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: Take care that you remain faithful to your promise. Prospero may have caught the lovers just indulging in dalliance.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: To “give the rein” is to make a horse gallop.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Virgin snow lies on his heart because he has remained chaste, never having given in to his ardent liver. The liver was held to be the seat of passion.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Goddess of the rainbow and messenger of Juno; her apparel is in the colors of the rainbow, and she wears “saffron wings” (line 78).[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Arable land. Ceres was the Roman goddess of agriculture and generative nature.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Pealike plants grown for fodder.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Hay for winter fodder.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Reinforced with channels (“pioned”) and with entwined branches (“twilled”) to prevent riverbank erosion.[Return to](#)

[reference 9](#)

- Note 1 : Adorns with flowers; this recalls the colloquial "April showers bring forth May flowers."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thickets of gorse, yellow-flowered shrubs. "Cold": chaste.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Vineyard with vines embracing, twined around, their supporting poles; pruned vineyard. "Vineyard" was pronounced as three syllables. "Lass-lorn": abandoned by the girl he wooed. "Poll-clipped": pruned short.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Juno, queen of the heavens and goddess of women, held to protect marriages and preside over childbirth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare "this short-grassed green" (line 83) and "this green land" (line 130): a green carpet on the acting area is indicated.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In haste. Peacocks, sacred to Juno, drew her chariot.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Her part is probably played by Ariel (see line 167).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Covered with bushes and thickets.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ornamental and hung across the body rather than around the neck.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cupid, proverbially blind.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: King of the underworld in classical mythology. Venus and her son Cupid made him fall in love with Ceres' daughter Proserpine, whom he abducted (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.385–571).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: City in Cyprus associated with Venus.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Doves were sacred to Venus and drew her chariot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Done . . . upon": cast a lustful spell upon.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Right to consummate the marriage; also, suggesting a rite, as in line 17.[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: Until the wedding ceremony is performed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Peevish, irritable, and with arrows like the wasp's sting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sparrows were associated with Venus because they were proverbially lustful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Although most editors place "JUNO*descends*" at the point where Juno enters and speaks, in the Folio (1623) this stage direction appears around line 74.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ceres and Juno might be raised together in the flight apparatus and sing suspended above the stage. They would then vanish (line 138 stage direction) by being raised into the heavens.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Let spring return immediately after harvest, without any intervening winter. (In Greek mythology, winter was originally caused by Ceres abandoning the earth in search of Proserpine.)[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Delightfully; magically; harmoniously.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Regions of dwelling. The word is accented on the second syllable.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Since the eighteenth century, some editors have changed "wise" to "wife," an emendation backed by disputed typographical evidence but with implications for the play's representation of women.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Perhaps a conflation of "wandering" and "winding." The naiads were mythical river nymphs.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Either appropriately or finely dressed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sorrowfully depart (probably not implying a trick of staging).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Entertainment, in both festive and theatrical senses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An edifice or substance without foundations; insubstantial, alluding to buildings in masque scenery.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: World; also a passing allusion to the Globe theater.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: All who come into possession of it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rounded off; surrounded; or, possibly, crowned.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Come as fast as thought, a colloquial simile.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Acted; produced the masque of; introduced while playing Iris.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Covered with filthy scum.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Made smelly; smelled worse than.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Variant of lind, the lime tree or linden, probably indicating a stage property tree.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Blind with a hood, as was done to pacify a hawk—hence, make harmless; also, put out of sight.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Recover; rescue; drink off.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Recalling “King Stephen was and a worthy peer, / His breeches cost him but a crown,” a popular ballad about King Stephen, sung in part in *Othello* 2.3.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A disease characterized by the accumulation of fluid in connective tissue.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Below the lime tree; south of the equator; below the waist. Also, a possible allusion to the proverb “Thou hast stricken the ball under the line,” meaning “You have cheated.” Stefano has taken the jerkin from the lime tree.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Baldness caused either through tropical disease or by sailors who customarily shaved the heads of passengers when they crossed the line of the equator for the first time. “Under the [waist]line” could also be an allusion to baldness from syphilis.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An idiomatic expression for “properly, by the rules”—literally, “by plumb line and carpenter’s level”; also, punning on “lime.” “Do, do”: an expression of approval.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Thrust of wit (fencing term).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Be "lime-fingered," sticky-fingered (alluding to birdlime, a gluey substance used to catch birds).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Barnacle geese, also known as "tree geese" and supposed to begin life as barnacle shells.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spotted with bruises from pinches. "Agèd cramps": the convulsions of old age.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Both terms are synonymous with "leopard"; the second is from Jeremiah 13:23: "May a man of Ind change his skin, and the cat of the mountain her spots?" (Bishops' Bible).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 4.1: **4.1**[Return to reference 4.1](#)

## Notes

- °: *whom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *offer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wonderfully*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sing her praises*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limp*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gained by effort*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hymen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *holy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shower of grace*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *children*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cave*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *temptation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unblunted desire*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *now then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lesser*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *understand*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *surplus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *briskly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rejected suitor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seashore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take fresh air* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rainbow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Juno)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bestow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rainbow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as far as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scandalous; notorious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lover; Venus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an ordinary boy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *majestic bearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abundance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *granaries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would I be right*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endowed with wonders*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *softly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *garlands of reeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harvesters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agitates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *troubled; distracted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disturbed manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *told you before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wisp of cloud*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruffians*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aiming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *side drum*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *never-ridden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *mooring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prickly shrubs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chick; dear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheap goods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decoy; bait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *festers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knave; will-o'-the-wisp*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smell of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drowned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *old-clothes shop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encumbrances*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn us into*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leather jacket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if it please*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wretchedly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apply*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thoroughly*[Return to reference](#) °

## 5.1

*Enter PROSPERO in his magic robes, and ARIEL.*

PROSPERO Now does my project gather to a head:<sup>1</sup>  
My charms crack not, my spirits obey, and time  
Goes upright with his carriage.<sup>2</sup> How's the day?

ARIEL On the sixth hour; at which time, my lord,  
You said our work should cease.

5 PROSPERO I did say so  
When first I raised the tempest. Say, my spirit,  
How fares the King and 's<sup>o</sup> followers?

ARIEL Confined  
together  
In the same fashion as you gave in charge,  
Just as you left them; all prisoners, sir,  
10 In the line-grove which weather-fends<sup>3</sup> your cell:  
They cannot budge till your release.<sup>o</sup> The King,  
His brother, and yours abide all three distracted,<sup>o</sup>  
And the remainder mourning over them,  
Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly  
15 Him that you termed, sir, the good old Lord Gonzalo:  
His tears runs down his beard like winter's drops  
From eaves of reeds.<sup>o</sup> Your charm so strongly works  
'em  
That if you now beheld them, your affections<sup>o</sup>  
Would become tender.

PROSPERO Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL Mine would, sir, were I human.

20 PROSPERO And mine  
shall.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch,<sup>o</sup> a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself—  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply

Passion as they<sup>4</sup>—be kindlier<sup>5</sup> moved than thou art?  
Though with their high<sub>o</sub> wrongs I am struck to th'  
25 quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part.<sub>o</sub> The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel.  
30 My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,  
And they shall be themselves.

ARIEL I'll fetch them, sir.

*Exit.*

[PROSPERO *makes a circle on the stage.*]<sup>6</sup>

PROSPERO<sup>7</sup> Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes,  
and groves,  
And ye that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him  
35 When he comes back; you demi-puppets<sup>8</sup> that  
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets<sup>9</sup> make,  
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you, whose pastime  
Is to make midnight<sub>o</sub>-mushrooms, that rejoice  
To hear the solemn curfew;<sup>1</sup> by whose aid—  
40 Weak masters<sup>2</sup> though ye be—I have bedimmed  
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,  
And twixt the green sea and the azured vault<sub>o</sub>  
Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder  
Have I given fire, and rifted<sub>o</sub> Jove's stout oak  
45 With his own bolt;<sub>o</sub> the strong-based promontory  
Have I made shake, and by the spurs<sub>o</sub> plucked up  
The pine and cedar. Graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth  
By my so potent art. But this rough<sup>3</sup> magic  
50 I here abjure; and when I have required<sub>o</sub>  
Some heavenly music—which even now I do—  
To work mine end upon their senses that<sub>o</sub>

55 This airy<sup>4</sup> charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain<sup>o</sup> fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.

*Solemn music.*

*Here enters ARIEL before; then ALONSO with a  
frantic gesture, attended by GONZALO; SEBASTIAN  
and ANTONIO in like manner, attended by ADRIAN  
and FRANCISCO. They all enter the circle which  
PROSPERO had made, and there stand charmed;  
which PROSPERO observing, speaks.* <sup>5</sup>

60 A solemn air<sup>o</sup> and<sup>o</sup> the best comforter  
To an unsettled fancy<sup>o</sup> cure thy brains,  
Now useless, boiled within thy skull. There stand,  
For you are spell-stopped.

Holy Gonzalo, honorable man,  
Mine eyes, e'en sociable<sup>o</sup> to the show<sup>o</sup> of thine,  
Fall fellowly drops. [*aside*] The charm dissolves  
apace

65 And, as the morning steals upon the night,  
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses  
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes<sup>6</sup> that mantle<sup>o</sup>  
Their clearer<sup>o</sup> reason. —O good Gonzalo,  
My true preserver and a loyal sir<sup>o</sup>

70 To him thou follow'st, I will pay<sup>o</sup> thy graces  
Home<sup>o</sup> both in word and deed. Most cruelly  
Didst thou, Alonso, use me and my daughter.  
Thy brother was a furtherer<sup>o</sup> in the act:  
Thou art pinched<sup>o</sup> for't now, Sebastian. Flesh and  
blood,

75 You, brother mine, that entertained ambition,  
Expelled remorse and nature,<sup>7</sup> whom<sup>o</sup> with  
Sebastian—

Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong—  
Would here have killed your king, I do forgive thee,



Unnatural though thou art. [*aside*] Their  
 understanding  
 Begins to swell,<sup>o</sup> and the approaching tide  
 80 Will shortly fill the reasonable shore  
 That now lies foul and muddy. Not<sup>o</sup> one of them  
 That yet looks on me or would know me. —Ariel,  
 Fetch me the hat and rapier<sup>8</sup> in my cell.  
 [*ARIEL exits and returns.*]  
 I will discase<sup>o</sup> me and myself present  
 85 As I was sometime Milan.<sup>9</sup> Quickly, spirit!  
 Thou shalt ere long be free.  
 [*ARIEL sings and helps to attire him.*]  
 ARIEL Where the bee sucks, there suck  
 I;  
 In a cowslip's bell I lie;  
 There I couch when owls do cry;  
 90 On the bat's back I do fly  
 After summer merrily.  
 Merrily, merrily shall I live now,  
 Under the blossom that hangs on the  
 bough.  
 PROSPERO Why, that's my dainty Ariel! I shall miss  
 95 Thee, but yet thou shalt have freedom.—So, so, so.<sup>1</sup>  
 To the King's ship, invisible as thou art;  
 There shalt thou find the mariners asleep  
 Under the hatches. The Master and the Boatswain  
 Being awake, enforce them to this place,  
 100 And presently,<sup>o</sup> I prithee.  
 ARIEL I drink the air before me and return  
 Or ere<sup>o</sup> your pulse twice beat. *Exit.*  
 GONZALO All torment, trouble, wonder, and  
 amazement<sup>o</sup>  
 Inhabits here. Some heavenly power guide us  
 105 Out of this fearful<sup>o</sup> country!  
 PROSPERO Behold, sir King,

The wrongèd Duke of Milan, Prospero.  
 For more assurance that a living prince  
 Does now speak to thee, I embrace thy body  
 And to thee and thy company I bid  
 110 A hearty welcome.

ALONSO                      Whe'er<sup>o</sup>thou beest he or no,  
 Or some enchanted trifle<sup>2</sup> to abuse<sup>o</sup> me—  
 As late I have been—I not know. Thy pulse  
 Beats as of flesh and blood; and since I saw thee,  
 Th'affliction of my mind amends, with which,  
 115 I fear, a madness held me. This must crave<sup>o</sup>—  
 An if this be at all<sup>3</sup>—a most strange story.  
 Thy dukedom<sup>4</sup> I resign and do entreat  
 Thou pardon me my wrongs. But how should  
 Prospero  
 Be living, and be here?

PROSPERO [*to* GONZALO]      First, noble friend,  
 120 Let me embrace thine age,<sup>o</sup> whose honor cannot  
 Be measured or confined.

GONZALO                      Whether this be  
 Or be not, I'll not swear.

PROSPERO                      You do yet taste  
 Some subtleties<sup>5</sup> o'th' isle, that will not let you  
 Believe things certain. Welcome, my friends all.  
 125 [*aside to* SEBASTIAN *and* ANTONIO ] But you, my brace <sup>o</sup>  
    of lords, were I so minded  
 I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you  
 And justify<sup>o</sup> you traitors. At this time  
 I will tell no tales.

SEBASTIAN [*to* ANTONIO]      The devil speaks in him!

PROSPERO  
 No.  
 130 [*to* ANTONIO] For you, most wicked sir, whom to call  
    brother  
 Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive

Thy rankest fault—all of them—and require  
My dukedom of thee, which perforce<sup>o</sup> I know  
Thou must restore.

135 ALONSO If thou beest Prospero,  
Give us particulars of thy preservation;  
How thou hast met us here, whom three hours since  
Were wrecked upon this shore, where I have lost—  
How sharp the point of this remembrance is—  
My dear son Ferdinand.

PROSPERO I am woe<sup>o</sup> for't, sir.

140 ALONSO Irreparable is the loss, and patience  
Says it is past her cure.

PROSPERO I rather think  
You have not sought her help, of<sup>o</sup> whose soft grace<sup>o</sup>  
For the like loss I have her sovereign aid  
And rest myself content.

ALONSO You the like loss?

145 PROSPERO As great to me as late;<sup>o</sup> and supportable  
To make the dear loss<sup>6</sup> have I means much weaker  
Than you may call to comfort you, for I  
Have lost my daughter.<sup>7</sup>

ALONSO A daughter?

150 O heavens, that they were living both in Naples,  
The King and Queen there! That they were, I wish  
Myself were mudded in that oozy bed  
Where my son lies. When did you lose your  
daughter?

PROSPERO In this last tempest. I perceive these  
lords

155 At this encounter do so much admire<sup>o</sup>  
That they devour their reason<sup>8</sup> and scarce think  
Their eyes do offices of truth,<sup>o</sup> their words  
Are natural breath. But, howsoe'er you have  
Been jostled from your senses, know for certain  
That I am Prospero, and that very duke

160 Which was thrust forth of Milan, who most strangely  
Upon this shore where you were wrecked, was  
landed

To be the lord on't. No more yet of this,  
For 'tis a chronicle of day by day,  
Not a relation for a breakfast, nor  
Befitting this first meeting. Welcome, sir;  
165 This cell's my court. Here have I few attendants  
And subjects none abroad.<sup>9</sup> Pray you look in.  
My dukedom since you have given me again,  
I will requite you with as good a thing;  
At least bring forth a wonder to content ye  
170 As much as me my dukedom.

*Here PROSPERO discovers<sup>1</sup> FERDINAND and MIRANDA  
playing at chess.*

MIRANDA Sweet lord, you play me false.<sup>o</sup>

FERDINAND No, my  
dearest love,  
I would not for the world.

MIRANDA Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should  
wrangle,

And I would call it fair play.<sup>2</sup>

175 ALONSO If this prove  
A vision of the island, one dear son  
Shall I twice lose.

SEBASTIAN A most high miracle!

FERDINAND Though the seas threaten, they are  
merciful:

I have cursed them without cause.

[FERDINAND *kneels.*]

ALONSO Now all the  
blessings

180 Of a glad father compass thee about!<sup>o</sup>  
Arise, and say how thou cam'st here.

MIRANDA Oh, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! Oh, brave new world  
That has such people in't!

PROSPERO 'Tis new to thee.

185 ALONSO [*to* FERDINAND] What is this maid with  
whom thou wast at play?  
Your eld'st<sup>o</sup> acquaintance cannot be three hours.  
Is she the goddess that hath severed us  
And brought us thus together?

FERDINAND Sir, she is mortal;  
But by immortal Providence she's mine.  
190 I chose her when I could not ask my father  
For his advice, nor thought I had one. She  
Is daughter to this famous Duke of Milan—  
Of whom so often I have heard renown  
But never saw before—of whom I have  
Received a second life; and second father  
195 This lady makes him to me.

ALONSO I am hers.<sup>3</sup>  
But oh, how oddly will it sound that I  
Must ask my child<sup>o</sup> forgiveness!

PROSPERO There, sir, stop.  
Let us not burden our remembrances with  
A heaviness<sup>o</sup> that's gone.

200 GONZALO I have inly wept,  
Or should have spoke ere this. Look down, you gods,  
And on this couple drop a blessed crown.  
For it is you that have chalked forth<sup>o</sup> the way  
Which brought us hither.

ALONSO I say "Amen," Gonzalo.

205 GONZALO Was Milan<sup>o</sup> thrust from Milan that his  
issue  
Should become kings of Naples? Oh, rejoice  
Beyond a common joy and set it down  
With gold on lasting pillars:<sup>4</sup> in one voyage

Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,  
 And Ferdinand her brother found a wife  
 210 Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom  
 In a poor isle; and all of us ourselves  
 When no man was his own.<sup>5</sup>  
 ALONSO [*to* FERDINAND *and* MIRANDA] Give me your  
 hands.  
 Let grief and sorrow still<sup>o</sup> embrace his heart  
 That<sup>o</sup> doth not wish you joy.  
 GONZALO Be it so. Amen.  
 215 *Enter* ARIEL, *with the* MASTER *and* BOATSWAIN  
*amazedly following.*  
 Oh, look, sir, look, sir: here is more of us.  
 I prophesied if a gallows were on land  
 This fellow could not drown. [*to* BOATSWAIN] Now,  
 blasphemy,<sup>o</sup>  
 That swear'st grace o'erboard, not an oath on shore?  
 Hast thou no mouth by land? What is the news?  
 220 BOATSWAIN The best news is that we have safely  
 found  
 Our king and company; the next, our ship,  
 Which but three glasses<sup>o</sup> since we gave out<sup>o</sup> split,  
 Is tight and yare<sup>6</sup> and bravely rigged as when  
 We first put out to sea.  
 225 ARIEL [*to* PROSPERO] Sir, all this service  
 Have I done since I went.  
 PROSPERO [*to* ARIEL] My tricky<sup>o</sup> spirit!  
 ALONSO These are not natural events; they  
 strengthen<sup>o</sup>  
 From strange to stranger. Say, how came you hither?  
 230 BOATSWAIN If I did think, sir, I were well awake,  
 I'd strive to tell you. We were dead of<sup>o</sup> sleep  
 And—how we know not—all clapped<sup>o</sup> under hatches,  
 Where but even now with strange and several<sup>o</sup>  
 noises

235 Of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains,  
 And more diversity of sounds, all horrible,  
 We were awaked; straightway at liberty,  
 Where we, in all our trim, freshly beheld  
 Our royal, good, and gallant ship, our Master  
 240 Cap'ring to eye<sup>o</sup> her. On<sup>o</sup> a trice, so please you,  
 Even in a dream were we divided from them  
 And were brought moping<sup>o</sup> hither.  
 ARIEL [*to* PROSPERO] Was't well done?  
 PROSPERO [*to* ARIEL] Bravely, my diligence. Thou shalt  
 be free.  
 ALONSO This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod,  
 And there is in this business more than nature  
 245 Was ever conduct<sup>o</sup> of. Some oracle  
 Must rectify our knowledge.  
 PROSPERO Sir, my liege,  
 Do not infest<sup>o</sup> your mind with beating on<sup>z</sup>  
 The strangeness of this business. At picked leisure,  
 Which shall be shortly, single<sup>o</sup> I'll resolve you—  
 250 Which to you shall seem probable<sup>o</sup>—of every  
 These happened accidents.<sup>o</sup> Till when, be cheerful  
 And think of each thing well. [*to* ARIEL] Come hither,  
 spirit.  
 Set Caliban and his companions free:  
 Untie the spell. [*Exit*  
 ARIEL.]  
 255 [*to* ALONSO] How fares my gracious sir?  
 There are yet missing of your company  
 Some few odd lads that you remember not.  
*Enter* ARIEL, *driving in* CALIBAN, STEFANO, and  
 TRINCULO *in their stolen apparel*.  
 STEFANO Every man shift for all the rest, and let no  
 man take care for himself;<sup>8</sup> for all is but fortune.  
*Coraggio*, bully monster,<sup>9</sup> *coraggio*!

TRINCULO If these<sup>o</sup> be true spies which I wear in my  
 head, here's a goodly sight!  
 CALIBAN O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!  
 How fine<sup>o</sup> my master is! I am afraid  
 He will chastise me.  
 265 SEBASTIAN Ha, ha! What things are these, my lord  
 Antonio?  
 Will money buy 'em?  
 ANTONIO Very like.<sup>o</sup> One of them  
 Is a plain<sup>o</sup> fish, and no doubt marketable.  
 PROSPERO Mark but the badges<sup>1</sup> of these men, my  
 lords;  
 Then say if they<sup>o</sup> be true. This misshapen knave,  
 His mother was a witch, and one so strong  
 270 That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,  
 And deal in her command without her power.<sup>2</sup>  
 These three have robbed me, and this demi-devil<sup>3</sup>—  
 For he's a bastard one—had plotted with them  
 275 To take my life. Two of these fellows you  
 Must know and own;<sup>4</sup> this thing of darkness I  
 Acknowledge mine.  
 CALIBAN I shall be pinched to death.  
 ALONSO Is not this Stefano, my drunken butler?  
 SEBASTIAN He is drunk now. Where had he wine?  
 280 ALONSO And Trinculo is reeling-ripe.<sup>o</sup> Where should  
 they  
 Find this grand liquor that hath gilded<sup>5</sup> 'em?  
 How cam'st thou in this pickle?<sup>6</sup>  
 TRINCULO I have been in such a pickle since I saw  
 you last that I fear me will never out of my bones:  
 I shall not fear flyblowing.<sup>7</sup>  
 SEBASTIAN Why, how now, Stefano?  
 285 STEFANO Oh, touch me not! I am not Stefano, but a  
 cramp.  
 PROSPERO You'd be king o'the isle, sirrah?



290 STEFANO I should have been a sore<sup>o</sup> one then.  
 ALONSO [*indicating* CALIBAN] This is a strange thing as  
 e'er I looked on.  
 PROSPERO He is as disproportioned in his manners<sup>8</sup>  
 As in his shape. Go, sirrah, to my cell;  
 Take with you your companions. As you look  
 To have my pardon, trim<sup>o</sup> it handsomely.  
 295 CALIBAN Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter  
 And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass  
 Was I to take this drunkard for a god  
 And worship this dull fool!  
 PROSPERO Go to, away.  
 300 ALONSO Hence, and bestow your luggage where  
 you found it.  
 SEBASTIAN Or stole it rather.  
 [*Exeunt* CALIBAN, STEFANO, *and*  
 TRINCULO.]  
 PROSPERO Sir, I invite your highness and your train  
 To my poor cell, where you shall take your rest  
 For this one night; which—part of it<sup>o</sup>—I'll waste<sup>o</sup>  
 With such discourse as, I not doubt, shall make it  
 305 Go quick away: the story of my life  
 And the particular accidents<sup>o</sup> gone by  
 Since I came to this isle. And in the morn  
 I'll bring you to your ship, and so to Naples,  
 Where I have hope to see the nuptial  
 310 Of these our dear-belovèd solemnized,  
 And thence retire me to my Milan, where  
 Every third thought shall be my grave.  
 ALONSO I long  
 To hear the story of your life, which must  
 Take<sup>o</sup> the ear strangely.  
 PROSPERO I'll deliver<sup>o</sup> all,  
 315 And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales,  
 And sail so expeditious that shall<sup>o</sup> catch

Your royal fleet far off. —My Ariel, chick,  
That is thy charge. Then to the elements  
Be free, and fare thou well. —Please you draw near.  
*Exeunt all [except*

PROSPERO].<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Draw to its fulfillment. “Project” suggests an alchemical projection or experiment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because his carriage, or burden, is now light.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Which protects from the weather.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Who feel as much strong emotion as they do.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: More tenderly; more naturally.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The original text does not indicate when the circle is drawn. Other possibilities are at the beginning of the scene or before the entry at line 57.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Prospero’s speech closely follows Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 7.265–77, in Arthur Golding’s translation (1567); the speaker in Ovid is the sorceress Medea, who uses her witchcraft to vengeful ends.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Puppets; elves; quasi-puppets.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fairy rings: distinctive circles of grass supposed to be caused by dancing fairies but actually caused by mushrooms.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The bell rung at nightfall, indicating the time when spirits are abroad.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ineffectual when acting independently; without supernatural power; subordinate spirits.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Violent; discordant; crudely approximate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wrought by spirits of the air.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Prospero remains invisible and inaudible to Alonso and his party until he greets Alonso at line 106.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fogs of ignorance; the image is of the sun ("rising senses") dissipating morning mist.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pity and brotherly affection.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Elements of normal aristocratic dress.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Formerly, when duke of Milan.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Prospero arranges his attire approvingly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: With a suggestion of the old sense of "trifle" as "deception."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: If this is really happening.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Alonso's rights of homage and tribute from it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You still experience some of the illusions. "Subtleties" were also sweet confections shaped like castles, temples, beasts, allegorical figures, and the like, and arranged like a pageant.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Supportable . . . loss": in order to make the heartfelt loss bearable.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Prospero apparently means that Alonso still has a child, his daughter Claribel, to comfort him.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Reason" has the additional sense of "discourse"; hence, the phrase is an extension of "swallow their words."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Elsewhere about the island; beyond the cell.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reveals by drawing back a curtain hanging in front of the discovery space.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: You could quarrel for twenty kingdoms, and I would still call it fair play.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I will be her second father: Alonso's assent to the betrothal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Suggesting, perhaps, the triumphal arches commissioned to celebrate notable occasions.[Return to](#)

#### [reference 4](#)

- Note 5: When we all had lost our senses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Is sound and ready to sail.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: With repeatedly worrying about.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Stefano drunkenly confuses the saying "Every man for himself."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Gallant monster. "*Coraggio*": take courage (Italian).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Livery. Servants often wore their master's emblem, but Prospero probably refers to the stolen apparel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: And wield her (the moon's) power without her authority, or beyond the reach of her might.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Being the offspring of Sycorax and the devil.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: And acknowledge to be yours.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Probably alluding to the alchemical elixir ("liquor") known as *aurum potabile* (drinkable gold); hence, "gilded" (flushed).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sorry plight; Trinculo takes up the literal sense of "preserving liquid," recalling both his drunkenness and his drenching in the lake.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Not fear being infested with flies, since he has been "pickled" (preserved).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Behavior; moral character.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The general exeunt is through Prospero's cell; Ariel departs in another direction.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 5.1: **5.1**[Return to reference 5.1](#)

## Notes

- °: *and his*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *you release them*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *out of their wits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thatched roofs*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *feelings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *side*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *springing up overnight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *split*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lightning bolt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *roots*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *summoned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the senses of whom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *several*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *song* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *which is*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sympathetic* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *envelop*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *growing clearer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentleman*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an accomplice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tortured; afflicted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(as does a tide)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there is not*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bewilderment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fearsome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delude; maltreat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requires, as explanation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *old body*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *pair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessarily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I grieve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mercy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *function accurately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trick me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surround you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *longest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(Miranda)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sorrow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marked out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Duke of Milan*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blasphemer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hourglasses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *declared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *capricious; neat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shut up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *various*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dancing to see* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dazed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conductor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trouble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in private*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plausible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occurrences*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *these eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendidly dressed*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *likely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mere*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(the men); (the badges)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drunk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an inept; severe; pained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tidy; decorate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *part of which* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *events*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *captivate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *relate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it will*[Return to reference](#) °

## Epilogue

*Spoken by* PROSPERO.

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own,  
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true  
I must be here confined by you,  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
5 Since I have my dukedom got  
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island<sup>o</sup> by your spell,  
But release me from my bands<sup>o</sup>  
With the help of your good hands.<sup>o</sup>  
10 Gentle breath<sup>o</sup> of yours my sails  
Must fill or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want<sup>o</sup>  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
And my ending<sup>1</sup> is despair,  
15 Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Let your indulgence<sup>2</sup> set me free.  
20 [Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Punning on the sense "death." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Approval; appeasement; remission for sin. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note Epilogue: **Epilogue** [Return to reference Epilogue](#)

## Notes



- °: *(the stage)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fetters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(applause)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *favorable comment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack*[Return to reference](#) °

# England and the World

Othello first captured Desdemona's attention, he recalls, by telling her his "traveler's history,"

Wherein of antars [caves] vast and deserts idle,  
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,  
It was my hint to speak—such was my process—  
And of the cannibals that each other eat,  
The anthropophagi, and men whose heads  
Do grow beneath their shoulders. (1.3.139–44)

The Venetian heiress was not the only person who found such stories thrilling. In the sixteenth century, narratives of adventure, exploration, trade, and reconnaissance proliferated throughout western Europe, circulating widely in both manuscript and print. Public interest in them was not entirely new. Shakespeare probably found some of the details in Othello's stories in *Mandeville's Travels*, an immensely popular fourteenth-century text still widely read in the Renaissance. Columbus took a copy with him on his first voyage, and even a century later, despite growing skepticism about the book's wilder claims, Sir Walter Raleigh continued to be on the lookout for "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" in what is now Venezuela.

But in the wake of Columbus's encounter with the Americas and the voyages and colonial projects that followed, there came a flood of new reports about places and peoples whose existence had been unknown to Europeans. Readers' interest was about far more than idle curiosity. With Muslim powers in control of the key eastern Mediterranean ports and trade routes, Europeans had long been searching for an alternative route to the spices and silks of the East. Columbus believed that he had discovered such a route—he initially thought he had reached islands off the coast of India or China when he arrived at the Americas—but the enormous quantities of gold, silver, and pearls that treasure fleets began to carry back to Spain after the brutal conquests of the Mexica-

Aztec and Inca empires heralded a new world orientation in trade, colonization, and enslavement. The major European states strengthened their fleets, supplied them with weapons, recruited armies and navies, and fiercely competed with one another to reach, and claim ownership of, potentially lucrative overseas territories.

The New World was not the only site of contest. Islands in the Mediterranean, including Sicily, Cyprus, Malta, and Rhodes were particularly vulnerable to attempted invasion by one or another European power and by the Muslim states of Turkey and North Africa. Competition existed as well along the coast of Africa, where access to trade in gold, ivory, and, increasingly, human beings, aroused the greed of privateers and merchants and their royal protectors. Wherever there was the promise of gain—in Russia, Scandinavia, Poland, and elsewhere—there were diplomatic maneuverings and trade agreements. In such a constantly shifting scene, traditional allies could suddenly become dangerous rivals; conversely, bitter enemies could forge convenient alliances. From a position of relative isolation—a Protestant island-nation at the geographical margins of Europe—England proved itself a remarkably energetic and brutal participant in this increasingly global, and increasingly genocidal, competition.

Though the English failed to equal the astonishing Spanish and Portuguese enterprises of exploration and conquest, they nonetheless undertook many naval, overland, and colonial ventures in the sixteenth century. While several other Englishmen had already taken and enslaved people from Africa by the mid-fifteenth century, John Hawkins effectively set the pattern for English triangular trade between England, Africa, and the Americas. In 1562, Hawkins led an expedition in which he captured 300 Africans in Sierra Leone (and from other slavers) and transported them to Spanish plantations in the Americas, where he traded them for pearls, animal hides, and sugar. His mission was so lucrative that Queen Elizabeth I sponsored his subsequent journeys, providing ships, supplies, and guns. She also gave him coat of arms, reproduced above, which featured an enslaved African man. In four voyages to Sierra Leone between 1564 and 1569, Hawkins took a total of 1,200 Africans across the Atlantic to sell to Spanish colonists in the Caribbean. Several West Africans returned to England from these voyages as well, assimilating into English life. In a three-year voyage

from 1577 to 1580, Hawkins's protégé Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe on his ship *The Golden Hind*, laying claim to California on behalf of the queen and bringing home untold riches. (His crew of wage-earning sailors included Diego, a Cimarron—an African fleeing slavery—who had joined him in Panama in 1572.) At one point in his journey, Drake, who was said to be critical of the trade in human beings, left two Black men and “a proper Negro wench” taken from a Spanish ship during an earlier raid on a deserted island off the Celebes in what is now Indonesia. In addition to the queen (who retained the right to “disavow” responsibility for any actions taken by the men), Drake's investors in his raids on the Spanish West Indies included Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Sir Walter Raleigh. Sometime before 1591, Elizabeth gave Drake a jewel, reproduced in the color insert in this volume, which features profile heads of a Black male figure in front of a White female head. The jewel was enclosed in a case featuring a Nicholas Hilliard miniature of the queen. A few years later, Thomas Cavendish followed Drake in circumnavigating the globe. His 120-ton, eighteen-cannon ship was called the *Desire*.



**John Hawkins's coat of arms**, granted in 1568, features an enslaved person, with arms bound, representing the trade that Hawkins himself introduced to the English. The text, expanded and modernized, reads: "Sir John Hawkins Knight: The canton [that is, emblem for a shield] given by Robert Cook, clarenceux [that is, officer of arms]: 1568."

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The English desire for territory and colonies in the Americas led Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe to make an expedition, financed by Sir Walter Raleigh, to Virginia in the mid-1580s. The failure of the short-lived colony at Roanoke would haunt all subsequent colonial efforts in North America. Included below are accounts in which Raleigh himself ventures up the Orinoco delta in what is now Venezuela in search of the golden city of “El Dorado”; Thomas Hariot visits Virginia to see how many of its commodities might support a settlement there and/or be imported back to England; and Thomas Strachey, landing unexpectedly in the Bermudas, realizes that the island is, as he carefully puts it, “habitable”; it was to be officially added to England’s territories in 1612. Also included below are Captain John Smith’s later account of Virginia, which shows the progress, and fantasies, of English colonial efforts in America, and Richard Ligon’s account of the colonization of Barbados in the 1650s, which reveals how the work of enslaved Indians from Guiana, enslaved Africans, and indentured and enslaved Europeans made the West Indian sugar colony “one of the richest spots of earth” in the world.

Many accounts of England’s early exploratory and colonial efforts were collected by the clergyman, geographer, and tireless promoter of empire Richard Hakluyt (1552?–1616), and published as *The principal navigations, voyages, traffiques, and discoveries of the English Nation* (1589; three-volume edition 1598–1600). Bartolomé de las Casas’ *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552), which described Spanish atrocities against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, was printed in English for the first time in 1583, and Spain’s Protestant Northern European rivals used this account to demonize the Spanish Empire and counter its influence and power. English commentators and writers, including Hakluyt, amplified Catholic mistreatment of Indigenous Americans in order to suggest an apparent contrast with “reformed” English behavior. Hakluyt also understood that his nation’s success in the competitive, often violent struggle to explore, chart, and exploit the natural and human resources of the globe depended on assembling as much reliable information as possible, preferably from European eyewitnesses. To be of full use, both for England’s practical endeavors and for the general goal of

understanding the world, that information would have to reach beyond physical geography to the social practices and beliefs of the Indigenous inhabitants of the territories being explored and colonized. Hence, for example, Sir Walter Raleigh sent the mathematician and natural scientist Thomas Hariot to observe the Algonquin natives of Virginia and to describe in detail their technology, society, and conceptions of the world. Hariot's ethnographic observations were supplemented by beautiful watercolors by the artist and cartographer John White, one of which is included in the color insert in this volume. Expeditions brought back native plants and their products (including tomatoes, potatoes, pineapples, chocolate, and tobacco), animals, cultural artifacts, and, on occasion, native people themselves, most often seized against their will. There were exhibitions in London of a kidnapped Inuit with his kayak and of Algonquins with their canoes. Most of these captives, violently uprooted and vulnerable to European diseases, quickly perished, but even in death they were evidently valuable property: while the English will not give one small coin "to relieve a lame beggar," one of the characters in *The Tempest* remarks, "they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian" (2.2.30–31). As we see in the selections from John Smith below, the Powhatan "Princess" Pocahontas died during a much-publicized embassy to England, right before she was set to sail for home.

The Algonquin were new to the English and therefore aroused particular curiosity, but a comparable attention extended to parts of the world that were at least partially known and to peoples traditionally regarded as mortal enemies. In 1600 a protégé of Hakluyt, John Pory, translated and published the *Geographical History of Africa* (completed in 1526) by "John Leo Africanus," a Muslim-born traveler whose vivid descriptions were widely regarded as a crucial resource for understanding that entire continent. Also around the turn of the seventeenth century, Thomas Dallam and Richard Knolles wrote accounts of the Ottoman Empire that displayed often nuanced and ambivalent attitudes to the great and fearsome Islamic power. During the sixteenth century around 35,000 Europeans, including captured English sailors, were enslaved on the Barbary Coast. ("Barbary" was the name given to the coastal regions of North Africa, or Maghreb, specifically the Ottoman borderlands consisting of the regencies in



Algiers and Tripoli, as well as the Beylik of Tunis and the Sultanate of Morocco.) Popular plays on the Elizabethan stage featured parodic versions of the Muslim enemy—and the occasional “Christian turned Turk”—but Queen Elizabeth’s foreign policy contemplated the possibility of an alliance with rulers in Turkey and Morocco against the Spanish. For the first time in this period English readers begin to find reasonably detailed accounts not only of the Ottoman Sultan’s court and the organization of his state, but also of Islam. Elizabeth I’s negotiations with the Moroccan ruler Mulay Ahmed al-Mansur for a proposed military alliance against Spain is commemorated by the remarkable portrait of his ambassador, Abd al-Wahid bin Masoud bin Muhammad-al-Annuri, which is included in the color insert in this volume.

The principal way in which English men and women encountered the wider world was through eyewitness accounts, some in print, many others in manuscript or in casual conversation—Strachey’s narration below, for instance, is still in letter form. Travelers’ tales had an ancient and well-deserved reputation for self-inflation, exaggeration, and lying, and Elizabethan and Jacobean writers strove for the effect of factual directness, simplicity, and trustworthiness rather than for rhetorical brilliance, from title onward: Hariot’s account is called a “true report,” Strachey’s a “true repertory,” and Ligon’s “a true and exact history.” Their content, however, was nonetheless often fantastical.



## SIR WALTER RALEGH

The brilliant and versatile Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) was a soldier, courtier, philosopher, explorer and colonist, student of science, historian, and poet. Born to West Country gentry of modest means, Raleigh amassed great wealth thanks to his position at court, leading him to be denounced by some as a social upstart and hated by others as a greedy monopolist. He fought ruthlessly in Ireland and the Spanish city of Cádiz, directed the colonization of Virginia, made the smoking of tobacco fashionable in England, brought Edmund Spenser from Ireland to the English court, conducted scientific experiments, led a 1595 expedition to Guiana (now part of Venezuela) in an unsuccessful effort to find gold, and urged England to challenge Spanish dominance in the New World. A selection from his account of the 1595 expedition to Guiana is included here. His goal was to find and take possession of the fabled “El Dorado,” or golden city, before the Spanish did: his failure to find such a city is downplayed in his exaggerated account of the golden promise of the area. The alliances he made with the native peoples of Guiana laid the groundwork for future colonization.

Raleigh was known for his violent temper, his dramatic sense of life, his extravagant dress, his skepticism in religious matters, his bitter hatred of Spain, and his great favor with Queen Elizabeth, who knighted him in 1585. (A portrait of Raleigh is included in the color insert to this volume.) In 1592, after Raleigh seduced and married one of her ladies-in-waiting, Elizabeth Throckmorton, Elizabeth suspended her favor and briefly imprisoned him in the Tower of London. His long, remorseful poem to the queen, “The Ocean to Cynthia,” survived in manuscript fragments, one of more than five hundred lines. Released from the tower in 1593, Raleigh was elected to Parliament, traveled, and built what is now Sherborne New Castle in Dorset.

After Elizabeth's death Raleigh was again imprisoned, this time for his supposed role in a plot to remove James I from the throne and put Lady Arbella Stuart in his place. He remained in the Tower for the rest of his life, save for an ill-fated second expedition to Guiana in 1618, which again failed to discover gold but succeeded in infuriating the Spanish. To appease the Spanish, with whom James I hoped to be on better terms, Raleigh was beheaded on the old treason charge in October 1618.

# ***From The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana, with a Relation of the Great and Golden City of Manoa (Which the Spaniards Call El Dorado)***

\* \* \*

The next day we arrived at the port of Morequito, and anchored there, sending away one of our pilots<sup>1</sup> to seek the king of Aromaia, uncle to Morequito, slain by Berreo<sup>2</sup> as aforesaid. The next day following, before noon, he came to us on foot from his house, which was fourteen English miles, himself being a hundred and ten years old, and returned on foot the same day; and with him many of the borderers,<sup>3</sup> with many women and children, that came to wonder at our nation and to bring us down victual,<sup>o</sup> which they did in great plenty, as venison, pork, hens, chickens, fowl, fish, with divers sorts of excellent fruits and roots, and great abundance of pinas,<sup>o</sup> the princess of fruits that grow under the sun, especially those of Guiana. They brought us, also, store of bread and of their wine, and a sort of paraquitos<sup>o</sup> no bigger than wrens, and of all other sorts both small and great. One of them gave me a beast called by the Spaniards armadillo, which they call cassacam, which seemeth to be all barred over with small plates somewhat like to a rhinoceros, with a white horn growing in his hinder parts as big as a great hunting-horn, which they use to wind<sup>o</sup> instead of a trumpet. Monardus writeth that a little of the powder of that horn put into the ear cureth deafness.<sup>4</sup>

After this old king had rested awhile in a little tent that I caused to be set up, I began by my interpreter to discourse with him of the death of Morequito his predecessor, and afterward of the Spaniards;

and ere I went any farther, I made him know the cause of my coming thither, whose servant I was, and that the Queen's pleasure was I should undertake the voyage for their defense, and to deliver them from the tyranny of the Spaniards, dilating<sup>o</sup> at large, as I had done before to those of Trinidad, her Majesty's greatness, her justice, her charity to all oppressed nations, with as many of the rest of her beauties and virtues as either I could express or they conceive.<sup>o</sup> All which being with great admiration attentively heard and marvelously<sup>o</sup> admired, I began to sound<sup>o</sup> the old man as touching Guiana and the state thereof, what sort of commonwealth it was, how governed, of what strength and policy, how far it extended, and what nations were friends or enemies adjoining, and finally of the distance and way to enter the same. He told me that himself and his people, with all those down the river towards the sea as far as Emeria, the province of Carapana, were of Guiana, but that they called themselves Orenoqueponi,<sup>5</sup> and that all the nations between the river and those mountains in sight, called Wacarima, were of the same cast<sup>o</sup> and appellation;<sup>o</sup> and that on the other side of those mountains of Wacarima there was a large plain (which after I discovered in my return) called the valley of Amariocapana. In all that valley the people were also of the ancient Guianians.

I asked what nations those were which inhabited on the further side of those mountains, beyond the valley of Amariocapana. He answered with a great sigh (as a man which had inward feeling of the loss of his country and liberty, especially for that<sup>o</sup> his eldest son was slain in a battle on that side of the mountains, whom he most entirely loved) that he remembered in his father's lifetime, when he was very old and himself a young man, that there came down into that large valley of Guiana a nation from so far off as the sun slept (for such were his own words), with so great a multitude as they could not be numbered nor resisted, and that they wore large coats and hats of crimson color, which color he expressed by shewing a piece of red wood wherewith my tent was supported, and that they were called Orejones and Epuremei;<sup>6</sup> that those had slain and rooted out<sup>o</sup> so many of the ancient people as there were leaves in

the wood upon all the trees, and had now made themselves lords of all, even to that mountain foot called Curaa, saving only of two nations, the one called Iwarawaqueri and the other Cassipagotos; and that in the last battle fought between the Epuremei and the Iwarawaqueri his eldest son was chosen to carry to the aid of the Iwarawaqueri a great troop of the Orenoqueponi, and was there slain with all his people and friends, and that he had now remaining but one son; and farther told me that those Epuremei had built a great town called Macureguarai at the said mountain foot, at the beginning of the great plains of Guiana, which have no end; and that their houses have many rooms, one over the other, and that therein the great king of the Orejones and Epuremei kept three thousand men to defend the borders against them, and withal<sup>o</sup> daily to invade and slay them; but that of late years, since the Christians offered to<sup>o</sup> invade his territories and those frontiers, they were all at peace, and traded one with another, saving only the Iwarawaqueri and those other nations upon the head of the river of Caroli called Cassipagotos, which we afterwards discovered, each one holding the Spaniard for a common enemy.

After he had answered thus far, he desired leave to depart, saying that he had far to go, that he was old and weak, and was every day called for by death (which was also his own phrase). I desired him to rest with us that night, but I could not entreat him; but he told me that at my return from the country above he would again come to us, and in the meantime provide for us the best he could of all that his country yielded. The same night he returned to Orocotona, his own town; so as<sup>o</sup> he went that day eight-and-twenty miles, the weather being very hot, the country being situate between four and five degrees of the equinoctial.<sup>o</sup> This Topiawari is held for the proudest and wisest of all the Orenoqueponi, and so he behaved himself towards me in all his answers at my return, as I marveled to find a man of that gravity and judgment and of so good discourse that had no help of learning nor breed.<sup>o</sup> The next morning we also left the port and sailed westward up to the river to view the famous river called Caroli, as well because<sup>o</sup> it was marvelous of

itself, as also for that I understood it led to the strongest nations of all the frontiers, that were enemies to the Epuremei, which are subjects to Inga, emperor of Guiana and Manoa.<sup>7</sup> And that night we anchored at another island called Caiama, of some five or six miles in length; and the next day arrived at the mouth of Caroli. When we were short of it<sup>o</sup> as low or further down as the port of Morequito, we heard the great roar and fall of the river. But when we came to enter with our barge and wherries,<sup>o</sup> thinking to have gone up some forty miles to the nations of the Cassipagotos, we were not able with a barge of eight oars to row one stone's cast<sup>o</sup> in an hour; and yet the river is as broad as the Thames at Woolwich, and we tried both sides, and the middle, and every part of the river. So as<sup>o</sup> we encamped upon the banks adjoining, and sent off our Orenoquepone, which came with us from Morequito, to give knowledge to the nations upon the river of our being there, and that we desired to see the lords of Canuria which dwelt within the province upon that river, making them know that we were enemies to the Spaniards; for it was on this river side that Morequito slew the friar, and those nine Spaniards which came from Manoa, the city of Inga, and took from them 14,000 pesos of gold. So as the next day there came down a lord or cacique,<sup>8</sup> called Wanuretona, with many people with him, and brought all store of provisions to entertain us as the rest had done. And as I had before made my coming known to Topiawari, so did I acquaint this cacique therewith, and how I was sent by her Majesty for the purpose aforesaid and gathered also what I could of him touching<sup>o</sup> the estate of Guiana. And I found that those also of Caroli were not only enemies to the Spaniards, but most of all to the Epuremei, which abound in gold. And by this Wanuretona I had knowledge that on the head of this river were three mighty nations, which were seated on a great lake from whence this river descended, and were called Cassipagotos, Eparegotos, and Arawagotos, and that all those either against the Spaniards or the Epuremei would join with us, and that if we entered the land over the mountains of Curaa we should satisfy ourselves with gold and all other good things. He told us farther of a nation

called Iwarawaqueri, before spoken of, that held daily war with the Epuremei that inhabited Macureguarai, and first civil town of Guiana, of the subjects of Inga, the emperor.

Upon this river one Captain George, that I took with Berreo, told me that there was a great silver mine, and that it was near the banks of the said river. But by this time as well Orenoque, Caroli, as all the rest of the rivers were risen four or five feet in height, so as it was not possible by the strength of any men, or with any boat whatsoever, to row into the river against the stream. I therefore sent Captain Thynn, Captain Greenville, my nephew John Gilbert, my cousin Butthead<sup>9</sup> Gorges, Captain Clarke, and some thirty shot<sup>o</sup> more to coast<sup>o</sup> the river by land, and to go to a town some twenty miles over the valley called Amnatapoi; and they found guides there to go farther towards the mountain foot to another great town called Capurepana, belonging to a cacique called Haharacoa, that was a nephew to old Topiawari, king of Aromaia, our chiefest friend, because this town and province of Capurepana adjoined to Macureguarai, which was a frontier town of the empire. And the meanwhile myself with Captain Gifford, Captain Caulfield, Edward Hancock, and some half-a-dozen shot marched overland to view the strange overfalls<sup>o</sup> of the river of Caroli, which roared so far off; and also to see the plains adjoining, and the rest of the province of Canuri. I sent also Captain Whiddon, William Connock, and some eight shot with them to see if they could find any mineral stone amongst the river's side. When we were come to the tops of the first hills of the plains adjoining to the river, we beheld that wonderful breach of waters<sup>o</sup> which ran down Caroli; and might from that mountain see the river how it ran in three parts, above<sup>o</sup> twenty miles off, and there appeared some ten or twelve overfalls in sight, every one as high over the other as a church tower, which fell with that fury that the rebound of water made it seem as if it had been all covered over with a great shower of rain; and in some places we took it at the first for a smoke that had risen over some great town. For mine own part I was well persuaded from thence to have returned, being a very ill footman;<sup>o</sup> but the rest were all so desirous

to go near the said strange thunder of waters as<sup>o</sup> they drew me on by little and little till we came into the next valley where we might better discern the same. I never saw a more beautiful country nor more lively prospects;<sup>o</sup> hills so raised here and there over the valleys; the river winding into divers branches;<sup>o</sup> the plains adjoining without bush or stubble, all fair green grass; the ground of hard sand, easy to march on, either for horse or foot; the deer crossing in every path; the birds towards the evening singing on every tree with a thousand several<sup>o</sup> tunes; cranes and herons of white, crimson, and carnation, perching in the river's side; the air fresh with a gentle easterly wind; and every stone that we stooped to take up promised either gold or silver by his complexion.<sup>1</sup> Your Lordship shall see of<sup>o</sup> many sorts, and I hope some of them cannot be bettered under the sun; and yet we had no means but with our daggers and fingers to tear them out here and there, the rocks being most hard of that mineral spar<sup>o</sup> aforesaid, which is like a flint, and is altogether as hard or harder, and, besides, the veins lie a fathom or two deep in the rocks. But we wanted<sup>o</sup> all things requisite<sup>o</sup> save only<sup>o</sup> our desires and good will to have performed more if it had pleased God. To be short, when both our companies returned, each of them brought also several sorts of stones that appeared very fair but were such as they found loose on the ground, and were for the most part but colored, and had not any gold fixed in them. Yet such as had no judgment or experience kept all that glistered and would not be persuaded but<sup>2</sup> it was rich because of the luster;<sup>o</sup> and brought of those, and of marcasite<sup>3</sup> withal, from Trinidad, and have delivered of<sup>o</sup> those stones to be tried in many places and have thereby bred an opinion that all the rest is of the same. Yet some of these stones I shewed afterward to a Spaniard of the Caracas who told me that it was "el madre del oro" that is, the mother of gold, and that the mine was farther in the ground.

But it shall be found a weak policy in me either to betray myself or my country with imaginations; neither am I so far in love with that lodging, watching,<sup>o</sup> care, peril, diseases, ill savors,<sup>o</sup> bad fare,<sup>o</sup> and many other mischiefs that accompany these voyages as to woo



myself again into any of them, were I not assured that the sun covereth not so much riches in any part of the earth. Captain Whiddon, and our chirurgion,<sup>o</sup> Nicholas Millechamp, brought me a kind of stones like sapphires; what they may prove<sup>o</sup> I know not. I shewed them to some of the Orenoqueponi, and they promised to bring me to a mountain that had of them very large pieces growing diamond-wise; whether it be crystal of the mountain, Bristol diamond,<sup>4</sup> or sapphire, I do not yet know, but I hope the best; sure I am that the place is as likely as<sup>o</sup> those from whence all the rich stones are brought and in the same height or very near. On the left hand of this river Caroli are seated those nations which I called Iwarawaqueri before remembered,<sup>o</sup> which are enemies to the Epuremei; and on the head of it, adjoining to the great lake Cassipa, are situated those other nations which also resist Inga, and the Epuremei, called Cassipagotos, Eparegotos, and Arawagotos. I farther understood that this lake of Cassipa is so large as<sup>o</sup> it is above<sup>o</sup> one day's journey for one of their canoas to cross, which may be some forty miles; and that thereinto fall divers rivers, and that great store<sup>o</sup> of grains of gold are found in the summer time when the lake falleth by the banks in those branches.

There is also another goodly river beyond Caroli, which is called Arui, which also runneth through the lake Cassipa, and falleth into Orenoque farther west, making all that land between Caroli and Arui an island; which is likewise a most beautiful country. Next unto Arui there are two rivers, Atoica and Caura, and on that branch which is called Caura are a nation of people whose heads appear not above their shoulders,<sup>5</sup> which though it may be thought a mere fable, yet for mine own part I am resolved it is true, because every child in the provinces of Aromaia and Canuri affirm the same. They are called Ewaipanoma; they are reported to have their eyes in their shoulders and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, and that a long train of hair groweth backward between their shoulders.

\* \* \*

For the rest, which myself have seen, I will promise these things that follow which I know to be true. Those that are desirous to discover and to see many nations may be satisfied within this river which bringeth forth so many arms and branches leading to several countries and provinces, above 2,000 miles east and west and 800 miles south and north, and of these the most either rich in gold or in other merchandises. The common soldier shall here fight for gold, and pay himself, instead of pence, with plates of half-a-foot broad, whereas he breaketh his bones in other wars for provant<sup>o</sup> and penury. Those commanders and chieftains that shoot at<sup>o</sup> honor and abundance shall find there more rich and beautiful cities, more temples adorned with golden images, more sepulchers filled with treasure than either Cortes found in Mexico or Pizarro in Peru.<sup>6</sup> And the shining glory of this conquest will eclipse all those so far-extended beams of the Spanish nation. There is no country which yieldeth more pleasure to the inhabitants, either for those common delights of hunting, hawking, fishing, fowling and the rest, than Guiana doth; it hath so many plains, clear rivers, and abundance of pheasants, partridges, quails, rails, cranes, herons, and all other fowl; deer of all sorts, porks, hares, lions, tigers, leopards, and divers other sorts of beasts, either for chase or food. It hath a kind of beast called cama or anta, as big as an English beef, and in great plenty. To speak of the several sorts of every kind I fear would be troublesome to the reader, and therefore I will omit them, and conclude that both for health, good air, pleasure, and riches, I am resolved it cannot be equaled by any region either in the east or west. Moreover, the country is so healthful as, of an hundred persons and more, which lay without shift<sup>o</sup> most sluttishly,<sup>o</sup> and were every day almost melted with heat in rowing and marching, and suddenly wet again with great showers, and did eat of all sorts of corrupt fruits, and made meals of fresh fish without seasoning, of tortugas,<sup>o</sup> of lagartos or crocodiles, and of all sorts good and bad, without either order or measure, and besides lodged in the open air every night, we lost not any one, nor had one ill-disposed to my knowledge; nor found any calenture<sup>7</sup> or other of those pestilent

diseases which dwell in all hot regions and so near the equinoctial line.

Where there is store of gold it is in effect needless to remember other commodities for trade. But it hath, towards the south part of the river, great quantities of Brazil-wood and divers berries that dye a most perfect crimson and carnation; and for painting,<sup>o</sup> all France, Italy, or the East Indies yield none such. For the more the skin is washed, the fairer the color appeareth, and with which even those brown and tawny women spot themselves and color their cheeks. All places yield abundance of cotton, of silk, of balsamum<sup>8</sup> and of those kinds most excellent and never known in Europe, of all sorts of gums, of Indian pepper,<sup>o</sup> and what else the countries may afford within the land we know not, neither had we time to abide the trial and search. The soil besides is so excellent and so full of rivers as it will carry sugar, ginger, and all those other commodities which the West Indies have.

The navigation is short, for it may be sailed with an ordinary wind in six weeks and in the like time back again; and, by the way,<sup>o</sup> neither lee shore,<sup>9</sup> enemies' coast, rocks, nor sands. All which in the voyages to the West Indies and all other places we are subject unto; as the channel of Bahama, coming from the West Indies, cannot well be passed in the winter, and when it is at the best it is a perilous and a fearful place; the rest of the Indies for calms<sup>o</sup> and diseases very troublesome, and the sea about the Bermudas a hellish sea for thunder, lightning, and storms.

This very year<sup>o</sup> there were seventeen sail<sup>1</sup> of Spanish ships lost in the channel of Bahama, and the great Philip,<sup>2</sup> like to have sunk at the Bermudas, was put back to St. Juan de Puerto Rico; and so it falleth out in that navigation every year for the most part. Which in this voyage are not to be feared; for the time of year to leave England is best in July, and the summer in Guiana is in October, November, December, January, February and March, and then the ships may depart thence in April and so return again into England in June. So as they shall never be subject to winter weather, either coming, going, or staying there: which, for my part, I take to be one

of the greatest comforts and encouragements that can be thought on, having, as I have done, tasted in this voyage by the West Indies so many calms, so much heat, such outrageous gusts, such weather and contrary winds.

To conclude, Guiana is a country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought; the face of the earth hath not been torn, nor the virtue and salt of the soil spent by manurance.<sup>3</sup> The graves have not been opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges,<sup>o</sup> nor their images pulled down out of their temples. It hath never been entered by any army of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any Christian prince. It is, besides, so defensible<sup>o</sup> that if two forts be builded in one of the provinces which I have seen, the flood<sup>o</sup> setteth in so near the bank—where the channel also lieth—that no ship can pass up but within a pike's length of the artillery, first of the one, and afterwards of the other. Which two forts will be a sufficient guard both to the empire of Inga, and to an hundred other several kingdoms lying within the said river, even to the city of Quito in Peru.

There is therefore great difference between the easiness of the conquest of Guiana, and the defense of it being conquered,<sup>4</sup> and the West or East Indies. Guiana hath but one entrance by the sea, if it hath that, for any vessels of burden.<sup>5</sup> So as whosoever shall first possess it, it shall be found unaccessible for any enemy, except<sup>o</sup> he come in wherries, barges, or canoas, or else in flat-bottomed boats; and if he do offer<sup>o</sup> to enter it in that manner, the woods are so thick two hundred miles together upon the rivers of such entrance, as a mouse cannot sit in a boat unhit from the bank. By land it is more impossible to approach, for it hath the strongest situation of any region under the sun, and it is so environed<sup>o</sup> with impassable mountains on every side as it is impossible to victual any company in the passage. Which hath been well proved by the Spanish nation, who since the conquest of Peru have never left five years free from attempting<sup>o</sup> this empire or discovering some way into it; and yet of three-and-twenty several gentlemen, knights, and noblemen, there was never any that knew which way to lead an army by land, or to

conduct ships by sea, anything near the said country. Orellana, of whom the river of Amazons taketh name, was the first, and Don Antonio de Berreo, whom we displanted,<sup>o</sup> the last: and I doubt much whether he himself—or any of his—yet know the best way into the said empire. It can therefore hardly be regained, if any strength<sup>o</sup> be formerly set down, but in one or two places, and but two or three crumsters<sup>6</sup> or galleys built and furnished<sup>o</sup> upon the river within. The West Indies have many ports, watering places,<sup>7</sup> and landings; and nearer than three hundred miles to Guiana, no man can harbor a ship, except he know one only place, which is not learned in haste, and which I will undertake<sup>o</sup> there is not any one of my companies that knoweth, whosoever hearkened<sup>o</sup> most after it.

Besides, by keeping one good fort, or building one town of strength, the whole empire is guarded; and whatsoever companies shall be afterwards planted within the land, although in twenty several provinces, those shall be able all to reunite themselves upon any occasion either by the way of one river or be able to march by land without either wood, bog, or mountain. Whereas in the West Indies there are few towns or provinces that can succor or relieve one the other by land or sea. By land the countries are either desert, mountainous, or strong enemies. By sea, if any man invade to the eastward, those to the west cannot in many months turn against the breeze and eastern wind. Besides, the Spaniards are therein so dispersed as they are nowhere strong but in *Ñueva Espana*<sup>8</sup> only; the sharp mountains, the thorns, and poisoned prickles, the sandy and deep ways in the valleys, the smothering heat and air, and want of water in other places are their only and best defense; which, because those nations that invade them are not victualled or provided to stay, neither have any place to friend<sup>o</sup> adjoining, do serve them instead of good arms and great multitudes.

The West Indies were first offered her Majesty's grandfather by Columbus,<sup>9</sup> a stranger,<sup>o</sup> in whom there might be doubt<sup>o</sup> of deceit; and besides it was then thought incredible that there were such and so many lands and regions never written of before. This Empire is made known to her Majesty by her own vassal,<sup>o</sup> and by him that

oweth to her more duty than an ordinary subject; so that it shall ill sort<sup>o</sup> with the many graces and benefits which I have received to abuse her Highness, either with fables or imaginations. The country is already discovered, many nations won to her Majesty's love and obedience, and those Spaniards which have latest and longest labored about the conquest, beaten out, discouraged and disgraced, which among these nations were thought invincible. Her Majesty may in this enterprise employ all those soldiers and gentlemen that are younger brethren,<sup>1</sup> and all captains and chieftains that want<sup>o</sup> employment, and the charge<sup>o</sup> will be only the first setting out in victualling and arming them; for after the first or second year I doubt not but to see in London a contractation-house of more receipt<sup>o</sup> for Guiana than there is now in Seville for the West Indies.<sup>2</sup>

And I am resolved<sup>o</sup> that if there were but a small army afoot in Guiana, marching towards Manoa, the chief city of Inga, he would yield to her Majesty by composition<sup>o</sup> so many hundred thousand pounds yearly as should both defend all enemies abroad, and defray all expenses at home; and that he would besides pay a garrison of three or four thousand soldiers very royally to defend him against other nations. For he cannot but know how his predecessors, yea, how his own great uncles, Guascar and Atabalipa, sons to Guiana-Capac, emperor of Peru, were, while they contended for the empire, beaten out by the Spaniards, and that both of late years and ever since the said conquest, the Spaniards have sought the passages and entry of his country; and of their cruelties used to the borderers he cannot be ignorant. In which respects no doubt but he will be brought to tribute with great gladness; if not, he hath neither shot nor iron weapon in all his empire and therefore may easily be conquered.

And I further remember that Berreo confessed to me and others, which I protest<sup>o</sup> before the Majesty of God to be true, that there was found among the prophecies in Peru, at such time as the empire was reduced to the Spanish obedience, in their chiefest temples, amongst divers others which foreshadowed the loss of the said empire, that from Inglatierra<sup>o</sup> those Ingas should be again in time to

come restored, and delivered from the servitude of the said conquerors. And I hope, as we with these few hands have dislodged the first garrison and driven them out of the said country, so her Majesty will give order for the rest, and either defend it, and hold it as tributary,<sup>3</sup> or conquer and keep it as empress of the same. For whatsoever prince shall possess it shall be greatest; and if the king of Spain enjoy it, he will become irresistible. Her Majesty hereby shall confirm and strengthen the opinions of all nations as touching<sup>o</sup> her great and princely actions. And where the south border of Guiana reacheth to the dominion and empire of the Amazons, those women shall hereby bear the name of a virgin, which is not only able to defend her own territories and her neighbors, but also to invade and conquer so great empires and so far removed.

To speak more at this time I fear would be but troublesome: I trust in God, this being true, will suffice, and that he which is King of all Kings, and Lord of Lords, will put it into her heart which is Lady of Ladies to possess it. If not, I will judge those men worthy to be kings thereof, that by her grace and leave will undertake it of themselves.

1596, 1599

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Those who steer ships.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Antonio de Berrío (1527–1597), Spanish soldier, governor, and explorer; one of Raleigh's informants.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: People dwelling close by.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nicolás Monardes, trader between Seville and the New World, wrote the *Historia Medicinal* (in three parts, 1565, 1571, and 1574). It detailed treatments that he learned from indigenous people and medicines that he made using products from the New World.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, people who live on the borders of the Orenoque River.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Orejones: a Spanish term meaning 'having big ears,' used to describe native noble Guianians who wore plugs in their pierced earlobes; Epuremei: supposedly elite native Guianians, but possibly, given their Spanish characteristics, an invention of Raleigh's.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Inga, or Inca; the supposed ruler of Guiana and its chief city, Manoa.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Indigenous chief. The term is a Spanish transliteration of a word from a Central American Indian language.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Name for a historic estate in the parish of St. Budeaux in Devon, now known as Budockshed; it was lived in by the Gorges family.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Seemed by its texture and appearance to give promise of containing gold or silver.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Could not be dissuaded from the idea that.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: White iron pyrite; sometimes known as "fool's gold."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quartz crystals found in the Avon Gorge in Bristol, England.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See *Othello* 1.3.143–44 and the image on p. 641 for reference to this notion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hernán Cortés (1485–1547), leader of a Spanish expedition that conquered the Aztec empire in Mexico; Francisco Pizarro (ca. 1476–1541), leader of a Spanish expedition that conquered the Inca empire in Peru.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A tropical sailors' disease, characterized by delirium in which the patient, it is said, believes the sea to be green fields and wants to leap into it.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An aromatic resinous vegetable juice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The shore that the wind blows on.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A collective singular for sailing vessels.[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: The *Saint Philip* was the largest ship in the navy of Spain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Guiana is here described as a virgin country that has not been raped, plundered, or exhausted through labor. “Manurance”: manuring; that is, (over)cultivating the land—so, here, an occupation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Once it has been conquered.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ships capable of carrying a significant load.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Kromsteven or Kromster (Dutch), a vessel with a bent prow.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Places where fresh water can be obtained.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Literally, “New Spain”—the territorial land claimed by Spain extended over large parts of the Americas and had its capital in Mexico City.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In 1488 Bartholomew Columbus petitioned Henry VII to sponsor his brother Christopher in an attempt to find a new route to the (East) Indies by sailing west. The king declined, so Christopher sought the sponsorship of Queen Isabella of Spain.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Younger brothers were seen as likely recruits because they were without patrimony.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An exchange or treasury in Seville, the Casa de Contratación, where contracts were made in connection with West Indian trade.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nation that pays tribute to the sovereign nation.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *food* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pineapples* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *parrots* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to blow wind into* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *describing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understand* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greatly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *examine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *type* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *designation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eradicated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likewise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proposed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in such a way that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equator* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *racial origin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not only because* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not quite at it* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *light rowing boats* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throw* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for that reason* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concerning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soldiers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skirt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waterfalls* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breaking of waves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *over* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poor pedestrian* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vistas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *streams* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have sight of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crystalline minerals* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appropriate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sheen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *presented* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *wakefulness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bad smells* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bad food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surgeon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn out to be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *similar to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reflected on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *over* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abundant supply* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an allowance of food* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aspire to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *underclothing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repulsively* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tortoises* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cosmetics* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *probably chili pepper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *along the way* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absences of wind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *1595* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sledgehammers* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy to defend* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tide* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surrounded* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attacking* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uprooted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fortress* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitted with appliances* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affirm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eavesdropped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on intimate terms* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foreigner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subordinate* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *badly fit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cost* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *money* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *certain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treaty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affirm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *England* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concerning* [Return to reference](#) °

# THOMAS HARIOT

Thomas Hariot (1560–1621), mathematician, astronomer, linguist, and surveyor in the service of Sir Walter Raleigh, was observing sunspots and using a telescope at about the same time as Galileo; he also made important discoveries in algebra, navigational techniques, and optics.

Hariot matriculated at Oxford University in 1577, where he met Richard Hakluyt, who may have interested him in the subject of travel and colonization. After Hariot graduated in 1580, Raleigh hired him to keep accounts, design ships, and improve navigational methods with a view to traveling to the New World. Over that period, Hariot also became friendly with two Native Americans, the Algonquins Manteo and Wanchese, who had been brought to England, and who taught him their language. Hariot accompanied Sir Richard Grenville's expedition to the Roanoke Colony in 1585, and his account of it, extracted here, was intended to describe the virtues of the place and people and to promote colonization. To this end, he supplies information about the geography and climate, details the vegetation and wildlife that can be eaten, and offers an account of the inhabitants, about whom the English were intensely curious. Reports had begun to circulate in England about tensions with the Algonquin Indians, on whom the colonists were almost completely dependent for food, and Hariot's brief ethnographic observations are meant to reassure readers that the Indigenous people "are not to be feared." First published in 1588, his account was printed by Theodor de Bry in 1590, with maps and engravings of Native American life based on the watercolors by John White.

After he returned to England in 1586, Hariot worked for Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland, and continued to do so when his patron was imprisoned for his close connections with the 1605 Gunpowder Plot. Hariot was among the first people to use a telescope; in 1611, he produced the first map of the moon. Hariot

died in 1621, apparently from cancer of the nose—possibly caused by the habit of taking tobacco that he had acquired in the New World.

## ***From A Brief and True Report of the New-Found land of Virginia***

A brief and true report of the new-found land of Virginia; of the commodities there found and to be raised—as well merchantable,<sup>o</sup> as others for victual, building and other necessary uses—for those that are and shall be the planters there, and of the nature and manners of the natural inhabitants. Discovered by the English Colony there seated<sup>o</sup> by *Sir Richard Grenville Knight*<sup>1</sup> in the year 1585, which remained under the government of Ralph Lane Esquire,<sup>2</sup> one of her Majesty's Esquires, during the space of twelve months, at the special charge and direction of the Honorable SIR WALTER RALEGH, Knight, lord Warden of the Stannaries,<sup>3</sup> who therein hath been favored and authorized by her MAJESTY and her letters patents.

Directed to the adventurers, favorers and well-willers of the action for the inhabiting and planting there. By Thomas Hariot, servant to the above-named Sir WALTER, a member of the colony, and there employed in discovering. 1588

The first part: of merchantable commodities.

\* \* \*

The second part: of such commodities as Virginia is known to yield for victual and sustenance of man's life, usually fed upon by the natural inhabitants, as also by us during the time of our abode. And first of such as are sowed and husbanded.<sup>o</sup>

\* \* \*

The third and last part: of such other things as is behoveful<sup>o</sup> for those which shall plant and inhabit to know of, with a description of the nature and manners of the people of the country.

Of commodities for building and other necessary uses.

Those other things which I am more to make rehearsal of<sup>o</sup> are such as concern building and other mechanical necessary uses—as diverse sorts of trees for house and ship timber and other uses else; also lime, stone, and brick, lest that being not mentioned some might have been doubted of, or by some that are malicious reported the contrary.

*Oaks* there are as fair, straight, tall, and as good timber as any can be, and also great store,<sup>o</sup> and in some places very great.

*Walnut trees*, as I have said before, very many. Some have been seen excellent fair timber of four and five fathom<sup>4</sup> and above fourscore<sup>o</sup> foot straight without bough.

*Fir trees* fit for masts of ships, some very tall and great.

*Rakiock*,<sup>5</sup> a kind of trees so called that are sweet wood of which the inhabitants that were near unto us do commonly make their boats or canoes of the form of trows,<sup>6</sup> only with the help of fire, hatchets of stones, and shells; we have known some so great being made in that sort<sup>o</sup> of one tree that they have carried well twenty men at once besides much baggage; the timber being great, tall, straight, soft, light, and yet tough enough I think (besides other uses) to be fit also for masts of ships.

*Cedar*, a sweet wood good for ceilings, chests, boxes, bedsteads, lutes, virginals<sup>7</sup> and many things else, as I have also said before. Some of our company, which have wandered in some places where I have not been, have made certain affirmation of *Cyprus* which for such and other excellent uses is also a wood of price and no small estimation.<sup>o</sup>

*Maple*, and also *Witch-hazel*, whereof the inhabitants use to make their bows.

*Holly*, a necessary thing for the making of birdlime.<sup>8</sup>

*Willows*, good for the making of weirs and weels<sup>9</sup> to take fish after the English manner, although the inhabitants use only reeds



which, because they are so strong as also<sup>o</sup> flexible, do serve for that turn<sup>o</sup> very well and sufficiently.

*Beech* and *Ash*, good for cask, hoops,<sup>1</sup> and if need require,<sup>o</sup> plough work, as also for many things else.

*Elm*.

*Sassafras* trees.

*Ascopo*<sup>o</sup> a kind of tree very like unto laurel. The bark is hot in taste and spicy; it is very like to that tree which Monardus<sup>2</sup> describeth to be *Cassia Lignea* of the West Indies.<sup>3</sup>

There are many other strange trees whose names I know not but in the Virginian language, of which I am not now able, neither is it so convenient for the present, to trouble you with particular relation, <sup>o</sup> seeing that for timber and other necessary uses I have named sufficient. And of many of the rest, but that they may be applied to good use, I know no cause to doubt.

Now for stone, brick, and lime, thus it is. Near unto the seacoast where we dwelt, there are no kind of stones to be found (except a few small pebbles about four miles off) but such as have been brought from farther out of the main.<sup>o</sup> In some of our voyages, we have seen diverse hard, raggy<sup>o</sup> stones, great pebbles, and a kind of grey stone like unto marble, of which the inhabitants make their hatchets to cleave wood. Upon enquiry we heard that a little further up into the country were of all sorts very many, although of quarries they are ignorant, neither have they use of any store whereupon they should have occasion to seek any. For if every household have one or two to crack nuts, grind shells, whet copper, and sometimes other stones for hatchets, they have enough. Neither use they any digging, but only for graves about three foot deep, and therefore no marvel that they know neither quarries nor limestones, which both may be in places nearer than they wot<sup>o</sup> of.

In the meantime, until there be discovery of sufficient store in some place or other convenient, the want<sup>o</sup> of you which are and shall be the planters therein may be as well supplied by brick, for the making whereof in diverse places of the country there is clay both excellent good and plenty, and also by lime<sup>o</sup> made of oyster shells,

and of others burnt, after the manner as they use in the isles of Thanet and Sheppey,<sup>4</sup> and also in diverse other places of England, which kind of lime is well known to be as good as any other. And of oyster shells there is plenty enough. For besides diverse other particular places where are abundance, there is one shallow sound along the coast where, for the space of many miles together in length and two or three miles in breadth, the ground is nothing else being but half a foot or a foot under water for the most part.

This much can I say furthermore of stones: that about one hundred twenty miles from our fort near the water in the side of a hill was found by a gentleman of our company a great vein of hard raggy stones, which I thought good to remember<sup>o</sup> unto you.

#### OF THE NATURE AND MANNERS OF THE PEOPLE

It resteth<sup>o</sup> I speak a word or two of the natural inhabitants, their natures and manners \* \* \*

They are a people clothed with loose mantles<sup>o</sup> made of deerskins, and aprons of the same round about their middles, all else naked; of such a difference of statures only as we in England; having no edge tools<sup>5</sup> or weapons of iron or steel to offend us withal, neither know they how to make any. Those weapons that they have are only bows made of witch hazel and arrows of reeds, flat-edged truncheons also of wood about a yard long, neither have they anything to defend themselves but targets<sup>o</sup> made of barks, and some armors made of sticks wickered<sup>o</sup> together with thread.

Their towns are but small and near the seacoast but few, some containing but ten or twelve houses, some twenty. The greatest that we have seen hath been but of thirty houses. If they be walled, it is only done with barks of trees made fast<sup>o</sup> to stakes, or else with poles only fixed upright and close one by another.

Their houses are made of small poles made fast at the tops in round form after the manner as is used in many arbories<sup>o</sup> in our gardens of England, in most towns covered with barks, and in some with artificial<sup>o</sup> mats, made of long rushes, from the tops of the

houses down to the ground. The length of them is commonly double to the breadth. In some places they are but twelve and sixteen yards long, and in other some we have seen of four-and-twenty.

In some places of the country only one town belongs to the government, of a *werowance* or chief lord;<sup>6</sup> in other some two or three, on some six, eight, and more. The greatest *werowance* that yet we had dealing with had but eighteen towns in his government, and able to make<sup>o</sup> not above seven or eight hundred fighting men at the most. The language of every government is different from any other, and the farther they are distant, the greater is the difference.

Their manner of wars amongst themselves is either by sudden surprising one another, most commonly about the dawning of the day or moonlight, or else by ambushes, or some subtle devices. Set battles are very rare, except it fall out<sup>o</sup> where there are many trees, where either part may have some hope of defense, after the delivery of every arrow, in leaping behind some or other.

If there fall out any wars between us and them, what their fight is likely to be, we having advantages against them for many manner of ways—as by our discipline, our strange<sup>o</sup> weapons and devices else,<sup>o</sup> especially ordnance<sup>o</sup> great and small—it may be easily imagined, by the experience we have had in some places, the turning up of their heels against us in running away was their best defense.

In respect of<sup>o</sup> us they are a people poor, and for want of skill and judgement in the knowledge and use of our things, do esteem<sup>o</sup> our trifles before things of greater value. Notwithstanding in their proper<sup>o</sup> manner, considering the want of such means as we have, they seem very ingenious. For although they have no such tools nor any such crafts, sciences, and arts as we, yet in those things they do, they show excellency of wit.<sup>o</sup> And by how much they upon due consideration shall find our manner of knowledges and crafts to exceed theirs in perfection, and speed for doing or execution,<sup>o</sup> by so much the more is it probable that they should desire our friendship and love and have the greater respect for pleasing and obeying us. Whereby may be hoped if means of good government be used that

they may in short time be brought to civility and the embracing of true religion.

Some religion they have already which although it be far from the truth, yet being as it is, there is hope it may be the easier and sooner reformed.

They believe that there are many gods, which they call *Mantoac*, but of different sorts and degrees, one only chief and great god, which hath been from all eternity. Who, as they affirm, when he purposed to make the world, made, first, other gods of a principal order to be as means and instruments to be used in the creation and government to follow; and, after, the sun, moon, and stars as petty gods and the instruments of the other order more principal. First, they say, were made waters, out of which by the gods was made all diversity of creatures that are visible or invisible.

For mankind, they say, a woman was made first, which by the working of one of the gods conceived and brought forth children. And in such sort, they say, they had their beginning.

But how many years have passed since, they say, they can make no relation,° having no letters° nor other such means as we do to keep records of the particularities of times past, but only tradition from father to son.

They think that all the gods are of human shape, and therefore they represent them by images in the forms of men, which they call *Kewasowok*. One alone is called *Kewas*. Then they place in houses appropriate, or temples which they call *Machicomuck*, where they worship, pray, sing, and make many times offering unto them. In some *Machicomuck* we have seen but one *Kewas*, in some two, and in other some three. The common sort think them to be also gods.

They believe also the immortality of the soul: that after this life, as soon as the soul is departed from the body according to the works it hath done, it is either carried to heaven, the habitacle° of gods, there to enjoy perpetual bliss and happiness, or else to a great pit or hole, which they think to be in the furthest parts of their part of the world toward the sunset, there to burn continually. The place they call *Popogusso*.

For the confirmation of this opinion, they told me two stories of two men that had been lately dead and renewed<sup>o</sup> again. The one happened but few years before our coming, in the country of a wicked man which, having been dead and buried, the next day the earth of the grave being seen to move, was taken up again, who made declaration where his soul had been—that is to say very near entering into *Popogusso*—had not one of the gods saved him and gave him leave to return again, and teach his friends what they should do to avoid that terrible place of torment.

The other happened in the same year we were there, but in a town that was threescore<sup>o</sup> miles from us, and it was told me for strange news: that one being dead, buried, and taken up again as the first, showed that although his body had lien dead in the grave, yet his soul was alive, and had traveled far in a long broad way, on both sides whereof grew most delicate and pleasant trees, bearing more rare and excellent fruits than ever he had seen before or was able to express;<sup>o</sup> and at length came to most brave<sup>o</sup> and fair houses, near which he met his father that had been dead before, who gave him great charge<sup>7</sup> to go back again and show his friends what good they were to do to enjoy the pleasures of that place, which, when he had done he should after come again.

What subtlety<sup>o</sup> soever be in the *Wiroances* and priests, this opinion<sup>o</sup> worketh so much in many of the common and simple sort of people that it maketh them have a great respect to their governors and also great care what they do to avoid torment after death and to enjoy bliss. Although, notwithstanding, there is punishment ordained for malefactors, as<sup>o</sup> stealers, whoremongers,<sup>8</sup> and other sorts of wicked-doers: some punished with death, some with forfeitures,<sup>o</sup> some with beating, according to the greatness of the facts.<sup>o</sup>

And this is the sum of their religion, which I learned by having special familiarity with some of their priests. Wherein they were not so sure grounded, nor gave such credit to their traditions and stories, but through conversing with us they were brought into great doubts of their own,<sup>9</sup> and no small admiration of ours, with earnest

desire in many to learn more than we had means—for want of perfect utterance in their language—to express.

Most things they saw with us, as mathematical instruments, sea compasses, the virtue<sup>o</sup> of the lodestone<sup>o</sup> in drawing iron, a perspective glass<sup>o</sup> whereby was showed many strange sights, burning glasses,<sup>1</sup> wildfire works,<sup>o</sup> guns, books, writing and reading, spring-clocks that seem to go of themselves, and many other things that we had were so strange unto them and so far exceeded their capacities to comprehend the reason and means how they should be made and done, that they thought they were rather the works of gods than of men, or at the leastwise they had been given and taught us of the gods. Which made many of them to have such opinion of us as, that if they knew not the truth of God and religion already, it was rather to be had from us, whom God so especially loved, than from a people that were so simple (as they found themselves to be in comparison of us). Whereupon greater credit was given unto that we spake of concerning such matters.

Many times, and in every town where I came according as<sup>o</sup> I was able, I made declaration of the contents of the bible: that therein was set forth the true and only God and his mighty works; that therein was contained the true doctrine of salvation through Christ; with many particularities of miracles and chief points of religion as I was able then to utter and thought fit<sup>o</sup> for the time. And although I told them the book materially and of itself was not of any such virtue, as I thought they did conceive, but only the doctrine therein contained, yet would many be glad to touch it, to embrace it, to kiss it, to hold it to their breasts, and heads, and stroke over all their body with it to show their hungry desire of that knowledge which was spoken of.

The *Wiroans* with whom we dwelt [was] called *Wingina*, and many of his people would be glad many times to be with us at our prayers and many times call upon us, both in his own town, as also in others (whither he sometimes accompanied us to pray and sing psalms) hoping thereby to be partaker of the same effects which we by that means also expected.

Twice this *Wiroance* was so grievously sick that he was like to die, and as he lay languishing, doubting of any help by his own priests—and thinking he was in such danger for offending us and thereby our God—sent for some of us to pray and be a means to our God that it would please Him either that he might live or after death dwell with Him in bliss, so likewise were the requests of many others in the like case.

On a time also when their corn began to wither by reason of a drought which happened extraordinarily,<sup>o</sup> fearing that it had come to pass by reason that in something they had displeased us, many would come to us and desire us to pray to our God of England that he would preserve their corn, promising that, when it was ripe, we also should be partakers of the fruit.

There could at no time happen any strange sickness, losses, hurts, or any other cross<sup>o</sup> unto them, but that they would impute<sup>o</sup> to us the cause or means thereof for offending or not pleasing us.

One other rare and strange accident,<sup>o</sup> leaving others, will I mention before I end, which moved the whole country that either knew or heard of us to have us in wonderful admiration.<sup>o</sup> There was no town where we had any subtle device<sup>o</sup> practiced against us we leaving it unpunished or not revenged (because we sought by all means possible to win them by gentleness) but that within a few days after our departure, from every such town, the people began to die very fast, and many in short space; in some towns about twenty, in some forty, in some sixty, and in one sixscore,<sup>o</sup> which in truth was very many in respect of<sup>o</sup> their numbers. This happened in no place that we could learn but where we had been, where they used some practice against us, and after such time. The disease also was so strange that they neither knew what it was nor how to cure it; the like by report of the oldest men in the country never happened before, time out of mind, a thing specially observed by us as also by the natural inhabitants themselves.

Insomuch that when some of the inhabitants which were our friends and especially the *Wiroance Wingina* had observed such effects in four of five towns to follow their<sup>2</sup> wicked practices, they



were persuaded that it was the work of our God through our means, and that we by Him might kill and slay whom we would<sup>o</sup> without weapons and not come near them.

And thereupon when it had happened that they had understanding that any of their enemies had abused us in our journeys, hearing that we had wrought no revenge with our weapons, and fearing upon some cause the matter should so rest, did come and entreat us that we would be a means to our God that they, as others that had dealt ill with us, might in like sort die, alleging how much it would be for our credit and profit as also theirs, and hoping furthermore that we would do so much at their requests in respect of the friendship we profess them.

Whose entreaties, although we showed that they were ungodly, affirming that our God would not subject Himself to any such prayers and requests of men; that indeed all things have been and were to be done according to His good pleasure as he had ordained; and that we, to show ourselves His true servants, ought rather to make petition for the contrary, that they with them might live together with us, be made partakers of His truth, and serve Him in righteousness, but notwithstanding in such sort that we refer that, as all other things, to be done according to His divine will and pleasure, and as by His wisdom He had ordained to be best.

Yet because the effect fell out<sup>o</sup> so suddenly and shortly after, according to their desires, they thought nevertheless it came to pass by our means, and that we in using such speeches unto them did but dissemble the matter, and therefore came unto us to give us thanks in their manner, that although we satisfied them not in promise, yet in deeds and effect we had fulfilled their desires.

This marvelous accident in all the country wrought so strange opinions of us that some people could not tell whether to think us gods or men, and the rather because that all the space of their sickness there was no man of ours known to die or that was especially sick. They noted also that we had no women amongst us, neither that we did care for any of theirs.



Some, therefore, were of opinion that we were not born of women and therefore not mortal, but that we were men of an old generation many years past then risen again to immortality.

Some would likewise seem to prophesy that there were more of our generation yet to come to kill theirs and take their places—as some thought the purpose was, by<sup>o</sup> that which was already done.

Those that were immediately to come after us they imagined to be in the air yet invisible and without bodies, and that they by our entreaty and for the love of us did make the people to die in that sort<sup>o</sup> as they did by shooting invisible bullets into them.

To confirm this opinion, their physicians (to excuse<sup>o</sup> their ignorance in curing disease), would not be ashamed to say, but earnestly make the simple people believe, that the strings of blood that they sucked out of the sick bodies were the strings wherewithal the invisible bullets were tied and cast.

Some also thought that we shot them ourselves out of our pieces<sup>o</sup> from the place where we dwelled and killed the people in any such town that had offended us as we listed,<sup>o</sup> how far distant from us soever it were.

And other some said that it was the special work of God for our sakes, as we ourselves have cause in some sort<sup>o</sup> to think no less, whatsoever some do or may imagine to the contrary, specially some astrologers, knowing of the eclipse of the sun which we saw the same year before in our voyage thitherward which unto them appeared very terrible. And also of a comet which began to appear but a few days before the beginning of the said sickness. But to exclude them from being the special causes of so special an accident, there are further reasons than I think fit<sup>o</sup> at this present to be alleged.

These their opinions I have set down the more at large,<sup>o</sup> that it may appear unto you that there is good hope they may be brought, through discreet dealing and government, to the embracing of the truth, and consequently to honor, obey, fear, and love us.

And although some of our company towards the end of the year showed themselves so fierce in slaying some of the people in some

towns, upon causes that on our part might easily enough have been borne withal, yet notwithstanding (because it was on their part justly deserved), the alteration of their opinions generally and for the most part concerning us is the less to be doubted.° And whatsoever else they may be, by carefulness of ourselves need nothing at all to be feared.

### ***The Conclusion.***

\* \* \* Although all which I have before spoken of have been discovered and experimented not far from the seacoast where was our abode and most of our traveling, yet sometimes, as we made our journeys farther into the main° and country, we found the soil to be fatter,° the trees greater and to grow thinner, the ground more firm and deeper mold, more and larger champions,³ finer grass and as good as ever we saw any in England, in some places rocky and far more high and hilly ground, more plenty of their fruits, more abundance of beasts, the more inhabited with people, and of greater policy and larger dominions, with greater towns and houses.

Why may we not, then, look for in good hope—from the inner parts—of more and greater plenty, as well of other things, as of those which we have already discovered? Unto the Spaniards happened the like in discovering the main of the West Indies. The main also of this country of Virginia, extending some ways so many hundreds of leagues, as otherwise° than by the relation of the inhabitants we have most certain knowledge of, where yet no Christian prince hath any possession or dealing, cannot but yield many kinds of excellent commodities, which we in our discovery have not yet seen.

What hope there is else to be gathered of the nature of the climate, being answerable to the island of Japan, the land of China, Persia, Jewry, the islands of Cyprus and Candy,° the south parts of Greece, Italy, and Spain, and of many other notable and famous countries, because I mean not to be tedious, I leave to your own consideration.

Whereby also the excellent temperature of the air there at all seasons—much warmer than in England, and never so violently hot as sometimes is under and between the Tropics or near them—cannot be unknown unto you without farther relation.

For the wholesomeness thereof I need to say but thus much. That for all the want of provision, as, first, of English victual—excepting for twenty days, we lived only by drinking water and by the victual of the country, of which some sorts were very strange unto us, and might have been thought to have altered our temperatures in such sort as to have brought us into some grievous and dangerous diseases—secondly, the want of English means for the taking of beasts, fish, and fowl, which by the help only of the inhabitants and their means, could not be so suddenly and easily provided for us, nor in so great numbers and quantities, nor of that choice as otherwise might have been to our better satisfaction and contentment. Some want also we had of clothes. Furthermore, in all our travails which were most special and often in the time of winter, our lodging was in the open air upon the ground. And yet I say for all of this, there were but four of our whole company (being one hundred and eight) that died all the year and that but at the latter end thereof and upon none of the aforesaid causes. For all four, especially three, were feeble and sickly persons before ever they came thither, and those that knew them much marveled that they lived so long being in that case<sup>o</sup> or had adventured<sup>o</sup> to travel.

Seeing therefore the air there is so temperate and wholesome, the soil so fertile—and yielding such commodities as I have before mentioned—the voyage also thither to and fro being sufficiently experimented<sup>4</sup> to be performed thrice a year with ease and at any season thereof, and the dealing of Sir Walter Raleigh so liberal in large giving and granting land there, as is already known, with many helps and furtherances<sup>o</sup> else (the least that he hath granted hath been five hundred acres to a man only for the adventure<sup>o</sup> of his person) I hope there remain no cause whereby the action should be misliked.

If that those which shall thither travel to inhabit and plant be but reasonably provided for the first year—as those are which were transported the last—and being there do use but that diligence and care as is requisite, and as they may with ease, there is no doubt but for the time following they may have victuals that is excellent good and plenty enough: some more English sorts of cattle<sup>o</sup> also hereafter, as some have been before and are there yet remaining, may and shall be, God willing, thither transported. So likewise our kind of fruits, roots, and herbs may be there planted and sowed, as some have been already, and prove well.<sup>o</sup> And in short time also they may raise of<sup>o</sup> those sorts of commodities which I have spoken of as shall both enrich themselves as also others that shall deal with them.

And this is all the fruits<sup>o</sup> of our labors that I have thought necessary to advertise you of at this present.

\* \* \*

Thus referring my relation<sup>o</sup> to your favorable constructions, expecting good success of the action from Him<sup>o</sup> which is to be acknowledged the author and governor not only of this but of all else, I take my leave of you this month of February, 1588.

Finis.

1588, 1589, 1590

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Richard Grenville (1542–1591), English privateer and explorer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ralph Lane (ca. 1532–1603), English explorer and colonizer.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tin mines in Cornwall and Devon.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Six feet (the length covered by the outstretched arms).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: What tree this is has not been determined. A tulip tree, perhaps.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A type of boat used for fishing in early modern England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Instruments consisting of keyboards in a box.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A sticky substance spread on trees to catch birds.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Weirs were fences in rivers that would channel fish toward a trap; weels were wicker traps for catching fish.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the staves of barrels and the hoops that bind them[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nicolás Monardes (1493–1588) wrote an account of the plants of the New World and their medical uses in 1574; it was translated into English 1580.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A variety of cinnamon.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A peninsula and island respectively off the coast of Kent in southern England. Oyster shells can be burned to create lime, then mixed with water, sand, ash, and other shells to create a kind of concrete (to be known, later, as tabby).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tools with sharp, cutting edges.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Name for a chief among the Native Americans of what is now Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Commanded him powerfully.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: People who use/procure prostitutes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, of their own religion.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Concave mirrors used to concentrate the sun's rays.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Following on from their.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Areas of level open country.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tried by experiment.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Notes

- °: *salable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cultivated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *further to relate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in abundance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eighty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in that manner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in great number* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as well as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fulfil the purpose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessary* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweet bay tree* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tell you* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sea* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ragged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mortar* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mention* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remains that* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sleeveless cloaks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shields* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enclosed with wicker* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *arbors* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manufactured (woven)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *muster* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfamiliar* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in addition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *artillery* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in comparison with* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *regard, value* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intelligence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carrying into effect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cannot tell* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *writing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *habitation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spiritually reborn* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sixty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put into words* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *craftiness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belief* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *such as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finer* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deeds* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magnet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magnifying glass* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fireworks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as far as* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proper* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *very unusually* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affliction* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attribute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occurrence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high regard* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contrivance, plot* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one hundred and twenty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in proportion to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wanted to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happened* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judging by* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in that manner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clear from blame* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *firearms* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *as we pleased* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in some fashion* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suitable* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at length* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mainland* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *richer* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in other ways* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Crete* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *condition* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aids* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *risk* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *livestock* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thrive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *results* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *account* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that is, God* [Return to reference °](#)



## WILLIAM STRACHEY

In 1625 the Reverend Samuel Purchas (1577–1626) first published the “True Reportory” by William Strachey (1572–1621). Purchas included it in a huge set of travel narratives he had gathered and printed in the style of his predecessor, Richard Hakluyt (1553–1616), from whom—or from whose surviving papers—he probably received Strachey’s text. Strachey’s account is in the form of a letter to an “Excellent Lady” (who is unclear) dated 15 July 1610. It is autobiographical and tells the story of Strachey’s 1609 voyage on the colonial ship *The Sea Venture*, intended to be a relief fleet for the Jamestown colony of Virginia; how he and his company survived a powerful hurricane by crash-landing on the islands of Bermuda; how they lived on the main island, constructing two small boats there, *Patience* and *Deliverance*, and overcoming potential mutinies; and how they finally made their way from the Bermudas to Virginia.

Of farming and merchant stock, Strachey’s family was aggrandized during his life time when his father acquired a gentleman’s coat of arms. Strachey seems at first to have supported himself from his father’s, and then his wife’s, estates: he went to Cambridge but did not complete a degree; he also studied law at Gray’s Inn, but there is no record of his practicing. His interests seem to have been in literature and the theatre. Thomas Campion and John Donne were friends; and Strachey himself was a shareholder in the Blackfriars playhouse when the boy company, the Children of the Revels, performed there. His first publication, in 1605, was a poem in praise of Ben Jonson’s unsuccessful play *Sejanus* (1603), with which it was printed. Struggling financially, in 1606 Strachey traveled to the Ottoman Empire’s capital, Constantinople, as secretary to its ambassador—a post from which he was dismissed—then to Venice, where he was unable to find a job. Finally, in 1609, he purchased two shares in the Virginia Company with which he then traveled to Virginia, the story he tells

in this letter. After his arrival in Virginia, Strachey was appointed secretary and recorder of the colony. He returned to England in 1611, where he wrote a long account of the Virginia colony and its prospects. Yet the Virginia Company found his *History of the Travel into Virginia Britania* too critical and refused to publish it. It is unclear whether he ever had another job; he died in poverty in 1621.

The letter, extracted below, seems intended to be a public rather than private account. It tactfully praises General Thomas Gates, who had been sent out as Virginia's governor-designate, and Admiral Sir George Somers, who was commander of the fleet, for their leadership after landing on the Bermudas. It also promotes the Bermudas' natural resources—plants, animals, and potentially merchantable qualities—making the case for settling on the uninhabited islands. The account's second half, not supplied here, is rather less full of praise for the state and management of the Virginia colony.

Strachey's letter seems to have circulated before printing; thus it is sometimes suggested that Shakespeare read it, and that it influenced *The Tempest*. Shakespeare could have heard what happened in the Bermudas without reading Strachey's account. News would have reached England in 1609 that *The Sea Venture* had not arrived in Virginia, and oral accounts from the survivors themselves would certainly have been circulating by 1610. But it is clear that around 1609 Shakespeare became interested in a story like this one: of a tempest that miraculously brings a ship of troubled people to a fertile, and haunting, island.

## ***From A True Reportory . . . of the Wreck***

*A true reportory of the wreck and redemption of Sir THOMAS GATES, Knight,<sup>1</sup> upon, and from the islands of the Bermudas; his coming to Virginia, and the estate<sup>o</sup> of that Colony then and after, under the government of the Lord LA WARR,<sup>2</sup> July 15. 1610, written by WILLIAM STRACHEY, Esquire*

### ***I***

*A most dreadful tempest (the manifold deaths whereof are here to the life<sup>o</sup> described); their wrack<sup>o</sup> on Bermuda, and the description of those islands*

Excellent lady,<sup>3</sup> know that upon Friday late in the evening, we brake ground<sup>o</sup> out of the sound<sup>4</sup> of Plymouth, our whole fleet then consisting of seven good ships and two pinnaces<sup>5</sup>\* \* \* on St. James his day, July 24, being Monday (preparing for no less all the black night before), the clouds gathering thick upon us and the winds singing and whistling most unusually \* \* \* A dreadful storm and hideous began to blow from out the north east, which swelling and roaring as it were by fits, some hours with more violence than others, at length did beat all light from heaven—which, like an hell of darkness, turned black upon us, so much the more fuller of horror, as in such cases horror and fear use<sup>o</sup> to overrun the troubled and overmastered senses of all, which (taken up with amazement) the ears lay so sensible<sup>6</sup> to the terrible cries and murmurs of the winds, and distraction of our company, as who was<sup>o</sup> most armed and best prepared was not a little shaken. For surely (noble lady) as death comes not so sudden nor apparent, so he comes not so elvish<sup>o</sup> and painful (to men especially even then in health and perfect habitudes<sup>o</sup> of body) as at sea. \* \* \*

For four-and-twenty hours, the storm, in a restless tumult, had blown so exceedingly as we could not apprehend in our imaginations any possibility of greater violence, yet did we still find it not only more terrible, but more constant, fury added to fury, and one storm urging a second more outrageous than the former, whether it so wrought upon o our fears or indeed met with new forces. Sometimes strikes in our ship amongst women and passengers not used to such hurly o and discomforts made us look one upon the other with troubled hearts and panting bosoms, our clamors drowned in the winds and the winds in thunder. Prayers might well be in the heart and lips but drowned in the outcries of the officers. \* \* \* There was not a moment in which the sudden splitting or instant oversetting of the ship was not expected.

Howbeit o this was not all. It pleased God to bring a greater affliction yet upon us, for in the beginning of the storm we had received likewise a mighty leak. And the ship, in every joint almost, having spued out her oakum z \* \* \* was grown five foot suddenly deep with water above her ballast, 8 and we almost drowned within, whilst we sat looking when o to perish from above. This, imparting no less terror than danger, ran through the whole ship with much fright and amazement, startled and turned the blood, and took down the braves o of the most hardy mariner of them all, insomuch as he that before happily felt not the sorrow of others, now began to sorrow for himself, when he saw such a pond of water so suddenly broken in, and which he knew could not (without present avoiding) but instantly sink him. \* \* \* [T]here might be seen master, master's mate, boatswain, quartermaster, coopers, carpenters, and who not, with candles in their hands, creeping along the ribs, viewing the sides, searching every corner, and listening in every place if they could hear the water run. Many a weeping leak was this way found and hastily stopped, and at length one in the gunner room made up o with I know not how many pieces of beef; but all was to no purpose, the leak (if it were but one), which drunk in our greatest seas and took in our destruction fastest, could not then be found, nor ever was, by any labor, counsel, or search. \* \* \*

Our governor,<sup>9</sup> upon the Tuesday morning \* \* \* had caused the whole company (about one hundred and forty, besides women), to be equally divided into three parts, and opening the ship in three places (under the forecastle, in the waist, and hard by the bittacle),<sup>1</sup> appointed each man where to attend \* \* \* Then men might be seen to labor, I may well say, for life, and the better sort, even our governor and admiral themselves, not refusing their turn, and to spell<sup>o</sup> each the other, to give example to other. The common sort, stripped naked as men in galleys,<sup>2</sup> the easier both to hold out<sup>3</sup> and to shrink<sup>o</sup> from under the salt water which continually leaped in among them, kept their eyes waking and their thoughts and hands working, with tired bodies and wasted spirits, three days and four nights, destitute<sup>o</sup> of outward comfort and desperate of any deliverance, testifying how mutually willing they were yet by labor to keep each other from drowning, albeit each one drowned whilst he labored.

Once, so huge a sea brake upon the poop<sup>o</sup> and quarter upon us as it covered our ship from stern to stem.<sup>4</sup> Like a garment or a vast cloud, it filled her brimful for a while within, from the hatches up to the spar deck.<sup>5</sup> This source or confluence of water was so violent as it rushed and carried the helmman from the helm and wrested the whipstaff<sup>o</sup> out of his hand. \* \* \* Our governor was at this time below at the capstan,<sup>6</sup> both by his speech and authority heartening<sup>o</sup> every man unto his labor. It struck him from the place where he sat and grovelled him<sup>7</sup> and all us about him on our faces, beating together with our breaths all thoughts from our bosoms else<sup>o</sup> than that we were now sinking.

\* \* \* East and by South we steered away as much as we could to bear upright, which was no small carefulness nor pain to do, albeit we much unrigged our ship, threw overboard much luggage, many a trunk and chest (in which I suffered no mean<sup>o</sup> loss) and staved<sup>8</sup> many a butt of beer, hogsheads of oil, cider, wine, and vinegar, and heaved away all our ordnance<sup>o</sup> on the starboard side, and had now purposed to have cut down the main mast, the more

to lighten her, for we were much spent<sup>o</sup> and our men so weary as<sup>o</sup> their strengths together failed them with their hearts, having travailed now from Tuesday till Friday morning, day and night, without either sleep or food; for the leakage taking up all the hold, we could neither come by beer nor fresh water; fire we could keep none in the cook-room to dress<sup>o</sup> any meat; and carefulness, grief, and our turn at the pump or bucket were sufficient to hold sleep from our eyes.

\* \* \* [I]t being now Friday, the fourth morning, it wanted little but<sup>9</sup> that there had been a general determination to have shut up hatches, and commending our sinful souls to God, committed the ship to the mercy of the sea. Surely that night we must have done it and that night had we then perished;<sup>1</sup> but see the goodness and sweet introduction of better hope, by our merciful God, given unto us. Sir George Somers,<sup>2</sup> when no man dreamed of such happiness, had discovered and cried land. \* \* \* We had got her<sup>o</sup> within a mile under the southeast point of the land where we had somewhat smooth water. But having no hope to save her by coming to an anchor in the same, we were enforced to run her ashore, as near the land as we could, which brought us within three quarters of a mile of shore, and by the mercy of God unto us, making out our boats, we had ere<sup>o</sup> night brought all our men, women, and children, about the number of one hundred and fifty, safe into the island.

We found it to be the dangerous and dreaded island, or rather islands, of the Bermuda, whereof let me give your ladyship a brief description before I proceed to my narration. And that, the rather, because they be so terrible to all that ever touched on them, and such tempests, thunders, and other fearful objects are seen and heard about them that they be called commonly "The Devil's Islands" and are feared and avoided of<sup>o</sup> all sea travelers alive above any other place in the world. Yet it pleased our merciful God to make even this hideous and hated place both the place of our safety and means of our deliverance.

And hereby also I hope to deliver<sup>o</sup> the world from a foul and general error: it being counted<sup>o</sup> of most that they can be no

habitation for men, but rather given over to devils and wicked spirits; whereas indeed we find them now by experience to be as habitable and commodious as most countries of the same climate and situation, insomuch as if the entrance into them were as easy as the place itself is contenting,<sup>o</sup> it had long ere this been inhabited as well as other islands.

\* \* \*

The soil of the whole island is one and the same, the mold dark, red, sandy, dry, and uncapable, I believe, of any of our commodities or fruits. Sir George Somers, in the beginning of August, squared out<sup>3</sup> a garden by the quarter<sup>4</sup>—the quarter being set down before a goodly bay upon which our governor did first leap ashore, and therefore called it, as aforesaid, “Gates his bay,” which opened into the east, and into which the sea did ebb and flow according to their tides—and sowed muskmelons,<sup>o</sup> peas, onions, radish, lettuce, and many English seeds and kitchen herbs. All which, in some ten days, did appear above ground, but whether by the small birds, of which there be many kinds, or by flies (worms I never saw any, nor any venomous thing as toad or snake or any creeping beast hurtful, only some spiders which, as many affirm, are signs of great store of gold—but they were long- and slender-leg spiders, and whether venomous or no I know not; I believe not, since we should still find them amongst our linen in our chests, and drinking cans; but we never received any danger from them: \* \* \*) whether, I say, hindered by these, or by the condition or vice of the soil, they came to no proof,<sup>5</sup> nor thrived. \* \* \*

Likewise there grow great store of palm trees, \* \* \* in the uppermost part thereof, and in the top, grow leaves about the head of it (the most inmost part whereof they call “palmetto,” and it is the heart and pith of the same trunk, so white and thin as it will peel off into pleats<sup>o</sup> as smooth and delicate as white satin into twenty folds, in which a man may write as in paper, where they spread and fall downward about the tree like an overblown rose, or saffron flower not early gathered). So broad are the leaves as an “Italian

umbrello":<sup>6</sup> a man may well defend his whole body under one of them from the greatest storm rain that falls. For they being stiff and smooth, as if so many flags were knit together, the rain easily slideth off. \* \* \* With these leaves we thatched our cabins, and roasting the palmetto or soft top thereof, they had a taste like fried melons, and being sod<sup>o</sup> they eat like cabbages, but not so offensively thankful to the stomach. Many an ancient burgher was therefore heaved at and fell not for his place but for his head. For our common people, whose bellies never had ears, made it no breach of charity in their hot bloods and tall stomachs to murder thousands of them.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

Other kinds of high and sweet-smelling woods there be, and divers colors, black, yellow, and red, and one which bears a round blue berry, much eaten by our own people, of a styptic<sup>o</sup> quality and rough taste on the tongue, like a sloe to stay or bind the flux,<sup>8</sup> which the often eating of the luscious palm berry would bring them into, for the nature of sweet things is to cleanse and dissolve.

A kind of pea[r] of the bigness and shape of a Katherine pear we found growing upon the rocks, full of many sharp subtle pricks (as a thistle) which we therefore called "the prickly pear," the outside green, but being opened of a deep murrey,<sup>o</sup> full of juice like a mulberry, and just of the same substance and taste; we both ate them raw and baked.

Sure it is that there are no rivers nor running springs of fresh water to be found upon any of them. When we came first we digged and found certain gushings and soft bubblings, which being either in bottoms or on the side of hanging ground were only fed with rain water, which nevertheless soon sinketh into the earth and vanisheth away \* \* \* howbeit some low bottoms (which the continual descent from the hills filled full, and in those flats could have no passage away) we found to continue<sup>o</sup> as fishing ponds, or standing pools, continually summer and winter full of fresh water.



The shore and bays round about when we landed first afforded great store of fish, and that of divers kinds, and good; but it should seem that our fires, which we maintained on the shore's side, drove<sup>o</sup> them from us, so as we were in some want until we had made a flat bottom gondal<sup>o</sup> of cedar with which we put off<sup>o</sup> farther into the sea, and then daily hooked great store of many kinds, as excellent angelfish, salmon, peal,<sup>o</sup> bonitos, stingray, cavalli,<sup>o</sup> snappers, hogfish, sharks, dogfish, pilchards, mullets, and rockfish, of which be divers kinds. And of these our governor dried and salted and, barreling them up, brought to sea five hundred. For he had procured salt to be made with some brine, which happily was preserved, and once having made a little quantity, he kept three or four pots boiling, and two or three men attending nothing else in an house (some little distance from his bay) set up on purpose for the same work.

\* \* \* A kind of web-footed fowl there is, of the bigness of an English green plover, or seamew,<sup>o</sup> which all the summer we saw not, and in the darkest nights of November and December (for in the night they only feed) they would come forth, \* \* \* I have been at the taking of three hundred in an hour, and we might have laden<sup>o</sup> our boats. Our men found a pretty way to take them, which was by standing on the rocks or sands by the seaside, and hollowing,<sup>o</sup> laughing, and making the strangest outcry that possibly they could, with the noise whereof the birds would come flocking to that place, and settle upon the very arms and head of him that so cried, and still creep nearer and nearer, answering the noise themselves; by which our men would weigh them with their hand, and which weighed heaviest they took for the best and let the others alone, and so our men would take twenty dozen in two hours of the chiefest of them;<sup>o</sup> and they were a good and well-relished<sup>o</sup> fowl, fat and full as a partridge. In January we had great store of their eggs, which are as great as an hen's egg, and so fashioned<sup>o</sup> and white-shelled, and have no difference in yolk nor white from an hen's egg. There are thousands of these birds, and two or three islands full of their burrows, whither at any time (in two hours' warning) we could send our cockboat<sup>o</sup> and bring home as many as would serve the

whole company; which birds for their blindness (for they see weakly in the day) and for their cry and hooting we called the "sea owl"; they will bite cruelly with their crooked bills.

We had knowledge that there were wild hogs upon the island, at first by our own swine preserved from the wrack<sup>o</sup> and brought to shore, for they straying into the woods, an huge wild boar followed down to our quarter, which at night was watched and taken \* \* \* Our people would go a-hunting with our ship dog, and sometimes bring home thirty, sometimes fifty, boars, sows, and pigs in a week alive; for the dog would fasten on them and hold, whilst the huntsmen made in: and there be thousands of them in the islands, and at that time of the year, in August, September, October, and November, they were well fed with berries that dropped from the cedars and the palms, and in our quarter we made sties for them, and gathering of these berries served them twice a day, by which means we kept them in good plight<sup>o</sup> \* \* \* But in February when the palm berries began to be scant or dry, \* \* \* the tortoises came in again, of which we daily both turned up great store, finding them on land, as also, sculling after them in our boat, stroke<sup>o</sup> them with an iron goad,<sup>9</sup> and sod,<sup>o</sup> baked, and roasted them. The tortoise is reasonable toothsome<sup>o</sup> (some say) wholesome meat. I am sure our company liked the meat of them very well, and one tortoise would go further amongst them than three hogs. One turtle (for so we called them) feasted well a dozen messes,<sup>o</sup> appointing six to every mess. It is such a kind of meat, as a man can neither absolutely call fish nor flesh, keeping mostwhat<sup>o</sup> in the water, and feeding upon seagrass like a heifer, in the bottom of the coves and bays, and laying their eggs (of which we should find five hundred at a time in the opening of a she-turtle) in the sand by the shore side. \* \* \*

## ***II***

*Actions and occurrents whiles they continued in the islands; Ravens sent for Virginia; Divers mutinies; PAINE executed: two pinnaces built.*

So soon as we were a little settled after our landing, with all the conveniency we might, and as the place and our many wants would give us leave, we made up our longboat<sup>1</sup> (as your ladyship hath heard) in fashion of a pinnace, fitting her with a little deck, made of the hatches of our ruined ship, so close<sup>o</sup> that no water could go in her, gave her sails and oars, and intreating with our master's mate Henry Ravens (who was supposed<sup>o</sup> a sufficient pilot), we found him easily won to make over therewith,<sup>2</sup> as a barque of aviso<sup>o</sup> for Virginia, \* \* \* promising if he lived and arrived safe there, to return unto us the next new moon with the pinnace belonging to the colony there. \* \* \*

\* \* \* Sir George Somers coasted the islands and drew the former plat<sup>o</sup> of them, and daily fished and hunted for our whole company, until the seven-and-twentieth of November, when then well perceiving that we were not likely to hear from Virginia and conceiving how the pinnace which Richard Frobisher was a-building would not be of burthen<sup>o</sup> sufficient to transport all our men from thence into Virginia (especially considering the season of the year wherein we were likely to put off),<sup>o</sup> he consulted with our governor that if he might have two carpenters (for we had four, such as they were) and twenty men over with him into the main island, he would quickly frame up another little bark<sup>o</sup> to second ours, for the better fitting and convenience of our people. Our governor, with many thanks \* \* \*, made ready for him all such tools and instruments as our own use required not. And for him were drawn forth twenty of the ablest and stoutest<sup>o</sup> of the company and the best of our men, to hew and square timber, when himself then, with daily pains and labor, wrought upon a small vessel, which was soon ready as ours—at which we leave him a while busied, and return to ourselves.

\* \* \* Some dangerous and secret discontents nourished amongst us had like to have been the parents of bloody issues and mischiefs. They began first in the seamen, who in time had fastened unto them (by false baits) many of our landmen likewise \* \* \* A conspiracy was discovered, of which six were found principals, who had promised

each unto the other not to set their hands to any travail or endeavor which might expedite or forward this pinnacle. And each of these had severally<sup>o</sup> (according to appointment) sought his opportunity to draw<sup>o</sup> the smith, and one of our carpenters, Nicholas Bennet (who made much profession of<sup>o</sup> scripture, a mutinous and dissembling imposter), the captain and one of the chief persuaders of others—who afterwards brake from the society of the colony, and like outlaws retired into the woods to make a settlement and habitation there—on their party, with whom they purposed<sup>o</sup> to leave our quarter, and possess another island by themselves. But this happily<sup>o</sup> found out, they were condemned to the same punishment which they would have chosen (but without smith or carpenter) and to an island far by itself they were carried and there left. \* \* \* But soon they missed comfort \* \* \* insomuch as many humble petitions were sent unto our governor, fraught<sup>o</sup> full of their seeming sorrow and repentance and earnest vows to redeem the former trespass with example of duties in them all to the common cause and general business. Upon which our governor (not easy to admit<sup>o</sup> any accusation and hard to remit<sup>o</sup> an offence, but at all times sorry in the punishment of him in whom may appear either shame or contrition) was easily content to reacknowledge them again.

Yet could not this be any warning to others, who more subtly began to shake the foundation of our quiet safety. \* \* \* They \* \* \* purposed to have made a surprise of<sup>o</sup> the storehouse and to have forced from thence what was therein, either of meal, cloth, cables, arms, sails, oars or what else it pleased God that we had recovered from the wrack<sup>o</sup> and was to serve our general necessity and use, either for the relief of us, while we stayed here, or for the carrying of us from this place again when our pinnacle should have been furnished.

But \* \* \* there were some of the association who, not strong enough fortified in their own conceits,<sup>o</sup> break from the plot itself, and (before the time was ripe for the execution thereof) discovered<sup>o</sup> the whole order, and every agent and actor thereof \* \* \* A gentleman amongst them, one Henry Paine, the thirteenth of March,

full of mischief, and every hour preparing something or other, stealing swords, adzes,<sup>o</sup> axes, hatchets, saws, augers,<sup>3</sup> planes, mallets, etc. to make good his own bad end, \* \* \* did not only give his said commander evil language, but struck at him, doubled his blows, and when he was not suffered to close with<sup>4</sup> him, went off<sup>o</sup> the guard, scoffing at the double diligence and attendance of the watch<sup>o</sup> appointed by the governor for much purpose, as he said; upon which, the watch telling him if the governor should understand of this his insolency, it might turn him to much blame, and happily<sup>o</sup> be as much as his life were worth, the said Paine replied with a settled<sup>o</sup> and bitter violence and in such unreverent terms as I should offend the modest ear too much to express it in his own phrase, but the contents were how that the governor had no authority of that quality to justify upon anyone (how mean soever in the colony) an action of that nature, and therefore let the governor, said he, kiss etc.<sup>5</sup> Which words being with the omitted additions brought the next day unto every common and public discourse, at length<sup>o</sup> they were delivered over to the governor, who \* \* \* calling the said Paine before him, \* \* \* condemned him to be instantly hanged; and the ladder being ready, after he had made many confessions, he earnestly desired, being a gentleman, that he might be shot to death; and towards the evening he had his desire, the sun and his life setting together.

But for the other \* \* \* they sent an audacious and formal petition to our governor subscribed with all their names and seals, not only intreating him that they might stay here, but (with great art) importuned<sup>o</sup> him, that he would perform<sup>o</sup> other conditions with them \* \* \* as, namely, to furnish each of them with two suits of apparel, and contribute meal<sup>o</sup> rateably<sup>o</sup> for one whole year, so much among them, as they had weekly now, which was one pound and an half a week (for such had been our proportion for nine months). Our governor answered this their petition, writing to Sir George Somers \* \* \* to do his best to give this revolted<sup>o</sup> company (if he could send unto them) the consideration of these particulars and so work with them, if he might, that by fair means (the mutiny reconciled) they

would at length survey their own errors \* \* \* In which good office Sir George Somers did so nobly work, and heartily labor, as he brought most of them in, and indeed all but Christopher Carter and Robert Waters, who \* \* \* grew so cautelous<sup>o</sup> and wary for their own ill as, at our coming away, we were fain to leave them behind. \* \* \*

During our time of abode upon these islands, we had daily every Sunday two sermons, preached by our Minister; besides, every morning and evening, at the ringing of a bell, we repaired all<sup>o</sup> to public prayer, at what time the names of our whole company were called by bill, and such as were wanting<sup>o</sup> were duly punished.

The contents, for the most part, of all our preacher's sermons, were especially of thankfulness and unity, etc.

It pleased God also to give us opportunity to perform all the other offices and rites of our Christian profession in this island: as marriage, for the six-and-twentieth of November we had one of Sir George Somers his men, his cook named Thomas Powell, who married a maidservant of one Mistress Horton, whose name was Elizabeth Persons; and upon Christmas Eve, as also once before, the first of October, our minister preached a godly sermon, which being ended he celebrated a communion at the partaking whereof our governor was and the greatest part of our company; and the eleventh of February we had the child of one John Rolf christened, a daughter, to which Captain Newport and myself were witnesses and the aforesaid Mistress Horton and we named it Bermuda; as also, the five and twentieth of March, the wife of one Edward Eason, being delivered the week before of a boy, had him then christened, to which Captain Newport and myself and Master James Swift were godfathers, and we named it Bermudas.

Likewise, we buried five of our company: Jeffery Briars, Richard Lewis, William Hitchman, and my Goddaughter Bermuda Rolf, and one untimely, Edward Samuel, a sailor, being villainously killed by the foresaid Robert Waters (a sailor likewise) with a shovel, who strake him therewith<sup>o</sup> under the list<sup>6</sup> of the ear, for which he was apprehended and appointed to be hanged the next day (the fact being done in the twilight), but being bound fast to a tree all night,



with many ropes and a guard of five or six to attend him, his fellow sailors, watching the advantage<sup>o</sup> of the sentinels sleeping, in despite and disdain that justice should be showed upon a sailor, and that one of their crew should be an example to others—not taking into consideration the unmanliness of the murder nor the horror of the sin—they cut his bands, and conveyed him into the woods, where they fed him nightly and closely, who afterward by the mediation of Sir George Somers, upon many conditions, had his trial respited<sup>o</sup> by our governor.

We had brought our pinnace so forward by this time as, the eight-and-twentieth of August, we having laid her keel, the six-and-twentieth of February we now began to caulk.<sup>7</sup> Old cables we had preserved unto us, which afforded oakum enough; and one barrel of pitch, and another of tar we likewise saved, which served our use some little way upon the bilge. We breamed her<sup>8</sup> otherwise with lime made of whelk shells and an hard white stone which we burned in a kiln, slaked<sup>o</sup> with fresh water and tempered with tortoises' oil. \* \* \* The most part of her timber was cedar, which we found to be bad for shipping, for that it is wondrous false inward, and besides it is so spalt or brickle<sup>o</sup> that it will make no good planks. Her beams were all oak of our ruined ship, and some planks in her bow of oak, and the rest as is aforesaid. When she began to swim<sup>o</sup> (upon her launching) our governor called her "The Deliverance," and she might be some eighty tons of burthen.

Before we quitted our old quarter and dislodged<sup>o</sup> to the fresh water with our pinnace, our governor set up in Sir George Somers' garden a fair mnemosynon<sup>o</sup> in figure of a cross made of some of the timber of our ruined ship, which was screwed in with strong and great trunnels<sup>9</sup> to a mighty cedar which grew in the midst of the said garden and whose top and upper branches he caused to be lopped that the violence of the wind and weather might have the less power over her.

In the midst of the cross, our governor fastened the picture of His Majesty in a piece of silver of twelve pence, and on each side of

the cross he set an inscription graven<sup>o</sup> in copper in the Latin and English to this purpose:

In memory of our great deliverance both from a mighty storm and leak, we have set up this to the honor of God. It is the spoil<sup>o</sup> of an English ship (of three hundred ton) called the "Sea Venture," bound with seven ships more (from which the storm divided us) to Virginia, or Nova Britania, in America. In it were two knights, Sir Thomas Gates, Knight, Governor of the English Forces and Colony there; and Sir George Somers, Knight, Admiral of the Seas. Her captain was Christopher Newport; passengers and mariners she had beside (which came all safe to land) one hundred and fifty. We were forced to run her ashore, by reason of her leak, under a point that bore southeast from the northern point of the island, which we discovered first the eight-and-twentieth of July, 1609.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Thomas Gates (fl? 1622), governor-designate and then governor of Jamestown, Virginia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thomas West, third Baron De La Warr (1577–1618), first governor of Jamestown, Virginia.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: It is not clear to whom this is addressed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Narrow stretch of water.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Small sailing vessels with two masts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perceptible through the senses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The fibers used as caulking material for ships.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Heavy material, such as gravel, sand, metal, water, etc., placed in the hold of a ship to weigh it down in the water and prevent it from capsizing.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: That is, General Thomas Gates, Virginia's governor-designate.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Binnacle—a box near the helm in which the compass is kept. "Forecastle": fore part of a ship. "Waist": middle part of the upper deck of a ship.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Low flat-built seagoing vessels with one deck, propelled by sails and oars. The rowers were mostly slaves or condemned criminals.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Maintain their positions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Timber at the extremity of the vessel. "Quarter": upper part of a ship's side aft of the beam.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Light upper deck.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mechanism for weighing the anchor.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Laid him prone on the ground.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Broke up (a cask) into staves.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It would not have taken much for.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: We would then have perished.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: George Somers (fl. 1554–1610), English privateer and sea captain who colonized the Bermudas for Britain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Marked out into squares.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A measurement (one fourth of an ell); or nautical quarter point by compass or other instrument.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Did not come to fulfillment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Parasol that shades one from the sun; the predecessor of the umbrella.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A burgher is a citizen. In this metaphor the trees are being described as old men murdered for their heads.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Stop or hinder the flow of dysentery.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Rod with a sharpened point.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Large, open ship's boat.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Transform with that.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Devices for boring holes in wood.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Engage in hand-to-hand fighting with.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Presumably the omitted addition is “my arse,” in which case, this is one of the earliest recorded uses of the phrase.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: List = lobe. The original word, “lift,” is a typo.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Stop up the crevices with melted pitch.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cleared her of rubbish.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cylindrical wooden pins.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *state*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with exact fidelity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wreck*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heaved the anchor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *customarily* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *even those who were* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *troublesomely* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *constitution*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *caused* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tumult*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *however* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expecting* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bravado* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stoppered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *relieve* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *draw back* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *devoid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stern* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *steering device* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *encouraging* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *other* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *small* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *military supplies* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exhausted* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prepare* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that is, the ship* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recounted* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gives contentment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nutmeg melons* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *folds* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boiled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harsh and raw* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reddish purple color* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *maintain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *drove* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gondola* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *launched* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea trout* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crevalle jack* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gull* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *loaded* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *calling out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *main ones* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *appetizing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shaped* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *small, light boat* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wreck* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *condition* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *struck* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boiled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *palatable* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *courses or meals* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *almost all* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tight* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dispatch vessel* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *earlier map* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carrying capacity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leave* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small ship* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strongest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *influence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laid great claim to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intended* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by chance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supplied* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *concede* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forgive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made an assault on* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wreck* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opinions* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wood axes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reproached* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watchmen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fixed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eventually* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begged* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fulfill* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flour* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proportionately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rebellious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceitful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all traveled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with it* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *awaiting the chance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reprieved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wetted* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brittle* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *float* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *monument* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *engraved* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remains* [Return to reference](#) °

# JOHN SMITH

After years spent as a soldier and an adventurer abroad, including being taken captive in war and sold into slavery under the Turks, Captain John Smith (1580–1631) sailed on England's first fleet to Virginia in 1607. Smith helped to establish England's first permanent settlement in North America, "Jamestown," in the territory that the native Algonquins called Tsenacommacah ("densely inhabited land"). The colony was plagued with difficulties from the beginning, and Smith's published accounts of the venture, culminating in *The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624), defended and promoted England's colonies in North America, as well as his own extraordinary skills. (In addition to serving as the de facto governor of Jamestown until he was replaced by Christopher Newport—the captain of the ship wrecked in the Bermudas discussed in William Strachey's account—Smith served as New England's first admiral.) *The General History* records Smith's challenges as governor of the emerging colony, and his imprisonment by and negotiations with the powerful chieftan Powhatan and Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas. Smith credits Pocahontas with saving his life, as well as that of the colony. The selection below offers an account of Pocahontas's role in the 1616 Powhatan embassy to England, which assured her place in colonial legend—as well as her death. While we do not have direct access to the Algonquins' views of the colonists, we can glimpse in Smith's reported first-person accounts of Pocahontas's and Powhatan's speeches traces of their criticism of and resistance to the colonists, as well as their skills as political leaders and negotiators.





Portrait of Matoaka or Rebecca, better known as Pocahontas, made by the royal engraver Simon van de Passe during Pocahontas's 1616 trip to England.

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## ***From The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles***

During this time, the Lady Rebecca,<sup>1</sup> alias Pocahontas, daughter to Powhatan, by the diligent care of Master John Rolfe her husband and his friends, was taught to speak such English as might well be understood, well instructed in Christianity, and was become very formal and civil after our English manner; she had also by him a child which she loved most dearly, and the Treasurer and Company<sup>2</sup> took order both for the maintenance of her and it, besides there were divers<sup>o</sup> persons of great rank and quality had been very kind to her; and before she arrived at London, Captain Smith, to deserve<sup>o</sup> her former courtesies, made her qualities known to the Queen's most excellent Majesty and her Court, and writ a little book to this effect to the Queen, an abstract whereof followeth.

To the most high and virtuous Princess Queen Anne of Great Britain.

Most admired Queen,

The love I bear my God, my King, and Country hath so oft emboldened me in the worst of extreme dangers, that now honesty doth constrain me presume thus far beyond myself to present your Majesty this short discourse: if ingratitude be a deadly poison to all honest virtues, I must be guilty of that crime if I should omit any means to be thankful.

So it is that some ten years ago being in Virginia, and taken prisoner by the power of Powhatan, their chief king, I received from this great savage<sup>3</sup> exceeding great courtesy, especially from his son Nantaquaus, the most manliest, comeliest, boldest spirit I ever saw in a savage, and his sister Pocahontas, the king's most dear and



well-beloved daughter, being but a child of twelve or thirteen years of age, whose compassionate pitiful heart of<sup>o</sup> my desperate estate gave me much cause to respect her. I being the first Christian this proud King and his grim attendants ever saw, and thus enthralled in their barbarous power, I cannot say I felt the least occasion of want<sup>o</sup> that was in the power of those my mortal foes to prevent, notwithstanding all their threats. After some weeks fattening<sup>o</sup> among those savage courtiers, at the minute of my execution, she hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine, and not only that, but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown,<sup>4</sup> where I found about eight and thirty miserable poor and sick creatures to keep possession of all those large territories of Virginia. Such was the weakness of this poor Commonwealth, as had the savages not fed us, we had directly starved.

And this relief, most gracious Queen, was commonly brought us by this Lady Pocahontas, notwithstanding all these passages when inconstant Fortune turned our peace to war, this tender virgin would still not spare to dare to visit us, and by her our jars<sup>o</sup> have been oft appeased, and our wants still supplied; were it the policy of her father thus to employ her, or the ordinance of God thus to make her his instrument, or her extraordinary affection to our nation, I know not, but of this I am sure: when her father with the utmost of his policy and power sought to surprise me, having but eighteen with me, the dark night could not affright her from coming through the irksome woods, and with watered eyes gave me intelligence, with her best advice to escape his fury; which had he known, he had surely slain her. Jamestown with her wild train<sup>o</sup> she as freely frequented as her father's habitation; and during the time of two or three years, she next under God was still the instrument to preserve this colony from death, famine, and utter confusion, which if in those times had once been dissolved, Virginia might have lain as it was at our first arrival to this day. Since then, this business having been turned and varied by many accidents from that I left it at, it is most certain, after a long and troublesome war after my departure betwixt her father and our colony, all which time she was not heard of, about

two years after she herself was taken prisoner, being so detained near two years longer, the colony by that means was relieved, peace concluded, and at last rejecting her barbarous condition, was married to an English gentleman, with whom at this present she is in England;<sup>5</sup> the first Christian ever of that nation, the first Virginian ever spoke English, or had a child in marriage by an Englishman, a matter surely, if my meaning be truly considered and well understood, worthy a prince's understanding.

Thus, most gracious Lady, I have related to your Majesty what at your best leisure our approved histories will account you at large, and done in the time of your Majesty's life, and however this might be presented you from a more worthy pen, it cannot from a more honest heart, as yet I never begged anything of the state, or any, and it is my want of ability and her exceeding desert, your birth, means, and authority, her birth, virtue, want, and simplicity, doth make me thus bold, humbly to beseech your Majesty to take this knowledge of her, though it be from one so unworthy to be the reporter as myself, her husband's estate not being able to make her fit to attend your Majesty. The most and least I can do is to tell you this, because none so oft hath tried it as myself, and the rather being of so great a spirit, however her stature: if she should not be well received, seeing this kingdom may rightly have a kingdom by her means, her present love to us and Christianity might turn to such scorn and fury as to divert all this good to the worst of evil, where finding so great a Queen should do her some honor more than she can imagine, for being so kind to your servants and subjects, would so ravish her with content as endear her dearest blood to effect that your Majesty and all the king's subjects most earnestly desire. And so I humbly kiss your gracious hands.<sup>6</sup>

Being about this time preparing to set sail for New England,<sup>7</sup> I could not stay to do her that service I desired and she well deserved; but hearing she was at Branford with divers of my friends, I went to see her. After a modest salutation, without any word she turned about, obscured her face, as not seeming well contented; and in that humor her husband, with divers others, we all left her

two or three hours, repenting myself to have writ she could speak English. But not long after, she began to talk, and remembered<sup>o</sup> me well what courtesies she had done: saying, "You did promise Powhatan what was yours should be his, and he the like to you; you called him father being in his land a stranger, and by the same reason so must I do you," which though I would have excused, I durst<sup>o</sup> not allow of that title, because she was a king's daughter; with a well-set countenance she said, "Were you not afraid to come into my father's country, and caused fear in him and all his people (but me) and fear you here I should call you father; I tell you then I will, and you shall call me child, and so I will be forever and ever your countryman. They did tell us always you were dead, and I knew no other till I came to Plymouth; yet Powhatan did command Uttamatomakkin<sup>8</sup> to seek you, and know the truth, because your countrymen will lie much."

This savage, one of Powhatan's council, being amongst them held<sup>o</sup> an understanding fellow, the King purposely sent him, as they say, to number the people here, and inform him well what we were and our state. Arriving at Plymouth, according to his directions, he got a long stick, whereon by notches he did think to have kept the number of all the men he could see, but he was quickly weary of that task. Coming to London, where by chance I met him, having renewed our acquaintance, where many were desirous to hear and see his behavior, he told me Powhatan did bid him to find me out, to show him our God, the King, Queen, and Prince, I so much had told them of. Concerning God, I told him the best I could, the King I heard he had seen, and the rest he should see when he would. He denied ever to have seen the King, till by circumstances he was satisfied he had. Then he replied very sadly, You gave Powhatan a white dog, which Powhatan fed as himself, but your King gave me nothing, and I am better than your white dog.

The small time I stayed in London, divers courtiers and others my acquaintances hath gone with me to see her,<sup>o</sup> that generally concluded they did think God had a great hand in her conversion, and they have seen many English ladies worse favored,

proportioned, and behavioered, and, as since I have heard, it pleased both the King and Queen's Majesty honorably to esteem her, accompanied with that honorable Lady, the Lady De la Warr,<sup>9</sup> and that honorable Lord her husband, and divers other persons of good qualities, both publicly at the masques<sup>1</sup> and otherwise, to her great satisfaction and content, which doubtless she would have deserved<sup>o</sup> had she lived to arrive in Virginia.<sup>2</sup>

[In January 1608, Captain Christopher Newport, the representative of the Virginia Company, arrived with supplies for the colony, saving Smith from the vengeance of the settlers. Smith disagreed with Newport over many matters of Indian policy. In the excerpt below, from fall 1608, Smith has come to see Powhatan crowned as a vassal of the king of England, a "coronation" he considers a foolish diversion from the colony's need to prepare for winter. When Smith and his men arrive, Powhatan is thirty miles away, and while they wait for him to arrive, Pocahontas and "her women" entertain the visitors.]

In a fair plain field they<sup>o</sup> made a fire, before which he<sup>o</sup> sitting upon a mat, suddenly among the woods was heard such a hideous noise and shrieking, that the English betook themselves to their arms, and seized on two or three old men by them, supposing Powhatan with all his power was come to surprise them. But presently Pocahontas came, willing him to kill her if any hurt were intended, and the beholders, which were men, women, and children, satisfied<sup>o</sup> the captain there was no such matter. Then presently they were presented with this antic:<sup>o</sup> thirty young women came naked out of the woods, only covered behind and before with a few green leaves, their bodies all painted, some of one color, some of another, but all differing. Their leader had a fair pair of buck's horns on her head, and an otter's skin at her girdle<sup>o</sup> and another at her arm, a quiver of arrows at her back, a bow and arrows in her hand; the next had in her hand a sword, another a club, another a pot-stick,<sup>3</sup> all horned alike: the rest every one with their several devices.<sup>4</sup> These fiends,

with most hellish shouts and cries rushing from among the trees, cast themselves in a ring about the fire, singing and dancing with most excellent ill variety, oft falling into their infernal passions, and solemnly again to sing and dance; having spent near an hour in this mascarado,<sup>o</sup> as they entered, in like manner they departed.

Having reaccommodated<sup>o</sup> themselves, they solemnly invited him to their lodgings, where he was no sooner within the house but all these nymphs<sup>5</sup> more tormented him than ever, with crowding, pressing, and hanging about him, most tediously crying, "Love you not me? Love you not me?" This salutation ended, the feast was set, consisting of all the savage dainties they could devise: some attending, other singing and dancing about them; which mirth being ended, with firebrands<sup>6</sup> instead of torches they conducted him to his lodging.

*Thus did they show their feats of arms, and others art in dancing:  
Some other used their oaten pipe, others voices chanting.<sup>7</sup>*

The next day came Powhatan. Smith delivered his message of the presents sent him, and redelivered him Namontack<sup>8</sup> he had sent for<sup>o</sup> England, desiring him to come to his Father Newport to accept those presents, and conclude their revenge against the Monacans.<sup>9</sup> Whereunto this subtle<sup>o</sup> savage thus replied:

If your king have sent me presents, I also am a king, and this is my land: eight days I will stay to receive them. Your father is to come to me, not I to him, nor yet to your fort, neither will I bite at such a bait. As for the Monacans, I can revenge my own injuries, and as for Atquanachuk, where you say your brother was slain, it is a contrary way from those parts you suppose it; but for any salt water beyond the mountains, the relations you have had from my people are false.

Whereupon he began to draw plots upon the ground (according to his discourse) of all those regions. Many other discourses they had (yet both content to give each other content in complemental<sup>o</sup> courtesies) and so Captain Smith returned with this answer.

Upon this the presents were sent by water, which is near a hundred miles, and the captains went by land with fifty good shot. All being met at Werowocomoco,<sup>1</sup> the next day was appointed for his coronation, then the presents were brought him: his basin and ewer,<sup>o</sup> bed and furniture set up, his scarlet cloak and apparel with much ado put on him, being persuaded by Namontack they would not hurt him. But a foul trouble there was to make him kneel to receive his crown, he neither knowing the majesty nor meaning of a crown, nor bending of the knee, endured so many persuasions, examples, and instructions as tired them all. At last, by leaning hard on his shoulders, he a little stooped, and three, having the crown in their hands, put it on his head, when by the warning of a pistol the boats were prepared with such a volley of shot, that the king started up in a horrible fear, till he saw all was well. Then, remembering himself, to congratulate their kindness he gave his old shoes and his mantle to Captain Newport: but perceiving his<sup>o</sup> purpose was to discover the Monacans, he labored to divert his resolution, refusing to lend him either men or guides more than Namontack; and so after some small complemental kindness on both sides, in requital of his presents, he presented Newport with a heap of wheat ears that might contain some seven or eight bushels, and as much more we bought in the town, wherewith we returned to the fort.

\* \* \*

[Powhatan explains the differences between peace and war]

Captain Smith you may understand, that I, having seen the death of all my people thrice, and not one living of those three generations but myself, I know the difference of peace and war better than any in my country.<sup>2</sup> But now I am old and ere long must die, my brethren, namely Opichapam, Opechankanough, and Kekataugh, my

two sisters, and their two daughters, are distinctly each other's successors, I wish their experiences no less than mine, and your love to them, no less than mine to you. But this bruit<sup>o</sup> from Nansamund<sup>3</sup> that you are come to destroy my country so much affrighteth all my people as they dare not visit you; what will it avail you to that that perforce<sup>o</sup> you may quietly have with love, or to destroy them that provide your food?<sup>4</sup> What can you get by war, when we can hide our provision and fly to the woods, whereby you must famish, by wronging us your friends; and why are you thus jealous of our loves, seeing us unarmed, and both do, and are willing still, to feed you with that you cannot get but by our labors? Think you I am so simple not to know it is better to eat good meat, lie well, and sleep quietly with my women and children, laugh and be merry with you, have copper, hatchets, or what I want, being your friend, than be forced to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon acorns, roots, and such trash:<sup>o</sup> and be so hunted by you that I can neither rest, eat, nor sleep, but my tired men must watch, and if a twig but break, everyone cry 'There comes Captain Smith,' then must I fly I know not whether,<sup>o</sup> and thus with miserable fear end my miserable life, leaving my pleasures to such youths as you, which, through your rash unadvisedness may quickly as miserably end for want of that you never know where to find. Let this therefore assure you of our loves, and every year our friendly trade shall furnish you with corn, and now also, if you would come in friendly manner to see us, and not thus with your guns and swords as to invade your foes.

1624

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Pocahontas was given the English name "Rebecca" when she was baptized. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Virginia Company was an English trading company chartered by King James I on April 10, 1606, with the object of colonizing the eastern coast of America. The coast was named



Virginia, after Elizabeth I, and it stretched from present-day Maine to the Carolinas. John Smith was the treasurer in 1616, when the party set forth for England.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The term Smith uses for Native Americans throughout his *History* is “Salvage.” Unlike its near-synonym, “savage,” the Latin root of “salvage,” *salve*, or save, hints at the Algonquins’ role in saving the colonists from certain death.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Jamestown, named after James I, was the first permanent English settlement in North America, on land Indigenous peoples had inhabited for at least 12,000 years. About thirty Algonquin tribes were allied in the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom, or Confederacy, along the coast, which was estimated to include around 15,000 people at the time of colonization. One hundred and four settlers arrived in 1607, and despite the dispatch of more settlers and supplies in 1608 (including eight Polish and German colonists and the first two European women), over 80 percent of the colonists died in 1609–10, mostly from starvation and disease. In 1610, those shipwrecked on the Bermudas, including John Rolfe finally arrived in Jamestown. In 1619, the first Africans, enslaved people originally from the Kingdom of Ndongo in what is now Angola, arrived in the colony via the efforts of English privateers. One hundred European women arrived in the same year.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Powhatan removed his daughter from contact with the English when she moved from childhood into puberty; she was found and kidnapped by an English trading ship in 1613.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The letter to Queen Anna ends here.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Smith went to the coast of Massachusetts and Maine in 1614, which he then mapped and labeled as “New England” (his coinage). This map, published in *A Description of New England*



(1616), proved useful to the New England colonists.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Uttamatomakkin, also known as Tomocomo, was Powhatan's emissary. He traveled with Pocahontas's party to London in 1616. His wife was Pocahontas's half sister. In January 1617, Pocahontas and Tomocomo were brought before the king at the Banqueting House in Whitehall Place, at a performance of Ben Jonson's masque *The Vision of Delight*. Anne Clifford and Mary Sidney Herbert were present as well.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lady De La Warr (Cecilia Shirley West) was the wife of Thomas West, third Baron De La Warr, the English merchant and politician for whom "Delaware" (state, river, First Nation) was named. De La Warr was the nominal governor of Virginia at the time, and in fall 1616, he and his wife introduced Pocahontas and her husband, John Rolfe, into English society.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Elaborate court entertainments that celebrated and idealized the court and its rulers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pocahontas died in England in March 1617, right as her ship was about to leave for America. She was buried under the chancel of St. George's Church in Gravesend. She had been away for less than a year. John Rolfe returned to Virginia, leaving their son in England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Stick for stirring a pot.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Things artistically devised or invented for dramatic representation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In classical mythology, any class of semi-divine spirits, imagined as taking the form of young maidens and inhabiting the sea, rivers, and mountains, and often portrayed in poetry as attendants on a particular god or goddess. The term was also used to describe beautiful young women and prostitutes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pieces of burning wood.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Smith included many italicized verse couplets like this one in his work, many of them taken (and modified) from Martin

Fotherby's collection of commonplaces, *Atheomastic* (1622). These lines are from Homer's *Iliad*. "Oaten pipe": pipe made of straw or a stem of an oat.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Namontack was a young Powhatan man who was traded to the English as a hostage or ward in exchange for the young Englishman, Thomas Savage, who served in a similar capacity with the Native Americans. An accomplished guide, interpreter, and diplomatic mediator, Namontack made at least one trip to England.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Traders with and rivals of the Powhatan Confederacy. The Monacans spoke Siouan languages. Those in the Powhatan Confederacy spoke Algonquian languages.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A village that served as Powhatan's headquarters. The name comes from the Powhatan words *werowans* (leader) and *komakah* (settlement). It is now an archeological site. Powhatan never went to Jamestown. Smith was captured and brought to Powhatan at Werowocomoco in January 1608, and it was there that Pocohantas purportedly saved him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Powhatan may be referring to the devastating effects on the Algonquins of European diseases contracted from other European visitors before the arrival of the Jamestown colonists.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In fall 1608, Smith and his men sailed up the Nansemond River, where they obtained corn from the Nansemond Indians by threatening to destroy their canoes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Smith presented his opinions on Indian policy through his exchanges with Powhatan and his brother, Opechancanough. These exchanges reveal Smith's desire to maintain a dominant position as well as his awareness of the colony's dependence on the knowledge, labor, and cooperation of the Native Americans. While this is Smith's account of Powhatan's speech, it nonetheless presents Powhatan as a formidable political opponent who was well aware of the colonists' vulnerability.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Notes

- °: *various, several* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sympathy for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *need* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *growing fat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disagreements* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attendants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reminded* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dare* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered to be* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Pocahontas* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *returned in kind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Algonquins* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Smith* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reassured* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grotesque performance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt; waist* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *masked ball; masque* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *redressed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clever, crafty* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formal* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitcher* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Newport's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *report* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by force* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rubbish, dross* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *where* [Return to reference](#) °

## RICHARD LIGON

Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657) is the first account of the English colonization of the Caribbean island of Barbados, and of the rise of the sugar industry that would turn the island into "one of the richest Spots of earth under the Sun" and change the global economy forever. Ligon (1585?–1662) left for the Caribbean in 1647, following the failure of his efforts at land reclamation and enclosure in England, and the defeat of the royalists in the English Civil Wars. He wrote his history in London in the 1650s, while in prison for debt. The history served not only as a description of Barbados' plantations and "Sugarworks" and a prospectus (and how-to manual) for investors and future planters, but also as an account of Ligon's own value: as plantation overseer, natural scientist, draughtsman (the volume included detailed diagrams of the industrial parts of the sugar works), colonial apologist, and self-described "limner," or watercolorist.

Ligon's account (and voyage) begins with a trip to the Cape Verde Islands off the western coast of Africa, where the colonists plan to collect "Negroes, Horses, and Cattle" to sell in Barbados. The first selection below recounts a dinner in "St. Iago" (Santiago) at the Portuguese governor's house, in which Ligon's knowledge of European art, including court masques like Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, provides the lens through which he sees Black women.

The Barbados selections illustrate Ligon's views of life on the plantations, from the spectre of rebellions by enslaved people and servants (including one by servants who, *Tempest*-like, sought to make themselves "Masters of the Island"), and the challenges presented by both the diversity of languages spoken by the Africans, and a natural environment whose fertility and intractability often threatened to overwhelm the colonists' fantasies of mastery and ease. The account also displays Ligon's critique of "Christian" violence and hypocrisy, not least in his account of the Indian

“maiden” Yarico, which became, much like Smith’s account of Pocahontas, the stuff of legend.

# ***From A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados***

\* \* \*

Dinner being near half done (the Padre, Bernardo,<sup>1</sup> and the other black attendants, waiting on us), in comes an old fellow whose complexion was raised out of the red sack,<sup>2</sup> for near that colour it was: his head and beard milk white, his countenance bold and cheerful, a lute in his hand, and played us for a novelty, the *passamezzo galliard*,<sup>3</sup> a tune in great esteem in Harry the fourth's days; for when Sir *John Falstaff*<sup>4</sup> makes his amours to Mistress *Doll Tear sheet*, *Sneak* and his company, the admired fiddlers of that age, play this tune, which put a thought into my head, that if time and tune be the composites of music, what a long time this tune had in sailing from England to this place. But we being sufficiently satisfied with this kind of harmony, desired a song, which he performed in as antique<sup>5</sup> a manner, both favoring much of antiquity<sup>o</sup>; no graces, double relishes, trillos, gropos, or pianofortes,<sup>6</sup> but plain as a packstaff.<sup>7</sup> His lute, too, was but of ten strings, and that was in fashion in King David's days,<sup>8</sup> so that the rarity of this antique piece pleased me beyond measure.

Dinner being ended and the Padre were near weary of his waiting, we rose and made room for better company; for now the Padre and his Black mistress were to take their turns; a Negro of the greatest beauty and majesty together that ever I saw in one woman. Her stature large and excellently shaped, well-favored, full-eyed, and admirably graced; she wore on her head a roll of green taffety, striped with white and philiamort,<sup>9</sup> made up in manner of a turban; and over that a slight veil, which she took off at pleasure. On her body next to her linen, a petticoat of orange tawny and sky colors,

not done with straight stripes, but waved; and upon that a mantle of purple silk, engrailed<sup>o</sup> with straw color. This mantle was large, and tied with a knot of very broad black ribbon, with a rich jewel on her right shoulder, which came under her left arm, and so hung loose and carelessly almost to the ground. On her legs she wore buskins<sup>1</sup> of watchet<sup>o</sup> silk, decked with silver lace and fringe; Her shoes, of white leather, laced with sky color and pinked<sup>2</sup> between those laces. In her ears, she wore large pendants; about her neck and on her arms, fair pearls. But her eyes were her richest jewels: for they were the largest and most oriental<sup>3</sup> that I have ever seen.

Seeing all these perfections in her only at passage,<sup>o</sup> but not yet heard her speak, I was resolved after dinner to make an essay what a present of rich silver, silk, and gold ribbon would do to persuade her to open her lips, partly out of a curiosity to see whether her teeth were exactly white and clean as I hoped they were; for 'tis a general opinion that all Negroes have white teeth, but that is a common error, for the black and white being so neer together, they set off one another with the greater advantage, but look to them and you shall find those teeth, which at a distance appeared rarely white, are yellow and foul. This knowledge wrought this curiosity in me, but it was not the end of my enquiries, for there was now but one thing more to set her off in my opinion, the rarest black swan that I had ever seen, and that was her language, and graceful delivery of that which was to unite and confirm a perfection in all the rest. And to that end I took a gentleman that spoke good Spanish with me, and awaited her coming out, which was with far greater majesty and gracefulness than I have seen Queen Anne descend from the chair of state to dance the measures with a baron of England at a masque in the Banqueting House.<sup>4</sup> And truly, had her followers and friends with other perquisites<sup>5</sup> (that ought to be the attendants on such a state and beauty) waited on her, I had made a stop and gone no farther. But finding her but slightly attended, and considering she was but the Padre's mistress and therefore the more accessible, I made my addresses to her by my interpreter and told her I had some trifles made by the people of England, which for

their value were not worthy her acceptance, yet for their novelty they might be of some esteem, such having been worn by the great queens of Europe, and intreated her to vouchsafe to receive them. She, with much gravity and reservedness, opened the paper, but when she looked on them, the colors pleased her so as she put her gravity into the loveliest smile that I have ever seen. And then showed her rows of pearls, so clean, white, Orient, and well-shaped as Neptune's court was never paved with such as these; and to show which was whiter or more Orient, those or the whites of her eyes, she turned them up and gave me such a look as was a sufficient return for a far greater present, and withall wished I would think of somewhat wherein she might pleasure me, and I should find her both ready and willing. And so with a graceful bow of her neck, she took her way towards her own house, which was not above a stone's cast from the Padre's. Other addresses were not to be made without the dislike of the Padre, for they are there as jealous of their mistresses as the Italians of their wives.

In the afternoon we took leave and went aboard, where we remained three or four days; about which time some passengers of the ship who had no great store of linen for shift,<sup>9</sup> desired leave to go ashore and took divers women along with them to wash their linen. But (it seemed) the Portuguese, and Negroes too, found them handsome and fit for their turns,<sup>6</sup> and were a little rude; I cannot say ravished<sup>7</sup> them, for the major part of them, being taken from Bridewell, Turnbull Street,<sup>8</sup> and such like places of education, were better natured than to suffer such violence. Yet complaints were made when they came aboard, both of such abuses, and stealing their linen.

But such a praise they gave of the place as we all were desirous to see it: for after the rain, every day gave an increase to the beauty of the place by the budding out of new fruits and flowers.

\* \* \*



No sooner were we landed, but the captain of the castle, with one soldier with him, came towards us with a slow formal pace, who desired to speak with one of us alone. Colonel Modyford,<sup>9</sup> being the chief man in the company, went with an interpreter to meet him, and being at the distance of speech desired to know his pleasure, which he told him was this: That he understood divers of our women had been ashore the day before and received some injury from the people of the island, and that it was conceived we were come armed to take revenge on those that did the affront. He therefore advised us either to make speedy return to the boat that brought us, or to send back our swords and pistols and commit our selves to his protection; and if one of those were not presently put in act, we should in a very short time have all our throats cut.

We told him we had no intention of revenge for any wrong done, and that the only cause of our landing was to see the beauty of the place we had heard so much commended by our people that were ashore, of which they had given a very large testimony both of the pleasantness and fruitfulness of it, and that our visit was out of love, both to the place and people. But for sending our weapons back to the boat, we desired his pardon for this reason: that the billows going so very high at that time, we could not send them to the boat without being dipped in sea water, which would spoil them, and the most of them being rich swords and pistols, we were loath to have their beauty covered with rust, which the salt water would be the occasion of. We desired rather that he would command a soldier of his to stay with a man of ours, and keep them safe till our return; which he being content to do, we committed ourselves to his protection, who put a guard upon us of ten soldiers, part Portuguese, part Negroes; the most part of either kind as proper men as I have seen, and as handsomely clothed.

\* \* \*

In this valley of pleasure, adorned as you have heard, we marched with our guard, fair and softly, near a quarter of a mile before we came to the much-praised fountain from whence we

fetches our water. The circle whereof was about 60 foot, the diameter about 20 from the ground to the top of the well (which was of freestone), 3 foot and a half; from thence within down to the surface of the water, about 15 foot. The spring itself, not so much to be praised for the excellency of the taste, though clear enough, as for the nymphs that repair thither. For whilst we stayed there seeing the sailors fill their casks, and withall contemplating the glory of the place, there appeared to our view many pretty young Negro virgins, playing about the well. But amongst those, two that came down with either of them a natural pitcher, a calabash,<sup>1</sup> upon their arm, to fetch water from this fountain, creatures of Durer,<sup>2</sup> the great master of proportion, but to have imitated; and Titian, or Andrea del Sarto, for softness of muscles, and curiosity of coloring, though with a studied diligence, and a love both to the party and the work. To express all the perfections of nature, and parts these virgins were owners of, would ask a more skillful pen or pencil than mine. Sure I am, though all were excellent, their motions were the highest, and that is a beauty no painter can express, and therefore my pen may well be silent. Yet a word or two would not be amiss to express the difference between these and those of high Africa; as of Morocco, Guinea, Binny, Cutchew, Angola, Æthiopia, and Mauritania, or those that dwell nere the River of Gambia,<sup>3</sup> who are thicklipped, short-nosed, and commonly low foreheads. But these are composed of such features as would mar the judgment of the best painters to undertake to mend. Wanton as the soil that bred them, sweet as the fruits they fed on; for being come so near as their motions and graces might perfectly be discerned, I guessed that nature could not, without help of art, frame such accomplished beauties not only of colors and favor, but of motion too, which is the highest part of beauty. If dancing had been in fashion in this island, I might have been persuaded that they had been taught those motions by some who had studied that art. But considering the Padre's music to be the best the island afforded, I could not but cast away that thought and attribute all to pure nature; innocent as youthful, their ages about 15. Seeing their beauties so fresh and youthful with all the

perfections I have named, I thought good to try whether the uttering of their language would be as sweet and harmonious as their other parts were comely. And by the help of a gentleman that spoke Portuguese, I accosted them, and began to praise their beauties, shapes, and manner of dressings, which was extremely pretty. Their hair not shorn as the Negroes in the places I have named, close to their heads, nor in quarters and mazes,<sup>4</sup> as they use to wear it, which is ridiculous to all that see them but themselves, but in a due proportion of length so as having their shortenings by the natural curls, they appeared as wires<sup>5</sup> and artificial<sup>o</sup> dressings to their faces. On the sides of their cheeks, they plait<sup>o</sup> little of it of purpose to tie small ribbon, or some small beads of white amber or bugle,<sup>o</sup> sometimes of the rare flowers that grow there; their ears hung with pendants, their necks and arms adorned with bracelets of counterfeit pearls and blue bugle<sup>6</sup> such as the Portuguese bestow on them, for these are free Negroes, and wear upon the small of one of their legs the badge of their freedom, which is a small piece of silver or tin, as big as the stale<sup>o</sup> of a spoon, which comes round about the leg, and by reason of the smoothness and lightness is no impediment to their going. Their clothes were petticoats of striped silk next to their linen, which reach to their middle leg, and upon that a mantle of blue taffety, tied with a ribbon on the right shoulder, which coming under the left arm, hung down carelessly somewhat lower than the petticoat, so as a great part of the natural beauty of their backs and necks before lay open to the view, their breast round, firm, and beautifully shaped.

Upon my addresses to them, they appeared a little disturbed, and whispered to one another, but had not the confidence to speak aloud. I had in my hat a piece of silver and silk ribbon, which I perceived their well-shaped eyes often to dart at, but their modesties would not give them confidence to ask. I took it out and divided it between them, which they accepted with much alacrity, and in return, drank to one another my health in the liquor of the pure fountain, which I perceived by their wanton smiles and jesticulations, and casting their eyes towards me. When they

thought they had expressed enough they would take in their countenances and put themselves in the modestest of postures that could be. But we having brought a case of bottles of English spirits with us, I called for some and drunk a health to them in a small dram cup, and gave it to one of them, which they smelled so, and finding it too strong for their temper poured some of it into one of their calabashes and put to it as much water as would temper it to their palates. They drank again, but all this would not give them the confidence to speak, but in mute language and extremely pretty motions, showed they wanted neither wit nor discretion to make an answer. But it seemed it was not the fashion there for young maids to speak to strangers in so public a place.

I thought I had been sufficiently armed with the perfections I found in the Padre's mistress as to be free from the darts of any other beauty of that place, and in so short a time, but I found the difference between young fresh beauties and those that are made up with the addition of state and majesty: for though they counsel and persuade our loves, yet young beauties force and so commit rapes upon our affections. In sum, had not my heart been fixed fast in my breast and dwelt there above sixty years, and therefore loath to leave his long-kept habitation, I had undoubtedly left it between them for a legacy. For, so equal were their beauties and my love, as it was not, nor could be, particular to either.

\* \* \*

Being now come in sight of this happy island,<sup>o</sup> the nearer we came, the more beautiful it appeared to our eyes; for that being in itself extremely beautiful was best discerned, and best judged of, when our eyes became full masters of the object. There we saw the high, large, and lofty trees, with their spreading branches and flourishing tops, seemed to be beholding to the earth and roots that gave them such plenty of sap for their nourishment, as to grow to that perfection of beauty and largeness. Whilst they, in gratitude, return their cool shade to secure and shelter them from the sun's heat, which without it would scorch and dry away. So that bounty

and goodness in the one, and gratefulness in the other, serve to make up this beauty which otherwise would lie empty and waste.<sup>o</sup> And truly these vegetatives may teach both the sensible and reasonable creatures what it is that makes up wealth, beauty, and all harmony in that *Leviathan*,<sup>7</sup> a well-governed common-wealth where the mighty men and rulers of the earth, by their prudent and careful protection, secure them from harms, whilst they retribute<sup>o</sup> their pains and faithful obedience to serve them in all just commands; and both these, interchangeably and mutually in love, which is the cord that binds up all imperfect harmony, and where these are wanting, the roots dry and leaves fall away, and a general decay and devastation ensues. Witness the woeful experience of these sad times we live in.

\* \* \*

A little before I came from thence,<sup>8</sup> there was such a combination amongst them<sup>o</sup> as the like was never seen there before. Their sufferings being grown to a great height, and their daily complainings to one another (of the intolerable burdens they labored under) being spread throughout the island, at the last, some amongst them, whose spirits were not able to endure such slavery, resolved to break through it or die in the act, and so conspired with some others of their acquaintance, whose sufferings were equal if not above theirs and their spirits no way inferior, resolved to draw as many of the discontented party into this plot as possibly they could, and those of this persuasion were the greatest numbers of servants in the island. So that a day was appointed to fall upon their masters and cut all their throats, and by that means to make themselves not only freemen but masters of the island. And so closely was this plot carried as no discovery was made till the day before they were to put it in act, and then one of them, either by the failing of his courage, or some new obligation from the love of his master, revealed this long-plotted conspiracy, and so by this timely advertishment the masters were saved: Justice Hetherfall (whose servant this was) sending letters to all his friends, and they to theirs,

and so one to another till they were all secured; and by examination found out the greatest part of them, whereof eighteen of the principal men in the conspiracy, and they the first leaders and contrivers of the plot, were put to death for example to the rest. And the reason why they made examples of so many was they found these so haughty in their resolutions, and so incorrigible, as they were like enough to become actors in a second plot; and so they thought good to secure them, and for the rest, to have a special eye over them.

It has been accounted a strange thing that the Negroes, being more than double the numbers of the Christians that are there,<sup>9</sup> and they accounted a bloody people where they think they have power or advantages, and the more bloody by how much they are more fearful than others, that these should not commit some horrid massacre upon the Christians, thereby to enfranchise themselves and become masters of the island. But there are three reasons that take away this wonder: the one is, they are not suffered to touch or handle any weapons; the other, that they are held in such awe and slavery as they are fearful to appear in any daring act; and seeing the mustering of our men and hearing their gunshot, (than which nothing is more terrible to them), their spirits are subjugated to so low a condition as they dare not look up to any bold attempt. Besides these, there is a third reason which stops all designs of that kind, and that is, they are fetched from several parts of Africa, who speak several languages, and by that means one of them understands not another: For some of them are fetched from Guinea and Binny, some from Cutchew, some from Angola, and some from the River of Gambia. And in some of these places where petty kingdoms are, they sell their subjects, and such as they take in battle, whom they make slaves; and some mean men sell their servants, their children, and sometimes their wives, and think all good traffic for such commodities as our merchants send them.

When they are brought to us, the planters buy them out of the ship, where they find them stark naked and therefore cannot be deceived in any outward infirmity. They choose them as they do

horses in a market; the strongest, youthfulest, and most beautiful yield the greatest prices. Thirty pound sterling is a price for the best man Negro; and twenty five, twenty six, or twenty seven pound for a woman; the children are at easier rates. And we buy them so, as the sexes may be equal; for if they have more men than women, the men who are unmarried will come to their masters and complain that they cannot live without wives and desire him they may have wives.

\* \* \*

What their<sup>o</sup> other opinions are in matter of religion, I know not, but certainly they are not altogether of the sect of the Sadducees,<sup>1</sup> for they believe a resurrection, and that they shall go into their own country again and have their youth renewed. And lodging this opinion in their hearts, they make it an ordinary practice, upon any great fright or threatening by their masters, to hang themselves.

But Colonel Walrond,<sup>2</sup> having lost three or four of his best Negroes this way, and in a very little time, caused one of their heads to be cut off and set upon a pole a dozen foot high; and having done that, caused all his Negroes to come forth and march round about this head, and bid them look on it, whether this were not the head of such a one that hanged himself. Which they acknowledging, he then told them that they were in a main error in thinking they went into their own countries after they were dead; for this man's head was here, as they all were witnesses of, and how was it possible the body could go without a head. Being convinced by this sad yet lively spectacle, they changed their opinions; and after that, no more hanged themselves.

\* \* \*

We had an Indian woman,<sup>3</sup> a slave in the house, who was of excellent shape and color, for it was a pure bright bay,<sup>4</sup> small breasts, with the nipples of a porphyry<sup>5</sup> color, this woman would not be wooed by any means to wear clothes. She chanced to be with



child, by a Christian<sup>6</sup> servant, and lodging in the Indian house amongst other women of her own country, where the Christian servants, both men and women, came, and being very great, and, that her time was come to be delivered, loath to fall in labour before the men, walked down to a wood in which was a pond of water, and there by the side of the pond, brought her self abed;<sup>o</sup> and presently washing her child in some of the water of the pond, lapped<sup>o</sup> it up in such rags as she had begged of the Christians, and in three hours' time came home with her child in her arms, a lusty boy, frolic and lively.

This Indian dwelling near the sea coast upon the main, an English ship put in to a bay and sent some of her men ashore to try what victuals or water they could find, for in some distress they were. But the Indians perceiving them to go up so far into the country as they were sure they could not make a safe retreat, intercepted them in their return and fell upon them, chasing them into a wood, and being dispersed there, some were taken, and some killed. But a young man amongst them straggling from the rest was met by this Indian maid, who upon the first sight fell in love with him, and hid him close from her countrymen (the Indians) in a cave,<sup>7</sup> and there fed him till they could safely go down to the shore, where the ship lay at anchor, expecting the return of their friends, but at last seeing them upon the shore, sent the long boat for them, took them aboard, and brought them away. But the youth, when he came ashore in the Barbados, forgot the kindness of the poor maid that had ventured her life for his safety, and sold her for a slave, who was as free born as he: and so poor Yarico for her love, lost her liberty.<sup>8</sup>

Now for the masters, I have said but little, nor am able to say half of what they deserve. They are men of great abilities and parts, otherwise they could not go through with such great works as they undertake, the managing of one of their plantations being a work of such a latitude as will require a very good headpiece,<sup>o</sup> to put in order and continue it so.



\* \* \*

This tree<sup>9</sup> wants little of the beauty of the plantain, yet she has somewhat to delight the eyes which the other wants, and that is the picture of Christ upon the cross, so lively expressed as no limner can do it (with one color) more exactly. And this is seen when you cut the fruit just cross as you do the root of fern, to find a spread eagle. But this is much more perfect, the head hanging down, the arms extended to the full length, with some little elevation, and the feet cross upon one another. This I will speak as an artist: let a very excellent limner<sup>9</sup> paint a crucifix, only with one color, in limning, and let his touches be as sharp and as masterly as he pleases, the figure no bigger than this, which is about an inch long, and remove that picture at such a distance from the eye as to lose some of the curiosity, and dainty touches of the work, so as the outmost stels<sup>9</sup> or profile of the figure may be perfectly discerned, and at such a distance, the figure in the fruit of the banana shall seem as perfect as it. Much may be said upon this subject by better wits and abler souls than mine, my contemplation being only this: that since those men dwelling in that place professing the names of Christians, and denying to preach to those poor ignorant harmless souls, the Negroes, the doctrine of Christ crucified, which might convert many of them to his worship, he himself has set up his own cross to reproach these men, who rather than lose the hold they have of them as slaves, will deny them the benefit and blessing of being Christians. Otherwise why is this figure set up for these to look on, that never heard of Christ, and God never made anything useless or in vain?

\* \* \*

1657

## Endnotes

- Note 1:

Bernardo Mendes de Sousa was a Portuguese national whom the expedition brought with them as a translator. He was released from jail in London to serve in this capacity. The Cape Verde islands, named for their proximity to the verdant cape on the African coast, had been largely uninhabited until the Portuguese colonized them in the 15th century. Santiago (Ligon's "St. Iago") had been the bishop's seat for the islands and adjacent coast for almost a century when Ligon arrived. Portugal signed a treaty with England in 1642 that opened Portuguese territory to English traders. The "Padre" in Ligon's account is the current bishop.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Wine, imported from Spain or the Canary Islands.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *passamezzo galliard* : from *passer*, to walk, and *mezzo*, the middle or half, was a popular dance, and popular tune, in the period.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir John Falstaff courts the prostitute Doll Tearsheet and "Sneak and his company" provide musical entertainment in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part II*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Old-fashioned or "antic," grotesque or absurd.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Graces, double relishes, trillos, and grops were musical flourishes, usually consisting of trills or vibrations made by alternating rapidly between adjacent notes. Pianofortes were alterations between loud and soft playing.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The stick on which a beggar supported their pack while resting. The phrase "plain as a packstaff" referred to something low or contemptible.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: King David was the third king of Israel in the Bible.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Philiamort* (*feuilles mortes*, in French): the color of dead leaves.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Calf- or knee-high boots.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ornamented with cut-outs.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Characteristic of countries/regions to the east of the Mediterranean, ancient Roman empire, or early Christian world. The term was also used to describe a precious stone, especially a pearl.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Ligon refers to court masques, elaborate court entertainments that celebrated and idealized the court and its rulers. The members of the royal family did often “descend” to dance with the nobility (“barons”) at the conclusion of the masque. Queen Anna commissioned and performed in many masques at the Banqueting House in Whitehall, including Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness* (see above, p. 1039). For resonances between Ligon’s description of the Black woman’s attire and court masque costumes, see the illustration on p. C12 in the color insert to this volume.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Adjuncts, proper accompaniments.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To serve their sexual desires.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Carried away by force, raped.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Bridewell was a London hospital that served as a workhouse and correctional facility, primarily for women. Turnbull Street was a notorious center of crime and prostitution.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Colonel Thomas Modyford was the leader of the Barbados expedition. Ligon had fought with him in the royalist garrison in Exeter. Modyford amassed a huge fortune in Barbados. He moved to Jamaica as royal governor in the early 1660s, where he became the richest planter in the English Caribbean.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Shell of an emptied gourd or pumpkin used to carry liquid.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), German printer, painter, and theorist of the Northern Renaissance. Titian (1488–1576), Italian Renaissance painter. A Black woman is represented attending to Diana in Titian’s *Diana and Actaeon* (1556–59).

Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530), Italian Renaissance painter. Dürer's *Four Books on Human Proportions* was influenced by Leonardo da Vinci and Marcus Vitruvius. Dürer thought that there were "many forms of relative beauty . . . conditioned by the diversity of breeding, vocation, and natural disposition."

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Morocco and Mauritania are in North Africa. Cacheo ("Cutchew") and the River of Gambia, centers of the trade in enslaved Africans, were in Guinea and Benin. Angola lay farther south along the West African coast. The location of Ethiopia was indeterminate in the period.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Quarters and mazes" are ways of creating patterns on the scalp with the hair.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Forms used to support complex hairstyles.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tube-shaped glass bead.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Thomas Hobbes was, like Ligon, a royalist and an exile. He published *Leviathan* in 1651, the year he returned to England. Ligon's is the second recorded use of the term "Leviathan" to refer to the state or commonwealth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Right before this section, Ligon discusses the living and working conditions of servants and enslaved workers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ligon overestimated the island's population, which by 1660 was roughly 40,000, equally divided between people of European and of African or Indian descent.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that denied the immortality of the soul and the possibility of resurrection. The name was applied to all those who rejected such beliefs.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Colonel Humphrey Walrond emigrated to Barbados in 1646 after a royalist defeat and became a sugar planter. After trying to seize control of the island, largely by stoking fears of servant and slave rebellions, Walrond was sent back to England

- in 1652. He returned in 1656 and became president of the council in 1660.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Indians enslaved in Barbados were from the mainland of South America, likely Guiana.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Reddish-brown color, usually used to describe a horse.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Porphyry was a hard purplish-red rock quarried in the eastern desert of Egypt for ornamental use, especially during the Roman period.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: "Christian" here means non-Indian or African.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Later in the book, Ligon tells us that "runaway Negroes" often shelter themselves in such caves, and "range abroad" in the night, stealing "pigs, plantains, potatoes and pullen [chicken]," "the nights being dark, and their bodies black, they escape undiscerned."[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Yarico's story is taken up by later authors, including Richard Steele.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: A limner is an illuminator of manuscripts or a painter, especially in watercolors.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *the ancient past*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *variegated, mixed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *light blue*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in passing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *change (of clothing)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artful* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *braid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tube-shaped glass bead* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *handle*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Barbados* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *uncultivated* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *repay*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *servants* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the enslaved Africans* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gave birth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swaddled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brain or intellect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the banana tree* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outlines* [Return to reference](#) °

# **THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (1603–1660)**



# The Early Seventeenth Century 1603–1660



***Charles I at the Hunt***, a portrait of Charles I of England by Anthony Van Dyck, ca. 1635. See the [Image Gallery](#) for this volume for another portrait of Charles I by Van Dyck.

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- 1603: Death of Elizabeth I; accession of James I, first Stuart king of England
- 1605: The Gunpowder Plot, a failed effort by Catholic extremists to blow up Parliament and the king
- 1607: Establishment of first permanent English colony in the New World at Jamestown, Virginia
- 1625: Death of James I; accession of Charles I
- 1642: Outbreak of civil war; theaters closed
- 1649: Execution of Charles I; beginning of Commonwealth and Protectorate, known inclusively as the Interregnum (1649–60)
- 1660: End of the Protectorate; restoration of Charles II

Queen Elizabeth died on March 24, 1603, after ruling England for more than four decades. The Virgin Queen had not, of course, produced a child to inherit her throne, but her kinsman, the thirty-six-year-old James Stuart, James VI of Scotland, succeeded her as James I without the violence that many had feared. Worries over the succession, which had plagued the reigns of the Tudor monarchs since Henry VIII, could finally subside: James already had several children with his queen, Anna of Denmark. Writers and scholars jubilantly noted that their new ruler had literary inclinations. He was the author of treatises on government and witchcraft, as well as some youthful efforts at poetry. Nonetheless, there were grounds for disquiet. James had come to maturity in Scotland, a foreign land with a different church, different customs, and different institutions of government. Two of his books, *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilikon Doron* (1599), expounded authoritarian theories of kingship, and James's views seemed incompatible with the English tradition of "mixed" government, in which power was shared by the monarch, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. As Thomas Howard wrote in 1611, while Elizabeth "did talk of her subjects' love and good affection," James "talketh of his subjects' fear and subjection." James liked to imagine himself as a modern version of the wise, peace-loving Roman Augustus Caesar, who autocratically governed a vast empire. The Romans had deified their emperors, and while the Christian James could not expect the same, he insisted on his closeness to divinity. Kings, he believed, derived their powers from God rather than from the people. As God's specially chosen delegate, surely he deserved his subjects' reverent, unconditional obedience.

Yet unlike the charismatic Elizabeth, James was personally unprepossessing. One contemporary, Anthony Weldon, provides a barbed description: "His tongue too large for his mouth, which ever made him speak full in the mouth, and drink very uncomely as if eating his drink . . . he never washed his hands . . . his walk was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walk fiddling about his

codpiece." Unsurprisingly, James did not always inspire in his subjects the deferential awe to which he thought himself entitled.

The relationship between the monarch and his people, and the relationship between England and Scotland, would be sources of friction throughout James's reign. James had hoped to unify his domains as a single nation, "the empire of Britain." But the two realms' legal and ecclesiastical systems proved difficult to reconcile, and the English Parliament, traditionally a sporadically convened body providing advice to the monarch, offered robustly xenophobic opposition. The failure of unification was only one of the king's several clashes with the English Parliament, especially with the House of Commons, which had authority over taxation. After James died in 1625 and his son Charles I succeeded him, tensions persisted and intensified. Charles attempted to rule without summoning Parliament at all between 1629 and 1638. By 1642 England was up in arms. The civil war between the king's forces and those loyal to the House of Commons ended with Charles's defeat and beheading in 1649.

In the early 1650s the monarchy as an institution seemed as dead as the man who had last worn the crown, but an adequate replacement proved difficult to devise and sustain. In 1653, executive power devolved upon a "Lord Protector," Oliver Cromwell, former general of the parliamentary forces, who wielded power nearly as autocratically as Charles had done. Yet without an institutionally sanctioned method of transferring power upon Cromwell's death, the attempt to fashion a commonwealth without a hereditary monarch eventually failed. In 1660 Parliament invited the eldest son of the old king home from exile. He succeeded to the throne as King Charles II.

As James's accession marks the beginning of "the early seventeenth century," his grandson's marks the end. Literary periods often fail to correlate neatly with the reigns of monarchs, and the period 1603–60 can seem especially arbitrary. Many important cultural trends in seventeenth-century Europe neither began nor ended in these years but unfolded slowly over several centuries. The

Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was still ongoing in the seventeenth, and still producing turmoil. The European printing press, an invention of the fifteenth century, continued to make books ever more widely available, contributing to an expansion of literacy and to a changed conception of authorship. Although the English economy remained primarily agrarian, its manufacturing and trade sectors were expanding rapidly. England was also establishing itself as a leading maritime nation, as a colonial power, and increasingly, particularly in the 1650s, as a major participant in the transatlantic slave trade. From 1550 on, London grew explosively as a center of population, trade, and literary endeavor. Each of these developments was under way before James came to the throne, and many of them would continue after the 1714 death of James's great-granddaughter Queen Anne, the last of the Stuarts to reign in England.

From a literary point of view, 1603 can seem a particularly capricious dividing line; many of England's most famous writers were midcareer when James came to the throne. The professional lives of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, Francis Bacon, Walter Raleigh, and many less famous writers—including George Chapman, Samuel Daniel, Thomas Dekker, Michael Drayton, Thomas Heywood, and Aemilia Lanyer—straddle the reigns of Elizabeth and James. The restoration of Charles II, with which this section ends, is likewise a more significant political than literary milestone: John Milton completed *Paradise Lost* and wrote two other major poems in the 1660s, and Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips, and Lucy Hutchinson wrote their most important works across the dividing line between the "early" seventeenth century and the Restoration. Nonetheless, recognizing the years 1603–60 as a period sharpens our awareness of some important political, intellectual, cultural, and stylistic currents that bear directly upon literary production. It also helps focus attention upon the seismic shift in national consciousness that, in 1649, could permit the formal trial, conviction, and execution of an anointed king at the hands of his former subjects.

## STATE AND CHURCH, 1603–1640

In James's reign, the most pressing difficulties were apparently financial, but money troubles were merely symptoms of deeper quandaries about the proper relationship between king and people. Compared to James's native Scotland, England seemed prosperous, but James was less wealthy than he believed. Except in times of war, the Crown was supposed to fund the government not through regular taxation but through its own extensive land revenues and by exchanging Crown prerogatives, such as the collection of taxes on luxury imports, in return for money or services. Yet the Crown's independent income had declined throughout the sixteenth century as inflation eroded the value of land rents. Meanwhile, innovations in military technology and shipbuilding dramatically increased the cost of port security and other defenses, traditional Crown responsibilities. Elizabeth had responded to straitened finances with parsimony, transferring much of the expense of her court, for instance, onto wealthy subjects, whom she visited for extended periods on her summer "progresses." She also kept a tight lid on honorific titles, creating new knights or peers very rarely, even though the years of her reign saw considerable upward social mobility. Many of those who became wealthy during her reign, including Sir Francis Drake, did so as pirates and privateers. In consequence, by 1603 there was considerable pent-up pressure both for honors and for more tangible rewards for courtiers and government officials. As soon as James came to power he was besieged with supplicants.

James responded with what seemed to him appropriate royal munificence, knighting and ennobling many of his courtiers and endowing them with opulent gifts. His expenses were much higher than Elizabeth's; the Crown had to maintain not only his own household but also separate establishments for his queen, Anna, and for the heir apparent, Prince Henry. Yet James quickly became notorious for his financial heedlessness. Compared to Elizabeth's, his court was disorderly and wasteful, marked by hard drinking,

gluttonous feasting, and a craze for hunting. "It is not possible for a king of England . . . to be rich or safe, but by frugality," warned James's lord treasurer, Robert Cecil, but James seemed unable to restrain himself. Soon after assuming the throne he was deeply in debt and unable to persuade Parliament to bankroll him by raising taxes. As the republican writer Lucy Hutchinson put it, in "setting honors to public sale," James empowered people "to invent projects to pill [plunder] the people, and pick their purses for the maintenance of vice and lewdness."

The king's financial difficulties set his authoritarian assertions about the monarch's supremacy at odds with Parliament's control over taxation. How were his prerogatives as a ruler to coexist with the rights of his subjects? Particularly disturbing to many was James's tendency to bestow high offices upon favorites apparently chosen for good looks rather than for good judgment. James's openly romantic attachment first to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, and then to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, gave rise to widespread rumors of homosexuality at court. James's own letters, in which he refers to his "Steenie" (a diminutive of St. Stephen) in headily erotic terms, make it clear that James's homosexuality was more than a rumor. The period had complex attitudes toward same-sex relationships; on the one hand, "sodomy" was a capital (though rarely prosecuted) crime; on the other hand, passionately intense male friendship, sometimes suffused with eroticism, constituted an important cultural ideal. In James's case, at least, contemporaries considered his susceptibility to lovely, expensive youths a political rather than a moral calamity. For his critics, it crystallized what was wrong with unlimited royal power: the ease with which a king could confuse his own desires with a divine mandate. There were also occasional conflicts between the king and Prince Henry, who was often seen as more martially Protestant and interventionist than his peace-keeping father, as well as between the king and Queen Anna, whose reputed Catholicism—and alliances with powerful courtiers, including Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford—often put her at odds with her husband. A 1617 diary entry by Lady Anne Clifford, who was engaged in a fierce battle for the Clifford properties, gives a

vivid sense of the complex personal and political relations in the Jacobean (from *Jacobus*, Latin for James) court: "I went presently . . . to the Drawing Chamber where my Lady Derby told the Queen how my business stood, and that I was to go to the King; so she promised me she would do all the good in it she could. When I had stayed but a little while there I was sent for . . . , my Lord and I going through my Lord Buckingham's Chamber, who brought us into the King." "The Queen gave me a warning not to trust my matters absolutely to the King," Clifford concludes her entry, "lest he should deceive me." The Jacobean court was neither as authoritarian nor as centralized as one might imagine.

Despite James's frictions with Parliament, and his chronic problems of self-management, he was nonetheless politically astute. Like Elizabeth, he often succeeded not through decisiveness but through canny inaction. Cautious by temperament, he characterized himself as a peacemaker and for many years successfully kept England out of the religious wars raging on the Continent. His 1604 peace treaty with England's old enemy, Spain, made the Atlantic safe for English ships, a prerequisite for the colonization of the New World and for regular long-distance trading expeditions into the Mediterranean and down the African coast into the Indian Ocean. James's reign saw the establishment of the first permanent English settlements in North America, first at Jamestown and then in the Bermudas, at Plymouth, and in the Caribbean. In 1611, the East India Company established England's first foothold in India. Even when expeditions ended disastrously, as did Henry Hudson's 1611 attempt to find the Northwest Passage, and Walter Raleigh's 1617 expedition to Guiana, they often asserted territorial claims that England would exploit in later decades. While Jamestown certainly struggled, the decimation of Indigenous populations and the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in 1619 laid the groundwork for future colonial success. England itself was not immune to threats from abroad. In 1625, for example, Barbary pirates (Muslim privateers who operated from North Africa) captured and enslaved sixty people from the Cornwall coast. Despite late Elizabethan "Edicts of Expulsion" authorizing the removal of "blackamoors" from England,

Black people were nonetheless present in England (and Scotland) in a variety of capacities during the period; the archives include records of a trumpeter, a needle maker, a decorated soldier, and “Grace Robinson, a Black moor” who had a seat at the laundress’s table in Anne Clifford’s household.

Although the Crown’s deliberate attempts to manage the economy were often misguided, its frequent inattention or refusal to interfere often had the unintentional effect of stimulating growth. Early seventeenth-century entrepreneurs undertook a wide variety of schemes for industrial and agricultural improvement. Some ventures were almost as loony as Sir Politic Would-be’s ridiculous moneymaking notions in Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* (1606), but others were serious, profitable enterprises. In the south, domestic industries began manufacturing goods like pins and light woollens that had previously been imported. In the north, newly developed coal mines provided fuel for England’s growing cities. In the east, landowners drained wetlands, producing more arable land to feed England’s rapidly growing population and to accrue wealth for themselves. These endeavors gave rise to a new respect for the practical arts, a faith in technology as a means of improving human life, and a conviction that the future might be better than the past: all important influences on the scientific theories of Francis Bacon and his seventeenth-century followers, even as thinkers such as Margaret Cavendish offered resistance and critique. Economic growth in this period owed as much to the initiative of individuals and small groups as to government policy, a factor that encouraged a reevaluation of the role of self-interest, the profit motive, and the role of business contracts in society. This reevaluation was a prerequisite for the secular, contractual political theories proposed by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke later in the seventeenth century. There were also multiple uprisings and riots by common people in the period, primarily over food scarcity and the enclosure of common lands. In March 1629, for example, hundreds of starving women and children boarded a Flemish ship in the Essex port town of Maldon and forced its crew to fill their caps and aprons with grain from its hold. The period also saw fierce contestations over vagrancy (including the



mere presence of itinerant “Gypsies” and “Irish”), poor laws, and policing.

The Church of England also faced many challenges in the early seventeenth century, and James was again often most successful when he was least activist. Since the Reformation, English rulers considered themselves heads of the Church of England, and, largely for reasons of political order, demanded that their subjects belong to one unified church. Yet the Reformation itself had opened up many areas of religious debate, and England’s own history of vacillating between Protestant and Catholic rule meant that those debates were still very much alive. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English people argued over many aspects of ritual and faith. How should public worship be conducted, and what sorts of qualifications should ministers possess? How should scripture be understood? How should people pray? What did the sacrament of Communion mean? What happened to people’s souls after they died? Elizabeth’s government had needed to devise a common religious practice when actual consensus was impossible. Sensibly, it sought a middle ground between traditional and reformed views. Everyone was legally required to attend Church of England services, and the form of the services themselves was mandated in the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer deliberately avoided addressing abstruse theological controversies. The language of the English church service was carefully chosen to be open to several interpretations and acceptable to both Protestant- and Catholic-leaning subjects.

The Elizabethan compromise effectively tamed many of the Reformation’s divisive energies and proved acceptable to the majority of English people. Yet to staunch Catholics on one side, and ardent Protestants on the other, the Elizabethan church seemed to have sacrificed truth to political expediency. Catholics wanted to return England to the Roman fold; while some of them were loyal subjects of the queen, others advocated invasion by a foreign Catholic power. Meanwhile the “Puritans,” as they were disparagingly called—they referred to themselves as the “godly”—pressed for more thoroughgoing reformation in doctrine, ritual, and church

government, urging the elimination of “popish” elements from worship services and “idolatrous” religious images from churches. Some, the Presbyterians, wanted to separate lay and clerical power in the national church, so that church leaders would be appointed by other ministers rather than the state. Others, known as separatists, advocated abandoning a national church in favor of small congregations of the “elect.”

The resistance of religious minorities to Elizabeth’s established church opened them to state persecution. In the 1580s and 1590s, Catholic priests and the laypeople who harbored them were executed for treason, and radical Protestants for heresy. Both groups thus greeted James’s accession enthusiastically; his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, had been Catholic, while his upbringing had been in the strict reformed tradition of the Scottish Presbyterian Kirk. James began his reign with a conference at Hampton Court, one of his palaces, during which advocates debated a variety of religious views. Yet the Puritans failed to persuade him to make any substantive reforms. Practically speaking, the Puritan belief that congregations should choose their leaders diminished the monarch’s power by stripping him of authority over ecclesiastical appointments. More generally, allowing people to choose their leaders in any sphere of life threatened to subvert the entire system of deference and hierarchy upon which the institution of monarchy itself seemed to rest. As James famously remarked: “No bishop, no king.”



**The Execution of the Gunpowder Plot Conspirators.** This engraving by the Dutch artist Crispijn van de Passe shows the

execution of the Gunpowder Conspirators for treason in January 1606. The punishment for treason was deliberately "cruel and unusual": the traitor was sentenced to be dragged through town on a wicker hurdle "at horse's tail," hanged but cut down while still conscious, and then castrated, disemboweled, beheaded, and his body cut into four pieces and parboiled. Though the punishment was often commuted to simple beheading or hanging, in the case of the Gunpowder Conspirators it was carried out in its entirety. On the left, the condemned men are taken to the place of execution. In the middle, the heart of one of the conspirators is being torn out, to be thrown into the fire. On the right, the heads of the conspirators are mounted on poles for display.

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Catholics did not fare well in the new reign either. Initially inclined to lift Elizabethan sanctions against them, James hesitated when he realized the popular extent of the opposition to toleration. Then, barely two years into his reign, a small group of disaffected Catholics packed a cellar adjacent to the Houses of Parliament with gunpowder, intending to detonate it on the day that the king formally opened Parliament, with Prince Henry, the Houses of Lords and Commons, and the leading justices in attendance. The conspirators were arrested before they could effect their plan, but if the "Gunpowder Plot" had succeeded, it would have eliminated much of England's ruling class in a single tremendous explosion, and exposed the country to invasion by a foreign Catholic power. Not surprisingly, the Gunpowder Plot dramatically heightened anti-Catholic paranoia in England, and its apparently miraculous revelation was widely seen as a sign of God's care for England's Protestant governors. Many Catholics, known as "recusants" for their refusal to attend Church of England services, went underground.

In the end, James's ecclesiastical policies continued along the lines laid down by Elizabeth. By appointing bishops of varying doctrinal views, he restrained any single faction from controlling church policy. The most important religious event (and literary

accomplishment) of James's reign was a newly commissioned translation of the Bible. First published in 1611, the King James Bible was a typically moderating document. A much more graceful rendering than its predecessor, the Geneva version produced by Puritan expatriates in the 1550s, the King James Bible immediately became the standard English scripture. Its impressive rhythms and memorable phrasing would influence writers for centuries. On the one hand, the new translation contributed to the Protestant aim of making the Bible widely available to every reader in their own language. On the other hand, unlike the Geneva Bible, the King James version translated controversial and ambiguous passages in ways that bolstered conservative preferences for a ceremonial church and for a hierarchically organized church government. Regardless, the widespread availability of an English Bible invited a range of interpreters, and interpretations, beyond the control of church or state. As the royalist William Cavendish wrote in a letter to the future Charles II in 1658, when the monarchy and nobility were in full crisis, "The Bible in English under every weaver's and chambermaid's arms hath done us much hurt."

James's moderation was not universally popular. Some Protestants yearned for a more confrontational policy toward Catholic powers—particularly toward England's old enemy, Spain. In the first decade of James's reign, this party clustered around James's eldest son and heir apparent, Prince Henry, who cultivated a militantly Protestant persona. When Henry died of typhoid fever in 1612, those who favored his policies were forced to seek avenues of power outside the royal court. By 1621, the House of Commons was developing a vigorous sense of its own independence, debating policy agendas often quite at odds with the Crown's, and openly attempting to use its power to approve taxation as a means of exacting concessions from the king.

James's second son, Prince Charles, came to the throne upon James's death in 1625. Unlike his father, Charles was not a theorist of royal absolutism, but he acted on that principle with an inflexibility that far exceeded his father's. By 1629 he had dissolved Parliament three times in frustration with its recalcitrance. He then embarked

upon more than a decade of “personal rule” without summoning Parliament at all. Charles was more prudent in some respects than his father had been—he not only restrained the costs of his own court, but paid off his father’s staggering debts as well. Throughout his reign, he conscientiously applied himself to the business of government. Yet his refusal to involve powerful individuals and factions in the workings of the state inevitably alienated them and cut him off from important channels of information about the opinions and reactions of his people. Money was also a problem. Even a relatively frugal king required some funds for ambitious government initiatives; but without parliamentary approval, any taxes Charles imposed were widely perceived as illegal. As a result, even popular policies, such as Charles’s effort to build up the English navy, spawned misgivings among many of his subjects.

Religious conflicts also intensified. Charles’s queen, the French princess Henrietta Maria, supported an entourage of Roman Catholic priests and French women courtiers, protected English Catholics, and encouraged several noblewomen in her court to convert to Catholicism. While Charles remained a staunch member of the Church of England, he loved visual splendor and majestic ceremony in all aspects of life, spiritual and otherwise—proclivities that led his Puritan subjects to suspect him of popish sympathies. Charles’s profound attachment to his wife, so different from James’s sparring with Anna, only deepened their qualms. Like many fellow Puritans, Lucy Hutchinson blamed the debacle of Charles’s reign on his wife’s influence: concerned only with “the meritoriousness of advancing her own religion,” Hutchinson wrote, the queen used her “great wit and parts, and the power her haughty spirit kept over her husband” to “promote her own designs.”

Charles’s appointment of William Laud as archbishop of Canterbury, the ecclesiastical head of the English Church, further alienated the godly. Laud subscribed to a theology that most Puritans rejected. As followers of the sixteenth-century reformer John Calvin, Puritans held that salvation depended on faith in Christ, not “works.” Works were meaningless, because the deeds of sinful human beings could not be sanctified in the absence of faith; moreover, the Fall had

so thoroughly corrupted human beings that they could not muster this faith without the help of God's grace. God chose (or refused) to extend grace to particular individuals on grounds that human beings were incapable of comprehending, and his decision had been made from eternity, before the individuals concerned were even born. In other words, the godly believed that God predestined people to be saved or damned, and Christ's redemptive sacrifice was designed only for those who were saved, the "elect." Laud, by contrast, advocated the Arminian doctrine that through Christ, God made redemption freely available to all human beings. (Arminius was a Dutch theologian.) Individuals could choose whether to respond to God's grace, and they could work toward their salvation by acts of charity, ritual devotion, and generosity to the church.

Although Laud's theology appears more generously inclusive than the Calvinist alternative, his ecclesiastical policies were uncompromising. Stripping many "Puritan" ministers of their posts, Laud aligned the doctrine and ceremonies of the English church with those of Roman Catholicism, which, like Arminianism, held works in high regard. In an ambitious project of church renovation, Laud also installed religious paintings and images in churches; he thought they promoted reverence in worshippers, but the more godly Protestants believed they encouraged idolatry. Laud also rebuilt and resituated church altars, making them more ornate and prominent—another change that dismayed Puritans, since it implied that the Eucharist, rather than the sermon, was the central element of worship. Herbert's magnificent poem "The Altar" nods toward this controversy. In the 1630s, thousands of Puritans departed for the New England colonies, but many more remained at home, deeply discontented and often resistant. In 1637 the Puritan writer William Prynne was found guilty of sedition, along with a fellow divine (Henry Burton) and a doctor (John Bastwick). As punishment, Prynne's nose was slit and the initials "S. L." were burned into his cheeks. The letters stood for "Seditious Libeller," but Prynne claimed that they signified "Stigma of Laud." This story, which Prynne wrote about in *A New Discovery of the Prelates Tyranny* (1641), and which Milton alludes to in his

sonnet "On the New Forcers of Conscience," became fodder in the battle against Laud.

As the 1630s drew to a close, Archbishop Laud and Charles attempted to impose a version of the English liturgy and episcopal organization on Presbyterian Scotland. Unlike his father, Charles had little acquaintance with his northern realm, and he drastically underestimated the difficulties involved. The Scots objected on both nationalist and religious grounds, and they were not shy about expressing their objections: the bishop of Brechin, obliged to conduct divine service in the prescribed English style, mounted the pulpit armed with two pistols against his unruly congregation, while his wife, stationed on the floor below, backed him up with a blunderbuss. In the conflict that followed, the Bishops' Wars of 1639 and 1640, Charles's forces met with abject defeat. Exacerbating the situation, Laud at the same time was insisting on greater conformity within the English church. Riots in the London streets and the Scots' occupation of several northern English cities forced Charles to call into session the so-called Long Parliament, which would soon be managing a revolution.

# LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1603–1640

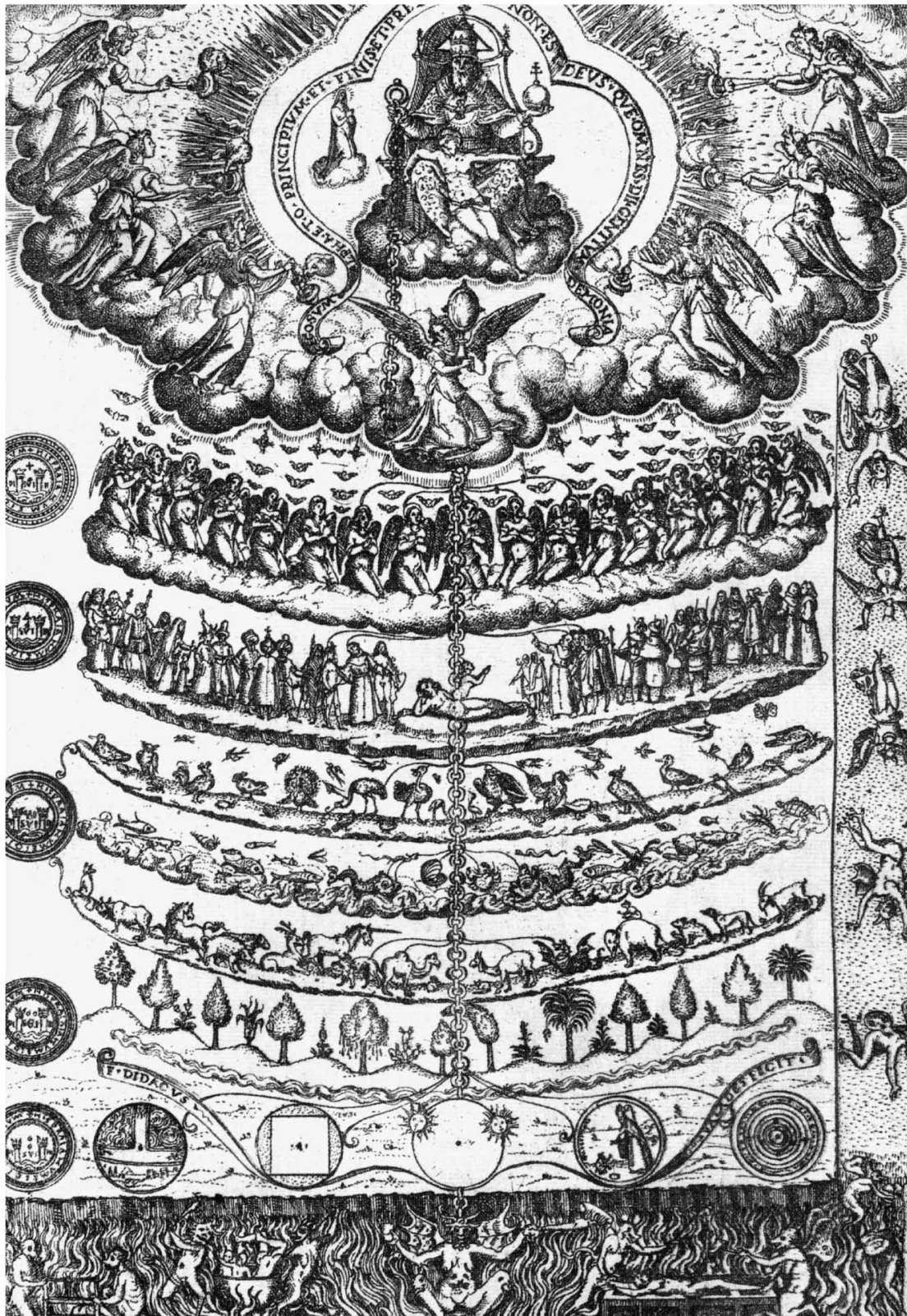
## *Old Ideas and New*

In the first part of the seventeenth century, exciting new scientific theories were in the air; but older ways of thinking about the nature of things had not yet been superseded. Writers such as John Donne and Ben Jonson often invoked an inherited body of concepts even though they were aware that those concepts were being questioned or displaced. The Ptolemaic universe, with its fixed earth and circling sun, moon, planets, and stars, was a rich source of poetic imagery. So were the four elements—fire, earth, water, and air—that together were thought to constitute all matter, and the four bodily humors—choler, blood, phlegm, and black bile—that were supposed to determine a person's temperament and to cause physical and mental disease when out of balance. Late Elizabethans and Jacobeans considered themselves especially prone to melancholy, an ailment of scholars and thinkers stemming from an excess of black bile. Shakespeare's Hamlet is melancholic, as is Bosola in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Milton's title figure in "Il Penseroso" ("the serious-minded one"). In his panoramic *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton argued that melancholy was universal.

Key concepts of this inherited system of knowledge were analogy and order. Donne was especially fond of drawing parallels between the macrocosm, or "big world," and the microcosm, or "little world," of the individual human being. (See also George Herbert's "Man".) Also widespread were versions of the "chain of being" that linked and ordered various kinds of beings in hierarchies. The order of nature, for instance, put God above angels, angels above human beings, human beings above animals, animals above plants, plants above rocks. The social order installed the king over his nobles, nobles over the gentry, gentry over yeomen, yeomen over common laborers. The order of the family set husband above wife, parents above children, master and mistress above servants, the elderly above the young. Each level had its particular function, and each was connected to those above and beneath in a tight network of obligation and dependency. Items that occupied similar positions in different hierarchies were related by analogy: thus a monarch was like God, and he was also like a father, the head of the family, or like



a lion, most majestic of beasts, or like the sun, the most excellent of heavenly bodies. Medieval or Renaissance poets who call a king a sun or a lion, then, imagine themselves not to be forging a metaphor in their own creative imagination, but to be describing something like an obvious fact of nature. Many Jacobean tragedies depict the catastrophes that ensue when these hierarchies rupture and both the social order and the natural order disintegrate.



**The Great Chain of Being.** This illustration of the "Great Chain of Being" from Diego Valadés's 1579 *Rhetorica Christiana* shows the

hierarchy of the universe according to Christian orthodoxy. God is at the top of the diagram surrounded by angels, with the blessed souls in heaven sitting on clouds just beneath; below them is the layer of humans, with Eve emerging from Adam's rib in the center; below that are layers of birds, fish, and beasts; below that is a layer of plants upon the earth. All these layers are connected by a chain running down the middle, imagined as connecting all of God's creation. At the bottom, detached from the Great Chain, are Satan and his rebel angels, who can be seen falling from heaven into hell in the right margin.

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Yet this conceptual system was itself beginning to crumble. Francis Bacon advocated rooting out of the mind all the intellectual predilections that had made the old ideas so attractive: love of ingenious correlations, reverence for tradition, and *a priori* assumptions about what was possible in nature. Instead, he argued, groups of collaborators ought to design controlled experiments to find the truths of nature by empirical means. Even as Bacon was promoting his views in *The Advancement of Learning*, *Novum Organum*, and *The New Atlantis*, actual experiments and discoveries were calling the old verities into question. From the far-flung territories that England was beginning to colonize or to trade with, collectors brought animal, plant, and ethnological novelties, many of which were hard to subsume under old categories of understanding. Some of the materials that Richard Ligon collected in Barbados, for example, formed the basis of what would become the British Museum. William Harvey's discovery that blood circulated in the body shook received views on the function of blood, casting doubt on the theory of the humors. Galileo's telescope provided evidence confirming Copernican astronomical theory, which dislodged the earth from its stable central position in the cosmos and, in defiance of all ordinary observation, set it whirling around the sun. Galileo found evidence as well of change in the heavens, which were supposed to be perfect and incorruptible above the level of the moon. Donne, like other writers of his age, responded with a mixture of excitement and anxiety to such novel ideas:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt:  
The element of fire is quite put out;  
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man's wit

Can well direct him where to look for it. ("An Anatomy of the World")

Several decades later, however, Milton embraced the new science, proudly recalling a visit during his European tour to "the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought." In *Paradise Lost*, he would make complex poetic use of the astronomical controversy, considering how, and how far, humans should pursue scientific knowledge. In the invocation to her epic poem *Order and Disorder*, Lucy Hutchinson asks her muse: "Let not my thoughts beyond their bound aspire." Yet the poem's celebration of the "mystic wonders" of the world is nonetheless infused with the materialist views found in Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things), which Hutchinson was the first to translate into English. Margaret Cavendish's materialist philosophy theorized a self-moving nature imbued with knowledge, and her poetry imagined and celebrated both possible worlds and animal and plant intelligences. Similarly influenced by materialist philosophies, Hester Pulter wrote poems in which she imagined the processes by which beings, "dispersed to atoms," "give a being to another world," and a flower reduced to ashes is brought back to life. The "new philosophy" neither wholly displaced the old, nor settled into common acceptance without robust and ongoing debate.

### ***Patrons, Printers, and Acting Companies***

The social institutions, customs, and practices that had supported and regulated writers in Tudor times changed only gradually before 1640. As it had under Elizabeth, the Church promoted writing of several kinds: devotional treatises; guides to meditation; controversial tracts; "cases of conscience," which work out difficult moral issues in complex situations; and, especially, sermons. Since everyone was required to attend church, everyone heard sermons at least once and often twice on Sunday, as well as on religious or national holidays. The essence of a sermon, Protestants agreed, was the careful exposition of scripture, and its purpose was to instruct and to move. Yet styles varied; while some preachers, like Donne, strove to enthrall their congregations with all the resources of artful rhetoric, others, especially Puritans, sought an undecorated style that would display God's word in its own splendor. Printing made it easy to circulate many copies of sermons, blurring the line between oral delivery

and written text, and enhancing the role of printers and booksellers in disseminating God's word.

Many writers of the period depended in one way or another on literary patronage. Like their medieval forebears, Jacobean and Caroline (from *Carolus*, Latin for Charles) aristocrats were expected to reward dependents in return for services and homage. In the early seventeenth century, although commercial relationships were rapidly replacing feudal ones, patronage pervaded all walks of life: it governed relationships between landlords and tenants, masters and servants, kings and courtiers. Writers were assimilated into this system partly because their works reflected well on the patron, and partly because their all-around intelligence and writing skills made them useful members of elite households or political factions. Important patrons of the time included the royal family—especially Queen Anna, who sponsored court masques, and Prince Henry—the members of the intermarried Sidney and Herbert families, and Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, Queen Anna's confidante.

Because the patronage relationship often took the form of an exchange of favors rather than a simple financial transaction, its terms were variable and thus difficult to recover from a historical distance. A poet might dedicate a poem or a work to a patron in the expectation of a simple cash payment, but a patron might provide a wide range of other benefits: a place to live; employment as a secretary, tutor, or household servant; or a gift of clothing. (Textiles were valuable commodities.) Donne, for instance, received financial support from Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford; inexpensive lodging from the Drury family, for whom he wrote the *Anniversaries*; a suit of clerical attire from James Hay, when he took orders in the Church of England; and advancement in the church from King James. Ben Jonson lived for several years at the country estates of Lord Aubigny and of Robert Sidney, in whose honor he wrote "To Penshurst"; he received a regular salary from the king in return for writing court masques; and he served as chaperone to Sir Walter Raleigh's son on a Continental tour. Aemilia Lanyer claimed to have resided for some time in the household of Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and her frequent invocations of the countess in her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* invite an ongoing relationship. Andrew Marvell lived for two years with Thomas Fairfax, tutored Fairfax's daughter, and dedicated his great country house poem, *Upon Appleton House*, to him. All these quite

different relationships and forms of remuneration fall under the rubric of patronage.

The patronage system required the poets involved to hone their skills in praising their patrons. Many of Jonson's epigrams, Donne's verse letters, and Lanyer's dedicatory poems evoke communities of virtuous poets and patrons joined by bonds of mutual respect and affection, or by shared religious, philosophical, or political concerns. Like the line between sycophantic flattery and truthful depiction, the line between patronage and friendship could be a thin one. Literary manuscripts circulated among circles of acquaintances and supporters, many of whom were, at least occasionally, writers as well as readers. Jonson esteemed Mary Wroth both as a fellow poet and as a member of the Sidney family to whom he owed so much. Donne became part of a coterie around Queen Anna's chief courtier, Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, who was also an important patron for Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and Samuel Daniel. The countess evidently wrote poems herself, although apparently only one attributed to her has survived.

Writers did not have to print a poem to present it to a patron or to circulate it among friends or allies. In early seventeenth-century England, the reading public for sophisticated literary works was small and concentrated in a few social settings: the royal court, the universities, the Inns of Court (or law schools), and great (and a few less-than-great) households, some of which were headed by women. In these circumstances, manuscript circulation was an effective way of reaching, and (at least in theory) restricting, one's audience. A great deal of writing thus remained in manuscript in early seventeenth-century England. The collected works of many important writers of the period—most notably John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, and William Shakespeare—appeared in print only posthumously, in editions produced by friends or admirers. Other writers, like Robert Herrick, collected and printed their own works long after they were written and (probably) circulated in manuscript. Still others, including Katherine Philips, claimed that their work had been pirated, or published without their consent. In consequence, it is often difficult to accurately date the composition of a seventeenth-century poem. Some writings, like the entirety of Hester Pulten's oeuvre and the vast majority of Lucy Hutchinson's, were never printed. When authors did not participate in the printing of their own works, editorial questions multiply—when, for instance, the printed version

of a poem is inconsistent with a surviving manuscript copy. For some poets, including Donne, there are hundreds of extant manuscripts.

Nonetheless, the printing of all kinds of literary works was becoming more common. Writers such as Francis Bacon, who hoped to reach large numbers of readers with whom they were not acquainted, usually arranged for the printing of their texts soon after they were composed. The sense that the printing of lyric poetry, in particular, was a bit vulgar began to fade when the already famous Ben Jonson collected his own works in a grand folio edition in 1616, the same year (not coincidentally) in which the king published his own collected *Works*.

Until 1640, the Stuart kings kept in place the strict controls over print publication originally instituted by Henry VIII in response to the ideological threat posed by the Reformation. Henry had given the members of London's Stationer's Company a monopoly on all printing; in return for their privilege, they were supposed to submit texts for prepublication censorship. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, presses associated with the universities at Oxford and Cambridge began operation as well, but they focused largely on scholarly and theological books. As a result, with a few exceptions, such as George Herbert's *The Temple*, which was published by Cambridge University Press, almost all printed literary texts were produced in London. Most of them were sold there as well, in the booksellers' stalls set up outside St. Paul's Cathedral.

The licensing system located both primary responsibility for a printed work and its ownership with the printer rather than with the author. Printers typically paid writers a one-time fee for the use of their work, but the payment was small, and the authors of popular texts earned no royalties from the copies sold. As a result, no one could make a living as a writer in the early seventeenth century by producing best sellers. The first English writer to formally arrange for royalties was John Milton, who received five pounds up front for *Paradise Lost*, and another five pounds (and two hundred copies) at the end of each of the first three impressions. Legal ownership of and control over printed works remained with the printers: authorial copyright would not become a reality until the early eighteenth century. During the early seventeenth century, some publishers began to specialize in literary texts. Humphrey Moseley, for example, published Donne, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, and Milton, among others. Many of these volumes included engravings of the authors on their title pages. A not-very-flattering portrait of a middle-aged Milton

in his 1645 *Poems* drew a marked contrast with the cherubic engraving of the sixteen-year-old Abraham Cowley printed on the title page to his *Blossoms* (1633).

In monetary terms, a more promising outlet for writers was the commercial theater, which provided the first successful literary market in English history. Profitable and popular acting companies established successfully in London in Elizabeth's time continued to play a very important cultural role under James and Charles. Because the acting companies staged a large number of different plays and paid for them at a predictable, if not generous, rate, they enabled a few hardworking writers to support themselves as full-time professionals. One of them, Thomas Dekker, commented bemusedly on the novelty of being paid for the mere products of one's imagination: "The theater," he wrote, "is your poet's Royal Exchange upon which their muses—that are now turned to merchants—meeting, barter away that light commodity of words." (The Royal Exchange was the center of commerce for the City of London.) In James's reign, Shakespeare was at the height of his powers: *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and other major plays were first staged during these years. So were Jonson's major comedies: *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. The most important new playwright was John Webster, whose dark tragedies *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* combined gothic horror with stunningly beautiful poetry.

Just as printers were legally the owners of the texts they printed, so theater companies, not playwrights, were the owners of the texts they performed. Typically, companies guarded their scripts closely, permitting them to be printed only in times of financial distress, or when the works were so old that printing them seemed unlikely to reduce the paying audience. As a result, many Jacobean and Caroline plays are lost or available only in corrupt or posthumous versions. For contemporaries, though, a play was "published" not by being printed but by being performed. Aware of the dangerous potential of plays in arousing the sentiments of large crowds of onlookers, the Stuarts, like the Tudors before them, instituted tight controls over dramatic performances. Like printers, acting companies were obliged to submit works to the censor before public presentation.

Authors, printers, and acting companies who flouted the censorship laws were subject to imprisonment, fines, or even bodily mutilation.



Queen Elizabeth cut off the hand of a man who disagreed in print with her marriage plans; King Charles, the ears of a man who inveighed against court masques. Jonson and his collaborators found themselves in prison for ridiculing James's broad Scots accent in a comedy. The effects of censorship were therefore far-reaching across literary genres. Since overt criticism or satire of the great was so dangerous, political writing was apt to be oblique and allegorical. As the literary theorist George Puttenham put it, the genre of pastoral used "the veil of homely [rustic] persons" to "glance at greater matters, and such as perchance had not been safe to have been disclosed in any other sort." Writers often employed animal fables, tales of distant lands, or descriptions of long-past historical events to comment on contemporary issues.

While the commercial theaters were profitable businesses that made most of their money from paying audiences, several factors combined to bring writing for the theater closer to the court than it had been in Elizabeth's time. The Elizabethan theater companies had been officially associated with noblemen who guaranteed their legitimacy (in contrast to unsponsored traveling players, who were subject to punishment as vagrants). Early in his reign, James brought the major theater companies under royal auspices. Shakespeare's company, the most successful of the day, became the King's Men: it performed not only Shakespeare's plays, but also *Volpone* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Queen Anna, Prince Henry, Prince Charles, and Princess Elizabeth sponsored other companies. Royal patronage, which brought with it tangible rewards and regular court performances, naturally encouraged the theater companies to pay more attention to courtly taste. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* put onstage Scots history and witches, two of James's own interests; in *King Lear*, the hero's disastrous division of his kingdom may reflect controversies over James's proposed union of Scotland and England. Both *Othello* and *The Tempest* were performed at court, and the latter alluded to contemporary colonial mishaps. In the first four decades of the seventeenth century, court-affiliated theater companies such as the King's Men increasingly cultivated audiences markedly more affluent than the audiences they had sought in the 1580s and 1590s, performing in intimate, expensive indoor theaters instead of, or as well as, in the cheap popular amphitheaters. *The Duchess of Malfi*, for instance, was probably written with the King's Men's indoor theater at Blackfriars in mind; several scenes depend for their effect on control over lighting that would have been impossible outdoors. Partly

because the commercial theaters seemed increasingly to cater to the affluent and courtly elements of society, they attracted the ire of the king's opponents when civil war broke out in the 1640s. Even before closet drama took off in the 1640s, Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland, published *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), a remarkable, and politically resonant, closet drama about a queen subjected to her husband's domestic and political tyranny. While the term "closet" suggests private reading, closet dramas were often read aloud or performed in smaller settings. Wroth's unpublished play *Loves Victory* (ca. 1620), which is full of familial and topical allusions, was likely performed at Penshurst, or another country estate nearby.

### ***Jacobean Writers and Genres***

The era saw important changes in poetic fashion. Some major Elizabethan genres fell out of favor—long allegorical or mythological narratives, sonnet sequences (Wroth's 1621 *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* excepted), and pastoral poems. Others came into ascendancy—particularly short, concentrated, often witty poems. Poets and prose writers alike often preferred the jagged rhythms of colloquial speech to the elaborate ornamentation and near-musical orchestration of sound sought by many Elizabethans. Many notable poets of these years, including Jonson, Donne, and Herbert, led this shift and also promoted a variety of "new" genres: love elegy and satire after the classical models of Ovid and Horace, epigram, verse epistle, meditative religious lyric, and country house poem. Aemilia Lanyer also made notable contributions, particularly to these last three of these genres. Her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) contained verse letters to powerful court women, a long poem on Christ's passion that focused on the role of godly women, and the first country house poem, "The Description of Cookham."

Although Jonson, Donne, and Herbert differed enormously from one another, they all exercised a significant influence on the poets of the next generation. A native Londoner, Jonson first distinguished himself as an acute observer of urban manners in a series of early, controversial satiric plays. Although he wrote two of his most moving poems to his dead children, Jonson rarely focused on the family dynamics that so profoundly concerned his contemporary Shakespeare. When generational and dynastic matters do figure in his poetry, as they do at the end of "To Penshurst," they seem part of the agrarian, feudal order that Jonson may

have romanticized but certainly knew was disappearing. Jonson interested himself in relationships that were negotiated by the participants themselves, often in bustling urban or courtly milieux in which blood kinship no longer decisively determined one's social place. Jonson's poems of praise celebrate and exemplify classical and humanist ideals of friendship: like-minded men and women elect to join in a community that fosters wisdom, generosity, civic responsibility, and mutual respect. In his plays and satiric poems, Jonson stages the violation of those values with such riotous comprehensiveness that the very survival of such ideals seems endangered; the plays swarm with voracious swindlers and their eager victims, social climbers both adroit and inept, and a dizzying assortment of morons and misfits. In many of Jonson's plays, rogues or wits collude to victimize others. These stormy, self-interested alliances, apparently so different from the virtuous friendships of the poems of praise, in fact resemble them in one respect: they are connections entered into by choice, not by law, inheritance, or custom.

Throughout his life, Jonson earned his living from his writing, composing plays for the public theater while also attracting patronage as a poet and a writer of court masques. He found particular success collaborating with the architect and set- and costume-designer Inigo Jones. Jonson's acute awareness of his audience was partly, then, a sheerly practical matter. Yet his yearning for recognition far exceeded any desire for material reward. A gifted poet, Jonson argued, was a society's proper judge and teacher, and he could be effective only if his audience understood and respected the poet's exalted role. Jonson set out unabashedly to create that audience and to monumentalize himself as a great English author. When he took the step—unusual for his time—of collecting his poems, plays, and masques in an elegant folio volume titled *The Works of Ben Jonson*, a contemporary epigram poked fun at his pretensions: "Pray tell me Ben," the epigram asks, "where doth the mystery lurk / What others call a play, you call a work?" Jonson's audacious attempt to dignify popular drama may have made him the butt of someone's joke, but it had far-reaching consequences for the canonization of seventeenth-century stage plays, including in the First Folio of Shakespeare's, which appeared in 1623.

Jonson's influence on the next generation of writers, and, through them, into the Restoration and the eighteenth century, was an effect both of his poetic mastery of his chosen modes and of his powerful personal

example. Jonson mentored a group of younger poets known as the Tribe (or Sons) of Ben, meeting regularly with some of them in the Apollo Room of the Devil Tavern in London. Many of the royalist, or "Cavalier," poets—Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, Edmund Waller, Henry Vaughan (in his secular verse)—proudly acknowledged their relationship to Jonson or gave some evidence of it in their verse. Most of them also absorbed Jonson's attitude toward print and in later decades supervised the publication of their own poems. Jonson himself testifies to his particular indebtedness to Mary Wroth; and while his relationship with Lanyer is unknown, there are myriad resonances between the first two country house poems, her "The Description of Cookham" and his "To Penshurst."

Donne, like Jonson, spent most of his life in or near London, often in the company of other writers and intellectuals—indeed, in the company of many of the same writers and intellectuals, since the two men were friends and shared some of the same patrons. Yet unlike Jonson's, most of Donne's poetry concerns itself not with a crowded social panorama but with a dyad—a relationship between the speaker and one single other being, whether a lover, a friend, or God—that in its intensity blots out the claims of lesser relationships. Love for Donne encompasses an astonishing range of emotional experiences: from the lusty impatience of "To His Mistress Going to Bed" to the cheerful promiscuity of "The Indifferent" and mysterious platonic telepathy of "Air and Angels"; from the vengeful wit of "The Apparition" to the postcoital tranquility of "The Good Morrow." While for Jonson the shared meal among friends often becomes an emblem of communion, for Donne sexual consummation has something of the same highly charged symbolic character, a moment in which the isolated individual can, however temporarily, escape the boundaries of selfhood in union with another. As he writes in "The Canonization,"

The phoenix riddle hath more wit  
By us: we two being one, are it.  
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.

In the religious poems, where Donne both yearns for an intimate, physical relationship with God and knows it is impossible, he does not abandon his characteristic bodily metaphors. Donne was fascinated by the doctrine of the Incarnation—God's taking material form in the person of Jesus Christ—and the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the dead at the Last Day,

Christian teachings to which he returns again and again in his poems, sermons, and devotional writings. While sexual and religious love had long shared a common vocabulary, Donne delights in making that overlap new and shocking. He likens conjoined lovers to saints; demands to be raped by God; speculates after his wife's death that God killed her because he was jealous of Donne's divided loyalty; imagines Christ encouraging his bride, the church, to "open" herself to as many men as possible. Donne also celebrated friendship in his poetry, both with men (as in his verse letter to Henry Wotton) and with women—particularly with his patron, Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, for whom he wrote five verse letters, and with whom he exchanged books, letters, and poems.

Throughout Donne's life, his faith, like his intellect, was anything but quiet. Born into a devoutly Roman Catholic family just as the persecution of Catholics was intensifying in Elizabethan England, Donne eventually became a member of the Church of England. If "Satire 3" is any indication, the conversion was accompanied by profound doubt and an existential crisis. Donne's restless mind can lead him in surprising and sometimes unorthodox directions. At the same time, overwhelmed with a sense of his own unworthiness, he courts God's punishment, demanding to be spat upon, flogged, burned, and broken down in the expectation that suffering at God's hand will restore him to grace and favor.

In both style and content, Donne's poems are addressed to a select few rather than to the public at large. His style is demanding, characterized by learned terms, audaciously far-fetched analogies, and an intellectually sophisticated play of ironies. Even Donne's sermons, which were attended by large crowds, share the knotty difficulty of the poems, as well as something of their quality of intimate address. Donne circulated his poems in manuscript and largely avoided print publication (most of his poems were printed after his death). Some critics have regarded Donne as the founder of a "Metaphysical" school of poetry. (The term was coined by Samuel Johnson, who argued that in Donne's poetry, "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together.") We find echoes of Donne's style in many later poets: in Thomas Carew (who praised Donne as a "monarch of wit"), George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Sir John Suckling, Abraham Cowley, Hester Pulter, Andrew Marvell, and Katherine Philips.

Herbert, the younger son of a wealthy, cultivated, and well-connected family, seemed destined in early adulthood for a brilliant career as a

diplomat or government servant. Yet he turned his back on worldly greatness to be ordained a priest in the Church of England. Moreover, eschewing a highly visible career as an urban preacher, he spent the remaining years of his short life ministering to the tiny rural parish of Bemerton in Wiltshire. Herbert's poetry is shot through with the difficulty and joy of this renunciation. Herbert identifies literary ambition—pride in one's independent creativity—as a temptation that must be resisted, whether it takes the form of Jonson's openly competitive aspiration for literary preeminence, or Donne's brilliantly ironic self-displaying performance. Instead, Herbert seeks other models for poetic agency: the secretary taking dictation from a master, the musician playing in harmonious consort with others, the member of a church congregation who speaks with and for a community.

Herbert destroyed his secular verse in English, and he turned his volume of religious verse over to a friend only on his deathbed, asking him to print it if he thought it would be useful to "some dejected poor soul," but otherwise to burn it. The 177 lyrics contained in that volume, *The Temple*, display a complex religious sensibility and great artistic subtlety in an amazing variety of stanza forms. Herbert was the major influence on the next generation of religious lyric poets and was explicitly recognized as such by Henry Vaughan and Richard Crashaw. (Crashaw titled his own collection *Steps to the Temple*.)

Like Herbert, Lady Mary Wroth was part of a well-connected and influential family. Wroth grew up at Penshurst, and as the niece of Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, she seemed destined for literary fame. When she published her long prose romance, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, together with a Petrarchan sonnet sequence titled *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* in 1621, she put her own stamp on the two famous genres. The *Urania* overturns many of the conventions of romance by focusing on a number of interlinked royal families and imagining the literary—as well as romantic—careers of their queens. The sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, which takes its name from the romance's main characters, not only reverses the gender of lover and beloved but offers a bracing analysis of female subjectivity and desire. When Wroth's romance was criticized for "traducing," or shaming, living people, she told the Duke of Buckingham that the "strange constructions" that were made of her book were "as far from my meaning as is possible for truth to be from conjecture." Yet her

choice of (notorious) publishers and (a famous) engraver indicates the nature and the scale of her ambition.

The Jacobean period saw the emergence of what would become a major prose genre, the familiar essay. The works of the French inventor of the form, Michel de Montaigne, appeared in English translation in 1603, influencing Shakespeare as well as later writers such as Sir Thomas Browne and Margaret Cavendish. Yet the first essays written in English—the work of Francis Bacon, who was attorney general under Elizabeth and eventually lord chancellor under James—bear little resemblance to Montaigne's intimate, wide-ranging, conversational pieces. Bacon's essays present pithy, sententious, sometimes provocative claims in a tone of cool objectivity, tempering moral counsel with an awareness of the importance of prudence and expediency in practical affairs. In *Novum Organum* Bacon adapts his deliberately discontinuous mode of exposition to outline a new scientific method, holding out the tantalizing prospect of eventual mastery over the natural world, and boldly articulating the ways in which science might improve the human condition. In his fictional utopia, *The New Atlantis*, Bacon imagines a society that realizes his dream of carefully orchestrated collaborative research, so different from what he saw as the erratic, uncoordinated efforts of alchemists and amateurs in his own day. Bacon's philosophically revolutionary approach to the natural world profoundly affected scientifically minded people over the next several generations. His writings influenced the materialist philosophy of his erstwhile secretary, Thomas Hobbes; encouraged Oliver Cromwell to attempt a large-scale overhaul of the university curriculum during the 1650s; and inspired the formation of the Royal Society, an organization of experimental scientists, in 1660. In the 1650s and 1660s, Margaret Cavendish responded to Bacon (and to Hobbes and the Royal Society, which she was the first woman to visit) by questioning some of their methods and instruments, and making a powerful case for the role of speculation, contemplation, and imagination in the "work of discovery."

## THE CAROLINE ERA, 1625–1640

When Charles I came to the throne in 1625, Lucy Hutchinson recalled, “The fools and bawds, mimics and catamites of the former court grew out of fashion.” The changed style of the court directly affected the arts and literature of the Caroline period (a name derived from *Carolus*, Latin for Charles). Charles and his French queen, Henrietta Maria, were art collectors on a large scale and patrons of such painters as Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck; the latter’s portrayal of Charles as a heroic figure of knightly romance, mounted on a splendid stallion, is included in the color insert to this volume. The conjunction of chivalric virtue and divine beauty or love, symbolized in the union of the royal couple, was the dominant theme of Caroline court masques, which were even more extravagantly hyperbolic than their Jacobean predecessors. Henrietta Maria encouraged an artistic and literary cult of platonic love, which some courtier-poets mocked in more licentiously physical terms, and others celebrated in poems and court entertainments. In *The Blazing World*, Margaret Cavendish does both, imagining the presence of several souls in one body as a “Platonic seraglio,” or harem.

The religious tensions between the Caroline Laudian church and the Puritan opposition produced something of a culture war. In 1633 Charles reissued the *Book of Sports*, originally published by his father in 1618, prescribing traditional holiday festivities and Sunday sports in every parish. Like his father, he saw these recreations as the rural, downscale equivalent of the court masque: harmless, healthy diversions for people who otherwise spent most of their waking hours hard at work. Puritans, however, regarded masques and rustic dances as occasions for sin, the maypole as a vestige of pagan phallus worship, and Sunday sports as a profanation of the Sabbath. In 1632 William Prynne staked out the most extreme Puritan position, publishing a thousand-page tirade, *Histriomastix: The Player’s Scourge*, against stage plays, court masques, maypoles, Laudian church rituals, stained glass windows, mixed dancing, and



other outrages, all of which he associated with licentiousness, effeminacy, and the seduction of popish idolatry. As punishment for this cultural critique, Prynne was stripped of his academic degrees, ejected from the legal profession, set in the pillory, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He also had his books burned and his ears cut off. The severity of the punishment indicates the perceived danger of Prynne's book, and the inextricability of literary and cultural affairs from politics.

Milton's astonishingly virtuosic early poems also respond to the tensions of the 1630s. Milton repudiated both courtly aesthetics and Prynne's wholesale prohibitions, developing reformed versions of pastoral, masque, and hymn. In "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," the birth of Christ coincides with a casting out of idols and the flight of false gods, stanzas that suggest contemporary Puritan resistance to Laudian policies. Milton's magnificent funeral elegy "Lycidas" firmly rejects the poetic career of the Cavalier poet who disregards high artistic ambition to "sport with Amaryllis in the shade / Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair." The poem also vehemently denounces the establishment clergy, ignorant and greedy "blind mouths" who rob their flocks of spiritual nourishment.



**King Charles at Prayer.** This frontispiece from *Eikon Basilike* (Latin for Portrait of the King) represents the praying king as a Christlike martyr surrounded by allegorical representations of virtue under trial. The left background shows a rock besieged by waves in a storm, surmounted with a Latin caption reading "Triumphing unmoved." The left foreground displays palm trees with weights hung to their branches, which was supposed to make them grow more vigorously: the Latin caption reads "Virtue grows under burdens." A shaft of light pierces the storm clouds to illuminate Charles's head, with the caption "More clear out of the shadows." Wearing his coronation robes, Charles is nonetheless shown turning away from this turmoil, having cast aside an earthly crown, labeled "Vanity," to grasp a crown of thorns, labeled "Grace." Set before him is a "treatise of Christ" and a Bible reading "In your words, my hope." Charles is receiving a

vision from heaven of the immortal crown, "Blessed and Eternal," with which his supporters believed God would reward him. Published within days of the king's execution, *Eikon Basilike* was an immediate best seller. In 1649 alone, thirty-five editions were published in England and twenty-five elsewhere in Europe.

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## THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA, 1640–1660

Early in the morning on January 30, 1649, Charles Stuart, the dethroned king Charles I, set off across St. James Park for his execution, surrounded by a heavy guard. He wore two shirts because the weather was frigid, and he did not want the thousands who had gathered to watch him be beheaded to think he was shivering with fear. The black-draped scaffold had been erected just outside James I's elegant Banqueting House, inside of which so many court masques had celebrated the might of the Stuart monarchs and assured them of their people's love and gratitude. To those who could not attend, newsbooks provided eyewitness accounts of the dramatic events of the execution, as they had of Charles's trial the week before. Contemporary poets registered the enormity of the execution as well. The royalist Katherine Philips asked "what noble eye could see (and careless pass) / The dying lion kicked by every ass?" Marvell's famously ambivalent celebration of Oliver Cromwell in "An Horatian Ode" includes a remarkable description of the "tragic scaffold" around which "armed bands / Did clap their bloody hands" as Charles tried "the axe's edge."

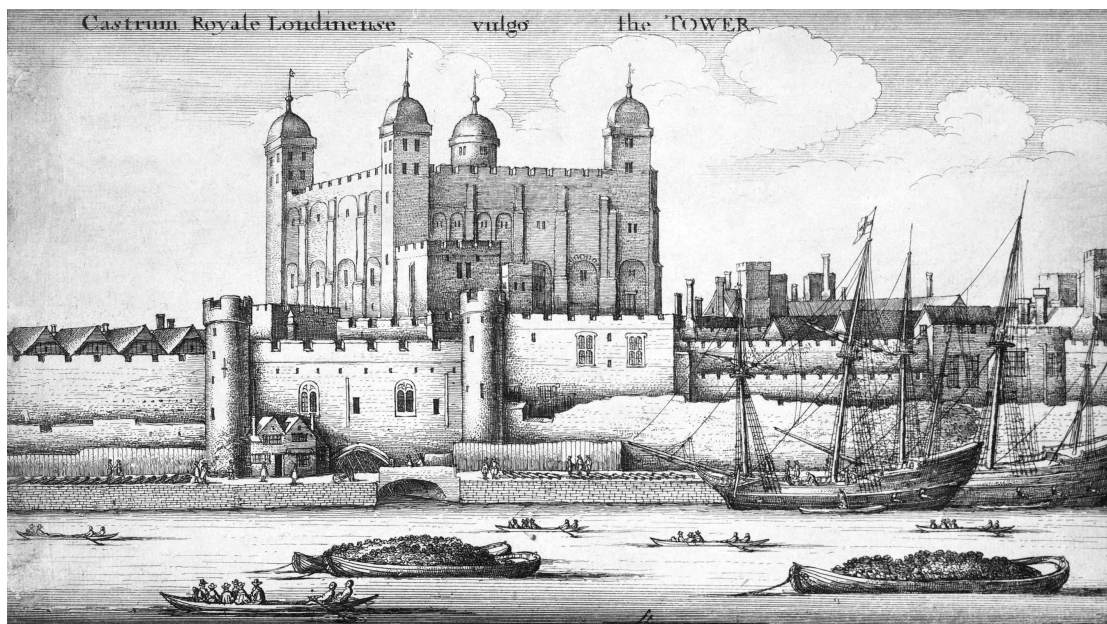
The execution of Charles I was understood at the time, and is still seen by many historians today, as a watershed event in English history. How did it come to pass? Historians do not agree over what caused "the English revolution," or, as it is alternatively called, the English Civil Wars. Some argue that the conflict was largely religious, others that long-term changes in English society and the English economy led to rising social tensions and eventually to violent conflict. New capitalist modes of production in agriculture, industry, and trade were often incompatible with older feudal norms and agrarian modes of production. The gentry—an affluent, highly educated class below the nobility but above the artisans, mechanics, and yeomen—played an increasingly important part in national affairs, as did the rich merchants in London; but the traditional social hierarchies failed to grant them the economic, political, and religious

freedoms they believed they deserved. The guild democracy movement also achieved successes in the period, particularly among transport workers like the Thames watermen who democratized their company in the early 1640s. Another group of historians, the “revisionists,” emphasize instead short-term and avoidable causes of the war—unlucky chances, personal idiosyncrasies, and poor decisions made by a small group of overly influential individuals.

Whatever caused the outbreak of hostilities, there is no doubt that the twenty-year period between 1640 and 1660 saw the emergence of concepts that would be central to bourgeois liberal thought for centuries to come: religious toleration, separation of church and state, freedom from press censorship, popular sovereignty, and heightened nationalism and imperialism. These concepts developed out of bitter disputes centering on three fundamental questions: What is the ultimate source of political power? What kind of church government is laid down in scripture, and therefore ought to be settled in England, and what should be the relation between the church and the state? What is England’s role vis-à-vis other nations and powers, particularly on the sea, in trade, and in the race for colonies? The theories that evolved in response to these questions contained the seeds of much that is familiar in modern thought, mixed with much that is forbiddingly alien. The participants in these disputes were not attempting to predict the shape of modern liberalism; instead, they were responding powerfully to the most important problems and competitions of their day. The need to find the right answers was particularly urgent for the Millenarians among them, who, interpreting the upheavals of the time through the lens of the apocalyptic book of Revelation, believed that their day was very near to being the last day of all. Others, like the Diggers, fought for communal land ownership and the abolishment of private property.

When the so-called Long Parliament convened in 1640, it did not plan to execute a monarch or even to start a war. It did, however, want to secure its rights in the face of Charles’s absolutist tendencies. Refusing merely to approve taxes and go home, as Charles would have wished, the Long Parliament insisted that it could

remain in session until its members agreed to disband. Then it set about abolishing extralegal taxes and courts, reining in the bishops' powers, and arresting (and eventually trying and executing) two of the king's ministers—Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, and Archbishop William Laud. The collapse of effective royal government meant that the machinery of press censorship, which had been a Crown responsibility, no longer restrained the printing of explicit commentary on contemporary affairs of state. As Parliament debated, therefore, presses poured forth a flood of treatises arguing vociferously on all sides of the questions about church and state, creating a lively public forum for political discussion where none had existed before. The suspension of censorship permitted the development of weekly newsbooks, the forerunners of modern newspapers; they reported, and editorialized on, current domestic events from varying political and religious perspectives.



**The Tower of London** as seen from the River Thames in 1647. From an engraving by Wenceslaus Hollar.

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As the rift widened between Parliament and the king in 1641, Charles sought to arrest five members of Parliament for treason, and Londoners rose in arms against him. The king fled to York, while the

queen escaped to the Continent. Negotiations for compromise broke down over the issues that would derail them at every future stage: control of the army and the church. On July 12, 1642, Parliament voted to raise an army, and on August 22 the king stood before a force of two thousand soldiers on horse and foot at Nottingham, unfurled his royal standard, and summoned his liegemen to his aid. Civil war had begun. Regions of the country, cities, towns, social classes, and even families found themselves painfully divided. Both John Milton and Lucy Hutchinson, for example, had relatives fighting on the other side of the war, and the royalist Katherine Philips was married to a Parliamentarian. The king set up court and an alternative parliament in Oxford, to which many in the House of Lords and some in the House of Commons transferred their allegiance.

In the First Civil War (1642–46), Parliament and the Presbyterian clergy that supported it had limited aims. They hoped to secure the rights of the House of Commons to limit the king's power over the army and the church—but not to depose him—and to settle Presbyterianism as the national established church. As Puritan armies moved through the country, fighting at Edgehill, Marston Moor, Naseby, and elsewhere, they also frequently undertook a crusade to stamp out idolatry in English churches, smashing religious images and stained glass windows and lopping off the heads of statues, much as an earlier generation had done at the time of the English Reformation. Their ravages are still visible in English churches and cathedrals.

But the Puritans were not a homogeneous group, as the 1643 Toleration Controversy revealed. The Presbyterians wanted a national Presbyterian church, with dissenters punished and silenced as before. But Congregationalists, Independents, Baptists, and other separatists opposed a national church and pressed for some measure of toleration, for themselves at least. In 1641 the Independent Katherine Chidley wrote that she knew “of no true Divinity that teacheth men to be Lords over the Conscience,” and the religious radical Roger Williams, just returned from New England, argued that Christ mandated the complete separation of church and state and

the civic toleration of those following all religions, including Roman Catholics, Jews, and Muslims. Yet to most people, the civil war itself seemed to confirm that people of different faiths could not coexist peacefully. Thus while sects continued to proliferate—Seekers, Finders, Antinomians, Fifth Monarchists, Quakers, Muggletonians, Ranters—even the most broad-minded of the age often attempted to draw a line between what was acceptable and what was not. Predictably, their lines failed to coincide. In *Areopagitica* (1644), John Milton argues vigorously against pre-publication press censorship and for toleration of most Protestants—but for him, Catholics were beyond the pale. Robert Herrick regarded Catholic rites—and even some pagan ones—indulgently, but could not stomach the zeal of the godly.

In 1648, after a period of negotiation and a brief Second Civil War, the king's army was definitively defeated. His supporters were captured or fled into exile, losing position and property. Yet Charles, imprisoned on the Isle of Wight, remained a threat. He was a natural rallying point for those disillusioned by parliamentary rule—many people disliked Parliament's legal but heavy taxes even more than they had disliked the king's illegal but lighter ones. Charles repeatedly attempted to escape, and was accused of trying to open the realm to a foreign invasion. Some powerful leaders of the victorious New Model Army took drastic action. They expelled from the House of Commons royalists and Presbyterians who still wanted to come to an accommodation with the king, and abolished the House of Lords. With consensus ensured by the purgation of dissenting viewpoints, the army brought the king to trial for high treason in the Great Hall of Westminster. There were dissenters, including from the Parliamentary side. Most famously, the commander in chief of the army, Thomas Fairfax, refused to participate in the king's trial. On the day of sentencing (January 27), when the president of the court declared that Parliament was trying the king in the name of "the commons and people of England," Anne Fairfax, Thomas Fairfax's wife, cried out from the gallery, "Not half, nor a quarter of the people." "Oliver Cromwell," she added, "is a rogue and a traitor."



After the king's execution, the Rump Parliament, the part of the House of Commons that had survived the purge, immediately established a new government "in the way of a republic, without king or House of Lords." The new state was extremely fragile. Royalists and Presbyterians fiercely resented their exclusion from power and pronounced the execution of the king a sacrilege. The Rump Parliament and army leaders were at odds with the army rank and file, who argued that voting rights ought not be restricted to men of property. The Levellers, led by John Lilburne, called for suffrage for all adult males. An associated but more radical group, called the Diggers or True Levellers, pushed for economic reforms to match the political ones. Their spokesman, Gerrard Winstanley, wrote eloquent manifestos developing a Christian communist program that included abolishing private property. The lords of manors, he argued, "hold title to the Commons by no stronger hold than the King's will, whose head is cut off." Meanwhile, Millenarians and Fifth Monarchists (who took their name from the "fifth monarchy" prophesied in the Bible) wanted political power vested in the regenerate "saints," in preparation for the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth foretold in the biblical book of Revelation. Quakers, having turned to the light that shines within, claimed to live in unity with the divine. They defied both state and church authority by refusing to take oaths, by preaching incendiary sermons in open marketplaces, and by arguing for the spiritual equality of men and women. Most alarming of all, and out of proportion to their scant numbers, were the Ranters, who believed (or were said to believe) that because God dwelt within them none of their acts could be sinful. Notorious for sexual license and for public nudity, they got their name from their deliberate blasphemy and penchant for rambling prophecy. The most active Ranter, Abiezer Coppe, was arrested in January 1650 on charges of blasphemy and treason, and his "mad and blasphemous" pamphlets were "burnt by the Hand of the Hangman, at the New Palace Yard, at Westminster; the Exchange, in Cheapside; and at the Market Place in Southwark." In addition to internal disarray, the new state faced serious external threats. After Charles I's execution, the Scots and the Irish—who had not been consulted about the trial—proclaimed

his eldest son, Prince Charles, the new king. The prince, exiled on the Continent, was attempting to enlist the support of a major European power for an invasion.

The formidable Oliver Cromwell, now undisputed leader of the army, crushed external threats, including rebellions in Ireland and Scotland. The Irish war was especially bloody, as Cromwell's army massacred the Catholic natives in a frenzy of religious hatred. The civil war was funded in part by the "Adventurers Act," which was initially conceived as a way of raising funds to suppress the Irish rebellion of 1641. The act invited people to invest money in exchange for lands that would be confiscated from rebels in Ireland. (The English government set aside 2.5 million acres of the island's 20.9 million acres for this purpose.) Both king and Parliament supported the bill, but its true cost was realized during Cromwell's conquest of Ireland in 1649–53, when a large proportion of the native population was killed, and as many as 50,000 people were transported as indentured laborers to English colonies in North America and the Caribbean. The act also formed the basis for the 1652 Act for the Settling of Ireland, in which the land of nearly all Catholic landowners was confiscated and divided among English soldiers and adventurers. When trade rivalries erupted with the Dutch over control of shipping lanes in the North Sea and the English Channel, the new republic was again victorious. The 1651 Navigation Act constituted the beginning of a system of regulated imperial commerce. Yet the domestic situation remained unstable. Given popular disaffection and the unresolved disputes between Parliament and the army, the republic's leaders dared not call new elections. In 1653 power effectively devolved upon Cromwell, who was sworn in as Lord Protector for life under England's first written constitution. Many property owners considered Cromwell the only hope for stability, while others, including John Milton, saw him as a champion of religious liberty. Still others, including Lucy and John Hutchinson, saw his status as "Lord Protector" as a betrayal of the cause for which they had fought. In the words of Lucy Hutchinson, the "poison of ambition" had "ulcerated Cromwell's heart." Although persecution of Quakers and Ranters continued, Cromwell sometimes intervened

to mitigate the lot of the Quakers. He also began a program to readmit Jews to England, partly in the interests of trade, but also to open the way for their conversion, supposedly a precursor of the Last Day as prophesied in the book of Revelation. In 1654 Cromwell's "Western Design" failed in its attempt to wrest Hispaniola from the Spanish, but it succeeded in conquering Jamaica. Over the next century, Jamaica would eclipse Barbados as the profit center of the British Empire: a sugar plantation colony based on the labor of enslaved Africans. By 1657, when Cromwell rechartered the East India company and commenced trade with China, more than twenty thousand enslaved Africans had been imported into English colonies.



**Ranters.** This woodcut from *The Ranters Ranting* (1650) depicts adherents to the sect in various acts of sexual license, mocking their claims to radical egalitarianism and communalism.

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When Oliver Cromwell died in 1658, his son, Richard, was appointed in his place. Richard, however, had inherited none of his father's leadership qualities. In April 1660, General George Monck succeeded in calling elections for a new "full and free" Parliament,

open to supporters of the monarchy as well as of the republic. The new Parliament immediately recalled the exiled prince, officially proclaiming him King Charles II on May 8, 1660. The period that followed is therefore called the Restoration: it saw the restoration of the monarchy and with it the royal court, the established Church of England, and the professional theater.

Over the next few years, the new regime executed some of the regicides that had participated in Charles I's trial and execution, and harshly repressed radical Protestants. (The Baptist John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* in prison.) Yet Charles II, who came to the throne at the invitation of Parliament, could not lay claim to absolute power as his father had done. After his accession, Parliament retained its legislative supremacy and complete power over taxation, and exercised some control over the king's choice of counselors. It assembled by its own authority, not by the king's mandate. During the Restoration years, the journalistic commentary and political debates that had first flourished in the 1640s remained forceful and open, and the first modern political parties developed out of what had been the royalist and republican factions in the civil war. In London and in other cities, the merchant classes, filled with Dissenters, retained their powerful economic leverage. Although the English revolution was apparently dismantled in 1660, its long-term effects profoundly changed English institutions and English society. Cromwell's expansion of the navy had also established England as a formidable colonial power, an advantage that Charles II exploited. Early in his reign, he granted a charter to the Company of Royal Adventurers of England, which, led by his younger brother James, Duke of York (later King James II), benefited from a monopoly on British trade with West Africa, including the trade in enslaved Africans. After Charles II's forces captured "New Netherland" during the Anglo-Dutch wars of the 1660s, the king gave the colony to this same brother, renaming it "New York" in his honor.

## LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1640–1660

The English Civil Wars were disastrous for all aspects of English life, including the theater. One of Parliament's first acts after hostilities began in 1642 was to abolish public plays and sports for "too commonly expressing lascivious mirth and levity." Some drama continued to be written and published—Margaret Cavendish wrote dozens of plays during the Interregnum—but performances were rare, and would-be theatrical entrepreneurs had to exploit loopholes in the prohibitions by describing their works as "operas" and by mounting semiprivate productions.

As the king's government collapsed, so too did the patronage relationships centered on the court. Many leading poets were staunch royalists, or Cavaliers, who suffered considerably in the war years. Robert Herrick lost his church employment; Richard Lovelace was imprisoned; Margaret Cavendish went into exile. With their usual networks of manuscript circulation disrupted, many royalist writers printed their verse. Volumes of poetry by Thomas Carew, John Denham, Richard Lovelace, and Robert Herrick appeared in the 1640s. Their poems, some dating from the 1620s or 1630s, celebrate the courtly ideal "of the good life: good food, plenty of wine, good verse, hospitality, and high-spirited loyalty, especially to the king." One characteristic Cavalier genre was the love lyric, often with a *carpe diem* theme. In Herrick's case especially, apparent ease and frivolity mask a frankly political subtext. While the Puritans excoriated May Day celebrations, harvest-home festivities, and other time-honored holidays and "sports" as unscriptural, idolatrous, or frankly pagan, for Herrick, these pastimes sustained a community. This idealized community strove neither for ascetic perfection nor for equality among social classes, but knew the value of pleasure in cementing social harmony and incorporating everyone—rich and poor, unlettered and learned—into one social body, much as the established church had traditionally tried to do.

As they faced defeat in the 1640s and 1650s, the Cavaliers wrote movingly of the relationship between love and honor, of fidelity under duress, of like-minded friends sustaining one another in a hostile environment. They presented themselves as amateurs, writing verse in the midst of a life devoted to more important matters: war, love, the king's service, the endurance of loss. Rejecting the radical Protestant emphasis on the "inner light," which they considered merely a pretext for presumptuousness and violence, Cavalier poets cultivated deliberately unidiosyncratic, even self-deprecating poetic personae. Thus the poems of Richard Lovelace express sentiments that he represents not as the unique insights of an isolated genius, but as principles easily grasped by all honorable men, and enjoyments reserved for their timeless privilege. When in "The Vine" Herrick relates a wet dream, he laughs not only at himself, but at those who mistake their own fantasies for divine inspiration.

During the 1650s, royalists wrote lyric poems in places far removed from the hostile centers of parliamentary power. In Wales, Henry Vaughan wrote religious verse expressing his intense longing for past eras of innocence and for the perfection of heaven or the millennium. Also in Wales, Katherine Philips wrote and circulated manuscript poems that celebrate female friends in terms usually reserved for male friendships and that question the ethics of the regicide and commonwealth. "Hath Charles so broke God's laws," she asks in one poem, that "he must not have / A quiet crown, nor yet a quiet grave?" The publication of her poems after the Restoration brought Philips considerable celebrity as "the Matchless Orinda." (Orinda was the classical name she gave to herself in her poetry.) Richard Crashaw, an exile in Paris and Rome, and a convert to Roman Catholicism, wrote lush religious poetry that attempted to reveal the spiritual by stimulating the senses. Margaret Cavendish, who also spent the Interregnum in exile, published a book of poems and a book of philosophy when she returned to England temporarily in 1653 and an astounding amount of work after the Restoration.

Several prose works by royalist sympathizers became classics in their respective genres. Thomas Hobbes, the most important English philosopher of the period, developed his materialist philosophy and psychology during his exile in Paris. His *Leviathan* (1651) presented his unflinching defense of absolute sovereignty based on a theory of social contract. The revolutionary era gave new impetus to all kinds of writing, including by women and non-elites. The circumstances of war placed women in novel, occasionally dangerous, situations, giving them unusual events to describe and prompting self-discovery, creativity, and innovation. The autobiographies of the royalists Lady Anne Halkett and Margaret Cavendish, published after the Restoration, report their experiences and their sometimes daring activities during the civil wars. Lucy Hutchinson's memoir of her husband, Colonel John Hutchinson, narrates much of the history of the times from a republican point of view, as do her epic poem on Genesis, *Order and Disorder*, and her elegies, which mourn both her husband and the cause for which he fought. Leveller women presented petitions and manifestos in support of their imprisoned husbands and of their cause. Women petitioned Parliament for many causes, including their own political rights, in astounding numbers. They also registered their demands in print. The widespread belief that the Holy Spirit was moving in unexpected ways encouraged a number of women prophets, including Anna Trapnel, Mary Cary, and Lady Eleanor Davies. Their published prophecies often carried strong political critiques of Charles or of Cromwell. Authorized by the Quaker belief in the spiritual equality of women and men, and by the conviction that all persons should testify to what the inner light communicates to them, Quaker women came into their own as preachers and, occasionally, as writers of tracts. Many of their memoirs, such as Dorothy Waugh's "Relation," were originally published to call attention to their sufferings, and to inspire other Quakers to similar feats of moral fortitude.

While most writers during this period were royalists, some of the best, including Andrew Marvell, John Milton, and Lucy Hutchinson, sided with the republic. Marvell wrote most of the poems for which

he is still remembered in the early 1650s while at Nunappleton, tutoring the daughter of the retired parliamentary general Thomas Fairfax; in 1657 he joined his friend Milton in the office of Cromwell's Latin Secretariat. Marvell's love poems and pastorals seem to register the conflict of civil war: older convictions about ordered harmony give way to unresolved or unresolvable oppositions—some playful, some painful. In his country house poem *Upon Appleton House*, even agricultural practices associated with regular changes of the season, like the flooding of fallow fields, become emblems of unpredictability, reversal, and category confusion. In other poems Marvell eschews an authoritative poetic persona in favor of speakers who seem limited or even a bit unbalanced: a mower who argues for the values of pastoral with disconcerting belligerence, a nymph who seems to exemplify virginal innocence but also immature self-absorption and possibly unconscious sexual perversity. Marvell's finest political poem, "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland," celebrates Cromwell's providential victories even while inviting sympathy for the executed king and warning about the potential dangers of Cromwell's meteoric rise to power.

A promising, prolific young poet in the 1630s, Milton committed himself to the English republic as soon as the conflict between the king and Parliament began to take shape. His loyalty to the revolution remained unwavering, despite his disillusion when it failed to realize his ideals: religious toleration for all Protestants, and the free circulation of ideas without prior censorship. First as a self-appointed adviser to the state, then as its official defender, Milton addressed the great issues at stake in the 1640s and the 1650s. In a series of treatises he argued for church disestablishment and for the removal of bishops; for a republican government based on natural law and popular sovereignty; for the right of the people to dismiss their rulers from office and even execute them; and, most controversial even to his usual allies, in favor of divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. Milton was a Puritan, but both his theological heterodoxies and his poetic vision mark him as a distinctly unusual one.



During his years as a political polemicist, Milton also wrote several sonnets, revising that small, love-centered genre to accommodate large private and public topics: a Catholic massacre of proto-Protestants in the foothills of Italy; the agonizing questions posed by his blindness; various threats to intellectual and religious liberty. In 1645 he published his collected English and Latin poems as a counterstatement to the royalist volumes of the 1640s. Yet he wrote his most ambitious poetry when the war was over. Milton probably wrote some part of *Paradise Lost* in the late 1650s and completed it after the Restoration, encompassing in it all he had thought, read, and experienced of tyranny, political controversy, evil, deception, love, and the need for companionship. His cosmic blank-verse poem about the fall of humanity assimilates and critiques the epic tradition as well as Milton's entire intellectual and literary heritage, classical and Christian. Yet unlike earlier epics, *Paradise Lost* centers not on martial heroes but on a domestic couple who must discover how to live a good life day by day, in Eden and later in the fallen world, amid intense emotional pressures and the seductions of evil.

Lucy Hutchinson is best known for her *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, an account of the English Civil Wars written during the period but not printed until 1806. Yet Hutchinson was also the first person to translate Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) from Latin into English, and the author of a magisterial epic poem on Genesis entitled *Order and Disorder*. Hutchinson wrote *Order and Disorder* in the years surrounding the collapse of the republican cause. "Whatever mortals' vain endeavors be," she wrote in the opening canto, "They must be broken who with power contend." Yet her faith in God's providence includes the ultimate vindication of what she calls the "little church," and the epic is rife with political commentary; in *Order and Disorder*, God always "cuts the bloody tyrant down." It is possible that the poem's outspoken republicanism prevented it from being published in the 1660s, when it circulated in manuscript. Like Milton, Hutchinson proclaims both divine inspiration—"My ravished soul a pious ardour

fires"—and poetic ambition in the opening lines of her poem. The "poetic fables" she seeks to overturn, however, seem to include Milton's own, as when she writes that she (unlike Milton) will not "dare t'invent" an account of the angels' "rebellion and their overthrow," hewing instead to what "that light [of scripture] doth show." Yet her account of the creation of the universe is infused with Lucretian materialism, and she offers a bracing analysis of women's punishment for the Fall that extends far beyond the few lines devoted to the topic in Genesis. *Order and Disorder* was first published in its entirety in 2001, cementing Hutchinson's reputation as one of the finest, and most politically committed, poets of the era. In the series of elegies she wrote after her husband's death, Hutchinson expresses not only her personal grief and thwarted desire, but her unvanquished commitment to what she called "the grand quarrel."

Seventeenth-century poetry, prose, and drama retain their hold on readers because so much of it is so very good, fusing intellectual power, emotional passion, and extraordinary linguistic and formal artfulness. Poetry in this period ranges over an astonishing variety of topics and modes: highly erotic celebrations of sexual desire; passionate declarations of faith and doubt; lavishly embroidered paeans to friends and benefactors; tough-minded assessments of social and political institutions; fanciful imaginations of life beyond what the naked eye (and human-made instrument) can see. English dramatists were at the height of their powers, situating characters of unprecedented complexity in plays sometimes remorselessly satiric, sometimes achingly moving. In these years English prose becomes a highly flexible instrument, suited to informal essays, scientific treatises, religious meditation, political polemic, biography and autobiography, journalistic reportage, and speculative fiction. Literary forms evolve for the exquisitely modulated representation of the self: dramatic monologues, memoirs, spiritual autobiographies, sermons in which the preacher takes himself for an example, and epic poets who assume the role of inspired prophet, envisioning a world created by God but shaped by human choice and imagination.

# THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1603</b> James I, <i>Basilikon Doron</i> reissued	<b>1603</b> Death of Elizabeth I; accession of James I. Plague
<b>1604</b> William Shakespeare, <i>Othello</i>	
<b>1605</b> Shakespeare, <i>King Lear</i> . Ben Jonson, <i>The Masque of Blackness</i> . Francis Bacon, <i>The Advancement of Learning</i>	<b>1605</b> Gunpowder Plot, failed effort by Roman Catholic extremists to blow up Parliament
<b>1606</b> Jonson, <i>Volpone</i> . Shakespeare, <i>Macbeth</i>	
	<b>1607</b> Founding of Jamestown colony in Virginia
<b>1609</b> Shakespeare, <i>Sonnets</i>	<b>1609</b> Galileo begins observing the heavens with a telescope

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1611</b> “King James” Bible (Authorized Version). Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i> . John Donne, <i>The First Anniversary</i> . Aemilia Lanyer, <i>Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum</i>	
<b>1612</b> Donne, <i>The Second Anniversary</i>	<b>1612</b> Death of Prince Henry
<b>1613</b> Elizabeth Cary, <i>The Tragedy of Mariam</i>	
<b>1614</b> John Webster, <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	
<b>1616</b> Jonson, <i>Works</i> . James I, <i>Works</i>	<b>1616</b> Death of Shakespeare
	<b>1618</b> Beginning of the Thirty Years War
	<b>1619</b> First African enslaved people in North America exchanged by Dutch frigate for food and supplies at Jamestown

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1620</b> Bacon, <i>Novum Organum</i>	<b>1620</b> Pilgrims land at Plymouth
<b>1621</b> Mary Wroth, <i>The Countess of Montgomery's Urania</i> and <i>Pamphilia to Amphilanthus</i> . Robert Burton, <i>The Anatomy of Melancholy</i>	<b>1621</b> Donne appointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral
<b>1623</b> Shakespeare, First Folio	
<b>1625</b> Bacon, <i>Essays</i>	<b>1625</b> Death of James I; accession of Charles I; Charles I marries Henrietta Maria
	<b>1629</b> Charles I dissolves Parliament
<b>1633</b> Donne, <i>Poems</i> . George Herbert, <i>The Temple</i>	<b>1633</b> Galileo forced by the Inquisition to recant the Copernican theory
<b>1637</b> John Milton, "Lycidas"	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1640</b> Thomas Carew, <i>Poems</i>	<b>1640</b> Long Parliament called (1640–53). Archbishop Laud impeached
<b>1640s–60s</b> Hester Pulter writes <i>Poems Breathed Forth by the Nobel Hadassas</i> , which would not be published until 2014	
<b>1642</b> Thomas Browne, <i>Religio Medici</i> . Milton, <i>The Reason of Church Government</i>	<b>1642</b> First Civil War begins (1642–46). Parliament closes the theaters
<b>1643</b> Milton, <i>The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce</i>	<b>1643</b> Accession of Louis XIV of France
<b>1644</b> Milton, <i>Areopagitica</i>	
<b>1645</b> Milton, <i>Poems</i> . Edmund Waller, <i>Poems</i>	<b>1645</b> Archbishop Laud executed. Royalists defeated at Naseby
<b>1648</b> Robert Herrick, <i>Hesperides</i> and <i>Noble Numbers</i>	<b>1648</b> Second Civil War. “Pride’s Purge” of Parliament

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1649</b> Milton, <i>The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates</i> and <i>Eikonoklastes</i>	<b>1649</b> Trial and execution of Charles I. Republic declared. Milton becomes Latin Secretary (1649–59)
<b>1650</b> Henry Vaughan, <i>Silex Scintillans</i> (Part II, 1655)	
<b>1650s</b> Lucy Hutchinson translates Lucretius's <i>De Rerum Natura</i> from Latin to English—the first person to do so	
<b>1651</b> Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> . Andrew Marvell, <i>Upon Appleton House</i> (unpublished)	
	<b>1652</b> Anglo-Dutch War (1652–54)
	<b>1653</b> Cromwell made Lord Protector
	<b>1658</b> Death of Cromwell; his

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	son Richard made Protector
<b>1660</b> Milton, <i>Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth</i>	<b>1660</b> Restoration of Charles II to throne. Royal Society founded
	<b>1662</b> Charles II marries Catherine of Braganza
	<b>1665</b> The Great Plague
<b>1666</b> Margaret Cavendish, <i>The Blazing World</i>	<b>1666</b> The Great Fire
<b>1667</b> Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (in ten books). Katherine Philips, <i>Collected Poems</i> . John Dryden, <i>Annus Mirabilis</i>	
<b>1671</b> Milton, <i>Paradise Regained</i> and <i>Samson Agonistes</i>	
<b>1674</b> Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (in twelve books)	<b>1674</b> Death of Milton



TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p><b>1679</b> The first five cantos of Lucy Hutchinson's <i>Order and Disorder</i> published anonymously</p>	
<p><b>1681</b> Marvell, <i>Poems</i>, published posthumously</p>	

# **JOHN DONNE**

## **1572–1631**

Lovers' eyeballs threaded on a string, a god who assaults the human heart with a battering ram, a teardrop that encompasses and drowns the world: John Donne's poems abound with startling images. With his strange and playful intelligence, expressed in puns, paradoxes, and the elaborately sustained metaphors known as "conceits," Donne has enthralled and sometimes enraged readers from his day to our own. The tired clichés of love poetry—cheeks like roses, hearts pierced by the arrows of love—emerge reinvigorated and radically transformed in Donne's poems, demanding from the reader an unprecedented level of mental alertness and engagement. Donne prided himself on his wit and displayed it not only in his conceits but in his grasp of learned discourses ranging from theology to alchemy, from cosmology to law. Yet for all their ostentatious intellectuality, Donne's poems never give the impression of being academic exercises. Rather, they are intense dramatic monologues in which the speaker's ideas and feelings evolve from one line to the next. Donne's prosody is equally dramatic. His jagged rhythms capture the effect of speech (and elicited from his classically minded contemporary Ben Jonson the gruff observation that "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging").

Donne began life as an outsider, and in some respects remained one. He was born in London in 1572 into a devout Roman Catholic household. The family was prosperous, but, as the poet later

remarked, none had suffered more heavily for its loyalty to the Catholic Church. As Donne wrote in a prose treatise, "I have been ever kept awake in a meditation of martyrdom." Donne was distantly related to the great Catholic humanist and martyr Sir Thomas More; two of Donne's uncles, Jesuit priests, were forced to flee the realm; and Donne's brother Henry, arrested for harboring a priest, died in prison. As a Catholic in Protestant England, growing up in decades when anti-Roman feeling reached new heights, Donne could not expect any kind of public career, nor could he receive a university degree. (He left Oxford without a degree and studied law for a time at the Inns of Court.) What Donne could reasonably expect instead was prejudice, official harassment, and crippling financial penalties. He chose not to live under such conditions. At some point in the 1590s, having returned to London after travels abroad, and having devoted some years to studying theology, Donne converted to the Church of England.

The poems that belong with certainty to this period of his life—the five satires and most of the elegies—reveal a man both fascinated by and keenly critical of English society. Four of the satires treat commonplace Elizabethan topics—obsequious courtiers, bad poets, unscrupulous lawyers, and a corrupt court—but are unique in their visceral revulsion and intellectual excitement. Donne uses striking images of pestilence, vomit, excrement, and pox to create a unique satiric world, vibrant and degenerate, in which his dramatic speakers have only to step outside the door to be inundated by all the fools and knaves in Christendom. By contrast, the third satire treats the quest for true religion—the question that preoccupied him above all others in these years—in terms that are serious, witty, and deeply felt. Donne argues that honest, doubtful searching is better than the facile acceptance of religious tradition, epitomizing his point brilliantly in the image of Truth on a craggy hill that is almost impossible to climb. Society's values are of no help whatsoever to the individual seeker—none will escape the final judgment by pleading that "A Harry, or a Martin taught [them] this." In his love elegies Donne seems intent on making up for his social powerlessness through witty representations of mastery in the bedroom and

abroad. In "Elegy 19," for example, his seduction of a naked lover becomes in a famous conceit the equivalent of exploration in America. Donne was not alone in introducing classical Roman genres such as satire and elegy to English verse, but he was unmatched in his skill.



**Donne in His Shroud.** Shortly before his death in 1631, Donne posed in the shroud in which he would be buried. The resulting engraving, by Martin Droeshout, is the frontispiece of *Death's Duel* (1632).

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If Donne's conversion to the Church of England promised him security, social acceptance, and the possibility of a public career, that promise was soon to be withdrawn. In 1596–97 he participated in the Earl of Essex's military expeditions against Catholic Spain in Cádiz and the Azores (the experience prompted two remarkable poems about life at sea, "The Storm" and "The Calm"), and upon his return he became secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. This appointment should have been the beginning of a successful public career. But Donne's secret marriage in 1601 to Egerton's seventeen-year-old niece Ann More enraged Donne's employer and the bride's wealthy father; Donne was briefly imprisoned and dismissed from service. The poet was reduced to a retired country life, beset by financial insecurity and a rapidly increasing family; Ann had borne twelve children (not counting miscarriages) by the time she died in 1617 at age thirty-three. At one point, Donne wrote despairingly that while the death of a child would mean one less mouth to feed, he could not afford the burial expenses. In this bleak period, he wrote but dared not publish *Biathanatos* ("Violent Death"), a defense of suicide.

As his family grew, Donne made every effort to reinstate himself in political favor. Among other pleas for office, Donne purportedly sought to become the secretary of the Virginia Company in 1609. To win the approval of James I, he penned *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), defending the king's insistence that Catholics take the Oath of Allegiance to the English crown. This publication set an irrevocable public stamp on his renunciation of Catholicism, and Donne followed up with a satire on the Jesuits, *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611). In the same period he produced a steady stream of occasional poems for friends and patrons such as the Earl of Somerset (the king's favorite), the Countess of Bedford, and Magdalen Herbert, as well as for small coteries of courtly readers. Like most gentlemen of his era, Donne saw poetry as a polite accomplishment rather than as a trade or vocation. He thus circulated his poems in manuscript and, with few exceptions, left most of them uncollected and unpublished.

For some years, James I had urged an ecclesiastical career on Donne, denying him any other means of advancement. In 1615

Donne finally consented. He was ordained in the Church of England, and entered upon a distinguished career as court preacher, reader in divinity at Lincoln's Inn, and, eventually, dean of St. Paul's. Donne's metaphorical style, bold erudition, and dramatic wit established him as a great preacher in an age that appreciated learned sermons powerfully delivered. Preached to monarchs and courtiers, lawyers and London magistrates, city merchants and trading companies, some 160 of his sermons survive. As a distinguished Church of England clergyman, Donne had traveled an immense distance from the religion of his childhood and the adventurous life of his twenties. Yet in his sermons and late poems we find the same brilliant, idiosyncratic mind at work, refashioning his profane conceits to serve a new and higher purpose. In "Expostulation 19" he praises God as the greatest of literary stylists: "a figurative, a metaphorical God." In poems, meditations, and sermons, Donne became increasingly engaged in anxious contemplation of his own mortality. In "Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness," for example, he imagines himself spread out on his deathbed like a map showing the route to the next world. Only a few days before his death, he preached "Death's Duel," a terrifying analysis of all life as a decline toward death and dissolution which contemporaries termed his own funeral sermon. In his final illness, according to his contemporary biographer Izaak Walton, Donne had a portrait made of himself in his shroud and meditated on it daily. Meditations upon skulls as emblems of mortality were common in the period, but nothing is more characteristic of Donne than to find a way to meditate on his own skull. Walton also notes that after Donne's death, an unknown person wrote the following "epitaph with a coal on the wall over his grave":

Reader! I am to let thee know,  
Donne's body only lies below,  
For, could the grave his soul comprise.  
Earth would be richer than the skies.

Given the shape of Donne's career, it is no surprise that his poems and prose display an astonishing variety of attitudes, viewpoints, and feelings on the great subjects of love and religion. Yet this variety cannot be fully explained in biographical terms. The poet's own attempt to distinguish between Jack Donne, the young rake, and Dr. Donne, the grave and religious dean of St. Paul's, is (perhaps intentionally) misleading. We do not know the time and circumstances for most of Donne's verses, but it is clear that many of his finest religious poems predate his ordination, and it is possible that he continued to add to the love poems known as his "songs and sonnets" after he entered the church. Theological language abounds in his love poetry, and daringly erotic images in his religious verse.

Donne's "songs and sonnets" have been the cornerstone of his reputation almost since their publication in 1633. The title *Songs and Sonnets* associates them with the popular miscellanies of love poems and sonnet sequences in the Petrarchan tradition, but they directly challenge the sonnet sequences of the 1590s. Donne's collection contains only one formal sonnet, the "songs" are not notably lyrical, and Donne draws on and transforms a whole range of literary traditions concerned with love. Like Petrarch, Donne can present himself as the despairing lover of an unattainable lady ("The Funeral"). Like Ovid, he can be lighthearted, witty, cynical, and frankly lustful ("The Flea," "The Indifferent"). Like the Neoplatonists, he espouses a theory of transcendent love, but he breaks from them with his insistence on the union of physical and spiritual love. What binds these poems together, and grants them enduring power, is their compelling and dramatic immediacy. The speaker is always in the throes of intense emotion, and that emotion is constantly shifting with the turns of the poet's thought. Donne seems supremely present in these poems, standing behind their various speakers. Where Petrarchan poets exhaustively catalogue their beloved's physical features (though in highly conventional terms), Donne's speakers tell us little or nothing about the beloved woman imagined as the audience for many poems. Donne's repeated insistence that the private world of lovers is superior to the wider public world, or that it somehow contains all of that world, is understandable in light



of the many disappointments of his career. Yet he also threw himself headlong into secular life, and later into the very visible role of preacher.

Donne was long grouped with Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Marvell, Thomas Traherne, and Abraham Cowley under the heading of "Metaphysical poets." The expression was first employed by critics like Samuel Johnson and William Hazlitt, who found the intricate conceits and self-conscious learning of these poets incompatible with poetic beauty and sincerity. Early in the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot sought to restore their reputation, attributing to them a unity of thought and feeling that had since their time been lost. There was, however, no formal "school" of Metaphysical poetry, and the characteristics ascribed to it by later critics pertain chiefly to Donne. Like Ben Jonson, John Donne had an immense influence on the succeeding generation, but he remains a singular figure.

## ***FROM SONGS AND SONNETS***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
Donne's love poems were written over nearly two decades, beginning around 1595; they were not published in Donne's lifetime but circulated widely in manuscript. The title *Songs and Sonnets* was supplied in the second edition (1635), which grouped the poems by kind, but neither this arrangement nor the more haphazard organization of the first edition (1633) is Donne's own. In Donne's time the term "sonnet" often meant simply "love lyric," and in fact there is only one formal sonnet in this collection. For the poems we present we follow the 1635 edition, beginning with the extremely popular poem "The Flea."  
[Return to reference 1](#)

## The Flea<sup>2</sup>

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
5 A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
And pampered<sup>o</sup> swells with one blood made of  
two,<sup>3</sup>  
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
10 Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed and marriage temple is;  
Though parents grudge, and you, we are met,  
And cloistered<sup>4</sup> in these living walls of jet.<sup>o</sup>  
15 Though use<sup>o</sup> make you apt to kill me,<sup>5</sup>  
Let not to that, self-murder added be,  
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?  
20 Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thy self nor me the weaker now;  
'Tis true; then learn how false fears be:  
25 Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: This insect afforded a popular erotic theme for poets all over Europe, deriving from a pseudo-Ovidian medieval poem in which a lover envies the flea for the liberties it takes with his mistress's body.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The swelling suggests pregnancy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: As in a convent or monastery.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: By denying me sexual gratification.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *virginity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overfed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *black*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *habit*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Good-Morrow<sup>o</sup><sub>u</sub>

I wonder, by my troth,<sup>o</sup> what thou and I  
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then,  
But sucked on country<sup>o</sup> pleasures, childishly?  
Or snorted<sup>o</sup> we in the seven sleepers' den?<sup>1</sup>  
5 'Twas so; but<sup>o</sup> this, all pleasures fancies be.  
If ever any beauty I did see,  
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,  
Which watch not one another out of fear;  
For love all love of other sights controls,  
10 And makes one little room an everywhere.  
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown:  
Let us possess one world;<sup>2</sup> each hath one, and is  
one.

15 My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,  
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;  
Where can we find two better hemispheres,  
Without sharp North, without declining West?  
Whatever dies was not mixed equally;<sup>3</sup>  
20 If our two loves be one, or thou and I  
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Cave in Ephesus where, according to legend, seven Christian youths hid from pagan persecutors and slept for 187

- years.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Our world” in many manuscripts.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Scholastic philosophy taught that when the elements were imperfectly mixed (“not mixed equally”), matter was mutable and mortal; conversely, when the elements were perfectly mixed, matter was immutable and hence immortal.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *morning greeting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *good faith*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unsophisticated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *snored*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *except for*[Return to reference °](#)

## Song

Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root,<sup>1</sup>  
Tell me where all past years are,  
Or who cleft the Devil's foot,  
Teach me to hear mermaids<sup>o</sup> singing,  
5 Or to keep off envy's stinging,  
And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou beest born to strange sights,  
10 Things invisible to see,  
Ride ten thousand days and nights,  
Till age snow white hairs on thee,  
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me  
All strange wonders that befell thee,  
15 And swear  
No where  
Lives a woman true, and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,  
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;  
20 Yet do not, I would not go,  
Though at next door we might meet;  
Though she were true when you met her,  
And last till you write your letter,  
Yet she  
25 Will be  
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The mandrake root, or mandragora, is forked like the lower part of the human body. It was thought to shriek when pulled from the ground and to kill all humans who heard it; it was also (paradoxically) thought to help women conceive.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *sirens*[Return to reference °](#)



# The Sun Rising

5            Busy old fool, unruly sun,  
             Why dost thou thus  
Through windows and through curtains call on us?  
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?  
             Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide  
             Late schoolboys and sour prentices,  
             Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,<sup>1</sup>  
             Call country ants to harvest offices;<sup>2</sup>  
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,  
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

10            Thy beams, so reverend and strong  
             Why shouldst thou think?  
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,  
But that I would not lose her sight so long;  
             If her eyes have not blinded thine,  
15            Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,  
             Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine<sup>3</sup>  
             Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.  
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

20            She is all states,<sup>o</sup> and all princes I,  
             Nothing else is.  
Princes do but play us; compared to this,  
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.  
             Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,  
25            In that the world's contracted thus;  
             Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be  
             To warm the world, that's done in warming us.  
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;

## Endnotes

- Note 1: King James was fond of hunting. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Autumn chores. "Country ants": farm drudges. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The India of "spice" is the East Indies; that of "mine" (gold), the West Indies. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: According to the old Ptolemaic astronomy, the earth was the center of the sun's orbit, and the sun's motion was contained within its sphere. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *nations* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Indifferent

I can love both fair and brown,<sup>1</sup>  
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want  
betrays,  
Her who loves lonesome best, and her who masks  
and plays,  
Her whom the country formed, and whom the town,  
Her who believes, and her who tries,<sup>o</sup>  
5 Her who still<sup>o</sup> weeps with spongy eyes,  
And her who is dry cork, and never cries;  
I can love her, and her, and you, and you,  
I can love any, so she be not true.

Will no other vice content you?  
10 Will it not serve your turn to do as did your mothers?  
Or have you all old vices spent, and now would find  
out others?  
Or doth a fear that men are true torment you?  
O we are not, be not you so;  
Let me, and do you, twenty know.  
15 Rob me, but bind me not, and let me go.  
Must I, who came to travail thorough<sup>2</sup> you,  
Grow your fixed subject, because you are true?

Venus heard me sigh this song,  
And by love's sweetest part, variety, she swore,  
20 She heard not this till now; and that it should be so  
no more.  
She went, examined, and returned ere long,  
And said, Alas, some two or three  
Poor heretics in love there be,  
Which think to 'stablish dangerous constancy.

But I have told them, Since you will be true,  
You shall be true to them who are false to you.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Both blonde and brunette. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Through. "Travail": grief. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *tests* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Canonization<sup>1</sup>

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,  
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,  
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune, flout,  
With wealth your state, your mind with arts  
improve,  
5 Take you a course, get you a place,<sup>2</sup>  
Observe His Honor, or His Grace,<sup>3</sup>  
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face<sup>4</sup>  
Contemplate; what you will, approve,<sup>o</sup>  
So you will let me love.

10 Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?  
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?  
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?  
When did my colds a forward<sup>o</sup> spring remove?<sup>5</sup>  
When did the heats which my veins fill  
15 Add one man to the plaguy bill?<sup>6</sup>  
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move,  
Though she and I do love.

20 Call us what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another fly,  
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,<sup>7</sup>  
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.  
The phoenix riddle hath more wit  
By us: we two being one, are it.<sup>8</sup>  
25 So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,  
 And if unfit for tombs and hearse  
 Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;  
 30 And if no piece of chronicle<sup>o</sup> we prove,  
 We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;<sup>9</sup>  
 As well a well-wrought urn becomes<sup>o</sup>  
 The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,  
 35 And by these hymns,<sup>1</sup> all shall approve<sup>o</sup>  
 Us canonized for love:  
  
 And thus invoke us: You whom reverend love  
 Made one another's hermitage;  
 You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;  
 40 Who did the whole world's soul contract,<sup>2</sup> and  
 drove  
 Into the glasses of your eyes  
 (So made such mirrors, and such spies,<sup>o</sup>  
 That they did all to you epitomize)  
 Countries, towns, courts:<sup>3</sup> Beg from above  
 45 A pattern of your love!

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poem plays off against the Roman Catholic process of determining that certain persons are saints, proper objects of veneration and prayer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An appointment, at court or elsewhere. "Take you a course": follow some career.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pay court to some lord or bishop.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: On coins; "real" (royal) refers also to a particular Spanish coin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Petrarchan lovers traditionally sigh, weep, and are frozen because of their mistresses' neglect.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Deaths from the plague, which raged in summer, were recorded by parish in weekly lists.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Flies were emblems of transience and lustfulness; tapers (candles) attract flies to their death and also consume themselves. "Die" in the punning terminology of the period means to experience orgasm, and there was a superstition that intercourse shortened life.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
The eagle signifies strength and vision; the dove, meekness and mercy. The phoenix was a mythic Arabian bird, only one of which existed at any one time. After living five hundred years, it was consumed by fire, then rose triumphantly from its ashes a new bird. Thus it was a symbol of immortality and sometimes associated with Christ. "Eagle" and "dove" are also alchemical terms for processes leading to the rise of "phoenix," a stage in the transmutation of metals to gold.  
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Rooms" (punning on the Italian meaning of "stanza") will contain their exploits, as prose chronicle histories contain great deeds done in the world.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The lover's own poems.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An alternative meaning is "extract."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Countries, towns, courts" are objects of the verb "drove." The notion is that eyes both see and reflect the outside world, and so can contain all of it.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *try, test*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *early*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *history*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *befits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confirm*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spyglasses, telescopes*[Return to reference °](#)

## Song

Sweetest love, I do not go,  
For weariness of thee,  
Nor in hope the world can show  
A fitter love for me;  
But since that I  
5 Must die at last, 'tis best,  
To use myself in jest  
Thus by feigned deaths<sup>o</sup> to die.

Yesternight the sun went hence  
And yet is here today,  
10 He hath no desire nor sense,  
Nor half so short a way:  
Then fear not me,  
But believe that I shall make  
Speedier journeys, since I take  
15 More wings and spurs than he.

O how feeble is man's power,  
That if good fortune fall,<sup>o</sup>  
Cannot add another hour,  
Nor a lost hour recall!  
20 But come bad chance,  
And we join to't our strength,  
And we teach it art and length,  
Itself o'er us to'advance.

When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,  
25 But sigh'st my soul away,  
When thou weep'st, unkindly<sup>1</sup> kind,  
My life's blood doth decay.



30           It cannot be  
          That thou lov'st me, as thou say'st,  
          If in thine my life thou waste,  
          Thou art the best of me.

35           Let not thy divining<sup>o</sup> heart  
          Forethink me any ill,  
          Destiny may take thy part,  
          And may thy fears fulfill;  
          But think that we  
          Are but turned aside to sleep;  
          They who one another keep  
40           Alive, ne'er parted be.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This word also carries the meaning "unnaturally."[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *that is, absences*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *happen*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *prophetic*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## Air and Angels

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,  
Before I knew thy face or name;  
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,  
Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be;  
5        Still<sup>o</sup> when, to where thou wert, I came,  
Some lovely glorious nothing<sup>1</sup> I did see.  
      But since my soul, whose child love is,  
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,<sup>2</sup>  
      More subtle<sup>o</sup> than the parent is  
Love must not be, but take a body too;  
10        And therefore what thou wert, and who,  
      I bid love ask, and now  
That it assume thy body I allow,  
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.  
Whilst thus to ballast love I thought,  
15        And so more steadily to have gone,  
With wares which would sink<sup>o</sup> admiration,  
I saw I had love's pinnace<sup>o</sup> overfraught;<sup>o</sup>  
      Every thy hair for love to work upon  
Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;  
20        For, nor in nothing, nor in things  
Extreme and scatt'ring<sup>o</sup> bright, can love inhere.  
      Then as an angel, face and wings  
Of air, not pure as it, yet pure doth wear,<sup>3</sup>  
      So thy love may be my love's sphere;<sup>4</sup>  
25        Just such disparity  
As is 'twixt air and angels' purity,  
'Twixt women's love and men's will ever be.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Spiritual beauty, the true object of love in Neoplatonic philosophy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: My soul could not function unless it were in a body.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: It was commonly believed that angels, when they appeared to humans, assumed a body of air that, though pure, was less so than the angel's spiritual essence.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Each sphere in the cosmos was thought to be governed by an angel (an intelligence).[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rarefied*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overwhelm*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *small boat* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overloaded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dazzling*[Return to reference °](#)

## Break of Day<sup>1</sup>

'Tis true, 'tis day; what though it be?  
O wilt thou therefore rise from me?  
Why should we rise because 'tis light?  
Did we lie down because 'twas night?  
5 Love, which in spite of darkness brought us hither,  
Should in despite of light keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;  
If it could speak as well as spy,  
This were the worst that it could say,  
10 That being well, I fain<sup>o</sup> would stay,  
And that I loved my heart and honor so  
That I would not from him, that had them, go.

Must business thee from hence remove?  
O, that's the worst disease of love.  
15 The poor, the foul, the false, love can  
Admit, but not the busied man.  
He which hath business, and makes love, doth do  
Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

1622, 1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: An aubade, or song of the lovers' parting at dawn, this poem is unusual for Donne in having a female speaker. The poem was given a musical setting and published in 1622, in William Corkine's *Second Book of Ayers*.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *gladly* [Return to reference](#) °

## A Valediction:<sup>1</sup> Of Weeping

Let me pour forth  
My tears before thy face whilst I stay here,  
For thy face coins them, and thy stamp<sup>o</sup> they bear,  
And by this mintage they are something worth,  
For thus they be  
5 Pregnant of thee;  
Fruits of much grief they are, emblems<sup>o</sup> of more—  
When a tear falls, that thou falls which it bore,  
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a diverse<sup>o</sup>  
shore.

On a round ball  
10 A workman that hath copies by can lay  
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,  
And quickly make that, which was nothing, all;<sup>2</sup>  
So doth each tear  
Which thee doth wear,<sup>3</sup>  
15 A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,  
Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow  
This world; by waters sent from thee, my heaven  
dissolvèd so.

O more than moon,  
20 Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere;<sup>4</sup>  
Weep me not dead in thine arms, but forbear  
To teach the sea what it may do too soon.  
Let not the wind  
Example find  
To do me more harm than it purposeth;  
25 Since thou and I sigh one another's breath,

Whoe'er sighs most is cruelest, and hastes the  
other's death.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A farewell poem, one of four so titled in the *Songs and Sonnets*. Another is "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," p. 897.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, on a blank globe one can place maps of the continents and so convert "nothing" into the whole world ("all").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Which bears your image.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A star or planet with more power of attraction than the moon might not only affect tides but draw the very seas unto itself.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *image*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *symbols*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *different*[Return to reference °](#)

# A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day<sup>1</sup>

'Tis the year's midnight and it is the day's,  
Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmask;  
The sun is spent, and now his flasks<sup>2</sup>  
Send forth light squibs,<sup>o</sup> no constant rays.  
The world's whole sap is sunk;  
5 The general balm th' hydroptic<sup>3</sup> earth hath drunk,  
Whither, as to the bed's feet, life is shrunk,  
Dead and interred; yet all these seem to laugh,  
Compared with me, who am their epitaph.

Study me, then, you who shall lovers be  
10 At the next world, that is, at the next spring;  
For I am every dead thing  
In whom love wrought new alchemy.  
For his art did express<sup>o</sup>  
15 A quintessence<sup>4</sup> even from nothingness,  
From dull privations and lean emptiness.  
He ruined me, and I am re-begot  
Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not.

All others from all things draw all that's good,  
Life, soul, form, spirit, whence they being have;  
20 I, by love's limbeck,<sup>5</sup> am the grave  
Of all that's nothing. Oft a flood  
Have we two wept, and so  
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow  
To be two chaoses when we did show  
25 Care to aught<sup>o</sup> else; and often absences  
Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses.



But I am by her death (which word wrongs her)  
 Of the first nothing the elixir grown;<sup>6</sup>  
 Were I a man, that I were one  
 30 I needs must know; I should prefer,  
 If I were any beast,  
 Some ends, some means; yea plants, yea stones  
 detest  
 And love.<sup>7</sup> All, all some properties invest.  
 If I an ordinary nothing were,  
 35 As shadow, a light and body must be here.  
  
 But I am none; nor will my sun renew.  
 You lovers, for whose sake the lesser sun  
 At this time to the Goat<sup>8</sup> is run  
 To fetch new lust and give it you,  
 40 Enjoy your summer all.  
 Since she enjoys her long night's festival,  
 Let me prepare towards her, and let me call  
 This hour her vigil and her eve, since this  
 45 Both the year's and the day's deep midnight is.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
 The nocturne, or night office of the Roman Catholic Church, is a service held in the primitive church at midnight. St. Lucy's Day fell on December 13 according to the old calendar still in use in England at the time, and its vigil (the previous day and night) was the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. At this time of the year, the sun rises after 8 A.M. in the latitude of London and sets well before 4 P.M.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The stars are “flasks,” thought to store up light from the sun.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dropsical, thus insatiably thirsty. “General balm”: the supposedly life-preserving essence of all things.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The reputed fifth essence, a celestial element beyond the mundane four elements (earth, water, air, fire), thought to be latent in all things and to be a universal cure. Alchemists sought to extract it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Alembic; a vessel used in distilling.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the quintessence of that absolute nothingness that existed before the creation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Beasts have intentions; plants and even stones (like lodestones) have attractions and antipathies.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The sign of Capricorn, which the sun enters at the winter solstice; the goat is an emblem of sexual vigor.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *small fireworks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *extract*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anything*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Bait<sup>1</sup>

Come live with me and be my love,  
And we will some new pleasures prove,<sup>o</sup>  
Of golden sands and crystal brooks,  
With silken lines and silver hooks.

5 There will the river whispering run,  
Warmed by thine eyes more than the sun.  
And there the enamored fish will stay,  
Begging themselves they may betray.

10 When thou wilt swim in that live bath,  
Each fish, which every channel hath,  
Will amorously to thee swim,  
Gladder to catch thee, than thou him.

15 If thou, to be so seen, beest loath,  
By sun or moon, thou darkenest both;  
And if myself have leave to see,  
I need not their light, having thee.

20 Let others freeze with angling reeds,  
And cut their legs with shells and weeds,  
Or treacherously poor fish beset  
With strangling snare or windowy net.

Let coarse bold hands from slimy nest  
The bedded fish in banks outwrest,  
Or curious traitors, sleeve-silk flies,<sup>2</sup>  
Bewitch poor fishes' wandering eyes.

25 For thee, thou need'st no such deceit,

For thou thyself art thine own bait;  
That fish that is not caught thereby,  
Alas, is wiser far than I.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem is Donne's response to Marlowe's "Passionate Shepherd to His Love," p. 495. Another of the many responses was Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," p. 496. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Flies (for fishing) made of unraveled silk. "Curious": exquisitely made. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *try* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Apparition

When by thy scorn, O murderess, I am dead,  
And that thou thinkst thee free  
From all solicitation from me,  
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,  
5 And thee, feigned vestal,<sup>1</sup> in worse arms shall see;  
Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,<sup>o</sup>  
And he whose thou art then, being tired before,  
Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think  
Thou call'st for more,  
10 And in false sleep will from thee shrink,  
And then, poor aspen wretch,<sup>2</sup> neglected thou  
Bathed in a cold quicksilver sweat<sup>3</sup> wilt lie  
A verier<sup>o</sup> ghost than I;  
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,  
15 I had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Virgin consecrated to the Roman goddess Vesta.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Aspen leaves flutter in the slightest breeze.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sweating in terror; quicksilver (mercury) was a stock prescription for venereal disease, and sweating was part of the cure.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *flicker*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *truer*[Return to reference](#) °

## A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning<sup>1</sup>

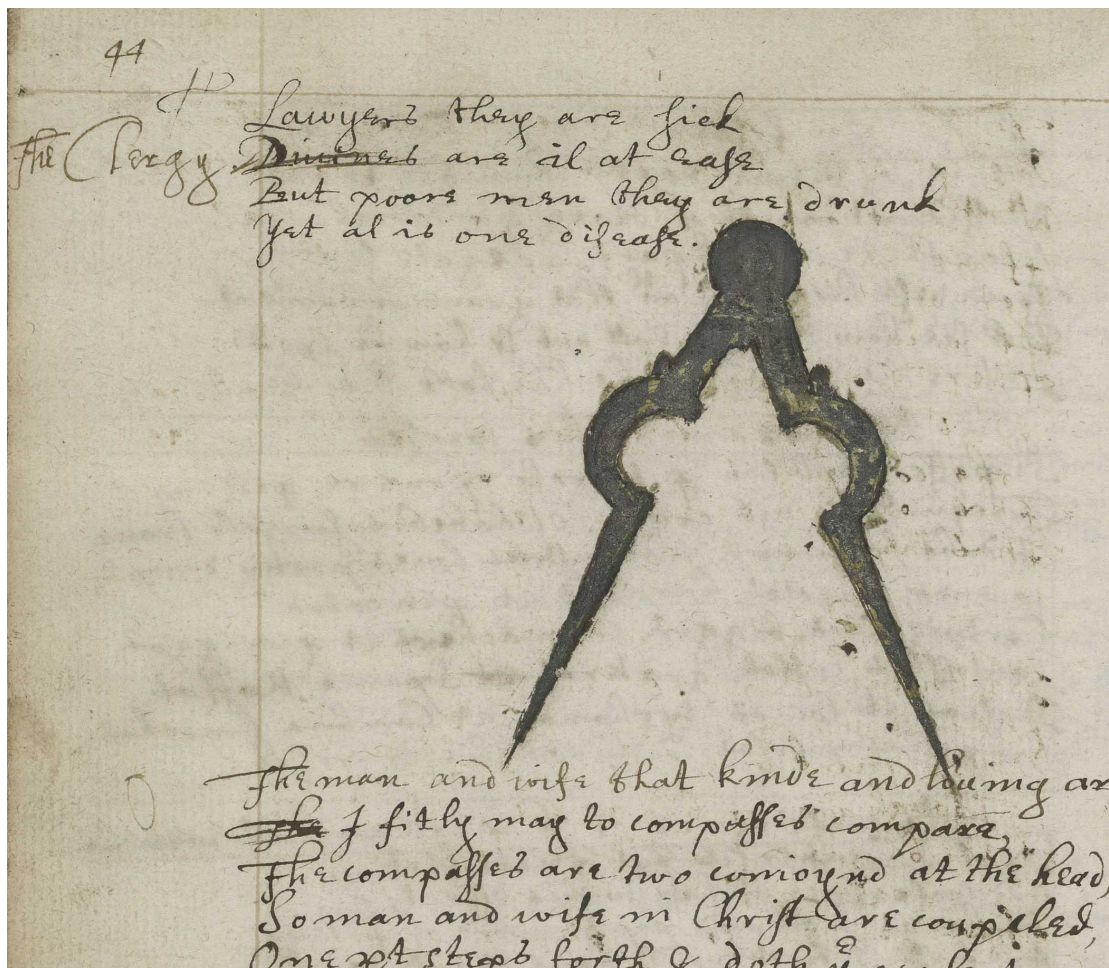
As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No;  
  
5 So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation<sup>o</sup> of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.  
  
Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did and meant;  
10 But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.<sup>2</sup>  
  
Dull sublunary<sup>3</sup> lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
15 Those things which elemented<sup>o</sup> it.  
  
But we, by a love so much refined  
That ourselves know not what it is,  
Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.  
20  
  
Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.  
  
25 If they be two, they are two so

As stiff twin compasses<sup>4</sup> are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
30 It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
35 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.

1633





**The Compass.** A manuscript poem inspired by the compass image in Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is prefaced by a drawing of a seventeenth-century compass meant to celebrate the poem's central metaphor.

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## Endnotes

- Note 1: For "valediction" see p. 893, n. 1. Izaak Walton speculated that this poem was addressed to Donne's wife on the occasion of his trip to the Continent in 1611, but there is no proof of that.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Earthquakes cause damage and were thought to be portentous. "Trepidation" (in the Ptolemaic cosmology) is an oscillation of the ninth or crystalline sphere imparted to all the inner spheres. Though a much more violent motion than an earthquake, it is neither destructive nor sinister.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Beneath the moon, therefore earthly, sensual, and subject to change.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The two legs of a geometer's or draftsman's compass.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *desecration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *composed*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Ecstasy<sup>1</sup>

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
A pregnant bank swelled up to rest  
The violet's reclining head,  
Sat we two, one another's best.

5 Our hands were firmly cemented  
With a fast balm<sup>o</sup> which thence did spring,  
Our eye-beams<sup>2</sup> twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes upon one double string;

10 So to intergraft our hands, as yet  
Was all our means to make us one,  
And pictures in our eyes<sup>3</sup> to get<sup>o</sup>  
Was all our propagation.

15 As 'twixt two equal armies Fate  
Suspends uncertain victory,  
Our souls (which to advance their state  
Were gone out) hung 'twixt her and me;

20 And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
We like sepulchral statues lay;  
All day the same our postures were,  
And we said nothing all the day.

If any, so by love refined  
That he soul's language understood,  
And by good love were grown all mind,  
Within convenient distance stood,

25 He (though he knew not which soul spake,

Because both meant, both spake the same)  
Might thence a new concoction<sup>4</sup> take,  
And part far purer than he came.

30 This ecstasy doth unperplex,  
We said, and tell us what we love;  
We see by this it was not sex;  
We see we saw not what did move;<sup>o</sup>

But as all several<sup>o</sup> souls contain  
Mixture of things, they know not what,  
35 Love these mixed souls doth mix again,  
And makes both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,  
The strength, the color, and the size  
(All which before was poor and scant)  
40 Redoubles still,<sup>o</sup> and multiplies.

When love with one another so  
Interinanimates two souls,  
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,  
Defects of loneliness controls.

45 We then, who are this new soul, know  
Of what we are composed and made,  
For th' atomies<sup>o</sup> of which we grow  
Are souls, whom no change can invade.

But O alas, so long, so far  
50 Our bodies why do we forbear?  
They are ours, though they are not we; we are  
The intelligences, they the sphere.<sup>5</sup>

We owe them thanks because they thus  
Did us to us at first convey,

55      Yielded their forces, sense, to us,  
          Nor are dross to us, but allay.<sup>6</sup>

         On man heaven's influence works not so  
          But that it first imprints the air:<sup>7</sup>  
          So soul into the soul may flow,  
 60      Though it to body first repair.<sup>8</sup>

         As our blood labors to beget  
          Spirits<sup>8</sup> as like souls as it can,  
          Because such fingers need<sup>9</sup> to knit  
          That subtle knot which makes us man,

65      So must pure lovers' souls descend  
          T' affections, and to faculties  
          Which sense may reach and apprehend;  
          Else a great prince in prison lies.

         To our bodies turn we then, that so  
          Weak men on love revealed may look;  
 70      Love's mysteries<sup>9</sup> in souls do grow,  
          But yet the body is his book.

         And if some lover, such as we,  
          Have heard this dialogue of one,<sup>1</sup>  
          Let him still mark<sup>9</sup> us; he shall see  
 75      Small change when we are to bodies gone.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: From *ekstasis* (Greek), a movement of the soul outside of the body.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Invisible shafts of light, thought of as going out of the eyes and thereby enabling one to see things.[Return to reference](#)

[2](#)

- Note 3: Reflections of each in the other's eyes, often called "making babies."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the alchemical sense of sublimation or purification.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Ptolemaic astronomy, each planet, set in a transparent "sphere" that revolved and so carried it around the earth, was inhabited by a controlling angelic "intelligence."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Dross" is an impurity that weakens metal; "allay" (alloy) strengthens it.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Astrological influences were thought to work on people through the medium of the surrounding air.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Subtle substances thought to be produced by the blood to serve as intermediaries between body and soul.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The implied comparison is with God's mysteries, which are revealed and may be read in the book of nature and the book of scripture.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Dialogue of one" because "both meant, both spake the same" (line 26).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *perspiration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beget*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *motivate us*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *continually*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *components*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *go*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *are needed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *observe*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Funeral

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm  
Nor question much  
That subtle wreath of hair which crowns my arm;  
The mystery, the sign you must not touch,  
For 'tis my outward soul,  
5 Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,  
Will leave this to control,  
And keep these limbs, her<sup>1</sup> provinces, from  
dissolution.

For if the sinewy thread<sup>2</sup> my brain lets fall  
Through every part  
10 Can tie those parts and make me one of all,  
These hairs which upward grew, and strength and  
art  
Have from a better brain,  
Can better do it; except<sup>o</sup> she meant that I  
By this should know my pain,  
15 As prisoners then are manacled, when they're  
condemned to die.

Whate'er she meant by it, bury it with me,  
For since I am  
Love's martyr, it might breed idolatry,  
If into others' hands these relics<sup>3</sup> came:  
20 As 'twas humility  
To afford to it all that a soul can do,  
So 'tis some bravery,<sup>o</sup>  
That since you would save<sup>4</sup> none of me, I bury some  
of you.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The soul's, but also the mistress's (compare "she," line 14).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The nervous system.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Body parts or other objects belonging to a saint, venerated by Roman Catholics.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: All the early printed texts read "have" (which carries sexual connotations), while many manuscripts read "save."[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *unless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *defiance*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Relic

When my grave is broke up again  
Some second guest to entertain  
(For graves have learned that woman-head<sup>o</sup>  
To be to more than one a bed),<sup>1</sup>  
And he that digs it spies  
5 A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,  
Will he not let us alone,  
And think that there a loving couple lies,  
Who thought that this device might be some way  
To make their souls, at the last busy day,<sup>2</sup>  
10 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

If this fall<sup>o</sup> in a time, or land,  
Where mis-devotion<sup>3</sup> doth command,  
Then he that digs us up will bring  
Us to the bishop and the king,  
15 To make us relics; then  
Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I  
A something else thereby;  
All women shall adore us, and some men;  
And since at such times, miracles are sought,  
20 I would have that age by this paper taught  
What miracles we harmless lovers wrought.

First, we loved well and faithfully,  
Yet knew not what we loved, nor why,  
Difference of sex no more we knew,  
25 Than our guardian angels do;  
Coming and going, we  
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;<sup>4</sup>  
Our hands ne'er touched the seals<sup>o</sup>



Which nature, injured by late law, sets free:<sup>5</sup>  
 These miracles we did: but now, alas,  
 All measure and all language I should pass,  
 Should I tell what a miracle she was.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Graves were often used to inter successive corpses, the bones of previous occupants being deposited in charnel houses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Judgment Day, when the bodies of the deceased are reunited with their souls (and the beloved comes to her lover's grave to reclaim her hair).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: False devotion, superstition—that is, Roman Catholicism.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The kisses of salutation and parting.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Human law forbids the free love permitted by nature. "Late": recent (comparatively speaking).[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *female trait*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *happen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sexual organs*[Return to reference °](#)

## A Lecture upon the Shadow

Stand still, and I will read to thee  
A lecture, Love, in love's philosophy.  
These three hours that we have spent  
Walking here, two shadows went  
Along with us, which we ourselves produced;  
5 But, now the sun is just above our head,  
We do those shadows tread  
And to brave<sup>o</sup> clearness all things are reduced.  
So, whilst our infant loves did grow,  
Disguises did and shadows flow  
10 From us and our care;<sup>o</sup> but now, 'tis not so.

That love hath not attained the high'st degree  
Which is still diligent lest others see.

Except<sup>o</sup> our loves at this noon stay,  
We shall new shadows make the other way.  
15 As the first were made to blind  
Others, these which come behind  
Will work upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.  
If our loves faint and westwardly decline,  
To me thou falsely thine  
20 And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.  
The morning shadows wear away,  
But these grow longer all the day,  
But, oh, love's day is short if love decay.

Love is a growing or full constant light,  
25 And his first minute after noon is night.

## Notes

- °: *splendid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caution*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °

## Elegy<sup>1</sup> 16. On His Mistress

By our first strange and fatal<sup>o</sup> interview,  
By all desires which thereof did ensue,  
By our long starving hopes, by that remorse<sup>o</sup>  
Which my words' masculine persuasive force  
Begot in thee, and by the memory  
5 Of hurts which spies and rivals threatened me,  
I calmly beg; but by thy father's wrath,  
By all pains which want and divorcement hath,  
I conjure thee; and all the oaths which I  
And thou have sworn to seal joint constancy  
10 Here I unswear and overswear them thus:  
Thou shalt not love by ways so dangerous.  
Temper, oh fair love, love's impetuous rage;  
Be my true mistress still, not my feigned page.<sup>2</sup>  
I'll go, and, by thy kind leave, leave behind  
15 Thee, only worthy to nurse in my mind  
Thirst to come back. Oh, if thou die before,  
My soul from other lands to thee shall soar.  
Thy (else almighty) beauty cannot move  
Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love,  
20 Nor tame wild Boreas' harshness.<sup>3</sup> Thou hast read  
How roughly he in pieces shiverèd  
Fair Orithea, whom he swore he loved.  
Fall ill or good, 'tis madness to have proved<sup>o</sup>  
Dangers unurged; feed on this flattery,  
25 That absent lovers one in th' other be.  
Dissemble nothing, not a boy, nor change  
Thy body's habit,<sup>o</sup> nor mind's; be not strange  
To thyself only; all will spy in thy face  
A blushing womanly discovering grace.  
30

Richly clothed apes are called apes, and as soon  
 Eclipsed as bright we call the moon the moon.  
 Men of France, changeable chameleons,  
 Spitals<sup>o</sup> of diseases, shops of fashions,  
 Love's fuelers<sup>4</sup> and the rightest company  
 35 Of players which upon the world's stage be,  
 Will quickly know thee, and know thee; and alas!<sup>5</sup>  
 Th' indifferent<sup>o</sup> Italian, as we pass  
 His warm land, well content to think thee page,  
 Will hunt thee with such lust and hideous rage  
 40 As Lot's fair guests were vexed.<sup>6</sup> But none of these  
 Nor spongy, hydroptic<sup>7</sup> Dutch shall thee displease  
 If thou stay here. O stay here, for, for thee,  
 England is only a worthy gallery  
 To walk in expectation, till from thence  
 45 Our greatest king call thee to his presence.<sup>8</sup>  
 When I am gone, dream me some happiness,  
 Nor let thy looks our long-hid love confess;  
 Nor praise nor dispraise me, bless nor curse  
 Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy nurse  
 50 With midnight's startings, crying out "Oh, oh!  
 Nurse, oh my love is slain, I saw him go  
 O'er the white Alps alone; I saw him, I,  
 Assailed, fight, taken, stabbed, bleed, fall, and die."  
 Augur me better chance, except dread Jove  
 55 Think it enough for me t' have had thy love.

1635

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In Latin poetry, an elegy is a discursive or reflective poem written in "elegiacs" (unrhymed couplets of alternating dactylic hexameters and pentameters). This meter was used for funeral laments and especially for love poetry. The most famous classical elegist was the Roman poet Ovid; his *Amores*, a

- collection of witty and sensual love poems, deeply influenced Donne's erotic poetry.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The speaker's mistress wanted to accompany him abroad, disguised as a page boy. Such escapades occasionally took place in real life; in 1605, Elizabeth Southwell, disguised as a page, went abroad with Sir Robert Dudley.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: God of the north wind; in *Metamorphoses* 6 Ovid describes the wild force with which Boreas abducted Orithea.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Providers of aphrodisiacs.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: May pun on "a lass." "Know": in the sexual sense.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: The inhabitants of Sodom tried to rape two angels who visited Lot in the guise of men to warn of the city's impending destruction (Genesis 19:1–11).[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Dropsical, thus insatiably thirsty.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Throne rooms commonly had antechambers (galleries) where visitors waited until the monarch was ready to see them.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *fateful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sought out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clothing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hospitals*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bisexual*[Return to reference °](#)

## Elegy 19. To His Mistress Going to Bed

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,  
Until I labor, I in labor lie.<sup>1</sup>  
The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,  
Is tired with standing though he never fight.  
Off with that girdle,<sup>o</sup> like heaven's zone<sup>o</sup> glistening,  
5 But a far fairer world encompassing.  
Unpin that spangled breastplate<sup>2</sup> which you wear  
That th' eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.  
Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime  
Tells me from you that now it is bed-time.  
10 Off with that happy busk,<sup>o</sup> which I envy,  
That still<sup>o</sup> can be and still can stand so nigh.  
Your gown going off, such beauteous state reveals  
As when from flowery meads th' hill's shadow steals.  
Off with that wiry coronet and show  
15 The hairy diadem which on you doth grow;  
Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread  
In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.  
In such white robes, heaven's angels used to be  
Received by men; thou, angel, bring'st with thee  
20 A heaven like Mahomet's paradise;<sup>3</sup> and though  
Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know  
By this these angels from an evil sprite,  
Those set our hairs, but these our flesh upright.  
License my roving hands, and let them go  
25 Before, behind, between, above, below.  
O my America! my new-found-land,  
My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,  
My mine of precious stones, my empery,<sup>o</sup>  
30 How blest am I in this discovering thee!

To enter in these bonds is to be free;  
 There where my hand is set, my seal shall be.<sup>4</sup>  
 Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee.  
 As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be,  
 To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use  
 35 Are like Atalanta's balls,<sup>5</sup> cast in men's views,  
 That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,  
 His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them.  
 Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings, made  
 For laymen, are all women thus arrayed;  
 40 Themselves are mystic books, which only we  
 (Whom their imputed grace will dignify)  
 Must see revealed.<sup>6</sup> Then since that I may know,  
 As liberally as to a midwife show  
 Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,  
 45 Here is no penance, much less innocence.<sup>7</sup>  
 To teach thee, I am naked first; why then  
 What need'st thou have more covering than a man?  
 1669

## Endnotes

- Note 1: "Labor" in the dual sense of "get to work (sexually)" and "distress."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The stomacher, an ornamental, often jeweled, covering for the chest, worn under the lacing of the bodice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A place of sensual pleasure, thought to be populated by seductive houris for the delectation of the faithful.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The jokes mingle law with sex: where he has signed a document (placed his hand) he will now place his seal; and in the bonds of her arms he will find freedom.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Atalanta, running a race against her suitor Hippomenes, was beaten when he dropped golden apples ("balls") for her to pick up. Donne reverses the story.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: By granting favors to their lovers, women impute to them grace that they don't deserve, as God, in Calvinist doctrine, imputes grace to undeserving sinners. Laymen can only look at the covers of mystic books (clothed women), but "we" elect can read them (see women naked).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Some manuscripts read: "There is no penance due to innocence." White garments would be appropriate either for the innocent virgin or for the sinner doing formal penance.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *belt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *zodiac* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bodice* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *empire* [Return to reference °](#)

**Satire 3** In satire the author holds a subject up to ridicule. Like his elegies, Donne's five verse satires were written in his twenties and are in the forefront of an effort in the 1590s (by Donne, Ben Jonson, Joseph Hall, and John Marston) to naturalize those classical forms in England. While elements of satire figure in many different kinds of literature, the great models for formal verse satire were the Roman poets Horace and Juvenal, the former for an urbanely witty style, the latter for an indignant or angry manner. While Donne's other satires call on these models, his third satire more nearly resembles those of a third Roman satirist, Persius, known for an abstruse style and moralizing manner. This work is a strenuous discussion of an acute theological problem, for the age and for Donne himself: How may one discover the true Christian church among so many claimants to that role? At the time Donne wrote "Satire 3," he was in the process of leaving the Roman Catholic Church of his heritage for the Church of England.

## Satire 3

Kind pity chokes my spleen;<sup>1</sup> brave<sup>o</sup> scorn forbids  
Those tears to issue which swell my eyelids;  
I must not laugh, nor weep<sup>o</sup> sins, and be wise:  
Can railing then cure these worn maladies?  
Is not our mistress, fair Religion,  
5 As worthy of all our souls' devotion  
As virtue was to the first blinded age?<sup>2</sup>  
Are not heaven's joys as valiant to assuage  
Lusts, as earth's honor was to them?<sup>o</sup> Alas,  
As we do them in means, shall they surpass  
10 Us in the end, and shall thy father's spirit  
Meet blind philosophers in heaven, whose merit  
Of strict life may be imputed faith,<sup>3</sup> and hear  
Thee, whom he taught so easy ways and near  
To follow, damned? O, if thou dar'st, fear this;  
15 This fear great courage and high valor is.  
Dar'st thou aid mutinous Dutch,<sup>4</sup> and dar'st thou lay  
Thee in ships, wooden sepulchers, a prey  
To leaders' rage, to storms, to shot, to dearth?<sup>o</sup>  
Dar'st thou dive seas and dungeons<sup>o</sup> of the earth?  
20 Hast thou courageous fire to thaw the ice  
Of frozen north discoveries?<sup>5</sup> And thrice  
Colder than salamanders, like divine  
Children in the oven,<sup>6</sup> fires of Spain and the line,  
Whose countries limbecks to our bodies be,  
25 Canst thou for gain bear?<sup>7</sup> And must every he  
Which cries not "Goddess!" to thy mistress, draw,<sup>o</sup>  
Or eat thy poisonous words? Courage of straw!  
O desperate coward, wilt thou seem bold, and  
To thy foes and His<sup>o</sup> (who made thee to stand

Sentinel in his world's garrison) thus yield,  
30 And for forbidden wars leave th' appointed field?<sup>8</sup>  
Know thy foes: The foul Devil (whom thou  
Strivest to please) for hate, not love, would allow  
Thee fain<sup>o</sup> his whole realm to be quit;<sup>o</sup> and as  
35 The world's all parts wither away and pass,<sup>9</sup>  
So the world's self, thy other loved foe, is  
In her decrepit wane, and thou, loving this,  
Dost love a withered and worn strumpet; last,  
Flesh (itself's death) and joys which flesh can taste  
40 Thou lovest; and thy fair goodly soul, which doth  
Give this flesh power to taste joy, thou dost loathe.  
Seek true religion. O, where? Mirreus,<sup>1</sup>  
Thinking her unhoused here, and fled from us,  
Seeks her at Rome; there, because he doth know  
45 That she was there a thousand years ago.  
He loves her rags so, as we here obey  
The statecloth<sup>2</sup> where the prince sat yesterday.  
Crantz to such brave loves will not be enthralled,  
But loves her only, who at Geneva is called  
50 Religion—plain, simple, sullen, young,  
Contemtuious, yet unhandsome; as among  
Lecherous humors,<sup>o</sup> there is one that judges  
No wenches wholesome but coarse country drudges.  
Graius stays still at home here, and because  
55 Some preachers, vile ambitious bawds, and laws  
Still new, like fashions, bid him think that she  
Which dwells with us is only perfect, he  
Embraceth her whom his godfathers will  
Tender to him, being tender, as wards still  
60 Take such wives as their guardians offer, or  
Pay values.<sup>3</sup> Careless Phrygius doth abhor  
All, because all cannot be good, as one  
Knowing some women whores, dares marry none.  
Graccus loves all as one, and thinks that so

65 As women do in divers countries go  
In divers habits,<sup>o</sup> yet are still one kind,  
So doth, so is religion; and this blind-  
ness too much light breeds;<sup>4</sup> but unmoved thou  
Of force<sup>o</sup> must one, and forced but one allow;  
70 And the right; ask thy father which is she,  
Let him ask his; though truth and falsehood be  
Near twins, yet truth a little elder is;  
Be busy to seek her, believe me this,  
He's not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best.<sup>5</sup>  
75 To adore, or scorn an image, or protest,  
May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way  
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;  
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,  
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will  
80 Reach her, about must, and about must go,  
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so;  
Yet strive so, that before age, death's twilight,  
Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night.<sup>6</sup>  
To will<sup>o</sup> implies delay, therefore now do.  
85 Hard deeds, the body's pains; hard knowledge too  
The mind's endeavors reach,<sup>o</sup> and mysteries  
Are like the sun, dazzling, yet plain to all eyes.  
Keep the truth which thou hast found; men do not  
stand  
In so ill case here, that God hath with his hand  
90 Signed kings' blank charters to kill whom they hate,  
Nor are they vicars, but hangmen to fate.<sup>7</sup>  
Fool and wretch, wilt thou let thy soul be tied  
To man's laws, by which she shall not be tried  
At the last day? O, will it then boot<sup>o</sup> thee  
95 To say a Philip, or a Gregory,  
A Harry, or a Martin taught thee this?<sup>8</sup>  
Is not this excuse for mere<sup>o</sup> contraries  
Equally strong? Cannot both sides say so?

100 That thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds  
     know;  
 Those passed, her nature and name is changed; to  
     be  
 Then humble to her is idolatry.  
 As streams are, power is; those blest flowers that  
     dwell  
 At the rough stream's calm head, thrive and prove  
     well,  
 105 But having left their roots, and themselves given  
 To the stream's tyrannous rage, alas, are driven  
 Through mills, and rocks, and woods, and at last,  
     almost  
 Consumed in going, in the sea are lost:  
 So perish souls, which more choose men's unjust  
 Power from God claimed, than God himself to trust.  
 110

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The seat of bile, hence scorn and ridicule.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The age of paganism, blind to Christianity but capable of natural morality ("virtue").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Donne's formulation wittily turns on its head the key concept of Protestant theology—that salvation is to be achieved only by imputing Christ's merits to Christians through faith—by suggesting that virtuous pagans might be saved by imputing faith to them on the basis of their moral life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: English volunteers took frequent part with the Dutch in their wars against Spain. Donne himself had sailed in two raiding expeditions against the Spanish.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Many explorers tried to find a northwest passage to the Pacific.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: In the biblical story (Daniel 3), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were rescued from a fiery furnace. The salamander (a lizardlike creature) was thought to be so cold-blooded that it could live in fire.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The object of “bear” is “fires of Spain and the line”—inquisitorial and equatorial heats, which roast people as chemists heat materials in “limbecks” (alembics, or vessels for distilling).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Of moral struggle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The common belief that the world was growing old and becoming decrepit.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The satiric types in this passage represent different creeds: “Mirreus” is a Roman Catholic; “Crantz,” an austere Calvinist Presbyterian of Geneva; “Graius,” a Church of England Erastian who believes in any religion sponsored by the state; “Phrygius,” a skeptic; and “Graccus,” a complete relativist.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The royal canopy, a symbol of kingly power.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: If minors in care of a guardian (in wardship) rejected the wives offered (“tendered”) to them they had to pay fines (“values”).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Graccus considers the differences between religions merely incidental, like women’s clothes, but his apparently tolerant, “enlightened” attitude is itself a form of blindness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The person who seeks the best church is neither an unbeliever nor the worst sort of believer.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An echo of John 9:4, “the night cometh, when no man can work.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Kings are not God’s vicars on earth, with license (“blank charters”) to persecute or kill whomever they wish on grounds of religion.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “Philip” is Philip II of Spain, “Gregory” is Pope Gregory XIII or XIV, “Harry” is England’s Henry VIII, and “Martin” is Martin Luther.[Return to reference 8](#)

# Notes

- °: *defiant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lament*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pagans*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *famine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mines, caves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fight a duel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to satisfy you*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *temperaments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *styles of clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *necessity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intend a future act*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *achieve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complete*[Return to reference](#) °



## To Sir Henry Wotton<sup>1</sup>

Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls;  
For, thus friends absent speak. This ease controls<sup>o</sup>  
The tediousness of my life: but for these  
I could ideate nothing, which could please,  
But I should wither in one day, and pass  
5 To a bottle<sup>o</sup> of hay, that am a lock of grass.  
Life is a voyage, and in our life's ways  
Countries, courts, towns are rocks, or remoras;<sup>o</sup>  
They break or stop all ships, yet our state's such,  
That though than pitch they stain worse, we must  
10 touch.  
If in the furnace of the even line,<sup>o</sup>  
Or under th' adverse<sup>o</sup> icy poles thou pine,  
Thou know'st two temperate regions, girded in,  
Dwell there: But Oh! what refuge canst thou win  
Parched in the court, and in the country frozen?  
15 Shall cities, built of both extremes, be chosen?  
Can dung or garlic be a perfume? Or can  
A scorpion or torpedo<sup>o</sup> cure a man?  
Cities are worst of all three; of all three  
(O knotty riddle) each is worst equally.  
20 Cities are sepulchres; they who dwell there  
Are carcasses, as if no such they were:  
And courts are theaters, where some men play  
Princes, some slaves, all to one end, of one clay.  
The country is a desert, where no good,  
25 Gained (as habits, not born,) is understood.  
There men become beasts, and prone to more evils;  
In cities, blocks,<sup>o</sup> and in a lewd court, devils.  
As in the first Chaos confusedly

30 Each element's qualities were in the other three;<sup>2</sup>  
So pride, lust, covetize, being several  
To these three places, yet all are in all,  
And mingled thus, their issue is incestuous:  
Falsehood is denizen'd.° Virtue is barbarous.  
35 Let no man say there, "Virtue's flinty wall  
Shall lock vice in me; I'll do none, but know all."  
Men are sponges, which to pour out, receive,  
Who know false play, rather than lose, deceive.  
For in best understandings, sin began,  
40 Angels sinned first, then devils, and then man.  
Only perchance beasts sin not; wretched we  
Are beasts in all, but white integrity.°  
I think if men, which in these places live  
Durst look for themselves, and themselves retrieve,  
They would like strangers greet themselves, seeing  
45 then  
Utopian youth, grown old Italian.°  
Be then thine own home, and in thyself dwell;  
Inn° anywhere; continuance maketh hell.  
And seeing the snail, which everywhere doth roam,  
Carrying his own house still, still is at home,  
50 Follow (for he is easy paced) this snail,  
Be thine own palace, or the world's thy jail.<sup>3</sup>  
And in the world's sea, do not like cork sleep  
Upon the water's face; nor in the deep  
Sink like a lead without a line: but as  
55 Fishes glide, leaving no print where they pass,  
Nor making sound, so closely thy course go,  
Let men dispute, whether thou breathe, or no.  
Only in this one thing be no Galenist:<sup>4</sup> to make  
Courts' hot ambitions wholesome, do not take  
60 A dram of country's dullness; do not add  
Correctives, but as chemics,° purge the bad.  
But, Sir, I advise not you, I rather do

65 Say o'er those lessons, which I learned of you,  
Whom, free from German schisms, and lightness  
Of France, and fair Italy's faithlessness,<sup>5</sup>  
Having from these sucked all they had of worth,  
And brought home that faith, which you carried  
forth,  
I thoroughly love. But if myself, I have won  
70 To know my rules,<sup>6</sup> I have, and you have  
Donne

1597 or 1598

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Wotton and Donne were at Oxford together and remained friends. Wotton was secretary to the Earl of Essex and, like Donne, went on the Cadiz and Azores expeditions in 1596–97. The poem arises out of a literary exchange among members of the Essex circle over the nature of a good life. (Some manuscripts give what appears to be Wotton's reply to Donne's poem, headed "To Mr. J. D. from Mr. H. W.")[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The separation of confused materials into four distinct elements (air, earth, fire, water) was a critical stage as order was created out of chaos.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Goal" in 1633 (a boundary or limit; finishing point in a race or journey); "gaile" in 1635–69 (a wind of considerable strength or a storm). Later editors changed the word to "jail."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Galen (129–ca. 216 C.E.) was a Greek physician whose teachings were dominant until the mid-17th century; Galenists worked to cure by contraries, correcting an excess of some bodily humor by making up the deficiency in its opposite humor so as to restore a balance.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Wotton had traveled on the Continent between 1589 and 1594.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Principles, precepts (set out in the poem).[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *limits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bundle*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impediments*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *equator*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opposite*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *electric ray*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blockheads*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *resides; is naturalized*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *innocence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crafty, corrupt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lodge for a short while*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *alchemists, chemists*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***From Holy Sonnets***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
Donne wrote a variety of religious poems (called “Divine Poems”), including a group of nineteen “holy sonnets” that reflect his interest in Jesuit and Protestant meditative procedures. He probably began writing them about 1609, a decade or so after leaving the Catholic Church. Our selections follow the traditional numbering established in Sir Herbert Grierson’s influential edition, since for most of these sonnets we cannot tell when they were written or in what order they were intended to appear.

[Return to reference 1](#)

# 1

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?  
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste;  
I run to death, and death meets me as fast,  
And all my pleasures are like yesterday.  
I dare not move my dim eyes any way,  
5 Despair behind, and death before doth cast  
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste  
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh.°  
Only thou art above, and when towards thee  
By thy leave I can look, I rise again;  
10 But our old subtle foe so tempteth me  
That not one hour myself I can sustain.  
Thy grace may wing° me to prevent° his art,  
And thou like adamant° draw mine iron heart.

1635

## Notes

- °: *incline, weigh down*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *give wings to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forestall*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *magnetic lodestone*[Return to reference °](#)

## 5

I am a little world<sup>2</sup> made cunningly  
Of elements, and an angelic sprite;<sup>o</sup>  
But black sin hath betrayed to endless night  
My world's both parts, and O, both parts must die.  
5 You which beyond that heaven which was most high  
Have found new spheres, and of new lands can  
write,<sup>3</sup>  
Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might  
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,  
Or wash it if it must be drowned no more.<sup>4</sup>  
10 But O, it must be burnt! Alas, the fire  
Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,  
And made it fouler; let their flames retire,  
And burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeal  
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal.<sup>5</sup>  
1635

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The traditional idea of the human being as microcosm (a "little world"), containing in miniature all the features of the macrocosm, or great world.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "You" are astronomers, especially Galileo, and explorers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God promised Noah (Genesis 9:11) never to flood the earth again.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Psalm 69:9: "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." These lines refer to three kinds of flame—those of the Last Judgment, those of lust and envy, and those of zeal, which alone save.[Return to reference 5](#)

# Notes

- °: *spirit, soul* [Return to reference °](#)



At the round earth's imagined corners,<sup>6</sup> blow  
 Your trumpets, angels; and arise, arise  
 From death, you numberless infinities  
 Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go:  
 5 All whom the flood did, and fire shall, o'erthrow,<sup>7</sup>  
 All whom war, dearth,<sup>o</sup> age, agues,<sup>o</sup> tyrannies,  
 Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes  
 Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.<sup>8</sup>  
 But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space;  
 10 For, if above all these, my sins abound,  
 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace  
 When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,  
 Teach me how to repent; for that's as good  
 As if thou hadst sealed my pardon with thy blood.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Compare Revelation 7:1: "I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Noah's Flood, and the universal conflagration at the end of the world (Revelation 6:11).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Those who will be alive at the Second Coming (compare Luke 9:27).[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *famine* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fevers* [Return to reference °](#)

If poisonous minerals, and if that tree<sup>9</sup>  
 Whose fruit threw death on else-immortal us,  
 If lecherous goats, if serpents envious<sup>1</sup>  
 Cannot be damned, alas! why should I be?  
 Why should intent or reason, born in me,  
 5     Make sins, else equal, in me more heinous?  
 And, mercy being easy and glorious  
 To God, in his stern wrath why threatens he?  
 But who am I that dare dispute with thee  
 O God? Oh, of thine only worthy blood  
 10     And my tears, make a heavenly Lethean<sup>2</sup> flood,  
 And drown in it my sin's black memory.  
 That thou remember them some claim as debt;  
 I think it mercy if thou wilt forget.<sup>3</sup>

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, whose fruit was forbidden to Adam and Eve in Eden.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Traits commonly associated with these creatures.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In classical mythology, the waters of the river Lethe in the underworld caused total forgetfulness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare Jeremiah 31:34: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more."[Return to reference 3](#)

## 10

Death, be not proud, though some have callèd thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
5 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must  
flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.<sup>4</sup>  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate  
men,  
10 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy<sup>o</sup> or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st<sup>o</sup> thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.<sup>5</sup>  
1633

## Endnotes

- Note 4: That is, to find rest for their bones and freedom ("delivery") for their souls.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare 1 Corinthians 15:26: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *opium*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *puff with pride*[Return to reference °](#)

## 11

Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,  
Buffet, and scoff,<sup>o</sup> scourge, and crucify me,  
For I have sinned, and sinned, and only he,  
Who could do no iniquity, hath died:  
But by my death cannot be satisfied<sup>o</sup>  
5 My sins, which pass the Jews' impiety:  
They killed once an inglorious<sup>o</sup> man, but I  
Crucify him daily,<sup>6</sup> being now glorified.  
Oh let me then, his strange love still admire:<sup>o</sup>  
Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment.<sup>7</sup>  
10 And Jacob came clothed in vile harsh attire  
But to supplant, and with gainful intent:<sup>8</sup>  
God clothed himself in vile man's flesh, that so  
He might be weak enough to suffer woe.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Compare Hebrews 6:6: "they [sinners] crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Kings may pardon crimes, but the King of Kings, Christ, bore the punishment due to our sins.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Jacob disguised himself in goatskins to gain from his blind father the blessing belonging to the firstborn son, his brother Esau (Genesis 27:1–36).[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *scoff at*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *atoned for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *obscure*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *wonder at* [Return to reference](#) °

What if this present were the world's last night?  
 Mark in my heart, O soul, where thou dost dwell,  
 The picture of Christ crucified, and tell  
 Whether that countenance can thee affright.  
 Tears in his eyes quench the amazing light,  
 5 Blood fills his frowns, which from his pierced head  
     fell;  
 And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell  
 Which prayed forgiveness for his foes' fierce spite?  
 No, no; but as in my idolatry  
 I said to all my profane<sup>o</sup> mistresses,  
 10 Beauty of pity, foulness only is  
 A sign of rigor:<sup>9</sup> so I say to thee,  
 To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned,  
 This beauteous form assures a piteous mind.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 9: In Neoplatonic theory, beautiful features are the sign of a compassionate mind, while ugliness signifies the contrary. [Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *secular* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

Batter my heart, three-personed God;<sup>1</sup> for you  
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
 That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
 Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
 I, like an usurped town, to another due,  
 5 Labor to admit you, but O, to no end;  
 Reason, your viceroy<sup>2</sup> in me, me should defend,  
 But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
 Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,<sup>o</sup>  
 But am betrothed<sup>3</sup> unto your enemy.  
 10 Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;  
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
 Except<sup>o</sup> you enthrall<sup>4</sup> me, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish<sup>5</sup> me.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, God existing as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The governor in your stead. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Humanity's relationship with God has been described in terms of marriage and adultery from the time of the Hebrew prophets. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Enslave, also enchant. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rape, also overwhelm with wonder. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *gladly* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *unless* [Return to reference](#) °



Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt<sup>6</sup>  
 To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,  
 And her soul early into heaven ravishèd,  
 Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.  
 Here the admiring her my mind did whet  
 5 To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head;<sup>°</sup>  
 But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst  
     hast fed,  
 A holy thirsty dropsy<sup>°</sup> melts me yet.  
 But why should I beg more love, whenas thou  
 Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine:  
 10 And dost not only fear lest I allow  
 My love to saints and angels, things divine,  
 But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt<sup>°</sup>  
 Lest the world, flesh, yea, devil put thee out.

1899

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Donne's wife died in 1617 at the age of thirty-three, having just given birth to her twelfth child. This very personal sonnet and the following two survive in a single manuscript discovered only in 1892.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *source*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immoderate thirst*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fear*[Return to reference °](#)

Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse<sup>7</sup> so bright and  
 clear.  
 What! is it she which on the other shore  
 Goes richly painted? or which, robbed and tore,  
 Laments and mourns in Germany and here?<sup>8</sup>  
 Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year?  
 5 Is she self-truth, and errs? now new, now outwore?  
 Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore  
 On one, on seven, or on no hill appear?<sup>9</sup>  
 Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights  
 First travel we to seek, and then make love?  
 10 Betray, kind husband, thy spouse to our sights,  
 And let mine amorous soul court thy mild dove,  
 Who is most true and pleasing to thee then  
 When she is embraced and open to most men.<sup>1</sup>

1899

## Endnotes

- Note 7: The church is commonly called the bride of Christ. See Revelation 19:7–8: “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. / And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.” [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the painted woman (the Church of Rome) or the ravished virgin (the Lutheran and Calvinist churches in Germany and England). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The church on one hill is probably Solomon’s temple on Mount Moriah; that on seven hills is the Church of Rome; that on no hill is the Presbyterian church of Geneva. [Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The final lines wittily rework, with startling sexual associations, Song of Solomon 5:2: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." That biblical book was often interpreted as the song of love between Christ and the church.[Return to reference 1](#)

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one:  
 Inconstancy unnaturally hath begot  
 A constant habit; that when I would not  
 I change in vows, and in devotion.  
 As humorous<sup>o</sup> is my contrition  
 5 As my profane love, and as soon forgot:  
 As riddlingly distempered, cold and hot,<sup>2</sup>  
 As praying, as mute, as infinite, as none.  
 I durst not view heaven yesterday; and today  
 10 In prayers and flattering speeches I court God:  
 Tomorrow I quake with true fear of his rod.  
 So my devout fits come and go away  
 Like a fantastic ague:<sup>3</sup> save<sup>o</sup> that here  
 Those are my best days, when I shake with fear.

1899

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Arising from the unbalanced humors, inexplicably changeable. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A fever, attended with paroxysms of hot and cold and trembling fits. "Fantastic": capricious, extravagant. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *subject to whim* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *except* [Return to reference °](#)

## Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward

Let man's soul be a sphere, and then, in this,  
The intelligence that moves, devotion is,<sup>1</sup>  
And as the other spheres, by being grown  
Subject to foreign motions, lose their own,  
And being by others hurried every day,  
5 Scarce in a year their natural form<sup>2</sup> obey;  
Pleasure or business, so, our souls admit  
For<sup>o</sup> their first mover, and are whirled by it.  
Hence is 't, that I am carried towards the West  
This day, when my soul's form bends towards the  
10 East.

There I should see a Sun<sup>3</sup> by rising, set,  
And by that setting endless day beget:  
But that Christ on this cross did rise and fall,  
Sin had eternally benighted all.  
Yet dare I almost be glad I do not see  
15 That spectacle, of too much weight for me.  
Who sees God's face, that is self-life, must die;<sup>4</sup>  
What a death were it then to see God die?  
It made his own lieutenant,<sup>o</sup> Nature, shrink;  
It made his footstool crack, and the sun wink.<sup>5</sup>  
20 Could I behold those hands which span the poles,  
And tune<sup>6</sup> all spheres at once, pierced with those  
holes?  
Could I behold that endless height which is  
Zenith to us, and t'our antipodes,<sup>7</sup>  
Humbled below us? Or that blood which is  
25 The seat<sup>o</sup> of all our souls, if not of his,  
Make dirt of dust, or that flesh which was worn  
By God for his apparel, ragg'd and torn?

If on these things I durst not look, durst I  
 Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,  
 30 Who was God's partner here, and furnished thus  
 Half of that sacrifice which ransomed us?  
 Though these things, as I ride, be from<sup>o</sup> mine eye,  
 They are present yet unto my memory,  
 35 For that looks towards them; and thou look'st  
 towards me,  
 O Savior, as thou hang'st upon the tree.  
 I turn my back to thee but to receive  
 Corrections,<sup>8</sup> till thy mercies bid thee leave.<sup>o</sup>  
 O think me worth thine anger; punish me;  
 Burn off my rusts and my deformity;  
 40 Restore thine image so much, by thy grace,  
 That thou may'st know me, and I'll turn my face.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: As angelic intelligences guide the celestial spheres, so devotion is or should be the guiding principle of the soul.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Their true moving principle or intelligence. The orbit of the celestial spheres was thought to be governed by an unmoving outermost sphere, the primum mobile, or first mover (line 8), but sometimes outside influences ("foreign motions," line 4) deflected the spheres from their correct orbits.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The "sun" / "Son" pun was an ancient one. Christ the Son of God "set" when he rose on the Cross, and that setting (death) gave rise to the Christian era and the promise of immortality.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God told Moses, "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33:20).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: An earthquake and eclipse supposedly accompanied the Crucifixion (Matthew 27:45, 51). Compare Isaiah 66:1: "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Some manuscripts read "turn."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: God is at once the highest point for us and for our "antipodes," those who live on the opposite side of the earth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The phrase suggests a flogging.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *instead of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deputy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dwelling place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *away from*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cease*[Return to reference °](#)

# Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness<sup>1</sup>

Since I am coming to that holy room  
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,  
I shall be made thy music; as I come  
I tune the instrument here at the door,  
5 And what I must do then, think now before.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown  
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie  
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown  
That this is my southwest discovery<sup>3</sup>  
10 *Per fretum febris*,<sup>4</sup> by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;  
For, though their currents yield return to none,  
What shall my West hurt me? As West and East  
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,<sup>5</sup>  
15 So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are  
The Eastern riches?<sup>6</sup> Is Jerusalem?  
Anyan,<sup>6</sup> and Magellan, and Gibraltar,  
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,  
20 Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.<sup>7</sup>

We think that Paradise and Calvary,  
Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place;  
Look, Lord and find both Adams<sup>8</sup> met in me;  
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,  
25 May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.



So, in his purple wrapped,<sup>9</sup> receive me, Lord;  
 By these his thorns<sup>o</sup> give me his other crown;  
 And, as to others' souls I preached thy word,  
 Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:  
 Therefore that he may raise the Lord throws  
 down.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Though Izaak Walton, Donne's friend and biographer, assigns this poem to the last days of his life, it was probably written during another illness, in December 1623.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This is less a hymn (songs of praise) than a meditation preparing (tuning the instrument) for such (Latin) hymn.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: South is the region of heat, west the region of sunset and death.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Through the straits of fever, with a pun on straits as sufferings, rigors, and a geographical reference to the Strait of Magellan.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: If a flat map is pasted on a round globe, west and east meet.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Anian, a strait on the west coast of America, shown on early maps as separating America from Asia.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The three sons of Noah by whom the world was repopulated after the Flood (Genesis 10). The descendants of Japhet were thought to inhabit Europe; those of Cham (Ham), Africa; and those of Shem, Asia.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Adam and Christ. Legend had it that Christ's cross was erected on the spot, or at least in the region, where the tree forbidden to Adam in Eden had stood.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: In his blood, also in his kingly robes.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *Cathay, China*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crown of thorns*[Return to reference °](#)

# A Hymn to God the Father<sup>1</sup>

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,  
Which is my sin, though it were done before?<sup>2</sup>  
Wilt thou forgive that sin through which I run,  
And do run still, though still I do deplore?  
5        When thou hast done,<sup>3</sup> thou hast not done,  
          For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I have won  
Others to sin? and made my sin their door?  
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun  
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?  
10        When thou hast done, thou hast not done,  
          For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun  
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;  
Swear by thy self, that at my death thy Son  
15        Shall shine as he shines now and heretofore;  
          And, having done that, thou hast done,  
          I fear<sup>4</sup> no more.

1633

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This hymn was used as a congregational hymn. Walton tells us that Donne wrote it during his illness of 1623, had it set to music, and was delighted to hear it performed (as it frequently was) by the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: That is, he inherits the original sin of Adam and Eve.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the refrains, Donne puns on his own name and may pun on his wife's maiden name, Ann More.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Some manuscripts read "have."[Return to reference 4](#)

# ***From Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*<sup>[1](#)</sup>**

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
Donne's *Devotions* were composed in the aftermath of his serious illness in the winter of 1623, though Donne characteristically writes as if the events of the illness were happening as he describes them. The *Devotions* recount in twenty-three sections the stages ("emergent occasions") of the illness and recovery: the term associates the exercise with a popular kind of Protestant meditation on the occasions that daily life presents to us. Each section contains a "meditation upon our human condition," an "expostulation and debatement with God," and a prayer to God. The book was published almost immediately, offering its meditation on an intensely personal experience as exemplary for others.  
[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Meditation 4***

*Medicusque vocatur.*

The physician is sent for.<sup>2</sup>

It is too little to call man a little world; except God, man is a diminutive to nothing.<sup>3</sup> Man consists of more pieces, more parts, than the world; than the world doth, nay, than the world is. And if those pieces were extended and stretched out in man as they are in the world, man would be the giant and the world the dwarf; the world but the map, and the man the world. If all the veins in our bodies were extended to rivers, and all the sinews to veins of mines, and all the muscles that lie upon one another to hills, and all the bones to quarries of stones, and all the other pieces to the proportion of those which correspond to them in the world, the air would be too little for this orb of man to move in, the firmament would be but enough for this star. For as the whole world hath nothing to which something in man doth not answer,<sup>4</sup> so hath man many pieces of which the whole world hath no representation. Enlarge this meditation upon this great world, man, so far as to consider the immensity of the creatures this world produces. Our creatures are our thoughts, creatures that are born giants, that reach from east to west, from earth to heaven, that do not only bestride all the sea and land, but span the sun and firmament at once: my thoughts reach all, comprehend all.

Inexplicable mystery! I their creator am in a close prison, in a sick bed, anywhere, and any one of my creatures, my thoughts, is with the sun, and beyond the sun, overtakes the sun, and overgoes the sun in one pace, one step, everywhere. And then as the other world produces serpents and vipers, malignant and venomous creatures, and worms and caterpillars, that endeavor to devour that world which produces them, and monsters compiled and

complicated<sup>5</sup> of divers parents and kinds, so this world, our selves, produces all these in us, in producing diseases and sicknesses of all those sorts; venomous and infectious diseases, feeding and consuming diseases, and manifold and entangled diseases made up of many several ones. And can the other world name so many venomous, so many consuming, so many monstrous creatures, as we can diseases of all these kinds? O miserable abundance, O beggarly riches! How much do we lack of having remedies for every disease, when as yet we have not names for them?

But we have a Hercules against these giants, these monsters: that is the physician. He musters up all the forces of the other world to succor this, all nature to relieve man. We have the physician but we are not the physician. Here we shrink in our proportion, sink in our dignity in respect of very mean creatures who are physicians to themselves. The hart that is pursued and wounded, they say, knows an herb which, being eaten, throws off the arrow: a strange kind of vomit.<sup>6</sup> The dog that pursues it, though he be subject to sickness, even proverbially knows his grass that recovers him. And it may be true that the druggier is as near to man as to other creatures; it may be that obvious and present simples,<sup>7</sup> easy to be had, would cure him; but the apothecary is not so near him, nor the physician so near him, as they two are to other creatures.<sup>8</sup> Man hath not that innate instinct to apply these natural medicines to his present danger, as those inferior creatures have. He is not his own apothecary, his own physician, as they are. Call back therefore thy meditation again, and bring it down.<sup>9</sup> What's become of man's great extent and proportion, when himself shrinks himself and consumes himself to a handful of dust? What's become of his soaring thoughts, his compassing thoughts, when himself brings himself to the ignorance, to the thoughtlessness, of the grave? His diseases are his own, but the physician is not; he hath them at home, but he must send for the physician.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Donne's Latin epigraphs are followed by his English translations, often quite free.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This meditation is based on the notion that each human being is a microcosm, a little world, analogous in every respect to the macrocosm, or great world. But in playing with this notion, Donne paradoxically reverses it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Correspond.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mixed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deer supposedly expelled arrows wounding them by eating the herb dittany.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Medicinal plants.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: One who administers drugs might do this for man as well as for other creatures, but one who sells drugs ("the apothecary") and the physician do not know how to prescribe for man as well as for other creatures.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, apply it to the present situation.[Return to reference 9](#)



## ***Meditation 17***

*Nunc lento sonitu dicunt, morieris.*

Now this bell tolling softly for another, says to me,  
Thou must die.

Perchance he for whom this bell<sup>1</sup> tolls may be so ill as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me and see my state may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body<sup>2</sup> whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated<sup>3</sup> into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated. God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another. As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness. There was a contention as far as a suit<sup>4</sup> (in which piety and dignity, religion and estimation,<sup>5</sup> were mingled) which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him that

thinks it doth; and though it intermit again, yet from that minute that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? But who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? But who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.<sup>6</sup> If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.<sup>7</sup> Neither can we call this a begging of misery or a borrowing of misery, as though we were not miserable enough of ourselves but must fetch in more from the next house, in taking upon us the misery of our neighbors. Truly it were an excusable covetousness if we did; for affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough that is not matured and ripened by it, and made fit for God by that affliction. If a man carry treasure in bullion, or in a wedge of gold, and have none coined into current moneys, his treasure will not defray<sup>8</sup> him as he travels. Tribulation is treasure in the nature of it, but it is not current money in the use of it, except we get nearer and nearer our home, heaven, by it. Another man may be sick too, and sick to death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels as gold in a mine and be of no use to him; but this bell that tells me of his affliction digs out and applies that gold to me, if by this consideration of another's danger I take mine own into contemplation and so secure myself by making my recourse to my God, who is our only security.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The "passing bell" for the dying.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The church.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Punning on the literal sense, “carried across.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Controversy that went as far as a lawsuit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Self-esteem.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mainland.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This phrase gave Ernest Hemingway the title for his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Meet his expenses.[Return to reference 8](#)

## From *Expostulation* 19

### [THE LANGUAGE OF GOD]

My God, my God, thou art a direct God, may I not say a literal God, a God that wouldst be understood literally and according to the plain sense of all that thou sayest. But thou art also (Lord, I intend it to thy glory, and let no profane misinterpreter abuse it to thy diminution), thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God too: a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so persuading commandments, such sinews even in thy milk and such things in thy words, as all profane<sup>9</sup> authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps; thou art the dove that flies. Oh, what words but thine can express the inexpressible texture and composition of thy word; in which, to one man, that argument that binds his faith to believe that to be the word of God is the reverent simplicity of the word, and to another, the majesty of the word; and in which two men, equally pious, may meet, and one wonder that all should not understand it, and the other as much that any man should. So, Lord, thou givest us the same earth to labor on and to lie in; a house and a grave of the same earth; so, Lord, thou givest us the same word for our satisfaction and for our inquisition,<sup>1</sup> for our instruction and for our admiration too. For there are places that thy servants Jerome and Augustine would scarce believe (when they grew warm by mutual letters) of one another that they understood them, and yet both Jerome and Augustine call upon persons whom they knew to be far weaker than they thought one another (old women and young maids) to read thy Scriptures, without confining them to these or those places.<sup>2</sup>

Neither art thou thus a figurative, a metaphorical God, in thy word only, but in thy works too. The style of thy works, the phrase of thine actions, is metaphorical. The institution of thy whole worship in the old law was a continual allegory; types and figures<sup>3</sup> overspread all, and figures flowed into figures, and poured themselves out into further figures. Circumcision carried a figure of baptism,<sup>4</sup> and baptism carries a figure of that purity which we shall have in perfection in the New Jerusalem. Neither didst thou speak and work in this language only in the time of the prophets; but since thou spokest in thy son it is so too. How often, how much more often, doth thy son call himself a way and a light and a gate and a vine and bread than the son of God or of man? How much oftener doth he exhibit a metaphorical Christ than a real, a literal? This hath occasioned thine ancient servants, whose delight it was to write after thy copy,<sup>5</sup> to proceed the same way in their expositions of the Scriptures, and in their composing both of public liturgies and of private prayers to thee, to make their accesses to thee in such a kind of language as thou wast pleased to speak to them, in a figurative, in a metaphorical language; in which manner I am bold to call the comfort which I receive now in this sickness, in the indication of the concoction<sup>6</sup> and maturity thereof, in certain clouds<sup>7</sup> and residences<sup>8</sup> which the physicians observe, a discovering of land from sea after a long and tempestuous voyage. \* \* \*

## 1623 **Endnotes**

1624

- Note 9: Secular.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Investigation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Saints Jerome and Augustine did in fact differ over the proper way of interpreting the Bible, yet they both encouraged its use by the unlearned.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Anticipations or prefigurations, especially persons and events in the Hebrew Bible that were read as prefiguring Christ, or some aspect of the New Testament or of Christian practice.

For a beautiful poem exemplifying this process, see Herbert, "The Bunch of Grapes" (p. 1192).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Both circumcision and baptism are rites of admission to a religious community.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Text.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ripening.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cloudy urine.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Residues.[Return to reference 8](#)

## ***From Death's Duel*<sup>1</sup>**

[Donne's last sermon, on Psalm 68:20: "And unto God the Lord belong the issues<sup>2</sup> of Death"—that is, from death.]

\* \* \*

First, then, we consider this *exitus mortis*, to be *liberatio à morte*, that with God, the Lord are the issues of death, and therefore in all our deaths, and the deadly calamities of this life, we may justly hope of a good issue from him; and all our periods and transitions in this life, are so many passages from death to death. Our very birth and entrance into this life is *exitus à morte*, an issue from death, for in our mother's womb we are dead so, as that we do not know we live, not so much as we do in our sleep, neither is there any grave so close, or so putrid a prison, as the womb would be unto us, if we stayed in it beyond our time, or died there before our time. In the grave the worms do not kill us, we breed and feed, and then kill the worms which we ourselves produced. In the womb the dead child kills the mother that conceived it, and is a murderer, nay a parricide, even after it is dead. And if we be not dead so in the womb, so as that being dead, we kill her that gave us our first life, our life of vegetation,<sup>3</sup> yet we are dead so, as David's idols are dead. In the womb we have eyes and see not, ears and hear not.<sup>4</sup> There in the womb we are fitted for works of darkness, all the while deprived of light: And there in the womb we are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood, and may be damned, though we be never born.

\* \* \*

\* \* \* But then this *exitus à morte* is but *introitus in mortem*, this issue, this deliverance from that death, the death of the womb, is an entrance, a delivering over to another death, the manifold deaths of

this world. We have a winding-sheet<sup>5</sup> in our mother's womb, which grows with us from our conception, and we come into the world wound up in that winding-sheet, for we come to seek a grave. \* \* \* Now this which is so singularly peculiar to him [Christ], that his flesh should not see corruption, at his second coming, his coming to Judgment, shall extend to all then alive, their flesh shall not see corruption. \* \* \* But for us that die now and sleep in the state of the dead, we must all pass this posthume death, this death after death, nay this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave. When those bodies that have been the children of royal parents, and the parents of royal children, must say with Job, to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister.<sup>6</sup> Miserable riddle, when the same worm must be my mother, and my sister, and myself. Miserable incest, when I must be married to my mother and my sister, beget, and bear that worm which is all that miserable penury; when my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worm shall feed, and feed sweetly upon me,<sup>7</sup> when the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction, if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equal to princes, for they shall be equal but in dust. One dies at his full strength, being wholly at ease and in quiet, and another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eats with pleasure, but they lie down alike in the dust, and the worm covers them.<sup>8</sup> The worm covers them in Job, and in Isaiah, it covers them and is spread under them, the worm is spread under thee, and the worm covers thee.<sup>9</sup> There's the mats and the carpets that lie under, and there's the state and the canopy,<sup>1</sup> that hangs over the greatest of the sons of men. Even those bodies that were the temple of the Holy Ghost, come to this dilapidation, to ruin, to rubbish, to dust: even the Israel of the Lord, and Jacob himself hath no other specification, no other denomination, but that *vermis Jacob*, thou worm of Jacob.<sup>2</sup> Truly the consideration of this posthume death, this death after burial, that after God (with whom are the issues of death) hath delivered me



from the death of the womb, by bringing me into the world, and from the manifold deaths of the world, by laying me in the grave, I must die again in an incineration of this flesh, and in a dispersion of that dust.

\* \* \*

There we leave you in that blessed dependency, to hang upon him that hangs upon the Cross, there bathe in his tears, there suck at his wounds, and lie down in peace in his grave, till he vouchsafe you a resurrection, and an ascension into that Kingdom, which he hath purchased for you, with the inestimable price of his incorruptible blood. Amen.

1632

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
The printed version of this sermon (1632) has the subtitle “A Consolation to the Soul, against the dying life, and living death of the body.” Donne’s friend and executor Henry King (later bishop of Chichester) supplied the further information that the sermon was delivered at Whitehall, before King Charles, that it was delivered only a few days before Donne’s death, and that it was fitly styled “the author’s own funeral sermon.” Donne was a powerful and popular preacher, and this sermon was especially moving according to the testimony of many auditors, including Izaak Walton. Besides the personal drama of the preacher himself visibly ill and perhaps dying, the audience must have responded to the almost unbearably graphic analysis of the forms of death and decay—a theme that often preoccupied Donne. As in his poems, the language is personal, rich in learning and curious lore, dazzling in verbal ingenuity and metaphor. As in the *Devotions*, the sentences are long, sinuous,

and elaborate. Typically, he uses a number of Latin phrases, but almost always translates or paraphrases them immediately.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Passages out. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, of growth. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A paraphrase of Psalm 115:5–6. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The placenta. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A paraphrase of Job 17:14. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An echo of Job 24:20. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An echo of Job 21:23–26. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An echo of Isaiah 14:11. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cloth of state, a canopy erected over a king's throne. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That epithet is used in Isaiah 41:14. [Return to reference 2](#)

## **AEMILIA LANYER**

### **1569–1645**

Aemilia Lanyer published one of the earliest collections of poetry by an English woman. She was a member of an Italian family of court musicians who came to England in the reign of Henry VIII; they may have been Christianized Jews or, alternatively, Protestants forced to flee Catholic persecution in their native land. Some information about Lanyer's life survived in the notebooks of the astrologer and fortune-teller Simon Forman, whom Lanyer consulted in 1597. Lanyer claims to have been educated in the aristocratic household of the Countess of Kent, and in her late teens and early twenties she was the mistress of Queen Elizabeth's lord chamberlain, Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, who was forty-five years her senior. The wealthy Hunsdon was a notable patron of the arts—Shakespeare's company performed under his auspices in the 1590s—and he maintained Lanyer (then Bassano) in luxury. Yet when she became pregnant by Hunsdon at age twenty-three, she was married off to Alfonso Lanyer, one of another family of gentleman musicians attached to the courts of Elizabeth I and James I. Lanyer's poetry suggests that she resided for some time in the household of the influential courtier and literary patron Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and Margaret's daughter Anne Clifford, later Countess of Dorset. Lanyer reports receiving their encouragement in learning, piety, and poetry, and, in turn, she highlights their status as exemplary women and faithful servants of the only true king, Jesus Christ.



**Margaret Clifford.** The motto of this Laurence Hilliard miniature of Clifford, "Constant in the midst / of Inconstancy," resonates with Lanyer's representation of her in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*.

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Lanyer's single volume of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611; Latin for "Hail, God, King of the Jews"), begins with a series of dedicatory poems to powerful courtiers and would-be patrons whom she praises as a community of good women. The title poem, a

meditation on Christ's Passion, is framed and punctuated by its dedication to the Countess of Cumberland, and contrasts the good women in the Passion story with the evil and weak men who failed to support Christ in his time of need. The poem also includes a defense of Eve, which participates in the contemporary *querelle des femmes*, or debate on women. Why, she asks, are women "By more faulty men so much defamed?" Lanyer's Christ, moreover, would rather speak to "poor women" than kings. The final poem in Lanyer's volume, "The Description of Cookham," celebrates in elegiac mode the Crown estate occasionally occupied by the Countess of Cumberland, portraying it as an Edenic paradise of women, now lost. The poem may or may not have been written before Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst"—commonly thought to have inaugurated the "country house" genre in English literature—but Lanyer's poem was published first.

***FROM* SALVE DEUS REX JUDAEORUM**

## ***From To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty<sup>1</sup>***

Renowned empress, and Great Britain's queen,  
Most gracious mother of succeeding kings;  
Vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> to view that which is seldom seen,  
A woman's writing of divinest things:  
5       Read it fair queen, though it defective be,  
      Your excellence can grace both it and me.

\* \* \*

Look in this mirror of a worthy mind,<sup>2</sup>  
Where some of your fair virtues will appear;  
Though all it is impossible to find,  
40       Unless my glass<sup>o</sup> were crystal, or more clear:  
      Which is dim steel,<sup>3</sup> yet full of spotless truth,  
      And for one look from your fair eyes it su'th.<sup>o</sup>

Here may your sacred majesty behold  
That mighty monarch<sup>o</sup> both of heaven and earth,  
He that all nations of the world controlled,  
45       Yet took our flesh in base and meanest berth:<sup>o</sup>  
      Whose days were spent in poverty and sorrow,  
      And yet all kings their wealth of him do borrow.

For he is crown and crowner of all kings,  
The hopeful haven of the meaner sort,  
50       It's he that all our joyful tidings brings  
      Of happy reign within his royal court:  
      It's he that in extremity can give  
      Comfort to them that have no time to live.

55 And since my wealth within his region stands,  
And that his cross my chiefest comfort is,  
Yea in his kingdom only rests my lands,  
Of honor there I hope I shall not miss:  
Though I on earth do live unfortunate,  
60 Yet there I may attain a better state.

In the meantime, accept, most gracious queen  
This holy work virtue presents to you  
In poor apparel, shaming to be seen,  
Or once t'appear in your judicial view:  
65 But that fair virtue, though in mean attire,  
All princes of the world do most desire.

\* \* \*

*The Lady  
Elizabeth's  
Grace*

And she<sup>4</sup> that is the pattern of all beauty,  
The very model of your majesty,  
Whose rarest parts enforceth love and duty,  
The perfect pattern of all piety:  
95 O let my book by her fair eyes be blessed,  
In whose pure thoughts all innocence rests.

Then shall I think my glass a glorious sky,  
When two such glitt'ring suns at once appear;  
The one replete with sovereign majesty,  
Both shining brighter than the clearest clear:  
100 And both reflecting comfort to my spirits,  
To find their grace so much above my merits

Whose untuned voice the doleful notes doth sing  
Of sad affliction in an humble strain;  
Much like unto a bird that wants a wing,  
105 And cannot fly, but warbles forth her pain:  
Or he that barred from the sun's bright light,  
Wanting day's comfort, doth commend the night.



\* \* \*

140 My weak distempered brain and feeble spirits,  
Which all unlearned have adventured this  
To write of Christ and of his sacred merits,  
Desiring that this book her<sup>o</sup> hands may kiss:  
And though I be unworthy of that grace,  
Yet let her blessed thoughts this book embrace.

145 And pardon me (fair queen) though I presume,  
To do that which so many better can;  
Not that I learning to myself assume,  
Or that I would compare with any man:  
But as they are scholars, and by art do write,  
150 So nature yields my soul a sad<sup>o</sup> delight.

And since all arts at first from nature came,  
That goodly creature, mother of perfection,  
Whom Jove's<sup>5</sup> almighty hand at first did frame,  
Taking both her and hers<sup>6</sup> in his protection:  
155 Why should not she now grace my barren muse,  
And in a woman all defects excuse.

So peerless princess humbly I desire,  
That your great wisdom would vouchsafe t'omit<sup>o</sup>  
All faults; and pardon if my spirits retire,  
160 Leaving<sup>o</sup> to aim at what they cannot hit:  
To write your worth, which no pen can express,  
Were but t'eclipse your fame, and make it less.<sup>7</sup>

1611

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
Queen Anna of Denmark, the wife of James I. Anna was a patron of writers, including Ben Jonson and Samuel Daniel, and

the mother of Prince Henry, Princess Elizabeth, and the future Charles I. This is the first of a series of poems addressed to court ladies whom Lanyer sought to attract as patrons; such poems often preface literary works by male courtier poets as well. These poems are followed by a prose address to her primary dedicatee, Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and then by a prose epistle, "To the Virtuous Reader," which engages many of the tropes of the *querelle des femmes* and legends of good women traditions.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Lanyer presents her poem both as a mirror, or reflection, of Queen Anna, and as a form of political advice in the "mirror for magistrates" tradition.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Renaissance mirrors were made of both steel, which needed frequent polishing, and crystal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Elizabeth Stuart, the second child and first daughter of Queen Anna and James I.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: God as creator of nature.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nature and those (especially women) under nature's protection.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: As her poetry of praise cannot possibly do justice to the queen, she abandons an attempt that would obscure rather than promote the queen's fame.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *be willing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mirror*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *courts, pursues*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Christ*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *humblest birth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Queen Anna's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *solemn, serious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overlook*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *declining*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***From To the Lady Anne, Countess of Dorset***<sup>1</sup>

To you I dedicate this work of grace,  
This frame of glory which I have erected,  
For your fair mind I hold the fittest place  
Where virtue should be settled and protected;  
If highest thoughts true honor do embrace,  
5 And holy wisdom is of them respected,  
Then in this mirror let your fair eyes look,  
To view your virtues in this blessed book.

Blest by our savior's merits, not my skill,  
Which I acknowledge to be very small;  
10 Yet if the least part of his blessed will  
I have performed, I count I have done all:  
One spark of grace sufficient is to fill  
Our lamps with oil, ready when he doth call  
To enter with the bridegroom<sup>2</sup> to the feast,  
15 Where he that is the greatest may be least.

Greatness is no sure frame to build upon,  
No worldly treasure can assure that place;  
God makes both even, the cottage with the throne,<sup>3</sup>  
20 All worldly honors there are counted base,  
Those he holds dear, and reckneth as his own,  
Whose virtuous deeds by his especial grace  
Have gained his love, his kingdom, and his crown,  
Whom in the book of life he hath set down.

Titles of honor which the world bestows,  
25 To none but to the virtuous belong;

As beauteous bowers<sup>o</sup> where true worth should  
repose,  
And where his dwellings should be built most strong:  
But when they are bestowed upon her foes,  
30 Poor virtue's friends endure the greatest wrong:  
For they must suffer all indignity,  
Until in heaven they better graced be.

What difference was there when the world began,  
Was it not virtue that distinguished all?  
35 All sprang but from one woman and one man,  
Then how doth gentry come to rise and fall?<sup>4</sup>  
Or who is he that very rightly can  
Distinguish of his birth, or tell at all,  
In what mean<sup>o</sup> state his ancestors have been,  
40 Before someone of worth did honor win?

\* \* \*

To you, as to God's steward I do write,  
In whom the seeds of virtue have been sown,  
By your most worthy mother, in whose right,  
60 All her fair parts you challenge as your own;  
If you, sweet lady, will appear as bright  
As ever creature did that time hath known,  
Then wear this diadem<sup>o</sup> I present to thee  
Which I have framed for her eternity.

\* \* \*

1611

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
Anne Clifford (1590–1676) was the sole surviving child of  
George Clifford, Duke of Cumberland (d. 1605), and Margaret

Clifford, Countess of Cumberland. Following her father's death, Anne and her mother spent years pursuing Anne's right to inherit her father's properties in Yorkshire and Westmoreland. In 1609, she married Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset (d. 1624), and in 1630, after Sackville's death, Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery (d. 1650). She finally acquired the rights to the Clifford properties in 1643 and actively managed them from 1649 until her death in 1676. She was an ardent family chronicler and diary keeper.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A reference to Jesus's parable comparing readiness for the kingdom of heaven to the behavior of ten virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom, five carrying lamps with oil in them and five without (Matthew 25:1–13).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: All social classes are equal in the sight of God.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Perhaps an allusion to the well-known rhyme "When Adam delved and Eve span, / Who was then the gentleman?"[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *idealized pleasant spaces*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *low*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crown*[Return to reference °](#)

# ***From Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*<sup>1</sup>**

\* \* \*

155 The meditation of this monarch's<sup>o</sup> love,  
Draws thee<sup>o</sup> from caring what this world can yield;  
Of joys and griefs both equal thou dost prove,  
They have no force, to force thee from the field:  
Thy constant faith like to the turtle dove<sup>2</sup>  
Continues combat, and will never yield  
To base affliction, or proud pomp's desire,  
That sets the weakest minds so much on fire.

160  
Thou from the court to the country art retired,  
Leaving the world, before the world leaves thee:  
That great enchantress of weak minds admired,  
Whose all-bewitching charms so pleasing be  
To worldly wantons; and too much desired  
165 Of those that care not for eternity:  
But yield themselves as preys to lust and sin,  
Losing their hopes of heav'n hell pains to win.

170 But thou, the wonder of our wanton age  
Leav'st all delights to serve a heav'nly king:  
Who is more wise? or who can be more sage,  
Than she that doth affection subject bring;  
Not forcing for the world, or Satan's rage,  
But shrouding under the Almighty's wing;  
175 Spending her years, months, days, minutes, hours,  
In doing service to the heav'nly powers.

Thou fair example, live without compare,  
With honors triumphs seated in thy breast;

180

Pale envy never can thy name impair,  
When in thy heart thou harbor'st such a guest,  
Malice must live forever in despair;  
There's no revenge where virtue still doth rest:  
All hearts must needs do homage unto thee,  
In whom all eyes such rare perfection see.

*An invective  
against  
outward  
beauty  
unaccompanied  
with virtue*

That outward beauty which the world commends,  
Is not the subject I will write upon,  
Whose date expired, that tyrant time soon ends,  
Those gaudy colors soon are spent and gone:  
But those fair virtues which on thee attends  
Are always fresh, they never are but one:  
They make thy beauty fairer to behold,  
Than was that queen's o for whom proud Troy was  
sold.

195

As for those matchless colors red and white,  
Or perfect features in a fading face,  
Or due proportion pleasing to the sight;  
All these do draw but dangers and disgrace:  
A mind enriched with virtue shines more bright,  
Adds everlasting beauty, gives true grace,  
Frames an immortal goddess on the earth,  
Who though she dies, yet fame gives her new  
200 berth. o

200

205

That pride of nature which adorns the fair,  
Like blazing comets to allure all eyes,  
Is but the thread that weaves their web of care,  
Who glories most, where most their danger lies;  
For greatest perils do attend the fair,  
When men do seek, attempt, plot and devise,  
How they may overthrow the chastest Dame,  
Whose beauty is the white o whereat they aim.

\* \* \*

*To the Lady of  
Cumberland  
the  
Introduction to  
the Passion of  
Christ.*

¶ This grace, great lady, doth possess thy soul,  
And makes thee pleasing in thy maker's sight;  
This grace doth all imperfect thoughts control,<sup>o</sup>  
Directing thee to serve thy God aright;  
Still reckoning him the husband of thy soul,<sup>3</sup>  
Which is most precious in his glorious sight:  
Because the world's delights she doth deny  
255 For him, who for her sake vouchsafed to die.

And dying made her dowager<sup>4</sup> of all;  
Nay more, co-heir of that eternal bliss  
That angels lost, and we by Adam's fall;  
260 Mere cast-aways, raised by a Judas kiss,<sup>5</sup>  
Christ's bloody sweat, the vinegar and gall,  
The spear, sponge, nails, his buffeting with fists,  
His bitter passion, agony, and death,  
Did gain us heaven when he did lose his breath.

*A preamble of  
the Author  
before the  
Passion*

These high deserts<sup>o</sup> invite my lowly muse  
To write of him, and pardon crave of thee,  
For time so spent, I need make no excuse,  
Knowing it doth with thy fair mind agree  
So well, as thou no labor wilt refuse  
That to thy holy love may pleasing be:  
270 His death and passion I desire to write,  
And thee to read, the blessed soul's delight.

But my dear Muse, now whither wouldst thou fly,  
Above the pitch of thy appointed strain?  
275 With Icarus,<sup>6</sup> thou seekest now to try,  
Not waxen wings, but thy poor barren brain,  
Which far too weak, these siely<sup>o</sup> lines descry;<sup>o</sup>  
Yet cannot this thy forward mind restrain,  
But thy poor infant verse must soar aloft,



280 Not fearing threat'ning dangers, happening oft.

Think when the eye of wisdom shall discover  
Thy weakling muse to fly, that scarce could creep,  
And in the air above the clouds to hover,  
When better 'twere mewed up,<sup>o</sup> and fast asleep;  
They'll think with Phaeton,<sup>z</sup> thou canst ne'er recover,  
285 But helpless with that poor young lad to weep:  
The little world of thy weak wit on fire,  
Where thou wilt perish in thine own desire.

But yet the weaker thou dost seem to be  
In sex, or sense, the more his<sup>o</sup> glory shines,  
290 That doth infuse such powerful grace in thee,  
To show thy love in these few humble lines;  
The widow's mite<sup>8</sup> with this may well agree,  
Her little all more worth than golden mines,  
Being more dearer to our loving Lord,  
295 Than all the wealth that kingdoms could afford.

Therefore I humbly for his grace will pray,  
That he will give me power and strength to write,  
That what I have begun, so end I may,  
As his great glory may appear more bright;  
300 Yea in these lines I may no further stray  
Than his most holy spirit shall give me light:  
That blindest weakness be not over bold,  
The manner of his Passion to unfold.

\* \* \*

745 Now Pontius Pilate<sup>9</sup> is to judge the cause<sup>o</sup>  
Of faultless Jesus, who before him stands;  
Who neither hath offended prince, nor laws,  
Although he now be brought in woeful bands:  
O noble governor, make thou yet a pause,  
Do not in innocent blood imbrue<sup>o</sup> thy hands;

750 But hear the words of thy most worthy wife,  
Who sends to thee, to beg her Savior's life.<sup>1</sup>

Let barb'rous cruelty far depart from thee,  
And in true justice take affliction's part;  
Open thine eyes, that thou the truth may'st see,  
755 Do not the thing that goes against thy heart;  
Condemn not him that must thy savior be;  
But view his holy life, his good desert:  
Let not us women glory in men's fall,<sup>2</sup>  
Who had power given to overrule us all.

760 *Eve's Apology* ¶ Till now your<sup>o</sup> indiscretion sets us free,  
And makes our former fault much less appear;  
Our mother Eve, who tasted of the tree,  
Giving to Adam what she held most dear,  
Was simply good, and had no power to see;<sup>4</sup>  
765 The after-coming harm did not appear:  
The subtle serpent that our sex betrayed,  
Before our fall so sure a plot had laid.

That undiscerning ignorance perceived  
No guile, or craft that was by him intended;  
770 For, had she known of what we were bereaved,<sup>5</sup>  
To his request she had not condescended.<sup>o</sup>  
But she (poor soul) by cunning was deceived,  
No hurt therein her harmless heart intended:  
For she alleged<sup>o</sup> God's word, which he<sup>o</sup> denies  
775 That they should die, but even as gods, be wise.

But surely Adam cannot be excused,  
Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame;  
What weakness offered, strength might have  
refused,  
780 Being lord of all, the greater was his shame:  
Although the serpent's craft had her abused,

God's holy word ought all his actions frame:  
For he was lord and king of all the earth,  
Before poor Eve had either life or breath.<sup>6</sup>

785 Who being framed<sup>o</sup> by God's eternal hand,  
The perfectest man that ever breathed on earth,  
And from God's mouth received that strait<sup>o</sup>  
command,<sup>7</sup>  
The breach whereof he knew was present death:  
Yea having power to rule both sea and land,  
790 Yet with one apple won to lose that breath,<sup>8</sup>  
Which God hath breathed in his beauteous face,  
Bringing us all in danger and disgrace.

And then to lay the fault on patience's back,  
That we (poor women) must endure it all;  
795 We know right well he did discretion<sup>o</sup> lack,  
Being not persuaded thereunto at all;  
If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake,  
The fruit being fair persuaded him to fall:  
No subtle serpent's falsehood did betray him,  
800 If he would eat it, who had power to stay<sup>o</sup> him?

Not Eve, whose fault was only too much love,  
Which made her give this present to her dear,  
That which she tasted, he likewise might prove,<sup>o</sup>  
Whereby his knowledge might become more clear;  
He never sought her weakness to reprove  
805 With those sharp words which he of God did hear:  
Yet men will boast of knowledge which he took  
From Eve's fair hand, as from a learned book.

810 If any evil did in her remain,  
Being made of him, he was the ground of all;  
If one of many worlds could lay a stain  
Upon our sex, and work so great a fall

To wretched man by Satan's<sup>9</sup> subtle train;<sup>o</sup>  
What will so foul a fault amongst you all?  
Her weakness did the serpent's word obey,  
815 But you<sup>o</sup> in malice God's dear son betray.

Whom, if unjustly you condemn to die,  
Her sin was small, to what you do commit;  
All mortal sins<sup>1</sup> that do for vengeance cry,  
Are not to be compared unto it:  
820 If many worlds would altogether try  
By all their sins the wrath of God to get,  
This sin of yours surmounts them all as far  
As doth the sun, another little star.

Then let us have our liberty again,  
825 And challenge<sup>o</sup> to your selves no sovereignty;  
You came not in the world without our pain,  
Make that a bar against your cruelty;  
Your fault being greater, why should you disdain  
Our being your equals, free from tyranny?  
830 If one weak woman simply did offend,  
This sin of yours hath no excuse, nor end.

To which (poor souls) we never gave consent,  
Witness thy wife (O Pilate) speaks for all;  
Who did but dream, and yet a message sent,  
835 That thou should'st have nothing to do at all  
With that just man,<sup>o</sup> which, if thy heart relent,  
Why wilt thou be a reprobate<sup>o</sup> with Saul?<sup>2</sup>  
To seek the death of him that is so good,  
840 For thy soul's health to shed his dearest blood.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

*The tears of  
the daughters  
of Jerusalem.*

Thrice happy women<sup>4</sup> that obtained such grace  
From him whose worth the world could not contain;

Immediately to turn about his face,  
As not rememb'ring his great grief and pain,  
To comfort you, whose tears poured forth apace  
On Flora's<sup>o</sup> banks, like showers of April rain:  
975 Your cries enforced mercy, grace, and love  
From him, whom greatest princes could not move

To speak one word, nor once to lift his eyes  
Unto proud Pilate, no nor Herod, king,  
By all the questions that they could devise,  
980 Could make him answer to no manner of thing;  
Yet these poor women by their piteous cries  
Did move their lord, their lover, and their king,  
To take compassion, turn about, and speak  
To them whose hearts were ready now to break.

Most blessed Daughters of Jerusalem,  
985 Who found such favor in your Savior's sight,  
To turn his face when you did pity him;  
Your tearful eyes beheld his eyes more bright;  
Your faith and love unto such grace did climb,  
To have reflection from this heav'nly light:  
990 Your eagles' eye did gaze against this sun,  
Your hearts did think, he dead, the world were  
done.

When spiteful men with torments did oppress  
Th'afflicted body of this innocent dove,  
985 Poor women seeing how much they did transgress,  
By tears, by sighs, by cries, intreat, nay prove,  
What may be done among the thickest press,  
They labor still these tyrants' hearts to move:<sup>5</sup>  
In pity and compassion to forbear  
1000 Their whipping, spurning, tearing of his hair.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

1305

This is that bridegroom that appears so fair,<sup>7</sup>  
So sweet, so lovely in his spouse's sight,  
That unto snow we may his face compare,  
His cheeks like scarlet, and his eyes so bright  
As purest doves that in the rivers are  
Washed with milk, to give the more delight;  
1310 His head is likened to the finest gold,  
His curled locks so beauteous to behold;

1315

Black as a raven in her blackest hue;  
His lips like scarlet threads, yet much more sweet  
Than is the sweetest honey-dropping dew,  
Or honeycombs, where all the bees do meet;  
Yea, he is constant, and his words are true,  
His cheeks are beds of spices, flowers sweet;  
His lips like lilies, dropping down pure myrrh,  
Whose love, before all worlds we do prefer.<sup>8</sup>

1320

*To my Lady of  
Cumberland.*

Ah! give me leave (good lady) now to leave  
This task of beauty which I took in hand,  
I cannot wade so deep, I may deceive  
My self, before I can attain the land;  
Therefore (good Madam) in your heart I leave  
1325 His perfect picture, where it still shall stand,  
Deeply engraved in that holy shrine,  
Environed with love and thoughts divine.

1330

There may you see him as a God in glory,  
And as a man in miserable case;  
There may you read his true and perfect story,  
His bleeding body there you may embrace,  
And kiss his dying cheeks with tears of sorrow,  
With joyful grief, you may intreat for grace;

1335

And all your prayers, and your alms-deeds<sup>9</sup>  
May bring to stop his cruel wounds that bleeds.

Oft times hath he made trial of your love,  
And in your faith hath took no small delight,  
By crosses and afflictions he doth prove,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet still your heart remaineth firm and right;  
1340 Your love so strong as nothing can remove,  
Your thoughts being placed on him both day and  
night,  
Your constant soul doth lodge between her  
breasts,  
This sweet of sweets, in which all glory rests.

\* \* \*

Wise Deborah<sup>9</sup> that judged Israel,  
Nor valiant Judith<sup>1</sup> cannot equal thee,  
Unto the first, God did his will reveal,  
And gave her power to set his people free;  
Yea Judith had the power likewise to quell  
1485 Proud Holofernes, that the just might see  
What small defence vain pride and greatness hath  
Against the weapons of God's word and faith.

But thou far greater war do'st still maintain  
Against that many-headed monster sin,  
1490 Whose mortal sting hath many thousand slain,  
And every day fresh combats do begin;  
Yet cannot all his venom lay one stain  
Upon thy soul, thou do'st the conquest win,  
Though all the world he daily doth devour,  
1495 Yet over thee he never could get power.

For that one worthy deed by Deb'rah done,  
Thou hast performed many in thy time;  
For that one conquest that faire Judith won,  
By which she did the steps of honor climb,  
1500 Thou hast the conquest of all conquests won,

When to thy conscience Hell can lay no crime:  
For that one head that Judith bare away,  
Thou takest from sin a hundred heads a day.

1505     Though virtuous Hester<sup>2</sup> fasted three days' space,  
And spent her time in prayers all that while,  
That by God's power she might obtain such grace,  
That she and hers might not become a spoil  
To wicked Haman, in whose crabbed face  
1510     Was seen the map of malice, envy, guile;  
Her glorious garments though she put apart,  
So to present a pure and single heart.

\* \* \*

1825     Lo Madam,<sup>o</sup> here you take a view of those,<sup>o</sup>  
Whose worthy steps you do desire to tread,  
Decked in those colors which our Savior chose;  
The purest colors both of white and red,  
*Colors of*     Their freshest beauties would I fain disclose,  
*Confessors &*     By which our Savior most was honored:  
*Martyrs*     But my weak Muse desireth now to rest,  
Folding up all their beauties in your breast.

1835     Whose excellence hath raised my spirits to write,  
Of what my thoughts could hardly apprehend;  
Your rarest virtues did my soul delight,  
Great lady of my heart: I must commend  
You that appear so fair in all men's sight:  
On your deserts my muses do attend;  
You are the Arctic star that guides my hand,  
1840     All what I am, I rest at your command.

1611

## Endnotes



- Note 1: Lanyer's title poem has four parts: The Passion; Eve's Apology in Defense of Women; The Tears of the Daughters of Jerusalem; and The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgin Mary. It also includes multiple addresses to the Countess of Cumberland, whom Lanyer imagines as a model of constancy. (See Hilliard's miniature on p. 924.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Symbol of steadfast love.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Christ is figured as a bridegroom in the gospel of John (John 3:29); the brides of Christ were the faithful. (See also the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1–13.)[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
A widow who receives title or property from her husband's estate. Lanyer presents the countess's soul first as Christ's bride and then as his dowager, enjoying and dispensing his wealth. Lanyer may also allude to Margaret Clifford's own status following the 1605 death of her (estranged) husband: she and her daughter embarked on a years-long battle for Anne's right to inherit the Clifford estates. (George Clifford left his property to his brother.)  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The kiss with which Judas identified Jesus to those seeking to arrest him also led (through his death) to the salvation of humankind (Matthew 26:47–56). More generally, a Judas kiss is an apparent act of friendship that actually harms the recipient.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Greek myth, son of the inventor Daedalus; he fell into the sea because he flew too close to the sun, melting the wax wings his father had made for him.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Greek myth, son of the sun god, Helios; after borrowing his father's sun-chariot, he drove both too close to and too far from the earth, alternately burning and freezing it. To save the world, Zeus struck him down.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A coin of small value. In a parable, Jesus praises the widow for giving all she has ("the widow's mite") while the

- wealthy give less (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4). Lanyer also puns on the widow's "might."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Roman governor of Judea (26–36 C.E.) who authorized the crucifixion of Jesus. The intervening stanzas recount Christ's story up until his trial, focusing largely on the wickedness of kings, priests, and elders, and on the weaknesses of the disciples, "Though they protest they never will forsake him," Lanyer writes, "They do like men, when dangers overtake them."[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1:  
 "While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him' " (Matthew 27:19). Lanyer writes her own, much-elaborated version of this letter in the following stanzas, in which there is no clear differentiation between the voice of Pilate's wife's and that of Lanyer herself.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: The fall of Adam and the prospective fall of Pilate.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Apology here means defense. Lanyer's defense of Eve, and of women more generally, is presented by Pilate's wife. (It does not appear in the Bible.)[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4:  
 In Genesis, Eve eats the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil first, and then Adam eats it (Genesis 3:1–13). There was much debate in the *querelle des femmes* about whose crime was worse: that of Eve, who was seduced by the serpent, or of Adam, who hearkened to the voice of his wife. See *Paradise Lost* 9.733–1189, 10.1–208, and *Order and Disorder*, 5.120–267, for other versions of the story.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Deprived (here, of eternal life). See Genesis 3:16–19.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: In contrast to Genesis 1:27 in which God created man in his own image, "male and female created he them," in

- Genesis 2, God creates Adam first (7), then fashions Eve from a rib taken from Adam's side (21–23). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Not to eat of the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:17). [Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: The breath of life, which would have been eternal. [Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Tradition, not Genesis, identifies the serpent with Satan. [Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: Sins punishable by damnation. [Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: First king of Israel; he tried to kill his successor and God's anointed prophet-king, David (1 Samuel 20:30–24:17). [Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Lanyer's account of Christ's Passion ends with Pilate's decision (as his wife puts it) that he could not be Caesar's "friend / Unless he sent sweet Jesus to his end." Yet, she also notes, Christ's crown of thorns is superior to "the diadem / Of any king that ever lived before." [Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: "The daughters of Jerusalem" are the women who wept as they followed Jesus to his crucifixion (Luke 23:27–31). "Daughters of Jerusalem" also appear in the Song of Songs (or "Canticles") 5:16, where they are called upon to witness and support the courtship of the bride (in Christian typology, the church) and bridegroom (Christ). [Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Women followed and ministered to Christ (Matthew 27:55–56), were critical of and mourned his execution (27:61), and were among his most fervent followers (28:1–12), but their role in Lanyer's poem is more activist than it is in the Gospels. [Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: The omitted stanzas include "The Salutation and the Sorrow of the Virgin Mary." [Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: The following stanzas are part of "*A brief description of his [the bridegroom/Christ's] beauty upon the Canticles*" (Lanyer's marginal note). [Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Some of the metaphors Lanyer uses here, such as the scarlet ribbon lips dropping honey, are based on those used by the bridegroom to describe the bride in the Songs of Songs

- (4:3, 11). Others, such as cheeks of spices and lips like lilies (5:13), are based on those the bride uses to describe the bridegroom to the daughters of Jerusalem.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A judge and prophet who played a crucial role in the Israelites' victory over the Canaanites (Judges 4 and 5).[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: Heroine of the apocryphal book of Judith; she beheaded the enemy general, Holofernes.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: Queen Esther, who interceded with King Ahasuerus when his minister Haman sought to destroy her people, the Jews; Haman was hanged, and the Jews' enemies destroyed (Esther 5–9; for her fasting, see 4:16). A defense of women published a few years after Lanyer's was entitled *Esther Hath Hanged Haman* (1617).[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *Christ's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Countess of Cumberland*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Helen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *birth, beginning; status*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mark, target*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contain, restrict*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deservings, merits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *silly, simple* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proclaim*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confined, enclosed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Christ's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *case*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Pilate's, men's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *consented*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *asserted* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the serpent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *determine*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fashioned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prevent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experience, test*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *treachery, deceit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Pilate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attribute*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Christ*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *damned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Roman goddess of spring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acts of charity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *test*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Countess of Cumberland* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *martyrs*[Return to reference](#) °

## The Description of Cookham<sup>1</sup>

Farewell, sweet Cookham, where I first obtained  
Grace<sup>2</sup> from that grace where perfect grace  
remained;  
And where the muses gave their full consent,  
I should have power the virtuous to content;  
Where princely palace willed me to indite,<sup>o</sup>  
5 The sacred story of the soul's delight.<sup>3</sup>  
Farewell, sweet place, where virtue then did rest,  
And all delights did harbor in her breast;  
Never shall my sad eyes again behold  
Those pleasures which my thoughts did then unfold.  
10 Yet you, great lady, mistress of that place,  
From whose desires did spring this work of grace;  
Vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> to think upon those pleasures past,  
As fleeting worldly joys that could not last,  
Or, as dim shadows of celestial pleasures,  
15 Which are desired above all earthly treasures.  
Oh how, methought, against<sup>o</sup> you thither came,  
Each part did seem some new delight to frame!  
The house received all ornaments to grace it,  
And would endure no foulness to deface it.  
20 And walks put on their summer liveries,<sup>4</sup>  
And all things else did hold like similes:<sup>5</sup>  
The trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,  
Embraced each other, seeming to be glad,  
Turning themselves to beauteous canopies,  
25 To shade the bright sun from your brighter eyes;  
The crystal streams with silver spangles graced,  
While by the glorious sun they were embraced;  
The little birds in chirping notes did sing,

30 To entertain both you and that sweet spring.  
And Philomela<sup>6</sup> with her sundry lays,  
Both you and that delightful place did praise.  
Oh how me thought each plant, each flower, each  
tree  
Set forth their beauties then to welcome thee!  
The very hills right humbly did descend,  
35 When you to tread on them did intend.  
And as you set your feet, they still did rise,  
Glad that they could receive so rich a prize.  
The gentle winds did take delight to be  
Among those woods that were so graced by thee,  
40 And in sad murmur uttered pleasing sound,  
That pleasure in that place might more abound.  
The swelling banks delivered all their pride  
When such a phoenix<sup>7</sup> once they had espied.  
Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree,  
45 Thought themselves honored in supporting thee.  
The pretty birds would oft come to attend thee,  
Yet fly away for fear they should offend thee;  
The little creatures in the burrow by  
Would come abroad to sport them in your eye,  
50 Yet fearful of the bow in your fair hand,  
Would run away when you did make a stand.  
Now let me come unto that stately tree,  
Wherein such goodly prospects you did see;  
That oak that did in height his fellows pass,  
55 As much as lofty trees, low growing grass,  
Much like a comely cedar straight and tall,  
Whose beauteous stature far exceeded all.  
How often did you visit this fair tree,  
Which seeming joyful in receiving thee,  
60 Would like a palm tree spread his arms abroad,  
Desirous that you there should make abode;  
Whose fair green leaves much like a comely veil,

Defended Phoebus<sup>o</sup> when he would assail;  
Whose pleasing boughs did yield a cool fresh air,  
65 Joying<sup>o</sup> his happiness when you were there.  
Where being seated, you might plainly see  
Hills, vales, and woods, as if on bended knee  
They had appeared, your honor to salute,  
Or to prefer some strange unlooked-for suit;<sup>8</sup>  
70 All interlaced with brooks and crystal springs,  
A prospect fit to please the eyes of kings.  
And thirteen shires appeared all in your sight,  
Europe could not afford much more delight.  
What was there then but gave you all content,  
75 While you the time in meditation spent  
Of their Creator's power, which there you saw,  
In all his creatures held a perfect law;  
And in their beauties did you plain descry<sup>o</sup>  
His beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majesty.  
80 In these sweet woods how often did you walk,  
With Christ and his apostles there to talk;  
Placing his holy writ in some fair tree  
To meditate what you therein did see.  
With Moses you did mount his holy hill  
85 To know his pleasure, and perform his will.<sup>9</sup>  
With lowly David you did often sing  
His holy hymns to heaven's eternal King.<sup>1</sup>  
And in sweet music did your soul delight  
To sound his praises, morning, noon, and night.  
90 With blessed Joseph you did often feed  
Your pined<sup>o</sup> brethren, when they stood in need.<sup>2</sup>  
And that sweet lady sprung from Clifford's race,  
Of noble Bedford's blood, fair stem of grace,<sup>3</sup>  
To honorable Dorset now espoused,<sup>4</sup>  
95 In whose fair breast true virtue then was housed,  
Oh what delight did my weak spirits find  
In those pure parts<sup>o</sup> of her well framed mind.



And yet it grieves me that I cannot be  
Near unto her, whose virtues did agree  
100 With those fair ornaments of outward beauty,  
Which did enforce from all both love and duty.  
Unconstant Fortune, thou art most to blame,  
Who casts us down into so low a frame  
Where our great friends we cannot daily see,  
105 So great a difference is there in degree.<sup>5</sup>  
Many are placéd in those orbs of state,  
Parters<sup>6</sup> in honor, so ordained by Fate,  
Nearer in show, yet farther off in love,  
In which, the lowest always are above.<sup>7</sup>  
110 But whither am I carried in conceit,<sup>o</sup>  
My wit too weak to conster<sup>o</sup> of the great.  
Why not? Although we are but born of earth,  
We may behold the heavens, despising death;  
And loving heaven that is so far above,  
115 May in the end vouchsafe us entire love.<sup>8</sup>  
Therefore sweet memory do thou retain  
Those pleasures past, which will not turn again:  
Remember beauteous Dorset's<sup>9</sup> former sports,  
So far from being touched by ill reports,  
120 Wherein myself did always bear a part,  
While reverend love presented my true heart.  
Those recreations let me bear in mind,  
Which her sweet youth and noble thoughts did find,  
Whereof deprived, I evermore must grieve,  
125 Hating blind Fortune, careless to relieve.  
And you sweet Cookham, whom these ladies leave,  
I now must tell the grief you did conceive  
At their departure, when they went away,  
How everything retained a sad dismay.  
130 Nay long before, when once an inkling came,  
Methought each thing did unto sorrow frame:  
The trees that were so glorious in our view,

Forsook both flowers and fruit, when once they knew  
Of your depart, their very leaves did wither,  
135 Changing their colors as they grew together.  
But when they saw this had no power to stay you,  
They often wept, though, speechless, could not pray  
you,  
Letting their tears in your fair bosoms fall,  
As if they said, Why will ye leave us all?  
140 This being vain, they cast their leaves away  
Hoping that pity would have made you stay:  
Their frozen tops, like age's hoary hairs,  
Shows their disasters, languishing in fears.  
A swarthy riveled rind<sup>o</sup> all over spread,  
145 Their dying bodies half alive, half dead.  
But your occasions called you so away<sup>1</sup>  
That nothing there had power to make you stay.  
Yet did I see a noble grateful mind  
Requiting each according to their kind,  
150 Forgetting not to turn and take your leave  
Of these sad creatures, powerless to receive  
Your favor, when with grief you did depart,  
Placing their former pleasures in your heart,  
Giving great charge to noble memory  
155 There to preserve their love continually.  
But specially the love of that fair tree,  
That first and last you did vouchsafe to see,  
In which it pleased you oft to take the air  
With noble Dorset, then a virgin fair,  
160 Where many a learned book was read and scanned,  
To this fair tree, taking me by the hand,  
You did repeat the pleasures which had passed,  
Seeming to grieve they could no longer last.  
And with a chaste, yet loving kiss took leave,  
165 Of which sweet kiss I did it soon bereave,<sup>o</sup>  
Scorning a senseless creature should possess

So rare a favor, so great happiness.  
No other kiss it could receive from me,  
For fear to give back what it took of thee,  
170 So I ungrateful creature did deceive it  
Of that which you in love vouchsafed to leave it.  
And though it oft had given me much content,  
Yet this great wrong I never could repent;  
But of the happiest made it most forlorn,  
175 To show that nothing's free from Fortune's scorn,  
While all the rest with this most beauteous tree  
Made their sad comfort sorrow's harmony.  
The flowers that on the banks and walks did grow,  
Crept in the ground, the grass did weep for woe.  
180 The winds and waters seemed to chide together  
Because you went away they knew not whither;  
And those sweet brooks that ran so fair and clear,  
With grief and trouble wrinkled did appear.  
Those pretty birds that wonted<sup>o</sup> were to sing,  
185 Now neither sing, nor chirp, nor use their wing,  
But with their tender feet on some bare spray,  
Warble forth sorrow, and their own dismay.  
Fair Philomela leaves her mournful ditty,  
Drowned in deep sleep, yet can procure no pity.  
190 Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree  
Looks bare and desolate now for want of thee,  
Turning green tresses into frosty gray,  
While in cold grief they wither all away.  
The sun grew weak, his beams no comfort gave,  
195 While all green things did make the earth their  
grave.  
Each briar, each bramble, when you went away  
Caught fast your clothes, thinking to make you stay;  
Delightful Echo wonted to reply  
To our last words, did now for sorrow die;  
200 The house cast off each garment that might grace it,  
Putting on dust and cobwebs to deface it.

All desolation then there did appear,  
When you were going whom they held so dear.  
This last farewell to Cookham here I give,  
205 When I am dead thy name in this may live,  
Wherein I have performed her noble hest<sup>o</sup>  
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,  
And ever shall, so long as life remains,  
210 Tying my life to her by those rich chains.<sup>o</sup> 1611

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
The poem was written in honor of Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and celebrates a royal estate leased to her brother, at which the countess occasionally resided. The poem should be compared with Jonson's "To Penshurst" (p. 1053). Lanyer's poem is based on a familiar classical topic, the "farewell to a place," which had its most famous development in Virgil's *Eclogue* 1. Lanyer makes extensive use of the common pastoral motif of nature's active sympathy with and response to human emotion, which later came to be called the "pathetic fallacy."  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here, both God's grace and the favor of Her Grace, the Countess of Cumberland. Lanyer attributes both her religious conversion and her vocation as poet to a period of residence in the countess's household. We do not know how long or under what circumstances Lanyer resided at Cookham.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Apparently a reference to the countess as her patron, commissioning her poem on Christ's Passion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Distinctive garments worn by persons in the service of great families, to indicate whose servants they were.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Behaved in similar fashion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In myth, Philomela was raped by her brother-in-law Tereus, who also tore out her tongue; the gods transformed her into a bird (in Ovid's version, a nightingale) who tells her tale in song. The bird's song is joyous at first, then mournful (line 189) as Lanyer associates Philomela's woes with those of Cookham at the women's departure.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mythical bird that lived alone of its kind for five hundred years, then was consumed in flame and reborn from its own ashes; metaphorically, a person of rare excellence. "All their pride": fish (compare "To Penshurst," p. 1054, lines 31–36).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To urge some unexpected petition, as to a monarch.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: You sought out and followed God's law, like Moses, who received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: You often sang David's psalms.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Like Joseph, who fed the starving Israelites in Egypt, you fed the hungry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Main line of the family tree. Anne Clifford, only surviving child of the seaman-adventurer George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland, and the countess, a Russell (of "Bedford's blood").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Anne Clifford was married to Richard Sackville, third Earl of Dorset, on February 25, 1609; the reference helps date Lanyer's poem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: These lines and lines 117–25 probably exaggerate Lanyer's former familiarity with Anne Clifford.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Separators; that is, the various honorific ranks ("orbs of state") act to separate person from person.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An egalitarian sentiment playing on the Christian notion that in spiritual things—love and charity—the poor and lowly surpass the great ones.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: That is, we (lowly) may also love God and enjoy God's love, and hence are equal to anyone.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As was common, Anne Clifford is here referred to by her husband's title.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: After her husband's death in 1605, Margaret Clifford chiefly resided in her dower properties in the north; Anne Clifford was married in 1609. The two women began their pursuit of Anne's rights to the Clifford properties immediately after George Clifford's death. Anne finally obtained her rights in 1643.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *write*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be willing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in preparation for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *resisted the sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *enjoying*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perceive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gaunt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *qualities*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thought, fancy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *construe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bark*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soon take from it*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *commission*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her virtues*[Return to reference °](#)

# **BEN JONSON**

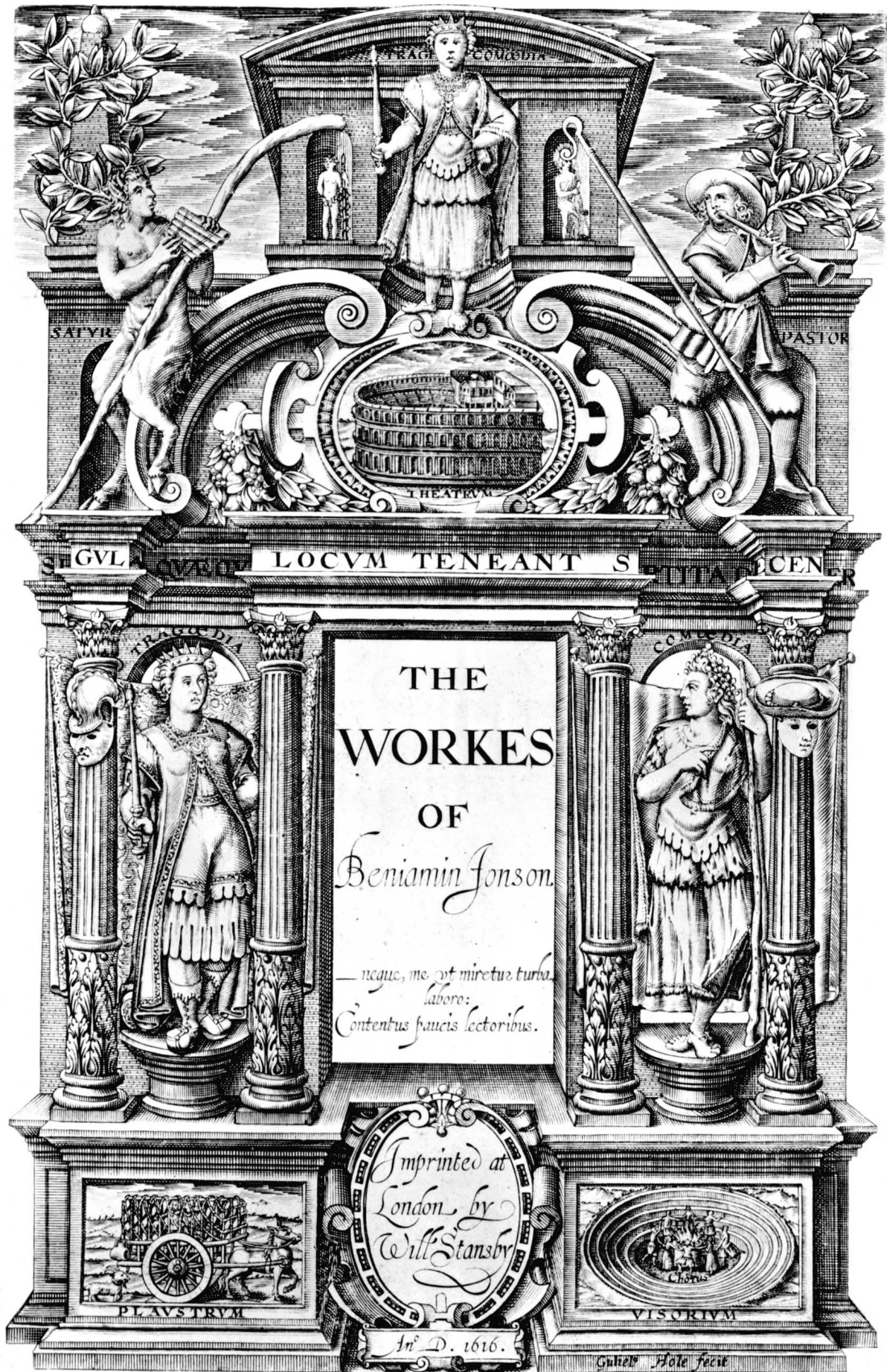
## **1572–1637**

In 1616 Ben Jonson published his *Works*, to the derision of those astounded to see mere plays and poems collected under the same title the king gave to his political treatises. Many of Jonson's contemporaries shied away from publication, either because, like Donne, they wrote for small coterie audiences or because, like Shakespeare, they wrote for theater companies that preferred not to let go of the scripts. Jonson knew and admired both Donne and Shakespeare and more than any Jacobean belonged to both of their very different worlds, but in publishing his *Works* he laid claim to higher literary status. He had risen from humble beginnings to become England's unofficial poet laureate, with a pension from the king and honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge. If he was not the first professional author in England, he was the first to invest that role with dignity and respectability. His published *Works*, over which he labored with painstaking care, testify to an extraordinary feat of self-transformation.

Jonson's early life was tough and turbulent. The son of a London clergyman who died before he was born, he was educated at Westminster School under the antiquarian scholar William Camden. There he developed his love of classical learning; but lacking the resources to continue his education, Jonson was forced to turn to his stepfather's trade of bricklaying, a life he "could not endure." He escaped by joining the English forces in Flanders, where, he later

boasted, he killed a man in single combat before the eyes of two armies. Back in London, his attempt to make a living as an actor and a playwright almost ended in disaster. He was imprisoned in 1597 for collaborating with Thomas Nashe on the scandalous play *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost), and shortly after his release he killed one of his fellow actors in a duel. Jonson escaped the gallows by pleading benefit of clergy (a medieval privilege exempting felons from the death penalty if they could read Latin). His learning had saved his life, but he emerged from captivity branded on the thumb, and with another mark against him as well. Under the influence of a priest imprisoned with him, Jonson had converted to Catholicism. He was now more than ever a marginal figure, distrusted by the society that he satirized brilliantly in his early plays.





THE  
WORKES  
OF  
*Benjamin Jonson*

— neque, me pot miretur turba  
labore:  
Contentus paucis lectoribus.

Imprinted at  
London, by  
Will<sup>m</sup> Stansby

Anno D. 1616.

Guilielmus Stansby fecit

**Jonson's 1616 Works.** This title page makes a strong claim for the importance of Jonson's literary achievement and for the significance of English drama in general. The columned portico suggests Jonson's connection to the classical tradition, and the figures within it represent his mastery of various genres; they represent, clockwise from the top, Tragicomedy, Pastoral, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire. Underneath Tragedy is a cart of the sort medieval traveling players would have used; underneath Comedy is an ancient Greek amphitheater. Centered just beneath Tragicomedy is a depiction of the English public theaters for which Jonson wrote many of his plays.

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Jonson's fortunes improved with the accession of James I, though not immediately. In 1603 he was called before the Privy Council to answer charges of "popery and treason" found in his play *Sejanus*. Little more than a year later he was in jail again for co-writing the play *Eastward Ho*, which openly mocked the Scots accent of the new king and his courtiers. Nonetheless, in January 1605 Jonson received a commission from Queen Anna to organize the court's Twelfth Night entertainment, or masque, in the old Banqueting House at Whitehall. *The Masque of Blackness*, which Jonson produced in collaboration with the architect and scene designer Inigo Jones, featured Queen Anna and eleven of her ladies emerging from a scallop shell, "all painted like Blackamoors, face and neck bare" and "strangely attired." Jonson would go on to produce twenty-four masques for the court, most of them with Inigo Jones. In the same years that he was writing the masques, he produced his greatest works for the public theater, including the comedies *Volpone* (1606), *Epicene* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). Jonson preserved the detached, satiric perspective of an outsider, but he was rising in society and making accommodations where necessary. Around 1610, he returned to the Church of England.

Although he rose to a position of respectability, Jonson retained a quarrelsome spirit all his life. Much of his best work emerged out of fierce tensions with collaborators and contemporaries. Still, in spite

of his antagonistic nature, Jonson had a great capacity for friendship. His friends included Shakespeare, Donne, and Francis Bacon. In later years he gathered around himself a group of admiring younger men known as the "Sons of Ben," among them Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, and Sir John Suckling. Jonson also moved easily among the great of the land. His patrons included Lady Mary Wroth, whose sonnets he praised for making him a better poet, and other members of the Sidney and Herbert families. In "To Penshurst," a celebration of Robert Sidney's country estate, Jonson offers an ideal image of a social order in which a virtuous landowner offers hospitality to guests of all stations, from poets to kings.

"To Penshurst," together with Aemilia Lanyer's "Description of Cookham," inaugurated the genre of the "country house poem" in England. Jonson tried his hand at a wide range of poetic genres, including epitaph and epigram, love and funeral elegy, verse satire and verse letter, song and ode. More often than not he looked back to classical precedents. The classical values Jonson most admired are enumerated in "Inviting a Friend to Supper," which, in contrast to the excess that marked the banquets and entertainments of imperial Rome and Stuart England, describes a dinner party characterized by moderation and refinement, while still hinting at Jonson's own notoriety. The man who produced this image of temperate civility was a man of immense appetites, which found expression in his art as well as in his life. His best works seethe with imaginative energy and a lust for abundance. Even after a stroke in 1629 left him partially paralyzed and confined to his home, Jonson continued to write; he was at work on a new play when he died in 1637.



# Volpone

*or*  
The Fox

## THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY<sup>1</sup>

VOLPONE, *a magnifico*<sup>°</sup>

MOSCA, *his parasite*<sup>°</sup>

NANO, *a dwarf*

ANDROGYNO, *a hermaphrodite*

CASTRONE, *an eunuch*

VOLTORE, *an advocate*<sup>°</sup>

CORBACCIO, *an old gentleman*

BONARIO, *a young gentleman* [CORBACCIO's son]

CORVINO, *a merchant*

CELIA, *the merchant's wife*

*Servitore*, *a servant* [to CORVINO]

[*Sir*] POLITIC *Would-be*, *a knight*

*Fine Madame* [LADY] WOULD-BE, *the knight's wife*

[*Two*] WOMEN [*servants to* LADY WOULD-BE]

PEREGRINE, *a gentleman traveler*

AVOCATORI,<sup>o</sup> *four magistrates*

*Notario* [NOTARY], *the register*<sup>o</sup>

COMMENDATORI,<sup>o</sup> *officers*

[*Other court officials, litter-bearers*]

*Mercatori*, *three* MERCHANTS

*Grege* [*members of a* CROWD]

SCENE. *Venice*

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
Many of the characters have allegorically apt names. "Volpone" is defined in John Florio's 1598 Italian-English dictionary as "an old fox . . . a sneaking, lurking, wily deceiver." "Mosca" means "fly." "Nano" means "dwarf." "Vulture" means "vulture." "Corbaccio" means "raven." "Bonario" is derived from *bono*, meaning "good." "Corvino" means "crow." "Celia" means "heaven." "Politic" means "worldly-wise" or "temporizing." "Peregrine" means "traveler" or "small hawk." In many performances the symbolism of the animal names is reinforced by costuming.  
[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *Venetian nobleman*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hanger-on*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *lawyer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *public prosecutors*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *court recorder*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *court deputies*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***The Argument***<sup>1</sup>

V olpone, childless, rich, feigns sick, despairs,<sup>o</sup>  
O ffers his state<sup>o</sup> to hopes of several heirs,  
L ies languishing; his parasite receives  
P resents of all, assures, deludes, then weaves  
O ther cross-plots, which ope themselves,<sup>o</sup> are  
told.<sup>o</sup>  
N ew tricks for safety are sought; they thrive—  
when, bold,  
E ach tempts th'other again, and all are sold.<sup>o</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Plot summary. Jonson imitates the acrostic “arguments” of the Latin playwright Plautus.[Return to reference 1](#)

## **Notes**

- °: *is despaired of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *estate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unfold* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exposed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *betrayed*[Return to reference °](#)



## ***Prologue***

Now, luck yet send us, and a little wit  
Will serve to make our play hit  
According to the palates of the season.<sup>o</sup>  
Here is rhyme not empty of reason.  
This we were bid to credit<sup>o</sup> from our poet,  
5 Whose true scope,<sup>o</sup> if you would know it,  
In all his poems still hath been this measure,  
To mix profit with your pleasure;<sup>1</sup>  
And not as some—whose throats their envy failing<sup>o</sup>  
—  
10 Cry hoarsely, “all he writes is railing,”<sup>o</sup>  
And when his plays come forth think they can flout  
them  
With saying he was a year about them.<sup>2</sup>  
To these there needs no lie<sup>o</sup> but this his creature,<sup>o</sup>  
Which was, two months since, no feature;<sup>o</sup>  
And, though he dares give them<sup>o</sup> five lives to mend  
15 it,  
’Tis known five weeks fully penned it  
From his own hand, without a coadjutor,<sup>o</sup>  
Novice, journeyman,<sup>o</sup> or tutor.  
Yet thus much I can give you, as a token  
Of his play’s worth: no eggs are broken,  
20 Nor quaking custards with fierce teeth affrighted,<sup>3</sup>  
Wherewith your rout<sup>o</sup> are so delighted;  
Nor hailes he in a gull,<sup>o</sup> old ends<sup>o</sup> reciting,  
To stop gaps in his loose writing,  
With such a deal of monstrous and forced action  
25 As might make Bethlehem a faction.<sup>4</sup>  
Nor made he his play for jests stol’n from each table,  
<sup>o</sup>  
But makes jests to fit his fable,

And so presents quick<sup>o</sup> comedy, refined  
As best critics have designed.  
30 The laws of time, place, persons he observeth;<sup>5</sup>  
From no needful rule he swerveth.  
All gall and copperas<sup>6</sup> from his ink he draineth;  
Only a little salt<sup>7</sup> remaineth  
35 Wherewith he'll rub your cheeks, till, red with  
laughter,  
They shall look fresh a week after.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Rule, as laid down by Horace, that the poet ought to both please his audience and teach it something useful.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thomas Dekker ridiculed the slow pace at which Jonson produced new work in *Satiromastix, or The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet* (1602), and John Marston did the same in *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The satirist John Marston, in a line Jonson had previously ridiculed, boasted: "let custards [cowards] quake, my rage must freely run." Huge custards were a staple feature of city feasts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: As might win approval from lunatics (who inhabited Bethlehem hospital in London).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: He observes the unities of time and place and the consistency of character.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ferrous sulfate, like gall a corrosive substance used in ink.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A traditional metaphor for satiric wit.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *fashionable taste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asked to believe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not fully expressing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *personal insult*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *denial* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nonexistent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *his detractors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *collaborator*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apprentice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mob*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fool* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *saws*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plagiarized jokes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lively*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Act 1***

**SCENE 1. VOLPONE'S house.**

[*Enter*] VOLPONE [*and*] MOSCA.<sup>1</sup>

VOLPONE Good morning to the day, and, next, my gold!

Open the shrine that I may see my saint.

[*MOSCA reveals the treasure.*]<sup>2</sup>

Hail the world's soul,<sup>o</sup> and mine! More glad than is  
The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun

5 Peep through the horns of the celestial Ram<sup>3</sup>

Am I to view thy splendor darkening his,<sup>o</sup>

That, lying here amongst my other hoards,  
Show'st like a flame by night, or like the day

Struck out of chaos, when all darkness fled

10 Unto the center.<sup>o</sup> O thou son of Sol<sup>4</sup>—

But brighter than thy father—let me kiss

With adoration thee and every relic

Of sacred treasure in this blessed room.

Well did wise poets by thy glorious name

15 Title that age which they would have the best,<sup>5</sup>

Thou being the best of things, and far transcending

All style of joy in children, parents, friends,

Or any other waking dream on earth.

Thy looks when they to Venus did ascribe,

20 They should have giv'n her twenty thousand

Cupids,<sup>6</sup>

Such are thy beauties and our loves.<sup>o</sup> Dear saint,

Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues,

That canst do naught and yet mak'st men do all  
things,

The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot,<sup>o</sup>

25 Is made worth heaven! Thou art virtue, fame,

Honor, and all things else. Who<sup>o</sup> can get thee,

He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise—

MOSCA And what he will, sir. Riches are in fortune  
 A greater good than wisdom is in nature.

30 VOLPONE True, my belovèd Mosca. Yet I glory  
 More in the cunning purchase<sup>o</sup> of my wealth  
 Than in the glad possession, since I gain  
 No common way. I use no trade, no venture;<sup>o</sup>  
 I wound no earth with plowshares; fat no beasts  
 To feed the shambles;<sup>o</sup> have no mills for iron,  
 35 Oil, corn, or men, to grind 'em into powder;  
 I blow no subtle<sup>z</sup> glass; expose no ships  
 To threat'nings of the furrow-faced sea;  
 I turn<sup>o</sup> no moneys in the public bank,  
 Nor usure<sup>o</sup> private—

40 MOSCA No, sir, nor devour  
 Soft prodigals. You shall ha' some will swallow  
 A melting<sup>o</sup> heir as glibly as your Dutch  
 Will pills<sup>o</sup> of butter, and ne'er purge for't;<sup>8</sup>  
 Tear forth the fathers of poor families  
 Out of their beds and coffin them alive  
 45 In some kind, clasping<sup>o</sup> prison, where their bones  
 May be forthcoming<sup>o</sup> when the flesh is rotten.  
 But your sweet nature doth abhor these courses;  
 You loathe the widow's or the orphan's tears  
 Should wash your pavements, or their piteous cries  
 50 Ring in your roofs and beat the air for vengeance.

VOLPONE Right, Mosca, I do loathe it.

MOSCA And besides,  
 sir,  
 You are not like the thresher that doth stand  
 With a huge flail, watching a heap of corn,  
 And, hungry, dares not taste the smallest grain,  
 55 But feeds on mallows<sup>o</sup> and such bitter herbs;  
 Nor like the merchant who hath filled his vaults  
 With Romagna and rich Candian wines,  
 Yet drinks the lees of Lombard's vinegar.<sup>9</sup>

60 You will not lie in straw whilst moths and worms  
Feed on your sumptuous hangings<sup>o</sup> and soft beds.  
You know the use of riches, and dare give now  
From that bright heap to me, your poor observer,<sup>o</sup>  
Or to your dwarf, or your hermaphrodite,  
Your eunuch, or what other household<sup>o</sup> trifle  
65 Your pleasure allows maint'nance<sup>o</sup>—

VOLPONE [*giving money*] Hold thee,

Mosca,  
Take of my hand; thou strik'st on truth in all,  
And they are envious term<sup>o</sup> thee parasite.  
Call forth my dwarf, my eunuch, and my fool,  
And let 'em make me sport. [*Exit*

MOSCA.]

70 What should I do  
But cocker up my genius,<sup>o</sup> and live free  
To all delights my fortune calls me to?  
I have no wife, no parent, child, ally  
To give my substance to, but whom I make<sup>o</sup>  
Must be my heir, and this makes men observe<sup>o</sup> me.  
75 This draws new clients<sup>o</sup> daily to my house,  
Women and men of every sex and age,  
That bring me presents, send me plate,<sup>o</sup> coin,  
jewels,  
With hope that when I die—which they expect  
Each greedy minute—it shall then return  
80 Tenfold upon them; whilst some, covetous  
Above the rest, seek to engross<sup>o</sup> me whole,  
And counterwork,<sup>o</sup> the one unto the other,  
Contend in gifts as they would seem in love;  
All which I suffer, playing with their hopes,  
85 And am content to coin 'em into profit,  
And look upon their kindness and take more,  
And look on that, still bearing them in hand,<sup>o</sup>  
Letting the cherry knock against their lips,

And draw it by their mouths and back again.<sup>1</sup>—  
How now!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Alternatively, the play may begin with Volpone rising from his onstage bed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The treasure is probably hidden behind a curtain in the alcove at the back of the stage.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Aries, the constellation ascendant in early spring.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Alchemists believed gold to have issued from the sun ("Sol"). Volpone blasphemously applies this metaphor to God's creation of the world in Genesis.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The mythical Golden Age (when, ironically, gold was not yet in use) was influentially described by Ovid in *The Metamorphoses*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Latin poetry, Venus was commonly described as *aurea*, meaning "golden." The throng of cupids Volpone imagines around her suggests gold's irresistible, and for him highly sexual, appeal.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: (1) Delicate; (2) artful. (Venice was and is renowned for its art glass.)[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Never use a remedy for gastric distress. (The Dutch were notoriously fond of butter.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Romagna and rich Candian wines are expensive wines from Greece and Crete. The lees of Lombard's vinegar are the dregs of cheap Italian wine.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the game of chop-cherry, one player dangles a cherry in front of another, who tries to bite it.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *animating principle*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outshining the sun's*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *center of the earth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *our love of thee*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the bargain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whoever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acquisition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *risky commerce*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slaughterhouse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exchange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lend money at interest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *financially dwindling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morsels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manacled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *protruding; carted away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unpalatable weeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bed curtains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *follower*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *menial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *you're pleased to support*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *who term*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indulge my appetite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *he whom I designate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flatter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *petitioners*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gold or silver plate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swallow; monopolize*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compete; undermine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leading them on*[Return to reference](#) °

## SCENE 2. *The scene continues.*

[*Enter*] MOSCA, NANO, ANDROGYNO, [*and*] CASTRONE.

NANO Now, room for fresh gamesters,<sup>o</sup> who do will you  
to know

They do bring you neither play nor university show,<sup>1</sup>  
And therefore do entreat you that whatsoever they  
rehearse

May not fare a whit the worse for the false pace of  
the verse.<sup>2</sup>

5 If you wonder at this, you will wonder more ere we  
pass,

For know here [*indicating* ANDROGYNO] is enclosed the  
soul of Pythagoras,<sup>3</sup>

That juggler<sup>o</sup> divine, as hereafter shall follow;  
Which soul (fast and loose, sir) came first from  
Apollo,

And was breathed into Aethalides,<sup>4</sup> Mercurius his<sup>o</sup>  
son,

10 Where it had the gift to remember all that ever was  
done.

From thence it fled forth and made quick  
transmigration

To goldilocked Euphorbus,<sup>5</sup> who was killed in good  
fashion

At the siege of old Troy, by the cuckold of Sparta.<sup>6</sup>

Hermotimus<sup>7</sup> was next—I find it in my *charta*<sup>o</sup>—

15 To whom it did pass, where no sooner it was missing  
But with one Pyrrhus of Delos<sup>o</sup> it learned to go a-  
fishing;

And thence did it enter the Sophist of Greece.<sup>o</sup>

From Pythagore she went into a beautiful piece<sup>o</sup>

Hight<sup>o</sup> Aspasia the meretrix;<sup>8</sup> and the next toss of  
her

20 Was again of a whore; she became a philosopher,  
Crates the Cynic,<sup>9</sup> as itself doth relate it.  
Since,<sup>o</sup> kings, knights, and beggars, knaves, lords,  
and fools gat<sup>o</sup> it,  
Besides ox and ass, camel, mule, goat, and brock,<sup>o</sup>  
In all which it hath spoke as in the cobbler's cock.<sup>1</sup>  
But I come not here to discourse of that matter,  
25 Or his one, two, or three, or his great oath, "By  
quater,"<sup>2</sup>  
His musics, his trigon, his golden thigh,  
Or his telling how elements<sup>o</sup> shift; but I  
Would ask how of late thou hast suffered translation,  
<sup>o</sup>  
And shifted thy coat in these days of reformation?<sup>o</sup>  
30 ANDROGYNO Like one of the reformed, a fool,<sup>3</sup> as you  
see,  
Counting all old doctrine heresy.  
NANO But not on thine own forbid meats hast thou  
ventured?  
ANDROGYNO On fish, when first a Carthusian I  
entered.<sup>4</sup>  
35 NANO Why, then thy dogmatical silence<sup>o</sup> hath left  
thee?  
ANDROGYNO Of that an obstreperous lawyer bereft  
me.  
NANO Oh, wonderful change! When Sir Lawyer  
forsook thee,  
For Pythagore's sake, what body then took thee?  
ANDROGYNO A good dull mule.  
NANO And how, by that  
means,  
40 Thou wert brought to allow of the eating of beans?  
ANDROGYNO Yes.  
NANO But from the mule into whom didst thou pass?

ANDROGYNO Into a very strange beast, by some writers  
 called an ass;  
 By others a precise, pure, illuminate brother<sup>5</sup>  
 Of those devour flesh and sometimes one another,<sup>o</sup>  
 45 And will drop you forth a libel<sup>o</sup> or a sanctified lie  
 Betwixt every spoonful of a Nativity pie.<sup>6</sup>  
 NANO Now quit thee, for heaven, of that profane  
 nation,<sup>o</sup>  
 And gently report thy next transmigration.  
 ANDROGYNO To the same that I am.<sup>o</sup>  
 NANO A creature of  
 50 delight?  
 And—what is more than a fool—an hermaphrodite?  
 Now pray thee, sweet soul, in all thy variation<sup>o</sup>  
 Which body wouldst thou choose to take up thy  
 station?  
 ANDROGYNO Troth, this I am in, even here would I  
 tarry.  
 NANO 'Cause here the delight of each sex thou canst  
 55 vary?  
 ANDROGYNO Alas, those pleasures be stale and  
 forsaken.  
 No, 'tis your fool wherewith I am so taken,  
 The only one creature that I can call blessèd,  
 For all other forms I have proved<sup>o</sup> most distressèd.  
 NANO Spoke true, as thou wert in Pythagoras still.  
 60 This learnèd opinion we celebrate will,  
 Fellow eunuch, as behooves us, with all our wit and  
 art,  
 To dignify that<sup>o</sup> whereof ourselves are so great and  
 special a part.  
 VOLPONE [*applauding*] Now, very, very pretty!  
 Mosca, this  
 Was thy invention?  
 MOSCA If it please my patron,  
 65

Not else.

VOLPONE It doth, good Mosca.

MOSCA Then it was, sir.

### SONG

NANO *and* CASTRONE [*sing*]

70 Fools, they are the only nation<sup>o</sup>  
Worth men's envy or admiration,  
Free from care or sorrow-taking,  
Selves<sup>o</sup> and others merry making;  
All they speak or do is sterling.  
Your fool, he is your great man's dearling,  
And your lady's sport and pleasure;  
Tongue and bauble<sup>o</sup> are his treasure.  
75 E'en his face begetteth laughter,  
And he speaks truth free from slaughter.<sup>o</sup>  
He's the grace of every feast,  
And sometimes the chiefest guest,  
Hath his trencher<sup>o</sup> and his stool,  
When wit waits upon the fool.  
80 Oh, who would not be  
He, he, he? *One knocks*  
*without.*

VOLPONE Who's that? Away!

[*Exeunt* NANO *and* CASTRONE.]

Look, Mosca.

MOSCA

Fool,

begone!

[*Exit* ANDROGYNO.]

'Tis Signor Voltore, the advocate;

I know him by his knock.

85 VOLPONE Fetch me my gown,

My furs, and nightcaps; say my couch is changing,<sup>z</sup>

And let him entertain himself awhile

Without i'th'gallery. [Exit MOSCA.]

Now, now, my clients  
Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite,  
90 Raven, and gorcrow,° all my birds of prey  
That think me turning carcass, now they come.  
I am not for 'em° yet.

[Enter MOSCA.]

How now? The news?

MOSCA A piece of plate,° sir.

VOLPONE Of what bigness?

MOSCA Huge,  
Massy, and antique, with your name inscribed  
And arms° engraven.

VOLPONE Good! And not a fox  
95 Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights°  
Mocking a gaping crow?⁸ Ha, Mosca?

MOSCA [laughing] Sharp, sir.

VOLPONE Give me my furs. Why dost thou laugh so,  
man?

MOSCA I cannot choose, sir, when I apprehend  
100 What thoughts he has, without,° now, as he walks:  
That this might be the last gift he should° give;  
That this would fetch you;° if you died today  
And gave him all, what he should be tomorrow;  
What large return would come of all his ventures;  
How he should worshipped be and revered;  
105 Ride with his furs and footcloths,⁹ waited on  
By herds of fools and clients; have clear way  
Made for his mule, as lettered° as himself;  
Be called the great and learned advocate;  
And then concludes there's naught impossible.

110 VOLPONE Yes, to be learned, Mosca.

MOSCA Oh, no, rich  
Implies it.° Hood an ass with reverend purple,¹  
So you can hide his two ambitious° ears,

And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor.<sup>o</sup>  
 115 VOLPONE My caps, my caps, good Mosca. Fetch him  
 in.  
 MOSCA Stay, sir, your ointment for your eyes.  
 [MOSCA *helps* VOLPONE *with his disguise*.]  
 VOLPONE That's  
 true.  
 Dispatch, dispatch! I long to have possession  
 Of my new present.  
 MOSCA That, and thousands more  
 I hope to see you lord of.  
 VOLPONE Thanks, kind Mosca.  
 120 MOSCA And that, when I am lost in blended dust,  
 And hundred such as I am in succession—  
 VOLPONE Nay, that were too much, Mosca.  
 MOSCA —you  
 shall live  
 Still, to delude these harpies.<sup>2</sup>  
 VOLPONE Loving Mosca!  
 'Tis well. My pillow now, and let him enter.  
 [Exit MOSCA. VOLPONE *lies down*.]  
 125 Now, my feigned cough, my phthisic,<sup>o</sup> and my gout,  
 My apoplexy, palsy, and catarrhs,<sup>o</sup>  
 Help with your forcèd functions this my posture,<sup>o</sup>  
 Wherein this three year I have milked their hopes.  
 He comes, I hear him. [*Coughing*] Uh, uh, uh, uh!  
 Oh—

## Endnotes

- Note 1: University students performed classical plays or their imitations to hone their abilities in Latin oratory. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The four-stress meter of the skit Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone here perform was common in medieval drama but old-

fashioned by Jonson's time.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3:  
Ancient Greek philosopher, mathematician, and music theorist who believed in the transmigration of souls and in the mystical properties of geometrical relationships (especially triangles [triangles = trigon]). His followers observed strict dietary restrictions and took five-year vows of silence. His thigh was rumored to be made of gold. Jonson adapts much of the career of Pythagoras's soul from *The Dialogue of the Cobbler and the Cock*, by the Greek satirist Lucian.  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The herald of the Greek Argonauts and son of the god Mercury, who inherited his father's divine gift of memory. Thus, unlike other souls, which forget their previous lives, Aethalides' soul can recall its transmigrations.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Trojan youth who injured Achilles' beloved friend, Patroclus, in the *Iliad*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Menelaus, the Spartan king whose wife, Helen, was stolen by the Trojan prince Paris.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Greek philosopher of about 500 B.C.E.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Whore. Aspasia was the mistress of the Athenian statesman Pericles.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Student of Diogenes, founder of the Cynic philosophy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The speaker in Lucian's dialogue (see p. 949, n. 3 above).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A quater is an equilateral triangle the sides of which are evenly divisible by four.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The "reformed" are Protestants in general, but more specifically the Puritan wing of the Church of England. Jonson was a Catholic when he wrote *Volpone*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pythagoreans abstained from fish, but Carthusians, an order of Catholic monks, ate fish on fast days.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Puritan who claimed immediate, visionary knowledge of religious truth. Puritans did not observe the traditional fasting days (hence “devour flesh” in the following line).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Puritans substituted the term “Nativity” for “Christmas,” to avoid reference to the Mass.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: My bedsheets are being changed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In one of Aesop’s *Fables*, the fox tricks the crow into dropping its cheese.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ornamental cloths for the back of a horse.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Doctors of Divinity wore purple academic hoods.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mythological ravenous monsters with women’s heads and the bodies and claws of birds.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *entertainers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trickster*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Mercury’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *record*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *another philosopher*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Pythagoras*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slut*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *named*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *since then*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *received*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *badger*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *earth, air, fire, water*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *metamorphosis*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *religious change*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vow of silence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prey on each other*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *polemic*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *sect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what I am now*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of all your shapes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found to be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *folly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *group*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *themselves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fool's staff; penis*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with impunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *platter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *carriage crow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready to die*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gold platter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coat of arms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceptive tricks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *would have to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bring you around*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *educated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth implies learning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aspiring; upraised*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Doctor of Divinity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consumption; asthma*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mucus discharges*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imposture*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 3. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] VOLTORE [*with a platter, ushered by*]

MOSCA.

MOSCA [*to* VOLTORE] You still are what you were, sir.

Only you,

Of all the rest, are he commands<sup>o</sup> his love;

And you do wisely to preserve it thus

With early visitation and kind notes<sup>o</sup>

5 Of your good meaning to<sup>o</sup> him, which, I know,  
Cannot but come most grateful. [*Loudly, to* VOLPONE]

Patron, sir!

Here's Signor Voltore is come—

VOLPONE [*weakly*] What say you?

MOSCA Sir, Signor Voltore is come this morning

To visit you.

VOLPONE I thank him.

MOSCA And hath brought

10 A piece of antique plate bought of Saint Mark,<sup>1</sup>  
With which he here presents you.

VOLPONE He is welcome.

Pray him to come more often.

MOSCA Yes.

VOLTORE [*straining to hear*] What says he?

MOSCA He thanks you, and desires you see him  
often.

VOLPONE Mosca.

MOSCA My patron?

VOLPONE [*groping*] Bring him near. Where  
is he?

I long to feel his hand.

15 MOSCA [*guiding* VOLPONE's hands toward the platter]

The plate is here, sir.

VOLTORE How fare you, sir?

VOLPONE I thank you, Signor  
 Voltore.  
 Where is the plate? Mine eyes are bad.  
 VOLTORE [*relinquishing the platter*] I'm sorry  
 To see you still thus weak.  
 MOSCA [*aside*] That he is not weaker.  
 VOLPONE You are too munificent.  
 VOLTORE No, sir, would to  
 heaven  
 I could as well give health to you as that plate.  
 20 VOLPONE You give, sir, what you can. I thank you.  
 Your love  
 Hath taste in<sup>o</sup> this, and shall not be unanswered.  
 I pray you see me often.  
 VOLTORE Yes, I shall, sir.  
 VOLPONE Be not far from me.  
 MOSCA [*aside to* VOLTORE] Do you observe that,  
 sir?  
 25 VOLPONE Hearken unto me still. It will concern you.  
 MOSCA [*aside to* VOLTORE] You are a happy man, sir.  
 Know your good.  
 VOLPONE I cannot now last long—  
 MOSCA [*aside to* VOLTORE] You are his heir,  
 sir.  
 VOLTORE [*aside to* MOSCA] Am I?  
 VOLPONE I feel me going, uh,  
 uh, uh, uh!  
 I am sailing to my port, uh, uh, uh, uh!  
 And I am glad I am so near my haven.  
 30 [*He pretends to lapse into unconsciousness.*]  
 MOSCA Alas, kind gentleman! Well, we must all go—  
 VOLTORE But Mosca—  
 MOSCA Age will conquer.  
 VOLTORE Pray thee,  
 hear me.  
 Am I inscribed his heir for certain?

MOSCA Are you?  
 I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe  
 To write me i' your family.<sup>2</sup> All my hopes  
 35 Depend upon Your Worship. I am lost  
 Except<sup>o</sup> the rising sun do shine on me.  
 VOLTRE It shall both shine and warm thee, Mosca.  
 MOSCA  
 Sir,  
 I am a man that have not done your love  
 All the worst offices:<sup>o</sup> here I wear your keys,  
 40 See all your coffers and your caskets locked,  
 Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,  
 Your plate, and moneys, am your steward, sir,  
 Husband your goods here.  
 VOLTRE But am I sole heir?  
 MOSCA Without a partner, sir, confirmed this  
 45 morning;  
 The wax<sup>o</sup> is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry  
 Upon the parchment.  
 VOLTRE Happy, happy me!  
 By what good chance, sweet Mosca?  
 MOSCA Your desert,  
 sir;  
 I know no second cause.  
 VOLTRE Thy modesty  
 Is loath to know it.<sup>o</sup> Well, we shall requite it.  
 50 MOSCA He ever liked your course, sir; that first took  
 him.  
 I oft have heard him say how he admired  
 Men of your large<sup>3</sup> profession, that could speak  
 To every cause, and things mere contraries,<sup>o</sup>  
 Till they were hoarse again, yet all be law;  
 55 That with most quick agility could turn  
 And re-turn, make knots and undo them,  
 Give forkèd<sup>o</sup> counsel, take provoking gold

On either hand, and put it up:<sup>4</sup> these men,  
 He knew, would thrive with their humility.<sup>o</sup>  
 60 And for his part, he thought he should be blessed  
 To have his heir of such a suffering<sup>o</sup> spirit,  
 So wise, so grave, of so perplexed<sup>o</sup> a tongue,  
 And loud withal,<sup>o</sup> that would not wag nor scarce  
 Lie still without a fee, when every word  
 65 Your Worship but lets fall is a *cecchine!*<sup>o</sup> *Another*  
*knocks.*  
 Who's that? One knocks; I would not have you seen,  
 sir.  
 And yet—pretend you came and went in haste;  
 I'll fashion an excuse. And, gentle sir,  
 When you do come to swim in golden lard,  
 70 Up to the arms in honey, that your chin  
 Is born up stiff with fatness of the flood,  
 Think on your vassal; but<sup>o</sup> remember me.  
 I ha' not been your worst of clients.  
 VOLTORE Mosca—  
 75 MOSCA When will you have your inventory brought,  
 sir?  
 Or see a copy of the will? [*More knocking.*] Anon!<sup>o</sup>—  
 I'll bring 'em to you, sir. Away, begone,  
 Put business i' your face.<sup>5</sup> [*Exit VOLTORE.*]  
 VOLPONE Excellent, Mosca!  
 Come hither, let me kiss thee.  
 MOSCA Keep you still, sir.  
 Here is Corbaccio.  
 VOLPONE Set the plate away.  
 80 The vulture's gone, and the old raven's come.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Goldsmiths kept shop in the square of St. Mark's Basilica. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Employ me in your household (after Volpone's death). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Expansive, liberal (with the suggestion of "unscrupulous"). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Take a bribe from each party to a suit and pocket it. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Look as if you were here on business. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *the one who possesses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tokens* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intentions toward* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *is suggested by* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *services* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of the seal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *admit your role* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *utterly contradictory* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ambiguous* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *obsequiousness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *long-suffering* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bewildering* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *besides* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gold coin* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *only* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Just a minute!* [Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 4. *The scene continues.***

MOSCA [*to VOLPONE*] Betake you to your silence and  
your sleep;

[*He puts up the plate.*]

Stand there and multiply.°—Now shall we see  
A wretch who is indeed more impotent  
Than this° can feign to be, yet hopes to hop  
Over his grave.

[*Enter*] CORBACCIO.

Signor Corbaccio!

5 You're very welcome, sir.

CORBACCIO How does your patron?

MOSCA Troth, as he did, sir: no amends.

CORBACCIO What?

Mends he?

MOSCA No, sir, he is rather worse.

CORBACCIO That's well. Where  
is he?

MOSCA Upon his couch, sir, newly fall'n asleep.

CORBACCIO Does he sleep well?

10 MOSCA No wink, sir, all this  
night,

Nor yesterday, but slumbers.°

CORBACCIO Good! He should take  
Some counsel of physicians. I have brought him  
An opiate here, from mine own doctor—

MOSCA He will not hear of drugs.

15 CORBACCIO Why, I myself  
Stood by while't was made, saw all th'ingredients,  
And know it cannot but most gently work.  
My life for his, 'tis but to make him sleep.

VOLPONE [*aside*] Ay, his last sleep, if he would take  
it.



MOSCA

Sir,

He has no faith in physic.<sup>o</sup>

CORBACCIO 'Say you? 'Say you?

20 MOSCA He has no faith in physic. He does think  
Most of your doctors<sup>1</sup> are the greater danger  
And worse disease t'escape. I often have  
Heard him protest that your physician  
Should never be his heir.

CORBACCIO Not I his heir?

MOSCA Not your physician, sir.

25 CORBACCIO Oh, no, no, no,  
I do not mean it.

MOSCA No, sir, nor their fees  
He cannot brook.<sup>o</sup> He says they flay<sup>o</sup> a man  
Before they kill him.

CORBACCIO Right, I do conceive<sup>o</sup> you.

30 MOSCA And then, they do it by experiment,<sup>2</sup>  
For which the law not only doth absolve 'em,  
But gives them great reward; and he is loath  
To hire his death so.

CORBACCIO It is true, they kill  
With as much license as a judge.

MOSCA Nay, more:  
For he<sup>o</sup> but kills, sir, where the law condemns,  
And these<sup>o</sup> can kill him,<sup>o</sup> too.

35 CORBACCIO Ay, or me  
Or any man. How does his apoplex?<sup>o</sup>  
Is that strong on him still?

MOSCA Most violent.<sup>3</sup>  
His speech is broken and his eyes are set,<sup>o</sup>  
His face drawn longer than 'twas wont—

CORBACCIO How?

How?  
Stronger than he was wont?

40 MOSCA No, sir: his face  
 Drawn longer than 'twas wont.  
 CORBACCIO Oh, good.  
 MOSCA His mouth  
 Is ever gaping, and his eyelids hang.  
 CORBACCIO Good.  
 MOSCA A freezing numbness stiffens all his joints,  
 And makes the color of his flesh like lead.  
 CORBACCIO 'Tis  
 good.  
 MOSCA His pulse beats slow and dull.  
 CORBACCIO Good symptoms  
 45 still.  
 MOSCA And from his brain—  
 CORBACCIO Ha? How? Not from his  
 brain?  
 MOSCA Yes, sir, and from his brain—  
 CORBACCIO I conceive you,  
 good.  
 MOSCA —Flows a cold sweat with a continual  
 rheum<sup>o</sup>  
 Forth the resolvèd<sup>o</sup> corners of his eyes.  
 CORBACCIO Is't possible? Yet I am better, ha!  
 50 How does he with the swimming of his head?  
 MOSCA Oh, sir, 'tis past the scotomy;<sup>4</sup> he now  
 Hath lost his feeling, and hath left to snort;<sup>o</sup>  
 You hardly can perceive him that he breathes.  
 CORBACCIO Excellent, excellent. Sure I shall outlast  
 55 him!  
 This makes me young again a score of years.  
 MOSCA I was a-coming for you, sir.  
 CORBACCIO Has he made his  
 will?  
 What has he giv'n me?  
 MOSCA No, sir.

CORBACCIO Nothing? Ha?

MOSCA He has not made his will, sir.

CORBACCIO Oh, oh, oh.

60 What then did Voltore, the lawyer, here?

MOSCA He smelt a carcass, sir, when he but heard  
My master was about his testament<sup>o</sup>—  
As I did urge him to it, for your good—

CORBACCIO He came unto him, did he? I thought so.

65 MOSCA Yes, and presented him this piece of plate.

CORBACCIO To be his heir?

MOSCA I do not know, sir.

CORBACCIO True,  
I know it too.

MOSCA [*aside*] By your own scale,<sup>o</sup> sir.

CORBACCIO [*showing a bag of gold*] Well,  
I shall prevent<sup>o</sup> him yet. See, Mosca, look,  
Here I have brought a bag of bright *cecchines*,  
Will quite weigh down his plate.

70 MOSCA Yea, marry, sir!

This is true physic, this your sacred medicine;  
No talk of opiates to<sup>o</sup> this great elixir.<sup>5</sup>

CORBACCIO 'Tis *aurum palpabile*, if not *potabile*.<sup>6</sup>

MOSCA It shall be ministered to him in his bowl?

CORBACCIO Ay, do, do, do.

75 MOSCA Most blessed cordial!<sup>o</sup>

This will recover him.

CORBACCIO Yes, do, do, do.

MOSCA I think it were not best, sir.

CORBACCIO What?

MOSCA To recover  
him.

CORBACCIO Oh, no, no, no; by no means.

MOSCA Why, sir, this  
Will work some strange effect, if he but feel it.

CORBACCIO 'Tis true, therefore forbear, I'll take my  
 venture.◦  
 Give me 't again. [*He snatches for the bag.*]  
 MOSCA [*keeping it out of his reach*] At no hand.◦  
 Pardon me,  
 You shall not do yourself that wrong, sir. I  
 Will so advise you, you shall have it all.  
 CORBACCIO How?  
 MOSCA All, sir, 'tis your right, your own; no  
 man  
 Can claim a part. 'Tis yours without a rival,  
 85 Decreed by destiny.  
 CORBACCIO How? How, good Mosca?  
 MOSCA I'll tell you, sir. This fit he shall recover—  
 CORBACCIO I do conceive you.  
 MOSCA —and, on first  
 advantage◦  
 Of his gained sense, will I re-importune him  
 Unto the making of his testament,  
 90 And show him this.  
 CORBACCIO Good, good.  
 MOSCA 'Tis better yet,  
 If you will hear, sir.  
 CORBACCIO Yes, with all my heart.  
 MOSCA Now, would I counsel you, make home with  
 speed;  
 There frame a will, whereto you shall inscribe  
 My master your sole heir.  
 CORBACCIO And disinherit  
 95 My son?  
 MOSCA Oh, sir, the better, for that color◦  
 Shall make it much more taking.◦  
 CORBACCIO Oh, but color?◦  
 MOSCA This will, sir, you shall send it unto me.  
 Now, when I come to enforce◦—as I will do—  
 Your cares, your watchings, and your many prayers,

100 Your more than many gifts, your this day's present,  
 And last produce your will, where—without thought  
 Or least regard unto your proper issue,<sup>o</sup>  
 A son so brave<sup>o</sup> and highly meriting—  
 105 The stream of your diverted love hath thrown you  
 Upon my master, and made him your heir,  
 He cannot be so stupid or stone dead  
 But out of conscience and mere gratitude—  
 CORBACCIO He must pronounce me his?  
 MOSCA 'Tis true.  
 CORBACCIO This  
 plot  
 Did I think on before.  
 MOSCA I do believe it.  
 110 CORBACCIO Do you not believe it?  
 MOSCA Yes, sir.  
 CORBACCIO Mine own  
 project.  
 MOSCA Which when he hath done, sir—  
 CORBACCIO Published  
 me his heir?  
 MOSCA And you so certain to survive him—  
 CORBACCIO Ay.  
 MOSCA Being so lusty a man—  
 CORBACCIO 'Tis true.  
 MOSCA Yes, sir—  
 115 CORBACCIO I thought on that too. See how he<sup>o</sup>  
 should be  
 The very organ to express my thoughts!  
 MOSCA You have not only done yourself a good—  
 CORBACCIO But multiplied it on my son?  
 MOSCA 'Tis right, sir.  
 CORBACCIO Still my invention.  
 MOSCA 'Las, sir, heaven  
 knows,  
 It hath been all my study, all my care,

120 (I e'en grow gray withal) how to work things—  
 CORBACCIO I do conceive, sweet Mosca.  
 MOSCA You are he  
 For whom I labor here.  
 CORBACCIO Ay, do, do, do.  
 I'll straight about it. [CORBACCIO *starts to*  
*leave.*]  
 MOSCA Rook go with you,<sup>7</sup> raven!  
 CORBACCIO I know thee honest.  
 MOSCA You do lie, sir—  
 CORBACCIO And  
 125 —  
 MOSCA Your knowledge is no better than your ears,  
 sir.  
 CORBACCIO I do not doubt to be a father to thee.  
 MOSCA Nor I to gull my brother of his blessing.<sup>8</sup>  
 CORBACCIO I may ha' my youth restored to me, why  
 not?  
 MOSCA Your Worship is a precious ass—  
 CORBACCIO What say'st  
 130 thou?  
 MOSCA I do desire Your Worship to make haste, sir.  
 CORBACCIO 'Tis done, 'tis done, I go.  
 [Exit.]  
 VOLPONE [*leaping from the bed*] Oh, I shall  
 burst!  
 Let out my sides,<sup>9</sup> let out my sides—  
 MOSCA Contain  
 Your flux of laughter, sir. You know this hope  
 Is such a bait it covers any hook.  
 135 VOLPONE Oh, but thy working and thy placing it!  
 I cannot hold;<sup>9</sup> good rascal, let me kiss thee.  
 I never knew thee in so rare a humor.<sup>9</sup>  
 MOSCA Alas, sir, I but do as I am taught:  
 Follow your grave instructions, give 'em words,  
 140

Pour oil into their ears,<sup>o</sup> and send them hence.  
VOLPONE 'Tis true, 'tis true. What a rare punishment  
Is avarice to itself!<sup>9</sup>

MOSCA Ay, with our help, sir.

VOLPONE So many cares, so many maladies,  
145 So many fears attending on old age,  
Yea, death so often called on,<sup>o</sup> as no wish  
Can be more frequent with 'em, their limbs faint,  
Their senses dull, their seeing, hearing, going,<sup>o</sup>  
All dead before them; yea, their very teeth,  
150 Their instruments of eating, failing them—  
Yet this is reckoned life! Nay, here was one  
Is now gone home that wishes to live longer!  
Feels not his gout nor palsy, feigns himself  
Younger by scores of years, flatters his age  
155 With confident belying it,<sup>1</sup> hopes he may  
With charms, like Aeson,<sup>2</sup> have his youth restored,  
And with these thoughts so battens,<sup>o</sup> as if fate  
Would be as easily cheated on as he,  
And all turns air!<sup>o</sup> *Another knocks.*  
Who's that there, now? A third?

MOSCA Close,<sup>o</sup> to your couch again. I hear his  
160 voice.  
It is Corvino, our spruce<sup>o</sup> merchant.

VOLPONE [*lying down again*] Dead.<sup>o</sup>

MOSCA Another bout, sir, with your eyes.  
[*He applies ointment.*]  
Who's there?

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Not Corbaccio's doctors, but doctors generally. (Also in line 23.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: By testing possible remedies on their patients.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: In the following lines, Mosca attributes to Volpone a wide variety of symptoms that were, even occurring singly, considered sure signs of impending death.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dizziness, accompanied by partial blindness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In alchemy, a liquid thought to be capable of prolonging life indefinitely or changing base metal into gold.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: It is gold that can be felt, if not drunk (Latin). Dissolved gold was used as a medicine.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: May you be swindled ("rooked"). Playing on "rook" meaning "crow," "raven." This speech and Mosca's following lines, through line 130, could be considered asides since Corbaccio cannot hear them; but they need not be delivered sotto voce.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: If Corbaccio were Mosca's father, then Bonario would be his brother. A reference to Genesis 25, in which Jacob tricks his elder brother, Esau, into resigning his birthright, and Genesis 27, in which Jacob tricks their dying father, Isaac, into giving him the paternal blessing and property.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Quoting the Stoic philosopher Seneca's *Moral Epistles*, no. 115.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Deceives himself, and attempts to deceive others, about his age by vigorously refusing to admit the truth.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Father of the Greek hero Jason; his youth was restored by Medea, his sorceress daughter-in-law.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *beget more booty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Volpone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dozes fitfully*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tolerate* [Return to reference °](#)



- °: *skin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the doctors* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apoplexy, stroke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fixed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mucus discharge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watery; limp*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stopped snoring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *making his will*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scale of values*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forestall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compared to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heart medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *investment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *By no means*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appearance, fiction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plausible; attractive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it's only a ruse?*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *urge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own offspring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mosca*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loosen my clothes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contain my delight*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so excellently witty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flatter them*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *invoked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ability to walk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gluts himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is illusory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hide yourself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dapper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *I'll play dead*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 5. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] CORVINO.

Signor Corvino! Come<sup>o</sup> most wished for! Oh,  
How happy were you if you knew it now!

CORVINO Why? What? Wherein?

MOSCA The tardy hour is  
come, sir.

CORVINO He is not dead?

MOSCA Not dead, sir, but as good;  
He knows no man.

CORVINO How shall I do, then?

MOSCA Why, sir?

5 CORVINO I have brought him here a pearl.

MOSCA Perhaps  
he has

So much remembrance left as to know you, sir;  
He still calls on you; nothing but your name  
Is in his mouth. Is your pearl orient,<sup>1</sup> sir?

10 CORVINO Venice was never owner of the like.

VOLPONE [*weakly*] Signor Corvino—

MOSCA Hark.

VOLPONE —Signor  
Corvino—

MOSCA He calls you. Step and give it him.—He's  
here, sir,

And he has brought you a rich pearl.

CORVINO [*to* VOLPONE] How do you,  
sir?

[*To* MOSCA] Tell him it doubles the twelfth carat.<sup>2</sup>

[*He gives* VOLPONE *the pearl.*]

MOSCA [*to* CORVINO] Sir,

15 He cannot understand. His hearing's gone;  
And yet it comforts him to see you—

CORVINO Say  
I have a diamond for him too.

MOSCA Best show't, sir.  
Put it into his hand; 'tis only there  
He apprehends; he has his feeling yet.  
[*CORVINO gives VOLPONE the diamond.*]  
See how he grasps it!

20 CORVINO 'Las, good gentleman!  
How pitiful the sight is!

MOSCA Tut, forget, sir.  
The weeping of an heir should still<sup>o</sup> be laughter  
Under a visor.<sup>o</sup>

CORVINO Why, am I his heir?

MOSCA Sir, I am sworn; I may not show the will  
25 Till he be dead. But here has been Corbaccio,  
Here has been Voltore, here were others too,  
I cannot number 'em they were so many,  
All gaping here for legacies; but I,  
Taking the vantage<sup>o</sup> of his naming you—  
30 "Signor Corvino! Signor Corvino!"—took  
Paper and pen and ink, and there I asked him  
Whom he would have his heir? "Corvino." Who  
Should be executor? "Corvino." And  
To any question he was silent to,  
35 I still interpreted the nods he made  
Through weakness for consent, and sent home  
th'others,  
Nothing bequeathed them but to cry and curse.

CORVINO Oh, my dear Mosca! [*They embrace.*] Does  
he not perceive us?

MOSCA No more than a blind harper.<sup>3</sup> He knows no  
man,  
40 No face of friend, nor name of any servant,  
Who 'twas that fed him last or gave him drink;  
Not those he hath begotten or brought up

Can he remember.

CORVINO

Has he children?

MOSCA

Bastards,<sup>4</sup>

45 Some dozen or more, that he begot on beggars,  
Gypsies and Jews and blackmoors,<sup>o</sup> when he was  
drunk.

Knew you not that, sir? 'Tis the common fable.<sup>o</sup>

The dwarf, the fool, the eunuch are all his;

He's the true father of his family

In all save<sup>o</sup> me, but he has given 'em nothing.

50 CORVINO That's well, that's well. Art sure he does not  
hear us?

MOSCA Sure, sir? Why, look you, credit your own  
sense.<sup>o</sup>

[*Shouting at* VOLPONE] The pox<sup>o</sup> approach and add to  
your diseases

If it would send you hence the sooner, sir.

For your incontinence, it hath deserved it

55 Thoroughly<sup>o</sup> and thoroughly, and the plague to boot.

[*To* CORVINO] You may come near, sir. [*shouting at*  
VOLPONE *again*]

Would you would once close

Those filthy eyes of yours, that flow with slime

Like two frog-pits,<sup>o</sup> and those same hanging cheeks,

Covered with hide instead of skin—nay, help, sir—

60 That look like frozen dishclouts<sup>o</sup> set on end!

CORVINO [*shouting at* VOLPONE] Or like an old

smoked wall on

which the rain

Ran down in streaks!

MOSCA

Excellent, sir! Speak out;

You may be louder yet; a culverin<sup>o</sup>

Dischargèd in his ear would hardly bore it.

65 CORVINO [*shouting*] His nose is like a common  
sewer, still<sup>o</sup>

running.

MOSCA 'Tis good! And what his mouth?

CORVINO [*shouting*] A very draught!°

MOSCA Oh, stop it up—

CORVINO By no means.

MOSCA Pray you let me.

Faith, I could stifle him rarely with a pillow  
As well as any woman that should keep° him.

CORVINO Do as you will, but I'll be gone.

70 MOSCA Be so;  
It is your presence makes him last so long.

CORVINO I pray you, use no violence.

MOSCA No, sir? Why?  
Why should you be thus scrupulous? Pray you, sir.

CORVINO Nay, at your discretion.

MOSCA Well, good sir,  
begone.

75 CORVINO I will not trouble him now to take my  
pearl?

MOSCA Pooh! Nor your diamond. What a needless  
care

Is this afflicts you? Is not all here yours?  
Am not I here, whom you have made your creature?  
That owe my being to you?

80 CORVINO Grateful Mosca!  
Thou art my friend, my fellow, my companion,  
My partner, and shalt share in all my fortunes.

MOSCA Excepting one.

CORVINO What's that?

MOSCA Your gallant°  
wife, sir.

[*Exit* CORVINO.]

Now is he gone. We had no other means  
To shoot him hence but this.

VOLPONE My divine Mosca!  
Thou hast today outgone thyself. *Another knocks.*  
Who's there?  
85 I will be troubled with no more. Prepare  
Me music, dances, banquets, all delights.  
The Turk<sup>5</sup> is not more sensual in his pleasures  
Than will Volpone. *[Exit*  
MOSCA.]  
Let me see, a pearl?  
A diamond? Plate? *Cecchines?* Good morning's  
90 purchase.<sub>o</sub>  
Why, this is better than rob churches, yet,  
Or fat by eating, once a month, a man.<sub>o</sub>  
*[Enter MOSCA.]*  
Who is't?  
MOSCA The beauteous Lady Would-be, sir,  
Wife to the English knight, Sir Politic Would-be—  
This is the style, sir, is directed me<sup>6</sup>—  
95 Hath sent to know how you have slept tonight,<sub>o</sub>  
And if you would be visited.  
VOLPONE Not now.  
Some three hours hence—  
MOSCA I told the squire<sub>o</sub> so  
much.  
VOLPONE When I am high with mirth and wine:  
then, then.  
'Fore heaven, I wonder at the desperate<sub>o</sub> valor  
100 Of the bold English, that they dare let loose  
Their wives to all encounters!<sup>7</sup>  
MOSCA Sir, this knight  
Had not his name for nothing. He is politic,<sub>o</sub>  
And knows, howe'er his wife affect strange<sub>o</sub> airs,  
She hath not yet the face<sup>8</sup> to be dishonest.<sub>o</sub>  
105 But had she Signor Corvino's wife's face—  
VOLPONE Has she so rare a face?

MOSCA Oh, sir, the wonder,  
 The blazing star<sup>9</sup> of Italy! A wench  
 O'the first year!<sup>o</sup> A beauty ripe as harvest!  
 Whose skin is whiter than a swan, all over,  
 110 Than silver, snow, or lilies! A soft lip,  
 Would<sup>o</sup> tempt you to eternity of kissing!  
 And flesh that melteth in the touch to blood!<sup>1</sup>  
 Bright as your gold, and lovely as your gold!  
 VOLPONE Why had not I known this before?  
 MOSCA Alas, sir,  
 115 Myself but yesterday discovered it.  
 VOLPONE How might I see her?  
 MOSCA Oh, not possible.  
 She's kept as warily as is your gold:  
 Never does come abroad,<sup>o</sup> never takes air  
 But at a window. All her looks are sweet  
 120 As the first<sup>o</sup> grapes or cherries, and are watched  
 As near<sup>o</sup> as they are.  
 VOLPONE I must see her—  
 MOSCA Sir,  
 There is a guard of ten spies thick upon her—  
 All his whole household—each of which is set  
 Upon his fellow, and have all their charge  
 125 When he goes out; when he comes in, examined.<sup>2</sup>  
 VOLPONE I will go see her, though but at her  
 window.  
 MOSCA In some disguise, then.  
 VOLPONE That is true. I must  
 Maintain mine own shape still the same.<sup>3</sup> We'll think.  
 [Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Especially brilliant. (The most beautiful pearls came from the Indian Ocean.)[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: In the seventeenth century, a carat was between 1/144 and 1/150 of an ounce. A twenty-four-carat pearl was therefore very large, weighing roughly 1/6 of an ounce.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Harp players were often blind.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By law, ordinarily barred from the line of inheritance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Stereotyped as given to decadent luxuries.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This is the mode of address I've been told to use.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Married Englishwomen were reputed to enjoy more personal freedom than their southern European counterparts; Venetian wives in particular were much restricted, though Celia's situation is obviously extreme (see below, p. 964, lines 118–26).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: (1) Beauty; (2) shamelessness.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Comet. (Rare and beautiful.)[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: (1) Blushes; (2) sexual responsiveness. (Mosca is evidently conjecturing here.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Each member of the household spies on all the others; each gets his instructions when Corvino departs and is interrogated when he returns.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I must, in my own person, continue to pretend to be near death.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *you come*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mask*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opportunity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *black Africans*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rumor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *except*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *believe your senses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *syphilis*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thoroughly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mud puddles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dishrags*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *firearm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cesspool*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take care of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haul*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by taking monthly interest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *last night*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *messenger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reckless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *canny*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foreign; bizarre*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unchaste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unflawed and in her prime*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that would*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outside*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of the season*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *closely*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Act 2***

**SCENE 1. *Saint Mark's Square.***

[*Enter*] POLITIC WOULD-BE [*and*] PEREGRINE.

POLITIC Sir, to a wise man all the world's his soil.<sup>1</sup>

It is not Italy, nor France, nor Europe

That must bound me if my fates call me forth.

Yet I protest it is no salt<sup>o</sup> desire

5 Of seeing countries, shifting a religion,<sup>2</sup>

Nor any disaffection to the state

Where I was bred—and unto which I owe

My dearest plots<sup>o</sup>—hath brought me out;<sup>o</sup> much less

That idle, antique, stale, gray-headed project

10 Of knowing men's minds and manners with Ulysses;<sup>3</sup>

But a peculiar humor<sup>o</sup> of my wife's

Laid for this height<sup>o</sup> of Venice, to observe,

To quote,<sup>o</sup> to learn the language, and so forth.—

I hope you travel, sir, with license?<sup>4</sup>

PEREGRINE Yes.

15 POLITIC I dare the safelier converse. How long, sir,

Since you left England?

PEREGRINE Seven weeks.

POLITIC So lately!

You ha' not been with my Lord Ambassador?

PEREGRINE Not yet, sir.

POLITIC Pray you, what news, sir, vents

our climate?<sup>5</sup>

I heard last night a most strange thing reported

By some of my lord's<sup>o</sup> followers, and I long

20 To hear how't will be seconded.<sup>o</sup>

PEREGRINE What was't, sir?

POLITIC Marry, sir, of a raven that should build<sup>o</sup>

In a ship royal of the King's.

PEREGRINE [*aside*] This fellow,

Does he gull<sup>o</sup> me, trow?<sup>o</sup> Or is gulled?—Your name,  
sir?

POLITIC My name is Politic Would-be.

PEREGRINE [*aside*] Oh, that  
25 speaks<sup>o</sup> him.—  
A knight, sir?

POLITIC A poor knight, sir.<sup>6</sup>

PEREGRINE Your lady  
Lies<sup>o</sup> here in Venice for intelligence<sup>o</sup>  
Of tires<sup>o</sup> and fashions and behavior  
Among the courtesans?<sup>7</sup> The fine Lady Would-be?

POLITIC Yes, sir, the spider and the bee ofttimes  
30 Suck from one flower.

PEREGRINE Good Sir Politic,  
I cry you mercy!<sup>o</sup> I have heard much of you.  
'Tis true, sir, of your raven.

POLITIC On your knowledge?

PEREGRINE Yes, and your lion's whelping in the  
Tower.<sup>8</sup>

POLITIC Another whelp!

PEREGRINE Another, sir.

POLITIC Now, heaven!  
35 What prodigies<sup>o</sup> be these? The fires at Berwick!  
And the new star!<sup>9</sup> These things concurring,<sup>o</sup>  
strange!  
And full of omen! Saw you those meteors?

PEREGRINE I did, sir.

POLITIC Fearful! Pray you sir, confirm  
me:

40 Were there three porpoises seen above the bridge,<sup>1</sup>  
As they give out?<sup>o</sup>

PEREGRINE Six, and a sturgeon, sir.

POLITIC I am astonished!

PEREGRINE Nay, sir, be not so.  
I'll tell you a greater prodigy than these—



PEREGRINE Indeed, sir?  
 POLITIC While he lived, in action,<sup>o</sup>  
 He has received weekly intelligence,  
 Upon my knowledge, out of the Low Countries,  
 For all parts of the world, in cabbages,<sup>o</sup>  
 70 And those dispensed again to ambassadors  
 In oranges, muskmelons, apricots,  
 Lemons, pome-citrons,<sup>o</sup> and suchlike—sometimes  
 In Colchester oysters, and your Selsey cockles.<sup>8</sup>  
 PEREGRINE You make me wonder!  
 POLITIC Sir, upon my  
 75 knowledge.  
 Nay, I have observed him at your public ordinary<sup>o</sup>  
 Take his advertisement<sup>o</sup> from a traveler—  
 A concealed statesman—in a trencher<sup>o</sup> of meat,  
 And instantly before the meal was done  
 Convey an answer in a toothpick.<sup>9</sup>  
 PEREGRINE Strange!  
 80 How could this be, sir?  
 POLITIC Why, the meat was cut  
 So like his character,<sup>o</sup> and so laid as he  
 Must easily read the cipher.  
 PEREGRINE I have heard  
 He could not read, sir.  
 POLITIC So 'twas given out,  
 In polity,<sup>o</sup> by those that did employ him.  
 85 But he could read, and had your languages,<sup>o</sup>  
 And to't<sup>o</sup> as sound a noddle<sup>o</sup>—  
 PEREGRINE I have heard, sir,  
 That your baboons were spies, and that they were  
 A kind of subtle nation near to China.  
 POLITIC Ay, ay, your *Mamuluchi*.<sup>1</sup> Faith, they had  
 90 Their hand in a French plot or two, but they  
 Were so extremely given to women as  
 They made discovery of<sup>o</sup> all. Yet I

Had my advices<sup>o</sup> here, on Wednesday last,  
 From one of their own coat;<sup>o</sup> they were returned,  
 95 Made their relations,<sup>o</sup> as the fashion is,  
 And now stand fair<sup>o</sup> for fresh employment.  
 PEREGRINE [*aside*] Heart,  
 This Sir Pol will be<sup>o</sup> ignorant of nothing.  
 [To POLITIC] It seems, sir, you know all?  
 POLITIC Not all, sir.  
 But  
 100 I have some general notions; I do love  
 To note and to observe. Though I live out,<sup>o</sup>  
 Free from the active torrent, yet I'd mark  
 The currents and the passages of things  
 For mine own private use, and know the ebbs  
 And flows of state.  
 PEREGRINE Believe it, sir, I hold  
 105 Myself in no small tie unto my fortunes<sup>o</sup>  
 For casting me thus luckily upon you,  
 Whose knowledge—if your bounty equal it—  
 May do me great assistance in instruction  
 For my behavior and my bearing, which  
 110 Is yet so rude and raw—  
 POLITIC Why, came you forth  
 Empty of rules for travel?  
 PEREGRINE Faith, I had  
 Some common ones from out that vulgar grammar,<sup>2</sup>  
 Which he that cried<sup>o</sup> Italian to me taught me.  
 POLITIC Why, this it is that spoils all our brave  
 115 bloods,<sup>o</sup>  
 Trusting our hopeful<sup>o</sup> gentry unto pedants,  
 Fellows of outside and mere bark.<sup>3</sup> You seem  
 To be a gentleman of ingenuous race<sup>o</sup>—  
 I not profess it,<sup>o</sup> but my fate hath been  
 To be where I have been consulted with  
 120 In this high kind,<sup>o</sup> touching some great men's sons,

Persons of blood<sup>o</sup> and honor—

PEREGRINE

Who be these, sir?

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Proverbial, like most of Sir Pol's "original" advice. "Soil": native land.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, members of religious minorities throughout Europe sought refuge in lands more hospitable to their faiths.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The hero of the *Odyssey*, an archetype of the wise traveler.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A passport. (English people could not travel abroad without permission.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Comes from our part of the world?[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the first decade of the 17th century, King James I raised badly needed money by selling knighthoods to many whose birth, attainments, or wealth would not have previously merited a title.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Venice was famous for its elegant prostitutes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A lioness kept at the Tower of London gave birth in 1604 and 1605.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The fires at Berwick were aurora borealis visible above Berwick, Northumberland, in 1605, said to resemble battling armies. The new star, a supernova, was described by the astronomer Johannes Kepler in 1604.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A porpoise was found upstream of London Bridge in the Thames River the January before *Volpone* was first performed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A town on the Thames, a bit to the east of London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The English merchant adventurers' ships, which were harboring at Stade, in the mouth of the Elbe River.[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: The Archduke Albert of Austria and his wife, Isabella, the Infanta of Spain, ruled the Netherlands in the name of Spain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ambrosio de Spinola was general of the Spanish army in the Netherlands.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Mas' " means "master," a term of address for boys and fools. Stone, King James's outspoken court jester, was a well-known urban character. He was whipped the year before *Volpone's* first performance for slandering the Lord Admiral. Politic is evidently unaware of the play on words in "Stone dead."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The person who said this was not commonly recognized as a spy; he used foolery as his cover.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Expensive delicacies, unlikely tavern fare.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Presumably by inserting a tiny note into a toothpick hollowed out for espionage use.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mamluks, a class of warriors originally from Asia Minor, who ruled Egypt from 1250 to 1517.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Modern language textbook, which sometimes included travelers' tips.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Superficial accomplishments.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *inordinate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *projects* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abroad*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whim*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *latitude*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jot things down*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the ambassador's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confirmed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reportedly built*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trick* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *do you suppose?*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *characterizes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stays* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *news*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apparel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beg your pardon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange occurrences*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happening together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *people report*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *far upstream*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *considered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subversive activities*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a Dutch import*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grapefruitlike fruits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tavern*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *information*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wooden plate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *code letters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *craftily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knew foreign languages*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in addition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *head*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *information*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reports*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ready*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *admit to being*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abroad*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *much obliged to my luck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taught orally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fine young men*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promising*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honorable family*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *don't declare it openly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *important matter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noble birth*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] MOSCA [*and*] NANO [*disguised as a mountebank's assistants*].

MOSCA Under that window, there't must be. The same.

[MOSCA *and* NANO *set up a platform.*]

POLITIC Fellows to mount a bank!° Did your instructor

In the dear tongues<sup>1</sup> never discourse to you  
Of the Italian mountebanks?

PEREGRINE Yes, sir.

POLITIC Why,  
Here shall you see one.

5 PEREGRINE They are quacksalvers,  
Fellows that live by venting° oils and drugs.

POLITIC Was that the character he gave you of  
them?

PEREGRINE As I remember.

POLITIC Pity his ignorance.  
They are the only knowing men of Europe!  
Great general scholars, excellent physicians,  
10 Most admired statesmen, professed favorites  
And cabinet counselors° to the greatest princes!  
The only languaged° men of all the world!

PEREGRINE And I have heard they are most lewd°  
impostors,  
15 Made all of terms° and shreds, no less beliers  
Of great men's favors than their own vile med'cines,  
Which they will utter° upon monstrous oaths,  
Selling that drug for twopence ere they part  
Which they have valued at twelve crowns° before.

POLITIC Sir, calumnies are answered best with  
silence.  
Yourself shall judge. [*to* MOSCA *and* NANO] Who is it  
mounts, my friends?

MOSCA Scotto of Mantua,<sup>2</sup> sir.

POLITIC Is't he? [*to* PEREGRINE]  
Nay, then,  
I'll proudly promise, sir, you shall behold  
Another man than has been fancied<sup>o</sup> to you.  
I wonder yet that he should mount his bank  
25 Here in this nook, that has been wont t'appear  
In face of<sup>o</sup> the piazza! Here he comes.  
[*Enter*] VOLPONE [*disguised as a mountebank,  
followed by*] a crowd.  
VOLPONE [*to* NANO] Mount, zany.<sup>o</sup>  
[VOLPONE *and* NANO *climb onto the platform.*]  
CROWD Follow, follow, follow, follow, follow!  
POLITIC See how the people follow him! He's a man  
30 May write ten thousand crowns in bank here. Note,  
Mark but his gesture. I do use<sup>o</sup> to observe  
The state<sup>o</sup> he keeps, in getting up.  
PEREGRINE 'Tis worth it, sir.  
VOLPONE Most noble gentlemen and my worthy  
patrons, it  
35 may seem strange that I, your Scotto Mantuano, who  
was  
ever wont to fix my bank in face of the public piazza  
near  
the shelter of the portico to the *procuratia*,<sup>3</sup> should  
now,  
after eight months' absence from this illustrious city  
of  
Venice, humbly retire myself into an obscure nook of  
the  
40 piazza.

POLITIC [*to* PEREGRINE] Did not I now object the  
same?°

PEREGRINE Peace,  
sir.

VOLPONE Let me tell you: I am not, as your  
Lombard proverb  
saith, cold on my feet,° or content to part with my  
commodities  
at a cheaper rate than I accustomed; look not for  
it. Nor that the calumnious reports of that impudent  
45 detractor  
and shame to our profession (Alessandro Buttone,°  
I mean) who gave out in public I was condemned a  
'sforzato° to the galleys for poisoning the Cardinal  
Bembo's—cook,⁴ hath at all attached,° much less  
dejected  
50 me. No, no, worthy gentlemen. To tell you true, I  
cannot  
endure to see the rabble of these ground *ciarlitani*,⁵  
that  
spread their cloaks on the pavement as if they  
meant to  
do feats of activity° and then come in lamely with  
their  
moldy tales out of Boccaccio, like stale Tabarine,⁶ the  
fabulist: some of them discoursing their travels and  
55 of  
their tedious captivity in the Turks' galleys, when  
indeed,  
were the truth known, they were the Christians'  
galleys,  
where very temperately they ate bread and drunk  
water as  
a wholesome penance, enjoined them by their  
confessors,



make of this precious liquor so fast as it is fetched  
 away  
 80 from my lodging by gentlemen of your city, strangers  
 of the  
*terra firma*,<sup>8</sup> worshipful merchants, ay, and senators  
 too,  
 who ever since my arrival have detained me to their  
 uses by  
 their splendidous liberalities. And worthily. For what  
 avails  
 your rich man to have his magazines<sup>o</sup> stuffed with  
*moscadelli*,<sup>o</sup>  
 85 or of<sup>o</sup> the purest grape, when his physicians  
 prescribe  
 him (on pain of death) to drink nothing but water  
 cocted<sup>o</sup> with anise seeds? Oh, health, health! The  
 blessing  
 of the rich! The riches of the poor! Who can buy  
 thee at  
 too dear a rate, since there is no enjoying this world  
 without  
 thee? Be not then so sparing of your purses,  
 90 honorable  
 gentlemen, as to abridge the natural course of life—  
 PEREGRINE You see his end?  
 POLITIC Ay, is't not good?  
 VOLPONE For when a humid flux<sup>o</sup> or catarrh, by the  
 mutability  
 of air, falls from your head into an arm or shoulder  
 or any other part, take you a ducat or your *cecchine*  
 95 of  
 gold and apply to the place affected; see what good  
 effect  
 it can work. No, no, 'tis this blessed *unguento*,<sup>o</sup> this  
 rare



extraction, that hath only power to disperse all  
malignant  
humors that proceed either of hot, cold, moist, or  
windy  
causes<sup>9</sup>—

PEREGRINE I would he had put in “dry,” too.

100 POLITIC Pray you,  
observe.

VOLPONE To fortify the most indigest and crude<sup>o</sup>  
stomach,  
ay, were it of one that, through extreme weakness,  
vomited  
blood, applying only a warm napkin to the place  
after  
the unction and fricace;<sup>o</sup> for the *vertigine*<sup>o</sup> in the  
head  
105 putting but a drop into your nostrils, likewise behind  
the  
ears, a most sovereign<sup>o</sup> and approved remedy; the  
*mal*  
*caduco*, cramps, convulsions, paralyses, epilepsies,  
*tremor*  
*cordia*, retired nerves, ill vapors of the spleen,  
stopplings of  
the liver, the stone, the strangury, *hernia ventosa*,  
*iliaca*  
110 *passio*; stops a *dysenteria* immediately; easeth the  
torsion  
of the small guts; and cures *melancholia*  
*hypochondriaca*,<sup>1</sup>  
being taken and applied according to my printed  
receipt.<sup>o</sup>  
(*Pointing to his bill and his glass*<sup>o</sup>). For this is the  
physician,

this the medicine; this counsels, this cures; this gives  
 the  
 direction, this works the effect; and in sum, both  
 115 together  
 may be termed an abstract of the theoric and practic  
 in the  
 Aesculapian<sup>2</sup> art. 'Twill cost you eight crowns. And,  
 Zan  
 Fritatta,<sup>3</sup> pray thee sing a verse extempore in honor  
 of it.  
 POLITIC How do you like him, sir?  
 PEREGRINE Most strangely, I!  
 POLITIC Is not his language rare?<sup>o</sup>  
 PEREGRINE But<sup>o</sup> alchemy  
 120 I never heard the like, or Broughton's books.<sup>4</sup>

### SONG

NANO [*sings*] Had old Hippocrates or Galen,<sup>5</sup>  
 That to their books put med'cines all in,  
 But known this secret, they had never  
 (Of which they will be guilty ever)  
 125 Been murderers of so much paper,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or wasted many a hurtless taper;<sup>o</sup>  
 No Indian drug had e'er been famed,  
 Tobacco, sassafras<sup>6</sup> not named,  
 130 Ne<sup>o</sup> yet of *guacum*<sup>7</sup> one small stick, sir,  
 Nor Raymond Lully's great elixir.  
 Ne had been known the Danish  
 Gonswart  
 Or Paracelsus with his long sword.<sup>8</sup>  
 PEREGRINE All this yet will not do; eight crowns is  
 high.  
 135 VOLPONE [*to* NANO] No more.—Gentlemen, if I had  
 but

time to discourse to you the miraculous effects of  
this my  
oil, surnamed *oglio del Scoto*, with the countless  
catalogue  
of those I have cured of th'aforesaid and many more  
diseases,  
the patents and privileges of all the princes and  
commonwealths of Christendom, or but the  
140 depositions of  
those that appeared on my part before the signory  
of the  
*Sanità*,<sup>9</sup> and most learned College of Physicians,  
where I  
was authorized, upon notice taken of the admirable  
virtues  
of my medicaments and mine own excellency in  
matter  
145 of rare and unknown secrets, not only to disperse  
them  
publicly in this famous city but in all the territories  
that  
happily joy under the government of the most pious  
and  
magnificent states of Italy. But may some other  
gallant fellow  
say, "Oh, there be divers that make profession<sup>o</sup> to  
have  
as good and as experimented receipts as yours."  
150 Indeed,  
very many have assayed like apes in imitation of that  
which  
is really and essentially in me, to make of<sup>o</sup> this oil;  
bestowed  
great cost in furnaces, stills, alembics,<sup>1</sup> continual  
fires, and

preparation of the ingredients (as indeed there goes  
to it  
155 six hundred several simples,◊ besides some quantity  
of  
human fat for the conglutination,◊ which we buy of  
the  
anatomists); but, when these practitioners come to  
the last  
decoction,◊ blow, blow, puff, puff, and all flies *in*  
*fumo.*◊  
Ha, ha, ha! Poor wretches! I rather pity their folly  
and  
160 indiscretion◊ than their loss of time and money; for  
those  
may be recovered by industry, but to be a fool born  
is a  
disease incurable. For myself, I always from my  
youth have  
endeavored to get the rarest secrets and book◊  
them, either  
in exchange or for money; I spared nor◊ cost nor  
labor  
165 where anything was worthy to be learned. And,  
gentlemen,  
honorable gentlemen, I will undertake, by virtue of  
chemical  
art, out of the honorable hat that covers your head  
to  
extract the four elements—that is to say, the fire, air,  
water,  
and earth—and return you your felt◊ without burn or  
stain.  
170 For, whilst others have been at the balloo◊ I have  
been at  
my book, and am now past the craggy paths of  
study and

come to the flow'ry plains of honor and reputation.  
 POLITIC I do assure you, sir, that is his aim.  
 VOLPONE But to our price.  
 PEREGRINE And that withal,° Sir Pol.  
 175 VOLPONE You all know, honorable gentlemen, I  
     never valued  
 this *ampulla*, or vial, at less than eight crowns, but  
     for  
 this time I am content to be deprived of it for six; six  
     crowns  
 is the price, and less, in courtesy, I know you cannot  
     offer  
 me. Take it or leave it howsoever, both it and I am at  
     your  
 service. I ask you not as the value of the thing, for  
 180 then I  
 should demand° of you a thousand crowns; so the  
     Cardinals  
 Montalto, Fernese, the great Duke of Tuscany, my  
 gossip,° with divers other princes, have given me.  
     But I  
 despise money. Only to show my affection to you,  
     honorable  
 gentlemen, and your illustrious state here, I have  
 185 neglected the messages of these princes, mine own  
     offices,°  
 framed° my journey hither only to present you with  
     the  
 fruits of my travels. [*to NANO and MOSCA*] Tune your  
     voices  
 once more to the touch of your instruments, and  
     give the  
 honorable assembly some delightful recreation.  
 190 PEREGRINE What monstrous and most painful  
     circumstance°  
 Is here, to get some three or four *gazets*!°

Some threepence, i'th'whole, for that 'twill come to.

## SONG

**[During the song, CELIA appears at her window, above.]**

NANO [*sings*]<sub>o</sub> You that would last long, list to my  
song,

195                    Make no more coil,<sub>o</sub> but buy of this oil.  
                      Would you be ever fair and young?  
                      Stout of teeth and strong of tongue?  
                      Tart<sub>o</sub> of palate? Quick of ear?  
                      Sharp of sight? Of nostril clear?  
200                    Moist of hand<sub>2</sub> and light of foot?  
                      Or (I will come nearer to't)<sub>o</sub>  
                      Would you live free from all diseases,  
                      Do the act your mistress pleases,  
                      Yet fright all aches<sub>o</sub> from your bones?  
205                    Here's a med'cine for the nones.<sub>o</sub>

VOLPONE    Well, I am in a humor at this time to make  
                  a present  
                  of the small quantity my coffer contains: to the rich  
                  in  
                  courtesy, and to the poor for God's sake.<sub>o</sub>  
                  Wherefore, now  
                  mark; I asked you six crowns, and six crowns at  
                  other  
210                    times you have paid me. You shall not give me six  
                      crowns,  
                      nor five, nor four, nor three, nor two, nor one, nor  
                      half a  
                      ducat, no, nor a *moccenigo*.<sub>o</sub> Six—pence it will cost  
                      you, or  
                      six hundred pound—expect no lower price, for by the  
                      banner of my front,<sub>o</sub> I will not bate a *bagatine*,<sub>3</sub> that  
                      I will

215 have only a pledge of your loves, to carry something  
from  
amongst you to show I am not contemned<sub>o</sub> by you.  
Therefore  
now, toss your handkerchiefs cheerfully, cheerfully,  
and be advertised<sub>o</sub> that the first heroic spirit that  
deigns to  
grace me with a handkerchief, I will give it a little  
remembrance  
of something beside, shall please<sub>o</sub> it better than if I  
220 had presented it with a double *pistolet*.<sup>4</sup>  
PEREGRINE Will you be that heroic spark,<sub>o</sub> Sir Pol?  
CELIA *at the window throws down her*  
*handkerchief*  
*[with a coin tied inside it]*.  
Oh, see! The window has prevented you.<sub>o</sub>  
VOLPONE Lady, I kiss your bounty, and, for this  
timely grace  
you have done your poor Scoto of Mantua, I will  
225 return  
you, over and above my oil, a secret of that high and  
inestimable  
nature shall<sub>o</sub> make you forever enamored on that  
minute wherein your eye first descended on so  
mean,<sub>o</sub> yet  
not altogether to be despised, an object. Here is a  
powder  
concealed in this paper of which, if I should speak to  
230 the  
worth, nine thousand volumes were but as one  
page, that  
page as a line, that line as a word—so short is this  
pilgrimage  
of man, which some call life, to<sub>o</sub> the expressing of it.

Would I reflect on the price, why, the whole world  
were but  
235 as an empire, that empire as a province, that  
province as a  
bank, that bank as a private purse, to the purchase  
of it. I  
will only tell you it is the powder that made Venus a  
goddess,  
given her by Apollo,<sup>5</sup> that kept her perpetually  
young,  
cleared her wrinkles, firmed her gums, filled<sub>o</sub> her  
skin, colored  
240 her hair; from her derived to Helen, and at the sack  
of Troy unfortunately lost; till now in this our age it  
was  
as happily<sub>o</sub> recovered by a studious antiquary out of  
some  
ruins of Asia, who sent a moiety<sub>o</sub> of it to the court of  
France (but much sophisticated)<sub>o</sub> wherewith the  
ladies  
245 there now color their hair. The rest, at this present,  
remains  
with me, extracted to a quintessence,<sub>o</sub> so that  
wherever  
it but touches, in youth it perpetually preserves, in  
age  
restores the complexion; seats your teeth, did<sub>o</sub> they  
dance  
like virginal jacks,<sup>6</sup> firm as a wall; makes them white  
as  
250 ivory that were black as—

## Endnotes



- Note 1: Italian was called the “cara lingua,” a phrase Sir Pol translates.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An Italian juggler and magician who visited England and performed before Elizabeth I in the 1570s.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Arcade on the north side of the Piazza di San Marco.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) was a famous humanist, featured as a speaker in Castiglione’s *Courtier* (1528). “Cook” is a teasing substitution for “whore.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Charlatans too poor to afford a “bank,” or platform.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boccaccio’s *Decameron* is a storehouse of tales. Tabarine was a member of an Italian comic troupe that played in France and perhaps in England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: White metal used as an emetic (to cause vomiting) and a poison.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mainland territory of Venice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Renaissance medicine was based on the theory of the humors, four bodily fluids whose balance within the body determined both physical and mental health. Their qualities, in various combinations, were hot, cold, moist, and dry; hence Peregrine’s comment in the next line.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Volpone’s list of diseases includes “*mal caduco*,” epilepsy; “*tremor cordia*,” palpitations; “retired nerves,” withered sinews; “ill vapors of the spleen,” short temper; “stone,” kidney stones; “strangury,” painful urination; “*hernia ventosa*,” a hernia containing air; “*iliaca passio*,” intestinal cramps; “*dysenteria*,” diarrhea; “torsion of the small guts,” spasmodic bowel pain; and “*melancholia hypochondriaca*,” depression.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Medical. Aesculapius was the classical god of medicine.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Italian dialect for “Jack Omelet,” the name of the zany (see line 28), here referring to Nano.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Hugh Broughton was a Puritan rabbinical scholar who wrote impenetrable treatises on scriptural matters.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Greek physicians (ca. 460–377 B.C.E. and 129–ca. 199 C.E., respectively) who developed the theory of humors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: New World plants, used medicinally.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The bark of a tropical tree, used medicinally.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Raymond Lully was a medieval astrologer rumored to have discovered the elixir of life. “Danish Gonswart” has not been positively identified. Paracelsus was an early 16th-century alchemist who developed an alternative to Galenic medicine; he carried his medicines in his sword pommel.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Venetian medical licensing board.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Vessels for purifying liquids.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Associated with youth and sexual vigor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I won’t reduce the price by even a tiny coin.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Spanish gold coin worth about one English pound.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In his capacity as the god of health.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The virginal is a type of harpsichord; its “jacks” are quills that pluck strings when the keys are played, but the term was also sometimes used for the keys.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *platform*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *selling*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *close advisers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *most eloquent*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *ignorant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jargon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advertise for sale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *silver or gold coins*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *presented in imagination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *facing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clown; performer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make it my practice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stateliness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ask the same question*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in desperate straits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a rival mountebank* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prisoner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stuck to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acrobatics*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fourpenceworth* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *paper envelopes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if a game* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obstructions* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *halfpennyworth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *say no more about them* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mob*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *storehouses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wine of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boiled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *runny discharge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ointment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *upset* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *massage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dizziness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *potent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *direction* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *paper and flagon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrivalled*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *except for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *written so much* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *candle (working at night)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that claim* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *some of* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *different ingredients* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to glue it together* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boiling down* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *up in smoke* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack of discernment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *record* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *neither* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *felt hat* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Venetian ball game* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as well* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ask* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *buddy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *duties* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *devised* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beating around the bush* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *small Venetian coins* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accompanied by Mosca* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fuss* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *keen* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *get to the point* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *venereal disease* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *occasion* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *charity* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worth ninepence* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *displayed on my "bank"* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scorned* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *notified* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *which will please* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gallant* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beaten you to it* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *which will* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lowly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compared to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *filled out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fortunately* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *part* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adulterated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refined concentrate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *even if* [Return to reference](#) °

### SCENE 3. *The scene continues.*

[Enter] CORVINO. *He beats away the mountebank, etc.*

CORVINO     Spite o'the devil, and my shame! Come down here,  
Come down! No house but mine to make your scene?<sup>o</sup>

Signor Flaminio, will you down, sir? Down!

What, is my wife your Franciscina, sir?<sup>1</sup>

5     No windows on the whole piazza here  
To make your properties<sup>o</sup> but mine? But mine?  
Heart! Ere tomorrow I shall be new christened  
And called the *pantalone di bisognios*<sup>2</sup>  
About the town. [Exeunt VOLPONE, NANO, and MOSCA,  
followed by CORVINO and the crowd.]

PEREGRINE             What should this mean, Sir Pol?

10     POLITIC     Some trick of state, believe it. I will home.

PEREGRINE     It may be some design on you.

POLITIC                                     I know  
not.

I'll stand upon my guard.

PEREGRINE                             It is your best,<sup>o</sup> sir.

POLITIC     This three weeks, all my advices, all my  
letters,

They have been intercepted,

PEREGRINE                             Indeed, sir?

Best have a care.

POLITIC                             Nay, so I will. [Exit.]

15     PEREGRINE                             This knight,  
I may not lose him,<sup>o</sup> for my mirth, till night. [Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Corvino imagines the scene in terms of a stock episode from the Italian commedia dell'arte, in which the young lover, conventionally named Flaminio after the famous actor Flaminio Scala, seduces Franciscina, the easygoing serving wench.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The *pantalone* is another stock figure in the commedia dell'arte, a decrepit old man suspicious of his desirable young wife. *Di bisogniosi* is his jocular surname, meaning "descended from poor people."[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *stage set*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stage props*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *best course of action*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I won't leave him*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 4. VOLPONE'S house.**

[*Enter*] VOLPONE [*and*] MOSCA.

VOLPONE Oh, I am wounded!

MOSCA Where, sir?

VOLPONE Not  
without;°

Those blows were nothing; I could bear them ever,  
But angry Cupid, bolting° from her° eyes,  
Hath shot himself into me like a flame,  
Where now he flings about his burning heat,  
5 As in a furnace an ambitious° fire  
Whose vent is stopped. The fight is all within me.  
I cannot live except thou help me, Mosca;  
My liver<sup>1</sup> melts, and I, without the hope  
Of some soft air from her refreshing breath,  
10 Am but a heap of cinders.

MOSCA 'Las, good sir!

Would you had never seen her.

VOLPONE Nay, would thou  
Hadst never told me of her.

MOSCA Sir, 'tis true;

I do confess I was unfortunate,  
And you unhappy; but I'm bound in conscience  
15 No less than duty to effect my best  
To your release of torment, and I will, sir.

VOLPONE Dear Mosca, shall I hope?

MOSCA Sir, more than  
dear,

I will not bid you to despair of aught  
Within a human compass.°

VOLPONE Oh, there spoke  
20 My better angel. Mosca, take my keys.  
Gold, plate, and jewels, all's at thy devotion;°



Employ them how thou wilt; nay, coin me too,<sup>2</sup>  
 So<sub>o</sub> thou in this but crown my longings. Mosca?  
 MOSCA Use but your patience.  
 VOLPONE So I have.<sup>3</sup>  
 MOSCA I doubt not  
 25 To bring success to your desires.  
 VOLPONE Nay, then,  
 I not repent me of my late disguise.  
 MOSCA If you can horn him,<sup>4</sup> sir, you need not.  
 VOLPONE True;  
 Besides, I never meant him for my heir.  
 30 Is not the color o' my beard and eyebrows<sup>5</sup>  
 To make me known?  
 MOSCA No jot.  
 VOLPONE I did it well.  
 MOSCA So well, would I could follow you in mine  
 With half the happiness!<sub>o</sub> And yet I would  
 Escape your epilogue.<sub>o</sub>  
 VOLPONE But were they gulled<sub>o</sub>  
 With a belief that I was Scoto?  
 MOSCA Sir,  
 35 Scoto himself could hardly have distinguished!  
 I have not time to flatter you now. We'll part,  
 And, as I prosper, so applaud my art. [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Supposed to be the seat of lust. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Use my coins as well. (But also with the implication "make coins out of me," that is, "turn my body into money.") [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Punning on the original meaning of "patience," "enduring blows." [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cuckold him. (The husbands of adulterous wives were traditionally supposed to sprout horns.) [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Red, because he is a fox. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *externally* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shooting darts* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Celia's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rising* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *that's humanly possible* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disposal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *provided that* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *success* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the beating* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fooled* [Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 5. CORVINO'S house.**

[*Enter*] CORVINO [*and*] CELIA.

CORVINO    Death of mine honor, with the city's fool?  
A juggling, tooth-drawing,<sup>1</sup> prating<sup>o</sup> mountebank?  
And at a public window? Where, whilst he  
With his strained action<sup>o</sup> and his dole of faces<sup>2</sup>  
To his drug lecture draws your itching ears,  
5    A crew of old, unmarried, noted lechers  
Stood leering up like satyrs;<sup>o</sup> and you smile  
Most graciously! And fan your favors forth  
To give your hot spectators satisfaction!  
What, was your mountebank their call? Their  
10    whistle?<sup>3</sup>  
Or were you enamored on his copper rings?  
His saffron jewel with the toadstone<sup>o</sup> in't?  
Or his embroidered suit with the cope-stitch,<sup>o</sup>  
Made of a hearse-cloth? Or his old tilt-feather?<sup>4</sup>  
Or his starched beard? Well! You shall have him, yes.  
15    He shall come home and minister unto you  
The fricace for the mother.<sup>5</sup> Or, let me see,  
I think you'd rather mount?<sup>6</sup> Would you not mount?  
Why, if you'll mount, you may; yes truly, you may—  
And so you may be seen down to th'foot.  
20    Get you a cittern, Lady Vanity,<sup>7</sup>  
And be a dealer with the virtuous man;  
Make one.<sup>8</sup> I'll but protest<sup>o</sup> myself a cuckold  
And save your dowry.<sup>9</sup> I am a Dutchman, I!  
For if you thought me an Italian,  
25    You would be damned ere you did this, you whore.<sup>1</sup>  
Thou'dst tremble to imagine that the murder  
Of father, mother, brother, all thy race,  
Should follow as the subject of my justice!

CELIA Good sir, have patience!  
 CORVINO [*drawing a weapon*] What couldst thou  
 30 propose  
 Less to thyself<sup>o</sup> than, in this heat of wrath  
 And stung with my dishonor, I should strike  
 This steel unto thee, with as many stabs  
 As thou wert gazed upon with goatish<sup>o</sup> eyes?  
 CELIA Alas, sir, be appeased! I could not think  
 35 My being at the window should more now  
 Move your impatience than at other times.  
 CORVINO No? Not to seek and entertain a parley<sup>o</sup>  
 With a known knave? Before a multitude?  
 You were an actor with your handkerchief!  
 40 Which he most sweetly kissed in the receipt,  
 And might, no doubt, return it with a letter,  
 And 'point the place where you might meet—your  
 sister's,  
 Your mother's, or your aunt's might serve the turn.<sup>o</sup>  
 CELIA Why, dear sir, when do I make these  
 45 excuses?  
 Or ever stir abroad but to the church?  
 And that, so seldom—  
 CORVINO Well, it shall be less;  
 And thy restraint before was liberty  
 To what I now decree: and therefore, mark me.  
 [*Pointing to the window*] First, I will have this bawdy  
 50 light dammed up,  
 And, till't be done, some two or three yards off  
 I'll chalk a line, o'er which if thou but chance  
 To set thy desp'rate foot, more hell, more horror,  
 More wild, remorseless rage shall seize on thee  
 Than on a conjurer that had heedless left  
 55 His circle's safety ere his devil was laid.<sup>2</sup>  
 Then here's a lock which I will hang upon thee.  
 [*He shows a chastity belt.*]

And now I think on't, I will keep thee backwards;<sup>3</sup>  
 Thy lodging shall be backwards, thy walks  
 backwards,  
 Thy prospect<sup>o</sup>—all be backwards; and no pleasure  
 60 That thou shalt know but backwards. Nay, since you  
 force  
 My honest nature, know it is your own  
 Being too open makes me use you thus,  
 Since you will not contain your subtle<sup>o</sup> nostrils  
 In a sweet<sup>o</sup> room, but they must snuff the air  
 65 Of rank and sweaty passengers<sup>o</sup>— *Knock within.*  
 One knocks.  
 Away, and be not seen, pain of thy life!  
 Not look toward the window. If thou dost—  
 [CELIA *begins to exit.*]  
 Nay stay, hear this—let me not prosper, whore,  
 But I will make thee an anatomy,<sup>4</sup>  
 70 Dissect thee mine own self, and read a lecture  
 Upon thee to the city, and in public.  
 Away! [*Exit* CELIA.]  
 Who's there?  
 [*Enter*] *Servitore* [*a* SERVANT].  
 SERVANT 'Tis Signor Mosca, sir.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Mountebanks, like barbers, performed dental work.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Small repertory of facial expressions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Used to lure trained falcons.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The feather from a tilting (jousting) helmet. A hearse-cloth is a heavy cloth for draping over a coffin.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Womb massage; with obvious sexual innuendo. "The mother" was a term for the uterus, but also for a variety of ailments, from cramps to depression, that were supposed to originate there.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: (1) Climb up on the mountebank's stage yourself; (2) take the top sexual position.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Allegorical character of a morality play representing pride and worldly pleasure. A cittern is a guitarlike instrument that conventionally was played by whores.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Join up with him. (With sexual innuendo.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The husbands of proven adultresses could divorce them and keep their dowry.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Dutch were proverbially phlegmatic, in contrast to Italians, who were stereotypically impetuous and vengeful.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Conjurers protected themselves from the devils who served them by staying inside a magical circle.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the back part of the house, lacking a view out onto the piazza; but with the suggestion of anal intercourse, supposedly favored by Italians.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Use you for anatomical research. (In the early modern period, physicians obtained the bodies of executed criminals upon which to perform dissections, often before large crowds.)[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *chattering*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overacting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lustful goat-men*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *agate-like stone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gaudy needlework*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proclaim*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *as your punishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lustful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have a conversation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *occasion; sexual act*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *view (see n. 3)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delicate; crafty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweet-smelling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passersby*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 6. *The scene continues.***

CORVINO     Let him come in.                    [*Exit* SERVANT.]  
His master's dead! There's

yet  
Some good to help the bad.

[Enter] MOSCA.

My Mosca, welcome!

I guess your news.

MOSCA I fear you cannot, sir.

CORVINO     Is't not his death?

MOSCA                      Rather the contrary.

CORVINO Not his recovery?

MOSCA Yes, sir.

5 CORVINO I am cursed,  
I am bewitched! My crosses<sup>o</sup> meet to vex me!  
How? How? How? How?

MOSCA                      Why, sir, with Scoto's oil.

Corbaccio and Voltore brought of it

Whilst I was busy in an inner room—

10 CORVINO Death! That damned mountebank! But for  
the law,

Now, I could kill the rascal. 'T cannot be

His oil should have that virtue. Ha' not I

Known him a common rogue, come fiddling in

To th'*osteria*<sup>o</sup> with a tumbling whore,

15 And, when he has done all his forced tricks, been  
glad

Of a poor spoonful of dead wine with flies in't?

It cannot be. All his ingredients

Are a sheep's gall, a roasted bitch's marrow,

Some few sod<sup>o</sup> earwigs, pounded caterpillars,

A little capon's grease, and fasting spittle:<sup>1</sup>

20 I know 'em to a dram. o



MOSCA I know not, sir,  
But some on't there they poured into his ears,  
Some in his nostrils, and recovered him,  
Applying but the fricace.<sup>o</sup>

CORVINO Pox o'that fricace!

25 MOSCA And since, to seem the more officious<sup>o</sup>  
And flatt'ring of his health, there they have had—  
At extreme fees—the College of Physicians  
Consulting on him how they might restore him;  
Where one would have a cataplasm<sup>2</sup> of spices,  
Another a flayed ape clapped to his breast,  
30 A third would ha' it a dog, a fourth an oil  
With wildcats' skins. At last, they all resolved  
That to preserve him was no other means  
But some young woman must be straight sought  
out,  
35 Lusty and full of juice, to sleep by him;  
And to this service—most unhappily  
And most unwillingly—am I now employed,  
Which here I thought to preacquaint you with,  
For your advice, since it concerns you most,  
Because I would not do that thing might cross  
40 Your ends,<sup>3</sup> on whom I have my whole dependence,  
sir.

Yet if I do it not, they may delate<sup>4</sup>  
My slackness to my patron, work me out  
Of his opinion;<sup>o</sup> and there all your hopes,  
Ventures, or whatsoever, are all frustrate.  
45 I do but tell you, sir. Besides, they are all  
Now striving who shall first present him. Therefore,  
I could entreat you briefly, conclude somewhat;<sup>o</sup>  
Prevent 'em if you can.

CORVINO Death to my hopes!  
50 This is my villainous fortune! Best to hire  
Some common courtesan.

MOSCA Ay, I thought on that,  
 sir.  
 But they are all so subtle, <sup>o</sup> full of art, <sup>o</sup>  
 And age again <sup>o</sup> doting and flexible,  
 So as—I cannot tell—we may perchance  
 Light on a quean <sup>o</sup> may cheat us all.  
 CORVINO 'Tis true.  
 55 MOSCA No, no; it must be one that has no tricks, sir,  
 Some simple thing, a creature made unto <sup>o</sup> it;  
 Some wench you may command. Ha' you no  
 kinswoman?  
 Godso <sup>o</sup>—think, think, think, think, think, think, think,  
 sir.  
 One o'the doctors offered there his daughter.  
 60 CORVINO How!  
 MOSCA Yes, Signor Lupo, <sup>o</sup> the physician.  
 CORVINO His  
 daughter?  
 MOSCA And a virgin, sir. Why, alas,  
 He knows the state of's body, what it is,  
 That naught can warm his blood, sir, but a fever,  
 Nor any incantation raise his spirit. <sup>o</sup>  
 65 A long forgetfulness hath seized that part. <sup>o</sup>  
 Besides, sir, who shall know it? Some one or two—  
 CORVINO I pray thee give me leave. <sup>o</sup> [*He walks*  
*apart.*] If any man  
 But I had had this luck—The thing in 'tself,  
 I know, is nothing.—Wherefore should not I  
 70 As well command my blood and my affections  
 As this dull doctor? In the point of honor  
 The cases are all one, of wife and daughter.  
 MOSCA [*aside*] I hear him coming. <sup>o</sup>  
 CORVINO [*aside*] She shall do't.  
 'Tis done.  
 'Slight, <sup>o</sup> if this doctor, who is not engaged,  
 75

Unless 't be for his counsel (which is nothing),<sup>5</sup>  
Offer his daughter, what should I, that am  
So deeply in? I will prevent him. Wretch!  
Covetous wretch!—Mosca, I have determined.

MOSCA How, sir?

80 CORVINO We'll make all sure. The party you  
wot<sup>o</sup> of  
Shall be mine own wife, Mosca.

MOSCA Sir, the thing  
(But that I would not seem to counsel you)  
I should have motioned<sup>o</sup> to you at the first.  
And, make your count,<sup>o</sup> you have cut all their  
throats.

85 Why, 'tis directly taking a possession!<sup>6</sup>  
And in his next fit we may let him go.  
'Tis but to pull the pillow from his head  
And he is throttled; 't had been done before,  
But for your scrupulous doubts.

CORVINO Ay, a plague on't!  
90 My conscience fools my wit.<sup>o</sup> Well, I'll be brief,  
And so be thou, lest they should be before us.  
Go home, prepare him, tell him with what zeal  
And willingness I do it; swear it was  
On the first hearing (as thou mayst do, truly)  
Mine own free motion.<sup>o</sup>

MOSCA Sir, I warrant you,  
95 I'll so possess<sup>o</sup> him with it that the rest  
Of his starved clients shall be banished all,  
And only you received. But come not, sir,  
Until I send, for I have something else  
To ripen for your good; you must not know't.

100 CORVINO But do not you forget to send, now.

MOSCA Fear  
not.

[Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Saliva of a fasting person. (Scoto cannot afford anything to eat.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Poultice. (The substances described in the following lines were believed to work by absorbing the patient's infection, which bodes ill for the young woman prescribed for Volpone in lines 34–35.)[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Do anything that might frustrate your purposes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Report. (A legal term for making an accusation.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Who is not financially involved, except for whatever slight fee he could expect for his advice.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A legal term for the heir's formal assumption of inherited property.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *misfortunes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tavern (Italian)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boiled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tiny amount*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *massage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *zealous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *favor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *decide something*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cunning* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deceit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *old people moreover*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whore (who)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suited to; forced into*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *an oath*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Wolf (Italian)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vigor; semen*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *his penis*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give me a minute*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coming around*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by God's light (an oath)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *know*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rest assured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common sense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *initiative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impress*[Return to reference](#) °

## SCENE 7. *The scene continues.*

CORVINO Where are you, wife? My Celia? Wife?

[*Enter*] CELIA [*weeping.*]

What,

blubbering?

Come, dry those tears. I think thou thought'st me in earnest?

Ha! By this light, I talked so but to try<sup>o</sup> thee.

Methinks the lightness<sup>o</sup> of the occasion

5 Should ha' confirmed thee.<sup>1</sup> Come, I am not jealous.

CELIA No?

CORVINO Faith, I am not, I, nor never<sup>2</sup> was;

It is a poor, unprofitable humor.

Do not I know if women have a will

They'll do 'gainst all the watches<sup>o</sup> o'the world?

10 And that the fiercest spies are tamed with gold?

Tut, I am confident in thee, thou shalt see't;

And see, I'll give thee cause too, to believe it.

Come, kiss me. Go and make thee ready straight

In all thy best attire, thy choicest jewels;

15 Put 'em all on, and, with 'em thy best looks.

We are invited to a solemn feast

At old Volpone's, where it shall appear

How far I am free from jealousy or fear. [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Convinced you that I was not serious.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Double negatives are grammatical in Jacobean English.[Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *test*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *triviality*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despite the vigilance*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Act 3***



**SCENE 1. *The piazza.***

[*Enter*] MOSCA.

MOSCA I fear I shall begin to grow in love  
With my dear self and my most prosp'rous parts,<sup>o</sup>  
They do so spring and burgeon.<sup>o</sup> I can feel  
A whimsy<sup>o</sup> i'my blood. I know not how,  
Success hath made me wanton. I could skip  
5 Out of my skin now like a subtle snake,  
I am so limber. Oh, your parasite  
Is a most precious thing, dropped from above,<sup>o</sup>  
Not bred 'mongst clods and clodpolls here on earth.  
I muse the mystery was not made a science,  
10 It is so liberally professed!<sup>1</sup> Almost  
All the wise world is little else in nature  
But parasites or subparasites. And yet  
I mean not those that have your bare town-art,<sup>2</sup>  
To know who's fit to feed 'em; have no house,  
15 No family, no care, and therefore mold  
Tales for men's ears,<sup>o</sup> to bait<sup>o</sup> that sense; or get  
Kitchen-invention, and some stale receipts<sup>o</sup>  
To please the belly and the groin;<sup>o</sup> nor those,  
With their court-dog tricks, that can fawn and fleer,<sup>o</sup>  
20 Make their revenue out of legs and faces,  
Echo my lord, and lick away a moth;<sup>3</sup>  
But your fine, elegant rascal, that can rise  
And stoop almost together, like an arrow,  
Shoot through the air as nimbly as a star,<sup>o</sup>  
25 Turn short as doth a swallow, and be here  
And there and here and yonder all at once,  
Present to any humor, all occasion,<sup>4</sup>  
And change a visor<sup>o</sup> swifter than a thought!  
This is the creature had the art born with him,  
30 Toils not to learn it, but doth practice it

Out of most excellent nature, and such sparks  
Are the true parasites, others but their zanies.°

## Endnotes

- Note 1: I wonder why the craft was not made a subject for academic study, it is so frequently practiced! (Punning on the “liberal professions.”)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Crude skills of ingratiation, sufficient only for getting free meals in taverns.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Make a living from bows and sycophantic looks, repeat anything a nobleman says, and fawn over him, fussing over every detail of his appearance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Ready to respond to any mood or opportunity.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *talents*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *swell; thrive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *giddiness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sent from heaven*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tell juicy rumors* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recipes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as aphrodisiacs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *smile insincerely*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meteor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mask; expression*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clownish imitators*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] BONARIO.

[*Aside*] Who's this? Bonario? Old Corbaccio's son?  
The person I was bound<sup>o</sup> to seek.—Fair sir,  
You are happ'ly met.

BONARIO That cannot be by thee.

MOSCA Why, sir?

BONARIO Nay, pray thee know thy way and  
leave me.

5 I would be loath to interchange discourse  
With such a mate<sup>o</sup> as thou art.

MOSCA Courteous sir,  
Scorn not my poverty.

BONARIO Not I, by heaven,  
But thou shalt give me leave to hate thy baseness.

MOSCA Baseness?

BONARIO Ay. Answer me, is not thy sloth  
10 Sufficient argument? Thy flattery?  
Thy means of feeding?

MOSCA Heaven, be good to me!  
These imputations are too common, sir,  
And eas'ly stuck on virtue when she's poor.  
You are unequal<sup>o</sup> to me, and howe'er  
Your sentence<sup>o</sup> may be righteous, yet you are not,  
15 That, ere you know me, thus proceed in censure.  
Saint Mark bear witness 'gainst you, 'tis inhuman.

[*He weeps.*]

BONARIO [*aside*] What? Does he weep? The sign is soft  
and good.

I do repent me that I was so harsh.

MOSCA 'Tis true that, swayed by strong necessity,  
20 I am enforced to eat my careful bread  
With too much obsequy;<sup>o</sup> 'tis true, beside,

That I am fain<sup>o</sup> to spin mine own poor raiment  
 Out of my mere observance,<sup>o</sup> being not born  
 To a free fortune. But that I have done  
 25 Base offices in rending friends asunder,  
 Dividing families, betraying counsels,  
 Whispering false lies, or mining<sup>o</sup> men with praises,  
 Trained<sup>o</sup> their credulity with perjuries,  
 Corrupted chastity, or am in love  
 30 With mine own tender ease, but would not rather  
 Prove<sup>o</sup> the most rugged and laborious course  
 That might redeem my present estimation,<sup>1</sup>  
 Let me here perish in all hope of goodness.  
 BONARIO [*aside*] This cannot be a personated  
 35 passion!—  
 I was to blame, so to mistake thy nature;  
 Pray thee forgive me, and speak out thy business.  
 MOSCA Sir, it concerns you; and though I may seem  
 At first to make a main<sup>o</sup> offense in manners  
 And in my gratitude unto my master,  
 40 Yet for the pure love which I bear all right  
 And hatred of the wrong, I must reveal it.  
 This very hour your father is in purpose  
 To disinherit you—  
 BONARIO How!  
 MOSCA And thrust you forth  
 As a mere stranger to his blood. 'Tis true, sir.  
 45 The work no way engageth<sup>o</sup> me but as  
 I claim an interest in the general state  
 Of goodness and true virtue, which I hear  
 T'abound in you, and for which mere respect,<sup>o</sup>  
 Without a second aim, sir, I have done it.  
 50 BONARIO This tale hath lost thee much of the late<sup>o</sup>  
 trust  
 Thou hadst with me. It is impossible.  
 I know not how to lend it any thought<sup>o</sup>

My father should be so unnatural.

55 MOSCA It is a confidence that well becomes  
Your piety;<sup>o</sup> and formed, no doubt, it is  
From your own simple innocence, which makes  
Your wrong more monstrous and abhorred. But, sir,  
I now will tell you more. This very minute  
60 It is or will be doing; and if you  
Shall be but pleased to go with me, I'll bring you,  
I dare not say where you shall see, but where  
Your ear shall be a witness of the deed:  
Hear yourself written bastard, and professed  
The common issue of the earth.<sup>2</sup>

65 BONARIO I'm mazed!

MOSCA Sir, if I do it not, draw your just sword  
And score your vengeance on my front<sup>o</sup> and face;  
Mark me your villain. You have too much wrong,  
And I do suffer for you, sir. My heart  
Weeps blood in anguish—

70 BONARIO Lead. I follow thee.  
[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That might improve your current appraisal of me.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A bastard was called *filius terrae*, "son of the earth."[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *on my way*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *fellow (contemptuous)*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *superior; unfair*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *verdict*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *obsequiousness*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *obliged*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deferential service*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undermining*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lured on*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undergo*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *great*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *concerns*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for which reason alone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *believe that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *filial loyalty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brow*[Return to reference °](#)

### SCENE 3. VOLPONE'S house.

[*Enter*] VOLPONE, NANO, ANDROGYNO, [*and*] CASTRONE.

VOLPONE Mosca stays long, methinks. Bring forth  
your sports

And help to make the wretched time more sweet.

NANO Dwarf, fool, and eunuch, well met here we  
be.

5 A question it were now, whether<sup>o</sup> of us three,  
Being all the known delicates<sup>o</sup> of a rich man,  
In pleasing him, claim the precedency can?

CASTRONE I claim for myself.

ANDROGYNO And so doth the fool.

NANO 'Tis foolish indeed; let me set you both to  
school.

10 First, for your dwarf: he's little and witty,  
And everything, as it is little, is pretty;  
Else why do men say to a creature of my shape,  
So soon as they see him, "It's a pretty little ape"?  
And why a pretty ape? But for pleasing imitation  
Of greater men's action in a ridiculous fashion.  
Beside, this feat<sup>o</sup> body of mine doth not crave  
15 Half the meat, drink, and cloth one of your bulks will  
have.

Admit your fool's face be the mother of laughter,  
Yet for his brain, it must always come after;<sup>o</sup>  
And though that do feed him,<sup>o</sup> it's a pitiful case,<sup>1</sup>  
His body is beholding<sup>o</sup> to such a bad face.

20 *One knocks.*

VOLPONE Who's there? My couch. [*He lies down.*]

Away, look, Nano, see!

Give me my caps, first—go, inquire.

[*Exeunt* NANO, ANDROGYNO, *and* CASTRONE.]

Now, Cupid

Send<sup>o</sup> it be Mosca, and with fair return!<sup>o</sup>  
 [Enter NANO.]  
 NANO It is the beauteous Madam—  
 VOLPONE Would-be—is it?  
 NANO The same  
 25 VOLPONE Now, torment on me! Squire her in,  
 For she will enter or dwell here forever.  
 Nay, quickly, that my fit were past! [Exit  
 NANO.]  
 I fear  
 A second hell, too, that my loathing this  
 Will quite expel my appetite to the other.<sup>o</sup>  
 30 Would she were taking, now, her tedious leave.  
 Lord, how it threatens me what I am to suffer!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: With a pun on “container.”[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: which[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: playthings[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: neat, trim[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: be lesser[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: earns his keep[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: beholden[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: grant [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: good results[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: Celia[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)



**SCENE 4. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] LADY [WOULD-BE *and*] NANO.

LADY WOULD-BE [*to* NANO] I thank you, good sir. Pray  
you signify

Unto your patron I am here.<sup>1</sup> [*regarding herself in a  
mirror*] This band<sup>o</sup>

Shows not my neck enough. I trouble you, sir.

Let me request you, bid one of my women

Come hither to me. [*Exit*

NANO.]

5 In good faith, I am dressed  
Most favorably today!<sup>o</sup> It is no matter;  
'Tis well enough.

[*Enter* NANO *and* FIRST] WOMAN.

Look, see, these petulant things!<sup>o</sup>

How they have done this!

VOLPONE [*aside*] I do feel the fever

Ent'ring in at mine ears. Oh, for a charm

To fright it hence!

10 LADY WOULD-BE [*to* FIRST WOMAN] Come nearer. Is this  
curl

In his<sup>o</sup> right place? Or this? Why is this higher  
Than all the rest? You ha' not washed your eyes yet?  
Or do they not stand even<sup>o</sup> i'your head?

Where's your fellow? Call her. [*Exit* FIRST

WOMAN.]

NANO [*aside*] Now Saint Mark

15 Deliver us! Anon she'll beat her women  
Because her nose is red.

[*Enter* FIRST *and* SECOND WOMEN.]

LADY WOULD-BE I pray you, view

This tire,<sup>o</sup> forsooth. Are all things apt or no?

SECOND WOMAN One hair a little here sticks out,  
forsooth.

LADY WOULD-BE Does 't so, forsooth? [*to* FIRST WOMAN]

And

where was your dear sight

When it did so, forsooth? What now? Bird-eyed?°

20 [*to* SECOND WOMAN] And you, too? Pray you both  
approach and mend it.

[*They tend to*

*her.*]

Now, by that light,° I muse you're not ashamed!

I, that have preached these things so oft unto you,

Read you the principles, argued all the grounds,

Disputed every fitness, every grace,

25 Called you to counsel of so frequent dressings—

NANO [*aside*] More carefully than of your fame° or  
honor.

LADY WOULD-BE Made you acquainted what an ample  
dowry

The knowledge of these things would be unto you,

Able alone to get you noble husbands

30 At your return,° and you thus to neglect it?

Besides, you seeing what a curious° nation

Th'Italians are, what will they say of me?

"The English lady cannot dress herself."

Here's a fine imputation to our country!

35 Well, go your ways, and stay i'the next room.

This fucus° was too coarse, too; it's no matter.

[*to* NANO] Good sir, you'll give 'em entertainment?°

[*Exeunt* NANO *and* WOMEN.]

VOLPONE [*aside*] The storm comes toward me.

LADY WOULD-BE [*approaching the bed*] How  
does my Volp?

40 VOLPONE Troubled with noise. I cannot sleep; I  
dreamt

That a strange Fury entered now my house,

And with the dreadful tempest of her breath  
Did cleave my roof asunder.

LADY WOULD-BE Believe me, and I  
Had the most fearful dream, could I remember't—

45 VOLPONE [*aside*] Out on<sub>o</sub> my fate! I ha' giv'n her the  
occasion

How to torment me: she will tell me hers.

LADY WOULD-BE Methought the golden mediocrity,<sub>o</sub>  
Polite and delicate—

VOLPONE Oh, if you do love me,  
No more! I sweat and suffer at the mention  
Of any dream. Feel how I tremble yet.

50 LADY WOULD-BE Alas, good soul! The passion of the  
heart.<sub>o</sub>

Seed pearl were good now, boiled with syrup of  
apples,

Tincture of gold and coral, citron pills,  
Your elecampane<sub>o</sub> root, myrobalans<sup>2</sup>—

55 VOLPONE [*aside*] Ay me, I have ta'en a grasshopper  
by the wing!

LADY WOULD-BE Burnt silk and amber; you have  
muscadel

Good i'the house—

VOLPONE You will not drink and part?

LADY WOULD-BE No, fear not that. I doubt we shall  
not get

Some English saffron—half a dram would serve—

60 Your sixteen cloves, a little musk, dried mints,  
Bugloss,<sub>o</sub> and barley-meal—

VOLPONE [*aside*] She's in again.

Before I feigned diseases; now I have one.

LADY WOULD-BE And these applied with a right scarlet  
cloth—

VOLPONE [*aside*] Another flood of words! A very  
torrent!

LADY WOULD-BE Shall I, sir, make you a poultice?  
 VOLPONE No,  
 65 no, no.  
 I'm very well; you need prescribe no more.  
 LADY WOULD-BE I have a little studied physic, but  
 now  
 I'm all for music, save i'the forenoons  
 An hour or two for painting. I would have  
 A lady indeed t' have all letters and arts,  
 70 Be able to discourse, to write, to paint,  
 But principal, as Plato holds,<sup>o</sup> your music  
 (And so does wise Pythagoras, I take it)  
 Is your true rapture, when there is concent<sup>o</sup>  
 In face, in voice, and clothes, and is indeed  
 75 Our sex's chiefest ornament.  
 VOLPONE The poet<sup>o</sup>  
 As old in time as Plato, and as knowing,  
 Says that your highest female grace is silence.  
 LADY WOULD-BE Which o' your poets? Petrarch? Or  
 Tasso? Or Dante?  
 Guarini? Ariosto? Aretine?  
 80 Cieco di Hadria?<sup>3</sup> I have read them all.  
 VOLPONE [*aside*] Is everything a cause to my  
 destruction?  
 LADY WOULD-BE [*searching her garments*] I think I ha'  
 two or three of 'em about me.  
 VOLPONE [*aside*] The sun, the sea will sooner both  
 stand still  
 Than her eternal tongue! Nothing can scape it.  
 85 LADY WOULD-BE Here's *Pastor Fido*<sup>4</sup>—  
 VOLPONE [*aside*] Profess  
 obstinate silence,  
 That's now my safest.  
 LADY WOULD-BE All our English writers,  
 I mean such as are happy in th'Italian,

Will deign to steal out of this author mainly,  
 Almost as much as from Montaigné<sup>o</sup>  
 90 He has so modern and facile<sup>o</sup> a vein,  
 Fitting the time, and catching the court ear.  
 Your Petrarch is more passionate, yet he,  
 In days of sonneting, trusted 'em with much.<sup>5</sup>  
 Dante is hard, and few can understand him.  
 95 But for a desperate<sup>o</sup> wit, there's Aretine!  
 Only his pictures are a little obscene<sup>6</sup>—  
 You mark me not?  
 VOLPONE                      Alas, my mind's perturbed.  
 LADY WOULD-BE      Why, in such cases we must cure  
                                  ourselves,  
 Make use of our philosophy—  
 VOLPONE      Ay me!  
 100 LADY WOULD-BE      And, as we find our passions do  
                                  rebel,  
 Encounter 'em with reason, or divert 'em  
 By giving scope unto some other humor  
 Of lesser danger—as in politic bodies<sup>o</sup>  
 105 There's nothing more doth overwhelm the judgment  
 And clouds the understanding than too much  
 Settling and fixing and (as 'twere) subsiding<sup>o</sup>  
 Upon one object. For the incorporating  
 Of these same outward things into that part  
 Which we call mental leaves some certain feces<sup>o</sup>  
 110 That stop the organs and, as Plato says,  
 Assassinate our knowledge.  
 VOLPONE [*aside*]                      Now, the spirit  
 Of patience help me!  
 LADY WOULD-BE                      Come, in faith, I must  
 Visit you more o'days and make you well.  
 Laugh and be lusty.<sup>o</sup>  
 115 VOLPONE [*aside*]                      My good angel save me!

LADY WOULD-BE      There was but one sole man in all  
the world  
With whom I e'er could sympathize, and he  
Would lie youo often three, four hours together  
To hear me speak, and be sometime so rapt  
As he would answer me quite from the purpose,  
120 Like you—and you are like him, just. I'll discourse—  
An'to be but only, sir, to bring you asleep—  
How we did spend our time and loves together  
For some six years.  
VOLPONE      Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!  
LADY WOULD-BE      For we were *coaetani*o and brought  
125 up—  
VOLPONE [*aside*]      Some power, some fate, some fortune  
rescue me!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Much of Lady Would-be's dialogue in the following scene is adapted from Libanius of Antioch's *On Talkative Women*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dried tropical fruits.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lady Would-be juxtaposes major Italian writers with the minor di Hadria and the obscene Aretino (see p. 988, n. 6).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A pastoral by Giovanni Guarini, translated into English in 1602.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When sonnet writing was popular, gave poets plenty to imitate.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The libertine poems of Aretine (Pietro Aretino 1492–1556) were published with pornographic illustrations by Giulio Romano.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *ruff*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sarcastic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *her women; her curls*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *level*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *headdress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *startled (?)*; *asquint (?)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by heaven*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to England*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastidious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *makeup*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *look after them*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curses on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *golden mean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heartburn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perennial herb*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an herb*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in The Republic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmony*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Sophocles, in Ajax*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *French essayist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *graceful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outrageous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *political councils*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alchemical jargon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dregs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lie*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the same age*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 5. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] MOSCA.

MOSCA God save you, madam.

LADY WOULD-BE

Good sir.

VOLPONE [*aside to* MOSCA]

Mosca?

Welcome,

Welcome to my redemption.

MOSCA [*to* VOLPONE]

Why, sir?

VOLPONE [*aside to* MOSCA]

Oh,

Rid me of this my torture quickly, there,

My madam with the everlasting voice!

The bells in time of pestilence ne'er made

5

Like noise, or were in that perpetual motion;<sup>1</sup>

The cockpit<sup>o</sup> comes not near it. All my house

But now steamed like a bath with her thick breath.

A lawyer could not have been heard, nor scarce

Another woman, such a hail of words

10

She has let fall. For hell's sake, rid her hence.

MOSCA [*aside to* VOLPONE] Has she presented?<sup>o</sup>

VOLPONE [*aside to* MOSCA]

Oh, I do

not care.

I'll take her absence upon any price,

With any loss.

MOSCA Madam—

LADY WOULD-BE

I ha' brought your patron

A toy,<sup>o</sup> a cap here, of mine own work—

MOSCA [*taking it from her*]

'Tis well.

15

I had forgot to tell you, I saw your knight

Where you'd little think it—

LADY WOULD-BE

Where?

MOSCA

Marry,

Where yet, if you make haste, you may apprehend

him,



Rowing upon the water in a gondole  
 With the most cunning courtesan of Venice.  
 20 LADY WOULD-BE Is't true?  
 MOSCA Pursue 'em, and believe  
 your eyes.  
 Leave me to make your gift. [*Exit* LADY WOULD-BE.]  
 I knew 'twould take.<sup>o</sup>  
 For lightly,<sup>o</sup> they that use themselves most license  
 Are still<sup>o</sup> most jealous.  
 VOLPONE Mosca, hearty thanks  
 For thy quick fiction and delivery of me.  
 25 Now, to my hopes, what say'st thou?  
 [*Enter* LADY WOULD-BE.]  
 LADY WOULD-BE But do you  
 hear, sir?  
 VOLPONE [*aside*] Again! I fear a paroxysm.<sup>o</sup>  
 LADY WOULD-BE Which way  
 Rowed they together?  
 MOSCA Toward the Rialto.<sup>o</sup>  
 LADY WOULD-BE I pray you, lend me your dwarf.  
 MOSCA I pray  
 you, take him.  
 [*Exit* LADY WOULD-BE.]  
 Your hopes, sir, are like happy blossoms: fair,  
 30 And promise timely fruit if you will stay  
 But the maturing. Keep you at your couch.  
 Corbaccio will arrive straight with the will;  
 When he is gone I'll tell you more. [*Exit.*]  
 VOLPONE My blood,  
 My spirits are returned. I am alive;  
 35 And like your wanton<sup>o</sup> gamester at primero,<sup>2</sup>  
 Whose thought had whispered to him, not go<sup>o</sup> less,  
 Methinks I lie, and draw—for an encounter.<sup>3</sup>  
 [*He gets into bed and closes the bed curtains.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Church bells marked the deaths of parishioners; in times of plague they therefore rang almost constantly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A card game.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: (1) Winning play in primero; (2) sexual act.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *cockfighting arena*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *given a gift*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trifle; embroidered piece*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *do the trick*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *commonly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *relapse*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *commercial district*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reckless; lustful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *don't gamble*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 6. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] MOSCA [*and*] BONARIO. [MOSCA *shows*  
BONARIO *to a hiding place.*]

MOSCA Sir, here concealed you may hear all. But  
pray you

Have patience, sir. [*One knocks.*] The same's your  
father knocks.

I am compelled to leave you.

BONARIO Do so. Yet

Cannot my thought imagine this a truth.

[*He conceals himself.*]

**SCENE 7. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] CORVINO [*and*] CELIA. MOSCA [*crosses the stage to intercept them*].

MOSCA Death on me! You are come too soon. What meant you?

Did not I say I would send?

CORVINO Yes, but I feared  
You might forget it, and then they prevent us.

MOSCA [*aside*] Prevent? Did e'er man haste so for  
his horns?<sup>o</sup>

5 A courtier would not ply it so for a place.<sup>1</sup>  
[*to* CORVINO] Well, now there's no helping it, stay  
here;

I'll presently return. [*He crosses the stage to*  
BONARIO.]

CORVINO Where are you, Celia?  
You know not wherefore I have brought you hither?

CELIA Not well, except you told me.

CORVINO Now I will.  
Hark hither. [*CORVINO and CELIA talk apart.*]

10 MOSCA [*to* BONARIO] Sir, your father hath sent word  
It will be half an hour ere he come;  
And therefore, if you please to walk the while  
Into that gallery, at the upper end  
There are some books to entertain the time;

15 And I'll take care no man shall come unto you, sir.  
BONARIO Yes, I will stay there. [*aside*] I do doubt  
this fellow.

[*He retires.*]

MOSCA There, he is far enough; he can hear  
nothing.

And for<sup>o</sup> his father, I can keep him off.

[MOSCA *joins* VOLPONE *and opens his bed curtains.*]

CORVINO [*to CELIA*] Nay, now, there is no starting back,  
and therefore

20 Resolve upon it; I have so decreed.  
It must be done. Nor would I move't<sup>o</sup> afore,  
Because I would avoid all shifts<sup>o</sup> and tricks  
That might deny me.

CELIA Sir, let me beseech you,  
Affect<sup>o</sup> not these strange trials. If you doubt  
My chastity, why, lock me up forever;  
25 Make me the heir of darkness. Let me live  
Where I may please<sup>o</sup> your fears, if not your trust.

CORVINO Believe it, I have no such humor, I.  
All that I speak, I mean; yet I am not mad,  
Not horn-mad,<sup>o</sup> see you? Go to, show yourself  
30 Obedient, and a wife.

CELIA O heaven!

CORVINO I say it,  
Do so.

CELIA Was this the train?<sup>o</sup>

CORVINO I have told you reasons:  
What the physicians have set down; how much  
It may concern me; what my engagements are;  
My means, and the necessity of those means  
35 For my recovery. Wherefore, if you be  
Loyal and mine, be won, respect my venture.<sup>o</sup>

CELIA Before your honor?

CORVINO Honor? Tut, a breath.  
There's no such thing in nature; a mere term  
Invented to awe fools. What is my gold  
40 The worse for touching? Clothes for being looked  
on?

Why, this's no more. An old, decrepit wretch,  
That has no sense,<sup>o</sup> no sinew; takes his meat  
With others' fingers; only knows to gape

45 When you do scald his gums; a voice, a shadow.  
And what can this man hurt you?

CELIA Lord! What spirit  
Is this hath entered him?

CORVINO And for your fame,<sup>o</sup>  
That's such a jig;<sup>o</sup> as if I would go tell it,  
Cry<sup>o</sup> it on the piazza! Who shall know it  
But he that cannot speak it,<sup>o</sup> and this fellow<sup>o</sup>  
50 Whose lips are i'my pocket, save yourself?  
If you'll proclaim't, you may. I know no other  
Should come to know it.

CELIA Are heaven and saints then  
nothing?

Will they be blind or stupid?

CORVINO How?<sup>o</sup>

CELIA Good sir,  
Be jealous still, emulate them, and think  
55 What hate they burn with toward every sin.

CORVINO I grant you, if I thought it were a sin  
I would not urge you. Should I offer this  
To some young Frenchman, or hot Tuscan blood  
That had read Aretine, conned<sup>o</sup> all his prints,  
60 Knew every quirk within lust's labyrinth,  
And were professed critic<sup>o</sup> in lechery,  
And I would look upon him and applaud him,  
This were a sin. But here 'tis contrary,  
A pious work, mere charity, for physic,  
65 And honest polity<sup>o</sup> to assure mine own.

CELIA O heaven! Canst thou suffer such a change?

VOLPONE [*aside to* MOSCA] Thou art mine honor, Mosca,  
and my pride,

My joy, my tickling, my delight! Go, bring 'em.

MOSCA [*to* CORVINO] Please you draw near, sir.

CORVINO [*dragging* CELIA *toward* VOLPONE]  
70 You will not be rebellious? By that Come on, what—  
light—

MOSCA [*to* VOLPONE] Sir, Signor Corvino here is come to see you.

VOLPONE Oh!

MOSCA And, hearing of the consultation had So lately for your health, is come to offer, Or rather, sir, to prostitute—

75 CORVINO Thanks, sweet Mosca.

MOSCA Freely, unasked or unentreated—

CORVINO Well.

MOSCA As the true, fervent instance of his love, His own most fair and proper wife, the beauty Only of price<sup>o</sup> in Venice—

CORVINO 'Tis well urged.

80 MOSCA To be your comfortress and to preserve you.

VOLPONE Alas, I am past already! Pray you, thank him

For his good care and promptness. But for<sup>o</sup> that, 'Tis a vain labor e'en to fight 'gainst heaven, Applying fire to a stone (uh! uh! uh! uh!), Making a dead leaf grow again. I take

85 His wishes gently, though; and you may tell him What I have done for him. Marry, my state is hopeless!

Will him to pray for me, and t' use his fortune With reverence when he comes to't.

MOSCA [*to* CORVINO] Do you hear, sir?

Go to him with your wife.

90 CORVINO [*to* CELIA] Heart of my father!<sup>o</sup> Wilt thou persist thus? Come, I pray thee, come. Thou see'st 'tis nothing. [*He threatens to strike her.*] Celia! By this hand,

I shall grow violent. Come, do't, I say.

CELIA Sir, kill me, rather. I will take down poison, Eat burning coals, do anything—

CORVINO Be damned!

95 Heart! I will drag thee hence, home, by the hair,  
 Cry thee a strumpet through the streets, rip up  
 Thy mouth unto thine ears, and slit thy nose  
 Like a raw rochet!°—Do not tempt me. Come,  
 100 Yield! I am loath—Death!° I will buy some slave  
 Whom I will kill,<sup>2</sup> and bind thee to him alive,  
 And at my window hang you forth, devising  
 Some monstrous crime, which I in capital letters  
 Will eat into thy flesh with *aqua fortis*°  
 And burning cor'sives° on this stubborn breast.  
 105 Now, by the blood thou hast incensed, I'll do't.  
 CELIA Sir, what you please, you may; I am your  
 martyr.  
 CORVINO Be not thus obstinate. I ha' not deserved  
 it.  
 Think who it is entreats you. Pray thee, sweet!  
 Good faith, thou shalt have jewels, gowns, attires,  
 110 What° thou wilt think and ask. Do but go kiss him.  
 Or touch him but. For my sake. At my suit.  
 This once. No? Not? I shall remember this.  
 Will you disgrace me thus? Do you thirst my  
 undoing?  
 MOSCA Nay, gentle lady, be advised.  
 CORVINO No, no.  
 115 She has watched her time.<sup>3</sup> God's precious,<sup>4</sup> this is  
 scurvy;  
 'Tis very scurvy, and you are—  
 MOSCA Nay, good, sir.  
 CORVINO An arrant locust,° by heaven, a locust.  
 Whore,  
 Crocodile,<sup>5</sup> that hast thy tears prepared,  
 Expecting° how thou'lt bid 'em flow!  
 120 MOSCA Nay, pray  
 you, sir,  
 She will consider.





In varying figures I would have contended  
With the blue Proteus or the hornèd flood.<sup>6</sup>  
Now art thou welcome.

CELIA

Sir!

VOLPONE

Nay, fly me not,

155 Nor let thy false imagination  
That I was bedrid make thee think I am so.  
Thou shalt not find it. I am now as fresh,  
As hot, as high, and in as jovial plight<sup>o</sup>  
As when—in that so celebrated scene,  
At recitation of our comedy  
160 For entertainment of the great Valois<sup>7</sup>—  
I acted young Antinoüs,<sup>8</sup> and attracted  
The eyes and ears of all the ladies present,  
T'admire each graceful gesture, note, and footing.<sup>o</sup>

### SONG

165 [*He sings.*] Come, my Celia, let us prove,<sup>9</sup>  
While we can, the sports of love.  
Time will not be ours forever;  
He at length our good will sever.  
Spend not then his gifts in vain.  
170 Suns that set may rise again,  
But if once we lose this light  
'Tis with us perpetual night.  
Why should we defer our joys?  
Fame and rumor are but toys.<sup>o</sup>  
175 Cannot we delude the eyes  
Of a few poor household spies?  
Or his<sup>o</sup> easier ears beguile,  
Thus removèd by our wile?  
'Tis no sin love's fruits to steal,  
But the sweet thefts to reveal.  
180 To be taken,<sup>o</sup> to be seen,



210 If thou hast wisdom, hear me, Celia.  
 Thy baths shall be the juice of July flowers,<sup>o</sup>  
 Spirit<sup>o</sup> of roses, and of violets,  
 The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath<sup>6</sup>  
 Gathered in bags, and mixed with Cretan wines.  
 215 Our drink shall be preparèd gold and amber,  
 Which we will take until my roof whirl round  
 With the vertigo; and my dwarf shall dance,  
 My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antic,<sup>7</sup>  
 Whilst we, in changèd shapes, act Ovid's tales:  
 220 Thou like Europa now and I like Jove,  
 Then I like Mars and thou like Erycine,<sup>8</sup>  
 So of the rest, till we have quite run through  
 And wearied all the fables of the gods.  
 Then will I have thee in more modern forms,  
 225 Attirèd like some sprightly dame of France,  
 Brave Tuscan lady, or proud Spanish beauty;  
 Sometimes unto the Persian Sophy's<sup>o</sup> wife,  
 Or the Grand Signor's<sup>o</sup> mistress; and for change,  
 To one of our most artful courtesans,  
 230 Or some quick<sup>o</sup> Negro, or cold Russian.  
 And I will meet thee in as many shapes,  
 Where we may so transfuse<sup>o</sup> our wand'ring souls  
 Out at our lips, and score up sums of pleasures,  
 [*He sings.*] That the curious shall not know  
 235 How to tell<sup>o</sup> them as they flow;  
 And the envious, when they find  
 What their number is, be pined.<sup>o</sup>  
 CELIA If you have ears that will be pierced, or eyes  
 That can be opened, a heart may be touched,  
 240 Or any part that yet sounds man<sup>9</sup> about you;  
 If you have touch of holy saints or heaven,  
 Do me the grace to let me scape. If not,  
 Be bountiful and kill me. You do know  
 I am a creature hither ill betrayed

245 By one whose shame I would forget it were.  
 If you will deign me neither of these graces,  
 Yet feed your wrath, sir, rather than your lust—  
 It is a vice comes nearer manliness—  
 And punish that unhappy crime of nature  
 250 Which you miscall my beauty. Flay my face  
 Or poison it with ointments for seducing  
 Your blood to this rebellion.◊ Rub these hands  
 With what may cause an eating leprosy  
 E'en to my bones and marrow—anything  
 255 That may disfavor me,◊ save in my honor—  
 And I will kneel to you, pray for you, pay down  
 A thousand hourly vows, sir, for your health,  
 Report and think you virtuous—  
 VOLPONE Think me cold,  
 Frozen, and impotent, and so report me?  
 260 That I had Nestor's<sup>1</sup> hernia, thou wouldst think.  
 I do degenerate, and abuse my nation<sup>2</sup>  
 To play with opportunity thus long.  
 I should have done the act and then have parleyed.  
 Yield, or I'll force thee.  
 CELIA O just God!  
 VOLPONE [*seizing* CELIA] In vain—  
 265 *He* [BONARIO] *leaps out from where MOSCA had*  
*placed him.*  
 BONARIO Forbear, foul ravisher, libidinous swine!  
 Free the forced lady or thou diest, impostor.  
 But that I am loath to snatch thy punishment  
 Out of the hand of justice, thou shouldst yet  
 Be made the timely sacrifice of vengeance  
 270 Before this altar and this dross,◊ thy idol.—  
 Lady, let's quit the place. It is the den  
 Of villainy. Fear naught; you have a guard;  
 And he◊ ere long shall meet his just reward.  
 [*Exeunt* BONARIO *and* CELIA.]

275       VOLPONE    Fall on me, roof, and bury me in ruin!  
              Become my grave, that wert my shelter! Oh!  
              I am unmasked, unspirited, undone,  
              Betrayed to beggary, to infamy—

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Work so hard for a position at court.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the following lines, Corvino elaborates luridly upon the fate that the notorious rapist Tarquin promised the chaste Roman matron Lucretia if she did not capitulate; unlike Celia, Lucretia yielded to threats.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Waited for her chance (to ruin me).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God's precious blood. (An oath.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Which was supposed to weep while preying upon its victims.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Proteus is a shape-changing sea god with whom Menelaus wrestles in the *Odyssey*. The "hornèd flood" is the river god Achelous, defeated by Hercules despite changing into an ox.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Henry of Valois, Duke of Anjou, and later King Henry III of France (1574–89), was sumptuously entertained at Venice in 1574. His sexual taste for men was widely remarked.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The beautiful homosexual favorite of the Roman emperor Hadrian.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Try out. (The song is an adaptation of the Roman poet Catullus's fifth ode.)[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cleopatra dissolved and drank a pearl during a banquet with her lover, Marc Antony. "Brave": magnificent.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ruby, thought to emit light.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Patron saint of Venice, whose statue stood in the basilica.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Third wife of the Roman emperor Caligula.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mythical bird, of which it was supposed that only one existed at a time; it died in flames and was reborn from its own ashes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Panthers were believed to use their sweet-smelling breath to lure prey.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Grotesque dance or pageant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* retells the pagan myths of transformation. Jove, king of the gods, became a bull to seduce the lovely Europa. The adulterous couple Mars, god of war, and Erycine (Venus), goddess of sexual love, were caught in a net by Vulcan, her husband.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That has a hint of manliness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Nestor was the oldest of the Greek leaders in the Trojan War.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I fall away from my ancestors' virtues and abuse the Italian reputation for virility.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *cuckold's horns*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suggest it*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *evasions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undertake*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *satisfy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crazy with jealousy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scheme*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *support my endeavor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sensory perception*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *joke*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *advertise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Volpone* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mosca*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what's this?*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *learned by heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *connoisseur*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prudence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beyond comparison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *an oath*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a fish, the red gurnard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God's death! (an oath)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nitric acid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corrosives*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whatever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *destroyer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anticipating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compliant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God's and the angels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sex and wedlock*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lowest of concerns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *buyer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *not only just now*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scheming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *robust condition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dance step*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trifles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Corvino's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caught*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poisonous mist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merely in hope*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brilliant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it became extinct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *valuable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clove pinks*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *extract*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Shah of Persia's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Sultan of Turkey's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *energetic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pour into each other*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *count*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tormented*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sexual mutiny*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make me ugly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the treasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Volpone*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 8. *The scene continues.***

[Enter] MOSCA [*bloody*].<sup>1</sup>

MOSCA Where shall I run, most wretched shame of  
men,  
To beat out my unlucky brains?

VOLPONE Here, here.  
What! Dost thou bleed?

MOSCA Oh, that his well-driv'n  
sword

Had been so courteous to have cleft me down  
Unto the navel, ere I lived to see  
5 My life, my hopes, my spirits, my patron, all  
Thus desperately engagè<sup>o</sup> by my error!

VOLPONE Woe on thy fortune!

MOSCA And my follies, sir.

VOLPONE Th'hast made me miserable.

MOSCA And myself,  
sir.

10 Who would have thought he would have hearkened<sup>o</sup>  
so?

VOLPONE What shall we do?

MOSCA I know not. If my heart  
Could expiate the mischance, I'd pluck it out.  
Will you be pleased to hang me, or cut my throat?  
And I'll requite you, sir. Let's die like Romans,  
Since we have lived like Grecians.<sup>2</sup> *They knock*  
*without.*

15 VOLPONE Hark, who's  
there?

I hear some footing: officers, the *Saffi*,<sup>o</sup>  
Come to apprehend us! I do feel the brand  
Hissing already at my forehead; now  
Mine ears are boring.<sup>3</sup>

20 MOSCA To your couch, sir; you  
 Make that place good, however.<sup>4</sup> [VOLPONE *gets into*  
*bed.*]  
 Guilty men  
 Suspect<sup>o</sup> what they deserve still.<sup>o</sup> [*He opens the*  
*door.*]  
 Signor Corbaccio!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Bonario apparently remembered Mosca's invitation, in 3.2.66–68, to punish him if he turns out to be lying: "draw your just sword / And score your vengeance on my front and face; / Mark me your villain." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Romans often committed suicide in adversity; Greeks were thought to be pleasure-loving. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Branding was a common criminal punishment; ear-boring is described as an Italian torture in Thomas Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveler* (1594). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: (1) Defend that place, whatever happens; (2) maintain your invalid's role at all costs, since that role suits you. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *placed at risk* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *eavesdropped* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arresting officers* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dread* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 9. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] CORBACCIO [*and converses with*] MOSCA;  
VOLTORE [*enters unnoticed by them*].

CORBACCIO Why, how now, Mosca!

MOSCA Oh, undone,  
amazed, sir.

Your son—I know not by what accident—  
Acquainted with your purpose to my patron  
Touching<sup>o</sup> your will and making him your heir,  
Entered our house with violence, his sword drawn,  
5 Sought for you, called you wretch, unnatural,  
Vowed he would kill you.

CORBACCIO Me?

MOSCA Yes, and my patron.

CORBACCIO This act shall disinherit him indeed.  
Here is the will.

MOSCA [*taking it from him*] 'Tis well, sir.

CORBACCIO Right and  
well.

Be you as careful now for me.

10 MOSCA My life, sir,  
Is not more tendered;<sup>o</sup> I am only yours.

CORBACCIO How does he? Will he die shortly, think'st  
thou?

MOSCA I fear  
He'll outlast May.

CORBACCIO Today?

MOSCA No, last out May, sir.

CORBACCIO Couldst thou not gi' him a dram?<sup>o</sup>

MOSCA Oh, by no  
means, sir.

CORBACCIO Nay, I'll not bid you.

VOLTORE [*aside*]  
see.

This is a knave, I

[VOLTORE *comes forward to speak privately with*  
MOSCA.]

MOSCA [*aside*] How, Signor Voltore! Did he hear  
me?

VOLTORE  
Parasite!

MOSCA Who's that? Oh, sir, most timely welcome—

VOLTORE  
Scarce<sup>o</sup>

To the discovery of your tricks, I fear.

You are his only? And mine also? Are you not?

MOSCA Who, I, sir? [*They speak out of* CORBACCIO  
*'s hearing.*]

20 VOLTORE You, sir. What device<sup>o</sup> is this  
About a will?

MOSCA A plot for you, sir.

VOLTORE Come,  
Put not your foists<sup>o</sup> upon me. I shall scent 'em.

MOSCA Did you not hear it?

VOLTORE Yes, I hear Corbaccio  
Hath made your patron there his heir.

25 MOSCA 'Tis true,  
By my device, drawn to it by my plot,  
With hope—

VOLTORE Your patron should reciprocate?  
And you have promised?

30 MOSCA For your good I did, sir.  
Nay, more, I told his son, brought, hid him here  
Where he might hear his father pass the deed,  
Being persuaded to it by this thought, sir,  
That the unnaturalness, first, of the act,  
And then, his father's oft disclaiming in<sup>o</sup> him  
(Which I did mean t' help on) would sure enrage him  
To do some violence upon his parent,

35 On which the law should take sufficient hold,  
 And you be stated<sup>o</sup> in a double hope.  
 Truth be my comfort and my conscience,  
 My only aim was to dig you a fortune  
 Out of these two old rotten sepulchres—  
 VOLTORE I cry thee mercy, Mosca.  
 MOSCA Worth your  
 40 patience  
 And your great merit, sir. And see the change!  
 VOLTORE Why? What success?<sup>o</sup>  
 MOSCA Most hapless!<sup>o</sup> You must  
 help, sir.  
 Whilst we expected th'old raven, in comes  
 Corvino's wife, sent hither by her husband—  
 VOLTORE What, with a present?  
 MOSCA No, sir, on visitation  
 45 —  
 I'll tell you how, anon—and, staying long,  
 The youth, he grows impatient, rushes forth,  
 Seizeth the lady, wounds me, makes her swear—  
 Or he would murder her, that was his vow—  
 T'affirm my patron to have done her rape,  
 50 Which how unlike<sup>o</sup> it is, you see! And hence,  
 With that pretext, he's gone t'accuse his father,  
 Defame my patron, defeat you—  
 VOLTORE Where's her  
 husband?  
 Let him be sent for straight.  
 MOSCA Sir, I'll go fetch him.  
 VOLTORE Bring him to the *Scrutineo*.<sup>o</sup>  
 MOSCA Sir, I will.  
 55 VOLTORE This must be stopped.  
 MOSCA Oh, you do nobly,  
 sir.  
 Alas, 'twas labored all, sir, for your good;  
 Nor was there want of counsel<sup>o</sup> in the plot.

But fortune can at any time o'erthrow  
 The projects of a hundred learned clerks, o sir.  
 60 CORBACCIO [*striving to hear*] What's that?  
 VOLTRE [*to CORBACCIO*] Will't please  
 you, sir, to go along?  
 [*Exeunt CORBACCIO and VOLTRE.*]  
 MOSCA Patron, go in and pray for our success.  
 VOLPONE [*rising*] Need makes devotion. Heaven your  
 labor bless!

## Notes

- °: *concerning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cherished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dose (of poison)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only just in time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruse* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tricks; stench* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disowning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *installed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfortunate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unlikely* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Venetian law court* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack of wisdom* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scholars* [Return to reference](#) °

## ***Act 4***



**SCENE 1. *The piazza.***

[*Enter*] POLITIC [*and*] PEREGRINE.

POLITIC I told you, sir, it<sup>o</sup> was a plot. You see  
What observation is! You mentioned me  
For<sup>o</sup> some instructions; I will tell you, sir,  
Since we are met here, in this height<sup>o</sup> of Venice,  
Some few particulars I have set down  
5 Only for this meridian, fit to be known  
Of your crude<sup>o</sup> traveler, and they are these.  
I will not touch, sir, at your phrase or clothes,  
For they are old.<sup>1</sup>

PEREGRINE Sir, I have better.

POLITIC Pardon,  
I meant as they are themes.<sup>o</sup>

PEREGRINE Oh; sir, proceed.  
10 I'll slander<sup>o</sup> you no more of wit, good sir.

POLITIC First, for your garb,<sup>2</sup> it must be grave and  
serious,  
Very reserved and locked;<sup>o</sup> not<sup>o</sup> tell a secret  
On any terms, not to your father; scarce  
A fable<sup>3</sup> but with caution. Make sure choice  
15 Both of your company and discourse. Beware  
You never speak a truth—

PEREGRINE How!

POLITIC Not to strangers,<sup>o</sup>  
For those be they you must converse with most;  
Others<sup>o</sup> I would not know, sir, but at distance,  
So as I still might be a saver<sup>4</sup> in 'em.  
20 You shall have tricks else passed upon you hourly.  
And then, for your religion, profess none,  
But wonder at the diversity of all,  
And, for your part, protest, were there no other  
But simply the laws o'th'land, you could content you.

25 Nick Machiavel and Monsieur Bodin both  
Were of this mind.<sup>5</sup> Then must you learn the use  
And handling of your silver fork<sup>o</sup> at meals,  
The metal<sup>o</sup> of your glass—these are main matters  
30 With your Italian—and to know the hour  
When you must eat your melons and your figs.  
PEREGRINE Is that a point of state,<sup>o</sup> too?  
POLITIC Here it is.  
For your Venetian, if he see a man  
Preposterous in the least, he has<sup>o</sup> him straight;  
He has, he strips<sup>o</sup> him. I'll acquaint you, sir.  
35 I now have lived here—'tis some fourteen months;  
Within the first week of my landing here,  
All took me for a citizen of Venice,  
I knew the forms so well—  
PEREGRINE [*aside*] And nothing else.  
POLITIC I had read Contarine,<sup>6</sup> took me a house,  
40 Dealt with my Jews<sup>7</sup> to furnish it with movables<sup>o</sup>—  
Well, if I could but find one man, one man  
To mine own heart, whom I durst trust, I would—  
PEREGRINE What? What, sir?  
POLITIC Make him rich, make him  
a fortune.  
He should not think<sup>o</sup> again. I would command it.  
45 PEREGRINE As how?  
POLITIC With certain projects<sup>o</sup> that I have—  
Which I may not discover.<sup>o</sup>  
PEREGRINE [*aside*] If I had  
But one<sup>o</sup> to wager with, I would lay odds, now,  
He tells me instantly.  
POLITIC One is—and that  
I care not greatly who knows—to serve the state  
50 Of Venice with red herrings for three years,  
And at a certain rate, from Rotterdam,<sup>8</sup>

Where I have correspondence. [*He shows* PEREGRINE *a paper.*]

There's a letter

Sent me from one o'th'States,<sup>o</sup> and to that purpose;  
He cannot write his name, but that's his mark.

55

PEREGRINE [*examining the paper*] He is a chandler?<sup>9</sup>

POLITIC

No, a

cheesemonger.

There are some other<sup>o</sup> too, with whom I treat<sup>o</sup>  
About the same negotiation;

And I will undertake it, for 'tis thus

60

I'll do't with ease; I've cast it all.<sup>o</sup> Your hoy<sup>1</sup>

Carries but three men in her and a boy,

And she shall make me three returns<sup>o</sup> a year.

So if there come but one of three, I save;<sup>o</sup>

If two, I can defalk.<sup>o</sup> But this is, now,

If my main project fail.

65

PEREGRINE Then you have others?

POLITIC I should be loath to draw<sup>o</sup> the subtle air

Of such a place without my thousand aims.

I'll not dissemble, sir: where'er I come,

I love to be considerative;<sup>o</sup> and 'tis true

70

I have at my free hours thought upon

Some certain goods<sup>o</sup> unto the state of Venice,

Which I do call my cautions,<sup>o</sup> and, sir, which

I mean, in hope of pension,<sup>o</sup> to propound

To the Great Council, then unto the Forty,

75

So to the Ten.<sup>2</sup> My means<sup>o</sup> are made already—

PEREGRINE By whom?

POLITIC

Sir, one that though his place

b'obscure,

Yet he can sway and they will hear him. He's

*A commendatore.*

PEREGRINE What, a common sergeant?

POLITIC Sir, such as they are put it in their mouths

80 What they should say, sometimes, as well as  
 greater.<sup>3</sup>  
 I think I have my notes to show you—  
 [*He searches in his garments.*]  
 PEREGRINE Good, sir.  
 POLITIC But you shall swear unto me on your  
 gentry<sup>o</sup>  
 Not to anticipate—  
 PEREGRINE I, sir?  
 POLITIC Nor reveal  
 A circumstance—My paper is not with me.  
 PEREGRINE Oh, but you can remember, sir.  
 POLITIC My first is  
 85 Concerning tinderboxes.<sup>o</sup> You must know  
 No family is here without its box.  
 Now, sir, it being so portable a thing,  
 Put case<sup>o</sup> that you or I were ill affected<sup>o</sup>  
 Unto the state; sir, with it in our pockets  
 90 Might not I go into the Arsenale?<sup>4</sup>  
 Or you? Come out again? And none the wiser?  
 PEREGRINE Except yourself, sir.  
 POLITIC Go to,<sup>o</sup> then. I therefore  
 Advertise to<sup>o</sup> the state how fit it were  
 That none but such as were known patriots,  
 95 Sound lovers of their country, should be suffered  
 T'enjoy them<sup>o</sup> in their houses, and even those  
 Sealed<sup>o</sup> at some office, and at such a bigness  
 As might not lurk in pockets.  
 PEREGRINE Admirable!  
 POLITIC My next is, how t'inquire and be resolved<sup>o</sup>  
 100 By present<sup>o</sup> demonstration whether a ship  
 Newly arrived from Syria, or from  
 Any suspected part of all the Levant,<sup>o</sup>  
 Be guilty of the plague. And where they use<sup>o</sup>  
 To lie out<sup>o</sup> forty, fifty days sometimes  
 105



PEREGRINE Pray you, Sir Pol.  
 POLITIC I have 'em<sup>o</sup> not about me.  
 PEREGRINE That I feared.  
 They are there, sir? [*He indicates a book POLITIC is holding.*]  
 POLITIC No, this is my diary,  
 Wherein I note my actions of the day.<sup>9</sup>  
 PEREGRINE Pray you, let's see, sir. What is here?  
 135 [*reading*]  
 "Notandum,<sup>o</sup>  
 A rat had gnawn my spur leathers;<sup>o</sup> notwithstanding  
 I put on new and did go forth, but first  
 I threw three beans over the threshold.<sup>o</sup> *Item,*  
 I went and bought two toothpicks, whereof one  
 I burst immediately in a discourse  
 140 With a Dutch merchant, 'bout *ragion' del stato.*<sup>o</sup>  
 From him I went, and paid a *moccinigo*<sup>o</sup>  
 For piecing<sup>o</sup> my silk stockings; by the way  
 I cheapened sprats,<sup>1</sup> and at Saint Mark's I urined."  
 Faith, these are politic notes!  
 POLITIC Sir, I do slip<sup>o</sup>  
 145 No action of my life thus but I quote<sup>o</sup> it.  
 PEREGRINE Believe me, it is wise!  
 POLITIC Nay, sir, read forth.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: I will not discuss those familiar ("old") topics: the language one ought to use or the clothes one ought to wear. In the next line, in an attempt at a joke, Peregrine deliberately misconstrues "your . . . clothes" to refer to his own apparel, but Politic does not get it. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As for a traveler's bearing. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An apparently trivial story subject to political allegorization. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: So that I might not be imposed upon. (“Be a saver” is a gambling term, meaning “to escape loss.”)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Political theorists Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Jean Bodin (1530–1596) argued that religious zeal was often politically inexpedient or divisive; as a result both were popularly thought to be atheists.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An English translation of Gasparo Contarini’s important book, *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, was published in 1599.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The usual Jews. (In Venice Jews served as moneylenders and pawnbrokers.)[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Venice, on the Adriatic Sea, had little need to import pickled fish from afar.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Candlemaker. (Evidently the paper is grease-stained.)[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Small vessel, not suitable for long voyages. Sir Pol’s scheme is thus obviously impractical.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Great Council was a large legislative group made up of wealthy Venetians; the Councils of Forty were much smaller groups that oversaw judicial affairs; the Council of Ten consisted of the elected Doge and his cabinet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Common men, as well as those of higher status, may sometimes make suggestions to the government.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Shipyard where Venice built and repaired its naval vessels.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Quarantine hospital on an outlying island.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Onions were popularly supposed to absorb plague infection.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Perpetual-motion machines were popular attractions in early modern England, but Jonson regarded them contemptuously. Since Venice is in flat marshland, there are no waterfalls to harness there, as Sir Pol proposes.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The Ottoman Turks, southeast of Venice along the Adriatic Sea, were maritime and religious rivals and a long-standing military threat.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Many Renaissance travel writers recommended that travelers keep a written record of their journeys.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Bargained over some small fish.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *the mountebank episode*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as one who could give*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *latitude*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inexperienced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *topics for advice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accuse*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *guarded* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *do not*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foreigners*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fellow countrymen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *an Italian novelty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *composition*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *statecraft*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sees through*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ridicules; defrauds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *household goods*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have to think*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entrepreneurial schemes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *someone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Dutch provinces*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *others* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *figured it all out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *round trips*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *break even*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay off loans*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breathe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *analytic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *benefits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *precautions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *financial reward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contacts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentleman's honor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for lighting fires*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suppose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impatient expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tinderboxes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *licensed; sealed shut*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Middle East*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at anchor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *French coins*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a ship in question*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pay for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stretch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by means of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as easy as can be*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *it (the onion)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there's nothing to it*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *traitorous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warships*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the notes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be it noted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for good luck*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *political expediency*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small coin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mending*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *let pass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without noting*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] LADY [WOULD-BE], NANO, [*and the two*]  
WOMEN.

[*They do not see* POLITIC *and* PEREGRINE *at first.*]

LADY WOULD-BE     Where should this loose knight be,  
trow? Sure he's housed.

NANO Why, then he's fast.

LADY WOULD-BE me. Ay, he plays both o with

I pray you, stay. This heat will do more harm  
To my complexion than his heart is worth.  
I do not care to hinder, but to take<sup>o</sup> him.

5 [She rubs her cheeks.]

How it o comes off!

FIRST WOMAN [*pointing*] My master's yonder.

LADY WOULD-BE Where?

FIRST WOMAN      With a young gentleman.

LADY WOULD-BE                      That same's  
the party,

In man's apparel!<sup>1</sup> [*to* NANO] Pray you, sir, jog my knight.

I will be tender to his reputation,

However he demerit. o

POLITIC [*seeing her*]      My lady!

PEREGRINE Where?

10       POLITIC   'Tis she indeed, sir; you shall know her. She  
                  is,

Were she not mine,<sup>2</sup> a lady of that merit  
For fashion and behavior; and for beauty  
I durst compare—

PEREGRINE                      It seems you are not jealous,  
That dare commend her.

POLITIC                      Nay, and for discourse—

PEREGRINE Being your wife, she cannot miss<sup>o</sup> that.

POLITIC [*introducing* PEREGRINE]

Madam,

Here is a gentleman; pray you use him fairly.

He seems a youth, but he is—

LADY WOULD-BE

None?

POLITIC

Yes, one

Has<sup>o</sup> put his face as soon<sup>o</sup> into the world—

LADY WOULD-BE You mean, as early? But today

POLITIC

How's

20

this!

LADY WOULD-BE Why, in this habit,<sup>o</sup> sir; you  
apprehend<sup>o</sup> me.

Well, Master Would-be, this doth not become you;

I had thought the odor, sir, of your good name

Had been more precious to you, that you would not

Have done this dire massacre on your honor—

25

One of your gravity and rank besides!

But knights, I see, care little for the oath

They make to ladies, chiefly their own ladies.

POLITIC Now, by my spurs—the symbol of my  
kighthood—

30

PEREGRINE [*aside*] Lord, how his brain is humbled<sup>3</sup> for  
an oath!

POLITIC —I reach<sup>o</sup> you not.

LADY WOULD-BE

Right, sir, your polity<sup>o</sup>

May bear<sup>o</sup> it through thus. [*to* PEREGRINE] Sir, a word  
with you.

I would be loath to contest publicly

With any gentlewoman, or to seem

35

Froward<sup>o</sup> or violent; as *The Courtier*<sup>4</sup> says,

It comes too near rusticity<sup>o</sup> in a lady,

Which I would shun by all means. And however

I may deserve from Master Would-be, yet

T' have one fair gentlewoman<sup>o</sup> thus be made

40 Th'unkind instrument to wrong another,  
 And one she knows not, ay, and to persevere,  
 In my poor judgment is not warranted  
 From being a solecism<sup>o</sup> in our sex,  
 If not in manners.  
 PEREGRINE How is this?  
 POLITIC Sweet madam,  
 Come nearer to your aim.<sup>o</sup>  
 45 LADY WOULD-BE Marry, and will, sir.  
 Since you provoke me with your impudence  
 And laughter of your light land-siren<sup>5</sup> here,  
 Your Sporus,<sup>6</sup> your hermaphrodite—  
 PEREGRINE What's here?  
 Poetic fury and historic storms!<sup>7</sup>  
 50 POLITIC The gentleman, believe it, is of worth,  
 And of our nation.  
 LADY WOULD-BE Ay, your Whitefriars<sup>o</sup> nation!  
 Come, I blush for you, Master Would-be, I,  
 And am ashamed you should ha' no more forehead<sup>o</sup>  
 Than thus to be the patron, or Saint George,<sup>8</sup>  
 To a lewd harlot, a base fricatrice,<sup>o</sup>  
 55 A female devil in a male outside.  
 POLITIC [*to* PEREGRINE] Nay,  
 An<sup>o</sup> you be such a one, I must bid adieu  
 To your delights. The case appears too liquid.<sup>9</sup>  
 [POLITIC *starts to leave.*]  
 LADY WOULD-BE Ay, you may carry't clear, with your  
 stateface!<sup>o</sup>  
 But for your carnival concupiscence,<sup>o</sup>  
 60 Who here is fled for liberty of conscience<sup>o</sup>  
 From furious persecution of the marshal,<sup>1</sup>  
 Her will I disc'ple.<sup>o</sup>  
 [Exit POLITIC, LADY POLITIC *accosts* PEREGRINE.]  
 PEREGRINE This is fine, i'faith!  
 And do you use this<sup>o</sup> often? Is this part

65      Of your wit's exercise, 'gainst you have occasion?<sup>2</sup>  
 Madam—  
 LADY WOULD-BE      Go to,<sup>o</sup> sir.  
 PEREGRINE                      Do you hear me, lady?  
 Why, if your knight have set you to beg shirts,<sup>3</sup>  
 Or to invite me home, you might have done it  
 A nearer<sup>o</sup> way by far.  
 LADY WOULD-BE              This cannot work you  
 Out of my snare.  
 70      PEREGRINE              Why, am I in it, then?  
 Indeed, your husband told me you were fair,  
 And so you are; only your nose inclines—  
 That side that's next the sun—to the queen-apple.<sup>4</sup>  
 LADY WOULD-BE      This cannot be endured by any  
 patience.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Lady Would-be believes that Peregrine is the whore Mosca mentioned, in transvestite attire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Even though I, her husband, say so.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Literally, "brought down" to his feet—where spurs, the appurtenances of a knight, are worn.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Baldassare Castiglione's famous handbook of gentility.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Sirens were mythical sea creatures who lured sailors to their deaths by sitting on dangerous rocks and singing irresistibly. (Lady Would-be refers to Peregrine.)[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A eunuch whom the emperor Nero dressed in drag and married.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Peregrine notes that even Lady Would-be's tantrums include literary allusions.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Patron saint of England, often pictured rescuing a damsel from a dragon.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Obvious. (Sir Pol has become convinced that his wife is right in believing that Peregrine is a transvestite whore.)[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Official charged with punishing prostitutes. Lady Would-be thinks that Peregrine has dressed as a man to flee prosecution.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To keep it ready for when it is really needed?[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Peregrine pretends to believe that Lady Would-be is tearing off his shirt in order to give it to her husband. Probably she is just trying to prevent his leaving.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A bright red apple. See 3.4.15–16, where we learn that Lady Would-be is sensitive about her red nose.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *do you suppose?*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in a brothel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fast-moving; secure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *both fast and loose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *catch*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the makeup*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deserves blame*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack (sarcastic)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *who has*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *so young*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *apparel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *understand*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *comprehend*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cunning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bluff*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bad-tempered*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *ill breeding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Peregrine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impropriety*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speak more clearly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *London brothel district*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shame*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *If*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dignified expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lecherous strumpet*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *licentious conduct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discipline*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *act this way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impatient expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more direct*[Return to reference](#) °



**SCENE 3. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] MOSCA.

MOSCA What's the matter, madam?

LADY WOULD-BE If the Senate<sup>o</sup>  
Right not my quest<sup>o</sup> in this, I will protest 'em  
To all the world no aristocracy.

MOSCA What is the injury, lady?

LADY WOULD-BE Why, the callet<sup>o</sup>  
You told me of, here I have ta'en disguised.

5 MOSCA Who, this? What means Your Ladyship? The  
creature

I mentioned to you is apprehended now  
Before the Senate. You shall see her—

LADY WOULD-BE Where?

MOSCA I'll bring you to her. This young gentleman,  
I saw him land this morning at the port.

10 LADY WOULD-BE Is't possible! How has my judgment  
wandered!

[*Releasing* PEREGRINE] Sir, I must, blushing, say to you  
I have erred,  
And plead your pardon.

PEREGRINE What, more changes  
yet?

LADY WOULD-BE I hope you ha' not the malice to  
remember

15 A gentlewoman's passion. If you stay  
In Venice here, please you to use me,<sup>1</sup> sir—

MOSCA Will you go, madam?

LADY WOULD-BE Pray you, sir, use me. In  
faith,

The more you see me, the more I shall conceive  
You have forgot our quarrel.

[*Exeunt* MOSCA, LADY WOULD-BE, NANO, *and* WOMEN.]

20 PEREGRINE This is rare!  
Sir Politic Would-be? No, Sir Politic Bawd,  
To bring me thus acquainted with his wife!  
Well, wise Sir Pol, since you have practiced thus  
Upon my freshmanship,<sup>2</sup> I'll try your salt-head,  
What proof<sup>o</sup> it is against a counterplot. [Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Make use of my services. (With a sexual innuendo continued in "The more you see me, the more I shall conceive" [line 18], where "conceive" means both "understand" and "conceive a child.")[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Taken advantage of my inexperience. (Peregrine apparently believes that Sir Pol has deliberately involved him in a humiliating setup. "Salt-head," following, plays on both "salt" meaning "seasoned," "old," and "salt" meaning "lecherous."[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *Venetian government*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *petition*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prostitute*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *how invulnerable*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 4. *The Scrutineo, or Court of Law, in the Doge's palace.***

[*Enter*] VOLTORE, CORBACCIO, CORVINO, [*and*] MOSCA.

VOLTORE Well, now you know the carriage<sup>o</sup> of the  
business,  
Your constancy is all that is required  
Unto the safety of it.

MOSCA Is the lie  
Safely conveyed<sup>o</sup> amongst us? Is that sure?  
Knows every man his burden?<sup>o</sup>

CORVINO Yes.

5 MOSCA Then shrink  
not.

CORVINO [*aside to* MOSCA] But knows the advocate  
the truth?

MOSCA [*aside to* CORVINO] Oh, sir,  
By no means. I devised a formal<sup>o</sup> tale  
That salved your reputation. But be valiant, sir.

CORVINO I fear no one but him,<sup>o</sup> that this his  
pleading

Should make him stand for a co-heir—

10 MOSCA Co-halter!<sup>1</sup>  
Hang him, we will but use his tongue, his noise,  
As we do Croaker's,<sup>o</sup> here.

CORVINO Ay, what shall he do?

MOSCA When we ha' done, you mean?

CORVINO Yes.

MOSCA Why, we'll  
think—

Sell him for *mumma*;<sup>2</sup> he's half dust already.

15 ([*Aside*] *to* VOLTORE) Do not you smile to see this  
buffalo,<sup>3</sup>

How he doth sport it with his head? [*to himself*] I  
should,

If all were well and past. (*[aside]* to CORBACCIO) Sir,  
 only you  
 Are he that shall enjoy the crop<sup>o</sup> of all,  
 And these not know for whom they toil.

CORBACCIO Ay, peace!

20 MOSCA (*[aside]* to CORVINO) But you shall eat it. [*To himself*]  
 Much!<sup>o</sup> (*then to* VOLTRE *again*) Worshipful sir,  
 Mercury<sup>4</sup> sit upon your thund'ring tongue,  
 Or the French Hercules, and make your language  
 As conquering as his club,<sup>5</sup> to beat along,  
 As with a tempest, flat, our adversaries!  
 [*Aside to* CORVINO] But much more yours,<sup>o</sup> sir.

25 VOLTRE Here they come. Ha' done.  
<sup>o</sup>  
 MOSCA I have another witness<sup>o</sup> if you need, sir,  
 I can produce.

VOLTRE Who is it?

MOSCA Sir, I have her.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Playing on "halter," a hangman's noose, to suggest that both Corbaccio and Voltore are being duped. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Powdered embalmed corpse, used medicinally. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Corvino, with his cuckold's horns. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: May the god of rhetoric (and thieves). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: After his tenth labor, according to some legendary accounts, Hercules, aged by now but powerfully eloquent, fathered the Celts in Gaul, or France. He was traditionally pictured with a club. [Return to reference 5](#)

# Notes

- °: *management*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreed upon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refrain, tune*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elaborate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Voltore*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Corbaccio's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harvest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Sure you will!*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *your adversaries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shut up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Lady Would-be*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 5. *The scene continues.***

[Enter] four AVOCATORI, BONARIO, CELIA. *Notario*  
[NOTARY], COMMENDATORI<sup>o</sup> [and other court  
officials].

FIRST AVOCATORE The like of this the Senate never  
heard of.

SECOND AVOCATORE 'Twill come most strange to them  
when we report it.

FOURTH AVOCATORE The gentlewoman has been ever  
held  
Of unreprieved name.

THIRD AVOCATORE So, the young man.

5 FOURTH AVOCATORE The more unnatural part that of his  
father.

SECOND AVOCATORE More of the husband.

FIRST AVOCATORE I not know  
to give

His act a name, it is so monstrous!

FOURTH AVOCATORE But the impostor,<sup>o</sup> he is a thing  
created

T'exceed example!<sup>o</sup>

FIRST AVOCATORE And all aftertimes!<sup>o</sup>

10 SECOND AVOCATORE I never heard a true voluptuary  
Described but him.

THIRD AVOCATORE Appear yet those were cited?

NOTARY All but the old magnifico, Volpone.

FIRST AVOCATORE Why is not he here?

MOSCA Please Your

Fatherhoods,

Here is his advocate. Himself's so weak,

So feeble—

FOURTH AVOCATORE What are you?

15 BONARIO His parasite,

His knave, his pander! I beseech the court  
 He may be forced to come, that your grave eyes  
 May bear strong witness of his strange impostures.  
 VOLTRE Upon my faith and credit with your virtues,  
 He is not able to endure the air.  
 20 SECOND AVOCATORE Bring him, however.  
 THIRD AVOCATORE We will see  
 him.  
 FOURTH AVOCATORE Fetch him.  
 [Exit officers.]  
 VOLTRE Your Fatherhoods' fit pleasures be obeyed,  
 But sure the sight will rather move your pities  
 Than indignation. May it please the court,  
 In the meantime he may be heard in me.  
 25 I know this place most void of prejudice,  
 And therefore crave it, since we have no reason  
 To fear our truth should hurt our cause.  
 THIRD AVOCATORE Speak free.  
 VOLTRE Then know, most honored fathers, I must  
 now  
 30 Discover<sup>o</sup> to your strangely abused ears  
 The most prodigious and most frontless<sup>o</sup> piece  
 Of solid<sup>o</sup> impudence and treachery  
 That ever vicious nature yet brought forth  
 To shame the state of Venice. [*indicating* CELIA] This  
 lewd woman,  
 That wants<sup>o</sup> no artificial looks or tears  
 35 To help the visor<sup>o</sup> she has now put on,  
 Hath long been known a close<sup>o</sup> adulteress  
 To that lascivious youth there [*indicating* BONARIO];  
 not suspected,  
 I say, but known, and taken in the act  
 With him; and by this man, the easy<sup>o</sup> husband,  
 40 Pardoned; whose timeless<sup>o</sup> bounty makes him now  
 Stand here, the most unhappy, innocent person

That ever man's own goodness made accused.<sup>1</sup>  
 For these, not knowing how to owe<sup>o</sup> a gift  
 Of that dear grace but<sup>o</sup> with their shame, being  
 45 placed  
 So above all powers of their gratitude,<sup>2</sup>  
 Began to hate the benefit, and in place  
 Of thanks devise t'extirp<sup>o</sup> the memory  
 Of such an act. Wherein I pray Your Fatherhoods  
 To observe the malice, yea, the rage of creatures  
 50 Discovered in their evils, and what heart<sup>o</sup>  
 Such take even from their crimes. But that anon  
 Will more appear. This gentleman, the father,  
 [*indicating* CORBACCIO]  
 Hearing of this foul fact,<sup>o</sup> with many others  
 Which daily struck at his too tender ears,  
 55 And grieved in nothing more than that he could not  
 Preserve himself a parent—his son's ills<sup>o</sup>  
 Growing to that strange flood—at last decreed  
 To disinherit him.  
 FIRST AVOCATORE      These be strange turns!  
 SECOND AVOCATORE      The young man's fame<sup>o</sup> was ever  
 60 fair  
 and honest.  
 VOLTORE      So much more full of danger is his vice,  
 That can beguile so under shade of virtue.  
 But, as I said, my honored sires, his father  
 Having this settled purpose, by what means  
 To him<sup>o</sup> betrayed we know not, and this day  
 65 Appointed for the deed, that parricide—  
 I cannot style him better<sup>o</sup>—by confederacy  
 Preparing this his paramour to be there,  
 Entered Volpone's house—who was the man,  
 Your Fatherhoods must understand, designed  
 70 For the inheritance—there sought his father.  
 But with what purpose sought he him, my lords?



I tremble to pronounce it, that a son  
Unto a father, and to such a father,  
Should have so foul, felonious intent:  
75 It was to murder him. When, being prevented  
By his more happy<sup>o</sup> absence, what then did he?  
Not check his wicked thoughts; no, now new deeds

—  
Mischief doth ever end where it begins<sup>3</sup>—  
An act of horror, fathers! He dragged forth  
80 The agèd gentleman, that had there lain bedrid  
Three years and more, out of his innocent couch;  
Naked upon the floor there left him; wounded  
His servant in the face, and with this strumpet,  
The stale<sup>o</sup> to his forged practice,<sup>o</sup> who was glad  
85 To be so active—I shall here desire  
Your Fatherhoods to note but my collections<sup>o</sup>  
As most remarkable—thought at once to stop  
His father's ends,<sup>o</sup> discredit his free choice  
In the old gentleman,<sup>o</sup> redeem themselves  
90 By laying infamy upon this man<sup>o</sup>  
To whom with blushing they should owe their lives.

FIRST AVOCATORE      What proofs have you of this?

BONARIO      Most  
honored fathers,  
I humbly crave there be no credit given  
To this man's mercenary tongue.

SECOND AVOCATORE      Forbear.

95 BONARIO      His soul moves in his fee.

THIRD AVOCATORE      Oh, sir!

BONARIO      This  
fellow,

For six sols<sup>o</sup> more, would plead against his Maker.

FIRST AVOCATORE      You do forget yourself.

VOLTORE      Nay, nay, grave  
fathers,

Let him have scope. Can any man imagine  
 That he will spare 's<sup>o</sup> accuser, that would not  
 100 Have spared his parent?  
 FIRST AVOCATORE Well, produce your proofs.  
 CELIA I would I could forget I were a creature!<sup>o</sup>  
 VOLTRE [*calling a witness*] Signor Corbaccio!  
 FOURTH AVOCATORE What is  
 he?  
 VOLTRE The father.  
 SECOND AVOCATORE Has he had an oath?  
 NOTARY Yes.  
 CORBACCIO What must I  
 do now?  
 NOTARY Your testimony's craved.  
 CORBACCIO [*mis-hearing*] Speak to the  
 105 knave?  
 I'll ha' my mouth first stopped with earth! My heart  
 Abhors his knowledge;<sup>o</sup> I disclaim in<sup>o</sup> him.  
 FIRST AVOCATORE But for what cause?  
 CORBACCIO The mere portent  
 of nature.<sup>4</sup>  
 He is an utter stranger to my loins.  
 BONARIO Have they made you to this?  
 CORBACCIO I will not hear  
 110 thee,  
 Monster of men, swine, goat, wolf, parricide!  
 Speak not, thou viper.  
 BONARIO Sir, I will sit down,  
 And rather wish my innocence should suffer  
 Than I resist the authority of a father.  
 VOLTRE [*calling a witness*] Signor Corvino!  
 SECOND AVOCATORE This is  
 strange!  
 FIRST AVOCATORE Who's this?  
 115 NOTARY The husband.

FOURTH AVOCATORE            Is he sworn?

NOTARY He is.

THIRD AVOCATORE Speak, then.

CORVINO     This woman, please Your Fatherhoods, is a  
               whore

Of most hot exercise, more than a partridge,<sup>5</sup>  
Upon record<sub>o</sub>—

FIRST AVOCATORE      No more.

CORVINO Neighs like a jennet.o

NOTARY      Preserve the honor of the court.

120 CORVINO I shall,  
And modesty of your most reverend ears.

And yet I hope that I may say these eyes  
Have seen her glued unto that piece of cedar,  
That fine well-timbered gallant,<sup>6</sup> and that here  
[*Pointing to his forehead*] The letters may be read,  
125           thorough the horn,<sup>7</sup>

That make the story perfect. [o](#)

MOSCA [*aside to* CORVINO]      Excellent, sir!

CORVINO [*aside to MOSCA*] There is no shame in this,  
now, is there?

MOSCA [*aside to* CORVINO]

None.

CORVINO [*to the court*] Or if I said I hoped that she  
were onward<sup>o</sup>

130 To her damnation, if there be a hell  
Greater than whore and woman—a good Catholic  
May make the doubt<sup>o</sup>—

THIRD AVOCATORE                      His grief hath made him  
frantic.

FIRST AVOCATORE    Remove him hence.    *She* [CELIA]  
*swoons.*

SECOND AVOCATORE                      Look to the  
woman!

CORVINO [*taunting her*]

Rare!

Prettily feigned! Again!

FOURTH AVOCATORE Stand from about her.

FIRST AVOCATORE Give her the air.

THIRD AVOCATORE [*to MOSCA*] What can you say?

MOSCA My wound,

135 May't please Your Wisdoms, speaks for me, received  
In aid of my good patron when he<sup>o</sup> missed  
His sought-for father, when that well-taught dame  
Had her cue given her to cry out a rape.

BONARIO Oh, most laid<sup>o</sup> impudence! Fathers—

THIRD AVOCATORE Sir,  
be silent.

140 You had your hearing free,<sup>o</sup> so must they theirs.

SECOND AVOCATORE I do begin to doubt th'imposture  
here.

FOURTH AVOCATORE This woman has too many  
moods.

VOLTRE Grave fathers,  
She is a creature of a most professed  
And prostituted lewdness.

CORVINO Most impetuous!  
Unsatisfied,<sup>o</sup> grave fathers!

145 VOLTRE May her feignings  
Not take<sup>o</sup> Your Wisdoms! But<sup>o</sup> this day she baited  
A stranger, a grave knight, with her loose eyes  
And more lascivious kisses. This man<sup>o</sup> saw 'em  
Together on the water in a gondola.

150 MOSCA Here is the lady herself that saw 'em too,  
Without;<sup>o</sup> who then had in the open streets  
Pursued them, but for saving her knight's honor.

FIRST AVOCATORE Produce that lady.

SECOND AVOCATORE Let her come.

[*Exit MOSCA.*]

FOURTH AVOCATORE These things,

They strike with wonder!

THIRD AVOCATORE

I am turned a stone!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That ever had his own goodness turned against him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Since the rare value of Corvino's forgiveness was so far beyond their powers of gratitude.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wickedness is always persistent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A completely monstrous birth. (A deformed child was often considered to be a portent, or evil omen.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A bird capable of numerous consecutive sexual acts and so a byword for lechery.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Corvino sarcastically compliments Bonario as a strapping fellow to whom Celia no doubt wishes to cling. The cedars of the Middle East are tall and stately.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Children learned to read the alphabet from pages protected by transparent sheets of horn. (With an allusion to the cuckold's horn.)[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *law court deputies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Volpone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *precedent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *later eras*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shameless*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complete*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *who lacks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(weeping) mask*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secret; intimate*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *lenient*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unseasonable; endless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acknowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *other than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *to extirpate, wipe out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *audacity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *evil deeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Bonario*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *give him a better name*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Corbaccio's fortunate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decoy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deductions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aims*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Volpone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Corvino*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *halfpennies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spare his*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living being*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowing him* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disavow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as is well attested*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mare (in heat)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complete*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well on her way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *may wonder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Bonario*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *premeditated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uninterrupted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *insatiable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take in* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *only*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mosca*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waiting outside*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 6. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] MOSCA [*and*] LADY [WOULD-BE].

MOSCA Be resolute, madam.

LADY WOULD-BE Ay, this same is she.

[*To CELIA*] Out, thou chameleon<sup>o</sup> harlot! Now thine eyes

Vie tears with the hyena.<sup>1</sup> Dar'st thou look  
Upon my wrongèd face? [*to the* AVOCATORI] I cry<sup>o</sup>  
your pardons.

5 I fear I have forgettingly transgressed  
Against the dignity of the court—

SECOND AVOCATORE No, madam.

LADY WOULD-BE And been exorbitant<sup>o</sup>—

SECOND AVOCATORE You have  
not, lady.

FOURTH AVOCATORE These proofs are strong.

LADY WOULD-BE Surely, I had  
no purpose

To scandalize your honors, or my sex's.

THIRD AVOCATORE We do believe it.

10 LADY WOULD-BE Surely, you may  
believe it.

SECOND AVOCATORE Madam, we do.

LADY WOULD-BE Indeed, you may. My  
breeding

Is not so coarse—

FOURTH AVOCATORE We know it.

LADY WOULD-BE —to offend

With pertinacy<sup>o</sup>—

THIRD AVOCATORE Lady—

LADY WOULD-BE —such a presence;

No, surely.

FIRST AVOCATORE We well think it.

LADY WOULD-BE You may think it.  
FIRST AVOCATORE [*to the other* AVOCATORI] Let her  
o'ercome.<sup>1</sup>  
[*To* CELIA *and* BONARIO] What witnesses have you  
To make good your report?  
BONARIO Our consciences.  
CELIA And heaven, that never fails the innocent.  
FOURTH AVOCATORE These are no testimonies.  
BONARIO Not in  
your courts,  
Where multitude and clamor overcomes.  
FIRST AVOCATORE Nay, then, you do wax insolent.  
VOLPONE *is brought in [on a litter], as impotent.*<sup>2</sup>  
[*LADY WOULD-BE embraces him.*]<sup>3</sup>  
VOLTORE  
Here, here  
The testimony comes that will convince  
And put to utter dumbness their bold tongues.  
See here, grave fathers, here's the ravisher,  
The rider on men's wives, the great impostor,  
The grand voluptuary! Do you not think  
These limbs should affect ventry?<sup>4</sup> Or these eyes  
Covet a concubine? Pray you, mark these hands:  
Are they not fit to stroke a lady's breasts?  
Perhaps he doth dissemble?  
BONARIO So he does.  
VOLTORE Would you ha' him tortured?  
BONARIO I would have him  
proved.<sup>5</sup>  
VOLTORE Best try him, then, with goads or burning  
irons;  
Put him to the strappado.<sup>6</sup> I have heard  
The rack<sup>7</sup> hath cured the gout; faith, give it him  
And help him of a malady; be courteous.  
I'll undertake, before these honored fathers,



35 He shall have yet as many left<sup>o</sup> diseases  
As she has known adulterers, or thou strumpets.  
O my most equal<sup>o</sup> hearers, if these deeds,  
Acts of this bold and most exorbitant strain,  
May pass with sufferance,<sup>o</sup> what one citizen  
40 But owes the forfeit of his life, yea, fame  
To him that dares traduce him?<sup>6</sup> Which of you  
Are safe, my honored fathers? I would ask,  
With leave of Your grave Fatherhoods, if their plot  
Have any face or color like to truth?  
45 Or if unto the dullest nostril here  
It smell not rank and most abhorred slander?  
I crave your care of this good gentleman,  
Whose life is much endangered by their fable;  
And as for them, I will conclude with this:  
50 That vicious persons, when they are hot, and  
fleshed<sup>z</sup>

In impious acts, their constancy<sup>o</sup> abounds.  
Damned deeds are done with greatest confidence.  
FIRST AVOCATORE Take 'em to custody, and sever  
them.

55 SECOND AVOCATORE 'Tis pity two such prodigies<sup>o</sup>  
should live.

[*Exeunt CELIA and BONARIO, guarded.*]

FIRST AVOCATORE Let the old gentleman be returned  
with care.

I'm sorry our credulity wronged him.

[*Exeunt litter-bearers with VOLPONE.*]

FOURTH AVOCATORE These are two creatures!<sup>o</sup>

THIRD AVOCATORE I have an  
earthquake in me!

SECOND AVOCATORE Their shame, even in their  
cradles, fled their faces.

60 FOURTH AVOCATORE [*to VOLTORE*] You've done a worthy  
service to the state, sir,

In their discovery.

FIRST AVOCATORE You shall hear ere night  
What punishment the court decrees upon 'em.

VOLTORE We thank Your Fatherhoods.

[*Exeunt* AVOCATORI, NOTARY, COMMENDATORI.]

[*To* MOSCA] How like you  
it?

MOSCA

Rare!

I'd ha' your tongue, sir, tipped with gold for this;  
I'd ha' you be the heir to the whole city;  
65 The earth I'd have want men ere you want living.<sup>o</sup>  
They're bound to erect your statue in Saint Mark's.—  
Signor Corvino, I would have you go  
And show yourself,<sup>8</sup> that you have conquered.

CORVINO Yes.

70 MOSCA [*aside to* CORVINO] It was much better that you  
should profess

Yourself a cuckold thus, than that the other<sup>9</sup>  
Should have been proved.

CORVINO Nay, I considered that.  
Now it is her fault.

MOSCA Then it had been yours.

CORVINO True. I do doubt this advocate still.

MOSCA I'faith,  
You need not; I dare ease you of that care.

75 CORVINO I trust thee, Mosca.

MOSCA As your own soul, sir.

[*Exit* CORVINO.]

CORBACCIO

Mosca!

MOSCA Now for your business, sir.

CORBACCIO How? Ha' you  
business?

MOSCA Yes, yours, sir.  
 CORBACCIO Oh, none else?  
 MOSCA None else, not  
 I.  
 CORBACCIO Be careful, then.  
 MOSCA Rest you with both your  
 eyes,<sup>o</sup> sir.  
 CORBACCIO Dispatch it.<sup>1</sup>  
 MOSCA Instantly.  
 CORBACCIO And look that all  
 80 Whatever be put in: jewels, plate, moneys,  
 Household stuff, bedding, curtains.  
 MOSCA Curtain rings,  
 sir.  
 Only the advocate's fee must be deducted.  
 CORBACCIO I'll pay him, now; you'll be too prodigal.  
 MOSCA Sir, I must tender<sup>o</sup> it.  
 CORBACCIO Two *cecchines* is well?  
 85 MOSCA No, six, sir.  
 CORBACCIO 'Tis too much.  
 MOSCA He talked a great  
 while,  
 You must consider that, sir.  
 CORBACCIO [*giving money*] Well, there's three—  
 MOSCA I'll give it him.  
 CORBACCIO Do so, and [*he tips MOSCA*]  
 there's for thee.  
 [*Exit CORBACCIO.*]  
 MOSCA [*aside*] Bountiful bones! What horrid strange  
 offense  
 Did he commit 'gainst nature in his youth  
 90 Worthy this age?<sup>2</sup> [*to VOLTORE*] You see, sir, how I  
 work  
 Unto your ends; take you no notice.<sup>o</sup>  
 VOLTORE No,

I'll leave you.  
 MOSCA All is yours, [Exit  
 VOLTRE.]  
 [aside] the devil and all,  
 Good advocate! [to LADY WOULD-BE] Madam, I'll bring  
 you home.  
 LADY WOULD-BE No, I'll go see your patron.  
 MOSCA That you  
 95 shall not.  
 I'll tell you why. My purpose is to urge  
 My patron to reform<sup>o</sup> his will; and, for  
 The zeal you've shown today, whereas before  
 You were but third or fourth, you shall be now  
 Put in the first, which would appear as begged  
 100 If you were present. Therefore—  
 LADY WOULD-BE You shall sway me.  
 [Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A symbol of treachery, the hyena was supposed to be able to change its sex and the color of its eyes at will and to imitate human voices.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Delight in sexual activity.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tested for impotence, a regular court procedure in some divorce and rape cases. (Torture was another method sometimes used to extract confessions.)[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Torture in which the victim's arms were tied behind his back; he was then hoisted up by the wrists and dropped.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Torture instrument that stretched the victim to the point of dislocating his joints.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: What citizen is there whose life and reputation might not be forfeit to a slanderer?[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Excited by the taste of blood, like hunting hounds.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Appear in public. (To indicate that he is not ashamed of having admitted to being a cuckold.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The attempt to prostitute Celia to Volpone.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Hurry to make Volpone's will, since Corbaccio has already delivered on his half of the promise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To deserve this old age.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *deceitfully changeable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beg*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *excessive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stubborn resolution*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *have the last word*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disabled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(see 5.2.97)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *remaining*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impartial*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be permitted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *resoluteness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *monsters*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *monsters*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack income*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rest assured*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *present*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *leave it to me*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *revise*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Act 5***

## SCENE 1. VOLPONE'S house.

[Enter] VOLPONE [attended].

VOLPONE Well, I am here, and all this brunt<sup>o</sup> is past.  
I ne'er was in dislike with my disguise  
Till this fled<sup>o</sup> moment; here 'twas good, in private,  
But, in your public—*cave<sup>o</sup>* whilst I breathe.  
Fore God, my left leg 'gan to have the cramp,  
5 And I apprehended straight<sup>o</sup> some power had struck  
me  
With a dead palsy.<sup>o</sup> Well, I must be merry  
And shake it off. A many of these fears  
Would put me into some villainous disease,  
Should they come thick upon me. I'll prevent 'em.  
10 Give me a bowl of lusty wine to fright  
This humor from my heart.<sup>1</sup>—Hum, hum, hum! *He  
drinks.*  
'Tis almost gone already; I shall conquer,<sup>o</sup>  
Any device, now, of rare ingenious knavery,  
That would possess me with a violent laughter,  
15 Would make me up<sup>o</sup> again. So, so, so, so. *Drinks  
again.*  
This heat is life; 'tis blood by this time. [*calling*]  
Mosca!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Wine was supposed to convert quickly to blood (see line 17), thus giving courage to the drinker.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *crisis*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *past*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *watch out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *paralysis*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overcome my fears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restore me*[Return to reference](#) °



**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[Enter] MOSCA.

MOSCA How now, sir? Does the day look clear  
again?

Are we recovered and wrought out of error  
Into our way, to see our path before us?  
Is our trade free once more?

VOLPONE Exquisite Mosca!

MOSCA Was it not carried learnedly?

5 VOLPONE And stoutly.°  
Good wits are greatest in extremities.

MOSCA It were a folly beyond thought to trust  
Any grand act unto a cowardly spirit.

10 You are not taken with it enough, methinks?  
VOLPONE Oh, more than if I had enjoyed the wench!  
The pleasure of all womankind's not like it.

MOSCA Why, now you speak, sir. We must here be  
fixed;

Here we must rest. This is our masterpiece.  
We cannot think to go beyond this.

VOLPONE True,  
Th'hast played thy prize,<sup>1</sup> my precious Mosca.

15 MOSCA Nay,  
sir,  
To gull° the court—

VOLPONE And quite divert the torrent  
Upon the innocent.

MOSCA Yes, and to make  
So rare a music out of discords<sup>2</sup>—

20 VOLPONE Right.  
That yet to me's the strangest, how th'ast borne it!°  
That these,° being so divided 'mongst themselves,  
Should not scent° somewhat, or° in me or thee,

Or doubt their own side.°

MOSCA True, they will not see't.

Too much light blinds 'em, I think. Each of 'em  
Is so possessed and stuffed with his own hopes  
That anything unto the contrary,

25 Never so true or never so apparent,  
Never so palpable, they will resist it—

VOLPONE Like a temptation of the devil.

MOSCA Right, sir.

Merchants may talk of trade, and your great signors  
Of land that yields well; but if Italy

30 Have any glebe° more fruitful than these fellows,  
I am deceived. Did not your advocate rare?°

VOLPONE Oh!—"My most honored fathers, my grave  
fathers,

Under correction of Your Fatherhoods,  
What face of truth is here? If these strange deeds  
May pass, most honored fathers"—I had much ado  
To forbear laughing.

35

MOSCA 'T seemed to me you sweat,°  
sir.

VOLPONE In troth, I did a little.

MOSCA But confess, sir,  
Were you not daunted?

VOLPONE In good faith, I was

A little in a mist,° but not dejected;°

40 Never but still myself.

MOSCA I think° it, sir.

Now, so truth help me, I must needs say this, sir,  
And out of conscience for your advocate:

He's taken pains, in faith, sir, and deserved,  
In my poor judgment—I speak it under favor,°

45 Not to contrary° you, sir—very richly—  
Well—to be cozened.°

VOLPONE Troth, and I think so too,  
By that° I heard him° in the latter end.

MOSCA Oh, but before, sir! Had you heard him first  
 Draw it to certain heads, then aggravate,<sup>3</sup>  
 50 Then use his vehement figures<sup>o</sup>—I looked still  
 When he would shift<sup>4</sup> a shirt; and doing this  
 Out of pure love, no hope of gain—  
 VOLPONE 'Tis right.  
 I cannot answer<sup>o</sup> him, Mosca, as I would,  
 Not yet; but for thy sake, at thy entreaty  
 55 I will begin ev'n now to vex 'em all,  
 This very instant.  
 MOSCA Good, sir.  
 VOLPONE Call the dwarf  
 And eunuch forth.  
 MOSCA [*calling*] Castrone, Nano!  
 [*Enter*] NANO [*and*] CASTRONE.  
 NANO Here.  
 VOLPONE Shall we have a jig, now?  
 MOSCA What you please, sir.  
 VOLPONE [*to* CASTRONE *and* NANO]  
 Go,  
 60 Straight give out about the streets, you two,  
 That I am dead. Do it with constancy,<sup>o</sup>  
 Sadly, do you hear? Impute it to the grief  
 Of this late slander. [*Exeunt* CASTRONE *and*  
 NANO.]  
 MOSCA What do you mean, sir?  
 VOLPONE Oh,  
 I shall have instantly my vulture, crow,  
 Raven come flying hither on the news  
 65 To peck for carrion, my she-wolf<sup>o</sup> and all,  
 Greedy and full of expectation—  
 MOSCA And then to have it ravished from their  
 mouths?  
 VOLPONE 'Tis true. I will ha' thee put on a gown<sup>5</sup>  
 And take upon thee as<sup>o</sup> thou wert mine heir;  
 70

Show 'em a will. Open that chest and reach  
Forth one of those that has the blanks.◊ I'll straight  
Put in thy name.

MOSCA [*fetching a blank will*] It will be rare, sir.

VOLPONE Ay,  
When they e'en gape, and find themselves deluded

—  
MOSCA Yes.

75 VOLPONE And thou use them scurvily. Dispatch,  
Get on thy gown.

[VOLPONE *signs the will MOSCA has given him. MOSCA  
puts on a mourning garment.*]

MOSCA But, what, sir, if they ask  
After the body?

VOLPONE Say it was corrupted.

MOSCA I'll say it stunk, sir, and was fain◊ t'have it  
Coffined up instantly and sent away.

80 VOLPONE Anything; what thou wilt. Hold, here's my  
will.

Get thee a cap, a count-book, pen and ink,  
Papers afore thee; sit as thou wert taking  
An inventory of parcels.◊ I'll get up  
Behind the curtain on a stool, and hearken;  
Sometime peep over, see how they do look,  
85 With what degrees their blood doth leave their faces.  
Oh, 'twill afford me a rare meal of laughter!

MOSCA Your advocate will turn stark dull◊ upon it.

VOLPONE It will take off his oratory's edge.

90 MOSCA But your *clarissimo*,◊ old round-back, he  
Will crump you◊ like a hog-louse with the touch.

VOLPONE And what Corvino?

MOSCA Oh, sir, look for him  
Tomorrow morning with a rope and a dagger<sup>6</sup>  
To visit all the streets; he must run mad.

95 My lady, too, that came into the court

To bear false witness for Your Worship—  
VOLPONE Yes,  
And kissed me 'fore the fathers, when my face  
Flowed all with oils.°

MOSCA And sweat, sir. Why, your gold  
Is such another° med'cine, it dries up  
All those offensive savors! It transforms  
100 The most deformèd, and restores 'em lovely,  
As 'twere the strange poetical girdle.⁷ Jove  
Could not invent t'himself a shroud more subtle  
To pass Acrisius' guards.⁸ It is the thing  
105 Makes all the world her grace, her youth, her beauty.  
VOLPONE I think she loves me.  
MOSCA Who? The lady, sir?  
She's jealous of you.⁹  
VOLPONE Dost thou say so?  
[*Knocking offstage.*]  
MOSCA Hark,  
There's some already.  
VOLPONE Look.  
MOSCA [*peeping out the door*] It is the vulture.  
He has the quickest scent.  
VOLPONE I'll to my place,  
Thou to thy posture.°  
MOSCA I am set.  
VOLPONE But, Mosca,  
110 Play the artificer° now; torture 'em rarely.  
[VOLPONE *conceals himself.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Professional fencers “played the prize,” that is, competed for purses and titles, in virtuoso displays of swordsmanship.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: To bring harmony out of various discordant elements was thought to be the highest achievement of art.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Arrange his material under various headings, then bring charges.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Change (because his efforts made him sweat).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This must be the long black gown ordinarily worn by chief mourners, not the *clarissimo's* (aristocrat's) garment, which Mosca dons later in the scene and which constitutes a different kind of insult to Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Traditional equipment of suicidal madmen, borne by the allegorical figure of Despair in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* 1.9 and by the revenger Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The girdle of Venus, the goddess of love, made its wearer irresistible.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: King Acrisius shut his daughter Danaë in a tower, but the god Jove came to her in a shower of gold.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: (1) Devoted to you; (2) covetous of your wealth.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *resolutely*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hoodwink*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brought it off*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *these men*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suspect* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *position*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soil*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *do brilliantly*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *sweated (with fear)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *uncertain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overwhelmed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *believe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with your permission*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contradict*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cheated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *what* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *him say*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *figures of speech*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *repay*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *conviction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Lady Would-be*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *act as though*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blank spaces*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *I was obliged*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *items*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gloomy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aristocrat (Corbaccio)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *curl up on you*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(see 4.6.20.1–2)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *so effective a*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artist*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 3. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] VOLTRE.

VOLTRE How now, my Mosca?

MOSCA [*pretending not to notice him, and reading from an inventory*] "Turkey carpets, 9 nine"—

VOLTRE Taking an inventory? That is well.

MOSCA "Two suits of bedding, tissue"<sup>1</sup>—

VOLTRE Where's the will?

Let me read that the while.<sup>9</sup>

[*Enter*] CORBACCIO [*on a litter*].

CORBACCIO [*to the litter-bearers*] So, set me down And get you home. [*Exeunt litter-bearers.*]

VOLTRE Is he come now to trouble us?

5 MOSCA "Of cloth-of-gold, 2 two more"—

CORBACCIO Is it done, Mosca?

MOSCA "Of several velvets, 9 eight"—

VOLTRE [*aside*] I like his care.

CORBACCIO [*to MOSCA*] Dost thou not hear?

[*Enter*] CORVINO.

CORVINO Ha! Is the hour come, Mosca?

VOLPONE *peeps from behind a traverse.*<sup>9</sup>

VOLPONE [*aside*] Ay, now they muster.<sup>9</sup>

CORVINO What does the advocate here?

Or this Corbaccio?

CORBACCIO What do these here?

[*Enter*] LADY [*WOULD-BE*].

LADY WOULD-BE Mosca,



Is his thread spun?<sup>3</sup>

MOSCA

"Eight chests of linen"—

VOLPONE [*aside*]

Oh,

My fine Dame Would-be, too!

CORVINO

Mosca, the will,

That I may show it these, and rid 'em hence.

MOSCA "Six chests of diaper, four of damask"<sup>4</sup>—  
there.

[*He gives them the will.*]

CORBACCIO Is that the will?

MOSCA

"Down beds and

bolsters"—

VOLPONE [*aside*]

15

Rare!

Be busy still. Now they begin to flutter;

They never think of me. Look, see, see, see!

How their swift eyes run over the long deed

Unto the name, and to the legacies,

What is bequeathed them there—

MOSCA

"Ten suits of

20

hangings"<sup>5</sup>—

VOLPONE [*aside*]

Ay, i' their garters,<sup>5</sup> Mosca. Now  
their hopes

Are at the gasp.<sup>6</sup>

VOLTRE

Mosca the heir!

CORBACCIO

What's that?

VOLPONE [*aside*]

My advocate is dumb. Look to my  
merchant;

He has heard of some strange storm, a ship is lost,

He faints. My lady will swoon. Old glazen-eyes,<sup>6</sup>

25

He hath not reached his despair yet.

CORBACCIO

All these

Are out of hope; I'm sure the man.

CORVINO

But, Mosca—

MOSCA "Two cabinets"—

CORVINO Is this in earnest?  
MOSCA "One  
Of ebony"—  
CORVINO Or do you but delude me?  
MOSCA "The other, mother-of-pearl"—I am very  
30 busy.  
Good faith, it is a fortune thrown upon me—  
"It<sub>o</sub>em, one salt<sub>o</sub> of agate"—not my seeking.  
LADY WOULD-BE Do you hear, sir?  
MOSCA "A perfumed box"—  
pray you, forbear;  
You see I am troubled<sub>o</sub>—"made of an onyx"—  
LADY WOULD-BE How!  
MOSCA Tomorrow or next day I shall be at leisure  
35 To talk with you all.  
CORVINO Is this my large hope's issue?<sub>o</sub>  
LADY WOULD-BE Sir, I must have a fairer answer.  
MOSCA  
Madam!  
Marry, and shall: pray you, fairly<sub>o</sub> quit my house.  
Nay, raise no tempest with your looks, but hark you,  
Remember what Your Ladyship offered me<sub>o</sub>  
40 To put you in<sub>o</sub> an heir; go to, think on't,  
And what you said e'en your best madams did  
For maintenance,<sub>o</sub> and why not you? Enough.  
Go home and use the poor Sir Pol, your knight, well,  
For fear I tell some riddles.<sub>o</sub> Go, be melancholic.  
45 [*Exit* LADY WOULD-BE.]  
VOLPONE [*aside*] Oh, my fine devil!  
CORVINO Mosca, pray you a  
word.  
MOSCA Lord! Will not you take your dispatch hence  
yet?  
Methinks of all you should have been th'ex<sub>o</sub>ample.  
Why should you stay here? With what thought?  
What promise?

50 Hear you, do not you know I know you an ass?  
And that you would most fain have been a wittol<sup>o</sup>  
If fortune would have let you? That you are  
A declared cuckold, on good terms?<sup>o</sup> This pearl,  
You'll say, was yours? Right. This diamond?  
I'll not deny't, but thank you. Much here else?  
55 It may be so. Why, think that these good works  
May help to hide your bad. I'll not betray you.  
Although you be but extraordinary<sup>o</sup>  
And have it<sup>o</sup> only in title, it sufficeth.  
Go home. Be melancholic too, or mad. [Exit  
60 CORVINO.]  
VOLPONE [*aside*] Rare, Mosca! How his villainy  
becomes him!  
VOLTORE [*aside*] Certain he doth delude all these for  
me.  
CORBACCIO [*finally making out the will*] Mosca the  
heir?  
VOLPONE [*aside*] Oh, his four  
eyes have found it!  
CORBACCIO I'm cozened, cheated by a parasite-  
slave!  
Harlot,<sup>z</sup> th'ast gulled me.  
65 MOSCA Yes, sir. Stop your mouth,  
Or I shall draw the only tooth is left.  
Are not you he, that filthy covetous wretch  
With the three legs,<sup>o</sup> that here, in hope of prey,  
Have, any time this three year, snuffed about  
70 With your most grov'ling nose, and would have hired  
Me to the pois'ning of my patron? Sir?  
Are not you he that have today in court  
Professed the disinheriting of your son?  
Perjured yourself? Go home, and die, and stink.  
75 If you but croak a syllable, all comes out.

Away and call your porters. Go, go stink! [Exit  
CORBACCIO.]

VOLPONE [*aside*] Excellent varlet!<sup>o</sup>

VOLTORE Now, my faithful

Mosca,  
I find thy constancy—

MOSCA Sir?

VOLTORE Sincere.

MOSCA "A table  
Of porphyry"—I mar'l<sup>o</sup> you'll be thus troublesome.

VOLTORE Nay, leave off now, they are gone.

MOSCA Why,  
80 who are you?

What? Who did send for you? Oh, cry you mercy,<sup>o</sup>  
Reverend sir! Good faith, I am grieved for you,  
That any chance of mine should thus defeat  
Your—I must needs say—most deserving travails.

85 But I protest, sir, it was cast upon me,  
And I could almost wish to be without it,  
But that the will o'th'dead must be observed.

Marry, my joy is that you need it not;  
You have a gift, sir—thank your education—  
90 Will never let you want, while there are men  
And malice to breed causes.<sup>o</sup> Would I had  
But half the like, for all my fortune, sir!  
If I have any suits—as I do hope,

Things being so easy and direct,<sup>8</sup> I shall not—  
I will make bold with your obstreperous<sup>o</sup> aid,  
95 Conceive me, for your fee,<sup>9</sup> sir. In meantime  
You, that have so much law, I know, ha' the  
conscience

Not to be covetous of what is mine.  
Good sir, I thank you for my plate;<sup>o</sup> 'twill help  
To set up a young man.<sup>o</sup> Good faith, you look  
100 As you were costive; best go home and purge, sir.

[Exit VOLTORE.]

VOLPONE [*coming from behind the traverse*] Bid him  
eat  
lettuce<sup>o</sup> well. My witty mischief,  
Let me embrace thee! [*He hugs MOSCA.*] Oh, that I  
could now  
Transform thee to a Venus!<sup>o</sup> Mosca, go,  
Straight take my habit of *clarissimo*<sup>1</sup>  
105 And walk the streets; be seen, torment 'em more.  
We must pursue as well as plot. Who would  
Have lost<sup>o</sup> this feast?  
MOSCA I doubt<sup>o</sup> it will lose them.<sup>o</sup>  
VOLPONE Oh, my recovery shall recover all.<sup>2</sup>  
110 That I could now but think on some disguise  
To meet 'em in, and ask 'em questions.  
How I would vex 'em still at every turn!  
MOSCA Sir, I can fit you.  
VOLPONE Canst thou?  
MOSCA Yes, I know  
One o'the *commendatori*, sir, so like you,  
Him will I straight make drunk, and bring you his  
115 habit.  
VOLPONE A rare disguise, and answering thy brain!<sup>o</sup>  
Oh, I will be a sharp disease unto 'em.  
MOSCA Sir, you must look for curses—  
VOLPONE Till they burst!  
The fox fares ever best when he is curst.<sup>o</sup>  
[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Sets of bedcovers and hangings, made of cloth with gold or silver threads interwoven. The fancy textiles Mosca mentions in this scene were extremely expensive to produce in the days before automation.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Cloth made of gold threads.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Is he dead? (In Greek mythology, the Fates spin out the thread of a human being's life and cut it at the time of death.)[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Two kinds of costly textile with interwoven motifs. Diaper was linen with a diamond pattern; damask could be linen or silk with floral or other designs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Go hang yourself in your own garters" was a common phrase of ridicule.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Corbaccio wears spectacles (see also line 63 below).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A word used of wicked men as well as women.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The situation being so straightforward.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It being understood that I will pay you, of course.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Aristocrat. (By obeying this order, Mosca violates the sumptuary laws that restricted the wearing of distinctive high-status garments, such as the *clarissimo's* robe, to persons of the appropriate rank.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Volpone believes that by "undoing" his death, he will be able to resuscitate his scam.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *Oriental rugs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *while you're busy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separate velvet hangings*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *curtain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *assemble*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tapestries*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *last gasp*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *saltcellar*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *busy*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *positively*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *implicitly, sexual favors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *your name in as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *financial support*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *secrets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *led the way*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *willing cuckold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in good standing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in name only*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the name of cuckold*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *including his cane*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servant; rascal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marvel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beg your pardon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lawsuits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vociferous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(see 1.3.1–20)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set up my household*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *used as a laxative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for Volpone's sexual use*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *missed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fear*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as dupes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suiting your wit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proverbial wisdom*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 4. *The WOULD-BES' house.***

[*Enter*] PEREGRINE [*in disguise, and*] three  
MERCATORI [MERCHANTS].

PEREGRINE Am I enough disguised?

FIRST MERCHANT I warrant you.

PEREGRINE All my ambition is to fright him only.

SECOND MERCHANT If you could ship him away, 'twere  
excellent.

THIRD MERCHANT To Zante, or to Aleppo?<sup>1</sup>

PEREGRINE Yes, and  
ha' his

5 Adventures put i'th'book of voyages,<sup>2</sup>  
And his gulled<sup>o</sup> story registered for truth?  
Well, gentlemen, when I am in awhile,  
And that you think us warm in our discourse,  
Know<sup>o</sup> your approaches.

FIRST MERCHANT Trust it to our care.

[*Exeunt* MERCHANTS.]

[PEREGRINE *knocks. A*] WOMAN [*servant answers  
the door*].

10 PEREGRINE Save you, fair lady. Is Sir Pol within?

WOMAN I do not know, sir.

PEREGRINE Pray you, say unto him  
Here is a merchant upon earnest business  
Desires to speak with him.

WOMAN I will see, sir.

PEREGRINE Pray you.

[*Exit* WOMAN.]

I see the family is all female here.

[*Enter* WOMAN.]

15 WOMAN He says, sir, he has weighty affairs of state  
That now require him whole;<sup>o</sup> some other time  
You may possess<sup>o</sup> him.



PEREGRINE                                Pray you say again,  
If those require him whole, these will exact him<sup>o</sup>  
Whereof I bring him tidings.                                [*Exit*  
WOMAN.]

What might be  
His grave affair of state, now? How to make  
Bolognian sausages here in Venice, sparing  
One o'th'ingredients?  
[*Enter* WOMAN.]

WOMAN                      Sir, he says he knows  
By your word "tidings" that you are no statesman,<sup>3</sup>  
And therefore wills you stay.<sup>o</sup>

PEREGRINE Sweet, pray you  
return<sup>o</sup> him  
25 I have not read so many proclamations  
And studied them for words as he has done,  
But—here he deigns to come.

[Enter] POLITIC.  
[Exit WOMAN.]

POLITIC Sir, I must crave  
Your courteous pardon. There hath chanced today  
Unkind disaster 'twixt my lady and me,  
And I was penning my apology  
30 To give her satisfaction, as you came now.

PEREGRINE Sir, I am grieved I bring you worse  
disaster.

The gentleman you met at th'port today,  
That told you he was newly arrived—

POLITIC Ay, was  
A fugitive punk?\_

PEREGRINE                      No, sir, a spy set on you;  
35      And he has made relation to the Senate  
That you professed to him to have a plot  
To sell the state of Venice to the Turk. [◊](#)

POLITIC Oh, me!

PEREGRINE For which warrants are signed by  
this time  
To apprehend you, and to search your study  
For papers—  
POLITIC Alas, sir, I have none but notes  
Drawn out of playbooks<sup>o</sup>—  
PEREGRINE All the better, sir.  
POLITIC And some essays. What shall I do?  
PEREGRINE Sir, best  
Convey yourself into a sugar-chest;  
Or, if you could lie round, a frail were rare,<sup>4</sup>  
And I could send you aboard.  
POLITIC Sir, I but talked so,  
For discourse sake merely.<sup>o</sup> *They knock without.*  
PEREGRINE Hark, they are there!  
POLITIC I am a wretch, a wretch!  
PEREGRINE What will you do,  
sir?  
Ha' you ne'er a currant-butt<sup>o</sup> to leap into?  
They'll put you to the rack; you must be sudden.  
POLITIC Sir, I have an engine<sup>o</sup>—  
THIRD MERCHANT [*without*] Sir Politic Would-be!  
SECOND MERCHANT [*without*] Where is he?  
POLITIC That I have  
thought upon beforetime.  
PEREGRINE What is it?  
POLITIC I shall ne'er endure the  
torture!  
Marry, it is, sir, of a tortoiseshell, [*producing the  
shell*]  
Fitted for these extremities. Pray you sir, help me.  
Here I have a place, sir, to put back my legs—  
Please you to lay it on, sir—with this cap  
And my black gloves. I'll lie, sir, like a tortoise  
Till they are gone.

PEREGRINE [*laying the shell on* POLITIC'S *back*] And  
 call you this an engine?  
 60 POLITIC Mine own device—good sir, bid my wife's  
 women  
 To burn my papers. [*Exit* PEREGRINE.]  
*They* [*the* MERCHANTS] *rush in*.  
 FIRST MERCHANT Where's he hid?  
 THIRD MERCHANT We must  
 And will, sure, find him.  
 SECOND MERCHANT Which is his study?  
 [*Enter* PEREGRINE.]  
 FIRST MERCHANT What  
 Are you, sir?  
 PEREGRINE I'm a merchant, that came here  
 To look upon this tortoise.  
 THIRD MERCHANT How?  
 FIRST MERCHANT Saint Mark!  
 What beast is this?  
 PEREGRINE It is a fish.  
 SECOND MERCHANT [*to* POLITIC] Come out here!  
 65 PEREGRINE Nay, you may strike him, sir, and tread  
 upon him.  
 He'll bear a cart.  
 FIRST MERCHANT What, to run over him?  
 PEREGRINE Yes.  
 THIRD MERCHANT Let's jump upon him.  
 SECOND MERCHANT Can he not  
 go?°  
 PEREGRINE He creeps, sir.  
 FIRST MERCHANT [*poking* POLITIC] Let's see him creep.  
 PEREGRINE  
 No, good sir, you will hurt him.  
 70 SECOND MERCHANT Heart! I'll see him creep, or prick  
 his guts.  
 THIRD MERCHANT [*to* POLITIC] Come out here!

PEREGRINE [*aside to* POLITIC] Pray you,  
sir, creep a little.

[POLITIC *creeps.*]

FIRST MERCHANT

Forth!

SECOND MERCHANT Yet further.

PEREGRINE [*aside to* POLITIC] Good sir, creep.

SECOND MERCHANT We'll  
see his legs.

*They pull off the shell and discover*<sup>o</sup> him.

THIRD MERCHANT Godso, he has garters!

FIRST MERCHANT Ay, and  
gloves!

SECOND MERCHANT

Is this

Your fearful tortoise?

PEREGRINE [*revealing himself*] Now, Sir Pol, we are  
even.

75

For your next project I shall be prepared.

I am sorry for the funeral of your notes, sir.

FIRST MERCHANT 'Twere a rare motion to be seen in  
Fleet Street!<sup>5</sup>

SECOND MERCHANT Ay, i'the term.

FIRST MERCHANT Or Smithfield, in the  
fair.<sup>6</sup>

THIRD MERCHANT Methinks 'tis but a melancholic  
sight!

80

PEREGRINE Farewell, most politic tortoise.

[*Exeunt* PEREGRINE *and* MERCHANTS.]

[*Enter* WOMAN.]

POLITIC

Where's

my lady?

Knows she of this?

WOMAN

I know not, sir.

POLITIC

Inquire.

[Exit WOMAN.]

Oh, I shall be the fable of all feasts,<sup>o</sup>  
The freight of the *gazetti*, ship boys' tale,<sup>z</sup>  
And, which is worst, even talk for ordinaries.<sup>o</sup>

[Enter WOMAN.]

85

WOMAN My lady's come most melancholic home,  
And says, sir, she will straight to sea for physic.

POLITIC And I, to shun this place and clime forever,  
Creeping with house on back, and think it well  
To shrink my poor head in my politic shell.

[Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Zante is an island off Greece under Venetian control; Aleppo, a big trading center, is in Syria.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An enlarged edition of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics, and Discoveries of the English Nation* was published in 1598–1600.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Government agent. (Sir Pol believes that a spy would use the word "intelligence.")[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: If you could curl up, a fruit basket would be excellent.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Puppet shows, called "motions," were frequently performed on London's Fleet Street, adjacent to the Inns of Court, where attorneys were trained and cases were argued during the three law terms.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Smithfield, just northwest of London, was the site every August of Bartholomew Fair; puppet shows were a prime entertainment there.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Topic of the newspapers and the gossip of boys serving on board ships.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *erroneous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demand all his attention*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gain audience with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force him out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wishes you to wait*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reply to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prostitute*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *(see 4.1.128–30)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *printed plays*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just to be conversing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *casket for currants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contrivance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walk*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *expose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *talk of the town*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taverns*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 5. VOLPONE'S house.**

[*Enter*] VOLPONE [*and*] MOSCA, *the first in the habit of a commendatore, the other, of a clarissimo.*

VOLPONE Am I then like him?

MOSCA Oh, sir, you are he.  
No man can sever you.

VOLPONE Good.

MOSCA But what am I?

VOLPONE 'Fore heav'n, a brave *clarissimo*; thou  
becom'st it!

Pity thou wert not born one.

MOSCA If I hold  
My made one, 'twill be well.

5 VOLPONE I'll go and see  
What news, first, at the court.

MOSCA Do so. [*Exit*  
VOLPONE.]

My fox  
Is out on his hole, <sup>1</sup> and ere he shall reenter  
I'll make him languish in his borrowed case,  
Except he come to composition with me.  
[*Calling*] Androgyno, Castrone, Nano!

[*Enter* ANDROGYNO, CASTRONE, *and* NANO.]

10 ALL Here.  
MOSCA Go recreate yourselves abroad; go sport.  
[*Exeunt* ANDROGYNO, CASTRONE, *and* NANO.]

So, now I have the keys, and am possessed.  
Since he will needs be dead afore his time,  
I'll bury him or gain by him. I am his heir,  
And so will keep me till he share at least.  
15 To cozen him of all were but a cheat  
Well placed; no man would construe it a sin.

Let his sport pay for't.° This is called the Fox Trap.  
[Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Alluding to the children's game, fox-in-the-hole.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: (see 5.3.104–15)[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *distinguish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disguise*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unless he makes a deal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outside*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in possession*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *remain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *for itself*[Return to reference °](#)



**SCENE 6. A street in Venice.**

[*Enter*] CORBACCIO [*and*] CORVINO.

CORBACCIO They say the court is set.°

CORVINO We must  
maintain

Our first tale good, for both our reputations.

CORBACCIO Why, mine's no tale; my son would there  
have killed me.

CORVINO That's true; I had forgot. [*aside*] Mine is, I  
am sure.—

But for your will, sir.

5 CORBACCIO Ay, I'll come upon him  
For that hereafter, now his patron's dead.

[*Enter*] VOLPONE [*disguised*].

VOLPONE Signor Corvino! And Corbaccio! Sir,  
Much joy unto you.

CORVINO Of what?

VOLPONE The sudden good  
Dropped down upon you—

CORBACCIO Where?

VOLPONE And none knows  
how—

From old Volpone, sir.

10 CORBACCIO Out, arrant knave!

VOLPONE Let not your too much wealth, sir, make  
you furious.°

CORBACCIO Away, thou varlet!

VOLPONE Why, sir?

CORBACCIO Dost thou  
mock me?

VOLPONE You mock the world, sir.<sup>1</sup> Did you not  
change° wills?

CORBACCIO Out, harlot!

15 VOLPONE [*to* CORVINO] Oh, belike you are the man,  
 Signor Corvino? Faith, you carry it<sup>o</sup> well;  
 You grow not mad withal. I love your spirit.  
 You are not overleavened<sup>o</sup> with your fortune.  
 You should ha' some would swell now like a wine-vat  
 With such an autumn.<sup>o</sup> Did he gi' you all, sir?  
 CORVINO Avoid,<sup>o</sup> you rascal!  
 20 VOLPONE Troth, your wife has  
 shown  
 Herself a very<sup>o</sup> woman. But you are well;  
 You need not care; you have a good estate  
 To bear it out, sir, better by this chance—  
 Except Corbaccio have a share?  
 CORBACCIO Hence, varlet!  
 25 VOLPONE You will not be aknow<sup>2</sup>n, sir; why, 'tis  
 wise.  
 Thus do all gamesters at all games dissemble.  
 No man will seem to win.<sup>o</sup>  
 [*Exeunt* CORBACCIO *and* CORVINO.]  
 Here comes my vulture,  
 Heaving his beak up i'the air and snuffing.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Volpone pretends to believe that Corbaccio is misleading people by refusing to admit to his good fortune.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: You prefer not to be recognized (as heir).[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *in session*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *insane*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exchange*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *carry it off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too puffed up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harvest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *go away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *typical*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *admit he's winning*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 7. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] VOLTORE.

VOLTORE [*to himself*] Outstripped thus by a  
parasite? A slave  
Would run on errands, and make legs<sup>o</sup> for crumbs?  
Well, what I'll do—

VOLPONE The court stays for<sup>o</sup> Your  
Worship.

I e'en rejoice, sir, at Your Worship's happiness,  
And that it fell into so learnèd hands  
5 That understand the fingering<sup>1</sup>—

VOLTORE What do you  
mean?

VOLPONE I mean to be a suitor to Your Worship  
For the small tenement, out of reparations<sup>2</sup>—  
That at the end of your long row of houses  
By the *piscaria*.<sup>o</sup> It was in Volpone's time,  
10 Your predecessor, ere he grew diseased,  
A handsome, pretty, customed<sup>o</sup> bawdy house  
As any was in Venice—none dispraised<sup>3</sup>—  
But fell with him; his body and that house  
Decayed together.

VOLTORE Come, sir, leave your prating.<sup>o</sup>

15 VOLPONE Why, if Your Worship give me but your  
hand,

That I may ha' the refusal,<sup>o</sup> I have done.

'Tis a mere toy to you, sir, candle-rents,<sup>4</sup>

As Your learned Worship knows—

VOLTORE What do I know?

20 VOLPONE Marry, no end of your wealth, sir, God  
decrease<sup>5</sup> it.

VOLTORE Mistaking knave! What, mock'st thou my  
misfortune?

VOLPONE    His<sup>o</sup> blessing on your heart, sir! Would  
              'twere more.

              [*Exit* VOLTORE.]

Now, to my first<sup>6</sup> again, at the next corner.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That understand how to handle money.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: For the rental house in bad repair.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Not to disparage the others.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: (1) Revenue from deteriorating property; (2) "pin money," money for incidentals.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Instead of "increase".[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The ones I was taunting earlier, Corvino and Corbaccio.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *curtsies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awaits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fish market*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *much-patronized*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chattering*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *right of first refusal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *God's*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 8. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] CORBACCIO [*and*] CORVINO. [*Enter*] MOSCA,  
*passant*<sup>o</sup> [*over the stage in clarissimo's attire,*  
*and exit*].

CORBACCIO See, in our habit! See the impudent  
varlet!

CORVINO That I could shoot mine eyes at him, like  
gunstones!<sup>o</sup>

VOLPONE But, is this true, sir, of the parasite?

CORBACCIO Again t'afflict us? Monster!

VOLPONE In good faith,  
sir,

5 I'm heartily grieved a beard of your grave length<sup>o</sup>  
Should be so overreached. I never brooked<sup>o</sup>  
That parasite's hair; methought his nose should  
cozen.<sup>o</sup>

There still<sup>o</sup> was somewhat in his look did promise.  
The bane<sup>o</sup> of a *clarissimo*.

CORBACCIO Knave—

VOLPONE [*to* CORVINO] Methinks

10 Yet you that are so traded<sup>o</sup> i'the world,  
A witty merchant, the fine bird Corvino,  
That have such moral emblems<sup>1</sup> on your name,  
Should not have sung your shame and dropped your  
cheese,

To let the fox laugh at your emptiness.<sup>2</sup>

15 CORVINO Sirrah, you think the privilege of the  
place,<sup>3</sup>

And your red saucy cap, that seems to me  
Nailed to your jolt-head with those two *cecchines*,<sup>4</sup>  
Can warrant<sup>o</sup> your abuses. Come you hither.

You shall perceive, sir, I dare beat you. Approach!

VOLPONE No haste, sir, I do know your valor well,



- °: *so wise an old man*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *could stand*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *he had a cheating nose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ruin*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *experienced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sanction*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make public*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to withstand*[Return to reference °](#)



**SCENE 9. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter*] VOLTORE.

VOLTORE [*to Mosca*] Well, flesh fly, it is summer with  
you now;  
Your winter will come on.

MOSCA Good advocate,  
Pray thee not rail, nor threaten out of place<sup>o</sup> thus;  
Thou'lt make a solecism,<sup>o</sup> as madam says.  
Get you a biggin<sup>1</sup> more; your brain breaks loose.

5 VOLTORE Well, sir. [*Exit*  
MOSCA.]

VOLPONE Would you ha' me beat the insolent slave?  
Throw dirt upon his first good clothes?

VOLTORE This same<sup>o</sup>  
Is doubtless some familiar!<sup>o</sup>

VOLPONE Sir, the court,  
In troth, stays for you. I am mad<sup>o</sup> a mule  
That never read Justinian<sup>2</sup> should get up  
10 And ride an advocate. Had you no quirk<sup>o</sup>  
To avoid gullage,<sup>o</sup> sir, by such a creature?  
I hope you do but jest; he has not done't.  
This's but confederacy to blind the rest.<sup>o</sup>  
You are the heir?

VOLTORE A strange, officious,  
15 Troublesome knave! Thou dost torment me.

VOLPONE I know

—  
It cannot be, sir, that you should be cozened;  
'Tis not within the wit of man to do it.  
You are so wise, so prudent, and 'tis fit  
That wealth and wisdom still should go together.

20 [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A larger skullcap (worn by lawyers).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Roman law, codified under Emperor Justinian and still influential on the Continent. Lawyers traditionally rode mules to the courts; here the image is comically inverted.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *unsuitably*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: (see 4.2.43)[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the disguised Volpone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attendant devil*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *furious that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trick*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deception*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Corvino and Corbaccio*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 10. *The law court.***

[*Enter*] *four* AVOCATORI, NOTARIO [NOTARY],  
COMMENDATORI, BONARIO [*and*] CELIA [*under guard*],  
CORBACCIO, [*and*] CORVINO.

FIRST AVOCATORE     Are all the parties here?

NOTARY     All but the  
advocate.

SECOND AVOCATORE     And here he comes.

FIRST AVOCATORE     Then bring 'em  
forth to sentence.

[*Enter*] VOLTORE, [*and*] VOLPONE [*still disguised as  
a commendatore*].

VOLTORE     O my most honored fathers, let your  
mercy

Once win upon<sup>o</sup> your justice, to forgive—  
I am distracted—

VOLPONE (*aside*)     What will he do now?

5 VOLTORE     Oh,  
I know not which t'address myself to first,  
Whether Your Fatherhoods or these innocents<sup>o</sup>—

CORVINO [*aside*]     Will he betray himself?

VOLTORE     Whom  
equally

I have abused, out of most covetous ends—

CORVINO [*aside to* CORBACCIO]     The man is mad!

CORBACCIO     What's  
that?

10 CORVINO     He is possessed.

VOLTORE     For which, now struck in conscience, here I  
prostrate

Myself at your offended feet for pardon.

[*He throws himself down.*]

FIRST AND SECOND AVOCATORI      Arise!  
CELIA                                      O heav'n, how just  
   thou art!

VOLPONE [*aside*]  
caught  
I' mine own noose—

CORVINO [*aside to* CORBACCIO]      Be constant, sir;  
naught now  
Can help but impudence.      [VOLTORE  
*rises.*]

FIRST AVOCATORE [*to* VOLTORE]    Speak forward. o

COMMENDATORI [*to the courtroom*]

15 Silence!

VOLTRE It is not passion<sup>o</sup> in me, reverend fathers,  
But only conscience, conscience, my good sires,  
That makes me now tell truth. That parasite,  
That knave hath been the instrument of all.

SECOND AVOCATORE     Where is that knave? Fetch him.

VOLPONE [*as commendatore*] I  
go. [*Exit.*]

20 CORVINO Grave fathers,  
This man's distracted; he confessed it now;  
For, hoping to be old Volpone's heir,  
Who now is dead—

THIRD AVOCATORE      How?

SECOND AVOCATORE                      Is Volpone dead?

CORVINO Dead since, o grave fathers—

BONARIO O sure  
vengeance!

FIRST AVOCATORE

# Stay.

Then he was no deceiver?

25 VOLTRE Oh, no, none.  
The parasite, grave fathers.

CORVINO    He does speak  
Out of mere envy, 'cause the servant's made

The thing he gaped<sup>o</sup> for. Please Your Fatherhoods,  
 This is the truth; though I'll not justify  
 The other,<sup>o</sup> but he may be somedeal<sup>o</sup> faulty.  
 30 VOLTRE Ay, to your hopes as well as mine, Corvino;  
 But I'll use modesty.<sup>o</sup> Pleaseth Your Wisdoms  
 To view these certain notes, and but confer<sup>o</sup> them.  
 As I hope favor, they shall speak clear truth.  
 [*He gives documents to the* AVOCATORI.]  
 CORVINO The devil has entered him!  
 BONARIO Or bides in you.  
 35 FOURTH AVOCATORE We have done ill, by a public  
 officer  
 To send for him, if he be heir.  
 SECOND AVOCATORE For whom?  
 FOURTH AVOCATORE Him that they call the parasite.  
 THIRD AVOCATORE  
 'Tis true;  
 He is a man of great estate now left.<sup>o</sup>  
 40 FOURTH AVOCATORE [*to* NOTARY] Go you and learn his  
 name, and say the court  
 Entreats his presence here but to the clearing  
 Of some few doubts. [*Exit*  
 NOTARY.]  
 SECOND AVOCATORE This same's a labyrinth!  
 FIRST AVOCATORE [*to* CORVINO] Stand you unto<sup>o</sup> your first  
 report?  
 CORVINO My  
 state,<sup>o</sup>  
 My life, my fame<sup>o</sup>—  
 BONARIO Where is't?<sup>1</sup>  
 CORVINO —are at the stake.  
 FIRST AVOCATORE [*to* CORBACCIO] Is yours so too?  
 45 CORBACCIO The  
 advocate's a knave,  
 And has a forkèd tongue—

50

- : prevail over [Return to reference °](#)
- : Celia and Bonario [Return to reference °](#)
- : continue [Return to reference °](#)
- : madness [Return to reference °](#)
- : just now [Return to reference °](#)
- : since his appearance here [Return to reference °](#)
- : Voltore yearned [Return to reference °](#)
- : Mosca [Return to reference °](#)
- : somewhat [Return to reference °](#)
- : self-control [Return to reference °](#)
- : compare [Return to reference °](#)
- : bequeathed to him [Return to reference °](#)
- : do you stand by [Return to reference °](#)
- : estate [Return to reference °](#)
- : reputation [Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 11. A street.<sup>1</sup>**

[Enter] VOLPONE [on a separate part of the stage].

VOLPONE To make a snare for mine own neck! And  
run

My head into it willfully! With laughter!

When I had newly scaped, was free and clear!

Out of mere wantonness!° Oh, the dull devil

5 Was in this brain of mine when I devised it,

And Mosca gave it second. He must now

Help to sear up° this vein, or we bleed dead.

[Enter] NANO, ANDROGYNO, [and] CASTRONE.

How now, who let you loose? Whither go you now?

What, to buy gingerbread? Or to drown kitlings?°

10 NANO Sir, Master Mosca called us out of doors,

And bid us all go play, and took the keys.

ANDROGYNO Yes.

VOLPONE Did Master Mosca take the keys? Why, so!

I am farther in.° These are my fine conceits!°

I must be merry, with a mischief to me!

15 What a vile wretch was I, that could not bear

My fortune soberly! I must ha' my crotchets°

And my conundrums! Well, go you and seek him.

His meaning may be truer than my fear.²

Bid him he straight come to me, to the court.

20 Thither will I, and, if't be possible,

Unscrew° my advocate upon° new hopes.

When I provoked him, then I lost myself.

[Exeunt VOLPONE and his entourage. The  
AVOCATORI and parties to the courtroom  
proceedings remain onstage.]

**Endnotes**

- Note 1: The courtroom characters remain visible onstage, perhaps in silent tableau, while Volpone is understood to be outside.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mosca's intentions may be truer (more loyal) than my fear is true (accurate).[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *caprice*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cauterize*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *kittens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in trouble* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *notions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perverse whims*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dissuade* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by means of*[Return to reference °](#)



## SCENE 12. *The courtroom.*

FIRST AVOCATORE [*with* VOLTORE *'s notes*] These things  
can ne'er be reconciled. He here  
Professeth that the gentleman<sup>o</sup> was wronged,  
And that the gentlewoman was brought thither,  
Forced by her husband, and there left.

VOLTORE Most true.

CELIA How ready is heav'n to those that pray!

5 FIRST AVOCATORE But  
that

Volpone would have ravished her, he holds  
Utterly false, knowing his impotence.

CORVINO Grave fathers, he is possessed; again I  
say,

Possessed. Nay, if there be possession  
And obsession, he has both.

10 THIRD AVOCATORE Here comes our officer.  
[*Enter* VOLPONE, *still disguised.*]

VOLPONE The parasite will straight be here, grave  
fathers.

FOURTH AVOCATORE You might invent some other  
name, sir varlet.

THIRD AVOCATORE Did not the notary meet him?

VOLPONE Not that  
I know.

FOURTH AVOCATORE His coming will clear all.

SECOND AVOCATORE Yet it is  
misty.

VOLTORE May't please Your Fatherhoods—

15 VOLPONE (*whispers [to] the advocate*) Sir, the  
parasite

Willed me to tell you that his master lives,  
That you are still the man, your hopes the same;

And this was only a jest—  
 VOLTORE [*aside to* VOLPONE] How?  
 VOLPONE [*aside to* VOLTORE] Sir, to try  
 If you were firm, and how you stood affected.°  
 VOLTORE Art sure he lives?  
 VOLPONE Do I live,° sir?  
 VOLTORE Oh, me!  
 20 I was too violent.  
 VOLPONE Sir, you may redeem it.  
 They said you were possessed; fall down, and seem  
 so.  
 I'll help to make it good. VOLTORE  
*falls.*  
 [Aloud] God bless the man!  
 [Aside to VOLTORE] Stop your wind hard, and swell.!  
 [Aloud]  
 See, see, see, see!  
 25 He vomits crooked pins! His eyes are set  
 Like a dead hare's hung in a poulter's² shop!  
 His mouth's running away!° [to CORVINO] Do you see,  
 signor?  
 Now 'tis in his belly.  
 CORVINO Ay, the devil!  
 VOLPONE Now in his throat.  
 CORVINO Ay, I perceive it plain.  
 VOLPONE 'Twill out, 'twill out! Stand clear. See where  
 30 it flies,  
 In shape of a blue toad with a bat's wings!  
 [To CORBACCIO] Do not you see it, sir?  
 CORBACCIO What? I think I  
 do.  
 CORVINO 'Tis too manifest.  
 VOLPONE Look! He comes t'  
 himself!  
 VOLTORE Where am I?

VOLPONE Take good heart; the worst is  
 past, sir.  
 You are dispossessed.  
 35 FIRST AVOCATORE What accident<sup>o</sup> is this?  
 SECOND AVOCATORE Sudden, and full of wonder!  
 THIRD AVOCATORE If he  
 were  
 Possessed, as it appears, all this<sup>o</sup> is nothing.  
 CORVINO He has been often subject to these fits.  
 FIRST AVOCATORE Show him that writing. [*To* VOLTORE]  
 Do you know it, sir?  
 40 VOLPONE [*aside to* VOLTORE] Deny it, sir; forswear it;  
 know it not.  
 VOLTORE Yes, I do know it well, it is my hand;  
 But all that it contains is false.  
 BONARIO Oh, practice!<sup>o</sup>  
 SECOND AVOCATORE What maze is this!  
 FIRST AVOCATORE Is he not guilty,  
 then,  
 Whom you there name the parasite?  
 VOLTORE Grave fathers,  
 No more than his good patron, old Volpone.  
 45 FOURTH AVOCATORE Why, he is dead!  
 VOLTORE Oh, no, my  
 honored fathers.  
 He lives—  
 FIRST AVOCATORE How! Lives?  
 VOLTORE Lives.  
 SECOND AVOCATORE This is subtler  
 yet!  
 THIRD AVOCATORE [*to* VOLTORE] You said he was dead?  
 VOLTORE Never.  
 THIRD AVOCATORE [*to* CORVINO] You  
 said so?  
 CORVINO I  
 heard so.

FOURTH AVOCATORE     Here comes the gentleman; make  
him way.  
[*Enter* MOSCA.]

THIRD AVOCATORE     A stool!

50     FOURTH AVOCATORE [*aside*]     A proper<sup>o</sup> man! And, were  
Volpone dead,  
A fit match for my daughter.

THIRD AVOCATORE     Give him way.

VOLPONE [*aside to* MOSCA]     Mosca, I was almost lost; the  
advocate  
Had betrayed all; but now it is recovered.  
All's o'the hinge<sup>o</sup> again. Say I am living.

55     MOSCA [*aloud*]     What busy<sup>o</sup> knave is this? Most  
reverend fathers,  
I sooner had attended your grave pleasures,  
But that my order for the funeral  
Of my dear patron did require me—

VOLPONE (*aside*)     Mosca!

MOSCA     Whom I intend to bury like a gentleman.

VOLPONE [*aside*]     Ay, quick,<sup>o</sup> and cozen me of all.<sup>3</sup>

60     SECOND AVOCATORE     Still stranger!  
More intricate!

FIRST AVOCATORE     And come about<sup>o</sup> again!

FOURTH AVOCATORE [*aside*]     It is a match; my daughter is  
bestowed.

MOSCA [*aside to* VOLPONE]     Will you gi' me half?

VOLPONE [*aside to* MOSCA]     First, I'll be hanged.

MOSCA [*aside to* VOLPONE]  
I know  
Your voice is good. Cry not so loud.

FIRST AVOCATORE     Demand<sup>o</sup>  
The advocate. [*To* VOLTRE] Sir, did not you affirm

65     Volpone was alive?

VOLPONE     Yes, and he is;

This gent'man told me so. [*Aside to MOSCA*] Thou shalt have half.

MOSCA Whose drunkard is this same? Speak, some that know him;

I never saw his face. (*Aside to VOLPONE*) I cannot now Afford it you so cheap.

VOLPONE [*aside to MOSCA*] No?

FIRST AVOCATORE [*to VOLTORE*] What say you?

70 VOLTORE The officer told me.

VOLPONE I did, grave fathers,  
And will maintain he lives with mine own life,  
And that this creature<sup>o</sup> told me. [*aside*] I was born  
With all good stars my enemies.

MOSCA Most grave fathers,  
75 If such an insolence as this must pass<sup>o</sup>  
Upon me, I am silent. 'Twas not this  
For which you sent, I hope.

SECOND AVOCATORE [*pointing to VOLPONE*] Take him  
away.

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) Mosca!

THIRD AVOCATORE Let him be  
whipped.

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) Wilt  
thou betray me?  
Cozen me?

THIRD AVOCATORE And taught to bear himself  
Toward a person of his<sup>o</sup> rank.

80 FOURTH AVOCATORE Away!  
[*Officers seize VOLPONE.*]

MOSCA I humbly thank Your Fatherhoods.

VOLPONE Soft, soft.  
[*Aside*] Whipped?

And lose all that I have? If I confess,  
It cannot be much more.

FOURTH AVOCATORE [*to MOSCA*] Sir, are you married?

VOLPONE [*aside*] They'll be allied<sup>o</sup> anon; I must be  
resolute.  
The fox shall here uncase.<sup>o</sup> *He puts off his disguise.*  
MOSCA [*aside*] Patron!  
VOLPONE Nay, now  
85 My ruins shall not come alone. Your match  
I'll hinder sure; my substance shall not glue you  
Nor screw you into a family.  
MOSCA [*aside*] Why, patron!  
VOLPONE I am Volpone, and [*pointing to* MOSCA] this  
is my knave;  
[*Pointing to* VOLTORE] This his own knave; [*pointing to*  
CORBACCIO] this, avarice's fool;  
90 [*Pointing to* CORVINO] This, a chimera<sup>o</sup> of wittol, fool,  
and knave;  
And, reverend fathers, since we all can hope  
Naught but a sentence, let's not now despair it.<sup>o</sup>  
You hear me brief.<sup>o</sup>  
CORVINO May it please Your Fatherhoods  
—  
COMMENDATORE<sup>4</sup>  
Silence!  
95 FIRST AVOCATORE The knot is now undone by miracle!  
SECOND AVOCATORE Nothing can be more clear.  
THIRD AVOCATORE Or can  
more prove  
These innocent.  
FIRST AVOCATORE Give 'em their liberty.  
[BONARIO *and* CELIA *are released.*]  
BONARIO Heaven could not long let such gross  
crimes be hid.  
SECOND AVOCATORE If this be held the highway to get  
riches,  
May I be poor!  
THIRD AVOCATORE This's not the gain, but torment.  
100



[VOLPONE *is placed under guard.*]

125 VOLPONE This is called mortifying<sup>6</sup> of a fox.  
FIRST AVOCATORE Thou, Voltore, to take away the  
scandal

Thou hast giv'n all worthy men of thy profession,  
Art banished from their fellowship and our state.<sup>o</sup>

[VOLTORE *is placed under guard.*]

130 Corbaccio—bring him near.—We here possess  
Thy son of all thy state,<sup>o</sup> and confine thee  
To the monastery of San' Spirito,<sup>o</sup>  
Where, since thou knew'st not how to live well here,  
Thou shalt be learned<sup>o</sup> to die well.

CORBACCIO Ha! What said  
he?

COMMENDATORE You shall know anon,<sup>o</sup> sir.

[CORBACCIO *is placed under guard.*]

135 FIRST AVOCATORE Thou, Corvino, shalt  
Be straight embarked from thine own house and  
rowed

Bound about Venice, through the Grand Canal,  
Wearing a cap with fair<sup>o</sup> long ass's ears  
Instead of horns, and so to mount, a paper  
Pinned on thy breast, to the *berlino*<sup>7</sup>—

140 CORVINO Yes,  
And have mine eyes beat out with stinking fish,  
Bruised fruit, and rotten eggs—'Tis well. I'm glad  
I shall not see my shame yet.

FIRST AVOCATORE And to expiate  
Thy wrongs done to thy wife, thou art to send her  
Home to her father with her dowry trebled.<sup>8</sup>  
And these are all your judgments—

145 ALL Honored fathers!  
FIRST AVOCATORE Which may not be revoked. Now  
you begin,  
When crimes are done and past and to be punished,



To think what your crimes are.—Away with them!

[MOSCA, VOLPONE, VOLTORE, CORBACCIO, *and* CORVINO  
*retire to the back of the stage, guarded.*]<sup>9</sup>

Let all that see these vices thus rewarded

150 Take heart,<sup>o</sup> and love to study 'em. Mischiefs feed  
Like beasts, till they be fat, and then they bleed.

[*The* AVOCATORI *step back.*]

[VOLPONE *comes forward.*]

VOLPONE The seasoning of a play is the applause

Now, though the fox be punished by the laws,

He yet doth hope there is no suff'ring due

155 Nor any fact<sup>o</sup> which he hath done 'gainst you.  
If there be, censure him; here he, doubtful,<sup>o</sup> stands.

If not, fare jovially, and clap your hands.

[*Exeunt.*]

performed 1606 **Endnotes**

published 1616

- Note 1: The details of Voltore's dispossession in the following lines resemble the fake exorcisms described in Samuel Harsnett's lively exposé, *A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practices of John Darrell* (1599). "Stop your wind": hold your breath.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Seller of poultry and small game.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Volpone sees that Mosca's pious pretense of burying the "dead" Volpone will mean an end to all of Volpone's hopes; he'll be cheated out of everything.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not Volpone, of course, but one of the genuine Commendatori. They are probably the officers who strip Mosca at line 103.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Hospital of the Incurables was founded in Venice in 1522 to care for people terminally ill with syphilis.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: (1) Hanging of meat to make it tender; (2) disciplining spiritually; (3) killing. (Volpone's sentence is almost certain to

- bring about his death.)[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pillory. Versions of such shaming punishments were commonly imposed for sexual and marital infractions. The offender typically had to wear a placard specifying his crimes; hence the paper pinned on Corvino's breast.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8:  
The judges grant Celia "separation from bed and board." Such legal separations could be permitted to the innocent party in a case of adultery or, as here, to a victim of gross spousal abuse. Because legal separation entailed the finding of serious fault, the guilty spouse could also, as here, be forced to pay financial damages. Legal separation did not bring with it, however, the right of remarriage for either party.  
[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Alternatively, the prisoners, and later the Avocatori and the others, could exit, and Volpone could return to speak the epilogue. The advantage of the staging preferred here is that almost all the players are onstage to receive the audience's applause.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *Bonario*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *how loyal you were*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *he's as alive as I am*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *twitching spasmodically*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unforeseen event*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Voltore's written statement*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deception*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *handsome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *running smoothly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *troublesome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *alive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reversing direction*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *question*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mosca*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be permitted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Mosca's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *linked by marriage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *monstrous combination* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be disappointed (ironic)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that's all I have to say*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleading* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vile, obscene*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *garb*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *curses on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bailiffs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the same sentence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Venice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *estate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Holy Spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taught*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soon enough*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handsome; clearly visible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take them to heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crime*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apprehensive*[Return to reference](#) °

**The Masque of Blackness** When James I and Queen Anna ascended the English throne in 1603, they presided over the development of the court masque as a major form of praise, entertainment, and political idealization, celebrating the Stuart court as the embodiment of perfection. *The Masque of Blackness* established Jonson and Inigo Jones as the chief makers of court masques for more than two decades. Jonson provided the words and Jones the spectacle; over the years they developed an intense rivalry. For the first decade, the queen took an active role in planning and performing in court masques, which were usually performed only once—most often on Twelfth Night, as in this case, or sometimes for a wedding or other special occasion. *The Masque of Blackness* also began the tradition of prodigiously expensive masques: the queen's bill for it came to around £5000 (more than five hundred times what the young Jonson would have made in a year as an apprentice bricklayer). Masques were customarily followed by elaborate feasts and all-night dancing known as "the revels." On this occasion, as on many that followed, the evening was chaotic. The banquet table was overturned by the crush of diners before the meal began; guests were beaten by the palace guards; light-fingered revelers stole jewels, chains, and purses; and sexual liaisons went on in dark corners.

Court masques differed from performances in the public theater in almost every respect, particularly in their focus on dance. Masques were multimedia events combining song, speech, richly ornamented costumes and masks, shifting scene panels depicting elaborate architecture and landscapes, and intricate machines in which gods and goddesses descended from the heavens. They were presented to King James, who occupied the Chair of State, which was placed in the ideal viewing position. While the speaking parts were taken by professionals, the dancers were members of the court, including—to the chagrin of some godly Protestants—women. In the reign of Charles I, William Prynne lost his ears for attacking

masques and comparing the women who danced in them (including the queen) to whores.

On the surface, *The Masque of Blackness* asserts the cultural superiority of the English over non-European peoples and celebrates the power of James, the “Sun King” of Britain, who can turn black skin to white. But as in other masques commissioned by the queen, there is also a subversive element in *The Masque of Blackness*. Jonson tells us it was “her Majesty’s will” that she and her court ladies appear as beautiful black African women: the daughters of Niger. (Two of Inigo Jones’s designs for their costumes are included in the color insert in this volume.) The power of the supposed Sun King is further undercut by Niger’s lengthy praise of black beauty and by the fact that the promised transformation of the ladies’ skin is never seen. (They have, however, become white in the sequel, *The Masque of Beauty*, performed three years later.) One contemporary response to the masque gives a sense of its racially charged nature. Instead of wearing “vizards,” Sir Dudley Carleton wrote from the court, the ladies’ “faces and arms, up to the elbows, were painted black, which was disguise sufficient, for they were hard to be known; but it became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly sight than a troop of lean-cheeked Moors.” Here we see racist ideas both about the intimate relationship between Petrarchan ideals of beauty (“red and white”) and white skin, and about racial phenotypes. Queen Anna danced in six masques, but the masques of *Blackness* and *Beauty* stand out for their impact on the imaginations of later writers, including John Smith, who finds echoes of the masques in Algonquin Virginia, and Richard Ligon, who finds them in a mixed-race woman in the Cape Verde islands.

In many later Jacobean masques, the glorification of the monarch seems less conflicted. Jonson developed a kind of prologue known as the antimasque, in which wicked, disruptive, or rustic characters played by professional actors invade the court, only to be banished by aristocratic masquers whose dancing transforms the court into a golden world. The aristocrats enact the mixture of the

ideal and real as they unmask, revealing themselves as courtiers, and proceed to dance the revels with the other members of the court. Caroline court masques, in which Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria regularly danced, tended to be longer, more elaborate, more dialogic, more spectacular, and even more hyperbolic. But early to late, many masques contain features that subtly resist the politics of Stuart absolutism.

# The Masque of Blackness

## *The Queen's Masques: the first Of Blackness*

### ***Personated at the Court at Whitehall, on the Twelfth Night, 1605.***

Pliny, Solinus, Ptolemy, and of late Leo the African,<sup>1</sup> remember unto us a river in Ethiopia famous by the name of Niger,<sup>2</sup> of which the people were called *Nigritae*, now Negroes, and are the blackest nation of the world. This river taketh spring out of a certain lake,<sup>3</sup> eastward, and after a long race, falleth into the western ocean. Hence (because it was her Majesty's will to have them blackamoors at first) the invention was derived by me, and presented thus.

*First, for the scene, was drawn a Landscape<sup>4</sup> consisting of small woods, and here and there a void place filled with huntings; which falling, an artificial sea was seen to shoot forth, as if it flowed to the land, raised with waves which seemed to move, and in some places the billow to break,<sup>5</sup> as imitating that orderly disorder, which is common in nature. In front of this sea were placed six tritons,<sup>6</sup> in moving and sprightly actions; their upper parts human, save that their hairs were blue, as partaking of the sea-color; their desinent<sup>7</sup> parts fish, mounted above their heads, and all varied in disposition. From their backs were borne out certain light pieces of taffeta, as if carried by the wind, and their music made out of wreathed shells. Behind these, a pair of sea-maids, for song, were as conspicuously seated; between which two great sea-horses, as big as the life, put forth themselves; the one mounting aloft, and writhing his head from the other, which seemed to sink forwards; so intended for variation, and that the figure behind might come off better. Upon their backs Oceanus<sup>8</sup> and Niger were advanced.*

*Oceanus, presented in a human form, the color of his flesh blue, and shadowed with a robe of sea green; his head grey and horned, as he is described by the ancients; his beard of the like mixed color. He was garlanded with algae or sea-grass, and in his hand a trident.*

*Niger, in form and color of an Ethiop, his hair and rare beard curled, shadowed with a blue and bright mantle; his front, neck, and wrists adorned with pearl; and crowned with an artificial wreath of cane and paper-rush.<sup>9</sup>*

*These induced the masquers, which were twelve nymphs, negroes, and the daughters of Niger, attended by so many of the Oceaniae,<sup>1</sup> which were their light-bearers.*

*The masquers were placed in a great concave shell, like mother of pearl, curiously made to move on those waters, and rise with the billow; the top thereof was stuck with a chevron of lights which, indented to the proportion of the shell, struck a glorious beam upon them as they were seated one above another; so that they were all seen, but in an extravagant<sup>2</sup> order.*

*On sides of the shell did swim six huge sea-monsters, varied in their shapes and dispositions, bearing on their backs the twelve torch-bearers, who were planted there in several greces,<sup>3</sup> so as the backs of some were seen, some in purple<sup>4</sup> (or side), others in face, and all having their lights burning out of whelks or murex shells.<sup>5</sup>*

*The attire of the masquers was alike in all, without difference; the colors azure and silver, their hair thick, and curled upright in tresses, like pyramids, but returned on the top with a scroll and antique dressing of feathers, and jewels interlaced with ropes of pearl. And for the front, ear, neck and wrists, the ornament was of the most choice and orient pearl, best setting off from the black.*

*For the light-bearers, sea-green, waved about the skirts with gold and silver; their hair loose and flowing, garlanded with sea-grass, and that stuck with branches of coral.*

*These thus presented, the scene behind seemed a vast sea (and united with this that flowed forth)<sup>6</sup> from the termination or horizon of which (being the level of the state,<sup>7</sup> which was placed in the upper end of the hall) was drawn, by the lines of perspective, the whole work shooting downwards from the eye; which decorum made it more conspicuous, and caught the eye afar off with a wandering beauty. To which was added an obscure and cloudy night piece,<sup>8</sup> that made the whole set off. So much for the bodily part, which was of Master Inigo Jones his design and act.*

*By this, one of the tritons, with the two sea-maids, began to sing to the others loud music, their voices being a tenor and two trebles.*

#### **SONG**

Sound, sound aloud  
The welcome of the orient flood  
Into the west;



5 Fair Niger, son to great Oceanus,  
Now honored thus  
With all his beauteous race,  
Who though but black in face,  
Yet are they bright,  
And full of life and light,  
10 To prove that beauty best  
Which not the color, but the feature  
Assures unto the creature.

OCEANUS Be silent, now the ceremony's done,  
And Niger, say, how comes it, lovely son,  
That thou, the Ethiop's river, so far east,  
15 Art seen to fall into th'extremest west  
Of me, the king of floods, Oceanus,  
And in mine empire's heart salute me thus?  
My ceaseless current now amazed stands  
To see thy labor through so many lands  
20 Mix thy fresh billow with my brackish stream,  
And in thy sweetness, stretch thy diadem<sup>o</sup>  
To these far distant and unequalled skies,  
This squared circle of celestial bodies.<sup>9</sup>

NIGER Divine Oceanus, 'tis not strange at all  
25 That, since the immortal souls of creatures mortal  
Mix with their bodies, yet reserve for ever  
A power of separation, I should sever  
My fresh streams from thy brackish, like things fixed,  
Though with thy powerful saltness thus far mixed.  
30 'Virtue though chained to earth, will still live free;  
And hell itself must yield to industry.<sup>1</sup>

OCEANUS But what's the end of thy Herculean labors,  
Extended to these calm and blessed shores?

NIGER To do a kind and careful father's part,  
35 In satisfying every pensive heart  
Of these my daughters, my most loved birth;  
Who, though they were the first formed dames of earth,  
And in whose sparkling and refulgent<sup>o</sup> eyes  
The glorious sun did still delight to rise,  
40 Though he (the best judge, and most formal cause<sup>2</sup>  
Of all dames' beauties) in their firm hues<sup>o</sup> draws

Signs of his fervent'st love, and thereby shows  
That in their black the perfect'st beauty grows,  
Since the fixed color of their curlèd hair  
45 (Which is the highest grace of dames most fair)  
No cares, no age can change, or there display  
The fearful tincture<sup>o</sup> of abhorrèd grey,  
Since Death herself (herself being pale and blue)  
Can never alter their most faithful hue;  
50 All which are arguments to prove how far  
Their beauties conquer in great beauty's war;  
And more, how near divinity they be,  
That stand from passion or decay so free.  
Yet, since the fabulous voices of some few  
55 Poor brain-sick men, styled poets<sup>3</sup> here with you,  
Have, with such envy of their graces, sung  
The painted beauties other empires sprung,  
Letting their loose and wingèd fictions fly  
To infect all climates, yea, our purity;  
60 As of one Phaëton, that fired the world,<sup>4</sup>  
And that before his heedless flames were hurled  
About the globe, the Ethiops were as fair  
As other dames, now black with black despair,  
And in respect of their complexions changed,  
65 Are eachwhere, since, for luckless creatures ranged.  
Which when my daughters heard (as women are  
Most jealous of their beauties) fear and care  
Possessed them whole; yea, and believing them,<sup>5</sup>  
They wept such ceaseless tears into my stream  
70 That it hath thus far overflowed his shore  
To seek them patience; who have since e'ermore  
As the sun riseth, charged his burning throne  
With volleys of revilings, 'cause he shone  
On their scorched cheeks with such intemperate fires,  
75 And other dames made queens of all desires.  
To frustrate which strange error oft I sought,  
Though most in vain against a settled thought  
As women's are, till they confirmed at length  
By miracle what I with so much strength  
80 Of argument resisted; else they feigned:

For in the lake where their first spring they gained,  
 As they sat cooling their soft limbs one night,  
 Appeared a face all circumfused with light;  
 (And sure they saw't, for Ethiops never dream)<sup>6</sup>  
 85 Wherein they might decipher through the stream  
 These words:  
 That they a land must forthwith seek,  
 Whose termination (of the Greek)  
 Sounds *-tania*; where bright Sol, that heat  
 90 Their bloods, doth never rise or set,  
 But in his journey passeth by,  
 And leaves that climate of the sky  
 To comfort of a greater light,<sup>7</sup>  
 Who forms all beauty with his sight.  
 95 In search of this have we three pryncedoms past  
 That speak out *-tania* in their accents last:  
 Black Mauritania<sup>8</sup> first, and secondly  
 Swarth<sup>9</sup> Lusitania,<sup>9</sup> next we did descry<sup>0</sup>  
 Rich Aquitania,<sup>1</sup> and yet cannot find  
 100 The place unto these longing nymphs designed.<sup>0</sup>  
 Instruct and aid me, great Oceanus:  
 What land is this that now appears to us?  
 OCEANUS This land, that lifts into the temperate air  
 His snowy cliff, is Albion the fair,  
 105 So called of Neptune's son, who ruleth here;<sup>2</sup>  
 For whose dear guard, myself four thousand year,  
 Since old Deucalion's<sup>3</sup> days, have walked the round  
 About his empire, proud to see him crowned  
 Above my waves.

*At this, the moon was discovered in the upper part of the house, triumphant in a silver throne, made in figure of a pyramis.<sup>4</sup> Her garments white and silver, the dressing of her head antique, and crowned with a luminary or sphere of light, which striking on the clouds, and heightened with silver, reflected as natural clouds do by the splendor of the moon. The heaven about her was vaulted with blue silk, and set with stars of silver which had in them their several lights burning. The sudden sight of which made Niger to interrupt Oceanus with this present passion.<sup>5</sup>*

NIGER —O see, our silver star!  
 110 Whose pure auspicious light greets us thus far!  
 Great Æthiopia, goddess of our shore,<sup>6</sup>  
 Since with particular worship we adore  
 Thy general brightness, let particular grace  
 Shine on my zealous daughters. Show the place  
 115 Which long their longings urged their eyes to see.  
 Beautify them, which long have deified thee.  
 AETHIOPIA Niger, be glad; resume thy native cheer.  
 Thy daughters' labors have their period<sup>o</sup> here,  
 And so thy errors. I was that bright face  
 120 Reflected by the lake, in which thy race  
 Read mystic<sup>o</sup> lines (which skill Pythagoras<sup>7</sup>  
 First taught to men by a reverberate<sup>o</sup> glass).  
 This blessed isle doth with that *-tania* end  
 Which there they saw inscribed, and shall extend  
 125 Wished satisfaction to their best desires.  
 Britannia, which the triple world admires,<sup>8</sup>  
 This isle hath now recovered for her name;  
 Where reign those beauties that with so much fame  
 The sacred Muses' sons<sup>o</sup> have honorèd,  
 130 And from bright Hesperus to Eos spread.<sup>9</sup>  
 With that great name, Britannia, this blessed isle  
 Hath won her ancient dignity and style,  
*A world divided from the world,*<sup>1</sup> and tried  
 The abstract of it in his general pride.  
 135 For were the world, with all his wealth, a ring,  
 Britannia (whose new name makes all tongues sing)  
 Might be a diamond worthy to enchase<sup>o</sup> it,  
 Ruled by a sun, that to this height doth grace it.  
 Whose beams shine day and night, and are of force  
 140 To blanch<sup>o</sup> an Ethiop and revive a corpse.<sup>2</sup>  
 His light sciential<sup>o</sup> is and (past mere nature)  
 Can salve<sup>o</sup> the rude defects of every creature.  
 Call forth thy honored daughters, then,  
 And let them 'fore the Britain men  
 145 Indent the land with those pure traces<sup>3</sup>  
 They flow with in their native graces.  
 Invite them boldly to the shore,

Their beauties shall be scorched no more;  
 This sun is temperate, and refines  
 All things on which his radiance shines.

*Here the tritons sounded, and they danced on shore, every couple as they advanced severally presenting their fans,<sup>4</sup> in one of which were inscribed their mixed names, in the other a mute hieroglyphic, expressing their mixed qualities.<sup>5</sup> Which manner of symbol I rather chose than imprecise, as well for strangeness, as relishing of antiquity, and more applying to that original doctrine of sculpture which the Egyptians are said first to have brought from the Ethiopians.*

	<i>The Names<sup>6</sup></i>	<i>The Symbols</i>
<i>The Queen</i>	<i>Euphoris</i>	<i>A golden tree, laden with fruit</i>
<i>Countess of Bedford</i>	<i>Aglaia</i>	
<i>Lady Herbert</i>	<i>Diaphane</i>	<i>The figure icosahedron<sup>7</sup> of cryst</i>
<i>Countess of Derby</i>	<i>Eucampse</i>	
<i>Lady Rich</i>	<i>Ocyte</i>	<i>A pair of naked feet in a river</i>
<i>Countess of Suffolk</i>	<i>Kathare</i>	
<i>Lady Bevill</i>	<i>Notis</i>	<i>The salamander simple</i>
<i>Lady Effingham</i>	<i>Psychrote</i>	
<i>Lady Elizabeth Howard</i>	<i>Glycyte</i>	<i>A cloud full of rain dropping</i>
<i>Lady Susan Vere</i>	<i>Malacia</i>	
<i>Lady Wroth</i>	<i>Baryte</i>	<i>An urn, sphered with wine</i>
<i>Lady Walsingham</i>	<i>Periphere</i>	

The names of the Oceaniae were

<i>Doris</i>	<i>Cydippe</i>	<i>Beroe</i>	<i>Ianthe</i>
<i>Petraea</i>	<i>Glauce</i>	<i>Acaste</i>	<i>Lycoris</i>
<i>Ocyrhoe</i>	<i>Tyche</i>	<i>Clytia</i>	<i>Plexaure</i>

*Their own single dance ended, as they were about to make choice of their men, one from the sea was heard to call 'em with this charm,<sup>8</sup> sung by a tenor voice.*

### SONG

Come away, come away,

155 We grow jealous of your stay.  
If you do not stop your ear,  
We shall have more cause to fear  
Sirens of the land, than they  
To doubt the sirens of the sea.

*Here they danced with their men several measures and corantos. All which ended, they were again accited<sup>9</sup> to sea, with a song of two trebles, whose cadences were iterated by a double echo from several parts of the land.*

### SONG

160 Daughters of the subtle flood,  
Do not let earth longer entertain you;  
1st ECHO Let earth longer entertain you  
2nd ECHO Longer entertain you

165 'Tis to them enough of good  
That you give this little hope to gain you.  
1st ECHO Give this little hope to gain you.  
2nd ECHO Little hope to gain you.

170 If they love  
You shall quickly see;  
For when to flight you move,  
They'll follow you, the more you flee.  
1st ECHO Follow you, the more you flee.  
2nd ECHO The more you flee.

175 If not, impute<sup>o</sup> it each to other's matter;  
They are but earth—  
1st ECHO But earth,  
2nd ECHO Earth—  
And what you vowed was water.  
1st ECHO And what you vowed was water  
2nd ECHO You vowed was water.

AETHIOPIA Enough, bright nymphs, the night grows old,  
And we are grieved we cannot hold

180 You longer light; but comfort take.  
 Your father only to the lake  
 Shall make return; yourselves, with feasts,  
 Must here remain the Ocean's guests.  
 Nor shall this veil the sun hath cast  
 185 Above your blood more summers last.  
 For which you shall observe these rites:  
 Thirteen times thrice, on thirteen nights  
 (So often as I fill my sphere  
 With glorious light, throughout the year)  
 190 You shall, when all things else do sleep  
 Save your chaste thoughts, with reverence steep  
 Your bodies in that purer brine  
 And wholesome dew, called rosmarine;<sup>o</sup>  
 Then with that soft and gentler foam,  
 195 Of which the ocean yet yields some,  
 Whereof bright Venus, beauty's queen,  
 Is said to have begotten been,  
 You shall your gentler limbs o'er-lave.<sup>o</sup>  
 And for your pains, perfection have.  
 200 So that, this night, the year gone round,<sup>1</sup>  
 You do again salute this ground;  
 And in the beams of yond bright sun  
 Your faces dry, and all is done.

*At which, in a dance they returned to the sea, where they took their shell,  
and with this full song, went out.*

#### SONG

205 Now Dian,<sup>o</sup> with her burning face,  
 Declines apace:  
 By which our waters know  
 To ebb, that late did flow.  
 Back seas, back nymphs, but with a forward grace  
 Keep still your reverence to the place,  
 210 And shout with joy of favor you have won,  
 In sight of Albion, Neptune's son.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This long introductory note is Jonson's. Leo wrote the *Description of Africa* (1526); the others are classical authorities on geography.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Some, though not Pliny, identified it as the Niger, which means black in Latin.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lake Chad.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Painted on the front curtain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Effects created by a series of painted cloths raised and lowered by a machine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sea gods.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Back.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Atlantic Ocean, father of the river Niger. Both ride on the backs of hippopotamuses ("sea-horses.")[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The papyrus plant.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sea nymphs, daughters of Oceanus and Tethys.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Moving about.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Steps.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Profile.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Whelks and murex are sea snails.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The painted backdrop and the wave machine.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The king's throne, placed at the ideal viewing position, the vanishing point of the perspective.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The upper part of the scenery, through which the moon later descends.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The squared circle is an image of perfection, a hyperbolic compliment to Britain.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alludes to Horace, *Odes* I.3.36.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Aristotle's formal cause produces the form or essence of anything.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: English Petrarchan poets, whose ideal of beauty involves fair skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. See, for example, the sonnets of Sidney, Spenser, and Wroth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Son of Apollo, the sun god, whose ill-fated attempt to drive the sun's chariot scorched the earth and reportedly turned the skin of the daughters of Niger black.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: The poets (line 56).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Jonson cites *The Natural History* of Pliny the Elder for this saying.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The allusion is to James, the “Sun King” of Britain.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Land of the Moors in North Africa.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Portugal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Southwest France.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: King James, regularly so styled because of Britain’s close relationship to the sea. Albion (previous line): ancient name for England (from Latin: *albus*, white). The “snowy cliff” refers to the cliffs of Dover, whose chalk content makes them seem white.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Greek analogue to Noah, as the survivor of a great flood.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pyramid.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Instant outburst.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Jonson identifies her as the moon, worshipped by the Ethiopians.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mystical Greek philosopher, said to have taught men how to read writing on the moon.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The triple realms of heaven, earth, and underworld, admiring the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Wales, united under James. In 1604, James reintroduced the name “Britain” to refer to the united island.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hesperus is the evening star, and Eos the rising sun/dawn, so west and east, respectively.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Britain as a separate world, divided from Europe by the channel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Both are proverbial impossibilities. On the proverb “to blanch an Ethiopie [white],” see the illustration on p. 1213 of this volume.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Imprint the land with their dancing feet. This is the call for the main masque dances.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The women advanced in pairs holding fans to the audience: on one appeared both women’s names; on the other, an allegorical symbol of their conjoined qualities.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
A “hieroglyph” is a character used in pictorial writing, standing for the object it depicts or for a syllable or sound; such writing is best known

from ancient Egyptian monuments and records. An “imprese” was an emblem or device, often accompanied by a motto. The “hieroglyphic” of the fruit-laden tree carried by Queen Anna and the Countess of Bedford alluded to the queen’s fertility. (She was pregnant during the performance.)

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6:

The meaning of the paired women’s names and symbols, in order: abundance and splendor, fertility symbol; transparency and flexibility, a twenty-sided water symbol; swiftness and spotlessness, symbol of purity; moisture and coldness, symbol, the salamander who lives in fire unharmed; sweetness and delicacy, symbol of education; weight and revolution, symbol, the earth’s globe. The women are members of Queen Anna’s court. Donne and Jonson wrote poems about Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford; Lady Mary Wroth wrote poems and a romance.

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A solid formed by twenty plane faces.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chanting or recitation of a verse supposed to possess occult influence. See also *The Tempest* 5.1.31.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Summoned.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Jonson had probably already planned *The Masque of Beauty*, in which the women’s black skin was turned white, but intervening masques prevented its production until 1608.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *realm, rule*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *radiant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fixed colors*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tinge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *black*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *catch sight of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *appointed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *end, completion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spiritual, allegorical*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reflecting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *singers and poets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ornament*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *whiten*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knowledgeable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *redeem, overcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attribute*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea spray*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wash*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the moon*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***FROM EPIGRAMS***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
Epigrams are commonly thought of as brief, witty, incisive poems of personal invective, often with a surprise turn at the end. But Jonson uses the word in a more liberal sense. His "Epigrams," a separate section in his collected *Works* of 1616, include not only sharp, satiric poems but also many complimentary ones to friends and patrons, as well as memorial epitaphs and a verse letter, "Inviting a Friend to Supper."  
[Return to reference 1](#)

## To My Book

It will be looked for, book, when some but see  
Thy title, *Epigrams*, and named of me,  
Thou should'st be bold, licentious, full of gall,  
Wormwood<sup>o</sup> and sulphur, sharp and toothed<sup>2</sup>  
withal,  
5 Become a petulant thing, hurl ink and wit  
As madmen stones, not caring whom they hit.  
Deceive their malice who could wish it so,  
And by thy wiser temper let men know  
Thou art not covetous of least self-fame  
10 Made from the hazard of another's shame<sup>3</sup>—  
Much less with lewd, profane, and beastly phrase  
To catch the world's loose laughter or vain gaze.  
He that departs<sup>o</sup> with his own honesty  
For vulgar praise, doth it too dearly buy.

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The distinction between toothed (biting) and toothless (general) satires was a commonplace.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here, as often elsewhere, Jonson echoes the greatest Roman epigrammatist, Martial.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *bitter-tasting plant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *parts*[Return to reference °](#)

# On Something, That Walks Somewhere

At court I met it, in clothes brave<sup>o</sup> enough  
To be a courtier, and looks grave enough  
To seem a statesman: as I near it came,  
It made me a great face. I asked the name.  
5 "A lord," it cried, "buried in flesh and blood,  
And such from whom let no man hope least good,  
For I will do none; and as little ill,  
For I will dare none." Good lord, walk dead still.  
1616

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *fine*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## To Fine Lady Would-Be<sup>1</sup>

Fine madam Would-Be,<sup>2</sup> wherefore should you fear,  
That love to make so well, a child to bear?  
The world reputes<sup>o</sup> you barren: but I know  
Your 'pothecary,<sup>o</sup> and his drug says no.  
Is it the pain affrights? That's soon forgot.  
5 Or your complexion's loss? you have a pot<sup>o</sup>  
That can restore that. Will it hurt your feature?<sup>o</sup>  
To make amends, you are thought a wholesome  
creature.  
What should the cause be? Oh, you live at court;  
And there's both loss of time, and loss of sport,  
10 In a great belly: Write then on thy womb,  
"Of the not born, yet buried, here's the tomb."

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem, epigram LXII, reads like a sonnet of rhyming couplets, yet falls two lines short of the fourteen-line sonnet form. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
Jonson's play *Volpone* features a character by the same name, Fine Madame [Lady] Would-be. Although she is said by her husband to have traveled to Venice "to observe / To quote, to learn the language, and so forth" (2.1.12–13), his interlocutor, Peregrine, reveals that she "Lies here, in Venice, for intelligence / Of tires, and fashions, and behavior / Among the courtesans" (2.1.26–29). Upon learning of Volpone's fabricated death, she realizes that she has not been made an heir and resolves to become a courtesan.

[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *considers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *druggist, chemist*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *makeup*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *good shape, comeliness*[Return to reference °](#)



# On My First Daughter<sup>1</sup>

Here lies, to each her parents' ruth,<sup>o</sup>  
Mary, the daughter of their youth;  
Yet all heaven's gifts being heaven's due,  
It makes the father less to rue.<sup>o</sup>  
5 At six months' end she parted hence  
With safety of her innocence;  
Whose soul heaven's queen,<sup>o</sup> whose name she  
bears,  
In comfort of her mother's tears,  
Hath placed amongst her virgin-train:  
10 Where, while that severed doth remain,  
This grave partakes the fleshly birth;<sup>o</sup>  
Which cover lightly, gentle earth!<sup>2</sup>

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Probably written in the late 1590s, in Jonson's Roman Catholic period (ca. 1598–1610).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A common sentiment in Latin epitaphs.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *grief*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *regret*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Mary*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the body*[Return to reference °](#)

# On My First Son

Farewell, thou child of my right hand,<sup>1</sup> and joy;  
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy.  
Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,  
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.  
5 O could I lose all father now! For why  
Will man lament the state he should envy,  
To have so soon 'scaped world's and flesh's rage,  
And, if no other misery, yet age?  
Rest in soft peace, and asked, say, "Here doth lie  
10 Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry."<sup>2</sup>  
For whose sake henceforth all his vows be such  
As what he loves may never like too much.<sup>3</sup>

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A literal translation of the Hebrew name "Benjamin," which implies the meaning "dexterous" or "fortunate." The boy was born in 1596 and died on his birthday in 1603.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Poet and father are both "makers," Jonson's favorite term for the poet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The obscure grammar of the last lines allows for various readings; "like" may carry the sense of "please."[Return to reference 3](#)

## To Lucy, Countess of Bedford, with Mr. Donne's Satires<sup>1</sup>

Lucy, you brightness<sup>2</sup> of our sphere, who are  
Life of the Muses' day, their morning star!  
If works, not th' authors, their own grace should  
look,<sup>o</sup>  
Whose poems would not wish to be your book?  
But these, desired by you, the maker's ends  
5 Crown with their own. Rare poems ask rare  
friends.  
Yet satires, since the most of mankind be  
Their unavowed<sup>o</sup> subject, fewest see:  
For none e'er took that pleasure in sin's sense,<sup>o</sup>  
But, when they heard it taxed, took more offense.  
10 They then that, living where the matter is bred,<sup>3</sup>  
Dare for these poems yet both ask and read  
And like them too, must needfully, though few,  
Be of the best: and 'mongst those, best are you;  
Lucy, you brightness of our sphere, who are  
15 The Muses' evening, as their morning star.<sup>4</sup>

1616

### Endnotes

- Note 1: With this poem, Jonson offered a manuscript collection of Donne's satires (see pp. 905–08), such as commonly passed from hand to hand in court circles. Bedford was a well-known literary patron in the period.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lucy's name derives from the Latin *lux*, meaning "light."[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: That is, at court.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The planet Venus is called Lucifer (“light-bearing”) when it appears before sunrise, Hesperus when it appears after sunset.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *have regard to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inevitable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experience*[Return to reference](#) °

## To Sir Thomas Roe<sup>1</sup>

Thou hast begun well, Roe, which stand<sup>o</sup> well too,  
And I know nothing more thou hast to do.  
He that is round<sup>o</sup> within himself, and straight,  
Need seek no other strength, no other height;  
5 Fortune upon him breaks herself, if ill,  
And what should hurt his virtue makes it still.<sup>o</sup>  
That thou at once, then, nobly may'st defend  
With thine own course the judgment of thy friend,  
Be always to thy gathered self the same,  
10 And study conscience, more than thou wouldst fame.  
Though both be good, the latter yet is worst,  
And ever is ill got without the first.

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Knighted in 1605, Roe was sent as ambassador to the Great Mogul—the ruler of the Muslim Mughal empire in South Asia—in 1614. His collection of coins and of Greek and Eastern manuscripts is in the Bodleian Library.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *continue*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *honest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *constant*[Return to reference °](#)

## Inviting a Friend to Supper

Tonight, grave sir, both my poor house and I  
Do equally desire your company:  
Not that we think us worthy such a guest,  
But that your worth will dignify our feast  
5 With those that come; whose grace may make that  
seem  
Something, which else could hope for no esteem.  
It is the fair acceptance, sir, creates  
The entertainment perfect: not the cates.<sup>o</sup>  
Yet shall you have, to rectify your palate,  
10 An olive, capers, or some better salad  
Ushering the mutton; with a short-legged hen,  
If we can get her, full of eggs, and then  
Lemons and wine for sauce; to<sup>o</sup> these, a coney<sup>o</sup>  
Is not to be despaired of for our money;  
15 And though fowl now be scarce, yet there are clerks,  
<sup>o</sup>  
The sky not falling, think we may have larks.  
I'll tell you of more, and lie, so you will come:  
Of partridge, pheasant, woodcock, of which some  
May yet be there; and godwit if we can,  
20 Knot, rail, and ruff, too.<sup>1</sup> Howsoe'er, my man<sup>o</sup>  
Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,  
Livy, or of some better book to us,  
Of which we'll speak our minds amidst our meat;<sup>o</sup>  
And I'll profess<sup>o</sup> no verses to repeat:  
25 To this,<sup>o</sup> if aught appear which I not know of,  
That will the pastry, not my paper, show of.<sup>2</sup>  
Digestive cheese and fruit there sure will be;  
But that which most doth take my muse and me  
Is a pure cup of rich canary wine,

30 Which is the Mermaid's now, but shall be mine;  
Of which, had Horace or Anacreon<sup>3</sup> tasted,  
Their lives, as do their lines, till now had lasted.  
Tobacco, nectar, or the Thespian spring  
Are all but Luther's beer to this I sing.<sup>4</sup>  
35 Of this we will sup free but moderately,  
And we will have no Pooley or Parrot<sup>5</sup> by;  
Nor shall our cups make any guilty men,  
But at our parting we will be as when  
We innocently met. No simple word  
40 That shall be uttered at our mirthful board  
Shall make us sad next morning, or affright  
The liberty that we'll enjoy tonight.

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: All these are edible birds.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Cooks sometimes lined pans with paper to keep pastry from sticking. The writing sometimes rubbed off on the crust.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Horace and Anacreon (one in Latin, the other in Greek) wrote many poems in praise of wine. "Mermaid": the Mermaid tavern was a favorite haunt of the poets; sweet wine from the Canary Islands was popular in England.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tobacco was an expensive New World novelty in Jonson's time. Nectar is the drink of the gods. The Thespian spring on Mount Helicon is a legendary source of poetic inspiration. Compared with canary wine, these intoxicants are no better than inferior German beer. (The Protestant reformer Martin Luther was German.)[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Robert Poley and (Henry?) Parrot were government spies. (A parrot was also a proverbial speaker.) As a Roman Catholic convert, Jonson had reason to be wary of undercover agents.[Return to reference 5](#)

# Notes

- °: *food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *besides* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rabbit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scholars*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food (of any kind)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on this point*[Return to reference](#) °



## On Gut

Gut eats all day, and lechers all the night,  
So all his meat he tasteth over twice;  
And striving so to double his delight,  
He makes himself a thoroughfare of vice.  
Thus in his belly can he change a sin:  
5 Lust it comes out, that gluttony went in.

1616

## ***FROM THE FOREST***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: In the 1616 *Works*, Jonson grouped some of his nonepigrammatic poems under the heading “The Forest,” a translation of the term *Sylvae*, meaning a poetic miscellany. “To Penshurst” and the two following poems are from that group.[Return to reference 1](#)

## To Penshurst<sup>2</sup>

Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show,  
Of touch<sup>3</sup> or marble; nor canst boast a row  
Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold;  
Thou hast no lantern<sup>o</sup> whereof tales are told,  
Or stair, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile,<sup>o</sup>  
5 And, these grudged at,<sup>4</sup> art revered the while.  
Thou joy'st in better marks, of soil, of air,  
Of wood, of water; therein thou art fair.  
Thou hast thy walks for health, as well as sport;  
Thy mount, to which the dryads<sup>o</sup> do resort,  
10 Where Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have  
made,  
Beneath the broad beech and the chestnut shade;  
That taller tree, which of a nut was set  
At his great birth where all the Muses met.<sup>5</sup>  
There in the writhèd bark are cut the names  
15 Of many a sylvan,<sup>o</sup> taken with his flames;  
And thence the ruddy satyrs oft provoke  
The lighter fauns<sup>6</sup> to reach thy Lady's Oak.<sup>7</sup>  
Thy copse<sup>o</sup> too, named of Gamage<sup>8</sup> thou hast there,  
That never fails to serve thee seasoned deer  
20 When thou wouldst feast or exercise thy friends.  
The lower land, that to the river bends,  
Thy sheep, thy bullocks, kine,<sup>o</sup> and calves do feed;  
The middle grounds thy mares and horses breed.  
Each bank doth yield thee conies;<sup>o</sup> and the tops,<sup>o</sup>  
25 Fertile of wood, Ashore and Sidney's copse,  
To crown thy open table, doth provide  
The purpled pheasant with the speckled side;  
The painted partridge lies in every field,  
And for thy mess<sup>o</sup> is willing to be killed.  
30 And if the high-swollen Medway<sup>9</sup> fail thy dish,

Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish:  
Fat agèd carps that run into thy net,  
And pikes, now weary their own kind to eat,  
As loath the second draft or cast to stay,  
35      Officiously<sup>o</sup> at first themselves betray;  
Bright eels that emulate them, and leap on land  
Before the fisher, or into his hand.  
Then hath thy orchard fruit, thy garden flowers,  
Fresh as the air, and new as are the hours.  
40      The early cherry, with the later plum,  
Fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth  
come;  
The blushing apricot and woolly peach  
Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach.  
And though thy walls be of the country stone,  
45      They're reared with no man's ruin, no man's  
groan;  
There's none that dwell about them wish them  
down;  
But all come in, the farmer and the clown,<sup>o</sup>  
And no one empty-handed, to salute  
Thy lord and lady, though they have no suit.<sup>o</sup>  
50      Some bring a capon, some a rural cake,  
Some nuts, some apples; some that think they  
make  
The better cheeses bring them, or else send  
By their ripe daughters, whom they would  
commend  
This way to husbands, and whose baskets bear  
55      An emblem of themselves in plum or pear.  
But what can this (more than express their love)  
Add to thy free provisions, far above  
The need of such? whose liberal board doth flow  
With all that hospitality doth know;  
60      Where comes no guest but is allowed to eat,  
Without his fear, and of thy lord's own meat;<sup>o</sup>

Where the same beer and bread, and selfsame wine,  
That is his lordship's shall be also mine,<sup>1</sup>  
And I not fain to sit (as some this day  
65 At great men's tables), and yet dine away.  
Here no man tells<sup>o</sup> my cups; nor, standing by,  
A waiter doth my gluttony envy,<sup>o</sup>  
But gives me what I call, and lets me eat;  
He knows below<sup>o</sup> he shall find plenty of meat.  
70 Thy tables hoard not up for the next day;  
Nor, when I take my lodging, need I pray  
For fire, or lights, or livery;<sup>o</sup> all is there,  
As if thou then wert mine, or I reigned here:  
There's nothing I can wish, for which I stay.<sup>o</sup>  
75 That found King James when, hunting late this  
way  
With his brave son, the Prince,<sup>2</sup> they saw thy fires  
Shine bright on every hearth, as the desires  
Of thy Penates<sup>o</sup> had been set on flame  
To entertain them; or the country came  
80 With all their zeal to warm their welcome here.  
What (great I will not say, but) sudden cheer  
Didst thou then make 'em! And what praise was  
heaped  
On thy good lady then, who therein reaped  
The just reward of her high housewifery;  
85 To have her linen, plate, and all things nigh,  
When she was far; and not a room but dressed  
As if it had expected such a guest!  
These, Penshurst, are thy praise, and yet not all.  
Thy lady's noble, fruitful, chaste withal.  
90 His children thy great lord may call his own,  
A fortune in this age but rarely known.  
They are, and have been, taught religion; thence  
Their gentler spirits have sucked innocence.  
Each morn and even they are taught to pray,  
95

100                    With the whole household, and may, every day,  
                         Read in their virtuous parents' noble parts<sup>o</sup>  
                         The mysteries of manners,<sup>o</sup> arms, and arts.  
                         Now, Penshurst, they that will proportion<sup>o</sup> thee  
                         With other edifices, when they see  
                         Those proud, ambitious heaps, and nothing else,  
                         May say, their lords have built, but thy lord dwells.  
1616

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Penshurst, in Kent, was the estate of Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle (later, earl of Leicester), a younger brother of the poet Sir Philip Sidney. Along with Lanyer's "The Description of Cookham" (p. 936), this poem inaugurated the genre of English "country house" poems, which includes Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* (p. 1287). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Touchstone, an expensive black basalt. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: More pretentious houses attract envy. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sir Philip Sidney was born at Penshurst. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Satyrs and fauns were woodland spirits. Satyrs had the bodies of men and the legs (and horns) of goats. "Provoke": challenge to a race. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Named after a lady of the house who went into labor under its branches. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lady Barbara (Gamage) Sidney, wife of Sir Robert. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The local river. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In many great houses, different courses might be served to different guests, depending on their social status. The lord would have the best food. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Prince Henry, the heir apparent, died in November 1612. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *cupola* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *edifice* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wood nymphs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *country dweller, rustic* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *little woods* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cattle* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rabbits* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *high ground* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *table* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dutifully* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *peasant* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *request to make* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *food* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *counts* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *resent* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in the servants' quarters* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *provisions* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wait* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Roman household gods* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attributes* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *moral behavior* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *compare* [Return to reference °](#)

## Song: To Celia<sup>1</sup>

Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
And I'll not look for wine.  
5 The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine:  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.  
I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honoring thee,  
10 As giving it a hope that there  
It could not withered be.  
But thou thereon didst only breathe,  
And sent'st it back to me;  
Since when it grows and smells, I swear,  
15 Not of itself, but thee.

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: These famous lines translate a patchwork of five separate prose passages by Philostratus, a Greek sophist (3rd century C.E.). The music that made it a barroom favorite is by an anonymous 18th-century composer. [Return to reference 1](#)



## To Heaven

Good and great God, can I not think of thee  
But it must straight<sup>o</sup> my melancholy be?  
Is it interpreted in me disease  
That, laden with my sins, I seek for ease?  
5 Oh, be thou witness, that the reins<sup>1</sup> dost know  
And hearts of all, if I be sad for show,  
And judge me after, if I dare pretend  
To aught but grace, or aim at other end.  
As thou art all, so be thou all to me,  
10 First, midst, and last, converted<sup>o</sup> one and three,  
My faith, my hope, my love; and in this state,  
My judge, my witness, and my advocate.  
Where have I been this while exiled from thee,  
And whither rapt,<sup>o</sup> now thou but stoop'st to me?  
15 Dwell, dwell here still:<sup>o</sup> Oh, being everywhere,  
How can I doubt to find thee ever here?  
I know my state, both full of shame and scorn,  
Conceived in sin and unto labor born,  
Standing with fear, and must with horror fall,  
20 And destined unto judgment after all.  
I feel my griefs too, and there scarce is ground  
Upon my flesh to inflict another wound.  
Yet dare I not complain or wish for death  
With holy Paul,<sup>2</sup> lest it be thought the breath  
25 Of discontent; or that these prayers be  
For weariness of life, not love of thee.

1616

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Literally, kidneys, but also the seat of the affections, with a glance at Psalm 7:9: “the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jonson refers to Paul’s question: “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interchanging*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *carried off*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***FROM UNDERWOOD***[1](#)

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Preparing a second edition of his *Works* (published posthumously in 1640–41), Jonson added a third section of poems, “Underwood,” “out of the analogy they hold to *The Forest* in my former book.”[Return to reference 1](#)

## A Sonnet, to the Noble Lady, the Lady Mary Wroth<sup>2</sup>

I that have been a lover, and could show it,  
Though not in these,<sup>o</sup> in rhymes not wholly dumb,  
Since I exscribe<sup>o</sup> your sonnets, am become  
A better lover, and much better poet.  
Nor is my muse, or I, ashamed to owe it  
5 To those true numerous graces; whereof some  
But charm the senses, others overcome  
Both brains and hearts; and mine now best do know  
it:  
For in your verse all Cupid's armory,  
His flames, his shafts, his quiver, and his bow,  
10 His very eyes are yours to overthrow.  
But then his mother's<sup>o</sup> sweets you so apply,  
Her joys, her smiles, her loves, as readers take  
For Venus' ceston,<sup>3</sup> every line you make.

1640–41

### Endnotes

- Note 2:  
Mary Wroth, author of the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* ( pp. 1074–79) and the romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (pp. 1069–73), was the daughter of Robert Sidney and his wife, Barbara Gamage, of Penshurst, the niece of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke; she was the wife of Sir Robert Wroth, whose country estate Jonson also praised in "The Forest." The poem exhibits how poems were exchanged within a coterie, though Jonson also writes as a client to a patron. Jonson's only sonnet, the poem pays tribute

to Wroth's mastery of the genre and shows how well Jonson knew her verse.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Venus's girdle or belt, which had aphrodisiacal powers; it aroused passion in all beholders. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *in sonnets* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *copy out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Venus's* [Return to reference °](#)

## My Picture Left in Scotland<sup>1</sup>

I now think Love is rather deaf than blind,  
For else it could not be  
That she  
Whom I adore so much should so slight me  
And cast my love behind;  
5 I'm sure my language to her was as sweet,  
And every close<sup>o</sup> did meet  
In sentence<sup>o</sup> of as subtle feet,<sup>o</sup>  
As hath the youngest he  
That sits in shadow of Apollo's tree.<sup>2</sup>  
10  
O, but my conscious fears  
That fly my thoughts between,  
Tell me that she hath seen  
My hundreds of gray hairs,  
Told<sup>o</sup> seven and forty years,  
15 Read so much waist<sup>3</sup> as she cannot embrace  
My mountain belly and my rocky face;  
And all these through her eyes have stopped her  
ears.



**Ben Jonson.** This 1617 portrait of Jonson by Abraham van Blyenberch shows the writer much as he describes himself in some of his poems, particularly "My Picture Left in Scotland."

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## Endnotes

- Note 1: After his walking tour of Scotland in 1618–19, Jonson sent a manuscript version of this poem to William Drummond, with whom he had stayed. The woman of the poem may or may not be a real person.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bay laurel, the tree associated with Apollo, god of poetry.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: With a pun on “waste,” meaning “untillable ground.”[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *cadence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wise sayings* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rhythm*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *counted*[Return to reference °](#)



**The Ode on Cary and Morison** The ode, originally a classical form, is a lyric poem in an elevated style, celebrating a lofty theme, a noble personage, or a grand occasion. The Greek poet Pindar wrote many odes for winners of the Olympic games, known as Great Odes because of their exalted subject and style. Later, the Roman poet Horace wrote more restrained poems that came to be known as Lesser Odes. Jonson's Cary-Morison ode comes closer than any other in the language to the lofty style and manner of Pindar. "To Penshurst" is in the Horatian style, as is Marvell's "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland."

Pindar's odes were designed to be sung by a chorus and often followed a three-part scheme: the chorus moved in one direction while chanting the strophe, reversed direction for the antistrophe, and stood still for the epode. Jonson imitates this pattern with his triple division of "turn," "counterturn," and "stand"—the terms more or less literally translated from the original Greek. His turns and counterturns rhyme in couplets, with line lengths varying in all stanzas according to a uniform scheme; the twelve-line stands follow a more complex but equally strict design. He imitates Pindar also in his moral generalizations and lofty but impersonal praise of the two noble friends.

# To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of That Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison<sup>1</sup>

## *The Turn*

Brave infant of Saguntum,<sup>2</sup> clear<sup>o</sup>  
Thy coming forth in that great year  
When the prodigious Hannibal did crown  
His rage, with razing your immortal town.  
Thou, looking then about  
5 Ere thou wert half got out,  
Wise child, didst hastily return  
And mad'st thy mother's womb thine urn.<sup>o</sup>  
How summed<sup>o</sup> a circle<sup>3</sup> didst thou leave mankind  
Of deepest lore, could we the center find!

10

## *The Counterturn*

Did wiser nature draw thee back  
From out the horror of that sack,  
Where shame, faith, honor, and regard of right  
Lay trampled on?—the deeds of death and night  
Urged, hurried forth, and hurled  
15 Upon th' affrighted world?  
Sword, fire, and famine, with fell<sup>o</sup> fury met,  
And all on utmost ruin set:  
As, could they but life's miseries foresee,  
No doubt all infants would return like thee.

20

## *The Stand*

For what is life if measured by the space,

Not by the act?  
Or maskèd man, if valued by his face,  
Above his fact?<sup>o</sup>  
Here's one outlived his peers  
25 And told forth fourscore years:  
He vexèd time, and busied the whole state,  
Troubled both foes and friends,  
But ever to no ends:  
30 What did this stirrer but die late?<sup>4</sup>  
How well at twenty had he fall'n or stood!  
For three of his four score, he did no good.

### ***The Turn***

He<sup>5</sup> entered well, by virtuous parts,<sup>o</sup>  
Got up and thrived with honest arts:  
He purchased friends and fame and honors then,  
35 And had his noble name advanced with men;  
But, weary of that flight,  
He stooped in all men's sight  
To sordid flatteries, acts of strife,  
And sunk in that dead sea of life  
40 So deep, as he did then death's waters sup;  
But that the cork of title buoyed him up.

### ***The Counterturn***

Alas, but Morison fell young;—  
He never fell, thou fall'st,<sup>6</sup> my tongue.  
He stood, a soldier, to the last right end,  
45 A perfect patriot and a noble friend,  
But most a virtuous son.  
All offices<sup>o</sup> were done  
By him, so ample, full, and round  
In weight, in measure, number, sound,  
50 As, though his age imperfect might appear,

His life was of humanity the sphere.

### ***The Stand***

Go now, and tell out<sup>o</sup> days summed up with fears,  
And make them years;  
Produce thy mass of miseries on the stage  
55 To swell thine age;  
Repeat of things a throng,  
To show thou hast been long,  
Not lived; for life doth her great actions spell,<sup>o</sup>  
By what was done and wrought  
60 In season, and so brought  
To light: her measures are, how well  
Each syllab'e<sup>o</sup> answered, and was formed how fair;  
These make the lines of life, and that's her air.<sup>z</sup>

### ***The Turn***

It is not growing like a tree  
65 In bulk, doth make man better be,  
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,  
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:<sup>o</sup>  
A lily of a day  
Is fairer far in May,  
70 Although it fall and die that night;  
It was the plant and flower of light.  
In small proportions we just beauties see,  
And in short measures life may perfect be.

### ***The Counterturn***

Call, noble Lucius, then for wine,  
75 And let thy looks with gladness shine:  
Accept this garland,<sup>8</sup> plant it on thy head,  
And think, nay, know, thy Morison's not dead.

80 He leaped the present age,  
Possessed with holy rage,<sup>o</sup>  
To see that bright eternal day,  
Of which we priests and poets say  
Such truths as we expect for happy men,  
And there he lives with memory: and Ben

### ***The Stand***

85 Jonson, who sung this of him ere he went  
Himself to rest,  
Or taste a part of that full joy he meant  
To have expressed  
In this bright asterism:<sup>o</sup>  
Where it were friendship's schism  
90 (Were not his Lucius long with us to tarry)  
To separate these twi-  
Lights, the Dioscuri,<sup>9</sup>  
And keep the one half from his Harry.  
But fate doth so alternate the design,  
95 Whilst that in heaven, this light on earth must shine.

### ***The Turn***

And shine as you exalted are,  
Two names of friendship, but one star,  
Of hearts the union. And those not by chance  
Made, or indentured,<sup>o</sup> or leased out t' advance  
100 The profits for a time.  
No pleasures vain did chime  
Of rhymes or riots at your feasts,  
Orgies of drink, or feigned protests;  
But simple love of greatness and of good  
105 That knits brave minds and manners, more than  
blood.

### ***The Counterturn***

This made you first to know the why  
You liked, then after to apply  
That liking; and approach so one the tother,<sup>o</sup>  
Till either grew a portion of the other;  
110 Each stylèd<sup>o</sup> by his end,  
The copy of his friend.  
You lived to be the great surnames  
And titles by which all made claims  
Unto the virtue: nothing perfect done,  
115 But as a Cary or a Morison.

### ***The Stand***

And such a force the fair example had,  
As they that saw  
The good and durst not practice it, were glad  
That such a law  
120 Was left yet to mankind;  
Where they might read and find  
Friendship in deed was written, not in words.  
And with the heart, not pen,  
Of two so early<sup>o</sup> men,  
125 Whose lives<sup>1</sup> her rolls were, and records,  
Who, ere the first down bloomèd on the chin  
Had sowed these fruits, and got the harvest in.

1629

1640–41

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Henry Morison died in 1629 at the age of twenty. His good friend Lucius Cary (son of Elizabeth Cary, the author of a 1613 closet drama, *The Tragedy of Mariam*) became the second

Viscount Falkland. He was known for his learning; he died fighting for King Charles in the first years of the civil war.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The ancient Roman writer Pliny the Elder tells the story of an infant born while Hannibal was assaulting Sagunto, in Spain. The infant dived back into his mother's womb (setting a record for brevity of life), where he was 'buried.'[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Emblem of perfection.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Punning on "dilate," meaning "talk endlessly."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, another man.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Slip, with a latent pun on Latin *fallo*, "to make a mistake."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Life is a poem set to music; life's "measures" are its metrical patterns as well as the standards by which it is judged.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Celebratory wreath; that is, this poem.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The mythical Greek twins, Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri, were said to have exchanged places regularly, after Castor's death, between earth and the underworld. They are the principal stars of the constellation Gemini (the twins).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Some texts read "lines."[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *explain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *burial vessel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complete*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fierce*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deeds*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *qualities*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *duties of life*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *count*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tell over*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *syllable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *withered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inspiration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *constellation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *contracted for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *other*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *called*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *youthful*[Return to reference °](#)



## Queen and Huntress<sup>1</sup>

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,  
Now the sun is laid to sleep,  
Seated in thy silver chair,  
State in wonted<sup>o</sup> manner keep;  
5 Hesperus entreats thy light,  
Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not thy envious shade  
Dare itself to interpose;<sup>2</sup>  
Cynthia's shining orb was made  
Heaven to clear, when day did close.  
10 Bless us then with wishèd sight,  
Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart,  
And thy crystal-shining quiver;  
Give unto the flying hart  
15 Space to breathe, how short soever.  
Thou that mak'st a day of night,  
Goddess excellently bright.

1600

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Also from *Cynthia's Revels* (4.3), this song is sung by Hesperus, the evening star, to Cynthia, or Diana, goddess of chastity and the moon—with whom Queen Elizabeth was frequently compared.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eclipses were thought to portend evil.[Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *accustomed* [Return to reference °](#)

# To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us<sup>1</sup>

To draw no envy, Shakespeare, on thy name,  
Am I thus ample<sup>o</sup> to thy book and fame,  
While I confess thy writings to be such  
As neither man nor muse can praise too much.  
5 'Tis true, and all men's suffrage.<sup>o</sup> But these ways  
Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise;  
For silliest<sup>o</sup> ignorance on these may light,  
Which, when it sounds at best, but echoes right;  
Or blind affection, which doth ne'er advance  
The truth, but gropes, and urgeth all by chance;  
10 Or crafty malice might pretend this praise,  
And think to ruin where it seemed to raise.  
These are as<sup>o</sup> some infamous bawd or whore  
Should praise a matron. What could hurt her  
more?  
But thou art proof against them, and, indeed,  
15 Above th' ill fortune of them, or the need.  
I therefore will begin. Soul of the age!  
The applause! Delight! The wonder of our stage!  
My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by  
Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie  
20 A little further to make thee a room:<sup>2</sup>  
Thou art a monument without a tomb,  
And art alive still while thy book doth live,  
And we have wits to read and praise to give.  
That I not mix thee so, my brain excuses,  
25 I mean with great, but disproportioned<sup>o</sup> Muses;  
For, if I thought my judgment were of years,

I should commit thee surely with thy peers,  
And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,  
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.<sup>3</sup>  
30 And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek,<sup>4</sup>  
From thence to honor thee I would not seek<sup>o</sup>  
For names, but call forth thund'ring Aeschylus,  
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,  
Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,<sup>5</sup>  
35 To life again, to hear thy buskin<sup>o</sup> tread  
And shake a stage; or, when thy socks<sup>o</sup> were on,  
Leave thee alone for the comparison  
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome  
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.  
40 Triumph, my Britain; thou hast one to show  
To whom all scenes<sup>o</sup> of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age, but for all time!  
And all the Muses still were in their prime  
When like Apollo<sup>o</sup> he came forth to warm  
45 Our ears, or like a Mercury<sup>o</sup> to charm.  
Nature herself was proud of his designs,  
And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines,  
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,  
As, since, she will vouchsafe<sup>o</sup> no other wit:  
50 The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,  
Neat Terence, witty Plautus<sup>6</sup> now not please,  
But antiquated and deserted lie,  
As they were not of Nature's family.  
Yet must I not give nature all; thy art,  
55 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.  
For though the poet's matter<sup>o</sup> nature be,  
His art doth give the fashion;<sup>o</sup> and that he  
Who casts<sup>o</sup> to write a living line must sweat  
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat  
60 Upon the Muses' anvil; turn the same,  
And himself with it, that he thinks to frame,

Or for<sup>o</sup> the laurel he may gain a scorn;  
 For a good poet's made as well as born,  
 And such wert thou. Look how the father's face  
 65 Lives in his issue;<sup>o</sup> even so the race  
 Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines  
 In his well-turnèd and true-filèd lines,  
 In each of which he seems to shake a lance,<sup>7</sup>  
 As brandished at the eyes of ignorance.  
 70 Sweet swan of Avon, what a sight it were  
 To see thee in our waters yet appear,  
 And make those flights upon the banks of Thames  
 That so did take Eliza and our James!<sup>8</sup>  
 But stay; I see thee in the hemisphere  
 75 Advanced and made a constellation there!<sup>9</sup>  
 Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage  
 Or influence<sup>1</sup> chide or cheer the drooping stage,  
 Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourned  
 like night,  
 And despairs day, but for thy volume's light.  
 80

1623

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem was prefixed to the first folio of Shakespeare's plays (1623).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Chaucer, Spenser, and Francis Beaumont were buried in Westminster Abbey; Shakespeare, in Stratford.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, and Christopher Marlowe were Elizabethan dramatists contemporary or nearly contemporary with Shakespeare.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Shakespeare's Latin was pretty good, but Jonson is judging by the standard of his own remarkable scholarship.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Marcus Pacuvius, Lucius Accius (2nd century B.C.E.), and “him of Cordova,” Seneca the Younger (1st century C.E.), were Latin tragedians. Seneca’s tragedies had a large influence on Elizabethan revenge tragedy.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Aristophanes, an ancient Greek satirist and writer of comedy; Terence and Plautus (2nd and 3rd centuries B.C.E.), Roman writers of comedy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pun on Shake-speare.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Queen Elizabeth and King James.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Heroes and demigods were typically exalted after death to a place among the stars.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: “Rage” and “influence” describe the supposed effects of the planets on earthly affairs. “Rage” also implies poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *copious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *admission*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *simplest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as though*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *not comparable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *symbol of tragedy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *symbol of comedy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stages*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *god of poetry*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *god of eloquence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *subject matter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *form, style*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undertakes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *instead of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *offspring*[Return to reference °](#)

## Ode to Himself<sup>1</sup>

Come, leave the loathèd stage,  
And the more loathsome age,  
Where pride and impudence, in faction knit,  
Usurp the chair of wit,  
5 Indicting and arraigning every day  
Something they call a play.  
Let their fastidious, vain  
Commission of the brain  
Run on and rage, sweat, censure, and condemn:  
10 They were not made for thee, less thou for them.

Say that thou pour'st them wheat,  
And they will acorns eat;  
'Twere simple<sup>o</sup> fury still thyself to waste  
On such as have no taste!  
To offer them a surfeit of pure bread,  
15 Whose appetites are dead!  
No, give them grains their fill,  
Husks, draff to drink, and swill:<sup>2</sup>  
If they love lees,<sup>o</sup> and leave the lusty wine,  
20 Envy them not; their palate's with the swine.

No doubt some moldy tale  
Like *Pericles*,<sup>3</sup> and stale  
As the shrieve's<sup>o</sup> crusts, and nasty as his fish—  
Scraps, out of every dish  
25 Thrown forth and raked into the common tub,<sup>4</sup>  
May keep up the play club:  
There, sweepings do as well  
As the best-ordered meal;  
For who the relish of these guests will fit

Needs set them but the alms basket of wit.  
30  
And much good do 't you then:  
Brave plush and velvet men  
Can feed on orts;<sup>o</sup> and, safe in your stage clothes,<sup>5</sup>  
Dare quit,<sup>o</sup> upon your oaths,  
35 The stagers and the stage-wrights<sup>6</sup> too, your peers,  
Of larding your large ears  
With their foul comic socks,<sup>o</sup>  
Wrought upon twenty blocks;<sup>7</sup>  
Which, if they're torn, and turned, and patched  
enough,  
40 The gamesters<sup>o</sup> share your guilt,<sup>8</sup> and you their  
stuff.

Leave things so prostitute  
And take th' Alcaic lute;  
Or thine own Horace, or Anacreon's lyre;  
Warm thee by Pindar's fire:<sup>9</sup>  
45 And though thy nerves<sup>o</sup> be shrunk, and blood be  
cold,  
Ere years have made thee old,  
Strike that disdainful heat  
Throughout, to their defeat,  
As curious fools, and envious of thy strain,  
May, blushing, swear no palsy's in thy brain.<sup>1</sup>  
50

But when they hear thee sing  
The glories of thy king,  
His zeal to God and his just awe o'er men,  
They may, blood-shaken then,  
55 Feel such a flesh-quake to possess their powers  
As they shall cry, "Like ours,  
In sound of peace or wars,  
No harp e'er hit the stars



In tuning forth the acts of his sweet reign,  
And raising Charles his chariot 'bove his Wain."<sup>2</sup>

60

## 1629 **Endnotes**

1631, 1640–41

- Note 1: The failure of Jonson's play *The New Inn* (1629) inspired this assault on criticism and the public taste.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: All three items are food for pigs.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Shakespeare's play, at least in part (printed 1609).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The basket outside the jail to receive food for prisoners was called the sheriff's tub.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Actors often wore on the stage clothes cast off by the gentry; these parasites wear clothes cast off by actors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Playwrights. "Stagers": actors.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A pun: molds/blockheads.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A pun: guilt/gilt.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Alcaeus (ca. 600 B.C.E.), Horace, Anacreon, and Pindar were among the greatest lyric poets in ancient Greece and Rome.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: By 1629 Jonson was partially paralyzed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jonson's poetry will elevate the chariot of Charles I (symbol of his royal power) above Charles's Wain (Wagon)—the seven bright stars of Ursa Major.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Notes**

- °: *foolish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dregs*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sheriff's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scraps*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *acquit*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *symbols of comedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gamblers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sinews*[Return to reference](#) °

## MARY WROTH

### 1587–1651?

In 1621 Mary Wroth published *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, a 558-page pastoral romance, with her Petrarchan lyric sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* appended. (She also wrote a manuscript continuation of her romance, first printed in 1999.) Both genres were firsts for an Englishwoman, as was the pastoral drama, *Love's Victory*, which she composed around the same time and circulated only in manuscript. Wroth's achievement was fostered by her strong sense of identity as heir to the literary and cultural fame of her uncle Sir Philip Sidney; her aunt Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (who may have served as her mentor); and her father, Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle, whose unpublished sonnet sequence was rediscovered in 1975. While Wroth was clearly influenced by her family's work, particularly Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and *Astrophil and Stella*, the *Urania* and *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* stand alone as major contributions to the privileged genres of the English Renaissance.

Wroth was raised and educated at Penshurst, the Sidney country house celebrated by Ben Jonson. She also spent time at the Herberts' London residence, Baynard's castle; her aunt's "little college" at Wilton House; and the English garrison in Flushing, where her father and brother held military posts. Lady Anne Clifford noted that Wroth taught her "a great deal of news from beyond the seas" during a visit to Penshurst in 1616. At age seventeen, Wroth was

married (not wholly compatibly) to Sir Robert Wroth, whose office it was to facilitate the king's hunting; and she befriended several poets, including Ben Jonson. Wroth's poems circulated in manuscript well before their publication, and her reputation as a poet and literary patron is attested by numerous dedicatory poems. Jonson celebrated her in two epigrams and in a verse letter honoring her husband, dedicated to her his great comedy *The Alchemist*, and claimed in his only sonnet ([p. 1057](#)) that her sonnets had made him a "better lover, and much better poet." An accomplished musician and dancer, Wroth also performed in Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) at the behest of Queen Anna. After her husband's death, Wroth carried on a long-standing love affair with her married first cousin, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, himself a poet, powerful courtier, and patron of literature and the theater. (He is one of the dedicatees of Shakespeare's First Folio.) That relationship, which occasioned some scandal, produced two children.

The title characters of Wroth's Petrarchan sequence, *Pamphilia* ("all-loving") to *Amphilanthus* ("lover of two"), derive from the romance to which they were appended, and at times shadow Wroth and Pembroke. The sonnet sequence was less popular in Jacobean than in Elizabethan England, but as the major genre for analyzing the (male) lover's passions, frustrations, and fantasies (and sometimes career anxieties), it was an obvious choice for a poet of Wroth's ambition. Yet *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* does more than reverse the roles of lover and beloved; Pamphilia addresses few sonnets to Amphilanthus, and seldom assumes the Petrarchan lover's position of abject servitude to a cruel beloved. Instead, she proclaims her subjection to Cupid, usually identified with the force of her own desire. This radical revision identifies female desire as the source and center of the love relationship, and celebrates the woman lover-poet's movement from the bondage of chaotic passion to the freedom of self-chosen constancy.

The love affair between Pamphilia and Amphilanthus plays a central role in the *Urania*, but the romance as a whole focuses on the activities of the interrelated royal families of Morea and Naples, particularly the political and literary activities of their queens.

Conventional romance tropes abound in the *Urania*—humble shepherdesses are revealed to be princesses; idealized knights fight monsters and tyrants—but rather than an Arcadia or Fairyland, the landscape of the *Urania* is an ambiguously ancient, war-torn Europe and Asia that often mirrors the contentious geopolitics of the early seventeenth century. Amphilanthus’s “valor” and Pamphilia’s “loyalty, met together” secure the future of Bohemia and the Holy Roman Empire, both hot topics of political dispute in the 1620s, and convert the Muslims of Cyprus to Christianity. Love stories proliferate in the romance, but while the male heroes are often courageous fighters and attractive lovers, they are often flawed by inconstancy, and it is the women’s steadfastness that serves as the romance’s guiding ethos. Almost all of Wroth’s female characters are also storytellers and poets, and they compose twice as many poems in the romance as the men do. Pamphilia, Wroth’s surrogate, is singled out as a poet by vocation, both by the number of her poems and by their excellence.



**Lady Mary Wroth, with archlute** (attributed to John de Critz).

The image represents Mary Wroth in a conventional pose and role, holding the archlute, which indicates that she has been educated in the graceful arts that an aristocratic woman was expected to know. But the massive archlute, emblem of song making, also points to her identity as a poet and to her literary heritage as a Sidney—niece of the poets Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke, and daughter of Sir Robert Sidney of Penshurst, also a poet.

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Many contemporaries read the *Urania* as a scandalous roman à clef, finding allusions not only to Sidney-Pembroke-Wroth affairs, but to notable personages of the Jacobean court, and to matters of political controversy. The historian Edmund Bolton placed the *Urania* in the company of the *Arcadia* and John Barclay's *Argenis* (1621) as texts that "shadow out some persons, or matter, which it were not otherwise safe, or convenient to discover directly." A public outcry from one reader, Lord Edward Denny, elicited a spirited satiric response from Wroth. Although she offered to withdraw the work from circulation, there is no evidence that she actually did so. Indeed, her choice of the famous Simon van de Passe as her engraver, and her use of publishers who had recently been punished for publishing politically sensitive materials, suggest that she may well have courted a degree of notoriety.

# ***From The Countess of Montgomery's Urania***<sup>1</sup>

## ***From The First Book***

When the spring began to appear like the welcome messenger of summer, one sweet (and in that more sweet) morning, after Aurora<sup>2</sup> had called all careful eyes to attend the day, forth came the fair shepherdess Urania<sup>3</sup> (fair indeed; yet that far too mean a title for her, who for beauty deserved the highest style<sup>4</sup> could be given by best-knowing judgments). Into the mead<sup>5</sup> she came, where usually she drove her flocks to feed, whose leaping and wantonness showed they were proud of such a guide: but she, whose sad thoughts led her to another manner of spending her time, made her soon leave them, and follow her late-begun custom; which was (while they delighted themselves) to sit under some shade, bewailing her misfortune; while they fed, to feed upon her own sorrow and tears, which at this time she began again to summon, sitting down under the shade of a well-spread beech; the ground (then blest) and the tree, with full and fine-leaved branches, growing proud to bear and shadow such perfections. But she regarding nothing, in comparison of her woe, thus proceeded in her grief: "Alas Urania," said she (the true servant to misfortune), "of any misery that can befall woman, is not this the most and greatest which thou art fallen into? Can there be any near the unhappiness of being ignorant, and that in the highest kind, not being certain of mine own estate or birth? Why was I not still continued in the belief I was, as I appear, a shepherdess, and daughter to a shepherd? My ambition then went no higher than this estate, now flies it to a knowledge; then was I contented, now perplexed. O ignorance, can thy dullness yet procure so sharp a pain? and that such a thought as makes me now aspire unto knowledge? How did I joy in this poor life, being quiet! blessed in the



love of those I took for parents, but now by them I know the contrary, and by that knowledge, now to know myself. Miserable Urania, worse art thou now than these thy lambs; for they know their dams, while thou dost live unknown of any." By this were others come into that mead with their flocks: but she, esteeming her sorrowing thoughts her best and choicest company, left that place, taking a little path which brought her to the further side of the plain, to the foot of the rocks, speaking as she went these lines, her eyes fixed upon the ground, her very soul turned into mourning.





The  
Countesse  
of Mountgomeries  
**URANIA.**

Written by the right honorable the Lady  
**MARY WROTH**  
Daughter to the right Noble Robert  
Earle of Leicester.  
And Neece to the ever famous, and re-  
nowned S<sup>r</sup> Phillips Sidney knight. And to  
S<sup>t</sup> most exalt<sup>d</sup> Lady Mary Countesse of  
Pembroke late deceased.

LONDON  
Printed for IOH<sup>n</sup> MARRIOTT  
and IOH<sup>n</sup> GRISMAND And  
are to bee sould at their shop-  
pes in S<sup>t</sup> Dunstons Church-  
yard in Fleetstreet and in  
Poules Alley at y<sup>e</sup> signe of  
the Gunne.

Sim: Pascheus sculp.

1621



**The Countess of Montgomerie's Urania.** The frontispiece to Wroth's work was engraved by Simon van de Passe. The publishers, John Marriot and John Grismond, had been fined a year earlier for publishing the overly topical *Wither's Motto* (1621).

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Unseen, unknown, I here alone complain  
To rocks, to hills, to meadows, and to springs,  
Which can no help return to ease my pain,  
But back my sorrows the sad Echo<sup>6</sup> brings.  
Thus still increasing are my woes to me,  
5 Doubly resounded by that moanful voice,  
Which seems to second me in misery,  
And answer gives like friend of mine own choice.  
Thus only she doth my companion prove,  
The others silently do offer ease.  
10 But those that grieve, a grieving note do love;  
Pleasures to dying eyes bring but disease:  
And such am I, who daily ending live,  
Wailing a state which can no comfort give.

In this passion she went on, till she came to the foot of a great rock, she thinking of nothing less than ease, sought how she might ascend it; hoping there to pass away her time more peaceably with loneliness, though not to find least respite from her sorrow, which so dearly she did value, as by no means she would impart it to any. The way was hard, though by some windings making the ascent pleasing. Having attained the top, she saw under some hollow trees the entry into the rock: she fearing nothing but the continuance of her ignorance, went in; where she found a pretty room, as if that stony place had yet in pity, given leave for such perfections to come into the heart as chiefest, and most beloved place, because most loving. The place was not unlike the ancient (or the descriptions of ancient) hermitages, instead of hangings, covered and lined with ivy,

disdaining aught else should come there, that being in such perfection. This richness in Nature's plenty made her stay to behold it, and almost grudge the pleasant fullness of content that place might have, if sensible, while she must know to taste of torments. As she was thus in passion mixed with pain, throwing her eyes as wildly as timorous lovers do for fear of discovery, she perceived a little light, and such a one, as a chink doth oft discover to our sights. She curious to see what this was, with her delicate hands put the natural ornament aside, discerning a little door, which she putting from her, passed through it into another room, like the first in all proportion; but in the midst there was a square stone, like to a pretty table, and on it a wax candle burning; and by that a paper,<sup>7</sup> which had suffered itself patiently to receive the discovering of so much of it, as presented this sonnet (as it seemed newly written) to her sight.

Here all alone in silence might I mourn:  
But how can silence be where sorrows flow?  
Sighs with complaints have poorer pains outworn;  
But broken hearts can only true grief show.

5 Drops of my dearest blood shall let Love know  
Such tears for her I shed, yet still do burn,  
As no spring can quench least part of my woe,  
Till this live earth, again to earth do turn.

10 Hateful all thought of comfort is to me,  
Despised day, let me still night possess;  
Let me all torments feel in their excess,  
And but this light allow my state to see.

Which still doth waste, and wasting as this light,  
Are my sad days unto eternal night.

"Alas Urania!" sighed she. "How well do these words, this place, and all agree with thy fortune? Sure, poor soul, thou wert here

appointed to spend thy days, and these rooms ordained to keep thy tortures in; none being assuredly so matchlessly unfortunate."

Turning from the table, she discerned in the room a bed of boughs, and on it a man lying, deprived of outward sense, as she thought, and of life, as she at first did fear, which struck her into a great amazement: yet having a brave spirit, though shadowed under a mean habit,<sup>8</sup> she stepped unto him, whom she found not dead, but laid upon his back, his head a little to her wards,<sup>9</sup> his arms folded on his breast, hair long, and beard disordered, manifesting all care;<sup>1</sup> but care itself had left him: curiousness thus far afforded him, as to be perfectly discerned the most exact piece of misery; apparel he had suitable to the habitation, which was a long gray<sup>2</sup> robe. This grieveful spectacle did much amaze the sweet and tender-hearted shepherdess; especially, when she perceived (as she might by the help of the candle) the tears which distilled from his eyes; who seeming the image of death, yet had this sign of worldly sorrow, the drops falling in that abundance, as if there were a kind strife among them, to rid their master first of that burdenous<sup>3</sup> carriage; or else meaning to make a flood, and so drown their woeful patient in his own sorrow, who yet lay still, but then fetching a deep groan from the profoundest part of his soul, he said:

"Miserable Perissus,<sup>4</sup> canst thou thus live, knowing she that gave thee life is gone? Gone, O me! and with her all my joy departed. Wilt thou (unblessed creature) lie here complaining for her death, and know she died for thee? Let truth and shame make thee do something worthy of such a love, ending thy days like thyself, and one fit to be her servant. But that I must not do: then thus remain and foster storms, still to torment thy wretched soul withall, since all are little, and too too little for such a loss. O dear Limena,<sup>5</sup> loving Limena, worthy Limena, and more rare, constant Limena: perfections delicately feigned to be in women were verified in thee, was such worthiness framed only to be wondered at by the best, but given as a prey to base and unworthy jealousy? When were all worthy parts joined in one, but in thee my best Limena? Yet all these grown subject to a creature ignorant of all but ill; like unto a fool, who in a

dark cave, that hath but one way to get out, having a candle, but not the understanding what good it doth him, puts it out: this ignorant wretch not being able to comprehend thy virtues, did so by thee in thy murder, putting out the world's light, and men's admiration: Limena, Limena, O my Limena."

With that he fell from complaining into such a passion, as weeping and crying were never in so woeful a perfection, as now in him; which brought as deserved a compassion from the excellent shepherdess, who already had her heart so tempered with grief, as that it was apt to take any impression that it would come to seal withal. Yet taking a brave courage to her, she stepped unto him, kneeling down by his side, and gently pulling him by the arm, she thus spoke.

"Sir," said she, "having heard some part of your sorrows, they have not only made me truly pity you, but wonder at you; since if you have lost so great a treasure, you should not lie thus leaving her and your love unrevenged, suffering her murderers to live, while you lie here complaining; and if such perfections be dead in her, why make you not the phoenix<sup>6</sup> of your deeds live again, as to new life raised out of the revenge you should take on them? Then were her end satisfied, and you deservedly accounted worthy of her favor, if she were so worthy as you say."

"If she were, O God," cried out Perissus, "what devilish spirit art thou, that thus dost come to torture me? But now I see you are a woman; and therefore not much to be marked, and less resisted: but if you know charity, I pray now practice it, and leave me who am afflicted sufficiently without your company; or if you will stay, discourse not to me."

"Neither of these will I do," said she.

"If you be then," said he, "some Fury<sup>7</sup> of purpose sent to vex me, use your force to the uttermost in martyring me; for never was there a fitter subject, then the heart of poor Perissus is."

"I am no Fury," replied the divine Urania, "nor hither come to trouble you, but by accident lighted on this place; my cruel hap being such, as only the like can give me content, while the

solitariness of this like cave might give me quiet, though not ease. Seeking for such a one, I happened hither; and this is the true cause of my being here, though now I would use it to a better end if I might: Wherefore favor me with the knowledge of your grief; which heard, it may be I shall give you some counsel, and comfort in your sorrow."

"Cursed may I be," cried he, "if ever I take comfort, having such cause of mourning: but because you are, or seem to be afflicted, I will not refuse to satisfy your demand, but tell you the saddest story that ever was rehearsed by dying man to living woman, and such a one, as I fear will fasten too much sadness in you; yet should I deny it, I were to blame, being so well known to these senseless places; as were they sensible of sorrow, they would condole, or else amazed at such cruelty stand dumb as they do, to find that man should be so inhuman."

\* \* \*

### SONG<sup>8</sup>

Love what art thou? A vain thought  
In our minds by fancy wrought.  
Idle smiles did thee beget,  
While fond wishes made the net  
Which so many fools have caught.

5

Love what art thou? Light and fair,  
Fresh as morning, clear as th' air.  
But too soon thy evening change  
Makes thy worth with coldness range;  
Still thy joy is mixed with care.

10

Love what art thou? A sweet flower  
Once full blown, <sup>o</sup> dead in an hour.  
Dust in wind as staid remains  
As thy pleasure or our gains,

15                    If thy humor<sup>o</sup> change, to lour.<sup>o</sup>

Love what art thou? Childish, vain,  
Firm as bubbles made by rain,  
Wantonness thy greatest pride.  
These foul faults thy virtues hide—  
20                    But babes can no staidness gain.

Love what art thou? Causeless cursed,  
Yet alas these not the worst:  
Much more of thee may be said.  
But thy law I once obeyed,  
25                    Therefore say no more at first.

1621

## Endnotes

- Note 8: This song, one of a group of eclogues that marks the conclusion of book 1 of the *Urania*, is sung to a shepherdess by a shepherd, “being, as it seemed, fallen out with Love.” [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 1: The Greek goddess of the dawn. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
The name has multiple associations: the Muse of astronomy, the Muse of Christian poetry, and a surname for Aphrodite (Venus) designating heavenly beauty. It was also an honorific commonly bestowed on Wroth’s aunt, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke. In Wroth’s romance, Urania is a foundling adopted by shepherds but actually the daughter of the King of Naples; after losing one lover and gaining another, she marries, becomes a matriarch, and is throughout (as in this episode) a counselor of others.  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Title. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 4: Title. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Meadow. [Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: In classical mythology Echo was a wood nymph who pined away in unrequited love for the handsome Narcissus until only her voice remained (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The episode alludes to an episode in Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* in which one of the heroines, Cleophila, enters a darkened cave illuminated by a single candle and finds a poem on top of a stone table.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lowly garment.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Toward her.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Trouble.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Gray is typically associated with mourning and despair.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Burdensome.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Perissus: "Lost one."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Literally, "woman of home or threshold."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mythical bird said to live five hundred years, then expire in flames, out of which a new phoenix arose. Only one phoenix existed at a time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Goddess of vengeance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- °: *in full bloom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whim* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *frown*[Return to reference °](#)

# ***From Pamphilia to Amphilanthus***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
Pamphilia ("all-loving") is the protagonist of the *Urania*. Her unfaithful beloved's name means "lover of two." These characters are first cousins, like Mary Wroth and William Herbert; their names adumbrate the main theme of both the romance and the appended sonnet sequence: constancy in the face of unfaithfulness.

While the sequence exists in two formats, one that circulated in manuscript and one in print, we have used the versions that appear in the printed edition of 1621. *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is broken into several separately numbered series (the first of which includes forty-eight sonnets, with songs inserted after every sixth sonnet except the last). In Josephine A. Roberts's edition of Wroth's poetry, the poems are numbered consecutively throughout the work; we have adopted this convenient renumbering.

[Return to reference 1](#)

# 1

When night's black mantle could most darkness  
prove,  
And sleep, death's image, did my senses hire  
From knowledge of myself, then thoughts did  
move  
Swifter than those most swiftness need require.  
In sleep, a chariot drawn by winged desire  
5 I saw, where sat bright Venus, Queen of Love,  
And at her feet, her son,<sup>o</sup> still adding fire  
To burning hearts, which she did hold above.  
But one heart flaming more than all the rest  
The goddess held, and put it to my breast.  
10 "Dear son, now shut,"<sup>2</sup> said she: "thus must we  
win."  
He her obeyed, and martyred my poor heart.  
I, waking, hoped as dreams it would depart:  
Yet since, O me, a lover I have been.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: That is, shut the burning heart into Pamphilia's breast.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *Cupid*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

Am I thus conquered? Have I lost the powers  
 That to withstand, which joys to ruin me?<sup>3</sup>  
 Must I be still while it my strength devours,  
 And captive leads me prisoner, bound, unfree?  
 5 Love first shall leave men's fant'sies to them free,<sup>4</sup>  
 Desire shall quench love's flames, spring, hate  
 sweet showers,  
 Love shall loose all his darts, have sight, and see  
 His shame, and wishings hinder happy hours.  
 Why should we not Love's purblind<sup>o</sup> charms resist?  
 10 Must we be servile, doing what he list?<sup>o</sup>  
 No, seek some host to harbor thee: I fly  
 Thy babish tricks, and freedom do profess.  
 But O my hurt makes my lost heart confess  
 I love, and must: so farewell liberty.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: That is, have I lost the power to withstand love ("That"), which takes pleasure in ruining me? [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, this and the other impossibilities that follow will occur before I surrender to love. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *completely blind* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *what pleases him* [Return to reference °](#)

Like to the Indians scorched with the sun,  
 The sun which they do as their god adore,  
 So am I used by Love, for evermore<sup>◦</sup>  
 I worship him, less favors have I won.  
 5 Better are they who thus to blackness run,  
 And so can only whiteness want deplore:  
 Than I, who pale and white am with grief's store,  
 Nor can have hope, but to see hopes undone.  
 Besides their sacrifice received in sight  
 10 Of their chose Saint, mine hid as worthless rite,  
 Grant me to see where I my offerings give.  
 Then let me wear the mark of Cupid's might  
 In heart, as they in skin of Phoebus<sup>◦</sup> light,  
 Not ceasing offerings to Love while I live.

## Notes

- ◦: *the more* [Return to reference ◦](#)
- ◦: *the sun god* [Return to reference ◦](#)

When everyone to pleasing pastime hies,<sup>o</sup>  
 Some hunt, some hawk, some play, while some  
 delight  
 In sweet discourse, and music shows joy's might:  
 Yet I my thoughts do far above these prize.  
 The joy which I take, is that free from eyes  
 5 I sit and wonder at this day-like night,  
 So to dispose themselves as void<sup>o</sup> of right,  
 And leave true pleasure for poor vanities.  
 When others hunt, my thoughts I have in chase;  
 If hawk, my mind at wished end doth fly;  
 10 Discourse, I with my spirit talk and cry;  
 While others music choose as greatest grace.  
 O God, say I, can these fond pleasures move?  
 Or music be but in sweet thoughts of love?

## Notes

- °: *hastens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *devoid*[Return to reference °](#)

Sweetest love, return again,  
Make not too long stay:  
Killing mirth and forcing pain,  
Sorrow leading way:  
5 Let us not thus parted be,  
Love and absence ne'er agree.

But since you must needs depart,  
And me hapless leave,  
In your journey take my heart,  
Which will not deceive:  
10 Yours it is, to you it flies,  
Joying in those lovèd eyes.

So in part we shall not part,  
Though we absent be,  
15 Time, nor place, nor greatest smart  
Shall my bands make free:  
Tied I am, yet think it gain,  
In such knots I feel no pain.

But can I live, having lost  
Chiefest part of me?  
20 Heart is fled, and sight is crossed,  
These my fortunes be:  
Yet dear heart go, soon return,  
As good there as here to burn.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: The poem seems to revise one of Donne's songs:  
"Sweetest love, I do not go," p. 891. [Return to reference 5](#)



Take heed mine eyes, how you your looks do cast,  
 Lest they betray my heart's most secret thought:  
 Be true unto yourselves, for nothing's bought  
 More dear than doubt, which brings a lover's fast.<sup>6</sup>  
 5 Catch you all-watching eyes ere they be past,  
 Or take yours fixed where your best love hath  
 sought  
 The pride of your desires; let them be taught  
 Their faults for shame they could no truer last.  
 Then look, and look with joy, for conquest won  
 10 Of those that searched your hurt in double kind;<sup>7</sup>  
 So you kept safe, let them themselves look blind,  
 Watch, gaze, and mark till they to madness run,  
 While you mine eyes enjoy full sight of Love  
 Contented that such happinesses move.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Lack of nourishment for love, due to jealousy ("doubt").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Those who spy and pry with their two eyes, to discover my secret love.[Return to reference 7](#)

False hope which feeds but to destroy and spill<sup>8</sup>  
 What it first breeds; unnatural to the birth  
 Of thine own womb, conceiving but to kill,  
 And plenty gives to make the greater dearth.<sup>9</sup>  
 So tyrants do, who falsely ruling earth,  
 5 Outwardly grace them,<sup>1</sup> and with profits fill,  
 Advance those who appointed are to death,  
 To make their greater fall to please their will.  
 Thus shadow<sup>o</sup> they their wicked vile intent,  
 Coloring evil with a show of good  
 10 While in fair shows their malice so is spent;<sup>2</sup>  
 Hope kills the heart, and tyrants shed the blood.  
 For hope deluding brings us to the pride  
 Of our desires the farther down to slide.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Kill. The image is of miscarriage or infanticide.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Gives abundance only to make scarcity more painful afterward.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, those whom they mean to destroy (see next line).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Expended, employed. "Shows": appearances.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *conceal*[Return to reference °](#)

Love like a juggler comes to play his prize,<sup>3</sup>  
 And all minds draw his wonders to admire,  
 To see how cunningly he (wanting eyes)<sup>4</sup>  
 Can yet deceive the best sight of desire.  
 5 The wanton child, how he can feign his fire  
 So prettily, as none sees his disguise,  
 How finely do his tricks; while we fools hire  
 The badge and office of his tyrannies.<sup>5</sup>  
 For in the end such juggling he doth make,  
 10 As he our hearts instead of eyes doth take;  
 For men can only by their sleights abuse  
 The sight with nimble and delightful skill;  
 But if he play, his gain is our lost will,  
 Yet child-like we cannot his sports refuse.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Engage in a sporting contest. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cupid, the god of love, was represented as a blind child. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Seek, at our own cost, the external tokens and ceremonies of tyrannical Love. [Return to reference 5](#)

My pain still smothered in my grievèd breast,  
 Seeks for some ease, yet cannot passage find  
 To be discharged of this unwelcome guest;  
 When most I strive, more fast his burdens bind,  
 5 Like to a ship on Goodwin's<sup>6</sup> cast by wind,  
 The more she strives, more deep in sand is  
 pressed,  
 Till she be lost: so am I, in this kind,<sup>°</sup>  
 Sunk, and devoured, and swallowed by unrest.  
 Lost, shipwrecked, spoiled, debarred of smallest  
 hope,  
 10 Nothing of pleasure left, save thoughts have scope  
 Which wander may. Go then, my thoughts, and cry  
 "Hope's perished, love tempest-beaten, joy lost:  
 Killing despair hath all these blessings crossed."  
 Yet faith still cries, "love will not falsify."

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Goodwin Sands, a line of shoals at the entrance to the Strait of Dover. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *manner* [Return to reference °](#)

Love a child is ever crying,  
 Please him, and he straight is flying;  
 Give him, he the more is craving,  
 Never satisfied with having.

5 His desires have no measure,  
 Endless folly is his treasure;  
 What he promiseth he breaketh:  
 Trust not one word that he speaketh.

10 He vows nothing but false matter,  
 And to cozen<sup>o</sup> you he'll flatter:  
 Let him gain the hand,<sup>o</sup> he'll leave you,  
 And still glory to deceive you.

15 He will triumph in your wailing,  
 And yet cause be of your failing:  
 These his virtues are, and slighter  
 Are his gifts, his favors lighter.

20 Feathers are as firm in staying,  
 Wolves no fiercer in their preying.  
 As a child then leave him crying,  
 Nor seek him so given to flying.

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *cheat* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *the upper hand* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## From *A Crown of Sonnets Dedicated to Love*<sup>7</sup>

### 77

In this strange labyrinth how shall I turn?  
Ways<sup>o</sup> are on all sides, while the way I miss:  
If to the right hand, there in love I burn,  
Let me go forward, therein danger is.  
If to the left, suspicion hinders bliss:  
5 Let me<sup>o</sup> turn back, shame cries I ought return:  
Nor faint, though crosses<sup>8</sup> with my fortunes kiss,  
Stand still is harder, although sure to mourn.<sup>9</sup>  
Then let me take the right- or left-hand way,  
Go forward, or stand still, or back retire;  
10 I must these doubts endure without allay<sup>o</sup>  
Or help, but travel find for my best hire.<sup>1</sup>  
Yet that which most my troubled sense doth move,  
Is to leave all, and take the thread of love.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 7:

The “crown” is a difficult poetic form (originally Italian and usually known by its Italian name, *corona*) in which the last line of each poem serves as the first line of the next, until a circle is completed by the last line of the final poem, which is the same as the first line of the first one. The number of poems varies from seven to (as in Wroth’s *corona*) fourteen.

In contrast to the errant-child Cupid of the preceding part of the sequence, Love in this series is a mature and just monarch, whose true service ennobles lovers. The crown is in part a

recantation of the harsh judgment of love earlier in the sequence. But Pamphilia relapses into melancholy afterward.

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Troubles, adversity. "Faint": lose heart. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, certain to make me mourn. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, I find travel (with a pun on "travail," the spelling in the manuscript edition) is my only reward. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ariadne gave Theseus a thread to follow so as to find his way out of the Labyrinth, after killing the Minotaur at its center. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *paths* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *if I* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abatement* [Return to reference °](#)

My muse now happy lay thyself to rest,  
 Sleep in the quiet of a faithful love,  
 Write you no more, but let these fant'sies move  
 Some other hearts, wake not to new unrest.  
 5 But if you study, be those thoughts addressed  
 To truth, which shall eternal goodness prove;  
 Enjoying of true joy, the most, and best  
 The endless gain which never will remove.  
 Leave the discourse of Venus and her son  
 10 To young beginners,<sup>3</sup> and their brains inspire  
 With stories of great love, and from that fire  
 Get heat to write the fortunes they have won.  
 And thus leave off; what's past shows you can love,  
 Now let your constancy your honor prove.<sup>4</sup>

1621

## Endnotes

- Note 3: In Neoplatonic love philosophy, “beginners” in love are attracted to physical beauty and sensory delights, while more advanced lovers love virtue and spiritual beauty. Writing love sonnets is traditionally the business of young lovers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In a symbolic episode in the *Urania*, Pamphilia embodies the virtue of constancy; she accepts the keys to the Throne of Love, “at which instant Constancy vanished as metamorphosing herself into her breast” (1.1.141).[Return to reference 4](#)



# JOHN WEBSTER

## 1580?–1625?

John Webster's fame rests on two remarkable tragedies, both set in Roman Catholic Italy and both evoking the common Jacobean stereotype of that land as a place of sophisticated corruption. Both plays have bold heroines who choose for themselves in love and refuse to submit to male authority. *The White Devil*, first performed in 1608, is based on events that took place in Italy in 1581–85; in this play Vittoria Corombona defies a courtroom full of corrupt magistrates who convict her of adultery and murder. *The Duchess of Malfi*, first performed in 1614 and published in 1623, is based on an Italian novella. In this play, the spirited ruler of Malfi secretly marries her steward for love, defying her brothers, a duke and a cardinal, who demand that she remain a widow. Their dark motives include greed for her fortune, overweening pride in their noble blood, and incestuous desire. The play weds sublime poetry and gothic horror in the devious machinations set in motion against the duchess by her brothers' melancholy spy Bosola, in the macabre mental and physical torments to which they subject her, and in the final scenes, in which the stage is littered with the slaughtered bodies of all the principal characters.

Webster was the son of a London tailor and a member of the Merchant Tailors' Company, but we know little else about him. He wrote a tragicomedy, *The Devil's Law Case* (1621), and collaborated on several plays with contemporary playwrights, among them

Thomas Dekker in *Westward Ho* (1607) and John Marston in *The Malcontent* (1604). Of all the Stuart dramatists, Webster is the one who comes closest to Shakespeare in his power of tragic utterance and his flashes of poetic brilliance.

# **The Duchess of Malfi**

# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

FERDINAND, *Duke of Calabria*

THE CARDINAL, *his brother*

ANTONIO BOLOGNA, *steward of the household to the* DUCHESS

DELIO, *his friend*

DANIEL DE BOSOLA, *gentleman of the horse to the* DUCHESS

CASTRUCCIO, *an old lord*

MARQUIS OF PESCARA

COUNT MALATESTA

SILVIO, *a lord, of Milan*

RODERIGO

*gentlemen attending on the* DUCHESS

GRISOLAN

DOCTOR

*Several* MADMEN, PILGRIMS, EXECUTIONERS, OFFICERS, ATTENDANTS &c.

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI, *sister of* FERDINAND *and the* CARDINAL

CARIOLA, *her woman*

JULIA, CASTRUCCIO's *wife, and the* CARDINAL's *mistress*

OLD LADY, LADIES, *and* CHILDREN

SCENE. *Amalfi, Rome, Loreto, and Milan*

## ***Act 1***

**SCENE 1. *Amalfi; a hall in the DUCHESS's palace.***

[*Enter* ANTONIO *and* DELIO.]

DELIO You are welcome to your country, dear Antonio;

You have been long in France, and you return  
A very formal Frenchman in your habit.<sup>1</sup>  
How do you like the French court?

ANTONIO I admire it:

5 In seeking to reduce both state and people  
To a fixed order, their judicious king  
Begins at home; quits<sup>o</sup> first his royal palace  
Of flattering sycophants, of dissolute  
And infamous persons—which he sweetly terms  
10 His Master's masterpiece, the work of heaven<sup>2</sup>—  
Considering duly that a prince's court  
Is like a common fountain, whence should flow  
Pure silver drops in general, but if 't chance  
Some cursed example poison 't near the head,  
15 Death and diseases through the whole land spread.  
And what is 't makes this blessed government  
But a most provident council, who dare freely  
Inform him the corruption of the times?  
Though some o' th' court hold it presumption  
20 To instruct princes what they ought to do,  
It is a noble duty to inform them  
What they ought to foresee.—Here comes Bosola,  
The only court-gall;<sup>3</sup> yet I observe his railing  
Is not for simple love of piety.  
Indeed, he rails at those things which he wants;  
25 Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,  
Bloody, or envious, as any man,

If he had means to be so. Here's the cardinal.

[*Enter the* CARDINAL *and* BOSOLA.]

BOSOLA I do haunt you still.

CARDINAL So.

30 BOSOLA I have done you better service than to be  
slighted thus. Miserable  
age, where the only reward of doing well is the  
doing of it!

CARDINAL You enforce your merit too much.

BOSOLA I fell into the galleys<sup>4</sup> in your service; where,  
for two years  
35 together, I wore two towels instead of a shirt, with a  
knot on the shoulder,  
after the fashion of a Roman mantle. Slighted thus? I  
will thrive some  
way. Blackbirds fatten best in hard weather; why not  
I in these dog days?<sup>5</sup>

CARDINAL Would you could become honest!

BOSOLA With all your divinity do but direct me the way  
to it. I have known  
40 many travel far for it, and yet return as arrant  
knaves as they went forth,  
because they carried themselves always along with  
them. [*Exit* CARDINAL.]  
Are you gone? Some fellows, they say, are possessed  
with the devil,  
but this great fellow were able to possess the  
greatest devil, and make him  
worse.

ANTONIO He hath denied thee some suit?

45 BOSOLA He and his brother are like plum trees that  
grow crooked over  
standing pools;<sup>6</sup> they are rich and o'erladen with  
fruit, but none but

crows, pies,<sup>7</sup> and caterpillars feed on them. Could I  
be one of their flattering  
panders, I would hang on their ears like a horse  
leech till I were  
50 full and then drop off. I pray, leave me. Who would  
rely upon these  
miserable dependencies, in expectation to be  
advanced tomorrow?  
What creature ever fed worse than hoping Tantalus?  
<sup>8</sup> Nor ever died any  
man more fearfully than he that hoped for a pardon.  
There are rewards  
for hawks and dogs when they have done us service;  
but for a soldier  
that hazards his limbs in a battle, nothing but a kind  
55 of geometry is his  
last supportation.<sup>9</sup>

DELIO Geometry?

BOSOLA Aye, to hang in a fair pair of slings, take his  
latter swing in the  
world upon an honorable pair of crutches, from  
hospital to hospital.<sup>1</sup>  
60 Fare ye well, sir: and yet do not you scorn us; for  
places in the court are  
but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head  
lies at that man's  
foot, and so lower and lower.

[Exit.]

DELIO I knew this fellow seven years<sup>2</sup> in the galleys  
For a notorious murder; and 'twas thought  
The cardinal suborned it. He was released  
65 By the French general, Gaston de Foix,  
When he recovered Naples.<sup>3</sup>

ANTONIO 'Tis great pity  
He should be thus neglected; I have heard



70        He's very valiant. This foul melancholy  
Will poison all his goodness; for, I'll tell you,  
If too immoderate sleep be truly said  
To be an inward rust unto the soul,  
It then doth follow want of action  
Breeds all black malcontents; and their close rearing,  
75        Like moths in cloth, do hurt for want of wearing.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: An absolute Frenchman in your dress.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Alludes to Christ ridding the temple of money changers (John 2:13–22).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One who frets the court, but with the overtone of a disease, a blight.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Forced labor at the oar of a Mediterranean galley was the last penalty this side of torture and execution, and was likely to be a death sentence.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The hot, sultry season of midsummer.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stagnant waters.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Magpies, birds of evil omen like blackbirds.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Tantalus, in classical mythology, was “tantalized” by the constant presence of delectable food and drink that, though he was desperate, he could never reach.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Support.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the 17th century, a place of last resort for the indigent dying.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In speaking to the cardinal himself (line 34), Bosola had mentioned only two years.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Gaston de Foix, French commander, was active in Italy during the early 1500s; hence, the time of the tragedy is about a hundred years before Webster wrote. Ferdinand and the

cardinal are Spaniards established in Italy, like the infamous house of Borgia.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, enforced idleness breeds discontent, as moths breed in unused clothing.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *rids*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter* CASTRUCCIO, SILVIO, RODERIGO, *and* GRISOLAN.]

DELIO The presence<sup>o</sup> 'gins to fill: you promised me  
To make me the partaker of the natures  
Of some of your great courtiers.

ANTONIO The Lord Cardinal's,  
And other strangers' that are now in court?  
I shall. Here comes the great Calabrian duke.

5

[*Enter* FERDINAND *and* ATTENDANTS.]

FERDINAND Who took the ring oftenest?<sup>1</sup>

SILVIO Antonio Bologna, my lord.

FERDINAND Our sister duchess' great master of her  
household?

Give him the jewel. When shall we leave this sportive  
action, and fall to action  
indeed?

10

CASTRUCCIO Methinks, my lord, you should not desire  
to go to war in person.

FERDINAND Now for some gravity. Why, my lord?

CASTRUCCIO It is fitting a soldier arise to be a prince,  
but not necessary a  
prince descend to be a captain.

FERDINAND No?

15

CASTRUCCIO No, my lord, he were far better do it by  
a deputy.

FERDINAND Why should he not as well sleep or eat by a  
deputy? This  
might take idle, offensive, and base office from him,  
whereas the other  
deprives him of honor.

20

CASTRUCCIO Believe my experience, that realm is never  
long in quiet  
where the ruler is a soldier.

FERDINAND    Thou told'st me thy wife could not endure  
                   fighting.  
 CASTRUCCIO   True, my lord.  
 FERDINAND    And of a jest she broke of a captain she  
                   met full of wounds. I  
                   have forgot it.  
 25    CASTRUCCIO   She told him, my lord, he was a pitiful  
                   fellow, to lie, like the  
                   children of Israel, all in tents.<sup>2</sup>  
 FERDINAND    Why, there's a wit were able to undo all the  
                   chirurgeons<sup>3</sup> o' the  
                   city; for although gallants should quarrel and had  
                   drawn their weapons  
 30                    and were ready to go to it, yet her persuasions  
                   would make them put up.  
 CASTRUCCIO    That she would, my lord.  
 FERDINAND    How do you like my Spanish gennet?<sup>4</sup>  
 RODERIGO    He is all fire.  
 FERDINAND    I am of Pliny's opinion, I think he was  
                   begot by the wind; he  
                   runs as if he were ballassed<sup>5</sup> with quicksilver.  
 35    SILVIO    True, my lord, he reels from the tilt often.<sup>6</sup>  
 RODERIGO *and* GRISOLAN   Ha, ha, ha!  
 FERDINAND    Why do you laugh? Methinks, you that are  
                   courtiers should  
                   be my touchwood, take fire when I give fire; that is,  
                   laugh but when I  
                   laugh, were the subject never so witty.  
 40    CASTRUCCIO   True, my lord, I myself have heard a very  
                   good jest, and  
                   have scorned to seem to have so silly a wit as to  
                   understand it.  
 FERDINAND    But I can laugh at your fool, my lord.  
 CASTRUCCIO    He cannot speak, you know, but he makes  
                   faces: my lady

cannot abide him.

45 FERDINAND No?

CASTRUCCIO Nor endure to be in merry company, for  
she says too much  
laughing and too much company fills her too full of  
the wrinkle.

FERDINAND I would, then, have a mathematical  
instrument made for her  
face, that she might not laugh out of compass.<sup>7</sup> I  
50 shall shortly visit you  
at Milan, Lord Silvio.

SILVIO Your grace shall arrive most welcome.

FERDINAND You are a good horseman, Antonio. You  
have excellent riders  
in France. What do you think of good horsemanship?

55 ANTONIO Nobly, my lord: as out of the Grecian horse  
issued many famous  
princes,<sup>8</sup> so out of brave horsemanship arise the first  
sparks of growing  
resolution that raise the mind to noble action.

FERDINAND You have bespoke it worthily.

SILVIO Your brother, the Lord Cardinal, and sister  
duchess.

[*Reenter* CARDINAL, *with* DUCHESS, CARIOLA, *and*  
JULIA.]

CARDINAL Are the galleys come about?

60 GRISOLAN They are, my  
lord.

FERDINAND Here's the Lord Silvio, is come to take his  
leave.

DELIO [*aside to* ANTONIO] Now, sir, your promise.  
What's that Cardinal?  
I mean his temper? They say he's a brave fellow,  
Will play<sup>9</sup> his five thousand crowns at tennis, dance,

Court ladies, and one that hath fought single  
combats.

ANTONIO Some such flashes superficially hang on him  
for form; but  
observe his inward character: he is a melancholy  
churchman; the spring  
in his face is nothing but the engendering of toads;  
where he is jealous of  
any man, he lays worse plots for them than ever was  
imposed on Hercules,<sup>1</sup>  
for he strews in his way flatterers, panders,  
70 intelligencers,<sup>2</sup> atheists,  
and a thousand such political monsters. He should  
have been Pope; but  
instead of coming to it by the primitive decency of  
the church, he did  
bestow bribes so largely and so impudently as if he  
would have carried it  
away without heaven's knowledge. Some good he  
hath done—

75 DELIO You have given too much of him. What's his  
brother?

ANTONIO The duke there? A most perverse and  
turbulent nature.  
What appears in him mirth is merely outside;  
If he laugh heartily, it is to laugh  
All honesty out of fashion.

DELIO Twins?

80 ANTONIO In quality.  
He speaks with others' tongues, and hears men's  
suits  
With others' ears; will seem to sleep o' th' bench  
Only to entrap offenders in their answers;  
Dooms men to death by information;<sup>o</sup>  
Rewards by hearsay.<sup>o</sup>

85 DELIO Then the law to him  
 Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:  
 He makes of it his dwelling and a prison  
 To entangle those shall feed him.

ANTONIO Most true:  
 He ne'er pays debts unless they be shrewd turns,o  
 And those he will confess that he doth owe.  
 90 Last, for his brother there, the Cardinal,  
 They that do flatter him most say oracles  
 Hang at his lips; and verily I believe them,  
 For the devil speaks in them.  
 But for their sister, the right noble duchess,  
 95 You never fixed your eye on three fair medals  
 Cast in one figure, of so different temper.  
 For her discourse, it is so full of rapture,  
 You only will begin then to be sorry  
 When she doth end her speech, and wish, in wonder,  
 100 She held it less vaingloryo to talk much,  
 Than your penance to hear her: whilst she speaks,  
 She throws upon a man so sweet a look,  
 That it were able to raise one to a galliardo  
 That lay in a dead palsy, and to dote  
 105 On that sweet countenance; but in that look  
 There speaketh so divine a continence  
 As cuts off all lascivious and vain hope.  
 Her days are practiced in such noble virtue  
 That sure her nights, nay, more, her very sleeps,  
 110 Are more in heaven than other ladies' shrifts.o  
 Let all sweet ladies break their flattering glasses,o  
 And dress themselves in her.

DELIO Fie, Antonio,  
 You play the wire-drawer<sup>3</sup> with her commendations.

ANTONIO I'll caseo the picture up only thus much;  
 115 All her particular worth grows to this sum:  
 She stainso the time past, lights the time to come.

CARDINAL You must attend my lady in the gallery,  
Some half an hour hence.

ANTONIO I shall. [*Exeunt* ANTONIO  
*and* DELIO.]

FERDINAND Sister, I have a suit to you.

DUCHESS To me, sir?

120 FERDINAND A gentleman here, Daniel de Bosola,  
One that was in the galleys—

DUCHESS Yes, I know him.

FERDINAND A worthy fellow he is. Pray, let me  
entreat for

The provisorship of your horse.<sup>4</sup>

DUCHESS Your knowledge of  
him

Commends him and prefers him.

125 FERDINAND Call him hither.  
[*Exit* ATTENDANT.]

We are now upon<sup>o</sup> parting. Good Lord Silvio,  
Do us commend to all our noble friends  
At the leaguer.<sup>o</sup>

SILVIO Sir, I shall.

DUCHESS You are for Milan?

SILVIO I am.

DUCHESS Bring the caroches. We'll bring you down  
to the haven.<sup>5</sup>

[*Exeunt all but* FERDINAND *and the* CARDINAL.]

130 CARDINAL Be sure you entertain<sup>o</sup> that Bosola  
For your intelligence:<sup>o</sup> I would not be seen in 't;  
And therefore many times I have slighted him  
When he did court our furtherance, as this morning.

FERDINAND Antonio, the great master of her  
household,  
Had been far fitter.

135 CARDINAL You are deceived in him:  
His nature is too honest for such business.



He comes: I'll leave you.

[*Exit.*]

[*Reenter* BOSOLA.]

BOSOLA

I was lured to you.

FERDINAND My brother here the cardinal could never  
Abide you.

BOSOLA

Never since he was in my debt.

140

FERDINAND Maybe some oblique character<sup>o</sup> in your  
face

Made him suspect you.

BOSOLA

Doth he study

physiognomy?

There's no more credit to be given to th' face  
Than to a sick man's urine, which some call  
The physician's whore, because she cozens<sup>o</sup> him.  
He did suspect me wrongfully.

145

FERDINAND

For that

You must give great men leave to take their times.  
Distrust doth cause us seldom be deceived:  
You see, the oft shaking of the cedar tree  
Fastens it more at root.

BOSOLA

Yet, take heed;

150

For to suspect a friend unworthily  
Instructs him the next<sup>o</sup> way to suspect you,  
And prompts him to deceive you.

FERDINAND [*giving him money*] There's gold.

BOSOLA

So:

What follows? Never rained such showers as these  
Without thunderbolts i' th' tail of them.  
Whose throat must I cut?

155

FERDINAND Your inclination to shed blood rides post<sup>o</sup>  
Before my occasion to use you. I give you that  
To live i' th' court here, and observe the duchess;  
To note all the particulars of her 'havior,  
What suitors do solicit her for marriage,  
160 And whom she best affects. She's a young widow:  
I would not have her marry again.

BOSOLA No, sir?  
 FERDINAND Do not you ask the reason, but be  
 satisfied  
 I say I would not.  
 BOSOLA It seems you would create me  
 One of your familiars.◊  
 FERDINAND Familiar? What's that?  
 165 BOSOLA Why, a very quaint invisible devil in flesh,  
 An intelligencer.◊  
 FERDINAND Such a kind of thriving thing  
 I would wish thee, and ere long thou may'st arrive  
 At a higher place by 't.  
 BOSOLA Take your devils,  
 170 Which hell calls angels;◊ these cursed gifts would  
 make  
 You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor;  
 And should I take these, they'd take me to hell.  
 FERDINAND Sir, I'll take nothing from you that I have  
 given:  
 There is a place that I procured for you  
 This morning, the provisorship o' th' horse;  
 175 Have you heard on 't?  
 BOSOLA No.  
 FERDINAND 'Tis yours. Is 't not worth  
 thanks?  
 BOSOLA I would have you curse yourself now, that  
 your bounty,  
 Which makes men truly noble, e'er should make me  
 A villain. Oh, that to avoid ingratitude  
 For the good deed you have done me, I must do  
 180 All the ill man can invent! Thus the devil  
 Candies all sins o'er; and what heaven terms vile,  
 That names he complimentary.◊  
 FERDINAND Be yourself;  
 Keep your old garb of melancholy; 'twill express

185 You envy those that stand above your reach,  
 Yet strive not to come near 'em: this will gain  
 Access to private lodgings, where yourself  
 May, like a politic dormouse—

BOSOLA As I have seen some  
 Feed in a lord's dish, half asleep, not seeming  
 To listen to any talk; and yet these rogues  
 190 Have cut his throat in a dream. What's my place?  
 The provisorship o' th' horse? Say, then, my  
 corruption  
 Grew out of horse dung. I am your creature.

FERDINAND Away!

BOSOLA Let good men, for good deeds, covet good  
 fame,  
 Since place and riches oft are bribes of shame:  
 195 Sometimes the devil doth preach.  
 [Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A common game around court, used in training for tournaments, involved catching a hanging ring on the tip of a lance. But some of Webster's audience would have caught a sexual analogy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lint bandages were called "tents."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Surgeons.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sometimes "jennet": a small Spanish horse of Arabian stock.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ballasted. Pliny in his *Natural History* tells about some Spanish horses generated by a swift wind (8.67).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Veers away from the target, undesirable in a warhorse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Excessively; with a pun on the draftsman's compass.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The Trojan horse, in which the Greek warriors hid, to overrun Troy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Wager. "Brave": fine; ostentatious.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hercules' uncle, King Eurystheus, sent him on twelve suicide missions to get rid of him, but Hercules performed all these "labors" successfully.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Spies, "political" schemers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Draw out her praises excessively.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Let me beg (for him) the position of supervisor of your horse.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Harbor. "Caroches": carriages.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gold coins, marked with the image of the archangel Michael.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *audience hall*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *testimony of spies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *random report*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hurtful acts*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *excessive pride*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gay and lively dance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confessions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mirrors*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *frame*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *darkens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at the point of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *camp*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hire*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crooked feature*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tricks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nearest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hurries*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *diabolical spirits*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *spy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gracious* [Return to reference](#) °

### SCENE 3. *The scene continues.*

[*Enter* DUCHESS, CARDINAL, *and* CARIOLA.]

CARDINAL We are to part from you, and your own  
discretion

Must now be your director.

FERDINAND You are a widow:  
You know already what man is; and therefore  
Let not youth, high promotion, eloquence—

5 CARDINAL No, nor any thing without the addition,  
honor,  
Sway your high blood.

FERDINAND Marry! They are most  
luxurious<sup>o</sup>  
Will wed twice.

CARDINAL Oh, fie!

FERDINAND Their livers are more  
spotted  
Than Laban's sheep.<sup>1</sup>

DUCHESS Diamonds are of most value,  
They say, that have passed through most jewelers'  
hands.

FERDINAND Whores by that rule are precious.

10 DUCHESS Will you  
hear me?  
I'll never marry.

CARDINAL So most widows say;  
But commonly that motion<sup>o</sup> lasts no longer  
Than the turning of an hourglass; the funeral  
sermon  
And it end both together.

15 FERDINAND Now hear me:  
You live in a rank pasture, here, i' th' court;  
There is a kind of honeydew<sup>2</sup> that's deadly;

'Twill poison your fame<sup>o</sup> look to 't; be not cunning;  
For they whose faces do belie their hearts  
Are witches ere they arrive at twenty years,  
Aye, and give the devil suck.

20 DUCHESS This is terrible good  
counsel.

FERDINAND Hypocrisy is woven of a fine small  
thread,  
Subtler than Vulcan's engine:<sup>3</sup> yet, believe 't,  
Your darkest actions, nay, your privatest thoughts,  
Will come to light.

CARDINAL You may flatter yourself,  
And take your own choice; privately be married  
25 Under the eaves of night—

FERDINAND Think 't the best voyage  
That e'er you made; like the irregular crab,  
Which, though 't goes backward, thinks that it goes  
right

30 Because it goes its own way; but observe,  
Such weddings may more properly be said  
To be executed than celebrated.

CARDINAL The marriage night  
Is the entrance into some prison.

FERDINAND And those joys,  
Those lustful pleasures, are like heavy sleeps  
Which do forerun man's mischief.

CARDINAL Fare you well.  
Wisdom begins at the end: remember it.  
35 [*Exit.*]

DUCHESS I think this speech between you both was  
studied,  
It came so roundly<sup>o</sup> off.

FERDINAND You are my sister;  
This was my father's poniard,<sup>o</sup> do you see?  
I'd be loath to see 't look rusty, 'cause 'twas his.

40 I would have you to give o'er these chargeable<sup>o</sup>  
revels:  
A visor<sup>4</sup> and a mask are whispering rooms  
That were ne'er built for goodness—fare ye well—  
And women like that part which, like the lamprey,<sup>5</sup>  
Hath never a bone in 't.  
DUCHESS Fie, sir!  
FERDINAND Nay,  
I mean the tongue; variety of courtship.  
45 What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale  
Make a woman believe? Farewell, lusty widow.  
[Exit.]  
DUCHESS Shall this move me? If all my royal kindred  
Lay in my way unto this marriage,  
I'd make them my low footsteps; and even now,  
50 Even in this hate, as men in some great battles,  
By apprehending danger, have achieved  
Almost impossible actions (I have heard soldiers say  
so),  
So I through frights and threatenings will assay<sup>o</sup>  
This dangerous venture. Let old wives report  
55 I winked and chose a husband. Cariola,  
To thy known secrecy I have given up  
More than my life—my fame.  
CARIOLA Both shall be safe,  
For I'll conceal this secret from the world  
As warily as those that trade in poison  
60 Keep poison from their children.  
DUCHESS Thy protestation  
Is ingenious<sup>o</sup> and hearty:<sup>o</sup> I believe it.  
Is Antonio come?  
CARIOLA He attends you.  
DUCHESS Good dear soul,  
Leave me, but place thyself behind the arras,<sup>6</sup>



Where thou mayst overhear us. Wish me good  
speed,  
For I am going into a wilderness  
Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clue  
To be my guide. [CARIOLA *goes behind the*  
*arras.*]

[*Enter* ANTONIO.]

I sent for you: sit down;  
Take pen and ink, and write. Are you ready?  
ANTONIO Yes.

DUCHESS What did I say?

70 ANTONIO That I should write  
somewhat.

DUCHESS Oh, I remember:  
After these triumphs<sup>o</sup> and this large expense,  
It's fit, like thrifty husbands,<sup>z</sup> we inquire  
What's laid up for tomorrow.

ANTONIO So please your beauteous excellence.

75 DUCHESS  
Beauteous?

Indeed, I thank you: I look young for your sake;  
You have ta'en my cares upon you.

ANTONIO I'll fetch your  
grace

The particulars of your revenue and expense.

DUCHESS Oh, you are an upright treasurer: but you  
mistook;

80 For when I said I meant to make inquiry  
What's laid up for tomorrow, I did mean  
What's laid up yonder for me.

ANTONIO Where?

DUCHESS In heaven.

I am making my will (as 'tis fit princes should,  
In perfect memory), and I pray sir, tell me,  
Were not one better make it smiling thus

85

Than in deep groans and terrible ghastly looks,  
As if the gifts we parted with procured<sup>o</sup>  
That violent distraction?

ANTONIO Oh, much better.

DUCHESS If I had a husband now, this care were  
quit:

90 But I intend to make you overseer.  
What good deed shall we first remember? Say.

ANTONIO Begin with that first good deed begun i' th'  
world

After man's creation, the sacrament of marriage:  
I'd have you first provide for a good husband;  
Give him all.

DUCHESS All?

95 ANTONIO Yes, your excellent self.

DUCHESS In a winding-sheet?

ANTONIO In a couple.

DUCHESS Saint Winfred, that were a strange will!<sup>8</sup>

ANTONIO 'Twere stranger if there were no will in you  
To marry again.

DUCHESS What do you think of marriage?

100 ANTONIO I take 't, as those that deny purgatory;  
It locally<sup>o</sup> contains or heaven or hell;  
There's no third place in 't.

DUCHESS How do you affect it?<sup>o</sup>

ANTONIO My banishment,<sup>o</sup> feeding my melancholy,  
Would often reason thus—

DUCHESS Pray, let's hear it.

105 ANTONIO Say a man never marry, nor have children,  
What takes that from him? Only the bare name  
Of being a father, or the weak delight  
To see the little wanton ride a-cock-horse  
Upon a painted stick, or hear him chatter  
Like a taught starling.

110 DUCHESS Fie, fie, what's all this?



To warm them.

DUCHESS                    So, now the ground's broke,  
You may discover what a wealthy mine  
I make you lord of.

ANTONIO                    O my unworthiness!

135 DUCHESS    You were ill to sell<sup>o</sup> yourself:  
This darkening of your worth is not like that  
Which tradesmen use i' th' city; their false lights  
Are to rid bad wares off:<sup>3</sup> and I must tell you,  
If you will know where breathes a complete man  
140 (I speak it without flattery), turn your eyes,  
And progress through yourself.

ANTONIO                    Were there nor  
   heaven  
Nor hell, I should be honest: I have long served  
   virtue,  
And ne'er ta'en wages of her.

DUCHESS                    Now she pays it.  
The misery of us that are born great!  
We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us;  
145 And as a tyrant doubles<sup>o</sup> with his words  
And fearfully equivocates, so we  
Are forced to express our violent passions  
In riddles and in dreams, and leave the path  
Of simple virtue, which was never made  
150 To seem the thing it is not. Go, go brag  
You have left me heartless;<sup>o</sup> mine is in your bosom:  
I hope 'twill multiply love there. You do tremble:  
Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh,  
To fear more than to love me. Sir, be confident:  
155 What is 't distracts you? This is flesh and blood, sir;  
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster  
Kneels at my husband's tomb. Awake, awake, man!  
I do here put off all vain ceremony,  
160 And only do appear to you a young widow

That claims you for her husband, and, like a widow,  
I use but half a blush in 't.

ANTONIO Truth speak for me,  
I will remain the constant sanctuary  
Of your good name.

165 DUCHESS I thank you, gentle love:  
And 'cause<sup>o</sup> you shall not come to me in debt,  
Being now my steward, here upon your lips  
I sign your *Quietus est*.<sup>4</sup> This you should have  
begged now;  
I have seen children oft eat sweetmeats thus,  
As fearful to devour them too soon.

ANTONIO But for your brothers?

170 DUCHESS Do not think of  
them.

All discord without this circumference<sup>5</sup>  
Is only to be pitied, and not feared;  
Yet, should they know it, time will easily  
Scatter the tempest.

175 ANTONIO These words should be mine,  
And all the parts you have spoke, if some part of it  
Would not have savored flattery.

DUCHESS Kneel.

[CARIOLA comes from behind the arras.]

ANTONIO Ha!

DUCHESS Be not amazed; this woman's of my  
counsel:

I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber  
*Per verba de present*<sup>6</sup> is absolute marriage. [She  
and ANTONIO kneel.]

180 Bless, heaven, this sacred gordian,<sup>o</sup> which let  
violence

Never untwine!

ANTONIO And may our sweet affections, like the  
spheres,



- Note 1: In Genesis 30:31–33, Laban promises to Jacob any speckled lambs born while Jacob is herding Laban’s sheep; the liver as seat of the passions was thought to be diseased when spotted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A sweet, sticky substance left on plants by aphids.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The net in which Vulcan, Venus’s husband, caught her misbehaving with Mars.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A half-mask, worn by ladies at carnivals, theaters, and other dubious resorts.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lamprey eels have a cartilaginous, not a bony, skeleton.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tapestries were often hung in Renaissance palaces to moderate the chill of the bare walls.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Though used here in its original sense of one who preserves and safeguards property, the word shows where the duchess’s thoughts are tending.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Saint Winifred, Welsh virgin and martyr, is an odd saint for the Duchess of Malfi to swear on. “In a couple”: that is, of sheets—but with a play on “coupling.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Healing, but with an overtone implying royal power.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To conjure up a devil, the necromancer first draws a charmed circle on the ground—like the duchess’s ring.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: His head as he kneels.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tradesmen in the city display their goods in a poor light so the defects won’t be seen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The legal formula for marking a bill “paid” or “acquitted.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Outside this room, or their embrace.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “By words in the present tense” (that is, not a betrothal or promise for the future). In canon law, the agreement of two parties to consider themselves married is valid with or without priest, ceremony, or witness.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Like the supposed music of the spheres.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The phrase is addressed to Cariola as the duchess shuts her eyes and rejects all support.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Alexander and Lodowick were look-alike friends in an old ballad. For purely virtuous reasons, one slept with the wife of the other, but with the precaution indicated.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *lecherous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impulse*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reputation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glibly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dagger*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expensive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attempt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ingenuous* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sincere*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tournaments*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brought on*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *within itself*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feel about it*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *solitary condition*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *evaluate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *speaks ambiguously*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *without a heart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *so that*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *knot*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *constantly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *giving life*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tighter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *idea*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *choleric*[Return to reference °](#)



## **Act 2**

### **SCENE 1. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter BOSOLA and CASTRUCCIO.*]

BOSOLA You say you would fain be taken for an  
eminent courtier?

CASTRUCCIO 'Tis the very main of my ambition.

BOSOLA Let me see: you have a reasonable good face  
for 't already, and  
your nightcap expresses your ears sufficient largely. I  
would have you

5 learn to twirl the strings of your band<sup>1</sup> with a good  
grace, and in a set  
speech, at th' end of every sentence, to hum three  
or four times, or blow  
your nose till it smart again, to recover your memory.  
When you come to  
be a president<sup>2</sup> in criminal causes, if you smile upon  
a prisoner, hang  
him, but if you frown upon him and threaten him, let  
him be sure to  
'scape the gallows.

10 CASTRUCCIO I would be a very merry president.

BOSOLA Do not sup o' nights; 'twill beget you an  
admirable wit.

CASTRUCCIO Rather it would make me have a good  
stomach<sup>3</sup> to quarrel;  
for they say, your roaring boys<sup>4</sup> eat meat seldom,  
and that makes them  
so valiant. But how shall I know whether the people  
15 take me for an eminent  
fellow?

BOSOLA I will teach a trick to know it: give out you lie  
a-dying, and if you  
hear the common people curse you, be sure you are  
taken for one of the  
prime nightcaps.<sup>5</sup>

[*Enter an* OLD LADY.]

20 You come from painting now?

OLD LADY From what?

BOSOLA Why, from your scurvy face-physic. To behold  
thee not painted  
inclines somewhat near a miracle; these in thy face  
here were deep ruts

and foul sloughs the last progress.<sup>6</sup> There was a lady  
in France that,

25 having had the smallpox, flayed the skin off her face  
to make it more

level; and whereas before she looked like a nutmeg  
grater, after she  
resembled an abortive hedgehog.

OLD LADY Do you call this painting?

BOSOLA No, no, but you call it careening of an old  
morphewed lady, to

30 make her disembugue again: there's rough-cast  
phrase to your plastic.<sup>7</sup>

OLD LADY It seems you are well acquainted with my  
closet.

BOSOLA One would suspect it for a shop of witchcraft,  
to find in it the fat of

serpents, spawn of snakes, Jews' spittle, and their  
young children's ordure;

and all these for the face. I would sooner eat a dead  
pigeon taken from the

35 soles of the feet of one sick of the plague than kiss  
one of you fasting.<sup>8</sup>

Here are two of you, whose sin of your youth is the  
very patrimony of the  
physician; makes him renew his footcloth with the  
spring, and change his  
high-prized courtesan with the fall of the leaf.<sup>9</sup> I do  
wonder you do not  
loathe yourselves. Observe my meditation now:  
What thing is in this outward form of man  
40 To be beloved? We account it ominous,  
If nature do produce a colt, or lamb,  
A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling  
A man, and fly from 't as a prodigy:<sup>o</sup>  
Man stands amazed to see his deformity  
45 In any other creature but himself.  
But in our own flesh, though we bear diseases  
Which have their true names only ta'en from beasts  
—

As the most ulcerous wolf and swinish measles<sup>1</sup>—  
Though we are eaten up of lice and worms,  
50 And though continually we bear about us  
A rotten and dead body, we delight  
To hide it in rich tissue: all our fear,  
Nay, all our terror, is lest our physician  
Should put us in the ground to be made sweet—  
55 Your wife's gone to Rome: you two couple, and get  
you

To the wells at Lucca to recover your aches.<sup>2</sup>

[*Exeunt* CASTRUCCIO *and* OLD LADY.]

I have other work on foot. I observe our duchess  
Is sick a-days: she pukes, her stomach seethes,  
The fins of her eyelids look most teeming blue,  
60 She wanes i' th' cheek, and waxes fat i' th' flank,  
And contrary to our Italian fashion,  
Wears a loose-bodied gown: there's somewhat in 't.  
I have a trick may chance discover it,



man's mind rides faster than his horse can gallop,  
they quickly both tire.

ANTONIO You would look up to heaven, but I think  
The devil, that rules i' th' air, stands in your light.

BOSOLA Oh, sir, you are lord of the ascendant,<sup>5</sup> chief  
man with the duchess;  
a duke was your cousin-german removed.<sup>6</sup> Say you  
were lineally descended  
90 from King Pepin,<sup>7</sup> or he himself, what of this? Search  
the heads of the  
greatest rivers in the world, you shall find them but  
bubbles of water. Some  
would think the souls of princes were brought forth  
by some more weighty  
cause than those of meaner persons: they are  
deceived, there's the same  
hand to them; the like passions sway them; the  
same reason that makes a  
95 vicar go to law for a tithe-pig<sup>8</sup> and undo his  
neighbors, makes them spoil a  
whole province, and batter down goodly cities with  
the cannon.

[*Enter DUCHESS and LADIES.*]

DUCHESS Your arm, Antonio; do I not grow fat?  
I am exceeding short-winded. Bosola,  
I would have you, sir, provide for me a litter,  
Such a one as the Duchess of Florence rode in.

100 BOSOLA The duchess used one when she was great  
with child.

DUCHESS I think she did. Come hither, mend my  
ruff;  
Here, when? Thou art such a tedious<sup>9</sup> lady, and  
Thy breath smells of lemon peels;<sup>9</sup> would thou hadst  
done;  
Shall I swoon under thy fingers? I am

105 So troubled with the mother!<sup>1</sup>  
 BOSOLA [*aside*] I fear too much.  
 DUCHESS I have heard you say that the French  
 courtiers  
 Wear their hats on 'fore the king.  
 ANTONIO I have seen it.  
 DUCHESS In  
 the presence?  
 ANTONIO Yes.  
 DUCHESS Why should not we bring up that fashion?  
 110 'Tis  
 Ceremony more than duty that consists  
 In the removing of a piece of felt.  
 Be you the example to the rest o' th' court;  
 Put on your hat first.  
 ANTONIO You must pardon me.  
 I have seen, in colder countries than in France,  
 115 Nobles stand bare to th' prince, and the distinction  
 Methought showed reverently.  
 BOSOLA I have a present for your grace.  
 DUCHESS For me, sir?  
 BOSOLA Apricots, madam.  
 DUCHESS O, sir, where are they?  
 I have heard of none to-year.  
 BOSOLA [*aside*] Good: her color rises.  
 120 DUCHESS Indeed, I thank you: they are wondrous  
 fair ones.  
 What an unskillful fellow is our gardener!  
 We shall have none this month.  
 BOSOLA Will not your grace pare them?  
 DUCHESS No. They taste of musk, methinks; indeed  
 125 they do.  
 BOSOLA I know not: yet I wish your grace had  
 pared 'em.  
 DUCHESS Why?

BOSOLA I forgot to tell you, the knave  
 gardener,  
 Only to raise his profit by them the sooner,  
 Did ripen them in horse dung.<sup>2</sup>

DUCHESS O, you jest.  
 You shall judge: pray taste one.

130 ANTONIO Indeed, madam,  
 I do not love the fruit.

DUCHESS Sir, you are loath  
 To rob us of our dainties: 'tis a delicate fruit;  
 They say they are restorative.

BOSOLA 'Tis a pretty art,  
 This grafting.

DUCHESS 'Tis so; a bettering of nature.

135 BOSOLA To make a pippin grow upon a crab,<sup>o</sup>  
 A damson on a blackthorn. [*aside*] How greedily she  
 eats them!

A whirlwind strike off these bawd farthingales!<sup>3</sup>  
 For, but for that and the loose-bodied gown,  
 I should have discovered apparently<sup>o</sup>

140 The young springal<sup>o</sup> cutting a caper in her belly.

DUCHESS I thank you, Bosola. They were right good  
 ones,  
 If they do not make me sick.

ANTONIO How now, madam?

DUCHESS This green fruit and my stomach are not  
 friends;  
 How they swell me!

BOSOLA [*aside*] Nay, you are too much swelled  
 already.

DUCHESS Oh, I am in an extreme cold sweat!

145 BOSOLA I am  
 very sorry.

DUCHESS Lights to my chamber! O good Antonio,  
 I fear I am undone!

DELIO Lights there, lights!

[*Exeunt* DUCHESS *and* LADIES. *Exit, on the other side,* BOSOLA.]

ANTONIO O my most trusty Delio, we are lost!  
I fear she's fall'n in labor; and there's left  
No time for her remove.

DELIO Have you prepared  
Those ladies to attend her? And procured  
That politic<sup>o</sup> safe conveyance for the midwife  
Your duchess plotted?

ANTONIO I have.

DELIO Make use, then, of this forced occasion:  
Give out that Bosola hath poisoned her  
With these apricots; that will give some color  
For her keeping close.

ANTONIO Fie, fie, the physicians  
Will then flock to her.

DELIO For that you may pretend  
She'll use some prepared antidote of her own,  
Lest the physicians should re-poison her.

ANTONIO I am lost in amazement:<sup>o</sup> I know not what  
to think on 't. [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The elaborate ruff of the day had strings attached to it.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Presiding magistrate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Disposition.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: London town bullies.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lawyers (who wore a white coif or skullcap; see line 4, above).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A progress was a formal royal journey of state.[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: Scraping ("careening") of an old, scaly ("morphewed") ship ("lady") to fit her for the ocean ("making her disemboque") again. All these metaphors are applied to the model ("plastic") of the lady's condition as "rough-cast," a mixture of lime and gravel, is troweled over a base.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Centuries of traditional invective about women's cosmetic practices lie behind this speech. Freshly killed pigeons were applied to the feet of plague victims to draw off the infection; fasting was supposed to cause bad breath.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The physician grows rich on those who have outworn their youth; every spring he buys a new harness for his horse and every fall a new mistress for himself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Wolf": cancer or lupus; "measle": an infection of swine, sometimes confused with human measles.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The wells at Lucca are the mineral springs at nearby Montecatini, renowned as a place to "take the cure." Aches are a symptom of syphilis.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Skin disease.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Foolishness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In astrology, the predominating influence, controlling destiny.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: First cousin once removed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Father of Charlemagne, hence source of a great dynasty.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A parson was entitled to a tenth ("tithe") of his parishioners' annual profit and was often paid in crops or livestock, but was thought mean if he sued for a petty sum.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lemon peels, chewed to sweeten the breath.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Heartburn, but with a second meaning not lost on Bosola.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Which grows warm as it decomposes.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Early hoopskirts, capable of concealing the figure.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *evil omen*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clumsy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crab apple*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *certainly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fellow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *secret*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confusion*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter* BOSOLA.]

BOSOLA So, so, there's no question but her tetchiness<sup>1</sup>  
and most vulturous  
eating of the apricots are apparent signs of  
breeding.

[*Enter an* OLD LADY.]

Now?

OLD LADY I am in haste, sir.

5 BOSOLA There was a young waiting woman had a  
monstrous desire to see  
the glasshouse<sup>2</sup>—

OLD LADY Nay, pray let me go.

BOSOLA And it was only to know what strange  
instrument it was should  
swell up a glass to the fashion of a woman's belly.

10 OLD LADY I will hear no more of the glasshouse. You  
are still<sup>3</sup> abusing  
women!

BOSOLA Who, I? No; only by the way now and then  
mention your frailties.  
The orange tree bears ripe and green fruit and  
blossoms all together;  
and some of you give entertainment for pure love,  
but more for more precious  
15 reward. The lusty spring smells well, but drooping  
autumn tastes  
well. If we have the same golden showers that  
rained in the time of Jupiter  
the thunderer, you have the same Danaës still,<sup>4</sup> to  
hold up their laps  
to receive them. Didst thou never study the  
mathematics?



2 SERVANT There  
 was  
 35 A cunning traitor: who would have searched his  
 codpiece?  
 1 SERVANT True, if he had kept out of the ladies'  
 chambers.  
 And all the molds of his buttons were leaden bullets.  
 2 SERVANT O wicked cannibal!  
 A firelock<sup>o</sup> in 's codpiece!  
 1 SERVANT 'Twas a French plot,  
 Upon my life.  
 2 SERVANT To see what the devil can do!  
 40 ANTONIO Are all the officers here?  
 SERVANTS We are.  
 ANTONIO  
 Gentlemen,  
 We have lost much plate<sup>z</sup> you know, and but this  
 evening  
 Jewels, to the value of four thousand ducats,  
 Are missing in the duchess' cabinet.  
 Are the gates shut?  
 SERVANT Yes.  
 ANTONIO 'Tis the duchess' pleasure  
 45 Each officer be locked into his chamber  
 Till the sun-rising; and to send the keys  
 Of all their chests and of their outward doors  
 Into her bedchamber. She is very sick.  
 RODERIGO At her pleasure.  
 ANTONIO She entreats you take 't  
 50 not ill:  
 The innocent shall be the more approved by it.  
 BOSOLA Gentlemen o' th' wood-yard, where's your  
 Switzer now?  
 1 SERVANT By this hand, 'twas credibly reported by one  
 o' th' black guard.<sup>8</sup>

[*Exeunt all except ANTONIO and DELIO.*]

DELIO     How fares it with the duchess?

ANTONIO    She's exposed  
Unto the worst of torture, pain, and fear.

---

55 DELIO Speak to her all happy comfort.

ANTONIO    How I do play the fool with mine own  
              danger!

You are this night, dear friend, to post to Rome;  
My life lies in your service.

DELIO Do not doubt me.

60 ANTONIO Oh, 'tis far from me, and yet fear presents  
me

Somewhat that looks like danger.

DELIO Believe it,

'Tis but the shadow of your fear, no more;

How superstitiously we mind our evils!

The throwing down salt, or crossing of a hare,

Bleeding at nose, the stumbling of a horse,

65 Or singing of a cricket, are of power

To daunt whole mano in us. Sir, fare you well:

I wish you all the joys of a blessed father:

And, for my faith, lay this unto your breast,

Old friends, like old swords, still are trusted best.

[*Exit.*]

[Enter CARIOLA.]

CARIOLA Sir, you are the happy father of a son:

Your wife commends him to you.

ANTONIO Blessed comfort!

For heaven's sake tend her well: I'll presently

Go set a figure for 's nativity.<sup>9</sup>

[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Irritability. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Where bottles were blown, near the theater in Blackfriars.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Always.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jupiter's success in wooing Danaë in a shower of gold traditionally illustrated female venality.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: At once. "Posterns": outer gates.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An outsize flap worn on the front of men's trunk hose.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Massive gold and silver dishes, a frequent form of wealth in the days before banks.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Kitchen scullions. The "wood-yard" is a source of firewood for kitchen and fireplaces.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cast his horoscope right away.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *Swiss guard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pistol*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *all courage*[Return to reference °](#)

### SCENE 3. *The scene continues.*

[*Enter BOSOLA, with a dark lantern.*]

5 BOSOLA Sure I did hear a woman shriek: list, ha!  
And the sound came, if I received it right,  
From the duchess' lodgings. There's some stratagem  
In the confining all our courtiers  
To their several<sup>o</sup> wards: I must have part of it;  
My intelligence will freeze else.<sup>1</sup> List, again!  
It may be 'twas the melancholy bird,  
Best friend of silence and of solitariness,  
The owl, that screamed so. Ha! Antonio?

[*Enter ANTONIO with a candle, his sword drawn.*]

10 ANTONIO I heard some noise. Who's there? What art  
thou? Speak.

BOSOLA Antonio? Put not your face nor body  
To such a forced expression of fear.  
I am Bosola, your friend.

ANTONIO Bosola!

[*aside*] This mole does undermine me.—Heard you  
not

A noise even now?

BOSOLA From whence?

15 ANTONIO From the  
duchess' lodging.

BOSOLA Not I. Did you?

ANTONIO I did, or else I dreamed.

BOSOLA Let's walk towards it.

ANTONIO No, it may be 'twas  
But the rising of the wind.

BOSOLA Very likely.

Methinks 'tis very cold, and yet you sweat:  
You look wildly.

20 ANTONIO I have been setting a figure<sup>2</sup>



For the duchess' jewels.

BOSOLA

Ah, and how falls your

question?

Do you find it radical?<sup>o</sup>

ANTONIO

What's that to you?

'Tis rather to be questioned what design,  
When all men were commanded to their lodgings,  
Makes you a nightwalker.

BOSOLA

In sooth, I'll tell you:

25

Now all the court's asleep, I thought the devil  
Had least to do here; I came to say my prayers;  
And if it do offend you I do so,  
You are a fine courtier.

ANTONIO [*aside*]

This fellow will undo me.

You gave the duchess apricots today:

30

Pray heaven they were not poisoned!

BOSOLA

Poisoned? A

Spanish fig<sup>3</sup>

For the imputation!

ANTONIO

Traitors are ever confident

Till they are discovered. There were jewels stolen,  
too;

In my conceit,<sup>o</sup> none are to be suspected  
More than yourself.

BOSOLA

You are a false steward.

35

ANTONIO Saucy slave, I'll pull thee up by the roots.

BOSOLA May be the ruin will crush you to pieces.

ANTONIO You are an impudent snake indeed, sir:

Are you scarce warm, and do you show your sting?  
You libel well, sir.

BOSOLA

No, sir: copy it out,

40

And I will set my hand to 't.<sup>4</sup>

ANTONIO [*aside*]

My nose bleeds.

One that were superstitious would count

This ominous, when it merely comes by chance:

Two letters, that are wrought here for my name,<sup>5</sup>  
 Are drowned in blood!  
 45 Mere accident.—For you, sir, I'll take order  
 I' th' morn you shall be safe.° [aside] 'Tis that must  
 color  
 Her lying-in.°—Sir, this door you pass not:  
 I do not hold it fit that you come near  
 The duchess' lodgings, till you have quit° yourself.  
 50 [aside] The great are like the base, nay, they are the  
 same,  
 When they seek shameful ways to avoid shame.  
 [Exit.]  
 BOSOLA Antonio hereabout did drop a paper:  
 Some of your help, false friend: [opening his lantern]  
 Oh, here it is.  
 What's here? A child's nativity calculated?  
 55 [reads]  
 "The duchess was delivered of a son, 'tween the  
 hours twelve and one  
 in the night, *Anno Dom.* 1504,"—that's this year  
 —"*decimo nono*  
*Decembris*,<sup>6</sup>—that's this night—"taken according to  
 the meridian of  
 Malfi"—that's our duchess: happy discovery! "The  
 lord of the first house  
 being combust<sup>7</sup> in the ascendant, signifies short life;  
 60 and Mars being in  
 a human sign, joined to the tail of the Dragon, in the  
 eighth house,  
 doth threaten a violent death. *Caetera non*  
*scrutantur.*"<sup>8</sup>  
 Why, now 'tis most apparent: this precise° fellow  
 Is the duchess' bawd:° I have it to my wish!  
 This is a parcel of intelligency  
 65

Our courtiers were cased up for: it needs must  
follow  
That I must be committed on pretense  
Of poisoning her; which I'll endure, and laugh at.  
If one could find the father now! But that  
Time will discover. Old Castruccio  
70 I' th' morning posts to Rome: by him I'll send  
A letter that shall make her brothers' galls  
O'erflow their livers. This was a thrifty<sup>o</sup> way.  
Though lust do mask in ne'er so strange disguise,  
75 She's oft found witty, but is never wise.  
[*Exit.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: All my news will be cold otherwise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Establishing the loss involved. But Bosola takes the expression astrologically, as if Antonio were casting a horoscope.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An obscene gesture, which Bosola doubtless makes onstage.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bosola denies the charge, not by denying malignancy, but by offering to publish it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Embroidered on the handkerchief.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: December 19.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Burned up; that is, the ruling planet is close to the sun.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "The rest is not examined"—that is, the horoscope is incomplete. Mars and the Dragon are sinister signs, even separately; fatal together.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *separate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *significant*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *opinion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *under guard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *giving birth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cleared*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *officious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *procurer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shrewd*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 4. *The palace of the CARDINAL at Rome.***

[*Enter* CARDINAL *and* JULIA.]

CARDINAL Sit. Thou art my best of wishes. Prithee,  
tell me

What trick didst thou invent to come to Rome  
Without thy husband.

JULIA Why, my lord, I told him  
I came to visit an old anchorite<sup>o</sup>  
Here for devotion.

5 CARDINAL Thou are a witty false one—  
I mean, to him.

JULIA You have prevailed with me  
Beyond my strongest thoughts! I would not now  
Find you inconstant.

CARDINAL Do not put thyself  
To such a voluntary torture, which proceeds  
Out of your own guilt.

JULIA How, my lord?

10 CARDINAL You fear  
My constancy, because you have approved<sup>o</sup>  
Those giddy and wild turnings in yourself.

JULIA Did you e'er find them?

CARDINAL Sooth, generally for  
women;

A man might strive to make glass malleable,  
Ere he should make them fixed.

15 JULIA So, my lord.

CARDINAL We had need go borrow that fantastic  
glass

Invented by Galileo the Florentine<sup>1</sup>  
To view another spacious world i' th' moon,  
And look to find a constant woman there.

JULIA This is very well, my lord.

20 CARDINAL Why do you weep?  
Are tears your justification? The selfsame tears  
Will fall into your husband's bosom, lady,  
With a loud protestation that you love him  
Above the world. Come, I'll love you wisely,  
That's jealously, since I am very certain  
25 You cannot make me cuckold.

JULIA I'll go home  
To my husband.

CARDINAL You may thank me, lady,  
I have taken you off your melancholy perch,  
Bore you upon my fist, and showed you game,  
And let you fly at it.<sup>2</sup> I pray thee, kiss me.  
30 When thou wast with thy husband, thou wast  
watched

Like a tame elephant: still you are to thank me:  
Thou hadst only kisses from him and high feeding;  
But what delight was that? 'Twas just like one  
That hath a little fingering on the lute,  
35 Yet cannot tune it: still you are to thank me.

JULIA You told me of a piteous wound i' th' heart  
And a sick liver, when you wooed me first,  
And spake like one in physic.<sup>3</sup> [A knock is  
heard.]

CARDINAL Who's that?  
Rest firm,<sup>o</sup> for my affection to thee,  
40 Lightning moves slow to 't.<sup>o</sup>  
[Enter SERVANT.]

SERVANT Madam, a gentleman,  
That's come post from Malfi, desires to see you.

CARDINAL Let him enter. I'll withdraw.  
[Exit.]

SERVANT He says  
Your husband, old Castruccio, is come to Rome,

Most pitifully tired with riding post.<sup>4</sup>

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter* DELIO.]

JULIA Signor Delio! [*aside*]'tis one of my old  
suitors.

DELIO I was bold to come and see you.

JULIA Sir, you are  
welcome.

DELIO Do you lie<sup>o</sup> here?

JULIA Sure, your own experience  
Will satisfy you no: our Roman prelates  
Do not keep lodging for ladies.

DELIO Very well.

50 I have brought you no commendations from your  
husband,  
For I know none by him.

JULIA I hear he's come to Rome.

DELIO I never knew man and beast, of a horse and  
a knight,

55 So weary of each other: if he had had a good back,  
He would have undertook to have borne his horse,  
His breech was so pitifully sore.

JULIA Your laughter  
Is my pity.

DELIO Lady, I know not whether  
You want money, but I have brought you some.

JULIA From my husband?

DELIO No, from mine own  
allowance.

60 JULIA I must hear the condition, ere I be bound to  
take it.

DELIO Look on 't, 'tis gold: hath it not a fine color?

JULIA I have a bird more beautiful.

DELIO Try the sound on 't.





- Note 1: In 1504, Galileo's telescope was more than one hundred years in the future, but the reference was topical for Webster's audience.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The cardinal speaks of himself as a falconer training a bird (Julia).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Like a person under a doctor's care.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: When riding post, one changed horses at regular intervals without stopping to rest oneself.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, who judge of actions before seeing their final consequences.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *hermit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *experienced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be assured*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by comparison*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lodge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicinal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *broth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *chastity*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 5. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter* CARDINAL, *and* FERDINAND *with a letter.*]

FERDINAND I have this night digged up a mandrake.<sup>1</sup>

CARDINAL

Say you?

FERDINAND And I am grown mad with 't.

CARDINAL What's the  
prodigy?<sup>o</sup>

FERDINAND Read there—a sister damned: she's loose i'  
th' hilt;<sup>2</sup>

Grown a notorious strumpet.

CARDINAL Speak lower.

FERDINAND Lower?

5 Rogues do not whisper 't now, but seek to publish 't  
(As servants do the bounty of their lords)

Aloud; and with a covetous searching eye,  
To mark who note them. O, confusion seize her!  
She hath had most cunning bawds to serve her turn,  
And more secure conveyances for lust  
10 Than towns of garrison for service.<sup>o</sup>

CARDINAL Is 't possible?  
Can this be certain?

FERDINAND Rhubarb, oh, for rhubarb  
To purge this choler!<sup>3</sup> Here's the cursèd day  
To prompt my memory, and here 't shall stick  
15 Till of her bleeding heart I make a sponge  
To wipe it out.

CARDINAL Why do you make yourself  
So wild a tempest?

FERDINAND Would I could be one,  
That I might toss her palace 'bout her ears,  
Root up her goodly forests, blast her meads,<sup>o</sup>  
20 And lay her general territory as waste



CARDINAL You fly beyond your reason.

FERDINAND Go to,  
mistress!

'Tis not your whore's milk that shall quench my wild  
fire,

But your whore's blood.

50 CARDINAL How idly shows this rage, which carries  
you,

As men conveyed by witches through the air,  
On violent whirlwinds! This intemperate noise  
Fitly resembles deaf men's shrill discourse,  
Who talk aloud, <sup>o</sup> thinking all other men  
To have their imperfection.

55 FERDINAND Have not you  
My palsy?

CARDINAL Yes, I can be angry, but  
Without this rupture: there is not in nature  
A thing that makes man so deformed, so beastly,  
As doth intemperate anger. Chide yourself.  
60 You have divers men who never yet expressed  
Their strong desire of rest but by unrest,  
By vexing of themselves. Come, put yourself  
In tune.

FERDINAND So; I will only study to seem  
The thing I am not. I could kill her now,  
In you, or in myself; for I do think  
65 It is some sin in us heaven doth revenge  
By her.

CARDINAL Are you stark mad?

FERDINAND I would have their  
bodies

Burnt in a coal pit with the ventage <sup>o</sup> stopped,  
That their cursed smoke might not ascend to  
heaven;

70 Or dip the sheets they lie in in pitch or sulphur,  
Wrap them in 't, and then light them like a match;

Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis,<sup>o</sup>  
 And give 't his lecherous father to renew<sup>o</sup>  
 The sin of his back.<sup>7</sup>

CARDINAL I'll leave you.

FERDINAND Nay, I have done.

75 I am confident, had I been damned in hell,  
 And should have heard of this, it would have put me  
 Into a cold sweat. In, in; I'll go sleep.  
 Till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir:  
 That known, I'll find scorpions to string my whips,<sup>8</sup>  
 And fix her in a general eclipse.

80 [Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A fabulous root, violently aphrodisiac but also deadly poison. Both aspects apply to Ferdinand. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, promiscuous. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rhubarb, as a laxative, was thought curative of the high pressures of hot rage. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By which people were bled. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The left is the sinister side, associated with bad luck, deceit, and passion. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gross tests of strength. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: As Atreus did to Thyestes in Greek legend. "The sin of his back": sexual capacity. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Tipping the thongs of a whip with "scorpions" (tips of jagged steel or lead that sting and bite the flesh) is an old metaphor for aggravated punishment. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *fearful wonder* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *receiving supplies* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *meadows* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *balm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cautery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *throw the hammer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loudly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chimney*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *broth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repair*[Return to reference](#) °

## **Act 3**

### **SCENE 1. *Amalfi.***

[*Enter* ANTONIO *and* DELIO.]

ANTONIO Our noble friend, my most beloved Delio!  
Oh, you have been a stranger long at court;  
Came you along with the Lord Ferdinand?

DELIO I did, sir. And how fares your noble duchess?

5 ANTONIO Right fortunately well: she's an excellent  
Feeder of pedigrees; since you last saw her,  
She hath had two children more, a son and  
daughter.

DELIO Methinks 'twas yesterday: let me but wink,  
And not behold your face, which to mine eye  
Is somewhat leaner, verily I should dream  
10 It were within this half-hour.

ANTONIO You have not been in law, friend Delio,  
Nor in prison, nor a suitor at the court,  
Nor begged the reversion of some great man's place,  
Nor troubled with an old wife, which doth make  
15 Your time so insensibly<sup>o</sup> hasten.

DELIO Pray, sir, tell me,  
Hath not this news arrived yet to the ear  
Of the Lord Cardinal?

ANTONIO I fear it hath:  
The Lord Ferdinand, that's newly come to court,  
Doth bear himself right dangerously.

DELIO Pray, why?  
20 ANTONIO He is so quiet that he seems to sleep  
The tempest out, as dormice do in winter.

Those houses that are haunted are most still  
Till the devil be up.

DELIO What say the common people?

ANTONIO The common rabble do directly say

25 She is a strumpet.  
 DELIO And your graver heads,  
 Which would be politic,<sup>o</sup> what censure<sup>o</sup> they?  
 ANTONIO They do observe I grow to infinite  
 purchase  
 The left-hand way,<sup>1</sup> and all suppose the duchess  
 Would amend it, if she could; for, say they,  
 30 Great princes, though they grudge their officers  
 Should have such large and unconfined means  
 To get wealth under them, will not complain,  
 Lest thereby they should make them odious  
 Unto the people; for other obligation  
 35 Of love or marriage between her and me  
 They never dream of.  
 DELIO The Lord Ferdinand  
 Is going to bed.  
 [*Enter DUCHESS, FERDINAND, and BOSOLA.*]  
 FERDINAND I'll instantly to bed,  
 For I am weary.—I am to bespeak  
 A husband for you.  
 DUCHESS For me, sir? Pray, who is 't?  
 40 FERDINAND The great Count Malateste.  
 DUCHESS Fie upon  
 him!  
 A count? He's a mere stick of sugar candy;  
 You may look quite through him. When I choose  
 A husband, I will marry for your honor.  
 45 FERDINAND You shall do well in 't.—How is 't, worthy  
 Antonio?  
 DUCHESS But, sir, I am to have private conference  
 with you  
 About a scandalous report is spread  
 Touching mine honor.  
 FERDINAND Let me be ever deaf to 't:  
 One of Pasquil's paper bullets,<sup>2</sup> court-calumny,



50 A pestilent air, which princes' palaces  
Are seldom purged of. Yet, say that it were true,  
I pour it in your bosom, my fixed love  
Would strongly excuse, extenuate, nay, deny  
Faults, were they apparent in you. Go, be safe  
In your own innocence.

55 DUCHESS [*aside*] O blessed comfort!  
This deadly air is purged.

[*Exeunt* DUCHESS, ANTONIO, *and* DELIO.]

FERDINAND Her guilt treads on  
Hot-burning coulters.<sup>3</sup> Now, Bosola,  
How thrives our intelligence?<sup>o</sup>

BOSOLA Sir, uncertainly:  
'Tis rumored she hath had three bastards, but  
By whom, we may go read i' th' stars.

60 FERDINAND Why, some  
Hold opinion all things are written there.

BOSOLA Yes, if we could find spectacles to read  
them.

I do suspect there hath been some sorcery  
Used on the duchess.

FERDINAND Sorcery? To what purpose?

65 BOSOLA To make her dote on some desertless fellow  
She shames to acknowledge.

FERDINAND Can your faith give  
way

To think there's power in potions or in charms,  
To make us love whether we will or no?

BOSOLA Most certainly.

70 FERDINAND Away! These are mere gulleries,<sup>o</sup> horrid  
things,

Invented by some cheating mountebanks<sup>4</sup>

To abuse us. Do you think that herbs or charms  
Can force the will? Some trials have been made  
In this foolish practice, but the ingredients

75 Were lenitive<sup>o</sup> poisons, such as are of force  
 To make the patient mad; and straight the witch  
 Swears by equivocation they are in love.  
 The witchcraft lies in her rank<sup>o</sup> blood. This night  
 I will force confession from her. You told me  
 80 You had got, within these two days, a false<sup>o</sup> key  
 Into her bedchamber.  
 BOSOLA I have.  
 FERDINAND As I would wish.  
 BOSOLA What do you intend to do?  
 FERDINAND Can you guess?  
 BOSOLA  
 No.  
 FERDINAND Do not ask, then:  
 He that can compass<sup>o</sup> me, and know my drifts,<sup>o</sup>  
 85 May say he hath put a girdle 'bout the world,  
 And sounded all her quicksands.  
 BOSOLA I do not  
 Think so.  
 FERDINAND What do you think, then, pray?  
 BOSOLA That you  
 Are your own chronicle too much, and grossly  
 Flatter yourself.  
 FERDINAND Give me thy hand; I thank thee:  
 90 I ne'er gave pension but to flatterers,  
 Till I entertained<sup>o</sup> thee. Farewell.  
 That friend a great man's ruin strongly checks,  
 Who rails into his belief all his defects.  
 [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, they think I am getting rich dishonestly.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Anonymous satires were traditionally pasted on the statue of Pasquillo, or Pasquino, near Piazza Navona in Rome, and attributed to his authorship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Medieval chastity inquests customarily required the questioned lady to walk barefoot over red-hot plowshares ("coulters").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A mixture of street entertainer and patent medicine salesman.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *imperceptibly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *statesmanlike* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *detective work*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deceits*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slow-working*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wanton*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unauthorized*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *comprehend* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *purposes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *employed*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 2. *The bedchamber of the* DUCHESS.**

[*Enter* DUCHESS, ANTONIO, *and* CARIOLA.]

DUCHESS Bring me the casket hither, and the glass.  
You get no lodging here tonight, my lord.

ANTONIO Indeed, I must persuade one.

DUCHESS Very good:

I hope in time 'twill grow into a custom,  
That noblemen shall come with cap and knee  
5 To purchase a night's lodging of their wives.

ANTONIO I must lie here.

DUCHESS Must! You are a lord of  
misrule.<sup>1</sup>

ANTONIO Indeed, my rule is only in the night.

DUCHESS To what use will you put me?

ANTONIO We'll sleep  
together.

10 DUCHESS Alas, what pleasure can two lovers find in  
sleep?

CARIOLA My lord, I lie with her often, and I know  
She'll much disquiet you.

ANTONIO See, you are complained  
of.

CARIOLA For she's the sprawling'st bedfellow.

ANTONIO I shall  
like her

The better for that.

CARIOLA Sir, shall I ask you a question?

ANTONIO I pray thee, Cariola.

15 CARIOLA Wherefore still,<sup>2</sup> when  
you lie  
with my lady,  
Do you rise so early?

ANTONIO Laboring men

Count the clock oftenest, Cariola,  
Are glad when their task's ended.

DUCHESS

I'll stop your mouth.

[*Kisses him.*]

ANTONIO Nay, that's but one; Venus had two soft  
doves

20 To draw her chariot; I must have another— [*She  
kisses him again.*]

When wilt thou marry, Cariola?

CARIOLA

Never, my lord.

ANTONIO Oh, fie upon this single life! Forgo it.

We read how Daphne, for her peevish flight,

Became a fruitless bay tree; Syrinx turned

25 To the pale empty reed; Anaxarete

Was frozen into marble: whereas those

Which married, or proved kind unto their friends,

Were by a gracious influence trans-shaped

Into the olive, pomegranate, mulberry,

30 Became flowers, precious stones, or eminent stars.<sup>2</sup>

CARIOLA

This is a vain poetry, but I pray you tell  
me,

If there were proposed me, wisdom, riches, and  
beauty,

In three several young men, which should I choose?

ANTONIO 'Tis a hard question: this was Paris' case,

35 And he was blind in 't, and there was great cause;

For how was 't possible he could judge right,

Having three amorous goddesses in view,

And they stark naked? 'Twas a motion<sup>3</sup>

Were able to benight the apprehension

Of the severest counselor of Europe.

40

Now I look on both your faces so well formed,

It puts me in mind of a question I would ask.

CARIOLA

What is 't?

ANTONIO I do wonder why hard-favored  
ladies,

To attend them, and cannot endure fair ones.

DUCHESS Oh, that's soon answered.

ANTONIO Pray thee, Cariola, let's steal forth the  
room,

And let her talk to herself: I have divers times  
Served her the like, when she hath chafed extremely.  
I love to see her angry. Softly, Cariola. [Exeunt

ANTONIO *and* CARIOLA.]

When I wax gray, I shall have all the court  
Powder their hair with arras,<sup>4</sup> to be like me.  
You have cause to love me; I entered you into my  
heart

Before you would vouchsafe to call for the keys.

We shall one day have my brothers take you napping;

You shall get no more children till my brothers  
Consent to be your gossips.<sup>5</sup> Have you lost your  
tongue?

[*She turns and sees FERDINAND.*]

'Tis welcome:

For know, whether I am doomed to live or die,  
I can do both like a prince.

FERDINAND Die, then, quickly! [*Giving  
her a poniard.*<sup>6</sup>]

70 Virtue, where art thou hid? What hideous thing  
Is it that doth eclipse thee?

DUCHESS Pray, sir, hear me.

FERDINAND Or is it true thou art but a bare name,  
And no essential<sup>o</sup> thing?

DUCHESS Sir—

FERDINAND Do not speak.

DUCHESS No, sir: I will plant my soul in mine ears, to  
hear you.

75 FERDINAND O most imperfect light of human reason,  
That mak'st us so unhappy to foresee  
What we can least prevent! Pursue thy wishes,  
And glory in them: there's in shame no comfort  
But to be past all bounds and sense of shame.

DUCHESS I pray, sir, hear me. I am married.

80 FERDINAND So!

DUCHESS Haply,<sup>o</sup> not to your liking: but for that,  
Alas, your shears do come untimely now  
To clip the bird's wings that's already flown!  
Will you see my husband?

FERDINAND Yes, if I could change  
Eyes with a basilisk.<sup>7</sup>

85 DUCHESS Sure, you came hither  
By his confederacy.

FERDINAND The howling of a wolf  
Is music to thee, screech owl: prithee, peace.  
Whate'er thou art that hast enjoyed my sister,  
For I am sure thou hear'st me, for thine own sake  
90 Let me not know thee. I came hither prepared  
To work thy discovery; yet am now persuaded  
It would beget such violent effects

As would damn us both. I would not for ten millions  
I had beheld thee: therefore use all means  
I never may have knowledge of thy name;  
95 Enjoy thy lust still, and a wretched life,  
On that condition. And for thee, vile woman,  
If thou do wish thy lecher may grow old  
In thy embracements, I would have thee build  
Such a room for him as our anchorites  
100 To holier use inhabit. Let not the sun  
Shine on him till he's dead; let dogs and monkeys  
Only converse with him, and such dumb things  
To whom nature denies use to sound his name;  
Do not keep a paraquito, lest she learn it;  
105 If thou do love him, cut out thine own tongue,  
Lest it bewray him.

DUCHESS Why might not I marry?  
I have not gone about in this to create  
Any new world or custom.

FERDINAND Thou art undone;  
And thou hast ta'en that massy sheet of lead  
110 That hid thy husband's bones, and folded it  
About my heart.

DUCHESS Mine bleeds for 't.

FERDINAND Thine? Thy  
heart?

What should I name 't unless a hollow bullet  
Filled with unquenchable wildfire?

DUCHESS You are in this  
115 Too strict, and were you not my princely brother,  
I would say, too willful. My reputation  
Is safe.

FERDINAND Dost thou know what reputation is?  
I'll tell thee—to small purpose, since the instruction  
Comes now too late.  
Upon a time, Reputation, Love, and Death  
120 Would travel o'er the world; and it was concluded



That they should part, and take three several ways.  
 Death told them, they should find him in great  
 battles,  
 Or cities plagued with plagues. Love gives them  
 counsel  
 To inquire for him 'mongst unambitious shepherds,  
 125 Where dowries were not talked of, and sometimes  
 'Mongst quiet kindred that had nothing left  
 By their dead parents. "Stay," quoth Reputation,  
 "Do not forsake me; for it is my nature,  
 130 If once I part from any man I meet,  
 I am never found again." And so for you:  
 You have shook hands<sup>o</sup> with Reputation,  
 And made him invisible. So, fare you well.  
 I will never see you more.  
 DUCHESS Why should only I,  
 135 Of all the other princes of the world,  
 Be cased up, like a holy relic? I have youth  
 And a little beauty.  
 FERDINAND So you have some virgins  
 That are witches. I will never see thee more.  
 [Exit.]  
 [Enter ANTONIO with a pistol, and CARIOLA.]  
 DUCHESS You saw this apparition?  
 ANTONIO Yes. We are  
 140 Betrayed. How came he hither? I should turn  
 This to thee, for that. [Pointing the pistol at  
 CARIOLA.]  
 CARIOLA Pray, sir, do; and when  
 That you have cleft my heart, you shall read there  
 Mine innocence.  
 DUCHESS That gallery gave him entrance.  
 ANTONIO I would this terrible thing would come  
 again,  
 145 That, standing on my guard, I might relate

My warrantable<sup>8</sup> love. [She shows the  
poniard.]

Ha! What means this?

DUCHESS He left this with me.

ANTONIO And it seems did wish  
You would use it on yourself.

DUCHESS His action seemed  
To intend so much.

150 ANTONIO This hath a handle to 't  
As well as a point: turn it towards him, and  
So fasten the keen edge in his rank gall. [Knocking  
within.]

How now! Who knocks? More earthquakes?

DUCHESS I  
stand

As if a mine beneath my feet were ready  
To be blown up.

CARIOLA 'Tis Bosola.

155 DUCHESS Away!  
O misery! Methinks unjust actions  
Should wear these masks and curtains, and not we.  
You must instantly part hence: I have fashioned it  
already.

[Exit ANTONIO.]

[Enter BOSOLA.]

BOSOLA The duke your brother is ta'en up in a  
whirlwind,  
Hath took horse, and 's rid post to Rome.

DUCHESS So late?

160 BOSOLA He told me, as he mounted into th' saddle,  
You were undone.

DUCHESS Indeed, I am very near it.

BOSOLA What's the matter?

DUCHESS Antonio, the master of our household,  
Hath dealt so falsely with me in 's accounts:

165 My brother stood engaged with me for money  
 Ta'en up of certain Neapolitan Jews,  
 And Antonio lets the bonds be forfeit.<sup>9</sup>  
 BOSOLA Strange!—[*aside*] This is cunning.  
 DUCHESS And  
 hereupon  
 My brother's bills at Naples are protested  
 Against.<sup>1</sup>—Call up our officers.  
 BOSOLA I shall.  
 170 [Exit.]  
 [Reenter ANTONIO.]  
 DUCHESS The place that you must fly to is Ancona:<sup>2</sup>  
 Hire a house there; I'll send after you  
 My treasure and my jewels. Our weak safety  
 Runs upon ingenious wheels: short syllables  
 175 Must stand for periods.<sup>3</sup> I must now accuse you  
 Of such a feignèd crime as Tasso calls  
*Magnanima menzogna*, a noble lie,  
 'Cause it must shield our honors. Hark! They are  
 coming.  
 [Reenter BOSOLA and OFFICERS.]  
 ANTONIO Will your grace hear me?  
 DUCHESS I have got well by you; you have yielded  
 180 me  
 A million of loss: I am like to inherit  
 The people's curses for your stewardship.  
 You had the trick in audit time to be sick,  
 Till I had signed your *quietus*;<sup>4</sup> and that cured you  
 Without help of a doctor.—Gentlemen,  
 185 I would have this man be an example to you all;  
 So shall you hold my favor; I pray, let him;<sup>5</sup>  
 For he's done that, alas, you would not think of,  
 And, because I intend to be rid of him,  
 I mean not to publish. [*to* ANTONIO] Use your fortune  
 190 elsewhere.

ANTONIO I am strongly armed to brook my  
overthrow;  
As commonly men bear with a hard year,  
I will not blame the cause on 't; but do think  
The necessity of my malevolent star  
Procures this, not her humor. Oh, the inconstant  
195 And rotten ground of service! You may see,  
'Tis even like him that in a winter night  
Takes a long slumber o'er a dying fire,  
As loath to part from 't; yet parts thence as cold  
As when he first sat down.

200 DUCHESS We do confiscate,  
Towards the satisfying of your accounts,  
All that you have.

ANTONIO I am yours, and 'tis very fit  
All mine should be so.

DUCHESS So, sir, you have your pass.<sup>o</sup>

ANTONIO You may see, gentlemen, what 'tis to serve  
A prince with body and soul.  
205 [*Exit.*]

BOSOLA Here's an example for extortion: what  
moisture is drawn out of the  
sea, when foul weather comes, pours down, and  
runs into the sea again.

DUCHESS I would know what are your opinions of this  
Antonio.

SECOND OFFICER He could not abide to see a pig's head  
gaping: I thought  
your grace would find him a Jew.<sup>4</sup>

210 THIRD OFFICER I would you had been his officer, for  
your own sake.

FOURTH OFFICER You would have had more money.

FIRST OFFICER He stopped his ears with black wool, and  
to those came to  
him for money said he was thick of hearing.

215 SECOND OFFICER Some said he was an hermaphrodite,  
for he could not  
abide a woman.

FOURTH OFFICER How scurvy proud he would look when  
the treasury was  
full! Well, let him go!

FIRST OFFICER Yes, and the chippings of the buttery fly  
after him, to scour  
his gold chain!<sup>5</sup>

220 DUCHESS Leave us. [*Exeunt* OFFICERS.] What do you  
think of these?

BOSOLA That these are rogues that in 's prosperity, but  
to have waited on his  
fortune, could have wished his dirty stirrup riveted  
through their noses,  
and followed after 's mule, like a bear in a ring;  
would have prostituted their  
daughters to his lust; made their firstborn  
225 intelligencers;<sup>6</sup> thought none  
happy but such as were born under his blessed  
planet, and wore his livery:  
and do these lice drop off now? Well, never look to  
have the like again:<sup>7</sup>  
he hath left a sort of flattering rogues behind him;  
their doom must follow.  
Princes pay flatterers in their own money: flatterers  
dissemble their  
vices, and they dissemble their lies; that's justice.  
230 Alas, poor gentleman!

DUCHESS Poor? He hath amply filled his coffers.

BOSOLA Sure, he was too honest. Pluto, the god of  
riches, when he's sent  
by Jupiter to any man, he goes limping, to signify  
that wealth that comes

on God's name comes slowly; but when he's sent on  
the devil's errand, he  
rides post and comes in by scuttles. Let me show  
235 you what a most unvalued<sup>8</sup>  
jewel you have in a wanton humor thrown away, to  
bless the man  
shall<sup>9</sup> find him. He was an excellent courtier and  
most faithful; a soldier  
that thought it as beastly to know his own value too  
little as devilish to  
acknowledge it too much. Both his virtue and form  
deserved a far better  
fortune: his discourse rather delighted to judge itself  
240 than show itself; his  
breast was filled with all perfection, and yet it  
seemed a private whispering-room,  
it made so little noise of 't.

DUCHESS But he was basely descended.

BOSOLA Will you make yourself a mercenary herald,  
rather to examine  
245 men's pedigrees than virtues? You shall want<sup>1</sup> him:  
for know, an honest  
statesman to a prince is like a cedar planted by a  
spring; the spring bathes  
the tree's root, the grateful tree rewards it with his  
shadow: you have not  
done so. I would sooner swim to the Bermoothes<sup>2</sup>  
on two politicians' rotten  
bladders, tied together with an intelligencer's  
heartstring, than depend  
on so changeable a prince's favor. Fare thee well,  
250 Antonio! Since the malice  
of the world would needs down with thee, it cannot  
be said yet that any

ill happened unto thee, considering thy fall was  
accompanied with virtue.

DUCHESS Oh, you render me excellent music!

BOSOLA Say you?

DUCHESS This good one that you speak of is my  
husband.

255 BOSOLA Do I not dream? Can this ambitious age  
Have so much goodness in 't as to prefer  
A man merely for worth, without these shadows  
Of wealth and painted honors? Possible?

DUCHESS I have had three children by him.

BOSOLA Fortunate  
lady!

260 For you have made your private nuptial bed  
The humble and fair seminary<sup>o</sup> of peace.  
No question but many an unbeneficed scholar<sup>3</sup>  
Shall pray for you for this deed, and rejoice  
That some preferment in the world can yet  
Arise from merit. The virgins of your land  
265 That have no dowries shall hope your example  
Will raise them to rich husbands. Should you want  
Soldiers, 'twould make the very Turks and Moors  
Turn Christians, and serve you for this act.  
Last, the neglected poets of your time,  
270 In honor of this trophy of a man,  
Raised by that curious<sup>o</sup> engine, your white hand,  
Shall thank you, in your grave, for 't; and make that  
More reverend than all the cabinets  
Of living princes.<sup>4</sup> For Antonio,  
275 His fame shall likewise flow from many a pen,  
When heralds shall want coats to sell to men.<sup>5</sup>

DUCHESS As I taste comfort in this friendly speech,  
So would I find concealment.

280 BOSOLA Oh, the secret of my prince,  
Which I will wear on th' inside of my heart!

DUCHESS    You shall take charge of all my coin and  
              jewels,  
              And follow him; for he retires himself  
              To Ancona.

BOSOLA                So.

DUCHESS                Whither, within few days,  
              I mean to follow thee.

BOSOLA                Let me think:  
285        I would wish your grace to feign a pilgrimage  
              To our Lady of Loreto,<sup>6</sup> scarce seven leagues  
              From fair Ancona; so may you depart  
              Your country with more honor, and your flight  
              Will seem a princely progress,<sup>o</sup> retaining  
290        Your usual train about you.

DUCHESS                Sir, your direction  
              Shall lead me by the hand.

CARIOLA                In my opinion,  
              She were better progress to the baths at Lucca,  
              Or go visit the Spa in Germany;  
              For, if you will believe me, I do not like  
295        This jesting with religion, this feigned  
              Pilgrimage.

DUCHESS                Thou art a superstitious fool.  
              Prepare us instantly for our departure.  
              Past sorrows, let us moderately lament them;  
              For those to come, seek wisely to prevent them.  
300        [*Exit* DUCHESS, *with* CARIOLA.]

BOSOLA    A politician<sup>o</sup> is the devil's quilted anvil;  
              He fashions all sins on him, and the blows  
              Are never heard: he may work in a lady's chamber,  
              As here for proof. What rests<sup>o</sup> but I reveal  
              All to my lord? Oh, this base quality  
305        Of intelligencer! Why, every quality<sup>o</sup> i' th' world  
              Prefers<sup>o</sup> but gain or commendation:  
              Now for this act I am certain to be raised,



And men that paint weeds to the life are praised.  
[Exit.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The mock-monarch of a carnival festival.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The olive was created by Athena; the mulberry gained its color from the blood of Pyramus and Thisbe; the pomegranate seems to have no particular mythological origin. Most of the other stories of ladies being transformed for complying, or not complying, with the solicitations of a god are from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spectacle. Paris had to choose among Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, goddesses of regal power, wisdom, and love; his selecting the third led to the Trojan War.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Orris root, used in powdered form to make hair artificially gray.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sponsors in baptism.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A knife.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Monster that was fabled to kill with a glance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Legitimate, defensible.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, my brother stood security for some money I borrowed from Neapolitan moneylenders; now Antonio has let them call on the duke for payment.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Duke Ferdinand's checks have bounced.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: On the Adriatic coast of Italy, across the peninsula from Amalfi and well to the north.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Full sentences. "Enginous": delicately balanced, as in clockwork. The allusion to Tasso (next line) is literally accurate (*Jerusalem Delivered* 2.22) but anachronistic, since Tasso's poem was not published until 1574.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Jews were identified by their antipathy to pork, but the assumptions here are deliberately ridiculous.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A gold chain was the steward's traditional badge of office. Bread crumbs (the "chippings of the buttery") were used to polish gold and silver plate.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spies.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, a servant as good as he was.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Invaluable. "By scuttles": in haste.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Who shall.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Miss.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Bermudas, unknown at the time of the action, but very topical a hundred years later, when the play was written.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A scholar without an official appointment.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: She will be more honored in her grave than living princes in their courts. "Cabinets": council chambers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Heralds' College (an English royal corporation) carried on a brisk trade in coats of arms.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The shrine of the Virgin at Loreto was famous throughout Europe.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *actual*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *parrot*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *betray*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *parted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *receipt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *release him*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *passport*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seedbed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exquisite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *state journey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crafty intriguer*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offers*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 3. *Rome.***

[*Enter* CARDINAL, FERDINAND, MALATESTA, PESCARA,  
SILVIO, DELIO.]

CARDINAL     Must we turn soldier, then?

MALATESTES    The Emperor,<sup>[1](#)</sup>  
Hearing your worth that way, ere you attained  
This reverend garment, joins you in commission  
With the right fortunate soldier the Marquis of  
Pescara,  
And the famous Lannoy.

5 CARDINAL He that had the honor  
Of taking the French king prisoner?<sup>2</sup>

[illegible]

FERDINAND    This great Count Malatesta, I perceive,  
Hath got employment?

DELIO No employment, my lord;  
A marginal note in the muster book, that he is  
10 A voluntary lord.

FERDINAND                    He's no soldier?

DELIO He has worn gunpowder in 's hollow tooth for the toothache.<sup>3</sup>

SILVIO    He comes to the leaguer<sup>o</sup> with a full intent  
To eat fresh beef and garlic, means to stay  
Till the scent be gone, and straight return to court.

15 DELIO He hath read all the late service<sup>4</sup> as the city  
chronicle relates it,  
and keeps two painters going, only to express  
battles in model.

SILVIO Then he'll fight by the book.

DELIO By the almanac, I think, to choose good days  
 and shun the critical.  
 That's his mistress' scarf.  
 20 SILVIO Yes, he protests he would do much for that  
 taffeta.  
 DELIO I think he would run away from a battle, to  
 save it from taking<sup>5</sup> prisoner.  
 SILVIO He is horribly afraid gunpowder will spoil the  
 perfume on 't.  
 25 DELIO I saw a Dutchman break his pate once for  
 calling him pot-gun;<sup>6</sup>  
 he made his head have a bore in 't like a musket.  
 SILVIO I would he had made a touchhole to 't. He is  
 indeed a guarded  
 sumpter cloth,<sup>7</sup> only for the remove of the court.  
 [*Enter BOSOLA and speaks to FERDINAND and the*  
 CARDINAL.]  
 PESCARA Bosola arrived? What should be the  
 business?  
 Some falling out amongst the cardinals.  
 30 These factions amongst great men, they are like  
 Foxes; when their heads are divided,  
 They carry fire in their tails, and all the country  
 About them goes to wrack for 't.<sup>8</sup>  
 SILVIO What's that  
 Bosola?  
 35 DELIO I knew him in Padua—a fantastical scholar, like  
 such who study  
 to know how many knots were in Hercules' club, of  
 what color Achilles'  
 beard was, or whether Hector were not troubled with  
 the toothache.  
 He hath studied himself half blear-eyed to know the  
 true symmetry of

Caesar's nose by a shoeing-horn; and this he did to  
gain the name of a  
speculative<sup>9</sup> man.

40 PESCARA Mark Prince Ferdinand:  
A very salamander lives in 's eye,  
To mock the eager violence of fire.<sup>1</sup>

SILVIO That Cardinal hath made more bad faces with  
his oppression  
than ever Michelangelo<sup>2</sup> made good ones: he lifts up  
45 's nose, like a foul  
porpoise before a storm.

PESCARA The Lord Ferdinand laughs.

DELIO Like a deadly cannon that lightens ere it  
smokes.

PESCARA These are your true pangs of death,  
The pangs of life, that struggle with great  
50 statesmen.

DELIO In such a deformed silence witches whisper  
Their charms.

CARDINAL Doth she make religion her riding  
hood  
To keep her from the sun and tempest?

FERDINAND That,  
That damns her. Methinks her fault and beauty,  
Blended together, show like leprosy,  
55 The whiter, the fouler. I make it a question  
Whether her beggarly brats were ever christened.

CARDINAL I will instantly solicit the state of Ancona  
To have them banished.

FERDINAND You are for Loreto?  
I shall not be at your ceremony; fare you well.  
60 Write to the Duke of Malfi, my young nephew  
She had by her first husband, and acquaint him  
With 's mother's honesty.

BOSOLA I will.

FERDINAND  
 Antonio!  
 A slave that only smelled of ink and counters,  
 And never in 's life looked like a gentleman,  
 65 But in the audit time. Go, go presently,<sup>o</sup>  
 Draw me out an hundred and fifty of our horse,<sup>o</sup>  
 And meet me at the fort-bridge.<sup>3</sup>  
 [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Spanish emperor, Charles V. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Charles de Lannoy, Belgian by origin, did indeed capture Francis I at Pavia in 1525, about two decades after the date of the play's supposed action. "Pescara": also a commander at Pavia. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Saltpeter was sometimes used to relieve a toothache. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Recent military operations. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Being taken. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Popgun. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Decorated saddlecloth used only when the court is changing its residence; that is, he's only for show. "Touchhole": where the match was applied to set off a cannon. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Samson once tied some foxes together by the tail and set them afire to burn down the fields of the Philistines (Judges 15). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Profound, given to abstruse thoughts. Intense and especially fantastical scholarship was thought to be a cause of melancholy—Bosola's temperament—caused by an imbalance of black bile. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The salamander was supposed to be so cold and wet of constitution that it could live in fire. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), the great Florentine painter and sculptor. Another anachronism. [Return to](#)

[reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Drawbridge.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *siege*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cavalry*[Return to reference °](#)



#### SCENE 4. *The shrine of Our Lady of Loreto.*

[*Enter* TWO PILGRIMS.]

FIRST PILGRIM I have not seen a goodlier shrine than  
this;

Yet I have visited many.

SECOND PILGRIM The Cardinal of Aragon  
Is this day to resign his cardinal's hat:  
His sister duchess likewise is arrived  
To pay her vow of pilgrimage. I expect  
A noble ceremony.

FIRST PILGRIM No question. They come.

*[Here the ceremony of the CARDINAL's installment  
in the habit of a soldier: performed in delivering  
up his cross, hat, robes, and ring at the shrine,  
and investing him with sword, helmet, shield,  
and spurs; then ANTONIO, the DUCHESS, and their  
children, having presented themselves at the  
shrine, are, by a form of banishment in dumb  
show expressed towards them by the CARDINAL  
and the state of Ancona, banished: during all  
which ceremony, this ditty is sung, to very  
solemn music, by divers churchmen.]*<sup>1</sup>

Arms and honors deck thy story,  
To thy fame's eternal glory!  
Adverse fortune ever fly thee;  
No disastrous fate come nigh thee!

I alone will sing thy praises,  
Whom to honor virtue raises;  
And thy study, that divine is,  
Bent to martial discipline is.  
Lay aside all those robes lie by thee;  
Crown thy arts with arms, they'll beautify thee.

O worthy of worthiest name, adorned in this manner,  
 Lead bravely thy forces on under war's warlike  
 banner!  
 Oh, mayst thou prove fortunate in all martial  
 courses!  
 Guide thou still by skill in arts and forces!  
 20 Victory attend thee nigh, whilst fame sings loud thy  
 powers;  
 Triumphant conquest crown thy head, and blessings  
 pour down showers!  
 [*Exeunt all except the* TWO PILGRIMS.]  
 FIRST PILGRIM Here's a strange turn of state! Who  
 would have thought  
 So great a lady would have matched herself  
 25 Unto so mean a person? Yet the cardinal  
 Bears himself much too cruel.  
 SECOND PILGRIM They are banished.  
 FIRST PILGRIM But I would ask what power hath this  
 state  
 Of Ancona to determine<sup>2</sup> of a free prince?  
 SECOND PILGRIM They are a free state, sir, and her  
 brother showed  
 30 How that the pope, fore-hearing of her looseness,  
 Hath seized into the protection of the church  
 The dukedom which she held as dowager.<sup>3</sup>  
 FIRST PILGRIM But by what justice?  
 SECOND PILGRIM Sure, I think by  
 none,  
 Only her brother's instigation.  
 FIRST PILGRIM What was it with such violence he  
 35 took  
 Off from her finger?  
 SECOND PILGRIM 'Twas her wedding ring,  
 Which he vowed shortly he would sacrifice

To his revenge.  
FIRST PILGRIM      Alas, Antonio!  
If that a man be thrust into a well,  
40 No matter who sets hands to 't, his own weight  
Will bring him sooner to th' bottom. Come, let's  
hence.  
Fortune makes this conclusion general,  
All things do help th' unhappy man to fall.  
[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This song is not very suitable to the scene, and Webster, in the edition of 1623, denied writing it.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pass judgment on.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As widow to her first husband, the Duke of Malfi.[Return to reference 3](#)

**SCENE 5. Near Loreto.**

[*Enter* DUCHESS, ANTONIO, CHILDREN, CARIOLA, *and*  
SERVANTS.]

DUCHESS Banished Ancona!

ANTONIO Yes, you see what  
power

Lightens<sup>o</sup> in great men's breath.

DUCHESS Is all our train  
Shrunk to this poor remainder?

ANTONIO These poor men,  
Which have got little in your service, vow

5 To take your fortune, but your wiser buntings,<sup>1</sup>  
Now they are fledged, are gone.

DUCHESS They have done  
wisely.

This puts me in mind of death: physicians thus,  
With their hands full of money, use<sup>o</sup> to give o'er  
Their patients.

ANTONIO Right<sup>o</sup> the fashion of the world:  
10 From decayed fortunes every flatterer shrinks;  
Men cease to build where the foundation sinks.

DUCHESS I had a very strange dream tonight.<sup>o</sup>

ANTONIO What  
was 't?

DUCHESS Methought I wore my coronet of state,  
And on a sudden all the diamonds  
Were changed to pearls.

ANTONIO My interpretation  
15 Is, you'll weep shortly, for to me the pearls  
Do signify your tears.

DUCHESS The birds that live  
I' th' field on the wild benefit of nature



To be our after-ruin: tell them so.  
 BOSOLA And what from you?  
 ANTONIO Thus tell him: I will not  
 45 come.  
 BOSOLA And what of this? [*Pointing to the letter.*]  
 ANTONIO My brothers have  
 dispersed  
 Bloodhounds abroad; which till I hear are muzzled,  
 No truce, though hatched with ne'er such politic skill,  
 Is safe, that hangs upon our enemies' will.  
 I'll not come at<sup>o</sup> them.  
 BOSOLA This proclaims your  
 50 breeding:  
 Every small thing draws a base mind to fear,  
 As the adamant<sup>o</sup> draws iron. Fare you well, sir;  
 You shall shortly hear from 's.  
 [*Exit.*]  
 DUCHESS I suspect some  
 ambush;  
 Therefore, by all my love I do conjure you  
 To take your eldest son, and fly towards Milan.  
 55 Let us not venture all this poor remainder  
 In one unlucky bottom.<sup>2</sup>  
 ANTONIO You counsel safely.  
 Best of my life, farewell. Since we must part,  
 Heaven hath a hand in 't, but no otherwise  
 Than as some curious artist takes in sunder  
 60 A clock or watch, when it is out of frame,<sup>3</sup>  
 To bring 't in better order.  
 DUCHESS I know not which is best,  
 To see you dead, or part with you. Farewell, boy:  
 Thou art happy that thou hast not understanding  
 65 To know thy misery; for all our wit  
 And reading brings us to a truer sense  
 Of sorrow. In the eternal church,<sup>o</sup> sir,

I do hope we shall not part thus.

ANTONIO

Oh, be of

comfort!

70     Make patience a noble fortitude,  
And think not how unkindly we are used:  
Man, like to cassia, is proved best being bruised.<sup>4</sup>

DUCHESS     Must I, like to a slave-born Russian,  
Account it praise to suffer tyranny?

75     And yet, O heaven, thy heavy hand is in 't!  
I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top,<sup>5</sup>  
And compared myself to 't: naught made me e'er  
Go right but heaven's scourge stick.

ANTONIO

Do not weep:

80     Heaven fashioned us of nothing, and we strive  
To bring ourselves to nothing. Farewell, Cariola,  
And thy sweet armful. If I do never see thee more,  
Be a good mother to your little ones,  
And save them from the tiger. Fare you well.

DUCHESS     Let me look upon you once more, for that  
speech

85     Came from a dying father. Your kiss is colder  
Than that I have seen an holy anchorite<sup>o</sup>  
Give to a dead man's skull.

ANTONIO     My heart is turned to a heavy lump of  
lead,

With which I sound<sup>6</sup> my danger. Fare you well.

[*Exeunt ANTONIO and his son.*]

DUCHESS     My laurel is all withered.

90     CARIOLA     Look, madam, what a troop of armèd men  
Make toward us.

DUCHESS

Oh, they are very welcome:

When Fortune's wheel<sup>7</sup> is overcharged with princes,  
The weight makes it move swift: I would have my  
ruin

Be sudden.

[Enter BOSOLA vizarded,<sup>o</sup> with a guard.]

95 I am your adventure,<sup>8</sup> am I not?  
BOSOLA You are. You must see your husband no  
more.

DUCHESS What devil art thou that counterfeits  
heaven's thunder?

BOSOLA Is that terrible? I would have you tell me  
whether  
Is that note worse that frights the silly birds  
Out of the corn,<sup>o</sup> or that which doth allure them  
100 To the nets? You have hearkened to the last too  
much.

DUCHESS Oh, misery! Like to a rusty o'ercharged  
cannon,  
Shall I never fly in pieces?—Come, to what prison?

BOSOLA To none.

DUCHESS Whither, then?

BOSOLA To your palace.

DUCHESS I  
have heard  
That Charon's boat serves to convey all o'er  
105 The dismal lake,<sup>9</sup> but brings none back again.  
BOSOLA Your brothers mean you safety and pity.  
DUCHESS Pity!  
With such a pity men preserve alive  
Pheasants and quails, when they are not fat enough  
To be eaten.

110 BOSOLA These are your children?

DUCHESS Yes.

BOSOLA Can they  
prattle?

DUCHESS

No.

But I intend, since they were born accursed,  
Curses shall be their first language.



BOSOLA Fie, madam!  
 Forget this base, low fellow—  
 DUCHESS Were I a man,  
 I'd beat that counterfeit face<sup>o</sup> into thy other.  
 115 BOSOLA One of no birth.<sup>1</sup>  
 DUCHESS Say that he was born  
mean,  
 Man is most happy when 's own actions  
 Be arguments and examples of his virtue.  
 BOSOLA A barren, beggarly virtue!  
 DUCHESS I prithee, who is greatest? Can you tell?  
 120 Sad tales befit my woe: I'll tell you one.  
 A salmon, as she swam unto the sea,  
 Met with a dogfish, who encounters her  
 With this rough language: "Why art thou so bold  
 To mix thyself with our high state of floods,  
 125 Being no eminent courtier, but one  
 That for the calmest and fresh time o' th' year  
 Dost live in shallow rivers, rank'st thyself  
 With silly<sup>o</sup> smelts and shrimps? And darrest thou  
 Pass by our dog-ship without reverence?"  
 130 "Oh!" quoth the salmon, "sister, be at peace:  
 Thank Jupiter we both have passed the net!  
 Our value never can be truly known,  
 Till in the fisher's basket we be shown:  
 I' th' market then my price may be the higher,  
 135 Even when I am nearest to the cook and fire."  
 So to great men the moral may be stretchèd:  
 Men oft are valued high, when they're most  
wretched.  
 But come, whither you please. I am armed 'gainst  
misery;  
 Bent to all sways of the oppressor's will:  
 140 There's no deep valley but near some great hill.  
[Exeunt.]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Migratory birds. "Take": accept.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The metaphor is mercantile: let's not load all our cargo in one ship ("bottom").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Not working. "Curious artist": clever craftsman.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cinnamon bark ("cassia") is most aromatic (virtuous) when pressed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Children used to make tops spin by whipping them.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plumb the depths of.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The wheel of fortune is an ancient emblem of mutability; people have their fixed positions on it and rise or fall as it turns.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The object of your journey.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In classical mythology, Charon transports the souls of the dead across the river Styx to Hades.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Of low rank by birth.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *are accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exactly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *last night*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whitewash*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crafty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lodestone*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heavenly society*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hermit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *masked*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mask*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *simple*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *flashes out* [Return to reference](#) °

## **Act 4**

### **SCENE 1. *Amalfi.***

[*Enter* FERDINAND *and* BOSOLA.]

FERDINAND   How doth our sister duchess bear herself  
In her imprisonment?

BOSOLA                               Nobly. I'll describe her.  
She's sad as one long used to 't, and she seems  
Rather to welcome the end of misery  
Than shun it; a behavior so noble  
5   As gives a majesty to adversity:  
You may discern the shape of loveliness  
More perfect in her tears than in her smiles;  
She will muse four hours together; and her silence,  
Methinks, expresseth more than if she spake.

10   FERDINAND   Her melancholy seems to be fortified  
With a strange disdain.

BOSOLA                               'Tis so; and this restraint,  
Like English mastiffs that grow fierce with tying,  
Makes her too passionately apprehend  
Those pleasures she's kept from.

15   FERDINAND                               Curse upon her!  
I will no longer study in the book  
Of another's heart. Inform her what I told you.

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter* DUCHESS.]

BOSOLA   All comfort to your grace!

DUCHESS                               I will have none.  
Pray thee, why dost thou wrap thy poisoned pills  
In gold and sugar?

20   BOSOLA   Your elder brother, the Lord Ferdinand,  
Is come to visit you, and sends you word,  
'Cause once he rashly made a solemn vow  
Never to see you more, he comes i' th' night,

25 And prays you gently neither torch nor taper  
Shine in your chamber. He will kiss your hand  
And reconcile himself, but for his vow  
He dares not see you.  
DUCHESS At his pleasure.  
Take hence the lights: he's come.  
[*Enter FERDINAND.*]  
FERDINAND Where are you?  
DUCHESS Here, sir.  
30 FERDINAND This darkness suits you well.  
DUCHESS I would ask your pardon.  
FERDINAND You have it;  
For I account it the honorabl'st revenge,  
Where I may kill, to pardon. Where are your cubs?  
DUCHESS Whom?  
FERDINAND Call them your children;  
35 For though our national law distinguish bastards  
From true legitimate issue, compassionate nature  
Makes them all equal.  
DUCHESS Do you visit me for this?  
You violate a sacrament o' th' church  
Shall make you howl in hell for 't.  
FERDINAND It had been well  
40 Could you have lived thus always; for, indeed,  
You were too much i' th' light<sup>1</sup>—but no more—  
I come to seal my peace with you. Here's a hand  
[*Gives her a dead man's hand.*]  
To which you have vowed much love; the ring upon  
't  
You gave.  
DUCHESS I affectionately kiss it.  
45 FERDINAND Pray, do, and bury the print of it in your  
heart.  
I will leave this ring with you for a lovetoken,  
And the hand as sure as the ring; and do not doubt

But you shall have the heart, too. When you need a  
friend,  
50 Send it to him that owed<sup>o</sup> it; you shall see  
Whether he can aid you.  
DUCHESS You are very cold;  
I fear you are not well after your travel.  
Ha! Lights! Oh, horrible!  
FERDINAND Let her have lights enough.  
[Exit.]  
DUCHESS What witchcraft doth he practice, that he  
hath left  
A dead man's hand here?  
55 [Here is discovered, behind a traverse,<sup>2</sup> the  
artificial figures of Antonio and his children,  
appearing as if they were dead.]  
BOSOLA Look you, here's the piece from which 'twas  
ta'en.  
He doth present you this sad spectacle,  
That, now you know directly they are dead,  
Hereafter you may wisely cease to grieve  
For that which cannot be recovered.  
60 DUCHESS There is not between heaven and earth  
one wish  
I stay for after this: it wastes<sup>3</sup> me more  
Than were 't my picture, fashioned out of wax,  
Stuck with a magical needle, and then buried  
In some foul dunghill; and yond's an excellent  
65 property<sup>4</sup>  
For a tyrant, which I would account mercy.  
BOSOLA What's  
that?  
DUCHESS If they would bind me to that lifeless trunk  
And let me freeze to death.  
BOSOLA Come, you must live.

DUCHESS That's the greatest torture souls feel in  
hell,

In hell: that they must live, and cannot die.

70 Portia,<sup>5</sup> I'll new-kindle thy coals again,  
And revive the rare and almost dead example  
Of a loving wife.

BOSOLA Oh, fie! Despair? Remember  
You are a Christian.

DUCHESS                      The church enjoins fasting:  
I'll starve myself to death.

75      BOSOLA                                      Leave this vain sorrow.  
Things being at the worst begin to mend: the bee  
When he hath shot his sting into your hand, may  
         then  
Play with your eyelid.

80 DUCHESS Good comfortable fellow,  
Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel<sup>6</sup>  
To have all his bones new set; entreat him live  
To be executed again. Who must dispatch me?  
I account this world a tedious theater,  
For I do play a part in 't 'gainst my will.

BOSOLA Come, be of comfort; I will save your life.

DUCHESS

Indeed,  
I have not leisure to tend so small a business.

85 BOSOLA Now, by my life, I pity you.

DUCHESS                                Thou art a fool,  
then,

To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched  
As cannot pity itself. I am full of daggers.  
Puff, let me blow these vipers from me.

[*Enter* SERVANT.]

# What are you?

90      SERVANT      One that wishes you long life.

DUCHESS I would thou wert hanged for the horrible  
 curse  
 Thou hast given me. I shall shortly grow one  
 Of the miracles of pity. I'll go pray—  
 No, I'll go curse.  
 BOSOLA Oh, fie!  
 DUCHESS I could curse the stars—  
 BOSOLA Oh, fearful!  
 95 DUCHESS And those three smiling seasons of the  
 year  
 Into a Russian winter,<sup>7</sup> nay, the world  
 To its first chaos.  
 BOSOLA Look you, the stars shine still.  
 DUCHESS Oh, but you must  
 Remember, my curse hath a great way to go.  
 100 Plagues, that make lanes through largest families,  
 Consume them!  
 BOSOLA Fie, lady!  
 DUCHESS Let them, like tyrants,  
 Never be remembered but for the ill they have done;  
 Let all the zealous prayers of mortified  
 Churchmen forget them!  
 BOSOLA Oh, uncharitable!  
 105 DUCHESS Let Heaven a little while cease crowning  
 martyrs  
 To punish them!  
 Go, howl them this, and say, I long to bleed:  
 It is some mercy when men kill with speed.  
 [*Exeunt* DUCHESS *and* SERVANT.]  
 [*Reenter* FERDINAND.]  
 110 FERDINAND Excellent, as I would wish; she's plagued  
 in art:<sup>8</sup>  
 These presentations are but framed in wax  
 By the curious master in that quality,  
 Vincentio Lauriola,<sup>8</sup> and she takes them



For true substantial bodies.

BOSOLA Why do you do this?

FERDINAND To bring her to despair.

115 BOSOLA 'Faith, end here,  
And go no farther in your cruelty.  
Send her a penitential garment to put on  
Next to her delicate skin, and furnish her  
With beads and prayer books.

FERDINAND Damn her! That body  
of hers,  
120 While that my blood ran pure in 't, was more worth  
Than that which thou wouldst comfort, called a soul.  
I will send her masques of common courtesans,  
Have her meat<sup>o</sup> served up by bawds and ruffians,  
And, 'cause she'll needs be mad, I am resolved  
To remove forth the common hospital<sup>o</sup>  
125 All the mad-folk, and place them near her lodging;  
There let them practice together, sing and dance,  
And act their gambols to the full o' th' moon:  
If she can sleep the better for it, let her.  
Your work is almost ended.

130 BOSOLA Must I see her again?

FERDINAND Yes.

BOSOLA Never.

FERDINAND You must.

BOSOLA Never in mine own shape;  
That's forfeited by my intelligence<sup>o</sup>  
And this last cruel lie. When you send me next,  
The business shall be comfort.

FERDINAND Very likely.  
135 Thy pity is nothing of kin to thee.<sup>9</sup> Antonio  
Lurks about Milan: thou shalt shortly thither  
To feed a fire as great as my revenge,  
Which ne'er will slack till it have spent his fuel.

140

Intemperate agues<sup>1</sup> make physicians cruel.  
[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Punning on “light,” wanton. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Curtain. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Consumes, as by secret disease; witches were supposed to be able to “waste” their enemies by making wax images and tormenting them as indicated below. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Appropriate act. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Portia, the wife of Brutus, committed suicide by swallowing hot coals. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Instrument of torture for stretching the body. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A Russian winter would last all year long. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The art of wax modeling was common enough, but the name of the artist seems to be imaginary. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, pity doesn’t suit you very well. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fevers that cannot be controlled. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *owned* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by a cunning device* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *food (of any kind)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *asylum* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *betrayal* [Return to reference °](#)

## SCENE 2

[*Enter* DUCHESS *and* CARIOLA.]

DUCHESS     What hideous noise was that?

CARIOLA  
consort

Of madmen, lady, which your tyrant brother  
Hath placed about your lodging. This tyranny,  
I think, was never practiced till this hour.

5 DUCHESS Indeed, I thank him. Nothing but noise  
and folly

Can keep me in my right wits, whereas reason  
And silence make me stark mad. Sit down;  
Discourse to me some dismal tragedy.

CARIOLA Oh, 'twill increase your melancholy.

[illegible]

10 To hear of greater grief would lessen mine.  
This is a prison?

CARLOTTA Yes, but you shall live  
To shake this durance off.

DUCHESS                                      Thou art a fool:  
The robin redbreast and the nightingale  
Never live long in cages.

CARIOLA Pray, dry your eyes.  
What think you of, madam?

15 DUCHESS Of nothing:  
When I muse thus, I sleep.

CARIOLA Like a madman, with your eyes open?

DUCHESS Dost thou think we shall know one another in  
th' other world?

CARIOLA Yes, out of question.

[illegible]

20 But hold some two days' conference with the dead!  
From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,  
I never shall know here. I'll tell thee a miracle;  
I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow:  
Th' heaven o'er my head seems made of molten  
brass,

25 The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad.  
I am acquainted with sad misery  
As the tanned galley slave is with his oar;  
Necessity makes me suffer constantly,  
And custom makes it easy. Who do I look like now?  
CARIOLA Like to your picture in the gallery,  
30 A deal of life in show, but none in practice;  
Or rather like some reverend monument  
Whose ruins are even pitied.

DUCHESS Very proper.  
And Fortune seems only to have her eyesight  
To behold my tragedy.  
35 How now! What noise is that?

[Enter SERVANT.]

SERVANT I am come to tell you  
Your brother hath intended you some sport.  
A great physician, when the pope was sick  
Of a deep melancholy, presented him  
40 With several sorts of madmen, which wild object  
Being full of change and sport, forced him to laugh,  
And so the imposthume<sup>o</sup> broke. The selfsame cure  
The duke intends on you.

DUCHESS Let them come in.

SERVANT There's a mad lawyer; and a secular  
priest;<sup>1</sup>  
45 A doctor that hath forfeited his wits  
By jealousy; an astrologian  
That in his works said such a day o' th' month  
Should be the day of doom, and, failing of 't,

50 Ran mad; an English tailor crazed i' th' brain  
With the study of new fashions; a gentleman-usher  
Quite beside himself with care to keep in mind  
The number of his lady's salutations  
Or "How do you's" she employed him in each  
morning;  
A farmer, too, an excellent knave in grain,  
55 Mad 'cause he was hindered transportation:<sup>2</sup>  
And let one broker that's mad loose to these,  
You'd think the devil were among them.  
DUCHESS Sit, Cariola. Let them loose when you  
please,  
For I am chained to endure all your tyranny.  
[Enter MADMEN.]  
[Here by a MADMAN this song is sung to a dismal  
kind of music.]

60 Oh, let us howl some heavy note,  
Some deadly dogged howl,  
Sounding as from the threatening throat  
Of beasts and fatal fowl!  
As ravens, screech owls, bulls, and bears,  
65 We'll bello and bawl our parts,  
Till irksome noise have cloyed your ears  
And corrosived your hearts.  
At last, whenas our choir wants breath,  
Our bodies being blest,  
70 We'll sing, like swans, to welcome death,  
And die in love and rest.

FIRST MADMAN Doomsday not come yet? I'll draw it  
nearer by a perspective,<sup>3</sup>  
or make a glass that shall set all the world on fire  
upon an instant. I cannot  
sleep; my pillow is stuffed with a litter of porcupines.

75 SECOND MADMAN Hell is a mere glasshouse, where the  
devils are continually  
blowing up women's souls on hollow irons, and the  
fire never goes out.

THIRD MADMAN I will lie with every woman in my parish  
the tenth night;  
I will tithe them over like haycocks.<sup>4</sup>

80 FOURTH MADMAN Shall my pothecary outgo me because  
I am a cuckold? I  
have found out his roguery; he makes alum of his  
wife's urine, and sells it  
to puritans that have sore throats with  
overstraining.<sup>5</sup>

FIRST MADMAN I have skill in heraldry.

SECOND MADMAN Hast?

85 FIRST MADMAN You do give for your crest a woodcock's<sup>6</sup>  
head with the  
brains picked out on 't; you are a very ancient  
gentleman.

THIRD MADMAN Greek is turned Turk: we are only to be  
saved by the Helvetian  
translation.<sup>7</sup>

FIRST MADMAN Come on, sir, I will lay the law to you.

SECOND MADMAN Oh, rather lay a corrosive: the law will  
eat to the bone.

90 THIRD MADMAN He that drinks but to satisfy nature is  
damned.

FOURTH MADMAN If I had my glass<sup>8</sup> here, I would show  
a sight should  
make all the women here call me mad doctor.

FIRST MADMAN What's he? A rope maker?

SECOND MADMAN No, no, no, a snuffling knave that,  
while he shows the  
tombs, will have his hand in a wench's placket.

95

THIRD MADMAN    Woe to the caroché<sup>9</sup> that brought home  
my wife from the  
masque at three o'clock in the morning! It had a  
large featherbed in it.

FOURTH MADMAN    I have pared the devil's nails forty  
times, roasted them  
in raven's eggs, and cured agues with them.

100    THIRD MADMAN    Get me three hundred milchbats, to  
make possets<sup>1</sup> to procure  
sleep.

FOURTH MADMAN    All the college may throw their caps<sup>2</sup>  
at me: I have made  
a soap boiler costive;<sup>3</sup> it was my masterpiece.

*[Here the dance, consisting of eight MADMEN,  
with music answerable thereunto; after which  
BOSOLA, like an old man, enters.]*

DUCHESS    Is he mad too?

SERVANT    Pray, question him. I'll leave  
you.

*[Exeunt SERVANT and MADMEN.]*

BOSOLA    I am come to make thy tomb.

105    DUCHESS    Ha! My tomb?  
Thou speak'st as if I lay upon my deathbed,  
Gasping for breath. Dost thou perceive me sick?

BOSOLA    Yes, and the more dangerously, since thy  
sickness is insensible.<sup>4</sup>

DUCHESS    Thou art not mad, sure. Dost know me?

110    BOSOLA    Yes.

DUCHESS    Who am I?

BOSOLA    Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best but a  
salvatory of green

mummy. What's this flesh? A little crudded<sup>5</sup> milk,  
fantastical puff paste.

Our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons  
boys use to keep flies in,

115 more contemptible, since ours is to preserve  
earthworms. Didst thou ever  
see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body:  
this world is like her  
little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our heads,  
like her looking glass,  
only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small  
compass of our prison.  
DUCHESS Am not I thy duchess?

120 BOSOLA Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot<sup>6</sup>  
begins to sit on thy  
forehead, clad in gray hairs, twenty years sooner  
than on a merry milkmaid's.  
Thou sleep'st worse than if a mouse should be  
forced to take up  
her lodging in a cat's ear: a little infant that breeds  
its teeth,<sup>7</sup> should it  
lie with thee, would cry out, as if thou wert the more  
unquiet bedfellow.  
DUCHESS I am Duchess of Malfi still.

125 BOSOLA That makes thy sleep so broken:  
Glories, like glowworms, afar off shine bright,  
But, looked to near, have neither heat nor light.  
DUCHESS Thou art very plain.

130 BOSOLA My trade is to flatter the dead, not the living; I  
am a tomb-maker.  
DUCHESS And thou com'st to make my tomb?  
BOSOLA Yes.  
DUCHESS Let me be a little merry. Of what stuff wilt  
thou make it?  
BOSOLA Nay, resolve<sup>8</sup> me first, of what fashion?  
DUCHESS Why, do we grow fantastical in our deathbed?  
135 Do we affect  
fashion in the grave?



BOSOLA Most ambitiously. Princes' images on their  
tombs do not lie, as  
they were wont, seeming to pray up to heaven, but  
with their hands  
under their cheeks, as if they died of the toothache.  
They are not carved  
with their eyes fixed upon the stars, but as their  
140 minds were wholly bent  
upon the world, the selfsame way they seem to turn  
their faces.

DUCHESS Let me know fully therefore the effect  
Of this thy dismal preparation,  
This talk fit for a charnel.<sup>8</sup>

BOSOLA Now I shall.  
[*Enter EXECUTIONERS, with a coffin, cords, and a  
bell.*]

145 Here is a present from your princely brothers;  
And may it arrive welcome, for it brings  
Last benefit, last sorrow.

DUCHESS Let me see it:  
I have so much obedience in my blood,  
I wish it in their veins to do them good.

150 BOSOLA This is your last presence chamber.<sup>9</sup>

CARIOLA O my sweet lady!

DUCHESS Peace, it affrights not me.

BOSOLA I am the common bellman,  
That usually<sup>o</sup> is sent to condemned persons  
The night before they suffer.

DUCHESS Even now thou said'st  
Thou wast a tomb-maker.

155 BOSOLA 'Twas to bring you  
By degrees to mortification.<sup>1</sup> Listen. [*rings the bell*]

Hark, now everything is still  
The screech owl and the whistler<sup>2</sup> shrill

160 Call upon our dame aloud,  
And bid her quickly don her shroud!  
Much you had of land and rent:  
Your length in clay's now competent.◊  
A long war disturbed your mind:  
Here your perfect peace is signed.  
165 Of what is 't fools make such vain keeping?  
Sin their conception, their birth weeping,  
Their life a general mist of error,  
Their death a hideous storm of terror.  
Strew your hair with powders sweet,  
170 Don clean linen, bathe your feet,  
And (the foul fiend more to check)  
A crucifix let bless your neck:  
'Tis now full tide 'tween night and day;  
End your groan, and come away.

175 CARIOLA Hence, villains, tyrants, murderers! Alas!  
What will you do with my lady? Call for help.

DUCHESS To whom? To our next neighbors? They  
are mad-folks.

BOSOLA Remove that noise.

DUCHESS Farewell, Cariola.

In my last will I have not much to give:  
A many hungry guests have fed upon me;  
180 Thine will be a poor reversion.◊

CARIOLA I will die with her.

DUCHESS I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy  
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl  
Say her prayers ere she sleep. [CARIOLA *is forced*  
*out by the* EXECUTIONERS.]

Now what you please.

What death?

185 BOSOLA Strangling: here are your executioners.

DUCHESS I forgive them:  
The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' th' lungs

Would do as much as they do.

BOSOLA Doth not death fright you?

DUCHESS Who would be  
afraid on 't,

190 Knowing to meet such excellent company  
In th' other world?

BOSOLA Yet, methinks,  
The manner of your death should much afflict you:  
This cord should terrify you.

DUCHESS Not a whit.

What would it pleasure me to have my throat cut  
With diamonds? Or to be smothered

195 With cassia? Or to be shot to death with pearls?

I know death hath ten thousand several doors

For men to take their exits, and 'tis found

They go on such strange geometrical hinges,

200 You may open them both ways.—Any way, for  
heaven sake,

So I were out of your whispering. Tell my brothers

That I perceive death, now I am well awake,

Best gift is they can give or I can take.

I would fain put off my last woman's fault,

I'd not be tedious to you.

205 EXECUTIONER We are ready.

DUCHESS Dispose my breath how please you, but  
my body

Bestow upon my women, will you?

EXECUTIONER Yes.

DUCHESS Pull, and pull strongly, for your able  
strength

Must pull down heaven upon me—

210 Yet stay; heaven gates are not so high arched

As princes' palaces; they that enter there

Must go upon their knees. [*kneels*] Come, violent  
death.

Serve for mandragora<sup>3</sup> to make me sleep!  
 Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  
 They then may feed in quiet. [They  
 215 *strangle her.*]  
 BOSOLA Where's the waiting woman?  
 Fetch her. Some other strangle the children.  
 [*Exeunt EXECUTIONERS, some of whom return with*  
 CARIOLA.]  
 Look you, there sleeps your mistress.  
 CARIOLA Oh, you are  
 damned  
 Perpetually for this! My turn is next.  
 Is 't not so ordered?  
 BOSOLA Yes, and I am glad  
 220 You are so well prepared for 't.  
 CARIOLA You are deceived,  
 sir,  
 I am not prepared for 't, I will not die;  
 I will first come to my answer,<sup>o</sup> and know  
 How I have offended.  
 BOSOLA Come, dispatch her.  
 You kept her counsel; now you shall keep ours.  
 225 CARIOLA I will not die, I must not; I am contracted  
 To a young gentleman.  
 EXECUTIONER Here's your wedding ring.  
 [*showing the noose*]  
 CARIOLA Let me but speak with the duke; I'll  
 discover<sup>o</sup>  
 Treason to his person.  
 BOSOLA Delays! Throttle her.  
 EXECUTIONER She bites and scratches.  
 CARIOLA If you kill me  
 230 now,  
 I am damned; I have not been at confession  
 This two years.

BOSOLA [*to* EXECUTIONERS] When!  
CARIOLA I am quick with  
child.  
BOSOLA

Why, then,  
Your credit's saved.<sup>4</sup> [*They strangle*  
CARIOLA.]

Bear her into th' next room;  
Let this lie still. [*Exeunt the* EXECUTIONERS *with the*  
*body of* CARIOLA.]  
[*Enter* FERDINAND.]

FERDINAND Is she dead?

BOSOLA She is what  
You'd have her. But here begin your pity. [*Shows*  
235 *the children strangled.*]

Alas, how have these offended?

FERDINAND The death  
Of young wolves is never to be pitied.

BOSOLA Fix  
Your eye here.

FERDINAND Constantly.

BOSOLA Do you not weep?  
Other sins only speak; murder shrieks out:  
The element of water moistens the earth,  
240 But blood flies upwards and bedews the heavens.

FERDINAND Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she  
died young.

BOSOLA I think not so; her infelicity<sup>o</sup>  
Seemed to have years too many.

FERDINAND She and I were  
twins;  
And should I die this instant, I had lived  
245 Her time to a minute.

BOSOLA It seems she was born first:

You have bloodily approved<sup>o</sup> the ancient truth,  
That kindred commonly do worse agree  
Than remote strangers.

250 FERDINAND Let me see her face again.  
Why didst not thou pity her? What an excellent  
Honest man mightst thou have been,  
If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary!  
Or, bold in a good cause, opposed thyself,  
With thy advanced sword above thy head,  
Between her innocence and my revenge!  
255 I bade thee, when I was distracted of my wits,  
Go kill my dearest friend, and thou hast done 't.  
For let me but examine well the cause:  
What was the meanness of her match to me?  
Only I must confess I had a hope,  
260 Had she continued widow, to have gained  
An infinite mass of treasure by her death:  
And that was the main cause, her marriage,  
That drew a stream of gall quite through my heart.  
For thee, as we observe in tragedies  
265 That a good actor many times is cursed  
For playing a villain's part, I hate thee for 't,  
And, for my sake, say thou hast done much ill well.  
BOSOLA Let me quicken your memory, for I perceive  
You are falling into ingratitude: I challenge  
270 The reward due to my service.

FERDINAND I'll tell thee  
What I'll give thee.

BOSOLA Do.

FERDINAND I'll give thee a pardon  
For this murder.

BOSOLA Ha!

FERDINAND Yes, and 'tis  
The largest bounty I can study to do thee.  
By what authority didst thou execute  
275 This bloody sentence?

BOSOLA By yours.  
 FERDINAND Mine! Was I her  
 judge?  
 Did any ceremonial form of law  
 Doom her to not-being? Did a complete<sup>o</sup> jury  
 Deliver her conviction up i' th' court?  
 280 Where shalt thou find this judgment registered,  
 Unless in hell? See, like a bloody fool,  
 Thou'st forfeited thy life, and thou shalt die for 't.  
 BOSOLA The office of justice is perverted quite  
 When one thief hangs another. Who shall dare  
 To reveal this?  
 285 FERDINAND Oh, I'll tell thee;  
 The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up,  
 Not to devour the corpse, but to discover  
 The horrid murder.  
 BOSOLA You, not I, shall quake for 't.  
 FERDINAND Leave me.  
 BOSOLA I will first receive my pension.  
 FERDINAND You are a villain.  
 290 BOSOLA When your ingratitude  
 Is judge, I am so.  
 FERDINAND Oh, horror!  
 That not the fear of Him which binds the devils  
 Can prescribe man obedience!  
 Never look upon me more.  
 BOSOLA Why, fare thee well.  
 295 Your brother and your self are worthy men:  
 You have a pair of hearts are rotten graves,  
 Rotten, and rotting others; and your vengeance,  
 Like two chained bullets, still<sup>o</sup> goes arm in arm.  
 You may be brothers, for treason, like the plague,  
 300 Doth take much in a blood.<sup>5</sup> I stand like one  
 That long hath ta'en a sweet and golden dream.  
 I am angry with myself, now that I wake.





BOSOLA Oh, she's gone again! There the cords of  
 life broke.  
 Oh, sacred innocence, that sweetly sleeps  
 On turtles<sup>6</sup> feathers, whilst a guilty conscience  
 Is a black register wherein is writ  
 All our good deeds and bad, a perspective<sup>o</sup>  
 335 That shows us hell! That we cannot be suffered<sup>o</sup>  
 To do good when we have a mind to it!  
 This is manly sorrow:  
 These tears, I am very certain, never grew  
 In my mother's milk. My estate is sunk  
 340 Below the degree of fear. Where were  
 These penitent fountains while she was living?  
 Oh, they were frozen up! Here is a sight  
 As direful to my soul as is the sword  
 Unto a wretch hath slain his father. Come,  
 345 I'll bear thee hence,  
 And execute thy last will; that's deliver  
 Thy body to the reverend dispose<sup>o</sup>  
 Of some good women: that the cruel tyrant  
 Shall not deny me. Then I'll post to Milan,  
 350 Where somewhat I will speedily enact  
 Worth my dejection. *[Exit with the  
 body.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: One serving a parish, not a member of an order. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Forbidden to export. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Telescope. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: As a priest takes his tenth ("tithe") of his parishioners' crops. "Haycocks": haystacks. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In long prayers and sermons. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A proverbially stupid bird. [Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The Geneva Bible, a jibe at English Puritans who used that translation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Looking glass.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Carriage. "Placket": slit in a skirt.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sedative drafts, here made of bat's milk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despair of emulating.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Constipated.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Imperceptible.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Curdled. "Worm-seed" is a matter whose ultimate end is the generation of worms. "A salvatory of green mummy": the substance of mummified bodies was considered medicinal. The living body is a box ("salvatory") of such medicine, only not yet ready for use.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Debauchery.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A teething infant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A storage place for bones reserved from old graves in the digging of new ones.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A noble person's reception room.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Repentance, also death and decomposition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A bird premonitory of death.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The word is used loosely for a stupefying drug.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Your reputation will now be safe.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Treason and plague run in certain families.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Turtledoves, emblems of a loving couple.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *band*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imprisonment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abscess*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *doorkeeper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inform*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by custom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sufficient*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inheritance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cinnamon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gladly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judicial hearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unhappiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *given proof of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *qualified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restorative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reconciliation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *telescope*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allowed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disposition*[Return to reference](#) °

## Act 5

**SCENE 1. *A public place in Milan.***

[*Enter* ANTONIO *and* DELIO.]

ANTONIO    What think you of my hope of  
              reconcilement  
To the Aragonian brethren?

DELIO I misdoubt it;  
For though they have sent their letters of safe  
conduct

For your repair<sup>o</sup> to Milan, they appear  
But nets to entrap you. The Marquis of Pescara,  
5 Under whom you hold certain land in cheat,<sup>1</sup>  
Much 'gainst his noble nature hath been moved  
To seize those lands, and some of his dependents  
Are at this instant making it their suit  
10 To be invested in your revenues.<sup>2</sup>  
I cannot think they mean well to your life  
That do deprive you of your means of life,  
Your living.

ANTONIO      You are still an heretic<sup>o</sup>  
To any safety I can shape myself.

15 DELIO Here comes the marquis. I will make myself  
Petitioner for some part of your land,  
To know whither it is flying.

ANTONIO I pray do.

[ *Withdraws.* ]

[Enter PESCARA.]

DELIO Sir, I have a suit to you.

PESCARA To me?

20 DELIO    An easy one.  
There is the citadel of Saint Bennet,  
With some demesnes,<sup>3</sup> of late in the possession

Of Antonio Bologna; please you bestow them on me.

PESCARA You are my friend, but this is such a suit,  
Nor fit for me to give, nor you to take.

DELIO No, sir?

25 PESCARA I will give you ample reason for 't  
Soon in private.—Here's the cardinal's mistress.

[*Enter JULIA.*]

JULIA My lord, I am grown your poor petitioner,  
And should be an ill beggar, had I not  
A great man's letter here, the cardinal's,  
To court you in my favor. [Gives  
a letter.]

30 PESCARA He entreats for you  
The citadel of Saint Bennet, that belonged  
To the banished Bologna.

JULIA Yes.

PESCARA I could not  
Have thought of a friend I could rather pleasure with  
it;  
'Tis yours.

35 JULIA Sir, I thank you; and he shall know  
How doubly I am engaged both in your gift,  
And speediness of giving, which makes your grant  
The greater. [Exit.]

ANTONIO [*aside*] How they fortify themselves  
With my ruin!

DELIO Sir, I am little bound to you.

PESCARA Why?

DELIO Because you denied this suit to me, and gave  
't  
To such a creature.

40 PESCARA Do you know what it was?  
It was Antonio's land, not forfeited  
By course of law, but ravished from his throat  
By the cardinal's entreaty. It were not fit  
I should bestow so main<sup>o</sup> a piece of wrong

45        Upon my friend; 'tis a gratification  
Only due to a strumpet, for it is injustice.  
Shall I sprinkle the pure blood of innocents  
To make those followers I call my friends  
Look ruddier<sup>4</sup> upon me? I am glad  
50        This land, ta'en from the owner by such wrong,  
Returns again unto so foul an use  
As salary for his lust. Learn, good Delio,  
To ask noble things of me, and you shall find  
I'll be a noble giver.  
DELIO                                You instruct me well.  
ANTONIO [*aside*]        Why, here's a man now would  
55        fright impudence  
From sauciest beggars.  
PESCARA                                Prince Ferdinand's come to  
Milan,  
Sick, as they give out, of an apoplexy,<sup>o</sup>  
But some say 'tis a frenzy.<sup>o</sup> I am going  
To visit him.  
[*Exit.*]  
ANTONIO                                'Tis a noble old fellow.  
DELIO        What course do you mean to take, Antonio?  
60        ANTONIO        This night I mean to venture all my  
fortune,  
Which is no more than a poor lingering life,  
To the cardinal's worst of malice. I have got  
Private access to his chamber, and intend  
To visit him about the mid of night,  
65        As once his brother did our noble duchess.  
It may be that the sudden apprehension  
Of danger—for I'll go in mine own shape—  
When he shall see it fraught with love and duty,  
May draw the poison out of him, and work  
70        A friendly reconciliation. If it fail,  
Yet it shall rid me of this infamous calling,

For better fall once than be ever falling.  
DELIO I'll second you in all danger, and, howe'er,  
My life keeps rank with yours.  
75 ANTONIO You are still my loved and best friend.  
[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Escheat, that is, subject to forfeiture under certain conditions.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, to be given your rents.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Associated estates. "Saint Bennet": St. Benedict.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: More agreeably, literally with a healthier (ruddy) complexion.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *resort*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skeptic*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *egregious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stroke*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *insanity*[Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 2. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter* PESCARA *and* DOCTOR.]

PESCARA Now, doctor, may I visit your patient?

DOCTOR If 't please your lordship: but he's  
instantly<sup>o</sup>

To take the air here in the gallery

By my direction.

PESCARA Pray thee, what's his disease?

5 DOCTOR A very pestilent disease, my lord,  
They call lycanthropia.

PESCARA What's that?

I need a dictionary to 't.

DOCTOR I'll tell you.

In those that are possessed with 't there o'erflows  
Such melancholy humor, they imagine  
10 Themselves to be transformèd into wolves;  
Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night,  
And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since  
One met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane  
Behind Saint Mark's Church, with the leg of a man  
Upon his shoulder; and he howled fearfully;  
15 Said he was a wolf, only the difference  
Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,  
His on the inside; bade them take their swords,  
Rip up his flesh, and try. Straight<sup>o</sup> I was sent for,  
And, having ministered to him, found his grace  
20 Very well recovered.

PESCARA I'm glad on 't.

DOCTOR Yet not without some fear  
Of a relapse. If he grow to his fit again,  
I'll go a nearer way to work with him  
25 Than ever Paracelsus<sup>1</sup> dreamed of: if  
They'll give me leave, I'll buffet his madness



Out of him. Stand aside; he comes.

[*Enter* FERDINAND, MALATESTA, CARDINAL, *and* BOSOLA  
*apart.*]

FERDINAND Leave me.

MALATESTA Why doth your lordship love this  
solitariness?

FERDINAND Eagles commonly fly alone: they are crows,  
daws, and starlings

30 that flock together. Look, what's that follows me?

MALATESTA Nothing, my lord.

FERDINAND Yes.

MALATESTA 'Tis your shadow.

FERDINAND Stay it; let it not haunt me.

35 MALATESTA Impossible, if you move, and the sun  
shine.

FERDINAND I will throttle it. [*Throws himself on  
the ground.*]

MALATESTA O, my lord, you are angry with nothing.

FERDINAND You are a fool: how is 't possible I should  
catch my shadow,

unless I fall upon 't? When I go to hell, I mean to  
carry a bribe; for, look

40 you, good gifts evermore make way for the worst  
persons.

PESCARA Rise, good my lord.

FERDINAND I am studying the art of patience.

PESCARA 'Tis a noble virtue.

FERDINAND To drive six snails before me from this town  
to Moscow; neither

45 use goad nor whip to them, but let them take their  
own time—the

patient'st man i' th' world match me for an  
experiment—and I'll crawl after

like a sheep-biter.<sup>2</sup>

CARDINAL Force him up.  
*raise him.*

[*They*

FERDINAND Use me well, you were best. What I have  
done, I have done:  
I'll confess nothing.

50 DOCTOR Now let me come to him. Are you mad, my  
lord? Are you out of  
your princely wits?

FERDINAND What's he?

PESCARA Your doctor.

55 FERDINAND Let me have his beard sawed off, and his  
eyebrows filed more  
civil.

DOCTOR I must do mad tricks with him, for that's the  
only way on 't.<sup>3</sup> I have  
brought your grace a salamander's skin to keep you  
from sunburning.

FERDINAND I have cruel sore eyes.

60 DOCTOR The white of a cockatrix's<sup>4</sup> egg is present  
remedy.

FERDINAND Let it be a new-laid one, you were best.  
Hide me from him:  
physicians are like kings—they brook no  
contradiction.

DOCTOR Now he begins to fear me: now let me alone  
with him.

CARDINAL How now? Put off your gown?

65 DOCTOR Let me have some forty urinals filled with  
rosewater: he and I'll  
go pelt one another with them. Now he begins to  
fear me. Can you fetch  
a frisk, sir?<sup>5</sup> Let him go, let him go, upon my peril: I  
find by his eye he  
stands in awe of me; I'll make him as tame as a  
dormouse.

FERDINAND Can you fetch your frisks, sir? I will stamp  
him into a cullis,<sup>6</sup>  
70 flay off his skin, to cover one of the anatomies<sup>7</sup> this  
rogue hath set i' th'  
cold yonder in Barber-Surgeons' Hall. Hence, hence!  
You are all of you  
like beasts for sacrifice: there's nothing left of you  
but tongue and belly,  
flattery and lechery.  
[Exit.]  
PESCARA Doctor, he did not fear you thoroughly.  
DOCTOR  
True;  
I was somewhat too forward.  
BOSOLA [*aside*] Mercy upon me,  
75 What a fatal judgment hath fall'n upon this  
Ferdinand!  
PESCARA Knows your grace what accident hath  
brought  
Unto the prince this strange distraction?  
CARDINAL [*aside*] I must feign somewhat.—Thus they  
say it grew:  
80 You have heard it rumored, for these many years  
None of our family dies but there is seen  
The shape of an old woman, which is given  
By tradition to us to have been murdered  
By her nephews for her riches. Such a figure  
One night, as the prince sat up late at 's book,  
85 Appeared to him; when, crying out for help,  
The gentlemen of 's chamber found his grace  
All on a cold sweat, altered much in face  
And language; since which apparition,  
He hath grown worse and worse, and I much fear  
90 He cannot live.  
BOSOLA Sir, I would speak with you.

PESCARA We'll leave your grace,  
Wishing to the sick prince, our noble lord,  
All health of mind and body.

CARDINAL You are most  
welcome.

[*Exeunt* PESCARA, MALATESTA, *and* DOCTOR.]

95 Are you come? So. [*aside*] This fellow must not know  
By any means I had intelligence<sup>o</sup>  
In our duchess' death; for, though I counseled it,  
The full of all th' engagement seemed to grow  
From Ferdinand.—Now, sir, how fares our sister?  
I do not think but sorrow makes her look  
100 Like to an oft-dyed garment: she shall now  
Taste comfort from me. Why do you look so wildly?  
Oh, the fortune of your master here the prince  
Dejects you, but be you of happy comfort:  
If you'll do one thing for me I'll entreat,  
105 Though he had a cold tombstone o'er his bones,  
I'll make you what you would be.

BOSOLA Anything;  
Give it me in a breath, and let me fly to 't:  
They that think long, small expedition win,  
For musing much o' th' end cannot begin.

110 [*Enter* JULIA.]

JULIA Sir, will you come in to supper?

CARDINAL I am busy;  
Leave me.

JULIA [*aside*] What an excellent shape hath that  
fellow! [*Exit.*]

CARDINAL 'Tis thus. Antonio lurks here in Milan:  
Inquire him out, and kill him. While he lives,  
Our sister cannot marry, and I have thought  
115 Of an excellent match for her. Do this, and style me  
Thy advancement.<sup>8</sup>

BOSOLA But by what means shall I find him out?

CARDINAL    There is a gentleman called Delio  
Here in the camp, that hath been long approved  
His loyal friend. Set eye upon that fellow;  
120 Follow him to Mass; maybe Antonio,  
Although he do account religion  
But a school-name, o for fashion of the world  
May accompany him; or else go inquire out  
Delio's confessor, and see if you can bribe  
125 Him to reveal it. There are a thousand ways  
A man might find to trace him; as to know  
What fellows haunt the Jews for taking up  
Great sums of money, for sure he's in want;  
Or else to go to th' picture-makers, and learn  
130 Who bought her picture lately. Some of these  
Haply may take.

BOSOLA                                Well, I'll not freeze i' th' business: o  
I would see that wretched thing, Antonio,  
Above all sights i' th' world.

CARDINAL                                Do, and be happy.

[*Exit.*]

BOSOLA    This fellow doth breed basilisks in 's eyes,  
135 He's nothing else but murder; yet he seems  
Not to have notice of the duchess' death.  
'Tis his cunning: I must follow his example;  
There cannot be a surer way to trace  
Than that of an old fox.

[*Reenter JULIA, with a pistol.*]

JULIA                                        So, sir, you are well met.

140 BOSOLA    How now?

JULIA                                        Nay, the doors are fast enough.  
Now, sir, I will make you confess your treachery.

BOSOLA    Treachery?

JULIA                                        Yes, confess to me  
Which of my women 'twas, you hired to put  
Love-powder into my drink?

BOSOLA                                        Love powder?

145 JULIA Yes, when I was at Malfi.  
 Why should I fall in love with such a face else?<sup>o</sup>  
 I have already suffered for thee so much pain,  
 The only remedy to do me good  
 Is to kill my longing.

150 BOSOLA Sure, your pistol holds  
 Nothing but perfumes or kissing-comfits.<sup>9</sup>  
 Excellent lady! You have a pretty way on 't  
 To discover<sup>o</sup> your longing. Come, come, I'll disarm  
 you,  
 And arm you thus:<sup>1</sup> yet this is wondrous strange.

155 JULIA Compare thy form and my eyes together,  
 you'll find  
 My love no such great miracle. Now you'll say  
 I am wanton: this nice<sup>o</sup> modesty in ladies  
 Is but a troublesome familiar<sup>2</sup> that haunts them.

BOSOLA Know you me, I am a blunt soldier.

JULIA The  
 better:  
 160 Sure, there wants<sup>o</sup> fire where there are no lively  
 sparks  
 Of roughness.

BOSOLA And I want compliment.<sup>3</sup>

JULIA Why,  
 ignorance  
 In courtship cannot make you do amiss,  
 If you have a heart to do well.

BOSOLA You are very fair.

JULIA Nay, if you lay beauty to my charge,  
 I must plead unguilty.

165 BOSOLA Your bright eyes  
 Carry a quiver of darts in them, sharper  
 Than sunbeams.

JULIA You will mar me with  
 commendation,

Put yourself to the charge of courting me,  
 Whereas now I woo you.  
 BOSOLA [*aside*] I have it, I will work upon this  
 170 creature.—  
 Let us grow most amorously familiar.  
 If the great cardinal now should see me thus,  
 Would he not count me a villain?  
 JULIA No, he might count me a wanton,  
 Not lay a scruple of offense on you;  
 175 For if I see and steal a diamond,  
 The fault is not i' th' stone, but in me the thief  
 That purloins it. I am sudden with you.  
 We that are great women of pleasure, use to cut off  
 These uncertain wishes and unquiet longings,  
 180 And in an instant join the sweet delight  
 And the pretty excuse together. Had you been i' th'  
 street,  
 Under my chamber window, even there  
 I should have courted you.  
 BOSOLA Oh, you are an excellent  
 lady!  
 JULIA Bid me do somewhat for you presently<sup>o</sup>  
 185 To express I love you.  
 BOSOLA I will, and if you love me,  
 Fail not to effect it.  
 The cardinal is grown wondrous melancholy;  
 Demand the cause, let him not put you off  
 With feigned excuse; discover the main ground on 't.  
 190 JULIA Why would you know this?  
 BOSOLA I have depended  
 on him,  
 And I hear he is fallen in some disgrace  
 With the emperor: if he be, like the mice  
 That forsake falling houses, I would shift  
 To other dependence.  
 195 JULIA You shall not need follow the wars;

I'll be your maintenance.  
 BOSOLA And I your loyal servant;  
 But I cannot leave my calling.  
 JULIA Not leave  
 An ungrateful general for the love of a sweet lady?  
 You are like some cannot sleep in featherbeds,  
 200 But must have blocks for their pillows.  
 BOSOLA Will you do  
 this?  
 JULIA Cunningly.  
 BOSOLA Tomorrow I'll expect th'  
 intelligence.  
 JULIA Tomorrow? Get you into my cabinet,<sup>o</sup>  
 You shall have it with you. Do not delay me,  
 No more than I do you. I am like one  
 205 That is condemned: I have my pardon promised,  
 But I would see it sealed. Go, get you in;  
 You shall see me wind my tongue about his heart  
 Like a skein of silk. [*Exit*  
 BOSOLA.]  
 [*Reenter* CARDINAL.]  
 CARDINAL Where are you?  
 [*Enter* SERVANTS.]  
 SERVANTS Here.  
 CARDINAL Let none, upon your lives,  
 210 Have conference with the Prince Ferdinand,  
 Unless I know it. [*aside*] In this distraction  
 He may reveal the murder. [*Exeunt*  
 SERVANTS.]  
 Yond's my lingering consumption:  
 I am weary of her, and by any means  
 215 Would be quit of.  
 JULIA How now, my lord?  
 What ails you?  
 CARDINAL Nothing.  
 JULIA Oh, you are much altered:



Come, I must be your secretary,<sup>o</sup> and remove  
 This lead from off your bosom.<sup>4</sup> What's the matter?  
 CARDINAL I may not tell you.  
 220 JULIA Are you so far in love with sorrow  
 You cannot part with part of it? Or think you  
 I cannot love your grace when you are sad  
 As well as merry? Or do you suspect  
 225 I, that have been a secret to your heart  
 These many winters, cannot be the same  
 Unto your tongue?  
 CARDINAL Satisfy thy longing—  
 The only way to make thee keep my counsel  
 Is not to tell thee.  
 230 JULIA Tell your echo this,  
 Or flatterers, that like echoes still report  
 What they hear though most imperfect, and not me;  
 For if that you be true unto yourself,  
 I'll know.  
 CARDINAL Will you rack<sup>o</sup> me?  
 JULIA No, judgment shall  
 Draw it from you: it is an equal fault,  
 To tell one's secrets unto all or none.  
 235 CARDINAL The first argues folly.  
 JULIA But the last, tyranny.  
 CARDINAL Very well. Why, imagine I have committed  
 Some secret deed which I desire the world  
 May never hear of.  
 JULIA Therefore may not I know it?  
 240 You have concealed for me as great a sin  
 As adultery. Sir, never was occasion  
 For perfect trial of my constancy  
 Till now: sir, I beseech you—  
 CARDINAL You'll repent it.  
 JULIA Never.  
 245 CARDINAL It hurries thee to ruin: I'll not tell thee.

Be well advised, and think what danger 'tis  
To receive a prince's secrets: they that do,  
Had need have their breasts hooped with adamant<sup>o</sup>  
To contain them. I pray thee, yet be satisfied;  
Examine thine own frailty; 'tis more easy  
250 To tie knots than unloose them: 'tis a secret  
That, like a lingering poison, may chance lie  
Spread in thy veins, and kill thee seven year hence.

JULIA Now you dally with me.

CARDINAL No more; thou shalt  
know it.

255 By my appointment the great Duchess of Malfi  
And two of her young children, four nights since,  
Were strangled.

JULIA O Heaven! Sir, what have you  
done?

CARDINAL How now? How settles this? Think you  
your bosom  
Will be a grave dark and obscure enough  
For such a secret?

260 JULIA You have undone yourself, sir.

CARDINAL Why?

JULIA It lies not in me to conceal it.

CARDINAL No?

Come, I will swear you to 't upon this book.

JULIA Most religiously.

CARDINAL Kiss it. [She  
*kisses the book.*]

Now you shall  
Never utter it; thy curiosity  
265 Hath undone thee: thou'rt poisoned with that book.  
Because I knew thou couldst not keep my counsel,  
I have bound thee to 't by death.

[*Reenter* BOSOLA.]

BOSOLA  
Hold!

For pity sake,



A fortune attends thee.

BOSOLA Shall I go sue to Fortune any longer?  
'Tis the fool's pilgrimage.

290 CARDINAL I have honors in store for  
thee.

BOSOLA There are a many ways that conduct to  
seeming  
Honor, and some of them very dirty ones.

CARDINAL Throw to  
the devil

Thy melancholy; the fire burns well,  
What need we keep a stirring of 't, and make  
A greater smother? Thou wilt kill Antonio?

295 BOSOLA Yes.

CARDINAL Take up that body.

BOSOLA I think I shall  
Shortly grow the common bier for churchyards!

CARDINAL I will allow thee some dozen of attendants  
To aid thee in the murder.

300 BOSOLA Oh, by no means. Physicians that apply horse  
leeches to any rank  
swelling use to cut off their tails, that the blood may  
run through them  
the faster. Let me have no train<sup>6</sup> when I go to shed  
blood, lest it make me  
have a greater when I ride to the gallows.<sup>7</sup>

CARDINAL Come to me after midnight, to help to  
remove that body to her  
own lodging. I'll give out she died of the plague;  
305 'twill breed the less  
inquiry after her death.

BOSOLA Where's Castruccio her husband?

CARDINAL He's rode to Naples to take possession of  
Antonio's citadel.

BOSOLA Believe me, you have done a very happy turn.

310 CARDINAL Fail not to come. There is the master key of our lodgings, and by that you may conceive what trust I plant in you.

BOSOLA You shall find me ready. [*Exit* CARDINAL.]

315 Oh poor Antonio, though nothing be so needful To thy estate as pity, yet I find Nothing so dangerous. I must look to my footing; In such slippery ice-pavements men had need To be frost-nailed well;<sup>8</sup> they may break their necks else;

320 The precedent's here afore me. How this man Bears up in blood! Seems fearless! Why, 'tis well: Security some men call the suburbs of hell, Only a dead<sup>o</sup> wall between. Well, good Antonio, I'll seek thee out, and all my care shall be To put thee into safety from the reach Of these most cruel biters that have got Some of thy blood already. It may be,

325 I'll join with thee in a most just revenge: The weakest arm is strong enough that strikes With the sword of justice. Still methinks the duchess Haunts me. There, there, 'tis nothing but my melancholy.

330 O Penitence, let me truly taste thy cup, That throws men down only to raise them up! [*Exit.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The great Swiss alchemist, famous for his cures by sympathetic magic. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A sheepdog. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: That is, to cure him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A fabulous, and deadly poisonous, serpent, supposed to be hatched of a cock's egg.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cut a caper, dance a jig.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Broth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Anatomical skeletons hung up in the surgeon's college, which Ferdinand proposes to cover with the doctor's flayed skin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Call me your means of promotion.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Candies to sweeten the breath.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Disarm (by taking away her pistol); arm (by embracing her).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Attendant spirit or demon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: I don't have the gift of flattery.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Secretaries opened letters addressed to their masters by removing the heavy lead seals.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plaster was often painted to look like marble.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Followers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Criminals, carted through the streets to be hanged at Tyburn, were followed by crowds.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To wear hobnailed boots.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *very shortly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was accessory*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *an idle phrase*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *delay*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reveal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fastidious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lacks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *right away*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *inner chamber*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confidante*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *torture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the hardest metal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bare*[Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 3. *A fortification at Milan.***

[Enter ANTONIO *and* DELIO. *Echo from the DUCHESS' grave.*]

DELIO    Yond's the cardinal's window. This  
fortification

5 Grew from the ruins of an ancient abbey;  
And to yond side o' th' river lies a wall,  
Piece of a cloister, which in my opinion  
Gives the best echo that you ever heard,  
So hollow and so dismal, and withal<sup>o</sup>  
So plain in the distinction of our words,  
That many have supposed it is a spirit  
That answers.

ANTONIO I do love these ancient ruins.  
We never tread upon them but we set  
10 Our foot upon some reverend history:  
And, questionless, here in this open court,  
Which now lies naked to the injuries  
Of stormy weather, some men lie interred  
Loved the church so well, and gave so largely to 't,  
15 They thought it should have canopied their bones  
Till doomsday; but all things have their end:  
Churches and cities, which have diseases like to  
men,  
Must have like death that we have.

ECHO "Like death that we have."

DELIO     Now the echo hath caught you.

ANTONIO

It groaned,  
methought, and gave  
A very deadly accent.

ECHO "Deadly accent."



DELIO I told you 'twas a pretty one: you may make  
 it  
 A huntsman, or a falconer, a musician,  
 Or a thing of sorrow.  
 ECHO "A thing of sorrow."  
 ANTONIO Aye, sure, that suits it best.  
 ECHO "That suits it  
 25 best."  
 ANTONIO 'Tis very like my wife's voice.  
 ECHO "Aye, wife's  
 voice."  
 DELIO Come, let's walk further from 't. I would not  
 have you  
 Go to th' cardinal's tonight: do not.  
 ECHO "Do not."  
 DELIO Wisdom doth not more moderate wasting  
 sorrow  
 Than time: take time for 't; be mindful of thy safety.  
 30 ECHO "Be mindful of thy safety."  
 ANTONIO Necessity compels  
 me:  
 Make<sup>o</sup> scrutiny throughout the passes  
 Of your own life, you'll find it impossible  
 To fly your fate.  
 ECHO "Oh, fly your fate."  
 DELIO Hark! The dead stones seem to have pity on  
 35 you,  
 And give you good counsel.  
 ANTONIO Echo, I will not talk with thee,  
 For thou art a dead thing.  
 ECHO "Thou art a dead thing."  
 ANTONIO My duchess is asleep now,  
 And her little ones, I hope sweetly: O heaven,  
 40 Shall I never see her more?  
 ECHO "Never see her more."  
 ANTONIO I marked<sup>o</sup> not one repetition of the echo

But that, and on the sudden a clear light  
Presented me a face folded in sorrow.  
DELIO Your fancy merely.  
ANTONIO Come, I'll be out of this  
45       ague,<sup>o</sup>  
For to live thus is not indeed to live;  
It is a mockery and abuse of life.  
I will not henceforth save myself by halves;  
Lose all, or nothing.  
DELIO Your own virtue save you!  
50 I'll fetch your eldest son, and second you<sup>o</sup>  
It may be that the sight of his own blood  
Spread in so sweet a figure<sup>o</sup> may beget  
The more compassion.  
ANTONIO However, fare you well.  
Though in our miseries Fortune have a part,  
Yet in our noble sufferings she hath none:  
55 Contempt of pain, that we may call our own.  
[*Exeunt.*]

## Notes

- °: *in addition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if you make* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attended to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *back you up* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *face* [Return to reference](#) °

**SCENE 4. *A room in the CARDINAL's palace.***

[*Enter* CARDINAL, PESCARA, MALATESTA, RODERIGO, *and*  
GRISOLAN.]

CARDINAL You shall not watch tonight by the sick  
prince;

His grace is very well recovered.

MALATESTA Good my lord, suffer<sup>o</sup> us.

CARDINAL Oh, by no  
means;

5 The noise and change of object in his eye  
Doth more distract him. I pray, all to bed;  
And though you hear him in his violent fit,  
Do not rise, I entreat you.

PESCARA So, sir; we shall not.

CARDINAL Nay, I must have you promise upon your  
honors,

For I was enjoined to 't by himself; and he seemed  
To urge it sensibly.<sup>o</sup>

10 PESCARA Let our honors bind  
This trifle.

CARDINAL Nor any of your followers.

MALATESTA Neither.

15 CARDINAL It may be, to make trial of your promise,  
When he's asleep, myself will rise and feign  
Some of his mad tricks, and cry out for help,  
And feign myself in danger.

MALATESTA If your throat were  
cutting,

I'd not come at you, now I have protested against it.

CARDINAL Why, I thank you.

[*Withdraws.*]

GRISOLAN 'Twas a foul storm  
tonight.

RODERIGO The Lord Ferdinand's chamber shook like  
an osier.°

20 MALATESTE 'Twas nothing but pure kindness in the  
devil,  
To rock his own child. [Exeunt all except the  
CARDINAL.]

CARDINAL The reason why I would not suffer° these  
About my brother is because at midnight  
I may with better privacy convey  
25 Julia's body to her own lodging. Oh, my conscience!  
I would pray now, but the devil takes away my heart  
For having any confidence in prayer.  
About this hour I appointed Bosola  
To fetch the body: when he hath served my turn,  
30 He dies.  
[Exit.]  
[Enter BOSOLA.]

BOSOLA Ha! 'Twas the cardinal's voice; I heard him  
name  
Bosola and my death. Listen! I hear  
One's footing.  
[Enter FERDINAND.]

FERDINAND Strangling is a very quiet death.

35 BOSOLA [aside] Nay, then, I see I must stand upon  
my guard.

FERDINAND What say to that? Whisper softly; do you  
agree to 't? So; it must  
be done i' th' dark: the cardinal would not for a  
thousand pounds the doctor  
should see it.  
[Exit.]

BOSOLA My death is plotted; here's the consequence of  
murder.  
40 We value not desert nor Christian breath,  
When we know black deeds must be cured with  
death.

[*Enter ANTONIO and SERVANT.*]

SERVANT Here stay, sir, and be confident, I pray:  
I'll fetch you a dark lantern.

[*Exit.*]

ANTONIO Could I take him at his prayers,  
There were hope of pardon.

45 BOSOLA Fall right, my sword!  
[*Stabs him.*]

I'll not give thee so much leisure as to pray.

ANTONIO Oh, I am gone! Thou hast ended a long  
suit<sup>1</sup>

In a minute.

BOSOLA What art thou?

ANTONIO A most wretched thing,  
That only have thy benefit in death,  
To appear myself.

[*Reenter SERVANT with a lantern.*]

50 SERVANT Where are you, sir?

ANTONIO Very near my home. Bosola?

SERVANT Oh,  
misfortune!

BOSOLA Smother thy pity; thou art dead else.<sup>o</sup>  
Antonio?

The man I would have saved 'bove mine own life!  
We are merely the stars' tennis balls, struck and  
banded

55 Which way please them.<sup>2</sup> O good Antonio,  
I'll whisper one thing in thy dying ear  
Shall make thy heart break quickly! Thy fair duchess  
And two sweet children—

ANTONIO Their very names  
Kindle a little life in me.

BOSOLA Are murdered.

60 ANTONIO Some men have wished to die  
At the hearing of sad tidings; I am glad

That I shall do 't in sadness: I would not now  
 Wish my wounds balmed nor healed, for I have no  
 use  
 To put my life to. In all our quest of greatness,  
 Like wanton boys, whose pastime is their care,  
 65 We follow after bubbles blown in th' air.  
 Pleasure of life, what is't? Only the good hours  
 Of an ague; merely a preparative to rest,  
 To endure vexation. I do not ask  
 The process<sup>o</sup> of my death; only commend me  
 70 To Delio.  
 BOSOLA Break, heart!  
 ANTONIO And let my son fly the courts of princes.  
 [*Dies.*]  
 BOSOLA Thou seem'st to have loved Antonio?  
 SERVANT I brought  
 him hither  
 To have reconciled him to the cardinal.  
 BOSOLA I do not ask thee that.  
 75 Take him up, if thou tender thine own life,  
 And bear him where the lady Julia  
 Was wont to lodge. Oh, my fate moves swift;  
 I have this cardinal in the forge already;  
 Now I'll bring him to th' hammer. Oh direful  
 80 misprision!<sup>o</sup>  
 I will not imitate things glorious,  
 No more than base; I'll be mine own example.  
 On, on, and look thou represent,<sup>o</sup> for silence,  
 The thing thou bear'st.<sup>3</sup>  
 [*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Antonio thinks it is the cardinal, to whom he came to address a plea ("suit"), who has stabbed him.[Return to](#)

[reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The power of the stars over people's lives was a Renaissance commonplace. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The corpse. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *allow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *with strong feeling* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a willow wand* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *allow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *otherwise* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reason, circumstances* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misunderstanding* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imitate* [Return to reference °](#)

**SCENE 5. *The scene continues.***

[*Enter* CARDINAL, *with a book.*]

CARDINAL I am puzzled in a question about hell:  
He says, in hell there's one material fire,  
And yet it shall not burn all men alike.  
Lay him by. How tedious is a guilty conscience!  
When I look into the fish ponds in my garden,  
5 Methinks I see a thing armed with a rake,  
That seems to strike at me.

[*Enter* BOSOLA, *and* SERVANT *bearing* ANTONIO'S  
*body.*]

Now, art thou come?

Thou look'st ghastly:  
There sits in thy face some great determination  
Mixed with some fear.

10 BOSOLA Thus it lightens<sup>o</sup> into action:  
I am come to kill thee.

CARDINAL Ha! Help! Our guard!

BOSOLA Thou art deceived; they are out of thy  
howling.

CARDINAL Hold; and I will faithfully divide  
Revenues with thee.

BOSOLA Thy prayers and proffers  
Are both unseasonable.

15 CARDINAL Raise the watch!  
We are betrayed!

BOSOLA I have confined your flight:<sup>o</sup>  
I'll suffer your retreat to Julia's chamber,  
But no further.

CARDINAL Help! We are betrayed!

[*Enter, above,* PESCARA, MALATESTA, RODERIGO, *and*  
GRISOLAN.]

MALATESTA

Listen.



CARDINAL My dukedom for rescue!  
 RODERIGO Fie upon his  
 counterfeiting!  
 MALATESTES Why, 'tis not the cardinal.  
 RODERIGO Yes, yes, 'tis  
 20 he,  
 But I'll see him hanged ere I'll go down to him.  
 CARDINAL Here's a plot upon me. I am assaulted! I  
 am lost,  
 Unless some rescue.  
 GRISOLAN He doth this pretty well,  
 But it will not serve to laugh me out of my honor.  
 CARDINAL The sword's at my throat!  
 RODERIGO You would not bawl  
 25 so loud then.  
 MALATESTES Come, come, let's go to bed. He told us  
 thus much aforehand.  
 PESCARA He wished you should not come at him; but,  
 believe 't,  
 The accent of the voice sounds not in jest:  
 I'll down to him, howsoever, and with engines.  
 Force ope the doors. *[Exit*  
*above.]*  
 RODERIGO Let's follow him aloof,  
 30 And note how the cardinal will laugh at him.  
*[Exeunt, above, MALATESTES, RODERIGO, and*  
*GRISOLAN.]*  
 BOSOLA There's for you first, *[He kills the*  
 SERVANT.]  
 'Cause you shall not unbarricade the door  
 To let in rescue.  
 CARDINAL What cause hast thou to pursue my life?  
 BOSOLA  
 35 Look there.  
 CARDINAL Antonio?  
 BOSOLA Slain by my hand unwittingly.

Pray, and be sudden: when thou killed'st thy sister,  
Thou took'st from Justice her most equal balance,  
And left her naught but her sword.

CARDINAL Oh, mercy!

40 BOSOLA Now it seems thy greatness was only  
outward;  
For thou fall'st faster of thyself than calamity  
Can drive thee. I'll not waste longer time: there!  
[*Stabs him.*]

CARDINAL Thou hast hurt me.

BOSOLA Again! [Stabs him  
again.]

CARDINAL Shall I die like a  
leveret,<sup>1</sup>

Without any resistance? Help, help, help!  
I am slain!

45 [Enter FERDINAND.]

FERDINAND Th' alarm? Give me a fresh horse;  
Rally the vaunt-guard, or the day is lost.  
Yield, yield! I give you the honor of arms,  
Shake my sword over you; will you yield?<sup>2</sup>

CARDINAL Help me; I am your brother!

50 FERDINAND The devil!  
My brother fight upon the adverse party?  
[He wounds the CARDINAL and, in the scuffle,  
gives BOSOLA his death wound.]

There flies your ransom.

CARDINAL O justice!  
I suffer now for what hath former<sup>o</sup> been:  
Sorrow is held the eldest child of sin.

55 FERDINAND Now you're brave fellows. Caesar's fortune  
was harder than  
Pompey's; Caesar died in the arms of prosperity,  
Pompey at the feet of

disgrace. You both died in the field. The pain's  
nothing: pain many times  
is taken away with the apprehension of greater, as  
the toothache with the  
sight of a barber that comes to pull it out: there's  
philosophy for you.

60 BOSOLA Now my revenge is perfect. Sink, thou main  
cause

[*He kills* FERDINAND.]

Of my undoing! The last part of my life  
Hath done me best service.

FERDINAND Give me some wet hay; I am broken-  
winded.<sup>3</sup> I do account this  
world but a dog kennel: I will vault credit and affect  
high pleasures<sup>4</sup>  
beyond death.

65 BOSOLA He seems to come to himself, now he's so  
near the bottom.

FERDINAND My sister, O my sister! There's the cause  
on 't.

Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,  
Like diamonds we are cut with our own dust.

[*Dies.*]

70 CARDINAL Thou hast thy payment, too.

BOSOLA Yes, I hold my weary soul in my teeth.

'Tis ready to part from me. I do glory  
That thou, which stood'st like a huge pyramid  
Begun upon a large and ample base,  
Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing.

75 [Enter, below, PESCARA, MALATESTA, RODERIGO, and  
GRISOLAN.]

PESCARA How now, my lord?

MALATESTA O sad disaster!

RODERIGO How  
comes this?

BOSOLA    Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi murdered  
By th' Aragonian brethren; for Antonio  
Slain by this hand; for lustful Julia  
Poisoned by this man; and lastly for myself,  
80    That was an actor in the main of all,  
Much 'gainst mine own good nature, yet i' th' end  
Neglected.

PESCARA    How now, my lord?

CARDINAL    Look to my brother:  
He gave us these large wounds as we were  
struggling

85    Here i' the rushes.<sup>5</sup> And now, I pray,  
Let me be laid by and never thought of.  
[*Dies.*]

PESCARA    How fatally, it seems, he did withstand  
His own rescue!

MALATESTA    Thou wretched thing of blood,  
How came Antonio by his death?

90    BOSOLA    In a mist: I know not how;  
Such a mistake as I have often seen  
In a play. Oh, I am gone!  
We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,  
That, ruined, yield no echo. Fare you well.

95    It may be pain, but no harm to me to die  
In so good a quarrel. Oh, this gloomy world,  
In what a shadow or deep pit of darkness  
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!  
Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust  
To suffer death or shame for what is just:  
100    Mine is another voyage.

[*Dies.*]

PESCARA    The noble Delio, as I came to the palace,  
Told me of Antonio's being here, and showed me  
A pretty gentleman, his son and heir.

[*Enter* DELIO *with* ANTONIO'S SON.]

MALATESTTE O, sir, you come too late.  
 DELIO I heard so, and  
 105 Was armed<sup>o</sup> for it ere I came. Let us make noble use  
 Of this great ruin, and join all our force  
 To establish this young hopeful<sup>o</sup> gentleman  
 In 's mother's right. These wretched eminent things  
 110 Leave no more fame behind 'em, than should one  
 Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow;  
 As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts  
 Both form and matter. I have ever thought  
 Nature doth nothing so great for great men  
 As when she's pleased to make them lords of truth:  
 115 Integrity of life is fame's best friend,  
 Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.  
 [*Exeunt.*]

*performed 1613*

## Endnotes

*published 1623*

- Note 1: A baby hare.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ferdinand thinks he's on the field of battle and offering the "honor of arms" (liberal surrender terms) to his foes. "Vaunt-guard": vanguard.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Worn-out horses are said to be broken-winded.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Go beyond expectation and enjoy great pleasures.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Leafy plants, strewn over Elizabethan floors in lieu of carpets.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *ignites*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *cut off your escape*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *battering rams*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *at a distance*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *earlier* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promising* [Return to reference](#) °

# FRANCIS BACON

## 1561–1626

As a literary figure Sir Francis Bacon played a central role in the development of the English essay and inaugurated the genre of the scientific utopia in his *New Atlantis* (1627). But he was even more important to the intellectual and cultural history of the earlier seventeenth century for his treatises on reforming learning through experiment. His life span closely overlapped that of Donne and of Jonson, but unlike them he was born into a leading political family close to the centers of government and power. During Elizabeth's reign he studied law and entered Parliament. But it was under James I that his political fortunes took off: he was knighted in 1603, became attorney general in 1613, lord chancellor (the highest judicial post) and Baron Verulam in 1618, and Viscount St. Albans in 1621. That same year, however, he was convicted on twenty-three counts of corruption and accepting bribes: he was fined, imprisoned, and forced from office. Bacon admitted the truth of the charges (though they were in part politically motivated), merely observing that everyone took bribes and that bribery never influenced his judgment.

As an essayist Bacon stands at almost the opposite pole from his great French predecessor Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), who proposed to learn about humankind by an intensive analysis of his own sensations, emotions, and ideas. Bacon's essays are instead on topics "civil and moral," and they are written in a curt, deliberately

impersonal style. The ten short pieces of the first edition of his essays (1597) are little more than collections of maxims placed in sequence; the thirty-eight of the second edition (1612) are longer and looser; the fifty-eight of the final edition (1625) are still longer, are smoother in texture, use more figurative language, and are more unified. In that last edition, more than half of the essays deal with public life, and many of the others—even on such topics as truth, marriage, and love—are written from the vantage point of a practical man of affairs. They evoke an atmosphere of expediency but also voice precepts of moral wisdom and public virtue, offering a penetrating insight into the thinking of the Jacobean ruling class.

Early in his life Bacon declared, "I have taken all knowledge to be my province." He believed that his new "scientific" method would lead humankind to a better future. The title of his *Novum Organum* (The New Instrument of Learning, 1620), written in Latin, challenged the authority of Aristotle's *Organon*, which was still the basis of university education. Bacon argued that the right method of investigating nature combined careful empirical observation with limited generalizations, which themselves could be tested by further experiments. *Novum Organum* includes a trenchant analysis of four kinds of "Idols"—psychological dispositions and intellectual habits that hold individuals back in their quest for truth. But despite his emphasis on experiment, in his written work Bacon generally ignored major scientific discoveries by Galileo, William Harvey, and others; his true role was as a herald of the modern age. And despite his critique of misleading words and intellectual fictions, he used the rich resources of literary and figurative language—and of utopian fiction in *The New Atlantis*—to urge a new faith in experiment and science. He segregated theology and science as "two truths," freeing science to go its own way unhampered by religious dogmas and unrestrained by the morality they supported. He is a primary creator of the myth of science as a pathway to utopia; in the 1660s the Royal Society honored him as a prophet.



## ***FROM ESSAYS***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: Bacon's essays appeared in three editions, 1597 (10 essays), 1612 (38 essays), and 1625 (58 essays); we illustrate the considerable stylistic differences between the earliest and latest collections by presenting two versions of "Of Studies." Otherwise, all selections are from the 1625 collection, in which "Of Truth" stands first.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Of Truth

“What is truth?” said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.<sup>2</sup> Certainly there be that delight in giddiness,<sup>3</sup> and count it a bondage to fix a belief; affecting free will in thinking, as well as in acting. And though the sects of philosophers of that kind be gone, yet there remain certain discoursing wits,<sup>4</sup> which are of the same veins, though there be not so much blood in them as was in those of the ancients. But it is not only the difficulty and labor which men take in finding out of truth; nor again, that when it is found, it imposeth upon<sup>5</sup> men’s thoughts, that doth bring lies in favor; but a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself. One of the later school of the Grecians examineth the matter, and is at a stand<sup>6</sup> to think what should be in it, that men should love lies, where neither they make for pleasure, as with poets, nor for advantage, as with the merchant, but for the lie’s sake. But I cannot tell: this same truth is a naked and open daylight, that doth not show the masques and mummeries and triumphs of the world half so stately and daintily as candlelights. Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that showeth best by day, but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle,<sup>7</sup> that showeth best in varied lights. A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure. Doth any man doubt that if there were taken out of men’s minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves? One of the fathers, in great severity, called poesy *vinum daemonum*,<sup>8</sup> because it filleth the imagination, and yet it is but with the shadow of a lie. But it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in, and settleth in it, that doth the hurt, such as we spake of before. But howsoever these things are thus in men’s depraved judgments and affections, yet truth, which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the inquiry of

truth, which is the lovemaking or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature. The first creature<sup>9</sup> of God, in the works of the days, was the light of the sense; the last was the light of reason; and his sabbath work ever since is the illumination of his Spirit. First he breathed light upon the face of the matter, or chaos; then he breathed light into the face of man; and still he breatheth and inspireth light into the face of his chosen. The poet that beautified the sect that was otherwise inferior to the rest<sup>1</sup> saith yet excellently well: "It is a pleasure to stand upon the shore, and to see ships tossed upon the sea; a pleasure to stand in the window of a castle, and to see a battle, and the adventures thereof below; but no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth" (a hill not to be commanded,<sup>2</sup> and where the air is always clear and serene), "and to see the errors, and wanderings, and mists, and tempests, in the vale below": so always that this prospect<sup>3</sup> be with pity, and not with swelling or pride. Certainly, it is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.

To pass from theological and philosophical truth to the truth of civil business, it will be acknowledged even by those that practice it not, that clear and round<sup>4</sup> dealing is the honor of man's nature, and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth<sup>5</sup> it. For these winding and crooked courses are the goings of the serpent; which goeth basely upon the belly, and not upon the feet. There is no vice that doth so cover a man with shame as to be found false and perfidious. And therefore Montaigne saith prettily, when he inquired the reason why the word of the lie should be such a disgrace, and such an odious charge, saith he, "If it be well weighed, to say that a man lieth is as much to say as that he is brave towards God and a coward towards men."<sup>6</sup> For a lie faces God, and shrinks from man. Surely the wickedness of falsehood and breach of faith cannot possibly be so highly expressed, as in that it shall be the last peal to call the judgments of God upon the generations of men, it being

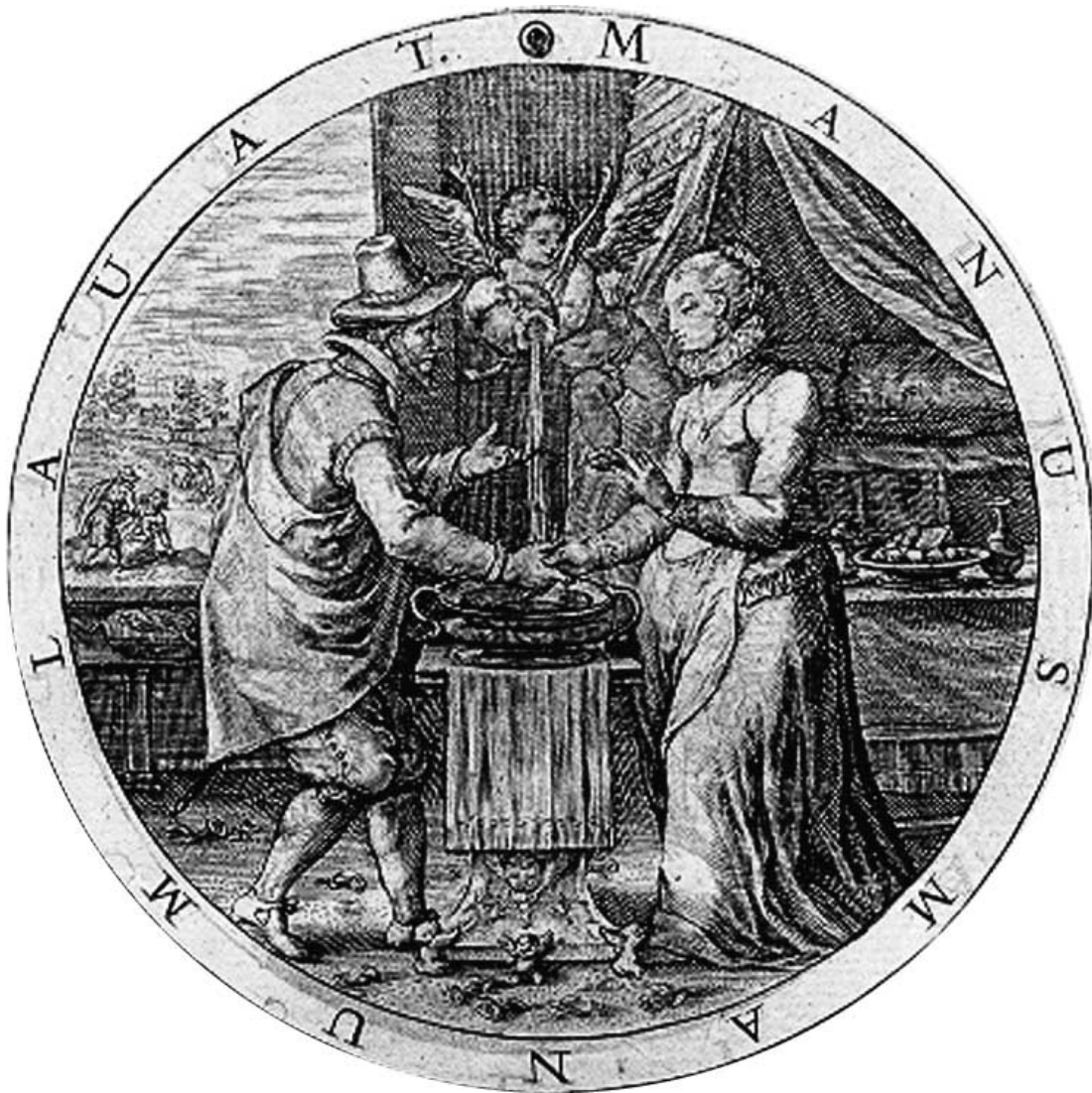
foretold that when Christ cometh, he shall not “find faith upon the earth.”<sup>7</sup>

1625

## Endnotes

- Note 2: See John 18:38 for Pilate’s idle query to Jesus.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Foolish changeability. “That”: those who.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Discursive minds. “Philosophers of that kind”: the Greek Skeptics, who taught the uncertainty of all things.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Restricts, controls.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, is baffled.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ruby.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “The wine of devils”; St. Augustine is probably being cited.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Creation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lucretius’s *On the Nature of Things* expressed the Epicurean creed, which Bacon thought inferior because it emphasized pleasure.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Topped by anything higher.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, provided always that this observation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Upright.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Debases.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Essays* 2.18.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Luke 18:8.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Of Marriage and Single Life



**Marriage.** The Liturgy of Solemnizing Marriage from *The Book of Common Prayer* (1559) emphasized the purposes of marriage (with procreation primary), the indissolubility of marriage, and the biblical texts undergirding that definition of marriage. It also held up the ideal of mutual love and help, which is represented in this emblem from George Wither's *A Collection of Emblems* (1635). The Latin motto reads in English, "Hand Washes Hand."

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He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief. Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public. Yet it were great reason that those that have children should have greatest care of future times, unto which they know they must transmit their dearest pledges. Some there are who, though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves, and account future times impertinences.<sup>1</sup> Nay, there are some other that account wife and children but as bills of charges. Nay more, there are some foolish rich covetous men that take a pride in having no children, because they may be thought so much the richer. For perhaps they have heard some talk, "Such an one is a great rich man," and another except to it, "Yea, but he hath a great charge of children"; as if it were an abatement to his riches. But the most ordinary cause of a single life is liberty, especially in certain self-pleasing and humorous<sup>2</sup> minds, which are so sensible of every restraint, as they will go near to think their girdles and garters to be bonds and shackles. Unmarried men are best friends, best masters, best servants, but not always best subjects, for they are light to run away, and almost all fugitives are of that condition. A single life doth well with churchmen, for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool. It is indifferent for judges and magistrates, for if they be facile<sup>3</sup> and corrupt, you shall have a servant five times worse than a wife. For soldiers, I find the generals commonly in their hortatives<sup>4</sup> put men in mind of their wives and children; and I think the despising of marriage amongst the Turks maketh the vulgar soldier more base. Certainly wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity; and single men, though they be many times more charitable, because their means are less exhaust,<sup>5</sup> yet, on the other side, they are more cruel and hardhearted (good to make severe inquisitors), because their tenderness is not so oft called upon. Grave natures, led by custom, and therefore constant, are commonly loving husbands, as was said of Ulysses, *Vetulam suam praetulit*

*immortalitati*.<sup>6</sup> Chaste women are often proud and froward,<sup>7</sup> as presuming upon the merit of their chastity. It is one of the best bonds, both of chastity and obedience, in the wife if she think her husband wise, which she will never do if she find him jealous. Wives are young men's mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men's nurses; so as a man may have a quarrel<sup>8</sup> to marry when he will. But yet he was reputed one of the wise men that made answer to the question when a man should marry: "A young man not yet, an elder man not at all."<sup>9</sup> It is often seen that bad husbands have very good wives; whether it be that it raiseth the price of their husbands' kindness when it comes, or that the wives take a pride in their patience. But this never fails, if the bad husbands were of their own choosing, against their friends' consent; for then they will be sure to make good their own folly.

1612, 1625

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Irrelevant concerns.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unbalanced, whimsical.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pliable.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Exhortations.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Exhausted.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "He preferred his old wife to immortality." Ulysses might have had immortality with the nymph Calypso but preferred to go back to Penelope.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ill-tempered.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pretext.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thales (6th century B.C.E.), one of the Seven Sages of Greece.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Of Great Place

Men in great place are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state, servants of fame, and servants of business. So as they have no freedom, neither in their persons, nor in their actions, nor in their times. It is a strange desire, to seek power and to lose liberty, or to seek power over others and to lose power over a man's self. The rising unto place is laborious, and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base, and by indignities men come to dignities. The standing is slippery, and the regress is either a downfall or at least an eclipse, which is a melancholy thing: *Cum non sis qui fueris, non esse cur velis vivere.*<sup>1</sup> Nay, retire men cannot when they would, neither will they when it were reason; but are impatient of privateness, even in age and sickness, which require the shadow;<sup>2</sup> like old townsmen, that will be still sitting at their street door, though thereby they offer age to scorn. Certainly great persons had need to borrow other men's opinions to think themselves happy; for if they judge by their own feeling, they cannot find it; but if they think with themselves what other men think of them, and that other men would fain be as they are, then they are happy, as it were by report; when perhaps they find the contrary within. For they are the first that find their own griefs, though they be the last that find their own faults. Certainly men in great fortunes are strangers to themselves, and while they are in the puzzle of business they have no time to tend their health, either of body or mind. *Illi mors gravis incubat, qui notus nimis omnibus, ignotus moritur sibi.*<sup>3</sup> In place there is license to do good and evil, whereof the latter is a curse; for in evil the best condition is not to will, the second not to can.<sup>4</sup> But power to do good is the true and lawful end of aspiring; for good thoughts (though God accept them) yet towards men are little better than good dreams, except they be put in act; and that cannot be without power and place, as the vantage and commanding ground.



Merit and good works is the end of man's motion, and conscience<sup>5</sup> of the same is the accomplishment of man's rest; for if a man can be partaker of God's theater,<sup>6</sup> he shall likewise be partaker of God's rest. *Et conversus Deus, ut aspiceret opera quae fecerunt manus suae, vidit quod omnia essent bona nimis;*<sup>7</sup> and then the Sabbath.

In the discharge of thy place set before thee the best examples, for imitation is a globe<sup>8</sup> of precepts. And after a time set before thee thine own example; and examine thyself strictly, whether thou didst not best at first. Neglect not also the examples of those that have carried themselves ill in the same place; not to set off thyself by taxing<sup>9</sup> their memory, but to direct thyself what to avoid. Reform, therefore, without bravery, or scandal<sup>1</sup> of former times and persons; but yet set it down to thyself, as well to create good precedents as to follow them. Reduce things to the first institution,<sup>2</sup> and observe wherein and how they have degenerate; but yet ask counsel of both times; of the ancient time what is best, and of the latter time what is fittest. Seek to make thy course regular, that men may know beforehand what they may expect; but be not too positive and peremptory, and express thyself well when thou digressest from thy rule. Preserve the right of thy place, but stir not questions of jurisdiction; and rather assume thy right in silence and *de facto*,<sup>3</sup> than voice it with claims and challenges. Preserve likewise the rights of inferior places, and think it more honor to direct in chief than to be busy in all. Embrace and invite helps and advices touching the execution of thy place, and do not drive away such as bring thee information as meddlers, but accept of them in good part. The vices of authority are chiefly four: delays, corruption, roughness, and facility.<sup>4</sup> For delays, give easy access, keep times appointed, go through with that which is in hand, and interlace not business<sup>5</sup> but of necessity. For corruption, do not only bind thine own hands or thy servants' hands from taking, but bind the hands of suitors also from offering. For integrity used doth the one; but integrity professed, and with a manifest detestation of bribery, doth the other. And avoid not only the fault, but the suspicion. Whosoever is found variable

and changeth manifestly, without manifest cause, giveth suspicion of corruption. Therefore, always when thou changest thine opinion or course, profess it plainly and declare it, together with the reasons that move thee to change; and do not think to steal it.<sup>6</sup> A servant or a favorite, if he be inward,<sup>7</sup> and no other apparent cause of esteem, is commonly thought but a byway to close<sup>8</sup> corruption. For roughness, it is a needless cause of discontent; severity breedeth fear, but roughness breedeth hate. Even reproofs from authority ought to be grave, and not taunting. As for facility, it is worse than bribery; for bribes come but now and then, but if importunity or idle respects<sup>9</sup> lead a man, he shall never be without. As Solomon saith, "To respect persons is not good, for such a man will transgress for a piece of bread."<sup>1</sup>

It is most true that was anciently spoken, "A place showeth the man"; and it showeth some to the better and some to the worse. *Omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset,*<sup>2</sup> saith Tacitus of Galba; but of Vespasian he saith, *Solus imperantium Vespasianus mutatus in melius:*<sup>3</sup> though the one was meant of sufficiency, the other of manners and affection. It is an assured sign of a worthy and generous spirit, whom honor amends.<sup>4</sup> For honor is, or should be, the place of virtue; and as in nature things move violently to their place and calmly in their place, so virtue in ambition is violent, in authority settled and calm. All rising to great place is by a winding stair; and if there be factions, it is good to side a man's self<sup>5</sup> whilst he is in the rising, and to balance himself when he is placed. Use the memory of thy predecessor fairly and tenderly; for if thou dost not, it is a debt will sure be paid when thou art gone. If thou have colleagues, respect them, and rather call them when they look not for it, than exclude them when they have reason to look to be called. Be not too sensible<sup>6</sup> or too remembering of thy place in conversation and private answers to suitors; but let it rather be said, "When he sits in place he is another man."

# Endnotes

- Note 1: "When you aren't what you were, there's no reason to live" (Cicero, *Familiar Letters* 7.3).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "The shadow" of retirement, out of the glare of public life.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Death lies heavily on him who, while too well known to everyone else, dies unknown to himself" (Seneca, *Thyestes* 401–03).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Be able.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Consciousness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Actions in the world.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: World.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Blaming.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Defaming. "Bravery": ostentation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To their original form.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Without debate, as a matter of course.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Docility, too great obligingness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, do not carry on different businesses at the same time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Change your mind without its being noticed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In his master's confidence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Secret.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Irrelevant considerations.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Compare Proverbs 28:21.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Everyone would have thought him a good ruler, if he had not ruled" (*Histories* 1.49).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Of all the emperors, only Vespasian changed for the better" (slightly misquoted from *Histories* 1.50).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, whom promotion improves. "Sufficiency": abilities. "Affection": disposition. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For a man to take sides. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sensitive. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Of Superstition<sup>1</sup>

It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of him. For the one is unbelief, the other is contumely;<sup>2</sup> and certainly superstition is the reproach of the deity. Plutarch saith well to that purpose: "Surely" (saith he) "I had rather a great deal men should say there was no such man at all as Plutarch, than that they should say that there was one Plutarch that would eat his children as soon as they were born"—as the poets speak of Saturn.<sup>3</sup> And as the contumely is greater towards God, so the danger is greater towards men. Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation, all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not. But superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men. Therefore atheism did never perturb states, for it makes men wary of themselves as looking no further;<sup>4</sup> and we see the times inclined to atheism (as the time of Augustus Caesar) were civil times. But superstition hath been the confusion of many states, and bringeth in a new *primum mobile*, that ravisheth all the spheres of government.<sup>5</sup> The master of superstition is the people, and in all superstition wise men follow fools, and arguments are fitted to practice in a reversed order. It was gravely said by some of the prelates in the council of Trent, where the doctrine of the schoolmen bare great sway, *that the schoolmen were like astronomers, which did feign eccentrics and epicycles and such engines of orbs to save the phenomena, though they knew there were no such things;*<sup>6</sup> and in like manner that the schoolmen had framed a number of subtle and intricate axioms and theorems to save the practice of the church.

The causes of superstition are: pleasing and sensual rites and ceremonies; excess of outward and pharisaical holiness;<sup>7</sup> overgreat reverence of traditions, which cannot but load the church; the

stratagems of prelates for their own ambition and lucre; the favoring too much of good intentions, which openeth the gate to conceits<sup>8</sup> and novelties; the taking an aim at divine matters by human, which cannot but breed mixture of imaginations; and lastly barbarous times, especially joined with calamities and disasters. Superstition without a veil is a deformed thing, for as it addeth deformity to an ape to be so like a man, so the similitude of superstition to religion makes it the more deformed. And as wholesome meat corrupteth to little worms, so good forms and orders corrupt into a number of petty observances. There is a superstition in avoiding superstition, when men think to do best if they go furthest from the superstition formerly received; therefore care would be had that (as it fareth in ill purgings) the good be not taken away with the bad, which commonly is done when the people is the reformer.<sup>9</sup>

1612, 1625

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Irrational religious practices founded on fear or ignorance.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Contempt.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Saturn (Cronos), god of time (among other things), was reputed to have eaten all his children, as time does. Many of the sentiments in Bacon's essay come from Plutarch's essay "On Superstition."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, not looking beyond their own personal lifetimes. The rule of Augustus Caesar (following) was marked by general peace and civil quiet (that is, civilized). In this period of Roman history, many members of the elite no longer believed in the pagan gods, though they participated in the forms of state religion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The prime mover (*primum mobile*) was supposed to control the motions of the other heavenly spheres; superstition is a second (and contrary) mover.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: "Save the phenomena" means "explain appearances," as did the elaborate theories of pre-Copernican astronomers (epicycles, trepidation, and such concepts). So with the Scholastic philosophers ("schoolmen").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Pharisees were the strict party among the Jews of Christ's time; they taught precise observance of the letter of Mosaic law.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Fancies.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The final sentence is directed against Puritan reformers, who loathed ceremonies, traditions, liturgy, and images, which they considered "superstitions."[Return to reference 9](#)

## Of Plantations<sup>1</sup>

Plantations are amongst ancient, primitive, and heroical works. When the world was young it begat more children; but now it is old it begets fewer: for I may justly account new plantations to be the children of former kingdoms. I like a plantation in a pure soil; that is, where people are not displanted to the end to plant in others. For else it is rather an extirpation than a plantation. Planting of countries is like planting of woods; for you must make account to leese<sup>2</sup> almost twenty years profit, and expect your recompense in the end. For the principal thing that hath been the destruction of most plantations hath been the base and hasty drawing of profit in the first years. It is true, speedy profit is not to be neglected, as far as may stand<sup>3</sup> with the good of the plantation, but no further. It is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of people, and wicked condemned men, to be the people with whom you plant; and not only so, but it spoileth the plantation, for they will ever live like rogues, and not fall to work, but be lazy, and do mischief, and spend victuals, and be quickly weary, and then certify over<sup>4</sup> to their country, to the discredit of the plantation. The people wherewith you plant ought to be gardeners, plowmen, laborers, smiths, carpenters, joiners,<sup>5</sup> fishermen, fowlers, with some few apothecaries, surgeons, cooks, and bakers.

In a country of plantation, first look about what kind of victual the country yields of itself to hand, as chestnuts, walnuts, pineapples, olives, dates, plums, cherries, wild honey, and the like, and make use of them. Then consider what victual or esculent<sup>6</sup> things there are which grow speedily and within the year, as parsnips, carrots, turnips, onions, radish, artichokes of Jerusalem,<sup>7</sup> maize, and the like. For wheat, barley, and oats, they ask<sup>8</sup> too much labor; but with peas and beans you may begin, both because they ask less labor and because they serve for meat<sup>9</sup> as well as for bread.



And of rice likewise cometh a great increase, and it is a kind of meat. Above all, there ought to be brought store of biscuit, oatmeal, flour, meal, and the like in the beginning, till bread may be had. For beasts or birds, take chiefly such as are least subject to diseases, and multiply fastest, as swine, goats, cocks, hens, turkeys, geese, house doves, and the like. The victual in plantations ought to be expended almost as in a besieged town; that is, with certain<sup>1</sup> allowance. And let the main part of the ground employed to gardens or corn be to<sup>2</sup> a common stock, and to be laid in and stored up and then delivered out in proportion; besides some spots of ground that any particular person will manure<sup>3</sup> for his own private. Consider likewise what commodities the soil where the plantation is doth naturally yield, that they may some way help to defray the charge of the plantation (so it be not, as was said, to the untimely prejudice of the main business), as it hath fared with tobacco in Virginia. Wood commonly aboundeth but too much, and therefore timber is fit to be one. If there be iron ore and streams whereupon to set the mills, iron is a brave commodity, where wood aboundeth.<sup>4</sup> Making of bay-salt, if the climate be proper for it, would be put in experience.<sup>5</sup> Growing silk likewise, if any be, is a likely commodity. Pitch and tar, where store of firs and pines are, will not fail; so drugs and sweet woods, where they are, cannot but yield great profit. Soap ashes likewise, and other things that may be thought of. But moil<sup>6</sup> not too much underground, for the hope of mines is very uncertain, and useth to make the planters lazy in other things.

For government, let it be in the hands of one, assisted with some counsel; and let them have commission to exercise martial laws, with some limitation. And above all, let men make that profit of being in the wilderness, as they have God always, and his service, before their eyes. Let not the government of the plantation depend upon too many counselors and undertakers<sup>7</sup> in the country that planteth, but upon a temperate number; and let those be rather noblemen and gentlemen than merchants, for they look ever to the present gain. Let there be freedoms from custom<sup>8</sup> till the plantation be of strength; and not only freedom from custom, but freedom to

carry their commodities where they may make their best of them, except there be some special cause of caution. Cram not in people by sending too fast, company after company, but rather harken how they waste,<sup>9</sup> and send supplies proportionably, but so as the number may live well in the plantation, and not by surcharge<sup>1</sup> be in penury.

It hath been a great endangering to the health of some plantations, that they have built along the sea and rivers, in marish<sup>2</sup> and unwholesome grounds. Therefore, though you begin there, to avoid carriage and other like discommodities,<sup>3</sup> yet build still rather upwards from the streams than along. It concerneth likewise the health of the plantation that they have good store of salt with them, that they may use it in their victuals when it shall be necessary. If you plant where savages are, do not only entertain them with trifles and jingles, but use them justly and graciously, with sufficient guard nevertheless; and do not win their favor by helping them to invade their enemies, but for their defense it is not amiss. And send oft of them over to the country that plants, that they may see a better condition than their own, and commend it when they return. When the plantation grows to strength, then it is time to plant with women as well as with men, that the plantation may spread into generations and not be ever pieced from without. It is the sinfulness thing in the world to forsake or destitute a plantation once in forwardness; for besides the dishonor it is the guiltiness of blood of many commiserable<sup>4</sup> persons.

1625

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
The planting of colonies had been a standard topic of political theory since Plato, with attention focused on such matters as the choice of site, the best mix of population, and the treatment of Indigenous peoples. Sir Thomas More considered the matter in his *Utopia*, and it took on increased practical importance in

the narratives of English explorers such as Sir Walter Raleigh, and especially in the early 17th century, When English colonists first settled permanently settler colonies in the New World. Bacon's essay largely avoids the most acute moral issues English colonization was posing: English participation in the brutal African slave trade, and the stocking of "plantations" in Ireland with Scottish Presbyterian settlers (to supplement genocidal policies that were starving the indigenous Roman Catholics). These policies sowed the seeds of slavery in America and civil war in Ireland.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Lose. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Be consistent. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Report. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Workers in fine carpentry. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Edible. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Jerusalem artichokes, a species of sunflower having an edible root. "Jerusalem" is a mistranslation of the Italian word for sunflower, *girasole*. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Require. "For": as for. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, as a main dish. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fixed. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: For. "Corn": grain. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cultivate. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Waterpower and wood fires were required for getting iron out of ore. "Brave": excellent. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, should be tried. "Bay-salt" is a coarse salt obtained by evaporating seawater. "Growing silk" (next sentence): vegetable silk. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Labor. "Soap ashes": ashes used for making soap. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Investors holding shares in the enterprise. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Customs duties. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, observe at what rate the population declines. [Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: That is, by being overpopulated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Marshy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Disadvantages, inconveniences.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Worthy of compassion. "Destitute": abandon.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Of Negotiating

It is generally better to deal by speech than by letter, and by the mediation of a third than by a man's self. Letters are good when a man would draw an answer by letter back again, or when it may serve for a man's justification afterwards to produce his own letter, or where it may be danger to be interrupted or heard by pieces. To deal in person is good when a man's face breedeth regard, as commonly with inferiors, or in tender<sup>1</sup> cases, where a man's eye upon the countenance of him with whom he speaketh may give him a direction how far to go; and generally, where a man will reserve to himself liberty either to disavow or to expound. In choice of instruments, it is better to choose men of a plainer sort, that are like to do that that is committed to them, and to report back again faithfully the success,<sup>2</sup> than those that are cunning to contrive out of other men's business somewhat to grace themselves, and will help the matter in report for satisfaction sake. Use also such persons as affect<sup>3</sup> the business wherein they are employed, for that quickeneth much; and such as are fit for the matter, as bold men for expostulation, fair-spoken men for persuasion, crafty men for inquiry and observation, froward and absurd men for business that doth not well bear out itself.<sup>4</sup> Use also such as have been lucky, and prevailed before in things wherein you have employed them; for that breeds confidence, and they will strive to maintain their prescription.<sup>5</sup> It is better to sound a person with whom one deals afar off, than to fall upon the point at first, except you mean to surprise him by some short question. It is better dealing with men in appetite,<sup>6</sup> than with those that are where they would be. If a man deal with another upon conditions, the start or first performance is all, which a man cannot reasonably demand,<sup>7</sup> except either the nature of the thing be such which must go before, or else a man can persuade the other party that he shall still need him in some other thing, or else that he

be counted the honestest man. All practice is to discover or to work.<sup>8</sup> Men discover themselves in trust, in passion, at unawares, and of necessity, when they would have somewhat done and cannot find an apt pretext. If you would work any man, you must either know his nature and fashions, and so lead him; or his ends, and so persuade him; or his weakness and disadvantages, and so awe him; or those that have interest in him, and so govern him. In dealing with cunning persons, we must ever consider their ends, to interpret their speeches; and it is good to say little to them, and that which they least look for. In all negotiations of difficulty, a man may not look to sow and reap at once, but must prepare business, and so ripen it by degrees.

1597, 1625

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Delicate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Result.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Like.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, when your business is less than honest, use an ill-tempered or foolish person.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Keep up their reputation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Who are hungry; that is, ambitious men.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: You cannot reasonably make special conditions favorable to you, except in the circumstances noted.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: All sharp bargaining aims to find out what men are up to or to make use of them. "Discover" (next sentence): reveal.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Of Masques and Triumphs

These things are but toys to come amongst such serious observations; but yet, since princes will have such things, it is better they should be graced with elegancy, than daubed with cost. Dancing to song is a thing of great state and pleasure. I understand it that the song be in choir, placed aloft, and accompanied with some broken music,<sup>1</sup> and the ditty fitted to the device. Acting in song, especially in dialogues, hath an extreme good grace; I say acting, not dancing (for that is a mean and vulgar thing);<sup>2</sup> and the voices of the dialogue would be strong and manly (a bass and tenor, no treble), and the ditty high and tragical, not nice or dainty. Several choirs, placed one over against another, and taking the voices by catches anthem-wise, give great pleasure. Turning dances into figure<sup>3</sup> is a childish curiosity; and, generally, let it be noted, that those things which I here set down are such as to naturally take the sense, and not respect petty wonderments. It is true, the alterations of scenes, so it be quietly and without noise, are things of great beauty and pleasure for they feed and relieve the eye before it be full of the same object. Let the scenes abound with light, specially colored and varied; and let the masquers, or any other that are to come down from the scene,<sup>4</sup> have some motions upon the scene itself before their coming down; for it draws the eye strangely, and makes it with great pleasure to desire to see that it cannot perfectly discern. Let the songs be loud and cheerful, and not chirpings or pulings; let the music, likewise, be sharp and loud, and well placed. The colors that show best by candlelight<sup>5</sup> are white, carnation, and a kind of seawater green; and oes or spangs,<sup>6</sup> as they are of no great cost, so they are of most glory. As for rich embroidery, it is lost and not discerned. Let the suits of the masquers be graceful, and such as become the person when the vizors are off; not after examples of known attires, Turks, soldiers, mariners, and the like. Let

antimasques<sup>7</sup> not be long; they have been commonly of fools, satyrs, baboons, wild men, antics, beasts, sprites, witches, Ethiopes, pigmies, turquets,<sup>8</sup> nymphs, rustics, Cupids, statues moving, and the like. As for angels, it is not comical enough to put them in antimasques; and anything that is hideous, as devils, giants, is, on the other side, as unfit; but, chiefly, let the music of them be recreative, and with some strange changes. Some sweet odors suddenly coming forth, without any drops falling, are, in such a company as there is steam and heat, things of great pleasure and refreshment. Double masques, one of men, another of ladies, addeth state and variety; but all is nothing, except the room be kept clear and neat.

For jousts, and tourneys, and barriers,<sup>9</sup> the glories of them are chiefly in the chariots, wherein the challengers make their entry; especially if they be drawn with strange beasts, as lions, bears, camels, and the like; or in the devices of their entrance, or in the bravery of their liveries, or in the goodly furniture of their horses and armor. But enough of these toys.

1625

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Part-music, for different voices and different kinds of instruments.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bacon's emphasis on dialogue and song (as opposed to dance) is in keeping with the increased emphasis on dialogue in later Jacobean and Caroline masques; dance, however, remains at the center of both early and late masques.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Patterns with allegorical or numerological significance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: To unmask at the end and come onto the floor, so as to take part in the general dancing (the revels) with members of the court.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: The Banqueting Hall at Whitehall, the site of many court masques, was lit only by candlelight; viewers complained that some masques were hard to see.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spangles shaped like the letter "O."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The antic dances (presented by professionals) that preceded the main masque dances and represented the vices, follies, or disorders that are to be dispelled with the arrival of the main masques (royal and noble personages).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Turkish dwarfs.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: One form of masque was the "joust," "tourney" (tournament), or "barrier," which chiefly involved knights, who represented allegorical qualities, tilting lances against each other.[Return to reference 9](#)

# Of Studies

[1597 version]<sup>1</sup>

Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastime is in privateness<sup>2</sup> and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgment. For expert men<sup>3</sup> can execute, but learned men are fittest to judge or censure. To spend too much time in them is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humor<sup>4</sup> of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience. Crafty men condemn them, simple men admire them, wise men use them, for they teach not their own use; but that<sup>5</sup> is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict nor to believe, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read but cursorily; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Reading maketh a full man, conference<sup>6</sup> a ready man, and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit;<sup>7</sup> and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that<sup>8</sup> he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets, witty;<sup>9</sup> the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy,<sup>1</sup> deep; moral,<sup>2</sup> grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This version of the essay illustrates Bacon's early epigrammatic, aphoristic style, featuring balance, parallelism,

disjunction between sentences, and a curtness that is occasionally cryptic. The 1625 version keeps some aphoristic elements unchanged but provides more connectives and transitions, resulting in a smoother, more flowing style.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Private life.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Men of experience.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Disposition, implying folly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the knowledge of how to use them. “Without” (following): outside.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Conversation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Lively intelligence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That which.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Clever.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Science.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Moral philosophy.[Return to reference 2](#)

# Of Studies

**[ 1625 version ]**

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness<sup>1</sup> and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. For expert men<sup>2</sup> can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshaling of affairs, come best from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humor<sup>3</sup> of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience; for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them, for they teach not their own use; but that<sup>4</sup> is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously;<sup>5</sup> and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy and extracts made of them by others, but that would be only in the less important arguments and the meaner sort of books; else distilled books are like common distilled waters,<sup>6</sup> flashy things. Reading maketh a full man, conference<sup>7</sup> a ready man, and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit;<sup>8</sup> and if he read little, he had need have much cunning,

to seem to know that<sup>9</sup> he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets, witty;<sup>1</sup> the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy,<sup>2</sup> deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend. *Abeunt studia in mores.*<sup>3</sup> Nay, there is no stond or impediment in the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies, like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises. Bowling is good for the stone and reins,<sup>4</sup> shooting for the lungs and breast, gentle walking for the stomach, riding for the head, and the like. So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the schoolmen, for they are *cumini sectores.*<sup>5</sup> If he be not apt to beat over matters<sup>6</sup> and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyer's cases. So every defect of the mind may have a special receipt.<sup>7</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Private life.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Men of experience.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Folly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the knowledge of how to use them. "Without" (following): outside.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Attentively.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Used as home remedies, without real value.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Conversation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lively intelligence.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That which.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Clever.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Science. "Moral" (following): that is, moral philosophy.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: "Studies culminate in manners" (Ovid, *Heroides* 15.83).  
"Stond" (following): stoppage.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Gallstone and kidneys.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Dividers of cuminseed"; that is, hairsplitters.  
"Schoolmen": Scholastic philosophers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Discuss a subject thoroughly.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cure, prescription.[Return to reference 7](#)

# ***From The Advancement of Learning***

## **[THE ABUSES OF LANGUAGE]<sup>1</sup>**

Martin Luther, conducted (no doubt) by an higher providence, but in discourse of reason finding what a province he had undertaken against the bishop of Rome<sup>2</sup> and the degenerate traditions of the church, and finding his own solitude being no ways aided by the opinions of his own time, was enforced to awake all antiquity and to call former times to his succor to make a party against the present time, so that the ancient authors both in divinity and in humanity which had long time slept in libraries began generally to be read and revolved.<sup>3</sup> This by consequence did draw on a necessity of a more exquisite travail in the languages original wherein those authors did write,<sup>4</sup> for the better understanding of those authors and the better advantage of pressing and applying their words. And thereof grew again a delight in their manner of style and phrase, and an admiration of that kind of writing, which was much furthered and precipitated by the enmity and opposition that the propounders of those (primitive but seeming new) opinions had against the schoolmen, who were generally of the contrary part, and whose writings were altogether in a differing style and form, taking liberty to coin and frame new terms of art to express their own sense and to avoid circuit of speech, without regard to the pureness, pleasantness, and (as I may call it) lawfulness of the phrase or word.<sup>5</sup> And again, because the greatest labor then was with the people (of whom the Pharisees were wont to say, *Execrabilis ista turba, quae non novit legem*<sup>6</sup>) for the winning and persuading of them there grew of necessity in chief price and request<sup>7</sup> eloquence and variety of discourse, as the fittest and forciblest access into the capacity of the vulgar sort. So that these four causes concurring (the admiration of ancient authors, the hate of the schoolmen, the exact

study of languages, and the efficacy of preaching) did bring in an affectionate study of eloquence and copy<sup>8</sup> of speech, which then began to flourish. This grew speedily to an excess, for men began to hunt more after words than matter, and more after the choiceness of the phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their works with tropes and figures<sup>9</sup> than after the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of judgment. Then grew the flowing and watery vein of Osorius, the Portugal bishop, to be in price. Then did Sturmius spend such infinite and curious pains upon Cicero the orator and Hermogenes the rhetorician, besides his own books of periods and imitation and the like.<sup>1</sup> Then did Carr of Cambridge and Ascham with their lectures and writings almost deify Cicero and Demosthenes, and allure all young men that were studious unto that delicate and polished kind of learning.<sup>2</sup> Then did Erasmus take occasion to make the scoffing echo, *Decem annos consumpsi in legendo Cicerone*, and the echo answered in Greek, *one, Asine*.<sup>3</sup> Then grew the learning of the schoolmen to be utterly despised as barbarous. In sum, the whole inclination and bent of those times was rather towards copy than weight.<sup>4</sup>

Here therefore is the first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter, whereof though I have represented an example of late times, yet it hath been and will be *secundum maius et minus*<sup>5</sup> in all time. And how is it possible but this should have an operation to discredit learning, even with vulgar capacities, when they see learned men's works like the first letter of a patent or limned<sup>6</sup> book, which though it hath large flourishes, yet it is but a letter? It seems to me that Pygmalion's frenzy<sup>7</sup> is a good emblem or portraiture of this vanity, for words are but the images of matter, and except they have life of reason and invention, to fall in love with them is all one as to fall in love with a picture.

But yet notwithstanding, it is a thing not hastily to be condemned to clothe and adorn the obscurity even of philosophy itself with



sensible and plausible elocution. For hereof we have great examples in Xenophon, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, and of Plato also in some degree; and hereof likewise there is great use, for surely to the severe inquisition of truth and the deep progress into philosophy it is some hindrance, because it is too early satisfactory to the mind of man, and quencheth the desire of further search before we come to a just period; but then if a man be to have any use of such knowledge in civil occasions of conference, counsel, persuasion, discourse, or the like, then shall he find it prepared to his hands in those authors which write in that manner. But the excess of this is so justly contemptible that as Hercules, when he saw the image of Adonis, Venus' minion, in a temple, said in disdain, *Nil sacri es*;<sup>8</sup> so there is none of Hercules' followers in learning, that is, the more severe and laborious sort of inquirers into truth,<sup>9</sup> but will despise those delicacies and affectations as indeed capable of no divineness.

1605

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Among the "three distempers of learning" that Bacon proposes to cure in this work, the most important involves "vain imaginations, vain altercations, and vain affectations"; to help explain these he offers a concise history of changes in the language of learned discourse since the Reformation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The pope. "Province": task.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Considered. Luther (1483–1546) indeed looked back to the original languages of the Bible and to ancient authors in "divinity" (chiefly Augustine), but he was not involved in the efforts of the humanists (including Erasmus and Sir Thomas More) to revive the classical languages and authors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Classical Greek and Latin, and biblical Hebrew. "Exquisite travail": careful work.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The Scholastic philosophers (“schoolmen”) used the living Latin of the Middle Ages, wrenching the language yet further from classical norms in applying it to subtle philosophical matters; the humanists denounced the Scholastics’ Latin as barbarous and sought instead to imitate classical models, especially Cicero.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “This people who knoweth not the law are cursed” (John 7:49).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Worth and demand.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Copiousness. “Affectionate”: affected.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Figurative language.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Jeronimo Osorio (1506–1580) wrote a history of Portuguese conquests in a flowing style that caused him to be known as the Portuguese Cicero. His contemporary, Johann Sturm, edited texts of Cicero and the Greek rhetorician Hermogenes; his “book of periods” was a rhetorical handbook.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nicholas Carr was professor of Greek at Cambridge; Roger Ascham was tutor to Queen Elizabeth and author of *The Schoolmaster*. Both admired the rhetorical polish of the Roman orator Cicero and the Greek orator Demosthenes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “I spent ten years in reading Cicero.” Echo answers, “Ass!” The joke is in the *Colloquies* of Erasmus.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Elegant phrasing rather than profundity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: More or less, depending on circumstances.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Illuminated that is illustrated, as with elaborate initial capitals. Royal grants (“patents”) were also engrossed with fancy initial letters.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pygmalion’s “frenzy” (delirium) was to fall in love with a statue he had carved of a beautiful woman.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: “You’re nothing holy.” Adonis was the lover (“minion”) of Venus, deified after his death while boar hunting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hercules early in life was offered a choice between a life of ignoble ease and sensory delights and one of strenuous virtue. He chose the latter, and so do his followers in learning.[Return to reference 9](#)

# ***From Novum Organum*<sup>1</sup>**

## **19**

There are and can be only two ways of searching into and discovering truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle axioms.<sup>2</sup> And this way is now in fashion. The other derives from the senses and particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all.<sup>3</sup> This is the true way, but as yet untried.

\* \* \*

## **22**

Both ways set out from the senses and particulars, and rest in the highest generalities, but the difference between them is infinite. For the one just glances at experiment and particulars in passing, the other dwells duly and orderly among them. The one, again, begins at once by establishing certain abstract and useless generalities, the other rises by gradual steps to that which is prior and better known in the order of nature.

\* \* \*

## **38**

The idols and false notions which are now in possession of the human understanding and have taken deep root therein, not only so beset men's minds that truth can hardly find entrance, but even after entrance is obtained, they will again in the very instauration<sup>4</sup> of

the sciences meet and trouble us, unless men being forewarned of the danger fortify themselves as far as may be against their assaults.

\* \* \*

## **41**

The Idols of the Tribe have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. For it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things. On the contrary, all perceptions as well of the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.

## **42**

The Idols of the Cave are the idols of the individual man. For everyone (besides the errors common to human nature in general) has a cave or den of his own, which refracts and discolours the light of nature, owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature, or to his education and conversation with others, or to the reading of books, and the authority of those whom he esteems and admires; or to the difference of impressions, accordingly as they take place in a mind preoccupied and predisposed or in a mind indifferent and settled, or the like. So that the spirit of man (according as it is meted out to different individuals) is in fact a thing variable and full of perturbation, and governed as it were by chance. Whence it was well observed by Heraclitus<sup>5</sup> that men look for sciences in their own lesser worlds, and not in the greater or common world.

## **43**

There are also idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call Idols of the Marketplace, on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate, and words are imposed according to

the apprehension of the vulgar. And therefore the fit and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding. Nor do the definitions or explanations wherewith in some things learned men are wont to guard and defend themselves, by any means set the matter right. But words plainly force and overrule the understanding, and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies.

#### **44**

Lastly, there are idols which have immigrated into men's minds from the various dogmas of philosophies, and also from wrong laws of demonstration. These I call Idols of the Theater, because in my judgment all the received systems are but so many stage plays, representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion. Nor is it only of the systems now in vogue or only of the ancient sects and philosophies that I speak; for many more plays of the same kind may yet be composed and in like artificial manner set forth, seeing that errors the most widely different have nevertheless causes for the most part alike. Neither again do I mean this only of entire systems, but also of the many principles and axioms in science, which by tradition, credulity, and negligence have come to be received.

\* \* \*

#### **59**

But the Idols of the Marketplace are the most troublesome of all: idols which have crept into the understanding through the alliances of words and names. For men believe that their reason governs words; but it is also true that words react on the understanding; and this it is that has rendered philosophy and the sciences sophistical and inactive. Now words, being commonly framed and applied according to the capacity of the vulgar, follow those lines of division which are most obvious to the vulgar understanding. And whenever an understanding of greater acuteness or a more diligent

observation would alter those lines to suit the true divisions of nature, words stand in the way and resist the change. Whence it comes to pass that the high and formal discussions of learned men end oftentimes in disputes about words and names; with which (according to the use<sup>6</sup> and wisdom of the mathematicians) it would be more prudent to begin, and so by means of definitions reduce them to order. Yet even definitions cannot cure this evil in dealing with natural and material things; since the definitions themselves consist of words, and those words beget others;<sup>7</sup> so that it is necessary to recur to individual instances, and those in due series and order; as I shall say presently when I come to the method and scheme for the formation of notions and axioms.

## 60

The idols imposed by words on the understanding are of two kinds. They are either names of things which do not exist (for as there are things left unnamed through lack of observation, so likewise are there names which result from fantastic suppositions and to which nothing in reality corresponds), or they are names of things which exist, but yet confused and ill-defined, and hastily and irregularly derived from realities. Of the former kind are Fortune, the Prime Mover, Planetary Orbits, Element of Fire, and like fictions which owe their origin to false and idle theories.<sup>8</sup> And this class of idols is more easily expelled, because to get rid of them it is only necessary that all theories should be steadily rejected and dismissed as obsolete.<sup>9</sup>

But the other class, which springs out of a faulty and unskillful abstraction, is intricate and deeply rooted. Let us take for example such a word as *humid*; and see how far the several things which the word is used to signify agree with each other; and we shall find the word *humid* to be nothing else than a mark loosely and confusedly applied to denote a variety of actions which will not bear to be reduced to any constant meaning. For it both signifies that which easily spreads itself round any other body; and that which in itself is indeterminate and cannot solidize; and that which readily yields in every direction; and that which easily divides and scatters itself; and

that which easily unites and collects itself; and that which readily flows and is put in motion; and that which readily clings to another body and wets it; and that which is easily reduced to a liquid, or being solid easily melts. Accordingly when you come to apply the word—if you take it in one sense, flame is humid; if in another, air is not humid; if in another, fine dust is humid; if in another, glass is humid. So that it is easy to see that the notion is taken by abstraction only from water and common and ordinary liquids, without any due verification.

There are however in words certain degrees of distortion and error. One of the least faulty kinds is that of names of substances, especially of lowest species and well-deduced (for the notion of *chalk* and of *mud* is good, of *earth* bad); a more faulty kind is that of actions, as *to generate*, *to corrupt*, *to alter*; the most faulty is of qualities (except such as are the immediate objects of the sense), as *heavy*, *light*, *rare*, *dense*, and the like. Yet in all these cases some notions are of necessity a little better than others, in proportion to the greater variety of subjects that fall within the range of the human sense.

\* \* \*

## 62

Idols of the Theater, or of systems, are many, and there can be and perhaps will be yet many more. For were it not that now for many ages men's minds have been busied with religion and theology; and were it not that civil governments, especially monarchies, have been averse to such novelties, even in matters speculative, so that men labor therein to the peril and harming of their fortunes, not only unrewarded, but exposed also to contempt and envy; doubtless there would have arisen many other philosophical sects like to those which in great variety flourished once among the Greeks. For as on the phenomena of the heavens many hypotheses may be constructed, so likewise (and more also) many various dogmas may be set up and established on the phenomena of philosophy. And in



the plays of this philosophical theater you may observe the same thing which is found in the theater of the poets, that stories invented for the stage are more compact and elegant, and more as one would wish them to be, than true stories out of history.

In general, however, there is taken for the material of philosophy either a great deal out of a few things, or a very little out of many things; so that on both sides philosophy is based on too narrow a foundation of experiment and natural history, and decides on the authority of too few cases. For the rational school of philosophers snatches from experience a variety of common instances, neither duly ascertained nor diligently examined and weighed, and leaves all the rest to meditation and agitation of wit.<sup>1</sup>

There is also another class of philosophers, who having bestowed much diligent and careful labor on a few experiments, have thence made bold to educe and construct systems; wresting all other facts in a strange fashion to conformity therewith.

And there is yet a third class, consisting of those who out of faith and veneration mix their philosophy with theology and traditions; among whom the vanity of some has gone so far aside as to seek the origin of sciences among spirits and genii.<sup>2</sup> So that this parent stock of errors—this false philosophy—is of three kinds: the sophistical, the empirical, and the superstitious.

\* \* \*

## 68

So much concerning the several classes of idols, and their equipage: all of which must be renounced and put away with a fixed and solemn determination, and the understanding thoroughly freed and cleansed; the entrance into the kingdom of man, founded on the sciences, being not much other than the entrance into the kingdom of heaven, whereinto none may enter except as a little child.

# Endnotes

- Note 1:  
*Novum Organum*, or “The New Instrument of Learning,” was written not in English but in Latin, for an international scholarly audience. Nonetheless it requires our attention here, as it is the keystone of Bacon’s vast project to reform the structure of human learning from the ground up. His reform called for careful observation of all aspects of nature and controlled experiment, but the first part of the book analyzes the stumbling blocks in the way—among them, famously, the various “idols,” or delusive images of truth, that lead people away from the exact knowledge of science.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The deductive method, associated with Aristotle and the Scholastic philosophers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The inductive method that Bacon here champions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Renovation, renewal.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Greek philosopher (active ca. 500 B.C.E.) who considered knowledge to be based on perception by the senses and thought that everything was in flux.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Custom.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Bacon’s mistrust of words helped prompt the Royal Society (founded in 1645) to cultivate a plain prose style for scientific communication.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The “Prime Mover” was a transparent sphere on the outside of the universe, supposed to move all the other spheres; the “Element of Fire” was an area of pure, invisible fire, supposed to exist above the atmosphere. By “Planetary Orbits” Bacon may be referring to the old notion of crystalline spheres in which the planets were supposed to be set. Obviously, these concepts could be based on no observation.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Bacon means “theories” not in the inclusive modern sense, but “abstractions loosely invoked to explain particular facts.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Bacon’s enthusiasm for experiment at times led him to denigrate the value of reason, but what he chiefly opposes here is the excessive concern with logic he finds in the Scholastic philosophers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Guardian spirits of a place.[Return to reference 2](#)

# ***From The New Atlantis*<sup>1</sup>**

## **[SOLOMON'S HOUSE]**

We came at our day and hour, and I was chosen by my fellows for the private access.<sup>2</sup> We found him in a fair chamber, richly hanged, and carpeted under foot, without any degrees to the state.<sup>3</sup> He was set upon a low throne richly adorned, and a rich cloth of state over his head, of blue satin embroidered. He was alone, save that he had two pages of honor, on either hand one, finely attired in white. His undergarments were the like that we saw him wear in the chariot;<sup>4</sup> but instead of his gown, he had on him a mantle with a cape of the same fine black, fastened about him. When we came in, as we were taught, we bowed low at our first entrance, and when we were come near his chair, he stood up, holding forth his hand ungloved and in posture of blessing; and we every one of us stooped down, and kissed the hem of his tippet.<sup>5</sup> That done, the rest departed, and I remained. Then he warned the pages forth of the room, and caused me to sit down beside him, and spake to me thus in the Spanish tongue:

"God bless thee, my son; I will give thee the greatest jewel I have. For I will impart unto thee, for the love of God and men, a relation of the true state of Solomon's House. Son, to make you know the true state of Solomon's House, I will keep this order. First, I will set forth unto you the end of our foundation. Secondly, the preparations and instruments we have for our works. Thirdly, the several employments and functions whereto our fellows are assigned. And fourthly, the ordinances and rites which we observe.

"The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.

"The preparations and instruments are these. We have large and deep caves of several depths: the deepest are sunk six hundred fathom; and some of them are digged and made under great hills and mountains; so that if you reckon together the depth of the hill and the depth of the cave, they are, some of them, above three miles deep. For we find that the depth of a hill, and the depth of a cave from the flat, is the same thing; both remote alike from the sun and heaven's beams, and from the open air. These caves we call the Lower Region, and we use them for all coagulations, indurations,<sup>6</sup> refrigerations, and conservations of bodies. We use them likewise for the imitation of natural mines, and the producing also of new artificial metals, by compositions and materials which we use, and lay there for many years. We use them also sometimes (which may seem strange) for curing of some diseases, and for prolongation of life in some hermits that choose to live there, well accommodated of<sup>7</sup> all things necessary, and indeed live very long; by whom also we learn many things.

"We have burials in several earths, where we put divers cements,<sup>8</sup> as the Chinese do their porcelain. But we have them in greater variety, and some of them more fine. We have also great variety of composts and soils, for the making of the earth fruitful.

"We have high towers, the highest about half a mile in height, and some of them likewise set upon high mountains, so that the vantage of the hill, with the tower, is in the highest of them three miles at least. And these places we call the Upper Region, accounting the air between the high places and the low as a Middle Region. We use these towers, according to their several heights and situations, for insolation,<sup>9</sup> refrigeration, conservation, and for the view of divers meteors—as winds, rain, snow, hail; and some of the fiery meteors<sup>1</sup> also. And upon them, in some places, are dwellings of hermits, whom we visit sometimes, and instruct what to observe.

"We have great lakes, both salt and fresh, whereof we have use for the fish and fowl. We use them also for burials of some natural bodies, for we find a difference in things buried in earth, or in air below the earth, and things buried in water. We have also pools, of

which some do strain fresh water out of salt, and others by art do turn fresh water into salt. We have also some rocks in the midst of the sea, and some bays upon the shore, for some works wherein is required the air and vapor of the sea. We have likewise violent streams and cataracts, which serve us for many motions; and likewise engines for multiplying and enforcing<sup>2</sup> of winds to set also on going divers motions.

"We have also a number of artificial wells and fountains, made in imitation of the natural sources and baths, as tinted upon<sup>3</sup> vitriol, sulphur, steel, brass, lead, niter, and other minerals; and again, we have little wells for infusions of many things, where the waters take the virtue<sup>4</sup> quicker and better than in vessels or basins. And amongst them we have a water which we call Water of Paradise, being by that we do to it, made very sovereign<sup>5</sup> for health and prolongation of life.

"We have also great and spacious houses, where we imitate and demonstrate meteors—as snow, hail, rain, some artificial rains of bodies and not of water, thunders, lightnings; also generations of bodies in air—as frogs, flies, and divers others.

"We have also certain chambers, which we call Chambers of Health, where we qualify<sup>6</sup> the air as we think good and proper for the cure of divers diseases and preservation of health.

"We have also fair and large baths, of several mixtures, for the cure of diseases and the restoring of man's body from arefaction;<sup>7</sup> and others for the confirming of it in strength of sinews, vital parts, and the very juice and substance of the body.

"We have also large and various orchards and gardens, wherein we do not so much respect beauty as variety of ground and soil, proper for divers trees and herbs, and some very spacious, where trees and berries are set, whereof we make divers kinds of drinks, besides the vineyards. In these we practice likewise all conclusions<sup>8</sup> of grafting and inoculating, as well of wild trees as fruit trees, which produceth many effects. And we make (by art) in the same orchards and gardens trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their

seasons, and to come up and bear more speedily than by their natural course they do. We make them also by art greater much than their nature; and their fruit greater and sweeter, and of differing taste, smell, color, and figure, from their nature. And many of them we so order as they become of medicinal use.

"We have also means to make divers plants rise by mixtures of earths without seeds, and likewise to make divers new plants, differing from the vulgar,<sup>9</sup> and to make one tree or plant turn into another.

"We have also parks and enclosures of all sorts of beasts and birds; which we use not only for view or rareness, but likewise for dissections and trials,<sup>1</sup> that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man. Wherein we find many strange effects: as continuing life in them, though divers parts, which you account vital, be perished and taken forth; resuscitating of some that seem dead in appearance; and the like. We try also all poisons and other medicines upon them, as well of chirurgery<sup>2</sup> as physic. By art likewise, we make them greater or taller than their kind is, and contrariwise dwarf them and stay their growth; we make them more fruitful and bearing than their kind is, and contrariwise barren and not generative. Also, we make them differ in color, shape, activity, many ways. We find means to make commixtures and copulations of different kinds, which have produced many new kinds,<sup>3</sup> and them not barren, as the general opinion is. We make a number of kinds of serpents, worms, fishes, flies, of putrefaction, whereof some are advanced (in effect) to be perfect creatures, like beasts or birds, and have sexes, and do propagate. Neither do we this by chance, but we know beforehand of what matter and commixture what kind of those creatures will arise.

"We have also particular pools where we make trials upon fishes, as we have said before of beasts and birds.

"We have also places for breed and generation of those kinds of worms and flies which are of special use; such as are with you your silkworms and bees."<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

"For the several employments and offices of our fellows, we have twelve that sail into foreign countries under the names of other nations (for our own we conceal), who bring us the books and abstracts and patterns of experiments of all other parts. These we call Merchants of Light.

"We have three that collect the experiments which are in all books. These we call Depredators.

"We have three that collect the experiments of all mechanical arts, and also of liberal sciences, and also of practices which are not brought into arts. These we call Mystery-men.

"We have three that try new experiments, such as themselves think good. These we call Pioneers or Miners.

"We have three that draw the experiments of the former four into titles and tables, to give the better light for the drawing of observations and axioms out of them. These we call Compilers.

"We have three that bend themselves, looking into the experiments of their fellows, and cast about how to draw out of them things of use and practice for man's life and knowledge, as well for works as for plain demonstration of causes, means of natural divinations, and the easy and clear discovery of the virtues and parts of bodies. These we call Dowry-men or Benefactors.

"Then after divers meetings and consults of our whole number, to consider of the former labors and collections, we have three that take care out of them to direct new experiments, of a higher light, more penetrating into nature than the former. These we call Lamps.

"We have three others that do execute the experiments so directed, and report them. These we call Inoculators.

"Lastly, we have three that raise the former discoveries by experiments into greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms. These we call Interpreters of Nature.

"We have also, as you must think, novices and apprentices, that the succession of the former employed men do not fail; besides a great number of servants and attendants, men and women. And this



we do also: we have consultations, which of the inventions and experiences which we have discovered shall be published, and which not; and take all an oath of secrecy for the concealing of those which we think fit to keep secret; though some of those we do reveal sometimes to the State, and some not.<sup>5</sup>

"For our ordinances and rites, we have two very long and fair galleries: in one of these we place patterns and samples of all manner of the more rare and excellent inventions; in the other we place the statues of all principal inventors. There we have the statue of your Columbus, that discovered the West Indies; also the inventor of ships; your monk that was the inventor of ordnance and of gunpowder;<sup>6</sup> the inventor of music; the inventor of letters; the inventor of printing; the inventor of observations of astronomy; the inventor of works in metal; the inventor of glass; the inventor of silk of the worm; the inventor of wine; the inventor of corn and bread; the inventor of sugars; and all these by more certain tradition than you have. Then we have divers inventors of our own, of excellent works, which since you have not seen, it were too long to make descriptions of them; and besides, in the right understanding of those descriptions you might easily err. For upon every invention of value we erect a statue to the inventor, and give him a liberal and honorable reward. These statues are some of brass, some of marble and touchstone,<sup>7</sup> some of cedar and other special woods gilt and adorned; some of iron, some of silver, some of gold.

"We have certain hymns and services, which we say daily, of laud and thanks to God for his marvelous works; and forms of prayer, imploring his aid and blessing for the illumination of our labors, and the turning of them into good and holy uses.

"Lastly, we have circuits or visits of divers principal cities of the kingdom; where, as it cometh to pass, we do publish such new profitable inventions as we think good. And we do also declare natural divinations of diseases, plagues, swarms of hurtful creatures, scarcity, tempests, earthquakes, great inundations, comets, temperature of the year, and divers other things; and we give

counsel thereupon, what the people shall do for the prevention and remedy of them.”

And when he had said this he stood up; and I, as I had been taught, kneeled down; and he laid his right hand upon my head, and said, “God bless thee, my son, and God bless this relation which I have made. I give thee leave to publish it, for the good of other nations; for we here are in God’s bosom, a land unknown.” And so he left me; having assigned a value of about two thousand ducats for a bounty to me and my fellows. For they give great largesses, where they come, upon all occasions.

*The rest was not perfected.*

1627

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) set a fashion for accounts of imaginary communities with more or less ideal forms of government. Bacon’s imaginary community has at its center an account of a research establishment, Solomon’s House, that could exist in any society; indeed a version of it was established in England in 1662 as the Royal Society. Bacon’s title alludes to the legendary island and ideal commonwealth in the Atlantic Ocean described by Plato in *Critias*; in the 17th century it was sometimes located in the New World. Bacon places his island, Bensalem, in the Pacific, roughly where the Solomon Islands had been discovered in 1568. After an imaginary journey the nameless narrator and his shipmates discover an island cut off from Hebrew and Greek civilization (though given a special revelation of Christianity) and thereby freed to focus on the development of science.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Audience with one of the scientific “Fathers” of Solomon’s House.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Without stairs leading up to the dais.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: He had made a triumphal entry into the city the previous day, wearing an undergarment of white linen and a black robe.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Scarf.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hardenings.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Provided with.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Clays and pottery mixtures.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Exposure to the sun.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anything that fell from the sky was, in Renaissance terminology, a meteor.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reinforcing, strengthening.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tinctured with.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Property (of the substances put into water).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Efficacious.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Modify.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Drying up.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Experiments.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ordinary.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Experiments.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Surgery.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Species. It was commonly supposed that all hybrids were sterile (see following).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The narrator continues to describe the various bakeries, vineyards, breweries, and kitchens operated by Solomon’s House. He enumerates the medicines discovered there, as well as various experiments with heat. The researchers study light, sound, perfumes, mechanics, mathematics, and all ways of deceiving the senses.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bacon allows his scientists considerable autonomy in relation to the state.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Tradition credited Roger Bacon, a 13th-century monk, with the discovery of to gunpowder.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A hard basaltic-type rock.[Return to reference 7](#)

# GEORGE HERBERT

## 1593–1633

George Herbert's style in his volume of religious poetry, *The Temple*, is deceptively simple and graceful, especially compared to the learned, witty style of his friend John Donne. But it is also marked by self-irony, a remarkable intellectual and emotional range, and an artistry evident in the poems' tight construction, exact diction, perfect control of tone, and enormously varied stanzaic forms and rhythmic patterns. These poems reflect Herbert's struggle to define his (or his speaker's) relationship to God through biblical metaphors invested with the tensions of relationships familiar in his own society: king and subject, lord and courtier, master and servant, landlord and tenant, father and child, bridegroom and bride, and friends of unequal status. None of Herbert's secular English poems survives, so his reputation rests on this single volume, which was published posthumously. *The Temple* contains a long prefatory poem, "The Church-Porch," and a long concluding poem, "Church Militant," which together enclose a collection of 177 short lyrics titled *The Church*, among which are sonnets, songs, hymns, laments, meditative poems, dialogue poems, acrostic poems, emblematic poems, and more. Herbert describes his collection as "a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul." Herbert's early biographer Izaak Walton reports that Herbert gave the manuscript to his friend Nicholas Farrar, head of a quasi-monastic community at Little Gidding, with instructions to publish it if he

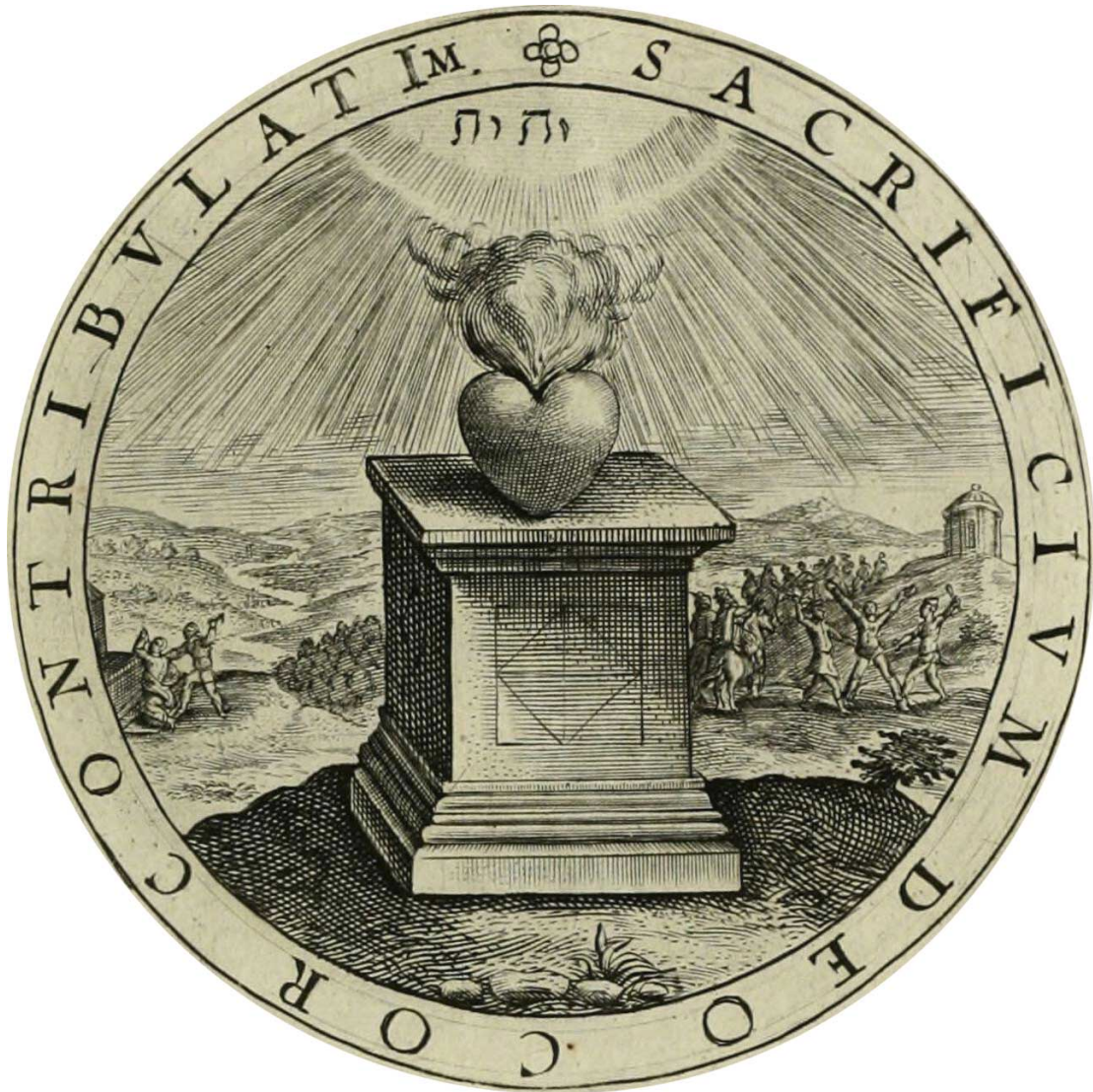
thought it would “turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul” and otherwise to burn it. Fortunately, Farrar chose to publish, and *The Temple* became the major influence on the religious lyric poets of the Caroline age, including Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Thomas Traherne, Hester Pulter, and the American colonial poet Edward Taylor.

The fifth son of an eminent Welsh family, Herbert (and his nine siblings) had an upbringing carefully monitored by his mother, Magdalen Herbert, patron and friend of Donne and several other scholars and poets. Herbert was educated at Westminster School and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he subsequently held a fellowship and wrote Latin poetry: elegies on the death of Prince Henry (1612), witty epigrams, poems on Christ’s Passion and death, and poems defending the rites of the English church. In 1620 he was appointed “public orator,” the official spokesman and correspondent for the university. This was a step toward a career at court or in public service, as was his election as the member of Parliament from Montgomery in 1624. But that route was closed off by the death of influential patrons and the change of monarchs. Like Donne, Herbert hesitated for some years before being ordained, but in 1630 he took up pastoral duties in the small country parish at Bemerton in Wiltshire. Whereas Donne preached to monarchs and statesmen, Herbert ministered to a few cottagers, and none of his sermons survive. His small book on the duties of his new life, *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson*, testifies to the earnestness and joy but also the aristocratic uneasiness with which he embraced that role. In chronic bad health, he lived only three more years—assiduously performing pastoral duties, writing and revising his poems, playing music, and listening to the organ and choir at nearby Salisbury Cathedral.

Herbert locates himself in the church through many poems that treat church liturgy, architecture, and art—for example, “Church Monuments” and “The Windows”—but his primary emphasis is always on the soul’s inner architecture. Unlike Donne, Herbert does not voice fears about his salvation or about his desperate sins; his anxieties center rather on his relationship with Christ. Many poems

register the speaker's distress over the vacillations and regressions in this relationship, over his lack of "fruition" in God's service, and over the instability of his own nature. In several dialogic poems the speaker's difficulties are alleviated by the voice of a divine friend heard within or recalled through scripture (as in "The Collar"). In one memorable line, the speaker compares his thoughts to "a case of knives." In poem after poem he has to come to terms with the fact that his relationship with Christ is always radically unequal, that Christ must both initiate it and enable his own response. The final poem in "The Church," "Love (3)," stages this agonistic drama with unmatched, compact power. Herbert also struggles with the paradox that, as the work of a Christian poet, his poetry ought to give fit praise to God but cannot possibly do so—an issue explored in "The Altar," the two "Jordan" poems, "Easter," "The Forerunners," and many others.





The motto of this emblem by George Wither, "*The Sacrifice, God loveth best, / Are Broken-hearts, for Sin, opprest,*" is also the subject of Herbert's "The Altar."

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Herbert's recourse is to develop a biblical poetics that renounces conventional poetic styles—"fictions" and "false hair"—to depend instead on God's "art" wrought in his own soul and displayed in the language and symbolism of the Bible. He makes scant use of Donnean learned imagery, but his scriptural allusions carry profound significances. A biblical metaphor provides the unifying motif for the volume: the New Testament temple in the human heart (1 Corinthians 3:16). Another recurring biblical metaphor represents the



Christian as plant or tree or flower in God's garden, in need of pruning, rain, and nurture. Herbert was profoundly influenced by the genre of the emblem, which typically associated mysterious but meaningful pictures and mottoes with explanatory text. Shaped poems like "The Altar" and "Easter Wings" present image and picture at once; others, like "The Windows," resemble emblem commentary. Other poems allude to typological symbolism, which interprets people and events in the Hebrew Bible (to Christians, the "Old Testament") as types or foreshadowings of Christ. Often, as in "The Bunch of Grapes," Herbert locates both type and antitype in the speaker's soul.

## ***FROM THE TEMPLE***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The title of Herbert's volume sets his poems in relation to David's psalms for the Temple at Jerusalem; his are "psalms" for the New Testament temple in the heart. All of the following poems come from this volume, published in 1633.[Return to reference 1](#)

## The Altar<sup>2</sup>

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,  
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:  
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;  
No workman's tool hath touched the same.<sup>3</sup>

5                   A   HEART   alone  
Is such a stone,  
As nothing but  
Thy power doth cut.  
Wherefore each part  
Of my hard heart  
10               Meets in this frame,  
To praise thy Name:  
That, if I chance to hold my peace,  
These stones to praise thee may not cease.<sup>4</sup>  
Oh let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,  
15       And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A variety of emblem poem. Emblems customarily have three parts: a picture, a motto, and a poem. This kind collapses picture and poem into one, presenting the emblem image by its very shape. Shaped poems have been used by authors from Hellenistic times to Susan Howe. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A reference to Exodus 20:25, in which the Lord enjoins Moses to build an altar of uncut stones, not touched by any tool, and also to Psalm 51:17: "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A reference to Luke 19:40: "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

Herbert's poems obtain much of their resonance from their biblical echoes. [Return to reference 4](#)

# Redemption<sup>1</sup>

Having been tenant long to a rich lord,  
Not thriving, I resolvèd to be bold,  
And make a suit unto him, to afford  
A new small-rented lease, and cancel th' old.<sup>2</sup>

5 In heaven at his manor I him sought:  
They told me there that he was lately gone  
About some land which he had dearly bought  
Long since on earth, to take possession.

10 I straight<sup>o</sup> returned, and knowing his great birth,  
Sought him accordingly in great resorts—  
In cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts:  
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth  
Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,  
Who straight, "Your suit is granted," said, and died.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Literally, "buying back." In this beautifully concise sonnet Herbert figures God as a landlord, himself as a discontented tenant.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, to ask him for a new lease, with a smaller rent; the figure points to the New Testament supplanting the Old.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *at once*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

# Easter<sup>1</sup>

Rise, heart, thy lord is risen. Sing his praise  
Without delays,  
Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise  
With him may'st rise;  
5 That, as his death calcinèd<sup>o</sup> thee to dust,  
His life may make thee gold, and, much more, just.

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part  
With all thy art.  
The cross taught all wood to resound his name  
Who bore the same.  
10 His stretchèd sinews taught all strings what key  
Is best to celebrate this most high day.

Consort, both heart and lute, and twist<sup>2</sup> a song  
Pleasant and long;  
15 Or, since all music is but three parts vied<sup>3</sup>  
And multiplied,  
Oh let thy blessèd spirit bear a part,  
And make up our defects with his sweet art.

## *The Song*

I got me flowers to straw<sup>o</sup> thy way,<sup>4</sup>  
I got me boughs off many a tree;  
20 But thou wast up by break of day  
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The sun arising in the east,  
Though he give light and th' east perfume,  
If they should offer to contest

25 With thy arising, they presume.  
Can there be any day but this,  
Though many suns to shine endeavor?  
We count three hundred, but we miss:°  
30 There is but one, and that one ever.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The first three stanzas work out the poetics of writing hymns; then comes the hymn itself.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Weave. "Consort": harmonize.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Increased by repetition. Harmony is based on the triad, the chord.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This evokes the scene of Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:8).[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *burned to powder*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strew*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *misunderstand*[Return to reference °](#)

# Easter Wings<sup>1</sup>

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,<sup>o</sup>  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more  
Till he became  
Most poor:  
5 With thee  
O let me rise  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
10 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.<sup>2</sup>  
My tender age in sorrow did begin:  
And still with sicknesses and shame  
Thou didst so punish sin,  
That I became  
15 Most thin.  
With thee  
Let me combine,  
And feel this day thy victory;  
For, if I imp<sup>3</sup> my wing on thine,  
20 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Another emblem poem whose shape presents the emblem picture; the lines, increasing and decreasing, imitate flight, and also the spiritual experience of falling and rising. Early editions printed the poem with the lines running vertically, making the wing shape more apparent. [Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: A reference to the “Fortunate Fall,” which brought humankind so great a redeemer.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In falconry, to insert feathers in a bird’s wing.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *abundance*[Return to reference °](#)

## Affliction (1)<sup>1</sup>

When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,  
I thought the service brave:<sup>o</sup>  
So many joys I writ down for my part,  
Besides what I might have  
5 Out of my stock of natural delights,  
Augmented with thy gracious benefits.

I lookèd on thy furniture so fine,  
And made it fine to me;  
Thy glorious household stuff did me entwine,  
And 'tice<sup>o</sup> me unto thee.  
10 Such stars I counted mine: both heaven and earth  
Paid me my wages in a world of mirth.

What pleasures could I want,<sup>o</sup> whose king I served,  
Where joys my fellows were?  
Thus argued into hopes, my thoughts reserved  
15 No place for grief or fear;  
Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place,  
And made her youth and fierceness seek thy face.

At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnesses;  
I had my wish and way:  
20 My days were strawed<sup>o</sup> with flowers and happiness;  
There was no month but May.  
But with my years sorrow did twist and grow,  
And made a party unawares<sup>o</sup> for woe.

My flesh began unto<sup>o</sup> my soul in pain,  
25 Sickneses cleave<sup>o</sup> my bones;  
Consuming agues<sup>o</sup> dwell in every vein,

And tune my breath to groans.  
Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce believed,  
Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived.

30

When I got health, thou took'st away my life,  
And more; for my friends die:  
My mirth and edge was lost: a blunted knife  
Was of more use than I.

35

Thus thin and lean without a fence or friend,  
I was blown through with every storm and wind.

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took  
The way that takes the town,  
Thou didst betray me to a lingering book,  
And wrap me in a gown.◊

40

I was entangled in the world of strife,  
Before I had the power to change my life.

Yet, for I threatened oft the siege to raise,  
Not simpering all mine age,  
Thou often didst with academic praise  
Melt and dissolve my rage.

45

I took thy sweetened pill, till I came where  
I could not go away, nor persevere.

Yet lest perchance I should too happy be  
In my unhappiness,  
Turning my purge◊ to food, thou throwest me  
Into more sicknesses.

50

Thus doth thy power cross-bias me,◊ not making  
Thine own gift good, yet me from my ways taking.

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me  
None of my books will show:  
I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree,  
For sure then I should grow

55

60 To fruit or shade; at least, some bird would trust  
Her household to me, and I should be just.

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;  
In weakness must be stout.  
Well, I will change the service, and go seek  
Some other master out.

65 Ah, my dear God! though I am clean forgot,  
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Herbert sometimes used the same title for several poems, thereby associating them; editors distinguish them by adding numbers. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *splendid* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entice* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strewn* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unwittingly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *started complaining to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *penetrate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fevers with convulsions* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *priest's garb* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laxative* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *turn me from my aim* [Return to reference °](#)

# Prayer (1)<sup>1</sup>

Prayer, the church's banquet; angels' age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth;  
The soul in paraphrase,<sup>2</sup> heart in pilgrimage;  
The Christian plummet,<sup>3</sup> sounding heaven and  
earth;

5 Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tower,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-days' world transposing<sup>4</sup> in an hour;  
A kind of tune which all things hear and fear:

10 Softness and peace and joy and love and bliss;  
Exalted manna,<sup>5</sup> gladness of the best;  
Heaven in ordinary,<sup>6</sup> man well dressed,  
The milky way, the bird of paradise,

Church bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's  
blood,  
The land of spices; something understood.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This extraordinary sonnet is a series of epithets without a main verb, defining prayer by metaphor.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Clarifying by expansion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A weight used to measure ("sound") the depth of water.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A musical term indicating sounds produced at another pitch from the original.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The food God supplied to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4–35); it became a Christian symbol for the Eucharist.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, everyday heaven.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Jordan (1)<sup>1</sup>

Who says that fictions only and false hair  
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beauty?  
Is all good structure in a winding stair?  
May no lines pass, except they do their duty<sup>o</sup>  
5       Not to a true, but painted chair?<sup>2</sup>

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves  
And sudden<sup>3</sup> arbors shadow<sup>o</sup> coarse-spun lines?  
Must purling<sup>o</sup> streams refresh a lover's loves?  
Must all be veiled,<sup>4</sup> while he that reads, divines,  
10       Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds<sup>5</sup> are honest people: let them sing;  
Riddle who list,<sup>o</sup> for me, and pull for prime:<sup>6</sup>  
I envy no man's nightingale or spring;  
Nor let them punish me with loss of rhyme,  
15       Who plainly say, *My God, My King.*<sup>7</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The river Jordan, which the Israelites crossed to enter the Promised Land, was also taken as a symbol for baptism. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: It was the custom for men to bow before a throne, whether it was occupied or not (see Donne, "Satire 3," lines 47–48, p. 907), but to require bowing before a throne in a painting would be ridiculous. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, that appear unexpectedly (an artificial effect much sought after in landscape gardening). [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: As in allegory.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Conventional pastoral poets.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To draw a lucky card in the game of primero. "For me": as far as I am concerned.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An echo of Psalm 145:1: "my God, O king."[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *pay reverence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shade*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rippling*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wishes*[Return to reference °](#)



# Church Monuments<sup>1</sup>

While that my soul repairs to her devotion,  
Here I entomb my flesh, that it betimes<sup>o</sup>  
May take acquaintance of this heap of dust  
To which the blast of death's incessant motion,  
Fed with the exhalation of our crimes,  
5 Drives all at last. Therefore I gladly trust

My body to this school, that it may learn  
To spell his elements and find his birth  
Written in dusty heraldry and lines<sup>o</sup>  
Which dissolution sure doth best discern,  
10 Comparing dust with dust and earth with earth.<sup>2</sup>  
These laugh at jet and marble,<sup>3</sup> put for signs

To sever the good fellowship of dust  
And spoil the meeting. What shall point out them<sup>4</sup>  
When they shall bow and kneel and fall down flat  
15 To kiss those heaps which now they have in trust?  
Dear flesh, while I do pray, learn here thy stem  
And true descent, that, when thou shalt grow fat

And wanton in thy cravings, thou mayest know  
That flesh is but the glass<sup>o</sup> which holds the dust  
20 That measures all our time, which also shall  
Be crumbled into dust. Mark here below  
How tame these ashes are, how free from lust,  
That thou mayest fit thyself against thy fall.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The earlier, manuscript version of the poem does not divide it into stanzas.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to Genesis 3:19: “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Jet (black basalt) and marble are used for tomb monuments. “These”: that is, dust and earth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The inhabitants of the tombs.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *while time remains*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *engraving, genealogy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hourglass*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Windows<sup>1</sup>

Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?  
He is a brittle, crazy<sup>o</sup> glass,  
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford  
This glorious and transcendent place,  
To be a window through thy grace.

5

But when thou dost anneal<sup>2</sup> in glass thy story,  
Making thy life to shine within  
The holy preachers, then the light and glory  
More reverend grows, and more doth win,  
Which else shows wat'rish, bleak, and thin.

10

Doctrine and life, colors and light, in one  
When they combine and mingle, bring  
A strong regard and awe; but speech alone  
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,  
And in the ear, not conscience, ring.

15

## Endnotes

- Note 1: From his little parish at Bemerton, Herbert used to walk twice a week across Salisbury Plain to the great cathedral, where he delighted not only in the music but in the stained glass windows. This poem explores how the preacher himself may become such a window.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Heat in order to color.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *flawed, distorting*[Return to reference °](#)

# Denial

When my devotions could not pierce  
Thy silent ears,  
Then was my heart broken, as was my verse;  
My breast was full of fears  
And disorder;<sup>1</sup>  
5

My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,  
Did fly asunder:  
Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,  
Some to the wars and thunder  
Of alarms.  
10

As good go anywhere, they say,  
As to benumb  
Both knees and heart in crying night and day,  
*Come, come, my God, O come!*  
But no hearing.  
15

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue  
To cry to thee,  
And then not hear it crying! All day long  
My heart was in my knee,  
But no hearing.  
20

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,  
Untuned, unstrung;  
My feeble spirit, unable to look right,  
Like a nipped<sup>o</sup> blossom, hung  
Discontented.  
25

O cheer and tune my heartless breast;

Defer no time,  
That so thy favors granting my request,  
They and my mind may chime,<sup>°</sup>  
And mend my rhyme.

30

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Unrhymed, as are the concluding lines of each stanza except the last. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *frostbitten* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ring together, agree* [Return to reference °](#)

# Virtue

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky:  
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight,  
For thou must die.

5 Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,<sup>1</sup>  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:  
Thy root is ever in its grave,  
And thou must die.

10 Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets<sup>o</sup> compacted lie;  
My music shows ye have your closes,<sup>2</sup>  
And all must die.

15 Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
Like seasoned timber, never gives;  
But though the whole world turn to coal,<sup>3</sup>  
Then chiefly lives.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Splendid. "Angry": having the hue of anger, red.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Concluding cadences in music. This poem has often been set to music.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Will be reduced to a cinder at the Last Judgment.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *perfumes* [Return to reference](#) °

# Man

My God, I heard this day  
That none doth build a stately habitation,  
But he that means to dwell therein.  
What house more stately hath there been,  
5 Or can be, than is man? to<sup>1</sup> whose creation  
All things are in decay.

For man is every thing  
And more; he is a tree, yet bears more<sup>2</sup> fruit;  
A beast, yet is or should be more;  
Reason and speech we only bring.<sup>3</sup>  
10 Parrots may thank us, if they are not mute:  
They go upon the score.<sup>4</sup>

Man is all symmetry,  
Full of proportions, one limb to another,  
And all to all the world besides;<sup>5</sup>  
15 Each part may call the farthest, brother;  
For head with foot hath private amity,  
And both with moons and tides.

Nothing hath got so far  
But man hath caught and kept it as his prey.  
20 His eyes dismount<sup>o</sup> the highest star:  
He is in little all the sphere.<sup>o</sup>  
Herbs gladly cure our flesh; because that they  
Find their acquaintance there.

For us the winds do blow,  
25 The earth doth rest, heav'n move, and fountains  
flow;



Nothing we see but means our good,  
As our delight, or as our treasure.  
The whole is either our cupboard of food,  
Or cabinet of pleasure.

30

The stars have us to bed;  
Night draws the curtain which the sun withdraws,  
Music and light attend our head.  
All things unto our flesh are kind<sup>o</sup>  
In their descent and being; to our mind

35

In their ascent and cause.

Each thing is full of duty.  
Waters united are our navigation,  
Distinguished,<sup>o</sup> our habitation;  
Below, our drink; above, our meat;<sup>6</sup>

40

Both are our cleanliness. Hath one such beauty?  
Then how are all things neat!

More servants wait on man  
Than he'll take notice of; in every path,  
He treads down that<sup>7</sup> which doth befriend him,

45

When sickness makes him pale and wan.  
O mighty love! Man is one world, and hath  
Another to attend him.

Since then, my God, thou hast  
So brave<sup>o</sup> a palace built, O, dwell in it,

50

That it may dwell with thee at last!  
Till then, afford us so much wit,  
That, as the world serves us, we may serve thee,  
And both thy servants be.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Compared to. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A textual variant is “no.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Man has a vegetable, an animal, and a spiritual nature; he is the only creature that speaks and reasons.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Parrots are indebted to us for speech.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The notion is of man as microcosm, whose parts all correspond to features of the great world. Compare Donne, Holy Sonnet 5, p. 911.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Oceans are valuable for navigation; the earth was created by dividing waters from waters (Genesis 1:6–7); on earth water is drink; from above it provides rain to grow our food (“meat”).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The herb that will cure him when he’s sick.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *bring down to earth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the universe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *akin*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendid*[Return to reference °](#)

## Jordan (2)<sup>1</sup>

When first my lines of heavenly joys made mention,  
Such was their luster, they did so excel,  
That I sought out quaint words and trim invention;  
My thoughts began to burnish,<sup>o</sup> sprout, and swell,  
Curling with metaphors a plain intention,  
5 Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.<sup>o</sup>

Thousands of notions in my brain did run,  
Offering their service, if I were not sped:<sup>o</sup>  
I often blotted what I had begun;  
This was not quick<sup>o</sup> enough, and that was dead.  
10 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sun,  
Much less those joys which trample on his head.<sup>2</sup>

As flames do work and wind when they ascend,  
So did I weave myself into the sense;  
But while I bustled, I might hear a friend  
15 Whisper, "How wide<sup>3</sup> is all this long pretense!  
There is in love a sweetness ready penned:  
Copy out only that, and save expense."

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Compare "Jordan (1)" (p. 1186), and Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 1 (p. 541).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The "joys which trample on" the sun's head are heavenly joys (line 1).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Irrelevant, wide of the mark.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *burgeon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for sale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supplied, satisfied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lively*[Return to reference](#) °

## Affliction (4)

Broken in pieces all asunder,<sup>o</sup>  
Lord, hunt me not,  
A thing forgot,  
Once a poor creature, now a wonder,<sup>o</sup>  
A wonder tortured in the space  
5 Betwixt this world and that of grace.

My thoughts are all a case of knives,  
Wounding my heart  
With scattered smart,<sup>o</sup>  
10 As wa'ring pots give flowers their lives.  
Nothing their fury can control,  
While they do wound and pink<sup>1</sup> my soul.

All my attendants are at strife,  
Quitting their place  
Unto my face:  
15 Nothing performs the task of life:  
The elements are let loose to fight,  
And while I live, try out their right.

Oh help, my God! let not their plot  
Kill them and me,  
20 And also thee,  
Who art my life: dissolve<sup>o</sup> the knot,  
As the sun scatters by his light  
All the rebellions of the night.

Then shall those powers which work for grief,  
25 Enter thy pay,  
And day by day

Labor<sup>o</sup> thy praise and my relief:  
With care and courage building me,  
Till I reach heav'n, and much more, thee.

30

## Endnotes

- Note 1: To pierce or perforate, so as to reveal a contrasting lining (a term from fencing). [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *separate from each other* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *marvel, miracle* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undo* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *labor for* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Bunch of Grapes<sup>1</sup>

Joy, I did lock thee up;<sup>o</sup> but some bad man  
Hath let thee out again,  
And now methinks I am where I began  
Sev'n years ago: one vogue<sup>o</sup> and vein,  
One air of thoughts usurps my brain.  
5 I did towards Canaan draw, but now I am  
Brought back to the Red Sea, the sea of shame.<sup>2</sup>

For as the Jews of old by God's command  
Traveled, and saw no town,  
So now each Christian hath his journeys spanned;<sup>o</sup>  
10 Their story pens and sets us down.<sup>3</sup>  
A single deed is small renown.  
God's works are wide, and let in future times;  
His ancient justice overflows our crimes.

Then have we too our guardian fires and clouds;  
15 Our Scripture-dew<sup>o</sup> drops fast;  
We have our sands and serpents, tents and shrouds;  
<sup>o</sup>  
Alas! our murmurings come not last.  
But where's the cluster? where's the taste  
Of mine inheritance? Lord, if I must borrow,  
20 Let me as well take up their joy as sorrow.

But can he want<sup>o</sup> the grape who hath the wine?  
I have their fruit and more.  
Blessèd be God, who prospered Noah's vine<sup>4</sup>  
And made it bring forth grapes good store.  
25 But much more him I must adore  
Who of the Law's sour juice<sup>5</sup> sweet wine did make,

Even God himself being pressed for my sake.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: When the children of Israel had almost lost hope in the wilderness, God inspired Moses to send forth scouts, who returned to report that Canaan was a land of milk and honey. They brought back a bunch of grapes so big they had to carry it between them on a pole (Numbers 13:23).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Red Sea's color suggests blushing for shame. Because the Israelites complained about their long ordeal in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, God drove them back toward the Red Sea.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness toward the land of Canaan was taken to be a type (prefiguration) of the Christian's trials on the path of salvation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Noah's vine (Genesis 9) was taken as a type of the earth replenished by God after the Flood.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The severe rules of the Old Testament as contrasted with the sweeter and more liberal covenant of the New Testament, which Christ's crucifixion established.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *hold you fast*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tendency*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *measured out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *manna*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *temporary shelters*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lack*[Return to reference °](#)



# The Holdfast<sup>1</sup>

I threatened to observe the strict decree  
Of my dear God with all my power and might.  
But I was told by one, it could not be;  
Yet I might trust in God to be my light.

5 Then will I trust, said I, in him alone.  
Nay, ev'n to trust in him, was also his;  
We must confess, that nothing is our own.  
Then I confess that he my succor is.

10 But to have naught is ours, not to confess  
That we have naught. I stood amazed at this,  
Much troubled, till I heard a friend express,  
That all things were more ours by being his.  
What Adam had, and forfeited for all,  
Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: An allusion to Psalm 73:27 in the Book of Common Prayer: "It is good for me to hold me fast by God." The poem dramatizes the entire reliance on grace—and the abnegation of any human capacity to cooperate with it or claim any merit—that was a cornerstone of Calvinist theology. [Return to reference 1](#)

# The Collar<sup>1</sup>

I struck the board<sup>2</sup> and cried, "No more;  
I will abroad!  
What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free, free as the road,  
Loose as the wind, as large as store.  
5 Shall I be still in suit?<sup>3</sup>  
Have I no harvest but a thorn  
To let me blood, and not restore  
What I have lost with cordial<sup>o</sup> fruit?  
Sure there was wine  
10 Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn<sup>o</sup>  
Before my tears did drown it.  
Is the year only lost to me?  
Have I no bays<sup>4</sup> to crown it,  
No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?  
15 All wasted?  
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.  
Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute  
20 Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,  
Thy rope of sands,  
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee  
Good cable,<sup>5</sup> to enforce and draw,  
And be thy law,  
25 While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
Away! Take heed;  
I will abroad.  
Call in thy death's-head<sup>6</sup> there; tie up thy fears.  
He that forbears



# The Pulley<sup>1</sup>

When God at first made man,  
Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can:  
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,  
5 Contract into a span.”<sup>2</sup>

So strength first made a way;  
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure.  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,  
10 Rest<sup>o</sup> in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said He,  
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
15 So both should losers be.

“Yet let him keep the rest,<sup>o</sup>  
But keep them with repining restlessness:  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
20 May toss him to my breast.”

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poem inverts the legend of Pandora’s box, which released all manner of evils when opened but left Hope trapped inside.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The short time during which a person lives.[Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *repose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remainder; repose*[Return to reference](#) °

# The Flower

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean  
Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring,  
To which, besides their own demesne,<sup>o</sup>  
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.  
Grief melts away  
5 Like snow in May,  
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shriveled heart  
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone  
Quite underground; as flowers depart  
10 To see their mother-root, when they have blown,<sup>o</sup>  
Where they together  
All the hard weather,  
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,  
15 Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell  
And up to heaven in an hour,  
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.<sup>1</sup>  
We say amiss  
This or that is:  
20 Thy word is all, if we could spell.<sup>o</sup>

O that I once past changing were,  
Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!  
Many a spring I shoot up fair,  
Offering<sup>o</sup> at heaven, growing and groaning thither;  
25 Nor doth my flower  
Want a spring shower,<sup>o</sup>

My sins and I joining together.

30 But while I grow in a straight line,  
Still upwards bent,o as if heaven were mine own,  
Thy anger comes, and I decline:  
What frost to that? What pole is not the zone  
Where all things burn,  
When thou dost turn,  
35 And the least frown of thine is shown?<sup>2</sup>

And now in age I bud again,  
After so many deaths I live and write;  
I once more smell the dew and rain,  
And relish versing. O my only light,  
40 It cannot be  
That I am he  
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,  
To make us see we are but flowers that glide;o  
Which when we once can find and prove,o  
45 Thou hast a garden for us where to bide;  
Who would be more,  
Swelling through store,  
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The “passing-bell,” intended to mark the death of a parishioner, is tolled in a monotone; a “chiming” bell offers pleasant variety.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, compared with God’s wrath, what polar chill would not seem like the heat of the equator?[Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *domain, demeanor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bloomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *read*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aiming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tears of contrition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *directed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slip silently away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *experience*[Return to reference](#) °



## The Forerunners

The harbingers are come: see, see their mark;  
White is their color,<sup>1</sup> and behold my head.  
But must they have my brain? Must they dispark<sup>o</sup>  
Those sparkling notions which therein were bred?  
Must dullness turn me to a clod?  
5 Yet have they left me "Thou art still my God."<sup>2</sup>

Good men ye be to leave me my best room,  
Even all my heart and what is lodged there:  
I pass not,<sup>o</sup> I, what of the rest become,  
10 So "Thou art still my God" be out of fear.  
He will be pleased with that ditty;  
And if I please Him, I write fine and witty.

Farewell, sweet phrases, lovely metaphors:  
But will ye leave me thus? When ye before  
Of stews<sup>o</sup> and brothels only knew the doors,  
15 Then did I wash you with my tears, and more,  
Brought you to church well-dressed and clad:  
My God must have my best, even all I had.

Lovely enchanting language, sugarcane,  
Honey of roses, whither wilt thou fly?  
20 Hath some fond lover 'ticed<sup>o</sup> thee to thy bane?<sup>o</sup>  
And wilt thou leave the church and love a sty?  
Fie! thou wilt soil thy 'broidered coat,  
And hurt thyself and him that sings the note.

Let foolish lovers, if they will love dung,  
25 With canvas, not with arras,<sup>o</sup> clothe their shame:  
Let Folly speak in her own native tongue.

True Beauty dwells on high; ours is a flame  
But borrowed thence to light us thither:  
Beauty and beauteous words should go together.

30

Yet, if you go, I pass not;° take your way.  
For "Thou art still my God" is all that ye  
Perhaps with more embellishment can say.  
Go, birds of spring; let winter have his fee;°  
Let a bleak paleness chalk the door,  
So all within be livelier than before.

35

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Harbingers rode ahead of a royal traveling party to requisition lodgings, marking the doors with chalk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An echo of Psalm 31:14: "But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God."[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *turn out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *care not*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whorehouses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *enticed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poison*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fine cloth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *care not*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *due*[Return to reference °](#)

# Discipline

Throw away thy rod,  
Throw away thy wrath:  
O my God,  
Take the gentle path.

5 For my heart's desire  
Unto thine is bent:  
I aspire  
To a full consent.

Not a word or look  
I affect<sup>o</sup> to own,  
10 But by book,<sup>1</sup>  
And thy book alone.

Though I fail, I weep:  
Though I halt<sup>o</sup> in pace,  
15 Yet I creep  
To the throne of grace.

Then let wrath remove;  
Love will do the deed:  
For with love  
20 Stony hearts will bleed.

Love is swift of foot;  
Love's a man of war,<sup>2</sup>  
And can shoot,  
And can hit from far.

25 Who can 'scape his bow?  
That which wrought on thee,

Brought thee low,  
Needs must work on me.

30      Throw away thy rod;  
          Though man frailties hath,  
                  Thou art God:  
          Throw away thy wrath.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, in a set manner, by command, or like an actor who follows his playbook. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The jubilant song sung by Moses in Exodus 15 calls the Lord “a man of war,” but Herbert also alludes to Cupid, another divine archer. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *wish, pretend* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limp* [Return to reference °](#)

# Death

Death, thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing,  
Nothing but bones,  
The sad effect of sadder groans:  
Thy mouth was open, but thou couldst not sing.

5 For we considered thee as at some six  
Or ten years hence,  
After the loss of life and sense,  
Flesh being turned to dust and bones to sticks.

We looked on this side of thee, shooting short,  
Where we did find  
10 The shells of fledge-souls left behind—  
Dry dust, which sheds no tears, but may extort.<sup>1</sup>

But since our Savior's death did put some blood  
Into thy face,  
15 Thou art grown fair and full of grace,  
Much in request, much sought for as a good.

For we do now behold thee gay and glad  
As at doomsday,  
When souls shall wear their new array,  
20 And all thy bones with beauty shall be clad.

Therefore we can go die as sleep, and trust  
Half that we have  
Unto an honest faithful grave,  
Making our pillows either down or dust.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Souls that have left the body and gone to heaven are like fledgling chicks that have left the shell behind; that corpse ("dry dust") sheds no tears but may draw ("extort") tears from the survivors. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Love (3)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack<sup>o</sup>  
From my first entrance in,  
5 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
If I lacked anything.<sup>1</sup>

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here":  
Love said, "You shall be he."  
"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,  
I cannot look on thee."  
10 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve."  
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the  
15 blame?"  
"My dear, then I will serve."  
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my  
meat."  
So I did sit and eat.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The first question of tavern waiters to an entering customer would be "What d'ye lack?" (that is, want).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In addition to the sacrament of Communion, the reference is especially to the banquet in heaven, when the Lord

“shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37). [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *hesitant* [Return to reference °](#)



# HENRY VAUGHAN

## 1621–1695

Born to a family with deep roots in Wales, Henry Vaughan was educated at Oxford and the Inns of Court but returned to his native county of Breconshire at the outbreak of the English Civil War and spent the rest of his life there. He served as secretary to the Welsh circuit courts until 1645; briefly fought for King Charles at Chester, just over the English border; and in his later years took up the practice of medicine without much formal study. In a volume of verse published in 1651, *Olor Iscanus* (The Swan of Usk), he drew attention to his heritage by terming himself “the Silurist”: the Silures were an ancient tribe from southeast Wales. Some features of Vaughan’s poetry derive from the rich Welsh-language poetic tradition: the frequency of assonance, consonance, and alliteration; the multiplication of comparisons and similes (*dyfalu*); and the sensitivity to nature, especially the countryside around the Usk River.

Some of Vaughan’s poetry is secular—*Poems with the Tenth Satire of Juvenal, Englished* (1646), *Olor Iscanus* (1651), and a late-published collection of earlier Latin verse, *Thalia Rediviva* (1678). Vaughan’s modern reputation, though, rests almost entirely on his religious poetry. In 1650 Vaughan published his major collection of religious verse, *Silex Scintillans* (The Flashing Flint), expanding it in 1655 to include an additional book. A conversion experience may have prompted Vaughan’s turn to religious themes: the title of the

book is explicated by the emblem of a flintlike heart struck by a bolt of lightning from the hand of God.

While Vaughan's secular poetry recalls Ben Jonson's, the religious poetry overtly models itself on George Herbert's. In the preface to *Silex Scintillans*, Vaughan refers to himself as one of Herbert's "pious converts." Some twenty-six poems appropriate their titles from *The Temple*, several owe their metrical form to Herbert, and many begin by quoting one of Herbert's lines (compare Vaughan's "Unprofitableness" with Herbert's "The Flower"). Yet no one with an ear for poetry will mistake Vaughan's long, loose poetic style for Herbert's artful precision. Vaughan's religious sensibility also differs markedly from Herbert's. Unable to locate himself in a national Church of England, now dismantled by war, he wanders unaccompanied through a landscape at once biblical, emblematic, and contemporary, mourning lost innocence. One unifying motif of the poems in *Silex Scintillans* is pilgrimage, though the arrival at the destination is typically deferred. Vaughan seems unable to experience Christ as a friend or supporter in present trials, as Herbert so often does; instead, he longs for a full relationship with the divine yet to come, at the Last Day. Despite his restless solitude, however, Vaughan finds vestiges of the divine everywhere. "I saw eternity the other night," he begins his most famous poem, "The World," situating the "ring of pure and endless light" in a specific, quotidian moment of illumination. Eternity hovers tantalizingly over the human world of strife, pain, and exploitation, apparently entirely detached from that world but in fact accessible to God's elect, who soar from earthly shadows into the light. Vaughan's twin brother, Thomas, introduced him to Hermetic philosophy, an esoteric brand of Neoplatonism that found occult correspondences between the visible world of matter and the invisible world of spirits. The influence of this philosophical system, so congenial to Vaughan's sensibility, is most apparent in the poem "Cock Crowing."

***FROM SILEX SCINTILLANS***

# Regeneration<sup>1</sup>

A ward, and still in bonds,<sup>2</sup> one day  
I stole abroad;  
It was high spring, and all the way  
Primrosed<sup>3</sup> and hung with shade;  
Yet was it frost within,  
5 And surly winds  
Blasted my infant buds, and sin  
Like clouds eclipsed my mind.  
  
Stormed thus, I straight perceived my spring  
Mere stage and show,  
10 My walk a monstrous, mountained thing,  
Roughcast with rocks and snow;  
And as a pilgrim's eye,  
Far from relief,  
Measures the melancholy sky,  
15 Then drops and rains for grief,  
  
So sighed I upwards still; at last  
'Twixt steps and falls  
I reached the pinnacle, where placed  
I found a pair of scales;  
20 I took them up and laid  
In th' one, late pains;  
The other smoke and pleasures weighed,  
But proved the heavier grains.<sup>4</sup>  
  
With that, some cried, "Away!" Straight<sup>o</sup> I  
25 Obeyed, and led  
Full east, a fair, fresh field could spy;  
Some called it Jacob's bed,<sup>5</sup>

30           A virgin soil which no  
              Rude feet ere trod,  
Where, since he stepped there, only go  
              Prophets and friends of God.

              Here I reposed; but scarce well set,  
              A grove descried<sup>o</sup>  
35       Of stately height, whose branches met  
              And mixed on every side;  
              I entered, and once in,  
              Amazed to see 't,  
40       Found all was changed, and a new spring<sup>6</sup>  
              Did all my senses greet.

              The unthrift sun shot vital gold,  
              A thousand pieces,  
              And heaven its azure did unfold,  
              Checkered with snowy fleeces;  
45       The air was all in spice,  
              And every bush  
              A garland wore; thus fed my eyes,  
              But all the ear lay hush.<sup>o</sup>

              Only a little fountain<sup>7</sup> lent  
              Some use for ears,  
50       And on the dumb shades language spent  
              The music of her tears;  
              I drew her near, and found  
              The cistern full  
55       Of divers stones, some bright and round,  
              Others ill-shaped and dull.<sup>8</sup>

              The first, pray mark, as quick as light  
              Danced through the flood;  
              But the last, more heavy than the night,  
              Nailed to the center stood.

60 I wondered much, but tired  
 At last with thought,  
 My restless eye that still desired  
 As strange an object brought:

65 It was a bank of flowers, where I descried,  
 Though 'twas midday,  
 Some fast asleep, others broad-eyed  
 And taking in the ray;  
 Here musing long, I heard  
 A rushing wind  
 70 Which still increased, but whence it stirred  
 Nowhere I could not find.

I turned me round, and to each shade  
 Dispatched an eye  
 To see if any leaf had made  
 75 Least motion or reply;  
 But while I listening sought  
 My mind to ease  
 By knowing where 'twas, or where not,  
 80 It whispered, "Where I please."<sup>9</sup>

"Lord," then said I, "on me one breath,  
 And let me die before my death!"

"Arise O North, and come thou South wind,  
 and blow upon my garden, that the spices  
 thereof may flow out."<sup>1</sup>  
 85

1650

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poem allegorizes in rather precise Calvinist terms the experience of God's grace calling the elect and

distinguishing between the regenerate and the unregenerate.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: He begins as “a ward” (in his minority under the law of the Hebrew Bible) and “in bonds” (in the Pauline “spirit of bondage” caused by fear of damnable sin).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An allusion to the adage that the “primrose path” leads to perdition.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: He climbs Mount Sinai (tries to live by the Hebrew Bible) but finds his sins and follies far outweigh that effort.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Jacob slept in an open field, where he had a vision of a ladder leading to heaven (Genesis 28:11–19); that place, Bethel, was taken as a type or figure for the church. Vaughan’s poem “Jacobs Pillow, and Pillar” works out this allegory.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Imagery in the following lines—spring, perfumes, flowers—alludes to the Song of Solomon in which the bride is traditionally allegorized as the church or the beloved soul.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the Song of Solomon 4:15 the “fountain of waters, a well of living waters” was traditionally allegorized as Christ.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An allusion to 1 Peter 2:5, which refers to the faithful as “lively stones.” The different sorts of stones and flowers here suggest the elect and the reprobate.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John 3:8: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Vaughan identifies this verse as Canticles (Song of Solomon) 5:17; it is properly 4:16.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *perceived* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quiet* [Return to reference](#) °



# The Retreat

Happy those early days! when I  
Shined in my angel infancy.  
Before I understood this place  
Appointed for my second race,<sup>1</sup>  
Or taught my soul to fancy aught<sup>o</sup>  
5 But a white, celestial thought;  
When yet I had not walked above  
A mile or two from my first love,  
And looking back, at that short space,  
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;  
10 When on some gilded cloud or flower  
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,  
And in those weaker glories spy  
Some shadows of eternity;  
Before I taught my tongue to wound  
15 My conscience with a sinful sound,  
Or had the black art to dispense  
A several<sup>o</sup> sin to every sense,  
But felt through all this fleshly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness.  
20 O, how I long to travel back,  
And tread again that ancient track!  
That I might once more reach that plain  
Where first I left my glorious train,  
From whence th' enlightened spirit sees  
25 That shady city of palm trees.<sup>2</sup>  
But, ah! my soul with too much stay<sup>o</sup>  
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.  
Some men a forward motion love;  
But I by backward steps would move,  
30 And when this dust falls to the urn,

In that state I came, return.

1650

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poem alludes throughout to the Platonic doctrine of preexistence, in conjunction with Christ's words (Mark 10:15): "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The New Jerusalem, the Heavenly City (identified with Jericho, the "city of Palm Trees," Deuteronomy 34:3).[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *anything*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *different*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *delay*[Return to reference °](#)

## Silence, and Stealth of Days!

Silence, and stealth of days! 'tis now  
Since thou art gone<sup>1</sup>  
Twelve hundred hours, and not a brow<sup>2</sup>  
But clouds hang on.  
As he that in some cave's thick damp,  
5 Locked from the light,  
Fixeth a solitary lamp  
To brave the night,  
And walking from his sun, when past  
That glimmering ray,  
10 Cuts through the heavy mists in haste  
Back to his day,<sup>3</sup>  
So o'er fled minutes I retreat  
Unto that hour  
Which showed thee last, but did defeat  
15 Thy light and power;  
I search and rack my soul to see  
Those beams again,  
But nothing but the snuff<sup>4</sup> to me  
Appeareth plain,  
20 That dark and dead sleeps in its known  
And common urn;  
But those<sup>5</sup> fled to their maker's throne,  
There shine and burn.  
O could I track them! but souls must  
25 Track one the other,  
And now the spirit, not the dust,  
Must be thy brother.  
Yet I have one pearl,<sup>6</sup> by whose light  
30 All things I see,

And in the heart of earth and night,  
Find heaven and thee.

1648 **Endnotes**

1650

- Note 1: As indicated in lines 27–28, the poem is on the loss of Vaughan’s brother—not his twin brother, Thomas, the Hermetic philosopher, who did not die until 1666, but his younger brother, William, who died in July 1648.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mountain ridge, or forehead.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The miner fixes his lamp halfway down the dark shaft, ventures a little beyond it, but then beats a hasty retreat.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The burned wick of the lamp or candle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The “beams” (line 18).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Probably the Bible. The reference is to Matthew 13:45–46, to the merchant who sold all he had to buy a pearl of great price, there likened to the Kingdom of Heaven.[Return to reference 6](#)

# Corruption

Sure it was so. Man in those early days  
Was not all stone and earth;  
He shined a little, and by those weak rays  
Had some glimpse of his birth.  
5 He saw heaven o'er his head, and knew from  
whence  
He came, condemnèd, hither;  
And, as first love draws strongest, so from hence  
His mind sure progressed thither.  
Things here were strange unto him: sweat and till,  
10 All was a thorn or weed:<sup>1</sup>  
Nor did those last, but (like himself) died still  
As soon as they did seed.  
They seemed to quarrel with him, for that act  
That felled him foiled them all:  
15 He drew the curse upon the world, and cracked  
The whole frame with his fall.  
This made him long for home, as loath to stay  
With murmurers and foes;  
He sighed for Eden, and would often say,  
20 "Ah! what bright days were those!"  
Nor was heaven cold unto him; for each day  
The valley or the mountain  
Afforded visits, and still Paradise lay  
In some green shade or fountain.  
25 Angels lay lieger<sup>2</sup> here; each bush and cell,  
Each oak and highway knew them;  
Walk but the fields, or sit down at some well,  
And he was sure to view them.  
Almighty Love! where art thou now? Mad man  
Sits down and freezeth on;

30       He raves, and swears to stir nor fire, nor fan,  
           But bids the thread<sup>o</sup> be spun.  
       I see, thy curtains are close-drawn; thy bow<sup>3</sup>  
           Looks dim, too, in the cloud;  
 35       Sin triumphs still, and man is sunk below  
           The center, and his shroud.  
       All's in deep sleep and night: thick darkness lies  
           And hatcheth o'er thy people—  
       But hark! what trumpet's that? what angel cries,  
 40       "Arise! thrust in thy sickle"?<sup>4</sup>

1650

## Endnotes

- Note 1: God's curse on Adam for eating the forbidden fruit included a curse on the earth: "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee" (Genesis 3:18).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As resident ambassadors (from heaven).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The rainbow, God's covenant with Noah after the Flood (Genesis 9:13).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An allusion to Revelation 14:15: "And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, 'Thrust in thy sickle, and reap, for the harvest of the earth is now.' "[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *thread of Fate*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

# Unprofitableness

How rich, O Lord! how fresh thy visits are!<sup>1</sup>  
'Twas but just now my bleak leaves hopeless hung,  
    Sullied with dust and mud;  
Each snarling blast shot through me, and did share<sup>o</sup>  
5      Their youth and beauty; cold showers nipped and  
        wrung  
        Their spiciness and blood.  
But since thou didst in one sweet glance survey  
Their sad decays, I flourish, and once more  
    Breathe all perfumes and spice;  
10      I smell a dew like myrrh, and all the day  
Wear in my bosom a full sun; such store  
    Hath one beam from thy eyes.  
But, ah, my God! what fruit hast thou of this?  
What one poor leaf did ever I let<sup>2</sup> fall  
15      To wait upon thy wreath?  
Thus thou all day a thankless weed dost dress,  
And when th' hast done, a stench or fog is all  
    The odor I bequeath.

1650

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Compare Herbert's "The Flower" (p. 1195).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The original printed text reads "yet," emended here.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *shear off* [Return to reference °](#)



# The World

I saw eternity the other night,  
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,  
    All calm as it was bright;  
And round beneath it, Time, in hours, days, years,  
    Driven by the spheres,<sup>1</sup>  
5     Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world  
    And all her train were hurled.  
The doting lover in his quaintest<sup>o</sup> strain  
    Did there complain;  
Near him, his lute, his fancy, and his flights,<sup>o</sup>  
10     Wit's sour delights,  
With gloves and knots,<sup>o</sup> the silly snares of pleasure,  
    Yet his dear treasure,  
All scattered lay, while he his eyes did pour  
    Upon a flower.  
15     The darksome statesman hung with weights and  
    woe  
Like a thick midnight fog moved there so slow  
    He did nor stay nor go;  
Condemning thoughts, like sad eclipses, scowl  
    Upon his soul,  
20     And clouds of crying witnesses<sup>2</sup> without  
    Pursued him with one shout.  
Yet digged the mole,<sup>3</sup> and, lest his ways be found,  
    Worked underground,  
Where he did clutch his prey. But one did see  
25     That policy:<sup>o</sup>  
Churches and altars fed him; perjuries  
    Were gnats and flies;  
It rained about him blood and tears; but he

30 Drank them as free.<sup>4</sup>

The fearful miser on a heap of rust  
Sat pining all his life there, did scarce trust  
His own hands with the dust;  
Yet would not place<sup>o</sup> one piece above, but lives  
In fear of thieves.

35 Thousands there were as frantic as himself,  
And hugged each one his pelf:  
The downright epicure placed heaven in sense,<sup>o</sup>  
And scorned pretense;  
While others, slipped into a wide excess,

40 Said little less;  
The weaker sort slight, trivial wares enslave,  
Who think them brave<sup>o</sup>  
And poor, despised Truth sat counting by<sup>o</sup>  
Their victory.

45 Yet some, who all this while did weep and sing,  
And sing and weep, soared up into the ring;  
But most would use no wing.  
"O fools!" said I, "thus to prefer dark night  
Before true light!

50 To live in grots and caves, and hate the day  
Because it shows the way,  
The way which from this dead and dark abode  
Leads up to God,  
A way where you might tread the sun and be

55 More bright than he!"  
But as I did their madness so discuss,  
One whispered thus:  
"This ring the bridegroom did for none provide,  
But for his bride."<sup>5</sup>

60

***John Chap. 2. ver. 16, 17***

All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the  
lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the  
Father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof,  
but he that doth the will of God abideth forever.

1650

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The concentric spheres of Ptolemaic astronomy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Hebrews 12, the “clouds of witnesses” testified to God’s truth in past times. Here, these champions of faith accuse one whose actions deny God.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the “darksome statesman” (line 16).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, as freely as they rained.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An allusion to Revelation 19:7–9, the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride, allegorized as Christ and the church or Christ and the regenerate soul: “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *most ingenious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *caprices*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *love knots*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strategy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *invest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the senses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fine, showy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *recording*[Return to reference °](#)

# Cock-Crowing<sup>1</sup>

Father of lights! what sunny seed,<sup>2</sup>  
What glance of day hast thou confined  
Into this bird? To all the breed  
This busy ray thou hast assigned;  
5            Their magnetism works all night,  
             And dreams of Paradise and light.

          Their eyes watch for the morning hue,  
          Their little grain expelling night  
          So shines and sings, as if it knew  
          The path unto the house of light.  
10           It seems their candle, howe'r done,  
             Was tinned<sup>o</sup> and lighted at the sun.

          If such a tincture,<sup>3</sup> such a touch,  
          So firm a longing can impower,  
15           Shall thy own image<sup>4</sup> think it much  
          To watch for thy appearing hour?  
             If a mere blast so fill the sail,  
             Shall not the breath of God<sup>5</sup> prevail?

          O thou immortal light and heat!  
          Whose hand so shines through all this frame,<sup>o</sup>  
20           That by the beauty of the seat,  
          We plainly see, who made the same.  
             Seeing thy seed abides in me,  
             Dwell thou in it, and I in thee.

25           To sleep without thee, is to die;  
          Yea, 'tis a death partakes of hell:  
          For where thou dost not close the eye

It never opens, I can tell.  
In such a dark, Egyptian border,  
The shades of death dwell and disorder.<sup>6</sup>

30

If joys, and hopes, and earnest throes,  
And hearts, whose pulse beats still for light  
Are given to birds; who, but thee, knows  
A love-sick soul's exalted flight?  
Can souls be tracked by any eye  
But his, who gave them wings to fly?

35

Only this veil<sup>7</sup> which thou hast broke,  
And must be broken yet in me,  
This veil, I say, is all the cloak  
And cloud which shadows thee from me.  
This veil thy full-eyed love denies,  
And only gleams and fractions spies.

40

O take it off! Make no delay,  
But brush me with thy light, that I  
May shine unto a perfect day,  
And warm me at thy glorious eye!  
O take it off! or till it flee,  
Though with no lily,<sup>8</sup> stay with me!

45

1655

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The poem calls on the Hermetic notion of sympathetic attraction between earthly and heavenly bodies—for example, the cock whose crowing announces the sun's rising because it bears within itself a "seed" of the sun. Vaughan finds here an analogy for the attraction the soul has for its Maker.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:

The opening lines recall a passage from Henry's brother, the Hermetic philosopher Thomas Vaughan: "For she [the Anima or Soul] is guided in her operations by a spiritual metaphysical grain, a seed or glance of light . . . descending from the Father of lights." That term for God is from James 1:17. "Seed," "glance," "ray," and "grain" in line 8 are almost synonymous Hermetic terms for the bit of the sun implanted in the rooster. "Magnetism" (line 5) refers to the attraction between the rooster's "seed" and its source, the sun.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Alchemical term for a spiritual principle whose quality may be infused into material things. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An allusion to Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image." [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An allusion to Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An allusion to Exodus 10:21: brought Moses bringing down the plague of "darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt." [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See Hebrews 10:20: "By a new and living way, which he [Christ] hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Song of Solomon 2:16: "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies." [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *kindled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *universe* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Waterfall

With what deep murmurs through time's silent  
stealth  
Doth thy transparent, cool, and watery wealth  
Here flowing fall,  
And chide, and call,  
As if his liquid, loose retinue stayed  
5 Ling'ring, and were of this steep place afraid,  
The common pass  
Where, clear as glass,  
All must descend,  
Not to an end,  
10 But quickened by this steep and rocky grave,  
Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.°

Dear stream! dear bank! where often I  
Have sat and pleased my pensive eye—  
Why, since each drop of thy quick° store  
15 Runs thither whence it flowed before,  
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,  
Who came, sure, from a sea of light?  
Or since those drops are all sent back  
So sure to thee that none doth lack,  
20 Why should frail flesh doubt any more  
That what God takes he'll not restore?  
O useful element and clear!  
My sacred wash and cleanser here,  
My first consigner° unto those  
25 Fountains of life where the Lamb goes!¹  
What sublime truths and wholesome themes  
Lodge in thy mystical deep streams!  
Such as dull man can never find

30 Unless that Spirit lead his mind  
 Which first upon thy face did move  
 And hatched all with his quickening love.<sup>2</sup>  
 As this loud brook's incessant fall  
 In streaming rings restagnates<sup>o</sup> all  
 35 Which reach by course the bank, and then  
 Are no more seen, just so pass men.  
 Oh my invisible estate,  
 My glorious liberty,<sup>3</sup> still late!  
 Thou art the channel my soul seeks,  
 40 Not this with cataracts and creeks.

1655

## Endnotes

- Note 1: See Revelation 7:17: "For the Lamb . . . shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to Genesis 1:2: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Latin Vulgate version, *incubabant*, is closer to Vaughan's "hatched" than to "moved."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An allusion to Romans 8:21, promising deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *resplendent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *living*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in baptism*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *makes still again*[Return to reference °](#)



# Quickness

False life! a foil and no more, when  
                                Wilt thou be gone?  
Thou foul deception of all men  
That would not have the true come on.

5      Thou art a moon-like toil; a blind  
                                Self-posing state;  
A dark contest of waves and wind;  
A mere tempestuous debate.

Life is a fixed, discerning light,  
                                A knowing joy;  
No chance, or fit, but ever bright,  
And calm and full, yet doth not cloy.°

                                'Tis such a blissful thing, that still  
  Doth vivify,  
15      And shine and smile and hath the skill  
To please without eternity.

Thou art a toilsome mole,° or less,  
                                A moving mist.  
But life is what none can express,  
20      *A quickness° which my God hath kissed.*

1655

## Notes

- °: *obstruct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hardworking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *life, vital principle*[Return to reference](#) °

# **RICHARD CRASHAW**

## **ca. 1613–1649**

*Steps to the Temple* (1646, 1648), the title of Richard Crashaw's collection of sacred poetry, clearly acknowledges George Herbert's primacy among devotional poets. Yet Crashaw is no mere imitator. A Roman Catholic convert, Crashaw was profoundly influenced by the Counter-Reformation, which reacted against Protestant austerity by linking heightened spirituality to vivid bodily experiences. He is the only major English poet in the tradition of the Continental baroque, a movement in literature and visual art that developed out of the Counter-Reformation. Baroque style is exuberant, sensuous, and elaborately ornamented, and it deliberately strains decorum, challenging formal restraints and generic limitations. Crashaw's favorite subjects are typical of baroque art: the infant Jesus surrounded by angels and cherubs; the crucified Savior, streaming blood; the sorrowful Virgin; the tearfully penitent Mary Magdalen; saintly martyrs wracked with ecstasy and pain. Although some consider his images grotesque, Crashaw is alone among English poets in rendering the experience of rapture and religious ecstasy.

The son of a bibliophile and anti-Catholic Church of England polemicist, Crashaw was educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he became an adherent of Laudian Anglicanism. In 1636 he was elected a fellow of Peterhouse, another Cambridge college. By 1639 he had become a priest of the Church of England, curate of Little St. Mary's, and a college lecturer. A contemporary wrote that

his sermons “ravished more like poems,” but apparently none survive. Crashaw called Peterhouse his “little contentful kingdom”: his friends included the poet Abraham Cowley and George Herbert’s literary executor Nicholas Ferrar, the founder of the Anglican monastic community Little Gidding. In 1643 the Puritans occupied Cambridge, violently disrupting Crashaw’s life there. He fled to Paris and to the English court in exile, becoming a Roman Catholic in 1645. He was saved from destitution by obtaining various minor posts through the influence of Queen Henrietta Maria, the last one at Loreto—thought to be Jesus’s house at Nazareth, miraculously transported to Italy.

Crashaw’s Latin epigrams, published as *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber* (1634), were much influenced by Jesuit epigram style. In their Latin and later English versions, they are characterized by puns, paradoxes, and startling—even bizarre—metaphors. In one poem, Crashaw compares Christ’s pierced side to a “purple wardrobe” in which Christians can find the proper garments for clothing themselves. In 1646 Crashaw published the first version of *Steps to the Temple*, along with a secular collection of poems titled *Delights of the Muses*, with the royalist publisher Humphrey Moseley. (Moseley published Milton’s *Poems* [1645], among many other works.) A second edition appeared in 1648.

Crashaw constantly revised his religious poems. His posthumous volume, *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Hymn to Our Lord, 1652), includes emblems he may have executed himself, including the padlocked heart prefixed to a poem urging the Countess of Denbigh to convert to Catholicism. Especially notable are the final versions of several hymns, particularly the praise of St. Theresa in “The Flaming Heart.”

# ***FROM* STEPS TO THE TEMPLE**

**Divine Epigrams**

## Acts 8. On the Baptized Aethiopian<sup>1</sup>

Let it no longer be a forlorn hope  
To wash an Ethiop:  
He's washed, his gloomy skin a peaceful shade  
For his white soul is made:  
And now, I doubt not, the eternal dove,<sup>o</sup>  
5 A black-faced house will love.

1646

### Endnotes

- Note 1:  
This epigram and the four that follow were originally written in Latin in a volume of "sacred epigrams," and then rendered by Cranshaw in English versions. Epigrams are brief, pithy, witty poems with, as was often said, "A sting in the tail." This poem refers to Acts 8, when Philip meets "an eunuch of great authority under the queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship" (Acts 8:27). Philip baptizes the Ethiopian (Acts 8:38). Crashaw combines this biblical story with the proverb about washing the Ethiopian white (see the illustration on p. 1213).  
[Return to reference 1](#)

### Notes

- °: *Holy Spirit*[Return to reference °](#)

## To the Infant Martyrs<sup>1</sup>

Go, smiling souls, your new-built cages<sup>o</sup> break:  
In heaven you'll learn to sing, ere here to speak.<sup>2</sup>  
Nor let the milky fonts that bathe your thirst  
Be your delay;  
The place that calls you hence is, at the worst,  
Milk all the way.<sup>3</sup>

5

1646



**"Baptized Aethiopian."** Geoffrey Whitney's emblem "Aethiopem lavare" ("to wash an Ethiop"), from *A Choice of Emblems* (1586), was a proverb for impossibility. Crashaw refers to this proverb in "On the Baptized Aethiopian."

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## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem addresses the Holy Innocents, the infants murdered by Herod in an effort to destroy the newborn Jesus, who was honored as King of the Jews by the Magi (Matthew 2:16–18). [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: “Infant” comes from the Latin *infans*, meaning “unable to speak.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Milky Way will replace their mothers’ milk.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *their bodies*[Return to reference °](#)



# I Am the Door<sup>[1](#)</sup>

And now th' art set wide ope, the spear's sad art,  
Lo! hath unlocked thee at the very heart;  
    He to himself (I fear the worst)  
    And his own hope  
5 Hath shut these doors of heaven, that durst  
    Thus set them ope.

1646

## Endnotes

- Note 1: "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John 10:9). [Return to reference 1](#)

## **Luke 11.[27]<sup>1</sup> Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked**

Suppose he had been tabled at thy teats,  
Thy hunger feels not what he eats:  
He'll have his teat e're long (a bloody one)<sup>2</sup>  
The Mother then must suck the Son.

1646

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The verse (Luke 11:27) identifies the addressee: "And it came to pass, as he [Jesus] spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.' "[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The wound in Christ's side, making his breast (the fountain of all graces) bloody.[Return to reference 2](#)

# On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord

O these wakeful wounds of thine!  
Are they mouths? or are they eyes?  
Be they mouths, or be they eyne,<sup>1</sup>  
Each bleeding part some one supplies.<sup>2</sup>

5 Lo! a mouth, whose full-bloomed lips  
At too dear a rate are roses.  
Lo! a bloodshot eye! that weeps  
And many a cruel tear discloses.

10 O thou that on this foot hast laid  
Many a kiss and many a tear,  
Now thou shalt have all repaid,  
Whatsoever thy charges were.

15 This foot hath got a mouth and lips  
To pay the sweet sum of thy kisses;  
To pay thy tears, an eye that weeps  
Instead of tears such gems as this is.

20 The difference only this appears  
(Nor can the change offend),  
The debt is paid in ruby-tears  
Which thou in pearls didst lend.

1646

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Eyes (an old plural form).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, each wound of Christ is either an eye or a mouth.[Return to reference 2](#)

# On Our Crucified Lord Naked and Bloody

Th' have left thee naked, Lord, O that they had;  
This garment too I would they had denied.  
Thee with thy self they have too richly clad,  
Opening the purple wardrobe of thy side.<sup>1</sup>  
O never could be found garments too good  
For thee to wear, but these, of thine own blood.

5 1646

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In the Gospels, the soldiers dress Jesus in a purple robe and crown of thorns on the way to his crucifixion, and divide his clothes among themselves after he is dead. In John 19:34, one of the soldiers pierces the crucified Jesus's side with a spear, and blood and water come out. [Return to reference 1](#)

## CARMEN DEO NOSTRO

**The Flaming Heart** St. Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century Spanish mystic and founder of an ascetic order of barefoot Carmelite nuns, was one of the great figures of the Catholic Reformation. Her autobiography, popular throughout Europe and translated into English in 1642 as *The Flaming Heart*, describes not only her practical problems in establishing her order but also a series of ecstatic trances and visitations that represent union with the divine in sensual, indeed erotic, imagery. The Italian sculptor and architect Gianlorenzo Bernini portrayed a mystical experience described in the autobiography in a stunning baroque statue still in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, in Rome. It shows the saint in an attitude of ecstatic, swooning abandonment while a juvenile seraph stands over her, about to plunge a golden arrow into her heart. Crashaw may or may not have seen this statue while Bernini was at work on it (it was installed after Crashaw's death), but his poem—published posthumously in *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Hymn to Our Lord, 1652)—addresses a painter who produced a picture of this episode conceived much as Bernini presented it.



**THE FLAMING HEART UPON THE BOOK  
AND Picture of the seraphical saint TERESA,  
(AS SHE IS USUALLY EX -pressed with a  
SERAPHIM beside her.)<sup>1</sup>**

Well-meaning readers! you that come as friends,  
And catch the precious name this piece pretends,<sup>o</sup>  
Make not too much haste to admire  
That fair-cheeked fallacy of fire.  
That is a seraphim, they say,  
5 And this the great Teresia.  
Readers, be ruled by me, and make  
Here a well-placed and wise mistake:  
You must transpose the picture quite  
And spell<sup>o</sup> it wrong to read<sup>o</sup> it right;  
10 Read *him* for *her* and *her* for *him*,  
And call the saint the seraphim.  
Painter, what didst thou understand,  
To put her dart into his hand!  
See, even the years and size of him  
15 Shows this the mother seraphim.  
This is the mistress-flame; and duteous he,  
Her happy fireworks here comes down to see.  
O most poor-spirited of men!  
Had thy cold pencil kissed her pen<sup>2</sup>  
20 Thou couldst not so unkindly err  
To show us this faint shade for her.  
Why, man, this speaks pure mortal frame,  
And mocks with female frost love's manly flame.  
One would suspect thou meant'st to paint  
25 Some weak, inferior, woman saint.



But had thy pale-faced purple took  
Fire from the burning cheeks of that bright book,  
Thou wouldst on her have heaped up all  
That could be found seraphical:  
30 Whate'er this youth of fire wears fair,  
Rosy fingers, radiant hair,  
Glowing cheek and glistening wings,  
All those fair and flagrant<sup>o</sup> things,  
But before all, that fiery dart  
35 Had filled the hand of this great heart.  
Do then as equal right requires,  
Since his the blushes be, and hers the fires,  
Resume and rectify thy rude design,  
Undress thy seraphim into mine.  
40 Redeem this injury of thy art,  
Give him the veil, give her the dart.  
Give him the veil, that he may cover  
The red cheeks<sup>o</sup> of a rivaled lover,  
Ashamed that our world now can show  
45 Nests of new seraphims here below.<sup>3</sup>  
Give her the dart, for it is she  
(Fair youth) shoots both thy shaft and thee.  
Say, all ye wise and well-pierced hearts  
That live and die amidst her darts,<sup>o</sup>  
50 What is 't your tasteful spirits do prove<sup>o</sup>  
In that rare life of her and love?  
Say and bear witness. Sends she not  
A seraphim at every shot?  
What magazines of immortal arms there shine!  
55 Heaven's great artillery in each love-spun line.  
Give then the dart to her who gives the flame,  
Give him the veil who kindly takes the shame.  
But if it be the frequent fate  
Of worst faults to be fortunate;  
60 If all's prescription,<sup>4</sup> and proud wrong



Hearkens not to an humble song,  
For all the gallantry of him,  
Give me the suffering seraphim.<sup>5</sup>  
His be the bravery<sup>o</sup> of all those bright things,  
65 The glowing cheeks, the glistening wings,  
The rosy hand, the radiant dart;  
Leave her alone the Flaming Heart.  
Leave her that, and thou shalt leave her  
Not one loose shaft, but love's whole quiver.  
70 For in love's field was never found  
A nobler weapon than a wound.  
Love's passives are his activ'st part,  
The wounded is the wounding heart.  
O heart! the equal poise of love's both parts,  
75 Big alike with wounds and darts,  
Live in these conquering leaves,<sup>6</sup> live all the same;  
And walk through all tongues one triumphant flame.  
Live here, great heart; and love and die and kill,  
And bleed and wound; and yield and conquer still.  
80 Let this immortal life, where'er it comes,  
Walk in a crowd of loves and martyrdoms.  
Let mystic deaths wait on 't, and wise souls be  
The love-slain witnesses of this life of thee.  
O sweet incendiary! show here thy art,  
85 Upon this carcass of a hard, cold heart;<sup>o</sup>  
Let all thy scattered shafts of light, that play  
Among the leaves of thy large books of day,<sup>7</sup>  
Combined against this breast, at once break in  
And take away from me myself and sin!  
90 This gracious robbery shall thy bounty be,  
And my best fortunes such fair spoils of me.<sup>8</sup>  
O thou undaunted daughter of desires!  
By all thy dower of lights and fires;  
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;<sup>9</sup>  
95 By all thy lives and deaths of love;

By thy large drafts of intellectual day,  
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;  
By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire,  
By thy last morning's draft of liquid fire;  
100 By the full kingdom of that final kiss  
That seized thy parting soul, and sealed thee His;  
By all the heavens thou hast in Him,  
Fair sister of the seraphim,  
By all of Him we have in thee,  
105 Leave nothing of myself in me!  
Let me so read thy life that I  
Unto all life of mine may die!

1652

## Endnotes

- Note 1: "Seraphim" is in fact the plural form of "seraph." This highest order of angels was thought to burn continuously in the fire of divine love.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, if you had only been properly inspired by her book.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Teresa burns on earth in love, as seraphim do in heaven.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, settled beforehand, by the decision of the artist.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: If Teresa can't be transformed into the angel, Crashaw prefers her as the "suffering" lover.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the leaves of St. Teresa's book.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Books filled with intellectual and spiritual light.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, my best fortune will be to be despoiled in this way.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The eagle suggests wisdom and power, for its lofty flight and ability to look into the sun's eye; the dove suggests mercy

and gentleness. Compare Donne's "The Canonization," line 22 (p. 890). [Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *puts forward* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *read* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *understand* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *burning* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blushes* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *her writings* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *experience* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Crashaw's heart* [Return to reference °](#)

# ROBERT HERRICK

## 1591–1674

Born in London the son of a goldsmith and apprenticed for some years in that craft, Herrick was educated at Cambridge and consorted in the early 1620s with Ben Jonson and his “tribe” of literary young men who met regularly to exchange and discuss their poetry. After his ordination in 1623, Herrick apparently served as chaplain to various noblemen and in that role joined the failed military expedition led by George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, to rescue French Protestants from La Rochelle in 1627. In 1630 he was installed as the vicar of Dean Prior in Devonshire. Expelled as a royalist in 1647, he probably lived in London until the Restoration, when he was reinstated at Dean Prior and remained there until his death.

Herrick’s single volume of poems, *Hesperides* (1648), with its appended book of religious poems, *Noble Numbers*, contains 1,400 short poems (1,129 in *Hesperides*, and 271 in *Noble Numbers*). Many are love poems on the *carpe diem* theme—seize the day, time is fleeting, make love now; a famous example is “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time.” But Herrick’s range is wider than is sometimes recognized. He moves from the pastoral to the cynical, from an almost rococo elegance to vulgar epigrams. Certain motifs recur in his work. One is “times trans-shifting,” the transience of all natural things; another is traditional ceremonies, such as rural harvest festivals (“The Hock Cart”) or the May Day rituals described in what

is perhaps his finest poem, "Corinna's Going A-Maying"; yet another is the classical but also perennial ideal of the "good life." For Herrick a good life involves love devoid of high passion (the several mistresses he addresses seem interchangeable and not very real); the pleasures of food, drink, and song; delight in the beauty of surfaces (as in "Upon Julia's Clothes"); and, above all, the creation of poetry as a bulwark against the ravages of time. Herrick knows Jonson's poetry well, but his epigrams and lyrics (like Jonson's) also show the direct influence of classical poets: Horace, Anacreon, Catullus, Tibullus, Ovid, and Martial.

Published just months before the execution of Charles I, Herrick's poems can seem merely playful and charming, almost oblivious to the catastrophes of the war. But they are not. Poems celebrating rituals of good fellowship reinforce the conservative values of social stability, tradition, and order threatened by Puritans and revolutionaries. Several poems that draw on the Celtic mythology of fairy folk make their feasts, temples, worship, and ceremonies stand in for the forbidden ceremonies of the Laudian church and a life governed by ritual. Still others, like "The Hock Cart" and "Corinna's Going A-Maying," extol the kind of rural festivals that were at the center of the culture wars between royalists and Puritans. Both James I and Charles I urged such activities in their *Book of Sports* as a means of reinforcing traditional institutions in the countryside and deflecting discontent, while Puritans vigorously opposed them as occasions for drunkenness and licentiousness.

## ***FROM HESPERIDES***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: In myth, the Hesperides, or Western Maidens, guarded an orchard and a garden, also called Hesperides, in which grew a tree bearing golden apples. Herrick's title suggests that his poems are golden apples from his residence in western Devonshire; the following poems are all from that volume, published in 1648.[Return to reference 1](#)

## The Argument<sup>2</sup> of His Book

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,  
Of April, May, of June, and July flowers.  
I sing of Maypoles, hock carts, wassails, wakes,<sup>3</sup>  
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes.  
I write of youth, of love, and have access  
5 By these to sing of cleanly wantonness.  
I sing of dews, of rains, and, piece by piece,  
Of balm, of oil, of spice, and ambergris.<sup>4</sup>  
I sing of times trans-shifting,<sup>o</sup> and I write  
How roses first came red and lilies white.  
10 I write of groves, of twilights, and I sing  
The court of Mab and of the fairy king.<sup>5</sup>  
I write of hell; I sing (and ever shall)  
Of heaven, and hope to have it after all.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Subject matter, theme.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Festive, not funerary, occasions, to celebrate the dedication of a new church. "Hock carts" carried home the last load of the harvest, so they were adorned and celebrated. "Wassails" were Twelfth Night celebrations.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A secretion of the sperm whale that is used in making perfume—hence it suggests something rare and delectable.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mab was queen of the fairies and wife of their king, Oberon.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *changing*[Return to reference](#) °



# Upon the Loss of His Mistresses<sup>1</sup>

I have lost, and lately, these  
Many dainty mistresses:  
Stately Julia, prime of all;  
Sappho next, a principal;  
Smooth Anthea, for a skin  
5 White and heaven-like crystalline;  
Sweet Electra, and the choice  
Myrrha, for the lute and voice;  
Next Corinna for her wit  
And the graceful use of it,  
10 With Perilla; all are gone,  
Only Herrick's left alone,  
For to number sorrows by  
Their departures hence, and die.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The ladies are imaginary, and their names are traditional in classical love poetry and pastoral poetry.[Return to reference 1](#)

# The Vine

I dreamed this mortal part of mine  
Was metamorphosed to a vine,  
Which, crawling one and every way,  
Enthralled my dainty Lucia.<sup>1</sup>  
5 Methought, her long small legs and thighs  
I with my tendrils did surprise;  
Her belly, buttocks, and her waist  
By my soft nervelets were embraced.  
About her head I writhing hung,  
10 And with rich clusters (hid among  
The leaves) her temples I behung,  
So that my Lucia seemed to me  
Young Bacchus ravished by his tree.<sup>o</sup>  
My curls about her neck did crawl,  
And arms and hands they did enthrall,  
15 So that she could not freely stir  
(All parts there made one prisoner).  
But when I crept with leaves to hide  
Those parts which maids keep unespied,  
Such fleeting pleasures there I took  
20 That with the fancy I awoke,  
And found (ah me!) this flesh of mine  
More like a stock<sup>o</sup> than like a vine.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: For the sake of both rhyme and meter, the name of this lady is given three syllables here; in line 12 it has only two.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *the grapevine* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hard stalk* [Return to reference](#) °

# Dreams

Here we are all, by day; by night, we're hurled  
By dreams, each one into a several<sup>°</sup> world.

## Notes

- <sup>°</sup>: *separate*[Return to reference <sup>°</sup>](#)

# Delight in Disorder<sup>1</sup>

A sweet disorder in the dress  
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.  
A lawn<sup>o</sup> about the shoulders thrown  
Into a fine distraction;  
An erring<sup>o</sup> lace, which here and there  
5 Enthralls the crimson stomacher;<sup>2</sup>  
A cuff neglectful, and thereby  
Ribbons to flow confusedly;  
A winning wave, deserving note,  
In the tempestuous petticoat;  
10 A careless shoestring, in whose tie  
I see a wild civility:  
Do more bewitch me than when art  
Is too precise<sup>3</sup> in every part.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: One of several poems in this period in which women's dress is a means by which to explore the relation of nature and art.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An ornamental covering of the chest, worn under the laces of the bodice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Precise" and "precision" were terms used satirically about Puritans. Herrick, in praising feminine disarray, is at one level praising the *sprezzatura*, or careless grace, of Cavalier art.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *fine linen scarf*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *wandering* [Return to reference](#) °

## Corinna's Going A-Maying

Get up! Get up for shame! The blooming morn  
Upon her wings presents the god unshorn.<sup>1</sup>  
See how Aurora throws her fair  
Fresh-quilted colors through the air:<sup>2</sup>  
Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see  
5 The dew bespangling herb and tree.  
Each flower has wept and bowed toward the east  
Above an hour since, yet you not dressed;  
Nay, not so much as out of bed?  
When all the birds have matins<sup>o</sup> said,  
10 And sung their thankful hymns, 'tis sin,  
Nay, profanation<sup>o</sup> to keep in,  
Whenas a thousand virgins on this day  
Spring, sooner than the lark, to fetch in May.<sup>3</sup>

Rise, and put on your foliage, and be seen  
15 To come forth, like the springtime, fresh and green,  
And sweet as Flora.<sup>4</sup> Take no care  
For jewels for your gown or hair;  
Fear not; the leaves will strew  
Gems in abundance upon you;  
20 Besides, the childhood of the day has kept,  
Against<sup>o</sup> you come, some orient pearls<sup>5</sup> unwept;  
Come and receive them while the light  
Hangs on the dew-locks of the night,  
And Titan<sup>o</sup> on the eastern hill  
25 Retires himself, or else stands still  
Till you come forth. Wash, dress, be brief in praying:  
Few beads<sup>6</sup> are best when once we go a-Maying.

Come, my Corinna, come; and, coming, mark  
How each field turns<sup>o</sup> a street, each street a park  
30     Made green and trimmed with trees; see how  
      Devotion gives each house a bough  
      Or branch: each porch, each door ere this,  
      An ark, a tabernacle is,<sup>z</sup>  
      Made up of whitethorn neatly interwove,  
35     As if here were those cooler shades of love.  
      Can such delights be in the street  
      And open fields, and we not see 't?  
      Come, we'll abroad; and let's obey  
      The proclamation<sup>8</sup> made for May,  
40     And sin no more, as we have done, by staying;  
      But, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.

There's not a budding boy or girl this day  
But is got up and gone to bring in May;  
      A deal of youth, ere this, is come  
45     Back, and with whitethorn laden, home.  
      Some have dispatched their cakes and cream  
      Before that we have left to dream;  
      And some have wept, and wooed, and plighted  
      troth,<sup>9</sup>  
      And chose their priest, ere we can cast off sloth.  
50     Many a green gown<sup>1</sup> has been given,  
      Many a kiss, both odd and even;<sup>2</sup>  
      Many a glance, too, has been sent  
      From out the eye, love's firmament;<sup>o</sup>  
      Many a jest told of the keys betraying  
55     This night, and locks picked; yet we're not a-Maying.

Come, let us go while we are in our prime,  
And take the harmless folly of the time.  
      We shall grow old apace, and die



60        Before we know our liberty.  
          Our life is short, and our days run  
          As fast away as does the sun;  
          And, as a vapor or a drop of rain,  
          Once lost, can ne'er be found again,  
65        So when or you or I are made  
          A fable, song, or fleeting shade,  
          All love, all liking, all delight  
          Lies drowned with us in endless night.<sup>3</sup>  
          Then while time serves, and we are but decaying,  
70        Come, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Apollo, the sun god; sunbeams are seen as his flowing locks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Aurora is goddess of the dawn.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: On May Day morning, it was the custom to gather whitethorn blossoms and trim the house with them.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Flora, Italian goddess of the flowering of plants, had her festival in the spring.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pearls from the Orient were especially lustrous, like drops of dew.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Rosary beads of the "old" Catholic religion; more generally, a casual term for prayers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The doorways, ornamented with whitethorn, are like the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant or the sanctuary that housed it (Leviticus 23:40–42: "Ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees . . .").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Probably a reference to Charles I's "Declaration to his subjects concerning lawful sports."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Engaged themselves to marry.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Made green because the wearer has rolled in the grass.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Kisses are odd and even in kissing games.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Some echoes of the apocryphal book Wisdom of Solomon 2:1–8: “For the ungodly said . . . the breath of our nostrils is as smoke, and a little spark . . . and our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud. . . . Come on therefore . . . Let us crown ourselves with rose buds before they be withered.” This carpe diem sentiment is a frequent theme in classical love poetry.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *morning prayer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impiety*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *until*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *turns into*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sky*[Return to reference °](#)

# To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,  
Old time is still<sup>o</sup> a-flying;<sup>1</sup>  
And this same flower that smiles today,  
Tomorrow will be dying.

5 The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,  
The higher he's a-getting,  
The sooner will his race be run,  
And nearer he's to setting.

10 That age is best which is the first,  
When youth and blood are warmer;  
But being spent, the worse, and worst  
Times still succeed the former.

15 Then be not coy, but use your time,  
And while ye may, go marry;  
For having lost but once your prime,  
You may forever tarry.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A translation of the Latin *tempus fugit*.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *always*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

# The Hock Cart,<sup>1</sup> or Harvest Home

*to the Right Honorable Mildmay, Earl of Westmoreland*

Come, sons of summer, by whose toil  
We are the lords of wine and oil;<sup>2</sup>  
By whose tough labors and rough hands  
We rip up first, then reap our lands.  
5   Crowned with the ears of corn,<sup>o</sup> now come  
And, to the pipe, sing harvest home.  
Come forth, my lord, and see the cart  
Dressed up with all the country art.  
See here a maukin,<sup>o</sup> there a sheet,  
10   As spotless pure as it is sweet,  
The horses, mares, and frisking fillies  
Clad all in linen, white as lilies,  
The harvest swains<sup>o</sup> and wenches bound  
For joy to see the hock-cart crowned.  
15   About the cart, hear how the rout  
Of rural younglings raise the shout,  
Pressing before, some coming after,  
Those with a shout and these with laughter.  
Some bless the cart, some kiss the sheaves,  
Some prank them up<sup>o</sup> with oaken leaves;  
20   Some cross the fill-horse,<sup>3</sup> some with great  
Devotion stroke the home-borne wheat;  
While other rustics, less attent  
To prayers than to merriment,  
Run after with their breeches rent.  
25   Well, on, brave boys, to your lord's hearth,  
Glittering with fire; where, for your mirth,  
Ye shall see first the large and chief

Foundation of your feast, fat beef;  
 With upper stories, mutton, veal,  
 30 And bacon,<sup>o</sup> which makes full the meal,  
 With several dishes standing by,  
 As here a custard, there a pie,  
 And here all-tempting frumenty.<sup>o</sup>  
 And for to make the merry cheer,  
 35 If smirking<sup>o</sup> wine be wanting<sup>o</sup> here,  
 There's that which drowns all care, stout beer:  
 Which freely drink to your lord's health,  
 Then to the plow (the common-wealth),  
 Next to your flails, your fans,<sup>4</sup> your vats,  
 40 Then to the maids with wheaten hats,  
 To the rough sickle and crook'd scythe,  
 Drink, frolic boys, till all be blithe.  
 Feed, and grow fat; and, as ye eat,  
 Be mindful that the lab'ring neat,<sup>o</sup>  
 45 As you, may have their fill of meat.<sup>5</sup>  
 And know, besides, ye must revoke<sup>o</sup>  
 The patient ox unto his yoke,  
 And all go back unto the plow  
 And harrow, though they're hanged up now.  
 50 And you must know, your lord's word's true,  
 Feed him ye must whose food fills you,  
 And that this pleasure is like rain,  
 Not sent ye for to drown your pain  
 But for to make it spring again.<sup>6</sup>  
 55

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The last cart carrying home the harvest; hence the occasion for a rural festival, traditional throughout Europe. Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmoreland (1628–1660), was one of Herrick's patrons.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Wine and oil are the yields of Mediterranean farming, connecting the English harvest festival to classical pastoral.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The fill-horse is harnessed between the shafts of the cart. Crossing the horse and kissing the sheaves suggest the persistence of pre-Reformation rituals in the countryside.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “Flails” are threshing instruments; “fans” are used to winnow grain from chaff. The plow is the common source of everybody’s wealth. In line with the anti-Puritan sentiments of the whole poem, the word “commonwealth,” in this communal and earthy sense, invites a contrast with Puritan republican theories.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Food (grain or hay).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spring is heralded by rain, but the lines also point to the continual renewal of the agricultural worker’s pain and labor.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *grain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scarecrow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *young men*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *adorn them*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pork*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pudding*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sparkling* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cattle*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call back*[Return to reference °](#)

# Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast

Have ye beheld (with much delight)  
A red rose peeping through a white?  
Or else a cherry (double graced)  
Within a lily center-placed?  
Or ever marked<sup>◦</sup> the pretty beam  
5 A strawberry shows half drowned in cream?  
Or seen rich rubies blushing through  
A pure smooth pearl, and orient<sup>◦</sup> too?  
So like to this, nay all the rest,  
10 Is each neat niplet of her breast.

## Notes

- ◦: *observed* [Return to reference ◦](#)
- ◦: *iridescent* [Return to reference ◦](#)

# Upon His Verses

What offspring other men have got,  
The how, where, when I question not.  
These are the children I have left;  
Adopted some, none got by theft.  
5 But all are touched (like lawful plate)<sup>1</sup>  
And no verse illegitimate.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A special variety of quartz, known as basanite, was used to test gold and silver objects; the color of the smear left on the touchstone revealed its purity.[Return to reference 1](#)



# Upon Julia's Clothes

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,<sup>o</sup>  
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows  
That liquefaction of her clothes.

5      Next, when I cast mine eyes and see  
That brave<sup>o</sup> vibration each way free,  
Oh, how that glittering taketh me!

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *walks*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *splendid*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

## Upon Prue, His Maid<sup>2</sup>

In this little urn is laid  
Prudence Baldwin, once my maid,  
From whose happy spark here let  
Spring the purple violet.

### Endnotes

- Note 2: This is an odd epitaph, since Prudence Baldwin died four years after Herrick. [Return to reference 2](#)

## To His Book's End<sup>3</sup>

To his book's end this last line he'd have placed:  
Jocund<sup>°</sup> his muse was, but his life was chaste.

### Endnotes

- Note 3: The last poem of *Hesperides*.[Return to reference 3](#)

### Notes

- °: *merry, sprightly*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***FROM* NOBLE NUMBERS**

# To His Conscience<sup>1</sup>

Can I not sin, but thou wilt be  
My private protonotary?<sup>2</sup>  
Can I not woo thee to pass by  
A short and sweet iniquity?  
I'll cast a mist and cloud upon  
5 My delicate transgression  
So utter dark as that no eye  
Shall see the hugged<sup>o</sup> impiety.  
Gifts blind the wise,<sup>3</sup> and bribes do please  
And wind<sup>o</sup> all other witnesses:  
10 And wilt not thou with gold be tied  
To lay thy pen and ink aside?  
That in the mirk<sup>o</sup> and tongueless night  
Wanton I may, and thou not write?  
It will not be; and therefore now  
15 For times to come I'll make this vow,  
From aberrations to live free,  
So I'll not fear the Judge, or thee.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This and the following poem are from *Noble Numbers*, the collection of Herrick's religious poems that was bound together with *Hesperides*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Chief recording clerk of a court.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An echo of Deuteronomy 16:19: "a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise."[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *cherished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pervert*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black, murky*[Return to reference](#) °

## Another Grace for a Child

Here a little child I stand,  
Heaving up my either hand;  
Cold as paddocks<sup>o</sup> though they be,  
Here I lift them up to thee,  
For a benison<sup>o</sup> to fall  
5 On our meat and on us all. *Amen.*

### Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: frogs [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: blessing [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

# HESTER PULTER

## 1605–1678

Rediscovered in a university archive in 1996, Hester Pulter's *Poems Breathed Forth by the Noble Hadassas*—a single bound manuscript containing 120 poems and an incomplete romance—is a remarkable record of an intellectual life almost lost to literary history. Pulter composed her work when she and her royalist family were living in semi-exile during the Interregnum. She was born Hester Ley in Dublin, where her father was Chief Justice of Ireland, and her family came to London under the patronage of James I. Her husband, Arthur Pulter, was a lesser magistrate and wealthy estate owner in Hertfordshire, where they seem to have retired shortly after the English Civil Wars broke out.

Like Katherine Philips and Margaret Cavendish, Pulter wrote elegies for fallen royalist leaders, including Charles I; and her chosen name, "Hadassah," another name for the biblical Queen Esther (or Hester), who saved her people from oppression, hints at her self-conception as a defender of a cause. Her poetry shows a keen interest both in the "divine breath" that animates all matter and in the natural philosophies, ranging from astronomy and alchemy to vitalist materialism, that fired the imaginations of her peers, including John Donne and George Herbert, whose work she clearly admired.

Pulter's poems below demonstrate ambitious reworkings of literary traditions, particularly of conventional Petrarchan tropes such



as the anatomical blazon. As she demands in one elegy on her daughter's death, "Tell me no more her cheeks excelled the rose." In "View But This Tulip," Pulter turns a philosophical discussion of "first principles" and "indivisibles" into a meditation on the resurrection of the flesh at the end of time. The formal simplicity of "Dear God, from Thy High Throne Look Down" shares with other seventeenth-century devotional poems an interest in what Herbert calls "the good fellowship of dust," but the poem is also infused with Pulter's interest in bodies tossed in a thousand "figures." Much like the poems of Margaret Cavendish, Pulter's verses invite speculation.

## Upon the Death of My Dear and Lovely Daughter, Jane Pulter

All you that have indulgent parents been,  
And have your children in perfection seen  
Of youth and beauty: lend one tear to me,  
And trust me, I will do as much for thee,  
Unless my own grief do exhaust my store;  
5 Then will I sigh till I suspire<sup>o</sup> no more.  
Twice hath the Earth thrown Chloris's<sup>o</sup> mantle by,  
Embroidered o'er with curious<sup>o</sup> tapestry,  
And twice hath seemed to mourn unto our sight,  
Like Jews or Chinese in snowy white,<sup>1</sup>  
10 Since she laid down her milky limbs on earth,  
Which, dying, gave her virgin soul new birth.  
Yet still my heart is overwhelmed with grief,  
And tears (alas) give sorrow no relief.  
Twice hath sad Philomel<sup>2</sup> left off to sing  
15 Her mortifying<sup>o</sup> sonnets to the spring.  
Twice at the sylvan<sup>o</sup> choristers' desire  
She hath lent her music to complete their choir,  
Since all devouring Death on her took seizure,  
And Tellus's<sup>o</sup> womb involved<sup>o</sup> so rich a treasure.  
20 Yet still my heart is overwhelmed with grief,  
And time, nor tears, will give my woes relief.  
Twelve times hath Phoebe,<sup>3</sup> hornéd,<sup>o</sup> seemed to  
fight,  
As often filled them with her brother's light,  
Since she did close her sparkling diamond eyes;  
25 Yet my sad heart, for her still pining,<sup>o</sup> dies.  
Through the twelve houses<sup>o</sup> hath the illustrious sun  
With splendency<sup>o</sup> his annual journey run.

Twice hath his fiery, furious horses hurled  
His blazing chariot to the lower world,  
30 Showing his luster to the wond'ring eyes  
Of our (now so well known) antipodes,<sup>o</sup>  
Since the brack<sup>o</sup> of her spotless virgin story  
Which now her soul doth end in endless glory.  
Yet my afflicted, sad, forsaken soul  
35 For her in tears and ashes still doth roll.  
O could a fever spot her snowy skin,  
Whose virgin soul was scarcely soiled with sin?  
Ay me, it did! So have I sometimes seen  
Fair maidens sit encircled on a green,  
40 White lilies spread when they were making poses,<sup>4</sup>  
Upon them scatter leaves of damask roses,<sup>o</sup>  
E'en so, the spots upon her fair skin shows  
Like lily leaves sprinkled with damask rose,  
Or, as a stately hart<sup>o</sup> to death pursued  
45 By ravening hounds, his eyes with tears bedewed,  
An arrow sticking in his trembling breast,  
His lost condition to the life expressed,<sup>o</sup>  
So trips he o'er the lawns on trodden snow,  
And from his side his guiltless blood doth flow.  
50 So did the spots upon her fair skin show  
Like drops of blood upon unsullied snow.  
But what a heart had I, when I did stand  
Holding her forehead with my trembling hand.  
My heart to heaven with her bright spirit flies  
55 Whilst she (ah me!) closed up her lovely eyes.  
Her soul being seated in her place of birth,  
I turned a Niobe<sup>5</sup> as she turned earth.

ca. 1647

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Traditional color of mourning in China and in Jewish traditions of burial and mourning.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In classical myth, Philomela was raped by her brother-in-law Tereus, who tore out her tongue; the gods transformed her into a bird (in Ovid's version of the story, a nightingale).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Goddess of the moon, and sister of the sun, Phoebus Apollo.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Posies: bouquets or bunches of flowers; figuratively, short verses.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, dissolved into tears. In Greek myth, the gods Apollo and Artemis killed Niobe's six sons and six daughters after she bragged that she had more children than their mother, Leto; she was metamorphosed into a rock weeping for their loss.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *breathe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *goddess of spring*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artful, elaborate, delicate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fatal, self-denying*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forest-dwelling*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *goddess of the earth* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *enveloped*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crescent-shaped*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *yearning*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of the Zodiac*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opposite side of the world*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *breach, rupture*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *roses from Damascus*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exactly reproduced*[Return to reference °](#)

## View But This Tulip

View but this tulip, rose, or gillyflower,<sup>o</sup>  
And by a finite, see an infinite power.  
These flowers into their chaos were retired  
Till human art them raised and re-inspired  
5 With beating, macerating,<sup>1</sup> fermentation,  
Calcining,<sup>o</sup> chemically, with segregation;<sup>2</sup>  
Then, lest the air these secrets should reveal,  
Shut up the ashes under Hermes's seal;<sup>3</sup>  
Then, with a candle or a gentle fire,  
10 You may reanimate at your desire  
These gallant<sup>o</sup> plants; but if you cool the glass,  
To their first principles<sup>4</sup> they'll quickly pass:  
From sulfur, salt, and mercury they came;  
When they dissolve, they turn into the same.  
Then, seeing a wretched mortal hath the power  
15 To recreate a Virbius of a flower,<sup>5</sup>  
Why should we fear, though sadly we retire  
Into our cause?<sup>o</sup> Our God will re-inspire  
Our dormant dust, and keep alive the same  
With an all-quick'ning,<sup>o</sup> everlasting flame.  
20 Then, though I into atoms scattered be,  
In indivisibles<sup>o</sup> I'll trust in Thee.  
Then let this comfort me in my sad story:  
Dust is but four degrees removed from glory  
By Nature's paths,<sup>6</sup> but God from death and night  
25 Can raise this flesh to endless life and light.  
Then, my impatient soul, contented be,  
For thou a glorious spring ere<sup>o</sup> long shalt see.  
After these gloomy shades of death and sorrow,  
Thou shalt enjoy an everlasting morrow.  
30

As wheat in new-plowed furrows rotting lies,  
Incapable of quick'ning till it dies,<sup>7</sup>  
So into dust this flesh of mine must turn  
And lie a while forgotten in my urn.  
Yet when the sea, and earth, and Hell shall give  
35 Their treasures up, my body too shall live:  
Not like the resurrection at Grand Caire,<sup>8</sup>  
Where men revive, then straight of life despair;  
But, with my soul, my flesh shall reunite  
And ne'er involv'd be with death and night,  
40 But live in endless pleasure, love, and light.  
Then hallelujahs will I sing to Thee,  
My gracious God, to all eternity.  
Then at thy dissolution patient be:  
If man can raise a flower, God can thee.  
45

ca. 1640–65

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Softening by steeping in liquid.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A reference to palingenesis, the (supposed) regeneration through alchemy of living organisms from ashes or putrefying matter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A hermetic seal, tight enough to exclude air; Hermes Trismegistus was the Greek name of the Egyptian god Thoth, regarded as the founder of alchemy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In alchemy, the substances composing all matter: mercury, salt, and sulfur; more generally, origins, constituent parts.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Greek myth, Hippolytus is unjustly killed because of his father's curse but brought back to life by Asclepius, the god of healing; he emigrated to Italy under the Latin name Virbius (from *vir bis*, "a man twice").[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Those paths derived from the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Seeds need to be buried (and thus “die”) under soil in order to return to life (or “quicken”).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cairo, possibly referring to the ancient Egyptian custom of mummifying the dead in anticipation of resurrection (one the speaker presumes, in the next line, will be disappointing), or to travelers’ accounts of superstitious Egyptian beliefs about the annual rising of dead bones.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *July flower, carnation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *burning to ash*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gorgeous or showy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *original, formative elements*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *all-enlivening*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *atoms*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before*[Return to reference °](#)

# Dear God, from Thy High Throne Look Down

Dear God, from Thy high throne look down,  
And let my suff'rings have their crown:  
I Thee implore.

5      Though grief calcine<sup>o</sup> my flesh to dust  
Yet in Thy mercy still I trust  
And Thee adore.

Should I to tears dissolvéd be  
Yet will I still depend on Thee  
Forevermore.

10      Or should I sigh away to air,  
Though rarefied,<sup>o</sup> I'd not despair  
But in Thee trust.

15      Though I to atoms am dispersed,  
I in their dances am unversed,<sup>o</sup>  
Yet shall no dust

Of my old carcass e'er be lost  
Though in a thousand figures<sup>o</sup> tossed,  
For Thou art just.

20      What mortal can or dares to look  
Into Thy glorious blessed book?  
Where written be

Of me, poor wretched me, each part,  
E'en all my soul, my thoughts, my heart.  
Thou plain may'st see



25

ca. 1640–65

- ◊: *burn to ash; purify, refine*[Return to reference](#) ◊
- ◊: *made less substantial; purified*[Return to reference](#) ◊
- ◊: *inexperienced; not in verse*[Return to reference](#) ◊
- ◊: *shapes; embodiments*[Return to reference](#) ◊

## **RICHARD LOVELACE**

### **1617–1657**

The quintessential Cavalier, Richard Lovelace was described by a contemporary as “the most amiable and beautiful person that ever eye beheld.” Born into a wealthy Kentish family, he was educated at Oxford and fought for Charles I in Scotland (in both expeditions, 1639 and 1640). He shared with his king a serious interest in art, especially the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, and Peter Lely. He was imprisoned for a few months in 1642 for supporting the “Kentish Petition” that urged restoration of the king to his ancient rights; in “To Althea, from Prison,” he finds freedom from external bondage in the Cavalier embrace of sex, wine, and royalism. During 1643–46 he fought in the king’s armies in England and in Holland and France, where he was wounded. In a general roundup of known royalists in 1648 he was imprisoned for ten months. While in prison Lovelace prepared his poems for publication under the title *Lucasta* (1649), the name of his muse. Besides witty and charming love songs, the volume includes the plaintive ballad about the conflict between love and honor, “To Lucasta, Going to the Wars,” and also “The Grasshopper,” a poem celebrating the Cavalier ideal. Like that emblematic summer creature, the once-carefree Cavalier suffers in the Puritan “winter,” but Lovelace finds in the fellowship of Cavalier friends a nobler version of the good life. After 1649 he endured years of poverty, and was largely dependent on the

generosity of his friend and fellow royalist, the poet Charles Cotton.  
His remaining poems appeared in 1659 as *Lucasta: Postume Poems*.

***FROM* LUCASTA**

## To Lucasta, Going to the Wars

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,  
That from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind  
To war and arms I fly.

5 True, a new mistress now I chase,  
The first foe in the field;  
And with a stronger faith embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.

10 Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore;  
I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honor more.

# The Grasshopper<sup>1</sup>

## *To My Noble Friend, Mr. Charles Cotton*

O thou that swing'st upon the waving hair  
Of some well-fillèd oaten beard,<sup>o</sup>  
Drunk every night with a delicious tear  
Dropped thee from heav'n, where now th' art  
reared,

5 The joys of earth and air are thine entire,  
That with thy feet and wings dost hop and fly;  
And when thy poppy<sup>o</sup> works thou dost retire  
To thy carved acorn bed to lie.

10 Up with the day, the sun thou welcom'st then,  
Sport'st in the gilt-plats<sup>o</sup> of his beams,  
And all these merry days mak'st merry men,  
Thyself, and melancholy streams.<sup>2</sup>

15 But ah, the sickle! golden ears are cropped,  
Ceres and Bacchus<sup>3</sup> bid goodnight;  
Sharp frosty fingers all your flow'rs have topped,  
And what scythes spared, winds shave off quite.

20 Poor verdant fool! and now green ice! thy joys,  
Large and as lasting as thy perch of grass,  
Bid us lay in 'gainst winter rain, and poise<sup>o</sup>  
Their floods with an o'erflowing glass.

Thou best of men and friends! we will create  
A genuine summer in each other's breast;  
And spite of this cold time and frozen fate

Thaw us a warm seat to our rest.

25 Our sacred hearths shall burn eternally  
As vestal flames;<sup>4</sup> the North Wind, he  
Shall strike his frost-stretched wings, dissolve, and  
fly  
This Etna in epitome.<sup>5</sup>

30 Dropping December shall come weeping in,  
Bewail th' usurping of his reign;  
But when in showers of old Greek we begin,  
Shall cry, he hath his crown again!<sup>6</sup>

35 Night as clear Hesper<sup>o</sup> shall our tapers whip  
From the light casements where we play,  
And the dark hag<sup>z</sup> from her black mantle strip,  
And stick there everlasting day.

40 Thus richer than untempted kings are we,  
That asking nothing, nothing need:  
Though lord of all that seas embrace, yet he  
That wants<sup>o</sup> himself is poor indeed.

1649

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In *Aesop's Fables* the grasshopper lives in carefree idleness, in contrast with the industrious ant who lays up stores for the winter. The circumstances of the poem are those of the Interregnum, when a Puritan 'winter' seemed, to royalists, to be settling over England and obliterating their mode of life. The grasshopper may also allude to the recently executed king, Charles I. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The three objects of "mak'st merry" are "men," "thyself," and "melancholy streams." [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Goddess of grain and god of wine. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Vestal Virgins, in Rome, were responsible for tending an eternal flame in the Temple of Vesta. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Boreas, the north wind, folding up ("striking") his wings, flees the heat of the volcano within Mount Etna, a figure for the fires of friendship. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Greek wine was favored in the classical world. "Crown" here has multiple associations: the crown worn by "King Christmas" at the festivities banned by Puritans, and the crown Cavaliers hoped would soon be restored to Charles II. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hecate, a daughter of Night. [Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *head of grain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opiate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *golden fields* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *counterbalance* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the evening star* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lacks* [Return to reference °](#)



## To Althea, from Prison

When Love with unconfined wings  
Hovers within my gates,  
And my divine Althea brings  
To whisper at the grates;  
5 When I lie tangled in her hair  
And fettered to her eye,  
The gods<sup>1</sup> that wanton<sup>o</sup> in the air  
Know no such liberty.

When flowing cups run swiftly round,  
10 With no allaying Thames,<sup>2</sup>  
Our careless heads with roses bound,  
Our hearts with loyal flames;  
When thirsty grief in wine we steep,  
When healths and drafts go free,  
15 Fishes that tipple in the deep  
Know no such liberty.

When, like committed linnets,<sup>o</sup> I  
With shriller throat shall sing  
The sweetness, mercy, majesty,  
And glories of my king;  
20 When I shall voice aloud how good  
He is, how great should be,  
Enlargèd winds, that curl the flood,  
Know no such liberty.

25 Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for an hermitage.

If I have freedom in my love,  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone, that soar above,  
Enjoy such liberty.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Some versions read “birds” instead of “gods.” [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: No mixture of water (as from the river Thames) in the wine. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *play* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *caged finches* [Return to reference °](#)

# La Bella Bona Roba<sup>1</sup>

## I

I cannot tell who loves the skeleton  
Of a poor marmoset,<sup>o</sup> naught but bone, bone.  
Give me a nakedness with her clothes on.<sup>2</sup>

## II

5 Such whose white satin upper coat of skin,  
Cut upon velvet rich incarnadine,<sup>o</sup>  
Has yet a body (and of flesh) within.

## III

Sure it is meant good husbandry<sup>o</sup> in men,  
Who do incorporate<sup>3</sup> with airy lean,<sup>o</sup>  
To repair their sides, and get their rib again.<sup>4</sup>

## IV

10 Hard hap<sup>o</sup> unto that huntsman that decrees  
Fat joys for all his sweat, whenas he sees,  
After his 'say,<sup>o</sup> naught but his keeper's fees.<sup>5</sup>

## V

15 Then Love, I beg, when next thou takest thy bow,  
Thy angry shafts, and dost heart-chasing go,  
Pass rascal<sup>o</sup> deer, strike me the largest doe.

## Endnotes

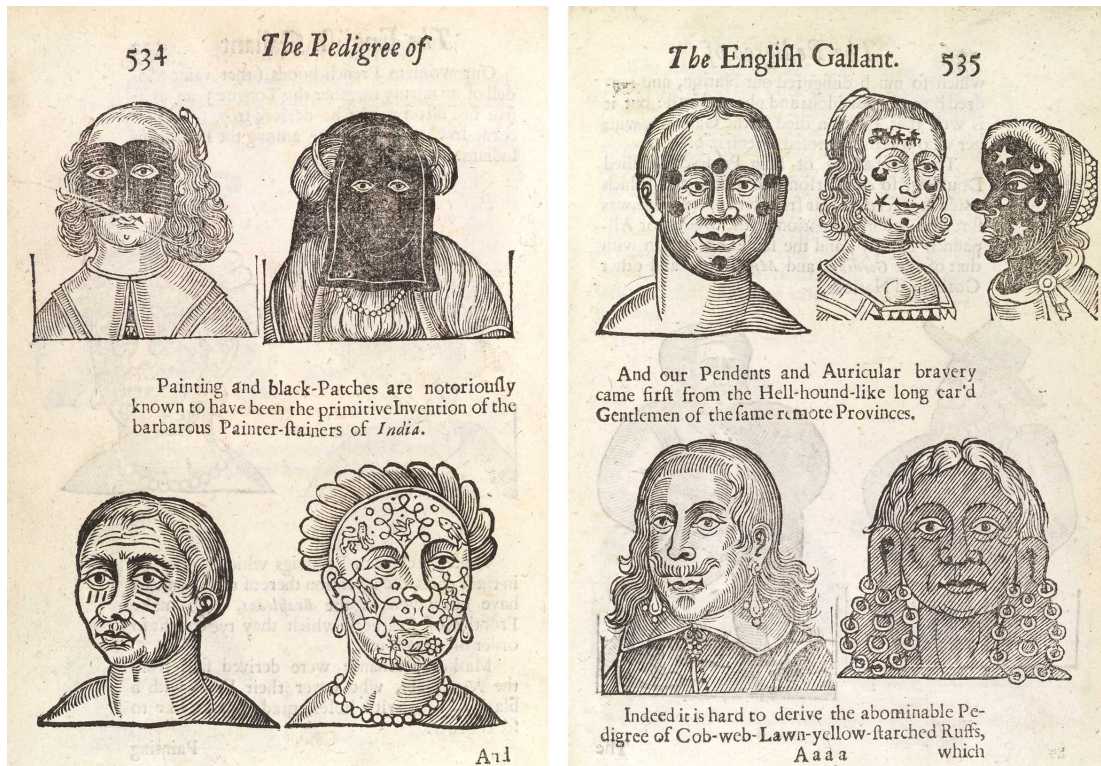
- Note 1: “Bona roba,” from the Italian for good dress or gear, was a term for a wanton woman or prostitute.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Well-fleshed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Both take into the body and copulate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Genesis 2:21–22 for Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The meager portion of a deer allotted to the gamekeeper.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *wanton woman*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flesh-colored, red*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *management*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *insubstantial meat*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fortune*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *assay, attempt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inferior, mean*[Return to reference °](#)

## A Black Patch on Lucasta's Face

Dull as I was, to think that a court fly<sup>1</sup>  
Presumed so near her eye,  
When 'twas th' industrious bee  
Mistook her glorious face for paradise;  
To sum up all his chemistry of spice,  
5 With a brave pride and honor led,  
Near both her suns<sup>o</sup> he makes his bed,  
And though a spark struggles to rise as red;  
Then emulates the gay  
Daughter of day,  
10 Acts the romantic phoenix's fate;<sup>2</sup>  
When now, with all his sweets laid out in state,  
Lucasta scatters but one heat,  
And all the aromatic pills do sweat,  
And gums calcined,<sup>o</sup> themselves to powder beat;<sup>3</sup>  
15 Which a fresh gale of air  
Conveys into her hair;  
Then chaste he's set on fire,  
And in these holy flames doth glad expire;  
And that black marble tablet<sup>4</sup> there  
20 So near her either sphere  
Was placed; nor foil, nor ornament,  
But the sweet little bee's large monument.<sup>o</sup>



**John Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd* (1653)** discusses the ways in which the English copied the fashions of other nations, including face patches.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: An insect, as well as a (court) parasite or flatterer, and a patch for the face (from the French *mouche*): a small piece of black material, typically silk or velvet, cut into a decorative shape and worn either for adornment or to conceal a blemish. (See the illustration from Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphosis*, as well as John Donne's "The Flea.") A patch was also a fool. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The phoenix was a mythic Arabian bird; only one existed at any time. After five hundred years it was consumed by fire, and another rose from its ashes. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As the radiance of Lucasta's eyes cremates the bee, the bee's store of honey is secreted and then calcined. [Return to](#)

[reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, the mark left on Lucasta's face where the bee died in the fire of her eyes. A tablet was a small slab bearing a memorial inscription, as well as a writing surface.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *eyes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reduced to powder by heat*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *memorial structure; sepulcher*[Return to reference °](#)

## Love Made in the First Age.<sup>1</sup> To Chloris

In the nativity of time,  
Chloris, it was not thought a crime  
In direct Hebrew for to woo.<sup>2</sup>  
Now we make love as all on fire,  
Ring retrograde<sup>3</sup> our loud desire,  
5 And court in English backward too.

Thrice happy was that golden age,  
When compliment was construed rage,<sup>4</sup>  
And fine words in the center hid;  
When cursèd *No* stained no maid's bliss,  
10 And all discourse was summed in *Yes*,  
And naught forbade, but to forbid.

Love then unstinted, love did sip,  
And cherries plucked fresh from the lip,  
On cheeks and roses free he fed;  
15 Lasses like autumn plums did drop,  
And lads indifferently<sup>o</sup> did crop  
A flower and a maidenhead.

Then unconfined each did tipple  
Wine from the bunch, milk from the nipple;  
20 Paps tractable as udders were;  
Then equally the wholesome jellies  
Were squeezed from olive trees and bellies,  
Nor suits of trespass did they fear.

A fragrant bank of strawberries,  
25 Diapered<sup>o</sup> with violet's eyes,  
Was table, tablecloth, and fare;



No palace to the clouds did swell,  
Each humble princess then did dwell  
30 In the piazza<sup>5</sup> of her hair.

Both broken faith and th' cause of it,  
All-damning gold, was damned to th' pit;  
Their troth, sealed with a clasp and kiss,  
Lasted until that extreme day  
35 In which they smiled their souls away,  
And, in each other, breathed new bliss.

Because no fault, there was no tear;  
No groan did grate the granting ear,  
No false foul breath their del'cate smell:  
40 No serpent kiss poisoned the taste,  
Each touch was naturally chaste,  
And their mere sense a miracle.

Naked as their own innocence,  
And unembroidered from offense<sup>6</sup>  
45 They went, above poor riches, gay;  
On softer than the cygnet's<sup>o</sup> down,  
In beds they tumbled of their own;  
For each within the other lay.

Thus did they live; thus did they love,  
Repeating only joys above;  
50 And angels were, but with clothes on,  
Which they would put off cheerfully,  
To bathe them in the galaxy,<sup>o</sup>  
Then gird them with the heavenly zone.<sup>7</sup>

55 Now, Chloris, miserably crave<sup>o</sup>  
The offered bliss you would not have,  
Which evermore I must deny,  
Whilst ravished with these noble dreams

And crownèd with mine own soft beams,  
Enjoying of my self I lie.

60

1659

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Golden Age, described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hebrew, supposed to be the original human language, is read from right to left; we have reversed this.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Backward, in reverse. The term also has musical connotations, perhaps referring here to a pattern of bell ringing.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Passion. Compliments in the Golden Age were understood as ardent propositions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Arcade, hence an artful structure.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, not ornamented to hide an offense.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The zodiac of stars.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *without preference*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *decorated, dappled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *young swan*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the Milky Way*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *beg*[Return to reference °](#)

# LUCY HUTCHINSON

## 1620–1681

Lucy Aspley was born in 1620 in the Tower of London, where her father was lieutenant. In a short autobiographical fragment, Hutchinson writes that her “genius was quite averse” from everything but her “book.” Hutchinson is best known for her *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, an account of the Civil Wars, particularly in Nottinghamshire, where her husband was governor of a parliamentary garrison. But she was also a poet, and the first person to translate Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) from Latin into English. Hutchinson also wrote a parody of the poet Edmund Waller’s panegyric to Oliver Cromwell, twenty-three elegies, and an epic poem on Genesis titled *Order and Disorder*. The first five cantos of the epic appeared anonymously in print in 1679; a manuscript of twenty cantos dating from the 1660s survives in the papers of Hutchinson’s cousin Anne Wilmot, Countess of Rochester, mother of the libertine poet John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester.

Hutchinson married John Hutchinson in 1638, and their estate in Owthorpe, Nottinghamshire became a significant political center even before the Civil Wars. Paired portraits by Robert Walker dating from the late 1640s or early 1650s show Lucy Hutchinson holding a laurel wreath, the emblem of poetic achievement, and Colonel Hutchinson wearing armor. Their complementary skills—hers with the pen, his with the sword—were central to their defense of a godly republic,

voluntary Protestant congregations, and a heightened role for the gentry (as opposed to an oligarchic nobility) in political governance.

Hutchinson worked on her translation of Lucretius in the 1650s. While Hutchinson expressed concern about the poem's "Atheisms & impieties," she nonetheless gave a presentation copy of her translation to Arthur Annesley, Earl of Anglesey, sometime protector of the godly, and friend of John Milton. After the Restoration, Hutchinson saved her husband's life by forging a letter of recantation. The Hutchinsons lived at Owthorpe until John was arrested in 1663 for his alleged involvement in an uprising against Charles II. Following his death in prison, Hutchinson wrote her vindictory *Memoirs*, as well as a series of elegies expressing her grief and longing for her dead husband, her theological and political beliefs, and her refusal to capitulate to the Restoration regime. The elegy included here, "To the Garden at Owthorpe," uses the conventions of the country house poem both to mourn John Hutchinson and to celebrate the forms of order to which they had dedicated their lives.

Hutchinson's invocation of an explicitly Christian muse in *Order and Disorder* reflects her belief in the divine order, or "stupendous Providence," that will ultimately vindicate the "little Church" against "the World's larger State." While the Lucretian ideas Hutchinson officially rejects in the preface to *Order and Disorder* certainly inform the poem's account of creation, the scriptural references in its margins make its primary intertext clear. (Those references have been omitted here.) Presented in its entirety below, canto 5 offers an account of the Fall that is particularly attentive to the punishment meted out to women in Genesis 3:16; Hutchinson even occasionally writes in the collective voice of women, looking forward to a time when "we shall trample on the serpent's head" (emphasis added).



**Lucy Hutchinson.** This portrait by Robert Walker features Hutchinson with a laurel wreath in her lap. It was paired with a painting of her husband, Colonel John Hutchinson, in armor.

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***From De rerum natura***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## From *Book I*

\* \* \*

250 But since we now eternal matter<sup>o</sup> find,<sup>2</sup>  
And principles<sup>o</sup> with different links combined,<sup>o</sup>  
Each body,<sup>o</sup> while it equal strength retains  
To its composure,<sup>o</sup> only firm remains.  
Thus nothing into nothing turns, but so  
Disjoined all back to their first bodies go.  
255 Further when the paternal heaven powers  
On the great mother earth engendering<sup>o</sup> showers  
They perish in her womb, but thence comes out  
The shining blade, plants grow, green branches  
sprout,  
Thence doth she both wild beasts and mankind  
260 nourish,  
And thence with growing youth great cities flourish.  
Thence do new birds the shady groves supply.  
Hence while the herd in their rich pastures lie  
And on rank<sup>o</sup> grass their weary limbs repose  
White milk from their extended udders flows.  
265 Hence sportful younglings<sup>o</sup> in the grounds we find  
Helping their weak joints with their vigorous mind.

Thus nothing perisheth that to our eyes  
Appears, for nature makes new creatures<sup>o</sup> rise  
From those which were dissolved,<sup>o</sup> and all that live  
270 Their beings out of others' deaths receive.  
Since things are not of nothing made, I've taught  
They cannot be again to nothing brought.

\* \* \*

## From *Book II*

\* \* \*

1055

*The reason of  
this world may  
persuade us  
there are more  
worlds  
springing from  
the same  
causes*<sup>5</sup>

What greater miracle can mortals frame  
Then the pure azure sky, the glorious flame  
Of every star, which wanders there, the bright  
Orb of the moon, the sun's refulgent<sup>o</sup> light,  
Which were they yet unknown, how would men gaze  
On such strange objects, how would they amaze  
The sense of vulgar<sup>o</sup> men, who scarce would dare  
To credit that such things in nature were,  
Who now cloyed<sup>o</sup> with the frequent sight despise  
The glorious view of the bright arched skies.  
No longer then, with strangeness terrified,  
Let reason be your thoughts access denied;<sup>3</sup>  
But with strict judgment weigh the whole dispute  
And if't be true assent, if not confute.<sup>o</sup>

Here then the mind enquires, by reason's  
light,  
Since space<sup>4</sup> beyond the world is infinite,  
What those vast regions are, what they can show,  
Where the free mind desires so much to go?

1650s

\* \* \*

1996

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Hutchinson was the first person to translate Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) into English.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This passage begins by assuming that matter, which is neither created nor subject to destruction, continuously transforms. Compare Milton's discussion of "one first matter all"



in *Paradise Lost* 5.472, and Cavendish's theory of matter in *The Blazing World*.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 2: No longer let your reason be terrified by strangeness and deny access to your thoughts.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The expanse in which celestial objects are situated.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This is Hutchinson's own comment.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *everlasting substance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *primary elements* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *joined*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *physical form*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *composition, structure*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *begetting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vigorous, luxuriant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *offspring*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *products of creation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *decomposed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *radiant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *common*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cumbered, burdened*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prove wrong*[Return to reference °](#)

## To the Garden at Owthorpe<sup>1</sup>

Poor desolate garden, smile no more on me  
To whom glad looks rude<sup>o</sup> entertainments be.  
While thou and I for thy dear master mourn  
That's best becoming that doth least adorn.<sup>2</sup>  
Shall we for any meaner eyes be dressed  
5 Who had the glory once to please thee best?  
Or shall we prostitute<sup>o</sup> those joys again  
Which once his noble soul did entertain?  
Forbid it honor and just gratitude,  
'Tis now our best grace to be wild and rude.<sup>o</sup>  
10 He that impaled<sup>o</sup> thee from the common<sup>o</sup> ground,<sup>3</sup>  
Who all thy walls with shining fruit trees crowned,  
Me also above vulgar<sup>o</sup> girls did raise  
And planted in me all that yielded praise;  
He that with various beauties decked thy face,  
15 Gave my youth lustre and becoming grace;  
But he is gone and these gone with him too.  
Let now thy flowers rise charged<sup>o</sup> with weeping dew  
And, missing him, shrink back into their beds;  
So my poor virgins<sup>o</sup> hang their drooping heads  
20 And, missing the dear object of their sight,  
Close up their eyes in sorrow's gloomy night.  
Let thy young trees which sad and fading stand  
Dried up since they lost his refreshing hand,  
Tell me too sadly how your noblest plant  
25 Degenerates<sup>o</sup> if it usual culture<sup>o</sup> want.  
There spreading weeds which, while his watchful  
eyes  
Checked their pernicious<sup>o</sup> growth, durst never rise;  
Let them o'errun all the sweet fragrant banks,

30 And hide what grows in better ordered ranks.<sup>o</sup>  
 Too much, alas, this parallel<sup>o</sup> I find  
 In the disordered passions of my mind  
 But thy late loveliness is only hid,  
 Mine like the shadow with its substance fled.  
 35 Another gardener and another spring  
 May into thee new grace and new luster bring,  
 While beauty's seeds do yet remain alive.  
 But ah, my glories never can revive  
 No more than new leaves or new smiling fruit  
 Can reinvest that tree that's dead at root.  
 40 When to his worthy memory thou then  
 Hast offered one year's fruit,<sup>4</sup> thou mayst again  
 In gaudy dresses to thy next lord shine<sup>5</sup>  
 And show weak semblance<sup>o</sup> of his grace in thine.  
 For all that's generous, healthful, sweet and fair,  
 45 Imperfect emblems<sup>o</sup> of his virtue are.  
 But could I call back hasty flying time  
 The vanished glories that decked once my prime,<sup>o</sup>  
 To me that resurrection would be vain  
 And like ungathered flowers would die again.  
 50 In vain would doting<sup>o</sup> time, which can no more  
 Give such a lover, loveliness restore.

ca. 1664 **Endnotes**

1997

- Note 1:  
 Hutchinson wrote her elegies after the death of her husband, John Hutchinson. This is Elegy 7. Despite having escaped death for his part in the regicide, he was arrested again in 1663 on charges of participating in a republican conspiracy and died in prison in September 1664. In the 1650s and 1660s, the Hutchinsons remodeled their Nottinghamshire estate, Owthorpe, and the elegies are haunted by John's absence from this once-shared landscape. In Elegy 12, "Musings in My Evening Walks at

Owthorpe," the garden joins Lucy in mourning, even as she reflects on how her sorrow "glads [her] enemies."

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: That which is the least ornamental is the most appropriate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
Hutchinson refers here to the process of enclosing the commons, the public grounds to which the people had rights and access under common law. In her *Memoirs*, she distinguishes between the massive enclosures of the nobility and the lesser enclosures of the gentry who guarded the landscape both from the incursions of the king and from the leveling democracy of common land. (The Hutchinson family behaved "as if there had been an Agrarian law in the family," following John Harrington's prescription to limit the size of landed wealth.)  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The offering of the first crop to God.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hutchinson parted from Owthorpe in 1671, when its "next lord" took possession.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *unkind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *debase, offer for sale*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *humble, unrefined*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *enclosed, fenced in* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shared*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ordinary, common*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laden*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flowers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *declines* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cultivation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destructive, undesirable*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *controlled rows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *correspondence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likeness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *representations*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *most flourishing stage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °

# ***From Order and Disorder***<sup>1</sup>

## ***Canto 5***

Sad Nature's sighs gave the alarms,  
And all her frightened hosts stood to their arms,  
Waiting whom the great Sovereign would employ  
His all-deserted rebels to destroy,  
5 When God descended out of heaven above<sup>2</sup>  
His disobedient viceroy<sup>o</sup> to remove.  
Yet, though himself had seen the forfeiture,<sup>o</sup>  
Which distance could not from his eyes obscure;  
To teach his future substitutes how they  
Should judgments execute in a right way,  
10 He would not unexamined facts condemn,  
Nor punish sinners without hearing them;  
Therefore cites to his bar<sup>3</sup> the criminals,  
And Adam first out of his covert calls.  
    'Where art thou, Adam?' the Almighty said.  
15 'Here, Lord,' the trembling sinner answer made,  
    'Amongst the trees I in the garden heard  
Thy voice, and being naked, was afeared,  
Nor durst I so thy purer sight abide,  
Therefore myself did in this shelter hide.'  
20 'Hast thou,' said God, 'eat the forbidden tree,  
Or who declared thy nakedness to thee?'  
    'She,' answered Adam, 'whom thou didst create  
To be my helper and associate  
Gave me the fatal fruit, and I did eat.'  
25 Then Eve was also called from her retreat.  
    'Woman, what hast thou done?' th'Almighty said;  
    'Lord,' answered she, 'the serpent me betrayed

And I did eat.' Thus did they both confess  
Their guilt, and vainly sought to make it less  
30 By such extenuations<sup>o</sup> as, well weighed,  
The sin, so circumstanced, more sinful made:  
A course which still half-softened sinners use:  
Transferring blame their own faults to excuse,  
They care not how, nor where, and oftentimes  
35 On God himself obliquely charge their crimes,  
Expostulating<sup>o</sup> in their discontent  
As if he caused what he did not prevent;  
Which Adam wickedly implies, when he  
Cries, ' 'Twas the woman that thou gavest me';  
40 Oft-times make that the Devil's guilt alone,  
Which was as well and equally their own.  
His lies could never have prevailed on Eve  
But that she wished them truth, and did believe  
A forgery that suited her desire,  
45 Whose haughty heart was prone enough t'aspire.  
The tempting and the urging was his ill,  
But the compliance was in her own will.  
And herein truly lies the difference  
Of natural and gracious penitence:  
50 The first transferreth and extenuates<sup>o</sup>  
The guilt, which the other owns and aggravates.  
While sin is but regarded slight and small  
It makes the value of rich mercy fall,  
But as our crimes seem greater in our eyes,  
55 So doth our grateful sense of pardon rise.  
Poor mankind at God's righteous bar was cast  
And set for judgment by, when at the last  
Satan within the serpent had his doom,<sup>4</sup>  
Whose execrable<sup>o</sup> malice left no room  
60 For plea or pardon, but was sentenced first:  
'Thou,' said the Lord, 'above all beasts accursed,  
Shalt on thy belly creep, on dust shalt feed;

Between thee and the woman, and her seed  
And thine, I will put lasting enmity;  
65 Thou in this war his heel shalt bruise, but he  
Thy head shall break.' More various mystery  
Ne'er did within so short a sentence lie.  
Here is irrevocable<sup>o</sup> vengeance, here  
Love as immutable.<sup>o</sup> Here doth appear  
70 Infinite wisdom plotting with free grace,  
Even by man's fall, th'advance of human race.  
Severity here utterly confounds,  
Here Mercy cures by kind and gentle wounds,  
The Father here the gospel first reveals,  
75 Here fleshly veils th'eternal Son conceals.  
The law of life and spirit here takes place,  
Given with the promise of assisting grace.  
Here is an oracle foretelling all  
Which shall the two opposèd seeds befall.  
80 The great war hath its first beginning here,  
Carried along more than five thousand year,  
With various success<sup>o</sup> on either side,  
And each age with new combatants supplied.  
Two sovereign champions here we find,  
85 Satan and Christ contending for mankind.  
Two empires here, two opposite cities rise,  
Dividing all in two societies:  
The little Church and the World's larger State,<sup>5</sup>  
Pursuing it with ceaseless spite and hate.  
90 Each party here erecting their own walls,  
As one advances, so the other falls.  
Hope in the promise the weak Church confirms,  
Hell and the World fight upon desperate terms:  
By this most certain oracle they know  
95 Their war must end in final overthrow.  
Some little present mischief they may do,  
And this with eager malice they pursue.



The angels whom God's justice did divide  
Engage their mighty powers on either side:  
100 Hell's gloomy princes the World's rulers made,<sup>6</sup>  
Heaven's unseen host the Church's guard and aid;  
Till the frail woman's conquering son shall tread  
Beneath his feet the serpent's broken head.  
105     Though God the speech to man's false foe  
address,  
The words rich grace to fallen man express,  
Which God will not to him himself declare  
Till he implore it by submissive prayer;  
Sufficient 'tis to know a latitude  
For hope, which doth no penitent exclude.  
110 Had death's sad sentence passed on man before  
The promise of that seed which should restore  
His fallen state, destroying death and sin,  
Cureless as Satan's had his misery been.  
But though free grace did future help provide,  
115 Yet must he present loss and woe abide  
And feel the bitter curse, that he may so  
The sweet release of saving mercy know.  
Prepared with late-indulgèd hope, on Eve  
Th'Almighty next did gentler sentence give.<sup>7</sup>  
120 'I will,' said he, 'greatly augment thy woes,  
And thy conceptions, which with painful throes  
Thou shalt bring forth, yet shall they be to thee  
But a successive crop of misery.  
Thy husband shall thy ruler be, whose sway  
125 Thou shalt with passionate desires obey'.  
Alas! How sadly to this day we find  
Th'effect of this dire curse on womankind;  
Eve sinned in fruit forbid,<sup>8</sup> and God requires  
Her penance in the fruit of her desires.  
130 When first to men their inclinations move,  
How are they tortured with distracting love!

What disappointments find they in the end;  
Constant uneasinesses which attend  
The best condition of the wedded state,  
135 Giving all wives sense of the curse's weight,  
Which makes them ease and liberty refuse,  
And with strong passion their own shackles choose.  
Now though they easier under wise rule prove,  
And every burden is made light by love,  
140 Yet golden fetters, soft-lined yokes, still be  
Though gentler curbs, but curbs of liberty,  
As well as the harsh tyrant's iron yoke;  
More sorely galling<sup>o</sup> them whom they provoke  
To loathe their bondage, and despise the rule  
145 Of an unmanly, fickle, froward<sup>o</sup> fool.<sup>8</sup>  
Whate'er the husbands be, they covet fruit,  
And their own wishes to their sorrows contribute.  
How painfully the fruit within them grows,  
What tortures do their ripened births disclose,  
150 How great, how various, how uneasy are  
The breeding-sicknesses, pangs that prepare  
The violent openings of life's narrow door,  
Whose fatal issues we as oft deplore!  
What weaknesses, what languishments ensue,  
155 Scattering dead lilies where fresh roses grew.<sup>9</sup>  
What broken rest afflicts the careful nurse,  
Extending to the breasts the mother's curse;  
Which ceases not when there her milk she dries,  
The froward child draws new streams from her eyes.  
160 How much more bitter anguish do we find  
Labouring to raise up virtue in the mind  
Than when the members<sup>1</sup> in our bowels<sup>o</sup> grew:  
What sad abortions, what cross births<sup>2</sup> ensue:  
What monsters, what unnatural vipers come  
165 Eating their passage through their parent's womb;  
How are the tortures of their births renewed,

Unrecompensed with love and gratitude.  
Even the good, who would our cares requite,  
Would be our crowns, joys, pillars, and delight,  
170 Affect us yet with other griefs and fears,  
Opening the sluices of our near-dried tears.  
Death, danger, sickness, losses, all the ill  
That on the children falls, the mothers feel,  
Repeating with worse pangs the pangs that bore  
175 Them into life; and though some may have more  
Of sweet and gentle mixture, some of worse,  
Yet every mother's cup tastes of the curse,  
And when the heavy load her faint heart tires,  
Makes her too oft repent her fond desires.  
180 Now last of all, as Adam last had been  
Drawn into the prevaricating<sup>o</sup> sin,  
His sentence came: 'Because that thou didst yield,'  
Said God, 'to thy enticing wife, the field,  
Producing briars and fruitless thorns to thee,  
185 Accursèd for thy sake and sins shall be.  
Thy careful brows in constant toils shall sweat,  
Thus thou thy bread shalt all thy whole life eat  
Till thou return into the earth's vast womb,  
Whence, taken first, thou didst a man become;  
190 For dust thou art, and dust again shalt be  
When life's declining spark goes out in thee.'  
In all these sentences we strangely find  
God's admirable love to lost mankind;  
Who, though he never will his word recall  
195 Or let his threats like shafts at random fall,  
Yet can his wisdom order curses so  
That blessings may out of their bowels flow.  
Thus death the door of lasting life became,  
Dissolving nature to rebuild her frame  
200 On such a sure foundation as shall break  
All the attempts Hell's cursèd empire make.  
Thus God revenged man's quarrel on his foe,

To whom th'Almighty would no mercy show,  
Making his reign, his respite, and success,  
205 All augmentations of his cursedness.  
Thus gave he us a powerful Chief and Head,  
By whom we shall be out of bondage led,  
And made the penalties of our offence  
Precepts and rules of new obedience,  
210 Fitted in all things to our fallen state  
Under sweet promises that ease their weight.  
Our first injunction is to hate and fly  
The flatteries of our first grand enemy;  
To have no friendship with his cursèd race,<sup>3</sup>  
215 The interest of the opposite seed t'embrace,  
Where though we toil in fights, though bruised we  
be,  
Yet shall our combat end in victory,  
Eternal glory healing our slight wound  
When all our labours are with triumph crowned.  
220 The next command is, mothers should maintain  
Posterity, not frightened with the pain,  
Which, though it make us mourn under the sense  
Of the first mother's disobedience,  
Yet hath a promise that thereby she shall  
225 Recover all the hurt of her first fall  
When, in mysterious manner, from her womb  
Her father, brother, husband, son shall come.  
Subjection to the husband's rule enjoined  
In the next place: that yoke with love is lined,<sup>4</sup>  
230 Love too a precept<sup>o</sup> made, where God requires  
We should perform our duties with desires;  
And promises t'incline our averse<sup>o</sup> will,  
Whose satisfaction takes away the ill  
Of every toil and every suffering  
235 That can from unenforced submission spring.  
The last command God with man's curse did give

Was that men should in honest callings live,  
Eating their own bread, fruit of their own sweat,  
Nor feed like drones<sup>o</sup> on that which others get:  
240 And this command a promise doth imply  
That bread should recompense<sup>o</sup> our industry.  
One mercy more his sentence did include,  
That mortal toils, faintings and lassitude  
Should not beyond death's fixèd bound extend,  
245 But there in everlasting quiet end.  
When men out of the troubled air depart,  
And to their first material dust revert,  
The utmost power that death or woe can have  
Is but to shut us prisoners in the grave,  
250 Bruising the flesh, that heel whereon we tread;  
But we shall trample on the serpent's head.  
Our scattered atoms shall again condense,  
And be again inspired with living sense;  
Captivity shall then a captive be,<sup>5</sup>  
255 Death shall be swallowed up in victory,  
And God shall man to Paradise restore,  
Where the foul tempter shall seduce no more.  
How far our parents, whose sad eyes were fixed  
On woe and terror, saw the mercy mixed  
260 We can but make a wild uncertain guess,  
As we are now affected in distress,  
Who less regard the mitigation still  
Than the slight smart of our afflicting ill;  
And while we groan under the hated yoke,  
265 Our gratitude for its soft lining choke.  
But God, having th'amazèd sinners doomed,  
Put off the judge's frown and reassumed  
A tender father's kind and melting<sup>o</sup> face,  
Opening his gracious arms for new embrace,  
270 Taught them to expiate<sup>o</sup> their heinous guilt  
By spotless sacrifice and pure blood spilt,

Which, done in faith, did their faint hearts sustain  
Till the intended Lamb of God was slain,  
Whose death, whose merit, and whose innocence  
275 The forfeit paid and blotted out th'offence.  
The skins of the slain beasts God vestures<sup>o</sup> made  
Wherein the naked sinners were arrayed,  
Not without mystery, which typified<sup>o</sup>  
That righteousness that doth our foul shame hide.  
280 As when a rotting patient must endure  
Painful excisions to effect cure,  
His spirits we with cordials<sup>o</sup> fortify,  
Lest, unsupported, he should faint and die,  
So with our parents the Almighty dealt:  
285 Before their necessary woes they felt,  
Their feeble souls rich promises upheld  
And their deliverance was in types<sup>6</sup> revealed.  
Even their bodies God himself did arm  
With clothes that kept them from the weather's  
290 harm;  
But after all, they must be driven away,  
Nor in their forfeit Paradise must stay.  
Then said the Lord with holy irony,  
Whence man the folly of his pride might see,  
'The earthly man like one of us is grown,  
295 To whom, as God, both good and ill is known.  
Now lest he also eat of th'other tree,  
Whose fruit gives life, and an immortal be,  
Let us by just and timely banishment  
His further sinful arrogance prevent.'  
300 Then did he them out of the garden chase  
And set a cherubim to guard the place,  
Who waved a flaming sword before the door  
Through which the wretches must return no more.  
May we not liken to this sword of flame  
305 The threatening law which from Mount Sinai<sup>7</sup> came,

With such thick flashes of prodigious fire  
As made the mountains shake and men retire,  
Forbidding them all forward hope that they  
Could enter into life that dreadful way?  
310 Whate'er it was, whate'er it signifies,  
It kept our parents out of Paradise,  
Who now, returning to their place of birth,  
Found themselves strangers in their native earth.  
Their fatal breach of God's most strict command  
315 Had there dissolved all concord, the sweet band  
Of universal loveliness and peace,  
And now the calm in every part did cease;  
Love, though immutable, its smiles did shroud  
Under the dark veil of an angry cloud,  
320 And while he seemed withdrawn whose grace upheld  
The order of all things, confusion filled  
The universe. The air became impure  
And frequent dreadful conflicts did endure  
With every other angry element;<sup>8</sup>  
325 The whirling fires its tender body rent.  
From earth and seas gross vapours did arise,  
Turned to prodigious meteors in the skies;  
The blustering winds let loose their furious rage  
And in their battles did the floods engage.  
330 The sun confounded was with Nature's shame  
And the pale moon shrunk in her sickly flame;  
The rude congressions<sup>o</sup> of the angry stars  
In heaven begun the universal wars,  
While their malicious influence from above  
335 On Earth did various perturbations move.  
Droughts, inundations, blastings, killed the plants;  
Worse influence wrought on th'inhabitants,  
Inspiring lust, rage, ravenous appetite,  
Which made the creatures in all regions fight.  
340 The little insects in great clouds did rise

And, in battalias<sup>o</sup> spread, obscured the skies;  
Armies of birds encountered in the air,  
With hideous cries deciding battles there;  
The birds of prey, to gorge their appetite,  
345 Seized harmless fowl in their unwary flight.  
When the dim evening had shut in the day,  
Troops of wild beasts, all marching out for prey,  
To the resistless<sup>o</sup> flocks would go, and there  
Oft-times by other troops assailèd were,  
350 Who snatched out of their jaws the new-slain food  
And made them purchase it again with blood.

Thus sin the whole Creation did divide  
Into th'oppressing and the suffering side.  
Those, still employing craft and violence  
355 T'ensnare and murder simple innocence,  
True emblems were of Satan's craft and power  
In daily ambuscado<sup>o</sup> to devour;  
Nor only emblems were, but organs<sup>o</sup> too,  
In and by whom he did his mischiefs do,  
360 While persecuting cruelty and rage  
Them in his cursèd party did engage.  
Love, meekness, patience, gentleness, combined  
The tamer brood with those of their own kind;  
Wherefore God chose them for his sacrifice  
365 When he the proud and mighty did despise,  
And his most certain oracles declare  
They man's restored peace at last shall share.

But to our parents then, sad was the change  
Which them from peace and safety did estrange,  
370 Brought universal woe and discord in,  
The never-failing consequents<sup>o</sup> of sin;  
Nor only made all things without them jar<sup>o</sup>  
But in their breasts raised up a civil war.  
Reason and sense maintained continual fight,  
375 Urging th'aversion and the appetite,  
Which led two different troops of passions out,



Confounding all in their tumultuous rout.<sup>o</sup>  
The less world with the great proportion held:  
As winds the caverns, sighs the bosoms filled;  
380 So flowing tears did beauty's fair fields drown,  
As inundations kept within no bound.  
Fear earthquakes made, lust in the fancy whirled,  
Turned into flame and, bursting, fired the world:  
Spite, hate, revenge, ambition, avarice.  
385 Made innocence a prey to monstrous vice.  
The cold and hot diseases represent  
The perturbations of the element.  
Thus woe and danger had beset them round,  
Distressed without, within no comfort found.  
390 Even as a monarch's favourite in disgrace  
Suffers contempt both from the high and base,  
And the most abject most insult o'er them  
Whom the offended sovereigns condemn;  
So after man th'Almighty disobeyed,  
395 Each little fly durst his late king invade  
As well as the wood's monsters, wolves and bears,  
And all things else that exercise his fears.<sup>9</sup>  
Methinks I hear sad Eve in some dark vale  
Her woeful state with such sad plaints<sup>o</sup> bewail:  
400 'Ah! why doth Death its latest stroke delay?<sup>1</sup>  
If we must leave the light, why do we stay  
By slow degrees more painfully to die,  
And languish in a long calamity?<sup>o</sup>  
Have we not lost by one false cheating sin  
405 All peace without, all sweet repose within?  
Is there a pleasure yet that life can show,  
Doth not each moment multiply our woe:  
And while we live thus in perpetual dread,  
Our hope and comfort long before us dead,  
410 Why should we not our angry Maker pray  
At once to take our wretched lives away?

Hath not our sin all Nature's pure leagues rent<sup>o</sup>  
 And armed against us every element?  
 Have not our subjects their allegiance broke,  
 415 Doth not each worm<sup>o</sup> scorn our unworthy yoke?  
 Are we not half with griping<sup>o</sup> hunger pined<sup>o</sup>  
 Before we bread amongst the brambles find?  
 All pale diseases in our members<sup>o</sup> reign,  
 Anguish and grief no less our sick souls pain.  
 420 Wherever I my eyes or thoughts convert,<sup>o</sup>  
 Each object adds new tortures to my heart.  
 If I look up, I dread Heaven's threatening frown,  
 Thorns prick my eyes when shame hath cast them  
 down,  
 Dangers I see, looking on either hand,  
 425 Before me all in fighting posture stand.  
 If I cast back my sorrow-drownèd eyes,  
 I see our ne'er to be recovered Paradise,  
 The flaming sword which doth us thence exclude,  
 By sad remorse and ugly guilt pursued.  
 430 If on my sin-defilèd self I gaze,  
 My nakedness and spots do me amaze.<sup>o</sup>  
 If I on thee a private glance reflect,<sup>o</sup>  
 Confusion doth my shameful eyes deject,  
 Seeing the man I love by me betrayed,  
 435 By me, who for his mutual help was made,  
 Who to preserve thy life ought to have died,  
 And I have killed thee by my foolish pride,  
 Defiled thy glory and pulled down thy throne.  
 O that I had but sinned and died alone!  
 440 Then had my torture and my woe been less,  
 I yet had flourished in thy happiness.<sup>2</sup>  
 If these words Adam's melting soul did move,  
 He might reply with kind rebuking<sup>o</sup> love:  
 'Cease, cease, O foolish woman, to dispute,  
 445 God's sovereign will and power are absolute.

If he will have us soon or slow to die,  
Frail worms must yield, but must not question why.  
When his great hand appears, we must conclude  
All that he doth is wise and just and good;  
450 Though our poor, sin-benighted souls are blind,  
Nor can the mysteries of his wisdom find,  
Yet in our present case we must confess  
His justice and our own unrighteousness.  
He warned us of this fatal consequence,  
455 That death must wait on disobedience;  
Yet we despised his threat and broke his law,  
So did destruction on our own heads draw;  
Now under his afflicting hand we lie,  
Reaping the fruit of our iniquity;  
460 Which, had not he prevented when we fell,  
At once had plunged us in the lowest Hell;  
But by his mercy yet we have reprieve,  
And yet are showed how we in death may live,  
If we improve our short-indulgèd space  
465 To understand, prize, and accept his grace.  
    'Did all of us at once like brutes expire  
And cease to be, we might quick death desire:  
But since our chief and immaterial part,  
Not framed of dust, doth not to dust revert,  
470 Its death not an annihilation is,  
But to be cut off from its supreme bliss:  
Whatever here to mortals can befall  
Compared to future miseries is small.  
The saddest, sharpest, and the longest have  
475 Their final consummations<sup>o</sup> in the grave;  
These have their intermissions and allays,<sup>o</sup>  
Though black and gloomy ones, these nights have  
    days.  
The worst calamities we here endure  
Admit a possibility of cure.  
480 Our miseries here are varied in their kind,

And in that change the wretched some ease find.  
Sleep here our pained senses stupefies  
And cheating streams in our sick fancies rise,  
But in our future sufferings 'tis not so,  
485 There is no end, no intermitted<sup>o</sup> woe,  
No more return from the accursed place,  
No hope, no possibility of grace,  
No sleepy intervals, no pleasant dreams,  
No mitigations of those sad extremes,  
490 No gentle mixtures, no soft changes there,  
Perpetual tortures heightened with despair,  
Eternal horror and eternal night,  
Eternal burnings with no glance of light,  
Eternal pain. O, 'tis a thought too great,  
495 Too terrible, for any to repeat  
Who have not 'scaped<sup>o</sup> the dread. Let's not to shun  
Heaven's scorching rays, into Hell's furnace run:  
But having slain ourselves, let's fly to him  
Who only can our souls from death redeem.  
500 'To undo what's done is not within our power,  
No more than to call back the last fled hour.  
To think we can our fallen state restore,  
Or without hope our ruin to deplore,  
Are equal aggravating crimes; the first  
505 Repeats that sin for which we were accursed,  
While we with foolish arrogating<sup>o</sup> pride  
More in ourselves than in our God confide;<sup>o</sup>  
The last is both ungrateful and unjust,  
That doth his goodness or his power distrust,  
510 Which wheresoe'er we look, without, within,  
Above, beneath, in every place is seen.  
Doth Heaven frown? Above the sullen shrouds  
God sits, and sees through all the blackest clouds  
Sin casts about us, like the misty night,  
515 Which hides his pleasing glances from our sight;  
Nor only sees, but darts on us his beams,

Ministering comfort in our worst extremes.  
When lightnings fly, dire storm and thunder roars,  
He guides the shafts, the serene calm restores.  
520 When shadows occupy day's vacant room,  
He makes new glory spring from night's dark womb.  
When the black prince of air lets loose the winds,  
The furious warriors he in prison binds.  
If burnings stars do conflagrations threat,<sup>o</sup>  
525 He gives cool breezes to allay the heat.  
When cold doth in its rigid season reign,  
He melts the snows and thaws the air again;  
Restoring the vicissitude of things,  
He still new good from every evil brings.  
530 He holds together the world's shaken frame,  
Ordaining every change, is still the same.  
If he permit the elements to fight,  
The rage of storms, the blackness of the night;  
'Tis that his power, love and wisdom may  
535 More glory have, restoring calm and day;  
That we may more the pleasant blessings prize,  
Laid in the balance with their contraries.  
    'Though dangers, then, like gaping monsters stand  
Ready to swallow us on either hand,  
540 Let us despise them, firm in this faith still,  
If God will save, they can nor hurt nor kill;  
If by his just permission we are slain,  
His power can heal and quicken<sup>o</sup> us again.  
If briars and thorns which from our sins arise,  
545 Looking on earth, pierce through our guilty eyes,  
Let's yet give thanks they have not choked the seed  
Which should with better fruit our sad lives feed.  
If discord set the inward world on fire,  
With haste let's to the living spring retire,  
550 There quench and quiet the disturbèd soul,  
There on Love's sweet refreshing green banks roll,  
Where, ecstasied with joy, we shall not feel

The serpent's little nibblings at our heel.  
If we look back on Paradise, late lost,  
555 Joys vanished like swift dreams, thawed like a frost,  
Converting pleasant walks to dirt and mire,  
Would we such frail delights again desire,  
Which at their best, however excellent,  
Had this defect, they were not permanent?  
560 If sin, remorse, and guilt give us the chase,  
Let us lie close in Mercy's sweet embrace,  
Which when it us ashamed and naked found,  
In the soft arms of melting pity bound,  
Eternal glorious triumphs did prepare,  
565 Armed us with clothes against the wounding air,  
By expiating sacrifices taught  
How new life shall by death to light be brought.  
If we before us look, although we see  
All things in present fighting posture be:  
570 Yet in the promise we a prospect have  
Of Victory swallowing up the empty grave;  
Our foes all vanquished, Death itself lies dead,  
And we shall trample on the monster's head,  
Entering into a new and perfect joy  
575 Which neither sin nor sorrow can destroy:  
A lasting and refined felicity,  
For which even we ourselves refined must be.  
Then shall we laugh at our now childish woes,  
And hug the birth that issues from these throes.<sup>3</sup>  
580 'Let not my share of grief afflict thy mind,  
But let me comfort in thy courage find;  
'Twas not thy malice, but thy ignorance  
That lately my destruction did advance;  
Nor can I my own self excuse; 'twas I  
585 Undid myself by my facility.<sup>o</sup>  
Let's not in vain each other now upbraid,<sup>o</sup>  
But rather strive to'afford each other aid,

And our most gracious Lord with due thanks bless,  
Who hath not left us single in distress.  
590 When fear chills thee, my hope shall make thee  
warm,  
When I grow faint, thou shalt my courage arm;  
When both our spirits at a low ebb are,  
We both will join in mutual fervent prayer  
To him whose gracious succour never fails  
595 When sin and death poor feeble man assails,  
He that our final triumph hath decreed  
And promised thee salvation in thy seed.  
Ah! can I this in Adam's person say,  
While fruitless tears melt my poor life away?  
600 Of all the ills to mortals incident,  
None more pernicious is than discontent,  
That brat of unbelief and stubborn pride  
And sensual lust, with no joy satisfied,  
That doth ingratitude and murmur nurse,  
605 And is a sin which carries its own curse;  
This is the only smart of every ill.  
But can we without it sad tortures feel?  
Yes; if our souls above our sense remain,  
And take not in th'afflicted body's pain;  
610 When they descend and mix with the disease,  
Then doth the anguish live, reign, and increase,  
Which when the soul is not in it, grows faint  
And wastes its strength, not nourished with  
complaint.  
Submissive, humble, happy, sweet content  
615 A thousand deaths by one death doth prevent,  
When our rebellious wills, subdued thereby  
Into th'eternal will and wisdom, die;  
Nor is that will harsh or irrational,  
But sweet in that which we most bitter call,  
620 Who err in judging what is ill or good,  
Only by studying that will understood.

What we admire in a low paradise,  
If they our souls from heavenly thoughts entice,  
Here terminating our most strong desire  
625 Which should to perfect permanence aspire,  
From being good to us they are so far  
That they our fetters, yokes and poisons are,  
The obstacles of our felicity,<sup>o</sup>  
The ruin of our souls' most firm healths be,  
630 Quenching that life-maintaining appetite  
Which makes substantial fruit our sound delight.  
The evils, so miscalled, that we endure  
Are wholesome medicines tending to our cure;  
Only disease to these aversion breeds,  
635 The healthy soul on them with due thanks feeds.  
If for a prince, a mistress, or a friend,  
Many do joy their blood and lives to spend,  
Wealth, honour, ease, dangers and wounds despise,  
Should we not more to God's will sacrifice  
640 And by free gift prevent that else-sure loss?  
Whate'er our will is, we must bear the cross,  
Which freely taken up, the weight is less  
And hurts not, carried on with cheerfulness.  
Besides, what we can lose are gliding streams,  
645 Light airy shadows, unsubstantial dreams,  
Wherein we no propriety<sup>o</sup> could have  
But that which our own cheating fancy gave.  
The right of them was due to God alone,  
And when with thanks we render him his own  
650 Either he gives us back our offerings  
Or our submission pays with better things.  
Were ills as real as our fancies make,  
They soon must us, or we must them forsake;  
We cannot miss ease and vicissitude  
655 Till our last rest our labours shall conclude.  
Natural tears<sup>4</sup> there are which in due bound



Do not the soul with sinful sorrow drown;  
Repentant tears, too, are no fretting brine,<sup>9</sup>  
But Love's soft meltings, which the soul refine;  
660 Like gentle showers that usher in the spring,  
These make the soul more fair and flourishing.  
No murmuring winds of passions here prevail,  
But the life-breathing spirit's sweet fresh gale,  
Which by those fruitful drops all graces feeds  
665 And draws rich extracts from the soaked seeds;  
But worldly sorrow, like rough winter's storms,  
All graces kills, all loveliness deforms,  
Augments the evils of our present state  
And doth eternal woes anticipate.  
670 Vain is that grief which can no ill redress  
But adds affliction to uneasiness,  
Unnerving the soul's powers then when they should  
Most exercise their constant fortitude.  
With these most certain truths let's wind up all:<sup>5</sup>  
675 Whatever doth to mortal men befall  
Not casual<sup>6</sup> is, like shafts at random shot,  
But Providence distributes every lot,  
In which th'obedient and the meek rejoice,  
Above their own preferring God's wise choice.  
680 Nor is his Providence less good than wise,  
Though our gross sense pierce not its mysteries.  
As there's but one most true substantial good,  
And God himself is that beatitude:  
So can we suffer but one real ill,  
685 Divorce from him by our repugnant will,  
Which when to just submission it returns  
The reunited soul no longer mourns,  
His serene rays dry up its former tears,  
Dispel the tempest of its carnal fears,  
690 Which dread what either never may arrive,  
Or not as seen in their false perspective;

For in the crystal mirror of God's grace  
All things appear with a new lovely face.  
When that doth Heaven's more glorious palace show,  
695 We cease t'admire a Paradise below,  
Rejoice in that which lately was our loss,  
And see a crown made up of every cross.  
Return, return, my soul, to thy true rest,  
700 As young benighted<sup>7</sup> birds unto their nest;  
There hide thyself under the wings of Love  
Till the bright morning all thy clouds remove.

ca. 1660s **Endnotes**

1679

- Note 1: Hutchinson likely wrote her epic poem on Genesis in the 1660s, when a manuscript of twenty cantos circulated among her peers. The first five cantos were printed anonymously in 1679. The twenty-canto version was not published until 2001. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
In the printed text, references to scriptural texts in the left-hand margin accompany many lines of verse, offering meaningful, and often politicized, intertexts for readers steeped in scripture. The marginal note here, for example, "Gen. 3.8," indicates the moment at which God arrives in the garden to punish Adam and Eve and they hide from him among the trees. These marginal references do not appear in the manuscript and have been omitted here for ease of reading.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Summons formally to appear in a court of law. Hutchinson often invokes the rule of law in her presentation of divine punishment. See also line 57. The marginal reference at line 11 is to 2 Samuel 23:3: "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Tradition, not Genesis, identifies the serpent with Satan.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The contrast here is between what Luke 12:32 (cited in the margin) calls God's "little flock" and the secular world. Hutchinson also suggests a smaller congregation of God's elect.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The marginal reference here is to Revelation 12:7–9, which describes the war in heaven, but Hutchinson also signals her defiant republicanism.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hutchinson ranges far beyond the description of Eve's punishment in Genesis (the marginal reference reads "Gen. 3.16 etc."), describing women's experiences as wives and mothers in terms at once sympathetic and indignant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The marginal reference here is to 1 Samuel 25:25, in which Abigail pleads with David not to countenance her husband, the tyrant Nabal.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Compare with Hester Pulten's "Upon the Death of My Dear and Lovely Daughter, Jane Pulten" (p. 1228).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Parts or organs of the body; persons (especially those belonging to the metaphorical body of Christ).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Births in which neither the feet nor head of the fetus lies in the direction of the birth canal. "Abortions" here refers to the expulsion or removal from the womb of developing embryos or fetuses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Children or descendants (poetic). See *Paradise Lost* 10.385.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The marginal reference here, "*Eph.5.25 etc.*," enjoins husbands to "love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it," a line that Hutchinson, like other defenders of women, chooses as a counterbalance to Ephesians 22, enjoining wives to "submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See *Paradise Lost* 10.188 and Donne's "Death Be Not Proud."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: People, objects, and events from the Hebrew Bible that Christians read as prefiguring new Christian dispensations.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The peak in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula where Moses received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:10–20:18).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: One of the substances out of which all material bodies are made (earth, water, air, and fire); the atmosphere.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The simile compares the disgraced favorite, hated by both high and low, to man, who after his fall is tormented both by "every little fly" and by the worst beasts of his fears.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See *Paradise Lost* 10.771–73.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Writing in the 1730s, Julius Hutchinson notes that "these verses were writ by Mrs. Hutchinson on the occasion of the Colonel her husband's being then a prisoner in the Tower, 1664."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The "birth" that issues from the "throes" of death is the final judgment and resurrection.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See *Paradise Lost* 12.645.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
 "Wind up all" (sum up or bring to a close) suggests that cantos 1–5 were originally conceived as a complete work. Hutchinson's twenty-canto poem circulated in the manuscript form associated with more politically controversial matters, but its first five cantos were printed anonymously in 1679 as *Order and disorder, or, The world made and undone, being meditations upon the creation and fall, as it is recorded in the beginnings of Genesis*.  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Accidental; without design.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Overtaken by darkness or obscurity.[Return to reference 7](#)

# Notes

- °: *vice king*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crime*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempts to mitigate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complaining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diminishes, underrates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *detestable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *irreversible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unchangeable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forbidden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chafing, harassing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perverse, ungovernable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *internal organs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *transgressing, equivocating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *maxim; divine command*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lazy people*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward, repay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tearful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *atone for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clothing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *symbolized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drinks, medicines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rough or turbulent meetings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *battalions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *powerless to resist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ambush*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *instruments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consequences*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clash*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mob*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moaning; complaints*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misery*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *covenants split apart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *low creature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painful* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *starved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *body parts or organs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrify, stupefy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turn back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reprimanding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conclusions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moderations*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspended, interrupted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escaped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *presumptuous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trust*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fires threaten*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easiness, compliance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reproach*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *happiness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ownerships, property*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corroding salt water*[Return to reference](#) °

# KATHERINE PHILIPS

## 1632–1664

The most famous woman poet of her own and the next generation, Katherine Philips was honored as “the Matchless Orinda,” the classical name she chose for herself in her poetic addresses to a coterie of chiefly female friends, especially Mary Aubrey (M. A.) and Anne Owen (Lucasia). Sometimes reminiscent of Donne’s love lyrics, and sometimes of the ancient Greek Sappho’s erotic lyrics to women, these poems develop an exalted ideal of female friendship as a Platonic union of souls. If souls “no sexes have,” she writes in one poem,

for men t’exclude  
Women from friendship’s vast capacity,  
Is a design injurious and rude,  
Only maintained by partial tyranny.

Two prose treatises, including Jeremy Taylor’s *Discourse of the Nature, Offices, and Measures of Friendship* (1657), were dedicated to Philips, indicating the seriousness with which her theories of friendship were considered in the period.

Born to a well-to-do Presbyterian family and educated at Mrs. Salmon’s Presbyterian School in Hackney, Philips was taken to Wales when her mother remarried. In 1648, at age seventeen, she was married to James Philips, a prominent member of Parliament. They lived together twelve years, chiefly in the small Welsh town of

Cardigan. The death of her son, Hector, a few days after birth prompted one of her most moving poems. A royalist despite her Puritan family connections, Philips forged connections with other displaced royalists. Her poems circulated in manuscript and elicited high praise from Henry Vaughan, among others. They include elegies, epitaphs, poems at parting, and friendship poems to women and men, but also poetry on political themes: a denunciation of the regicide, "Upon the Double Murder of King Charles," and panegyrics on the restored Stuarts.

After the Restoration, James Philips barely escaped execution as a regicide, had his estates confiscated, and lost his seat in Parliament. Katherine, however, became a favorite at court, promoted by her friend Sir Charles Cotterell ("Poliarchus"), who was master of ceremonies. Attempting (unsuccessfully) to redeem an investment, in Ireland, Philips translated Corneille's *Pompey*, which she and her friend the Earl of Orrery produced and printed in Dublin in 1663. The first edition of her poems, apparently pirated, appeared in 1664, the same year she died of smallpox. Her friend Cotterell brought out an authorized edition in 1667 titled *Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda*. The many extant manuscript collections of her poems suggest the popularity and wide circulation of her work both during her lifetime and after.



# A Married State<sup>1</sup>

A married state affords but little ease  
The best of husbands are so hard to please.  
This in wives' careful<sup>o</sup> faces you may spell<sup>o</sup>  
Though they dissemble their misfortunes well.  
5 A virgin state is crowned with much content;<sup>2</sup>  
It's always happy as it's innocent.  
No blustering husbands to create your fears;  
No pangs of childbirth to extort your tears;  
No children's cries for to offend your ears;  
10 Few worldly crosses to distract your prayers:  
Thus are you freed from all the cares that do  
Attend on matrimony and a husband too.  
Therefore Madam, be advised by me  
Turn, turn apostate to love's levity,  
Suppress wild nature if she dare rebel.  
15 There's no such thing as leading apes in hell.<sup>3</sup>

ca. 1646**Endnotes**

MS; 1988

- Note 1: In a manuscript (Orielson MSS Box 24 at the National Library of Wales) this poem appears with another by Philips, addressed to Anne Barlow (whom she probably met in 1646); this one is probably also for Barlow. Both are signed by her maiden name, C. Fowler, so were evidently written before her marriage in 1648.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Praise of the single life is a common topic in women's poetry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Proverbially, the fate of spinsters.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *full of cares* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *read* [Return to reference](#) °

# **An Answer to Another Persuading a Lady to Marriage**

## **1**

Forbear, bold youth, all's Heaven here,  
And what you do aver,  
To others, courtship may appear,  
'Tis sacrilege to her.

## **2**

5 She is a public deity,  
And were't not very odd  
She should depose her self to be  
A pretty household god?

## **3**

10 First make the sun in private shine,  
And bid the world adieu,  
That so he may his beams confine  
In complement to you.

## **4**

15 But if of that you do despair,  
Think how you did amiss,  
To strive to fix her beams which are  
More bright and large than this.

# Upon the Double Murder of King Charles

## *In Answer to a Libelous Rhyme made by V. P.*<sup>1</sup>

I think not on the state, nor am concerned  
Which way soever that great helm<sup>2</sup> is turned,  
But as that son whose father's danger nigh  
Did force his native dumbness, and untie  
His fettered organs: so here is a cause  
5 That will excuse the breach of nature's laws.<sup>3</sup>  
Silence were now a sin: nay passion now  
Wise men themselves for merit would allow.<sup>4</sup>  
What noble eye could see (and careless pass)  
The dying lion kicked by every ass?  
10 Hath Charles so broke God's laws, he must not have  
A quiet crown, nor yet a quiet grave?  
Tombs have been sanctuaries; thieves lie here  
Secure from all their penalty and fear.  
Great Charles his double misery was this,  
15 Unfaithful friends, ignoble enemies;  
Had any heathen been this prince's foe,  
He would have wept to see him injured so.  
His title was his crime, they'd reason good  
To quarrel at the right they had withstood.  
20 He broke God's laws, and therefore he must die,  
And what shall then become of thee and I?  
Slander must follow treason; but yet stay,  
Take not our reason with our king away.  
Though you have seized upon all our defense,  
25 Yet do not sequester<sup>o</sup> our common sense.  
But I admire<sup>o</sup> not at this new supply:  
No bounds will hold those who at scepters fly.

30

Christ will be King, but I ne'er understood,  
His subjects built his kingdom up with blood  
(Except their own) or that he would dispense  
With his commands, though for his own defense.  
Oh! to what height of horror are they come  
Who dare pull down a crown, tear up a tomb!<sup>5</sup>

## 1649? Endnotes

1664

- Note 1:  
The itinerant Welsh preacher Vavasour Powell was a Fifth Monarchist and an ardent republican who justified the regicide on the ground that Christ's second coming was imminent, when he would rule with his saints, putting down all earthly kings. His poem and Philips's answer were likely written shortly after Charles I's execution (January 30, 1649). Powell's poem has been published by Elizabeth H. Hageman in *English Manuscript Studies*. Compare this poem with Marvell's "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland."  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Steering wheel for the "ship" of state. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Breaking the supposed law of nature that excludes women from speaking about public affairs. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wise men, especially Stoic philosophers, normally counsel the firm control or elimination of passions. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Their slanders tear up Charles's tomb after his death. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *confiscate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wonder* [Return to reference °](#)

# Friendship's Mystery, To My Dearest *Lucasia*<sup>1</sup>

## 1

Come, my Lucasia, since we see  
That miracles men's faith do move,  
By wonder and by prodigy  
To the dull angry world let's prove  
There's a religion in our love.

5

## 2

For though we were designed t' agree,  
That fate no liberty destroys,  
But our election is as free  
As angels, who with greedy choice  
Are yet determined to their joys.<sup>2</sup>

10

## 3

Our hearts are doubled by the loss,  
Here mixture is addition grown;  
We both diffuse,<sup>o</sup> and both engross:<sup>o</sup>  
And we whose minds are so much one,  
Never, yet ever are alone.

15

## 4

We court our own captivity  
Than thrones more great and innocent:  
'Twere banishment to be set free,  
Since we wear fetters whose intent  
Not bondage is, but ornament.

20

## 5

25

Divided joys are tedious found,  
And griefs united easier grow:  
We are selves but by rebound,  
And all our titles shuffled so,  
Both princes, and both subjects too.<sup>3</sup>

## 6

30

Our hearts are mutual victims laid,  
While they (such power in friendship lies)  
Are altars, priests, and off'rings made:  
And each heart which thus kindly<sup>o</sup> dies,  
Grows deathless by the sacrifice.

1655, 1667

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
This poem was first printed, with a musical setting by the royalist musician and composer Henry Lawes, as "Mutual Affection betweene *Orinda* and *Lucasia*" in Lawes's *The Second Book of Ayres* (1655); our text is from *Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda* (1667). *Lucasia* is Philips's name for her friend Anne Owen.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Angels, though created with free will, were thought to have become fixed in goodness when they turned toward God in the first moments after their creation.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare Donne, "The Sun Rising," line 21: "She is all states, and all princes, I" (p. 888).  
[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *spread out* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *collect* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *benevolently, naturally* [Return to reference](#) °



## To Mrs. M. A.<sup>1</sup> at Parting

I have examined and do find,  
Of all that favor me  
There's none I grieve to leave behind  
But only only thee.  
5 To part with thee I needs must die,  
Could parting separate thee and I.

But neither chance nor compliment  
Did element<sup>o</sup> our love:  
'Twas sacred sympathy was lent  
Us from the choir above.  
10 (That friendship fortune did create,  
Still fears a wound from time or fate.)

Our changed and mingled souls are grown  
To such acquaintance now,  
That if each would resume their own,  
15 Alas! we know not how.  
We have each other so engrossed<sup>o</sup>  
That each is in the union lost.<sup>2</sup>

And thus we can no absence know,  
Nor shall we be confined;  
20 Our active souls will daily go  
To learn each other's mind.  
Nay, should we never meet to sense,<sup>o</sup>  
Our souls would hold intelligence.<sup>o</sup>

Inspired with a flame divine,  
25 I scorn to court a stay;<sup>3</sup>  
For from that noble soul of thine

I ne'er can be away.  
But I shall weep when thou dost grieve;  
Nor can I die whilst thou dost live.

30

By my own temper I shall guess  
At thy felicity,  
And only like my happiness  
Because it pleaseth thee.  
Our hearts at any time will tell  
If thou or I be sick or well.

35

All honor, sure, I must pretend,<sup>o</sup>  
All that is good or great:  
She that would be Rosania's<sup>4</sup> friend  
Must be at least complete.  
If I have any bravery,<sup>o</sup>  
'Tis cause I have so much of thee.

40

Thy leiger<sup>o</sup> soul in me shall lie,  
And all thy thoughts reveal;  
Then back again with mine shall fly,  
And thence to me shall steal.  
Thus still to one another tend:  
Such is the sacred name of friend.

45

Thus our twin souls in one shall grow,  
And teach the world new love,  
Redeem the age and sex, and show  
A flame fate dares not move:  
And courting death to be our friend,  
Our lives, together too, shall end.

50

A dew shall dwell upon our tomb  
Of such a quality  
That fighting armies, thither come,  
Shall reconcilèd be.

55

We'll ask no epitaph, but say:  
ORINDA and ROSANIA.

60

1664

## Endnotes

- Note 1: M. A. was Mary Aubrey, the first and, until she married, the dearest member of Philips's "Society of Friendship." Orinda's valedictory poem to her—which Keats admired enough to copy it out in full in an early letter—recalls some of Donne's lyrics, especially "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (p. 897).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: These lines play upon the Neoplatonic idea of friendship and spiritual love—two souls become one.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Postponement (of their parting).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The poetic name Philips gave to Mary Aubrey.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *compose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *absorbed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *physically*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *would still commune*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aspire to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ambassadorial*[Return to reference °](#)

## Epitaph: On Her Son H. P. at St. Syth's Church, Where Her Body Was Interred<sup>1</sup>

What on earth deserves our trust?  
Youth and beauty both are dust.  
Long we gathering are with pain,  
What one moment calls again.  
5 Seven years childless, marriage past,  
A son, a son is born at last;  
So exactly limned<sup>o</sup> and fair,  
Full of good spirits, mien,<sup>o</sup> and air,  
As a long life promised;  
10 Yet, in less than six weeks dead.  
Too promising, too great a mind  
In so small room to be confined:  
Therefore, as fit in heav'n to dwell,  
He quickly broke the prison shell.  
15 So the subtle alchemist,  
Can't with Hermes' seal resist  
The powerful spirit's subtler flight,  
But t'will bid him long good night.<sup>2</sup>  
And so the sun, if it arise  
20 Half so glorious as his eyes,  
Like this infant, takes a shroud,  
Buried in a morning cloud.

1667

### Endnotes

- Note 1: Philips wrote two poems on the death of her only son, Hector Philips; he was born April 23 and died May 2, 1655, in Philips's seventh year of marriage. St. Syth's Church, London,

where Philips was also buried, burned down in the Great Fire of 1666.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A reference to alchemy's attempt to find the secret of eternal life. Hermes' seal, tight enough to exclude air, is named for Hermes Trismegistus, the Greek name of the Egyptian god Thoth, regarded as the founder of alchemy.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *portrayed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bearing, expression*[Return to reference °](#)

# **ANDREW MARVELL**

## **1621–1678**

Andrew Marvell's finest poems are second to none in this or any other period. He wrote less than did Donne, Jonson, and Herbert, but his range was in some ways greater, including in poetry and prose both the private worlds of love and religious devotion and the public worlds of politics and satire. His overriding concern with art, his limpid style, and the cool balance and reserve of some poems align him with Jonson. Yet his paradoxes and complexities of tone, his use of dramatic monologue, and his witty, dialectical arguments associate him with Donne. Above all, he is a supremely original poet, so complex and elusive that it is often hard to know what he really thought about the subjects he treated. Many of his poems were published posthumously in 1681, some thirty years after they were written, by a woman who claimed to be his widow but was probably his housekeeper. So their date and order of composition are often in doubt, as is his authorship of some anonymous works.

The son of a Church of England clergyman, Marvell grew up in Yorkshire and attended Trinity College, Cambridge (perhaps deriving the persistent strain of Neoplatonism in his poetry from the academics known as the Cambridge Platonists). Falling under the influence of Jesuits, he ran off to London and converted to Roman Catholicism until his father put an end to both ventures. He returned to Cambridge, took his degree in 1639, and stayed on as a scholar until his father's death in 1641. During the years of the civil wars

(1642–48), he traveled in France, Italy, Holland, and Spain. While his earliest poems associate him with royalists, those after 1649 celebrate the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell; although he is sometimes ambivalent, Marvell recognizes divine providence in the political changes. From 1650 to 1652 he lived at Nunappleton, in rural Yorkshire, as tutor to the twelve-year-old daughter of Thomas Fairfax, who had given over his command of the parliamentary army to Cromwell because he was unwilling to invade Scotland. In these years of retirement, Marvell probably wrote most of his love lyrics and pastorals as well as *Upon Appleton House*. Later he was tutor to Cromwell's ward, William Dutton, and traveled with him on the Continent; in 1657 he joined the blind Milton, at Milton's request, in the post of Latin secretary to Cromwell's Council of State. After the restoration of Charles II, Marvell maintained his own independent vision and his abiding belief in religious toleration, a mixed state, and constitutional government. He helped his friend Milton avoid execution for his revolutionary polemics, as well as helping to negotiate Milton's release from a brief imprisonment. Elected a member of Parliament in 1659 from his hometown, Hull, in Yorkshire, he held that post until 1678; on two occasions he went on diplomatic missions to Holland and Russia. His (necessarily anonymous) antiroyalist polemics of these years include several verse satires on Charles II and his ministers, as well as his best-known prose work, *The Rehearsal Transposed* (1672–73), which defends Puritan dissenters and denounces censorship with verve and wit.

Many of Marvell's poems explore the human condition in terms of fundamental dichotomies that resist resolution. In religious or philosophical poems like "The Coronet" or "The Dialogue Between the Soul and Body," the conflict is between nature and grace, body and soul, poetic creation and sacrifice. Love poems such as "The Definition of Love" or "To His Coy Mistress" contrast flesh and spirit, physical sex and platonic love, idealized courtship and the ravages of time. In pastorals like the Mower poems and "The Garden," the opposition is between nature and art, or the fallen and the Edenic

state, or violent passion and contentment. Marvell's most subtle and complex political poem, "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland," sets stable traditional order and ancient right against providential revolutionary change, and the goods and costs of retirement and peace against those of action and war. *Upon Appleton House* also opposes the attractions of retirement to the duties of action and reformation.

Marvell experimented with style and genre to striking effect. Many of his dramatic monologues center on naive personas like the Mower or the Nymph, whose opinions may or may not voice those of the author. In "To His Coy Mistress," perhaps the best known of the century's carpe diem poems, an urbane narrator speaks in balanced and artful couplets. But the poem's rapid shifts from the world of fantasy to the charnel house of reality raise questions as to whether this is a clever seduction poem or an articulation of existential angst, and whether Marvell intends to endorse or to critique this speaker's view of passion and sex. *Upon Appleton House* transforms the mythic features of Jonson's country house poem "To Penshurst" by assimilating history and the conflicts of contemporary society. The poem incorporates into providential history the topographical features of the Fairfax estate, the Fairfax family myth of origin, the progress of the poet-tutor around the estate, and the activities and projected future of the daughter of the house. The poem's rich symbolism of biblical events—Eden, the first temptation, the Fall, the Israelites' journey in the wilderness—resonates with the experiences of the Fairfax family, the speaker, the history of the English Reformation, and the wanton destruction caused by the recent civil wars.



## **FROM POEMS<sup>1</sup>**

### **The Coronet<sup>2</sup>**

When for the thorns with which I long, too long,  
With many a piercing wound,  
My Savior's head have crowned,  
I seek with garlands to redress that wrong,  
Through every garden, every mead,  
5 I gather flowers (my fruits are only flowers),  
Dismantling all the fragrant towers<sup>o</sup>  
That once adorned my shepherdess's head:  
And now, when I have summed up all my store,  
Thinking (so I myself deceive)  
10 So rich a chaplet<sup>o</sup> thence to weave  
As never yet the King of Glory wore,  
Alas! I find the serpent old,<sup>3</sup>  
That, twining<sup>o</sup> in his speckled breast,  
About the flowers disguised does fold  
15 With wreaths of fame and interest.<sup>4</sup>  
Ah, foolish man, that wouldst debase with them,  
And mortal glory, heaven's diadem!  
But thou who only couldst the serpent tame,  
Either his slippery knots at once untie,  
20 And disentangle all his winding snare,  
Or shatter too with him my curious frame,<sup>o</sup>  
And let these wither, so that he may die,  
Though set with skill and chosen out with care;  
That they, while thou on both their spoils dost  
25 tread,<sup>5</sup>  
May crown thy feet, that could not crown thy head.

- Note 1: Marvell's lyrics were published posthumously in 1681. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A floral wreath, also a garland of poems of praise. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An allusion to the serpent that tempted Eve (Genesis 3), traditionally understood to be an instrument for Satan. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Self-glorification, self-advancement. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See the curse on the serpent (Genesis 3:15), that the seed of Eve will bruise his head. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *high headdress* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wreath* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entwining* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *elaborate construction* [Return to reference °](#)

## Bermudas<sup>1</sup>

Where the remote Bermudas ride  
In th' ocean's bosom unespied,  
From a small boat that rowed along,  
The listening winds received this song:

5        "What should we do but sing His praise  
That led us through the wat'ry maze  
Unto an isle so long unknown,  
And yet far kinder than our own?  
Where He the huge sea monsters wracks,<sup>2</sup>  
That lift the deep upon their backs;  
10      He lands us on a grassy stage,  
Safe from the storms, and prelate's rage.<sup>3</sup>  
He gave us this eternal spring  
Which here enamels everything,  
And sends the fowls to us in care,  
15      On daily visits through the air;  
He hangs in shades the orange bright,  
Like golden lamps in a green night,  
And does in the pomegranates close  
Jewels more rich than Ormus<sup>4</sup> shows;  
20      He makes the figs our mouths to meet,  
And throws the melons at our feet;  
But apples<sup>o</sup> plants of such a price,  
No tree could ever bear them twice;  
With cedars, chosen by his hand  
25      From Lebanon, he stores the land;  
And makes the hollow seas that roar  
Proclaim the ambergris<sup>5</sup> on shore;  
He cast (of which we rather<sup>o</sup> boast)

30 The gospel's pearl upon our coast,  
And in these rocks for us did frame  
A temple, where to sound his name.  
O let our voice his praise exalt  
Till it arrive at heaven's vault,  
35 Which, thence (perhaps) rebounding, may  
Echo beyond the Mexique Bay."◊

Thus sung they in the English boat  
An holy and a cheerful note;  
And all the way, to guide their chime,  
40 With falling oars they kept the time.

ca. 1650–52

## Endnotes

1681

- Note 1: Otherwise known as the Summer Isles, the Bermudas were described in travel books like John Smith's *The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) as an Edenic paradise. The poem was probably written after 1653, when Marvell took up residence in the house of John Oxenbridge, who had twice visited the Bermudas. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Probably an allusion to the event described in Edmund Waller's mock epic, a battle between the Bermudans and two stranded whales. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Puritan settlers in Bermuda have escaped both the dangers of the sea voyage and religious persecution at home. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Hormuz, a pearl- and jewel-trading center in the Persian Gulf. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A substance found in sperm whales that was used in the manufacture of expensive perfume. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *pineapples*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *more properly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Gulf of Mexico*[Return to reference](#) °

# A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body<sup>1</sup>

SOUL O, who shall from this dungeon raise  
A soul enslaved so many ways?<sup>2</sup>  
With bolts of bones, that fettered stands  
In feet, and manacled in hands.  
Here blinded with an eye, and there  
5 Deaf with the drumming of an ear;  
A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains  
Of nerves, and arteries, and veins;  
Tortured, besides each other part,  
In a vain head and double heart.  
10

BODY O, who shall me deliver whole  
From bonds of this tyrannic soul?  
Which, stretched upright, impales me so  
That mine own precipice<sup>3</sup> I go;  
And warms and moves this needless<sup>o</sup> frame  
15 (A fever could but do the same),  
And, wanting where<sup>o</sup> its spite to try,  
Has made me live to let me die.  
A body that could never rest  
Since this ill spirit it possessed.  
20

SOUL What magic could me thus confine  
Within another's grief to pine?  
Where, whatsoever it complain,<sup>o</sup>  
I feel, that cannot feel,<sup>4</sup> the pain;  
And all my care itself employs,  
25 That to preserve which me destroys;  
Constrained not only to endure  
Diseases, but, what's worse, the cure;  
And, ready oft the port to gain,

30 Am shipwrecked into health again.

BODY But physic<sup>o</sup> yet could never reach  
 The maladies thou me dost teach:  
 Whom first the cramp of hope does tear,  
 And then the palsy shakes of fear;  
 The pestilence of love does heat,  
 35 Or hatred's hidden ulcer eat;  
 Joy's cheerful madness does perplex,  
 Or sorrow's other madness vex;  
 Which knowledge forces me to know,  
 And memory will not forego.  
 40 What but a soul could have the wit  
 To build me up for sin so fit?  
 So architects do square and hew  
 Green trees that in the forest grew.

ca. 1650–52 **Endnotes**

1681

- Note 1: The poem derives from the medieval *debat* (debate) on this theme but alters the usual ending, which gives a clear victory to the soul. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The soul echoes Romans 7:24: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Having a soul enables humans to walk erect and so face the danger of falling. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The soul can sympathize ("feel") though it has no power of physical sensation. [Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *without needs* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *lacking an object* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *suffer, complain of* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)



# The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn<sup>1</sup>

The wanton troopers<sup>2</sup> riding by  
Have shot my fawn, and it will die.  
Ungentle men! They cannot thrive  
To kill thee. Thou ne'er didst alive  
5 Them any harm; alas, nor could  
Thy death yet do them any good.  
I'm sure I never wished them ill,  
Nor do I for all this, nor will:  
But if my simple prayers may yet  
Prevail with heaven to forget  
10 Thy murder, I will join my tears  
Rather than fail. But, O my fears!  
It cannot die so. Heaven's king  
Keeps register of everything,  
And nothing may we use in vain.  
15 Even beasts must be with justice slain,  
Else men are made their deodands.<sup>3</sup>  
Though they should wash their guilty hands  
In this warm lifeblood, which doth part  
From thine, and wound me to the heart,  
20 Yet could they not be clean; their stain  
Is dyed in such a purple grain.  
There is not such another in  
The world to offer for their sin.  
Unconstant Sylvio, when yet  
25 I had not found him counterfeit,<sup>o</sup>  
One morning (I remember well),  
Tied in this silver chain and bell,  
Gave it to me; nay, and I know

What he said then, I'm sure I do.  
30 Said he, Look how your huntsman here  
Hath taught a fawn to hunt his dear.  
But Sylvio soon had me beguiled;  
This waxèd tame, while he grew wild,  
And quite regardless of my smart,  
35 Left me his fawn, but took his heart.<sup>4</sup>  
Thenceforth I set myself to play  
My solitary time away  
With this; and very well content  
Could so mine idle life have spent.  
40 For it was full of sport, and light  
Of foot and heart, and did invite  
Me to its game. It seemed to bless  
Itself in me; how could I less  
Than love it? O I cannot be  
45 Unkind t' a beast that loveth me.  
Had it lived long, I do not know  
Whether it too might have done so  
As Sylvio did; his gifts might be  
Perhaps as false or more than he.  
50 But I am sure, for aught that I  
Could in so short a time espy,  
Thy love was far more better than  
The love of false and cruel men.  
With sweetest milk and sugar first  
55 I it at mine own fingers nursed.  
And as it grew, so every day  
It waxed more sweet and white than they.  
It had so sweet a breath! and oft  
I blushed to see its foot more soft  
60 And white—shall I say than my hand?—  
Nay, any lady's of the land.  
It is a wondrous thing how fleet  
'Twas on those little silver feet,

65 With what a pretty skipping grace  
It oft would challenge me the race;  
And when it had left me far away,  
'Twould stay, and run again, and stay.  
For it was nimbler much than hinds,<sup>5</sup>  
And trod, as on the four winds.

70 I have a garden of my own  
But so with roses overgrown  
And lilies that you would it guess  
To be a little wilderness.  
And all the springtime of the year  
75 It only loved to be there.  
Among the beds of lilies, I  
Have sought it oft where it should lie,  
Yet could not, till itself would rise,  
Find it, although before mine eyes.

80 For in the flaxen lilies' shade  
It like a bank of lilies laid.  
Upon the roses it would feed,  
Until its lips ev'n seemed to bleed;  
And then to me 'twould boldly trip  
85 And print those roses on my lip.  
But all its chief delight was still  
On roses thus itself to fill,  
And its pure virgin limbs to fold  
In whitest sheets of lilies cold.

90 Had it lived long, it would have been  
Lilies without, roses within.  
O help! O help! I see it faint,  
And die as calmly as a saint.  
See how it weeps.<sup>6</sup> The tears do come  
95 Sad, slowly dropping like a gum.  
So weeps the wounded balsam, so  
The holy frankincense doth flow.<sup>7</sup>  
The brotherless Heliades

100 Melt in such amber tears as these.<sup>8</sup>  
       I in a golden vial will  
       Keep these two crystal tears, and fill  
       It till it do o'erflow with mine,  
       Then place it in Diana's shrine.<sup>9</sup>  
 105 Now my sweet fawn is vanished to  
       Whither the swans and turtles<sup>o</sup> go,  
       In fair Elysium<sup>1</sup> to endure  
       With milk-white lambs and ermines pure.  
       O do not run too fast, for I  
       Will but bespeak<sup>o</sup> thy grave, and die.  
 110 First my unhappy statue shall  
       Be cut in marble, and withal,  
       Let it be weeping too; but there  
       Th' engraver sure his art may spare,  
       For I so truly thee bemoan  
 115 That I shall weep, though I be stone:<sup>2</sup>  
       Until my tears, still dropping, wear  
       My breast, themselves engraving there.  
       There at my feet shalt thou be laid,  
       Of purest alabaster made;  
 120 For I would have thine image be  
       White as I can, though not as thee.

ca. 1650–52 **Endnotes**

1681

- Note 1: The lament for the death of a pet is an ancient topic dating back to Catullus and Ovid; the closest analogue may be Virgil's story of Sylvia's deer killed wantonly by the Trojans (*Aeneid* 7.475ff). John Skelton has a mock-heroic poem on "Philip Sparrow." There are also echoes of the Song of Songs, which have prompted critical debate as to whether Marvell uses them with serious allegorical import or the nymph uses them quite inappropriately. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Soldiers of the invading Scots army were called “troopers” (ca. 1640), as were, sometimes, soldiers of Cromwell’s New Model Army.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In English law, animals or objects forfeited to the Crown (literally, to God) because they were the immediate cause of a human being’s death. The nymph applies the term to persons who cause the death of animals.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A pun: heart/hart (a deer); line 32 also puns on dear/deer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, full-grown deer.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deer were supposed to weep as they died.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Both balsam and frankincense are fragrant resins obtained a drop at a time from trees with holes bored in them.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The three daughters of the sun (Helios), grieving the death of their rash brother Phaëthon, were transformed to black poplar trees dropping “tears” of amber.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Diana was the goddess of chastity and woodland creatures; nymphs were her attendants.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Elysian fields, a pagan version of heaven.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Niobe, lamenting the death of her many children, killed by the gods because of her boasting about them, was turned into a stone that wept.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *false, deceitful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *turtledoves*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *give orders for*[Return to reference °](#)

## To His Coy Mistress

Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down, and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day.  
5 Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain.<sup>1</sup> I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood,  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
10 Till the conversion of the Jews.<sup>2</sup>  
My vegetable love should grow  
Vaster than empires, and more slow;  
An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;  
15 Two hundred to adore each breast,  
But thirty thousand to the rest:  
An age at least to every part,  
And the last age should show your heart.  
For, lady, you deserve this state,<sup>o</sup>  
Nor would I love at lower rate.  
20 But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found,  
25 Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song; then worms shall try  
That long-preserved virginity,  
And your quaint<sup>3</sup> honor turn to dust,  
And into ashes all my lust:  
30

The grave's a fine and private place,  
 But none, I think, do there embrace.  
 Now therefore, while the youthful hue  
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew,<sup>4</sup>  
 And while thy willing soul transpires  
 35 At every pore with instant fires,<sup>5</sup>  
 Now let us sport us while we may,  
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,  
 Rather at once our time devour  
 40 Than languish in his slow-chapped<sup>6</sup> power.  
 Let us roll all our strength and all  
 Our sweetness up into one ball,  
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
 Thorough<sup>o</sup> the iron gates of life:<sup>7</sup>  
 45 Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.<sup>8</sup>

ca. 1650–52

## Endnotes

1681

- Note 1: The exotic river Ganges in India is on one side of the world, the Humber flows past Marvell's city, Hull, on the opposite side. Complaints are poems of plaintive, unavailing love.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Popular belief had it that the Jews were to be converted just before the Last Judgment. The exaggerated offers in this stanza play off against conventional hyperbolic declarations of love in Petrarchan poetry.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Quaint" puns on "out of date" and *queynte*, a term for the female genitals.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The text reads "glew," which could be correct, but "dew" is a common emendation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Urgent, sudden enthusiasm. "Transpires": breathes forth.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Slowly devouring jaws.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: One manuscript reads “grates,” a somewhat different figure for the sexual act proposed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The sun stood still for Joshua (Joshua 10:12) in his war against Gibeon; see the very different resolution in Donne’s “The Sun Rising” (p. 888).[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *dignity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *through*[Return to reference °](#)



# The Definition of Love

My Love is of a birth as rare  
As 'tis, for object, strange and high;  
It was begotten by Despair  
Upon Impossibility.

5 Magnanimous Despair alone  
Could show me so divine a thing,  
Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown  
But vainly flapped its tinsel wing.

10 And yet I quickly might arrive  
Where my extended soul is fixed;<sup>1</sup>  
But Fate does iron wedges drive,  
And always crowds itself betwixt.

15 For Fate with jealous eye does see  
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;<sup>o</sup>  
Their union would her ruin be,  
And her tyrannic power depose.<sup>2</sup>

20 And therefore her decrees of steel  
Us as the distant poles have placed  
(Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel),<sup>3</sup>  
Not by themselves to be embraced,

Unless the giddy heaven fall,  
And earth some new convulsion tear,  
And, us to join, the world should all  
Be cramped into a planisphere.<sup>4</sup>

25 As lines, so loves oblique may well

Themselves in every angle greet;<sup>5</sup>  
But ours, so truly parallel,  
Though infinite, can never meet.

30 Therefore the Love which us doth bind,  
But Fate so enviously debars,  
Is the conjunction of the mind,  
And opposition of the stars.<sup>6</sup>

ca. 1650–52 **Endnotes**

1681

- Note 1: The soul has extended itself from the speaker's body and fixed itself to his lover.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Two perfections, united, would not be subject to change and thereby to Fate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rotates as on its axis.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A two-dimensional map of the world; Marvell images a round globe collapsed into a flat pancake shape, top to bottom, which would bring the two poles together.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Oblique lines can touch in angles, as might "oblique" lovers that (in one meaning of the term) "deviate from right conduct or thought."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Conjunction" is the coming together of two heavenly bodies in the same sign of the zodiac; "opposition" places them at diametrical opposites.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *unite*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers<sup>1</sup>

See with what simplicity  
This nymph begins her golden days!  
In the green grass she loves to lie,  
And there with her fair aspect tames  
The wilder flowers and gives them names,  
5 But only with the roses plays,  
And them does tell  
What color best becomes them and what smell.

Who can foretell for what high cause  
This darling of the gods was born?  
10 Yet this is she whose chaster laws  
The wanton Love shall one day fear,  
And under her command severe  
See his bow broke and ensigns<sup>o</sup> torn.  
Happy who can  
15 Appease this virtuous enemy of man!

O then let me in time compound<sup>o</sup>  
And parley with those conquering eyes  
Ere they have tried their force to wound,  
Ere with their glancing wheels they drive  
20 In triumph over hearts that strive  
And them that yield but more despise:  
Let me be laid  
Where I may see thy glories from some shade.

Meantime, whilst every verdant thing  
25 Itself does at thy beauty charm,  
Reform the errors of the spring;

30        Make that the tulips may have share  
Of sweetness, seeing they are fair;  
And roses of their thorns disarm:  
      But most procure  
That violets may a longer age endure.

35        But O, young beauty of the woods,  
Whom Nature courts with fruit and flowers,  
Gather the flowers but spare the buds,  
Lest Flora,<sup>2</sup> angry at thy crime  
To kill her infants in their prime,  
Do quickly make th' example yours;  
      And ere we see,  
40        Nip in the blossom all our hopes and thee.

ca. 1650–52

## Endnotes

1681

- Note 1: The little girl, T. C., has not been identified with any certainty. "Prospect": landscape. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Roman goddess of flowers. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *flags, pennants* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *come to terms* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Mower Against Gardens<sup>1</sup>

Luxurious<sup>o</sup> man, to bring his vice in use,<sup>2</sup>  
Did after him the world seduce,  
And from the fields the flowers and plants allure,  
Where Nature was most plain and pure.  
He first enclosed within the garden's square  
5 A dead and standing pool of air,  
And a more luscious earth for them did knead,  
Which stupefied them while it fed.  
The pink grew then as double as his mind;<sup>3</sup>  
The nutriment did change the kind.  
10 With strange perfumes he did the roses taint;  
And flowers themselves were taught to paint.  
The tulip white did for complexion seek,  
And learned to interline its cheek;  
Its onion root they then so high did hold,  
15 That one was for a meadow sold;<sup>4</sup>  
Another world was searched through oceans new,  
To find the marvel of Peru;<sup>5</sup>  
And yet these rarities might be allowed  
To man, that sovereign thing and proud,  
20 Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,<sup>6</sup>  
Forbidden mixtures there to see.  
No plant now knew the stock from which it came;  
He grafts upon the wild the tame,  
That the uncertain and adult'rate fruit  
25 Might put the palate in dispute.  
His green seraglio<sup>7</sup> has its eunuchs too,  
Lest any tyrant him outdo;  
And in the cherry he does Nature vex,  
To procreate without a sex.<sup>8</sup>

30 'Tis all enforced, the fountain and the grot,<sup>o</sup>  
 While the sweet fields do lie forgot,  
 Where willing Nature does to all dispense  
 A wild and fragrant innocence;  
 And fauns and fairies do the meadows till  
 35 More by their presence than their skill.  
 Their statues polished by some ancient hand  
 May to adorn the gardens stand;  
 But, howsoe'er the figures do excel,  
 40 The gods themselves with us do dwell.

ca. 1650–52

## Endnotes

1681

- Note 1: The four “Mower” poems are linked by their treatment of a distinctly unusual pastoral figure, a mower rather than a shepherd or goatherd, who provides a singular perspective on those familiar pastoral topics: nature versus art and nature’s sympathy for man (the pathetic fallacy). As mower wielding a scythe, he evokes other figures (Time, Death).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Into common practice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The double pink, or carnation, is a product of sophisticated (“double”) minds.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The lucrative trade in Dutch tulip bulbs during the 17th century led to speculation and a crash in 1637.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *Mirabilis jalapa*, the four-o’clock, was an exotic, multicolored flower found originally in tropical America.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An adage for interfering between husband and wife, in reference, apparently, to grafting.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Enclosure, a harem in a sultan’s palace.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cherries are commonly propagated by grafting.[Return to reference 8](#)

# Notes

- °: *voluptuous*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grotto*[Return to reference °](#)

## Damon the Mower

Hark how the mower Damon sung,  
With love of Juliana stung!<sup>1</sup>  
While everything did seem to paint  
The scene more fit for his complaint.<sup>2</sup>  
5 Like her fair eyes the day was fair,  
But scorching like his amorous care;  
Sharp, like his scythe, his sorrow was,  
And withered, like his hopes, the grass.

“Oh what unusual heats are here,  
Which thus our sunburned meadows sear!  
10 The grasshopper its pipe gives o’er,  
And hamstringed<sup>o</sup> frogs can dance no more:  
But in the brook the green frog wades,  
And grasshoppers seek out the shades.  
15 Only the snake, that kept within,  
Now glitters in its second skin.

“This heat the sun could never raise,  
Nor Dog Star so inflame the days;<sup>3</sup>  
It from an higher beauty grow’th,  
Which burns the fields and mower both;  
20 Which mads the dog, and makes the sun  
Hotter than his own Phaëton.<sup>4</sup>  
Not Jùly causeth these extremes,  
But Juliana’s scorching beams.

“Tell me where I may pass the fires  
25 Of the hot day or hot desires,  
To what cool cave shall I descend,  
Or to what gelid<sup>o</sup> fountain bend?



Alas! I look for ease in vain,  
When remedies themselves complain:<sup>5</sup>  
30 No moisture but my tears do rest,  
No cold but in her icy breast.

"How long wilt thou, fair shepherdess,  
Esteem me and my presents less?  
To thee the harmless snake I bring,  
35 Disarmèd of its teeth and sting:  
To thee chameleons, changing hue,  
And oak leaves tipped with honeydew;  
Yet thou, ungrateful, hast not sought  
Nor what they are, nor who them brought.  
40

"I am the mower Damon, known  
Through all the meadows I have mown.  
On me the morn her dew distills  
Before her darling daffodils,  
And if at noon my toil me heat,  
45 The sun himself licks off my sweat;  
While, going home, the evening sweet  
In cowslip-water bathes my feet.

"What though the piping shepherd stock  
The plains with an unnumbered flock?  
50 This scythe of mine discovers<sup>o</sup> wide  
More ground than all his sheep do hide.  
With this the golden fleece I shear  
Of all these closes every year,<sup>6</sup>  
And though in wool more poor than they,  
55 Yet I am richer far in hay.

"Nor am I so deformed to sight  
If in my scythe I lookèd right;  
In which I see my picture done  
As in a crescent moon the sun.

60 The deathless fairies take me oft  
To lead them in their dances soft,  
And when I tune myself to sing,  
About me they contract their ring.<sup>7</sup>

65 "How happy might I still have mowed,  
Had not Love here his thistles sowed!  
But now I all the day complain,  
Joining my labor to my pain;  
And with my scythe cut down the grass,  
Yet still my grief is where it was;  
70 But when the iron blunter grows,  
Sighing, I whet my scythe and woes."

While thus he threw his elbow round,  
Depopulating all the ground,  
And with his whistling scythe does cut  
75 Each stroke between the earth and root,  
The edgèd steel, by careless chance,  
Did into his own ankle glance,  
And there among the grass fell down<sup>8</sup>  
80 By his own scythe the mower mown.

"Alas!" said he, "these hurts are slight  
To those that die by Love's despite.  
With shepherd's purse and clown's<sup>o</sup> all-heal<sup>9</sup>  
The blood I stanch and wound I seal.  
Only for him no cure is found  
85 Whom Juliana's eyes do wound.  
'Tis Death alone that this must do;  
For, Death, thou art a mower too."

- Note 1: Damon is a familiar classical name in pastoral; Juliana gets her name from July (lines 23–24).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The plaintive love song of an unrequited lover.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Dog Star (Sirius in the constellation Canis Major) rises with the sun in late summer, producing the heats of “dog days.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Phaëthon, son of Helios, the sun god of Greek mythology; he tried to drive his father’s chariot but could not control the horses and scorched the world.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, fountain and cave themselves complain of unusual heat.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hay is the “wool” of the fields (“closes”).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the “fairy ring,” a discolored circle of grass popularly supposed to result from fairies dancing there.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An echo of the biblical phrase “All flesh is grass” (Isaiah 40:6).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Folk names for popular remedies to heal wounds, found in fields and hedges.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *disabled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *icy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *uncovers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rustic’s*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Mower to the Glowworms

Ye living lamps, by whose dear light  
The nightingale does sit so late,  
And studying all the summer night  
Her matchless songs does meditate,

5 Ye country comets, that portend  
No war nor prince's funeral,  
Shining unto no higher end  
Than to presage the grass's fall;

10 Ye glowworms, whose officious<sup>o</sup> flame  
To wand'ring mowers shows the way,  
That in the night have lost their aim,  
And after foolish fires<sup>o</sup> do stray;

15 Your courteous fires in vain you waste,  
Since Juliana here is come,  
For she my mind hath so displaced  
That I shall never find my home.

ca. 1650–52

## Notes

1681

- <sup>o</sup>: *helpful* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *will-o'-the-wisps* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## The Mower's Song

My mind was once the true survey  
Of all these meadows fresh and gay,  
And in the greenness of the grass  
Did see its hopes<sup>1</sup> as in a glass;<sup>o</sup>  
When Juliana came, and she,  
5 What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and  
me.<sup>2</sup>

But these, while I with sorrow pine,  
Grew more luxuriant still and fine,  
That not one blade of grass you spied  
But had a flower on either side;  
10 When Juliana came, and she,  
What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and  
me.

Unthankful meadows, could you so  
A fellowship so true forego,  
15 And in your gaudy May-games<sup>3</sup> meet,  
While I lay trodden under feet?  
When Juliana came, and she,  
What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and  
me.

But what you in compassion ought  
Shall now by my revenge be wrought,  
20 And flowers, and grass, and I, and all,  
Will in one common ruin fall;  
For Juliana comes, and she,  
What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and  
me.

25       And thus ye meadows, which have been  
          Companions of my thoughts more green,  
          Shall now the heraldry become  
          With which I shall adorn my tomb;  
          For Juliana comes, and she,  
30       What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and  
          me.

ca. 1650–52

## Endnotes

1681

- Note 1: Green is the color of hope.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The alexandrine (twelve-syllable line) used here is the only example of a refrain in Marvell.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Festivals and merrymaking marked the first of May, May Day.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *mirror*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Garden

How vainly men themselves amaze<sup>o</sup>  
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,<sup>1</sup>  
And their uncessant labors see  
Crowned from some single herb or tree,  
Whose short and narrow-vergèd<sup>o</sup> shade  
5 Does prudently their toils upbraid;<sup>o</sup>  
While all flowers and all trees do close<sup>o</sup>  
To weave the garlands of repose!

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,  
And Innocence, thy sister dear?  
10 Mistaken long, I sought you then  
In busy companies of men.  
Your sacred plants, if here below,<sup>o</sup>  
Only among the plants will grow;  
Society is all but rude,  
15 To<sup>o</sup> this delicious solitude.

No white nor red<sup>2</sup> was ever seen  
So amorous as this lovely green.  
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,  
Cut in these trees their mistress' name:  
20 Little, alas, they know or heed  
How far these beauties hers exceed!  
Fair trees, wheresoe'er your barks I wound,  
No name shall but your own be found.<sup>3</sup>

When we have run our passion's heat,  
25 Love hither makes his best retreat.  
The gods, that mortal beauty chase,  
Still<sup>o</sup> in a tree did end their race:

30 Apollo hunted Daphne so,  
Only that she might laurel grow;  
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,  
Not as a nymph, but for a reed.<sup>4</sup>

What wondrous life is this I lead!  
Ripe apples drop about my head;  
The luscious clusters of the vine  
35 Upon my mouth do crush their wine;  
The nectarine and curious<sup>o</sup> peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on melons<sup>5</sup> as I pass,  
Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

40 Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness;  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight<sup>o</sup> its own resemblance find;<sup>6</sup>  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
45 Far other worlds and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,  
Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,  
50 Casting the body's vest<sup>o</sup> aside,  
My soul into the boughs does glide:  
There like a bird it sits and sings,  
Then whets<sup>o</sup> and combs its silver wings,  
And, till prepared for longer flight,  
55 Waves in its plumes the various light.<sup>7</sup>

Such was that happy garden-state,  
While man there walked without a mate:  
After a place so pure and sweet,  
What other help could yet be meet!<sup>8</sup>



60 But 'twas beyond a mortal's share  
To wander solitary there:  
Two paradises 'twere in one  
To live in paradise alone.

65 How well the skillful gardener drew  
Of flowers and herbs this dial new,<sup>9</sup>  
Where from above the milder sun  
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;  
And as it works, th' industrious bee  
70 Computes its time<sup>1</sup> as well as we!  
How could such sweet and wholesome hours  
Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers?

ca. 1650–52 **Endnotes**

1681

- Note 1: Honors, respectively, for military, civic, and poetic achievement. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Colors traditionally associated with female beauty. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Marvell proposes to carve in the bark of trees not "Sylvia" or "Laura," but "Beech" and "Oak." [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Apollo, the god of poetry, chased Daphne until she turned into a laurel (the emblematic reward of poets); Pan pursued Syrinx until she became a reed, out of which he made panpipes. The gods' motives were, of course, sexual, not horticultural. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Melons," with etymological roots in the Greek word for "apple," may recall the apple over which all humankind stumbled. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As the ocean supposedly contained a counterpart of every creature on land, so the ocean of the mind holds the innate ideas of all things (in Neoplatonic philosophy). [Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The multicolored light of this world, contrasted with the white radiance of eternity.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Genesis 2:18 recounts the Lord's decision to make a "help meet" for Adam, Eve.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The garden itself is laid out as a sundial.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A pun on "thyme."[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *bewilder*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *edged*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reprove*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unite, agree*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *on earth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *compared to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exquisite*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *garment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *preens*[Return to reference °](#)

# An Horatian Ode

## *Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*<sup>1</sup>

The forward<sup>o</sup> youth that would appear  
Must now forsake his Muses dear,  
Nor in the shadows sing  
His numbers languishing:

5 'Tis time to leave the books in dust  
And oil th' unused armor's rust,  
Removing from the wall  
The corselet<sup>o</sup> of the hall.<sup>2</sup>

10 So restless Cromwell could not cease  
In the inglorious arts of peace,  
But through adventurous war  
Urgèd his active star;<sup>3</sup>

15 And, like the three-forked lightning, first  
Breaking the clouds where it was nursed,  
Did through his own side  
His fiery way divide:<sup>4</sup>

20 For 'tis all one to courage high,  
The emulous, or enemy;  
And with such, to enclose  
Is more than to oppose.

Then burning through the air he went,  
And palaces and temples rent;  
And Caesar's head at last  
Did through his laurels blast.<sup>5</sup>

25 'Tis madness to resist or blame  
The force of angry heaven's flame;  
And if we would speak true,  
Much to the man is due,

Who from his private gardens, where  
He lived reservèd and austere  
30 (As if his highest plot  
To plant the bergamot),<sup>6</sup>

Could by industrious valor climb  
To ruin the great work of time,  
And cast the kingdom old  
35 Into another mold;

Though Justice against Fate complain,  
And plead the ancient rights in vain:  
But those do hold or break,  
40 As men are strong or weak.

Nature that hateth emptiness,  
Allows of penetration less,<sup>7</sup>  
And therefore must make room  
Where greater spirits come.

45 What field of all the civil wars  
Where his were not the deepest scars?  
And Hampton shows what part  
He had of wiser art;<sup>8</sup>

Where, twining subtle fears with hope,  
He wove a net of such a scope  
50 That Charles himself might chase  
To Caresbrooke's narrow case,

That thence the royal actor<sup>9</sup> borne,

55           The tragic scaffold might adorn;  
              While round the armèd bands  
              Did clap their bloody hands.

60           *He* nothing common did or mean  
              Upon that memorable scene,  
              But with his keener eye  
              The ax's edge<sup>1</sup> did try;

              Nor called the gods with vulgar spite  
              To vindicate his helpless right;  
              But bowed his comely head  
              Down, as upon a bed.

65           This was that memorable hour,  
              Which first assured the forcèd power;  
              So when they did design  
              The Capitol's first line,

70           A bleeding head where they begun  
              Did fright the architects to run;  
              And yet in that the state  
              Foresaw its happy fate.<sup>2</sup>

75           And now the Irish are ashamed  
              To see themselves in one year tamed;  
              So much one man can do,  
              That does both act and know.

80           They can affirm his praises best,  
              And have, though overcome, confessed  
              How good he is, how just,  
              And fit for highest trust.<sup>3</sup>

              Nor yet grown stiffer with command,  
              But still in the republic's hand—  
              How fit he is to sway,

That can so well obey.<sup>4</sup>

85 He to the Commons' feet presents  
A kingdom for his first year's rents;  
And, what he may, forbears  
His fame to make it theirs;<sup>5</sup>

And has his sword and spoils ungirt,  
90 To lay them at the public's skirt:  
So, when the falcon high  
Falls heavy from the sky,

She, having killed, no more does search,  
But on the next green bough to perch;  
95 Where, when he first does lure,  
The falconer has her sure.

What may not then our isle presume,  
While victory his crest does plume!  
What may not others fear,  
100 If thus he crown each year!

A Caesar he ere long to Gaul,  
To Italy an Hannibal,  
And to all states not free,  
Shall climactèric be.<sup>6</sup>

105 The Pict no shelter now shall find  
Within his parti-colored mind,  
But from this valor sad,<sup>o</sup>  
Shrink underneath the plaid;<sup>7</sup>

Happy if in the tufted brake  
110 The English hunter him mistake,  
Nor lay his hounds in near  
The Caledonian<sup>o</sup> deer.

But thou, the war's and Fortune's son,  
March indefatigably on;  
And for the last effect,  
Still keep thy sword erect;

Besides the force it has to fright  
The spirits of the shady night,<sup>8</sup>  
The same arts that did gain  
A power must it maintain.<sup>9</sup>

1650

1681



**The Execution of Charles I.** A German print illustrates the beheading of Charles I before an enormous crowd, on a scaffold erected in front of the Banqueting House. At the top of the picture small portraits of General Fairfax and Cromwell, leaders of the parliamentary forces, flank a portrait of King Charles, to



whom an angel in the clouds is extending a heavenly crown. In the lower right corner, a woman faints.

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## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
Oliver Cromwell, the general primarily responsible for Parliament's victory in the English Civil War, returned from conquering Ireland in May 1650, about eighteen months after the execution of Charles I. The two events were persistently connected: Cromwell's "success" in Ireland was taken as a sign of God's favor to the new republican regime and to Cromwell as his chosen instrument. Pindaric odes (like Jonson's Cary-Morison ode, p. 1059) are heroic and ecstatic; Horatian odes are poems of cool and balanced judgment, as this one is in its representations of Cromwell, Charles I, and the issues of power and providence.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here as elsewhere there are allusions to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a poem of civil war whose sympathies are with Pompey, Cato, and the Roman Republic against Caesar and the empire. The poem's allusions to Caesar are most often to Charles I, but sometimes to Cromwell.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Normally the stars are thought to control men's fates, but Cromwell presses his own star forward.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The "three-forked lightning" identifies him with Zeus, suggesting the elemental force by which he surpassed all those in his own party ("side") of radical Independents; the imagery of giving birth to himself also suggests going Caesar (born by cesarean section) one better.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Royal crowns were made of laurel because they were supposed to protect from lightning.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A pear-shaped orange (from the Turkish, "prince's pear").[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: Nature abhors a vacuum, but even more, the penetration of one body's space by another body.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Charles was confined at Hampton Court after his defeat, as Parliament attempted to negotiate terms for his restoration. Cromwell was rumored to have connived at his escape to Carisbrooke Castle, on the Isle of Wight, in order to convince Parliament that he could not be trusted and must be executed. Cromwell has shown himself master of the two "arts" of rule defined by Machiavelli: namely, force and craft.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The theater metaphors used for Charles are even more powerful because the "tragic scaffold" was erected outside Whitehall, where so many royal masques were produced. See a depiction of the king's execution on p. 1283.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A play on the Latin *acies*, which means the edge of a sword or axe, a keen glance, and the vanguard of a battle. Compare the newsbook account of the king's execution, p. 1320.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Livy and Pliny record that the workmen digging the foundations for a temple of Jupiter at Rome uncovered a bloody head, which they were persuaded to take as an omen that Rome would be head (*caput*) of a great empire; the temple and the hill took the name Capitoline from that event.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cromwell conducted a particularly brutal campaign in Ireland, and the Irish had no such testimonials for him; the lines are deeply equivocal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The maxim about obedience fitting one to rule is a commonplace. The implications of "yet" and "still," along with the next stanza, suggest a Caesar figure who has not—but might—cross the Rubicon and defy the Republic, as Julius Caesar did.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thus far, Cromwell gives the Republic credit for his victories.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: It was thought that Cromwell's military acumen might subdue France and Italy (which threatened to attack the new republic to restore Charles II), just as did Caesar and Hannibal of old. "Climacteric": a period of crucial, epochal change—here, the expectation that the example of a successful English republic would topple absolute monarchs abroad.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Early Scots were called Picts (from the Latin *pictus*, painted), because the warriors painted themselves many colors; contemporary Scots are "parti-colored" (divided into many factions) like a scotch plaid. Cromwell was about to go to subdue Scotland, which had declared for Charles II.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A sword carried with the blade upright evokes the classical tradition that underworld spirits (here, the slain king and his followers) are frightened off by raised weapons.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The maxim alludes to Machiavelli's advice that a kingdom won by force must for some time be maintained by force.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *eager, ambitious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *upper body armor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *severe, solemn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Scottish*[Return to reference °](#)

# Upon Appleton House<sup>1</sup>

## *To My Lord Fairfax*

### 1

Within this sober frame expect  
Work of no foreign architect,  
That unto caves the quarries drew,  
And forests did to pastures hew;  
Who of his great design in pain  
5 Did for a model vault his brain,<sup>2</sup>  
Whose columns should so high be raised  
To arch the brows that on them gazed.

### 2

Why should of all things man unrul'd  
Such unproportioned dwellings build?  
10 The beasts are by their dens expressed,  
And birds contrive an equal nest;<sup>3</sup>  
The low-roofed tortoises do dwell  
In cases fit of tortoiseshell:  
No creature loves an empty space;  
15 Their bodies measure out their place.

### 3

But he, superfluously spread,  
Demands more room alive than dead;  
And in his hollow palace goes  
Where winds as he themselves may lose.  
20 What need of all this marble crust

T' impark the wanton mote of dust,  
That thinks by breadth the world t' unite  
Though the first builders<sup>4</sup> failed in height?

#### 4

25 But all things are composèd here  
Like nature, orderly and near:  
In which we the dimensions find  
Of what more sober age and mind,  
When larger sizèd men did stoop  
30 To enter at a narrow loop;  
As practicing, in doors so strait,  
To strain themselves through heaven's gate.

#### 5

And surely when the after age  
Shall hither come in pilgrimage,  
These sacred places to adore,  
35 By Vere and Fairfax trod before,  
Men will dispute how their extent  
Within such dwarfish confines went;  
And some will smile at this as well  
As Romulus his bee-like cell.<sup>5</sup>  
40

#### 6

Humility alone designs  
Those short but admirable lines,  
By which, ungirt and unconstrained,  
Things greater are in less contained.  
Let other vainly strive t'immure  
45 The circle in the quadrature!<sup>6</sup>  
These holy mathematics can  
In ev'ry figure equal man.<sup>7</sup>

## 7

Yet thus the laden house does sweat,  
And scarce endures the master great:  
50 But where he comes the swelling hall  
Stirs, and the square grows spherical;<sup>8</sup>  
More by his magnitude distressed,  
Than he is by its straitness pressed;  
And too officiously<sup>o</sup> it slights  
55 That in itself which him delights.

## 8

So honor better lowness bears,  
Than that unwonted<sup>o</sup> greatness wears.  
Height with a certain grace does bend,  
But low things clownishly<sup>o</sup> ascend.  
60 And yet what needs there here excuse,  
Where ev'ry thing does answer use?  
Where neatness nothing can condemn,  
Nor pride invent<sup>o</sup> what to condemn?

## 9

A stately frontispiece of poor<sup>9</sup>  
65 Adorns without the open door;  
Nor less the rooms within commends  
Daily new furniture of friends.  
The house was built upon the place  
Only as for a mark of grace;  
70 And for an inn to entertain  
Its lord a while, but not remain.<sup>1</sup>

## 10

Him Bishops-Hill, or Denton may,  
Or Bilbrough, better hold than they;

75 But Nature here hath been so free  
As if she said, Leave this to me.  
Art would more neatly<sup>o</sup> have defaced  
What she had laid so sweetly waste;  
In fragrant gardens, shady woods,  
80 Deep meadows, and transparent floods.

### 11

While with slow eyes we these survey,  
And on each pleasant footstep stay,  
We opportunely may relate  
The progress of this house's fate.  
A nunnery first gave it birth  
85 For virgin buildings oft brought forth.  
And all that neighbor-ruin shows  
The quarries whence this dwelling rose.

### 12

Near to this gloomy cloister's gates  
There dwelt the blooming virgin Thwaites<sup>2</sup>  
90 Fair beyond measure, and an heir  
Which might deformity make fair.  
And oft she spent the summer suns  
Discoursing with the subtle nuns.  
Whence in these words one to her weaved  
95 (As 'twere by chance) thoughts long conceived.

### 13

"Within this holy leisure we  
Live innocently as you see.  
These walls restrain the world without,  
But hedge<sup>o</sup> our liberty about.  
100 These bars inclose that wider den

Of those wild creatures, callèd men;  
The cloister outward shuts its gates,  
And, from us, locks on them the grates.

#### 14

105 "Here we, in shining armor white,<sup>o</sup>  
Like virgin amazons do fight:  
And our chaste lamps we hourly trim,  
Lest the great bridegroom find them dim.<sup>3</sup>  
Our orient<sup>o</sup> breaths perfumed are  
110 With incense of incessant pray'r.  
And holy water of our tears  
Most strangely our complexion clears:

#### 15

"Not tears of grief; but such as those  
With which calm pleasure overflows;  
Or pity, when we look on you  
115 That live without this happy vow.  
How should we grieve that must be seen  
Each one a spouse, and each a queen;  
And can in heaven hence behold  
Our brighter robes and crowns of gold?  
120

#### 16

"When we have prayed all our beads,  
Some one the holy legend<sup>o</sup> reads;  
While all the rest with needles paint  
The face and graces of the saint.  
But what the linen can't receive  
125 They in their lives do interweave.  
This work the saints best represents;  
That serves for altar's ornaments.

## 17

130 "But much it to our work would add  
If here your hand, your face we had.  
By it we would our Lady touch;<sup>4</sup>  
Yet thus she you resembles much.  
Some of your features, as we sewed,  
Through every shrine should be bestowed:  
135 And in one beauty we would take  
Enough a thousand saints to make.

## 18

"And (for I dare not quench the fire  
That me does for your good inspire)  
'Twere sacrilege a man t' admit  
140 To holy things, for heaven fit.  
I see the angels in a crown  
On you the lilies show'ring down;  
And round about you glory breaks,  
That something more than human speaks.

## 19

145 "All beauty, when at such a height,  
Is so already consecrate.  
Fairfax I know; and long ere this  
Have marked the youth, and what he is.  
But can he such a rival seem  
For whom you heav'n should disesteem?  
150 Ah, no! and 'twould more honor prove  
He your devoto<sup>o</sup> were, than love.

## 20

"Here live beloved, and obeyed,  
Each one your sister, each your maid.



155 And, if our rule seem strictly penned,  
The rule itself to you shall bend.  
Our abbess too, now far in age,  
Doth your succession near presage.  
How soft the yoke on us would lie,  
160 Might such fair hands as yours it tie!

## 21

"Your voice, the sweetest of the choir,  
Shall draw heav'n nearer, raise us higher:  
And your example, if our head,  
Will soon us to perfection lead.  
Those virtues to us all so dear,  
165 Will straight<sup>o</sup> grow sanctity when here:  
And that, once sprung, increase so fast  
Till miracles it work at last.

## 22

"Nor is our order yet so nice,<sup>o</sup>  
Delight to banish as a vice.  
170 Here pleasure piety doth meet,  
One perfecting the other sweet.  
So through the mortal fruit we boil  
The sugar's uncorrupting oil;  
And that which perished while we pull,  
175 Is thus preserved clear and full.

## 23

"For such indeed are all our arts;  
Still handling nature's finest parts.  
Flow'rs dress the altars; for the clothes,  
The sea-born amber<sup>5</sup> we compose;  
180 Balms for the grieved<sup>o</sup> we draw; and pastes

We mold, as baits for curious tastes.  
What need is here of man? unless  
These as sweet sins we should confess.

## 24

185 "Each night among us to your side  
Appoint a fresh and virgin bride;  
Whom if our Lord at midnight find,  
Yet neither should be left behind.  
Where you may lie as chaste in bed,  
190 As pearls together billeted,  
All night embracing arm in arm,  
Like crystal pure with cotton warm.

## 25

"But what is this to all the store  
Of joys you see, and may make more!  
Try but a while, if you be wise:  
195 The trial neither costs, nor ties."  
Now Fairfax seek her promised faith: [o](#)  
Religion that dispensed hath;  
Which she henceforward does begin: [6](#)  
200 The nun's smooth tongue has sucked her in.

## 26

Oft, though he knew it was in vain,  
Yet would he valiantly complain:  
"Is this that sanctity so great,  
An art by which you finelier cheat?  
205 Hypocrite witches, hence avaunt,  
Who though in prison yet enchant!  
Death only can such thieves make fast,  
As rob though in the dungeon cast.

## 27

“Were there but, when this house was made,  
One stone that a just hand had laid,  
210 It must have fall’n upon her head  
Who first thee from thy faith misled.  
And yet, how well soever meant,  
With them ’twould soon grow fraudulent:  
For like themselves they alter all,  
215 And vice infects the very wall.

## 28

“But sure those buildings last not long,  
Founded by folly, kept by wrong.  
I know what fruit their gardens yield,  
When they it think by night concealed.  
220 Fly from their vices. ’Tis thy state,<sup>o</sup>  
Not thee, that they would consecrate.  
Fly from their ruin. How I fear  
Though guiltless lest thou perish there!”

## 29

What should he do? He would respect  
225 Religion, but not right neglect;  
For first religion taught him right,  
And dazzled not but cleared his sight.  
Sometimes resolved his sword he draws,  
But reverenceth then the laws:  
230 For justice still that courage led;  
First from a judge, then soldier bred.<sup>z</sup>

## 30

Small honor would be in the storm.<sup>o</sup>  
The court him grants the lawful form;

235 Which licensed either peace or force,  
To hinder the unjust divorce.  
Yet still the nuns his right debarred,  
Standing upon their holy guard.  
Ill-counseled women, do you know  
240 Whom you resist, or what you do?

### 31

Is not this he whose offspring fierce  
Shall fight through all the universe;  
And with successive valor try  
France, Poland, either Germany;  
245 Till one, as long since prophesied,  
His horse through conquered Britain ride?  
Yet, against fate, his spouse they kept,  
And the great race would intercept.<sup>8</sup>

### 32

Some to the breach against their foes  
Their wooden saints in vain oppose.  
250 Another bolder stands at push  
With their old holy-water brush.  
While the disjointed<sup>o</sup> abbess threads  
The jingling chain-shot<sup>9</sup> of her beads.  
But their loud'st cannon were their lungs;  
255 And sharpest weapons were their tongues.

### 33

But, waving these aside like flies,  
Young Fairfax through the wall does rise.  
Then th' unfrequented vault appeared,  
And superstitions vainly feared.  
260 The relics false were set to view;

Only the jewels there were true—  
But truly bright and holy Thwaites  
That weeping at the altar waits.

### 34

265 But the glad youth away her bears  
And to the nuns bequeaths her tears:  
Who guiltily their prize bemoan,  
Like gypsies that a child had stol'n.  
Thenceforth (as when th' enchantment ends  
270 The castle vanishes or rends)  
The wasting cloister with the rest  
Was in one instant dispossessed.<sup>1</sup>

### 35

At the demolishing, this seat  
To Fairfax fell as by escheat.<sup>2</sup>  
275 And what both nuns and founders willed  
'Tis likely better thus fulfilled:  
For if the virgin proved not theirs,  
The cloister yet remained hers;  
Though many a nun there made her vow,  
280 'Twas no religious house till now.

### 36

From that blest bed the hero came,  
Whom France and Poland yet does fame;  
Who, when retired here to peace,  
His warlike studies could not cease;  
285 But laid these gardens out in sport  
In the just figure of a fort;  
And with five bastions it did fence,  
As aiming one for ev'ry sense.<sup>3</sup>

### 37

When in the east the morning ray  
Hangs out the colors of the day,  
290 The bee through these known alleys hums,  
Beating the dian<sup>o</sup> with its drums.  
Then flow'rs their drowsy eyelids raise,  
Their silken ensigns each displays,  
And dries its pan<sup>4</sup> yet dank with dew,  
295 And fills its flask<sup>o</sup> with odors new.

### 38

These, as their governor goes by,  
In fragrant volleys they let fly;  
And to salute their governess  
Again as great a charge they press:  
300 None for the virgin nymph;<sup>5</sup> for she  
Seems with the flow'rs a flow'r to be.  
And think so still! though not compare<sup>6</sup>  
With breath so sweet, or cheek so fair.

### 39

Well shot ye firemen!<sup>o</sup> Oh how sweet,  
305 And round your equal fires do meet;  
Whose shrill report no ear can tell,  
But echoes to the eye and smell.  
See how the flow'rs, as at parade,  
Under their colors stand displayed:  
310 Each regiment in order grows,  
That of the tulip, pink, and rose.

### 40

But when the vigilant patrol  
Of stars walks round about the pole,

315 Their leaves, that to the stalks are curled,  
Seem to their staves the ensigns furled.  
Then in some flow'r's beloved hut  
Each bee as sentinel is shut;  
And sleeps so too: but, if once stirred,  
320 She runs you through, nor asks the word.◊

#### 41

Oh thou,◊ that dear and happy isle  
The garden of the world ere while,  
Thou paradise of four<sup>7</sup> seas,  
Which heaven planted us to please,  
But, to exclude the world, did guard  
325 With wat'ry if not flaming sword;<sup>8</sup>  
What luckless apple did we taste,  
To make us mortal, and thee waste?

#### 42

Unhappy! shall we never more  
That sweet militia restore,  
330 When gardens only had their tow'rs,  
And all the garrisons were flow'rs;  
When roses only arms might bear,  
And men did rosy garlands wear?  
Tulips, in several colors barred,  
335 Were then the Switzers<sup>9</sup> of our guard.

#### 43

The gardener had the soldier's place,  
And his more gentle forts did trace.  
The nursery of all things green  
Was then the only magazine.  
340 The winter quarters were the stoves◊

Where he the tender plants removes.  
But war all this doth overgrow;  
We ordnance plant, and powder sow.

#### 44

345 And yet there walks one on the sod  
Who, had it pleased him and God,  
Might once have made our gardens spring  
Fresh as his own and flourishing.  
But he preferred to the Cinque Ports<sup>1</sup>  
These five imaginary forts;  
350 And, in those half-dry trenches, spanned<sup>o</sup>  
Pow'r which the ocean might command.

#### 45

For he did, with his utmost skill,  
Ambition weed, but conscience till.  
Conscience, that heaven-nursèd plant,  
355 Which most our earthly gardens want.<sup>o</sup>  
A prickling leaf it bears, and such  
As that which shrinks at every touch;  
But flow'rs eternal, and divine,  
That in the crowns of saints do shine.  
360

#### 46

The sight does from these bastions ply  
Th' invisible artillery;  
And at proud Cawood Castle<sup>2</sup> seems  
To point the batt'ry of its beams,  
As if it quarreled in<sup>o</sup> the seat  
365 Th' ambition of its prelate great;  
But o'er the meads below it plays,  
Or innocently seems to gaze.



## 47

And now to the abyss I pass  
Of that unfathomable grass,  
370 Where men like grasshoppers appear,  
But grasshoppers are giants<sup>3</sup> there:  
They, in their squeaking laugh, contemn  
Us as we walk more low than them:  
And, from the precipices tall  
375 Of the green spires, to us do call.

## 48

To see men through this meadow dive,  
We wonder how they rise alive;  
As, underwater, none does know  
Whether he fall through it or go;<sup>o</sup>  
380 But as the mariners that sound  
And show upon their lead the ground,<sup>4</sup>  
They bring up flow'rs so to be seen,  
And prove they've at the bottom been.

## 49

No scene<sup>o</sup> that turns with engines strange  
385 Does oft'ner than these meadows change:  
For when the sun the grass hath vexed,  
The tawny mowers enter next;  
Who seem like Israelites to be  
Walking on foot through a green sea.  
390 To them the grassy deeps divide  
And crowd a lane to either side.<sup>5</sup>

## 50

With whistling scythe and elbow strong,  
These massacre the grass along:

395 While one, unknowing, carves the rail,<sup>6</sup>  
Whose yet unfeathered quills her fail.  
The edge all bloody from its breast  
He draws, and does his stroke detest;  
Fearing the flesh untimely mowed  
400 To him a fate as black forebode.

## 51

But bloody Thestylis<sup>7</sup> that waits  
To bring the mowing camp their cates,<sup>8</sup>  
Greedy as kites<sup>9</sup> has trussed it up,  
And forthwith means on it to sup;  
405 When on another quick she lights,  
And cries, he<sup>8</sup> called us Israelites;  
But now, to make his saying true,  
Rails rain for quails, for manna dew.<sup>9</sup>

## 52

Unhappy birds! what does it boot<sup>8</sup>  
410 To build below the grasses' root,  
When lowness is unsafe as height,  
And chance o'ertakes what scapeth spite?  
And now your orphan parents' call  
Sounds your untimely funeral.  
415 Death-trumpets creak in such a note,  
And 'tis the sourdine<sup>1</sup> in their throat.

## 53

Or<sup>8</sup> sooner hatch or higher build:  
The mower now commands the field;  
In whose new traverse<sup>8</sup> seemeth wrought  
420 A camp of battle newly fought:  
Where, as the meads with hay, the plain

Lies quilted o'er with bodies slain;  
The women that with forks it fling,  
Do represent the pillaging.

## 54

425 And now the careless victors play,  
Dancing the triumphs of the hay;<sup>2</sup>  
Where every mower's wholesome heat  
Smells like an Alexander's sweat,<sup>3</sup>  
Their females fragrant as the mead  
Which they in fairy circles tread:  
430 When at their dance's end they kiss,  
Their new-made hay not sweeter is.

## 55

When after this 'tis piled in cocks,<sup>o</sup>  
Like a calm sea it shows the rocks:  
We wond'ring in the river near  
435 How boats among them safely steer.  
Or, like the desert Memphis<sup>4</sup> sand,  
Short pyramids of hay do stand.  
And such the Roman camps do rise<sup>5</sup>  
440 In hills for soldiers' obsequies.

## 56

This scene<sup>o</sup> again withdrawing brings  
A new and empty face of things;  
A leveled space, as smooth and plain,  
As cloths for Lely<sup>6</sup> stretched to stain.  
The world when first created sure  
445 Was such a table rase<sup>7</sup> and pure;  
Or rather such is the toril  
Ere the bulls enter at Madril.<sup>8</sup>

## 57

For to this naked equal flat,  
Which Levellers<sup>9</sup> take pattern at,  
450 The villagers in common<sup>o</sup> chase  
Their cattle, which it closer rase;<sup>o</sup>  
And what below the scythe increased<sup>o</sup>  
Is pinched yet nearer by the beast.  
Such, in the painted world, appeared,  
455 Davenant with th' universal herd.<sup>1</sup>

## 58

They seem within the polished grass  
A landscape drawn in looking glass;  
And shrunk in the huge pasture show  
460 As spots, so shaped, on faces do.<sup>2</sup>  
Such fleas, ere they approach the eye,  
In multiplying<sup>o</sup> glasses lie.  
They feed so wide, so slowly move,  
As constellations do above.

## 59

Then, to conclude these pleasant acts,  
465 Denton sets ope' its cataracts;<sup>3</sup>  
And makes the meadow truly be  
(What it but seemed before) a sea.  
For, jealous of its lord's long stay,  
It tries t' invite him thus away.  
470 The river in itself is drowned  
And isles th' astonished cattle round.

## 60

Let others tell the paradox,  
How eels now bellow in the ox;<sup>4</sup>

475 How horses at their tails do kick,  
Turned as they hang to leeches quick;<sup>5</sup>  
How boats can over bridges sail,  
And fishes do the stables scale;  
How salmons trespassing are found,  
480 And pikes are taken in the pound.<sup>o</sup>

## 61

But I, retiring from the flood,  
Take sanctuary in the wood;  
And, while it lasts, myself embark  
In this yet green, yet growing ark;  
485 Where the first carpenter<sup>6</sup> might best  
Fit timber for his keel have pressed;<sup>o</sup>  
And where all creatures might have shares,  
Although in armies, not in pairs.

## 62

The double wood of ancient stocks  
490 Linked in so thick an union locks,  
It like two pedigrees<sup>7</sup> appears,  
On one hand Fairfax, th' other Vere's:  
Of whom though many fell in war,  
Yet more to heaven shooting are:  
495 And, as they nature's cradle decked,  
Will in green age her hearse expect.

## 63

When first the eye this forest sees  
It seems indeed as wood not trees;  
As if their neighborhood<sup>o</sup> so old  
500 To one great trunk them all did mold.  
There the huge bulk takes place, as meant

To thrust up a fifth element;<sup>8</sup>  
And stretches still so closely wedged  
As if the night within were hedged.

## 64

505 Dark all without it knits; within  
It opens passable and thin;  
And in as loose an order grows  
As the Corinthian<sup>9</sup> porticoes.  
The arching boughs unite between  
510 The columns of the temple green;  
And underneath the winged choirs  
Echo about their tuned fires.

## 65

The nightingale does here make choice  
To sing the trials of her voice.  
515 Low shrubs she sits in, and adorns  
With music high the squatted thorns.  
But highest oaks stoop down to hear,  
And list'ning elders prick the ear.  
The thorn, lest it should hurt her, draws  
520 Within the skin its shrunken claws.

## 66

But I have for my music found  
A sadder, yet more pleasing sound:  
The stock doves,<sup>o</sup> whose fair necks are graced  
With nuptial rings, their ensigns chaste;  
525 Yet always, for some cause unknown,  
Sad pair, unto the elms they moan.  
O why should such a couple mourn,  
That in so equal flames do burn!

## 67

Then as I careless on the bed  
Of gelid strawberries do tread,  
530 And through the hazels thick espy  
The hatching throstle's shining eye,  
The heron from the ash's top  
The eldest of its young lets drop,  
535 As if it stork-like<sup>1</sup> did pretend  
That tribute to its lord to send.

## 68

But most the hewel's<sup>o</sup> wonders are,  
Who here has the holtfelster's<sup>o</sup> care.  
He walks still upright from the root,  
540 Meas'ring the timber with his foot;  
And all the way, to keep it clean,  
Doth from the bark the wood-moths glean.  
He, with his beak, examines well  
Which fit to stand and which to fell.

## 69

The good he numbers up, and hacks;  
545 As if he marked them with the ax.  
But where he, tinkling with his beak,  
Does find the hollow oak<sup>2</sup> to speak,  
That for his building he designs,  
And through the tainted side he mines.  
550 Who could have thought the tallest oak  
Should fall by such a feeble stroke!

## 70

Nor would it, had the tree not fed  
A traitor-worm, within it bred.

555 (As first our flesh corrupt within  
Tempts impotent and bashful sin)  
And yet that worm triumphs not long,  
But serves to feed the hewel's young;  
While the oak seems to fall content,  
560 Viewing the treason's punishment.

## 71

Thus I, easy philosopher,  
Among the birds and trees confer;  
And little now to make me, wants<sup>o</sup>  
Or<sup>o</sup> of the fowls, or of the plants.  
565 Give me but wings as they, and I  
Straight floating on the air shall fly:  
Or turn me but, and you shall see  
I was but an inverted tree.<sup>3</sup>

## 72

Already I begin to call  
In their most learned original:  
570 And where I language want, my signs  
The bird upon the bough divines;  
And more attentive there doth sit  
Than if she were with lime<sup>4</sup> twigs knit.  
No leaf does tremble in the wind  
575 Which I returning cannot find.

## 73

Out of these scattered Sibyl's leaves  
Strange prophecies my fancy weaves:<sup>5</sup>  
And in one history consumes,  
580 Like Mexique paintings, all the plumes.<sup>o</sup>  
What Rome, Greece, Palestine, ere said



I in this light Mosaic<sup>6</sup> read.  
Thrice happy he who, not mistook,  
Hath read in nature's mystic book.<sup>7</sup>

## 74

585 And see how chance's better wit  
Could with a mask<sup>8</sup> my studies hit!  
The oak-leaves me embroider all,  
Between which caterpillars crawl;  
And ivy, with familiar trails,  
590 Me licks, and clasps, and curls, and hales.  
Under this antic cope<sup>9</sup> I move  
Like some great prelate of the grove.

## 75

Then, languishing with ease, I toss  
On pallets swol'n of velvet moss;  
595 While the wind, cooling through the boughs,  
Flatters with air my panting brows.  
Thanks for my rest, ye mossy banks,  
And unto you, cool zephyrs,<sup>o</sup> thanks,  
Who, as my hair, my thoughts too shed,<sup>o</sup>  
600 And winnow from the chaff my head.

## 76

How safe, methinks, and strong, behind  
These trees have I encamped my mind;  
Where beauty, aiming at the heart,  
Bends in some tree its useless<sup>o</sup> dart;  
605 And where the world no certain shot  
Can make, or me it toucheth not.  
But I on it securely play,  
And gall its horsemen all the day.

## 77

Bind me ye woodbines in your twines,  
Curl me about ye gadding vines,  
610 And O so close your circles lace,  
That I may never leave this place:  
But, lest your fetters prove too weak,  
Ere I your silken bondage break,  
Do you, O brambles, chain me too,  
615 And courteous briars, nail me through.<sup>1</sup>

## 78

Here in the morning tie my chain,  
Where the two woods have made a lane;  
While, like a guard on either side,  
The trees before their lord divide;  
620 This, like a long and equal thread,  
Betwixt two labyrinths does lead.  
But, where the floods did lately drown,  
There at the evening stake me down.

## 79

For now the waves are fall'n and dried,  
625 And now the meadows fresher dyed;  
Whose grass, with moister color dashed,  
Seems as green silks but newly washed.  
No serpent new nor crocodile  
Remains behind our little Nile;<sup>2</sup>  
630 Unless itself you will mistake,  
Among these meads<sup>o</sup> the only snake.

## 80

See in what wanton harmless folds  
It ev'rywhere the meadow holds;

635 And its yet muddy back doth lick,  
Till as a crystal mirror slick;<sup>o</sup>  
Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt  
If they be in it or without.  
And for his shade<sup>o</sup> which therein shines,  
640 Narcissus-like, the sun too pines.<sup>3</sup>

### 81

Oh what a pleasure 'tis to hedge  
My temples here with heavy sedge;  
Abandoning my lazy side,  
Stretched as a bank unto the tide;  
645 Or to suspend my sliding foot  
On th' osier's undermined root,  
And in its branches tough to hang,  
While at my lines the fishes twang!

### 82

But now away my hooks, my quills,<sup>o</sup>  
And angles, idle utensils.  
650 The young Maria walks tonight:  
Hide trifling youth thy pleasures slight.  
'Twere shame that such judicious eyes  
Should with such toys a man surprise;  
She that already is the law  
655 Of all her sex, her age's awe.

### 83

See how loose nature, in respect  
To her, itself doth recollect;  
And everything so whisht<sup>o</sup> and fine,  
Starts forthwith to its bonne mine.<sup>o</sup>  
660 The sun himself, of her aware,

Seems to descend with greater care;  
And lest she see him go to bed,  
In blushing clouds conceals his head.

## 84

665 So when the shadows laid asleep  
From underneath these banks do creep,  
And on the river as it flows  
With ebon shuts<sup>o</sup> begin to close;  
The modest halcyon<sup>4</sup> comes in sight,  
670 Flying betwixt the day and night;  
And such an horror calm and dumb,  
Admiring nature does benumb.

## 85

The viscous<sup>o</sup> air, wheresoe'r she fly,  
Follows and sucks her azure dye;  
The jellying stream compacts<sup>o</sup> below,  
675 If it might fix her shadow so;  
The stupid<sup>o</sup> fishes hang, as plain  
As flies in crystal overta'en;  
And men the silent scene assist,<sup>o</sup>  
680 Charmed with the sapphire-wingèd mist.<sup>5</sup>

## 86

Maria such, and so<sup>o</sup> doth hush  
The world, and through the ev'ning rush.  
No newborn comet such a train  
Draws through the sky, nor star new-slain.<sup>6</sup>  
685 For straight those giddy rockets<sup>7</sup> fail,  
Which from the putrid earth exhale,  
But by her flames, in heaven tried,  
Nature is wholly vitrified.<sup>o</sup>

## 87

'Tis she that to these gardens gave  
That wondrous beauty which they have;  
690 She straightness on the woods bestows;  
To her the meadow sweetness owes;  
Nothing could make the river be  
So crystal-pure but only she;  
695 She yet more pure, sweet, straight, and fair,  
Than gardens, woods, meads, rivers are.

## 88

Therefore what first she on them spent,  
They gratefully again present:  
The meadow, carpets where to tread;  
The garden, flow'rs to crown her head;  
700 And for a glass, the limpid brook,  
Where she may all her beauties look;  
But, since she would not have them seen,  
The wood about her draws a screen.

## 89

For she, to higher beauties raised,  
705 Disdains to be for lesser praised.  
She counts her beauty to converse  
In all the languages as hers;  
Nor yet in those herself employs  
But for the wisdom, not the noise;  
710 Nor yet that wisdom would affect,  
But as 'tis heaven's dialect.

## 90

Blest nymph! that couldst so soon prevent  
Those trains<sup>o</sup> by youth against thee meant:

715 Tears (wat'ry shot that pierce the mind)  
And sighs (love's cannon charged with wind)  
True praise (that breaks through all defense)  
And feigned complying innocence;  
But knowing where this ambush lay,  
720 She scaped the safe, but roughest way.

### 91

This 'tis to have been from the first  
In a domestic heaven nursed,  
Under the discipline severe  
Of Fairfax, and the starry Vere;  
725 Where not one object can come nigh  
But pure, and spotless as the eye;  
And goodness doth itself entail  
On females, if there want a male.<sup>8</sup>

### 92

Go now fond<sup>o</sup> sex that on your face  
Do all your useless study place,  
730 Nor once at vice your brows dare knit  
Lest the smooth forehead wrinkled sit;  
Yet your own face shall at you grin,  
Thorough<sup>o</sup> the black-bag<sup>o</sup> of your skin;  
735 When knowledge only could have filled  
And virtue all those furrows tilled.

### 93

Hence she with graces more divine  
Supplies beyond her sex the line;  
And, like a sprig of mistletoe,  
On the Fairfacian oak doth grow;  
740 Whence, for some universal good,

The priest shall cut the sacred bud;<sup>9</sup>  
While her glad parents most rejoice,  
And make their destiny their choice.

## 94

745 Meantime ye fields, springs, bushes, flow'rs,  
Where yet she leads her studious hours  
(Till fate her worthily translates,  
And find a Fairfax for our Thwaites),  
Employ the means you have by her,  
750 And in your kind yourselves prefer;<sup>1</sup>  
That, as all virgins she precedes,  
So you all woods, streams, gardens, meads.

## 95

For you Thessalian Tempe's<sup>2</sup> seat  
Shall now be scorned as obsolete;  
Aranjuez, as less, disdained;  
755 The Bel-Retiro<sup>3</sup> as constrained;  
But name not the Idalian grove,<sup>4</sup>  
For 'twas the seat of wanton Love;  
Much less the dead's Elysian Fields,<sup>5</sup>  
760 Yet nor to them your beauty yields.

## 96

'Tis not, what once it was, the world,  
But a rude heap together hurled;  
All negligently overthrown,  
Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone.  
Your lesser world<sup>6</sup> contains the same,  
765 But in more decent order tame;  
You heaven's center, nature's lap,  
And paradise's only map.

But now the salmon-fishers moist  
 Their leathern boats begin to hoist;  
 770 And, like antipodes in shoes,  
 Have shod their heads in their canoes.<sup>7</sup>  
 How tortoise-like, but not so slow,  
 These rational amphibii<sup>8</sup> go!  
 775 Let's in; for the dark hemisphere  
 Does now like one of them appear.

## 1651 **Endnotes**

1681

- Note 1: From 1651 to 1653, Marvell served as tutor to Mary Fairfax, daughter of Ann Vere and Thomas Fairfax, commander in chief of the parliamentary army throughout the civil wars. Fairfax opposed the regicide and in 1650 resigned his command rather than lead a preemptive strike against Scotland (which had declared for Charles II). Cromwell took over as Fairfax retired to his country estates in Yorkshire, especially Nunappleton, a comparatively simple brick structure on the site of a former Cistercian priory dissolved by Henry VIII along with all monasteries in 1542. The poem makes the house and its history figure the progress of the Reformation and the recent civil wars, played off against the Fall, the conflicts of the Israelites in the wilderness, and other biblical moments. The poem is structured as a journey around the estate, intersected by a long passage of family history. It was apparently written in the summer of 1651, when Mary Fairfax was twelve. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Did design in his brain the absurdly high vaulted ceilings of grand, magnificent houses built for showy display. This poem invites comparison and contrast with other country house poems and the houses, estates, and society they describe,



- including Jonson's "To Penshurst" (p. 1053), and Lanyer's "Description of Cookham" (p. 936).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a nest proportioned to their size.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: The proud builders of the Tower of Babel, who thought to make it reach to heaven (Genesis 11).[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: The thatched hut of the legendary founder of Rome.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: To square the circle.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: The circle symbolized perfection, the square variously virtue, justice, and prudence.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: The square hall rises up into a domed cupola.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Poor people awaiting Fairfax's alms.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: The house is described as an inn, with an allusion to Hebrews 11:13–16 and the faithful who proclaim themselves "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" as they "desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: In 1518 the heiress Isabel Thwaites was to marry Thomas Fairfax's ancestor, William, but was confined by her guardian, the prioress of Nunappleton; William obtained an order for her release and then seized her by force and married her.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Matthew 25:1–13 contrasts the wise virgins who kept their lamps lit for the bridegroom (Christ) and the foolish ones who did not and so were excluded from the marriage feast (heaven).[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: We could come close to representing the Virgin Mary in our designs with you as model.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Ambergris from the sperm whale supplies the rich perfume for our altar cloths.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: She now begins her "religious" life in the convent.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: His father was judge of the Common Pleas; his maternal grandfather was a heroic soldier.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Thomas Fairfax, son of William and Isabel Thwaites, fought in Italy and Germany; his descendants were also honored soldiers; the present Fairfax fulfilled the prophecy by his victories in the Civil War.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cannonballs linked in a chain and fired together.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An allusion to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Legally, in the absence of an heir, the property reverted to him as lord of the manor; Henry gave monastery lands to his nobles.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The garden's five (seeming) bulwarks or fortifications aim at the five senses.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In a musket, the hollow part of the lock that receives the priming.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mary Fairfax (Maria)—Marvell's pupil at Nunappleton.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The imperatives are addressed to the flowers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pronounced with two syllables.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: After the Fall, the garden in Eden was guarded by angels with flaming swords.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The papal Swiss guards, who wore multicolored uniforms.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The five ports on the southeast coast of England, of which Fairfax was warden for a time; the "imaginary forts" (next line) are the "five bastions" of line 287.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Seat of the archbishop of York, two miles from Appleton House.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare Numbers 13:33: "And there we saw the giants . . . and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Plumb the depths and show the nature of the ground below.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The mowers produce a lane in the grassy meadow, like that formed when the Red Sea parted to allow the Israelites

passage.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The corncrake (land rail), a field bird.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The cook for the harvest workers, comically given the name of a classical shepherdess.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The author, at line 389. The Puritans constantly compared themselves and their revolution to the Israelites battling enemies and wandering in the wilderness en route to Canaan, the Promised Land.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Exodus 13–15 describes the quails and manna (left after the dew evaporated) with which the Israelites were miraculously fed after crossing the Red Sea.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A small pipe put into the mouth of a trumpet to produce a low sound.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A country dance (with a pun).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Plutarch wrote that Alexander the Great's sweat smelled sweet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An ancient Egyptian city near the pyramids.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hillocks that served as burial mounds; they were actually British in origin, not Roman.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Canvases for the Dutch portrait painter Sir Peter Lely, who came to England in 1643.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: *Tabula rasa* (Latin): a clean or blank slate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Madrid. "Toril": bull ring.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A radical faction, the Diggers or True Levellers, who sought social and economic equality. A group of Diggers began to put their tenets into practice by taking over and cultivating the land on St. George Hill, part of Fairfax's domain. See Gerrard Winstanley (p. 1331).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: William Davenant, in his heroic poem *Gondibert* (2.6), describes a painting of the Creation, where on the sixth day "an universal herd" of animals appeared.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A landscape (or painted landscape) reflected in a mirror would be reduced in size.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Small waterfalls or dams. Denton, also a Fairfax estate (see line 73), was located on the Wharfe River, thirty miles from Nunappleton.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Because the ox swallowed them.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In popular superstition, horsehairs in water became live leeches or eels.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Noah, who built an ark to escape a flood that would cover the earth (Genesis 6).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Genealogical trees, of the Fairfax and Vere families.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The so-called quintessence, beyond and superior to fire, air, water, and earth.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The most elaborate order of Greek columns.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The stork upon leaving a nest was believed to leave behind one of its young as a tribute to the householder.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The “royal” oak was traditionally an emblem of monarchy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Originally classical, this is a widely used metaphor in the Renaissance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Birdlime, a sticky substance smeared on twigs to trap birds.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the Cumaean Sibyl, committed her prophecies to leaves that Aeneas feared might be scattered (6.77).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The pattern formed by the trembling leaves; also the books of Moses, who was thought to have written the first five books of the Bible.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The book of the creatures, or the book of God’s works.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Masque costume or disguise appropriate to the speaker’s studies.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Comic ecclesiastical vestment.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The imagery evokes imprisonment and crucifixion.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Our river; serpents and crocodiles were thought to be bred by spontaneous generation from the mud of the Nile.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In classical myth, Narcissus lay beside water, staring at his reflection, pining for himself.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The kingfisher, who by nesting on the waves was believed to bring absolute calm to the sea.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The bird in its flight.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Meteor, or shooting star.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vapors exhaled from the earth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Maria was the only child and heir of the Fairfaxes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Maria is, of course, intended for marriage.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Make yourselves the best you can.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Vale of Tempe, in Greece, was a kind of paradise.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spanish palaces.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A favorite haunt of Aphrodite (Venus), goddess of love, on Cyprus.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The pleasant habitation of the good in the classical underworld.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Appleton House.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The men who dwell at the "antipodes," on the other side of the world, are sometimes said to wear their shoes on their heads; these English fishermen transport their leather boats on their heads.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As men, the fishermen are "rational"; and they live in two elements, land and water.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *overeagerly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unaccustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in rustic fashion*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *find out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nun's habit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fresh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *a saint's life*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devotee*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *precise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promise to wed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *estate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *storming the priory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distracted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *veille*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *powder flask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shooters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *password*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *England*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hothouses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *restrained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack, need*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *found fault with*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *move forward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stage set*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *food*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *birds of prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avail*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *track*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haystacks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stage set*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common pasture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crops*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grew*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magnifying*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *cattle pen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obtained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nearness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turtledoves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *green woodpecker's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woodcutter's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feathers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentle west winds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *part*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meadows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smooth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shadow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *floats*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hushed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good appearance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black shutters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thick*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *solidifies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stupefied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attend*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in like fashion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turned to glass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *artillery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *through*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mask*[Return to reference](#) °

# Crisis of Authority

Most of the poets and prose writers who published in the civil war decades, 1640 to 1660, registered in some way their responses to the conflicts swirling about them. The war and the issues over which it was fought shadow the poetry of Vaughan, Herrick, Hutchinson, Lovelace, Suckling, Marvell, and Milton and the prose of Thomas Browne and Izaak Walton. Yet writers often addressed the conflict only obliquely. When Marvell or Herrick celebrates peaceful gardens or fruitful countryside, when Vaughan envisions eternity as a “great ring of pure and endless light” suspended above all mortal turmoil, when Walton rhapsodizes about fishing, they create refuges of the imagination that might partially compensate for the trauma of war. Other writers confronted the issues of the age more straightforwardly. The readings included in this section sample this more explicitly political writing. They exemplify some of the genres encouraged by the new conditions in which literary materials could be written and circulated.

With the restoration of Charles II in 1660, many of the radical voices of the 1640s and 1650s were muted. Yet the war decades left a lasting imprint upon English literature. They established a tradition of overtly political, often ambitiously literary writing without which it is hard to imagine the works of such authors as John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, and Alexander Pope. They established prose as a dominant literary medium, especially for the description and analysis of everyday life. They initiated a tradition of apparently ordinary people bearing witness in writing to extraordinary events: a vital precedent for the rise of the novel.

This section presents examples of several kinds of writing that flourished during the Civil War and its immediate aftermath: the printed petition; the journalistic reporting of current events; political theory; and descriptions of contemporary history, personal experience, and individual character. These excerpts demonstrate a



variety of ways in which writers responded to the disturbing and exciting developments around them: by reporting the details of dramatic, unprecedented occurrences; by analyzing the political and social problems posed by the conflict; by ruminating upon the character of great men; by seizing new opportunities for autobiographical reflection.

## **PETITIONING**

### **A TRUE COPY OF THE PETITION OF GENTLEWOMEN AND TRADESMEN'S WIVES**

Petitions—requests or demands signed by a number of people and presented to a governing authority—were always a fact of English political life. But in the crises leading up to and during the English Civil Wars and Commonwealth, petitions, particularly those addressed to Parliament, took on new life, expressing and manifesting the public demand for a greater role in political decision making and helping to pave the way for a more representative government. The “Root and Branch Petition,” which called for the abolition of bishops in all “roots” and “branches” of English life, including Parliament, was purportedly signed by 15,000 subscribers and presented to Parliament in December 1640 by 1,500 people. Most petitions from the period do not survive, but some, including the one below, were printed as stand-alone publications or in newsbooks.

THE 220  
Parliament of VVomen.

With the merrie Lawes by them newly  
Enacted. To live in more Ease, Pompe, Pride,  
and wantonneſſe : but eſpecially that they might have ſu-  
periority and domineere over their husbands ; with a new way  
found out by them to cure any old or new Cuckolds, and  
how both parties may recover their credit  
and honeſty againe



London, Printed for W. Wiſſon and are to be ſold by him in  
Will-yard in Little Saint Bartholomewes. 1646.

*Aug: 14 - London 1646*

**The Parliament of Women.** Satirical pamphlets like this one responded directly to the increased participation of women in political life in the 1640s.

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While still a minority among petitioners, women petitioned Parliament on matters of trade, war, religion, and government. *A True Copy of the Petition of the Gentlewomen and Tradesmen's Wives in and about the City of London*, dated February 5, 1641 (1642 in the Julian calendar), articulates a number of reasons why women ought to petition "as well as the men": they share in the "common calamities" that affect church and commonwealth; they are equal sharers in Christian salvation; they are punished for their political actions; and there are biblical precedents for women's political activism. Like Aemilia Lanyer and Hester Pulter, the women petitioners marshal the example of Queen Esther, who, aided by the collective action of women, saved her people from a tyrannical king. In the King James Version of the book of Esther, King Ahasuerus even describes Esther's request as a petition. "What is thy petition?" he asks her, "and it shall be granted thee" (Esther 5:6). While later women petitioners were described as Medusa, Hecuba, "Whores, Bawds, Oyster-women," and "Lacedemonians or bold Amazons," their voices were nonetheless heard loud and clear.

***A True Copy of the Petition of Gentlewomen and  
Tradesmen's Wives in and about the City of London.  
Delivered to the Honorable, the Knights, Citizens and  
Burgesses, of the House of Commons in Parliament, the 4th  
of February, 1641. Together with their several reasons why  
their sex ought thus to petition, as well as the men; and the  
manner how both their petition and reasons was delivered.  
Likewise the answer which the Honorable Assembly sent to  
them by Mr. Pym, as they stood at the House door.***

With lowest submission showing,

That we also with all thankful humility acknowledging the unwearied pains, care, and great charge, besides hazard of health and life, which you the noble worthies<sup>1</sup> of this honorable and renowned assembly have undergone, for safety both of Church and Commonwealth, for a long time already past; for which not only we your humble petitioners, and all well affected in this kingdom, but also all other good Christians are bound now and at all times to acknowledge; yet notwithstanding that many worthy deeds have been done by you, great danger and fear do still attend us, and will, as long as popish lords and superstitious bishops are suffered to have their voice in the House of Peers,<sup>2</sup> and that accursed and abominable idol of the mass suffered in the kingdom, and that arch-enemy<sup>3</sup> of our prosperity and reformation lie in the tower, yet not receiving his deserved punishment.

All these under correction, gives us great cause to suspect that God is angry with us, and to be the chief causes why your pious endeavors for a further reformation proceed not with that success as you desire, and is most earnestly prayed for of all that wish well to true religion and the flourishing estate both of king and kingdom; the insolencies of the papists and their abettors raise a just fear and suspicion of sowing sedition, and breaking out into bloody persecution in this kingdom, as they have done in Ireland,<sup>4</sup> the thoughts of which sad and barbarous events make our tender hearts



to melt within us, forcing us humbly to petition to this honorable assembly to make safe provision for yourselves and us before it be too late.

And whereas we, whose hearts have joined cheerfully with all those petitions which have been exhibited unto you in the behalf of the purity of religion, and the liberty of our husbands' persons and estates, recounting ourselves to have an interest in the common privileges with them, do with the same confidence assure ourselves to find the same gracious acceptance with you for easing of those grievances, which in regard of our frail condition, do more nearly concern us, and do deeply terrify our souls: our domestical dangers with which this kingdom is so much distracted, especially growing on us from those treacherous and wicked attempts already are such, as we find ourselves to have as deep a share as any other.

We cannot but tremble at the very thoughts of the horrid and hideous facts which modesty forbids us now to name, occasioned by the bloody wars in Germany,<sup>5</sup> his Majesty's late northern army,<sup>6</sup> how often did it affright our hearts, whilst their violence began to break out so furiously upon the persons of those whose husbands or parents were not able to rescue: we wish we had no cause to speak of those insolencies, and savage usage and unheard of rapes, exercised upon our sex in Ireland,<sup>7</sup> and have we not just cause to fear they will prove the forerunners of our ruin, except almighty God by the wisdom and care of this parliament be pleased to succor us, our husbands and children, which are as dear and tender unto us as the lives and blood of our hearts, to see them murdered and mangled and cut in pieces before our eyes, to see our children dashed against the stones, and the mothers' milk mingled with the infants' blood, running down the streets; to see our houses on flaming fire over our heads: oh how dreadful would this be! We thought it misery enough (though nothing to that we have just cause to fear) but few years since for some of our sex, by unjust divisions from their bosom comforts, to be rendered in a manner widows, and the children fatherless, husbands were imprisoned from the society of their wives, even against the laws of God and nature,

and little infants suffered in their fathers' banishments: thousands of our dearest friends have been compelled to fly from Episcopal persecutions<sup>8</sup> into desert places amongst wild beasts, there finding more favor then in their native soil, and in the midst of all the sorrows, such hath the pity of the prelates been, that our cries could never enter into their ears or hearts, nor yet through multitudes of obstructions could never have access or come nigh to those royal mercies of our most gracious sovereign, which we confidently hope, would have relieved us: but after all these pressures ended, we humbly signify that our present fears are that unless the blood-thirsty faction of the papists and prelates be hindered in their designs, ourselves here in England as well as they in Ireland shall be exposed to that misery which is more intolerable than that which is already past, as namely to the rage not of men alone, but of devils incarnate (as we may so say), besides the thraldom of our souls and consciences in matters concerning God, which of all things are most dear unto us.

Now the remembrance of all these fearful accidents aforementioned do strongly move us from the example of the woman of Tekoa to fall submissively at the feet of his Majesty,<sup>9</sup> our dread sovereign, and cry help, O king, help O ye the noble worthies now sitting in parliament: And we humbly beseech you, that you will be a means to his Majesty and the House of Peers, that they will be pleased to take our heartbreaking grievances into timely consideration, and to add strength and encouragement to your noble endeavors, and further that you would move his Majesty with our humble requests that he would be graciously pleased according to the example of the good King Asa,<sup>1</sup> to purge both the court and kingdom of that great idolatrous service of the mass, which is tolerated in the Queen's court,<sup>2</sup> this sin (as we conceive) is able to draw down a greater curse upon the whole kingdom than all your noble and pious endeavors can prevent, which was the cause that the good and pious King Asa would not suffer idolatry in his own mother, whose example if it shall please his Majesty's gracious goodness to follow in putting down popery and idolatry both in great

and small, in court and in the kingdom throughout, to subdue the papists and their abettors, and by taking away the power of the prelates, whose government by long and woeful experience we have found to be against the liberty of our conscience and the freedom of the gospel and the sincere profession and practice thereof, then shall our fears be removed, and we may expect that God will power down his blessings in abundance both upon his Majesty and upon this honorable assembly, and upon the whole land.

For which your new petitioners shall pray affectionately.

The reasons follow.

It may be thought strange and unbeseeming our sex to show ourselves by way of petition to this honorable assembly: but the matter being rightly considered, of the right and interest we have in the common and public cause of the church, it will as we conceive (under correction) be found a duty commanded and required.

First, because Christ has purchased us at as dear a rate as he has done men, and therefore requires the like obedience for the same mercy as of men.

Secondly, because in the free enjoining of Christ in his own laws and a flourishing estate of the church and commonwealth consists the happiness of women as well as men.

Thirdly, because women are sharers in the common calamities that accompany both church and commonwealth when oppression is exercised over the church or kingdom wherein they live; and an unlimited power has been given to prelates to exercise authority over the consciences of women, as well as men; witness Newgate, Smithfield, and other places of persecution, wherein women as well as men have felt the smart of their fury.



Neither are we left without example in Scripture, for when the state of the church in the time of King Ahasuerus<sup>3</sup> was by the bloody enemies thereof sought to be utterly destroyed, we find that Esther the Queen and her maids fasted and prayed, and that Esther petitioned to the king in the behalf of the church: and though she enterprised this duty with the hazard of her own life, being contrary to the law to appear before the king before she were sent for, yet her love to the church carried her through all difficulties to the performance of that duty.

On which grounds we are emboldened to present our humble petition unto this honorable assembly, not weighing the reproaches which may and are by many cast upon us, who (not well weighing the premises) scoff and deride our good intent. We do it not out of any self conceit, or pride of heart, as seeking to equal ourselves with men, either in authority or wisdom, but according to our places to discharge that duty we owe to God, and the cause of the church, as far as lie in us, following herein the example of the men which have gone in this duty before us.

A relation of the manner how it was delivered,  
with their Answer, sent by Mr. Pym.<sup>4</sup>

The petition with their reasons was delivered the fourth of Feb. 1641 by Mrs. Anne Stagg, a gentlewoman and brewer's wife, and many others with her of like rank and quality, which when they had delivered it, after some time spent in reading of it, the honorable assembly sent them an answer by Mr. Pym, which was performed in this manner.

Mr. Pym came to the commons door, and called for the women, and spake unto them in these words: Good women, your petition and the reasons have been read in the house, and is very thankfully accepted of, and is come in a seasonable time. You shall (God willing) receive from us all the satisfaction which we can possibly give to your just and lawful desires. We entreat you to repair to your

houses, and turn your petition which you have delivered here into prayers at home for us; for we have been, are, and shall be (to our utmost power) ready to relieve you, your husbands, and children, and to perform the trust committed unto us, towards God, our king and country, as becometh faithful Christians and loyal subjects.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Members of the House of Commons, the lower chamber of the English Parliament; they are elected.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The House of Lords, originally the more powerful chamber of the English Parliament, consisting of religious leaders and hereditary peers. “Popish”: Catholic; high church.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: William Laud, archbishop of Canterbury; he was imprisoned in 1641 but not executed until 1645.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In October 1641, Irish Catholics fought against English and settler-colonial rule for greater Irish self-governance, an end to (or limitations on) plantations, and an end to anti-Catholic discrimination.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), a series of wars fought mostly on German soil following the efforts of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Ferdinand II, to impose Catholicism throughout his domain.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The army raised to fight in the Second Bishops’ War (1640), after Charles I imposed universal church practices, including the presence of bishops, on the Presbyterian-leaning Church of Scotland; it was defeated by the Scots.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The English press emphasized the Irish rebels’ anti-settler violence during the Catholic uprising in 1641, particularly the murder of children and the rape of women.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: That is, the movement led by Archbishop William Laud and his supporters within the Church of England; it emphasized free will, and hence the possibility of salvation for all men, thus rejecting the predestination embraced by Calvinism. Its stress on liturgical ceremony and clerical hierarchy, as well as its active silencing of dissent, was unpopular with more reform-minded Protestants.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In 2 Samuel 14, Joab asks a “wise woman” of Tekoa to reconcile David to Absalom after Absalom was banished for the murder of Amnon.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The third king of the Kingdom of Judah, who zealously opposed idolatry and disestablished all churches of false worship in his kingdom. Asa’s eradication of idolatry and paganism was followed by decades of peace (2 Chronicles 14–15).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Charles I’s queen, Henrietta Maria, kept a separate court in which she and many of her women attendants openly maintained their Catholic faith.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Persian king; the book of Esther tells the story of how his Jewish wife, Queen Esther, and her attending women successfully interceded with him to save her people (Esther 5–9).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
John Pym (1584–1643), a member of Parliament who had long opposed arbitrary royalist rule and high church Anglicanism; this response was recorded in the *Journal of the House of Commons*. Pym was treasurer of the Providence Island Company, a colonial venture that helped fund the parliamentary side in the civil wars. Following the Irish uprising in 1641 (which Charles I refused to condemn), Pym became the unofficial leader of the parliamentary opposition to the king, and the attempt in January 1642 to arrest him and four other members of Parliament sparked the first English Civil War.  
[Return to reference 4](#)

## REPORTING THE NEWS

The following accounts of the king's trial and execution are excerpted from newsbooks, one of the most important new literary forms of the war years. In England the reportage of current events originated in the 1620s, when anxiety over the nation's entanglement in what would become the Thirty Years' War on the Continent generated a demand for international news. In addition, in the 1620s and 1630s a few enterprising individuals provided "corantos," handwritten reports of court goings-on, to wealthy individuals in the provinces; these were technically considered private letters, although they sometimes circulated to several hundred paid subscribers. Yet even these modest ventures were always on legally shaky ground. The printing of domestic news, or commentary on it, was strictly prohibited by Charles I, as it had been by his forebears.

In the early 1640s, censorship collapsed just when many people urgently wanted information about the momentous events transpiring in England, Scotland, and Ireland. The result was the explosive development of printed news. While in 1640 there were no newsbooks, by 1645 there were 755. Their format varied, but typically they were eight-page cheaply printed pamphlets, issued weekly. Most writers and compilers remained anonymous, though in some cases the identity of the authors was an open secret. Unlike the earlier corantos, the inexpensive newsbooks of the 1640s gave a broad spectrum of readers access to information about current events. Often, simultaneously, they propagandized on behalf of various parties to the developing conflict. The newsbooks thus encouraged an unprecedentedly wide and deep sense of civic involvement, and arguably also had the effect of hardening factional differences.

The newsbooks provided eyewitness, or what purported to be eyewitness, accounts of the king's trial and execution very shortly

after they occurred. Both events were highly charged, with important and complex stakes on both sides. In the autumn of 1648, many in Parliament who had initially wanted to restrict the king's powers hesitated to remove him from the throne; they favored a negotiated end to hostilities. Yet the powerful leaders of the New Model Army, including Oliver Cromwell, were convinced that Charles was a threat to a reorganized commonwealth. Even if the king dealt with his opponents in good faith, which they doubted, he would be a constant rallying point for opposition to their policies. Conceivably, the war would never be over.

When Charles seemed to be planning to escape from his relatively light confinement on the Isle of Wight, the army council ordered him seized and brought to London, which the army occupied. Yet what were they to do with their captive? Simply to assassinate him would deprive his killers of any semblance of legitimacy. A formal trial, therefore, seemed necessary; but it was not easy to achieve. First, Parliament had to be purged of more than half its members, who disapproved of putting the king on trial. Once reconstituted so as to exclude opposition, Parliament then had to pass a law redefining treason as a crime against the state, not a crime against the king, of which the king himself could not logically have been guilty.

As in the case of most treason trials in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a guilty verdict was a foregone conclusion. Yet the trial's value as propaganda was unpredictable. The judges and executioners pointedly assumed the regalia and symbolism of state power, and conducted both the trial and the execution with great punctiliousness, in order to bolster the impression of due process in the eyes of onlookers and newsbook readers. Charles's calmly defiant behavior, meanwhile, was not meant to secure his acquittal, which everyone knew would have been unforthcoming anyhow. Rather, he hoped to garner sympathy for his plight, to demonstrate publicly his unwavering adherence to his own principles, and to provoke prosecutors and judges into behaving like rabid zealots. Likewise, his conduct on the scaffold impressed even

those who deplored his political position. While his judges and executioners strove to describe him as an overweening tyrant, Charles struggled to appear the heir to a Christian tradition of suffering innocence, a "martyr of the people." In 1660, as soon as the monarchy was restored, Charles I was canonized by the Church of England.

# ***From The Moderate, No. 28***

***16–23 January 1649***

## **[THE TRIAL OF KING CHARLES I, THE FIRST DAY]**

At the high court of justice sitting in the Great Hall of Westminster, Sergeant Bradshaw President,<sup>1</sup> about 70 Members present. Oyez<sup>2</sup> made thrice, silence commanded. The president had the sword and mace carried before him, attended with Colonel Fox, and twenty other officers and gentlemen with partisans.<sup>3</sup> The act of the Commons in Parliament for trial of the king, read. After the court was called, and each member rising up as he was called. The king came into the court, his hat on, and the Commissioners with theirs on also; no congratulation or motion of hats at all.<sup>4</sup> The Sergeant ushered him in with the mace, Colonel Hacker<sup>5</sup> and about thirty officers and gentlemen more came as his guard; the president then spake in these words, viz.

“Charles Stuart, King of England, the Commons of England assembled in Parliament being sensible of the great calamities that have been brought upon this nation, of the innocent blood that hath been shed in this nation, which is referred<sup>6</sup> to you, as the author of it; and according to that duty which they owe to God, to the nation, and themselves, and according to that fundamental power and trust that is reposed in them by the people, have constituted this high court of justice before which you are now brought; and you are to hear the charge upon which the court will proceed.”

Mr. Cook Solicitor General.<sup>7</sup> “My lord, in behalf of the Commons of England, and of all the people thereof, I do accuse Charles Stuart, here present, of high treason and high misdemeanors, and I do in the name of the Commons of England desire that the charge may be read unto him.”

King. "Hold a little"—tapping the solicitor general twice on the shoulder with his cane, which drawing towards him again, the head thereon fell off, he stooping for it, put it presently<sup>8</sup> into his pocket. This is conceived will be very ominous.

Lord President. "Sir, the court commands the charge to be read; if you have any thing to say after, you may be heard."

The charge was read.

The king smiled often during the time, especially at those words therein, viz that Charles Stuart was a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy of the commonwealth.

Lord President. "Sir, you have now heard your charge read, containing such matter as appears in it: you find that in the close of it, it is prayed to the court in the behalf of all the Commons of England, that you answer to your charge. The court expects your answer."

King. "I would know by what power I am called hither. I was not long ago in the Isle of Wight; how I came hither is a larger story then I think is fit at this time for me to speak of: But there I entered into a treaty with the two Houses of Parliament, with as much public faith as is possibly to be had of any people in the world. I treated there with a number of honorable lords and gentlemen, and treated honestly and uprightly. I cannot say but they did deal very nobly with me. We were upon conclusion of a treaty. Now I would know by what authority—I mean lawful; there are many unlawful authorities in the world, thieves and robbers by the highways—but I would know by what authority I was brought from thence, and carried from place to place; and when I know by what lawful authority, I shall answer.

"Remember, I am your king, your lawful king; and what sin you bring upon your heads, and the judgments of God upon this land, think well upon it; I say think well upon it before you go further, from one sin to a greater.<sup>9</sup> Therefore let me know by what lawful authority I am seated here, and I shall not be unwilling to answer. In the meantime, I shall not betray my trust. I have a trust committed



to me by God, by old and lawful descent. I will not betray it, to answer to a new and unlawful authority. Therefore resolve me that, and you shall hear more of me."

Lord President. "If you had been pleased to have observed what was hinted to you by the court at our first coming hither, you would have known by what authority; which authority requires you in the name of the people of England, of which you are elected king, to answer them."

King. "No sir, I deny that."

Lord President. "If you acknowledge not the authority of the court, they must proceed."

King. "I do tell you so, England was never an elective kingdom, but an hereditary kingdom, for near a thousand years; therefore let me know by what authority I am called hither. I do stand more for the liberty of my people than any here that come to be my pretended judges; and therefore let me know by what lawful authority I am seated here, and I will answer it; otherwise I will not answer it."

Lord President told him he did interrogate the court, which beseeemed not one in his condition, and it was known how he had managed his trust.

\* \* \*

King. "I desire that you would give me, and all the world, satisfaction in this. For let me tell you, it is not a slight thing you are about. I am sworn to keep the peace by the duty I owe to God and my country; and I will do it to the last breath of my body: And therefore you shall do well to satisfy first God and then the country by what authority you do it; if by a reserved<sup>1</sup> authority, you cannot answer it. There is a God in heaven that will call you, and all that give you power, to an account. Satisfy me in that, and I will answer; otherwise, I betray my trust and the liberties of the people. And therefore think of that, and then I shall be willing. For I do vow, that

it is as great a sin to withstand lawful authority, as it is to submit to a tyrannical or any otherways unlawful authority, And therefore satisfy me that, and you shall receive my answer."

Lord President. "The court expects a final answer. They are to adjourn till Monday. If you satisfy not yourself, though we tell you our authority, we are satisfied with our authority, and it is upon God's authority and the kingdom's; and that peace you speak of will be kept in the doing of justice; and that is our present work."

The court adjourned till Monday ten of clock to the Painted Chamber, and thence hither.

As the king went away, facing the court, the king said, "I fear not that," looking upon and meaning the sword.

Going down from the court, the people cried, "Justice, justice, justice!"

Jan. 21. The commissioners kept a fast this day in Whitehall. There preached before them Mr. Sprig, whose text was, "He that sheds blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Mr. Foxley's was "Judge not, lest you be judged." And Mr. Peters' was. "I will bind their kings in chains, and their nobles in fetters of iron."<sup>2</sup> The last sermon made amends for the two former.

1649

## Endnotes

- Note 1: John Bradshaw (1609–1659), chief justice of Cheshire and Wales, accepted the office of president after others declined. He lost this office after 1653, when he opposed Cromwell's consolidation of personal power. Bradshaw was posthumously convicted of treason at the Restoration in 1660; his body was exhumed and hanged in chains.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hear ye (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: John Fox (1610–1650) was commander of the Lord President's bodyguard, the members of which carried spears

with a lobed base or “partisans.” The “sword and mace” symbolizes state power.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: For either the king or the judges to doff their hats would be to acknowledge the others’ superiority.  
“Congratulation”: salutation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Francis Hacker (1618–1660) commanded the soldiers who guarded the king, signed the king’s death warrant, and supervised the guard on the scaffold. He was executed after the Restoration.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Attributed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John Cook (1608–1660), a radical republican lawyer, served as chief prosecutor. He was executed after the Restoration.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Immediately.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From rebellion to regicide.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unexplained.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The biblical texts are Genesis 9:6, Matthew 7:1, and Psalm 149:8. Hugh Peters (1598–1660), Independent preacher to Cromwell’s New Model Army, passionately supported the king’s execution. He was himself executed after the Restoration.[Return to reference 2](#)

# ***From A Perfect Diurnal of Some Passages in Parliament, No. 288***

***Tuesday, January 30***

## **[THE EXECUTION OF CHARLES I]**

This day the king was beheaded over against the Banqueting House by Whitehall.<sup>1</sup> The manner of execution and what passed before his death take thus.<sup>2</sup> He was brought from Saint James<sup>3</sup> about ten in the morning, walking on foot through the park with a regiment of foot for his guard, with colors flying, drums beating, his private guard of partisans,<sup>4</sup> with some of his gentlemen before, and some behind bareheaded, Dr. Juxon late Bishop of London<sup>5</sup> next behind him, and Colonel Tomlinson<sup>6</sup> (who had the charge of him) to the gallery in Whitehall, and so into the Cabinet Chamber where he used to lie, where he continued at his devotion, refusing to dine (having before taken the sacrament) only about 12 at noon he drank a glass of claret wine, and eat a piece of bread. From thence he was accompanied by Dr. Juxon, Colonel Tomlinson, Colonel Hacker,<sup>7</sup> and the guards before mentioned through the Banqueting House adjoining to which the scaffold was erected between Whitehall Gate and the gate leading into the gallery from Saint James. The scaffold was hung round with black, and the floor covered with black, and the ax and block laid in the middle of the scaffold. There were divers companies of foot and horse on every side the scaffold, and the multitudes of people that came to be spectators very great. The king making a pass upon<sup>8</sup> the scaffold, looked very earnestly on the block, and asked Colonel Hacker if there were no higher; and then spake thus, directing his speech to the gentlemen upon the scaffold.

King. "I shall be very little heard of anybody here; I shall therefore speak a word unto you here. Indeed I could hold my peace<sup>9</sup> very well, if I did not think that holding my peace would make some men think that I did submit to the guilt as well as to the punishment. But I think it is my duty to God first, and to my country, for to clear myself both as an honest man, and a good king, and a good Christian. I shall begin first with my innocency. In troth I think it not very needful for me to insist long upon this, for all the world knows that I never did begin a war with the two Houses of Parliament, and I call God to witness, to whom I must shortly make an account, that I never did intend for to encroach upon their privileges; they began upon me. It is the militia they began upon;<sup>1</sup> they confessed that the militia was mine but they thought it fit to have it from me; and to be short, if anybody will look to the dates of commissions, theirs and mine, and likewise to the declarations,<sup>2</sup> will see clearly that they began these unhappy troubles, not I. So that as the guilt of these enormous crimes that are laid against me, I hope in God that God will clear me of it. I will not; I am in charity;<sup>3</sup> God forbid that I should lay it upon the two Houses of Parliament, there is no necessity of either.<sup>4</sup> I hope they are free of this guilt; for I do believe that ill instruments<sup>5</sup> between them and me has been the chief cause of all this bloodshed. So that by way of speaking, as I find myself clear of this, I hope and pray God that they may too. Yet for all this, God forbid that I should be so ill a Christian, as not to say that God's judgments are just upon me. Many times he does pay justice by an unjust sentence; that is ordinary. I only say this, that an unjust sentence (meaning Strafford)<sup>6</sup> that I suffered for to take effect, is punished now by an unjust sentence upon me. That is, so far I have said, to show you that I am an innocent man.

"Now for to show you that I am a good Christian, I hope there is" (pointing to Dr. Juxon) "a good man that will bear me witness that I have forgiven all the world, and those in particular that have been the chief causers of my death. Who they are, God knows; I do not desire to know. I pray God forgive them. But this is not all; my

charity must go farther. I wish that they may repent, for indeed they have committed a great sin in that particular. I pray God with Saint Stephen that this be not laid to their charge;<sup>7</sup> nay, not only so, but that they may take the right way to the peace of the kingdom, for charity commands me not only to forgive particular men, but to endeavor to the last gasp the peace of the kingdom. Sirs, I do wish with all my soul, and I do hope there is some here will carry it further, that they may endeavor the peace of the kingdom.

“Now, sirs, I must show you both how you are out of the way, and will put you in a way.<sup>8</sup> First, you are out of the way, for certainly all the way<sup>9</sup> you ever have had yet as I could find by anything, is in the way of conquest. Certainly this is an ill way, for conquest, sir, in my opinion is never just, except there be a good just cause, either for matter of wrong or just title, and then if you go beyond it,<sup>1</sup> the first quarrel that you have to it, that makes it unjust at the end that was just at first. But if it be only matter of conquest, then it is a great robbery; as a pirate said to Alexander that he was a great robber, he was but a petty robber. And so, sir, I do think the way that you are in, is much out of the way. Now, sir, for to put you in the way, believe it you never do right, nor God will never prosper you,<sup>2</sup> until you give Him his due, the king his due (that is, my successors) and the people their due. I am as much for them<sup>3</sup> as any of you. You must give God his due by regulating rightly his Church, according to Scripture, which is now out of order. For to set you in a way particularly<sup>4</sup> now I cannot, but only this, a national synod freely called, freely debating among themselves, must settle this; when that every opinion is freely and clearly heard. For the king, indeed I will not—(Then turning to a gentleman that touched the ax, said, hurt not the ax that may hurt me.)—For the king, the laws of the land will clearly instruct you for that; therefore, because it concerns my own particular I only give you a touch of it.<sup>5</sup> For the people, and truly I desire their liberty and freedom, as much as anybody whomsoever; but I must tell you, that their liberty and their freedom consists in having of government, those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own. It is not for having

share in government, sir, that is nothing pertaining to them.<sup>6</sup> A subject and a sovereign are clean<sup>7</sup> different things; and therefore, until they do that, I mean, that you do put the people in that liberty as I say, certainly they will never enjoy themselves.<sup>8</sup> Sirs, it was for this<sup>9</sup> that now I am come here. If I would have given way to an arbitrary way, for to have all laws changed according to the power of the sword, I needed not to have come here; and therefore I tell you, and I pray God it be not laid to your charge, that I am the martyr of the people. In troth sirs, I shall not hold you much longer; for I will only say this to you, that in truth I could have desired some little time longer because that I would have put this that I have said in a little more order and a little better digested<sup>1</sup> than I have done; and therefore I hope you will excuse me. I have delivered<sup>2</sup> my conscience. I pray God that you do take those courses that are best for the good of the kingdom and your own salvations."

Dr. Juxon. "Will Your Majesty—though it may be very well known Your Majesty's affections to religion—yet it may be expected that you should say somewhat<sup>3</sup> for the world's satisfaction."

King. "I thank you very heartily, my lord, for that I had almost forgotten it. In troth, sirs, my conscience in religion I think is very well known to the world, and therefore I declare before you all that I die a Christian according to the profession of the Church of England as I found it left me by my father; and this honest man, I think, will witness it." Then turning to the officers said, "sirs, excuse me for this same.<sup>4</sup> I have a good cause, and I have a gracious God; I will say no more."

Then turning to Colonel Hacker, he said, "Take care that they do not put me to pain; and, sir, this, an it please you."<sup>5</sup> But then a gentleman coming near the ax, the king said, "Take heed of the ax, pray take heed of the ax." Then the king speaking to the executioner said, "I shall say but very short prayers, and then thrust out my hands."

Then the king called to Dr. Juxon for his nightcap, and having put it on he said to the executioner, "Does my hair trouble you?" Who



desired him to put it all under his cap, which the king did accordingly, by the help of the executioner and the bishop. Then the king turning to Dr. Juxon said, "I have a good cause, and a gracious God on my side."

Dr. Juxon, "There is but one stage more. This stage is turbulent and troublesome; it is a short one: But you may consider it will soon carry you a very great way; it will carry you from earth to heaven, and there you shall find a great deal of cordial joy and comfort."

King. "I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be."

Dr. Juxon. "You are exchanged from a temporal to an eternal crown, a good exchange."

Then the king took off his cloak and his George,<sup>6</sup> giving his George to Dr. Juxon, saying "Remember" (it is thought for the prince) and some other small ceremonies past. After which the king stooping down laid his neck upon the block, and after a very little pause stretching forth his hands, the executioner at one blow severed his head from his body. Then his body was put in a coffin covered with black velvet, and removed to his lodging chamber in Whitehall.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Whitehall Palace was the English monarch's principal residence from 1530 to 1698, when most of it was destroyed by fire. The Banqueting House, designed by Inigo Jones with ceilings painted by Peter Paul Rubens, was built for King James I in 1619–22 and was used to stage court masques. "Over against": just outside.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Accept the following account.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: St. James Palace, near Whitehall.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Guards armed with partisans, spears with lobed points or halberds.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Juxon (1582–1663), Charles I's personal chaplain, was bishop of London until 1649, when he was



deprived of office. In the late 1630s he had also served as one of the king's financial advisers. After the Restoration he became archbishop of Canterbury.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Matthew Tomlinson commanded the guards assigned to Charles. He was tried after the Restoration but was spared because he had been courteous to the king.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: On Colonel Hacker, see p. 1318, note 5.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Traversing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Remain silent. It was customary for condemned prisoners to address onlookers before their public executions. "You here": the small group standing on the scaffold, as distinguished from the large crowd watching the execution.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In 1642 Parliament's Militia Ordinance transferred local militias from the king's control to Parliament's. Despite its failure to secure Charles's assent to the measure, Parliament declared it legally binding.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Commissions" and "declarations": warrants for enlisting troops and proclamations of war.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Practicing the charity that befits a Christian, I refuse to lay the blame for the war on my enemies.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Of blaming either side for the war.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Corrupt go-betweens.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In an attempt to appease his opponents in Parliament, Charles reluctantly consented to the execution of his adviser Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, for treason in 1641, despite lack of evidence that Strafford had committed any crime.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed that God not hold his persecutors responsible for their actions (see Acts 7:54–60). "Particular" (previous line): regard.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Both show you how you are wrong and put you on a correct course.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: All the rationale.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Beyond what is necessary to correct the wrong.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Allow you to flourish.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: On the people's side.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In detail.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Because it concerns my own situation, I mention it only briefly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Of their concern or responsibility.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Completely.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Be happy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Because I upheld the liberty of the people.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: More methodically arranged.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Spoken.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Something.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This religious profession. Charles did not accept the radical Protestantism espoused by many of his opponents.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As was customary, Charles tips Hacker, the person supervising the execution, in hopes of ensuring a quick death. "An": if.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A jeweled pendant representing St. George killing a dragon, worn by Knights of the Garter. The prince (following) is the king's eldest son, later King Charles II, who had escaped to exile in France.[Return to reference 6](#)

## POLITICAL WRITING

Not surprisingly, the tumult of civil war stimulated a good deal of thinking about the nature and ends of government. The excerpts that follow give some idea of the arguments proposed by English political writers between 1630 and 1655.

Robert Filmer and Thomas Hobbes both favor an absolutist government that would concentrate power in the sovereign and deprive the people of any way to get rid of him. However, the two writers work from quite different premises. In *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings Defended Against the Unnatural Liberty of the People*, Filmer outlines a historical theory based on the authority of biblical patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for instance—over their families. God ratified kingly authority, Filmer argues, when he commanded the honoring of parents. Although many royalists retained a larger role for popular consent than Filmer did, Filmer's account of the king's fatherly care of his people, and the people's childlike incompetence to manage political affairs, was close to the Stuart kings' own view.

Unlike Filmer, Thomas Hobbes, a gifted mathematician, believed in working from clearly defined first principles to conclusions, grounding his political vision not on biblical history but upon a comprehensive philosophy of nature and of knowledge. He believed that human beings seek self-preservation as a primary goal, and power as a means to secure that goal; his politics spring directly from these premises. Since the best way to assure self-preservation, he argued, is to assent permanently to the creation of a strong authority, the founding political covenant cannot be revoked and rebellion against the sovereign is absurd. Hobbes's materialism and secularism—his virtual exclusion of God from politics—scandalized both the Puritans who opposed him and many royalists as well.

The claims of royalists came under vigorous attack from the poet John Milton, who during the war years became one of the most

effective polemicists for the parliamentary radicals. Milton wrote *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* in 1648, the days leading up to Charles's trial and execution, when many of those who had originally supported limiting the king's power shrank from actually beheading him. Milton decries this hesitation, seeing it as the effect of a misdirected awe for the privileges of monarchs. All political authorities, Milton argues, hold their power in trust from the people, and the people can revoke that trust whenever they choose.

Like Filmer, Milton bases his argument upon biblical history, but he cites very different passages. Filmer emphasizes the importance of fatherly authority in Genesis, which narrates the lives of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Milton acknowledges that the fall of Adam and Eve corrupted human nature so that individuals were henceforth unable to govern themselves properly without external discipline. Yet, he insists, since those charged with implementing that discipline are themselves sinners, they must be kept in check by laws and by strict limitations upon their authority. In Milton's account, problems with the exercise of authority became evident only gradually. Unlike Filmer, who assumes that the social arrangements described in Genesis are a pattern for modern political communities, Milton chooses his examples from later eras in Jewish history: for instance, the book of Samuel, in which God disapproves of the Israelites' desire for a king.

For Filmer, Hobbes, and Milton, the central issue of the conflict between the king and Parliament is, Who has ultimate authority, the king or the people? Gerrard Winstanley construes the problem differently, in primarily economic rather than political terms. Winstanley was a well-educated London linen draper who worked as a laborer in the countryside after suffering financial reverses during the war years. In his political writing, he concerns himself less with the way power is allocated than with the equitable distribution of wealth. The ownership of land is especially important to him, since it was the critical asset in a largely agrarian society. Members of the House of Commons, though they considered themselves the representatives of "the people," were actually fairly substantial

property owners; indeed, those without land or income were not entitled to vote. In consequence, more than half the male population (and, of course, the entire female population) was denied the franchise. In *A New Year's Gift Sent to the Parliament and Army* (1650), Winstanley accuses Parliament of having merely transferred oppressive power from the king to itself, leaving most of England's population as impoverished and downtrodden as before.

Winstanley suggests a practical means to remedy his society's inequities: "the commons," undeveloped lands used for grazing, should be made available to poor people to farm communally. Since the commons, though traditionally used by all the residents on an estate, were legally the manorial landlord's private property, Winstanley's ideas were highly unpopular among landowners. Moreover, his proposal was not merely a theoretical recommendation. The year before he wrote *A New Year's Gift*, Winstanley and some of his followers, called Diggers, had settled on St. George's Hill in Surrey. They planted twelve acres of grain and built a number of makeshift houses before they were violently evicted.

Like Filmer and Milton, Winstanley turns to the Bible to justify his politics. And like them, he chooses passages that suit his argument. He reads contemporary history through the heady allegories of the book of Revelation, as a confrontation between the powers of darkness and the powers of light. Jesus's concern for the poor and scorn for the rich loom large to him, and his social vision owes much to biblical accounts of early Christian communities, which held property in common and minimized class differences.

## ROBERT FILMER

The eldest of eighteen children, Robert Filmer (1588–1653) attended Trinity College, Cambridge, and inherited his father's estate in Kent in 1629. When war broke out he was too old to participate as a soldier, but he was briefly imprisoned by Parliament as a known supporter of the king, and his property was seized. After his release, he published a number of treatises arguing for absolute monarchy, among them *The Anarchy of a Limited and Mixed Monarchy* (1648); *The Freeholder's Grand Inquest* (1648), which argued that Parliament could meet only at the will of the king; and a translation of excerpts from the works of the French absolutist Jean Bodin. However, Filmer's most important treatise, *Patriarcha*, was not among these publications. Scholars disagree about when it was written, but Filmer probably composed it in the early 1630s in the wake of Charles's conflicts with Parliament early in his reign. The treatise remained in manuscript until 1680. Printed during a heated debate between Tories (royalists) and Whigs (Parliamentarians) over the right of King Charles II's brother James to inherit the throne, *Patriarcha* was comprehensively savaged by John Locke in his *First Treatise of Government* (1690).

While Filmer's motive in writing *Patriarcha* was undoubtedly close-to-home disputes between the English king and his subjects, his explicit polemical target is not Charles's parliamentary opponents. Rather, Filmer argues against Continental political theorists such as the Jesuit Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, who had written a devastating critique of James I's treatises on monarchy earlier in the century. Bellarmine's aim had been to secure freedom of conscience and worship for Roman Catholic subjects of a Protestant monarch, by arguing that the power of monarchs was constrained by their people. Charles's Puritan opponents would find many aspects of Bellarmine's line of reasoning irresistible. Since in the English-speaking tradition republican concepts eventually came to be

strongly associated with Puritan dissent, it is worth remembering that for much of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it had been Protestants who advocated consolidating secular and spiritual power in the figure of a powerful king, and Catholics who had resisted that consolidation.

***From Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of  
Kings Defended Against the Unnatural  
Liberty of the People***



## **From *Chapter 1: That the First Kings Were Fathers of Families***

Since the time that school divinity<sup>1</sup> began to flourish there hath been a common opinion maintained, as well by divines as by divers other learned men, which affirms: "Mankind is naturally endowed and born with freedom from all subjection, and at liberty to choose what form of government it please, and that the power which any one man hath over others was at first bestowed according to the discretion of the multitude." This tenet was first hatched in the schools, and hath been fostered by all succeeding Papists for good divinity. The divines, also, of the reformed churches have entertained it, and the common people everywhere tenderly embrace it as being most plausible<sup>2</sup> to flesh and blood, for that it prodigally distributes a portion of liberty to the meanest of the multitude, who magnify liberty as if the height of human felicity were only to be found in it, never remembering that the desire of liberty was the first cause of the fall of Adam.

But howsoever this vulgar<sup>3</sup> opinion hath of late obtained a great reputation, yet it is not to be found in the ancient fathers and doctors of the primitive church. It contradicts the doctrine and history of the holy scriptures, the constant practice of all ancient monarchies, and the very principles of the law of nature. It is hard to say whether it be more erroneous in divinity or dangerous in policy.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

That the patriarchs<sup>5</sup> \* \* \* were endowed with kingly power, their deeds do testify; for as Adam was lord of his children, so his children under him had a command and power over their own children, but still with subordination to the first parent, who is lord-paramount over his children's children to all generations, as being the grandfather of his people.

I see not then how the children of Adam, or of any man else, can be free from subjection to their parents. And this subjection of children being the fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself, it follows that civil power not only in general is by divine institution, but even the assignment of it specifically to the eldest parents, which quite takes away that new and common distinction which refers only power universal and absolute to God, but power respective<sup>6</sup> in regard of the special form of government to the choice of the people.

This lordship which Adam by command had over the whole world, and by right descending from him the patriarchs did enjoy, was as large and ample as the absolutest dominion of any monarch which hath been since the Creation. For dominion of life and death we find that Judah, the father, pronounced sentence of death against Tamar, his daughter-in-law, for playing the harlot. "Bring her forth," saith he, "that she may be burnt."<sup>7</sup> Touching war, we see that Abraham commanded an army of three hundred and eighteen soldiers of his own family. And Esau met his brother Jacob with four hundred men at arms. For matter of peace, Abraham made a league with Abimelech, and ratified the articles with an oath. These acts of judging in capital crimes, of making war, and concluding peace, are the chiefest marks of sovereignty that are found in any monarch.

\* \* \*

It may seem absurd to maintain that kings now are the fathers of their people, since experience shows the contrary. It is true, all kings be not the natural parents of their subjects, yet they all either are, or are to be reputed, the next heirs to those first progenitors who were at first the natural parents of the whole people, and in their right succeed to the exercise of supreme jurisdiction; and such heirs are not only lords of their own children, but also of their brethren, and all others that were subject to their fathers. And therefore we find that God told Cain of his brother Abel, "His desires shall be subject unto thee, and thou shalt rule over him." Accordingly, when Jacob bought his brother's birthright, Isaac blessed him thus: "Be

lord over thy brethren, and let the sons of thy mother bow before thee.”<sup>8</sup>

As long as the first fathers of families lived, the name of patriarchs did aptly belong unto them; but after a few descents, when the true fatherhood itself was extinct, and only the right of the father descends to the true heir, then the title of prince or king was more significant to express the power of him who succeeds only to the right of that fatherhood which his ancestors did naturally enjoy. By this means it comes to pass that many a child, by succeeding a king, hath the right of a father over many a gray-headed multitude, and hath the title of *pater patriae*.<sup>9</sup>

To confirm this natural right of regal power, we find in the Decalogue<sup>1</sup> that the law which enjoins obedience to kings is delivered in the terms of “Honor thy father,” as if all power were originally in the father. If obedience to parents be immediately due by a natural law, and subjection to princes but by the mediation of a human ordinance, what reason is there that the laws of nature should give place to the laws of men, as we see the power of the father over his child gives place and is subordinate to the power of the magistrate?

If we compare the natural rights of a father with those of a king, we find them all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them: as the father over one family, so the king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct, and defend the whole commonwealth. His war, his peace, his courts of justice, and all his acts of sovereignty, tend only to preserve and distribute to every subordinate and inferior father, and to their children, their rights and privileges, so that all the duties of a king are summed up in an universal fatherly care of his people.

- Note 1: Systematic theology, as undertaken by medieval philosophers in the universities (“schools”).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Agreeable.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Commonly held.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The conduct of public affairs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Forefathers of the Jews, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Partial, limited.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Genesis 38:24. The examples following also come from Genesis, 14:14, 32:6, and 21:22–27.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The first reference is to Genesis 4:7, which Filmer reads tendentiously as establishing the elder brother Cain's authority over the younger Abel, and the second is to Genesis 27:29.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Father of his country. See Exodus 20:12.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ten Commandments.[Return to reference 1](#)

# JOHN MILTON<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: See headnote to Milton, p. 1381.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***From The Tenure<sup>2</sup> of Kings and Magistrates***

If men within themselves would be governed by reason, and not generally give up their understanding to a double tyranny, of custom from without, and blind affections<sup>3</sup> within, they would discern better what it is to favor and uphold the tyrant of a nation. But being slaves within doors,<sup>4</sup> no wonder that they strive so much to have the public state conformably governed to the inward vicious rule by which they govern themselves. For indeed none can love freedom heartily but good men; the rest love not freedom but license; which never hath more scope or more indulgence than under tyrants. Hence it is that tyrants are not oft offended nor stand much in doubt of bad men, as being all naturally servile; but in whom<sup>5</sup> virtue and true worth most is eminent, them they fear in earnest as by right their masters; against them lies all their hatred and suspicion. Consequently neither do bad men hate tyrants, but have been always readiest with the falsified names of loyalty, and obedience, to color over their base compliances.<sup>6</sup> And although sometimes for shame, and when it comes to their own grievances, of purse especially, they would seem good patriots and side with the better cause, yet when others for the deliverance of their country, endued with fortitude and heroic virtue to fear nothing by the curse written against those "that do the work of the lord negligently,"<sup>7</sup> would go on to remove not only the calamities and thralldoms of a people but the roots and causes whence they spring, straight these men and sure helpers at need, as if they hated only the miseries but not the mischiefs,<sup>8</sup> after they have juggled and paltered<sup>9</sup> with the world, bandied and borne arms against their king, divested him, disanointed him, nay cursed him all over in their pulpits and their pamphlets, to the engaging of sincere and real men beyond what is possible or honest to retreat from, not only turn revolvers from those principles which only could at first move them, but lay the stain of disloyalty and worse on those proceedings which are the necessary consequences of their own former actions; nor disliked by themselves, were they managed to

the entire advantages of their own faction; not considering the while that he toward whom they boasted their new fidelity counted them accessory;<sup>1</sup> and by those statutes and laws which they so impotently brandish against others would have doomed them to a traitor's death for what they have done already. 'Tis true, that most men are apt enough to civil wars and commotions as a novelty, and for a flash hot and active; but through sloth or inconstancy, and weakness of spirit either fainting ere their own pretences,<sup>2</sup> though never so just, be half attained, or through an inbred falsehood and wickedness, betray oftentimes to destruction with themselves men of noblest temper<sup>3</sup> joined with them for causes whereof they in their rash undertakings<sup>4</sup> were not capable.

\* \* \*

No man who knows aught, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were born free, being the image and resemblance of God Himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures born to command and not to obey, and that they lived so. Till from the root of Adam's transgression,<sup>5</sup> falling among themselves to do wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and jointly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement. Hence came cities, towns, and commonwealths. And because no faith in all was found sufficiently binding,<sup>6</sup> they saw it needful to ordain some authority that might restrain by force and punishment what was violated against peace and common right. This authority and power of self-defense and preservation being originally and naturally in every one of them, and unitedly in them all, for ease, for order, and lest each man should be his own partial<sup>7</sup> judge, they communicated and derived<sup>8</sup> either to one, whom for the eminence of his wisdom and integrity they chose above the rest, or to more than one whom they thought of equal deserving: the first was called a king, the other magistrates. Not to be their lords and masters (though

afterward those names in some places were given voluntarily to such as had been authors<sup>9</sup> of inestimable good to the people) but to be their deputies and commissioners, to execute, by virtue of their entrusted power, that justice which else every man by the bond of nature and of covenant must have executed for himself and for one another. And to him that shall consider well why among free persons, one man by civil right<sup>1</sup> should bear authority and jurisdiction over another, no other end or reason can be imaginable. These<sup>2</sup> for a while governed well, and with much equity decided all things at their own arbitrament:<sup>3</sup> till the temptation of such a power left absolute in their hands, perverted them at length to injustice and partiality. Then did they who now by trial<sup>4</sup> had found the danger and inconveniences of committing arbitrary power to any, invent laws either framed or consented to by all, that should confine and limit the authority of whom they chose to govern them: that so man,<sup>5</sup> of whose failing they had proof, might no more rule over them, but law and reason abstracted as much as might be from personal errors and frailties. While<sup>6</sup> as the magistrate was set above the people, so the law was set above the magistrate. When this would not serve, but that the law was either not executed or misapplied, they were constrained from that time, the only remedy left them, to put conditions<sup>7</sup> and take oaths from all kings and magistrates at their first installment to do impartial justice by law: who upon those terms and no other received allegiance from the people, that is to say, bond or covenant to obey them in execution of those laws which they the people had themselves made or assented to. And this oftentimes with express warning, that if the king or magistrate proved unfaithful to his trust, the people would be disengaged.<sup>8</sup> They added also counselors and parliaments, nor to be only at his beck,<sup>9</sup> but with him or without him, at set times, or at all times when any danger threatened to have care of the public safety.

\* \* \*



It being thus manifest that the power of kings and magistrates is nothing else but what is only derivative, transferred and committed to them in trust from the people, to the common good of them all, in whom the power yet remains fundamentally, and cannot be taken from them without a violation of their natural birthright; and seeing that from hence Aristotle<sup>1</sup> and the best of political writers have defined a king, him who governs to the good and profit of his people and not for his own ends, it follows from necessary causes that the titles of sovereign lord, natural lord, and the like, are either arrogancies or flatteries, not admitted<sup>2</sup> by emperors and kings of best note, and disliked by the church both of Jews, Isaiah 26.13, and ancient Christians, as appears by Tertullian and others.<sup>3</sup> Although generally the people of Asia, and with them the Jews also, especially since the time they chose a king against the advice and counsel of God,<sup>4</sup> are noted by wise authors much inclinable to slavery.

Secondly, that to say, as is usual, the king hath as good right to his crown and dignity as any man to his inheritance, is to make the subject no better than the king's slave, his chattel or his possession that may be bought and sold. And doubtless if hereditary title were sufficiently inquired, the best foundation of it would be found either but in courtesy or convenience. But suppose it to be of right hereditary, what can be more just and legal, if a subject for certain crimes be to forfeit by law from himself, and posterity, all his inheritance to the king,<sup>5</sup> than that a king for crimes proportional should forfeit all his title and inheritance to the people: unless the people must be thought created all for him, he not for them, and they all in one body inferior to him single, which were a kind of treason against the dignity of mankind to affirm.

Thirdly it follows that to say kings are accountable to none but God is the overturning of all law and government. For if they may refuse to give account, then all covenants made with them at coronation, all oaths are in vain and mere mockeries, all laws which they swear to keep made to no purpose; for if the king fear not God—as how many of them do not?—we hold then our lives and estates by the tenure of his mere grace and mercy, as from a God, not a

mortal magistrate, a position that none but court parasites or men besotted would maintain.

\* \* \*

It follows lastly, that since the king or magistrate holds his authority of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retain him or depose him though no tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of freeborn men to be governed as seems to them best.

1649

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Terms of holding office.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Impulses, passions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, within their own selves.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Those in whom.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Make their slavishness look good.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Milton apparently refers to Jeremiah 48:10: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The suffering but not its causes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Played fast and loose.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Guilty of being accessories to a crime.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Purposes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Character.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Attempts, enterprises.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Adam's fall introduced sin and violence into human life.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Because merely trusting people to behave themselves did not suffice to control them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Biased.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Delegated. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Doers. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Law. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Kings and magistrates. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Judgment. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Experience. "They": the people who had delegated power to the kings and magistrates. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An individual man. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thus. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Specify restrictions on. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Freed from having to obey. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The king's command. Charles had claimed that Parliament could not assemble unless called into session by the king. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.11.1. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Permitted. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Isaiah 26:13: "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." The church father Tertullian wrote against earthly monarchs in *On the Crown*. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Israelites, traditionally governed by judges, demanded a king despite God's warning against monarchy, as conveyed by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 8). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Convicted felons forfeited their property to the king. [Return to reference 5](#)

## **GERRARD WINSTANLEY**

The demand for democratic elections by a political faction called the Levellers raised the fear in Cromwell and his conservative associates that with unpropertied voters outnumbering the propertied by five to one, they might divide or even abolish private property. That was in fact the program of a small group calling themselves True Levellers or, later, Diggers, who were a group of Christian communists. Their leader was Gerrard Winstanley (1609–1676?), a failed businessman and subsequently a hired laborer, who began to publish tracts in 1648, became notorious in 1649 with the attempted enactment of the Diggers' program, and lapsed back into obscurity after his last published work in 1652.

In the spring of 1649, the Diggers began to put their ideals into practice, digging up the wasteland of St. George's Hill in Surrey and preparing it for crops. Though this land was not enclosed, all over England landowners claimed property rights in such common land, and the Diggers' gesture of cultivation here and in a few other Digger communities made a threatening counterclaim on behalf of the poor and propertyless. Their aim was at one level practical: at least one-third of England, they claimed, was barren waste, and if properly cultivated could vastly increase the food supply, to the great benefit of the poor. At another level their aim was ideological, a fundamental challenge to the concept of private ownership of land, as the tract excerpted here argues—at least in regard to the common land. The army and the civil authorities were not very hard on the Diggers, but the local landholders were, beating them, expelling them, and destroying their settlements. Nonetheless, their radical and often eloquent tracts survived to inspire later communes.

## ***From A New Year's Gift<sup>1</sup> Sent to the Parliament and Army***

Gentlemen of the Parliament and army: you and the common people have assisted each other to cast out the head of oppression which was kingly power seated in one man's hand, and that work is now done; and till that work was done you called upon the people to assist you to deliver this distressed, bleeding, dying nation out of bondage; and the people came and failed you not, counting neither purse nor blood too dear to part with to effect this work.

The Parliament after this have made an act to cast out kingly power, and to make England a free commonwealth. These acts the people are much rejoiced with, as being words forerunning their freedom, and they wait for their accomplishment that their joy may be full; for as words without action are a cheat and kills the comfort of a righteous spirit, so words performed in action does comfort and nourish the life thereof.

Now, sirs, wheresoever we spy out kingly power, no man I hope shall be troubled to declare it, nor afraid to cast it out, having both act of Parliament, the soldiers' oath, and the common people's consent on his side; for kingly power is like a great spread tree, if you lop the head or top bough, and let the other branches and root stand, it will grow again and recover fresher strength.

If any ask me what kingly power is, I answer, there is a twofold kingly power. The one is the kingly power of righteousness, and this is the power of almighty God, ruling the whole creation in peace and keeping it together. And this is the power of universal love, leading people into all truth, teaching everyone to do as he would be done unto: now once more striving with flesh and blood, shaking down everything that cannot stand, and bringing everyone into the unity of himself, the one spirit of love and righteousness, and so will work a thorough restoration. But this kingly power is above all and will

tread all covetousness, pride, envy, and self-love, and all other enemies whatsoever, under his feet, and take the kingdom and government of the creation out of the hand of self-seeking and self-honoring flesh,<sup>2</sup> and rule the alone king of righteousness in the earth; and this indeed is Christ himself, who will cast out the curse.<sup>3</sup> But this is not that kingly power intended by that act of Parliament to be cast out, but pretended to be set up, though this kingly power be much fought against both by Parliament, army, clergy, and people; but when they are made to see him, then they shall mourn because they have persecuted him.<sup>4</sup>

But the other kingly power is the power of unrighteousness, which indeed is the devil. And O, that there were such a heart in Parliament and army as to perform your own act.<sup>5</sup> Then people would never complain of you for breach of covenant, for your covetousness, pride, and too much self-seeking that is in you. And you on the other side would never have cause to complain of the people's murmurings against you. Truly this jarring that is between you and the people is the kingly power; yea that very kingly power which you have made an act to cast out. Therefore see it be fulfilled on your part; for the kingly power of righteousness expects it, or else he will cast you out for hypocrites and unsavory salt;<sup>6</sup> for he looks upon all your actions, and truly there is abundance of rust about your actings, which makes them that they do not shine bright.

This kingly power is covetousness in his branches,<sup>7</sup> or the power of self-love ruling in one or in many men over others and enslaving those who in the creation are their equals; nay, who are in the strictness of equity rather their masters. And this kingly power is usually set in the chair of government under the name of prerogative<sup>8</sup> when he rules in one over other: and under the name of state privilege of Parliament when he rules in many over others: and this kingly power is always raised up and established by the sword, and therefore he is called the murderer, or the great red dragon which fights against Michael,<sup>9</sup> for he enslaves the weakness of the people under him, denying an equal freedom in the earth to

everyone, which the law of righteousness gave every man in his creation. This I say is kingly power under darkness; and as he rules in men, so he makes men jar one against another, and is the cause of all wars and complainings. He is known by his outward actions, and his action at this very day fills all places; for this power of darkness rules, and would rule, and is that only enemy that fights against creation and national freedom. And this kingly power is he which you have made an act of Parliament to cast out. And now, you rulers of England, play the men and be valiant for the truth, which is Christ: for assure yourselves God will not be mocked, nor the devil will not be mocked. For first you say and profess you own<sup>1</sup> the scriptures of prophets and apostles, and God looks that you should perform that word in action. Secondly you have declared against the devil, and if you do not now go through with your work but slack your hand by hypocritical self-love, and so suffer this dark kingly power to rise higher and rule, you shall find he will maul both you and yours to purpose.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

In the time of the kings, who came in as conquerors and ruled by the power of the sword, not only the common land but the enclosures<sup>3</sup> also were captivated under the will of those kings, till now of late that our later kings granted more freedom to the gentry than they had presently after the Conquest:<sup>4</sup> yet under bondage still. For what are prisons, whips, and gallows in the times of peace but the laws and power of the sword, forcing and compelling obedience, and so enslaving as if the sword raged in the open field? England was in such a slavery under the kingly power that both gentry and commonalty<sup>5</sup> groaned under bondage; and to ease themselves, they endeavored to call a parliament, that by their counsels and decrees they might find some freedom.

But Charles the then king perceiving that the freedom they strove for would derogate from his prerogative tyranny,<sup>6</sup> thereupon he goes into the north to raise a war against the Parliament; and took

William the Conqueror's sword into his hand again, thereby to keep under the former conquered English, and to uphold his kingly power of self-will and prerogative, which was the power got by former conquests; that is, to rule over the lives and estates of all men at his will, and so to make us pure slaves and vassals.

Well, this Parliament, that did consist of the chief lords, lords of manors, and gentry, and they seeing that the king, by raising an army, did thereby declare his intent to enslave all sorts to him by the sword; and being in distress and in a low ebb, they call upon the common people to bring in their plate, monies, taxes, free-quarter, excise,<sup>7</sup> and to adventure their lives with them, and they would endeavor to recover England from that Norman yoke and make us a free people. And the common people assent hereunto, and call this the Parliament's cause, and own it and adventure person and purse to preserve it; and by the joint assistance of Parliament and people the king was beaten in the field, his head taken off, and his kingly power voted down. And we the commons thereby virtually have recovered ourselves from the Norman conquest; we want nothing but possession of the spoil,<sup>8</sup> which is a free use of the land for our livelihood.

And from hence we the common people, or younger brothers,<sup>9</sup> plead our property in the common land as truly our own by virtue of this victory over the king, as our elder brothers can plead property in their enclosures; and that for three reasons in England's law.

First, by a lawful purchase or contract between the Parliament and us; for they were our landlords and lords of manors, that held the freedom of the commons from us<sup>1</sup> while the king was in his power; for they held title thereunto from him,<sup>2</sup> he being the head and they branches of the kingly power that enslaved the people by that ancient conqueror's sword, that was the ruling power. For they said, "Come and help us against the king that enslaves us, that we may be delivered from his tyranny, and we will make you a free people."

Now they cannot make us free unless they deliver us from the bondage<sup>3</sup> which they themselves held us under; and that is, they



held the freedom of the earth from us: for we in part with them have delivered ourselves from the king. Now we claim freedom from that bondage you have and yet do hold us under, by the bargain and contract between Parliament and us, who, I say, did consist of lords of manors and landlords, whereof Mr. Drake,<sup>4</sup> who hath arrested me for digging upon the common, was one at that time. Therefore by the law of bargain and sale we claim of them our freedom, to live comfortably with them in this land of our nativity; and this we cannot do so long as we lie under poverty, and must not be suffered to plant the commons and wasteland for our livelihood. For take away the land from any people, and those people are in a way of continual dearth and misery; and better not to have had a body, than not to have food and raiment for it. But, I say, they have sold us our freedom in the common, and have been largely paid for it; for by means of our bloods and money they sit in peace: for if the king had prevailed, they had lost all, and been in slavery to the meanest cavalier, if the king would.<sup>5</sup> Therefore we the commons say, give us our bargain: if you deny us our bargain, you deny God, Christ, and scriptures; and all your profession<sup>6</sup> then is and hath been hypocrisy.

Secondly, the commons and crown land is our property by equal conquest over the kingly power: for the Parliament did never stir up the people by promises and covenant to assist them to cast out the king and to establish them in the king's place and prerogative power. No, but all their declarations were for the safety and peace of the whole nation.

Therefore the common people being part of the nation, and especially they that bore the greatest heat of the day in casting out the oppressor; and the nation cannot be in peace so long as the poor oppressed are in wants and the land is entangled and held from them by bondage.

But the victory being obtained over the king, the spoil, which is properly the land, ought in equity to be divided now between the two parties, that is Parliament and the common people. The Parliament, consisting of lords of manors and gentry, ought to have their enclosure lands free to them without molestation. \* \* \* And

the common people, consisting of soldiers and such as paid taxes and free-quarter, ought to have the freedom of all waste and common land and crown land equally among them. The soldiery ought not in equity to have all, nor the other people that paid them to have all; but the spoil ought to be divided between them that stayed at home and them that went to war; for the victory is for the whole nation.

And as the Parliament declared they did all for the nation, and not for themselves only; so we plead with the army, they did not fight for themselves, but for the freedom of the nation: and I say, we have bought our freedom of them likewise by taxes and free-quarter. Therefore we claim an equal freedom with them in this conquest over the king.

Thirdly, we claim an equal portion in the victory over the king by virtue of the two acts of Parliament: the one to make England a free commonwealth, the other to take away kingly power. Now the kingly power, you have heard, is a power that rules by the sword in covetousness and self, giving the earth to some and denying it to others: and this kingly power was not in the hand of the king alone, but lords, and lords of manors, and corrupt judges and lawyers especially held it up likewise. For he was the head and they, with the tithing priests,<sup>7</sup> are the branches of that tyrannical kingly power; and all the several limbs and members must be cast out before kingly power can be pulled up root and branch. Mistake me not, I do not say, cast out the persons of men. No, I do not desire their fingers to ache;<sup>8</sup> but I say, cast out their power whereby they hold the people in bondage, as the king held them in bondage. And I say, it is our own freedom we claim, both by bargain and by equality in the conquest; as well as by the law of righteous creation which gives the earth to all equally.

And the power of lords of manors lies in this: they deny the common people the use and free benefit of the earth, unless they give them leave and pay them for it, either in rent, in fines, in homages or heriots.<sup>9</sup> Surely the earth was never made by God that the younger brother should not live in the earth unless he would

work for and pay his elder brother rent for the earth. No, this slavery came in by conquest, and it is part of the kingly power; and England cannot be a free commonwealth till this bondage be taken away. You have taken away the king; you have taken away the House of Lords. Now step two steps further, and take away the power of lords of manors and of tithing priests, and the intolerable oppressions of judges by whom laws are corrupted; and your work will be honorable.

Fourthly, if this freedom be denied the common people, to enjoy the common land; then Parliament, army, and judges will deny equity and reason, whereupon the laws of a well-governed commonwealth ought to be built. And if this equity be denied, then there can be no law but club law<sup>1</sup> among the people: and if the sword must reign, then every party will be striving to bear the sword; and then farewell peace; nay, farewell religion and gospel, unless it be made use of to entrap one another, as we plainly see some priests and others make it a cloak for their knavery. If I adventure my life and fruit of my labor equal with you, and obtain what we strive for; it is both equity and reason that I should equally divide the spoil with you, and not you to have all and I none. And if you deny us this, you take away our property from us, our monies and blood, and give us nothing for it.

Therefore, I say, the common land is my own land, equal with my fellow-commoners, and our true property, by the law of creation. It is everyone's, but not one single one's. \* \* \* True religion and undefiled is this, to make restitution of the earth, which hath been taken and held from the common people by the power of conquests formerly, and so set the oppressed free. Do not all strive to enjoy the land? The gentry strive for land, the clergy strive for land, the common people strive for land; and buying and selling is an art whereby people endeavor to cheat one another of the land. Now if any can prove from the law of righteousness that the land was made peculiar to him and his successively,<sup>2</sup> shutting others out, he shall enjoy it freely for my part. But I affirm it was made for all; and true religion is to let everyone enjoy it. Therefore, you rulers of England,

make restitution of the lands which the kingly power holds from us: set the oppressed free, and come in and honor Christ, who is the restoring power, and you shall find rest.

1650

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In 17th-century England, gifts were customarily exchanged on New Year's Day, not at Christmas.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Flesh" is imagined as everything mortal and fallible, that which rebels against divine righteousness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The curse upon mankind that was the punishment of Adam's fall.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Parliament and the army do not expressly intend to cast out God's kingly power, but rather they act as if they are conforming to God's teachings, and yet often they resist God until they are brought to recognize him.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Enforce the act already passed by Parliament.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Matthew 5:13: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, covetousness is one manifestation of unrighteous kingly power.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The monarch's special powers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
Revelation 12:3–9: "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. . . . And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, / and prevailed

not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. / And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Acknowledge. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thoroughly. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Privately held land, often common land that had been enclosed. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The conquest of England by the Norman William the Conqueror in 1066. Winstanley argued that the oppression of the poor and the landless was a consequence of nearly six centuries of occupation of England by a foreign power.  
“Presently”: immediately. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Common people. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Absolute rule. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A tax on domestically manufactured goods, first imposed by Parliament in 1643 to finance the war against the king. “Plate”: silver plate. “Free-quarter”: free room and board for soldiers, or its monetary equivalent imposed as a tax. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Reward of victory. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Estates commonly passed to the eldest brother, leaving the younger brothers landless. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Kept the right to use the common lands from us, the common people. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Under the feudal system, the great lords held their lands on grant from the king, in return for their allegiance. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Technically bondage refers to the services and goods legally required by feudal landowners of their tenants. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir Francis Drake, a member of Parliament who owned St. George’s Hill, on which Winstanley and his followers had established a commune. At first sympathetic to the Diggers, Drake eventually took legal action to have them evicted. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: To the lowest soldier of the king, if the king so commanded.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Statement of principles.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Priests of the Church of England were legally entitled to a tenth, or “tithe,” of the goods of every parishioner; those people who wished to separate from the established church fiercely resented the involuntary nature of the tithe.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Wish the least physical harm to them.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fees or goods paid by tenants to landlords in addition to rent.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, might makes right.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: By inheritance.[Return to reference 2](#)

# THOMAS HOBBS

The English Civil War and its aftermath raised fundamental questions about the nature and legitimacy of state power. In 1651 Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) attempted to answer those questions in his ambitious masterwork of political philosophy, *Leviathan*. He grounded his political vision upon a comprehensive philosophy of nature and knowledge. Hobbes held that everything in the universe is composed only of matter; spirit does not exist. All knowledge is gained through sensory impressions, which are nothing but matter in motion. What we call the self is, for Hobbes, simply a tissue of sensory impressions—clear and immediate in the presence of the objects that evoke them, vague and less vivid in their absence. As a result, an iron determinism of cause and effect governs everything in the universe, including human action.

Because, Hobbes argues, all humans are roughly equal mentally and physically, they possess equal hopes of attaining goods, as well as equal fears of danger from others. In the state of nature, prior to the foundation of some sovereign power to keep them in awe, everyone is continually at war with everyone else, and life, in Hobbes's memorable phrase, is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." To escape this ghastly strife, humans covenant with one another to establish a sovereign government over all of them. That sovereign power—which need not be a king but is always indivisible—incorporates the wills and individuality of them all, so that the people no longer have rights or liberties apart from the sovereign's will. The sovereign's dominion over his subjects extends to the right to pronounce on all matters of religion.

While other versions of covenant theory, for instance Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, insisted that the power transferred by the people to the sovereign could be limited or revoked, in Hobbes's system, the founding political covenant must be a permanent one, since no tyranny can be so evil as the state of war

that the sovereign power prevents. Yet if the sovereign power should be overthrown, the individual ruler has no further claim, and the people, for their safety, must accept the new sovereign unconditionally. Hobbes was generally associated with the royalist cause, as a tutor to the Cavendish family and as an exile in Paris from 1640 to 1651, where he tutored the future Charles II. Yet his argument made no distinction between a legitimate monarch and a successful usurper, like Oliver Cromwell. Moreover, Hobbes's philosophical materialism led many to suspect him of atheism; after the Restoration, the publication of many of his books, including a history of the civil war titled *Behemoth*, was prohibited for a number of years. Undeterred, Hobbes continued to write on a variety of psychological, political, and mathematical topics, completing a translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* at the age of eighty-six.

Hobbes's political theory did not fit easily into the established patterns of English thought partly because his perspective was unusually cosmopolitan. Educated at Oxford as a classicist, Hobbes traveled widely in Europe between 1610 and 1660 as a companion and tutor of noblemen, often remaining abroad for years at a time. During these lengthy sojourns he became acquainted with many of the leading intellectuals and scientists on the Continent, including Galileo, Descartes, and the prominent French mathematician Pierre Gassendi, who argued that the universe was governed entirely by mechanical principles. The most important political philosophers for Hobbes were also Continental figures: the Italian Niccolò Machiavelli, who saw human beings as naturally competitive and power hungry, and Jean Bodin, a French theorist of indivisible, absolute monarchy. One English writer who did influence Hobbes profoundly was Francis Bacon, whose amanuensis Hobbes had been in Bacon's last years. Ironically, Hobbes was not invited to join the Royal Society, established after the Restoration on Baconian principles, because his religious views were suspect and because he had quarreled with several of the society's founders. Yet Hobbes is truly Bacon's heir, sharing Bacon's utter lack of sentimentality and a memorably astringent prose style.



## ***From Leviathan***[1](#)

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The title refers to the primordial sea creature Leviathan, described in Job 41 as the prime evidence of and analogue to God's power, beyond all human measure and comprehension. Hobbes takes him as figure for the sovereign power in the state. Leviathan was also sometimes taken as a figure for Satan, on the basis of Job 41:34: "he is a king over all the children of pride."[Return to reference 1](#)

## From *The Introduction*

### [THE ARTIFICIAL MAN]

Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial<sup>2</sup> animal. For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within, why may we not say that all automata (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life?<sup>3</sup> For what is the heart but a spring; and the nerves but so many strings; and the joints but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body such as was intended by the artificer? Art goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of nature, man. For by art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth or State (in Latin, *Civitas*), which is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defense it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the magistrates and other officers of judicature and execution, artificial joints; reward and punishment (by which, fastened to the seat of the sovereignty, every joint and member is moved to perform his duty) are the nerves, that do the same in the body natural; the wealth and riches of all the particular members are the strength; *salus populi* (the people's safety) its business; counselors, by whom all things needful for it to know are suggested unto it, are the memory; equity and laws an artificial reason and will; concord, health; sedition, sickness; and civil war, death. Lastly, the pacts and covenants by which the parts of this body politic were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that *Fiat* or the "let us make man," pronounced by God in the creation.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Made by art.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hobbes's definition of life as motion collapses the distinction between the life of humans and the life of machines or institutions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Genesis 1:26.[Return to reference 4](#)

## FROM CHAPTER 15. OF OTHER LAWS OF NATURE

From that law of nature by which we are obliged to transfer to another such rights as, being retained, hinder the peace of mankind, there followeth a third, which is this: *That men perform their covenants made.*<sup>3</sup> without which, covenants are in vain, and but empty words; and, the right of all men to all things remaining, we are still in the condition of war.

And in this law of nature consisteth the fountain and original of Justice. For where no covenant hath preceded, there hath no right been transferred, and every man has right to every thing; and consequently no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is unjust; and the definition of injustice is no other than *the not performance of covenant*. And whatsoever is not unjust is just. \* \* \*

For the question is not of promises mutual where there is no security of performance on either side, as when there is no civil power erected over the parties promising; for such promises are no covenants. But either where one of the parties has performed already, or where there is a power to make him perform: there is the question whether it be against reason, that is against the benefit of the other, to perform or not. And I say it is not against reason.<sup>4</sup> For the manifestation whereof, we are to consider: first, that when a man doth a thing which (notwithstanding anything can be foreseen and reckoned on) tendeth to his own destruction, howsoever<sup>5</sup> some accident, which he could not expect, arriving may turn it to his benefit; yet such events do not make it reasonably or wisely done. Secondly, that in a condition of war, wherein every man to every man, for want of a common power to keep them all in awe, is an enemy, there is no man can hope by his own strength or wit to defend himself from destruction without the help of confederates; where everyone expects the same defense by the confederation that anyone else does. And therefore he which declares he thinks it reason to deceive those that help him can in reason expect no other means of safety than what can be had from his own single power.

He therefore that breaketh his covenant, and consequently declareth that he thinks he may with reason do so, cannot be received into any society that unite themselves for peace and defense, but by the error of them that receive him; nor when he is received be retained in it without seeing the danger of their error; which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security. And therefore if he be left or cast out of society, he perisheth; and if he live in society, it is by the errors of other men, which he could not foresee nor reckon upon; and consequently against the reason of his preservation; and so as all men that contribute not to his destruction forbear him only out of ignorance of what is good for themselves.

As for the instance of gaining the secure and perpetual felicity of heaven by any way, it is frivolous: there being but one way imaginable, and that is not breaking, but keeping of covenant.

And for the other instance of attaining sovereignty by rebellion, it is manifest that though the event follow, yet because it cannot reasonably be expected, but rather the contrary; and because by gaining it so others are taught to gain the same in like manner, the attempt thereof is against reason. Justice therefore, that is to say, keeping of covenant, is a rule of reason, by which we are forbidden to do anything destructive to our life, and consequently a law of nature.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Though the terms are general, Hobbes refers in this chapter especially to the covenants men make with each other when they transfer power to the sovereign. Milton makes very different use of covenant theory to justify the rebellion and regicide in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, to perform the promise.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Even though.[Return to reference 5](#)

## CHAPTER 17. OF THE CAUSES, GENERATION, AND DEFINITION OF A COMMONWEALTH

The final cause, end, or design of men, who naturally love liberty and dominion over others, in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves in which we see them live in commonwealths, is the foresight of their own preservation and of a more contented life thereby—that is to say, of getting themselves out from their miserable condition of war which is necessarily consequent, as has been shown ([Chapter 13](#)), to the natural passions of men when there is no visible power to keep them in awe and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants and observation of those laws of nature set down in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters.

For the laws of nature—as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others as we would be done to—of themselves, without the terror of some power to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality,<sup>6</sup> pride, revenge, and the like. And covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore, notwithstanding the laws of nature (which everyone has then kept when he had the will to keep them, when he can do it safely), if there be no power erected, or not great enough for our security, every man will—and may lawfully—rely on his own strength and art for caution<sup>7</sup> against all other men. And in all places where men have lived by small families, to rob and spoil one another has been a trade, and so far from being reputed against the law of nature that the greater spoils they gained, the greater was their honor; and men observed no other laws therein but the laws of honor—that is to abstain from cruelty, leaving to men their lives and instruments of husbandry. And as small families did then, so now do cities and kingdoms, which are but greater families, for their own security enlarge their dominions upon all pretenses of danger and fear of invasion or assistance that may be given to invaders, and endeavor as much as they can to subdue or weaken their neighbors by open

force and secret arts, for want of other caution, justly; and are remembered for it in after ages with honor.

Nor is it the joining together of a small number of men that gives them this security, because in small numbers small additions on the one side or the other make the advantage of strength so great as is sufficient to carry the victory, and therefore gives encouragement to an invasion. The multitude sufficient to confide in for our security is not determined by any certain number but by comparison with the enemy we fear, and is then sufficient when the odds of the enemy is not of so visible and conspicuous moment to determine the event<sup>8</sup> of war as to move him to attempt.

And be there never so great a multitude, yet if their actions be directed according to their particular judgments and particular appetites, they can expect thereby no defense nor protection, neither against a common enemy nor against the injuries of one another. For being distracted in opinion<sup>9</sup> concerning the best use and application of their strength, they do not help but hinder one another, and reduce their strength by mutual opposition to nothing; whereby they are easily not only subdued by a very few that agree together, but also, when there is no common enemy, they make war upon each other for their particular interest. For if we could suppose a great multitude of men to consent in the observation of justice and other laws of nature without a common power to keep them all in awe, we might as well suppose all mankind to do the same, then there neither would be, nor need to be, any civil government or commonwealth at all, because there would be peace without subjection.

Nor is it enough for the security which men desire should last all the time of their life that they be governed and directed by one judgment for a limited time, as in one battle or one war. For though they obtain a victory by their unanimous endeavor against a foreign enemy, yet afterwards, when either they have no common enemy or he that by one part is held for an enemy is by another part held for a friend, they must needs, by the difference of their interests, dissolve and fall again into a war among themselves.

It is true that certain living creatures, as bees and ants, live sociably one with another—which are therefore by Aristotle numbered among political creatures—and have no other direction than their particular judgments and appetites, nor speech whereby one of them can signify to another what he thinks expedient for the common benefit; and therefore some man may perhaps desire to know why mankind cannot do the same. To which I answer:

First, that men are continually in competition for honor and dignity, which these creatures are not; and consequently among men there arises on that ground envy and hatred and finally war, but among these not so.

Secondly, that among these creatures the common good differs not from the private; and being by nature inclined to their private, they procure thereby the common benefit. But man, whose joy consists in comparing himself with other men, can relish nothing but what is eminent.

Thirdly, that these creatures—having not, as man, the use of reason—do not see nor think they see any fault in the administration of their common business; whereas among men there are very many that think themselves wiser and abler to govern the public better than the rest, and these strive to reform and innovate, one this way, another that way, and thereby bring it into distraction and civil war.

Fourthly, that these creatures, though they have some use of voice in making known to one another their desires and other affections, yet they want that art of words by which some men can represent to others that which is good in the likeness of evil, and evil in the likeness of good, and augment or diminish this apparent greatness of good and evil, discontenting men and troubling their peace at their pleasure.

Fifthly, irrational creatures cannot distinguish between injury and damage, and therefore, as long as they be at ease, they are not offended with their fellows; whereas man is then most troublesome when he is most at ease, for then it is that he loves to show his wisdom and control the actions of them that govern the commonwealth.



Lastly, the agreement of these creatures is natural, that of men is by covenant only, which is artificial, and therefore it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required besides covenant to make their agreement constant and lasting, which is a common power to keep them in awe and to direct their actions to the common benefit.

The only way to erect such a common power as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as that by their own industry and by the fruits of the earth they may nourish themselves and live contentedly, is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, into one will, which is as much as to say, to appoint one man or assembly of men to bear their person, and everyone to own and acknowledge himself to be the author of whatsoever he that so bears their person shall act or cause to be acted in those things which concern the common peace and safety, and therein to submit their wills everyone to his will, and their judgments to his judgment. This is more than consent or concord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner as if every man should say to every man, "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on the condition that you give up your right to him and authorize all his actions in like manner." This done, the multitude so united in one person is called a commonwealth, in Latin *civitas*. This is the generation of that great Leviathan (or rather, to speak more reverently, of that mortal god) to whom we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defense. For by this authority, given him by every particular man in the commonwealth, he has the use of so much power and strength conferred on him that, by terror thereof, he is enabled to form the wills of them all to peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad. And in him consists the essence of the commonwealth, which, to define it, is one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves everyone the author, to the end he

may use the strength and means of them all as he shall think expedient for their peace and common defense. And he that carries this person is called sovereign and said to have sovereign power; and everyone besides, his subject.

1651

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Favoritism, to oneself or another.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Precaution, defense.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Outcome.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, by opinions.[Return to reference 9](#)

## HISTORY AND LIFE-WRITING

The Civil Wars invited new kinds of histories, including partisan accounts like Margaret Cavendish's *Life of William Cavendish* (1667) and Lucy Hutchinson's "Life of Colonel Hutchinson" (which circulated in manuscript). Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, excerpted below, would become the standard text of the period. The civil war decades also provided the impetus for non-elite subjects to record their lives. The excerpt from the Quaker Dorothy Waugh's account of her persecution in Carlisle gives a vivid sense of the courage of those forging new paths in tumultuous times.

## EDWARD HYDE, EARL OF CLARENDON

Edward Hyde (1609–1674) was educated at Oxford and during the 1630s practiced law. From about 1641 onward, he was among the chief supporters and advisers of Charles I; he went into exile with the boy who was to become Charles II and was privy to the various plots and plans of the royalists to restore him to power. After the Restoration he became lord chancellor and prime minister to Charles II, and he was instrumental in enacting the so-called Clarendon Code, a series of harsh laws against all nonconformists to the reestablished Church of England. He was impeached in 1667, owing partly to England's ill success in the Dutch War, and spent the last seven years of his life in France.

Clarendon wrote part of his great *History of the Rebellion* amid the events it describes. For the Muse of History such a short view can be a mixed blessing. But Clarendon's learning—legal, classical, and historical—and the formality of his method save him from many of the failings of partisanship. He wrote with dignity and for posterity. His *History*, which first appeared in print thirty years after his death, was remarkable not only for the largeness of its canvas but also for the force and coherence of the conservative social philosophy informing it. As a historian and rhetorician, Clarendon invites comparison with his classical models, Thucydides and Tacitus. As an evaluator of character, he invites comparison with Plutarch, whose judiciousness he shares.

# ***From The History of the Rebellion***

## **[THE CHARACTER OF OLIVER CROMWELL]<sup>[1](#)</sup>**

About the middle of August he was seized on by a common tertian ague,<sup>[2](#)</sup> from which he believed a little ease and divertissement at Hampton Court<sup>[3](#)</sup> would have freed him; but the fits grew stronger and his spirits much abated, so that he returned again to Whitehall,<sup>[4](#)</sup> when his physicians began to think him in danger, though the preachers who prayed always about him and told God Almighty what great things he had done for Him, and how much more need He had still of his service, declared as from God that he should recover, and he himself did not think he should die, till even the time that his spirits failed him, and then declared to them that he did appoint his son to succeed him, his eldest son Richard. And so expired upon the third day of September (a day he thought always very propitious to him, and on which he had triumphed for several victories),<sup>[5](#)</sup> 1658, a day very memorable for the greatest storm of wind that had been ever known for some hours before and after his death, which overthrew trees, houses, and made great wrecks at sea, and was so universal that there were terrible effects of it both in France and Flanders, where all people trembled at it, besides the wrecks all along the coast, many boats having been cast away in the very rivers; and within few days after, that circumstance of his death that accompanied that storm was known.

He was one of those men *quos vituperare ne inimici quidem possunt, nisi ut simul laudent*,<sup>[6](#)</sup> for he could never have done half that mischief without great parts of courage and industry and judgment, and he must have had a wonderful understanding in the natures and humors of men, and as great a dexterity in the applying them, who from a private and obscure birth (though of a good

family), without interest of estate, alliance, or friendships, could raise himself to such a height, and compound and knead such opposite and contradictory tempers, humors, and interests into a consistence that contributed to his designs and to their own destruction, whilst himself grew insensibly powerful enough to cut off those by whom he had climbed, in the instant that they projected to demolish their own building.<sup>7</sup> What Velleius Paterculus said of Cinna may very justly be said of him, *Ausum eum quae nemo auderet bonus, perfecisse quae a nullo nisi fortissimo perfici possunt.*<sup>8</sup> Without doubt no man with more wickedness ever attempted anything, or brought to pass what he desired more wickedly, more in the face and contempt of religion and moral honesty; yet wickedness as great as his could never have accomplished those trophies without the assistance of a great spirit, an admirable circumspection and sagacity, and a most magnanimous resolution. When he appeared first in the Parliament he seemed to have a person in no degree gracious, no ornament of discourse, none of those talents which use to reconcile the affections of the standers-by; yet as he grew into place and authority, his parts<sup>9</sup> seemed to be renewed, as if he had concealed faculties till he had occasion to use them, and when he was to act the part of a great man, he did it without any indecency<sup>1</sup> through the want of custom.

After he was confirmed and invested Protector by the Humble Petition and Advice,<sup>2</sup> he consulted with very few upon any action of importance, nor communicated any enterprise he resolved upon with more than those who were to have principal parts in the execution of it, nor to them sooner than was absolutely necessary. What he once resolved, in which he was not rash, he would not be dissuaded from, nor endure any contradiction of his power and authority, but extorted obedience from them who were not willing to yield it.

When he had laid some very extraordinary tax upon the city, one Cony, an eminent fanatic,<sup>3</sup> and one who had heretofore served him very notably, positively refused to pay his part and loudly dissuaded others from submitting to it, as an imposition notoriously against the law and the property of the subject, which all honest men were

bound to defend. Cromwell sent for him and cajoled him with the memory of the old kindness and friendship that had been between them, and that of all men he did not expect this opposition from him in a matter that was so necessary for the good of the commonwealth. But it was always his fortune to meet with the most rude and obstinate behavior from those who had formerly been absolutely governed by him, and they commonly put him in mind of some expressions and sayings of his own in cases of the like nature. So this man remembered<sup>4</sup> him how great an enemy he had expressed himself to such grievances, and declared that all who submitted to them and paid illegal taxes were more to blame, and greater enemies to their country, than they who imposed them; and that the tyranny of princes could never be grievous but by the tameness and stupidity of the people.

When Cromwell saw that he could not convert him, he told him that he had a will as stubborn as his, and he would try which of them two should be master, and thereupon with some terms of reproach and contempt he committed the man to prison—whose courage was nothing abated by it, but as soon as the term came, he brought his *habeas corpus*<sup>5</sup> in the King's Bench, which they then called the Upper Bench. Maynard, who was of counsel with the prisoner, demanded his liberty with great confidence, both upon the illegality of the commitment and the illegality of the imposition,<sup>6</sup> as being laid without any lawful authority. The judges could not maintain or defend either, but enough declared what their sentence would be, and therefore the Protector's attorney required a further day to answer what had been urged. Before that day, Maynard was committed to the Tower for presuming to question or make doubt of his authority, and the judges were sent for and severely reprehended for suffering that license; and when they with all humility mentioned the law, and Magna Carta, Cromwell told them their Magna Carta should not control his actions, which he knew were for the safety of the commonwealth. He asked them who made them judges; whether they had any authority to sit there but what he gave them, and that if his authority were at an end, they knew well enough

what would become of themselves. And therefore advised them to be more tender of that which could only preserve them, and so dismissed them with caution that they should not suffer the lawyers to prate what it would not become them to hear.

Thus he subdued a spirit that had been often troublesome to the most sovereign power, and made Westminster Hall<sup>7</sup> as obedient and subservient to his commands as any of the rest of his quarters. In all other matters which did not concern the life of his jurisdiction, he seemed to have great reverence for the law, and rarely interposed between party and party; and as he proceeded with this kind of indignation and haughtiness with those who were refractory and dared to contend with his greatness, so towards those who complied with his good pleasure and courted his protection he used a wonderful civility, generosity, and bounty.

To reduce three nations which perfectly hated him to an entire obedience to all his dictates, to awe and govern those nations by an army that was indevoted to him and wished his ruin, was an instance of a very prodigious address;<sup>8</sup> but his greatness at home was but a shadow of the glory he had abroad. It was hard to discover which feared him most, France, Spain, or the Low Countries, where his friendship was current at the value he put upon it; and as they did all sacrifice their honor and their interest to his pleasure, so there is nothing he could have demanded that either of them would have denied him.

\* \* \*

He was not a man of blood, and totally declined Machiavel's method, which prescribes upon any alteration of a government, as a thing absolutely necessary, to cut off all the heads of those, and extirpate their families, who are friends to the old;<sup>9</sup> and it was confidently reported in the Council of Officers, it was more than once proposed that there might be a general massacre of all the royal party as the only expedient to secure the government, but Cromwell would never consent to it, it may be out of too much contempt of his enemies. In



a word, as he had all the wickednesses against which damnation is denounced and for which hellfire is prepared, so he had some virtues which have caused the memory of some men in all ages to be celebrated, and he will be looked upon by posterity as a brave, bad man.

1702–04

## Endnotes

- Note 1: After the manner of ancient historians, Clarendon describes the last days, sickness, and death of Cromwell, then summarizes his character. The Protector, who had been depressed for some time by the death of a favorite daughter, first grew ill in the summer of 1658.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An acute fever, with paroxysms recurring every third day.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hampton Court, built by Cardinal Wolsey and ceded by him to Henry VIII, is a splendid old palace up the Thames from London. “Divertissement”: diversion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Whitehall, in London, was the traditional residence of the head of state.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dunbar and Worcester were important battles that Cromwell had won on September 3.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Whom not even his enemies could curse without praising him” (Latin), a slight misquotation of Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 3.12.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Clarendon’s judgment can be compared with that of Marvell in “An Horatian Ode” (p. 1282). “Insensibly”: imperceptibly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “He dared undertake what no good man would have tried and triumphed where only the strongest of men could have succeeded.” Velleius Paterculus (died 30 C.E.) wrote a concise *History of Rome*; the quotation is from 2.24.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Personal qualities.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Indecorum. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In December 1653, Cromwell was invested as Protector under a written constitution called the Instrument of Government. In 1657 another constitution, the Humble Petition and Advice, invested him with quasi-monarchical powers and restored the House of Lords. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Clarendon's vocabulary, a radical Puritan. "The city": the City of London. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Reminded. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Writ to release a prisoner. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the original tax. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The center of the law courts and legal profession. Clarendon never tells us what happened to poor George Cony; the lawyer and judges made their submission and got off, but the fate of the plaintiff remains obscure. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Skill. "Indevoted": Clarendon's word, carefully coined to express the far from unanimous feelings of the army. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters 3 and 7. [Return to reference 9](#)

## DOROTHY WAUGH

Around 1647, a group of disciples began forming around the charismatic itinerant preacher George Fox. Like many religious radicals of the period, Fox taught the importance of relying upon the Inner Light—one's own conscience as guided by the Holy Spirit—in preference to human law or holy writ. Fox believed that the days of prophecy and revelation had not ended in biblical times but were ongoing, so that the teachings of scripture were open to revision. Moreover, sacred illumination was available to all sincere believers regardless of sex, education, or social rank. Fox's followers were derisively called "Quakers" because, in the grip of a visitation by the Holy Spirit, they would suffer paroxysms similar to epileptic convulsions.

Because Quakers believed all human beings to be spiritually equal, they refused to perform the acts of deference that permeated social life in seventeenth-century England—bowing before and doffing the hat to superiors or addressing them with the honorific "you" rather than the familiar "thou." They felt called upon to testify to their beliefs wherever, and whenever, the Inner Light prompted, answering back to ministers in the pulpit, inveighing against what they considered social injustices, and sermonizing without a license in public places. Often, their outspokenness enraged secular and ecclesiastical authorities.

Dorothy Waugh (ca. 1636–?) worked as a maidservant in Preston Patrick, in northwest England, a hotbed of Quaker activity. She probably became one of Fox's followers in the early 1650s, when she was still a teenager. Like Fox and a number of other missionary spirits, sometimes called "the Valiant Sixty," she traveled through England on foot, spreading the Quaker message to all who would listen. In 1656, about age twenty, she was one of the Friends who arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, aboard the *Speedwell*: the party was imprisoned for ten days by the staunch Puritan governor John

Endicott, and then forced to return to England. Undaunted, Waugh embarked for the colonies again, with another small group of missionary Quakers, the following year, this time landing in New Amsterdam (modern New York). They were no more welcome here than they had been in Boston. After a brief imprisonment, they were shipped in shackles to the colony of Rhode Island, where complete religious toleration was the rule. In the late 1650s, probably between voyages to the New World, Waugh married, but nothing is known about her later life or the circumstances of her death. Other Quakers traveled even farther than Waugh on missionary expeditions; one woman made it as far as the Ottoman Empire and gave a sermon before the Grand Turk; when she failed to convert him, she walked back home to England.

Waugh's account of her treatment in Carlisle was published in *The Lamb's Defence Against Lies*, a collection in which various Quakers testified to their maltreatment by secular and religious authorities; like most Quaker accounts, it owed much to John Foxe's influential tales of Protestant martyrdom under the Catholic queen "Bloody Mary." Although the Friends were pacifists who refused to retaliate physically or verbally against their persecutors, they were fully aware of the propaganda value of unmerited suffering—indeed, their enemies believed that they deliberately courted abuse as a publicity stunt. In the years between 1650 and 1700, numerous male and female Friends published memoirs of their arduous lives, producing some of the first printed autobiographical writing in English by women and by people of humble status.

## **A Relation Concerning Dorothy Waugh's Cruel Usage by the Mayor of Carlisle**

Upon a seventh day about the time called Michaelmas in the year of the world's account 1655<sup>1</sup> I was moved of the Lord to go into the market of Carlisle, to speak against all deceit and ungodly practices, and the mayor's officer came and violently haled me off the cross<sup>2</sup> and put me in prison, not having anything to lay to my charge. And presently the mayor came up where I was, and asked me from whence I came; and I said, "Out of Egypt,<sup>3</sup> where thou lodgest." But after these words, he was so violent and full of passion he scarce asked me any more questions, but called to one of his followers to bring the bridle<sup>4</sup> as he called it to put upon me, and was to be on three hours. And that which they called so was like a steel cap and my hat being violently plucked off which was pinned to my head whereby they tore my clothes to put on their bridle as they called it, which was a stone weight of iron by the relation of their own generation,<sup>5</sup> and three bars of iron to come over my face, and a piece of it was put in my mouth, which was so unreasonable big a thing for that place as cannot be well related, which was locked to my head. And so I stood their time with my hands bound behind me, with the stone weight of iron upon my head and the bit in my mouth to keep me from speaking. And the mayor said he would make me an example to all that should ever come in that name.<sup>6</sup> And the people to see me so violently abused were broken into tears, but he cried out on them and said, "For foolish pity, one may spoil a whole city." And the man that kept the prison door demanded two pence of everyone that came to see me while their bridle remained upon me. Afterwards it was taken off and they kept me in prison for a little season, and after a while the mayor came again and caused it to be put on again, and sent me out of the city with it on, and gave me very vile and unsavory words, which were not fit to proceed out of

any man's mouth, and charged the officer to whip me out of the town, from constable to constable to send me till I came to my own home, whenas<sup>7</sup> they had not anything to lay to my charge.

1656

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Quakers saw themselves as separated from "the world" and its conventional means of marking dates, particularly objecting to terms left over from medieval Catholicism, like "Michaelmas," or the Mass of the Archangel Michael, celebrated on September 29. "Seventh day": Sabbath.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A large stone cross marked the main intersection of most English towns; public speakers could mount the steps in order to be heard better.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the Bible, the place where God's chosen people were enslaved and where most of the population worshipped false gods.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An instrument of torture and humiliation, typically used to punish women who "scolded" their husbands or neighbors in public.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: By their own report. A stone is fourteen pounds.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As professed Friends, or Quakers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Inasmuch as.[Return to reference 7](#)

# MARGARET CAVENDISH

## 1623–1673

Margaret (Lucas) Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, wrote and published numerous works in many genres, including poetry (*Poems and Fancies*), essays, short fiction and nonfiction, a full-length piece of utopian fiction (*The Description of a New Blazing World*), plays, letters, orations, a biography of her husband (which is also a history of the English Civil Wars), and multiple works of natural philosophy. Born to a wealthy gentry family in Colchester, in 1643 Margaret Lucas joined Queen Henrietta Maria's court-in-exile in Paris. Following the defeat of the royalist forces at Marston Moor in 1644, William Cavendish, then Marquess of Newcastle, went into self-imposed exile in France, where he met and married Margaret Lucas. William and Margaret Cavendish formed a partnership based on shared intellectual interests and writing projects. The couple lived in exile in Europe until the Restoration—first in Paris, where they hosted leading philosophers, including René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes, and then in Antwerp in a house designed and built by the artist Peter Paul Rubens. In 1651 Cavendish traveled to London to (unsuccessfully) petition Parliament for her share of the sequestered Newcastle estates, and published her earliest work, *Poems and Fancies*, in the lavish folio format that became her signature style. (Cavendish was an active circulator of her own books.) Immediately after Charles II returned to the throne the Cavendishes returned to

England, where they lived largely at their war-damaged estates, Welbeck Abbey and Bolsover Castle.

Cavendish's literary work illustrates the original theory of self-moving matter that she developed in dialogue with and resistance to the mechanical theories of matter and empiricist and experimental practices that came to dominate English natural philosophy in her lifetime. While Cavendish was the first woman to visit the Royal Society (in 1667), the visit was not a success, and in both *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) and, in greater detail, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668) she pushed back against many scientific premises then current, including the idea that "optic glasses"—both telescopes and the microscopes celebrated in Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665)—enabled a closer approach to the truth of things. "Sense," she writes in *Observations*, "is more apt to be deluded than reason." Cavendish continued to argue for the value of reason, including contemplation, speculation, and imagination, in natural philosophy, and to assert, as she put it in *Grounds*, that "all the parts of nature have life and knowledge." Her refusal of a strict separation between literary and philosophical pursuits is reflected in the mixed genres of many of her volumes. She published her first book of natural philosophy, *Philosophical Fancies*, which also included the poem "Of Sense and Reason Exercised in Their Different Shapes," in the same year as she published her first volume of poetry. Her utopia, *The Blazing World*, which was published "as an appendix" to her *Observations*, extends many of the ideas and precepts expressed in the first part into a literary form. While the *Observations* argues that "boys that play with watery bubbles" and "superficial wonders" "contribute less to the Commonwealth of Learning" than they like to think, *The Blazing World* presents a commonwealth of learning that is governed by an Empress who not only puts a stop to the infighting of experimental philosophers, but hires the "Spirit" of one "Duchess of Newcastle" to support her in her work. The two women discuss myriad political, moral, natural philosophical, and socioeconomic ideas, including the Duchess's suggestion that there is inestimable value in creating "a



world of [one's] own." Cavendish's ideas about imagined worlds and the possibility of worlds beyond our senses are complemented by her beliefs that God is the only immaterial entity; that animals are not, as she puts it in "The Hunting of the Hare," ours to "tyrannize upon"; that all forms of life have intelligence, or what she calls "rational spirits"; and that thoughts and literary "fancies" are expressive and creative matter.

## ***FROM* POEMS AND FANCIES**

# The Poetess's Hasty Resolution

Reading my verses, I liked them so well,  
Self-love did make my judgment to rebel.  
Thinking them so good, I thought more to write;  
Considering not how others would them like.  
5 I writ so fast, I thought, if I lived long,  
A pyramid of fame<sup>1</sup> to build thereon.  
Reason observing which way I was bent,  
Did stay my hand, and asked me what I meant;  
Will you, said she, thus waste your time in vain,  
10 On that which in the world small praise shall gain?  
For shame, leave off, said she, the printer spare,  
He'll lose by your ill poetry, I fear.  
Besides the world hath already such a weight  
Of useless books, as it is overfraught.<sup>2</sup>  
15 Then pity take, do the world a good turn,  
And all you write cast in the fire, and burn.  
Angry I was, and Reason struck away,  
When I did hear, what she to me did say.  
Then all in haste I to the press it sent,  
Fearing persuasion might my book prevent.  
20 But now 'tis done, with grief repent do I,  
Hang down my head with shame, blush, sigh, and  
cry.  
Take pity, and my drooping spirits raise,  
Wipe off my tears with handkerchiefs of praise.

1653

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A poetic monument. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Like a ship with too heavy a cargo, in danger of sinking.[Return to reference 2](#)

# A World Made by Atoms

Small atoms<sup>1</sup> of themselves a world may make,  
As being subtle,<sup>2</sup> and of every shape:  
And as they dance about, fit places find,  
Such forms<sup>3</sup> as best agree, make every kind.  
5 For when we build a house of brick, and stone,  
We lay them even, every one by one:  
And when we find a gap that's big, or small,  
We seek out stones, to fit that place withal.<sup>°</sup>  
For when not fit, too big, or little be,  
10 They fall away, and cannot stay, we see.  
So atoms, as they dance, find places fit,  
They there remain, lie close, and fast will stick.  
Those that unfit, the rest that rove about,  
Do never leave, until they thrust them out.  
15 Thus by their several motions, and their forms,  
As several workmen serve each other's turns.  
And thus, by chance, may a new world create:  
Or else, predestinate,<sup>°</sup> may work by fate.

1653

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Smallest particles of matter.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Finely woven; refined; imperceptible.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Shapes, arrangements of parts.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *in addition, moreover*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *foreordained (by God)*[Return to reference](#) °

# Of Many Worlds in This World

Just like unto a nest of boxes<sup>°</sup> round,  
Degrees of sizes within each box are found.  
So in this world, may many worlds more be,  
Thinner, and less, and less still by degree;<sup>°</sup>  
Although they are not subject to our sense,  
5 A world may be no bigger than twopence.  
Nature is curious, and such work may make,  
That our dull sense can never find, but scape.<sup>°</sup>  
For creatures,<sup>°</sup> small as atoms, may be there,  
If every atom a creature's figure<sup>°</sup> bear.  
10 If four atoms a world can make,<sup>1</sup> then see,  
What several<sup>°</sup> worlds might in an earring be.  
For millions of these atoms may be in  
The head of one small, little, single pin.  
And if thus small, then ladies well may wear  
15 A world of worlds as pendants in each ear.

1653

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Cavendish includes a marginal note to the right of this line: "As I have before showed they do, in my Atoms"—that is, in her earlier poems about atoms. A poem titled "The Four Principal Atoms Make the Four Elements, as Square, Round, Long, and Sharp" follows "A World Made by Atoms" in *Poems and Fancies* (1653).[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *nested boxes*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *step, stage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *escape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beings, composite bodies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *matter and form combined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *many, distinct*[Return to reference](#) °



## The Hunting of the Hare

Betwixt two ridges of plowed land lay Wat,<sup>1</sup>  
Pressing his body close to earth lay squat.  
His nose upon his two forefeet close lies,  
Glazing obliquely with his great gray eyes.  
His head he always sets against the wind,  
5 If turn his tail, his hairs blow up behind:  
Which he too cold will grow, but he is wise,  
And keeps his coat still<sup>o</sup> down, so warm he lies.  
Then resting all the day, till, sun doth set,  
Then riseth up, his relief for to get.  
10 Walking about until the sun doth rise,  
Then back returns, down in his form<sup>o</sup> he lies.  
At last, poor Wat was found, as he there lay,  
By huntsmen, with their dogs which came that way.  
Seeing, gets up, and fast begins to run,  
15 Hoping some ways the cruel dogs to shun.  
But they by nature have so quick a scent,  
That by their nose they trace what way he went.  
And with their deep, wide mouths set forth a cry,  
Which answered was by echoes in the sky.  
20 Then Wat was struck with terror, and with fear,  
Thinks every shadow still the dogs they were.  
And running out some distance from the noise,  
To hide himself, his thoughts he new employs.  
Under a clod of earth in sand pit wide,  
25 Poor Wat sat close, hoping himself to hide.  
There long he had not sat, but straight<sup>o</sup> his ears  
The winding<sup>o</sup> horns and crying dogs he hears:  
Staring with fear, up leaps, then doth he run,  
And with such speed, the ground scarce treads  
30 upon.

Into a great thick wood he straightway gets.  
Where underneath a broken bough he sits.  
At every leaf that with the wind did shake,  
Did bring such terror, made his heart to ache.  
That place he left, to champaign<sup>o</sup> plains he went,  
35 Winding about, for to deceive their scent.  
And while they snuffling were, to find his track,  
Poor Wat, being weary, his swift pace did slack.  
On his two hinder legs for ease did sit,  
His forefeet rubbed his face from dust, and sweat.  
40 Licking his feet, he wiped his ears so clean,  
That none could tell that Wat had hunted been.  
But casting round about his fair great eyes,  
The hounds in full career he near him spies:  
To Wat it was so terrible a sight,  
45 Fear gave him wings, and made his body light.  
Though weary was before, by running long,  
Yet now his breath he never felt more strong.  
Like those that dying are, think health returns,  
When 'tis but a faint blast, which life out burns.  
50 For spirits seek to guard the heart about,  
Striving with death, but death doth quench them  
out.  
Thus they so fast came on, with such loud cries,  
That he no hopes hath left, nor help espies.  
With that the winds did pity poor Wat's case,  
55 And with their breath the scent blew from the place.  
Then every nose is busily employed,  
And every nostril is set open wide,  
And every head doth seek a several<sup>o</sup> way,  
To find what grass, or track, the scent on lay.  
60 Thus quick industry<sup>o</sup> that is not slack,  
Is like to witchery,<sup>o</sup> brings lost things back.  
For though the wind had tied the scent up close,  
A busy dog thrust in his snuffling nose  
And drew it out, with it did foremost run,

Then horns blew loud, for th'rest to follow on.  
65 The great slow hounds, their throats did set a bass,  
The fleet swift hounds, as tenors next in place,  
The little beagles they a treble sing,  
And through the air their voices round did ring.  
70 Which made a consort, as they ran along;  
If they but words could speak, might sing a song.  
The horns kept time, the hunters shout for joy,  
And valiant seem, poor Wat for to destroy:  
Spurring their horses to a full career,  
75 Swim rivers deep, leap ditches without fear;  
Endanger life and limbs so fast will ride,  
Only to see how patiently Wat died.  
At last,<sup>2</sup> the dogs so near his heels did get,  
That they their sharp teeth in his breech did set;  
80 Then tumbling down, did fall with weeping eyes,  
Gives up his ghost, and thus poor Wat he dies.  
Men whooping loud, such acclamations make,  
As if the Devil they did prisoner take.  
When they do but a shiftless<sup>o</sup> creature kill;  
85 To hunt, there needs no valiant soldier's skill.  
But man doth think that exercise and toil,  
To keep their health, is best, which makes most  
    spoil.  
Thinking that food and nourishment so good,  
And appetite, that feeds on flesh and blood.  
90 When they do lions, wolves, bears, tigers see,  
To kill poor sheep, straight say, they cruel be,  
But for themselves all creatures think too few  
For luxury, wish God would make them new.  
As if that God made creatures for man's meat,  
95 To give them life and sense, for man to eat;  
Or else for sport, or recreation's sake,  
Destroy those lives that God saw good to make:  
Making their stomachs, graves, which full they fill

100 With murdered bodies that in sport they kill.  
Yet man doth think himself so gentle, mild,  
When he of creatures is most cruel wild.  
And is so proud, thinks only he shall live,  
That God a godlike nature did him give.  
105 And that all creatures for his sake alone  
Was made for him, to tyrannize upon.

1653, 1664

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Conventional name for a hare.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From the 1664 edition; 1653 has "For why."[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *constantly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blowing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *open*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *different*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clever work*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *witchcraft*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *helpless*[Return to reference °](#)

## Of Sense and Reason Exercised in Their Different Shapes<sup>1</sup>

If everything hath sense and reason, then  
There might be beasts, and birds, and fish, and  
men:

As vegetables and minerals, had they  
The animal shape<sup>o</sup> to express that way;  
And vegetables and minerals may know,  
5 As man, though like to trees and stones they grow.  
Then coral trouts may through the water glide,  
And pearled minnows swim on either side;  
And mermaids, which in the sea delight,  
Might all be made of watry lilies white,  
10 Set on salt watry billows as they flow,  
Which like green banks appear thereon to grow.  
And mariners i'th'midst their ship might stand,  
Instead of mast, hold sails in either hand.  
On mountain tops the golden fleece<sup>2</sup> might feed,  
15 Some hundred years their ewes bring forth their  
breed.  
Large deer of oak might through the forest run,  
Leaves on their heads might keep them from the  
sun;  
Instead of shedding horns, their leaves might fall,  
And acorns to increase a wood of fawns withal.  
20 Then might a squirrel for a nut be cracked,  
If nature had that matter<sup>o</sup> so compact:  
And the small sprouts<sup>o</sup> which on the husk<sup>o</sup> do grow,  
Might be the tail, and make a brushing<sup>3</sup> show.  
Then might the diamonds which on rocks oft lie,  
25 Be all like to some little sparkling fly.

Then might a leaden hare, if swiftly run,  
Melt from that shape, and so a pig<sup>4</sup> become.  
And dogs of copper-mouths sound like a bell;  
So when they kill a hare, ring out his knell.<sup>5</sup>  
30 Hard iron men shall have no cause to fear  
To catch a fall, when they a hunting were.  
Nor in the wars should have no use of arms,  
Nor feared to fight; they could receive no harms.  
For if a bullet on their breasts should hit,  
35 Fall on their back, but straightways up may get.  
Or if a bullet on their head do light,  
May make them totter, but not kill them quite.  
And stars be like the birds with twinkling wing,  
When in the air they fly, like larks might sing.  
40 And as they fly, like wand'ring<sup>o</sup> planets show,  
Their tails may like to blazing comets grow.  
When they on trees do rest themselves from flight,  
Appear like fixed stars in clouds of night.  
Thus may the sun be like a woman fair,  
45 And the bright beams be as her flowing hair.  
And from her eyes may cast a silver light,  
And when she sleeps, the world be as dark night.  
Or women may of alabaster be,  
And so as smooth as polished ivory,  
50 Or, as clear crystal, where hearts may be shown,  
And all their falsehoods to the world be known.  
Or else be made of rose, and lilies white,  
Both fair, and sweet, to give the soul delight,  
Or else be made like tulips fresh in May,  
55 By nature dressed, clothed several colors gay.  
Thus every year there may young virgins spring,  
But wither, and decay, as soon again.  
While they are fresh,<sup>o</sup> upon their breast might set  
Great swarms of bees, from thence sweet honey get.  
60 Or, on their lips, for gillyflowers,<sup>o</sup> flies

Drawing delicious sweet that therein lies.  
Thus every maid, like several flowers show,  
Not in their shape, but like in substance grow.  
Then tears which from oppressed hearts do rise,  
65 May gather into clouds within the eyes:  
From whence those tears, like showers of rain may  
    flow  
Upon the banks of cheeks, where roses grow.  
After those showers of rain, so sweet may smell,  
Perfuming all the air, that near them dwell.  
70 But when the sun of joy and mirth doth rise,  
Darting forth pleasing beams from loving eyes.  
Then may the buds of modesty unfold,  
With full blown confidence the sun behold.  
But grief as frost them nips, and withering die,  
75 In their own pods<sup>6</sup> entombèd lie.  
Thus virgin cherry trees, where blossoms blow,<sup>o</sup>  
So red ripe cherries on their lips may grow.  
Or women plum trees at each finger's end,  
May ripe plums hang, and make their joints to bend.  
80 Men sycamores, which on their breast may write  
Their amorous verses, which their thoughts indite.<sup>o</sup>  
Men's stretched arms may be like spreading vines,  
Where grapes may grow, so drink of their own wine.  
To plant large orchards, need no pains nor care,  
85 For every one their sweet fresh fruit may bear.  
Then silver grass may in the meadows grow,  
Which nothing but a scythe of fire can mow.  
The wind, which from the north a journey takes,  
May strike those silver strings, and music make.  
90 Thus may another world, though matter still the  
    same,  
By changing shapes, change humors,<sup>7</sup> properties,  
    and name.  
Thus Colossus,<sup>8</sup> a statue wondrous great,

When it did fall, might straight get on his feet.  
 Where ships, which through his legs did swim, he  
 95        might  
 Have blowed their sails, or else have drowned them  
 quite.  
 The golden calf<sup>9</sup> that Israel joyed to see,  
 Might run away from their idolatry.  
 The Basan bull of brass might be,<sup>1</sup> when roar,  
 100        His metalled throat might make his voice sound  
              more.  
 The hill, which Muhammed did call,<sup>2</sup> might come  
 At the first word, or else away might run.  
 Thus Pompey's statue might rejoice to see,  
 When killed was Caesar, his great enemy.<sup>3</sup>  
 105        The wooden horse<sup>4</sup> that did great Troy betray,  
              Have told what's in him, and then run away.  
 Achilles arms against Ulysses plead,  
 And not let wit against true valor speed.<sup>o5</sup>  
1653

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem appeared in *Philosophical Fancies* (1653). In Cavendish's natural philosophy, matter is solid, self-moving, sensitive, and rational.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In classical Greek myth, the fleece sought by Jason, which had belonged to a single ram; Cavendish imagines a living herd of golden sheep.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Brushwood, the cutting of brushwood. Brush is also the bushy part of an animal's tail.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cavendish's marginal note: "A Pig [a crudely cast bar] of Lead."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The stroke or sound of a bell, especially one rung to announce a death.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Cavendish's marginal note: "The Husk."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The four fluids of the body—blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile—whose relative proportions were thought to determine a person's disposition and general health.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A huge bronze statue of the sun god Helios at Rhodes; it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In later accounts, ships were said to sail between its legs.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Literally, the idol created and worshipped by the Israelites when Moses was slow to return from Mount Sinai (Exodus 32); more broadly, any object of false worship, including material wealth.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cavendish conflates a strong bull from Bashan (Psalm 22:12), in what is now Syria, and the brazen bull, a torture device invented for a Greek tyrant in the 6th century B.C.E.: victims were roasted to death inside it, and their screams were said to be converted into the lowing of a bull.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to a story about the founder of Islam that was told in Francis Bacon's *Essays* ("Of Boldness"): "Mahomet called the hill to come to him. And when the hill stood still, he was never a whit abashed, but said; if the hill will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the hill."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Roman generals Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar, formerly allies, became enemies in the civil war in which Pompey was killed in 48 B.C.E. Pompey's statue stood in the senate house, on whose steps Caesar was murdered in 44 B.C.E.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In Greek myth, the huge hollow horse in which Greek soldiers hid and were drawn inside the gates of Troy, which they destroyed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Achilles and Ulysses were Greek leaders in the Trojan War, preeminent respectively for skill in battle and for cunning. Here, Achilles' "arms," or armor, plead on behalf of bravery

("true valor") against "wit" in a contest of values.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *animate, living form*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *physical substance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *offshoots* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outer shell*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *roving*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *new, not deteriorated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sweet-scented flowers*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bloom*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *put into words, compose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *succeed, prosper*[Return to reference °](#)

**The Blazing World**    *The Blazing World* begins as a romance: a young woman is abducted by merchants and then miraculously saved when a tempest carries the abductors' boat to the North Pole (where the kidnappers freeze to death) and then further on into another world. The emperor of this "Blazing World" marries the heroine and gives her sovereignty over its entire government. *The Blazing World* then assumes a utopian character, as the fantastical inhabitants teach their new Empress about their scientific experiments, politics, and religious practices, many of which reflect Cavendish's own views. When the Empress decides she needs a scribe to help her with her "Cabbala," or book of wisdom, she considers philosophers ranging from Aristotle to Descartes, but ultimately settles on the spirit of the Duchess of Newcastle. The two "Platonic friends" travel to Cavendish's world, where they evaluate its culture and politics and visit the ruined Newcastle estates. *The Blazing World* illustrates the philosophy of matter in Cavendish's own *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, to which it was attached. Her argument for the work of fancy thus privileges both natural philosophy and literature: one can create and rule over an imagined world with force comparable to that of a "Caesar or an Alexander," but one can also "alter it as often as you please."

## ***From The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*<sup>1</sup>**

***From To the Reader***

\* \* \*

[F]ictions are an issue of man's fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without regard whether the thing he fancies be really existent without<sup>2</sup> his mind or not; so that reason searches

the depth of nature, and enquires after the true causes of natural effects, but fancy creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work. The end of reason, is truth; the end of fancy, is fiction. But mistake me not, when I distinguish fancy from reason; I mean not as if fancy were not made by the rational parts of matter; but by reason I understand a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects; and by fancy a voluntary creation or production of the mind, both being effects, or rather actions, of the rational part of matter; of which, as that is a more profitable and useful study than this, so it is also more laborious and difficult, and requires sometimes the help of fancy to recreate the mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations. And this is the reason why I added this piece of fancy to my philosophical observations, and joined them as two worlds at the ends of their poles; both for my own sake, to divert my studious thoughts which I employed in the contemplation thereof, and to delight the reader with variety, which is always pleasing. But lest my fancy should stray too much, I chose such a fiction as would be agreeable to the subject I treated of in the former parts; it is a description of a new world, not such as Lucian's, or the French man's world in the moon;<sup>3</sup> but a world of my own creating, which I call the Blazing World: the first part whereof is romancical, the second philosophical, and the third is merely fancy, or (as I may call it) fantastical; which if it add any satisfaction to you, I shall account myself a happy creatoress; if not, I must be content to live a melancholy life in my own world; I cannot call it a poor world, if poverty be only want of gold, silver, and jewels; for there is more gold in it than all the chemists ever did, and (as I verily believe) will ever be able to make. As for the rocks of diamonds, I wish with all my soul they might be shared amongst my noble female friends, and upon that condition I would willingly quit my part; and of the gold I should only desire so much as might suffice to repair my noble lord and husband's losses:<sup>4</sup> for I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which is the cause, that though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavor to be Margaret the First; and

although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as Alexander and Caesar did;<sup>5</sup> yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since fortune and the fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in everyone's power to do the like.

### ***The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World***

\* \* \*

No sooner was the lady brought before the emperor, but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; which she refused, telling him (for by that time she had pretty well learned their language) that although she came out of another world, yet was she but a mortal; at which the emperor rejoicing, made her his wife, and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity.

\* \* \*

Their priests and governors were princes of the imperial blood, and made eunuchs for that purpose; and as for the ordinary sort of men in that part of the world where the emperor resided, they were of several complexions; not white, black, tawny, olive, or ash-colored; but some appeared of an azure, some of a deep purple, some of a grass-green, some of a scarlet, some of an orange color, etc. Which colors and complexions, whether they were made by bare reflection of light without the assistance of small particles, or by the help of well-ranged and ordered atoms; or by a continual agitation of little globules; or by some pressing and reacting motion, I am not able to determine.<sup>6</sup> The rest of the inhabitants of that world were men of several different sorts, shapes, figures, dispositions, and humors, as I have already made mention heretofore; some were bear-men, some worm-men, some fish- or mear-men, otherwise

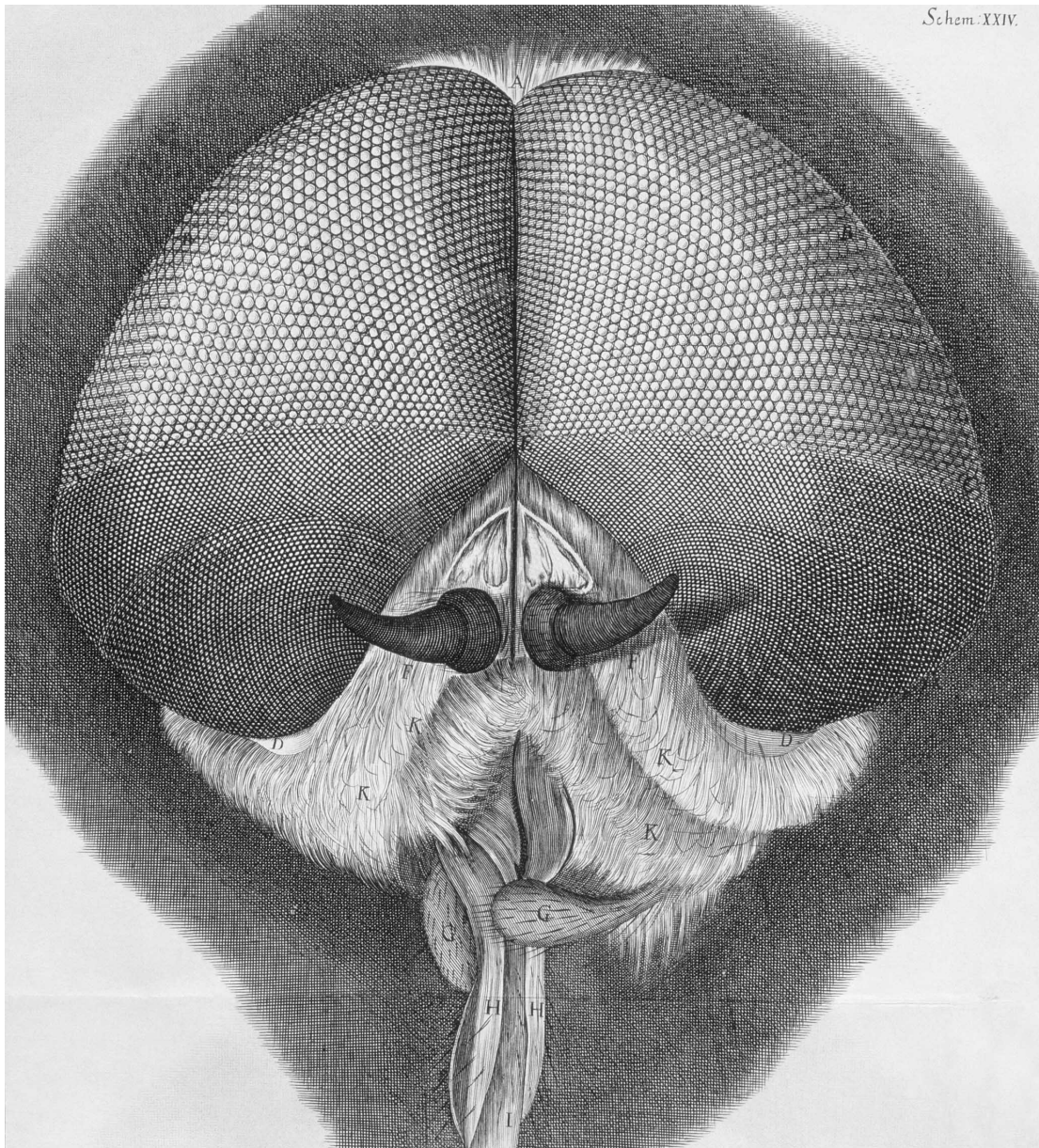
called sirens;<sup>7</sup> some bird-men, some fly-men, some ant-men, some geese-men, some spider-men, some lice-men, some fox-men, some ape-men, some jackdaw-men, some magpie-men, some parrot-men, some satyrs, some giants, and many more which I cannot all remember; and of these several sorts of men, each followed such a profession as was most proper for the nature of their species, which the Empress encouraged them in, especially those that had applied themselves to the study of several arts and sciences; for they were as ingenious and witty in the invention of profitable and useful arts as we are in our world, nay, more; and to that end she erected schools and founded several societies. The bear-men were to be her experimental philosophers, the bird-men her astronomers, the fly-, worm-, and fish-men her natural philosophers, the ape-men her chemists, the satyrs her Galenic physicians,<sup>8</sup> the fox-men her politicians, the spider- and lice-men her mathematicians, the jackdaw-, magpie-, and parrot-men her orators and logicians, the giants her architects, etc. But before all things, she having got a sovereign power from the emperor over all the world, desired to be informed both of the manner of their religion and government, and to that end she called the priests and statesmen to give her an account of either. Of the statesmen she enquired, first, why they had so few laws? To which they answered that many laws made many divisions, which most commonly did breed factions and at last brake out into open wars. Next, she asked, why they preferred the monarchical form of government before any other? They answered that as it was natural for one body to have but one head, so it was also natural for a politic body to have but one governor; and that a commonwealth which had many governors was like a monster of many heads: besides, said they, a monarchy is a divine form of government and agrees most with our religion; for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one faith, so we are resolved to have but one emperor to whom we all submit with one obedience.

Then the Empress seeing that the several sorts of her subjects had each their churches apart, asked the priests whether they were

of several religions. They answered Her Majesty that there was no more but one religion in all that world, nor no diversity of opinions in that same religion; for though there were several sorts of men, yet had they all but one opinion concerning the worship and adoration of God. The Empress asked them whether they were Jews, Turks, or Christians? We do not know, said they, what religions those are; but we do all unanimously acknowledge, worship, and adore the only, omnipotent, and eternal God, with all reverence, submission, and duty. Again, the Empress enquired, whether they had several forms of worship? They answered, no: for our devotion and worship consists only in prayers, which we frame according to our several necessities, in petitions, humiliations, thanksgiving, etc. Truly, replied the Empress, I thought you had been either Jews or Turks,<sup>9</sup> because I never perceived any women in your congregations; but what is the reason, you bar them from your religious assemblies? It is not fit, said they, that men and women should be promiscuously together in time of religious worship; for their company hinders devotion, and makes many, instead of praying to God, direct their devotion to their mistresses. But, asked the Empress, have they no congregation of their own to perform the duties of divine worship as well as men? No, answered they: but they stay at home and say their prayers by themselves in their closets.<sup>1</sup> Then the Empress desired to know the reason why the priests and governors of their world were made eunuchs? They answered, to keep them from marriage: for women and children most commonly make disturbance both in church and state. But, said she, women and children have no employment in church or state. 'Tis true, answered they; but although they are not admitted to public employments, yet are they so prevalent with their husbands and parents that many times by their importunate<sup>2</sup> persuasions they cause as much, nay more, mischief secretly, than if they had the management of public affairs.

\* \* \*





**Grey Drone Fly.** *The Blazing World* discusses this image "Of the eyes and head of a grey drone fly" from Robert Hooke's *Of Micrographia: or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses* (1665).

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**[TIRING OF THE EXPERIMENTAL AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHERS, THE EMPRESS COMMANDS THEM TO BREAK THEIR "ARTIFICIAL GLASSES"]**



The bear-men, being exceedingly troubled at her Majesty's displeasure concerning their telescopes, kneeled down, and in the humblest manner petitioned that they might not be broken; for, said they, we take more delight in artificial delusions than in natural truths. Besides, we shall want employments for our senses and subjects for arguments; for were there nothing but truth and no falsehood there would be no occasion for to dispute, and by this means we should want the aim and pleasure of our endeavors in confuting and contradicting each other; neither would one man be thought wiser than another, but all would either be alike knowing and wise, or all would be fools; wherefore we most humbly beseech your imperial Majesty to spare our glasses, which are our only delight and as dear to us as our lives. The Empress at last consented to their request, but upon condition that their disputes and quarrels should remain within their schools, and cause no factions or disturbances in state or government. The bear-men, full of joy, returned their most humble thanks to the Empress; and to make her amends for the displeasure which their telescopes had occasioned, told her Majesty that they had several other artificial optic-glasses which they were sure would give her Majesty a great deal more satisfaction. Amongst the rest they brought forth several microscopes by the means of which they could enlarge the shapes of little bodies and make a louse appear as big as an elephant, and a mite as big as a whale. First of all, they shewed the Empress a gray drone-fly, wherein they observed that the greatest part of her face, nay, of her head, consisted of two large bunches all covered over with a multitude of small pearls or hemispheres in a trigonal order, which pearls were of two degrees, smaller and bigger; the smaller degree was lowermost, and looked towards the ground; the other was upward, and looked sideward, forward, and backward. They were all so smooth and polished that they were able to represent the image of any object, the number of them was in all 14000.<sup>3</sup> After the view of this strange and miraculous creature, and their several observations upon it, the Empress asked them what they judged those little hemispheres might be? They answered that each of them was a perfect eye, by reason they perceived that each was covered

with a transparent cornea containing a liquor within them, which resembled the watery or glassy humor of the eye. To which the Empress replied that they might be glassy pearls and yet not eyes, and that perhaps their microscopes did not truly inform them: but they smilingly answered her Majesty that she did not know the virtue of those microscopes; for they did never delude but rectify and inform their senses; nay, the world, said they, would be but blind without them, as it has been in former ages before those microscopes were invented.

\* \* \*

Then the Empress asked [the worm-men], whether by their sensitive perceptions they could observe the interior corporeal, figurative motions both of vegetables and minerals? They answered that their senses could perceive them after they were produced, but not before; Nevertheless, said they, although the interior, figurative motions of natural creatures are not subject to the exterior, animal, sensitive perceptions, yet by their rational perception they may judge of them and of their productions if they be regular: whereupon the Empress commanded the bear-men to lend them some of their best microscopes; at which the bear-men smilingly answered her Majesty that their glasses would do them but little service in the bowels of the earth because there was no light; for, said they, our glasses do only represent exterior objects according to the various reflections and positions of light; and wheresoever light is wanting,<sup>4</sup> the glasses will do no good. To which the worm-men replied that although they could not say much of refractions, reflections, inflections, and the like; yet were they not blind, even in the bowels of the earth, for they could see the several sorts of minerals, as also minute animals, that lived there, which minute animal creatures were not blind neither but had some kind of sensitive perception that was as serviceable to them as sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing, etc. was to other animal creatures: by which it is evident that nature has been as bountiful to those creatures that live underground or in the bowels of the earth as to those that live upon the surface of the

earth, or in the air, or in water. But howsoever, proceeded the worm-men, although there is light in the bowels of the earth, yet your microscopes will do but little good there, by reason those creatures that live underground have not such an optic sense as those that live on the surface of the earth: wherefore, unless you had such glasses as are proper for their perception, your microscopes will not be any ways advantageous to them. The Empress seemed well pleased with this answer of the worm-men, and asked them further whether minerals, and all other creatures within the earth, were colorless? At which question they could not forbear laughing; and when the Empress asked the reason why they laughed; we most humbly beg your Majesty's pardon, replied they; for we could not choose but laugh when we heard of a colorless body. Why, said the Empress, color is only an accident,<sup>5</sup> which is an immaterial thing, and has no being of itself but in another body. Those, replied they, that informed your Majesty thus, surely their rational motions were very irregular; for how is it possible that a natural nothing can have a being in nature? If it be no substance, it cannot have a being, and if no being, it is nothing; wherefore the distinction between subsisting of itself, and subsisting in another body, is a mere nicety and nonsense; for there is nothing in nature that can subsist of or by itself, (I mean singly) by reason all parts of nature are composed in one body, and though they may be infinitely divided, commixed, and changed in their particulars, yet in general parts cannot be separated from parts as long as nature lasts; nay, we might as probably affirm that infinite nature would be as soon destroyed as that one atom could perish; and therefore your Majesty may firmly believe that there is no body without color, nor no color without body; for color, figure, place, magnitude, and body are all but one thing, without any separation or abstraction from each other.

\* \* \* Again, the Empress asked them, whether there were any non-beings within the earth? To which they answered that they never heard of any such thing; and that if her Majesty would know the truth thereof, she must ask those creatures that are called immaterial spirits, which had a great affinity with non-beings, and

perhaps could give her a satisfactory answer to this question. Then, she desired to be informed, what opinion they had of the beginning of forms? They told her Majesty that they did not understand what she meant by this expression; for, said they, there is no beginning in nature, no not of particulars, by reason nature is eternal and infinite and her particulars are subject to infinite changes and transmutations by virtue of their own corporeal, figurative self-motions; so that there's nothing new in nature, nor properly a beginning of anything.

\* \* \*

The Empress having thus declared her mind to the ape-men and given them better instructions than perhaps they expected, not knowing that her Majesty had such great and able judgment in natural philosophy, had several conferences with them concerning chemical preparations, which for brevity's sake I'll forbear to rehearse: amongst the rest, she asked how it came that the imperial race appeared so young and yet was reported to have lived so long; some of them two, some three, and some four hundred years? and whether it was by nature or a special divine blessing? To which they answered that there was a certain rock in the parts of that world which contained the golden sands, which rock was hollow within and did produce a gum that was a hundred years before it came to its full strength and perfection; this gum, said they, if it be held in a warm hand will dissolve into an oil, the effects whereof are following: it being given every day for some certain time to an old decayed man, in the bigness of a little pea, will first make him spit for a week or more; after this, it will cause vomits of phlegm, and after that it will bring forth by vomits, humors<sup>6</sup> of several colors; first of a pale yellow, then of a deep yellow, then of a green, and lastly of a black color; and each of these humors have a several taste, some are fresh, some salt, some sour, some bitter, and so forth; neither do all these vomits make them sick, but they come out on a sudden and unawares, without any pain or trouble to the patient: and after it hath done all these mentioned effects, and cleared both the stomach

and several other parts of the body, then it works upon the brain, and brings forth of the nose such kind of humors as it did out of the mouth, and much after the same manner; then it will purge by stool, then by urine, then by sweat, and lastly by bleeding at the nose, and the hemorrhoids; all which effects it will perform within the space of six weeks or a little more; for it does not work very strongly, but gently, and by degrees: lastly, when it has done all this it will make the body break out into a thick scab, and cause both hair, teeth, and nails to come off; which scab being arrived to its full maturity, opens first along the back and comes off all in a piece like an armor, and all this is done within the space of four months. After this the patient is wrapped into a cerecloth<sup>7</sup> prepared of certain gums and juices wherein he continues until the time of nine months be expired from the first beginning of the cure, which is the time of a child's formation in the womb. In the meanwhile, his diet is nothing else but eagles' eggs and hinds' milk; and after the cerecloth is taken away he will appear of the age of twenty, both in shape and strength.

\* \* \*

## **[THE EMPRESS CONVERSES WITH IMMATERIAL SPIRITS]**

\* \* \* The Empress asked them further whether there was not a world of spirits as well as there is of material creatures? No, answered they, for the word world implies a quantity or multitude of corporeal creatures, but we being immaterial can make no world of spirits. Then she desired to be informed when spirits were made? We do not know, answered they, how and when we were made, nor are we much inquisitive after it; nay, if we did, it would be no benefit, neither for us, nor for you mortals to know it. The Empress replied that cabbalists and divine philosophers<sup>8</sup> said men's rational souls were immaterial and stood as much in need of corporeal vehicles as spirits did. If this be so, answered the spirits, then you are hermaphrodites<sup>9</sup> of nature; but your cabbalists are mistaken, for

they take the purest and subtlest parts of matter for immaterial spirits. \* \* \* She asked again whether souls did choose bodies? They answered that Platonics believed the souls of lovers lived in the bodies of their beloved; but surely, said they, if there be a multitude of souls in a world of matter, they cannot miss bodies; for as soon as a soul is parted from one body, it enters into another; and souls having no motion of themselves must of necessity be clothed or embodied with the next parts of matter. If this be so, replied the Empress, then I pray inform me, whether all matter be soulified? The spirits answered, they could not exactly tell that; but if it was true that matter had no other motion but what came from a spiritual power, and that all matter was moving, then no soul could quit a body, but she must of necessity enter into another soulified body, and then there would be two immaterial substances in one body. The Empress asked whether it was not possible that there could be two souls in one body? As for immaterial souls, answered the spirits, it is impossible; for there cannot be two immaterials in one inanimate body, by reason they want parts and place, being bodiless; but there may be numerous material souls in one composed body, by reason every material part has a material natural soul; for nature is but one infinite, self-moving, living, and self-knowing body, consisting of the three degrees of inanimate, sensitive, and rational matter, so intermixed together that no part of nature, were it an atom, can be without any of these three degrees; the sensitive is the life, the rational the soul, and the inanimate part the body of infinite nature. \* \* \* The Empress asked further, whether animal life came out of the spiritual world and did return thither again? The spirits answered, they could not exactly tell; but if it were so, then certainly animal lives must leave their bodies behind them, otherwise the bodies would make the spiritual world a mixed world, that is, partly material, and partly immaterial; but the truth is, said they, spirits being immaterial, cannot properly make a world; for a world belongs to material, not to immaterial creatures. If this be so, replied the Empress, then certainly there can be no world of lives and forms without matter? No, answered the spirits, nor a world of matter without lives and forms; for natural lives and forms cannot be

immaterial, no more than matter can be immovable. And therefore natural lives, forms, and matter, are inseparable.

\* \* \*

## **[THE EMPRESS CONSULTS WITH THE IMMATERIAL SPIRITS ABOUT WRITING A CABBALA]**

After some time, when the spirits had refreshed themselves in their own vehicles,<sup>1</sup> they sent one of their nimblest spirits to ask the Empress whether she would have a scribe, or whether she would write the Cabbala herself? The Empress received the proffer which they made her with all civility; and told them that she desired a spiritual scribe. The spirits answered that they could dictate, but not write, except they put on a hand or arm or else the whole body of man. The Empress replied, how can spirits arm themselves with gauntlets of flesh? As well, answered they, as man can arm himself with a gauntlet of steel. If it be so, said the Empress, then I will have a scribe. Then the spirits asked her whether she would have the soul of a living or a dead man? Why, said the Empress, can the soul quit a living body and wander or travel abroad? Yes, answered they, for according to Plato's doctrine, there is a conversation of souls, and the souls of lovers live in the bodies of their beloved. Then I will have, answered she, the soul of some ancient famous writer, either of Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, or the like.<sup>2</sup> The spirits said that those famous men were very learned, subtle, and ingenious writers; but they were so wedded to their own opinions that they would never have the patience to be scribes. Then, said she, I'll have the soul of one of the most famous modern writers, as either of Galileo, Gassendi, Descartes, Helmont, Hobbes, H. More, etc.<sup>3</sup> The spirits answered, that they were fine ingenious writers, but yet so self-conceited that they would scorn to be scribes to a woman. But, said they, there's a lady, the Duchess of Newcastle, which although she is not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty, and ingenious, yet she is a plain and rational writer; for the principle of her writings



is sense and reason, and she will without question be ready to do you all the service she can. That lady then, said the Empress, will I choose for my scribe, neither will the emperor have reason to be jealous, she being one of my own sex. In truth, said the spirit, husbands have reason to be jealous of Platonic lovers, for they are very dangerous, as being not only very intimate and close, but subtle and insinuating. You say well, replied the Empress; wherefore I pray send me the Duchess of Newcastle's soul; which the spirit did; and after she came to wait on the Empress, at her first arrival the Empress embraced and saluted her with a spiritual kiss; then she asked her whether she could write? Yes, answered the Duchess's soul, but not so intelligibly that any reader whatsoever may understand it, unless he be taught to know my characters; for my letters are rather like characters,<sup>4</sup> than well formed letters. Said the Empress, you were recommended to me by an honest and ingenious spirit. Surely, answered the Duchess, the spirit is ignorant of my handwriting. The truth is, said the Empress, he did not mention your handwriting; but he informed me, that you writ sense and reason, and if you can but write so that any of my secretaries may learn your hand, they shall write it out fair and intelligible. The Duchess answered that she questioned not but it might easily be learned in a short time. But, said she to the Empress, what is it that your Majesty would have written? She answered, the Jews' Cabbala. \* \* \* [I]f your Majesty were resolved to make a Cabbala, I would advise you rather to make a poetical or romancical Cabbala, wherein you may use metaphors, allegories, similitudes, etc. and interpret them as you please.<sup>5</sup> With that the Empress thanked the Duchess, and embracing her soul, told her she would take her counsel: she made her also her favorite and kept her sometime in that world, and by this means the Duchess came to know and give this relation of all that passed in that rich, populous, and happy world; and after some time the Empress gave her leave to return to her husband and kindred into her native world, but upon condition that her soul should visit her now and then; which she did: and truly their meeting did produce



such an intimate friendship between them that they became Platonic lovers, although they were both females.

## **[THE DUCHESS WANTS TO BE THE EMPRESS OF HER OWN WORLD]**

\* \* \* I love you so well, replied the Empress, that I wish with all my soul you had the fruition of your ambitious desire, and I shall not fail to give you my best advice how to accomplish it; the best informers are the immaterial spirits, and they'll soon tell you whether it be possible to obtain your wish. But, said the Duchess, I have little acquaintance with them, for I never knew any before the time you sent for me. They know you, replied the Empress, for they told me of you, and were the means and instrument of your coming hither: wherefore I'll confer with them and enquire whether there be not another world whereof you may be Empress as well as I am of this? No sooner had the Empress said this, but some immaterial spirits came to visit her, of whom she inquired whether there were but three worlds in all, to wit, the Blazing World where she was in, the world which she came from, and the world where the Duchess lived? The spirits answered, that there were more numerous worlds than the stars which appeared in these three mentioned worlds. Then the Empress asked whether it was not possible that her dearest friend the Duchess of Newcastle might be empress of one of them?<sup>6</sup> Although there be numerous, nay, infinite worlds, answered the spirits, yet none is without government. But is none of these worlds so weak, said she, that it may be surprised or conquered? The spirits answered, that Lucian's World of Lights had been for some time in a snuff,<sup>7</sup> but of late years one Helmont had got it, who since he was emperor of it had so strengthened the immortal parts thereof with mortal outworks as it was for the present impregnable.<sup>8</sup> Said the Empress, if there be such an infinite number of worlds, I am sure not only my friend the Duchess but any other might obtain one. Yes, answered the spirits, if those worlds were uninhabited; but they are as populous as this your Majesty governs. Why, said the Empress, it

is not possible to conquer a world? No, answered the spirits, but for the most part conquerors seldom enjoy their conquest, for they being more feared than loved most commonly come to an untimely end. \* \* \* [B]ut we wonder, proceeded the spirits, that you desire to be empress of a terrestrial world when as you can create yourself a celestial world if you please. What, said the Empress, can any mortal be a creator? Yes, answered the spirits; for every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures and populous of immaterial subjects such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or skull; nay, not only so, but he may create a world of what fashion and government he will, and give the creatures thereof such motions, figures, forms, colors, perceptions, etc. as he pleases, and make whirlpools, lights, pressures, and reactions, etc. as he thinks best; nay, he may make a world full of veins, muscles, and nerves, and all these to move by one jolt or stroke: also he may alter that world as often as he pleases, or change it from a natural world to an artificial; he may make a world of ideas, a world of atoms, a world of lights, or whatsoever his fancy leads him to. And since it is in your power to create such a world, what need you to venture life, reputation, and tranquility to conquer a gross material world? For you can enjoy no more of a material world than a particular creature is able to enjoy, which is but a small part, considering the compass of such a world; and you may plainly observe it by your friend the Empress here which although she possesses a whole world, yet enjoys she but a part thereof; neither is she so much acquainted with it that she knows all the places, countries, and dominions she governs. The truth is, a sovereign monarch has the general trouble; but the subjects enjoy all the delights and pleasures in parts; for it is impossible that a kingdom, nay, a country, should be enjoyed by one person at once, except he take the pains to travel into every part and endure the inconveniencies of going from one place to another? Wherefore, since glory, delight, and pleasure lives but in other men's opinions, and can neither add tranquility to your mind nor give ease to your body, why should you desire to be empress of a material world and be troubled with the cares that attend government, when

as by creating a world within yourself, you may enjoy all both in whole and in parts, without control or opposition; and may make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you? You have converted me, said the Duchess to the spirits, from my ambitious desire; wherefore, I'll take your advice, reject and despise all the worlds without me, and create a world of my own. The Empress said, if I do make such a world, then I shall be mistress of two worlds, one within, and the other without me. That your Majesty may, said the spirits; and so left these two ladies to create two worlds within themselves, who did also part from each other until such time as they had brought their worlds to perfection. The Duchess of Newcastle was most earnest and industrious to make her world, because she had none at present; and first she resolved to frame it according to the opinion of Thales,<sup>9</sup> but she found herself so much troubled with daemons, that they would not suffer her to take her own will, but forced her to obey their orders and commands; which she being unwilling to do, left off from making a world that way, and began to frame one according to Pythagoras's<sup>1</sup> doctrine; but in the creation thereof, she was so puzzled with numbers, how to order and compose the several parts, that she having no skill in arithmetic, was forced also to desist from the making of that world. Then she intended to create a world according to the opinion of Plato; but she found more trouble and difficulty in that than in the two former; for the numerous Ideas<sup>2</sup> having no other motion but what was derived from her mind whence they did flow and issue out, made it a far harder business to her to impart motion to them than puppet-players have in giving motion to every several puppet; in so much that her patience was not able to endure the trouble which those Ideas caused her; wherefore she annihilated also that world and was resolved to make one according to the opinion of Epicurus;<sup>3</sup> which she had no sooner begun but the infinite atoms made such a mist that it quite blinded the perception of her mind; neither was she able to make a vacuum as a receptacle for those atoms, or a place which they might retire into; so that partly for the want of it, and of

a good order and method, the confusion of those atoms produced such strange and monstrous figures as did more affright then delight her, and caused such a chaos in her mind as had almost dissolved it. At last, having with much ado cleansed and cleared her mind of these dusty and misty particles, she endeavored to create a world according to Aristotle's opinion;<sup>4</sup> but remembering that her mind, as most of the learned hold it, was immaterial, and that, according to Aristotle's principle, out of nothing, nothing could be made, she was forced also to desist from that work, and then she fully resolved not to take any more patterns from the ancient philosophers, but to follow the opinions of the moderns; and to that end, she endeavored to make a world according to Descartes' opinion; but when she had made the ethereal globules and set them a moving by a strong and lively imagination her mind became so dizzy with their extraordinary swift turning round that it almost put her into a swoon;<sup>5</sup> for her thoughts by their constant tottering did so stagger as if they had all been drunk: wherefore she dissolved that world and began to make another according to Hobbes's opinion; but when all the parts of this imaginary world came to press and drive each other they seemed like a company of wolves that worry sheep, or like so many dogs that hunt after hares;<sup>6</sup> and when she found a reaction equal to those pressures her mind was so squeezed together that her thoughts could neither move forward nor backward, which caused such an horrible pain in her head that although she had dissolved that world, yet she could not without much difficulty settle her mind and free it from that pain which those pressures and reactions had caused in it.

At last, when the Duchess saw that no patterns would do her any good in the framing of her world, she was resolved to make a world of her own invention, and this world was composed of sensitive and rational self-moving matter; indeed, it was composed only of the rational, which is the subtlest and purest degree of matter; for as the sensitive did move and act both to the perceptions and consistency of the body, so this degree of matter at the same point of time (for though the degrees are mixed, yet the several parts may move several ways at one time) did move to the creation of the imaginary

world; which world after it was made appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed, that it cannot possibly be expressed by words, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world-of-her-own.

\* \* \*

## **[HAVING MADE HER OWN WORLD, THE EMPRESS WANTS TO SEE THE WORLD THE DUCHESS CAME FROM]**

\* \* \* The Duchess used all the means she could to divert her from that journey, telling her that the world she came from was very much disturbed with factions, divisions, and wars; but the Empress would not be persuaded from her design; and lest the emperor or any of his subjects should know of her travel and obstruct her design, she sent for some of the spirits she had formerly conversed withal, and inquired whether none of them could supply the place of her soul in her body at such a time when she was gone to travel into another world? They answered: Yes, they could; for not only one, said they, but many spirits may enter into your body, if you please. The Empress replied, she desired but one spirit to be viceroy<sup>7</sup> of her body in the absence of her soul, but it must be an honest and ingenious spirit, and if it was possible, a female spirit. The spirits told her that there was no difference of sexes amongst them; but, said they, we will choose an honest and ingenious spirit, and such a one as shall so resemble your soul, that neither the emperor nor any of his subjects, although the most divine, shall know whether it be your own soul or not: which the Empress was very glad at; and after the spirits were gone, asked the Duchess how her body was supplied in the absence of her soul? who answered her Majesty that her body, in the absence of her soul, was governed by her sensitive and rational corporeal motions. Thus those two female souls travelled together as lightly as two thoughts into the Duchess her native world; and, which is remarkable, in a moment viewed all the parts of it, and all the



actions of all the creatures therein, especially did the Empress's soul take much notice of the several actions of human creatures in all the several nations and parts of that world, and wondered that for all there were so many several nations, governments, laws, religions, opinions, etc. they should all yet so generally agree in being ambitious, proud, self-conceited, vain, prodigal, deceitful, envious, malicious, unjust, revengeful, irreligious, factious, etc. She did also admire that not any particular state, kingdom, or commonwealth was contented with their own shares but endeavored to encroach upon their neighbors, and that their greatest glory was in plunder and slaughter, and yet their victories less than their expenses, and their losses more than their gains; but their being overcome, in a manner their utter ruin. But that she wondered most at was that they should prize or value dirt more than men's lives, and vanity more than tranquility[.]



**Welbeck Abbey.** This engraving from William Cavendish's *La méthode nouvelle et Invention extraordinaire de dresser les*

*chevaux* (1658), published in French while the Cavendishes were in exile, features Welbeck Abbey, the Newcastle seat, in the background.

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\* \* \*

## **[AFTER THE EMPRESS AND DUCHESS VISIT THE STUART COURT, THEY VISIT THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE]**

[W]hen the Empress's and Duchess's souls were travelling into Nottinghamshire (for that was the place where the Duke did reside), passing through the forest of Sherwood, the Empress's soul was very much delighted with it, as being a dry, plain, and woody place, very pleasant to travel in both in winter and summer; for it is neither much dirty nor dusty at no time. At last they arrived at Welbeck, a house where the Duke dwelled, surrounded all with wood so close and full that the Empress took great pleasure and delight therein, and told the Duchess she never had observed more wood in so little compass in any part of the kingdom she had passed through.<sup>8</sup> The truth is, said she, there seems to be more wood on the seas (she meaning the ships) than on the land. The Duchess told her the reason was that there had been a long civil war in that kingdom, in which most of the best timber-trees and principal palaces were ruined and destroyed; and my dear lord and husband, said she, has lost by it half his woods besides many houses, land, and movable goods so that all the loss out of his particular estate did amount to above half a million of pounds. I wish, said the Empress, he had some of the gold that is in the Blazing World, to repair his losses. The Duchess most humbly thanked her imperial Majesty for her kind wishes; but, said she, wishes will not repair his ruins[.] \* \* \* [W]hen the Duke was gone into the house again, those two souls followed him; where the Empress observing that he went to the exercise of the sword, and was such an excellent and unparalleled master

thereof, she was as much pleased with that exercise as she was with the former:<sup>9</sup> but the Duchess's soul being troubled, that her dear lord and husband used such a violent exercise before meat,<sup>1</sup> for fear of overheating himself, without any consideration of the Empress's soul, left her aerial vehicle and entered into her lord. The Empress's soul perceiving this, did the like: and then the Duke had three souls in one body; and had there been but some such souls more, the Duke would have been like the Grand Signior in his seraglio,<sup>2</sup> only it would have been a Platonic seraglio.

\* \* \*

## **[THE EMPRESS AND DUCHESS HAVE ONE FINAL DIALOGUE BEFORE RETURNING TO THEIR OWN WORLDS]**

[S]ince your Majesty complains much of the factions of the bear-, fish-, fly-, ape-, and worm-men, the satyrs, spider-men, and the like, and of their perpetual disputes and quarrels, I would advise your Majesty to dissolve all their societies; for 'tis better to be without their intelligences than to have an unquiet and disorderly government. The truth is, said she, wheresoever learning is, there is most commonly also controversy and quarrelling; for there be always some that will know more and be wiser than others: some think their arguments come nearer to truth and are more rational then others; some are so wedded to their own opinions that they'll never yield to reason; and others, though they find their opinions not firmly grounded upon reason, yet for fear of receiving some disgrace by altering them, will nevertheless maintain them against all sense and reason, which must needs breed factions in their schools, which at last break out into open wars and draw sometimes an utter ruin upon a state or government. The Empress told the Duchess that she would willingly follow her advice, but she thought it would be an eternal disgrace to her to alter her own decrees, acts, and laws. To



which the Duchess answered that it was so far from a disgrace as it would rather be for her Majesty's eternal honor to return from a worse to a better, and would express and declare her to be more than ordinary wise and good; so wise as to perceive her own errors, and so good as not to persist in them, which few did: for which, said she, you will get a glorious fame in this world, and an eternal glory hereafter, and I shall pray for it so long as I live. Upon which advice the Empress's soul embraced and kissed the Duchess's soul with an immaterial kiss, and shed immaterial tears that she was forced to part from her, finding her not a flattering parasite,<sup>3</sup> but a true friend; and in truth, such was their Platonic friendship as these two loving souls did often meet and rejoice in each other's conversation.

\* \* \*

### ***The Epilogue to the Reader***

By this poetical description you may perceive that my ambition is not only to be empress, but authoress of a whole world; and that the worlds I have made, both the Blazing and the other philosophical world mentioned in the first part of this description, are framed and composed of the most pure, that is, the rational parts of matter, which are the parts of my mind; which creation was more easily and suddenly effected than the conquests of the two famous monarchs of the world, Alexander and Caesar. Neither have I made such disturbances, and caused so many dissolutions of particulars, otherwise named deaths, as they did; for I have destroyed but some few men in a little boat, which died through the extremity of cold, and that by the hand of justice, which was necessitated to punish their crime of stealing away a young and beauteous lady. And in the formation of those worlds, I take more delight and glory than ever Alexander or Caesar did in conquering this terrestrial world; and though I have made my Blazing World a peaceable world, allowing it but one religion, one language, and one government, yet could I make another world as full of factions, divisions and wars, as this is of peace and tranquility; and the rational figures of my mind might express as much courage to fight as Hector and Achilles had; and be as wise as Nestor, as eloquent as Ulysses, and as beautiful as Helen.<sup>4</sup> But I esteeming peace before war, wit before policy, honesty before beauty, instead of the figures of Alexander, Caesar, Hector, Achilles, Nestor, Ulysses, Helen, etc. chose rather the figure of honest Margaret Newcastle, which now I would not change for all this terrestrial world; and if any should like the world I have made, and be willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such, I mean in their minds, fancies, or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own and govern themselves as they please. But yet let them have a care not to prove unjust usurpers and to rob me of mine: for, concerning the philosophical world, I am empress of it myself; and as for the Blazing World, it having an empress already who rules it

with great wisdom and conduct, which empress is my dear Platonic friend, I shall never prove so unjust, treacherous, and unworthy to her as to disturb her government, much less to depose her from her imperial throne, for the sake of any other, but rather choose to create another world for another friend.

1668

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *The Blazing World* was published as an addendum to Cavendish's *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. That critique of the new sciences emphasizes the limitations of experiments founded on human perception and such instruments as the microscope and telescope, and provides an argument for an original theory of rational, self-moving matter. The texts were published in 1666 and 1668.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Outside of.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Depicted in *The Comic History of the States and Empires of the Moon* (1656), by the French satirist and dramatist Cyrano de Bergerac (1619–1655). In a tale translated into English in 1634 as *Lucian's True History*, the Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata (ca. 120–after 180 C.E.) describes a voyage to the moon and beyond.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cavendish's husband, William, was a general in the royalist forces. After their defeat, his estates were confiscated by Parliament and fully returned to him only upon the restoration of the monarchy; in her *Life of William Cavendish* (1667), Cavendish offered a precise estimate of the financial losses suffered by her husband, equivalent today to millions of dollars.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Alexander the Great (356–23 B.C.E.) and Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.E.) were viewed as the greatest generals of Greek and Roman history, respectively. Henry V (1387–1422) made England one of the strongest military powers in Europe. Charles

II (1630–1685) was restored to the English throne in 1660.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Cavendish satirizes the theories and experiments of the Royal Society, including those described in Robert Boyle's *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours* (1664).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Imaginary serpents, or the mythical creatures (part bird, part woman) whose singing lures sailors to their destruction (see Homer, *Odyssey* 12). "Mear-men": mermen (the male counterparts of mermaids).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Followers of Galen (129–ca. 216 c.e.), ancient Greek physician and philosopher whose theories dominated European medical practice into the 17th century.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Muslims; in Jewish and Muslim houses of prayer, men and women traditionally worship in separate spaces.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Private chambers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Persistent. "Prevalent": influential.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Robert Hooke included a drawing of the drone fly in his *Of Micrographia: or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses* (1665); see p. 1368.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lacking.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A nonessential property.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The four fluids of the body—blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile—whose relative proportions were thought to determine a person's disposition and general health.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cloth impregnated with wax or gum, used as a plaster in surgery or as wrapping for a dead body.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Those who believed that soul and body were separable (unlike monists, who believed that they were one). "Cabbalists": devotees or interpreters of the Jewish Kabbalah, medieval esoteric mysticism; more generally, those skilled in mystic arts or secret learning.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Persons or animals that have (or appear to have) both male and female sexual organs; figuratively, persons or things in which radically different or contradictory attributes or qualities are combined. The term often had pejorative connotations.  
"Take": mistake.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Material objects that can contain the spirits.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: She names major Greek philosophers active between the 6th and the early 3rd century B.C.E.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
European scientists and philosophers: Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Italian astronomer, mathematician, and philosopher; Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), French mathematician and proponent of a mechanistic theory of matter; René Descartes (1596–1650), French mathematician and mechanist philosopher; Jan Baptista van Helmont (1579–1644), Flemish physician, chemist, and philosopher; Thomas Hobbes, English mechanistic philosopher and political scientist; Henry More (1614–1687), British poet and philosopher, author of *The Immateriality of the Soul* (1659).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Distinctive marks or impressions[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cavendish adds a fourth kind of Cabbala to the three identified by Henry More in his *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653): the literal, philosophical, and "Mystical or Moral" levels of biblical significance.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Texts on the new astronomy occasionally speculated about multiple inhabited worlds. Raphael introduces the idea to Adam in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 8.140–58.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: On the point of extinction.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
Cavendish suggests that van Helmont turned Lucian's material world of light into a world that mixed material and immaterial elements. In Walter Charleton's translation of van Helmont's *Ternary of Paradoxes* (1650), a section on the "variety of vital lights" includes a story of a light that appeared to van Helmont

and revealed to him that soul is distinct from body, a view with which Cavendish would have disagreed.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Greek philosopher (ca. 620–ca. 545 B.C.E.) who believed that the world originates in and returns to water.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Greek philosopher and mathematician (ca. 570–ca. 490 B.C.E.) whose followers believed that reality is fundamentally mathematical in nature.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the philosophy of the Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 427–ca. 347 B.C.E.), transcendent entities in whose reality existing things (their imperfect representations) participate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Greek philosopher (341–270 B.C.E.) who taught that all of matter was made of minute and invisible particles called atoms, and that all occurrences in the natural world resulted from atoms moving and interacting in empty space.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In his scientific writings, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) argued that objects were made of matter and form. The claim that nothing can come out of nothing actually was made by Parmenides (b. ca. 515 B.C.E.); Aristotle argued against it in *Physics* 1.8.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Fainting fit.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Governing authority.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Welbeck Abbey and Bolsover Castle were Newcastle's primary northern residences. He entertained Charles I at both houses in the 1630s.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Former" refers to his management of his houses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dinner.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Turkish harem. "Grand Signior": the Ottoman sultan.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Someone who lives at the expense of another.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: All figures from the story of the Trojan War.[Return to reference 4](#)

# **JOHN MILTON**

## **1608–1674**

As a young man, John Milton proclaimed himself the future author of a great English epic. He promised a poem devoted to the glory of the nation, centering on the deeds of King Arthur or some other ancient hero. When Milton finally published his epic thirty years later, readers found instead a poem about the Fall of Satan and humankind, set in Heaven, Hell, and the Garden of Eden, in which traditional heroism is denigrated and England is not mentioned once. What lay between the youthful promise and the eventual fulfillment was a career marked by private tragedy and public controversy.

In his poems and prose tracts, Milton often alludes to crises in his own life: his choice of a vocation, the early death of friends, painful disappointment in marriage, and the catastrophe of blindness. At the same time, no other major English poet has been so deeply involved in the major intellectual debates and political crises of his times, including the new science, freedom of the press, religious liberty and toleration, and republicanism. It is scarcely possible to treat Milton's career separately from the history of England in his lifetime, not only because he was an active participant in affairs of church and state, but also because when he signed himself, as he often did, "John Milton, Englishman," he was presenting himself as England's prophetic bard. He considered himself the spokesman for the nation as a whole even when he found himself isolated in the minority.



From an early age, Milton fashioned himself self-consciously as an author. He deliberately set out to follow the steps of the ideal poetic career—beginning with pastoral (the mode of several of his early poems) and ending with epic. His models for this progression were Virgil and Spenser: he called the latter “a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas.” (Scotus and Aquinas were influential medieval Christian philosopher-theologians, or “Scholastics.”) Milton resembles Spenser in his constant juxtaposition of biblical and classical stories and in his ability to continually transform the ideas, literary forms, and values of his literary and intellectual heritage to make it relevant to himself and to his age.

Milton’s family was middle-class, cultured, and staunchly Protestant. His father was a scrivener—a combination of solicitor, investment adviser, and moneylender—as well as an amateur composer with some reputation in musical circles. At age seventeen Milton wrote a funeral elegy for the death of his sister’s infant daughter and educated her two sons (the older, Edward, would later write his biography). Milton had private tutors at home and also attended one of London’s finest schools, St. Paul’s. At school he began a close friendship with Charles Diodati, with whom he exchanged Latin poems and letters over several years, and for whose death in 1638 he wrote a moving Latin elegy. Milton’s excellent early education gave him special facility in languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Italian, and French; later he learned Spanish and Dutch).

In 1625 Milton entered Christ’s College, Cambridge. He was briefly suspended during his freshman year over a dispute with his tutor, but graduated in 1629 and was made Master of Arts three years later. As his surviving student orations indicate, he was profoundly disappointed in his university education, reviling the scholastic logic and Latin rhetorical exercises that still formed its core as “futile and barren controversies and wordy disputes” that “stupefy and benumb the mind.” Milton expressed contempt for his fellow students: “They thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools.” They, in turn, dubbed him “the Lady of Christ’s College,”

but whether as compliment or insult is the subject of scholarly debate. He had gone to university with the serious intention of taking orders in the Church of England—the obvious vocation for a young man of his scholarly and religious bent—but became increasingly disenchanted with the lack of reformation in the church under Archbishop William Laud and later proclaimed himself “church-outed by the prelates.”

Above all, Milton came to believe more and more strongly that he was destined to serve his language, his country, and his God as a poet. He began by writing occasional poetry in Latin, the usual language for collegiate poets and for poets who sought a European audience. Milton wrote some of the century’s best Latin poems, but as early as 1628 he announced to a university audience his determination to glorify England in English poetry. In his first major English poem (written, he claimed, when he was twenty-one), the hymn “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” Milton portrayed himself as a prophet. This poem is very different from Richard Crashaw’s Nativity hymn, with its Spenserian echoes, its allusion to Roman Catholic and Laudian “idolatry”, and its stunning shifts from the Creation to Doomsday, from the manger at Bethlehem to the cosmos, and from the shepherd’s chatter to the music of the spheres. A few years later, Milton wrote the companion poems “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso,” achieving a stylistic tour de force by creating from the same meter (octosyllabic couplets) entirely different sound qualities, rhythmic effects, and moods. These poems celebrate, respectively, Mirth and Melancholy, as personifications, defining them by their ancestry, lifestyles, associates, landscapes, activities, music, and literature. In 1634, at the invitation of his musician friend Henry Lawes, he wrote a masque popularly known as “Comus,” in which the villain is a refined, seductive, and dissolute Cavalier. “Comus” challenges the royalist politics of previous court masques by locating true virtue and good pleasure in the households of the country magistracy rather than at court.

After university, as part of his preparation for a poetic career, Milton undertook a six-year program of self-directed reading in

ancient and modern theology, philosophy, history, science, politics, and literature. He was profoundly grateful to his father for sparing him the grubby business of making money and for financing these years of private study, followed by a fifteen-month "grand tour" of France, Italy, and Switzerland. In 1638 Milton contributed "Lycidas" to a Cambridge volume lamenting the untimely death of a college contemporary. This beautiful pastoral funeral elegy explores Milton's deep anxieties about poetry as a vocation, confronts the terrors of mortality in language of astonishing resonance and power, and incorporates a furious apocalyptic diatribe on the corrupt Church of England clergy. Milton nonetheless maintained relationships across religious and ideological divides; while he was in Italy he exchanged verses and learned compliments with various Catholic intellectuals and men of letters, some of whom became his friends. In 1645 he published his English and Latin poems together in a two-part volume, *Poems of Mr. John Milton*.

Upon his return to England, Milton opened a school and was soon involved in Presbyterian efforts to depose the bishops and to reform church liturgy, writing five "antiprelatical tracts" denouncing and satirizing bishops. These were the first in a series of political interventions Milton produced over the next twenty years, characterized by remarkable courage and fierce independence of thought. He wrote successively on church government, divorce, education, freedom of the press, and, most radically, on regicide and republicanism. From the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 until his death, Milton allied himself with the Puritan cause, but his religious opinions developed throughout his life, from relative orthodoxy in his youth to ever more heretical positions in his later years. And while his family belonged to the class that benefited most directly from Europe's first bourgeois revolution, his brother fought on the royalist side. The Milton brothers, like most of their contemporaries, did not see these wars as a confrontation of class interests, but as a conflict between radically differing theories of government and, above all, religion.

Some of Milton's treatises were prompted by personal concerns. He interrupted his polemical tract, *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty* (1642), to devote several pages to a discussion of his poetic vocation and the great works he hoped to produce in the future. His tracts about divorce, which can hardly have seemed the most pressing of issues in the strife-torn years 1643–45, were motivated by his own unhappy marriage. When he was thirty-three, he had married Mary Powell, aged seventeen; just a few months after the wedding, she left him to return to her royalist family. In response, Milton wrote several tracts vigorously advocating the man's right to divorce on the grounds of incompatibility and with the right to remarry—a position almost unheard of at the time and one that required a boldly antiliteral reading of the bible. At its heart this tract was a defense of companionate marriage, a union not just of bodies but of minds, in which the wife was meant to be “an intimate and speaking help.” The fact that these tracts could not be licensed and were roundly denounced in Parliament, from pulpits, and in print prompted him to write *Areopagitica* (1644), an impassioned attack against prepublication censorship, valorizing a “free and open encounter” between truth and falsehood. He saw these personal issues—reformed poetry, domestic liberty achieved through divorce, and a free press—as vital to the creation of a reformed English culture.

In 1649, just after Parliament executed Charles I, Milton published *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (see [p. 1328](#)). This treatise defends the revolution and the regicide and develops a “contract theory” of government based on the inalienable and ongoing sovereignty of the people—a version of contract very different from that of Thomas Hobbes, who argued for a one-time and irrevocable contract between king and people that rendered the monarch's powers absolute. Milton was appointed Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth government (1649–53) and to Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate (1654–58), which meant that he wrote the regimes' official letters—mostly in Latin—to foreign governments and heads of state. He also wrote polemical defenses of the new government:

*Eikonoklastes* (1649) ("Iconoclast"), to counter the powerful emotional effect of *Eikon Basilike* ("Royal Portrait"), supposedly written by the king just before his death, and two Latin *Defenses* upholding the regicide and the new republic to European audiences.

During these years Milton suffered a series of tragedies. Mary Powell returned to him in 1645 but died in childbirth in 1652, leaving four children; his only son, John, died a few months later. That same year Milton became totally blind; he claimed that his boyhood habit of reading until midnight had weakened his eyesight and that writing his first *Defense* against the political (and personal) attacks of the Frenchman Claudius Salmasius had destroyed it. Milton married again in 1656, apparently happily, but his new wife, Katherine Woodcock, died two years later, along with their infant daughter. Katherine is probably the subject of his sonnet "Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint," a moving dream vision poignant with the sense of loss—both of sight and of love. The few sonnets Milton wrote during the height of the Commonwealth and Protectorate revolutionized the genre. He used the small sonnet form, hitherto confined (in England) mainly to matters of love, for new and grand subjects: praises of Cromwell and other statesmen mixed with admonition and political advice; a prophetic denunciation calling down God's vengeance for Protestants massacred in Piedmont; and an emotional account of his continuing struggle to come to terms with his blindness as part of God's providence.

Cromwell's death in 1658 led to mounting political chaos, and soon the restoration of the Stuart monarchy seemed inevitable. Milton held out against that tide. His several tracts of 1659–60 developed radical arguments for broad toleration, church disestablishment, and republican government. And just as he was among the first to attack the power of the bishops, so he was virtually the last defender of the "Good Old Cause" of the Revolution; the second edition of his *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* appeared in late April 1660, scarcely two weeks before the monarchy was restored. For several months after that event, Milton was in hiding, his life in danger. Friends,

especially the poet Andrew Marvell, managed to secure his pardon and later his release from a brief imprisonment. He lived out his last years in reduced circumstances, plagued by ever more serious attacks of gout but grateful for the domestic comforts provided by his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, thirty years his junior, whom he had married in 1663 and who survived him.

In such conditions, dismayed by the defeat of his political and religious cause, totally blind and often ill, threatened by the plague of 1665 and the great fire of 1666, and entirely dependent on amanuenses and friends to transcribe his dictation, Milton completed his great epic poem. *Paradise Lost* (1667/74) radically reconceives the epic genre and epic heroism, choosing as protagonists a domestic couple rather than martial heroes and degrading the military glory celebrated in epic tradition in favor of "the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom." It offers a sweeping imaginative vision of Hell, Chaos, and Heaven; the creation of the world out of "one first matter all"; the sex lives of angels; prelapsarian life in Eden; the power of the devil's political rhetoric; the psychology of Satan, Adam, and Eve; and the high drama of the Fall and its aftermath.

In his final years, Milton published works on grammar and logic chiefly written during his days as a schoolmaster, a history of Britain (1670) from the earliest times to the Norman Conquest, and a treatise urging toleration for Puritan dissenters (1673). He also continued work on his *Christian Doctrine*, a Latin treatise that reveals how far he had moved from the orthodoxies of his day. The work denies the Trinity (making the Son and the Holy Spirit much inferior to God the Father), insists upon free will against Calvinist predestination, and privileges the inspiration of the Spirit even above the Scriptures and the Ten Commandments. Such heterodox positions could not be made public in Milton's lifetime, and *Christian Doctrine* was lost to view for over 150 years.

In 1671 Milton published two poems that reflect the harsh repression all Puritan dissenters faced after the Restoration. *Paradise Regained*, a brief epic in four books, treats Jesus's temptation in the

wilderness as an intellectual struggle through which the hero comes to understand both himself and his mission. He defeats Satan by renouncing the whole panoply of faulty versions of the good life and of God's kingdom. *Samson Agonistes*, a classical tragedy, is the more harrowing for the resemblances between its tragic hero and its author. The deeply flawed, pain-wracked, blind, and defeated Samson struggles, in dialogues with his visitors, to gain self-knowledge, discovering at last a desperate way to triumph over his captors and offer his people a chance to regain their freedom. In these last poems Milton sought to educate his readers in moral and political wisdom and virtue. Only through such inner transformation, Milton now firmly believed, would people come to value—and so perhaps reclaim—the intellectual, religious, and political freedom he so vigorously promoted in his work.

## ***FROM* POEMS**



# On the Morning of Christ's Nativity<sup>1</sup>

## 1

This is the month, and this the happy morn  
Wherein the son of Heaven's eternal King,  
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,  
Our great redemption from above did bring;  
5 For so the holy sages once did sing,  
That he our deadly forfeit<sup>2</sup> should release,  
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

## 2

That glorious form, that light unsufferable,<sup>o</sup>  
And that far-beaming blaze of majesty  
10 Wherewith he wont<sup>o</sup> at Heaven's high council-table  
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,<sup>3</sup>  
He laid aside; and here with us to be,  
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,  
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

## 3

15 Say, heavenly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein  
Afford a present to the infant God?  
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,  
To welcome him to this his new abode,  
Now while the heaven by the sun's team untrod<sup>4</sup>  
20 Hath took no print of the approaching light,  
And all the spangled host<sup>o</sup> keep watch in squadrons  
bright?

## 4

See how from far upon the eastern road  
The star-led wizards<sup>5</sup> haste with odors sweet:  
O run, prevent<sup>o</sup> them with thy humble ode,  
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;  
25 Have thou the honor first thy Lord to greet,  
And join thy voice unto the angel choir,  
From out His secret altar touched with hallowed  
fire.<sup>6</sup>

## *The Hymn*

### 1

It was the winter wild  
While the Heaven-born child  
30 All meanly wrapped in the rude manger lies;  
Nature in awe to him  
Had doffed her gaudy trim<sup>7</sup>  
With her great Master so to sympathize;  
It was no season then for her  
35 To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

### 2

Only with speeches fair  
She woos the gentle air  
To hide her guilty front<sup>o</sup> with innocent snow,  
And on her naked shame,  
40 Pollute with sinful blame,  
The saintly veil of maiden white to throw,<sup>8</sup>  
Confounded that her Maker's eyes  
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

### 3

45 But he her fears to cease  
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace;  
She, crowned with olive green, came softly sliding  
Down through the turning sphere,<sup>9</sup>  
His ready harbinger,<sup>o</sup>  
50 With turtle<sup>1</sup> wing the amorous clouds dividing,  
And waving wide her myrtle wand,  
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

### 4

No war or battle's sound  
Was heard the world around;<sup>2</sup>  
The idle spear and shield were high up-hung;  
55 The hookèd chariot<sup>3</sup> stood  
Unstained with hostile blood,  
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng,  
And kings sat still with awful<sup>o</sup> eye,  
60 As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by.

### 5

But peaceful was the night  
Wherein the Prince of Light  
His reign of peace upon the earth began:  
The winds, with wonder whist,<sup>o</sup>  
Smoothly the waters kissed,  
65 Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,  
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,  
While birds of calm<sup>4</sup> sit brooding on the charmèd  
wave.

### 6

The stars with deep amaze

70 Stand fixed in steadfast gaze,  
Bending one way their precious influence,  
And will not take their flight  
For all the morning light,  
Or Lucifer<sup>5</sup> that often warned them thence;  
But in their glimmering orbs did glow  
75 Until their Lord himself bespoke,<sup>o</sup> and bid them go.

## 7

And though the shady gloom  
Had given day her room,  
The sun himself withheld his wonted speed,  
And hid his head for shame  
80 As<sup>o</sup> his inferior flame  
The new-enlightened world no more should need;  
He saw a greater Sun<sup>6</sup> appear  
Than his bright throne or burning axletree<sup>o</sup> could  
bear.

## 8

85 The shepherds on the lawn  
Or ere the point of<sup>o</sup> dawn  
Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;  
Full little thought they than<sup>o</sup>  
That the mighty Pan<sup>7</sup>  
90 Was kindly<sup>8</sup> come to live with them below;  
Perhaps their loves or else their sheep  
Was all that did their silly<sup>o</sup> thoughts so busy keep.

## 9

When such music sweet  
Their hearts and ears did greet  
As never was by mortal finger struck,

95 Divinely warbled voice  
Answering the stringèd noise,  
As all their souls in blissful rapture took;  
The air, such pleasure loath to lose,  
100 With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly  
close.◊

## 10

Nature that heard such sound  
Beneath the hollow round  
Of Cynthia's seat,<sup>9</sup> the airy region thrilling,◊  
Now was almost won  
To think her part was done,  
105 And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;  
She knew such harmony alone  
Could hold all heaven and earth in happier union.

## 11

At last surrounds their sight  
A globe of circular light  
110 That with long beams the shamefaced night  
arrayed;◊  
The helmèd cherubim  
And sworded seraphim<sup>1</sup>  
Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed,  
Harping in loud and solemn choir  
115 With unexpressive◊ notes to Heaven's newborn heir.

## 12

Such music (as 'tis said)  
Before was never made,  
But when of old the sons of morning sung,<sup>2</sup>  
120 While the Creator great

His constellations set,  
And the well-balanced world on hinges<sup>o</sup> hung,  
And cast the dark foundations deep,  
And bid the welt'ring waves their oozy channel keep.

### 13

125 Ring out, ye crystal spheres,  
Once bless our human ears  
(If ye have power to touch our senses so),  
And let your silver chime  
Move in melodious time,  
And let the bass of Heaven's deep organ blow;  
130 And with your ninefold harmony<sup>3</sup>  
Make up full consort to th' angelic symphony.

### 14

For if such holy song  
Enwrap our fancy long,  
135 Time will run back and fetch the age of gold;<sup>4</sup>  
And speckled vanity  
Will sicken soon and die,  
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mold,  
And Hell itself will pass away,  
140 And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

### 15

Yea, Truth and Justice then  
Will down return to men,  
Th' enameled arras<sup>o</sup> of the rainbow wearing,  
And Mercy set between,<sup>5</sup>  
Throned in celestial sheen,  
145 With radiant feet the tissued<sup>6</sup> clouds down  
steering;

And Heaven, as at some festival,  
Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.

## 16

But wisest Fate says no,  
This must not yet be so;  
150     The Babe lies yet in smiling infancy<sup>7</sup>  
That on the bitter cross  
Must redeem our loss,  
      So both himself and us to glorify;  
Yet first to those ychained<sup>8</sup> in sleep  
155     The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through  
      the deep,

## 17

With such a horrid clang  
As on Mount Sinai rang  
      While the red fire and smoldering clouds outbrake;  
The agèd earth, aghast  
160     With terror of that blast,  
      Shall from the surface to the center shake,  
When at the world's last session,  
The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread His  
      throne.<sup>9</sup>

## 18

And then at last our bliss  
165     Full and perfect is,  
      But now begins; for from this happy day  
Th' old dragon under ground,<sup>1</sup>  
In straiter limits bound,  
      Not half so far casts his usurpèd sway,  
170     And wroth to see his kingdom fail,

Swinges<sup>9</sup> the scaly horror of his folded tail.

## 19

The oracles are dumb;<sup>2</sup>  
No voice or hideous hum  
Runs through the archèd roof in words deceiving.  
175 Apollo from his shrine  
Can no more divine,  
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.<sup>3</sup>  
No nightly trance or breathèd spell  
180 Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

## 20

The lonely mountains o'er  
And the resounding shore  
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;  
From haunted spring and dale  
185 Edged with the poplar pale,  
The parting genius<sup>4</sup> is with sighing sent;  
With flower-in-woven tresses torn  
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets  
mourn.

## 21

In consecrated earth  
And on the holy hearth,  
190 The lars and lemures<sup>5</sup> moan with midnight plaint;  
In urns and altars round  
A drear and dying sound  
Affrights the flamens<sup>6</sup> at their service quaint;  
And the chill marble seems to sweat,  
195 While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat.



## 22

Peor and Baalim<sup>7</sup>  
Forsake their temples dim,  
With that twice-battered god of Palestine,<sup>8</sup>  
And moonèd Ashtaroth,<sup>9</sup>  
200 Heaven's queen and mother both,  
Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine;  
The Libyc Hammon<sup>1</sup> shrinks<sup>o</sup> his horn;  
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz  
mourn.<sup>2</sup>

## 23

And sullen Moloch,<sup>3</sup> fled,  
205 Hath left in shadows dread  
His burning idol all of blackest hue;  
In vain with cymbals' ring  
They call the grisly king  
In dismal dance about the furnace blue;  
210 The brutish gods of Nile as fast,<sup>4</sup>  
Isis and Orus and the dog Anubis haste.

## 24

Nor is Osiris seen  
In Memphian grove or green,  
215 Trampling the unshowered<sup>o</sup> grass with lowings  
loud,  
Nor can he be at rest  
Within his sacred chest;  
Naught but profoundest Hell can be his shroud.  
In vain with timbrelled anthems dark  
220 The sable-stolèd sorcerers bear his worshipped ark.<sup>5</sup>

## 25

He feels from Judah's land  
 The dreaded Infant's hand,  
 The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyne;  
 Nor all the gods beside  
 Longer dare abide,  
 225 Not Typhon huge, ending in snaky twine;  
 Our Babe, to show his godhead true,  
 Can in his swaddling bands control the damnèd  
 crew.<sup>6</sup>

## 26

So when the sun in bed,  
 Curtained with cloudy red,  
 230 Pillows his chin upon an orient<sup>o</sup> wave,  
 The flocking shadows pale  
 Troop to th' infernal jail;  
 Each fettered ghost slips to his several<sup>o</sup> grave;  
 And the yellow-skirted fays  
 235 Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved  
 maze.<sup>7</sup>

## 27

But see! the Virgin blessed  
 Hath laid her Babe to rest.  
 Time is our tedious song should here have ending.  
 Heaven's youngest-teemèd<sup>o</sup> star  
 240 Hath fixed her polished car,<sup>o</sup>  
 Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending:  
 And all about the courtly stable  
 Bright-harnessed<sup>o</sup> angels sit in order serviceàble.

- Note 1:

This ode was written on Christmas 1629, a few weeks after Milton's twenty-first birthday. He placed it first in the 1645 edition of his poems, claiming in it his vocation as inspired poet. The poem often looks back to Spenser: the first four stanzas are an adaptation of the Spenserian stanza; there are several Spenserian archaisms (y- prefixes) and some Spenser-like onomatopoeia (lines 156, 172).

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The sentence of death consequent on the Fall. "Holy sages": for example, the prophet Isaiah (chaps. 9 and 40) and Job (chap. 19) were thought to have foretold Christ as Messiah.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Trinity: Father, Son (incarnate in Christ), and Holy Ghost.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In classical myth, the sun (Phoebus Apollo) drove across heaven in a chariot drawn by horses.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Magi who followed the star of Bethlehem to find and adore the infant Christ.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Isaiah's lips were touched by a burning coal from the altar, purifying him and confirming him as a prophet (Isaiah 6:7).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Put off her garments of leaves and flowers.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nature fell also with the Fall, so she is a harlot (line 36), not a pure maiden, despite her white garment of snow.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Ptolemaic spheres, revolving around the earth.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Like a turtledove, which, like the myrtle (next line), is an emblem of Venus (Love), as the olive crown is of peace.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Around the time of Christ's birth, the "Peace of Augustus" held, during which no major wars disturbed the Roman Empire; that peace was sometimes attributed to Christ.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: War chariots were built with scythelike hooks on the axles, to wound and kill.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Kingfishers (halcyons) were thought to calm the seas during the time they nested on its waves.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Not Satan but the morning star, Venus.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The familiar Son/sun pun.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pan, patron of shepherds, is a merry, goat-footed god, but he was often conceived in more exalted terms and identified with Christ, because his name in Greek means "all."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: By nature; also, benevolently.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cynthia is the moon. Nature rules below the moon (the region of the four elements and subject to decay). The unchanging, perfect region above the moon is normally the only place one could hear either angels' hymnody or the music of the spheres.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Seraphim and cherubim are the highest of the traditional nine orders of angels; they are often portrayed in martial attire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Job 38:4–7: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . / When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Pythagorean theory, each of the nine moving spheres sounds a distinctive note (the tenth, the primum mobile, does not move). It was supposed that, after the Fall, this harmonious music of the spheres could not be heard on earth. Earth would be the "bass" of the cosmic organ, sounding under that planetary harmony.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The first age, of human innocence, classical mythology's equivalent to the Garden of Eden.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
This allegorical scene, suggesting a masque descent, alludes to Psalm 85:10, part of the liturgy for Christmas: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each

other." Peace, in the poem, has already descended (lines 45–52). The lines also evoke the flight of Astraea, the classical goddess of justice, at the end of the Golden Age, and her return with its restoration, celebrated by Virgil in his fourth eclogue, applied by him to the birth of Pollio but by Christians to Christ.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Cloth woven with silver and gold. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Latin word, *infans*, means, literally, "nonspeaking." [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: One of Spenser's archaic *y-* prefixes. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Moses received the Ten Commandments amid thunder and lightning atop Mount Sinai (Exodus 19); the Last Judgment will take place amid similar uproar. "Session": court proceeding. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The devil (Revelation 20:2). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An ancient tradition held that pagan oracles ceased with the coming of Christ; another identified the pagan gods with the fallen angels. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Apollo's main shrine was at Delphi, on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A local deity guarding a particular place. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Spirits of the dead. "Lars": household gods. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Roman priests. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Other manifestations of Baal, a Canaanite sun god. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dagon, the Philistine god whose image at Ashdod was twice thrown down when the Ark of the Covenant was placed beside it (1 Samuel 5:2–4). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ashtaroth, also known as Astarte, was a Phoenician fertility goddess identified with the moon. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hammon, also Ammon, an Egyptian and Libyan god, depicted as a ram. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Thammuz, lover of Ashtaroth, was killed by a boar and lamented by the Phoenician women; he was taken into the Greek pantheon as Adonis.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Moloch was a Phoenician fire god, a brazen idol with a human body and a calf's head; the statue ("his burning idol," line 207) was heated flaming hot and children were thrown into its embrace, with cymbals drowning out their cries (2 Kings 22:10).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Egyptian gods had some features of animals: Isis (next line) was represented with cow's horns, Orus, or Horus, with a hawk's head; Osiris (lines 213–15) sometimes had the shape of a bull.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Osiris's image was carried from temple to temple in a wooden chest, and his priests accompanied it with tambourines ("timbrels").[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Typhon was a hundred-headed monster who was a serpent below the waist, a figure for the devil. The infant Christ controlling him calls up (as a foreshadowing) the story of the infant Hercules strangling two giant serpents in his cradle.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fairy rings. "Night-steeds": horses drawing Night's chariot.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *unable to be endured*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *angels*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anticipate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *brow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forerunner*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *filled with awe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hushed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spoke out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as if*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *chariot axle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *then*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *simple, humble*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cadence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *piercing, delighting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adorned with rays*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inexpressible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the two poles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brightly colored fabric*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lashes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *draws in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rainless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eyes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eastern, bright*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *latest born*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gleaming chariot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright-armored*[Return to reference](#) °

# On Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>

What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones  
The labor of an age in pilèd stones,  
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid  
Under a star-ypointing<sup>2</sup> pyramid?  
5 Dear son of memory,<sup>3</sup> great heir of fame,  
What<sup>o</sup> need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?  
Thou in our wonder and astonishment  
Hast built thyself a livelong<sup>o</sup> monument.  
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavoring art  
10 Thy easy numbers<sup>o</sup> flow, and that each heart  
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued<sup>o</sup> book  
Those Delphic<sup>4</sup> lines with deep impression took,  
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,  
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;<sup>5</sup>  
15 And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie,  
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

## 1630 Endnotes

1632

- Note 1: This tribute, Milton's first published poem, appeared in the Second Folio of Shakespeare's plays (1632).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A Spenserian archaism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As "son of memory" Shakespeare is a brother of the Muses, who are the daughters of Mnemosyne (Memory).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Apollo, god of poetry, had his oracle at Delphi.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Shakespeare's mesmerized readers are themselves his ("marble") monument.[Return to reference 5](#)



# Notes

- °: *why*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enduring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *verses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *invaluable*[Return to reference](#) °

# L'Allegro<sup>1</sup>

Hence loathèd Melancholy,<sup>2</sup>  
Of Cerberus<sup>3</sup> and blackest midnight born,  
In Stygian<sup>4</sup> cave forlorn  
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights  
unholy,  
Find out some uncouth<sup>o</sup> cell,  
5 Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous  
wings,  
And the night raven sings;  
There under ebon shades and low-browed rocks,  
As ragged as thy locks,  
In dark Cimmerian<sup>5</sup> desert ever dwell.  
10 But come thou goddess fair and free,  
In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,<sup>6</sup>  
And by men, heart-easing Mirth,  
Whom lovely Venus at a birth  
With two sister Graces more  
15 To ivy-crownèd Bacchus bore;  
Or whether (as some sager sing)  
The frolic wind that breathes the spring,  
Zephyr with Aurora playing,  
As he met her once a-Maying,  
20 There on beds of violets blue,  
And fresh-blown<sup>o</sup> roses washed in dew,  
Filled her with thee a daughter fair,  
So buxom,<sup>o</sup> blithe, and debonair.  
Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee  
25 Jest and youthful Jollity,  
Quips<sup>o</sup> and Cranks,<sup>o</sup> and wanton Wiles,  
Nods, and Becks,<sup>o</sup> and wreathèd Smiles,

Such as hang on Hebe's<sup>7</sup> cheek,  
And love to live in dimple sleek;  
30 Sport that wrinkled Care derides,  
And Laughter holding both his sides.  
Come, and trip it<sup>o</sup> as ye go  
On the light fantastic toe,  
And in thy right hand lead with thee  
35 The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty;  
And if I give thee honor due,  
Mirth, admit me of thy crew  
To live with her and live with thee,  
In unreprovèd<sup>o</sup> pleasures free;  
40 To hear the lark begin his flight,  
And, singing, startle the dull night,  
From his watch tower in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;  
Then to come in spite of<sup>o</sup> sorrow,  
45 And at my window bid good morrow,  
Through the sweetbriar or the vine,  
Or the twisted eglantine.  
While the cock with lively din  
Scatters the rear of darkness thin,  
50 And to the stack or the barn door,  
Stoutly struts his dames before;  
Oft listening how the hounds and horn  
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,  
From the side of some hoar<sup>o</sup> hill,  
55 Through the high wood echoing shrill.  
Sometime walking not unseen  
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,  
Right against the eastern gate,  
Where the great sun begins his state,<sup>8</sup>  
60 Robed in flames and amber light,  
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;<sup>o</sup>  
While the plowman near at hand

Whistles o'er the furrowed land,  
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,  
65 And the mower whets his scythe,  
And every shepherd tells his tale  
Under the hawthorn in the dale.  
Straight<sup>o</sup> mine eye hath caught new pleasures  
Whilst the landscape round it measures,  
70 Russet lawns and fallows<sup>o</sup> gray,  
Where the nibbling flocks do stray,  
Mountains on whose barren breast  
The laboring clouds do often rest;  
Meadows trim with daisies pied,<sup>o</sup>  
75 Shallow brooks, and rivers wide.  
Towers and battlements it sees  
Bosomed high in tufted trees,  
Where perhaps some beauty lies,  
The cynosure<sup>9</sup> of neighboring eyes.  
80 Hard by, a cottage chimney smokes  
From betwixt two aged oaks,  
Where Corydon and Thyrsis met  
Are at their savory dinner set  
Of herbs and other country messes,  
85 Which the neat-handed<sup>o</sup> Phyllis dresses;  
And then in haste her bower she leaves,  
With Thestylis<sup>1</sup> to bind the sheaves;  
Or if the earlier season lead  
To the tanned<sup>o</sup> haycock in the mead.  
90 Sometimes with secure<sup>o</sup> delight  
The upland hamlets will invite,  
When the merry bells ring round  
And the jocund rebecks<sup>2</sup> sound  
To many a youth and many a maid,  
95 Dancing in the checkered shade;  
And young and old come forth to play  
On a sunshine holiday,

Till the livelong daylight fail;  
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,  
100 With stories told of many a feat,  
How fairy Mab the junkets<sup>3</sup> eat;  
She was pinched and pulled, she said,  
And he, by friar's lantern led,  
105 Tells how the drudging goblin<sup>4</sup> sweat  
To earn his cream bowl duly set,  
When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,  
His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn  
That ten day laborers could not end;  
Then lies him down the lubber fiend,<sup>5</sup>  
110 And stretched out all the chimney's<sup>o</sup> length,  
Basks at the fire his hairy strength;  
And crop-full<sup>o</sup> out of doors he flings  
Ere the first cock his matin rings.  
Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,  
115 By whispering winds soon lulled asleep.  
Towered cities please us then,  
And the busy hum of men,  
Where throngs of knights and barons bold  
In weeds of peace high triumphs<sup>6</sup> hold,  
120 With store of ladies, whose bright eyes  
Rain influence,<sup>7</sup> and judge the prize  
Of wit or arms, while both contend  
To win her grace, whom all commend.  
There let Hymen<sup>8</sup> oft appear  
125 In saffron robe, with taper clear,  
And pomp and feast and revelry,  
With masque and antique<sup>o</sup> pageantry;  
Such sights as youthful poets dream  
On summer eves by haunted stream.  
130 Then to the well-trod stage anon,  
If Jonson's learned sock be on,  
Or sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,

Warble his native woodnotes wild.<sup>9</sup>  
 And ever against eating cares;<sup>1</sup>  
 135 Lap me in soft Lydian airs,<sup>2</sup>  
 Married to immortal verse  
 Such as the meeting soul may pierce  
 In notes with many a winding bout<sup>o</sup>  
 Of linkèd sweetness long drawn out,  
 140 With wanton heed and giddy cunning,  
 The melting voice through mazes running,  
 Untwisting all the chains that tie  
 The hidden soul of harmony;  
 That Orpheus' self may heave his head  
 145 From golden slumber on a bed  
 Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear  
 Such strains as would have won the ear  
 Of Pluto, to have quite set free  
 His half-regained Eurydice.<sup>3</sup>  
 150 These delights if thou canst give,  
 Mirth, with thee I mean to live.<sup>4</sup>

ca. 1631 **Endnotes**

1645

- Note 1:  
 The companion poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are both written in tetrameter couplets, except for the first ten lines, but Milton's virtuosity produces entirely different tempos and sound qualities in the two poems. The Italian titles name, respectively, the cheerful, mirthful man and the melancholy, contemplative man. The poems are carefully balanced and their different values celebrated, though "Il Penseroso's" greater length and final coda may intimate that life's superiority. Mirth, the presiding deity of "L'Allegro," is described in terms that evoke Botticelli's presentation of the Grace Euphrosyne (youthful mirth) and her sisters in his *Primavera*.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The black melancholy recognized and here exorcized by Mirth's man is a disease leading to madness. "Il Penseroso" celebrates "white" melancholy as the temperament of the scholarly, contemplative man, represented in Dürer's famous engraving *Melancholy*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The three-headed hellhound of classical mythology.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Near the river Styx, in the underworld.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Homer's Cimmerians (*Odyssey* 11.13–19) live on the outer edge of the world, in perpetual darkness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The three Graces—Euphrosyne (four syllables) figuring Youthful Mirth; Aglaia, Brilliance; and Thalia, Bloom—were commonly taken to be offspring of Venus (Love and Beauty) and Bacchus (god of wine). Milton proceeds, however, to devise another, more innocent parentage for Euphrosyne (ascribing it to "some sager," lines 17–24): Zephyr, the West Wind, and Aurora, goddess of the Dawn.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Goddess of youth and cupbearer to the gods.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Stately procession, as by a monarch.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Literally, the bright polestar, or North Star, by which mariners steer; here, a splendid object, much gazed at.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Milton uses traditional names from classical pastoral—Corydon, Thyrsis, Phyllis, Thestylis—for his rustic English shepherds.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A small three-stringed fiddle. "Jocund": merry, sprightly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sweetmeats, especially with cream. Queen Mab is the fairy queen, consort of Oberon. "She" and "he" in the next two lines are country folk telling of their experiences with fairies.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Robin Goodfellow, alias Puck, Pook, or Hobgoblin. “Friar’s lantern”: will-o’-the-wisp.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Puck, here identified with the folktale goblin, Lob-lie-by-the-fire. Robin traditionally did all manner of drudging work for people, to be rewarded with a bowl of cream.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pageants. “Weeds of peace”: courtly raiment.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The ladies’ eyes are stars and so have astrological influence over the men.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Roman god of marriage. An orange-yellow (“saffron”) robe and a torch are his attributes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It was conventional to contrast Jonson as a “learned” poet and Shakespeare as a “natural” one, but L’Allegro’s views and choices of literature also suits with his nature. “Sock”: the comedian’s low-heeled slipper, contrasted with the tragedian’s buskin, a high-heeled boot.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: “Eating cares” (Horace, *Odes* 2.11.18) is one of many classical echoes in the poem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Plato considered “Lydian airs” to be enervating, soft, and sensual; he preferred the solemn Doric mode. Some others thought Lydian airs relaxing and delightful.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Orpheus’s music so moved Pluto that he agreed to release Orpheus’s dead wife Eurydice (four syllables, accent on the second) from the underworld (Elysium), but he violated the condition set—that he not look back at her—and so lost her again. Milton often uses Orpheus as a figure for the poet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The final lines echo Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” (p. 495): “If these delights thy mind may move, / Then live with me and be my love.”[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes



- °: *desolate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *newly opened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lively*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *witty sayings* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jokes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beckonings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *irreproachable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in defiance of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ancient*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dressed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plowed land*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *multicolored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dexterous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sun-dried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *careless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fireplace's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satiated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ancient, also antic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *circuit*[Return to reference](#) °

## Il Penseroso<sup>1</sup>

Hence vain deluding joys,<sup>2</sup>  
The brood of Folly without father bred,  
How little you bestead,<sup>o</sup>  
Or fill the fixèd mind with all your toys<sup>o</sup>  
Dwell in some idle brain,  
5 And fancies fond<sup>o</sup> with gaudy shapes possess,  
As thick and numberless  
As the gay motes that people the sunbeams,  
Or likest hovering dreams,  
The fickle pensioners of Morpheus'<sup>3</sup> train.  
10 But hail thou Goddess sage and holy,  
Hail, divinest Melancholy,  
Whose saintly visage is too bright  
To hit<sup>o</sup> the sense of human sight,  
And therefore to our weaker view  
15 O'erlaid with black, staid wisdom's hue;<sup>4</sup>  
Black, but such as in esteem,  
Prince Memnon's sister<sup>5</sup> might beseem,  
Or that starred Ethiopie queen<sup>6</sup> that strove  
To set her beauty's praise above  
20 The sea nymphs, and their powers offended.  
Yet thou art higher far descended;  
Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore  
To solitary Saturn bore;<sup>7</sup>  
His daughter she (in Saturn's reign  
25 Such mixture was not held a stain).  
Oft in glimmering bowers and glades  
He met her, and in secret shades  
Of woody Ida's inmost grove,  
While yet there was no fear of Jove.

30 Come pensive nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, steadfast, and demure,  
All in a robe of darkest grain,<sup>o</sup>  
Flowing with majestic train,  
35 And sable stole<sup>8</sup> of cypress lawn  
Over thy decent<sup>o</sup> shoulders drawn.  
Come, but keep thy wonted<sup>o</sup> state,<sup>o</sup>  
With even step and musing gait,  
And looks commercing with the skies,  
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:  
40 There held in holy passion still,  
Forget thyself to marble,<sup>9</sup> till  
With a sad<sup>o</sup> leaden downward cast<sup>o</sup>  
Thou fix them on the earth as fast.  
And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,  
45 Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,  
And hears the Muses in a ring  
Aye<sup>o</sup> round about Jove's altar sing.  
And add to these retired Leisure,  
That in trim gardens takes his pleasure;  
50 But first, and chiefest, with thee bring  
Him that yon soars on golden wing,  
Guiding the fiery-wheelèd throne,  
The cherub Contemplation;<sup>1</sup>  
And the mute Silence hist<sup>o</sup> along,  
55 'Less Philomel<sup>2</sup> will deign a song,  
In her sweetest, saddest plight,<sup>o</sup>  
Smoothing the rugged brow of night,  
While Cynthia<sup>3</sup> checks her dragon yoke  
Gently o'er th' accustomed oak;  
60 Sweet bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,  
Most musical, most melancholy!  
Thee chantress oft the woods among  
I woo to hear thy evensong;<sup>4</sup>  
And missing thee, I walk unseen

65 On the dry smooth-shaven green,  
To behold the wandering moon,  
Riding near her highest noon,  
Like one that had been led astray  
Through the heaven's wide pathless way;  
70 And oft as if her head she bowed,  
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.  
Oft on a plat<sup>o</sup> of rising ground,  
I hear the far-off curfew sound  
Over some wide-watered shore,  
75 Swinging slow with sullen<sup>o</sup> roar;  
Or if the air will not permit,  
Some still removèd place will fit,  
Where glowing embers through the room  
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom,  
80 Far from all resort of mirth,  
Save the cricket on the hearth,  
Or the bellman's<sup>5</sup> drowsy charm,  
To bless the doors from nightly harm;  
Or let my lamp at midnight hour  
85 Be seen in some high lonely tower,  
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,<sup>6</sup>  
With thrice-great Hermes, or unsphere  
The spirit of Plato<sup>7</sup> to unfold  
What words or what vast regions hold  
90 The immortal mind that hath forsook  
Her mansion in this fleshly nook;  
And of those demons<sup>8</sup> that are found  
In fire, air, flood, or underground,  
Whose power hath a true consent<sup>o</sup>  
95 With planet, or with element.  
Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy  
In scepter'd pall<sup>9</sup> come sweeping by,  
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,  
Or the tale of Troy divine,<sup>1</sup>

100 Or what (though rare) of later age  
Ennobled hath the buskined<sup>2</sup> stage.  
But, O sad virgin, that thy power  
Might raise Musaeus<sup>3</sup> from his bower,  
105 Or bid the soul of Orpheus<sup>4</sup> sing  
Such notes as, warbled to the string,  
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,  
And made Hell grant what love did seek.  
Or call up him<sup>5</sup> that left half told  
The story of Cambuscan bold,  
110 Of Camball and of Algarsife,  
And who had Canacee to wife,  
That owned the virtuous<sup>o</sup> ring and glass,  
And of the wondrous horse of brass,  
On which the Tartar king did ride;  
115 And if aught<sup>o</sup> else great bards beside  
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,  
Of tourneys and of trophies hung,  
Of forests and enchantments drear,  
Where more is meant than meets the ear.<sup>6</sup>  
120 Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,  
Till civil-suited Morn appear,  
Not tricked and frownced as she was wont  
With the Attic boy to hunt,<sup>7</sup>  
But kerchiefed in a comely cloud,  
125 While rocking winds are piping loud,  
Or ushered with a shower still,<sup>o</sup>  
When the gust hath blown his fill,  
Ending on the rustling leaves,  
With minute drops from off the eaves.  
130 And when the sun begins to fling  
His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring  
To archèd walks of twilight groves,  
And shadows brown that Sylvan<sup>8</sup> loves  
Of pine or monumental oak,

135 Where the rude ax with heavèd stroke  
Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,  
Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.  
There in close covert<sup>o</sup> by some brook,  
Where no profaner eye may look,  
140 Hide me from day's garish eye,  
While the bee with honeyed thigh,  
That at her flowery work doth sing,  
And the waters murmuring  
With such consort<sup>o</sup> as they keep,  
145 Entice the dewy-feathered sleep;  
And let some strange mysterious dream  
Wave at his wings in airy stream  
Of lively portraiture displayed  
Softly on my eyelids laid.  
150 And as I wake, sweet music breathe  
Above, about, or underneath,  
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,  
Or th' unseen genius<sup>o</sup> of the wood.  
But let my due feet never fail  
155 To walk the studious cloister's pale,<sup>o</sup>  
And love the high embowèd roof,  
With antic pillars massy proof,<sup>9</sup>  
And storied windows richly dight,<sup>1</sup>  
Casting a dim religious light.  
160 There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced choir below,  
In service high and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into ecstasies,  
165 And bring all heaven before mine eyes.  
And may at last my weary age  
Find out the peaceful hermitage,  
The hairy gown and mossy cell,  
Where I may sit and rightly spell<sup>o</sup>  
170

Of every star that heaven doth shew,  
And every herb that sips the dew,  
Till old experience do attain  
To something like prophetic strain.  
These pleasures, Melancholy, give,<sup>2</sup>  
And I with thee will choose to live.

ca. 1631 **Endnotes**

1645

- Note 1: Il Penseroso whose name is Italian for “the thoughtful one,” celebrates a melancholy that does not produce madness but the scholarly temperament, ruled by Saturn. For “L’Allegro” see 2nd n. 2 on p. 1393. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In “Il Penseroso,” Mirth is not the innocent joys of “L’Allegro,” but “vain deluding joys.” [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Morpheus is the god of sleep. “Pensioners”: followers. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The melancholy humor, caused by black bile, was thought to make the face dark or saturnine—from the ancient god Saturn, allegorized in Neoplatonic philosophy as “the collective angelic mind.” [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Memnon, in *Odyssey* 11, was a handsome Ethiopian prince; his sister Himera’s beauty was mentioned by later commentators. See Song of Solomon 1:5, “I am black but comely.” [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cassiopeia was turned into a constellation (“starred”) for bragging that she was more beautiful than the sea nymphs. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vesta, daughter of Saturn, was goddess of the household and a virgin, as were her priestesses. Milton invented the story of her sexual congress with Saturn on Mount Ida, resulting in Melancholy’s birth. Saturn ruled the gods and the world during the Golden Age, which ended when he was murdered by his son Jove. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A delicate black cloth. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Still as a statue.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The special function of cherubim is contemplation of God; Milton alludes also (line 53) to their identification with the wheels of the mystical chariot/throne of God described by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 10).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The nightingale (the bird into which Philomela was transformed after her rape by her brother-in-law Tereus) traditionally sings a mournful song. " 'Less": unless.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Goddess of the moon, also associated with Hecate, goddess of the underworld, who drives a pair of sleepless dragons.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The evening liturgy traditionally sung by cloistered monks and nuns ("chantress" evokes such a singer); "L'Allegro's" cock, by contrast, calls hearers to the morning liturgy, "matins" (line 114).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Night watchman who rang a bell to mark the hours.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Great Bear constellation never sets in northern skies.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Various esoteric books (actually written in the 3rd and 4th centuries) were attributed to an ancient Egyptian, Hermes Trismegistus ("thrice great"). Neoplatonists made him the father of all knowledge; later he became a patron of magicians and alchemists. To "unsphere" Plato is to bring him magically back to earth from whatever sphere he now inhabits—in practical terms, by reading his books.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Demons (daemons), halfway between gods and men, preside over the four elements.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Royal robe, worn by tragic actors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Tragedies about Thebes include Sophocles' *Oedipus* cycle, those about the line of Pelops, Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, and those about Troy, Euripedes' *Trojan Women*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The buskin (high boot) of tragedy, contrasted with the "sock" of comedy ("L'Allegro," line 132).[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: Mythical poet-priest of the pre-Homeric age, supposedly a son or pupil of Orpheus.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: For the story of Orpheus, see "L'Allegro," line 145, and n. 3 (on line 150).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Chaucer, whose Squire's Tale is unfinished.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A capsule definition of allegory.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The now soberly dressed Aurora, goddess of the dawn, once fell in love with Cephalus ("the Attic boy") and hunted with him. "Tricked and frounced": adorned and with frizzled hair.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Roman god of woodlands.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Massive and strong. "Antic": covered with quaint or grotesque carvings, also antique.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dressed. "Storied windows": stained glass windows depicting biblical stories.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Compare "L'Allegro," lines 151–52 (p. 1397), and the final lines of Marlowe's "Passionate Shepherd" (p. 495).[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *avail*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trifles*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *suit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *color*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *comely, modestly covered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *usual*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dignity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *grave, dignified*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *continually*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *summon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mood*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *plot, open field*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deep, mournful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *having magical powers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gentle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hidden place*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *musical harmony*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guardian deity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enclosure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *study*[Return to reference](#) °

**Lycidas** Milton wrote this pastoral elegy for a volume of Latin, Greek, and English poems, *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago* (1638), commemorating the death by shipwreck of his college classmate Edward King, three years younger than himself. King was not a close friend, but Milton's deepest emotions, anxieties, and fears are engaged here because, as poet and minister, King could serve Milton as a kind of alter ego. Still engaged in preparing himself, at the age of twenty-nine, for his projected poetic career, Milton was forced to recognize the uncertainty of all human endeavors. King's death posed the problem of mortality in its most agonizing form: the death of the young, the unfulfilled, the good seems to deny all meaning to life, to demonstrate the uselessness of exceptional talent, lofty ambition, and noble ideals of service to God.

While the poem expresses Milton's anxieties, it also serves as an announcement of his grand ambitions. Like Edmund Spenser, Milton saw mastery of the pastoral mode as the first step in a great poetic career. In "Lycidas" that mastery is complete. In the tradition that Milton received from classical and Renaissance predecessors, including Theocritus, Virgil, Petrarch, and Spenser, the pastoral landscape was invested with profound significances that had little indeed to do with the hard life of agricultural labor. In lines 25–36, Milton evokes the conventional pastoral topic of carefree shepherds who engage in singing contests, watch contentedly over their grazing sheep, fall in love, and write poetry, offering an image of human life in harmony with nature and the seasonal processes of fruition and mellowing before the winter of death. That classical image of the shepherd as poet is mingled with the Christian understanding of the shepherd as pastor (Christ is the Good Shepherd), and sometimes as the prophet called to his mission from the fields, like David or Isaiah. Milton calls on all these associations, along with other motifs specific to pastoral funeral elegy: the recollection of past friendship, a questioning of destiny for cutting short this life, a procession of mourners (often mythological figures), and a "flower passage" in which nature pays tribute to the dead shepherd.

"Lycidas" uses but continually tests and challenges the assumptions and conventions of pastoral elegy, making for profound tensions and clashes of tone. The pastoral "oaten flute" is interrupted by divine pronouncements and bitter invective; nature seems rife with examples of meaningless waste and early death; the "blind Fury" often cuts off the poet's "thin-spun life" before he can win fame; good pastors die young while corrupt "Blind mouths" remain; and Nature cannot even pay her tribute of flowers to Lycidas's funeral bier since he welters in the deep, his bones hurled to the "bottom of the monstrous world." In response to these fierce challenges come pronouncements by Apollo and St. Peter, and images of protection and resurrection in nature and myth, culminating in a new vision of pastoral: in heaven Lycidas enjoys a perfected pastoral existence, and in the coda the consoled shepherd arises and carries his song to "pastures new." Milton's questioning leads to a final reassertion of confidence in his calling as national poet. Moreover, in the headnote added in the 1645 volume of his *Poems*, he lays claim to prophetic authority, for the Church of England clergy he denounced as corrupt in 1638 had mostly been expelled from their livings by Puritan reformers in 1645.

# Lycidas

***In this monody<sup>1</sup> the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas, 1637. And by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height.***

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more  
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,<sup>2</sup>  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,<sup>o</sup>  
And with forced fingers rude,<sup>o</sup>  
5 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,<sup>o</sup>  
Compels me to disturb your season due;  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,<sup>3</sup>  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew  
10 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.<sup>4</sup>  
He must not float upon his watery bier  
Unwept, and welter<sup>o</sup> to the parching wind,  
Without the meed<sup>o</sup> of some melodious tear.<sup>o</sup>  
15 Begin then, sisters of the sacred well<sup>5</sup>  
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,  
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.  
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse;  
So may some gentle muse<sup>6</sup>  
20 With lucky words favor my destined urn,  
And as he passes turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.  
For we were nursed upon the selfsame hill,  
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.  
Together both, ere the high lawns<sup>o</sup> appeared

25 Under the opening eyelids of the morn,  
We drove afield, and both together heard  
What time the grayfly winds her sultry horn,<sup>7</sup>  
Battening<sup>o</sup> our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
30 Oft till the star that rose at evening bright<sup>8</sup>  
Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering  
wheel.  
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,  
Tempered to th' oaten flute,<sup>9</sup>  
Rough satyrs danced, and fauns with cloven heel  
From the glad sound would not be absent long,  
35 And old Damoetas<sup>1</sup> loved to hear our song.  
But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,  
Now thou art gone, and never must return!  
Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,  
With wild thyme and the gadding<sup>o</sup> vine o'ergrown,  
40 And all their echoes mourn.  
The willows and the hazel copses<sup>o</sup> green  
Shall now no more be seen,  
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.  
As killing as the canker<sup>o</sup> to the rose,  
45 Or taint-worm<sup>2</sup> to the weanling herds that graze,  
Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear  
When first the white-thorn blows;<sup>3</sup>  
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.  
Where were ye, nymphs,<sup>4</sup> when the remorseless  
50 deep  
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?  
For neither were ye playing on the steep  
Where your old bards, the famous Druids,<sup>5</sup> lie,  
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,  
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream:<sup>6</sup>  
55 Ay me! I fondly dream—  
Had ye been there—for what could that have done?

What could the Muse<sup>7</sup> herself that Orpheus bore,  
The Muse herself, for her enchanting<sup>8</sup> son  
Whom universal Nature did lament,  
60 When by the rout that made the hideous roar  
His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?<sup>9</sup>  
Alas! What boots<sup>o</sup> it with incessant care  
To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,  
65 And strictly meditate the thankless muse?<sup>1</sup>  
Were it not better done as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?<sup>2</sup>  
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
70 (That last infirmity of noble mind)  
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;  
But the fair guerdon<sup>o</sup> when we hope to find,  
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind Fury<sup>3</sup> with th' abhorrèd shears,  
75 And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"  
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears;<sup>4</sup>  
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
Nor in the glistening foil<sup>5</sup>  
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumor lies,  
80 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,  
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;  
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed."<sup>o</sup>  
O fountain Arethuse, and thou honored flood,  
85 Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds,  
That strain I heard was of a higher mood.<sup>6</sup>  
But now my oat<sup>o</sup> proceeds,  
And listens to the herald of the sea<sup>7</sup>  
That came in Neptune's plea.  
90 He asked the waves, and asked the felon<sup>o</sup> winds,

"What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle  
 swain?"<sup>o</sup>  
 And questioned every gust of rugged<sup>o</sup> wings  
 That blows from off each beakèd promontory;  
 They knew not of his story,  
 95 And sage Hippotades<sup>8</sup> their answer brings,  
 That not a blast was from his dungeon strayed;  
 The air was calm, and on the level brine,  
 Sleek Panope<sup>9</sup> with all her sisters played.  
 It was that fatal and perfidious bark,  
 100 Built in th' eclipse,<sup>1</sup> and rigged with curses dark,  
 That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.  
 Next Camus,<sup>2</sup> reverend sire, went footing slow,  
 His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,<sup>o</sup>  
 Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge  
 105 Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.<sup>3</sup>  
 "Ah! who hath reft," quoth he, "my dearest pledge?"  
 Last came and last did go  
 The pilot of the Galilean lake;<sup>4</sup>  
 Two massy keys he bore of metals twain  
 110 (The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).<sup>o</sup>  
 He shook his mitered locks, and stern bespake:  
 "How well could I have spared for<sup>o</sup> thee, young  
 swain,  
 Enow<sup>o</sup> of such as for their bellies' sake  
 Creep and intrude and climb into the fold!<sup>5</sup>  
 115 Of other care they little reckoning make,  
 Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,<sup>6</sup>  
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.  
 Blind mouths!<sup>7</sup> that scarce themselves know how to  
 hold  
 A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least  
 120 That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!



What recks it them? What need they? They are  
 sped;<sup>8</sup>  
 And when they list,<sup>o</sup> their lean<sup>o</sup> and flashy songs  
 Grate on their scrannel<sup>o</sup> pipes of wretched straw.  
 The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,  
 125 But swol'n with wind, and the rank mist they draw,<sup>o</sup>  
 Rot inwardly,<sup>9</sup> and foul contagion spread,  
 Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw<sup>1</sup>  
 Daily devours apace, and nothing said.  
 But that two-handed engine at the door<sup>2</sup>  
 130 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."  
 Return, Alpheus,<sup>3</sup> the dread voice is past,  
 That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian muse,  
 And call the vales, and bid them hither cast  
 Their bells and flowerets of a thousand hues.<sup>4</sup>  
 135 Ye valleys low where the mild whispers use,<sup>o</sup>  
 Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,  
 On whose fresh lap the swart star<sup>5</sup> sparely looks,  
 Throw hither all your quaint enameled eyes,<sup>6</sup>  
 That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,  
 140 And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
 Bring the rathe<sup>o</sup> primrose that forsaken dies,  
 The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,<sup>7</sup>  
 The white pink, and the pansy freaked<sup>o</sup> with jet,  
 The glowing violet,  
 145 The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,  
 With cowslips wan<sup>o</sup> that hang the pensive head,  
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:  
 Bid amaranthus<sup>8</sup> all his beauty shed,  
 And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
 150 To strew the laureate hearse<sup>o</sup> where Lycid lies.  
 For so to interpose a little ease,  
 Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.<sup>9</sup>  
 Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas

155 Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled,  
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,<sup>1</sup>  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming<sup>o</sup> tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;  
Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,  
160 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,<sup>2</sup>  
Where the great vision of the guarded mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;<sup>3</sup>  
Look homeward angel now, and melt with ruth:<sup>o</sup>  
And, O ye dolphins,<sup>4</sup> waft the hapless youth.  
Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,  
165 For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor;  
So sinks the daystar<sup>o</sup> in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks<sup>o</sup> his beams, and with new-spangled ore  
170 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Through the dear might of him that walked the  
waves,<sup>5</sup>  
Where, other groves and other streams along,<sup>6</sup>  
With nectar pure his oozy<sup>o</sup> locks he laves,  
175 And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,<sup>7</sup>  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
There entertain him all the saints above,  
In solemn troops and sweet societies  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
180 And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.  
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;  
Henceforth thou art the Genius<sup>8</sup> of the shore,  
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good  
To all that wander in that perilous flood.  
185 Thus sang the uncouth swain<sup>9</sup> to th' oaks and rills,  
While the still morn went out with sandals gray;

190 He touched the tender stops of various quills,<sup>1</sup>  
 With eager thought warbling his Doric<sup>2</sup> lay:  
 And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,  
 And now was dropped into the western bay;  
 At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:<sup>3</sup>  
 Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

November 1637 **Endnotes**

1638

- Note 1: A dirge sung by a single voice, though this one incorporates several other voices. Milton added this headnote in the edition of 1645; it identifies Milton as a prophet in the passage denouncing the clergy in this 1638 poem (lines 112–31) and invites the reader to remember Milton’s 1641–42 polemics against the English bishops and church government (now dismantled).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Laurels,” associated with Apollo and poetry; “myrtle,” associated with Venus and love; “ivy,” associated with Bacchus and frenzy (also learning). All three are evergreens (“never sere”) linked to poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: King was twenty-five.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: King had written several poems of compliment in the patronage mode, chiefly on members of the royal family.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The nine (sister) Muses called (probably) from the fountain Aganippe, near Mount Helicon.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Here, some kindly poet.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, heard the grayfly when she buzzes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Hesperus, the evening star.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Panpipes, played traditionally by shepherds in pastoral.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A type name from pastoral poetry, possibly referring to some particular tutor at Cambridge. “Satyrs”: goat-legged

woodland creatures, Pan's boisterous attendants.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Internal parasite fatal to newly weaned lambs.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hawthorn blooms.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nature deities.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Priestly poet-kings of Celtic Britain, who worshipped the forces of nature. They are buried on the mountain ("steep") Kerig-y-Druidion in Wales.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mona is the island of Anglesey. Deva, the river Dee in Cheshire, was magic ("wizard") because its shifting stream foretold prosperity or dearth for the land. All these places are in the West Country, near where King drowned.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Calliope, Muse of epic poetry, was the mother of Orpheus.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Implies both song and magic; the root word survives in "incantation."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Orpheus's song was drowned out by the screams of a mob ("rout") of Thracian women, the Bacchantes, who then were able to tear him to pieces and throw his gory head into the river Hebrus, which carried it—still singing—to the island of Lesbos, bringing that island the gift of poetry.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, study to write poetry (a Virgilian phrase).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Amaryllis" and "Neaera" (*Nee-eye-ra*), conventional names for pretty shepherdesses wooed in song by pastoral shepherds.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Atropos, one of the three Fates, whose scissors cuts the thread of human life after her sisters spin and measure it. Milton makes her a savage, and blind, Fury.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Phoebus Apollo, god of poetic inspiration. In *Eclogue* 6.3–4 he plucked Virgil's ears, warning him against impatient ambition.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Flashy, glittering metal foil, set under a gem to enhance its brilliance.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Arethusa was a fountain in Sicily associated with Greek pastoral poetry (Theocritus), Mincius a river in Lombardy associated with Latin pastoral (Virgil); Milton invokes them as a return to the pastoral after the “higher mood” of Apollo’s speech.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Triton, who comes gathering evidence about the accident for Neptune’s court.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Aeolus, god of winds.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The chief Nereid, or sea nymph.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Eclipses were taken as evil omens.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God of the river Cam, representing Cambridge University.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Like the *AI AI* cry of grief supposedly found on the hyacinth, a “sanguine flower” sprung from the blood of the youth Hyacinthus, beloved of Apollo and accidentally killed by him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: St. Peter, originally a fisherman on the sea of Galilee, was Christ’s chief apostle; his keys open and shut the gates of heaven. He wears a bishop’s miter (line 112): Milton in his “antiprelatical tracts” allows for a special role for apostles but denies any distinction in office between bishops and ministers in the later church.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See John 10:1: “He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Festive suppers for the sheepshearers (hence, the material rewards of their ministry). “Worthy bidden guest” (next line): see Matthew 22:8, the parable of the marriage feast, “they which were bidden were not worthy.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Collapsing blindness with greed, this audacious metaphor accuses churchmen of shirking oversight (*episcopus*, bishop, means “supervision”) and of glutting themselves, although pastors ought to feed their flocks. “Sheep-hook” (next

line): the bishop's staff is in the form of a shepherd's crook.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Provided for. "What reck's it them?": what do they care?[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sheep rot is used as an allegory of church corruption by both Petrarch and Dante.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Roman Catholicism, whole agents operated in secret ("privy"). Conversions in the court of the Roman Catholic queen Henrietta Maria were notorious.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A celebrated crux, variously explained as the two houses of Parliament, St. Peter's keys, the two-edged sword of the Book of Revelation, a sword wielded by two hands, and by other guesses; what is clear is the denunciation of impending, apocalyptic vengeance. In Matthew 24:33 the Last Judgment is said to be "even at the doors."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A river in Arcadia, fabled to pass unmixed through the sea before mixing its waters with the "fountain Arethuse" in Sicily, again reviving the pastoral mode after the fierce denunciation of Peter (see lines 85–87).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A catalogue of flowers was a common pastoral topic. "Bells": bell-shaped flowers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Dog Star, Sirius, associated with the heats of late summer.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Flowers curiously patterned and adorned with many colors.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: White jasmine. "Tufted crow-toe": hyacinth or buttercup, growing in clusters. "Woodbine" (line 146): honeysuckle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Greek, "unfading," a legendary flower of immortality, one that never fades.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: False, because Lycidas's body is not here to receive floral and poetic tributes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Islands off the coast of Scotland, the northern terminus of the Irish Sea.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A fabulous giant invented by Milton as the origin of the Latin name for Land's End in Cornwall, *Bellerium*. "Monstrous

world" (line 158): filled with monsters, also, immense.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: "The guarded mount" is St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall, where the archangel was said to have appeared to fishermen in 495, and from which he is envisioned as looking over the Atlantic toward a region and fortress ("Bayona's hold") in northern Spain, thereby guarding Protestant England against the continuing Roman Catholic threat.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dolphins brought the Greek poet Arion safely ashore, for love of his verse, and also performed other sea rescues.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Christ, who rescued Peter when he tried and failed to walk on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:25–31).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Revelation 22:1–2, on the "pure river of water of life," and the "tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Inexpressible hymn of joy sung at "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Local guardian spirit.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Another voice now seems to take over from the previously heard voice of the "uncouth swain" (unknown, unskilled shepherd).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The oaten stalks of panpipes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rustic, the dialect of Theocritus and other famous Greek pastoral poets.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The color of hope. "Twitched": pulled up around his shoulders.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *unripe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unskilled*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heartfelt, also dire*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *be tossed about*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *reward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *elegy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *upland pastures* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *feeding fat* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wandering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thickets of trees* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cankerworm* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *profits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reward* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pastoral flute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *savage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shepherd* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stormy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formed of reeds* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forever* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in place of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enough (plural)* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choose* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *meager* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harsh, thin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inhale* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frequent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *early* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flecked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pale* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laurel-decked bier* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *engulfing* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adorns, trims* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *moist* [Return to reference](#) °



# ***From The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty*<sup>1</sup>**

## **[PLANS AND PROJECTS]**

\* \* \* Concerning therefore this wayward subject against prelacy,<sup>2</sup> the touching whereof is so distasteful and disquietous<sup>3</sup> to a number of men, as by what hath been said I may deserve of charitable readers to be credited that neither envy nor gall hath entered me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only and a preventive fear lest the omitting of this duty should be against me when I would store up to myself the good provision of peaceful hours; so lest it should be still imputed to me, as I have found it hath been, that some self-pleasing humor of vainglory hath incited me to contest with men of high estimation, now while green years are upon my head;<sup>4</sup> from this needless surmisaI shall hope to dissuade the intelligent and equal auditor, if I can but say successfully that which in this exigent<sup>5</sup> behooves me; although I would be heard only, if it might be, by the elegant and learned reader, to whom principally for a while I shall beg leave I may address myself. To him it will be no new thing though I tell him that if I hunted after praise by the ostentation of wit and learning, I should not write thus out of mine own season when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies,<sup>6</sup> although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand; or, were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit anything elaborately composed to the careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times. Next, if I were wise only to mine own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of itself might catch applause, whereas this hath all the disadvantages on the contrary, and such a subject as the publishing whereof might be delayed at

pleasure, and time enough to pencil it over with all the curious touches of art, even to the perfection of a faultless picture; whenas in this argument the not deferring is of great moment to the good speeding,<sup>7</sup> that if solidity have leisure to do her office, art cannot have much. Lastly, I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature<sup>8</sup> to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand. And though I shall be foolish in saying more to this purpose, yet, since it will be such a folly as wisest men going about to commit have only confessed and so committed, I may trust with more reason, because with more folly, to have courteous pardon. For although a poet, soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him, might without apology speak more of himself than I mean to do, yet for me sitting here below in the cool element of prose, a mortal thing among many readers of no empyreal conceit,<sup>9</sup> to venture and divulge unusual things of myself, I shall petition to the gentler sort, it may not be envy<sup>1</sup> to me.

I must say, therefore, that after I had from my first years by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father (whom God recompense) been exercised to the tongues and some sciences, as my age would suffer,<sup>2</sup> by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools, it was found that whether aught was imposed me by them that had the overlooking, or betaken to of mine own choice in English or other tongue, prosing or versing (but chiefly this latter), the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live. But much latelier in the private academies of Italy,<sup>3</sup> whither I was favored to resort—perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout (for the manner is that everyone must give some proof of his wit<sup>4</sup> and reading there) met with acceptance above what was looked for, and other things which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them, were received with written encomiums,<sup>5</sup> which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps—I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily

upon me, that by labor and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. These thoughts at once possessed me, and these other: that if I were certain to write as men buy leases, for three lives and downward,<sup>6</sup> there ought no regard be sooner had than to God's glory by the honor and instruction of my country. For which cause, and not only for that I knew it would be hard to arrive at the second rank among the Latins, I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bembo,<sup>7</sup> to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end—that were a toilsome vanity—but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I, in my proportion, with this over and above of being a Christian,<sup>8</sup> might do for mine; not caring to be once named abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that, but content with these British islands as my world; whose fortune hath hitherto been that if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskillful handling of monks and mechanics.

Time serves not now, and perhaps I might seem too profuse to give any certain account of what the mind at home in the spacious circuits of her musing hath liberty to propose to herself, though of highest hope and hardest attempting: whether that epic form whereof the two poems of Homer and those other two of Virgil and Tasso are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief, model;<sup>9</sup> or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be followed,<sup>1</sup> which in them that know art and use judgment is no transgression but an enriching of art; and lastly, what king or knight before the conquest<sup>2</sup> might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian hero. And as Tasso gave to a prince of Italy his choice whether he would command him to write of Godfrey's expedition

against the infidels, or Belisarius against the Goths, or Charlemagne against the Lombards;<sup>3</sup> if to the instinct of nature and the emboldening of art aught may be trusted, and that there be nothing adverse in our climate<sup>4</sup> or the fate of this age, it haply would be no rashness from an equal diligence and inclination to present the like offer in our own ancient stories; or whether those dramatic constitutions<sup>5</sup> wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation. The Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral drama in the Song of Solomon, consisting of two persons and a double chorus, as Origen rightly judges. And the Apocalypse of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies; and this my opinion the grave authority of Paraeus, commenting that book, is sufficient to confirm.<sup>6</sup> Or if occasion shall lead to imitate those magnific odes and hymns wherein Pindarus and Callimachus<sup>7</sup> are in most things worthy, some others in their frame judicious, in their matter most an end<sup>8</sup> faulty. But those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable.<sup>9</sup> These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation; and are of power beside the office of a pulpit to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church, to sing the victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ, to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave, whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of

that which is called fortune from without or the wily subtleties and reflexes of man's thoughts from within, all these things with a solid and treatable smoothness to paint out and describe.<sup>1</sup> Teaching over the whole book of sanctity and virtue through all the instances of example, with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper,<sup>2</sup> who will not so much as look upon truth herself unless they see her elegantly dressed, that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they would then appear to all men both easy and pleasant, though they were rugged and difficult indeed. And what a benefit this would be to our youth and gentry may be soon guessed by what we know of the corruption and bane which they suck in daily from the writings and interludes of libidinous and ignorant poetasters,<sup>3</sup> who, having scarce ever heard of that which is the main consistence of a true poem, the choice of such persons as they ought to introduce, and what is moral and decent to each one, do for the most part lap up<sup>4</sup> vicious principles in sweet pills to be swallowed down, and make the taste of virtuous documents harsh and sour.

But because the spirit of man cannot demean<sup>5</sup> itself lively in this body without some recreating intermission of labor and serious things, it were happy for the commonwealth if our magistrates, as in those famous governments of old, would take into their care, not only the deciding of our contentious law cases and brawls, but the managing of our public sports and festival pastimes, that they might be, not such as were authorized a while since,<sup>6</sup> the provocations of drunkenness and lust, but such as may inure and harden our bodies by martial exercises to all warlike skill and performance, and may civilize, adorn, and make discreet our minds by the learned and affable meeting of frequent academies, and the procurement of wise and artful recitations sweetened with eloquent and graceful enticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance, and fortitude, instructing and bettering the nation at all opportunities, that the call of wisdom and virtue may be heard everywhere, as Solomon saith: "She crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the

streets, in the top of high places, in the chief concourse, and in the openings of the gates."<sup>7</sup> Whether this may not be, not only in pulpits, but after another persuasive method,<sup>8</sup> at set and solemn panegyries, in theaters, porches,<sup>9</sup> or what other place or way may win most upon the people to receive at once both recreation and instruction, let them in authority consult.

The thing which I had to say, and those intentions which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, I return to crave excuse that urgent reason hath plucked from me by an abortive and foredated discovery.<sup>1</sup> And the accomplishment of them lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavored, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself as far as life and free leisure will extend; and that the land had once enfranchised herself from this impertinent<sup>2</sup> yoke of prelaty, under whose inquisitorious and tyrannical duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapors of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters,<sup>3</sup> but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.<sup>4</sup> To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs; till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost I refuse not to sustain this expectation.\* \* \* But were it the meanest under-service, if God by his secretary conscience enjoin it, it were sad for me if I should draw back; for me especially, now when all men offer their aid to help ease and lighten the difficult labors of the church, to whose service by the intentions of my parents and friends I was destined of a child, and in mine own

resolutions: till coming to some maturity of years and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave and take an oath withal,<sup>5</sup> which, unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure or split his faith; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing. Howsoever, thus church-outed by the prelates, hence may appear the right I have to meddle in these matters, as before the necessity and constraint appeared.

1642

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
This was the fourth of five tracts Milton published attacking the bishops, liturgy, and church government of the Church of England, in support of Presbyterian reform, though these tracts also show signs of the more radical positions he will soon adopt. This 1642 treatise is the first one to carry his name, so the autobiographical passage is in part to introduce himself to the reader and explain why, though a layman and a young man, he feels himself called, and well prepared, to write on theology and ecclesiastical order. Beyond that rhetorical purpose, this is also the fullest account Milton ever set forth of his poetics: his sense of the poet's calling, of the nature and multiple uses of poetry, and of the several genres he already has employed or hopes to attempt. It also registers his inner conflict between duty (to serve God and his church with his learning) and desire (to write poetry).  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Government by prelates (bishops). "Wayward": untoward, unpromising. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Distressing. [Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: Milton's opponents, Bishops Joseph Hall, James Ussher, and Lancelot Andrewes, were famous, and he was still almost unknown at age thirty-four.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Urgent occasion. "Equal": impartial.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: After taking his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Cambridge, Milton spent nearly six more years in private study at home; he was still continuing that program of reading.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Prompt publication is essential in polemic, so substance rather than art must be the priority. "Office": duty.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Intellectual gifts or natural disposition.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Without sublime and elevated conceits.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cause for odium or disrespect.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Admit. "Tongues": foreign languages. In *Ad Patrem* Milton says that as a boy he learned Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and Hebrew.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: When on the grand tour of the Continent (1638–39) Milton enjoyed attending academies in Rome and especially Florence, which were centers for literary, scientific, and social exchange.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Ingenuity, creative powers; Milton read some of his Latin poems to the academies.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Praises. Milton published five of these encomiums, four in Latin, one in Italian, as prefatory material to the Latin part of his 1645 *Poems*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Leases were often drawn for a tenancy to run through the longest-lived of three named persons.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Rejecting Cardinal Bembo's advice, Ariosto said he would rather be first among the Italian poets than second among those writing Latin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The advantage would be in having "true" subjects to write about.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9:  
The great models for the “diffuse” or long, epic were Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* (“Jerusalem Delivered”) (1581); there was also a long tradition of reading the Book of Job as a “brief” epic, a moral conflict between Job and Satan. Milton’s brief epic, *Paradise Regained* (1671), makes some use of that model. For all the genres he discusses, Milton cites both classical and biblical models.  
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: One contemporary debate concerned whether the Aristotelian rule of beginning in medias res was to be followed, or Ariosto’s “natural” method of beginning at the beginning of the story.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: At first Milton considered as potential epic subjects King Arthur, who fought against invading Saxons, and King Alfred, who warred with invading Danes; he excluded those after the Norman Conquest.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tasso offered this choice to his patron, Alfonso II d’Este, Duke of Ferrara.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Milton often speculated that the cold climate of England might not be as conducive to poetry as the warmer climates of Italy and Greece had been.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plays.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sophocles and Euripides are supreme examples of Greek tragedy; the Scripture models for drama are the Song of Solomon as a “divine pastoral drama” (Milton cites Origen, an Alexandrine Father of the 3rd century), and the Book of Revelation as a “high and stately tragedy” (he cites David Paraeus, a German theologian of the 16th and 17th centuries).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pindar, a 5th century B.C.E. Greek poet, wrote numerous odes especially on winners of the Olympic games; Callimachus, a 3rd century B.C.E. Alexandrine Greek, wrote elegant elegiac verse on the origin of various myths and rituals.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Almost entirely.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He thinks especially of the Psalms, often compared to classical lyric.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See the wide range of kinds and subjects and functions suggested for the serious national poet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Temperament. Milton here paraphrases Horace's formula, echoed by Sidney and Jonson, that poetry both teaches and delights, and that it encourages virtuous endeavor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Some of the pseudo-poets of the Cavalier court who wrote on lascivious topics.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roll up.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Comport.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Charles I's republication (1633) of James I's *Book of Sports*, encouraging sports, dancing, and rural festivals on Sundays—anathema to Puritans.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The phrases are from Proverbs 1:20–21 and 8:2–3. Milton would not ban recreation or festival pastimes but reform them: his models are the lofty encomiastic poems and recitations Plato would admit into his *Republic*, the literary and social exchanges of the Italian academies, and martial exercises (to prepare the citizenry for war, now imminent).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, poetry.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Porticos. "Panegyries": solemn public meetings.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, I have been forced to write for my country's sake and to reveal my poetic plans before I was ready to do either.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unsuitable, absurd.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: True poetry comes not from youth, wine, a full plate, or even Memory (and her daughters the Muses): tradition alone does not make a poet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The coal from the altar that purifies the prophet's lips (Isaiah 6:6–7): the passage makes poetry first and foremost the product of inspiration, but Milton also insists on his need to

attain well-nigh universal knowledge and experience.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Milton was not willing to subscribe the oath affirming that the Book of Common Prayer and the present government of the church by bishops were according to the word of God; still less was he willing to subscribe the notorious “etcetera” oath required in 1640, that the minister would never seek to alter the government of the church “by archbishops, bishops, deacons, and archdeacons, etc.”[Return to reference 5](#)

**Areopagitica** This passionate, trenchant defense of intellectual liberty has had a powerful influence on the evolving liberal conception of freedom of speech, press, and thought. Milton's specific target is the Press Ordinance of June 14, 1643, Parliament's attempt to crack down on the flood of pamphlets (including Milton's own controversial treatises on divorce) that poured forth both from legal and from underground presses as the Civil War raged. Like Tudor and Stuart censorship laws, Parliament's ordinance demanded that works be registered with the stationers and licensed by the censors before publication, and that both author and publisher be identified, on pain of fines and imprisonment for both. Milton vigorously protests the prepublication licensing of books, arguing that such measures have only been used by, and are only fit for, degenerate cultures. In the regenerate English nation, now "rousing herself like a strong man after sleep," men and women must be allowed to develop in virtue by participating in the clash and conflict of ideas. Truth will always overcome falsehood in reasoned debate. Thus, in opposition to the Presbyterians then in power, Milton defends widespread religious toleration, though with restrictions on Roman Catholicism, which, like most of his Protestant contemporaries, he viewed as a political threat and a tyranny binding individual conscience to the pope.

The title associates the tract with the speech of the Greek orator Isocrates to the Areopagus, the Council of the Wise in Athens. Learned readers would have recognized the irony of this. While Isocrates instructed the council to reform Athens by careful supervision of the private lives of citizens, Milton argues that only liberty and removal of censorship can advance reformation. This association explains the oratorical tone of the tract, which was, in fact, subtitled "A Speech." In this most literary of his tracts, Milton's style is elevated, eloquent, dense with poetic figures, and ranges in tone from satire and ridicule to urgent pleading and florid praise. His arguments and principles are often couched in striking images and phrases. One example is his passionate testimony to the potency and inestimable value of books: "As good almost kill a man as kill a

good book . . .” Most memorable is his ringing credo that echoes down the centuries to protest every new tyranny: “Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.”

## ***From Areopagitica***

I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the church and commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean<sup>1</sup> themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors:<sup>2</sup> For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon’s teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men.<sup>3</sup> And yet on the other hand unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God’s image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. ’Tis true, no age can restore a life, whereof perhaps there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labors of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at that ethereal and fifth essence,<sup>4</sup> the breath of reason itself, slays an immortality rather than a life. But lest I should be condemned of introducing licence, while I oppose licensing, I refuse

not the pains to be so much historical, as will serve to show what hath been done by ancient and famous commonwealths, against this disorder, till the very time that this project of licensing crept out of the Inquisition,<sup>5</sup> was caught up by our prelates, and hath caught some of our presbyters.<sup>6</sup> \* \* \*

\* \* \* Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labor to cull out and sort asunder were not more intermixed.<sup>7</sup> It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil.

As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring<sup>8</sup> Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed,<sup>9</sup> that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental<sup>1</sup> whiteness; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser (whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas), describing true temperance under the person of Guyon, brings him in with his Palmer through the Cave of Mammon and the Bower of Earthly Bliss,<sup>2</sup> that he might see and know, and yet abstain.

Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.

But of the harm that may result hence, three kinds are usually reckoned. First is feared the infection that may spread; but then all human learning and controversy in religious points must remove out of the world, yea, the Bible itself; for that oftentimes relates blasphemy not nicely,<sup>3</sup> it describes the carnal sense of wicked men not unelegantly, it brings in holiest men passionately murmuring against providence through all the arguments of Epicurus;<sup>4</sup> in other great disputes it answers dubiously and darkly to the common reader.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

To sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian politics,<sup>6</sup> which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition, but to ordain wisely as in this world of evil, in the midst whereof God hath placed us unavoidably. . . . Impunity and remissness, for certain, are the bane of a commonwealth; but here the great art lies, to discern in what the law is to bid restraint and punishment, and in what things persuasion only is to work. If every action which is good or evil in man at ripe years were to be under pittance<sup>7</sup> and prescription and compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what gramercy<sup>8</sup> to be sober, just, or continent?

Many there be that complain of divine providence for suffering Adam to transgress; foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions.<sup>9</sup> We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a

provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence.<sup>1</sup>

Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue? They are not skillful considerers of human things, who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin; for, besides that it is a huge heap increasing under the very act of diminishing, though some part of it may for a time be withdrawn from some persons, it cannot from all, in such a universal thing as books are; and when this is done, yet the sin remains entire. Though ye take from a covetous man all his treasure, he has yet one jewel left: ye cannot bereave him of his covetousness. Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste that came not thither so: such great care and wisdom is required to the right managing of this point.

Suppose we could expel sin by this means; look how much we thus expel of sin, so much we expel of virtue: for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and ye remove them both alike. This justifies the high providence of God, who, though he commands us temperance, justice, continence, yet pours out before us, even to a profuseness, all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety. Why should we then affect a rigor contrary to the manner of God and of nature, by abridging or scanting those means, which books freely permitted are, both to the trial of virtue and the exercise of truth? It would be better done to learn that the law must needs be frivolous which goes to restrain things uncertainly and yet equally working to good and to evil. And were I the chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evil-doing. For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious.

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What advantage is it to be a man over it is to be a boy at school, if we have only scaped the ferula to come under the fescue of an *imprimatur*;<sup>2</sup> if serious and elaborate writings, as if they were no more than the theme of a grammarlad under his pedagogue, must not be uttered without the cursory eyes of a temporizing and extemporizing licenser?<sup>3</sup> He who is not trusted with his own actions, his drift not being known to be evil, and standing to the hazard of law and penalty, has no great argument to think himself reputed, in the commonwealth wherein he was born, for other than a fool or a foreigner.

When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends, after all which done he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him. If in this the most consummate act of his fidelity and ripeness, no years, no industry, no former proof of his abilities can bring him to that state of maturity as not to be still mistrusted and suspected (unless he carry all his considerate diligence, all his midnight watchings, and expense of Palladian<sup>4</sup> oil, to the hasty view of an unleisured licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps far his inferior in judgment, perhaps one who never knew the labor of book-writing), and if he be not repulsed, or slighted, must appear in print like a puny<sup>5</sup> with his guardian, and his censor's hand on the back of his title to be his bail and surety that he is no idiot, or seducer; it cannot be but a dishonor and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning.\* \* \*

And how can a man teach with authority, which is the life of teaching, how can he be a doctor<sup>6</sup> in his book as he ought to be, or else had better be silent, whenas all he teaches, all he delivers, is but under the tuition, under the correction of his patriarchal<sup>7</sup> licenser to blot or alter what precisely accords not with the hide-bound humor which he calls his judgment? When every acute reader upon the first sight of a pedantic license, will be ready with these like words to ding the book a quoit's<sup>8</sup> distance from him: "I hate a pupil

teacher, I endure not an instructor that comes to me under the wardship of an overseeing fist. I know nothing of the licenser, but that I have his own hand here for his arrogance; who shall warrant me his judgment?"

"The state, sir," replies the stationer,<sup>9</sup> but has a quick return: "The state shall be my governors, but not my critics; they may be mistaken in the choice of a licenser, as easily as this licenser may be mistaken in an author."

\* \* \*

Well knows he who uses to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion.<sup>1</sup> Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain;<sup>2</sup> if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the Assembly<sup>3</sup> so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.

\* \* \*

Truth indeed came once into the world with her Divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris,<sup>4</sup> took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb, still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mold them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. Suffer not these licensing prohibitions to

stand at every place of opportunity, forbidding and disturbing them that continue seeking, that continue to do our obsequies<sup>5</sup> to the torn body of our martyred saint.

We boast our light; but if we look not wisely on the sun itself, it smites us into darkness. Who can discern those planets that are oft combust,<sup>6</sup> and those stars of brightest magnitude that rise and set with the sun, until the opposite motion of their orbs bring them to such a place in the firmament where they may be seen evening or morning? The light which we have gained was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge. It is not the unfrocking of a priest, the unmitering of a bishop, and the removing him from off the Presbyterian shoulders, that will make us a happy nation. No, if other things as great in the church, and in the rule of life both economical and political, be not looked into and reformed, we have looked so long upon the blaze that Zwinglius and Calvin<sup>7</sup> hath beacons up to us, that we are stark blind.

There be who perpetually complain of schisms and sects, and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. 'Tis their own pride and ignorance which causes the disturbing, who neither will hear with meekness, nor can convince; yet all must be suppressed which is not found in their syntagma.<sup>8</sup> They are the troublers, they are the dividers of unity, who neglect and permit not others to unite those dis severed pieces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth. To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneous and proportional), this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic, and makes up the best harmony in a church; not the forced and outward union of cold and neutral and inwardly divided minds.

Lords and Commons of England, consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to. Therefore the

studies of learning in her deepest sciences have been so ancient and so eminent among us, that writers of good antiquity and ablest judgment have been persuaded that even the school of Pythagoras and the Persian wisdom took beginning from the old philosophy of this island.<sup>9</sup> And that wise and civil Roman, Julius Agricola,<sup>1</sup> who governed once here for Caesar, preferred the natural wits of Britain before the labored studies of the French. Nor is it for nothing that the grave and frugal Transylvanian<sup>2</sup> sends out yearly from as far as the mountainous borders of Russia, and beyond the Hercynian wilderness, not their youth, but their staid men, to learn our language and our theologic arts.

Yet that which is above all this, the favor and the love of heaven we have great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious and propending<sup>3</sup> towards us. Why else was this nation chosen before any other, that out of her, as out of Zion,<sup>4</sup> should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europe? And had it not been the obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the divine and admirable spirit of Wycliffe to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemian Huss and Jerome,<sup>5</sup> no, nor the name of Luther or of Calvin, had been ever known: the glory of reforming all our neighbors had been completely ours. But now, as our obdurate clergy have with violence demeaned the matter, we are become hitherto the latest and the backwardest scholars of whom<sup>6</sup> God offered to have made us the teachers.

Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself; what does he then but reveal himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen? I say, as his manner is, first to us, though we mark not the method of his counsels, and are unworthy. Behold now this vast city: a city of refuge,<sup>7</sup> the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the

plates<sup>8</sup> and instruments of armed justice in defense of beleaguered truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and conviction.

What could a man require more from a nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant<sup>9</sup> soil, but wise and faithful laborers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets,<sup>1</sup> of sages, and of worthies? We reckon more than five months yet to harvest; there need not be five weeks; had we but eyes to lift up, the fields are white already.<sup>2</sup> Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up in this city.

What some lament of, we rather should rejoice at, should rather praise this pious forwardness among men, to reassume the ill-deputed care of their religion into their own hands again. A little generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity might win all these diligences to join, and unite into one general and brotherly search after truth; could we but forgo this prelatical tradition of crowding free consciences and Christian liberties into canons and precepts of men. I doubt not, if some great and worthy stranger should come among us, wise to discern the mold and temper of a people, and how to govern it, observing the high hopes and aims, the diligent alacrity of our extended thoughts and reasonings in the pursuance of truth and freedom, but that he would cry out as Pyrrhus did, admiring the Roman docility and courage: "If such were my Epirots, I would not despair the greatest design that could be attempted, to make a church or kingdom happy."<sup>3</sup> Yet these are the men cried out against for schismatics and sectaries;<sup>4</sup> as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there

should be a sort of irrational men, who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections<sup>5</sup> made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. Let us therefore be more considerate builders, more wise in spiritual architecture, when great reformation is expected. For now the time seems come, wherein Moses the great prophet may sit in heaven rejoicing to see that memorable and glorious wish of his fulfilled, when not only our seventy elders, but all the Lord's people, are become prophets.<sup>6</sup>

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Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks:<sup>7</sup> methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam;<sup>8</sup> purging and unsealing her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate<sup>9</sup> a year of sects and schisms.

What should ye do then, should ye suppress all this flowery crop of knowledge and new light sprung up and yet springing daily in this city? Should ye set an oligarchy of twenty engrossers<sup>1</sup> over it, to bring a famine upon our minds again, when we shall know nothing but what is measured to us by their bushel? Believe it, Lords and Commons, they who counsel ye to such a suppressing do as good as bid ye suppress yourselves; and I will soon show how.<sup>2</sup>

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And now the time in special is by privilege to write and speak what may help to the further discussing of matters in agitation. The temple of Janus with his two controversial faces might now not unsignificantly be set open.<sup>3</sup> And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter? Her<sup>4</sup> confuting is the best and surest suppressing. He who hears what praying there is for light and clearer knowledge to be sent down among us would think of other matters to be constituted beyond the discipline of Geneva framed and fabricated already to our hands.<sup>5</sup>

Yet when the new light which we beg for shines in upon us, there be who envy and oppose if it come not first in at their casements. What a collusion is this, whenas we are exhorted by the wise man to use diligence, to seek for wisdom as for hidden treasures early and late,<sup>6</sup> that another order shall enjoin us to know nothing but by statute. When a man hath been laboring the hardest labor in the deep mines of knowledge, hath furnished out his findings in all their equipage, drawn forth his reasons as it were a battle<sup>7</sup> ranged, scattered and defeated all objections in his way, calls out his adversary into the plain, offers him the advantage of wind and sun if he please, only that he may try the matter by dint of argument; for his opponents then to skulk, to lay ambushments, to keep a narrow bridge of licensing where the challenger should pass, though it be valor enough in soldiership, is but weakness and cowardice in the wars of Truth.

For who knows not that Truth is strong, next to the Almighty? She needs no policies nor stratagems nor licensings to make her victorious—those are the shifts and the defenses that error uses against her power. Give her but room, and do not bind her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true, as the old Proteus<sup>8</sup> did, who spake oracles only when he was caught and bound, but then rather



she turns herself into all shapes except her own, and perhaps tunes her voice according to the time, as Micaiah did before Ahab,<sup>9</sup> until she be adjured into her own likeness.

Yet it is not impossible that she may have more shapes than one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side or on the other without being unlike herself? What but a vain shadow else is the abolition of those ordinances, that handwriting nailed to the cross?<sup>1</sup> What great purchase is this Christian liberty which Paul so often boasts of? His doctrine is that he who eats or eats not, regards a day or regards it not, may do either to the Lord.<sup>2</sup> How many other things might be tolerated in peace and left to conscience, had we but charity, and were it not the chief stronghold of our hypocrisy to be ever judging one another? I fear yet this iron yoke of outward conformity hath left a slavish print upon our necks; the ghost of a linen decency<sup>3</sup> yet haunts us. We stumble and are impatient at the least dividing of one visible congregation from another, though it be not in fundamentals; and through our forwardness to suppress and our backwardness to recover any enthralled piece of truth out of the grip of custom, we care not<sup>4</sup> to keep truth separated from truth, which is the fiercest rent and disunion of all. We do not see that while we still affect by all means a rigid and external formality, we may as soon fall again into a gross conforming stupidity, a stark and dead congealment of "wood and hay and stubble,"<sup>5</sup> forced and frozen together, which is more to the sudden degenerating of a church than many subdichotomies of petty schisms.

Not that I can think well of every light separation, or that all in a church is to be expected "gold and silver and precious stones." It is not possible for man to sever the wheat from the tares, the good fish from the other fry; that must be the angels' ministry at the end of mortal things.<sup>6</sup> Yet if all cannot be of one mind—as who looks they should be?—this doubtless is more wholesome, more prudent, and more Christian, that many be tolerated rather than all compelled. I mean not tolerated popery and open superstition, which, as it extirpates all religions and civil supremacies, so itself



should be extirpate, provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and regain the weak and the misled; that also which is impious or evil absolutely, either against faith or manners,<sup>7</sup> no law can possibly permit that intends not to unlaw itself; but those neighboring differences or rather indifferences are what I speak of, whether in some point of doctrine or of discipline, which though they may be many yet need not interrupt "the unity of spirit," if we could but find among us the "bond of peace."<sup>8</sup>

In the meanwhile, if anyone would write and bring his helpful hand to the slow-moving reformation which we labor under, if truth have spoken to him before others, or but seemed at least to speak, who hath so bejesuited<sup>9</sup> us that we should trouble that man with asking license to do so worthy a deed? And not consider this, that if it come to prohibiting, there is not aught more likely to be prohibited than truth itself; whose first appearance to our eyes bleared and dimmed with prejudice and custom is more unsightly and unpalatable than many errors, even as the person is of many a great man slight and contemptible to see to. And what do they tell us vainly of new opinions, when this very opinion of theirs, that none must be heard but whom they like, is the worst and newest opinion of all others, and is the chief cause why sects and schisms do so much abound, and true knowledge is kept at distance from us; besides yet a greater danger which is in it. For when God shakes a kingdom<sup>1</sup> with strong and healthful commotions to a general reforming, it is not untrue that many sectaries and false teachers are then busiest in seducing; but yet more true it is that God then raises to his own work men of rare abilities and more than common industry, not only to look back and revise what hath been taught heretofore, but to gain further and go on some new enlightened steps in the discovery of truth.

1644

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Behave.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton allows that books may be called to account after publication, if they are proved to contain libels or other manifest crimes (he leaves this quite vague).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: After Cadmus killed a dragon on his way to founding Thebes, on a god's advice he sowed the dragon's teeth, which sprang up as an army, the belligerent forefathers of Sparta.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quintessence, a pure, mystical substance above the four elements (fire, air, water, earth).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Roman Catholic institution for suppressing heresy, especially strong in Spain.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Presbyterians, powerful in the Parliament, were striving to establish theirs as the national church and suppress others. Milton, who began by supporting them in *The Reason of Church Government* and his other antiprelatical tracts (1641–42), now rejects them, in large part because they seek to supplant one repressive church with another.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Angry at her son Cupid's love for Psyche, Venus set the girl many trials, among them to sort out a vast mound of mixed seeds, but the ants took pity on her and did the work.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The printed text reads "wayfaring," calling up the image of the Christian pilgrim; several presentation copies correct it (by hand) to "warfaring," calling up the image of the Christian warrior. Both suit the passage.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Not forced by exertion to breathe hard. "Immortal garland" (next line): the prize for the winner of a race, as figure for the "crown of life" promised to those who endure temptation (James 1:12).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Exterior only.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, major Scholastic theologians. Guyon (following), the hero of Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, passes through the Cave of Mammon (symbolic of all worldly goods and honors) without his Palmer-

guide, but that figure does accompany him through the Bower of Bliss.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Daintily.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Greek philosopher (342–270 B.C.E.) who taught that happiness is the greatest good, and that virtue should be practiced because it brings happiness; some of his followers equated happiness with sensual enjoyment. Milton may be thinking of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Milton goes on to argue that a fool can find material for folly in the best books, and a wise person material for wisdom in the worst. Also, one cannot remove evil by censoring books without also censoring ballads, fiddlers, clothing, conversation, and all social life.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Milton alludes to More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Rationing.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Reward, thanks.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Puppet shows.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Compare Milton's representation of Adam and Eve in Eden in *Paradise Lost*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Ferula": a schoolmaster's rod; "fescue": a pointer, "imprimatur": "it may be printed" (Latin), appears on the title page of books approved by the Roman Catholic censors. Milton's keen sense of the affront to scholars and scholarship, and to himself, is evident in this passage.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He temporizes in following the times, and acts by whim (extemporizes).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pertaining to Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A minor, hence, young, unseasoned.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Teacher.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Taking on the role of a father; also, standing in for ecclesiastical patriarchs or prelates (like Archbishop Laud).[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A flat disc of stone or metal, thrown as an exercise of strength or skill.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Printer, who was responsible for submitting books before publication to the “licenser” (censor).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Constitution, the proper mingling of qualities in the body.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Psalm 85:11.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Westminster Assembly, convened by Parliament in 1643 to reorganize the English church along Presbyterian lines.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Plutarch tells, in “Isis and Osiris,” of Typhon’s scattering the fragments of his brother Osiris and of Isis’s efforts to recover them.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Funeral or commemorative rites.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Burned up; in astrology, so close to the sun as not to be visible.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Zwingli and Calvin, famous Protestant reformers, were mainstays of the Presbyterian cause. “Economical”: domestic.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Compilations of beliefs, creeds.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Some speculation existed as to whether the Pythagorean notion of the transmigration of souls might trace back to the Druids, but the notion was mostly denied.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The “civil” (cultured, civilized) Agricola’s opinion of the British intellect is found in Tacitus’s *Life of Agricola*. Transylvania (following; now Romania) was an independent Protestant country whose citizens sometimes came to England to study. “Hercynian wilderness”: Roman name for a forested and mountainous region of Germany.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Protestant princes of Transylvania encouraged their theologians and humanist scholars to study at English universities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Inclining, favorable. “Argument”: reason.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, the site of the Temple.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Wycliffe was a 14th-century English reformer and translator of the Bible, whose books were forbidden by Pope Alexander V in 1409. John Huss spread Wycliffe's doctrines on the Continent; he was burned at the stake in 1415, as was (the next year) his follower Jerome of Prague.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Of those whom. "Demeaned": conducted, degraded.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Numbers 35 instructs the Jews to establish "cities of refuge" where those accused of crimes will be protected from "revengers of blood."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Plate mail, for armor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Favorable and fertile.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In Numbers 11:29 Moses reproaches Joshua, who complained of the presence of other prophets: "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton is paraphrasing Christ's words to his disciples (John 4:35): "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they are white already to harvest."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Though King Pyrrhus of Epirus beat the Roman armies at Heraclea in 280 B.C.E., he was much impressed by their discipline.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Schismatics": those who cut up or divide the church; "sectaries": members of Protestant communions outside the national church.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Milton is playing on the literal meaning of "schism," cutting up or dividing.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Again alluding to Numbers 11:29, Milton equates the English assembly of clergy to set doctrine and church order (the Westminster Assembly) with the Jewish Sanhedrin of seventy elders.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The allusion is to Samson, whose uncut hair made him invincible, when he frustrated the first three attempts of Delilah

and the Philistines to subdue him in sleep (Judges 16:6–14).[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Eagles were thought to be able to look directly at the sun. “Mewing”: molting, when the eagle sheds its feathers and thereby renews its coat.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Predict.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Engrossers, much hated in the English countryside, bought up great quantities of grain and held it for times of famine, selling it at high prices; Milton equates them with the twenty authorized printers, the stationers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton goes on to argue that Parliament, by its own liberalizing reforms to date, has created the vigorous and inquiring minds it now seeks to suppress.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Janus, as god of beginnings and endings, had two faces looking in opposite directions; a door dedicated to him in Rome was kept open in time of war, closed in time of peace.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Falsehood’s.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Milton was already disenchanted with Geneva’s “Discipline” (Presbyterian church government) and within a year or so would be writing “New *presbyter* is but old *priest*, writ large.” “Fabriced”: fabricated.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Solomon’s advice in Proverbs 8:11.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Line of battle. Wind and sun (below) were significant advantages in a fight with swords.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The sea god who could change shape at will, to avoid capture (*Odyssey* 4).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Micaiah, a prophet of God, tried for a time to disguise an unpleasant prophecy from King Ahab but then spoke truth when adjured to do so (1 Kings 22:10–28).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The locution, from Colossians 2:14, implies that the Crucifixion canceled all the rules and penalties of the Mosaic law. Paul’s doctrine of Christian liberty (below) is expressed in Galatians 5 and elsewhere.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the Lord’s service.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: White bands around the necks of clergymen are made emblems of formal piety.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Scruple not.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The contrast between “wood and hay and stubble” and “gold and silver and precious stones” (next paragraph) is from 1 Corinthians 3:12.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43, Christ in a parable tells his disciples to let the wheat and tares (weeds) grow up together till harvest time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Morals.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The quoted phrases are from Ephesians 4:3.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Imposed on us Jesuit ideas (of censorship).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Milton alludes to Haggai 2:7: “I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.”[Return to reference 1](#)

**Sonnets** Milton wrote twenty-four sonnets between 1630 and 1658. Five in Italian constitute a mini-Petrarchan sequence on a perhaps imaginary Italian lady. The rest, in English, are individual poems on a wide variety of topics and occasions, though not on the usual sonnet topics (love, as in the sequences of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, or religious devotion, as in that of Donne). Milton writes sometimes about personal crises (his blindness, the death of his wife), sometimes about political issues or personages (Cromwell, the persecuting Parliament), sometimes about friends and friendship (Cyriack Skinner, Lady Margaret Ley), sometimes about historical events (a threatened royalist attack on London, the massacre of Protestants in Piedmont). His tone ranges from Jonsonian urbanity to prophetic denunciation. The form of the sonnets is Petrarchan (see "Poetic Forms and Literary Terminology," in the appendices to this volume), but in the later sonnets especially (for example, the Blindness and Piedmont sonnets) the sense runs on from line to line, overriding the expected end-stopped lines and the octave/sestet shift. There is some precedent for this in the Italian sonneteer Giovanni della Casa, but not for the powerful tension Milton creates as meaning and emotion strive within and against the formal metrics of the Petrarchan sonnet. Milton's new ways with the sonnet had a profound influence on the Romantic poets, especially Wordsworth and Shelley.



# How Soon Hath Time

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stol'n on his wing my three and twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.  
5 Perhaps my semblance might deceive<sup>1</sup> the truth,  
That I to manhood am arrived so near,  
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.<sup>o</sup>  
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
10 It shall be still in strictest measure even<sup>2</sup>  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of  
Heaven;  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.<sup>3</sup>

1632? **Endnotes**

1645

- Note 1: Misrepresent. "Semblance": appearance. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Equal, adequate. "It": Milton's inner growth. "Even / To that same lot": conformed to my appointed destiny. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The final lines allow for various readings. "Taskmaster" identifies God with the parable (Matthew 20:1–16) in which a vineyard keeper takes on workers throughout the day, paying the same wages to those hired at the first and at the eleventh hour. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *endows* [Return to reference](#) °

# On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament<sup>1</sup>

Because you have thrown off your prelate lord,<sup>2</sup>  
And with stiff vows renounced his liturgy,  
To seize the widowed whore Plurality<sup>3</sup>  
From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred,  
Dare ye for this adjure<sup>o</sup> the civil sword<sup>4</sup>  
5 To force our consciences that Christ set free,  
And ride us with a classic hierarchy<sup>5</sup>  
Taught ye by mere A. S. and Rutherford?<sup>6</sup>  
Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent  
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul  
10 Must now be named and printed heretics  
By shallow Edwards and Scotch what-d'ye-call:<sup>7</sup>  
But we do hope to find out all your tricks,  
Your plots and packing<sup>o</sup> worse than those of  
Trent,<sup>8</sup>  
15 That so the Parliament<sup>9</sup>  
May with their wholesome and preventive shears  
Clip your phylacteries,<sup>1</sup> though balk your ears,<sup>2</sup>  
And succor our just fears  
When they shall read this clearly in your charge:  
20 New *presbyter* is but old *priest* writ large.<sup>3</sup>

ca. 1646 **Endnotes**

1673

- Note 1:  
The sonnet targets the Presbyterians, whom Milton in *The Reason of Church Government* (p. 1408) and other antiprelatical tracts of 1641–42 had supported against the bishops. Now that

they have overthrown the bishops and dominate the Long Parliament, they seek to become the national church, repressing all others. This *sonetto cauduto*, or “tailed sonnet” (an Italian form), has the usual fourteen lines followed by two “tails” of three lines each.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Bishops and the ecclesiastical church structure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The practice of holding several benefices at once; she is a “widowed whore” because her earlier lovers, the Anglican clergy, can no longer possess her.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: State authority.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Presbyterian church order comprised of synods and classes as governing boards and disciplinary courts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Adam Stuart and Samuel Rutherford, Scottish Presbyterian pamphleteers who urged the establishment of an English national Presbyterian church on the Scottish model.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Thomas Edwards analyzed hundreds of so-called heresies in a book picturesquely titled *Gangraena* (1645, 1646). It even identifies Milton as the founder of a sect of Divorcers, promoting “divorce at pleasure.” “Scotch what-d’ye-call” may refer to another Scots cleric, Robert Baillie, or may simply be a sneer at the unpronounceability of Scottish names.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Council of Trent, held by the Roman Church to deal with the Protestant Reformation, was notorious as a scene of political jockeying.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the previous few months Independents and more secular-minded republicans had gained some strength in the Parliament, so Milton could hope they might weigh in against Presbyterian repression.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Little scrolls containing texts from the Pentateuch, worn on the forehead and arm by observant Jews; Milton takes them as a symbol of self-righteous ostentation.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: “Balk”: spare. Mutilation by cutting off the ears was a punishment formerly suffered by several Presbyterian leaders, as Milton hereby reminds them. Milton changed the rather cruel manuscript version of this line—“Crop ye as close as marginal P —’s ears”—alluding to the ultraprolific pamphleteer William Prynne, who stuffed his margins with citations, and who had his ears cropped twice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “Priest” is, etymologically, a contracted form of “Presbyter.”[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *invoke*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fraudulent dealings*[Return to reference °](#)

# To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652<sup>1</sup>

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud  
Not of war only, but detractions<sup>2</sup> rude,  
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude  
To peace and truth<sup>3</sup> thy glorious way hast  
ploughed,  
5 And on the neck of crownèd Fortune proud  
Hast reared God's trophies,<sup>4</sup> and his work pursued,  
While Darwen stream with blood of Scots  
imbrued<sup>5</sup>  
And Dunbar field resounds thy praises loud,  
And Worcester's laureate wreath;<sup>6</sup> yet much remains  
10 To conquer still; peace hath her victories  
No less renowned than war; new foes arise,  
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains:<sup>7</sup>  
Help us to save free conscience from the paw  
Of hireling wolves<sup>8</sup> whose gospel is their maw.<sup>9</sup>

## 1652 Endnotes

1694

- Note 1: The sonnet appeals to Cromwell, a longtime supporter of religious toleration but also of some kind of loosely defined national church, to oppose recent proposals by Independents to set up a national church with a paid clergy and some limits to toleration. This is the only Milton sonnet to end with an epigrammatic couplet. It could not be published in the 1673 *Poems* of Milton because the subject would have offended the restored Stuart monarchy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Cromwell was a target of slander and vituperation from royalists and from extreme radicals.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The words “Truth and Peace” were on a coin issued by Parliament to honor Cromwell’s victories over the Scots at Preston (1648), Dunbar (1650), and Worcester (1651).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Alluding to the ancient Greek custom of erecting trophies of victory on the battlefield.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Stained with blood. The river Darwen runs through Preston, site of a major victory by Cromwell over the Scots.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cromwell described his victory at Worcester as his “crowning mercy.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Alluding to the new proposals that Parliament, the secular power, repress heresies and blasphemy.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Milton fiercely opposed a paid clergy, believing they should support themselves or be supported by their congregations.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *belly*[Return to reference °](#)

# When I Consider How My Light Is Spent<sup>1</sup>

When I consider how my light is spent,<sup>0</sup>  
Ere half my days,<sup>2</sup> in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide<sup>3</sup>  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more  
bent  
5 To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"<sup>4</sup>  
I fondly<sup>0</sup> ask; but Patience to prevent<sup>0</sup>  
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
10 Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state<sup>0</sup>  
Is kingly.<sup>5</sup> Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

## 1652? **Endnotes**

1673

- Note 1: Apparently written soon after Milton lost his sight entirely in 1652. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton was forty-three in 1652; he is obviously not thinking of the biblical lifespan of seventy, but perhaps of that of his father, who died at eighty-four. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), a crucial text for Puritans, the servants who put their master's money ("talents") to earn interest for him were praised, while the servant who buried the single talent he was given was deprived of it and cast into outer darkness. Milton puns on "literary talent." "Useless" (line 4) carries a pun on "usury," the return expected by the Master. [Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: Milton alludes here to the parable of the vineyard keeper (see “How Soon Hath Time,” note 3), and also to John 9:4, spoken by Jesus before curing a blind man: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The changed metaphor for God—from master who needs to profit from his workers to king—allows the inference that those who “stand and wait” may be placed nearest the throne.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *extinguished*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolishly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forestall*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *splendor*[Return to reference °](#)

# On the Late Massacre in Piedmont<sup>1</sup>

Avenge,<sup>2</sup> O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose  
bones  
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;  
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old  
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and  
stones,<sup>3</sup>  
5 Forget not: in thy book<sup>4</sup> record their groans  
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold  
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that rolled  
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow  
10 O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway  
The triple tyrant:<sup>5</sup> that from these may grow  
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way  
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.<sup>6</sup>

## 1655 Endnotes

1673

- Note 1:  
The Waldensians (or Vaudois) were a proto-Protestant sect dating to the 12th century who lived in the valleys of northern Italy (the Piedmont) and southern France; Protestants considered them a remnant retaining apostolic purity, free of Catholic superstitions and graven images ("stocks and stones," line 4). The treaty that had allowed them freedom of worship was bypassed in 1655 when the armies of the Catholic duke of Savoy conducted a massacre, razing villages, committing unspeakable atrocities, and hurling women and children from the mountaintops. Protestant Europe was outraged, and in his

capacity as Cromwell's Latin secretary Milton translated and wrote several letters about the episode. The sonnet incorporates details from such letters and the contemporary newsbooks. Here Milton transforms the sonnet into a prophetic denunciation.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: See Revelation 6:9–10: "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God . . . cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood . . . ?' "[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pagan gods of wood and stone, but with allusion to Roman Catholic "idols."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Revelation 20:12: "the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "Sheep" (next line) echoes Romans 8:36: "we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The pope, wearing his tiara with three crowns. The passage alludes to Tertullian's maxim that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"; also to the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3), some of whose seed brought forth fruit "an hundredfold" (see next line); and also to Cadmus, who sowed dragon's teeth that sprang forth armed men.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Protestants often identified the Roman Church with the whore of Babylon (Revelation 17–18).[Return to reference 6](#)

# Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint<sup>1</sup>

Methought I saw my late espoused saint  
Brought to me like Alcestis<sup>2</sup> from the grave,  
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,  
Rescued from death by force though pale and faint.

5 Mine, as whom<sup>3</sup> washed from spot of childbed taint,  
Purification in the old law did save,<sup>4</sup>  
And such, as yet once more I trust to have  
Full sight of her in heaven without restraint,  
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind.  
10 Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight<sup>5</sup>  
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined  
So clear, as in no face with more delight.  
But O, as to embrace me she inclined,  
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

## 1658 Endnotes

1673

- Note 1: There is some debate as to whether this poem refers to Milton's first wife, Mary Powell, who died in May 1652, three days after giving birth to her third daughter, or his second wife, Katherine Woodcock, who died in February 1658, after giving birth (in October 1657) to a daughter. The text can support either, but the latter seems more likely. The sonnet is couched as a dream vision.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Euripides' *Alcestis*, Alcestis, wife of Admetus, is rescued from the underworld by Hercules ("Jove's great son," next line) and restored, veiled, to Admetus; he is overjoyed when he lifts the veil, but she must remain silent until she is ritually cleansed.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: As one whom.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:2–8) prescribed periods for the purification of women after childbirth (eighty days for a daughter).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: She is veiled like Alcestis, and Milton's sight of her is only "fancied"; he never saw the face of his second wife, Katherine, because of his blindness.[Return to reference 5](#)

**Paradise Lost** The setting of Milton's great epic encompasses Heaven, Hell, primordial Chaos, and the planet earth. It features battles among immortal spirits, voyages through space, and lakes of fire. Yet its protagonists are a married couple living in a garden, and its climax consists in the eating of a piece of fruit. *Paradise Lost* is ultimately about the human condition, the Fall that caused "all our woe," and the promise and means of restoration. It is also about knowing and choosing, about free will. In the opening passages of Books 1, 3, 7, and 9, Milton highlights the choices and difficulties he faced in creating his poem. His central characters—Satan, Beelzebub, Abdiel, Adam, and Eve—are confronted with hard choices under the pressure of powerful desires and sometimes devious temptations. Milton's readers, too, are continually challenged to choose and to reconsider their most basic assumptions about freedom, heroism, work, pleasure, language, nature, and love. The great themes of *Paradise Lost* are intimately linked to the political questions at stake in the English Revolution and the Restoration, but the connection is by no means straightforward. This is a poem in which Satan leads a revolution against an absolute monarch and in which questions of tyranny, servitude, and liberty are debated in a parliament in Hell. Milton's readers are hereby challenged to rethink these topics and, like Abdiel debating with Satan in Books 5 and 6, to make crucial distinctions between God as monarch and earthly kings.

In Milton's time, the conventions of epic poetry followed a familiar recipe. The action was to begin *in medias res* (in the middle of things), following the poet's statement of his theme and invocation of his Muse. The reader could expect grand battles and love affairs, supernatural intervention, a descent into the underworld, catalogues of warriors, and epic similes. Milton had absorbed the epic tradition in its entirety, and his poem abounds with echoes of Homer and Virgil, the fifteenth-century Italians Tasso and Ariosto, and the English Spenser. But in *Paradise Lost* he at once heightens epic conventions and values and utterly transforms them.

This is the epic to end all epics. Milton gives us the first and greatest of all wars (between God and Satan) and the first and greatest of love affairs (between Adam and Eve). His theme is the destiny of the entire human race, caught up in the temptation and Fall of our first “grand parents.”

Milton challenges his readers in *Paradise Lost*, at once fulfilling and defying all of our expectations. Nothing in the epic tradition or in biblical interpretation can prepare us for the Satan who hurtles into view in Book 1, with his awesome energy and defiance, incredible fortitude, and, above all, magnificent rhetoric. For some readers, including Blake and Shelley, Satan is the true hero of the poem. But Milton is engaged in a radical reevaluation of epic values, and Satan’s version of heroism must be contrasted with those of the loyal Abdiel and the Son of God. Moreover, the poem’s truly epic action takes place not on the battlefield but in the moral and domestic arena. Milton’s Adam and Eve are not conventional epic heroes, but neither are they the conventional Adam and Eve. Their state of innocence is not childlike, tranquil, and free of sexual desire. Instead, the first couple enjoy sex, experience tension and passion, make mistakes of judgment, and grow in knowledge. Their task is to prune what is unruly in their own natures as they prune the vegetation in their garden, for both have the capacity to grow wild. Their relationship exhibits gender hierarchy, but Milton’s early readers may have been surprised by the fullness and complexity of Eve’s character and the centrality of her role, not only in the Fall but in the promised restoration.

We expect in epics a grand style, and Milton’s style engulfs us from the outset with its energy and power, as those rushing, enjambed, blank-verse lines propel us along with only a few pauses for line endings or grammar (there is only one full stop in the first twenty-six lines). The elevated diction and complex syntax, the sonorities and patternings make a magnificent music. But that music is an entire orchestra of tones, including the high political rhetoric of Satan in Books 1 and 2, the evocative sensuousness of the descriptions of Eden, the delicacy of Eve’s love lyric to Adam in Book

4, the relatively plain speech of God in Book 3, and the speech rhythms of Adam and Eve's marital quarrel in Book 9. This majestic achievement depends on the poet's rejection of heroic couplets, the norm for epic and tragedy in the Restoration, vigorously defended by Dryden but denounced by Milton in his note on "The Verse." The choice of verse form was, like so many other things in Milton's life, in part a question of politics. Milton's terms associate the "troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming" with Restoration monarchy and the repression of dissidents and present his use of unrhymed blank verse as a recovery of "ancient liberty."

The first edition (1667) presented *Paradise Lost* in ten books; the second (1674) recast it into twelve books, after the Virgilian model, splitting the original Books 7 and 10. We present the twelve-book epic in its entirety, to allow readers to experience the impact of the whole.



# PARADISE LOST

## SECOND EDITION (1674)

### The Verse

The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek and of Virgil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter<sup>1</sup> and lame meter; graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets,<sup>2</sup> carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause therefore some both Italian<sup>3</sup> and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rhyme both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers,<sup>4</sup> fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.

### Endnotes

- Note 1: Perhaps the bawdy content of the Latin songs composed by goliardic poets of the Middle Ages; they learned rhyme from medieval hymns.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Notably, Dryden. See his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Trissino and Tasso.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Appropriate rhythm.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Book 1

## *The Argument*<sup>1</sup>

This first book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was placed: then touches the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who revolting from God, and drawing to his side many legions of angels, was by the command of God driven out of Heaven with all his crew into the great deep. Which action passed over, the poem hastes into the midst of things,<sup>2</sup> presenting Satan with his angels now fallen into Hell, described here, not in the center<sup>3</sup> (for Heaven and Earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called Chaos: here Satan with his angels lying on the burning lake, thunderstruck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him; they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise, their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of creature to be created, according to an ancient prophecy or report in Heaven; for that angels were long before this visible creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers.<sup>4</sup> To find out the truth of this prophecy, and what to determine<sup>5</sup> thereon he refers to a full council. What his associates thence attempt. Pandemonium the palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the deep: the infernal peers there sit in council.

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit<sup>1</sup>

Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal<sup>o</sup> taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man<sup>2</sup>  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,  
5 Sing Heav'nly Muse,<sup>3</sup> that on the secret top  
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,  
In the beginning how the heav'ns and earth  
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion hill<sup>4</sup>  
10 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed  
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence  
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,  
That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above th' Aonian mount,<sup>5</sup> while it pursues  
15 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.<sup>6</sup>  
And chiefly thou O Spirit,<sup>7</sup> that dost prefer  
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread  
20 Dove-like sat'st brooding<sup>8</sup> on the vast abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
That to the height of this great argument<sup>o</sup>  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
25 And justify<sup>o</sup> the ways of God to men.  
Say first, for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view  
Nor the deep tract of Hell, say first what cause<sup>9</sup>  
Moved our grand parents in that happy state,  
Favored of Heav'n so highly, to fall off  
30 From their Creator, and transgress his will  
For<sup>o</sup> one restraint, lords of the world besides?<sup>o</sup>  
Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?  
Th' infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile  
Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived  
35 The mother of mankind, what time<sup>o</sup> his pride

Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his host  
Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring  
To set himself in glory above his peers,<sup>o</sup>  
He trusted to have equaled the Most High,  
40 If he opposed; and with ambitious aim  
Against the throne and monarchy of God  
Raised impious war in Heav'n and battle proud  
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power  
Hurled headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky  
45 With hideous ruin and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In adamantin<sup>1</sup>e chains and penal fire,  
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.  
Nine times the space<sup>2</sup> that measures day and night  
50 To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf  
Confounded though immortal: but his doom  
Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought  
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain  
55 Torments him; round he throws his baleful<sup>o</sup> eyes  
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay  
Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate:  
At once as far as angels' ken<sup>o</sup> he views  
The dismal situation waste and wild,  
60 A dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Served only to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
65 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes  
That comes to all;<sup>3</sup> but torture without end  
Still urges,<sup>o</sup> and a fiery deluge, fed  
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed:  
Such place Eternal Justice had prepared  
70 For those rebellious, here their prison ordained

In utter darkness, and their portion set  
As far removed from God and light of Heav'n  
As from the center thrice to th' utmost pole.<sup>4</sup>  
O how unlike the place from whence they fell!  
75 There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed  
With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,  
He soon discerns, and welt'ring<sup>o</sup> by his side  
One next himself in power, and next in crime,  
Long after known in Palestine, and named  
80 Beëlzebub.<sup>5</sup> To whom th' Arch-Enemy,  
And thence in Heav'n called Satan,<sup>6</sup> with bold words  
Breaking the horrid silence thus began.  
"If thou beest he; but O how fall'n!<sup>7</sup> how changed  
From him, who in the happy realms of light  
85 Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine  
Myriads though bright: if he whom mutual league,  
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope  
And hazard in the glorious enterprise,  
Joined with me once, now misery hath joined  
90 In equal ruin: into what pit thou seest  
From what height fall'n, so much the stronger  
proved  
He with his thunder:<sup>o</sup> and till then who knew  
The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,  
Nor what the potent victor in his rage  
95 Can else inflict, do I repent or change,  
Though changed in outward luster, that fixed mind  
And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,  
That with the mightiest raised me to contend,  
And to the fierce contention brought along  
100 Innumerable force of spirits armed  
That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,  
His utmost power with adverse power opposed  
In dubious<sup>o</sup> battle on the plains of Heav'n,  
And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?

105 All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study<sup>o</sup> of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?<sup>8</sup>  
That glory never shall his wrath or might  
110 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace  
With suppliant knee, and deify his power  
Who from the terror of this arm so late  
Doubted<sup>o</sup> his empire, that were low indeed,  
That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
115 This downfall; since by fate the strength of gods<sup>9</sup>  
And this empyreal substance cannot fail,<sup>o</sup>  
Since through experience of this great event  
In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,  
We may with more successful hope resolve  
120 To wage by force or guile eternal war  
Irreconcilable, to our grand foe,  
Who now triúmphs, and in th' excess of joy  
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heav'n."

125 So spake th' apostate angel, though in pain,  
Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair:  
And him thus answered soon his bold compeer.<sup>o</sup>

"O Prince, O Chief of many thronéd Powers,  
That led th' embattled Seraphim<sup>1</sup> to war  
Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds  
130 Fearless, endangered Heav'ns perpetual King;  
And put to proof his high supremacy,  
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate;  
Too well I see and rue the dire event,<sup>o</sup>  
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat  
135 Hath lost us Heav'n, and all this mighty host  
In horrible destruction laid thus low,  
As far as gods and heav'nly essences  
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains  
Invincible, and vigor soon returns,  
140

Though all our glory extinct, and happy state  
Here swallowed up in endless misery.  
But what if he our conqueror (whom I now  
Of force<sup>o</sup> believe almighty, since no less  
145 Than such could have o'erpow'ered such force as  
ours)  
Have left us this our spirit and strength entire  
Strongly to suffer and support our pains,  
That we may so suffice<sup>o</sup> his vengeful ire,  
Or do him mightier service as his thralls  
By right of war, whate'er his business be  
150 Here in the heart of Hell to work in fire,  
Or do his errands in the gloomy deep;  
What can it then avail though yet we feel  
Strength undiminished, or eternal being  
To undergo eternal punishment?"  
155 Whereto with speedy words th' Arch-Fiend replied.  
"Fall'n Cherub, to be weak is miserable  
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,  
To do aught<sup>o</sup> good never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our sole delight,  
160 As being the contrary to his high will  
Whom we resist. If then his providence  
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,  
Our labor must be to pervert that end,  
And out of good still to find means of evil;  
165 Which ofttimes may succeed, so as perhaps  
Shall grieve him, if I fail<sup>o</sup> not, and disturb  
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.  
But see the angry victor hath recalled  
His ministers of vengeance and pursuit  
170 Back to the gates of Heav'n: the sulphurous hail  
Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid<sup>o</sup>  
The fiery surge, that from the precipice  
Of Heav'n received us falling, and the thunder,  
Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,



175 Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now  
To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.  
Let us not slip<sup>o</sup> th' occasion, whether scorn,  
Or satiate fury yield it from our foe.  
Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,  
180 The seat of desolation, void of light,  
Save what the glimmering of these livid<sup>o</sup> flames  
Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend  
From off the tossing of these fiery waves,  
There rest, if any rest can harbor there,  
185 And reassembling our afflicted powers,<sup>o</sup>  
Consult how we may henceforth most offend<sup>o</sup>  
Our enemy, our own loss how repair,  
How overcome this dire calamity,  
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,  
190 If not what resolution from despair."<sup>2</sup>  
Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate  
With head uplift above the wave, and eyes  
That sparkling blazed, his other parts besides  
Prone on the flood, extended long and large  
195 Lay floating many a rood,<sup>3</sup> in bulk as huge  
As whom<sup>o</sup> the fables name of monstrous size,  
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,  
Briareos or Typhon,<sup>4</sup> whom the den  
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast  
200 Leviathan,<sup>5</sup> which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim th' ocean stream:  
Him haply<sup>o</sup> slumb'ring on the Norway foam  
The pilot of some small night-foundered<sup>o</sup> skiff,  
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,<sup>6</sup>  
205 With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind  
Moors by his side under the lee,<sup>o</sup> while night  
Invests<sup>o</sup> the sea, and wishèd morn delays:  
So stretched out huge in length the Arch-Fiend lay  
Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence

210 Had ris'n or heaved his head, but that the will  
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven  
Left him at large to his own dark designs,  
That with reiterated crimes he might  
215 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought  
Evil to others, and enraged might see  
How all his malice served but to bring forth  
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shown  
On man by him seduced, but on himself  
220 Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured.  
Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool  
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames  
Driv'n backward slope their pointing spires,<sup>o</sup> and  
rolled  
In billows, leave i' th' midst a horrid<sup>o</sup> vale.  
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight  
225 Aloft, incumbent on<sup>o</sup> the dusky air  
That felt unusual weight, till on dry land  
He lights,<sup>o</sup> if it were land that ever burned  
With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,  
And such appeared in hue; as when the force  
230 Of subterranean wind transports a hill  
Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side  
Of thund'ring Etna,<sup>z</sup> whose combustible  
And fueled entrails thence conceiving fire,  
Sublimed<sup>o</sup> with mineral fury, aid the winds,  
235 And leave a singèd bottom all involved<sup>o</sup>  
With stench and smoke: such resting found the sole  
Of unblest feet. Him followed his next mate,  
Both glorying to have scaped the Stygian<sup>o</sup> flood  
As gods, and by their own recovered strength,  
240 Not by the sufferance<sup>o</sup> of supernal power.  
"Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"  
Said then the lost Archangel, "this the seat<sup>o</sup>

That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful  
gloom  
245 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he  
Who now is sov'reign can dispose and bid  
What shall be right: farthest from him is best  
Whom reason hath equaled, force hath made  
supreme  
Above his equals. Farewell happy fields  
Where joy forever dwells: Hail horrors, hail  
250 Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell  
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings  
A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.<sup>8</sup>  
255 What matter where, if I be still the same,  
And what I should be, all but less than<sup>o</sup> he  
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least  
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built  
Here for his envy,<sup>9</sup> will not drive us hence:  
260 Here we may reign secure, and in my choice  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.<sup>1</sup>  
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,  
Th' associates and copartners of our loss  
265 Lie thus astonished<sup>o</sup> on th' oblivious pool,<sup>2</sup>  
And call them not to share with us their part  
In this unhappy mansion, or once more  
With rallied arms to try what may be yet  
Regained in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell?"  
270 So Satan spake, and him Beëlzebub  
Thus answered. "Leader of those armies bright,  
Which but th' Omnipotent none could have foiled,  
If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge  
Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft  
275 In worst extremes, and on the perilous edge<sup>o</sup>

Of battle when it raged, in all assaults  
Their surest signal, they will soon resume  
New courage and revive, though now they lie  
Groveling and prostrate on yon lake of fire,  
280 As we erewhile, astounded and amazed,  
No wonder, fall'n such a pernicious highth."  
He scarce had ceased when the superior Fiend  
Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield  
Ethereal temper,<sup>3</sup> massy, large and round,  
285 Behind him cast; the broad circumference  
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb  
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views<sup>4</sup>  
At evening from the top of Fesole,  
Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,  
290 Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.  
His spear, to equal which the tallest pine  
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast  
Of some great ammiral,<sup>5</sup> were but a wand  
He walked with to support uneasy steps  
295 Over the burning marl,<sup>6</sup> not like those steps  
On heaven's azure; and the torrid clime  
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire;  
Nathless<sup>7</sup> he so endured, till on the beach  
Of that inflamed<sup>8</sup> sea, he stood and called  
300 His legions, angel forms, who lay entranced  
Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks  
In Vallombrosa,<sup>9</sup> where th' Etrurian shades  
High overarched embow'r;<sup>10</sup> or scattered sedge<sup>11</sup>  
Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed  
305 Hath vexed the Red Sea coast,<sup>12</sup> whose waves  
o'erthrew  
Busiris<sup>13</sup> and his Memphian chivalry,  
While with perfidious hatred they pursued  
The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld  
From the safe shore their floating carcasses

310 And broken chariot wheels; so thick bestrown  
Abject and lost lay these, covering the flood,  
Under amazement of their hideous change.  
He called so loud, that all the hollow deep  
Of Hell resounded. "Princes, Potentates,  
315 Warriors, the flow'r of Heav'n, once yours, now lost,  
If such astonishment as this can seize  
Eternal Spirits: or have ye chos'n this place  
After the toil of battle to repose  
Your wearied virtue,<sup>o</sup> for the ease you find  
320 To slumber here, as in the vales of Heav'n?  
Or in this abject posture have ye sworn  
To adore the conqueror? who now beholds  
Cherub and Seraph rolling in the flood  
With scattered arms and ensigns,<sup>o</sup> till anon  
325 His swift pursuers from Heav'n gates discern  
Th' advantage, and descending tread us down  
Thus drooping, or with linkèd thunderbolts  
Transfix us to the bottom of this gulf.  
Awake, arise, or be forever fall'n."  
330 They heard, and were abashed, and up they  
sprung  
Upon the wing, as when men wont<sup>o</sup> to watch  
On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread,  
Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake.  
Nor did they not perceive the evil plight  
335 In which they were, or the fierce pains not feel;<sup>8</sup>  
Yet to their general's voice they soon obeyed  
Innumerable. As when the potent rod  
Of Amram's son<sup>9</sup> in Egypt's evil day  
Waved round the coast, up called a pitchy cloud  
340 Of locusts, warping<sup>o</sup> on the eastern wind,  
That o'er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung  
Like night, and darkened all the land of Nile:  
So numberless were those bad angels seen

345 Hovering on wing under the cope<sup>o</sup> of Hell  
'Twixt upper, nether, and surrounding fires;  
Till, as a signal giv'n, th' uplifted spear  
Of their great Sultan<sup>1</sup> waving to direct  
Their course, in even balance down they light  
On the firm brimstone, and fill all the plain;  
350 A multitude, like which the populous north  
Poured never from her frozen loins, to pass  
Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons  
Came like a deluge on the south, and spread  
Beneath Gibraltar to the Libyan sands.<sup>2</sup>  
355 Forthwith from every squadron and each band  
The heads and leaders thither haste where stood  
Their great commander; godlike shapes and forms  
Excelling human, princely dignities,  
And powers that erst<sup>o</sup> in Heaven sat on thrones;  
360 Though of their names in heav'nly records now  
Be no memorial, blotted out and razed<sup>o</sup>  
By their rebellion, from the Books of Life.  
Nor had they yet among the sons of Eve  
Got them new names, till wand'ring o'er the earth,  
365 Through God's high sufferance for the trial of man,  
By falsities and lies the greatest part  
Of mankind they corrupted to forsake  
God their Creator, and th' invisible  
Glory of him that made them, to transform  
370 Oft to the image of a brute, adorned  
With gay religions<sup>o</sup> full of pomp and gold,  
And devils to adore for deities:  
Then were they known to men by various names,  
And various idols through the heathen world.  
375 Say, Muse, their names then known, who first,  
who last,<sup>3</sup>  
Roused from the slumber on that fiery couch,  
At their great emperor's call, as next in worth

Came singly<sup>o</sup> where he stood on the bare strand,  
While the promiscuous<sup>o</sup> crowd stood yet aloof.  
380 The chief were those who from the pit of Hell  
Roaming to seek their prey on earth, durst fix  
Their seats long after next the seat of God,<sup>4</sup>  
Their altars by his altar, gods adored  
Among the nations round, and durst abide  
385 Jehovah thund'ring out of Zion, throned  
Between the Cherubim;<sup>5</sup> yea, often placed  
Within his sanctuary itself their shrines,  
Abomination; and with cursèd things  
His holy rites, and solemn feasts profaned,  
390 And with their darkness durst affront his light.  
First Moloch,<sup>6</sup> horrid king besmeared with blood  
Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears,  
Though for the noise of drums and timbrels<sup>o</sup> loud  
Their children's cries unheard, that passed through  
395 fire  
To his grim idol. Him the Ammonite<sup>7</sup>  
Worshipped in Rabba and her wat'ry plain,  
In Argob and in Basan, to the stream  
Of utmost Arnon. Nor content with such  
Audacious neighborhood, the wisest heart  
400 Of Solomon he led by fraud to build  
His temple right against the temple of God  
On that opprobrious hill, and made his grove  
The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence  
And black Gehenna called, the type of Hell.<sup>8</sup>  
405 Next Chemos,<sup>9</sup> th' obscene dread of Moab's sons,  
From Aroer to Nebo, and the wild  
Of southmost Abarim; in Hesebon  
And Horanaim, Seon's realm, beyond  
The flow'ry dale of Sibma clad with vines,  
410 And Elealè to th' Asphaltic Pool.<sup>1</sup>  
Peor<sup>2</sup> his other name, when he enticed

Israel in Sittim on their march from Nile  
To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe.  
Yet thence his lustful orgies he enlarged  
415 Even to that hill of scandal,<sup>3</sup> by the grove  
Of Moloch homicide, lust hard by<sup>o</sup> hate;  
Till good Josiah drove them thence to Hell.  
With these came they, who from the bord'ring flood  
Of old Euphrates to the brook that parts  
420 Egypt from Syrian ground,<sup>4</sup> had general names  
Of Baalim and Ashtaroth, those male,  
These feminine.<sup>5</sup> For Spirits when they please  
Can either sex assume, or both; so soft  
And uncompounded is their essence pure,  
425 Not tied or manacled with joint or limb,  
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,  
Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose  
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,  
Can execute their airy purposes,  
430 And works of love or enmity fulfill.  
For those the race of Israel oft forsook  
Their Living Strength, and unfrequented left  
His righteous altar, bowing lowly down  
To bestial gods; for which their heads as low  
435 Bowed down in battle, sunk before the spear  
Of despicable foes. With these in troop  
Came Astoreth, whom the Phoenicians called  
Astartè, queen of Heav'n, with crescent horns;  
To whose bright image nightly by the moon  
440 Sidonian virgins<sup>6</sup> paid their vows and songs,  
In Sion also not unsung, where stood  
Her temple on th' offensive mountain,<sup>7</sup> built  
By that uxorious king, whose heart though large,  
Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell  
445 To idols foul. Thammuz<sup>8</sup> came next behind,  
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured



The Syrian damsels to lament his fate  
In amorous ditties all a summer's day,  
While smooth Adonis<sup>9</sup> from his native work  
450 Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood  
Of Thammuz yearly wounded: the love-tale  
Infected Sion's daughters with like heat,  
Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch  
Ezekiel<sup>1</sup> saw, when by the vision led  
455 His eye surveyed the dark idolatries  
Of alienated Judah. Next came one  
Who mourned in earnest, when the captive ark  
Maimed his brute image, head and hands lopped off  
In his own temple, on the grunsel edge,<sup>2</sup>  
460 Where he fell flat, and shamed his worshippers:  
Dagon his name, sea monster, upward man  
And downward fish: yet had his temple high  
Reared in Azotus, dreaded through the coast  
Of Palestine, in Gath and Ascalon  
465 And Accaron and Gaza's<sup>3</sup> frontier bounds.  
Him followed Rimmon,<sup>4</sup> whose delightful seat  
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks  
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams.  
He also against the house of God was bold:  
470 A leper once he lost and gained a king,  
Ahaz his sottish conqueror, whom he drew  
God's altar to disparage and displace  
For one of Syrian mode,<sup>5</sup> whereon to burn  
His odious off'rings, and adore the gods  
475 Whom he had vanquished. After these appeared  
A crew who under names of old renown,  
Osiris, Isis, Orus<sup>6</sup> and their train  
With monstrous shapes and sorceries abused  
Fanatic Egypt and her priests, to seek  
480 Their wand'ring gods disguised in brutish forms  
Rather than human. Nor did Israel scape

Th' infection when their borrowed gold composed  
 The calf in Oreb:<sup>7</sup> and the rebel king  
 Doubled that sin in Bethel and in Dan,  
 485 Lik'ning his Maker to the grazèd ox,<sup>8</sup>  
 Jehovah, who in one night when he passed  
 From Egypt marching, equaled<sup>9</sup> with one stroke  
 Both her firstborn and all her bleating gods.<sup>9</sup>  
 Belial came last,<sup>1</sup> than whom a spirit more lewd  
 490 Fell not from Heaven, or more gross to love  
 Vice for itself: to him no temple stood  
 Or altar smoked; yet who more oft than he  
 In temples and at altars, when the priest  
 495 Turns atheist, as did Eli's sons,<sup>2</sup> who filled  
 With lust and violence the house of God.  
 In courts and palaces he also reigns  
 And in luxurious cities, where the noise  
 Of riot ascends above their loftiest tow'rs,  
 And injury and outrage: and when night  
 500 Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons  
 Of Belial, flown<sup>10</sup> with insolence and wine.<sup>3</sup>  
 Witness the streets of Sodom, and that night  
 In Gibeah, when the hospitable door  
 Exposed a matron to avoid worse rape.<sup>4</sup>  
 505       These were the prime in order and in might;  
 The rest were long to tell, though far renowned,  
 Th' Ionian gods, of Javan's issue held  
 Gods, yet confessed later than Heav'n and Earth  
 Their boasted parents;<sup>5</sup> Titan Heav'n's firstborn  
 510 With his enormous brood, and birthright seized  
 By younger Saturn, he from mightier Jove,  
 His own and Rhea's son, like measure found;  
 So Jove usurping reigned:<sup>6</sup> these first in Crete  
 And Ida known, thence on the snowy top  
 515 Of cold Olympus ruled the middle air  
 Their highest heav'n; or on the Delphian cliff,

Or in Dodona, and through all the bounds  
Of Doric land;<sup>7</sup> or who with Saturn old  
Fled over Adria to th' Hesperian fields,  
520 And o'er the Celtic roamed the utmost isles.<sup>8</sup>  
All these and more came flocking; but with looks  
Downcast and damp,<sup>9</sup> yet such wherein appeared  
Obscure some glimpse of joy, to have found their  
chief  
Not in despair, to have found themselves not lost  
525 In loss itself; which on his count'nance cast  
Like doubtful hue:<sup>9</sup> but he his wonted<sup>9</sup> pride  
Soon recollecting, with high words, that bore  
Semblance of worth, not substance, gently raised  
Their fainting courage, and dispelled their fears.  
530 Then straight<sup>9</sup> commands that at the warlike sound  
Of trumpets loud and clarions be upreared  
His mighty standard; that proud honor claimed  
Azazel<sup>1</sup> as his right, a Cherub tall:  
Who forthwith from the glittering staff unfurled  
535 Th' imperial ensign, which full high advanced  
Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind  
With gems and golden luster rich emblazed,  
Seraphic arms and trophies:<sup>2</sup> all the while  
Sonorous metal<sup>9</sup> blowing martial sounds:  
540 At which the universal host upsent  
A shout that tore Hell's concave,<sup>9</sup> and beyond  
Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.<sup>3</sup>  
All in a moment through the gloom were seen  
Ten thousand banners rise into the air  
545 With orient<sup>9</sup> colors waving: with them rose  
A forest huge of spears: and thronging helms  
Appeared, and serried<sup>9</sup> shields in thick array  
Of depth immeasurable: anon they move  
In perfect phalanx to the Dorian<sup>4</sup> mood  
550 Of flutes and soft recorders; such as raised

To highth of noblest temper heroes old  
Arming to battle, and instead of rage  
Deliberate valor breathed, firm and unmoved  
With dread of death to flight or foul retreat,  
555 Nor wanting power to mitigate and swage<sup>o</sup>  
With solemn touches, troubled thoughts, and chase  
Anguish and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain  
From mortal or immortal minds. Thus they  
Breathing united force with fixèd thought  
560 Moved on in silence to soft pipes that charmed  
Their painful steps o'er the burnt soil; and now  
Advanced in view they stand, a horrid<sup>o</sup> front  
Of dreadful length and dazzling arms, in guise  
Of warriors old with ordered spear and shield,  
565 Awaiting what command their mighty chief  
Had to impose. He through the armèd files  
Darts his experienced eye, and soon traverse<sup>o</sup>  
The whole battalion views, their order due,  
Their visages and stature as of gods,  
570 Their number last he sums. And now his heart  
Distends with pride, and hard'ning in his strength  
Glories: for never since created man<sup>5</sup>  
Met such embodied force, as named<sup>o</sup> with these  
Could merit more than that small infantry  
575 Warred on by cranes:<sup>6</sup> though all the giant brood  
Of Phlegra with th' heroic race were joined  
That fought at Thebes and Ilium,<sup>7</sup> on each side  
Mixed with auxiliar<sup>o</sup> gods; and what resounds  
In fable or romance of Uther's son  
580 Begirt with British and Armoric knights;  
And all who since, baptized or infidel  
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,  
Damasco, or Morocco, or Trebisonde,  
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore  
585 When Charlemagne with all his peerage fell

By Fontarabia.<sup>8</sup> Thus far these beyond  
Compare of mortal prowess, yet observed<sup>o</sup>  
Their dread commander: he above the rest  
In shape and gesture proudly eminent  
590 Stood like a tow'r; his form had yet not lost  
All her<sup>9</sup> original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than Archangel ruined, and th' excess  
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-ris'n  
Looks through the horizontal<sup>o</sup> misty air  
595 Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon  
In dim eclipse disastrous<sup>o</sup> twilight sheds  
On half the nations, and with fear of change  
Perplexes monarchs. Darkened so, yet shone  
Above them all th' Archangel: but his face  
600 Deep scars of thunder had intrenched,<sup>o</sup> and care  
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows  
Of dauntless courage, and considerate<sup>o</sup> pride  
Waiting revenge: cruel his eye, but cast  
Signs of remorse and passion<sup>o</sup> to behold  
605 The fellows of his crime, the followers rather  
(Far other once beheld in bliss) condemned  
Forever now to have their lot in pain,  
Millions of Spirits for his fault amerced<sup>o</sup>  
Of Heav'n, and from eternal splendors flung  
610 For his revolt, yet faithful how they stood,  
Their glory withered: as when Heaven's fire  
Hath scathed<sup>o</sup> the forest oaks, or mountain pines,  
With singèd top their stately growth though bare  
Stands on the blasted heath. He now prepared  
615 To speak; whereat their doubled ranks they bend  
From wing to wing, and half enclose him round  
With all his peers: attention held them mute.  
Thrice he essayed,<sup>o</sup> and thrice, in spite of scorn,  
Tears such as angels weep burst forth: at last  
620 Words interwove with sighs found out their way.

“O myriads of immortal Spirits, O Powers  
Matchless, but with th’ Almighty, and that strife  
Was not inglorious, though th’ event<sup>o</sup> was dire,  
As this place testifies, and this dire change  
625 Hateful to utter: but what power of mind  
Foreseeing or presaging, from the depth  
Of knowledge past or present, could have feared,  
How such united force of gods, how such  
As stood like these, could ever know repulse?  
630 For who can yet believe, though after loss,  
That all these puissant<sup>o</sup> legions, whose exile  
Hath emptied Heav’n, shall fail to reascend  
Self-raised, and repossess their native seat?  
For me, be witness all the host of Heav’n,  
635 If counsels different,<sup>o</sup> or danger shunned  
By me, have lost our hopes. But he who reigns  
Monarch in Heav’n, till then as one secure  
Sat on his throne, upheld by old repute,  
Consent or custom, and his regal state  
640 Put forth at full, but still<sup>o</sup> his strength concealed,  
Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall.  
Henceforth his might we know, and know our own  
So as not either to provoke, or dread  
New war, provoked; our better part remains  
645 To work in close design, by fraud or guile  
What force effected not: that he no less  
At length from us may find, who overcomes  
By force, hath overcome but half his foe.  
Space may produce new worlds; whereof so rife<sup>o</sup>  
650 There went a fame<sup>o</sup> in Heav’n that he ere long  
Intended to create, and therein plant  
A generation, whom his choice regard  
Should favor equal to the sons of Heaven:  
Thither, if but to pry, shall be perhaps  
655 Our first eruption,<sup>o</sup> thither or elsewhere:  
For this infernal pit shall never hold

Celestial Spirits in bondage, not th' abyss  
 Long under darkness cover. But these thoughts  
 Full counsel must mature: peace is despaired,  
 660 For who can think submission? War then, war  
 Open or understood<sup>o</sup> must be resolved."

He spake: and to confirm his words, out flew  
 Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs  
 Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze  
 665 Far round illumined Hell: highly they raged  
 Against the Highest, and fierce with grasped arms  
 Clashed on their sounding shields the din of war,<sup>1</sup>  
 Hurling defiance toward the vault of Heav'n.

There stood a hill not far whose grisly top  
 670 Belched fire and rolling smoke; the rest entire  
 Shone with a glossy scurf,<sup>o</sup> undoubted sign  
 That in his womb was hid metallic ore,  
 The work of sulphur.<sup>2</sup> Thither winged with speed  
 A numerous brigade hastened. As when bands  
 675 Of pioneers<sup>o</sup> with spade and pickax armed  
 Forerun the royal camp, to trench a field,  
 Or cast a rampart. Mammon<sup>3</sup> led them on,  
 Mammon, the least erected Spirit that fell  
 From Heav'n, for ev'n in Heav'n his looks and  
 680 thoughts  
 Were always downward bent, admiring more  
 The riches of Heav'n's pavement, trodden gold,  
 Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed  
 In vision beatific: by him first  
 Men also, and by his suggestion taught,  
 685 Ransacked the center, and with impious hands  
 Rifled the bowels of their mother earth  
 For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew  
 Opened into the hill a spacious wound  
 And digged out ribs of gold. Let none admire<sup>o</sup>  
 690 That riches grow in Hell; that soil may best

Deserve the precious bane.° And here let those  
Who boast in mortal things, and wond'ring tell  
Of Babel, and the works of Memphian kings,<sup>4</sup>  
Learn how their greatest monuments of fame,  
695 And strength and art are easily outdone  
By Spirits reprobate, and in an hour  
What in an age they with incessant toil  
And hands innumerable scarce perform.  
Nigh on the plain in many cells prepared,  
700 That underneath had veins of liquid fire  
Sluiced from the lake, a second multitude  
With wondrous art founded° the massy ore,  
Severing° each kind, and scummed the bullion  
dross:°  
A third as soon had formed within the ground  
705 A various mold, and from the boiling cells  
By strange conveyance filled each hollow nook,  
As in an organ from one blast of wind  
To many a row of pipes the soundboard breathes.  
Anon out of the earth a fabric huge  
710 Rose like an exhalation, with the sound  
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet,  
Built like a temple,<sup>5</sup> where pilasters° round  
Were set, and Doric pillars<sup>6</sup> overlaid  
With golden architrave; nor did there want  
715 Cornice or frieze, with bossy° sculptures grav'n;  
The roof was fretted° gold. Not Babylon,  
Nor great Alcairo such magnificence  
Equaled in all their glories, to enshrine  
Belus or Serapis<sup>7</sup> their gods, or seat  
720 Their kings, when Egypt with Assyria strove  
In wealth and luxury. Th' ascending pile  
Stood fixed° her stately height, and straight° the  
doors  
Opening their brazen folds discover° wide



725      Within, her ample spaces, o'er the smooth  
And level pavement: from the archèd roof  
Pendent by subtle magic many a row  
Of starry lamps and blazing cressets<sup>8</sup> fed  
With naphtha and asphaltus yielded light  
As from a sky. The hasty multitude  
730      Admiring entered, and the work some praise  
And some the architect: his hand was known  
In Heav'n by many a towered structure high,  
Where sceptered angels held their residence,  
And sat as princes, whom the Súpreme King  
735      Exalted to such power, and gave to rule,  
Each in his hierarchy, the orders bright.  
Nor was his name unheard or unadored  
In ancient Greece and in Ausonian land  
Men called him Mulciber<sup>9</sup> and how he fell  
740      From Heav'n, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove  
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements: from morn  
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,  
A summer's day; and with the setting sun  
Dropped from the zenith like a falling star,  
745      On Lemnos th' Aégean isle: thus they relate,  
Erring; for he with this rebellious rout  
Fell long before; nor aught availed him now  
To have built in Heav'n high tow'rs; nor did he scape  
By all his engines, but was headlong sent  
750      With his industrious crew to build in Hell.

    Meanwhile the wingèd heralds by command  
Of sov'reign power, with awful ceremony  
And trumpet's sound throughout the host proclaim  
A solemn council forthwith to be held  
755      At Pandemonium,<sup>1</sup> the high capitol  
Of Satan and his peers:<sup>o</sup> their summons called  
From every band and squarèd regiment  
By place<sup>o</sup> or choice<sup>o</sup> the worthiest; they anon

760 With hundreds and with thousands trooping came  
Attended: all access was thronged, the gates  
And porches wide, but chief the spacious hall  
(Though like a covered field, where champions bold  
Wont ride in armed, and at the soldan's<sup>o</sup> chair  
Defied the best of paynim<sup>o</sup> chivalry  
765 To mortal combat or career with lance)  
Thick swarmed, both on the ground and in the air,  
Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees  
In springtime, when the sun with Taurus rides,<sup>2</sup>  
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive  
770 In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers  
Fly to and fro, or on the smoothèd plank,  
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,  
New rubbed with balm, expatiate and confer<sup>3</sup>  
Their state affairs. So thick the aery crowd  
775 Swarmed and were straitened; till the signal giv'n,  
Behold a wonder! They but now who seemed  
In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons  
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room  
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race  
780 Beyond the Indian mount,<sup>4</sup> or fairy elves,  
Whose midnight revels, by a forest side  
Or fountain some belated peasant sees,  
Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon  
Sits arbitress,<sup>o</sup> and nearer to the earth  
785 Wheels her pale course: they on their mirth and  
dance  
Intent, with jocund<sup>o</sup> music charm his ear;<sup>5</sup>  
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.  
Thus incorporeal Spirits to smallest forms  
Reduced their shapes immense, and were at large,  
790 Though without number still amidst the hall  
Of that infernal court. But far within  
And in their own dimensions like themselves

The great Seraphic Lords and Cherubim  
 In close recess and secret conclave sat,  
 A thousand demigods on golden seats,  
 Frequent and full.<sup>6</sup> After short silence then  
 And summons read, the great consult<sup>7</sup> began.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *Paradise Lost* appeared originally without any sort of prose aid to the reader, but the printer asked Milton for some "Arguments," or summary explanations of the action in the various books, and these were prefixed to later issues of the poem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: According to Horace, the epic poet should begin "in medias res."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, of the earth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Church Fathers, the Christian writers of the first centuries.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, what action to take.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 1: Eve's apple, and all the consequences of eating it. This first proem (lines 1–26) combines the epic statement of theme and invocation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Christ, the second Adam.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Greek mythology, Urania, Muse of astronomy; here, however, by the references to Oreb (Horeb) and Sinai (following), identified with the Muse who inspired Moses ("that shepherd") to write Genesis and the other four books of the Pentateuch for the instruction of the Jews ("the chosen seed").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Mount Zion: the site of Solomon's Temple. "Siloa's brook" (next line): a spring near the Temple where Christ cured a blind man.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Helicon, home of the classical Muses. Milton will attempt to surpass Homer and Virgil.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Paradoxically, Milton vaunts his originality in a translated line from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* 1.2. The allusion also challenges the romantic epic in Ariosto's tradition.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Here identified with God's creating power.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A composite of phrases and ideas from Genesis 1:2 ("And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"). Only a small number of Milton's many allusions to the Bible (in many versions) can be indicated in the notes. Milton's brooding dove image comes from the Latin (Tremellius) Bible version, *incubabat*, "incubated."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An opening question like this is an epic convention.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A mythical substance of great hardness.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Extent of time.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The phrase alludes to Dante ("All hope abandon, ye who enter here").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Milton makes use of various images of the cosmos in *Paradise Lost*: (1) the earth is the center of the (Ptolemaic) cosmos of ten concentric spheres; (2) the earth and the whole cosmos are an appendage hanging from Heaven by a golden chain; (3) the cosmos seems Copernican from the angels' perspective (see Book 8). Here, the fall from Heaven to Hell is described as thrice as far as the distance from the center (earth) to the outermost sphere.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A Phoenician deity, or Baal (the name means "Lord of Flies"). He is called the prince of devils in Matthew 12:24. As with the other fallen angels, his angelic name has been obliterated, and he is now called by the name he will bear as a pagan deity. That literary strategy evokes all the evil associations attaching to those names in human history.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: In Hebrew the name means “adversary.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Alludes to Isaiah 14:12: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the morning.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, what else does it mean not to be overcome?  
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A term commonly used in the poem for angels. But to Satan and his followers it means more, as Satan claims the position of a god, subject to fate but nothing else. Their substance is “empyrean” (next line), of the empyrean.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: According to tradition, there were nine orders of angels, arranged hierarchically—seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, and angels. The poem makes use of some of these titles but does not keep this hierarchy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Five of the last nine lines of Satan’s speech rhyme.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An old unit of measure, between six and eight yards.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Both the Titans, led by Briareos (said to have had a hundred hands), and the earth-born Giants, represented by Typhon (who lived in Cilicea near Tarsus and was said to have had a hundred heads), fought with Jove. They were punished by being thrown into the underworld. Christian mythographers found in these stories an analogy to Satan’s revolt and punishment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The whale, often identified with the great sea monster and enemy of the Lord in Isaiah 17:1 and the crocodile-like dragon of Job 41. Both were also identified with Satan.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The story of the deceived sailor and the illusory island was a commonplace, but the reference to Norway suggests a 16th-century version by Olaus Magnus, a Swedish historian.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Pelorus and Etna are volcanic mountains in Sicily.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Compare Satan's soliloquy, 4.32–113.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, because he desires this place.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An ironic echo of *Odyssey* 11.489–91, where the shade of Achilles tells Odysseus that it is better to be a farmhand on earth than king among the dead.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The epithet "oblivious" is transferred from the fallen angels to the pool into which they have fallen.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, tempered in celestial fire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Galileo, who looked through a telescope ("optic glass") from the hill town of Fiesole, outside Florence, in the valley of the Arno River ("Valdarno," val d'Arno, line 290). In 1610 he published a book describing the mountains on the moon.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The name means "shady valley" and refers to a region high in the Apennines, about twenty miles from Florence, in Tuscany ("Etruria"). Similes comparing the numberless dead to falling leaves are frequent in epic (for example, *Aeneid* 6.309–10).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Orion is a constellation whose rising near sunset in late summer and autumn was associated with storms in the Red Sea.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Mythical Egyptian pharaoh, whom Milton associates with the pharaoh of Exodus 14, who pursued the Israelites ("sojourners of Goshen," line 309) into the Red Sea, which God parted for them. His "chivalry" (following) are horsemen from Memphis.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The double negatives make a positive: they did perceive both plight and pain.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Moses, who drew down a plague of locusts on Egypt (Exodus 10:12–15).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A first use of this description of Satan as an Oriental despot.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The barbarian invasions of Rome began with crossings of the Rhine ("Rhene") and Danube ("Danaw") rivers and spread across Spain, via Gibraltar, to North Africa.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The catalogue of gods here is an epic convention; Homer catalogues ships; Virgil, warriors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The first group of devils come from the Middle East, close neighbors of Jehovah "throned" in his sanctuary in Jerusalem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Golden cherubim adorned opposite ends of the gold cover on the Ark of the Covenant.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Moloch was a sun god, sometimes represented as a roaring bull or with a calf's head, within whose brazen image living children were supposedly burned as sacrifices.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Ammonites lived east of the Jordan River. "Rabba" (next line) is modern Amman, in Jordan; "Argob," "Basan," "utmost Arnon" (lines 398–99) are lands east of the Dead Sea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The rites of Moloch on "that opprobrious hill" (the Mount of Olives), just opposite the Jewish temple, and in the valley of Hinnom so polluted those places that they were turned into the refuse dump of Jerusalem. Under the name "Tophet" and "Gehenna," Hinnom became a type of Hell.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Chemos, or Chemosh, associated with Moloch in 1 Kings 11:7, was the god of the Moabites, whose lands (many drawn from Isaiah 15–16) are mentioned in the following lines.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Dead Sea.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The story of Peor seducing the Israelites in Sittim is told in Numbers 25.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Mount of Olives, where Solomon built temples for Chemos and Moloch (1 Kings 11:7); epithets were commonly



attached to the names of gods, as in the next line, Moloch “homicide.” Josiah (following line) destroyed pagan idols in Jerusalem and other cities (2 Chronicles 34).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Palestine lies between the Euphrates and “the brook Besor” (1 Samuel 30:10).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plural forms, masculine and feminine, respectively, denoting aspects of the sun god Baal and the moon goddess Astarte (called “Astareth” in line 438, below).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sidon and Tyre were the chief cities of Phoenicia.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Mount of Olives again. “That uxorious king” (next line) is Solomon, who “loved many strange women” (2 Kings 11:1–8).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A Syrian god, supposedly killed by a boar in Lebanon; his Greek form was Adonis, beloved of Aphrodite and god of the solar year. Annual festivals mourned his death and celebrated his revival as signifying the death and rebirth of vegetation.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Here, the Lebanese river named for the deity because every spring it turned bloodred from sedimentary mud.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The prophet complained that Jewish women were worshipping Thammuz (Ezekiel 8:14).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: When the Philistines stole the ark of God, they placed it in the temple of their sea god, Dagon, but in the morning the mutilated statue of Dagon was found on the threshold (“grunsel edge”) (1 Samuel 5:1–5).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The five chief cities of the Philistines, sites of Dagon’s worship.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A Phoenician god whose temple was in Damascus.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A Syrian general, Naaman, was cured of leprosy and converted from worship of Rimmon by the waters of the Jordan (2 Kings 5), while King Ahaz, an Israelite monarch who



conquered Damascus, was converted there to Rimmon's worship.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The second group of devils includes the Egyptian gods driven from Heaven by the revolt of the giants (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5) and forced to wander in "monstrous" (next line) animal disguises.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the wilderness of Egypt, while Moses was receiving the Law, Aaron made a golden calf, thought to be an idol of the Egyptian god Apis and made of ornaments brought out of Egypt (Exodus 32).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Jeroboam, "the rebel king" who led the ten tribes of Israel in revolt against Solomon's son, Rehoboam; he doubled Aaron's sin by making two golden calves (1 Kings 12:25–30).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Jehovah smote the firstborn of all Egyptian families as well as their gods (Exodus 12:12).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Belial was never worshipped as a god; his name means "wickedness," but its use in phrases like "sons of Belial" encouraged personification.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Priests who were termed "sons of Belial" because they seized for themselves offerings made to God and lay with women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:12–22).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This passage, with its present-tense verbs, invites application to current examples—at court and in Restoration London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lot begged the Sodomites to rape his daughters rather than his (male) angel guests (Genesis 19); in Gibeah a Levite avoided "worse" (homosexual) rape by surrendering his concubine to riotous "sons of Belial" (Judges 19:21–30).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Ionian Greeks ("Javan's issue," that is, of the line of Javan, grandson of Noah) regarded the Titans as gods; their supposed parents were Heaven (Uranus) and Earth (Gaia).[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The Titan Cronos, or Saturn, deposed his father, married his sister Rhea, and ruled until he was deposed by his son, Zeus (Jove), who had been reared in secret on Mount Ida in Crete.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Zeus and the other Olympian gods had their seat on Mount Olympus, in “middle air”; they were worshipped in Delphi, Dodona, and throughout Greece (“Doric lands”).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Saturn, after his downfall, fled over “Adria” (the Adriatic Sea) to the “Hesperian fields” (Italy), crossed the “Celtic” fields of France, and thence to Britain, the “utmost isles.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Satan’s face reflected the same mixed emotions.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Traditionally, one of the four standard-bearers in Satan’s army. “Clarions” (line 532): small, shrill trumpets.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Their flags bear the heraldic arms of the various orders of angels and memorials of their battles.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In *Paradise Lost* 2.894–909, 959–70 Chaos and Night rule the region of unformed matter between Heaven and earth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Severe, martial music used by the Spartans marching to battle. “Phalanx”: battle formation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, since the creation of man.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pygmies (little people, with a pun, in “infantry” on “infants”) had periodic fights with the cranes, in Pliny’s account. Compared with Satan’s forces, all other armies are puny.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Greek mythology, the Giants fought the gods at Phlegra in Macedonia; in Roman myth, it was at Phlegra in Italy. Satan’s forces surpass them, even if joined with the Seven who fought against Thebes and the whole Greek host that besieged Troy (“Ilium”).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Satan’s forces also surpass the “British and Armoric” (from Brittany) knights who fought with King Arthur (“Uther’s

son”) and all the romance knights who fought at the famous named sites in the following lines. Roncesvalles, near Fontarabia, was the place where Charlemagne’s “peerage,” including his best knight, Roland, were defeated in battle (though not Charlemagne himself).[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: *Forma* in Latin is feminine.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Like Roman legionnaires, the fallen angels applaud by beating swords on shields.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sulfur and mercury were considered the basic substances of all metals.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “Mammon,” an abstract word for riches, came to be personified and associated with the god of wealth, Plutus, and so with Pluto, god of the underworld. See Matthew 6:24: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Tower of Babel and the pyramids of Egypt.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: After melting the gold with fire from the lake and pouring it into molds, the devils cause their building to rise as by magic, to the sounds of marvelous music.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Doric pillars are severe and plain. The devils’ palace combines classical architectural features with elaborate ornamentation, suggesting, perhaps, St. Peter’s in Rome.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: At Babylon, in Assyria, there were temples to “Belus” or Baal; at Alcairo (modern Cairo, ancient Memphis), in Egypt, they were to Osiris (“Serapis”).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Basketlike lamps, hung from the ceiling.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hephaestus, or Vulcan, was sometimes known in “Ausonian land” (Italy) as “Mulciber.” The story of Jove’s tossing him out of Heaven (see following lines) is told in Book 1 of the *Iliad*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: “Pandemonium” (a Miltonic coinage) means literally “all demons,” an inversion of “pantheon,” “all gods.”[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The sun is in the zodiacal sign of Taurus from about April 19 to May 20.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spread out and discuss. Bee similes were common in epic from Homer on; also, the bees' (royalist) society was often cited in political argument. The simile prepares for the sudden contraction of the devils, who can shrink or dilate at will.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The pygmies were supposed to live beyond the Himalayas.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The belated peasant's.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Crowded together, and in full complement.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Consultation, often secret and seditious.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *deadly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *subject, theme*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *show the justice of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *because of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *when*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *equals*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *malignant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *range of sight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always provokes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rolling in the waves*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thunderbolt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of uncertain outcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intense consideration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feared for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cease to exist*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *comrade*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *necessarily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *err*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *calmed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *let slip*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bluish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *armies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harm, vex*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as those whom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overcome by night*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *out of the wind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *covers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *points of flames*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreadful, bristling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resting on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alights*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vaporized*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enveloped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Styxlike, hellish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permission*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *estate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *barely less than*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *front lines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *admiral's ship*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nevertheless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flaming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form bowers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seaweed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strength, valor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *battle flags*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swarming*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *roof*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *erased*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *showy rites*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one at a time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mixed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tambourines*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leveled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flushed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depressed, dazed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trumpets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lustrous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pushed close together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assuage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bristling with spears*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *across*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *composed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obeyed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on the horizon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill-starred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *furrowed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conscious, deliberate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compassion, pain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *damaged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *potent, powerful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contradictory*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *rumor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *breaking out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *covert* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crust* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *military engineers* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wonder* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poison* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *melted* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separating* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boiling dregs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *columns set in a wall* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *embossed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *richly ornamented* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complete* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *at once* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reveal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nobles* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rank* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *election* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sultan's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pagan* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *witness* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *merry* [Return to reference °](#)

## Book 2

### *The Argument*

The consultation begun, Satan debates whether another battle be to be hazarded for the recovery of heaven: some advise it, others dissuade: a third proposal is preferred, mentioned before by Satan, to search the truth of that prophecy or tradition in heaven concerning another world, and another kind of creature equal or not much inferior to themselves, about this time to be created: their doubt who shall be sent on this difficult search; Satan their chief undertakes alone the voyage, is honored and applauded. The council thus ended, the rest betake them several ways and to several employments, as their inclinations lead them, to entertain the time till Satan return. He passes on his journey to hell gates, finds them shut, and who sat there to guard them, by whom at length they are opened, and discover to him the great gulf between hell and heaven; with what difficulty he passes through, directed by Chaos, the power of that place, to the sight of this new world which he sought.

High on a throne of royal state, which far  
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,<sup>1</sup>  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
Show'rs on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,  
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised  
5 To that bad eminence; and from despair  
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires  
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue  
Vain war with Heav'n, and by success<sup>o</sup> untaught  
His proud imaginations<sup>o</sup> thus displayed.  
10 "Powers and Dominions,<sup>2</sup> deities of Heaven,



For since no deep within her gulf can hold  
Immortal vigor, though oppressed and fall'n,  
I give not Heav'n for lost. From this descent  
Celestial Virtues rising, will appear  
15 More glorious and more dread than from no fall,  
And trust themselves to fear no second fate.  
Me though just right, and the fixed laws of Heav'n  
Did first create your leader, next, free choice,  
With what besides, in counsel or in fight,  
20 Hath been achieved of merit, yet this loss  
Thus far at least recovered, hath much more  
Established in a safe unenvied throne  
Yielded with full consent. The happier state  
In Heav'n, which follows dignity, might draw  
25 Envy from each inferior; but who here  
Will envy whom the highest place exposes  
Foremost to stand against the Thunderer's aim  
Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share  
Of endless pain? Where there is then no good  
30 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there  
From faction; for none sure will claim in Hell  
Precédence, none, whose portion is so small  
Of present pain, that with ambitious mind  
Will covet more. With this advantage then  
35 To union, and firm faith, and firm accord,  
More than can be in Heav'n, we now return  
To claim our just inheritance of old,  
Surer to prosper than prosperity  
Could have assured us;<sup>3</sup> and by what best way,  
40 Whether of open war or covert guile,<sup>4</sup>  
We now debate; who can advise, may speak."  
He ceased, and next him Moloch, sceptered king  
Stood up, the strongest and the fiercest Spirit  
That fought in Heav'n; now fiercer by despair:  
45 His trust was with th' Eternal to be deemed

Equal in strength, and rather than be less  
Cared not to be at all; with that care lost  
Went all his fear: of God, or Hell, or worse  
He recked<sup>o</sup> not, and these words thereafter spake.  
50     “My sentence<sup>o</sup> is for open war: of wiles,  
More unexpért,<sup>o</sup> I boast not: them let those  
Contrive who need, or when they need, not now.  
For while they sit contriving, shall the rest,  
Millions that stand in arms, and longing wait  
55     The signal to ascend, sit lingering here  
Heav’n’s fugitives, and for their dwelling place  
Accept this dark opprobrious den of shame,  
The prison of his tyranny who reigns  
By our delay? No, let us rather choose  
60     Armed with Hell flames and fury all at once  
O’er Heav’n’s high tow’rs to force resistless way,  
Turning our tortures into horrid<sup>o</sup> arms  
Against the Torturer; when to meet the noise  
Of his almighty engine<sup>o</sup> he shall hear  
65     Infernal thunder, and for lightning see  
Black fire and horror shot with equal rage  
Among his angels; and his throne itself  
Mixed with Tartarean<sup>5</sup> sulfur, and strange fire,  
His own invented torments. But perhaps  
70     The way seems difficult and steep to scale  
With upright wing against a higher foe.  
Let such bethink them, if the sleepy drench<sup>o</sup>  
Of that forgetful<sup>o</sup> lake benumb not still,  
That in our proper<sup>o</sup> motion we ascend  
75     Up to our native seat: descent and fall  
To us is adverse. Who but felt of late  
When the fierce foe hung on our broken rear  
Insulting,<sup>6</sup> and pursued us through the deep,  
With what compulsion and laborious flight  
80     We sunk thus low? Th’ ascent is easy then;

Th' event<sup>o</sup> is feared; should we again provoke  
Our stronger, some worse way his wrath may find  
To our destruction: if there be in Hell  
Fear to be worse destroyed: what can be worse  
85 Than to dwell here, driven out from bliss,  
condemned  
In this abhorrèd deep to utter woe;  
Where pain of unextinguishable fire  
Must exercise<sup>o</sup> us without hope of end  
The vassals<sup>7</sup> of his anger, when the scourge  
90 Inexorably, and the torturing hour  
Calls us to penance? More destroyed than thus  
We should be quite abolished and expire.  
What fear we then? What<sup>o</sup> doubt we to incense  
His utmost ire? which to the height enraged,  
95 Will either quite consume us, and reduce  
To nothing this essential,<sup>o</sup> happier far  
Than miserable to have eternal being:  
Or if our substance be indeed divine,  
And cannot cease to be, we are at worst  
100 On this side nothing;<sup>8</sup> and by proof we feel  
Our power sufficient to disturb his Heav'n,  
And with perpetual inroads to alarm,  
Though inaccessible, his fatal<sup>9</sup> throne:  
Which if not victory is yet revenge."  
105 He ended frowning, and his look, denounced<sup>o</sup>  
Desperate revenge, and battle dangerous  
To less than gods. On th' other side up rose  
Belial, in act more graceful and humane;<sup>o</sup>  
A fairer person lost not Heav'n; he seemed  
110 For dignity composed and high exploit:  
But all was false and hollow; though his tongue  
Dropped manna, and could make the worse appear  
The better reason,<sup>1</sup> to perplex and dash<sup>o</sup>  
Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low;

115 To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds  
Timorous and slothful: yet he pleased the ear,  
And with persuasive accent thus began.  
    "I should be much for open war, O Peers,  
As not behind in hate; if what was urged  
120 Main reason to persuade immediate war,  
Did not dissuade me most, and seem to cast  
Ominous conjecture on the whole success:  
When he who most excels in fact<sup>o</sup> of arms,  
In what he counsels and in what excels  
125 Mistrustful, grounds his courage on despair  
And utter dissolution, as the scope  
Of all his aim, after some dire revenge.  
First, what revenge? The tow'rs of Heav'n are filled  
With armèd watch, that render all access  
130 Impregnable; oft on the bordering deep  
Encamp their legions, or with óbscure wing  
Scout far and wide into the realm of Night,  
Scorning surprise. Or could we break our way  
By force, and at our heels all Hell should rise  
135 With blackest insurrection, to confound  
Heav'n's purest light, yet our great enemy  
All incorruptible would on his throne  
Sit unpolluted, and th' ethereal mold<sup>2</sup>  
Incapable of stain would soon expel  
140 Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire  
Victorious. Thus repulsed, our final hope  
Is flat despair: we must exasperate  
Th' almighty victor to spend all his rage,  
And that must end us, that must be our cure,  
145 To be no more; sad cure; for who would lose,  
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,  
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,  
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost  
In the wide womb of uncreated night,  
150

Devoid of sense and motion? And who knows,  
Let this be good, whether our angry foe  
Can give it, or will ever? How he can  
Is doubtful; that he never will is sure.  
Will he, so wise, let loose at once his ire,  
155 Belike<sup>o</sup> through impotence, or unaware,  
To give his enemies their wish, and end  
Them in his anger, whom his anger saves  
To punish endless? 'Wherefore cease we then?'  
Say they who counsel war, 'We are decreed,  
160 Reserved and destined to eternal woe;  
Whatever doing, what can we suffer more,  
What can we suffer worse?' Is this then worst,  
Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms?  
What when we fled amain,<sup>o</sup> pursued and strook<sup>o</sup>  
165 With Heav'n's afflicting thunder, and besought  
The deep to shelter us? This Hell then seemed  
A refuge from those wounds. Or when we lay  
Chained on the burning lake? That sure was worse.  
What if the breath that kindled those grim fires  
170 Awaked should blow them into sevenfold rage  
And plunge us in the flames? Or from above  
Should intermitted<sup>o</sup> vengeance arm again  
His red right hand to plague us? What if all  
Her<sup>o</sup> stores were opened, and this firmament<sup>o</sup>  
175 Of Hell should spout her cataracts<sup>o</sup> of fire,  
Impendent<sup>3</sup> horrors, threat'ning hideous fall  
One day upon our heads; while we perhaps  
Designing or exhorting glorious war,  
Caught in a fiery tempest shall be hurled  
180 Each on his rock transfixed, the sport and prey  
Of racking whirlwinds, or forever sunk  
Under yon boiling ocean, wrapped in chains;  
There to converse with everlasting groans,  
Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved,  
185

Ages of hopeless end; this would be worse.  
War therefore, open or concealed, alike  
My voice dissuades; for what can force or guile<sup>4</sup>  
With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye  
Views all things at one view? He from Heav'n's high  
190 All these our motions<sup>o</sup> vain, sees and derides;  
Not more almighty to resist our might  
Than wise to frustrate all our plots and wiles.  
Shall we then live thus vile, the race of Heav'n  
Thus trampled, thus expelled to suffer here  
195 Chains and these torments? Better these than worse  
By my advice; since fate inevitable  
Subdues us, and omnipotent decree,  
The victor's will. To suffer, as to do,  
Our strength is equal, nor the law unjust  
200 That so ordains: this was at first resolved,  
If we were wise, against so great a foe  
Contending, and so doubtful what might fall.  
I laugh, when those who at the spear are bold  
And vent'rous, if that fail them, shrink and fear  
205 What yet they know must follow, to endure  
Exile, or ignominy, or bonds, or pain,  
The sentence of their conqueror: This is now  
Our doom; which if we can sustain and bear,  
Our Súpreme Foe in time may much remit  
210 His anger, and perhaps thus far removed  
Not mind us not offending, satisfied  
With what is punished; whence these raging fires  
Will slacken, if his breath stir not their flames.  
Our purer essence then will overcome  
215 Their noxious vapor, or inured<sup>o</sup> not feel,  
Or changed at length, and to the place conformed  
In temper and in nature, will receive  
Familiar the fierce heat, and void of pain;  
This horror will grow mild, this darkness light,  
220

Besides what hope the never-ending flight  
Of future days may bring, what chance, what change  
Worth waiting, since our present lot appears  
For happy though but ill, for ill not worst,<sup>5</sup>  
If we procure not to ourselves more woe.”  
225       Thus Belial, with words clothed in reason’s garb,  
Counseled ignoble ease and peaceful sloth,  
Not peace: and after him thus Mammon spake.  
“Either to disenthroned the King of Heav’n  
We war, if war be best, or to regain  
230       Our own right lost: him to unthroned we then  
May hope when everlasting Fate shall yield  
To fickle Chance, and Chaos judge the strife:  
The former vain to hope argues<sup>o</sup> as vain  
The latter: for what place can be for us  
235       Within Heav’n’s bound, unless Heav’n’s Lord supreme  
We overpower? Suppose he should relent  
And publish grace to all, on promise made  
Of new subjection; with what eyes could we  
Stand in his presence humble, and receive  
240       Strict laws imposed, to celebrate his throne  
With warbled hymns, and to his Godhead sing  
Forced hallelujahs; while he lordly sits  
Our envied Sov’reign, and his altar breathes  
Ambrosial<sup>o</sup> odors and ambrosial flowers,  
245       Our servile offerings. This must be our task  
In Heav’n, this our delight; how wearisome  
Eternity so spent in worship paid  
To whom we hate. Let us not then pursue  
By force impossible, by leave obtained  
250       Unacceptable, though in Heav’n, our state  
Of splendid vassalage,<sup>o</sup> but rather seek  
Our own good from ourselves, and from our own  
Live to ourselves, though in this vast recess,  
Free, and to none accountable, preferring  
255

Hard liberty before the easy yoke  
Of servile pomp. Our greatness will appear  
Then most conspicuous, when great things of small,  
Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse  
We can create, and in what place soe'er  
260 Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain  
Through labor and endurance. This deep world  
Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst  
Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'n's all-ruling Sire  
Choose to reside, his glory unobscured,  
265 And with the majesty of darkness round  
Covers his throne; from whence deep thunders roar  
Must'ring their rage, and Heav'n resembles Hell?  
As he our darkness, cannot we his light  
Imitate when we please? This desert soil  
270 Wants<sup>o</sup> not her hidden luster, gems and gold;  
Nor want we skill or art, from whence to raise  
Magnificence; and what can Heav'n show more?  
Our torments also may in length of time  
Become our elements, these piercing fires  
275 As soft as now severe, our temper<sup>o</sup> changed  
Into their temper; which must needs remove  
The sensible of pain.<sup>6</sup> All things invite  
To peaceful counsels, and the settled state  
Of order, how in safety best we may  
280 Compose<sup>o</sup> our present evils, with regard  
Of what we are and where, dismissing quite  
All thoughts of war: ye have what I advise."  
He scarce had finished, when such murmur filled  
Th' assembly, as when hollow rocks retain  
285 The sound of blust'ring winds, which all night long  
Had roused the sea, now with hoarse cadence lull  
Seafaring men o'erwatched,<sup>o</sup> whose bark by chance  
Or pinnace<sup>o</sup> anchors in a craggy bay  
After the tempest: such applause was heard  
290



As Mammon ended, and his sentence pleased,  
Advising peace: for such another field<sup>o</sup>  
They dreaded worse than Hell: so much the fear  
Of thunder and the sword of Michaël<sup>7</sup>  
Wrought still within them; and no less desire  
295 To found this nether empire, which might rise  
By policy,<sup>o</sup> and long process of time,  
In emulation opposite to Heav'n.  
Which then Beëlzebub perceived, than whom,  
Satan except, none higher sat, with grave  
300 Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemed  
A pillar of state; deep on his front<sup>o</sup> engraven  
Deliberation sat and public care;  
And princely counsel in his face yet shone,  
Majestic though in ruin: sage he stood  
305 With Atlantean<sup>8</sup> shoulders fit to bear  
The weight of mightiest monarchies; his look  
Drew audience and attention still as night  
Or summer's noontide air, while thus he spake.  
"Thrones and imperial Powers, offspring of Heav'n  
310 Ethereal Virtues; or these titles<sup>9</sup> now  
Must we renounce, and changing style<sup>o</sup> be called  
Princes of Hell? for so the popular vote  
Inclines, here to continue, and build up here  
A growing empire. Doubtless! while we dream,  
315 And know not that the King of Heav'n hath doomed  
This place our dungeon, not our safe retreat  
Beyond his potent arm, to live exempt  
From Heav'n's high jurisdiction, in new league  
Banded against his throne, but to remain  
320 In strictest bondage, though thus far removed,  
Under th' inevitable curb, reserved  
His captive multitude: for he, be sure,  
In height or depth, still first and last will reign  
Sole King, and of his kingdom lose no part  
325

By our revolt, but over Hell extend  
His empire, and with iron scepter rule  
Us here, as with his golden those in Heav'n.  
What<sup>o</sup> sit we then projecting peace and war?  
War hath determined us,<sup>1</sup> and foiled with loss  
330 Irreparable; terms of peace yet none  
Vouchsafed<sup>o</sup> or sought; for what peace will be giv'n  
To us enslaved, but custody severe,  
And stripes, and arbitrary punishment  
Inflicted? And what peace can we return,  
335 But, to our power,<sup>2</sup> hostility and hate,  
Untamed reluctance,<sup>o</sup> and revenge though slow,  
Yet ever plotting how the conqueror least  
May reap his conquest, and may least rejoice  
In doing what we most in suffering feel?  
340 Nor will occasion want,<sup>o</sup> nor shall we need  
With dangerous expedition to invade  
Heav'n, whose high walls fear no assault or siege,  
Or ambush from the deep. What if we find  
Some easier enterprise? There is a place  
345 (If ancient and prophetic fame<sup>o</sup> in Heav'n  
Err not) another world, the happy seat  
Of some new race called Man, about this time  
To be created like to us, though less  
In power and excellence, but favored more  
350 Of him who rules above; so was his will  
Pronounced among the gods, and by an oath,  
That shook Heav'n's whole circumference, confirmed.  
Thither let us bend all our thoughts, to learn  
What creatures there inhabit, of what mold,  
355 Or substance, how endued,<sup>o</sup> and what their power,  
And where their weakness, how attempted<sup>o</sup> best,  
By force or subtlety. Though Heav'n be shut,  
And Heav'n's high arbitrator sit secure  
In his own strength, this place may lie exposed,  
360

The utmost border of his kingdom, left  
To their defense who hold it:<sup>3</sup> here perhaps  
Some advantageous act may be achieved  
By sudden onset, either with hellfire  
To waste<sup>o</sup> his whole creation, or possess  
365 All as our own, and drive as we were driven,  
The puny habitants, or if not drive,  
Seduce them to our party, that their God  
May prove their foe, and with repenting hand  
370 Abolish his own works.<sup>4</sup> This would surpass  
Common revenge, and interrupt his joy  
In our confusion, and our joy upraise  
In his disturbance; when his darling sons  
Hurled headlong to partake with us, shall curse  
Their frail original,<sup>o</sup> and faded bliss,  
375 Faded so soon. Advise<sup>o</sup> if this be worth  
Attempting, or to sit in darkness here  
Hatching vain empires." Thus Beëlzebub  
Pleaded his devilish counsel, first devised  
By Satan, and in part proposed: for whence,  
380 But from the author of all ill could spring  
So deep a malice, to confound<sup>o</sup> the race  
Of mankind in one root,<sup>5</sup> and earth with Hell  
To mingle and involve, done all to spite  
The great Creator? But their spite still serves  
385 His glory to augment. The bold design  
Pleased highly those infernal States,<sup>o</sup> and joy  
Sparkled in all their eyes; with full assent  
They vote: whereat his speech he thus renews.  
"Well have ye judged, well ended long debate,  
390 Synod of gods, and like to what ye are,  
Great things resolved, which from the lowest deep  
Will once more lift us up, in spite of fate,  
Nearer our ancient seat; perhaps in view

395

Of those bright confines, whence with neighboring  
arms  
And opportune excursion we may chance  
Reenter Heav'n; or else in some mild zone  
Dwell not unvisited of Heav'n's fair light  
Secure, and at the bright'ning orient<sup>o</sup> beam  
Purge off this gloom; the soft delicious air,  
400 To heal the scar of these corrosive fires  
Shall breathe her balm. But first whom shall we send  
In search of this new world, whom shall we find  
Sufficient? Who shall tempt<sup>o</sup> with wand'ring feet  
The dark unbottomed infinite abyss  
405 And through the palpable obscure<sup>6</sup> find out  
His uncouth<sup>o</sup> way, or spread his aery flight  
Upborne with indefatigable wings  
Over the vast abrupt,<sup>7</sup> ere he arrive  
The happy isle? What strength, what art can then  
410 Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe  
Through the strict senteries<sup>o</sup> and stations thick  
Of angels watching round? Here he had need  
All circumspection, and we now no less  
Choice<sup>o</sup> in our suffrage; for on whom we send,  
415 The weight of all and our last hope relies."  
This said, he sat; and expectation held  
His look suspense,<sup>8</sup> awaiting who appeared  
To second, or oppose, or undertake  
The perilous attempt: but all sat mute,  
420 Pondering the danger with deep thoughts; and each  
In other's count'nance read his own dismay  
Astonished. None among the choice and prime  
Of those Heav'n-warring champions could be found  
So hardy as to proffer or accept  
425 Alone the dreadful voyage; till at last  
Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised  
Above his fellows, with monarchal pride

Conscious of highest worth, unmoved thus spake.  
430 "O progeny of Heav'n, empyreal Thrones,  
With reason hath deep silence and demur<sup>o</sup>  
Seized us, though undismayed: long is the way  
And hard, that out of Hell leads up to light;  
Our prison strong, this huge convex of fire,  
435 Outrageous to devour, immures us round  
Ninefold,<sup>9</sup> and gates of burning adamant  
Barred over us prohibit all egress.  
These passed, if any pass, the void profound  
Of unessential Night receives him next  
440 Wide gaping, and with utter loss of being  
Threatens him, plunged in that abortive gulf.<sup>1</sup>  
If thence he scape into whatever world,  
Or unknown region, what remains him less<sup>o</sup>  
Than unknown dangers and as hard escape?  
445 But I should ill become this throne, O Peers,  
And this imperial sov'reignty, adorned  
With splendor, armed with power, if aught proposed  
And judged of public moment,<sup>o</sup> in the shape  
Of difficulty or danger could deter  
450 Me from attempting. Wherefore do I assume  
These royalties, and not refuse to reign,  
Refusing<sup>o</sup> to accept as great a share  
Of hazard as of honor, due alike  
To him who reigns, and so much to him due  
Of hazard more, as he above the rest  
455 High honored sits? Go therefore mighty Powers,  
Terror of Heav'n, though fall'n; intend<sup>o</sup> at home,  
While here shall be our home, what best may ease  
The present misery, and render Hell  
More tolerable; if there be cure or charm  
460 To respite or deceive, or slack the pain  
Of this ill mansion: intermit no watch  
Against a wakeful foe, while I abroad

Through all the coasts<sup>o</sup> of dark destruction seek  
Deliverance for us all: this enterprise  
465 None shall partake with me." Thus saying rose  
The monarch, and prevented<sup>o</sup> all reply,  
Prudent, lest from his resolution raised<sup>o</sup>  
Others among the chief might offer now  
(Certain to be refused) what erst<sup>o</sup> they feared;  
470 And so refused might in opinion stand  
His rivals, winning cheap the high repute  
Which he through hazard huge must earn. But they  
Dreaded not more th' adventure than his voice  
Forbidding; and at once with him they rose;  
475 Their rising all at once was as the sound  
Of thunder heard remote. Towards him they bend  
With awful<sup>o</sup> reverence prone; and as a god  
Extol him equal to the Highest in Heav'n:  
Nor failed they to express how much they praised,  
480 That for the general safety he despised  
His own: for neither do the Spirits damned  
Lose all their virtue; lest bad men should boast  
Their specious<sup>o</sup> deeds on earth, which glory excites,  
Or close<sup>o</sup> ambition varnished o'er with zeal.  
485     Thus they their doubtful consultations dark  
Ended rejoicing in their matchless chief:  
As when from mountaintops the dusky clouds  
Ascending, while the north wind sleeps, o'erspread  
Heav'n's cheerful face, the louring element<sup>o</sup>  
490 Scowls o'er the darkened landscape snow, or show'r;  
If chance the radiant sun with farewell sweet  
Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,  
The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds  
Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings.  
495 O shame to men! Devil with devil damned  
Firm concord holds, men only disagree  
Of creatures rational, though under hope  
Of heavenly grace: and God proclaiming peace,

500 Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife  
Among themselves, and levy cruel wars,  
Wasting the earth, each other to destroy:  
As if (which might induce us to accord)  
Man had not hellish foes enow<sup>o</sup> besides,  
That day and night for his destruction wait.

505 The Stygian<sup>o</sup> council thus dissolved; and forth  
In order came the grand infernal peers:  
Midst came their mighty paramount,<sup>o</sup> and seemed  
Alone th' antagonist of Heav'n, nor less  
Than Hell's dread emperor with pomp supreme,  
510 And godlike imitated state; him round  
A globe<sup>o</sup> of fiery Seraphim enclosed  
With bright emblazonry and horrent<sup>2</sup> arms.  
Then of their session ended they bid cry  
With trumpet's regal sound the great result:

515 Toward the four winds four speedy Cherubim  
Put to their mouths the sounding alchemy<sup>3</sup>  
By herald's voice explained; the hollow abyss  
Heard far and wide, and all the host of Hell  
With deaf'ning shout, returned them loud acclaim.

520 Thence more at ease their minds and somewhat  
raised  
By false presumptuous hope, the rangèd<sup>o</sup> powers  
Disband, and wand'ring, each his several way  
Pursues, as inclination or sad choice  
Leads him perplexed, where he may likeliest find

525 Truce to his restless thoughts, and entertain  
The irksome hours, till his great chief return.  
Part on the plain, or in the air sublime<sup>o</sup>  
Upon the wing, or in swift race contend,  
As at th' Olympian games or Pythian fields;<sup>4</sup>

530 Part curb their fiery steeds, or shun the goal<sup>5</sup>  
With rapid wheels, or fronted<sup>o</sup> brígades form.  
As when to warn proud cities war appears

Waged in the troubled sky, and armies rush  
To battle in the clouds,<sup>6</sup> before each van<sup>o</sup>  
535 Prick<sup>o</sup> forth the aery knights, and couch their spears  
Till thickest legions close; with feats of arms  
From either end of Heav'n the welkin<sup>o</sup> burns.  
Others with vast Typhoean<sup>z</sup> rage more fell<sup>o</sup>  
540 Rend up both rocks and hills, and ride the air  
In whirlwind; Hell scarce holds the wild uproar.  
As when Alcides from Oechalia crowned  
With conquest, felt th' envenomed robe, and tore  
Through pain up by the roots Thessalian pines,  
545 And Lichas from the top of Oeta threw  
Into th' Euboic sea.<sup>8</sup> Others more mild,  
Retreated in a silent valley, sing  
With notes angelical to many a harp  
Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall  
550 By doom of battle; and complain that fate  
Free virtue should enthrall to force or chance.  
Their song was partial,<sup>o</sup> but the harmony  
(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)  
Suspended<sup>o</sup> Hell, and took with ravishment  
555 The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet  
(For eloquence the soul, song charms the sense)  
Others apart sat on a hill retired,  
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high  
Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,  
560 Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,  
And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.  
Of good and evil much they argued then,  
Of happiness and final misery,  
Passion and apathy,<sup>9</sup> and glory and shame,  
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy:  
565 Yet with a pleasing sorcery could charm  
Pain for a while or anguish, and excite  
Fallacious hope, or arm th' obdured<sup>o</sup> breast



With stubborn patience as with triple steel.  
Another part in squadrons and gross<sup>o</sup> bands,  
570 On bold adventure to discover wide  
That dismal world, if any clime perhaps  
Might yield them easier habitation, bend  
Four ways their flying march, along the banks  
Of four infernal rivers that disgorge  
575 Into the burning lake their baleful streams:<sup>1</sup>  
Abhorred Styx the flood of deadly hate,  
Sad Acheron of sorrow, black and deep;  
Cocytus, named of lamentation loud  
Heard on the rueful stream; fierce Phlegethon  
580 Whose waves of torrent fire inflame with rage.  
Far off from these a slow and silent stream,  
Lethe the river of oblivion rolls  
Her wat'ry labyrinth, whereof who drinks,  
Forthwith his former state and being forgets,  
585 Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain.  
Beyond this flood a frozen continent  
Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms  
Of whirlwind and dire hail, which on firm land  
Thaws not, but gathers heap,<sup>2</sup> and ruin seems  
590 Of ancient pile; all else deep snow and ice,  
A gulf profound as that Serbonian bog<sup>3</sup>  
Betwixt Damiata and Mount Casius old,  
Where armies whole have sunk: the parching air  
Burns froze,<sup>o</sup> and cold performs th' effect of fire.  
595 Thither by harpy-footed<sup>4</sup> Furies haled,<sup>o</sup>  
At certain revolutions<sup>o</sup> all the damned  
Are brought: and feel by turns the bitter change  
Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce,  
From beds of raging fire to starve<sup>o</sup> in ice  
600 Their soft ethereal warmth, and there to pine  
Immovable, infixed, and frozen round,  
Periods of time; thence hurried back to fire.

They ferry over this Lethean sound  
Both to and fro, their sorrow to augment,  
605 And wish and struggle, as they pass, to reach  
The tempting stream, with one small drop to lose  
In sweet forgetfulness all pain and woe,  
All in one moment, and so near the brink;  
But fate withstands, and to oppose th' attempt  
610 Medusa<sup>5</sup> with Gorgonian terror guards  
The ford, and of itself the water flies  
All taste of living wight,<sup>o</sup> as once it fled  
The lip of Tantalus.<sup>6</sup> Thus roving on  
In cónfused march forlorn, th' advent'rous bands  
615 With shudd'ring horror pale, and eyes aghast  
Viewed first their lamentable lot, and found  
No rest: through many a dark and dreary vale  
They passed, and many a region dolorous,  
O'er many a frozen, many a fiery alp,<sup>o</sup>  
620 Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of  
death,  
A universe of death, which God by curse  
Created evil, for evil only good,  
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,  
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
625 Abominable, inutterable, and worse  
Than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived,  
Gorgons and Hydras, and Chimeras<sup>7</sup> dire.  
Meanwhile the Adversary<sup>8</sup> of God and man,  
Satan, with thoughts inflamed of highest design,  
630 Puts on swift wings,<sup>o</sup> and towards the gates of Hell  
Explores his solitary flight; sometimes  
He scours the right-hand coast, sometimes the left,  
Now shaves with level wing the deep, then soars  
Up to the fiery concave<sup>o</sup> tow'ring high.  
635 As when far off at sea a fleet descried  
Hangs on the clouds, by equinoctial<sup>o</sup> winds

Close sailing from Bengala,<sup>o</sup> or the isles  
Of Ternate and Tidore,<sup>9</sup> whence merchants bring  
Their spicy drugs: they on the trading flood  
640 Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape  
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole:<sup>1</sup> so seemed  
Far off the flying Fiend. At last appear  
Hell bounds high reaching to the horrid roof,  
And thrice threefold the gates; three folds were  
645 brass,  
Three iron, three of adamantine rock,  
Impenetrable, impaled with circling fire,  
Yet unconsumed. Before the gates there sat  
On either side a formidable shape;<sup>2</sup>  
The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,  
650 But ended foul in many a scaly fold  
Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed  
With mortal sting: about her middle round  
A cry<sup>o</sup> of hellhounds never ceasing barked  
With wide Cerberean<sup>3</sup> mouths full loud, and rung  
655 A hideous peal: yet, when they list,<sup>o</sup> would creep,  
If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb,  
And kennel there, yet there still barked and howled,  
Within unseen. Far less abhorred than these  
Vexed Scylla<sup>4</sup> bathing in the sea that parts  
660 Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore:  
Nor uglier follow the night-hag,<sup>5</sup> when called  
In secret, riding through the air she comes  
Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance  
With Lapland witches, while the laboring<sup>o</sup> moon  
665 Eclipses at their charms.<sup>o</sup> The other shape,  
If shape it might be called that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,  
For each seemed either; black it stood as night,  
670 Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as hell,

And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed his head  
 The likeness of a kingly crown had on.  
 Satan was now at hand, and from his seat  
 The monster moving onward came as fast  
 675 With horrid strides. Hell trembled as he strode.  
 Th' undaunted Fiend what this might be admired,  
 Admired, not feared; God and his Son except,  
 Created thing naught valued he nor shunned;  
 And with disdainful look thus first began.  
 680 "Whence and what art thou, execrable shape,  
 That dar'st, though grim and terrible, advance  
 Thy miscreated front<sup>o</sup> athwart my way  
 To yonder gates? Through them I mean to pass,  
 That be assured, without leave asked of thee:  
 685 Retire, or taste<sup>o</sup> thy folly, and learn by proof,  
 Hell-born, not to contend with Spirits of Heav'n."  
 To whom the goblin full of wrath replied:  
 "Art thou that traitor angel, art thou he,  
 Who first broke peace in Heav'n and faith, till then  
 690 Unbroken, and in proud rebellious arms  
 Drew after him the third part of Heav'n's sons  
 Conjured<sup>o</sup> against the Highest, for which both thou  
 And they outcast from God, are here condemned  
 To waste eternal days in woe and pain?  
 695 And reckon'st thou thyself with Spirits of Heav'n,  
 Hell-doomed, and breath'st defiance here and scorn,  
 Where I reign king, and to enrage thee more,  
 Thy king and lord? Back to thy punishment,  
 False fugitive, and to thy speed add wings,  
 700 Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue  
 Thy ling'ring, or with one stroke of this dart  
 Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before."  
 So spake the grisly terror, and in shape,  
 So speaking and so threat'ning, grew tenfold  
 705 More dreadful and deform: on th' other side  
 Incensed with indignation Satan stood

Unterrified, and like a comet burned  
That fires the length of Ophiuchus<sup>6</sup> huge  
In th' arctic sky, and from his horrid<sup>o</sup> hair  
710 Shakes pestilence and war. Each at the head  
Leveled his deadly aim; their fatal hands  
No second stroke intend, and such a frown  
Each cast at th' other, as when, two black clouds  
715 With Heav'n's artillery fraught,<sup>7</sup> come rattling on  
Over the Caspian,<sup>8</sup> then stand front to front  
Hov'ring a space, till winds the signal blow  
To join their dark encounter in mid-air:  
So frowned the mighty combatants, that Hell  
720 Grew darker at their frown, so matched they stood;  
For never but once more was either like  
To meet so great a foe.<sup>9</sup> And now great deeds  
Had been achieved, whereof all Hell had rung,  
Had not the snaky sorceress that sat  
725 Fast by Hell gate, and kept the fatal key,  
Ris'n, and with hideous outcry rushed between.  
"O father, what intends thy hand," she cried,  
"Against thy only son?<sup>1</sup> What fury O son,  
Possesses thee to bend that mortal dart  
730 Against thy father's head? And know'st for whom;  
For him who sits above and laughs the while  
At thee ordained his drudge, to execute  
Whate'er his wrath, which he calls justice, bids,  
His wrath which one day will destroy ye both."  
735 She spake, and at her words the hellish pest  
Forbore, then these to her Satan returned.  
"So strange thy outcry, and thy words so strange  
Thou interposest, that my sudden hand  
Prevented<sup>o</sup> spares to tell thee yet by deeds  
740 What it intends; till first I know of thee,  
What thing thou art, thus double-formed, and why  
In this infernal vale first met thou call'st

Me father, and that phantasm call'st my son?  
 I know thee not, nor ever saw till now  
 Sight more detestable than him and thee."  
 745 T' whom thus the portress of Hell gate replied:  
 "Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem  
 Now in thine eye so foul, once deemed so fair  
 In Heav'n, when at th' assembly, and in sight  
 Of all the Seraphim with thee combined  
 750 In bold conspiracy against Heav'n's King,  
 All on a sudden miserable pain  
 Surprised thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum  
 In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast  
 Threw forth, till on the left side op'ning wide,  
 755 Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,  
 Then shining heav'nly fair, a goddess armed  
 Out of thy head I sprung:<sup>2</sup> amazement seized  
 All th' host of Heav'n; back they recoiled afraid  
 At first, and called me Sin, and for a sign  
 760 Portentous held me; but familiar grown,  
 I pleased, and with attractive graces won  
 The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft  
 Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing  
 Becam'st enamored, and such joy thou took'st  
 765 With me in secret, that my womb conceived  
 A growing burden. Meanwhile war arose,  
 And fields were fought in Heav'n; wherein remained  
 (For what could else) to our almighty foe  
 Clear victory, to our part loss and rout  
 770 Through all the empyrean: down they fell  
 Driv'n headlong from the pitch<sup>o</sup> of Heaven, down  
 Into this deep, and in the general fall  
 I also; at which time this powerful key  
 Into my hand was giv'n, with charge to keep  
 775 These gates forever shut, which none can pass  
 Without my op'ning. Pensive here I sat

Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb  
Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown  
Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.  
780 At last this odious offspring whom thou seest  
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way  
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain  
Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew  
Transformed: but he my inbred enemy  
785 Forth issued, brandishing his fatal dart  
Made to destroy: I fled, and cried out 'Death';  
Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sighed  
From all her caves, and back resounded 'Death.'  
I fled, but he pursued (though more, it seems,  
790 Inflamed with lust than rage) and swifter far,  
Me overtook his mother all dismayed,  
And in embraces forcible and foul  
Engend'ring with me, of that rape begot  
These yelling monsters that with ceaseless cry  
795 Surround me, as thou saw'st, hourly conceived  
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite  
To me, for when they list, o into the womb  
That bred them they return, and howl and gnaw  
My bowels, their repast; then bursting forth  
800 Afresh with conscious terrors vex me round,  
That rest or intermission none I find.  
Before mine eyes in opposition sits  
Grim Death my son and foe, who sets them on,  
And me his parent would full soon devour  
805 For want of other prey, but that he knows  
His end with mine involved; and knows that I  
Should prove a bitter morsel, and his bane, o  
Whenever that shall be; so fate pronounced.  
But thou O father, I forewarn thee, shun  
810 His deadly arrow; neither vainly hope  
To be invulnerable in those bright arms,  
Though tempered heav'nly, for that mortal dint, o

Save he who reigns above, none can resist.”  
815 She finished, and the subtle Fiend his lore<sup>o</sup>  
Soon learned, now milder, and thus answered  
smooth.  
“Dear daughter, since thou claim’st me for thy sire,  
And my fair son here show’st me, the dear pledge  
Of dalliance had with thee in Heav’n, and joys  
820 Then sweet, now sad to mention, through dire  
change  
Befall’n us unforeseen, unthought of, know  
I come no enemy, but to set free  
From out this dark and dismal house of pain,  
Both him and thee, and all the heav’nly host  
Of Spirits that in our just pretenses<sup>o</sup> armed  
825 Fell with us from on high: from them I go  
This uncouth errand<sup>3</sup> sole, and one for all  
Myself expose, with lonely steps to tread  
Th’ unfounded<sup>o</sup> deep, and through the void immense  
To search with wand’ring quest a place foretold  
830 Should be, and, by concurring signs, ere now  
Created vast and round, a place of bliss  
In the purlieus<sup>o</sup> of Heav’n, and therein placed  
A race of upstart creatures, to supply  
Perhaps our vacant room, though more removed,  
835 Lest Heav’n surcharged<sup>o</sup> with potent multitude  
Might hap to move new broils:<sup>o</sup> be this or aught  
Than this more secret now designed, I haste  
To know, and this once known, shall soon return,  
And bring ye to the place where thou and Death  
840 Shall dwell at ease, and up and down unseen  
Wing silently the buxom<sup>o</sup> air, embalmed<sup>o</sup>  
With odors; there ye shall be fed and filled  
Immeasurably, all things shall be your prey.”  
He ceased, for both seemed highly pleased, and  
845 Death



Grinned horrible a ghastly smile, to hear  
His famine<sup>o</sup> should be filled, and blessed his maw<sup>o</sup>  
Destined to that good hour: no less rejoiced  
His mother bad, and thus bespake her sire.

850     "The key of this infernal pit by due,  
And by command of Heav'n's all-powerful King  
I keep, by him forbidden to unlock  
These adamantine gates; against all force  
Death ready stands to interpose his dart,  
Fearless to be o'ermatched by living might.  
855     But what owe I to his commands above  
Who hates me, and hath hither thrust me down  
Into this gloom of Tartarus profound,  
To sit in hateful office here confined,  
Inhabitant of Heav'n, and heav'nly-born,  
860     Here in perpetual agony and pain,  
With terrors and with clamors compassed round  
Of mine own brood, that on my bowels feed?  
Thou art my father, thou my author, thou  
My being gav'st me; whom should I obey  
865     But thee, whom follow? Thou wilt bring me soon  
To that new world of light and bliss, among  
The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign  
At thy right hand voluptuous,<sup>4</sup> as beseems  
Thy daughter and thy darling, without end."  
870     Thus saying, from her side the fatal key,  
Sad instrument of all our woe, she took;  
And towards the gate rolling her bestial train,<sup>5</sup>  
Forthwith the huge portcullis high up drew,  
Which but herself not all the Stygian powers<sup>o</sup>  
875     Could once have moved; then in the keyhole turns  
Th' intricate wards, and every bolt and bar  
Of massy iron or solid rock with ease  
Unfastens: on a sudden open fly  
880     With impetuous recoil and jarring sound

Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate  
Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook  
Of Erebus.<sup>o</sup> She opened, but to shut  
Excelled<sup>o</sup> her power; the gates wide open stood,  
885 That with extended wings a bannered host  
Under spread ensigns<sup>o</sup> marching might pass through  
With horse and chariots ranked in loose array;  
So wide they stood, and like a furnace mouth  
Cast forth redounding<sup>o</sup> smoke and ruddy flame.  
890 Before their eyes in sudden view appear  
The secrets of the hoary<sup>o</sup> deep, a dark  
Illimitable<sup>o</sup> ocean without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and  
height,  
And time and place are lost; where eldest Night  
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold  
895 Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise  
Of endless wars, and by confusion stand.  
For Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, four champions fierce  
Strive here for mastery, and to battle bring  
900 Their embryon atoms;<sup>6</sup> they around the flag  
Of each his faction, in their several clans,  
Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or slow,  
Swarm populous, unnumbered as the sands  
Of Barca or Cyrene's torrid soil,<sup>7</sup>  
905 Levied to side with warring winds, and poise<sup>8</sup>  
Their lighter wings. To whom these most adhere,  
He rules a moment; Chaos<sup>9</sup> umpire sits,  
And by decision more embroils the fray  
By which he reigns: next him high arbiter  
Chance governs all. Into this wild abyss,  
910 The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave,  
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,  
But all these in their pregnant causes<sup>o</sup> mixed  
Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,

915 Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain  
His dark materials to create more worlds,  
Into this wild abyss the wary Fiend  
Stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while,  
Pondering his voyage; for no narrow frith<sup>o</sup>  
920 He had to cross. Nor was his ear less pealed<sup>o</sup>  
With noises loud and ruinous (to compare  
Great things with small) than when Bellona<sup>1</sup> storms,  
With all her battering engines bent to raze  
Some capital city; or less than if this frame<sup>o</sup>  
925 Of Heav'n were falling, and these elements  
In mutiny had from her axle torn  
The steadfast earth. At last his sail-broad vans<sup>o</sup>  
He spreads for flight, and in the surging smoke  
Uplifted spurns the ground, thence many a league  
As in a cloudy chair ascending rides  
930 Audacious, but that seat soon failing, meets  
A vast vacuity: all unawares  
Flutt'ring his pennons<sup>2</sup> vain plumb down he drops  
Ten thousand fathom deep, and to this hour  
Down had been falling, had not by ill chance  
935 The strong rebuff<sup>o</sup> of some tumultuous cloud  
Instinct<sup>o</sup> with fire and niter<sup>o</sup> hurried him  
As many miles aloft: that fury stayed,  
Quenched in a boggy Syrtis,<sup>3</sup> neither sea,  
Nor good dry land: nigh foundered<sup>o</sup> on he fares,  
940 Treading the crude consistence, half on foot,  
Half flying; behoves<sup>o</sup> him now both oar and sail.  
As when a griffin through the wilderness  
With wingèd course o'er hill or moory<sup>o</sup> dale,  
Pursues the Arimasbian, who by stealth  
945 Had from his wakeful custody purloined  
The guarded gold:<sup>4</sup> so eagerly the Fiend  
O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or  
rare,

With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way,  
And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies:  
950 At length a universal hubbub wild  
Of stunning sounds and voices all confused  
Borne through the hollow dark assaults his ear  
With loudest vehemence: thither he plies,  
Undaunted to meet there whatever Power  
955 Or Spirit of the nethermost abyss  
Might in that noise reside, of whom to ask  
Which way the nearest coast of darkness lies  
Bordering on light; when straight behold the throne  
Of Chaos, and his dark pavilion spread  
960 Wide on the wasteful deep; with him enthroned  
Sat sable-vested Night, eldest of things,  
The consort of his reign; and by them stood  
Orcus and Ades,<sup>5</sup> and the dreaded name  
Of Demogorgon,<sup>6</sup> Rumor next and Chance,  
965 And Tumult and Confusion all embroiled,  
And Discord with a thousand various mouths.  
T' whom Satan turning boldly, thus. "Ye Powers  
And Spirits of this nethermost abyss,  
Chaos and ancient Night, I come no spy,  
970 With purpose to explore or to disturb  
The secrets of your realm, but by constraint  
Wand'ring this darksome desert, as my way  
Lies through your spacious empire up to light,  
Alone, and without guide, half lost, I seek  
975 What readiest path leads where your gloomy bounds  
Confine with<sup>o</sup> Heav'n; or if some other place  
From your dominion won, th' Ethereal King  
Possesses lately, thither to arrive  
I travel this profound;<sup>o</sup> direct my course;  
980 Directed, no mean recompense it brings  
To your behoof,<sup>o</sup> if I that region lost,  
All usurpation thence expelled, reduce

To her original darkness and your sway  
 (Which is my present journey)<sup>7</sup> and once more  
 985 Erect the standard there of ancient Night;  
 Yours be th' advantage all, mine the revenge."  
 Thus Satan; and him thus the anarch<sup>8</sup> old  
 With falt'ring speech and visage incomposed<sup>o</sup>  
 990 Answered. "I know thee, stranger, who thou art,  
 That mighty leading angel, who of late  
 Made head against Heav'n's King, though  
 overthrown.  
 I saw and heard, for such a numerous host  
 Fled not in silence through the frightened deep  
 With ruin upon ruin, rout on rout,  
 995 Confusion worse confounded; and Heav'n gates  
 Poured out by millions her victorious bands  
 Pursuing. I upon my frontiers here  
 Keep residence; if all I can will serve,  
 That little which is left so to defend,  
 1000 Encroached on still<sup>o</sup> through our intestine broils<sup>o</sup>  
 Weak'ning the scepter of old Night: first Hell  
 Your dungeon stretching far and wide beneath;  
 Now lately heaven and earth,<sup>9</sup> another world  
 Hung o'er my realm, linked in a golden chain  
 1005 To that side Heav'n from whence your legions fell:  
 If that way be your walk, you have not far;  
 So much the nearer danger; go and speed;  
 Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain."  
 He ceased; and Satan stayed not to reply,  
 1010 But glad that now his sea should find a shore,  
 With fresh alacrity and force renewed  
 Springs upward like a pyramid of fire  
 Into the wild expanse, and through the shock  
 Of fighting elements, on all sides round  
 1015 Environed wins his way; harder beset  
 And more endangered, than when Argo passed

Through Bosphorus betwixt the justling rocks:<sup>1</sup>  
Or when Ulysses on the larboard shunned  
Charybdis, and by th' other whirlpool steered.<sup>2</sup>  
1020 So he with difficulty and labor hard  
Moved on, with difficulty and labor he;  
But he once passed, soon after when man fell,  
Strange alteration! Sin and Death amain<sup>o</sup>  
Following his track, such was the will of Heav'n,  
1025 Paved after him a broad and beaten way  
Over the dark abyss, whose boiling gulf  
Tamely endured a bridge of wondrous length  
From Hell continued reaching th' utmost orb<sup>3</sup>  
Of this frail world; by which the Spirits perverse  
1030 With easy intercourse pass to and fro  
To tempt or punish mortals, except whom  
God and good angels guard by special grace.  
But now at last the sacred influence  
Of light appears, and from the walls of Heav'n  
1035 Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night  
A glimmering dawn; here Nature first begins  
Her farthest verge,<sup>o</sup> and Chaos to retire  
As from her outmost works a broken foe  
With tumult less and with less hostile din,  
1040 That<sup>o</sup> Satan with less toil, and now with ease  
Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light  
And like a weather-beaten vessel holds<sup>o</sup>  
Gladly the port, though shrouds and tackle torn;  
Or in the emptier waste, resembling air  
1045 Weighs<sup>o</sup> his spread wings, at leisure to behold  
Far off th' empyreal Heav'n, extended wide  
In circuit, undetermined square or round,  
With opal tow'rs and battlements adorned  
Of living sapphire, once his native seat;  
1050 And fast by hanging in a golden chain  
This pendent world,<sup>o</sup> in bigness as a star

Of smallest magnitude close by the moon.  
Thither full fraught with mischievous revenge,  
Accursed, and in a cursèd hour, he hies.

1055

## Endnotes

- Note 1: India. "Ormus": an island in the Persian Gulf, modern Hormuz, famous for pearls.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Angelic orders.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Note the play on "surer," "prosper," "prosperity," "assured," a favorite device of Milton's.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A typical epic convention (in Homer, Virgil, Tasso, and elsewhere) involved councils debating war or peace, with spokesmen on each side. Satan offers only the option of war, open or covert.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tartarus is a classical name for hell.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With the Latin sense of stamping on; also, triumphantly scorning.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Servants, but perhaps also vessels. See Romans 9:22: "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, we cannot be worse off than we are now, and still live.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Established by Fate; also, deadly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Sophists, mercenary teachers of rhetoric in ancient Greece, were denounced by Plato for making "the worse appear / The better reason." "His tongue / Dropped manna": his honeyed words seemed like the manna supplied to the Israelites in the desert.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Heavenly substance, derived from "ether," the fifth and purest element, thought to be incorruptible.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the Latin sense, hanging down, threatening.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The verb “accomplish” or “achieve” is understood.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, from the point of view of happiness, the devils are in an ill state, but it could be worse.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pain felt by the senses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The warrior angel, chief of the angelic armies.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Worthy of Atlas, the Titan who as a punishment for rebellion was condemned to hold up the heavens on his shoulders.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The official titles of angelic orders.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, war has decided the question for us, but also limited us.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, to the best of our power.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To be defended by the occupants.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Genesis 6:7: “And the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man [and all other creatures]; for it repenteth me that I have made them.’ ”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Adam, the first man, is the “root” of the human race.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Darkness so thick it can be felt (see Exodus 10:21).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Chaos, a striking example of sound imitating sense.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, he sat waiting in suspense.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hell’s fiery walls and gates have nine thicknesses (see lines 645ff.). “Adamant” (following): a fabulously hard metal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Chaos is a womb in which all potential forms fragment (see lines 895ff.) “Unessential” (line 439): having no real essence.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bristling. “Emblazonry”: decorated shields.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Trumpets (made of the goldlike alloy brass).[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: The Olympic games were held at Olympia, the Pythian games at Delphi. Games celebrating a (usually dead) hero are an epic convention.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To drive a chariot as close as possible around a column without hitting it.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The appearance of warfare in the skies, reported before several notable battles, portends trouble on earth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Like that of Typhon, the hundred-headed Titan (see 1.199).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Wearing a poisoned robe given him in a deception, Hercules ("Alcides") in his dying agonies threw his beloved companion Lichas, along with a good part of Mount Oeta, into the Euboean Sea, near Thermopylae.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Stoic goal of freedom from passion.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: These four rivers are traditional in hellish geography. Milton distinguishes them by the original meanings of their Greek names: Styx means "hateful," Acheron "woeful," etc. Lethe is "far off" and quite different from the others, oblivion being a desired state in Hell.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In a heap, resembling the ruin of an old building ("ancient pile," next line).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lake Serbonis, once famous for its quicksands, lies near the city of Damietta ("Damiata," next line), just east of the Nile.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Taloned. In Greek mythology the Harpies (monsters with women's faces) carried off individuals to the Furies, who avenged crimes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: One of the three Gorgons, women with snaky hair, scaly bodies, and boar tusks, the sight of whose faces changed men to stone.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tantalus, afflicted with a raging thirst, stood in the middle of a lake, the water of which always receded when he tried to drink (hence, "tantalize").[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The Hydra was a serpent whose multiple heads grew back when severed; the Chimera was a fire-breathing creature, part lion, part dragon, part goat.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Satan* in Hebrew means “adversary.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Two of the Moluccas, or Spice Islands, modern Indonesia.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The South Pole. “Ethiopian”: the Indian Ocean. “The Cape” is the Cape of Good Hope.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The allegorical figures of Sin and Death are founded on James 1:15: “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” But the incestuous relations of Sin and Death are Milton’s own invention. Physically, Sin is modeled on Virgil’s or Ovid’s Scylla, with some touches adopted from Spenser’s Error. Death is a traditional figure, vague and vast.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Like Cerberus, the multiheaded hound of Hell.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Circe, out of jealousy, threw poison into the water where Scylla bathed, in the straits between Calabria and Sicily (“Trinacria,” next line); the poison caused Scylla to develop a ring of barking, snapping dogs around her waist.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hecate (three syllables), goddess of sorcery. She attends orgies of witches in Lapland (line 665, famous for witchcraft), drawn by the blood of babies sacrificed for the occasion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A vast northern constellation, “the Serpent Bearer.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Loaded with thunderbolts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Caspian is a particularly stormy area.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, the Son of God.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Sin, Death, and Satan, in their various interrelations, parody obscenely the relations between God and the Son, Adam and Eve.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As Athena sprang full grown from the head of Zeus.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Unknown journey—a parody of Christ’s errand on earth (3.236–65).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: As the Son sits at God’s right hand, Sin will at Satan’s, a blasphemous parody of the Apostles’ Creed and of *Paradise Lost* 3.250–80.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, propelling her yelping offspring.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: These subatomic qualities combine together in nature to form the four elements, fire, earth, water, and air, but they struggle endlessly in Chaos, where the atoms of these elements remain undeveloped (in “embryo”).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cities built on the shifting sands of North Africa.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Give weight to. “Levied”: both enlisted and raised up.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Chaos is both the place where confusion reigns and personified confusion itself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Goddess of war.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Useless wings (“pinions”).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Quicksand in North African gulfs, famous for their shifting sandbars.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Griffins, mythical creatures, half-eagle, half-lion, hoarded gold that was stolen from them by the one-eyed Arimaspians.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Latin and Greek names of Pluto, god of Hell.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A mysterious deity associated with Fate; Milton elsewhere identifies him with Chaos.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The purpose of my present journey.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Chaos is not monarch of his realm but, appropriately, “anarch,” nonruler.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The cosmos, with its own “heaven” (not the empyrean, the Heaven of God and the angels).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Jason and his fifty Argonauts, sailing through the Bosphorus to the Black Sea in pursuit of the Golden Fleece, had to pass through the Symplegades, or clashing rocks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Homer’s Ulysses, sailing where Italy almost touches Sicily, had to pass between Charybdis, a whirlpool, and Scylla, a monster who devoured six of his men (not another whirlpool, as used here).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The bridge ends on the outermost sphere of the ten concentric spheres making up the universe.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *the outcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *schemes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cared*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *judgment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *less experienced*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bristling, horrifying*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the thunderbolt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *large draught*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *causing oblivion*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *natural to us*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vex, afflict*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *why*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *essence*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *portended*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *civil, polite*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confuse*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *feat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *headlong* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Hell's* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cascades*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proposals*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *proves*[Return to reference](#) °
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## Book 3

### *The Argument*

God sitting on his throne sees Satan flying towards this world, then newly created; shows him to the Son who sat at his right hand; foretells the success of Satan in perverting mankind; clears his own justice and wisdom from all imputation, having created man free and able enough to have withstood his tempter; yet declares his purpose of grace towards him, in regard he fell not of his own malice, as did Satan, but by him seduced. The Son of God renders praises to his Father for the manifestation of his gracious purpose towards man; but God again declares, that grace cannot be extended towards man without the satisfaction of divine justice; man hath offended the majesty of God by aspiring to Godhead, and therefore with all his progeny devoted to death must die, unless someone can be found sufficient to answer for his offense, and undergo his punishment. The Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man: the Father accepts him, ordains his incarnation, pronounces his exaltation about all names in heaven and earth; commands all the angels to adore him; they obey, and hymning to their harps in full choir, celebrate the Father and the Son. Meanwhile Satan alights upon the bare convex of this world's outermost orb; where wandering he first finds a place since called the Limbo of Vanity; what persons and things fly up thither; thence comes to the gate of heaven, described ascending by stairs, and the waters above the firmament that flow about it: his passage thence to the orb of the sun; he finds there Uriel the regent of that orb, but first changes himself into the shape of a meaner angel; and pretending a zealous desire to behold the new creation and man whom God had placed there, inquires of him the place of his habitation, and is directed; alights first on Mount Niphates.

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n firstborn,

Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam  
May I express thee unblamed?<sup>1</sup> Since God is light,  
And never but in unapproachèd light  
Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,  
5 Bright effluence of bright essence increate.<sup>o</sup>  
Or hear'st thou rather<sup>2</sup> pure ethereal stream,  
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,  
Before the heavens thou wert, and at the voice  
Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest<sup>o</sup>  
10 The rising world of waters dark and deep,  
Won from the void and formless infinite.  
Thee I revisit now with bolder wing,  
Escaped the Stygian pool, though long detained  
In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight  
15 Through utter and through middle darkness<sup>3</sup> borne  
With other notes than to th' Orphéan lyre<sup>4</sup>  
I sung of Chaos and eternal Night,  
Taught by the Heav'nly Muse<sup>5</sup> to venture down  
The dark descent, and up to reascend,  
20 Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,  
And feel thy sov'reign vital I but thou  
Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain  
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;  
So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,  
25 Or dim suffusion<sup>6</sup> veiled. Yet not the more  
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt  
Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,  
Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief  
Thee Sion<sup>7</sup> and the flow'ry brooks beneath  
30 That wash thy hallowed feet, and warbling flow,  
Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget<sup>o</sup>  
Those other two equaled with me in fate,<sup>8</sup>  
So were I equaled with them in renown,  
Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides,  
35 And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old,<sup>9</sup>

Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers; o as the wakeful bird o  
Sings darkling, o and in shadiest covert hid  
40 Tunes her nocturnal note. Thus with the year  
Seasons return, but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;  
But cloud instead, and ever-during o dark  
45 Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge o fair  
Presented with a universal blank  
Of nature's works to me expunged and razed, o  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
50 So much the rather thou celestial Light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.  
55 Now had the Almighty Father from above,  
From the pure empyrean o where he sits  
High throned above all height, bent down his eye,  
His own works and their works at once to view:  
Above him all the sanctities o of Heaven  
60 Stood thick as stars, and from his sight received  
Beatitude past utterance; on his right  
The radiant image of his glory sat,  
His only Son; on earth he first beheld  
Our two first parents, yet the only two  
65 Of mankind, in the happy garden placed,  
Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,  
Uninterrupted joy, unrivaled love  
In blissful solitude; he then surveyed  
Hell and the gulf between, and Satan there  
70 Coasting the wall of Heav'n on this side Night  
In the dun o air sublime, o and ready now

To stoop<sup>o</sup> with wearied wings, and willing feet  
On the bare outside of this world,<sup>o</sup> that seemed  
Firm land embosomed without firmament,<sup>o</sup>  
75 Uncertain which, in ocean or in air.  
Him God beholding from his prospect high,  
Wherein past, present, future he beholds,  
Thus to his only Son foreseeing spake.  
“Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage  
80 Transports our Adversary, whom no bounds  
Prescribed, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains  
Heaped on him there, nor yet the main<sup>o</sup> abyss  
Wide interrupt<sup>1</sup> can hold; so bent he seems  
On desperate revenge, that shall redound<sup>o</sup>  
85 Upon his own rebellious head. And now  
Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way  
Not far off Heav’n, in the precincts of light,  
Directly towards the new-created world,  
And man there placed, with purpose to essay<sup>o</sup>  
90 If him by force he can destroy, or worse,  
By some false guile pervert; and shall pervert;  
For man will hearken to his glozing<sup>o</sup> lies,  
And easily transgress the sole command,  
Sole pledge of his obedience: so will fall  
95 He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?  
Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me  
All he could have; I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
Such I created all th’ ethereal Powers  
100 And Spirits, both them who stood and them who  
failed;  
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.  
Not free, what proof could they have giv’n sincere  
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love,  
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,  
105

Not what they would? What praise could they  
receive?

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
When will and reason (reason also is choice)  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,  
Made passive both, had served necessity,  
110 Not me. They therefore as to right belonged,  
So were created, nor can justly accuse  
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,  
As if predestination overruled  
Their will, disposed by absolute decree  
115 Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed  
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,  
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,  
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.<sup>2</sup>  
So without least impulse or shadow of fate,  
120 Or aught by me immutably foreseen,  
They trespass, authors to themselves in all  
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so  
I formed them free, and free they must remain,  
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change  
125 Their nature, and revoke the high decree  
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained  
Their freedom, they themselves ordained their fall.  
The first sort<sup>3</sup> by their own suggestion fell,  
Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived  
130 By the other first: man therefore shall find grace,  
The other none: in mercy and justice both,  
Through Heav'n and earth, so shall my glory excel,  
But mercy first and last shall brightest shine."  
Thus while God spake, ambrosial<sup>o</sup> fragrance filled  
135 All Heav'n, and in the blessèd Spirits elect<sup>o</sup>  
Sense of new joy ineffable<sup>o</sup> diffused:  
Beyond compare the Son of God was seen  
Most glorious, in him all his Father shone

140 Substantially expressed, and in his face  
Divine compassion visibly appeared,  
Love without end, and without measure grace,  
Which uttering thus he to his Father spake.  
    "O Father, gracious was that word which closed  
Thy sov'reign sentence, that man should find grace;  
145 For which both Heav'n and earth shall high extol  
Thy praises, with th' innumerable sound  
Of hymns and sacred songs, wherewith thy throne  
Encompassed shall resound thee ever blessed.  
For should man finally be lost, should man  
150 Thy creature late so loved, thy youngest son  
Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though joined  
With his own folly? That be from thee far,  
That far be from thee, Father, who art judge  
Of all things made, and judgest only right.<sup>4</sup>  
155 Or shall the Adversary thus obtain  
His end, and frustrate thine, shall he fulfill  
His malice, and thy goodness bring to naught,  
Or proud return though to his heavier doom,  
Yet with revenge accomplished, and to Hell  
160 Draw after him the whole race of mankind,  
By him corrupted? Or wilt thou thyself  
Abolish thy creation, and unmake,  
For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?  
So should thy goodness and thy greatness both  
165 Be questioned and blasphemed<sup>o</sup> without defense."  
    To whom the great Creator thus replied.  
"O Son, in whom my soul hath chief delight,  
Son of my bosom, Son who art alone  
My Word, my wisdom, and effectual might,<sup>5</sup>  
170 All hast thou spoken as my thoughts are, all  
As my eternal purpose hath decreed:  
Man shall not quite be lost, but saved who will,  
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me

175 Freely vouchsafed;<sup>o</sup> once more I will renew  
His lapsèd powers, though forfeit and enthralled  
By sin to foul exorbitant desires;  
Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand  
On even ground against his mortal foe,  
180 By me upheld, that he may know how frail  
His fall'n condition is, and to me owe  
All his deliv'rance, and to none but me.  
Some I have chosen of peculiar grace  
Elect above the rest;<sup>6</sup> so is my will:  
The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warned<sup>o</sup>  
185 Their sinful state, and to appease betimes  
Th' incensèd Deity, while offered grace  
Invites; for I will clear their senses dark,  
What may suffice, and soften stony hearts  
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.  
190 To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,  
Though but endeavored with sincere intent,  
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.  
And I will place within them as a guide  
My umpire conscience, whom if they will hear,  
195 Light after light well used they shall attain,<sup>7</sup>  
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.  
This my long sufferance and my day of grace  
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;  
But hard be hardened, blind be blinded more,  
200 That they may stumble on, and deeper fall;  
And none but such from mercy I exclude.  
But yet all is not done; man disobeying,  
Disloyal breaks his fealty, and sins  
Against the high supremacy of Heav'n,  
205 Affecting<sup>o</sup> Godhead, and so losing all,  
To expiate his treason hath naught left,  
But to destruction sacred and devote,<sup>o</sup>  
He with his whole posterity must die,

210 Die he or justice must; unless for him  
Some other able, and as willing, pay  
The rigid satisfaction, death for death.  
Say heav'nly Powers, where shall we find such love,  
Which of ye will be mortal to redeem  
215 Man's mortal crime,<sup>8</sup> and just th' unjust to save,  
Dwells in all Heaven charity so dear?"

He asked, but all the heav'nly choir stood mute,<sup>9</sup>  
And silence was in Heav'n; on man's behalf  
Patron or intercessor none appeared,  
Much less that durst upon his own head draw  
220 The deadly forfeiture, and ransom set.  
And now without redemption all mankind  
Must have been lost, adjudged to death and Hell  
By doom severe, had not the Son of God,  
In whom the fullness dwells of love divine,  
225 His dearest mediation<sup>o</sup> thus renewed.

"Father, thy word is passed, man shall find grace;  
And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,  
The speediest of thy wingèd messengers,  
To visit all thy creatures, and to all  
230 Comes unprevented,<sup>o</sup> unimplored, unsought,  
Happy for man, so coming; he her aid  
Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;  
Atonement for himself or offering meet,<sup>o</sup>  
Indebted and undone, hath none to bring:  
235 Behold me then, me for him, life for life  
I offer, on me let thine anger fall;  
Account me man; I for his sake will leave  
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee  
Freely put off, and for him lastly die  
240 Well pleased, on me let Death wreak all his rage;  
Under his gloomy power I shall not long  
Lie vanquished; thou hast giv'n me to possess  
Life in myself forever, by thee I live,



245 Though now to Death I yield, and am his due  
 All that of me can die, yet that debt paid,  
 Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave  
 His prey, nor suffer my unspotted soul  
 Forever with corruption there to dwell;  
 But I shall rise victorious, and subdue  
 250 My vanquisher, spoiled of his vaunted spoil;  
 Death his death's wound shall then receive, and  
 stoop  
 Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarmed.  
 I through the ample air in triumph high  
 Shall lead Hell captive maugre<sup>o</sup> Hell, and show  
 255 The powers of darkness bound. Thou at the sight  
 Pleased, out of Heaven shalt look down and smile,  
 While by thee raised I ruin<sup>1</sup> all my foes,  
 Death last, and with his carcass glut the grave:  
 Then with the multitude of my redeemed  
 260 Shall enter Heaven long absent, and return,  
 Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud  
 Of anger shall remain, but peace assured,  
 And reconcilment; wrath shall be no more  
 Thenceforth, but in thy presence joy entire."  
 265 His words here ended, but his meek aspect  
 Silent yet spake, and breathed immortal love  
 To mortal men, above which only shone  
 Filial obedience: as a sacrifice  
 Glad to be offered, he attends the will  
 270 Of his great Father. Admiration<sup>o</sup> seized  
 All Heav'n, what this might mean, and whither tend  
 Wond'ring; but soon th' Almighty thus replied:  
 "O thou in Heav'n and earth the only peace  
 Found out for mankind under wrath, O thou  
 275 My sole complacence!<sup>o</sup> well thou know'st how dear  
 To me are all my works, nor man the least  
 Though last created, that for him I spare

280 Thee from my bosom and right hand, to save,  
By losing thee a while, the whole race lost.  
Thou therefore whom<sup>2</sup> thou only canst redeem,  
Their nature also to thy nature join;  
And be thyself man among men on earth,  
Made flesh, when time shall be, of virgin seed,  
285 By wondrous birth: be thou in Adam's room  
The head of all mankind, though Adam's son.<sup>3</sup>  
As in him perish all men, so in thee  
As from a second root shall be restored,  
As many as are restored, without thee none.  
290 His crime makes guilty all his sons; thy merit  
Imputed shall absolve them who renounce  
Their own both righteous and unrighteous deeds,  
And live in thee transplanted, and from thee  
Receive new life.<sup>4</sup> So man, as is most just,  
295 Shall satisfy for man, be judged and die,  
And dying rise, and rising with him raise  
His brethren, ransomed with his own dear life.  
So heav'nly love shall outdo hellish hate,  
Giving to death, and dying to redeem,  
300 So dearly to redeem what hellish hate  
So easily destroyed, and still destroys  
In those who, when they may, accept not grace.  
Nor shalt thou by descending to assume  
Man's nature, lessen or degrade thine own.  
305 Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss  
Equal to God, and equally enjoying  
Godlike fruition,<sup>o</sup> quitted all to save  
A world from utter loss, and hast been found  
By merit more than birthright Son of God,<sup>5</sup>  
310 Found worthiest to be so by being good,  
Far more than great or high; because in thee  
Love hath abounded more than glory abounds.  
Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt

With thee thy manhood also to this throne;  
 Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt reign  
 315 Both God and man, Son both of God and man,  
 Anointed<sup>6</sup> universal King; all power  
 I give thee, reign forever, and assume  
 Thy merits; under thee as Head Supreme  
 320 Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, Dominions<sup>7</sup> I reduce:  
 All knees to thee shall bow, of them that bide  
 In Heaven, or earth, or under earth in Hell;  
 When thou attended gloriously from Heav'n  
 Shalt in the sky appear, and from thee send  
 The summoning Archangels to proclaim  
 325 Thy dread tribunal: forthwith from all winds<sup>o</sup>  
 The living, and forthwith the cited<sup>o</sup> dead  
 Of all past ages to the general doom<sup>o</sup>  
 Shall hasten, such a peal shall rouse their sleep.  
 Then all thy saints assembled, thou shalt judge  
 330 Bad men and angels, they arraigned<sup>o</sup> shall sink  
 Beneath thy sentence; Hell, her numbers full,  
 Thenceforth shall be forever shut. Meanwhile  
 The world shall burn, and from her ashes spring  
 New heav'n<sup>o</sup> and earth, wherein the just shall  
 335 dwell,<sup>8</sup>  
 And after all their tribulations long  
 See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,  
 With joy and love triumphing, and fair truth.  
 Then thou thy regal scepter shalt lay by,  
 For regal scepter then no more shall need,<sup>o</sup>  
 340 God shall be all in all. But all ye gods,<sup>o</sup>  
 Adore him, who to compass all this dies,  
 Adore the Son, and honor him as me."  
 No sooner had th' Almighty ceased, but all  
 The multitude of angels with a shout  
 345 Loud as from numbers without number, sweet  
 As from blest voices, uttering joy, Heav'n rung<sup>9</sup>

With jubilee, and loud hosannas filled  
Th' eternal regions: lowly reverent  
Towards either throne<sup>1</sup> they bow, and to the ground  
350 With solemn adoration down they cast  
Their crowns inwove with amarant<sup>2</sup> and gold,  
Immortal amarant, a flow'r which once  
In Paradise, fast by the Tree of Life  
Began to bloom, but soon for man's offense  
355 To Heav'n removed where first it grew, there grows,  
And flow'rs aloft shading the Fount of Life,  
And where the river of bliss through midst of Heav'n  
Rolls o'er Elysian<sup>3</sup> flow'rs her amber stream;  
With these that never fade the Spirits elect  
360 Bind their resplendent locks inwreathed with beams,  
Now in loose garlands thick thrown off, the bright  
Pavement that like a sea of jasper shone  
Impurpled with celestial roses smiled.  
Then crowned again their golden harps they took,  
365 Harps ever tuned, that glittering by their side  
Like quivers hung, and with preamble sweet  
Of charming symphony they introduce  
Their sacred song, and waken raptures high;  
No voice exempt,<sup>o</sup> no voice but well could join  
370 Melodious part, such concord is in Heav'n.  
Thee Father first they sung omnipotent,  
Immutable, immortal, infinite,  
Eternal King; thee Author of all being,  
Fountain of light, thyself invisible  
375 Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sitt'st  
Throned inaccessible, but<sup>o</sup> when thou shad'st  
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud  
Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine,<sup>4</sup>  
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,  
380 Yet dazzle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim  
Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.

Thou next they sang of all creation first,<sup>5</sup>  
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,  
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud  
385 Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines,  
Whom else no creature can behold;<sup>6</sup> on thee  
Impressed th' effulgence of his glory abides,  
Transfused on thee his ample spirit rests.  
He Heav'n of heavens and all the Powers therein  
390 By thee created, and by thee threw down  
Th' aspiring Dominations.<sup>7</sup> Thou that day  
Thy Father's dreadful thunder didst not spare,  
Nor stop thy flaming chariot wheels, that shook  
Heav'n's everlasting frame, while o'er the necks  
395 Thou drov'st of warring angels disarrayed.  
Back from pursuit thy Powers<sup>8</sup> with loud acclaim  
Thee only extolled, Son of thy Father's might,  
To execute fierce vengeance on his foes,  
Not so on man; him through their malice fall'n,  
400 Father of mercy and grace, thou didst not doom  
So strictly, but much more to pity incline:  
No sooner did thy dear and only Son  
Perceive thee purposed not to doom<sup>9</sup> frail man  
So strictly, but much more to pity inclined,  
405 He to appease thy wrath, and end the strife  
Of mercy and justice in thy face discerned,  
Regardless of the bliss wherein he sat  
Second to thee, offered himself to die  
For man's offense. O unexampled love,  
410 Love nowhere to be found less than divine!  
Hail Son of God, Savior of men, thy name  
Shall be the copious matter of my<sup>8</sup> song  
Henceforth, and never shall my harp thy praise  
Forget, nor from thy Father's praise disjoin.  
415 Thus they in Heav'n, above the starry sphere,  
Their happy hours in joy and hymning spent.

Meanwhile upon the firm opacous<sup>o</sup> globe  
Of this round world, whose first convex divides  
The luminous inferior orbs, enclosed  
420 From Chaos and th' inroad of Darkness old,  
Satan alighted walks:<sup>9</sup> a globe far off  
It seemed, now seems a boundless continent  
Dark, waste, and wild, under the frown of Night  
Starless exposed, and ever-threatening storms  
425 Of Chaos blust'ring round, inclement sky;  
Save on that side which from the wall of Heav'n  
Though distant far some small reflection gains  
Of glimmering air less vexed with tempest loud:  
Here walked the Fiend at large in spacious field.  
430 As when a vulture on Imaus bred,  
Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,<sup>1</sup>  
Dislodging from a region scarce of prey  
To gorge the flesh of lambs or yeanling<sup>o</sup> kids  
On hills where flocks are fed, flies toward the springs  
435 Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;<sup>2</sup>  
But in his way lights on the barren plains  
Of Sericana, where Chinesees drive  
With sails and wind their cany wagons light:  
So on this windy sea of land, the Fiend  
440 Walked up and down alone bent on his prey,  
Alone, for other creature in this place  
Living or lifeless to be found was none,  
None yet, but store hereafter from the earth  
Up hither like aërial vapors flew  
445 Of all things transitory and vain, when sin  
With vanity had filled the works of men:  
Both all things vain, and all who in vain things  
Built their fond<sup>o</sup> hopes of glory or lasting fame,  
Or happiness in this or th' other life;  
450 All who have their reward on earth, the fruits  
Of painful superstition and blind zeal,

Naught seeking but the praise of men, here find  
Fit retribution, empty as their deeds;  
455 All th' unaccomplished<sup>o</sup> works of nature's hand,  
Abortive, monstrous, or unkindly<sup>o</sup> mixed,  
Dissolved on earth, fleet<sup>o</sup> hither, and in vain,  
Till final dissolution, wander here,  
Not in the neighboring moon, as some<sup>3</sup> have  
dreamed;  
Those argent<sup>o</sup> fields more likely habitants,  
460 Translated saints,<sup>4</sup> or middle Spirits hold  
Betwixt th' angelical and human kind:  
Hither of ill-joined sons and daughters born  
First from the ancient world those giants came  
465 With many a vain exploit, though then renowned:<sup>5</sup>  
The builders next of Babel on the plain  
Of Sennaär,<sup>6</sup> and still with vain design  
New Babels, had they wherewithal, would build:  
Others came single; he who to be deemed  
470 A god, leaped fondly<sup>o</sup> into Etna flames,  
Empedocles, and he who to enjoy  
Plato's Elysium, leaped into the sea,  
Cleombrotus, and many more too long,<sup>7</sup>  
Embryos and idiots, eremites<sup>o</sup> and friars  
475 White, black, and gray, with all their trumpery.<sup>8</sup>  
Here pilgrims roam, that strayed so far to seek  
In Golgotha<sup>9</sup> him dead, who lives in Heav'n;  
And they who to be sure of paradise  
Dying put on the weeds<sup>o</sup> of Dominic,  
Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised;<sup>1</sup>  
480 They pass the planets seven, and pass the fixed,  
And that crystalline sphere whose balance weighs  
The trepidation talked, and that first moved;<sup>2</sup>  
And now Saint Peter at Heav'n's wicket seems  
485 To wait them with his keys, and now at foot  
Of Heav'n's ascent they lift their feet, when lo

A violent crosswind from either coast  
Blows them transverse ten thousand leagues awry  
Into the devious<sup>o</sup> air. Then might ye see  
490 Cows, hoods, and habits<sup>3</sup> with their wearers tossed  
And fluttered into rags; then relics, beads,  
Indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls,  
The sport of winds: all these upwhirled aloft  
Fly o'er the backside<sup>o</sup> of the world far off  
495 Into a limbo large and broad, since called  
The Paradise of Fools, to few unknown  
Long after, now unpeopled, and untrod;  
All this dark globe the Fiend found as he passed,  
And long he wandered, till at last a gleam  
500 Of dawning light turned thitherward in haste  
His traveled<sup>o</sup> steps; far distant he descries  
Ascending by degrees<sup>o</sup> magnificent  
Up to the wall of Heaven a structure high,  
At top whereof, but far more rich appeared  
505 The work as of a kingly palace gate  
With frontispiece<sup>o</sup> of diamond and gold  
Embellished; thick with sparkling orient<sup>o</sup> gems  
The portal shone, inimitable on earth,  
By model, or by shading pencil drawn.  
510 The stairs were such as whereon Jacob saw  
Angels ascending and descending, bands  
Of guardians bright, when he from Esau fled  
To Padan-Aram in the field of Luz,  
Dreaming by night under the open sky,  
515 And waking cried, "This is the gate of Heav'n."<sup>4</sup>  
Each stair mysteriously was meant, nor stood  
There always, but drawn up to Heav'n sometimes  
Viewless,<sup>o</sup> and underneath a bright sea flowed  
Of jasper, or of liquid pearl, whereon  
520 Who after came from earth, sailing arrived,  
Wafted by angels, or flew o'er the lake



Rapt in a chariot drawn by fiery steeds.<sup>5</sup>  
The stairs were then let down, whether to dare  
The Fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate  
His sad exclusion from the doors of bliss.  
525 Direct against which opened from beneath,  
Just o'er the blissful seat of Paradise,  
A passage down to th' earth, a passage wide,<sup>6</sup>  
Wider by far than that of aftertimes  
Over Mount Zion, and, though that were large,  
530 Over the Promised Land to God so dear,  
By which, to visit oft those happy tribes,  
On high behests his angels to and fro  
Passed frequent, and his eye with choice<sup>o</sup> regard  
From Paneas the fount of Jordan's flood  
535 To Beërsaba, where the Holy Land  
Borders on Egypt and the Arabian shore;<sup>7</sup>  
So wide the op'ning seemed, where bounds were set  
To darkness, such as bound the ocean wave.  
Satan from hence now on the lower stair  
540 That scaled by steps of gold to Heaven gate  
Looks down with wonder at the sudden view  
Of all this world at once. As when a scout  
Through dark and desert ways with peril gone  
All night; at last by break of cheerful dawn  
545 Obtains<sup>o</sup> the brow of some high-climbing hill,  
Which to his eye discovers unaware  
The goodly prospect of some foreign land  
First seen, or some renowned metropolis  
With glistening spires and pinnacles adorned,  
550 Which now the rising sun gilds with his beams.  
Such wonder seized, though after Heaven seen,  
The Spirit malign, but much more envy seized  
At sight of all this world beheld so fair.  
Round he surveys, and well might, where he stood  
555 So high above the circling canopy

Of night's extended shade; from eastern point  
Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears  
Andromeda far off Atlantic seas<sup>8</sup>  
Beyond th' horizon; then from pole to pole  
560 He views in breadth, and without longer pause  
Down right into the world's first region throws  
His flight precipitant, and winds with ease  
Through the pure marble<sup>o</sup> air his oblique way  
Amongst innumerable stars, that shone  
565 Stars distant, but nigh hand seemed other worlds,  
Or other worlds they seemed, or happy isles,  
Like those Hesperian gardens famed of old,  
Fortunate fields, and groves and flow'ry vales,<sup>9</sup>  
Thrice happy isles, but who dwelt happy there  
570 He stayed not to inquire: above them all  
The golden sun in splendor likest Heaven  
Allured his eye: thither his course he bends  
Through the calm firmament;<sup>o</sup> but up or down  
By center, or eccentric, hard to tell,  
575 Or longitude,<sup>1</sup> where the great luminary  
Aloof the vulgar constellations thick,  
That from his lordly eye keep distance due,  
Dispenses light from far; they as they move  
Their starry dance in numbers that compute  
580 Days, months, and years, towards his all-cheering  
lamp  
Turn swift their various motions, or are turned  
By his magnetic beam, that gently warms  
The universe, and to each inward part  
With gentle penetration, though unseen,  
585 Shoots invisible virtue<sup>o</sup> even to the deep:  
So wondrously was set his station bright.  
There lands the Fiend, a spot like which perhaps  
Astronomer in the sun's lucent orb  
590 Through his glazed optic tube yet never saw.<sup>2</sup>

The place he found beyond expression bright,  
Compared with aught on earth, metal or stone;  
Not all parts like, but all alike informed  
With radiant light, as glowing iron with fire;  
If metal, part seemed gold, part silver clear;  
595 If stone, carbuncle most or chrysolite,<sup>3</sup>  
Ruby or topaz, to the twelve that shone  
In Aaron's breastplate,<sup>4</sup> and a stone besides  
Imagined rather oft than elsewhere seen,<sup>5</sup>  
That stone, or like to that which here below  
600 Philosophers in vain so long have sought,<sup>6</sup>  
In vain, though by their powerful art they bind  
Volatile Hermes, and call up unbound  
In various shapes old Proteus from the sea,  
Drained through a limbec to his native form.<sup>7</sup>  
605 What wonder then if fields and regions here  
Breathe forth elixir pure,<sup>8</sup> and rivers run  
Potable<sup>o</sup> gold, when with one virtuous<sup>o</sup> touch  
Th' arch-chemic<sup>o</sup> sun so far from us remote  
Produces with terrestrial humor<sup>o</sup> mixed  
610 Here in the dark so many precious things  
Of color glorious and effect so rare?  
Here matter new to gaze the Devil met  
Undazzled, far and wide his eye commands,  
For sight no obstacle found here, nor shade,  
615 But all sunshine, as when his beams at noon  
Culminate from th' equator, as they now  
Shot upward still direct, whence no way round  
Shadow from body opaque can fall,<sup>9</sup> and the air,  
Nowhere so clear, sharpened his visual ray  
620 To objects distant far,<sup>1</sup> whereby he soon  
Saw within ken<sup>o</sup> a glorious angel stand,  
The same whom John saw also in the sun:<sup>2</sup>  
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;  
Of beaming sunny rays, a golden tiar<sup>o</sup>

625      Circled his head, nor less his locks behind  
Illustrious<sup>o</sup> on his shoulders fledge<sup>o</sup> with wings  
Lay waving round; on some great charge employed  
He seemed, or fixed in cogitation deep.  
630      Glad was the Spirit impure; as now in hope  
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight  
To Paradise the happy seat of man,  
His journey's end and our beginning woe.  
But first he casts<sup>o</sup> to change his proper shape,  
Which else might work him danger or delay:  
635      And now a stripling Cherub he appears,  
Not of the prime,<sup>3</sup> yet such as in his face  
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb  
Suitable grace diffused, so well he feigned;  
Under a coronet his flowing hair  
640      In curls on either cheek played, wings he wore  
Of many a colored plume sprinkled with gold,  
His habit fit for speed succinct,<sup>o</sup> and held  
Before his decent<sup>o</sup> steps a silver wand.  
He drew not nigh unheard; the angel bright,  
645      Ere he drew nigh, his radiant visage turned,  
Admonished by his ear, and straight<sup>o</sup> was known  
Th' Archangel Uriel, one of the sev'n  
Who in God's presence, nearest to his throne<sup>4</sup>  
Stand ready at command, and are his eyes  
650      That run through all the heav'ns, or down to th'  
earth  
Bear his swift errands over moist and dry,  
O'er sea and land: him Satan thus accosts:  
    "Uriel, for thou of those sev'n Spirits that stand  
In sight of God's high throne, gloriously bright,  
655      The first art wont<sup>o</sup> his great authentic<sup>o</sup> will  
Interpreter through highest Heav'n to bring,  
Where all his sons thy embassy attend;  
And here art likeliest by supreme decree

660 Like honor to obtain, and as his eye  
To visit oft this new creation round;  
Unspeakable desire to see, and know  
All these his wondrous works, but chiefly man,  
His chief delight and favor, o him for whom  
665 All these his works so wondrous he ordained,  
Hath brought me from the choirs of Cherubim  
Alone thus wand'ring. Brightest Seraph tell  
In which of all these shining orbs hath man  
His fixèd seat, or fixèd seat hath none,  
670 But all these shining orbs his choice to dwell;  
That I may find him, and with secret gaze,  
Or open admiration him behold  
On whom the great Creator hath bestowed  
Worlds, and on whom hath all these graces poured;  
That both in him and all things, as is meet, o  
675 The Universal Maker we may praise;  
Who justly hath driv'n out his rebel foes  
To deepest Hell, and to repair that loss  
Created this new happy race of men  
To serve him better: wise are all his ways."  
680     So spake the false dissembler unperceived;  
For neither man nor angel can discern  
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks  
Invisible, except to God alone,  
By his permissive will, through Heav'n and earth:  
685 And oft though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps  
At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity  
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill  
Where no ill seems: which now for once beguiled  
Uriel, though regent of the sun, and held  
690 The sharpest-sighted Spirit of all in Heav'n;  
Who to the fraudulent impostor foul  
In his uprightness answer thus returned:  
"Fair angel, thy desire which tends o to know  
The works of God, thereby to glorify

695 The great Work-Master, leads to no excess  
That reaches blame, but rather merits praise  
The more it seems excess, that led thee hither  
From thy empyreal mansion thus alone,  
700 To witness with thine eyes what some perhaps  
Contented with report hear only in Heav'n:  
For wonderful indeed are all his works,  
Pleasant to know, and worthiest to be all  
Had in remembrance always with delight;  
705 But what created mind can comprehend  
Their number, or the wisdom infinite  
That brought them forth, but hid their causes deep.  
I saw when at his word the formless mass,  
This world's material mold,<sup>o</sup> came to a heap:  
710 Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar  
Stood ruled, stood vast infinitude confined;  
Till at his second bidding darkness fled,  
Light shone, and order from disorder sprung:  
Swift to their several quarters hasted then  
715 The cumbrous elements, earth, flood, air, fire,  
And this ethereal quintessence<sup>5</sup> of Heav'n  
Flew upward, spirited with various forms,  
That rolled orbicular,<sup>6</sup> and turned to stars  
Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move;  
Each had his place appointed, each his course,  
720 The rest in circuit walls this universe.  
Look downward on that globe whose hither side  
With light from hence, though but reflected, shines;  
That place is earth the seat of man, that light  
His day, which else as th' other hemisphere  
725 Night would invade, but there the neighboring moon  
(So call that opposite fair star) her aid  
Timely interposes, and her monthly round  
Still ending, still renewing through mid-Heav'n,  
730 With borrowed light her countenance triform<sup>7</sup>

Hence<sup>8</sup> fills and empties to enlighten th' earth,  
 And in her pale dominion checks the night.  
 That spot to which I point is Paradise,  
 Adam's abode, those lofty shades his bow'r.  
 Thy way thou canst not miss, me mine requires."  
 735        Thus said, he turned, and Satan bowing low,  
              As to superior Spirits is wont in Heav'n,  
              Where honor due and reverence none neglects,  
              Took leave, and toward the coast of earth beneath,  
 740        Down from th' ecliptic,<sup>9</sup> sped with hoped success,  
              Throws his steep flight in many an airy wheel,  
              Nor stayed, till on Niphates' top<sup>9</sup> he lights.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This second proem or invocation (3.1–55) is a hymn to Light, addressed either as the first creature of God or as coeternal with God, with allusion to 1 John 1:5, "God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, would you rather be called (a Latinism).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hell is "utter" (outer) darkness; Chaos is middle darkness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: One of the so-called Orphic hymns is "To Night," and Orpheus himself visited the underworld. But Milton's song, Christian and epic, is of a different kind.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Urania (though not named until 7.1).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cataract—*suffusio nigra*. "Drop serene": *gutta serena*, the medical term for Milton's kind of blindness.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The mountain of scriptural inspiration, with its brooks Siloa and Kidron.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, blind like me.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Thamyras was a blind Thracian poet who lived before Homer; "Maeonides" is an epithet of Homer; Tiresias was the blind prophet of Thebes; Phineus was a blind king and seer (*Aeneid* 3).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Forming a wide breach between Heaven and Hell.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, if I had not foreknown it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Satan and his crew.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Son echoes (or rather foreshadows) Abraham pleading with the Lord to spare Sodom: "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked . . . that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: God's speech is rhythmic and sometimes rhymed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In this speech, Milton's God rejects the Calvinist doctrine that he had from the beginning predestined the damnation or salvation of each individual soul; he claims rather that grace sufficient for salvation is offered to all, enabling everyone, if they choose to do so, to believe and persevere. He does, however, assert his right to give special grace to some.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: By using the light of conscience well they will gain more light.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Mortal" means "human" in line 214, but "deadly" in line 215.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Compare the devils in the Great Consult, 2.420–26.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the Latin sense, throw down.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The antecedent of "whom" is, loosely construed, the "their nature" that follows it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Son of God, who long antedates the creation of Adam and who is actually the first created being (3.383), is later incarnated in Jesus Christ; he is called Second Adam and Son of Man by reason of his descent from the first man, Adam. See 1



Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The merit of Christ attributed vicariously ("imputed") to human beings frees from original sin those who renounce their own deeds, good and bad, and hope to be saved by faith.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A heterodox doctrine, that Christ was Son of God by merit. Compare with Satan (2.5).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Hebrew "Messiah" means "the anointed one."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Orders of angels.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Milton's description of the Last Judgment draws on several biblical texts, including Matthew 24:30–31 and 25:31–32; the account of the burning and re-creation of the heavens and earth is from 2 Peter 3:12–13.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Multitude" (line 345) is the subject of the sentence, "rung" the verb, and "Heav'n" the object.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thrones of God and the Son.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Greek, "unfading," a legendary immortal flower.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Milton draws freely, for his Christian Heaven, on descriptions of the classical paradisaical place, the Elysian Fields.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The turn from theological debate to images that evoke a more mystical aspect of God.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Son is not eternal, as in Trinitarian doctrine, but rather, God's first creation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: If it were not for the Son who is God's image, no creature could see God.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The rebel angels.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Either Milton here quotes the angels singing as a single chorus, or he associates himself with their song, or both.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Satan is on the outermost of the ten concentric spheres that make up the cosmos.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Imaus, a ridge of mountains beyond the modern Himalayas, runs north through Asia from modern Afghanistan to the Arctic Circle.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Both the Ganges and the Hydaspes (a tributary of the Indus) rise from the mountains of northern India. Sericana (line 438) is a region in northwest China.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Milton's Paradise of Fools (named in line 496) was inspired by Ariosto's Limbo of Vanity in *Orlando Furioso* (Book 34, lines 73ff.); Milton's region is reserved for deluded victims of misplaced devotion, chiefly Roman Catholics.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Holy men like Enoch and Elijah, transported to Heaven while yet alive (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11–12).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Giants, born of unnatural marriages between the "sons of God" and the daughters of men (Genesis 6:4), are creatures unkindly mixed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Shinar, the plain of Babel (Genesis 11:2–9); the Tower of Babel is an emblem of human pride and folly.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, it would take too long to name them. Both Empedocles and Cleombrotus foolishly carried piety to the point of suicide.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Religious paraphernalia. The white friars are Carmelites; the black, Dominicans; and the gray, Franciscans.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Place where Christ was crucified.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Some try to trick God into granting them salvation by wearing on their deathbeds the garb of various religious orders.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton follows their souls through the spheres of the moon and sun, the five then-known planets, the fixed stars, and the sphere responsible for the "trepidation" (a periodic corrective shudder of the cosmos), up to the primum mobile, or prime mover. The next step seems to be the empyreal Heaven.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The dress of religious orders, together with (next lines) saints' relics, rosary beads, various kinds of pardon for sins, and papal decrees ("bulls").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The story of Jacob's vision is summarized from Genesis 28:1–19; the stairs of the ladder (next line) allegorically ("mysteriously") represent stages of spiritual growth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Elijah was wafted to heaven in a chariot.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A passage through the crystalline spheres, otherwise impenetrable.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: From Paneas (or Dan) in northern Palestine to Beersaba, or Beersheba, near the Egyptian border—the entire land of Israel.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the zodiac, Libra is diametrically opposite Aries, or the Ram ("the fleecy star"), which seems to carry the constellation Andromeda on its back.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The gardens of the Hesperides and the "fortunate isles" of Greek mythology, classical versions of paradise, lay far out in the Atlantic.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The passage leaves open whether the sun or the earth is at the center of the cosmos.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Galileo first observed sunspots through his telescope in 1609.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Any green stone. "Carbuncle": any red stone.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In Exodus 28:15–20, Aaron's "breastplate" is described as decorated with twelve different gems, of which Milton lists the first four.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, elsewhere imagined more often than seen.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Alchemists had identified the "philosophers" stone with the *urim* on Aaron's breastplate (Exodus 28:30); that stone reputedly could heal all diseases, restore paradise, and transmute base metals to gold.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: “Hermes”: the winged god and the element mercury, which evaporated readily (“volatile”). “Proteus”: the shape-shifting sea god, a symbol of matter. Alchemists would “bind” (solidify) mercury and dissolve or refine matter to its “native form” in a vessel (alembic, “limbec”).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The liquid form of the philosopher’s stone. “Here”: in the sun.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Before the Fall (and the consequent tipping of the earth’s axis) the sun at noon, on the equator, never cast a shadow. “Culminate”: reach their zenith.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The eye was thought to emit a beam into the object perceived.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “I saw an angel standing in the sun” (Revelation 19:17).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Not yet in the prime of life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Uriel—in Hebrew, “light” (or “fire”) of God—is the angel named first (in 2 Esdras 4:1–5, *apocrypha*) among the seven angels who stood before God’s throne.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The fifth element, of which the incorruptible heavenly bodies were made.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The spherical shape of the stars and their orbits. “Spirited with various forms”: presided over or inhabited by various angelic spirits or intelligences (Plato, *Timaeus* 41E).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The moon was said to have a triple nature: Luna in Heaven, Diana on earth, and Hecate in Hell.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: From here (the sun).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A mountain in Assyria.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *uncreated, eternal*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cover*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always remember*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *verses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nightingale* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the dark* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *Book of Nature* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *wonder* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *sky, cosmos*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *influence, strength*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *feathered*[Return to reference](#) °
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## Book 4

### *The Argument*

Satan now in prospect of Eden, and nigh the place where he must now attempt the bold enterprise which he undertook alone against God and man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despair; but at length confirms himself in evil, journeys on to Paradise, whose outward prospect and situation is described, overleaps the bounds, sits in the shape of a cormorant on the Tree of Life, as highest in the Garden to look about him. The Garden described; Satan's first sight of Adam and Eve; his wonder at their excellent form and happy state, but with resolution to work their fall; overhears their discourse, thence gathers that the Tree of Knowledge was forbidden them to eat of, under penalty of death; and thereon intends to found his temptation, by seducing them to transgress: then leaves them a while, to know further of their state by some other means. Meanwhile Uriel descending on a sunbeam warns Gabriel, who had in charge the gate of Paradise, that some evil Spirit had escaped the deep, and passed at noon by his sphere in the shape of a good angel down to Paradise, discovered after by his furious gestures in the mount. Gabriel promises to find him ere morning. Night coming on, Adam and Eve discourse of going to their rest: their bower described; their evening worship. Gabriel drawing forth his bands of nightwatch to walk the round of Paradise, appoints two strong angels to Adam's bower, lest the evil Spirit should be there doing some harm to Adam or Eve sleeping; there they find him at the ear of Eve, tempting her in a dream, and bring him, though unwilling, to Gabriel; by whom questioned, he scornfully answers, prepares resistance, but hindered by a sign from heaven, flies out of Paradise.

O for that warning voice, which he who saw



Th' Apocalypse, heard cry in Heaven aloud,  
Then when the Dragon, put to second rout,  
Came furious down to be revenged on men,  
"Woe to the inhabitants on earth!"<sup>1</sup> that now,  
5 While time was, our first parents had been warned  
The coming of their secret foe, and scaped  
Haply<sup>o</sup> so scaped his mortal<sup>o</sup> snare; for now  
Satan, now first inflamed with rage, came down,  
The tempter ere<sup>o</sup> th' accuser of mankind,  
10 To wreak<sup>o</sup> on innocent frail man his loss  
Of that first battle, and his flight to Hell:  
Yet not rejoicing in his speed, though bold,  
Far off and fearless, nor with cause to boast,  
Begins his dire attempt, which nigh the birth  
15 Now rolling, boils in his tumultuous breast,  
And like a devilish engine back recoils  
Upon himself; horror and doubt distract  
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir  
The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
20 He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell  
One step no more than from himself can fly  
By change of place: now conscience wakes despair  
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory  
Of what he was, what is, and what must be  
25 Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue.  
Sometimes towards Eden which now in his view  
Lay pleasant, his grieved look he fixes sad,  
Sometimes towards Heav'n and the full-blazing sun,  
Which now sat high in his meridian tow'r:<sup>2</sup>  
30 Then much revolving,<sup>o</sup> thus in sighs began.  
"O thou that with surpassing glory crowned,<sup>3</sup>  
Look'st from thy sole dominion like the god  
Of this new world: at whose sight all the stars  
Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call,  
35 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name

O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams  
That bring to my remembrance from what state  
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere;  
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down  
40 Warring in Heav'n against Heav'n's matchless King:  
Ah wherefore! he deserved no such return  
From me, whom he created what I was  
In that bright eminence, and with his good  
Upbraided<sup>4</sup> none, nor was his service hard.  
45 What could be less than to afford him praise,  
The easiest recompense, and pay him thanks,  
How due! yet all his good proved ill in me,  
And wrought but malice; lifted up so high  
I 'sdained<sup>o</sup> subjection, and thought one step higher  
50 Would set me highest, and in a moment quit<sup>o</sup>  
The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
So burthensome still<sup>o</sup> paying, still to owe;  
Forgetful what from him I still received,  
And understood not that a grateful mind  
55 By owing owes not, but still pays, at once  
Indebted and discharged; what burden then?  
O had his powerful destiny ordained  
Me some inferior angel, I had stood  
Then happy; no unbounded hope had raised  
60 Ambition. Yet why not? some other Power<sup>o</sup>  
As great might have aspired, and me though mean  
Drawn to his part; but other Powers as great  
Fell not, but stand unshaken, from within  
Or from without, to all temptations armed.  
65 Hadst thou<sup>5</sup> the same free will and power to stand?  
Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to  
accuse,  
But Heav'n's free love dealt equally to all?  
Be then his love accursed, since love or hate,  
To me alike, it deals eternal woe.  
70

Nay cursed be thou; since against his thy will  
Chose freely what it now so justly rues.  
Me miserable!<sup>6</sup> which way shall I fly  
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?  
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;<sup>7</sup>  
75 And in the lowest deep a lower deep  
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,  
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.  
O then at last relent! is there no place  
Left for repentance, none for pardon left?  
80 None left but by submission; and that word  
Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame  
Among the Spirits beneath, whom I seduced  
With other promises and other vaunts  
Than to submit, boasting I could subdue  
85 Th' Omnipotent. Ay me, they little know  
How dearly I abide<sup>8</sup> that boast so vain,  
Under what torments inwardly I groan:  
While they adore me on the throne of Hell,  
With diadem and scepter high advanced  
90 The lower still I fall, only supreme  
In misery; such joy ambition finds.  
But say I could repent and could obtain  
By act of grace<sup>9</sup> my former state; how soon  
Would height recall high thoughts, how soon unsay  
95 What feigned submission swore: ease would recant  
Vows made in pain, as violent<sup>10</sup> and void.  
For never can true reconciliation grow  
Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep:  
Which would but lead me to a worse relapse,  
100 And heavier fall: so should I purchase dear  
Short intermission bought with double smart.  
This knows my punisher; therefore as far  
From granting he, as I from begging peace:  
All hope excluded thus, behold instead  
105

Of us outcast, exiled, his new delight,  
 Mankind created, and for him this world.  
 So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,  
 Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;  
 110 Evil be thou my good; by thee at least  
 Divided empire with Heav'n's King I hold  
 By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign;  
 As man ere long, and this new world shall know."  
 Thus while he spake, each passion dimmed his  
 face  
 115 Thrice changed with pale, <sup>o</sup>ire, envy, and despair,  
 Which marred his borrowed visage, and betrayed  
 Him counterfeit, if any eye beheld.  
 For heav'nly minds from such distempers foul  
 Are ever clear. Whereof he soon aware,  
 Each perturbation smoothed with outward calm,  
 120 Artificer of fraud; and was the first  
 That practiced falsehood under saintly show,  
 Deep malice to conceal, couched <sup>o</sup> with revenge:  
 Yet not enough had practiced to deceive  
 Uriel once warned; whose eye pursued him down  
 125 The way he went, and on th' Assyrian mount <sup>o</sup>  
 Saw him disfigured, more than could befall  
 Spirit of happy sort: his gestures fierce  
 He marked and mad demeanor, then alone,  
 As he supposed, all unobserved, unseen.  
 130 So on he fares, and to the border comes  
 Of Eden, where delicious Paradise, <sup>9</sup>  
 Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,  
 As with a rural mound the champaign head <sup>o</sup>  
 Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides  
 135 With thicket overgrown, grotesque <sup>1</sup> and wild,  
 Access denied; and overhead up grew  
 Insuperable heighth of loftiest shade,  
 Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm,

140 A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend  
Shade above shade, a woody theater<sup>2</sup>  
Of stateliest view. Yet higher than their tops  
The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung:  
Which to our general sire gave prospect large  
145 Into his nether empire neighboring round.  
And higher than that wall a circling row  
Of goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit,  
Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue  
Appeared, with gay enameled<sup>o</sup> colors mixed:  
150 On which the sun more glad impressed his beams  
Than in fair evening cloud, or humid bow,<sup>o</sup>  
When God hath show'ed the earth; so lovely  
seemed  
That landscape: and of pure now purer air<sup>3</sup>  
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires<sup>o</sup>  
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive<sup>o</sup>  
155 All sadness but despair: now gentle gales  
Fanning their odoriferous<sup>o</sup> wings dispense  
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole  
Those balmy spoils. As when to them who sail  
Beyond the Cape of Hope,<sup>o</sup> and now are past  
160 Mozambic, off at sea northeast winds blow  
Sabeian odors from the spicy shore  
Of Araby the Blest,<sup>4</sup> with such delay  
Well pleased they slack their course, and many a  
league  
165 Cheered with the grateful<sup>o</sup> smell old Ocean smiles.  
So entertained those odorous sweets the Fiend  
Who came their bane,<sup>o</sup> though with them better  
pleased  
Than Asmodeus with the fishy fume,  
That drove him, though enamored, from the spouse  
Of Tobit's son, and with a vengeance sent  
170 From Media post to Egypt, there fast bound.<sup>5</sup>

Now to th'ascent of that steep savage<sup>o</sup> hill  
Satan had journeyed on, pensive and slow;  
But further way found none, so thick entwined,  
As one continued brake,<sup>o</sup> the undergrowth  
175 Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplexed  
All path of man or beast that passed that way:  
One gate there only was, and that looked east  
On th' other side: which when th' arch-felon saw  
Due entrance he disdained, and in contempt,  
180 At one slight bound high overleaped all bound  
Of hill or highest wall, and sheer within  
Lights on his feet. As when a prowling wolf,  
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,  
Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve  
185 In hurdled cotes<sup>o</sup> amid the field secure,  
Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold:  
Or as a thief bent to unhoard the cash  
Of some rich burgher, whose substantial doors,  
Cross-barred and bolted fast, fear no assault,  
190 In at the window climbs, or o'er the tiles;  
So clomb<sup>o</sup> this first grand thief into God's fold:  
So since into his church lewd hirelings<sup>6</sup> climb.  
Thence up he flew, and on the Tree of Life,  
The middle tree and highest there that grew,  
195 Sat like a cormorant;<sup>7</sup> yet not true life  
Thereby regained, but sat devising death  
To them who lived; nor on the virtue<sup>o</sup> thought  
Of that life-giving plant, but only used  
For prospect,<sup>o</sup> what well used had been the pledge  
200 Of immortality. So little knows  
Any, but God alone, to value right  
The good before him, but perverts best things  
To worst abuse, or to their meanest use.  
Beneath him with new wonder now he views  
205 To all delight of human sense exposed

In narrow room nature's whole wealth, yea more,  
A heav'n on earth: for blissful Paradise  
Of God the garden was, by him in the east  
Of Eden planted; Eden stretched her line  
210 From Auran eastward to the royal tow'rs  
Of great Seleucia, built by Grecian kings,  
Or where the sons of Eden long before  
Dwelt in Telassar:<sup>8</sup> in this pleasant soil  
His far more pleasant garden God ordained;  
215 Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow  
All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste;  
And all amid them stood the Tree of Life,  
High eminent, blooming ambrosial<sup>o</sup> fruit  
Of vegetable gold; and next to life  
220 Our death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by,  
Knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill.  
Southward through Eden went a river large,<sup>9</sup>  
Nor changed his course, but through the shaggy hill  
Passed underneath engulfed, for God had thrown  
225 That mountain as his garden mold<sup>o</sup> high raised  
Upon the rapid current, which through veins  
Of porous earth with kindly<sup>o</sup> thirst up drawn,  
Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill  
Watered the garden; thence united fell  
230 Down the steep glade, and met the nether flood,  
Which from his darksome passage now appears,  
And now divided into four main streams,  
Runs diverse, wand'ring many a famous realm  
And country whereof here needs no account,  
235 But rather to tell how, if art could tell,  
How from that sapphire fount the crispèd<sup>o</sup> brooks,  
Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold,  
With mazy error<sup>1</sup> under pendent shades  
Ran nectar, visiting each plant, and fed  
240 Flow'rs worthy of Paradise which not nice<sup>o</sup> art

In beds and curious knots, but nature boon<sup>o</sup>  
Poured forth profuse on hill and dale and plain,  
Both where the morning sun first warmly smote  
The open field, and where the unpierced shade  
245 Embrowned<sup>o</sup> the noontide bow'rs. Thus was this  
place,  
A happy rural seat of various view,<sup>2</sup>  
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and  
balm,  
Others whose fruit burnished with golden rind  
Hung amiable,<sup>o</sup> Hesperian fables true,<sup>3</sup>  
250 If true, here only, and of delicious taste:  
Betwixt them lawns, or level downs,<sup>o</sup> and flocks  
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed,  
Or palmy hillock, or the flow'ry lap  
Of some irriguous<sup>o</sup> valley spread her store,  
255 Flow'rs of all hue, and without thorn the rose:  
Another side, umbrageous<sup>o</sup> grots and caves  
Of cool recess, o'er which the mantling<sup>o</sup> vine  
Lays forth her purple grape, and gently creeps  
Luxuriant; meanwhile murmuring waters fall  
260 Down the slope hills, dispersed, or in a lake,  
That to the fringed bank with myrtle crowned,  
Her crystal mirror holds, unite their streams.  
The birds their choir apply; airs,<sup>4</sup> vernal airs,  
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune  
265 The trembling leaves, while universal Pan<sup>5</sup>  
Knit<sup>o</sup> with the Graces and the Hours in dance  
Led on th' eternal spring. Not that fair field  
Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flow'rs  
Herself a fairer flow'r by gloomy Dis  
270 Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain  
To seek her through the world; nor that sweet grove  
Of Daphne by Orontes, and th' inspired  
Castalian spring, might with this Paradise



275 Of Eden strive;<sup>6</sup> nor that Nyseian isle  
 Girt with the river Triton, where old Cham,  
 Whom Gentiles Ammon call and Libyan Jove,  
 Hid Amalthea and her florid<sup>o</sup> son  
 Young Bacchus from his stepdame Rhea's eye;<sup>7</sup>  
 Nor where Abassin kings their issue guard,  
 280 Mount Amara,<sup>8</sup> though this by some supposed  
 True Paradise under the Ethiop line<sup>o</sup>  
 By Nilus'<sup>o</sup> head, enclosed with shining rock,  
 A whole day's journey high, but wide remote  
 From this Assyrian garden,<sup>o</sup> where the Fiend  
 285 Saw undelighted all delight, all kind  
 Of living creatures new to sight and strange:  
 Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
 Godlike erect, with native honor clad  
 In naked majesty seemed lords of all,  
 290 And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine  
 The image of their glorious Maker shone,  
 Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,  
 Severe but in true filial freedom placed;  
 Whence true authority in men;<sup>9</sup> though both  
 295 Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;  
 For contemplation he and valor formed,  
 For softness she and sweet attractive grace,  
 He for God only, she for God in him:<sup>1</sup>  
 His fair large front<sup>o</sup> and eye sublime declared  
 300 Absolute rule; and hyacinthine<sup>2</sup> locks  
 Round from his parted forelock manly hung  
 Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:  
 She as a veil down to the slender waist  
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
 305 Disheveled, but in wanton<sup>o</sup> ringlets waved  
 As the vine curls her tendrils,<sup>3</sup> which implied  
 Subjection, but required<sup>o</sup> with gentle sway,<sup>o</sup>  
 And by her yielded, by him best received,

310 Yielded with coy<sup>o</sup> submission, modest pride,  
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.  
Nor those mysterious parts were then concealed,  
Then was not guilty shame, dishonest<sup>o</sup> shame  
Of nature's works, honor dishonorable,  
315 Sin-bred, how have ye troubled all mankind  
With shows instead, mere shows of seeming pure,  
And banished from man's life his happiest life,  
Simplicity and spotless innocence.  
So passed they naked on, nor shunned the sight  
Of God or angel, for they thought no ill:  
320 So hand in hand they passed, the loveliest pair  
That ever since in love's embraces met,  
Adam the goodliest man of men since born  
His sons, the fairest of her daughters Eve.  
Under a tuft of shade that on a green  
325 Stood whispering soft, by a fresh fountain side  
They sat them down, and after no more toil  
Of their sweet gard'ning labor than sufficed  
To recommend cool Zephyr,<sup>4</sup> and made ease  
More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite  
330 More grateful, to their supper fruits they fell,  
Nectarine<sup>o</sup> fruits which the compliant boughs  
Yielded them, sidelong as they sat recline  
On the soft downy bank damasked with flow'rs:  
The savory pulp they chew, and in the rind  
335 Still as they thirsted scoop the brimming stream;  
Nor gentle purpose,<sup>o</sup> nor endearing smiles  
Wanted,<sup>o</sup> nor youthful dalliance as beseems  
Fair couple, linked in happy nuptial league,  
Alone as they. About them frisking played  
340 All beasts of th' earth, since wild, and of all chase<sup>o</sup>  
In wood or wilderness, forest or den;  
Sporting the lion ramped,<sup>o</sup> and in his paw  
Dandled the kid; bears, tigers, ounces,<sup>o</sup> pards<sup>o</sup>

345 Gamboled before them; th' unwieldy elephant  
 To make them mirth used all his might, and  
 wreathed  
 His lithe proboscis; <sup>o</sup> close the serpent sly  
 Insinuating, <sup>o</sup> wove with Gordian twine  
 His braided train, <sup>5</sup> and of his fatal guile  
 Gave proof unheeded; others on the grass  
 350 Couched, and now filled with pasture gazing sat,  
 Or bedward ruminating: <sup>o</sup> for the sun  
 Declined was hasting now with prone <sup>o</sup> career  
 To th' Ocean Isles, <sup>o</sup> and in th' ascending scale  
 Of Heav'n the stars that usher evening rose:  
 355 When Satan still in gaze, as first he stood,  
 Scarce thus at length failed speech recovered sad.  
 "O Hell! what do mine eyes with grief behold,  
 Into our room of bliss thus high advanced  
 Creatures of other mold, earth-born perhaps,  
 360 Not Spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright  
 Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue  
 With wonder, and could love, so lively shines  
 In them divine resemblance, and such grace  
 The hand that formed them on their shape hath  
 365 poured.  
 Ah gentle pair, ye little think how nigh  
 Your change approaches, when all these delights  
 Will vanish and deliver ye to woe,  
 More woe, the more your taste is now of joy;  
 Happy, but for so happy <sup>o</sup> ill secured  
 370 Long to continue, and this high seat your heav'n  
 Ill fenced for Heav'n to keep out such a foe  
 As now is entered; yet no purposed foe  
 To you whom I could pity thus forlorn  
 Though I unpitied: league with you I seek,  
 375 And mutual amity so strait, <sup>o</sup> so close,  
 That I with you must dwell, or you with me

Henceforth; my dwelling haply<sup>o</sup> may not please  
Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such  
Accept your Maker's work; he gave it me,  
380 Which I as freely give; Hell shall unfold,  
To entertain you two, her widest gates,  
And send forth all her kings; there will be room,  
Not like these narrow limits, to receive  
Your numerous offspring; if no better place,  
385 Thank him who puts me loath to this revenge  
On you who wrong me not for<sup>o</sup> him who wronged.  
And should I at your harmless innocence  
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just,  
Honor and empire with revenge enlarged  
390 By conquering this new world, compels me now  
To do what else though damned I should abhor."<sup>6</sup>

So spake the Fiend, and with necessity,  
The tyrant's plea, excused his devilish deeds.  
Then from his lofty stand on that high tree  
395 Down he alights among the sportful herd  
Of those four-footed kinds, himself now one,  
Now other, as their shape served best his end  
Nearer to view his prey, and unespied  
To mark what of their state he more might learn  
400 By word or action marked: about them round  
A lion now he stalks with fiery glare,  
Then as a tiger, who by chance hath spied  
In some purlieu<sup>o</sup> two gentle fawns at play,  
Straight<sup>o</sup> couches close, then rising changes oft  
405 His couchant watch, as one who chose his ground  
Whence rushing he might surest seize them both  
Gripped in each paw: when Adam first of men  
To first of women Eve thus moving speech  
Turned him all ear to hear new utterance flow:  
410 "Sole partner and sole<sup>o</sup> part of all these joys,  
Dearer thyself than all; needs must the Power

That made us, and for us this ample world  
Be infinitely good, and of his good  
As liberal and free as infinite,  
415 That raised us from the dust and placed us here  
In all this happiness, who at his hand  
Have nothing merited, nor can perform  
Aught whereof he hath need, he who requires  
420 From us no other service than to keep  
This one, this easy charge, of all the trees  
In Paradise that bear delicious fruit  
So various, not to taste that only Tree  
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,  
So near grows death to life, whate'er death is,  
425 Some dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou know'st  
God hath pronounced it death to taste that Tree,  
The only sign of our obedience left  
Among so many signs of power and rule  
Conferred upon us, and dominion giv'n  
430 Over all other creatures that possess  
Earth, air, and sea. Then let us not think hard  
One easy prohibition, who enjoy  
Free leave so large to all things else, and choice  
Unlimited of manifold delights:  
435 But let us ever praise him, and extol  
His bounty, following our delightful task  
To prune these growing plants, and tend these  
flow'rs,  
Which were it toilsome, yet with thee were sweet."  
440 To whom thus Eve replied. "O thou for whom  
And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh,  
And without whom am to no end, my guide  
And head, what thou hast said is just and right.  
For we to him indeed all praises owe,  
And daily thanks, I chiefly who enjoy  
445 So far the happier lot, enjoying thee  
Preeminent by so much odds,<sup>o</sup> while thou

Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find.  
That day I oft remember, when from sleep  
I first awaked, and found myself reposed<sup>o</sup>  
450 Under a shade on flowers, much wond'ring where  
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.  
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound  
Of waters issued from a cave and spread  
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved  
455 Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n; I thither went  
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down  
On the green bank, to look into the clear  
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.  
As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
460 A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared  
Bending to look on me, I started back,  
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,  
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks  
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed  
465 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain<sup>o</sup> desire,<sup>7</sup>  
Had not a voice thus warned me, 'What thou seest,  
What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,  
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,  
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays<sup>o</sup>  
470 Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he  
Whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy  
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear  
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called  
Mother of human race': what could I do,  
475 But follow straight<sup>o</sup> invisibly thus led?  
Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall,  
Under a platan,<sup>o</sup> yet methought less fair,  
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,  
Than that smooth wat'ry image; back I turned,  
480 Thou following cried'st aloud, 'Return fair Eve,  
Whom fli'st thou? Whom thou fli'st, of him thou art,

His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent  
 Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart  
 Substantial life, to have thee by my side  
 485 Henceforth an individual<sup>o</sup> solace dear;  
 Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim  
 My other half': with that thy gentle hand  
 Seized mine, I yielded, and from that time see  
 490 How beauty is excelled by manly grace  
 And wisdom, which alone is truly fair."  
 So spake our general mother, and with eyes  
 Of conjugal attraction unreprieved,  
 And meek surrender, half embracing leaned  
 On our first father, half her swelling breast  
 495 Naked met his under the flowing gold  
 Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight  
 Both of her beauty and submissive charms  
 Smiled with superior love, as Jupiter  
 On Juno smiles, when he impregns<sup>o</sup> the clouds  
 500 That shed May flowers; and pressed her matron lip  
 With kisses pure: aside the Devil turned  
 For envy, yet with jealous leer malign  
 Eyed them askance, and to himself thus plained.<sup>o</sup>  
 505 "Sight hateful, sight tormenting! thus these two  
 Imparadised in one another's arms  
 The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill  
 Of bliss on bliss, while I to Hell am thrust,  
 Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,  
 Among our other torments not the least,  
 510 Still<sup>o</sup> unfulfilled with pain of longing pines;  
 Yet let me not forget what I have gained  
 From their own mouths; all is not theirs it seems:  
 One fatal tree there stands of Knowledge called,  
 Forbidden them to taste: knowledge forbidden?  
 515 Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord  
 Envy<sup>o</sup> them that? Can it be sin to know,  
 Can it be death? And do they only stand

By ignorance, is that their happy state,  
 The proof of their obedience and their faith?  
 520 O fair foundation laid whereon to build  
 Their ruin! Hence I will excite their minds  
 With more desire to know, and to reject  
 Envious commands, invented with design  
 To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt  
 525 Equal with gods; aspiring to be such,  
 They taste and die: what likelier can ensue?  
 But first with narrow search I must walk round  
 This garden, and no corner leave unspied;  
 A chance, but chance<sup>8</sup> may lead where I may meet  
 530 Some wand'ring Spirit of Heav'n, by fountain side,  
 Or in thick shade retired, from him to draw  
 What further would be learnt. Live while ye may,  
 Yet happy pair; enjoy, till I return,  
 Short pleasures, for long woes are to succeed."  
 535 So saying, his proud step he scornful turned,  
 But with sly circumspection, and began  
 Through wood, through waste, o'er hill, o'er dale his  
 roam.<sup>o</sup>  
 Meanwhile in utmost longitude, where heav'n<sup>o</sup>  
 With earth and ocean meets, the setting sun  
 540 Slowly descended, and with right aspect  
 Against the eastern gate of Paradise  
 Leveled his evening rays.<sup>9</sup> It was a rock  
 Of alabaster,<sup>1</sup> piled up to the clouds,  
 Conspicuous far, winding with one ascent  
 545 Accessible from earth, one entrance high;  
 The rest was craggy cliff, that overhung  
 Still as it rose, impossible to climb.  
 Betwixt these rocky pillars Gabriel<sup>2</sup> sat  
 Chief of th' angelic guards, awaiting night;  
 550 About him exercised heroic games  
 Th' unarmèd youth of Heav'n, but nigh at hand



Celestial armory, shields, helms, and spears  
Hung high with diamond flaming, and with gold.  
Thither came Uriel, gliding through the even  
555 On a sunbeam, swift as a shooting star  
In autumn thwarts<sup>o</sup> the night, when vapors fired  
Impress the air, and shows the mariner  
From what point of his compass to beware  
Impetuous winds:<sup>3</sup> he thus began in haste.  
560 "Gabriel, to thee thy course by lot hath giv'n  
Charge and strict watch that to this happy place  
No evil thing approach or enter in;  
This day at height of noon came to my sphere  
A Spirit, zealous, as he seemed, to know  
565 More of th' Almighty's works, and chiefly man  
God's latest image: I described<sup>o</sup> his way  
Bent all on speed, and marked his airy gait;<sup>o</sup>  
But in the mount that lies from Eden north,  
Where he first lighted, soon discerned his looks  
570 Alien from Heav'n, with passions foul obscured:  
Mine eye pursued him still, but under shade<sup>o</sup>  
Lost sight of him; one of the banished crew  
I fear, hath ventured from the deep, to raise  
New troubles; him thy care must be to find."  
575 To whom the winged warrior thus returned:  
"Uriel, no wonder if thy perfect sight,  
Amid the sun's bright circle where thou sitt'st,  
See far and wide. In at this gate none pass  
The vigilance here placed, but such as come  
580 Well known from Heav'n; and since meridian hour<sup>o</sup>  
No creature thence: if Spirit of other sort,  
So minded, have o'erleaped these earthy bounds  
On purpose, hard thou know'st it to exclude  
Spiritual substance with corporeal bar.  
585 But if within the circuit of these walks,  
In whatsoever shape he lurk, of whom

Thou tell'st, by morrow dawning I shall know."  
 So promised he, and Uriel to his charge  
 Returned on that bright beam, whose point now  
 590 raised  
 Bore him slope downward to the sun now fall'n  
 Beneath th' Azorès; whether the prime orb,  
 Incredible how swift, had thither rolled  
 Diurnal, <sup>o</sup> or this less volúble <sup>o</sup> earth  
 By shorter flight to th' east, <sup>4</sup> had left him there  
 595 Arraying with reflected purple and gold  
 The clouds that on his western throne attend.  
 Now came still evening on, and twilight gray  
 Had in her sober livery all things clad;  
 Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,  
 600 They to their grassy couch, these to their nests  
 Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;  
 She all night long her amorous descant <sup>o</sup> sung;  
 Silence was pleased: now glowed the firmament  
 With living sapphires: Hesperus <sup>5</sup> that led  
 605 The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon  
 Rising in clouded majesty, at length  
 Apparent <sup>o</sup> queen unveiled her peerless light,  
 And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.  
 When Adam thus to Eve: "Fair consort, th' hour  
 610 Of night, and all things now retired to rest  
 Mind us of like repose, since God hath set  
 Labor and rest, as day and night to men  
 Successive, and the timely dew of sleep  
 Now falling with soft slumbrous weight inclines  
 615 Our eyelids; other creatures all day long  
 Rove idle unemployed, and less need rest;  
 Man hath his daily work of body or mind  
 Appointed, which declares his dignity,  
 And the regard of Heav'n on all his ways;  
 620 While other animals unactive range,

And of their doings God takes no account.  
 Tomorrow ere fresh morning streak the east  
 With first approach of light, we must be ris'n,  
 And at our pleasant labor, to reform  
 625 Yon flow'ry arbors, yonder alleys green,  
 Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,  
 That mock our scant manuring,<sup>o</sup> and require  
 More hands than ours to lop their wanton<sup>o</sup> growth:  
 Those blossoms also, and those dropping gums,  
 630 That lie bestrown unsightly and unsmooth,  
 Ask riddance,<sup>o</sup> if we mean to tread with ease;  
 Meanwhile, as nature wills, night bids us rest."  
 To whom thus Eve with perfect beauty adorned.  
 "My author and disposer, what thou bidd'st  
 635 Unargued I obey; so God ordains,  
 God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more  
 Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.  
 With thee conversing I forget all time.  
 All seasons<sup>o</sup> and their change, all please alike.  
 640 Sweet<sup>6</sup> is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,  
 With charm<sup>7</sup> of earliest birds; pleasant the sun  
 When first on this delightful land he spreads  
 His orient<sup>o</sup> beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flow'r,  
 Glist'ring with dew; fragrant the fertile earth  
 645 After soft showers; and sweet the coming on  
 Of grateful evening mild, then silent night  
 With this her solemn bird<sup>o</sup> and this fair moon,  
 And these the gems of heav'n, her starry train:  
 But neither breath of morn when she ascends  
 650 With charm of earliest birds, nor rising sun  
 On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flow'r,  
 Glist'ring with dew, nor fragrance after showers,  
 Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent night  
 With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon,  
 655 Or glittering starlight without thee is sweet.

But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom  
This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?"

To whom our general ancestor replied.

660 "Daughter of God and man, accomplished<sup>8</sup> Eve,  
Those have their course to finish, round the earth,  
By morrow evening, and from land to land  
In order, though to nations yet unborn,  
Minist'ring light prepared, they set and rise;  
Lest total darkness should by night regain  
665 Her old possession, and extinguish life  
In nature and all things, which these soft<sup>o</sup> fires  
Not only enlighten, but with kindly<sup>o</sup> heat  
Of various influence foment<sup>o</sup> and warm,  
Temper or nourish, or in part shed down  
670 Their stellar virtue on all kinds that grow  
On earth, made hereby apter to receive  
Perfection from the sun's more potent ray.<sup>9</sup>  
These then, though unbeheld in deep of night,  
Shine not in vain, nor think, though men were none,  
675 That heav'n would want<sup>o</sup> spectators, God want  
praise;  
Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth  
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep:  
All these with ceaseless praise his works behold  
Both day and night: how often from the steep  
680 Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard  
Celestial voices to the midnight air,  
Sole, or responsive each to other's note  
Singing their great Creator: oft in bands  
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,  
685 With heav'nly touch of instrumental sounds  
In full harmonic number joined, their songs  
Divide<sup>1</sup> the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven."

Thus talking hand in hand alone they passed  
690 On to their blissful bower; it was a place

Chos'n by the sov'reign Planter, when he framed<sup>o</sup>  
 All things to man's delightful use; the roof  
 Of thickest covert was inwoven shade  
 Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew  
 695 Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either side  
 Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub  
 Fenced up the verdant wall; each beauteous flow'r,  
 Iris all hues, roses, and jessamine<sup>o</sup>  
 Reared high their flourished<sup>o</sup> heads between, and  
 wrought  
 Mosaic; underfoot the violet,  
 700 Crocus, and hyacinth with rich inlay  
 Broidered the ground, more colored than with stone  
 Of costliest emblem:<sup>o</sup> other creature here  
 Beast, bird, insect, or worm durst enter none,  
 Such was their awe of man. In shadier bower  
 705 More sacred and sequestered,<sup>o</sup> though but feigned,  
 Pan or Silvanus never slept, nor nymph,  
 Nor Faunus<sup>2</sup> haunted. Here in close recess  
 With flowers, garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs  
 Espoused Eve decked first her nuptial bed,  
 710 And heav'nly choirs the hymenean<sup>o</sup> sung,  
 What day the genial<sup>3</sup> angel to our sire  
 Brought her in naked beauty more adorned,  
 More lovely than Pandora, whom the gods  
 Endowed with all their gifts, and O too like  
 715 In sad event,<sup>o</sup> when to the unwiser son  
 Of Japhet brought by Hermes, she ensnared  
 Mankind with her fair looks, to be avenged  
 On him who had stole Jove's authentic fire.<sup>4</sup>  
 Thus at their shady lodge arrived, both stood,  
 720 Both turned, and under open sky adored  
 The God that made both sky, air, earth, and heav'n  
 Which they beheld, the moon's resplendent globe  
 And starry pole:<sup>o</sup> "Thou also mad'st the night,

725     Maker Omnipotent, and thou the day,  
Which we in our appointed work employed  
Have finished happy in our mutual help  
And mutual love, the crown of all our bliss  
Ordained by thee, and this delicious place  
730     For us too large, where thy abundance wants  
Partakers, and uncropped falls to the ground.  
But thou hast promised from us two a race  
To fill the earth, who shall with us extol  
Thy goodness infinite, both when we wake,  
And when we seek, as now, thy gift of sleep.”  
735     This said unanimous, and other rites  
Observing none, but adoration pure  
Which God likes best,<sup>5</sup> into their inmost bow’r  
Handed<sup>o</sup> they went; and eased<sup>o</sup> the putting off  
740     These troublesome disguises which we wear,  
Straight side by side were laid, nor turned I ween<sup>o</sup>  
Adam from his fair spouse, nor Eve the rites  
Mysterious<sup>6</sup> of connubial love refused:  
Whatever hypocrites austere talk  
Of purity and place and innocence,  
745     Defaming as impure what God declares  
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all.  
Our Maker bids increase,<sup>7</sup> who bids abstain  
But our destroyer, foe to God and man?  
Hail wedded Love, mysterious law, true source  
750     Of human offspring, sole propriety<sup>o</sup>  
In Paradise of all things common else.  
By thee adulterous lust was driv’n from men  
Among the bestial herds to range, by thee  
Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,  
755     Relations dear, and all the charities<sup>o</sup>  
Of father, son, and brother first were known.  
Far be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,  
Or think thee unbefitting holiest place,

760 Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,  
 Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced,  
 Present, or past, as saints and patriarchs used.<sup>8</sup>  
 Here Love his golden shafts employs,<sup>9</sup> here lights  
 His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,  
 765 Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile  
 Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendeared,  
 Casual fruition, nor in court amours,  
 Mixed dance, or wanton masque, or midnight ball,  
 Or serenade, which the starved<sup>o</sup> lover sings  
 To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.  
 770 These lulled by nightingales embracing slept,  
 And on their naked limbs the flow'ry roof  
 Show'ed roses, which the morn repaired.<sup>o</sup> Sleep on,  
 Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek  
 No happier state, and know to know no more.<sup>1</sup>  
 775 Now had night measured with her shadowy cone  
 Halfway up hill this vast sublunar vault,<sup>2</sup>  
 And from their ivory port the Cherubim  
 Forth issuing at th' accustomed hour stood armed  
 To their night watches in warlike parade,  
 780 When Gabriel to his next in power thus spake:  
 "Uzziel,<sup>3</sup> half these draw off, and coast<sup>o</sup> the south  
 With strictest watch; these other wheel<sup>4</sup> the north,  
 Our circuit meets full west." As flame they part  
 Half wheeling to the shield, half to the spear.  
 785 From these, two strong and subtle Spirits he called  
 That near him stood, and gave them thus in charge:  
 "Ithuriel and Zephon,<sup>5</sup> with winged speed  
 Search through this garden, leave unsearched no  
 nook,  
 790 But chiefly where those two fair creatures lodge,  
 Now laid perhaps asleep secure of<sup>o</sup> harm.  
 This evening from the sun's decline arrived  
 Who<sup>o</sup> tells of some infernal Spirit seen

Hitherward bent; who could have thought? escaped  
 The bars of Hell, on errand bad no doubt:  
 795 Such where ye find, seize fast, and hither bring."  
 So saying, on he led his radiant files,  
 Dazzling the moon; these to the bower direct  
 In search of whom they sought: him there they  
 found  
 Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve;  
 800 Assaying<sup>o</sup> by his devilish art to reach  
 The organs of her fancy,<sup>6</sup> and with them forge  
 Illusions as he list,<sup>o</sup> phantasms and dreams;  
 Or if, inspiring<sup>o</sup> venom, he might taint  
 Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise  
 805 Like gentle breaths from rivers pure, thence raise  
 At least distempered,<sup>o</sup> discontented thoughts,  
 Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires  
 Blown up with high conceits<sup>o</sup> engend'ring pride.  
 Him thus intent Ithuriel with his spear  
 810 Touched lightly; for no falsehood can endure  
 Touch of celestial temper,<sup>7</sup> but returns  
 Of force to its own likeness: up he starts  
 Discovered and surprised. As when a spark  
 Lights on a heap of nitrous powder,<sup>8</sup> laid  
 815 Fit for the tun some magazine to store  
 Against a rumored war, the smutty<sup>o</sup> grain  
 With sudden blaze diffused, inflames the air:  
 So started up in his own shape the Fiend.  
 Back stepped those two fair angels half amazed  
 820 So sudden to behold the grisly king;  
 Yet thus, unmoved with fear, accost him soon:  
 "Which of those rebel Spirits adjudged to Hell  
 Com'st thou, escaped thy prison; and transformed,  
 Why sat'st thou like an enemy in wait  
 825 Here watching at the head of these that sleep?"  
 "Know ye not then," said Satan, filled with scorn,



830 "Know ye not me? Ye knew me once no mate  
For you, there sitting where ye durst not soar;  
Not to know me argues<sup>o</sup> yourselves unknown,  
The lowest of your throng; or if ye know,  
Why ask ye, and superfluous begin  
Your message, like to end as much in vain?"  
To whom thus Zephon, answering scorn with  
scorn:  
835 "Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,  
Or undiminished brightness, to be known  
As when thou stood'st in Heav'n upright and pure;  
That glory then, when thou no more wast good,  
Departed from thee, and thou resembl'st now  
840 Thy sin and place of doom obscure<sup>o</sup> and foul.  
But come, for thou, be sure, shalt give account  
To him who sent us, whose charge is to keep  
This place inviolable, and these from harm."  
So spake the Cherub, and his grave rebuke  
Severe in youthful beauty, added grace  
845 Invincible: abashed the Devil stood,  
And felt how awful<sup>o</sup> goodness is, and saw  
Virtue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pined<sup>o</sup>  
His loss; but chiefly to find here observed  
His luster visibly impaired; yet seemed  
850 Undaunted. "If I must contend," said he,  
"Best with the best, the sender not the sent,  
Or all at once; more glory will be won,  
Or less be lost." "Thy fear," said Zephon bold,  
"Will save us trial what the least can do  
855 Single<sup>o</sup> against thee wicked, and thence weak."  
The Fiend replied not, overcome with rage;  
But like a proud steed reined, went haughty on,  
Champing his iron curb: to strive or fly  
He held it vain; awe from above had quelled  
860 His heart, not else dismayed. Now drew they nigh  
The western point, where those half-rounding guards

Just met, and closing stood in squadron joined  
 Awaiting next command. To whom their chief  
 Gabriel from the front thus called aloud:  
 865     "O friends, I hear the tread of nimble feet  
 Hasting this way, and now by glimpse discern  
 Ithuriel and Zephon through the shade,o  
 And with them comes a third of regal port,o  
 But faded splendor wan;o who by his gait  
 870     And fierce demeanor seems the Prince of Hell,  
 Not likely to part hence without contést;  
 Stand firm, for in his look defiance lours."o  
 He scarce had ended, when those two approached  
 And brief related whom they brought, where found,  
 875     How busied, in what form and posture couched.  
 To whom with stern regard thus Gabriel spake:  
 "Why hast thou, Satan, broke the bounds prescribed  
 To thy transgressions, and disturbed the chargeo  
 Of others, who approve not to transgress  
 880     By thy example, but have power and right  
 To question thy bold entrance on this place;  
 Employed it seems to violate sleep, and those  
 Whose dwelling God hath planted here in bliss?"  
 To whom thus Satan, with contemptuous brow:  
 885     "Gabriel, thou hadst in Heav'n th' esteemo of wise,  
 And such I held thee; but this question asked  
 Puts me in doubt. Lives there who loves his pain?  
 Who would not, finding way, break loose from Hell,  
 Though thither doomed? Thou wouldst thyself, no  
 890     doubt,  
 And boldly venture to whatever place  
 Farthest from pain, where thou mightst hope to  
 changeo  
 Torment with ease, and soonest recompense  
 Doleo with delight, which in this place I sought;  
 To thee no reason, who know'st only good,  
 895

But evil hast not tried: and wilt object<sup>9</sup>  
His will who bound us? Let him surer bar  
His iron gates, if he intends our stay  
In that dark durance:<sup>o</sup> thus much what was asked.<sup>1</sup>  
The rest is true, they found me where they say;  
900 But that implies not violence or harm."

Thus he in scorn. The warlike angel moved,  
Disdainfully half smiling thus replied:  
"O loss of one in Heav'n to judge of wise,  
905 Since Satan fell, whom folly overthrew,<sup>2</sup>  
And now returns him from his prison scaped,  
Gravely in doubt whether to hold them wise  
Or not, who ask what boldness brought him hither  
Unlicensed from his bounds in Hell prescribed;  
910 So wise he judges it to fly from pain  
However,<sup>o</sup> and to scape his punishment.  
So judge thou still, presumptuous, till the wrath,  
Which thou incurr'st by flying, meet thy flight  
Sevenfold, and scourge that wisdom back to Hell,  
915 Which taught thee yet no better, that no pain  
Can equal anger infinite provoked.  
But wherefore thou alone? Wherefore with thee  
Came not all Hell broke loose? Is pain to them  
Less pain, less to be fled, or thou than they  
920 Less hardy to endure? Courageous chief,  
The first in flight from pain, hadst thou alleged  
To thy deserted host this cause of flight,  
Thou surely hadst not come sole fugitive."

To which the Fiend thus answered frowning stern:  
"Not that I less endure, or shrink from pain,  
925 Insulting angel, well thou know'st I stood<sup>o</sup>  
Thy fiercest, when in battle to thy aid  
The blasting volleyed thunder made all speed  
And seconded thy else not dreaded spear.  
930 But still thy words at random, as before,

Argue thy inexperience what behoves  
From<sup>o</sup> hard assays<sup>o</sup> and ill successes past  
A faithful leader, not to hazard all  
Through ways of danger by himself untried.  
I therefore, I alone first undertook  
935 To wing the desolate abyss, and spy  
This new-created world, whereof in Hell  
Fame<sup>o</sup> is not silent, here in hope to find  
Better abode, and my afflicted powers<sup>o</sup>  
To settle here on earth, or in midair;<sup>3</sup>  
940 Though for possession put<sup>o</sup> to try once more  
What thou and thy gay<sup>o</sup> legions dare against;  
Whose easier business were to serve their Lord  
High up in Heav'n, with songs to hymn his throne,  
And practiced distances to cringe, not fight."<sup>4</sup>  
945 To whom the warrior angel soon replied:  
"To say and straight unsay, pretending first  
Wise to fly pain, professing next the spy,  
Argues no leader, but a liar traced,<sup>o</sup>  
Satan, and couldst thou faithful add? O name,  
950 O sacred name of faithfulness profaned!  
Faithful to whom? To thy rebellious crew?  
Army of fiends, fit body to fit head;  
Was this your discipline and faith engaged,  
Your military obedience, to dissolve  
955 Allegiance to th' acknowledged Power Supreme?  
And thou sly hypocrite, who now wouldst seem  
Patron of liberty, who more than thou  
Once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored  
Heav'n's awful Monarch?<sup>5</sup> Wherefore but in hope  
960 To dispossess him, and thyself to reign?  
But mark what I areed<sup>o</sup> thee now, avaunt;<sup>o</sup>  
Fly thither whence thou fledd'st: if from this hour  
Within these hallowed limits thou appear,  
965 Back to th' infernal pit I drag thee chained,

And seal thee so, as henceforth not to scorn  
 The facile<sup>o</sup> gates of Hell too slightly barred."  
 So threatened he, but Satan to no threats  
 Gave heed, but waxing<sup>o</sup> more in rage replied:  
 970 "Then when I am thy captive talk of chains,  
 Proud liminary<sup>6</sup> Cherub, but ere then  
 Far heavier load thyself expect to feel  
 From my prevailing arm, though Heaven's King  
 Ride on thy wings, and thou with thy compeers,  
 Used to the yoke, draw'st his triumphant wheels  
 975 In progress through the road of heav'n star-paved."  
 While thus he spake, th' angelic squadron bright  
 Turned fiery red, sharp'ning in moonèd horns<sup>7</sup>  
 Their phalanx, and began to hem him round  
 With ported<sup>8</sup> spears, as thick as when a field  
 980 Of Ceres<sup>9</sup> ripe for harvest waving bends  
 Her bearded grove of ears, which way the wind  
 Sways them; the careful plowman doubting stands  
 Lest on the threshing floor his hopeful sheaves  
 Prove chaff. On th' other side Satan alarmed<sup>o</sup>  
 985 Collecting all his might dilated stood,  
 Like Tenerife or Atlas<sup>1</sup> unremoved:<sup>o</sup>  
 His stature reached the sky, and on his crest  
 Sat Horror plumed; nor wanted in his grasp  
 What seemed both spear and shield: now dreadful  
 990 deeds  
 Might have ensued, nor only Paradise  
 In this commotion, but the starry cope<sup>o</sup>  
 Of Heav'n perhaps, or all the elements  
 At least had gone to wrack, disturbed and torn  
 With violence of this conflict, had not soon  
 995 Th' Eternal to prevent such horrid fray  
 Hung forth in Heav'n his golden scales, yet seen  
 Betwixt Astraea and the Scorpion sign,<sup>2</sup>  
 Wherein all things created first he weighed,

1000 The pendulous round earth with balanced air  
 In counterpoise, now ponders all events,  
 Battles and realms: in these he put two weights  
 The sequel each of parting and of fight;<sup>3</sup>  
 The latter quick up flew, and kicked the beam;  
 Which Gabriel spying, thus bespake the Fiend:  
 1005 "Satan, I know thy strength, and thou know'st  
 mine,  
 Neither our own but giv'n; what folly then  
 To boast what arms can do, since thine no more  
 Than Heav'n permits, nor mine, though doubled now  
 To trample thee as mire: for proof look up,  
 1010 And read thy lot in yon celestial sign  
 Where thou art weighed, and shown how light, how  
 weak,<sup>4</sup>  
 If thou resist." The Fiend looked up and knew  
 His mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled  
 Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night.  
 1015

## Endnotes

- Note 1: John of Patmos, in Revelation 12:3–12, hears such a cry during a second war in Heaven, between the Dragon and the angels.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: At midday, the height of noon.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, said that this soliloquy was written "several years before the poem was begun," and was intended to begin a drama on the topic, *Adam Unparadised*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Reproached (James 1:5).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare Satan's address to himself here with Adam's soliloquy in parallel circumstances (10.758ff.).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A Latinism, *me miserum*![Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Compare Satan's earlier claim that "the mind is its own place" (1.254).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The technical term for a formal pardon.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Paradise is a delightful ("delicious") garden on top of a steep hill situated in the east of the land of Eden.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Characterized by interwoven, tangled vines and branches.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As if in a Greek amphitheater, the trees are set row on row.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The air becomes still purer.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *Arabia Felix* (modern Yemen). "Sabea": the biblical Sheba.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Apocryphal book of Tobit tells of Tobias, Tobit's son, who married Sara and avoided the fate of her previous seven husbands (killed on their wedding night by the demon Asmodeus) by following the instructions of the angel Raphael and making a fishy smell to drive him off; Asmodeus then fled to Egypt, where Raphael bound him.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Base men interested only in money; Milton would have clergymen not paid by required tithes or by the state, to ensure their purity of motive.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A sea bird, noted for gluttony.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Auran is the province of Hauran on the eastern border of Israel. Selucia, a powerful city on the Tigris, near modern Baghdad, was founded by one of Alexander's generals ("built by Grecian kings"). Telassar is another Near Eastern kingdom.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Tigris (identified at 9.71) flowed under the hill.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: From Latin *errare*, to wander.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Like a country estate, with a variety of prospects.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: These were real golden apples, by contrast to those feigned golden apples of the Hesperides, fabled paradisa

islands in the Western Ocean.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Both breezes and melodies. "Their choir apply": practice their songs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The god of all nature—*pan* in Greek means "all."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Milton compares Paradise with famous beauty spots of antiquity. Enna in Sicily was a lovely meadow from which Proserpine was kidnapped by "gloomy Dis" (Pluto); her mother Ceres sought her throughout the world. The grove of Daphne, near Antioch and the Orontes River in the Near East, had a spring called "Castalia" after the Muses' fountain near Parnassus.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The isle of Nysa in the river Triton in Tunisia was where Ammon (an Egyptian god, identified with Cham, or Ham, the son of Noah) hid Bacchus, his child by Amalthea (who later became the god of wine), away from the eyes of his wife Rhea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Atop Mount Amara, the "Abassin" (Abyssinian) king had a splendid palace in a paradisaal garden.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This phrase underscores Milton's idea that true freedom involves obedience to natural superiors (that is, God).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The phrase has as its context 1 Corinthians 11:3: "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A classical metaphor for hair curled in the form of hyacinth petals, and perhaps also implying dark or flowing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Eve's hair is curly, abundant, not subjected to rigid control, like the vegetation in Paradise.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, to make a cool breeze welcome.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Checkered body. "Gordian twine": cords as convoluted as the Gordian knot that Alexander the Great had to cut with his sword.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Satan's excuse—reason of state, public interest, empire, etc.—is called "the tyrant's plea" in line 394.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Eve's experience reprises (but with significant differences) the story of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection and was transformed into a flower.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An opportunity, even if only by luck.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Setting in the west, the sun struck the eastern gate from the inside, at a ninety-degree angle.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: White, translucent marble veined with colors.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Hebrew, "strength of God." A tradition (see 1 Enoch 20:7) gave Gabriel charge of Paradise.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Shooting stars were thought to indicate by the direction of their fall the source of oncoming storms. "Vapors fired": heat lightning.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here and elsewhere Milton leaves open the question of whether the sun moves around the earth, or vice versa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Called Venus when it appears in the evening sky.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With this embedded lyric, beginning here, Eve displays her literary talents in an elegant love song, sonnetlike and replete with striking rhetorical figures of circularity and repetition.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Blended singing of many birds.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Having many talents and achievements; perfect, complete.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The stars were thought to have their own occult influence, and also to moderate that of the sun.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mark the watches of the night; also, perform musical "divisions," elaborate melodic passages.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Forest and field divinities of classical mythology.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Presiding over marriage and generation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Pandora (the name means “all gifts”) was an artificial woman, molded of clay, bestowed by the gods on Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus (who angered Jove by stealing fire from heaven). She brought a box that foolish Epimetheus opened, releasing all the ills of the human race, leaving only hope inside. The brothers were sons of Iapetos, whom Milton identifies with Japhet, Noah’s third son. The Eve-Pandora parallel was often noted.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Like many Puritans, Milton objected to set forms of prayer, so Adam and Eve pray spontaneously (therefore sincerely), but also, paradoxically, together. Their prayer develops variations on Psalm 104:20–24.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ephesians 5:32 calls the union of man and woman a “mystery” paralleling that of Christ and the church.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Throughout history (“present or past”), Old and New Testament worthies have “used” matrimony as a noble estate.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The “golden shafts” (arrows) of Cupid produce true love, his lead-tipped arrows, hate.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Know enough to be content with what you know.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The conical shadow cast by the earth has moved halfway up to its zenith, so it is 9 P.M., the end of the first three-hour watch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hebrew, “my strength is God.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “Wheel”: turn to (military term); “shield” (line 785) is left, “spear” is right.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Hebrew, “a looking out.” “Ithuriel”: Hebrew, “discovery of God.” [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The faculty of forming mental images. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Anything, like the spear, made (“tempered”) in Heaven. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Alights or kindles (“lights”) gunpowder (“nitrous powder”), ready (next lines) to be stored in some barrel (“tun”) laid up in some storehouse (“magazine”), in preparation for (“against”) rumors of war. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Put forward as an objection. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, thus much (answers) what was asked. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Irony: “O what a loss to Heaven to lose such a judge of wisdom as Satan, whose folly led to his fall.” [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Satan will become “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Satan contemptuously parallels the angels’ courtly deference (“distances”) before God’s throne and keeping a safe distance from battle. “Cringe”: bow or kneel in fear or servility. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See 5.617 for Satan’s “servile” adoration on the day of the Son’s exaltation, when he “seemed well pleased” but was not. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Frontier guard, also, one of limited authority. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A crescent-shaped military formation. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Held slantwise in front. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Roman goddess of grain; here, the grain itself. A Homeric simile compares an excited army to windswept corn (*Iliad* 2.147–50). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A mountain in Morocco. “Tenerife”: a mountain in the Canary Islands. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The zodiac sign Libra, represented by a pair of scales, is between Virgo (identified with Astraea, goddess of Justice, who fled the earth at the end of the Golden Age) and Scorpio.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In several classical epic similes the fates of opposing heroes are weighed in scales by the gods, but here God “ponders” (weighs the consequences of) all events, including parting or fighting. Battle, desired by Satan, proves lighter (“kicked the beam,” line 1004).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Daniel 5:27: “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *perhaps* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *deadly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before being* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *avenge* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pondering* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *disdained* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pay* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *angel* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pay the penalty far* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forced* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pallor* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hidden* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Niphates* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *open summit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bright* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rainbow* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *infuses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *drive out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fragrance-bearing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Cape of Good Hope* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *pleasing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wooded, wild*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thicket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pens of woven reeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *climbed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as a lookout*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *divinely fragrant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rich earth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wavy, rippling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastidious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bounteous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darkened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lovely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uplands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *well-watered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shady*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enveloping*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clasping hands*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wine-flushed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equator*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Nile's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Eden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forehead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrestrained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requested* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *persuasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shyly reserved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unchaste*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweet as nectar*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conversation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *game animals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stood on hind legs*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *lynxes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leopards* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trunk* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *writhing, twisting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chewing the cud* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sinking* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Azores* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *such happiness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intimate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in place of* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outskirts of a forest* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chief* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advantage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resting* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *futile* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hinders* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plane tree* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inseparable, distinct* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impregnates* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complained* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begrudge* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *act of wandering* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sky* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passes across* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *descried, observed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *path* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trees* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noon* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swift-turning* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *melody* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clearly seen* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *cultivating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luxuriant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *need to be cleared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *times of day*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lustrious, eastern*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the nightingale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreeable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural, benevolent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foster*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fashioned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jasmine*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *wedding song*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hand in hand* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *surmise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *private property*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *loves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deprived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *replaced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skirt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempting*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *breathing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disordered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *notions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *black*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *awe-inspiring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mourned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in single combat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trees*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *faint, dark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frowns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *responsibility*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *pain, grief*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *advise* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *be gone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily moved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *growing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called to arms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unremovable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vault*[Return to reference](#) °



# Book 5

## *The Argument*

Morning approached, Eve relates to Adam her troublesome dream; he likes it not, yet comforts her: they come forth to their day labors: their morning hymn at the door of their bower. God to render man inexcusable sends Raphael to admonish him of his obedience, of his free estate, of his enemy near at hand; who he is, and why his enemy, and whatever else may avail Adam to know. Raphael comes down to Paradise, his appearance described, his coming discerned by Adam afar off sitting at the door of his bower; he goes out to meet him, brings him to his lodge, entertains him with the choicest fruits of Paradise got together by Eve; their discourse at table: Raphael performs his message, minds Adam of his state and of his enemy; relates at Adam's request who that enemy is, and how he came to be so, beginning from his first revolt in heaven, and the occasion thereof; how he drew his legions after him to the parts of the north, and there incited them to rebel with him, persuading all but only Abdiel a Seraph, who in argument dissuades and opposes him, then forsakes him.

Now Morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime  
Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl,<sup>o</sup>  
When Adam waked, so custom'd, for his sleep  
Was aery light, from pure digestion bred,  
And temperate vapors bland,<sup>o</sup> which th' only sound  
5 Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan,<sup>1</sup>  
Lightly dispersed, and the shrill matin<sup>o</sup> song  
Of birds on every bough; so much the more  
His wonder was to find unwaken'd Eve  
With tresses discomposed, and glowing cheek,  
10 As through unquiet rest: he on his side

Leaning half-raised, with looks of cordial<sup>o</sup> love  
Hung over her enamored, and beheld  
Beauty, which whether waking or asleep,  
Shot forth peculiar<sup>o</sup> graces; then with voice  
15 Mild, as when Zephyrus on Flora<sup>2</sup> breathes,  
Her hand soft touching, whispered thus: "Awake  
My fairest, my espoused, my latest found,  
Heav'n's last best gift, my ever new delight,  
Awake, the morning shines, and the fresh field  
20 Calls us, we lose the prime, to mark how spring  
Our tended plants, how blows<sup>o</sup> the citron grove,  
What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed,<sup>o</sup>  
How nature paints her colors, how the bee  
Sits on the bloom extracting liquid sweet."<sup>3</sup>  
25 Such whispering waked her, but with startled eye  
On Adam, whom embracing, thus she spake:  
"O sole in whom my thoughts find all repose,  
My glory, my perfection, glad I see  
Thy face, and morn returned, for I this night,  
30 Such night till this I never passed, have dreamed,  
If dreamed, not as I oft am wont,<sup>o</sup> of thee,  
Works of day past, or morrow's next design,  
But of offense and trouble, which my mind  
Knew never till this irksome night. Methought  
35 Close at mine ear one called me forth to walk  
With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said,  
'Why sleep'st thou Eve? Now is the pleasant time,  
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields  
To the night-warbling bird, that now awake  
40 Tunes sweetest his love-labored song; now reigns  
Full-orbed the moon, and with more pleasing light  
Shadowy sets off the face of things, in vain,  
If none regard; heav'n wakes with all his eyes,<sup>o</sup>  
Whom to behold but thee, nature's desire,  
45 In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment

Attracted by thy beauty still<sup>o</sup> to gaze.  
I rose as at thy call, but found thee not;  
To find thee I directed then my walk;  
And on, me thought, alone I passed through ways  
50 That brought me on a sudden to the tree  
Of interdicted knowledge: fair it seemed,  
Much fairer to my fancy than by day:  
And as I wond'ring looked, beside it stood  
One shaped and winged like one of those from  
55 Heav'n  
By us oft seen; his dewy locks distilled  
Ambrosia;<sup>o</sup> on that tree he also gazed;  
And 'O fair plant,' said he, 'with fruit surcharged,<sup>o</sup>  
Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet,  
Nor god,<sup>o</sup> nor man? Is knowledge so despised?  
60 Or envy, or what reserve forbids to taste?<sup>4</sup>  
Forbid who will, none shall from me withhold  
Longer thy offered good, why else set here?'  
This said he paused not, but with vent'rous arm  
He plucked, he tasted; me damp horror chilled  
65 At such bold words vouched with<sup>o</sup> a deed so bold:  
But he thus overjoyed, 'O fruit divine,  
Sweet of thyself, but much more sweet thus  
cropped,  
Forbidden here, it seems, as only fit  
For gods, yet able to make gods of men:  
70 And why not gods of men, since good, the more  
Communicated, more abundant grows,  
The author not impaired,<sup>o</sup> but honored more?  
Here, happy creature, fair angelic Eve,  
Partake thou also; happy though thou art,  
75 Happier thou may'st be, worthier canst not be:  
Taste this, and be henceforth among the gods  
Thyself a goddess, not to earth confined,  
But sometimes in the air, as we, sometimes

80 Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see  
What life the gods live there, and such live thou.'  
So saying, he drew nigh, and to me held,  
Even to my mouth of that same fruit held part  
Which he had plucked; the pleasant savory smell  
85 So quickened appetite, that I, methought,  
Could not but taste. Forthwith up to the clouds  
With him I flew, and underneath beheld  
The earth outstretched immense, a prospect wide  
And various: wond'ring at my flight and change  
90 To this high exaltation: suddenly  
My guide was gone, and I, methought, sunk down,  
And fell asleep; but O how glad I waked  
To find this but a dream!" Thus Eve her night  
Related, and thus Adam answered sad. <sup>o</sup>  
95 "Best image of myself and dearer half,  
The trouble of thy thoughts this night in sleep  
Affects me equally; nor can I like  
This uncouth <sup>o</sup> dream, of evil sprung I fear;  
Yet evil whence? In thee can harbor none,  
Created pure. But know that in the soul  
100 Are many lesser faculties <sup>5</sup> that serve  
Reason as chief; among these fancy next  
Her office holds; of all external things,  
Which the five watchful senses represent,  
She forms imaginations, <sup>o</sup> aery shapes,  
105 Which reason joining or disjoining, frames  
All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
Our knowledge or opinion; then retires  
Into her private cell when nature rests.  
Oft in her absence mimic fancy wakes  
110 To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,  
Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,  
Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.  
Some such resemblances methinks I find

115 Of our last evening's talk in this thy dream,<sup>6</sup>  
But with addition strange; yet be not sad.  
Evil into the mind of god<sup>7</sup> or man  
May come and go, so unapproved,<sup>8</sup> and leave  
No spot or blame behind: which gives me hope  
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,  
120 Waking thou never wilt consent to do.  
Be not disheartened then, nor cloud those looks  
That wont to be<sup>9</sup> more cheerful and serene  
Than when fair morning first smiles on the world,  
And let us to our fresh employments rise  
125 Among the groves, the fountains, and the flow'rs  
That open now their choicest bosomed smells  
Reserved from night, and kept for thee in store."  
So cheered he his fair spouse, and she was  
cheered,  
But silently a gentle tear let fall  
130 From either eye, and wiped them with her hair;  
Two other precious drops that ready stood,  
Each in their crystal sluice, he ere they fell  
Kissed as the gracious signs of sweet remorse  
And pious awe, that feared to have offended.  
135 So all was cleared, and to the field they haste.  
But first from under shady arborous<sup>10</sup> roof,  
Soon as they forth were come to open sight  
Of day-spring,<sup>11</sup> and the sun, who scarce up risen  
With wheels yet hov'ring o'er the ocean brim,  
140 Shot parallel to the earth his dewy ray,  
Discovering in wide landscape all the east  
Of Paradise and Eden's happy plains,  
Lowly they bowed adoring, and began  
Their orisons,<sup>12</sup> each morning duly paid  
145 In various style, for neither various style  
Nor holy rapture<sup>13</sup> wanted they to praise  
Their Maker, in fit strains pronounced or sung

Unmeditated,<sup>9</sup> such prompt eloquence  
Flowed from their lips, in prose or numerous<sup>o</sup> verse,  
150 More tuneable<sup>o</sup> than needed lute or harp  
To add more sweetness, and they thus began:  
    “These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,<sup>1</sup>  
Almighty, thine this universal frame,  
Thus wondrous fair; thyself how wondrous then!  
155 Unspeakable, who sitt’st above these heavens,  
To us invisible or dimly seen  
In these thy lowest works, yet these declare  
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine:  
Speak ye who best can tell, ye sons of light,  
160 Angels, for ye behold him, and with songs  
And choral symphonies,<sup>o</sup> day without night,  
Circle his throne rejoicing, ye in Heav’n,  
On earth join all ye creatures to extol  
Him first, him last, him midst, and without end.  
165 Fairest of stars,<sup>2</sup> last in the train<sup>o</sup> of night,  
If better thou belong not to the dawn,  
Sure pledge of day, that crown’st the smiling morn  
With thy bright circlet, praise him in thy sphere  
While day arises, that sweet hour of prime.  
170 Thou sun, of this great world both eye and soul,  
Acknowledge him thy greater, sound his praise  
In thy eternal course, both when thou climb’st,  
And when high noon hast gained, and when thou  
    fall’st.  
Moon, that now meet’st the orient sun, now fli’st  
175 With the fixed stars, fixed in their orb that flies,  
And ye five other wand’ring fires that move  
In mystic dance not without song,<sup>3</sup> resound  
His praise, who out of darkness called up light.  
Air, and ye elements the eldest birth  
180 Of nature’s womb, that in quaternions<sup>4</sup> run  
Perpetual circle, multiform, and mix

And nourish all things, let your ceaseless change  
Vary to our great Maker still<sup>o</sup> new praise.  
Ye mists and exhalations that now rise  
185 From hill or steaming lake, dusky or gray,  
Till the sun paint your fleecy skirts with gold,  
In honor to the world's great Author rise,  
Whether to deck with clouds the uncolored sky,  
Or wet the thirsty earth with falling showers,  
190 Rising or falling still advance his praise.  
His praise ye winds, that from four quarters blow,  
Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops, ye pines,  
With every plant, in sign of worship wave.  
Fountains and ye, that warble, as ye flow,  
195 Melodious murmurs, warbling tune his praise.  
Join voices all ye living souls: ye birds,  
That singing up to heaven gate ascend,  
Bear on your wings and in your notes his praise.  
Ye that in waters glide, and ye that walk  
200 The earth, and stately tread, or lowly creep;  
Witness if I be silent, morn or even,  
To hill, or valley, fountain, or fresh shade  
Made vocal by my song, and taught his praise.  
Hail universal Lord, be bounteous still<sup>o</sup>  
205 To give us only good; and if the night  
Have gathered aught of evil or concealed,  
Disperse it, as now light dispels the dark."  
So prayed they innocent, and to their thoughts  
Firm peace recovered soon and wonted calm.  
210 On to their morning's rural work they haste  
Among sweet dews and flow'rs; where any row  
Of fruit trees over-woody<sup>o</sup> reached too far  
Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check  
Fruitless embraces: or they led the vine  
215 To wed her elm;<sup>5</sup> she spoused about him twines  
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings

Her dow'r th' adopted clusters, to adorn  
His barren leaves. Them thus employed beheld  
220 With pity Heav'n's high King, and to him called  
Raphael, the sociable Spirit, that deigned  
To travel with Tobias, and secured  
His marriage with the seven-times-wedded maid.<sup>6</sup>  
"Raphael," said he, "thou hear'st what stir on earth  
Satan from Hell scaped through the darksome gulf  
225 Hath raised in Paradise, and how disturbed  
This night the human pair, how he designs  
In them at once to ruin all mankind.  
Go therefore, half this day as friend with friend  
Converse with Adam, in what bow'r or shade  
230 Thou find'st him from the heat of noon retired,  
To respite his day labor with repast,  
Or with repose; and such discourse bring on,  
As may advise him of his happy state,  
Happiness in his power left free to will,  
235 Left to his own free will, his will though free,  
Yet mutable; whence warn him to beware  
He swerve not too secure:<sup>o</sup> tell him withal  
His danger, and from whom, what enemy  
Late fall'n himself from Heav'n, is plotting now  
240 The fall of others from like state of bliss;  
By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,  
But by deceit and lies; this let him know,  
Lest wilfully transgressing he pretend<sup>o</sup>  
Surprisal, unadmonished, unforewarned."  
245 So spake th' Eternal Father, and fulfilled  
All justice: nor delayed the wingèd saint<sup>o</sup>  
After his charge received; but from among  
Thousand celestial ardors,<sup>7</sup> where he stood  
Veiled with his gorgeous wings, up springing light  
250 Flew through the midst of Heav'n; th' angelic choirs  
On each hand parting, to his speed gave way



Through all th' empyreal road; till at the gate  
Of Heav'n arrived, the gate self-opened wide  
On golden hinges turning, as by work<sup>o</sup>  
255 Divine the sov'reign Architect had framed.  
From hence, no cloud, or, to obstruct his sight,  
Star interposed, however small he sees,  
Not unconform to other shining globes,  
Earth and the gard'n of God, with cedars crowned  
260 Above all hills. As when by night the glass<sup>o</sup>  
Of Galileo, less assured, observes  
Imagined lands and regions in the moon:  
Or pilot from amidst the Cyclades  
Delos or Samos first appearing kens<sup>o</sup>  
265 A cloudy spot.<sup>8</sup> Down thither prone<sup>o</sup> in flight  
He speeds, and through the vast ethereal sky  
Sails between worlds and worlds, with steady wing  
Now on the polar wings, then with quick fan  
Winnows the buxom air; till within soar  
270 Of tow'ring eagles,<sup>9</sup> to all the fowls he seems  
A phoenix, gazed by all, as that sole bird  
When to enshrine his relics in the sun's  
Bright temple, to Egyptian Thebes he flies.<sup>1</sup>  
At once on th' eastern cliff of Paradise  
275 He lights, and to his proper shape returns  
A Seraph winged; six wings he wore, to shade  
His lineaments<sup>o</sup> divine; the pair that clad  
Each shoulder broad, came mantling<sup>o</sup> o'er his breast  
With regal ornament; the middle pair  
280 Girt like a starry zone<sup>o</sup> his waist, and round  
Skirted his loins and thighs with downy gold  
And colors dipped in Heav'n; the third his feet  
Shadowed from either heel with feathered mail<sup>2</sup>  
Sky-tinctured grain.<sup>o</sup> Like Maia's son<sup>3</sup> he stood,  
285 And shook his plumes, that heav'nly fragrance filled  
The circuit wide. Straight<sup>o</sup> knew him all the bands

Of angels under watch; and to his state,<sup>o</sup>  
And to his message<sup>o</sup> high in honor rise;  
For on some message high they guessed him bound.  
290 Their glittering tents he passed, and now is come  
Into the blissful field; through groves of myrrh,  
And flow'ring odors, cassia, nard, and balm;<sup>4</sup>  
A wilderness of sweets; for nature here  
Wantoned<sup>o</sup> as in her prime, and played<sup>o</sup> at will  
295 Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet,  
Wild above rule or art; enormous<sup>o</sup> bliss.  
Him through the spicy forest onward come  
Adam discerned, as in the door he sat<sup>5</sup>  
300 Of his cool bow'r, while now the mounted sun  
Shot down direct his fervid rays, to warm  
Earth's inmost womb, more warmth than Adam  
needs;  
And Eve within, due<sup>o</sup> at her hour prepared  
For dinner savory fruits, of taste to please  
True appetite and not disrelish thirst,  
305 Of nectarous drafts between, from milky stream,  
Berry or grape: to whom thus Adam called:  
"Haste hither Eve, and worth thy sight behold  
Eastward among those trees, what glorious shape  
Comes this way moving; seems another morn  
310 Ris'n on mid-noon; some great behest from Heav'n  
To us perhaps he brings, and will vouchsafe  
This day to be our guest. But go with speed,  
And what thy stores contain, bring forth and pour  
Abundance, fit to honor and receive  
315 Our heav'nly stranger; well we may afford  
Our givers their own gifts, and large bestow  
From large bestowed, where nature multiplies  
Her fertile growth, and by disburd'ning grows  
More fruitful, which instructs us not to spare."  
320

To whom thus Eve: "Adam, earth's hallowed  
 mold,<sup>6</sup>  
 Of God inspired, small store will serve, where store,<sup>7</sup>  
 All seasons, ripe for use hangs on the stalk;  
 Save what by frugal storing firmness gains  
 To nourish, and superfluous moist consumes:  
 325 But I will haste and from each bough and brake  
 Each plant and juiciest gourd will pluck such choice  
 To entertain our angel guest, as he  
 Beholding shall confess that here on earth  
 God hath dispensed his bounties as in Heav'n."  
 330 So saying, with dispatchful looks in haste  
 She turns, on hospitable thoughts intent  
 What choice to choose for delicacy best,  
 What order, so contrived as not to mix  
 Tastes, not well joined, inelegant, but bring  
 335 Taste after taste upheld<sup>o</sup> with kindest<sup>o</sup> change,  
 Bestirs her then, and from each tender stalk  
 Whatever earth all-bearing mother yields  
 In India east or west, or middle shore  
 In Pontus or the Punic coast,<sup>8</sup> or where  
 340 Alcinous reigned, fruit of all kinds, in coat,  
 Rough, or smooth-rined, or bearded husk, or shell  
 She gathers, tribute large, and on the board  
 Heaps with unsparing hand; for drink the grape  
 She crushes, inoffensive must, and meaths<sup>9</sup>  
 345 From many a berry, and from sweet kernels pressed  
 She tempers<sup>o</sup> dulcet creams, nor these to hold  
 Wants<sup>o</sup> her fit vessels pure, then strews the ground  
 With rose and odors from the shrub unfumed.<sup>1</sup>  
 Meanwhile our primitive<sup>o</sup> great sire, to meet  
 350 His godlike guest, walks forth, without more train<sup>o</sup>  
 Accompanied than with his own complete  
 Perfections, in himself was all his state,<sup>o</sup>  
 More solemn<sup>o</sup> than the tedious pomp that waits

355 On princes, when their rich retinue long  
Of horses led, and grooms besmeared with gold  
Dazzles the crowd, and sets them all agape.  
Nearer his presence Adam though not awed,  
Yet with submissive approach and reverence meek,  
As to a superior nature, bowing low,  
360 Thus said: "Native of Heav'n, for other place:  
None can than Heav'n such glorious shape contain;  
Since by descending from the thrones above,  
Those happy places thou hast deigned<sup>o</sup> a while  
To want,<sup>o</sup> and honor these, vouchsafe with us  
365 Two only, who yet by sov'reign gift possess  
This spacious ground, in yonder shady bow'r  
To rest, and what the garden choicest bears  
To sit and taste, till this meridian<sup>o</sup> heat  
Be over, and the sun more cool decline."  
370 Whom thus the angelic Virtue<sup>2</sup> answered mild:  
"Adam, I therefore came, nor art thou such  
Created, or such place hast here to dwell,  
As may not oft invite, though Spirits of Heav'n  
To visit thee; lead on then where thy bow'r  
375 O'ershades; for these mid-hours, till evening rise  
I have at will." So to the sylvan lodge  
They came, that like Pomona's<sup>3</sup> arbor smiled  
With flow'rets decked<sup>o</sup> and fragrant smells; but Eve  
Undecked, save with herself more lovely fair  
380 Than wood nymph, or the fairest goddess feigned  
Of three that in Mount Ida naked strove,<sup>4</sup>  
Stood to entertain her guest from Heav'n; no veil  
She needed, virtue-proof,<sup>o</sup> no thought infirm  
Altered her cheek. On whom the Angel "Hail"  
385 Bestowed, the holy salutation used  
Long after to blest Mary, second Eve.<sup>5</sup>  
"Hail mother of mankind, whose fruitful womb  
Shall fill the world more numerous with thy sons

390 Than with these various fruits the trees of God  
Have heaped this table." Raised of grassy turf  
Their table was, and mossy seats had round,  
And on her ample square from side to side  
All autumn piled, though spring and autumn here  
Danced hand in hand. A while discourse they hold;  
395 No fear lest dinner cool; when thus began  
Our author: <sup>o</sup> "Heav'nly stranger, please to taste  
These bounties which our Nourisher, from whom  
All perfect good unmeasured out, descends,  
To us for food and for delight hath caused  
400 The earth to yield; unsavory food perhaps  
To spiritual natures; only this I know,  
That one Celestial Father gives to all."

To whom the angel: "Therefore what he gives  
(Whose praise be ever sung) to man in part  
405 Spiritual, may of <sup>o</sup> purest Spirits be found  
No ingrateful food: and food alike those pure  
Intelligential substances require <sup>6</sup>  
As doth your rational; and both contain  
Within them every lower faculty  
410 Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch,  
taste,  
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate, <sup>7</sup>  
And corporeal to incorporeal turn.  
For know, whatever was created, needs  
To be sustained and fed; of elements  
415 The grosser feeds the purer, earth the sea,  
Earth and the sea feed air, the air those fires  
Ethereal, and as lowest first the moon;  
Whence in her visage round those spots, unpurged  
Vapors not yet into her substance turned. <sup>8</sup>  
420 Nor doth the moon no nourishment exhale  
From her moist continent to higher orbs. <sup>9</sup>  
The sun that light imparts to all, receives

From all his alimantal<sup>o</sup> recompense  
In humid exhalations, and at even  
425 Sups with the ocean:<sup>1</sup> though in Heav'n the trees  
Of life ambrosial<sup>o</sup> fruitage bear, and vines  
Yield nectar,<sup>2</sup> though from off the boughs each morn  
We brush mellifluous<sup>o</sup> dewes, and find the ground  
Covered with pearly grain; yet God hath here  
430 Varied his bounty so with new delights,  
As may compare with Heaven; and to taste  
Think not I shall be nice."<sup>o</sup> So down they sat,  
And to their viands fell, nor seemingly<sup>o</sup>  
The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss<sup>o</sup>  
435 Of theologians, but with keen dispatch  
Of real hunger, and concoctive<sup>o</sup> heat  
To transubstantiate;<sup>3</sup> what redounds, transpires  
Through Spirits with ease; nor wonder, if by fire  
Of sooty coal the empiric<sup>o</sup> alchemist  
440 Can turn, or holds it possible to turn  
Metals of drossiest ore to perfect gold  
As from the mine. Meanwhile at table Eve  
Ministered naked, and their flowing cups  
With pleasant liquors crowned.<sup>o</sup> O innocence  
445 Deserving Paradise! if ever, then,  
Then had the Sons of God excuse t' have been  
Enamored at that sight,<sup>4</sup> but in those hearts  
Love unlibidinous<sup>o</sup> reigned, nor jealousy  
Was understood, the injured lover's hell.  
450 Thus when with meats and drinks they had  
sufficed,  
Not burdened nature, sudden mind arose  
In Adam, not to let th' occasion pass  
Given him by this great conference to know  
Of things above his world, and of their being  
455 Who dwell in Heav'n, whose excellence he saw  
Transcend his own so far, whose radiant forms

Divine effulgence,<sup>o</sup> whose high power so far  
Exceeded human, and his wary speech  
Thus to th' empyreal minister he framed:  
460 "Inhabitant with God, now know I well  
Thy favor, in this honor done to man,  
Under whose lowly roof thou hast vouchsafed  
To enter and these earthly fruits to taste,  
Food not of angels, yet accepted so,  
465 As that more willingly thou couldst not seem  
At Heav'n's high feasts t' have fed: yet what  
compare?"  
To whom the wingèd hierarch<sup>o</sup> replied:  
"O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom  
All things proceed, and up to him return,  
470 If not depraved from good, created all  
Such to perfection, one first matter all,<sup>5</sup>  
Endued with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;  
But more refined, more spiritous, and pure,  
475 As nearer to him placed or nearer tending  
Each in their several active spheres assigned,  
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
Proportioned to each kind.<sup>6</sup> So from the root  
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the  
480 leaves  
More airy, last the bright consummate flow'r  
Spirits odorous breathes:<sup>7</sup> flow'rs and their fruit  
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed<sup>o</sup>  
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,  
To intellectual, give both life and sense,  
485 Fancy<sup>o</sup> and understanding, whence the soul  
Reason receives, and reason is her being,  
Discursive, or intuitive;<sup>8</sup> discourse  
Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,  
Differing but in degree, of kind the same.

Wonder not then, what God for you saw good  
490 If I refuse not, but convert, as you,  
To proper<sup>o</sup> substance; time may come when men  
With angels may participate, and find  
No inconvenient diet, nor too light fare:  
495 And from these corporal nutriments perhaps  
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,  
Improved by tract<sup>o</sup> of time, and winged ascend  
Ethereal as we, or may at choice  
Here or in heav'nly paradises dwell;  
500 If ye be found obedient, and retain  
Unalterably firm his love entire  
Whose progeny you are. Meanwhile enjoy  
Your fill what happiness this happy state  
Can comprehend, incapable<sup>o</sup> of more."  
505 To whom the patriarch of mankind replied:  
"O favorable Spirit, propitious guest,  
Well hast thou taught the way that might direct  
Our knowledge, and the scale of nature set  
From center to circumference, whereon  
510 In contemplation of created things  
By steps we may ascend to God. But say,  
What meant that caution joined, 'If ye be found  
Obedient'? Can we want<sup>o</sup> obedience then  
To him, or possibly his love desert  
515 Who formed us from the dust, and placed us here  
Full to the utmost measure of what bliss  
Human desires can seek or apprehend?"  
To whom the angel: "Son of Heav'n and earth,  
Attend: that thou art happy, owe<sup>o</sup> to God;  
520 That thou continu'st such, owe to thyself,  
That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.  
This was that caution giv'n thee; be advised.  
God made thee perfect, not immutable;<sup>o</sup>  
And good he made thee, but to persevere  
525 He left it in thy power, ordained thy will



By nature free, not overruled by fate  
Inextricable, or strict necessity,  
Our voluntary service he requires,  
Not our necessitated, such with him  
530 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how  
Can hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve  
Willing or no, who will but what they must  
By destiny, and can no other choose?  
Myself and all th' angelic host that stand  
535 In sight of God enthroned, our happy state  
Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;  
On other surety<sup>o</sup> none; freely we serve,  
Because we freely love, as in our will  
To love or not; in this we stand or fall:  
540 And some are fall'n, to disobedience fall'n,  
And so from Heav'n to deepest Hell; O fall  
From what high state of bliss into what woe!"  
To whom our great progenitor: "Thy words  
Attentive, and with more delighted ear,  
545 Divine instructor, I have heard, than when  
Cherubic songs<sup>o</sup> by night from neighboring hills  
Aerial music send: nor knew I not<sup>o</sup>  
To be both will and deed created free;  
Yet that we never shall forget to love  
550 Our Maker, and obey him whose command  
Single, is yet<sup>o</sup> so just, my constant thoughts  
Assured me, and still assure: though what thou tell'st  
Hath passed in Heav'n, some doubt within me move,  
But more desire to hear, if thou consent,  
555 The full relation, which must needs be strange,  
Worthy of sacred silence to be heard;  
And we have yet large<sup>o</sup> day, for scarce the sun  
Hath finished half his journey, and scarce begins  
His other half in the great zone of Heav'n."  
560 Thus Adam made request, and Raphael

After short pause assenting, thus began:

565     "High matter<sup>1</sup> thou enjoin'st me, O prime of men,  
Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate  
To human sense th' invisible exploits  
Of warring Spirits; how without remorse  
The ruin of so many glorious once  
And perfect while they stood; how last unfold  
The secrets of another world, perhaps  
Not lawful to reveal? Yet for thy good  
570     This is dispensed, and what surmounts the reach  
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,  
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,  
As may express them best, though what if earth  
Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein  
575     Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?  
      "As yet this world was not, and Chaos wild  
Reigned where these heav'ns now roll, where earth  
      now rests  
Upon her center poised, when on a day  
(For time, though in eternity, applied  
580     To motion, measures all things durable  
By present, past, and future)<sup>2</sup> on such day  
As Heav'n's great year<sup>3</sup> brings forth, th' empyreal  
      host  
Of angels by imperial summons called,  
Innumerable before th' Almighty's throne  
585     Forthwith from all the ends of Heav'n appeared  
Under their hierarchs<sup>o</sup> in orders bright.  
Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,  
Standards, and gonfalons<sup>o</sup> twixt van and rear  
Stream in the air, and for distinction serve  
590     Of hierarchies, of orders, and degrees;  
Or in their glittering tissues<sup>o</sup> bear emblazed  
Holy memorials, acts of zeal and love  
Recorded eminent. Thus when in orbs

595 Of circuit<sup>o</sup> inexpressible they stood,  
 Orb within orb, the Father Infinite,  
 By whom in bliss embosomed sat the Son,  
 Amidst as from a flaming mount, whose top  
 Brightness had made invisible, thus spake:  
 " 'Hear all ye angels, progeny of Light,  
 600 Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,  
 Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand.  
 This day I have begot whom I declare  
 My only Son, and on this holy hill  
 Him have anointed,<sup>4</sup> whom ye now behold  
 605 At my right hand; your head I him appoint;  
 And by myself have sworn to him shall bow  
 All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:  
 Under his great vicegerent<sup>5</sup> reign abide  
 United as one individual<sup>o</sup> soul  
 610 Forever happy: him who<sup>o</sup> disobeys  
 Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
 Cast out from God and blessèd vision, falls  
 Into utter<sup>o</sup> darkness, deep engulfed, his place  
 Ordained without redemption, without end.'  
 615 "So spake th' Omnipotent, and with his words  
 All seemed well pleased, all seemed, but were not  
 all.  
 That day, as other solemn<sup>o</sup> days, they spent  
 In song and dance about the sacred hill,  
 Mystical dance, which yonder starry sphere  
 620 Of planets and of fixed<sup>o</sup> in all her wheels  
 Resembles nearest, mazes intricate,  
 Eccentric,<sup>o</sup> intervolved,<sup>o</sup> yet regular  
 Then most, when most irregular they seem:  
 And in their motions harmony divine  
 625 So smooths her charming tones,<sup>6</sup> that God's own ear  
 Listens delighted. Evening now approached  
 (For we have also our evening and our morn,

We ours for change delectable, not need)  
Forthwith from dance to sweet repast they turn  
630 Desirous; all in circles as they stood,  
Tables are set, and on a sudden piled  
With angels' food, and rubied nectar flows  
In pearl, in diamond, and massy gold,  
Fruit of delicious vines, the growth of Heav'n.  
635 On flow'rs reposed, and with fresh flow'rets  
crowned,  
They eat, they drink, and in communion sweet  
Quaff immortality and joy, secure  
Of surfeit where full measure only bounds  
Excess, before th' all-bounteous King, who show'ed  
640 With copious hand, rejoicing in their joy.  
Now when ambrosial<sup>o</sup> night with clouds exhaled  
From that high mount of God, whence light and  
shade  
Spring both, the face of brightest Heav'n had  
changed  
To grateful<sup>o</sup> twilight (for night comes not there  
645 In darker veil) and roseate<sup>o</sup> dewes disposed  
All but the unsleeping eyes of God to rest,  
Wide over all the plain, and wider far  
Than all this globous earth in plain outspread,  
(Such are the courts of God) th' angelic throng  
650 Dispersed in bands and files their camp extend  
By living streams among the trees of life,  
Pavilions numberless, and sudden reared,  
Celestial tabernacles, where they slept  
Fanned with cool winds, save those who in their  
655 course  
Melodious hymns about the sov'reign throne  
Alternate all night long: but not so waked  
Satan, so call him now, his former name  
Is heard no more in Heav'n; he of the first,  
If not the first Archangel, great in power,

660 In favor and preeminence, yet fraught  
With envy against the Son of God, that day  
Honored by his great Father, and proclaimed  
Messiah<sup>7</sup> King anointed, could not bear  
665 Through pride that sight, and thought himself  
impaired.  
Deep malice thence conceiving and disdain,  
Soon as midnight brought on the dusky hour  
Friendliest to sleep and silence, he resolved  
With all his legions to dislodge,<sup>o</sup> and leave  
Unworshipped, unbayed the throne supreme  
670 Contemptuous, and his next subordinate<sup>8</sup>  
Awak'ning, thus to him in secret spake:  
" 'Sleep'st thou companion dear, what sleep can  
close  
Thy eyelids? and remember'st what decree  
Of yesterday, so late hath passed the lips  
675 Of Heav'n's Almighty. Thou to me thy thoughts  
Wast wont,<sup>o</sup> I mine to thee was wont to impart;  
Both waking we were one; how then can now  
Thy sleep dissent? New laws thou seest imposed;  
New laws from him who reigns, new minds<sup>o</sup> may  
680 raise  
In us who serve, new counsels, to debate  
What doubtful may ensue, more in this place  
To utter is not safe. Assemble thou  
Of all those myriads which we lead the chief;  
Tell them that by command, ere yet dim night  
685 Her shadowy cloud withdraws, I am to haste,  
And all who under me their banners wave,  
Homeward with flying march where we possess  
The quarters of the north, there to prepare  
Fit entertainment to receive our King  
690 The great Messiah, and his new commands,  
Who speedily through all the hierarchies

Intends to pass triumphant, and give laws.’  
“So spake the false Archangel, and infused  
695 Bad influence into th’ unwary breast  
Of his associate; he together calls,  
Or several one by one, the regent powers,  
Under him regent, tells, as he was taught,  
That the Most High commanding, now ere night,  
Now ere dim night had disencumbered Heav’n,  
700 The great hierarchal standard was to move;  
Tells the suggested<sup>o</sup> cause, and casts between  
Ambitious words and jealousies, to sound<sup>o</sup>  
Or taint integrity; but all obeyed  
The wonted signal, and superior voice  
705 Of their great potentate<sup>o</sup> for great indeed  
His name, and high was his degree in Heav’n;  
His count’nance as the morning star that guides  
The starry flock, allured them, and with lies  
Drew after him the third part of Heav’n’s host:  
710 Meanwhile, th’ Eternal Eye, whose sight discerns  
Abstrusest<sup>o</sup> thoughts, from forth his holy mount  
And from within the golden lamps that burn  
Nightly before him, saw without their light  
Rebellion rising, saw in whom, how spread  
715 Among the sons of morn, what multitudes  
Were banded to oppose his high decree;  
And smiling to his only Son thus said:  
“ ‘Son, thou in whom my glory I behold  
In full resplendence, heir of all my might,  
720 Nearly it now concerns us to be sure  
Of our omnipotence, and with what arms  
We mean to hold what anciently we claim  
Of deity or empire, such a foe  
Is rising, who intends to erect his throne  
725 Equal to ours, throughout the spacious north;  
Nor so content, hath in his thought to try  
In battle, what our power is, or our right.

Let us advise, and to this hazard draw  
With speed what force is left, and all employ  
730 In our defense, lest unawares we lose  
This our high place, our sanctuary, our hill.  
"To whom the Son with calm aspect and clear  
Lightning divine, ineffable, serene,  
Made answer: 'Mighty Father, thou thy foes  
735 Justly hast in derision, and secure  
Laugh'st at their vain designs and tumults vain,<sup>9</sup>  
Matter to me of glory, whom their hate  
Illustrates,<sup>o</sup> when they see all regal power  
Giv'n me to quell their pride, and in event<sup>o</sup>  
740 Know whether I be dextrous to subdue  
Thy rebels, or be found the worst in Heav'n.'  
"So spake the Son, but Satan with his powers<sup>o</sup>  
Far was advanced on wingèd speed, an host  
Innumerable as the stars of night,  
745 Or stars of morning, dewdrops, which the sun  
Impearls on every leaf and every flower.  
Regions they passed, the mighty regencies<sup>o</sup>  
Of Seraphim and Potentates and Thrones  
In their triple degrees, regions to<sup>o</sup> which  
750 All thy dominion, Adam, is no more  
Than what this garden is to all the earth,  
And all the sea, from one entire globose<sup>o</sup>  
Stretched into longitude<sup>o</sup> which having passed  
At length into the limits<sup>o</sup> of the north  
755 They came, and Satan to his royal seat  
High on a hill, far blazing, as a mount  
Raised on a mount, with pyramids and tow'rs  
From diamond quarries hewn, and rocks of gold,  
The palace of great Lucifer (so call  
760 That structure in the dialect of men  
Interpreted) which not long after, he  
Affecting<sup>o</sup> all equality with God,

In imitation of that mount whereon  
Messiah was declared in sight of Heav'n,  
765 The Mountain of the Congregation called;  
For thither he assembled all his train,  
Pretending so commanded to consult  
About the great reception of their King,  
Thither to come, and with calumnious art  
770 Of counterfeited truth thus held their ears:  
    " 'Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues,  
    Powers,  
If these magnific titles yet remain  
Not merely titular, since by decree  
Another now hath to himself engrossed<sup>o</sup>  
775 All power, and us eclipsed under the name  
Of King anointed, for whom all this haste  
Of midnight march, and hurried meeting here,  
This only to consult how we may best  
With what may be devised of honors new  
780 Receive him coming to receive from us  
Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,  
Too much to one, but double how endured,  
To one and to his image now proclaimed?  
But what if better counsels might erect  
785 Our minds and teach us to cast off this yoke?  
Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend  
The supple knee? Ye will not, if I trust  
To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves  
Natives and sons of Heav'n possessed before  
790 By none, and if not equal all, yet free,  
Equally free; for orders and degrees  
Jar not with liberty, but well consist.  
Who can in reason then or right assume  
Monarchy over such as live by right  
795 His equals,<sup>1</sup> if in power and splendor less,  
In freedom equal? or can introduce



Law and edict on us, who without law  
Err not, much less for this to be our Lord,  
And look for adoration to th' abuse  
800 Of those imperial titles which assert  
Our being ordained to govern, not to serve?  
"Thus far his bold discourse without control<sup>o</sup>  
Had audience, when among the Seraphim  
Abdiel,<sup>2</sup> than whom none with more zeal adored  
805 The Deity, and divine commands obeyed,  
Stood up, and in a flame of zeal severe  
The current of his fury thus opposed:  
" 'O argument blasphemous, false and proud!  
Words which no ear ever to hear in Heav'n  
810 Expected, least of all from thee, ingrate,  
In place thyself so high above thy peers.  
Canst thou with impious obloquy condemn  
The just decree of God, pronounced and sworn,  
That to his only Son by right endued  
815 With regal scepter, every soul in Heav'n  
Shall bend the knee, and in that honor due  
Confess him rightful King? Unjust thou says't,  
Flatly unjust, to bind with laws the free,  
And equal over equals to let reign,  
820 One over all with unsucceeded<sup>o</sup> power.  
Shalt thou give law to God, shalt thou dispute  
With him the points of liberty, who made  
Thee what thou art, and formed the pow'rs of  
Heav'n  
Such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being?  
825 Yet by experience taught we know how good,  
And of our good, and of our dignity  
How provident he is, how far from thought  
To make us less, bent rather to exalt  
Our happy state under one head more near  
830 United. But to grant it thee unjust,

That equal over equals monarch reign:  
Thyself though great and glorious dost thou count,  
Or all angelic nature joined in one,  
Equal to him begotten Son, by whom  
835 As by his Word the mighty Father made  
All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n  
By him created in their bright<sup>o</sup> degrees,  
Crowned them with glory, and to their glory named  
840 Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,  
Essential Powers, nor by his reign obscured,  
But more illustrious made, since he the head  
One of our number thus reduced becomes,<sup>3</sup>  
His laws our laws, all honor to him done  
Returns our own. Cease then this impious rage,  
845 And tempt not these; but hasten to appease  
Th' incensèd Father and th' incensèd Son,  
While pardon may be found in time besought.'  
"So spake the fervent angel, but his zeal  
None seconded, as out of season judged,  
850 Or singular and rash, whereat rejoiced  
Th' Apostate,<sup>o</sup> and more haughty thus replied.  
'That we were formed then say'st thou? and the  
work  
Of secondary hands, by task transferred  
From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!  
855 Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who  
saw  
When this creation was? Remember'st thou  
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
We know no time when we were not as now;  
Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised,  
860 By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course<sup>o</sup>  
Had circled his full orb, the birth mature  
Of this our native Heav'n, ethereal sons.<sup>4</sup>  
Our puissance<sup>o</sup> is our own, our own right hand

865 Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try  
Who is our equal: then thou shalt behold  
Whether by supplication we intend  
Address, and to begirt th' Almighty throne  
Beseeching or besieging. This report,  
870 These tidings carry to th' anointed King;  
And fly, ere evil intercept thy flight.'  
"He said, and as the sound of waters deep  
Hoarse murmur echoed to his words applause  
Through the infinite host, nor less for that  
The flaming Seraph fearless, though alone  
875 Encompassed round with foes, thus answered bold:  
" 'O alienate from God, O Spirit accurst,  
Forsaken of all good; I see thy fall  
Determined, and thy hapless crew involved  
In this perfidious fraud, contagion spread  
880 Both of thy crime and punishment: henceforth  
No more be troubled how to quit the yoke  
Of God's Messiah; those indulgent laws  
Will not be now vouchsafed, other decrees  
Against thee are gone forth without recall;  
885 That golden scepter which thou didst reject  
Is now an iron rod to bruise and break  
Thy disobedience. Well thou didst advise,  
Yet not for thy advice or threats I fly  
These wicked tents devoted, lest the wrath  
890 Impendent, raging into sudden flame  
Distinguish not: for soon expect to feel  
His thunder on thy head, devouring fire.  
Then who created thee lamenting learn,  
When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know.'  
895 "So spake the Seraph Abdiel faithful found,  
Among the faithless, faithful only he;  
Among innumerable false, unmoved,  
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;

900 Nor number, nor example with him wrought  
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind  
 Though single. From amidst them forth he passed,  
 Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained  
 Superior, nor of violence feared aught;<sup>o</sup>  
 905 And with retorted scorn his back he turned  
 On those proud tow'rs to swift destruction doomed."

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Rustling leaves and streams ("rills") stirred by Aurora, goddess of the dawn.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Zephyrus is god of the gentle west wind, Flora goddess of flowers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Adam sings a morning love song (*aubade*) to Eve, which works variations on Song of Solomon 2:10–12: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. . . . The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come." Compare Satan's serenade (5.38–47), a parody of Adam's *aubade* and the Song of Solomon. "Prime" (line 21): first hour of the day.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, does envy or some other barrier ("reserve") forbid your being tasted?[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Adam's explanation of the dream (lines 100–116) summarizes the orthodox faculty psychology and dream theory of Milton's time—one among many kinds of knowledge with which unfallen man was endowed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Adam recalls his own words in 4.411–39.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Probably "angel" as elsewhere, but perhaps God, whose omniscience must encompass knowledge of evil as well as good.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: If not willed (approved of) or not acted on (put to the proof).[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: In a variety of styles or forms of speech and song, which harmonize together but are at the same time impromptu, spontaneous, and ecstatic.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Their morning hymn works variations on Psalms 148, 104, and 19, as well as the canticle “Benedicite.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Venus, the morning star and (as Hesperus) the evening star.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The planets, unlike the fixed stars, change their relative positions; their motion produces the music of the spheres, audible to unfallen humans.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The fourfold changing relationship of the four elements.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A familiar emblem of matrimony, the elm symbolizing masculine strength, and the vine, feminine fruitfulness, softness, and sweetness; note, however, the matriarchal implications of “adopted clusters” (line 218).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Raphael (in Hebrew, “health of God”) was the adviser of Tobias in winning his wife (see 4.168–71 and note).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Bright spirits burning in love; the Hebrew *seraph* means “to burn.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Cyclades are a circular group of islands in the south Aegean Sea; the two islands seen as “spots” from within the archipelago are Delos (the traditional center but famous for having floated adrift) and Samos (outside the group).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Raphael sails with steady wing, turns at the pole, beats (“fans”) with his wings the yielding (“buxom”) air, and then comes within range of the eagle’s soaring flight.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The phoenix was a mythical, unique (“sole”) bird that lived five hundred years, was consumed by fire, and was reborn from the ashes, which it then carried to the temple of the sun at Heliopolis in Egypt.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Plumage suggesting scale armor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mercury, messenger of the gods.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Odors": aromatic substances; "cassia": cinnamon; "nard": spikenard; "balm": balsam—all were used to make perfumed ointments.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Raphael's visit to Adam is modeled on Abraham's entertainment of three angels (Genesis 18:1–16).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Revered shape of earth's substance. The name "Adam" signifies red earth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A great quantity. "Small store": few stored foods.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The "middle shore" includes Pontus, the south coast of the Black Sea, famous for nuts and fruits, and the "Punic" (Carthaginian) coast of North Africa on the Mediterranean, famous for figs; the gardens of Alcinous (next line) are described in the *Odyssey* 7.113–21 as perpetually fruitful.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Meads, drinks sweetened with honey. "Must": unfermented fruit juice.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Naturally scented, not burned for incense.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton uses these angelic titles freely, in the Protestant manner, not as designations of the nine traditional orders (Raphael was called "Seraph" at line 277).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Roman goddess of fruit trees.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: On Mount Ida, Venus, Juno, and Minerva "strove" naked for the title of the most beautiful; Paris awarded the prize (the apple of discord) to Venus, which led to the rape of Helen and the Trojan War.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See the angel's words to Mary announcing that she would bear a son, Jesus (Luke 1:28): "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Milton's angels ("intelligential substances") require real food, even as "rational" men do (see below, lines 430–38). As a

monist (believer that all creation is of one matter), Milton denied the more common (dualistic) idea that angels are pure spirit, holding instead that they are of a very highly refined material substance.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Three stages in digestion.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Here Raphael describes lunar spots as still-undigested vapors (in keeping with his exposition of the universal need of nourishment); in 1.287–91 he referred to moon spots in Galileo's terms, as landscape features.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A double negative: the moon does exhale such nourishment to other planets.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Milton explains evaporation as the sun dining off moisture exhaled from the oceans.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ambrosia is the food and nectar the drink of the classical gods; Milton adds "pearly grain" (line 430), like the manna showered on the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16:14–15).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In common theological use, transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic doctrine that the bread and wine of the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ. Milton vigorously denied that doctrine, but he describes the angels' transforming of earthly food into their more highly refined spiritual substance as a true transubstantiation. The excess ("what redounds") is exhaled ("transpires") through angelic pores.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Genesis 6:2 tells of the marriage of "the daughters of men" with "the sons of God," usually identified as sons of Seth, but a patristic tradition (alluded to here) identifies them as angels.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Milton held that the universe was created out of Chaos, not out of nothing: the primal matter of Chaos had its origin in God, who subsequently created all things from that matter (see 7.168–73, 210–42). This materialist "monism" denies sharp distinctions between angels and men, spirit and matter: all beings are of one substance, of varying degrees of refinement and life.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Milton's version of the chain of being qualifies natural hierarchy by allowing for movement up or down; beings may become increasingly spiritual ("more spiritous") or increasingly gross (as the rebel angels do), depending on their moral choices—"nearer tending."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
The plant figure—root, stalk, leaves, flowers, and fruit—provides an illustration of the dynamism of being in the universe and further explains why Raphael can eat the fruit. Such food is then transformed (next lines) into various orders of "spirits"—"vital," "animal," and "intellectual" (fluids in the blood that sustain life, sensation, motion, and finally intellect and its functions, "fancy," "understanding," and "reason"), indicating that the soul is also material.  
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Traditionally, on the dualist assumption that angels are pure spirit and humans a combination of matter and spirit, angelic intuition (immediate apprehension of truth) was absolutely distinguished from human "discourse" of reason (arguing from premises to conclusions). Milton, denying that assumption, makes the distinction only relative, a matter of "degree" (line 490).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A double negative; that is, "I did know."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Raphael's account of the war in Heaven is an epic device, a narrative of past action; it is also a mini-epic itself, with traditional battles, challenges, and single combats. As an "epic" poet treating sacred matter, Raphael confronts a narrative challenge similar to Milton's own.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Countering a long philosophical tradition, Milton asserts the existence of time in Heaven, before the creation of the universe.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Plato and others defined the "great year" as the cycle completed when all the heavenly bodies simultaneously return to the positions they held at the cycle's beginning.[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: See Psalm 2:7: "I will declare the decree: . . . Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." The episode refers to the exaltation of the Son as King, not his actual begetting, since he is elsewhere described as "of all creation first" (3.383) and as God's agent in creating the angels and everything else.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Vice-regent, one appointed by the supreme ruler (here, God) to wield his authority.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The movements of the angels in their dance produce harmony, like those of the planets in the Pythagorean theory of the music of the spheres.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hebrew, "anointed."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: His original name in Heaven is lost (1.356–63), but he will come to be known as Beelzebub.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Psalm 2:4: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Satan here paraphrases the republican theory against earthly monarchy like that urged by Milton in his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649); see p. 1328. Abdiel, however, insists (lines 809–41) that the argument from equality cannot pertain to God and the angels.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hebrew, "servant of God."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Abdiel suggests that the Son's appointment as the angels' king is something like an "incarnation" for them.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Satan's (illogical) argument is that since the angels cannot remember their creation, they created themselves. See Adam's comment on his recollection of origins (8.250–51, 270–79).[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sparkling dew*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gentle, balmy*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heartfelt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *its own*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blooms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *balsam*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stars*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavenly fragrance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overburdened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *backed by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injured, diminished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gravely, soberly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange, unpleasant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *images*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *usually are*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consisting of trees*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daybreak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ecstasy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rhythmic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *melodious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *music in parts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *procession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too bushy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overconfident*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *angel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mechanism*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *telescope*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discerns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bent forward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parts of the body*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *draping*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dye*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mission*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reveled* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *acted out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immense, beyond rule*[Return to reference](#) °
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# Book 6

## *The Argument*

Raphael continues to relate how Michael and Gabriel were sent forth to battle against Satan and his angels. The first fight described: Satan and his powers retire under night: he calls a council, invents devilish engines, which in the second day's fight put Michael and his angels to some disorder; but they at length pulling up mountains overwhelmed both the force and machines of Satan: yet the tumult not so ending, God on the third day sends Messiah his Son, for whom he had reserved the glory of that victory: he in the power of his Father coming to the place, and causing all his legions to stand still on either side, with his chariot and thunder driving into the midst of his enemies, pursues them unable to resist towards the wall of heaven; which opening, they leap down with horror and confusion into the place of punishment prepared for them in the deep: Messiah returns with triumph to this Father.

All night the dreadless angel<sup>1</sup> unpursued  
Through Heav'n's wide champaign<sup>o</sup> held his way, till  
Morn,  
Waked by the circling Hours,<sup>2</sup> with rosy hand  
Unbarred the gates of light. There is a cave  
Within the mount of God, fast<sup>o</sup> by his throne,  
5 Where light and darkness in perpetual round  
Lodge and dislodge by turns, which makes through  
Heav'n  
Grateful vicissitude,<sup>o</sup> like day and night;  
Light issues forth, and at the other door  
Obsequious<sup>o</sup> darkness enters, till her hour  
10 To veil the Heav'n, though darkness there might well

Seem twilight here; and now went forth the Morn  
Such as in highest Heav'n, arrayed in gold  
Empyreal;° from before her vanished night,  
Shot through with orient beams: when all the plain  
15 Covered with thick embattled° squadrons bright,  
Chariots and flaming arms, and fiery steeds  
Reflecting blaze on blaze, first met his view:  
War he perceived, war in procinct,° and found  
Already known what he for news had thought  
20 To have reported: gladly then he mixed  
Among those friendly Powers who him received  
With joy and acclamations loud, that one  
That of so many myriads fall'n, yet one  
Returned not lost: on to the sacred hill  
25 They led him high applauded, and present  
Before the seat supreme; from whence a voice:  
From midst a golden cloud thus mild was heard.  
" 'Servant of God,³ well done, well hast thou fought  
The better fight, who single hast maintained  
30 Against revolted multitudes the cause  
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms;  
And for the testimony of truth hast borne  
Universal reproach, far worse to bear  
Than violence: for this was all thy care  
35 To stand approved in sight of God, though worlds  
Judged thee perverse: the easier conquest now  
Remains thee, aided by this host of friends,  
Back on thy foes more glorious to return  
Than scorned thou didst depart, and to subdue  
40 By force, who reason for their law refuse,  
Right reason° for their law, and for their King  
Messiah, who by right of merit reigns.  
Go Michael of celestial armies prince,  
And thou in military prowess next  
45 Gabriel, lead forth to battle these my sons°

Invincible, lead forth my armèd saints  
By thousands and by millions ranged for fight;  
Equal in number to that godless crew  
Rebellious,<sup>4</sup> them with fire and hostile arms  
50 Fearless assault, and to the brow of Heav'n  
Pursuing drive them out from God and bliss,  
Into their place of punishment, the gulf  
Of Tartarus,<sup>o</sup> which ready opens wide  
His fiery chaos to receive their fall.'  
55 "So spake the Sovereign Voice, and clouds began  
To darken all the hill, and smoke to roll  
In dusky wreaths reluctant<sup>o</sup> flames, the sign  
Of wrath awaked: nor with less dread the loud  
Ethereal trumpet from on high gan<sup>o</sup> blow:  
60 At which command the powers militant,  
That stood for Heav'n, in mighty quadrate<sup>5</sup> joined  
Of union irresistible, moved on  
In silence their bright legions, to the sound  
Of instrumental harmony that breathed  
65 Heroic ardor to advent'rous deeds  
Under their godlike leaders, in the cause  
Of God and his Messiah. On they move  
Indissolubly firm; nor obvious<sup>o</sup> hill,  
Nor strait'ning vale,<sup>6</sup> nor wood, nor stream divides  
70 Their perfect ranks; for high above the ground  
Their march was, and the passive air upbore  
Their nimble tread; as when the total kind  
Of birds in orderly array on wing  
Came summoned over Eden to receive  
75 Their names of thee; so over many a tract  
Of Heav'n they marched, and many a province wide  
Tenfold the length of this terrene:<sup>o</sup> at last  
Far in th' horizon to the north appeared  
From skirt to skirt a fiery region, stretched  
80 In battailous<sup>o</sup> aspèct, and nearer view



Bristled with upright beams<sup>o</sup> innumerable  
 Of rigid spears, and helmets thronged, and shields  
 Various, with boastful argument<sup>o</sup> portrayed,  
 The banded powers of Satan hasting on  
 85 With furious expedition;<sup>o</sup> for they weened<sup>o</sup>  
 That selfsame day by fight, or by surprise  
 To win the mount of God, and on his throne  
 To set the envier of his state, the proud  
 Aspirer, but their thoughts proved fond<sup>o</sup> and vain  
 90 In the mid-way: though strange to us it seemed  
 At first, that angel should with angel war,  
 And in fierce hosting<sup>z</sup> meet, who wont<sup>o</sup> to meet  
 So oft in festivals of joy and love  
 Unanimous, as sons of one great Sire  
 95 Hymning th' Eternal Father: but the shout  
 Of battle now began, and rushing sound  
 Of onset ended soon each milder thought.  
 High in the midst exalted as a god  
 Th' Apostate in his sun-bright chariot sat  
 100 Idol of majesty divine, enclosed  
 With flaming Cherubim, and golden shields;  
 Then lighted from his gorgeous throne, for now  
 'Twixt host<sup>o</sup> and host but narrow space was left,  
 A dreadful interval, and front to front<sup>o</sup>  
 105 Presented stood in terrible array  
 Of hideous length: before the cloudy van,<sup>o</sup>  
 On the rough edge of battle<sup>o</sup> ere it joined,  
 Satan with vast and haughty strides advanced,  
 Came tow'ring, armed in adamant and gold;  
 110 Abdiel that sight endured not, where he stood  
 Among the mightiest, bent on highest deeds,  
 And thus his own undaunted heart explores:  
 " 'O Heav'n! that such resemblance of the Highest  
 Should yet remain, where faith and realty<sup>o</sup>

Remain not; wherefore should not strength and  
 might  
 There fail where virtue fails, or weakest prove  
 Where boldest; though to sight<sup>o</sup> unconquerable?  
 His puissance,<sup>o</sup> trusting in th' Almighty's aid,  
 I mean to try, whose reason I have tried<sup>o</sup>  
 120 Unsound and false; nor is it aught but just,  
 That he who in debate of truth hath won,  
 Should win in arms, in both disputes alike  
 Victor; though brutish that contést and foul,  
 When reason hath to deal with force, yet so  
 125 Most reason is that reason overcome.'  
 "So pondering, and from his armèd peers  
 Forth stepping opposite, halfway he met  
 His daring foe, at this prevention<sup>o</sup> more  
 Incensed, and thus securely<sup>o</sup> him defied:  
 130 " 'Proud, art thou met? Thy hope was to have  
 reached  
 The height of thy aspiring unopposed,  
 The throne of God unguarded, and his side  
 Abandoned at the terror of thy power  
 Or potent tongue; fool, not to think how vain  
 135 Against the Omnipotent to rise in arms;  
 Who out of smallest things could without end  
 Have raised incessant armies to defeat  
 Thy folly; or with solitary hand  
 Reaching beyond all limit at one blow  
 140 Unaided could have finished thee, and whelmed  
 Thy legions under darkness; but thou seest  
 All are not of thy train; there be<sup>o</sup> who faith  
 Prefer, and piety<sup>o</sup> to God, though then  
 To thee not visible, when I alone  
 145 Seemed in thy world erroneous to dissent  
 From all: my sect<sup>8</sup> thou seest, now learn too late  
 How few sometimes may know, when thousand err.'

"Whom the grand Foe with scornful eye askance  
 Thus answered. 'Ill for thee, but in wished hour  
 150 Of my revenge, first sought for thou return'st  
 From flight, seditious angel, to receive  
 Thy merited reward, the first assay  
 Of this right hand provoked, since first that tongue  
 Inspired with contradiction durst oppose  
 155 A third part of the gods, in synod met  
 Their deities to assert, who while they feel  
 Vigor divine within them, can allow  
 Omnipotence to none. But well thou com'st  
 Before thy fellows, ambitious to win  
 160 From me some plume, that thy success<sup>9</sup> may show  
 Destruction to the rest: this pause between  
 (Unanswered lest thou boast)<sup>1</sup> to let thee know;  
 At first I thought that liberty and Heav'n  
 To heav'nly souls had been all one;<sup>o</sup> but now  
 165 I see that most through sloth had rather serve,  
 Minist'ring Spirits, trained up in feast and song;  
 Such hast thou armed, the minstrelsy<sup>2</sup> of Heav'n,  
 Servility<sup>o</sup> with freedom to contend,  
 As both their deeds compared this day shall prove.'  
 170 "To whom in brief thus Abdiel stern replied:  
 'Apostate, still thou err'st, nor end wilt find  
 Of erring, from the path of truth remote:  
 Unjustly thou deprav'st<sup>o</sup> it with the name  
 Of servitude to serve whom God ordains,  
 175 Or nature; God and nature bid the same,  
 When he who rules is worthiest, and excels  
 Them whom he governs. This is servitude,  
 To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebelled  
 Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,  
 180 Thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled;<sup>3</sup>  
 Yet lewdly<sup>o</sup> dar'st our minist'ring upbraid.  
 Reign thou in Hell thy kingdom, let me serve

In Heav'n God ever blest, and his divine  
Behests obey, worthiest to be obeyed;  
185 Yet chains in Hell, not realms expect: meanwhile  
From me returned, as erst<sup>o</sup> thou saidst, from flight,  
This greeting on thy impious crest receive.'  
"So saying, a noble stroke he lifted high,  
Which hung not, but so swift with tempest fell  
190 On the proud crest of Satan, that no sight,  
Nor motion of swift thought, less could his shield  
Such ruin intercept: ten paces huge  
He back recoiled; the tenth on bended knee  
His massy spear upstayed; as if on earth  
195 Winds under ground or waters forcing way  
Sidelong, had pushed a mountain from his seat  
Half sunk with all his pines. Amazement seized  
The rebel Thrones,<sup>4</sup> but greater rage to see  
Thus foiled their mightiest: ours joy filled, and shout,  
200 Presage of victory and fierce desire  
Of battle: whereat Michaël bid sound  
Th' Archangel trumpet; through the vast of Heav'n  
It sounded, and the faithful armies rung  
Hosanna to the Highest: nor stood at gaze  
205 The adverse legions, nor less hideous joined  
The horrid shock: now storming fury rose,  
And clamor such as heard in Heav'n till now  
Was never, arms on armor clashing brayed<sup>5</sup>  
Horrible discord, and the madding<sup>o</sup> wheels  
210 Of brazen chariots raged; dire was the noise  
Of conflict; overhead the dismal<sup>o</sup> hiss  
Of fiery darts in flaming volleys flew,  
And flying vaulted either host with fire.  
So under fiery cope<sup>o</sup> together rushed  
215 Both battles main,<sup>6</sup> with ruinous assault  
And inextinguishable rage; all Heav'n  
Resounded, and had earth been then, all earth

Had to her center shook. What wonder? when  
Millions of fierce encount'ring angels fought  
220 On either side, the least of whom could wield  
These elements,<sup>7</sup> and arm him with the force  
Of all their regions: how much more of power  
Army against army numberless to raise  
Dreadful combustion<sup>o</sup> warring, and disturb,  
225 Though not destroy, their happy native seat;  
Had not th' Eternal King Omnipotent  
From his stronghold of Heav'n high overruled  
And limited their might; though numbered such  
As each divided legion might have seemed  
230 A numerous host, in strength each armèd hand  
A legion; led in fight, yet leader seemed  
Each warrior single as in chief,<sup>8</sup> expert  
When to advance, or stand, or turn the sway<sup>o</sup>  
Of battle, open when, and when to close  
235 The ridges<sup>o</sup> of grim war; no thought of flight,  
None of retreat, no unbecoming deed  
That argued fear; each on himself relied,  
As<sup>o</sup> only in his arm the moment<sup>9</sup> lay  
Of victory; deeds of eternal fame  
240 Were done, but infinite: for wide was spread  
That war and various; sometimes on firm ground  
A standing fight, then soaring on main<sup>o</sup> wing  
Tormented<sup>o</sup> all the air; all air seemed then  
Conflicting fire: long time in even scale  
245 The battle hung; till Satan, who that day  
Prodigious power had shown, and met in arms  
No equal, ranging through the dire attack  
Of fighting Seraphim confused, at length  
Saw where the sword of Michael smote, and felled  
250 Squadrons at once; with huge two-handed sway  
Brandished aloft the horrid edge came down  
Wide-wasting; such destruction to withstand

He hasted, and opposed the rocky orb  
Of tenfold adamant, his ample shield<sup>1</sup>  
255 A vast circumference: at his approach  
The great Archangel from his warlike toil  
Surceased, and glad as hoping here to end  
Intestine war<sup>o</sup> in Heav'n, the Arch-Foe subdued  
Or captive dragged in chains, with hostile frown  
260 And visage all inflamed first thus began:  
    " 'Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt,  
    Unnamed in Heav'n, now plenteous, as thou seest  
    These acts of hateful strife, hateful to all,  
    Though heaviest by just measure on thyself  
265 And thy adherents: how hast thou disturbed  
    Heav'n's blessèd peace, and into nature brought  
    Misery, uncreated till the crime  
    Of thy rebellion! how hast thou instilled  
    Thy malice into thousands, once upright  
270 And faithful, now proved false! But think not here  
    To trouble holy rest; Heav'n casts thee out  
    From all her confines. Heav'n the seat of bliss  
    Brooks<sup>o</sup> not the works of violence and war.  
    Hence then, and evil go with thee along  
275 Thy offspring, to the place of evil, Hell,  
    Thou and thy wicked crew; there mingle<sup>o</sup> broils,  
    Ere this avenging sword begin thy doom,  
    Or some more sudden vengeance winged from God  
    Precipitate thee with augmented pain.'  
280     " So spake the Prince of Angels; to whom thus  
    The Adversary: 'Nor think thou with wind  
    Of airy threats to awe whom yet with deeds  
    Thou canst not. Hast thou turned the least of these  
    To flight, or if to fall, but that they rise  
285 Unvanquished, easier to transact with me  
    That thou shouldst hope, imperious, and with threats  
    To chase me hence?<sup>2</sup> Err not that so shall end

The strife which thou call'st evil, but we style  
The strife of glory: which we mean to win,  
290 Or turn this Heav'n itself into the Hell  
Thou fablest, here however to dwell free,  
If not to reign: meanwhile thy utmost force,  
And join him named Almighty to thy aid,  
I fly not, but have sought thee far and nigh.'  
295 "They ended parle,<sup>o</sup> and both addressed<sup>o</sup> for fight  
Unspeakable; for who, though with the tongue  
Of angels, can relate, or to what things  
Likened on earth conspicuous, that may lift  
Human imagination to such height  
300 Of godlike power: for likest gods they seemed,  
Stood they or moved, in stature, motion, arms  
Fit to decide the empire of great Heav'n.  
Now waved their fiery swords, and in the air  
Made horrid circles; two broad suns their shields  
305 Blazed opposite, while Expectation stood<sup>3</sup>  
In horror; from each hand with speed retired  
Where erst<sup>o</sup> was thickest fight, th' angelic throng,  
And left large field, unsafe within the wind  
Of such commotion, such as to set forth  
310 Great things by small, if nature's concord broke,  
Among the constellations war were sprung,  
Two planets rushing from aspect malign  
Of fiercest opposition in midsky,  
Should combat, and their jarring spheres confound.<sup>4</sup>  
315 Together both with next to almighty arm,  
Uplifted imminent one stroke they aimed  
That might determine,<sup>o</sup> and not need repeat,<sup>o</sup>  
As not of power,<sup>5</sup> at once; nor odds<sup>o</sup> appeared  
In might or swift prevention;<sup>o</sup> but the sword  
320 Of Michael from the armory of God  
Was giv'n him tempered so, that neither keen  
Nor solid might resist that edge: it met

The sword of Satan with steep force to smite  
Descending, and in half cut sheer, nor stayed,  
325 But with swift wheel reverse, deep ent'ring shared<sup>o</sup>  
All his right side; then Satan first knew pain,  
And writhed him to and fro convolved;<sup>o</sup> so sore  
The griding<sup>o</sup> sword with discontinuous<sup>o</sup> wound  
Passed through him, but th' ethereal substance  
330 closed  
Not long divisible, and from the gash  
A stream of nectarous humor issuing flowed  
Sanguine,<sup>o</sup> such as celestial Spirits may bleed,  
And all his armor stained erewhile so bright.  
Forthwith on all sides to his aid was run  
335 By angels many and strong, who interposed  
Defense, while others bore him on their shields  
Back to his chariot, where it stood retired  
From off the files of war; there they him laid  
Gnashing for anguish and despite and shame  
340 To find himself not matchless, and his pride  
Humbled by such rebuke, so far beneath  
His confidence to equal God in power.  
Yet soon he healed; for Spirits that live throughout  
Vital in every part, not as frail man  
345 In entrails, heart or head, liver or reins,<sup>o</sup>  
Cannot but by annihilating die;  
Nor in their liquid texture mortal wound  
Receive, no more than can the fluid air:  
All heart they live, all head, all eye, all ear,  
350 All intellect, all sense, and as they please,  
They limb themselves,<sup>6</sup> and color, shape, or size  
Assume, as likes<sup>o</sup> them best, condense or rare.  
"Meanwhile in other parts like deeds deserved  
Memorial, where the might of Gabriel fought,  
355 And with fierce ensigns pierced the deep array  
Of Moloch furious king,<sup>7</sup> who him defied,



And at his chariot wheels to drag him bound  
Threatened, nor from the Holy One of Heav'n  
Refrained his tongue blasphemous; but anon  
360 Down clov'n to the waist, with shattered arms  
And uncouth<sup>o</sup> pain fled bellowing. On each wing  
Uriel and Raphael his vaunting foe,  
Though huge, and in a rock of diamond armed,  
Vanquished Adramelech, and Asmadai,<sup>8</sup>  
365 Two potent Thrones, that to be less than gods  
Disdained, but meaner thoughts learned in their  
flight,  
Mangled with ghastly wounds through plate and  
mail.  
Nor stood unmindful Abdiel to annoy<sup>o</sup>  
The atheist<sup>o</sup> crew, but with redoubled blow  
370 Ariel and Arioch, and the violence  
Of Ramiel<sup>9</sup> scorched and blasted overthrew.  
I might relate of thousands, and their names  
Eternize here on earth; but those elect  
Angels contented with their fame in Heav'n  
375 Seek not the praise of men: the other sort  
In might though wondrous and in acts of war,  
Nor of renown less eager, yet by doom  
Canceled from Heav'n and sacred memory,  
Nameless in dark oblivion let them dwell.  
380 For strength from truth divided and from just,  
Illaudable,<sup>o</sup> naught merits but dispraise  
And ignominy, yet to glory aspires  
Vainglorious, and through infamy seeks fame:  
Therefore eternal silence be their doom.  
385 "And now their mightiest quelled, the battle  
swerved,<sup>1</sup>  
With many an inroad gored; deformèd rout  
Entered, and foul disorder; all the ground  
With shivered armor strown, and on a heap

390 Chariot and charioteer lay overturned  
And fiery foaming steeds; what<sup>o</sup> stood, recoiled  
O'erwearied, through the faint Satanic host  
Defensive scarce,<sup>2</sup> or with pale fear surprised,<sup>o</sup>  
Then first with fear surprised and sense of pain  
Fled ignominious, to such evil brought  
395 By sin of disobedience, till that hour  
Not liable to fear or flight or pain.  
Far otherwise th' inviolable saints  
In cubic phalanx<sup>o</sup> firm advanced entire,  
Invulnerable, impenetrably armed:  
400 Such high advantages their innocence  
Gave them above their foes, not to have sinned,  
Not to have disobeyed; in fight they stood  
Unwearied, unobnoxious<sup>o</sup> to be pained  
By wound, though from their place by violence  
405 moved.  
"Now night her course began, and over Heav'n  
Inducing darkness, grateful truce imposed,  
And silence on the odious din of war:  
Under her cloudy covert both retired,  
Victor and vanquished: on the foughten field  
410 Michaël and his angels prevalent<sup>o</sup>  
Encamping, placed in guard their watches round,  
Cherubic waving fires: on th' other part  
Satan with his rebellious disappeared,  
Far in the dark dislodged,<sup>o</sup> and void of rest,  
415 His potentates to council called by night;  
And in the midst thus undismayed began:  
" 'O now in danger tried, now known in arms  
Not to be overpowered, companions dear,  
Found worthy not of liberty alone,  
420 Too mean pretense,<sup>o</sup> but what we more affect,<sup>3</sup>  
Honor, dominion, glory, and renown,  
Who have sustained one day in doubtful<sup>o</sup> fight,

(And if one day, why not eternal days?)  
 What Heaven's Lord had powerfulest to send  
 425 Against us from about his throne, and judged  
 Sufficient to subdue us to his will,  
 But proves not so: then fallible, it seems,  
 Of future<sup>o</sup> we may deem him, though till now  
 Omniscient thought. True is, less firmly armed,  
 430 Some disadvantage we endured and pain,  
 Till now not known, but known as soon contemned,<sup>4</sup>  
 Since now we find this our empyreal form  
 Incapable of mortal injury  
 Imperishable, and though pierced with wound,  
 435 Soon closing, and by native vigor healed.  
 Of evil then so small as easy think  
 The remedy; perhaps more valid<sup>o</sup> arms,  
 Weapons more violent, when next we meet,  
 May serve to better us, and worse<sup>o</sup> our foes,  
 440 Or equal what between us made the odds,  
 In nature none: if other hidden cause  
 Left them superior, while we can preserve  
 Unhurt our minds, and understanding sound,  
 Due search and consultation will disclose.'  
 445 "He sat; and in th' assembly next upstood  
 Nisroch,<sup>5</sup> of Principalities the prime;  
 As one he stood escaped from cruel fight,  
 Sore toiled, his riven arms to havoc hewn,<sup>o</sup>  
 And cloudy in aspect thus answering spake:  
 450 'Deliverer from new lords, leader to free  
 Enjoyment of our right as gods; yet hard  
 For gods, and too unequal work we find  
 Against unequal arms to fight in pain,  
 Against unpained, impassive;<sup>6</sup> from which evil  
 455 Ruin must needs ensue; for what avails  
 Valor or strength, though matchless, quelled with  
 pain

Which all subdues, and makes remiss<sup>o</sup> the hands  
Of mightiest. Sense of pleasure we may well  
Spare out of life perhaps, and not repine,  
460 But live content, which is the calmest life:  
But pain is perfect misery, the worst  
Of evils, and excessive, overturns  
All patience. He who therefore can invent  
With what more forcible we may offend<sup>o</sup>  
465 Our yet unwounded enemies, or arm  
Ourselves with like defense, to me<sup>o</sup> deserves  
No less than for deliverance what we owe.<sup>7</sup>  
    "Whereto with look composed Satan replied.  
'Not uninvented that, which thou aright  
470 Believ'st so main<sup>o</sup> to our success, I bring;  
Which of us who beholds the bright surface  
Of this ethereous mold<sup>o</sup> whereon we stand,  
This continent of spacious Heav'n, adorned  
With plant, fruit, flow'r ambrosial, gems and gold,  
475 Whose eye so superficially surveys  
These things, as not to mind<sup>o</sup> from whence they  
    grow  
Deep underground, materials dark and crude,  
Of spiritous and fiery spume,<sup>o</sup> till touched  
With Heav'n's ray, and tempered they shoot forth  
480 So beauteous, op'ning to the ambient<sup>o</sup> light.  
These in their dark nativity the deep  
Shall yield us, pregnant with infernal<sup>o</sup> flame,  
Which into hollow engines<sup>o</sup> long and round  
Thick-rammed, at th' other bore<sup>8</sup> with touch of fire  
485 Dilated and infuriate<sup>o</sup> shall send forth  
From far with thund'ring noise among our foes  
Such implements of mischief as shall dash  
To pieces, and o'erwhelm whatever stands  
Adverse, that they shall fear we have disarmed  
490 The Thunderer of his only<sup>o</sup> dreaded bolt.

Nor long shall be our labor, yet ere dawn,  
Effect shall end our wish. Meanwhile revive;  
Abandon fear; to strength and counsel joined  
Think nothing hard, much less to be despaired.'  
495 He ended, and his words their drooping cheer<sup>o</sup>  
Enlightened, and their languished hope revived.  
Th' invention all admired,<sup>o</sup> and each, how he  
To be th' inventor missed, so easy it seemed  
Once found, which yet unfound most would have  
500 thought  
Impossible: yet haply<sup>o</sup> of thy race  
In future days, if malice should abound,  
Someone intent on mischief, or inspired  
With dev'lish machination might devise  
Like instrument to plague the sons of men  
505 For sin, on war and mutual slaughter bent.  
Forthwith from council to the work they flew,  
None arguing stood, innumerable hands  
Were ready, in a moment up they turned  
Wide the celestial soil, and saw beneath  
510 Th' originals<sup>o</sup> of nature in their crude  
Conception; sulphurous and nitrous foam<sup>9</sup>  
They found, they mingled, and with subtle art,  
Concocted<sup>o</sup> and adjusted<sup>o</sup> they reduced  
To blackest grain, and into store conveyed:  
515 Part hidden veins dug up (nor hath this earth  
Entrails unlike) of mineral and stone,  
Whereof to found<sup>o</sup> their engines and their balls  
Of missive<sup>o</sup> ruin; part incentive<sup>o</sup> reed  
Provide, pernicious<sup>o</sup> with one touch to fire.  
520 So all ere day-spring,<sup>o</sup> under conscious<sup>1</sup> night  
Secret they finished, and in order set,  
With silent circumspection unespied.  
Now when fair morn orient in Heav'n appeared  
Up rose the victor angels, and to arms  
525

The matin<sup>o</sup> trumpet sung: in arms they stood  
 Of golden panoply, refulgent<sup>o</sup> host,  
 Soon banded; others from the dawning hills  
 Looked round, and scouts each coast light-armèd  
 scour,  
 Each quarter, to descry the distant foe,  
 530 Where lodged, or whither fled, or if for fight,  
 In motion or in alt:<sup>o</sup> him soon they met  
 Under spread ensigns moving nigh, in slow  
 But firm battalion; back with speediest sail  
 Zophiel,<sup>2</sup> of Cherubim the swiftest wing,  
 535 Came flying, and in mid-air aloud thus cried:  
 " 'Arm, warriors, arm for fight, the foe at hand,  
 Whom fled we thought, will save us long pursuit  
 This day, fear not his flight; so thick a cloud  
 He comes, and settled in his face I see  
 540 Sad<sup>o</sup> resolution and secure:<sup>o</sup> let each  
 His adamant<sup>o</sup>ine coat gird well, and each  
 Fit well his helm, gripe fast his orbèd shield,  
 Borne ev'n<sup>o</sup> or high, for this day will pour down,  
 If I conjecture<sup>o</sup> aught, no drizzling shower,  
 545 But rattling storm of arrows barbed with fire.'  
 So warned he them aware themselves, and soon  
 In order, quit of all impediment;<sup>o</sup>  
 Instant without disturb<sup>o</sup> they took alarm,  
 And onward move embattled;<sup>o</sup> when behold  
 550 Not distant far the heavy pace the foe  
 Approaching gross<sup>o</sup> and huge; in hollow cube  
 Training<sup>o</sup> his devilish enginry, impaled<sup>o</sup>  
 On every side with shadowing squadrons deep,  
 To hide the fraud. At interview<sup>o</sup> both stood  
 555 A while, but suddenly at head appeared  
 Satan: and thus was heard commanding loud:  
 " 'Vanguard, to right and left the front unfold;  
 That all may see who hate us, how we seek

560 Peace and composure,<sup>o</sup> and with open breast  
Stand ready to receive them, if they like  
Our overture,<sup>3</sup> and turn not back perverse;  
But that I doubt, however witness Heaven,  
Heav'n witness thou anon, while we discharge  
565 Freely our part: ye who appointed stand  
Do as you have in charge, and briefly touch  
What we propound, and loud that all may hear.  
"So scoffing in ambiguous words, he scarce  
Had ended; when to right and left the front  
570 Divided, and to either flank retired.  
Which to our eyes discovered new and strange,  
A triple-mounted<sup>o</sup> row of pillars laid  
On wheels (for like to pillars most they seemed  
Or hollowed bodies made of oak or fir  
575 With branches lopped, in wood or mountain felled)  
Brass, iron, stony mold,<sup>o</sup> had not their mouths  
With hideous orifice gaped on us wide,  
Portending hollow truce; at each behind  
A Seraph stood, and in his hand a reed  
580 Stood waving tipped with fire; while we suspense,<sup>o</sup>  
Collected stood within our thoughts amused,<sup>o</sup>  
Not long, for sudden all at once their reeds  
Put forth, and to a narrow vent applied  
With nicest<sup>o</sup> touch. Immediate in a flame,  
But soon obscured with smoke, all Heav'n appeared,  
585 From those deep-throated engines belched,<sup>4</sup> whose  
    roar  
Emboweled<sup>o</sup> with outrageous noise the air,  
And all her entrails tore, disgorging foul  
Their devilish glut, chained<sup>5</sup> thunderbolts and hail  
Of iron globes, which on the victor host  
590 Leveled, with such impetuous fury smote,  
That whom they hit, none on their feet might stand,  
Though standing else as rocks, but down they fell

By thousands, Angel on Archangel rolled,  
 The sooner for their arms; unarmed they might  
 595 Have easily as Spirits evaded swift  
 By quick contraction or remove; but now  
 Foul dissipation<sup>o</sup> followed and forced rout;  
 Nor served it to relax their serried files.<sup>6</sup>  
 What should they do? If on they rushed, repulse  
 600 Repeated, and indecent<sup>o</sup> overthrow  
 Doubled, would render them yet more despised,  
 And to their foes a laughter; for in view  
 Stood ranked of Seraphim another row  
 In posture to displode<sup>o</sup> their second dire<sup>o</sup>  
 605 Of thunder: back defeated to return  
 They worse abhorred. Satan beheld their plight,  
 And to his mates thus in derision called:  
 " 'O friends, why come not on these victors proud?  
 Erewhile they fierce were coming, and when we,  
 610 To entertain them fair with open front<sup>o</sup>  
 And breast,<sup>o</sup> (what could we more?) propounded<sup>Z</sup>  
 terms  
 Of composition, straight they changed their minds,  
 Flew off, and into strange vagaries<sup>o</sup> fell,  
 As they would dance, yet for a dance they seemed  
 615 Somewhat extravagant and wild, perhaps  
 For joy of offering peace: but I suppose  
 If our proposals once again were heard  
 We should compel them to a quick result.'  
 "To whom thus Belial in like gamesome mood:  
 620 'Leader, the terms we sent were terms of weight,  
 Of hard contents, and full of force urged home,  
 Such as we might perceive amused them<sup>8</sup> all,  
 And stumbled many: who receives them right,  
 Had need from head to foot well understand;  
 625 Not understood, this gift they have besides,  
 They show us when our foes walk not upright."



“So they among themselves in pleasant<sup>o</sup> vein  
Stood scoffing, heightened in their thoughts beyond  
All doubt of victory, Eternal Might  
630 To match with their inventions they presumed  
So easy, and of his thunder made a scorn,  
And all his host derided, while they<sup>o</sup> stood  
A while in trouble; but they stood not long,  
Rage prompted them at length, and found them  
635 arms  
Against such hellish mischief fit to oppose.  
Forthwith (behold the excellence, the power,  
Which God hath in his mighty angels placed)  
Their arms away they threw, and to the hills  
(For earth hath this variety from Heav’n  
640 Of pleasure situate in hill and dale)  
Light as the lightning glimpse they ran, they flew,  
From their foundations loos’ning to and fro  
They plucked the seated hills with all their load,<sup>9</sup>  
Rocks, waters, woods, and by the shaggy tops  
645 Uplifting bore them in their hands: amaze,<sup>o</sup>  
Be sure, and terror seized the rebel host,  
When coming towards them so dread they saw  
The bottom of the mountains upward turned,  
Till on those cursèd engines’ triple-row  
650 They saw them whelmed, and all their confidence  
Under the weight of mountains buried deep,  
Themselves invaded<sup>o</sup> next, and on their heads  
Main<sup>o</sup> promontories flung, which in the air  
Came shadowing, and oppressed<sup>o</sup> whole legions  
655 armed.  
Their armor helped their harm, crushed in and  
bruised  
Into their substance pent,<sup>o</sup> which wrought them pain  
Implacable, and many a dolorous groan,  
Long struggling underneath, ere they could wind

660 Out of such prison, though Spirits of purest light,  
Purest at first, now gross by sinning grown.  
The rest in imitation to like arms  
Betook them, and the neighboring hills uptore;  
So hills amid the air encountered hills  
665 Hurl'd to and fro with jaculation<sup>o</sup> dire,  
That underground they fought in dismal shade;  
Infernal noise; war seemed a civil<sup>o</sup> game  
To<sup>o</sup> this uproar; horrid confusion heaped  
Upon confusion rose: and now all Heav'n  
670 Had gone to wrack, with ruin overspread,  
Had not th' Almighty Father where he sits  
Shrined in his sanctuary of Heav'n secure,  
Consulting<sup>o</sup> on the sum of things, foreseen  
This tumult, and permitted all, advised:<sup>o</sup>  
That his great purpose he might so fulfill,  
675 To honor his anointed Son avenged  
Upon his enemies, and to declare  
All power on him transferred: whence to his Son  
Th' assessor<sup>1</sup> of his throne he thus began:  
    " 'Effulgence<sup>o</sup> of my glory, Son beloved,  
680 Son in whose face invisible is beheld  
Visibly,<sup>2</sup> what by Deity I am,  
And in whose hand what by decree I do,  
Second Omnipotence,<sup>3</sup> two days are passed,  
Two days, as we compute the days of Heav'n,  
685 Since Michael and his powers went forth to tame  
These disobedient; sore hath been their fight,  
As likeliest was, when two such foes met armed;  
For to themselves I left them, and thou know'st,  
Equal in their creation they were formed,  
690 Save what sin hath impaired, which yet hath  
wrought  
Insensibly,<sup>o</sup> for I suspend their doom;  
Whence in perpetual fight they needs must last

Endless, and no solution will be found:  
 War wearied hath performed what war can do,  
 695 And to disordered rage let loose the reins,  
 With mountains as with weapons armed, which  
 makes  
 Wild work in Heav'n, and dangerous to the main.<sup>o</sup>  
 Two days are therefore passed, the third is thine;  
 For thee I have ordained it, and thus far  
 700 Have suffered,<sup>o</sup> that the glory may be thine  
 Of ending this great war, since none but thou  
 Can end it. Into thee such virtue and grace  
 Immense I have transfused, that all may know  
 In Heav'n and Hell thy power above compare,  
 705 And this perverse commotion governed thus,  
 To manifest thee worthiest to be heir  
 Of all things, to be heir and to be King  
 By sacred unction,<sup>o</sup> thy deserved right.  
 Go then thou mightiest in thy Father's might,  
 710 Ascend my chariot, guide the rapid wheels  
 That shake Heav'n's basis, bring forth all my war,<sup>o</sup>  
 My bow and thunder, my almighty arms  
 Gird on, and sword upon thy puissant thigh;  
 Pursue these sons of darkness, drive them out  
 715 From all Heav'n's bounds into the utter<sup>o</sup> deep:  
 There let them learn, as likes them, to despise  
 God and Messiah his anointed<sup>4</sup> King.'  
 "He said, and on his Son with rays direct  
 Shone full, he all his Father full expressed  
 720 Ineffably<sup>o</sup> into his face received,  
 And thus the Filial Godhead answering spake:  
 " 'O Father, O Supreme of heav'nly Thrones,  
 First, highest, holiest, best, thou always seek'st  
 To glorify thy Son, I always thee,  
 725 As is most just; this I my glory account,  
 My exaltation, and my whole delight,

That thou in me well pleased, declar'st thy will  
Fulfilled, which to fulfill is all my bliss.  
Scepter and power, thy giving, I assume,  
730 And gladlier shall resign, when in the end  
Thou shalt be all in all, and I in thee  
Forever, and in me all whom thou lov'st:  
But whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on  
Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on,  
735 Image of thee in all things; and shall soon,  
Armed with thy might, rid Heav'n of these rebelled,  
To their prepared ill mansion driven down  
To chains of darkness, and th' undying worm,  
That from thy just obedience could revolt,  
740 Whom to obey is happiness entire.  
Then shall thy saints unmixed, and from th' impure  
Far separate, circling thy holy mount  
Unfeignèd hallelujahs to thee sing,  
Hymns of high praise, and I among them chief.'  
745 So said, he o'er his scepter bowing, rose  
From the right hand of Glory where he sat,  
And the third sacred morn began to shine  
Dawning through Heav'n: forth rushed with  
whirlwind sound  
The chariot of Paternal Deity,  
750 Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel undrawn,  
Itself instinct with <sup>o</sup> spirit, but convoyed  
By four Cherubic shapes, four faces each<sup>5</sup>  
Had wondrous, as with stars their bodies all  
And wings were set with eyes, with eyes the wheels  
755 Of beryl, and careering fires between;<sup>6</sup>  
Over their heads a crystal firmament,  
Whereon a sapphire throne, inlaid with pure  
Amber, and colors of the show'ry arch.<sup>o</sup>  
He in celestial panoply all armed  
760 Of radiant urim,<sup>7</sup> work divinely wrought,

Ascended, at his right hand Victory  
Sat eagle-winged, beside him hung his bow  
And quiver with three-bolted thunder stored,<sup>8</sup>  
And from about him fierce effusion<sup>o</sup> rolled  
765 Of smoke and bickering<sup>o</sup> flame, and sparkles dire;  
Attended with ten thousand thousand saints,  
He onward came, far off his coming shone,  
And twenty thousand<sup>9</sup> (I their number heard)  
Chariots of God, half on each hand were seen:  
770 He on the wings of Cherub rode sublime<sup>o</sup>  
On the crystalline sky, in sapphire throned,  
Illustrious<sup>o</sup> far and wide, but by his own  
First seen: them unexpected joy surprised,  
When the great ensign of Messiah blazed  
775 Aloft by angels borne, his sign in Heav'n:  
Under whose conduct Michael soon reduced<sup>o</sup>  
His army, circumfused<sup>o</sup> on either wing,  
Under their Head embodied all in one.  
Before him Power Divine his way prepared;  
780 At his command the uprooted hills retired  
Each to his place, they heard his voice and went  
Obsequious,<sup>o</sup> Heav'n his wonted face renewed,  
And with fresh flow'rets hill and valley smiled.  
This saw his hapless foes but stood obdured,<sup>o</sup>  
785 And to rebellious fight rallied their powers  
Insensate, hope conceiving from despair.  
In heav'nly Spirits could such perverseness dwell?  
But to convince the proud what signs avail,  
Or wonders move th' obdurate to relent?  
790 They hardened more by what might most reclaim,  
Grieving<sup>o</sup> to see his glory, at the sight  
Took envy, and aspiring to his height,  
Stood re-embattled<sup>1</sup> fierce, by force or fraud  
Weening<sup>o</sup> to prosper, and at length prevail  
795 Against God and Messiah, or to fall

In universal ruin last, and now  
To final battle drew; disdaining flight,  
Or faint retreat; when the great Son of God  
To all his host on either hand thus spake:  
800     " 'Stand still in bright array ye saints, here stand  
Ye angels armed, this day from battle rest;<sup>2</sup>  
Faithful hath been your warfare, and of God  
Accepted, fearless in his righteous cause,  
And as ye have received, so have ye done  
805     Invincibly; but of this cursed crew  
The punishment to other hand belongs,  
Vengeance is his,<sup>3</sup> or whose he sole appoints;  
Number to this day's work is not ordained  
Nor multitude, stand only and behold  
810     God's indignation on these godless poured  
By me, not you but me they have despised,  
Yet envied; against me is all their rage,  
Because the Father, t' whom in Heav'n supreme  
Kingdom and power and glory appertains,  
815     Hath honored me according to his will.  
Therefore to me their doom he hath assigned;  
That they may have their wish, to try with me  
In battle which the stronger proves, they all,  
Or I alone against them, since by strength  
820     They measure all, of other excellence  
Not emulous,<sup>o</sup> nor care who them excels;  
Nor other strife with them do I vouchsafe.'<sup>o</sup>  
      " So spake the Son, and into terror changed  
His count'nance too severe to be beheld  
825     And full of wrath bent on his enemies.  
At once the Four<sup>4</sup> spread out their starry wings  
With dreadful shade contiguous, and the orbs  
Of his fierce chariot rolled, as with the sound  
Of torrent floods, or of a numerous host.  
830     He on his impious foes right onward drove,

Gloomy as night; under his burning wheels  
The steadfast empyrean shook throughout,  
All but the throne itself of God. Full soon  
Among them he arrived; in his right hand  
835 Grasping ten thousand thunders, which he sent  
Before him, such as in their souls infixed  
Plagues; they astonished<sup>o</sup> all resistance lost,  
All courage; down their idle weapons dropped;  
O'er shields and helms, and helmèd heads he rode  
840 Of Thrones and mighty Seraphim prostrate,  
That wished the mountains now might be again  
Thrown on them as a shelter from his ire.  
Nor less on either side tempestuous fell  
His arrows, from the fourfold-visaged Four,  
845 Distinct<sup>o</sup> with eyes, and from the living wheels,  
Distinct alike with multitude of eyes;  
One spirit in them ruled, and every eye  
Glared lightning, and shot forth pernicious<sup>o</sup> fire  
Among th' accursed, that withered all their strength,  
850 And of their wonted<sup>o</sup> vigor left them drained,  
Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fall'n.  
Yet half his strength he put not forth, but checked  
His thunder in mid-volley, for he meant  
Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n:  
855 The overthrown he raised, and as a herd  
Of goats or timorous flock together thronged  
Drove them before him thunderstruck, pursued  
With terrors and with furies to the bounds  
And crystal wall of Heav'n, which op'ning wide,  
860 Rolled inward, and a spacious gap disclosed  
Into the wasteful<sup>o</sup> deep; the monstrous sight  
Strook them with horror backward, but far worse  
Urged them behind; headlong themselves they threw  
Down from the verge of Heav'n, eternal wrath  
865 Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.  
"Hell heard th' unsufferable noise, Hell saw

Heav'n ruining<sup>o</sup> from Heav'n, and would have fled  
Affrighted; but strict fate had cast too deep  
Her dark foundations, and too fast had bound.  
870 Nine days they fell; confounded Chaos roared,  
And felt tenfold confusion in their fall  
Through his wild anarchy, so huge a rout<sup>o</sup>  
Encumbered<sup>o</sup> him with ruin: Hell at last  
Yawning received them whole, and on them closed,  
875 Hell their fit habitation fraught with fire  
Unquenchable, the house of woe and pain.  
Disburdened Heav'n rejoiced, and soon repaired  
Her mural<sup>o</sup> breach, returning whence it rolled.  
Sole victor from th' expulsion of his foes  
880 Messiah his triumphal chariot turned:  
To meet him all his saints, who silent stood  
Eyewitnesses of his almighty acts,  
With jubilee<sup>o</sup> advanced; and as they went,  
Shaded with branching palm, each order bright  
885 Sung triumph, and him sung victorious King,  
Son, Heir, and Lord, to him dominion giv'n,  
Worthiest to reign: he celebrated rode  
Triumphant through mid-Heav'n, into the courts  
And temple of his mighty Father throned  
890 On high: who into glory him received,  
Where now he sits at the right hand of bliss.  
    "Thus measuring things in Heav'n by things on  
    earth  
At thy request, and that thou may'st beware  
By what is past, to thee I have revealed  
895 What might have else to human race been hid;  
The discord which befell, and war in Heav'n  
Among th' angelic powers,<sup>o</sup> and the deep fall  
Of those too high aspiring, who rebelled  
With Satan, he who envies now thy state,  
900 Who now is plotting how he may seduce  
Thee also from obedience, that with him



Bereaved of happiness thou may'st partake  
 His punishment, eternal misery;  
 Which would be all his solace and revenge,  
 905 As a despite<sup>o</sup> done against the Most High,  
 Thee once to gain companion of his woe.  
 But listen not to his temptations, warn  
 Thy weaker;<sup>5</sup> let it profit thee to have heard  
 By terrible example the reward  
 910 Of disobedience; firm they might have stood,  
 Yet fell; remember, and fear to transgress."

## Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, Abdiel. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Daughters of Jove, who control the seasons and guard the gates of Heaven. "Morn": Aurora, goddess of dawn. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The literal meaning (Hebrew) of the name Abdiel. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God sends out only an equal force to match the one-third of the angelic host that rebelled, not the two-thirds that remained loyal. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A square military formation. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A narrow valley would force other armies to march in a file. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hostile encounter. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
 The term carries political resonance, since the national English church, Anglican or (during the revolution) Presbyterian, sought to suppress and persecute the sects who separated from it (Baptists, Quakers, Socinians, and others), often denouncing them as heretics. Satan claims that a "synod" (line 156, term for a Presbyterian assembly) has proclaimed the truth of the rebel angels' case; Abdiel insists that truth may rather reside (as here) with a single "dissenter" or a sect of a few.

### [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The outcome of your action. "Plume": token of victory.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, lest thou boast that I did not answer your argument.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Satan's contemptuous pun links together the loyal angels' service ("Minist'ring," line 167) with their song, likened to the street songs of minstrels.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Abdiel cites the "natural law" principle that rule rightly belongs to the best or worthiest, and that tyrants are enslaved to their own passions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here as elsewhere Milton uses the name of one angelic order to stand for all. But the choice of "Thrones" here carries political resonance, linking monarchs with rebels against God's kingdom.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Made a harsh, jarring sound.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The principal body of an army, as opposed to the van, rear, and wing.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The four elements—fire, air, water, earth—that constitute the several "regions" (next line) of planet earth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the angelic legions had leaders, yet each single warrior seemed like such a leader.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Weight that will tip the scales.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Satan's shield is a rocklike ("rocky") circle, made of impenetrable "adamant" (probably diamond), ten layers thick.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Have you made even the least of my followers flee, or seen them fall and fail to rise, that you would hope "imperiously" to deal ("transact") otherwise with me, driving me off by mere threats? "Err not" (following): don't falsely suppose.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Personifying the angels' apprehension.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An epic simile comparing the clash of these armies ("great things") with war among the planets, in which two

planets clashing together from diametrically opposed positions ("aspect malign"), would cast the planetary system and its music ("jarring spheres") into confusion ("confound").[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: That is, because they would not have power to repeat the blow.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, provide themselves with limbs. "Condense or rare" (line 353): dense or airy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: With his companies ("ensigns") he pierced Moloch's troops in their dense formation ("deep array").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Asmodeus, a Persian god (see 4.167–71). "Adramelech": "king of fire," a god worshipped at Samaria with human sacrifice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "Ariel": "lion of God." "Arioch": "lionlike." "Ramiel": "thunder of God."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the army gave way.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scarcely defending themselves.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Aspire to.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: No sooner known than despised.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An Assyrian god; the Hebrew name was said to mean flight or luxurious temptation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Not liable to suffering.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, we would owe such a one our deliverance.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The touchhole into which fine powder was poured to serve as fuse for the charge. "Thick": compactly.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Saltpeter ("nitrous foam") and sulphur are the ingredients of gunpowder.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Aware, as an accessory to a crime.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hebrew, "spy of God."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A pun on "offer to negotiate" and "opening" (aperture), the hole or muzzle of the cannon. The passage is full of puns: for example, "perverse" (line 562, peevish, turned the wrong

- way), “discharge” (line 564), “charge,” “touch,” “propound,” “loud” (lines 566–67), “hollow” (line 578).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See the sustained debased imagery relating to bodily functions, for example, “belched,” “emboweled,” “entrails.”[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: Chainshot, which was linked cannonballs.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: That is, nor did it do any good (“served it”) to loosen up (“relax”) their rows pressed close together (“serried files”).[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: More puns, on “propounded,” “terms of composition,” “flew off.”[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: A pun on “held their attention” and “bewildered them.” Belial also puns on (among other terms) “stumbled” (“nonplussed” and “tripped up”) and “understand” (“comprehend” and “prop up”).[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: The hurling of hills as missiles is taken from the war between the Olympian gods and the Giants, in Hesiod’s *Theogony*.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: One who sits beside, an associate.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: See Colossians 1:15: “Who is the image of the invisible God.”[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Two omnipotences are a logical impossibility; the phrase underscores Milton’s view that the Son receives all power from the Father. See John 5:19, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do,” which Milton cites in *Christian Doctrine* 1.5 to argue that the Son derives all power from the Father.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: The literal meaning of “messiah.”[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: The Son’s living chariot, with its four-faced Cherubim—the faces being man, lion, ox, and eagle—is taken from Ezekiel 1 (especially 1:10) and 10.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: See Ezekiel 10:12: “And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had.”[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Gems worn by Aaron in his “breastplate of judgment” (Exodus 28:30).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Jove’s bird was the eagle; his weapon was the thunderbolt.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Psalm 68:17: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Drawn up again in battle formation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Echoes Moses’s words when God destroyed the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13): “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Romans 12:19: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The four “Cherubic shapes” of line 753.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Eve, who is, however, present for this story.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *plain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *close*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *delightful change*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *compliant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heavenly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in battle array*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *preparation*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *upright, true reason*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *angels*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Hell*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *writhing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *began to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *standing in the way*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *earth, terrain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *warlike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shafts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heraldic devices*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thought*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *were accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *army*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *face to face*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frowning vanguard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *front line*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sincerity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seemingly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proved by trial*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *obstruction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confidently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *there are those*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devotion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one and the same*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bondage, obsequiousness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vilify*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignorantly, basely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whirling madly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dreadful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tumult*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ranks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as if*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strong, powerful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agitated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *civil war*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endures*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *concoct*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parley*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prepared*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repetition*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inequality*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anticipation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut off*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contorted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keenly cutting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gaping*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blood-red*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kidneys*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *unfamiliar*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *those who*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized unexpectedly*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *not liable*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *shifted quarters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *low aim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indecisive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the future*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *powerful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *injure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cut to pieces*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slack, weak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attack*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in my opinion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *essential*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ethereal matter*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *consider*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frothy matter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enveloping*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from underground*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cannon*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unique*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marveled at*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possibly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *original elements*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heated* [Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *cast*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *missile* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kindling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *quick, destructive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dawn*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *shining*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *halt*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *confident*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of hardest metal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *straight out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interpret signs*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *disorder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in battle order*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *at mutual view*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreement*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in three rows*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *matter*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *in suspense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *puzzled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *most exact*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *eccentric motions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jesting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the good angels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *astonishment, panic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attacked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great, solid*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pressed down*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *closely confined*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *humane, refined*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *animated by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rainbow*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *flickering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lifted up*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *shining*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *falling headlong*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defeated army*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burdened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in the wall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *joyful shouts*[Return to reference](#) °
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- °: *malicious act*[Return to reference](#) °

# Book 7

## *The Argument*

Raphael at the request of Adam relates how and wherefore this world was first created; that God, after the expelling of Satan and his angels out of heaven, declared his pleasure to create another world and other creatures to dwell therein; sends his Son with glory and attendance of angels to perform the work of creation in six days: the angels celebrate with hymns the performance thereof, and his reascension into heaven.

Descend from Heav'n Urania,<sup>1</sup> by that name  
If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine  
Following, above th' Olympian hill I soar,  
Above the flight of Pegasean wing.<sup>2</sup>  
The meaning, not the name I call: for thou  
5 Nor of the muses nine, nor on the top  
Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heav'nly born  
Before the hills appeared, or fountain flowed,  
Thou with eternal Wisdom<sup>3</sup> didst converse,<sup>o</sup>  
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play  
10 In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleased  
With thy celestial song. Up led by thee  
Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presumed,  
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,  
Thy temp'ring;<sup>o</sup> with like safety guided down  
15 Return me to my native element:  
Lest from this flying steed unreined (as once  
Bellerophon,<sup>4</sup> though from a lower clime)<sup>o</sup>  
Dismounted, on th' Aleian field I fall  
Erroneous<sup>o</sup> there to wander and forlorn.  
20

Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound  
Within the visible diurnal sphere;<sup>5</sup>  
Standing on earth, not rapt<sup>o</sup> above the pole,  
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged  
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,  
25 On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;  
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,<sup>6</sup>  
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou  
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn  
Purples the east: still govern thou my song,  
30 Urania, and fit audience find, though few.  
But drive far off the barbarous dissonance  
Of Bacchus and his revelers, the race  
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard  
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears  
35 To rapture, till the savage clamor drowned  
Both harp and voice;<sup>7</sup> nor could the Muse defend  
Her son.<sup>8</sup> So fail not thou, who thee implores:  
For thou art heav'nly, she an empty dream.  
Say goddess, what ensued when Raphael,  
40 The affable Archangel, had forewarned  
Adam by dire example to beware  
Apostasy, by what befell in Heaven  
To those apostates, lest the like befall  
In Paradise to Adam or his race,  
45 Charged not to touch the interdicted tree,  
If they transgress, and slight that sole command,  
So easily obeyed amid the choice  
Of all tastes else<sup>o</sup> to please their appetite,  
Though wand'ring. He with his consorted<sup>o</sup> Eve  
50 The story heard attentive, and was filled  
With admiration,<sup>o</sup> and deep muse to hear  
Of things so high and strange, things to their  
thought  
So unimaginable as hate in Heav'n,

55 And war so near the peace of God in bliss  
With such confusion: but the evil soon  
Driv'n back redounded<sup>o</sup> as a flood on those  
From whom it sprung, impossible to mix  
With blessedness. Whence Adam soon repealed<sup>o</sup>  
60 The doubts that in his heart arose: and now  
Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know  
What nearer might concern him, how this world  
Of Heav'n and earth conspicuous<sup>o</sup> first began,  
When, and whereof created, for what cause,  
65 What within Eden or without was done  
Before his memory, as one whose drouth<sup>o</sup>  
Yet scarce allayed still eyes the current<sup>o</sup> stream,  
Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites,  
Proceeded thus to ask his heav'nly guest:  
70 "Great things, and full of wonder in our ears,  
Far differing from this world, thou hast revealed  
Divine interpreter, by favor sent  
Down from the empyrean to forewarn  
Us timely of what might else<sup>o</sup> have been our loss,  
Unknown, which human knowledge could not reach:  
75 For which to the Infinitely Good we owe  
Immortal thanks, and his admonishment  
Receive with solemn purpose to observe  
Immutably his sov'reign will, the end<sup>o</sup>  
Of what we are. But since thou hast vouchsafed  
80 Gently for our instruction to impart  
Things above earthly thought, which yet concerned  
Our knowing, as to Highest Wisdom seemed,  
Deign to descend now lower, and relate  
What may no less perhaps avail us known,  
85 How first began this Heav'n which we behold  
Distant so high, with moving fires adorned  
Innumerable, and this which yields or fills  
All space, the ambient<sup>o</sup> air wide interfused  
Embracing round this florid<sup>o</sup> earth, what cause

90 Moved the Creator in his holy rest  
Through all eternity so late to build  
In Chaos,<sup>9</sup> and the work begun, how soon  
Absolved,<sup>o</sup> if unforbid thou may'st unfold  
What we, not to explore the secrets ask  
95 Of his eternal empire, but the more  
To magnify<sup>o</sup> his works, the more we know.  
And the great light of day yet wants to run  
Much of his race though steep, suspense<sup>o</sup> in Heav'n  
Held by thy voice, thy potent voice he hears,  
100 And longer will delay to hear thee tell  
His generation,<sup>o</sup> and the rising birth  
Of nature from the unapparent<sup>1</sup> deep:  
Or if the star of evening and the moon  
Haste to thy audience, night with her will bring  
105 Silence, and sleep list'ning to thee will watch,<sup>o</sup>  
Or we can bid his absence, till thy song  
End, and dismiss thee ere the morning shine."  
Thus Adam his illustrious guest besought:  
And thus the godlike angel answered mild:  
110 "This also thy request with caution asked  
Obtain: though to recount almighty works  
What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice,  
Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?  
Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve  
115 To glorify the Maker, and infer<sup>o</sup>  
Thee also happier, shall not be withheld  
Thy hearing, such commission from above  
I have received, to answer thy desire  
Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain  
120 To ask, nor let thine own inventions<sup>o</sup> hope  
Things not revealed, which th' invisible King,  
Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night,  
To none communicable in earth or Heaven:  
Enough is left besides to search and know.  
125

But knowledge is as food, and needs no less  
Her temperance over appetite, to know  
In measure what the mind may well contain,  
Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns  
Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind.

130     "Know then, that after Lucifer from Heav'n  
(So call him, brighter once amidst the host  
Of angels, than that star the stars among)<sup>2</sup>  
Fell with his flaming legions through the deep  
Into his place, and the great Son returned

135     Victorious with his saints, th' Omnipotent  
Eternal Father from his throne beheld  
Their multitude, and to his Son thus spake:  
    " 'At least our envious foe hath failed, who thought  
All like himself rebellious, by whose aid

140     This inaccessible high strength, the seat  
Of Deity supreme, us dispossessed,<sup>3</sup>  
He trusted to have seized, and into fraud<sup>o</sup>  
Drew many, whom their place knows here no more;  
Yet far the greater part have kept, I see,

145     Their station, Heav'n yet populous retains  
Number sufficient to possess her realms  
Though wide, and this high temple to frequent  
With ministeries due and solemn rites:  
But lest his heart exalt him in the harm

150     Already done, to have dispeopled Heav'n,  
My damage fondly<sup>o</sup> deemed, I can repair  
That detriment, if such it be to lose  
Self-lost, and in a moment will create  
Another world, out of one man a race

155     Of men innumerable, there to dwell,  
Not here, till by degrees of merit raised  
They open to themselves at length the way  
Up hither, under long obedience tried,

160

And earth be changed to Heav'n and Heav'n to  
earth,  
One kingdom, joy and union without end.  
Meanwhile inhabit lax,<sup>o</sup> ye Powers of Heav'n;  
And thou my Word, begotten Son, by thee  
This I perform, speak thou, and be it done:<sup>4</sup>  
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee  
165 I send along, ride forth, and bid the deep  
Within appointed bounds be heav'n and earth,  
Boundless the deep, because I am who fill  
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.  
Though I uncircumscribed myself retire,  
170 And put not forth my goodness, which is free  
To act or not,<sup>5</sup> necessity and chance  
Approach not me, and what I will is fate.'  
"So spake th' Almighty and to what he spake  
His Word, the Filial Godhead, gave effect.  
175 Immediate are the acts of God, more swift  
Than time or motion, but to human ears  
Cannot without process of speech be told,  
So told as earthly notion<sup>o</sup> can receive.<sup>6</sup>  
Great triumph and rejoicing was in Heav'n  
180 When such was heard declared the Almighty's will;  
'Glory' they sung to the Most High, 'good will  
To future men, and in their dwellings peace:  
Glory to him whose just avenging ire  
Had driven out th' ungodly from his sight  
185 And th' habitations of the just; to him  
Glory and praise, whose wisdom had ordained  
Good out of evil to create, instead  
Of Spirits malign a better race to bring  
Into their vacant room, and thence diffuse  
190 His good to worlds and ages infinite.'  
So sang the hierarchies: meanwhile the Son  
On his great expedition now appeared,



Girt with omnipotence, with radiance crowned  
Of majesty divine, sapience<sup>o</sup> and love  
195 Immense, and all his Father in him shone.  
About his chariot numberless were poured  
Cherub and Seraph, Potentates and Thrones,  
And Virtues, winged Spirits, and chariots winged,  
From the armory of God, where stand of old  
200 Myriads between two brazen mountains lodged  
Against<sup>o</sup> a solemn day, harnessed at hand,  
Celestial equipage; and now came forth  
Spontaneous, for within them spirit lived,  
Attendant on their Lord: Heav'n opened wide  
205 Her ever-during<sup>o</sup> gates, harmonious sound  
On golden hinges moving, to let forth  
The King of Glory<sup>7</sup> in his powerful Word  
And Spirit coming to create new worlds.  
On heav'nly ground they stood, and from the shore  
210 They viewed the vast immeasurable abyss  
Outrageous<sup>o</sup> as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,  
Up from the bottom turned by furious winds  
And surging waves, as mountains to assault  
Heav'n's height, and with the center mix the pole.  
215 " 'Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou deep,  
peace,'  
Said then th' Omnific<sup>o</sup> Word, 'your discord end':  
"Nor stayed, but on the wings of Cherubim  
Uplifted, in paternal glory rode  
Far into Chaos, and the world unborn;  
220 For Chaos heard his voice: him all his train  
Followed in bright procession to behold  
Creation, and the wonders of his might.  
Then stayed the fervid<sup>o</sup> wheels, and in his hand  
He took the golden compasses, prepared  
225 In God's eternal store, to circumscribe  
This universe, and all created things:

One foot he centered, and the other turned  
 Round through the vast profundity obscure,  
 And said, 'Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,  
 230 This be thy just<sup>o</sup> circumference O world.'  
 Thus God the heav'n<sup>o</sup> created, thus the earth,  
 Matter unformed and void: darkness profound  
 Covered th' abyss: but on the wat'ry calm  
 His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,  
 235 And vital virtue<sup>o</sup> infused, and vital warmth  
 Throughout the fluid mass, but downward purged  
 The black tartareous cold infernal dregs<sup>8</sup>  
 Adverse to life: then founded, then conglobed  
 Like things to like, the rest to several place  
 240 Disparted, and between spun out the air,  
 And earth self-balanced on her center hung.  
 " 'Let there be light,' said God,<sup>9</sup> and forthwith light  
 Ethereal, first of things, quintessence<sup>1</sup> pure  
 Sprung from the deep, and from her native east  
 245 To journey through the airy gloom began,  
 Sphered in a radiant cloud, for yet the sun  
 Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle  
 Sojourned the while. God saw the light was good;  
 And light from darkness by the hemisphere  
 250 Divided: light the day, and darkness night  
 He named. Thus was the first day ev'n and morn:<sup>2</sup>  
 Nor passed uncelebrated, nor unsung  
 By the celestial choirs, when orient light  
 Exhaling<sup>o</sup> first from darkness they beheld;  
 255 Birthday of heav'n<sup>o</sup> and earth; with joy and shout  
 The hollow universal orb they filled,  
 And touched their golden harps, and hymning  
 praised  
 God and his works, Creator him they sung,  
 Both when first evening was, and when first morn.  
 260 "Again, God said, 'Let there be firmament

Amid the waters, and let it divide  
The waters from the waters': and God made  
The firmament, expanse of liquid,o pure,  
Transparent, elemental air diffused  
265 In circuit to the uttermost convexo  
Of this great round:o partition firm and sure,  
The waters underneath from those above  
Dividing: for as earth, so he the world  
Built on circumfluouso waters calm, in wide  
270 Crystalline ocean, and the loud misrule  
Of Chaos far removed, lest fierce extremes  
Contiguous might distemper the whole frame:3  
And heav'no he named the firmament: so ev'n  
And morning chorus sung the second day.  
275 "The earth was formed, but in the womb as yet  
Of waters, embryon<sup>4</sup> immature involvedo  
Appeared not: over all the face of earth  
Maino ocean flowed, not idle, but with warm  
Prolific humoro soft'ning all her globe,  
280 Fermented the great mother to conceive,  
Sate with genialo moisture, when God said,  
'Be gathered now ye waters under heav'n  
Into one place, and let dry land appear.'  
Immediately the mountains huge appear  
285 Emergent, and their broad bare backs upheave  
Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky:  
So high as heaved the tumido hills, so low  
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,  
Capacious bed of waters: thither they  
290 Hasted with glad precipitance,o uprolled  
As drops on dust conglobing from the dry;  
Part rise in crystal wall, or ridge directo  
For haste; such flight the great command impressed  
On the swift floods: as armies at the call  
295 Of trumpet (for of armies thou hast heard)

Troop to their standard, so the wat'ry throng,  
Wave rolling after wave, where way they found,  
If steep, with torrent rapture, o if through plain,  
Soft-ebbing; nor withstood them rock or hill,  
300 But they, or o underground, or circuit wide  
With serpent error o wand'ring, found their way,  
And on the washy ooze deep channels wore;  
Easy, ere God had bid the ground be dry,  
All but within those banks, where rivers now  
305 Stream, and perpetual draw their humid train. o  
The dry land, earth, and the great receptacle  
Of congregated waters he called seas:  
And saw that it was good, and said, 'Let th' earth  
Put forth the verdant grass, herb yielding seed,  
310 And fruit tree yielding fruit after her kind;  
Whose seed is in herself upon the earth.'  
He scarce had said, when the bare earth, till then  
Desert and bare, unsightly, unadorned,  
Brought forth the tender grass, whose verdure clad  
315 Her universal face with pleasant green,  
Then herbs of every leaf, that sudden flow'red  
Op'ning their various colors, and made gay  
Her bosom smelling sweet: and these scarce blown, o  
Forth flourished thick the clust'ring vine, forth crept  
320 The swelling gourd, up stood the corny o reed  
Embattled in her field: add the humble o shrub,  
And bush with frizzled hair implicit: o last  
Rose as in dance the stately trees, and spread  
Their branches hung with copious fruit; or gemmed o  
325 Their blossoms: with high woods the hills were  
crowned,  
With tufts the valleys and each fountain side,  
With borders long the rivers. That earth now  
Seemed like to Heav'n, a seat where gods might  
dwell,  
Or wander with delight, and love to haunt

330 Her sacred shades: though God had yet not rained  
Upon the earth, and man to till the ground  
None was, but from the earth a dewy mist  
Went up and watered all the ground, and each  
335 Plant of the field, which ere it was in the earth  
God made, and every herb, before it grew  
On the green stem; God saw that it was good:  
So ev'n and morn recorded the third day.  
"Again th' Almighty spake: 'Let there be lights  
340 High in th' expanse of heaven<sup>o</sup> to divide  
The day from night; and let them be for signs,  
For seasons, and for days, and circling years,  
And let them be for lights as I ordain  
Their office<sup>o</sup> in the firmament of heav'n  
To give light on the earth'; and it was so.  
345 And God made two great lights, great for their use  
To man, the greater to have rule by day,  
The less by night altern:<sup>o</sup> and made the stars,  
And set them in the firmament of heav'n  
To illuminate the earth, and rule the day  
350 In their vicissitude,<sup>o</sup> and rule the night,  
And light from darkness to divide. God saw,  
Surveying his great work, that it was good:  
For of celestial bodies first the sun  
A mighty sphere he framed, unlightsome first,  
355 Though of ethereal mold:<sup>o</sup> then formed the moon  
Globose, and every magnitude of stars,  
And sowed with stars the heav'n thick as a field:  
Of light by far the greater part he took,  
Transplanted from her cloudy shrine,<sup>5</sup> and placed  
360 In the sun's orb, made porous to receive  
And drink the liquid light, firm to retain  
Her gathered beams, great palace now of light.  
Hither as to their fountain other stars  
365 Repairing,<sup>o</sup> in their golden urns draw light,

And hence the morning planet gilds her horns;<sup>6</sup>  
By tincture<sup>o</sup> or reflection they augment  
Their small peculiar,<sup>o</sup> though from human sight  
So far remote, with dimunition seen.  
First in his east the glorious lamp was seen,  
370 Regent of day, and all th' horizon round  
Invested with bright rays, jocund<sup>o</sup> to run  
His longitude<sup>o</sup> through heav'n's high road: the gray  
Dawn, and the Pleiades<sup>7</sup> before him danced  
Shedding sweet influence: less bright the moon,  
375 But opposite in leveled west was set  
His mirror, with full face borrowing her light  
From him, for other light she needed none  
In that aspect,<sup>o</sup> and still that distance keeps  
Till night, then in the east her turn she shines,  
380 Revolved on heav'n's great axle, and her reign  
With thousand lesser lights dividual<sup>o</sup> holds,  
With thousand thousand stars, that then appeared  
Spangling the hemisphere: then first adorned  
With their bright luminaries that set and rose,  
385 Glad<sup>o</sup> evening and glad morn crowned the fourth  
day.  
And God said, 'Let the waters generate  
Reptile<sup>o</sup> with spawn abundant, living soul:  
And let fowl fly above the earth, with wings  
Displayed<sup>o</sup> on the op'n firmament of heav'n.'  
390 And God created the great whales, and each  
Soul living, each that crept, which plenteously  
The waters generated by their kinds,  
And every bird of wing after his kind;  
And saw that it was good, and blessed them, saying,  
395 'Be fruitful, multiply, and in the seas  
And lakes and running streams the waters fill;  
And let the fowl be multiplied on the earth.'  
Forthwith the sounds and seas, each creek and bay

400 With fry<sup>o</sup> innumerable swarm, and shoals  
Of fish that with their fins and shining scales  
Glide under the green wave, in sculls that oft  
Bank the mid-sea:<sup>8</sup> part single or with mate  
Graze the seaweed their pasture, and through  
groves  
Of coral stray, or sporting with quick glance  
405 Show to the sun their waved<sup>o</sup> coats dropped<sup>o</sup> with  
gold,  
Or in their pearly shells at ease, attend<sup>o</sup>  
Moist nutriment, or under rocks their food  
In jointed armor watch: on smooth the seal,  
And bended<sup>9</sup> dolphins play: part huge of bulk  
410 Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait  
Tempest<sup>o</sup> the ocean: there leviathan<sup>1</sup>  
Hugest of living creatures, on the deep  
Stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims,  
And seems a moving land, and at his gills  
415 Draws in, and at his trunk spouts out a sea.  
Meanwhile the tepid caves, and fens and shores  
Their brood as numerous hatch, from th' egg that  
soon  
Bursting with kindly<sup>o</sup> rupture forth disclosed  
Their callow<sup>o</sup> young, but feathered soon and fledge  
420 They summed their pens,<sup>2</sup> and soaring th' air  
sublime  
With clang<sup>o</sup> despised the ground, under a cloud  
In prospect;<sup>3</sup> there the eagle and the stork  
On cliffs and cedar tops their eyries build:  
Part loosely<sup>o</sup> wing the region,<sup>o</sup> part more wise  
425 In common, ranged in figure wedge their way,<sup>4</sup>  
Intelligent<sup>o</sup> of seasons, and set forth  
Their aery caravan high over seas  
Flying, and over lands with mutual wing  
Easing their flight;<sup>5</sup> so steers the prudent crane

430 Her annual voyage, borne on winds; the air  
Floats, o as they pass, fanned with unnumbered  
plumes:  
From branch to branch the smaller birds with song  
Solaced the woods, and spread their painted wings  
Till ev'n, nor then the solemn nightingale  
435 Ceased warbling, but all night tuned her soft lays: o  
Others on silver lakes and rivers bathed  
Their downy breast; the swan, with archèd neck  
Between her white wings mantling proudly, rows  
Her state with oary feet: o yet oft they quit  
440 The dank, o and rising on stiff pennons, tow'r o  
The mid-aerial sky: others on ground  
Walked firm; the crested cock whose clarion sounds  
The silent hours, and th' other o whose gay train  
Adorns him, colored with the florid hue  
445 Of rainbows and starry eyes. The waters thus  
With fish replenished, o and the air with fowl,  
Evening and morn solemnized the fifth day.  
"The sixth, and of creation last arose  
With evening harps and matin, o when God said,  
450 'Let th' earth bring forth soul living in her kind,  
Cattle and creeping things, and beast of the earth,  
Each in their kind.' The earth obeyed, and straight  
Op'ning her fertile womb teemed o at a birth  
Innumerable living creatures, perfect forms,  
455 Limbed and full grown: out of the ground up rose  
As from his lair the wild beast where he wons o  
In forest wild, in thicket, brake, or den;  
Among the trees in pairs they rose, they walked:  
The cattle in the fields and meadows green:  
460 Those rare and solitary, these z in flocks  
Pasturing at once, o and in broad herds upsprung.  
The grassy clods o now calved, now half appeared  
The tawny lion, pawing to get free



465 His hinder parts, then springs as broke from bonds,  
And rampant shakes his brinded<sup>o</sup> mane; the ounce,<sup>o</sup>  
The libbard,<sup>o</sup> and the tiger, as the mole  
Rising, the crumbled earth above them threw  
In hillocks; the swift stag from underground  
Bore up his branching head: scarce from his mold  
470 Behemoth<sup>8</sup> biggest born of earth upheaved  
His vastness: fleeced the flocks and bleating rose,  
As plants: ambiguous between sea and land  
The river-horse<sup>9</sup> and scaly crocodile.  
At once came forth whatever creeps the ground,  
475 Insect or worm;<sup>1</sup> those waved their limber fans  
For wings, and smallest lineaments exact  
In all the liveries decked of summer's pride  
With spots of gold and purple, azure and green:  
These as a line their long dimension drew,  
480 Streaking the ground with sinuous trace; not all  
Minims<sup>o</sup> of nature; some of serpent kind  
Wondrous in length and corpulence involved<sup>o</sup>  
Their snaky folds, and added wings. First crept  
The parsimonious emmet,<sup>o</sup> provident  
485 Of future, in small room large heart<sup>o</sup> enclosed,  
Pattern of just equality perhaps  
Hereafter, joined in her popular tribes  
Of commonalty:<sup>2</sup> swarming next appeared  
The female bee that feeds her husband drone  
490 Deliciously, and builds her waxen cells  
With honey stored: the rest are numberless,  
And thou their natures know'st, and gav'st them  
names,<sup>3</sup>  
Needless to thee repeated; nor unknown  
The serpent subtlest beast of all the field,  
495 Of huge extent sometimes, with brazen eyes  
And hairy mane<sup>4</sup> terrific,<sup>o</sup> though to thee  
Not noxious, but obedient at thy call.

Now heav'n in all her glory shone, and rolled  
Her motions, as the great First Mover's hand  
500 First wheeled their course; earth in her rich attire  
Consummate<sup>o</sup> lovely smiled; air, water, earth,  
By fowl, fish, beast, was flown, was swum, was  
walked  
Frequent;<sup>o</sup> and of the sixth day yet remained;  
There wanted yet the master work, the end<sup>o</sup>  
505 Of all yet done; a creature who not prone  
And brute as other creatures, but endued  
With sanctity of reason, might erect  
His stature,<sup>5</sup> and upright with front<sup>o</sup> serene  
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence  
510 Magnanimous to correspond<sup>6</sup> with Heav'n,  
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good  
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes  
Directed in devotion, to adore  
And worship God supreme, who made him chief  
515 Of all his works: therefore th' Omnipotent  
Eternal Father (for where is not he  
Present) thus to his Son audibly spake:  
" 'Let us make now man in our image, man  
In our similitude, and let them rule  
520 Over the fish and fowl of sea and air,  
Beast of the field, and over all the earth,  
And every creeping thing that creeps the ground.'  
This said, he formed thee, Adam, thee O man  
Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breathed  
525 The breath of life; in his own image he  
Created thee, in the image of God  
Express,<sup>o</sup> and thou becam'st a living soul.  
Male he created thee, but thy consort  
Female for race; then blessed mankind, and said,  
530 'Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth,  
Subdue it, and throughout dominion hold

Over fish of the sea, and fowl of the air,  
And every living thing that moves on the earth.'  
Wherever thus created, for no place  
535 Is yet distinct by name, thence, o as thou know'st  
He brought thee into this delicious o grove,  
This garden, planted with the trees of God,  
Delectable both to behold and taste;  
And freely all their pleasant fruit for food  
540 Gave thee, all sorts are here that all th' earth yields,  
Variety without end; but of the tree  
Which tasted works knowledge of good and evil,  
Thou may'st not; in the day thou eat'st, thou di'st;  
Death is the penalty imposed, beware,  
545 And govern well thy appetite, lest Sin  
Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death.  
Here finished he, and all that he had made  
Viewed, and behold all was entirely good;  
So ev'n and morn accomplished the sixth day:  
550 Yet not till the Creator from his work  
Desisting, though unwearied, up returned  
Up to the Heav'n of Heav'ns his high abode,  
Thence to behold his new-created world  
Th' addition of his empire, how it showed  
555 In prospect from his throne, how good, how fair,  
Answering his great Idea.<sup>7</sup> Up he rode  
Followed with acclamation and the sound  
Symphonious of ten thousand harps that tuned o  
Angelic harmonies: the earth, the air  
560 Resounded (thou remember'st, for thou heard'st),  
The heav'ns and all the constellations rung,  
The planets in their stations list'ning stood,  
While the bright pomp o ascended jubilant.  
    " 'Open, ye everlasting gates,' they sung,  
565 'Open, ye Heav'ns, your living doors; let in  
The great Creator from his work returned

Magnificent,<sup>8</sup> his six days' work, a world;  
 Open, and henceforth oft; for God will deign  
 To visit oft the dwellings of just men  
 570 Delighted, and with frequent intercourse  
 Thither will send his wingèd messengers  
 On errands of supernal<sup>o</sup> grace.' So sung  
 The glorious train ascending: he through Heav'n,  
 That opened wide her blazing<sup>o</sup> portals, led  
 575 To God's eternal house direct the way,  
 A broad and ample road, whose dust is gold  
 And pavement stars, as stars to thee appear,  
 Seen in the galaxy, that Milky Way  
 Which nightly as a circling zone<sup>o</sup> thou seest  
 580 Powdered with stars. And now on earth the seventh  
 Evening arose in Eden, for the sun  
 Was set, and twilight from the east came on,  
 Forerunning night; when at the holy mount  
 Of Heav'n's high-seated top, th' imperial throne  
 585 Of Godhead, fixed forever firm and sure,  
 The Filial Power arrived, and sat him down  
 With his great Father, for he<sup>9</sup> also went  
 Invisible, yet stayed (such privilege  
 Hath Omnipresence) and the work ordained,<sup>o</sup>  
 590 Author and end of all things, and from work  
 Now resting, blessed and hallowed the sev'nth day,  
 As resting on that day from all his work,  
 But not in silence holy kept; the harp  
 Had work and rested not, the solemn pipe,  
 595 And dulcimer, all organs<sup>o</sup> of sweet stop,  
 All sounds on fret<sup>1</sup> by string or golden wire  
 Tempered<sup>o</sup> soft tunings, intermixed with voice  
 Choral<sup>o</sup> or unison: of incense clouds  
 Fuming from golden censers hid the mount.  
 600 "Creation and the six days' acts they sung:  
 'Great are thy works, Jehovah, infinite

Thy power; what thought can measure thee or  
tongue  
Relate thee; greater now in thy return  
Than from the giant<sup>2</sup> angels; thee that day  
605 Thy thunders magnified; but to create  
Is greater than created to destroy.  
Who can impair thee, Mighty King, or bound  
Thy empire? Easily the proud attempt  
Of Spirits apostate and their counsels vain  
610 Thou hast repelled, while impiously they thought  
Thee to diminish, and from thee withdraw  
The number of thy worshippers. Who seeks  
To lessen thee, against his purpose serves  
To manifest the more thy might: his evil  
615 Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good.  
Witness this new-made world, another heav'n  
From Heaven gate not far, founded in view  
On the clear hyaline,<sup>3</sup> the glassy sea;  
Of amplitude almost immense,<sup>o</sup> with stars  
620 Numerous, and every star perhaps a world  
Of destined habitation; but thou know'st  
Their seasons: among these the seat of men,  
Earth with her nether ocean circumfused,<sup>o</sup>  
Their pleasant dwellingplace. Thrice happy men,  
625 And sons of men, whom God hath thus advanced,  
Created in his image, there to dwell  
And worship him, and in reward to rule  
Over his works, on earth, in sea, or air,  
And multiply a race of worshippers  
630 Holy and just: thrice happy if they know  
Their happiness, and persevere upright.'  
"So sung they, and the empyrean rung,  
With hallelujahs:<sup>4</sup> thus was Sabbath kept.  
And thy request think now fulfilled, that asked  
635 How first this world and face of things began,

And what before thy memory was done  
From the beginning, that posterity  
Informed by thee might know; if else thou seek'st  
Aught, not surpassing human measure, say."

640

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Urania, the Greek Muse of astronomy, had been made into the Muse of Christian poetry by du Bartas and other religious poets. Milton, however, constructs another derivation for her (line 5ff.). Milton begins Book 7 with a third proem (lines 1–39).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pegasus, the flying horse of inspired poetry, suggests (in connection with Bellerophon, line 18) Milton's sense of perilous audacity in writing this poem.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
In Proverbs 8:24–31 Wisdom tells of her activities before the Creation: "Then I was by him [God], as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." Milton describes "eternal Wisdom" as a daughter of God (personification of his wisdom) and devises a myth in which the Muse of divine poetry ("celestial song," line 12) is Wisdom's "sister"—also, thereby, originating from God.  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bellerophon incurred the gods' anger when he tried to fly to heaven upon Pegasus; Zeus sent an insect to sting the horse, and Bellerophon fell down to the "Aleian field" (plain of error), where he wandered alone and blind until his death.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The universe, which appears to rotate daily.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: After the Restoration of Charles II (May 1660) and until the passage of the Act of Oblivion (August 1660), Milton was in danger of death and dismemberment (like Orpheus, lines 34–35); several of his republican colleagues were hanged,

disembowelled, and quartered for their part in the revolution and regicide.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7:

The music of the “Thracian bard” Orpheus, type of the poet, charmed even “woods and rocks,” but his song was drowned out by the Bacchantes, a “wild rout” of screaming women who murdered and dismembered him and threw his body parts into the Hebrus River, which rises in the “Rhodope” mountains. Milton fears that a similar “barbarous dissonance” unleashed by the Restoration will drown out his voice and threaten his life.

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Orpheus’s mother is Calliope, Muse of epic poetry.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Adam’s question about God’s actions before the Creation was often cited as an example of presumptuous and dangerous speculation, especially when, as here, it implies mutability in God. But in Milton’s Eden, error that is not deliberate is not sinful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Invisible, because dark and without form.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Lucifer (Satan) was once brighter among the angels than the star bearing his name is among the stars.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, once he had dispossessed us.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God identifies himself as Creator, the Son as his agent to speak his creating Word.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Milton’s God creates out of Chaos, not out of nothing; the matter of Chaos emanated from God, and Chaos is therefore “infinite” because God fills it even while he withholds his “goodness” (creating power) from it. Neither necessity nor chance affect in any way God’s freely willed creative act.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Raphael explains the principle of accommodation, whereby God’s acts are said to be translated into terms humans

can understand: here, a six-day creation. This principle allows for an escape from biblical literalism.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: See Psalm 24:9: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Crusty, gritty stuff left over from the elements infused with life that make up the universe; it is associated with Hell ("infernal," "tartarous") and presumably used in its composition.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: God's creating words, here and later, are quoted from Genesis 1–2, but Milton freely elaborates the creatures' responses to those words.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ether was thought to be a fifth element or "quintessence," the substance of the celestial bodies above the moon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One twenty-four-hour period measured in the Hebrew manner from sundown to sundown.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Disturb the order and mixture of the elements and the created "frame" of the universe.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The earth is at first the "embryo" enveloped in a "womb of waters" and is then herself the "great mother" (line 281), made ready ("fermented") to conceive and bear every other being.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The "cloudy tabernacle" of line 248.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Venus, which Galileo's telescope found to be crescent-shaped in her first quarter.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A cluster of seven stars in the constellation Taurus. They appear at dawn ahead of the sun. See Job 38:31.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The fishes' darting motions resemble boats oared now on one side, now on the other ("sculls"), as they turn they seem to form banks within the sea.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Curved in leaping. "Smooth": a stretch of calm water.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The great whale (see 1.200–208).[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Brought their feathers to full growth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ground seems covered by a cloud of birds.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Fly in a wedge formation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Birds were thought to support each other with their wings when they flew in formation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The swan's outstretched ("mantling") wings form a mantle, and it seems like a monarch on a royal barge rowed by its own "oary" feet.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "These" are the domestic cattle who come forth in "flocks" and "herds" in pastures; "those" are the wild beasts who come forth "in pairs" (line 459), and spread out ("rare") at wide intervals.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A huge biblical beast (Job 40:15), often identified with the elephant.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Translates the Greek name "hippopotamus."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Any creeping creature, including serpents.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The ant will become the symbol of a frugal and self-governing republic ("pattern of just equality") with the "popular" (populous, plebian) tribes of common people ("commonalty") joined in rule (lines 486–89); Milton made it such a symbol in his prose tract *The Ready and Easy Way*. Bees here (lines 489–93) suggest delightful ease but are not yet (as in 1.768–75) a symbol of monarchy and associated with Hell.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See 8.342–54, and Genesis 2:19–20.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sea serpents were so described in *Aeneid* 2.203–7.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Both "stand erect" and "elevate his condition": his erect stance was understood to signify that he was created for Heaven.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Both “be in harmony” and “communicate.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Eternal archetype or pattern, as in Plato: concept in the mind of God.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Psalm 24:7: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Father.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Bar on the fingerboard of a stringed instrument. “Dulcimer”: the Hebrew bagpipe (Daniel 3:5).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The allusion implies that the myth of the Giants’ revolt against Jove is a classical type or version of the angels’ rebellion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: From the Greek word for glass (Revelation 4:6), the waters above the firmament as contrasted with the “nether ocean” (line 624), the earth’s seas.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Hebrew, “praise the Lord.”[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *associate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *made suitable by thee*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *region*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *straying*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *transported, enraptured*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *besides*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wedded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *amazement*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flowed back*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *abandoned*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *visible*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thirst*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flowing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *purpose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *yielding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flowery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *finished*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *glorify*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attentive, suspended*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stay awake*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make, render*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speculations*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deception, error*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spread out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *human understanding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wisdom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in preparation for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lasting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enormous, violent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all-creating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *burning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exact*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rising as vapor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *clear, bright*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vault*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *universe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flowing around*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enfolded*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *of great expanse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generative moisture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *generative*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *swollen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *headlong fall*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *surge forward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *winding course*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *following*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blossomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hard as horn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *low-growing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tangled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *put forth buds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *function*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in turns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regular alternation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fashioned from ether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resorting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absorption*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *own small light*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *when full*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *divided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright, gay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *creeping animals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spread out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *young fish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *striped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flecked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *watch for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stir up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *natural*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without feathers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harsh cry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *separately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *understanding*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *undulates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *songs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pool* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soar into*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the peacock*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fully supplied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *morning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brought forth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dwells*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mounds of earth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *streaked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lynx*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *leopard*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smallest animals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coiled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thrifty ant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *great wisdom*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrifying*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *complete, perfect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in throngs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purpose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brow, face*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exact, manifest*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from there*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delightful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *performed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *triumphal procession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavenly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *radiant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ordered, enacted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wind instruments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brought into harmony*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in parts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *immeasurable*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *surrounded, bathed* [Return to reference °](#)

# Book 8

## *The Argument*

Adam inquires concerning celestial motions, is doubtfully answered, and exhorted to search rather things more worthy of knowledge: Adam assents, and still desirous to detain Raphael, relates to him what he remembered since his own creation, his placing in Paradise, his talk with God concerning solitude and fit society, his first meeting and nuptials with Eve, his discourse with the angel thereupon; who after admonitions repeated departs.

The angel ended, and in Adam's ear  
So charming<sup>o</sup> left his voice, that he a while  
Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear;  
Then as new-waked thus gratefully replied:<sup>1</sup>  
5 "What thanks sufficient, or what recompense  
Equal have I to render thee, divine  
Historian, who thus largely hast allayed  
The thirst I had of knowledge, and vouchsafed  
This friendly condescension to relate  
10 Things else by me unsearchable, now heard  
With wonder, but delight, and, as is due,  
With glory attributed to the high  
Creator; something yet of doubt remains,  
Which only thy solution<sup>o</sup> can resolve.  
15 When I behold this goodly frame,<sup>o</sup> this world  
Of heav'n and earth consisting, and compute  
Their magnitudes, this earth a spot, a grain,  
An atom, with the firmament compared  
And all her numbered<sup>o</sup> stars, that seem to roll  
20 Spaces incomprehensible (for such  
Their distance argues and their swift return

Diurnal)° merely to officiate° light  
Round this opacous° earth, this punctual° spot,  
One day and night; in all their vast survey  
Useless besides; reasoning I oft admire,°  
25 How Nature wise and frugal could commit  
Such disproportions, with superfluous hand  
So many nobler bodies to create,  
Greater so manifold,° to this one use,  
For aught appears,° and on their orbs impose  
30 Such restless revolution day by day  
Repeated, while the sedentary° earth,  
That better might with far less compass° move,  
Served by more noble than herself, attains  
Her end without least motion, and receives,  
35 As tribute such a sumless° journey brought  
Of incorporeal° speed, her warmth and light;  
Speed, to describe whose swiftness number fails.”  
So spake our sire, and by his count’nance seemed  
Ent’ring on studious thoughts abstruse, which Eve  
40 Perceiving where she sat retired in sight,  
With lowliness majestic from her seat,  
And grace that won who saw to wish her stay,  
Rose, and went forth among her fruits and flow’rs,  
To visit° how they prospered, bud and bloom,  
45 Her nursery;° they at her coming sprung  
And touched by her fair tendance gladlier grew.  
Yet went she not as not with such discourse  
Delighted, or not capable her ear  
Of what was high: such pleasure she reserved,  
50 Adam relating, she sole auditress;  
Her husband the relater she preferred  
Before the angel, and of him to ask  
Chose rather;° he, she knew, would intermix  
Grateful° digressions, and solve high dispute  
55 With conjugal caresses, from his lip



Not words alone pleased her. O when meet now  
Such pairs, in love and mutual honor joined?  
With goddess-like demeanor forth she went;  
Not unattended, for on her as queen  
60 A pomp<sup>o</sup> of winning Graces<sup>4</sup> waited still,  
And from about her shot darts of desire  
Into all eyes to wish her still in sight.  
And Raphael now to Adam's doubt proposed  
Benevolent and facile<sup>o</sup> thus replied.  
65 "To ask or search I blame thee not, for heav'n  
Is as the book of God before thee set,  
Wherein to read his wondrous works, and learn  
His seasons, hours, or days, or months, or years:  
This to attain, whether heav'n move or earth,  
70 Imports not, if thou reckon right; the rest<sup>5</sup>  
From man or angel the great Architect  
Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge  
His secrets to be scanned<sup>o</sup> by them who ought  
Rather admire;<sup>o</sup> or if they list to try  
75 Conjecture, he his fabric<sup>o</sup> of the heav'ns  
Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move  
His laughter at their quaint opinions wide<sup>o</sup>  
Hereafter, when they come to model heav'n  
And calculate the stars, how they will wield  
80 The mighty frame, how build, unbuild, contrive  
To save appearances,<sup>6</sup> how gird the sphere  
With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er,  
Cycle and epicycle,<sup>7</sup> orb in orb:  
Already by thy reasoning this I guess,  
85 Who art to lead thy offspring, and supposest  
That bodies bright and greater should not serve  
The less not bright, nor heav'n such journeys run,  
Earth sitting still, when she alone receives  
The benefit: consider first, that great  
90 Or bright infers<sup>o</sup> not excellence: the earth

Though, in comparison of heav'n, so small,  
Nor glistening, may of solid good contain  
More plenty than the sun that barren shines,  
Whose virtue on itself works no effect,  
95 But in the fruitful earth; there first received  
His beams, unactive<sup>o</sup> else, their vigor find.  
Yet not to earth are those bright luminaries  
Officious,<sup>o</sup> but to thee earth's habitant.  
And for the heav'n's wide circuit, let it speak  
100 The Maker's high magnificence, who built  
So spacious, and his line stretched out so far;  
That man may know he dwells not in his own;  
An edifice too large for him to fill,  
Lodged in a small partition, and the rest  
105 Ordained for uses to his Lord best known.  
The swiftness of those circles<sup>o</sup> átribute,  
Though numberless,<sup>o</sup> to his omnipotence,  
That to corporeal substances could add  
Speed almost spiritual;<sup>o</sup> me thou think'st not slow,  
110 Who since the morning hour set out from Heav'n  
Where God resides, and ere midday arrived  
In Eden, distance inexpressible  
By numbers that have name. But this I urge,  
Admitting motion in the heav'ns, to show  
115 Invalid that which thee to doubt it moved;  
Not that I so affirm, though so it seem  
To thee who hast thy dwelling here on earth.<sup>8</sup>  
God to remove his ways from human sense,  
Placed heav'n from earth so far, that earthly sight,  
120 If it presume, might err in things too high,  
And no advantage gain. What if the sun  
Be center to the world, and other stars  
By his attractive virtue<sup>o</sup> and their own  
Incited, dance about him various rounds?<sup>o</sup>  
125 Their wand'ring course now high, now low, then hid,

Progressive, retrograde,<sup>o</sup> or standing still,  
In six thou seest,<sup>9</sup> and what if sev'nth to these  
The planet earth, so steadfast though she seem,  
130 Insensibly three different motions move?<sup>1</sup>  
Which else to several spheres thou must ascribe,  
Moved contrary with thwart obliquities,<sup>2</sup>  
Or save the sun his labor, and that swift  
Nocturnal and diurnal rhomb<sup>3</sup> supposed,  
135 Invisible else above all stars, the wheel  
Of day and night; which needs not thy belief,  
If earth industrious of herself fetch day  
Traveling east, and with her part averse  
From the sun's beam meet night, her other part  
Still luminous by his ray. What if that light  
140 Sent from her through the wide transpicious<sup>o</sup> air,  
To the terrestrial moon be as a star  
Enlight'ning her by day, as she by night  
This earth? Reciprocal, if land be there,  
Fields and inhabitants: her spots thou seest  
145 As clouds, and clouds may rain, and rain produce  
Fruits in her softened soil, for some to eat  
Allotted there; and other suns perhaps  
With their attendant moons thou wilt descry  
Communicating male<sup>o</sup> and female<sup>o</sup> light,  
150 Which two great sexes animate<sup>o</sup> the world,  
Stored in each orb perhaps with some that live.  
For such vast room in nature unpossessed  
By living soul, desert and desolate,  
Only to shine, yet scarce to contribute  
155 Each orb a glimpse of light, conveyed so far  
Down to this habitable,<sup>o</sup> which returns  
Light back to them, is obvious to dispute.<sup>o</sup>  
But whether thus these things, or whether not,  
Whether the sun predominant in heav'n  
160 Rise on the earth, or earth rise on the sun,

He from the east his flaming road begin,  
Or she from west her silent course advance  
With inoffensive<sup>o</sup> pace that spinning sleeps  
On her soft axle, while she paces ev'n,  
165 And bears thee soft with the smooth air along,  
Solicit<sup>o</sup> not thy thoughts with matters hid,  
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear;  
Of other creatures, as him pleases best,  
Wherever placed, let him dispose: joy thou  
170 In what he gives to thee, this Paradise  
And thy fair Eve; heav'n is for thee too high  
To know what passes there; be lowly wise:  
Think only what concerns thee and thy being;  
Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there  
175 Live, in what state, condition, or degree,  
Contented that thus far hath been revealed  
Not of earth only but of highest Heav'n."

To whom thus Adam cleared of doubt, replied:  
"How fully hast thou satisfied me, pure  
180 Intelligence<sup>o</sup> of Heav'n, angel serene,  
And freed from intricacies, taught to live  
The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts  
To interrupt the sweet of life, from which  
God hath bid dwell far off all anxious cares,  
185 And not molest us, unless we ourselves  
Seek them with wand'ring thoughts, and notions  
vain.

But apt the mind or fancy is to rove  
Unchecked, and of her roving is no end;  
Till warned, or by experience taught, she learn,  
190 That not to know at large of things remote  
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know  
That which before us lies in daily life,  
Is the prime wisdom; what is more, is fume,<sup>o</sup>  
Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,<sup>o</sup>  
195 And renders us in things that most concern

Unpracticed, unprepared, and still to seek.°  
 Therefore from this high pitch let us descend  
 A lower flight, and speak of things at hand  
 Useful, whence haply° mention may arise  
 200 Of something not unseasonable to ask  
 By sufferance,° and thy wonted° favor deigned.  
 Thee I have heard relating what was done  
 Ere my remembrance: now hear me relate  
 My story, which perhaps thou hast not heard;  
 205 And day is yet not spent; till then thou seest  
 How subtly to detain thee I devise,  
 Inviting thee to hear while I relate,  
 Fond,° were it not in hope of thy reply:  
 For while I sit with thee, I seem in Heav'n,  
 210 And sweeter thy discourse is to my ear  
 Than fruits of palm tree pleasantest to thirst  
 And hunger both, from labor, at the hour  
 Of sweet repast; they satiate, and soon fill,  
 Though pleasant, but thy words with grace divine  
 215 Imbued, bring to their sweetness no satiety."  
 To whom thus Raphael answered heav'nly meek:  
 "Nor are thy lips ungraceful, sire of men,  
 Nor tongue ineloquent; for God on thee  
 Abundantly his gifts hath also poured  
 220 Inward and outward both, his image fair:  
 Speaking or mute all comeliness and grace  
 Attends thee, and each word, each motion forms.  
 Nor less think we in Heav'n of thee on earth  
 Than of our fellow-servant, and inquire  
 225 Gladly into the ways of God with man:  
 For God we see hath honored thee, and set  
 On man his equal love: say therefore on;  
 For I that day was absent, as befell,  
 Bound on a voyage uncouth° and obscure,  
 230 Far on excursion toward the gates of Hell;  
 Squared in full legion (such command we had)

To see that none thence issued forth a spy,  
Or enemy, while God was in his work,  
Lest he incensed at such eruption bold,  
235 Destruction with creation might have mixed.  
Not that they durst without his leave attempt,  
But us he sends upon his high behests  
For state, [o](#) as sov'reign King, and to inure [o](#)  
Our prompt obedience. Fast we found, fast shut  
240 The dismal gates, and barricadoed strong;  
But long ere our approaching heard within  
Noise, other than the sound of dance or song,  
Torment, and loud lament, and furious rage.  
Glad we returned up to the coasts of light  
245 Ere Sabbath evening: so we had in charge.  
But thy relation now; for I attend,  
Pleased with thy words no less than thou with mine."  
So spake the godlike Power, and thus our sire:  
"For man to tell how human life began  
250 Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?<sup>4</sup>  
Desire with thee still longer to converse  
Induced me. As new-waked from soundest sleep  
Soft on the flow'ry herb I found me laid  
In balmy sweat, which with his beams the sun  
255 Soon dried, and on the reeking [o](#) moisture fed.  
Straight toward heav'n my wond'ring eyes I turned,  
And gazed a while the ample sky, till raised  
By quick instinctive motion up I sprung  
As thitherward endeavoring, and upright  
260 Stood on my feet; about me round I saw  
Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,  
And liquid lapse [o](#) of murmuring streams; by these,  
Creatures that lived, and moved, and walked, or  
flew,  
Birds on the branches warbling; all things smiled,  
265 With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed.

Myself I then perused, and limb by limb  
Surveyed, and sometimes went, <sup>o</sup> and sometimes ran  
With supple joints, as lively vigor led:  
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,  
270 Knew not; to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,  
My tongue obeyed and readily could name  
Whate'er I saw. <sup>5</sup> 'Thou sun,' said I, 'fair light,  
And thou enlightened earth, so fresh and gay,  
Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,  
275 And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,  
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?  
Not of myself; by some great Maker then,  
In goodness and in power preeminent;  
Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,  
280 From whom I have that thus I move and live,  
And feel that I am happier than I know.'  
While thus I called, and strayed I knew not whither,  
From where I first drew air, and first beheld  
This happy light, when answer none returned,  
285 On a green shady bank profuse of flow'rs  
Pensive I sat me down; there gentle sleep  
First found me, and with soft oppression seized  
My drowsèd sense, untroubled, though I thought  
I then was passing to my former state  
290 Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve:  
When suddenly stood at my head a dream,  
Whose inward apparition gently moved  
My fancy to believe I yet had being,  
And lived: one came, methought, of shape divine,  
295 And said, 'Thy mansion <sup>o</sup> wants <sup>o</sup> thee, Adam, rise,  
First man, of men innumerable ordained  
First father, called by thee I come thy guide  
To the garden of bliss, thy seat <sup>o</sup> prepared.'  
So saying, by the hand he took me raised,  
300 And over fields and waters, as in air

Smooth sliding without step, last led me up  
A woody mountain whose high top was plain,  
A circuit wide, enclosed, with goodliest trees  
Planted, with walks, and bowers, that what I saw  
305 Of earth before scarce pleasant seemed. Each tree  
Load'n with fairest fruit, that hung to the eye  
Tempting, stirred in me sudden appetite  
To pluck and eat; whereat I waked, and found  
Before mine eyes all real, as the dream  
310 Had lively<sup>o</sup> shadowed: here had new begun  
My wand'ring, had not he who was my guide  
Up hither, from among the trees appeared,  
Presence Divine. Rejoicing, but with awe  
In adoration at his feet I fell  
315 Submiss:<sup>o</sup> he reared me, and 'Whom thou sought'st  
I am,'  
Said mildly, 'Author of all this thou seest  
Above, or round about thee or beneath.  
This Paradise I give thee, count it thine  
To till and keep,<sup>o</sup> and of the fruit to eat:  
320 Of every tree that in the garden grows  
Eat freely with glad heart; fear here no dearth:  
But of the tree whose operation<sup>o</sup> brings  
Knowledge of good and ill, which I have set  
The pledge of thy obedience and thy faith,  
325 Amid the garden by the Tree of Life,  
Remember what I warn thee, shun to taste,  
And shun the bitter consequence: for know,  
The day thou eat'st thereof, my sole command  
Transgressed, inevitably thou shalt die;  
330 From that day mortal, and this happy state  
Shalt lose, expelled from hence into a world  
Of woe and sorrow.<sup>6</sup> Sternly he pronounced  
The rigid interdiction,<sup>o</sup> which resounds  
Yet dreadful in mine ear, though in my choice  
335



Not to incur; but soon his clear aspect<sup>o</sup>  
 Returned and gracious purpose<sup>o</sup> thus renewed:  
 'Not only these fair bounds, but all the earth  
 To thee and to thy race I give; as lords  
 Possess it, and all things that therein live,  
 340 Or live in sea, or air, beast, fish, and fowl.  
 In sign whereof each bird and beast behold  
 After their kinds; I bring them to receive  
 From thee their names, and pay thee fealty  
 With low subjection; understand the same  
 345 Of fish within their wat'ry residence,  
 Not hither summoned, since they cannot change  
 Their element to draw the thinner air.'  
 As thus he spake, each bird and beast behold  
 Approaching two and two, these<sup>o</sup> cow'ring low  
 350 With blandishment,<sup>o</sup> each bird stooped on his wing.  
 I named them, as they passed, and understood  
 Their nature, with such knowledge God endued  
 My sudden apprehension:<sup>7</sup> but in these  
 I found not what methought I wanted still;  
 355 And to the heav'nly Vision thus presumed:  
 " 'O by what name, for thou above all these,  
 Above mankind, or aught than mankind higher,  
 Surpassest far my naming,<sup>8</sup> how may I  
 Adore thee, Author of this universe,  
 360 And all this good to man, for whose well-being  
 So amply, and with hands so liberal  
 Thou hast provided all things: but with me  
 I see not who partakes. In solitude  
 What happiness, who can enjoy alone,  
 365 Or all enjoying, what contentment find?'  
 Thus I presumptuous; and the Vision bright,  
 As with a smile more brightened, thus replied:  
 " 'What call'st thou solitude? Is not the earth  
 370 With various living creatures, and the air

Replenished,<sup>o</sup> and all these at thy command  
 To come and play before thee? Know'st thou not  
 Their language and their ways? They also know,<sup>o</sup>  
 And reason not contemptibly; with these  
 Find pastime, and bear rule; thy realm is large.'  
 375 So spake the Universal Lord, and seemed  
 So ordering. I with leave of speech implored,  
 And humble deprecation thus replied:  
 " 'Let not my words offend thee, Heav'nly Power,  
 My Maker, be propitious while I speak.  
 380 Hast thou not made me here thy substitute,  
 And these inferior far beneath me set?  
 Among unequals what society  
 Can sort,<sup>o</sup> what harmony or true delight?  
 Which must be mutual, in proportion due  
 385 Giv'n and received; but in disparity  
 The one intense, the other still remiss  
 Cannot well suit with either,<sup>9</sup> but soon prove  
 Tedious alike. Of fellowship I speak  
 Such as I seek, fit to participate<sup>o</sup>  
 390 All rational delight, wherein the brute  
 Cannot be human consort; they rejoice  
 Each with their kind, lion with lioness;  
 So fitly them in pairs thou hast combined;  
 Much less can bird with beast, or fish with fowl  
 395 So well converse, nor with the ox the ape;  
 Worse then can man with beast, and least of all.'  
 "Whereto th' Almighty answered, not displeased:  
 'A nice<sup>o</sup> and subtle happiness I see  
 Thou to thyself proposest, in the choice  
 400 Of thy associates, Adam, and wilt taste  
 No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitary.  
 What think'st thou then of me, and this my state?  
 Seem I to thee sufficiently possessed  
 Of happiness, or not? who am alone  
 405

From all eternity, for none I know  
Second to me or like, equal much less.  
How have I then with whom to hold converse  
Save with the creatures which I made, and those  
To me inferior, infinite descents  
410 Beneath what other creatures are to thee?’  
“He ceased, I lowly answered: ‘To attain  
The height and depth of thy eternal ways  
All human thoughts come short, Supreme of things;  
Thou in thyself art perfect, and in thee  
415 Is no deficiency found; not so is man,  
But in degree, the cause of his desire  
By conversation with his like to help,  
Or solace his defects.<sup>1</sup> No need that thou  
Shouldst propagate, already infinite;  
420 And through all numbers absolute, though One;  
But man by number is to manifest  
His single imperfection, and beget  
Like of his like, his image multiplied,  
In unity defective,<sup>2</sup> which requires  
425 Collateral<sup>o</sup> love, and dearest amity.  
Thou in thy secrecy<sup>o</sup> although alone,  
Best with thyself accompanied, seek’st not  
Social communication, yet so pleased,  
Canst raise thy creature to what height thou wilt  
430 Of union or communion, deified;  
I by conversing cannot these erect  
From prone, nor in their ways complacency<sup>o</sup> find.’  
Thus I emboldened spake, and freedom used  
Permissive,<sup>o</sup> and acceptance found, which gained  
435 This answer from the gracious Voice Divine:  
“ ‘Thus far to try thee, Adam, I was pleased,  
And find thee knowing not of beasts alone,  
Which thou hast rightly named, but of thyself,  
Expressing well the spirit within thee free,  
440

My image, not imparted to the brute,  
Whose fellowship therefore unmeet<sup>o</sup> for thee  
Good reason was thou freely shouldst dislike,  
And be so minded still. I, ere thou spak'st,  
445 Knew it not good for man to be alone,  
And no such company as then thou saw'st  
Intended thee, for trial only brought,  
To see how thou couldst judge of fit and meet:  
What next I bring shall please thee, be assured,  
Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self,  
450 Thy wish, exactly to thy heart's desire.<sup>3</sup>  
    "He ended, or I heard no more, for now  
My earthly by his heav'nly overpowered,  
Which it had long stood under,<sup>o</sup> strained to the  
height  
In that celestial colloquy sublime,  
455 As with an object that excels<sup>o</sup> the sense,  
Dazzled and spent, sunk down, and sought repair  
Of sleep, which instantly fell on me, called  
By nature as in aid, and closed mine eyes.  
Mine eyes he closed, but open left the cell  
460 Of fancy<sup>o</sup> my internal sight, by which  
Abstract<sup>o</sup> as in a trance methought I saw,  
Though sleeping, where I lay, and saw the shape  
Still glorious before whom awake I stood;  
Who stooping opened my left side, and took  
465 From thence a rib, with cordial<sup>o</sup> spirits warm,  
And lifeblood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,  
But suddenly with flesh filled up and healed:  
The rib he formed and fashioned with his hands;  
Under his forming hands a creature grew,  
470 Manlike, but different sex, so lovely fair  
That what seemed fair in all the world seemed now  
Mean, or in her summed up, in her contained  
And in her looks, which from that time infused

475 Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,  
And into all things from her air<sup>o</sup> inspired  
The spirit of love and amorous delight.  
She disappeared, and left me dark, I waked  
To find her, or forever to deplore  
Her loss, and other pleasures all abjure:  
480 When out of hope, behold her, not far off,  
Such as I saw her in my dream, adorned  
With what all earth or heaven could bestow  
To make her amiable:<sup>o</sup> on she came,  
Led by her heav'nly Maker, though unseen,<sup>4</sup>  
485 And guided by his voice, nor uninformed  
Of nuptial sanctity and marriage rites:  
Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her eye,  
In every gesture dignity and love.  
I overjoyed could not forbear aloud:  
490 " 'This turn hath made amends; thou hast fulfilled  
Thy words, Creator bounteous and benign,  
Giver of all things fair, but fairest this  
Of all thy gifts, nor enviest.<sup>o</sup> I now see  
Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self  
495 Before me; woman is her name, of man  
Extracted; for this cause he shall forgo  
Father and mother, and to his wife adhere;  
And they shall be one flesh, one heart, one soul.<sup>5</sup>  
"She heard me thus, and though divinely brought,  
500 Yet innocence and virgin modesty,  
Her virtue and the conscience<sup>o</sup> of her worth  
That would be wooed, and not unsought be won,  
Not obvious,<sup>o</sup> not obtrusive,<sup>o</sup> but retired,  
The more desirable, or to say all,  
505 Nature herself, though pure of sinful thought,  
Wrought in her so that, seeing me, she turned;  
I followed her, she what was honor knew,  
And with obsequious<sup>o</sup> majesty approved

510 My pleaded reason. To the nuptial bow'r  
I led her blushing like the morn: all heav'n,  
And happy constellations on that hour  
Shed their selectest influence; the earth  
Gave sign of gratulation,<sup>o</sup> and each hill;  
Joyous the birds; fresh gales and gentle airs<sup>6</sup>  
515 Whispered it to the woods, and from their wings  
Flung rose, flung odors from the spicy shrub,  
Disporting,<sup>o</sup> till the amorous bird of night<sup>o</sup>  
Sung spousal, and bid haste the evening star<sup>o</sup>  
On his hill top, to light the bridal lamp.  
520 Thus I have told thee all my state, and brought  
My story to the sum of earthly bliss  
Which I enjoy, and must confess to find  
In all things else delight indeed, but such  
As used or not, works in the mind no change,  
525 Nor vehement desire, these delicacies  
I mean of taste, sight, smell, herbs, fruits, and  
flow'rs,  
Walks, and the melody of birds; but here  
Far otherwise, transported<sup>o</sup> I behold,  
Transported touch; here passion first I felt,  
530 Commotion<sup>o</sup> strange, in all enjoyments else  
Superior and unmoved, here only weak  
Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance.  
Or<sup>o</sup> nature failed in me, and left some part  
Not proof enough such object to sustain,<sup>o</sup>  
535 Or from my side subducting,<sup>o</sup> took perhaps  
More than enough; at least on her bestowed  
Too much of ornament, in outward show  
Elaborate, of inward less exact.  
For well I understand in the prime end  
540 Of nature her th' inferior, in the mind  
And inward faculties, which most excel,  
In outward also her resembling less

His image who made both, and less expressing  
The character of that dominion giv'n  
545 O'er other creatures; yet when I approach  
Her loveliness, so absolute<sup>o</sup> she seems  
And in herself complete, so well to know  
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,  
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;  
550 All higher knowledge in her presence falls  
Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her  
Loses discount'nanced,<sup>o</sup> and like folly shows;  
Authority and reason on her wait,  
As one intended first, not after made  
555 Occasionally;<sup>o</sup> and to consummate all,  
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat  
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe  
About her, as a guard angelic placed."  
To whom the angel with contracted brow:  
560 "Accuse not nature, she hath done her part;  
Do thou but thine, and be not diffident<sup>o</sup>  
Of wisdom, she deserts thee not, if thou  
Dismiss not her, when most thou need'st her nigh,  
By attributing overmuch to things  
565 Less excellent, as thou thyself perceiv'st.  
For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,  
An outside? Fair no doubt, and worthy well  
Thy cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love,  
Not thy subjection: weigh with her thyself;  
570 Then value: oft-times nothing profits more  
Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right  
Well managed; of that skill the more thou know'st,  
The more she will acknowledge thee her head,<sup>z</sup>  
And to realities yield all her shows:  
575 Made so adorn for thy delight the more,  
So awful,<sup>o</sup> that with honor thou may'st love  
Thy mate, who sees when thou art seen least wise.

But if the sense of touch whereby mankind  
Is propagated seem such dear delight  
580 Beyond all other, think the same vouchsafed  
To cattle and each beast; which would not be  
To them made common and divulged,<sup>o</sup> if aught  
Therein enjoyed were worthy to subdue  
The soul of man, or passion in him move.  
585 What higher in her society thou find'st  
Attractive, human, rational, love still;  
In loving thou dost well, in passion not,  
Wherein true love consists not; love refines  
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat  
590 In reason, and is judicious, is the scale<sup>8</sup>  
By which to heav'nly love thou may'st ascend,  
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause  
Among the beasts no mate for thee was found.”  
To whom thus half abashed Adam replied.  
595 “Neither her outside formed so fair, nor aught  
In procreation common to all kinds  
(Though higher of the genial<sup>9</sup> bed by far,  
And with mysterious reverence I deem)  
So much delights me, as those graceful acts,  
600 Those thousand decencies<sup>o</sup> that daily flow  
From all her words and actions, mixed with love  
And sweet compliance, which declare unfeigned  
Union of mind, or in us both one soul;  
Harmony to behold in wedded pair  
605 More grateful than harmonious sound to the ear.  
Yet these subject not; I to thee disclose  
What inward thence I feel, not therefore foiled,<sup>o</sup>  
Who meet with various objects, from the sense  
Variously representing;<sup>1</sup> yet still free  
610 Approve the best, and follow what I approve.  
To love thou blam'st me not, for love thou say'st  
Leads up to Heav'n, is both the way and guide;



Bear with me then, if lawful what I ask;  
Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and how their love  
615 Express they, by looks only, or do they mix  
Irradiance, virtual or immediate<sup>o</sup> touch?"

To whom the angel with a smile that glowed  
Celestial rosy red, love's proper hue,<sup>2</sup>  
Answered. "Let it suffice thee that thou know'st  
620 Us happy, and without love no happiness.  
Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st  
(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy  
In eminence,<sup>o</sup> and obstacle find none  
Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars:  
625 Easier than air with air, if Spirits embrace,  
Total they mix, union of pure with pure  
Desiring; nor restrained conveyance need  
As flesh to mix with flesh, or soul with soul.  
But I can now no more; the parting sun  
630 Beyond the earth's green cape and verdant isles  
Hesperian sets,<sup>3</sup> my signal to depart.  
Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all  
Him whom to love is to obey, and keep  
His great command; take heed lest passion sway  
635 Thy judgment to do aught, which else free will  
Would not admit;<sup>o</sup> thine and of all thy sons  
The weal or woe in thee is placed; beware.  
I in thy persevering shall rejoice,  
And all the blest: stand fast; to stand or fall  
640 Free in thine own arbitrament<sup>o</sup> it lies.  
Perfect within, no outward aid require;<sup>o</sup>  
And all temptation to transgress repel."

So saying, he arose; whom Adam thus  
Followed with benediction. "Since to part,  
645 Go heavenly guest, ethereal messenger,  
Sent from whose sov'reign goodness I adore.  
Gentle to me and affable hath been

Thy condescension, and shall be honored ever  
 With grateful memory: thou to mankind  
 Be good and friendly still,<sup>o</sup> and oft return."  
 So parted they, the angel up to Heav'n  
 From the thick shade, and Adam to his bow'r.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: When Milton divided Book 7 of the ten-book version of 1667 into the present Books 7 and 8, he replaced a line reading "To whom thus Adam gratefully replied" with these introductory lines.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Her garden, where she "nurses" her flowers and plants.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The emphasis on choice suggests that Eve is not bound in Eden by the Pauline directive (1 Corinthians 14:34–35) that women refrain from speaking in church and instead learn at home from their husbands, but she voluntarily and for her own pleasure observes this hierarchical decorum.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Graces attended on Venus.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Presumably, God's ways with other worlds and other creatures inhabiting them (if any).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To find ways of explaining discrepancies between their hypotheses and observed facts.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the Ptolemaic system, observed irregularities in the motion of heavenly bodies were first explained by hypothesizing eccentric orbits, then by adding epicycles, which were smaller orbits whose centers ride on the circumference of the main eccentric circles and carry the planets. The Copernican system also had some recourse to epicycles.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
 Raphael declines to "reveal" astronomical truth to Adam, leaving that matter open to human scientific speculation. He suggests here that Adam's Ptolemaic assumptions result from his

earthbound perspective, and he implies that angels see the universe in different terms. In the following lines (122–58) he sets forth advanced scientific notions Adam had not imagined: not only Copernican astronomy but multiple universes and other inhabited planets.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the moon. In the Ptolemaic system, the “seventh” is the sun; in the Copernican, earth.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Copernicus described the three motions as daily, annual, and “motion in declination” whereby the earth’s axis swerved so as always to point in the same direction.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Oblique paths that cross each other.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wheel, that is, the primum mobile, which (if we accept the Ptolemaic system and “save the sun his labor”) revolves around the universe every twenty-four hours, carrying the planets and their spheres with it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Compare Satan’s inability to remember his origins (5.856–63), from which he infers self-creation, whereas Adam infers a Maker (line 278).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Adam’s ability to name the creatures was said to signify his intuitive understanding of their natures.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare God’s commands to Adam (Genesis 1:28–30, 2:16–17) with Milton’s elaboration here.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Adam had already begun naming the sun and features of the earth (lines 272–74), but here he names (and thereby shows he understands) all living creatures.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Adam reasons, as the Scholastics did, from the creatures to the fact of a Creator, but he cannot name (and so indicates that he cannot understand) God, except as God reveals himself.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As with poorly matched musical instruments, Adam’s string is too taut (“intense”) and the animals’ is too slack (“remiss”) to be in harmony (“suit”).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: God is absolutely perfect, man only relatively so ("in degree"), and thereby needs companionship with a fit mate to assuage ("solace") the "defects" arising from solitude.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God, "though One," (line 421), contains all numbers, but man has to remedy the "imperfection" of being single (line 423) by procreating and thereby multiplying his single and thereby "defective" image (line 425).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare the account in Genesis 2:18 with Milton's elaboration.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Compare Eve's version of these events (4.440–91).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare the account in Genesis 2:23–24.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Both breezes and melodies. "Gales": winds.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See 1 Corinthians 11:3: "the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The ladder of love, a Neoplatonic concept for the movement from sensual love to higher forms, and ultimately to love of God.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Both "nuptial" and "generative." Adam takes respectful issue with the apparent denigration of human sex in Raphael's account of the Neoplatonic ladder, which prompts his question about angelic sex (lines 615–17).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, various objects, variously represented to me by my senses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This is not likely to be an embarrassed blush: red is the color traditionally associated with Seraphim, who burn with ardor. Raphael's smile also glows with friendship for Adam and appreciation of his perceptive inference about angelic love.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cape Verde, near Dakar, and the islands off that coast are the westernmost ("Hesperian") points of Africa.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *spell-binding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *explanation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the universe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *numerous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *supply*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pointlike*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so much greater*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as it seems*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *motionless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *circular course*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *incalculable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *like that of spirits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *see*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *gratifying*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *procession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy, affable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judged critically*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marvel*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *design*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wide of the mark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *implies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ineffective*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attentive, dutiful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *orbits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *innumerable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *that of angels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *magnetism*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *circles*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *backward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *transparent*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *original* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reflected* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endow with life* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inhabited place* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *open to dispute* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unobstructed, harmless* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disturb* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vapor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish irrelevance* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always searching* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perhaps* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permission* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *usual* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ceremony* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strengthen* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *steaming* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *walked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *habitation* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacks* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *residence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *vividly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *submissive* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care for* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *action* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prohibition* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *untroubled expression* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *speech* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the beasts* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flattering gesture* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fully stocked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *have understanding* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agree* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *partake of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fastidious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mutual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seclusion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfaction*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permitted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unsuitable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *been exposed to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exceeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withdrawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from the heart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mien, look*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lovely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *given reluctantly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consciousness*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bold* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forward*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compliant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rejoicing, congratulation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *frolicking* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nightingale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Venus*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enraptured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mental agitation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withstand*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subtracting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perfect, independent*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disconcerted, abashed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *incidentally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mistrustful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awe-inspiring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imparted generally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting acts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overcome*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *actual*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *higher degree*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *determination*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depend on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °



## Book 9

### *The Argument*

Satan having compassed the earth, with meditated guile returns as a mist by night into Paradise, enters into the serpent sleeping. Adam and Eve in the morning go forth to their labors, which Eve proposes to divide in several places, each laboring apart: Adam consents not, alleging the danger, lest that enemy, of whom they were forewarned, should attempt her found alone: Eve loath to be thought not circumspect or firm enough, urges her going apart, the rather desirous to make trial of her strength; Adam at last yields: the Serpent finds her alone; his subtle approach, first gazing, then speaking, with much flattery extolling Eve above all other creatures. Eve wondering to hear the Serpent speak, asks how he attained to human speech and such understanding not till now; the Serpent answers, that by tasting of a certain tree in the garden he attained both to speech and reason, till then void of both: Eve requires him to bring her to that tree, and finds it to be the Tree of Knowledge forbidden: the Serpent now grown bolder, with many wiles and arguments induces her at length to eat; she pleased with the taste deliberates a while whether to impart thereof to Adam or not, at last brings him of the fruit, relates what persuaded her to eat thereof: Adam at first amazed, but perceiving her lost, resolves through vehemence of love to perish with her; and extenuating the trespass, eats also of the fruit: the effects thereof in them both; they seek to cover their nakedness; then fall to variance and accusation of one another.

No more of talk where God or angel guest  
With man, as with his friend, familiar used  
To sit indulgent, and with him partake  
Rural repast, permitting him the while

5 Venial<sup>o</sup> discourse unblamed: I now must change  
Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach  
Disloyal on the part of man, revolt,  
And disobedience: on the part of Heav'n  
Now alienated, distance and distaste,<sup>o</sup>  
10 Anger and just rebuke, and judgment giv'n,  
That brought into this world a world of woe,  
Sin and her shadow Death, and misery  
Death's harbinger:<sup>o</sup> sad task, yet argument<sup>o</sup>  
Not less but more heroic than the wrath  
15 Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued  
Thrice fugitive about Troy wall; or rage  
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused,  
Or Neptune's ire or Juno's, that so long  
Perplexed the Greek and Cytherea's son;<sup>1</sup>  
20 If answerable<sup>o</sup> style I can obtain  
Of my celestial patroness, who deigns  
Her nightly visitation unimplored,<sup>2</sup>  
And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires  
Easy my unpremeditated verse:  
25 Since first this subject for heroic song  
Pleased me long choosing, and beginning late;  
Not sedulous<sup>o</sup> by nature to indite  
Wars, hitherto the only argument<sup>o</sup>  
Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect  
30 With long and tedious havoc fabled knights  
In battles feigned; the better fortitude  
Of patience and heroic martyrdom  
Unsung; or to describe races and games,  
Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,  
35 Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds;  
Bases<sup>3</sup> and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights  
At joust and tournament; then marshaled feast  
Served up in hall with sewers,<sup>o</sup> and seneschals;<sup>o</sup>  
The skill of artifice<sup>o</sup> or office mean,

40 Not that which justly gives heroic name  
To person or to poem. Me of these  
Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument  
Remains,<sup>4</sup> sufficient of itself to raise  
That name, unless an age too late, or cold  
Climate, or years damp my intended wing  
45 Depressed, and much they may, if all be mine,  
Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear.  
The sun was sunk, and after him the star  
Of Hesperus,<sup>5</sup> whose office is to bring  
Twilight upon the earth, short arbiter  
50 'Twixt day and night, and now from end to end  
Night's hemisphere had veiled the horizon round:  
When Satan who late<sup>o</sup> fled<sup>6</sup> before the threats  
Of Gabriel out of Eden, now improved<sup>o</sup>  
In meditated fraud and malice, bent  
55 On man's destruction, maugre what might hap  
Of heavier on himself,<sup>7</sup> fearless returned.  
By night he fled, and at midnight returned  
From compassing the earth, cautious of day,  
Since Uriel regent of the sun descried  
60 His entrance, and forewarned the Cherubim  
That kept their watch; thence full of anguish driv'n,  
The space of seven continued nights he rode  
With darkness, thrice the equinoctial line<sup>o</sup>  
He circled, four times crossed the car of Night  
65 From pole to pole, traversing each colure;<sup>8</sup>  
On the eighth returned, and on the coast averse<sup>o</sup>  
From entrance on Cherubic watch, by stealth  
Found unsuspected way. There was a place,  
Now not, though sin, not time, first wrought the  
70 change,  
Where Tigris at the foot of Paradise  
Into a gulf shot underground, till part  
Rose up a fountain by the Tree of Life;

In with the river sunk, and with it rose  
Satan involved<sup>o</sup> in rising mist, then sought  
75 Where to lie hid. Sea he had searched and land  
From Eden over Pontus,<sup>9</sup> and the pool  
Maeotis, up beyond the river Ob;  
Downward as far Antarctic; and in length  
West from Orontes to the ocean barred  
80 At Darien, thence to the land where flows  
Ganges and Indus: thus the orb he roamed  
With narrow<sup>o</sup> search; and with inspection deep  
Considered every creature, which of all  
Most opportune might serve his wiles, and found  
85 The serpent subtlest beast of all the field.<sup>1</sup>  
Him after long debate, irresolute<sup>o</sup>  
Of<sup>o</sup> thoughts revolved, his final sentence<sup>o</sup> chose  
Fit vessel, fittest imp<sup>o</sup> of fraud, in whom  
To enter, and his dark suggestions hide  
90 From sharpest sight: for in the wily snake,  
Whatever sleights<sup>o</sup> none would suspicious mark,  
As from his wit and native subtlety  
Proceeding, which in other beasts observed  
Doubt<sup>o</sup> might beget of diabolic pow'r  
95 Active within beyond the sense of brute.  
Thus he resolved, but first from inward grief  
His bursting passion into plaints thus poured:  
"O earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferred  
More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built  
100 With second thoughts, reforming what was old!  
For what God after better worse would build?  
Terrestrial heav'n, danced round by other heav'ns  
That shine, yet bear their bright officious<sup>o</sup> lamps,  
Light above light, for thee alone, as seems,<sup>2</sup>  
105 In thee concent'ring all their precious beams  
Of sacred influence: as God in Heav'n  
Is center, yet extends to all, so thou

Centring receiv'st from all those orbs; in thee,  
Not in themselves, all their known virtue appears  
110 Productive in herb, plant, and nobler birth  
Of creatures animate with gradual life  
Of growth, sense, reason,<sup>3</sup> all summed up in man.  
With what delight could I have walked thee round,  
If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange  
115 Of hill and valley, rivers, woods and plains,  
Now land, now sea, and shores with forest crowned,  
Rocks, dens, and caves; but I in none of these  
Find place or refuge; and the more I see  
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel  
120 Torment within me, as from the hateful siege<sup>o</sup>  
Of contraries; all good to me becomes  
Bane,<sup>o</sup> and in Heav'n much worse would be my  
state.  
But neither here seek I, no nor in Heav'n  
To dwell, unless by mastering Heav'n's Supreme;  
125 Nor hope to be myself less miserable  
By what I seek, but others to make such  
As I, though thereby worse to me redound:  
For only in destroying I find ease  
To my relentless thoughts; and him<sup>4</sup> destroyed,  
130 Or won to what may work his utter loss,  
For whom all this was made, all this will soon  
Follow, as to him linked in weal or woe:  
In woe then; that destruction wide may range:  
To me shall be the glory sole among  
135 The infernal Powers, in one day to have marred  
What he Almighty styled,<sup>o</sup> six nights and days  
Continued making, and who knows how long  
Before had been contriving, though perhaps  
Not longer than since I in one night freed  
140 From servitude inglorious well-nigh half  
Th' angelic name, and thinner left the throng

Of his adorers. He to be avenged,  
And to repair his numbers thus impaired,  
Whether such virtue<sup>o</sup> spent of old now failed  
145 More angels to create, if they at least  
Are his created, or to spite us more,  
Determined to advance into our room  
A creature formed of earth, and him endow,  
Exalted from so base original,<sup>o</sup>  
150 With Heav'nly spoils, our spoils: what he decreed  
He effected; man he made, and for him built  
Magnificent this world, and earth his seat,  
Him lord pronounced, and, O indignity!  
Subjected to his service angel wings,  
155 And flaming ministers to watch and tend  
Their earthy charge: of these the vigilance  
I dread, and to elude, thus wrapped in mist  
Of midnight vapor glide obscure, and pry  
In every bush and brake, where hap<sup>o</sup> may find  
160 The serpent sleeping, in whose mazy folds  
To hide me, and the dark intent I bring.  
O foul descent! that I who erst contended  
With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained  
Into a beast, and mixed with bestial slime,  
165 This essence to incarnate and imbrute,<sup>5</sup>  
That to the height of deity aspired;  
But what will not ambition and revenge  
Descend to? Who aspires must down as low  
As high he soared, obnoxious<sup>o</sup> first or last  
170 To basest things. Revenge, at first though sweet,  
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils;  
Let it; I reck<sup>o</sup> not, so it light well aimed,  
Since higher I fall short, on him who next  
Provokes my envy, this new favorite  
175 Of Heav'n, this man of clay, son of despite,  
Whom us the more to spite his Maker raised

From dust: spite then with spite is best repaid."

So saying, through each thicket dank or dry,  
Like a black mist low creeping, he held on  
180 His midnight search, where soonest he might find  
The serpent: him fast sleeping soon he found  
In labyrinth of many a round self-rolled,  
His head the midst, well stored with subtle wiles:  
Not yet in horrid shade or dismal den,  
185 Nor nocent<sup>o</sup> yet, but on the grassy herb  
Fearless unfeared he slept: in at his mouth  
The Devil entered, and his brutal<sup>o</sup> sense,  
In heart or head, possessing soon inspired  
With act intelligential: but his sleep  
190 Disturbed not, waiting close<sup>o</sup> th' approach of morn.  
Now whenas sacred light began to dawn  
In Eden on the humid flow'rs, that breathed  
Their morning incense, when all things that breathe,  
From th' earth's great altar send up silent praise  
195 To the Creator, and his nostrils fill  
With grateful<sup>o</sup> smell, forth came the human pair  
And joined their vocal worship to the choir  
Of creatures wanting<sup>o</sup> voice; that done, partake  
The season, prime<sup>o</sup> for sweetest scents and airs:  
200 Then c6mmune how that day they best may ply  
Their growing work; for much their work outgrew  
The hands' dispatch of two gard'ning so wide.  
And Eve first to her husband thus began:  
"Adam, well may we labor still<sup>o</sup> to dress  
205 This garden, still to tend plant, herb, and flow'r,  
Our pleasant task enjoined, but till more hands  
Aid us, the work under our labor grows,  
Luxurious<sup>o</sup> by restraint; what we by day  
Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,  
210 One night or two with wanton<sup>o</sup> growth derides,  
Tending to wild. Thou therefore now advise  
Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present,

Let us divide our labors, thou where choice  
Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind  
215 The woodbine round this arbor, or direct  
The clasping ivy where to climb, while I  
In yonder spring<sup>o</sup> of roses intermixed  
With myrtle, find what to redress<sup>o</sup> till noon:  
For while so near each other thus all day  
220 Our task we choose, what wonder if so near  
Looks intervene and smiles, or object new  
Casual discourse draw on, which intermits<sup>o</sup>  
Our day's work brought to little, though begun  
Early, and th' hour of supper comes unearned."  
225 To whom mild answer Adam thus returned:  
"Sole Eve, associate sole,<sup>6</sup> to me beyond  
Compare above all living creatures dear,  
Well hast thou motioned,<sup>o</sup> well thy thoughts  
employed  
230 How we might best fulfill the work which here  
God hath assigned us, nor of me shalt pass  
Unpraised: for nothing lovelier can be found  
In woman, than to study household good,  
And good works in her husband to promote.<sup>7</sup>  
235 Yet not so strictly hath our Lord imposed  
Labor, as to debar us when we need  
Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,  
Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse  
Of looks and smiles, for smiles from reason flow,  
240 To brute denied, and are of love the food,  
Love not the lowest end of human life.  
For not to irksome toil, but to delight  
He made us, and delight to reason joined.  
These paths and bowers doubt not but our joint  
hands  
245 Will keep from wilderness with ease, as wide  
As we need walk, till younger hands ere long



Assist us: but if much converse perhaps  
Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield.  
For solitude sometimes is best society,  
And short retirement urges sweet return.  
250 But other doubt possesses me, lest harm  
Befall thee severed from me; for thou know'st  
What hath been warned us, what malicious foe  
Envyng our happiness, and of his own  
Despairing, seeks to work us woe and shame  
255 By sly assault; and somewhere nigh at hand  
Watches, no doubt, with greedy hope to find  
His wish and best advantage, us asunder,  
Hopeless to circumvent us joined, where each  
To other speedy aid might lend at need;  
260 Whether his first design be to withdraw  
Our fealty<sup>o</sup> from God, or to disturb  
Conjugal love, than which perhaps no bliss  
Enjoyed by us excites his envy more;  
Or<sup>o</sup> this, or worse, leave not the faithful side  
265 That gave thee being, still shades thee and protects.  
The wife, where danger or dishonor lurks,  
Safest and seemliest by her husband stays,  
Who guards her, or with her the worst endures."  
To whom the virgin<sup>8</sup> majesty of Eve,  
270 As one who loves, and some unkindness meets,  
With sweet austere composure thus replied.  
"Offspring of Heav'n and earth, and all earth's  
lord,  
That such an enemy we have, who seeks  
Our ruin, both by thee informed I learn,  
275 And from the parting angel overheard  
As in a shady nook I stood behind,  
Just then returned at shut of evening flow'rs.<sup>9</sup>  
But that thou shouldst my firmness therefore doubt  
To God or thee, because we have a foe  
280

May tempt it, I expected not to hear.  
 His violence thou fear'st not, being such,  
 As we, not capable of death or pain,  
 Can either not receive, or can repel.  
 His fraud is then thy fear, which plain infers  
 285 Thy equal fear that my firm faith and love  
 Can by his fraud be shaken or seduced;  
 Thoughts, which how found they harbor in thy  
 breast,  
 Adam, misthought of o her to thee so dear?"  
 To whom with healing words Adam replied.  
 290 "Daughter of God and man, immortal Eve,  
 For such thou art, from sin and blame entire: o  
 Not diffident o of thee do I dissuade  
 Thy absence from my sight, but to avoid  
 Th' attempt itself, intended by our foe.  
 295 For he who tempts, though in vain, at least  
 asperses o  
 The tempted with dishonor foul, supposed  
 Not incorruptible of faith, not proof  
 Against temptation: thou thyself with scorn  
 And anger wouldst resent the offered wrong,  
 300 Though ineffectual found; misdeem not then,  
 If such affront I labor to avert  
 From thee alone, which on us both at once  
 The enemy, though bold, will hardly dare,  
 Or daring, first on me th' assault shall light.  
 305 Nor thou his malice and false guile contemn; o  
 Subtle he needs must be, who could seduce  
 Angels, nor think superfluous others' aid.  
 I from the influence of thy looks receive  
 Access o in every virtue, in thy sight  
 310 More wise, more watchful, stronger, if need were  
 Of outward strength; while shame, thou looking on,  
 Shame to be overcome or overreached o  
 Would utmost vigor raise, and raised unite.

315 Why shouldst not thou like sense within thee feel  
When I am present, and thy trial choose  
With me, best witness of thy virtue tried.”  
So spake domestic Adam in his care  
And matrimonial love; but Eve, who thought  
320 Less<sup>o</sup> attributed to her faith sincere,  
Thus her reply with accent sweet renewed.  
“If this be our condition, thus to dwell  
In narrow circuit straitened<sup>o</sup> by a foe,  
Subtle or violent, we not endued  
325 Single with like defense, wherever met,  
How are we happy, still<sup>o</sup> in fear of harm?  
But harm precedes not sin: only our foe  
Tempting affronts us with his foul esteem  
Of our integrity: his foul esteem  
330 Sticks no dishonor on our front,<sup>o</sup> but turns  
Foul on himself; then wherefore shunned or feared  
By us? who rather double honor gain  
From his surmise proved false, find peace within,  
Favor from Heav’n, our witness from th’ event.<sup>o</sup>  
335 And what is faith, love, virtue unassayed  
Alone, without exterior help sustained?<sup>1</sup>  
Let us not then suspect our happy state  
Left so imperfect by the Maker wise,  
As not secure to single<sup>o</sup> or combined.  
340 Frail is our happiness, if this be so,  
And Eden were no Eden thus exposed.”  
To whom thus Adam fervently replied.  
“O woman, best are all things as the will  
Of God ordained them, his creating hand  
Nothing imperfect or deficient left  
345 Of all that he created, much less man,  
Or aught that might his happy state secure,  
Secure from outward force; within himself  
The danger lies, yet lies within his power:

350     Against his will he can receive no harm.  
But God left free the will, for what obeys  
Reason, is free, and reason he made right,<sup>2</sup>  
But bid her well beware, and still erect,<sup>o</sup>  
Lest by some fair appearing good surprised  
She dictate false, and misinform the will  
355     To do what God expressly hath forbid.  
Not then mistrust, but tender love enjoins,  
That I should mind<sup>o</sup> thee oft, and mind thou me.  
Firm we subsist,<sup>o</sup> yet possible to swerve,  
Since reason not impossibly may meet  
360     Some specious<sup>o</sup> object by the foe suborned,  
And fall into deception unaware,  
Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warned.  
Seek not temptation then, which to avoid  
Were better, and most likely if from me  
365     Thou sever not: trial will come unsought.  
Wouldst thou approve<sup>o</sup> thy constancy, approve  
First thy obedience; th' other who can know,  
Not seeing thee attempted, who attest?  
But if thou think, trial unsought may find  
370     Us both securer<sup>o</sup> than thus warned thou seem'st,  
Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;  
Go in thy native innocence, rely  
On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,  
For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine."  
375     So spake the patriarch of mankind, but Eve  
Persisted, yet submiss, though last, replied:  
    "With thy permission then, and thus forewarned  
Chiefly by what thy own last reasoning words  
Touched only, that our trial, when least sought,  
380     May find us both perhaps far less prepared,  
The willinger I go, nor much expect  
A foe so proud will first the weaker seek;  
So bent, the more shall shame him his repulse."

385 Thus saying, from her husband's hand her hand  
Soft she withdrew, and like a wood nymph light<sup>3</sup>  
Oread or Dryad, or of Delia's train,  
Betook her to the groves, but Delia's self  
In gait surpassed and goddess-like deport,<sup>o</sup>  
390 Though not as she with bow and quiver armed,  
But with such gardening tools as art yet rude,  
Guiltless of fire<sup>4</sup> had formed, or angels brought.  
To Pales, or Pomona, thus adorned,  
Likest she seemed Pomona when she fled  
395 Vertumnus, or to Ceres in her prime,  
Yet virgin of Proserpina from Jove.<sup>5</sup>  
Her long with ardent look his eye pursued  
Delighted, but desiring more her stay.  
Oft he to her his charge of quick return  
Repeated, she to him as oft engaged  
400 To be returned by noon amid the bow'r,  
And all things in best order to invite  
Noontide repast, or afternoon's repose.  
O much deceived, much failing,<sup>o</sup> hapless<sup>o</sup> Eve,  
Of thy presumed return! event<sup>o</sup> perverse!  
405 Thou never from that hour in Paradise  
Found'st either sweet repast, or sound repose;  
Such ambush hid among sweet flow'rs and shades  
Waited with hellish rancor imminent  
To intercept thy way, or send thee back  
410 Despoiled of innocence, of faith, of bliss.  
For now, and since first break of dawn the Fiend,  
Mere serpent in appearance, forth was come,  
And on his quest, where likeliest he might find  
The only two of mankind, but in them  
415 The whole included race, his purposed prey.  
In bow'r and field he sought, where any tuft  
Of grove or garden plot more pleasant lay,  
Their tendance or plantation for delight,<sup>6</sup>

By fountain or by shady rivulet  
420 He sought them both, but wished his hap<sup>o</sup> might  
find  
Eve separate; he wished, but not with hope  
Of what so seldom chanced, when to his wish,  
Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies,  
425 Veiled in a cloud of fragrance, where she stood,  
Half spied, so thick the roses bushing round  
About her glowed, oft stooping to support  
Each flow'r of slender stalk, whose head though gay  
Carnation, purple, azure, or specked with gold,  
Hung drooping unsustained, then she upstays  
430 Gently with myrtle band, mindless<sup>o</sup> the while,  
Herself, though fairest unsupported flow'r  
From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh.<sup>7</sup>  
Nearer he drew, and many a walk traversed  
Of stateliest covert, cedar, pine, or palm,  
435 Then voluble<sup>o</sup> and bold, now hid, now seen  
Among thick-woven arborets<sup>o</sup> and flow'rs  
Embordered on each bank, the hand<sup>o</sup> of Eve:  
Spot more delicious than those gardens feigned  
Or<sup>o</sup> of revived Adonis, or renowned  
440 Alcinous, host of old Laertes' son,  
Or that, not mystic, where the sapient king  
Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian spouse.<sup>8</sup>  
Much he the place admired, the person more.  
As one who long in populous city pent,  
445 Where houses thick and sewers annoy<sup>o</sup> the air,  
Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe  
Among the pleasant villages and farms  
Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight,  
The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,<sup>9</sup>  
450 Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound;  
If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,  
What pleasing seemed, for<sup>o</sup> her now pleases more,

She most, and in her look sums all delight.  
Such pleasure took the Serpent to behold  
455 This flow'ry plat,o the sweet recesso of Eve  
Thus early, thus alone; her heav'nly form  
Angelic, but more soft, and feminine,  
Her graceful innocence, her every airo  
Of gesture or least action overawed  
460 His malice, and with rapine sweet<sup>1</sup> bereaved  
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:  
That space the Evil One abstractedo stood  
From his own evil, and for the time remained  
Stupidly good,o of enmity disarmed,  
465 Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge;  
But the hot hell that always in him burns,  
Though in mid-Heav'n, soon ended his delight,  
And tortures him now more, the more he sees  
Of pleasure not for him ordained: then soon  
470 Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts  
Of mischief gratulating,o thus excites:  
    "Thoughts, whither have ye led me, with what  
    sweet  
Compulsion thus transported to forget  
What hither brought us, hate, not love, nor hope  
475 Of Paradise for Hell, hope here to taste  
Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,  
Save what is in destroying, other joy  
To me is lost. Then let me not let pass  
Occasion which now smiles, behold alone  
480 The woman, opportuneo to all attempts,  
Her husband, for I view far round, not nigh,  
Whose higher intellectual more I shun,  
And strength, of courage haughty,o and of limb  
Heroic built, though of terrestrialo mold,  
485 Foe not formidable, exempt from wound,  
I not; so much hath Hell debased, and pain

Enfeebled me, to what I was in Heav'n.  
 She fair, divinely fair, fit love for gods,  
 Not terrible,<sup>o</sup> though terror be in love  
 490 And beauty, not<sup>o</sup> approached by stronger hate,  
 Hate stronger, under show of love well feigned,  
 The way which to her ruin now I tend."  
 So spake the Enemy of mankind, enclosed  
 In serpent, inmate bad, and toward Eve  
 495 Addressed his way, not with indented<sup>o</sup> wave,  
 Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear,  
 Circular base of rising folds, that tow'rd  
 Fold above fold a surging maze, his head  
 Crested aloft, and carbuncle<sup>o</sup> his eyes;  
 500 With burnished neck of verdant<sup>o</sup> gold, erect  
 Amidst his circling spires,<sup>o</sup> that on the grass  
 Floated redundant:<sup>o</sup> pleasing was his shape,  
 And lovely, never since of serpent kind  
 Lovelier, not those that in Illyria changed  
 505 Hermione and Cadmus, or the god  
 In Epidaurus;<sup>2</sup> nor to which transformed  
 Ammonian Jove, or Capitoline was seen,  
 He with Olympias, this with her who bore  
 Scipio, the height of Rome.<sup>3</sup> With tract<sup>o</sup> oblique  
 510 At first, as one who sought accéss, but feared  
 To interrupt, sidelong he works his way.  
 As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought  
 Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind  
 Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail;  
 515 So varied he, and of his tortuous train<sup>o</sup>  
 Curled many a wanton<sup>o</sup> wreath in sight of Eve,  
 To lure her eye; she busied heard the sound  
 Of rustling leaves, but minded not, as used  
 To such disport before her through the field,  
 520 From every beast, more duteous at her call,  
 Than at Circean call the herd disguised.<sup>4</sup>



He bolder now, uncalled before her stood;  
But as in gaze admiring: oft he bowed  
His turret crest, and sleek enameled<sup>o</sup> neck,  
525 Fawning, and licked the ground whereon she trod.  
His gentle dumb expression turned at length  
The eye of Eve to mark his play; he glad  
Of her attention gained, with serpent tongue  
Organic, or impulse of vocal air,<sup>5</sup>  
530 His fraudulent temptation thus began.

“Wonder not, sovereign mistress, if perhaps  
Thou canst, who art sole wonder, much less arm  
Thy looks, the heav’n of mildness, with disdain,  
Displeased that I approach thee thus, and gaze  
535 Insatiate, I thus single, nor have feared  
Thy awful<sup>o</sup> brow, more awful thus retired.  
Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair,  
Thee all things living gaze on, all things thine  
By gift, and thy celestial beauty adore  
540 With ravishment beheld, there best beheld  
Where universally admired; but here  
In this enclosure wild, these beasts among,  
Beholders rude, and shallow to discern  
Half what in thee is fair, one man except,  
545 Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be  
seen  
A goddess among gods, adored and served  
By angels numberless, thy daily train.”<sup>6</sup>

So glozed<sup>o</sup> the Tempter, and his proem<sup>o</sup> tuned;  
550 Into the heart of Eve his words made way,  
Though at the voice much marveling; at length  
Not unamazed she thus in answer spake.  
“What may this mean? Language of man  
pronounced  
By tongue of brute, and human sense expressed?  
555 The first at least of these I thought denied

To beasts, whom God on their creation day  
Created mute to all articulate sound;  
The latter I demur,<sup>o</sup> for in their looks  
Much reason, and in their actions oft appears.  
Thee, Serpent, subtlest beast of all the field  
560 I knew, but not with human voice endued;<sup>o</sup>  
Redouble then this miracle, and say,  
How cam'st thou speakable<sup>o</sup> of mute, and how  
To me so friendly grown above the rest  
Of brutal kind, that daily are in sight?  
565 Say, for such wonder claims attention due."  
To whom the guileful Tempter thus replied:  
"Empress of this fair world, resplendent Eve,  
Easy to me it is to tell thee all  
What thou command'st, and right thou shouldst be  
570 obeyed:  
I was at first as other beasts that graze  
The trodden herb, of abject thoughts and low,  
As was my food, nor aught but food discerned  
Or sex, and apprehended nothing high:  
Till on a day roving the field, I chanced  
575 A goodly tree far distant to behold  
Loaden with fruit of fairest colors mixed,  
Ruddy and gold: I nearer drew to gaze;  
When from the boughs a savory odor blown,  
Grateful to appetite, more pleased my sense  
580 Than smell of sweetest fennel, or the teats  
Of ewe or goat dropping with milk at ev'n,<sup>z</sup>  
Unsucked of lamb or kid, that tend their play.  
To satisfy the sharp desire I had  
Of tasting those fair apples, I resolved  
585 Not to defer;<sup>o</sup> hunger and thirst at once,  
Powerful persuaders, quickened at the scent  
Of that alluring fruit, urged me so keen.  
About the mossy trunk I wound me soon,

590 For high from ground the branches would require  
Thy utmost reach or Adam's: round the tree  
All other beasts that saw, with like desire  
Longing and envying stood, but could not reach.  
Amid the tree now got, where plenty hung  
Tempting so nigh, to pluck and eat my fill  
595 I spared<sup>o</sup> not, for such pleasure till that hour  
At feed or fountain never had I found.  
Sated at length, ere long I might perceive  
Strange alteration in me, to degree  
Of reason in my inward powers, and speech  
600 Wanted<sup>o</sup> not long, though to this shape retained.<sup>8</sup>  
Thenceforth to speculations high or deep  
I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind  
Considered all things visible in Heav'n,  
Or earth, or middle,<sup>o</sup> all things fair and good;  
605 But all that fair and good in thy divine  
Semblance, and in thy beauty's heav'nly ray  
United I beheld; no fair<sup>o</sup> to thine  
Equivalent or second, which compelled  
Me thus, though importune<sup>o</sup> perhaps, to come  
610 And gaze, and worship thee of right declared  
Sov'reign of creatures, universal dame."<sup>9</sup>

So talked the spirited<sup>1</sup> sly snake; and Eve  
Yet more amazed unwary thus replied:  
615 "Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt  
The virtue<sup>o</sup> of that fruit, in thee first proved:  
But say, where grows the tree, from hence how far?  
For many are the trees of God that grow  
In Paradise, and various, yet unknown  
To us, in such abundance lies our choice,  
620 As leaves a greater store of fruit untouched,  
Still hanging incorruptible, till men  
Grow up to their provision,<sup>2</sup> and more hands  
Help to disburden nature of her birth."

To whom the wily adder, blithe and glad:  
 625 "Empress, the way is ready, and not long,  
 Beyond a row of myrtles, on a flat,  
 Fast by <sup>o</sup> a fountain, one small thicket past  
 Of blowing myrrh and balm;<sup>3</sup> if thou accept  
 My conduct,<sup>o</sup> I can bring thee thither soon."  
 630 "Lead then," said Eve. He leading swiftly rolled  
 In tangles, and made intricate seem straight,  
 To mischief swift. Hope elevates, and joy  
 Brightens his crest, as when a wand'ring fire,<sup>o</sup>  
 Compact<sup>o</sup> of unctuous<sup>o</sup> vapor, which the night  
 635 Condenses, and the cold environs round,  
 Kindled through agitation to a flame,  
 Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends,  
 Hovering and blazing with delusive light,  
 Misleads th' amazed<sup>o</sup> night-wanderer from his way  
 640 To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,  
 There swallowed up and lost, from succor far.  
 So glistered the dire snake, and into fraud  
 Led Eve our credulous mother, to the tree  
 Of prohibition, root of all our woe;  
 645 Which when she saw, thus to her guide she spake:  
 "Serpent, we might have spared our coming hither,  
 Fruitless to me, though fruit be here to excess,  
 The credit of whose virtue<sup>o</sup> rest with thee,  
 Wondrous indeed, if cause of such effects.  
 650 But of this tree we may not taste nor touch;  
 God so commanded, and left that command  
 Sole daughter of his voice;<sup>4</sup> the rest, we live  
 Law to ourselves, our reason is our law."  
 To whom the Tempter guilefully replied:  
 655 "Indeed? hath God then said that of the fruit  
 Of all these garden trees ye shall not eat,  
 Yet lords declared of all in earth or air?"  
 To whom thus Eve yet sinless: "Of the fruit

660 Of each tree in the garden we may eat,  
But of the fruit of this fair tree amidst  
The garden, God hath said, 'Ye shall not eat  
Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die.' "5  
She scarce had said, though brief, when now more  
bold  
665 The Tempter, but with show of zeal and love  
To man, and indignation at his wrong,  
New part puts on, and as to passion moved,  
Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely, and in act  
Raised, 6 as of some great matter to begin.  
As when of old some orator renowned  
670 In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence  
Flourished, since mute, to some great cause  
addressed,  
Stood in himself collected, while each part,  
Motion, each act won audience ere the tongue, 9  
Sometimes in height began, as no delay  
675 Of preface brooking 7 through his zeal of right.  
So standing, moving, or to high upgrown  
The Tempter all impassioned thus began:  
"O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,  
680 Mother of science, 9 now I feel thy power  
Within me clear, not only to discern  
Things in their causes, but to trace the ways  
Of highest agents, deemed however wise.  
Queen of this universe, do not believe  
Those rigid threats of death; ye shall not die:  
685 How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life  
To knowledge. 8 By the Threat'ner? Look on me,  
Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live,  
And life more perfect have attained than fate  
Meant me, by vent'ring higher than my lot.  
690 Shall that be shut to man, which to the beast  
Is open? Or will God incense his ire

For such a petty trespass, and not praise  
Rather your dauntless virtue,<sup>o</sup> whom the pain  
Of death denounced,<sup>o</sup> whatever thing death be,  
695 Deterred not from achieving what might lead  
To happier life, knowledge of good and evil;  
Of good, how just?<sup>9</sup> Of evil, if what is evil  
Be real, why not known, since easier shunned?  
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;  
700 Not just, not God; not feared then,<sup>1</sup> nor obeyed:  
Your fear itself of death removes the fear.  
Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,  
Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,  
His worshippers; he knows that in the day  
705 Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,  
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then  
Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,<sup>2</sup>  
Knowing both good and evil as they know.  
That ye should be as gods, since I as man,  
710 Internal man, is but proportion meet,  
I of brute human, ye of human gods.<sup>3</sup>  
So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off  
Human, to put on gods, death to be wished,  
Though threatened, which no worse than this can  
715 bring.  
And what are gods that man may not become  
As they, participating<sup>o</sup> godlike food?  
The gods are first, and that advantage use  
On our belief, that all from them proceeds;  
I question it, for this fair earth I see,  
720 Warmed by the sun, producing every kind,  
Them nothing: if they all<sup>o</sup> things, who enclosed  
Knowledge of good and evil in this tree,  
That whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains  
Wisdom without their leave? And wherein lies  
725 Th' offense, that man should thus attain to know?

What can your knowledge hurt him, or this tree  
Impart against his will if all be his?  
Or is it envy, and can envy dwell  
In heav'nly breasts? These, these and many more  
730 Causes import<sub>o</sub> your need of this fair fruit.  
Goddess humane,<sup>4</sup> reach then, and freely taste."  
He ended, and his words replete with guile  
Into her heart too easy entrance won:  
Fixed on the fruit she gazed, which to behold  
735 Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound  
Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn'd<sub>o</sub>  
With reason, to her seeming, and with truth;  
Meanwhile the hour of noon drew on, and waked  
An eager appetite, raised by the smell  
740 So savory of that fruit, which with desire,  
Inclinable now grown to touch or taste,  
Solicited her longing eye; yet first  
Pausing a while, thus to herself she mused:  
"Great are thy virtues,<sub>o</sub> doubtless, best of fruits,  
745 Though kept from man, and worthy to be admired,  
Whose taste, too long forborne, at first assay<sub>o</sub>  
Gave elocution to the mute, and taught  
The tongue not made for speech to speak thy praise:  
Thy praise he also who forbids thy use,  
750 Conceals not from us, naming thee the Tree  
Of Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil;  
Forbids us then to taste, but his forbidding  
Commends thee more, while it infers<sub>o</sub> the good  
By thee communicated, and our want:<sub>o</sub>  
755 For good unknown, sure is not had, or had  
And yet unknown, is as not had at all.  
In plain<sub>o</sub> then, what forbids he but to know,  
Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?  
Such prohibitions bind not. But if death  
760 Bind us with after-bands,<sub>o</sub> what profits then

Our inward freedom? In the day we eat  
 Of this fair fruit, our doom is, we shall die.  
 How dies the serpent? He hath eat'n and lives,  
 And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns,  
 765 Irrational till then. For us alone  
 Was death invented? Or to us denied  
 This intellectual food, for beasts reserved?  
 For beasts it seems: yet that one beast which first  
 Hath tasted, envies<sup>o</sup> not, but brings with joy  
 770 The good befall'n him, author unsuspect,<sup>5</sup>  
 Friendly to man, far from deceit or guile.  
 What fear I then, rather what know to fear  
 Under this ignorance of good and evil,  
 Of God or death, of law or penalty?  
 775 Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine,  
 Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,  
 Of virtue<sup>o</sup> to make wise: what hinders then  
 To reach, and feed at once both body and mind?"  
 So saying, her rash hand in evil hour  
 780 Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat.<sup>6</sup>  
 Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat  
 Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,  
 That all was lost. Back to the thicket slunk  
 The guilty serpent, and well might, for Eve  
 785 Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else  
 Regarded, such delight till then, as seemed,  
 In fruit she never tasted, whether true  
 Or fancied so, through expectation high  
 Of knowledge, nor was godhead from her thought.  
 790 Greedily she engorged without restraint,  
 And knew not eating death:<sup>7</sup> satiate at length,  
 And heightened as with wine, jocund<sup>o</sup> and boon,<sup>o</sup>  
 Thus to herself she pleasingly began:  
 "O sov'reign, virtuous, precious of all trees  
 795 In Paradise, of operation blest



To sapience, hitherto obscured, infamed,<sup>8</sup>  
And thy fair fruit let hang, as to no end  
Created; but henceforth my early care,  
800 Shall tend thee, and the fertile burden ease  
Of thy full branches offered free to all;  
Till dieted by thee I grow mature  
In knowledge, as the gods who all things know;  
Though others envy what they cannot give;  
805 For had the gift been theirs,<sup>9</sup> it had not here  
Thus grown. Experience, next to thee I owe,  
Best guide; not following thee, I had remained  
In ignorance, thou open'st wisdom's way,  
And giv'st access, though secret<sup>o</sup> she retire.  
810 And I perhaps am secret;<sup>o</sup> Heav'n is high,  
High and remote to see from thence distinct  
Each thing on earth; and other care perhaps  
May have diverted from continual watch  
Our great Forbidder, safe with all his spies  
815 About him. But to Adam in what sort<sup>o</sup>  
Shall I appear? Shall I to him make known  
As yet my change, and give him to partake  
Full happiness with me, or rather not,  
But keep the odds<sup>o</sup> of knowledge in my power  
820 Without copartner? so to add what wants<sup>o</sup>  
In female sex, the more to draw his love,  
And render me more equal, and perhaps,  
A thing not undesirable, sometime  
Superior; for inferior who is free?<sup>1</sup>  
825 This may be well: but what if God have seen,  
And death ensue? Then I shall be no more,  
And Adam wedded to another Eve,  
Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;  
A death to think. Confirmed then I resolve,  
830 Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe:

So dear I love him, that with him all deaths  
I could endure, without him live no life."

835 So saying, from the tree her step she turned,  
But first low reverence done, as to the power  
That dwelt within,<sup>2</sup> whose presence had infused  
Into the plant sciential<sup>o</sup> sap, derived  
From nectar, drink of gods. Adam the while  
Waiting desirous her return, had wove  
Of choicest flow'rs a garland to adorn  
840 Her tresses, and her rural labors crown,  
As reapers oft are wont<sup>o</sup> their harvest queen.  
Great joy he promised to his thoughts, and new  
Solace in her return, so long delayed;  
Yet oft his heart, divine of<sup>o</sup> something ill,  
845 Misgave him; he the falt'ring measure<sup>o</sup> felt;  
And forth to meet her went, the way she took  
That morn when first they parted; by the Tree  
Of Knowledge he must pass; there he her met,  
Scarce from the tree returning; in her hand  
850 A bough of fairest fruit that downy smiled,  
New gathered, and ambrosial<sup>o</sup> smell diffused.  
To him she hasted, in her face excuse  
Came prologue,<sup>3</sup> and apology to prompt,  
Which with bland<sup>o</sup> words at will she thus addressed.  
855 "Hast thou not wondered, Adam, at my stay?  
Thee I have missed, and thought it long, deprived  
Thy presence, agony of love till now  
Not felt, nor shall be twice, for never more  
Mean I to try, what rash untried I sought,  
860 The pain of absence from thy sight. But strange  
Hath been the cause, and wonderful to hear:  
This tree is not as we are told, a tree  
Of danger tasted,<sup>o</sup> nor to evil unknown  
Op'ning the way, but of divine effect  
865 To open eyes, and make them gods who taste;

And hath been tasted such: the serpent wise,  
 Or<sup>o</sup> not restrained as we, or not obeying,  
 Hath eaten of the fruit, and is become,  
 Not dead, as we are threatened, but thenceforth  
 870 Endued with human voice and human sense,  
 Reasoning to admiration,<sup>o</sup> and with me  
 Persuasively<sup>o</sup> hath so prevailed, that I  
 Have also tasted, and have also found  
 Th' effects to correspond, opener mine eyes,  
 875 Dim erst,<sup>o</sup> dilated spirits, ampler heart,  
 And growing up to godhead; which for thee  
 Chiefly I sought, without thee can despise.  
 For bliss, as thou hast part, to me is bliss,  
 Tedious, unshared with thee, and odious soon.  
 880 Thou therefore also taste, that equal lot  
 May join us, equal joy, as equal love;  
 Lest thou not tasting, different degree<sup>o</sup>  
 Disjoin us, and I then too late renounce  
 Deity for thee, when fate will not permit."<sup>4</sup>  
 885     Thus Eve with count'nance blithe her story told;  
 But in her cheek distemper<sup>5</sup> flushing glowed.  
 On th' other side, Adam, soon as he heard  
 The fatal trespass done by Eve, amazed,<sup>o</sup>  
 Astonied<sup>o</sup> stood and blank, while horror chill  
 890 Ran through his veins, and all his joints relaxed;  
 From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve  
 Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed:  
 Speechless he stood and pale, till thus at length  
 First to himself he inward silence broke:  
 895     "O fairest of creation, last and best  
 Of all God's works, creature in whom excelled  
 Whatever can to sight or thought be formed,  
 Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!  
 How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,  
 900 Defaced, deflow'ed, and now to death devote?<sup>o</sup>

Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress  
 The strict forbiddance, how to violate  
 The sacred<sup>o</sup> fruit forbidd'n! Some cursèd fraud  
 Of enemy hath beguiled thee, yet unknown,  
 905 And me with thee hath ruined, for with thee  
 Certain my resolution is to die;  
 How can I live without thee, how forgo  
 Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined,  
 To live again in these wild woods forlorn?  
 910 Should God create another Eve, and I  
 Another rib afford, yet loss of thee  
 Would never from my heart; no no, I feel  
 The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,  
 915 Bone of my bone thou art,<sup>6</sup> and from thy state  
 Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe."  
 So having said, as one from sad dismay  
 Recomforted, and after thoughts disturbed  
 Submitting to what seemed remédiless,  
 Thus in calm mood his words to Eve he turned:  
 920 "Bold deed thou hast presumed, advent'rous Eve,  
 And peril great provoked, who thus hast dared  
 Had it been only coveting to eye  
 That sacred fruit, sacred<sup>o</sup> to abstinence,  
 Much more to taste it under ban to touch.  
 925 But past who can recall, or done undo?  
 Not God omnipotent, nor fate; yet so  
 Perhaps thou shalt not die, perhaps the fact<sup>o</sup>  
 Is not so heinous now, foretasted fruit,  
 Profaned first by the serpent, by him first  
 930 Made common and unhallowed ere our taste;  
 Nor yet on him found deadly, he yet lives,  
 Lives, as thou saidst, and gains to live as man  
 Higher degree of life, inducement strong  
 To us, as likely tasting to attain  
 935 Proportional ascent, which cannot be

But to be gods, or angels demigods.  
Nor can I think that God, Creator wise,  
Though threat'ning, will in earnest so destroy  
Us his prime creatures, dignified so high,  
940 Set over all his works, which in our fall,  
For us created, needs with us must fail,  
Dependent made; so God shall uncreate,  
Be frustrate, do, undo, and labor lose,  
Not well conceived of God, who though his power  
945 Creation could repeat, yet would be loath  
Us to abolish, lest the Adversary<sup>o</sup>  
Triumph and say; 'Fickle their state whom God  
Most favors, who can please him long? Me first  
He ruined, now mankind; whom will he next?'  
950 Matter of scorn, not to be given the Foe.  
However I with thee have fixed my lot,  
Certain<sup>o</sup> to undergo like doom; if death  
Consort<sup>o</sup> with thee, death is to me as life;  
So forcible within my heart I feel  
955 The bond of nature draw me to my own,  
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;  
Our state cannot be severed, we are one,  
One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself."  
So Adam, and thus Eve to him replied:  
960 "O glorious trial of exceeding<sup>7</sup> love,  
Illustrious evidence, example high!  
Engaging me to emulate, but short  
Of thy perfection, how shall I attain,  
Adam, from whose dear side I boast me sprung,  
965 And gladly of our union hear thee speak,  
One heart, one soul in both; whereof good proof  
This day affords, declaring thee resolved,  
Rather than death or aught<sup>o</sup> than death more dread  
Shall separate us, linked in love so dear,  
970 To undergo with me one guilt, one crime,

If any be, of tasting this fair fruit,  
Whose virtue, <sup>o</sup> for of good still good proceeds,  
Direct, or by occasion <sup>o</sup> hath presented  
This happy trial of thy love, which else  
975 So eminently never had been known.  
Were it <sup>o</sup> I thought death menaced would ensue <sup>o</sup>  
This my attempt, I would sustain alone  
The worst, and not persuade thee, rather die  
Deserted, than oblige <sup>o</sup> thee with a fact <sup>o</sup>  
980 Pernicious to thy peace, chiefly assured  
Remarkably so late of thy so true,  
So faithful love unequaled; <sup>8</sup> but I feel  
Far otherwise th' event, <sup>o</sup> not death, but life  
Augmented, opened eyes, new hopes, new joys,  
985 Taste so divine, that what of sweet before  
Hath touched my sense, flat seems to this, and  
harsh.  
On my experience, Adam, freely taste,  
And fear of death deliver to the winds."  
So saying, she embraced him, and for joy  
990 Tenderly wept, much won that he his love  
Had so ennobled, as of choice to incur  
Divine displeasure for her sake, or death.  
In recompense (for such compliance bad  
Such recompense best merits) from the bough  
995 She gave him of that fair enticing fruit  
With liberal hand: he scrupled not to eat  
Against his better knowledge, not deceived, <sup>9</sup>  
But fondly <sup>o</sup> overcome with female charm.  
Earth trembled from her entrails, as again  
1000 In pangs, and nature gave a second groan;  
Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops  
Wept at completing of the mortal sin  
Original; <sup>1</sup> while Adam took no thought,  
Eating his fill, nor Eve to iterate <sup>o</sup>  
1005

Her former trespass feared, the more to soothe  
Him with her loved society, that now  
As with new wine intoxicated both  
They swim in mirth, and fancy that they feel  
Divinity within them breeding wings  
1010 Wherewith to scorn the earth: but that false fruit  
Far other operation first displayed,  
Carnal desire inflaming, he on Eve  
Began to cast lascivious eyes, she him  
As wantonly repaid; in lust they burn:  
1015 Till Adam thus 'gan Eve to dalliance move:  
    "Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste,  
And elegant, of sapience<sup>2</sup> no small part,  
Since to each meaning savor we apply,  
And palate call judicious; I the praise  
1020 Yield thee, so well this day thou hast purveyed.<sup>o</sup>  
Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstained  
From this delightful fruit, nor known till now  
True relish, tasting; if such pleasure be  
In things to us forbidden, it might be wished,  
1025 For this one tree had been forbidden ten.  
But come, so well refreshed, now let us play,  
As meet<sup>o</sup> is, after such delicious fare;  
For never did thy beauty since the day  
I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorned  
1030 With all perfections, so inflame my sense  
With ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now  
Than ever, bounty of this virtuous tree."  
    So said he, and forbore not glance or toy<sup>o</sup>  
Of amorous intent, well understood  
1035 Of<sup>o</sup> Eve, whose eye darted contagious fire.  
Her hand he seized, and to a shady bank,  
Thick overhead with verdant roof embow'ed  
He led her nothing loath; flow'rs were the couch,  
Pansies, and violets, and asphodel,  
1040

And hyacinth, earth's freshest softest lap.  
 There they their fill of love and love's disport  
 Took largely, of their mutual guilt the seal,  
 The solace of their sin, till dewy sleep  
 Oppressed them, wearied with their amorous play.  
 1045 Soon as the force of that fallacious fruit,  
 That with exhilarating vapor bland<sup>o</sup>  
 About their spirits had played, and inmost powers  
 Made err, was now exhaled, and grosser sleep  
 Bred of unkindly fumes,<sup>o</sup> with conscious dreams  
 1050 Encumbered,<sup>o</sup> now had left them, up they rose  
 As from unrest, and each the other viewing,  
 Soon found their eyes how opened, and their minds  
 How darkened; innocence, that as a veil  
 Had shadowed them from knowing ill, was gone,  
 1055 Just confidence, and native righteousness,  
 And honor from about them, naked left  
 To guilty shame: he<sup>o</sup> covered, but his robe  
 Uncovered more. So rose the Danite strong  
 Hercúlean Samson from the harlot-lap  
 1060 Of Philistéan Dálilah, and waked  
 Shorn of his strength,<sup>3</sup> they destitute and bare  
 Of all their virtue: silent, and in face  
 Confounded long they sat, as stricken mute,  
 Till Adam, though not less than Eve abashed,  
 1065 At length gave utterance to these words constrained:  
<sup>o</sup>  
 "O Eve, in evil<sup>4</sup> hour thou didst give ear  
 To that false worm, of whomsoever taught  
 To counterfeit man's voice, true in our fall,  
 False in our promised rising; since our eyes  
 1070 Opened we find indeed, and find we know  
 Both good and evil, good lost and evil got,<sup>5</sup>  
 Bad fruit of knowledge, if this be to know,  
 Which leaves us naked thus, of honor void,



Of innocence, of faith, of purity,  
1075 Our wonted<sup>o</sup> ornaments now soiled and stained,  
And in our faces evident the signs  
Of foul concupiscence;<sup>6</sup> whence evil store;  
Even shame, the last of evils; of the first  
Be sure then. How shall I behold the face  
1080 Henceforth of God or angel, erst with joy  
And rapture so oft beheld? Those heav'nly shapes  
Will dazzle now this earthly, with their blaze  
Insufferably bright. O might I here  
In solitude live savage, in some glade  
1085 Obscured, where highest woods impenetrable  
To star or sunlight, spread their umbrage<sup>o</sup> broad,  
And brown as evening: cover me ye pines,  
Ye cedars, with innumerable boughs  
Hide me, where I may never see them more.  
1090 But let us now, as in bad plight, devise  
What best may for the present serve to hide  
The parts of each from other, that seem most  
To shame obnoxious,<sup>o</sup> and unseemliest seen,  
Some tree whose broad smooth leaves together  
1095       sewed,  
And girded on our loins, may cover round  
Those middle parts, that this newcomer, shame,  
There sit not, and reproach us as unclean."  
      So counseled he, and both together went  
Into the thickest wood, there soon they chose  
1100 The fig tree,<sup>z</sup> not that kind for fruit renowned,  
But such as at this day to Indians known  
In Malabar or Deccan spreads her arms  
Branching so broad and long, that in the ground  
The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow  
1105 About the mother tree, a pillared shade  
High overarched, and echoing walks between;  
There oft the Indian herdsman shunning heat

Shelters in cool, and tends his pasturing herds  
At loopholes cut through thickest shade: those  
1110 leaves  
They gathered, broad as Amazonian targe,<sup>o</sup>  
And with what skill they had, together sewed,  
To gird their waist, vain covering if to hide  
Their guilt and dreaded shame. O how unlike  
To that first naked glory. Such of late  
1115 Columbus found th' American so girt  
With feathered cincture,<sup>o</sup> naked else and wild,  
Among the trees on isles and woody shores.  
Thus fenced, and as they thought, their shame in  
part  
Covered, but not at rest or ease of mind,  
1120 They sat them down to weep, nor only tears  
Rained at their eyes, but high winds worse within  
Began to rise, high passions, anger, hate,  
Mistrust, suspicion, discord, and shook sore  
Their inward state of mind, calm region once  
1125 And full of peace, now tossed and turbulent:  
For understanding ruled not, and the will  
Heard not her lore, both in subjection now  
To sensual appetite, who from beneath  
Usurping over sov'reign reason claimed  
1130 Superior sway: from thus distempered breast,<sup>8</sup>  
Adam, estranged<sup>o</sup> in look and altered style,  
Speech intermitted<sup>o</sup> thus to Eve renewed:  
"Would thou hadst hearkened to my words, and  
stayed  
With me, as I besought thee, when that strange  
1135 Desire of wand'ring this unhappy morn,  
I know not whence possessed thee; we had then  
Remained still happy, not as now, despoiled  
Of all our good, shamed, naked, miserable.

1140

Let none henceforth seek needless cause to  
approve<sup>o</sup>

The faith they owe; when earnestly they seek  
Such proof, conclude, they then begin to fail."

To whom soon moved with touch of blame thus  
Eve:

1145 "What words have passed thy lips, Adam severe,  
Imput'st thou that to my default, or will  
Of wand'ring, as thou call'st it, which who knows  
But might as ill have happened thou being by,  
Or to thyself perhaps: hadst thou been there,  
Or here th' attempt, thou couldst not have discerned  
Fraud in the serpent, speaking as he spake;  
1150 No ground of enmity between us known,  
Why he should mean me ill, or seek to harm.  
Was I to have never parted from thy side?  
As good have grown there still a lifeless rib.  
Being as I am, why didst not thou the head  
1155 Command me absolutely not to go,  
Going into such danger as thou saidst?  
Too facile<sup>o</sup> then thou didst not much gainsay,<sup>o</sup>  
Nay didst permit, approve, and fair dismiss.  
Hadst thou been firm and fixed in thy dissent,  
1160 Neither had I transgressed, nor thou with me."

To whom then first incensed Adam replied.  
"Is this the love, is this the recompense  
Of mine to thee, ingrateful Eve, expressed<sup>o</sup>  
Immutable when thou wert lost, not I,  
1165 Who might have lived and joyed immortal bliss,  
Yet willingly chose rather death with thee:  
And am I now upbraided, as the cause  
Of thy transgressing? not enough severe,  
It seems, in thy restraint: what could I more?  
1170 I warned thee, I admonished thee, foretold  
The danger, and the lurking enemy  
That lay in wait; beyond this had been force,

And force upon free will hath here no place.  
 But confidence then bore thee on, secure<sup>o</sup>  
 1175 Either to meet no danger, or to find  
 Matter of glorious trial; and perhaps  
 I also erred in overmuch admiring  
 What seemed in thee so perfect, that I thought  
 No evil durst attempt thee, but I rue  
 1180 That error now, which is become my crime,  
 And thou th' accuser. Thus it shall befall  
 Him who to worth in women overtrusting  
 Lets her will rule; restraint she will not brook,<sup>o</sup>  
 And left to herself, if evil thence ensue,  
 1185 She first his weak indulgence will accuse."  
 Thus they in mutual accusation spent  
 The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning,  
 And of their vain contest appeared no end.

## Endnotes

- Note 1:  
 In this fourth proem (lines 1–47), after signaling his change from pastoral to tragic mode (lines 1–6), Milton emphasizes tragic elements in several classical epics: Achilles pursuing Hector three times around the wall of Troy before killing him (*Iliad* 22); Turnus fighting Aeneas over the loss of his betrothed Lavinia, and then killed by Aeneas; Odysseus ("the Greek") and Aeneas ("Cytherea's son," that is, Venus's son) tormented ("perplexed") by Neptune (Poseidon) and Juno, respectively.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Milton does not here invoke the Muse but testifies to her customary nightly visits. Milton's nephew reports that he often awoke in the morning with lines of poetry fully formed in his head, ready to dictate them to a scribe.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cloth coverings for horses; "tilting furniture": equipment for jousting; "impresses quaint": cunningly designed heraldic

devices on shields; "caparisons": ornamental trappings or armor for horses. After rejecting the classical epic subjects, Milton here rejects the familiar topics of romance.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: For a heroic poem. He proceeds to recap worries he has voiced before: that the times might not be receptive to such poems ("age too late"), that the "cold Climate" of England or his own advanced age might "damp" (benumb, dampen) his "intended wing / Depressed" (poetic flights held down, kept from soaring).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Venus, the evening star.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: At the end of Book 4.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, despite ("maugre") what might result in heavier punishments for himself.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The colures are two great circles that intersect at right angles at the poles. By circling the globe from east to west at the equator and then over the north and south poles, Satan can remain in darkness, keeping the earth between himself and the sun. "Car of Night" (line 65): the earth's shadow, imagined as the chariot of the goddess Night.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
The Black Sea. Satan's journey (lines 77–82) takes him from there to the Sea of Azov in Russia ("Maeotis"), beyond the river "Ob" in Siberia, which flows into the Arctic Ocean, then south to Antarctica; thence west from "Orontes" (a river in Syria) across the Atlantic to "Darien" (the Isthmus of Panama), then across the Pacific and Asia to India where the "Ganges" and "Indus" rivers flow.  
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The serpent is so described in Genesis 3:1.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Like Adam (8.15ff.) and Eve (4.657–58) but not Raphael (8.114–78), Satan assumes a Ptolemaic universe centered on the earth and humankind.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Graduated in steps ("gradual," 112) from vegetable to animal to rational forms (souls); compare 5.469–90.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Adam. "This" (line 132): the universe.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Satan "imbruting" himself in a snake parodies, grotesquely, the Son's incarnation in human form, as Christ.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Adam puns on "sole" as "unrivalled" and "only" (see 4.411).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Adam's compliments resemble the praises of a good wife in Proverbs 31.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The term here means unspotted or peerless; Milton has insisted at the end of Books 4 and 8 that Adam and Eve have sex.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Somewhat confusing, since Eve heard the full story of the war in Heaven and Raphael's earlier warnings; Raphael's parting words (8.630–43) overheard by Eve do not specifically mention Satan but warn Adam to resist his passion for Eve. He does, however, reiterate the charge to obey the "great command" and repel temptation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Compare with *Areopagitica*, p. 1413.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Right reason, a classical concept accommodated to Christian thought, is the God-given power to apprehend truth and moral law.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Light-footed, with overtones of "fickle" or "frivolous." "Oread" (next line): a mountain nymph. "Dryad": a wood nymph. "Delia": Diana, born on the isle of Delos, hunted with a "train" of nymphs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Having no experience of fire, not needed in Paradise. Milton may be alluding to the guilt of Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
These goddesses, like Eve, are associated with agriculture (lines 393–96)—Pales, with flocks and pastures; Pomona, with fruit trees; Ceres, with harvests—and the latter two foreshadow Eve's situation. Pomona was chased by the wood god "Vertumnus" in many guises before surrendering to him; Ceres was

impregnated by Jove with Proserpina—later carried off to Hades by Pluto.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: That is, which they had cultivated or planted for their pleasure.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The conceit of the flower-gatherer who is herself gathered evokes the story of Proserpina, to whom it was applied in 4.269–71.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The gardens of Adonis were beauty spots named for the lovely youth loved by Venus, killed by a boar, and subsequently revived; Odysseus (“Laertes’ son”) was entertained by Alcinous in his beautiful gardens; Solomon (“the sapient king”) entertained his “fair Egyptian spouse,” the Queen of Sheba, in a real garden (not “mystic,” or “feigned,” as the others were).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cattle. “Tedded”: spread out to dry, like hay.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: From Latin *rapere*, to seize, the root of both “rape” and “rapture,” underscoring the paradox of the ravisher (temporarily) ravished.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The legendary founder of Thebes, Cadmus, and his wife Harmonia (Milton’s “Hermione”) were changed to serpents when they went to Illyria in old age; Aesculapius, god of healing, sometimes came forth as a serpent from his temple in Epidaurus.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Jupiter Ammon (“Ammonian Jove”) made love to Olympias in the form of a snake and sired Alexander the Great; the Jupiter worshipped in Rome (“Capitoline”), also in serpent form, sired Scipio Africanus, the savior and great leader (“height”) of Rome.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Circe, in the *Odyssey*, transformed men to beasts and was attended by an obedient herd.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Satan either used the actual tongue of the serpent or impressed the air with his own voice.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Satan’s entire speech is couched in the extravagant praises of the Petrarchan love convention.[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: According to Pliny, serpents ate fennel to aid in shedding their skins and to sharpen their eyesight; folklore had it that they drank the milk of sheep and goats.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: There is no precedent in Genesis or the interpretative tradition for Satan's powerfully persuasive argument by analogy based on the snake's supposed experience of attaining to reason and speech by eating the forbidden fruit.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Satan continues his Petrarchan language of courtship.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Both inspired by and possessed by an evil spirit, Satan.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, until the numbers of the human race are such as to consume the food God has provided.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Blooming trees that exude the aromatic gums myrrh and balm (balsam).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God's only direct commandment (in Hebrew, *Bath Kol*, "daughter of a voice" from heaven). Otherwise (see following), they follow the moral law of nature, known to them perfectly by their unfallen reason, "our reason is our law."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Eve's formulation indicates her "sufficient" understanding of the prohibition and the conditions of life in Eden. See 3.98–101.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Drawn up to full dignity. Satan as the snake takes on the role of a Greek or Roman orator defending liberty (lines 670–72), a Demosthenes or a Cicero.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Bursting into the middle of his speech without a preface, and "upgrown" to the impassioned high style ("high") at once (lines 675–78).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, life as well as knowledge, and a better life enhanced by knowledge, which Satan in the snake presents as a magical property of the tree.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, how can it be just to forbid the knowledge of good?[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Satan's sophism invites atheism: if God forbids knowledge of good and evil he is not just, therefore not God, therefore his threat of death need not be feared.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hereafter, Satan speaks of "gods," not God.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Satan invites the aspiration to divinity, based on analogy to the supposed experience of the snake.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Both "human" and "gracious" or "kindly."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An authority or informant beyond suspicion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ate: an accepted past tense, pronounced *et*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, she is eating death and doesn't know it, or experience it yet, but also, punning, death is eating her too.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Slandered. "Sapience": both knowledge and tasting (Latin *sapere*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Like Satan, Eve now conflates gods and God, ascribing envy but also lack of power to "them."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Satan, 1.248–63, 5.790–97.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eve ends with idolatry, worship of the tree.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, excuse came like the prologue in a play, and apology ( justification, self-defense) served as prompter.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Compare Eve in soliloquy, lines 817–33.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, disorder arising from disturbance of the balance of humors in the body, intoxication.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Adam echoes Genesis 2:23–24.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The word, which Eve intends as praise, carries the implication of "excessive."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, since I have so recently been assured of your unparalleled love.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: See 1 Timothy 2:14: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The theological doctrine that all Adam's descendants are stained by Adam's sin and are thereby subject to physical death and (unless saved by grace) to damnation.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adam commends Eve for her fine ("exact") and discriminating ("elegant") taste, as a part of "sapience," which means both "taste" and "wisdom."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Samson, of the tribe of Dan, told the "harlot" Philistine Delilah that the secret of his strength (like that of Hercules) lay in his hair; she sheared it off while he slept, and when he awoke he was easily captured and blinded by his enemies.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Adam's bitter pun—Eve, evil—repudiates the actual etymology of Eve, "life," which Adam will later reaffirm (11.159–61).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Milton, like most commentators, derives the tree's name from the event (4.222, 11.84–89).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The theological term for the unruly human passions and desires seen as one effect of the Fall, a sign of abundance ("store") of evils. If "shame" (see following lines) is the "last" evil, the "first" is probably the guiltiness that produces it, according to Milton's *Christian Doctrine* (1.12).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The banyan, or Indian fig, has small leaves, but the account Milton draws on from Gerard's *Herbal* (1597) contains the details of lines 1104–11; Malabar and Deccan (line 1103) are in southern India.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The immediate psychological effects of the Fall are evident in the subjection of reason to the lower faculties of sensual appetite.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *permissible*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aversion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forerunner* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subject*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *eager*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subject*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *waiters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stewards*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mechanic art*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increased*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *equator*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turned away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *enveloped*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undecided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *among* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decision*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offshoot*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *artifices*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspicion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dutiful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conflict*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poison*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *origin*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *care*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmful, guilty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *animal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hidden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *best*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *continually*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luxuriant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrestrained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *growth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set upright*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interrupts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *allegiance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whether*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *misapplied to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *untouched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *distrustful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bespatters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outwitted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too little*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forehead*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *one alone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ever-alert*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remind, pay heed to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stand, exist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceptively attractive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overconfident*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *erring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unlucky*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luck*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heedless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *undulating*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *small trees*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handiwork*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make noisome, befoul*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *because of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plot* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *retreat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manner*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *withdrawn*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *good because stupefied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greeting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *open*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exalted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *earthly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *terrifying*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unless*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *zigzag*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deep red*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *green*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *coils*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in swelling waves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *course*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *twisting length*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *luxuriant, sportive*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *multicolored*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awe-inspiring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flattered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prelude*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hesitate about*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endowed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *able to speak*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *refrained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *regions between*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *beauty*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *inopportunistically*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *close by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guidance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *will-o'-the-wisp*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *composed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *oily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bewildered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before speaking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *courage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *threatened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *partaking of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *produce all*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impregnated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *powers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *try*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *implies*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in plain words*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *later bonds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *begrudges*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *merry* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jolly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hidden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unseen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *guise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advantage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge-producing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foreboding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heartbeat*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *fragrant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mild, coaxing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if tasted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonderfully well*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by persuasion*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rank*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stunned*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *petrified*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consecrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set apart*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Satan*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolved*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *associate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anything other*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *indirectly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *if* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *result from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bind* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *result*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *repeat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *provided*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appropriate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caress*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pleasing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnatural vapors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *oppressed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shame*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forced*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shadow, foliage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exposed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shields*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unlike himself*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *interrupted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prove*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easy, mild* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *oppose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *demonstrated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *self-assured*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accept*[Return to reference](#) °



# Book 10

## *The Argument*

Man's transgression known, the guardian angels forsake Paradise, and return up to heaven to approve their vigilance, and are approved, God declaring that the entrance of Satan could not be by them prevented. He sends his Son to judge the transgressors, who descends and gives sentence accordingly; then in pity clothes them both, and reascends. Sin and Death, sitting till then at the gates of hell, by wondrous sympathy feeling the success of Satan in this new world, and the sin by man there committed, resolve to sit no longer confined in hell, but to follow Satan their sire up to the place of man: to make the way easier from hell to this world to and fro, they pave a broad highway or bridge over chaos, according to the track that Satan first made; then preparing for earth, they meet him proud of his success returning to hell; their mutual gratulation. Satan arrives at Pandemonium, in full assembly relates with boasting his success against man; instead of applause is entertained with a general hiss by all his audience, transformed with himself also suddenly into serpents, according to his doom given in Paradise; then deluded with a show of the Forbidden Tree springing up before them, they greedily reaching to take of the fruit, chew dust and bitter ashes. The proceedings of Sin and Death; God foretells the final victory of his Son over them, and the renewing of all things; but for the present commands his angels to make several alterations in the heavens and elements. Adam more and more perceiving his fallen condition, heavily bewails, rejects the condolment of Eve; she persists and at length appeases him: then to evade the curse likely to fall on their offspring, proposes to Adam violent ways which he approves not, but conceiving better hope, puts her in mind of the late promise made them, that her seed should be revenged on the

Serpent, and exhorts her with him to seek peace of the offended Deity, by repentance and supplication.

Meanwhile the heinous and despiteful act  
Of Satan done in Paradise, and how  
He in the serpent had perverted Eve,  
Her husband she, to taste the fatal fruit,  
Was known in Heav'n; for what can scape the eye  
5 Of God all-seeing, or deceive his heart  
Omniscient, who in all things wise and just,  
Hindered not Satan to attempt the mind  
Of man, with strength entire, and free will armed,  
Complete<sup>o</sup> to have discovered and repulsed  
10 Whatever wiles of foe or seeming friend.  
For still they knew, and ought to have still<sup>o</sup>  
remembered  
The high injunction not to taste that fruit,  
Whoever tempted; which they not obeying,  
Incurred, what could they less, the penalty,  
15 And manifold in sin, deserved to fall.  
Up into Heav'n from Paradise in haste  
Th' angelic guards ascended, mute and sad  
For man, for of his state by this<sup>o</sup> they knew,  
Much wond'ring how the subtle Fiend had stol'n  
20 Entrance unseen. Soon as th' unwelcome news  
From earth arrived at Heaven gate, displeased  
All were who heard, dim sadness did not spare  
That time celestial visages, yet mixed  
With pity, violated not their bliss.  
25 About the new-arrived, in multitudes  
Th' ethereal people ran, to hear and know  
How all befell: they towards the throne supreme  
Accountable made haste to make appear  
With righteous plea, their utmost vigilance,  
30 And easily approved;<sup>1</sup> when the Most High

Eternal Father from his secret cloud,  
Amidst in thunder uttered thus his voice:

35 "Assembled Angels, and ye Powers returned  
From unsuccessful charge, be not dismayed,  
Nor troubled at these tidings from the earth,  
Which your sincerest care could not prevent,  
Foretold so lately what would come to pass,  
When first this tempter crossed the gulf from Hell.  
I told ye then he should prevail and speed<sup>o</sup>  
40 On his bad errand, man should be seduced  
And flattered out of all, believing lies  
Against his Maker; no decree of mine  
Concurring to necessitate his fall,  
Or touch with lightest moment<sup>2</sup> of impulse  
45 His free will, to her own inclining left  
In even scale. But fall'n he is, and now  
What rests,<sup>o</sup> but that the mortal sentence pass  
On his transgression, death denounced<sup>o</sup> that day,  
Which he presumes already vain and void,  
50 Because not yet inflicted, as he feared,  
By some immediate stroke; but soon shall find  
Forbearance no acquittance ere day end.<sup>3</sup>  
Justice shall not return as bounty scorned.  
But whom send I to judge them? Whom but thee  
55 Vicegerent Son, to thee I have transferred  
All judgment, whether in Heav'n, or earth, or Hell.<sup>4</sup>  
Easy it may be seen that I intend  
Mercy colleague with justice, sending thee  
Man's friend, his mediator, his designed  
60 Both ransom and redeemer voluntary,  
And destined man himself to judge man fall'n."  
So spake the Father, and unfolding bright  
Toward the right hand his glory, on the Son  
Blazed forth unclouded deity; he full  
65 Resplendent all his Father manifest

Expressed, and thus divinely answered mild:

“Father Eternal, thine is to decree,  
Mine both in Heav’n and earth to do thy will  
Supreme, that thou in me thy Son beloved  
70 May’st ever rest well pleased. I go to judge  
On earth these thy transgressors; but thou know’st,  
Whoever judged, the worst on me must light,  
When time shall be, for so I undertook  
Before thee; and not repenting, this obtain  
75 Of right, that I may mitigate their doom  
On me derived,<sup>o</sup> yet I shall temper so  
Justice with mercy, as may illustrate most<sup>o</sup>  
Them fully satisfied, and thee appease.  
Attendance none shall need, nor train,<sup>o</sup> where none  
80 Are to behold the judgment, but the judged,  
Those two; the third best absent is condemned,  
Convict<sup>o</sup> by flight, and rebel to all law:  
Conviction to the serpent none belongs.”

Thus saying, from his radiant seat he rose  
85 Of high collateral<sup>o</sup> glory: him Thrones and Powers,  
Princedoms, and Dominations ministrant  
Accompanied to Heaven gate, from whence  
Eden and all the coast<sup>o</sup> in prospect lay.  
Down he descended straight; the speed of gods  
90 Time counts not,<sup>5</sup> though with swiftest minutes  
winged.

Now was the sun in western cadence<sup>o</sup> low  
From noon, and gentle airs due at their hour  
To fan the earth now waked, and usher in  
The evening cool, when he from wrath more cool  
95 Came the mild Judge and Intercessor both  
To sentence man: the voice of God they heard  
Now walking in the garden, by soft winds  
Brought to their ears, while day declined; they  
heard,

100 And from his presence hid themselves among  
The thickest trees, both man and wife, till God  
Approaching, thus to Adam called aloud.  
"Where art thou Adam, wont<sup>o</sup> with joy to meet  
My coming seen far off? I miss thee here,  
Not pleased, thus entertained with solitude,  
105 Where obvious duty erewhile appeared unsought:  
Or come I less conspicuous, or what change  
Absents thee, or what chance detains? Come forth."  
He came, and with him Eve, more loath, though first  
To offend, discount'nanced both, and discomposed;  
110 Love was not in their looks, either to God  
Or to each other, but apparent<sup>o</sup> guilt,  
And shame, and perturbation, and despair,  
Anger, and obstinacy, and hate, and guile.  
Whence Adam falt'ring long, thus answered brief:  
115 "I heard thee in the garden, and of thy voice  
Afraid, being naked, hid myself." To whom  
The gracious Judge without revile<sup>o</sup> replied:  
"My voice thou oft hast heard, and hast not  
feared,  
But still<sup>o</sup> rejoiced, how is it now become  
120 So dreadful to thee? That thou art naked, who  
Hath told thee? Hast thou eaten of the tree  
Whereof I gave thee charge thou shouldst not eat?"  
To whom thus Adam sore beset replied.  
"O Heav'n! in evil strait this day I stand  
125 Before my Judge, either to undergo  
Myself the total crime, or to accuse  
My other self, the partner of my life;  
Whose failing, while her faith to me remains,  
I should conceal, and not expose to blame  
130 By my complaint; but strict necessity  
Subdues me, and calamitous constraint,  
Lest on my head both sin and punishment,  
However insupportable, be all

135      Devolved;° though should I hold my peace, yet thou  
Wouldst easily detect what I conceal.  
This woman whom thou mad'st to be my help,  
And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,  
So fit, so acceptáble, so divine,  
140      That from her hand I could suspect no ill,  
And what she did, whatever in itself,  
Her doing seemed to justify the deed;  
She gave me of the tree, and I did eat."6  
    To whom the Sov'reign Presence thus replied.  
145      "Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey  
Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,  
Superior, or but equal, that to her  
Thou didst resign thy manhood, and the place  
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
150      And for thee,7 whose perfection far excelled  
Hers in all real dignity: adorned  
She was indeed, and lovely to attract  
Thy love, not thy subjection, and her gifts  
Were such as under government well seemed,  
Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part  
155      And person,8 hadst thou known thyself aright."  
    So having said, he thus to Eve in few°  
"Say woman, what is this which thou hast done?"  
    To whom sad Eve with shame nigh overwhelmed,  
160      Confessing soon, yet not before her Judge  
Bold or loquacious, thus abashed replied:  
"The serpent me beguiled and I did eat."  
    Which when the Lord God heard, without delay  
To judgment he proceeded on th' accused  
Serpent though brute, unable to transfer  
165      The guilt on him who made him instrument  
Of mischief, and polluted from the end°  
Of his creation; justly then accursed,  
As vitiated in nature:9 more to know

170 Concerned not man (since he no further knew)  
Nor altered his offense; yet God at last  
To Satan first in sin his doom applied,  
Though in mysterious terms, judged as then best:  
And on the serpent thus his curse let fall.  
175 "Because thou hast done this, thou art accursed  
Above all cattle, each beast of the field;  
Upon thy belly groveling thou shalt go,  
And dust shalt eat all the days of thy life.  
Between thee and the woman I will put  
Enmity, and between thine and her Seed;  
180 Her Seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his  
heel."<sup>1</sup>  
So spake this oracle, then verified  
When Jesus son of Mary second Eve,  
Saw Satan fall like lightning down from Heav'n,<sup>2</sup>  
Prince of the air; then rising from his grave  
185 Spoiled Principalities and Powers, triumphed  
In open show, and with ascension bright  
Captivity led captive through the air,  
The realm itself of Satan long usurped,  
Whom he shall tread at last under our feet;  
190 Ev'n he who now foretold his fatal bruise,  
And to the woman thus his sentence turned.  
"Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply  
By thy conception; children thou shalt bring  
In sorrow forth, and to thy husband's will  
195 Thine shall submit, he over thee shall rule."  
On Adam last thus judgment he pronounced.  
"Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy  
wife,  
And eaten of the tree concerning which  
I charged thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat thereof,  
200 Cursed is the ground for thy sake, thou in sorrow  
Shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life;

Thorns also and thistles it shall bring thee forth  
Unbid, and thou shalt eat th' herb of the field,  
In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,  
205 Till thou return unto the ground, for thou  
Out of the ground wast taken: know thy birth,  
For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return."

So judged he man, both judge and savior sent,  
And th' instant stroke of death denounced<sup>o</sup> that day  
210 Removed far off; then pitying how they stood  
Before him naked to the air, that now  
Must suffer change, disdained not to begin  
Thenceforth the form of servant to assume,  
As when he washed his servants' feet,<sup>3</sup> so now  
215 As father of his family he clad  
Their nakedness with skins of beasts, or<sup>o</sup> slain,  
Or as the snake with youthful coat repaid;  
And thought not much<sup>o</sup> to clothe his enemies:  
Nor he their outward only with the skins  
220 Of beasts, but inward nakedness, much more  
Opprobrious, with his robe of righteousness,  
Arraying covered from his Father's sight.  
To him with swift ascent he up returned,  
Into his blissful bosom reassumed  
225 In glory as of old, to him appeased  
All, though all-knowing, what had passed with man  
Recounted, mixing intercession sweet.  
Meanwhile ere thus was sinned and judged on earth,  
Within the gates of Hell sat Sin and Death,  
230 In counterview within the gates, that now  
Stood open wide, belching outrageous<sup>o</sup> flame  
Far into Chaos, since the Fiend passed through,  
Sin opening, who thus now to Death began:  
"O son, why sit we here each other viewing  
235 Idly, while Satan our great author<sup>o</sup> thrives  
In other worlds, and happier seat provides



For us his offspring dear? It cannot be,  
But that success attends him; if mishap,  
Ere this he had returned, with fury driv'n  
240 By his avengers, since no place like<sup>o</sup> this  
Can fit his punishment, or their revenge.  
Methinks I feel new strength within me rise,  
Wings growing, and dominion giv'n me large  
Beyond this deep; whatever draws me on,  
245 Or sympathy, or some connatural force  
Powerful at greatest distance to unite  
With secret amity things of like kind  
By secretest conveyance.<sup>4</sup> Thou my shade  
Inseparable must with me along:  
250 For Death from Sin no power can separate.  
But lest the difficulty of passing back  
Stay his return perhaps over this gulf  
Impassable, impervious,<sup>o</sup> let us try  
Advent'rous work, yet to thy power and mine  
255 Not unagreeable, to found<sup>o</sup> a path  
Over this main from Hell to that new world  
Where Satan now prevails, a monument  
Of merit high to all th' infernal host,  
Easing their passage hence, for intercourse,<sup>o</sup>  
260 Or transmigration,<sup>o</sup> as their lot shall lead.  
Nor can I miss the way, so strongly drawn  
By this new-felt attraction and instínt."

Whom thus the meager<sup>o</sup> shadow answered soon:  
265 "Go whither fate and inclination strong  
Leads thee, I shall not lag behind, nor err  
The way, thou leading, such a scent I draw  
Of carnage, prey innumerable, and taste  
The savor of death from all things there that live:  
Nor shall I to the work thou enterprisest  
270 Be wanting, but afford thee equal aid."  
So saying, with delight he snuffed the smell

Of mortal change on earth. As when a flock  
Of ravenous fowl, though many a league remote,  
Against<sup>o</sup> the day of battle, to a field,  
275 Where armies lie encamped, come flying, lured  
With scent of living carcasses designed<sup>o</sup>  
For death, the following day, in bloody fight.  
So scented the grim feature,<sup>o</sup> and upturned  
His nostril wide into the murky air,  
280 Sagacious<sup>o</sup> of his quarry from so far.  
Then both from out Hell gates into the waste  
Wide anarchy of Chaos damp and dark  
Flew diverse,<sup>o</sup> and with power (their power was  
great)  
Hovering upon the water, what they met  
285 Solid or slimy, as in raging sea  
Tossed up and down, together crowded drive  
From each side shoaling<sup>o</sup> towards the mouth of Hell.  
As when two polar winds blowing adverse  
Upon the Cronian Sea,<sup>5</sup> together drive  
290 Mountains of ice, that stop th' imagined way  
Beyond Petsora eastward, to the rich  
Cathaiian coast. The aggregated soil  
Death with his mace petrific,<sup>6</sup> cold and dry,  
As with a trident smote, and fixed as firm  
295 As Delos floating once; the rest his look  
Bound with Gorgonian rigor not to move,<sup>7</sup>  
And with asphaltic slime;<sup>o</sup> broad as the gate,  
Deep to the roots of Hell the gathered beach  
They fastened, and the mole<sup>o</sup> immense wrought on  
300 Over the foaming deep high-arched, a bridge  
Of length prodigious joining to the wall<sup>o</sup>  
Immovable of this now fenceless world  
Forfeit to Death; from hence a passage broad,  
Smooth, easy, inoffensive<sup>o</sup> down to Hell.  
305 So, if great things to small may be compared,

Xerxes,<sup>8</sup> the liberty of Greece to yoke,  
From Susa his Memnonian palace high  
Came to the sea, and over Hellespont  
Bridging his way, Europe with Asia joined,  
310 And scourged with many a stroke th' indignant  
waves.  
Now had they brought the work by wondrous art  
Pontifical,<sup>9</sup> a ridge of pendent rock  
Over the vexed<sup>o</sup> abyss, following the track  
Of Satan, to the selfsame place where he  
315 First lighted from his wing, and landed safe  
From out of Chaos to the outside bare  
Of this round world: with pins of adamant  
And chains they made all fast, too fast they made  
And durable; and now in little space  
320 The confines<sup>o</sup> met of empyrean Heav'n  
And of this world, and on the left hand Hell  
With long reach interposed; three sev'ral ways  
In sight, to each of these three places led.<sup>1</sup>  
And now their way to earth they had descried,<sup>o</sup>  
325 To Paradise first tending, when behold  
Satan in likeness of an angel bright  
Betwixt the Centaur and the Scorpion<sup>2</sup> steering  
His zenith, while the sun in Aries rose:  
Disguised he came, but those his children dear  
330 Their parent soon discerned, though in disguise.  
He, after Eve seduced, unminded<sup>o</sup> slunk  
Into the wood fast by, and changing shape  
To observe the sequel, saw his guileful act  
By Eve, though all unweeting,<sup>o</sup> seconded  
335 Upon her husband, saw their shame that sought  
Vain covertures;<sup>o</sup> but when he saw descend  
The Son of God to judge them, terrified  
He fled, not hoping to escape, but shun  
The present, fearing guilty what his wrath

340 Might suddenly inflict; that past, returned  
By night, and list'ning where the hapless pair  
Sat in their sad discourse, and various plaint,  
Thence gathered his own doom, which understood  
345 Not instant, but of future time.<sup>3</sup> With joy  
And tidings fraught, to Hell he now returned,  
And at the brink of Chaos, near the foot  
Of this new wondrous pontifice,<sup>o</sup> unhop'd  
Met who to meet him came, his offspring dear.  
350 Great joy was at their meeting, and at sight  
Of that stupendous bridge his joy increased.  
Long he admiring stood, till Sin, his fair  
Enchanting daughter, thus the silence broken:  
    "O parent, these are thy magnific deeds,  
355 Thy trophies,<sup>4</sup> which thou view'st as not thine own,  
Thou art their author and prime architect:  
For I no sooner in my heart divined,  
My heart, which by a secret harmony  
Still moves with thine, joined in connection sweet,  
That thou on earth hadst prospered, which thy looks  
360 Now also evidence, but straight<sup>o</sup> I felt  
Though distant from thee worlds between, yet felt  
That I must after thee with this thy son;  
Such fatal consequence<sup>5</sup> unites us three:  
Hell could no longer hold us in her bounds,  
365 Nor this unvoyageable gulf obscure  
Detain from following thy illustrious track.  
Thou hast achieved our liberty, confined  
Within Hell gates till now, thou us empow'rd  
To fortify thus far, and overlay  
370 With this portentous<sup>o</sup> bridge the dark abyss.  
Thine now is all this world, thy virtue<sup>o</sup> hath won  
What thy hands builded not, thy wisdom gained  
With odds<sup>o</sup> what war hath lost, and fully avenged  
375 Our foil in Heav'n; here thou shalt monarch reign,

There didst not; there let him still victor sway,  
As battle hath adjudged, from this new world  
Retiring, by his own doom alienated,  
And henceforth monarchy with thee divide  
Of all things parted by th' empyreal bounds,  
380 His quadrature, from thy orbicular world,<sup>6</sup>  
Or try<sup>o</sup> thee now more dangerous to his throne."  
Whom thus the Prince of Darkness answered glad:  
"Fair daughter, and thou son and grandchild both,  
High proof ye now have giv'n to be the race  
385 Of Satan (for I glory in the name,  
Antagonist<sup>7</sup> of Heav'n's Almighty King)  
Amplly have merited of me, of all  
Th' infernal empire, that so near Heav'n's door  
Triumphal with triumphal act<sup>8</sup> have met,  
390 Mine with this glorious work, and made one realm  
Hell and this world, one realm, one continent  
Of easy thoroughfare. Therefore while I  
Descend through darkness, on your road with ease  
To my associate powers, them to acquaint  
395 With these successes, and with them rejoice,  
You two this way, among those numerous orbs  
All yours, right down to Paradise descend;  
There dwell and reign in bliss, thence on the earth  
Dominion exercise and in the air,  
400 Chiefly on man, sole lord of all declared,  
Him first make sure your thrall,<sup>o</sup> and lastly kill.  
My substitutes I send ye, and create  
Plenipotent<sup>o</sup> on earth, of matchless might  
Issuing from me: on your joint vigor now  
405 My hold of this new kingdom all depends,  
Through Sin to Death exposed by my exploit.  
If your joint power prevail, th' affairs of Hell  
No detriment need fear, go and be strong."  
410 So saying he dismissed them, they with speed

Their course through thickest constellations held  
    Spreading their bane;° the blasted° stars looked  
    wan,  
    And planets, planet-strook,<sup>9</sup> real eclipse  
    Then suffered. Th' other way Satan went down  
    The causey° to Hell gate; on either side  
415 Disparted Chaos over-built exclaimed,  
    And with rebounding surge the bars assailed,  
    That scorned his indignation.<sup>1</sup> Through the gate,  
    Wide open and unguarded, Satan passed,  
    And all about found desolate; for those<sup>2</sup>  
420 Appointed to sit there, had left their charge,  
    Flown to the upper world; the rest were all  
    Far to the inland retired, about the walls  
    Of Pandemonium, city and proud seat  
    Of Lucifer, so by allusion° called,  
425 Of that bright star to Satan paragoned.<sup>3</sup>  
    There kept their watch the legions, while the grand<sup>4</sup>  
    In council sat, solicitous° what chance  
    Might intercept their emperor sent, so he  
    Departing gave command, and they observed.  
430 As when the Tartar from his Russian foe  
    By Astracan over the snowy plains  
    Retires, or Bactrian Sophi from the horns  
    Of Turkish crescent, leaves all waste beyond  
    The realm of Aladule, in his retreat  
435 To Tauris or Casbeen:<sup>5</sup> so these the late  
    Heav'n-banished host, left desert utmost Hell  
    Many a dark league, reduced° in careful watch  
    Round their metropolis, and now expecting  
    Each hour their great adventurer from the search  
440 Of foreign worlds: he through the midst unmarked,°  
    In show plebeian angel militant  
    Of lowest order, passed; and from the door  
    Of that Plutonian<sup>6</sup> hall, invisible

445      Ascended his high throne, which under state<sup>o</sup>  
Of richest texture spread, at th' upper end  
Was placed in regal luster. Down a while  
He sat, and round about him saw unseen:  
At last as from a cloud his fulgent head  
And shape star-bright appeared, or brighter, clad  
450      With what permissive<sup>o</sup> glory since his fall  
Was left him, or false glitter: all amazed  
At that so sudden blaze the Stygian<sup>7</sup> throng  
Bent their aspéct, and whom they wished beheld,  
Their mighty chief returned: loud was th' acclaim:  
455      Forth rushed in haste the great consulting peers,  
Raised from their dark divan,<sup>8</sup> and with like joy  
Congratulant approached him, who with hand  
Silence, and with these words attention won:  
460      "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues,  
Powers,  
For in possession such, not only of right,  
I call ye<sup>9</sup> and declare ye now, returned  
Successful beyond hope, to lead ye forth  
Triumphant out of this infernal pit  
Abominable, accurst, the house of woe,  
465      And dungeon of our tyrant: now possess,  
As lords, a spacious world, to our native Heaven  
Little inferior, by my adventure hard  
With peril great achieved. Long were to tell  
What I have done, what suffered, with what pain  
470      Voyaged th' unreal,<sup>o</sup> vast, unbounded deep  
Of horrible confusion, over which  
By Sin and Death a broad way now is paved  
To expedite your glorious march; but I  
Toiled out my uncouth<sup>o</sup> passage, forced to ride  
475      Th' untractable abyss, plunged in the womb  
Of unoriginal<sup>1</sup> Night and Chaos wild,  
That jealous of their secrets fiercely opposed

My journey strange, with clamorous uproar  
Protesting Fate<sup>2</sup> supreme; thence how I found  
480 The new-created world, which fame in Heav'n  
Long had foretold, a fabric wonderful  
Of absolute perfection, therein man  
Placed in a paradise, by our exile  
Made happy: him by fraud I have seduced  
485 From his Creator, and the more to increase  
Your wonder, with an apple. He thereat  
Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv'n up  
Both his beloved man and all his world,  
To Sin and Death a prey, and so to us,  
490 Without our hazard, labor, or alarm,  
To range in, and to dwell, and over man  
To rule, as over all he should have ruled.  
True is, me also he hath judged, or rather  
Me not, but the brute serpent in whose shape  
495 Man I deceived; that which to me belongs,  
Is enmity, which he will put between  
Me and mankind; I am to bruise his heel;  
His seed, when is not set, shall bruise my head:  
A world who would not purchase with a bruise,  
500 Or much more grievous pain? Ye have th' account  
Of my performance: what remains, ye gods,  
But up and enter now into full bliss."<sup>3</sup>

So having said, a while he stood, expecting  
Their universal shout and high applause  
505 To fill his ear, when contrary he hears  
On all sides, from innumerable tongues  
A dismal universal hiss, the sound  
Of public scorn; he wondered, but not long  
Had leisure, wond'ring at himself now more;  
510 His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,  
His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining  
Each other, till supplanted<sup>o</sup> down he fell



A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,  
 Reluctant,<sup>o</sup> but in vain, a greater power  
 515 Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned,  
 According to his doom: he would have spoke,  
 But hiss for hiss returned with forkèd tongue  
 To forkèd tongue, for now were all transformed  
 Alike, to serpents<sup>4</sup> all as accessories  
 520 To his bold riot:<sup>o</sup> dreadful was the din  
 Of hissing through the hall, thick swarming now  
 With complicated<sup>o</sup> monsters, head and tail,  
 Scorpion and asp, and amphisbaena dire,  
 Cerastes horned, hydrus, and ellops drear,  
 525 And dipsas<sup>5</sup> (not so thick swarmed once the soil  
 Bedropped with blood of Gorgon, or the isle  
 Ophiusa)<sup>6</sup> but still greatest he the midst,  
 Now dragon grown, larger than whom the sun  
 Engendered in the Pythian vale on slime,  
 530 Huge Python,<sup>7</sup> and his power no less he seemed  
 Above the rest still to retain; they all  
 Him followed issuing forth to th' open field,  
 Where all yet left of that revolted rout  
 Heav'n-fall'n, in station stood or just array,<sup>8</sup>  
 535 Sublime<sup>o</sup> with expectation when to see  
 In triumph issuing forth their glorious chief;  
 They saw, but other sight instead, a crowd  
 Of ugly serpents; horror on them fell,  
 And horrid sympathy; for what they saw,  
 540 They felt themselves now changing; down their  
 arms,  
 Down fell both spear and shield, down they as fast,  
 And the dire hiss renewed, and the dire form  
 Caught by contagion, like in punishment,  
 As in their crime. Thus was th' applause they meant,  
 545 Turned to exploding hiss, triumph to shame

Cast on themselves from their own mouths. There  
stood  
A grove hard by, sprung up with this their change,  
His will who reigns above, to aggravate  
Their penance,<sup>o</sup> laden with fair fruit, like that  
550 Which grew in Paradise, the bait of Eve  
Used by the Tempter: on that prospect strange  
Their earnest eyes they fixed, imagining  
For one forbidden tree a multitude  
Now ris'n, to work them further woe or shame;  
555 Yet parched with scalding thirst and hunger fierce,  
Though to delude them sent, could not abstain,  
But on they rolled in heaps, and up the trees  
Climbing, sat thicker than the snaky locks  
That curled Megaera:<sup>9</sup> greedily they plucked  
560 The fruitage fair to sight, like that which grew  
Near that bituminous lake where Sodom flamed;<sup>1</sup>  
This more delusive, not the touch, but taste  
Deceived; they fondly<sup>o</sup> thinking to allay  
Their appetite with gust,<sup>o</sup> instead of fruit  
565 Chewed bitter ashes, which th' offended taste  
With spattering noise rejected: oft they assayed,<sup>o</sup>  
Hunger and thirst constraining, drugged as oft,  
With hatefulest disrelish writhed their jaws  
With soot and cinders filled; so oft they fell  
570 Into the same illusion, not as man  
Whom they triumphed once lapsed.<sup>2</sup> Thus were they  
plagued  
And worn with famine, long and ceaseless hiss,  
Till their lost shape, permitted, they resumed,<sup>3</sup>  
Yearly enjoined, some say, to undergo  
575 This annual humbling certain numbered days,  
To dash their pride, and joy for man seduced.  
However some tradition they dispersed  
Among the heathen of their purchase<sup>o</sup> got,

580 And fabled how the serpent, whom they called  
Ophion with Eurynome, the wide-  
Encroaching Eve perhaps, had first the rule  
Of high Olympus, thence by Saturn driv'n  
And Ops, ere yet Dictaeon Jove was born.<sup>4</sup>  
Meanwhile in Paradise the hellish pair  
585 Too soon arrived, Sin there in power before,  
Once actual, now in body, and to dwell  
Habitual habitant;<sup>5</sup> behind her Death  
Close following pace for pace, not mounted yet  
On his pale horse:<sup>6</sup> to whom Sin thus began:  
590 "Second of Satan sprung, all-conquering Death,  
What think'st thou of our empire now, though  
earned  
With travail<sup>o</sup> difficult, not better far  
Than still at Hell's dark threshold to have sat watch,  
Unnamed, undreaded, and thyself half-starved?"  
595 Whom thus the Sin-born monster answered soon:  
"To me, who with eternal famine pine,  
Alike is Hell, or Paradise, or Heaven,  
There best, where most with ravin<sup>o</sup> I may meet;  
Which here, though plenteous, all too little seems  
600 To stuff this maw, this vast unhidebound corpse."<sup>7</sup>  
To whom th' incestuous mother thus replied:  
"Thou therefore on these herbs, and fruits, and  
flow'rs  
Feed first, on each beast next, and fish, and fowl,  
No homely morsels, and whatever thing  
605 Thy scythe of Time mows down, devour unspared,  
Till I in man residing through the race,  
His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect,  
And season him thy last and sweetest prey."  
This said, they both betook them several ways,  
610 Both to destroy, or unimmortal make  
All kinds, and for destruction to mature

Sooner or later; which th' Almighty seeing,  
 From his transcendent seat the saints among,  
 To those bright orders uttered thus his voice:  
 615 "See with what heat these dogs of Hell advance  
 To waste and havoc<sup>o</sup> yonder world, which I  
 So fair and good created, and had still  
 Kept in that state, had not the folly of man  
 Let in these wasteful furies, who impute  
 620 Folly to me, so doth the Prince of Hell  
 And his adherents, that with so much ease  
 I suffer them to enter and possess  
 A place so heav'nly, and conniving seem  
 To gratify my scornful enemies,  
 625 That laugh, as if transported with some fit  
 Of passion, I to them had quitted all,<sup>o</sup>  
 At random yielded up to their misrule;  
 And know not that I called and drew them thither  
 My hellhounds, to lick up the draff<sup>o</sup> and filth  
 630 Which man's polluting sin with taint hath shed  
 On what was pure, till crammed and gorged, nigh  
 burst  
 With sucked and glutted offal, at one sling  
 Of thy victorious arm, well-pleasing Son,  
 Both Sin, and Death, and yawning grave at last  
 635 Through Chaos hurled, obstruct the mouth of Hell  
 Forever, and seal up his ravenous jaws.  
 Then Heav'n and earth renewed shall be made pure  
 To sanctity that shall receive no stain:  
 Till then the curse pronounced on both precedes."<sup>o</sup>  
 640 He ended, and the heav'nly audience loud  
 Sung hallelujah, as the sound of seas,  
 Through multitude that sung: "Just are thy ways,  
 Righteous are thy decrees on all thy works;  
 Who can extenuate<sup>o</sup> thee? Next, to the Son,  
 645 Destined restorer of mankind, by whom  
 New heav'n and earth shall to the ages rise,

Or down from Heav'n descend." Such was their song,  
While the Creator calling forth by name  
His mighty angels gave them several charge,  
650 As sorted<sup>o</sup> best with present things. The sun  
Had first his precept so to move, so shine,  
As might affect the earth with cold and heat  
Scarce tolerable, and from the north to call  
Decrepit winter, from the south to bring  
655 Solstitial summer's heat. To the blank<sup>o</sup> moon  
Her office they prescribed, to th' other five  
Their planetary motions and aspects<sup>8</sup>  
In sextile, square, and trine, and opposite,  
Of noxious efficacy, and when to join  
660 In synod<sup>o</sup> unbenign, and taught the fixed<sup>o</sup>  
Their influence malignant when to show'r,  
Which of them rising with the sun, or falling,  
Should prove tempestuous:<sup>o</sup> to the winds they set  
Their corners, when with bluster to confound  
665 Sea, air, and shore, the thunder when to roll  
With terror through the dark aerial hall.  
Some say<sup>9</sup> he bid his angels turn askance  
The poles of earth twice ten degrees and more  
From the sun's axle; they with labor pushed  
670 Oblique the centric globe:<sup>o</sup> some say the sun  
Was bid turn reins from th' equinoctial road<sup>o</sup>  
Like distant breadth to Taurus<sup>1</sup> with the sev'n  
Atlantic Sisters, and the Spartan Twins  
Up to the Tropic Crab; thence down amain<sup>o</sup>  
675 By Leo and the Virgin and the Scales,  
As deep as Capricorn, to bring in change  
Of seasons to each clime; else<sup>o</sup> had the spring  
Perpetual smiled on earth with vernant<sup>o</sup> flow'rs,  
Equal in days and nights, except to those  
680 Beyond the polar circles; to them day  
Had unbenighted<sup>o</sup> shone, while the low sun

To recompense his distance, in their sight  
Had rounded still<sup>o</sup> th' horizon, and not known  
Or<sup>o</sup> east or west, which had forbid the snow  
685 From cold Estotiland, and south as far  
Beneath Magellan.<sup>2</sup> At that tasted fruit  
The sun, as from Thyestean banquet, turned  
His course intended;<sup>3</sup> else how had the world  
690 Inhabited, though sinless, more than now,  
Avoided pinching cold and scorching heat?  
These changes in the heav'ns, though slow,  
produced  
Like change on sea and land, sideral blast,<sup>4</sup>  
Vapor, and mist, and exhalation hot,  
Corrupt and pestilent: now from the north  
695 Of Norumbega, and the Samoed shore  
Bursting their brazen dungeon, armed with ice  
And snow and hail and stormy gust and flaw,<sup>o</sup>  
Boreas and Caecias and Argestes loud  
And Thrascias rend the woods and seas upturn;  
700 With adverse blast upturns them from the south  
Notus and Afer black with thund'rous clouds  
From Serraliona,<sup>5</sup> thwart of these as fierce  
Forth rush the Levant and the ponent<sup>o</sup> winds  
Eurus and Zephyr with their lateral noise,  
705 Sirocco and Libecchio.<sup>6</sup> Thus began  
Outrage from lifeless things; but Discord first  
Daughter of Sin, among th' irrational,  
Death introduced through fierce antipathy:<sup>7</sup>  
Beast now with beast gan war, and fowl with fowl,  
710 And fish with fish; to graze the herb<sup>o</sup> all leaving,  
Devour'd each other; nor stood much in awe  
Of man, but fled him, or with count'nance grim  
Glared on him passing: these were from without  
The growing miseries, which Adam saw  
715 Already in part, though hid in gloomiest shade,

To sorrow abandoned, but worse felt within,  
And in a troubled sea of passion tossed,  
Thus to disburden sought with sad complaint:  
720 "O miserable of happy!<sup>8</sup> Is this the end  
Of this new glorious world, and me so late  
The glory of that glory, who now become  
Accurst of blessed, hide me from the face  
Of God, whom to behold was then my height  
725 Of happiness: yet well, if here would end  
The misery, I deserved it, and would bear  
My own deservings; but this will not serve;  
All that I eat or drink, or shall beget,  
Is propagated<sup>9</sup> curse. O voice once heard  
730 Delightfully, 'Increase and multiply,'  
Now death to hear! For what can I increase  
Or multiply, but curses on my head?  
Who of all ages to succeed, but feeling  
The evil on him brought by me, will curse  
735 My head: 'Ill fare our ancestor impure,  
For this we may thank Adam'; but his thanks  
Shall be the execration; so besides  
Mine own that bide upon me, all from me  
Shall with a fierce reflux on me redound,  
740 On me as on their natural center light  
Heavy, though in their place.<sup>1</sup> O fleeting joys  
Of Paradise, dear bought with lasting woes!  
Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay  
To mold me man, did I solicit thee  
745 From darkness to promote me, or here place  
In this delicious garden? As my will  
Concurred not to my being, it were but right  
And equal<sup>o</sup> to reduce me to my dust,  
Desirous to resign, and render back  
750 All I received, unable to perform  
Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold

The good I sought not. To the loss of that,  
Sufficient penalty, why hast thou added  
The sense of endless woes? Inexplicable  
Thy justice seems; yet to say truth, too late  
755 I thus contest; then should have been refused  
Those terms whatever, when they were proposed:  
Thou<sup>2</sup> didst accept them; wilt thou enjoy the good,  
Then cavil<sup>o</sup> the conditions? And though God  
760 Made thee without thy leave, what if thy son  
Prove disobedient, and reprov'd, retort,  
'Wherefore didst thou beget me? I sought it not':  
Wouldst thou admit for his contempt of thee  
That proud excuse? Yet him not thy election,<sup>o</sup>  
But natural necessity begot.  
765 God made thee of choice his own, and of his own  
To serve him, thy reward was of his grace,  
Thy punishment then justly is at his will.  
Be it so, for I submit, his doom is fair,  
That dust I am, and shall to dust return:  
770 O welcome hour whenever! Why delays  
His hand to execute what his decree  
Fixed on this day? Why do I overlive,  
Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out  
To deathless pain? How gladly would I meet  
775 Mortality my sentence, and be earth  
Insensible, how glad would lay me down  
As in my mother's lap! There I should rest  
And sleep secure; his dreadful voice no more  
Would thunder in my ears, no fear of worse  
780 To me and to my offspring would torment me  
With cruel expectation. Yet one doubt  
Pursues me still, lest all I<sup>o</sup> cannot die,  
Lest that pure breath of life, the spirit of man  
Which God inspired, cannot together perish  
785 With this corporeal clod; then in the grave,



Or in some other dismal place, who knows  
But I shall die a living death? O thought  
Horrid, if true! Yet why? It was but breath  
Of life that sinned; what dies but what had life  
790 And sin? The body properly hath neither.  
All of me then shall die:<sup>3</sup> let this appease  
The doubt, since human reach no further knows.  
For though the Lord of all be infinite,  
Is his wrath also? Be it, man is not so,  
795 But mortal doomed. How can he exercise  
Wrath without end on man whom death must end?  
Can he make deathless death? That were to make  
Strange contradiction, which to God himself  
Impossible is held, as argument  
800 Of weakness, not of power. Will he draw out,  
For anger's sake, finite to infinite  
In punished man, to satisfy his rigor  
Satisfied never; that were to extend  
His sentence beyond dust and nature's law,  
805 By which all causes else according still  
To the reception of their matter act,  
Not to th' extent of their own sphere.<sup>4</sup> But say  
That death be not one stroke, as I supposed,  
Bereaving<sup>o</sup> sense, but endless misery  
810 From this day onward, which I feel begun  
Both in me, and without<sup>o</sup> me, and so last  
To perpetuity; ay me, that fear  
Comes thund'ring back with dreadful revolution<sup>o</sup>  
On my defenseless head; both Death and I  
815 Am found eternal, and incorporate<sup>o</sup> both,  
Nor I on my part single, in me all  
Posterity stands cursed: fair patrimony  
That I must leave ye, sons; O were I able  
To waste it all myself, and leave ye none!  
820 So disinherited how would ye bless

Me now your curse! Ah, why should all mankind  
For one man's fault thus guiltless be condemned,  
If guiltless? But from me what can proceed,  
But all corrupt, both mind and will depraved,  
825 Not to do<sup>o</sup> only, but to will the same  
With me? How can they then acquitted stand  
In sight of God? Him after all disputes  
Forced I absolve: all my evasions vain  
And reasonings, though through mazes, lead me still  
830 But to my own conviction: first and last  
On me, me only, as the source and spring  
Of all corruption, all the blame lights due;  
So might the wrath.<sup>5</sup> Fond<sup>o</sup> wish! Couldst thou  
support  
That burden heavier than the earth to bear,  
835 Than all the world much heavier, though divided  
With that bad woman? Thus what thou desir'st,  
And what thou fear'st, alike destroys all hope  
Of refuge, and concludes thee miserable  
Beyond all past example and future,  
840 To Satan only like both crime and doom.  
O conscience, into what abyss of fears  
And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which  
I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged!"  
Thus Adam to himself lamented loud  
845 Through the still night, not now, as ere man fell,  
Wholesome and cool, and mild, but with black air  
Accompanied, with damps<sup>o</sup> and dreadful gloom,  
Which to his evil conscience represented  
All things with double terror: on the ground  
850 Outstretched he lay, on the cold ground, and oft  
Cursed his creation, Death as oft accused  
Of tardy execution, since denounced<sup>o</sup>  
The day of his offense: "Why comes not Death,"  
Said he, "with one thrice-acceptable stroke  
855

To end me? Shall Truth fail to keep her word,  
Justice divine not hasten to be just?  
But Death comes not at call, Justice divine  
Mends not her slowest pace for prayers or cries.  
860 O woods, O fountains, hillocks, dales, and bow'rs,  
With other echo late I taught your shades  
To answer, and resound far other song."<sup>6</sup>  
Whom thus afflicted when sad Eve beheld,  
Desolate where she sat, approaching nigh,  
Soft words to his fierce passion she assayed;<sup>o</sup>  
865 But her with stern regard he thus repelled:  
    "Out of my sight, thou serpent,<sup>7</sup> that name best  
    Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false  
    And hateful; nothing wants,<sup>o</sup> but that thy shape,  
    Like his, and color serpentine may show  
870 Thy inward fraud, to warn all creatures from thee  
    Henceforth; lest that too heav'nly form, pretended<sup>8</sup>  
    To hellish falsehood, snare them. But<sup>o</sup> for thee  
    I had persisted happy, had not thy pride  
    And wand'ring vanity, when least was safe,  
875 Rejected my forewarning, and disdained  
    Not to be trusted, longing to be seen  
    Though by the Devil himself, him overweening<sup>o</sup>  
    To overreach, but with the serpent meeting  
    Fooled and beguiled, by him thou, I by thee,  
880 To trust thee from my side, imagined wise,  
    Constant, mature, proof against all assaults,  
    And understood not all was but a show  
    Rather than solid virtue, all but a rib  
    Crooked by nature, bent, as now appears,  
885 More to the part sinister<sup>o</sup> from me drawn,  
    Well if thrown out, as supernumerary  
    To my just number found.<sup>9</sup> O why did God,  
    Creator wise, that peopled highest heav'n  
    With Spirits masculine,<sup>1</sup> create at last

890 This novelty on earth, this fair defect  
Of nature,<sup>2</sup> and not fill the world at once  
With men as angels without feminine,  
Or find some other way to generate  
Mankind? This mischief had not then befall'n,  
895 And more that shall befall, innumerable  
Disturbances on earth through female snares,  
And strait conjunction<sup>3</sup> with this sex: for either  
He never shall find out fit mate, but such  
As some misfortune brings him, or mistake,  
900 Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain  
Through her perverseness, but shall see her gained  
By a far worse, or if she love, withheld  
By parents, or his happiest choice too late  
Shall meet, already linked and wedlock-bound  
905 To a fell<sup>o</sup> adversary, his hate or shame:  
Which infinite calamity shall cause  
To human life, and household peace confound."  
He added not, and from her turned, but Eve  
Not so repulsed, with tears that ceased not flowing,  
910 And tresses all disordered, at his feet  
Fell humble, and embracing them, besought  
His peace, and thus proceeded in her plaint:  
"Forsake me not thus, Adam, witness Heav'n  
What love sincere, and reverence in my heart  
915 I bear thee, and unweeting<sup>o</sup> have offended,  
Unhappily deceived; thy suppliant  
I beg, and clasp thy knees;<sup>4</sup> bereave me not,  
Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid,  
Thy counsel in this uttermost distress,  
920 My only strength and stay: forlorn of thee,  
Whither shall I betake me, where subsist?  
While yet we live, scarce one short hour perhaps,  
Between us two let there be peace, both joining,  
As joined in injuries, one enmity  
925

Against a foe by doom express<sup>o</sup> assigned us,  
That cruel serpent: on me exercise not  
Thy hatred for this misery befall'n,  
On me already lost, me than thyself  
930 More miserable; both have sinned, but thou  
Against God only, I against God and thee,  
And to the place of judgment will return,  
There with my cries importune Heaven, that all  
The sentence from thy head removed may light  
On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,  
935 Me me only just object of his ire."<sup>5</sup>

She ended weeping, and her lowly plight,<sup>o</sup>  
Immovable till peace obtained from fault  
Acknowledged and deplored, in Adam wrought  
Commiseration; soon his heart relented  
940 Towards her, his life so late and sole delight,  
Now at his feet submissive in distress,  
Creature so fair his reconciliation seeking,  
His counsel whom she had displeased, his aid;  
As one disarmed, his anger all he lost,  
945 And thus with peaceful words upraised her soon:  
"Unwary, and too desirous, as before,  
So now of what thou know'st not, who desir'st  
The punishment all on thyself; alas!  
Bear thine own first, ill able to sustain  
950 His full wrath whose thou feel'st as yet least part,  
And my displeasure bear'st so ill."<sup>6</sup> If prayers  
Could alter high decrees, I to that place  
Would speed before thee, and be louder heard,  
That on my head all might be visited,  
955 Thy frailty and infirmer sex forgiv'n,  
To me committed and by me exposed.  
But rise, let us no more contend, nor blame  
Each other, blamed enough elsewhere, but strive  
In offices of love, how we may light'n  
960

Each other's burden in our share of woe;  
 Since this day's death denounced, if aught I see,  
 Will prove no sudden, but a slow-paced evil,  
 A long day's dying to augment our pain,  
 And to our seed (O hapless seed!) derived."°  
 965     To whom thus Eve, recovering heart, replied:  
 "Adam, by sad experiment I know  
 How little weight my words with thee can find,  
 Found so erroneous, thence by just event°  
 Found so unfortunate; nevertheless,  
 970     Restored by thee, vile as I am, to place  
 Of new acceptance, hopeful to regain  
 Thy love, the sole contentment of my heart  
 Living or dying, from thee I will not hide  
 What thoughts in my unquiet breast are ris'n,  
 975     Tending to some relief of our extremes,  
 Or end, though sharp and sad, yet tolerable,  
 As in our evils, and of easier choice.  
 If care of our descent perplex us most, 7  
 Which must be born to certain woe, devoured  
 980     By Death at last, and miserable it is  
 To be to others cause of misery,  
 Our own begotten, and of our loins to bring  
 Into this cursèd world a woeful race,  
 That after wretched life must be at last  
 985     Food for so foul a monster, in thy power  
 It lies, yet ere conception to prevent  
 The race unblest, to being yet unbegot.  
 Childless thou art, childless remain; so Death  
 Shall be deceived° his glut, and with us two  
 990     Be forced to satisfy his rav'nous maw.  
 But if thou judge it hard and difficult,  
 Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain  
 From love's due rites, nuptial embraces sweet,  
 And with desire to languish without hope,  
 995

Before the present object<sup>8</sup> languishing  
With like desire, which would be misery  
And torment less than none of what we dread,  
Then both ourselves and seed at once to free  
From what we fear for both, let us make short,<sup>o</sup>  
1000 Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply  
With our own hands his office on ourselves;  
Why stand we longer shivering under fears,  
That show no end but death, and have the power,  
Of many ways to die the shortest choosing,  
1005 Destruction with destruction to destroy."

She ended here, or vehement despair  
Broke off the rest; so much of death her thoughts  
Had entertained, as dyed her cheeks with pale.  
But Adam with such counsel nothing swayed,  
1010 To better hopes his more attentive mind  
Laboring had raised, and thus to Eve replied.

"Eve thy contempt of life and pleasure seems  
To argue in thee something more sublime  
And excellent than what thy mind contemns;<sup>o</sup>  
1015 But self-destruction therefore sought, refutes  
That excellence thought in thee, and implies,  
Not thy contempt, but anguish and regret  
For loss of life and pleasure overloved.  
Or if thou covet death, as utmost end  
1020 Of misery, so thinking to evade  
The penalty pronounced, doubt not but God  
Hath wiselier armed his vengeful ire than so  
To be forestalled; much more I fear lest death  
So snatched will not exempt us from the pain  
1025 We are by doom to pay: rather such acts  
Of contumácy<sup>o</sup> will provoke the Highest  
To make death in us live. Then let us seek  
Some safer resolution, which methinks  
I have in view, calling to mind with heed  
1030

Part of our sentence, that thy seed shall bruise  
The serpent's head; piteous amends, unless  
Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand foe  
Satan, who in the serpent hath contrived  
1035 Against us this deceit: to crush his head  
Would be revenge indeed; which will be lost  
By death brought on ourselves, or childless days  
Resolved, as thou proposest; so our foe  
Shall scape his punishment ordained, and we  
1040 Instead shall double ours upon our heads.  
No more be mentioned then of violence  
Against ourselves, and willful barrenness,  
That cuts us off from hope, and savors only  
Rancor and pride, impatience and despite,  
Reluctance<sup>o</sup> against God and his just yoke  
1045 Laid on our necks. Remember with what mild  
And gracious temper he both heard and judged  
Without wrath or reviling; we expected  
Immediate dissolution, which we thought  
Was meant by death that day, when lo, to thee  
1050 Pains only in childbearing were foretold,  
And bringing forth, soon recompensed with joy,  
Fruit of thy womb:<sup>9</sup> on me the curse aslope  
Glanced on the ground,<sup>1</sup> with labor I must earn  
My bread; what harm? Idleness had been worse;  
1055 My labor will sustain me; and lest cold  
Or heat should injure us, his timely care  
Hath unbesought provided, and his hands  
Clothed us unworthy, pitying while he judged;  
How much more, if we pray him, will his ear  
1060 Be open, and his heart to pity incline,  
And teach us further by what means to shun  
Th' inclement seasons, rain, ice, hail, and snow,  
Which now the sky with various face begins  
To show us in this mountain, while the winds  
1065



Blow moist and keen, shattering<sup>o</sup> the graceful locks  
Of these fair spreading trees; which bids us seek  
Some better shroud,<sup>o</sup> some better warmth to cherish  
Our limbs benumbed, ere this diurnal star<sup>o</sup>  
1070 Leave cold the night, how we his gathered beams  
Reflected, may with matter sere<sup>o</sup> foment,  
Or by collision of two bodies grind  
The air attrite to fire,<sup>2</sup> as late the clouds  
Justling or pushed with winds rude in their shock  
Tine<sup>o</sup> the slant lightning, whose thwart<sup>o</sup> flame driv'n  
1075 down  
Kindles the gummy bark of fir or pine,  
And sends a comfortable heat from far,  
Which might supply<sup>o</sup> the sun: such fire to use,  
And what may else be remedy or cure  
To evils which our own misdeeds have wrought,  
1080 He will instruct us praying, and of grace  
Beseeching him, so as we need not fear  
To pass commodiously this life, sustained  
By him with many comforts, till we end  
In dust, our final rest and native home.  
1085 What better can we do, than to the place  
Repairing where he judged us, prostrate fall  
Before him reverent, and there confess  
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears  
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air  
1090 Frequenting,<sup>o</sup> sent from hearts contrite, in sign  
Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek.  
Undoubtedly he will relent and turn  
From his displeasure; in whose look serene,  
When angry most he seemed and most severe,  
1095 What else but favor, grace, and mercy shone?"  
So spake our father penitent, nor Eve  
Felt less remorse: they forthwith to the place  
Repairing where he judged them prostrate fell

1100 Before him reverent, and both confessed  
Humbly their faults, and pardon begged, with tears  
Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air  
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign  
Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The angels, “accountable” for guarding Eden, rush to God’s throne to explain that they had exercised “utmost vigilance”; their plea is readily accepted (“easily approved”).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The smallest weight that would tip the scales.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A proverb: “Abstinence from enforcing a debt is not release from it.” Next line: My justice must not be scorned as my generosity has been.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See John 5:22: “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Son’s descent is immediate; Raphael had taken much of the morning to travel from Heaven to earth (8.110–14).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare Adam’s speech in Genesis 3:12, and the elements Milton adds of complaint, veiled accusation of God, and self-exculpation; also compare Eve’s answer in Genesis 3:13 and in lines 159–62 below.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See 1 Corinthians 11:8–9: “For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. / Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Role and character (persona), as in a drama.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The serpent was “unable to transfer” (line 165) his own guilt in being “polluted” from his proper end and nature onto

Satan, who made him “instrument,” so he was “justly . . . accursed,” but the terms of that judgment have a “mysterious” (line 173) or hidden meaning that applies to Satan.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: This is the so-called protoevangelion or judgment of the Serpent (Satan) that contains at the same time the promise of the Redeemer (“her Seed”); Adam and Eve are led to understand it by degrees.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Christ’s comment to his disciples (Luke 10:18: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven”), and also Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 4:8, to the following lines, 185–88.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Philippians 2:7: “[Christ] took upon him the form of a servant”; John 13:5: “he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sin feels an attraction (“sympathy”) drawing two things together, or an innate (“connatural”) force, linking her to Satan.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Arctic Ocean; the “imagined way” (lines 291–93) is the Northeast Passage to North China (“Cathay”) from Pechora (“Petsora”), a river in Siberia, which Henry Hudson could only imagine (in 1608) because it was blocked with ice.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Turning things to stone.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Anything the Gorgon Medusa looked upon turned to stone. Death’s materials are the “cold and dry” elements; his mace is associated with Neptune’s “trident,” which was said to have “fixed” the floating Greek island of Delos.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Persian king Xerxes ordered the sea whipped when it destroyed the bridge of ships he built over the Hellespont (linking Europe and Asia) so as to invade Greece. “Susa” (next line): Xerxes’ winter residence, founded by the mythical prince Memnon.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Bridge-building, with a pun on “papal” (the pope had the title “pontifex maximus”).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The golden staircase or chain linking the universe to Heaven, the new bridge linking it to Hell, and the passage through the spheres down to earth.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Satan steered between Sagittarius ("the Centaur") and Scorpio, thereby passing through Anguis, the constellation of the Serpent.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This evidently refers to the complaints and discourse of Adam and Eve (lines 720–1104 below), which therefore precede Satan's return to Hell (lines 345–609).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Objects or persons captured in battle were displayed in the Triumphs accorded Roman generals and emperors who had won a great military victory; the term casts Satan's conquests in Eden in such terms.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Connection of cause and effect.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Revelation 21:16 describes the City of God as "foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth"; Satan's new conquest, earth, is an orb. Sin may imply its superiority (being a sphere).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The name "Satan" means "adversary" or "antagonist."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The repeated word emphasizes that Satan is enacting a Triumph, passing over a triumphal bridge rather than through triumphal arches; the scene would likely evoke the "Roman" Triumph and triumphal arches celebrating the Restoration of Charles II.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Suffering not merely a temporary eclipse but a real loss of light, as from the malign influence of an adverse planet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Chaos is the instinctive enemy of all order, so hostile to the bridge built over it.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sin and Death.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Satan before his fall was Lucifer, the Lightbringer, and the morning star is named Lucifer because it is compared ("paragoned") to him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The "grand infernal peers" who govern (see 2.507).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5:  
The simile, begun in line 431, compares the fallen angels, withdrawn from other regions of Hell to guard their metropolis, to Tartars retiring before attacking Russians and Persians retreating before the attacking Turks. "Astracan": a region west of the Caspian Sea inhabited by Russia and defended against Turks and Tartars; "Aladule": the region of Armenia, from which the last Persian ruler, called Anadule, a "Bactrian Sophi" (Persian shah), was forced to retreat from the Turks, to Tabriz ("Tauris") and Kazvin ("Casbeen").  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pertaining to Pluto, ruler of the classical underworld.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Of the river Styx in Hades, the river of hate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Turkish Council of State.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, you now have these titles not only by right but by possession (from the conquest on earth).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Having no origin, uncreated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Protesting both to and against Fate.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ironically, the final word of Satan's proud, triumphal speech rhymes with and so prepares for the "hiss" (line 508) that will soon greet him, as his would-be triumph is turned by God to abject humiliation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The scene recalls Dante's vivid description of the thieves metamorphosed to snakes in *Inferno* 24–25.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The "scorpion" has a venomous sting at the tip of the tail; "asp" is a small Egyptian viper; "amphisbaena" supposedly had a head at each end; "Cerastes" is an asp with horny projections over each eye; "hydrus" and "ellops" were mythical water snakes; "dipsas" was a mythical snake whose bite caused raging thirst.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Drops of blood from the Gorgon Medusa's severed head turned into snakes; "Ophiusa" in Greek means "isle of snakes."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A gigantic serpent engendered from the slime left by Deucalion's flood; Apollo slew him and appropriated the "Pythian" vale and shrine at Delphi.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, at their posts or on parade.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: One of three Furies with snaky hair.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sodom apples reputedly grew on the spot where the accursed city once stood, now the Dead Sea ("that bituminous lake"); the apples look good but dissolve into ashes when eaten.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unlike man who fell once, they try to eat the dissolving apples over and over again.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: God permitted them to regain their "lost shape" as fallen angels; but they are undergoing a slower, natural metamorphosis into grosser substance by their continuing commitment to and choice of evil.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Titan Ophion (whose name means "snake") and his wife Eurynome ("the widereacher") ruled Olympus until driven away by "Saturn" and his wife Ops, who were in turn overthrown by Jove, who lived on the mountain Dicte. Milton suggests that these may represent versions of the story transmitted by the fallen angels to the pagans (lines 578–79).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sin was present in Eden in the actual sins committed by Adam and Eve; now she will dwell there in her own body and in all other bodies.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Revelation 6:8: "behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Its hide does not cling close to its bones: Death's hunger is such that it can never fill its skin.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Astrological positions. The next line names positions of 60, 90, 120, and 180 degrees, respectively.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The poem offers both a Ptolemaic and a Copernican explanation of the shifts made in the cosmic order so as to change the prelapsarian eternal spring. The Copernican explanation (offered first) proposes that the earth's axis is now tilted (lines 668–71); the Ptolemaic explanation is that the plane of the sun's orbit is tilted (lines 671–78).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lines 673–78 trace the sun's apparent (Ptolemaic) journey from Aries through Taurus and the rest of the zodiac over the course of the year.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The region of the Straits of Magellan, at the tip of South America. "Estotiland" (line 686): northern Labrador.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As a revenge, Atreus killed one of the sons of his brother Thyestes and served him in a banquet to that brother; the sun changed course to avoid the sight.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Malevolent stellar influences. "Norumbega" (line 696): northern New England and maritime Canada; "Samoed" Shore: northeastern Siberia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
Winds (701–6) from the south ("Notus," "Afer") come from Sierra Leone ("Serraliona") on the west coast of Africa; "Boreas," "Caecias," "Argestes," and "Thrascias" are all winds that blow from the north, northeast, and northwest, bursting from the cave ("brazen dungeon") in which Aeolus imprisoned the winds (lines 695–700).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Crossing the north and south winds ("thwart," line 703) are the "Levant" (from the east) and "Eurus" (east southeast), from the west "Zephyr," the west wind; "Sirocco" and "Libeccio" come from the southeast and southwest, respectively.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Discord (personified as daughter of Sin) introduced Death among the animals ("th' irrational") by stirring up "antipathy" among them.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: Adam's complaint begins with the classical formula for a tragic fall, or *peripeteia*, the change from happiness to misery.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Handed down from one generation to the next.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, Adam's "own" curse will remain ("bide") with him, and the curse ("execration") of "all" who descend from him will "redound" on him as to their "natural center"; objects so placed ("in their place") were thought to be weightless ("light"), but these curses will be "heavy."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adam turns from addressing God to address himself.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: After debating the matter, Adam concludes that the soul dies with the body; Milton in his *Christian Doctrine* worked out this "mortalist" doctrine, with its corollary, that both soul and body rise at the Last Judgment.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Adam convinces himself that "finite" matter (line 802) cannot suffer "infinite" punishment by an axiom of traditional philosophy, that by "nature's law" (line 805) the actions of agents are limited by the nature of the object they act upon.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See the Son's offer to accept all humankind's guilt (3.236–41), and Eve's similar offer (10.933–36).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See their morning hymn (5.153–208).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Adam's bitter, misogynistic outcry begins with reference to the patristic notion that the name Eve, aspirated, means "serpent."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Held in front, as a cover or mask.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It was supposed that Adam had thirteen ribs on the left side, so he could spare one for the creation of Eve and still retain the proper ("just") number, twelve.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Miltonic bard indicated that angels can assume at will "either sex . . . or both" (1.424).[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Aristotle had claimed that the female is a defective male.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Close, hard-pressing, binding union: Adam then projects the problems of future marriages.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Eve assumes the posture of the classical suppliant, clasping the knees of the one she begs from.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Eve also echoes the Son's offer (3.236–41). Compare Adam's cry (10.832–34).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, you could hardly bear God's "full wrath" since you are so distraught when you feel only the smallest part of it, and you can "ill" bear my displeasure.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, if concern for our descendants most torment ("perplex") us.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Eve herself, who then projects her own frustrated desire if they were to forgo sex.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Adam's prophetic echo of Elizabeth's address to Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1:41–42), "blessed is the fruit of thy womb," lays the ground for their fuller understanding of the promise about the "seed" of the woman.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the curse, like a spear that almost missed its target, glanced aside and hit the ground.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adam projects the invention of fire: they might, by striking two bodies together, rub ("attrite") the air into fire by friction; or else (lines 1070–71) focus reflected sunbeams (through some equivalent of glass) on dry ("sere") matter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The final six lines repeat, almost word for word, lines 1086–92, as the poet describes Adam's proposed gesture of repentance carried out in every detail.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *fully equipped*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *this time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *succeed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *remains*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *decreed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *diverted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *best show*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attendants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proved guilty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *placed side by side*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *region*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *falling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *used before*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily seen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *abuse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fallen on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *few words*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *purpose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *announced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *too much*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unrestrained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *father*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as well as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *impenetrable*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *establish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passing back and forth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *emigration*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *emaciated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anticipating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marked out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *form, shape*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *keenly smelling, wise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in different directions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assembling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitch*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *pier*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outer shell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *free from obstacle*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stormy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boundaries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *perceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnoticed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unaware*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *garments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bridge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at once*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marvelous, ominous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *power, courage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *advantage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *discover by experience*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slave*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with full power*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *poison* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ruined*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *causeway*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *metaphor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *anxious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drawn together*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unnoticed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *canopy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *permitted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unformed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *strange*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tripped up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *struggling*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revolt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tangled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raised up*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *relish*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *attempted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plunder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *labor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prey*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plunder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *handed everything over*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dregs*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *takes precedence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disparage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suited*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *white, pale*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *conjunction* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fixed stars*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *productive of storms*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the earth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the equator*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *at full speed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *otherwise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *without any night*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *squall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *opposing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grass*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *just*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *object frivolously to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *choice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *all of me*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taking away*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outside of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *return*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *made one body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *act*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolish*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noxious vapors*[Return to reference](#) °

- °: *pronounced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempted*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *is lacking*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *except*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overconfident*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the left side*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bitter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unintentionally*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *explicit judgment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *posture*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *passed on*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consequence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheated of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lose no time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *despises*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contempt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resistance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scattering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shelter*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dry*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ignite* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *slanting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *take the place of*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *filling*[Return to reference](#) °

# Book 11

## *The Argument*

The Son of God presents to his Father the prayers of our first parents now repenting, and intercedes for them: God accepts them, but declares that they must no longer abide in Paradise; sends Michael with a band of Cherubim to dispossess them; but first to reveal to Adam future things: Michael's coming down. Adam shows to Eve certain ominous signs; he discerns Michael's approach, goes out to meet him: the angel denounces their departure. Eve's lamentation. Adam pleads, but submits: the angel leads him up to a high hill, sets before him in vision what shall happen till the Flood.

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood<sup>1</sup>  
Praying, for from the mercy-seat above  
Prevenient grace<sup>2</sup> descending had removed  
The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh  
5 Regenerate grow instead, that sighs now breathed  
Unutterable, which the spirit of prayer  
Inspired, and winged for Heav'n with speedier flight  
Than loudest oratory: yet their port  
Not of mean suitors, nor important less  
10 Seemed their petition, than when th' ancient pair  
In fables old, less ancient yet than these,  
Deucalion and chaste Pyrrha to restore  
The race of mankind drowned, before the shrine  
Of Themis stood devout.<sup>3</sup> To Heav'n their prayers  
15 Flew up, nor missed the way, by envious winds  
Blown vagabond or frustrate:<sup>4</sup> in they passed  
Dimensionless through heav'nly doors; then clad  
With incense, where the golden altar fumed,

By their great Intercessor, came in sight  
Before the Father's throne: them the glad<sup>o</sup> Son  
20 Presenting, thus to intercede began:  
    "See Father, what firstfruits on earth are sprung  
From thy implanted grace in man, these sighs  
And prayers, which in this golden censer, mixed  
With incense, I thy priest before thee bring,  
25 Fruits of more pleasing savor from thy seed  
Sown with contrition in his heart, than those  
Which his own hand manuring<sup>o</sup> all the trees  
Of Paradise could have produced, ere fall'n  
From innocence. Now therefore bend thine ear  
30 To supplication, hear his sighs though mute;  
Unskillful with what words to pray, let me  
Interpret for him, me his advocate  
And propitiation, all his works on me  
Good or not good ingraft,<sup>5</sup> my merit those  
35 Shall perfect, and for these my death shall pay.  
Accept me, and in me from these receive  
The smell of peace toward mankind, let him live  
Before thee reconciled, at least his days  
Numbered, though sad, till death, his doom (which I  
40 To mitigate thus plead, not to reverse)  
To better life shall yield him, where with me  
All my redeemed may dwell in joy and bliss,  
Made one with me as I with thee am one."  
    To whom the Father, without cloud, serene:  
45 "All thy request for man, accepted Son,  
Obtain, all thy request was my decree:  
But longer in that Paradise to dwell,  
The law I gave to nature him forbids:  
Those pure immortal elements that know  
50 No gross, no unharmonious mixture foul,  
Eject him tainted now, and purge him off  
As a distemper, gross to air as gross,

And mortal food,<sup>6</sup> as may dispose him best  
For dissolution<sup>o</sup> wrought by sin, that first  
55 Distempered all things, and of incorrupt  
Corrupted. I at first with two fair gifts  
Created him endowed, with happiness  
And immortality: that fondly<sup>o</sup> lost,  
This other served but to eternize woe;  
60 Till I provided death; so death becomes  
His final remedy, and after life  
Tried in sharp tribulation, and refined  
By faith and faithful works, to second life,  
Waked in the renovation<sup>z</sup> of the just,  
65 Resigns him up with Heav'n and earth renewed.  
But let us call to synod<sup>o</sup> all the blest  
Through Heav'n's wide bounds; from them I will not  
hide  
My judgments, how with mankind I proceed,  
As how with peccant<sup>o</sup> angels late they saw;  
70 And in their state, though firm, stood more  
confirmed."

He ended, and the Son gave signal high  
To the bright minister that watched, he blew  
His trumpet, heard in Oreb<sup>8</sup> since perhaps  
When God descended, and perhaps once more  
75 To sound at general doom. Th' angelic blast  
Filled all the regions: from their blissful bow'rs  
Of amarantine<sup>o</sup> shade, fountain or spring,  
By the waters of life, where'er they sat  
In fellowships of joy, the sons of light  
80 Hasted, resorting to the summons high,  
And took their seats; till from his throne supreme  
Th' Almighty thus pronounced his sov'reign will:  
"O sons, like one of us man is become  
To know both good and evil, since his taste  
85 Of that defended<sup>o</sup> fruit; but let him boast



His knowledge of good lost, and evil got,  
Happier, had it sufficed him to have known  
Good by itself, and evil not at all.  
He sorrows now, repents, and prays contrite,  
90 My motions<sup>o</sup> in him; longer than they move,  
His heart I know, how variable and vain  
Self-left.<sup>9</sup> Lest therefore his now bolder hand  
Reach also of the Tree of Life, and eat,  
And live forever, dream at least to live  
95 Forever,<sup>1</sup> to remove him I decree,  
And send him from the garden forth to till  
The ground whence he was taken, fitter soil.  
"Michael, this my behest have thou in charge,  
Take to thee from among the Cherubim  
100 Thy choice of flaming warriors, lest the Fiend  
Or<sup>o</sup> in behalf of man, or to invade  
Vacant possession some new trouble raise:  
Haste thee, and from the Paradise of God  
Without remorse<sup>o</sup> drive out the sinful pair,  
105 From hallowed ground th' unholy, and denounce  
To them and to their progeny from thence  
Perpetual banishment. Yet lest they faint<sup>o</sup>  
At the sad sentence rigorously urged,  
For I behold them softened and with tears  
110 Bewailing their excess,<sup>o</sup> all terror hide.  
If patiently thy bidding they obey,  
Dismiss them not disconsolate; reveal  
To Adam what shall come in future days,  
As I shall thee enlighten,<sup>2</sup> intermix  
115 My cov'nant in the woman's seed renewed;  
So send them forth, though sorrowing, yet in peace:  
And on the east side of the garden place,  
Where entrance up from Eden easiest climbs,  
Cherubic watch, and of a sword the flame  
120 Wide-waving, all approach far off to fright,

And guard all passage to the Tree of Life:<sup>3</sup>  
 Lest Paradise a receptacle prove  
 To spirits foul, and all my trees their prey,  
 With whose stol'n fruit man once more to delude."  
 125     He ceased; and th' archangelic power prepared  
 For swift descent, with him the cohort bright  
 Of watchful Cherubim; four faces each<sup>4</sup>  
 Had, like a double Janus, all their shape  
 Spangled with eyes more numerous than those  
 130     Of Argus, and more wakeful than to drowse,  
 Charmed with Arcadian pipe, the pastoral reed  
 Of Hermes, or his opiate rod. Meanwhile  
 To resalute the world with sacred light  
 Leucóthea<sup>5</sup> waked, and with fresh dewes embalmed  
 135     The earth, when Adam and first matron Eve  
 Had ended now their orisons, and found  
 Strength added from above, new hope to spring  
 Out of despair, joy, but with fear yet linked;  
 Which thus to Eve his welcome words renewed:  
 140     "Eve, easily may faith admit, that all  
 The good which we enjoy, from Heav'n descends;  
 But that from us aught should ascend to Heav'n  
 So prevalent<sup>o</sup> as to concern the mind  
 Of God high-blest, or to incline his will,  
 145     Hard to belief may seem; yet this will prayer,  
 Or one short sigh of human breath, upborne  
 Ev'n to the seat of God. For since I sought  
 By prayer th' offended Deity to appease,  
 Kneeled and before him humbled all my heart,  
 150     Methought I saw him placable and mild,  
 Bending his ear; persuasion in me grew  
 That I was heard with favor; peace returned  
 Home to my breast, and to my memory  
 His promise, that thy seed shall bruise our foe;  
 155     Which then not minded in dismay, yet now

Assures me that the bitterness of death  
 Is past, and we shall live. Whence hail to thee,  
 Eve rightly called, mother of all mankind,  
 Mother of all things living, since by thee  
 160 Man is to live, and all things live for man."<sup>6</sup>  
 To whom thus Eve with sad demeanor meek:  
 "Ill-worthy I such title should belong  
 To me transgressor, who for thee ordained  
 A help, became thy snare; to me reproach  
 165 Rather belongs, distrust and all dispraise:  
 But infinite in pardon was my Judge,  
 That I who first brought death on all, am graced  
 The source of life; next favorable thou,  
 Who highly thus to entitle me vouchsaf'st,  
 170 Far other name deserving. But the field  
 To labor calls us now with sweat imposed,  
 Though after sleepless night; for see the morn,  
 All unconcerned with our unrest, begins  
 Her rosy progress smiling; let us forth,  
 175 I never from thy side henceforth to stray,  
 Where'er our day's work lies, though now enjoined  
 Laborious, till day droop; while here we dwell,  
 What can be toilsome in these pleasant walks?  
 Here let us live, though in fall'n state, content."  
 180 So spake, so wished much-humbled Eve, but fate  
 Subscribed not; nature first gave signs,<sup>o</sup> impressed  
 On bird, beast, air, air suddenly eclipsed<sup>o</sup>  
 After short blush of morn; nigh in her sight  
 The bird of Jove, stooped from his airy tow'r,<sup>7</sup>  
 185 Two birds of gayest plume before him drove:  
 Down from a hill the beast that reigns in woods,<sup>8</sup>  
 First hunter then, pursued a gentle brace,<sup>o</sup>  
 Goodliest of all the forest, hart and hind;  
 Direct to th' eastern gate was bent their flight.  
 190 Adam observed, and with his eye the chase

Pursuing, not unmoved to Eve thus spake:  
    "O Eve, some further change awaits us nigh,  
Which Heaven by these mute signs in nature shows  
Forerunners of his purpose, or to warn  
195 Us haply too secure<sup>o</sup> of our discharge  
From penalty, because from death released  
Some days; how long, and what till then our life,  
Who knows, or more than this, that we are dust,  
And thither must return and be no more.  
200 Why else this double object in our sight  
Of flight pursued in th' air and o'er the ground  
One way the selfsame hour? Why in the east  
Darkness ere day's mid-course, and morning light  
More orient<sup>o</sup> in yon western cloud that draws  
205 O'er the blue firmament a radiant white,  
And slow descends, with something heav'nly  
    fraught."<sup>o</sup>  
    He erred not, for by this<sup>o</sup> the heav'nly bands  
Down from a sky of jasper lighted<sup>o</sup> now  
In Paradise, and on a hill made alt,<sup>o</sup>  
210 A glorious apparition, had not doubt  
And carnal fear that day dimmed Adam's eye.  
Not that more glorious, when the angels met  
Jacob in Mahanaim,<sup>9</sup> where he saw  
The field pavilioned with his guardians bright;  
215 Nor that which on the flaming mount appeared  
In Dothan, covered with a camp of fire,  
Against the Syrian king, who to surprise  
One man, assassin-like had levied war,  
War unproclaimed.<sup>1</sup> The princely hierarch<sup>2</sup>  
220 In their bright stand, there left his powers to seize  
Possession of the garden; he alone,  
To find where Adam sheltered, took his way,  
Not unperceived of Adam, who to Eve,  
While the great visitant approached, thus spake:  
225

“Eve, now expect great tidings, which perhaps  
Of us will soon determine,<sup>o</sup> or impose  
New laws to be observed; for I descry  
From yonder blazing cloud that veils the hill  
One of the heav’nly host, and by his gait  
230 None of the meanest, some great potentate  
Or of the Thrones above, such majesty  
Invests him coming; yet not terrible,  
That I should fear, nor sociably mild,  
As Raphael, that I should much confide,  
235 But solemn and sublime, whom not to offend,  
With reverence I must meet, and thou retire.”  
He ended; and th’ Archangel soon drew nigh,  
Not in his shape celestial, but as man  
Clad to meet man; over his lucid arms  
240 A military vest of purple flowed  
Livelier than Meliboean, or the grain  
Of Sarra,<sup>3</sup> worn by kings and heroes old  
In time of truce; Iris<sup>4</sup> had dipped the woof;  
His starry helm unbuckled showed him prime  
245 In manhood where youth ended; by his side  
As in a glistening zodiac<sup>o</sup> hung the sword,  
Satan’s dire dread, and in his hand the spear.  
Adam bowed low, he kingly from his state<sup>o</sup>  
Inclined not, but his coming thus declared:  
250 “Adam, Heav’n’s high behest no preface needs:  
Sufficient that thy prayers are heard, and Death,  
Then due by sentence when thou didst transgress,  
Defeated<sup>o</sup> of his seizure<sup>o</sup> many days  
Giv’n thee of grace, wherein thou may’st repent,  
255 And one bad act with many deeds well done  
May’st cover: well may then thy Lord appeased  
Redeem thee quite from Death’s rapacious claim;  
But longer in this Paradise to dwell  
Permits not; to remove thee I am come,  
260

And send thee from the garden forth to till  
The ground whence thou wast taken, fitter soil."

He added not, for Adam at the news  
Heart-strook with chilling gripe<sup>o</sup> of sorrow stood,  
That all his senses bound; Eve, who unseen  
265 Yet all had heard, with audible lament  
Discovered<sup>o</sup> soon the place of her retire:

"O unexpected stroke, worse than of Death!  
Must I thus leave thee Paradise? thus leave  
Thee native soil,<sup>5</sup> these happy walks and shades,  
270 Fit haunt of gods? where I had hope to spend,  
Quiet though sad, the respite<sup>o</sup> of that day  
That must be mortal to us both. O flow'rs,  
That never will in other climate grow,  
My early visitation, and my last  
275 At ev'n which I bred up with tender hand  
From the first op'ning bud, and gave ye names,<sup>6</sup>  
Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank  
Your tribes,<sup>o</sup> and water from th' ambrosial<sup>o</sup> fount?  
Thee lastly nuptial bower, by me adorned  
280 With what to sight or smell was sweet; from thee  
How shall I part, and whither wander down  
Into a lower world, to<sup>o</sup> this obscure  
And wild, how shall we breathe in other air  
Less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits?"

285 Whom thus the angel interrupted mild:  
"Lament not Eve, but patiently resign  
What justly thou hast lost; nor set thy heart,  
Thus overfond, on that which is not thine;  
Thy going is not lonely, with thee goes  
290 Thy husband, him to follow thou art bound;  
Where he abides, think there thy native soil."

Adam by this from the cold sudden damp<sup>o</sup>  
Recovering, and his scattered spirits returned,  
To Michael thus his humble words addressed:  
295

“Celestial, whether among the Thrones, or named  
Of them the highest, for such of shape may seem  
Prince above princes, gently hast thou told  
Thy message, which might else in telling wound,  
And in performing end us; what besides  
300 Of sorrow and dejection and despair  
Our frailty can sustain, thy tidings bring,  
Departure from this happy place, our sweet  
Recess, and only consolation left  
Familiar to our eyes, all places else  
305 Inhospitable appear and desolate,  
Nor knowing us nor known: and if by prayer  
Incessant I could hope to change the will  
Of him who all things can, <sup>o</sup> I would not cease  
To weary him with my assiduous cries:  
310 But prayer against his absolute decree  
No more avails than breath against the wind,  
Blown stifling back on him that breathes it forth:  
Therefore to his great bidding I submit.  
This most afflicts me, that departing hence,  
315 As from his face I shall be hid, deprived  
His blessed count’nance; here I could frequent,  
With worship, place by place where he vouchsafed  
Presence Divine, and to my sons relate:  
‘On this mount he appeared, under this tree  
320 Stood visible, among these pines his voice  
I heard, here with him at this fountain talked:’  
So many grateful altars I would rear  
Of grassy turf, and pile up every stone  
Of luster from the brook, in memory,  
325 Or monument to ages, and thereon  
Offer sweet-smelling gums and fruits and flow’rs:  
In yonder nether world where shall I seek  
His bright appearances, or footstep trace?  
For though I fled him angry, yet recalled  
330

To life prolonged and promised race,<sup>7</sup> I now  
Gladly behold though but his utmost skirts  
Of glory, and far off his steps adore."

To whom thus Michael with regard benign:  
335 "Adam, thou know'st Heav'n his, and all the earth,  
Not this rock only; his omnipresence fills  
Land, sea, and air, and every kind that lives,  
Fomented<sup>o</sup> by his virtual<sup>o</sup> power and warmed:  
All th' earth he gave thee to possess and rule,  
No despicable gift; surmise not then  
340 His presence to these narrow bounds confined  
Of Paradise or Eden: this had been  
Perhaps thy capital seat, from whence had spread  
All generations, and had hither come  
From all the ends of th' earth, to celebrate  
345 And reverence thee their great progenitor.  
But this preeminence thou hast lost, brought down  
To dwell on even ground now with thy sons:  
Yet doubt not but in valley and in plain  
God is as here, and will be found alike  
350 Present, and of his presence many a sign  
Still following thee, still compassing thee round  
With goodness and paternal love, his face  
Express, and of his steps the track divine.  
Which that thou may'st believe, and be confirmed,  
355 Ere thou from hence depart, know I am sent  
To show thee what shall come in future days  
To thee and to thy offspring,<sup>8</sup> good with bad  
Expect to hear, supernal<sup>o</sup> grace contending  
With sinfulness of men; thereby to learn  
360 True patience, and to temper joy with fear  
And pious sorrow, equally inured<sup>o</sup>  
By moderation either state to bare,  
Prosperous or adverse: so shalt thou lead  
365 Safest thy life, and best prepared endure



Thy mortal passage when it comes. Ascend  
This hill; let Eve (for I have drenched her eyes)<sup>9</sup>  
Here sleep below while thou to foresight wak'st,  
As once thou slept'st while she to life was formed."

370 To whom thus Adam gratefully replied:  
"Ascend, I follow thee, safe guide, the path  
Thou lead'st me, and to the hand of Heav'n submit,  
However chast'ning, to the evil turn  
My obvious<sup>o</sup> breast, arming to overcome  
By suffering, and earn rest from labor won,  
375 If so I may attain." So both ascend  
In the visions of God: it was a hill  
Of Paradise the highest, from whose top  
The hemisphere of earth in clearest ken<sup>o</sup>  
Stretched out to amplest reach of prospect lay.  
380 Not higher that hill nor wider looking round,  
Whereon for different cause the Tempter set  
Our second Adam in the wilderness,  
To show him all earth's kingdoms and their glory.<sup>1</sup>  
His eye might there command wherever stood  
385 City of old or modern fame, the seat  
Of mightiest empire, from the destined walls  
Of Cambalu, seat of Cathaian Can,  
And Samarkand by Oxus, Temir's throne,  
To Paquin of Sinaean kings, and thence  
390 To Agra and Lahore of Great Mogul  
Down to the golden Chersonese,<sup>2</sup> or where  
The Persian in Ecbatan sat, or since  
In Hispahan, or where the Russian czar  
In Moscow, or the sultan in Bizance,  
395 Turkéstan-born;<sup>3</sup> nor could his eye not ken<sup>o</sup>  
Th' empire of Negus to his utmost port  
Ercoco and the less maritime kings  
Mombaza, and Quiloa, and Melind,  
And Sofala thought Ophir, to the realm

400 Of Congo, and Angola farthest south;<sup>4</sup>  
Or thence from Niger flood to Atlas mount  
The kingdoms of Almansor, Fez and Sus,  
Morocco and Algiers, and Tremisen;<sup>5</sup>  
405 On Europe thence, and where Rome was to sway  
The world: in spirit perhaps he also saw  
Rich Mexico the seat of Motezume,  
And Cuzco in Peru, the richer seat  
Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoiled  
410 Guiana, whose great city Geryon's sons  
Call El Dorado:<sup>6</sup> but to nobler sights  
Michael from Adam's eyes the film removed  
Which that false fruit that promised clearer sight  
Had bred; then purged with euphrasy and rue<sup>7</sup>  
415 The visual nerve, for he had much to see;  
And from the well of life three drops instilled.  
So deep the power of these ingredients pierced,  
Ev'n to the inmost seat of mental sight,  
That Adam now enforced to close his eyes,  
Sunk down and all his spirits became entranced:  
420 But him the gentle angel by the hand  
Soon raised, and his attention thus recalled:  
"Adam, now ope thine eyes, and first behold  
Th' effects which thy original crime hath wrought  
In some to spring from thee, who never touched  
425 Th' excepted<sup>o</sup> tree, nor with the snake conspired,  
Nor sinned thy sin, yet from that sin derive  
Corruption to bring forth more violent deeds."  
His eyes he opened, and beheld a field,  
430 Part arable and tilth,<sup>o</sup> whereon were sheaves  
New-reaped, the other part sheep-walks and folds;  
I' th' midst an altar as the landmark<sup>o</sup> stood  
Rustic, of grassy sord;<sup>o</sup> thither anon  
A sweaty reaper from his tillage brought  
Firstfruits, the green ear, and the yellow sheaf,

Unculled,<sup>o</sup> as came to hand; a shepherd next  
435 More meek came with the firstlings of his flock  
Choicest and best; then sacrificing, laid  
The inwards and their fat, with incense strewed,  
On the cleft wood, and all due rites performed.  
440 His off'ring soon propitious fire from Heav'n  
Consumed with nimble glance, and grateful steam;  
The other's not, for his was not sincere;<sup>8</sup>  
Whereat he inly raged, and as they talked,  
Smote him into the midriff with a stone  
445 That beat out life; he fell, and deadly pale  
Groaned out his soul with gushing blood effused.  
Much at that sight was Adam in his heart  
Dismayed, and thus in haste to th' angel cried:  
"O teacher, some great mischief hath befall'n  
450 To that meek man, who well had sacrificed;  
Is piety thus and pure devotion paid?"  
T' whom Michael thus, he also moved, replied:  
"These two are brethren, Adam, and to come  
Out of thy loins;<sup>9</sup> th' unjust the just hath slain,  
455 For envy that his brother's offering found  
From Heav'n acceptance; but the bloody fact<sup>o</sup>  
Will be avenged, and th' other's faith approved  
Lose no reward, though here thou see him die,  
Rolling in dust and gore." To which our sire:  
460 "Alas, both for the deed and for the cause!  
But have I now seen death? Is this the way  
I must return to native dust? O sight  
Of terror, foul and ugly to behold,  
Horrid to think, how horrible to feel!"  
465 To whom thus Michaël: "Death thou hast seen  
In his first shape on man; but many shapes  
Of Death, and many are the ways that lead  
To his grim cave, all dismal; yet to sense  
More terrible at th' entrance than within.  
470

Some, as thou saw'st, by violent stroke shall die,  
By fire, flood, famine; by intemperance more  
In meats and drinks, which on the earth shall bring  
Diseases dire, of which a monstrous crew  
Before thee shall appear; that thou may'st know  
475 What misery th' inabstinence of Eve  
Shall bring on men." Immediately a place<sup>1</sup>  
Before his eyes appeared, sad,<sup>o</sup> noisome, dark,  
A lazar-house it seemed, wherein were laid  
Numbers of all diseased, all maladies  
480 Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms  
Of heartsick agony, all feverous kinds,  
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,  
Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs,  
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy  
485 And moonstruck madness,<sup>o</sup> pining atrophy,  
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence,<sup>2</sup>  
Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums.  
Dire was the tossing, deep the groans, Despair  
Tended the sick busiest from couch to couch;  
490 And over them triumphant Death his dart  
Shook, but delayed to strike, though oft invoked  
With vows, as their chief good, and final hope.  
Sight so deform what heart of rock could long  
Dry-eyed behold? Adam could not, but wept,  
495 Though not of woman born; compassion quelled  
His best of man,<sup>o</sup> and gave him up to tears  
A space, till firmer thoughts restrained excess,  
And scarce recovering words his plaint renewed:  
"O miserable mankind, to what fall  
500 Degraded, to what wretched state reserved!  
Better end here unborn. Why is life giv'n  
To be thus wrested from us? Rather why  
Obtruded on us thus? who if we knew  
505 What we receive, would either not accept

Life offered, or soon beg to lay it down,  
Glad to be so dismissed in peace. Can thus  
Th' image of God in man created once  
So goodly and erect, though faulty since,  
To such unsightly sufferings be debased  
510 Under inhuman pains? Why should not man,  
Retaining still divine similitude  
In part, from such deformities be free,  
And for his Maker's image sake exempt?"

"Their Maker's image," answered Michael, "then  
515 Forsook them, when themselves they vilified<sup>o</sup>  
To serve ungoverned appetite, and took<sup>o</sup>  
His image whom they served, a brutish vice,  
Inductive<sup>o</sup> mainly to<sup>o</sup> the sin of Eve.  
Therefore so abject is their punishment,  
520 Disfiguring not God's likeness, but their own,  
Or if his likeness, by themselves defaced  
While they pervert pure nature's healthful rules  
To loathsome sickness, worthily,<sup>o</sup> since they  
God's image did not reverence in themselves."

525 "I yield it just," said Adam, "and submit.  
But is there yet no other way, besides  
These painful passages, how we may come  
To death, and mix with our connatural dust?"

"There is," said Michael, "if thou well observe  
530 The rule of not too much, by temperance taught  
In what thou eat'st and drink'st, seeking from thence  
Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight,  
Till many years over thy head return:  
So may'st thou live, till like ripe fruit thou drop  
535 Into thy mother's<sup>3</sup> lap, or be with ease  
Gathered, not harshly plucked, for death mature:  
This is old age; but then thou must outlive  
Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty, which will  
change

540 To withered weak and gray; thy senses then  
Obtuse, all taste of pleasure must forgo,  
To what thou hast, and for the air of youth  
Hopeful and cheerful, in thy blood will reign  
A melancholy damp<sup>o</sup> of cold and dry  
545 To weigh thy spirits down, and last consume  
The balm<sup>o</sup> of life." To whom our ancestor:  
"Henceforth I fly not death, nor would prolong  
Life much, bent rather how I may be quit  
Fairest and easiest of this cumbrous charge,  
Which I must keep till my appointed day  
550 Of rend'ring up, and patiently attend<sup>o</sup>  
My dissolution." Michaël replied:  
"Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st  
Live well, how long or short permit to Heav'n:  
And now prepare thee for another sight."  
555 He looked and saw a spacious plain,<sup>4</sup> whereon  
Were tents of various hue; by some were herds  
Of cattle grazing: others, whence the sound  
Of instruments that made melodious chime  
Was heard, of harp and organ; and who moved  
560 Their stops and chords was seen: his volant touch  
Instinct through all proportions low and high  
Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue.<sup>5</sup>  
In other part stood one<sup>6</sup> who at the forge  
Laboring, two massy clods of iron and brass  
565 Had melted (whether found where casual<sup>o</sup> fire  
Had wasted woods on mountain or in vale,  
Down to the veins of earth, thence gliding hot  
To some cave's mouth, or whether washed by  
stream  
From underground) the liquid ore he drained  
570 Into fit molds prepared; from which he formed  
First his own tools; then, what might else be  
wrought

Fusile<sup>o</sup> or grav'n in metal. After these,  
 But on the hither side a different sort<sup>7</sup>  
 575 From the high neighboring hills, which was their  
       seat,  
 Down to the plain descended: by their guise  
 Just men they seemed, and all their study bent  
 To worship God aright, and know his works  
 Not hid,<sup>8</sup> nor those things last which might preserve  
 580 Freedom and peace to men: they on the plain  
 Long had not walked, when from the tents behold  
 A bevy of fair women, richly gay  
 In gems and wanton dress; to the harp they sung  
 Soft amorous ditties, and in dance came on:  
 585 The men though grave, eyed them, and let their  
       eyes  
 Rove without rein, till in the amorous net  
 Fast caught, they liked, and each his liking chose;  
 And now of love they treat till th' evening star<sup>9</sup>  
 Love's harbinger appeared; then all in heat  
 590 They light the nuptial torch, and bid invoke  
 Hymen,<sup>1</sup> then first to marriage rites invoked;  
 With feast and music all the tents resound.  
 Such happy interview and fair event<sup>o</sup>  
 Of love and youth not lost, songs, garlands, flow'rs,  
 And charming symphonies attached<sup>o</sup> the heart  
 595 Of Adam, soon<sup>o</sup> inclined to admit delight,  
 The bent of nature; which he thus expressed:  
       "True opener of mine eyes, prime angel blest,  
 Much better seems this vision, and more hope  
 Of peaceful days portends, than those two past;  
 600 Those were of hate and death, or pain much worse,  
 Here nature seems fulfilled in all her ends."  
       To whom thus Michael: "Judge not what is best  
 By pleasure, though to nature seeming meet,<sup>o</sup>  
 Created, as thou art, to nobler end

Holy and pure, conformity divine.  
605 Those tents thou saw'st so pleasant, were the tents  
Of wickedness, wherein shall dwell his race  
Who slew his brother; studious they appear  
Of arts that polish life, inventors rare,  
610 Unmindful of their Maker, though his spirit  
Taught them, but they his gifts acknowledged none.  
Yet they a beauteous offspring shall beget;  
For that fair female troop thou saw'st, that seemed  
Of goddesses, so blithe, so smooth, so gay,  
615 Yet empty of all good wherein consists  
Woman's domestic honor and chief praise;  
Bred only and completed<sup>o</sup> to the taste  
Of lustful appetite,<sup>o</sup> to sing, to dance,  
To dress, and troll<sup>o</sup> the tongue, and roll the eye.  
620 To these that sober race of men, whose lives  
Religious titled them the sons of God,<sup>2</sup>  
Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame  
Ignobly, to the trains<sup>o</sup> and to the smiles  
Of these fair atheists, and now swim in joy,  
625 (Erelong to swim at large) and laugh; for which  
The world erelong a world of tears must weep."  
To whom thus Adam of short joy bereft:  
"O pity and shame, that they who to live well  
Entered so fair, should turn aside to tread  
630 Paths indirect, or in the mid-way faint!  
But still I see the tenor of man's woe  
Holds on the same, from woman to begin."  
"From man's effeminate slackness it begins,"  
Said th' angel, "who should better hold his place  
635 By wisdom, and superior gifts received.  
But now prepare thee for another scene."  
He looked and saw wide territory spread  
Before him, towns, and rural works between,  
Cities of men with lofty gates and tow'rs,  
640



Concourse<sup>o</sup> in arms, fierce faces threat'ning war,  
Giants<sup>3</sup> of mighty bone, and bold emprise;<sup>o</sup>  
Part wield their arms, part curb the foaming steed,  
Single or in array of battle ranged<sup>o</sup>  
Both horse and foot, nor idly must'ring stood;  
645 One way a band select from forage drives  
A herd of beeves, fair oxen and fair kine  
From a fat meadow ground; or fleecy flock,  
Ewes and their bleating lambs over the plain,  
Their booty; scarce with life the shepherds fly,  
650 But call in aid, which makes a bloody fray;  
With cruel tournament the squadrons join;  
Where cattle pastured late, now scattered lies  
With carcasses and arms th' ensanguined<sup>o</sup> field  
Deserted: others to a city strong  
655 Lay siege, encamped; by battery, scale, and mine,<sup>4</sup>  
Assaulting; others from the wall defend  
With dart and jav'lin, stones and sulphurous fire;  
On each hand slaughter and gigantic deeds.  
In other part the sceptered heralds call  
660 To council in the city gates: anon  
Gray-headed men and grave, with warriors mixed,  
Assemble, and harangues are heard, but soon  
In factious opposition, till at last  
Of middle age one<sup>5</sup> rising, eminent  
665 In wise deport, spake much of right and wrong,  
Of justice, of religion, truth and peace,  
And judgment from above: him old and young  
Exploded,<sup>o</sup> and had seized with violent hands,  
Had not a cloud descending snatched him thence  
670 Unseen amid the throng: so violence  
Proceeded, and oppression, and sword-law  
Through all the plain, and refuge none was found.  
Adam was all in tears, and to his guide  
Lamenting turned full sad; "O what are these,  
675

Death's ministers, not men, who thus deal death  
Inhumanly to men, and multiply  
Ten-thousandfold the sin of him who slew  
His brother; for of whom such massacre  
Make they but of their brethren, men of men?  
680 But who was that just man, whom had not Heav'n  
Rescued, had in his righteousness been lost?"  
To whom thus Michael: "These are the product  
Of those ill-mated marriages thou saw'st:  
Where good with bad were matched, who of  
685 themselves  
Abhor to join; and by imprudence mixed,  
Produce prodigious births of body or mind.  
Such were these giants, men of high renown;  
For in those days might only shall be admired,  
And valor and heroic virtue called;  
690 To overcome in battle, and subdue  
Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite  
Manslaughter, shall be held the highest pitch  
Of human glory, and for glory done  
Of triumph, to be styled great conquerors,  
695 Patrons of mankind, gods, and sons of gods,  
Destroyers rightlier called and plagues of men.  
Thus fame shall be achieved, renown on earth,  
And what most merits fame in silence hid.  
But he the sev'nth from thee, <sup>6</sup>whom thou beheld'st  
700 The only righteous in a world perverse,  
And therefore hated, therefore so beset  
With foes for daring single to be just,  
And utter odious truth, that God would come  
To judge them with his saints: him the Most High  
705 Rapt in a balmy cloud with winged steeds  
Did, as thou saw'st, receive, to walk with God  
High in salvation and the climes of bliss,  
Exempt from death; to show thee what reward

710 Awaits the good, the rest what punishment;  
Which now direct thine eyes and soon behold.”  
He looked, and saw the face of things quite  
changed;  
The brazen throat of war had ceased to roar,  
All now was turned to jollity and game,  
To luxury<sup>o</sup> and riot,<sup>o</sup> feast and dance,  
715 Marrying or prostituting, as befell,  
Rape or adultery, where passing fair<sup>o</sup>  
Allured them; thence from cups to civil broils.  
At length a reverend sire<sup>7</sup> among them came,  
And of their doings great dislike declared,  
720 And testified against their ways; he oft  
Frequented their assemblies, whereso met,  
Triumphs or festivals, and to them preached  
Conversion and repentance, as to souls  
In prison under judgments imminent:  
725 But all in vain: which when he saw, he ceased  
Contending, and removed his tents far off;  
Then from the mountain hewing timber tall,  
Began to build a vessel of huge bulk,  
Measured by cubit, length, and breadth, and height,  
730 Smeared round with pitch, and in the side a door  
Contrived, and of provisions laid in large  
For man and beast: when lo a wonder strange!  
Of every beast, and bird, and insect small  
Came sevens and pairs, and entered in, as taught  
735 Their order: last the sire and his three sons  
With their four wives; and God made fast the door.  
Meanwhile the south wind rose, and with black  
wings  
Wide hovering, all the clouds together drove  
From under heav’n; the hills to their supply<sup>o</sup>  
740 Vapor, and exhalation dusk<sup>o</sup> and moist,  
Sent up amain;<sup>o</sup> and now the thickened sky

Like a dark ceiling stood; down rushed the rain  
Impetuous, and continued till the earth  
No more was seen; the floating vessel swum  
745 Uplifted; and secure with beakèd prow  
Rode tilting o'er the waves, all dwellings else  
Flood overwhelmed, and them with all their pomp  
Deep underwater rolled; sea covered sea,  
Sea without shore;<sup>8</sup> and in their palaces  
750 Where luxury late reigned, sea monsters whelped  
And stabled; of mankind, so numerous late,  
All left, in one small bottom<sup>o</sup> swum embarked.  
How didst thou grieve then, Adam, to behold  
The end of all thy offspring, end so sad,  
755 Depopulation; thee another flood,  
Of tears and sorrow a flood thee also drowned,  
And sunk thee as thy sons; till gently reared  
By th' angel, on thy feet thou stood'st at last,  
Though comfortless, as when a father mourns  
760 His children, all in view destroyed at once;  
And scarce to th' angel utter'dst thus thy plaint:  
    "O visions ill foreseen! Better had I  
Lived ignorant of future, so had borne  
My part of evil only, each day's lot  
765 Enough to bear; those now, that were dispensed  
The burd'n of many ages, on me light  
At once, by my foreknowledge<sup>9</sup> gaining birth  
Abortive, to torment me ere their being,  
With thought that they must be. Let no man seek  
770 Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall  
Him or his children, evil he may be sure,  
Which neither his foreknowing can prevent,  
And he the future evil shall no less  
In apprehension than in substance feel  
775 Grievous to bear: but that care now is past,  
Man is not whom to warn:<sup>1</sup> those few escaped

Famine and anguish will at last consume  
Wand'ring that wat'ry desert: I had hope  
When violence was ceased, and war on earth,  
780 All would have then gone well, peace would have  
crowned  
With length of happy days the race of man;  
But I was far deceived; for now I see  
Peace to corrupt no less than war to waste.  
How comes it thus? Unfold, celestial guide,  
785 And whether here the race of man will end."  
To whom thus Michael: "Those whom last thou  
saw'st  
In triumph and luxurious wealth, are they  
First seen in acts of prowess eminent  
And great exploits, but of true virtue void;  
790 Who having spilt much blood, and done much waste  
Subduing nations, and achieved thereby  
Fame in the world, high titles, and rich prey,  
Shall change their course to pleasure, ease, and  
sloth,  
Surfeit, and lust, till wantonness and pride  
795 Raise out of friendship hostile deeds in peace.  
The conquered also, and enslaved by war  
Shall with their freedom lost all virtue lose  
And fear of God, from whom their piety feigned  
In sharp contest of battle found no aid  
800 Against invaders; therefore cooled in zeal  
Thenceforth shall practice how to live secure,  
Worldly or dissolute, on what their lords  
Shall leave them to enjoy, for th' earth shall bear  
More than enough, that temperance may be tried:  
805 So all shall turn degenerate, all depraved,  
Justice and temperance, truth and faith forgot;<sup>2</sup>  
One man except, the only son of light  
In a dark age, against example good,

810 Against allurements, custom, and a world  
 Offended; <sup>o</sup> fearless of reproach and scorn,  
 Or violence, he of their wicked ways  
 Shall them admonish, and before them set  
 The paths of righteousness, how much more safe,  
 815 And full of peace, denouncing <sup>o</sup> wrath to come  
 On their impenitence; and shall return  
 Of them derided, but of God observed  
 The one just man alive; by his command  
 Shall build a wondrous ark, as thou beheld'st,  
 To save himself and household from amidst  
 820 A world devote <sup>o</sup> to universal wrack.  
 No sooner he with them of man and beast  
 Select for life shall in the ark be lodged,  
 And sheltered round, but all the cataracts <sup>o</sup>  
 825 Of heav'n set open on the earth shall pour  
 Rain day and night, all fountains of the deep  
 Broke up, shall heave the ocean to usurp  
 Beyond all bounds, till inundation rise  
 Above the highest hills: then shall this mount  
 Of Paradise by might of waves be moved  
 830 Out of his place, pushed by the hornèd flood, <sup>3</sup>  
 With all his verdure spoiled, and trees adrift  
 Down the great river to the op'ning gulf, <sup>4</sup>  
 And there take root an island salt and bare,  
 The haunt of seals and ores, <sup>o</sup> and sea mews' <sup>o</sup> clang.  
 835 To teach thee that God átttributes to place  
 No sanctity, if none be thither brought  
 By men who there frequent, or therein dwell.  
 And now what further shall ensue, behold."  
 He looked, and saw the ark hull <sup>o</sup> on the flood,  
 840 Which now abated, for the clouds were fled,  
 Driv'n by a keen north wind, that blowing dry  
 Wrinkled the face of deluge, as decayed;  
 And the clear sun on his wide wat'ry glass

845 Gazed hot, and of the fresh wave largely drew,  
As after thirst, which made their flowing shrink  
From standing lake to tripping<sup>o</sup> ebb, that stole  
With soft foot towards the deep, who now had  
stopped  
His sluices, as the heav'n his windows shut.  
The ark no more now floats, but seems on ground  
850 Fast on the top of some high mountain fixed.<sup>5</sup>  
And now the tops of hills as rocks appear;  
With clamor thence the rapid currents drive  
Towards the retreating sea their furious tide.  
Forthwith from out the ark a raven flies,  
855 And after him, the surer messenger,  
A dove sent forth once and again to spy  
Green tree or ground whereon his foot may light;  
The second time returning, in his bill  
An olive leaf he brings, pacific sign:  
860 Anon dry ground appears, and from his ark  
The ancient sire descends with all his train;  
Then with uplifted hands, and eyes devout,  
Grateful to Heav'n, over his head beholds  
A dewy cloud, and in the cloud a bow  
865 Conspicuous with three listed colors gay,<sup>6</sup>  
Betok'ning peace from God, and covenant new.  
Whereat the heart of Adam erst so sad  
Greatly rejoiced, and thus his joy broke forth:  
"O thou who future things canst represent  
870 As present, heav'nly instructor, I revive  
At this last sight, assured that man shall live  
With all the creatures, and their seed preserve.  
Far less I now lament for one whole world  
Of wicked sons destroyed, than I rejoice  
875 For one man found so perfect and so just,  
That God vouchsafes to raise another world  
From him, and all his anger to forget.<sup>7</sup>

But say, what mean those colored streaks in heav'n,  
 Distended<sup>o</sup> as the brow of God appeased,  
 880 Or serve they as a flow'ry verge to bind  
 The fluid skirts of that same wat'ry cloud,  
 Lest it again dissolve and show'r the earth?"  
 To whom th' Archangel: "Dextrously thou aim'st;  
 So willingly doth God remit his ire,  
 885 Though late repenting him of man depraved,  
 Grieved at his heart, when looking down he saw  
 The whole earth filled with violence, and all flesh  
 Corrupting each their way; yet those removed,  
 890 Such grace shall one just man find in his sight,  
 That he relents, not to blot out mankind,  
 And makes a cov'nant<sup>8</sup> never to destroy  
 The earth again by flood, nor let the sea  
 Surpass his bounds, nor rain to drown the world  
 With man therein or beast; but when he brings  
 895 Over the earth a cloud, will therein set  
 His triple-colored bow, whereon to look  
 And call to mind his cov'nant: day and night,  
 Seed-time and harvest, heat and hoary frost  
 Shall hold their course, till fire purge all things new,  
 900 Both heav'n and earth, wherein the just shall dwell."<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: "Stood" may mean "remained," or that, after prostrating themselves (10.1099) they prayed standing upright; their demeanor ("port") was "Not of mean suitors" (11.8–9), and they had stood to pray before (4.720). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Grace given before the human will can turn from sin, enabling it to do so. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Greek myth, when Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha (like Noah's family) alone survived a universal flood, they sought direction from Themis, goddess of justice; she told them to



throw stones behind them, which became men and women.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, their prayers were not scattered ("blown vagabond") by spiteful ("envious") winds, or prevented ("frustrate") from reaching their goal. "Dimensionless": without physical extension.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The theological term for Christ's standing in the place of humankind, taking onto himself all their deeds, perfecting the good by his merit, and, by his death, "paying" (see next line) the debt due God's justice for their evil deeds.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The pure elements of the Garden of Eden will themselves "purge" Adam and Eve as an impurity or disorder ("distemper"), ejecting them to a place where the air and food are more gross, like themselves.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The resurrection and renewal of body and soul on the Last Day.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Where God delivered the Ten Commandments to the sound of a trumpet (Exodus 19:19); it will sound again at the Last Judgment ("general doom," line 76).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Left to itself, without my continual promptings ("motions," line 91), I know his heart to be "variable and vain."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Milton adds the phrase "dream at least to live forever" to suggest that parts of God's speech (especially lines 84–85 and 93–95, closely quoted from Genesis 3:22) are ironic.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God, it seems, has to "enlighten" Michael with knowledge of humankind's future at the same time Michael presents that future to Adam (see 12.128); Michael is told to "intermix" in his account God's "cov'nant in the woman's seed" (lines 115–16), the "mysterious" promise of the redeemer hinted when the Son pronounced judgment on the serpent (10.179–81).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare Genesis 3:24: "he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned

every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Ezekiel 1:6 Janus (line 129), the Roman god of doorways, had two faces; in one version he had four, corresponding to the four seasons and the four quarters of the earth. Argus (line 131), a giant with one hundred eyes, was set by Juno to watch Jove's mistress Io, but Hermes (Mercury) put all of his eyes to sleep with his music ("pipe") and his sleep-producing caduceus ("opiate rod").[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Roman goddess of the dawn.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The name Eve is cognate with the Hebrew word meaning "life." In Genesis 3:20 Adam names his wife Eve only after the Fall; Milton's Adam has named her before (4.481) and now affirms that that name is right.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The eagle swooped ("stooped") from his soaring flight ("tow'r").[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The lion.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Jacob gave that name, meaning "armies" or "camps" ("field pavilioned," line 215), to a place where he saw an army of angels (Genesis 32:2).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Syrian king levied war against "Dothan" (line 217) in order to capture Elisha the prophet ("One man," line 219), but the Lord saved Elisha by sending "horses and chariots of fire" (2 Kings 6:8ff.).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Michael, who left his angelic forces ("powers") in their formation ("stand") to take possession of the garden (lines 221–22).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Both Meliboea and Tyre ("Sarra") in Thessaly were famous for purple dye.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Goddess of the rainbow.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Unlike Adam, Eve was created in the Paradise of Eden.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Departing from Genesis 2:19–20, in which Adam alone gives names, Milton has Eve name the flowers, an action that signifies (like Adam's naming of the beasts, 8.352–54) intuitive knowledge of their nature.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: His descendants, from whom will spring the “promised Seed.” See 10.180–81 and n. 1, and 12.623.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Prophetic visions are a common feature in epic, for example, Aeneas’s vision of his descendants culminating in the Roman Empire (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.754–854).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Put a soporific liquid (“drench”) in her eyes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: When Satan tempted Christ (the subject of Milton’s “brief epic” *Paradise Regained*), he took him up to “an exceeding high mountain” and showed him “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them” (Matthew 4:8). The passage that follows details the places “he” (Christ and/or Adam) might see (lines 386–411).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
His first views are of “destined” (yet to come) great kingdoms in Asia: “Cambalu,” capital of “Cathay,” the region of North China ruled by such khans as Genghis and Kublai; “Samarkand,” ruled by Tamburlaine (“Temir”), near the “Oxus” river near modern Uzbekistan; Beijing (“Paquin,” Peking), ruled by Chinese (“Sinaean”) kings; “Agra” and “Lahore,” capitals in northern India ruled by the “Great Mogul”; “golden Chersonese,” an area sometimes identified with the Malay Peninsula.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Next, Persian and Turkish kingdoms. From Persia (Iran): Ecbatana (“Ecbatan”), a summer residence of Persian kings, and the 16th-century Persian capital Isfahan (“Hispanan”); and Byzantium (“Bizance,” Constantinople, Istanbul), capital of the Ottoman Empire after falling to the Turks in 1453.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Africa: Abyssinia (empire of King “Negus”); Arkiko (“Ercoco”) in Ethiopia, a Red Sea port; Mombasa (“Mombaza”) and Malindi (“Melind”) in Kenya; Kilwa (“Quilwa”) in Tanzania; “Sofala,” sometimes identified with the biblical “Ophir” from which Solomon took gold for his Temple (1 Kings 9:28); and “Congo” and “Angola” on the west coast.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: In North Africa: the kingdoms of "Almansor" (the name shared by various Muslim rulers, here referring probably to Abu-Amir al Ma-Ma'afiri, caliph of Cordova) reached from the "Niger" River in northern Morocco to the "Atlas" Mountains in Algeria, taking in Morocco (and its capital, "Fez"), Tunis ("Sus"), and part of Algeria called Tiemecen ("Tremisen").[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
Because they lay on the other side of the spherical earth, Christ and/or Adam could only see places in the New World "in spirit" (line 406): Mexico, the seat of Montezuma ("Motezume"), the last Aztec emperor; "Cuzco in Peru," seat of Atahualpa ("Atabalipa"), the last Incan emperor (murdered by Pizarro); and "Guiana" (a region including Surinam, Guyana, and parts of Venezuela and Brazil). Unlike Mexico and Peru it was "yet unspoiled" by the Spaniards (sons of the evil monster "Geryon," in Spenser an allegory of the great power and oppression of Spain), though they identified its chief city, Manoa, with the fabled city of gold, "El Dorado."  
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Both herbs were thought to sharpen eyesight.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Milton's version of the Cain and Abel story (Genesis 4:1–16) provides a clear reason for God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Adam has to be told that these are his own sons, not simply descendants.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This is the only nonbiblical sight shown to Adam, a "lazar-house" (line 479)—a hospital for leprosy and infectious diseases, especially syphilis.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The plague. "Marasmus": a wasting disease of the body.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Mother" earth.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Adam's third vision is based on Genesis 4:19–22; "tents" (next line) identifies these as the descendants of Cain, described as "such as dwell in tents."[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Genesis 4:21 describes Cain's descendant Jubal as "father of all such as handle the harp and organ." "Volant": nimble; "instinct": instinctive; "proportions": ratios of pitches; "fugue": musical form in which one statement of the theme seems to chase another.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tubal-cain, "instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (Genesis 4:22).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The descendants of Seth, Adam's third son (Genesis 5:3); "hither side": away from the "east" (Genesis 4:16), where Cain's sons lived.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: They studied God's visible works, not the "matters hid" that Raphael had warned Adam against.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Venus.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: God of marriage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Like many exegetes, Milton identifies the "sons of God" as the descendants of Seth, and the "daughters of men" whom they wed (Genesis 6:2) as the descendants of Cain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Adam's fourth vision, based on Genesis 6:4, is of the "Giant" offspring of the previous marriages (identified at lines 683–84); Milton makes them exemplify false heroism and false glory sought through military might and conquest (lines 689–99).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, by battering, scaling, and tunneling under the walls.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Enoch, who "walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24); Milton elaborates on the story.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Here Enoch is more precisely identified by generation, but neither he nor the other biblical personages in these pageants are named. Apparently, Michael and Adam together see the pageants, and Michael (by God's illumination) can interpret them rightly, but neither of the two knows the names these persons will later bear.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Noah. Milton's account is based on Genesis 6–9.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The “sea without shore” and some other features of this description are taken from Ovid’s account of Deucalion’s Flood (*Metamorphoses* 1.292–300, Sandys translation).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The term suggests that Adam is experiencing something akin to God’s foreknowledge, which the poem insists is not predestination. Adam knows what is to happen but can neither cause it nor prevent it.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, there is no man to warn, all will die.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This passage (lines 797–807) may also allude to the backsliding Puritans who betrayed the Commonwealth in 1660 and have now taken on the vices of the restored royalists.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Classical river gods were often depicted as horned.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, down the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The primary colors, red, yellow, and blue.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The language invites recognition of Noah as a type (foreshadowing) of Christ, the one “perfect” and “just” who will cause God to forget his anger.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The language of covenant makes this promise—that God will not again destroy the earth by flood—a type of the “covenant of grace” through which God will save humankind.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The restoration of the orderly processes of nature after the Flood is identified as a type (foreshadowing) of the final renewal of all things after the final conflagration at the Last Judgment.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *pleased*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cultivating*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *death*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assembly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sinning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfading*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forbidden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *promptings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *either*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pity*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lose courage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violation of law*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *influential*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *omens*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darkened*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pair*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overconfident*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bright*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *laden*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *by this time*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *alighted, shone*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *halt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *make an end*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *belt*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *stately bearing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cheated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *possession*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spasm*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *revealed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *species* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fragrant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *compared to*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dejection*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knows, can do*[Return to reference](#) °



- °: *nurtured* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *potent* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heavenly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tempered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *exposed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *view* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *view* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forbidden* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cultivated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boundary marker* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turf* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *picked at random* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *crime* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lamentable* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lunacy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *manliness, courage* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *debased* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *took away* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *produced* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deservedly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *depression of spirits* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *preservative essence* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *await* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accidental* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cast* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *outcome* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seized* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *easily* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *appropriate* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accomplished* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *desire* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *move* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wiles, snares* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *encounters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chivalric adventure* [Return to reference](#) °



- °: *drawn up in ranks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *blood-stained*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *mocked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lust* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *debauchery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *surpassing beauty*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assistance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dark mist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *with main force*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *boat*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hostile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *proclaiming*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *doomed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *floodgates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sea monsters* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *seagulls*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *drift*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *running*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spread out*[Return to reference](#) °

# Book 12

## *The Arguments*

The angel Michael continues from the Flood to relate what shall succeed; then, in the mention of Abraham, comes by degrees to explain, who that Seed of the Woman shall be, which was promised Adam and Eve in the Fall; his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension; the state of the church till his second coming. Adam greatly satisfied and recomforted by these relations and promises descends the hill with Michael; wakens Eve, who all this while had slept, but with gentle dreams composed to quietness of mind and submission. Michael in either hand leads them out of Paradise, the fiery sword waving behind them, and the Cherubim taking their stations to guard the place.

As one who in his journey bates<sup>o</sup> at noon,  
Though bent on speed, so here the Archangel  
    paused  
Betwixt the world destroyed and world restored,  
If Adam aught perhaps might interpose;  
5 Then with transition sweet new speech resumes:<sup>1</sup>  
    "Thus thou hast seen one world begin and end;  
And man as from a second stock proceed.  
Much thou hast yet to see, but I perceive  
Thy mortal sight to fail; objects divine  
Must needs impair and weary human sense:  
10 Henceforth what is to come I will relate,<sup>2</sup>  
Thou therefore give due audience, and attend.  
This second source of men, while yet but few,  
And while the dread of judgment past remains  
Fresh in their minds, fearing the Deity,  
15

With some regard to what is just and right  
Shall lead their lives, and multiply apace,  
Laboring the soil, and reaping plenteous crop,  
Corn, wine, and oil; and from the herd or flock,  
Oft sacrificing bullock, lamb, or kid,  
20 With large wine-offerings poured, and sacred feast,  
Shall spend their days in joy unblamed, and dwell  
Long time in peace by families and tribes  
Under paternal rule; till one<sup>3</sup> shall rise  
Of proud ambitious heart, who not content  
25 With fair equality, fraternal state,  
Will arrogate dominion undeserved  
Over his brethren, and quite dispossess  
Concord and law of nature from the earth;  
Hunting (and men not beasts shall be his game)  
30 With war and hostile snare such as refuse  
Subjection to his empire tyrannous:  
A mighty hunter thence he shall be styled<sup>o</sup>  
Before the Lord, as in despite of Heav'n,  
Or from Heav'n claiming second sov'reignty;<sup>4</sup>  
35 And from rebellion shall derive his name,  
Though of rebellion others he accuse.  
He with a crew, whom like ambition joins  
With him or under him to tyrannize,  
Marching from Eden towards the west, shall find  
40 The plain, wherein a black bituminous gurge<sup>o</sup>  
Boils out from underground, the mouth of Hell;  
Of brick, and of that stuff they cast<sup>o</sup> to build  
A city and tow'r,<sup>5</sup> whose top may reach to Heav'n;  
And get themselves a name, lest far dispersed  
45 In foreign lands their memory be lost,  
Regardless whether good or evil fame.  
But God who oft descends to visit men  
Unseen, and through their habitations walks  
To mark their doings, them beholding soon,  
50

Comes down to see their city, ere the tower  
Obstruct Heav'n tow'rs, and in derision sets  
Upon their tongues a various<sup>o</sup> spirit to raze  
Quite out their native language, and instead  
To sow a jangling noise of words unknown:  
55      Forthwith a hideous gabble<sup>6</sup> rises loud  
Among the builders; each to other calls  
Not understood, till hoarse, and all in rage,  
As mocked they storm; great laughter was in Heav'n  
And looking down, to see the hubbub strange  
60      And hear the din; thus was the building left  
Ridiculous, and the work Confusion<sup>7</sup> named."

    Where to thus Adam fatherly displeased:  
"O execrable son so to aspire  
Above his brethren, to himself assuming  
65      Authority usurped, from God not giv'n:  
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl  
Dominion absolute; that right we hold  
By his donation; but man over men  
He made not lord; such title to himself  
70      Reserving, human left from human free.<sup>8</sup>  
But this usurper his encroachment proud  
Stays not on man; to God his tower intends  
Siege and defiance: wretched man! What food  
Will he convey up thither to sustain  
75      Himself and his rash army, where thin air  
Above the clouds will pine<sup>o</sup> his entrails gross,  
And famish him of breath, if not of bread?"

    To whom thus Michael: "Justly thou abhorr'st  
That son, who on the quiet state of men  
80      Such trouble brought, affecting<sup>o</sup> to subdue  
Rational liberty; yet know withal,  
Since thy original lapse, true liberty  
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells  
Twinned, and from her hath no dividual<sup>o</sup> being:<sup>9</sup>  
85

Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,  
Immediately inordinate desires  
And upstart passions catch the government  
From reason, and to servitude reduce  
Man till then free. Therefore since he permits  
90 Within himself unworthy powers to reign  
Over free reason, God in judgment just  
Subjects him from without to violent lords;  
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall  
His outward freedom: tyranny must be,  
95 Though to the tyrant thereby no excuse.  
Yet sometimes nations will decline so low  
From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,  
But justice, and some fatal curse annexed  
Deprives them of their outward liberty,  
100 Their inward lost: witness th' irreverent son<sup>1</sup>  
Of him who built the ark, who for the shame  
Done to his father, heard this heavy curse,  
'Servant of servants,' on his vicious race.<sup>2</sup>  
Thus will this latter, as the former world,  
105 Still tend from bad to worse, till God at last  
Wearied with their iniquities, withdraw  
His presence from among them, and avert  
His holy eyes; resolving from thenceforth  
To leave them to their own polluted ways;  
110 And one peculiar<sup>o</sup> nation to select  
From all the rest, of whom to be invoked,  
A nation from one faithful man<sup>3</sup> to spring:  
Him on this side Euphrates yet residing,  
Bred up in idol-worship; O that men  
115 (Canst thou believe?) should be so stupid grown,  
While yet the patriarch<sup>4</sup> lived, who scaped the Flood,  
As to forsake the living God, and fall  
To worship their own work in wood and stone  
For gods! Yet him God the Most High vouchsafes

120 To call by vision from his father's house,  
His kindred and false gods, into a land  
Which he will show him, and from him will raise  
A mighty nation, and upon him show'r  
His benediction so, that in his seed  
125 All nations shall be blest; he straight<sup>o</sup> obeys,  
Not knowing to what land, yet firm believes:  
I see him, but thou canst not,<sup>5</sup> with what faith  
He leaves his gods, his friends, and native soil  
Ur<sup>6</sup> of Chaldaea, passing now the ford  
130 To Haran, after him a cumbrous train  
Of herds and flocks, and numerous servitude;<sup>o</sup>  
Not wand'ring poor, but trusting all his wealth  
With God, who called him, in a land unknown.  
Canaan he now attains, I see his tents  
135 Pitched about Sechem, and the neighboring plain  
Of Moreh; there by promise he receives  
Gift to his progeny of all that land;  
From Hamath northward to the desert south  
(Things by their names I call, though yet unnamed)  
140 From Hermon east to the great western sea,<sup>7</sup>  
Mount Hermon, yonder sea, each place behold  
In prospect, as I point them; on the shore  
Mount Carmel; here the double-founted stream  
Jordan, true limit eastward; but his sons  
145 Shall dwell to Senir, that long ridge of hills.<sup>8</sup>  
This ponder, that all nations of the earth  
Shall in his seed be blessed; by that Seed  
Is meant thy great Deliverer,<sup>9</sup> who shall bruise  
The Serpent's head; whereof to thee anon  
150 Plainlier shall be revealed. This patriarch blest,  
Whom 'faithful Abraham'<sup>1</sup> due time shall call,  
A son, and of his son a grandchild leaves,  
Like him in faith, in wisdom, and renown;  
The grandchild with twelve sons increased, departs

155 From Canaan, to a land hereafter called  
Egypt, divided by the river Nile;  
See where it flows,<sup>2</sup> disgorging at seven mouths  
Into the sea: to sojourn in that land  
He comes invited by a younger son<sup>3</sup>  
160 In time of dearth,<sup>o</sup> a son whose worthy deeds  
Raise him to be the second in that realm  
Of Pharaoh: there he dies, and leaves his race  
Growing into a nation, and now grown  
Suspected to<sup>o</sup> a sequent<sup>o</sup> king, who seeks  
165 To stop their overgrowth, as inmate<sup>o</sup> guests  
Too numerous; whence of guests he makes them  
slaves  
Inhospitably, and kills their infant males:  
Till by two brethren (those two brethren call  
Moses and Aaron) sent from God to claim  
170 His people from enthrallment, they return  
With glory and spoil back to their promised land.<sup>4</sup>  
But first the lawless tyrant, who denies<sup>o</sup>  
To know their God, or message to regard,  
Must be compelled by signs and judgments dire;<sup>5</sup>  
175 To blood unshed the rivers must be turned,  
Frogs, lice, and flies must all his palace fill  
With loathed intrusion, and fill all the land;  
His cattle must of rot and murrain<sup>o</sup> die,  
Botches and blains must all his flesh emboss,<sup>6</sup>  
180 And all his people; thunder mixed with hail,  
Hail mixed with fire must rend th' Egyptian sky  
And wheel on th' earth, devouring where it rolls;  
What it devours not, herb, or fruit, or grain,  
A darksome cloud of locusts swarming down  
185 Must eat, and on the ground leave nothing green:  
Darkness must overshadow all his bounds,  
Palpable darkness, and blot out three days;  
Last with one midnight stroke all the firstborn

Of Egypt must lie dead. Thus with ten wounds<sup>o</sup>  
190 The river-dragon<sup>7</sup> tamed at length submits  
To let his sojourners depart, and oft  
Humbles his stubborn heart, but still as ice  
More hardened after thaw, till in his rage  
Pursuing whom he late dismissed, the sea  
195 Swallows him with his host, but them lets pass  
As on dry land between two crystal walls,  
Awed by the rod of Moses so to stand  
Divided, till his rescued gain their shore:<sup>8</sup>  
Such wondrous power God to his saint will lend,  
200 Though present in his angel, who shall go  
Before them in a cloud, and pillar of fire,  
By day a cloud, by night a pillar of fire,  
To guide them in their journey,<sup>9</sup> and remove  
Behind them, while th' obdurate king pursues:  
205 All night he will pursue, but his approach  
Darkness defends<sup>o</sup> between till morning watch;  
Then through the fiery pillar and the cloud  
God looking forth will trouble all his host  
And craze<sup>o</sup> their chariot wheels: when by command  
210 Moses once more his potent rod extends  
Over the sea; the sea his rod obeys;  
On their embattled ranks the waves return,  
And overwhelm their war:<sup>o</sup> the race elect  
Safe towards Canaan from the shore advance  
215 Through the wild desert, not the readiest way,  
Lest ent'ring on the Canaanite alarmed<sup>o</sup>  
War terrify them inexperienced, and fear  
Return them back to Egypt, choosing rather  
Inglorious life with servitude; for life  
220 To noble and ignoble is more sweet  
Untrained in arms, where rashness leads not on.<sup>1</sup>  
This also shall they gain by their delay  
In the wide wilderness, there they shall found



225 Their government, and their great senate<sup>2</sup> choose  
Through the twelve tribes, to rule by laws ordained:  
God from the mount of Sinai, whose gray top  
Shall tremble, he descending, will himself  
In thunder, lightning, and loud trumpet's sound  
Ordain them laws; part such as appertain  
230 To civil justice, part religious rites  
Of sacrifice,<sup>3</sup> informing them, by types  
And shadows, of that destined Seed to bruise  
The Serpent, by what means he shall achieve  
Mankind's deliverance.<sup>4</sup> But the voice of God  
235 To mortal ear is dreadful; they beseech  
That Moses might report to them his will,  
And terror cease; he grants what they besought  
Instructed that to God is no access  
Without mediator, whose high office now  
240 Moses in figure<sup>5</sup> bears, to introduce  
One greater, of whose day he shall foretell,  
And all the prophets in their age the times  
Of great Messiah shall sing. Thus laws and rites  
Established, such delight hath God in men  
245 Obedient to his will, that he vouchsafes  
Among them to set up his tabernacle,  
The Holy One with mortal men to dwell:  
By his prescript a sanctuary is framed  
Of cedar, overlaid with gold, therein  
250 An ark, and in the ark his testimony,  
The records of his cov'nant, over these  
A mercy-seat of gold between the wings  
Of two bright Cherubim, before him burn  
Seven lamps as in a zodiac<sup>o</sup> representing  
255 The heav'nly fires; over the tent a cloud  
Shall rest by day, a fiery gleam by night,  
Save when they journey, and at length they come,  
Conducted by his angel to the land

260 Promised to Abraham and his seed: the rest  
Were long to tell, how many battles fought,  
How many kings destroyed, and kingdoms won,  
Or how the sun shall in mid-heav'n stand still  
A day entire, and night's due course adjourn,  
265 Man's voice commanding, 'Sun in Gibeon stand,  
And thou moon in the vale of Aialon,  
Till Israel overcome';<sup>6</sup> so call the third  
From Abraham, son of Isaac, and from him  
His whole descent,<sup>7</sup> who thus shall Canaan win."  
Here Adam interposed: "O sent from Heav'n,  
270 Enlight'ner of my darkness, gracious things  
Thou hast revealed, those chiefly which concern  
Just Abraham and his seed: now first I find  
Mine eyes true op'ning, and my heart much eased,  
Erewhile perplexed with thoughts what would  
275 become  
Of me and all mankind; but now I see  
His day, in whom all nations shall be blest,<sup>8</sup>  
Favor unmerited by me, who sought  
Forbidden knowledge by forbidden means.  
This yet I apprehend not, why to those  
280 Among whom God will deign to dwell on earth  
So many and so various laws are giv'n;  
So many laws argue so many sins  
Among them; how can God with such reside?"  
To whom thus Michael: "Doubt not but that sin  
285 Will reign among them, as of thee begot;  
And therefore was law given them to evince<sup>o</sup>  
Their natural pravity,<sup>o</sup> by stirring up  
Sin against law to fight; that when they see  
Law can discover sin, but not remove,  
290 Save by those shadowy expiations weak,  
The blood of bulls and goats, they may conclude  
Some blood more precious must be paid for man,

Just for unjust, that in such righteousness  
To them by faith imputed, they may find  
295 Justification towards God, and peace  
Of conscience,<sup>9</sup> which the law by ceremonies  
Cannot appease, nor man the moral part  
Perform, and not performing cannot live.<sup>1</sup>  
So law appears imperfect, and but giv'n  
300 With purpose to resign<sup>o</sup> them in full time  
Up to a better cov'nant, disciplined  
From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit,  
From imposition of strict laws, to free  
Acceptance of large grace, from servile fear  
305 To filial, works of law to works of faith.<sup>2</sup>  
And therefore shall not Moses, though of God  
Highly beloved, being but the minister  
Of law, his people into Canaan lead;  
But Joshua whom the Gentiles Jesus call,<sup>3</sup>  
310 His name and office bearing, who shall quell  
The adversary Serpent, and bring back  
Through the world's wilderness long-wandered man  
Safe to eternal paradise of rest.  
Meanwhile they in their earthly Canaan placed  
315 Long time shall dwell and prosper, but when sins  
National interrupt their public peace,  
Provoking God to raise them enemies:  
From whom as oft he saves them penitent<sup>o</sup>  
By judges first, then under kings; of whom  
320 The second, both for piety renowned  
And puissant<sup>o</sup> deeds, a promise shall receive  
Irrevocable, that his regal throne  
Forever shall endure;<sup>4</sup> the like shall sing  
All prophecy, that of the royal stock  
325 Of David (so I name this king) shall rise  
A son, the Woman's Seed to thee foretold,<sup>5</sup>  
Foretold to Abraham, as in whom shall trust

All nations, and to kings foretold, of kings  
The last, for of his reign shall be no end.  
330 But first a long succession must ensue,  
And his next son for wealth and wisdom famed,  
The clouded ark of God till then in tents  
Wand'ring, shall in a glorious temple enshrine.<sup>6</sup>  
Such follow him, as shall be registered  
335 Part good, part bad, of bad the longer scroll,  
Whose foul idolatries and other faults  
Heaped<sup>o</sup> to the popular sum, will so incense  
God, as to leave them, and expose their land,  
Their city, his temple, and his holy ark  
340 With all his sacred things, a scorn and prey  
To that proud city, whose high walls thou saw'st  
Left in confusion, Babylon thence called.  
There in captivity he lets them dwell  
The space of seventy years,<sup>7</sup> then brings them back,  
345 Rememb'ring mercy, and his cov'nant sworn  
To David, stablished as the days of Heav'n.  
Returned from Babylon by leave of kings<sup>8</sup>  
Their lords, whom God disposed,<sup>o</sup> the house of God  
They first re-edify, and for a while  
350 In mean estate live moderate, till grown  
In wealth and multitude, factious they grow;  
But first among the priests dissension springs,  
Men who attend the altar, and should most  
Endeavor peace: their strife pollution brings  
355 Upon the Temple itself: at last they seize  
The scepter, and regard not David's sons,<sup>o</sup>  
Then lose it to a stranger,<sup>9</sup> that the true  
Anointed King Messiah might be born  
Barred of his right; yet at his birth a star  
360 Unseen before in heav'n proclaims him come,  
And guides the eastern sages,<sup>o</sup> who inquire  
His place, to offer incense, myrrh, and gold;

His place of birth a solemn<sup>o</sup> angel tells  
 To simple shepherds, keeping watch by night;  
 365 They gladly thither haste, and by a choir  
 Of squadroned angels hear his carol sung.  
 A virgin is his mother, but his sire  
 The Power of the Most High; he shall ascend  
 The throne hereditary, and bound his reign  
 370 With earth's wide bounds, his glory with the  
 heav'ns."  
 He ceased, discerning Adam with such joy  
 Surcharged,<sup>o</sup> as had like grief been dewed in tears,  
 Without the vent of words, which these he breathed:  
 "O prophet of glad tidings, finisher  
 375 Of utmost hope! now clear I understand  
 What oft my steadiest thoughts have searched in  
 vain,  
 Why our great expectation should be called  
 The Seed of Woman: Virgin Mother, hail,  
 High in the love of Heav'n, yet from my loins  
 380 Thou shalt proceed, and from thy womb the Son  
 Of God Most High; so God with man unites.  
 Needs must the Serpent now his capital<sup>o</sup> bruise  
 Expect with mortal pain: say where and when  
 Their fight, what stroke shall bruise the victor's heel."  
 385 To whom thus Michael: "Dream not of their fight,  
 As of a duel, or the local wounds  
 Of head or heel: not therefore joins the Son  
 Manhood to Godhead, with more strength to foil  
 Thy enemy; nor so is overcome  
 390 Satan, whose fall from Heav'n, a deadlier bruise,  
 Disabled not to give thee thy death's wound:  
 Which he who comes thy Savior, shall recure,<sup>o</sup>  
 Not by destroying Satan, but his works  
 In thee and in thy seed: nor can this be,  
 395 But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,<sup>o</sup>  
 Obedience to the law of God, imposed

On penalty of death, and suffering death,  
The penalty to thy transgression due,  
And due to theirs which out of thine will grow:  
400 So only can high justice rest apaid.<sup>o</sup>  
The law of God exact he shall fulfill  
Both by obedience and by love, though love  
Alone fulfill the law; thy punishment  
He shall endure by coming in the flesh  
405 To a reproachful life and cursèd death,  
Proclaiming life to all who shall believe  
In his redemption, and that his obedience  
Imputed becomes theirs by faith, his merits  
410 To save them, not their own, though legal works.<sup>1</sup>  
For this he shall live hated, be blasphemed,  
Seized on by force, judged, and to death condemned  
A shameful and accursed, nailed to the cross  
By his own nation, slain for bringing life;  
But to the cross he nails thy enemies,  
415 The law that is against thee, and the sins  
Of all mankind, with him there crucified,  
Never to hurt them more who rightly trust  
In this his satisfaction; so he dies,  
But soon revives, Death over him no power  
420 Shall long usurp; ere the third dawning light  
Return, the stars of morn shall see him rise  
Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light,  
Thy ransom paid, which man from Death redeems,  
His death for man, as many as offered life  
425 Neglect not,<sup>2</sup> and the benefit embrace  
By faith not void of works: this Godlike act  
Annuls thy doom, the death thou shouldst have died,  
In sin forever lost from life; this act  
Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength  
430 Defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms,  
And fix far deeper in his head their stings

Than temporal death shall bruise the victor's heel,  
Or theirs whom he redeems, a death like sleep,  
A gentle wafting to immortal life.  
435 Nor after resurrection shall he stay  
Longer on earth than certain times to appear  
To his disciples, men who in his life  
Still followed him; to them shall leave in charge  
To teach all nations what of him they learned  
440 And his salvation, them who shall believe  
Baptizing in the profluent<sup>o</sup> stream, the sign  
Of washing them from guilt of sin to life  
Pure, and in mind prepared, if so befall,  
For death, like that which the Redeemer died.  
445 All nations they shall teach; for from that day  
Not only to the sons of Abraham's loins  
Salvation shall be preached, but to the sons  
Of Abraham's faith wherever through the world;  
So in his seed all nations shall be blest.<sup>3</sup>  
450 Then to the Heav'n of Heav'ns he shall ascend  
With victory, triumphing through the air  
Over his foes and thine; there shall surprise  
The Serpent, prince of air, and drag in chains  
Through all his realm, and there confounded leave;  
455 Then enter into glory, and resume  
His seat at God's right hand, exalted high  
Above all names in Heav'n; and thence shall come,  
When this world's dissolution shall be ripe  
With glory and power to judge both quick<sup>o</sup> and  
460 dead,  
To judge th' unfaithful dead, but to reward  
His faithful, and receive them into bliss,  
Whether in Heav'n or earth, for then the earth  
Shall all be paradise, far happier place  
Than this of Eden, and far happier days."  
465 So spake th' Archangel Michaël, then paused,

As at the world's great period;<sup>o</sup> and our sire  
Replete with joy and wonder thus replied:  
"O goodness infinite, goodness immense!  
470 That all this good of evil shall produce,  
And evil turn to good; more wonderful  
Than that which by creation first brought forth  
Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,  
Whether I should repent me now of sin  
475 By me done and occasioned, or rejoice  
Much more, that much more good thereof shall  
spring,  
To God more glory, more good will to men  
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound.<sup>4</sup>  
But say, if our Deliverer up to Heav'n  
Must reascend, what will betide the few  
480 His faithful, left among th' unfaithful herd,  
The enemies of truth; who then shall guide  
His people, who defend? Will they not deal  
Worse with his followers than with him they dealt?"  
"Be sure they will," said th' angel; "but from  
485 Heav'n  
He to his own a Comforter will send,<sup>5</sup>  
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell  
His Spirit within them, and the law of faith  
Working through love, upon their hearts shall write,  
490 To guide them in all truth, and also arm  
With spiritual armor, able to resist  
Satan's assaults, and quench his fiery darts,<sup>6</sup>  
What<sup>o</sup> man can do against them, not afraid,  
Though to the death, against such cruelties  
495 With inward consolations recompensed,  
And oft supported so as shall amaze  
Their proudest persecutors: for the Spirit  
Poured first on his apostles, whom he sends  
To evangelize the nations, then on all



Baptized, shall them with wondrous gifts endue<sup>o</sup>  
500 To speak all tongues, and do all miracles,  
As did their Lord before them. Thus they win  
Great numbers of each nation to receive  
With joy the tidings brought from Heav'n: at length  
Their ministry performed, and race well run,  
505 Their doctrine and their story written left,<sup>7</sup>  
They die; but in their room, as they forewarn,  
Wolves shall succeed for teachers, grievous wolves,  
Who all the sacred mysteries of Heav'n  
To their own vile advantages shall turn  
510 Of lucre<sup>o</sup> and ambition, and the truth  
With superstitions and traditions taint,<sup>8</sup>  
Left only in those written records pure,  
Though not but by the Spirit understood.  
Then shall they seek to avail themselves of names,<sup>o</sup>  
515 Places<sup>o</sup> and titles, and with these to join  
Secular power, though feigning still to act  
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating  
The Spirit of God, promised alike and giv'n  
To all believers; and from that pretense,  
520 Spiritual laws by carnal<sup>o</sup> power shall force  
On every conscience;<sup>9</sup> laws which none shall find  
Left them enrolled, or what the Spirit within  
Shall on the heart engrave.<sup>1</sup> What will they then  
But force the Spirit of Grace itself, and bind  
525 His consort Liberty; what, but unbuild  
His living temples,<sup>2</sup> built by faith to stand,  
Their own faith not another's: for on earth  
Who against faith and conscience can be heard  
Infallible?<sup>3</sup> Yet many will presume:  
530 Whence heavy persecution shall arise  
On all who in the worship persevere  
Of Spirit and Truth; the rest, far greater part,  
Will deem in outward rites and specious forms

535 Religion satisfied; Truth shall retire  
Bestuck with sland'rous darts, and works of faith  
Rarely be found: so shall the world go on,  
To good malignant, to bad men benign,  
Under her own weight groaning, till the day  
Appear of respiration<sup>o</sup> to the just,  
540 And vengeance to the wicked, at return  
Of him so lately promised to thy aid,  
The Woman's Seed,<sup>4</sup> obscurely then foretold,  
Now amplier known thy Savior and thy Lord,  
Last in the clouds from Heav'n to be revealed  
545 In glory of the Father, to dissolve  
Satan with his perverted world, then raise  
From the conflagrant mass,<sup>o</sup> purged and refined,  
New heav'ns, new earth, ages of endless date  
Founded in righteousness and peace of love,  
550 To bring forth fruits joy and eternal bliss."  
He ended; and thus Adam last replied:  
"How soon hath thy prediction, seer blest,  
Measured this transient world, the race of time,  
Till time stand fixed: beyond is all abyss,  
555 Eternity, whose end no eye can reach.  
Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,  
Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill  
Of knowledge, what<sup>o</sup> this vessel can contain;  
Beyond which was my folly to aspire.  
560 Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,  
And love with fear the only God, to walk  
As in his presence, ever to observe  
His providence, and on him sole depend,  
Merciful over all his works, with good  
565 Still overcoming evil, and by small  
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak  
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise  
By simply meek; that suffering for truth's sake

Is fortitude to highest victory,  
570 And to the faithful death the gate of life;  
Taught this by his example whom I now  
Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest.”  
To whom thus also th’ angel last replied:  
575 “This having learnt, thou hast attained the sum  
Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the stars  
Thou knew’st by name,<sup>5</sup> and all th’ ethereal powers,  
All secrets of the deep, all nature’s works,  
Or works of God in heav’n, air, earth, or sea,  
And all the riches of this world enjoy’dst,  
580 And all the rule, one empire; only add  
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable,<sup>o</sup> add faith,  
Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,  
By name to come called charity, the soul  
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath  
585 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
A paradise within thee, happier far.  
Let us descend now therefore from this top  
Of speculation;<sup>o</sup> for the hour precise  
Exacts<sup>o</sup> our parting hence; and see the guards,  
590 By me encamped on yonder hill, expect  
Their motion,<sup>o</sup> at whose front a flaming sword,  
In signal of remove, waves fiercely round;  
We may no longer stay: go, waken Eve;  
Her also I with gentle dreams have calmed  
595 Portending good, and all her spirits composed  
To meek submission: thou at season fit  
Let her with thee partake what thou hast heard,  
Chiefly what may concern her faith to know,  
The great deliverance by her seed to come  
600 (For by the Woman’s Seed) on all mankind.  
That ye may live, which will be many days,  
Both in one faith unanimous though sad,  
With cause for evils past, yet much more cheered

With meditation on the happy end.”  
605       He ended, and they both descend the hill;  
Descended, Adam to the bow’r where Eve  
Lay sleeping ran before, but found her waked;  
And thus with words not sad she him received:  
610       “Whence thou return’st, and whither went’st, I  
      know;  
For God is also in sleep, and dreams advise,<sup>6</sup>  
Which he hath sent propitious, some great good  
Presaging, since with sorrow and heart’s distress  
Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on;  
In me is no delay; with thee to go,  
615       Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me  
Art all things under heav’n, all places thou,<sup>7</sup>  
Who for my willful crime art banished hence.  
This further consolation yet secure  
620       I carry hence; though all by me is lost,  
Such favor I unworthy am vouchsafed,  
By me the promised Seed shall all restore.”  
      So spake our mother Eve, and Adam heard  
Well pleased, but answered not; for now too nigh  
625       Th’ Archangel stood, and from the other hill  
To their fixed station, all in bright array  
The Cherubim descended; on the ground  
Gliding metéorous,<sup>8</sup> as evening mist  
Ris’n from a river o’er the marish<sup>9</sup> glides,  
630       And gathers ground fast at the laborer’s heel  
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,  
The brandished sword of God before them blazed  
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,  
And vapor<sup>10</sup> as the Libyan air adust,<sup>11</sup>  
635       Began to parch that temperate clime; whereat  
In either hand the hast’ning angel caught  
Our ling’ring parents, and to th’ eastern gate

Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast  
To the subjected<sup>o</sup> plain; then disappeared.  
640 They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,<sup>o</sup>  
Waved over by that flaming brand,<sup>o</sup> the gate  
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:  
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them  
645 soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.

1674

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The first five lines were added when Book 10 of the 1667 edition was divided to make Books 11 and 12 of the 1674 edition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adam no longer sees visions or pageants, as before, but simply listens to Michael's narration.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nimrod (Genesis 10:8–10) is described as the first king, in terms that equate kingship itself with tyranny (lines 25–29).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Milton offers two explanations of the biblical phrase "Before the Lord": either he openly defied God ("despite") or he claimed divine right ("second sov'reignty") like the Stuart kings. Drawing on the (false) etymology linking the name Nimrod with the Hebrew word meaning "to rebel," Milton implies that the paradox developed in the next two lines (that he accuses others of rebellion but is himself a rebel against God) extends to other kings, especially Charles I, who accused his opponents in the civil war of rebellion.  
[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Babylon is the city, Babel the tower.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Genesis 11:1–9 recounts the building of the Tower of Babel reaching to Heaven; God punished this presumption by confounding the builders' original language into multiple languages.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Confusion" was taken to be the meaning of "Babel."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Adam states the assumption Milton often invokes to support republicanism.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
As Milton (following classical theorists) often did, and as Abdiel did earlier (6.178–81), Michael links political to psychological servitude, and political liberty to inner freedom, that is, the exercise of "right reason" and the control of passion. Loss of liberty is often (though not always) God's just punishment for national decline (lines 81–100). The long passage alludes to the "baseness" of the English in restoring monarchy in 1660.  
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ham, son of Noah, who looked on the nakedness of his father and brought down the curse that his descendants would be "servant of servants" to their brethren (Genesis 9:22–25).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
Noah's curse provided scriptural authorization for ancient Hebrew enslavement of the native Canaanites after the conquest of the Promised Land. Some early modern thinkers expanded the scope of the curse beyond the people of Canaan to include Ham and his son Cush, who was thought to be the progenitor of Black Africans, in order to justify the enslavement of Africans. Milton's use of the term "vicious race" allows for a wide range of possible interpretations.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Abraham, whose name means "father of many nations"; the passage is based on Genesis 11:27 to 25.10.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Noah, who lived for 350 years after the Flood.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Michael evidently continues to see the stories he recounts as visionary scenes or pageants; Adam must accept the story of Abraham “by faith,” analogous to the faith Abraham himself displays.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ur was on one bank of the Euphrates, Haran (line 131) on the other, to the northwest.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Promised Land was bounded on the north by Hamath, a city on the Orontes River in west Syria; on the south by the wilderness “desert” of Zin; on the east by Mount Hermon; and on the west by the Mediterranean, the “great western sea.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “Mount Carmel”: a mountain range near Haifa, on the Mediterranean coast of Israel; “Jordan”: the river thought incorrectly to have two sources (“double-founted”), the Jor and the Dan; “Senir”: a peak of Mount Hermon.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Michael interprets the promise to Abraham (Genesis 17:5, “a father of many nations have I made thee”) typologically, as to be fulfilled in Christ, the “Woman’s Seed.” See 10.180–81 and note 1, and 12.322–28, 12.600–601, 12.623.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Echoes Galatians 3:9: “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” His son (line 153) is Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adam can see geographical features from his mountaintop, though not the scenes Michael sees and describes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Joseph, the next youngest of Jacob’s twelve sons, invited the Israelites to Egypt to escape famine, but they were subsequently made slaves (Genesis 21–50).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The story of Moses and Aaron leading the Israelites from captivity to the Promised Land is told in Exodus and Deuteronomy.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The ten plagues, recounted in lines 176–90.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Botches”: boils; “blains”: blisters; “emboss”: cover as with studs.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Egyptian pharaoh is termed “the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers” (Ezekiel 29:3).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Red Sea was parted by the rod of Moses; the Israelites passed through, but Pharaoh’s pursuing forces drowned as the water rushed back (Exodus 13:17–22 and 14:5–31).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Milton repeats here a view developed in his *Christian Doctrine*, that God was “present in his angel,” not in his own person, in the cloud and pillar of fire that led the Israelites on their journey (Exodus 13:21–22).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, unless prompted by “rashness,” those “untrained in arms” will choose servitude rather than battle.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The “Seventy Elders” of the Sanhedrin, whom Milton cites as a model for republican government in his *Ready and Easy Way*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: God delivered ceremonial, civil, and moral/religious laws (the Ten Commandments) to Moses on Mount Sinai, with thunder and lightning (lines 227–32; Exodus 19–31).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The principle of typology, whereby persons and events in the Old Testament are seen to prefigure Christ or matters pertaining to his life or the Christian church.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Moses is a type of Christ in his role as mediator between the people and God.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The story of Joshua, at whose bidding the sun stood still in Gibeon, and the moon in Ajalon (both a few miles north of Jerusalem), until Israel won its battle against the Amorites (Joshua 10:12–23).[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: Isaac's son Jacob was named Israel, and his descendants after him (Genesis 33:28).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Adam supposes that the promise made to him is fulfilled in the covenant with Abraham; he has yet to understand that in this Abraham is a type of Christ.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The ceremonial sacrifices of "bulls and goats" under the Law are types, "shadowy expiations," pointing to Christ's efficacious sacrifice that alone can win "Justification" for humankind, by Christ's merits being "imputed" (attributed vicariously) to them through faith (lines 290–96).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The theological doctrine that the Law is intended to lead humans to the "better cov'nant" (line 302) of grace, by demonstrating that fallen men cannot fulfill the commandments of the Law or appease God through ceremonial sacrifices (lines 297–302).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A more complete explanation of the principle of typology.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Joshua," who, rather than Moses, led the children of Israel into the Promised Land of Canaan, being in this a type of Christ.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The history summarized in lines 315–30 is recounted in Judges, Samuel, and Kings.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Messiah was prophesied to come of David's line, and Jesus was referred to as the "Son of David."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Solomon, son of David, built a "glorious temple" to house the Ark of the Covenant.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The seventy-year Babylonian Captivity of the Jews and destruction of the Temple (6th century B.C.E.).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Persian kings Cyrus the Great, Darius, and Artaxerxes allowed the Jews to return from Babylon and rebuild the Temple.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Antiochus, father of Herod the Great (who ruled at the time of Christ's birth), was made governor of Jerusalem in 61 B.C.E. by the Romans, and procurator of Judaea in 47 B.C.E. Prior to this (lines 353–57), strife among the priests allowed the Seleucid king Antiochus IV to sack Jerusalem and pollute the Temple; then one of the Maccabees seized the throne, disregarding the claims of David's dynasty.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Michael restates the theological doctrine that humans can be saved only by Christ's merits attributed to them vicariously ("imputed"), not by their own good works performed according to God's law ("legal").[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, for as many as accept ("neglect not") his offer of life.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Michael spells out the application to Christ of the promise offered typologically to Abraham's seed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: These lines do not formulate the medieval idea of the *felix culpa*—that the Fall was fortunate in bringing humans greater happiness than they would otherwise have enjoyed—only that the Fall has provided God an occasion to bring still greater good out of evil. The poem makes clear that Adam and Eve would have grown in perfection and advanced to Heaven had they not sinned.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Holy Spirit, who for Milton is much subordinate to both Father and Son.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare Ephesians 6:11–16: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." The subsequent history (lines 493–507) is that of the early Christian church in apostolic times.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, in the Gospels and Epistles.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
The history summarized in lines 508–40 is of the corruption of the Christian church by superstitions, traditions, and

persecutions of conscience in patristic times under the popes and the Christian emperors, but also extending to the Last Day. The terms point especially to what Milton saw as the revival of “popish” superstitions in the English church of the Restoration and to the fierce persecution of dissenters.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: These lines affirm the Protestant principle of every Christian’s right to interpret Scripture according to the “inner light” of the Spirit, and denounce (as Milton consistently did in his tracts) the use of civil (“carnal”) power to enforce orthodoxy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, there is nothing in Scripture or in the Spirit’s inner teaching that sanctions persecution for conscience.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See 1 Corinthians 3:16: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?” “His consort Liberty”: Milton typically insists that Christ’s gospel and the Spirit of God teach liberty, religious and civil, alluding as here to 2 Corinthians 3:17: “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An attack on papal claims to infallibility, asserted though not yet proclaimed as doctrine.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Michael’s story ends with the full explication of the promised “Woman’s Seed” as Christ, and with the renewal of all things after the Last Judgment (lines 545–51).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Michael glances back at Raphael’s warning in Book 8 that Adam should concern himself first with matters pertaining to his own life and world, rather than speculating overmuch about the cosmos.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The lines suggest that Eve’s dream has provided her a parallel (if lesser) prophecy to Adam’s visions and instruction. See Numbers 12:6: “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Eve’s lines—the final speech in the poem—recall her prelapsarian love song to Adam (4.641ff.) and Ruth’s promise to

accompany her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:16).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *stops for refreshment*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *called*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *whirlpool*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *set about*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *divisive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *waste away*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aspiring*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *separate*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *special*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *immediately*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *servants and slaves*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *famine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *by* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *successive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foreign*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *refuses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cattle plague*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plagues*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prevents*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shatter*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *armies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prepared to fight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *like the planets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *make evident*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *original sin*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *yield*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *when penitent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mighty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *added*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *made well-disposed*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *descendants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Magi*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awe-inspiring*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *overwhelmed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *on the head, fatal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heal*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lack*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *satisfied*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flowing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *living*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *consummation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as much as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wealth*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honors*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *offices*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fleshly, worldly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *respite*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the burning world*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *as much as*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *corresponding*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hill of speculation*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *requires*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *await their orders*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *like a meteor*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *marsh*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *smoke*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *parched*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *low-lying*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *estate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sword*[Return to reference](#) °

# VOLUME C: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century





THE NORTON  
ANTHOLOGY  
**ENGLISH**  
LITERATURE

THE  
RESTORATION  
AND THE  
EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

**VOLUME C**  
ELEVENTH EDITION

# The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, 1660–1785



***A Philosopher Giving That Lecture on the Orrery, in Which a Lamp Is Put in Place of the Sun*** (detail), 1766, Joseph Wright. For more information about this painting, see the [Image Gallery](#) for this volume.

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1660: Charles II restored to the English throne

1672: The Royal African Company founded



1688–89: The Glorious Revolution: deposition of James II and accession of William of Orange

1707: Act of Union unites Scotland, England, and Wales, creating the nation of "Great Britain"

1714: Queen Anne's death marks the end of Stuart rule and George I becomes the first Hanoverian king

1757: Victory in the Battle of Plassey consolidates British East India Company control in parts of India

1775–83: American Revolution

The period between 1660 and 1785 brought important changes to the island of Great Britain, which became a single nation after 1707, when the Act of Union joined Scotland to England and Wales. Across these years, Britain's national population nearly doubled to ten million and literacy rose to include most of the middle classes and many among the poor. Britain became a central actor in international commerce and the transatlantic trade in enslaved people, and it increasingly extended its imperial power globally. New ideas about science, reason, liberty, rights, politeness, sentiment, and sympathy transformed the intellectual scene.

This same period brought important changes to English literature. In 1660, the playhouses—closed since the beginning of the Civil War in 1642—sprang back to life with witty, bawdy comedies written and acted by women as well as men. An expanding assortment of increasingly affordable printed works—including newspapers and magazines—was available to the reading public, who debated the ideas in coffeehouses and quoted their favorite lines of poetry at pleasure gardens and concert halls. Poets aimed to intervene in social, political, and philosophical discussions, but also experimented with more private or personal ways of expressing intense emotion. Novelistic forms flourished, as prose romances and travel narratives were joined by more domestic and psychologically detailed fictions.

This period, moreover, brought important changes to the very idea of “English literature.” You are reading *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*—in a real way, eighteenth-century debates about literature and the canon made this anthology possible, even shaping the academic course that likely prompted you to purchase it. When Samuel Johnson defined the word *literature* in his 1755 *Dictionary*, he offered the older meaning, “Learning; skill in letters.” Literature in today's sense—creative or imaginative writing—was associated with the larger category of *belles lettres*, which could also include rhetoric, history, philosophy, and essays. Over the course of this period, however, our modern meanings of *literature* began to

consolidate, as writers were praised for their “originality” and “imagination.” Eighteenth-century writers, moreover, self-consciously forged a canon of *English* literature. As they created new editions of old works, wrote histories of English poetry, and narrated biographies of influential past writers, these canon-makers patriotically celebrated an English-speaking tradition stretching from Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare to Milton and the best poets writing in their moment.

The eighteenth century also saw the first university courses featuring English literature (as opposed to Greek or Latin literature, staples of elite education). Since much canon-making was a patriotic English project, it is striking that the first universities to teach English literature were not in England but in Scotland, which had formally joined Britain with the Act of Union but had a complicated relation with the dominating center of British power in England. While some Scots embraced Scottish patriotism against the English, others—self-conscious modernizers, anxious about their provincial accents and their physical and cultural distance from metropolitan London—wanted to forge a new “British” identity. These Scots began offering lectures on “Rhetoric and the Belles Lettres” that used English literature to teach a “correct,” “polite” writerly style (free of Scottish words and idioms that were sometimes described as relics of a “primitive” or “barbarous” past). In an ideologically fraught way, English literature was used for a project of “polite” refinement, for educating especially those among the lower classes and in the colonies. At the same time, however, English literature was being written by people across the social spectrum and was also used as a tool for challenging existing power structures—as it was during the early days of the movement to abolish slavery. Literature in English was written not only in England but all over the globe—including in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, India, North America, Jamaica, and Turkey. In all these places, “English literature” allowed for self-assertion, satire, experimentation, and even play—and such play could have its own world-shaping implications.

This Norton volume contains some of the richest, most fascinating literary texts from the Restoration and eighteenth century—written by a more diverse and representative selection of writers than the few White male poets central to the eighteenth century's own canon-making projects. The texts included here are works of art, but they are also often focused on political, moral, and philosophical questions: this is a literature oriented toward and participating in the bustling social world of the period. The canonical literature collected in this anthology thus constitutes a rich site for understanding the changes that helped create our modern world.

# RELIGION, POLITICS, AND BRITAIN IN THE WORLD

The Restoration of 1660—the return of Charles Stuart (son of the beheaded King Charles I) and, with him, the monarchy to England—brought hope to a divided nation, exhausted by years of civil war and political turmoil. Many of Charles's subjects welcomed him home from his exile. After the abdication of Richard Cromwell in 1659 and the end of the Commonwealth, the country had seemed at the brink of chaos, and Britons were eager to believe that their king would bring order and law and a spirit of mildness back into the national life. But no political settlement could be stable until the religious issues had been resolved. The restoration of the monarchy meant that the Church of England would also be restored, and though Charles was willing to pardon or ignore many former enemies (such as John Milton), some of the Anglican clergy were less tolerant of dissent. When Parliament reimposed the Book of Common Prayer in 1662 and then in 1664 barred Nonconformists from religious meetings outside the established church, thousands of clergymen resigned their livings, and the jails were filled with preachers like John Bunyan who refused to be silenced. In 1673 the Test Act required all holders of civil and military offices to take the sacrament in an Anglican church and to deny belief in transubstantiation. Thus Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics were largely excluded from public life; for instance, Alexander Pope, a Catholic, could not attend a university, own land, or vote. Some Anglicans showed scorn for Protestant Nonconformist zeal, or “enthusiasm” (a belief in private revelation), and English Catholics were widely regarded as potential traitors and (wrongly) thought to have set the Great Fire that destroyed much of London in 1666.

Yet the triumph of the established church did not resolve the constitutional issues that had divided Charles I and Parliament. Charles II promised to govern through Parliament but slyly tried to consolidate royal power. Steering away from crises, he hid his

Catholic sympathies and avoided a test of strength with Parliament—except on one occasion. In 1678 the report of the Popish Plot, in which Catholics would rise and murder their Protestant foes, terrified London; and though the charge turned out to be a fraud, the House of Commons exploited the fear by trying to force Charles to exclude his Catholic brother, James, Duke of York, from succession to the throne. The turmoil of this period is captured brilliantly by John Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). Finally, Charles defeated this attempt to prevent James from becoming king by dissolving Parliament. But the crisis resulted in a basic division of the country between two new political parties: the Tories, who supported the king, and the Whigs, the king's opponents.

Neither party was thrilled with James II. After he came to the throne in 1685, he claimed the right to make his own laws, suspended the Test Act, and began to fill the army and government with fellow Catholics. The birth of James's son in 1688 brought matters to a head, confronting the nation with the prospect of a Catholic dynasty. Secret negotiations paved the way for the Dutchman William of Orange, a champion of Protestantism and the husband of James's Protestant daughter Mary. William landed with a small army in southwestern England and marched toward London. As he advanced, the king's allies melted away, and James fled to a permanent exile in France. But the house of Stuart would be heard from again. For more than half a century some loyal Jacobites (from the Latin *Jacobus*, "James"), especially in Scotland, supported James, his son ("the Old Pretender"), and his grandson ("the Young Pretender" or "Bonnie Prince Charlie") as the legitimate rulers of Britain. Moreover, a good many writers, from Aphra Behn and Dryden (and arguably Pope and Johnson) to Robert Burns, privately sympathized with Jacobitism. But after the failure of one last rising in 1745–46, the cause would dwindle gradually into a wistful sentiment. In retrospect, the accession of William and Mary in 1688—the Glorious, or Bloodless, Revolution—came to be seen as the beginning of a stabilized, unified Great Britain.

A number of innovations made this stability possible. In 1689 a Bill of Rights revoked James's actions; the bill limited the powers of the Crown, reaffirmed the supremacy of Parliament, and guaranteed some individual rights. The same year the Toleration Act relaxed the strain of religious conflict by granting a limited freedom of worship to Dissenters (although not to Catholics or Jews) so long as they swore allegiance to the Crown. This proved to be a workable compromise. The passage of the Act of Settlement in 1701 seemed finally to resolve the difficult problem of succession that had bedeviled the monarchy. Anne, James II's Protestant younger daughter, was next in line after William. Though Anne was pregnant seventeen times, including many stillbirths, her last surviving child died young in 1700, leaving her without a successor. In the wake of this, the Act of Settlement put Anne's nearest Protestant relative—Sophia, the electress of Hanover in Germany, who was James I's granddaughter—and her descendants in line for the throne. Queen Anne reigned from 1702 to 1714, and upon her death George I, Sophia's son, came to Britain to become the first king of the Hanoverian line that would rule until 1901.

But the succession being settled did not eliminate the political rancor that often animates contests for power. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) in Queen Anne's reign, Britain and its allies weakened the power of commercial rivals France and Spain, and the Whig lords and London merchants supporting the war grew rich and held enormous power in the government. But the Whigs pushed their luck too hard: powerful Whig leader John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough, with his wife made requests that angered the Queen, and others were working to defend Dissenters and their practice of occasional conformity (which offered a way around the Test Act). Anne fought back, dismissing her Whig ministers and calling in Robert Harley and Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, to form a Tory ministry. When Whigs returned to power after Anne's death and the accession of George I, Harley was imprisoned in the Tower of London for several years and Bolingbroke, charged with being a Jacobite traitor, fled to France. The great architect of Whig

policy in the following decades was Sir Robert Walpole, who came to power as a result of the "South Sea Bubble" (1720), a stock market crash. Walpole had an ability to restore confidence and keep the country running smoothly, as well as to juggle money. Coming to be known as Britain's first "prime" minister, Walpole consolidated his power during the reign of George II (1727–60). George II, more involved in British affairs than his essentially German father, came to appreciate the efficient administration of the patronage system under Walpole, who installed dependents in government offices and controlled the House of Commons by financially rewarding its members.

The political principles of the Whig and Tory parties, which bring so much fire to eighteenth-century public debate, evolved through the period to address changing circumstances. Now we tend to think of Tories as conservative and Whigs as liberal. (Members of today's Conservative Party in the United Kingdom are sometimes called Tories.) During the Exclusion Crisis of the 1680s the Whigs asserted the liberties of the English subject against the royal prerogatives of Charles II, whom Tories such as Dryden supported. After both parties survived the 1688 Glorious Revolution, the Tories guarded the preeminence of the established church, while Whigs tended to support toleration of Dissenters. Economically, too, Tories defined themselves as traditionalists, affirming landownership as the proper basis of wealth, power, and privilege (though most thought trade honorable), whereas the Whigs came to be seen as supporting a new "moneyed interest" (as Jonathan Swift called it): managers of the Bank of England (founded 1694), contrivers of the system of public credit, and investors in the stock market. But conservatism and liberalism did not exist as ideological labels in the period, and the vicissitudes of party dispute offer many surprises. When Bolingbroke returned to England in 1724 after being pardoned, he led a Tory opposition that decried the "ministerial tyranny" of Walpole's Whig government. This opposition patriotically hailed liberty in a manner recalling the Whig rhetoric of earlier decades, appealed to both landed gentry and urban merchants, and



anticipated the antigovernment radicalism of the end of the eighteenth century. Many writers embraced Bolingbroke's Tory rhetoric extolling fierce independence from the corrupting power of centralized government and concentrations of wealth: for instance, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) drew parallels between great criminals and great politicians. Conversely, the Whigs sought to secure a centralized fiscal and military state machine and a web of financial interdependence controlled by the wealthiest aristocrats.

As this machine was built and maintained through the century, Britain's place in the world changed dramatically. In the early 1660s, when the events described in Behn's *Oroonoko* are supposed to have taken place, England was just beginning to ramp up its involvement in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people. Charles helped found the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa in 1660, which was later reconstituted as the Royal African Company. English, then British, ships forcibly took people from the west coast of Africa, across the Atlantic to the Americas, often to the brutally productive colonies in the Caribbean that farmed sugar cane. The ships then returned to England with money and sugar, a profitable colonial commodity. Britain's involvement in slaving would increase dramatically across the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and by the time of abolition in the early nineteenth century, British enslavers would have taken over three million African people from their homes. This terrible trade was immensely lucrative for Britain. Bristol and then Liverpool developed into prosperous ports, and by the 1780s the British national economy depended on the trade. The human cost was terrible. Torn from their homes, enslaved people were often packed into ships in spaces too small to allow them to turn, with barely enough food and drink and air to keep them alive. It is estimated that 15 percent, on average, died on each crossing; on a bad voyage the death toll would be much worse. Nor did those who survived the Middle Passage, as it came to be called, feel fortunate for long, given the terrible conditions of labor in Britain's Caribbean sugar colonies. It was only at the end of the period this volume covers, in the 1780s, that the movement for the

abolition of slavery began to exert popular influence in Britain, though these years were also marked by parliamentary setbacks. While abolition would not be achieved until the nineteenth century, in the meantime many writers took up their pens to write arguments and poems, both for and against slavery. (See “Britain and Transatlantic Slavery,” [p. 926](#).)

Slavery was a crucial part of the British Empire, which also expanded dramatically in this period. In 1660, England had control over Ireland and Wales in the British Isles and had established colonies in North America and the Caribbean. It also had trade relations across the globe. In the following decades, commerce motivated more and more territorial claims. Indeed, increasingly across the period Britain deployed its powerful navy to secure a series of military victories that consolidated and extended its colonial power. For instance, William Pitt the elder, a powerful prime minister after Walpole, appealed to a spirit of patriotism and called for the expansion of British power and commerce overseas. Pitt helped orchestrate the defeat of the French in the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), especially in North America, and the 1763 Peace of Paris consolidated British rule in Canada and India. British power worked *very* differently in these different places, however, and it was never without controversy. Eventually, American colonists revolted against what they described as the tyranny of King George III (who reigned in Britain from 1760 to 1820). Not even the loss of the American colonies in the American Revolution (1775–83), though, could slow British imperial ambitions. Asia, Africa, and the Pacific increasingly became central sites for British imperial—and commercial—ambition. Britain in the eighteenth century was no isolated island but a nation with conflicts, investments, and subjects around the world. (See “Global Commerce and Empire,” [p. 323](#).)

At home, however, there was discontent. Though London—a bustling multiracial city (in 1768, at least 15,000 Black people lived there)—was becoming a center of global commerce, the wealth brought to England by industrialism and foreign trade had not spread to the great mass of the poor. Only White male property

owners could vote in parliamentary elections, and, for much of the century, rich families' alliances and rivalries, national and local, dominated politics. But the practice of enclosure—private landowners “enclosing” with fences what had been common areas supporting a larger community—had displaced many to the cities, and the urban poor were increasingly subject to intense criminalization: even some minor crimes like pickpocketing were punishable with the death penalty. Other common punishments included the pillory and forced transportation to the colonies. As the century progressed, it seemed to many that the bonds of custom that once held people together had finally broken, and now money alone was respected. Protestants turned violently against Catholics; in 1780 the Gordon Riots put London temporarily under mob rule. Around the same time, radical reformers such as John Wilkes, Richard Price, and Catharine Macaulay called for a new, more just and equitable political republic. Fear of their radicalism would contribute to the conservative British reaction against the French Revolution. In the last decades of the century British authors would be torn between two opposing attitudes: loyalty to the old traditions of hierarchy, mutual obligations, and local self-sufficiency, and yearning for a new dispensation founded on principles of liberty, the rule of reason, and human rights.

## THE CONTEXT OF IDEAS

Much of the most powerful writing after 1660 exposed divisions in the nation's thinking inherited from the tumult of earlier decades. As the possibility of a Christian commonwealth receded, the great republican John Milton published *Paradise Lost* (final version, 1674), and John Bunyan's immensely popular masterwork *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) expressed the conscience of a Nonconformist. Conversely, an aristocratic culture, led by Charles II himself, aggressively celebrated pleasure and the right of the elite to behave as they wished. Members of the court scandalized respectable London citizens and considered their wives and daughters fair game. The court's hero, John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, became a celebrity for enacting the sexually exuberant creed of a libertine and rake.

In the Restoration, too, Charles II gave official approval to science by chartering the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge in 1662. New features of the world were disclosed to everyone who had the chance to look. Two wonderful inventions, the microscope and telescope, had begun to reveal that nature is more extravagant—teeming with tiny creatures and boundless galaxies—than anyone had ever imagined. One book that stayed popular for more than a century, Bernard de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686; translated from French by Behn), suggested that an infinite number of alternate worlds and living creatures might exist, not only in outer space but under our feet, invisibly small. Travels to unfamiliar regions of the globe enlarged understandings of what nature could do, and appetites for wondrous facts and curious objects kept pace with the economic motives of world exploration and colonization. (See "Science, Society, and God," [p. 93](#).)

Excited by new developments in science and philosophy, some people began to argue that the achievements of modern inquiry had eclipsed those of the ancients (and the fathers of the Church), who

had not known about the solar system, the Americas, microscopic organisms, or the circulation of the blood. Yet, the school curriculum still began with years of Latin and Greek and focused on the long-established humanistic tradition. A “Battle of the Books” erupted in the late seventeenth century between champions of ancient and of modern learning—in Jonathan Swift’s satire of that title, tomes of Aristotle battled Cartesian philosophy, and editions of modern poets looked insignificant next to Virgil’s volumes. But as stark as the contrasts were during the Restoration between ancients and moderns, religious and libertine intellectuals, royalists and republicans, High Churchmen and Nonconformists, the court and the rest of the country, a spirit of compromise was brewing.

Perhaps the most widely shared intellectual impulse of the age was a distrust of dogmatism. Nearly everybody blamed it for the civil strife through which the nation had recently passed. Opinions varied widely about which dogma was most dangerous—Puritan enthusiasm, papal infallibility, the divine right of kings, medieval scholastic or modern Cartesian philosophy—but these were denounced in remarkably similar terms. Though this might seem surprising in an age often described today as the “Enlightenment,” writers from across the political and social spectrum portrayed overconfidence in human reasoning as the supreme disaster. Many philosophers, divines, and advocates of science began to embrace a mitigated skepticism, which argued that human beings could readily achieve a sufficient degree of necessary knowledge (sometimes called “moral certainty”), but also contended that the pursuit of absolute certainty was vain, mad, and socially calamitous. Perhaps John Locke best expresses the temper of the times in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690):

If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover the powers thereof; how far they reach; to what things they are in any degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use, to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop when it is at the

utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities. . . . Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct.

Such a position is Pope's, when he warns against human presumption in *An Essay on Man* and Johnson's, when he talks of "the business of living."

Clearly, these ideas had important implications for religion. They led to some Anglican clergy's dislike of emotion and "enthusiasm" in religion and their emphasis on good works, rather than faith, as the way to salvation. If, as the commentator Martin Clifford put it in *A Treatise of Humane Reason* (1675), "in this vast latitude of probabilities," a person thinks "there is none can lead one to salvation, but the path wherein he treads himself, we may see the evident and necessary consequence of eternal troubles and confusions." Such writers insist that a distrust of human capacities is fully compatible with religious faith: for them the inability of reason and sensory evidence to settle important questions reveals our need to accept Christian mysteries as our intellectual foundation. At the same time, scientific discovery also opened up the possibility of "natural religion" (the study of nature as a book written by God). Newly discovered natural laws, such as Newton's celestial mechanics, seemed evidence of a universal order in creation, which implied God's hand in the design of the universe, as a watch implies a watchmaker. Some intellectuals embraced Deism, the doctrine that religion need not depend on mystery or biblical truths and could rely on reason alone, which recognized the goodness and wisdom of natural law and its creator. However, other Christians shuddered at the idea of an impersonal clockwork universe without God's active participation. Instead, they rested their faith on the revelation of Scripture, the scheme of salvation in which Christ died to redeem their sins.

Religious ideas about souls and minds in the period could also bolster powerful arguments by women and the disenfranchised. The

groundbreaking intellectual Mary Astell, in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694) and *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700, 1706), initiated a strain of modern feminism, arguing for the establishment of women's educational institutions and decrying the tyranny that husbands legally exercised over their wives. She nonetheless mocked the calls for political rights and liberty by Locke and other Whig theorists, rights that pointedly did not extend to women. Instead, she and other early feminists, including Sarah Fyge Egerton and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, embraced the Tory principle of obedience to royal and church authority. Astell feared the doctrines of male revolutionaries could produce civil chaos and so jeopardize the best that women could hope for in her day: the freedom to become fully educated, practice their religion, and marry (or not) according to their own judgment. Richard Steele's periodical the *Tatler* satirized Astell as "Madonella" because she seemed to recommend women to a nunlike, "recluse life." But at the same time thinkers, both male and female, began to advocate improving women's education as part of a wider commitment to enhancing and extending sociability. Periodicals like the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* sought to teach as large a readership as possible to think and behave politely. All the while, women had to navigate a world structured by both what Egerton called "tyrant Custom" and these new ideas, by marriage laws that took away their agency but also by a certain freedom of movement enabled by a commercialized urban society: some women experimented with gender identities, and many cultivated intense friendships with other women. (See "Women, Gender, Power," [p. 743](#).)

Understandings of individuality—and human fellowship—were made all the more pressing as encounters with hitherto little-known societies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas enlarged Europeans' understanding of human norms as well. In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift shows the comical, painful ways in which the discovery of new cultures forces one average Briton to reexamine his own. Across the period's literature, writers imagined themselves into personas from far-away places as they critiqued British behavior at home and abroad. Human difference also became a pressing philosophical

problem. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith worked to develop an understanding of the stages of civilization: according to these writers, all cultures move from more “primitive” stages involving hunting and pasturage toward agriculture and eventually the kind of cultural and technological refinement eighteenth-century writers imagined their own commercial societies to possess. British thinkers thus treated geographical differences as temporal ones: people *elsewhere* were imagined as stuck in an *earlier*, less developed or more primitive stage of civilization. These ideas were debated alongside various climate theories and biological understandings of race, as British thinkers tried to understand how to make sense of human differences. At the same time, British readers were fascinated by these differences and eager to read travelogues and translations that gave them a glimpse into the minds of people from other cultures. (See “Global Commerce and Empire,” [p. 323.](#))

Britons also pursued their fascination with the material world. Scientific discoveries increasingly found practical applications in industry, the arts, and even entertainment. By the late 1740s, as knowledge of electricity advanced, public experiments offered fashionable British crowds the opportunity to shock themselves. Birmingham became famous as a center where science and manufacturing were combining to change the world: in the early 1760s Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) established the most impressive factory of the age just outside town, producing vast quantities of pins, buckles, and buttons; in subsequent decades, his applications and manufacture of the new steam engine invented by Scotsman James Watt (1736–1819) helped build an industry to drive all others. Practical chemistry also led to industrial improvements: domestic porcelain production became established in the 1750s; and from the 1760s Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795) developed glazing, manufacturing, and marketing techniques that enabled British ceramics to compete with China for fashionable taste. Wedgwood and others answered an ever-increasing demand in Britain for beautiful objects. Artist William Hogarth satirized this appetite for finery: a chaotic collection of china figurines crowds the mantel in



Plate 2 of *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743–45). Yet the images that made Hogarth famous would soon decorate English ceramic teapots and plates and be turned into porcelain figurines themselves.

An obsession with getting and spending coexisted in this moment with a fascination with feeling. Midcentury, the popularity of the “sentimental” located the bases of social conduct in instinctual feeling rather than divinely sanctioned moral codes. Religion itself, according to Laurence Sterne, might be a “Great Sensorium,” a sort of central nervous system that connects the feelings of all living creatures in one great benevolent soul. And people began to feel pleasure in the exercise of charity. The cult of sensibility fostered a philanthropy that led to social reforms seldom envisioned in earlier times—to the improvement of jails, the relief of imprisoned debtors, the establishment of foundling hospitals and of homes for penitent sex workers, and ultimately the abolition of the slave trade. It loosed a ready flow of sympathetic responses to the joys and sorrows of fellow human beings, but also an intense, sometimes limiting fixation on the feeling self. (See “Sentiment,” [p. 997](#).)

New forms of religious devotion sprang up. The evangelical revival known as Methodism began in the 1730s, led by three Oxford graduates: John Wesley, his brother Charles, and George Whitefield. The Methodists took their gospel to the common people, warning that all were sinners and damned unless they accepted “amazing grace,” salvation through faith. Often denied the privilege of preaching in village churches, evangelicals preached to thousands in barns or the open fields. The emotionalism of such revival meetings repelled the Anglican Church and the upper classes, who feared that the fury and zeal of the Puritan sects were returning. Methodism was sometimes related to madness; convinced that he was damned forever, the poet William Cowper broke down and became a recluse. But the religious awakening persisted and affected many clergymen and laymen within the establishment, who reanimated the church and promoted unworldliness and piety. Nor did the insistence of Methodists on faith over works as the way to salvation prevent them or their Anglican allies from fighting for social reforms like abolition.



Robert Dighton, *Mr. Deputy Dumpling and Family Enjoying a Summer Afternoon*, 1781. A family of the middling sort, the father self-important, the mother beaming, visit Bagnigge Wells, one of many resorts in London catering to specific classes.

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Sentimentalism, Evangelicalism, and the pursuits of wealth and luxury in different ways all placed a new importance on individuals—the gratification of their tastes and ambitions or their yearning for personal encounters with each other or a personal God. Diary-keeping, elaborate letter-writing, and the novel also testified to the growing importance of the private, individual life. Few histories of kings or nations could rival Samuel Richardson’s novel *Clarissa* (1747–48) in length, popularity, or documentary detail: it was subtitled “The History of a Young Lady.” The older hierarchical system had tended to subordinate individuals to their social rank or station. In the eighteenth century that fixed system began to break down, and people’s sense of themselves began to change. By the end of the century many issues of politics and the law revolved around rights, not traditions. The modern individual had been invented; no product of the age is more enduring.

# CONDITIONS OF LITERARY PRODUCTION

Publishing boomed in eighteenth-century Britain, as the number of titles appearing annually and the periodicals printed in London and provincial towns dramatically increased. This expansion in part resulted from a loosening of legal restraints on printing. Through much of the previous three centuries, the government had licensed the texts deemed suitable for publication and refused to license those it wanted suppressed (a practice called “prior restraint”). After the Restoration, the Printing Act (1662) tightened licensing controls, though unlike his Stuart predecessors Charles II now shared this power with Parliament. But in 1695, during the reign of William III, the last in a series of printing acts was not renewed. Debate in Parliament on the matter was more practical than idealistic: it was argued that licensing hampered the printing trades and was ineffective at preventing obnoxious publications anyway, which could be better constrained after publication by enforcing laws against seditious libel, obscenity, and treason. As the two-party system consolidated, both Whigs and Tories seemed to realize that prepublication censorship could bite them when their own side happened to be out of power. Various governments attempted to revive licensing during political crises throughout the eighteenth century, but it was gone for good.

This did not end the legal liabilities, and the prosecutions, of authors. Daniel Defoe, for instance, was convicted of seditious libel and faced the pillory and jail for his satirical pamphlet “The Shortest Way with the Dissenters” (1702), which imitated High Church zeal so extravagantly that it provoked both the Tories and the Dissenters he had set about to defend. And licensing of the stage returned: irritated especially by Henry Fielding’s antigovernment play *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*, Robert Walpole pushed the Stage Licensing Act through Parliament in 1737, which authorized the Lord Chamberlain to license all plays and reduced the number of London theaters to two (Drury Lane and Covent Garden), closing

Fielding's New Theatre in the Haymarket and driving him to become a novelist. But despite such constraints, philosopher David Hume could begin his essay "Of the Liberty of the Press" (1741) by citing "the extreme liberty we enjoy in this country of communicating whatever we please to the public" as an internationally recognized commonplace. This freedom allowed eighteenth-century Britain to build an exemplary version of what historians have called "the public sphere": a cultural arena, free of direct government control, consisting of not just published comment on matters of national interest but also the public venues—coffeehouses, clubs, taverns—where readers circulated, discussed, and conceived responses to it. The first regular daily London newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, appeared in 1702; in 1731, the first magazine, the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The latter was followed both by imitations and by successful literary journals like the *Monthly Review* (1749) and the *Critical Review* (1756). Each audience attracted some periodical tailored to it, as with the *Female Tatler* (1709) and Haywood's the *Female Spectator* (1744–46).

After 1695, the legal status of printed matter became ambiguous, and in 1710 Parliament enacted the Statute of Anne—"An Act for the Encouragement of Learning by Vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or Purchasers of Such Copies"—the first copyright law in British history not tied to government approval of works' contents. Typically, these copyrights were held by booksellers, who operated much as publishers do today (in the eighteenth century, *publisher* referred to one who distributed books). A bookseller paid an author for a work's copyright and, after registering the work with the Stationers' Company for a fee, had the exclusive right for fourteen years to publish it; if alive when this term expired, he owned it another fourteen years. Payments to authors for copyright varied. Pope got £15 for the 1714 version of *The Rape of the Lock*, while Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* earned him £100. The Statute of Anne spurred the book trade by enhancing booksellers' control over works and hence their chance to profit by them. But the government soon introduced a new constraint. In 1712, the first Stamp Act put a tax on all newspapers, advertisements, paper, and pamphlets (effectively

any work under a hundred pages or so): all printed matter had to carry the stamp indicating the taxes had been paid. Stamp Acts were in effect throughout the century, and duties tended to increase when the government needed to raise money and rein in the press, as during the Seven Years' War in 1757.

But such constraints were not enough to hold back the publishing market, which began to sustain the first true professional class of authors in British literary history. The lower echelon of the profession was called "Grub Street," which was, as Johnson's *Dictionary* explains, "originally the name of a street in Moorfields in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems." The market increasingly motivated the literary elite too, and Johnson himself came to remark that "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money." As a young writer, he sold articles to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and many other men and women struggled to survive doing piecework for periodicals. The enhanced opportunity to sell their works on the open market meant that fewer authors needed to look to aristocratic patrons for support. But a new practice, publication by subscription, blended elements of patronage and literary capitalism and created the century's most spectacular authorial fortunes. Wealthy readers could subscribe to a work in progress, usually by agreeing to pay the author half in advance and half upon receipt of the book. Subscribers were rewarded with an edition more sumptuous than the common run and the appearance of their names in a list in the book's front pages. Major works by famous authors, such as Dryden's translation of Virgil (1697), generated the most subscription sales; the grandest success was Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1715–20), which gained him about £5000; his *Odyssey* (1725–26) raised nearly that much. But smaller projects deemed to need special encouragement also sold by subscription, including many books of poetry by women, such as Mary Leapor's poems (1751).

Not all entered the literary market with equal advantages; and social class played a role in preparing authors for success. The better educated were better placed to be taken seriously: many eminent male writers, including Dryden, Locke, Addison, Swift, Hume,

Johnson, Burke—the list could go on and on—had at least some university education, either at Oxford or Cambridge or at Scottish or Irish universities, where attendance by members of the laboring classes was virtually nil. Also universities were officially closed to non-Anglican men. Some important writers attended the Dissenting academies that sprang up to fulfill Nonconformists' educational aspirations: Defoe went to an excellent one at Newington Green. A few celebrated authors such as Rochester and Fielding had aristocratic backgrounds, but many came from the "middle class," though those in this category show how heterogeneous it was. Pope, a Catholic, obtained his education privately, and his father was a linen wholesaler, but he eventually became intimate with earls and viscounts, whereas Richardson, who had a family background in trade and (as he said) "only common school-learning," was a successful printer before he became a novelist. Both were middle-class in a sense and made their own fortunes in eighteenth-century print culture, yet they inhabited vastly different social worlds.

Despite the general exclusion of the poor from education and other means of social advancement, some self-educated writers of the laboring classes fought their way into print. A few became celebrities, aided by the increasing popularity of the idea, famously expressed by Thomas Gray in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," that there must be unknown geniuses among the poor. Stephen Duck, an agricultural worker from Wiltshire, published his popular *Poems on Several Subjects* in 1730, which included "The Thresher's Labor"—he became known as the "Thresher Poet." Queen Caroline herself retained him to be keeper of her library in Richmond. Several authors of the "common sort" followed in Duck's wake, including Mary Collier, whose poem "The Woman's Labor: An Epistle to Mr. Duck" (1739) defended country women against charges of idleness. Apart from such visible successes, eighteenth-century print culture afforded work for many from lower socioeconomic levels, if not as authors, then as hawkers of newspapers on city streets and singers of political ballads (often illiterate women), bookbinders, papermakers, and printing-press workers. The vigor of the literary market demanded the labor of all classes.

As all women were barred from universities and faced innumerable other disadvantages and varieties of repression, the story of virtually every woman author in the period is one of self-education, courage, and extraordinary initiative. Yet women did publish widely for the first time in the period, and the examples that can be assembled are as diverse as they are impressive. During the Restoration and early eighteenth century, a few aristocratic women poets were hailed as marvelous exceptions: the poems of Katherine Philips, "the matchless Orinda," were published posthumously in 1667; and others, including Anne Finch, Anne Killigrew, and later Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, printed poems or circulated them in manuscript among fashionable circles. A more public sort of female authorship was more ambivalently received. Though Aphra Behn built a successful career in the theater and in print, her sexually frank works were sometimes denounced as unbecoming a woman. Many women writers of popular literature after her in the early eighteenth century assumed "scandalous" public roles. Delarivier Manley published transparent fictionalizations of the doings of the Whig nobility, including *The New Atalantis* (1709), while Eliza Haywood produced stories about seduction and sex (though her late works, including *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 1751, courted a rising taste for morality). Defenders of high culture found it easy to denounce these women and their works as affronts to sexual decency and good literary taste: Pope's *Dunciad* (1728) awards Haywood as the prize in a pissing contest between scurrilous male booksellers. But still these women found enormous success—Haywood's salacious *Love in Excess* was as popular as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Many women writers after midcentury were determined to be perceived as more moral than their predecessors. Around 1750, intellectual women established clubs of their own under the leadership of Elizabeth Vesey and Elizabeth Montagu, cousin to Lady Mary. Proclaiming a high religious and intellectual standard, these women came to be called "bluestockings" (after the inelegant worsted hose of an early member). The literary accomplishments of bluestockings ranged widely: in 1758 Elizabeth Carter published her



translation of the Greek philosopher Epictetus, while Hannah More won fame as a poet, abolitionist, and educational theorist. Some of the most considerable literary achievements of women after midcentury came in the novel, a form increasingly associated with women readers (though men read them too), often exploring the moral difficulties of young women approaching marriage. The satirical novel *The Female Quixote* (1752) by Charlotte Lennox describes one such heroine deluded by the extravagant romances she reads, while Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) unfolds the sexual and other dangers besetting its naive but good-hearted heroine.



Richard Samuel, ***Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*** (*The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*), 1778. A mythological depiction of some “bluestockings,” women who made outstanding contributions to British literature and culture after the mid-18th century. *Standing, left to right:*

Elizabeth Carter, Anna Barbauld, Elizabeth Sheridan, Hannah More, and Charlotte Lennox; *seated, left to right*: Angelica Kauffmann, Catharine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu, and Elizabeth Griffith.

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Readers' abilities and inclinations to consume literature helped determine the volume and variety of published works. While historians disagree about exactly how the literacy rate changed in Britain through the early modern period, there is widespread consensus that by 1800 between 60 and 70 percent of adult men could read, in contrast to 25 percent in 1600. Because historians use the ability to sign one's name as an indicator of literacy, the evidence is even sketchier for women, who were less often parties to legal contracts: perhaps a third of women could read by the mid-eighteenth century. Reading was commoner among the relatively well-off than among the very poor, and among the latter, more prevalent in urban centers than the countryside. Cultural commentators throughout the century portrayed literacy as a good in itself: everyone in a Protestant country such as Britain, many thought, would benefit from direct access to the Bible and devotional works, and increasingly employers found literacy among servants and other laborers useful, especially those working in cities. Moral commentators did their best to steer inexperienced readers away from the frivolous and idle realm of popular imaginative literature, though literacy could not but give its new possessors freedom to explore their own tastes and inclinations.

Cost placed another limit on readership: few of the laboring classes would have disposable income to buy a cheap edition of Milton (around two shillings at midcentury) or even a copy of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (sixpence), let alone the spare time or sense of entitlement to peruse such things. Nonetheless, reading material was widely shared (Addison optimistically calculated "twenty readers to every paper" of the *Spectator*), and occasionally servants were given access to the libraries of their employers or the rich family of the neighborhood. In the 1740s, circulating libraries began to

emerge in cities and towns throughout Britain. Though the yearly fee they usually charged put them beyond the reach of the poor, these libraries gave the middle classes access to a wider array of books than they could afford to assemble on their own. Records of such libraries indicate that travels, histories, letters, and novels were most popular, though patrons borrowed many specialized, technical works as well. One fascinating index of change in the character of the reading public was the very look of words on the page. In the past, printers had rather capriciously capitalized many nouns—words as common as *Wood* or *Happiness*—and frequently italicized various words for emphasis. But around the middle of the eighteenth century, new conventions arose: initial capitals were increasingly reserved for proper names, and the use of italics was reduced. The modern, eighteenth-century reader had come to expect that all English writing, no matter how old or new, on any topic, in any genre, would be printed in the same consistent, uncluttered style. This is an innovation of the eighteenth-century culture of reading that immediately demonstrates its linkage to our own.

## POETIC PRINCIPLES

Eighteenth-century poetry is often described as “neoclassical,” sometimes “Augustan”—after classical writers like Virgil and Ovid who flourished during the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar (63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.). But calling eighteenth-century poems “Augustan” seems to accept as fact the highly strategic and self-conscious way that some period poets embraced a political analogy between post–Civil War England and Augustan Rome, hoping that Charles II would be a better Augustus or that the British Empire would flourish like the Roman one. The relation between classical models and the modern world was never taken for granted: it was precisely the thing many poets wanted to explore, often quite playfully. Indeed, “neoclassical” English literature aimed to be not only classical but *new*. Rochester and Dryden infused fresh life into Greek, Latin, and French models by drawing on the English literary traditions of variety, humor, and freewheeling fancy represented by Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Milton. Pope, John Gay, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote in forms like the mock-epic and mock-pastoral, where satire was pointed both at the values encoded in the classical form and at a contemporary world that did not share those values. Enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley self-consciously placed herself in a long learned tradition that stretched back to Virgil, but also to the Roman playwright Terence, from North Africa.

Poets also aimed to give pleasure to readers—to express passions that everyone could recognize in language that everyone could understand. Dryden, for instance, values poetry according to its power to move an audience. Thus Timotheus, in Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast,” is not only a musician but an archetypal poet who can make Alexander tearful or loving or angry at will. Readers, in turn, were supposed to cooperate with authors through the exercise of their own imaginations, creating pictures in the mind. A phrase from Horace’s *Art of Poetry*, *ut pictura poesis* (“as in painting,

so in poetry”), was interpreted to mean that poetry ought to be a visual as well as verbal art. Pope’s “Eloisa to Abelard,” for instance, begins by picturing two rival female personifications: “heavenly-pensive Contemplation” and “ever-musing Melancholy” (in the older typographical style, the nouns were capitalized to indicate the personification). Readers were expected to *see* these figures: Contemplation, in the habit of a nun, whose eyes roll upward toward heaven; and the goddess Melancholy, in wings and drapery, who broods upon the darkness. These two competing visions fight for Eloisa’s soul throughout the poem, which we see entirely through her perspective. Eighteenth-century poetry asks readers to translate even abstract words into moving images in the mind’s eye.

What many poets tried to see and represent was *Nature*—a word of many meanings. For eighteenth-century poets, these meanings included Nature as the universal and permanent elements in human experience. External nature, the landscape, also attracted attention throughout the eighteenth century as a source of pleasure and an object of inquiry. But as Anne Finch muses on the landscape, in “A Nocturnal Reverie,” it is her own soul she discovers. Pope’s injunction to the critic, “First follow Nature,” has primarily *human* nature in view. Nature consists of the enduring, general truths that have been, are, and will be true for everyone in all times, everywhere. Hence the business of the poet, according to Johnson’s *Rasselas*, is “to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances . . . to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind.” Yet if human nature was held to be uniform, human beings were known to be infinitely varied. Pope praises Shakespeare’s characters as “Nature herself,” but continues that “every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it is . . . impossible to find any two alike.” This indicates a characteristic eighteenth-century state of mind in which life assumes the form of a perpetual allegory and some abiding truth shines through each circumstance as it passes. The particular is already the general, in much eighteenth-century literature.

To study Nature was also to study the ancients. Nature and Homer, according to Pope, were the same; and both Pope and his readers applied Horace's satires on Rome to their own world, because Horace had expressed the perennial forms of life. Moreover, modern writers could learn from the ancients how to practice their craft. If a poem is an object to be made, the *poet* (a word derived from the Greek for "maker") must make the object to proper specifications. Thus poets were taught to plan their works in one of the classical "kinds" or genres—epic, tragedy, comedy, pastoral, satire, or ode—to choose a language appropriate to that genre, and to select the right style and tone and rhetorical figures. The rules of art, as Pope said, "are Nature methodized." At the same time, however, writers needed *wit*: quickness of mind, inventiveness, a knack for conceiving images and metaphors and for perceiving resemblances between things apparently unlike. Shakespeare had surpassed the ancients themselves in wit, and no one could deny that Pope was witty. Hence a major project of the age was to combine good method with wit, or judgment with fancy. Nature intended them to be one, and the role of judgment was not to suppress passion, energy, and originality but to make them more effective through discipline: "The winged courser, like a generous horse, / Shows most true mettle when you check his course."

The test of a poet's true mettle, or spirit, is language. William Wordsworth, in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), declared that he wrote "in a selection of the language really used by men," and he went on to attack eighteenth-century poets for their use of an artificial and stock "poetic diction." Many poets did employ a special language. It is characterized by personification, representing a thing or abstraction in human form, as when an "Ace of Hearts steps forth" or "Melancholy frowns"; by periphrasis (a roundabout way of avoiding homely words: "finny tribes" for *fish*, or "household feathery people" for *chickens*); by stock phrases such as "shining sword," "verdant mead," "bounding main," and "checkered shade"; by words used in their original Latin sense, such as "genial" and "horrid"; and by English sentences forced into Latin syntax ("Here

rests his head upon the lap of Earth / A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown," where *youth* is the subject of the verb *rests*). This language originated in the attempt of early modern poets to rival the elegant diction of Roman writers, and Milton depended on it to help him match his lofty theme in *Paradise Lost*. When used mechanically it could become a mannerism. But Thomas Gray contrives subtle, expressive effects from this diction and syntax, as in the ironic inflation of "Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat" or a famous stanza from "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

It is easy to misread the first sentence. What is the subject of *awaits*? The answer must be *hour* (the only available singular noun), which lurks at the end of the sentence, ready to spring a trap not only on the reader but on all those aristocratic, powerful, beautiful, wealthy people who forget that their hour will come. Moreover, the intricacy of that sentence sets off the simplicity of the next, which says the same thing with deadly directness. The artful mix in the "Elegy" of a special poetic language—a language that nobody speaks but that calls attention to the lush resources of language itself—with sentiments that everybody feels helps account for the poem's enduring popularity.

Versification also tests a poet's skill. The heroic couplet was brought to such perfection by Pope, Johnson thought, that "to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous." Pope's couplets, in rhymed iambic pentameter, typically present a complete statement, closed by a punctuation mark. Within the binary system of these two lines, a world of distinctions can be compressed. The second line of the couplet might closely parallel the first in structure and meaning, for instance, or the two lines might antithetically play against each other. Similarly, because a slight

pause called a “caesura” often divides the typical pentameter line (“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan”), one part of the line can be made parallel with or antithetical to the other, or even to one part of the following line. An often quoted and parodied passage of Sir John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” (1642) illustrates these effects. The poem addresses the Thames and builds up a witty comparison between the flow of a river and the flow of verse (italics are added to highlight the terms compared):

O could I flow like thee, | and make thy stream

Parallelism: *My great example*, | as it is *my theme*!

Double balance: Though *deep*, yet *clear*, | though *gentle*, yet not  
*dull*,

Double balance: *Strong* without *rage*, | without *o’erflowing*, *full*.

Once Dryden and Pope had bound such passages more tightly together with alliteration and assonance, the typical metrical-rhetorical wit of the new age had been perfected. For most of the eighteenth century its only metrical rival was blank verse: iambic pentameter that does not rhyme and is not closed in couplets. Milton’s blank verse in *Paradise Lost* provided one model, and the dramatic blank verse of Shakespeare and Dryden provided another. This more expansive form appealed to poets who cared less for wit than for stories and thoughts with plenty of room to develop. Blank verse was favored as the best medium for descriptive and meditative poems, from James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1726–30) to Cowper’s *The Task* (1785).

Ordinary people also wrote and read verse, and many of them did not know the classics. Only a minority of men, and very few women, had the chance to study Latin and Greek, but that did not keep a good many from playing with verse as a pastime or writing about their own lives. While the heroic couplet was being perfected, doggerel also thrived, and Milton’s blank verse was sometimes used to describe a drunk or an oyster. Burlesque and broad humor characterize much of the common run of eighteenth-century verse. As the audience for poetry became more diversified, so did the



subject matter. No readership was too small to address; Isaac Watts, and later Anna Laetitia Barbauld and William Blake, wrote songs for children. The rise of unconventional forms and topics of verse subverted an older poetic ideal: the Olympian art that only a handful of the elect could possibly master. The eighteenth century brought poetry down to earth. In the future, art that claimed to be high would have to find ways to distinguish itself from the low.

## RESTORATION LITERATURE, 1660–1700

Dryden brought England a *modern* literature between 1660 and 1700. He combined a cosmopolitan outlook on the latest European trends with some of the richness and variety he admired in Chaucer and Shakespeare. In most of the important contemporary forms—occasional verse, comedy, tragedy, heroic play, ode, satire, translation, and critical essay—both his example and his rules influenced others. As a critic, he spread the word that English literature, particularly his own, could vie with the best of the past. As a translator, he made such classics as Ovid and Virgil available to a wide public; for the first time, a large number of women and men without a formal education could feel included in the high literary world.

Restoration prose clearly indicated the desire to reach a new audience. The styles of John Donne's sermons, Milton's pamphlets, or Thomas Browne's treatises now seemed too elaborate and rhetorical for simple communication. By contrast, Samuel Pepys and Aphra Behn head straight to the point, informally and unself-consciously. The Royal Society asked its members to employ a plain, utilitarian prose style that spelled out scientific truths; according to this theory (which did not always correspond with practice), rhetorical flourishes and striking metaphors might be acceptable in poetry, which engaged the emotions, but had no place in rational discourse. The impact of scientific stylistic ideals can be felt in Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688). In other literature, the ideal prose style had the ease and poise of well-bred urbane conversation. This is a social prose for a sociable age.

Yet despite its broad appeal to the public, Restoration literature kept its ties to an aristocratic heroic ideal. The "fierce wars and faithful loves" of epic poems were expected to offer patterns of virtue for noble emulation. These ideals lived on in popular French prose romances and in Behn's *Oroonoko*. They were also expressed in heroic plays like those written by Dryden, which push to extremes

the conflict between love and honor in the hearts of impossibly valiant heroes and impossibly high-minded and attractive heroines.

But comedy was the real distinction of Restoration drama. The best plays of Sir George Etherege (*The Man of Mode*, 1676), William Wycherley (*The Country Wife*, 1675), Aphra Behn (*The Rover*, 1677), and William Congreve (*Love for Love*, 1695; *The Way of the World*, 1700) can still hold the stage today. These "comedies of manners" pick social behavior apart, exposing the nasty struggles for power among the upper classes, who use wit and manners as weapons. Human nature in these plays often conforms to the worst fears of Thomas Hobbes's pessimism: sensual, false-hearted, selfish characters prey on each other. The male hero lives for pleasure and for the money and women that he can conquer. The object of his game of sexual intrigue is a beautiful, witty, pleasure-loving, and emancipated lady, every bit his equal in the strategies of love. What makes the favored couple stand out is the true wit and well-bred grace with which they step through the minefield of the plot. But during the 1690s, "Societies for the Reformation of Manners" began to attack the blasphemy and obscenity they detected in such plays, and they sometimes brought offenders to trial. When Dryden died in 1700, new ideas about politeness and respectability were coming into being.

## EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE, 1700–1745

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a brilliant new group of writers emerged, many with a taste for satire: Swift, in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704); Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711); Montagu, in *Town Eclogues* (written 1715); and Addison and Steele, in the *Tatler* (1709–11) and *Spectator* (1711–12, 1714). Addison and Steele refined the form of the elegant periodical essay to comment on up-to-the-minute fashions and fads. And the period's finest poetic works often cast a strange light on modern times by viewing them through the screen of classical myths and classical forms. Thus Pope exposes the frivolity of fashionable London, in *The Rape of the Lock* (1714–17), through the incongruity of verse that casts the idle rich as epic heroes. Similarly, Montagu takes up the pastoral form, meant for the countryside, to deal with fashionable people in the cities, where values of "natural" and "pure" get refracted richly. Such incongruities are not entirely negative. They also provide a fresh perspective on things that had once seemed too low for poetry to notice—for instance, in *The Rape of the Lock*, a girl putting on her makeup. In this way a parallel with classical literature could show not only how far the modern world has fallen but also how fascinating and magical it is when seen with "quick, poetic eyes."

At the same time, a new mass and multiplicity of writings responded to the expanding commercial possibilities of print. An array of popular prose genres—news, thinly disguised political allegories, biographies of notorious criminals, travelogues, gossip, romantic tales—often blended facts and patently fictional elements, cemented by a rich lode of exaggeration, misrepresentations, and outright lies. Out of this matrix the modern novel would come to be born. Two early masters of such works were Eliza Haywood—who centered stories of women and desire in texts like *Love in Excess* (1719) and *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725)—and Daniel Defoe, producing first-person accounts such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the

famous castaway, and *Moll Flanders* (1722), mistress of lowlife crime. Claims that such works present (as the “editor” of *Crusoe* says) “a just history of fact,” believed or not, sharpened the public’s eagerness for them. These writers show readers a world plausibly like the one they know, where ordinary people negotiate familiar, entangled problems of financial, emotional, or spiritual existence. Jane Barker, Mary Davys, and many others brought women’s work and daily lives as well as love affairs to fiction. Such stories were not only amusing but also served as models of conduct. Readers also eagerly embraced less probable and realistic kinds of fiction. *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*—which was first published in English in this period—proved wildly popular, firing its readers’ imaginations with its magical and fantastic tales.

The theater also began to change to appeal to a wider audience. The clergyman Jeremy Collier had taken Dryden, Wycherley, and Congreve to task in *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), which spoke for the moral outrage of the pious middle classes. The comedy of manners was replaced by a new kind, later called “sentimental” not only because goodness triumphs over vice but also because it deals in high moral sentiments rather than witty dialogue and because the embarrassments of its heroines and heroes move the audience not to laughter but to tears. Virtue refuses to bow to aristocratic codes. In one crucial scene of Steele’s play *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), the hero would rather accept dishonor than fight a duel with a friend. Piety and middle-class values typify tragedies such as George Lillo’s *London Merchant* (1731). Later in the century the comedies of Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan proved that sentiment is not necessarily an enemy to wit and laughter. Larger and larger audiences responded to spectacles and special effects, and the emerging star system produced idolized actors and actresses, such as David Garrick and Sarah Siddons.

Despite the sociable impulses of much of the period’s writing, readers also craved less crowded, more meditative works. Since the seventeenth century, a common poetic theme had been the

pleasures of retirement, poems that invited the reader to dream about a retreat in the country or to meditate, like Finch, on scenery and the soul. But after 1726, when Thomson published *Winter*, the first of his cycle on the seasons, the poetry of natural description came into its own. A taste for nature's beauty found expression not only in verse but in the elaborate, cultivated art of landscape gardening, and finally in the cherished art of landscape painting in watercolor or oils (often illustrating Thomson's *The Seasons*). Many readers also learned to enjoy a thrilling pleasure or fear in the presence of the "sublime" in nature: rushing waters, wild prospects, and mountains shrouded in mist. Whether enthusiasts went to the landscape in search of God or merely of heightened sensations, they came back feeling that they had been touched by something beyond the life they knew, by something that could hardly be expressed. Tourists as well as poets roamed the countryside, frequently quoting verse as they gazed at some evocative scene.

## THE EMERGENCE OF NEW LITERARY THEMES AND MODES, 1740–85

When Matthew Arnold called the eighteenth century an “age of prose,” he meant to belittle its poetry, but he also stated a significant fact: great prose does dominate the age. Until the 1740s, poetry tended to set the standards of literature, but over the course of the century prose—and the novel especially—became increasingly powerful. Intellectual prose flourished, with the achievements of Johnson in the essay and literary criticism, of James Boswell in biography, of Hume in philosophy, of Burke in politics, of Edward Gibbon in history, of Sir Joshua Reynolds in aesthetics, of Gilbert White in natural history, and of Adam Smith in economics. Each of these authors is a master stylist, whose effort to express himself clearly and fully demands an art as carefully wrought as poetry. Forms of life writing also became important and exciting. Frances Burney’s novels were written in the form of personal letters, but she also kept a diary that glitteringly captured the rhythms of everyday life in London. Formerly enslaved writers like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana wrote autobiographies that recounted what was horrifying and what was redemptive in their life stories, and these first-person accounts became powerful forces in the movement to end slavery.

Johnson helped codify that language, not only with his writings but with the first great English *Dictionary* (1755). This work established him as a national man of letters, but his dominance also involved service to others. The *Dictionary* illustrates its definitions with more than 114,000 quotations from the best English writers, thus building a bridge from past to present usage; and Johnson’s essays, poems, and criticism also reflect his desire to preserve the lessons of the past. Yet he looks to the future as well, trying both to reach and to mold a nation of readers. If Johnson speaks for his age, one reason is his faith in common sense and the common reader. “By the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices,”

he wrote in the last of his *Lives of the Poets* (1781), "must be finally decided all claim to poetical honors."

No prose form better united availability to the common reader and seriousness of artistic purpose than the emerging novel. Like many writers of fiction earlier in the century, Samuel Richardson did not set out to entertain the public with an avowedly invented tale: he conceived *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) while compiling a little book of model letters. The letters grew into a story about a young servant who resists her master's base designs on her virtue until he gives up and marries her. The combination of a high moral tone with sexual titillation and a minute analysis of the heroine's emotions and state of mind proved irresistible to readers, in Britain and in Europe at large. Richardson topped *Pamela's* success with *Clarissa* (1747–48), another epistolary novel, which explored the conflict between the libertine Lovelace, an attractive and diabolical aristocrat, and the angelic Clarissa, a middle-class paragon who struggles to stay pure. The sympathy that readers felt for Clarissa was magnified by a host of sentimental novels, including Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, or The New Heloise* (1761), and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). Henry Fielding made his entrance into the novel by turning *Pamela* farcically upside down, offering instead the stories of the hypocritical *Shamela* (1741) and Pamela's brother *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Fielding's true model, however, is Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605–15), from which *Joseph Andrews* borrowed an ironic, antiromantic style; a plot of wandering around the countryside; and an idealistic central character (Parson Adams) who keeps mistaking appearances for reality. The ambition of writing what Fielding called "a comic epic-poem in prose" went still further in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749). Crowded with incidents and comments on the state of England, the novel contrasts a good-natured, generous, wayward hero (who needs to learn prudence) with cold-hearted people who use moral codes and the law for their own selfish interests. This emphasis on instinctive virtue and vice, instead of Richardson's devotion to good principles, put off some respectable readers like Johnson. But Samuel Taylor Coleridge thought that *Tom*

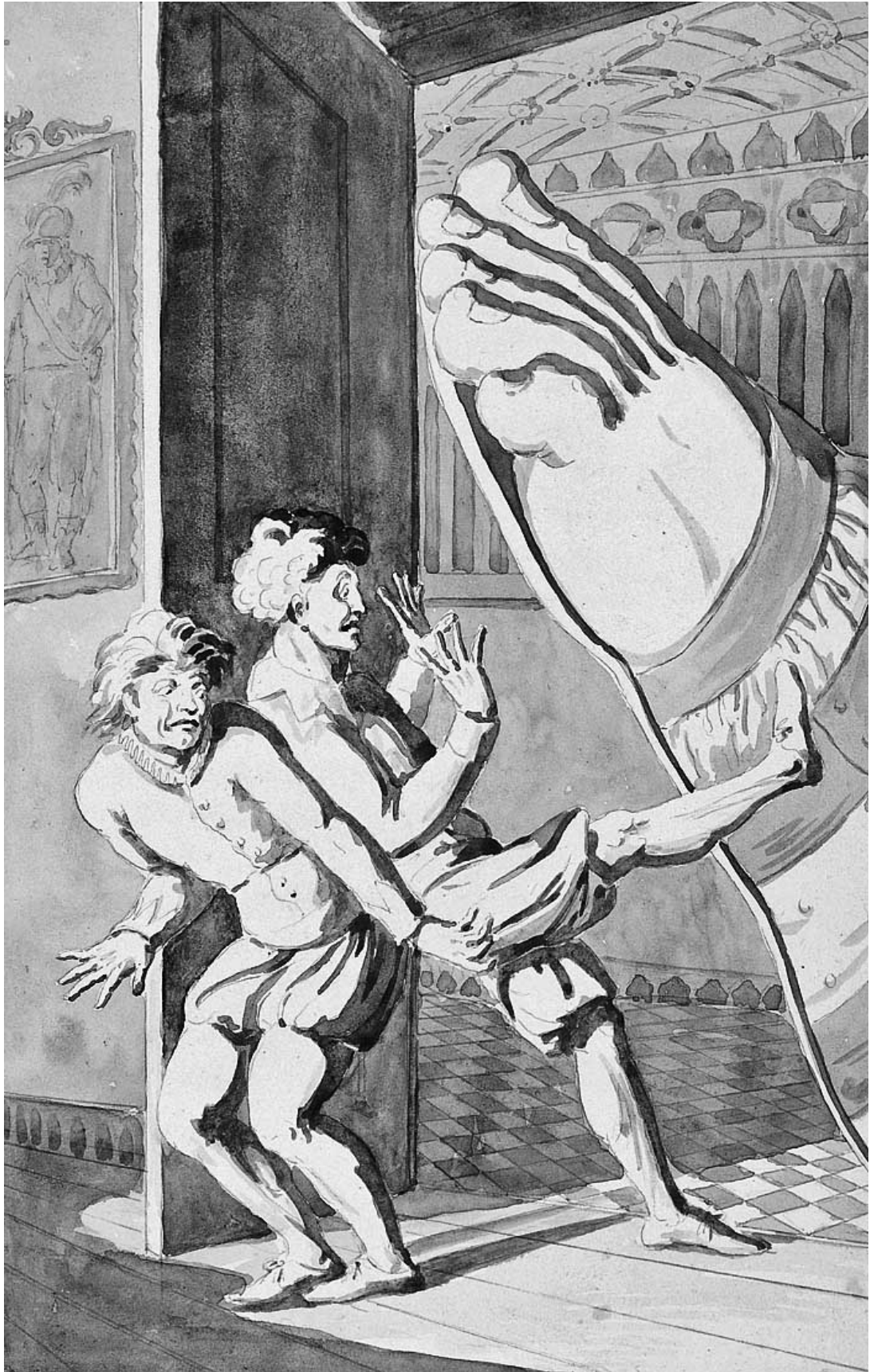


*Jones* (along with *Oedipus Rex* and Jonson's *Alchemist*) was one of "the three most perfect plots ever planned." (See "The Rise of the Novel," [p. 669](#).)

Some poets continued in the tradition of the earlier eighteenth century, taking on the guise of the learned commentator as they engaged social and political issues. Other poets seemed interested in withdrawing from the public arena. To Gray, Collins, Mark Akenside, and the brothers Joseph and Thomas Warton, it seemed that the spirit of poetry might be dying, driven out by the spirit of prose, by uninspiring truth, by the end of superstitions that had once peopled the land with poetic fairies and demons. In an age barren of magic, they ask, where has poetry gone? That question haunts many poems, suffusing them with melancholy. Poets who muse in silence are never far from thoughts of death, and a morbid fascination with the grave preoccupies many at midcentury. Such an attitude has little in common with that of poets like Dryden and Pope, social beings who live in a crowded world and seldom confess their private feelings in public. Pope's *An Essay on Man* had taken a sunny view of providence; Edward Young's *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–46), an immensely long poem in blank verse, is darkened by Christian fear of the life to come.

Often the melancholy poet, set apart from the world, yearns to be living in some other time and place. In his "Ode to Fancy" (1746), Joseph Warton associated "fancy" with visions in the wilderness and spontaneous passions; the true poet was no longer defined as a craftsman or maker but as a seer or nature's priest. "The public has seen all that art can do," William Shenstone wrote in 1761, welcoming James Macpherson's *Ossian*, "and they want the more striking efforts of wild, original, enthusiastic genius." Macpherson filled the bill. His sentimental epics, supposedly translated from an ancient Gaelic warrior-bard, won the hearts of readers around the world; Napoleon and Thomas Jefferson, for instance, both thought that *Ossian* was greater than Homer. Poets began to cultivate archaic language and antique forms.

A medieval revival spurred, also, the invention of the Gothic novel. Horace Walpole set *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), a dreamlike tale of terror, in a simulacrum of Strawberry Hill, his own tiny, pseudo-medieval castle, which helped revive a taste for Gothic architecture. Walpole created a mode of fiction that retains its popularity to the present day. In a typical Gothic romance, amid the glooms and secret passages of some remote castle, the laws of nightmare replace the laws of probability. Forbidden themes—incest, murder, necrophilia, atheism, and the torments of sexual desire—are allowed free play. Most such romances, like William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), revel in sensationalism and the grotesque. The Gothic vogue suggested that classical canons of taste—simplicity and harmonious balance—might count for less than the pleasures of fancy—intricate puzzles and a willful excess. But Gothicism also resulted in works, like Ann Radcliffe's, that temper romance with reality, as well as in serious novels of social purpose, like William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798); and Mary Shelley, the daughter of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, eventually composed a romantic nightmare, *Frankenstein* (1818), that continues to haunt our dreams.



Bertie Greatheed, ***Diego and Jaquez Frightened by the Giant Foot***, 1791. A scene from Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), showing servants terrified by the supernatural appearance of an oversize stone foot in the castle.

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The century abounded in other remarkable experiments in fiction, anticipating many of the forms that novelists still use today. Tobias Smollett's picaresque *Roderick Random* (1748) and *Humphry Clinker* (1771) delight in coarse practical jokes, the freaks and strong odors of life. But the most *novel* novelist of the age was Laurence Sterne, a humorous, sentimental clergyman who loves to play tricks on his readers. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760–67) abandons clock time for psychological time, whimsically follows chance associations, interrupts its own stories, violates the conventions of print by putting [Chapters 18](#) and [19](#) after [Chapter 25](#), sneaks in double entendres, and seems ready to go on forever. Sterne's second masterpiece, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), gives us a narrator, Yorick, who cultivates his feelings so self-consciously and renders them in such convincing detail that we are unsure whether to laugh at or weep along with him. Such uncertainty helps us recognize that our sympathies are as volatile and ambiguous as those of Sterne's characters. As unique as Sterne's fictional world is, his interest in private life matched the concerns of the novel toward the end of the century: depictions of characters' intimate feelings dominated the tradition of domestic fiction that included Burney, Radcliffe, and, later, Maria Edgeworth, culminating in the masterworks of Jane Austen. The copious, acute, often ironic attention to details of private life by Richardson, Sterne, and Austen have continued to influence the novel profoundly through its subsequent history.

This period brought important changes to ideas about what literature is how it works, and what it should do. If the debates in eighteenth-century Britain helped shape our understanding of "English literature," however, in their own moment these ideas were

profoundly in flux, contested. The new modes of meditative feeling explored by eighteenth-century poets like Thomas Gray and Charlotte Smith were developed by poets at the beginning of the nineteenth century into a Romantic poetics. We today have inherited a set of post-Romantic assumptions about poetry and emotional expressivity that make other aspects of eighteenth-century poetry feel surprising: its willingness to engage big philosophical or political questions, its play with personifications, its exuberant and sometimes vicious satire. The novel as a form was developing in the eighteenth century too, but it developed through a series of daring experiments undertaken without knowledge of the conventions that now seem obvious to us: writers tried out fake travelogues, faux-oriental tales, sentimental scenes designed to make readers weep, even stories narrated from the point of view of objects (as in *The Adventures of a Black Coat . . . As Related by Itself*, 1750). In an era of flourishing ideas about individualism, writers forged individualistic literary genres like the autobiography, but also cultivated aesthetic effects like sublimity that made the individual feel small. These texts might not always conform to our expectations today about what literature is and does, but they are all the more illuminating and compelling for that.

# The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1660</b> Samuel Pepys begins his diary	<b>1660</b> Charles II restored to the throne. Reopening of the theaters  <b>1662</b> Act of Uniformity requires all clergy to obey the Church of England. Chartering of the Royal Society  <b>1664–66</b> Great Plague of London
<b>1666</b> Margaret Cavendish, <i>The Blazing World</i>	<b>1666</b> Fire destroys the City of London
<b>1667</b> John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i>	
<b>1668</b> John Dryden, <i>Essay of Dramatic Poesy</i>	<b>1668</b> Dryden becomes poet laureate  <b>1672</b> Royal African Company founded

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1673</b> Test Act requires all officeholders to swear allegiance to Anglicanism
<b>1678</b> John Bunyan, <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> , part 1	<b>1678</b> The Popish Plot inflames anti-Catholic feeling
<b>1681</b> Dryden, <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i>	<b>1681</b> Charles II dissolves Parliament  <b>1685</b> Death of Charles II. James II, his Catholic brother, takes the throne
<b>1687</b> Sir Isaac Newton, <i>Principia Mathematica</i>	
<b>1688</b> Aphra Behn, <i>Oroonoko</i>	<b>1688</b> The Glorious Revolution. James II exiled and succeeded by his Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, William of Orange
<b>1690</b> John Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1700</b> William Congreve, <i>The Way of the World</i> . Mary Astell, <i>Some Reflections upon Marriage</i>	
	<b>1702</b> War of the Spanish Succession begins. Death of William III. Succession of Anne (Protestant daughter of James II)
<b>1704</b> Jonathan Swift, <i>A Tale of a Tub</i> . Newton, <i>Opticks</i>	
	<b>1707</b> Act of Union with Scotland  <b>1710</b> Tories take power
<b>1711</b> Alexander Pope, <i>An Essay on Criticism</i> . Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, <i>Spectator</i> (1711–12, 1714)	
<b>1713</b> Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, <i>Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions</i>	<b>1713</b> Treaty of Utrecht ends War of the Spanish Succession



TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1714</b> Death of Anne. George I (great-grandson of James I) becomes the first Hanoverian king. Tory government replaced by Whigs
<b>1716</b> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu writes her letters from Turkey (1716–18)	
<b>1717</b> Pope, <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> (final version)	
<b>1719</b> Daniel Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> . Eliza Haywood, <i>Love in Excess</i>	<b>1720</b> "South Sea Bubble" collapses <b>1721</b> Robert Walpole comes to power
<b>1726</b> Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	
	<b>1727</b> George I dies. George II succeeds
<b>1728</b> John Gay, <i>The Beggar's Opera</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1730</b> Stephen Duck, <i>The Thresher's Labor</i>	
<b>1733</b> Pope, <i>An Essay on Man</i>	
	<b>1737</b> Stage Licensing Act censors plays
<b>1740</b> Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>	
<b>1742</b> Henry Fielding, <i>Joseph Andrews</i>	<b>1742</b> Walpole resigns
<b>1743</b> Pope, <i>The Dunciad</i> (final version). William Hogarth, <i>Marriage A-la-Mode</i> (1743–45)	
<b>1746</b> William Collins, <i>Odes</i>	<b>1746</b> Charles Edward Stuart's defeat at Culloden ends the last Jacobite rebellion
<b>1747</b> Richardson, <i>Clarissa</i> (1747–48)	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1749</b> Fielding, <i>Tom Jones</i>	
<b>1751</b> Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"	<b>1751</b> Robert Clive seizes Arcot, the prelude to English control of India
<b>1752</b> Charlotte Lennox, <i>The Female Quixote</i>	
<b>1755</b> Samuel Johnson, <i>Dictionary</i>	<b>1756</b> Beginning of Seven Years' War  <b>1757</b> Victory in Battle of Plassey gives British control of Bengal
<b>1759</b> Johnson, <i>Rasselas</i> . Voltaire, <i>Candide</i>	<b>1759</b> James Wolfe's capture of Quebec ensures British control of Canada
<b>1760</b> Laurence Sterne, <i>Tristram Shandy</i> (1760–67)	<b>1760</b> George III succeeds to the throne
<b>1768</b> Sterne, <i>A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy</i>	<b>1768</b> Captain James Cook voyages to Australia and New Zealand

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1773</b> Phillis Wheatley, <i>Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral</i>	<b>1772</b> <i>Somerset</i> decision declares slavery illegal in England
<b>1776</b> Adam Smith, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i>	<b>1775</b> American Revolution (1775–83). James Watt produces steam engines <b>1777</b> Vermont constitution first in North America to ban slavery
<b>1778</b> Frances Burney, <i>Evelina</i>	
<b>1779</b> Johnson, <i>Lives of the Poets</i> (1779–81)	<b>1780</b> Gordon Riots in London <b>1783</b> William Pitt becomes prime minister
<b>1785</b> William Cowper, <i>The Task</i>	
<b>1789</b> Olaudah Equiano, <i>The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano</i>	<b>1789</b> Captain and crew of British ship <i>Zong</i> massacre over 130 enslaved Africans by drowning

# **JOHN DRYDEN**

## **1631–1700**

Although John Dryden's parents seem to have sided with Parliament against the king, there is no evidence that the poet grew up in a strict Puritan family. His father, a country gentleman of moderate fortune, gave his son a gentleman's education at Westminster School, under the renowned Dr. Richard Busby, who used the rod as a pedagogical aid in imparting a sound knowledge of the learned languages and literatures to his charges (among others John Locke and Matthew Prior). From Westminster, Dryden went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took his A.B. in 1654. His first important poem, "Heroic Stanzas" (1659), was written to commemorate the death of Cromwell. The next year, however, in "Astraea Redux," Dryden joined his countrymen in celebrating the return of Charles II to his throne. During the rest of his life Dryden was to remain entirely loyal to Charles and to his successor, James II.

Dryden is a commanding literary figure of the last four decades of the seventeenth century. An impressive range of aspects of the life of his times—political, religious, philosophical, artistic—finds expression somewhere in his writings. Dryden is the least personal of poets. He is not at all the solitary, subjective poet listening to the murmur of his own voice and preoccupied with his own feelings but rather a citizen of the world commenting publicly on matters of public concern.

From the beginning to the end of his literary career, Dryden's nondramatic poems are most typically occasional poems, which commemorate particular events of a public character—a coronation, a military victory, a death, or a political crisis. Such poems are social and often ceremonial, written not for the self but for the nation. Dryden's principal achievements in this form are the two poems on the king's return and his coronation; *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), which celebrates the English naval victory over the Dutch and the fortitude of the people of London and the king during the Great Fire, both events of that "year of wonder," 1666; the political poems; and poems celebrating holidays, such as "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day."

Between 1664 and 1681, however, Dryden was mainly a playwright. The newly chartered theaters needed a modern repertory, and he set out to supply one. Dryden wrote his plays, as he frankly confessed, to please his audiences, which were not heterogeneous like Shakespeare's but were largely drawn from the court and from people of fashion. In the style of the time, he produced rhymed heroic plays, in which noble heroes and heroines face incredibly difficult choices between love and honor; comedies, in which fashionable men and women engage in intrigue and bright repartee; and later, libretti for the newly introduced dramatic form, the opera. His one great tragedy, *All for Love* (produced 1677), in blank verse, adapts Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* to the unities of time, place, and action. As his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) shows, Dryden had studied the works of the great playwrights of Greece and Rome, of the English Renaissance, and of contemporary France, seeking sound theoretical principles on which to construct the new drama that the age demanded. Indeed, his fine critical intelligence always supported his creative powers. His abilities as both poet and dramatist brought him to the attention of the king, who in 1668 made him poet laureate. Two years later the post of historiographer royal was added to the laureateship at a combined stipend of £200, enough money to live comfortably on.

Between 1678 and 1681, when he was nearing fifty, Dryden discovered his great gift for writing formal verse satire. A quarrel

with the playwright Thomas Shadwell prompted the mock-heroic "Mac Flecknoe," probably written in 1678 or 1679 but not published until 1682. Out of the stresses occasioned by the Popish Plot (1678) and its political aftermath came his major political satires, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681–82), and "The Medal" (1682), his final attack on the villain of *Absalom and Achitophel*, the Earl of Shaftesbury.

The consideration of religious and political questions that the events of 1678–81 forced on Dryden brought a new seriousness to his mind and works. In 1682 he published *Religio Laici*, a poem in which he examined the grounds of his religious faith and defended the middle way of the Anglican Church against the rationalism of Deism on the one hand and the authoritarianism of Rome on the other. But he had moved closer to Rome than he perhaps realized when he wrote the poem. Charles II died in 1685 and was succeeded by his Catholic brother, James II. Within a year Dryden and his two sons converted to Catholicism. Though his enemies accused him of opportunism, he proved his sincerity by his steadfast loyalty to the Roman Church after James abdicated and the Protestant William and Mary came in; as a result he was to lose his offices and their much-needed stipends.

With a family to support, Dryden resumed writing plays and turned to translations to enhance his much-diminished income. In 1693 appeared his versions of Juvenal and Persius, with a long dedicatory epistle on satire; and in 1697, his greatest achievement in this mode, the works of Virgil. At the very end, two months before his death, came the *Fables Ancient and Modern*, prefaced by one of the finest of his critical essays and made up of translations from Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer.

Dryden's foremost achievement was to bring the pleasures of literature to the ever-increasing reading public of Britain. As a critic and translator, he made many classics available to men and women who lacked a classical education. His canons of taste and theoretical principles would set the standard for the next generation. As a writer of prose, he helped establish a popular new style, shaped to the cadences of good conversation. Johnson praised its apparent

artlessness: "every word seems to drop by chance, though it falls into its proper place. Nothing is cold or languid; the whole is airy, animated, and vigorous . . . though all is easy, nothing is feeble; though all seems careless, there is nothing harsh." Although Dryden's plays went out of fashion, his poems did not. His satire inspired the most brilliant verse satirist of the next century, Alexander Pope, and the energy and variety of his metrics launched the long-standing vogue of heroic couplets. Dryden fashioned the couplet form into an instrument suitable for every sort of discourse, from the thrust and parry of quick logical argument to expressive feelings, rapid narrative, or forensic declamation. Dryden crafted his verse into a style that was lively, dignified, precise, and always musical—a flexible instrument of public speech. "By him we were taught *sapere et fari*, to think naturally and express forcibly," Johnson concluded. "What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus, may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, *lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit*, he found it brick, and he left it marble."



# ***From Annus Mirabilis***<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

## **[LONDON REBORN]**

845 Yet London, empress of the northern clime,  
By an high fate thou greatly didst expire;  
Great as the world's, which at the death of time  
Must fall, and rise a nobler frame by fire.<sup>2</sup>

850 As when some dire usurper Heaven provides,  
To scourge his country with a lawless sway:<sup>3</sup>  
His birth, perhaps, some petty village hides,  
And sets his cradle out of fortune's way:

Till fully ripe his swelling fate breaks out,  
And hurries him to mighty mischiefs on:  
855 His Prince, surprised at first, no ill could doubt,<sup>o</sup>  
And wants the power to meet it when 'tis  
known:

Such was the rise of this prodigious fire,  
Which in mean buildings first obscurely bred,  
From thence did soon to open streets aspire,  
860 And straight to palaces and temples spread.

\* \* \*

Me-thinks already, from this chymic<sup>o</sup> flame,  
I see a city of more precious mold:  
1170 Rich as the town which gives the Indies name,<sup>o</sup>  
With silver paved, and all divine with gold.

Already, laboring with a mighty fate,  
She shakes the rubbish from her mounting  
brow,  
And seems to have renewed her charter's date,  
1175 Which Heaven will to the death of time allow.

More great than human, now, and more August,<sup>4</sup>  
New deified she from her fires does rise:  
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,  
And, opening, into larger parts she flies.  
1180

Before, she like some shepherdess did show,  
Who sat to bathe her by a river's side:  
Not answering to her fame, but rude and low,  
Nor taught the beauteous arts of modern pride.

Now, like a Maiden Queen, she will behold,  
1185 From her high turrets, hourly suitors come:  
The East with incense, and the West with gold,  
Will stand, like suppliants, to receive her doom.<sup>o</sup>

The silver Thames, her own domestic flood,  
Shall bear her vessels like a sweeping train;  
1190 And often wind (as of his mistress proud)  
With longing eyes to meet her face again.

The wealthy Tagus,<sup>5</sup> and the wealthier Rhine,  
The glory of their towns no more shall boast;  
And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join,<sup>6</sup>  
1195 Shall find her luster stained, and traffic lost.

The venturous merchant, who designed<sup>o</sup> more far,  
And touches on our hospitable shore,  
Charmed with the splendor of this northern star,  
1200 Shall here unlade him, and depart no more.

Our powerful navy shall no longer meet,  
The wealth of France or Holland to invade;  
The beauty of this Town, without a fleet,  
From all the world shall vindicate<sup>o</sup> her trade.

1205 And while this famed emporium we prepare,  
The British ocean shall such triumphs boast,  
That those who now disdain our trade to share,  
Shall rob like pirates on our wealthy coast.

1210 Already we have conquered half the war,  
And the less dangerous part is left behind:  
Our trouble now is but to make them dare,  
And not so great to vanquish as to find.

Thus to the eastern wealth through storms we go,  
But now, the Cape once doubled,<sup>o</sup> fear no  
more;  
1215 A constant trade-wind will securely blow,  
And gently lay us on the spicy shore.

## 1666 **Endnotes**

1667

- Note 1:

The year 1666 was a “year of wonders” (*annus mirabilis*; Latin): war, plague, and the Great Fire of London. According to the enemies of Charles II, God was visiting His wrath on the English people to signify that the reign of an unholy king would soon come to an end. Dryden’s long “historical poem” *Annus Mirabilis*, written the same year, interprets the wonders differently: as trials sent by God to punish rebellious spirits and to bind the king and his people together. “Never had prince or people more mutual reason to love each other,” Dryden wrote, “if suffering for each other can endear affection.” Charles had endured rejection and exile, England had been torn by civil wars. Dryden views these sufferings as a covenant, a pledge of better times

to come. Out of Charles's troubles, he predicts in heroic stanzas modeled on Virgil, the king shall arise like a new Augustus, the ruler of a great empire, and out of fire, London shall arise like the phoenix, ready to take its place as trade center for the world, in the glory of a new Augustan age.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Dryden's footnote cites Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, which foretells that the world will be purged by fire. The Fire of London, which utterly consumed the central city, burned for four days, September 2–6. By September 10, Christopher Wren had already submitted a plan, much of it later adopted, for rebuilding the city on a grander scale. For a dramatic contemporary depiction of the event, see *The Great Fire of London*, 1666, in the color insert in this volume. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Probably a reference to Oliver Cromwell. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Augusta, the old name of London [*Dryden's note*]. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The river Tagus flows into the Atlantic at Lisbon. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: France and Holland (which then included Belgium) had made an alliance for trade, as well as war, against England. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *fear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *alchemic, transmuting* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Mexico* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *judgment, decree* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intended to go* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *defend, protect* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sailed around* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Absalom and Achanitophel**

In 1678 a dangerous crisis, both religious and political, threatened to undo the Restoration settlement and to precipitate England once again into civil war. The Popish Plot and its aftermath not only whipped up extreme anti-Catholic passions, but led between 1679 and 1681 to a bitter political struggle between Charles II (whose adherents came to be called Tories) and the Earl of Shaftesbury (whose followers were termed Whigs). The issues were nothing less than the prerogatives of the Crown and the possible exclusion of the king's Catholic brother, James, Duke of York, from his position as heir-presumptive to the throne. Charles's cool courage and brilliant, if unscrupulous, political genius saved the throne for his brother and gave at least temporary peace to his people.

Charles was a Catholic at heart—he received the last rites of that church on his deathbed—and was eager to do what he could do discreetly for the relief of his Catholic subjects, who suffered severe civil and religious disabilities imposed by their numerically superior Protestant compatriots. James openly professed the Catholic religion, an awkward fact politically, for he was next in line of succession because Charles had no legitimate children. The household of the duke, as well as that of Charles's neglected queen, Catherine of Braganza, inevitably became the center of Catholic life and intrigue at court and consequently of Protestant prejudice and suspicion.

No one understood, however, that the situation was explosive until 1678, when Titus Oates (a renegade Catholic convert of infamous character) offered sworn testimony of the existence of a Jesuit plot to assassinate the king, burn London, massacre Protestants, and reestablish the Roman Church.

The country might have kept its head and come to realize (what no historian has doubted) that Oates and his confederates were perjured rascals, as Charles himself quickly perceived. But panic was created by the discovery of the body of a prominent London justice of the peace, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, who a few days before had received for safekeeping a copy of Oates's testimony. The murder, immediately ascribed to the Catholics, has never been solved. Fear

and indignation reached a hysterical pitch when the seizure of the papers of the Duke of York's secretary revealed that he had been in correspondence with the confessor of Louis XIV regarding the reestablishment of the Roman Church in England. Before the terror subsided many innocent men were executed on the increasingly bold and always false evidence of Oates and his accomplices.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, the Duke of Buckingham, and others quickly took advantage of the situation. With the support of the Commons and the City of London, they moved to exclude the Duke of York from the succession. Between 1679 and 1681 Charles and Shaftesbury were engaged in a mighty struggle. The Whigs found a candidate of their own in the king's favorite illegitimate son, the handsome and engaging Duke of Monmouth, whom they advanced as a proper successor to his father. They urged Charles to legitimize him, and when he refused, they whispered that there was proof that the king had secretly married Monmouth's mother. The young man allowed himself to be used against his father. He was sent on a triumphant progress through western England, where he was enthusiastically received. Twice an Exclusion Bill nearly passed both houses. But by early 1681 Charles had secured his own position by secretly accepting from Louis XIV a three-year subsidy that made him independent of Parliament, which had tried to force his hand by refusing to vote him funds. He summoned Parliament to meet at Oxford in the spring of 1681, and a few moments after the Commons had passed the Exclusion Bill, in a bold stroke he abruptly dissolved Parliament, which never met again during his reign. Already, as Charles was aware, a reaction had set in against the violence of the Whigs. In midsummer, when he felt it safe to move against his enemies, Shaftesbury was sent to the Tower of London, charged with high treason. In November, the grand jury, packed with Whigs, threw out the indictment, and the earl was free, but his power was broken, and he lived only two more years.

Shortly before the grand jury acted, Dryden published anonymously the first part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, apparently hoping to influence their verdict. The issues in question were grave;

the chief actors, the most important men in the realm. Dryden, therefore, could not use burlesque and caricature as had Butler, or the mock heroic, as he himself had done in "Mac Flecknoe." Only a heroic style and manner were appropriate to his weighty material, and the poem is most original in its blending of the heroic and the satiric. Dryden's task called for all his tact and literary skill; he had to mention, but to gloss over, the king's faults: his indolence and love of pleasure; his neglect of his wife; and his devotion to his mistresses—conduct that had left him with many children, but no heir except his Catholic brother. He had to deal gently with Monmouth, whom Charles still loved. And he had to present, or appear to present, the king's case objectively.

The remarkable parallels between the rebellion of Absalom against his father, King David (2 Samuel 13–18), had already been noticed in sermons, satires, and pamphlets. Dryden took the hint and gave contemporary events a due distance and additional dignity by approaching them indirectly through their biblical analogues. The poem is famous for its brilliant portraits of the king's enemies and friends, but equally admirable are the temptation scene (which, like other passages, is indebted to Milton's *Paradise Lost*) and the exceptionally astute analysis of the Popish Plot itself.

A second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* (not included here) appeared in 1682. Most of it is the work of Nahum Tate, but lines 310–509, which include the devastating portraits of Doeg and Og (two Whig poets, Elkanah Settle and Thomas Shadwell), are certainly by Dryden.

## Absalom and Achitophel: A Poem

In pious times, ere priestcraft<sup>1</sup> did begin,  
Before polygamy was made a sin;  
When man on many multiplied his kind,  
Ere one to one was cursedly confined;  
5 When nature prompted and no law denied  
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;  
Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart,<sup>2</sup>  
His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,  
Scattered his Maker's image through the land.  
10 Michal,<sup>3</sup> of royal blood, the crown did wear,  
A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care:  
Not so the rest; for several mothers bore  
To godlike David several sons before.  
But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,  
15 No true succession could their seed attend.  
Of all this numerous progeny was none  
So beautiful, so brave, as Absalom:<sup>4</sup>  
Whether, inspired by some diviner lust,  
His father got him with a greater gust,<sup>o</sup>  
20 Or that his conscious destiny made way,  
By manly beauty, to imperial sway.  
Early in foreign fields he won renown,  
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown:<sup>5</sup>  
In peace the thoughts of war he could remove,  
25 And seemed as he were only born for love.  
Whate'er he did, was done with so much ease,  
In him alone 'twas natural to please;  
His motions all accompanied with grace;  
And paradise was opened in his face.  
30



With secret joy indulgent David viewed  
His youthful image in his son renewed:  
To all his wishes nothing he denied;  
And made the charming Annabel<sup>6</sup> his bride.  
What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)  
35 His father could not, or he would not see.  
Some warm excesses which the law forbore,  
Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er:  
And Amnon's murder,<sup>7</sup> by a specious name,  
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.  
40 Thus praised and loved the noble youth remained,  
While David, undisturbed, in Sion<sup>8</sup> reigned.  
But life can never be sincerely<sup>9</sup> blest;  
Heaven punishes the bad, and proves<sup>10</sup> the best.  
The Jews,<sup>11</sup> a headstrong, moody, murmuring race,  
45 As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace;  
God's pampered people, whom, debauched with  
ease,  
No king could govern, nor no God could please  
(Gods they had tried of every shape and size  
That god-smiths could produce, or priests devise);<sup>12</sup>  
50 These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,  
Began to dream they wanted liberty;<sup>13</sup>  
And when no rule, no precedent was found,  
Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,  
They led their wild desires to woods and caves,  
55 And thought that all but savages were slaves.  
They who, when Saul<sup>14</sup> was dead, without a blow,  
Made foolish Ishbosheth<sup>15</sup> the crown forgo;  
Who banished David did from Hebron<sup>16</sup> bring,  
And with a general shout proclaimed him king:  
60 Those very Jews, who, at their very best,  
Their humor<sup>17</sup> more than loyalty expressed,  
Now wondered why so long they had obeyed  
An idol monarch, which their hands had made;

65 Thought they might ruin him they could create,  
Or melt him to that golden calf,<sup>4</sup> a state.<sub>o</sub>  
But these were random bolts;<sub>o</sub> no formed design  
Nor interest made the factious crowd to join:  
The sober part of Israel, free from stain,  
Well knew the value of a peaceful reign;  
70 And, looking backward with a wise affright,  
Saw seams of wounds, dishonest<sub>o</sub> to the sight:  
In contemplation of whose ugly scars  
They cursed the memory of civil wars.  
The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,<sub>o</sub>  
75 Inclined the balance to the better side;  
And David's mildness managed it so well,  
The bad found no occasion to rebel.  
But when to sin our biased<sup>5</sup> nature leans,  
The careful Devil is still at hand with means;  
80 And providently pimps for ill desires:  
The Good Old Cause<sup>6</sup> revived, a plot requires.  
Plots, true or false, are necessary things,  
To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings.  
The inhabitants of old Jerusalem  
85 Were Jebusites;<sup>7</sup> the town so called from them;  
And theirs the native right.  
But when the chosen people<sub>o</sub> grew more strong,  
The rightful cause at length became the wrong;  
And every loss the men of Jebus bore,  
90 They still were thought God's enemies the more.  
Thus worn and weakened, well or ill content,  
Submit they must to David's government:  
Impoverished and deprived of all command,  
Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;  
95 And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,  
Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood.<sup>8</sup>  
This set the heathen priesthood<sub>o</sub> in a flame;  
For priests of all religions are the same:

100 Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be,  
Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,  
In his defense his servants are as bold,  
As if he had been born of beaten gold.  
The Jewish rabbins,<sup>o</sup> though their enemies,  
105 In this conclude them honest men and wise:  
For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,  
To espouse his cause, by whom they eat and drink.  
From hence began that Plot, the nation's curse,  
Bad in itself, but represented worse;  
110 Raised in extremes, and in extremes decried;  
With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied;  
Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude;  
But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude.  
Some truth there was, but dashed<sup>o</sup> and brewed with  
lies,  
115 To please the fools, and puzzle all the wise.  
Succeeding times did equal folly call,  
Believing nothing, or believing all.  
The Egyptian<sup>9</sup> rites the Jebusites embraced,  
Where gods were recommended by their taste.<sup>1</sup>  
Such savory deities must needs be good,  
120 As served at once for worship and for food.  
By force they could not introduce these gods,  
For ten to one in former days was odds;  
So fraud was used (the sacrificer's trade):  
Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.  
125 Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews,  
And raked for converts even the court and stews:<sup>o</sup>  
Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took,  
Because the fleece accompanies the flock.<sup>2</sup>  
Some thought they God's anointed<sup>o</sup> meant to slay  
130 By guns, invented since full many a day:  
Our author swears it not; but who can know  
How far the Devil and Jebusites may go?

This Plot, which failed for want of common sense,  
 Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence:  
 135 For, as when raging fevers boil the blood,  
 The standing lake soon floats into a flood,  
 And every hostile humor,<sup>3</sup> which before  
 Slept quiet in its channels, bubbles o'er;  
 So several factions from this first ferment  
 140 Work up to foam, and threat the government.  
 Some by their friends, more by themselves thought  
 wise,  
 Opposed the power to which they could not rise.  
 Some had in courts been great, and thrown from  
 thence,  
 Like fiends were hardened in impenitence;  
 145 Some, by their monarch's fatal mercy, grown  
 From pardoned rebels kinsmen to the throne,  
 Were raised in power and public office high;  
 Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie.  
 Of these the false Achitophel<sup>4</sup> was first;  
 150 A name to all succeeding ages cursed:  
 For close designs, and crooked counsels fit;  
 Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit;<sup>o</sup>  
 Restless, unfixed in principles and place;  
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace:  
 155 A fiery soul, which, working out its way,  
 Fretted the pygmy body to decay,  
 And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.<sup>5</sup> }  
 A daring pilot in extremity;  
 Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,  
 160 He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,  
 Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.  
 Great wits<sup>o</sup> are sure to madness near allied,<sup>6</sup>  
 And thin partitions do their bounds divide;  
 Else why should he, with wealth and honor blest,  
 165 Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?

Punish a body which he could not please;  
 Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?  
 And all to leave what with his toil he won,  
 To that unfeathered two-legged thing,<sup>7</sup> a son;  
 170 Got, while his soul did huddled<sup>o</sup> notions try;  
 And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.  
 In friendship false, implacable in hate,  
 Resolved to ruin or to rule the state.  
 To compass this the triple bond<sup>8</sup> he broke, }  
 175 The pillars of the public safety shook,  
 And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke;  
 Then seized with fear, yet still affecting  
     fame,  
 Usurped a patriot's all-atoning name.  
 So easy still it proves in factious times,  
 180 With public zeal to cancel private crimes.  
 How safe is treason, and how sacred ill,  
 Where none can sin against the people's will!  
 Where crowds can wink, and no offense be known,  
 Since in another's guilt they find their own!  
 185 Yet fame deserved, no enemy can grudge;  
 The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.  
 In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin<sup>9</sup>  
 With more discerning eyes, or hands more clean;  
 Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress;  
 190 Swift of dispatch, and easy of access.  
 Oh, had he been content to serve the crown,  
 With virtues only proper to the gown<sup>o</sup>  
 Or had the rankness of the soil been freed  
 From cockle,<sup>o</sup> that oppressed the noble seed;  
 195 David for him his tuneful harp had strung,  
 And Heaven had wanted one immortal song.<sup>1</sup>  
 But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand,  
 And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.  
 Achitophel, grown weary to possess

200 A lawful fame, and lazy happiness,  
Disdained the golden fruit to gather free,  
And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.  
Now, manifest of<sup>o</sup> crimes contrived long since,  
He stood at bold defiance with his prince;  
205 Held up the buckler of the people's cause  
Against the crown, and skulked behind the laws.  
The wished occasion of the Plot he takes;  
Some circumstances finds, but more he makes.  
By buzzing emissaries fills the ears  
210 Of listening crowds with jealousies<sup>o</sup> and fears  
Of arbitrary counsels brought to light,  
And proves the king himself a Jebusite.  
Weak arguments! which yet he knew full well  
Were strong with people easy to rebel.  
215 For, governed by the moon, the giddy Jews  
Tread the same track when she the prime renews;  
And once in twenty years, their scribes record,<sup>2</sup>  
By natural instinct they change their lord.  
Achitophel still wants a chief, and none  
220 Was found so fit as warlike Absalom:  
Not that he wished his greatness to create  
(For politicians neither love nor hate),  
But, for he knew his title not allowed,  
Would keep him still depending on the crowd,  
225 That<sup>o</sup> kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be  
Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.<sup>3</sup>  
Him he attempts with studied arts to please,  
And sheds his venom in such words as these:  
"Auspicious prince, at whose nativity  
230 Some royal planet<sup>4</sup> ruled the southern sky;  
Thy longing country's darling and desire;  
Their cloudy pillar and their guardian fire:  
Their second Moses, whose extended wand  
Divides the seas, and shows the promised land;<sup>5</sup>  
235

Whose dawning day in every distant age  
Has exercised the sacred prophet's rage:  
The people's prayer, the glad diviners' theme,  
The young men's vision, and the old men's dream!<sup>6</sup>  
Thee, savior, thee, the nation's vows<sup>7</sup> confess,  
240 And, never satisfied with seeing, bless:  
Swift unbespoken<sup>8</sup> pomps thy steps proclaim,  
And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.  
How long wilt thou the general joy detain,  
Starve and defraud the people of thy reign?  
245 Content ingloriously to pass thy days  
Like one of Virtue's fools that feeds on praise;  
Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,  
Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.  
Believe me, royal youth, thy fruit must be  
250 Or gathered ripe, or rot upon the tree.  
Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late,  
Some lucky revolution of their fate;  
Whose motions if we watch and guide with skill  
(For human good depends on human will),  
255 Our Fortune rolls as from a smooth descent,  
And from the first impression takes the bent;  
But, if unseized, she glides away like wind,  
And leaves repenting Folly far behind.  
Now, now she meets you with a glorious prize,  
260 And spreads her locks before her as she flies.<sup>8</sup>  
Had thus old David, from whose loins you spring,  
Not dared, when Fortune called him, to be king,  
At Gath<sup>9</sup> an exile he might still remain,  
And heaven's anointing<sup>1</sup> oil had been in vain.  
265 Let his successful youth your hopes engage;  
But shun the example of declining age;  
Behold him setting in his western skies,  
The shadows lengthening as the vapors rise.  
He is not now, as when on Jordan's sand<sup>2</sup>

270 The joyful people thronged to see him land,  
 Covering the beach, and blackening all the  
 strand;  
 But, like the Prince of Angels, from his  
 height  
 Comes tumbling downward with diminished light;<sup>3</sup>  
 Betrayed by one poor plot to public scorn  
 275 (Our only blessing since his cursed return),  
 Those heaps of people which one sheaf did bind,  
 Blown off and scattered by a puff of wind.  
 What strength can he to your designs oppose,  
 Naked of friends, and round beset with foes?  
 280 If Pharaoh's<sup>4</sup> doubtful succor he should use,  
 A foreign aid would more incense the Jews:  
 Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring;  
 Foment the war, but not support the king:  
 Nor would the royal party e'er unite  
 285 With Pharaoh's arms to assist the Jebusite;  
 Or if they should, their interest soon would break,  
 And with such odious aid make David weak.  
 All sorts of men by my successful arts,  
 Abhorring kings, estrange their altered hearts  
 290 From David's rule: and 'tis the general cry,  
 'Religion, commonwealth, and liberty.'<sup>5</sup>  
 If you, as champion of the public good,  
 Add to their arms a chief of royal blood,  
 What may not Israel hope, and what applause  
 295 Might such a general gain by such a cause?  
 Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flower  
 Fair only to the sight, but solid power;  
 And nobler is a limited command,  
 Given by the love of all your native land,  
 300 Than a successive title,<sup>6</sup> long and dark,  
 Drawn from the moldy rolls of Noah's ark."  
 What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,



When flattery soothes, and when ambition blinds!  
Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,  
305 Yet, sprung from high, is of celestial seed:  
In God 'tis glory; and when men aspire,  
'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.  
The ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,  
310 Too full of angels' metal<sup>7</sup> in his frame,  
Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,  
Made drunk with honor, and debauched with praise.  
Half loath, and half consenting to the ill  
(For loyal blood within him struggled still),  
He thus replied: "And what pretense have I  
315 To take up arms for public liberty?  
My father governs with unquestioned right;  
The faith's defender, and mankind's delight,  
Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws:  
And heaven by wonders has espoused his cause.  
320 Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign?  
Who sues for justice to his throne in vain?  
What millions has he pardoned of his foes,  
Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose?  
Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good,  
325 Inclined to mercy, and averse from blood;  
If mildness ill with stubborn Israel suit,  
His crime is God's beloved attribute.  
What could he gain, his people to betray,  
Or change his right for arbitrary sway?  
330 Let haughty Pharaoh curse, with such a reign  
His fruitful Nile, and yoke a servile train.  
If David's rule Jerusalem displease,  
The Dog Star<sup>8</sup> heats their brains to this disease.  
Why then should I, encouraging the bad,  
335 Turn rebel and run popularly mad?  
Were he a tyrant, who, by lawless might  
Oppressed the Jews, and raised the Jebusite,

Well might I mourn; but nature's holy bands  
Would curb my spirits and restrain my hands:  
340 The people might assert<sup>o</sup> their liberty,  
But what was right in them were crime in me.  
His favor leaves me nothing to require;  
Prevents my wishes, and outruns desire.  
What more can I expect while David lives?  
345 All but his kingly diadem he gives:  
And that"—But there he paused; then sighing, said—  
"Is justly destined for a worthier head.  
For when my father from his toils shall rest  
And late augment the number of the blest,  
350 His lawful issue shall the throne ascend,  
Or the collateral line,<sup>9</sup> where that shall end.  
His brother, though oppressed with vulgar spite,<sup>1</sup>  
Yet dauntless, and secure of native right,  
Of every royal virtue stands possessed;  
355 Still dear to all the bravest and the best.  
His courage foes, his friends his truth proclaim;  
His loyalty the king, the world his fame.  
His mercy even the offending crowd will find,  
For sure he comes of a forgiving kind.<sup>2</sup>  
360 Why should I then repine at heaven's decree,  
Which gives me no pretense to royalty?  
Yet O that fate, propitiously inclined,  
Had raised my birth, or had debased my mind;  
To my large soul not all her treasure lent,  
365 And then betrayed it to a mean descent!  
I find, I find my mounting spirits bold,  
And David's part disdains my mother's mold.  
Why am I scanted by a niggard birth?<sup>3</sup>  
My soul disclaims the kindred of her earth;  
370 And, made for empire, whispers me within,  
'Desire of greatness is a godlike sin.' "  
Him staggering so when hell's dire agent found,

While fainting Virtue scarce maintained her ground,  
He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies:  
375       “The eternal god, supremely good and wise,  
Imparts not these prodigious gifts in vain:  
What wonders are reserved to bless your reign!  
Against your will, your arguments have shown,  
Such virtue’s only given to guide a throne.  
380       Not that your father’s mildness I contemn,  
But manly force becomes the diadem.  
’Tis true he grants the people all they crave;  
And more, perhaps, than subjects ought to have:  
For lavish grants suppose a monarch tame,  
385       And more his goodness than his wit<sup>o</sup> proclaim.  
But when should people strive their bonds to break,  
If not when kings are negligent or weak?  
Let him give on till he can give no more,  
The thrifty Sanhedrin<sup>4</sup> shall keep him poor;  
390       And every shekel which he can receive,  
Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.<sup>5</sup>  
To ply him with new plots shall be my care;  
Or plunge him deep in some expensive war;  
Which when his treasure can no more supply,  
395       He must, with the remains of kingship, buy.  
His faithful friends our jealousies and fears  
Call Jebusites, and Pharaoh’s pensioners;  
Whom when our fury from his aid has torn,  
He shall be naked left to public scorn.  
400       The next successor, whom I fear and hate,  
My arts have made obnoxious to the state;  
Turned all his virtues to his overthrow,  
And gained our elders<sup>6</sup> to pronounce a foe.  
His right, for sums of necessary gold,  
405       Shall first be pawned, and afterward be sold;  
Till time shall ever-wanting David draw,  
To pass your doubtful title into law:

If not, the people have a right supreme  
To make their kings; for kings are made for them.  
410 All empire is no more than power in trust,  
Which, when resumed,<sup>o</sup> can be no longer just.  
Succession, for the general good designed,  
In its own wrong a nation cannot bind;  
If altering that the people can relieve,  
415 Better one suffer than a nation grieve.  
The Jews well know their power: ere Saul they  
chose,<sup>7</sup>  
God was their king, and God they durst depose.  
Urge now your piety,<sup>8</sup> your filial name,  
A father's right and fear of future fame;  
420 The public good, that universal call,  
To which even heaven submitted, answers all.  
Nor let his love enchant your generous mind;  
'Tis Nature's trick to propagate her kind.  
Our fond begetters, who would never die,  
425 Love but themselves in their posterity.  
Or let his kindness by the effects be tried,  
Or let him lay his vain pretense aside.  
God said he loved your father; could he bring  
A better proof than to anoint him king?  
430 It surely showed he loved the shepherd well,  
Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.  
Would David have you thought his darling son?  
What means he then, to alienate<sup>9</sup> the crown?  
The name of godly he may blush to bear:  
435 'Tis after God's own heart<sup>1</sup> to cheat his heir.  
He to his brother gives supreme command;  
To you a legacy of barren land,<sup>2</sup>  
Perhaps the old harp, on which he thrums his lays,  
Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise.  
440 Then the next heir, a prince severe and wise,  
Already looks on you with jealous eyes;

Sees through the thin disguises of your arts,  
And marks your progress in the people's hearts.  
Though now his mighty soul its grief contains,  
445 He meditates revenge who least complains;  
And, like a lion, slumbering in the way,  
Or sleep dissembling, while he waits his prey,  
His fearless foes within his distance draws,  
Constrains his roaring, and contracts his paws;  
450 Till at the last, his time for fury found,  
He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground;  
The prostrate vulgar<sup>o</sup> passes o'er and spares,  
But with a lordly rage his hunters tears.  
Your case no tame expedients will afford:  
455 Resolve on death, or conquest by the sword,  
Which for no less a stake than life you draw;  
And self-defense is nature's eldest law.  
Leave the warm people no considering time;  
For then rebellion may be thought a crime.  
460 Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,  
But try your title while your father lives;  
And that your arms may have a fair pretense,<sup>o</sup>  
Proclaim you take them in the king's defense;  
Whose sacred life each minute would expose  
465 To plots, from seeming friends, and secret foes.  
And who can sound the depth of David's soul?  
Perhaps his fear his kindness may control.  
He fears his brother, though he loves his son,  
For plighted vows too late to be undone.  
470 If so, by force he wishes to be gained,  
Like women's lechery, to seem constrained.<sup>o</sup>  
Doubt not; but when he most affects the frown,  
Commit a pleasing rape upon the crown.  
Secure his person to secure your cause:  
475 They who possess the prince, possess the laws."  
He said, and this advice above the rest  
With Absalom's mild nature suited best:

Unblamed of life (ambition set aside),  
Not stained with cruelty, nor puffed with pride,  
480 How happy had he been, if destiny  
Had higher placed his birth, or not so high!  
His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne,  
And blest all other countries but his own.  
But charming greatness since so few refuse,  
485 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse.  
Strong were his hopes a rival to remove,  
With blandishments to gain the public love;  
To head the faction while their zeal was hot,  
And popularly prosecute the Plot.  
490 To further this, Achitophel unites  
The malcontents of all the Israelites;  
Whose differing parties he could wisely join,  
For several ends, to serve the same design:  
The best (and of the princes some were such),  
495 Who thought the power of monarchy too much;  
Mistaken men, and patriots in their hearts;  
Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts.  
By these the springs of property were bent,  
And wound so high, they cracked the government.  
500 The next for interest sought to embroil the state,  
To sell their duty at a dearer rate;  
And make their Jewish markets of the throne,  
Pretending public good, to serve their own.  
Others thought kings an useless heavy load,  
505 Who cost too much, and did too little good.  
These were for laying honest David by,  
On principles of pure good husbandry.<sup>o</sup>  
With them joined all the haranguers of the throng,  
That thought to get preferment by the tongue.  
510 Who follow next, a double danger bring,  
Not only hating David, but the king:  
The Solymaeen rout,<sup>3</sup> well-versed of old

In godly faction, and in treason bold;  
Cowering and quaking at a conqueror's sword,  
515 But lofty to a lawful prince restored;  
Saw with disdain an ethnic<sup>4</sup> plot begun,  
And scorned by Jebusites to be outdone.  
Hot Levites<sup>5</sup> headed these; who, pulled before  
From the ark, which in the Judges' days they bore,  
520 Resumed their cant, and with a zealous cry  
Pursued their old beloved theocracy:  
Where Sanhedrin and priest enslaved the nation,  
And justified their spoils by inspiration:  
For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race,<sup>6</sup>  
525 If once dominion they could found in grace?  
These led the pack; though not of surest scent,  
Yet deepest-mouthed<sup>7</sup> against the government.  
A numerous host of dreaming saints<sup>8</sup> succeed,  
Of the true old enthusiastic breed:  
530 'Gainst form and order they their power employ,  
Nothing to build, and all things to destroy.  
But far more numerous was the herd of such,  
Who think too little, and who talk too much.  
These out of mere instinct, they knew not why,  
535 Adored their fathers' God and property;  
And, by the same blind benefit of fate,  
The Devil and the Jebusite did hate:  
Born to be saved, even in their own despite,  
Because they could not help believing right.  
540 Such were the tools; but a whole Hydra more  
Remains, of sprouting heads too long to score.<sup>9</sup>  
Some of their chiefs were princes of the land:  
In the first rank of these did Zimri<sup>9</sup> stand;  
A man so various, that he seemed to be  
545 Not one, but all mankind's epitome:  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;  
Was everything by starts, and nothing long;

But, in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was chymist,<sup>o</sup> fiddler, statesman, and buffoon:  
550 Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,  
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.  
Blest madman, who could every hour employ,  
With something new to wish, or to enjoy!  
Railing<sup>o</sup> and praising were his usual themes;  
555 And both (to show his judgment) in extremes:  
So over-violent, or over-civil,  
That every man, with him, was God or Devil.  
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art:  
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.  
560 Beggared by fools, whom still<sup>o</sup> he found<sup>o</sup> too late,  
He had his jest, and they had his estate.  
He laughed himself from court; then sought relief  
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief;  
For, spite of him, the weight of business fell  
565 On Absalom and wise Achitophel:  
Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,  
He left not faction, but of that was left.  
Titles and names 'twere tedious to rehearse  
Of lords, below the dignity of verse.  
570 Wits, warriors, Commonwealth's men, were the best;  
Kind husbands, and mere nobles, all the rest.  
And therefore, in the name of dullness, be  
The well-hung Balaam and cold Caleb,<sup>1</sup> free;  
And canting Nadab<sup>2</sup> let oblivion damn,  
575 Who made new porridge for the paschal lamb.<sup>3</sup>  
Let friendship's holy band some names assure;  
Some their own worth, and some let scorn secure.  
Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place,  
Whom kings no titles gave, and God no grace:  
580 Not bull-faced Jonas,<sup>4</sup> who could statutes draw  
To mean rebellion, and make treason law.  
But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,



The wretch who heaven's anointed dared to curse:  
 Shimei,<sup>5</sup> whose youth did early promise bring  
 585 Of zeal to God and hatred to his king,  
 Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,  
 And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain;  
 Nor ever was he known an oath to vent,  
 Or curse, unless against the government.  
 590 Thus heaping wealth, by the most ready way  
 Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray,  
 The city, to reward his pious hate  
 Against his master, chose him magistrate.  
 His hand a vane<sup>o</sup> of justice did uphold;  
 595 His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.  
 During his office, treason was no crime;  
 The sons of Belial<sup>6</sup> had a glorious time;  
 For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,<sup>o</sup>  
 Yet loved his wicked neighbor as himself.  
 600 When two or three were gathered to declaim  
 Against the monarch of Jerusalem,  
 Shimei was always in the midst of them;  
 And if they cursed the king when he was by,  
 Would rather curse than break good company.  
 605 If any durst his factious friends accuse,  
 He packed a jury of dissenting Jews;  
 Whose fellow-feeling in the godly cause  
 Would free the suffering saint from human laws.  
 For laws are only made to punish those  
 610 Who serve the king, and to protect his foes.  
 If any leisure time he had from power  
 (Because 'tis sin to misemploy an hour),  
 His business was, by writing, to persuade  
 That kings were useless, and a clog to trade;  
 615 And, that his noble style he might refine,  
 No Rechabite<sup>7</sup> more shunned the fumes of wine.  
 Chaste were his cellars, and his shrival board<sup>8</sup>

The grossness of a city feast abhorred:  
His cooks, with long disuse, their trade forgot;  
620 Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot,  
Such frugal virtue malice may accuse,  
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:  
For towns once burnt<sup>9</sup> such magistrates require  
As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.  
625 With spiritual food he fed his servants well,  
But free from flesh that made the Jews rebel;  
And Moses' laws he held in more account,  
For forty days of fasting in the mount.<sup>1</sup>  
To speak the rest, who better are forgot,  
630 Would tire a well-breathed witness of the Plot.  
Yet, Corah,<sup>2</sup> thou shalt from oblivion pass:  
Erect thyself, thou monumental brass,  
High as the serpent of thy metal made,<sup>3</sup>  
While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.  
635 What though his birth were base, yet comets rise  
From earthy vapors, ere they shine in skies.  
Prodigious actions may as well be done  
By weaver's issue,<sup>4</sup> as by prince's son.  
This arch-attestor for the public good  
640 By that one deed ennobles all his blood.  
Who ever asked the witnesses' high race  
Whose oath with martyrdom did Stephen<sup>5</sup> grace?  
Ours was a Levite, and as times went then,  
His tribe were God Almighty's gentlemen.  
645 Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,  
Sure signs he neither choleric<sup>o</sup> was nor proud:  
His long chin proved his wit; his saintlike grace  
A church vermilion, and a Moses' face.<sup>6</sup>  
His memory, miraculously great,  
650 Could plots, exceeding man's belief, repeat;  
Which therefore cannot be accounted lies,  
For human wit could never such devise.

Some future truths are mingled in his book;  
But where the witness failed, the prophet spoke:  
655 Some things like visionary flights appear;  
The spirit caught him up, the Lord knows where,  
And gave him his rabbinical degree,  
Unknown to foreign university.<sup>7</sup>  
His judgment yet his memory did excel;  
660 Which pieced his wondrous evidence so well,  
And suited to the temper of the times,  
Then groaning under Jebusitic crimes.  
Let Israel's foes suspect his heavenly call,  
And rashly judge his writ apocryphal;<sup>8</sup>  
665 Our laws for such affronts have forfeits made:  
He takes his life, who takes away his trade.  
Were I myself in witness Corah's place,  
The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace  
Should whet my memory, though once forgot,  
670 To make him an appendix of my plot.  
His zeal to heaven made him his prince despise,  
And load his person with indignities;  
But zeal peculiar privilege affords,  
Indulging latitude to deeds and words;  
675 And Corah might for Agag's<sup>9</sup> murder call,  
In terms as coarse as Samuel used to Saul.<sup>1</sup>  
What others in his evidence did join  
(The best that could be had for love or coin),  
In Corah's own predicament will fall;  
680 For *witness* is a common name to all.  
Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,  
Deluded Absalom forsakes the court:  
Impatient of high hopes, urged with renown,  
And fired with near possession of a crown.  
685 The admiring crowd are dazzled with surprise,  
And on his goodly person feed their eyes:  
His joy concealed, he sets himself to show,

On each side bowing popularly<sup>2</sup> low;  
 His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames,  
 690 And with familiar ease repeats their names.  
 Thus formed by nature, furnished out with arts,  
 He glides unfelt into their secret hearts.  
 Then, with a kind compassionating look,  
 And sighs, bespeaking pity ere he spoke,  
 695 Few words he said; but easy those and fit,  
 More slow than Hybla-drops,<sup>3</sup> and far more sweet.  
 "I mourn, my countrymen, your lost estate;  
 Though far unable to prevent your fate:  
 Behold a banished man, for your dear cause  
 700 Exposed a prey to arbitrary laws!  
 Yet oh! that I alone could be undone,  
 Cut off from empire, and no more a son!  
 Now all your liberties a spoil are made;  
 Egypt<sup>o</sup> and Tyrus<sup>o</sup> intercept your trade,  
 705 And Jebusites your sacred rites invade.  
 My father, whom with reverence yet I name,  
 Charmed into ease, is careless of his fame;  
 And, bribed with petty sums of foreign gold,  
 Is grown in Bathsheba's<sup>4</sup> embraces old;  
 710 Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys;  
 And all his power against himself employs.  
 He gives, and let him give, my right away;  
 But why should he his own, and yours betray?  
 He only, he can make the nation bleed,  
 715 And he alone from my revenge is freed.  
 Take then my tears (with that he wiped his eyes),  
 'Tis all the aid my present power supplies:  
 No court-informer can these arms accuse;  
 These arms may sons against their fathers use:  
 720 And 'tis my wish, the next successor's reign  
 May make no other Israelite complain."  
 Youth, beauty, graceful action seldom fail;

But common interest always will prevail;  
And pity never ceases to be shown  
725 To him who makes the people's wrongs his own.  
The crowd (that still believe their kings oppress)  
With lifted hands their young Messiah bless:  
Who now begins his progress to ordain  
With chariots, horsemen, and a numerous train;  
730 From east to west his glories he displays,<sup>5</sup>  
And, like the sun, the promised land surveys.  
Fame runs before him as the morning star,  
And shouts of joy salute him from afar:  
Each house receives him as a guardian god,  
735 And consecrates the place of his abode:  
But hospitable treats did most commend  
Wise Issachar,<sup>6</sup> his wealthy western friend.  
This moving court, that caught the people's eyes,  
And seemed but pomp, did other ends disguise:  
740 Achitophel had formed it, with intent  
To sound the depths, and fathom, where it went,  
The people's hearts; distinguish friends from foes,  
And try their strength, before they came to blows.  
Yet all was colored with a smooth pretense  
745 Of specious love, and duty to their prince.  
Religion, and redress of grievances,  
Two names that always cheat and always please,  
Are often urged; and good King David's life  
Endangered by a brother and a wife.<sup>7</sup>  
750 Thus, in a pageant show, a plot is made,  
And peace itself is war in masquerade.  
O foolish Israel! never warned by ill,  
Still the same bait, and circumvented still!  
Did ever men forsake their present ease,  
755 In midst of health imagine a disease;  
Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee,  
Make heirs for monarchs, and for God decree?

What shall we think! Can people give away  
Both for themselves and sons, their native sway?  
760 Then they are left defenseless to the sword  
Of each unbounded, arbitrary lord:  
And laws are vain, by which we right enjoy,  
If kings unquestioned can those laws destroy.  
Yet if the crowd be judge of fit and just,  
765 And kings are only officers in trust,  
Then this resuming covenant was declared  
When kings were made, or is forever barred.  
If those who gave the scepter could not tie  
By their own deed their own posterity,  
770 How then could Adam bind his future race?  
How could his forfeit on mankind take place?  
Or how could heavenly justice damn us all,  
Who ne'er consented to our father's fall?  
Then kings are slaves to those whom they  
775       command,  
And tenants to their people's pleasure stand.  
Add, that the power for property allowed  
Is mischievously seated in the crowd;  
For who can be secure of private right,  
If sovereign sway may be dissolved by might?  
780 Nor is the people's judgment always true:  
The most may err as grossly as the few;  
And faultless kings run down, by common cry,  
For vice, oppression, and for tyranny.  
What standard is there in a fickle rout,  
785 Which, flowing to the mark,<sup>o</sup> runs faster out?  
Nor only crowds, but Sanhedrins may be  
Infected with this public lunacy,<sup>8</sup>  
And share the madness of rebellious times,  
To murder monarchs for imagined crimes.<sup>9</sup>  
790 If they may give and take whene'er they please,  
Not kings alone (the Godhead's images),

But government itself at length must fall  
To nature's state, where all have right to all.  
Yet, grant our lords the people kings can make,  
795 What prudent men a settled throne would shake?  
For whatsoe'er their sufferings were before,  
That change they covet makes them suffer more.  
All other errors but disturb a state,  
But innovation is the blow of fate.  
800 If ancient fabrics nod, and threat to fall,  
To patch the flaws, and buttress up the wall,  
Thus far 'tis duty; but here fix the mark;  
For all beyond it is to touch our ark.<sup>1</sup>  
To change foundations, cast the frame anew,  
805 Is work for rebels, who base ends pursue,  
At once divine and human laws control,  
And mend the parts by ruin of the whole.  
The tampering world is subject to this curse,  
To physic their disease into a worse.  
810 Now what relief can righteous David bring?  
How fatal 'tis to be too good a king!  
Friends he has few, so high the madness grows:  
Who dare be such, must be the people's foes:  
Yet some there were, even in the worst of days;  
815 Some let me name, and naming is to praise.  
In this short file Barzillai<sup>2</sup> first appears;  
Barzillai, crowned with honor and with years:  
Long since, the rising rebels he withstood  
In regions waste, beyond the Jordan's flood:  
820 Unfortunately brave to buoy the State;  
But sinking underneath his master's fate:  
In exile with his godlike prince he mourned;  
For him he suffered, and with him returned.  
The court he practiced, not the courtier's art:  
825 Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart:  
Which well the noblest objects knew to choose,

The fighting warrior, and recording Muse.  
 His bed could once a fruitful issue boast;  
 Now more than half a father's name is lost.  
 830 His eldest hope, <sup>3</sup> with every grace adorned,  
 By me (so Heaven will have it) always mourned,  
 And always honored, snatched in manhood's prime  
 By unequal fates, and Providence's crime:  
 835 Yet not before the goal of honor won,  
 All parts fulfilled of subject and of son;  
 Swift was the race, but short the time to  
 run. }  
 O narrow circle, but of power divine,  
 Scanted in space, but perfect in thy line!  
 By sea, by land, thy matchless worth was known,  
 840 Arms thy delight, and war was all thy own:  
 Thy force, infused, the fainting Tyrians<sup>o</sup> propped;  
 And haughty Pharaoh found his fortune stopped.  
 Oh ancient honor! Oh unconquered hand,  
 Whom foes unpunished never could withstand!  
 845 But Israel was unworthy of thy name:  
 Short is the date of all immoderate fame.  
 It looks as Heaven our ruin had designed,  
 And durst not trust thy fortune and thy mind.  
 Now, free from earth, thy disencumbered soul  
 850 Mounts up, and leaves behind the clouds and starry  
 pole:  
 From thence thy kindred legions mayst thou bring,  
 To aid the guardian angel of thy king.  
 Here stop my Muse, here cease thy painful flight;  
 No pinions can pursue immortal height:  
 855 Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,  
 And tell thy soul she should have fled before:  
 Or fled she with his life, and left this verse  
 To hang on her departed patron's hearse?  
 Now take thy steepy flight from heaven, and see  
 860



If thou canst find on earth another *he*:  
Another *he* would be too hard to find;  
See then whom thou canst see not far behind.  
Zadoc<sup>4</sup> the priest, whom, shunning power and place,  
His lowly mind advanced to David's grace:  
865 With him the Sagan<sup>5</sup> of Jerusalem,  
Of hospitable soul, and noble stem;  
Him of the western dome,<sup>6</sup> whose weighty sense  
Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence.  
The prophets' sons,<sup>7</sup> by such example led,  
870 To learning and to loyalty were bred:  
For colleges on bounteous kinds depend,  
And never rebel was to arts a friend.  
To these succeed the pillars of the laws,  
Who best could plead, and best can judge a cause.  
875 Next them a train of loyal peers ascend;  
Sharp-judging Adriel,<sup>8</sup> the Muses' friend,  
Himself a Muse—in Sanhedrin's debate  
True to his prince, but not a slave of state:  
Whom David's love with honors did adorn,  
880 That from his disobedient son were torn.  
Jotham<sup>9</sup> of piercing wit, and pregnant thought,  
Indued by nature, and by learning taught  
To move assemblies, who but only tried  
The worse a while, then chose the better side;  
885 Nor chose alone, but turned the balance too;  
So much the weight of one brave man can do.  
Hushar,<sup>1</sup> the friend of David in distress,  
In public storms, of manly steadfastness:  
By foreign treaties he informed his youth,  
890 And joined experience to his native truth.  
His frugal care supplied the wanting throne,  
Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own:  
'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow,  
But hard the task to manage well the low;

895 For sovereign power is too depressed or high,  
 When kings are forced to sell, or crowds to buy.  
 Indulge one labor more, my weary Muse,  
 For Amiel:<sup>2</sup> who can Amiel's praise refuse?  
 Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet  
 900 In his own worth, and without title great:  
 The Sanhedrin long time as chief he ruled,  
 Their reason guided, and their passion cooled:  
 So dexterous was he in the crown's defense,  
 So formed to speak a loyal nation's sense,  
 905 That, as their band was Israel's tribes in small,  
 So fit was he to represent them all.  
 Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend,  
 Whose loose careers his steady skill commend:<sup>o</sup>  
 They like the unequal ruler of the day,  
 910 Misguide the seasons, and mistake the way;  
 While he withdrawn at their mad labor smiles,  
 And safe enjoys the sabbath of his toils.  
 These were the chief, a small but faithful band  
 Of worthies, in the breach who dared to  
 915 stand, }  
 And tempt the united fury of the land. }  
 With grief they viewed such powerful  
 engines bent,  
 To batter down the lawful government:  
 A numerous faction, with pretended frights,  
 In Sanhedrins to plume<sup>o</sup> the regal rights;  
 920 The true successor from the court removed:<sup>3</sup>  
 The Plot, by hireling witnesses, improved.  
 These ills they saw, and, as their duty bound,  
 They showed the king the danger of the wound:  
 That no concessions from the throne would please,  
 925 But lenitives<sup>o</sup> fomented the disease;  
 That Absalom, ambitious of the crown,  
 Was made the lure to draw the people down;

That false Achitophel's pernicious hate  
Had turned the Plot to ruin Church and State:  
930 The council violent, the rabble worse;  
That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse.  
With all these loads of injuries oppressed,  
And long revolving, in his careful breast,  
The event of things, at last, his patience tired,  
935 Thus from his royal throne, by Heaven inspired,  
The godlike David spoke: with awful fear  
His train their Maker in their master hear.  
"Thus long have I, by native mercy swayed,  
My wrongs dissembled, my revenge delayed:  
940 So willing to forgive the offending age,  
So much the father did the king assuage.  
But now so far my clemency they slight,  
The offenders question my forgiving right.  
That one was made for many, they contend;  
945 But 'tis to rule; for that's a monarch's end.  
They call my tenderness of blood, my fear;  
Though manly tempers can the longest bear.  
Yet, since they will divert my native course,  
'Tis time to show I am not good by force.  
950 Those heaped affronts that haughty subjects bring,  
Are burdens for a camel, not a king:  
Kings are the public pillars of the State,  
Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight:  
If my young Samson will pretend a call  
955 To shake the column, let him share the fall:<sup>4</sup>  
But, oh, that yet he would repent and live!  
How easy 'tis for parents to forgive!  
With how few tears a pardon might be won  
From nature, pleading for a darling son!  
960 Poor pitied youth, by my paternal care  
Raised up to all the height his frame could bear:  
Had God ordained his fate for empire born,

He would have given his soul another turn:  
Gulled<sup>o</sup> with a patriot's name, whose modern sense  
965 Is one that would by law supplant his prince:  
The people's brave,<sup>o</sup> the politician's tool;  
Never was patriot yet, but was a fool.  
Whence comes it that religion and the laws  
Should more be Absalom's than David's cause?  
970 His old instructor,<sup>5</sup> ere he lost his place,  
Was never thought indued with so much grace.  
Good heavens, how faction can a patriot paint!  
My rebel ever proves my people's saint:  
Would *they* impose an heir upon the throne?  
975 Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their own.<sup>o</sup>  
A king's at least a part of government,  
And mine as requisite as their consent;  
Without my leave a future king to choose,  
Infers a right the present to depose:  
980 True, they petition me to approve their choice;  
But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.<sup>6</sup>  
My pious subjects for my safety pray,  
Which to secure, they take my power away.  
From plots and treasons Heaven preserve my years,  
985 But save me most from my petitioners.  
Unsatiate as the barren womb or grave;  
God cannot grant so much as they can crave.  
What then is left but with a jealous eye  
To guard the small remains of royalty?  
990 The law shall still direct my peaceful sway,  
And the same law teach rebels to obey:  
Votes shall no more established power control—  
Such votes as make a part exceed the whole:  
No groundless clamors shall my friends remove,  
995 Nor crowds have power to punish ere they prove:  
For gods and godlike kings, their care express,  
Still to defend their servants in distress.

1000 O that my power to saving were confined:  
 Why am I forced, like Heaven, against my  
 mind,  
 To make examples of another kind?  
 Must I at length the sword of justice draw?  
 O curst effects of necessary law!  
 How ill my fear they by my mercy scan!<sup>o</sup>  
 Beware the fury of a patient man.  
 1005 Law they require, let Law then show her face;  
 They could not be content to look on Grace,  
 Her hinder parts, but with a daring eye  
 To tempt the terror of her front and die.<sup>7</sup>  
 By their own arts, 'tis righteously decreed,  
 1010 Those dire artificers of death shall bleed.  
 Against themselves their witnesses will swear,  
 Till viper-like their mother Plot they tear:  
 And suck for nutriment that bloody gore,  
 Which was their principle of life before.  
 1015 Their Belial with their Belzebub<sup>8</sup> will fight;  
 Thus on my foes, my foes shall do me right:  
 Nor doubt the event; for factious crowds engage,  
 In their first onset, all their brutal rage.  
 Then let 'em take an unresisted course,  
 1020 Retire and traverse,<sup>o</sup> and delude their force:  
 But when they stand all breathless, urge the fight,  
 And rise upon 'em with redoubled might:  
 For lawful power is still superior found,  
 When long driven back, at length it stands the  
 1025 ground."  
 He said. The Almighty, nodding, gave consent;  
 And peals of thunder shook the firmament.  
 Henceforth a series of new time began,  
 The mighty years in long procession ran:  
 Once more the godlike David was restored,  
 1030 And willing nations knew their lawful lord.

- Note 1: "Religious frauds; management of wicked priests to gain power" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: David ("a man after [God's] own heart," according to 1 Samuel 13:14) represents Charles II.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of David's wives, who represents the childless queen, Catherine of Braganza.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: James Scott, Duke of Monmouth (1649–1685).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Monmouth had won repute as a soldier fighting for France against Holland and for Holland against France.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Anne Scott, Duchess of Buccleuch (pronounced *Bue-cloo*), a beauty and a great heiress.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Absalom killed his half-brother Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:28–29). The parallel with Monmouth is vague. He is known to have committed acts of violence in his youth, but certainly not fratricide.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dryden recalls the political and religious controversies that, since the Reformation, had divided England and finally caused civil wars.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Adam rebelled because he felt he lacked ("wanted") liberty because he was forbidden to eat the fruit of one tree.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Oliver Cromwell.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Saul's son. He stands for Richard Cromwell, who succeeded his father as lord protector.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Where David reigned over Judah after the death of Saul and before he became king of Israel (2 Samuel 1–5). Charles had been crowned in Scotland in 1651.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The image worshiped by the children of Israel during the period that Moses spent on Mount Sinai, receiving the law

from God.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Inclined (see “Mac Flecknoe,” line 189 and p. 63, n. 8).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Commonwealth. Dryden stigmatizes the Whigs by associating them with subversion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Roman Catholics. The original name of Jerusalem (here, London) was Jebus.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Such oppressive laws against Roman Catholics date from the time of Elizabeth I.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: French, therefore Catholic.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Here Dryden sneers at the doctrine of transubstantiation. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dryden charges that the Anglican clergy (“Hebrew priests”) resented proselytizing by Catholics chiefly because they stood to lose their tithes (“fleece”).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Bodily fluid. Such fluids were thought to determine health and temperament.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683). He had served in the parliamentary army and been a member of Cromwell’s council of state. He later helped bring back Charles and, in 1670, was made a member of the notorious Cabal Ministry, which formed an alliance with Louis XIV in which England betrayed her ally, Holland, and joined France in war against that country. In 1672 he became lord chancellor, but with the dissolution of the cabal in 1673, he was removed from office. Lines 146–49 apply perfectly to him.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The soul is thought of as the animating principle, the force that puts the body in motion. Shaftesbury’s body seemed too small to house his fiery, energetic soul.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That genius and madness are akin is a very old idea.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See Plato’s definition of a human: “a featherless biped.”[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The triple alliance of England, Sweden, and Holland against France, 1668. Shaftesbury helped bring about the war against Holland in 1672.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The chief of the seventy elders who composed the Jewish supreme court. The allusion is to Shaftesbury's serving as lord chancellor from 1672 to 1673.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, David would have had occasion to write one fewer song of praise to heaven. The reference may be to 2 Samuel 22 or to Psalms 4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The moon "renews her prime" when its several phases recur on the same day of the solar calendar (complete a cycle) as happens approximately every twenty years. The crisis between Charles I and Parliament began to grow acute about 1640; Charles II returned in 1660; it is now 1680 and a full cycle has been completed.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, mob rule. To Dryden, *democracy* meant "popular government."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A planet whose influence destines him to kingship.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
After their exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, whose "extended wand" separated the waters of the Red Sea so that they crossed over on dry land, the Israelites were led in their forty-year wandering in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13–14).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare with Joel 2:28.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Solemn promises of fidelity.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Achitophel gives to Fortune the traditional attributes of the allegorical personification of Opportunity: bald except for a forelock, she can be seized only as she approaches.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Brussels, where Charles spent his last years in exile. David took refuge from Saul in Gath (1 Samuel 27:4).[Return to](#)



[reference 9](#)

- Note 1: After God rejected Saul, he sent Samuel to anoint the boy David, as a token that he should finally come to the throne (1 Samuel 16:1–13).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The seashore at Dover, where Charles landed (May 25, 1660).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare with the fall of Satan in *Paradise Lost* 1.50–124, which dims the brightness of the archangel. The choice of the undignified word *tumbling* is deliberate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pharaoh is Louis XIV of France.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare with line 82 and p. 37, n. 6.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A title to the crown based on succession.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An alternative spelling of *mettle* (spirit). But a pun on *metal* is intended, as is obvious from the pun *angel* (a purely intellectual being and a coin). Ambition caused the revolt of the angels in heaven.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sirius, which in midsummer rises and sets with the sun and is thus associated with the maddening heat of the “dog days.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the event of Charles’s dying without legitimate issue, the throne would constitutionally pass to his brother, James, or his descendants, the “collateral line.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anger of the common people.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Race, in the sense of family.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Why does my mean birth impose such limits on me?[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The highest judicial counsel of the Jews, here, Parliament.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Whigs hoped to limit the special privileges of the Crown (the royal “prerogative”) by refusing to vote money to Charles. He circumvented them by living on French subsidies and refusing to summon Parliament.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The chief magistrates and rulers of the Jews. Shaftesbury had won over ("gained") country gentlemen and nobles to his hostile view of James.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Before Saul, the first king of Israel, came to the throne, the Jews were governed by judges. Similarly Oliver Cromwell as lord protector took over the reins of government, after he had dissolved the Rump Parliament in 1653.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dutifulness to a parent.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In law, to convey the title to property to another person.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An irony (see line 7 and n. 2).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: James was given the title of generalissimo in 1678. In 1679 Monmouth was banished and withdrew to Holland.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: London rabble. Solyma was a name for Jerusalem.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Gentile; here, Roman Catholic.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
That is, Presbyterian clergymen. The tribe of Levi, assigned to duties in the tabernacle, carried the Ark of the Covenant during the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness (Numbers 4). Under the Commonwealth ("in the Judges' days") Presbyterianism became the state religion, and its clergy, therefore, "bore the ark." The Act of Uniformity (1662) forced the Presbyterian clergy out of their livings: in short, before the Popish Plot, they had been "pulled from the ark." They are represented here as joining the Whigs in the hope of restoring the Commonwealth, "their old beloved theocracy."  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Priests had to be descendants of Aaron (Exodus 28:1, Numbers 18:7).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Loudest. The phrase is applied to hunting dogs. "Pack" and "scent" sustain the image.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Term used by certain Dissenters for those elected to salvation. The extreme fanaticism of the "saints" and their

claims to inspiration are characterized as a form of religious madness ("enthusiastic," line 530).[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9:

George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham (1628–1687), wealthy, brilliant, dissolute, and unstable. He had been an influential member of the cabal, but after 1673 had joined Shaftesbury in opposition to the court party. This is the least political of the satirical portraits in the poem. Buckingham had been the chief author of *The Rehearsal* (1671), the play that satirized heroic tragedy and ridiculed Dryden in the character of Mr. Bayes. Politics gave Dryden an opportunity to retaliate. He comments on this portrait in his "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire." Dryden had two biblical Zimris in mind: the Zimri destroyed for his lustfulness and blasphemy (Numbers 25) and the conspirator and regicide of 1 Kings 16:8–20 and 2 Kings 9:31.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: See Numbers 13–14. "Well-hung": fluent of speech or sexually potent or both. For Balaam, see Numbers 22–24. "Cold": contrasts with the second meaning of *well-hung*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Leviticus 10:1–2. "Canting": points to a Nonconformist, as does "new porridge," for Dissenters referred to the Book of Common Prayer contemptuously as "porridge," a hodgepodge, unsubstantial stuff.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The lamb slain during Passover; here, Christ. The identities of Balaam, Caleb, and Nadab have not been certainly established, although various Whig nobles have been suggested.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir William Jones, attorney general, had been largely responsible for the passage of the first Exclusion Bill by the House of Commons. He prosecuted the accused in the Popish Plot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
He cursed and stoned David when he fled into the wilderness during Absalom's revolt (2 Samuel 16:5–14). His name is used

here for one of the two sheriffs of London: Slingsby Bethel, a Whig, former republican, and virulent enemy of Charles. He packed juries with Whigs and so secured the acquittal of enemies of the court, among them Shaftesbury himself.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Sons of wickedness (see Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.490–505). Dryden probably intended a pun on Balliol, the Oxford college in which leading Whigs stayed during the brief and fateful meeting of Parliament at Oxford in 1681.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An austere Jewish sect that drank no wine (Jeremiah 35:2–19).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sheriff's dinner table.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: London burned in 1666.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mount Sinai, where, during a fast of forty days, Moses received the law (Exodus 34:28).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
Or Korah, a rebellious Levite, swallowed up by the earth because of his crimes (Numbers 16). Corah is Titus Oates, the self-appointed, perjured, and "well-breathed" (long-winded) witness of the plot.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Moses erected a brazen serpent to heal the Jews bitten by fiery serpents (Numbers 21:4–9). *Brass* also means impudence or shamelessness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Oates's father, a clergyman, belonged to an obscure family of ribbon weavers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first Christian martyr, accused by false witnesses (Acts 6–7).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Moses's face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai with the tables of the law (Exodus 34:29–30). Oates's face suggests high living, not spiritual illumination.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Oates falsely claimed to be a doctor of divinity in the University of Salamanca.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Not inspired and hence excluded from Holy Writ.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
Agag is probably one of the five Catholic peers executed for the Popish Plot in 1680, most likely Lord Stafford, against whom Oates fabricated testimony. He is almost certainly not, as is usually suggested, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey (see headnote, [p. 34](#)).  
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See 1 Samuel 15, where “Agag’s murder” also occurs.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “So as to please the crowd” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The famous honey of Hybla in Sicily.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The woman with whom David committed adultery (2 Samuel 11). Here, Charles II’s French mistress, Louise de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In 1680 Monmouth made a progress through the west of England, seeking popular support for his cause.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thomas Thynne of Longleat. He entertained Monmouth on his journey in the west. *Wise* is, of course, ironic.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Titus Oates had sworn that both James, Duke of York, and the queen were involved in a similar plot to poison Charles II.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The fickle crowd flows and ebbs like the tide, which is pulled back and forth by the moon (hence “lunacy,” after the Latin *luna*, or “moon”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An allusion to the execution of Charles I.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Uzzah was struck dead because he sacrilegiously touched the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6–7).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:

James Butler, Duke of Ormond (1610–1688), who was famous for his loyalty to the Stuart cause. He fought for Charles I in Ireland, and when that cause was hopeless, he joined Charles II in his exile abroad. He spent a large fortune on behalf of the king and continued to serve him loyally after the Restoration. Six of his ten children were dead (see line 830). See 2 Samuel 19:31–39.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Ormond's son Thomas, Earl of Ossory (1634–1680), a famous soldier and, like his father, devoted to Charles II. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: William Sancroft, archbishop of Canterbury. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Henry Compton, bishop of London. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Dolben, dean of Westminster. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The boys of Westminster School, which Dryden had attended. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: George Savile, Marquis of Halifax. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Edward Seymour, speaker of the House of Commons. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Duke of York had been banished from England. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Judges 16. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Earl of Shaftesbury. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Genesis 27:22. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Moses was not allowed to see the countenance of Jehovah (Exodus 33:20–23). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A god of the Philistines. "Belial": the incarnation of all evil. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *relish, pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *London*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wholly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tests*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *English*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caprice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *republic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shots*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disgraceful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assuaged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Protestants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Roman Catholic clergy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Anglican clergy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adulterated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brothels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the king*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unruly intellect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *men of genius*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confused, hurried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge's robe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *detected in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspicious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spontaneous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *claim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intelligence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common people*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretext*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *economy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *count*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chemist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reviling, abusing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *found out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *staff*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *free with money*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prone to anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *France* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Holland*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high water mark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Dutch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set off to advantage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pluck, plunder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain relievers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what's theirs to give*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thwart*[Return to reference](#) °



**Mac Flecknoe** The target of this superb satire, which is cast in the form of a mock-heroic episode, is Thomas Shadwell (1640–1692), the playwright, with whom Dryden had been on good terms for a number of years, certainly as late as March 1678. Shadwell considered himself the successor of Ben Jonson and the champion of the type of comedy that Jonson had written, the “comedy of humors,” in which each character is presented under the domination of a single psychological trait or eccentricity, his humor. His plays are not without merit, but they are often clumsy and prolix and certainly much inferior to Jonson’s. For many years he had conducted a public argument with Dryden on the merits of Jonson’s comedies, which he thought Dryden undervalued. Exactly what moved Dryden to attack him is a matter of conjecture: he may simply have grown progressively bored and irritated by Shadwell and his tedious argument. The poem seems to have been written in late 1678 or 1679 and to have circulated only in manuscript until it was printed in 1682 in a pirated edition by an obscure publisher. By that time, the two playwrights were alienated by politics as well as by literary quarrels. Shadwell was a violent Whig and the reputed author of a sharp attack on Dryden as the Tory author of *Absalom and Achitophel* and “The Medal.” It was probably for this reason that the printer added the subtitle referring to Shadwell’s Whiggism in the phrase “true-blue-Protestant poet.” Political passions were running high, and sales would be helped if the poem seemed to refer to the events of the day.

Dryden exposes Shadwell to ridicule by using the devices of mock epic, which treats the low, mean, or absurd in the grand language, lofty style, and solemn tone of epic poetry. The obvious disparity between subject and style makes the satiric point. In 1678, a prolific, untalented writer, Richard Flecknoe, died. Dryden conceived the idea of presenting Shadwell (the self-proclaimed heir of Ben Jonson, the laureate) as the son and successor of Flecknoe (an irony also because Flecknoe was a Catholic priest)—hence *Mac* (son of) *Flecknoe*—from whom he inherits the throne of dullness. Flecknoe in the triple role of king, priest, and poet hails his successor,

pronounces a panegyric on his perfect fitness for the throne, anoints and crowns him, foretells his glorious reign, and as he sinks (leaden dullness cannot soar), leaves his mantle to fall symbolically on Shadwell's shoulders. The poem abounds in literary allusions—to Roman legend and history and to the *Aeneid*, to Abraham Cowley's fragmentary epic *The Davideis* (1656), to *Paradise Lost*, and to Shadwell's own plays. Biblical allusions add an unexpected dimension of incongruous dignity to the low scene. The coronation takes place in the City, to the plaudits of the citizens, who are fit to admire only what is dull.

# Mac Flecknoe

## *Or a Satire upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T. S.*

All human things are subject to decay,  
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.  
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus,<sup>1</sup> young  
Was called to empire, and had governed long;  
In prose and verse, was owned, without dispute,  
5 Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.  
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,  
And blest with issue of a large increase,  
Worn out with business, did at length debate  
To settle the succession of the state;  
10 And, pondering which of all his sons was fit  
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,  
Cried: "'Tis resolved; for nature pleads that he  
Should only rule, who most resembles me.  
Sh—<sup>2</sup> alone my perfect image bears,  
15 Mature in dullness from his tender years:  
Sh— alone, of all my sons, is he  
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,  
But Sh— never deviates into sense.  
20 Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike through, and make a lucid interval;  
But Sh—'s genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.  
Besides, his goodly fabric<sup>3</sup> fills the eye,  
25 And seems designed for thoughtless majesty:  
Thoughtless as monarch oaks that shade the plain,  
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.

Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,<sup>4</sup>  
 Thou last great prophet of tautology.<sup>5</sup>  
 30 Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,  
 Was sent before but to prepare thy way;  
 And, coarsely clad in Norwich drugget,<sup>o</sup> came  
 To teach the nations in thy greater name.<sup>6</sup>  
 My warbling lute, the lute I whilom<sup>o</sup> strung,  
 35 When to King John of Portugal<sup>7</sup> I sung,  
 Was but the prelude to that glorious day,  
 When thou on silver Thames didst cut thy way,  
 With well-timed oars before the royal barge,  
 Swelled with the pride of thy celestial charge;  
 40 And big with hymn, commander of a host,  
 The like was ne'er in Epsom blankets tossed.<sup>8</sup>  
 Methinks I see the new Arion<sup>9</sup> sail,  
 The lute still trembling underneath thy nail.  
 At thy well-sharpened thumb from shore to shore  
 45 The treble squeaks for fear, the basses roar;  
 Echoes from Pissing Alley<sup>1</sup> Sh—— call,  
 And Sh—— they resound from Aston Hall.  
 About thy boat the little fishes throng,  
 As at the morning toast<sup>o</sup> that floats along.  
 50 Sometimes, as prince of thy harmonious band,  
 Thou wield'st thy papers in thy threshing hand,  
 St. André's<sup>2</sup> feet ne'er kept more equal time,  
 Not ev'n the feet of thy own *Psyche's* rhyme;  
 Though they in number as in sense excel:  
 55 So just, so like tautology, they fell,  
 That, pale with envy, Singleton<sup>3</sup> forswore  
 The lute and sword, which he in triumph  
 bore, }  
 And vowed he ne'er would act Villerius<sup>4</sup>  
 more."  
 60 Here stopped the good old sire, and wept for joy

In silent raptures of the hopeful boy.  
All arguments, but most his plays, persuade,  
That for anointed dullness<sup>5</sup> he was made.

65       Close to the walls which fair Augusta<sup>o</sup> bind  
(The fair Augusta much to fears inclined),<sup>6</sup>  
An ancient fabric,<sup>o</sup> raised to inform the sight,  
There stood of yore, and Barbican it high:<sup>o</sup>  
A watchtower once; but now, so fate ordains,  
Of all the pile an empty name remains.  
70       From its old ruins brothel houses rise,  
Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys,  
Where their vast courts the mother-strumpets keep,  
And, undisturbed by watch, in silence sleep.  
Near these a Nursery<sup>7</sup> erects its head,  
Where queens are formed, and future heroes bred;  
75       Where unfledged actors learn to laugh and cry,  
Where infant punks<sup>o</sup> their tender voices try,  
And little Maximins<sup>8</sup> the gods defy.       }  
Great Fletcher<sup>9</sup> never treads in buskins here,       }  
80       Nor greater Jonson dares in socks<sup>1</sup> appear;  
But gentle Simkin<sup>2</sup> just reception finds  
Amidst this monument of vanished minds:  
Pure clinches<sup>o</sup> the suburban Muse affords,  
And Panton<sup>3</sup> waging harmless war with words.  
Here Flecknoe, as a place to fame well known,  
85       Ambitiously design'd his Sh—'s throne;  
For ancient Dekker<sup>4</sup> prophesied long since,       }  
That in this pile would reign a mighty prince,  
Born for a scourge of wit, and flail of sense;       }  
90       To whom true dullness should some *Psyches*  
owe,  
But worlds of *Misers* from his pen should flow;  
*Humorists* and *Hypocrites*<sup>5</sup> it should produce,  
Whole Raymond families, and tribes of Bruce.<sup>6</sup>

Now Empress Fame had published the renown  
Of Sh——'s coronation through the town.  
95 Roused by report of Fame, the nations meet,  
From near Bunhill, and distant Watling Street.<sup>7</sup>  
No Persian carpets spread the imperial way,  
But scattered limbs of mangled poets lay;  
From dusty shops neglected authors come,  
100 Martyrs of pies, and relics of the bum.<sup>8</sup>  
Much Heywood, Shirley, Ogilby<sup>9</sup> there lay,  
But loads of Sh—— almost choked the way.  
Bilked stationers for yeomen stood prepared,  
And Herringman was captain of the guard.<sup>1</sup>  
105 The hoary prince in majesty appeared,  
High on a throne of his own labors reared.  
At his right hand our young Ascanius sate,  
Rome's other hope, and pillar of the state.  
His brows thick fogs, instead of glories, grace,  
110 And lambent dullness played around his face.<sup>2</sup>  
As Hannibal did to the altars come,  
Sworn by his sire a mortal foe to Rome,<sup>3</sup>  
So Sh—— swore, nor should his vow be vain,  
That he till death true dullness would maintain;  
115 And, in his father's right, and realm's defense,  
Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense.  
The king himself the sacred unction<sup>4</sup> made,  
As king by office, and as priest by trade.  
In his sinister<sup>o</sup> hand, instead of ball,  
120 He placed a mighty mug of potent ale;  
*Love's Kingdom* to his right he did convey,  
At once his scepter, and his rule of sway;  
Whose righteous lore the prince had practiced  
young,  
And from whose loins recorded *Psyche* sprung.  
125 His temples, last, with poppies were o'erspread,  
That nodding seemed to consecrate his head.<sup>5</sup>

Just at that point of time, if fame not lie,  
 On his left hand twelve reverend owls did fly.<sup>6</sup>  
 So Romulus, 'tis sung, by Tiber's brook,  
 130 Presage of sway from twice six vultures took.  
 The admiring throng loud acclamations make,  
 And omens of his future empire take.  
 The sire then shook the honors<sup>7</sup> of his head,  
 And from his brows damps of oblivion shed  
 135 Full on the filial dullness: long he stood,  
 Repelling from his breast the raging god;  
 At length burst out in this prophetic mood: }  
     "Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let  
         him reign  
 To far Barbadoes on the western main;<sup>8</sup>  
 140 Of his dominion may no end be known,  
 And greater than his father's be his throne;  
 Beyond *Love's Kingdom* let him stretch his pen!"  
 He paused, and all the people cried, "Amen."  
 Then thus continued he: "My son, advance  
 145 Still in new impudence, new ignorance.  
 Success let others teach, learn thou from me  
 Pangs without birth, and fruitless industry.  
 Let *Virtuosos* in five years be writ;  
 Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.  
 150 Let gentle George<sup>9</sup> in triumph tread the stage,  
 Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage;  
 Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling, charm the pit,  
 And in their folly show the writer's wit.  
 Yet still thy fools shall stand in thy defense,  
 155 And justify their author's want of sense.  
 Let 'em be all by thy own model made  
 Of dullness, and desire no foreign aid;  
 That they to future ages may be known,  
 Not copies drawn, but issue of thy own.  
 160 Nay, let thy men of wit too be the same,

All full of thee, and differing but in name.  
But let no alien S—dl—y<sup>1</sup> interpose,  
To lard with wit<sup>2</sup> thy hungry *Epsom* prose.  
And when false flowers of rhetoric thou wouldst cull,  
165 Trust nature, do not labor to be dull;  
But write thy best, and top; and, in each line,  
Sir Formal's<sup>3</sup> oratory will be thine:  
Sir Formal, though unsought, attends thy quill,  
And does thy northern dedications<sup>4</sup> fill.  
170 Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame,  
By arrogating Jonson's hostile name.  
Let father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise,  
And uncle Ogilby thy envy raise.  
Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part:  
175 What share have we in nature, or in art?  
Where did his wit on learning fix a brand,  
And rail at arts he did not understand?  
Where made he love in Prince Nicander's vein,<sup>5</sup>  
Or swept the dust in *Psyche's* humble strain?  
180 Where sold he bargains, 'whip-stitch,<sup>6</sup> kiss my arse,'  
Promised a play and dwindled to a farce?<sup>7</sup>  
When did his Muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,  
As thou whole Eth'rege dost transfuse to thine?  
But so transfused, as oil on water's flow,  
185 His always floats above, thine sinks below.  
This is thy province, this thy wondrous way,  
New humors to invent for each new play:  
This is that boasted bias<sup>8</sup> of thy mind,  
By which one way, to dullness, 'tis inclined;  
190 Which makes thy writings lean on one side still,  
And, in all changes, that way bends thy will.  
Nor let thy mountain-belly make pretense  
Of likeness; thine's a tympany<sup>9</sup> of sense.  
A tun<sup>o</sup> of man in thy large bulk is writ,  
195 But sure thou'rt but a kilderkin<sup>o</sup> of wit.



Like mine, thy gentle numbers feebly creep;  
 Thy tragic Muse gives smiles, thy comic sleep.  
 With whate'er gall thou sett'st thyself to write,  
 Thy inoffensive satires never bite.  
 200 In thy felonious heart though venom lies,  
 It does but touch thy Irish pen,<sup>1</sup> and dies.  
 Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame  
 In keen iambics,<sup>2</sup> but mild anagram.  
 205 Leave writing plays, and choose for thy command  
 Some peaceful province in acrostic<sup>2</sup> land.  
 There thou may'st wings display and altars raise,<sup>3</sup>  
 And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.  
 Or, if thou wouldst thy different talent suit,  
 Set thy own songs, and sing them to thy lute."  
 210 He said: but his last words were scarcely heard  
 For Bruce and Longville had a trap prepared,  
 And down they sent the yet declaiming  
     bard.<sup>4</sup> }  
 Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,  
 Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.  
 215 The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,<sup>5</sup>  
 With double portion of his father's art.

ca. 1679

## Endnotes

1682

- Note 1: In 31 B.C.E. Octavian became the first Roman emperor, at the age of thirty-two. He assumed the title Augustus in 27 B.C.E. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thomas Shadwell. The initial and second letter of the name followed by a dash give the appearance, but only the appearance, of protecting Dryden's victim by concealing his name. A common device in the satire of the period. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: His body. Shadwell was a corpulent man. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Thomas Heywood (ca. 1570–1641) and James Shirley (1596–1666), playwrights popular before the closing of the theaters in 1642 but now out of fashion. They are introduced here as “types” (prefigurings) of Shadwell, in the sense that Solomon was regarded as an Old Testament prefiguring of Christ, the “last [final] great prophet.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Unnecessary repetition of meaning in different words.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The parallel between Flecknoe, as forerunner of Shadwell, and John the Baptist, as forerunner of Jesus, is made plain in lines 32–34 by the use of details and even words taken from Matthew 3:3–4 and John 1:23.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Flecknoe boasted of the patronage of the Portuguese king.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A reference to Shadwell’s comedy *Epsom Wells* and to the farcical scene in his *Virtuoso*, in which Sir Samuel Hearty is tossed in a blanket.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A legendary Greek poet. Returning home by sea, he was robbed and thrown overboard by the sailors, but was saved by a dolphin that had been charmed by his music.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Actual London street name, changed to Little Friday Street in 1848.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A French dancer who designed the choreography of Shadwell’s opera *Psyche* (1675). Dryden’s sneer at the mechanical metrics of the songs in *Psyche* is justified.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: John Singleton (d. 1686), a musician at the Theatre Royal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A character in Sir William Davenant’s *Siege of Rhodes* (1656), the first English opera.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The anticipated phrase is “anointed *majesty*.” English kings are anointed with oil at their coronations.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This line alludes to the fears excited by the Popish Plot (see *Absalom and Achitophel*, p. 35).[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The name of a training school for young actors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Maximin is the cruel emperor, in Dryden's *Tyrannic Love* (1669), notorious for his bombast.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Fletcher (1579–1625), the playwright and collaborator with Francis Beaumont (ca. 1584–1616).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Buskins" and "socks" were the symbols of tragedy and comedy, respectively. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A popular character in low farces.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Said to have been a celebrated punster.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Thomas Dekker (ca. 1572–1632), the playwright, whom Jonson had satirized in *The Poetaster*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Three of Shadwell's plays; *The Hypocrite*, a failure, was not published.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Raymond and Bruce are characters in *The Humorists* and *The Virtuoso*, respectively.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Because Bunhill is about a quarter mile and Watling Street little more than a half mile from the site of the Nursery, where the coronation is held, Shadwell's fame is narrowly circumscribed. Moreover, his subjects live in the heart of the City, regarded by men of wit and fashion as the abode of bad taste and middle-class vulgarity.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Unsold books were used to line pie plates and as toilet paper.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Ogilby, a translator of Homer and Virgil, ridiculed by both Dryden and Pope as a bad poet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Bilked stationers": cheated publishers, acting as "yeomen" of the guard, led by Henry Herringman, who until 1679 was the publisher of both Shadwell and Dryden.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ascanius, or Iulus, was the son of Aeneas. Virgil referred to him as "*spes altera Romae*" ("Rome's other hope," *Aeneid* 12.168). As Troy fell, he was marked as favored by the

- gods when a flickering (“lambent”) flame played round his head (*Aeneid* 2.680–84).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hannibal, who almost conquered Rome in 216 B.C.E., during the Second Punic War, took this oath at the age of nine (Livy 21.1).[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: The sacramental oil, used in the coronation.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: During the coronation a British monarch holds two symbols of the throne: a globe (“ball”) representing the world in the left hand and a scepter in the right. Shadwell’s symbols of monarchy are a mug of ale, Flecknoe’s dreary play *Love’s Kingdom*, and a crown of poppies, which suggest heaviness, dullness, and drowsiness. The poppies also refer obliquely to Shadwell’s addiction to opium.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Birds of night. Appropriate substitutes for the twelve vultures whose flight confirmed to Romulus the destined site of Rome, of which he was founder and king.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: Ornaments, hence locks.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Shadwell’s empire is vast but empty.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Sir George Etherege (ca. 1635–1691), a writer of brilliant comedies. In the next couplet Dryden names characters from his plays.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: Sir Charles Sedley (1638–1701), wit, rake, poet, and playwright. Dryden hints that he contributed more than the prologue to Shadwell’s *Epsom Wells*.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: This phrase recalls a sentence in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*: “They lard their lean books with the fat of others’ works.”[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Sir Formal Trifle, the ridiculous and vapid orator in *The Virtuoso*.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Shadwell frequently dedicated his works to the Duke of Newcastle and members of his family.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: In *Psyche*.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: A nonsense word frequently used by Sir Samuel Hearty in *The Virtuoso*. “Sold . . . bargains”: answered an innocent

question with a coarse or indecent phrase, as in this line.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Low comedy that depends largely on situation rather than wit, consistently condemned by Dryden and other serious playwrights.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In bowling, the spin given to the ball that causes it to swerve. Dryden closely parodies a passage in Shadwell's epilogue to *The Humorists*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A swelling in some part of the body caused by flatulence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dryden accuses Flecknoe and his "son" of being Irish. Ireland suggested only poverty, superstition, and barbarity to 17th-century Londoners.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A poem in which the first letter of each line, read downward, makes up the name of the person or thing that is the subject of the poem. "Anagram": the transposition of letters in a word so as to make a new one.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Wings" and "altars" refer to poems in the shape of these objects, as in George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and "The Altar." Dryden is citing instances of triviality and overingenuity in literature.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In *The Virtuoso*, Bruce and Longville play this trick on Sir Formal Trifle while he makes a speech.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When the prophet Elijah was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire borne on a whirlwind, his mantle fell on his successor, the younger prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:8–14). Flecknoe, prophet of dullness, naturally cannot ascend, but must sink.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *coarse woolen cloth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sewage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *London*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *building*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sex workers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *puns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *left*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *large cask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small cask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sharp satire*[Return to reference](#) °

# A Song for St. Cecilia's Day<sup>1</sup>

## 1

From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
This universal frame began:  
When Nature underneath a heap  
Of jarring atoms lay,  
And could not heave her head,  
5 The tuneful voice was heard from high:  
"Arise, ye more than dead."  
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,<sup>2</sup>  
In order to their stations leap,  
And Music's power obey.  
10 From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
This universal frame began:  
From harmony to harmony  
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason<sup>3</sup> closing full in man.  
15

## 2

What passion cannot Music raise and quell!<sup>4</sup>  
When Jubal struck the corded shell,<sup>5</sup>  
His listening brethren stood around,  
And, wondering, on their faces fell  
To worship that celestial sound.  
20 Less than a god they thought there could not dwell  
Within the hollow of that shell  
That spoke so sweetly and so well.  
What passion cannot Music raise and quell!

## 3

25       The trumpet's loud clangor  
          Excites us to arms,  
          With shrill notes of anger,  
          And mortal alarms.  
          The double double double beat  
          Of the thundering drum  
30       Cries: "Hark! the foes come;  
          Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat."

#### 4

          The soft complaining flute  
          In dying notes discovers  
          The woes of hopeless lovers,  
35       Whose dirge is whispered by the warbling lute.

#### 5

          Sharp violins<sup>6</sup> proclaim  
          Their jealous pangs, and desperation,  
          Fury, frantic indignation,  
40       Depth of pains, and height of passion,  
          For the fair, disdainful dame.

#### 6

          But O! what art can teach,  
          What human voice can reach,  
          The sacred organ's praise?  
          Notes inspiring holy love,  
45       Notes that wing their heavenly ways  
          To mend the choirs above.

#### 7

          Orpheus<sup>7</sup> could lead the savage race;  
          And trees unrooted left their place,



50 Sequacious of<sup>o</sup> the lyre;  
But bright Cecilia raised the wonder higher:  
When to her organ vocal breath was given,  
An angel heard, and straight appeared,<sup>8</sup>  
Mistaking earth for heaven.

#### GRAND CHORUS

55 *As from the power of sacred lays*  
*The spheres began to move,*  
*And sung the great Creator's praise<sup>9</sup>*  
*To all the blest above;*  
*So, when the last and dreadful hour*  
60 *This crumbling pageant<sup>1</sup> shall devour,*  
*The trumpet shall be heard on high,*  
*The dead shall live, the living die,*  
*And Music shall untune the sky.<sup>2</sup>*

}

## Endnotes

1687

- Note 1:  
St. Cecilia, a Roman lady, was an early Christian martyr. She has long been regarded as the patroness of music and the supposed inventor of the organ. Celebrations of her festival day (November 22) in England were usually devoted to music and the praise of music, and from about 1683 to 1703 the Musical Society in London annually commemorated it with a religious service and a public concert. This concert always included an ode written and set to music for the occasion, of which the two by Dryden ("A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," 1687, and "Alexander's Feast," 1697) are the most distinguished. G. B. Draghi, an Italian brought to England by Charles II, set this ode to music; but Handel's fine score, composed in 1739, has completely obscured the original setting. This is an irregular ode in the manner of Cowley. In stanzas 3–6, Dryden boldly attempted to

suggest in the sounds of his words the characteristic tones of the instruments mentioned.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: "Nature": created nature, ordered by the Divine Wisdom out of chaos, which Dryden, adopting the physics of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, describes as composed of the warring and discordant ("jarring") atoms of the four elements: earth, fire, water, and air ("cold," "hot," "moist," and "dry").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The entire compass of tones in the scale. Dryden is thinking of the Chain of Being, the ordered creation from inanimate nature up to humans, God's latest and final work. The just gradations of notes in a scale are analogous to the equally just gradations in the ascending scale of created beings. Both are the result of harmony.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The power of music to describe, evoke, or subdue emotion ("passion") is a frequent theme in 17th-century literature. In stanzas 2–6, the poet considers music as awakening religious awe, warlike courage, sorrow for unrequited love, jealousy and fury, and the impulse to worship God.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: According to Genesis 4:21, Jubal was the inventor of the lyre and the pipe. Dryden imagines Jubal's lyre to have been made of a tortoise-shell ("corded shell").[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A reference to the bright tone of the modern violin, introduced into England at the Restoration. The tone of the old-fashioned viol is much duller.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Legendary poet, son of one of the Muses, who played so wonderfully on the lyre that wild beasts ("the savage race") grew tame and followed him, as did even rocks and trees.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: According to the legend, it was Cecilia's piety, not her music, that brought an angel to visit her.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As it was harmony that ordered the universe, so it was angelic song ("sacred lays") that put the celestial bodies ("spheres") in motion. The harmonious chord that results from

the traditional “music of the spheres” is a hymn of “praise” sung by created nature to its “Creator.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The universe, the stage on which the drama of human salvation has been acted out.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The “last trump” of 1 Corinthians 15:52, which will announce the Resurrection and the Last Judgment.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *following*[Return to reference °](#)

## Epigram on Milton<sup>1</sup>

Three poets,<sup>2</sup> in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.  
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed,  
The next in majesty, in both the last:  
The force of Nature could no farther go;  
To make a third, she joined the former two.

### Endnotes

1688

- Note 1: Engraved beneath the portrait of Milton in Jacob Tonson's edition of *Paradise Lost* (1688).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Homer, Virgil, and Milton.[Return to reference 2](#)

# CRITICISM

Dryden's impulse to write criticism came from his practical urge to explain and justify his own writings; his attraction to clear, ordered theoretical principles; and his growing sense of himself as a leader of English literary taste and judgment. The Elizabethans, largely impelled by the example of Italian humanists, had produced an interesting but unsystematic body of critical writings. Dryden could look back to such pioneering works as George Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy* (1589), Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* (1595), Samuel Daniel's *Defense of Rhyme* (ca. 1603), and Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries* (1641). These and later writings Dryden knew, as he knew the ancients and the important contemporary French critics, notably Pierre Corneille, René Rapin, and Nicolas Boileau. Taken as a whole, his critical prefaces and dedications, which appeared between 1664 and 1700, are the work of a man of independent mind who has made his own synthesis of critical canons from wide reading, a great deal of thinking, and the constant practice of the art of writing. As a critic he is no one's disciple, and he has the saving grace of being always willing to change his mind.

All but a very few of Dryden's critical works (most notably *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*) grew out of the works to which they served as prefaces: comedies, heroic plays, tragedies, translations, and poems of various sorts. Each work posed problems that Dryden was eager to discuss with his readers, and the topics that he treated proved to be important in the development of the new literature of which he was the principal advocate. He dealt with the processes of

literary creation, the poet's relation to tradition, the forms of modern drama, the craft of poetry, and above all the genius of earlier poets: Shakespeare, Jonson, Chaucer, Juvenal, Horace, Homer, and Virgil. His critical perspective, both authoritative and open-minded, profoundly influenced critical practice for decades.

# ***From An Essay of Dramatic Poesy***<sup>1</sup>

## **[TWO SORTS OF BAD POETRY]**

\* \* \* "I have a mortal apprehension of two poets,<sup>2</sup> whom this victory, with the help of both her wings, will never be able to escape." "'Tis easy to guess whom you intend," said Lisideius; "and without naming them, I ask you if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches<sup>3</sup> upon words, and a certain clownish kind of raillery?<sup>4</sup> if now and then he does not offer at a catachresis or Clevelandism, wresting and torturing a word into another meaning: in fine, if he be not one of those whom the French would call *un mauvais buffon*,<sup>5</sup> one who is so much a well-willer to the satire, that he spares no man; and though he cannot strike a blow to hurt any, yet ought to be punished for the malice of the action, as our witches are justly hanged, because they think themselves so, and suffer deservedly for believing they did mischief, because they meant it." "You have described him," said Crites, "so exactly that I am afraid to come after you with my other extremity of poetry. He is one of those who, having had some advantage of education and converse, knows better than the other what a poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any man; his style and matter are everywhere alike: he is the most calm, peaceable writer you ever read: he never disquiets your passions with the least concernment, but still leaves you in as even a temper as he found you; he is a very Leveller<sup>6</sup> in poetry: he creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his numbers with *for to*, and *unto*, and all the pretty expletives<sup>7</sup> he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line; while the sense is left tired halfway behind it: he doubly starves all his verses, first for want of thought, and then of expression; his poetry neither has wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in Martial:

***Pauper videri Cinna vult, et est pauper.*<sup>8</sup>**

"He affects plainness, to cover his want of imagination: when he writes the serious way, the highest flight of his fancy is some miserable antithesis, or seeming contradiction; and in the comic he is still reaching at some thin conceit, the ghost of a jest, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; these swallows which we see before us on the Thames are the just resemblance of his wit: you may observe how near the water they stoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how seldom they touch it; and when they do, it is but the surface: they skim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the air and leave it."

**[THE WIT OF THE ANCIENTS: THE UNIVERSAL]<sup>9</sup>**

\* \* \* "A thing well said will be wit in all languages; and though it may lose something in the translation, yet to him who reads it in the original, 'tis still the same: he has an idea of its excellency, though it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words than those in which he finds it. When Phaedria, in the *Eunuch*,<sup>1</sup> had a command from his mistress to be absent two days, and, encouraging himself to go through with it, said, '*Tan-dem ego non ilia caream, si sit opus, vel totum triduum?*'<sup>2</sup>—Parmeno, to mock the softness of his master, lifting up his hands and eyes, cries out, as it were in admiration, '*Hui! universum triduum!*'<sup>3</sup> the elegance of which *universum*, though it cannot be rendered in our language, yet leaves an impression on our souls: but this happens seldom in him; in Plautus<sup>4</sup> oftener, who is infinitely too bold in his metaphors and coining words, out of which many times his wit is nothing; which questionless was one reason why Horace falls upon him so severely in those verses:

*Sed proavi nostri Plautinos et numeros et  
Laudavere sales, nimium patienter utrumque,  
Ne dicam stolide.*<sup>5</sup>



For Horace himself was cautious to obtrude a new word on his readers, and makes custom and common use the best measure of receiving it into our writings:

*Multa renascentur quae nunc cecidere, cadentque  
Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,  
Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus, et norma  
loquendi.*<sup>6</sup>

"The not observing this rule is that which the world has blamed in our satirist, Cleveland: to express a thing hard and unnaturally is his new way of elocution. 'Tis true no poet but may sometimes use a catachresis: Virgil does it—

*Mistaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho*<sup>7</sup>—

in his eclogue of Pollio; and in his seventh *Aeneid*:

*mirantur et undae,  
Miratur nemus insuetum fulgentia longe  
Scuta virum fluvio pictasque innare carinas.*<sup>8</sup>

And Ovid once so modestly that he asks leave to do it:

*quem, si verbo audacia detur,  
Haud metuam summi dixisse Palatia caeli.*<sup>9</sup>

calling the court of Jupiter by the name of Augustus his palace; though in another place he is more bold, where he says, '*et longas visent Capitolia pompas.*<sup>1</sup> But to do this always, and never be able to write a line without it, though it may be admired by some few pedants, will not pass upon those who know that wit is best conveyed to us in the most easy language; and is most to be admired when a great thought comes dressed in words so commonly

received that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions, as the best meat is the most easily digested: but we cannot read a verse of Cleveland's without making a face at it, as if every word were a pill to swallow: he gives us many times a hard nut to break our teeth, without a kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his satires and Doctor Donne's; that the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abstruse words: 'tis true in some places his wit is independent of his words, as in that of the *Rebel Scot*:

Had Cain been Scot, God would have changed his  
doom;  
Not forced him wander, but confined him home.<sup>2</sup>

"*Si sic omnia dixisset*!"<sup>3</sup> This is wit in all languages: it is like mercury, never to be lost or killed: and so that other—

For beauty, like white powder, makes no noise,  
And yet the silent hypocrite destroys.<sup>4</sup>

You see that the last line is highly metaphorical, but it is so soft and gentle that it does not shock us as we read it."

## Endnotes

1668

- Note 1:  
With the reopening of the theaters in 1660, older plays were revived, but despite their power and charm, they seemed old-fashioned. Although new playwrights, ambitious to create a modern English drama, soon appeared, they were uncertain of their direction. What, if anything, useful could they learn from the dramatic practice of the ancients? Should they ignore the English dramatists of the late 16th and early 17th centuries? Should they make their example the vigorous contemporary

drama of France? Dryden addresses himself to these and other problems in this essay, his first extended piece of criticism. Its purpose, he tells us, was "chiefly to vindicate the honor of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them." Its method is skeptical: Dryden presents several points of view, but imposes none. The form is a dialogue among friends, like the *Tusculan Disputations* or the *Brutus* of Cicero. Crites praises the drama of the ancients; Eugenius protests against their authority and argues for the idea of progress in the arts; Lisideius urges the excellence of French plays; and Neander, speaking in the climactic position, defends the native tradition and the greatness of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson. The dialogue takes place on June 3, 1665, in a boat on the Thames. The four friends are rowed downstream to listen to the cannonading of the English and Dutch fleets, engaged in battle off the Suffolk coast. As the gunfire recedes they are assured of victory and order their boatman to return to London, and naturally enough they fall to discussing the number of bad poems that the victory will evoke.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Crites here is probably referring to Robert Wilde and possibly to Richard Flecknoe, whom Dryden later ridiculed in "Mac Flecknoe" (p. 59). Their actual identity is unimportant, for they merely represent two extremes in poetry, both deplorable: the fantastic and extravagant manner of decadent metaphysical wit and its opposite, the flat and the dull. The new poetry was to seek a mean between these extremes (see Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 2.239–42 and 289–300, pp. 526–27). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Puns. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boorish banter. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A malicious jester (French). "Catagresis": the use of a word in a sense remote from its normal meaning. A legitimate figure of speech used by all poets, it had been abused by John Cleveland (1613–1658), who was at first admired for his ingenuity, but whose reputation declined rapidly after the

Restoration. A Clevelandism: "The marigold, whose courtier's face / *Echoes* the sun."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The Levellers were radical egalitarians and republicans, a powerful political force in the Puritan army about 1648. They were suppressed by Cromwell. "Passions": emotions. "Still": always.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Words used merely to fill out a line of verse (see Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 2.346–47, p. 528).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cinna wishes to seem poor, and he is poor (Latin; *Epigrams* 8.19).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eugenius is in the midst of remarks about the limitations of the ancients.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A comedy by the Roman poet Terence (ca. 185–159 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Shall I not then do without her, if need be, for three whole days? (Latin).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The wit of Parmeno's exclamation, "Oh, three entire days," depends on *universum*, which suggests that a lover may regard three days as an eternity. "Admiration": wonder.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Titus Maccus Plautus (ca. 254–184 B.C.E.), Roman comic poet.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: But our ancestors too tolerantly (I do not say foolishly) praised both the verse and the wit of Plautus (Latin; *Art of Poetry*, lines 270–72). Dryden misquotes slightly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Many words that have perished will be born again, and those shall perish that are now esteemed, if usage wills it, in whose power are the judgment, the law, and the pattern of speech (Latin; *Art of Poetry*, lines 70–72).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: [The earth] shall give forth the Egyptian bean, mingled with the smiling acanthus (Latin; *Eclogues* 4.20). "Smiling acanthus" is a catachresis.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Actually *Aeneid* 8.91–93. Dryden's paraphrase makes the point clearly: "The woods and waters wonder at the gleam / Of shields and painted ships that stem the stream" (Latin;

*Aeneid*. 8.125–26). “Wonder” is a catachresis.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: [This is the place] which, if boldness of expression be permitted, I shall not hesitate to call the Palace of high heaven (Latin; *Metamorphoses* 1.175–76).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And the Capitol shall see the long processions (Latin; *Metamorphoses* 1.561).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lines 63–64.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Had he said everything thus! (Latin; Juvenal’s *Satires* 10.123–24).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From *Rupertismus*, lines 39–40. Mercury is said to be “killed” if its fluidity is destroyed.[Return to reference 4](#)

# ***From The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic License***<sup>1</sup>

## **["BOLDNESS" OF FIGURES AND TROPES DEFENDED: THE APPEAL TO "NATURE"]**

\* \* \* They, who would combat general authority with particular opinion, must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men. Are all the flights of heroic poetry to be concluded bombast, unnatural, and mere madness, because they are not affected with their excellencies? It is just as reasonable as to conclude there is no day, because a blind man cannot distinguish of light and colors. Ought they not rather, in modesty, to doubt of their own judgments, when they think this or that expression in Homer, Virgil, Tasso, or Milton's *Paradise* to be too far strained, than positively to conclude that 'tis all fustian and mere nonsense? 'Tis true there are limits to be set betwixt the boldness and rashness of a poet; but he must understand those limits who pretends to judge as well as he who undertakes to write: and he who has no liking to the whole ought, in reason, to be excluded from censuring of the parts. He must be a lawyer before he mounts the tribunal; and the judicature of one court, too, does not qualify a man to preside in another. He may be an excellent pleader in the Chancery, who is not fit to rule the Common Pleas.<sup>2</sup> But I will presume for once to tell them that the boldest strokes of poetry, when they are managed artfully, are those which most delight the reader.

Virgil and Horace, the severest writers of the severest age, have made frequent use of the hardest metaphors and of the strongest hyperboles; and in this case the best authority is the best argument, for generally to have pleased, and through all ages, must bear the force of universal tradition. And if you would appeal from thence to right reason, you will gain no more by it in effect than, first, to set

up your reason against those authors, and, secondly, against all those who have admired them. You must prove why that ought not to have pleased which has pleased the most learned and the most judicious; and, to be thought knowing, you must first put the fool upon all mankind. If you can enter more deeply than they have done into the causes and resorts<sup>3</sup> of that which moves pleasure in a reader, the field is open, you may be heard: but those springs of human nature are not so easily discovered by every superficial judge: it requires philosophy, as well as poetry, to sound the depth of all the passions, what they are in themselves, and how they are to be provoked; and in this science the best poets have excelled. \* \*

\* From hence have sprung the tropes and figures,<sup>4</sup> for which they wanted a name who first practiced them and succeeded in them. Thus I grant you that the knowledge of Nature was the original rule, and that all poets ought to study her, as well as Aristotle and Horace, her interpreters.<sup>5</sup> But then this also undeniably follows, that those things which delight all ages must have been an imitation of Nature—which is all I contend. Therefore is rhetoric made an art; therefore the names of so many tropes and figures were invented, because it was observed they had such and such effect upon the audience. Therefore catachreses and hyperboles<sup>6</sup> have found their place amongst them; not that they were to be avoided, but to be used judiciously and placed in poetry as heightenings and shadows are in painting, to make the figure bolder, and cause it to stand off to sight. \* \* \*

#### [WIT AS "PROPRIETY"]

\* \* \* [Wit] is a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thought and words elegantly adapted to the subject. If our critics will join issue on this definition, that we may *convenire in aliquo tertio*;<sup>7</sup> if they will take it as a granted principle, it will be easy to put an end to this dispute. No man will disagree from another's judgment concerning the dignity of style in heroic poetry; but all reasonable men will conclude it necessary that sublime subjects

ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and, consequently, often with the most figurative expressions. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1677

- Note 1:  
This essay was prefixed to Dryden's *State of Innocence*, the libretto for an opera (never produced) based on *Paradise Lost*. Dryden had been ridiculed for the extravagant and bold imagery and rhetorical figures that are typical of the style of his rhymed heroic plays. This preface is a defense not only of his own predilection for what Samuel Johnson described as "wild and daring sallies of sentiment, in the irregular and eccentric violence of wit" but also of the theory that heroic and idealized materials should be treated in lofty and boldly metaphorical style; hence his definition of wit as propriety.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Court in which civil actions could be brought by one subject against another. "Chancery": a high court presided over by the lord chancellor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mechanical springs that set something in motion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, such figures of speech as metaphors and similes. "Tropes": the uses of words in a figurative sense.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the words of the French critic René Rapin, the rules (largely derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry*) were made to "reduce Nature to method" (see Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 1.88–89 [p. 523]).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deliberate overstatement or exaggeration. "Cataphoresis": the use of a word in a sense remote from its normal meaning.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To find some means of agreement, in a third term, between the two opposites [Latin].[Return to reference 7](#)



# ***From A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire***<sup>1</sup>

## **[THE ART OF SATIRE]**

\* \* \* How easy is it to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave without using any of those opprobrious terms! To spare the grossness of the names, and to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks stand out, and yet not to employ any depth of shadowing.<sup>2</sup> This is the mystery of that noble trade, which yet no master can teach to his apprentice; he may give the rules, but the scholar is never the nearer in his practice. Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery<sup>3</sup> is offensive. A witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. The occasion of an offense may possibly be given, but he cannot take it. If it be granted that in effect this way does more mischief; that a man is secretly wounded, and though he be not sensible himself, yet the malicious world will find it out for him; yet there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's<sup>4</sup> wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my *Absalom*<sup>5</sup> is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem: it is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough; and he, for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed,<sup>6</sup> I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blindsides, and little

extravagancies; to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious.<sup>7</sup> It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1693

- Note 1:  
This passage is an excerpt from the long and rambling preface that served as the dedication of a translation of the satires of the Roman satirists Juvenal and Persius to Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset. The translations were made by Dryden and other writers, among them William Congreve. Dryden traces the origin and development of verse satire in Rome and in a very fine passage contrasts Horace and Juvenal as satiric poets. It is plain that he prefers the “tragic” satire of Juvenal to the urbane and laughing satire of Horace. But in the passage printed here, he praises his own satiric character of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham) in *Absalom and Achitophel* for the very reason that it is modeled on Horatian “raillery,” not Juvenalian invective.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Early English miniaturists prided themselves on the art of giving roundness to the full face without painting in shadows.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Satirical mirth, good-natured satire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A notorious public executioner of Dryden’s time (d. 1686). His name later became a generic term for all members of his profession.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *Absalom and Achitophel*, lines 544–68 (pp. 47–48).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Reviled, abused. Observe that the verb differed in meaning from its noun, defined above.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Liable.[Return to reference 7](#)

# **SAMUEL PEPYS**

## **1633–1703**

Samuel Pepys (pronounced "Peeps") was the son of a London tailor. With the help of a scholarship he took a degree at Cambridge; with the help of a cousin he found a place in the Navy Office. Eventually, through hard work and an eye for detail, he rose to secretary of the Admiralty. His defense of the Navy Office and himself before Parliament in 1668 won him a reputation as a good administrator, and his career continued to prosper until it was broken, first by false accusations of treason in 1679 and finally by the fall of James II in 1688. But Pepys was more than a bureaucrat. A Londoner to his core, he was interested in all the activities of the city: the theater, music, the social whirl, business, religion, literary life, and the scientific experiments of the Royal Society (of which he served as president from 1684 to 1686). He also found plenty of chances to indulge his two obsessions: chasing after women and making money.

Pepys kept his diary from 1660 to 1669 (when his eyesight began to fail). Writing in shorthand and sometimes in code, he was utterly frank in recording the events of his day, both public and private, the major affairs of state or his quarrels with his wife. Altogether he wrote about 1.3 million words. When the diary was first deciphered and published in the nineteenth century, it made him newly famous. As a document of social history, it is unsurpassed for its rich detail, honesty, and immediacy. But more than that, it gives us a sense of

somebody else's world: what it was like to live in the Restoration,  
and what it was like to see through the eyes of Pepys.

## ***From The Diary***

## [THE GREAT FIRE]

*September 2, 1666*

*Lords day.* Some of our maids sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast today, Jane called us up, about 3 in the morning, to tell us of a great fire they saw in the City.<sup>1</sup> So I rose, and slipped on my nightgown and went to her window, and thought it to be on the back side of Mark Lane<sup>2</sup> at the furthest; but being unused to such fires as followed, I thought it far enough off, and so went to bed again and to sleep. About 7 rose again to dress myself, and there looked out at the window and saw the fire not so much as it was, and further off. So to my closet<sup>3</sup> to set things to rights after yesterday's cleaning. By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down tonight by the fire we saw, and that it was now burning down all Fish Street by London Bridge. So I made myself ready presently,<sup>4</sup> and walked to the Tower and there got up upon one of the high places, Sir J. Robinson's little son going up with me; and there I did see the houses at that end of the bridge all on fire, and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge—which, among other people, did trouble me for poor little Michell and our Sarah<sup>5</sup> on the Bridge. So down, with my heart full of trouble, to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it begun this morning in the King's baker's house in Pudding Lane, and that it hath burned down St. Magnus' Church and most part of Fish Street already. So I down to the waterside and there got a boat and through bridge, and there saw a lamentable fire. Poor Michell's house, as far as the Old Swan,<sup>6</sup> already burned that way and the fire running further, that in a very little time it got as far as the Steelyard while I was there. Everybody endeavoring to remove their goods, and flinging into the river or bringing them into lighters<sup>7</sup> that lay off. Poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats or clambering from one pair of stair by the waterside to

another. And among other things, the poor pigeons I perceive were loath to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies till they were some of them burned, their wings, and fell down.

Having stayed, and in an hour's time seen the fire rage every way, and nobody to my sight endeavoring to quench it, but to remove their goods and leave all to the fire; and having seen it get as far as the Steelyard, and the wind mighty high and driving it into the city, and everything, after so long a drought, proving combustible, even the very stones of churches, and among other things, the poor steeple by which pretty Mrs. <sup>8</sup> lives, and whereof my old school-fellow Elborough is parson, taken fire in the very top and there burned till it fell down—I to Whitehall<sup>9</sup> with a gentleman with me who desired to go off from the Tower to see the fire in my boat—to Whitehall, and there up to the King's closet in the chapel, where people came about me and I did give them an account dismayed them all; and word was carried in to the King, so I was called for and did tell the King and Duke of York what I saw, and that unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down, nothing could stop the fire. They seemed much troubled, and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him and command him to spare no houses but to pull down before the fire every way. The Duke of York bid me tell him that if he would have any more soldiers, he shall; and so did my Lord Arlington afterward, as a great secret. Here meeting with Captain Cocke, I in his coach, which he lent me, and Creed with me, to Paul's;<sup>1</sup> and there walked along Watling Street as well as I could, every creature coming away laden with goods to save—and here and there sick people carried away in beds. Extraordinary good goods carried in carts and on backs. At last met my Lord Mayor in Canning Street, like a man spent, with a hankercher <sup>2</sup> about his neck. To the King's message, he cried like a fainting woman, "Lord, what can I do? I am spent. People will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses. But the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it." That he needed no more soldiers; and that for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having

been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home—seeing people all almost distracted and no manner of means used to quench the fire. The houses too, so very thick thereabouts, and full of matter for burning, as pitch and tar, in Thames Street—and warehouses of oil and wines and brandy and other things. Here I saw Mr. Isaak Houblon, that handsome man—prettily dressed and dirty at his door at Dowgate, receiving some of his brothers' things whose houses were on fire; and as he says, have been removed twice already, and he doubts<sup>3</sup> (as it soon proved) that they must be in a little time removed from his house also—which was a sad consideration. And to see the churches all filling with goods, by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time.

By this time it was about 12 o'clock, and so home and there find my guests, which was Mr. Wood and his wife, Barbary Shelden, and also Mr. Moone—she mighty fine, and her husband, for aught I see, a likely<sup>4</sup> man. But Mr. Moone's design and mine, which was to look over my closet and please him with the sight thereof, which he hath long desired, was wholly disappointed, for we were in great trouble and disturbance at this fire, not knowing what to think of it. However, we had an extraordinary good dinner, and as merry as at this time we could be.

While at dinner, Mrs. Batelier came to enquire after Mr. Woolfe and Stanes (who it seems are related to them), whose houses in Fish Street are all burned, and they in a sad condition. She would not stay in the fright.

As soon as dined, I and Moone away and walked through the City, the streets full of nothing but people and horses and carts loaden with goods, ready to run over one another, and removing goods from one burned house to another—they now removing out of Canning Street (which received goods in the morning) into Lombard Street and further; and among others, I now saw my little goldsmith Stokes receiving some friend's goods, whose house itself was burned the day after. We parted at Paul's, he home and I to Paul's Wharf, where I had appointed a boat to attend me; and took in Mr. Carcasse and his brother, whom I met in the street, and carried



them below and above bridge, to and again, to see the fire, which was now got further, both below and above, and no likelihood of stopping it. Met with the King and Duke of York in their barge, and with them to Queenhithe and there called Sir Rd. Browne<sup>5</sup> to them. Their order was only to pull down houses apace, and so below bridge at the waterside; but little was or could be done, the fire coming upon them so fast. Good hopes there was of stopping it at the Three Cranes above, and at Buttolph's Wharf below bridge, if care be used; but the wind carries it into the City, so as we know not by the waterside what it doth there. River full of lighters and boats taking in goods, and good goods swimming in the water; and only, I observed that hardly one lighter or boat in three that had the goods of a house in, but there was a pair of virginals<sup>6</sup> in it. Having seen as much as I could now, I away to Whitehall by appointment, and there walked to St. James's Park, and there met my wife and Creed and Wood and his wife and walked to my boat, and there upon the water again, and to the fire up and down, it still increasing and the wind great. So near the fire as we could for smoke; and all over the Thames, with one's face in the wind you were almost burned with a shower of firedrops—this is very true—so as houses were burned by these drops and flakes of fire, three or four, nay five or six houses, one from another. When we could endure no more upon the water, we to a little alehouse on the Bankside over against the Three Cranes, and there stayed till it was dark almost and saw the fire grow; and as it grew darker, appeared more and more, and in corners and upon steeples and between churches and houses, as far as we could see up the hill of the City, in a most horrid malicious bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire. Barbary<sup>7</sup> and her husband away before us. We stayed till, it being darkish, we saw the fire as only one entire arch of fire from this to the other side the bridge, and in a bow up the hill, for an arch of above a mile long. It made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once, and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruin. So home with a sad heart, and there find everybody discoursing and lamenting the fire; and poor

Tom Hater came with some few of his goods saved out of his house, which is burned upon Fish Street hill. I invited him to lie at my house, and did receive his goods: but was deceived in his lying there,<sup>8</sup> the noise coming every moment of the growth of the fire, so as we were forced to begin to pack up our own goods and prepare for their removal. And did by moonshine (it being brave,<sup>9</sup> dry, and moonshine and warm weather) carry much of my goods into the garden, and Mr. Hater and I did remove my money and iron chests into my cellar—as thinking that the safest place. And got my bags of gold into my office ready to carry away, and my chief papers of accounts also there, and my tallies<sup>1</sup> into a box by themselves. So great was our fear, as Sir W. Batten had carts come out of the country to fetch away his goods this night. We did put Mr. Hater, poor man, to bed a little; but he got but very little rest, so much noise being in my house, taking down of goods.

*September 5, 1666*

I lay down in the office again upon W. Hewer's<sup>2</sup> quilt, being mighty weary and sore in my feet with going till I was hardly able to stand. About 2 in the morning my wife calls me up and tells of new cries of "Fire!"—it being come to Barking Church, which is the bottom of our lane. I up; and finding it so, resolved presently to take her away; and did, and took my gold (which was about £2350), W. Hewer, and Jane down by Poundy's boat to Woolwich.<sup>3</sup> But Lord, what a sad sight it was by moonlight to see the whole City almost on fire—that you might see it plain at Woolwich, as if you were by it. There when I came, I find the gates shut, but no guard kept at all; which troubled me, because of discourses now begun that there is plot in it and that the French had done it.<sup>4</sup> I got the gates open, and to Mr. Sheldon's,<sup>5</sup> where I locked up my gold and charged my wife and W. Hewer never to leave the room without one of them in it night nor day. So back again, by the way seeing my goods well in the lighters at Deptford and watched well by people. Home, and whereas I expected to have seen our house on fire, it being now about 7 o'clock, it was not. But to the fire, and there find greater

hopes than I expected; for my confidence of finding our office on fire was such, that I durst not ask anybody how it was with us, till I came and saw it not burned. But going to the fire, I find, by the blowing up of houses and the great help given by the workmen out of the King's yards, sent up by Sir W. Penn, there is a good stop given to it, as well at Mark Lane end as ours—it having only burned the dial<sup>6</sup> of Barking Church, and part of the porch, and was there quenched. I up to the top of Barking steeple, and there saw the saddest sight of desolation that I ever saw. Everywhere great fires. Oil cellars and brimstone and other things burning. I became afear'd to stay there long; and therefore down again as fast as I could, the fire being spread as far as I could see it, and to Sir W. Penn's and there eat a piece of cold meat, having eaten nothing since Sunday but the remains of Sunday's dinner.

Here I met with Mr. Young and Whistler; and having removed all my things, and received good hopes that the fire at our end is stopped, they and I walked into the town and find Fanchurch Street, Gracious Street, and Lumbard Street all in dust. The Exchange a sad sight, nothing standing there of all the statues or pillars but Sir Tho. Gresham's picture in the corner.<sup>7</sup> Walked into Moore-fields (our feet ready to burn, walking through the town among the hot coals) and find that full of people, and poor wretches carrying their goods there, and everybody keeping his goods together by themselves (and a great blessing it is to them that it is fair weather for them to keep abroad<sup>8</sup> night and day); drank there, and paid twopence for a plain penny loaf.

Thence homeward, having passed through Cheapside and Newgate Market, all burned—and seen Anthony Joyce's house in fire. And took up (which I keep by me) a piece of glass of Mercer's Chapel in the street, where much more was, so melted and buckled with the heat of the fire, like parchment. I also did see a poor cat taken out of a hole in the chimney joining to the wall of the Exchange, with the hair all burned off the body and yet alive. So home at night, and find there good hopes of saving our office—but great endeavors of watching all night and having men ready; and so

we lodged them in the office and had drink and bread and cheese for them. And I lay down and slept a good night about midnight—though when I rose, I hear that there had been a great alarm of French and Dutch being risen—which proved nothing. But it is a strange thing to see how long this time did look since Sunday, having been always full of variety of actions, and little sleep, that it looked like a week or more. And I had forgot almost the day of the week.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Fire of London, which was to destroy four-fifths of the central city, had begun an hour earlier. For another description see Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (p. 32). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Near Pepys's own house in Seething Lane. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A small private room or study. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Immediately. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Michell and his wife, Betty, one of Pepys's old flames, lived near London Bridge. Sarah had been a maid of the Pepyses'. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A tavern in Thames Street, near the source of the fire. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Barges. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mrs. Horsely, a beauty admired and pursued by Pepys. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Palace in central London. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: St. Paul's Cathedral, later ravaged by the fire. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Handkerchief. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fears. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Promising. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sir Richard Browne was a former lord mayor. Queenhithe is a harbor in Thames Street. [Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Table-size harpsichord, popular at the time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The actress Elizabeth Knepp, another of Pepys's mistresses. He calls her "Barbary" because she had enchanted him by singing *Barbary Allen*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, mistaken in asking him to stay.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fine.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Receipts notched on sticks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Hewer, Pepys's chief clerk. Pepys had packed or sent away all his own goods.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Suburb on the east side of London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: There were rumors that the French had set the fire and were invading the city.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Sheldon, a Woolwich official at whose home Mrs. Pepys had stayed the year before, during the plague. "Gates": at the dockyard.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Clock. "Yards": dockyards.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sir Thomas Gresham had founded the Royal Exchange, a center for shopping and trading, in 1568. It was rebuilt in 1669.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Out of doors.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A day later the fire was under control. Pepys' own house was spared.[Return to reference 9](#)

[THE DEB WILLET AFFAIR]

*October 25, 1668*

*Lords day.* Up, and discoursing with my wife about our house and many new things we are doing of; and so to church I, and there find Jack Fen come, and his wife, a pretty black<sup>1</sup> woman; I never saw her before, nor took notice of her now. So home and to dinner; and after dinner, all the afternoon got my wife and boy<sup>2</sup> to read to me. And at night W. Batelier comes and sups with us; and after supper, to have my head combed by Deb,<sup>3</sup> which occasioned the greatest sorrow to me that ever I knew in this world; for my wife, coming up suddenly, did find me embracing the girl con my hand sub su coats; and indeed, I was with my main in her cunny.<sup>4</sup> I was at a wonderful loss upon it, and the girl also; and I endeavored to put it off, but my wife was struck mute and grew angry, and as her voice came to her, grew quite out of order; and I do say little, but to bed; and my wife said little also, but could not sleep all night; but about 2 in the morning waked me and cried, and fell to tell me as a great secret that she was a Roman Catholic and had received the Holy Sacrament;<sup>5</sup> which troubled me but I took no notice of it, but she went on from one thing to another, till at last it appeared plainly her trouble was at what she saw; but yet I did not know how much she saw and therefore said nothing to her. But after her much crying and reproaching me with inconstancy and preferring a sorry girl before her, I did give her no provocations but did promise all fair usage to her, and love, and foreswore any hurt that I did with her—till at last she seemed to be at ease again; and so toward morning, a little sleep; [*Oct. 26*] and so I, with some little repose and rest, rose, and up and by water to Whitehall, but with my mind mightily troubled for the poor girl, whom I fear I have undone by this, my wife telling me that she would turn her out of door. However, I was obliged to attend the Duke of York, thinking to have had a meeting of Tanger<sup>6</sup> today, but had not; but he did take me and Mr. Wren into his closet,

and there did press me to prepare what I had to say upon the answers of my fellow-officers to his great letter; which I promised to do against<sup>7</sup> his coming to town again the next week; and so to other discourse, finding plainly that he is in trouble and apprehensions of the reformers, and would be found to do what he can towards reforming himself. And so thence to my Lord Sandwich; where after long stay, he being in talk with others privately, I to him; and there he taking physic and keeping his chamber, I had an hour's talk with him about the ill posture of things at this time, while the King gives countenance to Sir Ch. Sidly and Lord Buckhurst,<sup>8</sup> telling him their late story of running up and down the streets a little while since all night, and their being beaten and clapped up all night by the constable, who is since chid and imprisoned for his pains.

He tells me that he thinks his matters do stand well with the King—and hopes to have dispatch to his mind;<sup>9</sup> but I doubt it, and do see that he doth fear it too. He told me my Lady Carteret's trouble about my writing of that letter of the Duke of York's lately to the office; which I did not own, but declared to be of no injury to G. Carteret<sup>1</sup> and that I would write a letter to him to satisfy him therein. But this I am in pain how to do without doing myself wrong, and the end I had, of preparing a justification to myself hereafter, when the faults of the Navy come to be found out. However, I will do it in the best manner I can.

Thence by coach home and to dinner, finding my wife mightily discontented and the girl sad, and no words from my wife to her. So after dinner, they out<sup>2</sup> with me about two or three things; and so home again, I all the evening busy and my wife full of trouble in her looks; and anon to bed—where about midnight, she wakes me and there falls foul on me again, affirming that she saw me hug and kiss the girl; the latter I denied, and truly; the other I confessed and no more. And upon her pressing me, did offer to give her under my hand that I would never see Mrs. Pierce more, nor Knepp, but did promise her particular demonstrations of my true love to her, owning some indiscretion in what I did, but that there was no harm in it. She at last on these promises was quiet, and very kind we were, and



so to sleep; [*Oct. 27*] and in the morning up, but with my mind troubled for the poor girl, with whom I could not get opportunity to speak; but to the office, my mind mighty full of sorrow for her, where all the morning, and to dinner with my people and to the office all the afternoon; and so at night home and there busy to get some things ready against tomorrow's meeting of Tanger; and that being done and my clerks gone, my wife did towards bedtime begin to be in a mighty rage from some new matter that she had got in her head, and did most part of the night in bed rant at me in most high terms, of threats of publishing<sup>3</sup> my shame; and when I offered to rise, would have rose too, and caused a candle to be lit, to burn by her all night in the chimney while she ranted; while I, that knew myself to have given some grounds for it, did make it my business to appease her all I could possibly, and by good words and fair promises did make her very quiet; and so rested all night and rose with perfect good peace, being heartily afflicted for this folly of mine that did occasion it; but was forced to be silent about the girl, which I have no mind to part with, but much less that the poor girl should be undone by my folly. [*Oct. 28*] So up, with mighty kindness from my wife and a thorough peace; and being up, did by a note advise the girl what I had done and owned, which note I was in pain for till she told me that she had burned it. This evening, Mr. Spong came and sat late with me, and first told me of the instrument called Parrallogram,<sup>4</sup> which I must have one of, showing me his practice thereon by a map of England.

*November 14, 1668*

Up, and had a mighty mind to have seen or given a note to Deb or to have given her a little money; to which purpose I wrapped up 40s in a paper, thinking to give her; but my wife rose presently, and would not let me be out of her sight; and went down before me into the kitchen, and came up and told me that she was in the kitchen, and therefore would have me go round the other way; which she repeating, and I vexed at it, answered her a little angrily; upon which she instantly flew out into a rage, calling me dog and rogue,



and that I had a rotten heart; all which, knowing that I deserved it, I bore with; and word being brought presently up that she was gone away by coach with her things, my wife was friends; and so all quiet, and I to the office with my heart sad, and find that I cannot forget the girl, and vexed I know not where to look for her—and more troubled to see how my wife is by this means likely for ever to have her hand over me, that I shall for ever be a slave to her; that is to say, only in matters of pleasure, but in other things she will make her business, I know, to please me and to keep me right to her—which I will labor to be indeed, for she deserves it of me, though it will be I fear a little time before I shall be able to wear Deb out of my mind. At the office all the morning, and merry at noon at dinner; and after dinner to the office, where all the afternoon and doing much business late; my mind being free of all troubles, I thank God, but<sup>5</sup> only for my thoughts of this girl, which hang after her. And so at night home to supper, and there did sleep with great content with my wife. I must here remember that I have lain with my moher<sup>6</sup> as a husband more times since this falling-out then in I believe twelve months before—and with more pleasure to her then I think in all the time of our marriage before.

*November 18, 1668*

Lay long in bed, talking with my wife, she being unwilling to have me go abroad, being and declaring herself jealous of my going out, for fear of my going to Deb; which I do deny—for which God forgive me, for I was no sooner out about noon but I did go by coach directly to Somerset House and there inquired among the porters there for Dr. Allbun;<sup>7</sup> and the first I spoke with told me he knew him, and that he was newly gone into Lincoln's Inn fields, but whither he could not tell me, but that one of his fellows, not then in the way, did carry a chest of drawers thither with him, and that when he comes he would ask him. This put me in some hopes; and I to Whitehall and thence to Mr. Povy's, but he at dinner; and therefore I away and walked up and down the Strand between the two turnstiles,<sup>8</sup> hoping to see her out of a window; and then employed a

porter, one Osbeston, to find out this doctor's lodgings thereabouts; who by appointment comes to me to Hercules' Pillars, where I dined alone, but tells me that he cannot find out any such but will inquire further. Thence back to Whitehall to the treasury a while, and thence to the Strand; and towards night did meet with the porter that carried the chest of drawers with this doctor, but he would not tell me where he lived, being his good master he told me; but if I would have a message to him, he would deliver it. At last, I told him my business was not with him, but a little gentlewoman, one Mrs. Willet, that is with him; and sent him to see how she did, from her friend in London, and no other token. He goes while I walk in Somerset House walk there in the court; at last he comes back and tells me she is well, and that I may see her if I will—but no more. So I could not be commanded by my reason, but I must go this very night; and so by coach, it being now dark, I to her, close by my tailor's; and there she came into the coach to me, and yo did besar her and tocar her thing, but ella was against it and labored with much earnestness, such as I believed to be real; and yet at last yo did make her tener mi cosa in her mano, while mi mano was sopra her pectus, and so did hazer<sup>9</sup> with grand delight. I did nevertheless give her the best counsel I could, to have a care of her honor and to fear God and suffer no man para haver to do con her—as yo have done—which she promised. Yo did give her 20s and directions para laisser sealed in paper at any time the name of the place of her being, at Herringman's my bookseller in the Change<sup>1</sup>—by which I might go para her. And so bid her good-night, with much content to my mind and resolution to look after her no more till I heard from her. And so home, and there told my wife a fair tale, God knows, how I spent the whole day; with which the poor wretch was satisfied, or at least seemed so; and so to supper and to bed, she having been mighty busy all day in getting of her house in order against tomorrow, to hang up our new hangings and furnishing our best chamber.

*November 19, 1668*

Up, and at the office all the morning, with my heart full of joy to think in what a safe condition all my matters now stand between my wife and Deb and me; and at noon, running upstairs to see the upholsters, who are at work upon hanging my best room and setting up my new bed, I find my wife sitting sad in the dining-room; which inquiring into the reason of, she begun to call me all the false, rotten-hearted rogues in the world, letting me understand that I was with Deb yesterday; which, thinking impossible for her ever to understand, I did a while deny; but at last did, for the ease of my mind and hers, and for ever to discharge my heart of this wicked business, I did confess all; and above-stairs in our bed-chamber there, I did endure the sorrow of her threats and vows and curses all the afternoon. And which was worst, she swore by all that was good that she would slit the nose of this girl, and be gone herself this very night from me; and did there demand 3 or 400/ of me to buy my peace, that she might be gone without making any noise, or else protested that she would make all the world know of it. So, with most perfect confusion of face and heart, and sorrow and shame, in the greatest agony in the world, I did pass this afternoon, fearing that it will never have an end; but at last I did call for W. Hewer, who I was forced to make privy now to all; and the poor fellow did cry like a child and obtained what I could not, that she would be pacified, upon condition that I would give it under my hand never to see or speak with Deb while I live, as I did before of Pierce and Knepp; and which I did also, God knows, promise for Deb too, but I have the confidence to deny it, to the perjuring of myself. So before it was late, there was, beyond my hopes as well as desert, a tolerable peace; and so to supper, and pretty kind words, and to bed, and there yo did hazer con ella to her content; and so with some rest spent the night in bed, being most absolutely resolved, if ever I can master this bout, never to give her occasion while I live of more trouble of this or any other kind, there being no curse in the world so great as this of the difference between myself and her; and therefore I do by the grace of God promise never to offend her more, and did this night begin to pray to God upon my knees alone in my chamber; which God knows I cannot yet do heartily, but I

hope God will give me the grace more and more every day to fear Him, and to be true to my poor wife. This night the upholsters did finish the hanging of my best chamber, but my sorrow and trouble is so great about this business, that put me out of all joy in looking upon it or minding how it was.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Dark-haired.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Servant. Pepys had no children.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Deborah Willett, Mrs. Pepys's maid.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: With his hand under her skirts and in her vulva.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When unhappy with her husband, Elizabeth Pepys sometimes threatened to convert to the Church of Rome. She never did.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Committee supervising the British naval base at Tangier, later evacuated under Pepys's supervision.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Before. Pepys had drafted a letter for the Duke of York (later James II), high admiral of the navy, defending him from charges of mismanagement.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir Charles Sedley and Lord Buckhurst were riotous rakes and well-known writers; they are often identified with Lisideius and Eugenius in Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (pp. 68–70).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A message to his liking.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sir George Carteret, former treasurer of the navy (which Pepys had plans to reform), was later censured for having kept poor accounts.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Went out.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Making public.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The pantograph, a mechanism for copying maps or plans.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Except.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Woman or wife (*mujer* in Spanish).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pepys' wife had told him that Deb was staying with a man named Allbon.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To keep traffic, except for pedestrians, out of the street.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Carry on. "Besar": kiss. "Tocar": touch. "Ella": she. "Tener mi cosa in her mano": take my thing in her hand. "Mi mano was sobre her pectus": my hand was on her breast. Pepys often used other languages when describing sexual encounters.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Royal Exchange, a center for shopping, business, and trade. "Para laisser": to leave.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despite his promises, Pepys continued to hanker for Deb, and they had a few brief encounters. Mrs. Pepys accused him of talking to Deb in his dreams, and she once threatened him with red-hot tongs. But so far as is known the affair was never consummated.[Return to reference 2](#)

# JOHN BUNYAN

## 1628–1688

John Bunyan is one of the most remarkable figures in seventeenth-century literature. The son of a poor Bedfordshire tinker (a maker and mender of metal pots), he received only meager schooling and then learned his father's craft. Nothing in the circumstances of his early life could have suggested that he would become a writer known the world over.

*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), his spiritual autobiography, records his transformation from a self-doubting sinner into an eloquent and fearless Baptist preacher. Preachers, both men and women, often even less educated than Bunyan, were common phenomena among the sects during the Commonwealth. They wished no ordination but the "call," and they could dispense with learning because they abounded in inspiration, inner light, and the gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit. In November 1660, the Anglican Church began to persecute and silence the dissenting sects. Jails filled with unlicensed Nonconformist preachers, and Bunyan was one of the prisoners. Refusing to keep silent, he chose imprisonment and so for twelve years remained in Bedford jail, preaching to his fellow prisoners and writing religious books. Upon his release, he was called to the pastorate of a Nonconformist group in Bedford. It was during a second imprisonment, in 1675, when the Test Act was once again rigorously enforced against Nonconformists, that he wrote his greatest work, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This*

*World to That Which Is to Come* (1678), revised and augmented in the third edition (1679). Bunyan was a prolific writer: part 2 of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, dealing with the journey of Christian's wife and children, appeared in 1684; *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, in 1680; *The Holy War*, in 1682. And these major works form only a small part of all his writings.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* was long the most popular allegory in English. Its basic metaphor—life is a journey—is simple and familiar; the objects that the pilgrim Christian meets are homely and commonplace: a quagmire, the highway, the bypaths and shortcuts through pleasant meadows, the inn, the steep hill, the town fair on market day, and the river that must be forded. As in the equally homely parables of Jesus, however, these simple things are charged with spiritual significance. Moreover, this is a tale of adventure. If the road that Christian travels is the King's Highway, it is also a perilous path along which we encounter giants, wild beasts, hobgoblins, and the terrible Apollyon, "the angel of the bottomless pit," whom Christian must fight. Bunyan keeps the tale firmly based on human experience, and his style, modeled on the prose of the English Bible, together with his concrete language and carefully observed details, enables even the simplest reader to share the experiences of the characters. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is no longer a household book, but it survives in the phrases it gave to our language: "the slough of despond," "the house beautiful," "Mr. Worldly-Wiseman," and "Vanity Fair."

# ***From The Pilgrim's Progress***

***From This World to That Which Is to Come: Delivered under  
the Similitude of a Dream***



## [CHRISTIAN SETS OUT FOR THE CELESTIAL CITY]

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back (Isaiah lxiv.6; Luke xiv.33; Psalms xxxviii.4; Habakkuk ii.2; Acts xvi.31). I looked and saw him open the book and read therein; and, as he read, he wept, and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?" (Acts ii.37).

In this plight, therefore, he went home and refrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be silent long, because that his trouble increased. Wherefore at length he brake his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them. O my dear wife, said he, and you the children of my bowels, I your dear friend am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am for certain informed that this our city will be burned with fire from heaven, in which fearful overthrow both myself, with thee, my wife, and you, my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found, whereby we may be delivered. At this his relations were sore amazed; not for that they believed that what he had said to them was true, but because they thought that some frenzy distemper<sup>1</sup> had got into his head; therefore, it drawing towards night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all haste they got him to bed; but the night was as troublesome to him as the day; wherefore, instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears. So when the morning was come, they would know how he did. He told them, Worse and worse; he also set to talking to them again, but they began to be hardened. They also thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriages<sup>2</sup> to him: sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they

would quite neglect him. Wherefore he began to retire himself to his chamber, to pray for and pity them, and also to condole his own misery; he would also walk solitarily in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying; and thus for some days he spent his time.

Now I saw, upon a time, when he was walking in the fields, that he was (as he was wont) reading in this book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?"

I saw also that he looked this way and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still, because (as I perceived) he could not tell which way to go. I looked then, and saw a man named Evangelist<sup>3</sup> coming to him, who asked, Wherefore dost thou cry? (Job xxxiii.23). He answered, Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment (Hebrews ix.27), and I find that I am not willing to do the first (Job xvi.21), nor able to do the second (Ezekiel xxii.14). . . .

Then said Evangelist, Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils? The man answered, Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into Tophet<sup>4</sup> (Isaiah xxx.33). And, sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry.<sup>5</sup>

Then said Evangelist, If this be thy condition, why standest thou still? He answered, Because I know not whither to go. Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Fly from the wrath to come" (Matthew iii.7).

The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully,<sup>6</sup> said, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicketgate?<sup>7</sup> (Matthew vii. 13, 14.) The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? (Psalms cxix.105; II Peter i.19.) He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate; at which when thou knockest it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, Life! life! eternal life! (Luke xiv.26). So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain (Genesis xix.17).

The neighbors also came out to see him run (Jeremiah xx.10); and as he ran some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return; and, among those that did so, there were two that resolved to fetch him back by force. The name of the one was Obstinate, and the name of the other Pliable. Now by this time the man was got a good distance from them; but, however, they were resolved to pursue him, which they did, and in a little time they overtook him. Then said the man, Neighbors, wherefore are ye come? They said, To persuade you to go back with us. But he said, That can by no means be; you dwell, said he, in the City of Destruction (the place also where I was born) I see it to be so; and, dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone; be content, good neighbors, and go along with me.

OBST. What! said Obstinate, and leave our friends and our comforts behind us?

CHR. Yes, said Christian (for that was his name), because that ALL which you shall forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that which I am seeking to enjoy (II Corinthians v.17); and, if you will go along with me, and hold it, you shall fare as I myself; for there, where I go, is enough and to spare (Luke xv.17). Come away, and prove my words.

OBST. What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

CHR. I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away (I Peter i.4), and it is laid up in heaven, and safe there (Hebrews xi.16), to be bestowed, at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. Read it so, if you will, in my book.

OBST. Tush! said Obstinate, away with your book; will you go back with us or no?

CHR. No, not I, said the other, because I have laid my hand to the plow (Luke ix.62).

OBST. Come, then, neighbor Pliable, let us turn again, and go home without him; there is a company of these crazed-headed coxcombs, that, when they take a fancy<sup>8</sup> by the end, are wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason (Proverbs xxvi.16).

PLI. Then said Pliable, Don't revile; if what the good Christian says is true, the things he looks after are better than ours; my heart inclines to go with my neighbor.

OBST. What! more fools still? Be ruled by me, go back; who knows whither such a brain-sick fellow will lead you? Go back, go back, and be wise.

CHR. Nay, but do thou come with thy neighbor, Pliable; there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides. If you believe not me, read here in this book; and for the truth of what is expressed therein, behold, all is confirmed by the blood of Him that made it (Hebrews ix.17–22; xiii.20).

PLI. Well, neighbor Obstinate, said Pliable, I begin to come to a point,<sup>9</sup> I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in my lot with him: but, my good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?

CHR. I am directed by a man, whose name is Evangelist, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.

PLI. Come, then, good neighbor, let us be going. Then they went both together. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A malady causing madness. The use of *frenzy* as an adjective was not uncommon in the 17th century.[Return to](#)

[reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Behavior.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A preacher of the Gospel; literally, a bearer of good news.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The place near Jerusalem where bodies and filth were burned; hence, by association, a name for hell.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cry out.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sorrowfully.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A small gate in or beside a larger gate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Delusion. "Coxcombs": fools.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Decision.[Return to reference 9](#)

## [THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND]

Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk they drew near to a very miry slough,<sup>1</sup> that was in the midst of the plain; and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond. Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with dirt; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.

PLI. Then said Pliable, Ah, neighbor Christian, where are you now?

CHR. Truly, said Christian, I do not know.

PLI. At that Pliable began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect 'twixt this and our journey's end? May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave<sup>2</sup> country alone for me. And, with that, he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next<sup>3</sup> to his own house: so away he went, and Christian saw him no more.

Wherefore Christian was left to tumble in the Slough of Despond alone: but still he endeavored to struggle to that side of the slough that was further from his own house, and next to the wicket-gate; the which he did, but could not get out, because of the burden that was upon his back: but I beheld in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help, and asked him what he did there?

CHR. Sir, said Christian, I was bid go this way by a man called Evangelist, who directed me also to yonder gate, that I might escape the wrath to come; and as I was going thither I fell in here.

HELP. But why did not you look for the steps?

CHR. Fear followed me so hard that I fled the next way, and fell in.

HELP. Then said he, Give me thy hand; so he gave him his hand, and he drew him out, and set him upon sound ground, and bid him

go on his way.

Then I stepped to him that plucked him out, and said, Sir, wherefore, since over this place is the way from the City of Destruction to yonder gate, is it that this plat<sup>4</sup> is not mended, that poor travelers might go thither with more security? And he said unto me, This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended; it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore it was called the Slough of Despond; for still, as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in his place. And this is the reason of the badness of this ground. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Swamp (pronounced to rhyme with *now*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fine.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nearest.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A plot of ground.[Return to reference 4](#)

## [VANITY FAIR]<sup>5</sup>

Then I saw in my dream, that when they were got out of the wilderness, they presently saw a town before them, and the name of that town is Vanity; and at the town there is a fair kept, called Vanity Fair; it is kept all the year long; it beareth the name of Vanity Fair because the town where it is kept is lighter than vanity; and also because all that is there sold, or that cometh thither, is vanity. As is the saying of the wise, "All that cometh is vanity" (Ecclesiastes i.2, 14; ii.11, 17; xi.8; Isaiah xl.17).

This fair is no new-erected business, but a thing of ancient standing; I will show you the original of it.

Almost five thousand years ago, there were pilgrims walking to the Celestial City, as these two honest persons are; and Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion,<sup>6</sup> with their companions, perceiving by the path that the pilgrims made, that their way to the city lay through this town of Vanity, they contrived here to set up a fair; a fair wherein should be sold all sorts of vanity, and that it should last all the year long. Therefore at this fair are all such merchandise sold, as houses, lands, trades, places, honors, preferments,<sup>7</sup> titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not.

And, moreover, at this fair there is at all times to be seen jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues, and that of every kind.

Here are to be seen, too, and that for nothing, thefts, murders, adulteries, false swearers, and that of a blood-red color.

And as in other fairs of less moment, there are the several rows and streets, under their proper names, where such and such wares are vended; so here likewise you have the proper places, rows, streets (viz., countries and kingdoms), where the wares of this fair are soonest to be found. Here is the Britain Row, the French Row, the Italian Row, the Spanish Row, the German Row, where several



sorts of vanities are to be sold. But, as in other fairs, some one commodity is as the chief of all the fair, so the ware of Rome and her merchandise<sup>8</sup> is greatly promoted in this fair; only our English nation, with some others, have taken a dislike thereat.

Now, as I said, the way to the Celestial City lies just through this town where this lusty<sup>9</sup> fair is kept; and he that will go to the City, and yet not go through this town, must needs "go out of the world" (I Corinthians v.10). The Prince of princes himself, when here, went through this town to his own country, and that upon a fair-day too,<sup>1</sup> yea, and as I think, it was Beelzebub, the chief lord of this fair, that invited him to buy of his vanities; yea, would have made him lord of the fair, would he but have done him reverence as he went through the town. (Matthew iv.8; Luke iv.5–7.) Yea, because he was such a person of honor, Beelzebub had him from street to street, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a little time, that he might, if possible, allure the Blessed One to cheapen<sup>2</sup> and buy some of his vanities; but he had no mind to the merchandise, and therefore left the town, without laying out so much as one farthing upon these vanities. This fair, therefore, is an ancient thing, of long standing, and a very great fair.

Now these pilgrims, as I said, must needs go through this fair. Well, so they did; but, behold, even as they entered into the fair, all the people in the fair were moved, and the town itself as it were in a hubbub about them; and that for several reasons: for

First, The pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people, therefore, of the fair, made a great gazing upon them: some said they were fools, some they were bedlams, and some they are outlandish<sup>3</sup> men. (I Corinthians ii.7, 8).

Secondly, And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said; they naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the fair were the men of this world; so that, from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed barbarians<sup>4</sup> each to the other.

Thirdly, But that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was that these pilgrims set very light by all their wares; they cared not so much as to look upon them; and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," and look upwards, signifying that their trade and traffic was in heaven. (Psalms cxix.37; Philippians iii.19, 20).

One chanced mockingly, beholding the carriages of the men, to say unto them, What will ye buy? But they, looking-gravely upon him, said, "We buy the truth" (Proverbs xxiii.23). At that there was an occasion taken to despise the men the more; some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully, and some calling upon others to smite them. At last things came to an hubbub and great stir in the fair, insomuch that all order was confounded. Now was word presently brought to the great one of the fair, who quickly came down, and deputed some of his most trusty friends to take these men into examination, about whom the fair was almost overturned. So the men were brought to examination; and they that sat upon them<sup>5</sup> asked them whence they came, whither they went, and what they did there, in such an unusual garb? The men told them that they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country, which was the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews xi.13–16); and that they had given no occasion to the men of the town, nor yet to the merchandisers, thus to abuse them, and to let<sup>6</sup> them in their journey, except it was for that, when one asked them what they would buy, they said they would buy the truth. But they that were appointed to examine them did not believe them to be any other than bedlams and mad, or else such as came to put all things into a confusion in the fair. Therefore they took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirt, and then put them into the cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all the men of the fair. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 5:

In this, perhaps the best-known episode in the book, Bunyan characteristically turns one of the most familiar institutions in contemporary England—annual fairs—into an allegory of universal spiritual significance. Christian and his companion Faithful pass through the town of Vanity at the season of the local fair. *Vanity* means “emptiness” or “worthlessness,” and hence the fair is an allegory of worldliness and the corruption of the religious life through the attractions of the world. From earliest times numerous fairs were held for stated periods throughout Britain; to them the most important merchants from all over Europe brought their wares. The serious business of buying and selling was accompanied by all sorts of diversions—eating, drinking, and other fleshly pleasures, as well as spectacles of strange animals, acrobats, and other wonders.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The “unclean spirit” sent by Jesus into the Gadarene swine (Mark 5:9). Beelzebub, prince of the devils (Matthew 12:24). Apollyon, the destroyer, “the Angel of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:11).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Appointments and promotions to political or ecclesiastical positions.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The practices and the temporal power of the Roman Catholic Church.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cheerful, lustful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ask the price of.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Foreign. “Bedlams”: lunatics from Bethlehem Hospital, the insane asylum in London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Greeks and Romans so designated all those who spoke a foreign tongue. “Canaan”: the Promised Land, ultimately conquered by the Children of Israel (Joshua 4) and settled by them; hence the pilgrims speak the language of the Bible and of the true religion. Dissenters were notorious for their habitual use of biblical language.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Interrogated and tried them. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hinder. [Return to reference 6](#)

## **[THE RIVER OF DEATH AND THE CELESTIAL CITY]**

So I saw that when they<sup>7</sup> awoke, they addressed themselves to go up to the City; but, as I said, the reflection of the sun upon the City (for the City was pure gold, Revelation xxi.18) was so extremely glorious, that they could not, as yet, with open face behold it, but through an instrument made for that purpose. (II Corinthians iii.18). So I saw that as I went on, there met them two men, in raiment that shone like gold; also their faces shone as the light.

These men asked the pilgrims whence they came; and they told them. They also asked them where they had lodged, what difficulties and dangers, what comforts and pleasures they had met in the way; and they told them. Then said the men that met them, You have but two difficulties more to meet with, and then you are in the City.

Christian then and his companion asked the men to go along with them; so they told them they would. But, said they, you must obtain it by your own faith. So I saw in my dream that they went on together till they came in sight of the gate.

Now I further saw that betwixt them and the gate was a river, but there was no bridge to go over; the river was very deep. At the sight, therefore, of this river, the pilgrims were much stunned;<sup>8</sup> but the men that went with them said, You must go through, or you cannot come at the gate.

The pilgrims then began to inquire if there was no other way to the gate; to which they answered, Yes; but there hath not any, save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah,<sup>9</sup> been permitted to tread that path, since the foundation of the world, nor shall, until the last trumpet shall sound. (I Corinthians xv.51, 52). The pilgrims then, especially Christian, began to despond in his mind, and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them by which they might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the waters were all of a depth. They said no; yet they could not help them in that case; for, said they, you shall find it deeper or shallower, as you believe in the King of the place.

They then addressed themselves to the water; and entering, Christian began to sink, and crying out to his good friend Hopeful, he said, I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all his waves go over me! Selah.<sup>1</sup>

Then said the other, Be of good cheer, my brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good. Then said Christian, Ah, my friend, the sorrows of death have compassed me about; I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey. And with that a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian, so that he could not see before him. Also here he in great measure lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his pilgrimage. But all the words that he spake still tended to discover<sup>2</sup> that he had horror of mind, and heart-fears that he should die in that river, and never obtain entrance in at the gate. Here also, as they that stood by perceived, he was much in the troublesome thoughts of the sins that he had committed, both since and before he began to be a pilgrim. 'Twas also observed that he was troubled with apparitions of hobgoblins and evil spirits; for ever and anon he would intimate so much by words. Hopeful, therefore, here had much ado to keep his brother's head above water; yea, sometimes he would be quite gone down, and then, ere a while, he would rise up again half dead. Hopeful also would endeavor to comfort him, saying, Brother, I see the gate and men standing by to receive us; but Christian would answer, 'Tis you, 'tis you they wait for; you have been Hopeful ever since I knew you. And so have you, said he to Christian. Ah, brother, said he, surely if I was right he would now arise to help me; but for my sins he hath brought me into the snare, and hath left me. Then said Hopeful, My brother, you have quite forgot the text, where it is said of the wicked, "There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men" (Psalms lxxiii.4, 5). These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God hath forsaken you, but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind

that which heretofore you have received of his goodness, and live upon him in your distresses.

Then I saw in my dream that Christian was as in a muse<sup>3</sup> a while, to whom also Hopeful added this word, Be of good cheer. Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. And with that Christian brake out with a loud voice, Oh, I see him again! and he tells me, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isaiah xliii.2). Then they both took courage, and the Enemy was after that as still as a stone, until they were gone over. Christian therefore presently found ground to stand upon, and so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow. Thus they got over. Now, upon the bank of the river on the other side, they saw the two Shining Men again, who there waited<sup>4</sup> for them. Wherefore, being come out of the river, they saluted<sup>4</sup> them saying, We are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those that shall be heirs of salvation. Thus they went along towards the gate. \* \* \*

Now when they were come up to the gate, there was written over it in letters of gold, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation xxii.14).

Then I saw in my dream, that the Shining Men bid them call at the gate; the which, when they did, some from above looked over the gate, to wit, Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, etc., to whom it was said, These pilgrims are come from the City of Destruction, for the love that they bear to the King of this place; and then the pilgrims gave in unto them each man his certificate, which they had received in the beginning; those, therefore, were carried in to the King, who, when he had read them, said, Where are the men? To whom it was answered, They are standing without the gate. The King then commanded to open the gate, "That the righteous nation," said he, "which keepeth the truth, may enter in" (Isaiah xxvi.2).

Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in at the gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There was also that met them

with harps and crowns, and gave them to them: the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honor. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them, "ENTER YE INTO THE JOY OF OUR LORD" (Matthew xxv.21). I also heard the men themselves, that they sang with a loud voice, saying, "BLESSING AND HONOR, GLORY AND POWER, BE TO HIM THAT SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB FOREVER AND EVER" (Revelation v.13).

Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and, behold, the City shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal.

There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord" (Revelation iv.8). And after that they shut up the gates, which when I had seen I wished myself among them.

Now while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back, and saw Ignorance come up to the riverside; but he soon got over, and that without half that difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened that there was then in that place one Vain-hope, a ferryman, that with his boat helped him over; so he, as the other, I saw, did ascend the hill to come up to the gate, only he came alone; neither did any man meet him with the least encouragement. When he was come up to the gate, he looked up to the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that entrance should have been quickly administered to him; but he was asked by the men that looked over the top of the gate, Whence came you? and what would you have? He answered, I have eat and drank in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets. Then they asked him for his certificate, that they might go in and show it to the King; so he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. Then said they, Have you none? But the man answered never a word. So they told the King, but he would not come down to see him, but commanded the two Shining Ones that conducted Christian and Hopeful to the City, to go out and take Ignorance, and bind him



hand and foot, and have him away. Then they took him up, and carried him through the air, to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

## Endnotes

1678

- Note 7: Christian and his companion, Hopeful. Ignorance, who appears tragically in the final paragraph, had tried to accompany the two pilgrims but had dropped behind because of his hobbling gait.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Amazed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Both were “translated” alive to heaven (Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5, 2 Kings 2:11–12).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A word of uncertain meaning that occurs frequently at the end of a verse in the Psalms. Bunyan may have supposed it to signify the end.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reveal.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A deep meditation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Greeted.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Science, Society, and God

In the early seventeenth century, politician and philosopher Francis Bacon imagined a utopian world organized around a powerful scientific society that aimed at “the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.” Over three decades later, on November 28, 1660, a group gathered at Gresham College to discuss creating a real scientific society—not in a fictional text but right where they were, in London. While Bacon had imagined a secretive society, these men wanted to create one that would publicly encourage a kind of learning that did not yet feature in the school or university curriculum. Among the men gathered was Robert Boyle, a gentleman doing groundbreaking experiments into the nature of matter with a vacuum pump. John Wilkins was there too, an influential clergyman who was devising a sign system for a new scientific language. The group also included, among others, Lawrence Rooke, an astronomer; William Petty, a medical doctor; Lord Viscount William Brouncker, a nobleman interested in math and music; and Christopher Wren, who would become famous as the architect of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. The society these men dreamed up later received a charter from King Charles II, who approved of their work, and became the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge—the first scientific society in England. This group would soon start publishing the *Philosophical Transactions*, the first scientific journal in English.

The seventeenth century used to be described as the century of the “Scientific Revolution,” a period of heroic individual acts of discovery: Isaac Newton supposedly was struck by an apple that prompted a “Eureka!” insight into the very structure of the universe. Today, scholars have challenged many aspects of this old picture. The myth of a solitary genius has been replaced by a clearer picture of a group of people working both within and outside new

institutions to forge new practices, build new technologies, and legitimize new kinds of knowledge. And what once seemed like a “revolution” instead involved complex continuities with the past. Even “science” as a singular noun does not seem exactly right. Contemporaries sometimes described what they were doing as the “new science” (where “science” was from the Latin *scientia*, signifying knowledge more generally), but they also talked of “natural philosophy,” “mechanical philosophy,” and “natural history.” The word *scientist* was not coined until the nineteenth century: they were instead “natural philosophers,” or “naturalists,” or “virtuosi” (a word also used for collectors). Using our word *science* also threatens to obscure the way seventeenth-century new science was understood in relation with religion, or alchemy and natural magic, or anthropology, or linguistics. Yet, even if the old picture of the “Scientific Revolution” has been challenged, this period remains crucial in the history of science: new ideas about atomism, experiment, technology, and probability developed, and many of the practices and structures we associate with modern science were institutionalized. The new science became more popular, capturing imaginations. This cluster focuses on the early Royal Society as it offers a snapshot of the late seventeenth-century moment when all this was starting to happen.

The Royal Society’s early advocates made much of how its members held different political and religious views and came from different walks of life (nobility and tradesmen alike). In the early years, however, the fellows were all men and most of them were quite privileged. Women were not allowed in the seventeenth century or for a long time after. (The first women were elected to the Royal Society in 1945.) The first Jewish man, Moses da Costa, was elected in 1736; and in the first decades of the eighteenth century the Society rejected a Black Jamaican man, Francis Williams, who attended a few meetings and was proposed for membership. (Later, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* suggested that the rejection was “solely . . . on account of his complexion.”) The men of the Royal Society were not the only people interested in science in the period, just one group that organized themselves influentially.





Frontispiece to Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, Wenceslaus Hollar, engraving, London, 1667. A bust of King Charles II, called the "author and patron of the Royal Society" (Latin), is being crowned by Fame. To the left is the Royal Society's president, William Brouncker; to the right, Francis Bacon, pointing to mathematical and military technology. On the left side are shelves full of books, and in the background, more

scientific instruments, including Robert Boyle's air pump (center left).

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The early fellows chose as their motto "Nullius in verba," meaning "On the word of no one." Instead of writing arguments relying on the authority of Aristotle and other ancient thinkers, they wanted to see things for themselves: actual natural things, animals and plants. They were empiricists, thinkers who started from sensory experience. These empiricists would begin small—studying natural objects and collecting facts from all over—and only slowly build to conclusions or generalizations. But they would not just passively look at nature: they would experiment and dissect. This approach to knowledge seemed to involve a change of scale that was striking to contemporaries. Some people found it mockable: instead of asking big questions about Truth, these philosophers proposed studying dirt and bugs. But they also used powerful instruments to enable a change of scale that seemed thrilling to others: with microscopes they could see tiny animals moving around in cheese, and telescopes helped them glimpse stars never before seen by humans. One influential idea at the core of the Society's early work was that nature was like a machine—it worked, clocklike, through tiny bits of matter in motion, with none of the complicated ideas about "occult powers" or "substantial forms" that Aristotelian traditions used to explain matter.

None of these ideas, however, went unchallenged. An empiricist approach to knowledge was dominant in the late seventeenth-century Royal Society, but it was not shared by the fellows doing cutting-edge work in math. And even proponents of the "mechanical" worldview were unsure if it could explain gravity or the human nervous system, say. Further, there were philosophers outside the society—like Thomas Hobbes and Margaret Cavendish—who were well versed in the new science but actively challenged the Royal Society's dominant ways of knowing (could seventeenth-century microscopes be trusted to do what advocates promised?) and its understanding of nature (was all matter really as inert and passive as



bits of a clock?). In the culture at large, the Royal Society's new science was far from dominant: universities kept on teaching their Aristotle-inspired brand of Scholasticism. And theater audiences of Thomas Shadwell's play *The Virtuoso* (1676) laughed at an impotent madman wasting time and money on bottles of air but also slaughtering dogs for useless experiments that led nowhere (see Joseph Addison's reimagining of this character, [p. 130](#)). Today, familiar with how powerful science has become, we might find it surprising that its early advocates had to work so hard to promote and legitimize science. The fellows of the Royal Society were at pains to emphasize that, unlike theological and political disputes that had been central to the Civil Wars of the preceding years, the study of nature posed no social threat. They also insisted that their work would be useful to society at large, yielding practical applications. And this new science did not challenge Christianity, they argued, but served it: they could help people understand God's wisdom and design in the creation of the world. Over the course of the eighteenth century, science was popularized in new ways—including in sermons, introductory books for women, and coffeehouse lectures featuring live experiments. Over the same period, science would also get aligned with power in increasingly material ways: for instance, the Royal Society would help fund Captain James Cook's imperial voyages into the Pacific in the 1760s.

Literature of this period expressed a wide range of attitudes about science: writers mocked it or thrilled to its possibilities; they cited its discoveries, or their prose styles registered its influence. And while science influenced literature, the reverse was also true. Francis Bacon inspired the Society with utopian fiction, and Cavendish critiqued it in fiction too. To be sure, some advocates of science distrusted literature's resources: "nullius in verba" condemned textual authorities but also rhetoric itself. Advocates of early science dreamed influentially of a "plain style" of writing that would avoid what John Locke called the "cheat" of figurative language and deliver, as Thomas Sprat put it, "so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*" (see [p. 98](#)). Whatever they said, though, science's advocates kept right on using kinds of language we think of as

literary—"nullius in verba" itself is taken from Horace's ancient Latin poetry. Moreover, Steven Shapin argues that Robert Boyle worked with vacuum technology but also a "literary technology" that helped legitimize his findings, a vivid and verbose kind of description that urged readers to imagine they were actually watching the experiment. And so many early Royal Society writers used analogies and metaphors to explain and understand what they saw—even the very notion of a "mechanical philosophy" rests on the metaphor of nature as a machine. Indeed, for all that "nullius in verba" was its ideal, early science happened in and through language, and it comes down to us in these words.

## THOMAS SPRAT

Thomas Sprat (1635–1713) wrote *The History of the Royal Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* in 1667, just seven years after the first meeting and five years after the Society received its charter. Sprat's book offers a history of the Society's founding but also of science itself, as Sprat places its brand of experimentation in a long history of knowledge stretching back to the ancient Greeks. The book also functions as a kind of introduction to the Society's work, featuring excerpts from its science: "observations of the eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter," a description of Tenerife, "an account of a dog dissected," experiments with colored dye, and a discussion of the life cycle of Colchester oysters. Above all, though, the *History* is a defense of the Royal Society against its critics, influentially expressing some key themes of early science's advocates: science is useful, and no danger to church or state.

The *History* is perhaps best remembered today for its famous comments on scientific writing—Sprat's celebration of the Royal Society's "plain" style that matched things to words, and his diatribe against ornamental and affective rhetoric. There is historical irony in the influence of his antirhetorical ideal, for Sprat himself was better known in the seventeenth century as a poet interested in ornate Pindaric odes. Moreover, Sprat brought considerable rhetorical savvy to his endorsement of the Royal Society and its aims. He closes by imagining science ushering in a better world: "all tempests will cease; the oppositions and contentious wranglings of science falsely so called will soon vanish away; the peaceable calmness of men's judgements will have admirable influence on their manners; the sincerity of their understandings will appear in their actions; their opinions will be less violent and dogmatical but more certain" and "the value of their arts will be esteemed by the great things they perform and not by those they speak." The new science will, Sprat promises, "enrich us with all the benefits of fruitfulness and plenty."



# ***From The History of the Royal Society***

## **[A MODEL OF THEIR WHOLE DESIGN]**

Their purpose is, in short, to make faithful records of all the works of nature or art, which can come within their reach: that so the present age and posterity may be able to put a mark on the errors, which have been strengthened by long prescription:<sup>1</sup> to restore the truths that have lain neglected: to push on those, which are already known, to more various uses:<sup>2</sup> and to make the way more passable to what remains unrevealed. This is the compass of their design. And to accomplish this, they have endeavored to separate the knowledge of nature from the colors of rhetoric, the devices of fancy, or the delightful deceit of fables. They have labored to enlarge it, from being confined to the custody of a few,<sup>3</sup> or from servitude to private interests. They have striven to preserve it from being over-pressed by a confused heap of vain and useless particulars; or from being straitened and bounded too much up by general doctrines. They have tried to put it into a condition of perpetual increasing, by settling an inviolable correspondence between the hand and the brain. They have studied to make it not only an enterprise of one season or of some lucky opportunity; but a business of time, a steady, a lasting, a popular, an uninterrupted work. They have attempted to free it from the artifice, and humors,<sup>4</sup> and passions of sects; to render it an instrument, whereby mankind may obtain a dominion over things, and not only over one another's judgments. And lastly, they have begun to establish these reformatations in philosophy, not so much by any solemnity of laws or ostentation of ceremonies, as by solid practice and examples: not by a glorious pomp of words, but by the silent, effectual, and unanswerable arguments of real productions.

## **[THEIR MANNER OF DISCOURSE]**

Thus they have directed, judged, conjectured upon, and improved experiments. But lastly, in these and all other businesses that have come under their care, there is one thing more about which the Society has been most solicitous; and that is, the manner of their discourse: which, unless they had been very watchful to keep in due temper, the whole spirit and vigor of their design had been soon eaten out by the luxury and redundance of speech. The ill effects of this superfluity of talking have already overwhelmed most other arts and professions; insomuch that when I consider the means of happy living and the causes of their corruption, I can hardly forbear recanting<sup>5</sup> what I said before; and concluding that eloquence ought to be banished out of all civil societies, as a thing fatal to peace and good manners. To this opinion I should wholly incline, if I did not find that it is a weapon, which may be as easily procured by bad men as good, and that, if these<sup>6</sup> should only cast it away and those retain it, the naked innocence of virtue would be upon all occasions exposed to the armed malice of the wicked. This is the chief reason that should now keep up the ornaments of speaking in any request: since they are so much degenerated from their original usefulness. They were at first, no doubt, an admirable instrument in the hands of wise men: when they were only employed to describe goodness, honesty, obedience in larger, fairer, and more moving images; to represent truth, clothed with bodies; and to bring knowledge back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first derived to our understandings.<sup>7</sup> But now they are generally changed to worse uses. They make the fancy disgust the best things, if they come sound and unadorned; they are in open defiance against reason, professing not to hold much correspondence with that but with its slaves, the passions; they give the mind a motion too changeable and bewitching to consist with right practice. Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties these specious tropes and figures have brought on our knowledge? How many rewards, which are due to more profitable and difficult arts, have been still snatched away by the easy vanity of fine speaking? For now I am warmed with this just anger, I cannot withhold myself from betraying

the shallowness of all these seeming mysteries, upon which we writers and speakers look so big. And, in few words, I dare say that of all the studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtained than this vicious abundance of phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of tongue, which makes so great a noise in the world. But I spend words in vain; for the evil is now so inveterate<sup>8</sup> that it is hard to know whom to blame or where to begin to reform. We all value one another so much upon this beautiful deceit and labor so long after it in the years of our education, that we cannot but ever after think kinder of it than it deserves. And indeed, in most other parts of learning, I look on it to be a thing almost utterly desperate in its cure: and I think it may be placed amongst those general mischiefs, such as the dissention of Christian princes, the want of practice in religion and the like, which have been so long spoken against that men are become insensible<sup>9</sup> about them, every one shifting off the fault from himself to others; and so they are only made bare commonplaces of complaint. It will suffice my present purpose to point out what has been done by the Royal Society towards the correcting of its excesses in natural philosophy, to which it is, of all others, a most professed enemy.

They have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution the only remedy that can be found for this extravagance, and that has been a constant resolution to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men delivered so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness; bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants, before that of wits or scholars.

### **[NATURAL PHILOSOPHY NOT HARMFUL TO RELIGION]**

First there can be no just reason assigned, why an experimenter should be prone to deny the essence and properties of God, the

universal sovereignty of His dominion, and His providence over the creation. He has before him the very same argument to confirm his judgment in all these; with which he himself is wont to be abundantly satisfied when he meets with it in any of his philosophical inquiries. In everything that he tries, he believes that this is enough for him to rest on, if he finds that not only his own, but the universal observations of men of all times and places, without any mutual conspiracy have consented in the same conclusion. How can he then refrain from embracing this common truth, which is witnessed by the unanimous approbation of all countries, the agreement of nations, and the secret acknowledgement of every man's breast?<sup>1</sup>

'Tis true his employment is about material things. But this is so far from drawing him to oppose invisible beings that it rather puts his thoughts into an excellent good capacity to believe them. In every work of nature that he handles, he knows that there is not only a gross<sup>2</sup> substance, which presents itself to all men's eyes, but an infinite subtilty of parts, which come not into the sharpest sense. So that what the Scripture relates of the purity of God, of the spirituality of his nature, and that of angels and the souls of men cannot seem incredible to him, when he perceives the numberless particles that move in every man's blood and the prodigious streams that continually flow unseen from every body. Having found that his own senses have been so far assisted by the instruments of art, he may sooner admit that his mind ought to be raised higher by a heavenly light in those things wherein his senses do fall short. If (as the Apostle says) the invisible things of God are manifested by the visible,<sup>3</sup> then how much stronger arguments has he for his belief in the eternal power and Godhead, from the vast number of creatures that are invisible to others but are exposed to his view by the help of his experiments?

Thus he is prepared to admit a deity and to embrace the consequences of that concession. He is also from his experiments as well furnished with arguments to adore it: he has always before his eyes the beauty, contrivance, and order of God's works: from hence,

he will learn to serve Him with all reverence, who in all that He has made consulted ornament, as well as use \* \* \*<sup>4</sup>

So true is that saying of my Lord Bacon, *That by a little knowledge of nature men become atheists; but a great deal returns them back again to a sound and religious mind.*<sup>5</sup> In brief, if we rightly apprehend the matter, it will be found that it is not only sottishness<sup>6</sup> but prophaneness for men to cry out against the understanding of nature: for that being nothing else but the instrument of God, whereby He gives being and action to things, the knowledge of it deserves so little to be esteemed impious, that it ought rather to be reckoned as divine.

## Endnotes

1667

- Note 1: Custom, practice.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A recurrent theme for the Royal Society: they would turn knowledge to use, including practical applications.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Royal Society often emphasized how it opened up knowledge to more people, though in practice it was still composed exclusively of men, mostly quite privileged.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Whims or dispositions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Taking back. Earlier, he had discussed style and proposed an English Academy for “polishing” the English language.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Good men.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A fundamental empiricist tenet: knowledge comes from sensory experience of things, not from words.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Entrenched.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Indifferent. “Dissent”: disagreement between. “Want”: lack.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sprat overstates the universality of monotheism. His emphasis on the “unanimous approbation” also sits oddly with

the Royal Society's emphasis on experiment over tradition.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Large enough for anyone to see.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: From Romans 1:20: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sprat then addresses the objection that science would lead experimenters to atheism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sprat misquotes Francis Bacon's essay "Of Atheism" (1612): "a little philosophy inclineth a man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men about to religion." Sprat later further develops this into an argument that the Royal Society poses no political threat: "that is true in civil affairs, which I have already quoted out of my Lord Bacon concerning divine: a little knowledge is subject to make men headstrong, insolent, and untractable; but a great deal has a quite contrary effect, inclining them to be submissive to their betters, and obedient to the sovereign power."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stupidity.[Return to reference 6](#)

# ROBERT HOOKE

Robert Hooke (1635–1703) was one of the most prolific and skilled natural philosophers of the early Royal Society. He was born to a minister and received a small inheritance, though he was of a lower class than many of the other gentlemen of the Royal Society. In the early 1650s, he started working as an assistant to natural philosophers in Oxford, a role that involved him in cutting-edge scientific work, including Robert Boyle's groundbreaking vacuum pump experiments. Upon the Royal Society's founding, Hooke was appointed curator of experiments, tasked with performing a few at every meeting. This was something more like a job at first (though a salary was promised only in the future), but Hooke was given full status as a fellow the following year. Later, he was granted a paid lectureship at Gresham College, the institution in London where the Royal Society met. Many scholars thus describe Hooke as "the first professional research scientist," earning his living off scientific work. Later, Hooke became one of the secretaries of the Royal Society.

Hooke's most influential work, the lavishly illustrated *Micrographia*—literally, "tiny writing" or "drawing"—was published in 1665, only the second book to come out with the Royal Society's imprimatur, or official sanction. The very project of microscopy captured many of the central energies of early science: it involved a Francis Bacon-inspired collection of facts about nature; it worked through minute attention to sensed particulars; and it used a scientific instrument that promised to remedy, at least partially, fundamental human limitations. The *Micrographia* also shows evidence of Hooke's own extraordinarily wide-ranging scientific interests, as in its pages he studies color, fire, minerals, plants, and insects and even speculates about craters on the moon. The book contains the first use of the word *cell* to describe plant structure, in Hooke's discussion of cork under a microscope.

One of Hooke's recurring conclusions was about how the microscope reveals the complex artistry of God's creation, in comparison with the "rudeness and bungling" of human constructions: magnified, a seed evinced previously unfathomable intricacy of design, whereas a manufactured needle showed only lumps and bumps. Yet, the *Micrographia* was also a celebration of the new possibilities of scientific technology, of the idea that human abilities might be extended.



# ***From Micrographia: or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses<sup>1</sup> with Observations and Inquiries Thereupon***

## ***From The Preface***

It is the great prerogative of mankind above other creatures, that we are not only able to behold the works of nature, or barely to sustain our lives by them, but we have also the power of considering, comparing, altering, assisting, and improving them to various uses. And as this is the peculiar privilege of human nature in general, so is it capable of being so far advanced by the helps of art and experience as to make some men excel others in their observations and deductions, almost as much as they do beasts. By the addition of such artificial instruments and methods, there may be, in some manner, a reparation made for the mischiefs, and imperfection, mankind has drawn upon itself, by negligence and intemperance and a willful and superstitious deserting the prescripts and rules of nature, whereby every man, both from a derived corruption, innate and born with him, and from his breeding and converse with men, is very subject to slip into all sorts of errors.<sup>2</sup>

The only way which now remains for us to recover some degree of those former perfections seems to be by rectifying the operations of the sense, the memory, and reason, since upon the evidence, the strength, the integrity, and the right correspondence of all these, all the light by which our actions are to be guided is to be renewed, and all our command over things is to be established.

It is therefore most worthy of our consideration to recollect their several defects,<sup>3</sup> that so we may the better understand how to

supply them, and by what assistances we may enlarge their power and secure them in performing their particular duties.

As for the actions of our senses, we cannot but observe them to be in many particulars much outdone by those of other creatures, and when at best to be far short of the perfection they seem capable of. And these infirmities of the senses arise from a double cause, either from the disproportion of the object to the organ, whereby an infinite number of things can never enter into them,<sup>4</sup> or else from error in the perception, that many things, which come within their reach, are not received in a right manner.

The like frailties are to be found in the memory; we often let many things slip away from us, which deserve to be retained; and of those which we treasure up, a great part is either frivolous or false; and if good and substantial, either in tract of time obliterated, or at best so overwhelmed and buried under more frothy notions that when there is need of them, they are in vain sought for.

The two main foundations being so deceivable, it is no wonder that all the succeeding works which we build upon them, of arguing, concluding, defining, judging, and all the other degrees of reason are liable to the same imperfection, being, at best, either vain<sup>5</sup> or uncertain: so that the errors of the understanding are answerable to the two other, being defective both in the quantity and goodness of its knowledge; for the limits to which our thoughts are confined are small in respect of the vast extent of nature itself; some parts of it are too large to be comprehended, and some too little to be perceived. And from thence it must follow, that not having a full sensation of the object, we must be very lame and imperfect in our conceptions about it, and in all the proportions which we build upon it; hence we often take the shadow of things for the substance, small appearances for good similitudes,<sup>6</sup> similitudes for definitions; and even many of those, which we think to be the most solid definitions, are rather expressions of our own misguided apprehensions than of the true nature of the things themselves.

The effects of these imperfections are manifested in different ways, according to the temper and disposition of the several minds

of men: some they incline to gross ignorance and stupidity, and others to a presumptuous imposing on other men's opinions, and a confident dogmatizing on matters, whereof there is no assurance to be given.

Thus all the uncertainty and mistakes of human actions proceed either from the narrowness and wandering of our senses, from the slipperiness or delusion of our memory, from the confinement<sup>7</sup> or rashness of our understanding, so that 'tis no wonder that our power over natural causes and effects is so slowly improved, seeing we are not only to contend with the obscurity and difficulty of the things whereon we work and think, but even the forces of our own minds conspire to betray us.

These being the dangers in the process of human reason, the remedies of them all can only proceed from the real, the mechanical, the experimental philosophy, which has this advantage over the philosophy of discourse and disputation, that whereas that chiefly aims at the subtilty of its deductions and conclusions, without much regard to the first groundwork, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory; so this<sup>8</sup> intends the right ordering of them all, and the making them serviceable to each other.

The first thing to be undertaken in this weighty work is a watchfulness over the failings and an enlargement of the dominion of the senses.

To which end it is requisite, first, that there should be a scrupulous choice and a strict examination of the reality, constancy, and certainty of the particulars that we admit; this is the first rise whereon truth is to begin, and here the most severe and most impartial diligence must be employed; the storing up of all, without any regard to evidence or use, will only tend to darkness and confusion. We must not therefore esteem the riches of our philosophical treasure by the number only, but chiefly by the weight; the most vulgar instances are not to be neglected, but above all, the most instructive are to be entertained; the footsteps of Nature are to be traced, not only in her ordinary course, but when she seems to be

put to her shifts, to make many doublings and turnings, and to use some kind of art in endeavoring to avoid our discovery.<sup>9</sup>

The next care to be taken, in respect of the senses, is a supplying of their infirmities with instruments, and, as it were, the adding of artificial organs to the natural; this in one of them has been of late years accomplished with prodigious benefit to all sorts of useful knowledge, by the invention of optical glasses. By the means of telescopes, there is nothing so far distant but may be represented to our view; and by the help of microscopes, there is nothing so small as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible world discovered<sup>1</sup> to the understanding. By this means the heavens are opened, and a vast number of new stars, and new motions, and new productions appear in them, to which all the ancient astronomers were utterly strangers. By this the Earth itself, which lies so near us, under our feet, shows quite a new thing to us, and in every little particle of its matter, we now behold almost as great a variety of creatures, as we were able before to reckon up in the whole universe itself.

It seems not improbable, but that by these helps the subtilty of the composition of bodies, the structure of their parts, the various texture of their matter, the instruments and manner of their inward motions,<sup>2</sup> and all the other possible appearances of things may come to be more fully discovered; all which the ancient Peripatetics<sup>3</sup> were content to comprehend in two general and (unless further explained) useless words of *matter* and *form*. From whence there may arise many admirable advantages towards the increase of the operative<sup>4</sup> and the mechanic knowledge, to which this age seems so much inclined, because we may perhaps be enabled to discern all the secret workings of nature, almost in the same manner as we do those that are the productions of art, and are managed by wheels, and engines, and springs, that were devised by human wit.<sup>5</sup>

In this kind I here present to the world my imperfect endeavors; which though they shall prove no other way considerable, yet, I hope, they may be in some measure useful to the main design of a reformation in philosophy, if it be only by showing that there is not

so much required towards it, any strength of imagination, or exactness of method, or depth of contemplation (though the addition of these, where they can be had, must needs produce a much more perfect composure) as a sincere hand and a faithful eye, to examine and to record the things themselves as they appear. \* \* \*<sup>6</sup>

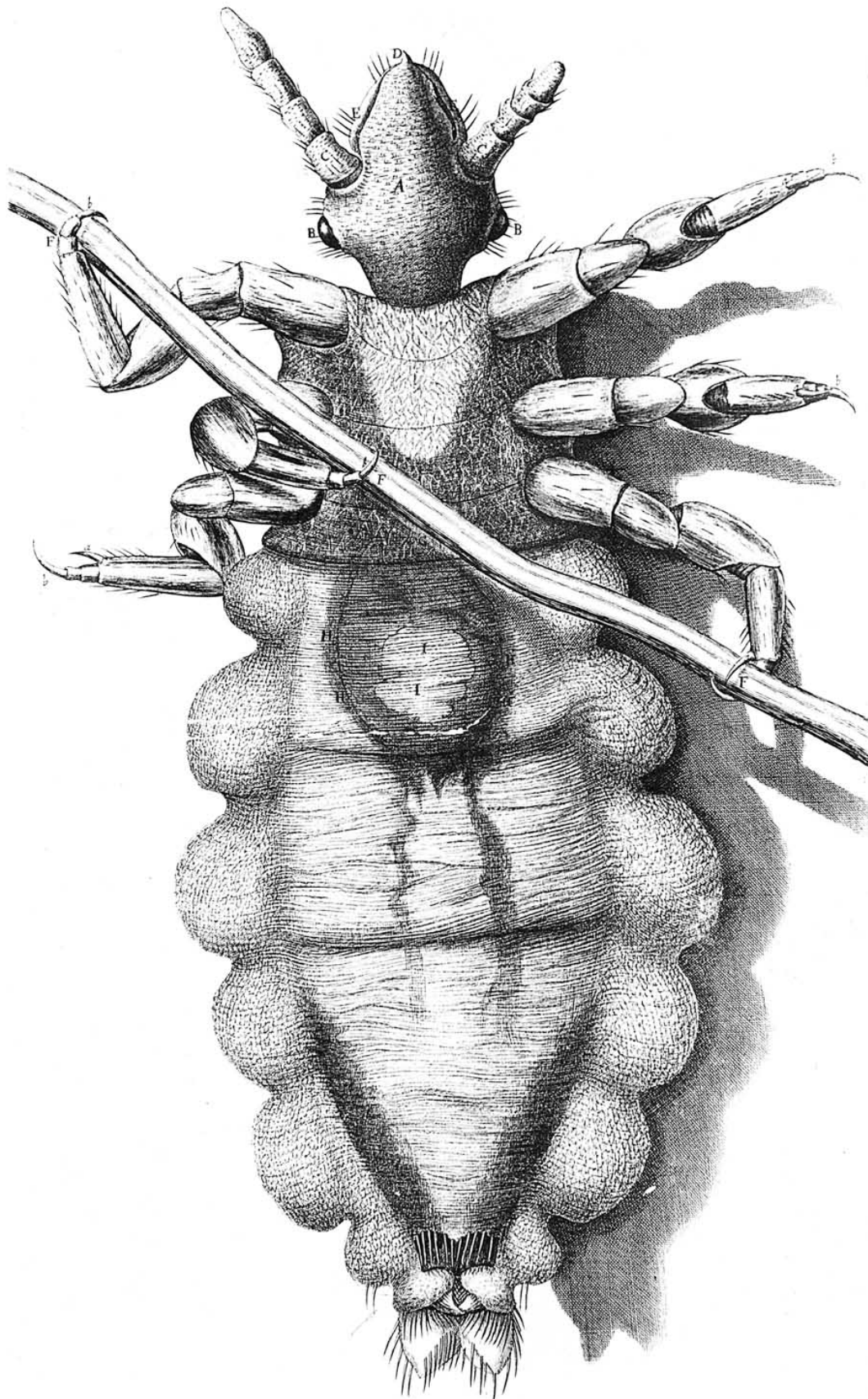
### ***Observation 54. Of a Louse***

This is a creature so officious, that 'twill be known to every one at one time or other, so busy and so impudent<sup>7</sup> that it will be intruding itself in everyone's company, and so proud and aspiring withall, that it fears not to trample on the best, and affects nothing so much as a crown;<sup>8</sup> feeds and lives very high, and that makes it so saucy, as to pull any one by the ears<sup>9</sup> that comes in its way, and will never be quiet till it has drawn blood: it is troubled at nothing so much as at a man that scratches his head, as knowing that man is plotting and contriving some mischief against it, and that makes it oftentime skulk into some meaner and lower place, and run behind a man's back, though it go very much against the hair;<sup>1</sup> which ill conditions of it having made it better known than trusted would exempt me from making any further description of it did not my faithful Mercury,<sup>2</sup> my microscope, bring me other information of it. For this has discovered to me, by means of a very bright light cast on it, that it is a creature of a very odd shape; it has a head shaped like that expressed in 35. *Scheme*<sup>3</sup> marked with A, which seems almost conical, but is a little flatted on the upper and under sides, at the biggest part of which, on either side behind the head (as it were, being the place where other creatures' ears stand) are placed its two black shining goggle eyes BB, looking backwards, and fenced round with several small cilia or hairs that encompass it, so that it seems this creature has no very good foresight:<sup>4</sup> it does not seem to have any eyelids, and therefore perhaps its eyes were so placed that it might the better cleanse them with its fore-legs; and perhaps this may be the reason why they so much avoid and run from the light behind them, for being made to live in the shady and dark recesses of the hair, and thence probably their eye having a great aperture, the open and

clear light, especially that of the sun, must needs very much offend them;<sup>5</sup> to secure these eyes from receiving any injury from the hairs through which it passes, it has two horns that grow before it, in the place where one would have thought the eyes should be; each of these CC hath four joints, which are fringed, as it were, with small bristles, from which to the tip of its snout D, the head seems very round and tapering, ending in a very sharp nose D, which seems to have a small hole and to be the passage through which he sucks the blood. Now whereas if it be placed on its back with its belly upwards, as it is in the 35. *Scheme*, it seems in several positions to have a resemblance of chaps, or jaws, as is represented in the figure by EE, yet in other postures those dark strokes disappear; and having kept several of them in a box for two or three days, so that for all that time they had nothing to feed on, I found, upon letting one creep on my hand, that it immediately fell to sucking,<sup>6</sup> and did neither seem to thrust its nose very deep into the skin, nor to open any kind of mouth, but I could plainly perceive a small current of blood, which came directly from its snout and past into its belly; and about A there seemed a contrivance, somewhat resembling a pump, pair of bellows, or heart, for by a very swift systole and diastole<sup>7</sup> the blood seemed drawn from the nose and forced into the body. It did not seem at all, though I viewed it a good while as it was sucking, to thrust more of its nose into the skin than the very snout D, nor did it cause the least discernable pain, and yet the blood seemed to run through its head very quick and freely, so that it seems there is no part of the skin but the blood is dispersed into, nay, even into the *cuticula*; for had it thrust its whole nose in from D to CC, it would not have amounted to the supposed thickness of that tegument,<sup>8</sup> the length of the nose being not more than a three hundredth part of an inch. It has six legs, covered with a very transparent shell, and jointed exactly like a crab's or lobster's; each leg is divided into six parts by these joints, and those have here and there several small hairs; and at the end of each leg it has two claws, very properly adapted for its peculiar use, being thereby enabled to walk very securely both on the skin and hair; and indeed this contrivance of

the feet is very curious, and could not be made more commodiously and compendiously,<sup>9</sup> for performing both these requisite motions of walking and climbing up the hair of a man's head than it is: for, by having the lesser claw (a) set so much short of the bigger (b) when it walks on the skin the shorter touches not, and then the feet are the same with those of a mite and several other small insects, but by means of the small joints of the longer claw it can bend it round, and so with both claws take hold of a hair, in the manner represented in the figure, the long transparent cylinder FFF being a man's hair held by it.







**Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*, 1665.** This image of a louse under a microscope is the 35th scheme that Hooke refers to in the text above.

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The thorax<sup>1</sup> seemed cased with another kind of substance than the belly, namely, with a thin transparent horny substance, which upon the fasting of the creature did not grow flaccid; through this I could plainly see the blood, sucked from my hand, to be variously distributed and moved to and fro; and about G there seemed a pretty big white substance, which seemed to be moved within its thorax; besides, there appeared very many small milk-white vessels, which crossed over the breast between the legs, out of which on either side were many small branchings, these seemed to be the veins and arteries, for that which is analogous to blood in all insects is milk-white.

The belly is covered with a transparent substance likewise, but more resembling a skin than a shell, for 'tis grained all over the belly just like the skin in the palms of a man's hand, and when the belly is empty grows very flaccid and wrinkled; at the upper end of this is placed the stomach HH, and perhaps also the white spot II may be the liver or pancreas, which, by the peristaltic motion<sup>2</sup> of the guts, is a little moved to and fro, not with a systole and diastole, but rather with a thronging or justling motion. Viewing one of these creatures after it had fasted two days, all the hinder part was lank and flaccid, and the white spot II hardly moved, most of the white branchings disappeared, and most also of the redness or sucked blood in the guts, the peristaltic motion of which was scarce discernable; but upon the suffering it to suck, it presently filled the skin of the belly, and of the six scalloped embossments<sup>3</sup> on either side, as full as it could be stuffed; the stomach and guts were as full as they could hold; the peristaltic motion of the gut grew quick, and the justling motion of II accordingly; multitudes of milk-white vessels seemed quickly filled and turgid,<sup>4</sup> which were perhaps the veins and arteries, and the creature was so greedy that though it could not contain more, yet it continued sucking as fast as ever and as fast emptying

itself behind: the digestion of this creature must needs be very quick, for though I perceived the blood thicker and blacker when sucked, yet, when in the guts, it was of a very lovely ruby color, and that part of it, which was digested into the veins, seemed white; whence it appears, that a further digestion of blood may make it milk, at least of a resembling color. What is else observable in the figure of this creature may be seen by the 35. *Scheme*.

## Endnotes

1665

- Note 1: Microscopes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Human imperfection and error can be learned but is also “innate,” a product of the fall from perfection in Eden. Hooke was not alone in the period in hoping that science might act as a “reparation” for the Fall, bringing humans closer to lost, prelapsarian wisdom.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The different defects in sense, memory, and reason.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: For example, some things are too small for human eyes to perceive.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Futile.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Analogies.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the confined limits of our ability to understand.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Experimental philosophy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nature was often personified as a woman, especially in relation to the male natural philosopher who wants to penetrate or reveal. “Shifts”: evasive movements. “Art”: cunning strategy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Exposed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hooke uses the language of Robert Boyle’s theory of matter. Boyle held that the world was made of tiny atom-like corpuscles with only a few primary characteristics (shape, size, motion); these join together into distinct structures and textures. “Subtilty”: intricacy.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Philosophers in the tradition of Aristotle.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Practical (as opposed to speculative).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A version of the influential metaphor: since nature is machine-like, Hooke imagines being able to understand its inner workings as fully as he understands a machine's wheels and gears.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hooke famously depicts the natural philosopher as simply taking nature's dictation (though elsewhere in his book he emphasizes the skill required to work the microscope and create images and the knowledge used to make connections and draw conclusions).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Shameless. "Officious": eager. Hooke opens the observation with playful personification and punning.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A pun conjuring both the crown on the top part of the human head and the possibility that even royal heads get lice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The idiomatic "to pull by the ears," or to force obedience, rendered literal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Also idiomatic, similar to "go against the grain."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A Roman god, a messenger. "Ill conditions of it": the bad characteristics of the louse.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The thirty-fifth illustration in the book, to which Hooke's description is keyed. "Expressed": represented.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Literally, forward vision.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Often, as here, Hooke's observations are not only a matter of "a sincere hand and a faithful eye." He himself acknowledges that his book contains "conjectures and queries" that might "seem more positive" than allowed by the Royal Society's "prescriptions" about "avoiding" hypothesizing "not sufficiently grounded and confirmed by experiments."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Unlike later scientific prose that aspires to objectivity, Hooke uses the first person and depicts his own body as part of the observation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Contraction and expansion—movements understood as central to the human heart and blood circulation. “Bellows”: machine to stoke a fire.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Covering. “*Cuticula*”: the outermost layer of skin. Note that this conclusion is about blood circulation in the human body.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Efficiently, compactly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Part of the body around the neck and chest.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Involuntary bodily motion, especially in digestion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Protuberances.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bulging.[Return to reference 4](#)

## MARGARET CAVENDISH

Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673), was a natural philosopher who wrote several books working out her own original alternative to both the older Aristotelean and the newer “mechanical” theories of matter. She advocated instead for a vitalist materialism premised on the idea that matter is not inert but animate. Cavendish, a noblewoman, was fascinated by the new science but was also a fierce critic of the Royal Society’s particular brand of it. In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), Cavendish incorporates whole passages in italics from Hooke’s *Micrographia* (1665) and then offers her own point-by-point rebuttals—attacking Hooke’s understanding of nature, his methods, his reliance on technology, and his understanding of humanity’s place in the world.

Cavendish was also a prolific poet, playwright, essayist, and fiction writer, and the philosophical critique in her *Observations* was published alongside her work of fiction, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (see volume B of this anthology), which developed many of her objections. In *Blazing World*, an empress visiting another world encounters many fantastical creatures, including a group of “bear-men” obsessed with microscopes and telescopes. Dismayed at how the bear-men cannot agree on what they see, the empress orders them to break their useless instruments, but they beg pitifully. These obstinate philosophers then baldly admit that they “take more delight in artificial delusions, than in natural truths” and that, without their lenses, they would lose all the fun of “confuting and contradicting each other.” The empress relents for the moment but later forces the bear-men to dissolve their society, which—with other scientific societies in the *Blazing World*—was causing “contentions and divisions” that threatened the “ruin of the government.” Cavendish’s criticisms were philosophical, methodological, and social, and they

were asserted powerfully in both a philosophical treatise and a utopian fiction. Unfortunately, the Royal Society would not engage meaningfully with her ideas. She visited a meeting once in 1667, but the existing reports by men there that day focus more on her clothing than her comments. Philosophers today, however, *do* engage with her brand of materialism—they see that she deserved to be taken much more seriously.

# ***From Observations upon Experimental Philosophy***

## **[OF ART AND EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY]**

Some are of opinion, *that by art there can be a reparation made of the mischiefs and imperfections mankind has drawn upon itself by negligence and intemperance, and a willful and superstitious deserting the prescripts and rules of nature, whereby every man, both from a derived corruption, innate and born with him, and from his breeding and converse with men is very subject to slip into all sorts of errors.*<sup>1</sup> But the all-powerful God and his servant Nature know that art, which is but a particular creature,<sup>2</sup> cannot inform us of the truth of the infinite parts of Nature, being but finite itself; for though every creature has a double perception, rational and sensitive, yet each creature or part has not an infinite perception; nay, although each particular creature or part of nature may have some conceptions of the infinite parts of nature, yet it cannot know the truth of those infinite parts, being but a finite part itself, which finiteness causes errors in perceptions; wherefore it is well said, when they confess themselves, *that the uncertainty and mistakes of human actions proceed either from the narrowness and wandering of our senses, or from the slipperiness or delusion of our memory, or from the confinement or rashness of our understanding.* But, say they, *It is no wonder that our power over natural causes and effects is so slowly improved, seeing we are not only to contend with the obscurity and difficulty of the things whereon we work and think, but even the forces of our minds conspire to betray us: And these being the dangers in the process of human reason, the remedies can only proceed from the real, the mechanical, the experimental philosophy, which has this advantage over the philosophy of discourse and disputation, that whereas that chiefly aims at the subtilty of its*

*deductions and conclusions, without much regard to the first groundwork, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory, so this intends the right ordering of them all, and making them serviceable to each other.*<sup>3</sup> In which discourse I do not understand, first, what they mean by our power over natural causes and effects; for we have no power at all over natural causes and effects, but only one particular effect may have some power over another, which are natural actions; but neither can natural causes nor effects be overpowered by man so, as if man was a degree above nature, but they must be as nature is pleased to order them; for man is but a small part, and his powers are but particular actions of nature, and therefore he cannot have a supreme and absolute power. Next, I say, that sense,<sup>4</sup> which is more apt to be deluded than reason, cannot be the ground of reason, no more than art can be the ground of nature: wherefore discourse shall sooner find or trace nature's corporeal figurative motions,<sup>5</sup> than deluding arts can inform the senses; for how can a fool order his understanding by art, if nature has made it defective? Or how can a wise man trust his senses, if either the objects be not truly presented according to their natural figure and shape, or if the senses be defective, either through age, sickness, or other accidents, which do alter the natural motions proper to each sense? And hence I conclude, that experimental and mechanic philosophy cannot be above the speculative part, by reason most experiments have their rise from the speculative, so that the artist or mechanic is but a servant to the student.

#### **[OF MICROGRAPHY, AND OF MAGNIFYING AND MULTIPLYING GLASSES]**

Although I am not able to give a solid judgment of the art of micrography, and the several dioptrical instruments<sup>6</sup> belonging thereto, by reason I have neither studied nor practiced that art; yet of this I am confident, that this same art, with all its instruments, is not able to discover the interior natural motions of any part or creature of nature; nay, the question is, whether it can represent yet the exterior shapes and motions so exactly, as naturally they are; for



art doth more easily alter than inform: as for example, art makes cylinders, concave and convex-glasses, and the like, which represent the figure of an object in no part exactly and truly, but very deformed and misshaped: also a glass that is flawed, cracked, or broke, or cut into the figure of lozenges,<sup>7</sup> triangles, squares, or the like will present numerous pictures of one object. Besides, there are so many alterations made by several lights, their shadows, refractions, reflections, as also several lines, points, mediums, interposing and intermixing parts, forms and positions, as the truth of an object will hardly be known; for the perception of sight, and so of the rest of the senses, goes no further than the exterior parts of the object presented; and though the perception may be true, when the object is truly presented, yet when the presentation is false, the information must be false also. And it is to be observed, that art, for the most part, makes hermaphroditical,<sup>8</sup> that is, mixed figures, as partly artificial and partly natural: for art may make some metal, as pewter, which is between tin and lead, as also brass, and numerous other things of mixed natures; in the like manner may artificial glasses present objects, partly natural and partly artificial; nay, put the case they can present the natural figure of an object, yet that natural figure may be presented in as monstrous a shape, as it may appear misshapen rather than natural. For example, a louse by the help of a magnifying glass<sup>9</sup> appears like a lobster, where the microscope enlarging and magnifying each part of it makes them bigger and rounder than naturally they are. The truth is, the more the figure by art is magnified, the more it appears misshapen from the natural, in so much as each joint will appear as a diseased, swelled and tumid body, ready and ripe for incision. But mistake me not; I do not say that no glass presents the true picture of an object; but only that magnifying, multiplying, and the like optic glasses may, and do oftentimes present falsely the picture of an exterior object; I say, the picture, because it is not the real body of the object which the glass presents, but the glass only figures or patterns out the picture presented in and by the glass, and there may easily mistakes be committed in taking copies from copies. Nay,

artists do confess themselves, that flies and the like will appear of several figures or shapes, according to the several reflections, refractions, mediums and positions of several lights;<sup>1</sup> which if so, how can they tell or judge which is the truest light, position, or medium, that doth present the object naturally as it is? And if not, then an edge may very well seem flat, and a point of a needle a globe; but if the edge of a knife or point of a needle<sup>2</sup> were naturally and really so as the microscope presents them, they would never be so useful as they are; for a flat or broad plain-edged knife would not cut, nor a blunt globe pierce so suddenly another body, neither would or could they pierce without tearing and rending, if their bodies were so uneven; and if the picture of a young beautiful lady should be drawn according to the representation of the microscope, or according to the various refraction and reflection of light through such like glasses, it would be so far from being like her, as it would not be like a human face, but rather a monster, than a picture of nature. Wherefore those that invented microscopes and such like dioptrical glasses at first did, in my opinion, the world more injury than benefit; for this art has intoxicated so many men's brains, and wholly employed their thoughts and bodily actions about phenomena, or the exterior figures of objects, as all better arts and studies are laid aside; nay, those that are not as earnest and active in such employments as they, are, by many of them, accounted unprofitable subjects to the Commonwealth of Learning. But though there be numerous books written of the wonders of these glasses, yet I cannot perceive any such, at best, they are but superficial wonders, as I may call them. But could experimental philosophers find out more beneficial arts than our forefathers have done, either for the better increase of vegetables and brute animals to nourish our bodies, or better and commodious contrivances in the art of architecture to build us houses, or for the advancing of trade and traffic to provide necessities for us to live, or for the decrease of nice<sup>3</sup> distinctions and sophistical disputes in churches, schools and courts of judicature to make men live in unity, peace and neighborly friendship, it would not only be worth their labor, but of as much

praise as could be given to them.<sup>4</sup> But as boys that play with watery bubbles,<sup>5</sup> or fling dust<sup>6</sup> into each other's eyes, or make a hobby-horse<sup>7</sup> of snow are worthy of reproof rather than praise, for wasting their time with useless sports; so those that addict themselves to unprofitable arts spend more time than they reap benefit thereby. Nay, could they benefit men either in husbandry, architecture, or the like necessary and profitable employments, yet before the vulgar sort would learn to understand them, the world would want<sup>8</sup> bread to eat, and houses to dwell in, as also clothes to keep them from the inconveniences of the inconstant weather. But truly, although spinsters were most experienced in this art, yet they will never be able to spin silk, thread, or wool, etc. from loose atoms; neither will weavers weave a web of light from the sun's rays, nor an architect build an house of the bubbles of water and air, unless they be poetical spinsters, weavers and architects; and if a painter should draw a louse as big as a crab, and of that shape as the microscope presents, can anybody imagine that a beggar would believe it to be true? But if he did, what advantage would it be to the beggar? For it doth neither instruct him how to avoid breeding them, or how to catch them, or to hinder them from biting.<sup>9</sup> Again: if a painter should paint birds according to those colors the microscope presents, what advantage would it be for fowlers<sup>1</sup> to take them? Truly, no fowler will be able to distinguish several birds through a microscope, neither by their shapes nor colors; they will be better discerned by those that eat their flesh, than by micrographers that look upon their colors and exterior figures through a magnifying-glass.<sup>2</sup> In short, magnifying-glasses are like a high heel to a short leg, which if it be made too high, it is apt to make the wearer fall, and at the best, can do no more than represent exterior figures in a bigger, and so in a more deformed shape and posture than naturally they are; but as for the interior form and motions of a creature, as I said before, they can no more represent them, than telescopes can the interior essence and nature of the sun, and what matter it consists of; for if one that never had seen milk before should look upon it through a microscope, he would never be able to discover

the interior parts of milk by that instrument, were it the best that is in the world; neither the whey, nor the butter, nor the curds. Wherefore the best optic is a perfect natural eye and a regular sensitive perception, and the best judge is reason, and the best study is rational contemplation joined with the observations of regular sense, but not deluding arts; for art is not only gross in comparison to nature, but, for the most part, deformed and defective, and at best produces mixed or hermaphroditical figures, that is, a third figure between nature and art: which proves, that natural reason is above artificial sense, as I may call it: wherefore those arts are the best and surest informers that alter nature least, and they the greatest deluders that alter nature most, I mean, the particular nature of each particular creature; (for art is so far from altering infinite Nature, that it is no more in comparison to it than a little fly to an elephant, no not so much, for there is no comparison between finite and infinite). But wise Nature taking delight in variety, her parts, which are her creatures, must of necessity do so too.

## Endnotes

1666

- Note 1: A passage from Hooke's Preface (see p. 101 above). In quoting, Cavendish makes small changes to Hooke's sentences.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A created thing, hence not infinite and divine. "Art": artificial things made by humans.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Also from Hooke's Preface (see [p. 102](#)).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sensory perception.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cavendish's *Philosophical Letters* (1664) insist, against the mechanical philosophy: "whosoever will study nature must consider the figures of every creature, as well as their motions, and must not make abstractions of motion and figure from matter, nor of matter from motion and figure, for they are inseparable as being but one thing, viz. corporeal figurative motions."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Instruments for intensifying vision that use light refraction, not reflection.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A diamond shape. "Glass": mirror.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The word comes from the myth (famously told by Ovid) of Hermaphroditus, whose originally male body gets permanently combined with a female nymph's body.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Microscope. She refers specifically to Hooke's image of the louse (see p. 105).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hooke acknowledged this "difficulty," while trying to hedge against it: "the same object seeming quite differing, in one position to the light, from what it really is and may be discovered in another. And therefore I never began to make any draught [of an illustration] before many examinations in several lights, in several positions to those lights, I had discovered the true form."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hooke featured illustrations of a razor's edge and needle's point under the microscope.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Over-precise, fussy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Against Royal Society rhetoric about useful knowledge, Cavendish argues that they have not yet produced anything beneficial.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Glass tubes [*Cavendish's note*]. In this sentence, Cavendish likens key scientific concepts to children's play, as a way of emphasizing their unimportance and superficiality.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Atoms [*Cavendish's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Exterior figures [*Cavendish's note*]. She imagines children shaping snow into a horse figure.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lack. "Husbandry": agriculture.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Repeating this point, Cavendish has the empress of the Blazing World ask the bear-men who show her a louse under the microscope if they "could hinder" lice from "biting, or least show some means how to avoid them." The microscopists say no, explaining that such practical issues are "below" their "noble study."[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Bird hunters.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This critique was voiced even within the Royal Society. John Locke suggested that a person with “microscopical eyes . . . would not make any great advantage by the change, if such an acute sight would not serve to conduct him to the market and exchange; if he could not see things he was to avoid, at a convenient distance” or even read a clock.[Return to reference 2](#)

# SIR ISAAC NEWTON

Isaac Newton (1642–1727) was the posthumous son of a Lincolnshire farmer. As a boy, he invented machines; as an undergraduate, he made major discoveries in optics and mathematics; and in 1667—at twenty-five—he was elected a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Two years later his teacher, Isaac Barrow, resigned the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics in his favor. By then, in secret, Newton had already begun to rethink the universe. His mind worked incessantly, at the highest level of insight, both theoretical and experimental. He designed the first reflecting telescope and explained why the sky looks blue; contemporaneously with Leibniz, he invented calculus; he revolutionized the study of mechanics and physics with three basic laws of motion; and as everyone knows, he discovered the universal law of gravity. Although Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, 1687) made possible the modern understanding of the cosmos, his *Opticks* (1704) had a still greater impact on his contemporaries, not only for its discoveries about light and color but also for its formulation of a proper scientific method. All the while he retained a lifelong fascination with alchemy and religious studies, and these pursuits overlapped with his science.

Newton reported most of his scientific findings in Latin, the language of international scholarship; but when he chose, he could express himself in crisp and vigorous English. His early experiments on light and color were described in a letter to Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society, and quickly published in the society's journal. By analyzing the spectrum, Newton had discovered something amazing, the "oddest if not the most considerable detection, which hath hitherto been made in the operations of nature": light is not homogeneous, as everyone thought, but a compound of heterogeneous rays, and white is not the absence of color but a composite of all sorts of colors. Newton assumes that a

clear account of his experiments and reasoning will compel assent; when, at the end of his summary, he drops a very heavy word, he clinches the point like a carpenter nailing a box shut. But other scientists resisted the theory. In years to come, Newton would become master of the mint in London and president of the Royal Society. All the while, his fame would continue to grow. "There could be only one Newton," Napoleon was told a century later: "there was only one world to discover."



# ***From A Letter of Mr. Isaac Newton, Professor of the Mathematics in the University of Cambridge, Containing His New Theory about Light and Colors***

***Sent by the Author to the Publisher from Cambridge, Febr. 6, 1672, in order to Be Communicated to the Royal Society***

Sir,

To perform my late promise to you, I shall without further ceremony acquaint you that in the beginning of the year 1666 (at which time I applied myself to the grinding of optic glasses of other figures than spherical) I procured me a triangular glass prism to try therewith the celebrated phenomena of colors. And in order thereto having darkened my chamber and made a small hole in my window-shuts to let in a convenient quantity of the sun's light, I placed my prism at his entrance that it might be thereby refracted<sup>1</sup> to the opposite wall. It was at first a very pleasing divertissement to view the vivid and intense colors produced thereby; but after a while, applying myself to consider them more circumspectly, I became surprised to see them in an *oblong* form, which according to the received laws of refraction I expected should have been *circular*.

They were terminated at the sides with straight lines, but at the ends the decay of light was so gradual that it was difficult to determine justly what was their figure; yet they seemed *semicircular*.

Comparing the length of this colored spectrum with its breadth, I found it about five times greater, a disproportion so extravagant that it excited me to a more than ordinary curiosity of examining from whence it might proceed. I could scarce think that the various thickness of the glass or the termination with shadow or darkness could have any influence on light to produce such an effect; yet I

thought it not amiss first to examine those circumstances, and so tried what would happen by transmitting light through parts of the glass of divers thicknesses, or through holes in the window of divers bignesses, or by setting the prism without, so that the light might pass through it and be refracted before it was terminated by the hole. But I found none of those circumstances material. The fashion of the colors was in all these cases the same.

Then I suspected whether by any unevenness in the glass or other contingent irregularity these colors might be thus dilated. And to try this, I took another prism like the former and so placed it that the light, passing through them both, might be refracted contrary ways, and so by the latter returned into that course from which the former had diverted it. For by this means I thought the regular effects of the first prism would be destroyed by the second prism, but the irregular ones more augmented by the multiplicity of refractions. The event was that the light, which by the first prism was diffused into an oblong form, was by the second reduced into an orbicular one with as much regularity as when it did not at all pass through them. So that, whatever was the cause of that length, 'twas not any contingent irregularity.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

The gradual removal of these suspicions at length led me to the *experimentum crucis*,<sup>3</sup> which was this: I took two boards, and placed one of them close behind the prism at the window, so that the light might pass through a small hole made in it for the purpose and fall on the other board, which I placed at about 12 foot distance, having first made a small hole in it also, for some of that incident<sup>4</sup> light to pass through. Then I placed another prism behind this second board so that the light, trajected through both the boards, might pass through that also, and be again refracted before it arrived at the wall. This done, I took the first prism in my hand, and turned it to and fro slowly about its axis, so much as to make the several parts of the image, cast on the second board,

successively pass through the hole in it, that I might observe to what places on the wall the second prism would refract them. And I saw by the variation of those places that the light, tending to that end of the image towards which the refraction of the first prism was made, did in the second prism suffer a refraction considerably greater than the light tending to the other end. And so the true cause of the length of that image was detected to be no other than that light consists of *rays differently refrangible*, which, without any respect to a difference in their incidence, were, according to their degrees of refrangibility, transmitted towards divers parts of the wall.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

I shall now proceed to acquaint you with another more notable difformity<sup>6</sup> in its rays, wherein the *origin of colors* is infolded. A naturalist<sup>7</sup> would scarce expect to see the science of those become mathematical, and yet I dare affirm that there is as much certainty in it as in any other part of optics. For what I shall tell concerning them is not an hypothesis but most rigid consequence, not conjectured by barely inferring 'tis thus because not otherwise or because it satisfied all phenomena (the philosophers' universal topic) but evinced by the mediation of experiments concluding directly and without any suspicion of doubt. \* \* \*

The doctrine you will find comprehended and illustrated in the following propositions.

1. As the rays of light differ in degrees of refrangibility, so they also differ in their disposition to exhibit this or that particular color. Colors are not *qualifications of light*, derived from refractions or reflections of natural bodies (as 'tis generally believed), but *original and connate properties* which in divers rays are divers. Some rays are disposed to exhibit a red color and no other; some a yellow and no other, some a green and no other, and so of the rest. Nor are there only rays proper and particular to the more eminent colors, but even to all their intermediate gradations.

2. To the same degree of refrangibility ever belongs the same color, and to the same color ever belongs the same degree of refrangibility. The least refrangible rays are all disposed to exhibit a red color, and contrarily those rays which are disposed to exhibit a red color are all the least refrangible. So the most refrangible rays are all disposed to exhibit a deep violet color, and contrarily those which are apt to exhibit such a violet color are all the most refrangible. And so to all the intermediate colors in a continued series belong intermediate degrees of refrangibility. And this analogy 'twixt colors and refrangibility is very precise and strict; the rays always either exactly agreeing in both or proportionally disagreeing in both.

3. The species of color and degree of refrangibility proper to any particular sort of rays is not mutable by refraction, nor by reflection from natural bodies, nor by any other cause that I could yet observe. When any one sort of rays hath been well parted from those of other kinds, it hath afterwards obstinately retained its color, notwithstanding my utmost endeavors to change it. I have refracted it with prisms and reflected it with bodies which in daylight were of other colors; I have intercepted it with the colored film of air interceding two compressed plates of glass; transmitted it through colored mediums and through mediums irradiated with other sorts of rays, and diversely terminated it; and yet could never produce any new color out of it. It would by contracting or dilating become more brisk or faint and by the loss of many rays in some cases very obscure and dark; but I could never see it changed *in specie*.<sup>8</sup>

4. Yet seeming transmutations of colors may be made, where there is any mixture of divers sorts of rays. For in such mixtures, the component colors appear not, but by their mutual allaying each other constitute a middling color. And therefore, if by refraction or any other of the aforesaid causes the difform rays latent in such a mixture be separated, there shall emerge colors different from the color of the composition. Which colors are not new generated, but only made apparent by being parted; for if they be again entirely mixed and blended together, they will again compose that color

which they did before separation. And for the same reason, transmutations made by the convening of divers colors are not real; for when the difform rays are again severed, they will exhibit the very same colors which they did before they entered the composition—as you see blue and yellow powders when finely mixed appear to the naked eye green, and yet the colors of the component corpuscles are not thereby transmuted, but only blended. For, when viewed with a good microscope, they still appear blue and yellow interspersedly.

5. There are therefore two sorts of colors: the one original and simple, the other compounded of these. The original or primary colors are red, yellow, green, blue, and a violet-purple, together with orange, indigo, and an indefinite variety of intermediate graduations.

6. The same colors *in specie* with these primary ones may be also produced by composition. For a mixture of yellow and blue makes green; of red and yellow makes orange; of orange and yellowish green makes yellow. And in general, if any two colors be mixed which, in the series of those generated by the prism, are not too far distant one from another, they by their mutual alloy compound that color which in the said series appeareth in the mid-way between them. But those which are situated at too great a distance, do not so. Orange and indigo produce not the intermediate green, nor scarlet and green the intermediate yellow.

7. But the most surprising and wonderful composition was that of *whiteness*. There is no one sort of rays which alone can exhibit this. 'Tis ever compounded, and to its composition are requisite all the aforesaid primary colors, mixed in a due proportion. I have often with admiration beheld that all the colors of the prism, being made to converge, and thereby to be again mixed as they were in the light before it was incident upon the prism, reproduced light entirely and perfectly white, and not at all sensibly differing from a direct light of the sun, unless when the glasses I used were not sufficiently clear; for then they would a little incline it to *their* color.

8. Hence therefore it comes to pass that *whiteness* is the usual color of light, for light is a confused aggregate of rays endued with

all sorts of colors, as they are promiscuously darted from the various parts of luminous bodies. And of such a confused aggregate, as I said, is generated whiteness, if there be a due proportion of the ingredients; but if any one predominate, the light must incline to that color, as it happens in the blue flame of brimstone, the yellow flame of a candle, and the various colors of the fixed stars.

9. These things considered, the manner how colors are produced by the prism is evident. For of the rays constituting the incident light, since those which differ in color proportionally differ in refrangibility, they by their unequal refractions must be severed and dispersed into an oblong form in an orderly succession from the least refracted scarlet to the most refracted violet. And for the same reason it is that objects, when looked upon through a prism, appear colored. For the difform rays, by their unequal refractions, are made to diverge towards several parts of the retina, and there express the images of things colored, as in the former case they did the sun's image upon a wall. And by this inequality of refractions they become not only colored, but also very confused and indistinct.

10. Why the colors of the rainbow appear in falling drops of rain is also from hence evident. For those drops which refract the rays disposed to appear purple in greatest quantity to the spectator's eye, refract the rays of other sorts so much less as to make them pass beside it;<sup>9</sup> and such are the drops on the inside of the primary bow and on the outside of the secondary or exterior one. So those drops which refract in greatest plenty the rays apt to appear red toward the spectator's eye, refract those of other sorts so much more as to make them pass beside it; and such are the drops on the exterior part of the primary and interior part of the secondary bow.

## Endnotes

1672

- Note 1: That is, that the light's direction might be diverted from a straight path.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Newton goes on to describe several experiments and calculations by which he disposed of alternative theories—that

rays coming from different parts of the sun caused the diffusion of light into an oblong or that the rays of light traveled in curved paths after leaving the prism.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Crucial experiment (Latin); turning point.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From the Latin *incidere*, to fall into or onto. Newton uses it in reference to light striking an obstacle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This insight enables Newton to design a greatly improved telescope, which uses reflections to correct the distortions caused by the scattering of refracted rays. He adds in passing that his experiments were interrupted for two years by the plague; but at last he returns to some further and even more important characteristics of light. "Refrangible": susceptible to being refracted.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Diversity of forms.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A student of physics or "natural philosophy."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In kind.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, disappear alongside it.[Return to reference 9](#)

## JOHN LOCKE

John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) is "a history-book," according to Laurence Sterne, "of what passes in a man's own mind." Like Montaigne's essays, it aims to explore the human mind in general by closely watching one particular mind. When Locke (1632–1704) analyzed his ideas, the ways they were acquired and put together, he found they were clear when they were based on direct sensed experience and adequate when they were clear. Usually, it appeared, problems occurred when basic ideas were blurred or confused or did not refer to anything determinate. Thus a critical analysis of the ideas in an individual mind could lead straight to a rule about adequate ideas in general and the sort of subject where adequate ideas were possible. On the basis of such a limitation, individuals might reach rational agreement with one another.

Locke's new "way of ideas" strikes a humble, antidogmatic note, but readers quickly perceived its far-reaching implications. By basing knowledge on the ideas immediately "before the mind," Locke comports with and helps codify the movement of his times away from the authority of traditions of medieval, scholastic philosophy. His understanding of how the mind works—empirically and inductively, building up from sensed particulars—bolstered the scientific project. His approach also alarmed some divines who argued that the foundation of human life—the mysteries of faith—could never be reduced to clear, distinct ideas. Locke indirectly accepts the Christian scriptures in the *Essay* in the midst of his famous critique of "enthusiasm," the belief in private revelation, but his main impulse is to restrain rather than to encourage religious speculations. (His fullest theological work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 1695, argues that scriptural revelation is necessary for right-thinking people but not incompatible with ordinary reasonable beliefs gathered from personal experience and history.) The *Essay*



also contains an unsettling discussion of personal identity (in the chapter "Of Identity and Diversity" added to the second edition in 1694). Locke argues that a person's sense of selfhood derives not from the "identity of soul" but rather from "consciousness of present and past actions": I am myself now because I remember my past, not because a unique substance ("me") underlies everything I experience. This account drew critical responses from numerous distinguished thinkers throughout the eighteenth century.

Locke spent his life in thought. His background and connections were all with the Puritan movement, but he was disillusioned early with the enthusiastic moods and persecutions to which he found the Puritans prone. Having a small but steady private income, he became a student, chiefly at Oxford, learning enough medicine to act as a physician and becoming interested in new currents in natural philosophy. He was later made a fellow of the Royal Society. After 1667, he was personal physician and tutor in the household of a violent, crafty politician, the first Earl of Shaftesbury (Dryden's "Achitophel"). But Locke himself was always a grave, dispassionate man. On one occasion, Shaftesbury's political enemies at Oxford had Locke watched for several years on end, during which he was not heard to say one word either critical of the government or favorable to it. When times are turbulent, so much discretion is suspicious in itself, and Locke found it convenient to go abroad for several years during the 1680s. He lived quietly in Holland and pursued his thoughts. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the accession of William III brought him back to England and made possible the publication of the *Essay*, on which he had been working for many years. Its publication foreshadowed the coming age, not only in the positive ideas that the book advanced but in the quiet way it set aside as insoluble a range of problems about absolute authority and absolute assurance that had torn society apart earlier in the seventeenth century.

# ***From An Essay Concerning Human Understanding***

## ***From The Epistle to the Reader***

Reader,

I here put into thy hands what has been the diversion of some of my idle and heavy hours; if it has the good luck to prove so of any of thine, and thou hast but half so much pleasure in reading as I had in writing it, thou wilt as little think thy money, as I do my pains, ill-bestowed. Mistake not this for a commendation of my work; nor conclude, because I was pleased with the doing of it, that therefore I am fondly taken with it now it is done. He that hawks at larks and sparrows, has no less sport, though a much less considerable quarry, than he that flies at nobler game: and he is little acquainted with the subject of this treatise, the Understanding, who does not know, that as it is the most elevated faculty of the soul, so it is employed with a greater and more constant delight than any of the other. Its searches after truth are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure. Every step the mind takes in its progress towards knowledge makes some discovery, which is not only new, but the best, too, for the time at least.

For the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers, having less regret for what has escaped it, because it is unknown. Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight, and he will have reason to think his time not ill-spent, even when he cannot much boast of any great acquisition.

This, reader, is the entertainment of those who let loose their own thoughts, and follow them in writing; which thou oughtest not to envy them, since they afford thee an opportunity of the like diversion, if thou wilt make use of thy own thoughts in reading. It is to them, if they are thy own, that I refer myself; but if they are taken upon trust from others, it is no great matter what they are, they not following truth, but some meaner consideration; and it is not worthwhile to be concerned what he says or thinks, who says or thinks only as he is directed by another. If thou judgest for thyself, I know thou wilt judge candidly; and then I shall not be harmed or offended, whatever be thy censure. For, though it be certain that there is nothing in this treatise of the truth whereof I am not fully persuaded, yet I consider myself as liable to mistakes as I can think thee; and know that this book must stand or fall with thee, not by any opinion I have of it, but thy own. If thou findest little in it new or instructive to thee, thou art not to blame me for it. It was not meant for those that had already mastered this subject, and made a thorough acquaintance with their own understandings, but for my own information, and the satisfaction of a few friends, who acknowledged themselves not to have sufficiently considered it. Were it fit to trouble thee with the history of this Essay, I should tell thee, that five or six friends, meeting at my chamber, and discoursing on a subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand by the difficulties that rose on every side. After we had awhile puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that, before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were or were not fitted to deal with. This I proposed to the company, who all readily assented; and thereupon it was agreed, that this should be our first inquiry. Some hasty and undigested thoughts, on a subject I had never before considered, which I set down against<sup>1</sup> our next meeting, gave the first entrance into this discourse, which, having been thus begun by chance, was continued by entreaty; written by

incoherent parcels; and, after long intervals of neglect, resumed again, as my humor or occasions permitted; and at last, in a retirement, where an attendance on my health gave me leisure, it was brought into that order thou now seest it.

This discontinued way of writing may have occasioned, besides others, two contrary faults; viz., that too little and too much may be said in it. If thou findest anything wanting, I shall be glad that what I have writ gives thee any desire that I should have gone farther: if it seems too much to thee, thou must blame the subject; for when I first put pen to paper, I thought all I should have to say on this matter would have been contained in one sheet of paper; but the farther I went, the larger prospect I had: new discoveries led me still on, and so it grew insensibly to the bulk it now appears in. I will not deny but possibly it might be reduced to a narrower compass than it is; and that some parts of it might be contracted; the way it has been writ in, by catches,<sup>2</sup> and many long intervals of interruption, being apt to cause some repetitions. But, to confess the truth, I am now too lazy or too busy to make it shorter.

\* \* \* I pretend not to publish this Essay for the information of men of large thoughts and quick apprehensions; to such masters of knowledge, I profess myself a scholar, and therefore warn them beforehand not to expect anything here but what, being spun out of my own coarse thoughts, is fitted to men of my own size, to whom, perhaps, it will not be unacceptable that I have taken some pains to make plain and familiar to their thoughts some truths, which established prejudice or the abstractness of the ideas themselves might render difficult.

\* \* \*

The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose mighty designs in advancing, the sciences will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity: but everyone must not hope to be a Boyle or a Sydenham; and in an age that produces such masters as the great Huygenius, and the

incomparable Mr. Newton,<sup>3</sup> with some other of that strain, it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-laborer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge; which certainly had been very much more advanced in the world, if the endeavors of ingenious and industrious men had not been much cumbered with the learned but frivolous use of uncouth, affected, or unintelligible terms introduced into the sciences, and there made an art of to that degree that philosophy, which is nothing but the true knowledge of things, was thought unfit or incapable to be brought into well-bred company and polite conversation.<sup>4</sup> Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language, have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard or misapplied words, with little or no meaning, have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation; that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them, that they are but the covers of ignorance, and hindrance of true knowledge. \* \* \*

The booksellers, preparing for the fourth edition of my Essay, gave me notice of it, that I might, if I had leisure, make any additions or alterations I should think fit. Whereupon I thought it convenient to advertise the reader, that besides several corrections I had made here and there, there was one alteration which it was necessary to mention, because it ran through the whole book, and is of consequence to be rightly understood. What I thereupon said, was this:—

“Clear and distinct ideas” are terms which, though familiar and frequent in men’s mouths, I have reason to think everyone who uses does not perfectly understand. And possibly it is but here and there one who gives himself the trouble to consider them so far as to know what he himself or others precisely mean by them. I have therefore, in most places, chose to put “determinate” or “determined,”<sup>5</sup> instead of “clear” and “distinct,” as more likely to direct men’s thoughts to my meaning in this matter. By those denominations, I mean some object in the mind, and consequently

determined, i.e., such as it is there seen and perceived to be. This, I think, may fitly be called a "determinate" or "determined" idea, when such as it is at any time objectively in the mind, and so determined there, it is annexed, and without variation determined, to a name or articulate sound which is to be steadily the sign of that very same object of the mind, or determinate idea.

To explain this a little more particularly: By "determinate," when applied to a simple idea, I mean that simple appearance which the mind has in its view, or perceives in itself, when that idea is said to be in it. By "determined," when applied to a complex idea, I mean such an one as consists of a determinate number of certain simple or less complex ideas, joined in such a proportion and situation as the mind has before its view, and sees in itself, when that idea is present in it, or should be present in it, when a man gives a name to it. I say "should be"; because it is not everyone, nor perhaps anyone, who is so careful of his language as to use no word till he views in his mind the precise determined idea which he resolves to make it the sign of. The want of this is the cause of no small obscurity and confusion in men's thoughts and discourses.

I know there are not words enough in any language to answer all the variety of ideas that enter into men's discourses and reasonings. But this hinders not but that when anyone uses any term, he may have in his mind a determined idea which he makes it the sign of, and to which he should keep it steadily annexed during that present discourse. Where he does not or cannot do this, he in vain pretends to clear or distinct ideas: it is plain his are not so; and therefore there can be expected nothing but obscurity and confusion, where such terms are made use of which have not such a precise determination.

Upon this ground I have thought "determined ideas" a way of speaking less liable to mistake than "clear and distinct"; and where men have got such determined ideas of all that they reason, inquire, or argue about, they will find a great part of their doubts and disputes at an end; the greatest part of the questions and controversies that perplex mankind depending on the doubtful and

uncertain use of words, or (which is the same) indetermined ideas, which they are made to stand for. I have made choice of these terms to signify, 1. Some immediate object of the mind, which it perceives and has before it, distinct from the sound it uses as a sign of it. 2. That this idea, thus determined, i.e., which the mind has in itself, and knows and sees there, be determined without any change to that name, and that name determined to that precise idea. If men had such determined ideas in their inquiries and discourses, they would both discern how far their own inquiries and discourses went, and avoid the greatest part of the disputes and wranglings they have with others.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1690, 1700

- Note 1: Before. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fragments. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sir Isaac Newton. Robert Boyle, the great Anglo-Irish chemist and physicist. Thomas Sydenham, a physician and authority on the treatment of fevers. Christiaan Huygens, Dutch mathematician and astronomer. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Locke was tutor to Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, whose philosophical writings make of genteel social conversation and civilized good humor something like guides to ultimate truth. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Definite, limited, fixed in value. [Return to reference 5](#)

# ROBERT BOYLE

Robert Boyle (1627–1691), the Anglo-Irish son of a powerful earl, brought his gentlemanly status and his considerable learning and skill in experimentation to his advocacy of science. Boyle became interested in natural philosophy and experiment in the late 1640s and in the 1650s attended the meetings that John Wilkins hosted for like-minded thinkers in Oxford. This group—whose meetings Boyle would later host in his own house—formed the core of what would become the Royal Society: Boyle was at the Society's first official meeting and would become a powerful representative of its scientific program. Against those who complained that the Royal Society had "done nothing" significant in its early years, one contemporary, Joseph Glanvill, wrote that "the Illustrious Mr. Boyle" had single-handedly "done enough" that, if he "lived in those days, when men *godded* their benefactors, he could not have missed one of the first places among their deified mortals."

Boyle's scientific publications are too many to list. He is best known to students today for "Boyle's law" concerning air pressure. This discovery was part of his influential work with the air pump, a piece of cutting-edge scientific equipment with a vacuum chamber. Boyle also influentially challenged the older Aristotelian ideas about the nature of matter still being taught in schools. He argued, instead, for a "mechanical philosophy," and he worked out a doctrine of "corpuscularianism," in which little atom-like corpuscles compose everything—though his use of "corpuscle" instead of "atom" helped him distinguish what he understood as his Christian philosophy from the atheism of ancient atomism. Indeed, a central theme of Boyle's work throughout his career was the compatibility of science and his Christian religion. This was part of Boyle's legacy too: upon his death, his will founded a series of influential "Boyle lectures" in defense of Christianity.



Boyle had an extremely various and active research agenda. The “General Heads,” included here, were among Boyle’s many publications in the *Philosophical Transactions* and reflect another aspect of his scientific program: his interest in the larger-scale projects of information collection promoted by Francis Bacon. Here, Boyle outlines a series of inquiries that any natural historian could ask about the places they traveled, and the Royal Society was interested in collecting answers from all over the globe. Such a project enacted the empiricist idea that collecting particulars might lead to eventual generalizations and insights, which in turn might provide a foundation “to superstruct,” or build, a whole philosophy upon. Boyle’s inquiries also illuminate science’s close links with early imperial projects and its interest in racial and geographical differences. What we today might think of as separate realms of nature and culture are closely intertwined here.

# General Heads for a Natural History of a Country, Great or Small<sup>1</sup>

It having been already intimated (*Num. 8 of Phil. Transact.* [p. 140](#), 141)<sup>2</sup> that diverse philosophers aim, among other things, at the composing of a good natural history, to superstruct in time a solid and useful philosophy upon; and it being of no slight importance to be furnished with pertinent heads,<sup>3</sup> for the direction of inquirers; that lately named benefactor to experimental philosophy<sup>4</sup> has been pleased to communicate, for the ends abovesaid, the following articles, which (as himself did signify) belong to one of his essays of the unpublished part of the *Usefulness of Nat. and Experimen. Philosophy*.<sup>5</sup>

But first he premises, that what follows is designed only to point at the more general heads of inquiry, which the proposer ignores not to be diverse of them very comprehensive,<sup>6</sup> in so much that, about some of the subordinate subjects, perhaps too not the most fertile, he has drawn up articles of inquisition about particulars, that take up near as much room as what is here to be delivered of this matter.<sup>7</sup>

The Heads themselves follow;

The things to be observed in such a history may be variously (and almost at pleasure) divided: As, into *supraterraneous*, *terrestrial*, and *subterraneous*;<sup>8</sup> and, otherwise: but we will at present distinguish them into those things that respect the heavens, or concern the air, the water, or the earth.

1. To the first sort of particulars belong the longitude and latitude of the place (that being of moment<sup>9</sup> in reference to observations about the air etc.) and consequently the length of the longest and shortest days and nights, the climate, parallels etc., what fixed stars are and what not seen there:

what constellations 'tis said to be subject to? Whereunto may be added other astrological matters, if they be thought worth mentioning.

2. About the air may be observed its temperature, as to the first four qualities (commonly so called)<sup>1</sup> and the measures of them: its weight, clearness, refractive power: its subtlety or grossness: its abounding with or wanting an esurine<sup>2</sup> salt: its variations according to the seasons of the year, and the times of the day; what duration the several kinds of weather usually have: what meteors it is most or least wont to breed; and in what order they are generated; and how long they usually last: especially what winds it is subject to; whether any of them be stated and ordinary, etc. What diseases are epidemical that are supposed<sup>3</sup> to flow from the air: what other diseases, wherein that hath a share, the country is subject to; the plague and contagious sickness: what is the usual salubrity or insalubrity of the air; and with what constitutions<sup>4</sup> it agrees better or worse than others.
3. About the water may be observed, the sea, its depth, degree of saltness, tides, currents, etc. Next, rivers, their bigness, length, course, inundations, goodness, levity<sup>5</sup> (or their contraries) of waters, etc. Then, lakes, ponds, springs, and especially mineral waters, their kinds, qualities, virtues, and how examined. To the waters belong also fishes, what kinds of them (whether salt or fresh-water fish) are to be found in the country; their store, bigness, goodness, seasons, haunts, peculiarities of any kind, and the ways of taking them, especially those that are not purely mechanical.<sup>6</sup>
4. In the earth may be observed
  1. Itself.
  2. Its inhabitants and its productions, and these external and internal.

First, in the earth itself may be observed, its dimensions, situation, east, west, north, and south: its figure, its plains and

valleys, and their extents, its hills and mountains, and the height of the tallest, both in reference to the neighboring valleys or plains, and in reference to the level of the seas: as also, whether the mountains lie scattered or in ridges, and whether those run north and south or east and west, etc. What promontories,<sup>7</sup> fiery or smoking hills, &c the country has, or hath not: whether the country be coherent, or much broken into islands. What the magnetical declination<sup>8</sup> is in several places, and the variations of that declination in the same place (and, if either of those be very considerable, then what circumstances may assist one to guess at the reason, as subterranean<sup>9</sup> fires, the vicinity of iron-mines &c.), what the nature of the soil is, whether clays, sandy, etc. or good mold; and what grains, fruits, and other vegetables do the most naturally agree with it: as also, by what particular arts and industries the inhabitants improve the advantages and remedy the inconveniences of their soil: what hidden qualities the soil may have (as that of Ireland, against venomous beasts,<sup>1</sup> etc.).

Secondly, above the ignobler productions of the earth, there must be careful account given of the inhabitants themselves, both natives and strangers that have been long settled there: and in particular, their stature, shape, color, features, strength, agility, beauty (or the want of it), complexions, hair, diet, inclinations, and customs that seem not due to education. As to their women (beside the other things) may be observed their fruitfulness or barrenness; their hard or easy labor, etc. And both in women and men must be taken notice of what diseases they are subject to, and in these whether there be any symptom or any other circumstance that is unusual and remarkable.

As to the external productions of the earth, the inquiries may be such as these: what grasses, grains, herbs, (garden and wild) flowers, fruit-trees, timber-trees (especially any trees whose wood is considerable), coppices,<sup>2</sup> groves, woods, forests, etc. the country has or wants: what peculiarities are observable in any of them: what soils they most like or dislike; and with what culture<sup>3</sup> they thrive best. What animals the country has or wants, both as to wild beasts,

hawks, and other birds of prey; and as to poultry and cattle of all sorts, and particularly whether it have any animals that are not common, or anything that is peculiar in those that are so.

The internal productions or concealments of the earth are here understood to be the riches that lie hid under the ground and are not already referred to other inquiries.

Among these subterranean observations may be taken notice of, what sorts of minerals of any kind they want, as well as what they have; then, what quarries the country affords and the particular conditions both of the quarries and the stones: as also, how the beds of stone lie, in reference to north and south etc. What clays and earths it affords, as tobacco-pipe-clay, marls, fuller's earths, earths for potter's wares, boluses and other medicated earths;<sup>4</sup> what other minerals it yields, as coals, salt-mines, or salt-springs, alum, vitriol, sulphur, etc. What metals the country yields, and a description of the mines, their number, situation, depth, signs, waters, damp, quantities of ore, goodness of ore, extraneous things and ways of reducing their ores into metals, etc.

To these general articles of inquiries (sayeth their proposer)<sup>5</sup> should be added; 1. Inquiries about traditions concerning all particular things relating to that country, as either peculiar to it or at least uncommon elsewhere. 2. Inquiries that require learning or skill in the answerer: to which should be subjoined proposals of ways to enable men to give answers to these more difficult inquiries.

Thus far our author, who, as he has been pleased to impart these general (but yet very comprehensive and greatly directive<sup>6</sup>) articles; so, 'tis hoped from his own late intimation, that he will shortly enlarge them with particular and subordinate ones. These, in the meantime, were thought fit to be published, that the inquisitive and curious might, by such an assistance, be invited not to delay their searches or matters that are so highly conducive to the improvement of true philosophy and the welfare of mankind.

- Note 1: The “Heads” appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* 11 (April 2, 1666).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The reference to *Philosophical Transactions* 8 is to an article featuring “Directions for Sea-Men, bound for far Voyages,” another proposal for information collection. “Directions” is explicit about how the Royal Society could “increase their philosophical stock by the advantage, which England enjoys of making voyages into all parts of the world,” English “Sea-men going into the East & West Indies” (India and the Caribbean, sites of colonial activity). Note that the article opens in the voice of Royal Society secretary Henry Oldenburg, before turning to Boyle’s “heads.”  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Topics or categories to organize research and discourse but also to direct information collection.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boyle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first volume of Boyle’s *Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy* was published in 1663; a second volume appeared in 1671.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boyle (“the proposer”) recognizes that some of the general heads, or categories, have a very large scope in themselves.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Boyle has drawn up lists of particular questions about “subordinate subjects” under each general category, some of the lists almost as long as what is given here. Boyle’s “Other Inquiries concerning the Sea” and “Articles of Inquiries touching Mines” later appeared in the *Transactions*, which also published lists by other authors focused on specific places—like Surat, in India.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Terra* is Latin for land, the surface of the earth. Boyle suggests that he might organize his inquiry with spatial categories: about things “above the earth,” “of the earth,” and “below the surface of the earth.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Significant.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: In his later “Suspensions about Some Hidden Qualities in the Air,” Boyle draws on Aristotelian tradition when referring to “the four first qualities of the air (heat, cold, dryness and moisture).”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Corrosive. “Wanting”: lacking.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Thought.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Different physical natures of human bodies. “Salubrity”: conduciveness to health.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lightness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boyle urges attention to not just natural phenomena but also the knowledge and skills of the people in a place—here, techniques for catching fish. “Their store”: the supply of them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Headlands, or high points near water.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Position of the magnetic compass needle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Underground.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Snakes, especially.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Composed of small trees and underwood.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Practices of cultivation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boyle lists different kinds of soils, with some attention to possible uses. Fuller’s earth, for example, is the clay used by a fuller to clean cloth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Boyle. Oldenburg’s voice now takes over again.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Informing; shewing the way” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)

## JOSEPH ADDISON

In his periodical writing in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* (see [p. 281](#)), Joseph Addison celebrated science and satirized it, thus offering a rich example of a thoughtful contemporary engaging with new intellectual currents. As his writings show, science could seem closely intertwined both with the noblest speculations of religion and with an extremely mockable form of obsessive collecting. As a university student, Addison offered a Latin oration praising Descartes' challenge to Aristotelianism, and later he helped arrange an influential series of London coffeehouse lectures on astronomy by Newton's chosen successor, the eccentric William Whiston. In *Spectator* 519, Addison articulated some of the excitement and importance he found in new scientific discoveries. But he also satirized certain kinds and uses of science. In *Tatler* 216, he repurposed the figure of Nicholas Gimcrack, the ridiculous experimenter skewered in Thomas Shadwell's 1676 play *The Virtuoso*. In the play, Gimcrack loses money and relationships in pursuit of a completely useless and trivial brand of science: he boasts, for instance, that he has spent "whole days and nights" studying "a small black speck" stuck to the "anus" of an ant inside an egg. (Many contemporaries assumed Shadwell was mocking Robert Hooke.) Decades later, Addison extends this satire by imagining Gimcrack's will—a document suggesting that science's focus on small things might lead to a failure to value things and people properly.



# [On Useless Science]

**The Tatler 216, August 24–26, 1710**

*Nugis addere pondus*<sup>1</sup> HORACE, *Epistles* 1.19.42

From my own apartment, August 25.

Nature is full of wonders; every atom is a standing miracle, and endowed with such qualities as could not be impressed on it by a power and wisdom less than infinite. For this reason I would not discourage any searches that are made into the most minute and trivial parts of the creation. However, since the world abounds in the noblest fields of speculation, it is, methinks, the mark of a little genius to be wholly conversant among insects, reptiles, animalcules, and these trifling rarities that furnish out the apartment of a Virtuoso.<sup>2</sup>

There are some men whose heads are so oddly turned this way, that though they are utter strangers to the common occurrences of life, they are able to discover the sex of a cockle, or describe the generation of a mite in all its circumstances. They are so little versed in the world, that they scarce know a horse from an ox; but at the same time will tell you with a great deal of gravity, that a flea is a rhinoceros, and a snail an hermaphrodite. I have known one of these whimsical philosophers who has set a greater value upon a collection of spiders than he would upon a flock of sheep, and has sold his coat off his back to purchase a tarantula.

I would not have a scholar wholly unacquainted with these secrets and curiosities of nature; but certainly the mind of man, that is capable of so much higher contemplations, should not be altogether fixed upon such mean<sup>3</sup> and disproportioned objects. Observations of this kind are apt to alienate us too much from the knowledge of the world, and to make us serious upon trifles, by which means they expose philosophy to the ridicule of the witty, and

contempt of the ignorant. In short, studies of this nature should be the diversions, relaxations and amusements, not the care, business, and concern of life.

It is indeed wonderful<sup>4</sup> to consider that there should be a sort of learned men who are wholly employed in gathering together the refuse of nature, if I may call it so, and hoarding up in their chests and cabinets such creatures as others industriously avoid the sight of. One does not know how to mention some of the most precious parts of their treasure, without a kind of an apology for it. I have been shewn a beetle valued at 20 crowns,<sup>5</sup> and a toad at an hundred. But we must take this for a general rule, that whatever appears trivial or obscene in the common notions of the world looks grave and philosophical in the eye of a Virtuoso.

To show this humor in its perfection, I shall present my reader with the legacy of a certain Virtuoso, who laid out a considerable estate<sup>6</sup> in natural rarities and curiosities, which upon his deathbed he bequeathed to his relations and friends in the following words:

*The will of a virtuoso.*

I Nicholas Gimcrack<sup>7</sup> being in sound health of mind, but in great weakness of body, do by this my last will and testament bestow my worldly goods and chattels in manner following:

Imprimis,<sup>8</sup> To my dear wife,

One box of butterflies,<sup>9</sup>

One drawer of shells,

A female skeleton,

A dried cockatrice.<sup>1</sup>

Item, To my daughter Elizabeth, my receipt for preserving dead caterpillars; as also my preparations of winter may-dew and embryo pickle.<sup>2</sup>

Item, To my little daughter Fanny,

Three crocodile's eggs.

And upon the birth of her first child, if she marries with her  
mother's consent,

The nest of an hummingbird.

Item, To my eldest brother, as an acknowledgment for the lands  
he has vested in<sup>3</sup> my son Charles, I bequeath

My last year's collection of grasshoppers.

Item, To his daughter Susanna, being his only child, I bequeath  
my

English weeds pasted on royal paper.

With my large folio<sup>4</sup> of Indian cabbage.

Item, To my learned and worthy friend Dr. Johannes Elscrickius,  
professor in anatomy, and my associate in the studies of nature, as  
an eternal monument of my affection and friendship for him, I  
bequeath

My rat's testicles, and

Whale's pizzle,<sup>5</sup>

To him and his issue-male,<sup>6</sup> and in default of such issue in the said  
Dr. Elscrickius, then to return to my executor and his heirs for ever.

Having fully provided for my nephew Isaac, by making over to  
him some years since

A horned scarabaeus<sup>7</sup>

The skin of a rattle-snake, and

The mummy of an Egyptian king,

I make no further provision for him in this my will.

My eldest son John having spoken disrespectfully of his little  
sister whom I keep by me in spirits of wine,<sup>8</sup> and in many other  
instances behaved himself undutifully towards me, I do disinherit  
and wholly cut off from any part of this my personal estate, by  
giving him a single cockle shell.

To my second son Charles I give and bequeath all my flowers, plants, minerals, mosses, shells, pebbles, fossils, beetles, butterflies, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and vermin not above specified; as also all my monsters,<sup>9</sup> both wet and dry, making the said Charles whole and sole executor of this my last will and testament; he paying or causing to be paid the aforesaid legacies within the space of six months after my decease. And I do hereby revoke all other wills whatsoever by me formerly made.

## Endnotes

1710

- Note 1: To add weight to trifles (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A word closely associated with learned scientific practitioners and collectors. It was used positively—Boyle published a book entitled *The Christian Virtuoso*—but also more disparagingly, implying triviality. “Animalcules”: very small or microscopic creatures.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Low, inferior.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Inciting wonder (used sarcastically).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Equivalent to £5, an outrageously high sum.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spent a considerable amount of his estate’s money.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The character borrowed from Shadwell’s play. A gimcrack, as a noun, is a bauble or trifle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the first place.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Tatler* 221 features a letter from Gimcrack’s widow, who explains that he eventually died from a fever caused by the “violent exercise” of chasing a rare butterfly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A mythical reptile (but the word was also used as a derogatory term for a woman).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A solution to pickle, or preserve, dead embryos. “Receipt”: recipe.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Given possession of to.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A big book.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Penis.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Male sons.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Beetle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spirits of wine used as a preservative (an “embryo pickle” for his dead “little sister”). In a 1666 essay in the *Philosophical Transactions*, Boyle endorsed these spirits as “A way of preserving birds taken out of the egg and other small fetuses.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Strange or unusually formed creatures. The *Philosophical Transactions* often featured “monsters” and “monstrous births.”[Return to reference 9](#)

# [On the Scale of Being]

**The Spectator 519, October 25, 1712**

*Inde hominum pecudumque genus, vitaeque  
volantum,  
Et quae marmoreo fert monstra sub aequore  
pontus.*<sup>1</sup>

—VIRGIL, *Aeneid* 6.728–29

Though there is a great deal of pleasure in contemplating the material world, by which I mean that system of bodies into which nature has so curiously wrought the mass of dead matter, with the several relations which those bodies bear to one another, there is still, methinks, something more wonderful and surprising in contemplations on the world of life, by which I mean all those animals with which every part of the universe is furnished. The material world is only the shell of the universe: the world of life are its inhabitants.

If we consider those parts of the material world which lie the nearest to us and are, therefore, subject to our observations and inquiries, it is amazing to consider the infinity of animals with which it is stocked. Every part of matter is peopled. Every green leaf swarms with inhabitants. There is scarce a single humor in the body of a man, or of any other animal, in which our glasses<sup>2</sup> do not discover myriads of living creatures. The surface of animals is also covered with other animals which are, in the same manner, the basis of other animals that live upon it; nay, we find in the most solid bodies, as in marble itself, innumerable cells and cavities that are crowded with such imperceptible inhabitants as are too little for the naked eye to discover. On the other hand, if we look into the more bulky parts of nature, we see the seas, lakes, and rivers teeming

with numberless kinds of living creatures. We find every mountain and marsh, wilderness and wood, plentifully stocked with birds and beasts, and every part of matter affording proper necessities and conveniences for the livelihood of multitudes which inhabit it.

The author of *The Plurality of Worlds*<sup>3</sup> draws a very good argument upon this consideration for the peopling of every planet, as indeed it seems very probable from the analogy of reason that, if no part of matter which we are acquainted with lies waste and useless, those great bodies, which are at such a distance from us, should not be desert and unpeopled, but rather that they should be furnished with beings adapted to their respective situations.

Existence is a blessing to those beings only which are endowed with perception and is, in a manner, thrown away upon dead matter any further than as it is subservient to beings which are conscious of their existence. Accordingly, we find from the bodies which lie under our observation that matter is only made as the basis and support of animals and that there is no more of the one than what is necessary for the existence of the other.

Infinite Goodness is of so communicative a nature that it seems to delight in the conferring of existence upon every degree of perceptive being. As this is a speculation which I have often pursued with great pleasure to myself, I shall enlarge farther upon it, by considering that part of the scale of beings which comes within our knowledge.

There are some living creatures which are raised but just above dead matter. To mention only that species of shellfish, which are formed in the fashion of a cone, that grow to the surface of several rocks and immediately die upon their being severed from the place where they grow. There are many other creatures but one remove from these, which have no other sense besides that of feeling and taste. Others have still an additional one of hearing; others of smell, and others of sight. It is wonderful to observe by what a gradual progress the world of life advances through a prodigious variety of species before a creature is formed that is complete in all its senses; and, even among these, there is such a different degree of

perfection in the sense which one animal enjoys, beyond what appears in another, that, though the sense in different animals be distinguished by the same common denomination, it seems almost of a different nature. If after this we look into the several inward perfections of cunning and sagacity, or what we generally call instinct, we find them rising after the same manner, imperceptibly, one above another, and receiving additional improvements, according to the species in which they are implanted. This progress in nature is so very gradual that the most perfect of an inferior species comes very near to the most imperfect of that which is immediately above it.

The exuberant and overflowing goodness of the Supreme Being, whose mercy extends to all his works, is plainly seen, as I have before hinted, from his having made so very little matter, at least what falls within our knowledge, that does not swarm with life. Nor is his goodness less seen in the diversity than in the multitude of living creatures. Had he only made one species of animals, none of the rest would have enjoyed the happiness of existence; he has, therefore, *specified* in his creation every degree of life, every capacity of being. The whole chasm in nature, from a plant to a man, is filled up with diverse kinds of creatures, rising one over another by such a gentle and easy ascent that the little transitions and deviations from one species to another are almost insensible. This intermediate space is so well husbanded and managed that there is scarce a degree of perception which does not appear in some one part of the world of life. Is the goodness or wisdom of the Divine Being more manifested in this his proceeding?

There is a consequence, besides those I have already mentioned, which seems very naturally deducible from the foregoing considerations. If the scale of being rises by such a regular progress so high as man, we may by a parity of reason<sup>4</sup> suppose that it still proceeds gradually through those beings which are of a superior nature to him, since there is an infinitely greater space and room for different degrees of perfection between the Supreme Being and man than between man and the most despicable insect. This



consequence of so great a variety of beings which are superior to us, from that variety which is inferior to us, is made by Mr. Locke<sup>5</sup> in a passage which I shall here set down after having premised that, notwithstanding there is such infinite room between man and his Maker for the creative power to exert itself in, it is impossible that it should ever be filled up, since there will be still an infinite gap or distance between the highest created being and the Power which produced him:

That there should be more species of intelligent creatures above us than there are of sensible and material below, is probable to me from hence: That in all the visible corporeal world we see no chasms or no gaps. All quite down from us, the descent is by easy steps and a continued series of things that, in each remove, differ very little from the other. There are fishes that have wings and are not strangers to the airy region; and there are some birds that are inhabitants of the water, whose blood is cold as fishes and their flesh so like in taste that the scrupulous are allowed them on fish days.<sup>6</sup> There are animals so near of kin both to birds and beasts that they are in the middle between both: amphibious animals link the terrestrial and aquatic together; seals live at land and at sea, and porpoises have the warm blood and entrails of a hog, not to mention what is confidently reported of mermaids or seamen. There are some brutes that seem to have as much knowledge and reason as some that are called men; and the animal and vegetable kingdoms are so nearly joined that, if you will take the lowest of one and the highest of the other, there will scarce be perceived any great difference between them; and so on, till we come to the lowest and the most inorganical parts of matter, we shall find everywhere that the several species are linked together and differ but in almost insensible degrees. And when we consider the infinite power and wisdom of the Maker, we

have reason to think that it is suitable to the magnificent harmony of the universe and the great design and infinite goodness of the Architect, that the species of creatures should also, by gentle degrees, ascend upward from us toward his infinite perfection, as we see they gradually descend from us downward; which, if it be probable, we have reason to be persuaded that there are far more species of creatures above us than there are beneath, we being in degrees of perfection much more remote from the infinite being of God than we are from the lowest state of being and that which approaches nearest to nothing. And yet of all those distinct species we have no clear distinct ideas.

In this system of being, there is no creature so wonderful in its nature, and which so much deserves our particular attention, as man, who fills up the middle space between the animal and intellectual nature, the visible and invisible world, and is that link in the chain of beings which has been often termed the *nexus utriusque mundi*.<sup>7</sup> So that he who, in one respect, is associated with angels and archangels, may look upon a Being of infinite perfection as his father, and the highest order of spirits as his brethren, may, in another respect, say to corruption, "Thou art my father," and to the worm, "Thou art my mother and my sister."<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

1712

- Note 1: Thence the race of men and beasts, the lives of flying creatures, and the monsters that ocean bears beneath her smooth surface (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Microscopes. "Humor": fluid.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Bernard de Fontenelle (1657–1757). This popular book, a series of dialogues between a scientist and a countess concerning the possibility of other inhabited planets and the new astrophysics in general, was published in 1686 in France

and was translated in 1688 by both John Glanvill and Aphra Behn.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A reasonable analogy or equivalence.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 3.6.12 (see above).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Days of religious observance when fish instead of meat is eaten.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The binding together of both worlds (Latin).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Job 17:14.[Return to reference 8](#)

# **JOHN WILMOT, SECOND EARL OF ROCHESTER 1647–1680**

John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, was the precocious son of one of Charles II's most loyal followers in exile. He won the king's favor at the Restoration and, in 1664, after education at Oxford and on the Continent, took a place at court, at the age of seventeen. There he soon distinguished himself as "the man who has the most wit and the least honor in England." When he was eighteen, he abducted Elizabeth Malet, an heiress, seemingly with an intent to force her to marry him. The crime outraged many, including the king, who imprisoned Rochester in the Tower of London. But he regained his position by courageous service in the naval war against the Dutch, and in 1667 he married Malet. The rest of his career was no less stormy. His satiric wit, directed not only at ordinary mortals but at Dryden and Charles II himself, embroiled him in constant quarrels and exiles; his practical jokes, his affairs, and his sinful ways were legendary. He circulated his works, always intellectually daring and often obscene, to a limited court readership in manuscripts executed by professional scribes—a common way of handling writing deemed too ideologically or morally scandalous for print. An early printed collection of his poems did appear in 1680, though the title page read "Antwerp," probably to hide its London origin. The air of scandal and disguise surrounding his writing only

intensified his notoriety as the exemplar of the dissolute, libertine ways of court culture. He told his biographer, Gilbert Burnet, that “for five years together he was continually drunk.” His deathbed was also a dramatic scene of performance, and for posterity Rochester became a favorite moral topic: the libertine who had seen the error of his ways and converted to Christian repentance.

*Wit*, in the Restoration, meant not only a clever turn of phrase but mental capacity and intellectual power. Rochester was famous for both kinds of wit. His fierce intelligence, impatient of sham and convention, helped design a way of life based on style, cleverness, and self-interest—a way of life observable in Restoration plays (Dorimant, in Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*, strongly resembles Rochester). Stylistically, Rochester infuses forms such as the heroic couplet with a volatility that contrasts with the pointed and balanced manner of its other masters. From the very first line of “A Satire against Reason and Mankind”—“Were I who to my cost already am”—he plunges the reader into a couplet mode energized by speculation, self-interruption, and enjambment; and he frequently employs extravagant effects (such as the alliterations “love’s lesser lightning” and “balmy brinks of bliss” in “The Imperfect Enjoyment”) to flaunt his delight in dramatizing situations, sensations, and himself. “The Disabled Debauchee,” composed in “heroic stanzas” like those of Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis*, subverts the very notion of heroism by turning conventions upside down. Philosophically, Rochester is daring and destabilizing. In “A Satire,” he rejects high-flown, theoretical reason and consigns its “misguided follower” to an abyss of doubt. And his love lyrics use libertine postures to press at the conventions of the poetic form. Rochester everywhere discovers his poetic voice through opposition and critique, and even seems to enjoy turning such critical energies against himself.

## The Disabled Debauchee

As some brave admiral, in former war  
Deprived of force, but pressed with courage still,  
Two rival fleets appearing from afar,  
Crawls to the top of an adjacent hill;

5 From whence, with thoughts full of concern, he  
views  
The wise and daring conduct of the fight,  
And each bold action to his mind renews  
His present glory and his past delight;

10 From his fierce eyes flashes of fire he throws,  
As from black clouds when lightning breaks  
away;  
Transported, thinks himself amidst his foes,  
And absent, yet enjoys the bloody day;

15 So, when my days of impotence approach,  
And I'm by pox<sup>o</sup> and wine's unlucky chance  
Forced from the pleasing billows of debauch  
On the dull shore of lazy temperance,

20 My pains at least some respite shall afford  
While I behold the battles you maintain  
When fleets of glasses sail about the board,<sup>o</sup>  
From whose broadsides<sup>1</sup> volleys of wit shall rain.

Nor shall the sight of honorable scars,  
Which my too forward valor did procure,  
Frighten new-listed<sup>o</sup> soldiers from the wars:  
Past joys have more than paid what I endure.

25       Should any youth (worth being drunk) prove nice,<sup>o</sup>  
           And from his fair inviter meanly shrink,  
       'Twill please the ghost of my departed vice  
           If, at my counsel, he repent and drink.

30       Or should some cold-complexioned sot forbid,  
           With his dull morals, our bold night-alarms,  
       I'll fire his blood by telling what I did  
           When I was strong and able to bear arms.

35       I'll tell of whores attacked, their lords at home;  
           Bawds' quarters beaten up, and fortress won;  
       Windows demolished, watches<sup>o</sup> overcome;  
           And handsome ills by my contrivance done.

40       Nor shall our love-fits, Chloris, be forgot,  
           When each the well-looking linkboy<sup>2</sup> strove t'  
           enjoy,  
       And the best kiss was the deciding lot  
           Whether the boy used<sup>3</sup> you, or I the boy.

45       With tales like these I will such thoughts inspire  
           As to important mischief shall incline:  
       I'll make him long some ancient church to fire,  
           And fear no lewdness he's called to by wine.

45       Thus, statesmanlike, I'll saucily impose,  
           And safe from action, valiantly advise;  
       Sheltered in impotence, urge you to blows,  
           And being good for nothing else, be wise.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: The sides of the table; artillery on a ship; sheets on which satirical verses were printed.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Good-looking boy employed to light the way with a link or torch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The meaning of “used,” which appears in the first printed version and many manuscript versions, includes but extends beyond that of “fucked,” another prevalent alternative and one preferred by most modern editors.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *syphilis*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *table*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *newly enlisted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *coy, fastidious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *watchmen*[Return to reference °](#)



# The Imperfect Enjoyment<sup>1</sup>

Naked she lay, clasped in my longing arms,  
I filled with love, and she all over charms;  
Both equally inspired with eager fire,  
Melting through kindness, flaming in desire.  
5 With arms, legs, lips close clinging to embrace,  
She clips<sup>o</sup> me to her breast, and sucks me to her  
face.  
Her nimble tongue, Love's lesser lightning, played  
Within my mouth, and to my thoughts conveyed  
Swift orders that I should prepare to throw  
10 The all-dissolving thunderbolt below.  
My fluttering soul, sprung<sup>2</sup> with the pointed kiss,  
Hangs hovering o'er her balmy brinks of bliss.  
But whilst her busy hand would guide that part  
Which should convey my soul up to her heart,  
15 In liquid raptures I dissolve all o'er,  
Melt into sperm, and spend at every pore.  
A touch from any part of her had done 't:  
Her hand, her foot, her very look's a cunt.  
Smiling, she chides in a kind murmuring noise,  
And from her body wipes the clammy joys,  
20 When, with a thousand kisses wandering o'er  
My panting bosom, "Is there then no more?"  
She cries. "All this to love and rapture's due;  
Must we not pay a debt to pleasure too?"  
But I, the most forlorn, lost man alive,  
25 To show my wished obedience vainly strive:  
I sigh, alas! and kiss, but cannot swive.<sup>o</sup>  
Eager desires confound my first intent,  
Succeeding shame does more success prevent,

30 And rage at last confirms me impotent.  
 Ev'n her fair hand, which might bid heat  
 return  
 To frozen age, and make cold hermits burn,  
 Applied to my dead cinder, warms no more  
 Than fire to ashes could past flames restore.  
 Trembling, confused, despairing, limber, dry,  
 35 A wishing, weak, unmoving lump I lie.  
 This dart of love, whose piercing point, oft tried,  
 With virgin blood ten thousand maids have dyed;  
 Which nature still directed with such art  
 That it through every cunt reached every heart—  
 40 Stiffly resolved, 'twould carelessly invade  
 Woman or man, nor aught<sup>o</sup> its fury stayed:  
 Where'er it pierced, a cunt it found or made  
 —  
 Now languid lies in this unhappy hour,  
 Shrunk up and sapless like a withered flower.  
 45 Thou treacherous, base deserter of my flame,  
 False to my passion, fatal to my fame,  
 Through what mistaken magic dost thou prove  
 So true to lewdness, so untrue to love?  
 What oyster-cinder-beggar-common whore  
 50 Didst thou e'er fail in all thy life before?  
 When vice, disease, and scandal lead the way,  
 With what officious haste dost thou obey!  
 Like a rude, roaring hector<sup>o</sup> in the streets  
 Who scuffles, cuffs, and justles all he meets,  
 55 But if his King or country claim his aid,  
 The rakehell villain shrinks and hides his head;  
 Ev'n so thy brutal valor is displayed, Breaks every  
 stew,<sup>3</sup> does each small whore invade,  
 But when great Love the onset does command,  
 60 Base recreant to thy prince, thou dar'st not stand.  
 Worst part of me, and henceforth hated most,

Through all the town a common fucking post,  
 On whom each whore relieves her tingling cunt  
 As hogs on gates do rub themselves and grunt,  
 65      Mayst thou to ravenous chancres be a prey,  
 Or in consuming weepings<sup>4</sup> waste away;  
 May strangury and stone<sup>5</sup> thy days attend;  
 May'st thou ne'er piss, who didst refuse to spend  
 When all my joys did on false thee depend.  
 70      And may ten thousand abler pricks agree  
 To do the wronged Corinna right for thee.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: The genre of poems about the downfall of male "pride"—not only a swelled head but an erection—derives from Ovid's *Amores* 3.7. For a woman's treatment of this situation, see Aphra Behn's "The Disappointment" (p. 148). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Startled from cover, like a game bird. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Breaks into every brothel. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Chancres" and "weepings" are signs of venereal disease. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Strangury" and "stone" cause slow and painful urination. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *hugs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *screw* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anything* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bully* [Return to reference °](#)

# Upon Nothing

Nothing, thou elder brother even to shade,  
Thou hadst a being ere the world was made  
And (well fixed) art alone of ending not afraid.

5 Ere time and place were, time and place were not,  
When primitive Nothing Something straight begot,  
Then all proceeded from the great united *What*.

Something, the general attribute of all,  
Severed from thee, its sole original,  
Into thy boundless self must undistinguished fall.

10 Yet Something did thy mighty power command  
And from thy fruitful emptiness's hand  
Snatched men, beasts, birds, fire, water, air, and  
land.

Matter, the wick'dst offspring of thy race,  
By form assisted, flew from thy embrace,  
And rebel light obscured thy reverend dusky face.

15 With form and matter, time and place did join,  
Body thy foe, with these did leagues combine<sup>1</sup>  
To spoil thy peaceful realm and ruin all thy line.

But turncoat time assists the foe in vain  
And bribed by thee destroys their short-lived reign  
20 And to thy hungry womb drives back thy slaves  
again.

Though mysteries are barred from laic eyes<sup>2</sup>  
And the divine alone with warrant pries

Into thy bosom where thy truth in private lies,  
25 Yet this of thee the wise may truly say:  
Thou from the virtuous, nothing tak'st away,<sup>3</sup>  
And to be part of thee, the wicked wisely pray.

Great negative, how vainly would the wise  
Enquire, define, distinguish, teach, devise,  
30 Didst thou not stand to point<sup>o</sup> their blind  
philosophies.

Is or Is Not, the two great ends of fate,  
And true or false, the subject of debate  
That perfect or destroy the vast designs of state,

When they have racked the politician's breast,  
35 Within thy bosom most securely rest  
And when reduced to thee are least unsafe and best.

But Nothing, why does Something still permit  
That sacred monarchs should at council sit  
With persons highly thought, at best, for nothing fit;

40 Whilst weighty Something modestly abstains  
From princes' coffers<sup>4</sup> and from statesmen's brains  
And Nothing there like stately Something reigns?

Nothing, who dwellst with fools in grave disguise,  
For whom they reverend shapes and forms devise,  
45 Lawn-sleeves and furs and gowns,<sup>5</sup> when they like  
thee look wise;

French truth, Dutch prowess, British policy,  
Hibernian<sup>o</sup> learning, Scotch civility,  
Spaniards' dispatch, Danes' wit<sup>6</sup> are mainly seen in  
thee;

The great man's gratitude to his best friend,  
 Kings' promises, whores' vows, towards thee they  
 bend,  
 Flow swiftly into thee and in thee ever end.

## Endnotes

1679

- Note 1: Form, matter, time, and place combined in alliances against Nothing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the eyes of the laity, who are uninitiated in Nothing's mysteries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: You, Nothing, do not take anything away from the virtuous.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Charles II's coffers were notably empty, and he was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1672.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Worn by judges. "Lawn": a fine linen or cotton fabric, worn by bishops.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: All proverbial deficiencies of the various nationalities mentioned, many of them exposed during the Anglo-Dutch war (1672–74).[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *expose*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Irish*[Return to reference °](#)

## A Satire against Reason and Mankind<sup>1</sup>

Were I (who to my cost already am  
One of those strange prodigious creatures, man)  
A spirit free to choose, for my own share,  
What case of flesh and blood I pleased to  
wear,  
5 I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear;  
Or anything but that vain animal  
Who is so proud of being rational.  
The senses are too gross, and he'll contrive  
A sixth<sup>2</sup> to contradict the other five:  
And before certain instinct will prefer  
10 Reason, which fifty times for one does err.  
Reason, an ignis fatuus<sup>3</sup> of the mind,  
Which leaving light of nature, sense, behind,  
Pathless and dangerous wandering ways it takes,  
Through Error's fenny bogs and thorny brakes:<sup>o</sup>  
15 Whilst the misguided follower climbs with pain  
Mountains of whimsies heaped in his own brain;  
Stumbling from thought to thought, falls headlong  
down  
Into doubt's boundless sea, where like<sup>o</sup> to drown,  
Books bear him up awhile, and make him try  
20 To swim with bladders<sup>4</sup> of philosophy;  
In hopes still to o'ertake th'escaping light,  
The vapor dances in his dazzled sight,  
Till spent, it leaves him to eternal night.  
Then old age and experience, hand in hand,  
25 Lead him to death, and make him understand,  
After a search so painful and so long,  
That all his life he has been in the wrong.  
Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine<sup>o</sup> lies,

30 Who was so proud, so witty and so wise.  
Pride drew him in (as cheats their bubbles<sup>o</sup> catch)  
And made him venture to be made a wretch.  
His wisdom did his happiness destroy,  
Aiming to know that world he should enjoy;  
35 And wit was his vain frivolous pretence  
Of pleasing others at his own expense:  
For wits are treated just like common whores,  
First they're enjoyed and then kicked out of doors.  
The pleasure past, a threatening doubt remains,  
40 That frights th'enjoyer with succeeding pains:<sup>5</sup>  
Women and men of wit are dangerous tools,  
And ever fatal to admiring fools.  
Pleasure allures, and when the fops escape,  
'Tis not that they're beloved, but fortunate;  
45 And therefore what they fear, at heart they  
hate.<sup>6</sup>

But now methinks some formal band and beard<sup>7</sup>  
Takes me to task. Come on, Sir, I'm prepared:  
"Then by your favor any thing that's writ  
Against this gibing,<sup>o</sup> jingling knack called wit,  
Likes<sup>o</sup> me abundantly, but you take care  
50 Upon this point not to be too severe.  
Perhaps my Muse were fitter for this part,  
For I profess I can be very smart  
On wit, which I abhor with all my heart.  
I long to lash it in some sharp essay,  
55 But your grand indiscretion bids me  
stay,  
And turns my tide of ink another way.  
What rage ferments in your degenerate mind,





Jacob Huysmans, ***Lord Rochester with a Monkey and a Book***, 1665–70. Rochester bestowing a laurel wreath, symbol of poetic excellence, on a monkey, who holds a page torn from a book.

---

60 To make you rail at reason and mankind?  
Blest glorious man! to whom alone kind heaven  
An everlasting soul has freely given;  
Whom his creator took such care to make,  
That from himself he did the image take,  
And this fair frame<sup>o</sup> in shining reason dressed,  
65 To dignify his nature above beast.

Reason, by whose aspiring influence  
We take a flight beyond material sense;  
Dive into mysteries, then soaring pierce  
The flaming limits of the universe;  
70 Search heaven and hell, find out what's acted there,  
And give the world true grounds of hope and fear."<sup>8</sup>  
    Hold, mighty man, I cry, all this we know,  
From the pathetic pen of Ingelo,<sup>9</sup>  
From Patrick's *Pilgrim*, Sibbs'<sup>1</sup> soliloquies;  
And 'tis this very reason I despise;  
75 This supernatural gift, that makes a mite  
Think he's the image of the infinite,  
Comparing his short life, void of all rest,  
To the eternal and the ever blest;  
This busy puzzling stirrer-up of doubt,  
80 That frames deep mysteries, then finds them out;  
Filling with frantic crowds of thinking fools  
Those reverend Bedlams,<sup>0</sup> colleges and schools;  
Borne on whose wings each heavy sot can pierce  
The limits of the boundless universe;  
85 So charming ointments make an old witch fly,  
And bear a crippled carcass through the sky.  
'Tis this exalted power whose business lies  
In nonsense and impossibilities.  
This made a whimsical philosopher  
90 Before the spacious world his tub prefer.<sup>2</sup>  
And we have modern cloistered coxcombs, who  
Retire to think, 'cause they have naught to do:  
But thoughts are given for action's government,  
Where action ceases, thought's impertinent.  
95 Our sphere of action is life's happiness,  
And he who thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.  
Thus, whilst against false reasoning I inveigh,  
I own<sup>0</sup> right reason, which I would obey:  
That reason which distinguishes by sense,  
100 And gives us rules of good and ill from thence;

That bounds desires with a reforming will,  
 To keep them more in vigor, not to kill.  
 Your reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy,  
 Renewing appetites yours would destroy.  
 105 My reason is my friend, yours is a cheat,  
 Hunger calls out, my reason bids me eat;  
 Perversely, yours your appetites does mock:  
 They ask for food, that answers, "what's a clock?"<sup>o</sup>  
 This plain distinction, Sir, your doubt secures,<sup>o</sup>  
 110 'Tis not true reason I despise, but yours.  
         Thus I think reason righted, but for man,  
 I'll ne'er recant, defend him if you can.  
 For all his pride and his philosophy,  
 'Tis evident beasts are, in their degree,  
 115 As wise at least, and better far than he.        }  
 Those creatures are the wisest who attain  
 By surest means, the ends at which they aim.  
 If therefore Jowler<sup>3</sup> finds and kills his hares  
 Better than Meres<sup>4</sup> supplies committee chairs,  
 120 Though one's a statesman, th'other but a hound,  
 Jowler in justice would be wiser found.  
 You see how far man's wisdom here extends;  
 Look next if human nature makes amends;  
 Whose principles most generous are and just,  
 125 And to whose morals you would sooner trust.  
 Be judge yourself, I'll bring it to the test,  
 Which is the basest creature, man or beast.  
 Birds feed on birds, beasts on each other prey,  
 But savage man alone does man betray;  
 130 Pressed by necessity they kill for food,  
 Man undoes man to do himself no good.  
 With teeth and claws by nature armed, they hunt  
 Nature's allowance to supply their want.  
 But man with smiles, embraces, friendship, praise,  
 135 Inhumanly his fellow's life betrays;  
 With voluntary<sup>o</sup> pains works his distress,

Not through necessity, but wantonness.  
For hunger or for love they fight and tear,  
Whilst wretched man is still<sup>o</sup> in arms for fear;  
140 For fear he arms, and is of arms afraid,  
By fear to fear successively betrayed.  
Base fear! The source whence his best passion came,  
His boasted honor, and his dear bought fame;  
That lust of power to which he's such a slave,  
145 And for the which alone he dares be brave,  
To which his various projects are designed,  
Which makes him generous, affable, and kind;  
For which he takes such pains to be thought wise  
And screws his actions in a forced disguise;  
150 Leading a tedious life in misery  
Under laborious mean hypocrisy.  
Look to the bottom of his vast design,  
Wherein man's wisdom, power, and glory join;  
The good he acts, the ill he does endure,  
155 'Tis all from fear to make himself secure.  
Merely for safety after fame we thirst,  
For all men would be cowards if they durst.  
And honesty's against all common sense;  
Men must be knaves, 'tis in their own defense.  
160 Mankind's dishonest, if you think it fair  
Amongst known cheats to play upon the square,<sup>o</sup>  
You'll be undone—  
Nor can weak truth your reputation save;  
The knaves will all agree to call you knave.  
165 Wronged shall he live, insulted o'er, oppressed,  
Who dares be less a villain than the rest.  
Thus Sir, you see what human nature craves:  
Most men are cowards, all men should be knaves.  
The difference lies, as far as I can see,  
170 Not in the thing itself, but the degree,  
And all the subject matter of debate  
Is only who's a knave of the first rate.

### **Addition<sup>5</sup>**

175 All this with indignation have I hurled  
At the pretending<sup>o</sup> part of the proud world,  
Who swollen with selfish vanity, devise  
False freedoms, holy cheats, and formal lies,  
Over their fellow slaves to tyrannize. }

180 But if in court so just a man there be  
(In court a just man yet unknown to me),  
Who does his needful flattery direct,  
Not to oppress and ruin, but protect  
(Since flattery, which way so ever laid,  
Is still a tax on that unhappy trade);<sup>6</sup>  
185 If so upright a statesman you can find,  
Whose passions bend to his unbiased mind;  
Who does his arts and policies apply  
To raise his country, not his family,  
Nor while his pride owned avarice withstands,  
Receives close bribes from friends' corrupted hands<sup>7</sup>—

190 Is there a churchman who on God relies,  
Whose life his faith and doctrine justifies?  
Not one blown up with vain prelati<sup>8</sup>c pride,  
Who for reproof of sins does man deride;  
Whose envious heart makes preaching a pretense,  
195 With his obstreperous saucy eloquence,  
To chide at kings, and rail at men of sense;  
Who from his pulpit vents more peevish lies,  
More bitter railings, scandals, calumnies, }

200 Than at a gossiping are thrown about  
When the good wives get drunk and then fall out;  
None of that sensual tribe, whose talents lie  
In avarice, pride, sloth and gluttony,  
Who hunt good livings,<sup>9</sup> but abhor good lives, }

205 Whose lust exalted to that height arrives,  
They act adultery with their own wives;<sup>1</sup> }

And ere a score of years completed be,

Can from the lofty pulpit proudly see  
 Half a large parish their own progeny.  
 Nor doating<sup>o</sup> bishop who would be adored  
 210 For domineering at the council board,<sup>2</sup>  
 A greater fop in business at fourscore,  
 Fonder of serious toys,<sup>o</sup> affected more  
 Than the gay glittering fool at twenty proves,  
 With all his noise, his tawdry clothes and loves;  
 215 But a meek humble man of honest sense,  
 Who, preaching peace, does practice continence;  
 Whose pious life's a proof he does believe  
 Mysterious truths, which no man can conceive;  
 If upon earth there dwell such God-like men,  
 220 I'll here recant my paradox<sup>3</sup> to them;  
 Adore those shrines of virtue, homage pay,  
 And with the rabble world, their laws obey.  
 If such there be, yet grant me this at least,  
 225 Man differs more from man, than man from beast.

## Endnotes

1679

- Note 1: Rochester's poem draws on a skeptical tradition emphasizing the weakness of human reason. For instance, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), in his essay "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," had made much of the idea that animals are better equipped than humans to lead successful lives. In general, Rochester's poem loosely follows *Satire VIII* by the influential French poet and critic Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711), but Rochester—with his energetic intellect and embrace of paradox—makes these materials his own.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here, reason.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Foolish fire (Latin). Sometimes called the will-o'-the-wisp, a light appearing in marshy lands that proverbially misleads travelers.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Inflated animal bladders used for buoyancy in the water.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The doubt that wits leave behind resembles venereal disease left by "common whores."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Though allured by wits, fops also fear and hate them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Clergyman, wearing a clerical collar.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Teach the world about salvation and damnation.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nathaniel Ingelo (d. 1683), author of the long religious allegory *Bentivolio and Urania* (1660).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Richard Sibbes, Puritan preacher who published volumes of sermons, though none called "soliloquies." Simon Patrick (1626–1707), author of the devotional work *The Parable of the Pilgrim* (1665).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Diogenes the Cynic (5th century B.C.E.), who lived in a tub to exemplify the virtues of asceticism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A common name for hunting dogs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir Thomas Meres (1635–1715), a busy parliamentarian of the day.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The second part was also circulated as a separate poem.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Even good men must pay the tax of flattery if they "trade" at the royal court at Whitehall.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Nor while he proudly rejects open greed, still arranges that his friends collect secret bribes for him.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Of prelates, high church officials.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ecclesiastical appointments.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Married women of their parishes. Rochester also suggests that these clergymen act out their adulterous lusts with their own spouses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the Privy Council, a meeting of advisers to the monarch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That beasts are superior to humans.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *thickets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dupes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jeering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Pleases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *physical body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *madhouses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what time is it?*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliberate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honestly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *senile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trifles*[Return to reference](#) °



## Love and Life<sup>1</sup>

5 All my past life is mine no more,  
The flying hours are gone;  
Like transitory dreams giv'n o're  
Whose images are kept in store,  
By memory alone.

10 What ever is to come is not,  
How can it then be mine?<sup>2</sup>  
The present moment's all my lot,<sup>o</sup>  
And that as fast as it is got,  
Phillis is wholly thine.

15 Then talk not of inconstancy,  
False hearts and broken vows:  
If I by miracle can be  
This live-long minute true to thee,  
'Tis all that Heav'n allows.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: Rochester playfully uses the conventional love lyric form to articulate more or less sexually exuberant libertine postures. Love lyrics often celebrate fidelity; Rochester reworks this value in both "Love and Life" and "To a Lady, in a Letter," below. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scholars suggest that Rochester elaborates on an idea from Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651): "The present only has a being in nature; things past have a being in the memory only, but things to come have no being at all; the future being but a fiction of the mind." [Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *possession, inheritance* [Return to reference °](#)

## To a Lady, in a Letter

Such perfect bliss, fair Cloris, we  
In our enjoyment prove:  
'Tis pity restless jealousy  
Should mingle with our love.

5 Let us, since wit has taught us how,  
Raise pleasure to the top:  
You rival bottle must allow,  
I'll suffer rival fop.<sup>o</sup><sub>—</sub>

10 Think not in this that I design  
A treason 'gainst love's charms,  
When following the God of Wine  
I leave my Cloris arms.

15 Since you have that, for all your haste,  
At which I'll ne're repine,<sup>o</sup><sub>—</sub>  
Will take its liquor off as fast,  
As I can take off mine.<sup>1</sup>

20 There's not a brisk insipid spark<sup>o</sup><sub>—</sub>  
That flutters in the town:  
But with your wanton eyes you mark  
Him out to be your own.

Nor do you think it worth your care  
How empty, and how dull  
The heads of your admirers are,  
So that their bags<sup>2</sup> be full.

25 All this you freely may confess,  
Yet we ne'er disagree:

For did you love your pleasure less,  
You were no match for me.

30      Whilst I, my pleasure to pursue,  
            Whole nights am taking in  
The lusty juice of grapes, take you  
            The juice of lusty men.

## 1676 **Endnotes**

1691

- Note 1: Both sex and drinking involve “taking off” liquids into one’s body. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Different manuscript versions also have “purse” or “cods” here. “Cods,” like “bags,” could refer to moneybags or the scrotum. [Return to reference 2](#)

## **Notes**

- °: *fashionable gentleman* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *never complain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dull but fashionable youth* [Return to reference °](#)

## Song [Love a woman! You're an ass]<sup>1</sup>

Love a woman! You're an ass,  
'Tis a most insipid<sup>o</sup> passion,  
To choose out for happiness  
The idlest part of God's creation.

5 Let the porter and the groom,<sup>2</sup>  
Things designed for dirty slaves,  
Drudge in fair Aurelia's womb,  
To get supplies for age and graves.

10 Farewell woman, I intend  
Henceforth ev'ry night to sit  
With my lewd well-natured friend,  
Drinking, to engender<sup>o</sup> wit.

15 Then give me health, wealth, mirth, and wine,  
And if busy love entrenches,<sup>o</sup>  
There's a sweet soft page<sup>o</sup> of mine,  
Does the trick worth forty wenches.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: Repurposing the song form often used for love lyrics, Rochester refuses both the genre's traditional values and heterosexual relationships generally. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The servants who attend the door and care for the horses, imagined as doing the servile labor of heterosexual reproduction. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *stupid, uninteresting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *produce, generate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intrudes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servant boy*[Return to reference](#) °

## APHRA BEHN

### 1640?–1689

"A woman wit has often graced the stage," Dryden wrote in 1681. Soon after women actors first appeared in English public theaters, there was an even more striking debut by a woman writer who boldly signed her plays and talked back to her critics. In a dozen years, Aphra Behn turned out at least that many plays, discovering fresh dramatic possibilities in the new casts of women and men. She also drew attention as a warm and witty poet of love. When writing for the stage became less profitable, she turned to prose fiction, composing a pioneering epistolary novel, *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*, and diverse short tales—not to mention a raft of translations from the French, pindarics to her beloved Stuart rulers, compilations, prologues, complimentary verses, all the piecework and puffery that were the stock in trade of the Restoration town wit. She worked in haste and with flair for nearly two decades and more than held her own as a professional writer. She is one of the most versatile authors of her age—alive to new currents of thought and inventive in recasting fashionable forms.

Much of Behn's life remains a mystery. Although her books have been accompanied—and often all but buried—by volumes of rumor, hard facts are elusive. She was almost certainly from East Kent; she may well have been named Johnson. But she herself seems to have left no record of her date and place of birth, her family name and upbringing, or the identity of the shadowy Mr. Behn whom she

reportedly married. Her many references to nuns and convents, as well as praise for prominent Catholic lords (*Oroonoko* is dedicated to one), have prompted speculation that she may have been raised as a Catholic and educated in a convent abroad. Without doubt, she drew on a range of worldly experience that would be closed to women in the more genteel ages to come. The circumstantial detail of *Oroonoko* supports her claim that she was in the new sugar colony of Surinam, on the northeastern Atlantic coast of South America, early in 1664. Perhaps she exaggerated her social position to enhance her tale, but many particulars—from dialect words and the location of plantations to methods of selling and torturing enslaved people—can be authenticated. During the trade war that broke out in 1665, Behn says regretfully, the “vast and charming world” she knew in Surinam was seized from the British by the Dutch; that year she traveled to the Low Countries on a spying mission for King Charles II. The king could be lax about payment, however, and Behn had to petition desperately to escape debtor’s prison. In 1670 she brought out her first plays, “forced to write for bread,” she confessed, “and not ashamed to own it.”

In London, Behn flourished in the cosmopolitan world of the playhouse and the court. Dryden and other wits encouraged her; she mixed with actresses and managers and playwrights and exchanged verses with a lively literary set that she called her “cabal.” Surviving letters record a passionate, troubled attachment to a lawyer named John Hoyle, a man with libertine views and bisexual desires. She kept up with the most advanced thinking and joined public debates with pointed satire against the Whigs. But the festivity of the Restoration world was fading out in bitter party acrimony. In 1682 Behn was placed under arrest for “abusive reflections” on the king’s illegitimate son, the Whig Duke of Monmouth (Dryden’s “Absalom”). Her Royalist opinions and the immodesty of her public role made her a target; gleeful lampoons declared that she was aging and ill and once again poor. She responded by bringing out her works at a still faster rate, composing *Oroonoko*, her dedication claims, “in a few hours . . . for I never rested my pen a moment for thought.” In some



last works she recorded her hope that her writings would live: "I value fame as much as if I had been born a hero." When she died she was buried in Westminster Abbey.

"All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn," Virginia Woolf wrote, "for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds." Behn herself spoke her mind. She scorned hypocrisy and calculation in her society and commented freely on religion, science, and philosophy. Moreover, she spoke as a woman. Denied the classical education available to men, she dismissed "musty rules" and lessons and relished the immediate human appeal of popular forms. Her first play, *The Forced Marriage*, exposes the bondage of matches arranged for money and status, and many later works invoke the powerful natural force of love, whose energy breaks through conventions. In a range of genres, from simple pastoral songs to complex plots of intrigue, she candidly explores the sexual feelings of women, their schooling in disguise, their need to "love upon the honest square" (for this her work was later denounced as coarse and impure). *Oroonoko* represents another departure for Behn and prose fiction. It achieves something new both in its narrative form and in extending some of her favorite themes to an original subject: the destiny of a Black male hero on a world historical stage.

*Oroonoko* cannot be classified as fact or fiction, realism or romance. In the still unshaped field of prose narrative—where a "history" could mean any story, true or false—Behn combined the attractions of three older forms. First, she presents the work as a memoir, a personal account of what she has heard and seen. According to a friend, Behn had told this tale over and over; perhaps that explains the conversational ease with which she turns back and forth, interpreting faraway scenes for her readers at home. Second, *Oroonoko* is a travel narrative in three parts. It turns west to a new world often extolled as a paradise, then east to Africa and the amorous intrigues of a corrupt old-world court (popular reading fare), then finally west again with its hero across the infamous Middle Passage—over which millions of enslaved people would be

transported during the next century—to the conflicts of a raw colonial world. Exotic scenes fascinate Behn, but she wants even more to talk to people and learn about their ways of life. As in imaginary voyages, from Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* to *Gulliver's Travels* and *Rasselas*, encounters with foreign cultures sharply challenge Europeans to reexamine themselves. The uncorrupted Indigenous Americans and noble Africans portrayed by Behn live by a code of virtue, by principles of fidelity and honor, that "civilized" Christians often ignore or betray. Oroonoko embodies this code. Above all, the book is his biography. Courageous, high-minded, and great-hearted, he rivals the heroes of classical epics and Plutarch's *Lives* and is equally worthy of fame. Nor does he lack gentler virtues. Like the heroes of seventeenth-century heroic dramas and romances, he shines in the company of women and proves his nobility by his passionate and constant love for Imoinda, his ideal counterpart. Yet finally a contradiction dooms Oroonoko: he is at once prince and chattel, a "royal slave."

Behn handles her forms dynamically, drawing out their inner discords and tensions. In the biography, Oroonoko's deepest values are turned against him. His trust in friendship and scrupulous truth to his word expose him to the treachery of Europeans who calculate human worth on a yardstick of profit. A hero cannot survive in such a world. His self-respect demands action, even when he can find no clear path through the tangle of assurances and lies. Moreover, the colony too seems tangled in contradictions. Behn's travel narrative reveals a broken paradise where, in the absence of secure authority, the settlers descend into a series of unstable alliances, improvised power relations, and escalating suspicions. Here every term—friend and foe, tenderness and brutality, savagery and civilization—can suddenly turn into its opposite. And the author also seems caught between worlds. The cultivated Englishwoman who narrates and acts in this memoir thinks highly of her hero's code of honor and shares his contempt for the riffraff who plague him. Yet her own role is ambiguous: she lacks the power to save Oroonoko and might be

viewed as implicated in his downfall. Only as a writer can she take control, preserving the hero in her work.

The story of Oroonoko did not end with Behn. Compassion for the royal slave and outrage at his fate were enlisted in the long battle against the trade in enslaved people. Reprinted, translated, serialized, dramatized, and much imitated, *Oroonoko* helped teach a mass audience to feel for all victims of the brutal commerce in human beings. A hundred years later, the popular writer Hannah More testified to the widening influence of the story: "No individual griefs my bosom melt, / For millions feel what Oroonoko felt." Behn, a "woman wit," had this widespread influence—she wrote poems and plays, helped shape the emerging novel, and gave future generations a powerful character through which to understand the pain of being treated as something less than fully human.

# The Disappointment<sup>1</sup>

One day the amorous Lysander,  
By an impatient passion swayed,  
Surprised fair Cloris, that loved maid,  
Who could defend herself no longer.  
All things did with his love conspire;  
5 The gilded planet of the day,<sup>o</sup>  
In his gay chariot drawn by fire,  
Was now descending to the sea,  
And left no light to guide the world  
But what from Cloris' brighter eyes was hurled.  
10

In a lone thicket made for love,  
Silent as yielding maid's consent,  
She with a charming languishment,  
Permits his force, yet gently strove;  
Her hands his bosom softly meet,  
15 But not to put him back designed,  
Rather to draw 'em on inclined:  
Whilst he lay trembling at her feet,  
Resistance 'tis in vain to show:  
She wants<sup>o</sup> the power to say—*Ah! what d'ye do?*  
20

Her bright eyes sweet and yet severe,  
Where love and shame confusedly strive,  
Fresh vigor to Lysander give;  
And breathing faintly in his ear,  
She cried—*Cease, cease—your vain desire,*  
25 *Or I'll call out—what would you do?*  
*My dearer honor even to you*  
*I cannot, must not give—Retire,*  
*Or take this life, whose chiefest part*

30 *I gave you with the conquest of my heart.*

But he as much unused to fear,  
As he was capable of love,  
The blessed minutes to improve  
Kisses her mouth, her neck, her hair;  
Each touch her new desire alarms;  
35 His burning, trembling hand he pressed  
Upon her swelling snowy breast,  
While she lay panting in his arms.  
All her unguarded beauties lie  
The spoils and trophies of the enemy.

40 And now without respect or fear  
He seeks the object of his vows  
(His love no modesty allows)  
By swift degrees advancing—where  
His daring hand that altar seized,  
45 Where gods of love do sacrifice:  
That awful throne, that paradise  
Where rage is calmed, and anger pleased;  
That fountain where delight still flows,  
And gives the universal world repose.

50 Her balmy lips encountering his,  
Their bodies, as their souls, are joined;  
Where both in transports unconfined  
Extend themselves upon the moss.  
Cloris half dead and breathless lay;  
55 Her soft eyes cast a humid light  
Such as divides the day and night;  
Or falling stars, whose fires decay:  
And now no signs of life she shows,  
But what in short-breathed sighs returns and goes.

60 He saw how at her length she lay;

He saw her rising bosom bare;  
Her loose thin robes, through which appear  
A shape designed for love and play;  
Abandoned by her pride and shame  
65 She does her softest joys dispense,  
Offering her virgin innocence  
A victim to love's sacred flame;  
While the o'er-ravished shepherd lies  
Unable to perform the sacrifice.  
70

Ready to taste a thousand joys,  
The too transported hapless swain  
Found the vast pleasure turned to pain;  
Pleasure which too much love destroys:  
75 The willing garments by he laid,<sup>2</sup>  
And heaven all opened to his view.  
Mad to possess, himself he threw  
On the defenseless lovely maid.  
But oh what envying god conspires  
To snatch his power, yet leave him the desire!  
80

Nature's support (without whose aid  
She can no human being give)  
Itself now wants the art<sup>3</sup> to live;  
Faintness its slackened nerves invade:  
85 In vain th'enraged youth essayed  
To call its fleeting vigor back;  
No motion 'twill from motion take;  
Excess of love his love betrayed:  
In vain he toils, in vain commands:  
90 The insensible<sup>4</sup> fell weeping in his hand.

In this so amorous cruel strife,  
Where love and fate were too severe,  
The poor Lysander in despair  
Renounced his reason with his life:

95 Now all the brisk and active fire  
That should the nobler part inflame  
Served to increase his rage and shame,  
And left no spark for new desire:  
Not all her naked charms could move  
Or calm that rage that had debauched his love.

100

Cloris returning from the trance  
Which love and soft desire had bred,  
Her timorous hand she gently laid  
(Or guided by design or chance)  
Upon that fabulous Priapus,<sup>5</sup>  
105 That potent god, as poets feign:  
But never did young shepherdess,  
Gathering the fern upon the plain,  
More nimbly draw her fingers back,  
Finding beneath the verdant leaves a snake,

110

Than Cloris her fair hand withdrew,  
Finding that god of her desires  
Disarmed of all his awful fires,  
And cold as flowers bathed in the morning dew.  
Who can the nymph's confusion guess?  
115 The blood forsook the hinder place,  
And strewed with blushes all her face,  
Which both disdain and shame expressed:  
And from Lysander's arms she fled,  
Leaving him fainting on the gloomy bed.

120

Like lightning through the grove she hies,  
Or Daphne from the Delphic god;<sup>6</sup>  
No print upon the grassy road  
She leaves, to instruct pursuing eyes.  
The wind that wantoned in her hair  
125 And with her ruffled garments played,  
Discovered in the flying maid

All that the gods e'er made, if fair.  
 So Venus, when her love<sup>7</sup> was slain,  
 With fear and haste flew o'er the fatal plain.  
 130  
 The nymph's resentments none but I  
 Can well imagine or condole:  
 But none can guess Lysander's soul,  
 But those who swayed his destiny.  
 135 His silent griefs swell up to storms,  
 And not one god his fury spares;  
 He cursed his birth, his fate, his stars;  
 But more the shepherdess's charms,  
 Whose soft bewitching influence  
 140 Had damned him to the hell of impotence.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: This variation on the "imperfect enjoyment" genre compares with Rochester's (p. 134); it first appeared in a collection of his poems. But Behn gives the theme of impotence her own twist. Freely translating a French poem, Cantenac's "The Lost Chance Recovered," she cuts the conclusion, in which the French lover regained his potency, and she highlights the woman's feelings as well as the man's.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He took off her compliant clothes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lacks the capacity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Devoid of feeling and too small to be noticed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Phallus. The ancient god Priapus is always pictured with an outstanding erection.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Apollo, from whom the Greek nymph Daphne fled until she turned into a laurel tree.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Adonis, who was killed by a boar.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Blaming the woman for an imperfect enjoyment is typical of the genre.[Return to reference 8](#)



# Notes

- °: *the sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lacks*[Return to reference °](#)

# To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagined More than Woman. By Mrs.

B.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Fair lovely maid, or if that title be  
Too weak, too feminine for nobler thee,  
Permit a name that more approaches truth:  
And let me call thee lovely charming youth<sup>[2](#)</sup>  
This last will justify my soft complaint,  
5 While that<sup>[3](#)</sup> may serve to lessen my constraint;  
And without blushes I the youth pursue,  
When so much beauteous woman is in view.  
Against thy charms we struggle but in vain  
With thy deluding form thou giv'st us pain,  
10 While the bright nymph betrays us to the swain.<sup>[4](#)</sup>  
In pity to our sex sure thou wert sent,  
That we might love, and yet be innocent:  
For sure no crime with thee we can commit;  
Or if we should—thy form excuses it.  
15 For who that gathers fairest flowers believes  
A snake lies hid beneath the fragrant leaves.

Thou beauteous wonder of a different kind,  
Soft Cloris with the dear Alexis<sup>[5](#)</sup> joined;  
When e'er the manly part of thee would plead  
20 Thou tempts us with the image of the maid,  
While we the noblest passions do extend  
The love to Hermes, Aphrodite<sup>[6](#)</sup> the friend.

- Note 1: This poem first appeared as the last in a 1688 miscellany of various authors' poems (many of them addressed to Behn, using her nickname Astrea) appended by Behn to her translation from the French of a longer narrative work, *Lycidus, or the Lover in Fashion*, by Paul Tallemant.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Youth" typically referred to a male person between boyhood and maturity.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the title "fair lovely maid."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Swain" and "nymph" used in their senses common in pastoral poetry of male and female lovers, respectively.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Cloris" and "Alexis," conventional female and male names, respectively, in pastoral poetry.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Aphrodite and Hermes were Greek gods of female and male sexuality, respectively (among other roles). Their son, Hermaphroditus, was assaulted by the nymph Salmacis, who prayed to be united with him; thereafter they became a single being with male and female attributes.[Return to reference 6](#)

# Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave<sup>1</sup>

From *Epistle Dedicatory*

*To the Right Honorable the Lord Maitland*<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

My lord, the obligations I have to some of the great men of your nation, particularly to your lordship, gives me an ambition of making my acknowledgements by all the opportunities I can; and such humble fruits as my industry produces I lay at your lordship's feet. This is a true story, of a man gallant enough to merit your protection, and, had he always been so fortunate, he had not made so inglorious an end. The Royal Slave I had the honor to know in my travels to the other world; and though I had none above me in that country, yet I wanted power to preserve this great man.<sup>3</sup> If there be anything that seems romantic,<sup>4</sup> I beseech your lordship to consider these countries do, in all things, so far differ from ours that they produce unconceivable wonders; at least, they appear so to us, because new and strange. What I have mentioned I have taken care should be truth, let the critical reader judge as he pleases. 'Twill be no commendation to the book to assure your lordship I writ it in a few hours, though it may serve to excuse some of its faults of connection, for I never rested my pen a moment for thought: 'Tis purely the merit of my slave<sup>5</sup> that must render it worthy of the honor it begs; and the author of that of subscribing herself,

My lord  
Your Lordship's most obliged and obedient Servant  
A. Behn.

I do not pretend, in giving you the history of this royal slave, to entertain my reader with the adventures of a feigned hero, whose life and fortunes fancy may manage at the poet's pleasure; nor in relating the truth, design to adorn it with any accidents but such as arrived in earnest to him. And it shall come simply into the world, recommended by its own proper merits and natural intrigues, there being enough of reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the addition of invention.

I was myself an eyewitness to a great part of what you will find here set down, and what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself, who gave us the whole transactions of his youth; and though I shall omit for brevity's sake a thousand little accidents of his life, which, however pleasant to us, where history was scarce and adventures very rare, yet might prove tedious and heavy to my reader, in a world where he finds diversions for every minute, new and strange. But we who were perfectly charmed with the character of this great man were curious to gather every circumstance of his life.

The scene of the last part of his adventures lies in a colony in America called Surinam,<sup>6</sup> in the West Indies.

But before I give you the story of this gallant slave, 'tis fit I tell you the manner of bringing them to these new colonies, for those they make use of there are not natives of the place; for those we live with in perfect amity, without daring to command 'em, but on the contrary caress 'em with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world, trading with 'em for their fish, venison, buffaloes, skins, and little rarities; as marmosets, a sort of monkey as big as a rat or weasel but of a marvelous and delicate shape, and has face and hands like a human creature, and *cousheries*,<sup>7</sup> a little beast in the form and fashion of a lion, as big as a kitten, but so exactly made in all parts like that noble beast, that it is it in miniature. Then for little parakeetoes, great parrots, macaws, and a thousand other birds and beasts of wonderful and surprising forms, shapes, and colors. For skins of prodigious snakes, of which there are some threescore yards in length, as is the skin of one that may be seen at his Majesty's

antiquaries'; where are also some rare flies<sup>8</sup> of amazing forms and colors, presented to 'em by myself, some as big as my fist, some less, and all of various excellencies, such as art cannot imitate. Then we trade for feathers, which they order into all shapes, make themselves little short habits of 'em, and glorious wreaths for their heads, necks, arms and legs, whose tinctures are unconceivable. I had a set of these presented to me, and I gave 'em to the King's theater, and it was the dress of the Indian Queen,<sup>9</sup> infinitely admired by persons of quality, and were unimitable. Besides these, a thousand little knacks and rarities in nature, and some of art, as their baskets, weapons, aprons, et cetera. We dealt with 'em with beads of all colors, knives, axes, pins and needles, which they used only as tools to drill holes with in their ears, noses, and lips, where they hang a great many little things, as long beads, bits of tin, brass, or silver beat thin, and any shining trinket. The beads they weave into aprons about a quarter of an ell long, and of the same breadth,<sup>1</sup> working them very prettily in flowers of several colors of beads; which apron they wear just before 'em, as Adam and Eve did the fig leaves, the men wearing a long stripe of linen which they deal with us for. They thread these beads also on long cotton threads and make girdles to tie their aprons to, which come twenty times or more about the waist, and then cross, like a shoulder belt, both ways, and round their necks, arms, and legs. This adornment, with their long black hair, and the face painted in little specks or flowers here and there, makes 'em a wonderful figure to behold.

Some of the beauties which indeed are finely shaped, as almost all are, and who have pretty features, are very charming and novel; for they have all that is called beauty, except the color, which is a reddish yellow; or after a new oiling, which they often use to themselves, they are of the color of a new brick, but smooth, soft, and sleek. They are extreme<sup>2</sup> modest and bashful, very shy and nice of being touched. And though they are all thus naked, if one lives forever among 'em there is not to be seen an indecent action or glance; and being continually used to see one another so unadorned, so like our first parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no

wishes; there being nothing to heighten curiosity, but all you can see you see at once, and every moment see, and where there is no novelty there can be no curiosity. Not but I have seen a handsome young Indian dying for love of a very beautiful young Indian maid; but all his courtship was to fold his arms, pursue her with his eyes, and sighs were all his language; while she, as if no such lover were present, or rather, as if she desired none such, carefully guarded her eyes from beholding him, and never approached him but she looked down with all the blushing modesty I have seen in the most severe and cautious of our world. And these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin. And 'tis most evident and plain that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive, and virtuous mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world than all the inventions of man. Religion would here but destroy that tranquillity they possess by ignorance, and laws would but teach 'em to know offense, of which now they have no notion. They once made mourning and fasting for the death of the English governor, who had given his hand to come on such a day to 'em and neither came nor sent, believing when once a man's word was passed, nothing but death could or should prevent his keeping it. And when they saw he was not dead, they asked him what name they had for a man who promised a thing he did not do. The governor told them, such a man was a liar, which was a word of infamy to a gentleman. Then one of 'em replied, "Governor, you are a liar, and guilty of that infamy." They have a native justice which knows no fraud, and they understand no vice or cunning, but when they are taught by the white men. They have plurality of wives, which, when they grow old, they serve those that succeed 'em, who are young, but with a servitude easy and respected; and unless they take slaves in war, they have no other attendants.

Those on that continent where I was had no king, but the oldest war captain was obeyed with great resignation. A war captain is a man who has led them on to battle with conduct<sup>3</sup> and success, of

whom I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter, and of some other of their customs and manners, as they fall in my way.

With these people, as I said, we live in perfect tranquillity and good understanding, as it behooves us to do, they knowing all the places where to seek the best food of the country and the means of getting it, and for very small and unvaluable trifles, supply us with what 'tis impossible for us to get; for they do not only in the wood and over the savannas, in hunting, supply the parts of hounds, by swiftly scouring through those almost impassable places, and by the mere activity of their feet run down the nimblest deer and other eatable beasts; but in the water one would think they were gods of the rivers, or fellow citizens of the deep, so rare an art they have in swimming, diving, and almost living in water, by which they command the less swift inhabitants of the floods. And then for shooting, what they cannot take, or reach with their hands, they do with arrows, and have so admirable an aim that they will split almost a hair; and at any distance that an arrow can reach, they will shoot down oranges and other fruit, and only touch the stalk with the dart's point, that they may not hurt the fruit. So that they being, on all occasions, very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em as friends, and not to treat 'em as slaves; nor dare we do other, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent.

Those then whom we make use of to work in our plantations of sugar are Negroes, black slaves altogether, which are transported thither in this manner. Those who want slaves make a bargain with a master or captain of a ship and contract to pay him so much apiece, a matter of twenty pound a head for as many as he agrees for, and to pay for 'em when they shall be delivered on such a plantation. So that when there arrives a ship laden with slaves, they who have so contracted go aboard and receive their number by lot; and perhaps in one lot that may be for ten, there may happen to be three or four men, the rest women and children. Or be there more or less of either sex, you are obliged to be contented with your lot.

Coramantien,<sup>4</sup> a country of blacks so called, was one of those places in which they found the most advantageous trading for these



slaves, and thither most of our great traders in that merchandise trafficked; for that nation is very warlike and brave, and having a continual campaign, being always in hostility with one neighboring prince or other, they had the fortune to take a great many captives; for all they took in battle were sold as slaves, at least those common men who could not ransom themselves. Of these slaves so taken, the general only has all the profit; and of these generals, our captains and masters of ships buy all their freights.

The King of Coramantien was himself a man of a hundred and odd years old, and had no son, though he had many beautiful black wives; for most certainly there are beauties that can charm of that color. In his younger years he had had many gallant men to his sons, thirteen of which died in battle, conquering when they fell; and he had only left him for his successor one grandchild, son to one of these dead victors, who, as soon as he could bear a bow in his hand and a quiver at his back, was sent into the field, to be trained up by one of the oldest generals to war; where, from his natural inclination to arms and the occasions given him, with the good conduct of the old general, he became, at the age of seventeen, one of the most expert captains and bravest soldiers that ever saw the field of Mars. So that he was adored as the wonder of all that world, and the darling of the soldiers. Besides, he was adorned with a native beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy race that he struck an awe and reverence even in those that knew not his quality; as he did in me, who beheld him with surprise and wonder, when afterwards he arrived in our world.

He had scarce arrived at his seventeenth year, when fighting by his side, the general was killed with an arrow in his eye, which the Prince Oroonoko (for so was this gallant Moor<sup>5</sup> called) very narrowly avoided; nor had he, if the general, who saw the arrow shot, and perceiving it aimed at the Prince, had not bowed his head between, on purpose to receive it in his own body rather than it should touch that of the Prince, and so saved him.

'Twas then, afflicted as Oroonoko was, that he was proclaimed general in the old man's place; and then it was, at the finishing of

that war, which had continued for two years, that the Prince came to court, where he had hardly been a month together from the time of his fifth year to that of seventeen; and 'twas amazing to imagine where it was he learned so much humanity; or to give his accomplishments a juster name, where 'twas he got that real greatness of soul, those refined notions of true honor, that absolute generosity, and that softness that was capable of the highest passions of love and gallantry, whose objects were almost continually fighting men, or those mangled or dead; who heard no sounds but those of war and groans. Some part of it we may attribute to the care of a Frenchman of wit and learning, who, finding it turn to very good account to be a sort of royal tutor to this young black, and perceiving him very ready, apt, and quick of apprehension, took a great pleasure to teach him morals, language, and science, and was for it extremely beloved and valued by him. Another reason was, he loved, when he came from war, to see all the English gentlemen that traded thither, and did not only learn their language but that of the Spaniards also, with whom he traded afterwards for slaves.

I have often seen and conversed with this great man, and been a witness to many of his mighty actions, and do assure my reader the most illustrious courts could not have produced a braver man, both for greatness of courage and mind, a judgment more solid, a wit more quick, and a conversation more sweet and diverting. He knew almost as much as if he had read much. He had heard of and admired the Romans; he had heard of the late civil wars in England, and the deplorable death of our great monarch,<sup>6</sup> and would discourse of it with all the sense and abhorrence of the injustice imaginable. He had an extreme good and graceful mien, and all the civility of a well-bred great man. He had nothing of barbarity in his nature, but in all points addressed himself as if his education had been in some European court.

This great and just character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme curiosity to see him, especially when I knew he spoke French and English, and that I could talk with him. But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprised when I saw him as if I had

heard nothing of him, so beyond all report I found him. He came into the room and addressed himself to me, and some other women, with the best grace in the world. He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied. The most famous statuary<sup>7</sup> could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown, rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing, the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat; his mouth the finest shaped that could be seen, far from those great turned lips which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so noble and exactly formed that, bating<sup>8</sup> his color, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. There was no one grace wanting that bears the standard of true beauty. His hair came down to his shoulders by the aids of art; which was by pulling it out with a quill and keeping it combed, of which he took particular care. Nor did the perfections of his mind come short of those of his person, for his discourse was admirable upon almost any subject; and whoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom, and would have confessed that Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a soul, as politic<sup>9</sup> maxims, and was as sensible of power, as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts.

This prince, such as I have described him, whose soul and body were so admirably adorned, was (while yet he was in the court of his grandfather), as I said, as capable of love as 'twas possible for a brave and gallant man to be; and in saying that, I have named the highest degree of love, for sure, great souls are most capable of that passion.

I have already said, the old general was killed by the shot of an arrow, by the side of this prince, in battle, and that Oroonoko was made general. This old dead hero had one only daughter left of his

race, a beauty that, to describe her truly, one need say only she was female to the noble male, the beautiful black Venus to our young Mars, as charming in her person as he, and of delicate virtues. I have seen an hundred white men sighing after her, and making a thousand vows at her feet, all vain and unsuccessful. And she was, indeed, too great for any but a prince of her own nation to adore.

Oroonoko coming from the wars (which were now ended), after he had made his court to his grandfather, he thought in honor he ought to make a visit to Imoinda, the daughter of his foster-father, the dead general; and to make some excuses to her, because his preservation was the occasion of her father's death; and to present her with those slaves that had been taken in this last battle, as the trophies of her father's victories. When he came, attended by all the young soldiers of any merit, he was infinitely surprised at the beauty of this fair queen of night, whose face and person was so exceeding all he had ever beheld; that lovely modesty with which she received him; that softness in her look, and sighs, upon the melancholy occasion of this honor that was done by so great a man as Oroonoko, and a prince of whom she had heard such admirable things: the awfulness<sup>1</sup> wherewith she received him, and the sweetness of her words and behavior while he stayed, gained a perfect conquest over his fierce heart, and made him feel the victor could be subdued. So that having made his first compliments, and presented her a hundred and fifty slaves in fetters, he told her with his eyes that he was not insensible of her charms; while Imoinda, who wished for nothing more than so glorious a conquest, was pleased to believe she understood that silent language of newborn love, and from that moment put on all her additions to beauty.

The Prince returned to court with quite another humor than before; and though he did not speak much of the fair Imoinda, he had the pleasure to hear all his followers speak of nothing but the charms of that maid, insomuch that, even in the presence of the old king, they were extolling her and heightening, if possible, the beauties they had found in her. So that nothing else was talked of,

no other sound was heard in every corner where there were whisperers, but "Imoinda! Imoinda!"

'Twill be imagined Oroonoko stayed not long before he made his second visit, nor, considering his quality, not much longer before he told her he adored her. I have often heard him say that he admired by what strange inspiration he came to talk things so soft and so passionate, who never knew love, nor was used to the conversation<sup>2</sup> of women; but (to use his own words) he said, most happily some new and till then unknown power instructed his heart and tongue in the language of love, and at the same time, in favor of him, inspired Imoinda with a sense of his passion. She was touched with what he said, and returned it all in such answers as went to his very heart, with a pleasure unknown before. Nor did he use those obligations<sup>3</sup> ill that love had done him, but turned all his happy moments to the best advantage; and as he knew no vice, his flame aimed at nothing but honor, if such a distinction may be made in love; and especially in that country, where men take to themselves as many as they can maintain, and where the only crime and sin with woman is to turn her off, to abandon her to want, shame, and misery. Such ill morals are only practiced in Christian countries, where they prefer the bare name of religion, and, without virtue or morality, think that's sufficient. But Oroonoko was none of those professors, but as he had right notions of honor, so he made her such propositions as were not only and barely such; but contrary to the custom of his country, he made her vows she should be the only woman he would possess while he lived; that no age or wrinkles should incline him to change, for her soul would be always fine and always young, and he should have an eternal idea in his mind of the charms she now bore, and should look into his heart for that idea when he could find it no longer in her face.

After a thousand assurances of his lasting flame, and her eternal empire over him, she condescended to receive him for her husband, or rather, received him as the greatest honor the gods could do her.

There is a certain ceremony in these cases to be observed, which I forgot to ask him how performed; but 'twas concluded on both

sides that, in obedience to him, the grandfather was to be first made acquainted with the design, for they pay a most absolute resignation to the monarch, especially when he is a parent also.

On the other side, the old king, who had many wives and many concubines, wanted not court flatterers to insinuate in his heart a thousand tender thoughts for this young beauty, and who represented her to his fancy as the most charming he had ever possessed in all the long race of his numerous years. At this character his old heart, like an extinguished brand, most apt to take fire, felt new sparks of love and began to kindle; and now grown to his second childhood, longed with impatience to behold this gay thing, with whom, alas! he could but innocently play. But how he should be confirmed she was this wonder, before he used his power to call her to court (where maidens never came, unless for the King's private use), he was next to consider; and while he was so doing, he had intelligence brought him that Imoinda was most certainly mistress to the Prince Oroonoko. This gave him some chagrin; however, it gave him also an opportunity, one day when the Prince was a-hunting, to wait on a man of quality, as his slave and attendant, who should go and make a present to Imoinda as from the Prince; he should then, unknown, see this fair maid, and have an opportunity to hear what message she would return the Prince for his present, and from thence gather the state of her heart and degree of her inclination. This was put in execution, and the old monarch saw, and burned. He found her all he had heard, and would not delay his happiness, but found he should have some obstacle to overcome her heart; for she expressed her sense of the present the Prince had sent her in terms so sweet, so soft and pretty, with an air of love and joy that could not be dissembled, insomuch that 'twas past doubt whether she loved Oroonoko entirely. This gave the old king some affliction, but he salved it with this, that the obedience the people pay their king was not at all inferior to what they paid their gods; and what love would not oblige Imoinda to do, duty would compel her to.

He was therefore no sooner got to his apartment but he sent the royal veil to Imoinda, that is, the ceremony of invitation: he sends

the lady he has a mind to honor with his bed a veil, with which she is covered, and secured for the King's use; and 'tis death to disobey, besides held a most impious disobedience.

'Tis not to be imagined the surprise and grief that seized this lovely maid at this news and sight. However, as delays in these cases are dangerous and pleading worse than treason, trembling, and almost fainting, she was obliged to suffer herself to be covered and led away.

They brought her thus to court; and the King, who had caused a very rich bath to be prepared, was led into it, where he sat under a canopy, in state, to receive this longed-for virgin; whom he having commanded should be brought to him, they (after disrobing her) led her to the bath, and making fast the doors, left her to descend. The King, without more courtship, bade her throw off her mantle and come to his arms. But Imoinda, all in tears, threw herself on the marble, on the brink of the bath, and besought him to hear her. She told him, as she was a maid, how proud of the divine glory she should have been, of having it in her power to oblige her king; but as by the laws he could not, and from his royal goodness would not, take from any man his wedded wife, so she believed she should be the occasion of making him commit a great sin, if she did not reveal her state and condition, and tell him she was another's, and could not be so happy to be his.

The King, enraged at this delay, hastily demanded the name of the bold man that had married a woman of her degree without his consent. Imoinda, seeing his eyes fierce and his hands tremble (whether with age or anger, I know not, but she fancied the last), almost repented she had said so much, for now she feared the storm would fall on the Prince. She therefore said a thousand things to appease the raging of his flame, and to prepare him to hear who it was with calmness; but before she spoke, he imagined who she meant, but would not seem to do so, but commanded her to lay aside her mantle and suffer herself to receive his caresses; or by his gods, he swore that happy man whom she was going to name should die, though it were even Oroonoko himself. "Therefore," said

he, "deny this marriage, and swear thyself a maid." "That," replied Imoinda, "by all our powers I do, for I am not yet known to my husband." "'Tis enough," said the King; "'tis enough to satisfy both my conscience and my heart." And rising from his seat, he went and led her into the bath, it being in vain for her to resist.

In this time the Prince, who was returned from hunting, went to visit his Imoinda, but found her gone; and not only so, but heard she had received the royal veil. This raised him to a storm, and in his madness they had much ado to save him from laying violent hands on himself. Force first prevailed, and then reason. They urged all to him that might oppose his rage, but nothing weighed so greatly with him as the King's old age, incapable of injuring him with Imoinda. He would give way to that hope, because it pleased him most, and flattered best his heart. Yet this served not altogether to make him cease his different passions, which sometimes raged within him, and sometimes softened into showers. 'Twas not enough to appease him, to tell him his grandfather was old and could not that way injure him, while he retained that awful duty which the young men are used there to pay to their grave relations. He could not be convinced he had no cause to sigh and mourn for the loss of a mistress he could not with all his strength and courage retrieve. And he would often cry, "O my friends! Were she in walled cities or confined from me in fortifications of the greatest strength, did enchantments or monsters detain her from me, I would venture through any hazard to free her. But here, in the arms of a feeble old man, my youth, my violent love, my trade in arms, and all my vast desire of glory avail me nothing. Imoinda is as irrecoverably lost to me as if she were snatched by the cold arms of Death. Oh! she is never to be retrieved. If I would wait tedious years, till fate should bow the old king to his grave, even that would not leave me Imoinda free; but still that custom that makes it so vile a crime for a son to marry his father's wives or mistresses would hinder my happiness, unless I would either ignobly set an ill precedent to my successors, or abandon my country and fly with her to some unknown world, who never heard our story."

But it was objected to him that his case was not the same; for Imoinda being his lawful wife, by solemn contract, 'twas he was the



injured man and might if he so pleased take Imoinda back, the breach of the law being on his grandfather's side; and that if he could circumvent him and redeem her from the Otan, which is the palace of the King's women, a sort of seraglio, it was both just and lawful for him so to do.

This reasoning had some force upon him, and he should have been entirely comforted, but for the thought that she was possessed by his grandfather. However, he loved so well that he was resolved to believe what most favored his hope, and to endeavor to learn from Imoinda's own mouth what only she could satisfy him in, whether she was robbed of that blessing which was only due to his faith and love. But as it was very hard to get a sight of the women (for no men ever entered into the Otan but when the King went to entertain himself with some one of his wives or mistresses, and 'twas death at any other time for any other to go in), so he knew not how to contrive to get a sight of her.

While Oroonoko felt all the agonies of love, and suffered under a torment the most painful in the world, the old king was not exempted from his share of affliction. He was troubled for having been forced by an irresistible passion to rob his son<sup>4</sup> of a treasure he knew could not but be extremely dear to him, since she was the most beautiful that ever had been seen, and had besides all the sweetness and innocence of youth and modesty, with a charm of wit surpassing all. He found that, however she was forced to expose her lovely person to his withered arms, she could only sigh and weep there, and think of Oroonoko; and oftentimes could not forbear speaking of him, though her life were, by custom, forfeited by owning her passion. But she spoke not of a lover only, but of a prince dear to him to whom she spoke, and of the praises of a man who, till now, filled the old man's soul with joy at every recital of his bravery, or even his name. And 'twas this dotage on our young hero that gave Imoinda a thousand privileges to speak of him without offending, and this condescension in the old king that made her take the satisfaction of speaking of him so very often.

Besides, he many times inquired how the Prince bore himself; and those of whom he asked, being entirely slaves to the merits and virtues of the Prince, still answered what they thought conduced best to his service; which was to make the old king fancy that the Prince had no more interest in Imoinda, and had resigned her willingly to the pleasure of the King; that he diverted himself with his mathematicians, his fortifications, his officers, and his hunting.

This pleased the old lover, who failed not to report these things again to Imoinda, that she might, by the example of her young lover, withdraw her heart, and rest better contented in his arms. But however she was forced to receive this unwelcome news, in all appearance with unconcern and content, her heart was bursting within, and she was only happy when she could get alone, to vent her griefs and moans with sighs and tears.

What reports of the Prince's conduct were made to the King, he thought good to justify as far as possibly he could by his actions, and when he appeared in the presence of the King, he showed a face not at all betraying his heart. So that in a little time, the old man being entirely convinced that he was no longer a lover of Imoinda, he carried him with him in his train to the Otan, often to banquet with his mistress. But as soon as he entered, one day, into the apartment of Imoinda with the King, at the first glance from her eyes, notwithstanding all his determined resolution, he was ready to sink in the place where he stood, and had certainly done so but for the support of Aboan, a young man who was next to him; which, with his change of countenance, had betrayed him, had the King chanced to look that way. And I have observed, 'tis a very great error, in those who laugh when one says a Negro can change color, for I have seen 'em as frequently blush, and look pale, and that as visibly as ever I saw in the most beautiful white. And 'tis certain that both these changes were evident, this day, in both these lovers. And Imoinda, who saw with some joy the change in the Prince's face, and found it in her own, strove to divert the King from beholding either by a forced caress, with which she met him, which was a new wound in the heart of the poor dying Prince. But as soon as the King was busied in looking on some fine thing of Imoinda's making, she had

time to tell the Prince with her angry but love-darting eyes that she resented his coldness, and bemoaned her own miserable captivity. Nor were his eyes silent, but answered hers again, as much as eyes could do, instructed by the most tender and most passionate heart that ever loved. And they spoke so well and so effectually, as Imoinda no longer doubted but she was the only delight and the darling of that soul she found pleading in 'em its right of love, which none was more willing to resign than she. And 'twas this powerful language alone that in an instant conveyed all the thoughts of their souls to each other, that<sup>5</sup> they both found there wanted but opportunity to make them both entirely happy. But when he saw another door opened by Onahal, a former old wife of the King's who now had charge of Imoinda, and saw the prospect of a bed of state made ready with sweets and flowers for the dalliance of the King, who immediately led the trembling victim from his sight into that prepared repose, what rage, what wild frenzies seized his heart! which forcing to keep within bounds, and to suffer without noise, it became the more insupportable, and rent his soul with ten thousand pains. He was forced to retire to vent his groans, where he fell down on a carpet and lay struggling a long time, and only breathing now and then, "—O Imoinda!"

When Onahal had finished her necessary affair within, shutting the door, she came forth to wait till the King called; and hearing someone sighing in the other room, she passed on, and found the Prince in that deplorable condition, which she thought needed her aid. She gave him cordials, but all in vain, till finding the nature of his disease by his sighs and naming Imoinda. She told him, he had not so much cause as he imagined to afflict himself, for if he knew the King so well as she did, he would not lose a moment in jealousy, and that she was confident that Imoinda bore, at this minute, part in his affliction. Aboan was of the same opinion, and both together persuaded him to reassume his courage; and all sitting down on the carpet, the Prince said so many obliging things to Onahal that he half persuaded her to be of his party. And she promised him she would

thus far comply with his just desires, that she would let Imoinda know how faithful he was, what he suffered, and what he said.

This discourse lasted till the King called, which gave Oroonoko a certain satisfaction, and with the hope Onahal had made him conceive, he assumed a look as gay as 'twas possible a man in his circumstances could do; and presently after, he was called in with the rest who waited without. The King commanded music to be brought, and several of his young wives and mistresses came all together by his command to dance before him; where Imoinda performed her part with an air and grace so passing all the rest as her beauty was above 'em, and received the present ordained as a prize. The Prince was every moment more charmed with the new beauties and graces he beheld in this fair one. And while he gazed, and she danced, Onahal was retired to a window with Aboan.

This Onahal, as I said, was one of the cast mistresses of the old king; and 'twas these (now past their beauty) that were made guardians or governants<sup>6</sup> to the new and the young ones, and whose business it was to teach them all those wanton arts of love with which they prevailed and charmed heretofore in their turn; and who now treated the triumphing happy ones with all the severity, as to liberty and freedom, that was possible, in revenge of those honors they rob them of; envying them those satisfactions, those gallantries and presents, that were once made to themselves, while youth and beauty lasted, and which they now saw pass regardless by, and paid only to the bloomings. And certainly nothing is more afflicting to a decayed beauty than to behold in itself declining charms that were once adored, and to find those caresses paid to new beauties to which once she laid a claim; to hear 'em whisper as she passes by, "That once was a delicate woman." These abandoned ladies therefore endeavor to revenge all the despites<sup>7</sup> and decays of time on these flourishing happy ones. And 'twas this severity that gave Oroonoko a thousand fears he should never prevail with Onahal to see Imoinda. But, as I said, she was now retired to a window with Aboan.

This young man was not only one of the best quality,<sup>8</sup> but a man extremely well made and beautiful; and coming often to attend the King to the Otan, he had subdued the heart of the antiquated Onahal, which had not forgot how pleasant it was to be in love. And though she had some decays in her face, she had none in her sense and wit; she was there agreeable still, even to Aboan's youth, so that he took pleasure in entertaining her with discourses of love. He knew also that to make his court to these she-favorites was the way to be great, these being the persons that do all affairs and business at court. He had also observed that she had given him glances more tender and inviting than she had done to others of his quality. And now, when he saw that her favor could so absolutely oblige the Prince, he failed not to sigh in her ear and to look with eyes all soft upon her, and give her hope that she had made some impressions on his heart. He found her pleased at this, and making a thousand advances to him; but the ceremony ending and the King departing broke up the company for that day, and his conversation.

Aboan failed not that night to tell the Prince of his success, and how advantageous the service of Onahal might be to his amour with Imoinda. The Prince was overjoyed with this good news and besought him, if it were possible, to caress her so as to engage her entirely, which he could not fail to do, if he complied with her desires. "For then," said the Prince, "her life lying at your mercy, she must grant you the request you make in my behalf." Aboan understood him, and assured him he would make love so effectually that he would defy the most expert mistress of the art to find out whether he dissembled it or had it really. And 'twas with impatience they waited the next opportunity of going to the Otan.

The wars came on, the time of taking the field approached, and 'twas impossible for the Prince to delay his going at the head of his army to encounter the enemy. So that every day seemed a tedious year till he saw his Imoinda, for he believed he could not live if he were forced away without being so happy. 'Twas with impatience, therefore, that he expected the next visit the King would make, and according to his wish, it was not long.

The parley of the eyes of these two lovers had not passed so secretly but an old jealous lover could spy it; or rather, he wanted not flatterers who told him they observed it. So that the Prince was hastened to the camp, and this was the last visit he found he should make to the Otan; he therefore urged Aboan to make the best of this last effort, and to explain himself so to Onahal that she, deferring her enjoyment of her young lover no longer, might make way for the Prince to speak to Imoinda.

The whole affair being agreed on between the Prince and Aboan, they attended the King, as the custom was, to the Otan, where, while the whole company was taken up in beholding the dancing and antic postures the women-royal made to divert the King, Onahal singled out Aboan, whom she found most pliable to her wish. When she had him where she believed she could not be heard, she sighed to him, and softly cried, "Ah, Aboan! When will you be sensible of my passion? I confess it with my mouth, because I would not give my eyes the lie; and you have but too much already perceived they have confessed my flame. Nor would I have you believe that because I am the abandoned mistress of a king, I esteem myself altogether divested of charms. No, Aboan; I have still a rest<sup>9</sup> of beauty enough engaging, and have learned to please too well not to be desirable. I can have lovers still, but will have none but Aboan." "Madam," replied the half-feigning youth, "you have already, by my eyes, found you can still conquer, and I believe 'tis in pity of me you condescend to this kind confession. But, Madam, words are used to be so small a part of our country courtship, that 'tis rare one can get so happy an opportunity as to tell one's heart, and those few minutes we have are forced to be snatched for more certain proofs of love than speaking and sighing; and such I languish for."

He spoke this with such a tone that she hoped it true, and could not forbear believing it; and being wholly transported with joy, for having subdued the finest of all the King's subjects to her desires, she took from her ears two large pearls and commanded him to wear 'em in his. He would have refused 'em, crying, "Madam, these are not the proofs of your love that I expect; 'tis opportunity, 'tis a

lone hour only, that can make me happy." But forcing the pearls into his hand, she whispered softly to him, "Oh! Do not fear a woman's invention, when love sets her a-thinking." And pressing his hand, she cried, "This night you shall be happy. Come to the gate of the orange groves behind the Otan, and I will be ready, about midnight, to receive you." 'Twas thus agreed, and she left him, that no notice might be taken of their speaking together.

The ladies were still dancing, and the King, laid on a carpet, with a great deal of pleasure was beholding them, especially Imoinda, who that day appeared more lovely than ever, being enlivened with the good tidings Onahal had brought her of the constant passion the Prince had for her. The Prince was laid on another carpet at the other end of the room, with his eyes fixed on the object of his soul; and as she turned or moved, so did they, and she alone gave his eyes and soul their motions. Nor did Imoinda employ her eyes to any other use than in beholding with infinite pleasure the joy she produced in those of the Prince. But while she was more regarding him than the steps she took, she chanced to fall, and so near him as that, leaping with extreme force from the carpet, he caught her in his arms as she fell; and 'twas visible to the whole presence<sup>1</sup> the joy wherewith he received her. He clasped her close to his bosom, and quite forgot that reverence that was due to the mistress of a king, and that punishment that is the reward of a boldness of this nature; and had not the presence of mind of Imoinda (fonder of his safety than her own) befriended him, in making her spring from his arms and fall into her dance again, he had at that instant met his death; for the old king, jealous to the last degree, rose up in rage, broke all the diversion, and led Imoinda to her apartment, and sent out word to the Prince to go immediately to the camp, and that if he were found another night in court he should suffer the death ordained for disobedient offenders.

You may imagine how welcome this news was to Oroonoko, whose unseasonable transport and caress of Imoinda was blamed by all men that loved him; and now he perceived his fault, yet cried that for such another moment, he would be content to die.

All the Otan was in disorder about this accident; and Onahal was particularly concerned, because on the Prince's stay depended her happiness, for she could no longer expect that of Aboan. So that ere they departed, they contrived it so that the Prince and he should come both that night to the grove of the Otan, which was all of oranges and citrons, and that there they should wait her orders.

They parted thus, with grief enough, till night, leaving the King in possession of the lovely maid. But nothing could appease the jealousy of the old lover. He would not be imposed on, but would have it that Imoinda made a false step on purpose to fall into Oroonoko's bosom, and that all things looked like a design on both sides; and 'twas in vain she protested her innocence. He was old and obstinate, and left her more than half assured that his fear was true.

The King going to his apartment sent to know where the Prince was, and if he intended to obey his command. The messenger returned and told him, he found the Prince pensive and altogether unpreparing for the campaign, that he lay negligently on the ground, and answered very little. This confirmed the jealousy of the King, and he commanded that they should very narrowly and privately watch his motions, and that he should not stir from his apartment but one spy or other should be employed to watch him. So that the hour approaching wherein he was to go to the citron grove, and taking only Aboan along with him, he leaves his apartment, and was watched to the very gate of the Otan, where he was seen to enter, and where they left him, to carry back the tidings to the King.

Oroonoko and Aboan were no sooner entered but Onahal led the Prince to the apartment of Imoinda, who, not knowing anything of her happiness, was laid in bed. But Onahal only left him in her chamber, to make the best of his opportunity, and took her dear Aboan to her own, where he showed the height of complaisance for his prince, when, to give him an opportunity, he suffered himself to be caressed in bed by Onahal.

The Prince softly wakened Imoinda, who was not a little surprised with joy to find him there; and yet she trembled with a thousand fears. I believe he omitted saying nothing to this young maid that



might persuade her to suffer him to seize his own, and take the rights of love; and I believe she was not long resisting those arms where she so longed to be; and having opportunity, night and silence, youth, love and desire, he soon prevailed, and ravished in a moment what his old grandfather had been endeavoring for so many months.

'Tis not to be imagined the satisfaction of these two young lovers; nor the vows she made him that she remained a spotless maid till that night, and that what she did with his grandfather had robbed him of no part of her virgin honor, the gods in mercy and justice having reserved that for her plighted lord, to whom of right it belonged. And 'tis impossible to express the transports he suffered, while he listened to a discourse so charming from her loved lips, and clasped that body in his arms for whom he had so long languished; and nothing now afflicted him but his sudden departure from her; for he told her the necessity and his commands, but should depart satisfied in this, that since the old king had hitherto not been able to deprive him of those enjoyments which only belonged to him, he believed for the future he would be less able to injure him; so that abating the scandal of the veil, which was no otherwise so than that she was wife to another, he believed her safe, even in the arms of the King, and innocent; yet would he have ventured at the conquest of the world, and have given it all, to have had her avoided that honor of receiving the royal veil. 'Twas thus, between a thousand caresses, that both bemoaned the hard fate of youth and beauty, so liable to that cruel promotion. 'Twas a glory that could well have been spared here, though desired and aimed at by all the young females of that kingdom.

But while they were thus fondly employed, forgetting how time ran on, and that the dawn must conduct him far away from his only happiness, they heard a great noise in the Otan, and unusual voices of men; at which the Prince, starting from the arms of the frightened Imoinda, ran to a little battle-ax he used to wear by his side, and having not so much leisure as to put on his habit, he opposed himself against some who were already opening the door; which they did with so much violence that Oroonoko was not able to

defend it, but was forced to cry out with a commanding voice, "Whoever ye are that have the boldness to attempt to approach this apartment thus rudely, know that I, the Prince Oroonoko, will revenge it with the certain death of him that first enters. Therefore stand back, and know, this place is sacred to love and me this night; tomorrow 'tis the King's."

This he spoke with a voice so resolved and assured that they soon retired from the door, but cried, "'Tis by the King's command we are come; and being satisfied by thy voice, O Prince, as much as if we had entered, we can report to the King the truth of all his fears, and leave thee to provide for thy own safety, as thou art advised by thy friends."

At these words they departed, and left the Prince to take a short and sad leave of his Imoinda, who, trusting in the strength of her charms, believed she should appease the fury of a jealous king by saying she was surprised, and that it was by force of arms he got into her apartment. All her concern now was for his life, and therefore she hastened him to the camp, and with much ado prevailed on him to go. Nor was it she alone that prevailed; Aboan and Onahal both pleaded, and both assured him of a lie that should be well enough contrived to secure Imoinda. So that at last, with a heart sad as death, dying eyes, and sighing soul, Oroonoko departed and took his way to the camp.

It was not long after the King in person came to the Otan, where, beholding Imoinda with rage in his eyes, he upbraided her wickedness and perfidy, and threatening her royal lover, she fell on her face at his feet, bedewing the floor with her tears and imploring his pardon for a fault which she had not with her will committed, as Onahal, who was also prostrate with her, could testify; that unknown to her, he had broke into her apartment, and ravished her. She spoke this much against her conscience, but to save her own life 'twas absolutely necessary she should feign this falsity. She knew it could not injure the Prince, he being fled to an army that would stand by him against any injuries that should assault him. However, this last thought of Imoinda's being ravished changed the measures of his

revenge; and whereas before he designed to be himself her executioner, he now resolved she should not die. But as it is the greatest crime in nature amongst 'em to touch a woman after having been possessed by a son, a father, or a brother, so now he looked on Imoinda as a polluted thing, wholly unfit for his embrace; nor would he resign her to his grandson, because she had received the royal veil. He therefore removes her from the Otan, with Onahal; whom he put into safe hands, with order they should be both sold off as slaves to another country, either Christian or heathen; 'twas no matter where.

This cruel sentence, worse than death, they implored might be reversed; but their prayers were vain, and it was put in execution accordingly, and that with so much secrecy that none, either without or within the Otan, knew anything of their absence or their destiny.

The old king, nevertheless, executed this with a great deal of reluctancy; but he believed he had made a very great conquest over himself, when he had once resolved, and had performed what he resolved. He believed now that his love had been unjust, and that he could not expect the gods, or Captain of the Clouds (as they call the unknown power), should suffer a better consequence from so ill a cause. He now begins to hold Oroonoko excused, and to say he had reason for what he did. And now everybody could assure the King how passionately Imoinda was beloved by the Prince; even those confessed it now, who said the contrary before his flame was abated. So that the King being old, and not able to defend himself in war, and having no sons of all his race remaining alive but only this, to maintain him on his throne; and looking on this as a man disoblged, first by the rape of his mistress, or rather wife; and now by depriving of him wholly of her, he feared, might make him desperate and do some cruel thing, either to himself or his old grandfather, the offender: he began to repent him extremely of the contempt he had, in his rage, put on Imoinda. Besides, he considered he ought in honor to have killed her for this offense, if it had been one. He ought to have had so much value and consideration for a maid of her quality as to have nobly put her to death, and not to have sold her like a common slave, the greatest revenge and the most disgraceful

of any; and to which they a thousand times prefer death, and implore it, as Imoinda did, but could not obtain that honor. Seeing therefore it was certain that Oroonoko would highly resent this affront, he thought good to make some excuse for his rashness to him; and to that end he sent a messenger to the camp, with orders to treat with him about the matter, to gain his pardon, and to endeavor to mitigate his grief; but that by no means he should tell him she was sold, but secretly put to death, for he knew he should never obtain his pardon for the other.

When the messenger came, he found the Prince upon the point of engaging with the enemy; but as soon as he heard of the arrival of the messenger, he commanded him to his tent, where he embraced him and received him with joy; which was soon abated by the downcast looks of the messenger, who was instantly demanded the cause by Oroonoko, who, impatient of delay, asked a thousand questions in a breath, and all concerning Imoinda. But there needed little return, for he could almost answer himself of all he demanded, from his sighs and eyes. At last, the messenger casting himself at the Prince's feet, and kissing them with all the submission of a man that had something to implore which he dreaded to utter, he besought him to hear with calmness what he had to deliver to him, and to call up all his noble and heroic courage to encounter with his words, and defend himself against the ungrateful<sup>2</sup> things he must relate. Oroonoko replied, with a deep sigh and a languishing voice, "I am armed against their worst efforts—; for I know they will tell me, Imoinda is no more—and after that, you may spare the rest." Then, commanding him to rise, he laid himself on a carpet, under a rich pavilion, and remained a good while silent, and was hardly heard to sigh. When he was come a little to himself, the messenger asked him leave to deliver that part of his embassy which the Prince had not yet divined. And the Prince cried, "I permit thee—." Then he told him the affliction the old king was in, for the rashness he had committed in his cruelty to Imoinda; and how he deigned to ask pardon for his offense, and to implore the Prince would not suffer that loss to touch his heart too sensibly, which now all the gods could not restore him,

but might recompense him in glory, which he begged he would pursue; and that Death, that common revenger of all injuries, would soon even the account between him and a feeble old man.

Oroonoko bade him return his duty to his lord and master, and to assure him, there was no account of revenge to be adjusted between them; if there were, 'twas he was the aggressor, and that Death would be just and, maugre<sup>3</sup> his age, would see him righted; and he was contented to leave his share of glory to youths more fortunate and worthy of that favor from the gods. That henceforth he would never lift a weapon or draw a bow, but abandon the small remains of his life to sighs and tears, and the continual thoughts of what his lord and grandfather had thought good to send out of the world, with all that youth, that innocence, and beauty.

After having spoken this, whatever his greatest officers and men of the best rank could do, they could not raise him from the carpet, or persuade him to action and resolutions of life; but commanding all to retire, he shut himself into his pavilion all that day, while the enemy was ready to engage; and wondering at the delay, the whole body of the chief of the army then addressed themselves to him, and to whom they had much ado to get admittance. They fell on their faces at the foot of his carpet, where they lay and besought him with earnest prayers and tears to lead 'em forth to battle, and not let the enemy take advantages of them; and implored him to have regard to his glory, and to the world, that depended on his courage and conduct. But he made no other reply to all their supplications but this, that he had now no more business for glory; and for the world, it was a trifle not worth his care. "Go," continued he, sighing, "and divide it amongst you; and reap with joy what you so vainly prize, and leave me to my more welcome destiny."

They then demanded what they should do, and whom he would constitute in his room, that the confusion of ambitious youth and power might not ruin their order and make them a prey to the enemy. He replied, he would not give himself the trouble—; but wished 'em to choose the bravest man amongst 'em, let his quality or birth be what it would. "For, O my friends!" said he, "it is not titles

make men brave or good, or birth that bestows courage and generosity, or makes the owner happy. Believe this, when you behold Oroonoko, the most wretched and abandoned by fortune of all the creation of the gods." So turning himself about, he would make no more reply to all they could urge or implore.

The army, beholding their officers return unsuccessful, with sad faces and ominous looks that presaged no good luck, suffered a thousand fears to take possession of their hearts, and the enemy to come even upon 'em, before they would provide for their safety by any defense; and though they were assured by some, who had a mind to animate 'em, that they should be immediately headed by the Prince, and that in the meantime Aboan had orders to command as general, yet they were so dismayed for want of that great example of bravery that they could make but a very feeble resistance; and at last downright fled before the enemy, who pursued 'em to the very tents, killing 'em. Nor could all Aboan's courage, which that day gained him immortal glory, shame 'em into a manly defense of themselves. The guards that were left behind about the Prince's tent, seeing the soldiers flee before the enemy and scatter themselves all over the plain, in great disorder, made such outcries as roused the Prince from his amorous slumber, in which he had remained buried for two days without permitting any sustenance to approach him. But in spite of all his resolutions, he had not the constancy of grief to that degree, as to make him insensible of the danger of his army; and in that instant he leaped from his couch and cried, "—Come, if we must die, let us meet Death the noblest way; and 'twill be more like Oroonoko to encounter him at an army's head, opposing the torrent of a conquering foe, than lazily on a couch to wait his lingering pleasure, and die every moment by a thousand wrecking<sup>4</sup> thoughts; or be tamely taken by an enemy, and led a whining, lovesick slave to adorn the triumphs of Jamoan, that young victor, who already is entered beyond the limits I had prescribed him."

While he was speaking, he suffered his people to dress him for the field, and sallying out of his pavilion, with more life and vigor in his countenance than ever he showed, he appeared like some divine

power descended to save his country from destruction; and his people had purposely put on him all things that might make him shine with most splendor, to strike a reverend awe into the beholders. He flew into the thickest of those that were pursuing his men, and being animated with despair, he fought as if he came on purpose to die, and did such things as will not be believed that human strength could perform, and such as soon inspired all the rest with new courage and new order. And now it was that they began to fight indeed, and so as if they would not be outdone even by their adored hero; who, turning the tide of the victory, changing absolutely the fate of the day, gained an entire conquest; and Oroonoko having the good fortune to single out Jamoan, he took him prisoner with his own hand, having wounded him almost to death.

This Jamoan afterwards became very dear to him, being a man very gallant and of excellent graces and fine parts; so that he never put him amongst the rank of captives, as they used to do, without distinction, for the common sale or market; but kept him in his own court, where he retained nothing of the prisoner but the name, and returned no more into his own country, so great an affection he took for Oroonoko; and by a thousand tales and adventures of love and gallantry flattered<sup>5</sup> his disease of melancholy and languishment, which I have often heard him say had certainly killed him, but for the conversation of this prince and Aboan, and the French governor he had from his childhood, of whom I have spoken before, and who was a man of admirable wit, great ingenuity and learning, all which he had infused into his young pupil. This Frenchman was banished out of his own country for some heretical notions he held, and though he was a man of very little religion, he had admirable morals and a brave soul.

After the total defeat of Jamoan's army, which all fled, or were left dead upon the place, they spent some time in the camp, Oroonoko choosing rather to remain a while there in his tents than enter into a palace or live in a court where he had so lately suffered so great a loss. The officers, therefore, who saw and knew his cause of discontent, invented all sorts of diversions and sports to entertain

their prince; so that what with those amusements abroad and others at home, that is, within their tents, with the persuasions, arguments, and care of his friends and servants that he more peculiarly prized, he wore off in time a great part of that chagrin and torture of despair which the first efforts of Imoinda's death had given him. Insomuch as having received a thousand kind embassies from the King, and invitations to return to court, he obeyed, though with no little reluctance; and when he did so, there was a visible change in him, and for a long time he was much more melancholy than before. But time lessens all extremes, and reduces 'em to mediums and unconcern; but no motives or beauties, though all endeavored it, could engage him in any sort of amour, though he had all the invitations to it, both from his own youth and others' ambitions and designs.

Oroonoko was no sooner returned from this last conquest, and received at court with all the joy and magnificence that could be expressed to a young victor, who was not only returned triumphant but beloved like a deity, when there arrived in the port an English ship.

This person<sup>6</sup> had often before been in these countries and was very well known to Oroonoko, with whom he had trafficked for slaves, and had used to do the same with his predecessors.

This commander was a man of a finer sort of address and conversation, better bred and more engaging than most of that sort of men are, so that he seemed rather never to have been bred out of a court than almost all his life at sea. This captain therefore was always better received at court than most of the traders to those countries were; and especially by Oroonoko, who was more civilized, according to the European mode, than any other had been, and took more delight in the white nations, and above all men of parts and wit. To this captain he sold abundance of his slaves, and for the favor and esteem he had for him, made him many presents, and obliged him to stay at court as long as possibly he could. Which the captain seemed to take as a very great honor done him, entertaining the Prince every day with globes and maps, and mathematical discourses



and instruments; eating, drinking, hunting, and living with him with so much familiarity that it was not to be doubted but he had gained very greatly upon the heart of this gallant young man. And the captain, in return of all these mighty favors, besought the Prince to honor his vessel with his presence, some day or other, to dinner, before he should set sail; which he condescended to accept, and appointed his day. The captain, on his part, failed not to have all things in a readiness, in the most magnificent order he could possibly. And the day being come, the captain in his boat, richly adorned with carpets and velvet cushions, rowed to the shore to receive the Prince, with another longboat where was placed all his music and trumpets, with which Oroonoko was extremely delighted; who met him on the shore attended by his French governor, Jamoan, Aboan, and about a hundred of the noblest of the youths of the court. And after they had first carried the Prince on board, the boats fetched the rest off; where they found a very splendid treat, with all sorts of fine wines, and were as well entertained as 'twas possible in such a place to be.

The Prince, having drunk hard of punch and several sorts of wine, as did all the rest (for great care was taken they should want nothing of that part of the entertainment), was very merry, and in great admiration of the ship, for he had never been in one before; so that he was curious of beholding every place where he decently might descend. The rest, no less curious, who were not quite overcome with drinking, rambled at their pleasure fore and aft, as their fancies guided 'em. So that the captain, who had well laid his design before, gave the word, and seized on all his guests; they clapping great irons suddenly on the Prince, when he was leaped down in the hold to view that part of the vessel, and locking him fast down, secured him. The same treachery was used to all the rest; and all in one instant, in several places of the ship, were lashed fast in irons, and betrayed to slavery. That great design over, they set all hands to work to hoise<sup>z</sup> sail; and with as treacherous and fair a wind, they made from the shore with this innocent and glorious prize, who thought of nothing less than such an entertainment.

Some have commended this act as brave in the captain; but I will spare my sense of it, and leave it to my reader to judge as he pleases.

It may be easily guessed in what manner the Prince resented this indignity, who may be best resembled to a lion taken in a toil; so he raged, so he struggled for liberty, but all in vain; and they had so wisely managed his fetters that he could not use a hand in his defense, to quit himself of a life that would by no means endure slavery, nor could he move from the place where he was tied to any solid part of the ship, against which he might have beat his head, and have finished his disgrace that way. So that being deprived of all other means, he resolved to perish for want of food. And pleased at last with that thought, and toiled and tired by rage and indignation, he laid himself down, and sullenly resolved upon dying, and refused all things that were brought him.

This did not a little vex the captain, and the more so because he found almost all of 'em of the same humor; so that the loss of so many brave slaves, so tall and goodly to behold, would have been very considerable. He therefore ordered one to go from him (for he would not be seen himself) to Oroonoko, and to assure him he was afflicted for having rashly done so unhospitable a deed, and which could not be now remedied, since they were far from shore; but since he resented it in so high a nature, he assured him he would revoke his resolution, and set both him and his friends ashore on the next land they should touch at; and of this the messenger gave him his oath, provided he would resolve to live. And Oroonoko, whose honor was such as he never had violated a word in his life himself, much less a solemn asseveration, believed in an instant what this man said, but replied, he expected for a confirmation of this to have his shameful fetters dismissed. This demand was carried to the captain, who returned him answer that the offense had been so great which he had put upon the Prince that he durst not trust him with liberty while he remained in the ship, for fear lest by a valor natural to him, and a revenge that would animate that valor, he might commit some outrage fatal to himself and the King his master, to whom his vessel did belong. To this Oroonoko replied, he would

engage his honor to behave himself in all friendly order and manner, and obey the command of the captain, as he was lord of the King's vessel and general of those men under his command.

This was delivered to the still doubting captain, who could not resolve to trust a heathen, he said, upon his parole,<sup>8</sup> a man that had no sense or notion of the God that he worshipped. Oroonoko then replied, he was very sorry to hear that the captain pretended to the knowledge and worship of any gods who had taught him no better principles than not to credit as he would be credited; but they told him the difference of their faith occasioned that distrust. For the captain had protested to him upon the word of a Christian, and sworn in the name of a great god, which if he should violate, he would expect eternal torment in the world to come. "Is that all the obligation he has to be just to his oath?" replied Oroonoko. "Let him know I swear by my honor; which to violate, would not only render me contemptible and despised by all brave and honest men, and so give myself perpetual pain, but it would be eternally offending and diseasing all mankind, harming, betraying, circumventing and outraging all men; but punishments hereafter are suffered by one's self, and the world takes no cognizances whether this god have revenged 'em or not, 'tis done so secretly and deferred so long. While the man of no honor suffers every moment the scorn and contempt of the honester world, and dies every day ignominiously in his fame, which is more valuable than life. I speak not this to move belief, but to show you how you mistake, when you imagine that he who will violate his honor will keep his word with his gods." So turning from him with a disdainful smile, he refused to answer him, when he urged him to know what answer he should carry back to his captain; so that he departed without saying any more.

The captain pondering and consulting what to do, it was concluded that nothing but Oroonoko's liberty would encourage any of the rest to eat, except the Frenchman, whom the captain could not pretend to keep prisoner, but only told him he was secured because he might act something in favor of the Prince, but that he should be freed as soon as they came to land. So that they

concluded it wholly necessary to free the Prince from his irons, that he might show himself to the rest; that they might have an eye upon him, and that they could not fear a single man.

This being resolved, to make the obligation the greater, the captain himself went to Oroonoko; where after many compliments, and assurances of what he had already promised, he receiving from the Prince his parole and his hand for his good behavior, dismissed his irons and brought him to his own cabin; where after having treated and reposed him a while, for he had neither eat<sup>9</sup> nor slept in four days before, he besought him to visit those obstinate people in chains, who refused all manner of sustenance, and entreated him to oblige 'em to eat, and assure 'em of their liberty the first opportunity.

Oroonoko, who was too generous not to give credit to his words, showed himself to his people, who were transported with excess of joy at the sight of their darling prince, falling at his feet and kissing and embracing 'em, believing, as some divine oracle, all he assured 'em. But he besought 'em to bear their chains with that bravery that became those whom he had seen act so nobly in arms; and that they could not give him greater proofs of their love and friendship, since 'twas all the security the captain (his friend) could have, against the revenge, he said, they might possibly justly take for the injuries sustained by him. And they all with one accord assured him, they could not suffer enough, when it was for his repose and safety.

After this they no longer refused to eat, but took what was brought 'em, and were pleased with their captivity, since by it they hoped to redeem the Prince, who, all the rest of the voyage, was treated with all the respect due to his birth, though nothing could divert his melancholy; and he would often sigh for Imoinda, and think this a punishment due to his misfortune, in having left that noble maid behind him that fatal night, in the Otan, when he fled to the camp.

Possessed with a thousand thoughts of past joys with this fair young person, and a thousand griefs for her eternal loss, he endured a tedious voyage, and at last arrived at the mouth of the river of Surinam, a colony belonging to the King of England, and where they

were to deliver some part of their slaves. There the merchants and gentlemen of the country going on board to demand those lots of slaves they had already agreed on, and, amongst those, the overseers of those plantations where I then chanced to be, the captain, who had given the word, ordered his men to bring up those noble slaves in fetters whom I have spoken of; and having put 'em some in one and some in other lots, with women and children (which they call pickaninnies), they sold 'em off as slaves to several merchants and gentlemen; not putting any two in one lot, because they would separate 'em far from each other, not daring to trust 'em together, lest rage and courage should put 'em upon contriving some great action, to the ruin of the colony.

Oroonoko was first seized on, and sold to our overseer, who had the first lot, with seventeen more of all sorts and sizes, but not one of quality with him. When he saw this, he found what they meant, for, as I said, he understood English pretty well; and being wholly unarmed and defenseless, so as it was in vain to make any resistance, he only beheld the captain with a look all fierce and disdainful, upbraiding him with eyes that forced blushes on his guilty cheeks; he only cried, in passing over the side of the ship, "Farewell, sir. 'Tis worth my suffering, to gain so true a knowledge both of you and of your gods by whom you swear." And desiring those that held him to forbear their pains, and telling 'em he would make no resistance, he cried, "Come, my fellow slaves; let us descend, and see if we can meet with more honor and honesty in the next world we shall touch upon." So he nimbly leaped into the boat, and showing no more concern, suffered himself to be rowed up the river with his seventeen companions.

The gentleman that bought him was a young Cornish gentleman whose name was Trefry, a man of great wit and fine learning, and was carried into those parts by the Lord —, Governor,<sup>1</sup> to manage all his affairs. He reflecting on the last words of Oroonoko to the captain, and beholding the richness of his vest,<sup>2</sup> no sooner came into the boat but he fixed his eyes on him; and finding something so extraordinary in his face, his shape and mien, a greatness of look

and haughtiness in his air, and finding he spoke English, had a great mind to be inquiring into his quality and fortune; which, though Oroonoko endeavored to hide, by only confessing he was above the rank of common slaves, Trefry soon found he was yet something greater than he confessed, and from that moment began to conceive so vast an esteem for him that he ever after loved him as his dearest brother, and showed him all the civilities due to so great a man.

Trefry was a very good mathematician and a linguist, could speak French and Spanish; and in the three days they remained in the boat (for so long were they going from the ship to the plantation) he entertained Oroonoko so agreeably with his art and discourse, that he was no less pleased with Trefry than he was with the Prince; and he thought himself at least fortunate in this, that since he was a slave, as long as he would suffer himself to remain so, he had a man of so excellent wit and parts for a master. So that before they had finished their voyage up the river, he made no scruple of declaring to Trefry all his fortunes, and most part of what I have here related, and put himself wholly into the hands of his new friend, whom he found resenting all the injuries were done him, and was charmed with all the greatness of his actions; which were recited with that modesty and delicate sense as wholly vanquished him, and subdued him to his interest. And he promised him on his word and honor, he would find the means to reconduct him to his own country again, assuring him, he had a perfect abhorrence of so dishonorable an action, and that he would sooner have died than have been the author of such a perfidy. He found the Prince was very much concerned to know what became of his friends, and how they took their slavery; and Trefry promised to take care about the inquiring after their condition, and that he should have an account of 'em.

Though, as Oroonoko afterwards said, he had little reason to credit the words of a *backearary*,<sup>3</sup> yet he knew not why, but he saw a kind of sincerity and awful truth in the face of Trefry; he saw an honesty in his eyes, and he found him wise and witty enough to understand honor; for it was one of his maxims, a man of wit could not be a knave or villain.

In their passage up the river they put in at several houses for refreshment, and ever when they landed, numbers of people would flock to behold this man; not but their eyes were daily entertained with the sight of slaves, but the fame of Oroonoko was gone before him, and all people were in admiration of his beauty. Besides, he had a rich habit on, in which he was taken, so different from the rest, and which the captain could not strip him of, because he was forced to surprise his person in the minute he sold him. When he found his habit made him liable, as he thought, to be gazed at the more, he begged Trefry to give him something more befitting a slave, which he did, and took off his robes. Nevertheless, he shone through all; and his osenbrigs (a sort of brown holland<sup>4</sup> suit he had on) could not conceal the graces of his looks and mien, and he had no less admirers than when he had his dazzling habit on. The royal youth appeared in spite of the slave, and people could not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it. As soon as they approached him, they venerated and esteemed him; his eyes insensibly commanded respect, and his behavior insinuated it into every soul. So that there was nothing talked of but this young and gallant slave, even by those who yet knew not that he was a prince.

I ought to tell you that the Christians never buy any slaves but they give 'em some name of their own, their native ones being likely very barbarous and hard to pronounce; so that Mr. Trefry gave Oroonoko that of Caesar, which name will live in that country as long as that (scarce more) glorious one of the great Roman; for 'tis most evident, he wanted<sup>5</sup> no part of the personal courage of that Caesar, and acted things as memorable, had they been done in some part of the world replenished with people and historians that might have given him his due. But his misfortune was to fall in an obscure world, that afforded only a female pen to celebrate his fame; though I doubt not but it had lived from others' endeavors, if the Dutch, who immediately after his time took that country,<sup>6</sup> had not killed, banished, and dispersed all those that were capable of giving the world this great man's life, much better than I have done. And Mr.



Trefry, who designed it, died before he began it, and bemoaned himself for not having undertook it in time.

For the future, therefore, I must call Oroonoko Caesar, since by that name only he was known in our western world, and by that name he was received on shore at Parham House, where he was destined a slave. But if the King himself (God bless him) had come ashore, there could not have been greater expectations by all the whole plantation, and those neighboring ones, than was on ours at that time; and he was received more like a governor than a slave. Notwithstanding, as the custom was, they assigned him his portion of land, his house, and his business, up in the plantation. But as it was more for form than any design to put him to his task, he endured no more of the slave but the name, and remained some days in the house, receiving all visits that were made him, without stirring towards that part of the plantation where the Negroes were.

At last he would needs go view his land, his house, and the business assigned him. But he no sooner came to the houses of the slaves, which are like a little town by itself, the Negroes all having left work, but they all came forth to behold him, and found he was that prince who had, at several times, sold most of 'em to these parts; and from a veneration they pay to great men, especially if they know 'em, and from the surprise and awe they had at the sight of him, they all cast themselves at his feet, crying out in their language, "Live, O King! Long live, O King!" and kissing his feet, paid him even divine homage.

Several English gentlemen were with him; and what Mr. Trefry had told 'em was here confirmed, of which he himself before had no other witness than Caesar himself. But he was infinitely glad to find his grandeur confirmed by the adoration of all the slaves.

Caesar, troubled with their over-joy and over-ceremony, besought 'em to rise and to receive him as their fellow slave, assuring them he was no better. At which they set up with one accord a most terrible and hideous mourning and condoling, which he and the English had much ado to appease; but at last they prevailed with 'em, and they prepared all their barbarous music, and everyone killed and dressed



something of his own stock (for every family has their land apart, on which, at their leisure times, they breed all eatable things), and clubbing it together,<sup>7</sup> made a most magnificent supper, inviting their *Grandee Captain*, their prince, to honor it with his presence; which he did, and several English with him; where they all waited on him, some playing, others dancing before him all the time, according to the manners of their several nations, and with unwearied industry endeavoring to please and delight him.

While they sat at meat Mr. Trefry told Caesar that most of these young slaves were undone in love with a fine she-slave, whom they had had about six months on their land. The Prince, who never heard the name of love without a sigh, nor any mention of it without the curiosity of examining further into that tale, which of all discourses was most agreeable to him, asked how they came to be so unhappy as to be all undone for one fair slave. Trefry, who was naturally amorous and loved to talk of love as well as anybody, proceeded to tell him, they had the most charming black that ever was beheld on their plantation, about fifteen or sixteen years old, as he guessed; that for his part, he had done nothing but sigh for her ever since she came, and that all the white beauties he had seen never charmed him so absolutely as this fine creature had done; and that no man, of any nation, ever beheld her that did not fall in love with her; and that she had all the slaves perpetually at her feet, and the whole country resounded with the fame of Clemene, “for so,” said he, “we have christened her. But she denies us all with such a noble disdain, that ’tis a miracle to see that she, who can give such eternal desires, should herself be all ice and all unconcern. She is adorned with the most graceful modesty that ever beautified youth; the softest sigher—that, if she were capable of love, one would swear she languished for some absent happy man; and so retired, as if she feared a rape even from the god of day,<sup>8</sup> or that the breezes would steal kisses from her delicate mouth. Her task of work some sighing lover every day makes it his petition to perform for her, which she accepts blushing and with reluctance, for fear he will ask her a look for a recompense, which he dares not presume to hope, so

great an awe she strikes into the hearts of her admirers." "I do not wonder," replied the Prince, "that Clemene should refuse slaves, being as you say so beautiful, but wonder how she escapes those who can entertain her as you can do; or why, being your slave, you do not oblige her to yield." "I confess," said Trefry, "when I have, against her will, entertained her with love so long as to be transported with my passion, even above decency, I have been ready to make use of those advantages of strength and force nature has given me. But oh! she disarms me with that modesty and weeping, so tender and so moving that I retire, and thank my stars she overcame me." The company laughed at his civility to a slave, and Caesar only applauded the nobleness of his passion and nature, since that slave might be noble or, what was better, have true notions of honor and virtue in her. Thus passed they this night, after having received from the slaves all imaginable respect and obedience.

The next day Trefry asked Caesar to walk, when the heat was allayed, and designedly carried him by the cottage of the fair slave, and told him she whom he spoke of last night lived there retired. "But," says he, "I would not wish you to approach, for I am sure you will be in love as soon as you behold her." Caesar assured him he was proof against all the charms of that sex, and that if he imagined his heart could be so perfidious to love again, after Imoinda, he believed he should tear it from his bosom. They had no sooner spoke, but a little shock dog<sup>9</sup> that Clemene had presented her, which she took great delight in, ran out; and she, not knowing anybody was there, ran to get it in again, and bolted out on those who were just speaking of her. When seeing them, she would have run in again, but Trefry caught her by the hand and cried, "Clemene, however you fly a lover, you ought to pay some respect to this stranger" (pointing to Caesar). But she, as if she had resolved never to raise her eyes to the face of a man again, bent 'em the more to the earth when he spoke, and gave the Prince the leisure to look the more at her. There needed no long gazing or consideration to examine who this fair creature was; he soon saw Imoinda all over

her; in a minute he saw her face, her shape, her air, her modesty, and all that called forth his soul with joy at his eyes, and left his body destitute of almost life; it stood without motion, and for a minute knew not that it had a being; and I believe he had never come to himself, so oppressed he was with over-joy, if he had not met with this allay, that he perceived Imoinda fall dead in the hands of Trefry. This awakened him, and he ran to her aid and caught her in his arms, where by degrees she came to herself; and 'tis needless to tell with what transports, what ecstasies of joy, they both a while beheld each other, without speaking; then snatched each other to their arms; then gaze again, as if they still doubted whether they possessed the blessing they grasped; but when they recovered their speech, 'tis not to be imagined what tender things they expressed to each other, wondering what strange fate had brought 'em again together. They soon informed each other of their fortunes, and equally bewailed their fate; but at the same time they mutually protested that even fetters and slavery were soft and easy, and would be supported with joy and pleasure, while they could be so happy to possess each other and to be able to make good their vows. Caesar swore he disdained the empire of the world while he could behold his Imoinda; and she despised grandeur and pomp, those vanities of her sex, when she could gaze on Oroonoko. He adored the very cottage where she resided, and said that little inch of the world would give him more happiness than all the universe could do; and she vowed it was a palace, while adorned with the presence of Oroonoko.

Trefry was infinitely pleased with this novel,<sup>1</sup> and found this Clemene was the fair mistress of whom Caesar had before spoke; and was not a little satisfied that heaven was so kind to the Prince as to sweeten his misfortunes by so lucky an accident; and leaving the lovers to themselves, was impatient to come down to Parham House (which was on the same plantation) to give me an account of what had happened. I was as impatient to make these lovers a visit, having already made a friendship with Caesar, and from his own mouth learned what I have related; which was confirmed by his

Frenchman, who was set on shore to seek his fortunes, and of whom they could not make a slave, because a Christian, and he came daily to Parham Hill to see and pay his respects to his pupil prince. So that concerning and interesting myself in all that related to Caesar, whom I had assured of liberty as soon as the Governor arrived, I hasted presently to the place where the lovers were, and was infinitely glad to find this beautiful young slave (who had already gained all our esteems, for her modesty and her extraordinary prettiness) to be the same I had heard Caesar speak so much of. One may imagine then we paid her a treble respect; and though, from her being carved in fine flowers and birds all over her body, we took her to be of quality before, yet when we knew Clemene was Imoinda, we could not enough admire her.

I had forgot to tell you that those who are nobly born of that country are so delicately cut and rased<sup>2</sup> all over the forepart of the trunk of their bodies, that it looks as if it were japanned, the works being raised like high point round the edges of the flowers. Some are only carved with a little flower or bird at the sides of the temples, as was Caesar; and those who are so carved over the body resemble our ancient Picts,<sup>3</sup> that are figured in the chronicles, but these carvings are more delicate.

From that happy day Caesar took Clemene for his wife, to the general joy of all people; and there was as much magnificence as the country would afford at the celebration of this wedding: and in a very short time after she conceived with child, which made Caesar even adore her, knowing he was the last of his great race. This new accident made him more impatient of liberty, and he was every day treating with Trefry for his and Clemene's liberty, and offered either gold or a vast quantity of slaves, which should be paid before they let him go, provided he could have any security that he should go when his ransom was paid. They fed him from day to day with promises, and delayed him till the Lord Governor should come; so that he began to suspect them of falsehood, and that they would delay him till the time of his wife's delivery and make a slave of that too, for all the breed is theirs to whom the parents belong. This

thought made him very uneasy, and his sullenness gave them some jealousies<sup>4</sup> of him; so that I was obliged, by some persons who feared a mutiny (which is very fatal sometimes in those colonies, that abound so with slaves that they exceed the whites in vast numbers), to discourse with Caesar, and to give him all the satisfaction I possibly could; they knew he and Clemene were scarce an hour in a day from my lodgings, that they eat with me, and that I obliged 'em in all things I was capable of. I entertained him with the lives of the Romans, and great men, which charmed him to my company, and her with teaching her all the pretty works<sup>5</sup> that I was mistress of, and telling her stories of nuns, and endeavoring to bring her to the knowledge of the true God. But of all discourses Caesar liked that the worst, and would never be reconciled to our notions of the Trinity, of which he ever made a jest; it was a riddle, he said, would turn his brain to conceive, and one could not make him understand what faith was. However, these conversations failed not altogether so well to divert him that he liked the company of us women much above the men, for he could not drink, and he is but an ill companion in that country that cannot. So that obliging him to love us very well, we had all the liberty of speech with him, especially myself, whom he called his Great Mistress; and indeed my word would go a great way with him. For these reasons, I had opportunity to take notice to him that he was not well pleased of late as he used to be; was more retired and thoughtful; and told him I took it ill he should suspect we would break our words with him, and not permit both him and Clemene to return to his own kingdom, which was not so long a way but when he was once on his voyage he would quickly arrive there. He made me some answers that showed a doubt in him, which made me ask him what advantage it would be to doubt. It would but give us a fear of him, and possibly compel us to treat him so as I should be very loath to behold; that is, it might occasion his confinement. Perhaps this was not so luckily spoke of me, for I perceived he resented that word, which I strove to soften again in vain. However, he assured me that whatsoever resolutions he should take, he would act nothing upon the white people; and as for myself and those upon

that plantation where he was, he would sooner forfeit his eternal liberty, and life itself, than lift his hand against his greatest enemy on that place. He besought me to suffer no fears upon his account, for he could do nothing that honor should not dictate; but he accused himself for having suffered slavery so long; yet he charged that weakness on Love alone, who was capable of making him neglect even glory itself, and for which now he reproaches himself every moment of the day. Much more to this effect he spoke, with an air impatient enough to make me know he would not be long in bondage; and though he suffered only the name of a slave, and had nothing of the toil and labor of one, yet that was sufficient to render him uneasy; and he had been too long idle, who used to be always in action and in arms. He had a spirit all rough and fierce, and that could not be tamed to lazy rest; and though all endeavors were used to exercise himself in such actions and sports as this world afforded, as running, wrestling, pitching the bar, hunting and fishing, chasing and killing tigers of a monstrous size, which this continent affords in abundance, and wonderful snakes, such as Alexander is reported to have encountered at the river of Amazons,<sup>6</sup> and which Caesar took great delight to overcome, yet these were not actions great enough for his large soul, which was still panting after more renowned action.

Before I parted that day with him, I got, with much ado, a promise from him to rest yet a little longer with patience, and wait the coming of the Lord Governor, who was every day expected on our shore; he assured me he would, and this promise he desired me to know was given perfectly in complaisance to me, in whom he had an entire confidence.

After this, I neither thought it convenient to trust him much out of our view, nor did the country, who feared him; but with one accord it was advised to treat him fairly, and oblige him to remain within such a compass, and that he should be permitted as seldom as could be to go up to the plantations of the Negroes or, if he did, to be accompanied by some that should be rather in appearance attendants than spies. This care was for some time taken, and



Caesar looked upon it as a mark of extraordinary respect, and was glad his discontent had obliged 'em to be more observant to him. He received new assurance from the overseer, which was confirmed to him by the opinion of all the gentlemen of the country, who made their court to him. During this time that we had his company more frequently than hitherto we had had, it may not be unpleasant to relate to you the diversions we entertained him with, or rather he us.

My stay was to be short in that country, because my father died at sea, and never arrived to possess the honor was designed him (which was lieutenant general of six and thirty islands, besides the continent<sup>7</sup> of Surinam) nor the advantages he hoped to reap by them; so that though we were obliged to continue on our voyage, we did not intend to stay upon the place. Though, in a word, I must say thus much of it, that certainly had his late Majesty, of sacred memory, but seen and known what a vast and charming world he had been master of in that continent, he would never have parted so easily with it to the Dutch. 'Tis a continent whose vast extent was never yet known, and may contain more noble earth than all the universe besides, for, they say, it reaches from east to west, one way as far as China and another to Peru. It affords all things both for beauty and use; 'tis there eternal spring, always the very months of April, May, and June; the shades are perpetual, the trees bearing at once all degrees of leaves and fruit, from blooming buds to ripe autumn: groves of oranges, lemons, citrons, figs, nutmegs, and noble aromatics, continually bearing their fragrances. The trees appearing all like nosegays adorned with flowers of different kinds; some are all white, some purple, some scarlet, some blue, some yellow; bearing, at the same time, ripe fruit and blooming young, or producing every day new. The very wood of all these trees has an intrinsic value above common timber, for they are, when cut, of different colors, glorious to behold, and bear a price considerable, to inlay withal. Besides this they yield rich balm and gums, so that we make our candles of such an aromatic substance as does not only give a sufficient light, but, as they burn, they cast their perfumes all about. Cedar is the common firing, and all the houses are built with

it. The very meat we eat, when set on the table, if it be native, I mean of the country, perfumes the whole room; especially a little beast called an armadillo, a thing which I can liken to nothing so well as a rhinoceros; 'tis all in white armor, so jointed that it moves as well in it as if it had nothing on; this beast is about the bigness of a pig of six weeks old. But it were endless to give an account of all the diverse wonderful and strange things that country affords, and which we took a very great delight to go in search of, though those adventures are oftentimes fatal and at least dangerous. But while we had Caesar in our company on these designs we feared no harm, nor suffered any.

As soon as I came into the country, the best house in it was presented me, called St. John's Hill. It stood on a vast rock of white marble, at the foot of which the river ran a vast depth down, and not to be descended on that side; the little waves still dashing and washing the foot of this rock made the softest murmurs and purlings in the world; and the opposite bank was adorned with such vast quantities of different flowers eternally blowing,<sup>8</sup> and every day and hour new, fenced behind 'em with lofty trees of a thousand rare forms and colors, that the prospect was the most ravishing that fancy can create. On the edge of this white rock, towards the river, was a walk or grove of orange and lemon trees, about half the length of the Mall<sup>9</sup> here, whose flowery and fruit-bearing branches met at the top and hindered the sun, whose rays are very fierce there, from entering a beam into the grove; and the cool air that came from the river made it not only fit to entertain people in, at all the hottest hours of the day, but refreshed the sweet blossoms and made it always sweet and charming; and sure the whole globe of the world cannot show so delightful a place as this grove was. Not all the gardens of boasted Italy can produce a shade to outvie this, which nature had joined with art to render so exceeding fine; and 'tis a marvel to see how such vast trees, as big as English oaks, could take footing on so solid a rock and in so little earth as covered that rock; but all things by nature there are rare, delightful, and wonderful. But to our sports.



Sometimes we would go surprising,<sup>1</sup> and in search of young tigers in their dens, watching when the old ones went forth to forage for prey; and oftentimes we have been in great danger and have fled apace for our lives when surprised by the dams. But once, above all other times, we went on this design, and Caesar was with us, who had no sooner stolen a young tiger from her nest but, going off, we encountered the dam, bearing a buttock of a cow which he<sup>2</sup> had torn off with his mighty paw, and going with it towards his den. We had only four women, Caesar, and an English gentleman, brother to Harry Martin, the great Oliverian;<sup>3</sup> we found there was no escaping this enraged and ravenous beast. However, we women fled as fast as we could from it; but our heels had not saved our lives if Caesar had not laid down his cub, when he found the tiger quit her prey to make the more speed towards him, and taking Mr. Martin's sword, desired him to stand aside, or follow the ladies. He obeyed him, and Caesar met this monstrous beast of might, size, and vast limbs, who came with open jaws upon him; and fixing his awful stern eyes full upon those of the beast, and putting himself into a very steady and good aiming posture of defense, ran his sword quite through his breast down to his very heart, home to the hilt of the sword. The dying beast stretched forth her paw, and going to grasp his thigh, surprised with death in that very moment, did him no other harm than fixing her long nails in his flesh very deep, feebly wounded him, but could not grasp the flesh to tear off any. When he had done this, he halloed to us to return, which, after some assurance of his victory, we did, and found him lugging out the sword from the bosom of the tiger, who was laid in her blood on the ground; he took up the cub, and with an unconcern that had nothing of the joy or gladness of a victory, he came and laid the whelp at my feet. We all extremely wondered at his daring, and at the bigness of the beast, which was about the heighth of a heifer but of mighty, great, and strong limbs.

Another time, being in the woods, he killed a tiger which had long infested that part, and borne away abundance of sheep and oxen, and other things that were for the support of those to whom they belonged; abundance of people assailed this beast, some affirming

they had shot her with several bullets quite through the body at several times, and some swearing they shot her through the very heart, and they believed she was a devil rather than a mortal thing. Caesar had often said he had a mind to encounter this monster, and spoke with several gentlemen who had attempted her, one crying, "I shot her with so many poisoned arrows," another with his gun in this part of her, and another in that; so that he, remarking all these places where she was shot, fancied still he should overcome her by giving her another sort of a wound than any had yet done; and one day said (at the table), "What trophies and garlands, ladies, will you make me, if I bring you home the heart of this ravenous beast that eats up all your lambs and pigs?" We all promised he should be rewarded at all our hands. So taking a bow, which he choosed out of a great many, he went up in the wood, with two gentlemen, where he imagined this devourer to be; they had not passed very far in it but they heard her voice, growling and grumbling, as if she were pleased with something she was doing. When they came in view, they found her muzzling in the belly of a new ravished sheep, which she had torn open; and seeing herself approached, she took fast hold of her prey with her forepaws and set a very fierce raging look on Caesar, without offering to approach him, for fear at the same time of losing what she had in possession. So that Caesar remained a good while, only taking aim, and getting an opportunity to shoot her where he designed; 'twas some time before he could accomplish it, and to wound her and not kill her would but have enraged her more, and endangered him. He had a quiver of arrows at his side, so that if one failed he could be supplied; at last, retiring a little, he gave her opportunity to eat, for he found she was ravenous, and fell to as soon as she saw him retire, being more eager of her prey than of doing new mischiefs. When he going softly to one side of her, and hiding his person behind certain herbage that grew high and thick, he took so good aim that, as he intended, he shot her just into the eye, and the arrow was sent with so good a will and so sure a hand that it stuck in her brain, and made her caper and become mad for a moment or two; but being seconded by another arrow, he fell dead upon the prey. Caesar cut him open with a knife, to see where those

wounds were that had been reported to him, and why he did not die of 'em. But I shall now relate a thing that possibly will find no credit among men, because 'tis a notion commonly received with us, that nothing can receive a wound in the heart and live; but when the heart of this courageous animal was taken out, there were seven bullets of lead in it, and the wounds seamed up with great scars, and she lived with the bullets a great while, for it was long since they were shot. This heart the conqueror brought up to us, and 'twas a very great curiosity, which all the country came to see, and which gave Caesar occasion of many fine discourses, of accidents in war and strange escapes.

At other times he would go a-fishing; and discoursing on that diversion, he found we had in that country a very strange fish, called a numb eel<sup>4</sup> (an eel of which I have eaten), that while it is alive, it has a quality so cold, that those who are angling, though with a line of never so great a length with a rod at the end of it, it shall, in the same minute the bait is touched by this eel, seize him or her that holds the rod with benumbedness, that shall deprive 'em of sense for a while; and some have fallen into the water, and others dropped as dead on the banks of the rivers where they stood, as soon as this fish touches the bait. Caesar used to laugh at this, and believed it impossible a man could lose his force at the touch of a fish, and could not understand that philosophy,<sup>5</sup> that a cold quality should be of that nature. However, he had a great curiosity to try whether it would have the same effect on him it had on others, and often tried, but in vain. At last the sought for fish came to the bait, as he stood angling on the bank; and instead of throwing away the rod or giving it a sudden twitch out of the water, whereby he might have caught both the eel and have dismissed the rod, before it could have too much power over him, for experiment sake he grasped it but the harder, and fainting fell into the river; and being still possessed of the rod, the tide carried him, senseless as he was, a great way, till an Indian boat took him up, and perceived when they touched him a numbness seize them, and by that knew the rod was in his hand; which with a paddle (that is, a short oar) they struck away, and

snatched it into the boat, eel and all. If Caesar were almost dead with the effect of this fish, he was more so with that of the water, where he had remained the space of going a league, and they found they had much ado to bring him back to life. But at last they did, and brought him home, where he was in a few hours well recovered and refreshed, and not a little ashamed to find he should be overcome by an eel, and that all the people who heard his defiance would laugh at him. But we cheered him up; and he being convinced, we had the eel at supper, which was a quarter of an ell about and most delicate meat, and was of the more value, since it cost so dear as almost the life of so gallant a man.

About this time we were in many mortal fears about some disputes the English had with the Indians, so that we could scarce trust ourselves, without great numbers, to go to any Indian towns or place where they abode, for fear they should fall upon us, as they did immediately after my coming away; and that it was in the possession of the Dutch, who used 'em not so civilly as the English, so that they cut in pieces all they could take, getting into houses and hanging up the mother and all her children about her, and cut a footman I left behind me all in joints, and nailed him to trees.

This feud began while I was there, so that I lost half the satisfaction I proposed, in not seeing and visiting the Indian towns. But one day, bemoaning of our misfortunes upon this account, Caesar told us we need not fear, for if we had a mind to go, he would undertake to be our guard. Some would, but most would not venture; about eighteen of us resolved and took barge, and after eight days arrived near an Indian town. But approaching it, the hearts of some of our company failed, and they would not venture on shore; so we polled who would and who would not. For my part, I said if Caesar would, I would go; he resolved; so did my brother and my woman, a maid of good courage. Now none of us speaking the language of the people, and imagining we should have a half diversion in gazing only and not knowing what they said, we took a fisherman that lived at the mouth of the river, who had been a long inhabitant there, and obliged him to go with us. But because he was known to the Indians, as trading among 'em, and being by long

living there become a perfect Indian in color, we, who resolved to surprise 'em by making 'em see something they never had seen (that is, white people), resolved only myself, my brother and woman should go; so Caesar, the fisherman, and the rest, hiding behind some thick reeds and flowers that grew on the banks, let us pass on towards the town, which was on the bank of the river all along. A little distant from the houses, or huts, we saw some dancing, others busied in fetching and carrying of water from the river. They had no sooner spied us but they set up a loud cry, that frightened us at first; we thought it had been for those that should kill us, but it seems it was of wonder and amazement. They were all naked, and we were dressed so as is most comode for the hot countries, very glittering and rich, so that we appeared extremely fine; my own hair was cut short, and I had a taffety cap with black feathers on my head; my brother was in a stuff<sup>6</sup> suit, with silver loops and buttons and abundance of green ribbon. This was all infinitely surprising to them, and because we saw them stand still till we approached 'em, we took heart and advanced, came up to 'em, and offered 'em our hands; which they took, and looked on us round about, calling still for more company; who came swarming out, all wondering and crying out "*Tepeeme*," taking their hair up in their hands and spreading it wide to those they called out to, as if they would say (as indeed it signified) "Numberless wonders," or not to be recounted, no more than to number the hair of their heads. By degrees they grew more bold, and from gazing upon us round, they touched us, laying their hands upon all the features of our faces, feeling our breasts and arms, taking up one petticoat, then wondering to see another; admiring our shoes and stockings, but more our garters, which we gave 'em, and they tied about their legs, being laced with silver lace at the ends, for they much esteem any shining things. In fine, we suffered 'em to survey us as they pleased, and we thought they would never have done admiring us. When Caesar and the rest saw we were received with such wonder, they came up to us; and finding the Indian trader whom they knew (for 'tis by these fishermen, called Indian traders, we hold a commerce with 'em, for they love not to go far from home, and we never go to them), when they saw him

therefore they set up a new joy, and cried, in their language, "Oh! here's our *tiguamy*, and we shall now know whether those things can speak." So advancing to him, some of 'em gave him their hands and cried, "*Amora tiguamy*," which is as much as, "How do you?" or "Welcome, friend," and all with one din began to gabble to him, and asked if we had sense and wit; if we could talk of affairs of life and war, as they could do; if we could hunt, swim, and do a thousand things they use. He answered 'em, we could. Then they invited us into their houses, and dressed venison and buffalo for us; and going out, gathered a leaf of a tree called a *sarumbo* leaf, of six yards long, and spread it on the ground for a tablecloth; and cutting another in pieces instead of plates, setting us on little bow Indian stools, which they cut out of one entire piece of wood and paint in a sort of japan work. They serve everyone their mess<sup>7</sup> on these pieces of leaves, and it was very good, but too high seasoned with pepper. When we had eat, my brother and I took out our flutes and played to 'em, which gave 'em new wonder; and I soon perceived, by an admiration that is natural to these people, and by the extreme ignorance and simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant religion among them, and to impose any notions or fictions upon 'em. For seeing a kinsman of mine set some paper afire with a burning glass, a trick they had never before seen, they were like to have adored him for a god, and begged he would give them the characters or figures of his name, that they might oppose it against winds and storms; which he did, and they held it up in those seasons, and fancied it had a charm to conquer them, and kept it like a holy relic. They are very superstitious, and called him the great *Peeie*, that is, prophet. They showed us their Indian *Peeie*, a youth of about sixteen years old, as handsome as nature could make a man. They consecrate a beautiful youth from his infancy, and all arts are used to complete him in the finest manner, both in beauty and shape. He is bred to all the little arts and cunning they are capable of, to all the legerdemain tricks and sleight of hand, whereby he imposes upon the rabble, and is both a doctor in physic<sup>8</sup> and divinity; and by these tricks makes the sick believe he sometimes eases their

pains, by drawing from the afflicted part little serpents, or odd flies, or worms, or any strange thing; and though they have besides undoubted good remedies for almost all their diseases, they cure the patient more by fancy than by medicines, and make themselves feared, loved, and revered. This young *Peeie* had a very young wife, who seeing my brother kiss her, came running and kissed me; after this they kissed one another, and made it a very great jest, it being so novel; and new admiration and laughing went round the multitude, that they never will forget that ceremony, never before used or known. Caesar had a mind to see and talk with their war captains, and we were conducted to one of their houses, where we beheld several of the great captains, who had been at council. But so frightful a vision it was to see 'em no fancy can create; no such dreams can represent so dreadful a spectacle. For my part I took 'em for hobgoblins or fiends rather than men; but however their shapes appeared, their souls were very humane and noble; but some wanted their noses, some their lips, some both noses and lips, some their ears, and others cut through each cheek with long slashes, through which their teeth appeared; they had other several formidable wounds and scars, or rather dismemberings. They had *comitias* or little aprons before 'em, and girdles of cotton, with their knives naked, stuck in it; a bow at their backs and a quiver of arrows on their thighs; and most had feathers on their heads of diverse colors. They cried "*Amora tiguamy*" to us at our entrance, and were pleased we said as much to 'em; they seated us, and gave us drink of the best sort, and wondered, as much as the others had done before, to see us. Caesar was marveling as much at their faces, wondering how they should all be so wounded in war; he was impatient to know how they all came by those frightful marks of rage or malice, rather than wounds got in noble battle. They told us, by our interpreter, that when any war was waging, two men chosen out by some old captain whose fighting was past, and who could only teach the theory of war, these two men were to stand in competition for the generalship, or great war captain; and being brought before the old judges, now past labor, they are asked what they dare do to show they are worthy to lead an army. When he who is first asked,

making no reply, cuts off his nose, and throws it contemptibly<sup>9</sup> on the ground; and the other does something to himself that he thinks surpasses him, and perhaps deprives himself of lips and an eye; so they slash on till one gives out, and many have died in this debate. And 'tis by a passive valor they show and prove their activity, a sort of courage too brutal to be applauded by our black hero; nevertheless he expressed his esteem of 'em.

In this voyage Caesar begot so good an understanding between the Indians and the English that there were no more fears or heart-burnings during our stay, but we had a perfect, open, and free trade with 'em. Many things remarkable and worthy reciting we met with in this short voyage, because Caesar made it his business to search out and provide for our entertainment, especially to please his dearly adored Imoinda, who was a sharer in all our adventures; we being resolved to make her chains as easy as we could, and to compliment the Prince in that manner that most obliged him.

As we were coming up again, we met with some Indians of strange aspects; that is, of a larger size and other sort of features than those of our country. Our Indian slaves that rowed us asked 'em some questions, but they could not understand us; but showed us a long cotton string with several knots on it, and told us, they had been coming from the mountains so many moons as there were knots. They were habited in skins of a strange beast, and brought along with 'em bags of gold dust, which, as well as they could give us to understand, came streaming in little small channels down the high mountains when the rains fell; and offered to be the convoy to any body or persons that would go to the mountains. We carried these men up to Parham, where they were kept till the Lord Governor came. And because all the country was mad to be going on this golden adventure, the Governor by his letters commanded (for they sent some of the gold to him) that a guard should be set at the mouth of the river of Amazons<sup>1</sup> (a river so called, almost as broad as the river of Thames) and prohibited all people from going up that river, it conducting to those mountains of gold. But we going off for England before the project was further prosecuted, and the Governor



being drowned in a hurricane, either the design died, or the Dutch have the advantage of it. And 'tis to be bemoaned what his Majesty lost by losing that part of America.

Though this digression is a little from my story, however since it contains some proofs of the curiosity and daring of this great man, I was content to omit nothing of his character.

It was thus for some time we diverted him; but now Imoinda began to show she was with child, and did nothing but sigh and weep for the captivity of her lord, herself, and the infant yet unborn, and believed if it were so hard to gain the liberty of two, 'twould be more difficult to get that for three. Her griefs were so many darts in the great heart of Caesar; and taking his opportunity one Sunday when all the whites were overtaken in drink, as there were abundance of several trades and slaves for four years<sup>2</sup> that inhabited among the Negro houses, and Sunday was their day of debauch (otherwise they were a sort of spies upon Caesar), he went pretending out of goodness to 'em to feast amongst 'em; and sent all his music, and ordered a great treat for the whole gang, about three hundred Negroes; and about a hundred and fifty were able to bear arms, such as they had, which were sufficient to do execution<sup>3</sup> with spirits accordingly. For the English had none but rusty swords that no strength could draw from a scabbard, except the people of particular quality, who took care to oil 'em and keep 'em in good order. The guns also, unless here and there one, or those newly carried from England, would do no good or harm; for 'tis the nature of that country to rust and eat up iron, or any metals but gold and silver. And they are very unexpert at the bow, which the Negroes and Indians are perfect masters of.

Caesar, having singled out these men from the women and children, made an harangue to 'em of the miseries and ignominies of slavery, counting up all their toils and sufferings, under such loads, burdens, and drudgeries as were fitter for beasts than men, senseless brutes than human souls. He told 'em, it was not for days, months, or years, but for eternity; there was no end to be of their misfortunes. They suffered not like men, who might find a glory and

fortitude in oppression, but like dogs that loved the whip and bell,<sup>4</sup> and fawned the more they were beaten. That they had lost the divine quality of men and were become insensible asses, fit only to bear; nay, worse: an ass, or dog, or horse, having done his duty, could lie down in retreat and rise to work again, and while he did his duty endured no stripes; but men, villainous, senseless men such as they, toiled on all the tedious week till Black Friday;<sup>5</sup> and then, whether they worked or not, whether they were faulty or meriting, they promiscuously, the innocent with the guilty, suffered the infamous whip, the sordid stripes, from their fellow slaves, till their blood trickled from all parts of their body, blood whose every drop ought to be revenged with a life of some of those tyrants that impose it. "And why," said he, "my dear friends and fellow sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves? This would not anger a noble heart, this would not animate a soldier's soul; no, but we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys, to be the sport of women, fools, and cowards, and the support of rogues, runagades,<sup>6</sup> that have abandoned their own countries for rapine, murders, thefts, and villainies. Do you not hear every day how they upbraid each other with infamy of life, below the wildest savages; and shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race, who have no one human virtue left to distinguish 'em from the vilest creatures? Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands?" They all replied, with one accord, "No, no, no; Caesar has spoke like a great captain, like a great king."

After this he would have proceeded, but was interrupted by a tall Negro of some more quality than the rest; his name was Tuscan; who bowing at the feet of Caesar, cried, "My lord, we have listened with joy and attention to what you have said, and, were we only men, would follow so great a leader through the world. But oh! consider, we are husbands and parents too, and have things more dear to us than life, our wives and children, unfit for travel in these unpassable woods, mountains, and bogs; we have not only difficult lands to overcome, but rivers to wade, and monsters to encounter,

ravenous beasts of prey—.” To this, Caesar replied that honor was the first principle in nature that was to be obeyed; but as no man would pretend to that, without all the acts of virtue, compassion, charity, love, justice, and reason, he found it not inconsistent with that to take an equal care of their wives and children as they would of themselves; and that he did not design, when he led them to freedom and glorious liberty, that they should leave that better part of themselves to perish by the hand of the tyrant’s whip. But if there were a woman among them so degenerate from love and virtue to choose slavery before the pursuit of her husband, and with the hazard of her life to share with him in his fortunes, that such a one ought to be abandoned, and left as a prey to the common enemy.

To which they all agreed—and bowed. After this, he spoke of the impassable woods and rivers, and convinced ‘em, the more danger, the more glory. He told them that he had heard of one Hannibal, a great captain, had cut his way through mountains of solid rocks;<sup>2</sup> and should a few shrubs oppose them, which they could fire before ‘em? No, ‘twas a trifling excuse to men resolved to die or overcome. As for bogs, they are with a little labor filled and hardened; and the rivers could be no obstacle, since they swam by nature, at least by custom, from their first hour of their birth. That when the children were weary they must carry them by turns, and the woods and their own industry would afford them food. To this they all assented with joy.

Tuscan then demanded what he would do. He said, they would travel towards the sea, plant a new colony, and defend it by their valor; and when they could find a ship, either driven by stress of weather or guided by Providence that way, they would seize it and make it a prize, till it had transported them to their own countries; at least, they should be made free in his kingdom, and be esteemed as his fellow sufferers, and men that had the courage and the bravery to attempt, at least, for liberty; and if they died in the attempt it would be more brave than to live in perpetual slavery.

They bowed and kissed his feet at this resolution, and with one accord vowed to follow him to death. And that night was appointed

to begin their march; they made it known to their wives, and directed them to tie their hamaca<sup>8</sup> about their shoulder and under their arm like a scarf, and to lead their children that could go, and carry those that could not. The wives, who pay an entire obedience to their husbands, obeyed, and stayed for 'em where they were appointed. The men stayed but to furnish themselves with what defensive arms they could get; and all met at the rendezvous, where Caesar made a new encouraging speech to 'em, and led 'em out.

But as they could not march far that night, on Monday early, when the overseers went to call 'em all together to go to work, they were extremely surprised to find not one upon the place, but all fled with what baggage they had. You may imagine this news was not only suddenly spread all over the plantation, but soon reached the neighboring ones; and we had by noon about six hundred men they call the militia of the county, that came to assist us in the pursuit of the fugitives. But never did one see so comical an army march forth to war. The men of any fashion would not concern themselves, though it were almost the common cause; for such revoltings are very ill examples, and have very fatal consequences oftentimes in many colonies. But they had a respect for Caesar, and all hands were against the Parhamites, as they called those of Parham plantation, because they did not, in the first place, love the Lord Governor, and secondly they would have it that Caesar was ill used, and baffled with;<sup>9</sup> and 'tis not impossible but some of the best in the country was of his counsel in this flight, and depriving us of all the slaves; so that they of the better sort would not meddle in the matter. The deputy governor,<sup>1</sup> of whom I have had no great occasion to speak, and who was the most fawning fair-tongued fellow in the world and one that pretended the most friendship to Caesar, was now the only violent man against him; and though he had nothing, and so need fear nothing, yet talked and looked bigger than any man. He was a fellow whose character is not fit to be mentioned with the worst of the slaves. This fellow would lead his army forth to meet Caesar, or rather to pursue him; most of their arms were of those sort of cruel whips they call cat with nine tails; some had rusty useless guns for

show, others old basket hilts<sup>2</sup> whose blades had never seen the light in this age, and others had long staffs and clubs. Mr. Trefry went along, rather to be a mediator than a conqueror in such a battle; for he foresaw and knew, if by fighting they put the Negroes into despair, they were a sort of sullen fellows that would drown or kill themselves before they would yield; and he advised that fair means was best. But Byam was one that abounded in his own wit and would take his own measures.

It was not hard to find these fugitives; for as they fled they were forced to fire and cut the woods before 'em, so that night or day they pursued 'em by the light they made and by the path they had cleared. But as soon as Caesar found he was pursued, he put himself in a posture of defense, placing all the women and children in the rear, and himself with Tuscan by his side, or next to him, all promising to die or conquer. Encouraged thus, they never stood to parley, but fell on pell-mell upon the English, and killed some and wounded a good many, they having recourse to their whips as the best of their weapons. And as they observed no order, they perplexed the enemy so sorely with lashing 'em in the eyes; and the women and children seeing their husbands so treated, being of fearful cowardly dispositions, and hearing the English cry out, "Yield and live, yield and be pardoned," they all run in amongst their husbands and fathers, and hung about 'em, crying out, "Yield, yield; and leave Caesar to their revenge"; that by degrees the slaves abandoned Caesar, and left him only Tuscan and his heroic Imoinda; who, grown big as she was, did nevertheless press near her lord, having a bow and a quiver full of poisoned arrows, which she managed with such dexterity that she wounded several, and shot the governor<sup>3</sup> into the shoulder; of which wound he had like to have died, but that an Indian woman, his mistress, sucked the wound and cleansed it from the venom. But however, he stirred not from the place till he had parleyed with Caesar, who he found was resolved to die fighting, and would not be taken; no more would Tuscan, or Imoinda. But he, more thirsting after revenge of another sort than that of depriving him of life, now made use of all his art of talking

and dissembling, and besought Caesar to yield himself upon terms which he himself should propose, and should be sacredly assented to and kept by him. He told him, it was not that he any longer feared him, or could believe the force of two men, and a young heroine, could overcome all them, with all the slaves now on their side also; but it was the vast esteem he had for his person, the desire he had to serve so gallant a man, and to hinder himself from the reproach hereafter of having been the occasion of the death of a prince whose valor and magnanimity deserved the empire of the world. He protested to him, he looked upon this action as gallant and brave, however tending to the prejudice of his lord and master, who would by it have lost so considerable a number of slaves; that this flight of his should be looked on as a heat of youth, and rashness of a too forward courage, and an unconsidered impatience of liberty, and no more; and that he labored in vain to accomplish that which they would effectually perform as soon as any ship arrived that would touch on his coast. "So that if you will be pleased," continued he, "to surrender yourself, all imaginable respect shall be paid you; and yourself, your wife, and child, if it be here born, shall depart free out of our land."

But Caesar would hear of no composition;<sup>4</sup> though Byam urged, if he pursued and went on in his design, he would inevitably perish, either by great snakes, wild beasts, or hunger; and he ought to have regard to his wife, whose condition required ease, and not the fatigues of tedious travel, where she could not be secured from being devoured. But Caesar told him, there was no faith in the white men or the gods they adored, who instructed 'em in principles so false that honest men could not live amongst 'em; though no people professed so much, none performed so little; that he knew what he had to do when he dealt with men of honor, but with them a man ought to be eternally on his guard, and never to eat and drink with Christians without his weapon of defense in his hand; and for his own security, never to credit one word they spoke. As for the rashness and inconsiderateness of his action, he would confess the governor is in the right; and that he was ashamed of what he had

done, in endeavoring to make those free who were by nature slaves, poor wretched rogues, fit to be used as Christians' tools; dogs, treacherous and cowardly, fit for such masters; and they wanted only but to be whipped into the knowledge of the Christian gods to be the vilest of all creeping things, to learn to worship such deities as had not power to make 'em just, brave, or honest. In fine, after a thousand things of this nature, not fit here to be recited, he told Byam he had rather die than live upon the same earth with such dogs. But Trefry and Byam pleaded and protested together so much that Trefry, believing the governor to mean what he said, and speaking very cordially himself, generously put himself into Caesar's hands, and took him aside and persuaded him, even with tears, to live, by surrendering himself, and to name his conditions. Caesar was overcome by his wit and reasons, and in consideration of Imoinda; and demanding what he desired, and that it should be ratified by their hands in writing, because he had perceived that was the common way of contract between man and man, amongst the whites. All this was performed, and Tuscan's pardon was put in, and they surrender to the governor, who walked peaceably down into the plantation with 'em, after giving order to bury their dead. Caesar was very much toiled with the bustle of the day, for he had fought like a fury; and what mischief was done he and Tuscan performed alone, and gave their enemies a fatal proof that they durst do anything and feared no mortal force.

But they were no sooner arrived at the place where all the slaves receive their punishments of whipping, but they laid hands on Caesar and Tuscan, faint with heat and toil; and surprising them, bound them to two several stakes, and whipped them in a most deplorable and inhuman manner, rending the very flesh from their bones; especially Caesar, who was not perceived to make any moan or to alter his face, only to roll his eyes on the faithless governor, and those he believed guilty, with fierceness and indignation; and to complete his rage, he saw every one of those slaves, who but a few days before adored him as something more than mortal, now had a whip to give him some lashes, while he strove not to break his fetters; though if he had, it were impossible. But he pronounced a



woe and revenge from his eyes, that darted fire that 'twas at once both awful and terrible to behold.

When they thought they were sufficiently revenged on him, they untied him, almost fainting with loss of blood from a thousand wounds all over his body, from which they had rent his clothes, and led him bleeding and naked as he was, and loaded him all over with irons; and then rubbed his wounds, to complete their cruelty, with Indian pepper, which had like to have made him raving mad; and in this condition made him so fast to the ground that he could not stir, if his pains and wounds would have given him leave. They spared Imoinda, and did not let her see this barbarity committed towards her lord, but carried her down to Parham and shut her up; which was not in kindness to her, but for fear she should die with the sight, or miscarry, and then they should lose a young slave and perhaps the mother.

You must know, that when the news was brought on Monday morning that Caesar had betaken himself to the woods and carried with him all the Negroes, we were possessed with extreme fear, which no persuasions could dissipate, that he would secure himself till night, and then that he would come down and cut all our throats. This apprehension made all the females of us fly down the river, to be secured; and while we were away they acted this cruelty. For I suppose I had authority and interest enough there, had I suspected any such thing, to have prevented it; but we had not gone many leagues but the news overtook us that Caesar was taken and whipped like a common slave. We met on the river with Colonel Martin, a man of great gallantry, wit, and goodness, and whom I have celebrated in a character of my new comedy<sup>5</sup> by his own name, in memory of so brave a man. He was wise and eloquent and, from the fineness of his parts, bore a great sway over the hearts of all the colony. He was a friend to Caesar, and resented this false dealing with him very much. We carried him back to Parham, thinking to have made an accommodation; when we came, the first news we heard was that the governor was dead of a wound Imoinda had given him; but it was not so well. But it seems he would have the



pleasure of beholding the revenge he took on Caesar, and before the cruel ceremony was finished, he dropped down; and then they perceived the wound he had on his shoulder was by a venomed arrow, which, as I said, his Indian mistress healed by sucking the wound.

We were no sooner arrived but we went up to the plantation to see Caesar, whom we found in a very miserable and unexpressible condition; and I have a thousand times admired how he lived, in so much tormenting pain. We said all things to him that trouble, pity, and good nature could suggest, protesting our innocency of the fact and our abhorrence of such cruelties; making a thousand professions of services to him and begging as many pardons for the offenders, till we said so much that he believed we had no hand in his ill treatment; but told us he could never pardon Byam; as for Trefry, he confessed he saw his grief and sorrow for his suffering, which he could not hinder, but was like to have been beaten down by the very slaves for speaking in his defense. But for Byam, who was their leader, their head—and should, by his justice and honor, have been an example to 'em—for him, he wished to live, to take a dire revenge of him, and said, "It had been well for him if he had sacrificed me, instead of giving me the contemptible<sup>6</sup> whip." He refused to talk much, but begging us to give him our hands, he took 'em, and protested never to lift up his to do us any harm. He had a great respect for Colonel Martin, and always took his counsel like that of a parent, and assured him he would obey him in anything but his revenge on Byam. "Therefore," said he, "for his own safety, let him speedily dispatch me; for if I could dispatch myself I would not, till that justice were done to my injured person,<sup>7</sup> and the contempt of a soldier. No, I would not kill myself, even after a whipping, but will be content to live with that infamy, and be pointed at by every grinning slave, till I have completed my revenge; and then you shall see that Oroonoko scorns to live with the indignity that was put on Caesar." All we could do could get no more words from him; and we took care to have him put immediately into a healing bath to rid him of his pepper, and ordered a surgeon<sup>8</sup> to anoint him with healing balm,

which he suffered; and in some time he began to be able to walk and eat. We failed not to visit him every day, and to that end had him brought to an apartment at Parham.

The governor was no sooner recovered, and had heard of the menaces of Caesar, but he called his council; who (not to disgrace them, or burlesque the government there) consisted of such notorious villains as Newgate<sup>9</sup> never transported; and possibly originally were such who understood neither the laws of God or man, and had no sort of principles to make 'em worthy the name of men; but at the very council table would contradict and fight with one another, and swear so bloodily that 'twas terrible to hear and see 'em. (Some of 'em were afterwards hanged when the Dutch took possession of the place, others sent off in chains.) But calling these special rulers of the nation together, and requiring their counsel in this weighty affair, they all concluded that (Damn 'em) it might be their own cases; and that Caesar ought to be made an example to all the Negroes, to fright 'em from daring to threaten their betters, their lords and masters; and at this rate no man was safe from his own slaves; and concluded, *nemine contradicente*,<sup>1</sup> that Caesar should be hanged.

Trefry then thought it time to use his authority, and told Byam his command did not extend to his lord's plantation, and that Parham was as much exempt from the law as Whitehall,<sup>2</sup> and that they ought no more to touch the servants of the Lord — (who there represented the King's person) than they could those about the King himself; and that Parham was a sanctuary; and though his lord were absent in person, his power was still in being there, which he had entrusted with him as far as the dominions of his particular plantations reached, and all that belonged to it; the rest of the country, as Byam was lieutenant to his lord, he might exercise his tyranny upon. Trefry had others as powerful, or more, that interested themselves in Caesar's life, and absolutely said he should be defended. So turning the governor and his wise council out of doors (for they sat at Parham House), they set a guard upon our landing

place, and would admit none but those we called friends to us and Caesar.

The governor having remained wounded at Parham till his recovery was completed, Caesar did not know but he was still there; and indeed, for the most part his time was spent there, for he was one that loved to live at other people's expense; and if he were a day absent, he was ten present there, and used to play and walk and hunt and fish with Caesar. So that Caesar did not at all doubt, if he once recovered strength, but he should find an opportunity of being revenged on him. Though after such a revenge, he could not hope to live, for if he escaped the fury of the English mobile,<sup>3</sup> who perhaps would have been glad of the occasion to have killed him, he was resolved not to survive his whipping; yet he had, some tender hours, a repenting softness, which he called his fits of coward, wherein he struggled with Love for the victory of his heart, which took part with his charming Imoinda there; but for the most part his time was passed in melancholy thought and black designs. He considered, if he should do this deed and die, either in the attempt or after it, he left his lovely Imoinda a prey, or at best a slave, to the enraged multitude; his great heart could not endure that thought. "Perhaps," said he, "she may be first ravished by every brute, exposed first to their nasty lusts and then a shameful death." No; he could not live a moment under that apprehension, too insupportable to be borne. These were his thoughts and his silent arguments with his heart, as he told us afterwards; so that now resolving not only to kill Byam but all those he thought had enraged him, pleasing his great heart with the fancied slaughter he should make over the whole face of the plantation, he first resolved on a deed, that (however horrid it at first appeared to us all), when we had heard his reasons, we thought it brave and just. Being able to walk and, as he believed, fit for the execution of his great design, he begged Trefry to trust him into the air, believing a walk would do him good, which was granted him; and taking Imoinda with him, as he used to do in his more happy and calmer days, he led her up into a wood, where, after (with a thousand sighs, and long gazing silently on her face, while tears

gushed, in spite of him, from his eyes) he told her his design first of killing her, and then his enemies, and next himself, and the impossibility of escaping, and therefore he told her the necessity of dying, he found the heroic wife faster pleading for death than he was to propose it, when she found his fixed resolution, and on her knees besought him not to leave her a prey to his enemies. He (grieved to death) yet pleased at her noble resolution, took her up, and embracing her with all the passion and languishment of a dying lover, drew his knife to kill this treasure of his soul, this pleasure of his eyes; while tears trickled down his cheeks, hers were smiling with joy she should die by so noble a hand, and be sent in her own country (for that's their notion of the next world) by him she so tenderly loved and so truly adored in this; for wives have a respect for their husbands equal to what any other people pay a deity, and when a man finds any occasion to quit his wife, if he love her, she dies by his hand; if not, he sells her, or suffers some other to kill her. It being thus, you may believe the deed was soon resolved on; and 'tis not to be doubted but the parting, the eternal leave-taking of two such lovers, so greatly born, so sensible,<sup>4</sup> so beautiful, so young, and so fond, must be very moving, as the relation of it was to me afterwards.



C. Grignion, after J. Barralet, ***Mr. Savigny in the Character of Oroonoko***; engraving, 1785. Through the 18th century, the story

of *Oroonoko* was known mostly from a 1696 play adapted from Behn's work by Thomas Southerne. His version makes Imoinda White, as this scene from a 1775 production shows. The actor plays Oroonoko in blackface and is here on the verge of killing Imoinda. From *Oroonoko. A tragedy. Written by Thomas Southern, Marked with the variations in the manager's book, at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane* (1785).

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All that love could say in such cases being ended, and all the intermitting irresolutions being adjusted, the lovely, young, and adored victim lays herself down before the sacrificer; while he, with a hand resolved and a heart breaking within, gave the fatal stroke; first cutting her throat, and then severing her yet smiling face from that delicate body, pregnant as it was with fruits of tenderest love. As soon as he had done, he laid the body decently on leaves and flowers, of which he made a bed, and concealed it under the same coverlid of nature; only her face he left yet bare to look on. But when he found she was dead and past all retrieve, never more to bless him with her eyes and soft language, his grief swelled up to rage; he tore, he raved, he roared, like some monster of the wood, calling on the loved name of Imoinda. A thousand times he turned the fatal knife that did the deed toward his own heart, with a resolution to go immediately after her; but dire revenge, which now was a thousand times more fierce in his soul than before, prevents him; and he would cry out, "No; since I have sacrificed Imoinda to my revenge, shall I lose that glory which I have purchased so dear as at the price of the fairest, dearest, softest creature that ever nature made? No, no!" Then, at her name, grief would get the ascendant of rage, and he would lie down by her side and water her face with showers of tears, which never were wont to fall from those eyes. And however bent he was on his intended slaughter, he had not power to stir from the sight of this dear object, now more beloved and more adored than ever.

He remained in this deploring condition for two days, and never rose from the ground where he had made his sad sacrifice. At last,



rousing from her side, and accusing himself with living too long now Imoinda was dead, and that the deaths of those barbarous enemies were deferred too long, he resolved now to finish the great work; but offering to rise, he found his strength so decayed that he reeled to and fro, like boughs assailed by contrary winds; so that he was forced to lie down again, and try to summon all his courage to his aid. He found his brains turned round, and his eyes were dizzy, and objects appeared not the same to him they were wont to do; his breath was short, and all his limbs surprised with a faintness he had never felt before. He had not eat in two days, which was one occasion of this feebleness, but excess of grief was the greatest; yet still he hoped he should recover vigor to act his design, and lay expecting it yet six days longer, still mourning over the dead idol of his heart, and striving every day to rise, but could not.

In all this time you may believe we were in no little affliction for Caesar and his wife; some were of opinion he was escaped never to return; others thought some accident had happened to him. But however, we failed not to send out an hundred people several ways to search for him; a party of about forty went that way he took, among whom was Tuscan, who was perfectly reconciled to Byam. They had not gone very far into the wood but they smelt an unusual smell, as of a dead body; for stinks must be very noisome that can be distinguished among such a quantity of natural sweets as every inch of that land produces. So that they concluded they should find him dead, or somebody that was so. They passed on towards it, as loathsome as it was, and made such a rustling among the leaves that lie thick on the ground, by continual falling, that Caesar heard he was approached; and though he had during the space of these eight days endeavored to rise, but found he wanted strength, yet looking up and seeing his pursuers, he rose and reeled to a neighboring tree, against which he fixed his back; and being within a dozen yards of those that advanced and saw him, he called out to them and bid them approach no nearer, if they would be safe. So that they stood still, and hardly believing their eyes, that would persuade them that it was Caesar that spoke to 'em, so much was he altered, they asked him what he had done with his wife, for they smelt a stink that

almost struck them dead. He, pointing to the dead body, sighing, cried, "Behold her there." They put off the flowers that covered her with their sticks, and found she was killed, and cried out, "Oh, monster! that hast murdered thy wife." Then asking him why he did so cruel a deed, he replied, he had no leisure to answer impertinent questions. "You may go back," continued he, "and tell the faithless governor he may thank fortune that I am breathing my last, and that my arm is too feeble to obey my heart in what it had designed him." But his tongue faltering, and trembling, he could scarce end what he was saying. The English, taking advantage by his weakness, cried, "Let us take him alive by all means." He heard 'em; and as if he had revived from a fainting, or a dream, he cried out, "No, gentlemen, you are deceived; you will find no more Caesars to be whipped, no more find a faith in me. Feeble as you think me, I have strength yet left to secure me from a second indignity." They swore all anew, and he only shook his head and beheld them with scorn. Then they cried out, "Who will venture on this single man? Will nobody?" They stood all silent while Caesar replied, "Fatal will be the attempt to the first adventurer, let him assure himself," and at that word, held up his knife in a menacing posture. "Look ye, ye faithless crew," said he, "'tis not life I seek, nor am I afraid of dying," and at that word cut a piece of flesh from his own throat, and threw it at 'em; "yet still I would live if I could, till I had perfected my revenge. But oh! it cannot be; I feel life gliding from my eyes and heart, and if I make not haste, I shall yet fall a victim to the shameful whip." At that, he ripped up his own belly, and took his bowels and pulled 'em out, with what strength he could; while some, on their knees imploring, besought him to hold his hand. But when they saw him tottering, they cried out, "Will none venture on him?" A bold English cried, "Yes, if he were the devil" (taking courage when he saw him almost dead); and swearing a horrid oath for his farewell to the world, he rushed on him; Caesar, with his armed hand, met him so fairly as stuck him to the heart, and he fell dead at his feet. Tuscan, seeing that, cried out, "I love thee, O Caesar, and therefore will not let thee die, if possible." And running to him, took him in his arms; but at the same time warding a blow that Caesar made at his bosom, he



received it quite through his arm; and Caesar having not the strength to pluck the knife forth, though he attempted it, Tuscan neither pulled it out himself nor suffered it to be pulled out, but came down with it sticking in his arm; and the reason he gave for it was, because the air should not get into the wound. They put their hands across, and carried Caesar between six of 'em, fainted as he was, and they thought dead, or just dying; and they brought him to Parham, and laid him on a couch, and had the chirurgion immediately to him, who dressed his wounds and sewed up his belly, and used means to bring him to life, which they effected. We ran all to see him, and if before we thought him so beautiful a sight, he was now so altered that his face was like a death's head blacked over, nothing but teeth and eyeholes. For some days we suffered nobody to speak to him, but caused cordials to be poured down his throat, which sustained his life; and in six or seven days he recovered his senses. For you must know that wounds are almost to a miracle cured in the Indies, unless wounds in the legs, which rarely ever cure.

When he was well enough to speak, we talked to him, and asked him some questions about his wife, and the reasons why he killed her; and he then told us what I have related of that resolution, and of his parting; and he besought us we would let him die, and was extremely afflicted to think it was possible he might live; he assured us if we did not dispatch him, he would prove very fatal to a great many. We said all we could to make him live, and gave him new assurances; but he begged we would not think so poorly of him, or of his love to Imoinda, to imagine we could flatter him to life again; but the chirurgion assured him he could not live, and therefore he need not fear. We were all (but Caesar) afflicted at this news; and the sight was gashly;<sup>5</sup> his discourse was sad, and the earthly smell about him so strong that I was persuaded to leave the place for some time (being myself but sickly, and very apt to fall into fits of dangerous illness upon any extraordinary melancholy). The servants and Trefry and the chirurgions promised all to take what possible care they could of the life of Caesar, and I, taking boat, went with

other company to Colonel Martin's, about three days' journey down the river; but I was no sooner gone, but the governor taking Trefry about some pretended earnest business a day's journey up the river, having communicated his design to one Banister, a wild Irishman and one of the council, a fellow of absolute barbarity, and fit to execute any villainy, but was rich: he came up to Parham, and forcibly took Caesar, and had him carried to the same post where he was whipped; and causing him to be tied to it, and a great fire made before him, he told him he should die like a dog, as he was. Caesar replied, this was the first piece of bravery that ever Banister did, and he never spoke sense till he pronounced that word; and if he would keep it, he would declare, in the other world, that he was the only man of all the whites that ever he heard speak truth. And turning to the men that bound him, he said, "My friends, am I to die, or to be whipped?" And they cried, "Whipped! No, you shall not escape so well." And then he replied, smiling, "A blessing on thee," and assured them they need not tie him, for he would stand fixed like a rock, and endure death so as should encourage them to die. "But if you whip me," said he, "be sure you tie me fast."

He had learned to take tobacco; and when he was assured he should die, he desired they would give him a pipe in his mouth, ready lighted, which they did; and the executioner came, and first cut off his members,<sup>6</sup> and threw them into the fire; after that, with an ill-favored knife, they cut his ears, and his nose, and burned them; he still smoked on, as if nothing had touched him. Then they hacked off one of his arms, and still he bore up, and held his pipe; but at the cutting off the other arm, his head sunk, and his pipe dropped, and he gave up the ghost, without a groan or a reproach. My mother and sister were by him all the while, but not suffered to save him, so rude and wild were the rabble, and so inhuman were the justices, who stood by to see the execution, who after paid dearly enough for their insolence. They cut Caesar in quarters, and sent them to several of the chief plantations. One quarter was sent to Colonel Martin, who refused it, and swore he had rather see the quarters of Banister and the governor himself than those of Caesar

on his plantations, and that he could govern his Negroes without terrifying and grieving them with frightful spectacles of a mangled king.

Thus died this great man, worthy of a better fate, and a more sublime wit than mine to write his praise; yet, I hope, the reputation of my pen is considerable enough to make his glorious name to survive to all ages, with that of the brave, the beautiful, and the constant Imoinda.

## Endnotes

1688

- Note 1: The text, prepared by Joanna Lipking, is based on the 1688 edition, the sole edition published during Behn's lifetime. The critical edition of G. C. Duchovnay (diss., Indiana, 1971), which collates the four 17th-century editions, has been consulted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Richard Maitland (1653–1695), fourth Earl of Lauderdale, Scottish nobleman loyal to James II, who would soon join his king in France after the revolution of 1688 deposed him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Despite her high social standing in the South American colony, Behn could not save Oroonoko's life. "Other world": the so-called New World—here South America.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Like the fictions in a romance tale.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Oroonoko.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A British sugar colony on the South American coast east of Venezuela; later Dutch Guiana, now the Republic of Suriname.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A name appearing in local descriptions, but the animal is not clearly identified; probably the lion-headed marmoset or perhaps the *cujara* (Portuguese), a rodent known as the rice rat. "Buffaloes": wild oxen of various species.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Butterflies. "Antiquaries": probably the natural history museum of the Royal Society.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The title character in the 1664 heroic play by Sir Robert Howard and John Dryden, which was noted for its lavish production. There are contemporary records of “speckled plumes” and feather headdresses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: About a foot square.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Extremely.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Capacity to lead.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not a country but a British-held fort and market in enslaved people on the Gold Coast of Africa, in modern-day Ghana. As the trade expanded, the enslaved people and workers shipped out from the region (who came to be called Cormantines) impressed many European observers by their beauty and bearing, their fierceness in war, and their extreme dignity under captivity or torture.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Loosely used for any dark-skinned person.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Charles I, beheaded in 1649 during the civil wars between Royalists and Parliamentarians. In 1688 this remark and others would have signaled Behn’s ardent support of James II, the last of the Stuart kings, who would be forced into exile within the year.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sculptor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Except for. The singling out of Africans with European looks or moral values is by no means unique to Behn; for example, Edward Long’s 1774 *History of Jamaica* reports of the Cormantines that “their features are very different from the rest of the African Negroes, being smaller, and more of the European turn.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shrewd, sagacious.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reverence.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Company. “Admired”: marveled.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Benefits.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, grandson.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: So that.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Women teachers or chaperones. “Cast”: that is, cast-off.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Insults.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rank.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Remnant.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Company.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Offensive.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In spite of. Oroonoko is saying that he will die before the king does.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Racking.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Soothed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The ship's captain.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hoist.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Word of honor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The past form of *eat*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lord Willoughby of Parham, coproprietor of Surinam by royal grant. John Treffry, or Trefry, was his plantation overseer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An outer garment or robe.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: White person; a variant of *backra*, from an Ibo word that enslaved Africans brought to Surinam and the Caribbean.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Coarse cotton or linen, sometimes called osnaburg, after a German cloth-manufacturing town.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lacked.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In 1667 the Dutch attacked and conquered Surinam, and England ceded it by treaty in exchange for New York.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Contributing jointly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The sun.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A long-haired dog or poodle, especially associated with women of fashion.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, a novel event or piece of news.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Incised. The carving is likened to figured lacquerwork in the Japanese style and to elaborate "high point" lace.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: A North British people appearing in histories of England and Scotland.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Suspicions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Decorative needlework or other handiwork.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Alexander the Great is supposed to have encountered both snakes and Amazons in a campaign against India. "Pitching the bar": game in which players compete in throwing a heavy bar or rod. "Tigers": wild cats, including the South American jaguar and cougar.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Land not disjoined by the sea from other lands" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Blooming.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fashionable walk in St. James's Park in London.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A military term for making sudden raids.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The jarring mixture of pronouns in the two accounts of the tigers (wild cats) may suggest a reluctance to use a feminine pronoun in moments of extreme violence. The first account was left uncorrected in all four 17th-century editions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Supporter of Oliver Cromwell.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Electric eel.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Hypothesis or system upon which natural effects are explained" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Woven fabric, worsted. "Commode": suitable.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Meal.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Medicine.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: With contempt.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The mouth of the Amazon, in Brazil, is far distant from Surinam.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: White people who, for crimes or debt, were indentured for a fixed period. "Trades": tradesman.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Harm, slaughter.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Proverbial for something that distracts from comfort or pleasure, from the protective charm on chariots of triumphing generals in ancient Rome.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here a day of customary beating; more widely, a Friday bringing some notable disaster, from students' slang for examination day.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Renegades or fugitives.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Carthaginian general and his troops literally hacked their way down the Alps into Italy to attack Rome.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Hammock.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cheated.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: William Byam. There are recorded complaints against him for high-handedness and from him about insubordination by settlers and enslaved people.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Swords with protective hilt guards.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, Byam, the deputy governor.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Settlement.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *The Younger Brother; or, The Amorous Jilt*, not produced until 1696 despite this piece of promotion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Showing contempt.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Body or character.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Surgeon.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The major London prison, from which criminals were transported to the colonies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: No one disagreeing (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The king's palace in London. Trefry stands as Lord Willoughby's deputy on his private land, Byam in the colony at large.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Common people or mob.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sensitive.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ghastly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Genitals.[Return to reference 6](#)



# **ANNE FINCH, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA 1661–1720**

Born into an ancient country family, Anne Kingsmill became a maid of honor at the court of Charles II. There she met Colonel Heneage Finch; in 1684 they married. During the short reign of James II, they prospered at court. The king's fall in 1688, however, changed their fortunes: they were forced to leave court, and Heaneage was briefly arrested. For the rest of their lives, the Finches remained Nonjurors, refusing to swear allegiance to the new monarch, William III, and, instead, retaining Jacobite sympathies to the deposed James and his line. Eventually, they settled on a beautiful family estate at Eastwell, in Kent, near the south coast of England. At Eastwell, Finch wrote many of her poems, influenced, she said, by the "solitude and security of the country" and by "objects naturally inspiring soft and poetical imaginations." In their later years, the Finches returned to London, where Finch moved in influential literary circles, and in 1712 her husband became the Earl of Winchilsea. Their marriage was a happy one, and her husband supported her poetry.

Finch offers a fascinating example of a woman writer navigating issues surrounding gender, poetry, and print. Early in her career, she circulated her work among friends and their social networks in thoughtfully designed manuscript books. In the "Introduction" to those volumes, she roundly critiqued societal expectations for



women, as she explained her reasons for not printing her poems. In later years, though, her thinking about print changed. She contributed individual poems to popular miscellany collections, and in 1713 she published a volume entirely of her own verse, *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions, Written by a Lady*. In the printed volume's introductory poem, "Mercury and the Elephant," she framed her work very differently, cleverly brushing aside the criticisms that might meet her poetry. Finch was savvy about the possibilities and pitfalls of print, strategically choosing which poems to publish where (never publishing some political poems, for instance).

Finch's reputation today was shaped by William Wordsworth, who in the nineteenth century praised her carefully observed nature poetry, especially "Nocturnal Reverie." It was also shaped by Virginia Woolf, who in the early twentieth century emphasized the Finch of "The Introduction," the woman alone and indignant in her garden who can only "To some few friends, and to [her] sorrows sing." But both of these are very partial depictions: Finch was celebrated in her moment and wrote not only nature poetry but also fables, ballads, plays, and poems on politics, religion, and fashionable society. Principled, pious, witty, and brilliant, Finch is her own best example of what a poet can be.

## The Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Did I, my lines intend for public view,  
How many censures would their faults pursue,  
Some would, because such words they do affect,  
Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect.  
5 And many have attained, dull and untaught,  
The name of wit, only by finding fault.  
True judges might condemn their want of wit,  
And all might say, they're by a woman writ.  
Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,  
Such an intruder on the rights of men,  
10 Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,  
The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.  
They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;  
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play  
Are the accomplishments we should desire;  
15 To write, or read, or think, or to enquire,  
Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,  
And interrupt the conquests of our prime;  
Whilst the dull manage<sup>o</sup> of a servile house  
Is held by some our outmost art, and use.  
20       Sure 'twas not ever thus, nor are we told  
Fables,<sup>o</sup> of women that excelled of old;  
To whom, by the diffusive hand of heaven  
Some share of wit, and poetry was given.  
On that glad day, on which the Ark returned,  
25 The holy pledge, for which the land had mourned,  
The joyful tribes attend it on the way,  
The Levites<sup>2</sup> do the sacred charge convey,  
Whilst various instruments before it play;  
30 Here holy virgins in the concert join,

The louder notes, to soften and refine,  
And with alternate verse,<sup>3</sup> complete the  
hymn divine.

}

Lo! the young Poet, after God's own  
heart,<sup>4</sup>

By Him inspired, and taught the Muses art,  
Returned from conquest, a bright chorus meets,  
35 That sing his slain ten thousand in the streets.<sup>5</sup>  
In such loud numbers<sup>6</sup> they his acts declare,  
Proclaim the wonders of his early war,  
That Saul upon the vast applause does frown,  
And feels its mighty thunder shake the crown.  
40 What can the threatened judgment now prolong?<sup>7</sup>  
Half of the kingdom is already gone;  
The fairest half, whose influence guides the rest,  
Have David's empire o'er their hearts confessed.

A woman here, leads fainting Israel on,  
45 She fights, she wins, she triumphs with a song,<sup>8</sup>  
Devout, majestic, for the subject fit,  
And far above her arms, exalts her wit,  
Then, to the peaceful, shady palm withdraws,  
And rules the rescued nation with her laws.

50 How are we fall'n, fall'n by mistaken rules,  
And education's, more than nature's fools;  
Debarred from all improvements of the mind,  
And to be dull, expected and designed;<sup>9</sup>  
And if some one would soar above the rest,  
55 With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed,  
So strong th' opposing faction still appears,  
The hopes to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears.  
Be cautioned, then, my Muse, and still retired;  
Nor be despised, aiming to be admired;  
60 Conscious of wants,<sup>10</sup> still with contracted wing,  
To some few friends, and to thy sorrows sing;  
For groves of laurel,<sup>11</sup> thou wert never meant;

Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there  
content.

1689? **Endnotes**

1903

- Note 1: This poem prefaced Finch's early manuscript books and explored some of her reasons for circulating a collection of her work in manuscript, not print. Later, her attitude toward print changed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Levites were charged with carrying the Ark of the Covenant. In 1 Chronicles 15, David had it restored to Jerusalem.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Finch imagines the choir of virgins chanting every other line, responsively, as in some of the Psalms.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Acts 13:22 recounts God describing David, the Psalmist, as "a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: 1 Samuel 18:6–7.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Measures of music and verse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: What can now stave off the threatened judgment? Saul's doom ("judgment") had been prophesied. God would replace him with a better king.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The prophet and judge Deborah sang praise to the Lord for the victory she herself had brought about (Judges 4–5).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Laurel branches symbolized greatness in poetry.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *management*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stories*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intended*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inadequacies*[Return to reference °](#)

# Mercury and the Elephant: A Prefatory Fable<sup>1</sup>

As Merc'ry travelled through a wood,  
(Whose errands are more fleet than good)<sup>2</sup>  
An elephant before him lay,  
That much encumbered had the way:  
The messenger, who's still in haste,  
5 Would fain<sup>o</sup> have bowed, and so have passed;  
When up arose th' unwieldy brute,  
And would repeat a late dispute,  
In which (he said) he'd gained the prize  
From a wild boar of monstrous size:  
10 But Fame (quoth he) with all her tongues,  
Who lawyers, ladies, soldiers wrongs,  
Has, to my disadvantage, told  
An action throughly<sup>o</sup> bright and bold;  
Has said, that I foul play had used,  
15 And with my weight th' opposer bruised;  
Had laid my trunk about his brawn,  
Before his tushes<sup>o</sup> could be drawn;  
Had stunned him with a hideous roar,  
And twenty-thousand scandals more:  
20 But I defy the talk of men,  
Or voice of brutes in ev'ry den;  
Th' impartial skies are all my care,  
And how it stands recorded there.  
Amongst you Gods, pray, what is thought?  
25 Quoth Mercury—Then have you fought!  
Solicitous<sup>o</sup> thus should I be  
For what's said of my verse and me;  
Or should my friends excuses frame,

30 And beg the criticks not to blame  
 (Since from a female hand it came)  
 Defects in judgment, or in wit;  
 They'd but reply—Then has she writ!<sup>3</sup> }  
 Our vanity we more betray,  
 In asking what the world will say,  
 35 Than if, in trivial things like these,  
 We wait on the event<sup>o</sup> with ease;  
 Nor make long prefaces, to show  
 What men are not concerned to know:  
 For still untouched how we succeed,  
 40 'Tis for themselves, not us, they read;  
 Whilst that proceeding to requite,<sup>o</sup>  
 We own (who in the Muse delight)  
 'Tis for ourselves, not them, we write. }  
 Betrayed by solitude to try  
 45 Amusements, which the prosp'rous fly;<sup>o</sup>  
 And only to the press repair,  
 To fix our scattered papers there;  
 Tho' whilst our labors are preserved,  
 The printers may, indeed, be starved.  
 50

## Endnotes

1713

- Note 1: This prefatory poem to Finch's 1713 printed collection exhibits a strikingly different attitude toward print, women's authorship, and reputation than the "Introduction." The fable was one of Finch's most popular modes. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Roman god Mercury was messenger and trickster, associated with swift ("fleet") movement. His name was used in many newspaper titles, and thus fitting for this meditation on print and reputation. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The elephant in the fable is an example of what not to do. Overly concerned about his reputation, he spreads the very rumor that he hopes the gods have not heard. Applying the

moral to her own authorship, Finch embraces the fact that she might matter as little to the critics as the elephant to Mercury, but she also refuses to offer conventional apologies for “defects in judgment, or in wit” that prefaced many texts.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *gladly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thoroughly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tusks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worried*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *match; respond to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flee*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***From The Spleen***<sup>1</sup>

What art thou, Spleen, which ev'ry thing dost ape<sup>o</sup>?  
Thou Proteus<sup>2</sup> to abused mankind,  
Who never yet thy real cause could find,  
Or fix thee to remain in one continued shape.  
Still varying thy perplexing form,  
5 Now a dead sea thou'lt<sup>o</sup> represent,  
A calm of stupid discontent,  
Then, dashing on the rocks wilt rage into a storm.  
Trembling sometimes thou dost appear,  
Dissolved into a panic fear;  
10 On sleep intruding dost thy shadows spread,  
Thy gloomy terrors round the silent bed,  
And crowd with boading<sup>o</sup> dreams the  
melancholy head: }  
Or, when the midnight hour is told,  
And drooping lids thou still dost waking hold,  
15 Thy fond delusions cheat the eyes,  
Before them antic<sup>o</sup> specters dance,  
Unusual fires their pointed heads advance,  
And airy phantoms rise.  
Such was the monstrous vision seen,  
20 When Brutus (now beneath his cares oppressed,  
And all Rome's fortunes rolling in his breast,  
Before Philippi's latest field,  
Before his fate did to Octavius lead)  
25 Was vanquished by the Spleen.<sup>3</sup>

Falsely, the mortal part we blame  
Of our depressed, and pond'rous frame,<sup>o</sup>  
Which, till the first degrading sin



Let Thee, its dull attendant, in,<sup>4</sup>  
Still with the other did comply,  
30 Nor clogged the active soul, disposed to fly,  
And range the mansions of its native sky. }  
Nor, whilst in his own heaven he dwelt,  
Whilst man his paradise possessed,  
His fertile garden in the fragrant East,<sup>o</sup>  
35 And all united odors smelt,  
No arméd sweets, until thy reign,  
Could shock the sense, or in the face  
A flushed, unhandsome color place.  
Now the jonquil<sup>o</sup> o'ercomes the feeble brain;  
40 We faint beneath the aromatic pain,  
Till some offensive scent thy pow'rs appease,  
And pleasure we resign for short, and nauseous  
ease.

In ev'ry one thou dost possess,  
New are thy motions, and thy dress:  
45 Now in some grove a list'ning friend  
Thy false suggestions must attend,  
Thy whispered griefs, thy fancied sorrows hear,  
Breathed in a sigh, and witnessed by a tear;  
Whilst in the light, and vulgar crowd,  
50 Thy slaves, more clamorous and loud,  
By laughters unprovoked, thy influence too confess.  
In the imperious wife thou vapors art,  
Which from o'erheated passions rise  
In clouds to the attractive<sup>o</sup> brain,  
55 Until descending thence again,  
Thro' the o'er-cast, and show'ring eyes,  
Upon her husband's softened heart,  
He the disputed point must yield,  
Something resign of the contested field;  
60 Till lordly man, born to imperial sway,

Compounds for peace, to make that right  
away,<sup>5</sup>  
And woman, armed with Spleen, does  
servilely obey.

}

65       The fool, to imitate the wits,  
          Complains of thy pretended fits,  
          And dullness, born with him, would lay<sup>o</sup>  
          Upon thy accidental sway;<sup>6</sup>  
          Because, sometimes, thou dost presume  
          Into the ablest heads to come:  
70       That, often, men of thoughts refined,  
          Impatient of unequal sense,  
          Such slow returns, where they so much dispense,  
          Retiring from the crowd, are to thy shades inclined.  
          O'er me alas! thou dost too much prevail:  
75       I feel thy force, whilst I against thee  
          rail;  
          I feel my verse decay, and my cramped  
          numbers fail.

}

          Thro' thy black jaundice<sup>7</sup> I all objects see,  
          As dark, and terrible as thee,  
          My lines decried,<sup>o</sup> and my employment thought  
          An useless folly, or presumptuous fault:  
80       Whilst in the Muses' paths I stray,  
          Whilst in their groves, and by their secret springs  
          My hand delights to trace unusual things,  
          And deviates from the known, and common way;<sup>8</sup>  
          Nor will in fading silks compose  
85       Faintly th' inimitable Rose,  
          Fill up an ill-drawn bird, or paint on glass  
          The sov'reign's blurred and undistinguished  
          face,  
          The threatening Angel, and the speaking  
          Ass.<sup>9</sup>

}

## 1701 **Endnotes**

1713

- Note 1: "The Spleen" was Finch's most famous poem in her lifetime. Disorders of the spleen, often called "vapors" or just "the spleen" (after what was understood as their bodily cause), were common and associated with a wide range of what we today think of as psychological symptoms: depression, melancholy, sluggishness, mood swings, delusions, or anger. Finch's poem about the relationship between body and mind bears comparison with the "Cave of Spleen" in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (see p. 538).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A mythological god capable of changing shapes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (4.3.278), a "monstrous apparition," the ghost of Julius Caesar, appears to Brutus (Marcus Junius Brutus, ca. 85–42 B.C.E.) and says he will see Brutus at the upcoming Battle of Philippi (42 B.C.E.) between forces of Brutus and Cassius on one side, and those of Octavian ("Octavius," 63 B.C.E.–14 C.E., later Emperor Caesar Augustus) and Marc Antony on the other. After losing the battle, Brutus commits suicide.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the original sin that caused humans to be cast out of Eden also "let in" bodily pain and diseases like the spleen.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Man surrenders, and legally signs away his "imperial" rights. "Compounds": settles by concession.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The spleen was a fashionable complaint, sometimes feigned.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A particular problem involving the spleen; Finch is interested in how it could impact vision.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: While Finch earlier described the spleen hindering her writing, here it seems enabling.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Finch distinguishes her writing from more traditional feminine crafts of embroidery and glass painting. She also distinguishes its themes: she's not copying the picture of a bird, a rose, the king, or a scene from a Bible story. "Threatning Angel, the speaking ass": reference to Numbers 22:21–35. After this, the poem continues for some sixty more lines. [Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *imitate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thou wilt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foreboding, sinister* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unnatural, grotesque* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *human body* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Eden* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *daffodil* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *capable of attracting* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blame* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *criticized* [Return to reference °](#)

# Upon the Hurricane<sup>1</sup>

You have obeyed, you winds, that must fulfill  
The Great Disposer's<sup>o</sup> righteous will;  
Throughout the land, unlimited you flew,  
Nor sought, as heretofore, with friendly aid  
Only, new motion to bestow  
5 Upon the sluggish vapors, bred below,  
Condensing into mists, and melancholy shade.  
No more such gentle methods you pursue,  
But marching now in terrible array,  
Undistinguished was your prey:  
10 In vain the shrubs, with lowly bent,  
Sought their destruction to prevent;  
The beech in vain, with out-stretched arms,  
Deprecates<sup>o</sup> th' approaching harms;  
In vain the oak (so often stormed)  
15 Relied upon that native force,  
By which already was performed  
So much of his appointed course,  
As made him, fearless of decay,  
Wait but the accomplished time  
20 Of his long-wished and useful prime,  
To be removed, with honor, to the sea.<sup>2</sup>  
The straight and ornamental pine  
Did in the like ambition join,  
And thought his fame should ever last,  
25 When in some royal ship he stood the planted mast;  
And should again his length of timber rear,  
And new engrafted branches wear  
Of fibrous cordage and impending shrouds,<sup>3</sup>

Still trimmed with human care, and watered by the  
clouds.

But oh, you trees! who solitary stood;  
Or you, whose numbers formed a wood;  
You, who on mountains chose to rise,  
And drew them nearer to the skies;  
Or you, whom valleys late did hold  
35 In flexible and lighter mold;  
You num'rous brethren of the leafy kind,  
To whatsoever use designed,  
Now, vain you found it to contend  
With not, alas! one element your friend;  
40 Your Mother Earth, thro' long preceding rains,  
(Which undermining sink below)  
No more her wonted strength retains;  
Nor you so fixed within her bosom grow,  
That for your sakes she can resolve to bear  
45 These furious shocks of hurrying air;  
But finding all your ruin did conspire,  
She soon her beauteous progeny resigned  
To this destructive, this imperious wind,  
That checked your nobler aims, and gives you to the  
50 fire.

Thus! have thy cedars, Libanus, been struck  
As the lithe osiers twisted round;  
Thus! Cadez, has thy wilderness been shook,  
When the appalling, and tremendous sound  
55 Of rattling tempests o'er you broke,  
And made your stubborn glories bow,  
When in such whirlwinds the Almighty spoke,  
Warning Judea then, as our Britannia now.  
Yet these were the remoter harms,  
Foreign the care, and distant the alarms:  
60 Whilst but sheltring trees alone,  
Mastered soon, and soon o'erthrown,

Felt those gusts, which since prevail,  
And loftier palaces assail;  
Whose shaken turrets now give way,  
65 With vain inscriptions, which the frieze has  
borne<sup>5</sup>  
Through ages past, t'extol<sup>o</sup> and to adorn,  
And to our latter times convey;  
Who did the structures' deep foundation lay,  
Forcing his praise upon the gazing crowd,  
70 And, whilst he molders in a scanty shroud,  
Telling both earth and skies, he when alive was  
proud.  
Now down at once comes the superfluous load,  
The costly fret-work<sup>o</sup> with it yields,  
Whose imitated fruits and flow'rs are strewed,  
75 Like those of real growth o'er the autumnal fields.  
The present owner lifts his eyes,  
And the swift change with sad affrightment  
spies:  
The ceiling gone, that late<sup>o</sup> the roof concealed;  
The roof untiled, thro' which the heav'ns  
80 revealed,  
Exposes now his head, when all defense has failed.

What, alas, is to be done!  
Those, who in cities would from dangers run,  
Do but increasing dangers meet,  
And Death, in various shapes, attending in the  
85 street;  
Where some, too tardy in their flight,  
O'ertaken by a worse mischance,  
Their upward parts do scarce advance,  
When on their following limbs th' extending ruins  
light.<sup>o</sup>  
90 One half's interred, the other yet survives,  
And for release with fainting vigor strives;

95                    Implores the aid of absent friends in vain;  
                      With fault'ring speech, and dying wishes calls  
                      Those, whom perhaps, their own domestic walls  
By parallel distress, or swifter death retains.

                      O Wells! thy Bishop's mansion we lament,<sup>6</sup>  
                      So tragical the fall, so dire th' event!  
                      But let no daring thought presume  
                      To point a cause for that oppressive doom.  
100                    Yet strictly pious Ken!<sup>7</sup> had'st thou been there,  
This fate, we think, had not become thy share;  
                      Nor had that awful fabric<sup>o</sup> bowed,  
                      Sliding from its loosened bands;  
                      Nor yielding timbers been allowed  
                      To crush thy ever-lifted hands,  
105                    Or interrupt thy pray'r.  
                      Those orisons,<sup>o</sup> that nightly watches keep,  
Had called thee from thy bed, or there secured thy  
sleep.

                      Whilst you, bold winds and storms! his Word  
obeyed,  
110                    Whilst you his scourge the Great Jehova made,  
And into ruined heaps our edifices laid.  
                      You South and West<sup>8</sup> the tragedy began,  
As, with disordered haste, you o'er the surface ran;  
                      Forgetting, that you were designed  
                      (Chiefly thou Zephyrus,<sup>o</sup> thou softest wind!)

115                    Only our heats, when sultry, to allay,  
And chase the od'rous gums by your dispersing play.  
                      Now, by new orders and decrees,  
                      For our chastisement<sup>o</sup> issued forth,  
120                    You on his confines the alarmed North<sup>9</sup>  
                      With equal fury sees,  
                      And summons swiftly to his aid



Eurus,<sup>o</sup> his confederate made,  
His eager second in th' opposing fight,  
That even the winds may keep the balance  
125 right,  
Nor yield increase of sway to arbitrary might.  
Meeting now, they all contend,  
Those assail, while these defend;  
Fierce and turbulent the war,  
And in the loud tumultuous jar  
130 Winds their own fifes, and clarions<sup>1</sup> are.  
Each cavity, which art or nature leaves,  
Their inspiration<sup>2</sup> hastily receives;  
Whence, from their various forms and size,  
As various symphonies arise,  
135 Their trumpet ev'ry hollow tube is made,  
And, when more solid bodies they invade,  
Enraged, they can no farther come,  
The beaten flat,<sup>o</sup> whilst it repels the noise,  
Resembles but with more outrageous voice  
140 The soldier's threatening drum:  
And when they compass thus our world around,  
When they our rocks and mountains rend,<sup>o</sup>  
When they our sacred piles to their foundations  
send,  
No wonder if our echoing caves rebound;  
145 No wonder if our listening sense they wound,  
When armed with so much force, and ushered with  
such sound.  
  
Nor scarce, amidst the terrors of that night,  
When you, fierce winds, such desolations  
wrought,  
When you from out his stores the Great Commander  
150 brought,  
Could the most righteous stand upright;

Scarcely the holiest man performs  
The service, that becomes it best,  
By ardent vows, or solemn pray'rs addressed;  
Nor finds the calm, so usual to his breast,  
155 Full proof<sup>o</sup> against such storms.  
How should the guilty then be found,  
The men in wine, or looser pleasures drowned,  
To fix a steadfast hope, or to maintain their ground!  
When at his glass the late companion feels,  
160 That giddy, like himself, the tott'ring mansion reels!  
The miser, who with many a chest  
His gloomy tenement oppressed,  
Now fears the overburthened floor,  
And trembles for his life, but for his treasure more.  
165 What shall he do, or to what pow'rs apply?  
To those, which threaten from on high,  
By him ne'er called upon before,  
Who also will suggest th' impossible restore?  
No; Mammon,<sup>3</sup> to thy laws he will be true,  
170 And, rather than his wealth, will bid the world adieu.  
The rafters sink, and buried with his coin  
That fate does with his living thoughts combine;  
For still his heart's enclosed within a golden mine.

Contention with its angry brawls  
175 By storms o'er-clamored, shrinks and falls;  
Nor Whig, nor Tory now the rash contender calls.  
Those, who but vanity allowed,  
Nor thought it reached the name of sin,  
To be of their perfections proud,  
180 Too much adorned without, or too much raised  
within,  
Now find, that even the lightest things,  
As the minuter parts of air,  
When number to their weight addition brings,

185           Can, like the small, but numerous insects'  
              stings,  
Can, like th' assembled winds, urge ruin and despair.

          Thus you've obeyed, you winds, that must fulfill  
              The Great Disposer's righteous will:  
          Thus did your breath a strict inquiry make,  
          Thus did you our most secret sins awake,  
190           And thus chastised their ill.◊

              Whilst vainly those, of a rapacious◊ mind,  
              Fields to other fields had laid,  
              By force, or by injurious bargains joined,  
195           With fences for their guard impenetrable made;  
              The juster tempest mocks the wrong,  
              And sweeps, in its directed flight,  
              Th' enclosures of another's right,<sup>4</sup>  
          Driving at once the bounds, and licensed◊ herds  
              along.

200           The Earth again one general scene appears;  
              No regular distinction now,  
              Betwixt the grounds for pasture, or the plough,  
              The face of Nature wears.

205           Free as the men, who wild confusion love,  
              And lawless liberty approve,  
              Their fellow-brutes pursue their way,  
              To their own loss, and disadvantage  
              stray, }  
As wretched in their choice, as unadvised as }  
              they.

210           The tim'rous deer, whilst he forsakes the park,  
              And wanders on, in the misguiding dark,  
              Believes, a foe from ev'ry unknown bush  
              Will on his trembling body rush,  
              Taking the winds, that vary in their notes,

For hot pursuing hounds with deeply bellowing  
 throats.  
 215 Th' awaked birds, shook from their nightly seats,  
     Their unavailing pinions<sup>o</sup> ply,  
     Repulsed, as they attempt to fly  
 In hopes they might attain to more secure retreats.  
     But, where ye wildered<sup>o</sup> fowls would you repair?  
     When this your happy portion given,  
 220 Your upward lot, your firmament of heaven,  
     Your unentailed, your undivided air,<sup>5</sup>  
     Where no proprietor was ever known,  
     Where no litigious suits have ever grown,  
 225 Whilst none from star to star could call the space his  
     own;  
     When this no more your middle flights can bear,  
     But some rough blast too far above conveys,  
 Or to unquitted Earth confines your weak essays.<sup>o</sup>  
     Nor you, nor wiser man could find repose,  
     Nor could our industry produce  
 230 Expedients of the smallest use,  
     To ward our greater cares, or mitigate<sup>o</sup> your  
     woes.  
     Ye clouds! that pitied our distress,<sup>6</sup>  
     And by your pacifying showers  
     (The soft and usual methods of success)  
 235 Kindly assayed<sup>o</sup> to make this tempest less;  
     Vainly your aid was now alas! employed,  
 In vain you wept o'er those destructive hours,  
     In which the winds full tyranny enjoyed,  
     Nor would allow you to prevail,  
 240 But drove your scorned, and scattered tears to wail  
     The land that lay destroyed.  
     Whilst you obeyed, you winds! that must fulfill  
     The just Disposer's righteous will;  
 245 Whilst not the Earth alone, you disarray,

But to more ruined seas winged your impetuous way.

Which to foreshew, the still portentuous *Sun*<sup>7</sup>  
Beamless, and pale of late, his race begun,<sup>8</sup>  
Quenching the rays, he had no joy to keep,  
In the obscure, and sadly threatened deep.  
250 Farther than we, that Eye of Heaven discerns,  
And nearer placed to our malignant stars,<sup>9</sup>  
Our brooding tempests, and approaching wars  
Anticipating learns.

When now, too soon the dark event  
255 Shows what that faded planet meant;  
Whilst more the liquid empire<sup>o</sup> undergoes,  
More she resigns of her entrusted stores,  
The wealth, the strength, the pride of diff'rent  
shores

In one devoted,<sup>o</sup> one recorded night,  
260 Than years had known destroyed by generous  
fight,

Or privateering foes.<sup>1</sup>  
All rules of conduct laid aside,  
No more the baffled pilot steers,  
Or knows an art, when it each moment veers,  
265 To vary with the winds, or stem th' unusual tide.  
Dispersed and loose, the shattered vessels stray,  
Some perish within sight of shore,  
Some, happier thought, obtain a wider sea,  
But never to return, or cast an anchor more!  
270 Some on the Northern coasts are thrown,  
And by congealing<sup>o</sup> surges compassed round,  
To fixed and certain ruin bound,  
Immoveable are grown:

The fatal Goodwin<sup>2</sup> swallows all that come  
275 Within the limits of that dangerous sand,  
Amphibious in its kind, nor sea nor land;

Yet kin to both, a false and faithless strand,  
 Known only to our cost for a devouring tomb.  
 Nor seemed the hurricane content,  
 280      Whilst only ships were wrecked, and tackle rent;  
     ○  
     —      The sailors too must fall a prey,  
             Those that command, with those that did obey;  
             The best supporters of thy pompous style,<sup>3</sup>  
             Thou far renowned, thou powerful British Isle!  
 285      Foremost in naval strength, and sov'reign of the sea!  
             These from thy aid that wrathful night divides,  
             Plunged in those waves, o'er which this title  
             rides.  
  
             What art thou, envied Greatness, at the best,  
             In thy deluding splendors dressed?  
 290      What are thy glorious titles, and thy forms?  
             Which cannot give security, or rest  
             To favored men, or kingdoms that contest  
             With popular assaults, or providential storms!  
             Whilst on th' Omnipotent our fate depends,  
 295      And they are only safe, whom He alone defends.  
             Then let to Heaven our general praise be sent,  
             Which did our farther loss, our total wreck prevent.  
             And as our aspirations do ascend,  
             Let every thing be summoned to attend;  
 300      And let the poet after God's own heart<sup>4</sup>  
             Direct our skill in that sublimer part,  
             And our weak numbers<sup>○</sup> mend!

## Endnotes

1713

- Note 1: The poem's full title is "A Pindaric Poem *Upon the Hurricane* in November 1703, *referring to this Text in Psalm 148.* ver. 8. Winds and Storms fulfilling his Word." In November 1703,

a terrible storm caused destruction in the south of England: Daniel Defoe estimated over 8,000 deaths and stopped counting fallen trees in Kent after 17,000. Finch's poem tries to understand how this catastrophic event fits into a divine plan, pointedly not offering a simple political moral as many contemporaries did.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Timber from trees was used in ship-building.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Finch imagines a ship's pine mast as a new kind of tree, with the ropes in the rigging (cordage and shrouds) as branches. Engrafting is a botanical procedure in which a shoot from one plant is joined with another.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Kadesh, a biblical place. See Psalms 29:5–8, "the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon . . . the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A frieze is a decorative architectural feature, in this case inscribed with celebratory text.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Bishop's palace at Wells was blown down and killed Bishop [Richard] Kidder with his Lady [*Finch's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The bishop who died in the storm had replaced the pious and popular Thomas Ken. Ken lost his place in 1689, when he refused to swear an oath of allegiance to William and Mary (a political position that the Finches supported).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: South and West Winds.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The North Wind.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fifes and clarions are wind instruments associated with military music.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From the same root word as *respiration*, the breathing in of air.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A personification of greed and the desire for riches.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The practice of enclosure converted common land to private property, in order to maximize agricultural production

- and profit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In contrast to the land, the sky is not subject to human property arrangements, including legal arrangements for inheritance like entails.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: We had a great shower of rain in the midst of the storm [*Finch's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: The Ancients looked upon the sun (or Phoebus) as prophetic [*Finch's note*]. The sun is a "portent" or omen.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: One day of the summer before the storm, we had an unusual appearance of the sun (which was observed by many people in several parts of Kent). It was of a pale dead color, without any beams or brightness for some hours in the morning, although obstructed by no clouds; for the sky was clear [*Finch's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Stars portending (or causing) evil.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: That is, more ships were lost than had been lost to years of naval battles or capture by armed privateering ships.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: The Goodwin Sands near the Straits of Dover, notorious for shipwrecks.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Those who best support or uphold the official title (style) of British imperial power.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Acts 13:22 recounts God describing David, the Psalmist, as "a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *God's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prays to be delivered from*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soil*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *usual*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Lebanon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *willow branches*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *to praise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ornamental feature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awe-inspiring building*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *West Wind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *East Wind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flat plane*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tear, destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punished their evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *freed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inadequate wings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bewildered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lessen, give relief from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the ocean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill-fated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turning to ice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the rigging destroyed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *versification*[Return to reference](#) °

## A Nocturnal Reverie

In such a night,<sup>1</sup> when every louder wind  
Is to its distant cavern safe confined;  
And only gentle Zephyr fans his wings,  
And lonely Philomel,<sup>o</sup> still waking, sings;  
Or from some tree, famed for the owl's delight,  
5 She, hollowing clear, directs the wanderer right:  
In such a night, when passing clouds give place,  
Or thinly veil the heavens' mysterious face;  
When in some river, overhung with green,  
The waving moon and trembling leaves are seen;  
10 When freshened grass now bears itself upright,  
And makes cool banks to pleasing rest invite,  
Whence springs the woodbind, and the bramble-  
rose,  
And where the sleepy cowslip sheltered grows;  
Whilst now a paler hue the foxglove takes,  
15 Yet checkers still with red the dusky brakes:<sup>o</sup>  
When scattered glow-worms, but in twilight fine,  
Show trivial beauties watch their hour to shine;  
Whilst Salisbury<sup>2</sup> stands the test of every light,  
In perfect charms, and perfect virtue bright:  
20 When odors, which declined repelling day,  
Through temperate air uninterrupted stray;  
When darkened groves their softest shadows wear,  
And falling waters we distinctly hear;  
When through the gloom more venerable shows  
25 Some ancient fabric,<sup>o</sup> awful in repose,  
While sunburnt hills their swarthy looks conceal,  
And swelling haycocks thicken up the vale:  
When the loosed horse now, as his pasture leads,  
Comes slowly grazing through the adjoining meads,

30 Whose stealing pace, and lengthened shade we fear,  
 Till torn-up forage in his teeth we hear:  
 When nibbling sheep at large pursue their food,  
 And unmolested kine rechew the cud;  
 35 When curlews cry beneath the village walls,  
 And to her straggling brood the partridge calls;  
 Their shortlived jubilee the creatures keep,  
 Which but endures, whilst tyrant man does sleep;  
 When a sedate content the spirit feels,  
 And no fierce light disturbs, whilst it reveals;  
 40 But silent musings urge the mind to seek  
 Something, too high for syllables to speak;  
 Till the free soul to a composedness charmed,  
 Finding the elements of rage disarmed,  
 O'er all below a solemn quiet grown,  
 45 Joys in the inferior world,<sup>3</sup> and thinks it like her own:  
 In such a night let me abroad remain,  
 Till morning breaks, and all's confused again;  
 Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed,  
 Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued.  
 50

## Endnotes

1713

- Note 1: This phrase, repeated twice in this poem, echoes the same repeated phrase in the night piece that opens act 5 of *The Merchant of Venice*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Probably Lady Salisbury, the daughter of a friend. The sense is that this lady differs from others more trivial, who like glowworms look fine only one hour a day.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The world of nature (compared to the world of the soul).[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *nightingale*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *thickets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *edifice*[Return to reference](#) °

# MARY ASTELL

## 1666–1731

The term *feminism* would not enter the language until some 150 years after her death, but Mary Astell's powerful advocacy for women's education and rights in marriage has led scholars to see her as a founder of the modern women's movement. Daughter of a Newcastle merchant, Astell was encouraged and educated by her uncle, a clergyman. She never forgot what he taught her: a confidence in her own reason and a religious faith entirely compatible with reason. In her twenties she moved to Chelsea, on the outskirts of London, where she spent the rest of her life. There she championed the causes of women and the Church of England, and her vigorous way of arguing (not only in print but in person) won her many admirers, among both men and women. Her political and religious polemics also put her at odds with many important writers, including John Locke and Daniel Defoe. One of her best-known works, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), was, like the rest of her writings, published anonymously ("by a Lover of her Sex"). It advocates the founding of a monastic school or retreat for women, where a rigorous, wide-ranging education could be combined with moral and religious discipline. Though the idea was never carried out, it had a broad influence on later plans for educating women, as well as on literature.

To question the customs and laws of marriage is to question society itself, its distribution of money and power and love. During

the eighteenth century many of the terms of marriage were renegotiated. The older view of the wife as a chattel, bound by contract to a husband whom others had chosen for her and whom she was sworn to obey, was hotly debated and challenged. The witty arguments of Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) reflect this growing debate between the sexes. Another work published in the same year, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, takes a more independent position. Marriage, according to Astell, is all too often a trap. She insists that a woman should be guided by reason, not only in choosing a mate but in choosing whether or not to marry at all (Astell herself never married). So long as the institution of marriage perpetuates inequality rather than a true partnership of minds, women had better beware of flattery and look to themselves or to God, not to men, for the hope of a better life. She added "A Preface, in Answer to Some Objections" to the *Reflections* in 1706; in this preface she directly challenges the thinking of Locke, making a famous retort to his *Second Treatise of Government*: "If *all men are born free*, how is it that all women are born slaves?" Astell's critique understands that politics extends to the domestic sphere, a contention that would inspire generations of feminist writers.

## ***From Some Reflections upon Marriage***<sup>1</sup>

If marriage be such a blessed state, how comes it, may you say, that there are so few happy marriages? Now in answer to this, it is not to be wondered that so few succeed; we should rather be surprised to find so many do, considering how imprudently men engage, the motives they act by, and the very strange conduct they observe throughout.

For pray, what do men propose to themselves in marriage? What qualifications do they look after in a spouse? What will she bring? is the first enquiry: How many acres? Or how much ready coin? Not that this is altogether an unnecessary question, for marriage without a competency, that is, not only a bare subsistence, but even a handsome and plentiful provision, according to the quality<sup>2</sup> and circumstances of the parties, is no very comfortable condition. They who marry for love, as they call it, find time enough to repent their rash folly, and are not long in being convinced, that whatever fine speeches might be made in the heat of passion, there could be no *real kindness* between those who can agree to make each other miserable. But as an estate is to be considered, so it should not be the *main*, much less the *only* consideration; for happiness does not depend on wealth.

\* \* \*

But suppose a man does not marry for money, though for one that does not, perhaps there are thousands that do; suppose he marries for love, an heroic action, which makes a mighty noise in the world, partly because of its rarity, and partly in regard of its extravagancy, and what does his marrying for love amount to? There's no great odds between his marrying for the love of money, or for the love of beauty; the man does not act according to reason in either case, but is governed by irregular appetites. But he loves her wit perhaps, and

this, you'll say, is more spiritual, more refined: not at all, if you examine it to the bottom. For what is that which nowadays passes under the name of wit? A bitter and ill-natured raillery, a pert repartee, or a confident talking at all; and in such a multitude of words, it's odds if something or other does not pass that is surprising, though every thing that surprises does not please; some things are wondered at for their ugliness, as well as others for their beauty. True wit, durst one venture to describe it, is quite another thing; it consists in such a sprightliness of imagination, such a reach and turn of thought, so properly expressed, as strikes and pleases a judicious taste.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

Thus, whether it be wit or beauty that a man's in love with, there's no great hopes of a lasting happiness; beauty, with all the helps of art, is of no very lasting date; the more it is helped, the sooner it decays; and he, who only or chiefly chose for beauty, will in a little time find the same reason for another choice. Nor is that sort of wit which he prefers, of a more sure tenure; or allowing it to last, it will not always please. For that which has not a real excellency and value in itself entertains no longer than that giddy humor which recommended it to us holds; and when we can like on no just, or on very little ground, 'tis certain a dislike will arise, as lightly and as unaccountably. And it is not improbable that such a husband may in a little time, by ill usage, provoke such a wife to exercise her wit, that is, her spleen<sup>4</sup> on him, and then it is not hard to guess how very agreeable it will be to him.

\* \* \*

But do the women never choose amiss? Are the men only in fault? That is not pretended; for he who will be just must be forced to acknowledge that neither sex is always in the right. A woman, indeed, can't properly be said to choose; all that is allowed her, is to refuse or accept what is offered. And when we have made such



reasonable allowances as are due to the sex, perhaps they may not appear so much in fault as one would at first imagine, and a generous spirit will find more occasion to pity than to reprove. But sure I transgress—it must not be supposed that the ladies can do amiss! He is but an ill-bred fellow who pretends that they need amendment! They are, no doubt on't, always in the right, and most of all when they take pity on distressed lovers; whatever they *say* carries an authority that no reason can resist, and all that they *do* must needs be exemplary! This is the modish language, nor is there a man of honor amongst the whole tribe that would not venture his life, nay and his salvation too, in their defense, if any but himself attempts to injure them. But I must ask pardon if I can't come up to these heights, nor flatter them with the having no faults, which is only a malicious way of continuing and increasing their mistakes.

\* \* \*

But, alas! what poor woman is ever taught that she should have a higher design than to get her a husband? Heaven will fall in of course; and if she make but an obedient and dutiful wife, she cannot miss of it. A husband indeed is thought by both sexes so very valuable, that scarce a man who can keep himself clean and make a bow, but thinks he is good enough to pretend<sup>5</sup> to any woman; no matter for the difference of birth or fortune, a husband is such a wonder-working name as to make an equality, or something more, whenever it is pronounced.

\* \* \*

To wind up this matter: if a woman were duly principled and taught to know the world, especially the true sentiments that men have of her, and the traps they lay for her under so many gilded compliments, and such a seemingly great respect, that disgrace would be prevented which is brought upon too many families; women would marry more discreetly, and demean<sup>6</sup> themselves better in a married state than some people say they do.

\* \* \*

But some sage persons may perhaps object, that were women allowed to improve themselves, and not, amongst other discouragements, driven back by the wise jests and scoffs that are put upon a woman of sense or learning, a philosophical lady, as she is called by way of ridicule, they would be too wise, and too good for the men. I grant it, for vicious and foolish men. Nor is it to be wondered that he is afraid he should not be able to govern them were their understandings improved, who is resolved not to take too much pains with his own. But these, 'tis to be hoped, are no very considerable number, the foolish at least; and therefore this is so far from being an argument against their improvement, that it is a strong one for it, if we do but suppose the men to be as capable of improvement as the women; but much more if, according to tradition, we believe they have greater capacities. This, if anything, would stir them up to be what they ought, not permit them to waste their time and abuse their faculties in the service of their irregular appetites and unreasonable desires, and so let poor contemptible women, who have been their slaves, excel them in all that is truly excellent. This would make them blush at employing an immortal mind no better than in making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, since women, by a wiser conduct, have brought themselves to such a reach of thought, to such exactness of judgment, such clearness and strength of reasoning, such purity and elevation of mind, such command of their passions, such regularity of will and affection, and, in a word, to such a pitch of perfection as the human soul is capable of attaining even in this life by the grace of God; such true wisdom, such real greatness, as though it does not qualify them to make a noise in this world, to found or overturn empires, yet it qualifies them for what is infinitely better, a Kingdom that cannot be moved, an incorruptible crown of glory.

\* \* \*

Again, it may be said, if a wife's case be as it is here represented, it is not good for a woman to marry, and so there's an end of human race. But this is no fair consequence, for all that can justly be inferred from hence is that a woman has no mighty obligations to the man who makes love to her; she has no reason to be fond of being a wife, or to reckon it a piece of preferment when she is taken to be a man's upper-servant;<sup>7</sup> it is no advantage to her in this world; if rightly managed it may prove one as to the next. For she who marries purely to do good, to educate souls for heaven, who can be so truly mortified as to lay aside her own will and desires, to pay such an entire submission for life, to one whom she cannot be sure will always deserve it, does certainly perform a more heroic action than all the famous masculine heroes can boast of; she suffers a continual martyrdom to bring glory to God, and benefit to mankind; which consideration indeed may carry her through all difficulties, I know not what else can, and engage her to love him who proves perhaps so much worse than a brute, as to make this condition yet more grievous than it needed to be. She has need of a strong reason, of a truly Christian and well-tempered spirit, of all the assistance the best education can give her, and ought to have some good assurance of her own firmness and virtue, who ventures on such a trial; and for this reason 'tis less to be wondered at that women marry off in haste, for perhaps if they took time to consider and reflect upon it, they seldom would.

## Endnotes

1700

- Note 1: The text is from the first edition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Social position. "Competency": sufficient income.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare with Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* 2.297–304 (p. 527).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bad temper.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Aspire or lay claim.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Behave.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: High-ranking servant. "Preferment": advancement in rank. [Return to reference 7](#)

## ***From A Preface, in Answer to Some Objections to Reflections upon Marriage***

\* \* \*

[T]his design, which is unfortunately accused of being so destructive to the government, of the men I mean, is entirely her own.<sup>1</sup> She neither advised with friends, nor turned over <sup>2</sup> ancient or modern authors, nor prudently submitted to the correction of such as are, or such as *think* they are good judges, but with an *English* spirit and genius set out upon the forlorn hope, meaning no hurt to anybody, nor designing any thing but the public good, and to retrieve, if possible, the native liberty, the rights and privileges of the subject.

Far be it from her to stir up sedition of any sort, none can abhor it more; and she heartily wishes that our masters<sup>3</sup> would pay their civil and ecclesiastical governors the same submission which they themselves exact from their domestic subjects. Nor can she imagine how she any way undermines the masculine empire or blows the trumpet of rebellion to the moiety<sup>4</sup> of mankind. Is it by exhorting women not to expect to have their own will in any thing, but to be entirely submissive when once they have made choice of a lord and master, though he happen not to be so wise, so kind, or even so just a governor as was expected?<sup>5</sup> She did not indeed advise them to think his folly wisdom, nor his brutality that love and worship he promised in his matrimonial oath, for this required a flight of wit and sense much above her poor ability, and proper only to masculine understandings. However she did not in any manner prompt them to resist or to abdicate the perjured spouse, though the laws of God and the land make special provision for it in a case wherein, as is to be feared, few men can truly plead not guilty.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

If mankind had never sinned, reason would always have been obeyed, there would have been no struggle for dominion, and brutal power would not have prevailed. But in the lapsed state of mankind, and now that men will not be guided by their reason but by their appetites, and do not what they *ought* but what they *can*, the reason, or that which stands for it, the will and pleasure of the governor, is to be the reason of those who will not be guided by their own, and must take place for order's sake, although it should not be conformable to right reason. Nor can there be any society great or little, from empires down to private families, without a last resort to determine the affairs of the society by an irresistible sentence.<sup>7</sup> Now unless this supremacy be fixed somewhere, there will be a perpetual contention about it, such is the love of dominion; and let the reason of things be what it may, those who have least force or cunning to supply it<sup>8</sup> will have the disadvantage. So that since women are acknowledged to have least bodily strength, their being commanded to obey is in pure kindness to them, and for their quiet and security, as well as for the exercise of their virtue.<sup>9</sup> But does it follow that domestic governors have more sense than their subjects, any more than that other governors have? We do not find any man thinks the worse of his own understanding because another has superior power; or concludes himself less capable of a post of honor and authority because he is not preferred<sup>1</sup> to it. How much time would lie on men's hands, how empty would the places of concourse be, and how silent most companies, did men forbear to censure their governors; that is, in effect, to think themselves wiser. Indeed, government would be much more desirable than it is did it invest the possessor with a superior understanding as well as power. And if mere power gives a right to rule, there can be no such thing as usurpation; but a highway-man, so long as he has strength to force, has also a right to require our obedience.

Again, if absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? or if in a family why not in a state; since no reason can be alleged for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other? If the authority of the husband, so far as it

extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the prince? The domestic sovereign is without dispute elected,<sup>2</sup> and the stipulations and contracts are mutual. Is it not then partial<sup>3</sup> in men to the last degree to contend for and practice that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in the state? For if arbitrary power is evil in itself, and an improper method of governing rational and free agents, it ought not to be practiced anywhere. Nor is it less but rather more mischievous in families than in kingdoms, by how much 100,000 tyrants are worse than one. What though a husband can't deprive a wife of life without being responsible to the law, he may however do what is much more grievous to a generous mind, render life miserable, for which she has no redress, scarce pity, which is afforded to every other complainant; it being thought a wife's duty to suffer everything without complaint. If *all men are born free*, how is it that all women are born slaves? as they must be if the being subjected to the *inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will* of men be the *perfect condition of slavery*? and if the essence of freedom consists, as our masters say it does, in having *a standing rule to live by*?<sup>4</sup> And why is slavery so much condemned and strove against in one case and so highly applauded and held so necessary and so sacred in another?

\* \* \*

Again, men are possessed of all places of power, trust, and profit; they make laws and exercise the magistracy. Not only the sharpest sword, but even all the swords and blunderbusses are theirs, which by the strongest logic in the world gives them the best title to everything they please to claim as their prerogative. Who shall contend with them? Immemorial prescription<sup>5</sup> is on their side in these parts of the world, ancient tradition and modern usage! Our fathers have all along both taught and practiced superiority over the weaker sex, and consequently women are by nature inferior to men, as was to be demonstrated. An argument which must be

acknowledged unanswerable; for as well as I love my sex, I will not pretend a reply to *such* demonstration!

Only let me beg to be informed, to whom we poor fatherless maids and widows who have lost their masters owe subjection? It can't be to all men in general, unless all men were agreed to give the same commands. Do we then fall as strays to the first who finds us? By the maxims of some men and the conduct of some women, one would think so. But whoever he be that thus happens to become our master, if he allows us to be reasonable creatures and does not merely compliment us with that title, since no man denies our readiness to use our tongues, it would tend I should think to our master's advantage, and therefore he may please to be advised, to teach us to improve our reason. But if reason is only allowed us by way of raillery, and the secret maxim is that we have none, or little more than brutes, 'tis the best way to confine us with chain and block to the chimney-corner, which probably might save the estates of some families and the honor of others.

I do not propose this to prevent a rebellion, for women are not so well united as to form an insurrection. They are for the most part wise enough to love their chains and to discern how very becomingly they set. They think as humbly of themselves as their masters can wish with respect to the other sex, but in regard to their own they have a spice of masculine ambition: every one would lead, and none would follow—both sexes being too apt to envy and too backward in emulating, and take more delight in detracting from their neighbor's virtue than in improving their own. And therefore as to those women who find themselves born for slavery and are so sensible of their own meanness as to conclude it impossible to attain to anything excellent, since they are or ought to be best acquainted with their own strength and genius, she's a fool who would attempt their deliverance or improvement. No, let them enjoy the great honor and felicity of their tame, submissive, and depending temper! Let the men applaud and let them glory in this wonderful humility! Let them receive the flatteries and grimaces of the other sex, live unenvied by their own, and be as much beloved as one such woman can afford



to love another! Let them enjoy the glory of treading in the footsteps of their predecessors, and of having the prudence to avoid that audacious attempt of soaring beyond their sphere! Let them housewife<sup>6</sup> or play, dress, and be pretty entertaining company! Or, which is better, relieve the poor to ease their own compassions, read pious books, say their prayers and go to church, because they have been taught and used to do so, without being able to give a better reason for their faith and practice! Let them not by any means aspire at being women of understanding, because no man can endure a woman of superior sense or would treat a reasonable woman civilly, but that he thinks he stands on higher ground and that she is so wise as to make exceptions in his favor and to take her measures by his directions. They may pretend to sense indeed since mere pretences only render one the more ridiculous! Let them in short be what is called *very* women, for this is most acceptable to all sorts of men; or let them aim at the title of *good devout* women, since some men can bear with this; but let them not judge of the sex by their own scantling.<sup>7</sup> For the great Author of nature and fountain of all perfection never designed that the mean and imperfect, but that the most complete and excellent, of his creatures in every kind should be the standard to the rest.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1706

- Note 1: As in earlier editions, Astell does not put her name on the third edition's title page, but she here affirms that she, the author, is a woman (referring to herself in the third person).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ransacked.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Men in general, masters of women.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Half; here referring to the female half of humankind.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Astell advises in the body of *Some Reflections upon Marriage* that women accept their marriages, no matter how tyrannical their husbands are.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Astell's time, both ecclesiastical and civil law allowed wives the right to petition for legal separation (not divorce) from husbands who were egregiously physically cruel to them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, no society can subsist without vesting power in some ultimate authority that incontrovertibly decides contentious questions.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To occupy the place of supremacy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Here Astell presents the crucial link between her politics and her feminism: women must look favorably on absolute sovereignty because political instability threatens them, the weakest members of society, the most.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Promoted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The wife "elects" her husband when she consents to marry him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Unfair, or biased.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The last three italicized phrases quote the first and third paragraphs of the chapter "Of Slavery" (sections 22 and 24) from Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (p. 930).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Title or claim based on long possession.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perform domestic duties.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Small ability.[Return to reference 7](#)

# **WILLIAM CONGREVE**

## **1670–1729**

Both of William Congreve's parents came from well-to-do and prominent county families. His father, a younger son, obtained a commission as lieutenant in the army and moved to Ireland in 1674. There the future playwright was educated at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin; at both places he was a younger contemporary of Swift. In 1691 he took rooms in the Middle Temple in London and began to study law, but soon found he preferred the wit of the coffeehouses and the theater. Within a year he had so distinguished himself at Will's Coffeehouse that he had become intimate with the great Dryden himself, and his brief career as a dramatist began shortly thereafter.

The success of *The Old Bachelor* (produced in 1693) immediately established him as the most promising young dramatist in London. It had the then phenomenally long run of fourteen days, and Dryden declared it the best first play he had ever read. *The Double Dealer* (produced in 1693) was a near failure, though it evoked one of Dryden's most graceful and gracious poems, in which he praised Congreve as the superior of Jonson and Fletcher and the equal of Shakespeare. *Love for Love* (produced in 1695) was an unqualified success and remains Congreve's most frequently revived play. In 1697 he brought out a well-received tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*. Congreve's most elegant comedy of manners, *The Way of the World*, received a brilliant production in 1700, but it did not have a long run.

During the rest of his life he wrote no more plays. Instead he held a minor government post, which, although a Whig, he was allowed to keep during the Tory ministry of Oxford and Bolingbroke; after the accession of George I he was given a more lucrative government sinecure. Despite the political animosities of the first two decades of the century, he managed to remain on friendly terms with Swift and Pope, and Pope dedicated to him his translation of the *Iliad*. Congreve's final years were perplexed by poor health but were made bearable by the love of Henrietta, second Duchess of Marlborough, whose last child, a daughter, was in all probability the playwright's.

*The Way of the World* is one of the wittiest plays ever written, a play to read slowly and savor. Like an expert jeweler, Congreve polished the Restoration comedy of manners to its ultimate sparkle and gloss. The dialogue is epigrammatic and brilliant, the plot is an intricate puzzle, and the characters shine with surprisingly complex facets. Yet the play is not all dazzling surface; it also has depths. Most Restoration comedies begin with the struggle for power, sex, and money and end with a marriage. In an age that viewed property, not romance, as the basis of marriage, the hero shows his prowess by catching an heiress. *The Way of the World* reflects that standard plot; it is a battle more over a legacy than over a woman, a battle in which sexual attraction is used as a weapon. Yet Congreve, writing after such conventions had been thoroughly explored, reveals the weakness of those who treat love as a war or a game: "each deceiver to his cost may find / That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind." If "the way of the world" is cynical self-interest, it is also the worldly prudence that sees through the ruses of power and turns them to better ends. In this world generosity and affection win the day and true love conquers—with the help of some clever plotting.

At the center of the action are four fully realized characters—Mirabell and Millamant, the hero and heroine, and Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, the two villains—whose stratagems and relations move the play. Around them are characters who serve in one way or another as foils: Witwoud, the would-be wit, with whom we contrast

the true wit of Mirabell and Millamant; Petulant, a “humor” character, who affects bluff candor and cynical realism, but succeeds only in being offensive; and Sir Wilfull Witwoud, the booby squire from the country, who serves with Petulant to throw into relief the high good breeding and fineness of nature of the protagonists. Finally there is one of Congreve’s most striking creations, Lady Wishfort (“wish for it”), who though aging still longs for love, gallantry, and courtship and who is led by her appetites into the trap that Mirabell lays for her.

Because of the complexity of the plot, a summary of the situation at the play’s opening may prove helpful. Mirabell (a reformed rake) is sincerely in love with and wishes to marry Millamant, who, though a coquette and a highly sophisticated wit, is a virtuous woman. Mirabell some time before has married off his former mistress, the daughter of Lady Wishfort, to his friend Fainall. Fainall has grown tired of his wife and has been squandering her money on his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. In order to gain access to Millamant, Mirabell has pretended to pay court to the elderly and amorous Lady Wishfort, who is the guardian of Millamant and as such controls half her fortune. But his game has been spoiled by Mrs. Marwood, who nourishes a secret love for Mirabell and, to separate him from Millamant, has made Lady Wishfort aware of Mirabell’s duplicity. Lady Wishfort now loathes Mirabell for making a fool of her—an awkward situation, because if Millamant should marry without her guardian’s consent she would lose half her fortune, and Mirabell cannot afford to marry any but a rich wife. It is at this point that the action begins. Mirabell perfects a plot to get such power over Lady Wishfort as to force her to agree to the marriage, while Millamant continues to doubt whether she wishes to marry at all.

# The Way of the World

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE<sup>1</sup>

### *Men*

FAINALL, *in love with* MRS. MARWOOD

MIRABELL, *in love with* MRS. MILLAMANT

WITWOUD

PETULANT

}

*followers of* MRS. MILLAMANT

SIR WILFULL WITWOUD, *half brother to* WITWOUD, *and nephew to* LADY WISHFORT

WAITWELL, *servant to* MIRABELL

### *Women*

LADY WISHFORT, *enemy to* MIRABELL, *for having falsely pretended love to her*

MRS. MILLAMANT, *a fine lady, niece to* LADY WISHFORT, *and loves* MIRABELL

MRS. MARWOOD, *friend to* MR. FAINALL, *and likes* MIRABELL

MRS. FAINALL, *daughter to* LADY WISHFORT, *and wife to* FAINALL, *formerly friend to* MIRABELL

FOIBLE, *woman to* LADY WISHFORT

MINCING, *woman to* MRS. MILLAMANT

BETTY, *waitress at the chocolate house*

PEG, *under-servant to* LADY WISHFORT

DANCERS, FOOTMEN, *and* ATTENDANTS

SCENE—*London*

## Endnotes

- Note 1:

As was conventional in the period's plays, the names of the principal characters reveal their dominant traits: for example, Fainall would *fain* have *all*, with perhaps also the suggestion that he is the complete hypocrite, who *feigns*. Witwoud is the *would-be wit*. Wishfort suggests *wish for it*. Millamant is the lady with a thousand lovers (French *mille amants*). Marwood *would* willingly *mar* (injure) the lovers. Mincing has an air of affected gentility (that is, she *minces*), which clashes with her vulgar English. "Mrs." is "Mistress," a title then used by young unmarried ladies as well as by the married Mrs. Fainall.

[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Prologue***

SPOKEN BY MR. BETTERTON<sup>2</sup>

Of those few fools, who with ill stars are cursed,  
Sure scribbling fools, called poets, fare the worst:  
For they're a sort of fools which Fortune makes,  
And after she has made 'em fools, forsakes.  
With nature's oafs 'tis quite a different case,  
For Fortune favors all her idiot race.  
In her own nest the cuckoo eggs we find,  
O'er which she broods to hatch the changeling kind.<sup>3</sup>  
No portion for her own she has to spare,  
So much she dotes on her adopted care.

Poets are bubbles,<sup>o</sup> by the town drawn in,  
Suffered at first some trifling stakes to win:  
But what unequal hazards do they run!  
Each time they write they venture all they've won:  
The squire that's buttered still,<sup>o</sup> is sure to be undone.  
This author, heretofore, has found your favor,  
But pleads no merit from his past behavior;  
To build on that might prove a vain presumption,  
Should grants to poets made, admit resumption:<sup>4</sup>  
And in Parnassus<sup>5</sup> he must lose his seat,  
If that be found a forfeited estate.<sup>6</sup>

He owns,<sup>o</sup> with toil he wrought the following scenes,  
But if they're naught ne'er spare him for his pains:  
Damn him the more; have no commiseration  
For dullness on mature deliberation.  
He swears he'll not resent one hissed-off scene  
Nor, like those peevish wits, his play maintain,<sup>o</sup>  
Who, to assert their sense, your taste arraign.  
Some plot we think he has, and some new thought;  
Some humor too, no farce; but that's a fault.



Satire, he thinks, you ought not to expect,  
 For so reformed a town,<sup>7</sup> who dares correct?  
 To please, this time, has been his sole pretense,  
 He'll not instruct, lest it should give offense.  
 Should he by chance a knave or fool expose,  
 That hurts none here; sure here are none of those.  
 In short, our play shall (with your leave to show it)  
 Give you one instance of a passive poet  
 Who to your judgments yields all resignation;  
 So save or damn after your own discretion.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Thomas Betterton (ca. 1635–1710), the greatest actor of the period, played Fainall in the original production of this play.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Simpletons; children supposed to have been secretly exchanged in infancy for others. The cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of other birds.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Crown could both grant and take back (“resume”) estates.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Greek mountain sacred to the Muses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Seat* rhymed with *estate*; in the next couplet, *scenes* and *pains* rhymed. A few lines later *scene* is similarly pronounced to rhyme with *maintain*, and *fault* (the *l* being silent) is rhymed with *thought*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A sarcasm, directed against the general movement to reform manners and morals and, more particularly, against Jeremy Collier’s attack on actors and playwrights in his *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1698).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *dupes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly flattered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *admits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Act 1—A chocolate house***

MIRABELL *and* FAINALL *rising from cards*, BETTY *waiting*.

MIRABELL You are a fortunate man, Mr. Fainall.

FAINALL Have we done?

MIRABELL What you please. I'll play on to entertain you.

FAINALL No, I'll give you your revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent; you are thinking of something else now, and play too negligently. The coldness of a losing gamester lessens the pleasure of the winner. I'd no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation.

MIRABELL You have a taste extremely delicate, and are for refining on your pleasures.

FAINALL Prithee, why so reserved? Something has put you out of humor.

MIRABELL Not at all. I happen to be grave today, and you are gay; that's all.

FAINALL Confess, Millamant and you quarreled last night after I left you; my fair cousin has some humors that would tempt the patience of a stoic. What, some coxcomb came in, and was well received by her, while you were by?

MIRABELL Witwoud and Petulant; and what was worse, her aunt, your wife's mother, my evil genius; or to sum up all in her own name, my old Lady Wishfort came in.

FAINALL O, there it is then—she has a lasting passion for you, and with reason. What, then my wife was there?

MIRABELL Yes, and Mrs. Marwood and three or four more, whom I never saw before. Seeing me, they all put on their grave faces, whispered one another; then complained aloud of the vapors,<sup>8</sup> and after fell into a profound silence.

FAINALL They had a mind to be rid of you.

MIRABELL For which good reason I resolved not to stir. At last the good old lady broke through her painful taciturnity, with an invective against long visits. I would not have understood her, but

Millamant joining in the argument, I rose and with a constrained smile told her I thought nothing was so easy as to know when a visit began to be troublesome. She reddened and I withdrew, without expecting<sup>9</sup> her reply.

FAINALL You were to blame to resent what she spoke only in compliance with her aunt.

MIRABELL She is more mistress of herself than to be under the necessity of such a resignation.

FAINALL What? though half her fortune depends upon her marrying with my lady's approbation?

MIRABELL I was then in such a humor that I should have been better pleased if she had been less discreet.

FAINALL Now I remember, I wonder not they were weary of you: last night was one of their cabal<sup>1</sup> nights; they have 'em three times a week, and meet by turns, at one another's apartments, where they come together like the coroner's inquest, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week. You and I are excluded; and it was once proposed that all the male sex should be excepted; but somebody moved that to avoid scandal there might be one man of the community; upon which Witwoud and Petulant were enrolled members.

MIRABELL And who may have been the foundress of this sect? My Lady Wishfort, I warrant, who publishes her detestation of mankind, and full of the vigor of fifty-five, declares for a friend and ratafia;<sup>2</sup> and let posterity shift for itself, she'll breed no more.

FAINALL The discovery of your sham addresses to her, to conceal your love to her niece, has provoked this separation. Had you dissembled better, things might have continued in the state of nature.<sup>3</sup>

MIRABELL I did as much as man could, with any reasonable conscience: I proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her, and was guilty of a song in her commendation. Nay, I got a friend to put her into a lampoon and compliment her with the imputation of an affair with a young fellow, which I carried so far that I told her the malicious town took notice that she was grown fat of a

sudden; and when she lay in of a dropsy, persuaded her she was reported to be in labor. The devil's in't, if an old woman is to be flattered further, unless a man should endeavor downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me. But for the discovery of this amour, I am indebted to your friend, or your wife's friend, Mrs. Marwood.

FAINALL What should provoke her to be your enemy, unless she has made you advances, which you have slighted? Women do not easily forgive omissions of that nature.

MIRABELL She was always civil to me, till of late. I confess I am not one of those coxcombs who are apt to interpret a woman's good manners to her prejudice, and think that she who does not refuse 'em everything, can refuse 'em nothing.

FAINALL You are a gallant man, Mirabell; and though you may have cruelty enough not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity not to be tender of her honor. Yet you speak with an indifference which seems to be affected, and confesses you are conscious of a negligence.

MIRABELL You pursue the argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a concern for which the lady is more indebted to you than is your wife.

FAINALL Fie, fie, friend, if you grow censorious I must leave you.— I'll look upon the gamesters in the next room.

MIRABELL Who are they?

FAINALL Petulant and Witwoud. [*To BETTY.*] Bring me some chocolate. [*Exit FAINALL.*]

MIRABELL Betty, what says your clock?

BETTY Turned of the last canonical hour,<sup>4</sup> sir. [*Exit BETTY.*]

MIRABELL How pertinently the jade answers me! Ha? almost one a clock! [*Looking on his watch.*]—O, y'are come—  
[*Enter a FOOTMAN.*]

MIRABELL Well, is the grand affair over? You have been something tedious.<sup>5</sup>

FOOTMAN Sir, there's such coupling at Pancras<sup>6</sup> that they stand behind one another, as 'twere in a country dance. Ours was the

last couple to lead up; and no hopes appearing of dispatch, besides, the parson growing hoarse, we were afraid his lungs would have failed before it came to our turn; so we drove around to Duke's Place, and there they were riveted in a trice.

MIRABELL     So, so, you are sure they are married?

FOOTMAN     Married and bedded, sir. I am witness.

MIRABELL     Have you the certificate?

FOOTMAN     Here it is, sir.

MIRABELL     Has the tailor brought Waitwell's clothes home, and the new liveries?

FOOTMAN     Yes, sir.

MIRABELL     That's well. Do you go home again, d'ye hear, and adjourn the consummation till farther order. Bid Waitwell shake his ears, and Dame Partlet rustle up her feathers, and meet me at one a clock by Rosamond's Pond, that I may see her before she returns to her lady: and as you tender your ears,<sup>7</sup> be secret. [*Exit*

FOOTMAN.]

[*Re-enter* FAINALL, BETTY.]

FAINALL     Joy of your success, Mirabell; you look pleased.

MIRABELL     Aye, I have been engaged in a matter of some sort of mirth, which is not yet ripe for discovery. I am glad this is not a cabal night. I wonder, Fainall, that you who are married, and of consequence should be discreet, will suffer your wife to be of such a party.

FAINALL     Faith, I am not jealous. Besides, most who are engaged are women and relations; and for the men, they are of a kind too contemptible to give scandal.

MIRABELL     I am of another opinion. The greater the coxcomb, always the more the scandal: for a woman who is not a fool can have but one reason for associating with a man who is one.

FAINALL     Are you jealous as often as you see Witwoud entertained by Millamant?

MIRABELL     Of her understanding I am, if not of her person.

FAINALL     You do her wrong; for to give her her due, she has wit.

MIRABELL She has beauty enough to make any man think so; and complaisance enough not to contradict him who shall tell her so.

FAINALL For a passionate lover, methinks you are a man somewhat too discerning in the failings of your mistress.

MIRABELL And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover; for I like her with all her faults, nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her, and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, Fainall, she once used me with that insolence that in revenge I took her to pieces; sifted her, and separated her failings; I studied 'em, and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hopes, one day or other, to hate her heartily: to which end I so used myself to think of 'em that at length, contrary to my design and expectation, they gave me every hour less and less disturbance, till in a few days it became habitual to me to remember 'em without being displeased. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own frailties, and in all probability in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well.

FAINALL Marry her, marry her; be half as well acquainted with her charms as you are with her defects, and my life on't, you are your own man again.

MIRABELL Say you so?

FAINALL Aye, aye, I have experience; I have a wife, and so forth.

[*Enter a MESSENGER.*]

MESSENGER Is one Squire Witwoud here?

BETTY Yes. What's your business?

MESSENGER I have a letter for him, from his brother Sir Wilfull, which I am charged to deliver into his own hands.

BETTY He's in the next room, friend—that way. [*Exit MESSENGER.*]

MIRABELL What, is the chief of that noble family in town, Sir Wilfull Witwoud?

FAINALL He is expected today. Do you know him?

MIRABELL I have seen him. He promises to be an extraordinary person; I think you have the honor to be related to him.

FAINALL Yes; he is half brother to this Witwoud by a former wife, who was sister to my Lady Wishfort, my wife's mother. If you marry Millamant, you must call cousins too.

MIRABELL I had rather be his relation than his acquaintance.

FAINALL He comes to town in order to equip himself for travel.

MIRABELL For travel! Why the man that I mean is above forty.<sup>8</sup>

FAINALL No matter for that; 'tis for the honor of England that all Europe should know that we have blockheads of all ages.

MIRABELL I wonder there is not an Act of Parliament to save the credit of the nation, and prohibit the exportation of fools.

FAINALL By no means, 'tis better as 'tis; 'tis better to trade with a little loss than to be quite eaten up with being overstocked.

MIRABELL Pray, are the follies of this knight-errant, and those of the squire his brother, anything related?

FAINALL Not at all. Witwoud grows by the knight, like a medlar grafted on a crab.<sup>9</sup> One will melt in your mouth, and t'other set your teeth on edge; one is all pulp, and the other all core.

MIRABELL So one will be rotten before he be ripe, and the other will be rotten without ever being ripe at all.

FAINALL Sir Wilfull is an odd mixture of bashfulness and obstinacy. But when he's drunk, he's as loving as the monster in the *Tempest*,<sup>1</sup> and much after the same manner. To give t'other his due, he has something of good nature, and does not always want wit.

MIRABELL Not always; but as often as his memory fails him, and his commonplace of comparisons.<sup>2</sup> He is a fool with a good memory, and some few scraps of other folks' wit. He is one whose conversation can never be approved, yet it is now and then to be endured. He has indeed one good quality, he is not exceptious,<sup>3</sup> for he so passionately affects the reputation of understanding raillery that he will construe an affront into a jest; and call downright rudeness and ill language, satire and fire.

FAINALL If you have a mind to finish his picture, you have an opportunity to do it at full length. Behold the original.

[*Enter* WITWOUD.]



WITWOUD Afford me your compassion, my dears; pity me, Fainall,  
Mirabell, pity me.

MIRABELL I do from my soul.

FAINALL Why, what's the matter?

WITWOUD No letters for me, Betty?

BETTY Did not a messenger bring you one but now, sir?

WITWOUD Aye, but no other?

BETTY No, sir.

WITWOUD That's hard, that's very hard. A messenger, a mule, a  
beast of burden, he has brought me a letter from the fool my  
brother, as heavy as a panegyric in a funeral sermon, or a copy of  
commendatory verses from one poet to another. And what's  
worse, 'tis as sure a forerunner of the author as an epistle  
dedicatory.

MIRABELL A fool, and your brother, Witwoud!

WITWOUD Aye, aye, my half brother. My half brother he is, no  
nearer upon honor.

MIRABELL Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

WITWOUD Good, good, Mirabell, *le drôle!*<sup>4</sup> Good, good. Hang him,  
don't let's talk of him. Fainall, how does your lady? Gad. I say  
anything in the world to get this fellow out of my head. I beg  
pardon that I should ask a man of pleasure and the town a  
question at once so foreign and domestic. But I talk like an old  
maid at a marriage, I don't know what I say: but she's the best  
woman in the world.

FAINALL 'Tis well you don't know what you say, or else your  
commendation would go near to make me either vain or jealous.

WITWOUD No man in town lives well with a wife but Fainall. Your  
judgment, Mirabell?

MIRABELL You had better step and ask his wife, if you would be  
credibly informed.

WITWOUD Mirabell.

MIRABELL Aye.

WITWOUD My dear, I ask ten thousand pardons—gad, I have forgot  
what I was going to say to you.

MIRABELL I thank you heartily, heartily.

WITWOUD No, but prithee excuse me—my memory is such a memory.

MIRABELL Have a care of such apologies, Witwoud—for I never knew a fool but he affected to complain, either of the spleen<sup>5</sup> or his memory.

FAINALL What have you done with Petulant?

WITWOUD He's reckoning his money—my money it was.—I have no luck today.

FAINALL You may allow him to win of you at play—for you are sure to be too hard for him at repartee. Since you monopolize the wit that is between you, the fortune must be his of course.

MIRABELL I don't find that Petulant confesses the superiority of wit to be your talent, Witwoud.

WITWOUD Come, come, you are malicious now, and would breed debates.—Petulant's my friend, and a very honest fellow, and a very pretty fellow, and has a smattering—faith and troth a pretty deal of an odd sort of a small wit: nay, I'll do him justice. I'm his friend, I won't wrong him.—And if he had any judgment in the world—he would not be altogether contemptible. Come, come, don't detract from the merits of my friend.

FAINALL You don't take your friend to be over-nicely bred.

WITWOUD No, no, hang him, the rogue has no manners at all, that I must own—no more breeding than a bum-bailey,<sup>6</sup> that I grant you.—'Tis pity; the fellow has fire and life.

MIRABELL What, courage?

WITWOUD Hum, faith I don't know as to that—I can't say as to that.—Yes, faith, in a controversy he'll contradict anybody.

MIRABELL Though 'twere a man whom he feared, or a woman whom he loved.

WITWOUD Well, well, he does not always think before he speaks—we have all our failings; you are too hard upon him, you are, faith. Let me excuse him—I can defend most of his faults, except one or two. One he has, that's the truth on't, if he were my brother, I could not acquit him.—That indeed I could wish were otherwise.

MIRABELL Aye marry, what's that, Witwoud?

WITWOUD O, pardon me—expose the infirmities of my friend?—No, my dear, excuse me there.

FAINALL What, I warrant he's unsincere, or 'tis some such trifle.

WITWOUD No, no, what if he be? 'Tis no matter for that, his wit will excuse that. A wit should no more be sincere than a woman constant; one argues a decay of parts<sup>7</sup> as t'other of beauty.

MIRABELL Maybe you think him too positive?

WITWOUD No, no, his being positive is an incentive to argument, and keeps up conversation.

FAINALL Too illiterate.

WITWOUD That! that's his happiness.—His want of learning gives him the more opportunities to show his natural parts.

MIRABELL He wants words.

WITWOUD Aye; but I like him for that now; for his want of words gives me the pleasure very often to explain his meaning.

FAINALL He's impudent.

WITWOUD No, that's not it.

MIRABELL Vain.

WITWOUD No.

MIRABELL What, he speaks unseasonable truths sometimes, because he has not wit enough to invent an evasion.

WITWOUD Truths! Ha, ha, ha! No, no, since you will have it—I mean, he never speaks truth at all—that's all. He will lie like a chambermaid, or a woman of quality's porter. Now that is a fault.

[*Enter* COACHMAN.]

COACHMAN Is Master Petulant here, mistress?

BETTY Yes.

COACHMAN Three gentlewomen in a coach would speak with him.

FAINALL O brave Petulant, three!

BETTY I'll tell him.

COACHMAN You must bring two dishes of chocolate and a glass of cinnamon water.

[*Exeunt* BETTY, COACHMAN.]

WITWOUD That should be for two fasting strumpets, and a bawd troubled with wind. Now you may know what the three are.

MIRABELL You are free with your friend's acquaintance.

WITWOUD Aye, aye, friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting; but to tell you a secret, these are trulls<sup>8</sup> whom he allows coach-hire, and something more by the week, to call on him once a day at public places.

MIRABELL How!

WITWOUD You shall see he won't go to 'em because there's no more company here to take notice of him.—Why this is nothing to what he used to do, before he found out this way. I have known him call for himself.—

FAINALL Call for himself? What dost thou mean?

WITWOUD Mean? Why he would slip you out of this chocolate house, just when you had been talking to him.—As soon as your back was turned—whip he was gone—then trip to his lodging, clap on a hood and scarf, and a mask, slap into a hackney coach, and drive hither to the door again in a trice; where he would send in for himself, that I mean, call for himself, wait for himself, nay and what's more, not finding himself, sometimes leave a letter for himself.

MIRABELL I confess this is something extraordinary.—I believe he waits for himself now, he is so long a-coming. O, I ask his pardon.

[*Enter* PETULANT, BETTY.]

BETTY Sir, the coach stays.

PETULANT Well, well; I come.—'Sbud,<sup>9</sup> a man had as good be a professed midwife, as a professed whoremaster, at this rate; to be knocked up and raised at all hours, and in all places. Pox on 'em, I won't come.—D'ye hear, tell 'em I won't come.—Let 'em snivel and cry their hearts out.

FAINALL You are very cruel, Petulant.

PETULANT All's one, let it pass—I have a humor to be cruel.

MIRABELL I hope they are not persons of condition<sup>1</sup> that you use at this rate.

PETULANT Condition, condition's a dried fig, if I am not in humor.—  
By this hand, if they were your—a—a—your what-dee-call-'ems  
themselves, they must wait or rub off,<sup>2</sup> if I want appetite.

MIRABELL What-de-call-ems! What are they, Witwoud?

WITWOUD Empresses, my dear.—By your what-dee-call-'ems he  
means sultana queens.

PETULANT Aye, Roxolanas.<sup>3</sup>

MIRABELL Cry you mercy.

FAINALL Witwoud says they are—

PETULANT What does he say th' are?

WITWOUD I? Fine ladies I say.

PETULANT Pass on, Witwoud.—Harkee, by this light his relations—  
two coheiresses his cousins, and an old aunt, who loves  
caterwauling better than a conventicle.<sup>4</sup>

WITWOUD Ha, ha, ha; I had a mind to see how the rogue would  
come off.—Ha, ha, ha; gad, I can't be angry with him, if he had  
said they were my mother and my sisters.

MIRABELL No!

WITWOUD No; the rogue's wit and readiness of invention charm me,  
dear Petulant.

BETTY They are gone, sir, in great anger.

PETULANT Enough, let 'em trundle.<sup>5</sup> Anger helps complexion, saves  
paint.<sup>6</sup>

FAINALL This continence is all dissembled; this is in order to have  
something to brag of the next time he makes court to Millamant,  
and swear he had abandoned the whole sex for her sake.

MIRABELL Have you not left off your impudent pretensions there  
yet? I shall cut your throat, sometime or other, Petulant, about  
that business.

PETULANT Aye, aye, let that pass.—There are other throats to be  
cut.—

MIRABELL Meaning mine, sir?

PETULANT Not I—I mean nobody—I know nothing. But there are  
uncles and nephews in the world—and they may be rivals—What  
then? All's one for that—

MIRABELL     How! Harkee, Petulant, come hither—explain, or I shall call your interpreter.

PETULANT     Explain? I know nothing.—Why, you have an uncle, have you not, lately come to town, and lodges by my Lady Wishfort's?

MIRABELL     True.

PETULANT     Why, that's enough.—You and he are not friends; and if he should marry and have a child, you may be disinherited, ha?

MIRABELL     Where hast thou stumbled upon all this truth?

PETULANT     All's one for that; why, then, say I know something.

MIRABELL     Come, thou art an honest fellow, Petulant, and shalt make love to my mistress, thou sha't, faith. What hast thou heard of my uncle?

PETULANT     I, nothing, I. If throats are to be cut, let swords clash; snug's the word, I shrug and am silent.

MIRABELL     O raillery, raillery. Come, I know thou art in the women's secrets.—What, you're a cabalist. I know you stayed at Millamant's last night, after I went. Was there any mention made of my uncle or me? Tell me; if thou hadst but good nature equal to thy wit, Petulant, Tony Witwoud, who is now thy competitor in fame, would show as dim by thee as a dead whiting's eye by a pearl of Orient. He would no more be seen by thee than Mercury is by the sun: come, I'm sure thou wo't tell me.

PETULANT     If I do, will you grant me common sense then, for the future?

MIRABELL     Faith, I'll do what I can for thee, and I'll pray that Heaven may grant it thee in the meantime.

PETULANT     Well, harkee.

[MIRABELL *and* PETULANT *talk privately.*]

FAINALL     Petulant and you both will find Mirabell as warm a rival as a lover.

WITWOUD     Pshaw, pshaw, that she laughs at Petulant is plain. And for my part—but that it is almost a fashion to admire her, I should—harkee—to tell you a secret, but let it go no further—between friends, I shall never break my heart for her.

FAINALL     How!

WITWOUD     She's handsome; but she's a sort of an uncertain woman.

FAINALL I thought you had died for her.

WITWOUD Umh—no—

FAINALL She has wit.

WITWOUD 'Tis what she will hardly allow anybody else.—Now, demme,<sup>7</sup> I should hate that, if she were as handsome as Cleopatra. Mirabell is not so sure of her as he thinks for.

FAINALL Why do you think so?

WITWOUD We stayed pretty late there last night, and heard something of an uncle to Mirabell, who is lately come to town—and is between him and the best part of his estate. Mirabell and he are at some distance, as my Lady Wishfort has been told; and you know she hates Mirabell, worse than a Quaker hates a parrot,<sup>8</sup> or than a fishmonger hates a hard frost. Whether this uncle has seen Mrs. Millamant or not, I cannot say; but there were items of such a treaty being in embryo; and if it should come to life, poor Mirabell would be in some sort unfortunately fobbed<sup>9</sup> i' faith.

FAINALL 'Tis impossible Millamant should harken to it.

WITWOUD Faith, my dear, I can't tell; she's a woman and a kind of a humorist.<sup>1</sup>

[MIRABELL, PETULANT *privately*.]

MIRABELL And this is the sum of what you could collect last night.

PETULANT The quintessence. Maybe Witwoud knows more, he stayed longer.—Besides they never mind him; they say anything before him.

MIRABELL I thought you had been the greatest favorite.

PETULANT Aye, *tête à tête*,<sup>2</sup> but not in public, because I make remarks.

MIRABELL You do?

PETULANT Aye, aye, pox, I'm malicious, man. Now he's soft, you know, they are not in awe of him.—The fellow's well bred, he's what you call a—what-d'ye-call-'em. A fine gentleman, but he's silly withal.

MIRABELL I thank you, I know as much as my curiosity requires. Fainall, are you for the Mall?<sup>3</sup>

FAINALL     Aye, I'll take a turn before dinner.

WITWOUD     Aye, we'll all walk in the park, the ladies talked of being there.

MIRABELL     I thought you were obliged to watch for your brother Sir Wilfull's arrival.

WITWOUD     No, no, he's come to his aunt's, my Lady Wishfort. Pox on him, I shall be troubled with him too. What shall I do with the fool?

PETULANT     Beg him for his estate, that I may beg you afterwards, and so have but one trouble with you both.

WITWOUD     O rare Petulant; thou art as quick as fire in a frosty morning; thou shalt to the Mall with us; and we'll be very severe.

PETULANT     Enough, I'm in a humor to be severe.

MIRABELL     Are you? Pray then walk by yourselves.—Let not us be accessory to your putting the ladies out of countenance with your senseless ribaldry, which you roar out aloud as often as they pass by you; and when you have made a handsome woman blush, then you think you have been severe.

PETULANT     What, what? Then let 'em either show their innocence by not understanding what they hear, or else show their discretion by not hearing what they would not be thought to understand.

MIRABELL     But hast not thou then sense enough to know that thou ought'st to be most ashamed thyself, when thou hast put another out of countenance?

PETULANT     Not I, by this hand.—I always take blushing either for a sign of guilt, or ill breeding.

MIRABELL     I confess you ought to think so. You are in the right, that you may plead the error of your judgment in defense of your practice.

Where modesty's ill manners, 'tis but fit  
That impudence and malice pass for wit.

## Endnotes



- Note 8: Melancholy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Awaiting.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Secret organization designed for intrigue.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A liqueur flavored with fruit kernels (pronounced *rat-a-fé-a*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lady Wishfort's natural inclination for you would have continued.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The hours in which marriage can legally be performed in the Anglican Church, then eight to twelve noon.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Taken a long time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Church of St. Pancras, like that of St. James in Duke's Place (referred to later in the same speech), was notorious for a thriving trade in unlicensed marriages.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: If you don't want your ears cropped. "Dame Partlet": Pertelote, the hen-wife of the cock Chauntecleer in Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Rosamond's Pond is in St. James's Park.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The grand tour of the Continent was rapidly becoming a part of the education of gentlemen, but it was usually made in company with a tutor after a young man had graduated from a university, not after a man had passed the age of forty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Crabapple. "Medlar": a fruit eaten when it is overripe.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Trinculo, in the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest* by Sir William Davenant and Dryden (1667), having made Caliban drunk, says, "The poor monster is loving in his drink" (2.2).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One recognized sign of wit was the ability to quickly discover resemblances between objects apparently unlike. Witwoud specializes in this kind of wit, but Mirabell suggests that they are all obvious and collected from others, like

observations copied in a notebook, or “commonplace” book.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Quarrelsome.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The witty fellow (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Depression.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bum-bailiff, the lowest arresting officer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Talents.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sex workers. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: God’s body.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: High social standing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Go away.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “Empresses,” “sultana queens,” and “Roxolanas” were terms for sex workers. Roxolana is the wife of the Sultan in Davenant’s *Siege of Rhodes* (1656).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nonconformist religious meeting.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Move along.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Makeup.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Damn me.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678), the Quaker Robert Barclay says that professing belief in Christ without spiritual revelation is like “the prattling of a parrot.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tricked.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A capricious person.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: face-to-face (French); that is, in private.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A walk in St. James’s Park, one of the fashionable public places of London.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***Act 2—St. James's Park***

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

MRS. FAINALL     Aye, aye, dear Marwood, if we will be happy, we must find the means in ourselves, and among ourselves. Men are ever in extremes; either doting or averse. While they are lovers, if they have fire and sense, their jealousies are insupportable: and when they cease to love (we ought to think at least) they loathe. They look upon us with horror and distaste; they meet us like the ghosts of what we were, and as from such, fly from us.

MRS. MARWOOD     True, 'tis an unhappy circumstance of life that love should ever die before us; and that the man so often should outlive the lover. But say what you will, 'tis better to be left than never to have been loved. To pass over youth in dull indifference, to refuse the sweets of life because they once must leave us, is as preposterous as to wish to have been born old, because we one day must be old. For my part, my youth may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession.

MRS. FAINALL     Then it seems you dissemble an aversion to mankind only in compliance to my mother's humor.

MRS. MARWOOD     Certainly. To be free,<sup>4</sup> I have no taste of those insipid dry discourses with which our sex of force must entertain themselves apart from men. We may affect endearments to each other, profess eternal friendships, and seem to dote like lovers; but 'tis not in our natures long to persevere. Love will resume his empire in our breasts, and every heart, or soon or late, receive and readmit him as its lawful tyrant.

MRS. FAINALL     Bless me, how have I been deceived! Why, you profess<sup>5</sup> a libertine.

MRS. MARWOOD     You see my friendship by my freedom. Come, be as sincere, acknowledge that your sentiments agree with mine.

MRS. FAINALL     Never.

MRS. MARWOOD     You hate mankind?

MRS. FAINALL     Heartily, inveterately.

MRS. MARWOOD     Your husband?

MRS. FAINALL Most transcendently; aye, though I say it,  
meritoriously.

MRS. MARWOOD Give me your hand upon it.

MRS. FAINALL There.

MRS. MARWOOD I join with you. What I have said has been to try  
you.

MRS. FAINALL Is it possible? Dost thou hate those vipers men?

MRS. MARWOOD I have done hating 'em, and am now come to  
despise 'em; the next thing I have to do is eternally to forget 'em.

MRS. FAINALL There spoke the spirit of an Amazon, a Penthesilea.<sup>6</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD And yet I am thinking sometimes to carry my  
aversion further.

MRS. FAINALL How?

MRS. MARWOOD Faith, by marrying. If I could but find one that loved  
me very well, and would be thoroughly sensible of ill usage, I  
think I should do myself the violence of undergoing the ceremony.

MRS. FAINALL You would not make him a cuckold?

MRS. MARWOOD No; but I'd make him believe I did, and that's as  
bad.

MRS. FAINALL Why had not you as good do it?

MRS. MARWOOD O, if he should ever discover it, he would then know  
the worst, and be out of his pain; but I would have him ever to  
continue upon the rack of fear and jealousy.

MRS. FAINALL Ingenious mischief! Would thou wert married to  
Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD Would I were.

MRS. FAINALL You change color.

MRS. MARWOOD Because I hate him.

MRS. FAINALL So do I; but I can hear him named. But what reason  
have you to hate him in particular?

MRS. MARWOOD I never loved him; he is and always was insufferably  
proud.

MRS. FAINALL By the reason you give for your aversion, one would  
think it dissembled; for you have laid a fault to his charge of which  
his enemies must acquit him.

MRS. MARWOOD O then it seems you are one of his favorable enemies. Methinks you look a little pale, and now you flush again.

MRS. FAINALL Do I? I think I am a little sick o' the sudden.

MRS. MARWOOD What ails you?

MRS. FAINALL My husband. Don't you see him? He turned short upon me unawares, and has almost overcome me.

[*Enter FAINALL and MIRABELL.*]

MRS. MARWOOD Ha, ha, ha; he comes opportunely for you.

MRS. FAINALL For you, for he has brought Mirabell with him.

FAINALL My dear.

MRS. FAINALL My soul.

FAINALL You don't look well today, child.

MRS. FAINALL D'ye think so?

MIRABELL He is the only man that does, madam.

MRS. FAINALL The only man that would tell me so at least; and the only man from whom I could hear it without mortification.

FAINALL O my dear, I am satisfied of your tenderness; I know you cannot resent anything from me, especially what is an effect of my concern.

MRS. FAINALL Mr. Mirabell, my mother interrupted you in a pleasant relation last night. I would fain hear it out.

MIRABELL The persons concerned in that affair have yet a tolerable reputation.—I am afraid Mr. Fainall will be censorious.

MRS. FAINALL He has a humor more prevailing than his curiosity, and will willingly dispense with the hearing of one scandalous story to avoid giving an occasion to make another by being seen to walk with his wife. This way, Mr. Mirabell, and I dare promise you will oblige us both.

[*Exeunt MIRABELL and MRS. FAINALL.*]

FAINALL Excellent creature! Well, sure if I should live to be rid of my wife, I should be a miserable man.

MRS. MARWOOD Aye!

FAINALL For having only that one hope, the accomplishment of it of consequence must put an end to all my hopes; and what a wretch is he who must survive his hopes! Nothing remains when that day

comes but to sit down and weep like Alexander, when he wanted other worlds to conquer.

MRS. MARWOOD Will you not follow 'em?

FAINALL Faith, I think not.

MRS. MARWOOD Pray let us; I have a reason.

FAINALL You are not jealous?

MRS. MARWOOD Of whom?

FAINALL Of Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD If I am, is it inconsistent with my love to you that I am tender of your honor?

FAINALL You would intimate then, as if there were a fellow-feeling between my wife and him.

MRS. MARWOOD I think she does not hate him to that degree she would be thought.

FAINALL But he, I fear, is too insensible.<sup>7</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD It may be you are deceived.

FAINALL It may be so. I do now begin to apprehend it.

MRS. MARWOOD What?

FAINALL That I have been deceived, Madam, and you are false.

MRS. MARWOOD That I am false! What mean you?

FAINALL To let you know I see through all your little arts.—Come, you both love him; and both have equally dissembled your aversion. Your mutual jealousies of one another have made you clash till you have both struck fire. I have seen the warm confession reddening on your cheeks, and sparkling from your eyes.

MRS. MARWOOD You do me wrong.

FAINALL I do not.—'Twas for my ease to oversee<sup>8</sup> and willfully neglect the gross advances made him by my wife; that by permitting her to be engaged I might continue unsuspected in my pleasures; and take you oftener to my arms in full security. But could you think, because the nodding husband would not wake, that e'er the watchful lover slept?

MRS. MARWOOD And wherewithal can you reproach me?

FAINALL With infidelity, with loving another, with love of Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis false. I challenge you to show an instance that can confirm your groundless accusation. I hate him.

FAINALL And wherefore do you hate him? He is insensible, and your resentment follows his neglect. An instance! The injuries you have done him are a proof: your interposing in his love. What cause had you to make discoveries of his pretended passion? To undeceive the credulous aunt, and be the officious obstacle of his match with Millamant?

MRS. MARWOOD My obligations to my lady<sup>9</sup> urged me. I had professed a friendship to her, and could not see her easy nature so abused by that dissembler.

FAINALL What, was it conscience then? Professed a friendship! O the pious friendships of the female sex!

MRS. MARWOOD More tender, more sincere, and more enduring than all the vain and empty vows of men, whether professing love to us, or mutual faith to one another.

FAINALL Ha, ha, ha; you are my wife's friend too.

MRS. MARWOOD Shame and ingratitude! Do you reproach me? You, you upbraid me! Have I been false to her, through strict fidelity to you, and sacrificed my friendship to keep my love inviolate? And have you the baseness to charge me with the guilt, unmindful of the merit! To you it should be meritorious that I have been vicious: and do you reflect that guilt upon me, which should lie buried in your bosom?

FAINALL You misinterpret my reproof. I meant but to remind you of the slight account you once could make of strictest ties, when set in competition with your love to me.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis false, you urged it with deliberate malice.—'Twas spoke in scorn, and I never will forgive it.

FAINALL Your guilt, not your resentment, begets your rage. If yet you loved, you could forgive a jealousy, but you are stung to find you are discovered.

MRS. MARWOOD It shall be all discovered. You too shall be discovered; be sure you shall. I can but be exposed.—If I do it myself, I shall prevent<sup>1</sup> your baseness.

FAINALL Why, what will you do?

MRS. MARWOOD Disclose it to your wife; own what has passed between us.

FAINALL Frenzy!

MRS. MARWOOD By all my wrongs I'll do't—I'll publish to the world the injuries you have done me, both in my fame and fortune: with both I trusted you, you bankrupt in honor, as indigent of wealth.

FAINALL Your fame<sup>2</sup> I have preserved. Your fortune has been bestowed as the prodigality of your love would have it, in pleasures which we both have shared. Yet, had not you been false, I had e'er this repaid it.—'Tis true—had you permitted Mirabell with Millamant to have stolen their marriage, my lady had been incensed beyond all means of reconciliation: Millamant had forfeited the moiety<sup>3</sup> of her fortune, which then would have descended to my wife—and wherefore did I marry, but to make lawful prize of a rich widow's wealth, and squander it on love and you?

MRS. MARWOOD Deceit and frivolous pretense.

FAINALL Death, am I not married? What's pretense? Am I not imprisoned, fettered? Have I not a wife? Nay, a wife that was a widow, a young widow, a handsome widow; and would be again a widow, but that I have a heart of proof,<sup>4</sup> and something of a constitution to bustle through the ways of wedlock and this world. Will you yet be reconciled to truth and me?

MRS. MARWOOD Impossible. Truth and you are inconsistent—I hate you, and shall forever.

FAINALL For loving you?

MRS. MARWOOD I loathe the name of love after such usage; and next to the guilt with which you would asperse me, I scorn you most. Farewell.

FAINALL Nay, we must not part thus.

MRS. MARWOOD Let me go.

FAINALL Come, I'm sorry.

MRS. MARWOOD I care not.—Let me go.—Break my hands, do—I'd leave 'em to get loose.



FAINALL I would not hurt you for the world. Have I no other hold to keep you here?

MRS. MARWOOD Well, I have deserved it all.

FAINALL You know I love you.

MRS. MARWOOD Poor dissembling!—O that—Well, it is not yet—

FAINALL What? What is it not? What is it not yet? It is not yet too late—

MRS. MARWOOD No, it is not yet too late—I have that comfort.

FAINALL It is, to love another.

MRS. MARWOOD But not to loathe, detest, abhor mankind, myself, and the whole treacherous world.

FAINALL Nay, this is extravagance.—Come, I ask your pardon.—No tears.—I was to blame. I could not love you and be easy in my doubts.—Pray forbear.—I believe you; I'm convinced I've done you wrong; and any way, every way will make amends.—I'll hate my wife yet more, damn her, I'll part with her, rob her of all she's worth, and we'll retire somewhere, anywhere, to another world. I'll marry thee.—Be pacified.—'Sdeath, they come, hide your face, your tears.—You have a mask,<sup>5</sup> wear it a moment. This way, this way, be persuaded. [*Exeunt* FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

[*Enter* MIRABELL *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

MRS. FAINALL They are here yet.

MIRABELL They are turning into the other walk.

MRS. FAINALL While I only hated my husband, I could bear to see him, but since I have despised him, he's too offensive.

MIRABELL O, you should hate with prudence.

MRS. FAINALL Yes, for I have loved with indiscretion.

MIRABELL You should have just so much disgust for your husband as may be sufficient to make you relish your lover.

MRS. FAINALL You have been the cause that I have loved without bounds, and would you set limits to that aversion, of which you have been the occasion? Why did you make me marry this man?

MIRABELL Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? To save that idol, reputation. If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence, of which you were

apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father's name with credit, but on a husband? I knew Fainall to be a man lavish of his morals, an interested and professing friend, a false and a designing lover; yet one whose wit and outward fair behavior have gained a reputation with the town, enough to make that woman stand excused who has suffered herself to be won by his addresses. A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him, you know your remedy.

MRS. FAINALL I ought to stand in some degree of credit with you, Mirabell.

MIRABELL In justice to you, I have made you privy to my whole design, and put it in your power to ruin or advance my fortune.

MRS. FAINALL Whom have you instructed to represent your pretended uncle?

MIRABELL Waitwell, my servant.

MRS. FAINALL He is an humble servant to Foible,<sup>6</sup> my mother's woman, and may win her to your interest.

MIRABELL Care is taken for that.—She is won and worn by this time. They were married this morning.

MRS. FAINALL Who?

MIRABELL Waitwell and Foible. I would not tempt my servant to betray me by trusting him too far. If your mother, in hopes to ruin me, should consent to marry my pretended uncle, he might, like Mosca in *The Fox*, stand upon terms;<sup>7</sup> so I made him sure beforehand.

MRS. FAINALL So, if my poor mother is caught in a contract, you will discover the imposture betimes; and release her by producing a certificate of her gallant's former marriage.

MIRABELL Yes, upon condition that she consent to my marriage with her niece, and surrender the moiety of her fortune in her possession.

MRS. FAINALL She talked last night of endeavoring at a match between Millamant and your uncle.

MIRABELL That was by Foible's direction, and my instruction, that she might seem to carry it more privately.

MRS. FAINALL Well, I have an opinion of your success, for I believe my lady will do anything to get an husband; and when she has this, which you have provided for her, I suppose she will submit to anything to get rid of him.

MIRABELL Yes, I think the good lady would marry anything that resembled a man, though 'twere no more than what a butler could pinch out of a napkin.

MRS. FAINALL Female frailty! We must all come to it, if we live to be old, and feel the craving of a false appetite when the true is decayed.

MIRABELL An old woman's appetite is depraved like that of a girl—'tis the greensickness<sup>8</sup> of a second childhood; and like the faint offer of a latter spring, serves but to usher in the fall and withers in an affected bloom.

MRS. FAINALL Here's your mistress.

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT, WITWOUD, *and* MINCING.]

MIRABELL Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.—Ha, no, I cry her mercy.

MRS. FAINALL I see but one poor empty sculler, and he tows her woman after him.

MIRABELL You seem to be unattended, madam.—You used to have the *beau monde* throng after you; and a flock of gay fine perukes<sup>9</sup> hovering round you.

WITWOUD Like moths about a candle—I had like to have lost my comparison for want of breath.

MILLAMANT O, I have denied myself airs today. I have walked as fast through the crowd—

WITWOUD As a favorite just disgraced; and with as few followers.

MILLAMANT Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes: For I am as sick of 'em—

WITWOUD As a physician of a good air—I cannot help it, madam, though 'tis against myself.

MILLAMANT Yet again! Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

WITWOUD Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a screen before a great fire. I confess I do blaze today, I am too bright.

MRS. FAINALL But dear Millamant, why were you so long?

MILLAMANT Long! Lord, have I not made violent haste? I have asked every living thing I met for you; I have inquired after you, as after a new fashion.

WITWOUD Madam, truce with your similitudes.—No, you met her husband, and did not ask him for her.

MIRABELL By your leave, Witwoud, that were like inquiring after an old fashion, to ask a husband for his wife.

WITWOUD Hum, a hit, a hit, a palpable hit,<sup>1</sup> I confess it.

MRS. FAINALL You were dressed before I came abroad.

MILLAMANT Aye, that's true.—O, but then I had—Mincing, what had I? Why was I so long?

MINCING O mem, your la'ship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.

MILLAMANT O, aye, letters—I had letters—I am persecuted with letters—I hate letters.—Nobody knows how to write letters; and yet one has 'em, one does not know why.—They serve one to pin up one's hair.

WITWOUD Is that the way? Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all your letters? I find I must keep copies.

MILLAMANT Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud. I never pin up my hair with prose. I think I tried once, Mincing.

MINCING O mem, I shall never forget it.

MILLAMANT Aye, poor Mincing tiffed<sup>2</sup> and tiffed all the morning.

MINCING Till I had the cramp in my fingers, I'll vow, mem. And all to no purpose. But when your la'ship pins it up with poetry, it sits so pleasant the next day as anything, and is so pure and so crips.<sup>3</sup>

WITWOUD Indeed, so crips?

MINCING You're such a critic, Mr. Witwoud.

MILLAMANT Mirabell, did not you take exceptions last night? O, aye, and went away.—Now I think on't I'm angry.—No, now I think on't I'm pleased—for I believe I gave you some pain.

MIRABELL Does that please you?

MILLAMANT Infinitely; I love to give pain.

MIRABELL You would affect a cruelty which is not in your nature; your true vanity is in the power of pleasing.

MILLAMANT O, I ask your pardon for that—one's cruelty is one's power, and when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power; and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.

MIRABELL Aye, aye, suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of your power, to destroy your lover.—And then how vain, how lost a thing you'll be! Nay, 'tis true: you are no longer handsome when you've lost your lover; your beauty dies upon the instant: for beauty is the lover's gift; 'tis he bestows your charms—your glass is all a cheat. The ugly and the old, whom the looking glass mortifies, yet after commendation can be flattered by it, and discover beauties in it: for that reflects our praises, rather than your face.

MILLAMANT O, the vanity of these men! Fainall, d'ye hear him? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty the lover's gift?—Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases: and then if one pleases one makes more.

WITWOUD Very pretty. Why, you make no more of making of lovers, madam, than of making so many card-matches.<sup>4</sup>

MILLAMANT One no more owes one's beauty to a lover than one's wit to an echo.—They can but reflect what we look and say; vain empty things if we are silent or unseen, and want a being.

MIRABELL Yet, to those two vain empty things, you owe two of the greatest pleasures of your life.

MILLAMANT How so?

MIRABELL To your lover you owe the pleasure of hearing yourselves praised; and to an echo the pleasure of hearing yourselves talk.

WITWOUD But I know a lady that loves talking so incessantly she won't give an echo fair play; she has that everlasting rotation of

tongue, that an echo must wait till she dies before it can catch her last words.

MILLAMANT O, fiction; Fainall, let us leave these men.

MIRABELL [*Aside to* MRS. FAINALL.] Draw off Witwoud.

MRS. FAINALL Immediately; I have a word or two for Mr. Witwoud.  
[*Exeunt* WITWOUD *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

MIRABELL I would beg a little private audience too.—You had the tyranny to deny me last night, though you knew I came to impart a secret to you that concerned my love.

MILLAMANT You saw I was engaged.

MIRABELL Unkind. You had the leisure to entertain a herd of fools, things who visit you from their excessive idleness, bestowing on your easiness that time, which is the encumbrance of their lives. How can you find delight in such society? It is impossible they should admire you, they are not capable: or if they were, it should be to you as a mortification; for sure to please a fool is some degree of folly.

MILLAMANT I please myself—besides, sometimes to converse with fools is for my health.

MIRABELL Your health! Is there a worse disease than the conversation of fools?

MILLAMANT Yes, the vapors; fools are physic for it, next to asafetida.<sup>5</sup>

MIRABELL You are not in a course<sup>6</sup> of fools?

MILLAMANT Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive freedom, you'll displease me. I think I must resolve after all not to have you.—We shan't agree.

MIRABELL Not in our physic, it may be.

MILLAMANT And yet our distemper in all likelihood will be the same, for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults.—I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you, Mirabell—I'm resolved—I think—you may go—ha, ha, ha. What would you give that you could help loving me?

MIRABELL I would give something that you did not know I could not help it.

MILLAMANT Come, don't look grave then. Well, what do you say to me?

MIRABELL I say that a man may as soon make a friend by his wit, or a fortune by his honesty, as win a woman with plain-dealing and sincerity.

MILLAMANT Sententious Mirabell! prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Solomon at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry hanging.<sup>7</sup>

MIRABELL You are merry, madam, but I would persuade you for a moment to be serious.

MILLAMANT What, with that face? No, if you keep your countenance, 'tis impossible I should hold mine. Well, after all, there is something very moving in a lovesick face. Ha, ha, ha.—Well I won't laugh, don't be peevish—heigho! Now I'll be melancholy, as melancholy as a watchlight.<sup>8</sup> Well, Mirabell, if ever you will win me, woo me now. Nay, if you are so tedious, fare you well; I see they are walking away.

MIRABELL Can you not find in the variety of your disposition one moment—

MILLAMANT To hear you tell me Foible's married and your plot like to speed.—No.

MIRABELL But how you came to know it—

MILLAMANT Without the help of the devil, you can't imagine; unless she should tell me herself. Which of the two it may have been, I will leave you to consider; and when you have done thinking of that, think of me.

[*Exeunt* MILLAMANT *and* MINCING.]

MIRABELL I have something more.—Gone!—Think of you! To think of a whirlwind, though 'twere in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation, a very tranquility of mind and mansion. A fellow that lives in a windmill has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman. There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which



they are not turned; and by one as well as another, for motion, not method, is their occupation. To know this, and yet continue to be in love, is to be made wise from the dictates of reason, and yet persevere to play the fool by the force of instinct. O, here come my pair of turtles<sup>9</sup>—what, billing so sweetly! Is not Valentine's Day over with you yet?

[*Enter WAITWELL and FOIBLE.*]

MIRABELL Sirrah<sup>1</sup> Waitwell, why sure you think you were married for your own recreation and not for my conveniency.

WAITWELL Your pardon, sir. With submission, we have indeed been solacing in lawful delights, but still with an eye to business, sir. I have instructed her as well as I could. If she can take your directions as readily as my instructions, sir, your affairs are in a prosperous way.

MIRABELL Give you joy, Mrs. Foible.

FOIBLE O-las, sir, I'm so ashamed—I'm afraid my lady has been in a thousand inquietudes for me. But I protest, sir, I made as much haste as I could.

WAITWELL That she did indeed, sir. It was my fault that she did not make more.

MIRABELL That I believe.

FOIBLE But I told my lady as you instructed me, sir. That I had a prospect of seeing Sir Rowland your uncle, and that I would put her ladyship's picture in my pocket to show him; which I'll be sure to say has made him so enamored of her beauty that he burns with impatience to lie at her ladyship's feet and worship the original.

MIRABELL Excellent, Foible! Matrimony has made you eloquent in love.

WAITWELL I think she has profited, sir. I think so.

FOIBLE You have seen Madam Millamant, sir?

MIRABELL Yes.

FOIBLE I told her, sir, because I did not know that you might find an opportunity; she had so much company last night.

MIRABELL Your diligence will merit more—in the meantime—



[*Gives money.*]

FOIBLE O dear sir, your humble servant.

WAITWELL Spouse.

MIRABELL Stand off, sir, not a penny. Go on and prosper, Foible. The lease shall be made good and the farm stocked if we succeed.<sup>2</sup>

FOIBLE I don't question your generosity, sir. And you need not doubt of success. If you have no more commands, sir, I'll be gone; I'm sure my lady is at her toilet,<sup>3</sup> and can't dress till I come. O dear, I'm sure that [*Looking out.*] was Mrs. Marwood that went by in a mask; if she has seen me with you I'm sure she'll tell my lady. I'll make haste home and prevent her.<sup>4</sup> Your servant, sir. B'w'y,<sup>5</sup> Waitwell. [*Exit FOIBLE.*]

WAITWELL Sir Rowland, if you please. The jade's so pert upon her preferment she forgets herself.

MIRABELL Come, sir, will you endeavor to forget yourself—and transform into Sir Rowland.

WAITWELL Why, sir, it will be impossible I should remember myself—married, knighted, and attended<sup>6</sup> all in one day! 'Tis enough to make any man forget himself. The difficulty will be how to recover my acquaintance and familiarity with my former self; and fall from my transformation to a reformation into Waitwell. Nay, I shan't be quite the same Waitwell neither—for now I remember me, I'm married and can't be my own man again.

Aye, there's my grief; that's the sad change of life;  
To lose my title, and yet keep my wife.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: To speak freely.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Talk like.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Queen of the Amazons (a legendary nation of women warriors).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Indifferent.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Overlook.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lady Wishfort.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anticipate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Good name.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Half.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, a proved or tempered heart.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Often worn in public places by fashionable women of the time to preserve their complexions; they were also useful to disguise a woman and so to protect her reputation when she was carrying on an illicit affair.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He is Foible's lover.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To insist on conditions; here, to blackmail. "Mosca": the scheming parasite in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, who in the end tries to blackmail Volpone.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The anemia that sometimes affects girls at puberty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Periwigs, worn by fashionable men (see Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* 1.101). "Beau monde": fashionable world (French).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An allusion to the dueling scene in *Hamlet* 5.2.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dressed the hair.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A dialectal form of "crisp," curly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Matches made by dipping pieces of card in melted sulfur.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A foul-smelling resin used for medicinal purposes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plan of medical treatment.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16–27) was a favorite subject in painting and tapestry.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nightlight.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, turtledoves, remarkable for their affectionate billing and cooing. Birds were popularly supposed to choose their mates on St. Valentine's Day.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Form of address to an inferior.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Mirabell has promised to lease a farm for the couple for helping him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Vanity, makeup table.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Arrive before she does.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A shortened form of “God be with you” (our word *good-bye*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: By servants.[Return to reference 6](#)

### ***Act 3—A room in LADY WISHFORT's house***

LADY WISHFORT *at her toilet, PEG waiting.*

LADY WISHFORT Merciful, no news of Foible yet?

PEG No, madam.

LADY WISHFORT I have no more patience. If I have not fretted myself till I am pale again, there's no veracity in me. Fetch me the red—the red, do you hear, sweetheart? An errant ash color, as I'm a person. Look you how this wench stirs! Why dost thou not fetch me a little red? Didst thou not hear me, mopus?<sup>7</sup>

PEG The red ratafia does your ladyship mean, or the cherry brandy?

LADY WISHFORT Ratafia, fool. No, fool. Not the ratafia, fool. Grant me patience! I mean the Spanish paper,<sup>8</sup> idiot—complexion, darling. Paint, paint, paint, dost thou understand that, changeling, dangling thy hands like bobbins before thee? Why dost thou not stir, puppet? Thou wooden thing upon wires.

PEG Lord, madam, your ladyship is so impatient.—I cannot come at the paint, madam. Mrs. Foible has locked it up and carried the key with her.

LADY WISHFORT A pox take you both!—Fetch me the cherry brandy then. [*Exit PEG.*] I'm as pale and as faint, I look like Mrs. Qualmsick, the curate's wife, that's always breeding. Wench, come, come, wench, what art thou doing? Sipping? Tasting? Save thee, dost thou not know the bottle?

[*Re-enter PEG with a bottle and china cup.*]

PEG Madam, I was looking for a cup.

LADY WISHFORT A cup, save thee, and what a cup hast thou brought! Dost thou take me for a fairy, to drink out of an acorn? Why didst thou not bring thy thimble? Hast thou ne'er a brass thimble clinking in thy pocket with a bit of nutmeg? I warrant thee. Come, fill, fill.—So—again. See who that is.—[*A knock is heard.*—] Set down the bottle first. Here, here, under the table.—What, wouldst thou go with the bottle in thy hand like a tapster?<sup>9</sup> As I'm a person, this wench has lived in an inn upon the road before she

came to me, like Maritornes the Asturian<sup>1</sup> in *Don Quixote*. No Foible yet?

PEG No, madam, Mrs. Marwood.

LADY WISHFORT O Marwood, let her come in. Come in, good Marwood.

[*Enter* MRS. MARWOOD.]

MRS. MARWOOD I'm surprised to find your ladyship in *deshabille*<sup>2</sup> at this time of day.

LADY WISHFORT Foible's a lost thing; has been abroad since morning, and never heard of since.

MRS. MARWOOD I saw her but now, as I came masked through the park, in conference with Mirabell.

LADY WISHFORT With Mirabell! you call my blood into my face, with mentioning that traitor. She durst not have the confidence. I sent her to negotiate an affair, in which if I'm detected I'm undone. If that wheedling villain has wrought upon Foible to detect me, I'm ruined. O my dear friend, I'm a wretch of wretches if I'm detected.

MRS. MARWOOD O madam, you cannot suspect Mrs. Foible's integrity.

LADY WISHFORT O, he carries poison in his tongue that would corrupt integrity itself. If she has given him an opportunity, she has as good as put her integrity into his hands. Ah dear Marwood, what's integrity to an opportunity? Hark! I hear her—dear friend, retire into my closet,<sup>3</sup> that I may examine her with more freedom. You'll pardon me, dear friend, I can make bold with you. There are books over the chimney—Quarles and Prynne, and the *Short View of the Stage*,<sup>4</sup> with Bunyan's works to entertain you. [*Exit* MRS. MARWOOD; *to* PEG.] Go, you thing, and send her in. [*Exit* PEG.]

[*Enter* FOIBLE.]

LADY WISHFORT O Foible, where hast thou been? What hast thou been doing?

FOIBLE Madam, I have seen the party.

LADY WISHFORT But what hast thou done?

FOIBLE Nay, 'tis your ladyship has done, and are to do; I have only promised. But a man so enamored—so transported! Well, if worshiping of pictures be a sin—poor Sir Rowland, I say.

LADY WISHFORT The miniature has been counted like<sup>5</sup>—but hast thou not betrayed me, Foible? Hast thou not detected me to that faithless Mirabell?—What hadst thou to do with him in the park? Answer me, has he got nothing out of thee?

FOIBLE [*Aside.*] So, the devil has been beforehand with me. What shall I say?—Alas, madam, could I help it if I met that confident thing? Was I in fault? If you had heard how he used me, and all upon your ladyship's account, I'm sure you would not suspect my fidelity. Nay, if that had been the worst I could have borne; but he had a fling at your ladyship too; and then I could not hold; but i' faith I gave him his own.

LADY WISHFORT Me? What did the filthy fellow say?

FOIBLE O madam; 'tis a shame to say what he said—with his taunts and his fleers,<sup>6</sup> tossing up his nose. Humh (says he) what, you are a-hatching some plot (says he) you are so early abroad, or catering (says he), ferreting for some disbanded<sup>7</sup> officer, I warrant—half pay is but thin subsistence (says he).—Well, what pension does your lady propose? Let me see (says he) what, she must come down pretty deep now, she's superannuated (says he) and—

LADY WISHFORT Ods my life, I'll have him—I'll have him murdered. I'll have him poisoned. Where does he eat? I'll marry a drawer<sup>8</sup> to have him poisoned in his wine. I'll send for Robin from Locket's<sup>9</sup>—immediately.

FOIBLE Poison him? Poisoning's too good for him. Starve him, madam, starve him; marry Sir Rowland, and get him disinherited. O, you would bless yourself, to hear what he said.

LADY WISHFORT A villain!—superannuated!

FOIBLE Humh (says he) I hear you are laying designs against me too (says he) and Mrs. Millamant is to marry my uncle; (he does not suspect a word of your ladyship) but (says he) I'll fit you for that, I warrant you (says he) I'll hamper you for that (says he) you and your old frippery<sup>1</sup> too (says he). I'll handle you—

LADY WISHFORT Audacious villain! handle me, would he durst—frippery? old frippery! Was there ever such a foul-mouthed fellow? I'll be married tomorrow, I'll be contracted tonight.

FOIBLE The sooner the better, madam.

LADY WISHFORT Will Sir Rowland be here, say'st thou? When, Foible?

FOIBLE Incontinently, madam. No new sheriff's wife expects the return of her husband after knighthood, with that impatience in which Sir Rowland burns for the dear hour of kissing your ladyship's hand after dinner.

LADY WISHFORT Frippery! Superannuated frippery! I'll frippery the villain, I'll reduce him to frippery and rags. A tatterdemalion—I hope to see him hung with tatters, like a Long Lane penthouse,<sup>2</sup> or a gibbet-thief. A slander-mouthed railer—I warrant the spendthrift prodigal's in debt as much as the million lottery, or the whole court upon a birthday. I'll spoil his credit with his tailor. Yes, he shall have my niece with her fortune, he shall.

FOIBLE He! I hope to see him lodge in Ludgate first, and angle into Black-friars for brass farthings with an old mitten.<sup>3</sup>

LADY WISHFORT Aye, dear Foible; thank thee for that, dear Foible. He has put me out of all patience. I shall never recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland with any economy of face. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

FOIBLE Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.

LADY WISHFORT Let me see the glass.—Cracks, say'st thou? Why I am arrantly flayed—I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes, or I shall never keep up to my picture.

FOIBLE I warrant you, madam; a little art once made your picture like you and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam.

LADY WISHFORT But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come? Or will a' not fail<sup>4</sup> when he does come? Will he be importunate, Foible, and push? For if he should not be importunate—I shall never break decorums.—I shall die with confusion, if I am forced to advance.—Oh, no, I can never advance.—I shall swoon if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms. I won't

be too coy neither—I won't give him despair—but a little disdain is not amiss; a little scorn is alluring.

FOIBLE A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

LADY WISHFORT Yes, but tenderness becomes me best.—A sort of dyingness—You see that picture has a sort of a—Ha, Foible? A swimmingness in the eyes—Yes, I'll look so—my niece affects it; but she wants features.<sup>5</sup> Is Sir Rowland handsome? Let my toilet be removed—I'll dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I won't know: I'll be surprised. I'll be taken by surprise.

FOIBLE By storm, madam. Sir Rowland's a brisk man.

LADY WISHFORT Is he! O, then he'll importune, if he's a brisk man, I shall save decorums if Sir Rowland importunes. I have a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums. O, I'm glad he's a brisk man. Let my things be removed, good Foible.  
[Exit LADY WISHFORT.]

[Enter MRS. FAINALL.]<sup>6</sup>

MRS. FAINALL O Foible, I have been in a fright, lest I should come too late. That devil Marwood saw you in the park with Mirabell, and I'm afraid will discover it to my lady.

FOIBLE Discover what, madam?

MRS. FAINALL Nay, nay, put not on that strange face. I am privy to the whole design and know Waitwell, to whom thou wert this morning married, is to personate<sup>7</sup> Mirabell's uncle, and as such, winning my lady, to involve her in those difficulties from which Mirabell only must release her, by his making his conditions to have my cousin and her fortune left to her own disposal.

FOIBLE O dear madam, I beg your pardon. It was not my confidence in your ladyship that was deficient, but I thought the former good correspondence between your ladyship and Mr. Mirabell might have hindered his communicating this secret.

MRS. FAINALL Dear Foible, forget that.

FOIBLE O dear madam, Mr. Mirabell is such a sweet winning gentleman—but your ladyship is the pattern of generosity. Sweet lady, to be so good! Mr. Mirabell cannot choose but to be grateful.



I find your ladyship has his heart still. Now, madam, I can safely tell your ladyship our success. Mrs. Marwood had told my lady; but I warrant I managed myself. I turned it all for the better. I told my lady that Mr. Mirabell railed at her. I laid horrid things to his charge, I'll vow; and my lady is so incensed that she'll be contracted to Sir Rowland tonight, she says—I warrant I worked her up, that he may have her for asking for, as they say of a Welsh maidenhead.

MRS. FAINALL    O rare Foible!

FOIBLE    Madam, I beg your ladyship to acquaint Mr. Mirabell of his success. I would be seen as little as possible to speak to him—besides, I believe Madam Marwood watches me. She has a month's mind,<sup>8</sup> but I know Mr. Mirabell can't abide her. [*Calls.*] John, remove my lady's toilet. Madam, your servant. My lady is so impatient, I fear she'll come for me if I stay.

MRS. FAINALL    I'll go with you up the back stairs, lest I should meet her.

[*Exeunt* MRS. FAINALL, FOIBLE.]

[*Enter* MRS. MARWOOD.]

MRS. MARWOOD    Indeed, Mrs. Engine,<sup>9</sup> is it thus with you? Are you become a go-between of this importance? Yes, I shall watch you. Why, this wench is the *passe-partout*, a very master key to everybody's strongbox. My friend Fainall,<sup>1</sup> have you carried it so swimmingly? I thought there was something in it; but it seems it's over with you. Your loathing is not from a want of appetite, then, but from a surfeit. Else you could never be so cool to fall from a principal to be an assistant; to procure for him! A pattern of generosity, that I confess. Well, Mr. Fainall, you have met with your match. O, man, man! Woman, woman! The devil's an ass: If I were a painter, I would draw him like an idiot, a driveler with a bib and bells. Man should have his head and horns, and woman the rest of him. Poor simple fiend! Madam Marwood has a month's mind, but he can't abide her.—'Twere better for him you had not been his confessor in that affair without you could have kept his counsel closer. I shall not prove another pattern of generosity.—He

has not obliged me to that with those excesses of himself; and now I'll have none of him. Here comes the good lady, panting ripe, with a heart full of hope and a head full of care, like any chemist upon the day of projection.<sup>2</sup>

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT.]

LADY WISHFORT O dear Marwood, what shall I say for this rude forgetfulness—but my dear friend is all goodness.

MRS. MARWOOD No apologies, dear madam. I have been very well entertained.

LADY WISHFORT As I'm a person I am in a very chaos to think I should so forget myself—but I have such an olio<sup>3</sup> of affairs really I know not what to do—[*Calls.*] Foible—I expect my nephew Sir Wilfull every moment too.—Why, Foible!—He means to travel for improvement.

MRS. MARWOOD Methinks Sir Wilfull should rather think of marrying than traveling at his years. I hear he is turned of forty.

LADY WISHFORT O, he's in less danger of being spoiled by his travels.—I am against my nephew's marrying too young. It will be time enough when he comes back and has acquired discretion to choose for himself.

MRS. MARWOOD Methinks Mrs. Millamant and he would make a very fit match. He may travel afterwards. 'Tis a thing very usual with young gentlemen.

LADY WISHFORT I promise you I have thought on't—and since 'tis your judgment, I'll think on't again. I assure you I will; I value your judgment extremely. On my word I'll propose it.

[*Enter* FOIBLE.]

LADY WISHFORT Come, come Foible—I had forgot my nephew will be here before dinner.—I must make haste.

FOIBLE Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant are come to dine with your ladyship.

LADY WISHFORT O dear, I can't appear till I am dressed. Dear Marwood, shall I be free with you again and beg you to entertain 'em? I'll make all imaginable haste. Dear friend, excuse me.

[*Exeunt* LADY WISHFORT *and* FOIBLE.]

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* MINCING.]

MILLAMANT Sure never anything was so unbred as that odious man.  
—Marwood, your servant.

MRS. MARWOOD You have a color. What's the matter?

MILLAMANT That horrid fellow Petulant has provoked me into a flame  
—I have broke my fan.—Mincing, lend me yours; is not all the  
powder out of my hair?

MRS. MARWOOD No. What has he done?

MILLAMANT Nay, he has done nothing; he has only talked.—Nay, he  
has said nothing neither; but he has contradicted everything that  
has been said. For my part, I thought Witwoud and he would have  
quarreled.

MINCING I vow, mem, I thought once they would have fit.<sup>4</sup>

MILLAMANT Well, 'tis a lamentable thing, I swear, that one has not  
the liberty of choosing one's acquaintance as one does one's  
clothes.

MRS. MARWOOD If we had that liberty, we should be as weary of one  
set of acquaintance, though never so good, as we are of one suit,  
though never so fine. A fool and a doily stuff<sup>5</sup> would now and then  
find days of grace, and be worn for variety.

MILLAMANT I could consent to wear 'em, if they would wear alike;  
but fools never wear out—they are such drap-de-Berry<sup>6</sup> things!  
Without one could give 'em to one's chambermaid after a day or  
two.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Twere better so indeed. Or what think you of the  
play house?<sup>7</sup> A fine gay glossy fool should be given there, like a  
new masking habit after the masquerade is over, and we have  
done with the disguise. For a fool's visit is always a disguise, and  
never admitted by a woman of wit, but to blind her affair with a  
lover of sense. If you would but appear barefaced now and own  
Mirabell, you might as easily put off Petulant and Witwoud as your  
hood and scarf. And indeed 'tis time, for the town has found it:  
the secret is grown too big for the pretense: 'tis like Mrs. Primly's  
great belly; she may lace it down before, but it burnishes<sup>8</sup> on her  
hips. Indeed, Millamant, you can no more conceal it than my Lady

Strammel can her face, that goodly face, which in defiance of her Rhenish-wine tea will not be comprehended in a mask.<sup>9</sup>

MILLAMANT I'll take my death, Marwood, you are more censorious than a decayed beauty, or a discarded toast.<sup>1</sup> Mincing, tell the men they may come up. My aunt is not dressing here; their folly is less provoking than your malice. [*Exit MINCING.*] "The town has found it." What has it found? That Mirabell loves me is no more a secret than it is a secret that you discovered it to my aunt, or than the reason why you discovered it is a secret.

MRS. MARWOOD You are nettled.

MILLAMANT You're mistaken. Ridiculous!

MRS. MARWOOD Indeed, my dear, you'll tear another fan if you don't mitigate those violent airs.

MILLAMANT O silly! Ha, ha, ha. I could laugh immoderately. Poor Mirabell! His constancy to me has quite destroyed his complaisance for all the world beside. I swear, I never enjoined him, to be so coy.—If I had the vanity to think he would obey me, I would command him to show more gallantry.—'Tis hardly well bred to be so particular on one hand and so insensible on the other. But I despair to prevail, and so let him follow his own way. Ha, ha, ha. Pardon me, dear creature, I must laugh, ha, ha, ha; though I grant you 'tis a little barbarous, ha, ha, ha.

MRS. MARWOOD What pity 'tis, so much fine raillery, and delivered with so significant gesture, should be so unhappily directed to miscarry.

MILLAMANT Ha? Dear creature, I ask your pardon—I swear I did not mind you.

MRS. MARWOOD Mr. Mirabell and you both may think it a thing impossible, when I shall tell him by telling you—

MILLAMANT O dear, what? For it is the same thing, if I hear it—Ha, ha, ha.

MRS. MARWOOD That I detest him, hate him, madam.

MILLAMANT O madam, why so do I—and yet the creature loves me, ha, ha, ha. How can one forbear laughing to think of it?—I am a sibyl<sup>2</sup> if I am not amazed to think what he can see in me. I'll take

my death, I think you are handsomer—and within a year or two as young. If you could but stay for me, I should overtake you.—But that cannot be.—Well, that thought makes me melancholy.—Now I'll be sad.

MRS. MARWOOD    Your merry note may be changed sooner than you think.

MILLAMANT    D'ye say so? Then I'm resolved I'll have a song to keep up my spirits.

[*Enter* MINCING.]

MINCING    The gentlemen stay but to comb,<sup>3</sup> madam, and will wait on you.

MILLAMANT    Desire Mrs. —<sup>4</sup> that is in the next room to sing the song I would have learnt yesterday. You shall hear it, madam—not that there's any great matter in it—But 'tis agreeable to my humor.

**[*Song. Set by Mr. John Eccles*]**

**1**

Love's but the frailty of the mind,  
When 'tis not with ambition joined;  
A sickly flame, which if not fed expires;  
And feeding, wastes in self-consuming fires.

**2**

'Tis not to wound a wanton boy  
Or amorous youth, that gives the joy;  
But 'tis the glory to have pierced a swain,  
For whom inferior beauties sighed in vain.

**3**

Then I alone the conquest prize,  
When I insult a rival's eyes:  
If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see  
That heart which others bleed for, bleed for me.

[*Enter* PETULANT, WITWOUD.]

MILLAMANT Is your animosity composed, gentlemen?

WITWOUD Raillery, raillery, madam, we have no animosity. We hit off a little wit now and then, but no animosity. The falling out of wits is like the falling out of lovers—we agree in the main, like treble and bass. Ha, Petulant!

PETULANT Aye, in the main. But when I have a humor to contradict —

WITWOUD Aye, when he has a humor to contradict, then I contradict too. What, I know my cue. Then we contradict one another like two battledores,<sup>5</sup> for contradictions beget one another like Jews.

PETULANT If he says black's black—if I have a humor to say 'tis blue—let that pass.—All's one for that. If I have a humor to prove it, it must be granted.

WITWOUD Not positively must—but it may—it may.

PETULANT Yes, it positively must, upon proof positive.

WITWOUD Aye, upon proof positive it must; but upon proof presumptive it only may. That's a logical distinction now, madam.

MRS. MARWOOD I perceive your debates are of importance and very learnedly handled.

PETULANT Importance is one thing, and learning's another; but a debate's a debate, that I assert.

WITWOUD Petulant's an enemy to learning; he relies altogether on his parts.<sup>6</sup>

PETULANT No, I'm no enemy to learning; it hurts not me.

MRS. MARWOOD That's a sign indeed it's no enemy to you.

PETULANT No, no, it's no enemy to anybody but them that have it.

MILLAMANT Well, an illiterate man's my aversion. I wonder at the impudence of any illiterate man, to offer to make love.

WITWOUD That I confess I wonder at too.

MILLAMANT Ah! to marry an ignorant! that can hardly read or write.

PETULANT Why should a man be any further from being married though he can't read than he is from being hanged. The ordinary's<sup>7</sup> paid for setting the Psalm, and the parish priest for

reading the ceremony. And for the rest which is to follow in both cases, a man may do it without book.—So all's one for that.

MILLAMANT D'ye hear the creature? Lord, here's company, I'll be gone.

[*Exeunt* MILLAMANT *and* MINCING.]

WITWOUND In the name of Bartlemew and his Fair, what have we here?<sup>8</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis your brother, I fancy. Don't you know him?

WITWOUND Not I.—Yes, I think it is he—I've almost forgot him; I have not seen him since the Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

[*Enter* SIR WILFULL WITWOUND *in riding clothes, and a* FOOTMAN *to* LADY WISHFORT.]

FOOTMAN Sir, my lady's dressing. Here's company; if you please to walk in, in the meantime.

SIR WILFULL Dressing! What, it's but morning here, I warrant, with you in London; we should count it towards afternoon in our parts, down in Shropshire. Why, then belike my aunt han't dined yet—ha, friend?

FOOTMAN Your aunt, Sir?

SIR WILFULL My aunt, sir, yes, my aunt, sir, and your lady, sir; your lady is my aunt, sir.—Why, what do'st thou not know me, friend? Why, then send somebody hither that does. How long hast thou lived with thy lady, fellow, ha?

FOOTMAN A week, sir; longer than anybody in the house, except my lady's woman.

SIR WILFULL Why, then belike thou dost not know thy lady, if thou see'st her, ha, friend?

FOOTMAN Why truly, sir, I cannot safely swear to her face in a morning, before she is dressed. 'Tis like I may give a shrewd guess at her by this time.

SIR WILFULL Well, prithee try what thou canst do; if thou canst not guess, inquire her out, do'st hear, fellow? And tell her her nephew, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, is in the house.

FOOTMAN I shall, sir.

SIR WILFULL    Hold ye, hear me, friend; a word with you in your ear.  
Prithee who are these gallants?

FOOTMAN    Really, sir, I can't tell; there come so many here, 'tis hard  
to know 'em all. [*Exit* FOOTMAN.]

SIR WILFULL    Oons,<sup>1</sup> this fellow knows less than a starling; I don't  
think a'knows his own name.

MRS. MARWOOD    Mr. Witwoud, your brother is not behind hand in  
forgetfulness—I fancy he has forgot you too.

WITWOUD    I hope so.—The devil take him that remembers first, I  
say.

SIR WILFULL    Save you, gentlemen and lady.

MRS. MARWOOD    For shame, Mr. Witwoud; why don't you speak to  
him?—And you, sir.

WITWOUD    Petulant, speak.

PETULANT    And you, sir.

SIR WILFULL    [*Salutes*<sup>2</sup> MARWOOD.] No offense, I hope.

MRS. MARWOOD    No sure, sir.

WITWOUD    This is a vile dog, I see that already. No offense! Ha, ha,  
ha, to him; to him, Petulant, smoke him.<sup>3</sup>

PETULANT    [*Surveying him round.*] It seems as if you had come a  
journey, sir. Hem, hem.

SIR WILFULL    Very likely, sir, that it may seem so.

PETULANT    No offense, I hope, sir.

WITWOUD    Smoke the boots, the boots, Petulant, the boots. Ha, ha,  
ha.

SIR WILFULL    Maybe not, sir; thereafter as 'tis meant, sir.

PETULANT    Sir, I presume upon the information of your boots.

SIR WILFULL    Why, 'tis like you may, sir: If you are not satisfied with  
the information of my boots, sir, if you will step to the stable, you  
may inquire further of my horse, sir.

PETULANT    Your horse, sir! Your horse is an ass, sir!

SIR WILFULL    Do you speak by way of offense, sir?

MRS. MARWOOD    The gentleman's merry, that's all, sir.—[*Aside.*] 'Slife,<sup>4</sup>  
we shall have a quarrel betwixt an horse and an ass, before they  
find one another out. [*Aloud.*] You must not take anything amiss



from your friends, sir. You are among your friends, here, though it may be you don't know it.—If I am not mistaken, you are Sir Wilfull Witwoud.

SIR WILFULL Right, lady; I am Sir Wilfull Witwoud, so I write myself; no offense to anybody, I hope; and nephew to the Lady Wishfort of this mansion.

MRS. MARWOOD Don't you know this gentleman, sir?

SIR WILFULL Hum! What, sure, 'tis not—yea by'r Lady, but 'tis—'sheart,<sup>5</sup> I know not whether 'tis or no.—Yea but 'tis, by the Wrekin.<sup>6</sup> Brother Antony! What, Tony, i'faith! What, do'st thou not know me? By'r Lady, nor I thee, thou art so becravated and so beperriwigged—'sheart, why do'st not speak? Art thou o'erjoyed?

WITWOUD Odso, brother, is it you? Your servant, brother.

SIR WILFULL Your servant! Why, yours, sir. Your servant again—'sheart, and your friend and servant to that—and a—[*Puff.*]<sup>7</sup>—and a flapdragon for your service, sir: and a hare's foot, and a hare's scut<sup>7</sup> for your service, sir; an you be so cold and so courtly!

WITWOUD No offense, I hope, brother.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, sir, but there is, and much offense. A pox, is this your Inns o'Court<sup>8</sup> breeding, not to know your friends and your relations, your elders and your betters?

WITWOUD Why, Brother Wilfull of Salop, you may be as short as a Shrewsbury cake,<sup>9</sup> if you please. But I tell you 'tis not modish to know relations in town. You think you're in the country, where great lubberly brothers slabber and kiss one another when they meet, like a call of sergeants.<sup>1</sup>—'Tis not the fashion here; 'tis not indeed, dear brother.

SIR WILFULL The fashion's a fool; and you're a fop, dear brother. 'Sheart, I've suspected this—by'r Lady, I conjectured you were a fop, since you began to change the style of your letters and write in a scrap of paper gilt round the edges, no bigger than a subpoena. I might expect this when you left off "Honored Brother" and "hoping you are in good health," and so forth—to begin with a "Rat me, knight, I'm so sick of a last night's debauch"—'od's heart, and then tell a familiar tale of a cock and bull, and a whore and a

bottle, and so conclude—You could write news before you were out of your time, when you lived with honest Pumple-Nose, the attorney of Furnival's Inn<sup>2</sup>—You could entreat to be remembered then to your friends round the Wrekin. We could have gazettes then, and Dawks's *Letter*, and the Weekly Bill,<sup>3</sup> till of late days.

PETULANT 'Slife, Witwoud, were you ever an attorney's clerk? Of the family of the Furnivals. Ha, ha, ha!

WITWOUND Aye, aye, but that was but for a while. Not long, not long; pshaw, I was not in my own power then. An orphan, and this fellow was my guardian; aye, aye, I was glad to consent to that man to come to London. He had the disposal of me then. If I had not agreed to that, I might have been bound 'prentice to a felt-maker in Shrewsbury; this fellow would have bound me to a maker of felts.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, and better than to be bound to a maker of fops; where, I suppose, you have served your time; and now you may set up for yourself.

MRS. MARWOOD You intend to travel, sir, as I'm informed.

SIR WILFULL Belike I may, madam. I may chance to sail upon the salt seas, if my mind hold.

PETULANT And the wind serve.

SIR WILFULL Serve or not serve, I shan't ask license of you, sir; nor the weather-cock<sup>4</sup> your companion. I direct my discourse to the lady, sir. 'Tis like my aunt may have told you, madam—Yes, I have settled my concerns, I may say now, and am minded to see foreign parts. If an' how that the peace<sup>5</sup> holds, whereby, that is, taxes abate.

MRS. MARWOOD I thought you had designed for France at all adventures.<sup>6</sup>

SIR WILFULL I can't tell that; 'tis like I may and 'tis like I may not. I am somewhat dainty in making a resolution, because when I make it I keep it, I don't stand shill I, shall I,<sup>7</sup> then; if I say't, I'll do't. But I have thoughts to tarry a small matter in town, to learn somewhat of your lingo first, before I cross the seas. I'd gladly

have a spice of your French as they say, whereby to hold discourse in foreign countries.

MRS. MARWOOD    Here's an academy in town for that use.

SIR WILFULL    There is? 'Tis like there may.

MRS. MARWOOD    No doubt you will return very much improved.

WITWOUND    Yes, refined like a Dutch skipper from a whale-fishing.

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT    Nephew, you are welcome.

SIR WILFULL    Aunt, your servant.

FAINALL    Sir Wilfull, your most faithful servant.

SIR WILFULL    Cousin Fainall, give me your hand.

LADY WISHFORT    Cousin Witwoud, your servant; Mr. Petulant, your servant.—Nephew, you are welcome again. Will you drink anything after your journey, nephew, before you eat? Dinner's almost ready.

SIR WILFULL    I'm very well, I thank you, aunt. However, I thank you for your courteous offer. 'Sheart, I was afraid you would have been in the fashion too, and have remembered to have forgot your relations. Here's your cousin Tony, belike, I mayn't call him brother for fear of offense.

LADY WISHFORT    O, he's a rallier, nephew—my cousin's a wit; and your great wits always rally their best friends to choose.<sup>8</sup> When you have been abroad, nephew, you'll understand raillery better.

[FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD *talk apart.*]

SIR WILFULL    Why then let him hold his tongue in the meantime, and rail when that day comes.

[*Enter* MINCING.]

MINCING    Mem, I come to acquaint your la'ship that dinner is impatient.

SIR WILFULL    Impatient? Why then belike it won't stay till I pull off my boots. Sweetheart, can you help me to a pair of slippers?—My man's with his horses, I warrant.

LADY WISHFORT    Fie, fie, nephew, you would not pull off your boots here. Go down into the hall.—Dinner shall stay for you. My nephew's a little unbred; you'll pardon him, madam.—Gentlemen, will you walk? Marwood?

MRS. MARWOOD I'll follow you, madam—before Sir Wilfull is ready.

[*Exeunt all but* MRS. MARWOOD, FAINALL.]

FAINALL Why then Foible's a bawd, an errant, rank, match-making bawd. And I it seems am a husband, a rank husband; and my wife a very errant, rank wife—all in the way of the world. 'Sdeath, to be a cuckold by anticipation, a cuckold in embryo? Sure I was born with budding antlers like a young satyr, or a citizen's child.<sup>9</sup> 'Sdeath, to be outwitted, to be outjilted—outmatrimonied. If I had kept my speed like a stag, 'twere somewhat, but to crawl after, with my horns like a snail, and be outstripped by my wife—'tis scurvy wedlock.

MRS. MARWOOD Then shake it off. You have often wished for an opportunity to part, and now you have it. But first prevent their plot.—The half of Millamant's fortune is too considerable to be parted with to a foe, to Mirabell.

FAINALL Damn him, that had been mine—had you not made that fond<sup>1</sup> discovery.—That had been forfeited, had they been married. My wife had added luster to my horns. By that increase of fortune, I could have worn 'em tipped with gold, though my forehead had been furnished like a Deputy-Lieutenant's hall.<sup>2</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD They may prove a cap of maintenance<sup>3</sup> to you still, if you can away with your wife. And she's no worse than when you had her—I dare swear she had given up her game, before she was married.

FAINALL Hum! That may be—She might throw up her cards; but I'll be hanged if she did not put Pam<sup>4</sup> in her pocket.

MRS. MARWOOD You married her to keep you, and if you can contrive to have her keep you better than you expected, why should you not keep her longer than you intended?

FAINALL The means, the means.

MRS. MARWOOD Discover to my lady your wife's conduct; threaten to part with her.—My lady loves her and will come to any composition to save her reputation. Take the opportunity of breaking it, just upon the discovery of this imposture. My lady will be enraged beyond bounds and sacrifice niece and fortune and all at that

conjuncture. And let me alone to keep her warm; if she should flag in her part, I will not fail to prompt her.

FAINALL Faith, this has an appearance.<sup>5</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD I'm sorry I hinted to my lady to endeavor a match between Millamant and Sir Wilfull. That may be an obstacle.

FAINALL O, for that matter leave me to manage him; I'll disable him for that; he will drink like a Dane; after dinner, I'll set his hand in.

MRS. MARWOOD Well, how do you stand affected towards your lady?

FAINALL Why, faith, I'm thinking of it. Let me see—I am married already; so that's over. My wife has played the jade with<sup>6</sup> me—well, that's over too. I never loved her, or if I had, why that would have been over too by this time. Jealous of her I cannot be, for I am certain; so there's an end of jealousy. Weary of her I am and shall be—no, there's no end of that; no, no, that were too much to hope. Thus far concerning my repose. Now for my reputation. As to my own, I married not for it; so that's out of the question. And as to my part in my wife's—why, she had parted with hers before; so bringing none to me, she can take none from me; 'tis against all rule of play that I should lose to one who has not wherewithal to stake.

MRS. MARWOOD Besides you forget, marriage is honorable.

FAINALL Hum! Faith, and that's well thought on; marriage is honorable, as you say; and if so, wherefore should cuckoldom be a discredit, being derived from so honorable a root?

MRS. MARWOOD Nay, I know not; if the root be honorable, why not the branches?<sup>7</sup>

FAINALL So, so, why this point's clear.<sup>8</sup> Well, how do we proceed?

MRS. MARWOOD I will contrive a letter which shall be delivered to my lady at the time when that rascal who is to act Sir Rowland is with her. It shall come as from an unknown hand—for the less I appear to know of the truth, the better I can play the incendiary. Besides, I would not have Foible provoked if I could help it, because you know she knows some passages—nay, I expect all will come out. But let the mine be sprung first, and then I care not if I am discovered.

FAINALL If the worst come to the worst, I'll turn my wife to grass<sup>9</sup>—  
I have already a deed of settlement of the best part of her estate,  
which I wheedled out of her; and that you shall partake at least.

MRS. MARWOOD I hope you are convinced that I hate Mirabell now:  
you'll be no more jealous?

FAINALL Jealous, no—by this kiss.—Let husbands be jealous, but let  
the lover still believe. Or if he doubt, let it be only to endear his  
pleasure and prepare the joy that follows, when he proves his  
mistress true. But let husbands' doubts convert to endless  
jealousy; or if they have belief, let it corrupt to superstition and  
blind credulity. I am single, and will herd no more with 'em. True, I  
wear the badge, but I'll disown the order. And since I take my  
leave of 'em, I care not if I leave 'em a common motto to their  
common crest.

All husbands must, or pain, or shame, endure;  
The wise too jealous are, fools too secure.

[*Exeunt* FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Dull, stupid person.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rouge.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Bartender.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The servant at the inn where Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are taken care of.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In her negligee (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Private room.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By Collier (see p. 222, n. 7). Francis Quarles (1592–1644), a religious poet, by 1700 regarded with contempt, but formerly greatly admired, especially among the Puritans. William Prynne (1600–1669), Puritan pamphleteer, author of *Histriomastix* (1632), a violent attack on the stage. Congreve, who had been the object of much of Collier's vituperation, slyly

identifies his enemy with Puritans and Nonconformists, whom Collier, an ardent High Churchman, despised.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Considered a good likeness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Jeers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: When a regiment was “disbanded,” its officers went on half pay, often for life. “Catering”: procuring (that is, pimping for Lady Wishfort).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: One who draws wine from casks and serves it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A fashionable tavern near Charing Cross.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Old, cast-off clothes; an insulting metaphor to apply to Lady Wishfort.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A shed, supported by the wall toward which it is inclined. “Tatterdemalion”: ragamuffin. Long Lane was a street where old clothes were sold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Prisoners begged by letting down a mitten on a string; passers-by dropped coins into it. Ludgate was a debtor’s prison, adjoining the district of Blackfriars in London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, will *he* not fail?[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lacks the looks for it.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The subsequent conversation is sometimes staged to show Mrs. Marwood overhearing it.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, impersonate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An inclination (toward Mirabell).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A person who serves as an instrument or tool of others in an intrigue.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mrs. Fainall.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An alchemical term denoting the final step in the transmutation of baser metals into gold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hodgepodge.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Fought. Millamant turns Mincing’s word to refer to clothing in her next remark.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A woolen cloth.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Coarse woolen cloth, made in the Berry district of France.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fine gentlemen and ladies sometimes donated their old clothes to the playhouses.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spreads out.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lady Strammel (the name means “a lean, ill-favored person”) tries to lose weight by drinking Rhenish wine, but still her face is too large to be contained (“comprehended”) in a mask.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A lady to whom toasts are no longer drunk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A prophetess.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, to comb their periwigs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The name of the singer was to be inserted. The music was by John Eccles (d. 1735), a popular composer for the theater.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rackets used to strike the shuttlecock, or bird, in the old game from which badminton is descended.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Native abilities.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The clergyman appointed to prepare condemned prisoners for death.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A feature of St. Bartholomew’s Fair, held during August in Smithfield, London, was the exhibition of monsters and freaks of nature.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Glorious Revolution of 1688, which forced the abdication of James II.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An uncouth oath: God’s wounds.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Kisses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Make fun of him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God’s life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: God’s heart.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A solitary mountain peak in Shropshire, near the Welsh border.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Rabbit’s tail. “Flapdragon”: something worthless.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: The buildings—Gray’s Inn, Lincoln’s Inn, the Inner Temple, the Middle Temple—housing the four legal societies that have the sole right to admit persons to the practice of law.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shortcake, in the modern meaning of the term. Witwoud puns, using “short” also in the sense of “abrupt.” “Salop”: ancient name of Shropshire.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Witwoud refers to the mutual greetings and felicitations of a group of barristers (“sergeants”) newly admitted to the bar. “Lubberly”: loutish.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One of the inns of Chancery, attached to Lincoln’s Inn. Attorneys were looked down on socially; hence Petulant’s ill-natured mirth in his next speech. “Before you were out of your time”: before you had served out your apprenticeship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The official list of the deaths occurring in London. “Gazettes”: newspapers. “Dawks’s *Letter*”: a popular source of news in the country.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Weathervane.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The peace established by the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, which concluded the war against France waged under the leadership of William III by England, the Empire, Spain, and Holland. It endured until the spring of 1702, when the War of the Spanish Succession began.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: No matter what happens.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Shilly-shally. “Dainty”: scrupulous, cautious.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: By choice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A cuckold is said to wear horns. Because the wives of “citizens” (merchants living in the old city of London, not the fashionable suburbs) were regarded by the rakes as their natural and easy prey, a “citizen’s child” was born to be cuckolded. “Satyr”: a sylvan deity, usually represented with a goat’s legs and horns.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Foolish. Fainall blames her for revealing to Lady Wishfort that Mirabell was not interested in her.[Return to](#)

[reference 1](#)

- Note 2: That is, the great hall in the house of the deputy lieutenant of a shire. Fainall imagines it ornamented with numerous antlers taken from deer slain in the hunt.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In heraldry, a cap with two points like horns.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jack of clubs, high card in the game of loo.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: It's a promising scheme.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cheated on.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, of the cuckold's horns.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cleared up.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Turn out to pasture. A "grass widow" is divorced or separated from her husband.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Act 4—Scene continues***

**[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* FOIBLE.]**

LADY WISHFORT Is Sir Rowland coming, say'st thou, Foible? and are things in order?

FOIBLE Yes, madam. I have put wax lights in the sconces, and placed the footmen in a row in the hall, in their best liveries, with the coachman and postilion to fill up the equipage.

LADY WISHFORT Have you pulvilled<sup>1</sup> the coachman and postilion, that they may not stink of the stable, when Sir Rowland comes by?

FOIBLE Yes, madam.

LADY WISHFORT And are the dancers and the music ready, that he may be entertained in all points with correspondence to his passion?

FOIBLE All is ready, madam.

LADY WISHFORT And—well—and how do I look, Foible?

FOIBLE Most killing well, madam.

LADY WISHFORT Well, and how shall I receive him? In what figure shall I give his heart the first impression? There is a great deal in the first impression. Shall I sit?—No, I won't sit—I'll walk.—Aye, I'll walk from the door upon his entrance; and then turn full upon him.—No, that will be too sudden. I'll lie—aye, I'll lie down—I'll receive him in my little dressing-room, there's a couch.—Yes, yes, I'll give the first impression on a couch.—I won't lie neither, but loll and lean upon one elbow; with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way—yes—and then as soon as he appears, start, aye, start and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder—yes. O, nothing is more alluring than a levee<sup>2</sup> from a couch in some confusion. It shows the foot to advantage and furnishes with blushes and recomposing airs beyond comparison. Hark! There's a coach.

FOIBLE 'Tis he, madam.

LADY WISHFORT O dear, has my nephew made his addresses to Millamant? I ordered him.

FOIBLE Sir Wilfull is set in to drinking, madam, in the parlor.

LADY WISHFORT 'Ods my life, I'll send him to her. Call her down, Foible; bring her hither. I'll send him as I go.—When they are together, then come to me, Foible, that I may not be too long alone with Sir Rowland. [*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

FOIBLE Madam, I stayed here to tell your ladyship that Mr. Mirabell has waited this half hour for an opportunity to talk with you. Though my lady's orders were to leave you and Sir Wilfull together. Shall I tell Mr. Mirabell that you are at leisure?

MILLAMANT No—What would the dear man have? I am thoughtful and would amuse myself.—Bid him come another time.

There never yet was woman made,  
Nor shall, but to be cursed.<sup>3</sup>

[*Repeating and walking about.*]

That's hard!

MRS. FAINALL You are very fond of Sir John Suckling today, Millamant, and the poets.

MILLAMANT He? Aye, and filthy verses—so I am.

FOIBLE Sir Wilfull is coming, madam. Shall I send Mr. Mirabell away?

MILLAMANT Aye, if you please, Foible, send him away—or send him hither, just as you will, dear Foible. I think I'll see him—Shall I? Aye, let the wretch come.

Thyrsis, a youth of the inspirèd train.<sup>4</sup>

[*Repeating.*]

Dear Fainall, entertain Sir Wilfull.—Thou hast philosophy to undergo a fool, thou art married and hast patience.—I would confer with my own thoughts.

MRS. FAINALL I am obliged to you that you would make me your proxy in this affair, but I have business of my own.

[*Enter* SIR WILFULL.]

MRS. FAINALL O Sir Wilfull; you are come at the critical instant.  
There's your mistress up to the ears in love and contemplation.  
Pursue your point, now or never.

SIR WILFULL Yes; my aunt will have it so.—I would gladly have been encouraged with a bottle or two, because I'm somewhat wary at first, before I am acquainted; [*This while* MILLAMANT *walks about repeating to herself.*]*—*but I hope, after a time, I shall break my mind<sup>5</sup>—that is upon further acquaintance.—So for the present, cousin, I'll take my leave.—If so be you'll be so kind to make my excuse, I'll return to my company.—

MRS. FAINALL O fie, Sir Wilfull! What, you must not be daunted.

SIR WILFULL Daunted, no, that's not it; it is not so much for that—for if so be that I set on't, I'll do't. But only for the present, 'tis sufficient till further acquaintance, that's all.—Your servant.

MRS. FAINALL Nay, I'll swear you shall never lose so favorable an opportunity if I can help it. I'll leave you together and lock the door. [*Exit* MRS. FAINALL.]

SIR WILFULL Nay, nay, cousin—I have forgot my gloves.—What d'ye do? 'Sheart, a'has locked the door indeed, I think.—Nay, cousin Fainall, open the door.—Pshaw, what a vixen trick is this? Nay, now a'has seen me too.—Cousin, I made bold to pass through, as it were.—I think this door's enchanted.—

MILLAMANT [*Repeating.*]

I prithee spare me, gentle boy,  
Press me no more for that slight toy.<sup>6</sup>

SIR WILFULL Anan?<sup>7</sup> Cousin, your servant.

MILLAMANT. —"That foolish trifle of a heart"—Sir Wilfull!

SIR WILFULL Yes—your servant. No offense I hope, cousin.

MILLAMANT [*Repeating.*]

I swear it will not do its part,  
Though thou dost thine, employ'st thy power and  
art.

Natural, easy Suckling!

SIR WILFULL    Anan? Suckling? No such suckling neither, cousin, nor stripling: I thank heaven I'm no minor.

MILLAMANT    Ah rustic, ruder than Gothic.<sup>8</sup>

SIR WILFULL    Well, well, I shall understand your lingo one of these days, cousin. In the meanwhile I must answer in plain English.

MILLAMANT    Have you any business with me, Sir Wilfull?

SIR WILFULL    Not at present, cousin.—Yes, I made bold to see, to come and know if that how you were disposed to fetch a walk this evening, if so be that I might not be troublesome, I would have sought a walk with you.

MILLAMANT    A walk? What then?

SIR WILFULL    Nay nothing—only for the walk's sake, that's all—

MILLAMANT    I nauseate walking; 'tis a country diversion. I loathe the country and everything that relates to it.

SIR WILFULL    Indeed! Hah! Look ye, look ye, you do? Nay, 'tis like you may.—Here are choice of pastimes here in town, as plays and the like; that must be confessed indeed.—

MILLAMANT    Ah, *l'étourdi*.<sup>9</sup> I hate the town too.

SIR WILFULL    Dear heart, that's much—Hah! that you should hate 'em both! Hah! 'tis like you may; there are some can't relish the town, and others can't away with the country—'tis like you may be one of those, cousin.

MILLAMANT    Ha, ha, ha. Yes, 'tis like I may. You have nothing further to say to me?

SIR WILFULL    Not at present, cousin. 'Tis like when I have an opportunity to be more private, I may break my mind in some measure.—I conjecture you partly guess—however, that's as time shall try; but spare to speak and spare to speed, as they say.

MILLAMANT    If it is of no great importance, Sir Wilfull, you will oblige me to leave me. I have just now a little business.

SIR WILFULL    Enough, enough, cousin. Yes, yes, all a case—when you're disposed, when you're disposed. Now's as well as another time; and another time as well as now. All's one for that.—Yes,

yes, if your concerns call you, there's no haste; it will keep cold as they say.—Cousin, your servant. I think this door's locked.

MILLAMANT     You may go this way, sir.

SIR WILFULL     Your servant—then with your leave I'll return to my company.

[*Exit* SIR WILFULL.]

MILLAMANT     Aye, aye. Ha, ha, ha.

Like Phoebus sung the no less amorous Boy.<sup>1</sup>

[*Enter* MIRABELL.]

MIRABELL

Like Daphne she, as lovely and as coy.

Do you lock yourself up from me, to make my search more curious?<sup>2</sup>  
Or is this pretty artifice contrived to signify that here the chase must end, and my pursuit be crowned, for you can fly no further?

MILLAMANT     Vanity! No—I'll fly and be followed to the last moment.

Though I am upon the very verge of matrimony, I expect you should solicit me as much as if I were wavering at the grate of a monastery,<sup>3</sup> with one foot over the threshold. I'll be solicited to the very last, nay and afterwards.

MIRABELL     What, after the last?

MILLAMANT     O, I should think I was poor and had nothing to bestow, if I were reduced to an inglorious ease; and freed from the agreeable fatigues of solicitation.

MIRABELL     But do not you know that when favors are conferred upon instant and tedious solicitation, that they diminish in their value and that both the giver loses the grace, and the receiver lessens his pleasure?

MILLAMANT     It may be in things of common application, but never sure in love. O, I hate a lover that can dare to think he draws a moment's air, independent on the bounty of his mistress. There is

not so impudent a thing in nature as the saucy look of an assured man, confident of success. The pedantic arrogance of a very husband has not so pragmatical<sup>4</sup> an air. Ah! I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure.

MIRABELL Would you have 'em both before marriage? Or will you be contented with the first now, and stay for the other till after grace?

MILLAMANT Ah, don't be impertinent.—My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you then adieu? Ay-h adieu—My morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye *douceurs*, ye *sommeils du matin*,<sup>5</sup> adieu.—I can't do't, 'tis more than impossible.—Positively, Mirabell, I'll lie abed in a morning as long as I please.

MIRABELL Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please.

MILLAMANT Ah, idle creature, get up when you will.—and d'ye hear? I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.

MIRABELL Names!

MILLAMANT Aye, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar—I shall never bear that.—Good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler<sup>6</sup> and Sir Francis; nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers; and then never be seen there together again, as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange<sup>7</sup> and well bred; let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well bred as if we were not married at all.

MIRABELL Have you any more conditions to offer? Hitherto your demands are pretty reasonable.

MILLAMANT Trifles—as liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part; to wear what I please;



and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please, dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humor, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

MIRABELL Your bill of fare is something advanced in this latter account. Well, have I liberty to offer conditions—that when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband?

MILLAMANT You have free leave, propose your utmost, speak and spare not.

MIRABELL I thank you. *Imprimis*<sup>8</sup> then, I covenant that your acquaintance be general; that you admit no sworn confidante or intimate of your own sex; no she-friend to screen her affairs under your countenance and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy duck to wheedle you a fop—scrambling to the play in a mask—then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out—and rail at me for missing the play, and disappointing the frolic which you had to pick me up and prove my constancy.

MILLAMANT Detestable *imprimis*! I go to the play in a mask!

MIRABELL *Item*, I article,<sup>9</sup> that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall; and while it passes current with me, that you endeavor not to new coin it. To which end, together with all vizards for the day, I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled-skins and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat.<sup>1</sup> In short, I forbid all commerce with the gentlewoman in what-d'ye-call-it court. *Item*, I shut my doors against all bawds with baskets, and pennyworths of

muslin, china, fans, atlases,<sup>2</sup> etc. *Item*, when you shall be breeding—

MILLAMANT Ah! Name it not.

MIRABELL Which may be presumed, with a blessing on our endeavors—

MILLAMANT Odious endeavors!

MIRABELL I denounce against all strait lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mold my boy's head like a sugar loaf; and instead of a man-child, make me father to a crooked billet.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, to the dominion of the tea table I submit.—But with proviso that you exceed not in your province; but restrain yourself to native and simple tea-table drinks, as tea, chocolate, and coffee. As likewise to genuine and authorized tea-table talk—such as mending of fashions, spoiling reputations, railing at absent friends, and so forth—but that on no account you encroach upon the men's prerogative, and presume to drink healths, or toast fellows; for prevention of which, I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to the tea table, as orange brandy, all aniseed, cinnamon, citron and Barbados waters, together with ratafia and the most noble spirit of clary.<sup>4</sup>—But for cowslip-wine, poppy water, and all dormitives,<sup>5</sup> those I allow. These provisos admitted, in other things I may prove a tractable and complying husband.

MILLAMANT O, horrid provisos! filthy strong waters! I toast fellows, odious men! I hate your odious provisos.

MIRABELL Then we're agreed. Shall I kiss your hand upon the contract? And here comes one to be a witness to the sealing of the deed.

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL.]

MILLAMANT Fainall, what shall I do? Shall I have him? I think I must have him.

MRS. FAINALL Aye, aye, take him, take him. What should you do?

MILLAMANT Well then—I'll take my death I'm in a horrid fright—  
Fainall, I shall never say it—well—I think—I'll endure you.

MRS. FAINALL Fy, fy, have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms: for I am sure you have a mind to him.

MILLAMANT Are you? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too.—Well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you.—I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked.—Here kiss my hand though.—So, hold your tongue now, don't say a word.

MRS. FAINALL Mirabell, there's a necessity for your obedience—you have neither time to talk nor stay. My mother is coming; and in my conscience if she should see you, would fall into fits, and maybe not recover, time enough to return to Sir Rowland; who, as Foible tells me, is in a fair way to succeed. Therefore spare your ecstasies for another occasion, and slip down the back stairs, where Foible waits to consult you.

MILLAMANT Aye, go, go. In the meantime I suppose you have said something to please me.

MIRABELL I am all obedience.

[*Exit* MIRABELL.]

MRS. FAINALL Yonder Sir Wilfull's drunk, and so noisy that my mother has been forced to leave Sir Rowland to appease him; but he answers her only with singing and drinking.—What they may have done by this time I know not, but Petulant and he were upon quarreling as I came by.

MILLAMANT Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing; for I find I love him violently.

MRS. FAINALL So it seems, for you mind not what's said to you.—If you doubt him, you had best take up with Sir Wilfull.

MILLAMANT How can you name that superannuated lubber? foh!

[*Enter* WITWOUD *from drinking*.]

MRS. FAINALL So, is the fray made up, that you have left 'em?

WITWOUD Left 'em? I could stay no longer—I have laughed like ten christenings—I am tipsy with laughing.—If I had stayed any longer, I should have burst—I must have been let out and pieced in the sides like an unsized camlet.<sup>6</sup>—Yes, yes, the fray is composed; my lady came in like a *nolle prosequi*<sup>7</sup> and stopped the proceedings.

MILLAMANT What was the dispute?

WITWOUD That's the jest; there was no dispute. They could neither of 'em speak for rage; and so fell a-sputtering at one another like two roasting apples.

[*Enter PETULANT drunk.*]

WITWOUD Now, Petulant? All's over, all's well? Gad, my head begins to whim it about.—Why dost thou not speak? Thou art both as drunk and as mute as a fish.

PETULANT Look you, Mrs. Millamant—if you can love me, dear nymph—say it—and that's the conclusion—pass on, or pass off—that's all.

WITWOUD Thou hast uttered volumes, folios, in less than decimo sexto, my dear Lacedemonian.<sup>8</sup> Sirrah Petulant, thou art an epitomizer of words.

PETULANT Witwoud—You are an annihilator of sense.

WITWOUD Thou art a retailer of phrases, and dost deal in remnants of remnants, like a maker of pincushions. Thou art in truth (metaphorically speaking) a speaker of shorthand.

PETULANT Thou art (without a figure) just one-half of an ass, and Baldwin<sup>9</sup> yonder, thy half brother, is the rest.—A Gemini<sup>1</sup> of asses split, would make just four of you.

WITWOUD Thou dost bite, my dear mustard-seed; kiss me for that.

PETULANT Stand off—I'll kiss no more males.—I have kissed your twin yonder in a humor of reconciliation, till he—[*Hiccup.*—]—rises upon my stomach like a radish.

MILLAMANT Eh! filthy creature.—What was the quarrel?

PETULANT There was no quarrel—there might have been a quarrel.

WITWOUD If there had been words enow between 'em to have expressed provocation, they had gone together by the ears like a pair of castanets.

PETULANT You were the quarrel.

MILLAMANT Me!

PETULANT If I have a humor to quarrel, I can make less matters conclude premises.<sup>2</sup>—If you are not handsome, what then, if I have a humor to prove it?—If I shall have my reward, say so; if not, fight for your face the next time yourself.—I'll go sleep.

WITWOUD Do, wrap thyself up like a woodlouse, and dream revenge  
—and hear me, if thou canst learn to write by tomorrow morning,  
pen me a challenge.—I'll carry it for thee.

PETULANT Carry your mistress's monkey a spider—go flea dogs, and  
read romances—I'll go to bed to my maid.<sup>3</sup>

MRS. FAINALL He's horridly drunk—how came you all in this pickle?

WITWOUD A plot, a plot, to get rid of the knight—your husband's  
advice; but he sneaked off.

[*Enter* SIR WILFULL *drunk, and* LADY WISHFORT.]

LADY WISHFORT Out upon't, out upon't! At years of discretion, and  
comport yourself at this rantipole<sup>4</sup> rate!

SIR WILFULL No offense, aunt.

LADY WISHFORT Offense? As I'm a person, I'm ashamed of you.—  
Fogh! how you stink of wine! D'ye think my niece will ever endure  
such a borachio!<sup>5</sup> you're an absolute borachio.

SIR WILFULL Borachio!

LADY WISHFORT At a time when you should commence an amour, and  
put your best foot foremost—

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, an you grutch<sup>6</sup> me your liquor, make a bill.—  
Give me more drink, and take my purse.

[*Sings.*] Prithee fill me the glass  
'Till it laugh in my face,  
With ale that is potent and mellow;  
He that whines for a lass  
Is an ignorant ass,  
For a bumper<sup>7</sup> has not its fellow.

But if you would have me marry my cousin—say the word and I'll  
do't—Wilfull will do't, that's the word—Wilfull will do't, that's my crest  
—my motto I have forgot.<sup>8</sup>

LADY WISHFORT My nephew's a little overtaken, cousin—but 'tis with  
drinking your health—O' my word you are obliged to him—

SIR WILFULL *In vino veritas*,<sup>9</sup> aunt.—If I drunk your health today,  
cousin—I am a borachio. But if you have a mind to be married,

say the word, and send for the piper; Wilfull will do't. If not, dust<sup>1</sup> it away, and let's have t'other round.—Tony, 'ods heart, where's Tony?—Tony's an honest fellow, but he spits after a bumper, and that's a fault—

[*Sings.*]      We'll drink and we'll never ha' done, boys,  
                 'Put the glass then around with the sun, boys,  
         Let Apollo's example invite us;  
         'For he's drunk every night,  
         'And that makes him so bright,  
         That he's able next morning to light us.

The sun's a good pimple,<sup>2</sup> an honest soaker, he has a cellar at your Antipodes. If I travel, aunt, I touch at your Antipodes.—Your Antipodes are a good rascally sort of topsy-turvy fellows.—If I had a bumper, I'd stand upon my head and drink a health to 'em.—A match or no match, cousin, with the hard name?—aunt, Wilfull will do't. If she has her maidenhead, let her look to't; if she has not, let her keep her own counsel in the meantime, and cry out at the nine months' end.

MILLAMANT    Your pardon, madam, I can stay no longer—Sir Wilfull grows very powerful. Egh! how he smells! I shall be overcome if I stay. Come, cousin.

[*Exeunt* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT    Smells! he would poison a tallow-chandler<sup>3</sup> and his family. Beastly creature, I know not what to do with him. Travel, quoth a'; aye, travel, travel, get thee gone, get thee but far enough, to the Saracens, or the Tartars, or the Turks—for thou art not fit to live in a Christian commonwealth, thou beastly pagan.

SIR WILFULL    Turks, no; no Turks, aunt. Your Turks are infidels, and believe not in the grape.<sup>4</sup> Your Mahometan, your Mussulman is a dry stinkard.—No offense, aunt. My map says that your Turk is not so honest a man as your Christian.—I cannot find by the map that your Mufti<sup>5</sup> is orthodox—whereby it is a plain case, that orthodox is a hard word, aunt, and—[*Hiccup.*]—Greek for claret.





[*Enter WAITWELL, disguised as SIR ROWLAND.*]

LADY WISHFORT Dear Sir Rowland, I am confounded with confusion at the retrospection of my own rudeness—I have more pardons to ask than the Pope distributes in the Year of Jubilee. But I hope where there is likely to be so near an alliance—we may unbend the severity of decorum—and dispense with a little ceremony.

WAITWELL My impatience, madam, is the effect of my transport—and till I have the possession of your adorable person, I am tantalized on the rack; and do but hang, madam, on the tenter<sup>3</sup> of expectation.

LADY WISHFORT You have excess of gallantry, Sir Rowland; and press things to a conclusion, with a most prevailing vehemence.—But a day or two for decency of marriage.—

WAITWELL For decency of funeral, madam. The delay will break my heart—or if that should fail, I shall be poisoned. My nephew will get an inkling of my designs, and poison me—and I would willingly starve him before I die—I would gladly go out of the world with that satisfaction.—That would be some comfort to me, if I could but live so long as to be revenged on that unnatural viper.

LADY WISHFORT Is he so unnatural, say you? Truly I would contribute much both to the saving of your life and the accomplishment of your revenge—Not that I respect<sup>4</sup> myself; though he has been a perfidious wretch to me.

WAITWELL Perfidious to you!

LADY WISHFORT O Sir Rowland, the hours that he has died away at my feet, the tears that he has shed, the oaths that he has sworn, the palpitations that he has felt, the trances and the tremblings, the ardors and the ecstasies, the kneelings, and the risings, the heart-heavings and the hand-gripings, the pangs and the pathetic regards of his protesting eyes! Oh, no memory can register.

WAITWELL What, my rival! Is the rebel my rival? a'dies.

LADY WISHFORT No, don't kill him at once, Sir Rowland, starve him gradually inch by inch.

WAITWELL I'll do't. In three weeks he shall be barefoot; in a month out at knees with begging an alms—he shall starve upward and



upward, till he has nothing living but his head, and then go out in a stink like a candle's end upon a saveall.<sup>5</sup>

LADY WISHFORT Well, Sir Rowland, you have the way.—You are no novice in the labyrinth of love—you have the clue—but as I am a person, Sir Rowland, you must not attribute my yielding to any sinister appetite, or indigestion of widowhood; nor impute my complacency to any lethargy of continence.—I hope you do not think me prone to any iteration of nuptials.—

WAITWELL Far be it from me—

LADY WISHFORT If you do, I protest I must recede—or think that I have made a prostitution of decorums, but in the vehemence of compassion, and to save the life of a person of so much importance—

WAITWELL I esteem it so—

LADY WISHFORT Or else you wrong my condescension—

WAITWELL I do no, I do not—

LADY WISHFORT Indeed you do.

WAITWELL I do not, fair shrine of virtue.

LADY WISHFORT If you think the least scruple of carnality was an ingredient—

WAITWELL Dear madam, no. You are all camphire<sup>6</sup> and frankincense, all chastity and odor.

LADY WISHFORT Or that—

[*Enter* FOIBLE.]

FOIBLE Madam, the dancers are ready, and there's one with a letter, who must deliver it into your own hands.

LADY WISHFORT Sir Rowland, will you give me leave? Think favorably, judge candidly, and conclude you have found a person who would suffer racks in honor's cause, dear Sir Rowland, and will wait on you incessantly.<sup>7</sup>

[*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

WAITWELL Fie, fie!—What a slavery have I undergone; spouse, hast thou any cordial? I want spirits.

FOIBLE What a washy rogue art thou, to pant thus for a quarter of an hour's lying and swearing to a fine lady?

WAITWELL O, she is the antidote to desire. Spouse, thou wilt fare the worse for't—I shall have no appetite for iteration of nuptials—this eight and forty hours—by this hand I'd rather be a chairman in the dog days<sup>8</sup>—than act Sir Rowland till this time tomorrow.

[*Re-enter* LADY WISHFORT, *with a letter.*]

LADY WISHFORT Call in the dancers.—Sir Rowland, we'll sit, if you please, and see the entertainment.

[*Dance.*]

Now with your permission, Sir Rowland, I will peruse my letter.—I would open it in your presence, because I would not make you uneasy. If it should make you uneasy, I would burn it—speak if it does—but you may see, the superscription is like a woman's hand.

FOIBLE [*To him.*] By heaven! Mrs. Marwood's, I know it—my heart aches—get it from her.—

WAITWELL A woman's hand? No, madam, that's no woman's hand, I see that already. That's somebody whose throat must be cut.

LADY WISHFORT Nay, Sir Rowland, since you give me a proof of your passion by your jealousy, I promise you I'll make a return, by a frank communication—you shall see it—we'll open it together—look you here.—[*Reads.*]*—Madam, though unknown to you (Look you there, 'tis from nobody that I know.)—I have that honor for your character, that I think myself obliged to let you know you are abused. He who pretends to be Sir Rowland is a cheat and a rascal—*O Heavens! what's this?

FOIBLE Unfortunate, all's ruined.

WAITWELL How, how, let me see, let me see—[*Reads.*]*—A rascal and disguised, and suborned for that imposture—*O villainy! O villainy!*—by the contrivance of—*

LADY WISHFORT I shall faint, I shall die, oh!

FOIBLE [*To him.*] Say, 'tis your nephew's hand.—Quickly, his plot, swear, swear it.—

WAITWELL Here's a villain! Madam, don't you perceive it, don't you see it?

LADY WISHFORT Too well, too well. I have seen too much.

WAITWELL I told you at first I knew the hand—A woman's hand?  
The rascal writes a sort of a large hand, your Roman hand—I saw  
there was a throat to be cut presently. If he were my son, as he is  
my nephew, I'd pistol him—

FOIBLE O treachery! But are you sure, Sir Rowland, it is his writing?

WAITWELL Sure? Am I here? Do I live? Do I love this pearl of India?  
I have twenty letters in my pocket from him in the same character.

LADY WISHFORT How!

FOIBLE O, what luck it is, Sir Rowland, that you were present at this  
juncture! This was the business that brought Mr. Mirabell disguised  
to Madam Millamant this afternoon. I thought something was  
contriving, when he stole by me and would have hid his face.

LADY WISHFORT How, how!—I heard the villain was in the house  
indeed; and now I remember, my niece went away abruptly, when  
Sir Wilfull was to have made his addresses.

FOIBLE Then, then, madam, Mr. Mirabell waited for her in her  
chamber; but I would not tell your ladyship to discompose you  
when you were to receive Sir Rowland.

WAITWELL Enough, his date is short.<sup>9</sup>

FOIBLE No, good Sir Rowland, don't incur the law.

WAITWELL Law! I care not for law. I can but die, and 'tis in a good  
cause—my lady shall be satisfied of my truth and innocence,  
though it cost me my life.

LADY WISHFORT No, dear Sir Rowland, don't fight. If you should be  
killed I must never show my face—or be hanged—O, consider my  
reputation, Sir Rowland—no, you shan't fight—I'll go and examine  
my niece; I'll make her confess. I conjure you, Sir Rowland, by all  
your love not to fight.

WAITWELL I am charmed, madam, I obey. But some proof you must  
let me give you—I'll go for a black box, which contains the  
writings of my whole estate, and deliver that into your hands.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, dear Sir Rowland, that will be some comfort.  
Bring the black box.

WAITWELL And may I presume to bring a contract to be signed this  
night? May I hope so far?

LADY WISHFORT    Bring what you will; but come alive, pray come alive.  
O, this is a happy discovery.

WAITWELL    Dead or alive I'll come—and married we will be in spite of  
treachery; aye, and get an heir that shall defeat the last remaining  
glimpse of hope in my abandoned nephew. Come, my buxom  
widow:

E'er long you shall substantial proof receive  
That I'm an arrant<sup>1</sup> knight——

## FOIBLE    **Endnotes**

Or arrant knave.

- Note 1: Sprinkled with perfumed powder.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A rising.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The opening lines of a poem by Sir John Suckling. Impelled by her love to accept Mirabell, but reluctant to give herself, Millamant broods over poems that speak of the brief happiness of lovers and the falseness of men.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The first line of Edmund Waller's "The Story of Phoebus and Daphne Applied." In the flight of the virgin nymph from the embraces of the amorous god, Millamant finds an emblem of her relations with Mirabell.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Speak more openly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The first lines of a song by Suckling, which she continues in her next lines.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: How's that?[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To the new age with its classical taste, medieval art, especially architecture, seemed crude ("rude").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Oh, the silly fellow (French); also the title of a comedy by Molière.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This, and the line that Mirabell caps it with, are also from Waller's "The Story of Phoebus and Daphne"

Applied." [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Intricate, laborious. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The grated door of a convent. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Self-assured, conceited. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Soft (pleasures) and morning naps (French). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, Fondler. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reserved. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the first place (Latin), as in legal documents. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I stipulate. "Item": used to introduce each item in a list. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cosmetics were made of materials as repulsive as those that Mirabell names. "Vizards": masks. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rich silk fabrics. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a crooked piece of firewood. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A sweet liqueur made of wine, honey, and spices. "Aniseed, cinnamon, citron and Barbados waters": alcoholic drinks. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sedatives. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A fabric made by mixing wool and silk; "unsized" because not stiffened with some glutinous substance. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A Latin phrase indicating the withdrawal of a lawsuit. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spartans; people of few words. "Folios": books of the largest size. "Decimo sexto": a book of the smallest size. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name of the ass in the beast epic *Reynard the Fox* (ca. 1175–1250). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two Roman deities, the twins Castor and Pollux, for whom one of the signs of the zodiac is named. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I can argue successfully about matters less significant than you. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Monkeys were supposed to eat spiders. Petulant scornfully contrasts what he imagines to be Witwoud's technique with his lady with his own more vigorous and direct program for the rest of the evening.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Rakish.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Drunkard (Spanish).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Grudge.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A wineglass filled to the brim. The word comes from the custom of touching (bumping) glasses when drinking toasts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A coat of arms had a crest—a helmet surmounting the shield—and a motto. In his drunkenness, Sir Wilfull confuses the two.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In wine [there is] truth (Latin).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Throw.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fellow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Candle maker.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Muslims do not drink alcohol.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Grand Mufti, head of the state religion of Turkey.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The shah of Persia.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dung cart.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Punished by beating the soles of the feet.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Gamecock.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Inhabitant of Shropshire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: St. Anthony (hence "Tantony"), the patron of swineherds, was represented accompanied by a pig.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A frame for stretching cloth on hooks so that it can dry without losing its original shape (compare this with the phrase "to be on tenterhooks").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Consider.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A small pan inserted into a candlestick to catch the drippings of the candle.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Camphor was considered an effective antidote to sexual desire.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Immediately.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, one who carries a sedan chair during the hottest part of the summer. July and August are called the “dog days” because during these months the Dog Star, Sirius, rises and sets with the sun.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He won’t live long.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two words *errant* (“wandering,” as in “knight-errant”) and *arrant* (“thorough-going,” “notorious”) were originally the same and were still pronounced alike. This makes possible Foible’s pun.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Act 5—Scene continues***

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* FOIBLE.]

LADY WISHFORT Out of my house, out of my house, thou viper, thou serpent, that I have fostered; thou bosom traitress, that I raised from nothing.—Begone, begone, begone, go, go—that I took from washing of old gauze and weaving of dead hair,<sup>2</sup> with a bleak blue nose over a chafing dish of starved embers, and dining behind a traverse rag,<sup>3</sup> in a shop no bigger than a bird cage—go, go, starve again, do, do.

FOIBLE Dear madam, I'll beg pardon on my knees.

LADY WISHFORT Away, out, out, go set up for yourself again.—Do, drive a trade, do, with your three-pennyworth of small ware, flaunting upon a packthread, under a brandy-seller's bulk or against a dead wall<sup>4</sup> by a ballad-monger. Go, hang out an old frisoner-gorget, with a yard of yellow colberteen<sup>5</sup> again; do; an old gnawed mask, two rows of pins and a child's fiddle; a glass necklace with the beads broken, and a quilted nightcap with one ear. Go, go, drive a trade—these were your commodities, you treacherous trull, this was the merchandise you dealt in when I took you into my house, placed you next myself, and made you governante<sup>6</sup> of my whole family. You have forgot this, have you, now you have feathered your nest?

FOIBLE No, no, dear madam. Do but hear me, have but a moment's patience—I'll confess all. Mr. Mirabell seduced me; I am not the first that he has wheedled with his dissembling tongue. Your ladyship's own wisdom has been deluded by him, then how should I, a poor ignorant, defend myself? O madam, if you knew but what he promised me, and how he assured me your ladyship should come to no damage—or else the wealth of the Indies should not have bribed me to conspire against so good, so sweet, so kind a lady as you have been to me.

LADY WISHFORT No damage? What, to betray me, to marry me to a cast<sup>7</sup> servingman; to make me a receptacle, an hospital for a



decayed pimp? No damage? O, thou frontless<sup>8</sup> impudence, more than a big-bellied actress.

FOIBLE Pray do but hear me, madam. He could not marry your ladyship, madam.—No, indeed, his marriage was to have been void in law; for he was married to me first, to secure your ladyship. He could not have bedded your ladyship; for if he had consummated with your ladyship, he must have run the risk of the law, and been put upon his clergy.<sup>9</sup>—Yes, indeed, I inquired of the law in that case before I would meddle or make.<sup>1</sup>

LADY WISHFORT What, then I have been your property, have I? I have been convenient to you, it seems.—While you were catering for Mirabell, I have been broker for you? What, have you made a passive bawd of me?—This exceeds all precedent; I am brought to fine uses, to become a botcher of second-hand marriages between Abigails and Andrews!<sup>2</sup> I'll couple you. Yes, I'll baste you together, you and your philander.<sup>3</sup> I'll Duke's-Place<sup>4</sup> you, as I'm a person. Your turtle is in custody already: you shall coo in the same cage, if there be constable or warrant in the parish. [*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

FOIBLE O, that ever I was born, O, that I was ever married.—A bride, aye, I shall be a Bridewell-bride.<sup>5</sup> Oh!  
[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL.]

MRS. FAINALL Poor Foible, what's the matter?

FOIBLE O madam, my lady's gone for a constable. I shall be had to a justice, and put to Bridewell to beat hemp; poor Waitwell's gone to prison already.

MRS. FAINALL Have a good heart, Foible. Mirabell's gone to give security for him. This is all Marwood's and my husband's doing.

FOIBLE Yes, yes, I know it, madam; she was in my lady's closet, and overheard all that you said to me before dinner. She sent the letter to my lady; and that missing effect,<sup>6</sup> Mr. Fainall laid this plot to arrest Waitwell, when he pretended to go for the papers; and in the meantime Mrs. Marwood declared all to my lady.

MRS. FAINALL Was there no mention made of me in the letter?—My mother does not suspect my being in the confederacy? I fancy

Marwood has not told her, though she has told my husband.

FOIBLE Yes, madam; but my lady did not see that part. We stifled the letter before she read so far. Has that mischievous devil told Mr. Fainall of your ladyship then?

MRS. FAINALL Aye, all's out, my affair with Mirabell, everything discovered. This is the last day of our living together, that's my comfort.

FOIBLE Indeed, madam, and so 'tis a comfort if you knew all.—He has been even with your ladyship; which I could have told you long enough since, but I love to keep peace and quietness by my good will. I had rather bring friends together than set 'em at distance. But Mrs. Marwood and he are nearer related than ever their parents thought for!

MRS. FAINALL Say'st thou so, Foible? Canst thou prove this?

FOIBLE I can take my oath of it, madam. So can Mrs. Mincing; we have had many a fair word from Madam Marwood, to conceal something that passed in our chamber one evening when you were at Hyde Park—and we were thought to have gone a-walking; but we went up unawares—though we were sworn to secrecy too; Madam Marwood took a book and swore us upon it, but it was but a book of poems.—So long as it was not a Bible-oath, we may break it with a safe conscience.

MRS. FAINALL This discovery is the most opportune thing I could wish. Now, Mincing?

[*Enter* MINCING.]

MINCING My lady would speak with Mrs. Foible, mem. Mr. Mirabell is with her; he has set your spouse at liberty, Mrs. Foible, and would have you hide yourself in my lady's closet, till my old lady's anger is abated. O, my old lady is in a perilous passion, at something Mr. Fainall has said; he swears, and my old lady cries. There's a fearful hurricane, I vow. He says, mem, how that he'll have my lady's fortune made over to him, or he'll be divorced.

MRS. FAINALL Does your lady or Mirabell know that?

MINCING Yes, mem, they have sent me to see if Sir Wilfull be sober, and to bring him to them. My lady is resolved to have him, I think,

rather than lose such a vast sum as six thousand pound. O, come, Mrs. Foible, I hear my old lady.

MRS. FAINALL     Foible, you must tell Mincing that she must prepare to vouch when I call her.

FOIBLE     Yes, yes, madam.

MINCING     O yes, mem, I'll vouch anything for your ladyship's service, be what it will. [*Exit* MINCING, FOIBLE.]

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

LADY WISHFORT     O my dear friend, how can I enumerate the benefit that I have received from your goodness? To you I owe the timely discovery of the false vows of Mirabell; to you I owe the detection of the imposter Sir Rowland. And now you are become an intercessor with my son-in-law, to save the honor of my house, and compound for the frailties of my daughter. Well, friend, you are enough to reconcile me to the bad world, or else I would retire to deserts and solitudes, and feed harmless sheep by groves and purling streams. Dear Marwood, let us leave the world and retire by ourselves and be shepherdesses.

MRS. MARWOOD     Let us first dispatch the affair in hand, madam. We shall have leisure to think of retirement afterwards. Here is one who is concerned in the treaty.

LADY WISHFORT     O daughter, daughter, is it possible thou should'st be my child, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, and as I may say, another me, and yet transgress the most minute particle of severe virtue? Is it possible you should lean aside to iniquity, who have been cast in the direct mold of virtue? I have not only been a mold but a pattern for you, and a model for you, after you were brought into the world.

MRS. FAINALL     I don't understand your ladyship.

LADY WISHFORT     Not understand? Why, have you not been naught?<sup>7</sup> Have you not been sophisticated?<sup>8</sup> Not understand? Here I am ruined to compound<sup>9</sup> for your caprices and your cuckoldoms. I must pawn my plate and my jewels, and ruin my niece, and all little enough—

MRS. FAINALL I am wronged and abused, and so are you. 'Tis a false accusation, as false as hell, as false as your friend there, aye, or your friend's friend, my false husband.

MRS. MARWOOD My friend, Mrs. Fainall? Your husband my friend, what do you mean?

MRS. FAINALL I know what I mean, madam, and so do you; and so shall the world at a time convenient.

MRS. MARWOOD I am sorry to see you so passionate, madam. More temper<sup>1</sup> would look more like innocence. But I have done. I am sorry my zeal to serve your ladyship and family should admit of misconstruction, or make me liable to affront. You will pardon me, madam, if I meddle no more with an affair in which I am not personally concerned.

LADY WISHFORT O dear friend, I am so ashamed that you should meet with such returns.—You ought to ask pardon on your knees, ungrateful creature; she deserves more from you than all your life can accomplish—O, don't leave me destitute in this perplexity—no, stick to me, my good genius.

MRS. FAINALL I tell you, madam, you're abused—Stick to you? aye, like a leech, to suck your best blood—She'll drop off when she's full. Madam, you shan't pawn a bodkin, nor part with a brass counter, in composition for me.<sup>2</sup> I defy 'em all. Let 'em prove their aspersions; I know my own innocence, and dare stand a trial.

[*Exit* MRS. FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT Why, if she should be innocent, if she should be wronged after all, ha? I don't know what to think—and I promise you, her education has been unexceptionable—I may say it; for I chiefly made it my own care to initiate her very infancy in the rudiments of virtue, and to impress upon her tender years a young odium and aversion to the very sight of men.—Aye, friend, she would have shrieked if she had but seen a man, till she was in her teens. As I'm a person, 'tis true—she was never suffered to play with a male child, though but in coats.<sup>3</sup> Nay, her very babies<sup>4</sup> were of the feminine gender—O, she never looked a man in the face but her own father, or the chaplain, and him we made a shift

to put upon her for a woman, by the help of his long garments, and his sleek face; till she was going in her fifteen.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Twas much she should be deceived so long.

LADY WISHFORT I warrant you, or she would never have borne to have been catechized by him; and have heard his long lectures against singing and dancing, and such debaucheries; and going to filthy plays; and profane music-meetings, where the lewd trebles squeek nothing but bawdry, and the basses roar blasphemy. O, she would have swooned at the sight or name of an obscene play-book—and can I think after all this, that my daughter can be naught? What, a whore? And thought it excommunication to set her foot within the door of a playhouse? O dear friend, I can't believe it, no, no; as she says, let him prove it, let him prove it.

MRS. MARWOOD Prove it, madam? What, and have your name prostituted in a public court; yours and your daughter's reputation worried at the bar by a pack of bawling lawyers? To be ushered in with an *O Yes* of scandal; and have your case opened by an old fumbler lecher in a quof<sup>5</sup> like a man midwife, to bring your daughter's infamy to light; to be a theme for legal punsters, and quibblers by the statute; and become a jest, against a rule of court, where there is no precedent for a jest in any record, not even in *Doomsday Book*;<sup>6</sup> to discompose the gravity of the bench, and provoke naughty interrogatories in more naughty law-Latin; while the good judge, tickled with the proceeding, simpers under a gray beard, and fidgets off and on his cushion as if he had swallowed cantharides, or sate upon cowhage.<sup>7</sup>

LADY WISHFORT O, 'tis very hard!

MRS. MARWOOD And then to have my young revelers of the Temple take notes, like 'prentices at a conventicle; and after talk it over again in commons,<sup>8</sup> or before drawers in an eating house.

LADY WISHFORT Worse and worse.

MRS. MARWOOD Nay, this is nothing; if it would end here 'twere well. But it must after this be consigned by the shorthand writers to the public press; and from thence be transferred to the hands, nay into the throats and lungs of hawkers, with voices more licentious

than the loud flounderman's or the woman that cries gray peas;<sup>9</sup>  
and this you must hear till you are stunned; nay, you must hear  
nothing else for some days.

LADY WISHFORT O, 'tis insupportable. No, no, dear friend, make it up,  
make it up; aye, aye, I'll compound. I'll give up all, myself and my  
all, my niece and her all—anything, everything for composition.

MRS. MARWOOD Nay, madam, I advise nothing; I only lay before you,  
as a friend, the inconveniencies which perhaps you have  
overseen.<sup>1</sup> Here comes Mr. Fainall. If he will be satisfied to huddle  
up all in silence, I shall be glad. You must think I would rather  
congratulate than condole with you.

[*Enter* FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT Aye, aye, I do not doubt it, dear Marwood. No, no, I  
do not doubt it.

FAINALL Well, madam; I have suffered myself to be overcome by  
the importunity of this lady, your friend, and am content you shall  
enjoy your own proper estate during life; on condition you oblige  
yourself never to marry, under such penalty as I think convenient.

LADY WISHFORT Never to marry?

FAINALL No more Sir Rowlands—the next imposture may not be so  
timely detected.

MRS. MARWOOD That condition, I dare answer, my lady will consent  
to, without difficulty; she has already but too much experienced  
the perfidiousness of men. Besides, madam, when we retire to our  
pastoral solitude we shall bid adieu to all other thoughts.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, that's true; but in case of necessity; as of  
health, or some such emergency—

FAINALL O, if you are prescribed marriage, you shall be considered;  
I will only reserve to myself the power to choose for you. If your  
physic be wholesome, it matters not who is your apothecary. Next,  
my wife shall settle on me the remainder of her fortune, not made  
over already; and for her maintenance depend entirely on my  
discretion.

LADY WISHFORT This is most inhumanly savage; exceeding the  
barbarity of a Muscovite husband.

FAINALL I learned it from His Czarish Majesty's retinue,<sup>2</sup> in a winter evening's conference over brandy and pepper, amongst other secrets of matrimony and policy, as they are at present practiced in the northern hemisphere. But this must be agreed unto, and that positively. Lastly, I will be endowed, in right of my wife, with that six thousand pound, which is the moiety of Mrs. Millamant's fortune in your possession; and which she has forfeited (as will appear by the last will and testament of your deceased husband, Sir Jonathan Wishfort) by her disobedience in contracting herself against your consent or knowledge; and by refusing the offered match with Sir Wilfull Witwoud, which you, like a careful aunt, had provided for her.

LADY WISHFORT My nephew was *non compos*,<sup>3</sup> and could not make his addresses.

FAINALL I come to make demands—I'll hear no objections.

LADY WISHFORT You will grant me time to consider?

FAINALL Yes, while the instrument<sup>4</sup> is drawing, to which you must set your hand till more sufficient deeds can be perfected: which I will take care shall be done with all possible speed. In the meanwhile I will go for the said instrument, and till my return you may balance this matter in your own discretion. [*Exit* FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT This insolence is beyond all precedent, all parallel; must I be subject to this merciless villain?

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis severe indeed, madam, that you should smart for your daughter's wantonness.

LADY WISHFORT 'Twas against my consent that she married this barbarian, but she would have him, though her year was not out.<sup>5</sup>—Ah! her first husband, my son Languish, would not have carried it thus. Well, that was my choice, this is hers; she is matched now with a witness<sup>6</sup>—I shall be mad, dear friend. Is there no comfort for me? Must I live to be confiscated at this rebel-rate?—Here comes two more of my Egyptian plagues,<sup>7</sup> too.

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* SIR WILFULL.]

SIR WILFULL Aunt, your servant.

LADY WISHFORT Out, caterpillar, call not me aunt; I know thee not.



SIR WILFULL I confess I have been a little in disguise,<sup>8</sup> as they say—'Sheart! and I'm sorry for't. What would you have? I hope I committed no offense, aunt—and if I did, I am willing to make satisfaction; and what can a man say fairer? If I have broke anything, I'll pay for't, an' it cost a pound. And so let that content for what's past, and make no more words. For what's to come, to pleasure you I'm willing to marry my cousin. So, pray, let's all be friends. She and I are agreed upon the matter before a witness.

LADY WISHFORT How's this, dear niece? Have I any comfort? Can this be true?

MILLAMANT I am content to be a sacrifice to your repose, madam; and to convince you that I had no hand in the plot, as you were misinformed, I have laid my commands on Mirabell to come in person, and be a witness that I give my hand to this flower of knighthood; and for the contract that passed between Mirabell and me, I have obliged him to make a resignation of it in your ladyship's presence.—He is without, and waits your leave for admittance.

LADY WISHFORT Well, I'll swear I am something revived at this testimony of your obedience; but I cannot admit that traitor—I fear I cannot fortify myself to support his appearance. He is as terrible to me as a Gorgon;<sup>9</sup> if I see him, I fear I shall turn to stone, petrify incessantly.

MILLAMANT If you disoblige him, he may resent your refusal, and insist upon the contract still. Then 'tis the last time he will be offensive to you.

LADY WISHFORT Are you sure it will be the last time?—If I were sure of that—Shall I never see him again?

MILLAMANT Sir Wilfull, you and he are to travel together, are you not?

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, the gentleman's a civil gentleman, aunt, let him come in; why, we are sworn brothers and fellow travelers. We are to be Pylades and Orestes,<sup>1</sup> he and I. He is to be my interpreter in foreign parts. He has been overseas once already; and with proviso that I marry my cousin, will cross 'em once again, only to



bear my company.—'Sheart, I'll call him in—an I set on't once, he shall come in; and see who'll hinder him. [*Exit* SIR WILFULL.]

MRS. MARWOOD This is precious fooling, if it would pass; but I'll know the bottom of it.

LADY WISHFORT O dear Marwood, you are not going?

MARWOOD Not far, madam; I'll return immediately. [*Exit* MRS. MARWOOD.]

[*Re-enter* SIR WILFULL *and* MIRABELL.]

SIR WILFULL [*Aside.*] Look up, man, I'll stand by you. 'Sbud an she do frown, she can't kill you—besides—harkee, she dare not frown desperately, because her face is none of her own. 'Sheart, an she should her forehead would wrinkle like the coat of a cream cheese; but mum for that, fellow traveler.

MIRABELL If a deep sense of the many injuries I have offered to so good a lady, with a sincere remorse, and a hearty contrition, can but obtain the least glance of compassion, I am too happy—Ah madam, there was a time—but let it be forgotten—I confess I have deservedly forfeited the high place I once held of sighing at your feet. Nay kill me not by turning from me in disdain—I come not to plead for favor—nay not for pardon. I am a suppliant only for pity—I am going where I never shall behold you more—

SIR WILFULL [*Aside.*] How, fellow traveler!—You shall go by yourself then.

MIRABELL Let me be pitied first, and afterwards forgotten—I ask no more.

SIR WILFULL By'r Lady a very reasonable request, and will cost you nothing, aunt.—Come, come, forgive and forget, aunt. Why you must, an you are a Christian.

MIRABELL Consider, madam, in reality you could not receive much prejudice; it was an innocent device, though I confess it had a face of guiltiness.—It was at most an artifice which love contrived—and errors which love produces have ever been accounted venial. At least think it is punishment enough that I have lost what in my heart I hold most dear, that to your cruel indignation, I have offered up this beauty, and with her my peace and quiet; nay, all my hopes of future comfort.

SIR WILFULL    An he does not move me, would I may never be o' the quorum<sup>2</sup>—An it were not as good a deed as to drink, to give her to him again—I would I might never take shipping.—Aunt, if you don't forgive quickly I shall melt, I can tell you that. My contract went no farther than a little mouth glue,<sup>3</sup> and that's hardly dry.—One doleful sigh more from my fellow traveler and 'tis dissolved.

LADY WISHFORT    Well, nephew, upon your account—Ah, he has a false insinuating tongue.—Well, sir, I will stifle my just resentment at my nephew's request. I will endeavor what I can to forget—but on proviso that you resign the contract with my niece immediately.

MIRABELL    It is in writing and with papers of concern, but I have sent my servant for it and will deliver it to you, with all acknowledgements for your transcendent goodness.

LADY WISHFORT    [*Aside.*] O, he has witchcraft in his eyes and tongue; when I did not see him I could have bribed a villain to his assassination; but his appearance rakes the embers which have so long lain smothered in my breast.—

[*Enter* FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

FAINALL    Your date of deliberation, madam, is expired. Here is the instrument; are you prepared to sign?

LADY WISHFORT    If I were prepared, I am not empowered. My niece exerts a lawful claim, having matched herself by my direction to Sir Wilfull.

FAINALL    That sham is too gross to pass on me—though 'tis imposed on you, madam.

MILLAMANT    Sir, I have given my consent.

MIRABELL    And, sir, I have resigned my pretensions.

SIR WILFULL    And, sir, I assert my right; and will maintain it in defiance of you, sir, and of your instrument. 'Sheart, an you talk of an instrument, sir, I have an old fox by my thigh shall hack your instrument of ram vellum<sup>4</sup> to shreds, sir. It shall not be sufficient for a *mittimus*<sup>5</sup> or a tailor's measure; therefore withdraw your instrument, sir, or by'r Lady I shall draw mine.

LADY WISHFORT    Hold, nephew, hold.

MILLAMANT    Good Sir Wilfull, respite your valor.

FAINALL    Indeed? Are you provided of your guard, with your single beefeater<sup>6</sup> there? But I'm prepared for you; and insist upon my first proposal. You shall submit your own estate to my management and absolutely make over my wife's to my sole use, as pursuant to the purport and tenor of this other covenant. I suppose, madam, your consent is not requisite in this case; nor, Mr. Mirabell, your resignation; nor, Sir Wilfull, your right—You may draw your fox if you please, sir, and make a bear garden<sup>7</sup> flourish somewhere else: for here it will not avail. This, my Lady Wishfort, must be subscribed, or your darling daughter's turned adrift, like a leaky hulk to sink or swim, as she and the current of this lewd town can agree.

LADY WISHFORT    Is there no means, no remedy, to stop my ruin? Ungrateful wretch! Dost thou not owe thy being, thy subsistence to my daughter's fortune?

FAINALL    I'll answer you when I have the rest of it in my possession.

MIRABELL    But that you would not accept of a remedy from my hands—I own I have not deserved you should owe any obligation to me; or else perhaps I could advise—

LADY WISHFORT    O, what? what? to save me and my child from ruin, from want, I'll forgive all that's past; nay, I'll consent to anything to come, to be delivered from this tyranny.

MIRABELL    Aye, madam, but that is too late; my reward is intercepted. You have disposed of her who only could have made me a compensation for all my services; but be it as it may, I am resolved I'll serve you. You shall not be wronged in this savage manner.

LADY WISHFORT    How! Dear Mr. Mirabell, can you be so generous at last! But it is not possible. Harkee, I'll break my nephew's match, you shall have my niece yet, and all her fortune, if you can but save me from this imminent danger.

MIRABELL    Will you? I take you at your word. I ask no more. I must have leave for two criminals to appear.

LADY WISHFORT    Aye, aye, anybody, anybody.

MIRABELL    Foible is one, and a penitent.

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL, FOIBLE, *and* MINCING.]

MRS. MARWOOD O, my shame! These corrupt things are brought hither to expose me.

[MIRABELL *and* LADY WISHFORT *go to* MRS. FAINALL *and* FOIBLE.]

FAINALL If it must all come out, why let 'em know it, 'tis but *the way of the world*. That shall not urge me to relinquish or abate one tittle of my terms; no, I will insist the more.

FOIBLE Yes, indeed, madam, I'll take my Bible-oath of it.

MINCING And so will I, mem.

LADY WISHFORT O Marwood, Marwood, art thou false? My friend deceive me? Hast thou been a wicked accomplice with that profligate man?

MRS. MARWOOD Have you so much ingratitude and injustice, to give credit against your friend to the aspersions of two such mercenary trulls?

MINCING Mercenary, mem? I scorn your words. 'Tis true we found you and Mr. Fainall in the blue garret; by the same token, you swore us to secrecy upon Messalina's<sup>8</sup> poems. Mercenary? No, if we would have been mercenary, we should have held our tongues; you would have bribed us sufficiently.

FAINALL Go, you are an insignificant thing. Well, what are you the better for this! Is this Mr. Mirabell's expedient? I'll be put off no longer. You, thing that was a wife, shall smart for this. I will not leave thee wherewithal to hide thy shame: your body shall be naked as your reputation.

MRS. FAINALL I despise you and defy your malice.—You have aspersed me wrongfully.—I have proved your falsehood.—Go, you and your treacherous—I will not name it, but starve together—perish.

FAINALL Not while you are worth a groat, indeed, my dear. Madam, I'll be fooled no longer.

LADY WISHFORT Ah, Mr. Mirabell, this is small comfort, the detection of this affair.

MIRABELL O, in good time—Your leave for the other offender and penitent to appear, madam.

[*Enter WAITWELL with a box of writings.*]

LADY WISHFORT O Sir Rowland—Well, rascal.

WAITWELL What your ladyship pleases—I have brought the black box at last, madam.

MIRABELL Give it me. Madam, you remember your promise.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, dear sir.

MIRABELL Where are the gentlemen?

WAITWELL At hand, sir, rubbing their eyes, just risen from sleep.

FAINALL 'Sdeath, what's this to me? I'll not wait your private concerns.

[*Enter PETULANT and WITWOUD.*]

PETULANT How now? What's the matter? Whose hand's out?<sup>9</sup>

WITWOUD Heyday! What, are you all got together, like players at the end of the last act?

MIRABELL You may remember, gentlemen, I once requested your hands as witnesses to a certain parchment.

WITWOUD Aye, I do, my hand I remember—Petulant set his mark.

MIRABELL You wrong him, his name is fairly written, as shall appear. You do not remember, gentlemen, anything of what that parchment

contained—[*Undoing the box.*]

WITWOUD No.

PETULANT Not I. I writ, I read nothing.

MIRABELL Very well, now you shall know. Madam, your promise.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, aye, sir, upon my honor.

MIRABELL Mr. Fainall, it is now time that you should know that your lady, while she was at her own disposal, and before you had by your insinuations wheedled her out of a pretended settlement of the greatest part of her fortune—

FAINALL Sir! Pretended!

MIRABELL Yes, sir. I say that this lady while a widow, having, it seems, received some cautions respecting your inconstancy and tyranny of temper, which from her own partial opinion and fondness of you she could never have suspected—she did, I say, by the wholesome advice of friends and of sages learned in the

laws of this land, deliver this same as her act and deed to me in trust, and to the uses within mentioned. You may read if you please—[*Holding out the parchment.*—]—though perhaps what is written on the back may serve your occasions.

FAINALL Very likely, sir. What's here? Damnation!—[*Reads.*] *A deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella Languish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell.* Confusion!

MIRABELL Even so, sir, 'tis the way of the world, sir; of the widows of the world. I suppose this deed may bear an elder date than what you have obtained from your lady.

FAINALL Perfidious fiend! Then thus I'll be revenged.

[*Offers to run at* MRS. FAINALL.]

SIR WILFULL Hold, sir, now you may make your bear garden flourish somewhere else, sir.

FAINALL Mirabell, you shall hear of this, sir, be sure you shall. Let me pass, oaf. [*Exit* FAINALL.]

MRS. FAINALL Madam, you seem to stifle your resentment: you had better give it vent.

MRS. MARWOOD Yes, it shall have vent—and to your confusion, or I'll perish in the attempt. [*Exit* MRS. MARWOOD.]

LADY WISHFORT O daughter, daughter, 'tis plain thou hast inherited thy mother's prudence.

MRS. FAINALL Thank Mr. Mirabell, a cautious friend, to whose advice all is owing.

LADY WISHFORT Well, Mr. Mirabell, you have kept your promise and I must perform mine. First I pardon for your sake Sir Rowland there and Foible.—The next thing is to break the matter to my nephew—and how to do that—

MIRABELL For that, madam, give yourself no trouble—let me have your consent.—Sir Wilfull is my friend; he has had compassion upon lovers, and generously engaged a volunteer in this action, for our service; and now designs to prosecute his travels.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, aunt, I have no mind to marry. My cousin's a fine lady, and the gentleman loves her, and she loves him, and they deserve one another. My resolution is to see foreign parts—I

have set on't—and when I'm set on't, I must do't. And if these two gentlemen would travel too, I think they may be spared.

PETULANT For my part, I say little—I think things are best off or on.

WITWOUND Igad, I understand nothing of the matter—I'm in a maze yet; like a dog in a dancing school.

LADY WISHFORT Well, sir, take her, and with her all the joy I can give you.

MILLAMANT Why does not the man take me? Would you have me give myself to you over again?

MIRABELL Aye, and over and over again—[*Kisses her hand.*—I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, Heaven grant I love you not too well, that's all my fear.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, you'll have time enough to toy after you're married; or if you will toy now, let us have a dance in the meantime; that we who are not lovers may have some other employment, besides looking on.

MIRABELL With all my heart, dear Sir Wilfull. What shall we do for music?

FOIBLE O, sir, some that were provided for Sir Rowland's entertainment are yet within call.

[A DANCE.]

LADY WISHFORT As I am a person I can hold out no longer.—I have wasted my spirits so today already, that I am ready to sink under the fatigue; and I cannot but have some fears upon me yet, that my son Fainall will pursue some desperate course.

MIRABELL Madam, disquiet not yourself on that account; to my knowledge his circumstances are such, he must of force comply. For my part, I will contribute all that in me lies to a reunion: in the meantime, madam—[*To MRS. FAINALL.*—let me before these witnesses restore to you this deed of trust; it may be a means, well managed, to make you live easily together.

From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed;  
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed:

For each deceiver to his cost may find,  
That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind.

## Endnotes

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

- Note 2: Foible had been a wigmaker.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A worn cloth, used to curtain off part of a room.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A continuous, unbroken wall. "Bulk": stall.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A French imitation of Italian lace. "Frisoneer-gorget": a woolen garment that covers the neck and breast.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Housekeeper.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cast off, discharged.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Shameless.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, pleaded "benefit of clergy," originally the privilege of the clergy to be tried for felony before ecclesiastical, not secular, courts. By Congreve's time it had become the privilege to plead exemption from a penal sentence granted a person who could read and was a first offender.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A dialectal phrase; the two words mean approximately the same thing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Generic names for maidservants and serving-men. "Botcher": a mender of old clothes. Lady Wishfort means something like "a patcher-up of marriages."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lover. "Baste": sew together loosely.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Notorious for its thriving trade in unlicensed marriages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: House of correction for women, in London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Not working.[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: Wicked. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Corrupted. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, come to terms by making a monetary settlement. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Moderation. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To settle my debts. "Bodkin": ornamental hairpin. "Brass counter": an imitation coin, used in games of chance. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the dress common to young children of both genders. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dolls. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The cap of a sergeant-at-law. "O Yes": The formula for opening court, a variant of Old French *Oyez*, "Hear ye." [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Or Domesday Book, the survey of England made in 1085–86 by William the Conqueror. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A plant that causes intolerable itching. "Fidges": fidgets. "Cantharides": Spanish fly, an irritant. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the dining hall. "Revelers": here, law students. The Temple is one of the Inns of Court. "Conventicle": clandestine meeting of Protestant Dissenters. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Street vendors known for their stridency. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Overlooked. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Peter the Great of Russia visited London in 1698. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, *non compos mentis* (of unsound mind, Latin). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legal contract. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The conventional period of mourning for a widow was one year. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With a vengeance. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The plagues visited by God on Pharaoh until he agreed to release the Israelites from bondage (Exodus 7–12). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drunk. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: In Greek mythology, a hideous monster with snakes in her hair. Her glance turned people to stone.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pylades was the constant friend who journeyed with Orestes, the son and avenger of the murdered king Agamemnon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Justices of the peace, who were required to be present at the sessions of a court.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Literally, glue to be used by moistening with the tongue; but here, “glue made of mere words” and therefore not binding.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The legal instrument to be signed is written on vellum. “Fox”: a kind of sword.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A warrant, committing a felon to jail.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Yeoman of the guard.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The place for bear baiting, frequented by a vulgar and unruly crowd. “Draw”: track by scent.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mincing means *Miscellany*, a collection of poems by various writers, such as Dryden’s popular *Miscellanies*. Messalina was the viciously debauched wife of the Roman emperor Claudius.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Whose game’s over?[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Epilogue***

SPOKEN BY MRS. BRACEGIRDLE<sup>1</sup>

After our Epilogue this crowd dismisses,  
I'm thinking how this play'll be pulled to pieces.  
But pray consider, e'er you doom its fall,  
How hard a thing 'twould be to please you all.  
5 There are some critics so with spleen diseased,  
They scarcely come inclining to be pleased;  
And sure he must have more than mortal skill,  
Who pleases anyone against his will.  
Then, all bad poets we are sure are foes,  
10 And how their number's swelled the town well  
knows:  
In shoals, I've marked 'em judging in the pit;  
Though they're on no pretence for judgment  
fit,  
But that they have been damned for want of  
wit.  
Since when, they by their own offenses taught  
Set up for spies on plays, and finding fault.  
15 Others there are whose malice we'd prevent;  
Such, who watch plays, with scurrilous  
intent  
To mark out who by characters are meant.  
And though no perfect likeness they can trace,  
Yet each pretends to know the copied face.  
20 These, with false glosses feed their own ill-nature,  
And turn to libel, what was meant a *satire*.<sup>2</sup>  
May such malicious fops this fortune find,  
To think themselves alone the fools designed:  
If any are so arrogantly vain,  
25 To think they singly can support a scene,  
And furnish fool enough to entertain.

For well the learn'd and the judicious know,  
 That satire scorns to stoop so  
     meanly low,  
 30 As any one abstracted<sup>o</sup> fop to show.  
 For, as when painters form a  
     matchless face,  
 They from each fair one catch some different grace,  
 And shining features in one portrait blend,  
 To which no single beauty must pretend:  
 35 So poets oft do in one piece expose  
 Whole *belles assemblées* of coquettes and beaux.

## Endnotes

1700

- Note 1: Anne Bracegirdle (ca. 1663–1748), the most brilliant actress of her generation. She created the role of Millamant. Congreve loved her, and it was rumored that they were secretly married.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *nā-ter* and *sā-ter*.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *separated*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

**JOSEPH ADDISON *and* SIR  
RICHARD STEELE  
1672–1719                      1672–1729**

The friendship of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele began when they were schoolboys together in London. Their careers ran parallel courses and brought them for a while into fruitful collaboration. Addison, although charming when among friends, was by nature reserved, calculating, and prudent. Steele was impulsive and rakish when young (but ardently devoted to his wife), often imprudent, and frequently in want of money. Addison never stumbled in his progress to financial security, a late marriage to a widowed countess, and a successful political career; walking less surely, Steele experienced many vicissitudes and faced serious financial problems during his last years.

Both men attended Oxford, where Addison took his degree, won a fellowship, and gained a reputation for Latin verse; the less scholarly Steele left the university before earning a degree to take a commission in the army. For a while he cut a dashing figure in London, even, to his horror, seriously wounding a man in a duel. Both men enjoyed the patronage of the great Whig magnates; and except during the last four years of Queen Anne's reign, when the Tories were in the ascendancy, they were generously treated. Steele edited and wrote the *London Gazette*, an official newspaper that normally appeared twice a week, listing government appointments

and reporting domestic and foreign news—much like a modern paper. He served in Parliament, was knighted by George I, and later became manager of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Addison held more important positions: he was secretary to the lord lieutenant of Ireland and later an undersecretary of state; finally, toward the end of his life, he became secretary of state. Both men wrote plays: Addison's *Cato*, a frigid and very "correct" tragedy, had great success in 1713, and Steele's later plays at Drury Lane (especially *The Conscious Lovers*, 1722) were instrumental in establishing the popularity of sentimental comedy throughout the eighteenth century.

Steele's debts and Addison's loss of office in 1710 drove them to journalistic enterprises, through which they developed one of the most characteristic types of eighteenth-century literature, the periodical essay. Steele's experience as gazetteer had involved him in journalism and, in need of money, in 1709 he launched the *Tatler* under the pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff. He sought to attract the largest possible audience: the title was a bid for women readers, and the mixture of news with personal reflections soon became popular in coffeehouses and at breakfast tables. The paper appeared three times a week from April 1709 to January 1711. Steele wrote by far the greater number of *Tatlers*, but Addison contributed helpfully, as did other friends. When the *Spectator* began its run two months after the last *Tatler*, the new periodical drew on and expanded the readership Steele had reached and influenced. The *Spectator* appeared daily except Sunday from March 1711 to December 1712 (and was briefly resumed by Addison in 1714). It was the joint undertaking of the two friends, although it was dominated by Addison. Both the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* had many imitators in their own day and throughout the rest of the century. There was a *Female Tatler* and a *Female Spectator*, as well as Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler* and Oliver Goldsmith's brief *Bee*.

The periodical writing of Addison and Steele is remarkable for its comprehensive attention to diverse aspects of English life—good manners, daily happenings in London, going to church, shopping, investing in the stock market, the fascinations of trade and

commerce, proper gender roles and relations, the personality types found in society, the town's offerings of high and low entertainment, tastes in literature and luxury goods, philosophical speculations—and the seamless way all were shown to be elements of a single vast, agreeable world. In this unifying spirit, both Steele and Addison set the divisive political battles of the day, so vigorously fought in other periodicals and newspapers, at a distance: they portray the ardor for political dispute more as a personal quirk than as a provocation to true civil unrest. Less formal and didactic than the essays of Francis Bacon, less personal than those of Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt in the next century, these essays promote morality among their readers by praising and enacting sociability and set standards of good taste and polite behavior with a light but firm and unwavering grace. They thereby sought to establish a new social-literary ethos transcending the narrowness of Puritan morality and the exorbitance of the fashionable court culture of the last century.

In the *Spectator*, Steele and especially Addison set out to break down the distinction between educating their readers and entertaining them with winning characters, vivid scenes, and even playfully visionary allegories. In the second number, Steele introduces us to the members of Mr. Spectator's Club: a man about town, a student of law and literature, a churchman, a soldier, a Tory country squire, and—interestingly enough—a London merchant. The development of these characters shows how the very manner in which the *Spectator* makes distinctions tends to smooth away conflict. As a Whig, Steele sympathized with the new moneyed class in London and evidently intended to pit the merchant Sir Andrew Freeport, the representative of the new order, against the Tory Sir Roger de Coverley, representative of the one passing away. Addison, however, preferred to present Sir Roger in episodes set in town and in country as an endearing, eccentric character, often absurd but always amiable and innocent. He is a prominent ancestor of a long line of similar characters in fiction in the following two centuries. Addison's scholarly interests broadened the material to include not only social criticism but the popularization of current philosophical

and scientific notions. He wrote important critical papers distinguishing true and false wit; an extended series of Saturday essays evaluating *Paradise Lost*; and an influential series on "the pleasures of the imagination," which treated the visual effect of beautiful, "great," and uncommon objects in nature and art. Altogether, the *Spectator* fulfilled his ambition (outlined in "The Aims of the Spectator") to be considered an agreeable modern Socrates.

The best description of Addison's prose is Samuel Johnson's in his *Life of Addison*: "His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without apparent elaboration; always equable, and always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences." And he concludes: "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison"—a course of study that a good many aspiring writers during the century seem to have undertaken.



## STEELE: [The Spectator's Club]

**The Spectator 2, Friday, March 2, 1711**

—*Ast alii sex*

*Et plures uno conclamant ore.*<sup>1</sup>

—JUVENAL, *Satire* 7.167–68

The first of our society is a gentleman of Worcestershire, of ancient descent, a baronet, his name Sir Roger de Coverley. His great-grandfather was inventor of that famous country-dance which is called after him. All who know the shire are very well acquainted with the parts and merits of Sir Roger. He is a gentleman that is very singular in his behavior, but his singularities proceed from his good sense, and are contradictions to the manners of the world only as he thinks the world is in the wrong. However, this humor creates him no enemies, for he does nothing with sourness or obstinacy; and his being unconfined to modes and forms<sup>2</sup> makes him but the readier and more capable to please and oblige all who know him. When he is in town, he lives in Soho Square. It is said he keeps himself a bachelor by reason he was crossed in love by a perverse, beautiful widow of the next county to him. Before this disappointment, Sir Roger was what you call a fine gentleman, had often supped with my Lord Rochester and Sir George Etherege, fought a duel upon his first coming to town, and kicked Bully Dawson<sup>3</sup> in a public coffeehouse for calling him “youngster.” But being ill used by the above-mentioned widow, he was very serious for a year and a half; and though, his temper being naturally jovial, he at last got over it, he grew careless of himself, and never dressed afterwards. He continues to wear a coat and doublet of the same cut that were in fashion at the time of his repulse, which, in his merry humors, he tells us, has been in and out twelve times since he first wore it. 'Tis

said Sir Roger grew humble in his desires after he had forgot this cruel beauty, insomuch that it is reported he has frequently offended in point of chastity with beggars and gypsies; but this is looked upon by his friends rather as matter of raillery than truth. He is now in his fifty-sixth year, cheerful, gay, and hearty; keeps a good house both in town and country; a great lover of mankind; but there is such a mirthful cast in his behavior that he is rather beloved than esteemed. His tenants grow rich, his servants look satisfied, all the young women profess love to him, and the young men are glad of his company; when he comes into a house he calls the servants by their names, and talks all the way upstairs to a visit. I must not omit that Sir Roger is a justice of the quorum, that he fills the chair at a quarter-session with great abilities; and, three months ago, gained universal applause by explaining a passage in the Game Act.<sup>4</sup>

The gentleman next in esteem and authority among us is another bachelor, who is a member of the Inner Temple; a man of great probity, wit, and understanding; but he has chosen his place of residence rather to obey the direction of an old humorsome<sup>5</sup> father, than in pursuit of his own inclinations. He was placed there to study the laws of the land, and is the most learned of any of the house in those of the stage. Aristotle and Longinus are much better understood by him than Littleton or Coke.<sup>6</sup> The father sends up, every post, questions relating to marriage articles, leases, and tenures, in the neighborhood; all which questions he agrees with an attorney to answer and take care of in the lump. He is studying the passions themselves, when he should be inquiring into the debates among men which arise from them. He knows the argument of each of the orations of Demosthenes and Tully,<sup>7</sup> but not one case in the reports of our own courts. No one ever took him for a fool, but none, except his intimate friends, know he has a great deal of wit. This turn makes him at once both disinterested and agreeable; as few of his thoughts are drawn from business, they are most of them fit for conversation. His taste of books is a little too just<sup>8</sup> for the age he lives in; he has read all, but approves of very few. His familiarity with the customs, manners, actions, and writings of the ancients

makes him a very delicate observer of what occurs to him in the present world. He is an excellent critic, and the time of the play is his hour of business; exactly at five he passes through New Inn, crosses through Russell Court, and takes a turn at Will's till the play begins; he has his shoes rubbed and his periwig powdered at the barber's as you go into the Rose.<sup>9</sup> It is for the good of the audience when he is at a play, for the actors have an ambition to please him.

The person of next consideration is Sir Andrew Freeport, a merchant of great eminence in the city of London, a person of indefatigable industry, strong reason, and great experience. His notions of trade are noble and generous, and (as every rich man has usually some sly way of jesting which would make no great figure were he not a rich man) he calls the sea the British Common. He is acquainted with commerce in all its parts, and will tell you that it is a stupid and barbarous way to extend dominion by arms; for true power is to be got by arts and industry. He will often argue that if this part of our trade were well cultivated, we should gain from one nation; and if another, from another. I have heard him prove that diligence makes more lasting acquisitions than valor, and that sloth has ruined more nations than the sword. He abounds in several frugal maxims, among which the greatest favorite is, "A penny saved is a penny got." A general trader of good sense is pleasanter company than a general scholar; and Sir Andrew having a natural unaffected eloquence, the perspicuity of his discourse gives the same pleasure that wit would in another man. He has made his fortunes himself, and says that England may be richer than other kingdoms by as plain methods as he himself is richer than other men; though at the same time I can say this of him, that there is not a point in the compass but blows home a ship in which he is an owner.

Next to Sir Andrew in the clubroom sits Captain Sentry, a gentleman of great courage, good understanding, but invincible modesty. He is one of those that deserve very well, but are very awkward at putting their talents within the observation of such as should take notice of them. He was some years a captain, and

behaved himself with great gallantry in several engagements and at several sieges; but having a small estate of his own, and being next heir to Sir Roger, he has quitted a way of life in which no man can rise suitably to his merit who is not something of a courtier as well as a soldier. I have heard him often lament that in a profession where merit is placed in so conspicuous a view, impudence should get the better of modesty. When he has talked to this purpose I never heard him make a sour expression, but frankly confess that he left the world because he was not fit for it. A strict honesty and an even, regular behavior are in themselves obstacles to him that must press through crowds who endeavor at the same end with himself—the favor of a commander. He will, however, in his way of talk, excuse generals for not disposing according to men's desert, or inquiring into it, "for," says he, "that great man who has a mind to help me, has as many to break through to come at me as I have to come at him"; therefore he will conclude that the man who would make a figure, especially in a military way, must get over all false modesty, and assist his patron against the importunity of other pretenders by a proper assurance in his own vindication. He says it is a civil cowardice to be backward in asserting<sup>1</sup> what you ought to expect, as it is a military fear to be slow in attacking when it is your duty. With this candor does the gentleman speak of himself and others. The same frankness runs through all his conversation. The military part of his life has furnished him with many adventures, in the relation of which he is very agreeable to the company; for he is never overbearing, though accustomed to command men in the utmost degree below him; nor ever too obsequious from an habit of obeying men highly above him.

But that our society may not appear a set of humorists<sup>2</sup> unacquainted with the gallantries and pleasures of the age, we have among us the gallant Will Honeycomb, a gentleman who, according to his years, should be in the decline of his life, but having ever been very careful of his person, and always had a very easy fortune, time has made but very little impression either by wrinkles on his forehead or traces in his brain. His person is well turned, of a good

height. He is very ready at that sort of discourse with which men usually entertain women. He has all his life dressed very well, and remembers habits<sup>3</sup> as others do men. He can smile when one speaks to him, and laughs easily. He knows the history of every mode, and can inform you from which of the French king's wenches our wives and daughters had this manner of curling their hair, that way of placing their hoods; whose frailty was covered by such a sort of petticoat, and whose vanity to show her foot made that part of the dress so short in such a year. In a word, all his conversation and knowledge has been in the female world. As other men of his age will take notice to you what such a minister said upon such and such an occasion, he will tell you when the Duke of Monmouth<sup>4</sup> danced at court such a woman was then smitten, another was taken with him at the head of his troop in the Park. In all these important relations, he has ever about the same time received a kind glance or a blow of a fan from some celebrated beauty, mother of the present Lord Such-a-one. If you speak of a young commoner that said a lively thing in the House, he starts up: "He has good blood in his veins; Tom Mirabell begot him, the rogue cheated me in that affair; that young fellow's mother used me more like a dog than any woman I ever made advances to." This way of talking of his very much enlivens the conversation among us of a more sedate turn; and I find there is not one of the company but myself, who rarely speak at all, but speaks of him as of that sort of man who is usually called a well-bred, fine gentleman. To conclude his character, where women are not concerned he is an honest, worthy man.

I cannot tell whether I am to account him whom I am next to speak of as one of our company, for he visits us but seldom; but when he does, it adds to every man else a new enjoyment of himself. He is a clergyman, a very philosophic man, of general learning, great sanctity of life, and the most exact good breeding. He has the misfortune to be of a very weak constitution, and consequently cannot accept of such cares and business as preferments in his function would oblige him to; he is therefore among divines what a chamber-counselor<sup>5</sup> is among lawyers. The

probity of his mind and the integrity of his life create him followers, as being eloquent or loud advances others. He seldom introduces the subject he speaks upon; but we are so far gone in years that he observes, when he is among us, an earnestness to have him fall on some divine topic, which he always treats with much authority, as one who has no interest in this world, as one who is hastening to the object of all his wishes and conceives hope from his decays and infirmities. These are my ordinary companions.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Six more at least join their consenting voice (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Social conventions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Notorious cardsharp of the period. John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester (1647–1680), British poet; Etherege (ca. 1634–1691), playwright, rake, and close companion of the king and Rochester.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In 1671 the act gave the gentry (Sir Roger's class) broad legal powers to prevent poaching and hence granted them a virtual monopoly on hunting. "Justice of the quorum": a country justice of the peace, presiding over quarterly sessions of the court.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Temperamental. "Inner Temple": one of the Inns of Court, where lawyers resided or had their offices and where students studied law.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In other words, he is more familiar with the laws of literature than those of England. The *Poetics* of Aristotle and the Greek treatise *On the Sublime* (reputedly by Longinus) were in high favor among the critics of the time. Sir Thomas Littleton, 15th-century jurist, was author of a renowned treatise on *Tenures*. Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634) was the judge and writer whose *Reports* and *Institutes of the Laws of England* (known as *Coke upon Littleton*) have exerted a great influence on the interpretation of English law.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Marcus Tullius Cicero.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Exact.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A tavern near Drury Lane. "Will's": the coffeehouse in Covent Garden associated with literature and criticism since Dryden had begun to frequent it in the 1660s.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Claiming.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eccentrics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Clothes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The illegitimate son of Charles II, the ill-fated "Absalom" of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A lawyer who gives opinions in private, not in court.[Return to reference 5](#)



## ADDISON: [The Aims of the *Spectator*]

**The Spectator 10, Monday, March 12, 1711**

*Non aliter quam qui adverso vix flumine lembum  
Remigiis subigit, si bracchia forte remisit,  
Atque illum in præceps prono rapit alveus amni.*<sup>1</sup>  
—VIRGIL, *Georgics* 1.201–3

It is with much satisfaction that I hear this great city inquiring day by day after these my papers, and receiving my morning lectures with a becoming seriousness and attention. My publisher tells me that there are already three thousand of them distributed every day. So that if I allow twenty readers to every paper, which I look upon as a modest computation, I may reckon about three-score thousand disciples in London and Westminster, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless herd of their ignorant and unattentive brethren. Since I have raised to myself so great an audience, I shall spare no pains to make their instruction agreeable, and their diversion useful. For which reasons I shall endeavor to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day. And to the end that their virtue and discretion may not be short, transient, intermitting starts of thought, I have resolved to refresh their memories from day to day, till I have recovered them out of that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age is fallen. The mind that lies fallow but a single day sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture. It was said of Socrates that he brought philosophy down from heaven, to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought philosophy out of closets<sup>2</sup>



and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffeehouses.

I would therefore in a very particular manner recommend these my speculations to all well-regulated families that set apart an hour in every morning for tea and bread and butter; and would earnestly advise them for their good to order this paper to be punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a part of the tea equipage.

Sir Francis Bacon observes that a well-written book, compared with its rivals and antagonists, is like Moses's serpent, that immediately swallowed up and devoured those of the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup> I shall not be so vain as to think that where *The Spectator* appears the other public prints will vanish; but shall leave it to my reader's consideration whether is it not much better to be let into the knowledge of one's self, than to hear what passes in Muscovy or Poland; and to amuse ourselves with such writings as tend to the wearing out of ignorance, passion, and prejudice, than such as naturally conduce to inflame hatreds, and make enmities irreconcilable?

In the next place, I would recommend this paper to the daily perusal of those gentlemen whom I cannot but consider as my good brothers and allies, I mean the fraternity of spectators who live in the world without having anything to do in it; and either by the affluence of their fortunes or laziness of their dispositions have no other business with the rest of mankind but to look upon them. Under this class of men are comprehended all contemplative tradesmen, titular physicians, fellows of the Royal Society, Templars<sup>4</sup> that are not given to be contentious, and statesmen that are out of business; in short, everyone that considers the world as a theater, and desires to form a right judgment of those who are the actors on it.

There is another set of men that I must likewise lay a claim to, whom I have lately called the blanks of society, as being altogether unfurnished with ideas, till the business and conversation of the day has supplied them. I have often considered these poor souls with an eye of great commiseration, when I have heard them asking the first

man they have met with, whether there was any news stirring? and by that means gathering together materials for thinking. These needy persons do not know what to talk of till about twelve o'clock in the morning; for by that time they are pretty good judges of the weather, know which way the wind sits, and whether the Dutch mail<sup>5</sup> be come in. As they lie at the mercy of the first man they meet, and are grave or impertinent all the day long, according to the notions which they have imbibed in the morning, I would earnestly entreat them not to stir out of their chambers till they have read this paper, and do promise them that I will daily instil into them such sound and wholesome sentiments as shall have a good effect on their conversation for the ensuing twelve hours.

But there are none to whom this paper will be more useful than to the female world. I have often thought there has not been sufficient pains taken in finding out proper employments and diversions for the fair ones. Their amusements seem contrived for them, rather as they are women, than as they are reasonable creatures; and are more adapted to the sex than to the species. The toilet<sup>6</sup> is their great scene of business, and the right adjusting of their hair the principal employment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribbons is reckoned a very good morning's work; and if they make an excursion to a mercer's or a toyshop,<sup>7</sup> so great a fatigue makes them unfit for anything else all the day after. Their more serious occupations are sewing and embroidery, and their greatest drudgery the preparation of jellies and sweetmeats. This, I say, is the state of ordinary women; though I know there are multitudes of those of a more elevated life and conversation, that move in an exalted sphere of knowledge and virtue, that join all the beauties of the mind to the ornaments of dress, and inspire a kind of awe and respect, as well as love, into their male beholders. I hope to increase the number of these by publishing this daily paper, which I shall always endeavor to make an innocent if not improving entertainment, and by that means at least divert the minds of my female readers from greater trifles. At the same time, as I would fain give some finishing touches to those which are already the most

beautiful pieces in human nature, I shall endeavor to point all those imperfections that are the blemishes, as well as those virtues which are the embellishments, of the sex. In the meanwhile I hope these my gentle readers, who have so much time on their hands, will not grudge throwing away a quarter of an hour in a day on this paper, since they may do it without any hindrance to business.

I know several of my friends and well-wishers are in great pain for me, lest I should not be able to keep up the spirit of a paper which I oblige myself to furnish every day: but to make them easy in this particular, I will promise them faithfully to give it over as soon as I grow dull. This I know will be matter of great raillery to the small wits; who will frequently put me in mind of my promise, desire me to keep my word, assure me that it is high time to give over, with many other little pleasantries of the like nature, which men of a little smart genius cannot forbear throwing out against their best friends, when they have such a handle given them of being witty. But let them remember that I do hereby enter my caveat against this piece of raillery.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Like him whose oars can hardly force his boat against the current, if by chance he relaxes his arms, the boat sweeps him headlong down the stream (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Private rooms, studies.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In *The Advancement of Learning* 2, "To the King." But it was the rod of Aaron, not of Moses, that turned into a devouring serpent (Exodus 7:10–12).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lawyers or students of the law who live or have their offices ("chambers") in the Middle or Inner Temple, one of the Inns of Court.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bringing the latest war news.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dressing table.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A shop where baubles and trifles are sold. "Suit of ribbons": a set of ribbons to be worn together. "Mercer": a seller

of such notions as tape, ribbon, and fringe.[Return to reference 7](#)

## STEELE: [Inkle and Yarico]

**The Spectator 11, Tuesday, March 13, 1711**

*Dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas.*<sup>1</sup>

—JUVENAL, *Satire* 2.63

Arietta is visited by all persons of both sexes who have any pretence to wit and gallantry. She is in that time of life which is neither affected with the follies of youth or infirmities of age; and her conversation is so mixed with gaiety and prudence that she is agreeable both to the young and the old. Her behavior is very frank without being in the least blamable; as she is out of the tract<sup>2</sup> of any amorous or ambitious pursuits of her own, her visitants entertain her with accounts of themselves very freely, whether they concern their passions or their interests. I made her a visit this afternoon, having been formerly introduced to the honor of her acquaintance by my friend Will Honeycomb, who has prevailed upon her to admit me sometimes into her assembly as a civil, inoffensive man. I found her accompanied with one person only, a commonplace talker who upon my entrance arose and after a very slight civility sat down again; then turning to Arietta pursued his discourse, which I found was upon the old topic of constancy in love. He went on with great facility in repeating what he talks every day of his life; and with the ornaments of insignificant laughs and gestures enforced his arguments by quotations out of plays and songs which allude to the perjuries of the fair and the general levity<sup>3</sup> of women. Methought he strove to shine more than ordinarily in his talkative way that he might insult my silence, and distinguish himself before a woman of Arietta's taste and understanding. She had often an inclination to interrupt him but could find no opportunity, till the larum ceased of

itself; which it did not till he had repeated and murdered the celebrated story of the Ephesian Matron.<sup>4</sup>

Arietta seemed to regard this piece of raillery as an outrage done to her sex, as indeed I have always observed that women, whether out of a nicer regard to their honor or what other reason I cannot tell, are more sensibly touched with those general aspersions which are cast upon their sex than men are by what is said of theirs.

When she had a little recovered her self from the serious anger she was in, she replied in the following manner.

Sir, when I consider how perfectly new all you have said on this subject is, and that the story you have given us is not quite two thousand years old, I cannot but think it a piece of presumption to dispute with you. But your quotations put in me in mind of the fable of the Lion and the Man.<sup>5</sup> The man walking with that noble animal showed him, in the ostentation of human superiority, a sign of a man killing a lion. Upon which the lion said very justly, "We lions are none of us painters, else we could show a hundred men killed by lions, for one lion killed by a man." You men are writers and can represent us women as unbecoming as you please in your works, while we are unable to return the injury. You have twice or thrice observed in your discourse that hypocrisy is the very foundation of our education; and that an ability to dissemble our affections is a professed part of our breeding. These and such other reflections are sprinkled up and down the writings of all ages by authors who leave behind them memorials of their resentment against the scorn of particular women in invectives against the whole sex. Such a writer, I doubt not, was the celebrated Petronius, who invented the pleasant aggravations of the frailty of the Ephesian Lady; but when we consider this question between the sexes, which has been either a point of dispute or raillery ever since there were men and women, let us take facts from plain people, and from such as have not either ambition or capacity to embellish their narrations with any beauties of imagination. I was the other day amusing myself with Ligon's account of Barbados; and in answer to your well-wrought tale, I will

give you (as it dwells upon my memory) out of that honest traveler, in his fifty fifth page, the history of Inkle and Yarico.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Thomas Inkle of London, aged twenty years, embarked in the Downs<sup>7</sup> on the good ship called the Achilles, bound for the West Indies, on the 16th of June 1647, in order to improve his fortune by trade and merchandise. Our adventurer was the third son of an eminent citizen,<sup>8</sup> who had taken particular care to instill into his mind an early love of gain by making him a perfect master of numbers, and consequently giving him a quick view of loss and advantage, and preventing the natural impulses of his passions by prepossession towards his interests. With a mind thus turned, young Inkle had a person<sup>9</sup> every way agreeable, a ruddy vigor in his countenance, strength in his limbs, with ringlets of fair hair loosely flowing on his shoulders. It happened in the course of the voyage that the Achilles, in some distress, put into a creek on the main<sup>1</sup> of America in search of provisions. The youth, who is the hero of my story, among others went ashore on this occasion. From their first landing they were observed by a party of Indians who hid themselves in the woods for that purpose. The English unadvisedly marched a great distance from the shore into the country, and were intercepted by the natives, who slew the greatest number of them. Our adventurer escaped among others by flying into a forest. Upon his coming into a remote and pathless part of the wood, he threw himself, tired and breathless, on a little hillock, when an Indian maid rushed from a thicket behind him. After the first surprise, they appeared mutually agreeable to each other. If the European was highly charmed with the limbs, features, and wild graces of the naked American, the American was no less taken with the dress, complexion, and shape of an European, covered from head to foot. The Indian grew immediately enamored of him, and consequently solicitous for his preservation. She therefore conveyed him to a cave, where she gave him a delicious repast of fruits, and led him to a stream to slake his thirst. In the midst of these good offices, she would sometimes play with his hair and delight in the opposition of its color to that of her fingers; then open his bosom, then laugh at

him for covering it. She was, it seems, a person of distinction, for she every day came to him in a different dress of the most beautiful shells, bugles and breches.<sup>2</sup> She likewise brought him a great many spoils which her other lovers had presented to her; so that his cave was richly adorned with all the spotted skins of beasts and most parti-colored feathers of fowls which that world afforded. To make his confinement more tolerable, she would carry him in the dusk of the evening or by the favor of moonlight to unfrequented groves and solitudes, and show him where to lie down in safety and sleep amidst the falls of waters and melody of nightingales. Her part was to watch and hold him awake in her arms for fear of her countrymen, and wake him on occasions to consult his safety. In this manner did the lovers pass away their time, till they had learned a language of their own in which the voyager communicated to his mistress how happy he should be to have her in his country, where she should be clothed in such silks as his waistcoat was made of and be carried in houses drawn by horses, without being exposed to wind or weather. All this he promised her the enjoyment of, without such fears and alarms as they were there tormented with. In this tender correspondence these lovers lived for several months, when Yarico, instructed by her lover, discovered a vessel on the coast, to which she made signals, and in the night, with the utmost joy and satisfaction, accompanied him to a ship's crew of his countrymen bound for Barbados. When a vessel from the main arrives in that island, it seems the planters come down to the shore, where there is an immediate market of the Indians and other slaves, as with us of horses and oxen.

To be short, Mr. Thomas Inkle, now coming into English territories, began seriously to reflect upon his loss of time and to weigh with himself how many days' interest of his money he had lost during his stay with Yarico. This thought made the young man very pensive and careful what account he should be able to give his friends<sup>3</sup> of his voyage. Upon which considerations, the prudent and frugal young man sold Yarico to a Barbadian merchant; notwithstanding that the poor girl, to incline him to commiserate her



condition, told him that she was with child by him. But he only made use of that information to rise in his demands upon the purchaser.

I was so touched with this story (which I think should be always a counterpart to the Ephesian Matron) that I left the room with tears in my eyes; which a woman of Arietta's good sense did, I am sure, take for greater applause than any compliments I could make her.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Censure acquits the raven, but pursues the dove (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Course, way of acting.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Frivolity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A story from Petronius's *Satyricon*, satirizing a supposedly grieving widow who allows a soldier to seduce her and to steal her husband's body. See Haywood's *Fantomina*, p. 659. "Larum": clamor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Attributed to Aesop, the name under which a body of beast fables from Greek antiquity and later are collected. Compare with Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 698.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657), Richard Ligon tells the first version of this story, which was retold throughout the 18th century. Steele invents the names of the lovers and many incidental details.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An anchorage off the southeast coast of England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Inhabitant of a city (especially London), often identified as "a man of trade, not a gentleman" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Physical appearance.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mainland.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tube-shaped glass beads and braided or interwoven ornaments.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Family members and other connections. [Return to reference 3](#)

## ADDISON: [The Hoop Petticoat]

**The Spectator 127, Thursday, July 26, 1711**

*Quantum est in rebus Inane?*

—PERSIUS, *Satires* 1.1<sup>1</sup>

It is our custom at Sir Roger's, upon the coming in of the post, to sit about a pot of coffee, and hear the old knight read Dyer's *Letter*,<sup>2</sup> which he does with his spectacles upon his nose, and in an audible voice, smiling very often at those little strokes of satire which are so frequent in the writings of that author. I afterwards communicate to the knight such packets as I receive under the quality of<sup>3</sup> Spectator. The following letter chancing to please him more than ordinary, I shall publish it at his request.

Mr. Spectator,

You have diverted the town almost a whole month at the expense of the country;<sup>4</sup> it is now high time that you should give the country their revenge. Since your withdrawing from this place, the fair sex are run into great extravagancies. Their petticoats, which began to heave and swell before you left us, are now blown up into a most enormous concave, and rise every day more and more. In short, Sir, since our women know themselves to be out of the eye of the Spectator, they will be kept within no compass. You praised them a little too soon for the modesty of their head-dresses; for as the humor<sup>5</sup> of a sick person is often driven out of one limb into another, their superfluity of ornaments, instead of being entirely banished, seems only fallen from their heads upon their lower parts. What they have lost in height they make up in breadth, and contrary to all rules of architecture, widen the foundations at the same time that they shorten the superstructure. Were they, like Spanish jennets, to

impregnate by the wind, they could not have thought on a more proper invention.<sup>6</sup> But as we do not yet hear any particular use in this petticoat, or that it contains anything more than what was supposed to be in those of scantier make, we are wonderfully at a loss about it.

The women give out,<sup>7</sup> in defense of these wide bottoms, that they are airy, and very proper for the season; but this I look upon to be only a pretense, and a piece of art,<sup>8</sup> for it is well known we have not had a more moderate summer these many years, so that it is certain the heat they complain of cannot be in the weather. Besides, I would fain ask these tender-constituted ladies, why they should require more cooling than their mothers before them.

I find several speculative persons are of opinion that our sex has of late years been very saucy,<sup>9</sup> and that the hoop petticoat is made use of to keep us at a distance. It is most certain that a woman's honor cannot be better entrenched than after this manner, in circle within circle, amidst such a variety of outworks and lines of circumvallation.<sup>1</sup> A female who is thus invested in whale-bone is sufficiently secured against the approaches of an ill-bred fellow, who might as well think of Sir George Etherege's way of making love in a tub, as in the midst of so many hoops.<sup>2</sup>

Among these various conjectures, there are men of superstitious tempers who look upon the hoop petticoat as a kind of prodigy.<sup>3</sup> Some will have it that it portends the downfall of the French king,<sup>4</sup> and observe that the farthingale appeared in England a little before the ruin of the Spanish monarchy.<sup>5</sup> Others are of opinion that it foretells battle and bloodshed, and believe it of the same prognostication as the tail of a blazing star.<sup>6</sup> For my part, I am apt to think it is a sign that multitudes are coming into the world rather than going out of it.

The first time I saw a lady dressed in one of these petticoats, I could not forbear blaming her in my own thoughts for walking abroad when she was *so near her Time*,<sup>7</sup> but soon recovered myself out of my error, when I found all the modish part of the sex as *far*

*gone* as herself. It is generally thought some crafty women have thus betrayed their companions into hoops, that they might make them accessory to their own concealments, and by that means escape the censure of the world; as wary generals have sometimes dressed two or three dozen of their friends in their own habit, that they might not draw upon themselves any particular attacks of the enemy. The strutting petticoat smooths all distinctions, levels the mother with the daughter, and sets maids and matrons, wives and widows, upon the same bottom.<sup>8</sup> In the meanwhile, I cannot but be troubled to see so many well-shaped, innocent virgins bloated up, and waddling up and down like big-bellied<sup>9</sup> women.

Should this fashion get among the ordinary people, our public ways would be so crowded that we should want street-room. Several congregations of the best fashion find themselves already very much straightened, and if the mode increase I wish it may not drive many ordinary women into meetings and conventicles.<sup>1</sup> Should our sex at the same time take it into their heads to wear trunk breeches<sup>2</sup> (as who knows what their indignation at this female treatment may drive them to) a man and his wife would fill a whole pew.

You know, Sir, it is recorded of Alexander the Great, that in his Indian expedition he buried several suits of armor, which by his direction were made much too big for any of his soldiers, in order to give posterity an extraordinary idea of him, and make them believe he had commanded an army of giants.<sup>3</sup> I am persuaded that if one of the present petticoats happen to be hung up in any repository of curiosities, it will lead into the same error the generations that lie some removes from us; unless we can believe our posterity will think so disrespectfully of their great-grandmothers, that they made themselves monstrous to appear amiable.

When I survey this new-fashioned rotunda<sup>4</sup> in all its parts, I cannot but think of the old philosopher, who after having entered into an Egyptian temple, and looked about for the idol of the place, at length discovered a little black monkey enshrined in the midst of it, upon which he could not forbear crying out (to the great scandal

of the worshippers), "What a magnificent palace is here for such a ridiculous inhabitant!"<sup>5</sup>

Though you have taken a resolution, in one of your papers, to avoid descending to particularities of dress,<sup>6</sup> I believe you will not think it below you, on so extraordinary an occasion, to unhoop the fair sex, and cure this fashionable tympany<sup>7</sup> that is got among them. I am apt to think the petticoat will shrink of its own accord at your first coming to town; at least a touch of your pen will make it contract itself, like the sensitive plant, and by that means oblige several who are either terrified or astonished at this portentous novelty, and among the rest,

*Your humble Servant, &c.*

C.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: How much emptiness is there in things (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Dyer (1653/4–1713, not the Welsh poet), a writer of political newsletters that circulated in manuscript, with a country and Tory orientation that would appeal to Sir Roger.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: By the title or in the capacity of. "Packets": letters to the editor; the *Spectator* often published both actual and fictional ones (the following is a fiction of Addison's).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In *Spectator* 106 (Monday, July 2, 1711), Mr. Spectator accepts Sir Roger's invitation to spend a month with him in the country, and during that time, several *Spectator* papers gently satirize country life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here, an abnormal state of the bodily fluids believed to determine illness or health. "Modesty of their head-dresses": Addison praises this development in women's fashion in *Spectator* 98 (Friday, June 22, 1711).[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: An old legend tells of mares in Spain becoming pregnant by the wind. "Jennet": a small Spanish horse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Declare.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Deception, artifice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sexually aggressive. "Our sex": here the letter-writer indicates he is a man.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Defensive wall outside a besieged place. "Outworks": fortifications outside the main walls.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Toward the end of *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (1664), the first play by prominent Restoration comic playwright George Etherege (ca. 1636–1692), the ludicrous French servant Dufoy is drugged and trapped in tub by Betty, a chambermaid with whom he had pretended to be in love.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Omen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The mighty Louis XIV (1638–1715), whose downfall was much anticipated.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In 1557, the Spanish Crown declared the first in a series of nine bankruptcies, extending to the mid-17th century; and in 1558, the joint monarchy of England and Ireland held by Mary I and her husband, Philip II of Spain, ended with Mary's death and the accession of Elizabeth I. "Farthingale": also called the Spanish farthingale (from the Spanish *verdugado*, cane or rod), a whalebone framework for skirts that came into fashion in England in the 1540s and 1550s (worn by Mary, among others).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Comets were thought to portend disasters.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: So near to her pregnancy's coming to term.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Footing (with bawdy pun).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Pregnant.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Clandestine assemblies of Dissenters, unsanctioned by the Church of England. That is, unfashionable women may find themselves so hemmed in (straightened) at legitimate church

services that they will instead attend radical Protestant meetings.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Baggy, full-cut breeches, also called trunk hose, that covered the hips and upper thighs, sometimes shaped with stuffing of wool or other material, worn by men in the 16th and early 17th centuries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Greek-Roman historian Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 119 C.E.) tells this story in his “Life of Alexander” included in his series of biographies, *Parallel Lives* (early 2nd century C.E.).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Domed building.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thoth, Egyptian god of wisdom and writing, was often depicted with the head of a baboon.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addison did so in *Spectator* 16 (Monday, March 19, 1711).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A swelling; it could refer to a tumor, a pregnancy, or the swellings of pride or conceit.[Return to reference 7](#)



# ADDISON: [The Pleasures of the Imagination]

**The Spectator 411, Saturday, June 21, 1712**

*Avia Pieridum peragro loca, nullius ante  
Trita solo; juvat integros accedere fonts [fonteis];  
Atque haurire:*<sup>1</sup> . . .

—LUCRETIVS, *De Rerum Natura*, 1.926–8

Our sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses. It fills the mind with the largest variety of ideas, converses with its objects at the greatest distance, and continues the longest in action without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments. The sense of feeling can indeed give us a notion of extension, shape, and all other ideas that enter at the eye, except colors; but at the same time it is very much straitened and confined in its operations, to the number, bulk, and distance of its particular objects. Our sight seems designed to supply all these defects, and may be considered as a more delicate and diffusive kind of touch, that spreads itself over an infinite multitude of bodies, comprehends the largest figures, and brings into our reach some of the most remote parts of the universe.

It is this sense which furnishes the imagination with its ideas; so that by the pleasures of the imagination or fancy (which I shall use promiscuously<sup>2</sup>) I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion. We cannot indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight; but we have the power of retaining, altering, and compounding those images

which we have once received into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination; for by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature.

There are few words in the English language which are employed in a more loose and uncircumscribed sense than those of the fancy and the imagination. I therefore thought it necessary to fix and determine the notion of these two words, as I intend to make use of them in the thread of my following speculations, that the reader may conceive rightly what is the subject which I proceed upon. I must therefore desire him to remember that by the pleasures of the imagination I mean only such pleasures as arise originally from sight, and that I divide these pleasures into two kinds: my design being first of all to discourse of those primary pleasures of the imagination which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes; and in the next place to speak of those secondary pleasures of the imagination which flow from the ideas of visible objects when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious.

The pleasures of the imagination taken in their full extent are not so gross as those of sense nor so refined as those of the understanding. The last are indeed more preferable, because they are founded on some new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man; yet it must be confessed that those of the imagination are as great and as transporting as the other. A beautiful prospect delights the soul as much as a demonstration; and a description in Homer has charmed more readers than a chapter in Aristotle. Besides, the pleasures of the imagination have this advantage above those of the understanding, that they are more obvious and more easy to be acquired. It is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. The colors paint themselves on the fancy with very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately

assent to the beauty of an object without enquiring into the particular causes and occasions of it.

A man of a polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures that the vulgar<sup>3</sup> are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a picture and find an agreeable companion in a statue. He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows than another does in the possession. It gives him indeed a kind of property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude, uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasure; so that he looks upon the world, as it were, in another light, and discovers in it a multitude of charms that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind.

There are indeed but very few who know how to be idle and innocent, or have a relish of any pleasures that are not criminal; every diversion they take is at the expense of some one virtue or another, and their very first step out of business is into vice or folly. A man should endeavor, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with safety, and find in them such a satisfaction as a wise man would not blush to take. Of this nature are those of the imagination, which do not require such a bent of thought as is necessary to our more serious employments, nor at the same time suffer the mind to sink into that negligence and remissness which are apt to accompany our more sensual delights, but, like a gentle exercise to the faculties, awaken them from sloth and idleness without putting them upon any labor or difficulty.

We might here add that the pleasures of the fancy are more conducive to health than those of the understanding, which are worked out by dint of thinking and attended with too violent a labor of the brain. Delightful scenes, whether in nature, painting, or poetry, have a kindly influence on the body as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination but are able to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the animal spirits<sup>4</sup> in pleasing and agreeable motions. For this reason Sir Francis Bacon in his Essay upon Health<sup>5</sup> has not thought it improper to prescribe to

his reader a poem or a prospect, where he particularly dissuades him from knotty and subtle disquisitions, and advises him to pursue studies that fill the mind with splendid and illustrious objects, as histories, fables, and contemplations of nature.

I have in this paper, by way of introduction, settled the notion of those pleasures of the imagination which are the subject of my present undertaking, and endeavored by several considerations to recommend to my reader the pursuit of those pleasures. I shall in my next paper examine the several sources from whence these pleasures are derived.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: I wander paths of the Pierides [Muses] not traveled before and joy to be the first to drink at untasted springs (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Without discriminating between them.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ordinary sort of person. "Polite": cultivated, refined.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Principle of animating bodily energy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bacon's Essay 30, "Of Regiment of Health," appeared in his *Essays* (1597).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addison wrote eleven papers on various aspects of the pleasures of the imagination (*Spectator* 411–21), of which this is the first.[Return to reference 6](#)

# THE ARABIAN NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS 1706–21

Magic words. Evil sorcerers. Underground palaces. Women turned into dogs. Bargains with genies. An enchanted lamp. A valley full of diamonds and giant snakes. The magical stories collected in *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* captured the British imagination in ways that illuminate the complicated, entangled relations between Britain and the increasingly interconnected world in the eighteenth century.

*The Arabian Nights Entertainments* was massively popular in Britain in the eighteenth century—it went through twenty editions, provoked a slew of competing collections and imitations, and influenced countless writers. Novelist Horace Walpole told a friend that these tales (with “a wildness in them that captivates”) were better than Virgil’s Latin classics: “Read Sinbad the Sailor’s voyages, and you will be sick of Aeneas’s.”

What we know in English today as the *Arabian Nights* can be traced to a fifteenth-century Syrian manuscript in Arabic, *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (“The Thousand and One Nights”)—though this manuscript is itself a collection of older Persian, Indian, and Arabic stories. At the heart of the collection is the brave young woman Scheherazade: the spellbinding storyteller who keeps the murderous Sultan Schahriar fascinated enough to put off, night after night, his plan of

killing her in the morning. Scheherazade's story (which exists in an Arabic fragment from the ninth century) frames all the other stories in the compilation, which are offered as from Scheherazade's mouth.

So the *Arabian Nights* is very old, but, in a way, it is also a distinctive product of an eighteenth-century encounter between European and eastern cultures. The French scholar Antoine Galland became interested in Arabic fiction while he was working with a French ambassador in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). Galland later acquired the fifteenth-century Syrian manuscript and started translating. He published twelve volumes of *Les Mille et Une Nuits* ("A Thousand and One Nights") in France between 1705 and 1717, and in so doing he remade the old text. He drew material from the Syrian manuscript, but he also included stories from other sources, like the magical adventures of Sinbad the sailor that he found in a different Arabic manuscript. Two of his collection's most famous stories today—"The Story of Aladdin; or, the Wonderful Lamp" and "The Story of Ali Baba," featured here—came from Galland's wide-ranging additions. Galland first heard these two told aloud in 1709 by Syrian storyteller Hanna Diyab, and Galland's versions were the first ever printed. We just do not know what in "Ali Baba" came from an older oral tradition, what from Hanna's performance, and what from Galland's own imagination. Certainly, the story shares magical plot points and criminal characters with stories in the older collection, but its themes also resonate richly with other eighteenth-century French and English fictions: money, greed, curiosity, and individuals trying to rise in the world.

Almost as soon as each of Galland's French volumes appeared, they were translated into English and published in London. Little is known about the anonymous translator. The English edition is often called the "Grub Street" translation, referring to a print marketplace that was characterized by piecework for profit and hack writers. The authorship of the wildly popular *Arabian Nights Entertainments* is thus multiple and complex: countless anonymous Persian, Indian, and Arabic storytellers and scribes stretching back centuries, an identifiable eighteenth-century French scholar and Syrian storyteller,

and an unknown English translator. And the lines of global transmission remained tangled even after the publication: the first printed Arabic-language version of the *Nights* would first appear in early nineteenth-century Calcutta (Kolkata today), where its publication was meant to help officers of the British East India Company learn the language. And the whole story collection is now often described internationally by the title invented by the eighteenth-century English translator: *Arabian* (instead of *A Thousand and One*) *Nights*.

Galland was interested in Persian and Arabic tales almost anthropologically, for what they told him about the cultures they came from, but he also brought his own European biases and fascinations to his translation. Many scholars have found it helpful to understand Galland's version of the tales as part of what theorist Edward Said calls the discourse of "orientalism," a discourse produced by European writers whose vision of "the Orient" (a bunch of different cultures lumped together) was shaped by their own imperial fantasies and fears of cultural difference. In contrast to an emerging "western" self-understanding emphasizing reason, power, and modernity, they dreamed of "eastern" or "oriental" violence, weakness, opulence, and sex. Of course, at this same moment, European countries were inflicting their own violence in eastern colonial sites: Said insists that the binaries were always loaded, ideological, and connected to the pursuit of imperial projects. Also Galland was not *only* projecting, for he was also working closely with manuscripts in a genuine cross-cultural encounter. But the resulting *Arabian Nights* spurred a lively fad in Britain for oriental tales that used exotic locales and fantastic plots as a way of working out anxieties and desires central to Britain's sense of itself and its imperial project. The English oriental tale popularized in the *Nights'* wake was a hybrid form, offering a heady mix of sensual spectacle, mind-bending magic, moral fable, romance adventure, and political satire.

The *Nights* were a key influence on English fiction and the emerging novel in eighteenth-century England. This is fitting, for the

*Nights* themselves stage the power of its fictions to influence. The collection starts with Schahriar's diatribe against women: he is convinced that all women are unchaste and unfaithful, as his first wife had been. But then the brave Scheherazade starts strategically manipulating the sultan's desire for both her body and her stories. The stories she tells sometimes obliquely warn against cruel despotism (like Schahriar's murderous plan), and they often feature remarkable, smart, and resourceful women protagonists—like the brilliant enslaved girl Morgiana who saves Ali Baba multiple times. In the conclusion to the French and English volumes, Scheherazade's stories eventually reform the sultan and protect all the women of his empire. (In some extant Arabic manuscripts, Scheherazade produces not only a thousand and one nights of tales but also, in that time, three children.) The book is fundamentally about the inexhaustible, life-giving, world-shaping power of stories.



# ***From The Arabian Nights Entertainments***<sup>1</sup>

## ***[The Story of Schahriar and Scheherazade]***<sup>2</sup>

Being persuaded that no woman was chaste, [Schahriar] resolved, in order to prevent the disloyalty of such as he should afterwards marry, to wed one every night, and have her strangled next morning. Having imposed this cruel law upon himself, he swore that he would observe it immediately after the departure of the King of Tartary, who speedily took leave of him, and being loaden with magnificent presents set forward on his journey.<sup>3</sup>

Schahzenan being gone, Schahriar ordered his Grand Vizier<sup>4</sup> to bring him the daughter of one of his generals. The Vizier obeyed, the Sultan lay with her, and putting her next morning into his hands again, in order to be strangled, commanded him to get another next night. Whatever reluctancy the Vizier had to put such orders in execution, as he owed blind obedience to the Sultan his master, he was forced to submit. He brought him then the daughter of a subaltern, whom he also cut off the next day. After her he brought a citizen's daughter, and, in a word, there was every day a maid married and a wife murdered.

The rumor of this unparalleled barbarity occasioned a general consternation in the city, where there was nothing but crying and lamentation. Here a father in tears, and unconsolable for the loss of his daughter, and there tender mothers dreading lest theirs should have the same fate, making the air to resound beforehand with their groans. So that instead of the commendations and blessings which the Sultan had hitherto received from his subjects, their mouths were now filled with imprecations against him.

The Grand Vizier, who, as has been already said, was the executioner of this horrid injustice, against his will, had two daughters, the eldest called Scheherazade, and the youngest Dinarzade: the latter was a lady of very great merit, but the elder

had courage, wit, and penetration infinitely above her sex; she had read abundance, and had such a prodigious memory that she never forgot anything. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physic,<sup>5</sup> history, and the liberal arts, and for verse exceeded the best poets of her time: besides this, she was a perfect beauty, and all her fine qualifications were crowned by a solid virtue.

The Vizier passionately loved a daughter so worthy of his tender affection; and one day as they were discoursing together, she says to him, "Father, I have one favor to beg of you, and most humbly pray you to grant it me." "I will not refuse it," answers he, "provided it be just and reasonable." "For the justice of it," says she, "there can be no question, and you may judge of it by the motive which obliges me to demand it of you. I have a design to stop the course of that barbarity which the Sultan exercises upon the families of this city. I would dispel those unjust fears which so many mothers have of losing their daughter in such a fatal manner." "Your design, daughter," replies the Vizier, "is very commendable; but the disease you would remedy to me seems incurable; how do you pretend to effect it?" "Father," says Scheherazade, "since by your means the Sultan makes every day a new marriage, I conjure you by the tender affection you bear to me, to procure me the honor of his bed." The Vizier could not hear this without horror. "O Heaven!" replies he in passion, "Have you lost your senses daughter, that you make such a dangerous request to me? You know the Sultan has sworn by his soul, that he will never lie above one night with the same woman, and to order her to be killed next morning, and would you that I should propose you to him? Pray consider well to what your indiscrete zeal will expose you." "Yes, dear father," replies this virtuous daughter, "I know the risk I run, but that does not frighten me. If I perish, my death will be glorious; and if I succeed, I shall do my country an important piece of service." "No, no," says the Vizier, "whatever you can represent to engage me to let you throw yourself into that horrible danger, don't you think that ever I will agree to it. When the Sultan shall order me to strike my poniard<sup>6</sup> into your heart, alas! I must obey him, and what a dismal employment is that

for a father? Ah! if you don't fear death, yet at least be afraid of occasioning me the mortal grief of seeing my hand stained with your blood." "Once more father," says Scheherazade, "grant me the favor I beg." "Your stubbornness," replies the Vizier, "will make me angry, why will you run headlong to your ruin? They that don't foresee the end of a dangerous enterprise, can never bring it to a happy issue."<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

"Father," replies Scheherazade, "I beg you would not take it ill that I persist in my opinion. I am nothing moved by the story of that woman.<sup>8</sup> I can tell you abundance of others to persuade you that you ought not to oppose my design. Besides, pardon me for declaring to you, that your opposing me would be in vain; for if your paternal affection should hinder you to grant my request, I would go and offer myself to the Sultan." In short, the father being overcome by the resolution of his daughter, yielded to her importunity, and though he was very much grieved that he could not divert her from such a fatal resolution, he went that minute to acquaint the Sultan, that next night he would bring him Scheherazade.

The Sultan was much surprised at the sacrifice which the Grand Vizier made to him. "How could you resolve upon it," says he, "to bring me your own daughter?" "Sir," answers the Vizier, "it's her own offer. The sad destiny that attends it could not scare her, she prefers the honor of being your Majesty's wife one night to her life." "But don't mistake yourself Vizier," says the Sultan, "tomorrow when I put Scheherazade into your hands, I expect you should take away her life, and if you fail, I swear that you yourself shall die." "Sir," rejoins the Vizier, "my heart without doubt will be full of grief to execute your commands, but it is to no purpose for nature to murmur,<sup>9</sup> though I be her father, I will answer for the fidelity of my hand to obey your order." Schahriar accepted his minister's offer, and told him he might bring his daughter when he pleased.

The Grand Vizier went with the news to Scheherazade, who received it with as much joy as if it had been the most agreeable

thing in the world; she thanked her father for having obliged her in so sensible a manner, and perceiving that he was overwhelmed with grief, she told him, in order to his consolation, that she hoped he would never repent his having married her to the Sultan; but that on the contrary, he should have cause to rejoice in it all his days.

All her business was to put herself in a condition to appear before the Sultan; but before she went, she took her sister Dinarzade apart, and says to her, "My dear sister, I have need of your help in a matter of very great importance, and must pray you not to deny it me. My father is going to carry me to the Sultan to be his wife; don't let this frighten you, but hear me with patience. As soon as I am come to the Sultan, I will pray him to allow you to lie in the bride-chamber, that I may enjoy your company this one night more. If I obtain that favor, as I hope to do, remember to awake me tomorrow, an hour before the day, and to address me in these or some such words. 'My sister, if you be not asleep, I pray you that till daybreak, which will be very speedily, you would tell me one of the fine stories of which you have read so many.' Immediately I will tell you one; and I hope by this means to deliver the city from the consternation they are under at present." Dinarzade answered, that she would obey with pleasure what she required of her.

The time of going to bed being come, the Grand Vizier conducted Scheherazade to the palace, and retired after having introduced her into the Sultan's apartment. As soon as the Sultan was left alone with her, he ordered her to uncover her face, and found it so beautiful, that he was perfectly charmed with her; and perceiving her to be in tears, asked her the reason. "Sir," answered Scheherazade, "I have a sister who loves me tenderly as I do her, and I could wish that she might be allowed to be all night in this chamber, that I might see her, and bid her once more adieu. Will you be pleased to allow me the comfort of giving her this last testimony of my friendship?" Schahriar having consented to it, Dinarzade was sent for, who came with all possible diligence. The Sultan went to bed with Scheherazade upon an alcove raised very high, according

to the custom of the monarchs of the East, and Dinarzade lay in a bed that was prepared for her, near the foot of the alcove.

An hour before day, Dinarzade being awake, failed not to do as her sister ordered her. "My dear sister," cries she, "if you be not asleep, I pray until daybreak, which will be in a very little time, that you will tell me one of those pleasant stories you have read; Alas! this may perhaps be the last time, that ever I shall have that satisfaction."

Scheherazade, instead of answering her sister, addressed herself to the Sultan thus; "Sir, will your Majesty be pleased to allow me to give my sister this satisfaction?" "With all my heart," answers the Sultan. Then Scheherazade bid her sister listen, and afterwards addressing herself to Schahriar, begun thus.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

As she had spoke those words, perceiving it was day, and knowing that the Sultan rose betimes<sup>2</sup> in the morning to say his prayers and hold his council, Scheherazade held her peace. "Lord, sister," says Dinarzade, "what a wonderful story is this." "The remainder of it," says Scheherazade, "is more surprising, and you will be of my mind, if the Sultan will let me live this day, and permit me to tell it you next night." Schahriar, who had listened to Scheherazade with pleasure, says to himself, "I will stay<sup>3</sup> till tomorrow, for I can at any time put her to death, when she has made an end of the story." So having resolved not to take away Scheherazade's life that day, he rose and went to his prayers, and then called his council.

All this while the Grand Vizier was terrible uneasy. Instead of sleeping, he spent the night in sighs and groans, bewailing the lot of his daughter, of whom he believed that he himself should be the executioner. And as in that melancholy prospect, he was afraid of seeing the Sultan; he was agreeably surprised when he saw the prince enter the council chamber without giving him the fatal orders he expected.

The Sultan, according to his custom, spent the day in regulating his affairs; and when night came, he went to bed with Scheherazade. Next morning before day, Dinarzade failed not to address herself to her sister thus; "My dear sister, if you be not asleep, I pray you, till daybreak, which must be in a very little time, to go on with the story you began last night." The Sultan without staying till Scheherazade asked him leave, bid her make an end of the story of the genie and the merchant, "for I long to hear the issue<sup>4</sup> of it."

## Endnotes

1706

- Note 1: The text is taken from the earliest English versions of *Arabian Nights*. Quotation marks have been added to the dialogue for clarity.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Arabian Nights Entertainments* opens with the stories of two powerful brothers, Schahriar, the sultan of a vast empire in Persia and the Indies, and Schahzenan, king of Great Tartary (whose capital is in modern-day Uzbekistan). Both men discover that their wives have been unfaithful to them, and both kill their wives. The sexual betrayal leads Schahriar to his plan: he will marry a different woman every night and every morning have that woman killed. This frame story is part of the earliest extant versions of the *Nights* in Arabic.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Schahzenan, the sultan's brother, having come to terms with his own late wife's fidelity, returns home.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The sultan's chief minister.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Medicine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dagger.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Vizier then tries to change Scheherazade's mind by telling her two moral fables.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Vizier's second story featured a wife who insists on knowing a secret, which, if told, would cost her husband's life.

Her husband solves the problem brutally by beating her.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: For his natural feelings to resist the task.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scheherazade starts to tell her first story, about a merchant who accidentally kills a genie's son.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Early.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wait, refrain from acting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outcome.[Return to reference 4](#)

## ***[The Story of Ali Baba, and the Forty Thieves Destroyed by a Slave]<sup>1</sup>***

Most mighty Sultan (said Scheherazade),<sup>2</sup> in a town in Persia, on the confines of your Majesty's dominions, there lived two brothers called Cassim and Ali Baba, who, though they were left equally alike<sup>3</sup> by their father, whose substance was but small, yet they were not alike favorites of fortune.

Cassim married a wife, who soon after their marriage was left heir to a plentiful estate, and rich merchandises, so that he became a rich and considerable merchant and lived at his ease.

Ali Baba, on the other hand, who married a woman as poor as himself, lived very meanly, and was forced to maintain his wife and children by his daily labor, by cutting of wood in a forest hard by the town, and bringing it upon three asses, which were his whole substance,<sup>4</sup> to town to sell.

One day, when Ali Baba was in the forest, and had just cut wood enough to load his asses, he saw at a distance a great cloud of dust, which seemed to approach towards him; he observed it very attentively, and distinguished a large body of horse,<sup>5</sup> and though they did not talk much of thieves in that country, Ali Baba began to think that they might prove so, and without considering what might become of his asses, he was resolved to save one, and to that end climbed up a large, thick and close-leafed tree, from whence he could see all that passed without being seen; and this tree stood at the bottom of a rock which was very high, and so steep and craggy that nobody could climb up it.

This troop, who were all well mounted and well armed, came to the foot of this rock, and there dismounted. Ali Baba counted forty of them, and by their mien and equipment never doubted but that they were thieves, and in his opinion was not mistaken, for they were a troop of banditti<sup>6</sup> who robbed thereabouts, and made that place their rendezvous; and what confirmed him in this opinion was, every man unbridled his horse, and tied him to some shrub or other,



and hung a bag of corn they brought behind them about his neck; then each of them took his portmanteau,<sup>7</sup> which seemed to Ali Baba to be gold and silver by the weight, and followed one who was most likely among them, and whom he took to be their captain, who with his portmanteau too in his hand, came under the tree in which Ali Baba was hid, and traversing among some shrubs, pronounced these words distinctly, "*Sesame*" (which is a sort of corn) "*open.*" As soon as the captain of the robbers had said these words, a door opened, and after he had made all his troop go in, he followed them himself, and the door shut again.

The thieves stayed some time within the rock, and Ali Baba, who feared that someone, or all of them together should come out and catch him, if he should endeavor to make his escape, sat very patiently in the tree; but was nevertheless tempted once or twice to get down and mount one of their horses and lead another, and make all the haste he could to town; but the uncertainty of the event<sup>8</sup> made him choose the safest way.

At last the door opened again, and the forty robbers came out again; as the captain went in last, he came out first, and stood to see them all pass by him, and then Ali Baba heard him bid the door shut by pronouncing these words, "*Shut Sesame.*" Every man went and bridled his horse, fastened his portmanteau, and mounted again; and when the captain saw them all ready, he put himself at their head, and returned the same way he came.

Ali Baba all this time never stirred out of the tree; for, said he to himself, "they may have forgot something, and come back again, and then shall I be taken," but followed them with his eyes as far as he could see them; and after that, stayed some time, before he came down, and remembering the word the captain of the thieves made use of to open and shut, he had the curiosity to try if his pronouncing of it would have the same effect. Accordingly he went among the shrubs, and perceiving the door, he said, "*Open Sesame*"; the door flew wide open.

Ali Baba, who expected a dark dismal place, was very much surprised to see it lightsome and spacious, cut out in the form of a

vault by men, and received the light from an opening at the top of the rock. He saw all sorts of provisions, and rich bales of merchandises, of silk stuffs,<sup>9</sup> brocades, and fine tapestries, piled upon one another, and above all, great heaps of gold and silver, and great bags laid upon one another. This sight made him believe that this cave, by the riches it contained, had been possessed not years but ages, by robbers who succeeded one another.

Ali Baba did not stand long to consider what he should do, but went immediately into the cave, and as soon as he was in, the door shut again, which never disturbed him, because he knew the secret to open it again. He never regarded the silver, but made the best use of his time in carrying out as much of that gold which was in bags, at several times, as he thought his three asses could carry. When he had done, he gathered up his asses, which were dispersed about, and when he had loaded them, covered the bags with green boughs, and pronouncing the words "*Shut Sesame*," made the best of his way to town.

When Ali Baba got home he drove his asses into a little yard, and shut the gates carefully, threw off the wood that covered the bags, carried them into his house, and ranged them in order before his wife, who sat on a sofa.

His wife handled the bags and finding them full of money, suspected that her husband had been robbing, insomuch that when he had brought them all in, she could not help saying, "Ali Baba, have you been so unhappy as to"—"Be quiet wife," interrupted Ali Baba, "do not fright yourself, I am no robber, unless he can be one who steals from thieves. You'll no longer entertain an ill opinion of me, when I shall tell you my good fortune." Then he emptied the bags, which raised such a great heap of gold, as dazzled his wife's eyes; and when he had done, told her the whole adventure from the beginning to the end, and above all recommended it to her to keep secret.

The wife, recovered and cured of her fears, rejoiced with her husband for their good luck, and would count all the gold, piece by piece. "Wife," replied Ali Baba, "you don't know what you undertake,

when you pretend to count the money, you'll never have done; I'll go and dig a hole and bury it, there's no time to be lost." "You are in the right on it, husband," replied the wife, "but let us know as nigh as possible, how much we have; I'll go borrow a small measure<sup>1</sup> in the neighborhood, and measure it while you dig the hole." "What signifies it, wife?" said Ali Baba, "if you would take my advice, you had better let it alone, but be sure to keep the secret, and do what you please."

Away the wife ran to her brother-in-law, Cassim, who lived just by, but was not then at home, and addressing herself to his wife, desired her to lend her a measure for a little while. Her sister-in-law asked her whether she would have a great one or a small one, and being told a small one, bid her stay a little, and she would fetch one.

As the sister-in-law knew very well Ali Baba's poverty, she was curious to know what sort of grain his wife wanted to measure, and bethought herself immediately of putting some suet<sup>2</sup> at the bottom of the measure, and brought it to her with an excuse, that she was sorry that she had made her stay so long, but that she could not find it sooner.

Ali Baba's wife went home, set the measure upon the heap of gold, and filled it and emptied it so often at a small distance upon the floor, and was very well satisfied to find the numbers of measures run so high as they did, and went to tell her husband, who had almost finished the hole he was digging; and while Ali Baba was burying the gold, his wife, to show exactness and respect to her sister-in-law, carried the measure back again, but without taking notice of a piece of gold that stuck at the bottom. "Sister," said she, giving it to her again, "you see that I have not kept your measure long; I am obliged to you for it, and return it with thanks."

As soon as Ali Baba's wife's back was turned, Cassim's wife looked at the bottom of the measure, and was in an inexpressible surprise to find a piece of gold stuck to it. Envy immediately possessed her breast. "What," said she, "has Ali Baba gold so plentiful, as to measure it? Where has that poor wretch got all this gold?" Cassim, her husband, was not at home, as I said before, but

at his shop, which he left always in the evening, which time she thought an age, so great was her impatience to tell him the news.

When Cassim came home, his wife said to him, "Cassim, I warrant you, you think yourself rich, but you are much mistaken; Ali Baba is infinitely much richer than you; he does not count his money, but measures it." Cassim bid her explain the riddle, which she did, by telling him the stratagem she had made use of to make the discovery, and showed him the piece of money, which was so old a coin, that they could not tell in what prince's reign it was coined.

Cassim, instead of being pleased at his brother's prosperity, conceived a mortal jealousy, and could not sleep all that night for it, but went to him in the morning before sunrise. Now Cassim, after he married the rich widow, never treated Ali Baba as a brother, but forgot that name. "Ali Baba," said he, accosting him, "you are very reserved in your affairs; you pretend to be miserably poor, and yet you measure gold." "How brother!" replied Ali Baba; "I don't know what you mean; explain yourself." "Don't pretend ignorance," replied Cassim, showing him the piece of gold his wife had given him, "How many of these pieces," added he, "have you? My wife found this at the bottom of the measure yours borrowed yesterday."

By this discourse, Ali Baba perceived that Cassim and his wife, through his own wife's folly, knew what they had so much reason to keep secret; but what was done could not be recalled; therefore, without showing the least surprise or trouble, he confessed all, and told him by what chance he had discovered this retreat of the thieves, and in what place it was, and offered him part of his treasure to keep the secret. "That's not sufficient," replied Cassim, haughtily, "I'll know exactly where this treasure is, and the signs and tokens, that I may go to it myself, when I have a mind; otherwise I will go and inform against you, and then you will lose all you have got, and I shall have half of what you have for my information."

Ali Baba, more out of his natural good temper than frightened by the insulting menaces of a barbarous brother, told him all he desired, and even the very words he was to make use of to go into the cave, and out again.

Cassim, who wanted no more of Ali Baba, left him soon after, resolving to be before hand with him,<sup>3</sup> and to get all the treasure to himself. He rose early the next morning, and a long time before the sun, and set out with ten mules loaded with great chests, which he designed to fill, purposing to carry many more the next time, according to the riches he found, and followed the road, which Ali Baba had told him: he was not long before he came to the rock, and found out the place by the tree, and other marks his brother had given him. When he came to the door, he pronounced these words, "*Open Sesame*," and it opened, and when he was in, shut again. In examining the cave, he was in a great admiration to find much more riches than he comprehended by Ali Baba's relation. He was so covetous, and desirous of riches, that he could have spent the whole day in feasting his eyes with so much treasure, if the thoughts of carrying some away with him, and loading his mules, had not hindered him. He laid as many bags of gold as he could carry at the door, and coming at last to open the door, his thoughts were so full of the great riches he should possess, that he could not think of the necessary word, but instead of *Sesame*, said, "*Open Barley*," and was very much amazed to find that the door did not open, but remained fast shut: afterwards he named several sorts of grain, but all to no purpose.

Cassim never expected such an accident, and was so frightened at the danger he was in, that the more he endeavored to remember the word *Sesame*, the more his memory was confounded, and he had as much forgot it, as if he had never heard it in his life before, but walked and fretted about the cave, without having the least regard to all the riches that were about him; and in this miserable condition, we will leave him bewailing of his fate, and undeserving of pity.

About midnight the thieves returned to their cave, and at some distance from it, found Cassim's mules straggling about the rock, with great chests and hampers on their backs. This novelty made them very uneasy, and made them gallop in full speed to the cave. The thieves never gave themselves the trouble to pursue the mules

which they drove away, but were more concerned to know who they belonged to. And while some of them searched about the rock, the captain and others went directly to the door with their naked sabers in their hands, and pronouncing the word it opened.

Cassim, who heard the noise of the horses' feet trampling about the cave, never doubted of the coming of the thieves, and his approaching death; but was resolved to make one effort to escape from them. To this end he stood ready at the door, and no sooner heard the word *Sesame*, which he had forgot, and saw the door open, but he jumped briskly out, and threw the captain down, but could not escape the other thieves, who with their sabers soon deprived him of life.

The thieves' first care after this was to go into the cave; they found all the bags which Cassim had brought to the door, to be the more ready to load his mules with, and carried them all back again, without perceiving what Ali Baba had taken away before; then holding a council, and deliberating upon this matter, they guessed that Cassim, when he was in could not get out again; but then could not imagine how he got in. First they thought that he might have got down by the top of the cave; but the opening by which it received light was so high, and the rock so inaccessible without, that they believed it impracticable; and, in short, they none of them could imagine which way he entered; for they were all persuaded, nobody knew their secret: but however it happened, it was a matter of the greatest importance to them to secure their riches; therefore they agreed to cut Cassim's body into four quarters, and to hang two on one side and two on the other, within the door of the cave, to terrify any person, that should attempt the same thing. They had no sooner taken this resolution, but they executed it. And when they had nothing more to detain them, they mounted their horses, and went to beat the roads again, and to attack the caravans they should meet.

In the meantime Cassim's wife was very uneasy; when night came, and her husband was not returned, she ran to Ali Baba in a terrible fright, and said; "I believe, brother-in-law, that you know

that Cassim is gone to the forest, and upon what account; it's now night, and he is not returned; I am afraid some misfortune has come to him." Ali Baba, who never disputed but that his brother, after what he had said to him, would go to the forest, would not go himself that day, for fear of giving him any umbrage; therefore told her, without any reflection upon her husband's unhandsome behavior, that she need not fright herself, for that certainly Cassim did not think it proper to come into the town, till the night should be pretty far advanced.

Cassim's wife, considering how much it concerned her husband to keep this thing secret, was the more easily persuaded to believe him; and went home again, and waited patiently till midnight. Then her fear redoubled with much more sensible grief, because she durst not show it, but was forced to keep it secret from the neighborhood. Then if her fault had been repairable, she repented of her foolish curiosity, and cursed her desire of penetrating into the affairs of her brother and sister. She spent all that night in tears; and as soon as it was day, went to them, telling them, by her tears, the cause of her coming.

Ali Baba never waited for his sister-in-law to desire him to go to see what was become of Cassim, but went immediately with his three asses, begging of her first to moderate her affliction. When he came near the rock, and having seen neither his brother nor his mules in his way, he was very much surprised to see some blood spilt by the door, which he took for an ill omen: but when he had pronounced the word, and the door opened, he was much more startled at the dismal sight of his brother's quarters. He was not long in thinking how he should pay the last dues to his brother, and without remembering the little brotherly friendship he had for him, went into the cave to find something to wrap them in, and loaded one of his asses with them, and covered them over with green wood; the other two asses he loaded with bags of gold, covering them with boughs also; and then bidding the door shut, came away; but was so cautious as to stop some time at the end of the forest, that he might not go into the town before night. When he came

home, he drove the two asses loaded with gold into his little yard, and left the care of unloading them to his wife, while he led the other to his sister-in-law's.

Ali Baba knocked at the door, which was opened by Morgiana, a cunning artful slave, so fruitful in her inventions, that she would succeed in the most difficult undertakings; and Ali Baba knew her to be such. When he came into the court, he unloaded his ass, and taking Morgiana aside, said to her, "The first thing I ask of thee is an inviolable secrecy, which you will find is necessary both for thy mistress's sake and mine. Thy master's body is contained in both those two bundles, and our business is to bury him as if he died a natural death; go, tell your mistress I want to speak with her, and mind what I say to you."

Morgiana went to her mistress, and Ali Baba followed her. "Well, brother," said she with great impatience, "what news do you bring me of my husband? I perceive no comfort in your countenance." "Sister," answered Ali Baba, "I cannot tell you anything, before you hear my story from the beginning to the end, without speaking a word; for it is of as great importance to you, to keep what has happened secret, as to me." "Alas!" said she, "this preamble lets me know, that my husband is dead; but at the same time I know the necessity of the secrecy you require of me, and I must constrain myself; say on, I will hear you."

Then Ali Baba told his sister the success of his journey, till he came to the finding of Cassim's body. "Now," said he, "sister, I have something to tell you, which will afflict you much the more, because it is what you so little expect; but it cannot now be remedied; and if anything can comfort you, I offer to put that little which God has sent me to what you have, and marry you, assuring you, that my wife will not be jealous; and that we shall live happily together.<sup>4</sup> If this proposal is agreeable to you, we must think of acting so, as that my brother should appear to die a natural death; and I think fit to leave the management of it to the care of Morgiana, and will contribute myself all that lies in my power."



What could Cassim's widow do better than accept of this proposal? For though her first husband had left behind him a plentiful substance, this second was much richer, and by the discovery of this treasure might be much more. Instead of rejecting the offer, she looked upon it as a reasonable motive to comfort her, and drying up her tears, and suppressing her sighings and sobbings, showed Ali Baba she approved of his proposition in this matter. Ali Baba left the widow, and also recommending to Morgiana to acquit herself well of what she had undertaken, and returned home with his ass.

Morgiana went out at the same time to an apothecary's, and asked him for a sort of lozenges, which he prepared and were very efficacious in the most dangerous distempers. The apothecary asked her, who was sick, her master? And she replied, with a sigh, her good master Cassim himself; that they knew not what his distemper was; but that he could neither eat nor speak. After these words, Morgiana carried the lozenges home with her, and the next morning went to the same apothecary's again, and with tears in her eyes, asked for an essence, with which they used to rub sick people, when at the last extremity. "Alas!" said she, taking it from the apothecary, "I am afraid that this remedy will have no better effect than the lozenges; and that I shall lose my good master."

On the other hand, as Ali Baba and his wife were often seen to go between Cassim's and their own house all that day, and to seem melancholy, nobody was much surprised in the evening, to hear the lamentable shrieks and cries of Cassim's wife and Morgiana, who told it everywhere that her master was dead.

The next morning, soon after day appeared, Morgiana, who knew a certain old cobbler that opened his stall early, before other people, went to him, and bidding him good morrow, put a piece of gold into his hand. "Well," said Baba Mustapha, which was his name, and who was a merry old fellow, looking on the gold, "this is good handsel;<sup>5</sup> what must I do for it?"

"Baba Mustapha," said Morgiana, "you must take along with you your sewing tackle, and go with me; but I must tell you, we must

blindfold you, when we come to such a place.”

Baba Mustapha seemed to boggle a little at these words. “Oh! oh!” replied he, “you would have me to do something against my conscience and honor.” “God forbid,” said Morgiana, putting another piece of gold into his hand, “that I should ask anything that is contrary to your honor; only come along with me, and fear nothing.”

Baba Mustapha went with Morgiana, who after she had bound his eyes, at the place she told him of, with an handkerchief, carried him home with her, and never unloosed his eyes till he came into the room where her master lay. “Baba Mustapha,” said she, “you must make haste and sew these quarters together; and when you have done, I’ll give you another piece of gold.”

After Baba Mustapha had done as she bid him, she blindfolded him again, gave him the gold she promised, recommending secrecy to him, carried him back to the place where she first bound his eyes; pulled off the band, and watched him that he returned to his stall, for fear he should have the curiosity to dog her; and then went home.

By that time Morgiana had done all this, and warmed some water to wash the body, Ali Baba came with perfumes and incense to embalm it, with the usual ceremonies. Not long after the joiner,<sup>6</sup> according to Ali Baba’s order, brought the coffin, which Morgiana, that he might perceive nothing, received at the door; and helped Ali Baba to put the body into it; and as soon as he had nailed it up, went to the mosque to tell the imam that they were ready, telling the people of the mosque whose business it was to wash the dead, and who offered to perform their duty, that it was done already.

Morgiana had scarce got home before the imam and the other ministers of the mosque. Four neighbors carried the corpse on their shoulders, and followed the imam, who recited some prayers to the burying ground. Morgiana, as a slave of the deceased, followed the corpse, beating her breast, and tearing her hair; and Ali Baba came after with some neighbors, who walked two and two, and often relieved one another in carrying the corpse.

Cassim's wife, she stayed at home to mourn, and receive visits from her neighbors' wives and acquaintance, who according to the custom, during the time of the ceremony of the burial, came to bewail with the widow for her loss.

In this manner Cassim's horrid murder was concealed, and managed so well by Ali Baba, his wife, Cassim's widow, and Morgiana that nobody had the least knowledge or suspicion of it.

Three or four days afterwards Ali Baba removed his goods to his brother's widow's house; but the money he had taken from the thieves he conveyed thither by night; and soon after the marriage with his sister-in-law (which is common in our religion) was blown about.<sup>2</sup>

As for Cassim's shop, Ali Baba gave it to his eldest son, who had been some time out of his apprenticeship to a great merchant, promising him withal, that if he managed the stock well, he would give him a fortune to marry very advantageously.

Now let us leave Ali Baba to enjoy the beginning of his good fortune, and return to the forty thieves.

They came again, at the appointed time, to visit their retreat, and were in a great surprise to find Cassim's body taken away, and some of their gold; "we are certainly discovered," said the captain, "and shall be undone, if we don't take care, and apply some remedy; otherwise, we shall insensibly lose all the riches, which our ancestors have been so many years amassing together with so much pains and danger. What I think of this loss, which we have sustained, is, that the thief which we surprised had the secret of opening the door, and we came luckily as he was coming out: But his body being removed, and the money which we miss, plainly shows that he has an accomplice; and it is likely that there were but two, who had got this secret, and one we have catched; therefore we must look narrowly after the other. What say you to it, my lads?"

All the thieves approved of and thought the captain's sentiments very just; and agreed that they must lay all other enterprises aside, to follow this closely, and not to depart till they had succeeded.

"I expected no less," said the captain, "from your courage and bravery; but first of all, we must make choice of one who is bold enough to go into the town dressed like a traveler and stranger, to try if he can hear of anyone's being barbarously murdered and massacred, and to endeavor to find out the house where he lived. This is a thing of the first importance for us to know, that we may do nothing we have reason to repent of by discovering of ourselves in a country where we have lived so long unknown, and where we have so much reason to continue: but to prevent our being deceived by anyone who shall take upon himself the charge of this commission, and may come and give us a false report, which may be the cause of our ruin; I ask you all, if you don't think it fit, that in that case, he shall submit to suffer death."

Without waiting for the suffrages<sup>8</sup> of all his companions, one of the thieves started up, and said, "I submit myself to this law, and think it an honor to expose my life by taking such a commission upon me; but remember, if I do not succeed, that at least I neither wanted courage nor good will to serve my troop."

After this robber had received the thanks and commendations of the captain and his comrades, he disguised himself so, that nobody would take him for what he was; and taking his leave of the troop that night, went into the town just at daybreak; and walked up and down till he came to Baba Mustapha's stall, which was always open before any of the shops of the town.

Baba Mustapha was set on his seat, with an awl<sup>9</sup> in his hand, just going to work. The thief saluted him, bidding him good morrow, and perceiving that he was old, he said, "Honest man, you begin to work very early: is it possible, that anyone of your age can see so well? I question, if it was somewhat lighter, whether I could see to stitch."

"Certainly," replied Baba Mustapha, "you must be a stranger, and don't know me; for, as old as I am, I have extraordinary good eyes; and perhaps you will not believe me when I tell you, that I sewed a dead body together in a place, where I had not so much light as I have now."

The thief was overjoyed to think that he had addressed himself at his first coming into the town, to a man who gave him the intelligence he wanted, without asking him. "A dead body!" replied he with amazement, to make him explain himself. "How do you say, stitched up a dead body!" added he, "you mean, you sewed up his winding sheet?"<sup>1</sup> "No, no," answered Baba Mustapha, "I know what I say; you want to have me speak out, but you shall know no more."

The thief wanted no greater an insight to be persuaded, that he had discovered what he came about; he put his hand into his pocket, and pulling out a piece of gold, putting it into Baba Mustapha's hand, said to him, "I don't want to know your secret, though I can assure you I would not divulge it, if you trusted me with it. The only thing, which I desire of you, is to do me the favor to show me the house where you stitched up the dead body."

"If I would do you that favor which you ask of me," replied Baba Mustapha, holding the money in his hand, ready to give him again, "I assure you I cannot do it; and you may believe me for this reason: I was carried to a certain place, where they first blinded me, and then led me to the house, and brought me back again after the same manner; therefore you see the impossibility of doing what you desire."

"Well," replied the thief, "you may remember a little way that you was led blindfolded. Come, let me blind your eyes at the same place, perhaps you may remember some part of the way and turnings; and as everybody ought to be paid for their trouble, there's another piece of gold for you; gratify me in what I ask of you."

The two pieces of gold were great temptations to Baba Mustapha; he looked at them a long time in his hand without saying one word, thinking with himself what he should do; but at last he pulled out his purse and put them in. "I cannot assure you," said he to the thief, "that I can remember the way exactly; but since you desire it, I'll try what I can do." At these words, Baba Mustapha got off his seat, and without shutting up his shop, where he had nothing valuable to lose, he led the thief to the place where Morgiana bound his eyes. "'Twas here," said Baba Mustapha, "where I was

blindfolded, and I turned this way." The thief, who had his handkerchief ready, tied it over his eyes, and walked by him till he stopped. "I think," said Baba Mustapha, "I went no farther than here," and stopped directly at Cassim's house, where Ali Baba lived then; upon which the thief, before he pulled off the band, marked the door with a piece of chalk, which he had ready in his hand; and when he pulled it off, he asked him if he knew whose house that was? To which Baba Mustapha replied, that as he did not live in that neighborhood, he could not tell.

The thief, finding he could discover no more from Baba Mustapha, thanked him for the trouble he had given him, and left him to go back to his stall, while he returned to the forest, persuaded that he should be very well received.

A little after the thief and Baba Mustapha parted, Morgiana went out for something, and coming home again, seeing the mark the thief had made, she stopped to observe it. "What's the meaning of this mark?" said she to herself; "somebody intends my master no good, or else some boy has been playing the rogue; be what it will," added she, "it is good to fence against the worst." Accordingly she went and fetched a piece of chalk, and marked two or three doors on each side theirs, the same, without saying a word to her master.

In the meantime, the thief rejoined his troop again in the forest, and told them the good success he had, expatiating upon his good fortune, in meeting with the only person, so soon, who could inform him of what he wanted to know. All the robbers listened to him with the utmost satisfaction; when the captain commending his diligence, and addressing himself to them all, said, "Comrades, we have no time to lose, let us all go armed, and that we may not give any suspicion, let one or two go privately into the town together, and appoint the rendezvous in the great square; and in the meantime our comrades here and I will go find out the house, and then we will consult what is best to be done."

The speech and method was approved by all, and according to it, they all got into the town without being in the least suspected. The captain and he that was the spy entered the last of all, and when

they came to the street where Ali Baba lived, he showed the captain one of the houses which Morgiana had marked, and said, that was it: but going a little farther to prevent being taken notice of, the captain observed that the next door was chalked in the same manner and place; and showing it to his guide, asked him, which house it was, that or the first? The guide was so confounded, that he knew not what answer to make, and much more, when he and the captain saw five or six houses besides, marked after the same manner. He assured the captain, with an oath, that he had marked but one, and could not tell who had chalked the rest so like that which he marked, and owned in that confusion he could not distinguish it.

The captain, finding that their design proved abortive, went directly to the place of rendezvous, and told the first of his troop that he met, that they had lost all their labor, and must return to their cave the same way as they came; and set them, himself, the example.

When the troop was all got together, the captain told them the reason of their returning; and presently the conductor was declared by all worthy of death; and with courage and resignation to their suffrages kneeled down to receive the stroke from him that was appointed to give it.

But as for the preservation of the troop, so great an injury was not to go unpunished. Another of the gang, who promised himself, that he should succeed better, presented himself, and his offer being accepted, he went and corrupted Baba Mustapha, as the other had done, and being showed the house, marked it in a place more remote from sight with red chalk.

Not long after, Morgiana, whose eyes nothing could escape, went out, and seeing the red chalk, and arguing after the same manner with herself, marked the other neighbors' houses in the same place and manner.

The thief, at his return to his company, valued himself very much upon the precaution he had taken, which he looked upon as an infallible way of distinguishing Ali Baba's house from his neighbors;

and the captain and all of them thought it would do. They conveyed themselves into the town in the same manner as before; and when the thief and his captain came to the street, they found the same difficulty; at which the captain was enraged, and the thief in as great confusion as his predecessor.

Thus the captain and his troop were forced to retire a second time, and much more dissatisfied; and the robber, as the author of the mistake, underwent the same punishment, which he willingly submitted to.

The captain, having by this way lost two brave fellows of his troop, was afraid of diminishing it too much by pursuing it, and found, by their example, that their heads were not so good as their hands on such occasions; and therefore resolved to take upon himself this important commission.

Accordingly he went and addressed himself to Baba Mustapha, who did him the same piece of service he had done to the former. He never amused himself with setting any particular mark on the house, but examined and observed it so carefully, by passing often by it, that it was impossible for him to mistake it.

The captain, very well satisfied with his journey, and informed in what he wanted to know, returned to the forest; and when he came into the cave where the troop waited for him, he said, "Now comrades, there's nothing can prevent our revenge; I am certain of the house, and in my way hither, I have thought how to put it in execution, and if anyone knows a better expedient, let him communicate it." Then he told them his contrivance; and as they approved of it, he ordered them to go into the towns and villages about, and buy nineteen mules and eight and thirty large jars, and fill one of them full of oil.

In two or three days' time, the thieves purchased the mules and jars; and the captain put his whole troop into the jars, all armed, leaving them room to breathe, by making holes under the place where they were tied up at the top, and rubbed the jars on the outside with oil.



Things being thus prepared, the nineteen mules were loaded with seven and thirty thieves, in jars, and the jar of oil; and the captain, as their driver, set out with them, and got to the town by the dusk of the evening, as he intended. He led them through the streets till he came to Ali Baba's, at whose door he designed to have knocked, but was prevented by his sitting there, after supper, to take a little fresh air. However, he stopped his mules, and addressed himself to him, and said, "I have brought some oil here a great way to sell at tomorrow's market, and it is now so late that I do not know where to lodge; if I should not be troublesome to you, do me the favor to let me lie with you, and I shall be very much obliged to you."

Though Ali Baba had seen the captain of thieves, and had heard him speak, yet it was impossible for him to know him in the disguise of an oil merchant. He told him he should be welcome, and immediately opened his gates for the mules to go into the yard. At the same time he called to a slave he had, and not only ordered him, when the mules were unloaded, to put them into the stable, but to give them corn and hay; and then went to Morgiana to bid her get a good hot supper for his guest; and make him a good bed.

When the captain had unloaded his mules, and led them into the stable, and was looking for a place to lie in all night, Ali Baba went to him, and desired him to walk into the hall, telling him, he would not by any means suffer him to lie in the yard all night. The captain excused himself very much, upon account of being troublesome, the better to disguise the matter, and at last, with much importunity, and with an inward satisfaction consented. Ali Baba not only bore him company, but entertained him with a great many things to divert him; and when he had supped, told him, in taking his leave for that night, he might be free, and call for what he wanted.

The captain rose up at the same time, and went with him to the door; and while Ali Baba went into the kitchen to speak to Morgiana, he went into the yard, under a pretext of looking at his mules. Ali Baba, after charging Morgiana afresh to take care of his guest, said to her, "tomorrow morning I design to go to the bath before day,

take care of my bathing-linen, be ready, and give them to Abdalla," which was the slave's name; "and make me some broth against I come back"; after this he went to bed.

In the meantime, the captain of the thieves went into the yard to give his people orders what to do; and beginning at the first jar, and so on to the last, said, "as soon as I throw some stones out of the chamber window, where I lie, do not fail to cut the jar open with the knife you have about you, and come out, and I'll be presently with you." After this he returned into the kitchen, and Morgiana taking up a light, conducted him to his chamber, where, after she had asked him if he wanted anything, she left him; and he, to avoid any suspicion, put the light out soon after, and laid himself down in his clothes, that he might be the more ready to rise again.

Morgiana, remembering Ali Baba's orders, got his bathing-linen ready, and ordered Abdalla, who was not then gone to bed, to set on the pot for the broth; but while she scummed the pot, the lamp went out, and there were no candles, nor no more oil in the house, and what to do she did not know, for the broth must be made; when Abdalla, seeing her very uneasy, said, "don't fret and tease yourself, but go into the yard, and take some oil out of some of the jars."

Morgiana thanked Abdalla for his advice, and while he went to bed, that he might be the better able to rise to follow Ali Baba to the bath, she took the oil pot, and went into the yard, and as she came nigh the first jar, the thief within it said softly, "Is it time?"

Any other slave but Morgiana, to be so surprised, as she was to find a man in the jar instead of the oil she wanted, would have made so great a noise, and given an alarm, attended with ill consequences; whereas Morgiana apprehending immediately the importance of keeping the secret, and the danger she, Ali Baba, and his family were in, and the necessity of applying a speedy remedy without noise, conceived at once the means, and without showing the least concern answered, "Not yet, but presently"; and went in this manner to all the jars, giving the same answer, till she came to the jar of oil.

By this means, Morgiana found that her master Ali Baba, who thought that he had entertained an oil merchant, had admitted eight and thirty thieves into his house; looking on the pretended merchant as their captain, she made what haste she could to fill her oil-pot, and returned into the kitchen, where, as soon as she had lighted her lamp, she took a great kettle, and went again to the oil jar, filled it full, and set it on the fire to boil; and as soon as it boiled, went and poured enough into every jar to stifle and destroy the thief within.

When this action, worthy the courage of Morgiana, was executed, without any noise, as she had projected, she returned into the kitchen and shut the door, and having put out the great fire she had made to boil the oil, and leaving just enough to make the broth, put out also the lamp, and remained hushed, resolving not to go to bed, till she had observed what was to follow.

She had not waited above a quarter of an hour, before the captain of the thieves waked, got up, and opened the window, and finding no light, and hearing no noise, or anyone stirring in the house, gave the signal, by throwing stones at the copper jars, never disputing but that they would hear the sound they gave. Then he listened, and hearing nor perceiving nothing whereby he could judge that his companions stirred, he began to grow very uneasy, and threw again a second and third time, and could not comprehend the reason that none of them should answer to his signal; cruelly alarmed, he went softly down into the yard, and going to the first jar, and asking the thief whom he thought alive, if he was asleep? he smelled the hot boiled oil, which sent forth a steam out of the jar, and knew thereby that his plot was discovered; and examining all the jars, found that all his gang were dead; and by the oil he missed out of the last jar, he guessed at the means and manner of their deaths. Enraged and in despair for having failed in his design, and to lose so many jolly companions, he forced the lock of a door that led from the yard to the garden; and climbing over the walls of several gardens at last made his escape.

When Morgiana heard no noise, nor sound, after waiting some time, that the captain did not return, she guessed that he chose

rather to make his escape by the gardens than by the street door, which was double locked, satisfied and pleased to have succeeded so well, and secured the house, she went to bed.

Ali Baba rose before day, and followed by his slave, went to the baths, entirely ignorant of the amazing accident that had happened at home; for Morgiana was in the right not to wake him before, for fear of losing the opportunity, and afterwards she thought it needless to disturb him.

When he returned from the baths and the sun was risen, he was very much surprised to see the oil jars, and that the merchant was not gone with the mules, and asked Morgiana, who opened the door, and let all things stand as they were, the reason of it. "My good master," answered she, "(God preserve you and your family), you will be better informed of what you desire to know, when you have seen what I have to show you, if you will give yourself the trouble to follow me."

As soon as Morgiana had shut the door, Ali Baba followed her, and when she brought him into the yard, she bid him look into the first jar, and see if there was any oil; Ali Baba accordingly did so, and seeing a man, started backward, almost frightened out of his wits, and cried out. "Do not be afraid," said Morgiana, "the man you see there can neither do you nor anybody else any harm, he is dead." "Ah! Morgiana," said Ali Baba, "what is it you show me? Explain the meaning of it to me." "Moderate your astonishment, and do not excite the curiosity of your neighbors," replied Morgiana, "and I will; for it is of great importance to keep this affair secret. Look in all the other jars."

Ali Baba examined in all the jars one after another, and when he came to that which had the oil in it, he found it prodigiously sunk, and stood for some time motionless, sometimes looking on the jars, and sometimes on Morgiana, without saying a word, so great was his surprise; at last, when he had recovered himself, he said, "And what's become of the merchant?"

"Merchant!" answered she, "he's as much one as I am; I'll tell you who he is, and what is become of him: but you had better hear

the story in your own chamber; for it is time that you had your broth after your bathing."

While Ali Baba went into his chamber, Morgiana went into the kitchen to fetch the broth, and carry it to him; but before he would drink it, he first bid her satisfy his impatience, and tell him the story with all the circumstances; and she obeyed him.

"Last night, sir," said she, "when you was gone to bed, I got your bathing-linen ready, and gave them to Abdalla; afterwards I set on the pot for the broth, and as I was skimming the pot, the lamp, for want of oil, went out; and as there was not a drop more in the house, I looked for a candle, but could not find one; Abdalla seeing me vexed put me in mind of the jars of oil which stood in the yard. I took the oil pot, and went directly to the jar, which stood nearest to me, and when I came to it, I heard a voice within it say, 'Is it time?' I answered, without being dismayed, and comprehending immediately the malicious intention of the pretended oil merchant, 'Not yet, but presently.' Then I went to the next, and another voice asked me the same question, and I returned the same answer; and so on, till I came to the last, which I found full of oil, with which I filled my pot."

"When I considered, that there were seven and thirty thieves in your yard, who only waited for a signal to be given by the captain, whom you took to be an oil merchant, and entertained so handsomely, I thought there was no time to be lost; I carried my pot of oil into the kitchen, lighted the lamp, and afterwards took the biggest kettle I had, went and filled it full of oil, and set it on the fire to boil, and then went and poured as much into each jar, as was sufficient to prevent them from executing the pernicious design they came about: after this I retired into the kitchen, and put out the lamp, but fore I went to bed, I waited at the window to know what measures the pretended merchant would take."

"After I had watched some time for the signal, he threw some stones against the jars, out of the window, and neither hearing or perceiving anybody stirring after throwing three times, he came down, and I saw him go to every jar; after which, through the

darkness of the night, I lost sight of him. I waited some time longer, and finding that he did not return, I never doubted, but that seeing he had missed his aim, he had made his escape over the walls of the gardens."

"This," said Morgiana, "is the account you asked of me, and I am convinced it is the consequence of an observation, which I had made for two or three days before, but did not think fit to acquaint you with; for when I came in one morning early, I found our street door marked with white chalk, and the next morning with red, and both times without knowing what was the intention of those chinks: I marked two or three neighbors' doors on each hand after the same manner. If you reflect on this, and what has since happened, you'll find it to be a plot of the thieves of the forest, of whose gang there are two wanting, and now they are reduced to three: All this shows, that they had sworn your destruction, and it's proper you should stand upon your guard while there's one of them alive: for my part, I shall not neglect anything necessary to your preservation, which I am in duty obliged to regard."

When Morgiana had left off speaking, Ali Baba was so sensible of the great service she had done him that he said to her, "I will not die without rewarding you as you deserve; I owe my life to thee, and for the first token of my acknowledgement, I give thee thy liberty from this moment. I am persuaded with thee, that the forty thieves have laid all manner of snares for me. God, by thy means, has delivered me from them, and I hope will continue to preserve me from their wicked designs, and by averting the danger which threatened me, will deliver the world from their persecution, and of that cursed race of people: all that we have to do is to bury them immediately, and with all the secrecy imaginable; but that Abdalla and I will undertake."

Ali Baba's garden was very long, and shaded at the farther end by a great number of trees; thither he and the slave went, and dug a trench long and wide enough to hold all the thieves, and were not long doing it by reason the earth was light. Afterwards they took the bodies out of the jars, pulled off their arms,<sup>2</sup> and carried them to the

end of the garden, and filled up the trench again. When this was done, Ali Baba hid the jars; and for the mules, as he had no occasion for them, he sent them at different times to be sold.

While Ali Baba took these measures to prevent the world knowing how he came by his riches in so short a time, the captain of the thieves returned to the forest in a most inconceivable mortification; and in the agitation, or rather confusion, he was in at his ill success, which proved so much the contrary to what he promised himself, he entered the cave, not being able all the way from the town to come to any resolution what to do to Ali Baba.

The loneliness of the place seemed frightful to him. "Where are you, my brave lads," cried he, "my old companions? What can I do without you? How unhappy am I to lose you by so fatal and so base a fate, and so unworthy your courage; had you died with your sabers in your hands, like brave men as you were, my regret had been less. When shall I get so gallant a troop again? And if I would, can I undertake it without exposing so much gold and treasure to him who hath already enriched himself out of it? I cannot, nor ought not to think of it, before I have taken away his life. Well, I will undertake that myself, which I could not accomplish with so powerful assistance, and when I have taken care to secure this treasure from being pillaged, I'll provide for it new masters and successors, who shall preserve and augment it to all posterity." This resolution being taken, he was not in the least embarrassed how to execute it; but easy in his mind and full of hopes, slept all that night very quietly.

When he waked the next morning, which was pretty early, he dressed himself as he had proposed, very agreeable to the project he had in his head, and went to the town, and took a lodging in a *khan*, or inn: and as he expected what had happened at Ali Baba's might make a great noise in the town, he asked his host, by way of discourse, what news there was in the city? Upon which the innkeeper told him a great many things, which did not concern him in the least. He judged by this, that the reason why Ali Baba kept this affair so secret was for fear people should know where the

treasure lay, and the means of coming to it; upon which account he sought his life: and this urged him the more to neglect nothing to rid himself of so dangerous a person, and by as secret a way.

The next thing that the captain had to do was to convey a great many sorts of rich stuffs and fine linen to his lodgings, which he did by a great many journeys to the forest on a horse's back, but with all the necessary precautions imaginable, and to dispose the merchandizes, when he had amassed them together, he took a shop, which happened to be opposite to that which was Cassim's, which Ali Baba's son traded in.

He took upon him the name of Cogia Houssain, and as a newcomer, was according to custom extremely civil and complaisant to all his neighbors: and as Ali Baba's son was young and handsome, and a man of good sense, and was often obliged to discourse with him; he strove to cultivate much firmer and stronger, when after two or three days he understood whose son he was. To serve his ends, he caressed him after the most engaging manner, made him some small presents, and often asked him to dine and sup with him; and then treated him very handsomely.

Ali Baba's son did not care to lie under such obligations without making the like return; but was so much straitened for want of room in his lodging, that he could not entertain him so well as he could have wished, therefore acquainted his father, Ali Baba, with his thoughts, and told him, that it did not look well for him to receive such favors from Cogia Houssain without inviting him again.

Ali Baba took care of the treat himself, with a great deal of pleasure. "Son," said he, "tomorrow's Friday, which is a day that the shops are shut up, get him to take a walk with you after dinner, and as you come back, pass by my door and call in, it will look better to have it happen accidentally, than if you gave him a formal invitation. I'll go order Morgiana to provide a supper."

The next day after dinner, Ali Baba's son and Cogia Hussain walked out, and as they returned, Ali Baba's son led Cogia Houssain through the street where his father lived, and when they came to the house, he stopped and knocked at the door. "This, sir," said he,



"is my father's house, who upon the account I have given him of your friendship, charged me to procure him the honor of your acquaintance; and I desire to add this one favor more to those I am already indebted to you."

Though it was the sole aim of Cogia Houssain to introduce himself into Ali Baba's house, that he might kill him without making any noise and hazarding his own life, yet he excused himself and offered to take his leave; but a slave having opened the door, Ali Baba's son took him obligingly by the hand, and in a manner forced him in.

Ali Baba received Cogia Houssain with a smiling countenance, and in the most obliging manner he could wish for: he thanked him for all the favors he had done his son, adding withal, that he was the more obliged to him, because his son was a young man, who could not very well know the world, and might profit by his example.

Cogia Houssain returned the compliment by assuring Ali Baba that, though his son might not have the experience of older men, he had so much good sense as stood him in stead thereof: and after a little more conversation on different subjects, offered again to take his leave, when Ali Baba stopping him, said, "Where are you going, sir, in so much haste; I beg you would do me the honor to take a supper with me, though what I have to give you is not worth your acceptance; but such as it is, you are heartily welcome to." "Sir," replied Cogia Houssain, "I am thoroughly persuaded of your goodwill, and if I ask the favor of you, not to take it ill that I do not accept of your obliging invitation; I beg of you to believe that it does not proceed from any slight, or intention of affront, but from a certain reason, which you would approve of, if you knew it."

"And what may that reason be, sir," replied Ali Baba, "if I may be so bold as to ask you?" "It is," answered Cogia Houssain, "that I can eat no victuals that has any salt in them;<sup>3</sup> therefore judge how I should look at your table." "If that's the only reason," said Ali Baba, "it ought not to deprive me of the honor of your company at supper: for in the first place, there's no salt ever put into my bread, and for the meat we shall have tonight, I promise you, there shall be none:

I'll go and take care of that; therefore you must do me the favor to stay; I'll come again immediately."

Ali Baba went into the kitchen, and ordered Morgiana to put no salt to the meat that was to be dressed that night; and besides to make two or three ragouts, but be sure to put no salt in them.

Morgiana, who was always ready to obey her master, could not help this time seeming somewhat dissatisfied at his new order. "Who is this difficult man," said she, "who eats no salt with his meat? Your supper will be spoiled, if I keep it back so long." "Don't be angry Morgiana," replied Ali Baba, "he is an honest man, therefore do as I bid you."

Morgiana obeyed, though with some reluctance, and had a great curiosity to see this man who eat no salt: to this end, when she had done what he had to do in the kitchen, and Abdalla had laid the cloth, she helped to carry up the plates, and looking at Cogia Houssain, knew him at the first sight to be a captain of the thieves, notwithstanding his disguise; and examining him over carefully, perceived that he had a dagger hid under his garment. "I am not in the least amazed," said she to herself, "that this wicked wretch, who is my master's greatest enemy, would eat no salt with him, since he intends to assassinate him; but I will prevent him."

When Morgiana had sent up the supper by Abdalla, while they were eating, she made the necessary preparations for executing one of the boldest acts which could be thought on, and had just done when Abdalla came again for the dessert of fruit, which she carried up, and as soon as Abdalla had taken the meat away, set it upon the table; after that she set a little table and three glasses by Ali Baba, and going out took Abdalla along with her to go sup together, and to give Ali Baba the more liberty of conversation with his guest.

Then the pretended Cogia Houssain, or rather captain of the thieves, thought he had a favorable opportunity to kill Ali Baba. "I will," said he to himself, "make the father and son both drunk, and then the son, whose life I intend to spare, will not be able to prevent my stabbing his father to the heart; and while the slaves are at

supper, or asleep in the kitchen, I can make my escape over the gardens, as before."

Instead of going to supper, Morgiana, who penetrated into the intentions of the counterfeit, Cogia Houssain, would not give him leave to put his villainous design in execution, but dressed herself like a dancer, girded her waist with a silver gilt girdle, to which there hung a poniard of the same metal, and put a handsome mask on her face. When she had thus disguised herself, she said to Abdalla, "take this tabor<sup>4</sup> and let us go and divert our master and his guest, as we are wont to do of a night when he is alone."

Abdalla took his tabor and played before Morgiana all the way into the hall, who, when she came to the door, made a low curtsy, by way of asking leave to show what she could do; and Abdalla, seeing that his master had a mind to say something, left off playing. "Come in Morgiana," said Ali Baba, "and let Cogia Houssain see what you can do, that he may tell us what he thinks of you: but sir," said he, turning towards Cogia Houssain, "don't think that I put myself to any expense to give you this diversion, since these are my slaves and my cook; and I hope you will not find the entertainment they shall give us disagreeable."

Cogia Houssain, who did not expect this diversion after supper, began to fear that he should not have the opportunity that he designed to have made use of, but hoped if he missed it now to have it another time, by keeping up a friendly correspondence; therefore, though he could have wished Ali Baba would have let it alone, he pretended to be obliged to him for it, and had the complaisance to express a pleasure which he could willingly have dispensed with.

As soon as Abdalla saw that Ali Baba and Cogia Houssain had done talking, he began to play on his tabor, and accompanied it with an excellent air, to which Morgiana, who was an excellent dancer, danced after such a manner, as would have created admiration in any other but Cogia Houssain, who was more attentive to his own designs.

After she had danced several dances with a great deal of justness, she drew the poniard, and holding it in her hand, danced a dance, which was very surprising for the many different figures and fine movements it required. Sometimes she presented the poniard to one's breast, and sometimes to another's, and oftentimes seemed to strike her own. At last, when she was just out of breath, she snatched the tabor from Abdalla with her left hand, and holding the dagger in her right, presented the side where there was a chink, after the manner of those who get their livelihoods by dancing, to try to liberality<sup>5</sup> of her spectators.

Ali Baba put a piece of gold into the tabor, as did also his son, and Cogia Houssain seeing that she was coming to him had pulled out his purse to make her a present too; but while he was putting his hand into it, Morgiana, with a courage and resolution worthy of herself, plunged the poniard into his heart.

Ali Baba and his son were very much frightened at this action. "Ah! Unhappy wretch," cried Ali Baba, "what hast thou done to ruin me and my family?" "'Twas to preserve you and not to ruin you," answered Morgiana; "for see here," said she (opening Cogia Houssain's garment, and showing the dagger), "what an enemy you had entertained; look well at him, and you'll find him to be both the pretended oil merchant, and the captain of the gang of forty thieves. Remember too that he would eat no salt with you, and what would you have more to inform you of his wicked design? Before I saw him, I suspected him, when you told me you had such a guest; and when I saw him, found that my suspicion was not groundless."

Ali Baba, who was immediately sensible of the new obligation he had to Morgiana, for saving his life a second time, embraced her. "Morgiana," said he, "I gave thee thy liberty, and then promised thee that my acknowledgement should not stop there, but that I would express it much farther, and now I'll give proof of it by making thee my daughter-in-law." Then addressing himself to his son, he said to him, "I believe you, son, to be so dutiful a child, that you will not refuse Morgiana for to be your wife. You see that Cogia Houssain sought your friendship with a treacherous design to take away my

life; and if he had succeeded, there's no dispute but he would have sacrificed you to his revenge. Consider that by marrying Morgiana, you marry the support of my family and your own."

The son, far from showing any dislike, readily consented to the marriage; not only because he would not disobey his father, but that his inclination prompted him to it.

After this, they thought of burying the captain of the thieves with his comrades, and did it so privately, that nobody knew anything of it, till a great many years after, when not any one had any concern in the publication of this remarkable history.

A few days afterwards, Ali Baba celebrated the nuptials of his son and Morgiana, with great solemnity, and was very glad to see that his friends and neighbors, whom he invited, had no knowledge of the true motives of that marriage; but that those persons, who were not unacquainted with Morgiana's good qualities, should commend his generosity.

Ali Baba forbore a long time after this marriage from going again to the thieves' cave, from the time he brought his brother Cassim and some bags of gold on three asses, for fear of being surprised by the other two thieves whom he could give no account of, but supposed to be alive.

But at the year's end, when he found they had not made any attempt to disturb him, he had a great inclination to make another journey, taking the most necessary precautions for his safety: accordingly he mounted his horse, and when he came to the cave, and saw no footsteps of neither man nor horse, he looked upon it as a good sign; he alighted off his horse, and tied him to a tree, and presenting himself before the door, pronouncing these words, "*Open Sesame,*" the door opened, he went in, and by the condition he found things in, he judged that nobody had ever been there since the false Cogia Houssain, when he fetched the goods for his shop, and that the gang of forty thieves was quite destroyed, and never disputed but that he was the only person in the world who had the secret of going into the cave, and that all the treasure was solely at his disposal; and having brought a valise<sup>6</sup> along with him, he put as

much gold into it as his horse would carry; and then returned to town.

Afterwards Ali Baba carried his son to the cave, taught him the secret, which they handed down to their posterity; and using this good fortune with moderation, lived in great honor and splendor, serving the greatest offices of the city.

Here the Sultanness Scheherazade ended her story, but perceiving that it was not yet day, began to tell the Sultan Schahriar that which follows. . . .

## Endnotes

- Note 1: “The Story of Ali Baba” does not appear in any older Arabic versions of the *Arabian Nights*. Galland heard it in 1709 from a Syrian storyteller he called Hanna and just added it to his translation’s eleventh volume. It first appeared in French in 1717 and in English in 1721–22. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scheherazade tells the story, though readers are only reminded of her narration at its very beginning and end. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Given an equal inheritance. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wealth, means of subsistence. “Meanly”: in impoverished circumstances. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Large group of men on horseback. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Synonym for thieves. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A case for carrying things while on horseback. “Corn”: grain. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Outcome. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fabrics. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A scale. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Animal fat, used here because it is sticky. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To act early, to anticipate Ali Baba’s actions. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Polygamy was practiced in early modern Muslim cultures in a limited way, with restrictions. Later English orientalist writers overemphasized a practice they found titillating.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first money he received that day, treated as a sign of luck.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The craftsman who made the wooden coffin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Widely reported.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Opinions or votes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A tool used to make shoes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The sheet wrapped around a body for burial.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Armor, weapons.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cultural customs of hospitality treated sharing salt as a sign of loyalty and trust.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A kind of drum.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ascertain the generosity of. "Chink": small hole.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A bag or case for traveling.[Return to reference 6](#)

## **[*The Conclusion to the Story of Schahriar and Scheherazade*]<sup>1</sup>**

The Sultan of the Indies could not but admire of the prodigious memory of the Sultaness his wife, who had entertained and diverted him so many nights with such new and agreeable stories, that he believed her stock was inexhaustible.

A thousand and one nights had passed away in these agreeable and innocent amusements, which contributed so much towards removing the Sultan's fatal prejudice against all women, and sweetening the violence of his temper, that he conceived a great esteem for the Sultaness Scheherazade, and was convinced of her merit and great wisdom, and remembered with what courage she exposed herself voluntarily to be his wife, knowing the fatal destiny of the many Sultanesses before her.

These considerations, and the many rare qualities he knew her to be mistress of, induced him at last to forgive her. "I see lovely Scheherazade," said he, "that you can never be at a loss for these sort of stories to divert me; therefore I renounce, in your favor, the cruel law I had imposed on myself; and I will have you to be looked upon as the deliverer of the many damsels I had resolved to have sacrificed to my unjust resentment."

The Sultaness cast herself at his feet, and embraced them with the marks of a most lively and sincere acknowledgement.

The Grand Vizier was the first that learned this agreeable news from the Sultan's own mouth, which was presently carried to all the towns and provinces; and gained the Sultan and the lovely Scheherazade the blessings of all the people of the large empire of the Indies.

## **Endnotes**

1721–22

- Note 1: The Syrian manuscript Galland translated from did not include the *Nights'* conclusion. This version of a conclusion



appeared in Galland's twelfth volume, in French in 1717 and in English in 1721–22.[Return to reference 1](#)

# Global Commerce and Empire

Over the years this volume covers, 1660 to 1785, Britain built an empire. Or, rather, it extended its imperial power into new territories, lost some (what became the United States of America), but acquired yet more. It was over this very stretch of years that Britain's various territorial holdings, settlements, trade relations, colonial subjects, and naval and martial activities increasingly came to be talked about as part of one imperial project. At the beginning of the period, in 1660, England exerted varying levels of control across the British Isles (in Wales and Ireland), had established colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America and in the Caribbean, and was active in trade in India and Africa. By 1773, Sir George Macartney—who had acted as diplomat in Russia and China and colonial official in Ireland, India, and the Caribbean—could write of “this vast empire on which the sun never sets and whose bounds nature has not yet ascertained.”

Macartney's dream of empire as one “vast” thing, however, obscures how differently British power worked in different geographical and political contexts—in, say, the places we now call Canada, Ghana, Jamaica, India, and Tahiti. British settlers who moved to North America built new lives there, often violently displacing the Indigenous people who preceded them. By contrast, officials of the British East India Company spent stretches of time in South Asia but then returned to Britain with wealth they had extracted from the Indian people, who remained the majority of the population in India. British explorers, just learning about islands in the Pacific, brazenly planted flags to claim possession and left again (with major consequences for the island populations first encountering British people, ships, weapons, and diseases). While Africa—and enslavement—were crucial to Britain's imperial economy, for most of this period British traders operated from forts and small settlements on the coast (though in the later eighteenth century

more African people in Africa would come under British rule in colonies established in Senegambia and Sierra Leone). Consistently, military force and war were crucial to Britain's success in gaining and maintaining its empire, though the nature of this military force also varied geographically. France, the Dutch Republic, Spain, and Portugal were also fighting for empires in this period, and Britain confronted these European rivals on land and at sea, all over the world. The British Navy used its military might to protect and gain trade routes. On the other hand, the East India Company, with a few British officials, hired an army of local Indian soldiers like Dean Mahomet (see [p. 357](#)) to help consolidate its land holdings in India. Registering some of these differences, statesman Edmund Burke described the empire as "vast" but also "infinitely diversified."

It's no accident that "vastness" recurs: eighteenth-century people were struck at the ways Britain was connected to far-flung places. Sometimes, in a celebratory mode, they imagined theirs to be "an empire of the seas," of rivers and oceans linked to all other global waterways. "Rule, Britannia, rule the waves," James Thomson wrote in his patriotic anthem (see [p. 334](#)), and Alexander Pope dreamed that the "Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind," "seas" actually "join[ing] the regions they divide" (see [p. 328](#)). Like oceans, commerce also connected the world. Joseph Addison offered an optimistic celebration of this: to him, God seemed to have designed the world in order to encourage international trade, spreading different desirable products around geographically so that "the natives of the several parts of the globe" would "have a kind of dependence upon one another, and be united together by a common interest" (see [p. 325](#)). Ignatius Sancho, a formerly enslaved Black man, saw Britain's participation in the networks of global trade differently, as uniting different places through a single bad motive: "I must observe your country's conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East—West Indies—and even on the coast of Guinea—The grand object of English navigators . . . is money—money—money" (see [p. 1011](#)). Scholars today are reckoning with this connectedness, as they work to understand the material realities of the flow of money

and goods around the globe in the period. An estate in the English countryside could be purchased with wealth gained in India by a family who wandered its gardens wearing furs from the Hudson Bay. Its table could be loaded with tea from China (which had been carried on ships containing North American timber or tar) and with sugar from plantations in Jamaica (farmed by enslaved laborers from Africa). That seemingly isolated and idyllic rural English country estate house was a part and a product of these complex networks of global commerce and international military power.

This cluster offers a range of perspectives on these realities. It features British paeans to commerce and empire but also scathing British critiques: some feared that Britain was extending itself too far and that its accumulations of wealth and power would inevitably lead to corruption at home. The cluster features, too, perspectives from outside Britain, real or imagined voices from America, India, China, and Tahiti—sometimes highly critical, sometimes complexly entangled in the events happening on the ground. One recurring theme in all these texts is identity. The realities of Britain's imperial project necessitated encounters between people who looked, dressed, worshiped, and behaved differently from one another. Period texts constantly take up questions about identities of the self and other: there are racist discussions of "savagery" and sentimentalized treatments of innocent "primitive" cultures, fine-grained discussions about familiar and unfamiliar cultural practices, shifting assumptions about the relationship between culture and race, celebrations of British identity, critiques of British behavior, and meditations on "HUMANITY" itself.

A few of the selections here were written as pragmatic political documents—a speech in Parliament, a petition to a state governor, a declaration of independence—but the rest are self-consciously literary. Postcolonial scholar Suvir Kaul has shown that literature played an active role in British "mercantile and colonial expansion": eighteenth-century poets aimed "to intervene in these processes, to inform and to mold them." They often thematized British imperial history, prophesized its future, and offered patriotic celebrations of

their nation and culture. Further, whether poetic or not, many of the texts here feature complex work with literary voice. James Mulholland has pointed out that eighteenth-century British authors often tried to understand themselves and their imperial projects by giving voice to imagined perspectives “from *over there* or *back then*,” from “the edges of their empire” or “the distant past.” Gerald Fitzgerald, an Irishman, pretends to be a Tahitian princess (see [p. 343](#)), and Oliver Goldsmith, in London, impersonates a Chinese philosopher (see [p. 335](#)). (Elsewhere in this volume, Jonathan Swift creates characters from imagined islands, and Thomas Gray and James Macpherson, as Ossian, give voice to doomed bards from the Welsh and Scottish pasts.) Moreover, outside of England, eighteenth-century writers in colonial outposts strategically worked both with and against British idioms. Samson Occom used a Christian rhetoric he learned from British settlers to advocate for his fellow Indigenous people in North America (see [p. 355](#)), and one of these settlers, Thomas Jefferson, took up a language of rights and freedom that was flourishing in Britain even as those colonies broke away from its power (see [p. 338](#)). Indian writer Dean Mahomet—like the formerly enslaved Olaudah Equiano (see [p. 1081](#))—embraced the genre of autobiography.

British literature, in short, was an agent of empire and a site of its contestation. British literature was also itself an imperial commodity, shipped and sold all over the world. The selections in this cluster foreground these realities, but the implications are far-reaching: just as that seemingly insulated rural English country estate was deeply enmeshed in the complex networks of empire, so too every text in this anthology.

## JOSEPH ADDISON

In *Spectator* 69, Addison takes a characteristically sunny view of commerce and what he calls the “additional empire” that it was helping his country secure, along with its empire of distant conquered and settled lands. The essayist enjoys the multicultural interactions that commerce permits, celebrating the friendliness and cooperation at the Royal Exchange among representatives of all nations, including those not only of Europe but also of China, Japan, Egypt, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and other places. Though citizens of France and the Dutch Republic briefly appear in the essay, Addison does not mention the wars Britain waged abroad against these imperial and commercial rivals, nor those against peoples around the globe with resources that the British coveted. He only glancingly refers to a British sugar colony, Barbados, and what is produced there, and does not refer to the British trade in enslaved Africans at all.

# [The Royal Exchange]

**The Spectator 69, Saturday, May 19, 1711**

*Hic segetes, illic veniunt felicius uvae:  
Arborei foetus alibi, atque injussa virescunt  
Gramina. Nonne vides, croceos ut Tmolus odores,  
India mittit ebur, molles sua thura Saboei?  
At Chalybes nudi ferrum, virosaque Pontus  
Castorea, Eliadum palmas Epirus equarum?  
Continuo has leges aeternaque foedera certis  
Imposuit Natura locis<sup>1</sup>. . .*

—VIRGIL, *Georgics* 1.54–61

There is no place in the town which I so much love to frequent as the Royal Exchange.<sup>2</sup> It gives me a secret satisfaction, and in some measure gratifies my vanity as I am an Englishman, to see so rich an assembly of countrymen and foreigners consulting together upon the private business of mankind, and making this metropolis a kind of emporium for the whole earth. I must confess I look upon High Change<sup>3</sup> to be a great council in which all considerable nations have their representatives. Factors<sup>4</sup> in the trading world are what ambassadors are in the politic world; they negotiate affairs, conclude treaties, and maintain a good correspondence between those wealthy societies of men that are divided from one another by seas and oceans or live on the different extremities of a continent. I have often been pleased to hear disputes adjusted between an inhabitant of Japan and an alderman of London, or to see a subject of the Great Mogul entering into a league with one of the Czar of Muscovy.<sup>5</sup> I am infinitely delighted in mixing with these several ministers of commerce as they are distinguished by their different walks<sup>6</sup> and



different languages. Sometimes I am jostled among a body of Armenians; sometimes I am lost in a crowd of Jews; and sometimes make one in a group of Dutchmen. I am a Dane, Swede, or Frenchman at different times; or rather fancy myself like the old philosopher,<sup>7</sup> who upon being asked what countryman he was, replied that he was a citizen of the world.



The bustle of the **Royal Exchange** in the 18th century. Etching by Francesco Bartolozzi (1788).

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Though I very frequently visit this busy multitude of people, I am known to nobody there but my friend Sir Andrew, who often smiles upon me as he sees me bustling in the crowd, but at the same time connives<sup>8</sup> at my presence without taking any further notice of me. There is indeed a merchant of Egypt who just knows me by sight, having formerly remitted me some money to Grand Cairo; but as I am not versed in the modern Coptic,<sup>9</sup> our conferences go no further than a bow and a grimace.



This grand scene of business gives me an infinite variety of solid and substantial entertainments. As I am a great lover of mankind, my heart naturally overflows with pleasure at the sight of a prosperous and happy multitude, insomuch that at many public solemnities I cannot forbear expressing my joy with tears that have stolen down my cheeks. For this reason I am wonderfully delighted to see such a body of men thriving in their own private fortunes and at the same time promoting the public stock; or in other words, raising estates for their own families by bringing into their country whatever is wanting, and carrying out of it whatever is superfluous.

Nature seems to have taken a particular care to disseminate her blessings among the different regions of the world with an eye to this mutual intercourse and traffic among mankind, that the natives of the several parts of the globe might have a kind of dependence upon one another and be united together by their common interest. Almost every degree<sup>1</sup> produces something peculiar to it. The food often grows in one country and the sauce in another. The fruits of Portugal are corrected by the products of Barbados; the infusion of a China plant sweetened with the pith of an Indian cane. The Philippick Islands<sup>2</sup> give a flavor to our European bowls. The single dress of a woman of quality is often the product of an hundred climates. The muff and the fan come together from the different ends of the earth. The scarf is sent from the torrid zone and the tippet<sup>3</sup> from beneath the pole. The brocade petticoat rises out of the mines of Peru and the diamond necklace out of the bowels of Indostan.<sup>4</sup>

If we consider our own country in its natural prospect without any of the benefits and advantages of commerce, what a barren uncomfortable spot of earth falls to our share! Natural historians tell us that no fruit grows originally among us besides hips and haws, acorns and pig-nuts, with other delicacies of the like nature; that our climate of itself and without the assistances of art can make no further advances towards a plum than to a sloe and carries an apple to no greater a perfection than a crab;<sup>5</sup> that our melons, our peaches, our figs, our apricots, and cherries are strangers among us, imported in different ages and naturalized in our English gardens;

and that they would all degenerate and fall away into the trash of our own country, if they were wholly neglected by the planter and left to the mercy of our sun and soil. Nor has traffic<sup>6</sup> more enriched our vegetable world than it has improved the whole face of nature among us. Our ships are laden with the harvest of every climate; our tables are stored with spices, and oils, and wines; our rooms are filled with pyramids of China and adorned with the workmanship of Japan; our morning's draught comes to us from the remotest corners of the earth. We repair our bodies by the drugs of America and repose ourselves under Indian canopies. My friend Sir Andrew calls the vineyards of France our gardens; the Spice-Islands our hot-beds; the Persians our silk-weavers, and the Chinese our potters. Nature indeed furnishes us with the bare necessities of life, but traffic gives us great variety of what is useful, and at the same time supplies us with every thing that is convenient and ornamental. Nor is it the least part of this our happiness that whilst we enjoy the remotest products of the north and south, we are free from those extremities of weather which give them birth; that our eyes are refreshed with the green fields of Britain at the same time that our palates are feasted with fruits that rise between the tropics.

For these reasons there are no more useful members in a commonwealth than merchants. They knit mankind together in a mutual intercourse of good offices, distribute the gifts of nature, find work for the poor, add wealth to the rich, and magnificence to the great. Our English merchant converts the tin of his own country into gold and exchanges his wool for rubies. The Mahometans are clothed in our British manufacture and the inhabitants of the frozen zone warmed with the fleeces of our sheep.

When I have been upon the 'Change, I have often fancied one of our old kings standing in person where he is represented in effigy, and looking down upon the wealthy concourse of people with which that place is every day filled. In this case, how would he be surprised to hear all the languages of Europe spoken in this little spot of his former dominions, and to see so many private men, who in his time would have been the vassals of some powerful baron, negotiating

like princes for greater sums of money than were formerly to be met with in the Royal Treasury! Trade, without enlarging the British territories, has given us a kind of additional empire. It has multiplied the number of the rich, made our landed estates infinitely more valuable than they were formerly, and added to them an accession of other estates as valuable as the lands themselves.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Here grain, there grapes grow more successfully, and elsewhere young trees and grasses sprout up spontaneously. Don't you see how Tmolus sends us fragrant saffron, India sends ivory, the soft Sabaeans send frankincense; but the naked Chalybes offer us iron, Pontus the pungent beaver-oil, and Epirus their award-winning horses? From the beginning, nature imposed these laws, and made eternal covenants with particular places (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A financial institution in the City of London near the Bank of England; a center where businessmen gathered and around two hundred shops and private companies were assembled. Opened in 1570, its first buildings were burned in the Great Fire of 1666: Addison discusses the Exchange as it was rebuilt in 1669.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The time of day when trading is most active.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Agents who buy and sell for other people.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Russia. The Great Mogul was a European name for the Mughal emperor, whose dominions extended throughout much of the Indian subcontinent.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ways of life.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Diogenes the Cynic (4th century B.C.E.).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Winks.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Language of the Copts, a sect of Egyptian Christians.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Here, a degree of latitude, hence a particular position on the earth's surface.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Philippines.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A cape or other hanging part of a woman's dress.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: India.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Crabapple. "Hips and haws": rosehips and the berries of the hawthorn tree. "Pig-nuts": or groundnuts, the tuber of *Bunium flexuosum*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Trade.[Return to reference 6](#)

## ALEXANDER POPE

As a locale, Windsor Forest in the Thames Valley west of London united multiple kinds of deeply felt meaning for the young Alexander Pope, some personal, others much grander. He grew up and played as a boy in the area and said he wrote the first part of *Windsor-Forest*, to around line 290, when he was sixteen. Scholars have shown that he extensively revised the whole of the poem when he published it as a stand-alone text, including the latter part, in 1713. The finished work joins a keen pleasure in beauties of the forest, a royal hunting ground near the town and castle of Windsor, to a mythic vision of the British monarchy and nation, and a celebration of the Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) between France and Spain on one side and the Grand Alliance, which included England, on the other. After depicting a natural world of harmonized difference under Queen Anne, the poem presents a long, violent account of English history, from the tyranny of William the Conqueror (ca. 1028–1087) to the execution of Charles I (1600–1649). The poem's latter part, included here, uses the voice of the mighty river Thames, which draws together the tributary streams of the nation and flows out into the oceans of the world, to predict an era of English global commercial and imperial dominion and peace. Pope draws inspiration from the poetic visions of Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), in the *Eclogues* (ca. 39–38 B.C.E.) and *Georgics* (before 37 B.C.E.), of the world's future Golden Age under imperial Rome, as well as from the biblical book of Isaiah. Pope's prophecy would prove to be partly true. Britain's empire would grow to vast proportions in the decades to come. But expansion would involve near perpetual conflict with its old enemies France and Spain; and the dream at poem's end of a British Empire without violence, slavery, and expropriation would not be realized.

# ***From Windsor-Forest***

**To the Right Honorable George Lord Lansdown<sup>1</sup>**

*Non injussa cano: Te nostræ Vare myricæ  
Te Nemus omne canet; nec Phoebæ gratior ulla est  
Quam sibi quæ Vari præscripsit pagina nomen.*  
—VIRGIL, *Eclogues* 6.9–12<sup>2</sup>

Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats,  
At once the monarch's and the muse's seats,<sup>3</sup>  
Invite my lays.° Be present, sylvan maids!°  
Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.  
Granville commands; your aid O muses bring!  
5 What muse for Granville can refuse to sing?

The groves of Eden, vanished now so long,  
Live in description, and look green in song:  
These,° were my breast inspired with equal flame,  
Like them in beauty, should be like in fame.  
10 Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,  
Here earth and water seem to strive again;  
Not Chaos-like together crushed and bruised,  
But as the world, harmoniously confused:  
Where order in variety we see,  
15 And where, though all things differ, all agree.  
Here waving groves a checkered scene display,  
And part admit and part exclude the day;  
As some coy nymph her lover's warm address  
Nor quite indulges, nor can quite repress.  
20 There, interspersed in lawns and opening glades,  
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.

Here in full light the russet<sup>o</sup> plains extend;  
There wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend.  
Ev'n the wild heath displays her purple dyes,  
25 And 'midst the desert fruitful fields arise,  
That crowned with tufted<sup>o</sup> trees and springing corn,<sup>o</sup>  
Like verdant isles the sable waste<sup>o</sup> adorn.  
Let India boast her plants, nor envy we  
The weeping amber or the balmy tree,  
30 While by our oaks the precious loads are borne,  
And realms commanded which those trees adorn.<sup>4</sup>  
Not proud Olympus yields a nobler sight,  
Though gods assembled grace his towering height,  
Than what more humble mountains offer here,  
35 Where, in their blessings, all those gods appear.  
See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crowned,  
Here blushing Flora paints th'enameled ground,  
Here Ceres' gifts<sup>5</sup> in waving prospect stand,  
And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand;  
40 Rich Industry<sup>o</sup> sits smiling on the plains,  
And peace and plenty tell, a Stuart reigns.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

325 At length great Anna said "Let discord cease!"<sup>7</sup>  
She said, the world obeyed, and all was peace!

In that blest moment, from his oozy bed  
Old father Thames advanced his reverend head.  
His tresses dropped with dews, and o'er the stream  
His shining horns diffused a golden gleam:<sup>8</sup>  
330 Graved on his urn, appeared the moon that guides  
His swelling waters, and alternate tides;<sup>9</sup>  
The figured streams in waves of silver rolled,  
And on their banks Augusta<sup>1</sup> rose in gold.  
Around his throne the sea-born brothers<sup>2</sup> stood,  
335 Who swell with tributary urns his flood:<sup>o</sup>

First the famed authors of his ancient name,  
The winding Isis and the fruitful Tame:<sup>3</sup>  
The Kennet swift, for silver eels renowned;  
The Loddon slow, with verdant alders crowned;  
340 Cole, whose clear streams his flowery islands lave;<sup>o</sup>  
And chalky Wey, that rolls a milky wave:  
The blue, transparent Vandalis appears;  
The gulphy Lee his sedgy tresses rears;  
And sullen Mole, that hides his diving flood;<sup>4</sup>  
345 And silent Darent, stained with Danish blood.<sup>5</sup>

High in the midst, upon his urn reclined,  
(His sea-green mantle waving with the wind)  
The god<sup>o</sup> appeared: he turned his azure eyes  
Where Windsor domes and pompous<sup>o</sup> turrets rise;  
350 Then bowed and spoke; the winds forget to roar,  
And the hushed waves glide softly to the shore.

"Hail sacred Peace! hail long-expected days,  
That Thames's glory to the stars shall raise!  
Though Tiber's streams immortal Rome behold,  
355 Though foaming Hermus swells with tides of gold,  
From heaven itself though seven-fold Nilus<sup>6</sup> flows,  
And harvests on a hundred realms bestows;  
These now no more shall be the muse's themes,  
Lost in my fame, as in the sea their streams.  
360 Let Volga's banks with iron squadrons shine,  
And groves of lances glitter on the Rhine,  
Let barbarous Ganges arm a servile train;<sup>7</sup>  
Be mine the blessings of a peaceful reign.  
No more my sons shall dye with British blood  
365 Red Iber's sands, or Ister's foaming flood;<sup>8</sup>  
Safe on my shore each unmolested swain  
Shall tend the flocks, or reap the bearded grain;  
The shady empire shall retain no trace



370 Of war or blood, but in the sylvan chase;<sup>o</sup>  
The trumpet sleep, while cheerful horns are blown,  
And arms employed on birds and beasts alone.  
Behold! th'ascending villas on my side,  
Project long shadows o'er the crystal tide.  
Behold! Augusta's glittering spires increase,  
375 And temples rise,<sup>9</sup> the beauteous works of Peace.  
I see, I see where two fair cities bend  
Their ample bow, a new Whitehall ascend!<sup>1</sup>  
There mighty nations shall enquire their doom,  
The world's great oracle in times to come;  
380 There kings shall sue, and suppliant states be seen  
Once more to bend before a British queen.<sup>2</sup>

Thy trees, fair Windsor! now shall leave their  
woods,  
And half thy forests rush into my floods,  
Bear Britain's thunder, and her cross display,<sup>3</sup>  
385 To the bright regions of the rising day;<sup>o</sup>  
Tempt icy seas, where scarce the waters roll,  
Where clearer flames<sup>o</sup> glow round the frozen pole;  
Or under southern skies exalt their sails,  
Led by new stars, and borne by spicy gales!<sup>o</sup>  
390 For me the balm shall bleed, and amber flow,  
The coral redden, and the ruby glow,  
The pearly shell its lucid globe enfold,  
And Phoebus warm the ripening ore to gold.<sup>4</sup>  
The time shall come, when free as seas or wind  
395 Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,  
Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,  
And seas but join the regions they divide;  
Earth's distant ends our glory shall behold,  
And the new world launch forth to seek the old.  
400 Then ships of uncouth<sup>o</sup> form shall stem the tide,  
And feathered people crowd my wealthy side,

And naked youths and painted chiefs admire<sup>o</sup>  
Our speech, our color, and our strange attire!<sup>5</sup>  
Oh stretch thy reign, fair Peace! from shore to shore,  
405 'Till conquest cease, and slavery be no more;<sup>6</sup>  
'Till the freed Indians in their native groves  
Reap their own fruits, and woo their sable<sup>7</sup> loves,  
Peru once more a race of kings behold,  
And other Mexicos be roofed with gold.<sup>8</sup>  
410 Exiled by thee<sup>o</sup> from earth to deepest hell,  
In brazen bonds shall barbarous Discord dwell:  
Gigantic Pride, pale Terror, gloomy Care,  
And mad Ambition, shall attend her there:  
There purple Vengeance bathed in gore retires,  
415 Her weapons blunted, and extinct her fires:  
There hateful Envy her own snakes shall feel,  
And Persecution mourn her broken wheel:<sup>9</sup>  
There Faction roar, Rebellion bite her chain,  
And gasping Furies thirst for blood in vain."  
420

Here cease thy flight, nor with unhallowed lays  
Touch the fair fame of Albion's<sup>o</sup> golden days:  
The thoughts of gods let Granville's verse recite,  
And bring the scenes of opening fate to light.  
My humble muse, in unambitious strains,  
425 Paints the green forests and the flowery plains,  
Where Peace descending bids her olives<sup>1</sup> spring,  
And scatters blessings from her dove-like wing.  
Ev'n I more sweetly pass my careless days,  
Pleased in the silent shade with empty praise;  
430 Enough for me, that to the listening swains  
First in these fields I sung the sylvan strains.

- Note 1: George Granville, Baron Lansdowne and Jacobite Duke of Albemarle (1666–1735), was Queen Anne’s Tory secretary at war who helped negotiate the Treaty of Utrecht, and also a poet and successful playwright.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I don’t sing without prompting: our tamarisk trees and all our groves will sing of you, Varus; nothing is more pleasing to Phoebus Apollo than the name of Varus written on a title page (Latin). “Vare”: Publius Alfenus Varus, Roman jurist and writer (1st century B.C.E.). Pope’s poem draws inspiration from Virgilian celebrations of Roman imperial power and peace in the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The place is linked with the poetic muse in part because John Denham (1614/15–1669) set his famous poem *Cooper’s Hill* (1642), a model for *Windsor-Forest*, in the Thames Valley, where Windsor is located. “The monarch’s”: the deep association of Windsor with the monarchy begins with legendary accounts of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table convening there.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: England’s oaks were used to build ships, which carry “precious loads” of spices from India, a land adorned with “the weeping amber or the balmy tree.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grain. Ceres is the Roman goddess of cereal crops and agriculture generally. “Pan”: Greek god of shepherds and flocks. “Pomona”: Roman goddess of fruit. “Flora”: Roman goddess of flowers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
A politically charged line. Queen Anne’s reign began in 1702, upon the death of William III of Orange, Dutch Protestant king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, who assumed the monarchy in 1689 after the Catholic, Stuart king, James II, was deposed. Anne, daughter of James II but raised a Protestant, returned the Stuart line to the throne, after an Act of Settlement had determined in 1701 that only Protestants could wear the crown. But she would die without an heir in 1714, soon after *Windsor-Forest* was published. Some readers take the line as signifying Pope’s loyalty not only to Anne but to the Catholic Stuart family

exiled in France: James Francis Edward Stuart (1688–1766), son of James II (d. 1701), maintained his right to the throne, and would lead a rising in Scotland in 1715, after George I of Hanover had become king.

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The intervening lines depict rural sports in the forest, including hunting, and narrate a long, violent history of the nation, rife with civil war and battles of the people against tyranny.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rivers, especially the great river of England, the Thames, were often personified as gods in this way, and often depicted with horns.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The flow and level of the Thames were affected by tides through most of its London section.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Roman name for London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rivers were said to be children of the Titan gods Oceanus and Tethys.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Isis, the upper section of the Thames which runs through Oxford, joins the river Thame at Dorchester on Thames; together they were said to be “authors” of the Thames’s “ancient name,” Tamesis, which was wrongly thought to be a combination of “Thame” and “Isis.” The rivers subsequently named, the Kennet, the Loddon, the Cole, the Wey, the Vandalis (commonly called the Wandle), the Lee, the Mole, and the Darent, were all tributaries of the Thames.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Between Dorking and Leatherhead, the Mole’s riverbed lies above the water table, seeming to flow underground, and can dry out in very hot summers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The English king Edmund Ironside defeated the Danes at Otford on the Darent in 1016.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Nile (Nilus) becomes “seven-fold” as it divides into its delta at the Mediterranean, and was the heart of the Egyptian Empire (“a hundred realms”). It was identified by some as the biblical river Gihon, one of the four rivers of Eden, said to flow from heaven. “Tiber”: the river of Rome was

associated with its imperial power. "Hermus": the Latin name for what is now called the Gediz, in ancient times the heart of the Lydian Empire in Asia Minor.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Politically subjugated followers. The armies of Muhi al-Din Muhammad (ca. 1618–1707), known as Aurengzeb, powerful Mughal emperor, waged wars along the Ganges River against the Marathi people of South Asia. "Volga's banks": along the Volga, Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718) fought against Russian armies. "The Rhine": the Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722) had quickly advanced along the Rhine to victory at the Battle of Blenheim (1704), a major engagement of the War of the Spanish Succession, whose end Pope's poem celebrates.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Iberus (Roman name for the river now called the Ebro) in Spain, and the Ister (Greek and Roman name for the Danube) were scenes of important Allied victories in the War of the Spanish Succession.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Queen Anne commissioned fifty new churches in London to meet the needs of its growing populace.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Palace of Whitehall, principal residence of English monarchs, burned in 1698, and was situated where London and Westminster (then distinctly "two fair cities") meet, at a bend ("ample bow") in the Thames. Pope predicts its reconstruction, which was planned but never accomplished.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In 1575 and 1585, the Dutch asked Elizabeth I for aid in their wars against Philip II of Spain. "Sue": petition, appeal to.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The red cross of St. George on the English flag, or that cross incorporated into the Union Jack, the flag of a united Great Britain. "Leave their woods": timber from the forest will be used to build the country's navy and commercial fleet. "Thunder": cannons.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: It was thought that gems and precious metals "ripen" in the earth by the rays of the sun ("Phoebus"). The voice of the

Thames predicts that the riches of the world, including “balm” that bleeds from trees in India, and various gemstones, will be brought to it.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Pope imagines Indigenous peoples of the Americas coming to visit the Thames and England in their own ships. The thought may be inspired by the visit in 1710 of representatives of the Iroquois Confederacy on a diplomatic mission, which caused a sensation in London, introducing Britons to members of a very different culture, and encouraging them to view themselves, at least fancifully, from a non-European perspective.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pope’s vision of global peace seems to exclude the very institution over which the Peace of Utrecht established Britain’s substantial control: the treaties signed in March and April 1713, right at the time *Windsor-Forest* was published (March), included the *asiento de negros*, by which Spain granted Britain a monopoly on the transport of enslaved Africans to Spanish colonies in the Americas. The British government transferred this monopoly to the South Sea Company, in which Pope himself would invest in 1720.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Though “sable” commonly means “black,” it was a racializing term sometimes applied to describe the skin tone of various non-European people, including Indigenous people of America.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pope imagines the restoration of Indigenous peoples’ rights and lands taken from them by the Spanish.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Persecution, like the other figures named in the passage, is a personified abstraction: her “wheel” represents an instrument of torture, now “broken,” commonly associated with the Spanish Inquisition. “Envy”: often figured with snakes, Envy falls victim to them herself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Olive branches, symbol of peace.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *verses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woodland nymphs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Windsor's groves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reddish brown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grouped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wilderness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *productive labor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bathe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Thames* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the hunt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the east* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the northern lights* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breezes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfamiliar, strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonder at* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Peace* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Britain's* [Return to reference](#) °

## JAMES THOMSON

This immensely popular patriotic song first appeared in a masque, a theatrical entertainment, in honor of Frederick, prince of Wales, titled *Alfred* (1740): like other writers of the period, Thomson evokes the image of Alfred the Great (849–899 C.E.) to locate the origins of British liberty in a Gothic past, free of modern corruption; the ode was originally sung by an actor dressed as an ancient bard accompanied by a British harp. But though the song looks backward in time to an image of a free Britain self-sufficient in its liberties, it also extends British power outward, across the waves, to suggest the nation's modern projects of imperial conquest, subjecting "every shore" of the world's oceans to its authority.



# Ode: Rule, Britannia

## 1

When *Britain* first, at heaven's command,  
Arose from out the azure main<sup>o</sup>  
*This* was the charter of the land,  
And guardian angels sung *this* strain:  
5 "Rule, *Britannia*, rule the waves;  
*Britons* never will be slaves."

## 2

The nations, not so blest as thee,  
Must, in their turns, to tyrants fall:  
While thou shalt flourish great and free,  
The dread and envy of them all.  
10 "Rule," etc.

## 3

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,  
More dreadful, from each foreign stroke:  
As the loud blast that tears the skies,  
Serves but to root thy native oak.  
15 "Rule," etc.

## 4

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame:  
All their attempts to bend thee down  
Will but arouse thy generous flame;  
But work their woe, and thy renown.  
20 "Rule," etc.

## 5

To thee belongs the rural reign;

25 Thy cities shall with commerce shine:  
All thine shall be the subject main,  
And every shore it circles thine.  
"Rule," etc.

## 6

30 The Muses, still<sup>o</sup> with freedom found,  
Shall to thy happy coast repair:  
Blest isle! with matchless beauty crowned,  
And manly hearts to guard the fair.  
"Rule, *Britannia*, rule the waves;  
"*Britons* never will be slaves."

1740**Notes**

1745–46

- <sup>o</sup>: *open ocean*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *always*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Irish author Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) took up practically every literary genre, producing memorable works of drama, fiction, and poetry (see *The Deserted Village*, [p. 912](#)). He started his career in London among Grub Street journalists and eventually found his place among the eminences of the literary world. His first success was a series of letters, *The Citizen of the World*, which originally appeared in a London financial newspaper, the *Public Ledger*, in 1760; in revised form, they became a two-volume book in 1762. Goldsmith's letters adopt the perspective of a fictional character, Lien Chi Altangi, a Chinese scholar visiting London, who views the manners and beliefs of the British and of Europeans generally from a satirical and critical distance. The literary technique of defamiliarization, which presents ordinary elements of a social world from an outsider's perspective to reveal their strangeness, shapes many great works in the eighteenth century, particularly those that explore the nature of cultural difference against a background of a presumed common humanity. Inventing an astute, fictional, foreign observer to scrutinize one's home culture was not original to Goldsmith. Anticipating his use of the device are the *Persian Letters* (1721) of Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) and the *Chinese Letters* (1741) of Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens (1703–1771), French fictions widely read in English translation. Like those works, Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* is quasinovelistic. It creates characters whose stories develop across the sweep of the whole: they fall in love, wander the world, become enslaved and freed, and so on. But mostly the letters deploy cultural juxtaposition to expose shortcomings and reveal commonalities. As the title indicates, Goldsmith supposed, with many British writers of his time, that "the world" was composed of comparable if not equal peoples, which a discerning person from anywhere, situated anywhere, could judge. "The truth is, the

Chinese and we are pretty much alike," Goldsmith declares in his "Editor's Preface." And as in *The Citizen of the World*, the "rational" qualities commonly attributed to Chinese culture, politics, and religion were widely invoked by eighteenth-century British writers (however well or ill informed about the actualities of China and its history) to denounce corresponding deficiencies of their own nation.

# ***From The Citizen of the World***

## ***From the same.***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Were an Asiatic politician to read the treaties of peace and friendship that have been annually making for more than an hundred years among the inhabitants of Europe, he would probably be surprised how it should ever happen that Christian princes could quarrel among each other. Their compacts for peace are drawn up with the utmost precision, and ratified with the greatest solemnity; to these each party promises a sincere and inviolable obedience, and all wears the appearance of open friendship and unreserved reconciliation.

Yet, notwithstanding those treaties, the people of Europe are almost continually at war. There is nothing more easy than to break a treaty ratified in all the usual forms, and yet neither party be the aggressor. One side, for instance, breaks a trifling article by mistake; the opposite party upon this makes a small but premeditated reprisal; this brings on a return of greater from the other; both sides complain of injuries and infractions; war is declared; they beat, are beaten; some two or three hundred thousand men are killed, they grow tired, leave off just where they began; and so sit coolly down to make new treaties.

The English and French seem to place themselves foremost among the champion states of Europe. Though parted by a narrow sea, yet are they entirely of opposite characters; and from their vicinity are taught to fear and admire each other. They are at present engaged in a very destructive war, have already spilled much blood, are excessively irritated; and all upon account of one side's desiring to wear greater quantities of furs than the other.<sup>[2](#)</sup>

The pretext of the war is about some lands a thousand leagues off; a country cold, desolate, and hideous; a country belonging to a people who were in possession for time immemorial. The savages of

Canada<sup>3</sup> claim a property in the country in dispute; they have all the pretensions which long possession can confer. Here they had reigned for ages without rivals in dominion, and knew no enemies but the prowling bear or insidious tiger; their native forests produced all the necessaries of life, and they found ample luxury in the enjoyment. In this manner they might have continued to live to eternity,<sup>4</sup> had not the English been informed that those countries produced furs in great abundance. From that moment the country became an object of desire; it was found that furs were things very much wanted in England; the ladies edged some of their clothes with furs, and muffs were worn both by gentlemen and ladies. In short, furs were found indispensably necessary for the happiness of the state: and the king was consequently petitioned to grant not only the country of Canada, but all the savages belonging to it to the subjects of England, in order to have the people supplied with proper quantities of this necessary commodity.

So very reasonable a request was immediately complied with, and large colonies were sent abroad to procure furs, and take possession. The French who were equally in want of furs (for they were as fond of muffs and tippetts<sup>5</sup> as the English) made the very same request to their monarch, and met with the same gracious reception from their king, who generously granted what was not his to give. Wherever the French landed, they called the country their own; and the English took possession wherever they came upon the same equitable pretensions. The harmless savages made no opposition; and could the intruders have agreed together, they might peaceably have shared this desolate country between them. But they quarreled about the boundaries of their settlements, about grounds and rivers to which neither side could show any other right than that of power, and which neither could occupy but by usurpation. Such is the contest, that no honest man can heartily wish success to either party.

The war has continued for some time with various success. At first the French seemed victorious; but the English have of late dispossessed them of the whole country in dispute.<sup>6</sup> Think not,

however, that success on one side is the harbinger of peace: on the contrary, both parties must be heartily tired to effect even a temporary reconciliation. It should seem the business of the victorious party to offer terms of peace; but there are many in England, who, encouraged by success, are still for protracting the war.

The best English politicians, however, are sensible, that to keep their present conquests, would be rather a burthen than an advantage to them rather a diminution of their strength than an increase of power. It is in the politic as in the human constitution; if the limbs grow too large for the body, their size, instead of improving, will diminish the vigor of the whole. The colonies should always bear an exact proportion to the mother country; when they grow populous, they grow powerful, and by becoming powerful, they become independent also; thus subordination is destroyed, and a country swallowed up in the extent of its own dominions. The Turkish empire would be more formidable, were it less extensive. Were it not for those countries, which it can neither command, nor give entirely away, which it is obliged to protect, but from which it has no power to exact obedience.

Yet, obvious as these truths are, there are many Englishmen who are for transplanting new colonies into this late acquisition, for peopling the deserts of America with the refuse of their countrymen, and (as they express it) with the waste of an exuberant nation. But who are those unhappy creatures who are to be thus drained away? Not the sickly, for they are unwelcome guests abroad as well as at home; nor the idle, for they would starve as well behind the Appalachian mountains as in the streets of London. This refuse is composed of the laborious and enterprising, of such men as can be serviceable to their country at home, of men who ought to be regarded as the sinews of the people, and cherished with every degree of political indulgence. And what are the commodities which this colony, when established, are to produce in return? Why raw silk, hemp, and tobacco. England, therefore, must make an exchange of her best and bravest subjects for raw silk, hemp, and

tobacco; her hardy veterans and honest tradesmen, must be trucked for a box of snuff or a silk petticoat. Strange absurdity! Sure the politics of the Daures<sup>7</sup> are not more strange, who sell their religion, their wives, and their liberty for a glass bead, or a paltry penknife.

Farewell.

## Endnotes

1760, 1762

- Note 1: Goldsmith's fictional author, Lien Chi Altangi, addressed letters to "Fum Hoam, First President of the Ceremonial Academy of Pekin, in China." "Pekin," or Peking, now transliterated "Beijing," is the capital of China. The publication's complete title was *The Citizen of the World, or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London, to His Friends in the East*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Seven Years' War, 1756–63, a major global conflict for imperial and commercial supremacy fought primarily between France and Britain, had theaters in North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and India. As Goldsmith notes, among the issues of contention in the North American conflict (also called the French and Indian War) was fur-trading rights with Indigenous peoples in Canada and what would become the upper Midwest of the United States.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Despite his apparent recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples of North America, Goldsmith imagines Lien Chi Altangi calling them "savages," a derogatory term commonly used in the period to distinguish some societies from so-called civilized ones, which for Goldsmith included the Europeans and Chinese, among others.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Goldsmith's romanticized simplifications ignore the politics, history, and diversity of Indigenous peoples in North America. During the Seven Years' War, members of the Iroquois Confederacy were allied with the British, and nations living in what would become Canada, including the Algonquin and the Huron, allied with the French.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Short cloaks or capes worn over the shoulders.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: After several years of indecisive conflict, British forces won a string of victories in 1759, culminating in that of the armies of General James Wolfe in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, also known as the Battle of Quebec, in September of that year, which effectively consolidated British power in North America.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Daur are a Mongolic people of northeast China. Goldsmith's Lien Chi Altangi mentions them several times in *The Citizen of the World*, as here, to illustrate political or cultural qualities that would seem "strange" from a purportedly civilized European or (as Goldsmith imagines it) Chinese perspective.[Return to reference 7](#)

# THOMAS JEFFERSON

One of the most important political documents in world history, the American Declaration of Independence, composed primarily by Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), was first published as a broadside, titled “A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled,” by Philadelphia printer John Dunlap the night of July 4, 1776, hours after it was ratified by the Second Continental Congress, a little over a year after war between British troops and American colonists had begun. The publication’s primary purpose was news: people throughout the thirteen colonies had to be quickly informed that a new nation had been declared into existence. The first piece of the British Empire to break away from it, the colonies also knew it was urgent to immediately explain their dramatic course of action: the bulk of space in the broadside is given to the “causes”—what would come to be called the 27 Grievances—that made continued subordination to Britain intolerable to the new nation’s founders, rooted in particular disputes and struggles arising through the decade and a half since the end of the Seven Years’ War.

But the future life of the document would primarily grow from its second paragraph. Its articulation of basic human rights, which had its roots in Enlightenment thought developed in Britain itself and elsewhere in Europe, would function as something like a sacred text: a source of inspiration and frustration, an invitation to interpret, revise, expand, and question, and to judge the United States in relation to its purported ideals, which, for many, the Declaration encapsulated and expressed better than the Constitution itself, ratified twelve years later. The contradiction between the notion that all men are created equal and the institution of racialized chattel slavery woven into the new nation’s existence was obvious even to the founders and deplored immediately by abolitionists, including Black writers Prince Hall (see [p. 951](#)) and Lemuel Haynes (1753–

1833). Other forms of inequality in the united colonies were similarly glaring, as the Indigenous writer Samson Occom (see [p. 355](#)), among many others, pointed out. But the Declaration also served as a blueprint for the expansion of rights and freedoms beyond those of the White, male, propertied settlers of North America. At the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention devoted to women's rights, a Declaration of Sentiments directly revised the language of 1776: "we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal." In the 1850s, Frederick Douglass (who signed the Seneca Falls Declaration) extolled the "saving principles" of the Declaration of Independence even as he excoriated the hypocrisy of a nation that espoused them and enslaved human beings. Abraham Lincoln would attempt to re-found the nation on the Declaration's principles, quoting its assertion of the equality of all in the midst of the Civil War, in his most famous speech. And in subsequent decades, reformers and radicals, in the United States and throughout the world, would cleave to this ideal equality, while sometimes bitterly noting its continuing failure to be realized.

# **The Declaration of Independence**

## ***In Congress, July 4, 1776: A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled***

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which

constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present king of Great Britain<sup>1</sup> is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.<sup>2</sup>

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners;<sup>3</sup> refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing Judiciary powers.<sup>4</sup>

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.<sup>5</sup>

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.<sup>6</sup>

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.<sup>7</sup>

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction<sup>8</sup> foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:<sup>9</sup>

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states:<sup>1</sup>

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:<sup>2</sup>

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences:<sup>3</sup>

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies:<sup>4</sup>

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns,<sup>5</sup> and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny,<sup>6</sup> already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear arms against their country,<sup>7</sup> to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages,<sup>8</sup> whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.<sup>9</sup>

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states; that they are

absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Signed for by order and in behalf of the Congress, John Hancock, President<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

1776

- Note 1: George III (1738–1820) of Great Britain. Though many of the violations of what colonists asserted as their rights were enacted by the British Parliament, the document lays blame for the abuses on King George.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This and many of the following grievances focus on the colonists' central complaint, that self-government in the colonies was being denied in numerous ways by the king and Parliament: colonial legislatures were dissolved, their laws not recognized, the locations of their meetings changed arbitrarily, and so on. Such actions and inactions were taken by the British government to punish colonial authorities and citizens for their rebellious behavior toward representatives of the Crown, especially during the preceding ten years.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Colonial governments had long exercised authority over immigration, and Britain now saw the increase in the number of immigrants, from Germany and elsewhere, as a threat to its authority and a way for the colonies to increase their power, independence, and territorial control.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The right of citizens of Massachusetts to elect their own judges was revoked in 1774; henceforth, judges were appointed



by the Crown, ensuring their loyalty to the government (see also the subsequent grievance).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: To pay for the expensive Seven Years' War, the British government instituted numerous mechanisms (including the massively unpopular Stamp Act of 1765), and employed many officials, to collect tax revenue throughout the colonies.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Professional armies of paid soldiers, as opposed to volunteer militias called up only during wartime, were seen as an instrument of repression and tyranny, both by the colonists and by many in Britain throughout the 18th century.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In 1774, General Thomas Gage (1719–1787), British commander-in-chief of North America, also took control of “civil power” in Massachusetts, as its newly appointed governor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Parliament of Great Britain.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Parliament's Quartering Act of 1765 required colonial legislatures to provide quarters and food to British soldiers; another Quartering Act, of 1774, gave this authority to royal governors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In an altercation with British marines in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1765, two colonial citizens were killed, but the marines were acquitted after a sensational trial.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A series of Navigation Acts dating back to the 1660s restricted the trade of colonial America with France and Spain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In 1774, the Administration of Justice Act stipulated that a colonial citizen accused of a serious crime could be tried in another colony, or in Britain, if the Crown believed that a local jury was prejudiced in favor of the defendant.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Quebec Act of 1774 allowed French civil law and culture, including Roman Catholicism, to hold sway in Quebec, after unsuccessful attempts to introduce English legal and

cultural practices to the population there. The act also expanded Quebec's boundaries into what would become the upper Midwest of the United States.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Among other attacks, this refers to a British naval bombardment that leveled Falmouth (now Portland, Maine) in 1775.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The first German auxiliary troops hired by George III, called "Hessians" by the colonists (from their origin in German states of Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Hanau), would land on Staten Island in August 1776, to supplement the British Army in its efforts to put down the American rebellion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In late 1775, an act of Parliament authorized the seizure of colonial ships, and the impressment of the captured sailors into the British Navy to fight against the colonies.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
The final grievance comments on two separate developments. The "domestic insurrections" feared by colonists included those incited by the proclamation in April 1775 by John Murray, Earl of Dunmore (1730–1809), royal governor of Virginia, which promised freedom to all enslaved Black men able to bear arms (as well as to indentured servants) if they would join the British war effort. (Several hundred enslaved men did so, forming the Royal Ethiopian Regiment.) Though pertaining to Virginia, the proclamation was published throughout the colonies. The grievance also deplores, in typically racist language, efforts of General Gage to persuade Indigenous nations along the frontiers of the colonies to fight alongside the British.  
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
In Jefferson's earlier draft, the fear of "domestic insurrections" in the 27th grievance was situated within a larger denunciation of slavery: it began, "He [George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery, or to

incur miserable death, in their transportation hither." The draft continued to note the irony of George (and Lord Dunmore) "exciting those very people to rise in arms against us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them"; and concluded by noting that the Crown and its representatives have resisted every attempt by various colonial legislatures "to prohibit or restrain an execrable commerce." These sentiments matched Jefferson's early theoretical conviction that slavery should be abolished in America, though he himself held around 200 enslaved people on his estates at the time. Decades later, after he had fallen silent on the question of abolishing enslavement and still held some 200 enslaved people, Jefferson would recall in his autobiography (1821) that the initially drafted passage was replaced in the Declaration's final version to placate Southern plantation owners and Northern merchants, both with a financial interest in perpetuating enslavement and the trade in enslaved people.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: John Hancock (1737–1793), president of the Second Continental Congress. [Return to reference 1](#)

## GERALD FITZGERALD

In the 1779 poem *The Injured Islanders*, an Irishman pretends to be a Tahitian queen in order to critique British colonialism. The poem features an important moment of contact between the British and Pacific islanders. In June 1767, Samuel Wallis—captain of the British ship *The Dolphin*—first encountered Tahiti (Otaheite, as it was called), an island previously unknown to Europeans. His arrival occasioned violence between the British forces and the islanders, before they were able to achieve some understanding of peace. Wallis claimed the island for the British, and Purea—the powerful local woman that Wallis mistook as queen—arrived later, offering gifts. Wallis and his crew stayed for several weeks and then departed again.

The author of *The Injured Islanders*, Gerald Fitzgerald, was a White clergyman at Trinity College in Dublin. He impersonates “Oberea” (a common European rendering of Purea’s name). As the poem’s speaker, she addresses an absent Wallis, after he left the island. In contrast to other available representations of Purea (often bawdy and satirical), Fitzgerald offers a notably sympathetic depiction. As he explains to readers, “Oberea” was a “Queen” who treated Wallis “with peculiar generosity and regard,” and her poetic monologue proceeds from “a remembrance of their mutual affection” and “a patriotic feeling for the fate of her country” in the aftermath—she fell from power shortly thereafter. Indeed, more than sympathetic, Fitzgerald uses his Tahitian persona to offer an impassioned critique of the negative effects of British exploration in the previously stable territories they “discovered.” He argues that British ships brought to Tahiti political violence, weapons, and disease. Fitzgerald also added learned footnotes (some of which are reproduced here) to substantiate his speaker’s critique with reference to printed accounts of recent Pacific voyages, including the Dublin edition of John Hawkesworth’s *Account of the Voyages Undertaken*

*by the Order of his Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere* (1773).



**“Interview between Captain Wallis and Oberea, Queen of Otaheite, after Peace being established with the Natives of that Island,”** early nineteenth century. This slightly later print closely resembles an image featured in the second edition of John Hawkesworth’s *An Account of the Voyages* (1773).

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Fitzgerald’s full-throated critique of British imperial exploration, however, also reveals something of the limits of his sympathetic imagination. Given British misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Tahitian sexual practices, Purea’s relations were often sexualized—though there is no evidence that Purea and Wallis were lovers, as imagined here. And the happy ending that Fitzgerald has his version of Purea ardently wish for involves Wallis, a White British man, returning to the island and her rule being “aided by” him.



# ***From The Injured Islanders; or The Influence of Art Upon the Happiness of Nature***

## ***A Poetical Epistle from Oberea of Otaheite to Captain Wallis***

### ***From Preface***

Few subjects of similar nature have afforded more entertainment to the public than the late voyages to the southern ocean; their design, and the degree of success that has attended it, are now generally known: but whatever advantages either the spirit of enterprise, or commercial and scientific interests may derive from some discoveries that have been made in that distant hemisphere, it is much to be lamented, that the innocent natives have been sufferers by the event: the imaginary value annexed to European toys and manufactures, and the ravages of a particular disorder<sup>1</sup> have already injured their morals and their peace; even the instruments of iron, which so much facilitate the ordinary operations of industry, have been used as weapons of destruction, or perverted to the purposes of ambition and revenge.

\* \* \*

55      Late,<sup>o</sup> as along the verdure-vested<sup>o</sup> lawn  
My morning steps approached the blushing dawn,  
Far from the beach, and pendent<sup>o</sup> from the sky,  
A distant vessel caught my longing eye,  
The purple streamers, wave by wave, appear,  
And Love still whispers, lo! thy WALLIS near;  
60      Oh joyful hope!—to greet thee I prepare,  
And bind the tomou<sup>2</sup> round my fragrant hair,  
With grateful gifts of vegetable store

I haste impatient to the crowded shore,  
In vain I haste,—no Wallis meets me there,  
65 No friend, no fondness to reward my care,  
Bereft of pow'r, and destitute of train,<sup>o</sup>  
My humble off'rings scarce acceptance gain,  
To richer chiefs, who rule Taheitee's land,  
The British treasures pass from hand to hand,  
70 The crimson plumes,<sup>3</sup> the beads of brightest dye,  
The mirrors faithful to the gazer's eye,  
The precious gifts, whose boasted aid we feel,  
Of pointed iron, and of polished steel,—  
Boast though we may, to judge them by the past,  
75 These gifts may prove our fatal foes at last,  
By piercing steel though proudest forests fall,  
And take new forms at man's imperial call,  
By steel too man his fellow man annoys,<sup>o</sup>  
It tempts as plunder, and as death destroys,  
80 The dang'rous wealth exotic wants inspires  
Where equal Nature levelled all desires,  
And, social freedom sapped by envious strife,  
We risk at once our morals and our life.

Cursed the desire for wealth like this that made  
85 A rival chief my royal realms invade!  
The lifted ax—Ah! Wallis, shall I tell?  
On all our friends with dreadful havoc fell,  
An instant flight thy Obra<sup>o</sup> scarce could save  
Where the stern mountain<sup>4</sup> frowns upon the wave—  
90 Where cloud-girt<sup>o</sup> rocks their cheerless bosoms bare,  
The wretches' last sad refuge from despair,—  
There, to conceal me from the furious foe,  
I sunk depressed in solitary woe;  
As some tall palm-tree, sov'reign of the plain,  
95 That tops the grove, and glads th'admiring swain,<sup>5</sup>  
If sudden shook by autumn's angry storm,

Shrinks from the blast to hide its humbled form,  
 Stripped of its fruit, its foliage and its pride,  
 It naked stands, and droops on ev'ry side;  
 100 So helpless Obra, in a luckless hour,  
 Yields to her fate, divested of her pow'r,  
 Her only trust in Tanè's<sup>6</sup> wise decree,  
 In hope, in love, in justice and in thee.

Nor here alone Commotion's hostile hand  
 105 With rage and rapine wastes a trembling land,  
 'Gainst other shores what fatal projects rise!<sup>7</sup>  
 What fleets tremendous fill my wond'ring eyes!  
 Already launched I see their awful form  
 Mount the high waves, and dare the threat'ning  
 110 storm,  
 See their fell purpose Freedom to o'erwhelm,  
 Pride at the prow, Presumption at the helm—  
 See subject isles, late objects of our care,  
 Marked out for plunder, servitude, despair,—  
 Invading Pow'r imperial rights define—  
 115 Asserted Liberty these rights decline—  
 Discord and War in dread confusion rise  
 With widow's wailings, and with orphan's cries—  
 The ravaged plains to desolation giv'n,  
 And ev'ry crime that calls the wrath of heav'n:  
 120 Ah! What a change from all that charmed before,  
 When kindred love connected ev'ry shore,  
 When mutual int'rest, spreading unconfined,  
 Parental care and filial duty joined—  
 Such were the bands that held our happy state  
 125 Ere<sup>8</sup> lux'ry taught ambition to be great—  
 Ere lust of pow'r to deeds oppressive led—  
 Ere Europe's crimes with Europe's commerce spread;  
 Do these alas! thy hapless<sup>9</sup> country shake?  
 Corruption sap it, and contention break?  
 130



Or dares proud trade, if meant for all mankind,  
Here, only here, the dearest ties unbind?  
In stinted<sup>o</sup> regions pour its blessings round?  
In climes luxuriant ev'ry bliss confound<sup>o</sup>?

\* \* \*

Yes, Wallis, yes, from thee no fears alarm,  
Whose highest rage submission could disarm<sup>8</sup>—  
Well do my thoughts recall that awful<sup>o</sup> hour  
385 When first we felt, and trembled at thy pow'r,  
Some dreadful demon, with an hostile band,  
We feared thee sent to desolate our land,  
What could, alas! defenseless troops inspire?  
What check the fury of destructive fire?  
390 Repelled, confounded, patriot valor fled  
As all around the rapid ruin sped,  
Till first in mercy, as the first in sway,<sup>o</sup>  
Your pity spared what pow'r could take away,  
Resistance conquered saw resentment cease,  
395 Hushed was the war, and raised each downcast face;  
'Twas then to meet thee on the crowded shore  
The peaceful plantain<sup>9</sup> in my hand I bore,  
In due obeisance<sup>o</sup> half my bosom bared,<sup>1</sup>  
And found respect by mutual rites revered,  
400 A kindling zeal ere complaisance<sup>o</sup> began,  
And all the hero soft'ning in the man:  
Pleased with the manners of my mighty guest,  
I fearless led thee to the social feast,  
Where palm-spread sheds on stately pillars stood  
405 Midst cooling shades and vistas of the wood,  
Each op'ning front drew fragrance from the air,  
You gazed—you vowed a paradise was there,  
Smiled as the cocoa, soothing to the soul,  
Poured the sweet bev'rage<sup>2</sup> from its native bowl,  
410 Or varied viands<sup>o</sup> oped<sup>o</sup> their grateful store,

Fruits from the grove, and fishes from the shore,  
New wonder rose, when ranged around<sup>o</sup> for thee,  
Attendant virgins danced the Timrodee,<sup>3</sup>  
And vocal bards, the pleasure to prolong,  
415 Sung the bold deeds and heroes of their song,  
But chiefly thee, thy vict'ry and thy praise,  
The noblest subject of their simple lays,  
Till the tired sun, on western waves reposed,  
Dismissed the ev'ning, and the Heiva<sup>4</sup> closed.  
420

If native pleasures, simply thus supplied,  
Disclaim<sup>o</sup> the arts that minister to pride,  
What tempts thee, wand'ring with the faithless main,  
<sup>o</sup>  
To barter ease for perils and for pain?  
Does churlish Nature stint<sup>o</sup> thy parent soil?  
425 Does wealth superfluous prompt to wanton spoil<sup>o</sup>?  
Do restless longings for a deathless name  
Glow in thy breast, and animate thy frame?—  
Vain is each wish that flatt'ring hope inspires,  
If in the toil, the taste for joy expires,  
430 If unrestrained we urge the wayward mind  
Without a glance on wasting time behind;

\* \* \*

Ah! Wallis, haste—the dreadful regions shun,  
Where dismal deaths in dark disguises run,  
Where fancied lands, removed from every joy,  
If found, deceive us—if possessed, destroy;  
460 Here shalt thou find each solace of thy woes  
That man can ask—if what to ask he knows;  
Here, in thy fav'rite, fond Taheitee, still  
Its sons obsequious,<sup>o</sup> and its laws thy will;  
Thy faithful Obra, aided by thy hand,  
465 Again shall rise, the empress of the land,

470 Her awestruck foes, to shun impending ire,  
Quick to the mountain's silent gloom retire;  
Or prostrate—penitent—their deeds deplore,  
Her wrongs redress, her regal rights restore,  
Till, smiling Peace through ev'ry region seen,  
She rules triumphant, and expires a queen.

## Endnotes

1779

- Note 1: Europeans brought venereal disease to Tahiti. "Toys": frivolous manufactured objects.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Human hair plaited, in which they stick flowers of various kinds, particularly the (gardenia) Cape Jessamine [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Red feathers are highly valued at O'Taheite [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The mountains always afford them refuge from impending danger, till the passion of the conqueror, which is violent but not lasting, has subsided [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rural youth. "Glads": makes glad.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A son of their supreme deities, whom they suppose to take a greater part in the affairs of mankind. See Hawkesworth's *Voyages* II.81 [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fitzgerald's note laments an example of islander forces using "European tools" and weapons to fight their neighbors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the islanders' willingness to submit disarmed Wallis's rage.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Green branches of trees, particularly of the plantain, are their symbols of peace [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lowering the garments, so as to uncover the shoulders, is in this country a mark of respect [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: For drink they have in general nothing but water, or the juice of the cocoa-nut; the art of producing liquors that intoxicate by fermentation, being happily unknown among them. Hawkesworth II.48 [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Tahitian dance, one of several aspects of Tahitian culture that the British found titillating.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A concert of assembly—it is also a common name for every public exhibition. See the same author [Hawkesworth], I.474 [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *lately* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clad with green* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hanging* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attendants* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harms* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Oberea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *encircled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unfortunate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limited* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destroy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awe-inducing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *power* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *courtesy, reverence* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *politeness, desire to please* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foods* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opened* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laid out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reject any connection with* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ocean* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limit or restrict gifts to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plunder* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *obedient* [Return to reference °](#)

## ANNA SEWARD

Anna Seward (1742–1809) was an influential poet of the later eighteenth century. She would become famous for poems that helped shift the direction of English poetics. Her lyrical sonnets played a key role in the Romantic sonnet revival, and her poems of self and nature featured a turn to inwardness and feeling that anticipated William Wordsworth. If her later influential works point toward new trends in Romantic poetry, though, in her earlier work—such as “An Elegy on Captain Cook” (1780), featured here—she took on the traditional, learned guise of the public poet who comments on current events.

Captain James Cook (1728–1779) was the most famous British explorer and cartographer of the eighteenth century. He was known for leading three important voyages to the Pacific, on ships called the *Endeavour* (1768–71) and the *Resolution* (1772–75, 1776–79). On these voyages, he visited, mapped, and made imperial claims of possession in what we now call New Zealand, Australia, and several other Pacific islands. He died in Hawaii on his third voyage, in a scuffle instigated by his attempt to hold a local leader hostage.

Seward drew in detail on Cook’s journals as she made him a symbol of what she saw as Britain’s heroic and moral project of exploration in the Pacific. The juxtaposition with the more critical description of British exploration in Fitzgerald’s poem (see above) could not be starker. Cook first visited Tahiti in 1769, two years after the encounter between Parea and Captain Wallis described in Fitzgerald’s poem, and Seward offers a much more positive and celebratory account of British influence there. Indeed, where Fitzgerald’s Oberea insists that “Europe’s crimes with Europe’s commerce spread,” Seward has British missions of discovery motivated by “HUMANITY.” Seward’s mythologizing account, like many others at the time, offers a racist description of Indigenous people as “savage” and treats European influence as purely positive.

In the period, patriotic poetry was a powerful vehicle for articulating this ideologically loaded, pro-imperial vision.

## ***From An Elegy on Captain Cook***

Sorrowing, the Nine<sup>o</sup> beneath yon blasted yew  
Shed the bright drops of pity's holy dew;  
Mute are their tuneful tongues, extinct their fires;  
Yet not in silence sleep their silver lyres;  
To the bleak gale they vibrate sad and slow,  
5 In deep accordance to a nation's woe.

Ye,<sup>1</sup> who ere while for COOK's illustrious brow  
Plucked the green laurel, and the oaken bough,  
Hung the gay garlands on the trophied oars,  
And poured his fame along a thousand shores,  
10 Strike the slow death-bell!—weave the sacred verse,  
And strew the cypress o'er his honored hearse;  
In sad procession wander round the shrine,  
And weep him mortal, whom ye sung divine!

Say first, what Pow'r inspired his dauntless breast  
15 With scorn of danger, and inglorious rest,  
To quit imperial London's gorgeous plains,  
Where, robed in thousand tints, bright Pleasure  
reigns;  
In cups of summer-ice her nectar pours,  
And twines, 'mid wintry snows, her roseate bow'rs?  
20 Where Beauty moves with undulating grace,  
Calls the sweet blush to wanton o'er her face,  
On each fond youth her soft artillery tries,  
Aims her light smile, and rolls her frolic eyes?

What Pow'r inspired his dauntless breast to brave  
25 The scorched equator, and th'Antarctic wave?  
Climes, where fierce suns in cloudless ardors shine,



And pour the dazzling deluge round the line;<sup>o</sup>  
The realms of frost, where icy mountains rise,  
‘Mid the pale summer of the polar skies?—  
30 It was HUMANITY!—on coasts unknown,  
The shiv’ring natives of the frozen zone,  
And the swart<sup>o</sup> Indian, as he faintly strays  
“Where Cancer reddens in the solar blaze,”<sup>2</sup>  
She<sup>3</sup> bade him seek;—on each inclement<sup>o</sup> shore  
35 Plant the rich seeds of her exhaustless store;  
Unite the savage hearts, and hostile hands,  
In the firm compact of her gentle bands;  
Strew her soft comforts o’er the barren plain,  
Sing her sweet lays, and consecrate her fane.<sup>o</sup>  
40

It was HUMANITY!—O nymph<sup>o</sup> divine!  
I see thy light step print the burning line!  
There thy bright eye the dubious pilot guides,  
The faint oar struggling with the scalding tides.—  
On as thou lead’st the bold, the glorious prow,  
45 Mild, and more mild, the sloping sun-beams glow;  
Now weak and pale the lessened lustres play,  
As round th’horizon rolls the timid day;  
Barbed with the sleeted snow, the driving hail,  
Rush the fierce arrows of the polar gale;  
50 And through the dim, unvaried, ling’ring hours,  
Wide o’er the waves incumbent horror low’rs.<sup>4</sup>

From the rude summit of yon frozen steep,  
Contrasting glory gilds the dreary deep!  
Lo!—decked with vermeil<sup>o</sup> youth and beamy<sup>o</sup> grace,  
55 Hope in her step, and gladness in her face,  
Light on the icy rock, with outstretched hands,  
The goddess of the new Columbus stands.  
Round her bright head the plummy peterels soar,<sup>5</sup>  
Blue as her robe, that sweeps the frozen shore;  
60

Glows her soft cheek, as vernal mornings fair,  
And warm as summer suns her golden hair;  
O'er the hoar<sup>o</sup> waste her radiant glances stream,  
And courage kindles in their magic beam.  
65 She points the ship its mazy path, to thread  
The floating fragments<sup>6</sup> of the frozen bed.

While o'er the deep, in many a dreadful form,  
The giant Danger howls along the storm,  
Furling the iron sails<sup>7</sup> with numbéd hands,  
70 Firm on the deck the great adventurer stands;  
Round glitt'ring mountains hears the billows rave,  
And the vast ruin thunder on the wave.<sup>8</sup>—  
Appalled he hears!—but checks<sup>o</sup> the rising sigh,  
And turns on his firm band a glist'ning eye.—  
Not for himself the sighs unbidden break,  
75 Amid the terrors of the icy wreck;  
Not for himself starts the impassioned tear,  
Congealing as it falls;—nor pain, nor fear,  
Nor Death's dread darts, impede the great design,  
Till Nature draws the circumscribing line.  
80 Huge rocks of ice th' arrested ship embay,  
And bar the gallant wanderer's dangerous way.<sup>9</sup>—  
His eye regretful marks the goddess turn  
Th' assiduous prow from its relentless bourn.<sup>o</sup>

85 And now antarctic Zealand's<sup>o</sup> drear domain  
Frowns, and o'erhangs th' inhospitable main.  
On its chill beach this dove of humankind  
For his long-wand'ring foot short rest shall find,  
Bear to the coast the olive branch<sup>o</sup> in vain,  
And quit on wearied wing the hostile plain.—  
90 With jealous low'r<sup>o</sup> the frowning natives view  
The stately vessel, and th' advent'rous crew;  
Nor fear the brave, nor emulate the good,

But scowl with savage thirst of human blood!<sup>1</sup>

95 And yet there were, who in this iron clime  
Soared o'er the herd on Virtue's wing sublime;  
Revered the stranger-guest, and smiling strove  
To soothe his stay with hospitable love;  
Fanned in full confidence the friendly flame,  
100 Joined plighted hands, and name exchanged for  
name.<sup>2</sup>

To these the hero leads his living store,<sup>3</sup>  
And pours new wonders on th' uncultured shore  
The silky fleece, fair fruit, and golden grain;  
And future herds and harvests bless the plain.  
O'er the green soil his kids<sup>o</sup> exulting play,  
105 And sounds his clarion loud the bird of day;  
The downy goose her ruffled bosom laves,<sup>o</sup>  
Trims her white wing, and wantons in the waves;  
Stern moves the bull along th' affrighted shores,  
And countless nations tremble as he roars.

110

\* \* \*

Now leads HUMANITY the destined way,  
Where all the loves in Otaheite<sup>4</sup> stray.  
To bid the arts disclose their wond'rous pow'rs,  
165 To bid the virtues consecrate the bow'rs,  
She gives her hero to its blooming plain.—  
Nor has he wandered, has he bled in vain!  
His lips persuasive charm th' uncultured youth,  
Teach wisdom's lore, and point the path of truth.  
170 See! chastened love in softer glances flows,  
See! with new fires parental duty glows.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

- Note 1: The Muses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Seward signals that this line is borrowed from James Thomson's *The Seasons* (*Summer*, line 43, slightly misquoted). "Cancer": a constellation, associated with the zodiac sign.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Humanity, personified.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "To appear dark, stormy, and gloomy" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The peterel [petrel] is a bird found in the frozen seas; its neck and tail are white, and its wings of a bright blue [*Seward's note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "In the course of the last twenty-four hours, we passed through several fields of broken ice; they were in general narrow, but of considerable extent. In one part the pieces of ice were so close, that the ship had much difficulty to thread them" [*Seward's note*]. She quotes from Cook's *Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (1777).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Our sails and rigging were so frozen, that they seemed plated of iron" [*Seward's note*]. Unknown source.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The breaking of one of those immense mountains of ice, and the prodigious noise it made, is particularly described in Cook's second voyage to the south pole [*Seward's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cook was searching for land near the Antarctic Circle, but ice made him turn around.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The British were fascinated by discussions of cannibalism (or anthropophagy) in New Zealand, though the historical facts and cultural meanings remain controversial and contested.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The exchange of names is a pledge of amity among these islanders, and was frequently proposed by them to Captain Cook and his people; so also is the joining noses [*Seward's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Captain Cook left various kinds of animals upon the coast, together with garden seeds, etc. The Zealanders had

hitherto subsisted upon fish, and such coarse vegetables as their climate produced; and this want of better provision, it is supposed, induced them to the horrid practice of eating human flesh [*Seward's note*]. Though the facts about anthropophagy are disputed, even one of the earliest reports from Cook's voyage suggested that hunger seemed unlikely as a motive, for there was plentiful food before the British arrived.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Tahiti.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Captain Cook observes, in his second voyage, that the women of Otaheite were grown more modest, and that the barbarous practice of destroying their children was lessened [*Seward's note*]. For a competing perspective on British influence in Tahiti, see Fitzgerald's poem, above.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *the Muses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *equator*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dark*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harsh*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *temple, sacred place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mythological spirit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *red*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *radiant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *white (with snow)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *represses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aimed-for endpoint*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(New Zealand)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *symbol of peace*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gloominess*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *young goats*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *washes*[Return to reference °](#)

## EDMUND BURKE

The Anglo-Irish philosopher, statesman, and orator Edmund Burke (1729–1797) is best known for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a critique of revolutionary impulses and motives that would be a defining inspiration for modern conservatism, and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), which he wrote in his twenties and which still influences discussions of aesthetics today. But he considered his life's great work to be British colonial policy in India. Serving in the House of Commons as a member for Wendover in Buckinghamshire (1765–74), then for Bristol (1774–80), then Malton (1780–94), he began in the late 1770s to scrutinize British Indian affairs, at the behest of the Whig faction in Parliament to which he was allied. By 1792, two years after his *Reflections* on the French Revolution appeared, he would write to a friend that “this Indian Affair” had been “the object of far the greatest and longest labor of a very laborious life,” taken up “on very public principles, and grounds that were of infinitely more importance than anything which related to me could possibly amount to.” Here he particularly refers to his leadership of the prosecution in the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, governor-general of Bengal, on charges of corruption and mismanagement, which dragged on, remarkably, from 1787 to 1795. The prosecution failed to make its case, which finally resulted in an overwhelming vote for acquittal. But Burke's involvement in British policy concerning India extended beyond determining the fate of Hastings: it centered on the extraordinary role of the British East India Company in South Asia. Though a private corporation, the Company orchestrated Indian politics, waged war, and collected taxes, all while relying on resources of the British government—a situation anticipating operations of multinational corporations in imperialist projects of the capitalist era. Founded in 1600, the Company increased its power enormously after its victory at Plassey over the

nawab of Bengal and his French allies in 1757, during the Seven Years' War. The selection below, from a speech Burke made in favor of a bill that would subject the Company to the oversight of the government, rises to a denunciation of a colonialism motivated only by the extraction of wealth: "an oppressive, irregular, capricious, unsteady, rapacious, and peculating despotism, with a direct disavowal of obedience to any authority at home," he calls it later in the speech. Even the settler colonialisms of earlier invaders of India from different parts of Asia, he argues, were superior to this. Burke recommends a better-managed colonialism, not a British withdrawal. And like his prosecution of Hastings, his efforts on behalf of this bill failed. But Burke's demands in this speech reflect the conviction he argued for throughout his career: that governors are duty-bound to promote the flourishing of those over whom they rule.

## ***From Mr. Burke's Speech . . . on Mr. Fox's East India Bill***<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

The several irruptions of Arabs, Tartars, and Persians<sup>2</sup> into India were, for the greater part, ferocious, bloody, and wasteful in the extreme: our entrance into the dominion of that country was, as generally, with small comparative effusion of blood; being introduced by various frauds and delusions, and by taking advantage of the incurable, blind, and senseless animosity which the several country powers<sup>3</sup> bear towards each other, rather than by open force. But the difference in favor of the first conquerors is this: the Asiatic conquerors very soon abated of their ferocity, because they made the conquered country their own. They rose or fell with the rise or fall of the territory they lived in. Fathers there deposited the hopes of their posterity; and children there beheld the monuments of their fathers. Here their lot was finally cast; and it is the natural wish of all that their lot should not be cast in a bad land. Poverty, sterility, and desolation are not a recreating prospect<sup>4</sup> to the eye of man; and there are very few who can bear to grow old among the curses of a whole people. If their passion or their avarice drove the Tartar lords to acts of rapacity or tyranny, there was time enough, even in the short life of man, to bring round the ill effects of an abuse of power upon the power itself. If hoards were made by violence and tyranny, they were still domestic hoards; and domestic profusion, or the rapine of a more powerful and prodigal hand, restored them to the people. With many disorders and with few political checks upon power, nature had still fair play; the sources of acquisition were not dried up; and therefore the trade, the manufactures, and the commerce of the country flourished. Even avarice and usury itself operated both for the preservation and the employment of national



wealth. The husbandman and manufacturer paid heavy interest, but then they augmented the fund from whence they were again to borrow. Their resources were dearly bought, but they were sure; and the general stock of the community grew by the general effort.

But under the English government all this order is reversed. The Tartar invasion was mischievous;<sup>5</sup> but it is our protection that destroys India. It was their enmity; but it is our friendship. Our conquest there, after twenty years, is as crude as it was the first day. The natives scarcely know what it is to see the gray head of an Englishman. Young men (boys almost) govern there, without society and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people than if they still resided in England; nor indeed any species of intercourse but that which is necessary to making a sudden fortune, with a view to a remote settlement.<sup>6</sup> Animated with all the avarice of age, and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another, wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting. Every rupee of profit made by an Englishman is lost forever to India. With us are no retributory superstitions,<sup>7</sup> by which a foundation of charity compensates, through ages, to the poor, for the rapine and injustice of a day. With us no pride erects stately monuments which repair the mischiefs which pride had produced, and which adorn a country out of its own spoils. England has erected no churches, no hospitals,<sup>8</sup> no palaces, no schools; England has built no bridges, made no high-roads, cut no navigations, dug out no reservoirs. Every other conqueror of every other description has left some monument, either of state<sup>9</sup> or beneficence, behind him. Were we to be driven out of India this day, nothing would remain to tell that it had been possessed, during the inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the orangutan or the tiger.

There is nothing in the boys we send to India worse than in the boys whom we are whipping at school, or that we see trailing a pike<sup>1</sup> or bending over a desk at home. But as English youth in India drink

the intoxicating draught of authority and dominion before their heads are able to bear it, and as they are full grown in fortune long before they are ripe in principle, neither nature nor reason have any opportunity to exert themselves for remedy of the excesses of their premature power. The consequences of their conduct, which in good minds (and many of theirs are probably such) might produce penitence or amendment, are unable to pursue the rapidity of their flight. Their prey is lodged in England; and the cries of India are given to seas and winds, to be blown about, in every breaking up of the monsoon, over a remote and unhearing ocean. In India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired: in England are often displayed, by the same persons, the virtues which dispense hereditary wealth. Arrived in England, the destroyers of the nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation, at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppressions and his oppressor. They marry into your families; they enter into your senate;<sup>2</sup> they ease your estates by loans; they raise their value by demand; they cherish and protect your relations which lie heavy on your patronage;<sup>3</sup> and there is scarcely an house in the kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest that makes all reform of our Eastern government appear officious<sup>4</sup> and disgusting; and, on the whole, a most discouraging attempt. In such an attempt you hurt those who are able to return kindness or to resent injury. If you succeed, you save those who cannot so much as give you thanks. All these things show the difficulty of the work we have on hand: but they show its necessity too. Our Indian government is in its best state a grievance. It is necessary that the correctives should be uncommonly vigorous, and the work of men sanguine, warm, and even impassioned in the cause. But it is an arduous thing to plead against abuses of a power which originates from your own country, and affects those whom we are used to consider as strangers.

## Endnotes

1783, 1784

- Note 1: The entire title is *Mr. Burke's speech, On the 1st December 1783, upon the question for the Speaker's leaving the chair, in order for the House to resolve itself into a committee on Mr. Fox's East India Bill*. Like many of Burke's speeches in Parliament, this one was published, and quite long, running to 105 printed pages. "Mr. Fox's East India Bill": Charles James Fox (1749–1806), a leader of the Whig Party in Parliament; his East India Bill of 1783, drafted by Burke, proposed to nationalize the East India Company's operations and passed the Commons, but was voted down in the House of Lords, at George III's urging.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Persian emperor Nader Shah Afshar (1688–1747) led a series of successful campaigns across the Middle East, and Central and South Asia, defeating the Mughal Empire and entering Delhi in 1739. "Arabs": numerous incursions of Arab raiders into South Asia began as early as the 7th century C.E. "Tartars": Burke refers to the armies of Central Asia that established the mighty and wealthy Mughal Empire which ruled South Asia from 1526; its decline is commonly said to have begun in the 1710s.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As the power of the Mughal Empire in India waned through the first part of the 18th century, the Maratha Empire and numerous regional kingdoms were in conflict in South Asia.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A pleasing sight.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grievously harmful.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An estate back in Britain.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Belief in eventual punishment if bad deeds are left unatoned for.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The paltry foundation at Calcutta is scarcely worth naming as an exception [*Burke's note*]. Burke refers to the Presidency General Hospital: its precursor was established in

1707 by the East India Company and expanded later in the 18th century, and is currently the IPGMER and SSKM Hospital of Kolkata (but still commonly called the Presidency General).[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Lasting works pertaining to the arts of government or political authority.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A common phrase for shouldering a musket as a volunteer (by Burke's time, the British Army no longer used pikes).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Parliament.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: They marry relations of the wealthy, who would otherwise have to be supported.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Meddling.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **SAMSON OCCOM**

Samson Occom (1723–1792) was an Indigenous person of the Mohegan tribe in what is now called Connecticut. In his autobiography, he wrote, “My parents lived a wandering life, as did all the Indians at Mohegan; they chiefly depended upon hunting, fishing, and fowling for their living and had no connections with the English, excepting to traffic with them in their small trifles.” Occom’s life, however, would be fundamentally shaped by connections with English settlers. Occom converted to evangelical Christianity as a teenager, studied English, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and eventually became a preacher famous on both sides of the Atlantic. He traveled to England, Scotland, and Ireland to help raise funds for a school for Indigenous students (what would become Dartmouth College, after the institution disappointed Occom by moving away from its original plan to serve Native youth). Throughout his life, Occom was an important Indigenous leader, working to support the continuity and autonomy of tribes in the American Northeast.

Occom spent many years among the Montaukett tribe in Montauk (at the east end of Long Island), and in 1751 he married a Montaukett woman, Mary Fowler. Included here is a petition that Occom helped craft, from the Montaukett tribe to the governor of New York. English settlers arrived in Montauk in the seventeenth century and had been slowly buying up and encroaching on traditional Montaukett land. The petition discusses in particular the terms of the disastrous 1703 treaties that the settlers had used to obtain legal title to most Montauk land and impose strict rules.

In the petition, Occom substitutes his singular “I” for a powerful collective “we,” his voice braided with those of other tribal leaders. They argue that, historically, English settlers had taken unfair advantage of ideas about writing, law, and land that the Montaukett people had not shared. In response, the petitioners strategically use their own English literacy and legal awareness, and their own

understanding of the Christian beliefs held by its representative in this case, the New York governor, to help redress the wrongs done to the Montaukett. But the petition also reminds us that eighteenth-century treaties were used to disenfranchise many: Indigenous people today still live with the damage wrought by this eighteenth-century literature.

# Montaukett Petition<sup>1</sup>

To the great and most excellent Governor, and to all the great men ruling the state of New York in North America—

We who are known by the name Mmeeeyautanheewuck, or Montauk Indians, humbly send greeting.

We are very glad and rejoice with you that you have at last got your freedom, liberty, and independence, from under the heavy and galling yoke of your late king, who has tried very hard to make you slaves, and have killed great many of you,<sup>2</sup> but by your steadiness, boldness, and great courage, you have broke the yoke and chain of slavery;<sup>3</sup>—now, God bless you, and make you very great and good forever.

We Montauk Indians have sot still and have not intermeddled in this family contention of yours, because we had no business with it,<sup>4</sup> and we have kept our young men quiet as we could, and the people on both sides have used<sup>5</sup> us well in general.

Now great and good gentlemen, we humbly entreat your condescension<sup>6</sup> and patience to hear us a little concerning ourselves.

The great and good spirit above saw fit in his good pleasure to plant our forefathers in this great wilderness but when and how, none knows but himself,—and he that works all things according to his own mind saw it good to give us this great continent and he filled this Indian world with variety, and a prodigious number of four-footed beasts, fowl without number and fish of all kinds great and small, filled our seas, rivers, brooks, and ponds every where,—and it was the pleasure of him who orders all things according to his good will, he that maketh rich and maketh poor, he that kills and that maketh alive, he that raiseth up whom he will and pulleth down whom he will, saw fit to keep us in poverty, only to live upon the provisions he hath made already at our hands. Thus we lived, till it pleased the great and good Governor of the world to send your

fathers into these goings down of the sun, and found us naked and very poor, destitute of every thing that your fathers enjoyed, only this, that we had good and large country to live in, and well furnished with natural provisions, and there was not a letter<sup>7</sup> known amongst them all in this boundless continent.—But your forefathers came with all the learning, knowledge, and understanding that was necessary for mankind to make them happy, and they knew the goodness of our land, and they soon began to settle and cultivate the land. Some they bought almost for nothing, and we suppose they took a great deal without purchase. And our fathers were very ignorant and knew not the value of land, and they cared nothing about it, they imagined they should always live by hunting, fishing, and fowling, and gathering wild fruits.—But alas at this age of the world, we find and plainly see by sad experience that by our forefathers' ignorance and your fathers' great knowledge, we are undone for this life.—Now only see the agreement your fathers and our fathers made,—we hope you won't be angry with us in telling the [     ].<sup>8</sup> They agreed that we should have only two small necks of land to plant on, and we are not allowed to sow wheat, and we as a tribe are stinted<sup>9</sup> to keep only 50 head of cattle, and 200 swine and three dogs.—Pray gentlemen take good notice, don't this discover a profound ignorance in our forefathers, indeed we suspect, sometimes, that what little understanding they had was drowned with hot waters<sup>1</sup> before they made these shameful agreements, and on the other hand, don't this show that the English took advantage of the ignorance of our forefathers? Would they be willing to be served so by us? Were we capable to use them so?—We fare now harder than our forefathers—for all our hunting, fowling, and fishing is now almost gone and our wild fruit is gone, what little there is left the English would engross or take all to themselves—and our wood is gone and the English forbid us of getting any, where there is some in their claim—and if our hogs happen to root<sup>2</sup> a little the English will make us pay damages, and they frequently count our cattle and hogs. Thus we are used by our English neighbors—pray most noble gentlemen consider our miserable case and for God's sake help us,



for we have nowhere to go now, but to your Excellence for help; if we had but 150 head of cattle and some sheep<sup>3</sup> and a few more hogs we should be contented and thankful.

This is all we have to say at this time, and shall now wait to see your pleasure concerning us—

## Endnotes

1788

- Note 1: This draft of the petition is in the Samson Occom Papers at the Connecticut Historical Society.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Referring to the American fight for independence from Britain, ratified by treaty in 1783. "Galling": frustrating, offensive.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The petition adopts American patriot rhetoric of British tyranny as slavery, now broken. Slavery as an institution continued.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Occom had wanted the Montaukett to maintain neutrality, though some tribe members were involved in the war.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Treated.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deference, willingness of a superior to listen.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Of the written alphabet.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The manuscript is missing a word here.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Limited, bounded.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alcohol.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dig in the soil.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The word in the manuscript is a bit unclear, but it appears to be *sheep*.[Return to reference 3](#)

## DEAN MAHOMET

Dean Mahomet was born in Patna in northern India in 1759 and died in Brighton, a resort town in southern England, in 1851. In the intervening years, he lived his life amid British imperial expansion. As a child, he lost his father, a soldier in the East India Company's army, and befriended a captain of that army, Anglo-Irishman Godfrey Evan Baker. In 1769, Mahomet himself joined the forces of East India Company—which began in 1600 as a trading company but increasingly (often violently) took over from Mughal rulers to control India as a British colonial holding. Mahomet traveled his native country as a representative of the imperial power that ruled it. Then, in 1783, he moved with Baker to another British imperial site, Ireland, where Mahomet would elope with an Irish woman and publish *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, an epistolary account for British audiences of his experiences in India. In 1807, he moved his family to England—first to London, where he opened “the Hindostanee Coffee House,” and then to Brighton, where he founded “Mahomed’s Baths” and practiced the Indian art of *champi* massage (“shampoo,” as Mahomet advertised it). Eventually, he would become the “shampooing surgeon” to the royal courts when they visited Brighton. Throughout his life, he capitalized on British interest—cultural and economic—in India.

Mahomet’s *Travels* offers both his autobiography and an important Indian perspective—in English—on India and the changes happening there. Throughout, Mahomet explains Indian culture to English readers and defends against racist attitudes, emphasizing the goodness and the civility of the Indian people. Among the excerpts here is Mahomet’s sympathetic account of Islam (the religion to which he was born, before converting to Christianity), and he elsewhere offers a lengthy, sympathetic discussion of the Hindu religion as practiced in India. Other writers in the period offered scathing indictments of the cruel British colonial policy (see Burke’s

speech, [p. 351](#)), but Mahomet's perspective is closer to the ground, more entangled in these changes as they happened. As his detailed explanation of the military illustrates, many Indians joined British colonial forces, which served as a path for advancement. But in a later letter, after describing a "hostile" encounter, he broke out into poetry:

Alas! destructive war, with ruthless hand,  
Unbinds each fond connection, tender tie,  
And tears from friendship's bosom all that's dear,  
Spreading dire carnage thro' the peopled globe.

As his modern biographer Michael Fisher explains, "*Travels* exposes the complex and often alienating attitudes Dean Mahomet—and tens of thousands of other Indians in service of the English company—held toward the British conquest. Many felt distanced from cultures of the old regimes which their ancestors had served. All remained apart from the Europeans who hired them. Like Dean Mahomet, each worked in distinct ways to create new social spaces for themselves between these cultures."

# ***From The Travels of Dean Mahomet***<sup>1</sup>

## ***From Letter I***

Dear Sir,

Since my arrival in this country, I find you have been very anxious to be made acquainted with the early part of my life, and the history of my travels: I shall be happy to gratify you; and must ingenuously confess, when I first came to Ireland, I found the face of everything about me so contrasted to those striking scenes in India, which we are wont<sup>2</sup> to survey with a kind of sublime delight, that I felt some timid inclination, even in the consciousness of incapacity, to describe the manners of my countrymen, who, I am proud to think, have still more of the innocence of our ancestors, than some of the boasting philosophers of Europe.

Though I acknowledge myself incapable of doing justice to the merits of men, whose happy manners<sup>3</sup> are worthy the imitation of civilized nations, yet, you will do me the justice to believe, that the gratification of your wishes is the principal incitement that engages me to undertake a work of this nature: the earnest entreaties of some friends, and the liberal encouragement of others, to whom I express my acknowledgements, I allow, are secondary motives.

The people of India, in general, are peculiarly favored by Providence<sup>4</sup> in the possession of all that can cheer the mind and allure the eye, and though the situation of Eden is only traced in the poet's creative fancy, the traveler beholds with admiration the face of this delightful country, on which he discovers tracts that resemble those so finely drawn by the animated pencil of Milton.<sup>5</sup> You will here behold the generous soil crowned with various plenty; the garden beautifully diversified with the gayest flowers diffusing their fragrance on the bosom of the air; and the very bowels of the earth enriched with inestimable mines of gold and diamonds.

Possessed of all that is enviable in life, we are still more happy in the exercise of benevolence and goodwill to each other, devoid of every species of fraud or low cunning. In our convivial enjoyments, we are never without our neighbors; as it is usual for an individual, when he gives an entertainment, to invite all those of his own profession to partake of it. That profligacy<sup>6</sup> of manners too conspicuous in other parts of the world, meets here with public indignation, and our women, though not so accomplished as those of Europe, are still very engaging for many virtues that exalt the sex.

\* \* \*

### ***Letter XIV***

Dear Sir,

The Mahometans<sup>1</sup> are, in general, a very healthful people: refraining from the use of strong liquors, and accustomed to a temperate diet, they have but few diseases, for which their own experience commonly finds some simple yet effectual remedy. When they are visited by sickness, they bear it with much composure of mind, partly through an expectation of removing their disorder by their own manner of treating it: but when they perceive their malady grows too violent to submit even to the utmost exertions of their skill, they send for a Mulna,<sup>2</sup> who comes to the bedside of the sick person, and putting his hand over him, feels that part of his body most affected, and repeats, with a degree of fervency, some pious prayers, by the efficacy of which it is supposed the patient will speedily recover. The Mahometans meet death with uncommon resignation and fortitude, considering it only as the means of enlarging them from a state of mortal captivity, and opening to them a free and glorious passage to the mansions of bliss. Those ideas console them on the bed of sickness and even amid the pangs of dissolution, the parting soul struggling to leave its earthly prison, and panting for the joys of immortality, changes, at bright intervals, the terrors of the grim monarch into the smiles of a cherub, who invites it to a happier region.

When a person dies among them, the neighbors of the same religious principles bring the family of the deceased to their houses, and use every means to comfort them in their affliction. The corpse is stretched on the death bed, which is covered with white muslin, and adorned with flowers: wax tapers<sup>3</sup> are lit about it, and the room hung round with white cotton. Numbers assemble together to pray for the departed spirit, and twenty-four hours after the decease of the person, on account of the excessive heat of the climate, the body is wrapped up in muslin, and carried towards the grave, near which it is laid down, before it is interred: all the people who attend the funeral kneel in a direct line beside it, imploring the great Alla to give the soul eternal rest: it is then consigned to the silent scene of interment, and the relations throw a little clay on it, after which it is covered. The Mulna consecrates a quantity of thin cakes, which he distributes in broken pieces among the people, who share them with each other, and join in prayer, while the eldest son of the deceased sprinkles the grave with holy water, and spreads a large white sheet over it. Four days after the funeral, the relatives entertain their neighbors and a multitude of poor people with unlimited hospitality, who, in gratitude for their munificence,<sup>4</sup> offer up their united petitions to Heaven for the kinsman of their benefactors.

People of condition have grand monuments erected to their memory, and lamps lighting at their tombs throughout the year: their houses also, on certain festivals, are magnificently illuminated in remembrance of them. The poorer natives perform this ceremony at the grave and their own habitations, but once in the year, for a short space of time. After the death of a husband, his wife puts on no mourning, and disrobing herself of all the ornaments of dress and jewels, wears only plain white muslin. In the middle walk of life, the widow enjoys the sole property,<sup>5</sup> which, making some reserve for herself, she generally divides in a very equitable manner, among her children: in more elevated situations, the son succeeds his father in rank or employment.

The Mahometans are strict adherents to the tenets of their religion, which does not, by any means, consist in that enthusiastic

veneration for Mahomet<sup>6</sup> so generally conceived: it considers much more, as its primary object, the unity of the supreme Being, under the name of Alla: Mahomet is only regarded in a secondary point of view, as the missionary of that unity, merely for destroying the idol worship, to which Arabia had continued so long under bondage:<sup>7</sup> and so far from addressing him as a deity, that in their orisons,<sup>8</sup> they do not pray to him, but for him, recommending him to the divine mercy: it is a mistaken, though a generally received opinion, that pilgrimages were made to his tomb, which, in a religious sense, were only directed to what is called the cahabah or holy-house at Mecca, an idol temple dedicated by him to the unity of God. His tomb is at Medina,<sup>9</sup> visited by the Mahometans purely out of curiosity and reverence to his memory. Most of his followers carry their veneration for the supreme Being so far, as not only never to mention the word Alla or God on any common occasion, but think it in some degree blasphemous to praise or define a Being, whom they consider as so infinitely transcendent to<sup>1</sup> all praise, definition or comprehension. Thus, they carry their scrupulosity to such a length, as not even to approve of calling him good, righteous, or merciful, from their thinking such epithets superfluous and impertinent; as if one were emphatically to say of a man that he had a head, or any other member necessary to the human form: for they conceive it to be a profanation of the name of God, to accompany it with human attributes; and that no idea can be so acceptable to that Being, as the name itself, a substantive<sup>2</sup> infinitely superior and independent of the connection of any adjective to give it the least degree of additional emphasis.

### ***Letter XVI***

Dear Sir,

That part of our army which we left in Calcutta, arrived at Barahampore, before our departure; and shortly after, the entire brigade received orders to march to Denapore,<sup>1</sup> where we arrived in the year 1775. On the Bengal establishment, there are three

brigades, who all wear the usual scarlet uniform: that of the first is faced with blue—of the second with black—and the third with yellow. Each brigade contains one regiment of Europeans, six regiments or twelve battalions of seapoys, three companies of European artillery, five companies of native artillery, called gullendas, and two companies of native cavalry. A regiment of seapoys on the present establishment consists of two battalions, each battalion 500 men or five companies, with a captain, two lieutenants, three ensigns, one serjeant-major, Europeans; besides one comedan, five subidars, ten jemidars, thirty howaldars, thirty homaldars, five tombourwallas, five basleewallas, and five troohewallas, natives.

As you may not understand those terms, I shall thus explain them to you;

Comedan signifies	<i>a captain</i>
Subidar	<i>a lieutenant</i>
Jemidar	<i>an ensign</i>
Howaldar	<i>a serjeant</i>
Homaldar	<i>a corporal</i>
Seapoy	<i>a private soldier</i>
Tombourwalla	<i>a drummer</i>
Basleewalla	<i>a fife<sup>2</sup></i>
Trooheewalla	<i>a trumpeter</i>

The seapoys are composed of Mahometans and Hindoos, who make no other distinction in their exterior appearance, than that the Hindoos color each side of the face and forehead with a kind of red paint, produced from the timber of the sandal tree. The dress of both is a thin muslin shirt, a red coat in uniform, a turban, sash, and short trousers. The turban, which is of muslin, is mostly blue as well as the sash: it is quite small, fitted very closely to the head, and not unlike a Scotch bonnet in form, except that the front is more flat, to which they affix a cockade of white muslin puffed and trimmed with silver lace, with a star in the middle. It is also ornamented with curious narrow festoons made of thin wire. Round the neck are worn



two or three rows of wooden beads, and a shield on the left shoulder. An officer wears silver or glass beads, a coat of scarlet cloth, in uniform with the brigade to which he belongs, a blue sash and turban, containing twenty yards each, a pair of long trousers, half boots, and a shield on the left shoulder.

The seapoys, who are in general well disciplined in the use of arms, serve as a strong reinforcement to a much less number of Europeans, and on many occasions display great firmness and resolution.

As a sequel to this letter, I beg leave to subjoin an alphabetical explanation of Persian and Indian terms, not commonly understood in this country.

### **From *Explanation of Persian and Indian Terms***

#### **[SOME DEFINITIONS: A SMALL ANTHOLOGY]**

Bazar	<i>a market</i>
Betel	<i>a leaf growing on a vine, and chewed by all ranks of people</i>
Bramin	<i>a priest</i>
Caffres	<i>Negroes from Africa, trained up as soldiers by the Europeans</i>
Gentoo	<i>a native Indian, in a state of idolatry</i>
Kistbundee	<i>times of the payment of the country revenues</i>
Mulna	<i>a Mahometan priest</i>
Muxadabad	<i>the capital of Bengal</i>
Nabob <sup>3</sup>	<i>a governor of a province, appointed by the Soubah</i>
Paddy	<i>rice in the husk</i>
Paddy-grounds	<i>rice fields</i>
Pagoda	<i>an Indian temple</i>

Pagoda	<i>an Indian coin worth 7s. 8d. sterling</i>
Palanquin	<i>a kind of canopy bed for travelling</i>
Raja	<i>the highest title claimed by the Gentoo princes</i>
Seapoys	<i>Indian foot soldiers, hired and disciplined by Europeans</i>
Soubah	<i>the Viceroy of the Deckan, or of Bengal</i>
Tunkahs	<i>assignments upon lands, or rents assigned to the Company</i>
Vakeel	<i>an English agent, or resident at the Nabob's court</i>
Zemindary	<i>an officer who takes care of the rents arising from the public lands</i>

## Endnotes

1794

- Note 1: The full title was *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, A native of Patna in Bengal, through several parts of India, while in the service of the honorable the East India Company*. The letters are addressed to his patron Colonel William A. Bailie. Mahomet writes from Ireland, of his time in India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Accustomed. "Ingenuously": candidly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the merits of Indian men (and Indian culture more generally).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God's care and design.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* describes paradise in Eden.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Extravagance or looseness; bad manners.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 1: Muslims.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Below, Mahomet defines Mulna, "a Mahometan priest."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Candles.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Generosity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Inherits the whole property.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The prophet Muhammad. "Enthusiastic": used pejoratively, fanatical or overzealous.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Muhammad famously broke idols in Mecca.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Prayers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A city in what is today Saudi Arabia.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Above, surpassing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Noun.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 1: Danapur, a city in Bihar, India. "Calcutta": today Kolkata, in West Bengal, then the center of British power in India. "Barahampore": Berhampore, another city in West Bengal.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Someone playing the wind instrument.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Also Nawab.[Return to reference 3](#)

# **JONATHAN SWIFT**

## **1667–1745**

Jonathan Swift was born of English parents in Dublin. His father, a lawyer, died seven months before he was born, and his mother and sister went to live with relations in the English Midlands. An uncle helped see Jonathan through an excellent education at preeminent institutions in Ireland, Kilkenny School and then Trinity College, Dublin. Before he could fix on a career, the troubles that followed upon James II's abdication and subsequent invasion of Ireland drove Swift along with other Anglo-Irish to England. Between 1689 and 1699 he was more or less continuously a member of the household of his kinsman Sir William Temple, an urbane, civilized man, a retired diplomat, and a friend of King William III, who took the throne in 1689. During these years Swift read widely, rather reluctantly decided on the church as a career and so took orders, and discovered his astonishing gifts as a satirist. In 1696–97 he wrote his powerful satires on corruptions in religion and learning, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*, which were published in 1704 and reached their final form only in the fifth edition of 1710. When, at the age of thirty-two, he returned to Ireland as chaplain to the lord justice, the Earl of Berkeley, he had a clear sense of his genius.

For the rest of his life, Swift devoted his talents to politics and religion—not clearly separated at the time—and most of his works in prose were written to further a specific cause. As a clergyman, a spirited controversialist, and a devoted supporter of the Anglican

Church, he was hostile to all who seemed to threaten it: Deists, freethinkers, Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, or merely Whig politicians. In 1710 he abandoned the Whigs because he opposed their indifference to the welfare of the Anglican Church in Ireland and their desire to repeal the Test Act, which required all holders of offices of state to take the Sacrament according to the Anglican rites, thus excluding Roman Catholics and Dissenters. Welcomed by the Tories, he became the most brilliant political journalist of the day, serving the government of Oxford and Bolingbroke as editor of the party organ, the *Examiner*, and as author of its most powerful articles. He also wrote longer pamphlets in support of important policies, such as that favoring the Peace of Utrecht (1713). He was greatly valued by the two ministers, who admitted him to social intimacy, although never to their counsels. The reward of his services was not the English bishopric that he felt he deserved but the deanship of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, which came to him in 1713, a year before the death of Queen Anne and the fall of the Tories put an end to all his hopes of preferment in England.

In Ireland, where he lived unwillingly, he became not only an efficient ecclesiastical administrator but also, in 1724, the leader of Irish resistance to English oppression. Under the pseudonym "M. B. Drapier," he published the famous series of public letters that aroused the country to refuse to accept £100,000 in new copper coins (minted in England by William Wood, who had obtained his patent through court corruption), which, it was feared, would further debase the coinage of the already poverty-stricken kingdom. Although the authorship of the letters was known to all Dublin, no one could be found to earn the £300 offered by the government for information as to the identity of the drapier. Swift is still venerated in Ireland as a national hero. He earned the right to refer to himself in the epitaph that he wrote for his tomb as a vigorous defender of liberty.

His last years were less happy. Swift had suffered most of his adult life from what we now recognize as Ménière's disease, which affects the inner ear, causing dizziness, nausea, and deafness. After

1739, when he was seventy-two years old, his infirmities cut him off from his duties as dean, and from then on his social life dwindled. In 1742 guardians were appointed to administer his affairs, and his last three years were spent in gloom and lethargy. But this dark ending should not put his earlier life, so full of energy and humor, into a shadow. The writer of the satires was a man in full control of great intellectual powers.

He also had a gift for friendship. Swift was admired and loved by many of the distinguished men of his time. His friendships with Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, John Arbuthnot, John Gay, Matthew Prior, Lord Oxford, and Lord Bolingbroke, not to mention those in his less brilliant but amiable Irish circle, bear witness to his moral integrity and social charm. He also had intense, tender, emotionally complicated relationships with women, especially Esther Johnson (whom he called "Stella" in his letters and poetry). She was the daughter of Temple's steward, and when Swift first knew her, she was little more than a child. He mentored her as she grew up and came to love her as he was to love no other person. After Temple's death she moved to Dublin, where she and Swift met constantly, but never alone. While working with the Tories in London, he wrote letters to her, later published as *The Journal to Stella* (1766), and they exchanged poems as well. Whether they were secretly married or never married—and in either case why—has been often debated. A marriage of any sort seems most unlikely; and however perplexing their relationship was to others, it seems to have satisfied them. Not even the violent passion that Swift awakened, no doubt unwittingly, in the much younger woman Esther Van Homrigh (pronounced *Van Úm-mery*)—with her pleadings and reproaches and early death—could unsettle his devotion to Stella. An enigmatic account of his relations with "Vanessa," as he called Van Homrigh, is given in his poem "Cadenus and Vanessa."

For all his involvement in public affairs, Swift seems to stand apart from his contemporaries—a striking figure among the statesmen of the time, a writer who towered above others by reason of his imagination, mordant wit, and emotional intensity. He has

been called a misanthrope, a hater of humanity, and *Gulliver's Travels* has been considered an expression of savage misanthropy. It is true that Swift proclaimed himself a misanthrope in a letter to Pope, declaring that, though he loved individuals, he hated "that animal called man" in general and offering a new definition of the species not as *animal rationale* ("a rational animal") but as merely *animal rationis capax* ("an animal *capable* of reason"). This, he declared, is the "great foundation" on which his "misanthropy" was erected. Swift was stating not his hatred of his fellow creatures but his antagonism to the current optimistic view that human nature is essentially good. To the "philanthropic" flattery that sentimentalism and Deistic rationalism were paying to human nature, Swift opposed a more ancient view: that human nature is deeply and permanently flawed and that we can do nothing with or for the human race until we recognize its moral and intellectual limitations. In his epitaph he spoke of the "fierce indignation" that had torn his heart, an indignation that found superb expression in his greatest satires. It was provoked by the constant spectacle of creatures capable of reason, and therefore of reasonable conduct, steadfastly refusing to live up to their capabilities.

Swift is a master of prose. He defined a good style as "proper words in proper places," a more complex goal, and more difficult to attain, than it may appear. Much of his writing vigorously embraces concreteness and clarity. Yet he is also a master mimic, infusing diverse tones and mannerisms into his prose as his fictions demand, from *Gulliver's* subtle flickering between credulity and wry skepticism, joined and heightened into outrage by the end of the *Travels*, to the statistically fortified deadpan of "A Modest Proposal." A love of bluntness also animates his poems, which shock us with their hard look at the facts of life and the body. It is unpoetic poetry, devoid of, indeed as often as not mocking at, inspiration, romantic love, cosmetic beauty, easily assumed literary attitudes, and conventional poetic language. Like the prose, it is predominantly satiric in purpose, but not without its moments of comedy and

lightheartedness, though most often written less to divert than to agitate the reader.



## A Description of a City Shower

Careful observers may foretell the hour  
(By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower:  
While rain depends,<sup>1</sup> the pensive cat gives o'er  
Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more.  
Returning home at night, you'll find the sink<sup>o</sup>  
5 Strike your offended sense with double stink.  
If you be wise, then go not far to dine;  
You'll spend in coach hire more than save in wine.  
A coming shower your shooting corns presage,  
Old achés throb, your hollow tooth will rage.  
10 Sauntering in coffeehouse is Dulman<sup>2</sup> seen;  
He damns the climate and complains of spleen.<sup>3</sup>  
Meanwhile the South, rising with dabbled wings,  
A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,  
That swilled more liquor than it could contain,  
15 And, like a drunkard, gives it up again.  
Brisk Susan whips her linen from the rope,  
While the first drizzling shower is borne aslope:  
Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean<sup>o</sup>  
Flirts on you from her mop, but not so clean:  
20 You fly, invoke the gods; then turning, stop  
To rail; she singing, still whirls on her mop.  
Not yet the dust had shunned the unequal strife,  
But, aided by the wind, fought still for life,  
And wafted with its foe by violent gust,  
25 'Twas doubtful which was rain and which was dust.  
Ah! where must needy poet seek for aid,  
When dust and rain at once his coat invade?  
Sole coat, where dust cemented by the rain  
30 Erects the nap,<sup>4</sup> and leaves a mingled stain.

Now in contiguous drops the flood comes down,  
Threatening with deluge this devoted town.  
To shops in crowds the daggled<sup>o</sup> females fly,  
Pretend to cheapen<sup>o</sup> goods, but nothing buy.  
35 The Templar spruce, while every spout's abroad,<sup>5</sup>  
Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a coach.  
The tucked-up sempstress walks with hasty strides,  
While streams run down her oiled umbrella's sides.  
Here various kinds, by various fortunes led,  
Commence acquaintance underneath a shed.  
40 Triumphant Tories and desponding Whigs  
Forget their feuds,<sup>6</sup> and join to save their wigs.  
Boxed in a chair<sup>o</sup> the beau impatient sits,  
While spouts run clattering o'er the roof by fits,  
And ever and anon with frightful din  
45 The leather sounds;<sup>7</sup> he trembles from within.  
So when Troy chairmen bore the wooden steed,  
Pregnant with Greeks impatient to be freed  
(Those bully Greeks, who, as the moderns do,  
Instead of paying chairmen, run them through),<sup>8</sup>  
50 Laocoön struck the outside with his spear,  
And each imprisoned hero quaked for fear.<sup>9</sup>  
Now from all parts the swelling kennels<sup>1</sup> flow,  
And bear their trophies with them as they go:  
Filth of all hues and odors seem to tell  
55 What street they sailed from, by their sight and  
smell.  
They, as each torrent drives with rapid force,  
From Smithfield or St. Pulchre's shape their course,  
And in huge confluence joined at Snow Hill ridge,  
Fall from the conduit prone to Holborn Bridge.<sup>2</sup>  
60 Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, }  
and blood, }  
Drowned puppies, stinking sprats,<sup>3</sup> all  
drenched in mud,

Dead cats, and turnip tops, come tumbling down the flood.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

1710

- Note 1: Impends, is imminent. An example of elevated diction used frequently throughout the poem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A type name (from “dull man”), like Congreve’s “Petulant” or “Witwoud.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The English tendency to melancholy (“the spleen”) was often attributed to the rainy climate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stiffens the coat’s surface.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pouring out water. “The Templar”: a young man engaged in studying law.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Whig ministry had just fallen, and the Tories, led by Harley and St. John, were forming the government with which Swift was to be closely associated until the death of the queen in 1714.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The roof of the sedan chair was made of leather.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, with their swords.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Aeneid* 2.40–53.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The open gutters in the middle of the street.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An accurate description of the drainage system of this part of London—the eastern edge of Holborn and West Smithfield, which lie outside the old walls west and east of Newgate. The great cattle and sheep markets were in Smithfield. The church of St. Sepulchre (“St. Pulchre’s”) stood opposite Newgate Prison. Holborn Conduit was at the foot of Snow Hill. It drained into Fleet Ditch, an evil-smelling open sewer, at Holborn Bridge.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Small herrings.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In George Faulkner’s edition of Swift’s *Works* (Dublin, 1735) a note almost certainly suggested by Swift points to the

concluding triplet, with its resonant final alexandrine, as a burlesque of a mannerism of Dryden and other Restoration poets and claims that Swift's ridicule banished the triplet from contemporary poetry.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sewer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wench*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mud-spattered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bargain for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sedan chair*[Return to reference °](#)

# Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift

## *Occasioned by Reading a Maxim in Rochefoucauld*<sup>1</sup>

*Dans l'adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons  
toujours quelque chose, qui ne nous déplaît pas.*<sup>2</sup>

As Rochefoucauld his maxims drew  
From nature, I believe 'em true:  
They argue no corrupted mind  
In him; the fault is in mankind.

5       This maxim more than all the rest  
Is thought too base for human breast:  
"In all distresses of our friends  
We first consult our private ends,  
While Nature, kindly bent to ease us,  
Points out some circumstance to please us."

10       If this perhaps your patience move,<sup>o</sup>  
Let reason and experience prove.

      We all behold with envious eyes  
Our equal raised above our size.  
Who would not at a crowded show  
15       Stand high himself, keep others low?  
I love my friend as well as you,  
But why should he obstruct my view?  
Then let me have the higher post;  
I ask but for an inch at most.

20       If in a battle you should find  
One, whom you love of all mankind,  
Had some heroic action done,  
A champion killed, or trophy won;  
Rather than thus be overtopped,

25 Would you not wish his laurels cropped?  
Dear honest Ned is in the gout,  
Lies racked with pain, and you without:  
How patiently you hear him groan!  
How glad the case is not your own!  
30 What poet would not grieve to see  
His brethren write as well as he?  
But rather than they should excel,  
He'd wish his rivals all in hell.  
Her end when Emulation misses,  
35 She turns to envy, stings, and hisses:  
The strongest friendship yields to pride,  
Unless the odds be on our side.  
Vain humankind! fantastic race!  
Thy various follies who can trace?  
40 Self-love, ambition, envy, pride,  
Their empire in our hearts divide.  
Give others riches, power, and station;  
'Tis all on me an usurpation;  
I have no title to aspire,  
45 Yet, when you sink, I seem the higher.  
In Pope I cannot read a line,  
But with a sigh I wish it mine:  
When he can in one couplet fix  
More sense than I can do in six,  
50 It gives me such a jealous fit,  
I cry, "Pox take him and his wit!"  
I grieve to be outdone by Gay<sup>3</sup>  
In my own humorous biting way.  
Arbuthnot<sup>4</sup> is no more my friend,  
55 Who dares to irony pretend,  
Which I was born to introduce,  
Refined it first, and showed its use.  
St. John, as well as Pulteney,<sup>5</sup> knows  
That I had some repute for prose;  
60

And, till they drove me out of date,  
Could maul a minister of state.  
If they have mortified my pride,  
And made me throw my pen aside;  
If with such talents Heaven hath blessed 'em,  
65 Have I not reason to detest 'em?  
To all my foes, dear Fortune, send  
Thy gifts, but never to my friend:  
I tamely can endure the first,  
But this with envy makes me burst.  
70 Thus much may serve by way of proem;  
Proceed we therefore to our poem.  
The time is not remote, when I  
Must by the course of nature die;  
When, I foresee, my special friends  
75 Will try to find their private ends:  
Though it is hardly understood  
Which way my death can do them good;  
Yet thus, methinks, I hear 'em speak:  
"See how the Dean begins to break!  
80 Poor gentleman! he droops apace!  
You plainly find it in his face.  
That old vertigo<sup>6</sup> in his head  
Will never leave him till he's dead.  
Besides, his memory decays;  
85 He recollects not what he says;  
He cannot call his friends to mind;  
Forgets the place where last he dined;  
Plies you with stories o'er and o'er;  
He told them fifty times before.  
90 How does he fancy we can sit  
To hear his out-of-fashion'd wit?  
But he takes up with younger folks,  
Who for his wine will bear his jokes.  
Faith, he must make his stories shorter,  
95

Or change his comrades once a quarter;  
In half the time, he talks them round;  
There must another set be found.

100        "For poetry, he's past his prime;  
He takes an hour to find a rhyme;  
His fire is out, his wit decayed,  
His fancy sunk, his Muse a jade.<sup>7</sup>  
I'd have him throw away his pen—  
But there's no talking to some men."

105        And then their tenderness appears  
By adding largely to my years:  
"He's older than he would be reckoned,  
And well remembers Charles the Second.  
He hardly drinks a pint of wine;  
And that, I doubt, is no good sign.  
110        His stomach, too, begins to fail;  
Last year we thought him strong and hale;  
But now he's quite another thing;  
I wish he may hold out till spring."  
Then hug themselves, and reason thus:  
115        "It is not yet so bad with us."

      In such a case they talk in tropes,<sup>8</sup>  
And by their fears express their hopes.  
Some great misfortune to portend  
No enemy can match a friend.  
120        With all the kindness they profess,  
The merit of a lucky guess  
(When daily how-d'ye's come of course,  
And servants answer, "Worse and worse!")  
Would please 'em better, than to tell  
125        That God be praised! the Dean is well.  
Then he who prophesied the best,  
Approves his foresight to the rest:  
"You know I always feared the worst,  
And often told you so at first."  
130



He'd rather choose that I should die,  
Than his prediction prove a lie.  
Not one foretells I shall recover,  
But all agree to give me over.

135        Yet, should some neighbor feel a pain  
Just in the parts where I complain,  
How many a message would he send?  
What hearty prayers that I should mend?  
Inquire what regimen I kept;  
140        What gave me ease, and how I slept,  
And more lament, when I was dead,  
Than all the snivelers round my bed.

      My good companions, never fear;  
For though you may mistake a year,  
Though your prognostics run too fast,  
145        They must be verified at last.

      Behold the fatal day arrive!  
"How is the Dean?"—"He's just alive."  
Now the departing prayer is read.  
"He hardly breathes"—"The Dean is dead."  
150        Before the passing bell begun,  
The news through half the town has run.  
"Oh! may we all for death prepare!  
What has he left? and who's his heir?"  
"I know no more than what the news is;  
155        'Tis all bequeathed to public uses."  
"To public use! a perfect whim!  
What had the public done for him?  
Mere envy, avarice, and pride:  
He gave it all—but first he died.  
160        And had the Dean in all the nation  
No worthy friend, no poor relation?  
So ready to do strangers good,  
Forgetting his own flesh and blood?"

165        Now Grub Street<sup>8</sup> wits are all employed;

With elegies the town is cloyed;  
Some paragraph in every paper  
To curse the Dean, or bless the Drapier.<sup>9</sup>  
The doctors, tender of their fame,  
Wisely on me lay all the blame.  
170 "We must confess his case was nice;<sup>1</sup>  
But he would never take advice.  
Had he been ruled, for aught appears,  
He might have lived these twenty years:  
For, when we opened him, we found,  
175 That all his vital parts were sound."  
From Dublin soon to London spread,  
'Tis told at court, "The Dean is dead."  
Kind Lady Suffolk, in the spleen,<sup>2</sup>  
Runs laughing up to tell the Queen.  
180 The Queen, so gracious, mild and good,  
Cries, "Is he gone? 'tis time he should.  
He's dead, you say; why, let him rot:  
I'm glad the medals were forgot.<sup>3</sup>  
I promised him, I own; but when?  
185 I only was the Princess then;  
But now, as consort of the King,  
You know, 'tis quite a different thing."  
Now Chartres, at Sir Robert's<sup>4</sup> levee,<sup>o</sup>  
Tells with a sneer the tidings heavy:  
190 "Why, is he dead without his shoes?"  
Cries Bob, "I'm sorry for the news:  
Oh, were the wretch but living still,  
And in his place my good friend Will!<sup>5</sup>  
Or had a miter on his head,  
195 Provided Bolingbroke were dead!"  
Now Curll<sup>6</sup> his shop from rubbish drains:  
Three genuine tomes of Swift's remains.  
And then, to make them pass the glibber,  
Revised by Tibbalds, Moore, and Cibber.<sup>7</sup>

200 He'll treat me as he does my betters,  
 Publish my will, my life, my letters;  
 Revive the libels born to die,  
 Which Pope must bear, as well as I.  
 Here shift the scene, to represent  
 205 How those I love, my death lament.  
 Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay  
 A week, and Arbuthnot a day.  
 St. John himself will scarce forbear  
 To bite his pen, and drop a tear.  
 210 The rest will give a shrug, and cry,  
 "I'm sorry—but we all must die."  
 Indifference clad in wisdom's guise  
 All fortitude of mind supplies:  
 For how can stony bowels melt  
 215 In those who never pity felt?  
 When *we* are lashed, *they* kiss the rod,  
 Resigning to the will of God.  
 The fools, my juniors by a year,  
 Are tortured with suspense and fear;  
 220 Who wisely thought my age a screen,  
 When death approached, to stand between:  
 The screen removed, their hearts are trembling;  
 They mourn for me without dissembling.  
 My female friends, whose tender hearts  
 225 Have better learned to act their parts,  
 Receive the news in doleful dumps:  
 "The Dean is dead (and what is trumps?)  
 Then, Lord have mercy on his soul!  
 (Ladies, I'll venture for the vole.)<sup>8</sup>  
 230 Six deans, they say, must bear the pall.  
 (I wish I knew what king to call.)  
 Madam, your husband will attend  
 The funeral of so good a friend?"  
 "No, madam, 'tis a shocking sight;  
 235

And he's engaged tomorrow night:  
My Lady Club would take it ill,  
If he should fail her at quadrille.  
He loved the Dean—I lead a heart)  
But dearest friends, they say, must part.  
240 His time was come; he ran his race;  
We hope he's in a better place."  
    Why do we grieve that friends should die?  
No loss more easy to supply.  
One year is past; a different scene;  
245 No further mention of the Dean,  
Who now, alas! no more is missed,  
Than if he never did exist.  
Where's now this favorite of Apollo?<sup>9</sup>  
Departed—and his works must follow,  
250 Must undergo the common fate;  
His kind of wit is out of date.  
    Some country squire to Lintot<sup>1</sup> goes,  
Inquires for *Swift* in verse and prose.  
Says Lintot, "I have heard the name;  
255 He died a year ago."—"The same."  
He searches all his shop in vain.  
"Sir, you may find them in Duck Lane:<sup>2</sup>  
I sent them, with a load of books,  
Last Monday to the pastry-cook's.<sup>3</sup>  
260 To fancy they could live a year!  
I find you're but a stranger here.  
The Dean was famous in his time,  
And had a kind of knack at rhyme.  
His way of writing now is past:  
265 The town has got a better taste.  
I keep no antiquated stuff;  
But spick and span I have enough.  
Pray do but give me leave to show 'em:  
Here's Colley Cibber's birthday poem.<sup>4</sup>

270 This ode you never yet have seen  
By Stephen Duck<sup>5</sup> upon the Queen.  
Then here's a letter finely penned  
Against the *Craftsman*<sup>6</sup> and his friend;  
It clearly shows that all reflection  
275 On ministers is disaffection.  
Next, here's Sir Robert's vindication,<sup>7</sup>  
And Mr. Henley's<sup>8</sup> last oration.  
The hawkers have not got 'em yet:  
Your honor please to buy a set?  
280 "Here's Woolston's<sup>9</sup> tracts, the twelfth edition;  
'Tis read by every politician:  
The country members, when in town,  
To all their boroughs send them down;  
You never met a thing so smart;  
285 The courtiers have them all by heart;  
Those maids of honor (who can read)  
Are taught to use them for their creed.  
The reverend author's good intention  
Has been rewarded with a pension.  
290 He does an honor to his gown,  
By bravely running priestcraft down;  
He shows, as sure as God's in Gloucester,<sup>1</sup>  
That Jesus was a grand impostor;  
That all his miracles were cheats,  
295 Performed as jugglers do their feats:  
The Church had never such a writer;  
A shame he hath not got a miter!"  
Suppose me dead; and then suppose  
A club assembled at the Rose;<sup>2</sup>  
300 Where, from discourse of this and that,  
I grow the subject of their chat:  
And while they toss my name about,  
With favor some, and some without,  
One, quite indifferent in the cause,

My character impartial draws:  
305 "The Dean, if we believe report,  
Was never ill received at court.  
As for his works in verse and prose,  
I own myself no judge of those;  
310 Nor can I tell what critics thought 'em:  
But this I know, all people bought 'em,  
As with a moral view designed  
To cure the vices of mankind.  
"His vein, ironically grave,  
315 Exposed the fool and lashed the knave;  
To steal a hint was never known,  
But what he writ was all his own.<sup>3</sup>  
"He never thought an honor done him,  
Because a duke was proud to own him;  
320 Would rather slip aside and choose  
To talk with wits in dirty shoes;  
Despised the fools with stars and garters,<sup>4</sup>  
So often seen caressing Chartres.  
He never courted men in station,  
325 Nor persons held in admiration;  
Of no man's greatness was afraid,  
Because he sought for no man's aid.  
Though trusted long in great affairs,  
He gave himself no haughty airs;  
330 Without regarding private ends,  
Spent all his credit for his friends;  
And only chose the wise and good;  
No flatterers, no allies in blood;  
But succored virtue in distress,  
335 And seldom failed of good success;  
As numbers in their hearts must own,  
Who, but for him, had been unknown.  
"With princes kept a due decorum,  
But never stood in awe before 'em.  
340

He followed David's lesson just;  
In princes never put thy trust:<sup>5</sup>  
And would you make him truly sour,  
Provoke him with a slave in power.  
The Irish senate if you named,  
345 With what impatience he declaimed!  
Fair Liberty was all his cry,  
For her he stood prepared to die;  
For her he boldly stood alone;  
For her he oft exposed his own.  
350 Two kingdoms, just as faction led,  
Had set a price upon his head,  
But not a traitor could be found,  
To sell him for six hundred pound.<sup>6</sup>  
"Had he but spared his tongue and pen,  
355 He might have rose like other men;  
But power was never in his thought,  
And wealth he valued not a groat:  
Ingratitude he often found,  
And pitied those who meant the wound;  
360 But kept the tenor of his mind,  
To merit well of human kind:  
Nor made a sacrifice of those  
Who still were true, to please his foes.  
He labored many a fruitless hour,  
365 To reconcile his friends in power;  
Saw mischief by a faction brewing,  
While they pursued each other's ruin.  
But, finding vain was all his care,  
He left the court in mere despair.<sup>7</sup>  
370 "And, oh! how short are human schemes!  
Here ended all our golden dreams.  
What St. John's skill in state affairs,  
What Ormonde's<sup>8</sup> valor, Oxford's cares,  
To save their sinking country lent,

375 Was all destroyed by one event.<sup>9</sup>  
Too soon that precious life was ended,  
On which alone our weal depended.  
When up a dangerous faction starts,<sup>1</sup>  
380 With wrath and vengeance in their hearts;  
By solemn League and Covenant bound,  
To ruin, slaughter, and confound;  
To turn religion to a fable,  
And make the government a Babel;  
Pervert the laws, disgrace the gown,  
385 Corrupt the senate, rob the crown;  
To sacrifice old England's glory,  
And make her infamous in story:  
When such a tempest shook the land,  
How could unguarded Virtue stand?  
390 With horror, grief, despair, the Dean  
Beheld the dire destructive scene:  
His friends in exile, or the Tower,<sup>2</sup>  
Himself within the frown of power,  
Pursued by base envenomed pens,  
395 Far to the land of slaves and fens;<sup>o</sup>  
A servile race in folly nursed,  
Who truckle most, when treated worst.  
"By innocence and resolution,  
He bore continual persecution;  
400 While numbers to preferment rose,  
Whose merits were to be his foes;  
When even his own familiar friends,  
Intent upon their private ends,  
Like renegadoes now he feels,  
405 Against him lifting up their heels.  
"The Dean did, by his pen, defeat  
An infamous destructive cheat;<sup>3</sup>  
Taught fools their interest how to know,  
And gave them arms to ward the blow.



410 Envy has owned it was his doing,  
To save that hapless land from ruin;  
While they who at the steerage<sup>4</sup> stood,  
And reaped the profit, sought his blood.

415 "To save them from their evil fate,  
In him was held a crime of state.  
A wicked monster on the bench,<sup>5</sup>  
Whose fury blood could never quench;  
As vile and profligate a villain,  
420 As modern Scroggs, or old Tresilian;<sup>6</sup>  
Who long all justice had discarded,  
Nor feared he God, nor man regarded;  
Vowed on the Dean his rage to vent,  
And make him of his zeal repent:  
425 But Heaven his innocence defends,  
The grateful people stand his friends;  
Not strains of law, nor judge's frown,  
Nor topics<sup>o</sup> brought to please the crown,  
Nor witness hired, nor jury picked,  
Prevail to bring him in convict.

430 "In exile, with a steady heart,  
He spent his life's declining part;  
Where folly, pride, and faction sway,  
Remote from St. John, Pope, and Gay.

435 "His friendships there, to few confined,  
Were always of the middling kind;  
No fools of rank, a mongrel breed,  
Who fain would pass for lords indeed:  
Where titles give no right or power,  
And peerage is a withered flower;  
440 He would have held it a disgrace,  
If such a wretch had known his face.  
On rural squires, that kingdom's bane,  
He vented oft his wrath in vain;  
445 Biennial squires<sup>7</sup> to market brought:

Who sell their souls and votes for naught;  
The nation stripped, go joyful back,  
To rob the church, their tenants rack,  
Go snacks<sup>o</sup> with rogues and rapparees;<sup>o</sup>  
And keep the peace to pick up fees;  
450 In every job to have a share,  
A jail or barrack to repair;  
And turn the tax for public roads  
Commodious to their own abodes.  
"Perhaps I may allow the Dean  
455 Had too much satire in his vein;  
And seemed determined not to starve it,  
Because no age could more deserve it.  
Yet malice never was his aim;  
He lashed the vice, but spared the name;  
460 No individual could resent,  
Where thousands equally were meant;  
His satire points at no defect,  
But what all mortals may correct;  
For he abhorred that senseless tribe  
465 Who call it humor when they gibe:  
He spared a hump, or crooked nose,  
Whose owners set not up for beaux.  
True genuine dullness moved his pity,  
Unless it offered to be witty.  
470 Those who their ignorance confessed,  
He ne'er offended with a jest;  
But laughed to hear an idiot quote  
A verse from Horace learned by rote.  
"He knew an hundred pleasant stories,  
475 With all the turns of Whigs and Tories:  
Was cheerful to his dying day;  
And friends would let him have his way.  
"He gave the little wealth he had  
480 To build a house for fools and mad;<sup>8</sup>

And showed by one satiric touch,  
No nation wanted it so much.  
That kingdom he hath left his debtor,  
I wish it soon may have a better."

1731**Endnotes**

1739

- Note 1: François de la Rochefoucauld (1613–1680), writer of witty, cynical maxims. Writing to Pope (November 26, 1725), Swift, opposing the optimistic philosophy that Pope and Bolingbroke (see *Essay on Man*, p. 565) were at that time developing, professed to have founded his whole character on these maxims.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the misfortune of our best friends we always find something that does not displease us (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The author of *The Beggar's Opera* and an intimate friend of Swift and Pope. His *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) owes something to Swift's "City Shower."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A physician and wit, friend of Swift and Pope (see Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, p. 574).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (see headnote to *An Essay on Man*, p. 566), though debarred from the House of Lords and from public office, had become the center of a group of Tories and discontented young Whigs (of whom William Pulteney was one) who united in opposing Sir Robert Walpole, the chief minister. They published a political periodical, the *Craftsman*, thus rivaling Swift in his role of political pamphleteer and enemy of Sir Robert.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Johnson in his *Dictionary* authorizes Swift's pronunciation: *ver-ti-go*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A worn-out horse, in contrast to Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, emblem of poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Originally a street in London largely inhabited by hack writers; later, a generic term applied to all such writers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It was in the character of M. B., a Dublin drapier, that Swift aroused the Irish people to resistance against the importation of Wood's halfpence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Delicate; hence demanding careful diagnosis and treatment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In low spirits. The phrase is ironic, as "laughing" (line 180) makes clear. Lady Suffolk was George II's mistress, with whom Swift became friendly during his visit to Pope in 1726.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Queen Caroline had promised Swift some medals when she was princess of Wales during the same year.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir Robert Walpole. Colonel Francis Chartres was a debauchee, often satirized by Pope.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Pulteney (see p. 367, n. 5).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Edmund Curll, shrewd and disreputable bookseller, published pirated works, scandalous biographies, and works falsely ascribed to notable writers of the time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Colley Cibber (1671–1757), comic actor, playwright, and supremely untalented poet laureate. He succeeded Theobald as king of the Dunces in Pope's *The Dunciad* of 1743. "Tibbalds": Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), Shakespeare scholar and editor, already enthroned as king of the Dunces in *The Dunciad* of 1728. Like Pope, Swift spells the name phonetically. "Moore": James Moore Smythe, poetaster and playwright, an enemy of Pope.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The equivalent in the card game quadrille of bidding a grand slam in bridge.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Poet who is inspired by the god of poetry (Apollo).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Bernard Lintot, a bookseller and the publisher of Pope's Homer and some of his early poems.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London street where secondhand books and publishers' remainders were sold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To be used as waste paper for lining baking dishes and wrapping parcels.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The laureate Cibber was obliged to celebrate each of the king's birthdays with a poem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "The Thresher Poet," an agricultural laborer whose verse brought him to the notice and patronage of Queen Caroline.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See p. 367, n. 5.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Walpole hires a string of party scribblers who do nothing else but write in his defense [Swift's note].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Orator" John Henley, an Independent preacher who dazzled unlearned audiences with his oratory and who wrote treatises on elocution.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thomas Woolston (1670–1733), a Cambridge scholar (hence wearing a "gown" in line 291) whose *Discourses on the Miracles of Our Saviour* had recently earned him notoriety.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Proverbially, Gloucestershire was full of monks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A fashionable tavern in Covent Garden.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A near exact copy of line 30 of John Denham's "On Mr. Abraham Cowley" (1667): "Yet what he wrote was all his own."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Emblems of knighthood.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Psalms 146:3.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In 1714 the government offered £300 for the discovery of the author of Swift's "Public Spirit of the Whigs," and in 1724 the Irish government offered a similar amount for the discovery of the author of the fourth of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The antagonism between the two chief ministers (his dear friends), Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Bolingbroke, paralyzed the Tory ministry in the crucial last months of Queen Anne's life and drove Swift to retirement in Ireland, whence he returned in 1714 to make a final effort to heal the breach and save the government, which failed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: James Butler, Duke of Ormond, who succeeded to the command of the English armies on the Continent when, in 1711, the Duke of Marlborough was stripped of his offices by Anne. He went into exile in 1714 and was active in Jacobite intrigue.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The death of Queen Anne.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Swift feared the policies of the "dangerous faction" (the Whig Party) because its toleration of Dissenters threatened the Church of England.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bolingbroke was in exile. Oxford was sent to the Tower of London by the Whigs.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The scheme to introduce Wood's copper halfpence into Ireland in 1723–24.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Literally, the steering of a ship. Here the direction and management of public affairs in Ireland.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Whitshed, lord chief justice of the King's Bench of Ireland. In 1720, when the jury refused to find Swift's anonymous pamphlet "Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture" wicked and seditious, Whitshed sent them back nine times, hoping to force them to another verdict. In 1724 he presided over the trial of Harding, the printer of the fourth of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*, but again was unable, despite bullying, to force a verdict of guilty.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In 1381, Sir Robert Tresilian punished with great severity men who had participated in the Peasants' Revolt; he was impeached and in 1387 was hanged. Sir William Scroggs, lord chief justice of England at the time of the Popish Plot, 1678 (see Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, p. 35), was impeached for his misdemeanors in office in 1680.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Members of the Irish Parliament.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Swift left funds to endow a hospital for the insane. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *should agitate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *figures of speech* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *morning reception* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Ireland* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arguments* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shares* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *highwaymen* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Gulliver's Travels**

*Gulliver's Travels* is Swift's most enduring satire. Although full of allusions to recent and current events, it still rings true today, for its objects are human failings and the defective political, economic, and social institutions that they call into being. Swift adopts an ancient satirical device: the imaginary voyage. Lemuel Gulliver, the narrator, is a ship's surgeon, a moderately well educated man, kindly, resourceful, cheerful, inquiring, patriotic, truthful, and rather unimaginative—in short, a reasonably decent example of humanity, with whom a reader can readily identify. He undertakes four voyages, all of which end disastrously among “several remote nations of the world.” In the first, Gulliver is shipwrecked in the empire of Lilliput, where he finds himself a giant among a diminutive people, charmed by their miniature city and amused by their toylike prettiness. But in the end they prove to be treacherous, malicious, ambitious, vengeful, and cruel. As we read we grow disenchanted with the inhabitants of this fanciful kingdom, and then gradually we begin to recognize our likeness to them, especially in the disproportion between our natural pettiness and our boundless and destructive passions. In the second voyage, Gulliver is abandoned by his shipmates in Brobdingnag, a land of giants, creatures ten times as large as Europeans. Though he fears that such monsters must be brutes, the reverse proves to be the case. Brobdingnag is something of a utopia, governed by a humane and enlightened prince who is the embodiment of moral and political wisdom. In the long interview in which Gulliver pridefully enlarges on the glories of England and its political institutions, the king reduces him to resentful silence by asking questions that reveal the difference between what England is and what it ought to be. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver finds himself a Lilliputian, his pride humbled by his helpless state and his human vanity diminished by the realization that his body must have seemed as disgusting to the Lilliputians as do the bodies of the Brobdingnagians to him.

Part 3 differs from the other parts of the *Travels*, each of which describes a single, distinct society that challenges Gulliver's sense of



his own humanity by landing him among bodies very different from his. In Part 3, Gulliver instead visits many places—Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdbudrib, Luggnagg, and (jarringly adding a real nation to the fantastic itinerary) Japan—and the inhabitants all at least look like normal human beings. This allows Swift to mock a variety of targets, including extremes of abstract reasoning in science, politics, and economics as well as commonly received ideas about history and human happiness. The final voyage sets Gulliver between a race of horses, Houyhnhnms (pronounced *Hwín-ims*), who live entirely by reason except for a few well-controlled and muted social affections, and the Yahoos, whom they enslave, whose bodies are obscene caricatures of the human body and who have no glimmer of reason but are mere creatures of appetite and passion.

When *Gulliver's Travels* first appeared, everyone read it—children for the story and politicians for the satire of current affairs—and ever since it has retained a hold on readers of every kind. Almost unique in world literature, it is simple enough for children, complex enough to carry adults beyond their depth. Swift's art works on many levels. First of all, there is the sheer playfulness of the narrative. Through Gulliver's eyes, we gaze on marvel after marvel: a tiny girl who threads an invisible needle with invisible silk or a white mare who threads a needle between pastern and hoof. The travels, like a fairy story, transport us to imaginary worlds that function with a perfect, fantastic logic different from our own; Swift exercises our sense of vision. But beyond that, he exercises our perceptions of meaning. In *Gulliver's Travels*, things are seldom what they seem; irony, probing or corrosive, underlies almost every word. In the last chapter, Gulliver insists that the example of the Houyhnhnms has made him incapable of telling a lie—but the oath he swears is quoted from Sinon, whose lies to the Trojans persuaded them to accept the Trojan *horse*. Swift trains us to read alertly, to look beneath the surface. Yet on its deepest level, the book does not offer final meanings, but a question: What is a human being? Voyaging through imaginary worlds, we try to find ourselves. Are we prideful insects or lords of creation? brutes or reasonable beings? In the last

voyage, Swift pushes such questions, and Gulliver himself, almost beyond endurance; hating his own humanity, Gulliver forgets who he is. For the reader, however, the outcome cannot be so clear. Swift does not set out to satisfy our minds but to vex and unsettle them. And he leaves us at the moment when the mixed face of humanity—the pettiness of the Lilliputians, the savagery of the Yahoos, the innocence of Gulliver himself—begins to look strangely familiar, like our own faces in a mirror.

Swift's full title for this work was *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of several Ships*. The first (1726) edition and most subsequent ones included maps of the lands Gulliver visited (reproduced here), which traced known coastlines as rendered by popular contemporary cartographer Herman Moll (mentioned in Part 4, chap. 11) and then added the fanciful lands described in the text. The *Travels* was initially published anonymously, and Swift's friends Charles Ford, Pope, and others helped him get it into print. But they or the bookseller altered and omitted so much of the original manuscript (because of its dangerous political implications) that Swift was seriously annoyed. When, in 1735, the Dublin bookseller George Faulkner brought out an edition of Swift's works, the dean seems to have taken pains, surreptitiously, to see that a more authentic version of the work was published. This text is the basis of modern editions.

# ***From Gulliver's Travels***

## ***A Letter from Captain Gulliver to His Cousin Sympson***<sup>1</sup>

I hope you will be ready to own publicly, whenever you shall be called to it, that by your great and frequent urgency you prevailed on me to publish a very loose and uncorrect account of my travels; with direction to hire some young gentlemen of either University to put them in order, and correct the style, as my Cousin Dampier<sup>2</sup> did by my advice, in his book called *A Voyage round the World*. But I do not remember I gave you power to consent that anything should be omitted, and much less that anything should be inserted: therefore, as to the latter, I do here renounce everything of that kind; particularly a paragraph about her Majesty the late Queen Anne, of most pious and glorious memory; although I did reverence and esteem her more than any of human species. But you, or your interpolator, ought to have considered that as it was not my inclination, so was it not decent to praise any animal of our composition before my master Houyhnhnm; and besides, the fact was altogether false; for to my knowledge, being in England during some part of her Majesty's reign, she did govern by a chief Minister; nay, even by two successively; the first whereof was the Lord of Godolphin, and the second the Lord of Oxford; so that you have made me *say the thing that was not*. Likewise, in the account of the Academy of Projectors, and several passages of my discourse to my master Houyhnhnm, you have either omitted some material circumstances, or minced or changed them in such a manner, that I do hardly know mine own work. When I formerly hinted to you something of this in a letter, you were pleased to answer that you were afraid of giving offense; that people in power were very watchful over the press; and apt not only to interpret, but to punish everything which looked like an *innuendo* (as I think you called it). But pray, how could that which I spoke so many years ago, and at

above five thousand leagues distance, in another reign, be applied to any of the Yahoos, who now are said to govern the herd; especially, at a time when I little thought on or feared the unhappiness of living under them. Have not I the most reason to complain, when I see these very Yahoos carried by Houyhnhnms in a vehicle, as if these were brutes, and those the rational creatures? And, indeed, to avoid so monstrous and detestable a sight was one principal motive of my retirement hither.<sup>3</sup>

Thus much I thought proper to tell you in relation to yourself, and to the trust I reposed in you.

I do in the next place complain of my own great want of judgment, in being prevailed upon by the intreaties and false reasonings of you and some others, very much against mine own opinion, to suffer my travels to be published. Pray bring to your mind how often I desired you to consider, when you insisted on the motive of public good, that the Yahoos were a species of animals utterly incapable of amendment by precepts or examples; and so it hath proved; for instead of seeing a full stop put to all abuses and corruptions, at least in this little island, as I had reason to expect, behold, after above six months warning, I cannot learn that my book hath produced one single effect according to mine intentions; I desired you would let me know by a letter, when party and faction were extinguished; judges learned and upright; pleaders honest and modest, with some tincture of common sense; and Smithfield<sup>4</sup> blazing with pyramids of law books; the young nobility's education entirely changed; the physicians banished; the female Yahoos abounding in virtue, honor, truth, and good sense; courts and levees of great ministers thoroughly weeded and swept; wit, merit, and learning rewarded; all disgracers of the press in prose and verse, condemned to eat nothing but their own cotton,<sup>5</sup> and quench their thirst with their own ink. These, and a thousand other reformatations, I firmly counted upon by your encouragement; as indeed they were plainly deducible from the precepts delivered in my book. And, it must be owned that seven months were a sufficient time to correct every vice and folly to which Yahoos are subject; if their natures had

been capable of the least disposition to virtue or wisdom; yet so far have you been from answering mine expectation in any of your letters, that on the contrary, you are loading our carrier every week with libels, and keys, and reflections, and memoirs, and second parts; wherein I see myself accused of reflecting upon great statesfolk; of degrading human nature (for so they have still the confidence to style it) and of abusing the female sex. I find likewise, that the writers of those bundles are not agreed among themselves; for some of them will not allow me to be author of mine own travels; and others make me author of books to which I am wholly a stranger.

I find likewise that your printer hath been so careless as to confound the times, and mistake the dates of my several voyages and returns; neither assigning the true year, or the true month, or day of the month; and I hear the original manuscript is all destroyed, since the publication of my book. Neither have I any copy left; however, I have sent you some corrections, which you may insert, if ever there should be a second edition; and yet I cannot stand to them, but shall leave that matter to my judicious and candid readers, to adjust it as they please.

I hear some of our sea Yahoos find fault with my sea language, as not proper in many parts, nor now in use. I cannot help it. In my first voyages, while I was young, I was instructed by the oldest mariners, and learned to speak as they did. But I have since found that the sea Yahoos are apt, like the land ones, to become new fangled in their words; which the latter change every year; insomuch, as I remember upon each return to mine own country, their old dialect was so altered, that I could hardly understand the new. And I observe, when any Yahoo comes from London out of curiosity to visit me at mine own house, we neither of us are able to deliver our conceptions in a manner intelligible to the other.<sup>6</sup>

If the censure of Yahoos could any way affect me, I should have great reason to complain that some of them are so bold as to think my book of travels a mere fiction out of mine own brain; and have

gone so far as to drop hints that the Houyhnhnms, and Yahoos have no more existence than the inhabitants of Utopia.

Indeed I must confess that as to the people of Lilliput, Brobdingrag (for so the word should have been spelled, and not erroneously Brobdingnag) and Laputa, I have never yet heard of any Yahoo so presumptuous as to dispute their being, or the facts I have related concerning them; because the truth immediately strikes every reader with conviction. And, is there less probability in my account of the Houyhnhnms or Yahoos, when it is manifest as to the latter, there are so many thousands even in this city, who only differ from their brother brutes in Houyhnhnmland, because they use a sort of a jabber, and do not go naked. I wrote for their amendment, and not their approbation. The united praise of the whole race would be of less consequence to me, than the neighing of those two degenerate Houyhnhnms I keep in my stable; because, from these, degenerate as they are, I still improve in some virtues, without any mixture of vice.

Do these miserable animals presume to think that I am so far degenerated as to defend my veracity; Yahoo as I am, it is well known through all Houyhnhnmland, that by the instructions and example of my illustrious master, I was able in the compass of two years (although I confess with the utmost difficulty) to remove that infernal habit of lying, shuffling, deceiving, and equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very souls of all my species; especially the Europeans.

I have other complaints to make upon this vexatious occasion; but I forbear troubling myself or you any further. I must freely confess that since my last return, some corruptions of my Yahoo nature have revived in me by conversing with a few of your species, and particularly those of mine own family, by an unavoidable necessity; else I should never have attempted so absurd a project as that of reforming the Yahoo race in this kingdom; but I have now done with all such visionary schemes for ever.

- Note 1: In this letter, first published in 1735, Swift complains, among other matters, of the alterations in his original text made by the publisher, Benjamin Motte, in the interest of what he considered political discretion.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Dampier (1652–1715), the explorer, whose account of his circumnavigation of the globe Swift had read.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To Nottinghamshire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A part of London containing many bookshops. “Pleaders”: lawyers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Presumably their paper. “Levees”: morning receptions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Swift was the inveterate enemy of slang.[Return to reference 6](#)

### ***The Publisher to the Reader***

The author of these travels, Mr. Lemuel Gulliver, is my ancient and intimate friend; there is likewise some relation between us by the mother's side. About three years ago Mr. Gulliver, growing weary of the concourse of curious people coming to him at his house in Redriff,<sup>7</sup> made a small purchase of land, with a convenient house, near Newark, in Nottinghamshire, his native country; where he now lives retired, yet in good esteem among his neighbors.

Although Mr. Gulliver were born in Nottinghamshire, where his father dwelt, yet I have heard him say his family came from Oxfordshire; to confirm which, I have observed in the churchyard at Banbury, in that county, several tombs and monuments of the Gullivers.

Before he quitted Redriff, he left the custody of the following papers in my hands, with the liberty to dispose of them as I should think fit. I have carefully perused them three times; the style is very plain and simple; and the only fault I find is that the author, after the manner of travelers, is a little too circumstantial. There is an air of truth apparent through the whole; and indeed the author was so distinguished for his veracity, that it became a sort of proverb among his neighbors at Redriff, when anyone affirmed a thing, to say, it was as true as if Mr. Gulliver had spoke it.

By the advice of several worthy persons, to whom, with the author's permission, I communicated these papers, I now venture to send them into the world; hoping they may be, at least for some time, a better entertainment to our young noblemen, than the common scribbles of politics and party.

This volume would have been at least twice as large, if I had not made bold to strike out innumerable passages relating to the winds and tides, as well as to the variations and bearings in the several voyages; together with the minute descriptions of the management of the ship in storms, in the style of sailors; likewise the account of the longitudes and latitudes, wherein I have reason to apprehend that Mr. Gulliver may be a little dissatisfied; but I was resolved to fit



the work as much as possible to the general capacity of readers. However, if my own ignorance in sea affairs shall have led me to commit some mistakes, I alone am answerable for them; and if any traveler hath a curiosity to see the whole work at large, as it came from the hand of the author, I will be ready to gratify him.

As for any further particulars relating to the author, the reader will receive satisfaction from the first pages of the book.

RICHARD SYMPSON

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Rotherhithe, a district in southern London, below Tower Bridge, then frequented by sailors.[Return to reference 7](#)

## ***Part 1. A Voyage to Lilliput***

CHAPTER 1. *The author gives some account of himself and family; his first inducements to travel. He is shipwrecked, and swims for his life; gets safe on shore in the country of Lilliput; is made a prisoner, and carried up the country.*

My father had a small estate in Nottinghamshire; I was the third of five sons. He sent me to Emanuel College in Cambridge, at fourteen years old, where I resided three years, and applied myself close to my studies: but the charge of maintaining me (although I had a very scanty allowance) being too great for a narrow fortune, I was bound apprentice to Mr. James Bates, an eminent surgeon in London, with whom I continued four years; and my father now and then sending me small sums of money, I laid them out in learning navigation, and other parts of the mathematics, useful to those who intend to travel, as I always believed it would be some time or other my fortune to do. When I left Mr. Bates, I went down to my father; where, by the assistance of him and my uncle John, and some other relations, I got forty pounds, and a promise of thirty pounds a year to maintain me at Leyden:<sup>8</sup> there I studied physic two years and seven months, knowing it would be useful in long voyages.

Soon after my return from Leyden, I was recommended by my good master Mr. Bates, to be surgeon to the *Swallow*, Captain Abraham Pannell commander; with whom I continued three years and a half, making a voyage or two into the Levant<sup>9</sup> and some other parts. When I came back, I resolved to settle in London, to which Mr. Bates, my master, encouraged me; and by him I was recommended to several patients. I took part of a small house in the Old Jury; and being advised to alter my condition, I married Mrs.<sup>1</sup> Mary Burton, second daughter to Mr. Edmond Burton, hosier, in Newgate Street, with whom I received four hundred pounds for a portion.

But, my good master Bates dying in two years after, and I having few friends, my business began to fail; for my conscience would not suffer me to imitate the bad practice of too many among my brethren. Having therefore consulted with my wife, and some of my acquaintance, I determined to go again to sea. I was surgeon

successively in two ships, and made several voyages, for six years, to the East and West Indies; by which I got some addition to my fortune. My hours of leisure I spent in reading the best authors, ancient and modern, being always provided with a good number of books; and when I was ashore, in observing the manners and dispositions of the people, as well as learning their language; wherein I had a great facility by the strength of my memory.

Plate I. Part I. Page 1.

Hoga I.

P. Mintoan

I. Good Fortune

I. Nafsoo

SUNDA I.

Sillabar

*Sunda Straits*



Mildendo

Blefuscu

Lilliput

Discover'd A.D. 1699



Dimen's Land

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The last of these voyages not proving very fortunate, I grew weary of the sea, and intended to stay at home with my wife and family. I removed from the Old Jury to Fetter Lane, and from thence to Wapping, hoping to get business among the sailors; but it would not turn to account. After three years' expectation that things would mend, I accepted an advantageous offer from Captain William Prichard, master of the *Antelope*, who was making a voyage to the South Sea. We set sail from Bristol, May 4th, 1699, and our voyage at first was very prosperous.

It would not be proper, for some reasons, to trouble the reader with the particulars of our adventures in those seas: let it suffice to inform him, that in our passage from thence to the East Indies we were driven by a violent storm to the northwest of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>2</sup> By an observation, we found ourselves in the latitude of 30 degrees 2 minutes south. Twelve of our crew were dead by immoderate labor, and ill food, the rest were in a very weak condition. On the fifth of November, which was the beginning of summer in those parts, the weather being very hazy, the seamen spied a rock, within half a cable's length<sup>3</sup> of the ship; but the wind was so strong, that we were driven directly upon it, and immediately split. Six of the crew, of whom I was one, having let down the boat into the sea, made a shift to get clear of the ship, and the rock. We rowed by my computation about three leagues, till we were able to work no longer, being already spent with labor while we were in the ship. We therefore trusted ourselves to the mercy of the waves; and in about half an hour the boat was upset by a sudden flurry from the north. What became of my companions in the boat, as well as of those who escaped on the rock, or were left in the vessel, I cannot tell; but conclude they were all lost. For my own part, I swam as fortune directed me, and was pushed forward by wind and tide. I often let my legs drop, and could feel no bottom; but when I was almost gone, and able to struggle no longer, I found myself within my depth; and by this time the storm was much abated. The declivity was so small, that I walked near a mile before I got to the shore, which I conjectured was about eight o'clock in the evening. I

then advanced forward near half a mile, but could not discover any sign of houses or inhabitants; at least I was in so weak a condition, that I did not observe them. I was extremely tired, and with that, and the heat of the weather, and about half a pint of brandy that I drank as I left the ship, I found myself much inclined to sleep. I lay down on the grass, which was very short and soft, where I slept sounder than ever I remember to have done in my life, and as I reckoned, above nine hours; for when I awaked, it was just daylight. I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir: for as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner. I likewise felt several slender ligatures across my body, from my armpits to my thighs. I could only look upwards; the sun began to grow hot, and the light offended my eyes. I heard a confused noise about me, but in the posture I lay, could see nothing except the sky. In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin; when bending my eyes downwards as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high,<sup>4</sup> with a bow and arrow in his hands, and a quiver at his back. In the meantime, I felt at least forty more of the same kind (as I conjectured) following the first. I was in the utmost astonishment, and roared so loud, that they all ran back in a fright; and some of them, as I was afterwards told, were hurt with the falls they got by leaping from my sides upon the ground. However, they soon returned; and one of them, who ventured so far as to get a full sight of my face, lifting up his hands and eyes by way of admiration,<sup>5</sup> cried out in a shrill, but distinct voice, *Hekinah Degul*: the others repeated the same words several times, but I then knew not what they meant. I lay all this while, as the reader may believe, in great uneasiness; at length, struggling to get loose, I had the fortune to break the strings, and wrench out the pegs that fastened my left arm to the ground; for, by lifting it up to my face, I discovered the methods they had taken to bind me; and, at the same time, with a violent pull, which gave me excessive pain, I a little loosened the

strings that tied down my hair on the left side; so that I was just able to turn my head about two inches. But the creatures ran off a second time, before I could seize them; whereupon there was a great shout in a very shrill accent; and after it ceased, I heard one of them cry aloud, *Tolgo phonac*; when in an instant I felt above an hundred arrows discharged on my left hand, which pricked me like so many needles; and besides they shot another flight into the air, as we do bombs in Europe, whereof many, I suppose, fell on my body (though I felt them not) and some on my face, which I immediately covered with my left hand. When this shower of arrows was over, I felt a groaning with grief and pain; and then striving again to get loose, they discharged another volley larger than the first, and some of them attempted with spears to stick me in the sides; but, by good luck, I had on me a buff jerkin,<sup>6</sup> which they could not pierce. I thought it the most prudent method to lie still; and my design was to continue so till night, when, my left hand being already loose, I could easily free myself: and as for the inhabitants, I had reason to believe I might be a match for the greatest armies they could bring against me, if they were all of the same size with him that I saw. But fortune disposed otherwise of me. When the people observed I was quiet, they discharged no more arrows: but by the noise increasing, I knew their numbers were greater; and about four yards from me, over-against my right ear, I heard a knocking for above an hour, like people at work; when turning my head that way, as well as the pegs and strings would permit me, I saw a stage erected about a foot and a half from the ground, capable of holding four of the inhabitants, with two or three ladders to mount it: from whence one of them, who seemed to be a person of quality, made me a long speech, whereof I understood not one syllable. But I should have mentioned, that before the principal person began his oration, he cried out three times, *Langro Dehul san*: (these words and the former were afterwards repeated and explained to me). Whereupon immediately about fifty of the inhabitants came, and cut the strings that fastened the left side of my head, which gave me the liberty of turning it to the right, and of observing the person and gesture of him who was to speak. He appeared to be of a middle age, and taller than any of



the other three who attended him; whereof one was a page who held up his train, and seemed to be somewhat longer than my middle finger; the other two stood one on each side to support him. He acted every part of an orator, and I could observe many periods<sup>2</sup> of threatenings, and others of promises, pity and kindness. I answered in a few words, but in the most submissive manner, lifting up my left hand and both my eyes to the sun, as calling him for a witness; and being almost famished with hunger, having not eaten a morsel for some hours before I left the ship, I found the demands of nature so strong upon me, that I could not forbear showing my impatience (perhaps against the strict rules of decency) by putting my finger frequently on my mouth, to signify that I wanted food. The *Hurgo* (for so they call a great lord, as I afterwards learned) understood me very well. He descended from the stage, and commanded that several ladders should be applied to my sides, on which above an hundred of the inhabitants mounted, and walked towards my mouth, laden with baskets full of meat, which had been provided and sent thither by the King's orders upon the first intelligence he received of me. I observed there was the flesh of several animals, but could not distinguish them by the taste. There were shoulders, legs, and loins shaped like those of mutton, and very well dressed, but smaller than the wings of a lark. I eat them by two or three at a mouthful, and took three loaves at a time, about the bigness of musket bullets. They supplied me as fast as they could, showing a thousand marks of wonder and astonishment at my bulk and appetite. I then made another sign that I wanted drink. They found by my eating that a small quantity would not suffice me; and being a most ingenious people, they slung up with great dexterity one of their largest hogsheads; then rolled it towards my hand, and beat out the top; I drank it off at a draught, which I might well do, for it hardly held half a pint, and tasted like a small wine of Burgundy, but much more delicious. They brought me a second hogshead, which I drank in the same manner, and made signs for more, but they had none to give me. When I had performed these wonders, they shouted for joy, and danced upon my breast, repeating several times as they did at first, *Hekinah Degul*. They

made me a sign that I should throw down the two hogsheads, but first warned the people below to stand out of the way, crying aloud, *Borach Mivola*, and when they saw the vessels in the air, there was an universal shout of *Hekinah Degul*. I confess I was often tempted, while they were passing backwards and forwards on my body, to seize forty or fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the ground. But the remembrance of what I had felt, which probably might not be the worst they could do; and the promise of honor I made them, for so I interpreted my submissive behavior, soon drove out those imaginations. Besides, I now considered myself as bound by the laws of hospitality to a people who had treated me with so much expense and magnificence. However, in my thoughts I could not sufficiently wonder at the intrepidity of these diminutive mortals, who durst venture to mount and walk on my body, while one of my hands was at liberty, without trembling at the very sight of so prodigious a creature as I must appear to them. After some time, when they observed that I made no more demands for meat, there appeared before me a person of high rank from his Imperial Majesty. His Excellency, having mounted on the small of my right leg, advanced forwards up to my face, with about a dozen of his retinue. And producing his credentials under the Signet Royal, which he applied<sup>8</sup> close to my eyes, spoke about ten minutes, without any signs of anger, but with a kind of determinate resolution; often pointing forwards, which, as I afterwards found, was towards the capital city, about half a mile distant, whither it was agreed by his Majesty in council that I must be conveyed. I answered in a few words, but to no purpose, and made a sign with my hand that was loose, putting it to the other (but over his Excellency's head, for fear of hurting him or his train) and then to my own head and body, to signify that I desired my liberty. It appeared that he understood me well enough; for he shook his head by way of disapprobation, and held his hand in a posture to show that I must be carried as a prisoner. However, he made other signs to let me understand that I should have meat and drink enough, and very good treatment. Whereupon I once more thought of attempting to break my bonds; but again, when I felt the smart of their arrows upon my face and

hands, which were all in blisters, and many of the darts still sticking in them; and observing likewise that the number of my enemies increased; I gave tokens to let them know that they might do with me what they pleased. Upon this the *Hurgo* and his train withdrew, with much civility and cheerful countenances. Soon after I heard a general shout, with frequent repetitions of the words, *Peplom Selan*, and I felt great numbers of the people on my left side relaxing the cords to such a degree, that I was able to turn upon my right, and to ease myself with making water; which I very plentifully did, to the great astonishment of the people, who conjecturing by my motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the right and left on that side, to avoid the torrent which fell with such noise and violence from me. But before this, they had daubed my face and both my hands with a sort of ointment very pleasant to the smell, which in a few minutes removed all the smart of their arrows. These circumstances, added to the refreshment I had received by their victuals and drink, which were very nourishing, disposed me to sleep. I slept about eight hours, as I was afterwards assured; and it was no wonder; for the physicians, by the Emperor's order, had mingled a sleeping potion in the hogsheads of wine.

It seems that upon the first moment I was discovered sleeping on the ground after my landing, the Emperor had early notice of it by an express; and determined in council that I should be tied in the manner I have related (which was done in the night while I slept), that plenty of meat and drink should be sent me, and a machine prepared to carry me to the capital city.

This resolution perhaps may appear very bold and dangerous, and I am confident would not be imitated by any prince in Europe on the like occasion; however, in my opinion it was extremely prudent as well as generous. For supposing these people had endeavored to kill me with their spears and arrows while I was asleep; I should certainly have awaked with the first sense of smart, which might so far have roused my rage and strength, as to enable me to break the strings wherewith I was tied; after which, as they were not able to make resistance, so they could expect no mercy.

These people are most excellent mathematicians, and arrived to a great perfection in mechanics by the countenance and encouragement of the Emperor, who is a renowned patron of learning. This prince hath several machines fixed on wheels, for the carriage of trees and other great weights. He often builds his largest men of war, whereof some are nine foot long, in the woods where the timber grows, and has them carried on these engines<sup>9</sup> three or four hundred yards to the sea. Five hundred carpenters and engineers were immediately set at work to prepare the greatest engine they had. It was a frame of wood raised three inches from the ground, about seven foot long and four wide, moving upon twenty-two wheels. The shout I heard was upon the arrival of this engine, which it seems set out in four hours after my landing. It was brought parallel to me as I lay. But the principal difficulty was to raise and place me in this vehicle. Eighty poles, each of one foot high, were erected for this purpose, and very strong cords of the bigness of packthread were fastened by hooks to many bandages, which the workmen had girt round my neck, my hands, my body, and my legs. Nine hundred of the strongest men were employed to draw up these cords by many pulleys fastened on the poles; and thus, in less than three hours, I was raised and slung into the engine, and there tied fast. All this I was told, for while the whole operation was performing, I lay in a profound sleep, by the force of that soporiferous<sup>1</sup> medicine infused into my liquor. Fifteen hundred of the Emperor's largest horses, each about four inches and a half high, were employed to draw me towards the metropolis, which, as I said, was half a mile distant.

About four hours after we began our journey, I awaked by a very ridiculous accident; for, the carriage being stopped a while to adjust something that was out of order, two or three of the young natives had the curiosity to see how I looked when I was asleep; they climbed up into the engine, and advancing very softly to my face, one of them, an officer in the guards, put the sharp end of his half-pike a good way up into my left nostril, which tickled my nose like a straw, and made me sneeze violently: whereupon they stole off

unperceived, and it was three weeks before I knew the cause of my awaking so suddenly. We made a long march the remaining part of the day, and rested at night with five hundred guards on each side of me half with torches, and half with bows and arrows, ready to shoot me if I should offer to stir. The next morning at sunrise we continued our march, and arrived within two hundred yards of the city gates about noon. The Emperor and all his court came out to meet us, but his great officers would by no means suffer his Majesty to endanger his person by mounting on my body.

At the place where the carriage stopped, there stood an ancient temple, esteemed to be the largest in the whole kingdom, which having been polluted some years before by an unnatural murder,<sup>2</sup> was, according to the zeal of those people, looked on as profane, and therefore had been applied to common use, and all the ornaments and furniture carried away. In this edifice it was determined I should lodge. The great gate fronting to the north was about four foot high, and almost two foot wide, through which I could easily creep. On each side of the gate was a small window not above six inches from the ground: into that on the left side, the King's smiths conveyed fourscore and eleven chains, like those that hang to a lady's watch in Europe, and almost as large, which were locked to my left leg with six and thirty padlocks. Over against this temple, on the other side of the great highway, at twenty foot distance, there was a turret at least five foot high. Here the Emperor ascended with many principal lords of his court, to have an opportunity of viewing me, as I was told, for I could not see them. It was reckoned that above an hundred thousand inhabitants came out of the town upon the same errand; and in spite of my guards, I believe there could not be fewer than ten thousand, at several times, who mounted upon my body by the help of ladders. But a proclamation was soon issued to forbid it upon pain of death. When the workmen found it was impossible for me to break loose, they cut all the strings that bound me; whereupon I rose up with as melancholy a disposition as ever I had in my life. But the noise and astonishment of the people at seeing me rise and walk are not to be

expressed. The chains that held my left leg were about two yards long, and gave me not only the liberty of walking backwards and forwards in a semicircle; but, being fixed within four inches of the gate, allowed me to creep in, and lie at my full length in the temple.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: The University of Leyden, in Holland, was a center for the study of medicine ("physic").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The eastern Mediterranean.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The title (pronounced *mistress*) designated any woman, married or unmarried. "Old Jury": a street (once "Old Jewry") in the City of London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tasmania.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A cable is about six hundred feet (one hundred fathoms).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lilliput is scaled, fairly consistently, at one-twelfth of Gulliver's world.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wonderment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Leather jacket.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In rhetoric, complete, well-constructed sentences.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Brought.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Contrivances.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Inducing unnatural sleep.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Presumably a reference to the execution of Charles I, who was sentenced in Westminster Hall.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 2. *The Emperor of Lilliput, attended by several of the nobility, comes to see the author in his confinement. The Emperor's person and habit described. Learned men appointed to teach the author their language. He gains favor by his mild disposition. His pockets are searched, and his sword and pistols taken from him.*

When I found myself on my feet, I looked about me, and must confess I never beheld a more entertaining prospect. The country round appeared like a continued garden, and the inclosed fields, which were generally forty foot square, resembled so many beds of flowers. These fields were intermingled with woods of half a stang,<sup>3</sup> and the tallest trees, as I could judge, appeared to be seven foot high. I viewed the town on my left hand, which looked like the painted scene of a city in a theater.

I had been for some hours extremely pressed by the necessities of nature; which was no wonder, it being almost two days since I had last disburthened myself. I was under great difficulties between urgency and shame. The best expedient I could think on, was to creep into my house, which I accordingly did; and shutting the gate after me, I went as far as the length of my chain would suffer; and discharged my body of that uneasy load. But this was the only time I was ever guilty of so uncleanly an action; for which I cannot but hope the candid reader will give some allowance, after he hath maturely and impartially considered my case, and the distress I was in. From this time my constant practice was, as soon as I rose, to perform that business in open air, at the full extent of my chain, and due care was taken every morning before company came, that the offensive matter should be carried off in wheelbarrows by two servants appointed for that purpose. I would not have dwelt so long upon a circumstance, that perhaps at first sight may appear not very momentous, if I had not thought it necessary to justify my character in point of cleanliness to the world; which I am told some of my maligners have been pleased, upon this and other occasions, to call in question.



When this adventure was at an end, I came back out of my house, having occasion for fresh air. The Emperor was already descended from the tower, and advancing on horseback towards me, which had like to have cost him dear; for the beast, although very well trained, yet wholly unused to such a sight, which appeared as if a mountain moved before him, reared up on his hinder feet: but that prince, who is an excellent horseman, kept his seat, until his attendants ran in, and held the bridle, while his Majesty had time to dismount. When he alighted, he surveyed me round with great admiration, but kept beyond the length of my chains. He ordered his cooks and butlers, who were already prepared, to give me victuals and drink, which they pushed forward in a sort of vehicles upon wheels until I could reach them. I took these vehicles, and soon emptied them all; twenty of them were filled with meat, and ten with liquor; each of the former afforded me two or three good mouthfuls, and I emptied the liquor of ten vessels, which was contained in earthen vials, into one vehicle, drinking it off at a draught; and so I did with the rest. The Empress, and young princes of the blood, of both sexes, attended by many ladies, sat at some distance in their chairs; but upon the accident that happened to the Emperor's horse, they alighted, and came near his person; which I am now going to describe. He is taller, by almost the breadth of my nail, than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into the beholders. His features are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip, and arched nose, his complexion olive, his countenance<sup>4</sup> erect, his body and limbs well proportioned, all his motions graceful, and his deportment majestic. He was then past his prime, being twenty-eight years and three quarters old, of which he had reigned about seven, in great felicity, and generally victorious. For the better convenience of beholding him, I lay on my side, so that my face was parallel to his, and he stood but three yards off: however, I have had him since many times in my hand, and therefore cannot be deceived in the description. His dress was very plain and simple, the fashion of it between the Asiatic and the European; but he had on his head a light helmet of gold, adorned with jewels, and a plume on the



crest. He held his sword drawn in his hand, to defend himself, if I should happen to break loose; it was almost three inches long, the hilt and scabbard were gold enriched with diamonds. His voice was shrill, but very clear and articulate, and I could distinctly hear it when I stood up. The ladies and courtiers were all most magnificently clad, so that the spot they stood upon seemed to resemble a petticoat spread on the ground, embroidered with figures of gold and silver. His Imperial Majesty spoke often to me, and I returned answers, but neither of us could understand a syllable. There were several of his priests and lawyers present (as I conjectured by their habits) who were commanded to address themselves to me, and I spoke to them in as many languages as I had the least smattering of, which were High and Low Dutch, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and Lingua Franca;<sup>5</sup> but all to no purpose. After about two hours the court retired, and I was left with a strong guard, to prevent the impertinence, and probably the malice of the rabble, who were very impatient to crowd about me as near as they durst; and some of them had the impudence to shoot their arrows at me as I sat on the ground by the door of my house, whereof one very narrowly missed my left eye. But the colonel ordered six of the ringleaders to be seized, and thought no punishment so proper as to deliver them bound into my hands, which some of his soldiers accordingly did, pushing them forwards with the butt-ends of their pikes into my reach; I took them all in my right hand, put five of them into my coat-pocket; and as to the sixth, I made a countenance as if I would eat him alive. The poor man squalled terribly, and the colonel and his officer were in much pain, especially when they saw me take out my penknife: but I soon put them out of fear; for, looking mildly, and immediately cutting the strings he was bound with, I set him gently on the ground, and away he ran. I treated the rest in the same manner, taking them one by one out of my pocket, and I observed both the soldiers and people were highly obliged at this mark of my clemency, which was represented very much to my advantage at court.

Towards night I got with some difficulty into my house, where I lay on the ground, and continued to do so about a fortnight; during which time the Emperor gave orders to have a bed prepared for me. Six hundred beds of the common measure were brought in carriages, and worked up in my house; an hundred and fifty of their beds sewn together made up the breadth and length, and these were four double, which however kept me but very indifferently from the hardness of the floor, that was of smooth stone. By the same computation they provided me with sheets, blankets, and coverlets, tolerable enough for one who had been so long enured to hardships as I.

As the news of my arrival spread through the kingdom, it brought prodigious numbers of rich, idle, and curious people to see me; so that the villages were almost emptied, and great neglect of tillage and household affairs must have ensued, if his Imperial Majesty had not provided by several proclamations and orders of state against this inconveniency. He directed that those who had already beheld me should return home, and not presume to come within fifty yards of my house without license from court; whereby the secretaries of state got considerable fees.

In the mean time, the Emperor held frequent councils to debate what course should be taken with me; and I was afterwards assured by a particular friend, a person of great quality, who was as much in the secret as any, that the court was under many difficulties concerning me. They apprehended<sup>6</sup> my breaking loose, that my diet would be very expensive, and might cause a famine. Sometimes they determined to starve me, or at least to shoot me in the face and hands with poisoned arrows, which would soon dispatch me: but again they considered, that the stench of so large a carcass might produce a plague in the metropolis, and probably spread through the whole kingdom. In the midst of these consultations, several officers of the army went to the door of the great council chamber; and two of them being admitted, gave an account of my behavior to the six criminals above-mentioned; which made so favorable an impression in the breast of his Majesty, and the whole

board, in my behalf, that an imperial commission was issued out, obliging all the villages nine hundred yards round the city to deliver in every morning six beeves, forty sheep, and other victuals for my sustenance; together with a proportionable quantity of bread and wine, and other liquors: for the due payment of which his Majesty gave assignments<sup>7</sup> upon his treasury. For this prince lives chiefly upon his own demesnes; seldom except upon great occasions raising any subsidies upon his subjects, who are bound to attend him in his wars at their own expense. An establishment was also made of six hundred persons to be my domestics, who had board-wages allowed for their maintenance, and tents built for them very conveniently on each side of my door. It was likewise ordered, that three hundred tailors should make me a suit of clothes after the fashion of the country: that six of his Majesty's greatest scholars should be employed to instruct me in their language: and, lastly, that the Emperor's horses, and those of the nobility, and troops of guards, should be exercised in my sight, to accustom themselves to me. All these orders were duly put in execution; and in about three weeks I made a great progress in learning their language; during which time the Emperor frequently honored me with his visits, and was pleased to assist my masters in teaching me. We began already to converse together in some sort; and the first words I learned, were to express my desire that he would please to give me my liberty; which I every day repeated on my knees.<sup>8</sup> His answer, as I could apprehend, was, that this must be a work of time, not to be thought on without the advice of his council; and that first I must *Lumos kelmin pesso desmar lon emposo*; that is, swear a peace with him and his kingdom. However, that I should be used with all kindness; and he advised me to acquire by my patience and discreet behavior, the good opinion of himself and his subjects. He desired I would not take it ill, if he gave orders to certain proper officers to search me; for probably I might carry about me several weapons, which must needs be dangerous things, if they answered the bulk of so prodigious a person.<sup>9</sup> I said, his Majesty should be satisfied, for I was ready to strip myself, and turn up my pockets before him. This I

delivered part in words, and part in signs. He replied, that by the laws of the kingdom, I must be searched by two of his officers; that he knew this could not be done without my consent and assistance; that he had so good an opinion of my generosity and justice, as to trust their persons in my hands; that whatever they took from me should be returned when I left the country, or paid for at the rate which I would set upon them. I took up the two officers in my hands, put them first into my coat-pockets, and then into every other pocket about me, except my two fobs, and another secret pocket which I had no mind should be searched, wherein I had some little necessaries of no consequence to any but myself. In one of my fobs there was a silver watch, and in the other a small quantity of gold in a purse. These gentlemen, having pen, ink, and paper about them, made an exact inventory of everything they saw; and when they had done, desired I would set them down, that they might deliver it to the Emperor. This inventory I afterwards translated into English, and is word for word as follows.

Imprimis,<sup>1</sup> In the right coat-pocket of the Great Man-Mountain (for so I interpret the words *Quinbus Flestrin*) after the strictest search, we found only one great piece of coarse cloth, large enough to be a foot-cloth for your Majesty's chief room of state. In the left pocket, we saw a huge silver chest, with a cover of the same metal, which we the searchers were not able to lift. We desired it should be opened; and one of us, stepping into it, found himself up to the mid leg in a sort of dust, some part whereof flying up to our faces, set us both a sneezing for several times together. In his right waistcoat-pocket, we found a prodigious bundle of white thin substances, folded one over another, about the bigness of three men, tied with a strong cable, and marked with black figures; which we humbly conceive to be writings; every letter almost half as large as the palm of our hands. In the left there was a sort of engine, from the back of which were extended twenty long poles, resembling the palisados<sup>2</sup>

before your Majesty's court; wherewith we conjecture the Man-Mountain combs his head; for we did not always trouble him with questions, because we found it a great difficulty to make him understand us. In the large pocket on the right side of his middle cover (so I translate the word *ranfu-lo*, by which they meant my breeches) we saw a hollow pillar of iron, about the length of a man, fastened to a strong piece of timber, larger than the pillar; and upon one side of the pillar were huge pieces of iron sticking out, cut into strange figures; which we know not what to make of. In the left pocket, another engine of the same kind. In the smaller pocket on the right side, were several round flat pieces of white and red metal, of different bulk; some of the white, which seemed to be silver, were so large and heavy, that my comrade and I could hardly lift them. In the left pocket were two black pillars irregularly shaped: we could not, without difficulty, reach the top of them as we stood at the bottom of his pocket. One of them was covered, and seemed all of a piece; but at the upper end of the other, there appeared a white round substance, about twice the bigness of our heads. Within each of these was inclosed a prodigious plate of steel; which, by our orders, we obliged him to show us, because we apprehended they might be dangerous engines. He took them out of their cases, and told us, that in his own country his practice was to shave his beard with one of these, and to cut his meat with the other. There were two pockets which we could not enter: these he called his fobs; they were two large slits cut into the top of his middle cover, but squeezed close by the pressure of his belly. Out of the right fob hung a great silver chain, with a wonderful kind of engine at the bottom. We directed him to draw out whatever was at the end of the chain, which appeared to be a globe, half silver, and half of some transparent metal: for on the transparent side we saw certain strange figures circularly drawn, and thought we could touch them, until we found our fingers stopped with that lucid substance. He put this engine

to our ears, which made an incessant noise like that of a watermill. And we conjecture it is either some unknown animal, or the god that he worships: but we are more inclined to the latter opinion, because he assured us (if we understood him right, for he expressed himself very imperfectly), that he seldom did any thing without consulting it. He called it his oracle, and said it pointed out the time for every action of his life. From the left fob he took out a net almost large enough for a fisherman, but contrived to open and shut like a purse, and served him for the same use: we found therein several massy pieces of yellow metal, which if they be of real gold, must be of immense value.

Having thus, in obedience to your Majesty's commands, diligently searched all his pockets, we observed a girdle<sup>3</sup> about his waist made of the hide of some prodigious animal; from which, on the left side, hung a sword of the length of five men; and on the right, a bag or pouch divided into cells; each cell capable of holding three of your Majesty's subjects. In one of these cells were several globes or balls of a most ponderous metal, about the bigness of our heads, and required a strong hand to lift them: the other cell contained a heap of certain black grains, but of no great bulk or weight, for we could hold above fifty of them in the palms of our hands.

This is an exact inventory of what we found about the body of the Man-Mountain; who used us with great civility, and due respect to your Majesty's commission. Signed and sealed on the fourth day of the eighty-ninth moon of your Majesty's auspicious reign.

CLEFREN FRELOCK, MARSI FRELOCK.

When this inventory was read over to the Emperor, he directed me to deliver up the several particulars. He first called for my scimitar, which I took out, scabbard and all. In the meantime he ordered three thousand of his choicest troops (who then attended

him) to surround me at a distance, with their bows and arrows just ready to discharge: but I did not observe it; for my eyes were wholly fixed upon his Majesty. He then desired me to draw my scimitar, which, although it had got some rust by the sea water, was in most parts exceeding bright. I did so, and immediately all the troops gave a shout between terror and surprise; for the sun shone clear, and the reflection dazzled their eyes, as I waved the scimitar to and fro in my hand. His Majesty, who is a most magnanimous<sup>4</sup> prince, was less daunted than I could expect; he ordered me to return it into the scabbard, and cast it on the ground as gently as I could, about six foot from the end of my chain. The next thing he demanded was one of the hollow iron pillars, by which he meant my pocket-pistols. I drew it out, and at his desire, as well as I could, expressed to him the use of it, and charging it only with powder, which by the closeness of my pouch happened to escape wetting in the sea (an inconvenience that all prudent mariners take special care to provide against), I first cautioned the Emperor not to be afraid; and then I let it off in the air. The astonishment here was much greater than at the sight of my scimitar. Hundreds fell down as if they had been struck dead; and even the Emperor, although he stood his ground, could not recover himself in some time. I delivered up both my pistols in the same manner as I had done my scimitar, and then my pouch of powder and bullets; begging him that the former might be kept from fire; for it would kindle with the smallest spark, and blow up his imperial palace into the air. I likewise delivered up my watch, which the Emperor was very curious to see; and commanded two of his tallest yeomen of the guards to bear it on a pole upon their shoulders, as draymen in England do a barrel of ale. He was amazed at the continual noise it made, and the motion of the minute-hand, which he could easily discern; for their sight is much more acute than ours: he asked the opinions of his learned men about him, which were various and remote, as the reader may well imagine without my repeating; although indeed I could not very perfectly understand them. I then gave up my silver and copper money, my purse with nine large pieces of gold, and some smaller ones; my



knife and razor, my comb and silver snuffbox, my handkerchief and journal book. My scimitar, pistols, and pouch, were conveyed in carriages to his Majesty's stores; but the rest of my goods were returned me.

I had, as I before observed, one private pocket which escaped their search, wherein there was a pair of spectacles (which I sometimes use for the weakness of my eyes), a pocket perspective,<sup>5</sup> and several other little conveniences; which, being of no consequence to the Emperor, I did not think myself bound in honor to discover, and I apprehended they might be lost or spoiled if I ventured them out of my possession.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: A quarter of an acre.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bearing, appearance. Swift may be satirically idealizing George I, whom most of the British thought gross.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A jargon, based on Italian, used by traders in the Mediterranean. "High and Low Dutch": German and Dutch, respectively.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Anticipated with fear.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Formal mandates of revenue.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Gulliver's plea for liberty and the threat of starvation or rebellion he represents to his captors suggest the situation of Ireland with respect to England.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: When the Whigs came into power in 1715, the leading Tories, who included Swift's friends Oxford and Bolingbroke (Robert Harley and Henry St. John) as well as Swift himself, were investigated by a committee of secrecy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the first place (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fences of stakes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Belt.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Courageous, great-spirited. [Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Telescope.[Return to reference 5](#)

CHAPTER 3. *The author diverts the Emperor and his nobility of both sexes in a very uncommon manner. The diversions of the court of Lilliput described. The author hath his liberty granted him upon certain conditions.*

My gentleness and good behavior had gained so far on the Emperor and his court, and indeed upon the army and people in general, that I began to conceive hopes of getting my liberty in a short time. I took all possible methods to cultivate this favorable disposition. The natives came by degrees to be less apprehensive of any danger from me. I would sometimes lie down, and let five or six of them dance on my hand. And at last the boys and girls would venture to come and play at hide-and-seek in my hair. I had now made a good progress in understanding and speaking their language. The Emperor had a mind one day to entertain me with several of the country shows; wherein they exceed all nations I have known, both for dexterity and magnificence. I was diverted with none so much as that of the rope-dancers, performed upon a slender white thread, extended about two foot, and twelve inches from the ground. Upon which I shall desire liberty, with the reader's patience, to enlarge a little.

This diversion is only practiced by those persons who are candidates for great employments, and high favor, at court. They are trained in this art from their youth, and are not always of noble birth, or liberal education. When a great office is vacant either by death or disgrace (which often happens) five or six of those candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the court with a dance on the rope; and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the office. Very often the chief ministers themselves are commanded to show their skill, and to convince the Emperor that they have not lost their faculty. Flimnap,<sup>6</sup> the Treasurer, is allowed to cut a caper on the strait rope, at least an inch higher than any other lord in the whole empire. I have seen him do the summerset several times together upon a trencher<sup>7</sup> fixed on the rope, which is no thicker than a common packthread in England.

My friend Reldresal, Principal Secretary for Private Affairs, is, in my opinion, if I am not partial, the second after the Treasurer; the rest of the great officers are much upon a par.

These diversions are often attended with fatal accidents, whereof great numbers are on record. I myself have seen two or three candidates break a limb. But the danger is much greater when the ministers themselves are commanded to show their dexterity; for, by contending to excel themselves and their fellows, they strain so far, that there is hardly one of them who hath not received a fall; and some of them two or three. I was assured, that a year or two before my arrival, Flimnap would have infallibly broke his neck, if one of the King's cushions,<sup>8</sup> that accidentally lay on the ground, had not weakened the force of his fall.

There is likewise another diversion, which is only shown before the Emperor and Empress, and first minister, upon particular occasions. The Emperor lays on a table three fine silken threads of six inches long. One is blue, the other red, and the third green.<sup>9</sup> These threads are proposed as prizes for those persons whom the Emperor hath a mind to distinguish by a peculiar mark of his favor. The ceremony is performed in his Majesty's great chamber of state; where the candidates are to undergo a trial of dexterity very different from the former, and such as I have not observed the least resemblance of in any other country of the old or the new world. The Emperor holds a stick in his hands, both ends parallel to the horizon, while the candidates, advancing one by one, sometimes leap over the stick, sometimes creep under it backwards and forwards several times, according as the stick is advanced or depressed. Sometimes the Emperor holds one end of the stick, and his first minister the other; sometimes the minister has it entirely to himself. Whoever performs his part with most agility, and holds out the longest in *leaping* and *creeping*, is rewarded with the blue-colored silk; the red is given to the next, and the green to the third, which they all wear girt twice round about the middle; and you see few great persons about this court who are not adorned with one of these girdles.

The horses of the army, and those of the royal stables, having been daily led before me, were no longer shy, but would come up to my very feet, without starting. The riders would leap them over my hand as I held it on the ground; and one of the Emperor's huntsmen, upon a large courser, took<sup>1</sup> my foot, shoe and all; which was indeed a prodigious leap. I had the good fortune to divert the Emperor one day after a very extraordinary manner. I desired he would order several sticks of two foot high, and the thickness of an ordinary cane, to be brought me; whereupon his Majesty commanded the master of his woods to give directions accordingly; and the next morning six woodmen arrived with as many carriages, drawn by eight horses to each. I took nine of these sticks, and fixing them firmly in the ground in a quadrangular figure, two foot and a half square, I took four other sticks, and tied them parallel at each corner, about two foot from the ground; then I fastened my handkerchief to the nine sticks that stood erect, and extended it on all sides till it was as tight as the top of a drum; and the four parallel sticks, rising about five inches higher than the handkerchief, served as ledges on each side. When I had finished my work, I desired the Emperor to let a troop of his best horse, twenty-four in number, come and exercise upon this plain. His Majesty approved of the proposal, and I took them up one by one in my hands, ready mounted and armed, with the proper officers to exercise them. As soon as they got into order, they divided into two parties, performed mock skirmishes, discharged blunt arrows, drew their swords, fled and pursued, attacked and retired; and in short discovered the best military discipline I ever beheld. The parallel sticks secured them and their horses from falling over the stage; and the Emperor was so much delighted, that he ordered this entertainment to be repeated several days; and once was pleased to be lifted up, and give the word of command; and, with great difficulty, persuaded even the Empress herself to let me hold her in her close chair<sup>2</sup> within two yards of the stage, from whence she was able to take a full view of the whole performance. It was my good fortune that no ill accident happened in these entertainments, only once a fiery horse that

belonged to one of the captains pawing with his hoof struck a hole in my handkerchief, and his foot slipping, he overthrew his rider and himself; but I immediately relieved them both; for covering the hole with one hand, I set down the troop with the other, in the same manner as I took them up. The horse that fell was strained in the left shoulder, but the rider got no hurt, and I repaired my handkerchief as well as I could; however, I would not trust to the strength of it any more in such dangerous enterprises.

About two or three days before I was set at liberty, as I was entertaining the court with these kinds of feats, there arrived an express to inform his Majesty that some of his subjects, riding near the place where I was first taken up, had seen a great black substance lying on the ground, very oddly shaped, extending its edges round as wide as his Majesty's bedchamber, and rising up in the middle as high as a man; that it was no living creature, as they at first apprehended, for it lay on the grass without motion, and some of them had walked round it several times; that by mounting upon each other's shoulders, they had got to the top, which was flat and even; and stamping upon it they found it was hollow within; that they humbly conceived it might be something belonging to the Man-Mountain, and if his Majesty pleased, they would undertake to bring it with only five horses. I presently<sup>3</sup> knew what they meant; and was glad at heart to receive this intelligence. It seems upon my first reaching the shore after our shipwreck, I was in such confusion, that before I came to the place where I went to sleep, my hat, which I had fastened with a string to my head while I was rowing, and had stuck on all the time I was swimming, fell off after I came to land; the string, as I conjecture, breaking by some accident which I never observed, but thought my hat had been lost at sea. I intreated his Imperial Majesty to give orders it might be brought to me as soon as possible, describing to him the use and the nature of it: and the next day the wagoners arrived with it, but not in a very good condition; they had bored two holes in the brim, within an inch and half of the edge, and fastened two hooks in the holes; these hooks were tied by a long cord to the harness, and thus my hat was

dragged along for above half an English mile: but the ground in that country being extremely smooth and level, it received less damage than I expected.

Two days after this adventure, the Emperor, having ordered that part of his army which quarters in and about his metropolis to be in a readiness, took a fancy of diverting himself in a very singular manner. He desired I would stand like a colossus, with my legs as far asunder as I conveniently could. He then commanded his general (who was an old experienced leader, and a great patron of mine) to draw up the troops in close order, and march them under me; the foot<sup>4</sup> by twenty-four in a breast, and the horse by sixteen, with drums beating, colors flying, and pikes advanced. This body consisted of three thousand foot, and a thousand horse. His Majesty gave orders, upon pain of death, that every soldier in his march should observe the strictest decency with regard to my person; which, however, could not prevent some of the younger officers from turning up their eyes as they passed under me. And, to confess the truth, my breeches were at that time in so ill a condition, that they afforded some opportunities for laughter and admiration.

I had sent so many memorials and petitions for my liberty, that his Majesty at length mentioned the matter first in the cabinet, and then in a full council; where it was opposed by none, except Skyresh Bolgolam,<sup>5</sup> who was pleased, without any provocation, to be my mortal enemy. But it was carried against him by the whole board, and confirmed by the Emperor. That minister was *Galbet*, or Admiral of the Realm; very much in his master's confidence, and a person well versed in affairs, but of a morose and sour complexion.<sup>6</sup> However, he was at length persuaded to comply; but prevailed that the articles and conditions upon which I should be set free, and to which I must swear, should be drawn up by himself. These articles were brought to me by Skyresh Bolgolam in person, attended by two under-secretaries, and several persons of distinction. After they were read, I was demanded to swear to the performance of them; first in the manner of my own country, and afterwards in the method prescribed by their laws; which was to hold my right foot in my left

hand, to place the middle finger of my right hand on the crown of my head, and my thumb on the tip of my right ear. But because the reader may perhaps be curious to have some idea of the style and manner of expression peculiar to that people, as well as to know the articles upon which I recovered my liberty, I have made a translation of the whole instrument,<sup>7</sup> word for word, as near as I was able; which I here offer to the public.

GOLBASTO MOMAREN EVLAME GURDILO SHEFIN MULLY ULLY GUE, most mighty Emperor of Lilliput, delight and terror of the universe, whose dominions extend five thousand blustrugs (about twelve miles in circumference) to the extremities of the globe; Monarch of all Monarchs; taller than the sons of men; whose feet press down to the center, and whose head strikes against the sun; at whose nod the princes of the earth shake their knees; pleasant as the spring, comfortable as the summer, fruitful as autumn, dreadful as winter. His most sublime Majesty proposeth to the Man-Mountain, lately arrived at our celestial dominions, the following articles, which by a solemn oath he shall be obliged to perform.

First, The Man-Mountain shall not depart from our dominions, without our license under our great seal.

Secondly, He shall not presume to come into our metropolis, without our express order; at which time the inhabitants shall have two hours warning, to keep within their doors.

Thirdly, The said Man-Mountain shall confine his walks to our principal high roads; and not offer to walk or lie down in a meadow, or field of corn.

Fourthly, As he walks the said roads, he shall take the utmost care not to trample upon the bodies of any of our loving subjects, their horses, or carriages, nor take any of our said subjects into his hands, without their own consent.

Fifthly, If an express require extraordinary dispatch, the Man-Mountain shall be obliged to carry in his pocket the messenger and horse, a six days' journey once in every

moon, and return the said messenger back (if so required) safe to our Imperial Presence.

Sixthly, He shall be our ally against our enemies in the island of Blefuscu, and do his utmost to destroy their fleet, which is now preparing to invade us.

Seventhly, That the said Man-Mountain shall, at his times of leisure, be aiding and assisting to our workmen, in helping to raise certain great stones, towards covering the wall of the principal park, and other our royal buildings.

Eighthly, That the said Man-Mountain shall, in two moons' time, deliver in an exact survey of the circumference of our dominions by a computation of his own paces round the coast.

Lastly, That upon his solemn oath to observe all the above articles, the said Man-Mountain shall have a daily allowance of meat and drink sufficient for the support of 1,728 of our subjects; with free access to our Royal Person, and other marks of our favor. Given at our palace at Belfaborac the twelfth day of the ninety-first moon of our reign.

I swore and subscribed to these articles with great cheerfulness and content, although some of them were not so honorable as I could have wished; which proceeded wholly from the malice of Skyresh Bolgolam the High Admiral: whereupon my chains were immediately unlocked, and I was at full liberty: the Emperor himself in person did me the honor to be by at the whole ceremony. I made my acknowledgements by prostrating myself at his Majesty's feet: but he commanded me to rise; and after many gracious expressions, which, to avoid the censure of vanity, I shall not repeat, he added, that he hoped I should prove a useful servant, and well deserve all the favors he had already conferred upon me, or might do for the future.

The reader may please to observe, that in the last article for the recovery of my liberty, the Emperor stipulates to allow me a quantity of meat and drink, sufficient for the support of 1,728 Lilliputians.



Some time after, asking a friend at court how they came to fix on that determinate number, he told me, that his Majesty's mathematicians, having taken the height of my body by the help of a quadrant, and finding it to exceed theirs in the proportion of twelve to one, they concluded from the similarity of their bodies, that mine must contain at least 1,728 of theirs, and consequently would require as much food as was necessary to support that number of Lilliputians. By which, the reader may conceive an idea of the ingenuity of that people, as well as the prudent and exact economy of so great a prince.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Sir Robert Walpole, the Whig head of the government, was notorious in Swift's circle for his political acrobatics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Plate. "Summerset": somersault.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A mistress of George I was supposed to have helped restore Walpole to office in 1721.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Orders of the Garter, the Bath, and the Thistle, conferred for services to the king.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Jumped over.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An enclosed or sedan chair.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Immediately.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Foot soldiers or infantry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Earl of Nottingham, an enemy of Swift.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Disposition.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A formal legal document.[Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 4. *Mildendo, the metropolis of Lilliput, described, together with the Emperor's palace. A conversation between the author and a principal secretary, concerning the affairs of that empire; the author's offers to serve the Emperor in his wars.*

The first request I made after I had obtained my liberty, was, that I might have license to see Mildendo, the metropolis; which the Emperor easily granted me, but with a special charge to do no hurt, either to the inhabitants, or their houses. The people had notice by proclamation of my design to visit the town. The wall which encompassed it is two foot and an half high, and at least eleven inches broad, so that a coach and horses may be driven very safely round it; and it is flanked with strong towers at ten foot distance. I stepped over the great western gate, and passed very gently, and sideling<sup>8</sup> through the two principal streets, only in my short waistcoat, for fear of damaging the roofs and eaves of the houses with the skirts of my coat. I walked with the utmost circumspection, to avoid treading on any stragglers, who might remain in the streets, although the orders were very strict, that all people should keep in their houses, at their own peril. The garret windows and tops of houses were so crowded with spectators, that I thought in all my travels I had not seen a more populous place. The city is an exact square, each side of the wall being five hundred foot long. The two great streets, which run cross and divide it into four quarters, are five foot wide. The lanes and alleys, which I could not enter, but only viewed them as I passed, are from twelve to eighteen inches. The town is capable of holding five hundred thousand souls. The houses are from three to five stories. The shops and markets well provided.

The Emperor's palace is in the center of the city, where the two great streets meet. It is enclosed by a wall of two foot high, and twenty foot distant from the buildings. I had his Majesty's permission to step over this wall; and the space being so wide between that and the palace, I could easily view it on every side. The outward court is a square of forty foot, and includes two other courts: in the inmost are the royal apartments, which I was very desirous to see, but

found it extremely difficult; for the great gates, from one square into another, were but eighteen inches high, and seven inches wide. Now the buildings of the outer court were at least five foot high; and it was impossible for me to stride over them, without infinite damage to the pile, although the walls were strongly built of hewn stone, and four inches thick. At the same time the Emperor had a great desire that I should see the magnificence of his palace; but this I was not able to do till three days after, which I spent in cutting down with my knife some of the largest trees in the royal park, about an hundred yards distance from the city. Of these trees I made two stools, each about three foot high, and strong enough to bear my weight. The people having received notice a second time, I went again through the city to the palace, with my two stools in my hands. When I came to the side of the outer court, I stood upon one stool, and took the other in my hand: this I lifted over the roof, and gently set it down on the space between the first and second court, which was eight foot wide. I then stepped over the buildings very conveniently from one stool to the other, and drew up the first after me with a hooked stick. By this contrivance I got into the inmost court; and lying down upon my side, I applied my face to the windows of the middle stories, which were left open on purpose, and discovered the most splendid apartments that can be imagined. There I saw the Empress, and the young princes in their several lodgings, with their chief attendants about them. Her Imperial Majesty was pleased to smile very graciously upon me and gave me out of the window her hand to kiss.

But I shall not anticipate the reader with farther descriptions of this kind, because I reserve them for a greater work, which is now almost ready for the press; containing a general description of this empire, from its first erection, through a long series of princes, with a particular account of their wars and politics, laws, learning, and religion; their plants and animals, their peculiar manners and customs, with other matters very curious and useful; my chief design at present being only to relate such events and transactions as

happened to the public, or to myself, during a residence of about nine months in that empire.

One morning, about a fortnight after I had obtained my liberty, Reldresal, Principal Secretary (as they style him) of Private Affairs, came to my house, attended only by one servant. He ordered his coach to wait at a distance, and desired I would give him an hour's audience; which I readily consented to, on account of his quality, and personal merits, as well as of the many good offices he had done me during my solicitations at court. I offered to lie down, that he might the more conveniently reach my ear; but he chose rather to let me hold him in my hand during our conversation. He began with compliments on my liberty, said he might pretend to some merit in it; but, however, added, that if it had not been for the present situation of things at court, perhaps I might not have obtained it so soon. For, said he, as flourishing a condition as we appear to be in to foreigners, we labor under two mighty evils; a violent faction at home, and the danger of an invasion by a most potent enemy from abroad. As to the first, you are to understand, that for above seventy moons past, there have been two struggling parties in the empire, under the names of *Tramecksan*, and *Slamecksan*,<sup>9</sup> from the high and low heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves.

It is alleged indeed, that the high heels are most agreeable to our ancient constitution: but however this be, his Majesty hath determined to make use of only low heels in the administration of the government and all offices in the gift of the crown; as you cannot but observe; and particularly, that his Majesty's imperial heels are lower at least by a *drurr* than any of his court; (*drurr* is a measure about the fourteenth part of an inch). The animosities between these two parties run so high, that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other. We compute the *Tramecksan*, or High-Heels, to exceed us in number; but the power is wholly on our side. We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the heir to the crown, to have some tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his heels higher than the other, which gives him a

hobble in his gait.<sup>1</sup> Now, in the midst of these intestine disquiets, we are threatened with an invasion from the island of Blefuscu,<sup>2</sup> which is the other great empire of the universe, almost as large and powerful as this of his Majesty. For as to what we have heard you affirm, that there are other kingdoms and states in the world, inhabited by human creatures as large as yourself, our philosophers are in much doubt; and would rather conjecture that you dropped from the moon, or one of the stars; because it is certain, that an hundred mortals of your bulk would, in a short time, destroy all the fruits and cattle of his Majesty's dominions. Besides, our histories of six thousand moons make no mention of any other regions, than the two great empires of Lilliput and Blefuscu. Which two mighty powers have, as I was going to tell you, been engaged in a most obstinate war for six and thirty moons past. It began upon the following occasion. It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs before we eat them, was upon the larger end: but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his father published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one emperor lost his life, and another his crown.<sup>3</sup> These civil commotions were constantly fomented by the monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the exiles always fled for refuge to that empire. It is computed, that eleven thousand persons have, at several times, suffered death, rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy: but the books of the Big-Endians have been long forbidden, and the whole party rendered incapable by law of holding employments.<sup>4</sup> During the course of these troubles, the emperors of Blefuscu did frequently expostulate by their ambassadors, accusing us of making a schism in religion, by offending against a fundamental doctrine of our great prophet Lustrog, in the fifty-fourth chapter of the *Brundecral* (which

is their Alcoran<sup>5</sup>). This, however, is thought to be a mere strain upon the text: for the words are these; *That all true believers shall break their eggs at the convenient end*: and which is the convenient end, seems, in my humble opinion, to be left to every man's conscience, or at least in the power of the chief magistrate<sup>6</sup> to determine. Now the Big-Endian exiles have found so much credit in the Emperor of Blefuscu's court, and so much private assistance and encouragement from their party here at home, that a bloody war hath been carried on between the two empires for six and thirty moons with various success;<sup>7</sup> during which time we have lost forty capital ships, and a much greater number of smaller vessels, together with thirty thousand of our best seamen and soldiers; and the damage received by the enemy is reckoned to be somewhat greater than ours. However, they have now equipped a numerous fleet, and are just preparing to make a descent upon us; and his Imperial Majesty, placing great confidence in your valor and strength, hath commanded me to lay this account of his affairs before you.

I desired the Secretary to present my humble duty to the Emperor, and to let him know, that I thought it would not become me, who was a foreigner, to interfere with parties; but I was ready, with the hazard of my life, to defend his person and state against all invaders.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Sideways. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tory (High Church) and Whig (Low Church), respectively. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Prince of Wales (later George II) had friends in both parties. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: France. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swift's satirical allegory of the strife between Catholics (Big-Endians) and Protestants (Little-Endians) touches on Henry VIII (who "broke" with the Pope), Charles I (who lost his life), and James II (who lost his crown). [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The Test Act (1673) prevented Catholics and Nonconformists from holding office unless they accepted the Anglican Sacrament.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Koran.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ruler, sovereign. Swift himself accepted the right of the king to determine religious observances.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reminiscent of the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13).[Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 5. *The author by an extraordinary stratagem prevents an invasion. A high title of honor is conferred upon him. Ambassadors arrive from the Emperor of Blefuscu, and sue for peace. The Empress's apartment on fire by an accident; the author instrumental in saving the rest of the palace.*

The empire of Blefuscu is an island situated to the north north-east side of Lilliput, from whence it is parted only by a channel of eight hundred yards wide. I had not yet seen it, and upon this notice of an intended invasion, I avoided appearing on that side of the coast, for fear of being discovered by some of the enemy's ships, who had received no intelligence of me; all intercourse between the two empires having been strictly forbidden during the war, upon pain of death; and an embargo laid by our Emperor upon all vessels whatsoever. I communicated to his Majesty a project I had formed of seizing the enemy's whole fleet; which, as our scouts assured us, lay at anchor in the harbor ready to sail with the first fair wind. I consulted the most experienced seamen upon the depth of the channel, which they had often plumbed; who told me, that in the middle at high water it was seventy *glumgluffs* deep, which is about six foot of European measure; and the rest of it fifty *glumgluffs* at most. I walked to the northeast coast over against Blefuscu; where, lying down behind a hillock, I took out my small pocket perspective glass, and viewed the enemy's fleet at anchor, consisting of about fifty men of war, and a great number of transports: I then came back to my house, and gave order (for which I had a warrant) for a great quantity of the strongest cable and bars of iron. The cable was about as thick as packthread and the bars of the length and size of a knitting-needle. I trebled the cable to make it stronger, and for the same reason I twisted three of the iron bars together, bending the extremities into a hook. Having thus fixed fifty hooks to as many cables, I went back to the northeast coast, and putting off my coat, shoes, and stockings, walked into the sea in my leathern jerkin, about half an hour before high water. I waded with what haste I could, and swam in the middle about thirty yards until I felt the ground; I arrived at the fleet in less than half an hour. The enemy



was so frightened when they saw me, that they leaped out of their ships, and swam to shore, where there could not be fewer than thirty thousand souls. I then took my tackling, and fastening a hook to the hole at the prow of each, I tied all the cords together at the end. While I was thus employed, the enemy discharged several thousand arrows, many of which stuck in my hands and face; and besides the excessive smart, gave me much disturbance in my work. My greatest apprehension was for my eyes, which I should have infallibly lost, if I had not suddenly thought of an expedient. I kept, among other little necessities, a pair of spectacles in a private pocket, which, as I observed before, had escaped the Emperor's searchers. These I took out, and fastened as strongly as I could upon my nose; and thus armed went on boldly with my work in spite of the enemy's arrows; many of which struck against the glasses of my spectacles, but without any other effect, further than a little to discompose them. I had now fastened all the hooks, and taking the knot in my hand, began to pull; but not a ship would stir, for they were all too fast by their anchors, so that the boldest part of my enterprise remained. I therefore let go the cord, and leaving the hooks fixed to the ships, I resolutely cut with my knife the cables that fastened the anchors, receiving about two hundred shots in my face and hands; then I took up the knotted end of the cables to which my hooks were tied; and with great ease drew fifty of the enemy's largest men-of-war after me.

The Blefuscudians, who had not the least imagination of what I intended, were at first confounded with astonishment. They had seen me cut the cables, and thought my design was only to let the ships run adrift, or fall foul on each other: but when they perceived the whole fleet moving in order, and saw me pulling at the end, they set up such a scream of grief and despair, that it is almost impossible to describe or conceive. When I had got out of danger, I stopped a while to pick out the arrows that stuck in my hands and face, and rubbed on some of the same ointment that was given me at my first arrival, as I have formerly mentioned. I then took off my spectacles, and waiting about an hour until the tide was a little fallen, I waded

through the middle with my cargo, and arrived safe at the royal port of Lilliput.

The Emperor and his whole court stood on the shore, expecting the issue of this great adventure. They saw the ships move forward in a large half-moon, but could not discern me, who was up to my breast in water. When I advanced to the middle of the channel, they were yet more in pain, because I was under water to my neck. The Emperor concluded me to be drowned, and that the enemy's fleet was approaching in a hostile manner: but he was soon eased of his fears, for the channel growing shallower every step I made, I came in a short time within hearing; and holding up the end of the cable by which the fleet was fastened, I cried in a loud voice, Long live the most puissant Emperor of Lilliput! This great prince received me at my landing with all possible encomiums, and created me a *Nardac* upon the spot, which is the highest title of honor among them.

His Majesty desired I would take some other opportunity of bringing all the rest of his enemy's ships into his ports. And so unmeasurable is the ambition of princes, that he seemed to think of nothing less than reducing the whole empire of Blefuscu into a province, and governing it by a viceroy; of destroying the Big-Endian exiles, and compelling that people to break the smaller end of their eggs, by which he would remain sole monarch of the whole world. But I endeavored to divert him from this design, by many arguments drawn from the topics of policy as well as justice: and I plainly protested, that I would never be an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery. And when the matter was debated in council, the wisest part of the ministry were of my opinion.

This open bold declaration of mine was so opposite to the schemes and politics of his Imperial Majesty, that he could never forgive me; he mentioned it in a very artful manner at council, where I was told that some of the wisest appeared, at least by their silence, to be of my opinion; but others, who were my secret enemies, could not forbear some expressions, which by a side-wind<sup>8</sup> reflected on me. And from this time began an intrigue between his Majesty and a junta of ministers maliciously bent against me, which

broke out in less than two months, and had like to have ended in my utter destruction. Of so little weight are the greatest services to princes, when put into the balance with a refusal to gratify their passions.<sup>9</sup>

About three weeks after this exploit, there arrived a solemn embassy from Blefuscu, with humble offers of a peace; which was soon concluded upon conditions very advantageous to our Emperor; wherewith I shall not trouble the reader. There were six ambassadors, with a train of about five hundred persons; and their entry was very magnificent, suitable to the grandeur of their master, and the importance of their business. When their treaty was finished, wherein I did them several good offices by the credit I now had, or at least appeared to have at court, their Excellencies, who were privately told how much I had been their friend, made me a visit in form. They began with many compliments upon my valor and generosity; invited me to that kingdom in the Emperor their master's name; and desired me to show them some proofs of my prodigious strength, of which they had heard so many wonders; wherein I readily obliged them, but shall not interrupt the reader with the particulars.

When I had for some time entertained their Excellencies to their infinite satisfaction and surprise, I desired they would do me the honor to present my most humble respects to the Emperor their master, the renown of whose virtues had so justly filled the whole world with admiration, and whose royal person I resolved to attend before I returned to my own country. Accordingly, the next time I had the honor to see our Emperor, I desired his general license to wait on the Blefusculian monarch, which he was pleased to grant me, as I could plainly perceive, in a very cold manner; but could not guess the reason, till I had a whisper from a certain person, that Flimnap and Bolgolam had represented my intercourse with those ambassadors as a mark of disaffection, from which I am sure my heart was wholly free. And this was the first time I began to conceive some imperfect idea of courts and ministers.

It is to be observed, that these ambassadors spoke to me by an interpreter; the languages of both empires differing as much from each other as any two in Europe, and each nation priding itself upon the antiquity, beauty, and energy of their own tongues, with an avowed contempt for that of their neighbor; yet our Emperor, standing upon the advantage he had got by the seizure of their fleet, obliged them to deliver their credentials, and make their speech, in the Lilliputian tongue. And it must be confessed, that from the great intercourse of trade and commerce between both realms, from the continual reception of exiles, which is mutual among them, and from the custom in each empire to send their young nobility and richer gentry to the other, in order to polish themselves, by seeing the world, and understanding men and manners, there are few persons of distinction, or merchants, or seamen, who dwell in the maritime parts, but what can hold conversation in both tongues; as I found some weeks after, when I went to pay my respects to the Emperor of Blefuscu, which in the midst of great misfortunes, through the malice of my enemies, proved a very happy adventure to me, as I shall relate in its proper place.

The reader may remember, that when I signed those articles upon which I recovered my liberty, there were some which I disliked upon account of their being too servile, neither could any thing but an extreme necessity have forced me to submit. But being now a *Nardac*, of the highest rank in that empire, such offices<sup>1</sup> were looked upon as below my dignity, and the Emperor (to do him justice) never once mentioned them to me. However, it was not long before I had an opportunity of doing his Majesty, at least as I then thought, a most signal service. I was alarmed at midnight with the cries of many hundred people at my door; by which being suddenly awaked, I was in some kind of terror. I heard the word *burglum* repeated incessantly; several of the Emperor's court, making their way through the crowd, intreated me to come immediately to the palace, where her Imperial Majesty's apartment was on fire, by the carelessness of a maid of honor, who fell asleep while she was reading a romance. I got up in an instant; and orders being given to

clear the way before me, and it being likewise a moonshine night, I made a shift to get to the palace without trampling on any of the people. I found they had already applied ladders to the walls of the apartment, and were well provided with buckets, but the water was at some distance. These buckets were about the size of a large thimble, and the poor people supplied me with them as fast as they could; but the flame was so violent, that they did little good. I might easily have stifled it with my coat, which I unfortunately left behind me for haste, and came away only in my leathern jerkin. The case seemed wholly desperate and deplorable; and this magnificent palace would have infallibly been burnt down to the ground, if, by a presence of mind, unusual to me, I had not suddenly thought of an expedient. I had the evening before drank plentifully of a most delicious wine, called *glimigrim* (the Blefuscudians call it *flunec*, but ours is esteemed the better sort), which is very diuretic. By the luckiest chance in the world, I had not discharged myself of any part of it. The heat I had contracted by coming very near the flames, and by my laboring to quench them, made the wine begin to operate by urine; which I voided in such a quantity, and applied so well to the proper places, that in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished; and the rest of that noble pile, which had cost so many ages in erecting, preserved from destruction.

It was now daylight, and I returned to my house, without waiting to congratulate with the Emperor; because, although I had done a very eminent piece of service, yet I could not tell how his Majesty might resent the manner by which I had performed it: for, by the fundamental laws of the realm, it is capital<sup>2</sup> in any person, of what quality soever, to make water within the precincts of the palace. But I was a little comforted by a message from his Majesty, that he would give orders to the Grand Justiciary for passing my pardon in form; which, however, I could not obtain. And I was privately assured, that the Empress, conceiving the greatest abhorrence of what I had done,<sup>3</sup> removed to the most distant side of the court, firmly resolved that those buildings should never be repaired for her

use; and, in the presence of her chief confidants, could not forbear vowing revenge.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Indirectly.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: After a series of British naval victories, the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) had ended the war with France, but the Tory ministers who engineered the peace were subsequently accused of having sold out to the enemy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Duties.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Punishable by death.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Queen Anne, whom Swift called “a royal prude,” strongly objected to the coarseness of *A Tale of a Tub*.[Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 6. *Of the inhabitants of Lilliput; their learning, laws, and customs, the manner of educating their children. The author's way of living in that country. His vindication of a great lady.*

Although I intend to leave the description of this empire to a particular treatise, yet in the mean time I am content to gratify the curious reader with some general ideas. As the common size of the natives is somewhat under six inches, so there is an exact proportion in all other animals, as well as plants and trees: for instance, the tallest horses and oxen are between four and five inches in height, the sheep an inch and a half, more or less; their geese about the bigness of a sparrow; and so the several gradations downwards, till you come to the smallest, which, to my sight, were almost invisible; but nature hath adapted the eyes of the Lilliputians to all objects proper for their view: they see with great exactness, but at no great distance. And to show the sharpness of their sight towards objects that are near, I have been much pleased with observing a cook pulling<sup>4</sup> a lark, which was not so large as a common fly; and a young girl threading an invisible needle with invisible silk. Their tallest trees are about seven foot high; I mean some of those in the great royal park, the tops whereof I could but just reach with my fist clinched. The other vegetables<sup>5</sup> are in the same proportion; but this I leave to the reader's imagination.

I shall say but little at present of their learning, which for many ages hath flourished in all its branches among them: but their manner of writing is very peculiar; being neither from the left to the right, like the Europeans; nor from the right to the left, like the Arabians; nor from up to down, like the Chinese; nor from down to up, like the Cascagians;<sup>6</sup> but aslant from one corner of the paper to the other, like ladies in England.

They bury their dead with their heads directly downwards; because they hold an opinion that in eleven thousand moons they are all to rise again; in which period, the earth (which they conceive to be flat) will turn upside down, and by this means they shall, at their resurrection, be found ready standing on their feet. The

learned among them confess the absurdity of this doctrine; but the practice still continues, in compliance to the vulgar.<sup>7</sup>

There are some laws and customs in this empire very peculiar; and if they were not so directly contrary to those of my own dear country, I should be tempted to say a little in their justification. It is only to be wished, that they were as well executed. The first I shall mention relateth to informers. All crimes against the state are punished here with the utmost severity; but if the person accused make his innocence plainly to appear upon his trial, the accuser is immediately put to an ignominious death; and out of his goods or lands, the innocent person is quadruply recompensed for the loss of his time, for the danger he underwent, for the hardship of his imprisonment, and for all the charges he hath been at in making his defense. Or, if that fund be deficient, it is largely<sup>8</sup> supplied by the crown. The Emperor doth also confer on him some public mark of his favor; and proclamation is made of his innocence through the whole city.

They look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death; for they allege, that care and vigilance, with a very common understanding, may preserve a man's goods from thieves; but honesty hath no fence against superior cunning: and since it is necessary that there should be a perpetual intercourse of buying and selling, and dealing upon credit, where fraud is permitted or connived at, or hath no law to punish it, the honest dealer is always undone, and the knave gets the advantage. I remember when I was once interceding with the King for a criminal who had wronged his master of a great sum of money, which he had received by order, and ran away with; and happening to tell his Majesty, by way of extenuation, that it was only a breach of trust, the Emperor thought it monstrous in me to offer, as a defense, the greatest aggravation of the crime: and truly, I had little to say in return, farther than the common answer, that different nations had different customs; for, I confess, I was heartily ashamed.

Although we usually call reward and punishment the two hinges upon which all government turns, yet I could never observe this



maxim to be put in practice by any nation, except that of Lilliput. Whoever can there bring sufficient proof that he hath strictly observed the laws of his country for seventy-three moons, hath a claim to certain privileges, according to his quality<sup>9</sup> and condition of life, with a proportionable sum of money out of a fund appropriated for that use: he likewise acquires the title of *Snilpall*, or *Legal*, which is added to his name, but doth not descend to his posterity. And these people thought it a prodigious defect of policy among us, when I told them that our laws were enforced only by penalties, without any mention of reward. It is upon this account that the image of Justice, in their courts of judicature, is formed with six eyes, two before, as many behind, and on each side one, to signify circumspection; with a bag of gold open in her right hand, and a sword sheathed in her left, to show she is more disposed to reward than to punish.

In choosing persons for all employments, they have more regard to good morals than to great abilities; for, since government is necessary to mankind, they believe that the common size of human understandings is fitted to some station or other; and that Providence never intended to make the management of public affairs a mystery, to be comprehended only by a few persons of sublime genius, of which there seldom are three born in an age: but they suppose truth, justice, temperance, and the like, to be in every man's power; the practice of which virtues, assisted by experience and a good intention, would qualify any man for the service of his country, except where a course of study is required. But they thought the want of moral virtues was so far from being supplied by superior endowments of the mind, that employments could never be put into such dangerous hands as those of persons so qualified; and at least, that the mistakes committed by ignorance in a virtuous disposition would never be of such fatal consequence to the public weal, as the practices of a man whose inclinations led him to be corrupt, and had great abilities to manage, to multiply, and defend his corruptions.

In like manner, the disbelief of a divine Providence renders a man incapable of holding any public station; for since kings avow themselves to be the deputies of Providence, the Lilliputians think nothing can be more absurd than for a prince to employ such men as disown the authority under which he acteth.

In relating these and the following laws, I would only be understood to mean the original institutions, and not the most scandalous corruptions into which these people are fallen by the degenerate nature of man. For as to that infamous practice of acquiring great employments by dancing on the ropes, or badges of favor and distinction by leaping over sticks, and creeping under them, the reader is to observe, that they were first introduced by the grandfather of the Emperor now reigning; and grew to the present height by the gradual increase of party and faction.

Ingratitude is among them a capital crime, as we read it to have been in some other countries; for they reason thus, that whoever makes ill returns to his benefactor, must needs be a common enemy to the rest of mankind, from whom he hath received no obligation; and therefore such a man is not fit to live.

Their notions relating to the duties of parents and children differ extremely from ours. For, since the conjunction of male and female is founded upon the great law of nature, in order to propagate and continue the species, the Lilliputians will needs have it, that men and women are joined together like other animals, by the motives of concupiscence; and that their tenderness towards their young proceedeth from the like natural principle: for which reason they will never allow, that a child is under any obligation to his father for begetting him, or to his mother for bringing him into the world; which, considering the miseries of human life, was neither a benefit in itself, nor intended so by his parents, whose thoughts in their love-encounters were otherwise employed. Upon these, and the like reasonings, their opinion is, that parents are the last of all others to be trusted with the education of their own children: and therefore they have in every town public nurseries, where all parents, except cottagers<sup>1</sup> and laborers, are obliged to send their infants of both

sexes to be reared and educated when they come to the age of twenty moons; at which time they are supposed to have some rudiments of docility. These schools are of several kinds, suited to different qualities, and to both sexes. They have certain professors<sup>2</sup> well skilled in preparing children for such a condition of life as befits the rank of their parents, and their own capacities as well as inclinations. I shall first say something of the male nurseries, and then of the female.

The nurseries for males of noble or eminent birth are provided with grave and learned professors, and their several deputies. The clothes and food of the children are plain and simple. They are bred up in the principles of honor, justice, courage, modesty, clemency, religion, and love of their country; they are always employed in some business, except in the times of eating and sleeping, which are very short, and two hours for diversions, consisting of bodily exercises. They are dressed by men until four years of age, and then are obliged to dress themselves, although their quality be ever so great; and the women attendants, who are aged proportionably to ours at fifty, perform only the most menial offices. They are never suffered to converse with servants, but go together in small or greater numbers to take their diversions, and always in the presence of a professor, or one of his deputies; whereby they avoid those early bad impressions of folly and vice to which our children are subject. Their parents are suffered to see them only twice a year; the visit is not to last above an hour; they are allowed to kiss the child at meeting and parting; but a professor, who always standeth by on those occasions, will not suffer them to whisper, or use any fondling expressions, or bring any presents of toys, sweetmeats, and the like.

The pension from each family for the education and entertainment<sup>3</sup> of a child, upon failure of due payment, is levied by the Emperor's officers.

The nurseries for children of ordinary gentlemen, merchants, traders, and handicrafts, are managed proportionably after the same manner; only those designed for trades are put out apprentices at

seven years old; whereas those of persons of quality continue in their exercises until fifteen, which answers to one and twenty with us: but the confinement is gradually lessened for the last three years.

In the female nurseries, the young girls of quality are educated much like the males, only they are dressed by orderly servants of their own sex, but always in the presence of a professor or deputy, until they come to dress themselves, which is at five years old. And if it be found that these nurses ever presume to entertain the girls with frightful or foolish stories, or the common follies practiced by chambermaids among us, they are publicly whipped thrice about the city, imprisoned for a year, and banished for life to the most desolate parts of the country. Thus the young ladies there are as much ashamed of being cowards and fools as the men; and despise all personal ornaments beyond decency and cleanliness: neither did I perceive any difference in their education, made by their difference of sex, only that the exercises of the females were not altogether so robust; and that some rules were given them relating to domestic life, and a smaller compass of learning was enjoined them: for their maxim is, that among people of quality, a wife should be always a reasonable and agreeable companion, because she cannot always be young. When the girls are twelve years old, which among them is the marriageable age, their parents or guardians take them home, with great expressions of gratitude to the professors, and seldom without tears of the young lady and her companions.

In the nurseries of females of the meaner sort, the children are instructed in all kinds of works proper for their sex, and their several degrees:<sup>4</sup> those intended for apprentices are dismissed at seven years old, the rest are kept to eleven.

The meaner families who have children at these nurseries are obliged, besides their annual pension, which is as low as possible, to return to the steward of the nursery a small monthly share of their gettings, to be a portion for the child; and therefore all parents are limited in their expenses by the law. For the Lilliputians think nothing can be more unjust, than that people, in subservience to their own

appetites, should bring children into the world, and leave the burthen of supporting them on the public. As to persons of quality, they give security to appropriate a certain sum for each child, suitable to their condition; and these funds are always managed with good husbandry, and the most exact justice.

The cottagers and laborers keep their children at home, their business being only to till and cultivate the earth; and therefore their education is of little consequence to the public; but the old and diseased among them are supported by hospitals: for begging is a trade unknown in this empire.

And here it may perhaps divert the curious reader, to give some account of my domestic,<sup>5</sup> and my manner of living in this country, during a residence of nine months and thirteen days. Having a head mechanically turned, and being likewise forced by necessity, I had made for myself a table and chair convenient enough, out of the largest trees in the royal park. Two hundred sempstresses were employed to make me shirts, and linen for my bed and table, all of the strongest and coarsest kind they could get; which, however, they were forced to quilt together in several folds; for the thickest was some degrees finer than lawn. Their linen is usually three inches wide, and three foot make a piece. The sempstresses took my measure as I lay on the ground, one standing at my neck, and another at my mid-leg, with a strong cord extended, that each held by the end, while the third measured the length of the cord with a rule of an inch long. Then they measured my right thumb, and desired no more; for by a mathematical computation, that twice round the thumb is one round the wrist, and so on to the neck and the waist; and by the help of my old shirt, which I displayed on the ground before them for a pattern, they fitted me exactly. Three hundred tailors were employed in the same manner to make me clothes; but they had another contrivance for taking my measure. I kneeled down, and they raised a ladder from the ground to my neck; upon this ladder one of them mounted, and let fall a plumb-line from my collar to the floor, which just answered the length of my coat; but my waist and arms I measured myself. When my clothes were

finished, which was done in my house (for the largest of theirs would not have been able to hold them), they looked like the patchwork made by the ladies in England, only that mine were all of a color.

I had three hundred cooks to dress my victuals, in little convenient huts built about my house, where they and their families lived, and prepared me two dishes apiece. I took up twenty waiters in my hand, and placed them on the table; an hundred more attended below on the ground, some with dishes of meat, and some with barrels of wine, and other liquors, slung on their shoulders; all which the waiters above drew up as I wanted, in a very ingenious manner, by certain cords, as we draw the bucket up a well in Europe. A dish of their meat was a good mouthful, and a barrel of their liquor a reasonable draught. Their mutton yields to ours, but their beef is excellent. I have had a sirloin so large, that I have been forced to make three bites of it; but this is rare. My servants were astonished to see me eat it bones and all, as in our country we do the leg of a lark. Their geese and turkeys I usually eat at a mouthful, and I must confess they far exceed ours. Of their smaller fowl I could take up twenty or thirty at the end of my knife.

One day his Imperial Majesty, being informed of my way of living, desired that himself and his royal consort, with the young princes of the blood of both sexes, might have the happiness (as he was pleased to call it) of dining with me. They came accordingly, and I placed them upon chairs of state on my table, just over against me, with their guards about them. Flimnap the Lord High Treasurer attended there likewise, with his white staff; and I observed he often looked on me with a sour countenance, which I would not seem to regard, but eat more than usual, in honor to my dear country, as well as to fill the court with admiration. I have some private reasons to believe, that this visit from his Majesty gave Flimnap an opportunity of doing me ill offices to his master. That minister had always been my secret enemy, although he outwardly caressed me more than was usual to the moroseness of his nature. He represented to the Emperor the low condition of his treasury; that

he was forced to take up money at great discount; that exchequer bills<sup>6</sup> would not circulate under nine per cent below par; that I had cost his Majesty above a million and a half of *sprugs* (their greatest gold coin, about the bigness of a spangle); and upon the whole, that it would be advisable in the Emperor to take the first fair occasion of dismissing me.

I am here obliged to vindicate the reputation of an excellent lady, who was an innocent sufferer upon my account. The Treasurer took a fancy to be jealous of his wife, from the malice of some evil tongues, who informed him that her Grace had taken a violent affection for my person; and the court-scandal ran for some time that she once came privately to my lodging. This I solemnly declare to be a most infamous falsehood, without any grounds, farther than that her Grace was pleased to treat me with all innocent marks of freedom and friendship. I own she came often to my house, but always publicly, nor ever without three more in the coach, who were usually her sister and young daughter, and some particular acquaintance; but this was common to many other ladies of the court. And I still appeal to my servants round, whether they at any time saw a coach at my door without knowing what persons were in it. On those occasions, when a servant had given me notice, my custom was to go immediately to the door; and, after paying my respects, to take up the coach and two horses very carefully in my hands (for if there were six horses, the postillion always unharnessed four) and place them on a table, where I had fixed a moveable rim quite round, of five inches high, to prevent accidents. And I have often had four coaches and horses at once on my table full of company, while I sat in my chair leaning my face towards them; and when I was engaged with one set, the coachmen would gently drive the others round my table. I have passed many an afternoon very agreeably in these conversations. But I defy the Treasurer, or his two informers (I will name them, and let them make their best of it) Clustril and Drunlo, to prove that any person ever came to me *incognito*, except the Secretary Reldresal, who was sent by express command of his Imperial Majesty, as I have before



related. I should not have dwelt so long upon this particular, if it had not been a point wherein the reputation of a great lady is so nearly concerned, to say nothing of my own; although I had the honor to be a *Nardac*, which the Treasurer himself is not; for all the world knows he is only a *Clumglum*, a title inferior by one degree, as that of a marquis is to a duke in England; yet I allow he preceded me in right of his post. These false informations, which I afterwards came to the knowledge of, by an accident not proper to mention, made the Treasurer show his lady for some time an ill countenance, and me a worse; for although he was at last undeceived and reconciled to her, yet I lost all credit with him; and found my interest decline very fast with the Emperor himself, who was indeed too much governed by that favorite.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Plucking.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plants.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Swift's invention.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The (beliefs of the) common people.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Fully.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Social position.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Agricultural workers, peasants.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Professional teachers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sustenance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Various social ranks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Household.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Government bills of credit. Walpole was noted as a canny financier.[Return to reference 6](#)



CHAPTER 7. *The author, being informed of a design to accuse him of high treason, makes his escape to Blefuscu. His reception there.*

Before I proceed to give an account of my leaving this kingdom, it may be proper to inform the reader of a private intrigue which had been for two months forming against me.

I had been hitherto all my life a stranger to courts, for which I was unqualified by the meanness of my condition. I had indeed heard and read enough of the dispositions of great princes and ministers; but never expected to have found such terrible effects of them in so remote a country, governed, as I thought, by very different maxims from those in Europe.

When I was just preparing to pay my attendance on the Emperor of Blefuscu, a considerable person at court (to whom I had been very serviceable at a time when he lay under the highest displeasure of his Imperial Majesty) came to my house very privately at night in a close chair, and without sending his name, desired admittance. The chairmen were dismissed; I put the chair, with his Lordship in it, into my coat-pocket; and giving orders to a trusty servant to say I was indisposed and gone to sleep, I fastened the door of my house, placed the chair on the table, according to my usual custom, and sat down by it. After the common salutations were over, observing his Lordship's countenance full of concern, and enquiring into the reason, he desired I would hear him with patience, in a matter that highly concerned my honor and my life. His speech was to the following effect, for I took notes of it as soon as he left me.

You are to know, said he, that several committees of council have been lately called in the most private manner on your account: and it is but two days since his Majesty came to a full resolution.

You are very sensible that Skyresh Bolgolam (*Galbet*, or High Admiral) hath been your mortal enemy almost ever since your arrival. His original reasons I know not; but his hatred is much increased since your great success against Blefuscu, by which his glory, as Admiral, is obscured. This lord, in conjunction with Flimnap the High Treasurer, whose enmity against you is notorious on

account of his lady, Limtoc the General, Lalcon the Chamberlain, and Balmuff the Grand Justiciary, have prepared articles of impeachment against you, for treason, and other capital crimes.<sup>7</sup>

This preface made me so impatient, being conscious of my own merits and innocence, that I was going to interrupt; when he entreated me to be silent, and thus proceeded.

Out of gratitude for the favors you have done me, I procured information of the whole proceedings, and a copy of the articles, wherein I venture my head for your service.

### ***Articles of Impeachment against Quinbus Flestrin (the Man-Mountain).***

#### **ARTICLE 1**

Whereas, by a statute made in the reign of his Imperial Majesty Calin Deffar Plune, it is enacted, that whoever shall make water within the precincts of the royal palace shall be liable to the pains and penalties of high treason: notwithstanding, the said Quinbus Flestrin, in open breach of the said law, under color of extinguishing the fire kindled in the apartment of his Majesty's most dear imperial consort, did maliciously, traitorously, and devilishly, by discharge of his urine, put out the said fire kindled in the said apartment, lying and being within the precincts of the said royal palace; against the statute in that case provided, etc., against the duty, etc.

#### **ARTICLE 2**

That the said Quinbus Flestrin, having brought the imperial fleet of Blefuscu into the royal port, and being afterwards commanded by his Imperial Majesty to seize all the other ships of the said empire of Blefuscu, and reduce that empire to a province, to be governed by a viceroy from hence; and to destroy and put to death not only all the Big-Indian exiles, but likewise all the people of that empire who would not immediately forsake

the Big-Endian heresy: he, the said Flestrin, like a false traitor against his most auspicious, serene, Imperial Majesty, did petition to be excused from the said service, upon pretense of unwillingness to force the consciences, or destroy the liberties and lives of an innocent people.

### **ARTICLE 3**

That, whereas certain ambassadors arrived from the court of Blefuscu to sue for peace in his Majesty's court: he the said Flestrin did, like a false traitor, aid, abet, comfort, and divert the said ambassadors; although he knew them to be servants to a prince who was lately an open enemy to his Imperial Majesty, and in open war against his said Majesty.

### **ARTICLE 4**

That the said Quinbus Flestrin, contrary to the duty of a faithful subject, is now preparing to make a voyage to the court and empire of Blefuscu, for which he hath received only verbal license from his Imperial Majesty; and under color of the said license, doth falsely and traitorously intend to take the said voyage, and thereby to aid, comfort, and abet the Emperor of Blefuscu, so late an enemy, and in open war with his Imperial Majesty aforesaid.

There are some other articles, but these are the most important, of which I have read you an abstract.

In the several debates upon this impeachment, it must be confessed that his Majesty gave many marks of his great *lenity*; often urging the services you had done him, and endeavoring to extenuate your crimes. The Treasurer and Admiral insisted that you should be put to the most painful and ignominious death, by setting fire on your house at night; and the General was to attend with twenty thousand men armed with poisoned arrows, to shoot you on the face and hands. Some of your servants were to have private

orders to strew a poisonous juice on your shirts and sheets, which would soon make you tear your own flesh, and die in the utmost torture. The General came into the same opinion; so that for a long time there was a majority against you. But his Majesty resolving, if possible, to spare your life, at last brought off<sup>8</sup> the Chamberlain.

Upon this incident, Reldresal, Principal Secretary for Private Affairs, who always approved<sup>9</sup> himself your true friend, was commanded by the Emperor to deliver his opinion, which he accordingly did; and therein justified the good thoughts you have of him. He allowed your crimes to be great; but that still there was room for mercy, the most commendable virtue in a prince, and for which his Majesty was so justly celebrated. He said, the friendship between you and him was so well known to the world, that perhaps the most honorable board might think him partial: however, in obedience to the command he had received, he would freely offer his sentiments. That if his Majesty, in consideration of your services, and pursuant to his own merciful disposition, would please to spare your life, and only give order to put out both your eyes, he humbly conceived, that by this expedient justice might in some measure be satisfied, and all the world would applaud the *lenity* of the Emperor, as well as the fair and generous proceedings of those who have the honor to be his counselors. That the loss of your eyes would be no impediment to your bodily strength, by which you might still be useful to his Majesty. That blindness is an addition to courage, by concealing dangers from us; that the fear you had for your eyes was the greatest difficulty in bringing over the enemy's fleet; and it would be sufficient for you to see by the eyes of the ministers, since the greatest princes do no more.

This proposal was received with the utmost disapprobation by the whole board. Bolgolam, the Admiral, could not preserve his temper; but rising up in fury, said, he wondered how the Secretary durst presume to give his opinion for preserving the life of a traitor: that the services you had performed were, by all true reasons of state, the great aggravation of your crimes; that you, who were able to extinguish the fire by discharge of urine in her Majesty's

apartment (which he mentioned with horror), might, at another time, raise an inundation by the same means, to drown the whole palace; and the same strength which enabled you to bring over the enemy's fleet might serve, upon the first discontent, to carry it back: that he had good reasons to think you were a Big-Indian in your heart; and as treason begins in the heart before it appears in overt acts, so he accused you as a traitor on that account, and therefore insisted you should be put to death.

The Treasurer was of the same opinion; he showed to what straits his Majesty's revenue was reduced by the charge of maintaining you, which would soon grow insupportable: that the Secretary's expedient of putting out your eyes was so far from being a remedy against this evil, that it would probably increase it; as it is manifest from the common practice of blinding some kind of fowl, after which they fed the faster, and grew sooner fat: that his sacred Majesty, and the council, who are your judges, were in their own consciences fully convinced of your guilt; which was a sufficient argument to condemn you to death, without the formal proofs required by the strict letter of the law.

But his Imperial Majesty, fully determined against capital punishment, was graciously pleased to say, that since the council thought the loss of your eyes too easy a censure, some other may be inflicted hereafter. And your friend the Secretary humbly desiring to be heard again, in answer to what the Treasurer had objected concerning the great charge his Majesty was at in maintaining you, said, that his Excellency, who had the sole disposal of the Emperor's revenue, might easily provide against this evil, by gradually lessening your establishment; by which, for want of sufficient food, you would grow weak and faint, and lose your appetite, and consequently decay and consume in a few months; neither would the stench of your carcass be then so dangerous, when it should become more than half diminished; and immediately upon your death, five or six thousand of his Majesty's subjects might, in two or three days, cut your flesh from your bones, take it away by cart-loads, and bury it in

distant parts to prevent infection; leaving the skeleton as a monument of admiration to posterity.

Thus by the great friendship of the Secretary, the whole affair was compromised. It was strictly enjoined, that the project of starving you by degrees should be kept a secret; but the sentence of putting out your eyes was entered on the books; none dissenting except Bolgolam the Admiral, who being a creature of the Empress, was perpetually instigated by her Majesty to insist upon your death; she having borne perpetual malice against you, on account of that infamous and illegal method you took to extinguish the fire in her apartment.

In three days your friend the Secretary will be directed to come to your house, and read before you the articles of impeachment; and then to signify the great lenity and favor of his Majesty and council; whereby you are only condemned to the loss of your eyes, which his Majesty doth not question you will gratefully and humbly submit to; and twenty of his Majesty's surgeons will attend, in order to see the operation well performed, by discharging very sharp-pointed arrows into the balls of your eyes, as you lie on the ground.

I leave to your prudence what measures you will take; and to avoid suspicion, I must immediately return in as private a manner as I came.

His Lordship did so, and I remained alone, under many doubts and perplexities of mind.

It was a custom introduced by this prince and his ministry (very different, as I have been assured, from the practices of former times), that after the court had decreed any cruel execution, either to gratify the monarch's resentment, or the malice of a favorite, the Emperor always made a speech to his whole council, expressing his great lenity and tenderness, as qualities known and confessed by all the world. This speech was immediately published through the kingdom; nor did any thing terrify the people so much as those encomiums on his Majesty's mercy; because it was observed, that the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent. Yet

as to myself, I must confess, having never been designed for a courtier, either by my birth or education, I was so ill a judge of things, that I could not discover the lenity and favor of this sentence, but conceived it (perhaps erroneously) rather to be rigorous than gentle. I sometimes thought of standing my trial; for although I could not deny the facts alleged in the several articles, yet I hoped they would admit of some extenuations. But having in my life perused many state trials, which I ever observed to terminate as the judges thought fit to direct, I durst not rely on so dangerous a decision, in so critical a juncture, and against such powerful enemies. Once I was strongly bent upon resistance: for while I had liberty, the whole strength of that empire could hardly subdue me, and I might easily with stones pelt the metropolis to pieces; but I soon rejected that project with horror, by remembering the oath I had made to the Emperor, the favors I received from him, and the high title of *Nardac* he conferred upon me. Neither had I so soon learned the gratitude of courtiers, to persuade myself that his Majesty's present severities acquitted me of all past obligations.

At last I fixed upon a resolution, for which it is probable I may incur some censure, and not unjustly; for I confess I owe the preserving my eyes, and consequently my liberty, to my own great rashness and want of experience: because if I had then known the nature of princes and ministers, which I have since observed in many other courts, and their methods of treating criminals less obnoxious than myself, I should with great alacrity and readiness have submitted to so *easy* a punishment. But hurried on by the precipitancy of youth, and having his Imperial Majesty's license to pay my attendance upon the Emperor of Blefuscu, I took this opportunity, before the three days were elapsed, to send a letter to my friend the Secretary, signifying my resolution of setting out that morning for Blefuscu,<sup>1</sup> pursuant to the leave I had got; and without waiting for an answer, I went to that side of the island where our fleet lay. I seized a large man of war, tied a cable to the prow, and lifting up the anchors, I stripped myself, put my clothes (together with my coverlet, which I carried under my arm) into the vessel; and

drawing it after me, between wading and swimming, arrived at the royal port of Blefuscu, where the people had long expected me. They lent me two guides to direct me to the capital city, which is of the same name; I held them in my hands until I came within two hundred yards of the gate; and desired them to signify my arrival to one of the secretaries, and let him know, I there waited his Majesty's commands. I had an answer in about an hour, that his Majesty, attended by the royal family, and great officers of the court, was coming out to receive me. I advanced a hundred yards; the Emperor, and his train, alighted from their horses, the Empress and ladies from their coaches; and I did not perceive they were in any fright or concern. I lay on the ground to kiss his Majesty's and the Empress's hand. I told his Majesty that I was come according to my promise, and with the license of the Emperor my master, to have the honor of seeing so mighty a monarch, and to offer him any service in my power, consistent with my duty to my own prince; not mentioning a word of my disgrace, because I had hitherto no regular information of it, and might suppose myself wholly ignorant of any such design; neither could I reasonably conceive that the Emperor would discover the secret while I was out of his power: wherein, however, it soon appeared I was deceived.

I shall not trouble the reader with the particular account of my reception at this court, which was suitable to the generosity of so great a prince; nor of the difficulties I was in for want of a house and bed, being forced to lie on the ground, wrapped up in my coverlet.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: After the Whigs had investigated Oxford and Bolingbroke, both were impeached for high treason, on charges of being sympathetic to the Jacobites and the French.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Won over.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Proved.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Before his trial for treason could be held, Bolingbroke had escaped to France.[Return to reference 1](#)

CHAPTER 8. *The author, by a lucky accident, finds means to leave Blefuscu; and, after some difficulties, returns safe to his native country.*

Three days after my arrival, walking out of curiosity to the northeast coast of the island, I observed, about half a league off, in the sea, somewhat that looked like a boat overturned. I pulled off my shoes and stockings, and wading two or three hundred yards, I found the object to approach nearer by force of the tide; and then plainly saw it to be a real boat, which I supposed might, by some tempest, have been driven from a ship. Whereupon I returned immediately towards the city, and desired his Imperial Majesty to lend me twenty of the tallest vessels he had left after the loss of his fleet, and three thousand seamen under the command of his Vice Admiral. This fleet sailed round, while I went back the shortest way to the coast where I first discovered the boat; I found the tide had driven it still nearer; the seamen were all provided with cordage, which I had beforehand twisted to a sufficient strength. When the ships came up, I stripped myself, and waded till I came within an hundred yards of the boat; after which I was forced to swim till I got up to it. The seamen threw me the end of the cord, which I fastened to a hole in the forepart of the boat, and the other end to a man of war: but I found all my labor to little purpose; for being out of my depth, I was not able to work. In this necessity, I was forced to swim behind, and push the boat forwards as often as I could, with one of my hands; and the tide favoring me, I advanced so far, that I could just hold up my chin and feel the ground. I rested two or three minutes, and then gave the boat another shove, and so on till the sea was no higher than my armpits. And now the most laborious part being over, I took out my other cables which were stowed in one of the ships, and fastening them first to the boat, and then to nine of the vessels which attended me, the wind being favorable, the seamen towed, and I shoved till we arrived within forty yards of the shore; and waiting till the tide was out, I got dry to the boat, and by the assistance of two thousand men, with ropes and engines, I

made a shift to turn it on its bottom, and found it was but little damaged.

I shall not trouble the reader with the difficulties I was under by the help of certain paddles, which cost me ten days making, to get my boat to the royal port of Blefuscu; where a mighty concourse of people appeared upon my arrival, full of wonder at the sight of so prodigious a vessel. I told the Emperor that my good fortune had thrown this boat in my way, to carry me to some place from whence I might return into my native country; and begged his Majesty's orders for getting materials to fit it up, together with license to depart; which, after some kind expostulations, he was pleased to grant.

I did very much wonder, in all this time, not to have heard of any express relating to me from our Emperor to the court of Blefuscu. But I was afterwards given privately to understand, that his Imperial Majesty, never imagining I had the least notice of his designs, believed I was only gone to Blefuscu in performance of my promise, according to the license he had given me, which was well known at our court; and would return in a few days when that ceremony was ended. But he was at last in pain at my long absence; and, after consulting with the Treasurer, and the rest of that cabal, a person of quality was dispatched with the copy of the articles against me. This envoy had instructions to represent to the monarch of Blefuscu the great lenity of his master, who was content to punish me no further than with the loss of my eyes; that I had fled from justice, and if I did not return in two hours, I should be deprived of my title of *Nardac*, and declared a traitor. The envoy further added, that in order to maintain the peace and amity between both empires, his master expected, that his brother of Blefuscu would give orders to have me sent back to Lilliput, bound hand and foot, to be punished as a traitor.

The Emperor of Blefuscu, having taken three days to consult, returned an answer consisting of many civilities and excuses. He said, that as for sending me bound, his brother knew it was impossible; that although I had deprived him of his fleet, yet he

owed great obligations to me for many good offices I had done him in making the peace. That however, both their Majesties would soon be made easy; for I had found a prodigious vessel on the shore, able to carry me on the sea, which he had given order to fit up with my own assistance and direction; and he hoped in a few weeks both empires would be freed from so insupportable an incumbrance.

With this answer the envoy returned to Lilliput, and the monarch of Blefuscu related to me all that had passed, offering me at the same time (but under the strictest confidence) his gracious protection, if I would continue in his service; wherein although I believed him sincere, yet I resolved never more to put any confidence in princes or ministers, where I could possibly avoid it; and therefore, with all due acknowledgements for his favorable intentions, I humbly begged to be excused. I told him, that since fortune, whether good or evil, had thrown a vessel in my way, I was resolved to venture myself in the ocean, rather than be an occasion of difference between two such mighty monarchs. Neither did I find the Emperor at all displeased; and I discovered by a certain accident, that he was very glad of my resolution, and so were most of his ministers.

These considerations moved me to hasten my departure somewhat sooner than I intended; to which the court, impatient to have me gone, very readily contributed. Five hundred workmen were employed to make two sails to my boat, according to my directions, by quilting thirteen fold of their strongest linen together. I was at the pains of making ropes and cables, by twisting ten, twenty or thirty of the thickest and strongest of theirs. A great stone that I happened to find, after a long search by the seashore, served me for an anchor. I had the tallow of three hundred cows for greasing my boat, and other uses. I was at incredible pains in cutting down some of the largest timber trees for oars and masts, wherein I was, however, much assisted by his Majesty's ship-carpenters, who helped me in smoothing them, after I had done the rough work.

In about a month, when all was prepared, I sent to receive his Majesty's commands, and to take my leave. The Emperor and royal

family came out of the palace; I lay down on my face to kiss his hand, which he very graciously gave me: so did the Empress, and young princes of the blood. His Majesty presented me with fifty purses of two hundred *sprugs* apiece, together with his picture at full length, which I put immediately into one of my gloves, to keep it from being hurt. The ceremonies at my departure were too many to trouble the reader with at this time.

I stored the boat with the carcasses of an hundred oxen, and three hundred sheep, with bread and drink proportionable, and as much meat ready dressed as four hundred cooks could provide. I took with me six cows and two bulls alive, with as many ewes and rams, intending to carry them into my own country, and propagate the breed. And to feed them on board, I had a good bundle of hay, and a bag of corn.<sup>2</sup> I would gladly have taken a dozen of the natives; but this was a thing the Emperor would by no means permit; and besides a diligent search into my pockets, his Majesty engaged my honor not to carry away any of his subjects, although with their own consent and desire.

Having thus prepared all things as well as I was able, I set sail on the twenty-fourth day of September, 1701, at six in the morning; and when I had gone about four leagues to the northward, the wind being at southeast, at six in the evening, I descried a small island about half a league to the northwest. I advanced forward, and cast anchor on the lee-side of the island, which seemed to be uninhabited. I then took some refreshment, and went to my rest. I slept well, and as I conjecture at least six hours; for I found the day broke in two hours after I awaked. It was a clear night; I eat my breakfast before the sun was up; and heaving anchor, the wind being favorable, I steered the same course that I had done the day before, wherein I was directed by my pocket compass. My intention was to reach, if possible, one of those islands which I had reason to believe lay to the northeast of Van Diemen's Land. I discovered nothing all that day; but upon the next, about three in the afternoon, when I had by my computation made twenty-four leagues from Blefuscu, I descried a sail steering to the southeast; my course

was due east. I hailed her, but could get no answer; yet I found I gained upon her, for the wind slackened. I made all the sail I could, and in half an hour she spied me, then hung out her ancient,<sup>3</sup> and discharged a gun. It is not easy to express the joy I was in upon the unexpected hope of once more seeing my beloved country, and the dear pledges<sup>4</sup> I had left in it. The ship slackened her sails, and I came up with her between five and six in the evening, September 26; but my heart leapt within me to see her English colors. I put my cows and sheep into my coat-pockets and got on board with all my little cargo of provisions. The vessel was an English merchantman, returning from Japan by the North and South Seas;<sup>5</sup> the captain, Mr. John Biddel of Deptford, a very civil man, and an excellent sailor. We were now in the latitude of 30 degrees south; there were about fifty men in the ship; and here I met an old comrade of mine, one Peter Williams, who gave me a good character to the captain. This gentleman treated me with kindness, and desired I would let him know what place I came from last, and whither I was bound; which I did in few words; but he thought I was raving, and that the dangers I underwent had disturbed my head; whereupon I took my black cattle and sheep out of my pocket, which, after great astonishment, clearly convinced him of my veracity. I then showed him the gold given me by the Emperor of Blefuscu, together with his Majesty's picture at full length, and some other rarities of that country. I gave him two purses of two hundred *sprugs* each, and promised, when we arrived in England, to make him a present of a cow and a sheep big with young.

I shall not trouble the reader with a particular account of this voyage; which was very prosperous for the most part. We arrived in the Downs<sup>6</sup> on the 13th of April, 1702. I had only one misfortune, that the rats on board carried away one of my sheep; I found her bones in a hole, picked clean from the flesh. The rest of my cattle I got safe on shore, and set them a grazing in a bowling-green at Greenwich, where the fineness of the grass made them feed very heartily, though I had always feared the contrary; neither could I possibly have preserved them in so long a voyage, if the captain had

not allowed me some of his best biscuit, which rubbed to powder, and mingled with water, was their constant food. The short time I continued in England, I made a considerable profit by showing my cattle to many persons of quality, and others: and before I began my second voyage, I sold them for six hundred pounds. Since my last return, I find the breed is considerably increased, especially the sheep; which I hope will prove much to the advantage of the woollen manufacture, by the fineness of the fleeces.

I stayed but two months with my wife and family; for my insatiable desire of seeing foreign countries would suffer me to continue no longer. I left fifteen hundred pounds with my wife, and fixed her in a good house at Redriff. My remaining stock I carried with me, part in money, and part in goods, in hopes to improve my fortunes. My eldest uncle, John, had left me an estate in land, near Epping, of about thirty pounds a year; and I had a long lease of the Black Bull in Fetter Lane, which yielded me as much more: so that I was not in any danger of leaving my family upon the parish.<sup>7</sup> My son Johnny, named so after his uncle, was at the grammar school, and a towardly<sup>8</sup> child. My daughter Betty (who is now well married, and has children) was then at her needlework. I took leave of my wife, and boy and girl, with tears on both sides; and went on board the *Adventure*, a merchant-ship of three hundred tons, bound for Surat, Captain John Nicholas of Liverpool, Commander. But my account of this voyage must be referred to the second part of my *Travels*.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Generic term for any cereal or grain crop (here, wheat).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Flag.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Hostages (his family).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: North and South Pacific.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A rendezvous for ships off the southeast coast of England.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: On welfare (living on charity given by the parish).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Promising.[Return to reference 8](#)



## ***Part 2. A Voyage to Brobdingnag***



Discovered, AD 1703

NORTH AMERICA

Straits of Annian

C Blanco

S<sup>t</sup> Sebastian

C Mendocino

P<sup>to</sup> S<sup>t</sup> Francis Drake

P Monterey

NE  
ALBIO

Mount  
St Martin





CHAPTER 1. *A great storm described. The longboat sent to fetch water; the Author goes with it to discover the country. He is left on shore, is seized by one of the natives, and carried to a farmer's house. His reception there, with several accidents that happened there. A description of the inhabitants.*

Having been condemned by nature and fortune to an active and restless life, in ten months after my return I again left my native country, and took shipping in the Downs on the 20th day of June, 1702, in the *Adventure*, Captain John Nicholas, a Cornish man, Commander, bound for Surat.<sup>9</sup> We had a very prosperous gale till we arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, where we landed for fresh water, but discovering a leak we unshipped our goods and wintered there; for the Captain falling sick of an ague, we could not leave the Cape till the end of March. We then set sail, and had a good voyage till we passed the Straits of Madagascar; but having got northward of that island, and to about five degrees south latitude, the winds, which in those seas are observed to blow a constant equal gale between the north and west from the beginning of December to the beginning of May, on the 19th of April began to blow with much greater violence and more westerly than usual, continuing so far twenty days together, during which time we were driven a little to the east of the Molucca Islands and about three degrees northward of the Line, as our Captain found by an observation he took the 2nd of May, at which time the wind ceased, and it was a perfect calm, whereat I was not a little rejoiced. But he, being a man well experienced in the navigation of those seas, bid us all prepare against a storm, which accordingly happened the day following: for a southern wind, called the southern monsoon, began to set in.

Finding it was likely to overblow,<sup>1</sup> we took in our spritsail, and stood by to hand the foresail; but making foul weather, we looked the guns were all fast, and handed the mizzen. The ship lay very broad off, so we thought it better spooning before the sea, than trying or hulling. We reefed the foresail and set him, we hauled aft the foresheet; the helm was hard aweather. The ship wore bravely.

We belayed the fore-downhaul; but the sail was split, and we hauled down the yard and got the sail into the ship, and unbound all the things clear of it. It was a very fierce storm; the sea broke strange and dangerous. We hauled off upon the lanyard of the whipstaff, and helped the man at helm. We would not get down our topmast, but let all stand, because she scudded before the sea very well, and we knew that the topmast being aloft, the ship was the wholesomer, and made better way through the sea, seeing we had searoom. When the storm was over, we set foresail and mainsail, and brought the ship to. Then we set the mizzen, main topsail and the fore topsail. Our course was east-northeast, the wind was at southwest. We got the starboard tacks aboard, we cast off our weather braces and lifts; we set in the lee braces, and hauled forward by the weather bowlings, and hauled them tight, and belayed them, and hauled over the mizzen tack to windward, and kept her full and by as near as she would lie.

During this storm, which was followed by a strong wind west-southwest, we were carried by my computation about five hundred leagues to the east, so that the oldest sailor on board could not tell in what part of the world we were. Our provisions held out well, our ship was staunch, and our crew all in good health; but we lay in the utmost distress for water. We thought it best to hold on the same course rather than turn more northerly, which might have brought us to the northwest parts of Great Tartary, and into the frozen sea.

On the 16th day of June, 1703, a boy on the topmast discovered land. On the 17th we came in full view of a great island or continent (for we knew not whether) on the south side whereof was a small neck of land jutting out into the sea, and a creek<sup>2</sup> too shallow to hold a ship of above one hundred tons. We cast anchor within a league of this creek, and our Captain sent a dozen of his men well armed in the longboat, with vessels for water if any could be found. I desired his leave to go with them that I might see the country and make what discoveries I could. When we came to land we saw no river or spring, nor any sign of inhabitants. Our men therefore wandered on the shore to find out some fresh water near the sea,

and I walked alone about a mile on the other side, where I observed the country all barren and rocky. I now began to be weary, and seeing nothing to entertain my curiosity, I returned gently down towards the creek; and the sea being full in my view, I saw our men already got into the boat, and rowing for life to the ship. I was going to hollow after them, although it had been to little purpose, when I observed a huge creature walking after them in the sea as fast as he could; he waded not much deeper than his knees and took prodigious strides, but our men had the start of him half a league, and the sea thereabouts being full of sharp-pointed rocks, the monster was not able to overtake the boat. This I was afterwards told, for I durst not stay to see the issue of that adventure, but ran as fast as I could the way I first went, and then climbed up a steep hill, which gave me some prospect of the country. I found it fully cultivated; but that which first surprised me was the length of the grass, which, in those grounds that seemed to be kept for hay, was about twenty foot high.<sup>3</sup>

I fell into a highroad, for so I took it to be, although it served to the inhabitants only as a footpath through a field of barley. Here I walked on for some time, but could see little on either side, it being now near harvest, and the corn<sup>4</sup> rising at least forty foot. I was an hour walking to the end of this field, which was fenced in with a hedge of at least one hundred and twenty foot high, and the trees so lofty that I could make no computation of their altitude. There was a stile to pass from this field into the next: it had four steps, and a stone to cross over when you came to the utmost. It was impossible for me to climb this stile, because every step was six foot high, and the upper stone above twenty. I was endeavoring to find some gap in the hedge when I discovered one of the inhabitants in the next field advancing towards the stile, of the same size with him whom I saw in the sea pursuing our boat. He appeared as tall as an ordinary spire-steeple, and took about ten yards at every stride, as near as I could guess. I was struck with the utmost fear and astonishment, and ran to hide myself in the corn, from whence I saw him at the top of the stile, looking back into the next field on

the right hand; and heard him call in a voice many degrees louder than a speaking trumpet; but the noise was so high in the air that at first I certainly thought it was thunder. Whereupon seven monsters like himself came towards him with reaping hooks in their hands, each hook about the largeness of six scythes. These people were not so well clad as the first, whose servants or laborers they seemed to be. For, upon some words he spoke, they went to reap the corn in the field where I lay. I kept from them at as great a distance as I could, but was forced to move with extreme difficulty, for the stalks of the corn were sometimes not above a foot distant, so that I could hardly squeeze my body betwixt them. However, I made a shift to go forward till I came to a part of the field where the corn had been laid by the rain and wind; here it was impossible for me to advance a step, for the stalks were so interwoven that I could not creep through, and the beards of the fallen ears so strong and pointed that they pierced through my clothes into my flesh. At the same time I heard the reapers not above an hundred yards behind me. Being quite dispirited with toil, and wholly overcome by grief and despair, I lay down between two ridges and heartily wished I might there end my days. I bemoaned my desolate widow and fatherless children; I lamented my own folly and willfulness in attempting a second voyage against the advice of all my friends and relations. In this terrible agitation of mind, I could not forbear thinking of Lilliput, whose inhabitants looked upon me as the greatest prodigy that ever appeared in the world; where I was able to draw an imperial fleet in my hand, and perform those other actions which will be recorded forever in the chronicles of that empire, while posterity shall hardly believe them, although attested by millions. I reflected what a mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this nation as one single Lilliputian would be among us. But this I conceived was to be the least of my misfortunes; for as human creatures are observed to be more savage and cruel in proportion to their bulk, what could I expect but to be a morsel in the mouth of the first among these enormous barbarians who should happen to seize me? Undoubtedly philosophers are in the right when they tell us that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison. It

might have pleased fortune to let the Lilliputians find some nation where the people were as diminutive with respect to them as they were to me. And who knows but that even this prodigious race of mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant part of the world, whereof we have yet no discovery?

Scared and confounded as I was, I could not forbear going on with these reflections; when one of the reapers approaching within ten yards of the ridge where I lay, made me apprehend that with the next step I should be squashed to death under his foot, or cut in two with his reaping hook. And therefore when he was again about to move, I screamed as loud as fear could make me. Whereupon the huge creature trod short, and looking round about under him for some time, at last espied me as I lay on the ground. He considered a while with the caution of one who endeavors to lay hold on a small dangerous animal in such a manner that it shall not be able either to scratch or to bite him, as I myself have sometimes done with a weasel in England. At length he ventured to take me up behind by the middle between his forefinger and thumb, and brought me within three yards of his eyes, that he might behold my shape more perfectly. I guessed his meaning, and my good fortune gave me so much presence of mind that I resolved not to struggle in the least as he held me in the air about sixty foot from the ground, although he grievously pinched my sides, for fear I should slip through his fingers. All I ventured was to raise mine eyes towards the sun, and place my hands together in a supplicating posture, and to speak some words in an humble melancholy tone, suitable to the condition I then was in. For I apprehended every moment that he would dash me against the ground, as we usually do any little hateful animal which we have a mind to destroy. But my good star would have it that he appeared pleased with my voice and gestures, and began to look upon me as a curiosity, much wondering to hear me pronounce articulate words, although he could not understand them. In the meantime I was not able to forbear groaning and shedding tears and turning my head towards my sides, letting him know, as well as I could, how cruelly I was hurt by the pressure of his thumb and



finger. He seemed to apprehend my meaning; for, lifting up the lappet<sup>5</sup> of his coat, he put me gently into it, and immediately ran along with me to his master, who was a substantial farmer, and the same person I had first seen in the field.

The farmer having (as I supposed by their talk) received such an account of me as his servant could give him, took a piece of a small straw about the size of a walking staff, and therewith lifted up the lappets of my coat, which it seems he thought to be some kind of covering that nature had given me. He blew my hairs aside to take a better view of my face. He called his hinds<sup>6</sup> about him, and asked them (as I afterwards learned) whether they had ever seen in the fields any little creature that resembled me. He then placed me softly on the ground upon all four; but I got immediately up, and walked slowly backwards and forwards, to let those people see I had no intent to run away. They all sat down in a circle about me, the better to observe my motions. I pulled off my hat, and made a low bow towards the farmer; I fell on my knees, and lifted up my hands and eyes, and spoke several words as loud as I could; I took a purse of gold out of my pocket, and humbly presented it to him. He received it on the palm of his hand, then applied it close to his eye to see what it was, and afterwards turned it several times with the point of a pin (which he took out of his sleeve), but could make nothing of it. Whereupon I made a sign that he should place his hand on the ground; I then took the purse, and opening it, poured all the gold into his palm. There were six Spanish pieces of four pistoles each, beside twenty or thirty smaller coins. I saw him wet the tip of his little finger upon his tongue, and take up one of my largest pieces, and then another; but he seemed to be wholly ignorant what they were. He made me a sign to put them again into my purse, and the purse again into my pocket, which after offering to him several times, I thought it best to do.

The farmer by this time was convinced I must be a rational creature. He spoke often to me, but the sound of his voice pierced my ears like that of a water mill, yet his words were articulate enough. I answered as loud as I could in several languages, and he

often laid his ear within two yards of me, but all in vain, for we were wholly unintelligible to each other. He then sent his servants to their work, and taking his handkerchief out of his pocket, he doubled and spread it on his hand, which he placed flat on the ground with the palm upwards, making me a sign to step into it, as I could easily do, for it was not above a foot in thickness. I thought it my part to obey, and for fear of falling, laid myself at full length upon the handkerchief, with the remainder of which he lapped me up to the head for further security, and in this manner carried me home to his house. There he called his wife, and showed me to her; but she screamed and ran back as women in England do at the sight of a toad or a spider. However, when she had a while seen my behavior, and how well I observed the signs her husband made, she was soon reconciled, and by degrees grew extremely tender of me.

It was about twelve at noon, and a servant brought in dinner. It was only one substantial dish of meat (fit for the plain condition of an husbandman) in a dish of about four-and-twenty foot diameter. The company were the farmer and his wife, three children, and an old grandmother. When they were sat down, the farmer placed me at some distance from him on the table, which was thirty foot high from the floor. I was in a terrible fright, and kept as far as I could from the edge, for fear of falling. The wife minced a bit of meat, then crumbled some bread on a trencher, and placed it before me. I made her a low bow, took out my knife and fork, and fell to eat; which gave them exceeding delight. The mistress sent her maid for a small dram cup, which held about two gallons, and filled it with drink; I took up the vessel with much difficulty in both hands, and in a most respectful manner drank to her ladyship's health, expressing the words as loud as I could in English; which made the company laugh so heartily that I was almost deafened with the noise. This liquor tasted like a small cider,<sup>7</sup> and was not unpleasant. Then the master made me a sign to come to his trencher side; but as I walked on the table, being in great surprise all the time, as the indulgent reader will easily conceive and excuse, I happened to stumble against a crust, and fell flat on my face, but received no hurt. I got

up immediately, and observing the good people to be in much concern, I took my hat (which I held under my arm out of good manners) and waving it over my head, made three huzzas to show I had got no mischief by my fall. But advancing forwards toward my master (as I shall henceforth call him), his youngest son who sat next him, an arch boy of about ten years old, took me up by the legs, and held me so high in the air that I trembled every limb; but his father snatched me from him, and at the same time gave him such a box on the left ear as would have felled an European troop of horse to the earth, ordering him to be taken from the table. But being afraid the boy might owe me a spite, and well remembering how mischievous all children among us naturally are to sparrows, rabbits, young kittens, and puppy dogs, I fell on my knees, and pointing to the boy, made my master to understand, as well as I could, that I desired his son might be pardoned. The father complied, and the lad took his seat again; whereupon I went to him and kissed his hand, which my master took, and made him stroke me gently with it.

In the midst of dinner, my mistress's favorite cat leaped into her lap. I heard a noise behind me like that of a dozen stocking weavers at work; and turning my head, I found it proceeded from the purring of this animal, who seemed to be three times larger than an ox, as I computed by the view of her head and one of her paws, while her mistress was feeding and stroking her. The fierceness of this creature's countenance altogether discomposed me, although I stood at the farther end of the table, about fifty foot off, and although my mistress held her fast for fear she might give a spring and seize me in her talons. But it happened there was no danger, for the cat took not the least notice of me when my master placed me within three yards of her. And as I have been always told, and found true by experience in my travels, that flying or discovering<sup>8</sup> fear before a fierce animal is a certain way to make it pursue or attack you, so I resolved in this dangerous juncture to show no manner of concern. I walked with intrepidity five or six times before the very head of the cat, and came within half a yard of her; whereupon she

drew herself back, as if she were more afraid of me. I had less apprehension concerning the dogs, whereof three or four came into the room, as it is usual in farmers' houses; one of which was a mastiff, equal in bulk to four elephants, and a greyhound, somewhat taller than the mastiff, but not so large.

When dinner was almost done, the nurse came in with a child of a year old in her arms, who immediately spied me, and began a squall that you might have heard from London Bridge to Chelsea, after the usual oratory of infants, to get me for a plaything. The mother out of pure indulgence took me up, and put me towards the child, who presently seized me by the middle, and got my head in his mouth, where I roared so loud that the urchin was frightened and let me drop; and I should infallibly have broke my neck if the mother had not held her apron under me. The nurse to quiet her babe made use of a rattle, which was a kind of hollow vessel filled with great stones, and fastened by a cable to the child's waist: but all in vain, so that she was forced to apply the last remedy by giving it suck. I must confess no object ever disgusted me so much as the sight of her monstrous breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with so as to give the curious reader an idea of its bulk, shape, and color. It stood prominent six foot, and could not be less than sixteen in circumference. The nipple was about half the bigness of my head, and the hue both of that and the dug so varified with spots, pimples, and freckles that nothing could appear more nauseous: for I had a near sight of her, she sitting down the more conveniently to give suck, and I standing on the table. This made me reflect upon the fair skins of our English ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own size, and their defects not to be seen but through a magnifying glass, where we find by experiment that the smoothest and whitest skins look rough and coarse and ill colored.

I remember when I was at Lilliput, the complexion of those diminutive people appeared to me the fairest in the world; and talking upon this subject with a person of learning there, who was an intimate friend of mine, he said that my face appeared much

fairer and smoother when he looked on me from the ground than it did upon a nearer view when I took him up in my hand and brought him close, which he confessed was at first a very shocking sight. He said he could discover great holes in my skin; that the stumps of my beard were ten times stronger than the bristles of a boar, and my complexion made up of several colors altogether disagreeable: although I must beg leave to say for myself that I am as fair as most of my sex and country and very little sunburnt by all my travels. On the other side, discoursing of the ladies in that Emperor's court, he used to tell me one had freckles, another too wide a mouth, a third too large a nose; nothing of which I was able to distinguish. I confess this reflection was obvious enough; which however I could not forbear, lest the reader might think those vast creatures were actually deformed: for I must do them justice to say they are a comely race of people; and particularly the features of my master's countenance, although he were but a farmer, when I beheld him from the height of sixty foot, appeared very well proportioned.

When dinner was done, my master went out to his laborers; and as I could discover by his voice and gesture, gave his wife a strict charge to take care of me. I was very much tired and disposed to sleep, which my mistress perceiving, she put me on her own bed, and covered me with a clean white handkerchief, but larger and coarser than the mainsail of a man-of-war.

I slept about two hours, and dreamed I was at home with my wife and children, which aggravated my sorrows when I awaked and found myself alone in a vast room, between two and three hundred foot wide, and above two hundred high, lying in a bed twenty yards wide. My mistress was gone about her household affairs, and had locked me in. The bed was eight yards from the floor. Some natural necessities required me to get down; I durst not presume to call, and if I had, it would have been in vain with such a voice as mine at so great a distance from the room where I lay to the kitchen where the family kept. While I was under these circumstances, two rats crept up the curtains, and ran smelling backwards and forwards on the bed. One of them came up almost to my face; whereupon I rose

in a fright, and drew out my hanger<sup>9</sup> to defend myself. These horrible animals had the boldness to attack me on both sides, and one of them held his forefeet at my collar; but I had the good fortune to rip up his belly before he could do me any mischief. He fell down at my feet; and the other seeing the fate of his comrade, made his escape, but not without one good wound on the back, which I gave him as he fled, and made the blood run trickling from him. After this exploit I walked gently to and fro on the bed, to recover my breath and loss of spirits. These creatures were of the size of a large mastiff, but infinitely more nimble and fierce; so that if I had taken off my belt before I went to sleep, I must have infallibly been torn to pieces and devoured. I measured the tail of the dead rat, and found it to be two yards long, wanting an inch; but it went against my stomach to drag the carcass off the bed, where it lay still bleeding; I observed it had yet some life, but with a strong slash cross the neck, I thoroughly dispatched it.

Soon after, my mistress came into the room, who seeing me all bloody, ran and took me up in her hand. I pointed to the dead rat, smiling and making other signs to show I was not hurt, whereat she was extremely rejoiced, calling the maid to take up the dead rat with a pair of tongs, and throw it out of the window. Then she set me on a table, where I showed her my hanger all bloody, and wiping it on the lapet of my coat, returned it to the scabbard. I was pressed to do more than one thing, which another could not do for me, and therefore endeavored to make my mistress understand that I desired to be set down on the floor; which after she had done, my bashfulness would not suffer me to express myself farther than by pointing to the door, and bowing several times. The good woman with much difficulty at last perceived what I would be at, and taking me up again in her hand, walked into the garden, where she set me down. I went on one side about two hundred yards; and beckoning to her not to look or to follow me, I hid myself between two leaves of sorrel, and there discharged the necessities of nature.

I hope the gentle reader will excuse me for dwelling on these and the like particulars, which however insignificant they may

appear to groveling vulgar minds, yet will certainly help a philosopher<sup>1</sup> to enlarge his thoughts and imagination, and apply them to the benefit of public as well as private life, which was my sole design in presenting this and other accounts of my travels to the world; wherein I have been chiefly studious of truth, without affecting any ornaments of learning or of style. But the whole scene of this voyage made so strong an impression on my mind, and is so deeply fixed in my memory, that in committing it to paper I did not omit one material circumstance; however, upon a strict review, I blotted out several passages of less moment which were in my first copy, for fear of being censured as tedious and trifling, whereof travelers are often, perhaps not without justice, accused.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: In India. The geography of the voyage (described next) is simple: The *Adventure*, after sailing up the east coast of Africa to about five degrees south of the equator (the "Line"), is blown past India into the Malay Archipelago, north of the islands of Buru and Ceram. The storm then drives the ship northward and eastward, away from the coast of Siberia ("Great Tartary") into the northeast Pacific, at that time unexplored. Brobdingnag lies somewhere in the vicinity of Alaska.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This paragraph is taken almost literally from Samuel Sturmy's *Mariner's Magazine* (1669). Swift is ridiculing the use of technical terms by writers of popular voyages.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A small bay or cove, affording anchorage.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swift's intention, not always carried out accurately, is that everything in Brobdingnag should be, in relation to our familiar world, on a scale of ten to one.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here, barley.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Flap or fold.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Farm servants.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Weak cider.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Revealing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A short, broad sword.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scientist, in contrast to the “vulgar” (commonplace, uncultivated).[Return to reference 1](#)



CHAPTER 2. *A description of the farmer's daughter. The Author carried to a market town, and then to the metropolis. The particulars of his journey.*

My mistress had a daughter of nine years old, a child of towardly parts for her age, very dexterous at her needle, and skillful in dressing her baby.<sup>2</sup> Her mother and she contrived to fit up the baby's cradle for me against night: the cradle was put into a small drawer of a cabinet, and the drawer placed upon a hanging shelf for fear of the rats. This was my bed all the time I stayed with those people, although made more convenient by degrees as I began to learn their language, and make my wants known. This young girl was so handy, that after I had once or twice pulled off my clothes before her, she was able to dress and undress me, although I never gave her that trouble when she would let me do either myself. She made me seven shirts, and some other linen of as fine cloth as could be got, which indeed was coarser than sackcloth, and these she constantly washed for me with her own hands. She was likewise my schoolmistress to teach me the language: when I pointed to anything, she told me the name of it in her own tongue, so that in a few days I was able to call for whatever I had a mind to. She was very good-natured, and not above forty foot high, being little for her age. She gave me the name of *Grildrig*, which the family took up, and afterwards the whole kingdom. The word imports what the Latins call *nanunculus*, the Italian *homunceletino*, and the English *mannikin*.<sup>3</sup> To her I chiefly owe my preservation in that country: we never parted while I was there; I called her my *Glumdalclitch*, or little nurse: and I should be guilty of great ingratitude if I omitted this honorable mention of her care and affection towards me, which I heartily wish it lay in my power to requite as she deserves, instead of being the innocent but unhappy instrument of her disgrace, as I have too much reason to fear.

It now began to be known and talked of in the neighborhood that my master had found a strange animal in the field, about the bigness of a *splacknuck*, but exactly shaped in every part like a

human creature, which it likewise imitated in all its actions: seemed to speak in a little language of its own, had already learned several words of theirs, went erect upon two legs, was tame and gentle, would come when it was called, do whatever it was bid, had the finest limbs in the world, and a complexion fairer than a nobleman's daughter of three years old. Another farmer who lived hard by, and was a particular friend of my master, came on a visit on purpose to inquire into the truth of this story. I was immediately produced, and placed upon a table, where I walked as I was commanded, drew my hanger, put it up again, made my reverence to my master's guest, asked him in his own language how he did, and told him he was welcome, just as my little nurse had instructed me. This man, who was old and dimsighted, put on his spectacles to behold me better, at which I could not forbear laughing very heartily, for his eyes appeared like the full moon shining into a chamber at two windows. Our people, who discovered the cause of my mirth, bore me company in laughing, at which the old fellow was fool enough to be angry and out of countenance. He had the character of a great miser, and to my misfortune he well deserved it by the cursed advice he gave my master to show me as a sight upon a market day in the next town, which was half an hour's riding, about two and twenty miles from our house. I guessed there was some mischief contriving when I observed my master and his friend whispering long together, sometimes pointing at me; and my fears made me fancy that I overheard and understood some of their words. But the next morning Glumdalclitch, my little nurse, told me the whole matter, which she had cunningly picked out from her mother. The poor girl laid me on her bosom, and fell a weeping with shame and grief. She apprehended some mischief would happen to me from rude vulgar folks, who might squeeze me to death, or break one of my limbs by taking me in their hands. She had also observed how modest I was in my nature, how nicely I regarded my honor, and what an indignity I should conceive it to be exposed for money as a public spectacle to the meanest of the people. She said her papa and mamma had promised that Grildrig should be hers; but now she found they meant to serve her as they did last year, when they pretended to

give her a lamb, and yet, as soon as it was fat, sold it to a butcher. For my own part, I may truly affirm that I was less concerned than my nurse. I had a strong hope, which never left me, that I should one day recover my liberty; and as to the ignominy of being carried about for a monster, I considered myself to be a perfect stranger in the country, and that such a misfortune could never be charged upon me as a reproach, if ever I should return to England; since the King of Great Britain himself, in my condition, must have undergone the same distress.

My master, pursuant to the advice of his friend, carried me in a box the next market day to the neighboring town, and took along with him his little daughter, my nurse, upon a pillion<sup>4</sup> behind him. The box was close on every side, with a little door for me to go in and out, and a few gimlet holes to let in air. The girl had been so careful to put the quilt of her baby's bed into it, for me to lie down on. However, I was terribly shaken and discomposed in this journey, although it were but of half an hour. For the horse went about forty foot at every step, and trotted so high that the agitation was equal to the rising and falling of a ship in a great storm, but much more frequent. Our journey was somewhat further than from London to St. Albans.<sup>5</sup> My master alighted at an inn which he used to frequent; and after consulting a while with the innkeeper, and making some necessary preparations, he hired the *Grultrud*, or crier, to give notice through the town of a strange creature to be seen at the Sign of the Green Eagle, not so big as a *splacknuck* (an animal in that country very finely shaped, about six foot long), and in every part of the body resembling an human creature; could speak several words and perform an hundred diverting tricks.

I was placed upon a table in the largest room of the inn, which might be near three hundred foot square. My little nurse stood on a low stool close to the table, to take care of me, and direct what I should do. My master, to avoid a crowd, would suffer only thirty people at a time to see me. I walked about on the table as the girl commanded; she asked me questions as far as she knew my understanding of the language reached, and I answered them as

loud as I could. I turned about several times to the company, paid my humble respects, said they were welcome, and used some other speeches I had been taught. I took up a thimble filled with liquor, which Glumdalclitch had given me for a cup, and drank their health. I drew out my hanger, and flourished with it after the manner of fencers in England. My nurse gave me part of a straw, which I exercised as pike, having learned the art in my youth. I was that day shown to twelve sets of company, and as often forced to go over again with the same fopperies, till I was half dead with weariness and vexation. For those who had seen me made such wonderful reports that the people were ready to break down the doors to come in. My master for his own interest would not suffer anyone to touch me except my nurse; and, to prevent danger, benches were set round the table at such a distance as put me out of everybody's reach. However, an unlucky schoolboy aimed a hazelnut directly at my head, which very narrowly missed me; otherwise, it came with so much violence that it would have infallibly knocked out my brains, for it was almost as large as a small pumpkin:<sup>6</sup> but I had the satisfaction to see the young rogue well beaten, and turned out of the room.

My master gave public notice that he would show me again the next market day, and in the meantime he prepared a more convenient vehicle for me, which he had reason enough to do; for I was so tired with my first journey, and with entertaining company for eight hours together, that I could hardly stand upon my legs or speak a word. It was at least three days before I recovered my strength; and that I might have no rest at home, all the neighboring gentlemen from an hundred miles round, hearing of my fame, came to see me at my master's own house. There could not be fewer than thirty persons with their wives and children (for the country is very populous); and my master demanded the rate of a full room whenever he showed me at home, although it were only to a single family. So that for some time I had but little ease every day of the week (except Wednesday, which is their Sabbath) although I were not carried to the town.

My master finding how profitable I was like to be, resolved to carry me to the most considerable cities of the kingdom. Having therefore provided himself with all things necessary for a long journey, and settled his affairs at home, he took leave of his wife; and upon the 17th of August, 1703, about two months after my arrival, we set out for the metropolis, situated near the middle of that empire, and about three thousand miles distance from our house. My master made his daughter Glumdalclitch ride behind him. She carried me on her lap in a box tied about her waist. The girl had lined it on all sides with the softest cloth she could get, well quilted underneath, furnished it with her baby's bed, provided me with linen and other necessaries, and made everything as convenient as she could. We had no other company but a boy of the house, who rode after us with the luggage.

My master's design was to show me in all the towns by the way, and to step out of the road for fifty or an hundred miles to any village or person of quality's house where he might expect custom. We made easy journeys of not above seven or eight score miles a day: for Glumdalclitch, on purpose to spare me, complained she was tired with the trotting of the horse. She often took me out of my box at my own desire, to give me air and show me the country, but always held me fast by leading strings.<sup>7</sup> We passed over five or six rivers many degrees broader and deeper than the Nile or the Ganges; and there was hardly a rivulet so small as the Thames at London Bridge. We were ten weeks in our journey, and I was shown in eighteen large towns, besides many large villages and private families.

On the 26th day of October, we arrived at the metropolis, called in their language *Lorbrulgrud*, or Pride of the Universe. My master took a lodging in the principal street of the city, not far from the royal palace, and put out bills in the usual form, containing an exact description of my person and parts. He hired a large room between three and four hundred foot wide. He provided a table sixty foot in diameter, upon which I was to act my part, and palisadoed it round three foot from the edge, and as many high, to prevent my falling

over. I was shown ten times a day to the wonder and satisfaction of all people. I could now speak the language tolerably well, and perfectly understood every word that was spoken to me. Besides, I had learned their alphabet, and could make a shift to explain a sentence here and there; for Glumdalclitch had been my instructor while we were at home, and at leisure hours during our journey. She carried a little book in her pocket, not much larger than a Sanson's *Atlas*;<sup>8</sup> it was a common treatise for the use of young girls, giving a short account of their religion: out of this she taught me my letters, and interpreted the words.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Doll. "Towardly parts": promising abilities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Little man, dwarf. The Latin and Italian words are Swift's own coinages, as, of course, are the various words from the Brobdingnagian language.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A pad attached to the hinder part of a saddle, on which a second person, usually a woman, could ride.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: About twenty miles.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pumpkin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Used to guide children learning to walk.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, over two feet long and about two feet wide.[Return to reference 8](#)

CHAPTER 3. *The Author sent for to Court. The Queen buys him of his master, the farmer, and presents him to the King. He disputes with his Majesty's great scholars. An apartment at Court provided for the Author. He is in high favor with the Queen. He stands up for the honor of his own country. His quarrels with the Queen's dwarf.*

The frequent labors I underwent every day made in a few weeks a very considerable change in my health: the more my master got by me, the more unsatiable he grew. I had quite lost my stomach, and was almost reduced to a skeleton. The farmer observed it, and concluding I soon must die, resolved to make as good a hand of me as he could. While he was thus reasoning and resolving with himself, a *Slardral*, or Gentleman Usher, came from Court, commanding my master to carry me immediately thither for the diversion of the Queen and her ladies. Some of the latter had already been to see me and reported strange things of my beauty, behavior, and good sense. Her Majesty and those who attended her were beyond measure delighted with my demeanor. I fell on my knees and begged the honor of kissing her Imperial foot; but this gracious princess held out her little finger towards me (after I was set on a table), which I embraced in both my arms, and put the tip of it, with the utmost respect, to my lip. She made me some general questions about my country and my travels, which I answered as distinctly and in as few words as I could. She asked whether I would be content to live at Court. I bowed down to the board of the table, and humbly answered that I was my master's slave, but if I were at my own disposal, I should be proud to devote my life to her Majesty's service. She then asked my master whether he were willing to sell me at a good price. He, who apprehended I could not live a month, was ready enough to part with me, and demanded a thousand pieces of gold, which were ordered him on the spot, each piece being about the bigness of eight hundred moidores;<sup>9</sup> but, allowing for the proportion of all things between that country and Europe, and the high price of gold among them, was hardly so great a sum as a thousand guineas would be in England. I then said to the



Queen, since I was now her Majesty's most humble creature and vassal, I must beg the favor that Glumdalclitch, who had always tended me with so much care and kindness, and understood to do it so well, might be admitted into her service, and continue to be my nurse and instructor. Her Majesty agreed to my petition, and easily got the farmer's consent, who was glad enough to have his daughter preferred at Court; and the poor girl herself was not able to hide her joy. My late master withdrew, bidding me farewell, and saying he had left me in a good service; to which I replied not a word, only making him a slight bow.

The Queen observed my coldness, and when the farmer was gone out of the apartment, asked me the reason. I made bold to tell her Majesty that I owed no other obligation to my late master than his not dashing out the brains of a poor harmless creature found by chance in his field; which obligation was amply recompensed by the gain he had made in showing me through half the kingdom, and the price he had now sold me for. That the life I had since led was laborious enough to kill an animal of ten times my strength. That my health was much impaired by the continual drudgery of entertaining the rabble every hour of the day; and that if my master had not thought my life in danger, her Majesty perhaps would not have got so cheap a bargain. But as I was out of all fear of being ill treated under the protection of so great and good an Empress, the Ornament of Nature, the Darling of the World, the Delight of her Subjects, the Phoenix of the Creation; so I hoped my late master's apprehensions would appear to be groundless, for I already found my spirits to revive by the influence of her most august presence.

This was the sum of my speech, delivered with great improprieties and hesitation; the latter part was altogether framed in the style peculiar to that people, whereof I learned some phrases from Glumdalclitch, while she was carrying me to Court.

The Queen, giving great allowance for my defectiveness in speaking, was however surprised at so much wit and good sense in so diminutive an animal. She took me in her own hand, and carried me to the King, who was then retired to his cabinet.<sup>1</sup> His Majesty, a



prince of much gravity, and austere countenance, not well observing my shape at first view, asked the Queen after a cold manner how long it was since she grew fond of a *splacknuck*; for such it seems he took me to be, as I lay upon my breast in her Majesty's right hand. But this princess, who hath an infinite deal of wit and humor, set me gently on my feet upon the scrutore,<sup>2</sup> and commanded me to give his Majesty an account of myself, which I did in a very few words; and Glumdalclitch, who attended at the cabinet door, and could not endure I should be out of her sight, being admitted, confirmed all that had passed from my arrival at her father's house.

The King, although he be as learned a person as any in his dominions, had been educated in the study of philosophy and particularly mathematics; yet when he observed my shape exactly, and saw me walk erect, before I began to speak, conceived I might be a piece of clockwork (which is in that country arrived to a very great perfection) contrived by some ingenious artist. But when he heard my voice, and found what I delivered to be regular and rational, he could not conceal his astonishment. He was by no means satisfied with the relation I gave him of the manner I came into his kingdom, but thought it a story concerted between Glumdalclitch and her father, who had taught me a set of words to make me sell at a higher price. Upon this imagination he put several other questions to me, and still received rational answers, no otherwise defective than by a foreign accent, and an imperfect knowledge in the language, with some rustic phrases which I had learned at the farmer's house, and did not suit the polite style of a court.

His Majesty sent for three great scholars who were then in their weekly waiting (according to the custom in that country). These gentlemen, after they had a while examined my shape with much nicety, were of different opinions concerning me. They all agreed that I could not be produced according to the regular laws of nature, because I was not framed with a capacity of preserving my life, either by swiftness, or climbing of trees, or digging holes in the earth. They observed by my teeth, which they viewed with great

exactness, that I was a carnivorous animal; yet most quadrupeds being an overmatch for me, and field mice, with some others, too nimble, they could not imagine how I should be able to support myself, unless I fed upon snails and other insects; which they offered, by many learned arguments, to evince that I could not possibly do. One of them seemed to think that I might be an embryo, or abortive birth. But this opinion was rejected by the other two, who observed my limbs to be perfect and finished, and that I had lived several years, as it was manifested from my beard, the stumps whereof they plainly discovered through a magnifying glass. They would not allow me to be a dwarf, because my littleness was beyond all degrees of comparison; for the Queen's favorite dwarf, the smallest ever known in that kingdom, was nearly thirty foot high. After much debate, they concluded unanimously that I was only *relplum scalcath*, which is interpreted literally, *lusus naturae*; a determination exactly agreeable to the modern philosophy of Europe, whose professors, disdaining the old evasion of *occult causes*, whereby the followers of Aristotle endeavor in vain to disguise their ignorance, have invented this wonderful solution of all difficulties, to the unspeakable advancement of human knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

After this decisive conclusion, I entreated to be heard a word or two. I applied myself to the King, and assured his Majesty that I came from a country which abounded with several millions of both sexes, and of my own stature, where the animals, trees, and houses were all in proportion, and where by consequence I might be as able to defend myself, and to find sustenance, as any of his Majesty's subjects could do here; which I took for a full answer to those gentlemen's arguments. To this they only replied with a smile of contempt, saying that the farmer had instructed me very well in my lesson. The King, who had a much better understanding, dismissing his learned men, sent for the farmer, who by good fortune was not yet gone out of town; having therefore first examined him privately, and then confronted him with me and the young girl, his Majesty began to think that what we told him might possibly be true. He desired the Queen to order that a particular care should be taken of

me, and was of opinion that Glumdalclitch should still continue in her office of tending me, because he observed we had a great affection for each other. A convenient apartment was provided for her at Court; she had a sort of governess appointed to take care of her education, a maid to dress her, and two other servants for menial offices; but the care of me was wholly appropriated to herself. The Queen commanded her own cabinetmaker to contrive a box that might serve me for a bedchamber, after the model that Glumdalclitch and I should agree upon. This man was a most ingenious artist, and according to my directions, in three weeks finished for me a wooden chamber of sixteen foot square and twelve high, with sash windows, a door, and two closets, like a London bedchamber. The board that made the ceiling was to be lifted up and down by two hinges, to put in a bed ready furnished by her Majesty's upholsterer, which Glumdalclitch took out every day to air, made it with her own hands, and letting it down at night, locked up the roof over me. A nice<sup>4</sup> workman, who was famous for little curiosities, undertook to make me two chairs, with backs and frames, of a substance not unlike ivory, and two tables, with a cabinet to put my things in. The room was quilted on all sides, as well as the floor and the ceiling, to prevent any accident from the carelessness of those who carried me, and to break the force of a jolt when I went in a coach. I desired a lock for my door to prevent rats and mice from coming in: the smith, after several attempts, made the smallest that ever was seen among them, for I have known a larger at the gate of a gentleman's house in England. I made a shift<sup>5</sup> to keep the key in a pocket of my own, fearing Glumdalclitch might lose it. The Queen likewise ordered the thinnest silks that could be gotten, to make me clothes, not much thicker than an English blanket, very cumbersome till I was accustomed to them. They were after the fashion of the kingdom, partly resembling the Persian, and partly the Chinese, and are a very grave, decent habit.

The Queen became so fond of my company that she could not dine without me. I had a table placed upon the same at which her Majesty ate, just at her left elbow, and a chair to sit on.

Glumdalclitch stood upon a stool on the floor, near my table, to assist and take care of me. I had an entire set of silver dishes and plates, and other necessaries, which, in proportion to those of the Queen, were not much bigger than what I have seen of the same kind in a London toyshop,<sup>6</sup> for the furniture of a baby-house: these my little nurse kept in her pocket in a silver box and gave me at meals as I wanted them, always cleaning them herself. No person dined with the Queen but the two Princesses Royal, the elder sixteen years old, and the younger at that time thirteen and a month. Her Majesty used to put a bit of meat upon one of my dishes, out of which I carved for myself; and her diversion was to see me eat in miniature. For the Queen (who had indeed but a weak stomach) took up at one mouthful as much as a dozen English farmers could eat at a meal, which to me was for some time a very nauseous sight. She would craunch the wing of a lark, bones and all, between her teeth, although it were nine times as large as that of a full-grown turkey; and put a bit of bread into her mouth as big as two twelve-penny loaves. She drank out of a golden cup, above a hogshead at a draught. Her knives were twice as long as a scythe set straight upon the handle. The spoons, forks, and other instruments were all in the same proportion. I remember when Glumdalclitch carried me out of curiosity to see some of the tables at Court, where ten or a dozen of these enormous knives and forks were lifted up together, I thought I had never till then beheld so terrible a sight.

It is the custom that every Wednesday (which, as I have before observed, was their Sabbath) the King and Queen, with the royal issue of both sexes, dine together in the apartment of his Majesty, to whom I was now become a favorite; and at these times my little chair and table were placed at his left hand, before one of the salt-cellars. This prince took a pleasure in conversing with me, inquiring into the manners, religion, laws, government, and learning of Europe; wherein I gave him the best account I was able. His apprehension was so clear, and his judgment so exact, that he made very wise reflections and observations upon all I said. But I confess

that after I had been a little too copious in talking of my own beloved country, of our trade and wars by sea and land, of our schisms in religion and parties in the state, the prejudices of his education prevailed so far that he could not forbear taking me up in his right hand, and stroking me gently with the other, after an hearty fit of laughing, asked me whether I were a Whig or a Tory. Then turning to his first minister, who waited behind him with a white staff, near as tall as the mainmast of the *Royal Sovereign*,<sup>7</sup> he observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I: "and yet," said he, "I dare engage, these creatures have their titles and distinctions of honor; they contrive little nests and burrows, that they call houses and cities; they make a figure in dress and equipage; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray." And thus he continued on, while my color came and went several times with indignation to hear our noble country, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France, the arbitress of Europe, the seat of virtue, piety, honor, and truth, the pride and envy of the world, so contemptuously treated.

But as I was not in a condition to resent injuries, so, upon mature thoughts, I began to doubt whether I were injured or no. For, after having been accustomed several months to the sight and converse of this people, and observed every object upon which I cast my eyes to be of proportionable magnitude, the horror I had first conceived from their bulk and aspect was so far worn off that if I had then beheld a company of English lords and ladies in their finery and birthday clothes,<sup>8</sup> acting their several parts in the most courtly manner of strutting and bowing and prating, to say the truth, I should have been strongly tempted to laugh as much at them as this King and his grandees did at me. Neither indeed could I forbear smiling at myself when the Queen used to place me upon her hand towards a looking glass, by which both our persons appeared before me in full view together; and there could be nothing more ridiculous than the comparison; so that I really began to imagine myself dwindled many degrees below my usual size.

Nothing angered and mortified me so much as the Queen's dwarf, who being of the lowest stature that was ever in that country (for I verily think he was not full thirty foot high) became so insolent at seeing a creature so much beneath him that he would always affect to swagger and look big as he passed by me in the Queen's antechamber, while I was standing on some table talking with the lords or ladies of the court; and he seldom failed of a smart word or two upon my littleness, against which I could only revenge myself by calling him brother, challenging him to wrestle, and such repartees as are usual in the mouths of Court pages. One day at dinner this malicious little cub was so nettled with something I had said to him that, raising himself upon the frame of Her Majesty's chair, he took me up by the middle, as I was sitting down, not thinking any harm, and let me drop into a large silver bowl of cream, and then ran away as fast as he could. I fell over head and ears, and if I had not been a good swimmer, it might have gone very hard with me; for Glumdalclitch in that instant happened to be at the other end of the room, and the Queen was in such a fright that she wanted presence of mind to assist me. But my little nurse ran to my relief, and took me out, after I had swallowed above a quart of cream. I was put to bed; however, I received no other damage than the loss of a suit of clothes, which was utterly spoiled. The dwarf was soundly whipped, and as further punishment, forced to drink up the bowl of cream into which he had thrown me; neither was he ever restored to favor: for soon after the Queen bestowed him to a lady of high quality, so that I saw him no more, to my very great satisfaction; for I could not tell to what extremity such a malicious urchin might have carried his resentment.

He had before served me a scurvy trick, which set the Queen a laughing, although at the same time she were heartily vexed, and would have immediately cashiered him, if I had not been so generous as to intercede. Her Majesty had taken a marrow bone upon her plate, and after knocking out the marrow, placed the bone again in the dish, erect as it stood before; the dwarf watching his opportunity, while Glumdalclitch was gone to the sideboard,

mounted upon the stool she stood on to take care of me at meals, took me up in both hands, and squeezing my legs together, wedged them into the marrow bone above my waist, where I stuck for some time, and made a very ridiculous figure. I believe it was near a minute before anyone knew what was become of me, for I thought it below me to cry out. But, as princes seldom get their meat hot, my legs were not scalded, only my stockings and breeches in a sad condition. The dwarf at my entreaty had no other punishment than a sound whipping.

I was frequently rallied by the Queen upon account of my fearfulness, and she used to ask me whether the people of my country were as great cowards as myself. The occasion was this. The kingdom is much pestered with flies in summer, and these odious insects, each of them as big as a Dunstable lark, hardly gave me any rest while I sat at dinner, with their continual humming and buzzing about my ears. They would sometimes alight upon my victuals, and leave their loathsome excrement or spawn behind, which to me was very visible, although not to the natives of that country, whose large optics were not so acute as mine in viewing smaller objects. Sometimes they would fix upon my nose or forehead, where they stung me to the quick, smelling very offensively; and I could easily trace that viscous matter, which our naturalists tell us enables those creatures to walk with their feet upwards upon a ceiling. I had much ado to defend myself against these detestable animals, and could not forbear starting when they came on my face. It was the common practice of the dwarf to catch a number of these insects in his hand, as schoolboys do among us, and let them out suddenly under my nose, on purpose to frighten me, and divert the Queen. My remedy was to cut them in pieces with my knife as they flew in the air, wherein my dexterity was much admired.

I remember one morning when Glumdalclitch had set me in my box upon a window, as she usually did in fair days to give me air (for I durst not venture to let the box be hung on a nail out of the window, as we do with cages in England), after I had lifted up one of my sashes, and sat down at my table to eat a piece of sweet cake



for my breakfast, above twenty wasps, allured by the smell, came flying into the room, humming louder than the drones of as many bagpipes. Some of them seized my cake, and carried it piecemeal away; others flew about my head and face, confounding me with the noise, and putting me in the utmost terror of their stings. However, I had the courage to rise and draw my hanger, and attack them in the air. I dispatched four of them, but the rest got away, and I presently shut my window. These insects were as large as partridges; I took out their stings, found them an inch and a half long, and as sharp as needles. I carefully preserved them all, and having since shown them with some other curiosities in several parts of Europe, upon my return to England I gave three of them to Gresham College,<sup>9</sup> and kept the fourth for myself.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Portuguese coins.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Private apartment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Writing desk.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swift had contempt for both the medieval Schoolmen, who discussed “occult causes,” the unknown causes of observable effects, and modern natural philosophers, who, he believed, often concealed their ignorance by using equally meaningless terms. “*Lusus naturae*”: one of nature’s sports, or, roughly, freaks.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Exact.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Contrived.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A shop for selling knickknacks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: One of the largest ships in the Royal Navy. “White staff”: at the English court borne by the lord treasurer as the symbol of his office.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Courtiers dressed with special splendor on the monarch’s birthday.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Royal Society, in its earliest years, met in Gresham College.[Return to reference 9](#)



CHAPTER 4. *The country described. A proposal for correcting modern maps. The King's palace, and some account of the metropolis. The Author's way of traveling. The chief temple described.*

I now intend to give the reader a short description of this country, as far as I had traveled in it, which was not above two thousand miles round Lorbrulgrud the metropolis. For the Queen, whom I always attended, never went further when she accompanied the King in his progresses, and there stayed till his Majesty returned from viewing his frontiers. The whole extent of this prince's dominions reacheth about six thousand miles in length, and from three to five in breadth. From whence I cannot but conclude that our geographers of Europe are in a great error by supposing nothing but sea between Japan and California: for it was ever my opinion that there must be a balance of earth to counterpoise the great continent of Tartary; and therefore they ought to correct their maps and charts by joining this vast tract of land to the northwest parts of America, wherein I shall be ready to lend them my assistance.

The kingdom is a peninsula, terminated to the northeast by a ridge of mountains thirty miles high, which are altogether impassable by reason of the volcanoes upon the tops. Neither do the most learned know what sort of mortals inhabit beyond those mountains, or whether they be inhabited at all. On the three other sides it is bounded by the ocean. There is not one seaport in the whole kingdom; and those parts of the coasts into which the rivers issue are so full of pointed rocks, and the sea generally so rough, that there is no venturing with the smallest of their boats; so that these people are wholly excluded from any commerce with the rest of the world. But the large rivers are full of vessels, and abound with excellent fish, for they seldom get any from the sea, because the sea fish are of the same size with those in Europe, and consequently not worth catching; whereby it is manifest that nature, in the production of plants and animals of so extraordinary a bulk, is wholly confined to this continent, of which I leave the reasons to be determined by philosophers. However, now and then they take a whale that happens to be dashed against the rocks, which the common people

feed on heartily. These whales I have known so large that a man could hardly carry one upon his shoulders; and sometimes for curiosity they are brought in hampers to Lorbrulgrud: I saw one of them in a dish at the King's table, which passed for a rarity, but I did not observe he was fond of it; for I think indeed the bigness disgusted him, although I have seen one somewhat larger in Greenland.

The country is well inhabited, for it contains fifty-one cities, near an hundred walled towns, and a great number of villages. To satisfy my curious reader, it may be sufficient to describe Lorbrulgrud. This city stands upon almost two equal parts on each side the river that passes through. It contains above eight thousand houses, and about six hundred thousand inhabitants. It is in length three *glonglungs* (which make about fifty-four English miles) and two and a half in breadth, as I measured it myself in the royal map made by the King's order, which was laid on the ground on purpose for me, and extended an hundred feet; I paced the diameter and circumference several times barefoot, and computing by the scale, measured it pretty exactly.

The King's palace is no regular edifice, but an heap of buildings about seven miles round: the chief rooms are generally two hundred and forty foot high, and broad and long in proportion. A coach was allowed to Glumdalclitch and me, wherein her governess frequently took her out to see the town, go among the shops; and I was always of the party, carried in my box, although the girl at my own desire would often take me out, and hold me in her hand, that I might more conveniently view the houses and the people as we passed along the streets. I reckoned our coach to be about a square of Westminster Hall,<sup>1</sup> but not altogether so high; however, I cannot be very exact. One day the governess ordered our coachman to stop at several shops, where the beggars, watching their opportunity, crowded to the sides of the coach, and gave me the most horrible spectacles that ever an English eye beheld. There was a woman with a cancer in her breast, swelled to a monstrous size, full of holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my

whole body. There was a fellow with a wen in his neck, larger than five woolpacks, and another with a couple of wooden legs, each about twenty foot high. But the most hateful sight of all was the lice crawling on their clothes. I could see distinctly the limbs of these vermin with my naked eye, much better than those of an European louse through a microscope, and their snouts with which they rooted like swine. They were the first I had ever beheld; and I should have been curious enough to dissect one of them if I had proper instruments (which I unluckily left behind me in the ship), although indeed the sight was so nauseous that it perfectly turned my stomach.

Besides the large box in which I was usually carried, the Queen ordered a smaller one to be made for me, of about twelve foot square and ten high, for the convenience of traveling, because the other was somewhat too large for Glumdalclitch's lap, and cumbersome in the coach; it was made by the same artist, whom I directed in the whole contrivance. This traveling closet was an exact square with a window in the middle of three of the squares, and each window was latticed with iron wire on the outside, to prevent accidents in long journeys. On the fourth side, which had no windows, two strong staples were fixed, through which the person that carried me, when I had a mind to be on horseback, put in a leathern belt, and buckled it about his waist. This was always the office of some grave trusty servant in whom I could confide, whether I attended the King and Queen in their progresses, or were disposed to see the gardens, or pay a visit to some great lady or minister of state in the court, when Glumdalclitch happened to be out of order: for I soon began to be known and esteemed among the greatest officers, I suppose more upon account of their Majesties' favor than any merit of my own. In journeys, when I was weary of the coach, a servant on horseback would buckle my box, and place it on a cushion before him; and there I had a full prospect of the country on three sides from my three windows. I had in this closet a field bed<sup>2</sup> and a hammock hung from the ceiling, two chairs and a table, neatly screwed to the floor to prevent being tossed about by the agitation

of the horse or the coach. And having been long used to sea voyages, those motions, although sometimes very violent, did not much discompose me.

When I had a mind to see the town, it was always in my traveling closet, which Glumdalclitch held in her lap in a kind of open sedan, after the fashion of the country, borne by four men, and attended by two others in the Queen's livery. The people, who had often heard of me, were very curious to crowd about the sedan; and the girl was complaisant enough to make the bearers stop, and to take me in her hand that I might be more conveniently seen.

I was very desirous to see the chief temple, and particularly the tower belonging to it, which is reckoned the highest in the kingdom. Accordingly one day my nurse carried me thither, but I may truly say I came back disappointed; for the height is not above three thousand foot, reckoning from the ground to the highest pinnacle top; which, allowing for the difference between the size of those people and us in Europe, is no great matter for admiration, nor at all equal in proportion (if I rightly remember) to Salisbury steeple.<sup>3</sup> But, not to detract from a nation to which during my life I shall acknowledge myself extremely obliged, it must be allowed that whatever this famous tower wants in height is amply made up in beauty and strength. For the walls are near an hundred foot thick, built of hewn stone, whereof each is about forty foot square, and adorned on all sides with statues of gods and emperors cut in marble larger than the life, placed in their several niches. I measured a little finger which had fallen down from one of these statues, and lay unperceived among some rubbish, and found it exactly four foot and an inch in length. Glumdalclitch wrapped it up in a handkerchief, and carried it home in her pocket to keep among other trinkets, of which the girl was very fond, as children at her age usually are.

The King's kitchen is indeed a noble building, vaulted at top, and about six hundred foot high. The great oven is not so wide by ten paces as the cupola at St. Paul's:<sup>4</sup> for I measured the latter on purpose after my return. But if I should describe the kitchen grate, the prodigious pots and kettles, the joints of meat turning on the

spits, with many other particulars, perhaps I should be hardly believed; at least a severe critic would be apt to think I enlarged a little, as travelers are often suspected to do. To avoid which censure, I fear I have run too much into the other extreme, and that if this treatise should happen to be translated into the language of Brobdingnag (which is the general name of that kingdom) and transmitted thither, the King and his people would have reason to complain that I had done them an injury by a false and diminutive representation.

His Majesty seldom keeps above six hundred horses in his stables: they are generally from fifty-four to sixty foot high. But when he goes abroad on solemn days, he is attended for state by a militia guard of five hundred horse, which indeed I thought was the most splendid sight that could be ever beheld, till I saw part of his army in battalia,<sup>5</sup> whereof I shall find another occasion to speak.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The ancient hall, now incorporated into the Houses of Parliament, where the law courts then sat. Swift presumably means the square of its breadth (just under sixty-eight feet).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Folding bed, cot.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of the most beautiful Gothic steeples in England is that of Salisbury Cathedral, 404 feet high.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The cupola of St. Paul's Cathedral in London is 108 feet in diameter.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Battle array.[Return to reference 5](#)

CHAPTER 5. *Several adventures that happened to the Author. The execution of a criminal. The Author shows his skill in navigation.*

I should have lived happy enough in that country if my littleness had not exposed me to several ridiculous and troublesome accidents, some of which I shall venture to relate. Glumdalclitch often carried me into the gardens of the court in my smaller box, and would sometimes take me out of it and hold me in her hand, or set me down to walk. I remember, before the dwarf left the Queen, he followed us one day into those gardens; and my nurse having set me down, he and I being close together near some dwarf apple trees, I must needs show my wit by a silly allusion between him and the trees, which happens to hold in their language as it doth in ours. Whereupon, the malicious rogue watching his opportunity, when I was walking under one of them, shook it directly over my head, by which a dozen apples, each of them near as large as a Bristol barrel, came tumbling about my ears; one of them hit me on the back as I chanced to stoop, and knocked me down flat on my face, but I received no other hurt; and the dwarf was pardoned at my desire, because I had given the provocation.

Another day Glumdalclitch left me on a smooth grassplot to divert myself while she walked at some distance with her governess. In the meantime there suddenly fell such a violent shower of hail that I was immediately by the force of it struck to the ground: and when I was down, the hailstones gave me such cruel bangs all over the body as if I had been pelted with tennis balls;<sup>6</sup> however I made a shift to creep on all four, and shelter myself by lying on my face on the lee side of a border of lemon thyme, but so bruised from head to foot that I could not go abroad in ten days. Neither is this at all to be wondered at, because nature in that country observing the same proportion through all her operations, a hailstone is near eighteen hundred times as large as one in Europe; which I can assert upon experience, having been so curious to weigh and measure them.

But a more dangerous accident happened to me in the same garden when my little nurse, believing she had put me in a secure

place, which I often entreated her to do that I might enjoy my own thoughts, and having left my box at home to avoid the trouble of carrying it, went to another part of the garden with her governess and some ladies of her acquaintance. While she was absent and out of hearing, a small white spaniel belonging to one of the chief gardeners, having got by accident into the garden, happened to range near the place where I lay. The dog following the scent, came directly up, and taking me in his mouth, ran straight to his master, wagging his tail, and set me gently on the ground. By good fortune he had been so well taught that I was carried between his teeth without the least hurt, or even tearing my clothes. But the poor gardener, who knew me well, and had a great kindness for me, was in a terrible fright. He gently took me up in both his hands, and asked me how I did; but I was so amazed and out of breath that I could not speak a word. In a few minutes I came to myself, and he carried me safe to my little nurse, who by this time had returned to the place where she left me, and was in cruel agonies when I did not appear nor answer when she called; she severely reprimanded the gardener on account of his dog. But the thing was hushed up and never known at court; for the girl was afraid of the Queen's anger; and truly, as to myself, I thought it would not be for my reputation that such a story should go about.

This accident absolutely determined Glumdalclitch never to trust me abroad for the future out of her sight. I had been long afraid of this resolution, and therefore concealed from her some little unlucky adventures that happened in those times when I was left by myself. Once a kite hovering over the garden made a stoop<sup>2</sup> at me, and if I had not resolutely drawn my hanger, and run under a thick espalier, he would have certainly carried me away in his talons. Another time walking to the top of a fresh molehill, I fell to my neck in the hole through which that animal had cast up the earth, and coined some lie, not worth remembering, to excuse myself for spoiling my clothes. I likewise broke my right shin against the shell of a snail, which I happened to stumble over, as I was walking alone, and thinking on poor England.

I cannot tell whether I were more pleased or mortified to observe in those solitary walks that the smaller birds did not appear to be at all afraid of me; but would hop about within a yard distance, looking for worms and other food with as much indifference and security as if no creature at all were near them. I remember a thrush had the confidence to snatch out of my hand with his bill a piece of cake that Glumdalclitch had just given me for my breakfast. When I attempted to catch any of these birds, they would boldly turn against me, endeavoring to pick my fingers, which I durst not venture within their reach; and then they would hop back unconcerned to hunt for worms or snails, as they did before. But one day I took a thick cudgel, and threw it with all my strength so luckily at a linnet that I knocked him down, and seizing him by the neck with both my hands, ran with him in triumph to my nurse. However, the bird, who had only been stunned, recovering himself, gave me so many boxes with his wings on both sides of my head and body, though I held him at arm's length, and was out of the reach of his claws, that I was twenty times thinking to let him go. But I was soon relieved by one of our servants, who wrung off the bird's neck, and I had him next day for dinner, by the Queen's command. This linnet, as near as I can remember, seemed to be somewhat larger than an English swan.

The Maids of Honor often invited Glumdalclitch to their apartments, and desired she would bring me along with her, on purpose to have the pleasure of seeing and touching me. They would often strip me naked from top to toe and lay me at full length in their bosoms; wherewith I was much disgusted, because, to say the truth, a very offensive smell came from their skins, which I do not mention or intend to the disadvantage of those excellent ladies, for whom I have all manner of respect; but I conceive that my sense was more acute in proportion to my littleness, and that those illustrious persons were no more disagreeable to their lovers, or to each other, than people of the same quality are with us in England. And, after all, I found their natural smell was much more supportable than when they used perfumes, under which I



immediately swooned away. I cannot forget that an intimate friend of mine in Lilliput took the freedom in a warm day, when I had used a good deal of exercise, to complain of a strong smell about me, although I am as little faulty that way as most of my sex: but I suppose his faculty of smelling was as nice with regard to me as mine was to that of this people. Upon this point, I cannot forbear doing justice to the Queen, my mistress, and Glumdalclitch, my nurse, whose persons were as sweet as those of any lady in England.

That which gave me most uneasiness among these Maids of Honor, when my nurse carried me to visit them, was to see them use me without any manner of ceremony, like a creature who had no sort of consequence. For they would strip themselves to the skin and put on their smocks in my presence, while I was placed on their toilet<sup>8</sup> directly before their naked bodies; which, I am sure, to me was very far from being a tempting sight, or from giving me any other emotions than those of horror and disgust. Their skins appeared so coarse and uneven, so variously colored, when I saw them near, with a mole here and there as broad as a trencher, and hairs hanging from it thicker than packthreads, to say nothing further concerning the rest of their persons. Neither did they at all scruple, while I was by, to discharge what they had drunk, to the quantity of at least two hogsheads, in a vessel that held above three tuns. The handsomest among these Maids of Honor, a pleasant frolicsome girl of sixteen, would sometimes set me astride upon one of her nipples, with many other tricks, wherein the reader will excuse me for not being over particular. But I was so much displeased that I entreated Glumdalclitch to contrive some excuse for not seeing that young lady any more.

One day a young gentleman, who was nephew to my nurse's governess, came and pressed them both to see an execution. It was of a man who had murdered one of that gentleman's intimate acquaintance. Glumdalclitch was prevailed on to be of the company, very much against her inclination, for she was naturally tender-hearted: and as for myself, although I abhorred such kind of

spectacles, yet my curiosity tempted me to see something that I thought must be extraordinary. The malefactor was fixed in a chair upon a scaffold erected for the purpose, and his head cut off at a blow with a sword of about forty foot long. The veins and arteries spouted up such a prodigious quantity of blood, and so high in the air, that the great *jet d'eau* at Versailles was not equal for the time it lasted; and the head, when it fell on the scaffold floor, gave such a bounce,<sup>9</sup> as made me start, although I were at least half an English mile distant.

The Queen, who often used to hear me talk of my sea voyages, and took all occasions to divert me when I was melancholy, asked me whether I understood how to handle a sail or an oar, and whether a little exercise of rowing might not be convenient for my health. I answered that I understood both very well. For although my proper employment had been to be surgeon or doctor to the ship, yet often, upon a pinch, I was forced to work like a common mariner. But I could not see how this could be done in their country, where the smallest wherry was equal to a first-rate man-of-war among us, and such a boat as I could manage would never live in any of their rivers. Her Majesty said, if I would contrive a boat, her own joiner should make it, and she would provide a place for me to sail in. The fellow was an ingenious workman and, by my instructions, in ten days finished a pleasure boat with all its tackling, able conveniently to hold eight Europeans. When it was finished, the Queen was so delighted that she ran with it in her lap to the King, who ordered it to be put in a cistern full of water, with me in it, by way of trial; where I could not manage my two sculls, or little oars, for want of room. But the Queen had before contrived another project. She ordered the joiner to make a wooden trough of three hundred foot long, fifty broad, and eight deep; which being well pitched to prevent leaking, was placed on the floor along the wall in an outer room of the palace. It had a cock near the bottom to let out the water when it began to grow stale, and two servants could easily fill it in half an hour. Here I often used to row for my own diversion, as well as that of the Queen and her ladies, who thought themselves

well entertained with my skill and agility. Sometimes I would put up my sail, and then my business was only to steer, while the ladies gave me a gale with their fans; and when they were weary, some of the pages would blow my sail forward with their breath, while I showed my art by steering starboard or larboard as I pleased. When I had done, Glumdalclitch always carried my boat into her closet, and hung it on a nail to dry.

In this exercise I once met an accident which had like to have cost me my life. For one of the pages having put my boat into the trough, the governess who attended Glumdalclitch very officiously lifted me up to place me in the boat; but I happened to slip through her fingers, and should have infallibly fallen down forty foot upon the floor, if by the luckiest chance in the world I had not been stopped by a corking-pin that stuck in the good gentlewoman's stomacher;<sup>1</sup> the head of the pin passed between my shirt and the waistband of my breeches, and thus I was held by the middle in the air until Glumdalclitch ran to my relief.

Another time, one of the servants, whose office it was to fill my trough every third day with fresh water, was so careless to let a huge frog (not perceiving it) slip out of his pail. The frog lay concealed till I was put into my boat, but then seeing a resting place, climbed up, and made it lean so much on one side that I was forced to balance it with all my weight on the other, to prevent overturning. When the frog was got in, it hopped at once half the length of the boat, and then over my head, backwards and forwards, daubing my face and clothes with its odious slime. The largeness of its features made it appear the most deformed animal that can be conceived. However, I desired Glumdalclitch to let me deal with it alone. I banged it a good while with one of my sculls, and at last forced it to leap out of the boat.

But the greatest danger I ever underwent in that kingdom was from a monkey, who belonged to one of the clerks of the kitchen. Glumdalclitch had locked me up in her closet, while she went somewhere upon business or a visit. The weather being very warm, the closet window was left open, as well as the windows in the door

of my bigger box, in which I usually lived, because of its largeness and conveniency. As I sat quietly meditating at my table, I heard something bounce in at the closet window, and skip about from one side to the other, whereat, although I was much alarmed, yet I ventured to look out, but stirred not from my seat; and then I saw this frolicsome animal, frisking and leaping up and down, till at last he came to my box, which he seemed to view with great pleasure and curiosity, peeping in at the door and every window. I retreated to the farther corner of my room, or box, but the monkey looking in at every side, put me into such a fright that I wanted presence of mind to conceal myself under the bed, as I might easily have done. After some time spent in peeping, grinning, and chattering, he at last espied me, and reaching one of his paws in at the door, as a cat does when she plays with a mouse, although I often shifted place to avoid him, he at length seized the lappet of my coat (which, being made of that country cloth, was very thick and strong) and dragged me out. He took me up in his right forefoot, and held me as a nurse does a child she is going to suckle, just as I have seen the same sort of creature do with a kitten in Europe: and when I offered to struggle, he squeezed me so hard that I thought it more prudent to submit. I have good reason to believe that he took me for a young one of his own species, by his often stroking my face very gently with his other paw. In these diversions he was interrupted by a noise at the closet door, as if somebody were opening it, whereupon he suddenly leaped up to the window at which he had come in, and thence upon the leads and gutters, walking upon three legs, and holding me in the fourth, till he clambered up to a roof that was next to ours. I heard Glumdalclitch give a shriek at the moment he was carrying me out. The poor girl was almost distracted: that quarter of the palace was all in an uproar; the servants ran for ladders; the monkey was seen by hundreds in the court, sitting upon the ridge of a building, holding me like a baby in one of his forepaws and feeding me with the other, by cramming into my mouth some victuals he had squeezed out of the bag on one side of his chaps, and patting me when I would not eat; whereat many of the rabble below could not forebear laughing; neither do I think they justly ought to be blamed,

for without question the sight was ridiculous enough to everybody but myself. Some of the people threw up stones, hoping to drive the monkey down; but this was strictly forbidden, or else very probably my brains had been dashed out.

The ladders were now applied, and mounted by several men; which the monkey observing, and finding himself almost encompassed, not being able to make speed enough with his three legs, let me drop on a ridge tile, and made his escape. Here I sat for some time three hundred yards from the ground, expecting every moment to be blown down by the wind, or to fall by my own giddiness, and come tumbling over and over from the ridge to the eaves. But an honest lad, one of my nurse's footmen, climbed up, and putting me into his breeches pocket, brought me down safe.

I was almost choked with the filthy stuff the monkey had crammed down my throat; but my dear little nurse picked it out of my mouth with a small needle, and then I fell a vomiting, which gave me great relief. Yet I was so weak and bruised in the sides with the squeezes given me by this odious animal that I was forced to keep my bed a fortnight. The King, Queen, and all the Court sent every day to inquire after my health, and her Majesty made me several visits during my sickness. The monkey was killed, and an order made that no such animal should be kept about the palace.

When I attended the King after my recovery, to return him thanks for his favors, he was pleased to rally me a good deal upon this adventure. He asked me what my thoughts and speculations were while I lay in the monkey's paw, how I liked the victuals he gave me, his manner of feeding, and whether the fresh air on the roof had sharpened my stomach. He desired to know what I would have done upon such an occasion in my own country. I told his Majesty that in Europe we had no monkeys, except such as were brought for curiosities from other places, and so small that I could deal with a dozen of them together, if they presumed to attack me. And as for that monstrous animal with whom I was so lately engaged (it was indeed as large as an elephant), if my fears had suffered me to think so far as to make use of my hanger (looking

fiercely and clapping my hand upon the hilt as I spoke) when he poked his paw into my chamber, perhaps I should have given him such a wound as would have made him glad to withdraw it with more haste than he put it in. This I delivered in a firm tone, like a person who was jealous lest his courage should be called in question. However, my speech produced nothing else besides a loud laughter, which all the respect due to his Majesty from those about him could not make them contain. This made me reflect how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavor doing himself honor among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him. And yet I have seen the moral of my own behavior very frequent in England since my return, where a little contemptible varlet, without the least title to birth, person, wit, or common sense, shall presume to look with importance, and put himself upon a foot with the greatest persons of the kingdom.

I was every day furnishing the court with some ridiculous story; and Glumdalclitch, although she loved me to excess, yet was arch enough to inform the Queen whenever I committed any folly that she thought would be diverting to her Majesty. The girl, who had been out of order,<sup>2</sup> was carried by her governess to take the air about an hour's distance, or thirty miles from town. They alighted out of the coach near a small footpath in a field, and Glumdalclitch setting down my traveling box, I went out of it to walk. There was a cow dung in the patch, and I must needs try my activity by attempting to leap over it. I took a run, but unfortunately jumped short, and found myself just in the middle up to my knees. I waded through with some difficulty, and one of the footmen wiped me as clean as he could with his handkerchief; for I was filthily bemired, and my nurse confined me to my box till we returned home, where the Queen was soon informed of what had passed and the footmen spread it about the Court, so that all the mirth, for some days, was at my expense.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Eighteenth-century tennis balls, unlike the modern, were very hard.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Swoop. "Kite": a bird of prey.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Toilet table.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A sudden noise. "*Jet d'eau* at Versailles": this fountain rose over forty feet in the air.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An ornamental covering for the front and upper part of the body. "Officiously": kindly, dutifully. "Corking-pin": a pin of the largest size.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Not feeling well.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 6. *Several contrivances of the Author to please the King and Queen. He shows his skill in music. The King inquires into the state of Europe, which the Author relates to him. The King's observations thereon.*

I used to attend the King's levee once or twice a week, and had often seen him under the barber's hand, which indeed was at first very terrible to behold. For the razor was almost twice as long as an ordinary scythe. His Majesty, according to the custom of the country, was only shaved twice a week. I once prevailed on the barber to give me some of the suds or lather, out of which I picked forty or fifty of the strongest stumps of hair. I then took a piece of fine wood, and cut it like the back of a comb, making several holes in it at equal distance with as small a needle as I could get from Glumdalclitch. I fixed in the stumps so artificially,<sup>3</sup> scraping and sloping them with my knife towards the points, that I made a very tolerable comb; which was a seasonable supply, my own being so much broken in the teeth that it was almost useless; neither did I know any artist in that country so nice and exact as would undertake to make me another.

And this puts me in mind of an amusement wherein I spent many of my leisure hours. I desired the Queen's woman to save for me the combings of her Majesty's hair, whereof in time I got a good quantity; and consulting with my friend the cabinetmaker, who had received general orders to do little jobs for me, I directed him to make two chair frames, no larger than those I had in my box, and then to bore little holes with a fine awl round those parts where I designed the backs and seats; through these holes I wove the strongest hairs I could pick out, just after the manner of cane chairs in England. When they were finished, I made a present of them to her Majesty, who kept them in her cabinet, and used to show them for curiosities, as indeed they were the wonder of every one that beheld them. The Queen would have made me sit upon one of these chairs, but I absolutely refused to obey her, protesting I would rather die a thousand deaths than place a dishonorable part of my



body on those precious hairs that once adorned her Majesty's head. Of these hairs (as I had always a mechanical genius) I likewise made a neat little purse above five foot long, with her Majesty's name deciphered in gold letters, which I gave to Glumdalclitch by the Queen's consent. To say the truth, it was more for show than use, being not of strength to bear the weight of the larger coins; and therefore she kept nothing in it but some little toys<sup>4</sup> that girls are fond of.

The King, who delighted in music, had frequent consorts<sup>5</sup> at court, to which I was sometimes carried, and set in my box on a table to hear them; but the noise was so great that I could hardly distinguish the tunes. I am confident that all the drums and trumpets of a royal army, beating and sounding together just at your ears, could not equal it. My practice was to have my box removed from the places where the performers sat, as far as I could, then to shut the doors and windows of it, and draw the window curtains, after which I found their music not disagreeable.

I had learned in my youth to play a little upon the spinet. Glumdalclitch kept one in her chamber, and a master attended twice a week to teach her: I call it a spinet, because it somewhat resembled that instrument, and was played upon in the same manner. A fancy came into my head that I would entertain the King and Queen with an English tune upon this instrument. But this appeared extremely difficult: for the spinet was near sixty foot long, each key being almost a foot wide; so that, with my arms extended, I could not reach to above five keys, and to press them down required a good smart stroke with my fist, which would be too great a labor and to no purpose. The method I contrived was this: I prepared two round sticks about the bigness of common cudgels; they were thicker at one end than the other, and I covered the thicker ends with a piece of a mouse's skin, that by rapping on them I might neither damage the tops of the keys, nor interrupt the sound. Before the spinet a bench was placed, about four foot below the keys, and I was put upon the bench. I ran sideling upon it that way and this, as fast as I could, banging the proper keys with my

two sticks; and made a shift to play a jig, to the great satisfaction of both their Majesties: but it was the most violent exercise I ever underwent, and yet I could not strike above sixteen keys, nor, consequently, play the bass and treble together, as other artists do; which was a great disadvantage to my performance.

The King, who, as I before observed, was a prince of excellent understanding, would frequently order that I should be brought in my box and set upon the table in his closet. He would then command me to bring one of my chairs out of the box, and sit down within three yards distance upon the top of the cabinet, which brought me almost to a level with his face. In this manner I had several conversations with him. I one day took the freedom to tell his Majesty that the contempt he discovered towards Europe, and the rest of the world, did not seem answerable to those excellent qualities of mind that he was master of. That reason did not extend itself with the bulk of the body: on the contrary, we observed in our country that the tallest persons were usually least provided with it. That among other animals, bees and ants had the reputation of more industry, art, and sagacity than many of the larger kinds; and that, as inconsiderable as he took me to be, I hoped I might live to do his Majesty some signal service. The King heard me with attention, and began to conceive a much better opinion of me than he had before. He desired I would give him as exact an account of the government of England as I possibly could; because, as fond as princes commonly are of their own customs (for so he conjectured of other monarchs, by my former discourses), he should be glad to hear of anything that might deserve imitation.

Imagine with thyself, courteous reader, how often I then wished for the tongue of Demosthenes or Cicero,<sup>6</sup> that might have enabled me to celebrate the praise of my own dear native country in a style equal to its merits and felicity.

I began my discourse by informing his Majesty that our dominions consisted of two islands, which composed three mighty kingdoms under one sovereign, beside our plantations in America. I dwelt long upon the fertility of our soil, and the temperature<sup>7</sup> of our

climate. I then spoke at large upon the constitution of an English Parliament, partly made up of an illustrious body called the House of Peers,<sup>8</sup> persons of the noblest blood, and of the most ancient and ample patrimonies. I described that extraordinary care always taken of their education in arts and arms, to qualify them for being counselors born to the king and kingdom; to have a share in the legislature, to be members of the highest Court of Judicature, from whence there could be no appeal; and to be champions always ready for the defense of their prince and country, by their valor, conduct, and fidelity. That these were the ornament and bulwark of the kingdom, worthy followers of their most renowned ancestors, whose honor had been the reward of their virtue, from which their posterity were never once known to degenerate. To these were joined several holy persons, as part of that assembly, under the title of Bishops, whose peculiar business it is to take care of religion, and of those who instruct the people therein. These were searched and sought out through the whole nation, by the prince and his wisest counselors, among such of the priesthood as were most deservedly distinguished by the sanctity of their lives and the depth of their erudition, who were indeed the spiritual fathers of the clergy and the people.

That the other part of the Parliament consisted of an assembly called the House of Commons, who were all principal gentlemen, freely picked and culled out by the people themselves, for their great abilities and love of their country, to represent the wisdom of the whole nation. And these two bodies make up the most august assembly in Europe, to whom, in conjunction with the prince, the whole legislature is committed.

I then descended to the Courts of Justice, over which the Judges, those venerable sages and interpreters of the law, presided, for determining the disputed rights and properties of men, as well as for the punishment of vice, and protection of innocence. I mentioned the prudent management of our treasury, the valor and achievements of our forces by sea and land. I computed the number of our people, by reckoning how many millions there might be of

each religious sect, or political party among us. I did not omit even our sports and pastimes, or any other particular which I thought might redound to the honor of my country. And I finished all with a brief historical account of affairs and events in England for about an hundred years past.

This conversation was not ended under five audiences, each of several hours, and the King heard the whole with great attention, frequently taking notes of what I spoke, as well as memorandums of several questions he intended to ask me.

When I had put an end to these long discourses, his Majesty in a sixth audience consulting his notes, proposed many doubts, queries, and objections, upon every article. He asked what methods were used to cultivate the minds and bodies of our young nobility, and in what kind of business they commonly spent the first and teachable part of their lives. What course was taken to supply that assembly when any noble family became extinct. What qualifications were necessary in those who were to be created new lords. Whether the humor<sup>9</sup> of the prince, a sum of money to a Court lady or a prime minister, or a design of strengthening a party opposite to the public interest, ever happened to be motives in those advancements. What share of knowledge these lords had in the laws of their country, and how they came by it, so as to enable them to decide the properties of their fellow subjects in the last resort. Whether they were always so free from avarice, partialities, or want that a bribe or some other sinister view could have no place among them. Whether those holy lords I spoke of were constantly promoted to that rank upon account of their knowledge in religious matters, and the sanctity of their lives; had never been compliers with the times while they were common priests, or slavish prostitute chaplains to some nobleman, whose opinions they continued servilely to follow after they were admitted into that assembly.

He then desired to know what arts were practiced in electing those whom I called Commoners. Whether a stranger with a strong purse might not influence the vulgar voters to choose him before their own landlord or the most considerable gentleman in the

neighborhood. How it came to pass that people were so violently bent upon getting into this assembly, which I allowed to be a great trouble and expense, often to the ruin of their families, without any salary or pension: because this appeared such an exalted strain of virtue and public spirit that his Majesty seemed to doubt it might possibly not be always sincere; and he desired to know whether such zealous gentlemen could have any views of refunding themselves for the charges and trouble they were at, by sacrificing the public good to the designs of a weak and vicious prince in conjunction with a corrupted ministry. He multiplied his questions, and sifted me thoroughly upon every part of this head, proposing numberless inquiries and objections, which I think it not prudent or convenient to repeat.

Upon what I said in relation to our Courts of Justice, his Majesty desired to be satisfied in several points: and this I was the better able to do, having been formerly almost ruined by a long suit in chancery, which was decreed for me with costs. He asked what time was usually spent in determining between right and wrong, and what degree of expense. Whether advocates and orators had liberty to plead in causes manifestly known to be unjust, vexatious, or oppressive. Whether party in religion or politics were observed to be of any weight in the scale of justice. Whether those pleading orators were persons educated in the general knowledge of equity, or only in provincial, national, and other local customs. Whether they or their judges had any part in penning those laws which they assumed the liberty of interpreting and glossing upon at their pleasure. Whether they had ever at different times pleaded for and against the same cause, and cited precedents to prove contrary opinions. Whether they were a rich or a poor corporation. Whether they received any pecuniary reward for pleading or delivering their opinions. And particularly whether they were ever admitted as members in the lower senate.

He fell next upon the management of our treasury, and said he thought my memory had failed me, because I computed our taxes at about five or six millions a year, and when I came to mention the

issues,<sup>1</sup> he found they sometimes amounted to more than double, for the notes he had taken were very particular in this point; because he hoped, as he told me, that the knowledge of our conduct might be useful to him, and he could not be deceived in his calculations. But if what I told him were true, he was still at a loss how a kingdom could run out of its estate like a private person. He asked me, who were our creditors? and where we should find money to pay them? He wondered to hear me talk of such chargeable and extensive wars; that certainly we must be a quarrelsome people, or live among very bad neighbors, and that our generals must needs be richer than our kings.<sup>2</sup> He asked what business we had out of our own islands, unless upon the score of trade or treaty or to defend the coasts with our fleet. Above all, he was amazed to hear me talk of a mercenary standing army<sup>3</sup> in the midst of peace, and among a free people. He said if we were governed by our own consent in the persons of our representatives, he could not imagine of whom we were afraid, or against whom we were to fight; and would hear my opinion whether a private man's house might not better be defended by himself, his children, and family, than by half a dozen rascals picked up at a venture<sup>4</sup> in the streets for small wages, who might get an hundred times more by cutting their throats.

He laughed at my odd kind of arithmetic (as he was pleased to call it) in reckoning the numbers of our people by a computation drawn from the several sects among us in religion and politics. He said he knew no reason why those who entertain opinions prejudicial to the public should be obliged to change, or should not be obliged to conceal them. And as it was tyranny in any government to require the first, so it was weakness not to enforce the second: for a man may be allowed to keep poisons in his closet, but not to vend them about for cordials.<sup>5</sup>

He observed that among the diversions of our nobility and gentry I had mentioned gaming. He desired to know at what age this entertainment was usually taken up, and when it was laid down; how much of their time it employed; whether it ever went so high as to affect their fortunes; whether mean, vicious people, by their

dexterity in that art, might not arrive at great riches, and sometimes keep our very nobles in dependence, as well as habituate them to vile companions, wholly take them from the improvement of their minds, and force them, by the losses they received, to learn and practice that infamous dexterity upon others.

He was perfectly astonished with the historical account I gave him of our affairs during the last century, protesting it was only an heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, or ambition could produce.

His Majesty in another audience was at the pains to recapitulate the sum of all I had spoken; compared the questions he made with the answers I had given; then taking me into his hands, and stroking me gently, delivered himself in these words, which I shall never forget, nor the manner he spoke them in. "My little friend Grildrig, you have made a most admirable panegyric upon your country. You have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness, and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator. That laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose interests and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them. I observe among you some lines of an institution which in its original might have been tolerable; but these half erased, and the rest wholly blurred and blotted by corruptions. It doth not appear from all you have said how any one virtue is required towards the procurement of any one station among you; much less that men are ennobled on account of their virtue, that priests are advanced for their piety or learning, soldiers for their conduct or valor, judges for their integrity, senators for the love of their country, or counselors for their wisdom. As for yourself," continued the King, "who have spent the greatest part of your life in traveling, I am well disposed to hope you may hitherto have escaped many vices of your country. But by what I have gathered from your own relation, and the answers I have with much pains wringed and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude the bulk

of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.”

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Skillfully.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Trifles.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Concerts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Great orators of Athens and Rome, respectively.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Temperateness.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The House of Lords. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Whim.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Expenditures.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to the enormous fortune gained by the Duke of Marlborough, formerly captain-general of the army, whom Swift detested.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Since the declaration of the Bill of Rights (1689), a standing army without authorization by Parliament had been illegal. Swift and the Tories in general were vigilant in their opposition to such an army.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By chance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Medicines to stimulate the heart, or, equally commonly, liqueurs.[Return to reference 5](#)



CHAPTER 7. *The Author's love of his country. He makes a proposal of much advantage to the King; which is rejected. The King's great ignorance in politics. The learning of that country very imperfect and confined. Their laws, and military affairs, and parties in the State.*

Nothing but an extreme love of truth could have hindered me from concealing this part of my story. It was in vain to discover my resentments, which were always turned into ridicule: and I was forced to rest with patience while my noble and most beloved country was so injuriously treated. I am heartily sorry as any of my readers can possibly be that such an occasion was given, but this prince happened to be so curious and inquisitive upon every particular that it could not consist either with gratitude or good manners to refuse giving him what satisfaction I was able. Yet thus much I may be allowed to say in my own vindication: that I artfully eluded many of his questions, and gave to every point a more favorable turn by many degrees than the strictness of truth would allow. For I have always borne that laudable partiality to my own country, which Dionysius Halicarnassensis<sup>6</sup> with so much justice recommends to an historian. I would hide the frailties and deformities of my political mother, and place her virtues and beauties in the most advantageous light. This was my sincere endeavor in those many discourses I had with that mighty monarch, although it unfortunately failed of success.

But great allowances should be given to a King who lives wholly secluded from the rest of the world, and must therefore be altogether unacquainted with the manners and customs that most prevail in other nations: the want of which knowledge will ever produce many *prejudices*, and a certain *narrowness of thinking*, from which we and the politer countries of Europe are wholly exempted. And it would be hard indeed if so remote a prince's notions of virtue and vice were to be offered as a standard for all mankind.

To confirm what I have now said, and further to show the miserable effects of a *confined education*, I shall here insert a passage which will hardly obtain belief. In hopes to ingratiate myself

farther into his Majesty's favor, I told him of an invention discovered between three and four hundred years ago, to make a certain powder, into an heap of which the smallest spark of fire falling would kindle the whole in a moment, although it were as big as a mountain, and make it all fly up in the air together, with a noise and agitation greater than thunder. That a proper quantity of this powder rammed into an hollow tube of brass or iron, according to its bigness, would drive a ball of iron or lead with such violence and speed as nothing was able to sustain its force. That the largest balls thus discharged would not only destroy whole ranks of an army at once, but batter the strongest walls to the ground; sink down ships with a thousand men in each, to the bottom of the sea; and, when linked together by a chain, would cut through masts and rigging; divide hundreds of bodies in the middle, and lay all waste before them. That we often put this powder into large hollow balls of iron, and discharged them by an engine into some city we were besieging; which would rip up the pavements, tear the houses to pieces, burst and throw splinters on every side, dashing out the brains of all who came near. That I knew the ingredients very well, which were cheap and common; I understood the manner of compounding them, and could direct his workmen how to make those tubes of a size proportionable to all other things in his Majesty's kingdom, and the largest need not be above two hundred foot long; twenty or thirty of which tubes, charged with the proper quantity of powder and balls, would batter down the walls of the strongest town in his dominions in a few hours; or destroy the whole metropolis, if ever it should pretend to dispute his absolute commands. This I humbly, offered to his Majesty as a small tribute of acknowledgement in return of so many marks that I had received of his royal favor and protection.

The King was struck with horror at the description I had given of those terrible engines and the proposal I had made. He was amazed how so impotent and groveling an insect as I (these were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and

desolation which I had painted as the common effects of those destructive machines; whereof he said some evil genius, enemy to mankind, must have been the first contriver. As for himself, he protested that although few things delighted him so much as new discoveries in art or in nature, yet he would rather lose half his kingdom than be privy to such a secret, which he commanded me, as I valued my life, never to mention any more.

A strange effect of *narrow principles* and *short views!* that a prince possessed of every quality which procures veneration, love, and esteem; of strong parts, great wisdom, and profound learning; endued with admirable talents for government, and almost adored by his subjects; should from a *nice, unnecessary scruple*, whereof in Europe we can have no conception, let slip an opportunity put into his hands that would have made him absolute master of the lives, the liberties, and the fortunes of his people. Neither do I say this with the least intention to detract from the many virtues of that excellent King, whose character I am sensible will on this account be very much lessened in the opinion of an English reader: but I take this defect among them to have risen from their ignorance; they not having hitherto reduced politics into a science, as the more acute wits of Europe have done. For I remember very well, in a discourse one day with the King, when I happened to say there were several thousand books among us written upon the art of government, it gave him (directly contrary to my intention) a very mean opinion of our understandings. He professed both to abominate and despise all *mystery, refinement*, and *intrigue*, either in a prince or a minister. He could not tell what I meant by *secrets of state*, where an enemy or some rival nation were not in the case. He confined the knowledge of governing within very *narrow bounds*: to common sense and reason, to justice and lenity, to the speedy determination of civil and criminal causes, with some other obvious topics which are not worth considering. And he gave it for his opinion that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before would deserve better of

mankind and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians<sup>7</sup> put together.

The learning of this people is very defective, consisting only in morality, history, poetry, and mathematics; wherein they must be allowed to excel. But the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in life, to the improvement of agriculture and all mechanical arts; so that among us it would be little esteemed. And as to ideas, entities, abstractions, and transcendentals,<sup>8</sup> I could never drive the least conception into their heads.

No law of that country must exceed in words the number of letters in their alphabet, which consists only in two and twenty. But indeed few of them extend even to that length. They are expressed in the most plain and simple terms, wherein those people are not mercurial enough to discover above one interpretation. And to write a comment upon any law is a capital crime. As to the decision of civil causes, or proceedings against criminals, their precedents are so few that they have little reason to boast of any extraordinary skill in either.

They have had the art of printing as well as the Chinese, time out of mind. But their libraries are not very large; for that of the King's, which is reckoned the biggest, doth not amount to above a thousand volumes, placed in a gallery of twelve hundred foot long, from whence I had liberty to borrow what books I pleased. The Queen's joiner had contrived in one of the Glumdalclitch's rooms a kind of wooden machine five and twenty foot high, formed like a standing ladder; the steps were each fifty foot long. It was indeed a movable pair of stairs, the lowest end placed at ten foot distance from the wall of the chamber. The book I had a mind to read was put up leaning against the wall. I first mounted to the upper step of the ladder, and turning my face towards the book began at the top of the page, and so walking to the right and left about eight or ten paces according to the length of the lines, till I had gotten a little below the level of mine eyes, and then descending gradually till I came to the bottom: after which I mounted again, and began the other page in the same manner, and so turned over the leaf, which I

could easily do with both my hands, for it was as thick and stiff as a pasteboard, and in the largest folios not above eighteen or twenty foot long.

Their style is clear, masculine, and smooth, but not florid; for they avoid nothing more than multiplying unnecessary words or using various expressions. I have perused many of their books, especially those in history and morality. Among the rest, I was much diverted with a little old treatise, which always lay in Glumdalclitch's bedchamber, and belonged to her governess, a grave elderly gentlewoman, who dealt in writings of morality and devotion. The book treats of the weakness of human kind, and is in little esteem, except among the women and the vulgar. However, I was curious to see what an author of that country could say upon such a subject. This writer went through all the usual topics of European moralists: showing how diminutive, contemptible, and helpless an animal was man in his own nature; how unable to defend himself from the inclemencies of the air, or the fury of wild beasts; how much he was excelled by one creature in strength, by another in speed, by a third in foresight, by a fourth in industry. He added that nature was degenerated in these latter declining ages of the world, and could now produce only small abortive births in comparison of those in ancient times. He said it was very reasonable to think, not only that the species of men were originally much larger, but also that there must have been giants in former ages; which, as it is asserted by history and tradition, so it hath been confirmed by huge bones and skulls casually dug up in several parts of the kingdom, far exceeding the common dwindled race of man in our days. He argued that the very laws of nature absolutely required we should have been made in the beginning of a size more large and robust, not so liable to destruction from every little accident of a tile falling from a house, or a stone cast from the hand of a boy, or of being drowned in a little brook. From this way of reasoning, the author drew several moral applications useful in the conduct of life, but needless here to repeat. For my own part, I could not avoid reflecting how universally this talent was spread, of drawing lectures in morality, or indeed

rather matter of discontent and repining, from the quarrels we raise with nature. And I believe, upon a strict inquiry, those quarrels might be shown as ill grounded among us as they are among that people.

As to their military affairs, they boast that the King's army consists of an hundred and seventy-six thousand foot and thirty-two thousand horse: if that may be called an army which is made up of tradesmen in the several cities, and farmers in the country, whose commanders are only the nobility and gentry, without pay or reward. They are indeed perfect enough in their exercises, and under very good discipline, wherein I saw no great merit; for how should it be otherwise, where every farmer is under the command of his own landlord, and every citizen under that of the principal men in his own city, chosen after the manner of Venice by ballot?

I have often seen the militia of Lorbrulgrud drawn out to exercise in a great field near the city, of twenty miles square. They were in all not above twenty-five thousand foot, and six thousand horse; but it was impossible for me to compute their number, considering the space of ground they took up. A cavalier mounted on a large steed might be about an hundred foot high. I have seen this whole body of horse, upon a word of command, draw their swords at once, and brandish them in the air. Imagination can figure nothing so grand, so surprising, and so astonishing. It looked as if ten thousand flashes of lightning were darting at the same time from every quarter of the sky.

I was curious to know how this prince, to whose dominions there is no access from any other country, came to think of armies, or to teach his people the practice of military discipline. But I was soon informed, both by conversation and reading their histories. For in the course of many ages they have been troubled with the same disease to which the whole race of mankind is subject: the nobility often contending for power, the people for liberty, and the King for absolute dominion. All which, however happily tempered by the laws of the kingdom, have been sometimes violated by each of the three parties, and have more than once occasioned civil wars, the last whereof was happily put an end to by this prince's grandfather in a

general composition;<sup>9</sup> and the militia, then settled with common consent, hath been ever since kept in the strictest duty.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: A Greek rhetorician and historian, who flourished ca. 25 B.C.E. His history of Rome was written to reconcile the Greeks to their Roman masters.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Swift means something like our modern political scientists or theorists.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Swift's time, *transcendental* was practically synonymous with *metaphysical*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A political settlement based on general agreement of all parties.[Return to reference 9](#)

CHAPTER 8. *The King and Queen make a progress to the frontiers. The Author attends them. The manner in which he leaves the country very particularly related. He returns to England.*

I had always a strong impulse that I should some time recover my liberty, though it were impossible to conjecture by what means, or to form any project with the least hope of succeeding. The ship in which I sailed was the first ever known to be driven within sight of that coast; and the King had given strict orders that if at any time another appeared, it should be taken ashore, and with all its crew and passengers brought in a tumbrel<sup>1</sup> to Lorbrulgrud. He was strongly bent to get me a woman of my own size, by whom I might propagate the breed: but I think I should rather have died than undergone the disgrace of leaving a posterity to be kept in cages like tame canary birds, and perhaps in time sold about the kingdom to persons of quality for curiosities. I was indeed treated with much kindness: I was the favorite of a great King and Queen, and the delight of the whole Court, but it was upon such a foot as ill became the dignity of human kind. I could never forget those domestic pledges I had left behind me. I wanted to be among people with whom I could converse upon even terms, and walk about the streets and fields without fear of being trod to death like a frog or a young puppy. But my deliverance came sooner than I expected, and in a manner not very common; the whole story and circumstances of which I shall faithfully relate.

I had now been two years in this country; and about the beginning of the third, Glumdalclitch and I attended the King and Queen in progress to the south coast of the kingdom. I was carried as usual in my traveling box, which, as I have already described, was a very convenient closet of twelve foot wide. I had ordered a hammock to be fixed by silken ropes from the four corners at the top, to break the jolts when a servant carried me before him on horseback, as I sometimes desired; and would often sleep in my hammock while we were upon the road. On the roof of my closet, set not directly over the middle of the hammock, I ordered the joiner



to cut out a hole of a foot square to give me air in hot weather as I slept, which hole I shut at pleasure with a board that drew backwards and forwards through a groove.

When we came to our journey's end, the King thought proper to pass a few days at a palace he hath near Flanflasnic, a city within eighteen English miles of the seaside. Glumdalclitch and I were much fatigued; I had gotten a small cold, but the poor girl was so ill as to be confined to her chamber. I longed to see the ocean, which must be the only scene of my escape, if ever it should happen. I pretended to be worse than I really was, and desired leave to take the fresh air of the sea with a page whom I was very fond of, and who had sometimes been trusted with me. I shall never forget with what unwillingness Glumdalclitch consented, nor the strict charge she gave the page to be careful of me, bursting at the same time into a flood of tears, as if she had some foreboding of what was to happen. The boy took me out in my box about half an hour's walk from the palace, towards the rocks on the seashore. I ordered him to set me down, and lifting up one of my sashes, cast many a wistful melancholy look towards the sea. I found myself not very well, and told the page that I had a mind to take a nap in my hammock, which I hoped would do me good. I got in, and the boy shut the window close down, to keep out the cold. I soon fell asleep: and all I can conjecture is that while I slept, the page, thinking no danger could happen, went among the rocks to look for birds' eggs; having before observed him from my window searching about, and picking up one or two in the clefts. Be that as it will, I found myself suddenly awaked with a violent pull upon the ring which was fastened at the top of my box for the conveniency of carriage. I felt my box raised very high in the air, and then borne forward with prodigious speed. The first jolt had like to have shaken me out of my hammock, but afterwards the motion was easy enough. I called out several times as loud as I could raise my voice, but all to no purpose. I looked towards my windows, and could see nothing but the clouds and sky. I heard a noise just over my head like the clapping of wings, and then began to perceive the woeful condition I was in; that some

eagle had got the ring of my box in his beak, with an intent to let it fall on a rock, like a tortoise in a shell, and then pick out my body and devour it. For the sagacity and smell of this bird enable him to discover his quarry at a great distance, although better concealed than I could be within a two-inch board.

In a little time I observed the noise and flutter of wings to increase very fast, and my box was tossed up and down like a signpost in a windy day. I heard several bangs or buffets, as I thought, given to the eagle (for such I am certain it must have been that held the ring of my box in his beak), and then all on a sudden felt myself falling perpendicularly down for above a minute, but with such incredible swiftness that I almost lost my breath. My fall was topped by a terrible squash, that sounded louder to mine ears than the cataract of Niagara; after which I was quite in the dark for another minute, and then my box began to rise so high that I could see light from the tops of my windows. I now perceived that I was fallen into the sea. My box, by the weight of my body, the goods that were in, and the broad plates of iron fixed for strength at the four corners of the top and bottom, floated above five foot deep in water. I did then and do now suppose that the eagle which flew away with my box was pursued by two or three others, and forced to let me drop while he was defending himself against the rest, who hoped to share in the prey. The plates of iron fastened at the bottom of the box (for those were the strongest) preserved the balance while it fell, and hindered it from being broken on the surface of the water. Every joint of it was well grooved, and the door did not move on hinges, but up and down like a sash; which kept my closet so tight that very little water came in. I got with much difficulty out of my hammock, having first ventured to draw back the slip-board on the roof already mentioned, contrived on purpose to let in air, for want of which I found myself almost stifled.

How often did I then wish myself with my dear Glumdalclitch, from whom one single hour had so far divided me! And I may say with truth that in the midst of my own misfortune, I could not forbear lamenting my poor nurse, the grief she would suffer for my

loss, the displeasure of the Queen, and the ruin of her fortune. Perhaps many travelers have not been under greater difficulties and distress than I was at this juncture, expecting every moment to see my box dashed in pieces, or at least upset by the first violent blast or a rising wave. A breach in one single pane of glass would have been immediate death, nor could anything have preserved the windows but the strong lattice wires placed on the outside against accidents in traveling. I saw the water ooze in at several crannies, although the leaks were not considerable, and I endeavored to stop them as well as I could. I was not able to lift up the roof of my closet, which otherwise I certainly should have done, and sat on the top of it, where I might at least preserve myself from being shut up, as I may call it, in the hold. Or, if I escaped these dangers for a day or two, what could I expect but a miserable death of cold and hunger! I was four hours under these circumstances, expecting and indeed wishing every moment to be my last.

I have already told the reader that there were two strong staples fixed upon that side of my box which had no window and into which the servant, who used to carry me on horseback, would put a leathern belt, and buckle it about his waist. Being in this disconsolate state, I heard, or at least thought I heard, some kind of grating noise on that side of my box where the staples were fixed; and soon after I began to fancy that the box was pulled or towed along in the sea; for I now and then felt a sort of tugging, which made the waves rise near the tops of my windows, leaving me almost in the dark. This gave me some faint hopes of relief, although I was not able to imagine how it could be brought about. I ventured to unscrew one of my chairs, which were always fastened to the floor; and having made a hard shift to screw it down again directly under the slipping-board that I had lately opened, I mounted on the chair, and putting my mouth as near as I could to the hole, I called for help in a loud voice, and in all the languages I understood. I then fastened my handkerchief to a stick I usually carried, and thrusting it up the hole, waved it several times in the air, that if any boat or ship

were near, the seamen might conjecture some unhappy mortal to be shut up in the box.

I found no effect from all I could do, but plainly perceived my closet to be moved along; and in the space of an hour or better, that side of the box where the staples were, and had no window, struck against something that was hard. I apprehended it to be a rock, and found myself tossed more than ever. I plainly heard a noise upon the cover of my closet, like that of a cable, and the grating of it as it passed through the ring. I then found myself hoisted up by degrees at least three foot higher than I was before. Whereupon I again thrust up my stick and handkerchief, calling for help till I was almost hoarse. In return to which, I heard a great shout repeated three times, giving me such transports of joy as are not to be conceived but by those who feel them. I now heard a trampling over my head, and somebody calling through the hole with a loud voice in the English tongue: "If there be anybody below, let them speak." I answered, I was an Englishman, drawn by ill fortune into the greatest calamity that ever any creature underwent, and begged, by all that was moving, to be delivered out of the dungeon I was in. The voice replied, I was safe, for my box was fastened to their ship; and the carpenter should immediately come and saw an hole in the cover, large enough to pull me out. I answered, that was needless and would take up too much time, for there was no more to be done but let one of the crew put his finger into the ring, and take the box out of the sea into the ship, and so into the captain's cabin. Some of them, upon hearing me talk so wildly, thought I was mad; others laughed; for indeed it never came into my head that I was now got among people of my own stature and strength. The carpenter came, and in a few minutes sawed a passage about four foot square; then let down a small ladder, upon which I mounted, and from thence was taken into the ship in a very weak condition.

The sailors were all in amazement, and asked me a thousand questions, which I had no inclination to answer. I was equally confounded at the sight of so many pygmies, for such I took them to be, after having so long accustomed my eyes to the monstrous

objects I had left. But the Captain, Mr. Thomas Wilcocks, an honest, worthy Shropshire man, observing I was ready to faint, took me into his cabin, gave me a cordial to comfort me, and made me turn in upon his own bed, advising me to take a little rest, of which I had great need. Before I went to sleep I gave him to understand that I had some valuable furniture in my box, too good to be lost, a fine hammock, an handsome field bed, two chairs, a table, and a cabinet; that my closet was hung on all sides, or rather quilted with silk and cotton; that if he would let one of the crew bring my closet into his cabin, I would open it before him and show him my goods. The Captain, hearing me utter these absurdities, concluded I was raving; however (I suppose to pacify me), he promised to give order as I desired, and going upon deck, sent some of his men down into my closet, from whence (as I afterwards found) they drew up all my goods and stripped off the quilting; but the chairs, cabinet, and bedstead, being screwed to the floor, were much damaged by the ignorance of the seamen, who tore them up by force. Then they knocked off some of the boards for the use of the ship; and when they had got all they had a mind for, let the hulk drop into the sea, which, by reason of many breaches made in the bottom and sides, sunk to rights.<sup>2</sup> And indeed I was glad not to have been a spectator of the havoc they made, because I am confident it would have sensibly touched me, by bringing former passages into my mind, which I had rather forget.

I slept some hours, but perpetually disturbed with dreams of the place I had left, and the dangers I had escaped. However, upon waking, I found myself much recovered. It was now about eight o'clock at night, and the Captain ordered supper immediately, thinking I had already fasted too long. He entertained me with great kindness, observing me not to look wildly, or talk inconsistently; and when we were left alone, desired I would give him a relation of my travels, and by what accident I came to be set adrift in that monstrous wooden chest. He said that about twelve o'clock at noon, as he was looking through his glass, he spied it at a distance, and thought it was a sail, which he had a mind to make,<sup>3</sup> being not

much out of his course, in hopes of buying some biscuit, his own beginning to fall short. That, upon coming nearer, and finding his error, he sent out his longboat to discover what I was; that his men came back in a fright, swearing they had seen a swimming house. That he laughed at their folly, and went himself in the boat, ordering his men to take a strong cable along with them. That the weather being calm, he rowed round me several times, observed my windows, and the wire lattices that defended them. That he discovered two staples upon one side, which was all of boards, without any passage for light. He then commanded his men to row up to that side, and fastening a cable to one of the staples, ordered his men to tow my chest (as he called it) towards the ship. When it was there, he gave directions to fasten another cable to the ring fixed in the cover, and to raise up my chest with pulleys, which all the sailors were not able to do above two or three foot. He said they saw my stick and handkerchief thrust out of the hole, and concluded that some unhappy man must be shut up in the cavity. I asked whether he or the crew had seen any prodigious birds in the air about the time he first discovered me. To which he answered that, discoursing this matter with the sailors while I was asleep, one of them said he had observed three eagles flying towards the north, but remarked nothing of their being larger than the usual size (which I suppose must be imputed to the great height they were at), and he could not guess the reason of my question. I then asked the Captain how far he reckoned we might be from land; he said, by the best computation he could make, we were at least an hundred leagues. I assured him that he must be mistaken by almost half; for I had not left the country from whence I came above two hours before I dropped into the sea. Whereupon he began again to think that my brain was disturbed, of which he gave me a hint, and advised me to go to bed in a cabin he had provided. I assured him I was well refreshed with his good entertainment and company, and as much in my senses as ever I was in my life. He then grew serious and desired to ask me freely whether I were not troubled in mind by the consciousness of some enormous crime, for which I was punished at the command of some prince, by exposing me in that

chest, as great criminals in other countries have been forced to sea in a leaky vessel without provisions; for although he should be sorry to have taken so ill<sup>4</sup> a man into his ship, yet he would engage his word to set me safe on shore in the first port where we arrived. He added that his suspicions were much increased by some very absurd speeches I had delivered at first to the sailors, and afterwards to himself, in relation to my closet or chest, as well as by my odd looks and behavior while I was at supper.

I begged his patience to hear me tell my story, which I faithfully did from the last time I left England to the moment he first discovered me. And as truth always forceth its way into rational minds, so this honest, worthy gentleman, who had some tincture of learning, and very good sense, was immediately convinced of my candor and veracity. But further to confirm all I had said, I entreated him to give order that my cabinet should be brought, of which I kept the key in my pocket (for he had already informed me how the seamen disposed of my closet). I opened it in his presence and showed him the small collection of rarities I made in the country from whence I had been so strangely delivered. There was the comb I had contrived out of the stumps of the King's beard, and another of the same materials, but fixed into a paring of her Majesty's thumbnail, which served for the back. There was a collection of needles and pins from a foot to half a yard long; four wasp-stings, like joiners' tacks; some combings of the Queen's hair; a gold ring which one day she made me a present of in a most obliging manner, taking it from her little finger, and throwing it over my head like a collar. I desired the Captain would please to accept this ring in return for his civilities, which he absolutely refused. I showed him a corn that I had cut off with my own hand from a Maid of Honor's toe; it was about the bigness of a Kentish pippin, and grown so hard that, when I returned to England, I got it hollowed into a cup and set in silver. Lastly, I desired him to see the breeches I had then on, which were made of a mouse's skin.

I could force nothing on him but a footman's tooth, which I observed him to examine with great curiosity, and found he had a

fancy for it. He received it with abundance of thanks, more than such a trifle could deserve. It was drawn by an unskillful surgeon in a mistake from one of Glumdalclitch's men, who was afflicted with the toothache; but it was as sound as any in his head. I got it cleaned, and put it into my cabinet. It was about a foot long, and four inches in diameter.

The Captain was very well satisfied with this plain relation I had given him, and said he hoped when we returned to England I would oblige the world by putting it in paper and making it public. My answer was that I thought we were already overstocked with books of travels; that nothing could now pass which was not extraordinary; wherein I doubted some authors less consulted truth than their own vanity or interest, or the diversion of ignorant readers. That my story could contain little besides common events, without those ornamental descriptions of strange plants, trees, birds, and other animals, or the barbarous customs and idolatry of savage people, with which most writers abound. However, I thanked him for his good opinion, and promised to take the matter into my thoughts.

He said he wondered at one thing very much, which was to hear me speak so loud, asking me whether the King or Queen of that country were thick of hearing. I told him it was what I had been used to for above two years past, and that I admired<sup>5</sup> as much at the voices of him and his men, who seemed to me only to whisper, and yet I could hear them well enough. But, when I spoke in that country, it was like a man talking in the street to another looking out from the top of a steeple, unless when I was placed on a table, or held in any person's hand. I told him I had likewise observed another thing: that when I first got into the ship, and the sailors stood all about me, I thought they were the most little contemptible creatures I had ever beheld. For indeed while I was in that prince's country, I could never endure to look in a glass after my eyes had been accustomed to such prodigious objects, because the comparison gave me so despicable a conceit<sup>6</sup> of myself. The Captain said that while we were at supper he observed me to look at everything with a sort of wonder, and that I often seemed hardly



able to contain my laughter; which he knew not well how to take, but imputed it to some disorder in my brain. I answered, it was very true; and I wondered how I could forbear, when I saw his dishes of the size of a silver threepence, a leg of pork hardly a mouthful, a cup not so big as a nutshell; and so I went on, describing the rest of his household stuff and provisions after the same manner. For, although the Queen had ordered a little equipage of all things necessary for me while I was in her service, yet my ideas were wholly taken up with what I saw on every side of me, and I winked at my own littleness, as people do at their own faults. The Captain understood my raillery very well, and merrily replied with the old English proverb, that he doubted<sup>7</sup> my eyes were bigger than my belly, for he did not observe my stomach so good, although I had fasted all day; and continuing in his mirth, protested he would have gladly given an hundred pounds to have seen my closet in the eagle's bill, and afterwards in its fall from so great an height into the sea; which would certainly have been a most astonishing object, worthy to have the description of it transmitted to future ages: and the comparison of Phaeton<sup>8</sup> was so obvious, that he could not forbear applying it, although I did not much admire the conceit.

The Captain having been at Tonquin,<sup>9</sup> was in his return to England driven northeastward to the latitude of 44 degrees, and of longitude 143. But meeting a trade wind two days after I came on board him, we sailed southward a long time, and coasting New Holland<sup>1</sup> kept our course west-southwest, and then south-southwest till we doubled the Cape of Good Hope. Our voyage was very prosperous, but I shall not trouble the reader with a journal of it. The Captain called in at one or two ports, and sent in his longboat for provisions and fresh water; but I never went out of the ship till we came into the Downs, which was on the third day of June, 1706, about nine months after my escape. I offered to leave my goods in security for payment of my freight; but the Captain protested he would not receive one farthing. We took kind leave of each other, and I made him promise he would come to see me at my house in

Redriff. I hired a horse and guide for five shillings, which I borrowed of the Captain.

As I was on the road, observing the littleness of the houses, the trees, the cattle, and the people, I began to think myself in Lilliput. I was afraid of trampling on every traveler I met, and often called aloud to have them stand out of the way, so that I had like to have gotten one or two broken heads for my impertinence.

When I came to my own house, for which I was forced to inquire, one of the servants opening the door, I bent down to go in (like a goose under a gate) for fear of striking my head. My wife ran out to embrace me, but I stooped lower than her knees, thinking she could otherwise never be able to reach my mouth. My daughter kneeled to ask my blessing, but I could not see her till she arose, having been so long used to stand with my head and eyes erect to above sixty foot; and then I went to take her up with one hand by the waist. I looked down upon the servants and one or two friends who were in the house, as if they had been pygmies and I a giant. I told my wife she had been too thrifty; for I found she had starved herself and her daughter to nothing. In short, I behaved myself so unaccountably that they were all of the Captain's opinion when he first saw me, and concluded I had lost my wits. This I mention as an instance of the great power of habit and prejudice.

In a little time I and my family and friends came to a right understanding; but my wife protested I should never go to sea any more, although my evil destiny so ordered that she had not power to hinder me; as the reader may know hereafter. In the meantime I here conclude the second part of my unfortunate voyages.

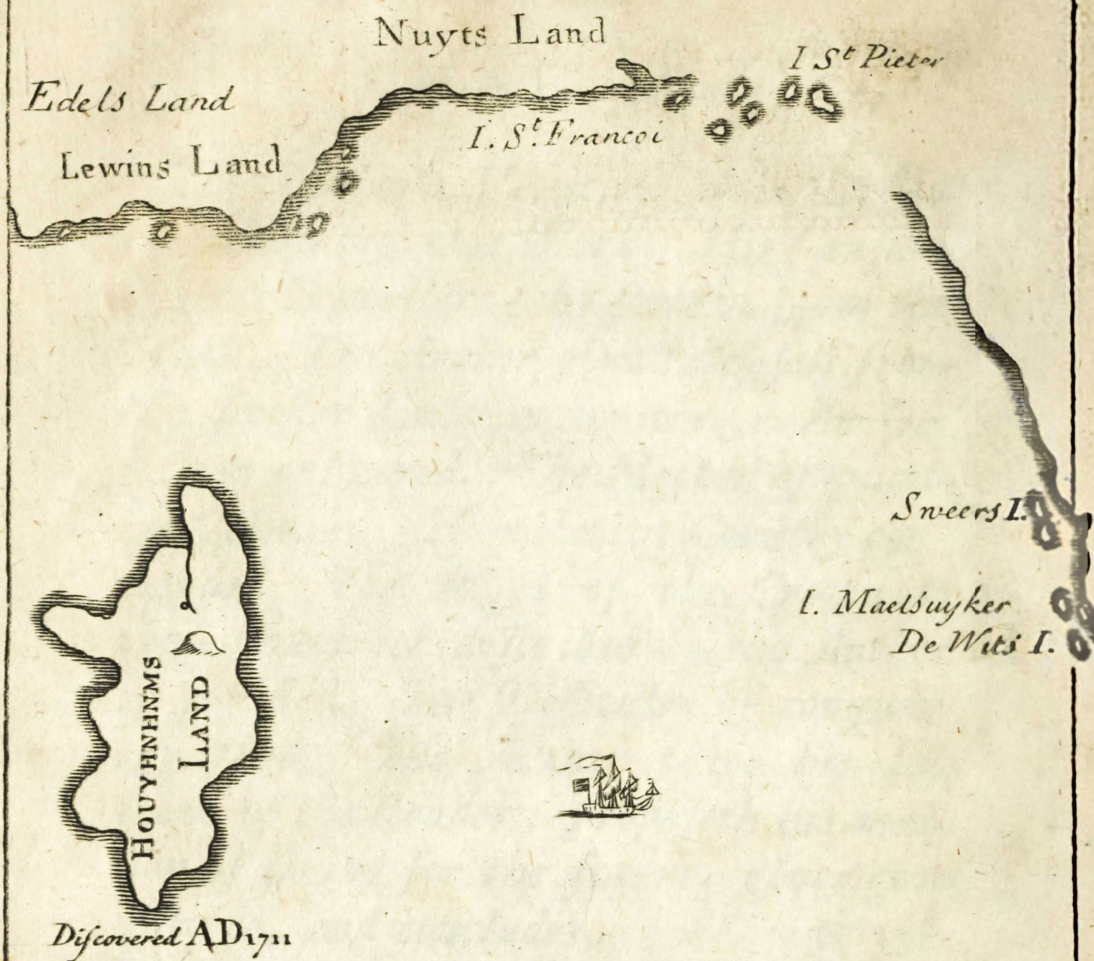
\* \* \* [2](#)

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A farm wagon. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: At once, altogether. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Overtake. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Evil.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wondered.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Notion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Feared.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Son of Helios, the sun god, whose unsuccessful attempt to drive his father's chariot led to his death, when he lost control and was hurled by Zeus from the sky, falling into the river Eridanus, where he drowned.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tonkin, now in Vietnam.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Australia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Part 3, Gulliver travels to many mostly fictional lands (though he does end up in Japan). Most notably he visits Laputa and the Academy of Lagado, which satirize useless abstract reasoning and the pointlessness of much modern science.[Return to reference 2](#)

***Part 4. A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms***<sup>3</sup>



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## Endnotes

- Note 3: Pronounced *hwin-ims*. The word suggests the neigh characteristic of a horse. [Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 1. *The Author sets out as Captain of a ship. His men conspire against him, confine him a long time to his cabin, set him on shore in an unknown land. He travels up into the country. The Yahoos, a strange sort of animal, described. The Author meets two Houyhnhnms.*

I continued at home with my wife and children about five months in a very happy condition, if I could have learned the lesson of knowing when I was well. I left my poor wife big with child, and accepted an advantageous offer made me to be Captain of the *Adventure*, a stout merchantman of 350 tons; for I understood navigation well, and being grown weary of a surgeon's employment at sea, which however I could exercise upon occasion, I took a skillful young man of that calling, one Robert Purefoy, into my ship. We set sail from Portsmouth upon the 7th day of September, 1710; on the 14th we met with Captain Pocock of Bristol, at Tenariff, who was going to the Bay of Campeachy<sup>4</sup> to cut logwood. On the 16th he was parted from us by a storm; I heard since my return that his ship foundered and none escaped, but one cabin boy. He was an honest man and a good sailor, but a little too positive in his own opinions, which was the cause of his destruction, as it hath been of several others. For if he had followed my advice, he might at this time have been safe at home with his family as well as myself.

I had several men died in my ship of calentures,<sup>5</sup> so that I was forced to get recruits out of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands, where I touched by the direction of the merchants who employed me; which I had soon too much cause to repent, for I found afterwards that most of them had been buccaneers. I had fifty hands on board; and my orders were that I should trade with the Indians in the South Sea, and make what discoveries I could. These rogues whom I had picked up debauched my other men, and they all formed a conspiracy to seize the ship and secure me; which they did one morning, rushing into my cabin, and binding me hand and foot, threatening to throw me overboard, if I offered to stir. I told them I was their prisoner, and would submit. This they made me

swear to do, and then unbound me, only fastening one of my legs with a chain near my bed, and placed a sentry at my door with his piece charged, who was commanded to shoot me dead if I attempted my liberty. They sent me down victuals and drink, and took the government of the ship to themselves. Their design was to turn pirates and plunder the Spaniards, which they could not do, till they got more men. But first they resolved to sell the goods in the ship, and then go to Madagascar for recruits, several among them having died since my confinement. They sailed many weeks, and traded with the Indians; but I knew not what course they took, being kept close prisoner in my cabin, and expecting nothing less than to be murdered, as they often threatened me.

Upon the 9th day of May, 1711, one James Welch came down to my cabin; and said he had orders from the Captain to set me ashore. I expostulated with him, but in vain; neither would he so much as tell me who their new Captain was. They forced me into the longboat, letting me put on my best suit of clothes, which were as good as new, and a small bundle of linen, but no arms except my hanger; and they were so civil as not to search my pockets, into which I conveyed what money I had, with some other little necessities. They rowed about a league, and then set me down on a strand. I desired them to tell me what country it was; they all swore, they knew no more than myself, but said that the Captain (as they called him) was resolved, after they had sold the lading, to get rid of me in the first place where they discovered land. They pushed off immediately, advising me to make haste, for fear of being overtaken by the tide, and bade me farewell.

In this desolate condition I advanced forward, and soon got upon firm ground, where I sat down on a bank to rest myself, and consider what I had best to do. When I was a little refreshed, I went up into the country, resolving to deliver myself to the first savages I should meet, and purchase my life from them by some bracelets, glass rings, and other toys, which sailors usually provide themselves with in those voyages, and whereof I had some about me. The land was divided by long rows of trees, not regularly planted, but



naturally growing; there was great plenty of grass, and several fields of oats. I walked very circumspectly for fear of being surprised, or suddenly shot with an arrow from behind, or on either side. I fell into a beaten road, where I saw many tracks of human feet, and some of cows, but most of horses. At last I beheld several animals in a field, and one or two of the same kind sitting in trees. Their shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little discomposed me, so that I lay down behind a thicket to observe them better. Some of them coming forward near the place where I lay, gave me an opportunity of distinctly marking their form. Their heads and breasts were covered with a thick hair, some frizzled and others lank; they had beards like goats, and a long ridge of hair down their backs, and the fore parts of their legs and feet; but the rest of their bodies were bare, so that I might see their skins, which were of a brown buff color. They had no tails, nor any hair at all on their buttocks, except about the anus; which, I presume Nature had placed there to defend them as they sat on the ground; for this posture they used, as well as lying down, and often stood on their hind feet. They climbed high trees, as nimbly as a squirrel, for they had strong extended claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points, and hooked. They would often spring, and bound, and leap with prodigious agility. The females were not so large as the males; they had long lank hair on their heads, and only a sort of down on the rest of their bodies, except about the anus, and pudenda. Their dugs hung between their forefeet, and often reached almost to the ground as they walked. The hair of both sexes was of several colors, brown, red, black, and yellow. Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy. So that thinking I had seen enough, full of contempt and aversion, I got up and pursued the beaten road, hoping it might direct me to the cabin of some Indian. I had not gone far when I met one of these creatures full in my way, and coming up directly to me. The ugly monster, when he saw me, distorted several ways every feature of his visage, and stared as at an object he had never seen before; then approaching nearer, lifted up his forepaw, whether out of curiosity or mischief, I could not tell;

but I drew my hanger, and gave him a good blow with the flat side of it; for I durst not strike him with the edge, fearing the inhabitants might be provoked against me, if they should come to know that I had killed or maimed any of their cattle. When the beast felt the smart, he drew back, and roared so loud, that a herd of at least forty came flocking about me from the near field, howling and making odious faces; but I ran to the body of a tree, and leaning my back against it, kept them off, by waving my hanger. Several of this cursed brood getting hold of the branches behind, leaped up into the tree, from whence they began to discharge their excrements on my head; however, I escaped pretty well, by sticking close to the stem of the tree, but was almost stifled with the filth, which fell about me on every side.

In the midst of this distress, I observed them all to run away on a sudden as fast as they could; at which I ventured to leave the tree, and pursue the road, wondering what it was that could put them into this fright. But looking on my left hand, I saw a horse walking softly in the field; which my persecutors having sooner discovered, was the cause of their flight. The horse started a little when he came near me, but soon recovering himself, looked full in my face with manifest tokens of wonder; he viewed my hands and feet, walking round me several times. I would have pursued my journey, but he placed himself directly in the way, yet looking with a very mild aspect, never offering the least violence. We stood gazing at each other for some time; at last I took the boldness, to reach my hand towards his neck, with a design to stroke it; using the common style and whistle of jockies when they are going to handle a strange horse. But this animal, seeming to receive my civilities with disdain, shook his head, and bent his brows, softly raising up his left forefoot to remove my hand. Then he neighed three or four times, but in so different a cadence, that I almost began to think he was speaking to himself in some language of his own.

While he and I were thus employed, another horse came up; who applying himself to the first in a very formal manner, they gently struck each other's right hoof before, neighing several times

by turns, and varying the sound, which seemed to be almost articulate. They went some paces off, as if it were to confer together, walking side by side, backward and forward, like persons deliberating upon some affair of weight; but often turning their eyes towards me, as it were to watch that I might not escape. I was amazed to see such actions and behavior in brute beasts; and concluded with myself that if the inhabitants of this country were endued with a proportionable degree of reason, they must needs be the wisest people upon earth. This thought gave me so much comfort, that I resolved to go forward until I could discover some house or village, or meet with any of the natives, leaving the two horses to discourse together as they pleased. But the first, who was a dapple grey, observing me to steal off, neighed after me in so expressive a tone that I fancied myself to understand what he meant; whereupon I turned back, and came near him, to expect his farther commands; but concealing my fear as much as I could; for I began to be in some pain, how this adventure might terminate; and the reader will easily believe I did not much like my present situation.

The two horses came up close to me, looking with great earnestness upon my face and hands. The grey steed rubbed my hat all round with his right fore hoof, and discomposed it so much that I was forced to adjust it better, by taking it off, and settling it again; whereat both he and his companion (who was a brown bay) appeared to be much surprised; the latter felt the lappet of my coat, and finding it to hang loose about me, they both looked with new signs of wonder. He stroked my right hand, seeming to admire the softness, and color; but he squeezed it so hard between his hoof and his pastern, that I was forced to roar; after which they both touched me with all possible tenderness. They were under great perplexity about my shoes and stockings, which they felt very often, neighing to each other, and using various gestures, not unlike those of a philosopher, when he would attempt to solve some new and difficult phenomenon.

Upon the whole, the behavior of these animals was so orderly and rational, so acute and judicious, that I at last concluded, they must needs be magicians, who had thus metamorphosed themselves upon some design; and seeing a stranger in the way, were resolved to divert themselves with him; or perhaps were really amazed at the sight of a man so very different in habit, feature, and complexion from those who might probably live in so remote a climate. Upon the strength of this reasoning, I ventured to address them in the following manner: "Gentlemen, if you be conjurers, as I have good cause to believe, you can understand any language; therefore I make bold to let your worships know that I am a poor distressed Englishman, driven by his misfortunes upon your coast; and I entreat one of you, to let me ride upon his back, as if he were a real horse, to some house or village, where I can be relieved. In return of which favor, I will make you a present of this knife and bracelet" (taking them out of my pocket). The two creatures stood silent while I spoke, seeming to listen with great attention; and when I had ended, they neighed frequently towards each other, as if they were engaged in serious conversation. I plainly observed, that their language expressed the passions very well, and the words might with little pains be resolved into an alphabet more easily than the Chinese.

I could frequently distinguish the word *Yahoo*,<sup>6</sup> which was repeated by each of them several times; and although it were impossible for me to conjecture what it meant, yet while the two horses were busy in conversation, I endeavored to practice this word upon my tongue; and as soon as they were silent, I boldly pronounced "Yahoo" in a loud voice, imitating, at the same time, as near as I could, the neighing of a horse; at which they were both visibly surprised, and the grey repeated the same word twice, as if he meant to teach me the right accent, wherein I spoke after him as well as I could, and found myself perceivably to improve every time, although very far from any degree of perfection. Then the bay tried me with a second word, much harder to be pronounced; but reducing it to the English orthography, may be spelt thus,

*Houyhnhnm*. I did not succeed in this so well as the former, but after two or three farther trials, I had better fortune; and they both appeared amazed at my capacity.

After some farther discourse, which I then conjectured might relate to me, the two friends took their leaves, with the same compliment of striking each other's hoof; and the grey made me signs that I should walk before him; wherein I thought it prudent to comply, till I could find a better director. When I offered to slacken my pace, he would cry, "Hhuun, Hhuun"; I guessed his meaning, and gave him to understand, as well as I could that I was weary, and not able to walk faster; upon which, he would stand a while to let me rest.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Campeche, in the Gulf of Mexico. Teneriffe is one of the Canary Islands.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "A distemper peculiar to sailors, in hot climates; wherein they imagine the sea to be green fields, and will throw themselves into it, if not restrained" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perhaps compounded from two expressions of disgust, *yah* and *ugh* (or *hoo*), common in the 18th century.[Return to reference 6](#)

CHAPTER 2. *The Author conducted by a Houyhnhnm to his house. The house described. The Author's reception. The food of the Houyhnhnms. The Author in distress for want of meat is at last relieved. His manner of feeding in that country.*

Having traveled about three miles, we came to a long kind of building, made of timber, stuck in the ground, and wattled across; the roof was low, and covered with straw. I now began to be a little comforted, and took out some toys, which travelers usually carry for presents to the savage Indians of America and other parts, in hopes the people of the house would be thereby encouraged to receive me kindly. The horse made me a sign to go in first; it was a large room with a smooth clay floor, and a rack and manger extending the whole length on one side. There were three nags, and two mares, not eating, but some of them sitting down upon their hams, which I very much wondered at; but wondered more to see the rest employed in domestic business. The last seemed but ordinary cattle; however this confirmed my first opinion, that a people who could so far civilize brute animals must needs excel in wisdom all the nations of the world. The grey came in just after, and thereby prevented any ill treatment, which the others might have given me. He neighed to them several times in a style of authority, and received answers.

Beyond this room there were three others, reaching the length of the house, to which you passed through three doors, opposite to each other, in the manner of a vista; we went through the second room towards the third; here the grey walked in first, beckoning me to attend.<sup>7</sup> I waited in the second room, and got ready my presents, for the master and mistress of the house; they were two knives, three bracelets of false pearl, a small looking glass and a bead necklace. The horse neighed three or four times, and I waited to hear some answers in a human voice, but I heard no other returns than in the same dialect, only one or two a little shriller than his. I began to think that this house must belong to some person of great note among them, because there appeared so much ceremony before I could gain admittance. But, that a man of quality should be

served all by horses, was beyond my comprehension. I feared my brain was disturbed by my sufferings and misfortunes; I roused myself, and looked about me in the room where I was left alone; this was furnished as the first, only after a more elegant manner. I rubbed my eyes often, but the same objects still occurred. I pinched my arms and sides, to awaken myself, hoping I might be in a dream. I then absolutely concluded that all these appearances could be nothing else but necromancy and magic. But I had no time to pursue these reflections; for the grey horse came to the door, and made me a sign to follow him into the third room; where I saw a very comely mare, together with a colt and foal, sitting on their haunches, upon mats of straw, not unartfully made, and perfectly neat and clean.

The mare soon after my entrance, rose from her mat, and coming up close, after having nicely observed my hands and face, gave me a most contemptuous look; then turning to the horse, I heard the word *Yahoo* often repeated betwixt them; the meaning of which word I could not then comprehend, although it were the first I had learned to pronounce; but I was soon better informed, to my everlasting mortification: for the horse beckoning to me with his head, and repeating the word, "Hhuun, Hhuun," as he did upon the road, which I understood was to attend him, led me out into a kind of court, where was another building at some distance from the house. Here we entered, and I saw three of those detestable creatures, which I first met after my landing, feeding upon roots, and the flesh of some animals, which I afterwards found to be that of asses and dogs, and now and then a cow dead by accident or disease. They were all tied by the neck with strong withes,<sup>8</sup> fastened to a beam; they held their food between the claws of their forefeet, and tore it with their teeth.

The master horse ordered a sorrel nag, one of his servants, to untie the largest of these animals, and take him into a yard. The beast and I were brought close together; and our countenances diligently compared, both by master and servant, who thereupon repeated several times the word *Yahoo*. My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable animal,

a perfect human figure; the face of it indeed was flat and broad, the nose depressed, the lips large, and the mouth wide; but these differences are common to all savage nations, where the lineaments of the countenance are distorted by the natives suffering their infants to lie groveling on the earth, or by carrying them on their backs, nuzzling with their face against the mother's shoulders. The forefeet of the Yahoo differed from my hands in nothing else but the length of the nails, the coarseness and brownness of the palms, and the hairiness on the backs. There was the same resemblance between our feet, with the same differences, which I knew very well, although the horses did not, because of my shoes and stockings; the same in every part of our bodies, except as to hairiness and color, which I have already described.

The great difficulty that seemed to stick with the two horses was to see the rest of my body so very different from that of a Yahoo, for which I was obliged to my clothes, whereof they had no conception; the sorrel nag offered me a root, which he held (after their manner, as we shall describe in its proper place) between his hoof and pastern; I took it in my hand, and having smelled it, returned it to him again as civilly as I could. He brought out of the Yahoo's kennel a piece of ass's flesh, but it smelled so offensively that I turned from it with loathing; he then threw it to the Yahoo, by whom it was greedily devoured. He afterwards showed me a wisp of hay, and a fetlock full of oats; but I shook my head, to signify that neither of these were food for me. And indeed, I now apprehended that I must absolutely starve, if I did not get to some of my own species; for as to those filthy Yahoos, although there were few greater lovers of mankind, at that time, than myself, yet I confess I never saw any sensitive being so detestable on all accounts; and the more I came near them, the more hateful they grew, while I stayed in that country. This the master horse observed by my behavior, and therefore sent the Yahoo back to his kennel. He then put his forehoof to his mouth, at which I was much surprised, although he did it with ease, and with a motion that appeared perfectly natural; and made other signs to know what I would eat; but I could not



return him such an answer as he was able to apprehend; and if he had understood me, I did not see how it was possible to contrive any way for finding myself nourishment. While we were thus engaged, I observed a cow passing by; whereupon I pointed to her, and expressed a desire to let me go and milk her. This had its effect; for he led me back into the house, and ordered a mare-servant to open a room, where a good store of milk lay in earthen and wooden vessels, after a very orderly and cleanly manner. She gave me a large bowl full, of which I drank very heartily, and found myself well refreshed.

About noon I saw coming towards the house a kind of vehicle, drawn like a sledge by four Yahoos. There was in it an old steed, who seemed to be of quality; he alighted with his hind feet forward, having by accident got a hurt in his left forefoot. He came to dine with our horse, who received him with great civility. They dined in the best room, and had oats boiled in milk for the second course, which the old horse eat warm, but the rest cold. Their mangers were placed circular in the middle of the room, and divided into several partitions, round which they sat on their haunches upon bosses<sup>9</sup> of straw. In the middle was a large rack with angles answering to every partition of the manger. So that each horse and mare eat their own hay, and their own mash of oats and milk, with much decency and regularity. The behavior of the young colt and foal appeared very modest; and that of the master and mistress extremely cheerful and complaisant to their guest. The grey ordered me to stand by him; and much discourse passed between him and his friend concerning me, as I found by the stranger's often looking on me, and the frequent repetition of the word *Yahoo*.

I happened to wear my gloves; which the master grey observing, seemed perplexed; discovering signs of wonder what I had done to my forefeet; he put his hoof three or four times to them, as if he would signify, that I should reduce them to their former shape, which I presently did, pulling off both my gloves, and putting them into my pocket. This occasioned farther talk, and I saw the company was pleased with my behavior, whereof I soon found the good

effects. I was ordered to speak the few words I understood; and while they were at dinner, the master taught me the names for oats, milk, fire, water, and some others which I could readily pronounce after him, having from my youth a great facility in learning languages.

When dinner was done, the master horse took me aside, and by signs and words made me understand the concern he was in that I had nothing to eat. Oats in their tongue are called *hlunnh*. This word I pronounced two or three times; for although I had refused them at first, yet upon second thoughts, I considered that I could contrive to make a kind of bread, which might be sufficient with milk to keep me alive, till I could make my escape to some other country, and to creatures of my own species. The horse immediately ordered a white mare-servant of his family to bring me a good quantity of oats in a sort of wooden tray. These I heated before the fire as well as I could, and rubbed them till the husks came off, which I made a shift to winnow from the grain; I ground and beat them between two stones, then took water, and made them into a paste or cake, which I toasted at the fire, and eat warm with milk. It was at first a very insipid diet, although common enough in many parts of Europe, but grew tolerable by time; and having been often reduced to hard fare in my life, this was not the first experiment I had made how easily nature is satisfied. And I cannot but observe that I never had one hour's sickness, while I staid in this island. It is true, I sometimes made a shift to catch a rabbit, or bird, by springes<sup>1</sup> made of Yahoos' hairs; and I often gathered wholesome herbs, which I boiled, or eat as salads with my bread; and now and then, for a rarity, I made a little butter, and drank the whey. I was at first at a great loss for salt; but custom soon reconciled the want of it; and I am confident that the frequent use of salt among us is an effect of luxury, and was first introduced only as a provocative to drink; except where it is necessary for preserving of flesh in long voyages, or in places remote from great markets. For we observe no animal to be fond of it but man;<sup>2</sup> and as to myself, when I left this country, it was a great while before I could endure the taste of it in anything that I eat.

This is enough to say upon the subject of my diet, wherewith other travelers fill their books, as if the readers were personally concerned whether we fare well or ill. However, it was necessary to mention this matter, lest the world should think it impossible that I could find sustenance for three years in such a country, and among such inhabitants.

When it grew towards evening, the master horse ordered a place for me to lodge in; it was but six yards from the house, and separated from the stable of the Yahoos. Here I got some straw, and covering myself with my own clothes, slept very sound. But I was in a short time better accommodated, as the reader shall know hereafter, when I come to treat more particularly about my way of living.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: To wait. "Vista": a long, open corridor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Slender, flexible branches.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Seats of bundled grasses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Snares.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Gulliver is, of course, in error; many animals require salt.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 3. *The Author studious to learn the language, the Houyhnhnm his master assists in teaching him. The language described. Several Houyhnhnms of quality come out of curiosity to see the Author. He gives his master a short account of his voyage.*

My principal endeavor was to learn the language, which my master (for so I shall henceforth call him) and his children, and every servant of his house were desirous to teach me. For they looked upon it as a prodigy, that a brute animal should discover such marks of a rational creature. I pointed to everything, and enquired the name of it, which I wrote down in my journal book when I was alone, and corrected my bad accent, by desiring those of the family to pronounce it often. In this employment, a sorrel nag, one of the under servants, was very ready to assist me.

In speaking, they pronounce through the nose and throat, and their language approaches nearest to the High Dutch or German, of any I know in Europe; but is much more graceful and significant. The Emperor Charles V made almost the same observation, when he said, that if he were to speak to his horse, it should be in High Dutch.<sup>3</sup>

The curiosity and impatience of my master were so great, that he spent many hours of his leisure to instruct me. He was convinced (as he afterwards told me) that I must be a Yahoo, but my teachableness, civility, and cleanliness astonished him; which were qualities altogether so opposite to those animals. He was most perplexed about my clothes, reasoning sometimes with himself whether they were a part of my body; for I never pulled them off till the family were asleep, and got them on before they waked in the morning. My master was eager to learn from whence I came; how I acquired those appearances of reason, which I discovered in all my actions; and to know my story from my own mouth, which he hoped he should soon do by the great proficiency I made in learning and pronouncing their words and sentences. To help my memory, I formed all I learned into the English alphabet, and writ the words down with the translations. This last, after some time, I ventured to

do in my master's presence. It cost me much trouble to explain to him what I was doing; for the inhabitants have not the least idea of books or literature.

In about ten weeks time I was able to understand most of his questions; and in three months could give him some tolerable answers. He was extremely curious to know from what part of the country I came, and how I was taught to imitate a rational creature; because the Yahoos (whom he saw I exactly resembled in my head, hands, and face, that were only visible) with some appearance of cunning, and the strongest disposition to mischief, were observed to be the most unteachable of all brutes. I answered that I came over the sea, from a far place, with many others of my own kind, in a great hollow vessel made of the bodies of trees; that my companions forced me to land on this coast, and then left me to shift for myself. It was with some difficulty, and by the help of many signs, that I brought him to understand me. He replied that I must needs be mistaken, or that I *said the thing which was not*. (For they have no word in their language to express lying or falsehood.) He knew it was impossible that there could be a country beyond the sea, or that a parcel of brutes could move a wooden vessel whither they pleased upon water. He was sure no Houyhnhnm alive could make such a vessel, or would trust Yahoos to manage it.

The word Houyhnhnm, in their tongue, signifies a Horse; and in its etymology, the Perfection of Nature. I told my master that I was at a loss for expression, but would improve as fast as I could; and hoped in a short time I should be able to tell him wonders. He was pleased to direct his own mare, his colt, and foal, and the servants of the family to take all opportunities of instructing me; and every day for two or three hours, he was at the same pains himself. Several horses and mares of quality in the neighborhood came often to our house, upon the report spread of a wonderful Yahoo, that could speak like a Houyhnhnm, and seemed in his words and actions to discover some glimmerings of reason. These delighted to converse with me; they put many questions, and received such answers as I was able to return. By all which advantages, I made so

great a progress, that in five months from my arrival, I understood whatever was spoke, and could express myself tolerably well.

The Houyhnhnms who came to visit my master, out of a design of seeing and talking with me, could hardly believe me to be a right Yahoo, because my body had a different covering from others of my kind. They were astonished to observe me without the usual hair or skin, except on my head, face, and hands; but I discovered that secret to my master, upon an accident, which happened about a fortnight before.

I have already told the reader, that every night when the family were gone to bed, it was my custom to strip and cover myself with my clothes; it happened one morning early, that my master sent for me, by the sorrel nag, who was his valet; when he came, I was fast asleep, my clothes fallen off on one side, and my shirt above my waist. I awaked at the noise he made, and observed him to deliver his message in some disorder; after which he went to my master, and in a great fright gave him a very confused account of what he had seen. This I presently discovered; for going as soon as I was dressed, to pay my attendance upon his honor, he asked me the meaning of what his servant had reported; that I was not the same thing when I slept as I appeared to be at other times; that his valet assured him, some part of me was white, some yellow, at least not so white, and some brown.

I had hitherto concealed the secret of my dress, in order to distinguish myself as much as possible, from that cursed race of Yahoos; but now I found it in vain to do so any longer. Besides, I considered that my clothes and shoes would soon wear out, which already were in a declining condition, and must be supplied by some contrivance from the hides of Yahoos, or other brutes; whereby the whole secret would be known. I therefore told my master, that in the country from whence I came, those of my kind always covered their bodies with the hairs of certain animals prepared by art, as well for decency, as to avoid inclemencies of air both hot and cold; of which, as to my own person I would give him immediate conviction, if he pleased to command me; only desiring his excuse, if I did not

expose those parts that Nature taught us to conceal. He said, my discourse was all very strange, but especially the last part; for he could not understand why Nature should teach us to conceal what Nature had given. That neither himself nor family were ashamed of any parts of their bodies; but however I might do as I pleased. Whereupon, I first unbuttoned my coat, and pulled it off. I did the same with my waistcoat; I drew off my shoes, stockings, and breeches. I let my shirt down to my waist, and drew up the bottom, fastening it like a girdle about my middle to hide my nakedness.

My master observed the whole performance with great signs of curiosity and admiration. He took up all my clothes in his pastern, one piece after another, and examined them diligently; he then stroked my body very gently, and looked round me several times; after which he said, it was plain I must be a perfect Yahoo; but that I differed very much from the rest of my species, in the whiteness and smoothness of my skin, my want of hair in several parts of my body, the shape and shortness of my claws behind and before, and my affectation of walking continually on my two hinder feet. He desired to see no more; and gave me leave to put on my clothes again, for I was shuddering with cold.

I expressed my uneasiness at his giving me so often the appellation of Yahoo, an odious animal, for which I had so utter an hatred and contempt. I begged he would forbear applying that word to me, and take the same order in his family, and among his friends whom he suffered to see me. I requested likewise, that the secret of my having a false covering to my body might be known to none but himself, at least as long as my present clothing should last; for as to what the sorrel nag his valet had observed, his honor might command him to conceal it.

All this my master very graciously consented to; and thus the secret was kept till my clothes began to wear out, which I was forced to supply by several contrivances, that shall hereafter be mentioned. In the meantime, he desired I would go on with my utmost diligence to learn their language, because he was more astonished at my capacity for speech and reason, than at the figure

of my body, whether it were covered or no; adding that he waited with some impatience to hear the wonders which I promised to tell him.

From thenceforward he doubled the pains he had been at to instruct me; he brought me into all company, and made them treat me with civility, because, as he told them privately, this would put me into good humor, and make me more diverting.

Every day when I waited on him, beside the trouble he was at in teaching, he would ask me several questions concerning myself, which I answered as well as I could; and by those means he had already received some general ideas, although very imperfect. It would be tedious to relate the several steps, by which I advanced to a more regular conversation, but the first account I gave of myself in any order and length was to this purpose:

That, I came from a very far country, as I already had attempted to tell him, with about fifty more of my own species; that we traveled upon the seas, in a great hollow vessel made of wood, and larger than his honor's house. I described the ship to him in the best terms I could; and explained by the help of my handkerchief displayed, how it was driven forward by the wind. That, upon a quarrel among us, I was set on shore on this coast, where I walked forward without knowing whither, till he delivered me from the persecution of those execrable Yahoos. He asked me who made the ship, and how it was possible that the Houyhnhnms of my country would leave it to the management of brutes? My answer was that I durst proceed no farther in my relation, unless he would give me his word and honor that he would not be offended; and then I would tell him the wonders I had so often promised. He agreed; and I went on by assuring him, that the ship was made by creatures like myself, who in all the countries I had traveled, as well as in my own, were the only governing, rational animals; and that upon my arrival hither, I was as much astonished to see the Houyhnhnms act like rational beings, as he or his friends could be in finding some marks of reason in a creature he was pleased to call a Yahoo; to which I owned my resemblance in every part, but could not account for their



degenerate and brutal nature. I said farther, that if good fortune ever restored me to my native country, to relate my travels hither, as I resolved to do, everybody would believe that I *said the thing which was not*, that I invented the story out of my own head; and with all possible respect to himself, his family, and friends, and under his promise of not being offended, our countrymen would hardly think it probable, that a Houyhnhnm should be the presiding creature of a nation, and a Yahoo the brute.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: The emperor is supposed to have said that he would speak to his God in Spanish, to his mistress in Italian, and to his horse in German. [Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 4. *The Houyhnhnms' notion of truth and falsehood. The Author's discourse disapproved by his master. The Author gives a more particular account of himself, and the accidents of his voyage.*

My master heard me with great appearances of uneasiness in his countenance; because *doubting* or *not believing* are so little known in this country, that the inhabitants cannot tell how to behave themselves under such circumstances. And I remember in frequent discourses with my master concerning the nature of manhood, in other parts of the world, having occasion to talk of *lying* and *false representation*, it was with much difficulty that he comprehended what I meant; although he had otherwise a most acute judgment. For he argued thus: that the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now if anyone *said the thing which was not*, these ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving information, that he leaves me worse than in ignorance; for I am led to believe a thing *black* when it is *white*, and *short* when it is *long*. And these were all the notions he had concerning the faculty of *lying*, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practiced among human creatures.

To return from this digression; when I asserted that the Yahoos were the only governing animals in my country, which my master said was altogether past his conception, he desired to know, whether we had Houyhnhnms among us, and what was their employment. I told him we had great numbers; that in summer they grazed in the fields, and in winter were kept in houses, with hay and oats, where Yahoo servants were employed to rub their skins smooth, comb their manes, pick their feet, serve them with food, and make their beds. "I understand you well," said my master; "it is now very plain from all you have spoken, that whatever share of reason the Yahoos pretend to, the Houyhnhnms are your masters; I heartily wish our Yahoos would be so tractable." I begged his honor would please to excuse me from proceeding any farther, because I was very certain that the account he expected from me would be highly displeasing. But he insisted in commanding me to let him

know the best and the worst; I told him he should be obeyed. I owned that the Houyhnhnms among us, whom we called Horses, were the most generous<sup>4</sup> and comely animal we had; that they excelled in strength and swiftness; and when they belonged to persons of quality, employed in traveling, racing, and drawing chariots, they were treated with much kindness and care, till they fell into diseases, or became foundered in the feet; but then they were sold, and used to all kind of drudgery till they died; after which their skins were stripped and sold for what they were worth, and their bodies left to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey. But the common race of horses had not so good fortune, being kept by farmers and carriers, and other mean people, who put them to greater labor, and feed them worse. I described as well as I could, our way of riding; the shape and use of a bridle, a saddle, a spur, and a whip; of harness and wheels. I added, that we fastened plates of a certain hard substance called iron at the bottom of their feet, to preserve their hoofs from being broken by the stony ways on which we often traveled.

My master, after some expressions of great indignation, wondered how we dared to venture upon a Houyhnhnm's back; for he was sure, that the weakest servant in his house would be able to shake off the strongest Yahoo; or by lying down, and rolling upon his back, squeeze the brute to death. I answered that our horses were trained up from three or four years old to the several uses we intended them for; that if any of them proved intolerably vicious, they were employed for carriages; that they were severely beaten while they were young for any mischievous tricks; that the males, designed for the common use of riding or draught, were generally castrated about two years after their birth, to take down their spirits, and make them more tame and gentle; that they were indeed sensible of rewards and punishments; but his honor would please to consider that they had not the least tincture of reason any more than the Yahoos in this country.

It put me to the pains of many circumlocutions to give my master a right idea of what I spoke; for their language doth not abound in

variety of words, because their wants and passions are fewer than among us. But it is impossible to express his noble resentment at our savage treatment of the Houyhnhnm race; particularly after I had explained the manner and use of castrating horses among us, to hinder them from propagating their kind, and to render them more servile. He said, if it were possible there could be any country where Yahoos alone were endued with reason, they certainly must be the governing animal, because reason will in time always prevail against brutal strength. But, considering the frame of our bodies, and especially of mine, he thought no creature of equal bulk was so ill-contrived for employing that reason in the common offices of life; whereupon he desired to know whether those among whom I lived resembled me or the Yahoos of his country. I assured him that I was as well shaped as most of my age; but the younger and the females were much more soft and tender, and the skins of the latter generally as white as milk. He said I differed indeed from other Yahoos, being much more cleanly, and not altogether so deformed; but in point of real advantage, he thought I differed for the worse. That my nails were of no use either to my fore or hinder feet; as to my forefeet, he could not properly call them by that name, for he never observed me to walk upon them; that they were too soft to bear the ground; that I generally went with them uncovered, neither was the covering I sometimes wore on them of the same shape, or so strong as that on my feet behind. That I could not walk with any security; for if either of my hinder feet slipped, I must inevitably fall. He then began to find fault with other parts of my body; the flatness of my face, the prominence of my nose, my eyes placed directly in front, so that I could not look on either side without turning my head; that I was not able to feed myself without lifting one of my forefeet to my mouth; and therefore nature had placed those joints to answer that necessity. He knew not what could be the use of those several clefts and divisions in my feet behind; that these were too soft to bear the hardness and sharpness of stones without a covering made from the skin of some other brute; that my whole body wanted a fence against heat and cold, which I was forced to put on and off every day with tediousness and trouble. And lastly,

that he observed every animal in his country naturally to abhor the Yahoos, whom the weaker avoided, and the stronger drove from them. So that supposing us to have the gift of reason, he could not see how it were possible to cure that natural antipathy which every creature discovered against us; nor consequently, how we could tame and render them serviceable. However, he would (as he said) debate the matter no farther, because he was more desirous to know my own story, the country where I was born, and the several actions and events of my life before I came hither.

I assured him how extremely desirous I was that he should be satisfied in every point; but I doubted much whether it would be possible for me to explain myself on several subjects whereof his honor could have no conception, because I saw nothing in his country to which I could resemble them. That however, I would do my best, and strive to express myself by similitudes, humbly desiring his assistance when I wanted proper words; which he was pleased to promise me.

I said, my birth was of honest parents, in an island called England, which was remote from this country, as many days journey as the strongest of his honor's servants could travel in the annual course of the sun. That I was bred a surgeon, whose trade it is to cure wounds and hurts in the body, got by accident or violence. That my country was governed by a female man, whom we called a queen. That I left it to get riches, whereby I might maintain myself and family when I should return. That in my last voyage, I was Commander of the ship and had about fifty Yahoos under me, many of which died at sea, and I was forced to supply them by others picked out from several nations. That our ship was twice in danger of being sunk; the first time by a great storm, and the second, by striking against a rock. Here my master interposed, by asking me, how I could persuade strangers out of different countries to venture with me, after the losses I had sustained, and the hazards I had run. I said, they were fellows of desperate fortunes, forced to fly from the places of their birth, on account of their poverty or their crimes. Some were undone by lawsuits; others spent all they had in

drinking, whoring, and gaming; others fled for treason; many for murder, theft, poisoning, robbery, perjury, forgery, coining false money; for committing rapes or sodomy; for flying from their colors, or deserting to the enemy; and most of them had broken prison. None of these durst return to their native countries for fear of being hanged, or of starving in a jail; and therefore were under a necessity of seeking a livelihood in other places.

During this discourse, my master was pleased often to interrupt me. I had made use of many circumlocutions in describing to him the nature of the several crimes, for which most of our crew had been forced to fly their country. This labor took up several days conversation before he was able to comprehend me. He was wholly at a loss to know what could be the use or necessity of practicing those vices. To clear up which I endeavored to give him some ideas of the desire of power and riches; of the terrible effects of lust, intemperance, malice, and envy. All this I was forced to define and describe by putting of cases, and making suppositions. After which, like one whose imagination was struck with something never seen or heard of before, he would lift up his eyes with amazement and indignation. Power, government, war, law, punishment, and a thousand other things had no terms, wherein that language could express them; which made the difficulty almost insuperable to give my master any conception of what I meant; but being of an excellent understanding, much improved by contemplation and converse, he at last arrived at a competent knowledge of what human nature in our parts of the world is capable to perform; and desired I would give him some particular account of that land, which we call Europe, especially, of my own country.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Noble.[Return to reference 4](#)

CHAPTER 5. *The Author, at his master's commands, informs him of the state of England. The causes of war among the princes of Europe. The Author begins to explain the English Constitution.*

The reader may please to observe that the following extract of many conversations I had with my master contains a summary of the most material points, which were discoursed at several times for above two years; his honor often desiring fuller satisfaction as I farther improved in the Houyhnhnm tongue. I laid before him, as well as I could, the whole state of Europe; I discoursed of trade and manufactures, of arts and sciences; and the answers I gave to all the questions he made, as they arose upon several subjects, were a fund of conversation not to be exhausted. But I shall here only set down the substance of what passed between us concerning my own country, reducing it into order as well as I can, without any regard to time or other circumstances, while I strictly adhere to truth. My only concern is that I shall hardly be able to do justice to my master's arguments and expressions; which must needs suffer by my want of capacity, as well as by a translation into our barbarous English.

In obedience therefore to his honor's commands, I related to him the Revolution under the Prince of Orange; the long war with France entered into by the said Prince, and renewed by his successor the present queen; wherein the greatest powers of Christendom were engaged, and which still continued. I computed at his request, that about a million of Yahoos might have been killed in the whole progress of it; and perhaps a hundred or more cities taken, and five times as many ships burned or sunk.<sup>5</sup>

He asked me what were the usual causes or motives that made one country to go to war with another. I answered, they were innumerable; but I should only mention a few of the chief. Sometimes the ambition of princes, who never think they have land or people enough to govern; sometimes the corruption of ministers, who engage their master in a war in order to stifle or divert the clamor of the subjects against their evil administration. Difference in opinions hath cost many millions of lives; for instance, whether flesh

be bread, or bread be flesh; whether the juice of a certain berry be blood or wine; whether whistling be a vice or a virtue; whether it be better to kiss a post, or throw it into the fire; what is the best color for a coat, whether black, white, red, or grey; and whether it should be long or short, narrow or wide, dirty or clean;<sup>6</sup> with many more. Neither are any wars so furious and bloody, or of so long continuance, as those occasioned by difference in opinion, especially if it be in things indifferent.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes the quarrel between two princes is to decide which of them shall dispossess a third of his dominions, where neither of them pretend to any right. Sometimes one prince quarreleth with another, for fear the other should quarrel with him. Sometimes a war is entered upon, because the enemy is too strong, and sometimes because he is too weak. Sometimes our neighbors want the things which we have, or have the things which we want; and we both fight, till they take ours or give us theirs. It is a very justifiable cause of war to invade a country after the people have been wasted by famine, destroyed by pestilence, or embroiled by factions amongst themselves. It is justifiable to enter into a war against our nearest ally, when one of his towns lies convenient for us, or a territory of land, that would render our dominions round and compact. If a prince send forces into a nation, where the people are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put half of them to death, and make slaves of the rest, in order to civilize and reduce them from their barbarous way of living. It is a very kingly, honorable, and frequent practice, when one prince desires the assistance of another to secure him against an invasion, that the assistant, when he hath driven out the invader, should seize on the dominions himself, and kill, imprison, or banish the prince he came to relieve. Alliance by blood or marriage is a sufficient cause of war between princes; and the nearer the kindred is, the greater is their disposition to quarrel. Poor nations are hungry, and rich nations are proud; and pride and hunger will ever be at variance. For these reasons, the trade of a soldier is held the most honorable of all others: because a soldier is a Yahoo hired to



kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can.

There is likewise a kind of beggarly princes in Europe, not able to make war by themselves, who hire out their troops to richer nations for so much a day to each man; of which they keep three fourths to themselves, and it is the best part of their maintenance; such are those in many northern parts of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

“What you have told me,” said my master, “upon the subject of war, doth indeed discover most admirably the effects of that reason you pretend to. However, it is happy that the shame is greater than the danger; and that Nature hath left you utterly incapable of doing much mischief; for your mouths lying flat with your faces, you can hardly bite each other to any purpose, unless by consent. Then, as to the claws upon your feet before and behind, they are so short and tender, that one of our Yahoos would drive a dozen of yours before him. And therefore in recounting the numbers of those who have been killed in battle, I cannot but think that you have *said the thing which is not.*”

I could not forbear shaking my head and smiling a little at his ignorance. And, being no stranger to the art of war, I gave him a description of cannons, culverins, muskets, carabines, pistols, bullets, powder, swords, bayonets, battles, sieges, retreats, attacks, undermines, countermines, bombardments, sea fights; ships sunk with a thousand men; twenty thousand killed on each side; dying groans, limbs flying in the air; smoke, noise, confusion, trampling to death under horses’ feet; flight, pursuit, victory; fields strewed with carcasses left for food to dogs, and wolves, and birds of prey; plundering, stripping, ravishing, burning, and destroying. And, to set forth the valor of my own dear countrymen, I assured him that I had seen them blow up a hundred enemies at once in a siege, and as many in a ship; and beheld the dead bodies drop down in pieces from the clouds, to the great diversion of all the spectators.

I was going on to more particulars, when my master commanded me silence. He said, whoever understood the nature of Yahoos might easily believe it possible for so vile an animal, to be capable of every

action I had named, if their strength and cunning equaled their malice. But, as my discourse had increased his abhorrence of the whole species, so he found it gave him a disturbance in his mind, to which he was wholly a stranger before. He thought his ears being used to such abominable words, might by degrees admit them with less detestation. That, although he hated the Yahoos of this country, yet he no more blamed them for their odious qualities, than he did a *gnnayh* (a bird of prey) for its cruelty, or a sharp stone for cutting his hoof. But, when a creature pretending to reason could be capable of such enormities, he dreaded lest the corruption of that faculty might be worse than brutality itself. He seemed therefore confident, that instead of reason, we were only possessed of some quality fitted to increase our natural vices; as the reflection from a troubled stream returns the image of an ill-shapen body, not only larger, but more distorted.

He added that he had heard too much upon the subject of war, both in this and some former discourses. There was another point which a little perplexed him at present. I had said that some of our crew left their country on account of being ruined by law: that I had already explained the meaning of the word; but he was at a loss how it should come to pass, that the law which was intended for every man's preservation, should be any man's ruin. Therefore he desired to be farther satisfied what I meant by law, and the dispensers thereof, according to the present practice in my own country; because he thought Nature and Reason were sufficient guides for a reasonable animal, as we pretended to be, in showing us what we ought to do, and what to avoid.

I assured his honor that law was a science wherein I had not much conversed, further than by employing advocates, in vain, upon some injustices that had been done me. However, I would give him all the satisfaction I was able.

I said there was a society of men among us, bred up from their youth in the art of proving by words multiplied for the purpose, that white is black, and black is white, according as they are paid. To this society all the rest of the people are slaves.

"For example. If my neighbor hath a mind to my cow, he hires a lawyer to prove that he ought to have my cow from me. I must then hire another to defend my right; it being against all rules of law that any man should be allowed to speak for himself. Now in this case, I who am the true owner lie under two great disadvantages. First, my lawyer being practiced almost from his cradle in defending falsehood is quite out of his element when he would be an advocate for justice, which as an office unnatural, he always attempts with great awkwardness, if not with ill-will. The second disadvantage is that my lawyer must proceed with great caution, or else he will be reprimanded by the judges, and abhorred by his brethren, as one who would lessen the practice of the law. And therefore I have but two methods to preserve my cow. The first is to gain over my adversary's lawyer with a double fee; who will then betray his client, by insinuating that he hath justice on his side. The second way is for my lawyer to make my cause appear as unjust as he can; by allowing the cow to belong to my adversary; and this if it be skillfully done, will certainly bespeak the favor of the bench.

"Now, your honor is to know that these judges are persons appointed to decide all controversies of property, as well as for the trial of criminals; and picked out from the most dextrous lawyers who are grown old or lazy; and having been biased all their lives against truth and equity, lie under such a fatal necessity of favoring fraud, perjury, and oppression, that I have known some of them to have refused a large bribe from the side where justice lay, rather than injure the faculty,<sup>9</sup> by doing anything unbecoming their nature or their office.

"It is a maxim among these lawyers, that whatever hath been done before may legally be done again; and therefore they take special care to record all the decisions formerly made against common justice and the general reason of mankind. These, under the name of *precedents*, they produce as authorities to justify the most iniquitous opinions; and the judges never fail of directing accordingly.

"In pleading, they studiously avoid entering into the merits of the cause; but are loud, violent, and tedious in dwelling upon all circumstances which are not to the purpose. For instance, in the case already mentioned, they never desire to know what claim or title my adversary hath to my cow; but whether the said cow were red or black; her horns long or short; whether the field I graze her in be round or square; whether she were milked at home or abroad; what diseases she is subject to, and the like. After which they consult precedents, adjourn the cause, from time to time, and in ten, twenty, or thirty years come to an issue.

"It is likewise to be observed, that this society hath a peculiar cant and jargon of their own, that no other mortal can understand, and wherein all their laws are written, which they take special care to multiply; whereby they have wholly confounded the very essence of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong; so that it will take thirty years to decide whether the field, left me by my ancestors for six generations, belong to me, or to a stranger three hundred miles off.

"In the trial of persons accused for crimes against the state, the method is much more short and commendable: the judge first sends to sound the disposition of those in power; after which he can easily hang or save the criminal, strictly preserving all the forms of law."

Here my master interposing said it was a pity that creatures endowed with such prodigious abilities of mind as these lawyers, by the description I gave of them, must certainly be, were not rather encouraged to be instructors of others in wisdom and knowledge. In answer to which, I assured his honor that in all points out of their own trade, they were usually the most ignorant and stupid generation among us, the most despicable in common conversation, avowed enemies to all knowledge and learning; and equally disposed to pervert the general reason of mankind, in every other subject of discourse as in that of their own profession.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 5: Gulliver relates recent English history: the Glorious Revolution (1688–89) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13). He greatly exaggerates the casualties in the war.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gulliver refers to the religious controversies of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: the doctrine of transubstantiation, the use of music in church services, the veneration of the crucifix, and the wearing of priestly vestments.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Of little consequence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A satiric glance at George I, who, as elector of Hanover, had dealt in this trade.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Profession.[Return to reference 9](#)

CHAPTER 6. *A continuation of the state of England, under Queen Anne. The character of a first minister in the courts of Europe.*

My master was yet wholly at a loss to understand what motives could incite this race of lawyers to perplex, disquiet, and weary themselves by engaging in a confederacy of injustice, merely for the sake of injuring their fellow animals; neither could he comprehend what I meant in saying they did it for hire. Whereupon I was at much pains to describe to him the use of money, the materials it was made of, and the value of the metals; that when a Yahoo had got a great store of this precious substance, he was able to purchase whatever he had a mind to; the finest clothing, the noblest houses, great tracts of land, the most costly meats and drinks; and have his choice of the most beautiful females. Therefore since money alone was able to perform all these feats, our Yahoos thought they could never have enough of it to spend or to save, as they found themselves inclined from their natural bent either to profusion or avarice. That the rich man enjoyed the fruit of the poor man's labor, and the latter were a thousand to one in proportion to the former. That the bulk of our people was forced to live miserably, by laboring every day for small wages to make a few live plentifully. I enlarged myself much on these and many other particulars to the same purpose, but his honor was still to seek,<sup>1</sup> for he went upon a supposition that all animals had a title to their share in the productions of the earth; and especially those who presided over the rest. Therefore he desired I would let him know what these costly meats were, and how any of us happened to want them. Whereupon I enumerated as many sorts as came into my head, with the various methods of dressing them, which could not be done without sending vessels by sea to every part of the world, as well for liquors to drink, as for sauces, and innumerable other conveniencies. I assured him, that this whole globe of earth must be at least three times gone round, before one of our better female Yahoos could get her breakfast, or a cup to put it in. He said, "That must needs be a miserable country which cannot furnish food for its own inhabitants."

But what he chiefly wondered at, was how such vast tracts of ground as I described, should be wholly without fresh water, and the people put to the necessity of sending over the sea for drink. I replied that England (the dear place of my nativity) was computed to produce three times the quantity of food, more than its inhabitants are able to consume, as well as liquors extracted from grain, or pressed out of the fruit of certain trees, which made excellent drink; and the same proportion in every other convenience of life. But, in order to feed the luxury and intemperance of the males, and the vanity of the females, we sent away the greatest part of our necessary things to other countries, from whence in return we brought the materials of diseases, folly, and vice, to spend among ourselves. Hence it follows of necessity, that vast numbers of our people are compelled to seek their livelihood by begging, robbing, stealing, cheating, pimping, forswearing, flattering, suborning, forging, gaming, lying, fawning, hectoring, voting, scribbling, star gazing, poisoning, whoring, canting, libeling, freethinking, and the like occupations; every one of which terms, I was at much pains to make him understand.

That, wine was not imported among us from foreign countries, to supply the want of water or other drinks, but because it was a sort of liquid which made us merry, by putting us out of our senses; diverted all melancholy thoughts, begat wild extravagant imaginations in the brain, raised our hopes, and banished our fears; suspended every office of reason for a time, and deprived us of the use of our limbs, until we fell into a profound sleep; although it must be confessed, that we always awaked sick and dispirited; and that the use of this liquor filled us with diseases, which made our lives uncomfortable and short.

But beside all this, the bulk of our people supported themselves by furnishing the necessities or conveniencies of life to the rich, and to each other. For instance, when I am at home and dressed as I ought to be, I carry on my body the workmanship of an hundred tradesmen; the building and furniture of my house employ as many more; and five times the number to adorn my wife.

I was going on to tell him of another sort of people, who get their livelihood by attending the sick; having upon some occasions informed his honor that many of my crew had died of diseases. But here it was with the utmost difficulty that I brought him to apprehend what I meant. He could easily conceive that a Houyhnhnm grew weak and heavy a few days before his death; or by some accident might hurt a limb. But that nature, who worketh all things to perfection, should suffer any pains to breed in our bodies, he thought impossible; and desired to know the reason of so unaccountable an evil. I told him, we fed on a thousand things which operated contrary to each other; that we eat when we were not hungry, and drank without the provocation of thirst; that we sat whole nights drinking strong liquors without eating a bit, which disposed us to sloth, inflamed our bodies, and precipitated or prevented digestion. That, prostitute female Yahoos acquired a certain malady, which bred rottenness in the bones of those who fell into their embraces; that this and many other diseases were propagated from father to son; so that great numbers come into the world with complicated maladies upon them; that it would be endless to give him a catalogue of all diseases incident to human bodies; for they could not be fewer than five or six hundred, spread over every limb, and joint; in short, every part, external and intestine, having diseases appropriated to each. To remedy which, there was a sort of people bred up among us, in the profession or pretense of curing the sick. And because I had some skill in the faculty, I would in gratitude to his honor let him know the whole mystery and method by which they proceed.

Their fundamental is that all diseases arise from repletion; from whence they conclude, that a great evacuation of the body is necessary, either through the natural passage, or upwards at the mouth. Their next business is, from herbs, minerals, gums, oils, shells, salts, juices, seaweed, excrements, barks of trees, serpents, toads, frogs, spiders, dead men's flesh and bones, birds, beasts and fishes, to form a composition for smell and taste the most abominable, nauseous, and detestable, that they can possibly



contrive, which the stomach immediately rejects with loathing, and this they call a vomit. Or else from the same storehouse, with some other poisonous additions, they command us to take in at the orifice above or below ( just as the physician then happens to be disposed) a medicine equally annoying and disgusting to the bowels; which relaxing the belly, drives down all before it; and this they call a purge, or a clyster. For nature (as the physicians allege) having intended the superior anterior orifice only for the intromission of solids and liquids, and the inferior posterior for ejection, these artists ingeniously considering that in all diseases nature is forced out of her seat; therefore to replace her in it, the body must be treated in a manner directly contrary, by interchanging the use of each orifice; forcing solids and liquids in at the anus, and making evacuations at the mouth.

But, besides real diseases, we are subject to many that are only imaginary, for which the physicians have invented imaginary cures; these have their several names, and so have the drugs that are proper for them; and with these our female Yahoos are always infested.

One great excellency in this tribe is their skill at prognostics, wherein they seldom fail; their predictions in real diseases, when they rise to any degree of malignity, generally portending death, which is always in their power, when recovery is not, and therefore, upon any unexpected signs of amendment, after they have pronounced their sentence, rather than be accused as false prophets, they know how to approve<sup>2</sup> their sagacity to the world by a seasonable dose.

They are likewise of special use to husbands and wives, who are grown weary of their mates; to eldest sons, to great ministers of state, and often to princes.

I had formerly upon occasion discoursed with my master upon the nature of government in general, and particularly of our own excellent constitution, deservedly the wonder and envy of the whole world. But having here accidentally mentioned a minister of state, he

commanded me some time after to inform him what species of Yahoo I particularly meant by that appellation.

I told him that a first or chief minister of state, whom I intended to describe, was a creature wholly exempt from joy and grief, love and hatred, pity and anger; at least makes use of no other passions but a violent desire of wealth, power, and titles; that he applies his words to all uses, except to the indication of his mind; that he never tells a truth, but with an intent that you should take it for a lie; nor a lie, but with a design that you should take it for a truth; that those he speaks worst of behind their backs are in the surest way to preferment; and whenever he begins to praise you to others or to yourself, you are from that day forlorn. The worst mark you can receive is a promise, especially when it is confirmed with an oath; after which every wise man retires, and gives over all hopes.

There are three methods by which a man may rise to be chief minister: the first is by knowing how with prudence to dispose of a wife, a daughter, or a sister; the second, by betraying or undermining his predecessor; and the third is by a furious zeal in public assemblies against the corruptions of the court. But a wise prince would rather choose to employ those who practice the last of these methods; because such zealots prove always the most obsequious and subservient to the will and passions of their master. That, these ministers having all employments at their disposal, preserve themselves in power by bribing the majority of a senate or great council; and at last by an expedient called an Act of Indemnity<sup>3</sup> (whereof I described the nature to him) they secure themselves from after reckonings, and retire from the public, laden with the spoils of the nation.

The palace of a chief minister is a seminary to breed up others in his own trade; the pages, lackies, and porter, by imitating their master, become ministers of state in their several districts, and learn to excel in the three principal ingredients, of insolence, lying, and bribery. Accordingly, they have a subaltern court paid to them by persons of the best rank; and sometimes by the force of dexterity

and impudence, arrive through several gradations to be successors to their lord.

He is usually governed by a decayed wench, or favorite footman, who are the tunnels through which all graces are conveyed, and may properly be called, in the last resort, the governors of the kingdom.

One day, my master, having heard me mention the nobility of my country, was pleased to make me a compliment which I could not pretend to deserve: that, he was sure, I must have been born of some noble family, because I far exceeded in shape, color, and cleanliness, all the Yahoos of his nation, although I seemed to fail in strength, and agility, which must be imputed to my different way of living from those other brutes; and besides, I was not only endowed with the faculty of speech, but likewise with some rudiments of reason, to a degree, that with all his acquaintance I passed for a prodigy.

He made me observe, that among the Houyhnhnms, the white, the sorrel, and the iron grey were not so exactly shaped as the bay, the dapple grey, and the black; nor born with equal talents of mind, or a capacity to improve them; and therefore continued always in the condition of servants, without ever aspiring to match out of their own race, which in that country would be reckoned monstrous and unnatural.

I made his honor my most humble acknowledgments for the good opinion he was pleased to conceive of me; but assured him at the same time, that my birth was of the lower sort, having been born of plain, honest parents, who were just able to give me a tolerable education; that, nobility among us was altogether a different thing from the idea he had of it; that, our young noblemen are bred from their childhood in idleness and luxury; that, as soon as years will permit, they consume their vigor, and contract odious diseases among lewd females; and when their fortunes are almost ruined, they marry some woman of mean birth, disagreeable person, and unsound constitution, merely for the sake of money, whom they hate and despise. That, the productions of such marriages are generally scrofulous, rickety or deformed children; by which means

the family seldom continues above three generations, unless the wife take care to provide a healthy father among her neighbors, or domestics, in order to improve and continue the breed. That a weak diseased body, a meager countenance, and sallow complexion are the true marks of noble blood; and a healthy robust appearance is so disgraceful in a man of quality, that the world concludes his real father to have been a groom or a coachman. The imperfections of his mind run parallel with those of his body; being a composition of spleen, dullness, ignorance, caprice, sensuality, and pride.

Without the consent of this illustrious body, no law can be enacted, repealed, or altered, and these nobles have likewise the decision of all our possessions without appeal.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Still did not understand.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Prove.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An act passed at each session of Parliament to protect ministers of state who in good faith might have acted illegally.[Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 7. *The Author's great love of his native country. His master's observations upon the constitution and administration of England, as described by the Author, with parallel cases and comparisons. His master's observations upon human nature.*

The reader may be disposed to wonder how I could prevail on myself to give so free a representation of my own species, among a race of mortals who were already too apt to conceive the vilest opinion of humankind, from that entire congruity betwixt me and their Yahoos. But I must freely confess that the many virtues of those excellent quadrupeds placed in opposite view to human corruptions had so far opened my eyes, and enlarged my understanding, that I began to view the actions and passions of man in a very different light; and to think the honor of my own kind not worth managing;<sup>4</sup> which, besides, it was impossible for me to do before a person of so acute a judgment as my master, who daily convinced me of a thousand faults in myself, whereof I had not the least perception before, and which with us would never be numbered even among human infirmities. I had likewise learned from his example an utter detestation of all falsehood or disguise; and truth appeared so amiable to me, that I determined upon sacrificing everything to it.

Let me deal so candidly with the reader as to confess that there was yet a much stronger motive for the freedom I took in my representation of things. I had not been a year in this country, before I contracted such a love and veneration for the inhabitants, that I entered on a firm resolution never to return to humankind, but to pass the rest of my life among these admirable Houyhnhnms in the contemplation and practice of every virtue; where I could have no example or incitement to vice. But it was decreed by fortune, my perpetual enemy, that so great a felicity should not fall to my share. However, it is now some comfort to reflect that in what I said of my countrymen, I extenuated their faults as much as I durst before so strict an examiner; and upon every article, gave as favorable a turn

as the matter would bear. For, indeed, who is there alive that will not be swayed by his bias and partiality to the place of his birth?

I have related the substance of several conversations I had with my master, during the greatest part of the time I had the honor to be in his service; but have indeed for brevity sake omitted much more than is here set down.

When I had answered all his questions, and his curiosity seemed to be fully satisfied; he sent for me one morning early, and commanding me to sit down at some distance (an honor which he had never before conferred upon me), he said he had been very seriously considering my whole story, as far as it related both to myself and my country; that, he looked upon us as a sort of animals to whose share, by what accident he could not conjecture, some small pittance of reason had fallen, whereof we made no other use than by its assistance to aggravate our natural corruptions, and to acquire new ones which nature had not given us. That we disarmed ourselves of the few abilities she had bestowed; had been very successful in multiplying our original wants, and seemed to spend our whole lives in vain endeavors to supply them by our own inventions. That, as to myself, it was manifest I had neither the strength or agility of a common Yahoo; that I walked infirmly on my hinder feet; had found out a contrivance to make my claws of no use or defense, and to remove the hair from my chin, which was intended as a shelter from the sun and the weather. Lastly, that I could neither run with speed, nor climb trees like my brethren (as he called them) the Yahoos in this country.

That our institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence, in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature; which was therefore a character we had no pretense to challenge, even from the account I had given of my own people; although he manifestly perceived, that in order to favor them, I had concealed many particulars, and often *said the thing which was not*.

He was the more confirmed in this opinion, because he observed that I agreed in every feature of my body with other Yahoos, except

where it was to my real disadvantage in point of strength, speed, and activity, the shortness of my claws, and some other particulars where Nature had no part; so, from the representation I had given him of our lives, our manners, and our actions, he found as near a resemblance in the disposition of our minds. He said the Yahoos were known to hate one another more than they did any different species of animals; and the reason usually assigned was the odiousness of their own shapes, which all could see in the rest, but not in themselves. He had therefore begun to think it not unwise in us to cover our bodies, and by that invention, conceal many of our deformities from each other, which would else be hardly supportable. But he now found he had been mistaken; and that the dissensions of those brutes in his country were owing to the same cause with ours, as I had described them. For, if (said he) you throw among five Yahoos as much food as would be sufficient for fifty, they will instead of eating peaceably, fall together by the ears, each single one impatient to have all to itself; and therefore a servant was usually employed to stand by while they were feeding abroad, and those kept at home were tied at a distance from each other. That, if a cow died of age or accident, before a Houyhnhnm could secure it for his own Yahoos, those in the neighborhood would come in herds to seize it, and then would ensue such a battle as I had described, with terrible wounds made by their claws on both sides, although they seldom were able to kill one another, for want of such convenient instruments of death as we had invented. At other times the like battles have been fought between the Yahoos of several neighborhoods without any visible cause; those of one district watching all opportunities to surprise the next before they are prepared. But if they find their project hath miscarried, they return home, and for want of enemies, engage in what I call a civil war among themselves.

That, in some fields of his country, there are certain shining stones of several colors, whereof the Yahoos are violently fond; and when part of these stones are fixed in the earth, as it sometimes happeneth, they will dig with their claws for whole days to get them

out, and carry them away, and hide them by heaps in their kennels; but still looking round with great caution, for fear their comrades should find out their treasure. My master said he could never discover the reason of this unnatural appetite, or how these stones could be of any use to a Yahoo; but now he believed it might proceed from the same principle of avarice, which I had ascribed to mankind. That he had once, by way of experiment, privately removed a heap of these stones from the place where one of his Yahoos had buried it, whereupon, the sordid animal missing his treasure, by his loud lamenting brought the whole herd to the place, there miserably howled, then fell to biting and tearing the rest; began to pine away, would neither eat nor sleep, nor work, till he ordered a servant privately to convey the stones into the same hole, and hide them as before; which when his Yahoo had found, he presently recovered his spirits and good humor; but took care to remove them to a better hiding place; and hath ever since been a very serviceable brute.

My master farther assured me, which I also observed myself, that in the fields where these shining stones abound, the fiercest and most frequent battles are fought, occasioned by perpetual inroads of the neighboring Yahoos.

He said it was common when two Yahoos discovered such a stone in a field, and were contending which of them should be the proprietor, a third would take the advantage, and carry it away from them both; which my master would needs contend to have some resemblance with our suits at law; wherein I thought it for our credit not to undeceive him; since the decision he mentioned was much more equitable than many decrees among us; because the plaintiff and defendant there lost nothing beside the stone they contended for; whereas our courts of equity would never have dismissed the cause while either of them had anything left.

My master continuing his discourse said there was nothing that rendered the Yahoos more odious, than their undistinguished appetite to devour everything that came in their way, whether herbs, roots, berries, corrupted flesh of animals, or all mingled together;



and it was peculiar in their temper, that they were fonder of what they could get by rapine or stealth at a greater distance, than much better food provided for them at home. If their prey held out, they would eat till they were ready to burst, after which nature had pointed out to them a certain root that gave them a general evacuation.

There was also another kind of root very juicy, but something rare and difficult to be found, which the Yahoos sought for with much eagerness, and would suck it with great delight; it produced the same effects that wine hath upon us. It would make them sometimes hug, and sometimes tear one another; they would howl and grin, and chatter, and reel, and tumble, and then fall asleep in the mud.

I did indeed observe that the Yahoos were the only animals in this country subject to any diseases; which however, were much fewer than horses have among us, and contracted not by any ill treatment they meet with, but by the nastiness and greediness of that sordid brute. Neither has their language any more than a general appellation for those maladies; which is borrowed from the name of the beast, and called *Hnea Yahoo*, or the Yahoo's Evil; and the cure prescribed is a mixture of their own dung and urine, forcibly put down the Yahoo's throat. This I have since often known to have been taken with success, and do here freely recommend it to my countrymen, for the public good, as an admirable specific<sup>5</sup> against all diseases produced by repletion.

As to learning, government, arts, manufactures, and the like, my master confessed he could find little or no resemblance between the Yahoos of that country and those in ours. For he only meant to observe what parity there was in our natures. He had heard indeed some curious Houyhnhnms observe that in most herds there was a sort of ruling Yahoo (as among us there is generally some leading or principal stag in a park) who was always more deformed in body, and mischievous in disposition, than any of the rest. That this leader had usually a favorite as like himself as he could get, whose employment was to lick his master's feet and posteriors, and drive

the female Yahoos to his kennel; for which he was now and then rewarded with a piece of ass's flesh. This favorite is hated by the whole herd; and therefore to protect himself, keeps always near the person of his leader. He usually continues in office till a worse can be found; but the very moment he is discarded, his successor, at the head of all the Yahoos in that district, young and old, male and female, come in a body, and discharge their excrements upon him from head to foot. But how far this might be applicable to our courts and favorites, and ministers of state, my master said I could best determine.

I durst make no return to this malicious insinuation, which debased human understanding below the sagacity of a common hound, who hath judgment enough to distinguish and follow the cry of the ablest dog in the pack, without being ever mistaken.

My master told me there were some qualities remarkable in the Yahoos, which he had not observed me to mention, or at least very slightly, in the accounts I had given him of humankind. He said, those animals, like other brutes, had their females in common; but in this they differed, that the she-Yahoo would admit the male while she was pregnant; and that the hes would quarrel and fight with the females as fiercely as with each other. Both which practices were such degrees of infamous brutality, that no other sensitive creature ever arrived at.

Another thing he wondered at in the Yahoos was their strange disposition to nastiness and dirt; whereas there appears to be a natural love of cleanliness in all other animals. As to the two former accusations, I was glad to let them pass without any reply, because I had not a word to offer upon them in defense of my species, which otherwise I certainly had done from my own inclinations. But I could have easily vindicated humankind from the imputation of singularity upon the last article, if there had been any swine in that country (as unluckily for me there were not) which although it may be a sweeter quadruped than a Yahoo, cannot I humbly conceive in justice pretend to more cleanliness; and so his honor himself must have

owned, if he had seen their filthy way of feeding, and their custom of wallowing and sleeping in the mud.

My master likewise mentioned another quality, which his servants had discovered in several Yahoos, and to him was wholly unaccountable. He said, a fancy would sometimes take a Yahoo, to retire into a corner, to lie down and howl, and groan, and spurn away all that came near him, although he were young and fat, and wanted neither food nor water; nor did the servants imagine what could possibly ail him. And the only remedy they found was to set him to hard work, after which he would infallibly come to himself. To this I was silent out of partiality to my own kind; yet here I could plainly discover the true seeds of spleen,<sup>6</sup> which only seizeth on the lazy, the luxurious, and the rich; who, if they were forced to undergo the same regimen, I would undertake for the cure.

His Honor had farther observed, that a female Yahoo would often stand behind a bank or a bush, to gaze on the young males passing by, and then appear, and hide, using many antic gestures and grimaces; at which time it was observed, that she had a most offensive smell; and when any of the males advanced, would slowly retire, looking back, and with a counterfeit show of fear, run off into some convenient place where she knew the male would follow her.

At other times, if a female stranger came among them, three or four of her own sex would get about her, and stare and chatter, and grin, and smell her all over; and then turn off with gestures that seemed to express contempt and disdain.

Perhaps my master might refine a little in these speculations, which he had drawn from what he observed himself, or had been told by others; however, I could not reflect without some amazement, and much sorrow, that the rudiments of lewdness, coquetry, censure, and scandal, should have place by instinct in womankind.

I expected every moment that my master would accuse the Yahoos of those unnatural appetites in both sexes, so common among us. But Nature it seems hath not been so expert a

schoolmistress; and these politer pleasures are entirely the productions of art and reason, on our side of the globe.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Defending.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Remedy.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Depression.[Return to reference 6](#)

CHAPTER 8. *The Author relateth several particulars of the Yahoos. The great virtues of the Houyhnhnms. The education and exercises of their youth. Their general assembly.*

As I ought to have understood human nature much better than I supposed it possible for my master to do, so it was easy to apply the character he gave of the Yahoos to myself and my countrymen; and I believed I could yet make farther discoveries from my own observation. I therefore often begged his honor to let me go among the herds of Yahoos in the neighborhood; to which he always very graciously consented, being perfectly convinced that the hatred I bore those brutes would never suffer me to be corrupted by them; and his honor ordered one of his servants, a strong sorrel nag, very honest and good-natured, to be my guard; without whose protection I durst not undertake such adventures. For I have already told the reader how much I was pestered by those odious animals upon my first arrival. I afterwards failed very narrowly three or four times of falling into their clutches, when I happened to stray at any distance without my hanger. And I have reason to believe, they had some imagination that I was of their own species, which I often assisted myself, by stripping up my sleeves, and shewing my naked arms and breast in their sight, when my protector was with me; at which times they would approach as near as they durst, and imitate my actions after the manner of monkeys, but ever with great signs of hatred; as a tame jackdaw with cap and stockings is always persecuted by the wild ones, when he happens to be got among them.

They are prodigiously nimble from their infancy; however, I once caught a young male of three years old, and endeavored by all marks of tenderness to make it quiet; but the little imp fell a squalling, and scratching, and biting with such violence, that I was forced to let it go; and it was high time, for a whole troop of old ones came about us at the noise; but finding the cub was safe (for away it ran) and my sorrel nag being by, they durst not venture near us. I observed the young animal's flesh to smell very rank, and the stink was somewhat between a weasel and a fox, but much more disagreeable. I forgot another circumstance (and perhaps I might

have the reader's pardon, if it were wholly omitted) that while I held the odious vermin in my hands, it voided its filthy excrements of a yellow liquid substance, all over my clothes; but by good fortune there was a small brook hard by, where I washed myself as clean as I could; although I durst not come into my master's presence until I were sufficiently aired.

By what I could discover, the Yahoos appear to be the most unteachable of all animals, their capacities never reaching higher than to draw or carry burdens. Yet I am of opinion, this defect ariseth chiefly from a perverse, restive disposition. For they are cunning, malicious, treacherous and revengeful. They are strong and hardy, but of a cowardly spirit, and by consequence insolent, abject, and cruel. It is observed that the red-haired of both sexes are more libidinous and mischievous than the rest, whom yet they much exceed in strength and activity.

The Houyhnhnms keep the Yahoos for present use in huts not far from the house; but the rest are sent abroad to certain fields, where they dig up roots, eat several kinds of herbs, and search about for carrion, or sometimes catch weasels and *luhimuhs* (a sort of wild rat) which they greedily devour. Nature hath taught them to dig deep holes with their nails on the side of a rising ground, wherein they lie by themselves; only the kennels of the females are larger, sufficient to hold two or three cubs.

They swim from their infancy like frogs, and are able to continue long under water, where they often take fish, which the females carry home to their young. And upon this occasion, I hope the reader will pardon my relating an odd adventure.

Being one day abroad with my protector the sorrel nag, and the weather exceeding hot, I entreated him to let me bathe in a river that was near. He consented, and I immediately stripped myself stark naked, and went down softly into the stream. It happened that a young female Yahoo standing behind a bank, saw the whole proceeding; and inflamed by desire, as the nag and I conjectured, came running with all speed, and leaped into the water within five yards of the place where I bathed. I was never in my life so terribly

frighted; the nag was grazing at some distance, not suspecting any harm. She embraced me after a most fulsome manner; I roared as loud as I could, and the nag came galloping towards me, whereupon she quitted her grasp, with the utmost reluctancy, and leaped upon the opposite bank, where she stood gazing and howling all the time I was putting on my clothes.

This was matter of diversion to my master and his family, as well as of mortification to myself. For now I could no longer deny that I was a real Yahoo, in every limb and feature, since the females had a natural propensity to me as one of their own species; neither was the hair of this brute of a red color (which might have been some excuse for an appetite a little irregular) but black as a sloe, and her countenance did not make an appearance altogether so hideous as the rest of the kind; for I think, she could not be above eleven years old.

Having already lived three years in this country, the reader I suppose will expect that I should, like other travelers, give him some account of the manners and customs of its inhabitants, which it was indeed my principal study to learn.

As these noble Houyhnhnms are endowed by Nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature; so their grand maxim is to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it. Neither is reason among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of a question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discolored by passion and interest. I remember it was with extreme difficulty that I could bring my master to understand the meaning of the word "opinion," or how a point could be disputable; because reason taught us to affirm or deny only where we are certain; and beyond our knowledge we cannot do either. So that controversies, wranglings, disputes, and positiveness in false or dubious propositions are evils unknown among the Houyhnhnms. In the like manner when I used to explain to him our several systems of natural philosophy,<sup>7</sup> he would laugh that a creature pretending to

reason should value itself upon the knowledge of other people's conjectures, and in things, where that knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no use. Wherein he agreed entirely with the sentiments of Socrates, as Plato delivers them, which I mention as the highest honor I can do that prince of philosophers. I have often since reflected what destruction such a doctrine would make in the libraries of Europe; and how many paths to fame would be then shut up in the learned world.

Friendship and benevolence are the two principal virtues among the Houyhnhnms; and these not confined to particular objects, but universal to the whole race. For a stranger from the remotest part is equally treated with the nearest neighbor, and wherever he goes, looks upon himself as at home. They preserve decency and civility in the highest degrees, but are altogether ignorant of ceremony. They have no fondness for their colts or foals; but the care they take in educating them proceedeth entirely from the dictates of reason. And I observed my master to show the same affection to his neighbor's issue that he had for his own. They will have it that Nature teaches them to love the whole species, and it is reason only that maketh a distinction of persons, where there is a superior degree of virtue.

When the matron Houyhnhnms have produced one of each sex, they no longer accompany with their consorts, except they lose one of their issue by some casualty, which very seldom happens; but in such a case they meet again; or when the like accident befalls a person whose wife is past bearing, some other couple bestows on him one of their own colts, and then go together a second time, until the mother be pregnant. This caution is necessary to prevent the country from being overburdened with numbers. But the race of inferior Houyhnhnms bred up to be servants is not so strictly limited upon this article; these are allowed to produce three of each sex, to be domestics in the noble families.

In their marriages they are exactly careful to choose such colors as will not make any disagreeable mixture in the breed. Strength is chiefly valued in the male, and comeliness in the female; not upon the account of love, but to preserve the race from degenerating; for,



where a female happens to excel in strength, a consort is chosen with regard to comeliness. Courtship, love, presents, jointures, settlements, have no place in their thoughts, or terms whereby to express them in their language. The young couple meet and are joined, merely because it is the determination of their parents and friends; it is what they see done every day; and they look upon it as one of the necessary actions in a reasonable being. But the violation of marriage, or any other unchastity, was never heard of; and the married pair pass their lives with the same friendship and mutual benevolence that they bear to all others of the same species who come in their way, without jealousy, fondness, quarreling, or discontent.

In educating the youth of both sexes, their method is admirable, and highly deserveth our imitation. These are not suffered to taste a grain of oats, except upon certain days, till eighteen years old; nor milk, but very rarely; and in summer they graze two hours in the morning, and as many in the evening, which their parents likewise observe; but the servants are not allowed above half that time; and a great part of the grass is brought home, which they eat at the most convenient hours when they can be best spared from work.

Temperance, industry, exercise, and cleanliness are the lessons equally enjoined to the young ones of both sexes; and my master thought it monstrous in us to give the females a different kind of education from the males, except in some articles of domestic management; whereby, as he truly observed, one half of our natives were good for nothing but bringing children into the world; and to trust the care of their children to such useless animals, he said was yet a greater instance of brutality.

But the Houyhnhnms train up their youth to strength, speed, and hardiness, by exercising them in running races up and down steep hills, or over hard stony grounds; and when they are all in a sweat, they are ordered to leap over head and ears into a pond or a river. Four times a year the youth of certain districts meet to show their proficiency in running, and leaping, and other feats of strength or agility; where the victor is rewarded with a song made in his or her

praise. On this festival the servants drive a herd of Yahoos into the field, laden with hay, and oats, and milk for a repast to the Houyhnhnms; after which these brutes are immediately driven back again, for fear of being noisome to the assembly.

Every fourth year, at the vernal equinox, there is a representative council of the whole nation, which meets in a plain about twenty miles from our house, and continueth about five or six days. Here they inquire into the state and condition of the several districts; whether they abound or be deficient in hay or oats, or cows or Yahoos? And wherever there is any want (which is but seldom) it is immediately supplied by unanimous consent and contribution. Here likewise the regulation of children is settled: as for instance, if a Houyhnhnm hath two males, he changeth one of them with another who hath two females, and when a child hath been lost by any casualty, where the mother is past breeding, it is determined what family in the district shall breed another to supply the loss.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Science.[Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 9. *A grand debate at the general assembly of the Houyhnhnms, and how it was determined. The learning of the Houyhnhnms. Their buildings. Their manner of burials. The defectiveness of their language.*

One of these grand assemblies was held in my time, about three months before my departure, whither my master went as the representative of our district. In this council was resumed their old debate, and indeed, the only debate that ever happened in their country; whereof my master after his return gave me a very particular account.

The question to be debated was whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the face of the earth. One of the members for the affirmative offered several arguments of great strength and weight, alleging that, as the Yahoos were the most filthy, noisome, and deformed animal which nature ever produced, so they were the most restive and indocible,<sup>8</sup> mischievous, and malicious; they would privately suck the teats of the Houyhnhnms' cows; kill and devour their cats, trample down their oats and grass, if they were not continually watched; and commit a thousand other extravagancies. He took notice of a general tradition, that Yahoos had not been always in their country, but that many ages ago, two of these brutes appeared together upon a mountain; whether produced by the heat of the sun upon corrupted mud and slime, or from the ooze and froth of the sea, was never known. That these Yahoos engendered, and their brood in a short time grew so numerous as to overrun and infest the whole nation. That the Houyhnhnms to get rid of this evil, made a general hunting, and at last enclosed the whole herd; and destroying the older, every Houyhnhnm kept two young ones in a kennel, and brought them to such a degree of tameness as an animal so savage by nature can be capable of acquiring, using them for draught and carriage. That there seemed to be much truth in this tradition, and that those creatures could not be *ylnhniamshy* (or aborigines of the land) because of the violent hatred the Houyhnhnms as well as all other animals bore them; which although

their evil disposition sufficiently deserved, could never have arrived at so high a degree, if they had been aborigines, or else they would have long since been rooted out. That the inhabitants taking a fancy to use the service of the Yahoos, had very imprudently neglected to cultivate the breed of asses, which were a comely animal, easily kept, more tame and orderly, without any offensive smell, strong enough for labor, although they yield to the other in agility of body; and if their braying be no agreeable sound, it is far preferable to the horrible howlings of the Yahoos.

Several others declared their sentiments to the same purpose, when my master proposed an expedient to the assembly, whereof he had indeed borrowed the hint from me. He approved of the tradition, mentioned by the honorable member, who spoke before; and affirmed, that the two Yahoos said to be first seen among them, had been driven thither over the sea; that coming to land, and being forsaken by their companions, they retired to the mountains, and degenerating by degrees, became in process of time much more savage than those of their own species in the country from whence these two originals came. The reason of his assertion was that he had now in his possession a certain wonderful Yahoo (meaning myself) which most of them had heard of, and many of them had seen. He then related to them how he first found me; that my body was all covered with an artificial composure of the skins and hairs of other animals; that I spoke in a language of my own, and had thoroughly learned theirs; that I had related to him the accidents which brought me thither; that when he saw me without my covering, I was an exact Yahoo in every part, only of a whiter color, less hairy and with shorter claws. He added how I had endeavored to persuade him that in my own and other countries the Yahoos acted as the governing, rational animal, and held the Houyhnhnms in servitude; that he observed in me all the qualities of a Yahoo, only a little more civilized by some tincture of reason, which however was in a degree as far inferior to the Houyhnhnm race as the Yahoos of their country were to me; that among other things, I mentioned a custom we had of castrating Houyhnhnms when they were young, in

order to render them tame; that the operation was easy and safe; that it was no shame to learn wisdom from brutes, as industry is taught by the ant, and building by the swallow (for so I translate the word *lyhannh*, although it be a much larger fowl). That this invention might be practiced upon the younger Yahoos here, which, besides rendering them tractable and fitter for use, would in an age put an end to the whole species without destroying life. That in the meantime the Houyhnhnms should be exhorted to cultivate the breed of asses, which, as they are in all respects more valuable brutes, so they have this advantage, to be fit for service at five years old, which the other are not till twelve.

This was all my master thought fit to tell me at that time, of what passed in the grand council. But he was pleased to conceal one particular, which related personally to myself, whereof I soon felt the unhappy effect, as the reader will know in its proper place, and from whence I date all the succeeding misfortunes of my life.

The Houyhnhnms have no letters, and consequently, their knowledge is all traditional. But there happening few events of any moment among a people so well united, naturally disposed to every virtue, wholly governed by reason, and cut off from all commerce with other nations, the historical part is easily preserved without burdening their memories. I have already observed that they are subject to no diseases, and therefore can have no need of physicians. However, they have excellent medicines composed of herbs, to cure accidental bruises and cuts in the pastern or frog<sup>9</sup> of the foot by sharp stones, as well as other maims and hurts in the several parts of the body.

They calculate the year by the revolution of the sun and the moon, but use no subdivisions into weeks. They are well enough acquainted with the motions of those two luminaries, and understand the nature of eclipses; and this is the utmost progress of their astronomy.

In poetry they must be allowed to excel all other mortals; wherein the justness of their similes, and the minuteness, as well as exactness of their descriptions, are indeed inimitable. Their verses

abound very much in both of these, and usually contain either some exalted notions of friendship and benevolence, or the praises of those who were victors in races and other bodily exercises. Their buildings, although very rude and simple, are not inconvenient, but well contrived to defend them from all injuries of cold and heat. They have a kind of tree, which at forty years old loosens in the root, and falls with the first storm; it grows very straight, and being pointed like stakes with a sharp stone (for the Houyhnhnms know not the use of iron), they stick them erect in the ground about ten inches asunder, and then weave in oat straw, or sometimes wattles, betwixt them. The roof is made after the same manner, and so are the doors.

The Houyhnhnms use the hollow part between the pastern and the hoof of their forefeet as we do our hands, and this with greater dexterity than I could at first imagine. I have seen a white mare of our family thread a needle (which I lent her on purpose) with that joint. They milk their cows, reap their oats, and do all the work which requires hands in the same manner. They have a kind of hard flints, which by grinding against other stones they form into instruments that serve instead of wedges, axes, and hammers. With tools made of these flints, they likewise cut their hay, and reap their oats, which there groweth naturally in several fields. The Yahoos draw home the sheaves in carriages, and the servants tread them in certain covered huts, to get out the grain, which is kept in stores. They make a rude kind of earthen and wooden vessels, and bake the former in the sun.

If they can avoid casualties, they die only of old age, and are buried in the obscurest places that can be found, their friends and relations expressing neither joy nor grief at their departure; nor does the dying person discover the least regret that he is leaving the world, any more than if he were upon returning home from a visit to one of his neighbors; I remember my master having once made an appointment with a friend and his family to come to his house upon some affair of importance; on the day fixed, the mistress and her two children came very late; she made two excuses, first for her

husband, who, as she said, happened that very morning to *lhnuwnh*. The word is strongly expressive in their language, but not easily rendered into English; it signifies, *to retire to his first Mother*. Her excuse for not coming sooner was that her husband dying late in the morning, she was a good while consulting her servants about a convenient place where his body should be laid; and I observed she behaved herself at our house, as cheerfully as the rest. She died about three months after.

They live generally to seventy or seventy-five years, very seldom to fourscore; some weeks before their death they feel a gradual decay, but without pain. During this time they are much visited by their friends, because they cannot go abroad with their usual ease and satisfaction. However, about ten days before their death, which they seldom fail in computing, they return the visits that have been made by those who are nearest in the neighborhood, being carried in a convenient sledge drawn by Yahoos; which vehicle they use, not only upon this occasion, but when they grow old, upon long journeys, or when they are lamed by any accident. And therefore when the dying Houyhnhnms return those visits, they take a solemn leave of their friends, as if they were going to some remote part of the country, where they designed to pass the rest of their lives.

I know not whether it may be worth observing, that the Houyhnhnms have no word in their language to express anything that is evil, except what they borrow from the deformities or ill qualities of the Yahoos. Thus they denote the folly of a servant, an omission of a child, a stone that cuts their feet, a continuance of foul or unseasonable weather, and the like, by adding to each the epithet of Yahoo. For instance, *hnhm Yahoo*, *whnaholm Yahoo*, *ynlhmndwihlma Yahoo*, and an ill-contrived house, *ynholmhnmrohlnw Yahoo*.

I could with great pleasure enlarge farther upon the manners and virtues of this excellent people; but intending in a short time to publish a volume by itself expressly upon that subject, I refer the reader thither. And in the meantime, proceed to relate my own sad catastrophe.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Unteachable. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sole. [Return to reference 9](#)



CHAPTER 10. *The Author's economy, and happy life among the Houyhnhnms. His great improvement in virtue, by conversing with them. Their conversations. The Author hath notice given him by his master that he must depart from the country. He falls into a swoon for grief, but submits. He contrives and finishes a canoe, by the help of a fellow servant, and puts to sea at a venture.*

I had settled my little economy to my own heart's content. My master had ordered a room to be made for me after their manner, about six yards from the house; the sides and floors of which I plastered with clay, and covered with rush mats of my own contriving; I had beaten hemp, which there grows wild, and made of it a sort of ticking; this I filled with the feathers of several birds I had taken with springes made of Yahoos' hairs, and were excellent food. I had worked two chairs with my knife, the sorrel nag helping me in the grosser and more laborious part. When my clothes were worn to rags, I made myself others with the skins of rabbits, and of a certain beautiful animal about the same size, called *nnuhnoh*, the skin of which is covered with a fine down. Of these I likewise made very tolerable stockings. I soled my shoes with wood which I cut from a tree, and fitted to the upper leather, and when this was worn out, I supplied it with the skins of Yahoos, dried in the sun. I often got honey out of hollow trees, which I mingled with water, or eat it with my bread. No man could more verify the truth of these two maxims, that *Nature is very easily satisfied*; and, that *Necessity is the mother of invention*. I enjoyed perfect health of body, and tranquility of mind; I did not feel the treachery or inconstancy of a friend, nor the inquiries of a secret or open enemy. I had no occasion of bribing, flattering, or pimping to procure the favor of any great man, or of his minion. I wanted no fence against fraud or oppression; here was neither physician to destroy my body, nor lawyer to ruin my fortune; no informer to watch my words and actions, or forge accusations against me for hire; here were no gibbers, censurers, backbiters, pickpockets, highwaymen, housebreakers, attorneys, bawds, buffoons, gamesters, politicians, wits, splenetics, tedious talkers,

controvertists, ravishers, murderers, robbers, virtuosos;<sup>1</sup> no leaders or followers of party and faction; no encouragers to vice, by seducement or examples; no dungeons, axes, gibbets, whipping posts, or pillories; no cheating shopkeepers or mechanics; no pride, vanity or affectation; no fops, bullies, drunkards, strolling whores, or poxes; no ranting, lewd, expensive wives; no stupid, proud pedants; no importunate, overbearing, quarrelsome, noisy, roaring, empty, conceited, swearing companions; no scoundrels raised from the dust upon the merit of their vices; or nobility thrown into it on account of their virtues; no lords, fiddlers, judges, or dancing masters.

I had the favor of being admitted to several Houyhnhnms, who came to visit or dine with my master; where his honor graciously suffered me to wait in the room, and listen to their discourse. Both he and his company would often descend to ask me questions, and receive my answers. I had also sometimes the honor of attending my master in his visits to others. I never presumed to speak, except in answer to a question; and then I did it with inward regret, because it was a loss of so much time for improving myself; but I was infinitely delighted with the station of an humble auditor in such conversations, where nothing passed but what was useful, expressed in the fewest and most significant words; where (as I have already said) the greatest decency was observed, without the least degree of ceremony; where no person spoke without being pleased himself, and pleasing his companions; where there was no interruption, tediousness, heat, or difference of sentiments. They have a notion, that when people are met together, a short silence doth much improve conversation; this I found to be true; for during those little intermissions of talk, new ideas would arise in their minds, which very much enlivened the discourse. Their subjects are generally on friendship and benevolence; on order and economy; sometimes upon the visible operations of nature, or ancient traditions; upon the bounds and limits of virtue; upon the unerring rules of reason; or upon some determinations, to be taken at the next great assembly; and often upon the various excellencies of poetry. I may add, without vanity, that my presence often gave them

sufficient matter for discourse, because it afforded my master an occasion of letting his friends into the history of me and my country, upon which they were all pleased to descant in a manner not very advantageous to human kind; and for that reason I shall not repeat what they said; only I maybe allowed to observe that his honor, to my great admiration, appeared to understand the nature of Yahoos much better than myself. He went through all our vices and follies, and discovered many which I had never mentioned to him; by only supposing what qualities a Yahoo of their country, with a small proportion of reason, might be capable of exerting; and concluded, with too much probability, how vile as well as miserable such a creature must be.

I freely confess, that all the little knowledge I have of any value was acquired by the lectures I received from my master, and from hearing the discourses of him and his friends; to which I should be prouder to listen, than to dictate to the greatest and wisest assembly in Europe. I admired the strength, comeliness, and speed of the inhabitants; and such a constellation of virtues in such amiable persons produced in me the highest veneration. At first, indeed, I did not feel that natural awe which the Yahoos and all other animals bear towards them; but it grew upon me by degrees, much sooner than I imagined, and was mingled with a respectful love and gratitude, that they would condescend to distinguish me from the rest of my species.

When I thought of my family, my friends, my countrymen, or human race in general, I considered them as they really were, Yahoos in shape and disposition, perhaps a little more civilized, and qualified with the gift of speech; but making no other use of reason than to improve and multiply those vices, whereof their brethren in this country had only the share that nature allotted them. When I happened to behold the reflection of my own form in a lake or fountain, I turned away my face in horror and detestation of myself, and could better endure the sight of a common Yahoo than of my own person. By conversing with the Houyhnhnms, and looking upon them with delight, I fell to imitate their gait and gesture, which is

now grown into a habit; and my friends often tell me in a blunt way, that I trot like a horse; which, however, I take for a great compliment. Neither shall I disown, that in speaking I am apt to fall into the voice and manner of the Houyhnhnms, and hear myself ridiculed on that account without the least mortification.

In the midst of this happiness, when I looked upon myself to be fully settled for life, my master sent for me one morning a little earlier than his usual hour. I observed by his countenance that he was in some perplexity, and at a loss how to begin what he had to speak. After a short silence, he told me, he did not know how I would take what he was going to say; that, in the last general assembly, when the affair of the Yahoos was entered upon, the representatives had taken offense at his keeping a Yahoo (meaning myself) in his family more like a Houyhnhnm than a brute animal. That he was known frequently to converse with me, as if he could receive some advantage of pleasure in my company; that such a practice was not agreeable to reason or nature, or a thing ever heard of before among them. The assembly did therefore exhort him, either to employ me like the rest of my species, or command me to swim back to the place from whence I came. That the first of these expedients was utterly rejected by all the Houyhnhnms who had ever seen me at his house or their own; for, they alleged, that because I had some rudiments of reason, added to the natural pravity<sup>2</sup> of those animals, it was to be feared, I might be able to seduce them into the woody and mountainous parts of the country, and bring them in troops by night to destroy the Houyhnhnms' cattle, as being naturally of the ravenous kind, and averse from labor.

My master added that he was daily pressed by the Houyhnhnms of the neighborhood to have the assembly's exhortation executed, which he could not put off much longer. He doubted<sup>3</sup> it would be impossible for me to swim to another country; and therefore wished I would contrive some sort of vehicle resembling those I had described to him, that might carry me on the sea; in which work I should have the assistance of his own servants, as well as those of

his neighbors. He concluded that for his own part he could have been content to keep me in his service as long as I lived; because he found I had cured myself of some bad habits and dispositions, by endeavoring, as far as my inferior nature was capable, to imitate the Houyhnhnms.

I should here observe to the reader, that a decree of the general assembly in this country is expressed by the word *hnhloayn*, which signifies an exhortation, as near as I can render it; for they have no conception how a rational creature can be compelled, but only advised, or exhorted; because no person can disobey reason without giving up his claim to be a rational creature.

I was struck with the utmost grief and despair at my master's discourse; and being unable to support the agonies I was under, I fell into a swoon at his feet; when I came to myself, he told me that he concluded I had been dead (for these people are subject to no such imbecilities of nature). I answered, in a faint voice, that death would have been too great an happiness; that although I could not blame the assembly's exhortation, or the urgency of his friends; yet in my weak and corrupt judgment, I thought it might consist with reason to have been less rigorous. That I could not swim a league, and probably the nearest land to theirs might be distant above an hundred; that many materials, necessary for making a small vessel to carry me off, were wholly wanting in this country, which, however, I would attempt in obedience and gratitude to his honor, although I concluded the thing to be impossible, and therefore looked on myself as already devoted<sup>4</sup> to destruction. That the certain prospect of an unnatural death was the least of my evils; for, supposing I should escape with life by some strange adventure, how could I think with temper<sup>5</sup> of passing my days among Yahoos, and relapsing into my old corruptions, for want of examples to lead and keep me within the paths of virtue. That I knew too well upon what solid reasons all the determinations of the wise Houyhnhnms were founded, not to be shaken by arguments of mine, a miserable Yahoo; and therefore after presenting him with my humble thanks for the offer of his servants' assistance in making a vessel, and

desiring a reasonable time for so difficult a work, I told him I would endeavor to preserve a wretched being; and, if ever I returned to England, was not without hopes of being useful to my own species by celebrating the praises of the renowned Houyhnhnms, and proposing their virtues to the imitation of mankind.

My master in a few words made me a very gracious reply, allowed me the space of two months to finish my boat, and ordered the sorrel nag, my fellow servant (for so at this distance I may presume to call him), to follow my instructions, because I told my master that his help would be sufficient, and I knew he had a tenderness for me.

In his company my first business was to go to that part of the coast where my rebellious crew had ordered me to be set on shore. I got upon a height, and looking on every side into the sea, fancied I saw a small island towards the northeast; I took out my pocket glass, and could then clearly distinguish it about five leagues off, as I computed; but it appeared to the sorrel nag to be only a blue cloud; for, as he had no conception of any country besides his own, so he could not be as expert in distinguishing remote objects at sea, as we who so much converse in that element.

After I had discovered this island, I considered no farther; but resolved, it should, if possible, be the first place of my banishment, leaving the consequence to fortune.

I returned home, and consulting with the sorrel nag, we went into a copse at some distance, where I with my knife, and he with a sharp flint fastened very artificially,<sup>6</sup> after their manner, to a wooden handle, cut down several oak wattles about the thickness of a walking staff, and some larger pieces. But I shall not trouble the reader with a particular description of my own mechanics; let it suffice to say, that in six weeks time, with the help of the sorrel nag, who performed the parts that required most labor, I finished a sort of Indian canoe; but much larger, covering it with the skins of Yahoos, well stitched together, with hempen threads of my own making. My sail was likewise composed of the skins of the same animal; but I made use of the youngest I could get, the older being

too tough and thick; and I likewise provided myself with four paddles. I laid in a stock of boiled flesh, of rabbits and fowls; and took with me two vessels, one filled with milk, and the other with water.

I tried my canoe in a large pond near my master's house, and then corrected in it what was amiss, stopping all the chinks with Yahoo's tallow, till I found it staunch, and able to bear me and my freight. And when it was as complete as I could possibly make it, I had it drawn on a carriage very gently by Yahoos, to the seaside, under the conduct of the sorrel nag and another servant.

When all was ready, and the day came for my departure, I took leave of my master and lady, and the whole family, my eyes flowing with tears and my heart quite sunk with grief.<sup>2</sup> But his honor, out of curiosity, and perhaps (if I may speak it without vanity) partly out of kindness, was determined to see me in my canoe; and got several of his neighboring friends to accompany him. I was forced to wait above an hour for the tide, and then observing the wind very fortunately bearing towards the island to which I intended to steer my course, I took a second leave of my master; but as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his hoof, he did me the honor to raise it gently to my mouth. I am not ignorant how much I have been censured for mentioning this last particular. Detractors are pleased to think it improbable that so illustrious a person should descend to give so great a mark of distinction to a creature so inferior as I. Neither have I forgot how apt some travelers are to boast of extraordinary favors they have received. But, if these censurers were better acquainted with the noble and courteous disposition of the Houyhnhnms, they would soon change their opinion. I paid my respects to the rest of the Houyhnhnms in his honor's company; then getting into my canoe, I pushed off from shore.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Those who pursue special interests in the arts or sciences.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Corruption. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Feared. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Doomed. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Equanimity. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Artfully. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For a depiction of this scene by Sawrey Gilpin, See the Image Gallery for this volume. [Return to reference 7](#)



CHAPTER 11. *The Author's dangerous voyage. He arrives at New Holland, hoping to settle there. Is wounded with an arrow by one of the natives. Is seized and carried by force into a Portuguese ship. The great civilities of the Captain. The Author arrives at England.*

I began this desperate voyage on February 15, 1714/5,<sup>8</sup> at 9 o'clock in the morning. The wind was very favorable; however, I made use at first only of my paddles; but considering I should soon be weary, and that the wind might probably chop about, I ventured to set up my little sail, and thus, with the help of the tide, I went at the rate of a league and a half an hour, as near as I could guess. My master and his friends continued on the shore, till I was almost out of sight; and I often heard the sorrel nag (who always loved me) crying out, "*Hnuy illa nyha maiah Yahoo*" ("Take care of thyself, gentle Yahoo").

My design was, if possible, to discover some small island uninhabited, yet sufficient by my labor to furnish me with necessaries of life, which I would have thought a greater happiness than to be first minister in the politest court of Europe, so horrible was the idea I conceived of returning to live in the society and under the government of Yahoos. For in such a solitude as I desired, I could at least enjoy my own thoughts, and reflect with delight on the virtues of those inimitable Houyhnhnms, without any opportunity of degenerating into the vices and corruptions of my own species.

The reader may remember what I related when my crew conspired against me, and confined me to my cabin, how I continued there several weeks, without knowing what course we took; and when I was put ashore in the longboat, how the sailors told me with oaths, whether true or false, that they knew not in what part of the world we were. However, I did then believe us to be about 10 degrees southward of the Cape of Good Hope, or about 45 degrees southern latitude, as I gathered from some general words I overheard among them, being I supposed to the southeast in their intended voyage to Madagascar. And although this were but little better than conjecture, yet I resolved to steer my course eastward,

hoping to reach the southwest coast of New Holland, and perhaps some such island as I desired, lying westward of it. The wind was full west, and by six in the evening I computed I had gone eastward at least eighteen leagues; when I spied a very small island about half a league off, which I soon reached. It was nothing but a rock with one creek, naturally arched by the force of tempests. Here I put in my canoe, and climbing a part of the rock, I could plainly discover land to the east, extending from south to north. I lay all night in my canoe; and repeating my voyage early in the morning, I arrived in seven hours to the southeast point of New Holland. This confirmed me in the opinion I have long entertained, that the maps and charts place this country at least three degrees more to the east than it really is; which thought I communicated many years ago to my worthy friend Mr. Herman Moll,<sup>9</sup> and gave him my reasons for it, although he hath rather chosen to follow other authors.

I saw no inhabitants in the place where I landed; and being unarmed, I was afraid of venturing far into the country. I found some shellfish on the shore, and eat them raw, not daring to kindle a fire, for fear of being discovered by the natives. I continued three days feeding on oysters and limpets, to save my own provisions; and I fortunately found a brook of excellent water, which gave me great relief.

On the fourth day, venturing out early a little too far, I saw twenty or thirty natives upon a height, not above five hundred yards from me. They were stark naked, men, women, and children round a fire, as I could discover by the smoke. One of them spied me, and gave notice to the rest; five of them advanced towards me, leaving the women and children at the fire. I made what haste I could to the shore, and getting into my canoe, shoved off; the savages observing me retreat, ran after me; and before I could get far enough into the sea, discharged an arrow, which wounded me deeply on the inside of my left knee. (I shall carry the mark to my grave.) I apprehended the arrow might be poisoned; and paddling out of the reach of their darts (being a calm day) I made a shift to suck the wound, and dress it as well as I could.

I was at a loss what to do, for I durst not return to the same landing place, but stood to the north, and was forced to paddle; for the wind, although very gentle, was against me, blowing northwest. As I was looking about for a secure landing place, I saw a sail to the north northeast, which appearing every minute more visible, I was in some doubt whether I should wait for them or no; but at last my detestation of the Yahoo race prevailed; and turning my canoe, I sailed and paddled together to the south, and got into the same creek from whence I set out in the morning, choosing rather to trust myself among these barbarians than live with European Yahoos. I drew up my canoe as close as I could to the shore, and hid myself behind a stone by the little brook, which, as I have already said, was excellent water.

The ship came within half a league of this creek, and sent out her longboat with vessels to take in fresh water (for the place it seems was very well known), but I did not observe it until the boat was almost on shore; and it was too late to seek another hiding place. The seamen at their landing observed my canoe, and rummaging it all over, easily conjectured that the owner could not be far off. Four of them well armed searched every cranny and lurking hole, till at last they found me flat on my face behind the stone. They gazed a while in admiration at my strange uncouth dress; my coat made of skins, my wooden-soled shoes, and my furred stockings; from whence, however, they concluded I was not a native of the place, who all go naked. One of the seamen in Portuguese bid me rise, and asked who I was. I understood that language very well, and getting upon my feet, said I was a poor Yahoo, banished from the Houyhnhnms, and desired they would please to let me depart. They admired to hear me answer them in their own tongue, and saw by my complexion I must be an European; but were at a loss to know what I meant by Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, and at the same time fell a laughing at my strange tone in speaking, which resembled the neighing of a horse. I trembled all the while betwixt fear and hatred; I again desired leave to depart, and was gently moving to my canoe; but they laid hold on me, desiring to know what country I

was of? whence I came? with many other questions. I told them I was born in England, from whence I came about five years ago, and then their country and ours was at peace. I therefore hoped they would not treat me as an enemy, since I meant them no harm, but was a poor Yahoo, seeking some desolate place where to pass the remainder of his unfortunate life.

When they began to talk, I thought I never heard or saw any thing so unnatural; for it appeared to me as monstrous as if a dog or a cow should speak in England, or a Yahoo in Houyhnhnmland. The honest Portuguese were equally amazed at my strange dress, and the odd manner of delivering my words, which however they understood very well. They spoke to me with great humanity, and said they were sure their Captain would carry me *gratis* to Lisbon, from whence I might return to my own country; that two of the seamen would go back to the ship, to inform the Captain of what they had seen, and receive his orders; in the meantime, unless I would give my solemn oath not to fly, they would secure me by force. I thought it best to comply with their proposal. They were very curious to know my story, but I gave them very little satisfaction; and they all conjectured, that my misfortunes had impaired my reason. In two hours the boat, which went laden with vessels of water, returned with the Captain's commands to fetch me on board. I fell on my knees to preserve my liberty; but all was in vain, and the men having tied me with cords, heaved me into the boat, from whence I was taken into the ship, and from thence into the Captain's cabin.

His name was Pedro de Mendez; he was a very courteous and generous person; he entreated me to give some account of myself, and desired to know what I would eat or drink; said I should be used as well as himself, and spoke so many obliging things, that I wondered to find such civilities from a Yahoo. However, I remained silent and sullen; I was ready to faint at the very smell of him and his men. At last I desired something to eat out of my own canoe; but he ordered me a chicken and some excellent wine, and then directed that I should be put to bed in a very clean cabin. I would

not undress myself, but lay on the bedclothes; and in half an hour stole out, when I thought the crew was at dinner; and getting to the side of the ship, was going to leap into the sea, and swim for my life, rather than continue among Yahoos. But one of the seamen prevented me, and having informed the Captain, I was chained to my cabin.

After dinner Don Pedro came to me, and desired to know my reason for so desperate an attempt; assured me he only meant to do me all the service he was able; and spoke so very movingly, that at last I descended to treat him like an animal which had some little portion of reason. I gave him a very short relation of my voyage; of the conspiracy against me by my own men; of the country where they set me on shore, and of my five years residence there. All which he looked upon as if it were a dream or a vision; whereat I took great offense; for I had quite forgot the faculty of lying, so peculiar to Yahoos in all countries where they preside, and consequently the disposition of suspecting truth in others of their own species. I asked him whether it were the custom of his country to *say the thing that was not*? I assured him I had almost forgot what he meant by falsehood; and if I had lived a thousand years in Houyhnhnmland, I should never have heard a lie from the meanest servant. That I was altogether indifferent whether he believed me or no; but however, in return for his favors, I would give so much allowance to the corruption of his nature, as to answer any objection he would please to make; and he might easily discover the truth.

The Captain, a wise man, after many endeavors to catch me tripping in some part of my story, at last began to have a better opinion of my veracity. But he added that since I professed so inviolable an attachment to truth, I must give him my word of honor to bear him company in this voyage without attempting anything against my life; or else he would continue me a prisoner till we arrived at Lisbon. I gave him the promise he required; but at the same time protested that I would suffer the greatest hardships rather than return to live among Yahoos.

Our voyage passed without any considerable accident. In gratitude to the Captain I sometimes sat with him at his earnest request, and strove to conceal my antipathy against humankind, although it often broke out; which he suffered to pass without observation. But the greatest part of the day, I confined myself to my cabin, to avoid seeing any of the crew. The Captain had often entreated me to strip myself of my savage dress, and offered to lend me the best suit of clothes he had. This I would not be prevailed on to accept, abhorring to cover myself with anything that had been on the back of a Yahoo. I only desired he would lend me two clean shirts, which having been washed since he wore them, I believed would not so much defile me. These I changed every second day, and washed them myself.

We arrived at Lisbon, Nov. 5, 1715. At our landing, the Captain forced me to cover myself with his cloak, to prevent the rabble from crowding about me. I was conveyed to his own house; and at my earnest request, he led me up to the highest room backwards.<sup>1</sup> I conjured him to conceal from all persons what I had told him of the Houyhnhnms; because the least hint of such a story would not only draw numbers of people to see me, but probably put me in danger of being imprisoned, or burned by the Inquisition. The Captain persuaded me to accept a suit of clothes newly made; but I would not suffer the tailor to take my measure; however, Don Pedro being almost of my size, they fitted me well enough. He accoutered me with other necessaries, all new, which I aired for twenty-four hours before I would use them.

The Captain had no wife, nor above three servants, none of which were suffered to attend at meals; and his whole deportment was so obliging, added to very good human understanding, that I really began to tolerate his company. He gained so far upon me, that I ventured to look out of the back window. By degrees I was brought into another room, from whence I peeped into the street, but drew my head back in a fright. In a week's time he seduced me down to the door. I found my terror gradually lessened, but my hatred and contempt seemed to increase. I was at last bold enough to walk the

street in his company, but kept my nose well stopped with rue, or sometimes with tobacco.

In ten days, Don Pedro, to whom I had given some account of my domestic affairs, put it upon me as a point of honor and conscience that I ought to return to my native country, and live at home with my wife and children. He told me there was an English ship in the port just ready to sail, and he would furnish me with all things necessary. It would be tedious to repeat his arguments, and my contradictions. He said it was altogether impossible to find such a solitary island as I had desired to live in; but I might command in my own house, and pass my time in a manner as recluse as I pleased.

I complied at last, finding I could not do better. I left Lisbon the 24th day of November, in an English merchantman, but who was the Master I never inquired. Don Pedro accompanied me to the ship, and lent me twenty pounds. He took kind leave of me, and embraced me at parting; which I bore as well as I could. During this last voyage I had no commerce with the Master, or any of his men; but pretending I was sick kept close in my cabin. On the fifth of December, 1715, we cast anchor in the Downs about nine in the morning, and at three in the afternoon I got safe to my house at Redriff.

My wife and family received me with great surprise and joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must freely confess, the sight of them filled me only with hatred, disgust, and contempt; and the more, by reflecting on the near alliance I had to them. For although since my unfortunate exile from the Houyhnhnm country, I had compelled myself to tolerate the sight of Yahoos, and to converse with Don Pedro de Mendez; yet my memory and imaginations were perpetually filled with the virtues and ideas of those exalted Houyhnhnms. And when I began to consider that by copulating with one of the Yahoo species, I had become a parent of more, it struck me with the utmost shame, confusion, and horror.

As soon as I entered the house, my wife took me in her arms, and kissed me; at which, having not been used to the touch of that odious animal for so many years, I fell in a swoon for almost an

hour. At the time I am writing, it is five years since my last return to England. During the first year I could not endure my wife or children in my presence, the very smell of them was intolerable; much less could I suffer them to eat in the same room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my bread, or drink out of the same cup; neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the hand. The first money I laid out was to buy two young stone-horses,<sup>2</sup> which I keep in a good stable, and next to them the groom is my greatest favorite; for I feel my spirits revived by the smell he contracts in the stable. My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four hours every day. They are strangers to bridle or saddle; they live in great amity with me, and friendship to each other.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, 1715, by modern dating. The year began on March 25.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A famous contemporary map maker.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: At the rear.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Stallions.[Return to reference 2](#)



CHAPTER 12. *The Author's veracity. His design in publishing this work. His censure of those travelers who swerve from the truth. The Author clears himself from any sinister ends in writing. His native country commended. The right of the crown to those countries described by the Author is justified. The difficulty of conquering them. The Author takes his last leave of the reader; proposeth his manner of living for the future; gives good advice, and concludeth.*

Thus gentle reader, I have given thee a faithful history of my travels for sixteen years, and above seven months; wherein I have not been so studious of ornament as of truth. I could perhaps like others have astonished thee with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform, and not to amuse thee.

It is easy for us who travel into remote countries, which are seldom visited by Englishmen or other Europeans, to form descriptions of wonderful animals both at sea and land. Whereas a traveler's chief aim should be to make men wiser and better, and to improve their minds by the bad as well as good example of what they deliver concerning foreign places.

I could heartily wish a law were enacted, that every traveler, before he were permitted to publish his voyages, should be obliged to make oath before the Lord High Chancellor that all he intended to print was absolutely true to the best of his knowledge; for then the world would no longer be deceived as it usually is, while some writers, to make their works pass the better upon the public, impose the grossest falsities on the unwary reader. I have perused several books of travels with great delight in my younger days; but, having since gone over most parts of the globe, and been able to contradict many fabulous accounts from my own observation, it hath given me a great disgust against this part of reading, and some indignation to see the credulity of mankind so impudently abused. Therefore, since my acquaintance were pleased to think my poor endeavors might not be unacceptable to my country, I imposed on myself as a

maxim, never to be swerved from, that I would *strictly adhere to truth*; neither indeed can I be ever under the least temptation to vary from it, while I retain in my mind the lectures and example of my noble master, and the other illustrious Houyhnhnms, of whom I had so long the honor to be an humble hearer.

—*Nec si miserum Fortuna Sinonem  
Finxit, vanum etiam, mendacemque improba finget.*<sup>3</sup>

I know very well how little reputation is to be got by writings which require neither genius nor learning, nor indeed any other talent, except a good memory, or an exact journal. I know likewise, that writers of travels, like dictionary-makers, are sunk into oblivion by the weight and bulk of those who come last, and therefore lie uppermost. And it is highly probable that such travelers who shall hereafter visit the countries described in this work of mine, may be detecting my errors (if there be any) and adding many new discoveries of their own, jostle me out of vogue, and stand in my place, making the world forget that ever I was an author. This indeed would be too great a mortification if I wrote for fame; but, as my sole intention was the PUBLIC GOOD, I cannot be altogether disappointed. For, who can read the virtues I have mentioned in the glorious Houyhnhnms, without being ashamed of his own vices, when he considers himself as the reasoning, governing animal of his country? I shall say nothing of those remote nations where Yahoos preside; amongst which the least corrupted are the Brobdingnagians, whose wise maxims in morality and government it would be our happiness to observe. But I forbear descanting further, and rather leave the judicious reader to his own remarks and applications.

I am not a little pleased that this work of mine can possibly meet with no censurers; for what objections can be made against a writer who relates only plain facts that happened in such distant countries, where we have not the least interest with respect either to trade or negotiations? I have carefully avoided every fault with which

common writers of travels are often too justly charged. Besides, I meddle not the least with any party, but write without passion, prejudice, or ill-will against any man or number of men whatsoever. I write for the noblest end, to inform and instruct mankind, over whom I may, without breach of modesty, pretend to some superiority, from the advantages I received by conversing so long among the most accomplished Houyhnhnms. I write without any view towards profit or praise. I never suffer a word to pass that may look like a reflection,<sup>4</sup> or possibly give the least offense even to those who are most ready to take it. So that, I hope, I may with justice pronounce myself an Author perfectly blameless; against whom the tribes of answerers, considerers, observers, reflectors, detectors, remarkers will never be able to find matter for exercising their talents.

I confess it was whispered to me that I was bound in duty as a subject of England, to have given in a memorial<sup>5</sup> to a secretary of state, at my first coming over; because, whatever lands are discovered by a subject, belong to the Crown. But I doubt whether our conquests in the countries I treat of would be as easy as those of Ferdinando Cortez over the naked Americans. The Lilliputians, I think, are hardly worth the charge of a fleet and army to reduce them; and I question whether it might be prudent or safe to attempt the Brobdingnagians; or, whether an English army would be much at their ease with the Flying Island over their heads. The Houyhnhnms, indeed, appear not to be so well prepared for war, a science to which they are perfect strangers, and especially against missive weapons. However, supposing myself to be a minister of state, I could never give my advice for invading them. Their prudence, unanimity, unacquaintedness with fear, and their love of their country would amply supply all defects in the military art. Imagine twenty thousand of them breaking into the midst of an European army, confounding the ranks, overturning the carriages, battering the warriors' faces into mummy, by terrible yerks from their hinder hoofs: for they would well deserve the character given to Augustus, *Recalcitrat undique tutus*.<sup>6</sup> But instead of proposals for conquering

that magnanimous nation, I rather wish they were in a capacity or disposition to send a sufficient number of their inhabitants for civilizing Europe; by teaching us the first principles of Honor, Justice, Truth, Temperance, Public Spirit, Fortitude, Chastity, Friendship, Benevolence, and Fidelity. The names of all which virtues are still retained among us in most languages, and are to be met with in modern as well as ancient authors, which I am able to assert from my own small reading.

But I had another reason which made me less forward to enlarge his majesty's dominions by my discoveries: to say the truth, I had conceived a few scruples with relation to the distributive justice of princes upon those occasions. For instance, a crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither; at length a boy discovers land from the topmast; they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for the king, they set up a rotten plank or a stone for a memorial, they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple more by force for a sample, return home, and get their pardon. Here commences a new dominion acquired with a title by Divine Right. Ships are sent with the first opportunity; the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free license given to all acts of inhumanity and lust; the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants: and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition is a *modern colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people.

But this description, I confess, doth by no means affect the British nation, who may be an example to the whole world for their wisdom, care, and justice in planting colonies; their liberal endowments for the advancement of religion and learning; their choice of devout and able pastors to propagate Christianity; their caution in stocking their provinces with people of sober lives and conversations from this the Mother Kingdom; their strict regard to the distribution of justice, in supplying the civil administration through all their colonies with officers of the greatest abilities, utter

strangers to corruption: and to crown all, by sending the most vigilant and virtuous governors, who have no other views than the happiness of the people over whom they preside, and the honor of the king their master.

But, as those countries which I have described do not appear to have any desire of being conquered, and enslaved, murdered, or driven out by colonies, nor abound either in gold, silver, sugar, or tobacco, I did humbly conceive they were by no means proper objects of our zeal, our valor, or our interest. However, if those whom it may concern, think fit to be of another opinion, I am ready to depose, when I shall be lawfully called, that no European did ever visit these countries before me. I mean, if the inhabitants ought to be believed.

But, as to the formality of taking possession in my sovereign's name, it never came once into my thoughts; and if it had, yet as my affairs then stood, I should perhaps in point of prudence and self-preservation have put it off to a better opportunity.

Having thus answered the only objection that can be raised against me as a traveler, I here take a final leave of my courteous readers, and return to enjoy my own speculations in my little garden at Redriff; to apply those excellent lessons of virtue which I learned among the Houyhnhnms; to instruct the Yahoos of my own family as far as I shall find them docible animals; to behold my figure often in a glass, and thus if possible habituate myself by time to tolerate the sight of a human creature; to lament the brutality of Houyhnhnms in my own country, but always treat their persons with respect, for the sake of my noble master, his family, his friends, and the whole Houyhnhnm race, whom these of ours have the honor to resemble in all their lineaments, however their intellectuals came to degenerate.

I began last week to permit my wife to sit at dinner with me, at the farthest end of a long table; and to answer (but with the utmost brevity) the few questions I ask her. Yet the smell of a Yahoo continuing very offensive, I always keep my nose well stopped with rue, lavender, or tobacco leaves. And although it be hard for a man late in life to remove old habits, I am not altogether out of hopes in

some time to suffer a neighbor Yahoo in my company, without the apprehensions I am yet under of his teeth or his claws.

My reconciliation to the Yahoo kind in general might not be so difficult, if they would be content with those vices and follies only which nature hath entitled them to. I am not in the least provoked at the sight of a lawyer, a pickpocket, a colonel, a fool, a lord, a gamester, a politician, a whoremonger, a physician, an evidence,<sup>2</sup> a suborner, an attorney, a traitor, or the like: this is all according to the due course of things. But when I behold a lump of deformity, and diseases both in body and mind, smitten with *pride*, it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together. The wise and virtuous Houyhnhnms, who abound in all excellencies that can adorn a rational creature, have no name for this vice in their language, which hath no terms to express anything that is evil, except those whereby they describe the detestable qualities of their Yahoos, among which they were not able to distinguish this of pride, for want of thoroughly understanding human nature, as it showeth itself in other countries, where that animal presides. But I, who had more experience, could plainly observe some rudiments of it among the wild Yahoos.

But the Houyhnhnms, who live under the government of reason, are no more proud of the good qualities they possess, than I should be for not wanting a leg or an arm, which no man in his wits would boast of, although he must be miserable without them. I dwell the longer upon this subject from the desire I have to make the society of an English Yahoo by any means not insupportable; and therefore I here entreat those who have any tincture of this absurd vice, that they will not presume to appear in my sight.

## Endnotes

1726, 1735

- Note 3: Nor if Fortune had molded Sinon for misery, will she also in spite mold him as false and lying (Latin; Virgil's *Aeneid* 2.79–80). [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Censure, criticism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Statement of facts for government use.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He kicks backward, at every point on his guard (Latin; Horace's *Satires* 2.1.20). "Mummy": pulp. "Yerks": kicks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Witness.[Return to reference 7](#)

# A Modest Proposal<sup>1</sup>

## FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN TO THEIR PARENTS OR COUNTRY, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLIC

It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town<sup>2</sup> or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.<sup>3</sup>

I think it is agreed by all parties that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound, useful members of the commonwealth would deserve so well of the public as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors,<sup>4</sup> I have always found them grossly



mistaken in their computation. It is true, a child just dropped from its dam may be supported by her milk for a solar year, with little other nourishment; at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner as instead of being a charge upon their parents or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall on the contrary contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing, of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas, too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt, more to avoid the expense than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

The number of souls in this kingdom<sup>5</sup> being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom; but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year. There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. For we can neither employ them in handicraft or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land. They can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing till they arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardly parts;<sup>6</sup> although I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, during which time they can however be looked upon only as

probationers, as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan, who protested to me that he never knew above one or two instances under the ages of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

I am assured by our merchants that a boy or a girl before twelve years old is no salable commodity; and even when they come to this age they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most on the Exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or the kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.<sup>2</sup>

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine; and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh twelve pounds, and in a solar year if tolerably nursed increaseth to twenty-eight pounds.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after. For we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician,<sup>8</sup> that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent than at any other season; therefore, reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of popish infants is at least three to one in this kingdom; and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of Papists among us.

I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, laborers, and four fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among the tenants; the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for the work till she produces another child.

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay the carcass; the skin of which artificially<sup>9</sup> dressed will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

As to our city of Dublin, shambles<sup>1</sup> may be appointed for this purpose in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife as we do roasting pigs.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased in discoursing on this matter to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the

bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age nor under twelve, so great a number of both sexes in every county being now ready to starve for want of work and service; and these to be disposed of by their parents, if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due deference to so excellent a friend and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable; and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think with humble submission, be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves; and besides, it is not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to censure such a practice (although indeed very unjustly) as a little bordering upon cruelty; which I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

But in order to justify my friend, he confessed that this expedient was put into his head by the famous Psalmanazar,<sup>2</sup> a native of the island Formosa, who came from thence to London above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend that in his country when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality as a prime dainty; and that in his time the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the emperor, was sold to his Imperial Majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins of the court, in joints from the gibbet, at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who without one single groat to their fortunes cannot stir abroad without a chair, and appear at the playhouse and assemblies in foreign fineries which they never will pay for, the kingdom would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people who are aged, diseased, or maimed, and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what

course may be taken to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known that they are every day dying and rotting by cold and famine, and filth and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the younger laborers, they are now in almost as hopeful a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment to a degree that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it; and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come.

I have too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance.

For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation as well as our most dangerous enemies; and who stay at home on purpose to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants, who have chosen rather to leave their country than stay at home and pay tithes against their conscience to an Episcopal curate.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to distress,<sup>4</sup> and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized and money a thing unknown.

Thirdly, whereas the maintenance of an hundred thousand children, from two years old and upwards, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings a piece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom who have any refinement in taste. And the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourthly, the constant breeders, besides the gain of eight shillings sterling per annum by the sale of their children, will be rid of the

charge of maintaining them after the first year.

Fifthly, this food would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts<sup>5</sup> for dressing it to perfection, and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating; and a skillful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

Sixthly, this would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards or enforced by laws and penalties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers toward their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the public, to their annual profit instead of expense. We should see an honest emulation among the married women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the market. Men would become as fond of their wives during the time of their pregnancy as they are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, or sows when they are ready to farrow; nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef, the propagation of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables, which are no way comparable in taste or magnificence to a well-grown, fat, yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a lord mayor's feast or any other public entertainment. But this and many others I omit, being studious of brevity.

Supposing that one thousand families in this city would be constant customers for infants' flesh, besides others who might have it at merry meetings, particularly weddings and christenings, I compute that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses, and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand.



I can think of no one objection that will probably be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and it was indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual kingdom of Ireland and for no other that ever was, is, or I think ever can be upon earth. Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients: of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound: of using neither clothes nor household furniture except what is of our own growth and manufacture: of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury: of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women: of introducing a vein of parsimony, prudence, and temperance: of learning to love our country, in the want of which we differ even from Laplanders and the inhabitants of Topinamboo:<sup>6</sup> of quitting our animosities and factions, nor acting any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken:<sup>7</sup> of being a little cautious not to sell our country and conscience for nothing: of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants: lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers; who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, till he hath at least some glimpse of hope that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them in practice.

But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, the flesh being of too tender a consistence to

admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.<sup>9</sup>

After all, I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion as to reject any offer proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for an hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in human figure throughout this kingdom, whose sole subsistence put into a common stock would leave them in debt two millions of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession to the bulk of farmers, cottagers, and laborers, with their wives and children who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual sense of misfortunes as they have since gone through by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from the inclemencies of the weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing the like or greater miseries upon their breed forever.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.



- Note 1:  
 “A Modest Proposal” is an example of Swift’s favorite satiric devices used with superb effect. Irony (from the deceptive adjective *modest* in the title to the very last sentence) pervades the piece. A rigorous logic deduces ghastly arguments from a premise so quietly assumed that readers assent before they are aware of what that assent implies. Parody, at which Swift is adept, allows him to glance sardonically at the by then familiar figure of the benevolent humanitarian (forerunner of the modern sociologist, social worker, and economic planner) concerned to correct a social evil by means of a theoretically conceived plan. The proposer, as naive as he is apparently logical and kindly, ignores and therefore emphasizes for the reader the enormity of his plan. The whole is an elaboration of a rather trite metaphor: “The English are devouring the Irish.” But there is nothing trite about the pamphlet, which expresses in Swift’s most controlled style his revulsion at the contemporary state of Ireland and his indignation at the rapacious English absentee landlords, who were bleeding the country white with the silent approbation of Parliament, ministers, and the crown.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dublin.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: James Francis Edward Stuart (1688–1766), the son of James II, was claimant (“Pretender”) to the throne of England from which the Glorious Revolution had barred his succession. Catholic Ireland was loyal to him, and Irishmen joined him in his exile on the Continent. Because of the poverty in Ireland, many Irish emigrated to the West Indies and other British colonies in America; they paid their passage by binding themselves to work for a stated period for one of the planters.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Devisers of schemes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ireland.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Promising abilities.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A highly seasoned meat stew.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: François Rabelais (ca. 1494–1553), a humorist and satirist, by no means grave.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Skillfully.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Slaughterhouses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: George Psalmanazar (ca. 1679–1763), a famous impostor. A Frenchman, he imposed himself on English bishops, noblemen, and scientists as a Formosan. He wrote an entirely fictitious account of Formosa, in which he described human sacrifices and cannibalism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ireland had many Protestant sectarians who did not support the “Episcopal” (Anglican) Church of Ireland.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Distraint, that is, the seizing, through legal action, of property for the payment of debts and other obligations. “Corn”: grain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Recipes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, even Laplanders love their frozen, infertile country and the tribes of Brazil love their jungle more than the Anglo-Irish love Ireland.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: During the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman Titus (later emperor), who captured and destroyed the city in 70 C.E., bloody fights broke out between fanatical factions among the defenders.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Swift himself had made all these proposals in various pamphlets. In editions printed during his lifetime the various proposals were italicized to indicate Swift’s support for them.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: England.[Return to reference 9](#)

# ALEXANDER POPE

## 1688–1744

Alexander Pope is the only important writer of his generation who was solely a man of letters. Because he could not, as a Roman Catholic, attend a university, vote, or hold public office, he was excluded from the sort of patronage that was bestowed by statesmen on many writers during the reign of Anne. This disadvantage he turned into a positive good, for the translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which he undertook for profit as well as for fame, gave him ample means to live the life of an independent suburban gentleman. After 1718 he lived hospitably in his villa by the Thames at Twickenham (then pronounced *Twit'nam*), entertaining his friends and converting his five acres of land into a diminutive landscape garden. Almost exactly a century earlier, William Shakespeare had earned enough to retire to a country estate at Stratford—but he had been an actor-manager as well as a playwright; Pope was the first English writer to build a lucrative, lifelong career by publishing his works.

Ill health plagued Pope almost from birth. Disabled when young by tuberculosis of the bone, he never grew taller than four and a half feet. In later life he suffered from violent headaches and required constant attention from servants. But Pope did not allow his infirmities to hold him back; he was always a master at making the best of what he had. Around 1700 his father, a well-to-do, retired London merchant, moved to a small property at Binfield in Windsor

Forest. There, in rural surroundings, young Pope completed his education by reading whatever he pleased, "like a boy gathering flowers in the woods and fields just as they fall in his way"; and there, encouraged by his father, he began to write verse. He was already an accomplished poet in his teens; no English poet has ever been more precocious.

Pope's first striking success as a poet was *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), which brought him Joseph Addison's approval and an intemperate personal attack from the critic John Dennis, who was angered by a casual reference to himself in the poem. *The Rape of the Lock*, both in its original shorter version of 1712 and in its more elaborate version of 1714, proved the author a master not only of metrics and of language but also of witty, urbane satire. In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope had excelled all his predecessors in writing a didactic poem after the example of Horace; in the *Rape*, he had written the most brilliant mock-epic in the language. But there was another vein in Pope's youthful poetry, a tender concern with natural beauty and love. The *Pastorals* (1709), his first publication, and *Windsor-Forest* (1713; much of it was written earlier) abound in visual imagery and descriptive passages of ideally ordered nature; they remind us that Pope was an amateur painter. The "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" and *Eloisa to Abelard*, published in the collected poems of 1717, dwell on the pangs of unhappy lovers (Pope himself never married). And even the long task of translating Homer, the "dull duty" of editing Shakespeare, and, in middle age, his dedication to ethical and satirical poetry did not make less fine his keen sense of beauty in nature and art.

Pope's early poetry brought him to the attention of the literary world, as he mingled in London coffeehouses and taverns frequented by writers, where he liked to play the rake. Between 1706 and 1711 he came to know, among many others, William Congreve; William Walsh, the critic and poet; and Richard Steele and Joseph Addison. As it happened, all were Whigs. Pope could readily ignore politics in the excitement of taking his place among the leading wits of the town. But after the fall of the Whigs in 1710 and

the formation of the Tory government under Robert Harley (later the Earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (later Viscount Bolingbroke), party loyalties bred bitterness among the wits as among the politicians. By 1712, Pope had made the acquaintance of another group of writers, all Tories, who were soon his intimate friends: Jonathan Swift, by then the close associate of Harley and St. John and the principal propagandist for their policies; Dr. John Arbuthnot, physician to the queen, a learned scientist, a wit, and a man of humanity and integrity; John Gay, the poet, who in 1728 was to create *The Beggar's Opera*, the greatest theatrical success of the century; and the poet Thomas Parnell. Through them he became the friend and admirer of Oxford and later the intimate of Bolingbroke. In 1714 this group, at the instigation of Pope, formed a club for satirizing all sorts of false learning. The friends proposed to write jointly the biography of a learned fool whom they named Martinus Scriblerus (Martin the Scribbler), whose life and opinions would be a running commentary on educated nonsense. Some amusing episodes were later rewritten and published as the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741). The real importance of the club, however, is that it fostered a satiric temper that would be expressed in such mature works of the friends as *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Beggar's Opera*, and *The Dunciad*.

"The life of a wit is a warfare on earth," said Pope, generalizing from his own experience. His very success as a poet (and his astonishing precocity brought him success very early) made enemies who were to plague him in pamphlets, verse satires, and squibs in the journals throughout his entire literary career. He was attacked for his writings, his religion, and his physical deformity. Although he smarted under the jibes of his detractors, he was a fighter who struck back, always giving better than he got. Pope's literary warfare began in 1713, when he announced his intention of translating the *Iliad* and sought subscribers to a deluxe edition of the work. Subscribers came in droves, but the Whig writers who surrounded Addison at Button's Coffee House did all they could to discredit the venture. The eventual success of the first published installment of

his *Iliad* in 1715 did not obliterate Pope's resentment against Addison and his "little senate"; and he took his revenge in the damaging portrait of Addison (under the name of Atticus), which was later included in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), lines 193–214. The not unjustified attacks on Pope's edition of Shakespeare (1725) by the learned Shakespeare scholar Lewis Theobald (Pope always spelled and pronounced the name "Tibbald" in his satires) led to Theobald's appearance as king of the dunces in *The Dunciad* (1728). In this impressive poem Pope stigmatized his literary enemies as agents of all that he disliked and feared in the tendencies of his time—the vulgarization of taste and the arts consequent on the rapid growth of the reading public and the development of journalism, magazines, and other popular and cheap publications, which spread scandal, sensationalism, and political partisanship—in short the new commercial spirit of the nation that was corrupting not only the arts but, as Pope saw it, the national life itself.

In the 1730s Pope moved on to philosophical, ethical, and political subjects in *An Essay on Man*, the *Epistles to Several Persons*, and the *Imitations of Horace*. The reigns of George I and George II appeared to him, as to Swift and other Tories, a period of rapid moral, political, and cultural deterioration. The agents of decay fed on the rise of moneyed (as opposed to landed) wealth, which accounted for the political corruption encouraged by Sir Robert Walpole and the court party and the corruption of all aspects of the national life by a vulgar class of *nouveaux riches*. Pope assumed the role of the champion of traditional values: of right reason, humanistic learning, sound art, good taste, and public virtue. His enemies, he insisted, happened to illustrate various degrees of unreason, pedantry, bad art, vulgar taste, and at best, indifferent morals.

The satirist traditionally deals in generally prevalent evils and generally observable human types, not with particular individuals. So too with Pope; the bulk of his satire can be read and enjoyed without much biographical information. Usually he used fictional or

type names, although he most often had an individual in mind—Sappho, Atossa, Atticus, Sporus—and when he named individuals (as he consistently did in *The Dunciad*), his purpose was to raise his victims to emblems of folly and vice. To judge and censure the age, Pope also created the *I* of the satires (not identical with Alexander Pope of Twickenham). This semifictional figure is the detached observer, somewhat removed from the city, town, and court, the centers of corruption; he is the friend of the virtuous, whose friendship for him testifies to his integrity; he is fond of peace, country life, the arts, morality, and truth; and he detests their opposites that flourish in the great world. In such an age, Pope implies, it is impossible for such a man—honest, truthful, blunt—not to write satire.

Pope was a master of style. From first to last, his verse is notable for its rhythmic variety, despite the apparently rigid metrical unit—the heroic couplet—in which he wrote; for the precision of meaning and the harmony (or expressive disharmony) of his language; and for the union of maximum conciseness with maximum complexity. The passages as marked below suggest how the subtle metrical effects of Pope's verse spring from the page, inviting us to embody them vocally in a living, dramatic reading. The first, lines 71–76 of the pastoral poem "Summer" (1709), is so lyrical that composer George Frideric Handel used it in his operatic entertainment *Semele* (1744). Accents mark where the rhetorical stress departs from normal iambic rhythm, often because of the slight emphasis to be given to "you," Summer, the addressee, on the off beat. Strong pauses inside the lines are marked with double bars, alliteration and assonance by italics.

Óh déígn to visit our *forsaken seats*,  
The mossy *fountains* || and the *green retreats*!  
Where'er yóu wálk || cóol *gáles* shall *fan* the *glade*,  
Trées whére yóu síť || shall crowd into a shade:

Where'er yóu t' read || the blushing *flowers* shall  
rise,  
And all thíngs *flóurish* where yóu túrn your eyes.

Pope has attained metrical variety by the free substitution of trochees and spondees for the normal iambs; he has achieved rhythmic variety by arranging phrases and clauses (units of syntax and logic) of different lengths within single lines and couplets, so that the passage moves with the sinuous fluency of thought and feeling; and he not only has chosen musical combinations of words but has also subtly modulated the harmony of the passage by unobtrusive patterns of alliteration and assonance.

Contrast with this pastoral passage lines 16–25 of the “Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue 2” (1738), in which Pope is not making music but imitating actual conversation so realistically that the metrical pattern and the integrity of the couplet and individual line seem to be destroyed (although in fact they remain in place). As above, double bars indicate where strong pauses might fall in the middle of lines in a live, vocal performance; here, possible lesser pauses are marked by single bars. In a dialogue with a friend who warns him that his satire is too personal, indeed mere libel, the poet-satirist replies:

Yé státesmen, | priests of one religion all!  
Yé trádesmen vile || in army, court, or hall!  
Yé réverend atheists. || F. Scandal! | name them, |  
Who?  
P. Why that's the thing you bid me not to do.  
Whó stárved a sister, || who foreswore a debt,  
Í néver named; || the town's inquiring yet.  
The poisoning dame—| F. Yóu méan—| P. I don't—| F.  
Yóu dó.  
P. Sée, nów Í kéep the secret, || and nót yóu!  
The bribing statesman—| F. Hóld, || too hígh you go.



P. The bribed elector—|| F. There you stoop too  
low.

In such a passage the language and rhythms of poetry merge with the language and rhythms of impassioned living speech.

Another sort of variety derives from Pope's respect for the idea that the different kinds of literature have their different and appropriate styles. Thus *An Essay on Criticism*, an informal discussion of literary theory, is written, like Horace's *Art of Poetry* (a similarly didactic poem), in a plain style, the easy language of well-bred talk. *The Rape of the Lock*, "a heroi-comical poem" (that is, a comic poem that treats trivial material in an epic style), employs the lofty heroic language that John Dryden had perfected in his translation of Virgil and introduces amusing parodies of passages in *Paradise Lost*, parodies later raised to truly Miltonic sublimity and complexity by the conclusion of *The Dunciad*. *Eloisa to Abelard* renders the brooding, passionate voice of its heroine in a declamatory language, given to sudden outbursts and shifts of tone, that recalls the stage. The grave epistles that make up *An Essay on Man*, a philosophical discussion of such majestic themes as the Creator and His creation, the universe, human nature, society, and happiness, are written in a stately forensic language and tone and constantly employ the traditional rhetorical figures. The *Imitations of Horace* and, above all, the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, his finest poem "in the Horatian way," reveal Pope's final mastery of the plain style of Horace's epistles and satires and support his image of himself as the heir of the Roman poet. In short, no other poet of the century can equal Pope in the range of his materials, the diversity of his poetic styles, and the wizardry of his technique.

**An Essay on Criticism** There is no more pleasant introduction to the canons of taste in the Restoration and eighteenth century than Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*. As Addison said in his review in *Spectator* 253, it assembles the "most known and most received observations on the subject of literature and criticism." Pope was attempting to do for his time what Horace, in his *Art of Poetry*, and what Nicolas Boileau (French poet, of the age of Louis XIV), in his *L'Art poétique*, had done for theirs. Horace is Pope's model not only for principles of criticism but also for style, especially in the simple, conversational language and the tone of well-bred ease.

In framing his critical creed, Pope did not try for novelty: he wished merely to give to generally accepted doctrines pleasing and memorable expression and make them useful to modern poets. Here one meets the key words of neoclassical criticism: *wit*, *Nature*, *ancients*, *rules*, and *genius*. *Wit* in the poem is a word of many meanings—a clever remark or the person who makes it, a conceit, liveliness of mind, inventiveness, fancy, genius, a genius, and poetry itself, among others. *Nature* is an equally ambiguous word, meaning not "things out there" or "the outdoors" but, most important, that which is representative, universal, permanent in human experience as opposed to the idiosyncratic, the individual, the temporary. In line 21, *Nature* comes close to meaning "intuitive knowledge." In line 52, it means that half-personified power manifested in the cosmic order, which in its modes of working is a model for art. The reverence felt by many writers of the period for the great writers of ancient Greece and Rome raised the question how far the authority of these *ancients* extended. Were their works to be received as models to be conscientiously imitated? Were the *rules* received from them or deducible from their works to be accepted as prescriptive laws or merely convenient guides? Was individual *genius* to be bound by what has been conventionally held to be *Nature*, by the authority of the *ancients*, and by the legalistic pedantry of *rules*? Or could it go its own way?

In Part 1 of the *Essay*, Pope constructs a harmonious system in which he effects a compromise among all these conflicting forces—a

compromise that is typical of his times. Part 2 analyzes the causes of faulty criticism. Part 3 characterizes the good critic and praises the great critics of the past.

# **An Essay on Criticism**

## ***Part 1***

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill  
Appear in writing or in judging ill;  
But of the two less dangerous is the offense  
To tire our patience than mislead our sense.  
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,  
5 Ten censure<sup>o</sup> wrong for one who writes amiss;  
A fool might once himself alone expose,  
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.  
'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none  
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.  
10 In poets as true genius is but rare,  
True taste as seldom is the critic's share;  
Both must alike from Heaven derive their light,  
These born to judge, as well as those to write.  
Let such teach others who themselves excel,  
15 And censure freely who have written well.  
Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,  
But are not critics to their judgment too?  
Yet if we look more closely, we shall find  
Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind:  
20 Nature affords at least a glimmering light;  
The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn  
right.  
But as the slightest sketch, if justly traced, }  
Is by ill coloring but the more disgraced, }  
So by false learning is good sense defaced:  
25 Some are bewildered in the maze of schools,  
And some made coxcombs<sup>1</sup> Nature meant but fools.  
In search of wit these lose their common sense,  
And then turn critics in their own defense:  
Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,  
30 Or with a rival's or an eunuch's spite.

All fools have still an itching to deride,  
And fain would be upon the laughing side.  
If Maevius<sup>2</sup> scribble in Apollo's spite,  
There are who judge still worse than he can write.  
35       Some have at first for wits, then poets passed,  
Turned critics next, and proved plain fools at last.  
Some neither can for wits nor critics pass,  
As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.  
Those half-learn'd witlings, numerous in our isle,  
40       As half-formed insects on the banks of Nile;<sup>3</sup>  
Unfinished things, one knows not what to call,  
Their generation's so equivocal:  
To tell<sup>o</sup> them would a hundred tongues require,  
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire.  
45       But you who seek to give and merit fame,  
And justly bear a critic's noble name,  
Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,  
How far your genius, taste, and learning go;  
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,  
50       And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.  
Nature to all things fixed the limits fit,  
And wisely curbed proud man's pretending<sup>o</sup> wit.  
As on the land while here the ocean gains,  
In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains;  
55       Thus in the soul while memory prevails,  
The solid power of understanding fails;  
Where beams of warm imagination play,  
The memory's soft figures melt away.  
One science<sup>o</sup> only will one genius fit,  
60       So vast is art, so narrow human wit.  
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,  
But oft in those confined to single parts.  
Like kings we lose the conquests gained before,  
By vain ambition still to make them more;  
65       Each might his several province well command,

Would all but stoop to what they understand.  
 First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
 By her just standard, which is still the same;  
 Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
 70 One clear, unchanged, and universal light,  
 Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,  
 At once the source, and end, and test of art.  
 Art from that fund each just supply provides,  
 Works without show, and without pomp presides.  
 75 In some fair body thus the informing soul  
 With spirits feeds, with vigor fills the whole,  
 Each motion guides, and every nerve sustains;  
 Itself unseen, but in the effects remains.  
 Some, to whom Heaven in wit has been profuse,  
 80 Want as much more to turn it to its use;  
 For wit and judgment often are at strife,  
 Though meant each other's aid, like man and wife.  
 'Tis more to guide than spur the Muse's steed,  
 Restrain his fury than provoke his speed;  
 85 The wingèd courser,<sup>4</sup> like a generous<sub>o</sub> horse,  
 Shows most true mettle when you check his course.  
 Those rules of old discovered, not devised,  
 Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;  
 Nature, like liberty, is but restrained  
 90 By the same laws which first herself ordained.  
 Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,  
 When to repress and when indulge our flights:  
 High on Parnassus' top her sons she showed,  
 And pointed out those arduous paths they trod;  
 95 Held from afar, aloft, the immortal prize,  
 And urged the rest by equal steps to rise.  
 Just precepts thus from great examples given,  
 She drew from them what they derived from  
 Heaven.  
 The generous critic fanned the poet's fire,  
 100

And taught the world with reason to admire.  
Then criticism the Muse's handmaid proved,  
To dress her charms, and make her more beloved:  
But following wits from that intention strayed,  
Who could not win the mistress, wooed the maid;  
105 Against the poets their own arms they turned,  
Sure to hate most the men from whom they learned.  
So modern 'pothecaries, taught the art  
By doctors's bills<sup>o</sup> to play the doctor's part,  
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,  
110 Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.  
Some on the leaves of ancient authors prey,  
Nor time nor moths e'er spoiled so much as they.  
Some dryly plain, without invention's aid,  
Write dull receipts<sup>5</sup> how poems may be made.  
115 These leave the sense their learning to display,  
And those explain the meaning quite away.  
    You then whose judgment the right course would  
    steer,  
Know well each ancient's proper character;  
His fable,<sup>6</sup> subject, scope<sup>o</sup> in every page;  
120 Religion, country, genius of his age:  
Without all these at once before your eyes,  
Cavil you may, but never criticize.  
Be Homer's works your study and delight,  
Read them by day, and meditate by night;  
125 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims  
    bring,  
And trace the Muses upward to their spring.  
Still with itself compared, his text peruse;  
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.  
    When first young Maro<sup>7</sup> in his boundless mind  
130 A work to outlast immortal Rome designed,  
Perhaps he seemed above the critic's law,  
And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw;



But when to examine every part he came,  
 Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.  
 135 Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design,  
 And rules as strict his labored work confine  
 As if the Stagirite<sup>8</sup> o'erlooked each line. }  
 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
 To copy Nature is to copy them.  
 140 Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,  
 For there's a happiness as well as care.<sup>9</sup>  
 Music resembles poetry, in each }  
 Are nameless graces which no methods  
 teach, }  
 And which a master hand alone can reach.  
 145 If, where the rules not far enough extend  
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)  
 Some lucky license answers to the full  
 The intent proposed, that license is a rule.  
 Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,  
 150 May boldly deviate from the common track.  
 Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
 And rise to faults true critics dare not mend;  
 From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,  
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,  
 155 Which, without passing through the judgment, gains  
 The heart, and all its end at once attains.  
 In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes,  
 Which out of Nature's common order rise, }  
 The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice. }  
 160 But though the ancients thus their rules  
 invade<sup>o</sup>  
 (As kings dispense with laws themselves have made)  
 Moderns, beware! or if you must offend  
 Against the precept, ne'er transgress its end;  
 Let it be seldom, and compelled by need;  
 165 And have at least their precedent to plead.

The critic else proceeds without remorse,  
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous  
thoughts

170 Those freer beauties, even in them, seem faults.<sup>1</sup>  
Some figures monstrous and misshaped appear,  
Considered singly, or beheld too near,  
Which, but proportioned to their light or place,  
Due distance reconciles to form and grace.

175 A prudent chief not always must display  
His powers in equal ranks and fair array,  
But with the occasion and the place comply,  
Conceal his force, nay seem sometimes to fly.  
Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,  
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

180 Still green with bays each ancient altar stands  
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands,  
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,  
Destructive war, and all-involving age.  
See, from each clime the learn'd their incense bring!  
185 Here in all tongues consenting<sup>o</sup> paeans ring!  
In praise so just let every voice be joined,<sup>2</sup>  
And fill the general chorus of mankind.  
Hail, bards triumphant! born in happier days,  
Immortal heirs of universal praise!

190 Whose honors with increase of ages grow,  
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;  
Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,  
And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!  
Oh, may some spark of your celestial fire,  
195 The last, the meanest of your sons inspire  
(That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights,  
Glow while he reads, but trembles as he writes)  
To teach vain wits a science little known,  
200 To admire superior sense, and doubt their own!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Superficial pretenders to learning.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A silly poet alluded to contemptuously by Virgil in *Eclogue* 3 and by Horace in *Epode* 10.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ancients believed that many forms of life were spontaneously generated in the fertile mud of the Nile.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pegasus, associated with the Muses and poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Formulas for preparing a dish; recipes. Pope himself wrote an amusing burlesque, "Receipt to Make an Epic Poem," first published in the *Guardian* 78 (1713).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plot or story of a play or poem.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Virgil, who was born in a village adjacent to Mantua in Italy, hence "Mantuan Muse." His epic, the *Aeneid*, was modeled on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and was considered to be a refinement of the Greek poems. Thus it could be thought of as a commentary ("comment") on Homer's poems.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Aristotle, a native of Stagira, from whose *Poetics* later critics formulated strict rules for writing tragedy and the epic.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, no rules ("precepts") can explain ("declare") some beautiful effects in a work of art that can be the result only of inspiration or good luck ("happiness"), not of painstaking labor ("care").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pronounced *fawts*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pronounced *jined*.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *judge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reckon, count*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aspiring*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *branch of learning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirited, highly bred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prescriptions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aim, purpose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreeing, concurring*[Return to reference](#) °

## **Part 2**

Of all the causes which conspire to blind  
Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,  
What the weak head with strongest bias rules,  
Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools.  
Whatever Nature has in worth denied,  
205 She gives in large recruits<sup>o</sup> of needful pride;  
For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find  
What wants in blood and spirits, swelled with wind:  
Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defense,  
And fills up all the mighty void of sense.  
210 If once right reason drives that cloud away,  
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.  
Trust not yourself: but your defects to know,  
Make use of every friend—and every foe.  
A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
215 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.<sup>3</sup>  
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.  
Fired at first sight with what the Muse imparts,  
In fearless youth we tempt<sup>o</sup> the heights of arts,  
220 While from the bounded level of our mind  
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;  
But more advanced, behold with strange surprise  
New distant scenes of endless science rise!  
So pleased at first the towering Alps we try,  
225 Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,  
The eternal snows appear already past,  
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;  
But, those attained, we tremble to survey  
The growing labors of the lengthened way,  
230 The increasing prospect tires our wandering eyes,  
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

A perfect judge will read each work of wit  
With the same spirit that its author writ:  
Survey the whole, nor seek slight faults to find  
235 Where Nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;  
Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,  
The generous pleasure to be charmed with wit.  
But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,  
Correctly cold, and regularly low,  
240 That, shunning faults, one quiet tenor keep,  
We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.  
In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts  
Is not the exactness of peculiar<sup>o</sup> parts;  
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,  
245 But the joint force and full result of all.  
Thus when we view some well-proportioned dome<sup>4</sup>  
(The world's just wonder, and even thine, O Rome!),  
No single parts unequally surprise,  
All comes united to the admiring eyes:  
250 No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;  
The whole at once is bold and regular.  
Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,  
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.  
In every work regard the writer's end,  
255 Since none can compass more than they intend;  
And if the means be just, the conduct true,  
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.  
As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,  
To avoid great errors must the less commit,  
260 Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays,  
For not to know some trifles is a praise.  
Most critics, fond of some subservient art,  
Still make the whole depend upon a part:  
They talk of principles, but notions prize,  
265 And all to one loved folly sacrifice.

Once on a time La Mancha's knight,<sup>5</sup> they say,

A certain bard encountering on the way,  
Discoursed in terms as just, with looks as sage,  
As e'er could Dennis,<sup>6</sup> of the Grecian stage;  
270 Concluding all were desperate sots and fools  
Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.  
Our author, happy in a judge so nice,  
Produced his play, and begged the knight's advice;  
Made him observe the subject and the plot,  
275 The manners, passions, unities; what not?  
All which exact to rule were brought about,  
Were but a combat in the lists left out.  
"What! leave the combat out?" exclaims the knight.  
"Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite."  
280 "Not so, by Heaven!" he answers in a rage,  
"Knights, squires, and steeds must enter on the  
stage."  
"So vast a throng the stage can ne'er contain."  
"Then build a new, or act it in a plain."  
Thus critics of less judgment than caprice,  
285 Curious,<sup>o</sup> not knowing, not exact, but nice,<sup>o</sup>  
Form short ideas, and offend in arts  
(As most in manners), by a love to parts.  
Some to conceit<sup>z</sup> alone their taste confine,  
And glittering thoughts struck out at every line;  
290 Pleased with a work where nothing's just or fit,  
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.  
Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace  
The naked nature and the living grace,  
With gold and jewels cover every part,  
295 And hide with ornaments their want of art.  
True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;  
Something whose truth convinced at sight we find,  
That gives us back the image of our mind.  
300 As shades more sweetly recommend the light,

So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit;  
 For works may have more wit than does them good,  
 As bodies perish through excess of blood.  
 Others for language all their care express,  
 305 And value books, as women men, for dress.  
 Their praise is still—the style is excellent;  
 The sense they humbly take upon content.<sup>8</sup>  
 Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,  
 Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.  
 310 False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,  
 Its gaudy colors spreads on every place;<sup>9</sup>  
 The face of Nature we no more survey,  
 All glares alike, without distinction gay.  
 But true expression, like the unchanging sun,  
 315 Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon; }  
 It gilds all objects, but it alters none. }  
 Expression is the dress of thought, and still  
 Appears more decent as more suitable.  
 A vile conceit in pompous words expressed  
 320 Is like a clown<sup>o</sup> in regal purple dressed:  
 For different styles with different subjects sort,  
 As several garbs with country, town, and court.  
 Some by old words to fame have made pretense,  
 Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense.  
 325 Such labored nothings, in so strange a style,  
 Amaze the unlearn'd, and make the learned smile;  
 Unlucky as Fungoso<sup>1</sup> in the play,  
 These sparks with awkward vanity display }  
 What the fine gentleman wore yesterday; }  
 330 And but so mimic ancient wits at best,  
 As apes our grandsires in their doublets dressed.  
 In words as fashions the same rule will hold,  
 Alike fantastic if too new or old:  
 Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
 335 Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.



But most by numbers<sup>o</sup> judge a poet's song,  
 And smooth or rough with them is right or wrong.  
 In the bright Muse though thousand charms  
 conspire,  
 Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire,  
 340 Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,  
 Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,  
 Not for the doctrine, but the music there. }  
 These equal syllables alone require,  
 Though oft the ear the open vowels tire,<sup>2</sup>  
 345 While expletives<sup>3</sup> their feeble aid do join,  
 And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:  
 While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,  
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes;  
 Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"  
 350 In the next line, it "whispers through the trees";  
 If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"  
 The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep";  
 Then, at the last and only couplet fraught  
 With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,  
 355 A needless Alexandrine<sup>4</sup> ends the song  
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length  
 along.  
 Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know  
 What's roundly smooth or languishingly slow;  
 And praise the easy vigor of a line  
 360 Where Denham's strength and Waller's sweetness  
 join.<sup>5</sup>  
 True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
 As those move easiest who have learned to dance.  
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,  
 The sound must seem an echo to the sense.  
 365 Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;  
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,

The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.  
 When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,  
 370 The line too labors, and the words move slow;  
 Not so when swift Camilla<sup>6</sup> scours the plain,  
 Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the  
 main.  
 Hear how Timotheus'<sup>7</sup> varied lays surprise,  
 And bid alternate passions fall and rise!  
 375 While at each change the son of Libyan Jove<sup>o</sup>  
 Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;  
 Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,  
 Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow:  
 380 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature<sup>8</sup> found  
 And the world's victor stood subdued by sound!  
 The power of music all our hearts allow,  
 And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.  
 Avoid extremes; and shun the fault of such  
 Who still are pleased too little or too much.  
 385 At every trifle scorn to take offense:  
 That always shows great pride, or little sense.  
 Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,  
 Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.  
 Yet let not each gay turn thy rapture move;  
 390 For fools admire,<sup>o</sup> but men of sense approve:<sup>9</sup>  
 As things seem large which we through mists descry,  
 Dullness is ever apt to magnify.  
 Some foreign writers, some our own despise;  
 The ancients only, or the moderns prize.  
 395 Thus wit, like faith, by each man is applied  
 To one small sect, and all are damned beside.  
 Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,  
 And force that sun but on a part to shine,  
 Which not alone the southern wit sublimed,<sup>o</sup>  
 400 But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;  
 Which from the first has shone on ages past,

Enlights the present, and shall warm the last;  
Though each may feel increases and decays,  
And see now clearer and now darker days.  
405 Regard not then if wit be old or new,  
But blame the false and value still the true.  
Some ne'er advance a judgment of their own,  
But catch the spreading notion of the town;  
They reason and conclude by precedent,  
410 And own<sup>o</sup> stale nonsense which they ne'er invent.  
Some judge of authors' names, not works, and then  
Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men.  
Of all this servile herd the worst is he  
415 That in proud dullness joins with quality,<sup>1</sup>  
A constant critic at the great man's board,  
To fetch and carry nonsense for my lord.  
What woeful stuff this madrigal would be  
In some starved hackney sonneteer<sup>o</sup> or me!  
420 But let a lord once own the happy lines,  
How the wit brightens! how the style refines!  
Before his sacred name flies every fault,  
And each exalted stanza teems with thought!  
The vulgar thus through imitation err;  
As oft the learn'd by being singular;  
425 So much they scorn the crowd, that if the throng  
By chance go right, they purposely go wrong.  
So schismatics<sup>2</sup> the plain believers quit,  
And are but damned for having too much wit.  
Some praise at morning what they blame at night,  
430 But always think the last opinion right.  
A Muse by these is like a mistress used,  
This hour she's idolized, the next abused;  
While their weak heads like towns unfortified,  
'Twixt sense and nonsense daily change their side.  
435 Ask them the cause; they're wiser still, they say;  
And still tomorrow's wiser than today.

We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow;  
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.  
Once school divines<sup>3</sup> this zealous isle o'erspread;  
440 Who knew most sentences<sup>4</sup> was deepest read.  
Faith, Gospel, all seemed made to be disputed,  
And none had sense enough to be confuted.  
Scotists and Thomists now in peace remain  
Amidst their kindred cobwebs in Duck Lane.<sup>5</sup>  
445 If faith itself has different dresses worn,  
What wonder modes in wit should take their turn?  
Oft, leaving what is natural and fit,  
The current folly proves the ready wit;  
And authors think their reputation safe,  
450 Which lives as long as fools are pleased to laugh.  
Some valuing those of their own side or mind,  
Still make themselves the measure of mankind:  
Fondly<sup>o</sup> we think we honor merit then,  
When we but praise ourselves in other men.  
455 Parties in wit attend on those of state,  
And public faction doubles private hate.  
Pride, Malice, Folly against Dryden rose,  
In various shapes of parsons, critics, beaux;  
But sense survived, when merry jests were past;  
460 For rising merit will buoy up at last.  
Might he return and bless once more our eyes,  
New Blackmores and new Milbourns<sup>6</sup> must arise.  
Nay, should great Homer lift his awful head,  
Zoilus<sup>7</sup> again would start up from the dead.  
465 Envy will merit, as its shade, pursue,  
But like a shadow, proves the substance true;  
For envied wit, like Sol eclipsed, makes known  
The opposing body's grossness, not its own.  
When first that sun too powerful beams displays,  
470 It draws up vapors which obscure its rays;  
But even those clouds at last adorn its way,

Reflect new glories, and augment the day.  
Be thou the first true merit to befriend;  
His praise is lost who stays till all commend.  
475 Short is the date, alas! of modern rhymes,  
And 'tis but just to let them live betimes.<sup>o</sup>  
No longer now that golden age appears,  
When patriarch wits survived a thousand years:  
Now length of fame (our second life) is lost,  
480 And bare threescore is all even that can boast;  
Our sons their fathers' failing language see,  
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.<sup>8</sup>  
So when the faithful pencil has designed  
Some bright idea of the master's mind,  
485 Where a new world leaps out at his command,  
And ready Nature waits upon his hand;  
When the ripe colors soften and unite,  
And sweetly melt into just shade and light;  
When mellowing years their full perfection give,  
490 And each bold figure just begins to live,  
The treacherous colors the fair art betray,  
And all the bright creation fades away!  
Unhappy<sup>o</sup> wit, like most mistaken things,  
Atones not for that envy which it brings.  
495 In youth alone its empty praise we boast,  
But soon the short-lived vanity is lost;  
Like some fair flower the early spring supplies,  
That gaily blooms, but even in blooming dies.  
What is this wit, which must our cares employ?  
500 The owner's wife, that other men enjoy;  
Then most our trouble still when most admired,  
And still the more we give, the more required;  
Whose fame with pains we guard, but lose with  
ease,  
Sure some to vex, but never all to please;  
505 'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,

By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!  
If wit so much from ignorance undergo,  
Ah, let not learning too commence its foe!  
Of old those met rewards who could excel,  
510 And such were praised who but endeavored well;  
Though triumphs were to generals only due,  
Crowns were reserved to grace the soldiers too.<sup>9</sup>  
Now they who reach Parnassus' lofty crown  
Employ their pains to spurn<sup>o</sup> some others down;  
515 And while self-love each jealous writer rules,  
Contending wits become the sport of fools;  
But still the worst with most regret commend,  
For each ill author is as bad a friend.  
To what base ends, and by what abject ways,  
520 Are mortals urged through sacred<sup>o</sup> lust of praise!<sup>1</sup>  
Ah, ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,  
Nor in the critic let the man be lost!  
Good nature and good sense must ever join;  
To err is human, to forgive divine.  
525 But if in noble minds some dregs remain  
Not yet purged off, of spleen<sup>o</sup> and sour disdain,  
Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,  
Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious<sup>o</sup> times.  
No pardon vile obscenity should find,  
530 Though wit and art conspire to move your mind;  
But dullness with obscenity must prove  
As shameful sure as impotence in love.  
In the fat age of pleasure, wealth, and ease  
Sprung the rank weed, and thrived with large  
535 increase:  
When love was all an easy monarch's<sup>2</sup> care,  
Seldom at council, never in a war;  
Jilts<sup>3</sup> ruled the state, and statesmen farces writ;  
Nay, wits had pensions, and young lords had wit;  
The fair sat panting at a courtier's play,

540 And not a mask<sup>4</sup> went unimproved away;  
 The modest fan was lifted up no more,  
 And virgins smiled at what they blushed before.  
 The following license of a foreign reign  
 545 Did all the dregs of bold Socinus<sup>5</sup> drain;  
 Then unbelieving priests reformed the nation,  
 And taught more pleasant methods of salvation;  
 Where Heaven's free subjects might their rights  
 dispute,  
 Lest God himself should seem too absolute;  
 Pulpits their sacred satire learned to spare,  
 550 And Vice admired<sup>o</sup> to find a flatterer there!  
 Encouraged thus, wit's Titans braved the skies,  
 And the press groaned with licensed blasphemies.  
 These monsters, critics! with your darts engage,  
 Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!  
 555 Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice,<sup>o</sup>  
 Will needs mistake an author into vice;  
 All seems infected that the infected spy,  
 As all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: The spring in Pieria on Mount Olympus, sacred to the Muses.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The dome of St. Peter's, designed by Michelangelo.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Don Quixote. The story comes not from Cervantes' novel, but from a spurious sequel to it by Don Alonzo Fernandez de Avellaneda.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Dennis (1657–1734), although one of the leading critics of the time, was frequently ridiculed by the wits for his irascibility and pomposity. Pope apparently did not know Dennis personally, but his jibe at him in Part 3 of this poem made him a bitter enemy.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Pointed wit, ingenuity, and extravagance, or affectation in the use of figures, especially similes and metaphors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dr. Johnson actually uses this Pope line to illustrate a distinct meaning. “Satisfaction in a thing unexamined” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*)”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A very up-to-date scientific reference. Newton’s *Opticks*, which dealt with the prism and the spectrum, had been published in 1704, although his theories had been known earlier.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A character in Ben Jonson’s comedy *Every Man out of His Humor* (1599).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In lines 345–57 Pope cleverly contrives to make his own metrics or diction illustrate the faults that he is exposing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Words used merely to achieve the necessary number of feet in a line of verse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A line of verse containing six iambic feet; it is illustrated in the next line.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dryden, whom Pope echoes here, considered Sir John Denham (1615–1669) and Edmund Waller (1606–1687) to have been the principal shapers of the closed pentameter couplet. He had distinguished the “strength” of the one and the “sweetness” of the other.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fleet-footed virgin warrior (*Aeneid* 7, 11).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The musician in Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast.” Pope retells the story of that poem in the following lines.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Alternations of feelings.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Judge favorably only after due deliberation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: People of high rank.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Those who have divided the church on points of theology. Pope stressed the first syllable, the pronunciation approved by Johnson in his *Dictionary*.[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: The medieval theologians, such as the followers of Duns Scotus and St. Thomas Aquinas, mentioned in line 444.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Allusion to Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*, a book esteemed by Scholastic philosophers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Street where publishers' remainders and secondhand books were sold.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Luke Milbourn had attacked Dryden's translation of Virgil. Sir Richard Blackmore, physician and poet, had attacked Dryden for the immorality of his plays.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A Greek critic of the 4th century B.C.E. who wrote a book of carping criticism of Homer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The radical changes that took place in the English language between the death of Chaucer in 1400 and the death of Dryden in 1700 suggested that in another three hundred years Dryden would be unintelligible.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To celebrate Roman victories, valiant soldiers were decorated with a variety of crowns.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The phrase imitates Virgil's *auri sacra famis*, "accursed hunger for gold" (*Aeneid* 3.57).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Charles II. The concluding lines of Part 2 discuss the corruption of wit and poetry under this monarch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mistresses of the king.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A woman wearing a mask.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The name of two Italian theologians of the 16th century who denied the divinity of Jesus. Pope charges that freethinkers attained the upper hand during the "foreign reign" of William III, a Dutchman.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *supplies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attempt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *particular*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *laborious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fussy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *country bumpkin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *versification* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Alexander the Great* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonder* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raises up, purifies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lay claim to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hireling poet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for a brief time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill-fated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kick* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accursed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rancor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scandalously wicked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wondered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subtle* [Return to reference](#) °

### **Part 3**

Learn then what morals critics ought to show,  
560 For 'tis but half a judge's task, to know.  
'Tis not enough, taste, judgment, learning, join;  
In all you speak, let truth and candor<sup>5</sup> shine:  
That not alone what to your sense is due  
All may allow; but seek your friendship too.  
565 Be silent always when you doubt your sense;  
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence:  
Some positive, persisting fops we know,  
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;  
But you, with pleasure own your errors past,  
570 And make each day a critic<sup>6</sup> on the last.  
'Tis not enough, your counsel still be true;  
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;  
Men must be taught as if you taught them not,  
And things unknown proposed as things forgot.  
575 Without good breeding, truth is disapproved;  
That only makes superior sense beloved.  
Be niggards of advice on no pretense;  
For the worst avarice is that of sense.  
With mean complacence<sup>6</sup> ne'er betray your trust,  
580 Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.  
Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;  
Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise.  
'Twere well might critics still this freedom take;  
But Appius reddens at each word you speak,  
585 And stares, tremendous! with a threatening eye,  
Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.<sup>7</sup>  
Fear most to tax an honorable fool,  
Whose right it is, uncensured to be dull;  
Such, without wit, are poets when they please,  
590 As without learning they can take degrees.<sup>8</sup>

Leave dangerous truths to unsuccessful satyrs,<sup>o</sup>  
 And flattery to fulsome dedicators,  
 Whom, when they praise, the world believes no  
 more,  
 Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er.  
 595 'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain,  
 And charitably let the dull be vain:  
 Your silence there is better than your spite,  
 For who can rail so long as they can write?  
 Still humming on, their drowsy course they keep,  
 600 And lashed so long, like tops, are lashed asleep.<sup>9</sup>  
 False steps but help them to renew the race,  
 As, after stumbling, jades<sup>o</sup> will mend their pace.  
 What crowds of these, impenitently bold,  
 In sounds and jingling syllables grown old,  
 605 Still run on poets, in a raging vein,  
 Even to the dregs and squeezings of the brain,  
 Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,  
 And rhyme with all the rage of impotence.  
 Such shameless bards we have, and yet 'tis true,  
 610 There are as mad, abandoned critics too.  
 The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,  
 With loads of learned lumber<sup>o</sup> in his head,  
 With his own tongue still edifies his ears,  
 And always listening to himself appears.  
 615 All books he reads, and all he reads assails,  
 From Dryden's *Fables* down to Durfey's *Tales*.<sup>1</sup>  
 With him, most authors steal their works, or buy;  
 Garth did not write his own *Dispensary*.<sup>2</sup>  
 Name a new play, and he's the poet's friend,  
 620 Nay showed his faults—but when would poets  
 mend?  
 No place so sacred from such fops is barred,  
 Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's  
 churchyard:<sup>3</sup>

Nay, fly to altars; *there* they'll talk you dead:  
 For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.  
 625 Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks,  
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes;  
 But rattling nonsense in full volleys breaks, }  
 And never shocked, and never turned aside, }  
 Bursts out, resistless, with a thundering tide.  
 630 But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,  
 Still pleased to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
 Unbiased, or <sup>o</sup> by favor, or by spite:  
 Not dully prepossessed, nor blindly right;  
 Though learned, well-bred; and though well-bred,  
 635 sincere;  
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe:  
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?  
 Blessed with a taste exact, yet unconfined;  
 A knowledge both of books and humankind;  
 640 Gen'rous converse;<sup>4</sup> a soul exempt from pride;  
 And love to praise, with reason on his side?  
 Such once were critics; such the happy few,  
 Athens and Rome in better ages knew.  
 The mighty Stagirite<sup>o</sup> first left the shore,  
 645 Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;  
 He steered securely, and discovered far,  
 Led by the light of the Maeonian star.<sup>5</sup>  
 Poets, a race long unconfined, and free,  
 Still fond and proud of savage liberty,  
 650 Received his laws; and stood convinced 'twas fit,  
 Who conquered nature, should preside o'er wit.  
 Horace still charms with graceful negligence,  
 And without method talks us into sense;  
 Will, like a friend, familiarly convey  
 655 The truest notions in the easiest<sup>o</sup> way.  
 He, who supreme in judgment, as in wit,

Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,  
Yet judg'd with coolness, though he sung with fire;  
His precepts teach but what his works inspire.  
660 Our critics take a contrary extreme,  
They judge with fury, but they write with fle'me.<sup>o</sup>  
Nor suffers Horace more in wrong translations  
By wits, than critics<sup>6</sup> in as wrong quotations.  
See Dionysius<sup>7</sup> Homer's thoughts refine,  
665 And call new beauties forth from every line!  
Fancy and art in gay Petronius<sup>8</sup> please,  
The scholar's learning, with the courtier's ease.  
In grave Quintilian's<sup>9</sup> copious work, we find  
The justest rules, and clearest method joined:  
670 Thus useful arms in magazines<sup>o</sup> we place,  
All ranged in order, and disposed with grace,  
But less to please the eye, than arm the hand,  
Still fit for use, and ready at command.  
Thee, bold Longinus!<sup>1</sup> all the nine<sup>o</sup> inspire,  
675 And bless their critic with a poet's fire.  
An ardent judge, who, zealous in his trust,  
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;  
Whose own example strengthens all his laws,  
And is himself that great sublime he draws.  
680 Thus long succeeding critics justly reigned,  
License repressed, and useful laws ordained.  
Learning and Rome alike in empire grew;  
And arts still followed where her eagles<sup>2</sup> flew;  
From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom,  
685 And the same age saw learning fall, and Rome.  
With tyranny, then superstition joined,  
As that the body, this enslaved the mind;  
Much was believed, but little understood,  
And to be dull was construed to be good;  
690 A second deluge learning thus o'errun,  
And the monks finished what the Goths begun.<sup>3</sup>

At length Erasmus, that great, injured name  
(The glory of the priesthood, and the shame!),<sup>4</sup>  
Stemmed the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,  
695 And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.  
But see! each Muse, in Leo's golden days,  
Starts from her trance, and trims her withered bays!<sup>5</sup>  
Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins spread,  
Shakes off the dust, and rears his reverend head.  
700 Then sculpture and her sister-arts revive;  
Stones leaped to form, and rocks began to live;  
With sweeter notes each rising temple rung;  
A Raphael painted, and a Vida<sup>6</sup> sung.  
Immortal Vida: on whose honored brow  
705 The poet's bays and critic's ivy grow:  
Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,  
As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!<sup>7</sup>  
But soon by impious arms from Latium<sup>8</sup> chased,  
710 Their ancient bounds the banished Muses passed;  
Thence arts o'er all the northern world advance,  
But critic-learning flourished most in France:  
The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;  
And Boileau still in right of Horace sways.<sup>9</sup>  
715 But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despised,  
And kept unconquered—and uncivilized;  
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,  
We still defied the Romans, as of old.  
Yet some there were, among the sounder few  
Of those who less presumed, and better knew,  
720 Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,  
And here restored wit's fundamental laws.  
Such was the Muse, whose rules and practice tell,  
"Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well."<sup>1</sup>  
Such was Roscommon,<sup>2</sup> not more learned than  
725 good,  
With manners gen'rous as his noble blood;

To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,  
 And every author's merit, but his own.  
 Such late was Walsh—the Muse's<sup>3</sup> judge and friend,  
 Who justly knew to blame or to commend;  
 730 To failings mild, but zealous for desert;  
 The clearest head, and the sincerest heart.  
 This humble praise, lamented shade! receive,  
 This praise at least a grateful Muse may give:  
 735 The Muse, whose early voice you taught to sing,  
 Prescribed her heights, and pruned her tender wing,  
 (Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,  
 But in low numbers<sup>o</sup> short excursions tries:  
 Content, if hence the unlearned their wants may  
 view,  
 740 The learned reflect on what before they knew:  
 Careless of<sup>o</sup> censure, nor too fond of fame;  
 Still pleased to praise, yet not afraid to blame;  
 Averse alike to flatter, or offend;  
 Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

## 1709 **Endnotes**

1711

- Note 6: Softness of manners; desire of pleasing. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This picture was taken to himself by John Dennis, a furious old critic by profession, who, upon no other provocation, wrote against this Essay and its author, in a manner perfectly lunatic [*Pope's note, 1744*]. Pope *did* intend to ridicule Dennis, whose *Appius and Virginia* had failed on the stage in 1709 and who was known for his stare and his use of the word *tremendous* (see line 270). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Honorary degrees were granted to unqualified men of rank. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tops "sleep" when they spin so rapidly that they seem not to move. [Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Thomas D'Urfey's *Tales* (1704) were notorious potboilers. Dryden's *Fables* (1700), a set of translations, were among his most admired works.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Samuel Garth (1661–1719), who had been accused of plagiarizing his mock-epic poem *The Dispensary* (1699), was admired and defended by Pope.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Booksellers' district near St. Paul's Cathedral, whose aisles were used as a place to meet and do business.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Well-bred conversation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Homer, who was supposed to have been born in Maeonia.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, than by critics. Phrases from Horace's *Art of Poetry* were quoted incessantly by critics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st century B.C.E.) wrote an important treatise on the artistic arrangement of words.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Author of the *Satyricon* (1st century C.E.).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Author of the *Institutio oratoria* (ca. 95 C.E.), a famous treatise on rhetoric. Here as elsewhere, Pope's terms of praise are drawn from the author he is praising.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Supposed author of the influential treatise *On the Sublime* (1st century C.E.), greatly in vogue at the time of Pope.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Emblems on the standards of the Roman army.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pope thought that the Scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages were "holy Vandals" who had "sacked" learning as the Goths and Vandals had sacked Rome.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Erasmus (1466–1536), the great humanist scholar, was the "glory of the priesthood" because of his goodness and learning and its "shame" because he was persecuted.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The wreath of poetry. Leo X, pope from 1513 to 1521, was notable for his encouragement of artists.[Return to](#)

### [reference 5](#)

- Note 6: M. Hieronymus Vida, an excellent Latin poet, who wrote an *Art of Poetry* in verse. He flourished in the time of Leo the Tenth [*Pope's note*]. Raphael (1483–1520) painted many of his greatest works under the patronage of Leo X. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vida came from Cremona, near Mantua, the birthplace of Virgil, his favorite poet. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Italy. German and Spanish troops sacked Rome in 1527. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674) regularized and modernized the lessons of Horace's *Art of Poetry*. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Quoted from an *Essay on Poetry* by John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham (1648–1721), who had befriended the young Pope. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, wrote the important *Essay on Translated Verse* (1684). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here, Pope himself. William Walsh (1663–1708), whom Dryden once called "the best critic of our nation," had advised Pope to work at becoming the first great "correct" poet in English. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *kindness, impartiality* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *critique* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *satires* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worn-out horses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rubbish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Aristotle* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *least formal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *phlegmatically* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *storehouses, arsenals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Muses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *humble verses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unconcerned at*[Return to reference](#) °

**The Rape of the Lock**    *The Rape of the Lock* is based on an actual episode that provoked a quarrel between two prominent Catholic families. Pope's friend John Caryll, to whom the poem is addressed (line 3), suggested that Pope write it, in the hope that a little laughter might serve to soothe ruffled tempers. Lord Petre had cut off a lock of hair from the head of the lovely Arabella Fermor (often spelled "Farmer" and doubtless so pronounced), much to the indignation of the lady and her relatives. In its original version of two cantos and 334 lines, published in 1712, *The Rape of the Lock* was a great success. In 1713 a new version was undertaken against the advice of Addison, who considered the poem perfect as it was first written. Pope greatly expanded the earlier version, adding the delightful "machinery" (the supernatural agents in epic action) of the Sylphs, Belinda's toilet, the card game, and the visit to the Cave of Spleen in Canto 4. In 1717, with the addition of Clarissa's speech on good humor, the poem assumed its final form.

With delicate fancy and playful wit, Pope elaborated the trivial episode that occasioned the poem into the semblance of an epic in miniature, the most nearly perfect mock-heroic poem in English. The verse abounds in parodies and echoes of the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and *Paradise Lost*, thus constantly forcing the reader to compare small things with great. The familiar devices of epic are observed, but the incidents or characters are beautifully proportioned to the scale of mock epic. The *Rape* tells of war, but it is the drawing-room war between the sexes; it has its heroes and heroines, but they are beaux and belles; it has its supernatural characters ("machinery"), but they are Sylphs (borrowed, as Pope tells us in his dedicatory letter, from Rosicrucian lore)—creatures of the air, the souls of dead coquettes (surprisingly given male pronouns), with tasks appropriate to their nature—or the Gnome Umbriel, once a prude on earth; it has its epic game, played on the "velvet plain" of the card table, its feasting heroes, who sip coffee and gossip, and its battle, fought with the clichés of compliment and conceits, with frowns and angry glances, with snuff and bodkin; it has the traditional epic journey into the underworld—here the Cave of Spleen, a twisted space

dramatizing contemporary ideas about women, bodies, and hypochondria. And Pope creates a world in which these actions take place, a world that is dense with beautiful objects: brocades, ivory and tortoiseshell, cosmetics and diamonds, lacquered furniture, silver teapots, delicate chinaware—products of Britain’s global commerce that Pope seems to find both dazzling and morally suspect. It is a world that is constantly in motion and that sparkles and glitters with light, whether the light of the sun or of Belinda’s eyes or that light into which the “fluid” bodies of the Sylphs seem to dissolve as they flutter in shrouds and around the mast of Belinda’s ship. Pope laughs at this world, its ritualized triviality, its irrational, upper-class women and feminized men—and remembers that a grimmer, darker world surrounds it (3.19–24 and 5.145–48); but he also makes us aware of its beauty and charm.

The epigraph may be translated, “I was unwilling, Belinda, to ravish your locks; but I rejoice to have conceded this to your prayers” (Martial’s *Epigrams* 12.84.1–2). Pope substituted his heroine for Martial’s Polytimus. The epigraph is intended to suggest that the poem was published at Miss Fermor’s request.

# The Rape of the Lock

## *An Heroi-Comical Poem*

*Nolueram, Belinda, tuos violare capillos;  
sed juvat hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis.*

—MARTIAL

### TO MRS. ARABELLA FERMOR

MADAM,

It will be in vain to deny that I have some regard for this piece, since I dedicate it to you. Yet you may bear me witness, it was intended only to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humor enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own. But as it was communicated with the air of a secret, it soon found its way into the world. An imperfect copy having been offered to a bookseller, you had the good nature for my sake to consent to the publication of one more correct; this I was forced to, before I had executed half my design, for the machinery was entirely wanting to complete it.

The machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the critics, to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem; for the ancient poets are in one respect like many modern ladies: let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian<sup>1</sup> doctrine of spirits.

I know how disagreeable it is to make use of hard words before a lady; but 'tis so much the concern of a poet to have his works understood, and particularly by your sex, that you must give me leave to explain two or three difficult terms.

The Rosicrucians are a people I must bring you acquainted with. The best account I know of them is in a French book called *Le Comte de Gabalis*,<sup>2</sup> which both in its title and size is so like a novel, that many of the fair sex have read it for one by mistake. According to these gentlemen, the four elements are inhabited by spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs, and Salamanders. The Gnomes or Demons of earth delight in mischief; but the Sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable. For they say, any mortals may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition very easy to all true adepts, an inviolate preservation of chastity.

As to the following cantos, all the passages of them are as fabulous as the vision at the beginning, or the transformation at the end (except the loss of your hair, which I always mention with reverence). The human persons are as fictitious as the airy ones; and the character of Belinda, as it is now managed, resembles you in nothing but in beauty.

If this poem had as many graces as there are in your person, or in your mind, yet I could never hope it should pass through the world half so uncensured as you have done. But let its fortune be what it will, mine is happy enough, to have given me this occasion of assuring you that I am, with the truest esteem,

MADAM,  
*Your most obedient, humble servant,*  
A. POPE

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A system of arcane philosophy introduced into England from Germany in the 17th century.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: By the Abbé de Montfaucon de Villars, published in 1670.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***Canto 1***

What dire offense from amorous causes springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,  
I sing—This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due:  
This, even Belinda may vouchsafe to view:  
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,  
5 If she inspire, and he approve my lays.  
Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel  
A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?  
Oh, say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,  
Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?  
10 In tasks so bold can little men engage,  
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?  
Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,  
And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day.  
Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake,  
15 And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:  
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knocked the  
ground,<sup>3</sup>  
And the pressed watch<sup>4</sup> returned a silver sound.  
Belinda still her downy pillow pressed,  
Her guardian Sylph prolonged the balmy rest.  
20 'Twas he had summoned to her silent bed  
The morning dream that hovered o'er her head.  
A youth more glittering than a birthnight beau<sup>5</sup>  
(That even in slumber caused her cheek to glow)  
Seemed to her ear his winning lips to lay,  
25 And thus in whispers said, or seemed to say:  
"Fairest of mortals, thou distinguished care  
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!  
If e'er one vision touched thy infant thought,  
Of all the nurse and all the priest have taught,  
30 Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,



The silver token, and the circled green,<sup>6</sup>  
Or virgins visited by angel powers,  
With golden crowns and wreaths of heavenly  
flowers,  
Hear and believe! thy own importance know,  
35 Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.  
Some secret truths, from learned pride concealed,  
To maids alone and children are revealed:  
What though no credit doubting wits may give?  
The fair and innocent shall still believe.  
40 Know, then, unnumbered spirits round thee fly,  
The light militia of the lower sky:  
These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,  
Hang o'er the box, and hover round the Ring.<sup>7</sup>  
Think what an equipage thou hast in air,  
45 And view with scorn two pages and a chair.<sup>8</sup>  
As now your own, our beings were of old,  
And once enclosed in woman's beauteous mold;  
Thence, by a soft transition, we repair  
From earthly vehicles to these of air.  
50 Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,  
That all her vanities at once are dead:  
Succeeding vanities she still regards,  
And though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.  
Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,  
55 And love of ombre,<sup>8</sup> after death survive.  
For when the Fair in all their pride expire,  
To their first elements<sup>9</sup> their souls retire:  
The sprites of fiery termagants<sup>1</sup> in flame  
Mount up, and take a Salamander's<sup>2</sup> name.  
60 Soft yielding minds to water glide away,  
And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental tea.<sup>3</sup>  
The graver prude sinks downward to a Gnome,  
In search of mischief still on earth to roam.  
The light coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,

And sport and flutter in the fields of air.  
65       "Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste  
Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embraced:  
For spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease  
70       Assume what sexes and what shapes they please.<sup>4</sup>  
What guards the purity of melting maids,  
In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,  
Safe from the treacherous friend, the daring spark,  
The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,  
75       When kind occasion prompts their warm desires,  
When music softens, and when dancing fires?  
'Tis but their Sylph, the wise Celestials<sup>o</sup> know,  
Though Honor is the word with men below.  
      "Some nymphs<sup>5</sup> there are, too conscious of their  
face,  
For life predestined to the Gnomes' embrace.  
80       These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,  
When offers are disdained, and love denied:  
Then gay ideas<sup>o</sup> crowd the vacant brain,  
While peers, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,  
And garters, stars, and coronets<sup>6</sup> appear,  
85       And in soft sounds, 'your Grace'<sup>o</sup> salutes their ear.  
'Tis these that early taint the female soul,  
Instruct the eyes of young coquettes to roll,  
Teach infant cheeks a bidden blush to know,  
And little hearts to flutter at a beau.  
90       "Oft, when the world imagine women stray,  
The Sylphs through mystic mazes guide their way,  
Through all the giddy circle they pursue,  
And old impertinence<sup>o</sup> expel by new.  
What tender maid but must a victim fall  
95       To one man's treat, but for another's ball?  
When Florio speaks, what virgin could withstand,  
If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?  
With varying vanities, from every part,

100 They shift the moving toyshop<sup>7</sup> of their heart;  
Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots  
strive,  
Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.  
This erring mortals levity may call;  
Oh, blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it all.  
105 "Of these am I, who thy protection claim,  
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.  
Late, as I ranged the crystal wilds of air,  
In the clear mirror of thy ruling star  
I saw, alas! some dread event impend,  
Ere to the main this morning sun descend,  
110 But Heaven reveals not what, or how, or where:  
Warned by thy Sylph, O pious maid, beware!  
This to disclose is all thy guardian can:  
Beware of all, but most beware of Man!"  
115 He said; when Shock,<sup>8</sup> who thought she slept too  
long,  
Leaped up, and waked his mistress with his tongue.  
'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,  
Thy eyes first opened on a billet-doux;  
Wounds, charms, and ardors were no sooner read,  
But all the vision vanished from thy head.  
120 And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,  
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.  
First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores,  
With head uncovered, the cosmetic powers.  
A heavenly image in the glass appears;  
125 To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears.  
The inferior priestess, at her altar's side,  
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.  
Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here  
The various offerings of the world appear;  
130 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,  
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.  
 The tortoise here and elephant unite,  
 135 Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.  
 Here files of pins extend their shining rows,  
 Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles,<sup>9</sup> billet-doux.  
 Now awful<sup>o</sup> Beauty puts on all its arms;  
 The fair each moment rises in her charms,  
 140 Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,  
 And calls forth all the wonders of her face;  
 Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,  
 And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.  
 The busy Sylphs surround their darling care,  
 145 These set the head, and those divide the hair,  
 Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;  
 And Betty's<sup>1</sup> praised for labors not her own.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Summons to a maid.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A watch that chimes the hour and the quarter hour when the stem is pressed down.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Courtiers wore especially fine clothes on the sovereign's birthday.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Rings of bright green grass, which are common in England even in winter, were held to be caused by the round dances of fairies. According to popular belief, fairies skim off the cream from jugs of milk left standing overnight and leave a coin ("silver token") in payment.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The "box" in the theater and the fashionable circular drive ("Ring") in Hyde Park.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A popular card game (see p. 546, n. 3).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The four elements out of which all things were believed to have been made were fire, water, earth, and air. One or

another of these elements was supposed to be predominant in both the physical and the psychological makeup of each human being. In this context they are spoken of as “humors.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Shrewish or overbearing women.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A lizardlike animal, in antiquity believed to live in fire. Each element was inhabited by a spirit, as the following lines explain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pronounced *tay*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Compare with Milton’s *Paradise Lost* 1.427–31; this is one of many allusions to that poem in the *Rape*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here and after, a fanciful name for a young woman, to be distinguished from the “Nymphs” (water spirits) in line 62.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Emblems of nobility.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A shop stocked with baubles and trifles.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A long-haired poodle, Belinda’s lapdog.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It has been suggested that Pope intended here not “Bibles,” but “bibelots” (trinkets), but this interpretation has not gained wide acceptance.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Belinda’s maid, the “inferior priestess” mentioned in line 127.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *sedan chair*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heavenly beings*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *showy images*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a duchess*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trifle*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awe-inspiring*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 2***

Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,  
The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,  
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams  
Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.  
Fair nymphs and well-dressed youths around her  
5 shone,

But every eye was fixed on her alone.  
On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,  
Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.  
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,  
Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those:  
10 Favors to none, to all she smiles extends;  
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.  
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,  
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.  
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,  
15 Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:  
If to her share some female errors fall,  
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,  
Nourished two locks which graceful hung behind  
20 In equal curls, and well conspired to deck  
With shining ringlets her smooth ivory neck.  
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,  
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.  
With hairy springes<sup>2</sup> we the birds betray,  
25 Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,  
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,  
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

The adventurous Baron the bright locks admired,  
He saw, he wished, and to the prize aspired.  
30 Resolved to win, he meditates the way,

By force to ravish, or by fraud betray;  
For when success a lover's toil attends,  
Few ask if fraud or force attained his ends.

35 For this, ere Phoebus<sup>o</sup> rose, he had implored  
Propitious Heaven, and every power adored,  
But chiefly Love—to Love an altar built,  
Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt.  
There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves,  
And all the trophies of his former loves.  
40 With tender billet-doux he lights the pyre,  
And breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire.  
Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes  
Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize:  
The powers gave ear, and granted half his prayer,  
45 The rest the winds dispersed in empty air.

But now secure the painted vessel glides,  
The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides,  
While melting music steals upon the sky,  
And softened sounds along the waters die.  
50 Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,  
Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay.  
All but the Sylph—with careful thoughts oppressed,  
The impending woe sat heavy on his breast.  
He summons straight his denizens of air;  
55 The lucid squadrons round the sails repair:  
Soft o'er the shrouds aërial whispers breathe  
That seemed but zephyrs to the train beneath.  
Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,  
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold.  
60 Transparent forms too fine for mortal sight,  
Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light,  
Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,  
Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew,  
Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,  
65 Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes,  
While every beam new transient colors flings,

Colors that change whene'er they wave their wings.  
Amid the circle, on the gilded mast,  
Superior by the head was Ariel placed;  
70 His purple<sup>3</sup> pinions opening to the sun,  
He raised his azure wand, and thus begun:  
    "Ye Sylphs and Sylphids, to your chief give ear!  
Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Daemons, hear!  
Ye know the spheres and various tasks assigned  
75 By laws eternal to the aërial kind.  
Some in the fields of purest ether play,  
And bask and whiten in the blaze of day.  
Some guide the course of wandering orbs on high,  
Or roll the planets through the boundless sky.  
80 Some less refined, beneath the moon's pale light  
Pursue the stars that shoot athwart the night,  
Or suck the mists in grosser air below,  
Or dip their pinions in the painted bow,<sup>o</sup>  
Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry main,  
85 Or o'er the glebe<sup>o</sup> distill the kindly rain.  
Others on earth o'er human race preside,  
Watch all their ways, and all their actions guide:  
Of these the chief the care of nations own,  
And guard with arms divine the British Throne.  
90 "Our humbler province is to tend the Fair,  
Not a less pleasing, though less glorious care:  
To save the powder from too rude a gale,  
Nor let the imprisoned essences<sup>o</sup> exhale;  
To draw fresh colors from the vernal flowers;  
95 To steal from rainbows e'er they drop in showers  
A brighter wash;<sup>o</sup> to curl their waving hairs,  
Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs,  
Nay oft, in dreams invention we bestow,  
To change a flounce, or add a furbelow.  
100 "This day black omens threat the brightest fair,  
That e'er deserved a watchful spirit's care;



Some dire disaster, or by force or slight,  
But what, or where, the Fates have wrapped in  
night:

105 Whether the nymph shall break Diana's<sup>4</sup> law,  
Or some frail china jar receive a flaw,  
Or stain her honor, or her new brocade,  
Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade,  
Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball;  
110 Or whether Heaven has doomed that Shock must  
fall.

Haste, then, ye spirits! to your charge repair:  
The fluttering fan be Zephyretta's care;  
The drops<sup>5</sup> to thee, Brillante, we consign;  
And, Momentilla, let the watch be thine;  
115 Do thou, Crispissa,<sup>6</sup> tend her favorite Lock;  
Ariel himself shall be the guard of Shock.

"To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,  
We trust the important charge, the petticoat;  
Oft have we known that sevenfold fence to fail,  
Though stiff with hoops, and armed with ribs of  
120 whale.<sup>7</sup>

Form a strong line about the silver bound,  
And guard the wide circumference around.

"Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,  
His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,  
Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins,  
125 Be stopped in vials, or transfixed with pins,  
Or plunged in lakes of bitter washes lie,  
Or wedged whole ages in a bodkin's<sup>8</sup> eye;  
Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,  
While clogged he beats his silken wings in vain,  
130 Or alum styptics with contracting power  
Shrink his thin essence like a riveled<sup>9</sup> flower:  
Or, as Ixion<sup>1</sup> fixed, the wretch shall feel  
The giddy motion of the whirling mill,

135 In fumes of burning chocolate shall glow,  
 And tremble at the sea that froths below!"  
 He spoke; the spirits from the sails descend;  
 Some, orb in orb, around the nymph extend;  
 Some thread the mazy ringlets of her hair;  
 Some hang upon the pendants of her ear:  
 140 With beating hearts the dire event they wait,  
 Anxious, and trembling for the birth of Fate.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Snares (pronounced *sprin-jez*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In 18th-century poetic diction the word might mean bloodred, purple, or simply (as is likely here) brightly colored. The word derives from Virgil's *Eclogue* 9.40, *purpureum*, and is an example of the Latinate nature of some poetic diction of the period.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Diana was the goddess of chastity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Diamond earrings. Observe the appropriateness of the names of the Sylphs to their assigned functions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From Latin *crispere*, "to curl."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Corsets and the hoops of hoopskirts were made of whalebone.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A blunt needle with a large eye used for drawing ribbon through eyelets in the edging of women's garments.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To "rivel" is to "contract into wrinkles and corrugations" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the Greek myth, he was punished in the underworld by being bound on an everturning wheel.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *the sun*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *rainbow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cultivated field*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perfumes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cosmetic lotion*[Return to reference °](#)

### ***Canto 3***

Close by those meads, forever crowned with  
flowers,  
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,  
There stands a structure of majestic frame,  
Which from the neighboring Hampton<sup>2</sup> takes its  
name.

5 Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom  
Of foreign tyrants and of nymphs at home;  
Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,  
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.

Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,  
To taste awhile the pleasures of a court;  
10 In various talk the instructive hours they passed,  
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;  
One speaks the glory of the British Queen,  
And one describes a charming Indian screen;  
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;  
15 At every word a reputation dies.

Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,  
With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that.

Meanwhile, declining from the noon of day,  
The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray;  
20 The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,  
And wretches hang that jurymen may dine;  
The merchant from the Exchange returns in peace,  
And the long labors of the toilet cease.

Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,  
25 Burns to encounter two adventurous knights,  
At ombre<sup>3</sup> singly to decide their doom,  
And swells her breast with conquests yet to come.  
Straight the three bands prepare in arms to join,  
Each band the number of the sacred nine.

30

Soon as she spreads her hand, the aërial guard  
Descend, and sit on each important card:  
First Ariel perched upon a Matadore,  
Then each according to the rank they bore;  
For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient race,  
35 Are, as when women, wondrous fond of place.  
Behold, four Kings in majesty revered,  
With hoary whiskers and a forked beard;  
And four fair Queens whose hands sustain a flower,  
The expressive emblem of their softer power;  
40 Four Knaves in garbs succinct, <sup>o</sup> a trusty band,  
Caps on their heads, and halberts in their hand;  
And parti-colored troops, a shining train,  
Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.  
The skillful nymph reviews her force with care;  
45 "Let Spades be trumps!" she said, and trumps they  
were.  
Now move to war her sable Matadores,  
In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors.  
Spadillio first, unconquerable lord!  
Led off two captive trumps, and swept the board.  
50 As many more Manillio forced to yield,  
And marched a victor from the verdant field.  
Him Basto followed, but his fate more hard  
Gained but one trump and one plebeian card.  
With his broad saber next, a chief in years,  
55 The hoary Majesty of Spades appears,  
Puts forth one manly leg, to sight revealed,  
The rest his many-colored robe concealed.  
The rebel Knave, who dares his prince engage,  
Proves the just victim of his royal rage.  
60 Even mighty Pam, <sup>4</sup> that kings and queens o'erthrew  
And mowed down armies in the fights of loo,  
Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid,  
Falls undistinguished by the victor Spade.

Thus far both armies to Belinda yield;  
65 Now to the Baron fate inclines the field.  
His warlike amazon her host invades,  
The imperial consort of the crown of Spades.  
The Club's black tyrant first her victim died,  
70 Spite of his haughty mien and barbarous pride.  
What boots <sup>o</sup> the regal circle on his head,  
His giant limbs, in state unwieldy spread?  
That long behind he trails his pompous robe,  
And of all monarchs only grasps the globe?<sup>5</sup>

The Baron now his Diamonds pours apace;  
75 The embroidered King who shows but half his face,  
And his refulgent Queen, with powers combined,  
Of broken troops an easy conquest find.  
Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild disorder seen,  
With throngs promiscuous strew the level green.  
80 Thus when dispersed a routed army runs,  
Of Asia's troops, and Afric's sable sons,  
With like confusion different nations fly,  
Of various habit, and of various dye,  
The pierced battalions disunited fall  
85 In heaps on heaps; one fate o'erwhelms them all.

The Knave of Diamonds tries his wily arts,  
And wins (oh, shameful chance!) the Queen of  
Hearts.  
At this, the blood the virgin's cheek forsook,  
A livid paleness spreads o'er all her look;  
90 She sees, and trembles at the approaching ill,  
Just in the jaws of ruin, and Codille.<sup>6</sup>  
And now (as oft in some distempered state)  
On one nice trick depends the general fate.  
An Ace of Hearts steps forth: the King unseen  
95 Lurked in her hand, and mourned his captive Queen.  
He springs to vengeance with an eager pace,  
And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace.

The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky,  
The walls, the woods, and long canals reply.  
100 O thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,  
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate:  
Sudden these honors shall be snatched away,  
And cursed forever this victorious day.  
105 For lo! the board with cups and spoons is  
crowned,  
The berries crackle, and the mill turns round;<sup>7</sup>  
On shining altars of Japan<sup>8</sup> they raise  
The silver I the fiery spirits blaze:  
From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,  
While China's earth receives the smoking tide.  
110 At once they gratify their scent and taste,  
And frequent cups prolong the rich repast.  
Straight hover round the fair her airy band;  
Some, as she sipped, the fuming liquor fanned,  
Some o'er her lap their careful plumes displayed,  
115 Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade.  
Coffee (which makes the politician wise,  
And see through all things with his half-shut eyes)  
Sent up in vapors to the Baron's brain  
New stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain.  
120 Ah, cease, rash youth! desist ere 'tis too late,  
Fear the just Gods, and think of Scylla's<sup>9</sup> fate!  
Changed to a bird, and sent to flit in air,  
She dearly pays for Nisus' injured hair!  
125 But when to mischief mortals bend their will,  
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!  
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace  
A two-edged weapon from her shining case:  
So ladies in romance assist their knight,  
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.  
130 He takes the gift with reverence, and extends  
The little engine on his fingers' ends;

This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,  
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.  
Swift to the Lock a thousand sprites repair,  
135 A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair,  
And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear,  
Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.  
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought  
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;  
140 As on the nosegay in her breast reclined,  
He watched the ideas rising in her mind,  
Sudden he viewed, in spite of all her art,  
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.  
Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,  
145 Resigned to fate, and with a sigh retired.  
The Peer now spreads the glittering forfex<sup>o</sup> wide,  
To enclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide.  
Even then, before the fatal engine closed,  
A wretched Sylph too fondly interposed;  
150 Fate urged the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain  
(But airy substance soon unites again):  
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever  
From the fair head, forever and forever!  
Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,  
155 And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies.  
Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast,  
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last;  
Or when rich china vessels fallen from high,  
In glittering dust and painted fragments lie!  
160 "Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine,"  
The victor cried, "the glorious prize is mine!  
While fish in streams, or birds delight in air,  
Or in a coach and six the British fair,  
As long as *Atalantis*<sup>1</sup> shall be read,  
165 Or the small pillow grace a lady's bed,  
While visits shall be paid on solemn days,



When numerous wax-lights in bright order blaze,  
 While nymphs take treats,<sup>o</sup> or assignations give,  
 So long my honor, name, and praise shall live!  
 170        "What time would spare, from steel receives its  
              date,  
 And monuments, like men, submit to fate!  
 Steel could the labor of the Gods destroy,  
 And strike to dust the imperial towers of Troy;  
 Steel could the works of mortal pride confound,  
 175        And hew triumphal arches to the ground.  
 What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel,  
 The conquering force of unresisted steel?"

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Hampton Court, the royal palace, about fifteen miles up the Thames from London. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
 The game of ombre that Belinda plays against the baron and another young man is too complicated for complete explication here. Pope has carefully arranged the cards so that Belinda wins. The baron's hand is strong enough to be a threat, but the third player's is of little account. The hand is played exactly according to the rules of ombre, and Pope's description of the cards is equally accurate. Each player holds nine cards (line 30). The "Matadores" (line 33), when spades are trump, are "Spadillio" (line 49), the ace of spades; "Manillio" (line 51), the two of spades; and "Basto" (line 53), the ace of clubs. Belinda holds all three of these. (For a more complete description of ombre, see *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, in the Twickenham Edition of Pope's poems, vol. 2, Appendix C.)  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The knave of clubs, the highest trump in the game of loo. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: In the English deck, only the king of clubs holds an imperial orb.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The term applied to losing a hand at cards.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Coffee is roasted and ground.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Small, lacquered tables. "Altars": suggests the ritualistic character of coffee drinking in Belinda's world.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Scylla, daughter of Nisus, was turned into a sea bird because, for the sake of her love for Minos of Crete, who was besieging her father's city of Megara, she cut from her father's head the purple lock on which his safety depended. She is not the Scylla of "Scylla and Charybdis."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Delarivier Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709) was notorious for its thinly concealed allusions to contemporary scandals.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *girded up*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *avails*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scissors*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *free refreshments*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 4***

But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppressed,  
And secret passions labored in her breast.  
Not youthful kings in battle seized alive,  
Not scornful virgins who their charms survive,  
Not ardent lovers robbed of all their bliss,  
5 Not ancient ladies when refused a kiss,  
Not tyrants fierce that unrepenting die,  
Not Cynthia when her manteau's<sup>o</sup> pinned awry,  
E'er felt such rage, resentment, and despair,  
As thou, sad virgin! for thy ravished hair.  
10 For, that sad moment, when the Sylphs withdrew  
And Ariel weeping from Belinda flew,  
Umbriel,<sup>2</sup> a dusky, melancholy sprite  
As ever sullied the fair face of light,  
Down to the central earth, his proper scene,  
15 Repaired to search the gloomy Cave of Spleen.<sup>o</sup>  
Swift on his sooty pinions flits the Gnome,  
And in a vapor reached the dismal dome.  
No cheerful breeze this sullen region knows,  
The dreaded east is all the wind that blows.  
20 Here in a grotto, sheltered close from air,  
And screened in shades from day's detested glare,  
She sighs forever on her pensive bed,  
Pain at her side, and Megrim<sup>o</sup> at her head.  
Two handmaids wait the throne: alike in place  
25 But differing far in figure and in face.  
Here stood Ill-Nature like an ancient maid,  
Her wrinkled form in black and white arrayed;  
With store of prayers for mornings, nights, and  
noons,  
Her hand is filled; her bosom with lampoons.  
30 There Affectation, with a sickly mien,

Shows in her cheek the roses of eighteen,  
Practiced to lisp, and hang the head aside,  
Faints into airs, and languishes with pride,  
On the rich quilt sinks with becoming woe,  
35 Wrapped in a gown, for sickness and for show.  
The fair ones<sup>o</sup> feel such maladies as these,  
When each new nightdress gives a new disease.  
A constant vapor<sup>3</sup> o'er the palace flies,  
Strange phantoms rising as the mists arise;  
40 Dreadful as hermit's dreams in haunted shades,  
Or bright as visions of expiring maids.  
Now glaring fiends, and snakes on rolling spires,<sup>o</sup>  
Pale specters, gaping tombs, and purple fires;  
Now lakes of liquid gold, Elysian scenes,  
45 And crystal domes, and angels in machines.<sup>4</sup>  
Unnumbered throngs on every side are seen  
Of bodies changed to various forms by Spleen.  
Here living teapots stand, one arm held out,  
One bent; the handle this, and that the spout:  
50 A pipkin<sup>o</sup> there, like Homer's tripod,<sup>5</sup> walks;  
Here sighs a jar, and there a goose pie talks;  
Men prove with child, as powerful fancy works,  
And maids, turned bottles, call aloud for corks.  
Safe passed the Gnome through this fantastic  
55 band,  
A branch of healing spleenwort<sup>6</sup> in his hand.  
Then thus addressed the Power: "Hail, wayward  
Queen!  
Who rule the sex to fifty from fifteen:  
Parent of vapors and of female wit,  
Who give the hysteric or poetic fit,  
60 On various tempers act by various ways,  
Make some take physic,<sup>o</sup> others scribble plays;  
Who cause the proud their visits to delay,  
And send the godly in a pet to pray.

65 A nymph there is that all your power disdains,  
And thousands more in equal mirth maintains.  
But oh! if e'er thy Gnome could spoil a grace,  
Or raise a pimple on a beauteous face,  
Like citron-waters<sup>7</sup> matrons' cheeks inflame,  
Or change complexions at a losing game;  
70 If e'er with airy horns<sup>8</sup> I planted heads,  
Or rumpled petticoats, or tumbled beds,  
Or caused suspicion when no soul was rude,  
Or discomposed the headdress of a prude,  
Or e'er to costive lapdog gave disease,  
75 Which not the tears of brightest eyes could ease,  
Hear me, and touch Belinda with chagrin:<sup>9</sup>  
That single act gives half the world the spleen."

The Goddess with a discontented air  
Seems to reject him though she grants his prayer.  
80 A wondrous bag with both her hands she binds,  
Like that where once Ulysses held the winds;<sup>9</sup>  
There she collects the force of female lungs,  
Sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues.  
A vial next she fills with fainting fears,  
85 Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears.  
The Gnome rejoicing bears her gifts away,  
Spreads his black wings, and slowly mounts to day.

Sunk in Thalestris'<sup>1</sup> arms the nymph he found,  
Her eyes dejected and her hair unbound.  
90 Full o'er their heads the swelling bag he rent,  
And all the Furies issued at the vent.  
Belinda burns with more than mortal ire,  
And fierce Thalestris fans the rising fire.  
"O wretched maid!" she spread her hands, and cried  
95 (While Hampton's echoes, "Wretched maid!" replied),  
"Was it for this you took such constant care  
The bodkin, comb, and essence to prepare?  
For this your locks in paper durance bound,

100 For this with torturing irons wreathed around?  
For this with fillets strained your tender head,  
And bravely bore the double loads of lead?<sup>2</sup>  
Gods! shall the ravisher display your hair,  
While the fops envy, and the ladies stare!  
Honor forbid! at whose unrivaled shrine  
105 Ease, pleasure, virtue, all, our sex resign.  
Methinks already I your tears survey,  
Already hear the horrid things they say,  
Already see you a degraded toast,  
And all your honor in a whisper lost!  
110 How shall I, then, your helpless fame defend?  
'Twill then be infamy to seem your friend!  
And shall this prize, the inestimable prize,  
Exposed through crystal to the gazing eyes,  
And heightened by the diamond's circling rays,  
115 On that rapacious hand forever blaze?  
Sooner shall grass in Hyde Park Circus grow,  
And wits take lodgings in the sound of Bow;<sup>3</sup>  
Sooner let earth, air, sea, to chaos fall,  
Men, monkeys, lapdogs, parrots, perish all!"  
120 She said; then raging to Sir Plume repairs,  
And bids her beau demand the precious hairs  
(Sir Plume of amber snuffbox justly vain,  
And the nice conduct of a clouded<sup>o</sup> cane).  
With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face,  
125 He first the snuffbox opened, then the case,  
And thus broke out—"My Lord, why, what the devil!  
Z—ds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil!  
Plague on 't! 'tis past a jest—nay prithee, pox!  
Give her the hair"—he spoke, and rapped his box.  
130 "It grieves me much," replied the Peer again,  
"Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain.  
But by this Lock, this sacred Lock I swear  
(Which never more shall join its parted hair;

135 Which never more its honors shall renew,  
Clipped from the lovely head where late it grew),  
That while my nostrils draw the vital air,  
This hand, which won it, shall forever wear.”  
He spoke, and speaking, in proud triumph spread  
The long-contended honors<sup>4</sup> of her head.

140 But Umbriel, hateful Gnome, forbears not so;  
He breaks the vial whence the sorrows flow.  
Then see! the nymph in beauteous grief appears,  
Her eyes half languishing, half drowned in tears;  
On her heaved bosom hung her drooping head,  
145 Which with a sigh she raised, and thus she said:  
“Forever cursed be this detested day,  
Which snatched my best, my favorite curl away!  
Happy! ah, ten times happy had I been,  
If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen!  
150 Yet am not I the first mistaken maid,  
By love of courts to numerous ills betrayed.  
Oh, had I rather unadmired remained  
In some lone isle, or distant northern land;  
Where the gilt chariot never marks the way,  
155 Where none learn ombre, none e’er taste bohea!<sup>5</sup>  
There kept my charms concealed from mortal eye,  
Like roses that in deserts bloom and die.  
What moved my mind with youthful lords to roam?  
Oh, had I stayed, and said my prayers at home!  
160 ’Twas this the morning omens seemed to tell;  
Thrice from my trembling hand the patch box<sup>6</sup> fell;  
The tottering china shook without a wind,  
Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind!  
A Sylph too warned me of the threats of fate,  
165 In mystic visions, now believed too late!  
See the poor remnants of these slighted hairs!  
My hands shall rend what e’en thy rapine spares.  
These in two sable ringlets taught to break,

170       Once gave new beauties to the snowy neck.  
The sister lock now sits uncouth, alone,  
And in its fellow's fate foresees its own;  
Uncurled it hangs, the fatal shears demands,  
And tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands.  
175       Oh, hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize  
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!"

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The name suggests shade and darkness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Emblematic of "the vapors," a fashionable hypochondria, melancholy, or peevishness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Mechanical devices used in the theaters for spectacular effects. The catalog of hallucinations draws on the sensational stage effects popular with contemporary audiences.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the *Iliad* (18.373–77), Vulcan furnishes the gods with self-propelling "tripods" (three-legged stools).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An herb, efficacious against diseases of the spleen. Pope alludes to the golden bough that Aeneas and the Cumaean sibyl carry with them for protection into the underworld in *Aeneid* 6.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Brandy flavored with orange or lemon peel.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The symbol of the cuckold, the man whose wife has been unfaithful to him; here "airy," because they exist only in the jealous suspicions of the husband, the victim of the mischievous Umbriel.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Aeolus (later conceived of as god of the winds) gave Ulysses a bag containing all the winds adverse to his voyage home. When his ship was in sight of Ithaca, his companions



opened the bag and the storms that ensued drove Ulysses far away (*Odyssey* 10.19ff.).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The name is borrowed from a queen of the Amazons, hence a fierce and warlike woman.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The frame on which the elaborate coiffures of the day were arranged.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A person born within sound of the bells of St. Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside is said to be a cockney. No fashionable wit would have so vulgar an address.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Ornaments, hence locks; a Latinism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A costly sort of tea.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To hold the ornamental patches of court plaster worn on the face by both sexes.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *wrap*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Ill Humor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *headache*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *women*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *coils*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *earthen pot*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ill humor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *marbled, veined*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 5***

She said: the pitying audience melt in tears.  
But Fate and Jove had stopped the Baron's ears.  
In vain Thalestris with reproach assails,  
For who can move when fair Belinda fails?  
5 Not half so fixed the Trojan<sup>7</sup> could remain,  
While Anna begged and Dido raged in vain.  
Then grave Clarissa graceful waved her fan;  
Silence ensued, and thus the nymph began:  
    "Say, why are beauties praised and honored  
    most,  
10 The wise man's passion, and the vain man's toast?  
Why decked with all that land and sea afford,  
Why angels called, and angel-like adored?  
Why round our coaches crowd the white-gloved  
    beaux,  
Why bows the side box from its inmost rows?  
How vain are all these glories, all our pains,  
15 Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains;  
That men may say when we the front box grace,  
'Behold the first in virtue as in face!'  
Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day,  
Charmed the smallpox, or chased old age away,  
20 Who would not scorn what housewife's cares  
    produce,  
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?  
To patch, nay ogle, might become a saint,  
Nor could it sure be such a sin to paint.  
But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,  
25 Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to gray;  
Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
And she who scorns a man must die a maid;  
What then remains but well our power to use,

30 And keep good humor still whate'er we lose?  
And trust me, dear, good humor can prevail  
When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding  
fail.  
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;  
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul."<sup>8</sup>  
So spoke the dame, but no applause ensued;  
35 Belinda frowned, Thalestris called her prude.  
"To arms, to arms!" the fierce virago cries,  
And swift as lightning to the combat flies.  
All side in parties, and begin the attack;  
Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack;  
40 Heroes' and heroines' shouts confusedly rise,  
And bass and treble voices strike the skies.  
No common weapons in their hands are found,  
Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound.  
So when bold Homer makes the Gods engage,  
45 And heavenly breasts with human passions rage;  
'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms;  
And all Olympus rings with loud alarms:  
Jove's thunder roars, heaven trembles all around,  
Blue Neptune storms, the bellowing deeps resound:  
50 Earth shakes her nodding towers, the ground gives  
way,  
And the pale ghosts start at the flash of day!  
Triumphant Umbriel on a sconce's<sup>9</sup> height  
Clapped his glad wings, and sat to view the fight:  
Propped on the bodkin spears, the sprites survey  
55 The growing combat, or assist the fray.  
While through the press enraged Thalestris flies,  
And scatters death around from both her eyes,  
A beau and witling perished in the throng,  
One died in metaphor, and one in song.  
60 "O cruel nymph! a living death I bear,"  
Cried Dapperwit, and sunk beside his chair.

A mournful glance Sir Fopling upwards cast,  
"Those eyes are made so killing"—was his last.  
Thus on Maeander's flowery margin lies  
65 The expiring swan,<sup>1</sup> and as he sings he dies.  
When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,  
Chloe stepped in, and killed him with a frown;  
She smiled to see the doughty hero slain,  
But, at her smile, the beau revived again.  
70 Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air,  
Weighs the men's wits against the lady's hair;  
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;  
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.  
See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,  
75 With more than usual lightning in her eyes;  
Nor feared the chief the unequal fight to try,  
Who sought no more than on his foe to die.  
But this bold lord with manly strength endued,  
She with one finger and a thumb subdued:  
80 Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,  
A charge of snuff the wily virgin threw;  
The Gnomes direct, to every atom just,  
The pungent grains of titillating dust.  
Sudden, with starting tears each eye o'erflows,  
85 And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.  
"Now meet thy fate," incensed Belinda cried,  
And drew a deadly bodkin<sup>2</sup> from her side.  
(The same, his ancient personage to deck,  
Her great-great-grandsire wore about his neck,  
90 In three seal rings; which after, melted down,  
Formed a vast buckle for his widow's gown:  
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,  
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;  
Then in a bodkin graced her mother's hairs,  
95 Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)  
"Boast not my fall," he cried, "insulting foe!

Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.  
Nor think to die dejects my lofty mind:  
All that I dread is leaving you behind!  
100 Rather than so, ah, let me still survive,  
And burn in Cupid's flames—but burn alive."  
"Restore the Lock!" she cries; and all around  
"Restore the Lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound.  
Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain  
105 Roared for the handkerchief that caused his pain.<sup>3</sup>  
But see how oft ambitious aims are crossed,  
And chiefs contend till all the prize is lost!  
The lock, obtained with guilt, and kept with pain,  
In every place is sought, but sought in vain:  
110 With such a prize no mortal must be blessed,  
So Heaven decrees! with Heaven who can contest?  
Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere,  
Since all things lost on earth are treasured there.  
There heroes' wits are kept in ponderous vases,  
115 And beaux' in snuffboxes and tweezer cases.  
There broken vows and deathbed alms are found,  
And lovers' hearts with ends of riband bound,  
The courtier's promises, and sick man's prayers,  
The smiles of harlots, and the tears of heirs,  
120 Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea,  
Dried butterflies, and tomes of casuistry.  
But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,  
Though marked by none but quick, poetic eyes  
(So Rome's great founder to the heavens withdrew,<sup>4</sup>  
125 To Proculus alone confessed in view);  
A sudden star, it shot through liquid air,  
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair.  
Not Berenice's locks first rose so bright,<sup>5</sup>  
The heavens bespangling with disheveled light.  
130 The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies,  
And pleased pursue its progress through the skies.

This the beau monde shall from the Mall<sup>6</sup> survey,  
 And hail with music its propitious ray.  
 This the blest lover shall for Venus take,  
 135 And send up vows from Rosamonda's Lake.<sup>7</sup>  
 This Partridge<sup>8</sup> soon shall view in cloudless skies,  
 When next he looks through Galileo's eyes;<sup>9</sup>  
 And hence the egregious wizard shall foredoom  
 The fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome.  
 140 Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn thy ravished  
 hair,  
 Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!  
 Not all the tresses that fair head can boast  
 Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.  
 For, after all the murders of your eye,  
 145 When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:  
 When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,  
 And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,  
 This Lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame,  
 And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.  
 150

## 1712 **Endnotes**

1714, 1717

- Note 7: Aeneas, who forsook Dido at the bidding of the gods, despite her reproaches and the supplications of her sister Anna. Virgil compares him to a steadfast oak that withstands a storm (*Aeneid* 4.437–43). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The speech is a close parody of Pope's own translation of the speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus, first published in 1709 and slightly revised in his version of the *Iliad* (12.371–96). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A candlestick fastened on the wall. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Maeander, a river in what is now Turkey, was famous for its swans. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here, an ornamental hairpin shaped like a dagger. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: *Othello* 3.4.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Romulus, the “founder” and first king of Rome, was snatched to heaven in a storm cloud while reviewing his army in the Campus Martius (Livy 1.16).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The wife of Ptolemy III dedicated a lock of her hair to the gods to ensure her husband’s safe return from war. It was turned into a constellation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A walk laid out by Charles II in St. James’s Park (London), a resort for strollers of all sorts.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In St. James’s Park; associated with unhappy lovers.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Partridge, an astrologer whose annually published predictions (among them that Louis XIV and the Catholic Church would fall) had been amusingly satirized by Swift and other wits in 1708.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *telescope*[Return to reference °](#)

**Eloisa to Abelard** Like Ovid's *Sappho to Phaon*, which Pope had translated in his teens, *Eloisa to Abelard* is a heroic epistle: strictly defined, a versified love letter, involving historical persons, which dramatizes the feelings of a woman who has been forsaken. Pope took his subject from one of the most famous affairs of history. Peter Abelard (1079–1142), a brilliant medieval theologian, seduced a young girl, his pupil Heloise; eventually she bore him a child, and they were secretly married. Enraged at the betrayal of trust, and what he regarded as the casting off of Heloise, her uncle Fulbert revenged himself by having Abelard castrated. The lovers separated; each of them entered a monastery and went on to a distinguished career in the church. Yet their greatest fame derives from the letters they are supposed to have exchanged late in their lives (some scholars have cast doubt on the authenticity of Heloise's letters). It is this correspondence, made newly popular by French and English translations of the original Latin, that inspired Pope's poem.

The heroic epistle challenges authors in two ways: they must exert historical imagination, projecting themselves into another time and place; and they must enter the mind and passions of a woman, acting her part, and showing everything from her point of view. Historically, Pope draws on his knowledge of Roman Catholic ritual to envelop Eloisa in a rich medieval atmosphere. The dark Gothic convent, situated in an imaginary landscape of grottos, mountains, and pine forests, embodies the eighteenth-century sense of the romantic: fantastic, legendary, and extravagant. Here Eloisa is cloistered, not only physically but mentally, by religious mysticism that surrounds her with a melancholy as palpable as the image of her lover. The greatest triumph of the poem, however, is psychological. In *Eloisa*, for the only time in his career, Pope tells a story wholly in another's voice. Confused and tormented, the heroine tosses between two kinds of love: an erotic passion for the earthly lover whose memory she cannot quell and the divine, chaste love that must content a nun. Abelard and God, within her fantasy, compete for her soul. Pope brings these internal struggles to the surface by externalizing them in bold dramatic rhetoric, formal and



intense as an aria in an opera (the poem was long a favorite for reading aloud). Eloisa views herself theatrically, if only because, in the letter, she is trying to make Abelard visualize the pathos of her situation. There is literally no way out for her, and at the end of the poem, she can break the static circle of desire and loneliness only by picturing herself in the peace of death. Yet the high reputation of the work, well into the Romantic era, owes less to its theatrics than to its convincing image of a mind in pain. "If you search for passion," Lord Byron wrote more than a century later, "where is it to be found stronger than in the Epistle from Eloisa to Abelard?"

For a depiction of an incident in this famous love story, see Angelika Kauffmann's *The Parting of Abelard from Heloise* (ca. 1778), in the color insert in this volume.

# Eloisa to Abelard

## *The Argument*

Abelard and Eloisa flourished in the twelfth century; they were two of the most distinguished persons of their age in learning and beauty, but for nothing more famous than for their unfortunate passion. After a long course of calamities, they retired each to a several<sup>1</sup> convent, and consecrated the remainder of their days to religion. It was many years after this separation, that a letter of Abelard's to a friend which contained the history of his misfortune, fell into the hands of Eloisa. This awakening all her tenderness, occasioned those celebrated letters (out of which the following is partly extracted)<sup>2</sup> which give so lively a picture of the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion.

In these deep solitudes and awful cells,  
Where heavenly-pensive contemplation dwells,  
And ever-musing melancholy reigns;  
What means this tumult in a vestal's<sup>3</sup> veins?  
Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?  
5 Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?  
Yet, yet I love!—From Abelard it<sup>4</sup> came,  
And Eloisa yet must kiss the name.  
Dear fatal name! rest ever unrevealed,  
Nor pass these lips in holy silence sealed.  
10 Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,  
Where mixed with God's, his loved idea<sup>5</sup> lies.  
O write it not, my hand—the name appears  
Already written—wash it out, my tears!  
In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,  
15 Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys.

Relentless walls! whose darksome round contains  
Repentant sighs, and voluntary pains:  
Ye rugged rocks! which holy knees have worn;  
Ye grotts and caverns shagged with horrid<sup>o</sup> thorn!  
20 Shrines! where their vigils pale-eyed virgins keep,  
And pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep!<sup>5</sup>  
Tho' cold like you, unmoved, and silent grown,  
I have not yet forgot myself to stone.  
All is not Heaven's while Abelard has part,  
25 Still rebel nature holds out half my heart;  
Nor prayers nor fasts its stubborn pulse restrain,  
Nor tears, for ages taught to flow in vain.  
Soon as thy letters trembling I unclose,  
That well-known name awakens all my woes.  
30 Oh name for ever sad! for ever dear!  
Still breathed in sighs, still ushered with a tear.  
I tremble too, where'er my own I find,  
Some dire misfortune follows close behind.  
Line after line my gushing eyes o'erflow,  
35 Led through a sad variety of woe:  
Now warm in love, now withering in my bloom,  
Lost in a convent's solitary gloom!  
There stern religion quenched the unwilling flame,  
There died the best of passions, love and fame.  
40 Yet write, oh write me all, that I may join  
Griefs to thy griefs, and echo sighs to thine.  
Nor foes nor fortune take this power away.  
And is my Abelard less kind than they?  
Tears still are mine, and those I need not spare,  
45 Love but demands what else were shed in prayer;  
No happier task these faded eyes pursue,  
To read and weep is all they now can do.  
Then share thy pain, allow that sad relief;  
Ah, more than share it! give me all thy grief.  
50 Heaven first taught letters for some wretch's aid,

Some banished lover, or some captive maid;  
They live, they speak, they breathe what love  
inspires,  
Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires,  
The virgin's wish without her fears impart,  
55 Excuse the blush, and pour out all the heart,  
Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,  
And waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole.<sup>6</sup>

Thou knowest how guiltless first I met thy flame,  
When love approached me under friendship's name;  
60 My fancy formed thee of angelic kind,  
Some emanation of the all-beauteous Mind.<sup>7</sup>  
Those smiling eyes, attempering<sup>o</sup> every ray,  
Shone sweetly lambent with celestial day:  
Guiltless I gazed; heaven listened while you sung;  
65 And truths divine came mended from that tongue.<sup>8</sup>  
From lips like those what precept failed to move?  
Too soon they taught me 'twas no sin to love.  
Back through the paths of pleasing sense I ran,  
Nor wished an angel whom I loved a man.  
70 Dim and remote the joys of saints I see,  
Nor envy them, that heaven I lose for thee.

How oft, when pressed to marriage, have I said,  
Curse on all laws but those which love has made!  
Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,  
75 Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies.  
Let wealth, let honor, wait the wedded dame,  
August her deed, and sacred be her fame;  
Before true passion all those views remove,<sup>o</sup>  
Fame, wealth, and honor! what are you to love?  
80 The jealous god, when we profane his fires,  
Those restless passions in revenge inspires,  
And bids them make mistaken mortals groan,  
Who seek in love for aught but love alone.  
Should at my feet the world's great master fall,  
85

Himself, his throne, his world, I'd scorn 'em all:  
Nor Caesar's empress would I deign to prove;°  
No, make me mistress to the man I love;  
If there be yet another name more free,  
More fond than mistress, make me that to thee!  
90 Oh happy state! when souls each other draw,  
When love is liberty, and nature, law:  
All then is full, possessing, and possessed,  
No craving void left aching in the breast:  
Even thought meets thought ere from the lips it part,  
95 And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.  
This sure is bliss (if bliss on earth there be)  
And once the lot of Abelard and me.

Alas how changed! what sudden horrors rise!  
A naked lover bound and bleeding lies!  
100 Where, where was Eloise? her voice, her hand,  
Her poniard,° had opposed the dire command.  
Barbarian, stay! that bloody stroke restrain;  
The crime was common,° common be the pain.°  
I can no more; by shame, by rage suppressed,  
105 Let tears, and burning blushes speak the rest.

Canst thou forget that sad, that solemn day,  
When victims at yon altar's foot we lay?  
Canst thou forget what tears that moment fell,  
When, warm in youth, I bade the world farewell?  
110 As with cold lips I kissed the sacred veil,  
The shrines all trembled, and the lamps grew pale:  
Heaven scarce believed the conquest it surveyed,  
And saints with wonder heard the vows I made.  
Yet then, to those dread altars as I drew,  
115 Not on the Cross my eyes were fixed, but you;  
Not grace, or zeal, love only was my call,  
And if I lose thy love, I lose my all.  
Come! with thy looks, thy words, relieve my woe;  
Those still at least are left thee to bestow.  
120 Still on that breast enamored let me lie,

Still drink delicious poison from thy eye,  
Pant on thy lip, and to thy heart be pressed;  
Give all thou canst—and let me dream the rest.  
Ah no! instruct me other joys to prize,  
125 With other beauties charm my partial<sup>9</sup> eyes,  
Full in my view set all the bright abode,  
And make my soul quit Abelard for God.

Ah think at least thy flock deserves thy care,  
Plants of thy hand, and children of thy prayer.  
130 From the false world in early youth they fled,  
By thee to mountains, wilds, and deserts led.  
You raised these hallowed walls;<sup>1</sup> the desert smiled,  
And paradise was opened in the wild.

No weeping orphan saw his father's stores  
135 Our shrines irradiate,<sup>2</sup> or emblaze the floors;  
No silver saints, by dying misers given,  
Here bribed the rage of ill-requited heaven:  
But such plain roofs as piety could raise,  
And only vocal with the Maker's<sup>3</sup> praise.  
140 In these lone walls (their day's eternal bound)  
These moss-grown domes with spiry turrets  
crowned,  
Where awful arches make a noon-day night,  
And the dim windows shed a solemn light,  
Thy eyes diffused a reconciling ray,  
145 And gleams of glory brightened all the day.  
But now no face divine contentment wears,  
'Tis all blank sadness, or continual tears.  
See how the force of others' prayers I try,  
(O pious fraud of amorous charity!)

150 But why should I on others' prayers depend?  
Come thou, my father, brother, husband, friend!  
Ah let thy handmaid, sister, daughter move,  
And all those tender names in one, thy love!  
The darksome pines that o'er yon rocks reclined

Wave high, and murmur to the hollow wind,  
155 The wandering streams that shine between the hills,  
The grots that echo to the tinkling rills,  
The dying gales that pant upon the trees,  
The lakes that quiver to the curling breeze;  
160 No more these scenes my meditation aid,  
Or lull to rest the visionary<sup>4</sup> maid.  
But o'er the twilight groves and dusky caves,  
Long-sounding isles,<sup>5</sup> and intermingled graves,  
Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws  
165 A death-like silence, and a dread repose:  
Her gloomy presence saddens all the scene,  
Shades every flower, and darkens every green,  
Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,  
And breathes a browner horror on the woods.<sup>6</sup>  
170 Yet here for ever, ever must I stay;  
Sad proof how well a lover can obey!  
Death, only death, can break the lasting chain;  
And here, even then, shall my cold dust remain,  
Here all its frailties, all its flames resign,  
175 And wait, till 'tis no sin to mix with thine.  
Ah wretch! believed the spouse of God in vain,  
Confessed within the slave of love and man.  
Assist me, heaven! but whence arose that prayer?  
Sprung it from piety, or from despair?  
180 Even here, where frozen chastity retires,  
Love finds an altar for forbidden fires.  
I ought to grieve, but cannot what I ought;  
I mourn the lover, not lament the fault;  
I view my crime, but kindle at the view,  
185 Repent old pleasures, and solicit new;  
Now turned to heaven, I weep my past offense,  
Now think of thee, and curse my innocence.  
Of all affliction taught a lover yet,  
'Tis sure the hardest science<sup>o</sup> to forget!  
190

How shall I lose the sin, yet keep the sense,<sup>7</sup>  
And love the offender, yet detest the offense?  
How the dear object from the crime remove,  
Or how distinguish penitence from love?  
Unequal task! a passion to resign,  
195 For hearts so touched, so pierced, so lost as mine.  
Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,  
How often must it love, how often hate!  
How often hope, despair, resent, regret,  
Conceal, disdain—do all things but forget.  
200 But let heaven seize it, all at once 'tis fired,  
Not touched, but rapt; not wakened, but inspired!<sup>8</sup>  
Oh come! oh teach me nature to subdue,  
Renounce my love, my life, my self—and you.  
Fill my fond heart with God alone, for he  
205 Alone can rival, can succeed to thee.

How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!  
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.  
Eternal sun-shine of the spotless mind!  
Each prayer accepted, and each wish resigned;  
210 Labor and rest, that equal periods keep;  
"Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep;"<sup>9</sup>  
Desires composed, affections ever even;  
Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heaven.  
Grace shines around her with serenest beams,  
215 And whispering angels prompt her golden dreams.  
For her the unfading rose of Eden blooms,  
And wings of seraphs shed divine perfumes,  
For her the Spouse prepares the bridal ring,  
For her white virgins hymenaeals<sup>1</sup> sing,  
220 To sounds of heavenly harps she dies away,  
And melts in visions of eternal day.

Far other dreams my erring soul employ,  
Far other raptures, of unholy joy:  
When at the close of each sad, sorrowing day,



225 Fancy restores what vengeance snatched away,  
Then conscience sleeps, and leaving nature free,  
All my loose soul unbounded springs to thee.  
O curst, dear horrors of all-conscious night!<sup>2</sup>  
How glowing guilt exalts the keen delight!  
230 Provoking daemons all restraint remove,  
And stir within me every source of love.  
I hear thee, view thee, gaze o'er all thy charms,  
And round thy phantom glue my claspings arms.  
I wake—no more I hear, no more I view,  
235 The phantom flies me, as unkind as you.  
I call aloud; it hears not what I say;  
I stretch my empty arms; it glides away:  
To dream once more I close my willing eyes;  
Ye soft illusions, dear deceits, arise!  
240 Alas, no more!—methinks we wandering go  
Through dreary wastes, and weep each other's woe;  
Where round some moldering tower pale ivy creeps,  
And low-browed rocks hang nodding o'er the deeps.  
Sudden you mount! you beckon from the skies;  
245 Clouds interpose, waves roar, and winds arise.  
I shriek, start up, the same sad prospect find,  
And wake to all the griefs I left behind.  
For thee the fates, severely kind, ordain  
A cool suspense<sup>o</sup> from pleasure and from pain;  
250 Thy life a long dead calm of fixed repose;  
No pulse that riots, and no blood that glows.  
Still as the sea, ere winds were taught to blow,  
Or moving spirit bade the waters flow;  
Soft as the slumbers of a saint forgiven,  
255 And mild as opening gleams of promised heaven.  
Come, Abelard! for what hast thou to dread?  
The torch of Venus burns not for the dead.  
Nature stands checked; religion disapproves;  
Even thou art cold—yet Eloisa loves.  
260

Ah hopeless, lasting flames! like those that burn  
To light the dead, and warm the unfruitful urn.<sup>3</sup>

What scenes appear where'er I turn my view?  
The dear ideas, where I fly, pursue,  
265 Rise in the grove, before the altar rise,  
Stain all my soul, and wanton in my eyes!  
I waste the matin lamp in sighs for thee,  
Thy image steals between my God and me,  
Thy voice I seem in every hymn to hear,  
With every bead I drop too soft a tear.  
270 When from the censer clouds of fragrance roll,  
And swelling organs lift the rising soul,  
One thought of thee puts all the pomp to flight,  
Priests, tapers, temples, swim before my sight:  
In seas of flame<sup>o</sup> my plunging soul is drowned,  
275 While altars blaze, and angels tremble round.

While prostrate here in humble grief I lie,  
Kind, virtuous drops just gathering in my eye,  
While praying, trembling, in the dust I roll,  
And dawning grace is opening on my soul:  
280 Come, if thou dar'st, all charming as thou art!  
Oppose thyself to heaven; dispute<sup>o</sup> my heart;  
Come, with one glance of those deluding eyes  
Blot out each bright idea of the skies.  
Take back that grace, those sorrows, and those  
285 tears,  
Take back my fruitless penitence and prayers,  
Snatch me, just mounting, from the blest abode,  
Assist the fiends and tear me from my God!  
No, fly me, fly me! far as pole from pole;  
Rise Alps between us! and whole oceans roll!  
290 Ah come not, write not, think not once of me,  
Nor share one pang of all I felt for thee.  
Thy oaths I quit,<sup>o</sup> thy memory resign,  
Forget, renounce me, hate whate'er was mine.

295 Fair eyes, and tempting looks (which yet I view!)  
Long loved, adored ideas! all adieu!  
O grace serene! oh virtue heavenly fair!  
Divine oblivion of low-thoughted care!  
Fresh blooming hope, gay daughter of the sky!  
And faith, our early immortality!  
300 Enter, each mild, each amicable guest;  
Receive, and wrap me in eternal rest!  
    See in her cell sad Eloisa spread,  
Propped on some tomb, a neighbor of the dead!  
In each low wind methinks a spirit calls,  
305 And more than echoes talk along the walls.  
Here, as I watched the dying lamps around,  
From yonder shrine I heard a hollow sound.  
"Come, sister, come! (it said, or seemed to say)  
Thy place is here, sad sister, come away!  
310 Once like thyself, I trembled, wept, and prayed,  
Love's victim then, tho' now a sainted maid:  
But all is calm in this eternal sleep;  
Here grief forgets to groan, and love to weep,  
Even superstition loses every fear:  
315 For God, not man, absolves our frailties here."  
    I come, I come! prepare your roseate bowers,  
Celestial palms, and ever-blooming flowers.  
Thither, where sinners may have rest, I go,  
Where flames refined in breasts seraphic glow.  
320 Thou, Abelard! the last sad office pay,  
And smooth my passage to the realms of day;  
See my lips tremble, and my eyeballs roll,  
Suck my last breath, and catch my flying soul!  
Ah no—in sacred vestments may'st thou stand,  
325 The hallowed taper trembling in thy hand,  
Present the Cross before my lifted eye,  
Teach me at once, and learn of [me](#) to die.  
Ah then, thy once-loved Eloisa see!  
It will be then no crime to gaze on me.

330 See from my cheek the transient roses fly!  
See the last sparkle languish in my eye!  
Till every motion, pulse, and breath be o'er;  
And even my Abelard be loved no more.  
O death all-eloquent! you only prove  
335 What dust we doat on, when 'tis man we love.  
Then too, when fate shall thy fair frame destroy,  
(That cause of all my guilt, and all my joy)  
In trance ecstatic may thy pangs be drowned,  
Bright clouds descend, and angels watch thee round,  
340 From opening skies may streaming glories shine,  
And saints embrace thee with a love like mine.  
May one kind grave unite each hapless name,<sup>4</sup>  
And graft my love immortal on thy fame!  
Then, ages hence, when all my woes are o'er,  
345 When this rebellious heart shall beat no more;  
If ever chance two wandering lovers brings  
To Paraclete's white walls, and silver springs,  
O'er the pale marble shall they join their heads,  
And drink the falling tears each other sheds,  
350 Then sadly say, with mutual pity moved,  
"Oh may we never love as these have loved!"  
From the full choir when loud Hosannas rise,  
And swell the pomp of dreadful sacrifice,<sup>5</sup>  
Amid that scene if some relenting eye  
355 Glance on the stone where our cold relics lie,  
Devotion's self shall steal a thought from heaven,  
One human tear shall drop, and be forgiven.  
And sure if fate some future bard shall join  
In sad similitude of griefs to mine,  
360 Condemned whole years in absence to deplore,<sup>6</sup>  
And image<sup>o</sup> charms he must behold no more,  
Such if there be, who loves so long, so well,  
Let him our sad, our tender story tell;  
The well-sung woes will sooth my pensive ghost;  
365

He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most.

1717

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Separate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pope's source was a highly romanticized English version of the letters by John Hughes, published in 1713.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nun's. Here, as elsewhere, Eloisa substitutes a pagan form for a Christian; nor is she in fact a virgin (vestal).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The letter to which Eloisa is replying.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In damp places, stone "weeps" through condensation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From the Indus River, in South Asia, to the North Pole.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: God, conceived (as is proper to a student of philosophy) in Platonic terms.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: He was her preceptor in philosophy and divinity [*Pope's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fond; seeing only a part.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: He founded the monastery [*Pope's note*]. Abelard erected the "Paraclete," a modest oratory near Troyes, in 1122; seven years later, when the nunnery of which Heloise was prioress was evicted from its property, he ceded the lands of the Paraclete to her.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adorn with splendor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: God's or Abelard's.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Given to visions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sounds reverberate over water as in the *aisles* of a church.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The image of the Goddess Melancholy sitting over the convent, and, as it were, expanding her dreadful wings over its whole circuit, and diffusing her gloom all around it, is truly

sublime, and strongly conceived [*Joseph Warton's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Both perception and sensation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, when touched, at once rapt; when wakened, at once inspired.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From *Description of a Religious House* (1648), by Richard Crashaw.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Wedding hymns. Every nun is the bride of Christ, her spouse.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The night knows everything, and Eloisa is conscious (guiltily aware) all through the night.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Perpetual fires were placed in Roman tombs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Abelard and Eloisa were interred in the same grave, or in monuments adjoining, in the monastery of the Paraclete [Pope's note].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The celebration of the Eucharist (mass).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lament. Pope, imagining himself imagined by Eloisa, hints that he too is separated from a loved one, perhaps Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who was in Turkey. Pope and Montagu later quarreled, and she appears as Sappho in Epistle 2, *To a Lady*, in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, and in other places in his work.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *mental image*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bristling*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *moderating, assuaging*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *depart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *try*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dagger*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *punishment*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspension*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love or hell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contend for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagine, depict*[Return to reference](#) °

**An Essay on Man** Pope's philosophical poem *An Essay on Man* represents the beginnings of an ambitious but never completed plan for what he called his "ethic work," intended to be a large survey of human nature, society, and morals. He dedicated the *Essay* to Henry St. John (pronounced *Sín-jun*), Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751), the brilliant, erratic secretary of state in the Tory ministry of 1710–14. After the accession of George I, Bolingbroke fled to France, but he was allowed to return in 1723, settling near Pope at Dawley Farm. The two formed a close friendship and talked through the ideas expressed in the *Essay* and in Bolingbroke's own philosophical writings (some of which are addressed to Pope). But Pope's poem has many sources in the thought of his times and the philosophical tradition at large, and he says himself in the poem's little preface that his intention is to formulate a widely acceptable system of obvious, familiar truths. Pope's "optimism"—his insistence that everything must be "RIGHT" in a universe created and superintended by God—might seem to skip over the tragic elements of experience that much great literary, philosophical, and religious expression confronts. But the strains and contradictions of the poem are themselves deeply revealing about the thinking of Pope and his age, as he both presents and withholds a comprehensive view of the universe and reasons out reason's drastic limitations.

Pope's purpose is to "vindicate the ways of God to man," a phrase that consciously echoes *Paradise Lost* 1.26. Like Milton, Pope faces the problem of the existence of evil in a world presumed to be the creation of a good god. *Paradise Lost* is biblical in content, Christian in doctrine; *An Essay on Man* avoids all specifically Christian doctrines, not because Pope disbelieved them but because "man," the subject of the poem, includes millions who never heard of Christianity and Pope is concerned with the universal. Milton tells a Judeo-Christian story. Pope writes in more philosophical terms.

The *Essay* is divided into four epistles. In the first Pope asserts the essential order and goodness of the universe and the rightness of our place in it. The other epistles deal with how we may emulate in our nature and in society the cosmic harmony revealed in the first



epistle. The second seeks to show how we may attain a psychological harmony that can become the basis of a virtuous life through the cooperation of self-love and the passions (both necessary to our complete humanity) with reason, the controller and director. The third is concerned with the individual in society, which, it teaches, was created through the cooperation of self-love (the egoistic drives that motivate us) and social love (our dependence on others, our inborn benevolence). The fourth is concerned with happiness, which lies within the reach of all for it is dependent on virtue, which becomes possible when—though only when—self-love is transmuted into love of others and love of God. Such, in brief summary, are Pope's main ideas, expressed in many phrases so memorable that they have detached themselves from the poem and become part of daily speech.

# ***From An Essay on Man***

**TO HENRY ST. JOHN, LORD BOLINGBROKE**

*Epistle 1. Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to the Universe*

Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things  
To low ambition, and the pride of kings.  
Let us (since life can little more supply  
Than just to look about us and to die)  
Expatriate free<sup>o</sup> o'er all this scene of man;  
5 A mighty maze! but not without a plan;  
A wild, where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot,  
Or garden, tempting with forbidden fruit.  
Together let us beat this ample field,<sup>1</sup>  
Try what the open, what the covert yield;  
10 The latent tracts, the giddy heights, explore  
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;  
Eye Nature's walks, shoot folly as it flies,  
And catch the manners living as they rise;  
Laugh where we must, be candid<sup>o</sup> where we can;  
15 But vindicate the ways of God to man.

1. Say first, of God above, or man below,  
What can we reason, but from what we know?  
Of man, what see we but his station here,  
From which to reason, or to which refer?  
20 Through worlds unnumbered though the God be  
known,  
'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.  
He, who through vast immensity can pierce,  
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,

25      Observe how system into system runs,  
What other planets circle other suns,  
What varied being peoples every star,  
May tell why Heaven has made us as we are.  
But of this frame<sup>o</sup> the bearings, and the ties,  
The strong connections, nice dependencies,  
30      Gradations just, has thy pervading soul  
Looked through? or can a part contain the whole?  
Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,  
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee?<sup>2</sup>

35      2. Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou  
find,  
Why formed so weak, so little, and so blind?  
First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,  
Why formed no weaker, blinder, and no less!  
Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made  
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?  
40      Or ask of yonder argent fields above,  
Why Jove's satellites<sup>3</sup> are less than Jove?  
Of systems possible, if 'tis confessed  
That Wisdom Infinite must form the best,  
Where all must full or not coherent be,  
45      And all that rises, rise in due degree;  
Then, in the scale of reasoning life, 'tis plain,  
There must be, somewhere, such a rank as man:  
And all the question (wrangle e'er so long)  
Is only this, if God has placed him wrong?  
50      Respecting man, whatever wrong we call,  
May, must be right, as relative to all.  
In human works, though labored on with pain,  
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;  
In God's, one single can its end produce;  
55      Yet serves to second too some other use.  
So man, who here seems principal alone,

Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,  
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;  
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.  
60       When the proud steed shall know why man  
          restrains  
His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains;  
When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,  
Is now a victim, and now Egypt's god:<sup>4</sup>  
Then shall man's pride and dullness comprehend  
65       His actions', passions', being's use and end;  
Why doing, suffering, checked, impelled; and why  
This hour a slave, the next a deity.  
          Then say not man's imperfect, Heaven in fault;  
Say rather, man's as perfect as he ought;  
70       His knowledge measured to his state and place,  
His time a moment, and a point his space.  
If to be perfect in a certain sphere,<sup>5</sup>  
What matter, soon or late, or here or there?  
The blest today is as completely so,  
75       As who began a thousand years ago.

3. Heaven from all creatures hides the book of  
Fate,  
All but the page prescribed, their present state:  
From brutes what men, from men what spirits know:  
Or who could suffer being here below?  
80       The lamb thy riot<sup>o</sup> dooms to bleed today,  
Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?  
Pleased to the last, he crops the flowery food,  
And licks the hand just raised to shed his blood.  
O blindness to the future! kindly given,  
85       That each may fill the circle marked by Heaven:  
Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,  
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,  
Atoms or systems<sup>o</sup> into ruin hurled,

And now a bubble burst, and now a world.  
90        Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;  
Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore!  
What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,  
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.  
Hope springs eternal in the human breast:  
95        Man never is, but always to be blest:  
The soul, uneasy and confined from home,  
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.  
      Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind  
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;  
100        His soul proud Science never taught to stray  
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;  
Yet simple Nature to his hope has given,  
Behind the cloud-topped hill, an humbler heaven;  
Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,  
105        Some happier island in the watery waste,  
Where slaves once more their native land behold,  
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold!  
To be, contents his natural desire,  
He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire;  
110        But thinks, admitted to that equal<sup>o</sup> sky,  
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

4. Go, wiser thou! and, in thy scale of sense,  
Weigh thy opinion against Providence;  
Call imperfection what thou fancy'st such,  
115        Say, here he gives too little, there too much;  
Destroy all creatures for thy sport or gust,<sup>6</sup>  
Yet cry, if man's unhappy, God's unjust;  
If man alone engross not Heaven's high care,  
Alone made perfect here, immortal there:  
120        Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,<sup>7</sup>  
Rejudge his justice, be the God of God!  
      In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies;

All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.  
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,  
125 Men would be angels, angels would be gods.  
Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,  
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel:  
And who but wishes to invert the laws  
Of order, sins against the Eternal Cause.  
130

5. Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine,  
Earth for whose use? Pride answers, "'Tis for mine:  
For me kind Nature wakes her genial power,  
Suckles each herb, and spreads out every flower;  
Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew  
135 The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;  
For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings;  
For me, health gushes from a thousand springs;  
Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise;  
My footstool earth, my canopy the skies."  
140

But errs not Nature from this gracious end,  
From burning suns when livid deaths descend,  
When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests  
sweep  
Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep?  
"No," 'tis replied, "the first Almighty Cause  
145 Acts not by partial, but by general laws;  
The exceptions few; some change since all began,  
And what created perfect?"—Why then man?  
If the great end be human happiness,  
Then Nature deviates; and can man do less?  
150 As much that end a constant course requires  
Of showers and sunshine, as of man's desires;  
As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,  
As men forever temperate, calm, and wise.  
If plagues or earthquakes break not Heaven's  
155 design,  
Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline?<sup>8</sup>

Who knows but he whose hand the lightning forms,  
Who heaves old ocean, and who wings the storms,  
Pours fierce ambition in a Caesar's mind,  
Or turns young Ammon<sup>9</sup> loose to scourge mankind?  
160 From pride, from pride, our very reasoning springs;  
Account for moral, as for natural things:  
Why charge we Heaven in those, in these acquit?  
In both, to reason right is to submit.  
Better for us, perhaps, it might appear,  
165 Were there all harmony, all virtue here;  
That never air or ocean felt the wind;  
That never passion discomposed the mind:  
But ALL subsists by elemental strife;  
And passions are the elements of life.  
170 The general ORDER, since the whole began,  
Is kept in Nature, and is kept in man.

6. What would this man? Now upward will he  
soar,  
And little less than angel, would be more;  
Now looking downwards, just as grieved appears  
175 To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears.  
Made for his use all creatures if he call,  
Say what their use, had he the powers of all?  
Nature to these, without profusion, kind,  
The proper organs, proper powers assigned;  
180 Each seeming want compensated of course,<sup>o</sup>  
Here with degrees of swiftness, there of force;  
All in exact proportion to the state;  
Nothing to add, and nothing to abate.  
Each beast, each insect, happy in its own;  
185 Is Heaven unkind to man, and man alone?  
Shall he alone, whom rational we call,  
Be pleased with nothing, if not blessed with all?  
The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)  
Is not to act or think beyond mankind;

190 No powers of body or of soul to share,  
But what his nature and his state can bear.  
Why has not man a microscopic eye?  
For this plain reason, man is not a fly.  
Say what the use, were finer optics given,  
195 To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven?  
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,  
To smart and agonize at every pore?  
Or quick effluvia<sup>1</sup> darting through the brain,  
Die of a rose in aromatic pain?  
200 If nature thundered in his opening ears,  
And stunned him with the music of the spheres,  
How would he wish that Heaven had left him still  
The whispering zephyr, and the purling rill?  
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,  
205 Alike in what it gives, and what denies?

7. Far as creation's ample range extends,  
The scale of sensual,<sup>o</sup> mental powers ascends:  
Mark how it mounts, to man's imperial race,  
From the green myriads in the peopled grass:  
210 What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme,  
The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam:<sup>2</sup>  
Of smell, the headlong lioness between,  
And hound sagacious<sup>o</sup> on the tainted green:  
Of hearing, from the life that fills the flood,  
215 To that which warbles through the vernal wood:  
The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!  
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line:  
In the nice<sup>o</sup> bee, what sense so subtly true  
From poisonous herbs extracts the healing dew:  
220 How instinct varies in the groveling swine,  
Compared, half-reasoning elephant, with thine!  
'Twixt that, and reason, what a nice barrier,<sup>3</sup>  
Forever separate, yet forever near!



225 Remembrance and reflection how allied;  
What thin partitions sense from thought divide:  
And middle natures, how they long to join,  
Yet never pass the insuperable line!  
Without this just gradation, could they be  
230 Subjected, these to those, or all to thee?  
The powers of all subdued by thee alone,  
Is not thy reason all these powers in one?

8. See, through this air, this ocean, and this  
earth,  
All matter quick, and bursting into birth.  
Above, how high progressive life may go!  
235 Around, how wide! how deep extend below!  
Vast Chain of Being! which from God began,  
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,  
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,  
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,  
240 From thee to nothing.—On superior powers  
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:  
Or in the full creation leave a void,  
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroyed:  
From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,  
245 Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.

And, if each system in gradation roll  
Alike essential to the amazing whole,  
The least confusion but in one, not all  
That system only, but the whole must fall.  
250 Let earth unbalanced from her orbit fly,  
Planets and suns run lawless through the sky,  
Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurled,  
Being on being wrecked, and world on world,  
Heaven's whole foundations to their center nod,  
255 And Nature tremble to the throne of God:  
All this dread ORDER break—for whom? for thee?  
Vile worm!—oh, madness, pride, impiety!

9. What if the foot, ordained the dust to tread,  
Or hand, to toil, aspired to be the head?  
260 What if the head, the eye, or ear repined  
To serve mere engines to the ruling Mind?<sup>4</sup>  
Just as absurd, for any part to claim  
To be another, in this general frame.  
Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains,  
265 The great directing MIND of ALL ordains.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;  
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,  
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame,  
270 Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,  
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,  
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent,  
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,  
275 As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;  
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,  
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;  
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;  
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

280  
10. Cease then, nor ORDER imperfection name:  
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.  
Know thy own point: this kind, this due degree  
Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee.  
Submit—In this, or any other sphere,  
285 Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:  
Safe in the hand of one disposing Power,  
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.  
All Nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;  
290 All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,

One truth is clear: Whatever IS, is RIGHT.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Pope and Bolingbroke will try to drive truth into the open, like hunters beating the bushes for game.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: For the chain of being, see Addison's *Spectator* 519 (p. 130) and lines 207–58.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In his *Dictionary*, Johnson notes and condemns Pope's giving this word four syllables, as in Latin.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Egyptians worshiped a bull called Apis.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, in one's "state and place."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Sense of tasting" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Symbols of judgment and punishment.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lucius Sergius Catiline (ca. 108–62 B.C.E.), an ambitious, greedy, and cruel conspirator against the Roman state, was denounced in Cicero's famous orations before the senate and in the Forum. The Italian Renaissance family the Borgias was notorious for its ruthless lust for power, cruelty, rapaciousness, treachery, and murder (especially by poisoning). Cesare Borgia (1476–1507), son of Pope Alexander VI, is here referred to.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Alexander the Great.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: According to the philosophy of Epicurus (adopted by Robert Boyle, the chemist, and other 17th-century scientists), the senses are stirred to perception by being bombarded through the pores by steady streams of "effluvia," incredibly thin and tiny—but material—images of the objects that surround us.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One of several early theories of vision held that the eye casts a beam of light that makes objects visible.[Return to](#)

[reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Pronounced *ba-réer*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See 1 Corinthians 12:14–26.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *range freely*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *favorably disposed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the universe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feast*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *solar systems*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impartial*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as a matter of course*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sensory*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quick of scent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exact, accurate*[Return to reference °](#)

**From *Epistle 2. Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to Himself, as an Individual***

1. Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;<sup>◦</sup>  
The proper study of mankind is Man.  
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
5 With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,  
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,  
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer,  
10 Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;  
Still by himself abused, or disabused;  
15 Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

\* \* \*

**Notes**

1733

- <sup>◦</sup>: judge [Return to reference](#) <sup>◦</sup>

**Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** Dr. John Arbuthnot (1667–1735), to whom Pope addressed his best-known verse epistle, was distinguished both as a physician and as a man of wit. He had been one of the liveliest members of the Martinus Scriblerus Club, helping his friends create the character and shape the career of the learned pedant whose memoirs the club had undertaken to write.

Pope had long been meditating such a poem, which was to be both an attack on his detractors and a defense of his own character and career. In his usual way, he had jotted down hints, lines, couplets, and fragments over a period of two decades, but the poem might never have been completed had it not been for two events: Arbuthnot, from his deathbed, wrote to urge Pope to continue his abhorrence of vice and to express it in his writings and, during 1733, Pope was the victim of two bitter attacks by “persons of rank and fortune,” as the Advertisement has it. The “Verses Addressed to the Imitator of Horace” was the work of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, helped by her friend Lord Hervey (pronounced *Harvey*), a close friend and confidant of Queen Caroline. “An Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court” was the work of Lord Hervey alone. Montagu had provocation enough, especially in Pope’s recent reference to her in “The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace,” lines 83–84; and Pope had occasionally referred to Hervey as “Lord Fanny,” using the British slang term for female genitalia to mock Hervey’s non-normative gender identity, which was widely remarked in his social circle. The two attacks goaded Pope into action, and he completed the poem by the end of the summer of 1734.

The *Epistle* is the most brilliant and daring execution of the techniques that Pope used in many of the autobiographical poems of the 1730s. He presents himself in a theatrical array of postures: the comically exaggerating complainer, the admired man of genius, the true friend, the unpretentiously honest man, the satirist-hero of his country, the “manly” defender of virtue, the tender son mothering his own mother. Part of what cements this mixture is the verve with which he modulates from role to role, implying that none of them

exhaustively defines him. Pope tries to force the reader to take sides, for him and what he claims to represent, or against him. Thus reading becomes an ethical exercise; readers must make up their own minds about his moral superiority, his exquisitely crafted portraits of his enemies, his social self-positioning, or his self-righteous politics. Pope solicits our judgment of his character and his professed ideals, and no other poet in English does so with so much artistic energy, resourcefulness, and success.

It is not clear that Pope intended the poem to be thought of as a dialogue, as it has usually been printed since Warburton's edition of 1751. The original edition, while suggesting interruptions in the flow of the monologue, kept entirely to the form of a letter. The introduction of the friend, who speaks from time to time, converts the original letter into a dramatic dialogue.

# Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot

## *Advertisement*

TO THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS *Epistle*

This paper is a sort of bill of complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several occasions offered. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleased some persons of rank and fortune (the authors of *Verses to the Imitator of Horace*, and of an *Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court*) to attack, in a very extraordinary manner, not only my writings (of which, being public, the public is judge) but my person, morals, and family, whereof, to those who know me not, a truer information may be requisite. Being divided between the necessity to say something of myself, and my own laziness to undertake so awkward a task, I thought it the shortest way to put the last hand to<sup>1</sup> this epistle. If it have anything pleasing, it will be that by which I am most desirous to please, the truth and the sentiment; and if anything offensive, it will be only to those I am least sorry to offend, the vicious or the ungenerous.

Many will know their own pictures in it, there being not a circumstance but what is true; but I have, for the most part, spared their names, and they may escape being laughed at, if they please.

I would have some of them know, it was owing to the request of the learned and candid friend to whom it is inscribed, that I make not as free use of theirs as they have done of mine. However, I shall have this advantage, and honor, on my side, that whereas, by their proceeding, any abuse may be directed at any man, no injury can possibly be done by mine, since a nameless character can never be found out, but by its truth and likeness. P.

P. Shut, shut the door, good John!<sup>2</sup> (fatigued, I said),



Tie up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead.  
The Dog Star<sup>3</sup> rages! nay 'tis past a doubt  
All Bedlam,<sup>4</sup> or Parnassus, is let out:  
Fire in each eye, and papers in each hand,  
They rave, recite, and madden round the land.  
What walls can guard me, or what shades can hide?  
They pierce my thickets, through my grot<sup>5</sup> they glide,  
By land, by water, they renew the charge,  
They stop the chariot, and they board the barge.  
No place is sacred, not the church is free;  
Even Sunday shines no Sabbath day to me:  
Then from the Mint<sup>6</sup> walks forth the man of rhyme,  
Happy! to catch me just at dinner time.  
Is there a parson, much bemused in beer,  
A maudlin poetess, a rhyming peer,  
A clerk foredoomed his father's soul to cross,  
Who pens a stanza when he should engross?<sup>7</sup>  
Is there who, locked from ink and paper,<sup>8</sup> scrawls  
With desperate charcoal round his darkened walls?  
All fly to Twit'nam,<sup>9</sup> and in humble strain  
Apply to me to keep them mad or vain.  
Arthur,<sup>1</sup> whose giddy son neglects the laws,  
Imputes to me and my damned works the cause:  
Poor Cornus<sup>2</sup> sees his frantic wife elope,  
And curses wit, and poetry, and Pope.  
Friend to my life (which did not you prolong,  
The world had wanted<sup>o</sup> many an idle song)  
What drop or nostrum<sup>o</sup> can this plague remove?  
Or which must end me, a fool's wrath or love?  
A dire dilemma! either way I'm sped,<sup>o</sup>  
If foes, they write, if friends, they read me dead.  
Seized and tied down to judge, how wretched I!  
Who can't be silent, and who will not lie.  
To laugh were want of goodness and of grace,  
And to be grave exceeds all power of face.

I sit with sad civility, I read  
With honest anguish and an aching head,  
And drop at last, but in unwilling ears,  
This saving counsel, "Keep your piece nine years."<sup>3</sup>

"Nine years!" cries he, who high in Drury Lane,<sup>4</sup>  
Lulled by soft zephyrs through the broken pane,  
Rhymes ere he wakes, and prints before term<sup>5</sup> ends,  
Obliged by hunger and request of friends:

"The piece, you think, is incorrect? why, take it,  
I'm all submission, what you'd have it, make it."

Three things another's modest wishes bound,  
My friendship, and a prologue,<sup>6</sup> and ten pound.

Pitholeon<sup>7</sup> sends to me: "You know his Grace,  
I want a patron; ask him for a place."

Pitholeon libeled me—"but here's a letter  
Informs you, sir, 'twas when he knew no better.

Dare you refuse him? Curl<sup>8</sup> invites to dine,  
He'll write a *Journal*, or he'll turn divine."<sup>9</sup>

Bless me! a packet.—"'Tis a stranger sues,<sup>o</sup>  
A virgin tragedy, an orphan Muse."

If I dislike it, "Furies, death, and rage!"

If I approve, "Commend it to the stage."

There (thank my stars) my whole commission ends,  
The players and I are, luckily, no friends.

Fired that the house<sup>o</sup> reject him, "'Sdeath, I'll print it,  
And shame the fools—Your interest, sir, with Lintot!"<sup>1</sup>

Lintot, dull rogue, will think your price too much.

"Not, sir, if you revise it, and retouch."

All my demurs but double his attacks;

At last he whispers, "Do; and we go snacks."<sup>o</sup>

Glad of a quarrel, straight I clap the door,

"Sir, let me see your works and you no more."

'Tis sung, when Midas' ears began to spring  
(Midas, a sacred person and a king),  
His very minister who spied them first,

(Some say his queen) was forced to speak, or burst.<sup>2</sup>  
And is not mine, my friend, a sorer case,  
When every coxcomb perks them in my face?

A. Good friend, forbear! you deal in dangerous things.  
I'd never name queens, ministers, or kings;  
Keep close to ears,<sup>3</sup> and those let asses prick;  
'Tis nothing—P. Nothing? if they bite and kick?  
Out with it, *Dunciad*! let the secret pass,  
That secret to each fool, that he's an ass:  
The truth once told (and wherefore should we lie?)  
The queen of Midas slept, and so may I.

You think this cruel? take it for a rule,  
No creature smarts so little as a fool.  
Let peals of laughter, Codrus!<sup>3</sup> round thee break,  
Thou unconcerned canst hear the mighty crack.  
Pit, box, and gallery in convulsions hurled,  
Thou stand'st unshook amidst a bursting world.  
Who shames a scribbler? break one cobweb through,  
He spins the slight, self-pleasing thread anew:  
Destroy his fib or sophistry, in vain;  
The creature's at his dirty work again,  
Throned in the center of his thin designs,  
Proud of a vast extent of flimsy lines.  
Whom have I hurt? has poet yet or peer  
Lost the arched eyebrow or Parnassian sneer?  
And has not Colley<sup>4</sup> still his lord and whore?  
His butchers Henley?<sup>5</sup> his freemasons Moore?  
Does not one table Bavius still admit?  
Still to one bishop Philips<sup>6</sup> seem a wit?  
Still Sappho<sup>7</sup>—A. Hold! for god's sake—you'll offend.  
No names—be calm—learn prudence of a friend.  
I too could write, and I am twice as tall;  
But foes like these!—P. One flatterer's worse than all.  
Of all mad creatures, if the learn'd are right,  
It is the slaver kills, and not the bite.

A fool quite angry is quite innocent:  
Alas! 'tis ten times worse when they repent.

One dedicates in high heroic prose,  
And ridicules beyond a hundred foes;  
One from all Grub Street<sup>8</sup> will my fame defend,  
And, more abusive, calls himself my friend.  
This prints my letters,<sup>9</sup> that expects a bribe,  
And others roar aloud, "Subscribe, subscribe!"<sup>1</sup>

There are, who to my person pay their court:  
I cough like Horace,<sup>2</sup> and, though lean, am short;  
Ammon's great son<sup>3</sup> one shoulder had too high,  
Such Ovid's nose,<sup>4</sup> and "Sir! you have an eye—"   
Go on, obliging creatures, make me see  
All that disgraced my betters met in me.  
Say for my comfort, languishing in bed,  
"Just so immortal Maro<sup>o</sup> held his head":  
And when I die, be sure you let me know  
Great Homer died three thousand years ago.

Why did I write? what sin to me unknown  
Dipped me in ink, my parents', or my own?  
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,  
I lisped in numbers,<sup>o</sup> for the numbers came.  
I left no calling for this idle trade,  
No duty broke, no father disobeyed.  
The Muse but served to ease some friend, not wife,  
To help me through this long disease, my life,  
To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,  
And teach the being you preserved, to bear.<sup>o</sup>

A. But why then publish? P. Granville the polite,  
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;  
Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,  
And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays;  
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield, read;

Even mitred Rochester would nod the head,  
And St. John's self (great Dryden's friends before)  
With open arms received one poet more.<sup>5</sup>  
Happy my studies, when by these approved!  
Happier their author, when by these beloved!  
From these the world will judge of men and books,  
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cookes.<sup>6</sup>

Soft were my numbers; who could take offense  
While pure description held the place of sense?  
Like gentle Fanny's<sup>7</sup> was my flowery theme,  
A painted mistress, or a purling stream.  
Yet then did Gildon draw his venal quill;<sup>8</sup>  
I wished the man a dinner, and sat still.  
Yet then did Dennis<sup>9</sup> rave in furious fret;  
I never answered, I was not in debt.  
If want provoked, or madness made them print,  
I waged no war with Bedlam or the Mint.

Did some more sober critic come abroad?  
If wrong, I smiled; if right, I kissed the rod.  
Pains, reading, study are their just pretense,  
And all they want is spirit, taste, and sense.  
Commas and points they set exactly right,  
And 'twere a sin to rob them of their mite.  
Yet ne'er one sprig of laurel graced these ribalds,  
From slashing Bentley down to piddling Tibbalds.<sup>1</sup>  
Each wight who reads not, and but scans and spells,  
Each word-catcher that lives on syllables,  
Even such small critics some regard may claim,  
Preserved in Milton's or in Shakespeare's name.  
Pretty! in amber to observe the forms  
Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms!  
The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,  
But wonder how the devil they got there.

Were others angry? I excused them too;  
Well might they rage; I gave them but their due.

A man's true merit 'tis not hard to find;  
But each man's secret standard in his mind,  
That casting weight<sup>2</sup> pride adds to emptiness,  
This, who can gratify? for who can guess?  
The bard<sup>3</sup> whom pilfered pastorals renown,  
Who turns a Persian tale for half a crown,  
Just writes to make his barrenness appear,  
And strains from hard-bound brains eight lines a year:  
He, who still wanting, though he lives on theft,  
Steals much, spends little, yet has nothing left;  
And he who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,  
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning:  
And he whose fustian's so sublimely bad,  
It is not poetry, but prose run mad:  
All these, my modest satire bade translate,  
And owned that nine such poets made a Tate.<sup>4</sup>  
How did they fume, and stamp, and roar, and chafe!  
And swear, not Addison himself was safe.

Peace to all such! but were there one whose fires  
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires;  
Blessed with each talent and each art to please,  
And born to write, converse, and live with ease:  
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,  
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne;<sup>5</sup>  
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,  
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;  
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;  
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,  
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;  
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,  
A timorous foe, and a suspicious friend;  
Dreading even fools; by flatterers besieged,  
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;  
Like Cato, give his little senate<sup>6</sup> laws,

And sit attentive to his own applause;  
While wits and Templars<sup>o</sup> every sentence raise,  
And wonder with a foolish face of praise—  
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?  
Who would not weep, if Atticus<sup>z</sup> were he?

What though my name stood rubric<sup>o</sup> on the walls  
Or plastered posts, with claps,<sup>o</sup> in capitals?  
Or smoking forth, a hundred hawkers' load,  
On wings of winds came flying all abroad?  
I sought no homage from the race that write;  
I kept, like Asian monarchs, from their sight:  
Poems I heeded (now berhymed so long)  
No more than thou, great George! a birthday song.  
I ne'er with wits or witlings passed my days  
To spread about the itch of verse and praise;  
Nor like a puppy daggled through the town  
To fetch and carry sing-song up and down;  
Nor at rehearsals sweat, and mouthed, and cried,  
With handkerchief and orange at my side;  
But sick of fops, and poetry, and prate,  
To Bufo left the whole Castalian<sup>8</sup> state.

Proud as Apollo on his forkèd hill,<sup>9</sup>  
Sat full-blown Bufo, puffed<sup>o</sup> by every quill;<sup>o</sup>  
Fed with soft dedication all day long,  
Horace and he went hand in hand in song.  
His library (where busts of poets dead  
And a true Pindar stood without a head)  
Received of wits an undistinguished race,  
Who first his judgment asked, and then a place:  
Much they extolled his pictures, much his seat,<sup>1</sup>  
And flattered every day, and some days eat:  
Till grown more frugal in his riper days,  
He paid some bards with port, and some with praise;  
To some a dry rehearsal was assigned,  
And others (harder still) he paid in kind.

Dryden alone (what wonder?) came not nigh;  
Dryden alone escaped this judging eye:  
But still the great have kindness in reserve;  
He helped to bury whom he helped to starve.

May some choice patron bless each gray goose quill!  
May every Bavius have his Bufo still!  
So when a statesman wants a day's defense,  
Or envy holds a whole week's war with sense,  
Or simple pride for flattery makes demands,  
May dunce by dunce be whistled off my hands!  
Blessed be the great! for those they take away,  
And those they left me—for they left me Gay;<sup>2</sup>  
Left me to see neglected genius bloom,  
Neglected die, and tell it on his tomb;  
Of all thy blameless life the sole return  
My verse, and Queensberry weeping o'er thy urn!  
Oh, let me live my own, and die so too!  
("To live and die is all I have to do")<sup>3</sup>  
Maintain a poet's dignity and ease,  
And see what friends, and read what books I please;  
Above a patron, though I condescend  
Sometimes to call a minister my friend.  
I was not born for courts or great affairs;  
I pay my debts, believe, and say my prayers,  
Can sleep without a poem in my head,  
Nor know if Dennis be alive or dead.

Why am I asked what next shall see the light?  
Heavens! was I born for nothing but to write?  
Has life no joys for me? or (to be grave)  
Have I no friend to serve, no soul to save?  
"I found him close with Swift"—"Indeed? no doubt"  
Cries prating Balbus,<sup>4</sup> "something will come out."  
'Tis all in vain, deny it as I will.  
"No, such a genius never can lie still,"  
And then for mine obligingly mistakes



The first lampoon Sir Will or Bubo<sup>5</sup> makes.

Poor guiltless I! and can I choose but smile,  
When every coxcomb knows me by my style?

Cursed be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,  
That tends to make one worthy man my foe,  
Give virtue scandal, innocence a fear,  
Or from the soft-eyed virgin steal a tear!  
But he who hurts a harmless neighbor's peace,  
Insults fallen worth, or beauty in distress,  
Who loves a lie, lame slander helps about,  
Who writes a libel, or who copies out:  
That fop whose pride affects a patron's name,  
Yet absent, wounds an author's honest fame;  
Who can your merit selfishly approve,  
And show the sense of it without the love;  
Who has the vanity to call you friend,  
Yet wants the honor, injured, to defend;  
Who tells whate'er you think, whate'er you say,  
And, if he lie not, must at least betray:  
Who to the dean and silver bell can swear,  
And sees at Cannons what was never there:<sup>6</sup>  
Who reads but with a lust to misapply,  
Make satire a lampoon, and fiction, lie:  
A lash like mine no honest man shall dread,  
But all such babbling blockheads in his stead.

Let Sporus<sup>7</sup> tremble—A. What? that thing of silk,  
Sporus, that mere white curd of ass's milk?<sup>8</sup>  
Satire or sense, alas! can Sporus feel?  
Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?

P. Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,  
This painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings;  
Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,  
Yet wit ne'er tastes, and beauty ne'er enjoys;  
So well-bred spaniels civilly delight  
In mumbling of the game they dare not bite.

Eternal smiles his emptiness betray,  
As shallow streams run dimpling all the way.  
Whether in florid impotence he speaks,  
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppet squeaks;  
Or at the ear of Eve,<sup>9</sup> familiar toad,  
Half froth, half venom, spits himself abroad,  
In puns, or politics, or tales, or lies,  
Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies.  
His wit all seesaw between *that* and *this*,  
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,  
And he himself one vile antithesis.  
Amphibious thing! that acting either part,  
The trifling head or the corrupted heart,  
Fop at the toilet, flatterer at the board,  
Now trips a lady, and now struts a lord.  
Eve's tempter thus the rabbins<sup>1</sup> have expressed,  
A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest;  
Beauty that shocks you, parts that none will trust,  
Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust.

Not fortune's worshiper, nor fashion's fool,  
Not lucre's madman, nor ambition's tool,  
Not proud, nor servile, be one poet's praise,  
That if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways:  
That flattery, even to kings, he held a shame,  
And thought a lie in verse or prose the same:  
That not in fancy's maze he wandered long,  
But stooped<sup>2</sup> to truth, and moralized his song:  
That not for fame, but virtue's better end,  
He stood the furious foe, the timid friend,  
The damning critic, half approving wit,  
The coxcomb hit, or fearing to be hit;  
Laughed at the loss of friends he never had,  
The dull, the proud, the wicked, and the mad;  
The distant threats of vengeance on his head,  
The blow unfelt, the tear he never shed;

The tale revived, the lie so oft o'erthrown,  
The imputed trash, and dullness not his own;  
The morals blackened when the writings 'scape,  
The libeled person, and the pictured shape;<sup>3</sup>  
Abuse on all he loved, or loved him, spread,  
A friend in exile, or a father dead;  
The whisper, that to greatness still too near,  
Perhaps yet vibrates on his Sovereign's ear—  
Welcome for thee, fair virtue! all the past:  
For thee, fair virtue! welcome even the last!

A. But why insult the poor, affront the great?

P. A knave's a knave to me in every state:

Alike my scorn, if he succeed or fail,  
Sporus at court, or Japhet<sup>4</sup> in a jail,  
A hireling scribbler, or a hireling peer,  
Knight of the post<sup>5</sup> corrupt, or of the shire,  
If on a pillory, or near a throne,  
He gain his prince's ear, or lose his own.<sup>6</sup>

Yet soft by nature, more a dupe than wit,  
Sappho<sup>o</sup> can tell you how this man was bit:<sup>o</sup>  
This dreaded satirist Dennis will confess  
Foe to his pride, but friend to his distress:<sup>7</sup>  
So humble, he has knocked at Tibbald's door,  
Has drunk with Cibber, nay, has rhymed for Moore.  
Full ten years slandered, did he once reply?  
Three thousand suns went down on Welsted's lie.<sup>8</sup>  
To please a mistress one aspersed his life;  
He lashed him not, but let her be his wife.  
Let Budgell charge low Grub Street on his quill,  
And write whate'er he pleased, except his will;<sup>9</sup>  
Let the two Curlls of town and court,<sup>1</sup> abuse  
His father, mother, body, soul, and muse.  
Yet why? that father held it for a rule,  
It was a sin to call our neighbor fool;  
That harmless mother thought no wife a whore:

Hear this, and spare his family, James Moore!  
Unspotted names, and memorable long,  
If there be force in virtue, or in song.

Of gentle blood (part shed in honor's cause,  
While yet in Britain honor had applause)  
Each parent sprung—A. What fortune, pray?—P. Their own,  
And better got than Bestia's<sup>2</sup> from the throne.  
Born to no pride, inheriting no strife,  
Nor marrying discord in a noble wife,  
Stranger to civil and religious rage,  
The good man walked innoxious through his age.  
No courts he saw, no suits would ever try,  
Nor dared an oath,<sup>3</sup> nor hazarded a lie.  
Unlearn'd, he knew no schoolman's subtle art,  
No language but the language of the heart.  
By nature honest, by experience wise,  
Healthy by temperance, and by exercise;  
His life, though long, to sickness passed unknown,  
His death was instant, and without a groan.  
Oh, grant me thus to live, and thus to die!  
Who sprung from kings shall know less joy than I.

O friend! may each domestic bliss be thine!  
Be no unpleasing melancholy mine:  
Me, let the tender office long engage,  
To rock the cradle of reposing age,  
With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,  
Make languor smile, and smooth the bed of death,  
Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,  
And keep a while one parent from the sky!<sup>4</sup>  
On cares like these if length of days attend,  
May Heaven, to bless those days, preserve my friend,  
Preserve him social, cheerful, and serene,  
And just as rich as when he served a Queen!<sup>5</sup>

A. Whether that blessing be denied or given,  
Thus far was right—the rest belongs to Heaven.

- Note 1: Finish.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Serle, Pope's gardener.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sirius, associated with the period of greatest heat (and hence of madness) because it sets with the sun in late summer. August, in ancient Rome, was the season for reciting poetry.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bethlehem Hospital for the insane, in London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The subterranean passage under the road that separated his house at Twickenham from his garden became, in Pope's hands, a romantic grotto ornamented with shells and mirrors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A place in Southwark where debtors were free from arrest (they could not be arrested anywhere on Sundays).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Write out legal documents.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Is there some madman who, locked up without ink or paper . . . ?[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Twickenham, Pope's villa on the bank of the Thames; a few miles above Hampton Court.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Arthur Moore, whose son, James Moore Smythe, dabbled in literature. Moore Smythe had earned Pope's enmity by using in one of his plays some unpublished lines from Pope's "Epistle 2. To a Lady" in spite of Pope's objections.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Latin for "horn," the traditional emblem of the cuckold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The advice of Horace in *Art of Poetry* (line 388).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, living in a garret in Drury Lane, site of one of the theaters and the haunt of the profligate.[Return to reference](#)

#### 4

- Note 5: One of the four annual periods in which the law courts are in session and with which the publishing season coincided.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Famous poets helped playwrights by contributing prologues to their plays.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A foolish poet of Rhodes, who pretended much to Greek [*Pope's note*]. He is Leonard Welsted, who translated Longinus and had attacked and slandered Pope (see line 375).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Edmund Curll, shrewd and disreputable bookseller, published pirated works, works falsely ascribed to reputable writers, scandalous biographies, and other ephemera. Pope had often attacked him and had assigned to him a low role in *The Dunciad*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, he will attack Pope in the *London Journal* or write a treatise on theology, as Welsted in fact did.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Bernard Lintot, publisher of Pope's Homer and other early works.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Midas, king of ancient Lydia, had the bad taste to prefer the flute-playing of Pan to that of Apollo, whereupon the god endowed him with ass's ears. It was his barber (not his wife or his minister) who discovered the secret and whispered it into a hole in the earth. The reference to "queen" and "minister" makes it plain that Pope is alluding to George II, Queen Caroline, and Walpole.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Poet ridiculed by Virgil and Juvenal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Colley Cibber, the poet laureate.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Henley, known as "Orator" Henley, an independent preacher of marked eccentricity, was popular among the common people, especially for his elocution.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The "bishop" is Hugh Boulter, bishop of Armagh. He had employed as his secretary Ambrose Philips (1674–1749), whose

insipid simplicity of manner in poetry earned him the nickname of “Namby-Pamby.” Bavius, the bad poet alluded to in Virgil’s *Eclogue 3*.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A term denoting the whole society of literary, political, and journalistic hack writers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In 1726 Curll had surreptitiously acquired and published without permission some of Pope’s letters to Henry Cromwell.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To ensure the financial success of a work, wealthy readers were often asked to “subscribe” to it before printing was undertaken. Pope’s *Homer* was published in this manner.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Horace, who mentions a cough in a few poems, was plump and short.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Alexander the Great, whose head inclined to his left shoulder, resembling Pope’s hunchback.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Ovid’s family name, Naso, suggests the Latin word *nasus* (“nose”), hence the pun.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The purpose of this list is to establish Pope as the successor of Dryden and thus to place him far above his Grub Street persecutors. George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, poet, and statesman. William Walsh, poet and critic. Sir Samuel Garth, physician and mock-epic poet. William Congreve, the playwright. Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury, Lord Sommers. John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire. Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester, statesman. All had been associated with Dryden in his later years and all had encouraged the young Pope.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thomas Burnet, John Oldmixon, and Thomas Cooke: Pope identifies them in a note as “authors of secret and scandalous history.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John, Lord Hervey, whom Pope satirizes in the character of Sporus (lines 305–33).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Charles Gildon, minor critic and scribbler, who, Pope believed, early attacked him at the instigation of Addison; hence



“venal quill.”[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: John Dennis (see *An Essay on Criticism*, p. 534, n. 7).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), whose minute learning in Elizabethan literature had enabled him to expose Pope’s defects as an editor of Shakespeare in 1726. Pope made him king of the Dunces in *The Dunciad* of 1728. Richard Bentley (1662–1742), the eminent classical scholar, seemed to both Pope and Swift the perfect type of the pedant: he is called “slashing” because, in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1732), he had set in square brackets all passages that he disliked on the grounds that they had been slipped into the poem without the blind poet’s knowledge.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The weight that turns the scale; here, the “deciding factor.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Philips, Pope’s rival in pastoral poetry in 1709, when their pastorals were published in Tonson’s 6th *Miscellany*. Philips had also translated some Persian tales (see line 100 and p. 577, n. 6).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nahum Tate, poet laureate from 1692 to 1715. His popular rewriting of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* provided a happy ending; he wrote most of Part 2 of *Absalom and Achitophel*. The line refers to the old adage that it takes nine tailors to make one man.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Turkish monarchs proverbially killed off their nearest rivals.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addison’s tragedy *Cato* had been a sensational success in 1713. Pope had written the prologue, in which occurs the line, “While Cato gives his little senate laws.” The satirical reference here is to Addison in the role of arbiter of taste among his friends and admirers, mostly Whigs, at Button’s Coffee House. This group worked against the success of Pope’s *Homer*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pope’s satiric pseudonym for Addison. Atticus (109–32 B.C.E.), a wealthy man of letters and a friend of Cicero, was known as wise and disinterested.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: The Castalian spring on Mount Parnassus was sacred to Apollo and the Muses. "Bufo": a type of tasteless patron of the arts. (*Bufo* means "toad" in Latin.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Mount Parnassus had two peaks, one sacred to Apollo, one to Bacchus.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Estate. Pronounced *sate* and rhymed in next line with "eat" (*ate*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Gay (1685–1732), author of *The Beggar's Opera*, dear friend of Swift and Pope. His failure to obtain patronage from the court intensified Pope's hostility to the Whig administration and the queen. Gay spent the last years of his life under the protection of the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry. Pope wrote his epitaph.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A quotation from John Denham's poem "Of Prudence."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Latin for *stammering*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: George Bubb ("Bubo") Dodington, a Whig patron of letters. Sir William Yonge, Whig politician and poetaster.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pope's enemies had accused him of satirizing Cannons, the ostentatious estate of the Duke of Chandos, in his description of Timon's villa in the *Epistle to Burlington*. This Pope quite justly denied. The bell of Timon's chapel was of silver, and there preached a dean who "never mentions Hell to ears polite."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John, Lord Hervey, effeminate courtier and confidant of Queen Caroline (see headnote, p. 574). The original Sporus was a boy, whom the emperor Nero publicly married (see Suetonius's life of Nero in *Lives of the Caesars*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drunk by invalids.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The queen; the allusion is to *Paradise Lost* (4.799–809).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scholars of and authorities on Jewish law and doctrine.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The falcon is said to “stoop” to its prey when it swoops down and seizes it in flight.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pope’s deformity was frequently ridiculed and occasionally caricatured.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Japhet Crook, a notorious forger.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: One who lives by selling false evidence.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Those punished in the pillory often also had their ears cropped.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pope wrote the prologue to Cibber’s *Provoked Husband* (1728) when that play was performed for Dennis’s benefit, shortly before the old critic died.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: This man had the impudence to tell in print that Mr. P. had occasioned a Lady’s death, and to name a person he had never heard of [*Pope’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eustace Budgell attacked the *Grub Street Journal* for publishing what he took to be a squib by Pope charging him with having forged the will of Dr. Matthew Tindal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the publisher and Lord Hervey.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Probably the Duke of Marlborough, whose vast fortune was made through the favor of Queen Anne. The actual Bestia was a corrupt Roman consul.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As a Catholic, Pope’s father refused to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and the oath against the pope. He thus rendered himself vulnerable to the many repressive anti-Catholic laws then in force.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pope was a tender and devoted son. His mother had died in 1733. The earliest version of these lines dates from 1731, when the poet was nursing her through a serious illness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pope alludes to the fact that Arbuthnot, a man of strict probity, left the queen’s service no wealthier than when he entered it.[Return to reference 5](#)

# Notes

- °: *missed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *killed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asks for help*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *playhouse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shares*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whisper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Virgil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *verses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *law students*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in red letters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *posters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flattered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Montagu* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °

## JOHN GAY

### 1685–1732

The career of John Gay encompasses most of the ways that a talented but indigent writer of the early eighteenth century could try to make a living: publication, patronage, odd jobs at court, and the theater. After a good education at school in Devon, he went to London at seventeen to try his luck as apprentice to a dealer in silks. Five years later he became secretary to a friend from school, the writer and entrepreneur Aaron Hill, who introduced him to the publishing world and literary circles. Eventually, leading authors in London adopted Gay as a favorite; with Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot, and Thomas Parnell, he founded the Scriblerus Club, famous for its literary satires and practical jokes. Friends like these helped him obtain the patrons and political appointments that supported him. The same Scriblerian influence shaped the mixture of high Virgilian style and rustic humor in his first successful poem, *The Shepherd's Week* (1714), a burlesque pastoral. Here and in his other verse Gay shows off his special gifts: lightness of touch, a keen eye for homely details, and an irony that exposes the disparity between high poetic expectations and the coarse reality of the way people live. Two years later a mock-georgic, *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, revealed that the town could be as rough as the country, and far more corrupting. Gay's hopes for affluence were blasted by the collapse of South Sea stock in 1720. His popularity and financial security rose to new heights, however, with the phenomenal success

of his verse *Fables* (1727; a second set was published posthumously in 1738) and above all *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), which made him rich. But he did not enjoy his prosperity for long. A sequel, *Polly* (1729), was banned from the stage by Sir Robert Walpole; and although the printed version sold very well, the tension may have precipitated the illness that led a few years later to his death.

Audiences have always loved *The Beggar's Opera*. Nothing quite like it had ever been seen on the London stage; when Congreve read the script, he said, "It would either take greatly, or be damned confoundedly." On opening night, according to Pope, Gay's friends were anxious, "till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyle, who sat in the next box to us, say, 'It will do—it must do! I see it in the eyes of them.' " The duke was right. The play quickly became the talk of the town, it ran for a record sixty-two performances, and during the rest of the century it kept being revived. At first the shock of pleasure must have been sparked by daring thrusts at people and things in the news. Italian opera is one obvious target. Although it was extravagantly artificial and costly, with lavish scenery and imported stars, opera had been the rage of fashionable London. Now Gay turned the music over to beggars, or actors playing thieves and sex workers, and gave them popular British tunes to sing instead of showy foreign arias.

On this stage, moreover, the underworld rose to the surface. Crime was a constant, brutal threat in early eighteenth-century London, and stories about notorious criminals (such as Moll Flanders) poured from the press. In the corrupt legal system, which rewarded racketeers for informing on (or "peaching") less powerful felons, the line between those who broke the law and those who enforced it was often smudged. Jonathan Wild, the "Thief-Taker General of Great Britain and Ireland," became rich and famous by manipulating this system (before the executioner caught up with him); he serves as a model for Peachum. By comparison, a forthright highwayman and killer like Macheath might seem rather gallant. But the electricity of the play comes from its superimposition of these criminals on heads of state, especially the prime minister, Robert

Walpole. Playgoers recognized Walpole everywhere. In Act 2, scene 10, for instance, when Peachum and Lockit argue and conspire —“like great statesmen, we encourage those who betray their friends”—the audience roared at the allusion to Walpole and Lord Townshend, his ally and brother-in-law (at an early performance, Walpole himself is said to have won over the crowd by calling for an encore). Spectators saw a picture of their own times on the stage: a society driven by greed, where everything, including justice and love, was for sale.

Yet *The Beggar's Opera* has lasted beyond its age. The parallel between high life and low life turned out to be more than a trick; it still rings true when audiences reflect on those who hold power today. Brecht's and Weill's famous *Threepenny Opera* adapted Gay's story to the sinister conditions of Germany in the 1920s; gang lords, fascists, and capitalistic bosses all seem the same. Little people go to jail, the high ones get away. That worldly and cynical message, seasoned with wit, continues to make sense to people who compare their ideals of government, society, and law to things as they are.

Pope's epitaph on Gay, inscribed in Westminster Abbey, begins this way:

Of manners gentle, of affections mild;  
In wit, a man; simplicity, a child;  
With native humor tempering virtuous rage,  
Formed to delight at once and lash the age.

But Gay's own epitaph is far less pious:

Life is a jest, and all things show it;  
I thought so once, but now I know it.

# The Beggar's Opera

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE<sup>1</sup>

### *Men*

PEACHUM  
ROBIN OF BAGSHOT  
LOCKIT  
NIMMING NED  
MACHEATH  
HARRY PADDINGTON  
FILCH  
MATT OF THE MINT  
JEMMY TWITCHER  
BEN BUDGE  
CROOK-FINGERED JACK  
BEGGAR  
WAT DREARY  
PLAYER

Constables, drawer, turnkey, etc.

### *Women*

MRS. PEACHUM  
MRS. VIXEN  
POLLY PEACHUM  
BETTY DOXY  
LUCY LOCKIT  
JENNY DIVER

DIANA TRAPES  
MRS. SLAMMEKIN  
MRS. COAXER  
SUKY TAWDRY  
DOLLY TRULL  
MOLLY BRAZEN

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The names of characters reflect their trades. Peachum ("peach 'em") is an informer, Lockit a jailer, Macheath a "son of the heath" or highwayman, Twitcher and Diver pickpockets, Nimming Ned a thief, Budge a burglar, Trull and Doxy sex workers. Dreary ("gory") suggests a cutthroat; Bagshot Heath was known for highway robberies; Paddington ("pad," a highwayman) was where criminals were hanged; the Mint was a sanctuary for outlaws. Johnson defined "trapes" as "An idle slatternly woman," and "slammekin" had similar associations. [Return to reference 1](#)



## ***Introduction***

BEGGAR, PLAYER

BEGGAR If poverty be a title to poetry, I am sure nobody can dispute mine. I own myself of the Company of Beggars; and I make one at their weekly festivals at St. Giles's.<sup>2</sup> I have a small yearly salary for my catches,<sup>3</sup> and am welcome to a dinner there whenever I please, which is more than most poets can say.

PLAYER As we live by the Muses, 'tis but gratitude in us to encourage poetical merit wherever we find it. The Muses, contrary to all other ladies, pay no distinction to dress, and never partially mistake the pertness of embroidery for wit, nor the modesty of want for dullness. Be the author who he will, we push his play as far as it will go. So (though you are in want) I wish you success heartily.

BEGGAR This piece I own was originally writ for the celebrating the marriage of James Chanter and Moll Lay, two most excellent ballad singers. I have introduced the similes that are in all your celebrated operas: the swallow, the moth, the bee, the ship, the flower, etc. Besides, I have a prison scene, which the ladies always reckon charmingly pathetic. As to the parts, I have observed such a nice impartiality to our two ladies, that it is impossible for either of them to take offense.<sup>4</sup> I hope I may be forgiven, that I have not made my opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no recitative.<sup>5</sup> Excepting this, as I have consented to have neither prologue nor epilogue, it must be allowed an opera in all its forms. The piece indeed hath been heretofore frequently represented by ourselves in our great room at St. Giles's, so that I cannot too often acknowledge your charity in bringing it now on the stage.

PLAYER But I see 'tis time for us to withdraw; the actors are preparing to begin. Play away the overture.

[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A slum named after the patron saint of beggars and lepers. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rounds, in which one singer follows or chases the words of another. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Two famous divas, Faustina and Cuzzoni, had recently feuded on stage. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Operatic declamation, midway between singing and speaking. [Return to reference 5](#)

## ***Act 1***

## SCENE 1 *Peachum's house*

PEACHUM *sitting at a table with a large book of accounts before him.*

AIR 1. An old woman clothed in gray<sup>6</sup>

*Through all the employments of life  
Each neighbor abuses his brother;  
Whore and rogue they call husband and wife;  
All professions be-rogue one another.  
The priest calls the lawyer a cheat,  
The lawyer be-knaves the divine;  
And the statesman, because he's so great,  
Thinks his trade as honest as mine.*

A lawyer is an honest employment, so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double capacity, both against rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by them.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: The name of the ballad whose tune Peachum sings. [Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 2

### PEACHUM, FILCH

FILCH Sir, Black Moll hath sent word her trial comes on in the afternoon, and she hopes you will order matters so as to bring her off.

PEACHUM Why, she may plead her belly<sup>7</sup> at worst; to my knowledge she hath taken care of that security. But as the wench is very active and industrious, you may satisfy her that I'll soften the evidence.

FILCH Tom Gagg, sir, is found guilty.

PEACHUM A lazy dog! When I took him the time before, I told him what he would come to if he did not mend his hand. This is death without reprieve. I may venture to book him. [*Writes.*] For Tom Gagg, forty pounds.<sup>8</sup> Let Betty Sly know that I'll save her from transportation,<sup>9</sup> for I can get more by her staying in England.

FILCH Betty hath brought more goods into our lock to-year<sup>1</sup> than any five of the gang; and in truth, 'tis a pity to lose so good a customer.

PEACHUM If none of the gang take her off,<sup>2</sup> she may, in the common course of business, live a twelve-month longer. I love to let women scape. A good sportsman always lets the hen partridges fly, because the breed of the game depends upon them. Besides, here the law allows us no reward; there is nothing to be got by the death of women—except our wives.

FILCH Without dispute, she is a fine woman! 'Twas to her I was obliged for my education, and (to say a bold word) she hath trained up more young fellows to the business than the gaming-table.

PEACHUM Truly, Filch, thy observation is right. We and the surgeons are more beholden to women than all the professions besides.<sup>3</sup>

AIR 2. The bonny gray-eyed morn

FILCH     *'Tis woman that seduces all mankind,  
By her we first were taught the wheedling arts:  
Her very eyes can cheat; when most she's kind,  
She tricks us of our money with our hearts.  
For her, like wolves by night we roam for prey,  
And practise every fraud to bribe her charms;  
For suits of love, like law, are won by pay,  
And beauty must be fee'd into our arms.*

PEACHUM     But make haste to Newgate,<sup>4</sup> boy, and let my friends know what I intend; for I love to make them easy one way or other.

FILCH     When a gentleman is long kept in suspense, penitence may break his spirit ever after. Besides, certainty gives a man a good air upon his trial, and makes him risk another without fear or scruple. But I'll away, for 'tis a pleasure to be the messenger of comfort to friends in affliction.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Claim to be pregnant, hence not at risk of execution. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The reward when informing resulted in execution. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Criminals were sentenced to banishment abroad. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This year. "Lock": a house where stolen goods are kept. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Inform on her. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Surgeons treated venereal diseases. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The chief London prison. [Return to reference 4](#)

### SCENE 3

#### PEACHUM

But 'tis now high time to look about me for a decent execution against next Sessions.<sup>5</sup> I hate a lazy rogue, by whom one can get nothing 'till he is hanged. A register of the gang, [*reading*] Crook-fingered Jack. A year and a half in the service; let me see how much the stock owes to his industry: one, two, three, four, five gold watches, and seven silver ones. A mighty clean-handed fellow! Sixteen snuff-boxes, five of them of true gold. Six dozen of handkerchiefs, four silver-hilted swords, half a dozen of shirts, three tye-perriwigs, and a piece of broad cloth. Considering these are only the fruits of his leisure hours, I don't know a prettier fellow, for no man alive hath a more engaging presence of mind upon the road. Wat Dreary, alias Brown Will, an irregular dog, who hath an underhand way of disposing of his goods. I'll try him only for a Sessions or two longer upon his good behavior. Harry Paddington, a poor petty-larceny rascal, without the least genius; that fellow, though he were to live these six months, will never come to the gallows with any credit. Slippery Sam; he goes off the next Sessions, for the villain hath the impudence to have views of following his trade as a tailor, which he calls an honest employment. Matt of the Mint; listed<sup>6</sup> not above a month ago, a promising sturdy fellow, and diligent in his way; somewhat too bold and hasty, and may raise good contributions on the public, if he does not cut himself short by murder. Tom Tipple, a guzzling soaking sot, who is always too drunk to stand himself, or to make others stand.<sup>7</sup> A cart<sup>8</sup> is absolutely necessary for him. Robin of Bagshot, alias Gorgon, alias Bluff Bob, alias Carbuncle, alias Bob Booty.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Trials of criminals, held eight times a year.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Enlisted.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Stand still; that is, when held up.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Carriage to the gallows.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This became a nickname for Walpole.[Return to reference 9](#)



## SCENE 4

### PEACHUM, MRS. PEACHUM

MRS. PEACHUM    What of Bob Booty, husband? I hope nothing bad hath betided him. You know, my dear, he's a favorite customer of mine. 'Twas he made me a present of this ring.

PEACHUM    I have set his name down in the black-list, that's all, my dear; he spends his life among women, and as soon as his money is gone, one or other of the ladies will hang him for the reward, and there's forty pound lost to us forever.

MRS. PEACHUM    You know, my dear, I never meddle in matters of death; I always leave those affairs to you. Women indeed are bitter bad judges in these cases, for they are so partial to the brave that they think every man handsome who is going to the camp or the gallows.

AIR 3.    Cold and raw

*If any wench Venus's girdle wear,  
Though she be never so ugly;  
Lilies and roses will quickly appear,  
And her face look wond'rous smugly.  
Beneath the left ear so fit but a cord,  
(A rope so charming a zone is!)  
The youth in his cart hath the air of a lord,  
And we cry, "There dies an Adonis!"<sup>1</sup>*

But really, husband, you should not be too hard hearted, for you never had a finer, braver set of men than at present. We have not had a murder among them all, these seven months. And truly, my dear, that is a great blessing.

PEACHUM    What a dickens is the woman always a-whimpering about murder for? No gentleman is ever looked upon the worse for

killing a man in his own defense; and if business cannot be carried on without it, what would you have a gentleman do?

MRS. PEACHUM If I am in the wrong, my dear, you must excuse me, for nobody can help the frailty of an over-scrupulous conscience.

PEACHUM Murder is as fashionable a crime as a man can be guilty of. How many fine gentlemen have we in Newgate every year, purely upon that article! If they have wherewithal to persuade the jury to bring it in manslaughter, what are they the worse for it? So, my dear, have done upon this subject. Was Captain Macheath here this morning, for the bank notes he left with you last week?

MRS. PEACHUM Yes, my dear; and though the bank hath stopped payment, he was so cheerful and so agreeable! Sure there is not a finer gentleman upon the road than the Captain! If he comes from Bagshot at any reasonable hour he hath promised to make one this evening with Polly and me, and Bob Booty, at a party of quadrille.<sup>2</sup> Pray, my dear, is the Captain rich?

PEACHUM The Captain keeps too good company ever to grow rich. Marybone and the chocolate-houses<sup>3</sup> are his undoing. The man that proposes to get money by play should have the education of a fine gentleman, and be trained up to it from his youth.

MRS. PEACHUM Really, I am sorry upon Polly's account the Captain hath not more discretion. What business hath he to keep company with lords and gentlemen? He should leave them to prey upon one another.

PEACHUM Upon Polly's account! What, a plague, does the woman mean? Upon Polly's account!

MRS. PEACHUM Captain Macheath is very fond of the girl.

PEACHUM And what then?

MRS. PEACHUM If I have any skill in the ways of women, I am sure Polly thinks him a very pretty man.

PEACHUM And what then? You would not be so mad to have the wench marry him! Gamesters and highwaymen are generally very good to their whores, but they are very devils to their wives.

MRS. PEACHUM But if Polly should be in love, how should we help her, or how can she help herself? Poor girl, I am in the utmost concern

about her.

AIR 4. Why is your faithful slave disdained?

*If love the virgin's heart invade,  
How, like a moth, the simple maid  
Still plays about the flame!  
If soon she be not made a wife,  
Her honor's singed, and then for life,  
She's—what I dare not name.*

PEACHUM Look ye, wife. A handsome wench in our way of business is as profitable as at the bar of a Temple<sup>4</sup> coffee-house, who looks upon it as her livelihood to grant every liberty but one. You see I would indulge the girl as far as prudently we can. In anything but marriage! After that, my dear, how shall we be safe? Are we not then in her husband's power? For a husband hath the absolute power over all a wife's secrets but her own. If the girl had the discretion of a court lady, who can have a dozen young fellows at her ear without complying with one, I should not matter it;<sup>5</sup> but Polly is tinder, and a spark will at once set her on a flame. Married! If the wench does not know her own profit, sure she knows her own pleasure better than to make herself a property!<sup>6</sup> My daughter to me should be, like a court lady to a minister of state, a key to the whole gang. Married! If the affair is not already done, I'll terrify her from it, by the example of our neighbors.

MRS. PEACHUM Mayhap, my dear, you may injure the girl. She loves to imitate the fine ladies, and she may only allow the Captain liberties in the view of interest.

PEACHUM But 'tis your duty, my dear, to warn the girl against her ruin, and to instruct her how to make the most of her beauty. I'll go to her this moment, and sift her. In the meantime, wife, rip out the coronets and marks of these dozen of cambric handkerchiefs, for I can dispose of them this afternoon to a chap in the City.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Venus's lover. The magic powers of Venus's belt ("girdle"), which could make any woman sexy, are associated with the rope or belt ("zone") around a condemned man's neck.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A card game.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Popular haunts for gambling.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: London college for lawyers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Think it important.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A husband had legal title to everything his wife possessed.[Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 5

MRS. PEACHUM

Never was a man more out of the way in an argument than my husband! Why must our Polly, forsooth, differ from her sex, and love only her husband? And why must Polly's marriage, contrary to all observation, make her the less followed by other men? All men are thieves in love, and like a woman the better for being another's property.

AIR 5. Of all the simple things we do

*A maid is like the golden ore,  
Which hath guineas intrinsical in't,  
Whose worth is never known, before  
It is tried and impressed in the Mint.  
A wife's like a guinea in gold,  
Stamped with the name of her spouse:  
Now here, now there, is bought, or is sold,  
And is current in every house.*

## SCENE 6

### MRS. PEACHUM, FILCH

MRS. PEACHUM Come hither, Filch. I am as fond of this child, as though my mind misgave me he were my own. He hath as fine a hand at picking a pocket as a woman, and is as nimble-fingered as a juggler. If an unlucky Session does not cut the rope of thy life, I pronounce, boy, thou wilt be a great man in history. Where was your post last night, my boy?

FILCH I plied at the opera, madam; and considering 'twas neither dark nor rainy, so that there was no great hurry in getting chairs and coaches, made a tolerable hand on't. These seven handkerchiefs, madam.

MRS. PEACHUM Colored ones, I see. They are of sure sale from our warehouse at Redriff among the seamen.

FILCH And this snuffbox.

MRS. PEACHUM Set in gold! A pretty encouragement this to a young beginner.

FILCH I had a fair tug at a charming gold watch. Pox take the tailors for making the fobs so deep and narrow! It stuck by the way, and I was forced to make my escape under a coach. Really, madam, I fear I shall be cut off in the flower of my youth, so that every now and then (since I was pumped)<sup>7</sup> I have thoughts of taking up and going to sea.

MRS. PEACHUM You should go to Hockley in the Hole,<sup>8</sup> and to Marybone, child, to learn valor. These are the schools that have bred so many brave men. I thought, boy, by this time, thou hadst lost fear as well as shame. Poor lad! How little does he know as yet of the Old Bailey!<sup>9</sup> For the first fact I'll insure thee from being hanged; and going to sea, Filch, will come time enough upon a sentence of transportation. But now, since you have nothing better to do, even go to your book, and learn your catechism, for really a man makes but an ill figure in the Ordinary's paper,<sup>1</sup> who cannot give a satisfactory answer to his questions. But, hark you,

my lad. Don't tell me a lie; for you know I hate a liar. Do you know of anything that hath passed between Captain Macheath and our Polly?

FILCH I beg you, madam, don't ask me; for I must either tell a lie to you or to Miss Polly; for I promised her I would not tell.

MRS. PEACHUM But when the honor of our family is concerned—

FILCH I shall lead a sad life with Miss Polly, if ever she come to know that I told you. Besides, I would not willingly forfeit my own honor by betraying anybody.

MRS. PEACHUM Yonder comes my husband and Polly. Come, Filch, you shall go with me into my own room, and tell me the whole story. I'll give thee a glass of a most delicious cordial that I keep for my own drinking.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: When pickpockets were caught, they were doused with water.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A place for brutal sports such as bear-baiting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: London's criminal court.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: First offenders could escape the death sentence by pleading "benefit of clergy" if they passed a literacy test given by the ordinary or chaplain of Newgate.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 7

### PEACHUM, POLLY

POLLY I know as well as any of the fine ladies how to make the most of myself and of my man too. A woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a court or at an assembly.<sup>2</sup> We have it in our natures, papa. If I allow Captain Macheath some trifling liberties, I have this watch and other visible marks of his favor to show for it. A girl who cannot grant some things, and refuse what is most material, will make but a poor hand of her beauty, and soon be thrown upon the common.<sup>3</sup>

AIR 6. What shall I do to show how much I love her

*Virgins are like the fair flower in its luster,  
Which in the garden enamels the ground;  
Near it the bees in play flutter and cluster,  
And gaudy butterflies frolic around.  
But, when once plucked, 'tis no longer alluring,  
To Covent Garden<sup>4</sup> 'tis sent (as yet sweet),  
There fades, and shrinks, and grows past all  
enduring,  
Rots, stinks, and dies, and is trod under feet.*

PEACHUM You know, Polly, I am not against your toying and trifling with a customer in the way of business, or to get out a secret, or so. But if I find out that you have played the fool and are married, you jade you, I'll cut your throat, hussy. Now you know my mind.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A public social affair.[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: Common land; common law; and a name for a sex worker.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A market where produce was bought and sex workers engaged clients.[Return to reference 4](#)

## SCENE 8

PEACHUM, POLLY, MRS. PEACHUM

AIR 7. Oh London is a fine town

MRS. PEACHUM *[In a very great passion.]*

*Our Polly is a sad slut! nor heeds what we have taught her.*

*I wonder any man alive will ever rear a daughter!*

*For she must have both hoods and gowns, and hoops to swell her pride,*

*With scarfs and stays, and gloves and lace; and she will have men beside;*

*And when she's dressed with care and cost, all-tempting, fine and gay,*

*As men should serve a cowcumber,<sup>5</sup> she flings herself away.*

*Our Polly is a sad slut, etc.*

You baggage! You hussy! You inconsiderate jade! Had you been hanged, it would not have vexed me, for that might have been your misfortune; but to do such a mad thing by choice! The wench is married, husband.

PEACHUM Married! The Captain is a bold man, and will risk anything for money; to be sure he believes her a fortune. Do you think your mother and I should have lived comfortably so long together, if ever we had been married? Baggage!

MRS. PEACHUM I knew she was always a proud slut; and now the wench hath played the fool and married, because forsooth she would do like the gentry. Can you support the expense of a husband, hussy, in gaming, drinking and whoring? Have you money enough to carry on the daily quarrels of man and wife about who shall squander most? There are not many husbands and wives who can bear the charges of plaguing one another in a handsome way. If you must be married, could you introduce nobody into our family but a highwayman? Why, thou foolish jade,

thou wilt be as ill-used, and as much neglected, as if thou hadst married a lord!

PEACHUM Let not your anger, my dear, break through the rules of decency, for the Captain looks upon himself in the military capacity, as a gentleman by his profession. Besides what he hath already, I know he is in a fair way of getting,<sup>6</sup> or of dying; and both these ways, let me tell you, are most excellent chances for a wife. Tell me hussy, are you ruined or no?

MRS. PEACHUM With Polly's fortune, she might very well have gone off to a person of distinction. Yes, that you might, you pouting slut!

PEACHUM What, is the wench dumb? Speak, or I'll make you plead by squeezing out an answer from you. Are you really bound wife to him, or are you only upon liking?<sup>7</sup> [*Pinches her.*]

POLLY Oh! [*Screaming.*]

MRS. PEACHUM How the mother is to be pitied who hath handsome daughters! Locks, bolts, bars, and lectures of morality are nothing to them; they break through them all. They have as much pleasure in cheating a father and mother as in cheating at cards.

PEACHUM Why, Polly, I shall soon know if you are married, by Macheath's keeping from our house.

#### AIR 8. Grim king of the ghosts

POLLY *Can love be controlled by advice?  
Will Cupid our mothers obey?  
Though my heart were as frozen as ice,  
At his flame 'twould have melted away.  
When he kissed me so closely he pressed,  
'Twas so sweet that I must have complied;  
So I thought it both safest and best  
To marry, for fear you should chide.*

MRS. PEACHUM Then all the hopes of our family are gone for ever and ever!

PEACHUM And Macheath may hang his father and mother-in-law, in hope to get into their daughter's fortune.

POLLY I did not marry him (as 'tis the fashion) coolly and deliberately for honor or money. But I love him.

MRS. PEACHUM Love him! Worse and worse! I thought the girl had been better bred. O husband, husband! Her folly makes me mad! My head swims! I'm distracted! I can't support myself—O!  
[*Faints.*]

PEACHUM See, wench, to what a condition you have reduced your poor mother! A glass of cordial, this instant. How the poor woman takes it to heart! [POLLY *goes out, and returns with it.*] Ah hussy, now this is the only comfort your mother has left!

POLLY Give her another glass, sir; my mama drinks double the quantity whenever she is out of order. This, you see, fetches<sup>8</sup> her.

MRS. PEACHUM The girl shows such a readiness, and so much concern, that I could almost find in my heart to forgive her.

AIR 9. O Jenny, O Jenny, where hast thou been

MRS. PEACHUM *Oh Polly, you might have toyed and kissed.  
By keeping men off, you keep them on.*

POLLY *But he so teased me,  
And he so pleased me,  
What I did, you must have done.*

MRS. PEACHUM Not with a highwayman. You sorry slut!

PEACHUM A word with you, wife. 'Tis no new thing for a wench to take man without consent of parents. You know 'tis the frailty of woman, my dear.

MRS. PEACHUM Yes, indeed, the sex is frail. But the first time a woman is frail, she should be somewhat nice<sup>9</sup> methinks, for then or never is the time to make her fortune. After that, she hath nothing to do but to guard herself from being found out, and she may do what she pleases.

PEACHUM    Make yourself a little easy; I have a thought shall soon set all matters again to rights. Why so melancholy, Polly? Since what is done cannot be undone, we must all endeavor to make the best of it.

MRS. PEACHUM    Well, Polly, as far as one woman can forgive another, I forgive thee. Your father is too fond of you, hussy.

POLLY    Then all my sorrows are at an end.

MRS. PEACHUM    A mighty likely speech in troth, for a wench who is just married!

AIR 10.        Thomas, I cannot

POLLY    *I, like a ship in storms, was tossed,  
Yet afraid to put in to land;  
For seized in the port the vessel's lost,  
Whose treasure is contraband.  
The waves are laid,  
My duty's paid.  
O joy beyond expression!  
Thus, safe ashore,  
I ask no more,  
My all is in my possession.*

PEACHUM    I hear customers in t'other room. Go, talk with 'em, Polly; but come to us again as soon as they are gone. But, hark ye, child, if 'tis the gentleman who was here yesterday about the repeating-watch,<sup>1</sup> say, you believe we can't get intelligence of it, till tomorrow, for I lent it to Suky Straddle, to make a figure with it tonight at a tavern in Drury Lane. If t'other gentleman calls for the silver-hilted sword, you know beetle-browed Jemmy hath it on, and he doth not come from Tunbridge till Tuesday night, so that it cannot be had till then.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Cucumber.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Acquiring wealth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: On approval.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Revives.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Choosy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A watch that strikes the hour and quarter hour when a button is pressed.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 9

### PEACHUM, MRS. PEACHUM

PEACHUM     Dear wife, be a little pacified. Don't let your passion run away with your senses. Polly, I grant you, hath done a rash thing.

MRS. PEACHUM     If she had had only an intrigue with the fellow, why the very best families have excused and huddled up a frailty of that sort. 'Tis marriage, husband, that makes it a blemish.

PEACHUM     But money, wife, is the true fuller's earth<sup>2</sup> for reputations, there is not a spot or a stain but what it can take out. A rich rogue nowadays is fit company for any gentleman; and the world, my dear, hath not such a contempt for roguery as you imagine. I tell you, wife, I can make this match turn to our advantage.

MRS. PEACHUM     I am very sensible,<sup>3</sup> husband, that Captain Macheath is worth money, but I am in doubt whether he hath not two or three wives already, and then if he should die in a Session or two, Polly's dower would come into dispute.

PEACHUM     That, indeed, is a point which ought to be considered.

AIR 11.     A soldier and a sailor

*A fox may steal your hens, sir,  
A whore your health and pence, sir,  
Your daughter rob your chest, sir,  
Your wife may steal your rest, sir,  
A thief your goods and plate.  
But this is all but picking,  
With rest, pence, chest, and chicken;  
It ever was decreed, sir,  
If lawyer's hand is fee'd, sir,  
He steals your whole estate.*

The lawyers are bitter enemies to those in our way. They don't care that anybody should get a clandestine livelihood but themselves.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Clay used for cleaning fabrics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Aware.[Return to reference 3](#)



## SCENE 10

### MRS. PEACHUM, PEACHUM, POLLY

POLLY 'Twas only Nimming Ned. He brought in a damask window curtain, a hoop-petticoat, a pair of silver candlesticks, a perriwig, and one silk stocking, from the fire that happened last night.

PEACHUM There is not a fellow that is cleverer in his way, and saves more goods out of the fire than Ned. But now, Polly, to your affair; for matters must not be left as they are. You are married then, it seems?

POLLY Yes, sir.

PEACHUM And how do you propose to live, child?

POLLY Like other women, sir, upon the industry of my husband.

MRS. PEACHUM What, is the wench turned fool? A highwayman's wife, like a soldier's, hath as little of his pay as of his company.

PEACHUM And had not you the common views of a gentlewoman in your marriage, Polly?

POLLY I don't know what you mean, sir.

PEACHUM Of a jointure,<sup>4</sup> and of being a widow.

POLLY But I love him, sir. How then could I have thoughts of parting with him?

PEACHUM Parting with him! Why, that is the whole scheme and intention of all marriage articles. The comfortable estate of widowhood is the only hope that keeps up a wife's spirits. Where is the woman who would scruple to be a wife, if she had it in her power to be a widow whenever she pleased? If you have any views of this sort, Polly, I shall think the match not so very unreasonable.

POLLY How I dread to hear your advice! Yet I must beg you to explain yourself.

PEACHUM Secure what he hath got, have him peached the next Sessions, and then at once you are made a rich widow.

POLLY What, murder the man I love! The blood runs cold at my heart with the very thought of it.

PEACHUM Fie, Polly! What hath murder to do in the affair? Since the thing sooner or later must happen, I dare say, the Captain himself would like that we should get the reward for his death sooner than a stranger. Why, Polly, the Captain knows that as 'tis his employment to rob, so 'tis ours to take robbers; every man in his business. So that there is no malice in the case.

MRS. PEACHUM Ay, husband, now you have nicked the matter.<sup>5</sup> To have him peached is the only thing could ever make me forgive her.

AIR 12. Now Ponder well, ye parents dear

POLLY *O, ponder well! be not severe;  
So save a wretched wife!  
For on the rope that hangs my dear  
Depends poor Polly's life.*

MRS. PEACHUM But your duty to your parents, hussy, obliges you to hang him. What would many a wife give for such an opportunity!

POLLY What is a jointure, what is widowhood to me? I know my heart. I cannot survive him.

AIR 13. Le printemps rappelle aux armes<sup>6</sup>

*The turtle<sup>7</sup> thus with plaintive crying,  
Her lover dying,  
The turtle thus with plaintive crying,  
Laments her dove.  
Down she drops quite spent with sighing,  
Paired in death, as paired in love.*

Thus, sir, it will happen to your poor Polly.

MRS. PEACHUM What, is the fool in love in earnest then? I hate thee for being particular.<sup>8</sup> Why, wench, thou art a shame to thy very

sex.

POLLY But hear me, mother. If you ever loved—

MRS. PEACHUM Those cursed playbooks she reads have been her ruin. One word more, hussy, and I shall knock your brains out, if you have any.

PEACHUM Keep out of the way, Polly, for fear of mischief, and consider of what is proposed to you.

MRS. PEACHUM Away, hussy. Hang your husband, and be dutiful.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Property jointly held by a couple, hence inherited by the wife if her husband died.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hit the mark.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The spring calls to arms (French).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Turtledove.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Attached to one person; freakish.[Return to reference 8](#)

## SCENE 11

MRS. PEACHUM, PEACHUM [POLLY *listening*].

MRS. PEACHUM    The thing, husband, must and shall be done. For the sake of intelligence<sup>9</sup> we must take other measures, and have him peached the next Session without her consent. If she will not know her duty, we know ours.

PEACHUM    But really, my dear, it grieves one's heart to take off a great man. When I consider his personal bravery, his fine stratagem,<sup>1</sup> how much we have already got by him, and how much more we may get, methinks I can't find in my heart to have a hand in his death. I wish you could have made Polly undertake it.

MRS. PEACHUM    But in a case of necessity—our own lives are in danger.

PEACHUM    Then, indeed, we must comply with the customs of the world, and make gratitude give way to interest. He shall be taken off.

MRS. PEACHUM    I'll undertake to manage Polly.

PEACHUM    And I'll prepare matters for the Old Bailey.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Secret information.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Guile.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 12

### POLLY

Now I'm a wretch, indeed. Methinks I see him already in the cart, sweeter and more lovely than the nosegay in his hand! I hear the crowd extolling his resolution and intrepidity! What volleys of sighs are sent from the windows of Holborn,<sup>2</sup> that so comely a youth should be brought to disgrace! I see him at the tree! The whole circle are in tears! Even butchers weep! Jack Ketch<sup>3</sup> himself hesitates to perform his duty, and would be glad to lose his fee, by a reprieve. What then will become of Polly! As yet I may inform him of their design, and aid him in his escape. It shall be so. But then he flies, absents himself, and I bar my self from his dear dear conversation!<sup>4</sup> That too will distract me. If he keep out of the way, my papa and mama may in time relent, and we may be happy. If he stays, he is hanged, and then he is lost forever! He intended to lie concealed in my room, 'till the dusk of the evening. If they are abroad, I'll this instant let him out, lest some accident should prevent him.

*[Exit, and returns.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The street that connects Newgate to the gallows ("tree") at Tyburn.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The hangman (after a famous 17th-century executioner).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Intimate contact.[Return to reference 4](#)

## SCENE 13

### POLLY, MACHEATH

AIR 14. Pretty parrot, say

MACHEATH      *Pretty Polly, say,  
                         When I was away,  
Did your fancy never stray  
                         To some newer lover?*

POLLY           *Without disguise,  
                         Heaving sighs,  
                         Doating eyes,  
My constant heart discover.  
                         Fondly let me loll!*

MACHEATH      *O pretty, pretty Poll.*

POLLY      And are *you* as fond as ever, my dear?

MACHEATH      Suspect my honor, my courage, suspect anything but my  
                         love. May my pistols misfire, and my mare slip her shoulder while I  
                         am pursued, if I ever forsake thee!

POLLY      Nay, my dear, I have no reason to doubt you, for I find in the  
                         romance you lent me, none of the great heroes were ever false in  
                         love.

AIR 15. Pray, fair one, be kind

MACHEATH      *My heart was so free,  
                         It roved like the bee,  
'Till Polly my passion requited;  
                         I sipped each flower,  
                         I changed every hour,  
But here every flower is united.*

POLLY Were you sentenced to transportation, sure, my dear, you could not leave me behind you—could you?

MACHEATH Is there any power, any force that could tear me from thee? You might sooner tear a pension out of the hands of a courtier, a fee from a lawyer, a pretty woman from a looking glass, or any woman from quadrille. But to tear me from thee is impossible!

AIR 16. Over the hills and far away

MACHEATH *Were I laid on Greenland's coast,  
And in my arms embraced my lass;  
Warm amidst eternal frost,  
Too soon the half year's night would pass.*

POLLY *Were I sold on Indian soil,  
Soon as the burning day was closed,  
I could mock the sultry toil,  
When on my charmer's breast reposed.*

MACHEATH *And I would love you all the day,*

POLLY *Every night would kiss and play,*

MACHEATH *If with me you'd fondly stray*

POLLY *Over the hills and far away.*

Yes, I would go with thee. But oh! How shall I speak it? I must be torn from thee. We must part.

MACHEATH How? Part?

POLLY We must, we must. My papa and mama are set against thy life. They now, even now, are in search after thee. They are preparing evidence against thee. Thy life depends upon a moment.

AIR 17. Gin thou wert mine awn thing

*Oh what pain it is to part!  
Can I leave thee, can I leave thee?  
Oh what pain it is to part!  
Can thy Polly ever leave thee?  
But lest death my love should thwart,  
And bring thee to the fatal cart,  
Thus I tear thee from my bleeding heart!  
Fly hence, and let me leave thee.*

One kiss and then—one kiss—begone—farewell.

MACHEATH My hand, my heart, my dear, is so riveted to thine, that I cannot unloose my hold.

POLLY But my papa may intercept thee, and then I should lose the very glimmering of hope. A few weeks, perhaps, may reconcile us all. Shall thy Polly hear from thee?

MACHEATH Must I then go?

POLLY And will not absence change your love?

MACHEATH If you doubt it, let me stay—and be hanged.

POLLY Oh how I fear! How I tremble! Go—but when safety will give you leave, you will be sure to see me again; for 'till then Polly is wretched.

AIR 18. Oh the broom

*[Parting, and looking back at each other with fondness; he at one door, she at the other.]*

MACHEATH *The miser thus a shilling sees,  
Which he's obliged to pay,  
With sighs resigns it by degrees,  
And fears 'tis gone for aye.*

POLLY *The boy, thus, when his sparrow's flown,  
The bird in silence eyes;  
But soon as out of sight 'tis gone,  
Whines, whimpers, sobs, and cries.*



## ***Act 2***

## SCENE 1 *A tavern near Newgate*

JEMMY TWITCHER, CROOK-FINGERED JACK, WAT DREARY, ROBIN OF BAGSHOT, NIMMING NED, HENRY PADDINGTON, MATT OF THE MINT, BEN BUDGE, *and the rest of the gang, at the table, with wine, brandy, and tobacco.*

BEN But prithee, Matt, what is become of thy brother Tom? I have not seen him since my return from transportation.

MATT Poor brother Tom had an accident this time twelve-month, and so clever a made fellow he was, that I could not save him from those flaying rascals the surgeons; and now, poor man, he is among the otamies<sup>5</sup> at Surgeon's Hall.

BEN So it seems, his time was come.

JEMMY But the present time is ours, and nobody alive hath more. Why are the laws levelled at us? Are we more dishonest than the rest of mankind? What we win, gentlemen, is our own by the law of arms and the right of conquest.

JACK Where shall we find such another set of practical philosophers, who to a man are above the fear of death?

WAT Sound men, and true!

ROBIN Of tried courage, and indefatigable industry!

NED Who is there here that would not die for his friend?

HARRY Who is there here that would betray him for his interest?

MATT Show me a gang of courtiers that can say as much.

BEN We are for a just partition of the world, for every man hath a right to enjoy life.

MATT We retrench the superfluities of mankind. The world is avaricious, and I hate avarice. A covetous fellow, like a jackdaw, steals what he was never made to enjoy, for the sake of hiding it. These are the robbers of mankind, for money was made for the free-hearted and generous, and where is the injury of taking from another what he hath not the heart to make use of?

JEMMY Our several stations<sup>6</sup> for the day are fixed. Good luck attend us all. Fill the glasses.

AIR 19. Fill every glass

MATT        *Fill every glass, for wine inspires us,  
                 And fires us  
                 With courage, love, and joy.  
                 Women and wine should life employ.  
                 Is there ought else on earth desirous?*

CHORUS      *Fill every glass, etc.*

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Skeletons (“anatomies”). “Had an accident”: was hanged. “Clever a made”: well-made (a). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Individual posts. [Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 2

***To them enter MACHEATH.***

MACHEATH    Gentlemen, well met. My heart hath been with you this hour; but an unexpected affair hath detained me. No ceremony, I beg you.

MATT    We were just breaking up to go upon duty. Am I to have the honor of taking the air with you, sir, this evening upon the heath? I drink a dram now and then with the stagecoachmen in the way of friendship and intelligence; and I know that about this time there will be passengers upon the Western Road, who are worth speaking with.

MACHEATH    I was to have been of that party, but—

MATT    But what, sir?

MACHEATH    Is there any man who suspects my courage?

MATT    We have all been witnesses of it.

MACHEATH    My honor and truth to the gang?

MATT    I'll be answerable for it.

MACHEATH    In the division of our booty, have I ever shown the least marks of avarice or injustice?

MATT    By these questions something seems to have ruffled you. Are any of us suspected?

MACHEATH    I have a fixed confidence, gentlemen, in you all, as men of honor, and as such I value and respect you. Peachum is a man that is useful to us.

MATT    Is he about to play us any foul play? I'll shoot him through the head.

MACHEATH    I beg you, gentlemen, act with conduct and discretion. A pistol is your last resort.

MATT    He knows nothing of this meeting.

MACHEATH    Business cannot go on without him. He is a man who knows the world, and is a necessary agent to us. We have had a slight difference, and till it is accommodated I shall be obliged to keep out of his way. Any private dispute of mine shall be of no ill

consequence to my friends. You must continue to act under his direction, for the moment we break loose from him, our gang is ruined.

MATT As a bawd to a whore, I grant you, he is to us of great convenience.

MACHEATH Make him believe I have quitted the gang, which I can never do but with life. At our private quarters I will continue to meet you. A week or so will probably reconcile us.

MATT Your instructions shall be observed. 'Tis now high time for us to repair to our several duties; so till the evening at our quarters in Moorfields<sup>7</sup> we bid you farewell.

MACHEATH I shall wish myself with you. Success attend you. [*Sits down melancholy at the table.*]

AIR 20. March in *Rinaldo*,<sup>8</sup> with drums and trumpets

MATT *Let us take the road.  
Hark I hear the sound of coaches!  
The hour of attack approaches,  
To your arms, brave boys, and load.  
See the ball I hold!  
Let the chemists<sup>9</sup> toil like asses,  
Our fire their fire surpasses,  
And turns all our lead to gold.*

[*The gang, ranged in the front of the stage, load their pistols, and stick them under their girdles; then go off singing the first part in chorus.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 7: A district known as a "seminary of vice." [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Opera by Handel. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Alchemists.[Return to reference 9](#)

### SCENE 3

#### MACHEATH

What a fool is a fond wench! Polly is most confoundedly bit.<sup>1</sup> I love the sex. And a man who loves money might as well be contented with one guinea, as I with one woman. The town perhaps hath been as much obliged to me for recruiting it with free-hearted ladies, as to any recruiting officer in the army. If it were not for us and the other gentlemen of the sword, Drury Lane<sup>2</sup> would be uninhabited.

AIR 21. Would you have a young virgin

*If the heart of a man is depressed with cares,  
The mist is dispelled when a woman appears;  
Like the notes of a fiddle, she sweetly, sweetly  
Raises the spirits, and charms our ears,  
Roses and lilies her cheeks disclose,  
But her ripe lips are more sweet than those.  
Press her,  
Caress her,  
With blisses,  
Her kisses  
Dissolve us in pleasure, and soft repose.*

I must have women. There is nothing unbends the mind like them. Money is not so strong a cordial for the time. Drawer! [*Enter DRAWER.*] Is the porter gone for all the ladies, according to my directions?

DRAWER I expect him back every minute. But you know, sir, you sent him as far as Hockley in the Hole, for three of the ladies, for one in Vinegar Yard, and for the rest of them somewhere about Lewkner's Lane. Sure some of them are below, for I hear the bar bell. As they come I will show them up. Coming, coming.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Taken in. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Associated with sex workers. [Return to reference 2](#)



## SCENE 4

**MACHEATH, MRS. COAXER, DOLLY TRULL, MRS. VIXEN, BETTY DOXY, JENNY DIVER, MRS. SLAMMEKIN, SUKY TAWDRY, *and* MOLLY BRAZEN**

MACHEATH    Dear Mrs. Coaxer, you are welcome. You look charmingly today. I hope you don't want the repairs of quality, and lay on paint.<sup>3</sup> Dolly Trull! Kiss me, you slut; are you as amorous as ever, hussy? You are always so taken up with stealing hearts, that you don't allow yourself time to steal anything else. Ah Dolly, thou wilt ever be a coquette! Mrs. Vixen, I'm yours, I always loved a woman of wit and spirit; they make charming mistresses, but plaguey wives. Betty Doxy! Come hither, hussy. Do you drink as hard as ever? You had better stick to good wholesome beer; for in troth, Betty, strong waters<sup>4</sup> will in time ruin your constitution. You should leave those to your betters. What! and my pretty Jenny Diver too! As prim and demure as ever! There is not any prude, though ever so high bred, hath a more sanctified look, with a more mischievous heart. Ah! Thou art a dear artful hypocrite. Mrs. Slammekin! As careless and genteel as ever! All you fine ladies, who know your own beauty, affect an undress.<sup>5</sup> But see, here's Suky Tawdry come to contradict what I was saying. Everything she gets one way she lays out upon her back. Why, Suky, you must keep at least a dozen tallymen.<sup>6</sup> Molly Brazen! [*She kisses him.*] That's well done. I love a free-hearted wench. Thou hast a most agreeable assurance, girl, and art as willing as a turtle. But hark! I hear music. The harper is at the door. "If music be the food of love, play on."<sup>7</sup> E'er you seat yourselves, ladies, what think you of a dance? Come in. [*Enter HARPER.*] Play the French tune that Mrs. Slammekin was so fond of.

*[A dance a la ronde in the French manner; near the end of it this song and chorus.]*

MACHEATH    *Youth's the season made for joys,  
Love is then our duty,  
She alone who that employs,  
Well deserves her beauty.  
Let's be gay,  
While we may,  
Beauty's a flower despised in decay.*

CHORUS       *Youth's the season etc.*

MACHEATH   *Let us drink and sport today,  
Ours is not tomorrow.  
Love with youth flies swift away,  
Age is nought but sorrow.  
Dance and sing,  
Time's on the wing,  
Life never knows the return of spring.*

CHORUS       *Let us drink etc.*

MACHEATH    Now, pray ladies, take your places. Here, fellow. [*Pays the HARPER.*] Bid the drawer bring us more wine. [*Exit HARPER.*] If any of the ladies choose gin, I hope they will be so free to call for it.

JENNY        You look as if you meant me. Wine is strong enough for me. Indeed, sir, I never drink strong waters, but when I have the colic.

MACHEATH    Just the excuse of the fine ladies! Why, a lady of quality is never without the colic. I hope, Mrs. Coaxer, you have had good success of late in your visits among the mercers.<sup>8</sup>

MRS. COAXER   We have so many interlopers.<sup>9</sup> Yet with industry, one may still have a little picking. I carried a silver flowered lute string and a piece of black padesoy<sup>1</sup> to Mr. Peachum's lock but last week.

MRS. VIXEN    There's Molly Brazen hath the ogle of a rattlesnake. She riveted a linen draper's eye so fast upon her that he was nicked of three pieces of cambric before he could look off.

MOLLY BRAZEN   Oh dear madam! But sure nothing can come up to your handling of laces! And then you have such a sweet deluding

tongue. To cheat a man is nothing; but the woman must have fine parts indeed who cheats a woman!

MRS. VIXEN     Lace, madam, lies in a small compass, and is of easy conveyance. But you are apt, madam, to think too well of your friends.

MRS. COAXER     If any woman hath more art than another, to be sure, 'tis Jenny Diver. Though her fellow be never so agreeable, she can pick his pocket as coolly, as if money were her only pleasure. Now that is a command of the passions uncommon in a woman!

JENNY     I never go to the tavern with a man, but in the view of business. I have other hours, and other sort of men, for my pleasure. But had I your address,<sup>2</sup> madam—

MACHEATH     Have done with your compliments, ladies; and drink about. You are not so fond of me, Jenny, as you use to be.

JENNY     'Tis not convenient, sir, to show my fondness among so many rivals. 'Tis your own choice, and not the warmth of my inclination, that will determine you.

AIR 23.     All in a misty morning

*Before the barn door crowing,  
The cock by hens attended,  
His eyes around him throwing,  
Stands for a while suspended.  
Then one he singles from the crew,  
And cheers the happy hen;  
With how do you do, and how do you do,  
And how do you do again.*

MACHEATH     Ah Jenny! Thou art a dear slut.

DOLLY     Pray, madam, were you ever in keeping?<sup>3</sup>

SUKY     I hope, madam, I ha'nt been so long upon the town, but I have met with some good fortune as well as my neighbors.

DOLLY     Pardon me, madam, I meant no harm by the question; 'twas only in the way of conversation.

SUKY     Indeed, madam, if I had not been a fool, I might have lived very handsomely with my last friend. But upon his missing five guineas, he turned me off. Now I never suspected he had counted them.

MRS. SLAMMEKIN     Who do you look upon, madam, as your best sort of keepers?

DOLLY     That, madam, is thereafter as they be.<sup>4</sup>

MRS. SLAMMEKIN     I, madam, was once kept by a Jew; and bating<sup>5</sup> their religion, to women they are a good sort of people.

SUKY     Now for my part, I own I like an old fellow, for we always make them pay for what they can't do.

MRS. VIXEN     A spruce prentice, let me tell you, ladies, is no ill thing, they bleed<sup>6</sup> freely. I have sent at least two or three dozen of them in my time to the plantations.<sup>7</sup>

JENNY     But to be sure, sir, with so much good fortune as you have had upon the road, you must be grown immensely rich.

MACHEATH     The road, indeed, hath done me justice, but the gaming table hath been my ruin.

AIR 24.     When once I lay with another man's wife

JENNY     *The gamesters and lawyers are jugglers<sup>8</sup> alike,  
If they meddle your all is in danger.  
Like gypsies, if once they can finger a souse,<sup>9</sup>  
Your pockets they pick, and they pilfer your house,  
And give your estate to a stranger.*

A man of courage should never put anything to the risk but his life. These are the tools of a man of honor. Cards and dice are only fit for cowardly cheats, who prey upon their friends. [*She takes up his pistol. SUKY takes up the other.*]

SUKY     This, sir, is fitter for your hand. Besides your loss of money, 'tis a loss to the ladies. Gaming takes you off from women. How fond could I be of you! But before company, 'tis ill bred.

MACHEATH    Wanton hussies!

JENNY    I must and will have a kiss to give my wine a zest.

*[ They take him about the neck, and make signs to PEACHUM and the constables, who rush in upon him.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Cosmetics. "Quality": women of high social position.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Spirits.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Prefer casual clothes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Suppliers of clothes on credit.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The opening line of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dealers in fabrics.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, competitors in thievery.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Expensive silk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adroitness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A kept mistress.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Depends on their behavior.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Except for.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spend.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The colonies, where convicts were transported.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Tricksters.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A negligible coin.[Return to reference 9](#)

## SCENE 5

### ***To them, PEACHUM and constables.***

PEACHUM I seize you, sir, as my prisoner.

MACHEATH Was this well done, Jenny? Women are decoy ducks; who can trust them! Beasts, jades, jilts, harpies, furies, whores!

PEACHUM Your case, Mr. Macheath, is not particular. The greatest heroes have been ruined by women. But, to do them justice, I must own they are a pretty sort of creatures, if we could trust them. You must now, sir, take your leave of the ladies, and if they have a mind to make you a visit, they will be sure to find you at home. The gentleman, ladies, lodges in Newgate. Constables, wait upon the Captain to his lodgings.

AIR 25. When first I laid siege to my Chloris

MACHEATH *At the tree I shall suffer with pleasure,  
At the tree I shall suffer with pleasure,  
Let me go where I will,  
In all kinds of ill,  
I shall find no such Furies as these are.*

PEACHUM Ladies, I'll take care the reckoning shall be discharged.  
[Exit MACHEATH, guarded, with PEACHUM and the constables.]

## SCENE 6

### *The women remain.*

MRS. VIXEN    Look ye, Mrs. Jenny, though Mr. Peachum may have made a private bargain with you and Suky Tawdry for betraying the Captain, as we were all assisting, we ought all to share alike.

MRS. COAXER    I think Mr. Peachum, after so long an acquaintance, might have trusted me as well as Jenny Diver.

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    I am sure at least three men of his hanging, and in a year's time too (if he did me justice), should be set down to my account.

DOLLY    Mrs. Slammekin, that is not fair. For you know one of them was taken in bed with me.

JENNY    As far as a bowl of punch or a treat, I believe Mrs. Suky will join with me. As for anything else, ladies, you cannot in conscience expect it.

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    Dear madam—

DOLLY    I would not for the world<sup>1</sup>—

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    'Tis impossible for me—

DOLLY    As I hope to be saved, madam—

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    Nay, then I must stay here all night—

DOLLY    Since you command me.

*[Exeunt with great ceremony.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: With exaggerated politeness, each gestures for the other to leave the room first. [Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 7 *Newgate*

**LOCKIT, *turnkeys*, MACHEATH, *constables***

LOCKIT    Noble Captain, you are welcome. You have not been a lodger of mine this year and half. You know the custom, sir.

Garnish,<sup>2</sup> Captain, garnish. Hand me down those fetters there.

MACHEATH    Those, Mr. Lockit, seem to be the heaviest of the whole set. With your leave, I should like the further pair better.

LOCKIT    Look ye, Captain, we know what is fittest for our prisoners. When a gentleman uses me with civility, I always do the best I can to please him. Hand them down I say. We have them of all prices, from one guinea to ten, and 'tis fitting every gentleman should please himself.

MACHEATH    I understand you, sir. [*Gives money.*] The fees here are so many, and so exorbitant, that few fortunes can bear the expense of getting off handsomely, or of dying like a gentleman.

LOCKIT    Those, I see, will fit the Captain better. Take down the further pair. Do but examine them, sir. Never was better work. How genteelly they are made! They will sit as easy as a glove, and the nicest man in England might not be ashamed to wear them. [*He puts on the chains.*] If I had the best gentleman in the land in my custody, I could not equip him more handsomely. And so, sir, I now leave you to your private meditations.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Jailer's fee or bribe. [Return to reference 2](#)



## SCENE 8

### MACHEATH

AIR 26. Courtiers, courtiers think it no harm

*Man may escape from rope and gun;  
Nay, some have outlived the doctor's pill;  
Who takes a woman must he undone,  
That basilisk<sup>3</sup> is sure to kill.  
The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,  
So he that tastes woman, woman, woman,  
He that tastes woman, ruin meets.*

To what a woeful plight have I brought myself! Here must I (all day long, 'till I am hanged) be confined to hear the reproaches of a wench who lays her ruin at my door. I am in the custody of her father, and to be sure if he knows of the matter, I shall have a fine time on't betwixt this and my execution. But I promised the wench marriage. What signifies a promise to a woman? Does not man in marriage itself promise a hundred things that he never means to perform? Do all we can, women will believe us, for they look upon a promise as an excuse for following their own inclinations. But here comes Lucy, and I cannot get from her. Would I were deaf!

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Mythical reptile whose breath and look were fatal. [Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 9

### MACHEATH, LUCY

LUCY    You base man you! How can you look me in the face after what hath passed between us? See here, perfidious wretch, how I am forced to bear about the load of infamy<sup>4</sup> you have laid upon me. O Macheath! Thou hast robbed me of my quiet. To see thee tortured would give me pleasure!

AIR 27.    A lovely lass to a friar came

*Thus when a good huswife sees a rat  
In her trap in the morning taken,  
With pleasure her heart goes pit a pat,  
In revenge for her loss of bacon.  
Then she throws him  
To the dog or cat,  
To be worried, crushed and shaken.*

MACHEATH    Have you no bowels,<sup>5</sup> no tenderness, my dear Lucy, to see a husband in these circumstances?

LUCY    A husband!

MACHEATH    In every respect but the form, and that, my dear, may be said over us at any time. Friends should not insist upon ceremonies. From a man of honor, his word is as good as his bond.

LUCY    'Tis the pleasure of all you fine men to insult the women you have ruined.

AIR 28.    'Twas when the sea was roaring

*How cruel are the traitors,*

*Who lie and swear in jest,  
To cheat unguarded creatures  
Of virtue, fame, and rest!  
Whoever steals a shilling,  
Through shame the guilt conceals;  
In love the perjured villain  
With boasts the theft reveals.*

MACHEATH The very first opportunity, my dear (have but patience),  
you shall be my wife in whatever manner you please.

LUCY Insinuating monster! And so you think I know nothing of the  
affair of Miss Polly Peachum. I could tear thy eyes out!

MACHEATH Sure Lucy, you can't be such a fool as to be jealous of  
Polly!

LUCY Are you not married to her, you brute, you?

MACHEATH Married! Very good. The wench gives it out only to vex  
thee, and to ruin me in thy good opinion. 'Tis true, I go to the  
house; I chat with the girl, I kiss her, I say a thousand things to  
her (as all gentlemen do) that mean nothing, to divert myself; and  
now the silly jade hath set it about that I am married to her, to let  
me know what she would be at. Indeed, my dear Lucy, these  
violent passions may be of ill consequence to a woman in your  
condition.

LUCY Come, come, Captain, for all your assurance, you know that  
Miss Polly hath put it out of your power to do me the justice you  
promised me.

MACHEATH A jealous woman believes everything her passion  
suggests. To convince you of my sincerity, if we can find the  
Ordinary,<sup>6</sup> I shall have no scruples of making you my wife; and I  
know the consequence of having two at a time.

LUCY That you are only to be hanged, and so get rid of them both.

MACHEATH I am ready, my dear Lucy, to give you satisfaction—if you  
think there is any in marriage. What can a man of honor say  
more?

LUCY So then it seems you are not married to Miss Polly.

MACHEATH    You know, Lucy, the girl is prodigiously conceited. No man can say a civil thing to her, but (like other fine ladies) her vanity makes her think he's her own for ever and ever.

AIR 29.    The sun had loosed his weary teams

*The first time at the looking-glass  
The mother sets her daughter,  
The image strikes the smiling lass  
With self-love ever after.  
Each time she looks, she, fonder grown,  
Thinks every charm grows stronger.  
But alas, vain maid, all eyes but your own  
Can see you are not younger.*

When women consider their own beauties, they are all alike unreasonable in their demands; for they expect their lovers should like them as long as they like themselves.

LUCY    Yonder is my father. Perhaps this way we may light upon the Ordinary, who shall try if you will be as good as your word. For I long to be made an honest woman.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Pregnancy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pity.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Chaplain.[Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 10

PEACHUM, LOCKIT *with an account book.*

LOCKIT In this last affair, Brother Peachum, we are agreed. You have consented to go halves in Macheath.

PEACHUM We shall never fall out about an execution. But as to that article, pray how stands our last year's account?

LOCKIT If you will run your eye over it, you'll find 'tis fair and clearly stated.

PEACHUM This long arrear<sup>z</sup> of the Government is very hard upon us! Can it be expected that we should hang our acquaintance for nothing, when our betters will hardly save theirs without being paid for it. Unless the people in employment pay better, I promise them for the future, I shall let other rogues live besides their own.

LOCKIT Perhaps, brother, they are afraid these matters may be carried too far. We are treated too by them with contempt, as if our profession were not reputable.

PEACHUM In one respect indeed, our employment may be reckoned dishonest, because, like great statesmen, we encourage those who betray their friends.

LOCKIT Such language, brother, anywhere else, might turn to your prejudice. Learn to be more guarded, I beg you.

AIR 30. How happy are we

*When you censure the age,  
Be cautious and sage,  
Lest the courtiers offended should be:  
If you mention vice or bribe,  
'Tis so pat to all the tribe,  
Each cries, "That was leveled at me!"*

PEACHUM Here's poor Ned Clincher's name, I see. Sure, brother Lockit, there was a little unfair proceeding in Ned's case; for he told me in the condemned hold,<sup>8</sup> that for value received, you had promised him a Session or two longer without molestation.

LOCKIT Mr. Peachum, this is the first time my honor was ever called in question.

PEACHUM Business is at an end if once we act dishonorably.

LOCKIT Who accuses me?

PEACHUM You are warm, brother.

LOCKIT He that attacks my honor, attacks my livelihood. And this usage, sir, is not to be born.

PEACHUM Since you provoke me to speak, I must tell you too that Mrs. Coaxer charges you with defrauding her of her information money, for the apprehending of curl-pated Hugh. Indeed, indeed, brother, we must punctually pay our spies, or we shall have no information.

LOCKIT Is this language to me, sirrah, who have saved you from the gallows, sirrah! [*Collaring each other.*]

PEACHUM If I am hanged, it shall be for ridding the world of an arrant rascal.

LOCKIT This hand shall do the office of the halter<sup>9</sup> you deserve, and throttle you—you dog!

PEACHUM Brother, brother, we are both in the wrong. We shall be both losers in the dispute—for you know we have it in our power to hang each other. You should not be so passionate.

LOCKIT Nor you so provoking.

PEACHUM 'Tis our mutual interest; 'tis for the interest of the world we should agree. If I said anything, brother, to the prejudice of your character, I ask pardon.

LOCKIT Brother Peachum, I can forgive as well as resent. Give me your hand. Suspicion does not become a friend.

PEACHUM I only meant to give you occasion to justify yourself. But I must now step home, for I expect the gentleman about this

snuffbox, that Filch nimmed<sup>1</sup> two nights ago in the park. I appointed him at this hour.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Overdue reward money.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Prison cell.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Moose.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stole.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 11

### LOCKIT, LUCY

LOCKIT    Whence come you, hussy?

LUCY    My tears might answer that question.

LOCKIT    You have then been whimpering and fondling, like a spaniel,  
            over the fellow that hath abused you.

LUCY    One can't help love; one can't cure it. 'Tis not in my power to  
            obey you, and hate him.

LOCKIT    Learn to bear your husband's death like a reasonable  
            woman. 'Tis not the fashion, nowadays, so much as to affect  
            sorrow upon these occasions. No woman would ever marry, if she  
            had not the chance of mortality for a release. Act like a woman of  
            spirit, hussy, and thank your father for what he is doing.

AIR 31.    Of a noble race was Shenkin

LUCY        *Is then his fate decreed, sir?  
                Such a man can I think of quitting?  
                When first we met, so moves me yet,  
                Oh see how my heart is splitting!*

LOCKIT    Look ye, Lucy, there is no saving him. So I think you must  
            even do like other widows: buy yourself weeds,<sup>2</sup> and be cheerful.

AIR 32.    You'll think e'er many days ensue

*You'll think e'er many days ensue  
            This sentence not severe;  
I hang your husband, child, 'tis true,  
            But with him hang your care.  
            Twang dang dillo dee.*



Like a good wife, go moan over your dying husband. That, child, is your duty. Consider, girl, you can't have the man and the money too. So make yourself as easy as you can, by getting all you can from him.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Mourning clothes. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 12

### LUCY, MACHEATH

LUCY    Though the Ordinary was out of the way today, I hope; my dear, you will, upon the first opportunity, quiet my scruples. Oh sir! My father's hard heart is not to be softened, and I am in the utmost despair.

MACHEATH    But if I could raise a small sum—would not twenty guineas, think you, move him? Of all the arguments in the way of business, the perquisite<sup>3</sup> is the most prevailing. Your father's perquisites for the escape of prisoners must amount to a considerable sum in the year. Money well timed, and properly applied, will do any thing.

AIR 33.    London ladies

*If you at an office solicit your due,  
And would not have matters neglected,  
You must quicken the clerk with the perquisite too,  
To do what his duty directed.  
Or would you the frowns of a lady prevent,  
She too has this palpable failing,  
The perquisite softens her into consent;  
That reason with all is prevailing.*

LUCY    What love or money can do shall be done; for all my comfort depends upon your safety.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Tip or bribe. [Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 13

LUCY, MACHEATH, POLLY

POLLY Where is my dear husband? Was a rope ever intended for this neck! Oh let me throw my arms about it, and throttle thee with love! Why dost thou turn away from me? 'Tis thy Polly! 'Tis thy wife!

MACHEATH Was ever such an unfortunate rascal as I am!

LUCY Was there ever such another villain!

POLLY Oh Macheath! Was it for this we parted? Taken! Imprisoned! Tried! Hanged! Cruel reflection! I'll stay with thee 'till death. No force shall tear thy dear wife from thee now.—What means my love? Not one kind word! Not one kind look! Think what thy Polly suffers to see thee in this condition.

AIR 34. All in the downs

*Thus when the swallow, seeking prey,  
Within the sash<sup>4</sup> is closely pent,  
His consort, with bemoaning lay,  
Without sits pining for th' event.  
Her chattering lovers all around her skim;  
She heeds them not (poor bird!), her soul's with him.*

MACHEATH [*Aside.*] I must disown her. The wench is distracted.

LUCY Am I then bilked of my virtue? Can I have no reparation?  
Sure men were born to lie, and women to believe them! Oh villain!  
Villain!

POLLY Am I not thy wife? Thy neglect of me, thy aversion to me,  
too severely proves it. Look on me. Tell me, am I not thy wife?

LUCY Perfidious wretch!

POLLY Barbarous husband!

LUCY Hadst thou been hanged five months ago, I had been happy.

POLLY And I too. If you had been kind to me 'till death, it would not have vexed me—and that's no very unreasonable request (though from a wife) to a man who hath not above seven or eight days to live.

LUCY Art thou then married to another? Hast thou two wives, monster?

MACHEATH If women's tongues can cease for an answer, hear me.

LUCY I won't. Flesh and blood can't bear my usage.

POLLY Shall I not claim my own? Justice bids me speak.

AIR 35. Have you heard of a frolicsome ditty

MACHEATH *How happy could I be with either,  
Were t'other dear charmer away!  
But while you thus tease me together,  
To neither a word will I say,  
But tol de rol, etc.*

POLLY Sure, my dear, there ought to be some preference shown to a wife. At least she may claim the appearance of it. He must be distracted with his misfortunes, or he could not use me thus!

LUCY Oh villain, villain! Thou hast deceived me. I could even inform against thee with pleasure. Not a prude wishes more heartily to have facts<sup>5</sup> against her intimate acquaintance, than I now wish to have facts against thee. I would have her satisfaction, and they should all out.

AIR 36. Irish trot

POLLY *I'm bubbled.*<sup>6</sup>

LUCY *I'm bubbled.*

POLLY *O how I am troubled!*

LUCY *Bamboozled, and bit!*

POLLY *My distresses are doubled.*

LUCY     *When you come to the tree, should the hangman refuse,  
              These fingers, with pleasure, could fasten the noose.*

POLLY    *I'm bubbled, etc.*

MACHEATH    Be pacified, my dear Lucy. This is all a fetch<sup>2</sup> of Polly's, to make me desperate with you in case I get off. If I am hanged, she would fain have the credit of being thought my widow. Really, Polly, this is no time for a dispute of this sort; for whenever you are talking of marriage, I am thinking of hanging.

POLLY    And hast thou the heart to persist in disowning me?

MACHEATH    And hast thou the heart to persist in persuading me that I am married? Why, Polly, dost thou seek to aggravate my misfortunes?

LUCY     Really, Miss Peachum, you but expose yourself. Besides, 'tis barbarous in you to worry a gentleman in his circumstances.

AIR 37.

POLLY     *Cease your funning;  
              Force or cunning  
              Never shall my heart trapan.<sup>8</sup>  
              All these sallies  
              Are but malice  
              To seduce my constant man.  
              'Tis most certain,  
              By their flirting  
              Women oft have envy shown;  
              Pleased to ruin  
              Others wooing,  
              Never happy in their own!*

Decency, madam, methinks might teach you to behave yourself with some reserve with the husband, while his wife is present.

MACHEATH    But seriously, Polly, this is carrying the joke a little too far.

LUCY If you are determined, madam, to raise a disturbance in the prison, I shall be obliged to send for the turnkey to show you the door. I am sorry, madam, you force me to be so ill-bred.

POLLY Give me leave to tell you, madam, these forward airs don't become you in the least, madam. And my duty, madam, obliges me to stay with my husband, madam.

AIR 38. Good morrow, gossip Joan

LUCY *Why how now, Madam Flirt?  
If you thus must chatter;  
And are for flinging dirt,  
Let's try who best can spatter,  
Madam Flirt!*

POLLY *Why how now, saucy jade?  
Sure the wench is tipsy!*  
[To him.] *How can you see me made  
The scoff of such a gipsy?*  
[To her.] *Saucy jade!*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Window.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Incriminating information.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cheated.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ruse.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Beguile.[Return to reference 8](#)

## SCENE 14

LUCY, MACHEATH, POLLY, PEACHUM

PEACHUM    Where's my wench? Ah hussy! Hussy! Come you home, you slut; and when your fellow is hanged, hang yourself, to make your family some amends.

POLLY    Dear, dear father, do not tear me from him. I must speak; I have more to say to him—Oh! Twist thy fetters about me, that he may not haul me from thee!

PEACHUM    Sure all women are alike! If ever they commit the folly, they are sure to commit another by exposing themselves. Away, not a word more. You are my prisoner now, hussy.

AIR 39.    Irish howl

POLLY    *No power on earth can e'er divide  
The knot that sacred love hath tied.  
When parents draw against our mind,  
The true-love's knot they faster bind.  
Oh, oh ray, oh Amborah—oh, oh, etc.*

[*Holding* MACHEATH, PEACHUM *pulling her.*]

## SCENE 15

### LUCY, MACHEATH

MACHEATH I am naturally compassionate, wife, so that I could not use the wench as she deserved; which made you at first suspect there was something in what she said.

LUCY Indeed, my dear, I was strangely puzzled.

MACHEATH If that had been the case, her father would never have brought me into this circumstance. No, Lucy, I had rather die than be false to thee.

LUCY How happy am I, if you say this from your heart! For I love thee so, that I could sooner bear to see thee hanged than in the arms of another.

MACHEATH But couldst thou bear to see me hanged?

LUCY O Macheath, I can never live to see that day.

MACHEATH You see, Lucy, in the account of love you are in my debt, and you must now be convinced that I rather choose to die than be another's. Make me, if possible, love thee more, and let me owe my life to thee. If you refuse to assist me, Peachum and your father will immediately put me beyond all means of escape.

LUCY My father, I know, hath been drinking hard with the prisoners, and I fancy he is now taking his nap in his own room. If I can procure the keys, shall I go off with thee, my dear?

MACHEATH If we are together, 'twill be impossible to lie concealed. As soon as the search begins to be a little cool, I will send to thee. 'Till then my heart is thy prisoner.

LUCY Come then, my dear husband, owe thy life to me. And though you love me not, be grateful. But that Polly runs in my head strangely.

MACHEATH A moment of time may make us unhappy forever.

AIR 40. The lass of Patie's mill

LUCY *I like the fox shall grieve,*



*Whose mate hath left her side,  
Whom hounds, from morn to eve,  
Chase o'er the country wide.  
Where can my lover hide?  
Where cheat the weary pack?  
If love be not his guide,  
He never will come back!*

### ***Act 3***

## SCENE 1 *Newgate*

### LOCKIT, LUCY

LOCKIT To be sure, wench, you must have been aiding and abetting to help him to this escape.

LUCY Sir, here hath been Peachum and his daughter Polly, and to be sure they know the ways of Newgate as well as if they had been born and bred in the place all their lives. Why must all your suspicion light upon me?

LOCKIT Lucy, Lucy, I will have none of these shuffling<sup>9</sup> answers.

LUCY Well then—if I know anything of him I wish I may be burnt!

LOCKIT Keep your temper, Lucy, or I shall pronounce you guilty.

LUCY Keep yours, sir. I do wish I may be burnt. I do. And what can I say more to convince you?

LOCKIT Did he tip handsomely? How much did he come down with? Come hussy, don't cheat your father, and I shall not be angry with you. Perhaps you have made a better bargain with him than I could have done. How much, my good girl?

LUCY You know, sir, I am fond of him, and would have given money to have kept him with me.

LOCKIT Ah Lucy! Thy education might have put thee more upon thy guard, for a girl in the bar of an ale house is always besieged.

LUCY Dear sir, mention not my education, for 'twas to that I owe my ruin.

AIR 41. If love's a sweet passion

*When young at the bar you first taught me to score,  
And bid me be free of my lips, and no more,  
I was kissed by the parson, the squire, and the sot;  
When the guest was departed, the kiss was forgot.  
But his kiss was so sweet, and so closely he pressed,  
That I languished and pined 'till I granted the rest.*

If you can forgive me, sir, I will make a fair confession, for to be sure he hath been a most barbarous villain to me.

LOCKIT And so you have let him escape, hussy, have you?

LUCY When a woman loves, a kind look, a tender word can persuade her to anything. And I could ask no other bribe.

LOCKIT Thou wilt always be a vulgar slut, Lucy. If you would not be looked upon as a fool, you should never do anything but upon the foot of interest. Those that act otherwise are their own bubbles.<sup>1</sup>

LUCY But love, sir, is a misfortune that may happen to the most discreet woman, and in love we are all fools alike. Notwithstanding all he swore, I am now fully convinced that Polly Peachum is actually his wife. Did I let him escape (fool that I was!) to go to her? Polly will wheedle herself into his money, and then Peachum will hang him, and cheat us both.

LOCKIT So I am to be ruined because, forsooth, you must be in love! A very pretty excuse!

LUCY I could murder that impudent happy strumpet. I gave him his life, and that creature enjoys the sweets of it. Ungrateful Macheath!

AIR 42. South Sea ballad

*My love is all madness and folly,  
Alone I lie,  
Toss, tumble, and cry,  
What a happy creature is Polly!  
Was e'er such a wretch as I!  
With rage I redden like scarlet,  
That my dear inconstant varlet,  
Stark blind to my charms,  
Is lost in the arms  
Of that jilt, that inveigling harlot!  
Stark blind to my charms,  
Is lost in the arms*

*Of that jilt, that inveigling harlot!  
This, this my resentment alarms.*

LOCKIT    And so, after all this mischief, I must stay here to be entertained with your caterwauling, Mistress Puss! Out of my sight, wanton strumpet! You shall fast and mortify yourself into reason, with now and then a little handsome discipline to bring you to your senses. Go.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 9: Evasive. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dupes. [Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 2

### LOCKIT

Peachum then intends to outwit me in this affair; but I'll be even with him. The dog is leaky<sup>2</sup> in his liquor, so I'll ply him that way, get the secret from him, and turn this affair to my own advantage. Lions, wolves, and vultures don't live together in herds, droves, or flocks. Of all animals of prey, man is the only sociable one. Every one of us preys upon his neighbor, and yet we herd together. Peachum is my companion, my friend. According to the custom of the world, indeed, he may quote thousands of precedents for cheating me. And shall not I make use of the privilege of friendship to make him a return?

AIR 43.    Packington's pound

*Thus gamesters united in friendship are found,  
Though they know that their industry all is a cheat;  
They flock to their prey at the dice-box's sound,  
And join to promote one another's deceit.  
But if by mishap  
They fail of a chap,<sup>3</sup>  
To keep in their hands, they each other entrap.  
Like pikes, lank with hunger, who miss of their ends,  
They bite their companions, and prey on their  
friends.*

Now, Peachum, you and I, like honest tradesmen, are to have a fair trial which of us two can overreach the other. Lucy! [*Enter LUCY.*] Are there any of Peachum's people now in the house?

LUCY    Filch, sir, is drinking a quartern<sup>4</sup> of strong waters in the next room with Black Moll.

LOCKIT    Bid him come to me.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A blabbermouth. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Customer or sucker. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quarter of a pint. [Return to reference 4](#)

### SCENE 3

#### LOCKIT, FILCH

LOCKIT    Why, boy, thou lookest as if thou wert half starved, like a shotten herring.<sup>5</sup>

FILCH    One had need have the constitution of a horse to go through the business. Since the favorite child-getter<sup>6</sup> was disabled by a mishap, I have picked up a little money by helping the ladies to a pregnancy against their being called down to sentence. But if a man cannot get an honest livelihood any easier way, I am sure 'tis what I can't undertake for another Session.

LOCKIT    Truly, if that great man should tip off,<sup>7</sup> 'twould be an irreparable loss. The vigor and prowess of a knight-errant never saved half the ladies in distress that he hath done. But, boy, can'st thou tell me where thy master is to be found?

FILCH    At his lock, sir, at the Crooked Billet.

LOCKIT    Very well. I have nothing more with you. [*Exit* FILCH.] I'll go to him there, for I have many important affairs to settle with him; and in the way of those transactions, I'll artfully get into his secret. So that Macheath shall not remain a day longer out of my clutches.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: A herring exhausted by spawning. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stud. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Die. [Return to reference 7](#)



## SCENE 4 *A gaming-house*

MACHEATH *in a fine tarnished coat*, BEN BUDGE, MATT OF THE MINT.

MACHEATH I am sorry, gentlemen, the road was so barren of money. When my friends are in difficulties, I am always glad that my fortune can be serviceable to them. [*Gives them money.*] You see, gentlemen, I am not a mere court friend, who professes everything and will do nothing.

AIR 44. Lillibullero

*The modes of the court so common are grown,  
That a true friend can hardly be met;  
Friendship for interest is but a loan,  
Which they let out for what they can get.  
'Tis true, you find  
Some friends so kind,  
Who will give you good counsel themselves to  
defend.  
In sorrowful ditty,  
They promise, they pity,  
But shift you for money, from friend to friend.*

But we, gentlemen, have still honor enough to break through the corruptions of the world. And while I can serve you, you may command me.

BEN It grieves my heart that so generous a man should be involved in such difficulties, as oblige him to live with such ill company, and herd with gamesters.

MATT See the partiality of mankind! One man may steal a horse, better than another look over a hedge.<sup>8</sup> Of all mechanics,<sup>9</sup> of all servile handicraftsmen, a gamester is the vilest. But yet, as many

of the quality are of the profession, he is admitted amongst the politest company. I wonder we are not more respected.

MACHEATH There will be deep play tonight at Marybone, and consequently money may be picked up upon the road. Meet me there, and I'll give you the hint who is worth setting.<sup>1</sup>

MATT The fellow with a brown coat with a narrow gold binding, I am told, is never without money.

MACHEATH What do you mean, Matt? Sure you will not think of meddling with him! He's a good honest kind of a fellow, and one of us.

BEN To be sure, sir, we will put ourselves under your direction.

MACHEATH Have an eye upon the moneylenders. A rouleau,<sup>2</sup> or two, would prove a pretty sort of an expedition. I hate extortion.

MATT Those rouleaus are very pretty things. I hate your bank bills; there is such a hazard in putting them off.<sup>3</sup>

MACHEATH There is a certain man of distinction, who in his time hath nicked me out of a great deal of the ready.<sup>4</sup> He is in my cash,<sup>5</sup> Ben. I'll point him out to you this evening, and you shall draw upon him for the debt. The company are met; I hear the dicebox in the other room. So, gentlemen, your servant. You'll meet me at Marybone.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, a mere look at a horse can get some people in trouble.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Workers who use their hands.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Robbing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Roll of gold coins.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Converting them into money.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Money.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: He owes me.[Return to reference 5](#)

## SCENE 5 *Peachum's Lock*

***A table with wine, brandy, pipes, and tobacco.***

PEACHUM, LOCKIT

LOCKIT The Coronation account,<sup>6</sup> brother Peachum, is of so intricate a nature, that I believe it will never be settled.

PEACHUM It consists indeed of a great variety of articles. It was worth to our people, in fees of different kinds, above ten installments.<sup>7</sup> This is part of the account, brother, that lies open before us.

LOCKIT A lady's tail<sup>8</sup>—of rich brocade—that, I see, is disposed of.

PEACHUM To Mrs. Diana Trapes, the tallywoman, and she will make a good hand on't in shoes and slippers, to trick out young ladies, upon their going into keeping.<sup>9</sup>

LOCKIT But I don't see any article of the jewels.

PEACHUM Those are so well known, that they must be sent abroad. You'll find them entered under the article of exportation. As for the snuffboxes, watches, swords, etc., I thought it best to enter them under their several heads.

LOCKIT Seven and twenty women's pockets<sup>1</sup> complete, with the several things therein contained; all sealed, numbered, and entered.

PEACHUM But, brother, it is impossible for us now to enter upon this affair. We should have the whole day before us. Besides, the account of the last half year's plate<sup>2</sup> is in a book by itself, which lies at the other office.

LOCKIT Bring us then more liquor. Today shall be for pleasure, tomorrow for business. Ah brother, those daughters of ours are two slippery hussies. Keep a watchful eye upon Polly, and Macheath in a day or two shall be our own again.

AIR 45. Down in the North Country

*What gudgeons<sup>3</sup> are we men!  
Every woman's easy prey.  
Though we have felt the hook, again*

*We bite and they betray.*

*The bird that hath been trapped,  
When he hears his calling mate,  
To her he flies, again he's clapped  
Within the wiry grate.*

PEACHUM But what signifies catching the bird, if your daughter Lucy will set open the door of the cage?

LOCKIT If men were answerable for the follies and frailties of their wives and daughters, no friends could keep a good correspondence together for two days. This is unkind of you, brother; for among good friends, what they say or do goes for nothing.

*[Enter a SERVANT.]*

SERVANT Sir, here's Mrs. Diana Trapes wants to speak with you.

PEACHUM Shall we admit her, brother Lockit?

LOCKIT By all means. She's a good customer, and a fine-spoken woman. And a woman who drinks and talks so freely, will enliven the conversation.

PEACHUM Desire her to walk in.

*[Exit SERVANT.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Register of goods stolen during the coronation of George II (1727). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Public installations of the new lord mayor of London. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Train. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Becoming mistresses. [Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Purses worn around the waist.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Silver or gold utensils.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Minnows.[Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 6

### PEACHUM, LOCKIT, MRS. TRAPES

PEACHUM Dear Mrs. Dye, your servant. One may know by your kiss that your gin is excellent.

MRS. TRAPES I was always very curious<sup>4</sup> in my liquors.

LOCKIT There is no perfumed breath like it. I have been long acquainted with the flavor of those lips, han't I, Mrs. Dye?

MRS. TRAPES Fill it up. I take as large draughts of liquor, as I did of love. I hate a flincher in either.

AIR 46. A shepherd kept sheep

*In the days of my youth I could bill like a dove, fa,  
la, la, etc.*

*Like a sparrow at all times was ready for love, fa, la,  
la, etc.*

*The life of all mortals in kissing should pass,  
Lip to lip while we're young—then the lip to the  
glass, fa, etc.*

But now, Mr. Peachum, to our business. If you have blacks of any kind, brought in of late, mantoos<sup>5</sup>—velvet scarfs, petticoats—let it be what it will, I am your chap. For all my ladies are very fond of mourning.

PEACHUM Why, look ye, Mrs. Dye, you deal so hard with us that we can afford to give the gentlemen who venture their lives for the goods little or nothing.

MRS. TRAPES The hard times oblige me to go very near<sup>6</sup> in my dealing. To be sure, of late years I have been a great sufferer by the Parliament—three thousand pounds would hardly make me amends. The Act for destroying the Mint<sup>7</sup> was a severe cut upon our business. 'Till then, if a customer stepped out of the way, we

knew where to have her. No doubt you know Mrs. Coaxer. There's a wench now (till today) with a good suit of clothes of mine upon her back, and I could never set eyes upon her for three months together. Since the Act too against imprisonment for small sums,<sup>8</sup> my loss there too hath been very considerable, and it must be so, when a lady can borrow a handsome petticoat or a clean gown, and I not have the least hank<sup>9</sup> upon her! And o' my conscience, nowadays most ladies take a delight in cheating, when they can do it with safety.

PEACHUM     Madam, you had a handsome gold watch of us t'other day for seven guineas. Considering we must have our profit, to a gentleman upon the road, a gold watch will be scarce worth the taking.

MRS. TRAPES     Consider, Mr. Peachum, that watch was remarkable, and not of very safe sale. If you have any black velvet scarfs, they are a handsome winter wear, and take with most gentlemen who deal with my customers. 'Tis I that put the ladies upon a good foot. 'Tis not youth or beauty that fixes their price. The gentlemen always pay according to their dress, from half a crown to two guineas; and yet those hussies make nothing of bilking of me. Then too, allowing for accidents—I have eleven fine customers now down under the surgeon's hands. What with fees and other expenses, there are great goings-out, and no comings-in, and not a farthing to pay for at least a month's clothing. We run great risks, great risks indeed.

PEACHUM     As I remember, you said something just now of Mrs. Coaxer.

MRS. TRAPES     Yes, sir. To be sure I stripped her of a suit of my own clothes about two hours ago; and have left her as she should be, in her shift, with a lover of hers at my house. She called him upstairs, as he was going to Marybone in a hackney coach. And I hope, for her own sake and mine, she will persuade the Captain to redeem her, for the Captain is very generous to the ladies.

LOCKIT     What Captain?

MRS. TRAPES     He thought I did not know him. An intimate acquaintance of yours, Mr. Peachum. Only Captain Macheath—as fine as a lord.

PEACHUM     Tomorrow, dear Mrs. Dye, you shall set your own price upon any of the goods you like. We have at least half a dozen velvet scarfs, and all at your service. Will you give me leave to make you a present of this suit of night-clothes for your own wearing? But are you sure it is Captain Macheath?

MRS. TRAPES     Though he thinks I have forgot him, nobody knows him better. I have taken a great deal of the Captain's money in my time at second hand, for he always loved to have his ladies well dressed.

PEACHUM     Mr. Lockit and I have a little business with the Captain—you understand me—and we will satisfy you for Mrs. Coaxer's debt.

LOCKIT     Depend upon it. We will deal like men of honor.

MRS. TRAPES     I don't inquire after your affairs, so whatever happens, I wash my hands on't. It hath always been my maxim, that one friend should assist another. But if you please, I'll take one of the scarfs home with me. 'Tis always good to have something in hand.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Choosy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mantles or cloaks. "Blacks": mourning clothes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stingy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The status of the Mint district as a sanctuary for outlaws had been undermined by recent statutes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Previous to this act, someone could be arrested for owing any sum, however small.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hold.[Return to reference 9](#)



## SCENE 7 *Newgate*

LUCY

Jealousy, rage, love, and fear are at once tearing me to pieces.  
How I am weather-beaten and shattered with distresses!

AIR 47. One evening, having lost my way

*I'm like a skiff on the ocean tossed,  
Now high, now low, with each billow born,  
With her rudder broke, and her anchor lost,  
Deserted and all forlorn.  
While thus I lie rolling and tossing all night,  
That Polly lies sporting on seas of delight!  
Revenge, revenge, revenge,  
Shall appease my restless sprite.*

I have the ratsbane<sup>1</sup> ready. I run no risk, for I can lay her death upon the gin, and so many die of that naturally that I shall never be called in question. But say I were to be hanged—I never could be hanged for anything that would give me greater comfort than the poisoning that slut.

[*Enter* FILCH.]

FILCH Madam, here's our Miss Polly come to wait upon you.

LUCY Show her in.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Poison. [Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 8

### LUCY, POLLY

LUCY Dear madam, your servant. I hope you will pardon my passion when I was so happy to see you last. I was so overrun with the spleen<sup>2</sup> that I was perfectly out of myself. And really when one hath the spleen, everything is to be excused by a friend.

AIR 48. Now Roger, I'll tell thee, because thou'rt my son

*When a wife's in her pout,  
(As she's sometimes, no doubt!)  
The good husband as meek as a lamb,  
Her vapors<sup>3</sup> to still,  
First grants her her will,  
And the quieting draught is a dram.  
Poor man! And the quieting draught is a dram.*

I wish all our quarrels might have so comfortable a reconciliation.

POLLY I have no excuse for my own behavior, madam, but my misfortunes. And really, madam, I suffer too upon your account.

LUCY But, Miss Polly, in the way of friendship, will you give me leave to propose a glass of cordial to you?

POLLY Strong waters are apt to give me the headache. I hope, madam, you will excuse me.

LUCY Not the greatest lady in the land could have better in her closet,<sup>4</sup> for her own private drinking. You seem mighty low in spirits, my dear.

POLLY I am sorry, madam, my health will not allow me to accept of your offer. I should not have left you in the rude manner I did when we met last, madam, had not my papa hauled me away so unexpectedly. I was indeed somewhat provoked, and perhaps

might use some expressions that were disrespectful. But really, madam, the Captain treated me with so much contempt and cruelty that I deserved your pity rather than your resentment.

LUCY But since his escape, no doubt all matters are made up again. Ah Polly, Polly! 'Tis I am the unhappy wife, and he loves you as if you were only his mistress.

POLLY Sure, madam, you cannot think me so happy as to be the object of your jealousy. A man is always afraid of a woman who loves him too well, so that I must expect to be neglected and avoided.

LUCY Then our cases, my dear Polly, are exactly alike. Both of us indeed have been too fond.

AIR 49. O Bessy Bell

POLLY *A curse attends that woman's love,  
Who always would be pleasing.*

LUCY *The pertness of the billing dove,  
Like tickling, is but teasing.*

POLLY *What then in love can woman do?*

LUCY *If we grow fond they shun us.*

POLLY *And when we fly them, they pursue.*

LUCY *But leave us when they've won us.*

Love is so very whimsical in both sexes, that it is impossible to be lasting. But my heart is particular, and contradicts my own observation.

POLLY But really, Mistress Lucy, by his last behavior I think I ought to envy you. When I was forced from him, he did not show the least tenderness. But perhaps he hath a heart not capable of it.

AIR 50. Would Fate to me Belinda give

*Among the men, coquettes we find,*

*Who court by turns all womankind;  
And we grant all their hearts desired,  
When they are flattered, and admired.*

The coquettes of both sexes are self-lovers, and that is a love no other whatever can dispossess. I fear, my dear Lucy, our husband is one of those.

LUCY    Away with these melancholy reflections. Indeed, my dear Polly, we are both of us a cup too low. Let me prevail upon you, to accept of my offer.

AIR 51.    Come, sweet lass

*Come sweet lass,  
Let's banish sorrow  
'Till tomorrow;  
Come, sweet lass,  
Let's take a chirping<sup>5</sup> glass.  
Wine can clear  
The vapors of despair,  
And make us light as air;  
Then drink, and banish care.*

I can't bear, child, to see you in such low spirits. And I must persuade you to what I know will do you good. [*Aside.*] I shall now soon be even with the hypocritical strumpet.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Fashionable seizure of peevishness or melancholy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ill humor or whims.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Small private room.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cheering.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **SCENE 9**

### **POLLY**

All this wheedling of Lucy cannot be for nothing. At this time too, when I know she hates me! The dissembling of a woman is always the forerunner of mischief. By pouring strong waters down my throat, she thinks to pump some secrets out of me. I'll be upon my guard, and won't taste a drop of her liquor, I'm resolved.

## SCENE 10

**LUCY, *with strong waters*. POLLY.**

LUCY Come, Miss Polly.

POLLY Indeed, child, you have given yourself trouble to no purpose.  
You must, my dear, excuse me.

LUCY Really, Miss Polly, you are so squeamishly affected about taking a cup of strong waters as a lady before company. I vow, Polly, I shall take it monstrously ill if you refuse me. Brandy and men (though women love them never so well) are always taken by us with some reluctance—unless 'tis in private.

POLLY I protest, madam, it goes against me.—What do I see! Macheath again in custody! Now every glimmering of happiness is lost. [*Drops the glass of liquor on the ground.*]

LUCY [*Aside.*] Since things are thus, I'm glad the wench hath escaped; for by this event, 'tis plain she was not happy enough to deserve to be poisoned.

## SCENE 11<sup>6</sup>

### LOCKIT, MACHEATH, PEACHUM, LUCY, POLLY

LOCKIT    Set your heart to rest, Captain. You have neither the chance of love or money for another escape, for you are ordered to be called down upon your trial immediately.

PEACHUM    Away, hussies! This is not a time for a man to be hampered with his wives. You see, the gentleman is in chains already.

LUCY    O husband, husband, my heart longed to see thee; but to see thee thus distracts me!

POLLY    Will not my dear husband look upon his Polly? Why hadst thou not flown to me for protection? With me thou hadst been safe.

AIR 52.    The last time I went o'er the moor

POLLY    *Hither, dear husband, turn your eyes.*

LUCY    *Bestow one glance to cheer me.*

POLLY    *Think with that look, thy Polly dies.*

LUCY    *O shun me not, but hear me.*

POLLY    *'Tis Polly sues.*

LUCY    *—'Tis Lucy speaks.*

POLLY    *Is thus true love requited?*

LUCY    *My heart is bursting*

POLLY    *—Mine too breaks.*

LUCY    *Must I—*

POLLY    *—Must I be slighted?*

MACHEATH    What would you have me say, ladies? You see, this affair will soon be at an end, without my disobliging either of you.

PEACHUM    But the settling this point, Captain, might prevent a lawsuit between your two widows.

AIR 53. Tom Tinker's my true love

MACHEATH *Which way shall I turn me? How can I decide?  
Wives, the day of our death, are as fond as a bride.  
One wife is too much for most husbands to hear,  
But two at a time there's no mortal can bear.  
This way, and that way, and which way I will,  
What would comfort the one, t'other wife would take  
ill.*

POLLY But if his own misfortunes have made him insensible to mine, a father sure will be more compassionate. Dear, dear sir, sink<sup>z</sup> the material evidence, and bring him off at his trial. Polly upon her knees begs it of you.

AIR 54. I am a poor shepherd undone

*When my hero in court appears,  
And stands arraigned for his life,  
Then think of poor Polly's tears;  
For ah! Poor Polly's his wife.  
Like the sailor he holds up his hand,  
Distressed on the dashing wave.  
To die a dry death at land,  
Is as bad as a wat'ry grave.  
And alas, poor Polly!  
Alack, and well-a-day!  
Before I was in love,  
Oh! every month was May.*

LUCY If Peachum's heart is hardened, sure you, sir, will have more compassion on a daughter. I know the evidence is in your power: how then can you be a tyrant to me? [*Kneeling.*]



AIR 55. Ianthe the lovely

*When he holds up his hand arraigned for his life,  
Oh think of your daughter, and think I'm his wife!  
What are cannons, or bombs, or clashing of swords?  
For death is more certain by witnesses' words.  
Then nail up their lips, that dread thunder allay;  
And each month of my life will hereafter be May.*

LOCKIT Macheath's time is come, Lucy. We know our own affairs,  
therefore let us have no more whimpering or whining.

AIR 56. A cobbler there was

*Ourselves, like the great, to secure a retreat,  
When matters require it, must give up our gang.  
And good reason why,  
Or, instead of the fry,  
Even Peachum and I,  
Like poor petty rascals, might hang, hang;  
Like poor petty rascals, might hang.*

PEACHUM Set your heart at rest, Polly. Your husband is to die today.  
Therefore, if you are not already provided, 'tis high time to look  
about for another. There's comfort for you, you slut.

LOCKIT We are ready, sir, to conduct you to the Old Bailey.

AIR 57. Bonny Dundee

MACHEATH *The charge is prepared; the lawyers are met;  
The judges all ranged (a terrible show!).  
I go, undismayed, for death is a debt,  
A debt on demand. So take what I owe.*

*Then farewell my love—dear charmers, adieu.  
Contented I die—'tis the better for you.  
Here ends all dispute the rest of our lives,  
For this way at once I please all my wives.*

Now, gentlemen, I am ready to attend you.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: For an illustration of this scene by William Hogarth, See the Image Gallery for this volume. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Suppress. [Return to reference 7](#)

## SCENE 12

LUCY, POLLY, FILCH

POLLY Follow them, Filch, to the court. And when the trial is over, bring me a particular account of his behavior, and of everything that happened. You'll find me here with Miss Lucy. [*Exit* FILCH.] But why is all this music?

LUCY The prisoners whose trials are put off till next Session are diverting themselves.

POLLY Sure there is nothing so charming as music, I'm fond of it to distraction. But alas! Now all mirth seems an insult upon my affliction. Let us retire, my dear Lucy, and indulge our sorrows. The noisy crew, you see, are coming upon us. [*Exeunt.*]  
[*A Dance of Prisoners in Chains, etc.*]

**SCENE 13 *The condemned hold***

**MACHEATH, *in a melancholy posture.***

AIR 58. Happy groves

*O cruel, cruel, cruel case!  
Must I suffer this disgrace?*

AIR 59. Of all the girls that are so smart

*Of all the friends in time of grief,  
When threat'ning death looks grimmer,  
Not one so sure can bring relief,  
As this best friend, a brimmer.<sup>8</sup>[Drinks.]*

AIR 60. Britons strike home

*Since I must swing, I scorn, I scorn to wince or  
whine.[Rises.]*

AIR 61. Chevy Chase

*But now again my spirits sink;  
I'll raise them high with wine.  
[Drinks a glass of wine.]*

AIR 62. To old Sir Simon the King

*But valor the stronger grows,  
The stronger liquor we're drinking.*

*And how can we feel our woes,  
When we've lost the trouble of thinking?[Drinks.]*

AIR 63. Joy to great Caesar

*If thus—A man can die  
Much bolder with brandy.  
[Pours out a bumper of brandy.]*

AIR 64. There was an old woman

*So I drink off this bumper. And now I can stand the  
test.  
And my comrades shall see, that I die as brave as  
the best.[Drinks.]*

AIR 65. Did you ever hear of a gallant sailor

*But can I leave my pretty hussies,  
Without one tear, or tender sigh?*

AIR 66. Why are mine eyes still flowing

*Their eyes, their lips, their busses<sup>9</sup>  
Recall my love. Ah must I die?*

AIR 67. Green sleeves

*Since laws were made for every degree,  
To curb vice in others, as well as me,  
I wonder we han't better company,*

*Upon Tyburn Tree!*  
*But gold from law can take out the sting;*  
*And if rich men like us were to swing,*  
*'Twould thin the land, such numbers to string*  
*Upon Tyburn Tree!*

JAILER    Some friends of yours, Captain, desire to be admitted. I  
            leave you together.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 8: Brimming goblet. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Kisses. [Return to reference 9](#)

## SCENE 14

**MACHEATH, BEN BUDGE, MATT OF THE MINT**

MACHEATH For my having broke prison, you see, gentlemen, I am ordered immediate execution. The sheriff's officers, I believe, are now at the door. That Jemmy Twitcher should peach me, I own surprised me! 'Tis a plain proof that the world is all alike, and that even our gang can no more trust one another than other people. Therefore, I beg you, gentlemen, look well to yourselves, for in all probability you may live some months longer.

MATT We are heartily sorry, Captain, for your misfortune. But 'tis what we must all come to.

MACHEATH Peachum and Lockit, you know, are infamous scoundrels. Their lives are as much in your power as yours are in theirs. Remember your dying friend! 'Tis my last request. Bring those villains to the gallows before you, and I am satisfied.

MATT We'll do't.

JAILER Miss Polly and Miss Lucy entreat a word with you.

MACHEATH Gentlemen, adieu.

## SCENE 15

### LUCY, MACHEATH, POLLY

MACHEATH Lucy, my dear Polly, whatsoever hath passed between us is now at an end. If you are fond of marrying again, the best advice I can give you, is to ship yourselves off for the West Indies,<sup>1</sup> where you'll have a fair chance of getting a husband apiece; or by good luck, two or three, as you like best.

POLLY How can I support this sight!

LUCY There is nothing moves one so much as a great man in distress.

AIR 68. All you that must take a leap

LUCY *Would I might be hanged!*

POLLY *And I would so too!*

LUCY *To be hanged with you.*

POLLY *My dear, with you.*

MACHEATH *O leave me to thought! I fear! I doubt!*

*I tremble! I droop! See, my courage is out.*

*[Turns up the empty bottle.]*

POLLY *No token of love?*

MACHEATH *See, my courage is out.*

*[Turns up the empty pot.]*

LUCY *No token of love?*

POLLY *Adieu.*

LUCY *Farewell.*

MACHEATH *But hark! I hear the toll of the bell.<sup>2</sup>*

CHORUS *Tol de rol lol, etc.*

JAILER Four women more, Captain, with a child apiece! See, here they come. *[Enter women and children.]*



MACHEATH    What—four wives more! This is too much. Here—tell the sheriff's officers I am ready. [*Exit* MACHEATH *guarded.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In the sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, Polly does find a husband in the West Indies, where fortunes could be made. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rung five minutes before the condemned were taken to Tyburn. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 16

***To them, enter PLAYER and BEGGAR.***

PLAYER But, honest friend, I hope you don't intend that Macheath shall be really executed.

BEGGAR Most certainly, sir. To make the piece perfect, I was for doing strict poetical justice. Macheath is to be hanged; and for the other personages of the drama, the audience must have supposed they were all either hanged or transported.

PLAYER Why then, friend, this is a downright deep tragedy. The catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an opera must end happily.

BEGGAR Your objection, sir, is very just, and is easily removed. For you must allow that in this kind of drama 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about. So—you rabble there—run and cry a reprieve. Let the prisoner be brought back to his wives in triumph.

PLAYER All this we must do, to comply with the taste of the town.

BEGGAR Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral. 'Twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich, and that they are punished for them.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 3: *Unlike* the rich. [Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 17

***To them, MACHEATH with rabble, etc.***

MACHEATH    So, it seems, I am not left to my choice, but must have a wife at last. Look ye, my dears, we will have no controversy now. Let us give this day to mirth, and I am sure she who thinks herself my wife will testify her joy by a dance.

ALL    Come, a dance, a dance.

MACHEATH    Ladies, I hope you will give me leave to present a partner to each of you. And (if I may without offense) for this time, I take Polly for mine. [*To POLLY.*] And for life, you slut, for we were really married. As for the rest—But at present keep your own secret.

### A DANCE

AIR 69.    Lumps of pudding

*Thus I stand like the Turk, with his doxies around;  
From all sides their glances his passion confound;  
For black, brown, and fair, his inconstancy burns,  
And the different beauties subdue him by turns;  
Each calls forth her charms, to provoke his desires;  
Though willing to all, with but one he retires.  
But think of this maxim, and put off your sorrow,  
The wretch of today may be happy tomorrow.*

CHORUS    *But think of this maxim, etc.*

FINIS

# **LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU**

## **1689–1762**

In her early teens Lady Mary Pierrepont did something that well-bred young women were not supposed to do: she secretly taught herself Latin. The act reveals many of the traits that would also characterize her as a mature woman: curiosity, love of learning, intelligence, ambition, and independence of mind. The eldest daughter of a wealthy Whig peer (he later became marquess of Dorchester), she grew up amid a glittering London circle that included Addison, Steele, Congreve, and later Pope and Gay. She began writing, circulating some of her poems among friends but also publishing, including a contribution to the *Spectator*. She was not content to live the life of a dutiful aristocratic daughter. Unlike most women in her time, she married for love, and when her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, was appointed ambassador to Constantinople in 1716, she took advantage of the opportunity by traveling through Europe and studying the language and customs of Turkey. Returning home in 1718, she spent unhappy years that included bitter political quarrels with Pope and the gradual failure of her marriage. Then, in middle age, she fell in love with a young Italian author, Francesco Algarotti. In 1739 she traveled to Italy hoping to see him; but the passion that had kindled in their letters was soon quenched when he failed to join her. The rest of her life was passed abroad, in Avignon, France, and in Brescia and Venice, Italy. She died soon after her return to London, in 1762.

In a century that included many of the great letter writers in English—Gray, Horace Walpole, William Cowper, and others—Montagu is one of the greatest. She had saved her correspondence from 1716 to 1718, which centered on her experiences in the Ottoman Empire, and in the year before she died, she deposited a manuscript version with a Protestant clergyman, intending it to be published. *Letters . . . Written during Her Travels* appeared, posthumously, in 1763. “What fire, what ease, what knowledge of Europe and Asia!” the eminent historian Edward Gibbon exclaimed of the work. Montagu had traveled as a young woman with the deliberate ambition to gain such knowledge. Before arriving in Turkey, she undertook the project of understanding its culture in conversations with an Islamic scholar in Belgrade, and her curiosity led her to a multitude of revealing, provocative situations, on which she reflects with acuity and wit. She approvingly describes the liberties given to women by Turkish customs and institutions, such as the veils that rendered a woman incognito in the street (the better, she thought, to conduct secret love affairs). Letter XXXI explains the technique of smallpox inoculation in Turkey. Montagu would earn a place in medical history for her brave introduction of the practice to Britain on her return (her son and daughter were among the first to be inoculated), arousing resistance from doctors (as she predicts) and from fearful people in general. The admiring frankness of Montagu’s description of the communal nudity of women in Turkish baths, in Letter XXVI, disturbed and shocked readers when the letters were finally published. Her correspondence presents two subjects to which many British readers at the time were unaccustomed: a complex, formidable civilization beyond Europe’s borders, and the independent, brilliant perceptions of a woman able to view the norms of her own society critically in light of those of another.

From an early age Montagu wrote in many literary forms: essays, poems, fiction, and even a translated play. In her own time she was especially admired as a poet. When Pope, after their quarrel, gave her the name “Sappho” in his poem “Epistle to a Lady,” he was

doubtless betraying the nervousness that many men felt in the presence of intelligent women (the Greek poet Sappho, after all, preferred women to men); yet Pope was also associating her with the classic author of lyric verse. Montagu's poems, although often casual, reveal the mind of a woman who is not willing to accept the stereotypes imposed upon her by men. Like her friend Mary Astell, Montagu puts her trust in education and reason, not in the opinions of others, and she insists on preserving her freedom of choice. A woman, Montagu's poems suggest, need not defer to a man who is less than her equal; she must look to her own satisfaction before she looks to his, and she retains the right to say no. Her poetry, like her travel writing, displays an energetic, witty, candid mind, alert to contradictions and differences in points of view, which she deftly orchestrates to present her reader with a fuller, more interesting world.

# Saturday. The Small Pox<sup>1</sup>

FLAVIA:<sup>2</sup>

The wretched Flavia on her couch reclined,  
Thus breathed the anguish of a wounded mind;  
A glass<sup>o</sup> reversed in her right hand she bore,  
For now she shunned the face she sought before.  
5        "How am I changed! alas! how am I grown  
A frightful specter, to myself unknown!  
Where's my complexion? where the radiant bloom,<sup>o</sup>  
That promised happiness for years to come?  
Then with what pleasure I this face surveyed!  
To look once more, my visits oft delayed!  
10        Charmed with the view, a fresher red would rise,  
And a new life shot sparkling from my eyes!  
      Ah! faithless glass, my wonted bloom restore;  
Alas! I rave, that bloom is now no more!  
The greatest good the gods on men bestow,  
15        Ev'n youth itself, to me is useless now.  
There was a time (oh! that I could forget!)  
When opera-tickets poured before my feet;  
And at the Ring,<sup>3</sup> where brightest beauties shine,  
The earliest cherries of the spring were mine.  
20        Witness, O Lilly; and thou, Motteux, tell  
How much Japan<sup>4</sup> these eyes have made ye sell.  
With what contempt ye saw me oft despise  
The humble offer of the raffled prize;  
For at the raffle still each prize I bore,  
25        With scorn rejected, or with triumph wore!  
Now beauty's fled, and presents are no more!<sup>5</sup>  
      For me the patriot has the House<sup>o</sup> forsook,

And left debates to catch a passing look:  
For me the soldier has soft verses writ;  
30 For me the beau has aimed to be a wit.  
For me the wit to nonsense was betrayed;  
The gamester<sup>o</sup> has for me his dun<sup>6</sup> delayed,  
And overseen<sup>o</sup> the card I would have played.  
The bold and haughty by success made vain,  
35 Awed by my eyes has trembled to complain:  
The bashful 'squire touched by a wish unknown,  
Has dared to speak with spirit not his own;  
Fired by one wish, all did alike adore;  
Now beauty's fled, and lovers are no more!  
40 As round the room I turn my weeping eyes,  
New unaffected scenes of sorrow rise!  
Far from my sight that killing<sup>o</sup> picture bear,  
The face disfigure, and the canvas tear!  
That picture which with pride I used to show,  
45 The lost resemblance but upbraids me now.  
And thou, my toilette! where I oft have sat,  
While hours unheeded passed in deep debate,  
How curls should fall, or where a patch<sup>z</sup> to place:  
If blue or scarlet best became my face;  
50 Now on some happier nymph thy aid bestow;  
On fairer heads, ye useless jewels glow!  
No borrowed luster can my charms restore;  
Beauty is fled, and dress is now no more!  
Ye meaner<sup>o</sup> beauties, I permit ye shine;  
55 Go, triumph in the hearts that once were mine;  
But midst your triumphs with confusion know,  
'Tis to my ruin all your arms<sup>8</sup> ye owe.  
Would pitying heaven restore my wonted mien,  
Ye still might move unthought-of and unseen.  
60 But oh! how vain, how wretched is the boast  
Of beauty faded, and of empire lost!  
What now is left but weeping, to deplore



My beauty fled, and empire now no more!  
 Ye, cruel chemists,<sup>o</sup> what withheld your aid!  
 65 Could no pomatums<sup>o</sup> save a trembling maid?  
 How false and trifling is that art<sup>o</sup> you boast;  
 No art can give me back my beauty lost.  
 In tears, surrounded by my friends I lay,  
 Masked o'er and trembled at the sight of day;  
 70 Mirmillo<sup>9</sup> came my fortune to deplore,  
 (A golden-headed cane, well-carved he bore)  
 Cordials,<sup>o</sup> he cried, my spirits must restore:  
 Beauty is fled, and spirit is no more!  
 Galen, the grave; officious Squirt<sup>1</sup> was there,  
 75 With fruitless grief and unavailing care:  
 Machaon<sup>2</sup> too, the great Machaon, known  
 By his red cloak and his superior frown;  
 And why, he cried, this grief and this despair?  
 You shall again be well, again be fair;  
 80 Believe my oath; (with that an oath he swore)  
 False was his oath; my beauty is no more!  
 Cease, hapless maid, no more thy tale pursue,  
 Forsake mankind, and bid the world adieu!  
 Monarchs and beauties rule with equal sway;  
 85 All strive to serve, and glory to obey:  
 Alike unpitied when deposed they grow;  
 Men mock the idol of their former vow.  
 Adieu! ye parks!—in some obscure recess,  
 Where gentle streams will weep at my distress,  
 90 Where no false friend will in my grief take part,  
 And mourn my ruin with a joyful heart;  
 There let me live in some deserted place,  
 There hide in shades this lost inglorious face.  
 Ye, operas, circles,<sup>3</sup> I no more must view!  
 95 My toilette, patches, all the world adieu!"

- Note 1:

A deadly disease, smallpox was also deplored for the scars it left on hitherto beautiful complexions. Montagu's brother died of it, and she herself nearly did. Her family members said she wrote this poem just after she recovered from the illness in 1715, at age twenty-six (though she would publish it decades later). The following year, she traveled with her husband to Turkey, where she would learn about and embrace inoculation against smallpox as practiced there. The title of the book in which this poem first appeared, *Six Town Eclogues, with Some Other Poems*, published in 1747, ironically alludes to the *Eclogues* (ca. 38–39 B.C.E.) of Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), pastoral poems peopled with fancifully elegant shepherds and shepherdesses in the countryside: Montagu's eclogues, each titled after a day of the week (Monday through Saturday), treat modern, urban figures with problems common in the "town," the fashionable part of London.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The name means "blonde." Each of Montagu's eclogues is devoted to a speech of a single figure, as here, or to a pair of characters in dialogue. (All were women except Tuesday's amorous male dialogists.)[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fashionable drive in Hyde Park.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lacquerware made in Japan, or imitations made elsewhere. "Lilly": Charles Lillie (d. 1746), an innovative perfumer who also sold scented snuffs and other items at a shop in the Strand, and was a publisher of Addison and Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator*, both of which mention him and his shop frequently. "Motteux": the Huguenot merchant and playwright Pierre Antoine Motteux (1663–1718) and, later, his widow, ran a shop that sold lacquerware in Leadenhall Street.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Montagu reworks Pope's changing refrain in his fourth pastoral, published in 1709: for example, "Fair Daphne's dead, and Love is now no more!"[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: What he is owed, his winnings.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A beauty patch of black silk worn on the face.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Beauty portrayed as a martial weapon. The word *charms* appears in a manuscript copy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name of a character, representing Dr. William Gibbons (1649–1728), in the very popular mock-heroic poem *The Dispensary* (1699) by the wit Samuel Garth (1661–1719), who was also Montagu’s family physician. She repurposes the name here to refer to Dr. Richard Mead (1674–1754), who researched smallpox extensively and promoted inoculation, and was known for his “golden-headed cane” (line 72). With Garth, he treated Montagu during her 1715 smallpox illness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A slang term for physician, and a character in *The Dispensary* (where he is also called “officious Squirt”). “Galen”: Aelius Galenus or Claudius Galenus (129–216 C.E.), Greek physician and surgeon in the Roman Empire, who exercised a dominant influence on western medicine; here he possibly represents Dr. John Woodward (1665/8–1728), who read a letter in favor of smallpox inoculation to the Royal Society in 1714, and also treated Montagu in 1715.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Son of the Greek god of medicine Asclepius, and so a nickname for physicians, as in *The Dispensary*, in which he represents Sir Thomas Millington (1628–1704); Montagu uses it here to refer to Garth himself, who wore a distinctive “red cloak” (line 78).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “A company; an assembly” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *mirror*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of Commons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gambler*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *overlooked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devastatingly beautiful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lesser*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apothecaries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ointments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicinal alcohols*[Return to reference](#) °

## The Lover: A Ballad

At length, by so much importunity pressed,  
Take, (Molly),<sup>1</sup> at once, the inside of my breast;  
This stupid indifference so often you blame  
Is not owing to nature, to fear, or to shame;  
5 I am not as cold as a Virgin in lead.<sup>2</sup>  
Nor is Sunday's sermon so strong in my head;  
I know but too well how time flies along,  
That we live but few years and yet fewer are young.

But I hate to be cheated, and never will buy  
Long years of repentance for moments of joy.  
10 Oh was there a man (but where shall I find  
Good sense and good nature so equally joined?)  
Would value his pleasure, contribute to mine,  
Not meanly would boast, nor lewdly design,<sup>3</sup>  
Not over severe, yet not stupidly vain,  
15 For I would have the power though not give the  
pain;

No pedant yet learned, not rakehelly gay  
Or laughing because he has nothing to say,  
To all my whole sex obliging and free,  
Yet never be fond of any but me;  
20 In public preserve the decorums are just,  
And show in his eyes he is true to his trust,  
Then rarely approach, and respectfully bow,  
Yet not fulsomely pert, nor yet foppishly low.

But when the long hours of public are past  
25 And we meet with champagne and a chicken at last,  
May every fond pleasure that hour endear,

Be banished afar both discretion and fear,  
 Forgetting or scorning the airs of the crowd  
 He may cease to be formal, and I to be proud,  
 30 Till lost in the joy we confess that we live,  
 And he may be rude, and yet I may forgive.

And that my delight may be solidly fixed,  
 Let the friend and the lover be handsomely mixed,  
 In whose tender bosom my soul might confide,  
 35 Whose kindness can sooth me, whose counsel could  
 guide.  
 From such a dear lover as here I describe  
 No danger should fright me, no millions should  
 bribe;  
 But till this astonishing creature I know,  
 40 As I long have lived chaste, I will keep myself so.

I never will share with the wanton coquette,  
 Or be caught by a vain affectation of wit.  
 The toasters and songsters may try all their art  
 But never shall enter the pass of my heart.  
 45 I loathe the lewd rake, the dressed fopling despise;  
 Before such pursuers the nice<sup>o</sup> virgin flies;  
 And as Ovid has sweetly in parables told  
 We harden like trees, and like rivers are cold.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

1747

- Note 1: Molly Skerrett, a friend of Lady Mary, was the mistress of Sir Robert Walpole. The ideal “lover” of the title, however, is not to be identified with any particular person. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, an image of the Virgin Mary, either as a leaden statue or as a stained-glass window framed in lead. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Daphne, to escape Apollo, was turned into a laurel, and Arethusa, escaping Alpheus, became a fountain.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *plot*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fastidious*[Return to reference °](#)

## Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband<sup>1</sup>

Think not this paper comes with vain pretense  
To move your pity, or to mourn th' offense.  
Too well I know that hard obdurate heart;  
No softening mercy there will take my part,  
Nor can a woman's arguments prevail,  
5 When even your patron's wise example fails.<sup>2</sup>  
But this last privilege I still retain;  
Th' oppressed and injured always may complain.  
    Too, too severely laws of honor bind  
The weak submissive sex of womankind.  
10 If sighs have gained or force compelled our hand,  
Deceived by art, or urged by stern command,  
Whatever motive binds the fatal tie,  
The judging world expects our constancy.  
    Just heaven! (for sure in heaven does justice  
15 reign,  
Though tricks below that sacred name profane)  
To you appealing I submit my cause,  
Nor fear a judgment from impartial laws.  
All bargains but conditional<sup>o</sup> are made;  
The purchase void, the creditor unpaid;  
20 Defrauded servants are from service free;  
A wounded slave regains his liberty.  
For wives ill used no remedy remains,  
To daily racks condemned, and to eternal chains.  
    From whence is this unjust distinction grown?  
25 Are we not formed with passions like your own?  
Nature with equal fire our souls endued,  
Our minds as haughty, and as warm our blood;  
O'er the wide world your pleasures you pursue,



30 The change is justified by something new;  
 But we must sigh in silence—and be true. }  
 Our sex's weakness you expose and blame  
 (Of every prattling fop the common theme),  
 Yet from this weakness you suppose is due  
 35 Sublimer virtue than your Cato<sup>3</sup> knew.  
 Had heaven designed us trials so severe,  
 It would have formed our tempers them to bear.  
 And I have borne (oh what have I not borne!)  
 The pang of jealousy, the insults of scorn.  
 40 Wearied at length, I from your sight remove,  
 And place my future hopes in secret love.  
 In the gay bloom of glowing youth retired,  
 I quit the woman's joy to be admired,  
 With that small pension your hard heart allows,  
 45 Renounce your fortune, and release your vows.  
 To custom (though unjust) so much is due;  
 I hide my frailty from the public view.  
 My conscience clear, yet sensible of shame,  
 My life I hazard, to preserve my fame.  
 50 And I prefer this low inglorious state }  
 To vile dependence on the thing I hate—  
 But you pursue me to this last retreat.  
 Dragged into light, my tender crime is shown  
 And every circumstance of fondness known.  
 Beneath the shelter of the law you stand,  
 55 And urge my ruin with a cruel hand,  
 While to my fault thus rigidly severe,  
 Tamely submissive to the man you fear.<sup>4</sup>  
 This wretched outcast, this abandoned wife,  
 60 Has yet this joy to sweeten shameful life:  
 By your mean conduct, infamously loose,  
 You are at once my accuser and excuse.  
 Let me be damned by the censorious prude  
 (Stupidly dull, or spiritually lewd),

65 My hapless case will surely pity find  
 From every just and reasonable mind.  
 When to the final sentence I submit,  
 The lips condemn me, but their souls acquit.  
 No more my husband, to your pleasures go,  
 The sweets of your recovered freedom know.  
 70 Go: court the brittle friendship of the great,  
 Smile at his board,<sup>o</sup> or at his levee<sup>5</sup> wait;  
 And when dismissed, to madam's toilet<sup>6</sup> fly,  
 More than her chambermaids, or glasses,<sup>o</sup> lie,  
 Tell her how young she looks, how heavenly fair,  
 75 Admire the lilies and the roses there.  
 Your high ambition may be gratified,  
 Some cousin of her own be made your bride,  
 And you the father of a glorious race  
 Endowed with Ch—l's strength and Low—r's face.<sup>7</sup>  
 80

## 1724 **Endnotes**

1972

- Note 1: In 1724 the notorious libertine William Yonge, separated from his wife, Mary, discovered that she (like him) had committed adultery. He sued her lover, Colonel Norton, for damages and collected £1500. Later that year, according to the law of the time, he petitioned the Houses of Parliament for a divorce. The case was tried in public, Mary Yonge's love letters were read aloud, and two men testified that they had found her and Norton "together in naked bed." William Yonge was granted the divorce, his wife's dowry, and the greater part of her fortune.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sir Robert Walpole, William Yonge's friend at court, was rumored to tolerate his own wife's infidelities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The asceticism and self-discipline of the Roman statesman Cato were emphasized in Addison's famous tragedy *Cato* (1713).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, Walpole. Montagu suggests that the whole political establishment of England takes sides against Mary Yonge.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Morning reception of visitors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: It was fashionable for women like Lady Walpole to receive visitors during the last stages of dressing (their “toilet”).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: General Churchill was rumored to have had an affair with Lady Walpole. Antony Lowther was a notorious gallant. The author implies that William Yonge’s next wife may be as untrue as his first. Mary Yonge remarried immediately after her divorce; five years later William Yonge himself (whose divorce had made him rich) married the daughter of a baron.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *only conditionally*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dining table*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mirrors*[Return to reference °](#)

# ***From Letters . . . Written during Her Travels [The Turkish Embassy Letters]***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

***Letter XXVI, To Lady —, Adrianople,***<sup>[2](#)</sup> ***1 April 1717***

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The complete title runs, *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—W— y M— e: written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, Men of Letters, &c. in different parts of Europe, which contain, among other curious relations, Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks; Drawn from Sources that have been inaccessible to other Travellers.*[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A city in western Turkey, named after the Roman emperor Hadrian and now called Edirne.[Return to reference 2](#)

**["THE WOMEN'S COFFEE HOUSE"; OR, THE TURKISH BATHS]**

I am now got into a new world, where every thing I see appears to me a change of scene; and I write to your ladyship with some content of mind, hoping, at least, that you will find the charm of novelty in my letters, and no longer reproach me that I tell you nothing extraordinary. I won't trouble you with a relation of our tedious journey; but I must not omit what I saw remarkable at Sophia,<sup>3</sup> one of the most beautiful towns in the Turkish empire and famous for its hot baths, that are resorted to both for diversion and health. I stopped here one day on purpose to see them; and designing to go *incognito*, I hired a Turkish coach. These voitures<sup>4</sup> are not at all like ours, but much more convenient for the country, the heat being so great that glasses<sup>5</sup> would be very troublesome. They are made a good deal in the manner of the Dutch coaches, having wooden lattices painted and gilded; the inside being painted with baskets and nosegays of flowers, intermixed commonly with little poetical mottos. They are covered all over with scarlet cloth, lined with silk, and very often richly embroidered and fringed. This covering entirely hides the persons in them, but may be thrown back at pleasure, and thus permit the ladies to peep through the lattices. They hold four people very conveniently, seated on cushions, but not raised.



Unknown artist, ***Mary Wortley Montagu in the Turkish Bath***, 1781. The scene in Montagu's *Letters* that most fascinated her European readers: the visit to the Turkish baths. From the frontispiece of *Letters . . . written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, Men of Letters, &c. . . . which contain . . . Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks* (Berlin, 1781).

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In one of these covered wagons, I went to the bagnio<sup>6</sup> about ten o'clock. It was already full of women. It is built of stone, in the shape of a dome, with no windows but in the roof, which gives light enough. There were five of these domes joined together, the outmost being less<sup>7</sup> than the rest, and serving only as a hall, where the portress stood at the door. Ladies of quality generally give this woman the value of a crown or ten shillings, and I did not forget that ceremony. The next room is a very large one, paved with marble, and all round it raised two sofas of marble, one above another. There were four fountains of cold water in this room, falling first into marble basins, and then running on the floor in little channels made for that purpose, which carried the streams into the next room, something less than this, with the same sort of marble sofas, but so hot with steams of sulphur proceeding from the baths joining to it, 'twas impossible to stay there with one's clothes on. The two other domes were the hot baths, one of which had cocks<sup>8</sup> of cold water turning into it, to temper it to what degree of warmth the bathers pleased to have.

I was in my traveling habit, which is a riding dress, and certainly appeared very extraordinary to them. Yet there was not one of them that showed the least surprise or impertinent curiosity, but received me with all the obliging civility possible. I know no European court where the ladies would have behaved themselves in so polite a manner to such a stranger. I believe, upon the whole, there were two hundred women, and yet none of those disdainful smiles or satirical whispers that never fail in our assemblies when anybody appears that is not dressed exactly in fashion. They repeated over



and over to me, "Uzelle, pek uzelle," which is nothing but "charming, very charming."—The first sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets, on which sat the ladies; and on the second, their slaves behind them, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them. They walked and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes our General Mother<sup>9</sup> with. There were many amongst them as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian,<sup>1</sup> and most of their skins shinningly white, only adorned by their beautiful hair, divided into many tresses hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or ribbon, perfectly representing the figures of the graces.<sup>2</sup>

I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that if it were the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed. I perceived that the ladies of the most delicate skins and finest shapes had the greatest share of my admiration, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions. To tell you the truth, I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase<sup>3</sup> could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty fancies. In short, 'tis the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, etc. They generally take this diversion once a week, and stay there at least four or five hours without getting cold, by immediate coming out of the hot bath into the cool room, which was very surprising to me. The lady that seemed the most considerable amongst them entreated me to sit by her, and would fain have undressed me for the bath. I excused myself with some difficulty. They being however all so earnest in persuading me, I was at last forced to open my skirt and show them



my stays,<sup>4</sup> which satisfied them very well, for I saw they believed I was locked up in that machine, and that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband. I was charmed with their civility and beauty and should have been very glad to pass more time with them, but Mr. W[ortley] resolving to pursue his journey the next morning early, I was in haste to see the ruins of Justinian's church,<sup>5</sup> which did not afford me so agreeable a prospect as I had left, being little more than a heap of stones.

Adieu, Madam. I am sure I have now entertained you with an account of such a sight as you never saw in your life, and what no book of travels could inform you of, as 'tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places.

***Letter XXX, To Mr. [Alexander] Pope, Adrianople, 1 April  
1717***

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Sofia, now the capital of Bulgaria.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Carriages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Windowpanes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bathhouse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Smaller.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Faucets.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eve. See *Paradise Lost* 4.492 and 8.42–43.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Italian painter (ca. 1488–1576). Guido Reni, Italian painter (1575–1642). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Three goddesses, daughters of Zeus, personifying grace and beauty.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Charles Jervas (1675–1739), English portrait painter, friend of Montagu, Pope, and Swift.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Corset stiffened with strips of whalebone.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Roman emperor Justinian (483–565) built St. Sofia Church in the middle of the 6th century.[Return to reference 5](#)

### [READING POETRY IN TURKEY]

I dare say you expect, at least, something very new in this letter, after I have gone a journey, not undertaken, by any Christian, for some hundred years. The most remarkable accident that happened to me was my being very near over-turned into the Hebrus;<sup>6</sup> and, if I had much regard for the glories that one's name enjoys after death, I should certainly be sorry for having missed the romantic conclusion of swimming down the same river in which the musical head of Orpheus repeated verses, so many ages since:

*Caput a cervice revulsum,  
Gurgite cum medio, portans Oeagrius Hebrus  
Volveret, Euridicen vox ipsa, et frigida lingua  
Ah! miseram Euridicen! anima fugiente vocabat,  
Euridicen toto referebant flumine ripæ.*<sup>7</sup>

Who knows but some of your bright wits might have found it a subject affording many poetical turns, and have told the world, in an heroic elegy, that,

*As equal were our souls, so equal were our fates?*<sup>8</sup>

I despair of ever hearing so many fine things said of me, as so extraordinary a death would have given occasion for.

I am at this present moment writing in a house situated on the banks of the Hebrus, which runs under my chamber window. My garden is full of tall cypress trees, upon the branches of which several couple of true turtles are saying soft things to one another from morning till night. How naturally do *boughs* and *vows* come into my mind, at this minute? And must not you confess, to my praise, that 'tis more than an ordinary discretion, that can resist the wicked suggestions of poetry, in a place where truth, for once, furnishes all the ideas of pastoral.<sup>9</sup> The summer is already far

advanced, in this part of the world; and for some miles round Adrianople, the whole ground is laid out in gardens, and the banks of the rivers are set with rows of fruit trees, under which all the most considerable Turks divert themselves every evening, not with walking, that is not one of their pleasures; but a set party of them choose out a green spot, where the shade is very thick, and there they spread a carpet, on which they sit drinking their coffee, and are generally attended by some slave with a fine voice, or that plays on some instrument. Every twenty paces you may see one of these little companies, listening to the dashing of the river; and this taste is so universal that the very gardeners are not without it. I have often seen them and their children sitting on the banks of the river, and playing on a rural instrument, perfectly answering the description of the ancient *fistula*,<sup>1</sup> being composed of unequal reeds, with a simple but agreeable softness in the sound.

Mr. Addison might here make the experiment he speaks of in his travels; there not being one instrument of music among the Greek or Roman statues, that is not to be found in the hands of the people of this country.<sup>2</sup> The young lads generally divert themselves with making garlands for their favorite lambs, which I have often seen painted and adorned with flowers, lying at their feet, while they sung or played. It is not that they ever read romances. But these are the ancient amusements here, and as natural to them as cudgel-playing and football to our British swains;<sup>3</sup> the softness and warmth of the climate forbidding all rough exercises, which were never so much as heard of amongst them, and naturally inspiring a laziness and aversion to labor, which the great plenty indulges. These gardeners are the only happy race of country people in Turkey. They furnish all the city with fruits and herbs, and seem to live very easily. They are most of them Greeks, and have little houses in the midst of their gardens, where their wives and daughters take a liberty not permitted in the town, I mean to go unveiled. These wenches are very neat and handsome, and pass their time at their looms under the shade of the trees.

I no longer look upon Theocritus as a romantic writer;<sup>4</sup> he has only given a plain image of the way of life amongst the peasants of his country; who, before oppression had reduced them to want, were, I suppose, all employed as the better sort of them are now. I don't doubt, had he been born a Briton, but his *Idylliums* had been filled with descriptions of threshing and churning, both which are unknown here, the corn being all trod out by oxen; and butter (I speak it with sorrow) unheard of.

I read over your *Homer*<sup>5</sup> here, with an infinite pleasure, and find several little passages explained, that I did not before entirely comprehend the beauty of: many of the customs, and much of the dress then in fashion, being yet retained. I don't wonder to find more remains here of an age so distant, than is to be found in any other country, the Turks not taking that pains to introduce their own manners, as has been generally practiced by other nations that imagine themselves more polite. It would be too tedious to you to point out all the passages that relate to present customs. But I can assure you that the princesses and great ladies pass their time at their looms, embroidering veils and robes, surrounded by their maids, which are always very numerous, in the same manner as we find Andromache and Helen described. The description of the belt of Menelaus exactly resembles those that are now worn by the great men, fastened before with broad golden clasps, and embroidered round with rich work. The snowy veil that Helen throws over her face is still fashionable; and I never see half a dozen of old bashaws<sup>6</sup> (as I do very often) with their reverend beards, sitting basking in the sun, but I recollect good King Priam and his counsellors. Their manner of dancing is certainly the same that Diana is sung to have danced on the banks of Eurotas.<sup>7</sup> The great lady still leads the dance, and is followed by a troop of young girls, who imitate her steps, and, if she sings, make up the chorus. The tunes are extremely gay and lively, yet with something in them wonderfully soft. The steps are varied according to the pleasure of her that leads the dance, but always in exact time, and infinitely more agreeable than any of our dances, at least in my opinion. I sometimes make

one in the train, but am not skillful enough to lead; these are the Grecian dances, the Turkish being very different.

I should have told you, in the first place, that the Eastern manners give a great light into many Scripture-passages that appear odd to us, their phrases being commonly what we should call Scripture-language. The vulgar Turk is very different from what is spoke at court, or amongst the people of figure; who always mix so much Arabic and Persian in their discourse that it may very well be called another language. And 'tis as ridiculous to make use of the expressions commonly used, in speaking to a great man or lady, as it would be to speak broad Yorkshire or Somersetshire in the drawing-room. Besides this distinction, they have what they call the *sublime*, that is, a style proper for poetry, and which is the exact Scripture style. I believe you will be pleased to see a genuine example of this; and I am very glad I have it in my power to satisfy your curiosity, by sending you a faithful copy of the verses that Ibrahim Bassa,<sup>8</sup> the reigning favorite, has made for the young princess, his contracted wife, whom he is not yet permitted to visit without witnesses, though she is gone home to his house. He is a man of wit and learning; and whether or no he is capable of writing good verse, you may be sure that, on such an occasion, he would not want the assistance of the best poets in the empire. Thus the verses may be looked upon as a sample of their finest poetry, and I don't doubt you'll be of my mind, that it is most wonderfully resembling *The Song of Solomon*, which was also addressed to a royal bride.<sup>9</sup>

***Turkish Verses Addressed to the Sultana, Eldest Daughter of Sultan Achmet III***

**1**

The nightingale now wanders in the vines;  
Her passion is to seek roses.

I went down to admire the beauty of the vines;

The sweetness of your charms has ravished my soul.

Your eyes are black and lovely  
But wild and disdainful as those of a stag;

## 2

The wished possession is delayed from day to day,  
The cruel Sultan Achmet will not permit me  
To see those cheeks, more vermilion than roses.

I dare not snatch one of your kisses,  
The sweetness of your charms has ravished my soul.

Your eyes are black and lovely,  
But wild and disdainful as those of a stag.

## 3

The wretched Ibrahim sighs in these verses,  
One dart from your eyes has pierced thro' my heart.

Ah! when will the hour of possession arrive?  
Must I yet wait a long time?  
The sweetness of your charms has ravished my soul.

Ah! Sultana! stag-eyed—an angel amongst angels!  
I desire,—and my desire remains unsatisfied.  
Can you take delight to prey upon my heart?

## 4

My cries pierce the heavens!  
My eyes are without sleep!  
Turn to me, Sultana—let me gaze on thy beauty.

Adieu—I go down to the grave.  
If you call me—I return.  
My heart is—hot as sulphur;—sigh, and it will flame.

Crown of my life, fair light of my eyes!  
My Sultana! my princess!  
I rub my face against the earth; I am drowned in  
scalding tears—I rave!  
Have you no compassion? Will you not turn to look  
upon me?

I have taken abundance of pains to get these verses in a literal translation; and if you were acquainted with my interpreters, I might spare myself the trouble of assuring you, that they have received no poetical touches from their hands. In my opinion (allowing for the inevitable faults of a prose translation into a language so very different) there is a good deal of beauty in them. The epithet of *stag-eyed* (though the sound is not very agreeable in English) pleases me extremely; and I think it a very lively image of the fire and indifference in his mistress's eyes. Monsieur Boileau<sup>1</sup> has very justly observed, that we are never to judge of the elevation of an expression in an ancient author, by the sound it carries with us; since it may be extremely fine with them, when, at the same time, it appears low or uncouth to us. You are so well acquainted with Homer, you cannot but have observed the same thing, and you must have the same indulgence for all oriental<sup>2</sup> poetry. The repetitions at the end of the two first stanzas are meant for a sort of chorus, and are agreeable to the ancient manner of writing. The music of the verses apparently changes in the third stanza, where the burden<sup>3</sup> is altered; and I think he very artfully seems more passionate at the conclusion, as 'tis natural for people to warm themselves by their own discourse, especially on a subject in which one is deeply concerned; 'tis certainly far more touching than our modern custom of concluding a song of passion, with a turn which is inconsistent with it. The first verse is a description of the season of the year; all the country now being full of nightingales, whose amours with roses



is an Arabian fable, as well known here as any part of Ovid amongst us, and is much the same as if an English poem should begin by saying,—‘Now Philomela<sup>4</sup> sings.’ Or what if I turned the whole into the style of English poetry, to see how it would look?

## 1

Now Philomel renews her tender strain.  
Indulging all the night her pleasing pain;

I sought the groves to hear the wanton sing,  
There saw a face, more beauteous than the spring,

Your large stag-eyes where thousand glories play,  
As bright, as lively, but as wild as they.

## 2

In vain I’m promised such a heavenly prize,  
Ah! cruel Sultan! who delay’st my joys!

While piercing charms transfix my amorous heart,  
I dare not snatch one kiss, to ease the smart.

Those eyes! like, etc.

## 3

Your wretched lover in these lines complains;  
From those dear beauties rise his killing pains.

When will the hour of wished-for bliss arrive?  
Must I wait longer?—Can I wait and live?

Ah! bright Sultana! Maid divinely fair!  
Can you, unpitying, see the pains I bear?

The heavens relenting, hear my piercing cries,  
 I loathe the light, and sleep forsakes my eyes,  
 Turn thee Sultana, 'ere thy lover dies;

Sinking to earth, I sigh the last adieu,  
 Call me, my goddess, and my life renew.

My queen! My angel! My fond heart's desire.  
 I rave—my bosom burns with heavenly fire!  
 Pity that passion, which thy charms inspire.

I have taken the liberty in the second verse, of following what I suppose the true sense of the author, though not literally expressed. By his saying, *he went down to admire the beauty of the vines, and her charms ravished his soul*, I understand a poetical fiction, of having first seen her in a garden, where he was admiring the beauty of the spring. But I could not forbear retaining the comparison of her eyes with those of a stag, though perhaps the novelty of it may give it a burlesque sound in our language. I cannot determine, upon the whole, how well I have succeeded in the translation, neither do I think our English proper to express such violence of passion, which is very seldom felt amongst us. We want also those compound words which are very frequent and strong in the Turkish language.

You see I am pretty far gone in Oriental learning, and to say truth, I study very hard. I wish my studies may give me an occasion of entertaining your curiosity, which will be the utmost advantage hoped for from them, by,

Yours, etc.

1717

1763

***Letter XXXI, To Mrs. S. C. [Sarah Chiswell],  
 Adrianople, 1 April 1717***

## Endnotes

- Note 6: A river, now called the Maritsa. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Virgil, *Georgics* 4. 523–26. In the myth, the musician Orpheus, searching for his lost love Eurydice, is ripped to pieces by Thracian women, and his head thrown into the river. In Dryden's influential translation: "Then, when his head, from his fair shoulders torn, / Washed by the waters, was on Hebrus born; / Even then his trembling tongue invoked his bride; / With his last voice, *Eurydice*, he cried, / *Eurydice*, the rocks and riverbanks replied" (761–65). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: She repurposes a line from Dryden's elegy "To the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew" (1685). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ancient poetic genre, often depicting the idyllic lives of shepherds. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An ancient reed instrument associated with pastoral. Montagu repeatedly links modern Turkey with the classical past. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joseph Addison discussed ancient musical instruments in his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rural boys in Britain play rougher, less bucolic sports, including play-fighting with cudgels (or clubs). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Theocritus was an ancient Greek pastoral poet, author of a collection of *Idylls* (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E.). Montagu counters the period discourse on pastoral that emphasizes its idealizations. As Pope put it in "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," "pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been." [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first two volumes of Pope's English translation of Homer's ancient Greek *Iliad* had been published in 1715 and

1716, respectively.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: A form of “pasha,” a Turkish title indicating high rank.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Montagu draws a number of parallels between ancient descriptions in the *Iliad* and contemporary Turkish culture. “Andromache”: a warrior’s wife, depicted at her loom in Homer’s poem at 22.437–49. “Helen”: a beautiful woman, weaving at 3.125–28 and wearing a veil at 3.141. “Belt of Menelaus”: this garment of Helen’s royal husband is described at 4.132–39. “King Priam and his counsellors”: key characters, gathered together for instance at 3.145–53. “Diana”: perhaps a reference to Virgil’s *Aeneid* 1.498–502, which has Diana dancing on Eurotas.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nevsehirli Ibrahim Pasha, who later in 1717 did marry sultan Ahmed III’s daughter and became Grand Vizier.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Also called Song of Songs, a book in the Christian Bible’s Old Testament.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: French literary critic Nicolas Boileau, in his *Réflexions critiques sur quelques passages du rhéteur Longin* (*Critical Reflections on Several Passages of the Orator Longinus*; 1694).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eastern.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The refrain of a song or poem.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Latinate poetic term for a nightingale, often with an allusion to the Ovidian story of the human woman Philomela metamorphosized into a bird.[Return to reference 4](#)

## [THE TURKISH METHOD OF INOCULATION FOR THE SMALL POX]

\* \* \*

Apropos of distempers,<sup>5</sup> I am going to tell you a thing that will make you wish yourself here. The small pox, so fatal and so general amongst us, is here entirely harmless by the invention of engrafting, which is the term they give it. There is a set of old women who make it their business to perform the operation, every autumn, in the month of September, when the great heat is abated. People send to one another to know if any of their family has a mind to have the small pox; they make parties for this purpose, and when they are met (commonly fifteen or sixteen together) the old woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of small pox,<sup>6</sup> and asks what veins you please to have opened. She immediately rips open that you offer to her, with a large needle (which gives you no more pain than a common scratch) and puts into the vein as much matter as can lie upon the head of her needle, and after that, binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell, and in this manner opens four or five veins. The Grecians have commonly the superstition of opening one in the middle of the forehead, one in each arm, and one on the breast to mark the sign of the cross; but this has a very ill effect, all these wounds leaving little scars, and is not done by those that are not superstitious, who choose to have them in the legs, or that part of the arm that is concealed. The children or young patients play together all the rest of the day and are in perfect health to the eighth. Then the fever begins to seize them, and they keep their beds two days, very seldom three. They have very rarely above twenty or thirty in their faces, which never mark, and in eight days' time they are as well as before their illness. Where they are wounded, there remains running sores during the distemper, which I don't doubt is a great relief to it. Every year thousands undergo this operation, and the French ambassador says pleasantly that they take the small pox here by way of diversion, as they take the waters in other countries. There is no example of

anyone that has died in it, and you may believe I am very well satisfied of the safety of this experiment, since I intend to try it on my dear little son. I am patriot enough to take pains to bring this useful invention into fashion in England, and I should not fail to write to some of our doctors very particularly about it, if I knew any one of them that I thought had virtue enough to destroy such a considerable branch of their revenue, for the good of mankind. But that distemper is too beneficial to them, not to expose to all their resentment the hardy wight<sup>7</sup> that should undertake to put an end to it. Perhaps if I live to return, I may, however, have courage to war with them. Upon this occasion, admire the heroism in the heart of your friend, etc.

## 1717 **Endnotes**

1763

- Note 5: Montagu has just described a mild outbreak of the plague in the area. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In inoculation or variolation, the milder form of the smallpox virus (*Variola minor*) is introduced to the skin of a healthy person; the localized nature of this infection stimulates the immune system in time for the body both to terminate it and to protect itself against the virus in the future. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Person (archaic), often implying misfortune. [Return to reference 7](#)

## ELIZA HAYWOOD

### 1693?–1756

Not much is known about the early life of Elizabeth Fowler or about the “unfortunate marriage,” as she described it, that made her Eliza Haywood. She first came before the public as an actress in 1714 in Dublin, then moved to London. But “the stage not answering my expectation,” as she later confessed, soon “made me turn my genius another way,” to the life of a professional writer. Her first novel, the racy, best-selling *Love in Excess; or, The Fatal Inquiry* (1719), launched her long career as one of the most popular, prolific, and versatile authors of her time. She retailed gossip and also was gossiped about, becoming involved with the poet Richard Savage—a friend of Pope and later of Samuel Johnson—and with William Hatchett, a playwright and actor who seems to have been her longtime companion. Pope mocked her scandal mongering, and her two illegitimate children, in his own scandal-mongering *The Dunciad* (1728), and Fielding caricatured her as “Mrs. Novel.” But nothing could keep her from writing. In addition to many kinds of fiction, she produced poems, translations, plays, political satires, essays, criticism, and books of advice and conduct—whatever might sell. In the 1730s she returned to the stage, as a playwright and actress, until the government cracked down on the theater in 1737. From 1744 to 1746 she had another great success with the *Female Spectator*, a wide-ranging periodical written for women. Later, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), the story of an indiscreet

charmer who eventually reforms and finds her Mr. Trueworth, proved how well Haywood could adjust to the new style of edifying novels. And right up to the moment of her death she continued to work.

*Fantomina* first appeared among Haywood's *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems* (1725), and the title page calls it "A Secret History of an Amour between Two Persons of Condition." The popular genre of "secret histories" promised a peep at what went on behind the scenes of fashionable society; and even though Haywood's story is obviously made up, it suggests that private lives, and especially love lives, are very different from what the public sees. Right at the start, the aristocratic heroine (whose name we never learn) is fascinated by the dalliance between "respectable" gentlemen and loose women of the town. She soon becomes a player herself. Cleverly switching roles, she gratifies her own desire by exploiting her lover's fickle passions. The story unsettles conventional views of social position, identity, morality, and gender. But most of all it shows that love is not only an irresistible impulse but also a risky, exciting game.



## Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze

*In love the victors from the vanquished fly.  
They fly that wound, and they pursue that die.*  
—Waller<sup>1</sup>

A young lady of distinguished birth, beauty, wit, and spirit, happened to be in a box one night at the playhouse; where, though there were a great number of celebrated toasts,<sup>2</sup> she perceived several gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a woman who sat in a corner of the pit and, by her air and manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who come there for no other purpose, than to create acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it. She could not help testifying her contempt of men who, regardless either of the play or circle, threw away their time in such a manner, to some ladies that sat by her. But they, either less surprised by being more accustomed to such sights than she who had been bred for the most part in the country, or not of a disposition to consider anything very deeply, took but little notice of it. She still thought of it, however; and the longer she reflected on it, the greater was her wonder that men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have wit, should have tastes so very depraved.—This excited a curiosity in her to know in what manner these creatures were addressed.—She was young, a stranger to the world, and consequently to the dangers of it; and having nobody in town, at that time, to whom she was obliged to be accountable for her actions, did in everything as her inclinations or humors rendered most agreeable to her: therefore thought it not in the least a fault to put in practice a little whim which came immediately into her head, to dress herself as near as she could in the fashion of those women who make sale of their favors, and set herself in the way of being accosted as such a one, having at that time no other aim than the gratification of an innocent curiosity.—She no sooner designed this

frolic than she put it in execution; and muffling her hoods over her face, went the next night into the gallery-box, and practicing, as much as she had observed at that distance, the behavior of that woman, was not long before she found her disguise had answered the ends she wore it for.—A crowd of purchasers of all degrees and capacities were in a moment gathered about her, each endeavoring to outbid the other, in offering her a price for her embraces.—She listened to 'em all, and was not a little diverted in her mind at the disappointment she should give to so many, each of which thought himself secure of gaining her.—She was told by 'em all, that she was the most lovely woman in the world; and some cried, *Gad, she is mighty like my fine Lady Such-a-one*—naming her own name. She was naturally vain, and received no small pleasure in hearing herself praised, though in the person of another, and a supposed prostitute; but she dispatched as soon as she could all that had hitherto attacked her, when she saw the accomplished *Beauplaisir*<sup>3</sup> was making his way through the crowd as fast as he was able, to reach the bench she sat on. She had often seen him in the drawing-room, had talked with him; but then her quality<sup>4</sup> and reputed virtue kept him from using her with that freedom she now expected he would do, and had discovered something in him which had made her often think she should not be displeased, if he would abate some part of his reserve.—Now was the time to have her wishes answered.—He looked in her face, and fancied, as many others had done, that she very much resembled that lady whom she really was; but the vast disparity there appeared between their characters prevented him from entertaining even the most distant thought that they could be the same.—He addressed her at first with the usual salutations of her pretended profession, as, *Are you engaged, Madam?—Will you permit me to wait on you home after the play?—By Heaven, you are a fine girl!—How long have you used this house?*—and such like questions; but perceiving she had a turn of wit, and a genteel manner in her raillery, beyond what is frequently to be found among those wretches, who are for the most part gentlewomen but by necessity, few of 'em having had an education suitable to what they

affect to appear, he changed the form of his conversation, and showed her it was not because he understood no better, that he had made use of expressions so little polite.—In fine, they were infinitely charmed with each other. He was transported to find so much beauty and wit in a woman who he doubted not but on very easy terms he might enjoy; and she found a vast deal of pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrained manner. They passed their time all the play with an equal satisfaction; but when it was over, she found herself involved in a difficulty which before never entered into her head, but which she knew not well how to get over.—The passion he professed for her was not of that humble nature which can be content with distant adorations.—He resolved not to part from her without the gratifications of those desires she had inspired; and presuming on the liberties which her supposed function allowed of, told her she must either go with him to some convenient house of his procuring, or permit him to wait on her to her own lodgings.—Never had she been in such a *dilemma*. Three or four times did she open her mouth to confess her real quality; but the influence of her ill stars prevented it, by putting an excuse into her head which did the business as well, and at the same time did not take from her the power of seeing and entertaining him a second time with the same freedom she had done this.—She told him, she was under obligations to a man who maintained her, and whom she durst not disappoint, having promised to meet him that night at a house hard by.—This story, so like what those ladies sometimes tell, was not at all suspected, by *Beauplaisir*; and assuring her he would be far from doing her a prejudice,<sup>5</sup> desired that in return for the pain he should suffer in being deprived of her company that night, that she would order her affairs so as not to render him unhappy the next. She gave a solemn promise to be in the same box on the morrow evening, and they took leave of each other; he to the tavern to drown the remembrance of his disappointment; she in a hackney-chair<sup>6</sup> hurried home to indulge contemplation on the frolic she had taken, designing nothing less on her first reflections than to keep the promise she had made him, and

hugging herself with joy, that she had the good luck to come off undiscovered.

But these cogitations were but of a short continuance, they vanished with the hurry of her spirits, and were succeeded by others vastly different and ruinous.—All the charms of *Beauplaisir* came fresh into her mind; she languished, she almost died for another opportunity of conversing with him; and not all the admonitions of her discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offered itself the next night.—She depended on the strength of her virtue to bear her fate through trials more dangerous than she apprehended this to be, and never having been addressed by him as Lady—, was resolved to receive his devoirs as a town-mistress,<sup>7</sup> imagining a world of satisfaction to herself in engaging him in the character of such a one and in observing the surprise he would be in to find himself refused by a woman who he supposed granted her favors without exception.—Strange and unaccountable were the whimsies she was possessed of—wild and incoherent her desires—unfixed and undetermined her resolutions, but in that of seeing *Beauplaisir* in the manner she had lately done. As for her proceedings with him, or how a second time to escape him without discovering who she was, she could neither assure herself, nor whether or not in the last extremity she would do so.—Bent, however, on meeting him, whatever should be the consequence, she went out some hours before the time of going to the playhouse, and took lodgings in a house not very far from it, intending, that if he should insist on passing some part of the night with her, to carry him there, thinking she might with more security to her honor entertain him at a place where she was mistress than at any of his own choosing.

The appointed hour being arrived, she had the satisfaction to find his love in his assiduity. He was there before her; and nothing could be more tender than the manner in which he accosted her. But from the first moment she came in, to that of the play being done, he continued to assure her no consideration should prevail with him to part from her again, as she had done the night before; and she

rejoiced to think she had taken that precaution of providing herself with a lodging, to which she thought she might invite him without running any risk, either of her virtue or reputation.—Having told him she would admit of his accompanying her home, he seemed perfectly satisfied; and leading her to the place, which was not above twenty houses distant, would have ordered a collation to be brought after them. But she would not permit it, telling him she was not one of those who suffered themselves to be treated at their own lodgings; and as soon she was come in, sent a servant belonging to the house to provide a very handsome supper and wine, and everything was served to table in a manner which showed the director neither wanted money, nor was ignorant how it should be laid out.

This proceeding, though it did not take from him the opinion that she was what she appeared to be, yet it gave him thoughts of her which he had not before.—He believed her a *mistress*, but believed her to be one of a superior rank, and began to imagine the possession of her would be much more expensive than at first he had expected. But not being of a humor to grudge anything for his pleasures, he gave himself no farther trouble than what were occasioned by fears of not having money enough to reach her price about him.

Supper being over, which was intermixed with a vast deal of amorous conversation, he began to explain himself more than he had done; and both by his words and behavior let her know he would not be denied that happiness the freedoms she allowed had made him hope.—It was in vain; she would have retracted the encouragement she had given.—In vain she endeavored to delay, till the next meeting, the fulfilling of his wishes.—She had now gone too far to retreat.—*He* was bold;—he was resolute. *She* fearful—confused, altogether unprepared to resist in such encounters, and rendered more so by the extreme liking she had to him.—Shocked, however, at the apprehension of really losing her honor, she struggled all she could, and was just going to reveal the whole secret of her name and quality, when the thoughts of the liberty he

had taken with her, and those he still continued to prosecute, prevented her, with representing the danger of being exposed, and the whole affair made a theme for public ridicule.—Thus much, indeed, she told him, that she was a virgin, and had assumed this manner of behavior only to engage him. But that he little regarded, or if he had, would have been far from obliging him to desist;—nay, in the present burning eagerness of desire, 'tis probable, that had he been acquainted both with who and what she really was, the knowledge of her birth would not have influenced him with respect sufficient to have curbed the wild exuberance of his luxurious wishes, or made him in that longing, that impatient moment, change the form of his addresses. In fine, she was undone; and he gained a victory, so highly rapturous, that had he known over whom, scarce could he have triumphed more. Her tears, however, and the distraction she appeared in, after the ruinous ecstasy was past, as it heightened his wonder, so it abated his satisfaction.—He could not imagine for what reason a woman, who, if she intended not to be a *mistress*, had counterfeited the part of one, and taken so much pains to engage him, should lament a consequence which she could not but expect, and till the last test, seemed inclinable to grant; and was both surprised and troubled at the mystery.—He omitted nothing that he thought might make her easy; and still retaining an opinion that the hope of interest<sup>8</sup> had been the chief motive which had led her to act in the manner she had done, and believing that she might know so little of him as to suppose, now she had nothing left to give, he might not make that recompense she expected for her favors: to put her out of that pain, he pulled out of his pocket a purse of gold, entreating her to accept of that as an earnest of what he intended to do for her; assuring her, with ten thousand protestations, that he would spare nothing which his whole estate could purchase, to procure her content and happiness. This treatment made her quite forget the part she had assumed, and throwing it from her with an air of disdain, Is this a reward (*said she*) for condescensions,<sup>9</sup> such as I have yielded to?—Can all the wealth you are possessed of make a reparation for my loss of honor?

—Oh! no, I am undone beyond the power of heaven itself to help me!—She uttered many more such exclamations; which the amazed *Beauplaisir* heard without being able to reply to, till by degrees sinking from that rage of temper, her eyes resumed their softening glances, and guessing at the consternation he was in, No, my dear *Beauplaisir*, (*added she*) your love alone can compensate for the shame you have involved me in; be you sincere and constant, and I hereafter shall, perhaps, be satisfied with my fate, and forgive myself the folly that betrayed me to you.

*Beauplaisir* thought he could not have a better opportunity than these words gave him of inquiring who she was, and wherefore she had feigned herself to be of a profession which he was now convinced she was not; and after he had made her a thousand vows of an affection as inviolable and ardent as she could wish to find in him, entreated she would inform him by what means his happiness had been brought about, and also to whom he was indebted for the bliss he had enjoyed.—Some remains of yet unextinguished modesty, and sense of shame, made her blush exceedingly at this demand; but recollecting herself in a little time, she told him so much of the truth, as to what related to the frolic she had taken of satisfying her curiosity in what manner *mistresses*, of the sort she appeared to be, were treated by those who addressed them; but forbore discovering her true name and quality, for the reasons she had done before, resolving, if he boasted of this affair, he should not have it in his power to touch her character. She therefore said she was the daughter of a country gentleman, who was come to town to buy clothes, and that she was called *Fantomina*. He had no reason to distrust the truth of this story, and was therefore satisfied with it; but did not doubt by the beginning of her conduct, but that in the end she would be in reality the thing she so artfully had counterfeited; and had good nature enough to pity the misfortunes he imagined would be her lot. But to tell her so, or offer his advice in that point, was not his business, at least as yet.

They parted not till towards morning; and she obliged him to a willing vow of visiting her the next day at three in the afternoon. It

was too late for her to go home that night, therefore she contented herself with lying there. In the morning she sent for the woman of the house to come up to her; and easily perceiving, by her manner, that she was a woman who might be influenced by gifts, made her a present of a couple of broad pieces,<sup>1</sup> and desired her, that if the gentleman who had been there the night before should ask any questions concerning her, that he should be told, she was lately come out of the country, had lodged there about a fortnight, and that her name was *Fantomina*. I shall (*also added she*) lie but seldom here; nor, indeed, ever come but in those times when I expect to meet him. I would, therefore, have you order it so, that he may think I am but just gone out, if he should happen by any accident to call when I am not here; for I would not, for the world, have him imagine I do not constantly lodge here. The landlady assured her she would do everything as she desired, and gave her to understand she wanted not<sup>2</sup> the gift of secrecy.

Everything being ordered at this home for the security of her reputation, she repaired to the other, where she easily excused to an unsuspecting aunt, with whom she boarded, her having been abroad all night, saying, she went with a gentleman and his lady in a barge to a little country seat of theirs up the river, all of them designing to return the same evening; but that one of the bargemen happening to be taken ill on the sudden, and no other waterman to be got that night, they were obliged to tarry till morning. Thus did this lady's wit and vivacity assist her in all but where it was most needful.—She had discernment to foresee and avoid all those ills which might attend the loss of her *reputation*, but was wholly blind to those of the ruin of her *virtue*; and having managed her affairs so as to secure the *one*, grew perfectly easy with the remembrance she had forfeited the *other*.—The more she reflected on the merits of *Beauplaisir*, the more she excused herself for what she had done; and the prospect of that continued bliss she expected to share with him took from her all remorse for having engaged in an affair which promised her so much satisfaction, and in which she found not the least danger of misfortune.—If he is really (*said she, to herself*) the



faithful, the constant lover he has sworn to be, how charming will be our amour?—And if he should be false, grow satiated, like other men, I shall but, at the worst, have the private vexation of knowing I have lost him;—the intrigue being a secret, my disgrace will be so too.—I shall hear no whispers as I pass,—She is forsaken.—The odious word *forsaken* will never wound my ears; nor will my wrongs excite either the mirth or pity of the talking world.—It would not be even in the power of my undoer himself to triumph over me; and while he laughs at, and perhaps despises the fond, the yielding *Fantomina*, he will revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserved lady.—In this manner did she applaud her own conduct, and exult with the imagination that she had more prudence than all her sex beside. And it must be confessed, indeed, that she preserved an economy<sup>3</sup> in the management of this intrigue beyond what almost any woman but herself ever did: in the first place, by making no person in the world a confidant in it; and in the next, in concealing from *Beauplaisir* himself the knowledge who she was; for though she met him three or four days in a week at that lodging she had taken for that purpose, yet as much as he employed her time and thoughts, she was never missed from any assembly she had been accustomed to frequent.—The business of her love has engrossed her till six in the evening, and before seven she has been dressed in a different habit, and in another place.—Slippers, and a night-gown loosely flowing, has been the garb in which he has left the languishing *Fantomina*;—laced and adorned with all the blaze of jewels has he, in less than an hour after, beheld at the royal chapel, the palace gardens, drawing-room, opera, or play, the haughty awe-inspiring lady.—A thousand times has he stood amazed at the prodigious likeness between his little mistress and this court beauty; but was still as far from imagining they were the same as he was the first hour he had accosted her in the playhouse, though it is not impossible but that her resemblance to this celebrated lady might keep his inclination alive something longer than otherwise they would have been; and that it was to the thoughts of this (as he

supposed) unenjoyed charmer she owed in great measure the vigor of his latter caresses.

But he varied not so much from his sex as to be able to prolong desire to any great length after possession. The rifled charms of *Fantomina* soon lost their poignancy,<sup>4</sup> and grew tasteless and insipid; and when the season of the year inviting the company to the *Bath*,<sup>5</sup> she offered to accompany him, he made an excuse to go without her. She easily perceived his coldness, and the reason why he pretended her going would be inconvenient, and endured as much from the discovery as any of her sex could do. She dissembled it, however, before him, and took her leave of him with the show of no other concern than his absence occasioned. But this she did to take from him all suspicion of her following him, as she intended, and had already laid a scheme for.—From her first finding out that he designed to leave her behind, she plainly saw it was for no other reason than that being tired of her conversation, he was willing to be at liberty to pursue new conquests; and wisely considering that complaints, tears, swoonings, and all the extravagancies which women make use of in such cases have little prevalence over a heart inclined to rove, and only serve to render those who practice them more contemptible, by robbing them of that beauty which alone can bring back the fugitive lover, she resolved to take another course; and remembering the height of transport she enjoyed when the agreeable *Beauplaisir* kneeled at her feet, imploring her first favors, she longed to prove the same again. Not but a woman of her beauty and accomplishments might have beheld a thousand in that condition *Beauplaisir* had been; but with her sex's modesty, she had not also thrown off another virtue equally valuable, though generally unfortunate, *constancy*. She loved *Beauplaisir*; it was only he whose solicitations could give her pleasure; and had she seen the whole species despairing, dying for her sake, it might, perhaps, have been a satisfaction to her pride, but none to her more tender inclination.—Her design was once more to engage him; to hear him sigh, to see him languish, to feel the strenuous pressures of his eager arms, to be compelled, to be sweetly forced to what she wished with equal

ardor, was what she wanted, and what she had formed a stratagem to obtain, in which she promised herself success.

She no sooner heard he had left the town, than making a pretense to her aunt that she was going to visit a relation in the country, went towards *Bath*, attended but by two servants, who she found reasons to quarrel with on the road and discharged. Clothing herself in a habit she had brought with her, she forsook the coach and went into a wagon, in which equipage she arrived at *Bath*. The dress she was in was a round-eared cap, a short red petticoat, and a little jacket of gray stuff; all the rest of her accoutrements were answerable to<sup>6</sup> these, and joined with a broad country dialect, a rude unpolished air, which she, having been bred in these parts, knew very well how to imitate, with her hair and eye-brows blacked, made it impossible for her to be known, or taken for any other than what she seemed. Thus disguised did she offer herself to service in the house where *Beauplaisir* lodged, having made it her business to find out immediately where he was. Notwithstanding this metamorphosis she was still extremely pretty; and the mistress of the house happening at that time to want a maid, was very glad of the opportunity of taking her. She was presently<sup>7</sup> received into the family; and had a post in it (such as she would have chose, had she been left at her liberty), that of making the gentlemen's beds, getting them their breakfasts, and waiting on them in their chambers. Fortune in this exploit was extremely on her side; there were no others of the male sex in the house than an old gentleman who had lost the use of his limbs with the rheumatism, and had come thither for the benefit of the waters, and her beloved *Beauplaisir*; so that she was in no apprehensions of any amorous violence, but where she wished to find it. Nor were her designs disappointed. He was fired with the first sight of her; and though he did not presently take any farther notice of her than giving her two or three hearty kisses, yet she, who now understood that language but too well, easily saw they were the prelude to more substantial joys.—Coming the next morning to bring his chocolate, as he had ordered, he caught her by the pretty leg, which the shortness of

her petticoat did not in the least oppose; then pulling her gently to him, asked her, how long she had been at service?—How many sweethearts she had? If she had ever been in love? and many other such questions, befitting one of the degree<sup>8</sup> she appeared to be. All which she answered with such seeming innocence, as more enflamed the amorous heart of him who talked to her. He compelled her to sit in his lap; and gazing on her blushing beauties, which, if possible, received addition from her plain and rural dress, he soon lost the power of containing himself.—His wild desires burst out in all his words and actions: he called her little angel, cherubim, swore he must enjoy her, though death were to be the consequence, devoured her lips, her breasts with greedy kisses, held to his burning bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant body, nor suffered her to get loose till he had ravaged all, and glutted each rapacious sense with the sweet beauties of the pretty *Celia*, for that was the name she bore in this second expedition.—Generous as liberality itself to all who gave him joy this way, he gave her a handsome sum of gold, which she durst not now refuse, for fear of creating some mistrust, and losing the heart she so lately had regained; therefore taking it with an humble curtsy, and a well counterfeited show of surprise and joy, cried, O law, Sir! what must I do for all this? He laughed at her simplicity, and kissing her again, though less fervently than he had done before, bad her not be out of the way when he came home at night. She promised she would not, and very obediently kept her word.

His stay at *Bath* exceeded not a month; but in that time his supposed country lass had persecuted him so much with her fondness that in spite of the eagerness with which he first enjoyed her, he was at last grown more weary of her than he had been of *Fantomina*: which she perceiving, would not be troublesome, but quitting her service remained privately in the town till she heard he was on his return; and in that time provided herself of another disguise to carry on a third plot, which her inventing brain had furnished her with, once more to renew his twice-decayed ardors. The dress she had ordered to be made was such as widows wear in

their first mourning, which, together with the most afflicted and penitential countenance that ever was seen, was no small alteration to her who used to seem all gaiety.—To add to this, her hair, which she was accustomed to wear very loose, both when *Fantomina* and *Celia*, was now tied back so straight, and her pinn<sup>9</sup>ers coming so very forward, that there was none of it to be seen. In fine, her habit and her air were so much changed, that she was not more difficult to be known in the rude country *girl*, than she was now in the sorrowful *widow*.

She knew that *Beauplaisir* came alone in his chariot to the *Bath*, and in the time of her being servant in the house where he lodged, heard nothing of anybody that was to accompany him to *London*, and hoped he would return in the same manner he had gone. She therefore hired horses and a man to attend her to an inn about ten miles on this side *Bath*, where having discharged them, she waited till the chariot should come by; which when it did, and she saw that he was alone in it, she called to him that drove it to stop a moment, and going to the door saluted the master with these words:

The distressed and wretched, Sir (*said she*), never fail to excite compassion in a generous mind; and I hope I am not deceived in my opinion that yours is such.—You have the appearance of a gentleman, and cannot, when you hear my story, refuse that assistance which is in your power to give to an unhappy woman, who without it may be rendered the most miserable of all created beings.

It would not be very easy to represent the surprise so odd an address created in the mind of him to whom it was made.—She had not the appearance of one who wanted charity; and what other favor she required he could not conceive; but telling her she might command anything in his power, gave her encouragement to declare herself in this manner. You may judge (*resumed she*), by the melancholy garb I am in, that I have lately lost all that ought to be valuable to womankind; but it is impossible for you to guess the greatness of my misfortune, unless you had known my husband, who was master of every perfection to endear him to a wife's

affections.—But, notwithstanding I look on myself as the most unhappy of my sex in out-living him, I must so far obey the dictates of my discretion as to take care of the little fortune he left behind him, which being in the hands of a brother of his in *London*, will be all carried off to *Holland*, where he is going to settle; if I reach not the town before he leaves it, I am undone for ever.—To which end I left *Bristol*, the place where we lived, hoping to get a place in the stage<sup>1</sup> at *Bath*, but they were all taken up before I came; and being, by a hurt I got in a fall, rendered incapable of traveling any long journey on horseback, I have no way to go to *London*, and must be inevitably ruined in the loss of all I have on earth, without<sup>2</sup> you have good nature enough to admit me to take part of your chariot.

Here the feigned widow ended her sorrowful tale, which had been several times interrupted by a parenthesis of sighs and groans; and *Beauplaisir*, with a complaisant and tender air, assured her of his readiness to serve her in things of much greater consequence than what she desired of him; and told her it would be an impossibility of denying a place in his chariot to a lady, who he could not behold without yielding one in his heart. She answered the compliments he made her but with tears, which seemed to stream in such abundance from her eyes that she could not keep her handkerchief from her face one moment. Being come into the chariot, *Beauplaisir* said a thousand handsome things to persuade her from giving way to so violent a grief, which, he told her, would not only be destructive to her beauty, but likewise her health. But all his endeavors for consolation appeared ineffectual, and he began to think he should have but a dull journey, in the company of one who seemed so obstinately devoted to the memory of her dead husband that there was no getting a word from her on any other theme.—But bethinking himself of the celebrated story of the *Ephesian* matron,<sup>3</sup> it came into his head to make trial, she who seemed equally susceptible of *sorrow*, might not also be so too of *love*: and having began a discourse on almost every other topic, and finding her still incapable of answering, resolved to put it to the proof, if this would have no more effect to rouse her sleeping spirits.—With a gay air,

therefore, though accompanied with the greatest modesty and respect, he turned the conversation, as though without design, on that joy-giving passion, and soon discovered that was indeed the subject she was best pleased to be entertained with; for on his giving her a hint to begin upon, never any tongue ran more voluble than hers, on the prodigious power it had to influence the souls of those possessed of it, to actions even the most distant from their intentions, principles, or humors.—From that she passed to a description of the happiness of mutual affection;—the unspeakable ecstasy of those who meet with equal ardency; and represented it in colors so lively, and disclosed by the gestures with which her words were accompanied, and the accent of her voice so true a feeling of what she said, that *Beauplaisir*, without being as stupid as he was really the contrary, could not avoid perceiving there were seeds of fire not yet extinguished in this fair widow's soul, which wanted but the kindling breath of tender sighs to light into a blaze.—He now thought himself as fortunate, as some moments before he had the reverse; and doubted not but that before they parted, he should find a way to dry the tears of this lovely mourner, to the satisfaction of them both. He did not, however, offer, as he had done to *Fantomina* and *Celia*, to urge his passion directly to her, but by a thousand little softening artifices, which he well knew how to use, gave her leave to guess he was enamored. When they came to the inn where they were to lie, he declared himself somewhat more freely, and perceiving she did not resent it past forgiveness, grew more encroaching still.—He now took the liberty of kissing away her tears, and catching the sighs as they issued from her lips; telling her if grief was infectious, he was resolved to have his share; protesting he would gladly exchange passions with her, and be content to bear her load of *sorrow*, if she would as willingly ease the burden of his *love*.—She said little in answer to the strenuous pressures with which at last he ventured to enfold her, but not thinking it decent, for the character she had assumed, to yield so suddenly, and unable to deny both his and her own inclinations, she counterfeited a fainting, and fell motionless upon his breast.—He had no great notion that she was in a real fit, and the room they supped in



happening to have a bed in it, he took her in his arms and laid her on it, believing that whatever her distemper was, that was the most proper place to convey her to.—He laid himself down by her, and endeavored to bring her to herself; and she was too grateful to her kind physician at her returning sense, to remove from the posture he had put her in, without his leave.

It may, perhaps, seem strange that *Beauplaisir* should in such near intimacies continue still deceived. I know there are men who will swear it is an impossibility, and that no disguise could hinder them from knowing a woman they had once enjoyed. In answer to these scruples, I can only say, that besides the alteration which the change of dress made in her, she was so admirably skilled in the art of feigning that she had the power of putting on almost what face she pleased, and knew so exactly how to form her behavior to the character she represented that all the comedians<sup>4</sup> at both playhouses are infinitely short of her performances. She could vary her very glances, tune her voice to accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appeared herself.—These aids from nature, joined to the wiles of art, and the distance between the places where the imagined *Fantomina* and *Celia* were, might very well prevent his having any thought that they were the same, or that the fair *widow* was either of them. It never so much as entered his head, and though he did fancy he observed in the face of the latter, features which were not altogether unknown to him, yet he could not recollect when or where he had known them;—and being told by her, that from her birth she had never removed from *Bristol*, a place where he never was, he rejected the belief of having seen her, and supposed his mind had been deluded by an idea of some other, whom she might have a resemblance of.

They passed the time of their journey in as much happiness as the most luxurious gratification of wild desires could make them; and when they came to the end of it, parted not without a mutual promise of seeing each other often.—He told her to what place she should direct a letter to him; and she assured him she would send to



let him know where to come to her, as soon as she was fixed in lodgings.

She kept her promise; and charmed with the continuance of his eager fondness, went not home but into private lodgings, whence she wrote to him to visit her the first opportunity, and inquire for the Widow *Bloomer*.—She had no sooner dispatched this billet<sup>5</sup> than she repaired to the house where she had lodged as *Fantomina*, charging the people if *Beauplaisir* should come there, not to let him know she had been out of town. From thence she wrote to him, in a different hand, a long letter of complaint, that he had been so cruel in not sending one letter to her all the time he had been absent, entreated to see him, and concluded with subscribing herself his unalterably affectionate *Fantomina*. She received in one day answers to both these. The first contained these lines:

To the Charming Mrs. BLOOMER,

*It would be impossible, my Angel! for me to express the thousandth part of that infinity of transport, the sight of your dear letter gave me.—Never was woman formed to charm like you: never did any look like you,—write like you,—bless like you;—nor did ever man adore as I do.—Since yesterday we parted, I have seemed a body without a soul; and had you not by this inspiring billet, gave me new life, I know not what by tomorrow I should have been.—I will be with you this evening about five.—O, 'tis an age till then!—But the cursed formalities of duty oblige me to dine with my lord—who never rises from table till that hour;—therefore adieu till then sweet lovely mistress of the soul and all the faculties of*

Your most faithful,  
BEAUPLAISIR.

The other was in this manner:

To the Lovely FANTOMINA,

*If you were half so sensible as you ought of your own power of charming, you would be assured, that to be unfaithful or unkind to*

*you would be among the things that are in their very natures impossibilities.—It was my misfortune, not my fault, that you were not persecuted every post with a declaration of my unchanging passion; but I had unluckily forgot the name of the woman at whose house you are, and knew not how to form a direction that it might come safe to your hands.—And, indeed, the reflection how you might misconstrue my silence, brought me to town some weeks sooner than I intended—If you knew how I have languished to renew those blessings I am permitted to enjoy in your society, you would rather pity than condemn*

Your most faithful,  
BEAUPLAISIR.

*P.S. I fear I cannot see you till tomorrow; some business has unluckily fallen out that will engross my hours till then.—Once more, my dear, Adieu.*

Traitor! (*cried she*) as soon as she had read them, 'tis thus our silly, fond, believing sex are served when they put faith in man. So had I been deceived and cheated, had I like the rest believed, and sat down mourning in absence, and vainly waiting recovered tendernesses.—How do some women (*continued she*) make their life a hell, burning in fruitless expectations, and dreaming out their days in hopes and fears, then wake at last to all the horror of despair?—But I have outwitted even the most subtle of the deceiving kind, and while he thinks to fool me, is himself the only beguiled person.

She made herself, most certainly, extremely happy in the reflection on the success of her stratagems; and while the knowledge of his inconstancy and levity of nature kept her from having that real tenderness for him she would else have had, she found the means of gratifying the inclination she had for his agreeable person in as full a manner as she could wish. She had all the sweets of love, but as yet had tasted none of the gall, and was in a state of contentment which might be envied by the more delicate.

When the expected hour arrived, she found that her lover had lost no part of the fervency with which he had parted from her; but when the next day she received him as *Fantomina*, she perceived a prodigious difference; which led her again into reflections on the unaccountableness of men's fancies, who still<sup>6</sup> prefer the last conquest, only because it is the last.—Here was an evident proof of it; for there could not be a difference in merit, because they were the same person; but the Widow *Bloomer* was a more new acquaintance than *Fantomina*, and therefore esteemed more valuable. This, indeed, must be said of *Beauplaisir*, that he had a greater share of good nature than most of his sex, who, for the most part, when they are weary of an intrigue, break it entirely off, without any regard to the despair of the abandoned nymph. Though he retained no more than a bare pity and complaisance<sup>7</sup> for *Fantomina*, yet believing she loved him to an excess, would not entirely forsake her, though the continuance of his visits was now become rather a penance than a pleasure.

The Widow *Bloomer* triumphed some time longer over the heart of this inconstant, but at length her sway was at an end, and she sunk in this character to the same degree of tastelessness as she had done before in that of *Fantomina* and *Celia*.—She presently perceived it, but bore it as she had always done; it being but what she expected, she had prepared herself for it, and had another project in *embryo* which she soon ripened into action. She did not, indeed, complete it altogether so suddenly as she had done the others, by reason there must be persons employed in it; and the aversion she had to any *confidants* in her affairs, and the caution with which she had hitherto acted, and which she was still determined to continue, made it very difficult for her to find a way without breaking through that resolution to compass what she wished.—She got over the difficulty at last, however, by proceeding in a manner, if possible, more extraordinary than all her former behavior.—Muffling herself up in her hood one day, she went into the park about the hour when there are a great many necessitous gentlemen, who think themselves above doing what they call little

things for a maintenance, walking in the *Mall*, to take a *Camelion* treat,<sup>8</sup> and fill their stomachs with air instead of meat. Two of those, who by their physiognomy she thought most proper for her purpose, she beckoned to come to her; and taking them into a walk more remote from company, began to communicate the business she had with them in these words: I am sensible, gentlemen (*said she*), that, through the blindness of fortune and partiality of the world, merit frequently goes unrewarded, and that those of the best pretensions meet with the least encouragement.—I ask your pardon (*continued she*), perceiving they seemed surprised, if I am mistaken in the notion that you two may, perhaps, be of the number of those who have reason to complain of the injustice of fate; but if you are such as I take you for, I have a proposal to make you which may be of some little advantage to you. Neither of them made any immediate answer, but appeared buried in consideration for some moments. At length, We should, doubtless, madam (*said one of them*), willingly come into any measures to oblige you, provided they are such as may bring us into no danger, either as to our persons or reputations. That which I require of you (*resumed she*), has nothing in it criminal. All that I desire is *secrecy* in what you are entrusted, and to disguise yourselves in such a manner as you cannot be known, if hereafter seen by the person on whom you are to impose.—In fine, the business is only an innocent frolic, but if blazed abroad might be taken for too great a freedom in me.—Therefore, if you resolve to assist me, here are five pieces to drink my health and assure you, that I have not discoursed you on an affair I design not to proceed in; and when it is accomplished fifty more lie ready for your acceptance. These words, and above all the money, which was a sum which, 'tis probable, they had not seen of a long time, made them immediately assent to all she desired, and press for the beginning of their employment. But things were not yet ripe for execution; and she told them that the next day they should be let into the secret, charging them to meet her in the same place at an hour she appointed. 'Tis hard to say, which of these parties went away best pleased; *they*, that fortune had sent them so unexpected

a windfall; or *she*, that she had found persons who appeared so well qualified to serve her.

Indefatigable in the pursuit of whatsoever her humor was bent upon, she had no sooner left her new-engaged emissaries than she went in search of a house for the completing her project.—She pitched on one very large and magnificently furnished, which she hired by the week, giving them the money beforehand to prevent any inquiries. The next day she repaired to the park, where she met the punctual squires of low degree; and ordering them to follow her to the house she had taken, told them they must condescend to appear like servants, and gave each of them a very rich livery. Then writing a letter to *Beauplaisir*, in a character vastly different from either of those she had made use of as *Fantomina*, or the fair Widow *Bloomer*, ordered one of them to deliver it into his own hands, to bring back an answer, and to be careful that he sifted out nothing of the truth.—I do not fear (*said she*), that you should discover to him who I am, because that is a secret of which you yourselves are ignorant; but I would have you be so careful in your replies, that he may not think the concealment springs from any other reasons than your great integrity to your trust.—Seem therefore to know my whole affairs; and let your refusing to make him partaker in the secret appear to be only the effect of your zeal for my interest and reputation. Promises of entire fidelity on the one side, and reward on the other, being past, the messenger made what haste he could to the house of *Beauplaisir*; and being there told where he might find him, performed exactly the injunction that had been given him. But never astonishment exceeding that which *Beauplaisir* felt at the reading this billet, in which he found these lines:

To the All-conquering BEAUPLAISIR.

*I imagine not that 'tis a new thing to you, to be told you are the greatest charm in nature to our sex. I shall therefore, not to fill up my letter with any impertinent praises on your wit or person, only tell you that I am infinite in love with both, and if you have a heart not too deeply engaged, should think myself the happiest of my sex*

*in being capable of inspiring it with some tenderness.—There is but one thing in my power to refuse you, which is the knowledge of my name, which believing the sight of my face will render no secret, you must not take it ill that I conceal from you.—The bearer of this is a person I can trust; send by him your answer; but endeavor not to dive into the meaning of this mystery, which will be impossible for you to unravel, and at the same time very much disoblige me.—But that you may be in no apprehensions of being imposed on by a woman unworthy of your regard, I will venture to assure you, the first and greatest men in the kingdom would think themselves blessed to have that influence over me you have, though unknown to yourself acquired.—But I need not go about to raise your curiosity, by giving you any idea of what my person is; if you think fit to be satisfied, resolve to visit me tomorrow about three in the afternoon; and though my face is hid, you shall not want sufficient demonstration that she who takes these unusual measures to commence a friendship with you is neither old, nor deformed. Till then I am,*

Yours,  
INCOGNITA.

He had scarce come to the conclusion before he asked the person who brought it, from what place he came;—the name of the lady he served;—if she were a wife, or widow, and several other questions directly opposite to the directions of the letter; but silence would have availed him as much as did all those testimonies of curiosity. No *Italian Bravo*,<sup>9</sup> employed in a business of the like nature, performed his office with more artifice; and the impatient inquirer was convinced, that nothing but doing as he was desired could give him any light into the character of the woman who declared so violent a passion for him; and little fearing any consequence which could ensue from such an encounter, resolved to rest satisfied till he was informed of everything from herself, not imagining this *Incognita* varied so much from the generality of her sex as to be able to refuse the knowledge of anything to the man she loved with that transcendancy of passion she professed, and

which his many successes with the ladies gave him encouragement enough to believe. He therefore took pen and paper, and answered her letter in terms tender enough for a man who had never seen the person to whom he wrote. The words were as follows:

To the Obliging and Witty INCOGNITA.

*Though to tell me I am happy enough to be liked by a woman such, as by your manner of writing, I imagine you to be, is an honor which I can never sufficiently acknowledge, yet I know not how I am able to content myself with admiring the wonders of your wit alone. I am certain a soul like yours must shine in your eyes with a vivacity which must bless all they look on.—I shall, however, endeavor to restrain myself in those bounds you are pleased to set me, till by the knowledge of my inviolable fidelity, I may be thought worthy of gazing on that heaven I am now but to enjoy in contemplation.—You need not doubt my glad compliance with your obliging summons. There is a charm in your lines which gives too sweet an idea of their lovely author to be resisted.—I am all impatient for the blissful moment which is to throw me at your feet, and give me an opportunity of convincing you that I am,*

Your everlasting slave,

BEAUPLAISIR.

Nothing could be more pleased than she to whom it was directed, at the receipt of this letter; but when she was told how inquisitive he had been concerning her character and circumstances, she could not forbear laughing heartily to think of the tricks she had played him, and applauding her own strength of genius and force of resolution, which by such unthought-of ways could triumph over her lover's inconstancy, and render that very temper,<sup>1</sup> which to other women is the greatest curse, a means to make herself more blessed.—Had he been faithful to me (*said she, to herself*), either as *Fantomina*, or *Celia*, or the *Widow Bloomer*, the most violent passion, if it does not change its object, in time will wither. Possession naturally abates the vigor of desire, and I should have



had, at best, but a cold, insipid, husband-like lover in my arms; but by these arts of passing on him as a new mistress whenever the ardor, which alone makes love a blessing, begins to diminish for the former one, I have him always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying.—O that all neglected wives and fond abandoned nymphs would take this method!—Men would be caught in their own snare, and have no cause to scorn our easy, weeping, wailing sex! Thus did she pride herself as if secure she never should have any reason to repent the present gaiety of her humor. The hour drawing near in which he was to come, she dressed herself in as magnificent a manner as if she were to be that night at a ball at court, endeavoring to repair the want of those beauties which the vizard<sup>2</sup> should conceal, by setting forth the others with the greatest care and exactness. Her fine shape, and air, and neck appeared to great advantage; and by that which was to be seen of her, one might believe the rest to be perfectly agreeable. *Beauplaisir* was prodigiously charmed, as well with her appearance as with the manner she entertained him. But though he was wild with impatience for the sight of a face which belonged to so exquisite a body, yet he would not immediately press for it, believing before he left her he should easily obtain that satisfaction.—A noble collation being over, he began to sue for the performance of her promise of granting everything he could ask, excepting the sight of her face, and knowledge of her name. It would have been a ridiculous piece of affectation in her to have seemed coy in complying with what she herself had been the first in desiring. She yielded without even a show of reluctance: and if there be any true felicity in an amour such as theirs, both here enjoyed it to the full. But not in the height of all their mutual raptures could he prevail on her to satisfy his curiosity with the sight of her face. She told him that she hoped he knew so much of her as might serve to convince him she was not unworthy of his tenderest regard; and if he could not content himself with that which she was willing to reveal, and which was the conditions of their meeting, dear as he was to her, she would rather part with him for ever than consent to gratify an inquisitiveness



which, in her opinion, had no business with his love. It was in vain that he endeavored to make her sensible of her mistake; and that this restraint was the greatest enemy imaginable to the happiness of them both. She was not to be persuaded, and he was obliged to desist his solicitations, though determined in his mind to compass what he so ardently desired, before he left the house. He then turned the discourse wholly on the violence of the passion he had for her; and expressed the greatest discontent in the world at the apprehensions of being separated;—swore he could dwell for ever in her arms, and with such an undeniable earnestness pressed to be permitted to tarry with her the whole night, that had she been less charmed with his renewed eagerness of desire, she scarce would have had the power of refusing him; but in granting this request, she was not without a thought that he had another reason for making it besides the extremity of his passion, and had it immediately in her head how to disappoint him.

The hours of repose being arrived, he begged she would retire to her chamber; to which she consented, but obliged him to go to bed first; which he did not much oppose, because he supposed she would not lie in her mask, and doubted not but the morning's dawn would bring the wished discovery.—The two imagined servants ushered him to his new lodging; where he lay some moments in all the perplexity imaginable at the oddness of this adventure. But she suffered not these cogitations to be of any long continuance. She came, but came in the dark; which being no more than he expected by the former part of her proceedings, he said nothing of; but as much satisfaction as he found in her embraces, nothing ever longed for the approach of day with more impatience than he did. At last it came; but how great was his disappointment, when by the noises he heard in the street, the hurry of the coaches, and the cries of penny-merchants,<sup>3</sup> he was convinced it was night nowhere but with him? He was still in the same darkness as before; for she had taken care to blind the windows in such a manner that not the least chink was left to let in day.—He complained of her behavior in terms that she would not have been able to resist yielding to, if she had not been

certain it would have been the ruin of her passion.—She therefore answered him only as she had done before; and getting out of the bed from him, flew out of the room with too much swiftness for him to have overtaken her, if he had attempted it. The moment she left him, the two attendants entered the chamber, and plucking down the implements which had screened him from the knowledge of that which he so much desired to find out, restored his eyes once more to day.—They attended to assist him in dressing, brought him tea, and by their obsequiousness, let him see there was but one thing which the mistress of them would not gladly oblige him in.—He was so much out of humor, however, at the disappointment of his curiosity, that he resolved never to make a second visit.—Finding her in an outer room, he made no scruple of expressing the sense he had of the little trust she reposed in him, and at last plainly told her, he could not submit to receive obligations from a lady who thought him incapable of keeping a secret, which she made no difficulty of letting her servants into.—He resented,—he once more entreated,—he said all that man could do, to prevail on her to unfold the mystery; but all his adjurations were fruitless; and he went out of the house determined never to re-enter it, till she should pay the price of his company with the discovery of her face and circumstances.—She suffered him to go with this resolution, and doubted not but he would recede from it, when he reflected on the happy moments they had passed together; but if he did not, she comforted herself with the design of forming some other stratagem, with which to impose on him a fourth time.

She kept the house and her gentlemen-equipage for about a fortnight, in which time she continued to write to him as *Fantomina* and the Widow *Bloomer*, and received the visits he sometimes made to each; but his behavior to both was grown so cold, that she began to grow as weary of receiving his now insipid caresses as he was of offering them. She was beginning to think in what manner she should drop these two characters, when the sudden arrival of her mother, who had been some time in a foreign country, obliged her to put an immediate stop to the course of her whimsical adventures.—

That lady, who was severely virtuous, did not approve of many things she had been told of the conduct of her daughter; and though it was not in the power of any person in the world to inform her of the truth of what she had been guilty of, yet she heard enough to make her keep her afterwards in a restraint, little agreeable to her humor, and the liberties to which she had been accustomed.

But this confinement was not the greatest part of the trouble of this now afflicted lady. She found the consequences of her amorous follies would be, without almost a miracle, impossible to be concealed.—She was with child; and though she would easily have found means to have screened even this from the knowledge of the world, had she been at liberty to have acted with the same unquestionable authority over herself as she did before the coming of her mother, yet now all her invention was at a loss for a stratagem to impose on a woman of her penetration.—By eating little, lacing prodigious straight, and the advantage of a great hoop-petticoat, however, her bigness was not taken notice of, and, perhaps, she would not have been suspected till the time of her going into the country, where her mother designed to send her, and from whence she intended to make her escape to some place where she might be delivered with secrecy, if the time of it had not happened much sooner than she expected.—A ball being at court, the good old lady was willing she should partake of the diversion of it as a farewell to the town.—It was there she was seized with those pangs, which none in her condition are exempt from.—She could not conceal the sudden rack<sup>4</sup> which all at once invaded her; or had her tongue been mute, her wildly rolling eyes, the distortion of her features, and the convulsions which shook her whole frame, in spite of her, would have revealed she labored under some terrible shock of nature.—Everybody was surprised, everybody was concerned, but few guessed at the occasion.—Her mother grieved beyond expression, doubted not but she was struck with the hand of death; and ordered her to be carried home in a chair,<sup>5</sup> while herself followed in another.—A physician was immediately sent for; but he presently perceiving what was her distemper, called the old lady

aside and told her, it was not a doctor of his sex, but one of her own, her daughter stood in need of.—Never was astonishment and horror greater than that which seized the soul of this afflicted parent at these words. She could not for a time believe the truth of what she heard; but he insisting on it, and conjuring her to send for a midwife, she was at length convinced of it.—All the pity and tenderness she had been for some moment before possessed of now vanished, and were succeeded by an adequate<sup>6</sup> shame and indignation.—She flew to the bed where her daughter was lying, and telling her what she had been informed of, and which she was now far from doubting, commanded her to reveal the name of the person whose insinuations<sup>7</sup> had drawn her to this dishonor.—It was a great while before she could be brought to confess anything, and much longer before she could be prevailed on to name the man whom she so fatally had loved; but the rack of nature growing more fierce, and the enraged old lady protesting no help should be afforded her while she persisted in her obstinacy, she, with great difficulty and hesitation in her speech, at last pronounced the name of *Beauplaisir*. She had no sooner satisfied her weeping mother, than that sorrowful lady sent messengers at the same time for a midwife, and for that gentleman who had occasioned the other's being wanted.—He happened by accident to be at home, and immediately obeyed the summons, though prodigiously surprised what business a lady so much a stranger to him could have to impart.—But how much greater was his amazement, when taking him into her closet,<sup>8</sup> she there acquainted him with her daughter's misfortune, of the discovery she had made, and how far he was concerned in it?—All the idea one can form of wild astonishment was mean to what he felt.—He assured her that the young lady her daughter was a person whom he had never, more than at a distance, admired;—that he had indeed spoke to her in public company, but that he never had a thought which tended to her dishonor.—His denials, if possible, added to the indignation she was before enflamed with.—She had no longer patience; and carrying him into the chamber, where she was just delivered of a fine girl, cried out, I will not be imposed on: the

truth by one of you shall be revealed.—*Beauplaisir* being brought to the bedside, was beginning to address himself to the lady in it, to beg she would clear the mistake her mother was involved in; when she, covering herself with the clothes, and ready to die a second time with the inward agitations of her soul, shrieked out, Oh, I am undone!—I cannot live, and bear this shame!—But the old lady believing that now or never was the time to dive into the bottom of this mystery, forcing her to rear her head, told her she should not hope to escape the scrutiny of a parent she had dishonored in such a manner, and pointing to *Beauplaisir*, Is this the gentleman (*said she*), to whom you owe your ruin? or have you deceived me by a fictitious tale? Oh! no (*resumed the trembling creature*), he is indeed the innocent cause of my undoing.—Promise me your pardon (*continued she*), and I will relate the means. Here she ceased, expecting what she would reply, which, on hearing *Beauplaisir* cry out, What mean you, madam? I your undoing, who never harbored the least design on you in my life, she did in these words: Though the injury you have done your family (*said she*) is of a nature which cannot justly hope forgiveness, yet be assured, I shall much sooner excuse you when satisfied of the truth than while I am kept in a suspense, if possible, as vexatious as the crime itself is to me. Encouraged by this she related the whole truth. And 'tis difficult to determine if *Beauplaisir*, or the lady, were most surprised at what they heard; he, that he should have been blinded so often by her artifices; or she, that so young a creature should have the skill to make use of them. Both sat for some time in a profound reverie; till at length she broke it first in these words: Pardon, sir (*said she*), the trouble I have given you. I must confess it was with a design to oblige you to repair the supposed injury you had done this unfortunate girl, by marrying her, but now I know not what to say.—The blame is wholly hers, and I have nothing to request further of you, than that you will not divulge the distracted folly she has been guilty of.—He answered her in terms perfectly polite; but made no offer of that which, perhaps, she expected, though could not, now informed of her daughter's proceedings, demand. He assured her, however, that if she would commit the newborn lady to his care, he

would discharge it faithfully. But neither of them would consent to that; and he took his leave, full of cogitations, more confused than ever he had known in his whole life. He continued to visit there, to inquire after her health every day; but the old lady perceiving there was nothing likely to ensue from these civilities but, perhaps, a renewing of the crime, she entreated him to refrain; and as soon as her daughter was in a condition, sent her to a monastery in *France*, the abbess of which had been her particular friend. And thus ended an intrigue which, considering the time it lasted, was as full of variety as any, perhaps, that many ages has produced.

1725

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Edmund Waller, "To A. H., of the different successes of their loves" (1645).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Women to whose charms men drink.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fine pleasure (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Social standing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Harm.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A small hired coach, carried by two men.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sex worker. "Devoirs": dutiful compliments.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Profit.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Humiliations.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Gold coins.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Did not lack.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Careful regulation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pungency.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A fashionable resort, one hundred miles west of London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In harmony with.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Immediately.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Social class.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Long flaps on the sides of a cap worn by women of rank.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stagecoach.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unless.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Petronius's *Satyricon*, a grieving widow who watches over her husband's burial vault is seduced by a soldier. When one of the bodies he was supposed to be guarding is stolen, she lets him replace it with her husband's.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Actors.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Letter.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Always.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Indulgence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chameleons supposedly fed on air. The Mall is a fashionable promenade in St. James's Park.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ruffian for hire.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Habit of mind (inconstancy).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mask.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Street vendors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Intense pain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Carriage.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Equal.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Artful ways of winding into someone's favor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Private room.[Return to reference 8](#)

# The Rise of the Novel

The origins of English literature's most popular form, the novel, have long been seen to lie in the eighteenth century. Critics have traced a great tradition arising from the fictions of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and others, carrying forward to the nineteenth century in the work of Jane Austen and Walter Scott, George Eliot and Charles Dickens, to the outstanding experiments in fiction in the twentieth, and the diverse novelistic voices heard in English in the twenty-first. Yet there have been prose fictions in literature for millennia, from works of antiquity such as the *Satyricon* by the Roman author Petronius (ca. 27–66 C.E.) to *Don Quixote* (1605, 1616) by the Spanish master Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616). As far back as the sixteenth century, English fictions were sometimes called “novels” on their title pages (a term, initially signifying a short story about love, taken from Continental Europe). And many eighteenth-century works now classified as novels first appeared under other labels: tale, history, secret history, romance, “the life of,” or “the adventures of.” Why does this period's fiction feel more novelistic to readers of English now than the romances, fables, and other narratives that appeared centuries before? What changes in the conventions and subject matter of fictional prose, in literature's social contexts, and in modes of literary production and consumption led to the emergence in the eighteenth century of the novel as many now recognize it?

Scholars confronting these questions must face the sheer variety of eighteenth-century fictions. Autobiographical adventures that claim to be true, such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688; see [p. 152](#)) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719; see below), and parodies of such stories like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; see [p. 377](#)), draw one strand of fictional narrative through outdoor settings as expansive as the globe. But more intimate stories of desire, seduction, and resistance also proliferated in the period, from tales



of disguise and sexual curiosity such as Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725; see [p. 650](#)) to Samuel Richardson's revelations of private domestic spaces and the inner recesses of his characters' minds. Henry Fielding's flair for theatrical comedy and intricate plots, and his self-consciously literary style, enliven his masterpieces *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). After midcentury, the novel haunted Gothic castles or flowed with the tears and passions of sensibility, though often with ironic twists, as in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). Frances Burney's novels interweave emotional plots of courtship with keen satirical accounts of elegant social mingling (or attempts at it), while those of Tobias Smollett practice a rougher satire and barrel through less refined settings. Fiction could also offer opportunities for explicit reflections on the meaning of life, as in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (see [p. 802](#)). As the selection of works in the present volume shows, the eighteenth-century novel takes in so much—from the fantastic to the everyday, the narratively propulsive to the philosophically meditative, the talk of ordinary people to the sophisticated language of the great or the learned—that it has been a challenge to say what one thing it essentially is or does.

One distinctive feature noticed by some novel writers themselves about their works is the closeness of their plots and characters to readers' experiences of real life. Novels "come near us," William Congreve says in his essay early in this section, and are "not so distant from our belief" as the marvelous tales of romance that dominated prose fiction in earlier times. The critic Ian Watt, in his classic scholarly work *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), saw believability as the modern novel's dominant trait and called the ensemble of techniques that achieved it "formal realism," suited especially, he thought, to the practical tastes of a growing readership among the middle ranks of commercial Britain. Scholars of the novel in the decades after Watt's book have supplemented, qualified, and questioned his view by finding other motives shaping the novel form. Defoe's fictions not only grapple with life's hard, empirical facts but also heed the supernatural whisper of Providence and seek spiritual redemption; the scandalous tales and secret histories by writers such

as Delarivier Manley (ca. 1670–1724) present the intrigues of the fabulously rich and powerful, not ordinary people. And the conventions of romance—a love requiring implausible coincidences to prevail, a birthmark that reveals the hero's true identity—never quite go away. The eighteenth-century novel includes a range of impulses much broader than what Watt's theory of formal realism first took into account. Celebrity gossip, religious inspiration, true (or half-true) crime, political allegories, ghost stories, and patterns for proper conduct variously “come near us” by engaging our aspirations, fears, and excited imaginations.

But the understanding in recent decades of the origins of the modern novel has most decisively been enhanced by recognizing the contributions of women authors to its success, widening Watt's focus on Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. As novelists, women shaped the course of literature as they never had before. From Aphra Behn's fictions at the end of the seventeenth century, a tradition of British women's writing arose, including Manley and Haywood, Penelope Aubin (1679?–1738), Mary Davys (1674–1732), Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737), Sarah Fielding (1710–1768), Sarah Scott (1720–1795), Charlotte Lennox (1730/31?–1804), and Burney—this list could be much expanded. Offering more than mere romantic tales, women fiction writers treated politics and religion, delivered tough-minded satire of women's credulity, men's cruelty, and the culture's unfair gender standards, and surveyed social ills and opportunities. Women authors helped establish the novel's unparalleled flexibility of theme and style, and their works sold at least as well as those of men.

The novel's success in the eighteenth century was buoyed by a growing industry that included booksellers (ancestors of present-day publishers), printers and all the labors associated with printing, and authors, catering to an increasingly literate populace of a Britain growing ever more prosperous. The publishing of works of all kinds dramatically increased: while a mere six thousand separate printed titles were published in the 1630s, the 1710s saw twenty-two thousand, and by the 1790s, about sixty thousand appeared. Readers not only bought but also borrowed books, from new institutions such as subscription libraries and circulating libraries

(which both charged sometimes hefty membership fees). These terms were often used interchangeably, but the former tended to cultivate their collections to suit subscribers' tastes, and the latter bought and sold off their books as public demand changed—and hence offered many novels. (Free public libraries were virtually nonexistent.) A tale of multiple risings—of the middle classes, of literacy, of the book trades, and of new ways to disseminate books to the public—has provided a background for plotting the rise of the novel. And increasing literacy rates among women ensured they were decisively important as consumers of novels as well as producers—a fact often noted with alarm by commentators of the period. In his popular *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), James Fordyce inveighs that the preponderance of novels are “in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous, and contain such rank treason against the royalty of Virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute, let her reputation in life be what it will” (see below). The vigor of such denunciations testifies to a sense that the novel's power over women was growing.

Yet a complete picture of the novel's production, consumption, breadth of appeal, and social effects contains some surprising facts. Based on sales data and extant records from circulating libraries, we know men read novels at least as much as women, including ones with putatively “feminine” themes like love and courtship. Scholars have also challenged the idea that the “middling sort”—shopkeepers, apprentices, small tradesmen, and others connected with commerce—constituted the novel's principal readership. The gentry, and clergymen and professional men and their families, bought and borrowed the most novels. The rate of new novels' publication rose and fell unevenly through the century. Though Watt concentrated on novelists from the first half, a real surge of new novels came in the late 1780s, and bigger ones followed. And as copious as the publication of novels was in the period, it amounted to only a small proportion of booksellers' and libraries' offerings. Readers seemed to gravitate even more to sermons and other works of religious

devotion, histories, legal and medical works, and especially periodicals.



**An Eighteenth-Century Printer's Shop.** Woodcut, British Library.

A vibrant print culture nonetheless provided the energy and promise of financial gain that the novel needed to flourish. A form that arose "from below," inspired by readers' curiosities and the demands of a growing marketplace, the novel only slowly gained respectability and was by many considered merely an ephemeral entertainment. Unlike high, ancient genres like epic and tragedy, the novel did not have a tradition of learned criticism and commentary to draw on. Many of the most revealing remarks on the theory and practice of novelistic writing appear in what book historians call the paratext of published novels: prefaces, introductions, letters to the reader, dedications, and other matter ancillary to the main text. Outstanding examples of this kind of writing in the cluster that follows help bring the literary aspirations and professional and personal difficulties of the period's novelists to life. In them, authors

beckon to their readers, anticipate criticisms, praise their own invention, and at times lie by insisting they are offering a true story. Some play with familiar literary labels when explaining what they seek to achieve in fiction, as when Fielding calls his *Joseph Andrews* “a comic epic-poem in prose”; others like Richardson extol their work’s high moral purpose.

As the century advanced, periodicals devoted to reviewing newly published works, including novels, were founded, such as the *Monthly Review* (1749–1845) and the *Critical Review* (1756–1817), of which Smollett was first editor. Other periodical essays, outstanding among them Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* 4 (see below), theorize about the nature and value of fiction. The first full-length book in English discussing the history and significant examples of prose fiction, *The Progress of Romance* by Clara Reeve (see below), appeared in 1785. As a result of the work of critics and literary historians such as Reeve, the English novel as we know it began to take shape: its canon of great early texts, its foundational oppositions (between, for instance, feeling Richardson and ribald Fielding), its special relationship, evolving through the century, to women as authors and readers, and its grip on an enthusiastic if not always discriminating reading public. No form of English literature would have a more illustrious future.

## WILLIAM CONGREVE

William Congreve (1670–1729) is famous for comedies that have been admired by audiences and readers since their first performances, such as *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World* (see [p. 221](#)). But his first publication was *Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconciled: A Novel* (1692), which appeared when he was twenty-two under a pastoral pseudonym, Cleophil. After the title page proudly identifies its literary type, the preface extols the believability and nearness to ordinary human concerns of novels, in contrast to romances. Yet Congreve's remarks also exemplify the novel's way of leaning on other, more traditionally prestigious genres—in this case, comic drama—to gain literary credit for itself. The setting of *Incognita* in Italy and its love intrigues, masks, and mistaken identities recall motifs common in English stage comedy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though elegantly crafted, *Incognita* never entered the canon of English fiction. "I would rather praise it than read it," remarked Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Congreve* (1779). But its preface offers a vivid sense of how writers understood what the novel is, decades before the more celebrated fictions of Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson.

# ***From Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconciled: A Novel***

## ***From The Preface to the Reader***

\* \* \* Romances are generally composed of the constant loves and invincible courages of heroes, heroines, kings and queens, mortals of the first rank, and so forth; where lofty language, miraculous contingencies, and impossible performances elevate and surprise the reader into a giddy delight, which leaves him flat upon the ground whenever he gives off,<sup>1</sup> and vexes him to think how he has suffered himself to be pleased and transported, concerned and afflicted at the several passages which he has read, viz. these knights' success to their damsels' misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lie. Novels are of a more familiar nature; come near us, and represent to us intrigues in practice,<sup>2</sup> delight us with accidents and odd events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unprecedented, such which not being so distant from our belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of wonder, novels more delight. And with reverence be it spoken, and the parallel kept at a due distance, there is something of equality in the proportion which they bear in reference to one another, with that between comedy and tragedy; but the drama is the long extracted from<sup>3</sup> romance and history: 'tis the midwife to industry, and brings forth alive the conceptions of the brain. Minerva walks upon the stage before us, and we are more assured of the real presence of wit when it is delivered viva voce<sup>4</sup>—

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,  
Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, & quae  
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.<sup>5</sup>—Horace.



Since all traditions must indisputably give place to<sup>6</sup> the drama, and since there is no possibility of giving that life to the writing or repetition of a story which it has in the action, I resolved in another beauty<sup>7</sup> to imitate dramatic writing, namely, in the design, contexture and result of the plot. I have not observed it before in a novel. Some I have seen begin with an unexpected accident, which has been the only surprising part of the story, cause enough to make the sequel<sup>8</sup> look flat, tedious, and insipid; for 'tis but reasonable the reader should expect it not to rise, at least to keep upon a level in the entertainment; for so he may be kept on in hopes that at some time or other it may mend; but the other is such a balk<sup>9</sup> to a man, 'tis carrying him up stairs to show him the dining room, and after forcing him to make a meal in the kitchen. This I have not only endeavored to avoid, but also have used a method for the contrary purpose. The design of the novel is obvious, after the first meeting of Aurelian and Hippolito with Incognita and Leonora,<sup>1</sup> and the difficulty is in bringing it to pass, maugre<sup>2</sup> all apparent obstacles, within the compass of two days. How many probable casualties<sup>3</sup> intervene in opposition to the main design, viz. of marrying two couple so oddly engaged in an intricate amour, I leave the reader at his leisure to consider; as also whether every obstacle does not in the progress of the story act as subservient to that purpose, which at first it seems to oppose. In a comedy this would be called the unity of action.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1692

- Note 1: Stops reading. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As they (really) are performed. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Is very far from (superior to). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In a living voice (Latin). Minerva is the Roman goddess of wisdom. [Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: That which enters through the ears affects the mind more languidly than that which is subjected to our faithful eyes, and which a spectator brings to himself (Latin), from *The Art of Poetry*, lines 180–82, by the Roman poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Concede the preeminence of. “Traditions”: all other genres of literature.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Another element of my fiction. “In the action”: in an acted play.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The rest of the story after the beginning.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Obstacle. “The other”: starting off a story on a high note only to offer little afterward.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two men and two women who pair up in the love plot of Congreve’s novel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despite.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Occurrences.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: One of the three “unities” which, by the neoclassic rules for drama derived from Aristotle, a comedy should adhere to: the unity of action was the connection, causal or otherwise, of all the incidents in a plot.[Return to reference 4](#)

## DANIEL DEFOE

Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) had many careers and wrote in many forms and styles before he began, at the age of nearly sixty, to publish the sequence of works for which he is best remembered: prose “autobiographies” of figures with sensational lives, all claiming to be true, all eventually called novels by later generations of grateful readers. He was raised as a Presbyterian and educated at a Dissenting academy at Newington Green in north London. (Not conforming to the doctrines of the Church of England, he could not attend Cambridge or Oxford.) Through the 1680s and early 1690s, he pursued high-stakes business ventures and made risky investments, going bankrupt in 1692 for the spectacular sum of £17,000, and ended up in debtors’ prison. After his release, publishing his work took an increasingly large place among his business enterprises. His long, very popular satirical poem *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) defended his hero, the Protestant and Dutch king of England, William III, by pointing out that people of many faiths and nations have helped create English identity. His satire *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) impersonated the bigotry against Nonconformists effectively enough to anger both sides: he endured prison and the pillory for it. In 1704, he launched *The Review*, a journal that criticized the government and commented on other topics of public interest, which he ran almost single-handedly until 1713. Soon, however, he was drafted into government service, working as a spy in England and Scotland. For the remainder of the 1710s, he wrote a lot—conduct books, political pamphlets, scandalous “secret histories”—though more was attributed to him, he complained, than he ever wrote. (Correctly identifying Defoe’s writings, many published anonymously, remains a thorny problem for scholars.)

In 1719, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* appeared, “Written by Himself,” the title page informs us.

Defoe had recognized the popularity of travel writing in his time and gave the public more of what it wanted, basing *Crusoe* on stories of famous actual castaways such as Alexander Selkirk. But a pamphlet almost immediately identified Defoe's tale as untrue and attributed it to him. His most famous fictional work thus entered the world not as a novel—a story acknowledging itself as invented, to be admired for its plot's probability and lifelike characters—but rather as something like a fraud. Defoe wrote fascinating but competing things about the truth of his fictions: *Crusoe* was, first, "a just history of fact"—then, while insisting again that it featured "fact" not fictional "romance," he defended "what may be called invention" in the story as justifiable because moral. The sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, came out the same year, and a final installment, *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), offered mostly contemplative and religious musings. After *Crusoe*, Defoe produced more "autobiographies" that would come to be seen as classic English novels: *Moll Flanders* (1722), *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724), among others. But *Robinson Crusoe* remained his most popular work in Britain and worldwide, never receding from the public consciousness: by some measures, it was the best-selling novel of the 1750s, some twenty years after his death, running to six editions in that decade. In the 1770s and 1780s, booksellers and circulating libraries began openly designating Defoe's first-person biographies as imaginative fiction, and as his: the canon of his novels began to take shape, though scholars have occasionally doubted his authorship of nearly all of them except *Crusoe*.

The power of *Robinson Crusoe*, in its long history as a classic of world literature, lies in its way of connecting Crusoe's extraordinary circumstances to readers' ordinary fantasies and fears and in the large, near-mythic meanings that this connection suggests. Washing up on an uninhabited island, Crusoe excites the reader's basic sense of what is needed to survive in the world, any world, alone. He eventually creates, or imitates, a comfortable mode of life by assuming a range of roles—landowner and farm laborer, builder,

tailor, cobbler, potter, soldier, miller of wheat and baker of bread—usually performed by an entire society. Economists from the eighteenth century on have used him as an allegory of, or foil to, society's division of labor, and its production and consumption of commodities. After building his world, he realizes he is not alone. First a single human footprint on the beach, then a scene of people of the islands that terrifies him, then his violent attack on them and acquisition from among them of his "man" and friend, Friday: all this has served as a parable of British colonialism and encounters with indigenous peoples. Throughout, Crusoe's hauntingly solitary spirituality, his straining to hear the voice of Providence and assure himself of his salvation, offers an image of religious experience in which readers have recognized themselves. Defoe sustains these large meanings not with lofty, learned disquisitions but with a propulsive style personalized to Crusoe. The prose builds and pushes forward like the wave that carries his body to his island. The momentum of the sentences and their sometimes chaotic way of taking in everything moving across the focus of narration—Crusoe's immediate consciousness—carry readers forward also, immersing them in his fictional yet vivid world. Often its details are so concretely haphazard that it seems the only motive to include them must be that they are true—like the "two shoes that were not fellows" washed ashore among his mates' former possessions. Due to Defoe's magnificently full realization of him and his predicament, Crusoe has become the rarest of literary creations: a symbol of the most broadly significant cultural and historical forces, and a unique personage, dynamic, individual, and vivid.

# ***From The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*<sup>1</sup>**

***Written by Himself***

## ***From Preface***

If ever the story of any private man's adventures in the world were worth making public, and were acceptable when published, the editor of this account thinks this will be so.

The wonders of this man's life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of a greater variety.

The story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them, viz. to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honor the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our circumstances, let them happen how they will.

The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it. And however thinks, because all such things are dispatched,<sup>2</sup> that the improvement of it, as well to the diversion, as to the instruction of the reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without farther compliments to the world, he does them a great service in the publication.



**Crusoe.** Frontispiece of *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 1719, artist unknown. Clark and Pine, engravers.

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### [CRUSOE WASHES ASHORE]

Nothing can describe the confusion of thought which I felt when I sunk into the water;<sup>3</sup> for though I swam very well, yet I could not deliver myself from the waves so as to draw breath, till that wave having driven me, or rather carried me a vast way on towards the shore, and having spent itself, went back, and left me upon the land almost dry, but half dead with the water I took in. I had so much presence of mind as well as breath left, that seeing myself nearer the mainland<sup>4</sup> than I expected, I got upon my feet, and endeavored to make on towards the land as fast as I could before another wave should return and take me up again. But I soon found it was impossible to avoid it; for I saw the sea come after me as high as a great hill, and as furious as an enemy, which I had no means or strength to contend with: my business was to hold my breath, and raise myself upon the water, if I could; and so, by swimming to preserve my breathing, and pilot myself towards the shore, if possible; my greatest concern now being that the sea, as it would carry me a great way towards the shore when it came on, might not carry me back again with it when it gave back towards the sea.

The wave that came upon me again buried me at once twenty or thirty foot deep in its own body, and I could feel myself carried with a mighty force and swiftness towards the shore a very great way; but I held my breath, and assisted myself to swim still forward with all my might. I was ready to burst with holding my breath, when, as I felt myself rising up, so, to my immediate relief, I found my head and hands shoot out above the surface of the water; and though it was not two seconds of time that I could keep myself so, yet it relieved me greatly, gave me breath and new courage. I was covered again with water a good while, but not so long but I held it out; and finding the water had spent itself, and began to return, I strook



forward against the return of the waves, and felt ground again with my feet. I stood still a few moments to recover breath, and till the water went from me, and then took to my heels, and run with what strength I had farther towards the shore. But neither would this deliver me from the fury of the sea, which came pouring in after me again; and twice more I was lifted up by the waves and carried forwards as before, the shore being very flat.

The last time of these two had well near been fatal to me; for the sea having hurried me along as before, landed me, or rather dashed me against a piece of rock, and that with such force, as it left me senseless, and indeed helpless, as to my own deliverance; for the blow taking my side and breast, beat the breath as it were quite out of my body; and had it returned again immediately, I must have been strangled in the water; but I recovered a little before the return of the waves, and seeing I should be covered again with the water, I resolved to hold fast by a piece of the rock, and so to hold my breath, if possible, till the wave went back; now as the waves were not so high as at first, being nearer land, I held my hold till the wave abated, and then fetched another run, which brought me so near the shore that the next wave, though it went over me, yet did not so swallow me up as to carry me away; and the next run I took, I got to the mainland, where, to my great comfort, I clambered up the cliffs of the shore and sat me down upon the grass, free from danger, and quite out of the reach of the water.

I was now landed, and safe on shore, and began to look up and thank God that my life was saved, in a case wherein there was some minutes before scarce any room to hope. I believe it is impossible to express to the life<sup>5</sup> what the ecstasies and transports of the soul are, when it is so saved, as I may say, out of the very grave; and I do not wonder now at that custom, viz. that when a malefactor, who has the halter about his neck, is tied up, and just going to be turned off,<sup>6</sup> and has a reprieve brought to him: I say, I do not wonder that they bring a surgeon with it, to let him bleed that very moment they tell him of it, that the surprise may not drive the animal spirits<sup>7</sup> from the heart, and overwhelm him:



*For sudden joys, like griefs, confound at first.*<sup>8</sup>

I walked about on the shore lifting up my hands, and my whole being, as I may say, wrapped up in the contemplation of my deliverance; making a thousand gestures and motions which I cannot describe; reflecting upon all my comrades that were drowned, and that there should not be one soul saved but myself; for, as for them, I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their hats, one cap, and two shoes that were not fellows.

I cast my eyes to the stranded vessel, when the breach and froth of the sea being so big, I could hardly see it, it lay so far off, and considered, Lord! how was it possible I could get on shore?

After I had solaced my mind with the comfortable part of my condition, I began to look round me to see what kind of place I was in, and what was next to be done; and I soon found my comforts abate, and that in a word I had a dreadful deliverance; for I was wet, had no clothes to shift me,<sup>9</sup> nor anything either to eat or drink to comfort me, neither did I see any prospect before me but that of perishing with hunger, or being devoured by wild beasts; and that which was particularly afflicting to me was that I had no weapon either to hunt and kill any creature for my sustenance, or to defend myself against any other creature that might desire to kill me for theirs. In a word, I had nothing about me but a knife, a tobacco-pipe, and a little tobacco in a box; this was all my provision; and this threw me into terrible agonies of mind, that for a while I run about like a madman. Night coming upon me, I began with a heavy heart to consider what would be my lot if there were any ravenous beasts in that country, seeing at night they always come abroad for their prey.

All the remedy that offered to my thoughts at that time was to get up into a thick bushy tree like a fir, but thorny, which grew near me, and where I resolved to set all night, and consider the next day what death I should die, for as yet I saw no prospect of life. I walked about a furlong<sup>1</sup> from the shore, to see if I could find any fresh water to drink, which I did, to my great joy; and having drank and put a

little tobacco into my mouth to prevent hunger, I went to the tree, and getting up into it, endeavored to place myself so, as that if I should sleep I might not fall; and having cut me a short stick, like a truncheon, for my defense, I took up my lodging, and having been excessively fatigued, I fell fast asleep, and slept as comfortably as, I believe, few could have done in my condition, and found myself more refreshed with it, than I think I ever was on such an occasion.

When I waked it was broad day, the weather clear, and the storm abated, so that the sea did not rage and swell as before. But that which surprised me most was that the ship was lifted off in the night from the sand where she lay, by the swelling of the tide, and was driven up almost as far as the rock which I at first mentioned, where I had been so bruised by the wave dashing me against it; this being within about a mile from the shore where I was, and the ship seeming to stand upright still, I wished myself on board, that at least I might save some necessary things for my use.

When I came down from my apartment in the tree, I looked about me again, and the first thing I found was the boat,<sup>2</sup> which lay as the wind and the sea had tossed her up upon the land, about two miles on my right hand. I walked as far as I could upon the shore to have got to her; but found a neck or inlet of water between me and the boat which was about half a mile broad; so I came back for the present, being more intent upon getting at the ship, where I hoped to find something for my present subsistence.

A little after noon I found the sea very calm, and the tide ebbed so far out, that I could come within a quarter of a mile of the ship; and here I found a fresh renewing of my grief; for I saw evidently, that if we had kept on board we had been all safe, that is to say, we had all got safe on shore, and I had not been so miserable as to be left entirely destitute of all comfort and company as I now was; this forced tears from my eyes again, but as there was little relief in that, I resolved, if possible, to get to the ship, so I pulled off my clothes, for the weather was hot to extremity, and took the water; but when I came to the ship, my difficulty was still greater to know how to get on board, for as she lay aground, and high out of the water, there

was nothing within my reach to lay hold of. I swam round her twice, and the second time I spied a small piece of rope, which I wondered I did not see at first, hang down by the fore-chains so low, as that with great difficulty I got hold of it, and by the help of that rope I got up into the fore-castle of the ship. Here I found that the ship was bulged,<sup>3</sup> and had a great deal of water in her hold, but that she lay so on the side of a bank of hard sand, or rather earth, that her stern lay lifted up upon the bank, and her head low almost to the water; by this means all her quarter<sup>4</sup> was free, and all that was in that part was dry; for you may be sure my first work was to search and to see what was spoiled and what was free; and first I found that all the ship's provisions were dry and untouched by the water, and being very well disposed to eat, I went to the bread room and filled my pockets with biscuit, and eat it as I went about other things, for I had no time to lose. I also found some rum in the great cabin, of which I took a large dram,<sup>5</sup> and which I had indeed need enough of to spirit me for what was before me. Now I wanted nothing but a boat to furnish myself with many things which I foresaw would be very necessary to me.

It was in vain to sit still and wish for what was not to be had, and this extremity roused my application; we had several spare yards, and two or three large spars<sup>6</sup> of wood, and a spare topmast or two in the ship; I resolved to fall to work with these, and I flung as many of them overboard as I could manage for their weight, tying every one with a rope that they might not drive away; when this was done I went down the ship's side, and pulling them to me, I tied four of them fast together at both ends as well as I could in the form of a raft, and laying two or three short pieces of plank upon them crossways, I found I could walk upon it very well, but that it was not able to bear any great weight, the pieces being too light; so I went to work, and with the carpenter's saw I cut a spare topmast into three lengths, and added them to my raft, with a great deal of labor and pains, but hope of furnishing myself with necessities encouraged me to go beyond what I should have been able to have done upon another occasion.

My raft was now strong enough to bear any reasonable weight; my next care was what to load it with, and how to preserve what I laid upon it from the surf of the sea; but I was not long considering this. I first laid all the plank or boards upon it that I could get, and having considered well what I most wanted, I first got three of the seamen's chests, which I had broken open and emptied, and lowered them down upon my raft; the first of these I filled with provision—viz. bread, rice, three Dutch cheeses, five pieces of dried goat's flesh which we lived much upon, and a little remainder of European corn,<sup>7</sup> which had been laid by for some fowls which we brought to sea with us, but the fowls were killed. There had been some barley and wheat together, but to my great disappointment, I found afterwards that the rats had eaten or spoiled it all. As for liquors, I found several cases of bottles belonging to our skipper, in which were some cordial waters, and in all about five or six gallons of rack.<sup>8</sup> These I stowed by themselves, there being no need to put hem into the chest, nor no room for them. While I was doing this, I found the tide began to flow, though very calm; and I had the mortification to see my coat, shirt, and waistcoat, which I had left on shore, upon the sand swim away. As for my breeches, which were only linen and open-kneed, I swam on board in them and my stockings. However this put me upon rummaging for clothes, of which I found enough, but took no more than I wanted for present use, for I had others things which my eye was more upon, as first tools to work with on shore, and it was after long searching that I found out the carpenter's chest, which was indeed a very useful prize to me, and much more valuable than a ship-loading of gold would have been at that time; I got it down to my raft, even whole as it was, without losing time to look into it, for I knew in general what it contained.

My next care was for some ammunition and arms; there were two very good fowling-pieces<sup>9</sup> in the great cabin, and two pistols. These I secured first, with some powder-horns, and a small bag of shot, and two old rusty swords. I knew there were three barrels of powder in the ship, but knew not where our gunner had stowed them; but with much search I found them, two of them dry and

good, the third had taken water; those two I got to my raft with the arms, and now I thought myself pretty well freighted, and began to think how I should get to shore with them, having neither sail, oar, or rudder, and the least capful of wind would have upset all my navigation.

I had three encouragements, 1. A smooth, calm sea, 2. The tide rising and setting in to the shore, 3. What little wind there was blew me towards the land. And thus, having found two or three broken oars belonging to the boat and besides the tools which were in the chest, I found two saws, an axe, and a hammer; and with this cargo I put to sea. For a mile or thereabouts my raft went very well, only that I found it drive a little distant from the place where I had landed before; by which I perceived that there was some indraft of the water, and consequently I hoped to find some creek or river there, which I might make use of as a port to get to land with my cargo.

As I imagined, so it was, there appeared before me a little opening of the land, and I found a strong current of the tide set into it; so I guided my raft as well as I could to keep in the middle of the stream. But here I had like to have suffered a second shipwreck, which, if I had, I think verily would have broken my heart, for knowing nothing of the coast, my raft run aground at one end of it upon a shoal, and not being aground at the other end, it wanted but<sup>1</sup> a little that all my cargo had slipped off towards the end that was afloat, and so fallen into the water. I did my utmost by setting my back against the chests, to keep them in their places, but could not thrust off the raft with all my strength, neither durst I stir from the posture I was in, but holding up the chests with all my might, stood in that manner near half an hour, in which time the rising of the water brought me a little more upon a level, and a little after, the water still rising, my raft floated again, and I thrust her off with the oar I had, into the channel, and then driving up higher, I at length found myself in the mouth of a little river, with land on both sides, and a strong current of tide running up. I looked on both sides for a proper place to get to shore, for I was not willing to be driven too

high up the river, hoping in time to see some ship at sea, and therefore resolved to place myself as near the coast as I could.

At length I spied a little cove on the right shore of the creek, to which with great pain and difficulty I guided my raft, and at last got so near as that, reaching ground with my oar, I could thrust her directly in. But here I had like to have dipped all my cargo in the sea again; for that shore lying pretty steep, that is to say sloping, there was no place to land, but where one end of my float, if it run on shore, would lie so high, and the other sink lower as before, that it would endanger my cargo again. All that I could do was to wait till the tide was at the highest, keeping the raft with my oar like an anchor to hold the side of it fast to the shore, near a flat piece of ground, which I expected the water would flow over; and so it did. As soon as I found water enough, for my raft drew about a foot water,<sup>2</sup> I thrust her on upon that flat piece of ground, and there fastened or moored her by sticking my two broken oars into the ground, one on one side near the one end, and one on the other side near the other end; and thus I lay till the water ebbed away, and left my raft and all my cargo safe on shore.

My next work was to view the country, and seek a proper place for my habitation, and where to stow my goods to secure them from whatever might happen; where I was I yet knew not, whether on the continent or on an island, whether inhabited or not inhabited, whether in danger of wild beasts or not. There was a hill not above a mile from me, which rose up very steep and high, and which seemed to overtop some other hills which lay as in a ridge from it northward. I took out one of the fowling pieces, and one of the pistols, and a horn of powder; and thus armed I travelled for discovery up to the top of that hill, where after I had with great labor and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate to my great affliction, (viz.) that I was in an island environed every way with the sea, no land to be seen, except some rocks which lay a great way off; and two small islands less than this, which lay about three leagues<sup>3</sup> to the west.

I found also that the island I was in was barren, and, as I saw good reason to believe, uninhabited, except by wild beasts, of whom



however I saw none, yet I saw abundance of fowls, but knew not their kinds, neither when I killed them could I tell what was fit for food, and what not; at my coming back, I shot at a great bird which I saw sitting upon a tree on the side of a great wood. I believe it was the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world; I had no sooner fired, but from all parts of the wood there arose an innumerable number of fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming, and crying every one according to his usual note, but not one of them of any kind that I knew. As for the creature I killed, I took it to be a kind of a hawk, its color and beak resembling it, but had no talons or claws more than common; its flesh was carrion, and fit for nothing.

Contented with this discovery, I came back to my raft, and fell to work to bring my cargo on shore, which took me up the rest of that day, and what to do with myself at night I knew not, nor indeed where to rest; for I was afraid to lie down on the ground, not knowing but some wild beast might devour me, though, as I afterwards found, there was really no need for those fears.

However, as well as I could, I barricadoed myself round with the chests and boards that I had brought on shore, and made a kind of hut for that night's lodging; as for food, I yet saw not which way to supply myself, except that I had seen two or three creatures like hares run out of the wood where I shot the fowl.

I now began to consider, that I might yet get a great many things out of the ship, which would be useful to me, and particularly some of the rigging, and sails, and such other things as might come to land; and I resolved to make another voyage on board the vessel, if possible; and as I knew that the first storm that blew must necessarily break her all in pieces, I resolved to set all other things apart,<sup>4</sup> till I got everything out of the ship that I could get; then I called a council, that is to say, in my thoughts, whether I should take back the raft; but this appeared impracticable: so I resolved to go as before, when the tide was down; and I did so, only that I stripped before I went from my hut, having nothing on but a checkered shirt, a pair of linen drawers, and a pair of pumps<sup>5</sup> on my feet.

I got on board the ship, as before, and prepared a second raft; and having had experience of the first, I neither made this so unwieldy, nor loaded it so hard, but yet I brought away several things very useful to me; as first, in the carpenter's stores I found two or three bags full of nails and spikes, a great screw-jack, a dozen or two of hatchets, and above all, that most useful thing called a grindstone.<sup>6</sup> All these I secured together with several things belonging to the gunner, particularly two or three iron crows,<sup>7</sup> and two barrels of musket bullets, seven muskets, another fowling-piece, with some small quantity of powder more; a large bagful of small shot, and a great roll of sheet-lead. But this last was so heavy I could not hoise it up to get it over the ship's side.

Besides these things, I took all the men's clothes that I could find, and a spare fore-topsail, a hammock and some bedding; and with this I loaded my second raft, and brought them all safe on shore to my very great comfort.

I was under some apprehensions during my absence from the land, that at least my provisions might be devoured on shore: but when I came back, I found no sign of any visitor, only there sat a creature like a wild cat upon one of the chests, which when I came towards it, ran away a little distance, and then stood still; she sat very composed, and unconcerned, and looked full in my face, as if she had a mind to be acquainted with me. I presented<sup>8</sup> my gun at her, but as she did not understand it, she was perfectly unconcerned at it, nor did she offer to stir away; upon which I tossed her a bit of biscuit, though by the way I was not very free of it, for my store was not great: however, I spared her a bit, I say, and she went to it, smelled of it, and ate it, and looked (as pleased) for more, but I thanked her, and could spare no more; so she marched off.

Having got my second cargo on shore, though I was fain to open the barrels of powder, and bring them by parcels, for they were too heavy, being large casks, I went to work to make me a little tent with the sail and some poles which I cut for that purpose, and into this tent I brought everything that I knew would spoil, either with rain or sun, and I piled all the empty chests and casks up in a circle round



the tent, to fortify it from any sudden attempt, either from man or beast.

When I had done this I blocked up the door of the tent with some boards within, and an empty chest set up on end without, and spreading one of the beds upon the ground, laying my two pistols just at my head, and my gun at length by me, I went to bed for the first time, and slept very quietly all night, for I was very weary and heavy, for the night before I had slept little, and had labored very hard all day, as well to fetch all those things from the ship, as to get them on shore.

I had the biggest magazine<sup>9</sup> of all kinds now that ever were laid up, I believe, for one man: but I was not satisfied still; for while the ship sat upright in that posture, I thought I ought to get everything out of her that I could; so every day at low water I went on board, and brought away something or other; but particularly the third time I went, I brought away as much of the rigging as I could, as also all the small ropes and rope-twine I could get, with a piece of spare canvas, which was to mend the sails upon occasion,<sup>1</sup> and the barrel of wet gunpowder. In a word, I brought away all the sails first and last, only that I was fain to cut them in pieces, and bring as much at a time as I could, for they were no more useful to be sails, but as mere canvas only.

But that which comforted me more still was that last of all, after I had made five or six such voyages as these, and thought I had nothing more to expect from the ship that was worth my meddling with, I say, after all this, I found a great hogshead of bread, three large runlets<sup>2</sup> of rum or spirits, a box of sugar, and a barrel of fine flour; this was surprising to me, because I had given over expecting any more provisions, except what was spoiled by the water. I soon emptied the hogshead of that bread, and wrapped it up parcel by parcel in pieces of the sails, which I cut out; and, in a word, I got all this safe on shore also.

The next day I made another voyage; and now having plundered the ship of what was portable and fit to hand out, I began with the cables; and cutting the great cable into pieces, such as I could move,

I got two cables and a hawser on shore, with all the ironwork I could get; and having cut down the spritsail-yard, and the mizzen-yard,<sup>3</sup> and everything I could to make a large raft, I loaded it with all those heavy goods, and came away; but my good luck began now to leave me; for this raft was so unwieldy, and so overladen, that after I was entered the little cove, where I had landed the rest of my goods, not being able to guide it so handily as I did the other, it overset, and threw me and all my cargo into the water; as for myself, it was no great harm, for I was near the shore; but as to my cargo, it was a great part of it lost, especially the iron, which I expected would have been of great use to me; however, when the tide was out, I got most of the pieces of the cable ashore, and some of the iron, though with infinite labor; for I was fain to dip<sup>4</sup> for it into the water, a work which fatigued me very much. After this, I went every day on board, and brought away what I could get.

I had been now thirteen days on shore, and had been eleven times on board the ship; in which time I had brought away all that one pair of hands could well be supposed capable to bring, though I believe verily, had the calm weather held, I should have brought away the whole ship piece by piece. But preparing the twelfth time to go on board, I found the wind begin to rise: however, at low water I went on board, and though I thought I had rummaged the cabin so effectually as that nothing more could be found, yet I discovered a locker with drawers in it, in one of which I found two or three razors, and one pair of large scissors, with some ten or a dozen of good knives and forks: in another I found about thirty-six pounds value in money, some European coin, some Brazil, some pieces of eight, some gold, some silver.

I smiled to myself at the sight of this money. "O drug!" said I aloud, "what art thou good for? Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the ground, one of those knives is worth all this heap, I have no manner of use for thee, e'en remain where thou art, and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving." However upon second thoughts, I took it away; and wrapping all this in a piece of canvas, I began to think of making another raft, but while I

was preparing this, I found the sky overcast, and the wind began to rise, and in a quarter of an hour it blew a fresh gale from the shore; it presently occurred to me that it was in vain to pretend<sup>5</sup> to make a raft with the wind off shore, and that it was my business to be gone before the tide of flood began, otherwise I might not be able to reach the shore at all. Accordingly I let myself down into the water, and swam across the channel, which lay between the ship and the sands, and even that with difficulty enough, partly with the weight of the things I had about me, and partly the roughness of the water, for the wind rose very hastily, and before it was quite high water, it blew a storm.

But I was gotten home to my little tent, where I lay with all my wealth about me very secure. It blew very hard all that night, and in the morning when I looked out, behold no more ship was to be seen; I was a little surprised, but recovered myself with the satisfactory reflection, viz. that I had lost no time, nor abated no diligence to get everything out of her that could be useful to me, and that indeed there was little left in her that I was able to bring away if I had had more time.

I now gave over any more thoughts of the ship, or of anything out of her, except what might drive on shore from her wreck, as indeed divers pieces of her afterwards did; but those things were of small use to me.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1719

- Note 1: The complete title on the title page runs, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner, Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke [the Orinoco, which runs mostly through present-day Venezuela]; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An*

*Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pirates.*[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Read quickly. From the third (1719) edition on, the word used is *disputed*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Near the beginning of the novel, a ferocious storm runs the ship on which Crusoe is a crew member onto a sandbar, and he and ten others desperately escape in a lifeboat, which is soon swamped by a huge wave. The selection reprinted here begins at this moment.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The body of land that is the island.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In an accurately vivid way.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hanged.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vital principle animating the body. "Let him blood": open a vein to discharge his blood.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: From Robert Wild, *Poetica Licentia, A Gratulatory Poem upon His Majesties Gracious Declaration for Liberty of Conscience, with a Friendly Debate betwixt Con and Non* (1672).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To allow me to change out of my wet ones.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A furlong is 220 yards.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The lifeboat in which Crusoe and the other crew members left the ship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fractured in the hull.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Upper part of the side of a ship behind the center beam, where the ship is broadest. "Stern": the ship's rear. "Head": front of the ship.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A swallow, a swig.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lengths of wood used for masts, booms, etc., on a ship. "Yards": comparatively slender spars.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Generic term for grain.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Arrack, "a spirituous liquor imported from the East Indies, used by way of dram and in punch" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). "Cordial waters": alcoholic drinks for medicinal purposes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Light shotguns for hunting fowl.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: It would have taken only.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Required about a foot of water to float.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A league is about three miles.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Put everything else aside.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Low-heeled shoes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A stone disk on an axle, for grinding and sharpening.  
“Screw-jack”: a jack, for lifting heavy objects.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Crowbars.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pointed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Store of goods.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: When necessary.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Casks. “Hogshead”: large cask.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The yards are wood pieces that support different sails.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dive.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Attempt.[Return to reference 5](#)

# ***From The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe***

## ***The Preface***

The success the former part of this work has met with in the world has yet been no other than is acknowledged to be due to the surprising variety of the subject, and to the agreeable manner of the performance.

All the endeavors of envious people to reproach it with being a romance,<sup>1</sup> to search it for errors in geography, inconsistency in the relation, and contradictions in the fact, have proved abortive, and as impotent as malicious.

The just application of every incident, the religious and useful inferences drawn from every part, are so many testimonies to the good design of making it public, and must legitimate all the part that may be called invention, or parable in the story.

The second part, if the editor's opinion may pass, is (contrary to the usage of <sup>2</sup> second parts) every way as entertaining as the first, contains as strange and surprising incidents, and as great a variety of them; nor is the application less serious, or suitable; and doubtless will, to the sober, as well as ingenious reader, be every way as profitable and diverting: and this makes the abridging this work as scandalous as it is knavish and ridiculous,<sup>3</sup> seeing, while to shorten the book, that they may seem to reduce the value, they strip it of all those reflections, as well religious as moral, which are not only the greatest beauties of the work, but are calculated for the infinite advantage of the reader.

By this they leave the work naked of its brightest ornaments; and if they would at the same time pretend that the author has supplied the story out of his invention, they take from it the improvement, which alone recommends that invention to wise and good men.

The injury these men do to the proprietor of this work is a practice all honest men abhor; and he believes he may challenge them to show the difference between that and robbing on the highway, or breaking open a house.

If they can't show any difference in the crime, they will find it hard to show why there should be any difference in the punishment: And he will answer for it, that nothing shall be wanting on his part, to do them justice.

## Endnotes

1719

- Note 1: A fanciful, fictional tale.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: What is usual with. "The second part": the current volume, *The Farther Adventures*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Abridgements of *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* appeared the year it was published and were a flourishing enterprise throughout the remainder of the century.[Return to reference 3](#)

## MARY DAVYS

Mary Davys (1674–1732) was born in Ireland and married a Dublin clergyman, a college friend of Jonathan Swift. Her husband died after just four years of marriage; their first daughter died before, their second just after him. Nearly destitute, she moved to London in 1700, published two works of fiction, then moved to York. Her play *The Northern Heiress* was staged there in 1715, and in London the next year. It earned money enough for her to open a coffeehouse in Cambridge in 1718, where she lived the rest of her life. Her best fiction, which displays her talent for deft plotting, colorful, concrete dialogue, and humorous situations, appeared in the 1720s. *The Reform'd Coquet* (1725), a comic novel about a vain young woman who learns to value the right man, sold well enough to inspire the publication of *The Works of Mary Davys* (also 1725), which contained plays, poems, and fiction. Her final novel, *The Accomplish'd Rake* (1727), takes a satirical view of the dissolute ways of fashionable London life. The preface to her *Works* offers an important perspective on both the theory and the practice of novel writing. She defines novels as “probable feigned stories,” noting their decline in sales compared to histories and travels—perhaps thinking, among other works, of the success of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which would not commonly be called a novel until decades later. She also reflects on her tough literary career, as “a woman left to her own endeavors for twenty-seven years together,” battling back against undeserved censures for bawdiness. (Late in her life, in 1731, the *Grub-Street Journal* published another such attack, and again she replied, “the novels may e’ne fight their own battles . . . they are too unfashionable to have one word of bawdy in them, the readers are the best judges and to them I appeal.”) Though literary historians now recognize how the success of Davys and other women writers of her time shaped the history of the novel, her story reminds us it never came easy.



# ***From The Works of Mary Davys***

## ***The Preface***

'Tis now for some time that those sort of writings called novels have been a great deal out of use and fashion, and that the ladies (for whose service they were chiefly designed) have been taken up with amusements of more use and improvement: I mean history and travels: with which the relation of probable feigned stories can by no means stand in competition. However, these are not without their advantages, and those considerable too; and it is very likely the chief reason that put them out of vogue was the world's being surfeited with such as were either flat and insipid, or offensive to modesty and good manners; or that they found them only a circle or repetition of the same adventures.

The French, who have dealt most in this kind, have, I think, chiefly contributed to put them out of countenance:<sup>1</sup> who, though upon all occasions, and where they pretend to write true history, give themselves the utmost liberty of feigning, are too tedious and dry in their matter, and so impertinent in their harangues, that the readers can hardly keep themselves awake over them. I have read a French novel of four hundred pages without the least variety of events, or any issue<sup>2</sup> in the conclusion, either to please or amuse the reader, yet all fiction and romance; and the commonest matters of fact, truly told, would have been much more entertaining. Now this is to lose the only advantage of invention, which gives us room to order accidents<sup>3</sup> better than fortune will be at the pains to do; so to work upon the reader's passions, sometimes keep him in suspense between fear and hope, and at last send him satisfied away. This I have endeavored to do in the following sheets.<sup>4</sup> I have in every novel proposed one entire scheme or plot, and the other adventures are only incident or collateral to it; which is the great

rule prescribed by the critics, not only in tragedy, and other heroic poems, but in comedy too. The adventures, as far as I could order them, are wonderful<sup>5</sup> and probable; and I have with the utmost justice rewarded virtue, and punished vice. *The Lady's Tale* was writ in the year 1700, and was the effect of my first flight to the muses, it was sent about the world as naked as it came into it, having not so much as one page of preface to keep it in countenance.<sup>6</sup> What success it met with, I never knew; for as some unnatural parents sell their offspring to beggars, in order to see them no more, I took three guineas for the brat of my brain, and then went a hundred and fifty miles northward,<sup>7</sup> to which place it was not very likely its fame should follow. But meeting with it some time ago, I found it in a sad ragged condition, and had so much pity for it, as to take it home, and get it into better clothes, that when it made a second sally,<sup>8</sup> it might with more assurance appear before its betters.

My whole design both in that and *The Cousins*<sup>9</sup> is to endeavor to restore the purity and empire of love, and correct the vile abuses of it; which, could I do, it would be an important service to the public: for since passions will ever have a place in the actions of men, and love a principal one, what cannot be removed or subdued ought at least to be regulated; and if the reformation would once begin from our sex, the men would follow it in spite of their hearts; for it is we have given up our empire, betrayed by rebels among ourselves.

The two plays I leave to fight their own battles; and I shall say no more than that I never was so vain as to think they deserved a place in the first rank, or so humble as to resign them to the last.

I have been so anxious for the credit of my *Modern Poet*<sup>1</sup> that I showed it to several of my friends, and earnestly begged their impartial opinion of it. Every one separately told me his objection, but not two among them agreed in any one particular; so that I found, to remove all the faults, would be to leave nothing behind, and I could not help thinking my case parallel with the man in the fable, whose two wives disliking, one his gray hairs, and the other his black, picked both out, till they left him nothing but a bald pate.

Perhaps it may be objected against me, by some more ready to give reproach than relief, that as I am the relict of a clergyman, and in years,<sup>2</sup> I ought not to publish plays, &c. But I beg of such to suspend their uncharitable opinions, till they have read what I have writ, and if they find anything there offensive either to God or Man, anything either to shock their morals or their modesty, 'tis then time enough to blame. And let them farther consider, that a woman left to her own endeavors for twenty-seven years together, may well be allowed to catch at any opportunity for that bread, which they that condemn her would very probably deny to give her.

## Endnotes

1725

- Note 1: Make them unpopular.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Outcome.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Incidents in a story.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Full of wonders.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To give it support.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Davys moved to York from London in 1704.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: When published a second time, in this edition.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Another short novel in volume 2 of Davys' *Works*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A long poem in couplets that concludes volume 1 of Davys' *Works*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Davys was fifty-one when she published her works. "Relict": widow.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ELIZA HAYWOOD

The immensely prolific Eliza Haywood (1693?–1756; see [p. 649](#)) wrote all sorts of prose: from racy romance and “oriental” tales to her later, more moralizing didactic fictions. *The Fortunate Foundlings* appeared in 1744, with a subtitle that associated it with the genre of secret history: *Being the Genuine History of Colonel M—rs, and his Sister, Madam Du P—y, the Issue of the Hon. Ch—es M—rs, Son of the late Duke of R—l—d. Containing many wonderful accidents that befell them in their travels, and interspersed with the characters and adventures of several persons of condition, in the most polite courts in Europe*. In the period, the thriving genre of secret history could contain true facts, thinly veiled political allegories, or fictions with no real-world referents. These texts promised glimpses of how powerful people really lived and of what Haywood elsewhere describes as “the secret springs which gave rise to the actions” that happened in the world—though part of the pleasure could also be in how unbelievable it all was. Poised at this blurry intersection between truth and fiction, secret histories could engage in scandalous gossip and political satire, while also offering thrilling invented adventures.

Haywood’s preface purports to be from “EDITORS” who have merely compiled true accounts, and it promises that the text both provides “amusement” and “encourage[s] virtue.”

# ***From The Fortunate Foundlings***

## ***Preface***

The many fictions which have been lately imposed upon the world, under the specious titles of *secret histories*, *memoirs*, etc., etc., have given but too much room to question the veracity of every thing that has the least tendency that way: we therefore think it highly necessary to assure the reader, that he will find nothing in the following sheets, but what has been collected from original letters, private memorandums, and the accounts we have been favored with from the mouths of persons too deeply concerned in many of the chief transactions not to be perfectly acquainted with the truth, and of too much honor and integrity to put any false colors upon it.

The adventures are not so long passed as to be wholly forgotten by many living witnesses, nor yet so recent as to give any reason to suspect us of flattery in the relation given of them, the motive of their publication being only to encourage virtue in both sexes, by showing the amiableness<sup>1</sup> of it in real characters. And if it be true (as certainly it is) that example has far more efficacy than precept, we may be bold to say that there are few fairer, or more worthy imitation.—The sons and daughters of the greatest families may give additional luster to their nobility, by forming themselves on the model here presented to them; and those of lower extraction,<sup>2</sup> attain qualities to atone for what they want in birth:—so that we flatter ourselves this undertaking will not fail of receiving the approbation of all who wish well to a reformation of manners, and more especially those who have youth under their care.—As for such who may take it up merely as an amusement, it is possible they will find something, which, by interesting their affections, may make them better without designing to be so.—Either way will full recompense the pains taken in the compiling by

THE EDITORS

## Endnotes

- Note 1: “Loveliness; power of raising love” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Social status.[Return to reference 2](#)

## HENRY FIELDING

Writing novels was a second literary career for Henry Fielding (1707–1754), who first became famous as the preeminent comic playwright of his time. The need to make money motivated both. He was from a family with high social connections, a relation of earls and second cousin to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and he received a classical education at England's most elite school, Eton, forming friendships with the nation's future leaders. But his prodigal father, an army colonel who would rise to the rank of general, squandered the fortune that Henry needed to live the life of a gentleman he thought he deserved. Early on, Fielding determined on a career as a writer to maintain this life, seeing his first comedy staged in London when he was twenty. After some time studying literature at the University of Leiden in Holland, he returned to England and wrote for the theater, specializing in farces, ballad operas, and political satires. These last were so successful that the ministry of Robert Walpole passed the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, which subjected all new plays to government censorship and closed the Haymarket Theatre, where Fielding's plays were produced, effectively ending his theatrical career. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1740.

That year also he aimed his talent for parody at the greatest sensation in fiction of the day, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson. Fielding's *Shamela* makes fun of that novel's epistolary style and of its heroine's way of using her chastity to her advantage. He extends the joke in his next fictional work, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), which follows Pamela's brother, a footman employed by a lady who attempts to seduce him. But Fielding now aspired to be much more than a parodist of Richardson, acknowledging Cervantes' great *Don Quixote* (1605, 1616) as a model even as he remarks in the preface on his own originality. Seven years later, he asserted this claim yet more strongly in his masterpiece *Tom Jones* (1749), in which he declares himself

“founder of a new province of writing.” He concluded his novelistic career with *Amelia* (1751), which disappointed some readers as it indulged sentiments reminiscent of Richardson’s own idiom. (One wit in response advertised a nonexistent novel called *Shamelia*.)

Despite his initial contempt, Fielding had sent Richardson a letter warm with praise for *Clarissa*: “beyond any thing I have ever read,” he said of one affecting part. Though gratified, Richardson remained hostile and would never miss a chance to deplore the bad morals of *Tom Jones*. From their rivalry, a multilayered contrast arose in commentary on novelistic fiction that strongly influenced later understandings of the form’s possibilities. Richardson’s excellences—his moral, psychological, and emotional intensity, his preference for feminine protagonists and intimate domestic settings, his orchestration of narrative through the first-person voices of correspondents—seemed incompatible with Fielding’s strengths: a comic vigor and well-populated plots that open out into the countryside and twist through chaotic scenes at public inns, overseen in the third person by an ironic, sociable author-narrator who smiles at the lapses of basically good-hearted heroes.

The preface to *Joseph Andrews* asserts not only the novelty of Fielding’s fictional enterprise but also its potential as high literary art. Fielding notices its deep connection to ancient and exalted literary forms, comedy and epic. His techniques also compare, he says, with those of his friend, “the comic history painter” William Hogarth, whose art represents the ridiculous in human nature without falling into unrealistic exaggeration and caricature. The theory of the ridiculous in the preface considers not only the undistorted representation of fictional characters but also realities of human motivation and morality. Fielding’s intent here to tell the reader what to think about his work will enter the body of this and his other novels, as his narrator points out details of the plot, moralizes on his characters’ behavior, and theorizes on the nature of fiction. In *Joseph Andrews*, he will depict the vicissitudes that finally bring the hero Joseph, virtuous but warmly in love with a young woman of his own social station, Fanny Goodwill, to a happy end. The resolution of



the plot, which includes Joseph's discovery of his true identity, employs some conventions of romance; and the preface applies that term to *Joseph Andrews* without embarrassment, though it contrasts this novel with the vast French prose romances of the seventeenth century. Fielding seems most taken with his creation of Parson Abraham Adams, who accompanies Joseph and Fanny on their adventures and sponsors their match—a character the likes of whom, Fielding says, is “not to be found in any book now extant.” Readers have concurred with this sense of Adams's uniqueness, a result of his pleasing (if at times maddening and puzzling) power to elicit both ridicule and affection. The success of Adams as a literary creation points to a feature typical of novels in the future: their construction of what the twentieth-century novelist E. M. Forster would call “round” characters. Instead of presenting simplifications of human beings, novels introduce characters that seem to breathe, feel, and think. Fielding's power to raise affection for such characters while also comprehensively surveying an entire social world lies at the heart of his achievement.

# ***From The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews***<sup>1</sup>

## **From *Preface***

As it is possible the mere English reader may have a different idea of romance with the author of these little volumes,<sup>2</sup> and may consequently expect a kind of entertainment not to be found, nor which was even intended, in the following pages, it may not be improper to premise a few words concerning this kind of writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language.

The epic as well as the drama is divided into tragedy and comedy. Homer, who was the father of this species of poetry, gave us a pattern of both these, though that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which Aristotle tells us bore the same relation to comedy which his *Iliad* bears to tragedy.<sup>3</sup> And perhaps, that we have no more instances of it among the writers of antiquity, is owing to the loss of this great pattern, which, had it survived, would have found its imitators equally with the other poems of this great original.

And farther, as this poetry may be tragic or comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise either in verse or prose: for though it wants one particular, which the critic<sup>4</sup> enumerates in the constituent parts of an epic poem, namely meter; yet, when any kind of writing contains all its other parts, such as fable, action, characters, sentiments, and diction,<sup>5</sup> and is deficient in meter only; it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the epic; at least, as no critic hath thought proper to range it under any other head, or to assign it a particular name to itself.

Thus the *Telemachus* of the archbishop of Cambray appears to me of the epic kind, as well as<sup>6</sup> the *Odyssey* of Homer; indeed, it is

much fairer and more reasonable to give it a name common with that species from which it differs only in a single instance, than to confound it with those which it resembles in no other. Such are those voluminous works, commonly called romances, namely, *Clelia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astraea*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*,<sup>7</sup> and innumerable others, which contain, as I apprehend, very little instruction or entertainment.

Now a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters. It differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this: that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous: it differs in its characters by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us: lastly in its sentiments and diction; by preserving the ludicrous instead of the sublime.<sup>8</sup> In the diction, I think, burlesque<sup>9</sup> itself may be sometimes admitted; of which many instances will occur in this work, as in the description of the battles, and some other places, not necessary to be pointed out to the classical reader, for whose entertainment those parodies or burlesque imitations are chiefly calculated.

But though we have sometimes admitted this in our diction, we have carefully excluded it from our sentiments and characters; for there it is never properly introduced, unless in writings of the burlesque kind, which this is not intended to be. Indeed, no two species of writing can differ more widely than the comic and the burlesque; for as the latter is ever the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprising absurdity, as in appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest, or *è converso*,<sup>1</sup> so in the former we should ever confine ourselves strictly to nature, from the just imitation of which will flow all the pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible reader. And perhaps there is one reason why a comic writer should of all others be the least excused for deviating from

nature, since it may not be always so easy for a serious poet to meet with the great and the admirable; but life everywhere furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous.

I have hinted this little concerning burlesque; because I have often heard that name given to performances which have been truly of the comic kind, from the author's having sometimes admitted it in his diction only; which, as it is the dress of poetry, doth like the dress of men establish characters (the one of the whole poem, and the other of the whole man) in vulgar opinion, beyond any of their greater excellencies. But surely a certain drollery in style, where the characters and sentiments are perfectly natural, no more constitutes the burlesque, than an empty pomp and dignity of words, where everything else is mean and low, can entitle any performance to the appellation of the true sublime.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1742

- Note 1: The entire title on the title page runs, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and his Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams, Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote*. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Joseph Andrews* was originally published to two duodecimo (small) volumes. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the *Poetics* (ca. 335 B.C.E.), Aristotle mentions a comic mock-epic of Homer's, the *Margites*, which is now lost. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Aristotle. "Wants": lacks. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Epic poetry shares this list of elements with tragedy, according to Aristotle. "Fable": story, plot. "Sentiments": thoughts. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Just as much as. François de Salignac de Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715) published the prose epic *Telemachus* in French in 1699. [Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: All popular, multivolume French romances of the 17th century. Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) wrote *Clélie* (1654–60) and *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* (1647–58). Gautier de Costes de la Calprenède (ca. 1610–1663) wrote *Cléopâtre* (1647–58) and *Cassandre* (1642–45). Honoré d'Urfé (1567–1625) wrote *L'Astrée* (1607–27). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lofty ideas and language. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Comically exaggerated imitation. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To the contrary (Latin); that is, vice versa. [Return to reference 1](#)

## SAMUEL RICHARDSON

The novels of Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) emerged not from a genteel literary world of elite education and social privilege but from a London culture of printing presses, paper, type, and ink.

Richardson came to his position as one of the two most celebrated masters of eighteenth-century fiction with (in his words) “only common school-learning,” without Latin or Greek, starting in the book trades as a printer’s apprentice in London. He held that position for seven years, then worked for his former master as a compositor and corrector, and finally in 1722 gained the livery of the Stationer’s Company, the guild of London printers, that licensed him to set up his own printing business, at the age of thirty-three.

Through the 1720s and 1730s this business thrived, as he printed documents for the government, periodicals, and many kinds of books and also did work as an editor, a bookseller, and occasionally an author.

In 1739 he was composing a book of sample letters to serve as models for correspondence when one pair of them, an exchange about a master’s violent sexual harassment of a servant girl, sparked an idea. In two months, he wrote his first novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740)—published, like all the miscellaneous work he had previously written, anonymously (though his authorship soon became known). In a 1741 letter, he would describe it as representing a “new species of writing” that did not traffic in “the improbable and marvelous, with which novels general abound.”

*Pamela* elaborated on the situation in the letter manual and was itself an epistolary novel, composed entirely in letters, mostly written by the servant, Pamela Andrews, to her parents. She is “rewarded” near the end with a proposal of marriage from her finally reformed master Mr. B, which she accepts. The novel was a vast success, running to five editions in a year, inspiring rapturous praise and censures of its erotic content and disruption of social hierarchy, as

well as continuations by other writers, theatrical adaptations, prints and other visual representations, and parodies, notably Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1740) and Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (1741). Richardson himself wrote a sequel in 1741, but his greatest achievement as a novelist would appear in 1747 and 1748, in seven volumes: *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, also composed of letters, nearly a million words long, follows the trials of Clarissa Harlowe, young, pious, rich, and beautiful, whose family cruelly forces her toward a financially advantageous marriage to an odious man. Clarissa is deceived into accepting the aid of a handsome libertine of high station, Lovelace, her great antagonist, bent on possessing and destroying her. Richardson's final novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54) portrays a truly good man, as an antidote to the specious appeal of men such as his own villain Lovelace and Fielding's comical hero Tom Jones, whom he thought far from harmless. Also notably prolix (seven volumes long) and also an epistolary novel, *Grandison* has not lived in readers' imaginations quite as *Pamela* and *Clarissa* have done, though its portrayal of intimate rhythms of domestic life captivated later masters of fiction such as Jane Austen.

Richardson did not invent epistolary fiction—Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (three volumes, 1684–87) is a substantial earlier example—but his works did more for the prestige of the form in European literature than those of any other author. A skeptical reader such as Henry Fielding can find aspects of the epistolary form that strain credulity. How do the authors of so very many letters find time to live the lives they so copiously write about? Where are these letters, who has them, and how did this “editor” get them from correspondents who are estranged or widely distant from each other, or dead? Yet the documentary illusion of the form, its consisting of “real” physical objects—actual letters—that may not only be read but also hidden, stolen, passed secretly from hand to hand, helps overcome its artificiality, both for eighteenth-century readers used to sharing their own (often voluminous) correspondence, and readers now.

In Richardson's preface to *Clarissa*, posing as the editor who has overseen the letters' transformation from handwriting to print, he describes the technique's power, its way of depicting characters' emotions at the very moment they write, in the midst of the plot, not knowing the outcome. This close scrutiny of the motions of consciousness would be seen as a hallmark of the novel form in general. But epistolary fiction, Richardson knew, had its dangers. Giving ample space to self-justifying, plausible villains such as Lovelace, without authorial correction, could trap readers in the wrong sympathies. Before the final volumes of *Clarissa* had appeared, Richardson's devotees urged him to reform Lovelace for a happy ending; he felt they missed the point. The preface printed here, from the third, 1751 edition, testifies to his anxiety about controlling readers' wayward reactions. As editor, he "restores" (in fact invents) more epistolary material to this third edition, making the novel yet longer, much of which serves to discredit Lovelace further. The preface also addresses mundane problems that Richardson the printer knew mattered: the size of the type, the "spoilers" in the previous edition's outline. The epistolary form that Richardson mastered did not immediately take off; it came into greatest vogue in the 1770s (when Frances Burney's *Evelina* appeared) and 1780s, when the French author Pierre Choderlos de Laclos published his epistolary classic *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). Though only occasionally revived in later fiction, the epistolary method allowed Richardson to create an intimacy between characters and the reader that remains at the heart of the novel's power.



# ***From Clarissa***<sup>1</sup>

## ***From Preface***

The following history is given in a series of letters written principally in a double yet separate correspondence;

Between two young ladies of virtue and honor, bearing an inviolable friendship for each other, and writing not merely for amusement, but upon the most *interesting*<sup>2</sup> subjects; in which every private family, more or less, may find itself concerned; and,

Between two gentlemen<sup>3</sup> of free lives; one of them glorying in his talents for stratagem and invention, and communicating to the other, in confidence, all the secret purposes of an intriguing head and resolute heart.

But here it will be proper to observe, for the sake of such as may apprehend hurt to the morals of youth, from the more freely written letters, that the gentlemen, though professed libertines as to the female sex, and making it one of their wicked maxims, to keep no faith with any of the individuals of it, who are thrown into their power, are not, however, either infidels or scoffers;<sup>4</sup> nor yet such as think themselves freed from the observance of those other moral duties which bind man to man.

On the contrary, it will be found, in the progress of the work, that they very often make such reflections upon each other, and each upon himself and his own actions, as reasonable beings *must* make, who disbelieve not a future state of rewards and punishments,<sup>5</sup> and who one day propose to reform—One of them actually reforming,<sup>6</sup> and by that means giving an opportunity to censure the freedoms which fall from the gayer pen and lighter heart of the other.

And yet that other, although in unbosoming himself to a select friend, he discovers<sup>7</sup> wickedness enough to entitle him to general detestation, preserves a decency, as well in his images as in his

language, which is not always to be found in the works of some of the most celebrated modern writers, whose subjects and characters have less warranted the liberties they have taken.

In the letters of the two young ladies, it is presumed will be found not only the highest exercise of a reasonable and *practicable* friendship, between minds endowed with the noblest principles of virtue and religion, but occasionally interspersed, such delicacy of sentiments, particularly with regard to the other sex; such instances of impartiality, each freely, as a fundamental principle of their friendship, blaming, praising, and setting right the other, as are strongly to be recommended to the observation of the *younger* part (more especially) of the female readers.

The principal of these two young ladies is proposed as an exemplar to her sex. Nor is it any objection to her being so, that she is not in all respects a perfect character. It was not only natural, but it was necessary, that she should have some faults, were it only to show the reader how laudably she could mistrust and blame herself, and carry to her own heart, divested of self-partiality, the censure which arose from her own convictions, and that even to the acquittal of those, because revered characters,<sup>8</sup> whom no one else would acquit, and to whose much greater faults her errors were owing, and not to a weak or reproachable heart. As far as it is consistent with human frailty, and as far as she could be perfect, considering the people she had to deal with, and those with whom she was inseparably connected, she *is* perfect. To have been impeccable must have left nothing for the divine grace and a purified state to do, and carried our idea of her from woman to angel. As such is she often esteemed by the man<sup>9</sup> whose *heart* was so corrupt that he could hardly believe human nature capable of the purity, which, on every trial or temptation, shone out in *hers*.

Besides the four principal persons, several others are introduced, whose letters are characteristic:<sup>1</sup> and it is presumed that there will be found in some of them, but more especially in those of the chief character among the men, and the second character among the

women,<sup>2</sup> such strokes of gayety, fancy, and humor, as will entertain and divert; and at the same time both warn and instruct.

All the letters are written while the hearts of the writers must be supposed to be wholly engaged in their subjects (the events at the time generally dubious<sup>3</sup>): so that they abound not only with critical situations, but with what may be called *instantaneous* descriptions and reflections (proper to be brought home to the breast of the youthful reader); as also with affecting conversations; many of them written in the dialogue or dramatic way.

"*Much more* lively and affecting," says one of the principal characters (Vol. VII, p. 73),<sup>4</sup> "must be the style of those who write in the height of a *present* distress; the mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty (the events then hidden in the womb of fate;) *than* the dry, narrative, unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted, can be; the relater perfectly at ease; and if himself unmoved by his own story, not likely greatly to affect the reader."

What will be found to be more particularly aimed at in the following work is—To warn the inconsiderate and thoughtless of the one sex, against the base arts and designs of specious contrivers of the other—To caution parents against the undue exercise of their natural authority over their children in the great article of marriage—To warn children against preferring a man of pleasure to a man of probity, upon that dangerous but too commonly received notion, *that a reformed rake makes the best husband*—But above all, to investigate the highest and most important doctrines not only of morality, but of Christianity, by showing them thrown into action in the conduct of the *worthy* characters; while the *unworthy*, who set those doctrines at defiance, are condignly, and, as may be said, consequentially punished.

From what has been said, considerate readers will not enter upon the perusal of the piece before them as if it were designed *only* to divert and amuse. It will probably be thought tedious to all such as *dip* into it, expecting a *light novel*, or *transitory romance*; and look

upon story in it (interesting as that is generally allowed to be) as its *sole end*, rather than as a vehicle to the instruction.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1747–48, 1751

- Note 1: The title page of the first edition reads *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life and Particularly Shewing, the Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage. Published by the Editor of Pamela.* (The text of the preface here is from the third edition.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Touching, involving. “Two young ladies”: Clarissa Harlowe, the heroine of the novel, and her confidante, Anna Howe.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Robert Lovelace, the novel’s villain obsessed with seducing Clarissa, and his friend and fellow libertine, John Belford.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: At religion or morality.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Heaven for the righteous, hell for sinners.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As the novel advances, Belford converts to a moral life, inspired by Clarissa’s example.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reveals. “Unbosoming himself”: confessing his secret thoughts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Clarissa censures herself to excuse her vindictive family members, whom she reveres.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lovelace frequently calls Clarissa an angel through the novel.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Suit and reveal their characters.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lovelace and Howe, respectively.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Their outcomes uncertain.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The comments appear in a letter of John Belford toward the end of the novel, slightly misquoted here.[Return to reference 4](#)

## SAMUEL JOHNSON

In *Rambler* 4, as Samuel Johnson (1709–1784; see [p. 788](#)) assesses the innovations in fiction in his own age, he voices some of his fundamental critical principles. He is enthusiastic about the popular appeal of the modern novel, and its duty to be true to the experiences of readers, even though its incidents are invented. Such fictional truth, he believes, is always gratifying. And he insists that novels ought to adhere to a moral purpose, especially given their popularity among the young. He recognized, however, that the writerly attempt to be true to life is often at odds with the aim to be moral, hence the problem of characters who exhibit a mixture of “good and bad qualities.” In his vigorous approval of the aims and effects of the fictions of the eighteenth century, Johnson helped to canonize not just particular novels but the novel form itself.

# ***Rambler 4***

[ON FICTION]

Saturday, *March 31*, 1750

*Simul et jucunda et idonea dicere vitae.*

—HORACE, *Art of Poetry*, 334

And join both profit and delight in one.

—CREECH

The works of fiction with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind.

This kind of writing may be termed, not improperly, the comedy of romance, and is to be conducted nearly by the rules of comic poetry. Its province is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder: it is therefore precluded from the machines<sup>1</sup> and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles.

I remember a remark made by Scaliger upon Pontanus,<sup>2</sup> that all his writings are filled with the same images; and that if you take from him his lilies and his roses, his satyrs and his dryads, he will have nothing left that can be called poetry. In like manner, almost all the fictions of the last age will vanish if you deprive them of a hermit and a wood, a battle and a shipwreck.

Why this wild strain of imagination found reception so long in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive; but we cannot wonder that while readers could be procured, the authors were willing to continue it; for when a man had by practice gained some fluency of language, he had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities; a book was thus produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life.

The task of our present writers is very different; it requires, together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse and accurate observation of the living world. Their performances have, as Horace expresses it, *plus oneris quanto veniae minus*,<sup>3</sup> little indulgence, and therefore more difficulty. They are engaged in portraits of which everyone knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance. Other writings are safe, except from the malice of learning, but these are in danger from every common reader; as the slipper ill executed was censured by a shoemaker who happened to stop in his way at the Venus of Apelles.<sup>4</sup>

But the fear of not being approved as just copiers of human manners is not the most important concern that an author of this sort ought to have before him. These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.

That the highest degree of reverence should be paid to youth, and that nothing indecent should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears, are precepts extorted by sense and virtue from an ancient writer by no means eminent for chastity of thought.<sup>5</sup> The same kind, though not the same degree, of caution, is required in everything



which is laid before them, to secure them from unjust prejudices, perverse opinions, and incongruous combinations of images.

In the romances formerly written, every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men that the reader was in very little danger of making any applications to himself; the virtues and crimes were equally beyond his sphere of activity; and he amused himself with heroes and with traitors, deliverers and persecutors, as with beings of another species, whose actions were regulated upon motives of their own, and who had neither faults nor excellencies in common with himself.

But when an adventurer is leveled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama as may be the lot of any other man, young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention, and hope, by observing his behavior and success, to regulate their own practices when they shall be engaged in the like part.

For this reason these familiar histories may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions. But if the power of example is so great as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will, care ought to be taken that when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited; and that which is likely to operate so strongly should not be mischievous or uncertain in its effects.

The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is that their authors are at liberty, though not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employed; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such situation as to display that luster which before was buried among common stones.

It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature which are most proper for imitation: greater care is still required in

representing life, which is so often discolored by passion or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously<sup>6</sup> described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination.

It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn; nor of a narrative that the train of events is agreeable to observation and experience, for that observation which is called knowledge of the world will be found much more frequently to make men cunning than good. The purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence, without infusing any wish for that superiority with which the betrayer flatters his vanity; to give the power of counteracting fraud without the temptation to practice it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defense, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue.

Many writers, for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favor, we lose the abhorrence of their faults because they do not hinder our pleasure, or perhaps regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit.<sup>7</sup>

There have been men indeed splendidly wicked, whose endowments threw a brightness on their crimes, and whom scarce any villainy made perfectly detestable because they never could be wholly divested of their excellencies; but such have been in all ages the great corrupters of the world, and their resemblance ought no more to be preserved than the art of murdering without pain.

Some have advanced, without due attention to the consequences of this notion, that certain virtues have their correspondent faults, and therefore that to exhibit either apart is to deviate from probability. Thus men are observed by Swift to be "grateful in the

same degree as they are resentful." This principle, with others of the same kind, supposes man to act from a brute impulse, and pursue a certain degree of inclination without any choice of the object; for, otherwise, though it should be allowed that gratitude and resentment arise from the same constitution of the passions, it follows not that they will be equally indulged when reason is consulted; yet, unless that consequence be admitted, this sagacious maxim becomes an empty sound, without any relation to practice or to life.

Nor is it evident that even the first motions to these effects are always in the same proportion. For pride, which produces quickness of resentment, will obstruct gratitude by unwillingness to admit that inferiority which obligation implies; and it is very unlikely that he who cannot think he receives a favor will acknowledge or repay it.

It is of the utmost importance to mankind that positions of this tendency should be laid open and confuted; for while men consider good and evil as springing from the same root, they will spare the one for the sake of the other, and in judging, if not of others at least of themselves, will be apt to estimate their virtues by their vices. To this fatal error all those will contribute who confound the colors of right and wrong, and, instead of helping to settle their boundaries, mix them with so much art that no common mind is able to disunite them.

In narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability (for what we cannot credit, we shall never imitate), but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which, exercised in such trials as the various revolutions of things shall bring upon it, may, by conquering some calamities and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform. Vice (for vice is necessary to be shown) should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, nor the dignity of courage, be so united with it as to reconcile it to the mind. Wherever it appears, it should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and contempt by the meanness of its stratagems: for

while it is supported by either parts<sup>8</sup> or spirit, it will be seldom heartily abhorred. The Roman tyrant was content to be hated if he was but feared;<sup>9</sup> and there are thousands of the readers of romances willing to be thought wicked if they may be allowed to be wits. It is therefore to be steadily inculcated that virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness; and that vice is the natural consequence of narrow thoughts; that it begins in mistake, and ends in ignominy.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The technical term in neoclassical critical theory for the supernatural agents who intervene in human affairs in epic and tragedy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558) criticized the Latin poems of the Italian poet Jovianus Pontanus (1426–1503).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Epistles* 2.1.170.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: According to Pliny the Younger (*Naturalis Historia* 35.85), the Greek painter Apelles of Kos (4th century B.C.E.) corrected the drawing of a sandal after hearing a shoemaker criticize it as faulty, but when the flattered artisan dared to find fault with the drawing of a leg, the artist bade him “stick to his last.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Juvenal’s *Satires* 14.1–58.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Indiscriminately.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Johnson is probably thinking of such popular novels as Tobias Smollett’s *Roderick Random* (1748) and Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749), as opposed to the model of virtue provided by Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747–48).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Abilities.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The emperor Tiberius (see Suetonius’s *Lives of the Caesars*).[Return to reference 9](#)

# CHARLOTTE LENNOX

Charlotte Lennox (1730?–1804), née Charlotte Ramsay, was born in Gibraltar (a British territory on the Iberian peninsula) and spent some of her early life in New York, where her father's military career had taken the family. She arrived in England at fifteen, turned author, and married Scotsman Alexander Lennox. Eventually she began to move in a circle of powerful literary friends and became a celebrated writer of poems, plays, periodical essays, translations, literary criticism, and novels.

Her most famous work, *The Female Quixote; or the Adventures of Arabella* (1752), is a novel about reading novels. Like the famous hero of Miguel de Cervantes' Spanish classic *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), Lennox's Arabella bases her understanding of the world on the unrealistic fictions she voraciously reads. Arabella particularly loves old seventeenth-century French romances, with their improbable, sensational plots and highly wrought depictions of love and adventure. Over and over again—as in the selection here—Arabella's romance reading leads her to misunderstand the things actually happening around her in modern-day England. At the novel's conclusion, a clergyman helps Arabella realize her mistake: he explains that romance novels are "senseless fictions." They "vitate" (or spoil) "the mind, and pervert the understanding." The lesson here echoes much period discourse about the dangers of novel reading, but of course there is an important difference, as the sentiment occurs in a novel—a novel that ends rather like a romance, with Arabella's happy marriage. The clergyman himself

allows, "Truth is not always injured by fiction." He recommends that Arabella read, instead, Samuel Richardson's more probable and more moralistic fiction. Though Arabella eventually gives up romance reading, Lennox herself kept on writing her own kind of novels, social comedies with young women as protagonists: *Henrietta* (1758), *Sophia* (1762), and *Euphemia* (1790).

## ***From The Female Quixote***

**From Chapter 1. Contains a turn at court, neither new nor surprising. Some useless additions to a fine lady's education. The bad effects of a whimsical study, which some will say is borrowed from Cervantes.**

The Marquis of —, for a long series of years, was the first and most distinguished favorite at court: he held the most honorable employments under the crown, disposed of all places of profit as he pleased, presided at the council, and in a manner governed the whole kingdom.

This extensive authority could not fail of making him many enemies: he fell at last a sacrifice to the plots they were continually forming against him; and was not only removed from all his employments, but banished the court forever.

The pain his undeserved disgrace gave him, he was enabled to conceal by the natural haughtiness of his temper; and, behaving rather like a man who had resigned, than been dismissed from his posts, he imagined he triumphed sufficiently over the malice of his enemies, while he seemed to be wholly insensible of the effects it produced. His secret discontent, however, was so much augmented by the opportunity he now had of observing the baseness and ingratitude of mankind, which in some degree he experienced every day, that he resolved to quit all society whatever, and devote the rest of his life to solitude and privacy. For the place of his retreat he pitched upon a castle he had in a very remote province of the kingdom, in the neighborhood of a small village, and several miles distant from any town. The vast extent of ground which surrounded this noble building, he had caused to be laid out in a manner peculiar to his taste: the most laborious endeavors of art had been used to make it appear like the beautiful product of wild, uncultivated nature. But if this epitome of Arcadia<sup>1</sup> could boast of only artless and simple beauties, the inside of the castle was adorned with a magnificence suitable to the dignity and immense riches of the owner.



While things were preparing at the castle for his reception, the Marquis, though now advanced in years, cast his eyes on a young lady, greatly inferior to himself in quality,<sup>2</sup> but whose beauty and good sense promised him an agreeable companion. After a very short courtship, he married her, and in a few weeks carried his new bride into the country, from whence he absolutely resolved never to return.

The Marquis, following the plan of life he had laid down, divided his time between the company of his lady, his library, which was large and well furnished, and his gardens. Sometimes he took the diversion of hunting, but never admitted any company whatever; and his pride and extreme reserve rendered him so wholly inaccessible to the country gentry about him, that none ever presumed to solicit his acquaintance.

In the second year of his retirement, the Marchioness brought him a daughter, and died in three days after her delivery. The Marquis, who had tenderly loved her, was extremely afflicted at her death; but time having produced its usual effects, his great fondness for the little Arabella entirely engrossed his attention, and made up all the happiness of his life. At four years of age he took her from under the direction of the nurses and women appointed to attend her, and permitted her to receive no part of her education from another, which he was capable of giving her himself. He taught her to read and write in a very few months; and, as she grew older, finding in her an uncommon quickness of apprehension, and an understanding capable of great improvements, he resolved to cultivate so promising a genius<sup>3</sup> with the utmost care; and, as he frequently, in the rapture of paternal fondness, expressed himself, render her mind as beautiful as her person<sup>4</sup> was lovely.

Nature had indeed given her a most charming face, a shape easy and delicate, a sweet and insinuating<sup>5</sup> voice, and an air so full of dignity and grace, as drew the admiration of all that saw her. These native charms were improved with all the heightenings of art; her dress was perfectly magnificent; the best masters of music and dancing were sent for from London to attend her. She soon became

a perfect mistress of the French and Italian languages, under the care of her father; and it is not to be doubted, but she would have made a great proficiency in all useful knowledge, had not her whole time been taken up by another study.

From her earliest youth she had discovered a fondness for reading, which extremely delighted the Marquis; he permitted her therefore the use of his library, in which, unfortunately for her, were great store of romances, and, what was still more unfortunate, not in the original French, but very bad translations.

The deceased Marchioness had purchased these books to soften a solitude which she found very disagreeable; and, after her death, the Marquis removed them from her closet<sup>6</sup> into his library, where Arabella found them.

The surprising adventures with which they were filled, proved a most pleasing entertainment to a young lady, who was wholly secluded from the world; who had no other diversion, but ranging like a nymph<sup>7</sup> through gardens, or, to say better, the woods and lawns in which she was enclosed; and who had no other conversation but that of a grave and melancholy father, or her own attendants.

Her ideas, from the manner of her life, and the objects around her, had taken a romantic<sup>8</sup> turn; and, supposing romances were real pictures of life, from them she drew all her notions and expectations. By them she was taught to believe that love was the ruling principle of the world; that every other passion was subordinate to this; and that it caused all the happiness and miseries of life. Her glass,<sup>9</sup> which she often consulted, always showed her a form so extremely lovely, that, not finding herself engaged in such adventures as were common to the heroines in the romances she read, she often complained of the insensibility of mankind, upon whom her charms seemed to have so little influence.

The perfect retirement she lived in afforded indeed no opportunities of making the conquests she desired; but she could not comprehend, how any solitude could be obscure enough to conceal a beauty like hers from notice; and thought the reputation

of her charms sufficient to bring a crowd of adorers to demand her of her father. Her mind being wholly filled with the most extravagant expectations, she was alarmed by every trifling incident; and kept in a continual anxiety by a vicissitude of hopes, fears, wishes, and disappointments.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Classical site of pastoral poetry, an idyllic garden paradise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rank, social status.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mental ability and disposition.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Body, appearance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Gently appealing or attractive.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Personal chamber.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "A goddess of the woods, meadows, or waters" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Formed by romances.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Mirror.[Return to reference 9](#)

**From Chapter 7. *In which some contradictions are very happily reconciled.***

The Marquis's head gardener had received a young fellow into his master's service, who had lived in several families of distinction. He had a good face; was tolerably genteel; and having an understanding something above his condition, joined to a great deal of second-hand politeness, which he had contracted while he lived at London,<sup>1</sup> he appeared a very extraordinary person among the rustics who were his fellow servants.

Arabella, when she walked in the garden, had frequent opportunities of seeing this young man, whom she observed with a very particular attention. His person and air had something, she thought, very distinguishing. When she condescended to speak to him about any business he was employed in, she took notice, that his answers were framed in a language vastly superior to his condition; and the respect he paid her had quite another air from that of the awkward civility of the other servants.

Having discerned so many marks of a birth far from being mean,<sup>2</sup> she easily passed from an opinion that he was a gentleman to a belief that he was something more; and every new sight of him adding strength to her suspicions, she remained, in a little time, perfectly convinced that he was some person of quality, who, disguised in the habit of a gardener, had introduced himself into her father's service, in order to have an opportunity of declaring a passion to her, which must certainly be very great, since it had forced him to assume an appearance so unworthy of his noble extraction.<sup>3</sup>

Wholly possessed with this thought, she set herself to observe him more narrowly; and soon found out, that he went very awkwardly about his work; that he sought opportunities of being alone; that he threw himself in her way as often as he could, and gazed on her very attentively: she sometimes fancied she saw him endeavor to smother a sigh when he answered her any question

about his work; once saw him leaning against a tree with his hands crossed upon his breast; and, having lost a string of small pearls, which she remembered he had seen her threading as she sat in one of the arbors, was persuaded he had taken it up, and kept it for the object of his secret adoration.

She often wondered, indeed, that she did not find her name carved on the trees, with some mysterious expressions of love; that he was never discovered lying along the side of one of the little rivulets, increasing the stream with his tears; nor, for three months that he had lived there, had ever been sick of a fever caused by his grief, and the constraint he put upon himself in not declaring his passion: but she considered again, that his fear of being discovered kept him from amusing himself with making the trees bear the records of his secret thoughts, or of indulging his melancholy in any manner expressive of the condition of his soul; and, as for his not being sick, his youth and the strength of his constitution might, even for a longer time, bear him up against the assaults of a fever: but he appeared much thinner and paler than he used to be; and she concluded, therefore, that he must in time sink under the violence of his passion, or else be forced to declare it to her; which she considered as a very great misfortune; for, not finding in herself any disposition to approve his love, she must necessarily banish him from her presence, for fear he should have the presumption to hope that time might do any thing in his favor: and it was possible also, that the sentence she would be obliged to pronounce might either cause his death, or force him to commit some extravagant action, which would discover him to her father, who would, perhaps, think her guilty of holding a secret correspondence with him.

These thoughts perplexed her so much, that, hoping to find some relief by unburdening her mind to Lucy,<sup>4</sup> she told her all her uneasiness. Ah! said she to her, looking upon Edward, who had just passed them, how unfortunate do I think myself in being the cause of that passion which makes this illustrious unknown wear away his days in so shameful an obscurity! Yes, Lucy, pursued she, that Edward, whom you regard as one of my father's menial servants, is

a person of sublime quality, who submits to this disguise only to have an opportunity of seeing me every day. But why do you seem so surprised? Is it possible that you have not suspected him to be what he is? Has he never unwittingly made any discovery of himself? Have you not surprised him in discourse with his faithful squire, who, certainly, lurks hereabouts to receive his commands, and is haply<sup>5</sup> the confidant of his passion? Has he never entertained you with any conversation about me? Or have you never seen any valuable jewels in his possession by which you suspected him to be not what he appears?

Truly, madam, replied Lucy, I never took him for anybody else but a simple gardener; but now you open my eyes, methinks I can find I have been strangely mistaken; for he does not look like a man of low degree; and he talks quite in another manner from our servants. I never heard him indeed speak of your ladyship, but once; and that was, when he first saw you walking in the garden, he asked our John, if you was not the Marquis's daughter. And he said, you was as beautiful as an angel. As for fine jewels, I never saw any; and I believe he has none; but he has a watch, and that looks as if he was something, madam: nor do I remember to have seen him talk with any stranger that looked like a squire.

Lucy, having thus, with her usual punctuality, answered every question her lady put to her, proceeded to ask her, what she should say, if he should beg her to give her a letter, as the other gentleman had done.

You must by no means take it, replied Arabella: my compassion had before like to have been fatal to me.<sup>6</sup> If he discovers his quality to me, I shall know in what manner to treat him.

They were in this part of their discourse, when a noise they heard at some distance made Arabella bend her steps to the place from whence it proceeded; and, to her infinite amazement, saw the head gardener, with a stick he had in his hand, give several blows to the concealed hero, who suffered the indignity with admirable patience.

Shocked at seeing a person of quality treated so unworthily, she called out to the gardener to hold his hand, who immediately obeyed; and Edward, seeing the young lady advance, sneaked off, with an air very different from an Oroondates.<sup>7</sup>

For what crime, pray, said Arabella, with a stern aspect, did you treat the person I saw with you so cruelly? He whom you take such unbecoming liberties with, may possibly—But again I ask you, what has he done? You should make some allowance for his want of skill in the abject employment he is in at present.

It is not for his want of skill, madam, said the gardener, that I corrected him; he knows his business very well, if he would mind it; but, madam, I have discovered him—

Discovered him, do you say? interrupted Arabella: and has the knowledge of his condition not been able to prevent such usage? Or rather, has it been the occasion of his receiving it?

His conditions are very bad, madam, returned the gardener; and I am afraid are such as will one day prove the ruin of body and soul too. I have for some time suspected he had bad designs in his head; and just now watched him to the fish-pond, and prevented him from —

O dear! interrupted Lucy, looking pitifully on her lady, whose fair bosom heaved with compassion, I warrant he was going to make away with himself.<sup>8</sup>

No, resumed the gardener, smiling at the mistake, he was only going to make away with<sup>9</sup> some of the carp, which the rogue had caught, and intended, I suppose, to sell; but I threw them into the water again; and if your ladyship had not forbid me, I would have drubbed him soundly for his pains.

Fye! fye! interrupted Arabella, out of breath with shame and vexation: tell me no more of these idle tales.

Then, hastily walking on to hide the blushes which this strange accusation of her illustrious lover had raised in her face, she continued for some time in the greatest perplexity imaginable.

Lucy, who followed her, and could not possibly reconcile what her lady had been telling her concerning Edward, with the circumstance of his stealing the carp, ardently wished to hear her opinion of this matter; but, seeing her deeply engaged with her own thoughts, she would not venture to disturb her.

Arabella indeed had been in such a terrible consternation, that it was some time before she even reconciled appearances to herself; but, as she had a most happy faculty in accommodating every incident to her own wishes and conceptions, she examined this matter so many different ways, drew so many conclusions, and fancied so many mysteries in the most indifferent actions of the supposed noble unknown, that she remained, at last, more than ever confirmed in the opinion, that he was some great personage, whom her beauty had forced to assume an appearance unworthy of himself: when Lucy, no longer able to keep silence, drew off her attention from those pleasing images, by speaking of the carp-stealing affair again.

Arabella, whose confusion returned at that disagreeable sound, charged her, in an angry tone, never to mention so injurious a suspicion any more: For, in fine, said she to her, do you imagine a person of his rank could be guilty of stealing carp? Alas! pursued she, sighing, he had, indeed, some fatal design; and, doubtless, would have executed it, had not this fellow so luckily prevented him.

But Mr. Woodbind, madam, said Lucy, saw the carp in his hand: I wonder what he was going to do with them.

Still, resumed Arabella, extremely chagrined, still will you wound my ears with that horrid sound? I tell you, obstinate and foolish wench, that this unhappy man went thither to die; and if he really caught the fish, it was to conceal his design from Woodbind: his great mind could not suggest to him, that it was possible he might be suspected of a baseness like that this ignorant fellow accused him of; therefore he took no care about it, being wholly possessed by his despairing thoughts.

However, madam, said Lucy, your ladyship may prevent his going to the fish-pond again, by laying your commands upon him to live.



I shall do all that I ought, answered Arabella; but my care for the safety of other persons must not make me forget what I owe to my own.

\* \* \*<sup>1</sup> [She] was at a great loss in what manner to comfort her despairing lover, without raising expectations she had no inclination to confirm: but she was delivered from her perplexity by the news of his having left the Marquis's service; which she attributed to some new design he had formed to obtain her; and Lucy, who always thought as her lady did, was of the same opinion; though it was talked among the servants, that Edward feared a discovery of more tricks, and resolved not to stay till he was disgracefully dismissed.

## Endnotes

1752

- Note 1: From imitating the upper class London families who had employed him. "Condition": rank.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Low or inferior.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Birth, lineage.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Her servant, a simple country girl.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Perhaps. "Squire": attendant.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the previous episode, an ambitious gentleman bribed Lucy to deliver a message. Arabella, characteristically misreading events, believed her subsequent show of "compassion" to him during a sickness had motivated his attempting to kidnap her.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A reference to a hero in a French romance, Gauthier de Costes de la Calprenède's *Cassandra* (1652). "Hold": restrain.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drown himself (she assumes, in despair for unrequited love).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Steal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the omitted passage, she considers her previous mistakes, aiming to avoid repeating them.[Return to reference 1](#)

## JAMES FORDYCE

James Fordyce (1720–1796) was a Scottish clergyman who found success preaching in fashionable London. His best-known work was the moralizing *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). In this excerpt from that text, he urgently “caution[s]” young women “against that fatal poison to virtue, which is conveyed by profligate and by improper books”—novels above all. His condemnation of novels was heated but not unusual. Many eighteenth-century writers worried about the dangerous moral and social implications of such fiction, especially when read by supposedly more impressionable women and children.

Fordyce had a misogynistic, patronizing view of women: no “charm of understanding, or of person,” he counsels, can “compensate the want of soft compliance and meek submission in a woman.” Years later, in 1792, feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft would roundly condemn these views: in a delicious parallel to Fordyce’s caution about novels, she insisted that his sermons (with their dangerous privileging of women’s meekness) were not safe for young women to read.

## ***From Sermon IV: On Female Virtue***

When entertainment is made the vehicle of instruction, nothing surely can be more harmless, agreeable, or useful. To prohibit young minds the perusal of any writings, where wisdom addresses the affections in the language of the imagination, may be sometimes well meant, but must be always injudicious.<sup>1</sup> Some such writings undoubtedly there are; the offspring of real genius enlightened by knowledge of the world, and prompted, it is to be hoped, by zeal for the improvement of youth.

Happy indeed beyond the vulgar storytelling tribe and highly to be praised is he, who, to fine sensibilities and a lively fancy superadding clear and comprehensive views of men and manners, writes to the heart with simplicity and chasteness, through a series of adventures well conducted, and relating chiefly to scenes in ordinary life; where the solid joys of virtue, and her sacred sorrows, are strongly contrasted with the hollowness and the horrors of vice; where, by little unexpected yet natural incidents of the tender and domestic kind, so peculiarly<sup>2</sup> fitted to touch the soul, the most important lessons are impressed, and the most generous sentiments awakened; where, to say no more, distress occasioned often by indiscretions, consistent with many degrees of worth, yet clouding it for the time, is worked up into a storm, such as to call forth the principles of fortitude and wisdom, confirming and brightening them by that exertion; till at length the bursting tempest is totally, or in a great measure dispelled, so that the hitherto suspended and agitated reader is either relieved entirely, and delighted even to transport, or has left upon his mind at the conclusion a mixture of virtuous sadness, which serves to fasten the moral deeper, and to produce an unusual sobriety in all his passions.

Amongst the few works of this kind which I have seen, I cannot but look on those of Mr. Richardson<sup>3</sup> as well entitled to the first rank;

an author, of whom an indisputable judge has with equal truth and energy pronounced, "that he taught the passions to move at the command of reason":<sup>4</sup> I will venture to add, an author, to whom your sex are under singular obligations for his uncommon attention to their best interests; but particularly for presenting, in a character sustained throughout with inexpressible pathos and delicacy, the most exalted standard of female excellence that was ever held up to their imitation. I would be understood to except that part of Clarissa's conduct, which the author meant to exhibit as exceptionable.<sup>5</sup> Setting this aside, we find in her character a beauty, a sweetness, an artlessness—what shall I say more?—a sanctity of sentiment and manner, which, I own for my part, I have never seen equaled in any book of that sort; yet such, at the same time, as appears no way impracticable for any woman who is ambitious of excelling.

Besides the beautiful productions of that incomparable pen, there seem to me to be very few, in the style of novel, that you can read with safety, and yet fewer that you can read with advantage.—What shall we say of certain books, which we are assured (for we have not read them) are in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous,<sup>6</sup> and which contain such rank treason against the royalty of virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute, let her reputation in life be what it will. But can it be true—say, ye chaste stars, that with innumerable eyes inspect the midnight behavior of mortals—can it be true, that any young woman, pretending to decency, should endure for a moment to look on this infernal brood of futility and lewdness?

Nor do we condemn those writings only, that, with an effrontery which defies the laws of God and men, carry on their very forehead the mark of the beast.<sup>7</sup> We consider the general run of novels as utterly unfit for you. Instruction they convey none. They paint scenes of pleasure and passion altogether improper for you to behold, even with the mind's eye. Their descriptions are often loose and luscious in a high degree; their representations of love between

the sexes are almost universally overstrained. All is dotage,<sup>8</sup> or despair; or else ranting swelled into burlesque. In short, the majority of their lovers are either mere lunatics, or mock-heroes. A sweet sensibility, a charming tenderness, a delightful anguish, exalted generosity, heroic worth, and refinement of thought; how seldom are these best ingredients of virtuous love mixed with any judgment or care in the composition of their principal characters!\* \* \*<sup>9</sup>

To come back to the species of writing which so many young women are apt to dote upon, the offspring of our present novelists, I mean the greater part; with whom we may join the common herd of playwrights. Beside the remarks already made on the former, is it not manifest with respect to both, that such books lead to a false taste of life and happiness; that they represent vices as frailties, and frailties as virtues; that they engender notions of love unspeakably perverting and inflammatory; that they overlook in a great measure the finest part of the passion, which one would suspect the authors had never experienced; that they turn it most commonly into an affair of wicked or of frivolous gallantry; that on many occasions they take off from the worst crimes committed in the prosecution of it, the horror which ought ever to follow them; on some occasions actually reward those very crimes, and almost on all leave the female reader with this persuasion at best, that it is their business to get husbands at any rate, and by whatever means? Add to the account, that repentance for the foulest injuries which can be done the sex is generally represented as the pang, or rather the start, of a moment; and holy wedlock converted into a sponge, to wipe out at a single stroke every stain of guilt and dishonor, which it was possible for the hero of the piece to contract.—Is this a kind of reading calculated to improve the principles, or preserve the sobriety, of female minds?<sup>1</sup> How much are those young women to be pitied, that have no wise parents or faithful tutors to direct them in relation to the books which are, or which are not, fit for them to read! How much are those parents and tutors to be commended, who with particular solicitude watch over them in so important a concern!

I conclude with saying, that the subject of this discourse has unavoidably suggested some ideas, which, had we not undertaken to address young ladies at large, we should have certainly suppressed for the sake of more modest natures, whom we would not unwillingly pain, no not for a moment. But such we hope will be candid enough to excuse us, if, by throwing out to others what to them would have been unnecessary, we may be happily instrumental in rescuing were it but one of their sex from the slavery of vice, or defending a single innocent from its snares.

## Endnotes

1766

- Note 1: Unwise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Especially.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Novelist Samuel Richardson (see above).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Slight misquotation of Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 97 (1751), which praised Richardson for having “taught the passions to move at the command of virtue.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Blameable. Clarissa herself offers moral commentary on actions she comes to view as mistakes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Destructive.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A sign of evil, with reference to Revelation 16:2.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Infatuation, too much doting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He continues to comment on both older romance fiction and contemporary attitudes about marriage.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The sermon focuses on words from 1 Timothy 2:8–9: “I will—that women adorn themselves with sobriety.”[Return to reference 1](#)

## CLARA REEVE

Like many successful women writers of the eighteenth century, Clara Reeve (1729–1807) wrote out of financial necessity, but unlike most, she did not move in metropolitan circles. Reeve's most discussed works now, the Gothic novel *The Old English Baron* (1777, 1778) and her literary history *The Progress of Romance* (1785), were first printed in the town of Colchester, near her home in Ipswich. The printing of books, pamphlets, and catalogs had increasingly spread to urban centers outside London as the century wore on, though the capital remained the undisputed center of the literary world. Never marrying, Reeve managed her literary career herself, corresponding with the booksellers in London to see nearly all of her works into print there, including novels, poems, and a treatise on women's education. Her provincial origins and life did not prevent Reeve from becoming famous. For over a century, *The Old English Baron* was read as a classic English novel, often printed together with her inspiration for it, Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)—though Reeve aims, as she says in her preface to her work, to surpass Walpole by avoiding supernatural extravagances.

Unlike *The Old English Baron*, Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* did not initially attract much attention and remained mostly unnoticed even by scholars until recently. It presents a learned history of prose fictional narrative, from ancient Greek romances (which she calls "the parents of the rest") to the novels of the eighteenth century. Reeve asserts the comprehensiveness and rigor of her scholarship: "while many eminent writers," she says in the preface, have "skimmed over the surface of this subject, it seemed to me that none of them had sounded the depths of it." Written as a dialogue between two women and a man—a form intended to enliven what otherwise might be a dry discourse—*The Progress* says romances are "neither so contemptible, nor so dangerous a kind of

reading” as is commonly supposed, compares them favorably to epic poems, and recognizes their antiquity, giving examples from not only Greek but also Arabic and even Egyptian literature. (She appends an Egyptian tale, “The History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt,” to the second volume of *The Progress*.) While firmly distinguishing romances from the modern novel in the first excerpt reprinted here, she does so not to denigrate the former, as in many other efforts to define the novel in the period, but to identify two species of the same genus. She also offers suggestive remarks on the novel’s special power over the minds of readers.

In Reeve’s account, the lineaments of later critical histories of the novel already appear. She describes the tradition of women writers starting with Aphra Behn as crucial to the modern novel’s early development. Within this account, she offers what would become a common narrative: early women novelists such as Behn and Delarivier Manley were scandalous and sexually improper, she says, but by the mid-eighteenth century a more morally edifying kind of women’s fiction began to hold sway—a transition exemplified in the career of Eliza Haywood, who redeemed herself in her final works. (Recently scholars have told a more complex story, noting that women novelists from the beginning presented the public with works at diverse points on the scale of sexual morality.) Reeve also provides illuminating terms in which to distinguish “the two most eminent writers of our country,” Richardson and Fielding—a contrast inescapable in taxonomies of English novels in the coming centuries. The final selection in this cluster recognizes not only the dangers of indiscriminate reading in the collections of circulating libraries but also how impracticable any attempt to ban fiction would be, given the prevalence of fictional stories throughout the best literature, ancient and modern. Reeve supports the reading of novels as long as it is subject to parental and other culturally authoritative monitors, and to a well-developed moral monitor within.



# ***From The Progress of Romance***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The complete title on the title page is *The Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries, and Manners, with Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of It, on Them Respectively; in a Course of Evening Conversations.* [Return to reference 1](#)

## From *Evening VII*<sup>2</sup>

### [NOVEL AND ROMANCE]

\* \* \*

*Euphrasia.* \* \* \* The word *novel* in all languages signifies something new. It was first used to distinguish these works from romance, though they have lately been confounded together and are frequently mistaken for each other.

*Sophronia.* But how will you draw the line of distinction, so as to separate them effectually, and prevent future mistakes?

*Euphrasia.* I will attempt this distinction, and I presume if it is properly done it will be followed—if not, you are but where you were before. The romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things.—The novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The romance in lofty and elevated language describes what never happened nor is likely to happen.—The novel gives a familiar relation of such things as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it is to represent every scene in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story, as if they were our own.

*Hortensius.* You have well distinguished, and it is necessary to make this distinction.—I clearly perceive the difference between the romance and novel, and am surprised they should be confounded together.

*Euphrasia.* I have sometimes thought it has been done insidiously, by those who endeavor to render all writings of both kinds contemptible.

*Sophronia.* I have generally observed that men of learning have spoken of them with the greatest disdain, especially collegians.<sup>3</sup>

*Euphrasia.* Take care what you say my friend, they are a set of men who are not to be offended with impunity. Yet they deal in romances, though of a different kind.—Some have taken up an opinion<sup>4</sup> upon trust in others whose judgment they prefer to their own.—Others having seen a few of the worst or dullest among them,<sup>5</sup> have judged of all the rest by them;—just as some men affect to despise our sex, because they have only conversed with the worst part of it.

*Hortensius.* Your sex knows how to retort upon ours, and to punish us for our offenses against you.—Proceed however.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

### [WOMEN NOVELISTS]

*Euphrasia.* \*\*\* Let us next consider some of the early novels of our own country.

We had early translations of the best novels of all other countries, but for a long time produced very few of our own. One of the earliest I know of is the *Cyprian Academy*, by Robert Baron<sup>7</sup> in the reign of Charles the First.—Among our early novel-writers we must reckon Mrs. Behn.<sup>8</sup>—There are strong marks of genius in all this lady's works, but unhappily, there are some parts of them very improper to be read by or recommended to virtuous minds, and especially to youth.—She wrote in an age, and to a court of licentious manners,<sup>9</sup> and perhaps we ought to ascribe to these causes the loose turn of her stories.—Let us do justice to her merits, and cast the veil of compassion over her faults.—She died in the year 1689, and lies buried in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.<sup>1</sup>—The inscription will show how high she stood in estimation at that time.

*Hortensius.* Are you not partial to the sex of this genius?—when you excuse in her, what you would not to a man?

*Euphrasia.* Perhaps I may, and you must excuse me if I am so, especially as this lady had many fine and amiable qualities, besides

her genius for writing.

*Sophronia*. Pray let her rest in peace—you were speaking of the inscription on her monument, I do not remember it.

*Euphrasia*. It is as follows:

Mrs. Aphra Behn, 1689.

Here lies a proof that wit can never be  
Defense enough against mortality.

Let me add that Mrs. Behn will not be forgotten, so long as the tragedy of *Oroonoko* is acted; it was from her story of that illustrious African, that Mr. Southerne<sup>2</sup> wrote that play, and the most affecting parts of it are taken almost literally from her.

*Hortensius*. Peace be to her *manes*!<sup>3</sup> I shall not disturb her, or her works.

*Euphrasia*. I shall not recommend them to your perusal, Hortensius.

The next female writer of this class is Mrs. Manley,<sup>4</sup> whose works are still more exceptionable than Mrs. Behn's, and as much inferior to them in point of merit.—She hoarded up all the public and private scandal within her reach, and poured it forth, in a work too well known in the last age, though almost forgotten in the present; a work that partakes of the style of the romance, and the novel. I forbear the name, and further observations on it, as Mrs. Manley's works are sinking gradually into oblivion. I am sorry to say they were once in fashion, which obliges me to mention them, otherwise I had rather be spared the pain of disgracing an author of my own sex.

*Sophronia*. It must be confessed that these books of the last age were of worse tendency than any of those of the present.

*Euphrasia*. My dear friend, there were bad books at all times, for those who sought them.—Let us pass them over in silence.

*Hortensius*. No not yet.—Let me help your memory to one more lady-author of the same class.—Mrs. Haywood.<sup>5</sup> She has the same claim upon you as those you have last mentioned.

*Euphrasia.* I had intended to have mentioned Mrs. Haywood though in a different way, but I find you will not suffer any part of her character to escape you.

*Hortensius.* Why should she be spared any more than the others?

*Euphrasia.* Because she repented of her faults, and employed the latter part of her life in expiating the offences of the former.<sup>6</sup>—There is reason to believe that the examples of the two ladies we have spoken of seduced Mrs. Haywood into the same track; she certainly wrote some amorous novels in her youth, and also two books of the same kind as Mrs. Manley's capital work,<sup>7</sup> all of which I hope are forgotten.

*Hortensius.* I fear they will not be so fortunate, they will be known to posterity by the infamous immortality conferred upon them by Pope in his *Dunciad*.<sup>8</sup>

*Euphrasia.* Mr. Pope was severe in his castigations, but let us be just to merit of every kind. Mrs. Haywood had the singular good fortune to recover a lost reputation, and the yet greater honor to atone for her errors.—She devoted the remainder of her life and labors to the service of virtue. Mrs. Haywood was one of the most voluminous female writers that ever England produced, none of her latter works are destitute of merit, though they do not rise to the highest pitch of excellence.—*Betsy Thoughtless* is reckoned her best novel; but those works by which she is most likely to be known to posterity are the *Female Spectator* and the *Invisible Spy*.<sup>9</sup> This lady died so lately as the year 1758.<sup>1</sup>

*Sophronia.* I have heard it often said that Mr. Pope was too severe in his treatment of this lady; it was supposed that she had given him some private offense, which he resented publicly as was too much his way.

*Hortensius.* That is very likely, for he was not of a forgiving disposition.—If I have been too severe also, you ladies must forgive me in behalf of your sex.

*Euphrasia.* Truth is sometimes severe.—Mrs. Haywood's wit and ingenuity were never denied. I would be the last to vindicate her

faults, but the first to celebrate her return to virtue, and her atonement for them.

*Sophronia*. May her first writings be forgotten, and the last survive to do her honor!

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: As the title indicates, Reeve's work takes the form of a dialogue between three participants, two women (Euphrasia and Sophronia) and a man (Hortensius), held on a series of evenings.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Scholars affiliated with the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge universities.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That novels deserve contempt.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Novels.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Euphrasia proceeds to identify Renaissance Italian writers such as Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) as the first modern novelists, then describes the novels of Spanish master Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616), and the more realistic French fiction of the 17th century.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The *Erotopaignion; or, The Cyprian Academy* (1647) by Robert Baron (1630–1658) was written in both prose and verse and later became notorious for its wholesale copying of passages from Milton, Shakespeare, and other famous writers.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Aphra Behn (1640–1689), playwright and author of *Oroonoko* (p. 152).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The court of the Restoration era (1660–88) was often denounced for its sexual license.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Gothic church in the city of Westminster, London, where English royalty and many famous writers are buried.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Thomas Southerne (1660–1746), Irish playwright, whose tragedy *Oroonoko* (1696) was based on Behn's novel.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Borrowed from Latin, a fanciful name of the deified or otherwise respected spirit of the dead.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Delarivier Manley (ca. 1670–1724), whose "too well known" work of satirical fiction, *The New Atalantis* (1709), portrayed the scandalous doings of prominent Whigs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Eliza Haywood (1693–1756), prolific author of fiction, including *Fantomina* (see p. 649).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Haywood's later works such as *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) took a more moral turn than her earlier ones.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reeve probably means Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island, Adjacent to Utopia* (1724) and *The Secret History of the Present Intrigues of the Court of Caramania* (1727), both of which satirically reflected on contemporary British politics by presenting fictionalized parallel "histories," in the manner of *The New Atalantis*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Alexander Pope's mockery of the book trade in his poem *The Dunciad* (1728, 1743) makes Haywood the prize in a pissing contest between booksellers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The former is a periodical for women (1744–46) treating philosophical and social topics, the latter a work of fiction (1754) full of political and cultural reflections.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reeve misstates Haywood's date of death, which is 1756.[Return to reference 1](#)

## From *Evening VIII*

[RICHARDSON AND FIELDING]

*Hortensius.* You have not yet made mention of the most eminent writers of our country, Richardson and Fielding.

*Euphrasia.* I hope you did not think it possible for me to forget them. Mr. Richardson published his works at a considerable distance of time from each other. *Pamela*<sup>2</sup> was the first; it met with a very warm reception, as it well deserved to do.—I remember my mother and aunts being shut up in the parlor reading *Pamela*, and I took it very hard that I was excluded.—I have since seen it put into the hands of children, so much are their understandings riper than mine, or so much are our methods of education improved since that time.

*Sophronia.* It is a general<sup>3</sup> mistake in regard to the youth of our time, they are put too forward in all respects. Let us return to *Pamela*, I can remember the time when this book was the fashion, the person that had not read *Pamela* was disqualified for conversation, of which it was the principal subject for a long time.—You will give us your opinion of this, and the other words of Mr. Richardson?

*Euphrasia.* To praise the works of Mr. Richardson is to hold a candle to the sun, their merits are well understood in other countries besides our own; they have been translated into French, Italian, and German, and they are read in English frequently, by the people of the first rank in all the politest countries in Europe.

A lady of quality in France sent an epigram to one of Mr. Richardson's family soon after his death, which I will give you here.

\* \* \* <sup>4</sup>

Richardson is now no more!  
Then may the human heart deplore<sup>5</sup>  
Its most profound investigator,  
Its patron, friend, and regulator,



And its most perfect legislator.

*Hortensius.* Very close indeed to the original.

*Sophronia.* But your remarks on Richardson's works?

*Euphrasia.* I will hazard a few remarks on them, which perhaps I may be allowed, because no person whatever has read them over with more pleasure and delight than myself.

It seems that *Pamela* is the *chef d'oeuvre*<sup>6</sup> of Mr. Richardson.—The originality, the beautiful simplicity of the manners and language of the charming maid, are interesting past expression; and find a short way to the heart, which it engages by its best and noblest feelings.—There needs no other proof of a bad and corrupted heart, than its being insensible to the distresses, and incapable<sup>7</sup> to the rewards of virtue.—I should want no other criterion of a *good* or a *bad* heart, than the manner in which a young person was affected by reading *Pamela*.

*Hortensius.* Your plaudit is a warm one.—But Richardson is a writer all your own; your sex are more obliged to him and Addison,<sup>8</sup> than to all other men-authors.

*Euphrasia.* I deny that.—We have many other redoubtable champions as I shall bring proof enough,—and no man is degraded by defending us, for the female cause is the cause of virtue.

*Hortensius.* I mean not to degrade your champions or their cause.—But let us hear your critique on Mr. Richardson's other works?

*Euphrasia.* It was yourself who digressed from the subject. I have but little more to say of them; that all are of capital merit is indisputable; but it seems to me that *Pamela* has the most originality.—*Grandison* the greatest regularity and equality.—*Clarissa* the highest graces, and most defects.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Richardson was besides the first who wrote novels in the epistolary style, and he was truly an original writer.

\* \* \*

*Euphrasia.* The next author upon the list, and whom Hortensius feared I should forget, is Henry Fielding, Esq., whose works are universally known and admired.—As I consider wit only as a secondary merit, I must beg leave to observe that his writings are as much inferior to Richardson's in morals and exemplary characters, as they are superior in wit and learning.—Young men of warm passions and not strict principles are always desirous to shelter themselves under the sanction of mixed characters, wherein virtue is allowed to be predominant.—In this light the character of Tom Jones is capable of doing much mischief; and for this reason a translation of this book was prohibited in France.<sup>1</sup>—On the contrary no harm can possibly arise from the imitation of a perfect character, though the attempt should fail of the original.

*Sophronia.* This is an indisputable truth—there are many objectionable scenes in Fielding's works, which I think Hortensius will not defend.

*Hortensius.* My objections were in character, and yours are so likewise; as you have defended Richardson, so I will defend Fielding. I allow there is some foundation for your remarks, nevertheless in all Fielding's works, virtue has always the superiority she ought to have, and challenges the honors that are justly due to her, the general tenor of them is in her favor, and it were happy for us, if our language had no greater cause of complaint in her behalf.

*Euphrasia.* There we will agree with you.—Have you any further observations to make upon Fielding's writings?

*Hortensius.* Since you refer this part of your task to me, I will offer a few more remarks.—Fielding's *Amelia*<sup>2</sup> is in much lower estimation than his *Joseph Andrews*, or *Tom Jones*; which have both received the stamp of public applause. He likewise wrote several dramatic pieces of various merits,<sup>3</sup> but these and his other works have no place in our present retrospect.—Lest you should think me too partial to the merits of this writer, I will give you the sentence of an historian upon him. "The genius of Cervantes" (says Dr. Smollett) "was transfused into the novels of Fielding, who painted the

characters, and ridiculed the follies of life, with equal strength, humor, and propriety.”<sup>4</sup>

*Euphrasia*. We are willing to join with you in paying the tribute due to Fielding’s genius, humor, and knowledge of mankind, but he certainly painted human nature as *it is*, rather than as *it ought to be*.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Published in 1740, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, tells the story, in letters, of a young servant woman harassed by her employer, whom she resists and eventually marries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Widespread.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Euphrasia quotes the passage in French, then provides her own literal translation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grieve over, lament the loss of.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Masterpiece.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Insusceptible.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Joseph Addison (1672–1719), author, with Richard Steele, of the periodical the *Spectator* (1711–14; see p. 281).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The two novels Richardson wrote after *Pamela*: *Clarissa* (1748; see above), and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), which tells the story of a virtuous aristocrat who honors women and defends them against wicked men.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A French translation of Fielding’s masterpiece, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), was suppressed when it was discovered that the bookseller who published it did not have permission from an official censor to do so.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: His last novel, published in 1751.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Fielding was a prolific comic dramatist in the 1730s.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Tobias Smollett's *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, vol. 4 (1761).[Return to reference 4](#)

## From *Evening XII*

### [CIRCULATING LIBRARIES]

*Euphrasia.* A circulating library<sup>5</sup> is indeed a great evil—young people are allowed to subscribe to them, and to read indiscriminately all they contain; and thus both food and poison are conveyed to the young mind together.

*Hortensius.* I should suppose that if books of the worst kind were excluded, still there would be enough to lay a foundation of idleness and folly.—A person used to this kind of reading will be disgusted with everything serious or solid, as a weakened and depraved stomach rejects plain and wholesome food.

*Sophronia.* There is truth and justice in your observation—but how to prevent it?

*Hortensius.* There are yet more and greater evils behind. The seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart—the passions are awakened—false expectations are raised.—A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues—she expects to be addressed in the style of these books, with the language of flattery and adulation.—If a plain man addresses her in rational terms and pays her the greatest of compliments—that of desiring to spend his life with her—that is not sufficient, her vanity is disappointed, she expects to meet a hero in romance.

*Euphrasia.* No, Hortensius—not a hero in romance, but a fine gentleman in a novel—you will not make the distinction.

*Hortensius.* I ask your pardon, I agreed to the distinction and therefore ought to observe it.

*Euphrasia.* I would not have interrupted you on this punctilio;<sup>6</sup> but let us walk into the house, and pursue the subject in the library.

*Hortensius.* Now<sup>7</sup> you are armed with your extracts, you think yourself invulnerable.

*Euphrasia.* I will not attempt to contradict you, unless I have good reason for it.—I beg you to proceed with your remarks.

*Hortensius.* From this kind of reading, young people fancy themselves capable of judging of men and manners, and that they are knowing, while involved<sup>8</sup> in the profoundest ignorance. They believe themselves wiser than their parents and guardians, whom they treat with contempt and ridicule.—Thus armed with ignorance, conceit, and folly, they plunge into the world and its dissipations, and who can wonder if they become its victims? For such as the foundation is, such will be the superstructure.

*Euphrasia.* All this is undoubtedly true, but at the same time would you exclude all works of fiction from the young reader?—In this case you would deprive him of the pleasure and improvement he might receive from works of genius, taste, and morality.

*Hortensius.* Yes, I would serve them as the priest did *Don Quixote's* library, burn the good ones for being found in bad company.<sup>9</sup>

*Euphrasia.* That is being very severe, especially if you consider how far your execution would extend.—If you would prohibit reading *all* works of fiction, what will become of your favorites the great ancients, as well as the most ingenious and enlightened modern writers?

*Sophronia.* Surely this is carrying the prohibition too far, and though it may sound well in theory, it would be utterly impracticable.

*Hortensius.* I do not deny that.—There are many things to be wished, that are not to be hoped. I see no way to cure this vice of the times, but by extirpating the cause of it.

*Euphrasia.* Pray Hortensius, is all this severity in behalf of our sex or your own?

*Hortensius.* Of both.—Yet yours are most concerned in my remonstrance for they read more of these books than ours, and consequently are most hurt by them.

*Euphrasia.* You will then become a knight errant, to combat with the windmills, which your imagination represents as giants;<sup>1</sup> while in the mean time you leave a side unguarded.

*Hortensius.* And you have found it out.—Pray tell me without metaphors your meaning in plain English?

*Euphrasia.* It seems to me that you are unreasonably severe upon these books, which you suppose to be appropriated to our sex (which however is not the case)—not considering how many books of worse tendency are put into the hands of the youth of your own, without scruple.

*Hortensius.* Indeed! how will you bring proofs of that assertion?

*Euphrasia.* I will not go far for them. I will fetch them from the school books, that generally make a part of the education of young men.—They are taught the history—the mythology—the morals—of the great ancients, whom you and all learned men revere.—But with these, they learn also—their idolatry—their follies—their vices—and everything that is shocking to virtuous manners. Lucretius teaches them that fear first made gods<sup>2</sup>—that men grew out of the earth like trees, and that the indulgence of the passions and appetites is the truest wisdom. Juvenal and Persius<sup>3</sup> describe such scenes as I may venture to affirm that romance and novel writers of any credit would blush at—and Virgil, the modest and delicate Virgil, informs them of many things, they had better be ignorant of.—As a woman I cannot give this argument its full weight—but a hint is sufficient—and I presume you will not deny the truth of my assertion.

*Hortensius.* I am astonished—admonished—and convinced!—I cannot deny the truth of what you have advanced, I confess that a reformation is indeed wanting in the mode of education of the youth of our sex.

*Sophronia.* Of both sexes you may say.—We will not condemn yours and justify our own.—You are convinced, and Euphrasia will use her victory generously I am certain.

*Euphrasia.* You judge rightly.—I do not presume to condemn indiscriminately the books used in the education of youth; but surely they might be better selected, and some omitted, without any disadvantage.—I fear there is little prospect of such a general reformation as Hortensius generously wishes for. If any method can be found to alleviate these evils, it must be lenient—gradual—and

practicable.—Let us then try to find out some expedient, with respect to those kind of books, which are our proper subject.

As this kind of reading is so common, and so much in everybody's power, it is the more incumbent on parents and guardians to give young people a good taste for reading, and above all to lay the foundation of good principles from their very infancy; to make them read what is really good, and by forming their taste teach to despise paltry books of every kind. When they come to maturity of reason, they will scorn to run over<sup>4</sup> a circulating library, but will naturally aspire to read the best books of all kinds.

## Endnotes

1785

- Note 5: New in the 18th century, libraries required families to subscribe by paying a fee for access to the latest books, including novels.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Minor point.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: We are to imagine some elapsed time as the dialogists move indoors to the library, though the text does not represent it.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Enfolded.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In [chapter 6](#) of part 1 of *Don Quixote*, a priest and a barber resolve to burn Don Quixote's books of chivalry.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Euphrasia evokes the famous episode of Don Quixote tilting at windmills.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The line "first of all, fear created the gods" comes from the *Thebaid* by Roman poet Statius (ca. 45–ca. 96 C.E.), though the poem *Of the Nature of Things* by Lucretius (ca. 99–ca. 55 B.C.E.) offers that and the other tenets of Epicurean philosophy here listed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Persius (34–62 C.E.) and Juvenal (late 1st–early 2nd century C.E.), Roman satirical poets.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Read indiscriminately in.[Return to reference 4](#)



# **WILLIAM HOGARTH**

## **1697–1764**

William Hogarth was a Londoner born and bred; the life of the city, both high and low, fills his work. His early life was hard. When his father, a writer and teacher, failed in business, the family was confined to the area of the Fleet, the debtor's prison. Hogarth never forgot "the cruel treatment" of his father by booksellers, and he resolved to make his living without relying on dealers; he would always be aggressively independent. Apprenticed as an engraver, he trained himself to sketch scenes quickly or catch them in memory. He also learned to paint, studying with the serjeant painter to the king, Sir James Thornhill, whose daughter he married (late in life Hogarth himself would become serjeant painter). Gradually he won a reputation for portraits and conversation pieces—group portraits in which members of a family or assembly interact in a social situation. But his popular fame was forged by sets of pictures that told a story: *A Harlot's Progress* (1731–32), *A Rake's Progress* (1734–35), and *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743–45). First Hogarth painted these Modern Moral Subjects (as he called them), then prints were made and sold in large editions. He also found new ways to market and protect his work; a copyright bill to ban cheap imitations of prints was known as "Hogarth's Act." Despite this success, however, his ambition to redefine British standards of art led to frustration. The high regard and high prices for continental old masters were too well entrenched to be undermined. Hogarth did not get prestigious commissions, and

his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), an effort to fix “the fluctuating ideas of taste” by appealing to practical observations, not academic rules, was poorly received. Political and aesthetic controversies embittered his final years.

Writers have always loved Hogarth’s satiric art, and many have claimed him as one of their own. Swift, Fielding, and Sterne associated their work with his; Horace Walpole considered him more “a writer of comedy with a pencil” than a painter; Charles Lamb compared him to Shakespeare; and William Hazlitt included him among the great English comic writers. This emphasis may slight Hogarth’s importance in the history of art. His attempts to found a British school that looked at life and nature directly, not through a haze of ideas or reverence for the past, and to give pleasure to common people, not only to critics and connoisseurs, opened the eyes of many artists to come. But Hogarth is also a great storyteller, someone to *read*. Like novels and plays, his pictures have plots and morals; they ask us not only to look but also to think. Yet looking and thinking are always intertwined. The mind delights in riddles, according to Hogarth; and as he revised his work he stuffed in more and more clues, like a mystery writer. A feast of interpretation draws the reader in. So many expressive details crowd the pictures, so many keys to character and meaning, that viewers often become obsessed with figuring them out. Even inanimate objects can speak; playwrights rely on words, as Walpole pointed out, but “it was reserved to Hogarth to write a scene of furniture.”

The furniture is particularly eloquent in *Marriage A-la-Mode*; note, for example, the fallen chairs in Plates 2 and 6. Hogarth took special pains with this series. The audience at which he aimed, as well as the subject matter, belonged to high society; and the art too is highly refined. A sinuous line weaves through each picture, leading the reader on, and each piece of bric-a-brac carries a message of lavish excess. Yet the story itself is brutally straightforward. A disastrous forced marriage stands at the center: a rich but miserly merchant buys the worthless son of an aristocrat for his restless daughter, and with nothing in common the couple destroy one

another. The crisis of values that Hogarth depicts was bringing about radical changes in English life. In the tension between a fading aristocracy, both morally and financially bankrupt, and an upwardly mobile middle class, greedy for power but culturally insecure, the marriage reflects a society that has lost all sense of right and wrong. The artist plays no favorites. The aristocratic Squanderfields are not only vain, effete, and dissipated but also lacking in taste; the wan mythological paintings on their walls are just the sort of pretentious, overpriced art that Hogarth hates. But the vulgar Dutch art on the merchant's walls (in Plate 6) seems even worse, and his daughter falls for every extravagant, spurious fashion (in Plate 4). Nor do the parasites who live off these easy marks offer any hope. Lawyer and doctor, bawd and servant pave the road to ruin. Hogarth's satire warns against the spreading corruption of modern times, when self-interest eats into marriage and old values die. Look hard, he tells the public. These objects make up the world we live in. We might become these people.

Many commentaries have been written on Hogarth's pictures. The notes printed here were supplied by the editors of this volume.

# Marriage A-la-Mode



Plate 1. ***The Marriage Contract.*** Lord Squanderfield points to the family tree, going back to William the Conqueror, that his son will bring to the marriage. Coronets are blazed all over the room, from the top of the canopy at the upper left to the lower right on the prostrate dog's side, incised just behind the shoulder. The earl, though hobbled by gout, is proud. But he has run out of money: construction has stopped on the Palladian mansion seen through the window. Sitting across from him, a squinting merchant grasps the marriage settlement. Some of the coins and banknotes he has placed on the table have been taken up by a scrawny usurer, who hands the earl a mortgage in return. At the right the betrothed sit back to back, uncaring as the dogs chained to each other below. The vacuous viscount pinches snuff and



gazes at himself in a mirror, which ominously reflects the image of lawyer Silvertongue, who sharpens his pen as he bends unctuously over the bride-to-be. Pouting, she twirls her wedding ring in a handkerchief. Disasters from mythology cover the walls. A bombastic portrait of the earl as Jupiter, astride a cannon, dominates the room; and in a candle sconce on the right Medusa glowers over the scene.

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Plate 2. ***After the Marriage.*** By now the couple are used to ignoring each other. The morning after a spree, the rumped, exhausted viscount slouches in a chair. His broken sword has dropped on the carpet, and a lapdog sniffs at a woman's cap in his pocket—souvenirs of the night. Lolling and stretching in an unladylike pose, his wife too is half asleep. She has spent the night home but not alone. *Hoyle on Whist* lies before her, cards are scattered on the floor, and the overturned chair, book of music, and violin cases suggest that some player may have



departed in haste. A steward carries away a sheaf of bills—only one paid—and the household ledger; a Methodist (*Regeneration* is in his pocket), he petitions heaven to look down on these heathens. Oriental idols decorate the mantel over the fireplace, surmounted by a broken-nosed Roman bust that frowns like the steward and a painting of Cupid playing the bagpipes. On the left, amid the shrubbery of a rococo clock, a cat leers over fish and a Buddha smiles. In the next room, a dozing servant fails to notice that a candle has set fire to a chair. Next to a row of saints, a curtain does not quite cover a bawdy painting from which a naked foot peeps.

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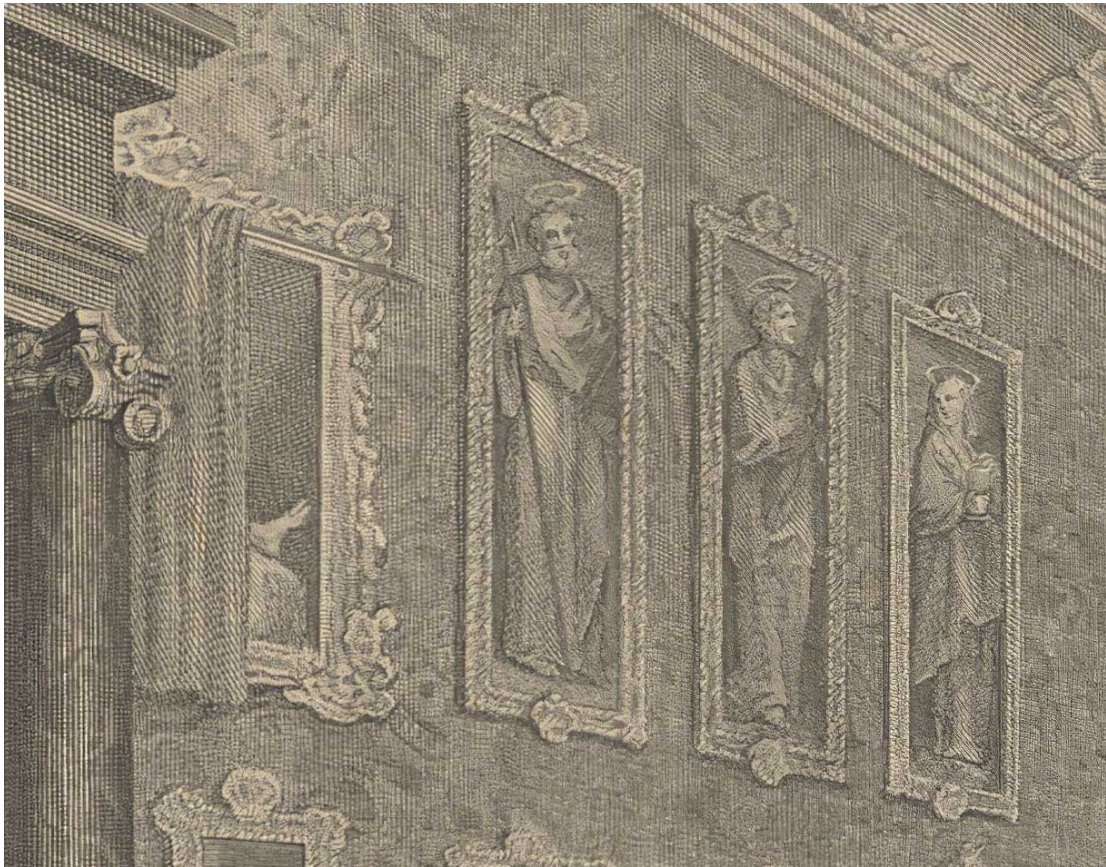




Plate 3. ***The Scene with the Quack.*** The husband has come to this chamber of medical horrors in search of a cure. The pillbox he holds toward the quack has not done its job, and he raises his cane as if with a playful threat. Evidently the little girl who stands between his legs is infected. She dabs a sore on her lip, and her ageless face may hint that she is not as young and pure as she looks. Her cap resembles the cap in Plate 2; she is the husband's mistress. Perhaps the beauty spot on his neck also covers a sore. The bowlegged Monsieur de la Pillule comfortably wipes his glasses; he has seen all this before. Between the two men an angry woman, fortified by a massive hoop skirt, opens a knife. She may be the wife of the quack, defending her man, or else a bawd who resents the charge that her girls are damaged goods. Medical oddities and monstrosities clutter the room, along with portents of death. The viscount's cane points to a cabinet where a wigged head looks at a skeleton that seems to be groping a cadaver; the tripod above evokes a gallows tree. At the far left, in

front of a laboratory door, are two of the doctor's inventions: machines for setting bones and uncorking bottles. Their similarity to instruments of torture hints at how useful the doctor's assistance will be.

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Plate 4. ***The Countess's Levee.*** In her bedchamber at rising (*levée*; French), the countess receives some guests and puts on a show. Her husband is now earl (note the coronets), and they have a child (note the rattle on her chair). While a hairdresser curls her locks, she hangs on the words of Silvertongue, who makes himself at home (note his portrait on the upper right wall). Tonight they will be going to a masquerade ball, like the one on the screen he gestures toward; his left hand holds the tickets. At the far right a puffy, bedizened castrato sings, accompanied by a flute. His audience includes a self-absorbed dandy in curl-papers; a man who appreciatively smirks and opens his hand, from which a fan dangles; a snoring husband, holding his riding-crop like a baton; and his enraptured wife, who leans forward as if about to swoon. Unobserved by the others, a Black servant, bearing a cup of chocolate, smiles in amazement at these precious airs. At the lower left another black servant, a boy in a turban, grins at gewgaws purchased at an auction. His finger points both to Actaeon's horns, the sign of a cuckold, and to the couple as they

arrange their tryst. Wall paintings illustrate unnatural sex: Lot's seduction by his daughters, Jupiter embracing Io, and the rape of Ganymede.

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Plate 5. ***The Death of the Earl.*** The melodramatic tableau at the center, as the earl totters toward death and the countess kneels to beg forgiveness, imitates paintings of Christ descending from the cross while Mary Magdalen mourns. But the surroundings are sordid. At a house of ill repute, the Turk's Head Bagnio, the countess and Silvertongue have been surprised in bed. The earl has broken in (key and socket on the floor) and drawn his sword, and the lawyer has run him through. As the horrified owner and constable enter, under a watchman's lantern, the killer, still in his nightshirt, flees through a window. A fire, outside the picture on the lower right, casts lurid light on the victim; the shadow of the tongs encircles the murder weapon. Costumed as a nun and friar, the lovers have come from a masquerade, and their discarded masks and clothes show they were in haste. Pills (presumably mercury, prescribed for venereal disease) have spilled from an overturned table on the right, beside an advertisement for the bagnio, a corset, and a bundle of

firewood. The portrait of a streetwalker, a squirrel perched on her hand, leers over the countess; on the wall behind the earl an uplifted blade is about to sever a child, in the Judgment of Solomon. At the top left St. Luke, the patron of artists, inscribes these transgressions.

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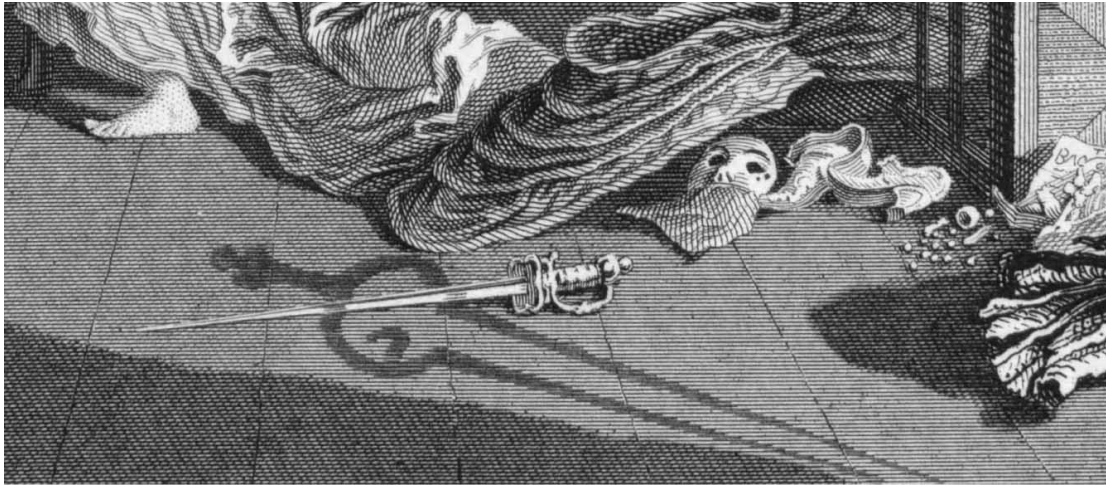




Plate 6. ***The Death of the Countess.*** "Counsellor Silvertongues Last Dying Speech," a paper on the floor announces, and a bottle of laudanum has dropped beside it. News of her lover's execution has driven the countess to poison herself. Slumped in a chair, she is already dead; on the far right a doctor steals away. Her father calmly slides the ring from her finger. This is his house; a window with cobwebs and broken panes opens on London Bridge, in the heart of the City. No luxury here. The furnishings are sparse, the floor is bare, and the dining table holds only one egg and a few leftovers, including a pathetic boar's head from which a starving hound is tearing scraps. The art is equally cheap: a pissing boy, a jumbled still life, a pipe set alight by the glowing nose of a drunk. At the center, beneath a coatrack, a stout apothecary (stomach pump and julep in his pocket) points toward the empty bottle in reproof and pokes the servant who brought it—an idiot wearing a coat many sizes too large, the merchant's hand-me-down. The service staff is completed by a withered old woman who holds out the countess's

little child for one last hug and kiss. But the mark on the child's cheek and the brace on its leg imply that disease has passed to the next generation. This noble family will have no heir.

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# JAMES THOMSON

## 1700–1748

James Thomson, the most popular nature poet of the eighteenth century, did not see London until he was twenty-five years old. He grew up in the picturesque border country of Roxboroughshire in Scotland and, after studying divinity in Edinburgh, went to London in 1725, bringing with him, in addition to a memory well stored with images of the external world, the earliest version of his descriptive poem "Winter" in 405 lines of blank verse. Published in 1726, it soon became popular. Thomson went on to publish "Summer" (1727), "Spring" (1728), and "Autumn" in the first collected edition of *The Seasons* (1730), to which he added the "Hymn to the Seasons." During the next sixteen years, through constant revisions and additions, the poem grew in length to 5,541 lines. *The Seasons* continued to be popular well into the Romantic period; between 1730 and 1800 it was printed fifty times. Thomson's last poem, *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), is a witty imitation of Spenser; it moves from a playful portrait of the idleness of the poet and his friends to a celebration of industry and progress.

*The Seasons* set the fashion for the poetry of natural description. Generations of readers learned to look at the external world through Thomson's eyes and with the emotions that he had taught them to feel. The eye dominates the literature of external nature during the eighteenth century as the *imagination* was to do in the poetry of William Wordsworth. And Thomson amazed his readers by his

capacity to see: the general effects of light and cloud and foliage or the particular image of a leaf tossed in the gale or the slender feet of a robin or the delicate film of ice at the edge of a brook. He tries to view each season from every perspective, as it might be perceived by a bird in the sky or by the tiniest insect, by God or a painter or Milton or Sir Isaac Newton (whom Thomson commemorated in a popular ode). As the poem grew, it became an *omnium gatherum* of contemporary ideas and interests: natural history; ideas about the nature of man and society, primitive and civilized; the conception of created nature as a source of religious experience, as an object of religious veneration, and as a continuing revelation of a Creator whose presence fills the world.



# ***From The Seasons***

## **From *Autumn***

[EVENING AND NIGHT]<sup>1</sup>

The western sun withdraws the shortened day;  
And humid evening, gliding o'er the sky,  
In her chill progress, to the ground condensed  
The vapors throws. Where creeping waters ooze,  
1085 Where marshes stagnate, and where rivers wind,  
Cluster the rolling fogs, and swim along  
The dusky-mantled lawn. Meanwhile the moon,  
Full-orbed and breaking through the scattered  
clouds,  
Shows her broad visage in the crimsoned east.  
1090 Turned to the sun direct, her spotted disk  
(Where mountains rise, umbrageous dales descend,<sup>2</sup>  
And caverns deep, as optic tube<sup>o</sup> describes)  
A smaller earth, gives all his blaze again,  
Void of its flame, and sheds a softer day.  
1095 Now through the passing cloud she seems to stoop,  
Now up the pure cerulean rides sublime.  
Wide the pale deluge<sup>o</sup> floats, and streaming mild  
O'er the skied<sup>3</sup> mountain to the shadowy vale,  
While rocks and floods reflect the quivering gleam,  
1100 The whole air whitens with a boundless tide  
Of silver radiance trembling round the world.  
But when, half blotted from the sky, her light  
Fainting, permits the starry fires to burn  
With keener luster through the depth of heaven;  
1105 Or quite extinct her deadened orb appears,

And scarce appears, of sickly beamless white;  
 Oft in this season, silent from the north  
 A blaze of meteors<sup>4</sup> shoots—ensweeping first  
 The lower skies, they all at once converge  
 1110 High to the crown<sup>5</sup> of heaven, and, all at once  
 Relapsing quick, as quickly reascend,  
 And mix and thwart,<sup>o</sup> extinguish and renew,  
 All ether coursing<sup>6</sup> in a maze of light.  
 From look to look, contagious through the crowd,  
 1115 The panic runs, and into wondrous shapes  
 The appearance throws—armies in meet<sup>o</sup> array,  
 Thronged with aerial spears and steeds of fire;  
 Till, the long lines of full-extended war  
 In bleeding fight commixed, the sanguine flood  
 1120 Rolls a broad slaughter o’er the plains of heaven.  
 As thus they scan the visionary scene,  
 On all sides swells the superstitious din,  
 Incontinent; and busy frenzy talks  
 Of blood and battle; cities overturned,  
 1125 And late at night in swallowing earthquake sunk,  
 Or hideous wrapped in fierce ascending flame;  
 Of sallow famine, inundation, storm;  
 Of pestilence, and every great distress;  
 Empires subversed,<sup>o</sup> when ruling fate has struck  
 1130 The unalterable hour; even nature’s self  
 Is deemed to totter on the brink of time.  
 Not so the man of philosophic eye  
 And inspect sage:<sup>o</sup> the waving brightness he  
 Curious surveys, inquisitive to know  
 1135 The causes and materials, yet unfixed,<sup>7</sup>  
 Of this appearance beautiful and new.  
 Now black and deep the night begins to fall,  
 A shade immense! Sunk in the quenching gloom,  
 Magnificent and vast, are heaven and earth.  
 1140 Order confounded lies, all beauty void,

Distinction lost, and gay variety  
 One universal blot—such the fair power  
 Of light to kindle and create the whole.  
 Drear is the state of the benighted wretch  
 1145 Who then bewildered wanders through the dark  
 Full of pale fancies and chimeras<sup>o</sup> huge;  
 Nor visited by one directive ray  
 From cottage streaming or from airy hall.  
 Perhaps, impatient as he stumbles on,  
 1150 Struck from the root of slimy rushes, blue  
 The wildfire<sup>8</sup> scatters round, or, gathered, trails  
 A length of flame deceitful o'er the moss;  
 Whither decoyed by the fantastic blaze,  
 Now lost and now renewed, he sinks absorbed,  
 1155 Rider and horse, amid the miry gulf—  
 While still, from day to day, his pining wife  
 And plaintive children his return await,  
 In wild conjecture lost. At other times,  
 Sent by the better genius of the night,  
 1160 Innoxious,<sup>o</sup> gleaming on the horse's mane,  
 The meteor<sup>9</sup> sits, and shows the narrow path  
 That winding leads through pits of death, or else  
 Instructs him how to take the dangerous ford.  
 The lengthened night elapsed, the morning  
 1165 shines  
 Serene, in all her dewy beauty bright,  
 Unfolding fair the last autumnal day.  
 And now the mounting sun dispels the fog;  
 The rigid hoarfrost melts before his beam;  
 And, hung on every spray, on every blade  
 1170 Of grass, the myriad dewdrops twinkle round.

- Note 1: This passage, like many in *The Seasons*, went through extensive revisions. The opening lines on the harvest moon shining through fog (1082–1102) originally belonged to “Winter”; the descriptions of the aurora borealis (1108–37) and wildfire (1150–64) first appeared in “Summer.” Scientific and visionary, divine and human perspectives are contrasted and join together in an intricate harmony.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Observation of the moon had revealed shadows (“umbrageous dales”), hence an irregular surface.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, seeming to touch the sky.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not meteors as we think of them, but the aurora borealis, or northern lights (multicolored, streaming pulses of light in the upper atmosphere). The aurora had often been associated with cosmic battles, in both literature and popular superstition.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The corona or central ring of the aurora.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Running through all the upper sky.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Unexplained by science.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Will-o’-the-wisp or ignis fatuus, a flitting phosphorescent light thought to kindle from the gas of decaying swamp grasses (“slimy rushes”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The ignis lambens, or St. Elmo’s fire, a halo of light that shines on the tips of certain objects during electrical storms.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *telescope*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *moonlight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cross*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overthrown*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wise examination*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *imaginary monsters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmless*[Return to reference](#) °

## STEPHEN DUCK

### 1705–1756

Decades before Thomas Gray's famous speculation appeared in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (see [p. 899](#)) that "some mute inglorious Milton" (line 59) may be hidden among the nation's working people, a writer of natural, untutored literary talent made his voice heard in Britain's literary landscape. Stephen Duck, the most celebrated laboring-class poet of the century, attended a charity school until the age of fourteen, and as he worked as an agricultural laborer by day, by night he read Milton, Dryden, the *Spectator*, Matthew Prior, and other literature. By 1729 he had begun writing the poems that would make him first a Wiltshire celebrity, then a national one. A pirated edition of three of his poems appeared in 1730 and went through ten editions in that year alone. The volume, which included "The Thresher's Labor," advertised Duck's wages for that job on the title page ("four shillings and six pence per week") and gained him the nickname the "Thresher Poet." That year, he came to the attention of Queen Caroline, who gave him an annuity and a house, and eventually various official posts; after Caroline's death he studied successfully to become a clergyman. But his transformed life did not bring him satisfaction, and he killed himself by drowning in a river behind a tavern.

It is from the 1730 edition that our text is taken. Duck was unhappy with the pirated texts and put out an authorized *Poems on Several Occasion* in 1736, but the language of the earlier version is

fresher and more direct, though it still exhibits his high literary ambitions. He alludes to classical mythology and motifs and (skeptically) to pastoral conventions, and carefully structures "The Thresher's Labor" to follow the seasons of the year, as experienced by farm workers. (Duck consistently uses the pronoun *we* to position himself as part of a laboring collective, switching to *I* only when making literary comparisons.) The work is primarily threshing—using a flail inside the barns to separate grain from its stalks—but includes winnowing (separating grain from chaff by dropping it and letting air blow the chaff away, also done indoors), haymaking, and reaping (cutting the crop in the fields at harvest). Duck provides an artful, vivid record of what such a life is like, physically and psychologically. While there are moments of enjoyment, including appreciation of natural beauty, interludes of celebration and rest, and the rhythmic, somatic pleasures of hard work, Duck's poem mostly represents a life of "endless toils," disappointments, noise, sweat, and exhaustion: any instance of relief from these seems little more than a deception. An unnamed "master," a farmer threatened himself by a landlord demanding rent, exerts consistent pressure, declaring his demands and satisfactions with an eye fixed on productivity. The labor exploited to maintain and increase it, Duck wanly concludes, will never end.

Duck was the most prominent and among the first of many laboring-class poets in the eighteenth century who gave the reading public poetically memorable accounts of their lives and work, including Mary Collier (see [p. 736](#)), who directly responded to his disparaging comments in "The Thresher's Labor" about "prattling females." Other notable poets who describe women's work first hand include Mary Leapor (see [p. 769](#)), and Ann Yearsley, the "Milkmaid Poet" (see [p. 1038](#)). Sponsored and condescended to by wealthy patrons, often seen as mere curiosities or tools of the elite in the period's literary culture, these authors speak in vigorous, singular voices heard for the first time in literature, of experiences shared by multitudes of working people, and inaugurate a tradition of laboring-

class writing that would transform the literary, social, and political consciousness of the nation.



## The Thresher's Labor

The grateful tribute of these rural lays,  
Which to her patron's hand<sup>1</sup> the muse conveys,  
Deign to accept: 'tis just she tribute bring  
To him whose bounty gives her life to sing:  
To him whose generous favors tune her voice;  
5 And bid her 'midst her poverty, rejoice.  
Inspired by these, she dares herself prepare,  
To sing the toils of each revolving year:  
Those endless toils which always grow anew,  
And the poor thresher's destined to pursue:  
10 Ev'n these with pleasure can the muse rehearse,  
When you, and gratitude, command the verse.  
Soon as the harvest hath laid bare the plains,  
And barns well filled reward the farmer's pains;  
What corn<sup>o</sup> each sheaf will yield, intent to hear,  
15 And guess from thence the profits of the year;  
Or else impending ruin to prevent,  
By paying, timely, threatening landlord's rent,  
He calls his threshers forth: around we stand,  
With deep attention waiting his command.  
20 To each our tasks he readily divides,  
And pointing, to our different stations guides.  
As he directs, to different barns we go;  
Here two for wheat, and there for barley two.  
But first, to show what he expects to find,  
25 These words, or words like these, disclose his mind:  
"So dry the corn was carried from the field,  
So easily will thresh, so well 'twill yield.  
Sure large day's work I well may hope for now;  
Come, strip, and try, let's see what you can do."  
30 Divested of our clothes, with flail in hand,

At a just distance, front to front<sup>o</sup> we stand;  
And first the threshall's<sup>o</sup> gently swung, to prove  
Whether with just exactness it will move:  
That once secure,<sup>o</sup> more quick we whirl them round,  
35 From the strong planks our crab-tree staves  
rebound,  
And echoing barns return the rattling sound.  
Now in the air our knotty weapons fly;  
And now with equal force descend from high:  
Down one, one up, so well they keep the time,  
40 The Cyclops' hammers could not truer chime;  
Nor with more heavy strokes could Aetna groan,  
When Vulcan forged the arms for Thetis' son.<sup>2</sup>  
In briny streams our sweat descends apace,  
Drops from our locks, or trickles down our face.  
45 No intermission in our works we know;  
The noisy threshall must for ever go.  
Their master absent, others safely play;  
The sleeping threshall doth itself betray.  
Nor yet the tedious labor to beguile,  
50 And make the passing minutes sweetly smile.  
Can we, like shepherds, tell a merry tale;<sup>3</sup>  
The voice is lost, drowned by the noisy flail.  
But we may think—Alas! what pleasing thing  
Here to the mind can the dull fancy bring?  
55 The eye beholds no pleasant object here;  
No cheerful sound diverts the listening ear.  
The shepherd well may tune his voice to sing,  
Inspired by all the beauties of the spring.  
No fountains murmur here, no lambkins play,  
60 No linnets warble, and no fields look gay.  
'Tis all a dull and melancholy scene,  
Fit only to provoke the muses' spleen.<sup>o</sup>  
When sooty peas we thresh,<sup>4</sup> you scarce can know  
Our native color, as from work we go;  
65

The sweat, the dust, and suffocating smoke,  
Make us so much like Ethiopians look:  
We scare our wives, when evening brings us home;  
And frightened infants think the bugbear<sup>5</sup> come.  
Week after week we this dull task pursue,  
70 Unless when winnowing days produce a new;  
A new indeed, but frequently a worse,  
The threshall yields but to the master's curse:  
He counts the bushels, counts how much a day,  
Then swears we've idled half our time away.  
75 "Why look ye, rogues! D'ye think that this will do?  
Your neighbors thresh as much again<sup>o</sup> as you."  
Now in our hands we wish our noisy tools,  
To drown the hated names of rogues and fools;  
But wanting<sup>o</sup> those, we just like schoolboys look,  
80 When th'angry master views the blotted book:  
They cry their ink was faulty, and their pen;  
We, the corn threshes bad, 'twas cut too green.  
But now the winter hides his hoary head,  
And nature's face is with new beauty spread;  
85 The spring appears, and kind refreshing showers  
New clothe the field with grass, and deck with  
flowers.  
Next her, the ripening summer presses on,  
And Sol<sup>o</sup> begins his longest stage to run:  
Before the door our welcome master stands,  
90 And tells us the ripe grass requires our hands.<sup>6</sup>  
The long much-wished intelligence<sup>o</sup> imparts  
Life to our looks, and spirits to our hearts:  
We wish the happy season may be fair,  
And, joyful, long to breathe in opener air.  
95 This change of labor seems to give much ease;<sup>7</sup>  
With thoughts of happiness our joy's complete,  
There's always bitter mingled with the sweet.  
When morn does through the eastern windows peep,

100 Straight from our beds we start, and shake off sleep;  
This new employ with eager haste to prove,<sup>o</sup>  
This new employ becomes so much our love:  
Alas! that human joys should change so soon,  
Even this may bear another face at noon!  
The birds salute<sup>o</sup> us as to work we go,  
105 And a new life seems in our breasts to glow.  
Across one's shoulder hangs a scythe well steeled,  
The weapon destined to unclothe the field:  
T'other supports the whetstone, scrip,<sup>o</sup> and beer;  
This for our scythes, and these ourselves to cheer.  
110 And now the field designed our strength to try,  
Appears, and meets at last our longing eye;  
The grass and ground each cheerfully surveys,  
Willing to see which way th'advantage lays.  
As the best man, each claims the foremost place,  
115 And our first work seems but a sportive race:  
With rapid force our well-whet blades we drive,  
Strain every nerve, and blow for blow we give:  
Though but this eminence<sup>o</sup> the foremost gains,  
Only t'excel the rest in toil and pains.  
120 But when the scorching sun is mounted high,  
And no kind barns with friendly shades are nigh,  
Our weary scythes entangle in the grass,  
And streams of sweat run trickling down apace;  
Our sportive labor we too late lament,  
125 And wish that strength again, we vainly spent:  
Thus in the morn a courser<sup>o</sup> have I seen  
With headlong fury scour<sup>o</sup> the level green,  
Or mount the hills, if hills are in his way,  
As if no labor could his fire<sup>o</sup> allay,  
130 Till the meridian<sup>o</sup> sun with sultry heat,  
And piercing beams hath bathed his sides in sweat;  
The lengthened chase scarce able to sustain,  
He measures back the hills and dales with pain.  
With heat and labor tired, our scythes we quit,

135 Search out a shady tree, and down we sit;  
From scrip and bottle hope new strength to gain;  
But scrip and bottle too are tried in vain.  
Down our parched throats we scarce the bread can  
get;  
And, quite o'erspent with toil, but faintly eat;  
140 Nor can the bottle only answer all,  
Alas! the bottle and the beer's too small.<sup>8</sup>  
Our time slides on, we move from off the grass;  
And each again betakes him to his place.  
Not eager now, as late, our strength to prove,  
145 But all contented regular to move:  
Often we whet, as often view the sun,  
To see how near his tedious race is run;  
At length he veils his radiant face from sight,  
And bids the weary traveler goodnight:  
150 Homewards we move, but so much spent with toil,  
We walk but slow, and rest at every stile.<sup>9</sup>  
Our good expecting wives, who think we stay,<sup>o</sup>  
Got to the door, soon eye us in the way;  
Then from the pot the dumpling's catch'd in haste,  
155 And homely by its side the bacon's placed.  
Supper and sleep by morn new strength supply,  
And out we set again our works to try:  
But not so early quite, nor quite so fast,  
As to our cost<sup>o</sup> we did the morning past.  
160 Soon as the rising sun has drank the dew,  
Another scene is opened to our view;  
Our master comes, and at his heels a throng  
Of prattling females, armed with rake and prong:<sup>o</sup>  
Prepared, whilst he is here, to make his hay;  
165 Or, if he turns his back, prepared to play.  
But here, or gone, sure of this comfort still,  
Here's company, so they may chat their fill:  
And were their hands as active as their tongues,

170       How nimbly then would move their rakes and  
             prongs?  
The grass again is spread upon the ground,  
Till not a vacant place is to be found;  
And while the piercing sunbeams on it shine,  
The haymakers have time allowed to dine:  
175       That soon dispatched, they still sit on the ground,  
And the brisk chat renewed, afresh goes round:  
All talk at once, but seeming all to fear,  
That all they speak so well, the rest won't hear;  
By quick degrees so high their notes they strain,  
That standers-by can naught distinguish plain:  
180       So loud their speech, and so confused their noise,  
Scarce puzzled Echo<sup>1</sup> can return a voice;  
Yet, spite of this, they bravely all go on,  
Each scorns to be, or seem to be, outdone:  
Till (unobserved before) a lowering sky,  
185       Fraught with black clouds, proclaims a shower nigh;  
The tattling crowd can scarce their garments gain,  
Before descends the thick impetuous rain:  
Their noisy prattle all at once is done,  
And to the hedge they all for shelter run.

190               Thus have I seen on a bright summer's day,  
On some green brake<sup>o</sup> a flock of sparrows play;  
From twig to twig, from bush to bush they fly;  
And with continued chirping fill the sky;  
But on a sudden, if a storm appears,  
195       Their chirping noise no longer dings your ears;  
They fly for shelter to the thickest bush,  
There silent sit, and all at once is hush.  
But better fate succeeds this rainy day,  
And little labor serves to make the hay;  
200       Fast as 'tis cut, so kindly shines the sun,  
Turned once or twice, the pleasing work is done:  
Next day the cocks<sup>o</sup> appear in equal rows,

Which the glad master in safe ricks<sup>o</sup> bestows.

205 But now the field we must no longer range,  
And yet, hard fate! still work for work we change.  
Back to the barns again in haste we're sent,  
Where lately so much time we pensive spent:  
Not pensive now; we bless the friendly shade;  
And to avoid the parching sun are glad.  
210 But few days here we're destined to remain,  
Before our master calls us forth again:  
"For harvest now," says he, "yourselves prepare,  
The ripened harvest now demands your care.  
Early next morn I shall disturb your rest.  
215 Get all things ready, and be quickly drest."  
Strict to his word, scarce the next dawn appears,  
Before his hasty summons fills our ears.  
Obedient to his call, straight up we get,  
And finding soon our company complete;  
220 With him, our guide, we to the wheat field go;  
He, to appoint, and we, the work to do.  
Ye reapers, cast your eyes around the field,  
And view the scene its different beauties yield:  
Then look again with a more tender eye,  
225 To think how soon it must in ruin lie.  
For once set in, where-e'er our blows we deal,  
There's no resisting of the well-whet steel:  
But here or there, where-e'er our course we bend,  
Sure desolation does our steps attend.  
230 Thus, when Arabia's sons, in hopes of prey,  
To some more fertile country take their way;  
How beauteous all things in the morn appear,  
There villages, and pleasing cots<sup>o</sup> are here;  
So many pleasing objects meet the sight,  
235 The ravished eye could willing gaze till night:  
But long ere then, where-e'er their troops have past,  
These pleasing prospects lie a gloomy waste.

The morning past, we sweat beneath the sun,  
And but uneasily our work goes on.  
240 Before us we perplexing<sup>o</sup> thistles find,  
And corn blown adverse with the ruffling wind;  
Behind our backs the female gleaners<sup>2</sup> wait,  
Who sometimes stoop, and sometimes hold a chat.  
Each morn we early rise, go late to bed,  
245 And laboring hard, a painful life we lead:  
For toils, scarce ever ceasing, press us now;  
Rest never does, but on the Sabbath, show,  
And barely that, our master will allow.  
Nor, when asleep, are we secure from pain,  
250 We then perform our labors o'er again:  
Our mimic fancy always restless seems;  
And what we act awake, she acts in dreams.  
Hard fate! Our labors ev'n in sleep don't cease,  
Scarce Hercules e'er felt such toils as these.<sup>3</sup>  
255 At length in rows stands up the well-dried corn,  
A grateful scene, and ready for the barn.  
Our well-pleased master views the sight with joy,  
And we for carrying all our force employ.  
Confusion soon o'er all the field appears,  
260 And stunning clamors fill the workmen's ears;  
The bells, and clashing whips, alternate sound,  
And rattling wagons thunder o'er the ground.  
The wheat got in, the peas, and other grain,  
Share the same fate, and soon leave bare the plain:  
265 In noisy triumph the last load moves on,  
And loud huzzahs proclaim the harvest done.  
Our master joyful at the welcome sight,  
Invites us all to feast with him at night.  
A table plentifully spread we find,  
270 And jugs of humming<sup>o</sup> beer to cheer the mind;  
Which he, too generous, pushes on so fast,  
We think no toils to come, nor mind the past.



But the next morning soon reveals the cheat,  
When the same toils we must again repeat:  
275 To the same barns again must back return,  
To labor there for room for next year's corn.

Thus, as the year's revolving course goes round,  
No respite from our labor can be found:  
280 Like Sisyphus,<sup>4</sup> our work is never done,  
Continually rolls back the restless stone.  
Now growing labors still succeed the past,  
And growing always new, must always last.

## Endnotes

1730, 1736

- Note 1: Hoby Stanley, rector of Pewsey, and his sister-in-law, Sarah Stanley, were two of Duck's early patrons. Stanley urged him to write about his life as a thresher, and the poem was dedicated to Stanley in the 1736 edition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thetis's son is Achilles, hero of Homer's *Iliad*. "Vulcan": Roman god identified with the Greek god Hephaestus, who made Achilles' shield in the volcano Mount Aetna, in Sicily. The Cyclops were Hephaestus's workmen. These lines echo a passage from the fourth of Virgil's *Georgics* (29 B.C.E.), which depict rural labor, as translated by Dryden.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Duck refers to themes conventional in pastoral poetry about the poetic leisure of shepherds' lives.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The black dust raised by peas and beans often led workers to thresh them outdoors, but Duck and his fellow workers still seem to be inside the barn.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Imaginary monster invoked to frighten children.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The laborers begin to cut grass in the fields for making hay (which women laborers will gather starting at line 164), welcoming the turn to outdoor work.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: An unrhymed line in the 1730 edition, the 1736 version closes the couplet and continues as follows: "This change of labor seems to give such ease, / With thoughts of happiness ourselves we please. / But, ah! how rarely's happiness complete! / There's always bitter mingled with the sweet."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Small beer has a low alcohol content, and the bottles are too small to hold much.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Steps over a fence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In mythology, a mountain nymph doomed by Hera to repeat the words last spoken to her.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The gleaners' job was to gather the grain left by the reapers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The preeminent hero Hercules (Herakles in Greek) performed twelve extraordinary labors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legendary king of Ephyrā: for cheating death twice, he was condemned by Zeus to roll a boulder uphill only for it to roll back upon him as he neared the top, a sequence repeated throughout eternity.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *grain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *face to face*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flail's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confirmed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anger, sadness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *twice as much*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *news*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *try*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *greet*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lunch sack*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *honor*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fast horse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *run across quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noonday*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *linger, delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disadvantage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitchfork*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thicket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haycocks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haystacks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cottages*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entangled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *potent, frothy*[Return to reference](#) °

## MARY COLLIER

### ca. 1699–1762

Mary Collier, born to a poor family near the town of Midhurst in southern England, never went to school, but her parents taught her to read. Upon the death of her long-infirm father, she moved about ten miles away, “to Petersfield, where my chief employment was washing, brewing, and such labor, still devoting what leisure time I had to books,” as she reports in an autobiographical notice, published near the end of her life—virtually the sole source of information about her. A copy of Stephen Duck’s celebrated poem “The Thresher’s Labor” reached her in the early 1730s: it impressed and inspired but also provoked her, resulting in her composition of “The Woman’s Labor,” which rebuts Duck’s charge that women laborers do less work than men. Her poetry “became a town talk” among families in Petersfield, who encouraged her to publish it in 1739, though at her own expense; she hoped its novelty as the work of a woman poet of the laboring classes might make her some money. It did not, and she never gained a national reputation at all comparable to Duck’s. But in the last year of her life, she published another volume of poems, which included “The Woman’s Labor” and her brief autobiography, with a subscribers’ list of over 150 names.

Some of the excitement of “The Woman’s Labor” comes from its directness, its vivid description of all the different jobs rural working women do. Unlike Duck, who structures his poem around work demanded of agricultural laborers at different seasons of the year,

Collier depicts the workday, seemingly never-ending for rural women, whose fieldwork, childcare, domestic labor, and service to rich families blend together into a single stream. Also notable is Collier's close engagement with Duck and the details of his poem. The degrees of irony with which she addresses him and notes his spectacular success at the beginning and throughout are hard to measure. She questions his lines that directly insult women but also mockingly quotes those in which he complains about the supposedly supreme miseries of men laborers' working lives. And she speaks not just for herself but for an entire class of people, for all of "poor woman-kind," primarily using the pronoun *we*, like Duck. Her account of childcare in the fields, and care in the home for children and men, for instance, portrays a plight borne by women collectively, though what is known of her indicates that she never married or had children. (In her autobiography, she refers to herself as "an old maid.") The shared struggles of working women's lives, both inside and outside the formal economy of wages, are the real topic of "The Woman's Labor," which Collier surveys with relentless clarity.

# The Woman's Labor

## *To Mr. Stephen Duck*

Immortal bard! thou favorite of the nine!<sup>o</sup>  
Enriched by peers, advanced by Caroline!<sup>1</sup>  
Deign to look down on one that's poor and low,  
Remembering you yourself was lately so;  
5 Accept these lines: Alas! what can you have  
From her, who ever was, and's still a slave?  
No learning ever was bestowed on me;  
My life was always spent in drudgery:  
And not alone; alas! with grief I find,  
10 It is the portion<sup>o</sup> of poor woman-kind.  
Oft have I thought as on my bed I lay,  
Eased from the tiresome labors of the day,  
Our first extraction from a mass refined,<sup>2</sup>  
Could never be for slavery designed;  
15 Till time and custom by degrees destroyed  
That happy state<sup>o</sup> our sex at first enjoyed.  
When men had used their utmost care and toil,  
Their recompense was but a female smile;  
When they by arts or arms were rendered great,  
20 They laid their trophies at a woman's feet;  
They, in those days, unto our sex did bring  
Their hearts, their all, a free-will<sup>o</sup> offering;  
And as from us their being they derive,  
They back again should all due homage give.

25 Jove once descending from the clouds did drop  
In show'rs of gold on lovely Danae's lap;<sup>3</sup>  
The sweet-tongued poets, in those generous days,

Unto our shrine still offered up their lays:<sup>o</sup>  
But now, alas! that golden age is past,  
We are the objects of your scorn at last.  
30 And you, great Duck, upon whose happy brow  
The muses seem to fix the garland<sup>4</sup> now,  
In your late poem boldly did declare  
Alcides' labors can't with yours compare;<sup>5</sup>  
And of your annual task have much to say,  
35 Of threshing, reaping, mowing corn and hay;  
Boasting your daily toil, and nightly dream,  
But can't conclude your never-dying theme,  
And let our hapless sex in silence lie  
Forgotten, and in dark oblivion die;  
40 But on our abject state you throw your scorn,  
And women wrong, your verses to adorn.  
You of haymaking speak a word or two,  
As if our sex but little work could do:<sup>6</sup>  
This makes the honest farmer smiling say,  
45 He'll seek for women still to make his hay;  
For if his back be turned their work they mind  
As well as men, as far as he can find.  
For my own part, I many a summer's day  
Have spent in throwing, turning, making hay;  
50 But ne'er could see, what you have lately found,  
Our wages paid for sitting on the ground.<sup>7</sup>  
'Tis true, that when our morning's work is done,  
And all our grass exposed unto the sun,  
While that his scorching beams do on it shine,  
55 As well as you we have a time to dine:  
I hope, that since we freely toil and sweat  
To earn our bread, you'll give us time to eat.  
That over, soon we must get up again,  
And nimbly turn our hay upon the plain;  
60 Nay, rake and row it in, the case is clear;  
Or how should *Cocks in equal Rows appear?*<sup>8</sup>

But if you'd have what you have wrote believed,  
I find, that you to hear us talk are grieved:  
In this, I hope, you do not speak your mind,  
65 For none but Turks, that ever I could find,  
Have mutes to serve them,<sup>9</sup> or did e'er deny  
Their slaves, at work, to chat it merrily.  
Since you have liberty to speak your mind,  
And are to talk, as well as we, inclined,  
70 Why should you thus repine,<sup>o</sup> because that we,  
Like you, enjoy that pleasing liberty?  
What! would you lord it quite,<sup>o</sup> and take away  
The only privilege our sex enjoy?

75 When evening does approach, we homeward hie,  
<sup>o</sup>  
And our domestic toils incessant ply:  
Against<sup>o</sup> your coming home prepare to get  
Our work all done, our house in order set;  
*Bacon* and *Dumpling*<sup>1</sup> in the pot we boil,  
Our beds we make, our swine we feed the while;  
80 Then wait at door to see you coming home,  
And set the table out against you come:  
Early next morning we on you attend,  
Our children dress and feed, their clothes we mend;  
And in the field our daily task renew,  
85 Soon as the rising sun has dried the dew.

When harvest comes, into the field we go,  
And help to reap the wheat as well as you;  
Or else we go the ears of corn to glean;<sup>o</sup>  
No labor scorning, be it e'er so mean;<sup>o</sup>  
90 But in the work we freely bear a part,  
And what we can, perform with all our heart.  
To get a living we so willing are,  
Our tender babes into the field we bear,  
And wrap them in our clothes to keep them warm,



95 While round about we gather up the corn;  
And often unto them our course do bend,  
To keep them safe, that nothing them offend:  
Our children that are able, bear a share  
In gleaning corn, such is our frugal care.  
100 When night comes on, unto our home we go,  
Our corn we carry, and our infant too;  
Weary, alas! but 'tis not worth our while  
Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry stile*;<sup>2</sup>  
We must make haste, for when we home are come,  
105 Alas! we find our work but just begun;  
So many things for our attendance call,  
Had we ten hands, we could employ them all.  
Our children put to bed, with greatest care  
We all things for your coming home prepare:  
110 You sup, and go to bed without delay,  
And rest yourselves till the ensuing day;  
While we, alas! but little sleep can have,  
Because our froward<sup>o</sup> children cry and rave;  
Yet, without fail, soon as daylight doth spring,  
115 We in the field again our work begin,  
And there, with all our strength, our toil renew,  
Till Titan's golden rays<sup>3</sup> have dried the dew;  
Then home we go unto our children dear,  
Dress, feed, and bring them to the field with care.  
120 Were this your case, you justly might complain  
That day nor night you are secure from pain;  
Those mighty troubles which perplex your mind  
(*Thistles* before, and *Females* come behind)<sup>4</sup>  
Would vanish soon, and quickly disappear,  
125 Were you, like us, encumbered thus with care.  
What you would have of us we do not know:  
We oft take up the corn that you do mow;  
We cut the peas, and always ready are,  
130 In every work to take our proper share;

And from the time that harvest doth begin,  
Until the corn be cut and carried in,  
Our toil and labor's daily so extreme,  
That we have hardly ever *Time to dream*.<sup>5</sup>

135       The harvest ended, respite none we find;  
The hardest of our toil is still behind:°  
Hard labor we most cheerfully pursue,  
And out, abroad, a charing° often go:  
Of which I now will briefly tell in part,  
140       What fully to declare is past my art;  
So many hardships daily we go through  
I boldly say, the like *you* never knew.

          When bright Orion glitters in the skies  
In winter nights, then early we must rise;  
The weather ne'er so° bad, wind, rain, or snow,  
145       Our work appointed, we must rise and go;  
While you on easy beds may lie and sleep,  
Till light does through your chamber windows peep.  
When to the house we come where we should go,  
How to get in, alas! we do not know:  
150       The maid quite tired with work the day before,  
O'ercome with sleep; we standing at the door  
Oppressed with cold, and often call in vain,  
Ere to our work we can admittance gain:  
But when from wind and weather we get in,  
155       Briskly with courage we our work begin;  
Heaps of fine linen we before us view,  
Whereon to lay our strength and patience too;  
Cambrics and muslins<sup>6</sup> which our ladies wear,  
Laces and edgings, costly, fine, and rare,  
160       Which must be washed with utmost skill and care;  
With Holland<sup>7</sup> shirts, ruffles and fringes too,  
Fashions which our forefathers never knew.  
For several hours here we work and slave,

165 Before we can one glimpse of daylight have;  
We labor hard before the morning's past,  
Because we fear the time runs on too fast.

At length bright Sol<sup>o</sup> illuminates the skies,  
And summons drowsy mortals to arise;  
Then comes our mistress to us without fail,  
170 And in her hand, *perhaps*, a mug of ale  
To cheer our hearts, and also to inform  
Herself what work is done that very morn;  
Lays her command upon us, that we mind  
Her linen well, nor *leave the dirt behind*:  
175 Nor this alone, but also to take care,  
We don't her cambrics nor her ruffles tear;  
And *these* most strictly does of us require,  
*To save her soap, and sparing be of fire*;  
Tells us her charge<sup>o</sup> is great, nay furthermore,  
180 Her clothes are fewer than the time before.  
Now we drive on, resolved our strength to try,  
And what we can, we do most willingly;  
Until with heat and work, 'tis often known,  
Not only sweat, but blood runs trickling down  
185 Our wrists and fingers; still our work demands  
The constant action of our laboring hands.

Now night comes on, from whence you have  
relief,  
But that, alas! does but increase our grief;  
With heavy hearts we often view the sun,  
190 Fearing he'll set before our work is done;  
For either in the morning, or at night,  
We piece<sup>o</sup> the summer's day with candlelight.  
Though we all day with care our work attend,  
Such is our fate, we know not when 'twill end:  
195 When evening's come, you homeward take your way,  
We, till our work is done, are forced to stay;

And after all our toil and labor past,  
*Six-pence* or *Eight-pence* pays us off at last;  
For all our pains, no prospect can we see  
200 Attend us, but old age and poverty.

The washing is not all we have to do:  
We oft change work for work as well as you,  
Our mistress of her pewter doth complain,  
And 'tis our part to make it clean again.  
205 This work, though very hard and tiresome too,  
Is not the worst we hapless females do:  
When night comes on, and we quite weary are,  
We scarce can count what falls unto our share;  
Pots, kettles, saucepans, skillets, we may see,  
210 Skimmers and ladles, and such trumpery,  
Brought in to make complete our slavery.  
Though early in the morning 'tis begun,  
'Tis often very late before we've done;  
Alas! our labors never know an end;  
215 On brass and iron we our strength must spend;  
Our tender hands and fingers scratch and tear:  
All this, and more, with patience we must bear.  
Colored with dirt and filth we now appear;  
Your threshing *sooty peas*<sup>8</sup> will not come near.  
220 All the perfections woman once could boast,  
Are quite obscured and altogether lost.

Once more our mistress sends to let us know  
She wants our help, because the beer runs low:  
Then in much haste for brewing we prepare,  
225 The vessels clean, and scald with greatest care;  
Often at midnight, from our bed we rise  
At other times, e'en *that* will not suffice;  
Our work at evening oft we do begin,  
And ere we've done, the night comes on again.  
230 Water we pump, the copper we must fill,

Or tend the fire; for if we e'er standing still,  
Like you, when threshing, we a watch must keep,  
Our wort<sup>9</sup> boils over, if we dare to sleep.

235 But to rehearse all labor is in vain,  
Of which we very justly might complain:  
For us, ye see, but little rest is found;  
Our toil increases as the year runs round.  
While you to Sisyphus yourselves compare,  
240 With Danaus' daughters<sup>1</sup> we may claim a share;  
For while he labors hard against the hill,  
Bottomless tubs of water they must fill.  
So the industrious bees do hourly strive,  
To bring their loads of honey to the hive;  
245 Their sordid<sup>o</sup> owners always reap the gains,  
And poorly recompense their toil and pains.

## Endnotes

1739

- Note 1: Queen Caroline, Duck's most exalted patron.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God created humanity by refining the dust from which he made us.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Confined in a windowless, doorless chamber by her father, Danaë became impregnated by Zeus, king of the Greek gods, who transformed himself into a golden rain and flowed down upon her through a skylight.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A wreath of flowers worn on the head, symbol of poetic excellence.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See line 255 of "The Thresher's Labor," which compares threshers' labors to those of Hercules (also known as Alcides). "Late poem": the recent ("late") publication of the authorized edition of Duck's poem "The Thresher's Labor" appeared in 1736.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Duck begins his derogatory comments about women workers making hay at line 163 of "The Thresher's Labor."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See "The Thresher's Labor," line 175.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Collier quotes "The Thresher's Labor," line 203.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Deaf people, called "mutes," were employed as servants in the court of the Ottoman Empire, a fact that 18th-century Britons often noted with interest.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 155–56.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Collier quotes "The Thresher's Labor," line 152.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The sun's rays. Homer calls the sun Titan after the Titan god Hyperion, though other Greek literature identifies the sun with Hyperion's son, Helios.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 241–43.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 252–53.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Light, plain-woven cotton fabrics. "Cambrics": fine white linens, first made in the town of Cambrai, in northern France.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A type of linen originally made in Holland.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 64–69.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "New beer either unfermented, or in the act of fermentation" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In Greek mythology, forty-nine of the fifty daughters of Danaus, king of Libya, killed their husbands on their wedding nights, on their father's orders. They were condemned in the underworld to carry water in leaky vessels that had to be ceaselessly refilled. "Sisyphus": another mythological figure

associated with an eternal, futile task; see “The Thresher’s Labor,” lines 280–81, and note. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *the Muses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *allotment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in Paradise* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *voluntary* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *songs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entirely control* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hasten* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *In preparation for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gather* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lowly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unruly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to come* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *doing chores* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *no matter how* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expenses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *supplement* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *self-interested, greedy* [Return to reference °](#)

# Women, Gender, Power

A new arena of power opened to women in Britain in the Restoration period and eighteenth century. As in earlier eras, careers in the church and the professions were closed to women; their legal rights in marriage were severely restricted; they could not vote in parliamentary elections or obtain a university education at Oxford or Cambridge or any of the Scottish universities. But they could write, and increasingly as the eighteenth century advanced, they published their work. Literacy was spreading ever more widely in Britain to include more and more men and women of every social station: an enlarged, diversifying literary marketplace began to crave the diversity of points of view, styles, innovations in genres, and insights that women authors could help provide. The late seventeenth-century career of Aphra Behn (1640?–1689) has long been seen as a watershed for the professional woman writer. Women who published their work before her were often aristocratic, with a level of education very rare for women outside the uppermost classes. Behn rose from obscurity and found a way to make a living as a playwright, novelist, and poet on her own (see [p. 145](#)). The next generation of women with literary careers, including Delarivier Manley (ca. 1670–1724) and Eliza Haywood (1693?–1756; see [p. 649](#)), published prose fiction, political scandal, translations, plays, periodical essays, poetry. These women often did piecework in the London milieu of writing for hire called Grub Street: they had to fight to make their way in a publishing industry dominated by men, and the financial returns they gained often amounted to barely enough to get by on. At the same time, women in the period made other models of authorship work for them: Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720) composed her influential, celebrated poems on her country estate, at first choosing to circulate them only in manuscript (and later experimenting with the possibilities of print); women poets of the laboring classes such as Mary Collier (see [p.](#)



[736](#)), Mary Leapor (see below), and Ann Yearsley (see [p. 1038](#)) found interested patrons, who were often themselves women of higher social stations, and made some money selling their works by subscription. In the early 1750s, a group of women, some wealthy, some of the middling ranks, convened to form the Bluestocking circle, which emphasized women's intellectual, often scholarly achievement. There is no single profile or template of the woman author in the eighteenth century. Women writers were Tories and Whigs (and eventually, radicals), urban sophisticates and rural laborers, titled ladies and clergymen's daughters, pious and risqué, popular and erudite, producing satirical, devotional, amatory, and emotionally uplifting works—no single genre defined what a woman writer in the period should do.

In all their diversity, however, women authors of the period together offered innovative perspectives on gender and, exploring their own evolving social and cultural positions, helped forge powerful new political ideas. The institution of marriage, as long established in English common law, gave husbands control over the property, the lives, even the identities of their wives. Defining this doctrine, known as coverture, the English jurist William Blackstone (1723–1780) commented, “by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law, that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated into that of the husband.” Writers such as Mary Astell (see [p. 213](#)), Judith Drake (fl. 1696–1723), and Mary, Lady Chudleigh (see below) began to discuss this subordination not merely as a cultural tradition but as a political issue, using the same terms employed by men when they criticized unjust rulers. “If *all men are born free*, how is it that all women are born slaves?” asked Astell. In recognizing the political dimensions of private, domestic life, these women inaugurated modern feminism.

Gender politics touched women's literary works in less philosophically overt ways as well. For instance, Finch notes in “The Unequal Fetters” (see below) how conventional love lyrics as written by men deliberately fail to notice the jeopardy for women inherent in

wooing and marriage; and Mary Wortley Montagu's poetic answer to Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" is both a personal attack on him and a general satire on male insecurity and impotence—which tend to turn into aggression against women. When Montagu traveled to Turkey and wrote about Turkish social customs, including literature (see [p. 640](#)), she was exploring her own talents and intellectual interests; but she was also demonstrating to her correspondents (and later, when her travelog was published, to the world) the brilliance of observation and analysis that women could achieve. Women's poems, essays, and advice literature (such as the selection from Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* below) treat women's friendship as a crucial part of their intimate, daily experience; but they also document and help create solidarity among women, in a social world often indifferent or hostile to their needs, safety, and aspirations.

In the period, expanded understandings of women's cultural and social roles could also open up broader questions about the codes designed to fix sexuality and gender along heteronormative and cisgender lines. Aphra Behn's poem "To the Fair Clarinda" (see [p. 151](#)), written in a Restoration subculture that linked expansive sexual experience to sophistication and status, uses her desire for a person (at first) identified as a woman to question the nature of the gender binary; and the anonymous lyric "Cloe to Artimesa" (see below) rejects heterosexuality and celebrates sexual relationships between women in vigorous terms. But such unrestrictive views of sex and gender were far from normalized in eighteenth-century British culture. At midcentury, the case of Charles Hamilton illustrates the dangers faced by people whose gender identities did not conform to conventional demands. Hamilton was a transgender man (though that terminology did not exist at the time) who married several women. In *The Female Husband* (see below), the novelist Henry Fielding presents a semifictional account of Hamilton's story (changing his first name to George), endorsing the violence to which the legal system and society at large subjects him. But Fielding also challenges the norm, after a fashion, merely by showing the public

that real people with complex, gender-nonconforming identities exist; and he almost cannot help rooting for his protagonist. The culture's complex attitudes toward the gender binary are also illustrated by the popular success at midcentury of Hannah Snell, whose autobiography (written with her collaborator, Robert Walker; see below) describes her passing as a male marine to serve in Britain's imperial wars in India (and her delight in revealing herself to her comrades as a woman when her service ended). Snell could cross gender lines as a British military hero and be applauded, though the codes surrounding sexuality and gender subtly dictated how her story had to be told for the public to accept it.

Gender and sexuality were pressing, personal topics, explored in writing by men and women alike. But just like their male counterparts, women authors of the long eighteenth century wrote about far more than gender and sexuality. They translated and interpreted ancient philosophers like Epictetus and analyzed new developments in natural science; they warmly professed their Christian faith and engaged in bitter party politics. And many women authors, such as Hannah More (see [p. 976](#)), came to assert their allegiance to what they conceived as traditional gender roles, anticipating ideologies of feminine domesticity that would emerge in the nineteenth century. But the unignorable fact of women's authorship itself transformed and enhanced the authority of women in British culture. Though often dismissed and marginalized by men throughout the period, women, in their individuality and range of diverse interests, were now heard.

## ANNE FINCH, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (see [p. 199](#)), could be a clear-eyed critic of the difficult predicament of married women, in poems like “The Unequal Fetters.” But also, as is evident in poems like “A Letter to Dafnis,” she thrived in her own marriage, and her husband eagerly supported her writing. The texts of the two following poems are based on the 1903 edition by Myra Reynolds of poems included in Finch’s carefully produced, handwritten folio of poetry, which has been dated to around 1702. This folio contains poems that later appeared in her 1713 printed collection *Miscellany Poems, On Several Occasions*, but also ones—like these—that she only circulated in manuscript form.

# The Unequal Fetters

5      Could we stop the time that's flying  
         Or recall it when 'tis past,  
         Put far off the day of dying  
         Or make youth forever last,  
         To love would then be worth our cost.<sup>1</sup>

10      But since we must lose those graces  
         Which at first your hearts have won,  
         And you seek for in new faces  
         When our spring of life is done,  
         It would but urge our ruin on.

15      Free as nature's first intention  
         Was to make us, I'll be found,  
         Nor by subtle man's invention  
         Yield to be in fetters bound  
         By one that walks a freer round.

20      Marriage does but slightly tie men  
         Whilst close<sup>o</sup> prisoners we remain:  
         They the larger slaves of Hymen<sup>2</sup>  
         Still are begging love again  
         At the full length of all their chain.

## Endnotes

1702?

- Note 1: Finch subverts the familiar conceit of *carpe diem* (Latin, "seize the day"), in which male poets try to persuade young women to enjoy sexual love now because time cannot stand still.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Greek god of marriage and weddings. “Larger slaves”: those bound in marriage but allowed to be “at large,” with more freedom of movement. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *tightly held* [Return to reference °](#)

## A Letter to Dafnis April 2d 1685<sup>1</sup>

This to the crown and blessing of my life,  
The much loved husband of a happy wife.  
To him, whose constant passion found the art<sup>o</sup>  
To win a stubborn and ungrateful heart,  
And to the world by tenderest proof discovers<sup>o</sup>  
5 They err, who say that husbands can't be lovers.  
With such return of passion as is due,  
Daphnis I love, Daphnis my thoughts pursue,  
Daphnis, my hopes, my joys, are bounded all in you:  
Even I, for Daphnis' and my promise's sake,  
10 What I in women censure, undertake.  
But this from love, not vanity, proceeds;  
You know who writes, and I who 'tis that reads.  
Judge not my passion by my want<sup>o</sup> of skill:  
Many love well, though they express it ill;  
15 And I your censure could with pleasure bear,  
Would you but soon return, and speak it here.

### Endnotes

1702?

- Note 1: Included in Finch's folio, this poem also appears in a manuscript where it is titled "A Letter to Daphnis from Westminster, Ap: the 2d, 1685," with "Mr. Finch" (that is, Finch's husband, Heneage) written in and partially erased, and the name "Daphnis" inserted in its place.[Return to reference 1](#)

### Notes

- °: *enlightened skill*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shows*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *lack* [Return to reference](#) °



## MARY, LADY CHUDLEIGH

With one of the most vigorous voices among women poets of the Restoration and early eighteenth century, Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656–1710) published books of poems and essays, including the long poem in dialogue *The Ladies Defence* (1701), which attacked the view that women owe their husbands total submission. She wrote on many topics, especially the friendships she formed with other women writers, including Mary Astell (1666–1731), Elizabeth Thomas (1675–1731), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), and Judith Drake (ca. 1670–1723). Though she did not write in detail about her own experience in her marriage to Sir George Chudleigh (d. 1718), which began in 1674 and produced six children, her work argues consistently for the reform of marriage as an institution and the extension of women's rights.

## To the Ladies

Wife and servant are the same,  
But only differ in the name:  
For when that fatal knot is tied,  
Which nothing, nothing can divide:  
When she the word *Obey* has said,  
5 And man by law supreme has made,  
Then all that's kind is laid aside,  
And nothing left but state<sup>o</sup> and pride:  
Fierce as an Eastern prince<sup>1</sup> he grows,  
And all his innate rigor shows:  
10 Then but to look, to laugh, or speak,  
Will the nuptial contract break.  
Like mutes, she signs alone must make,  
And never any freedom take:  
But still be governed by a nod,  
15 And fear her husband as her God:  
Him still must serve, him still obey,  
And nothing act, and nothing say,  
But what her haughty lord thinks fit,  
Who with the power, has all the wit.<sup>o</sup>  
20 Then shun, oh! shun that wretched state,  
And all the fawning flatterers hate:  
Value your selves, and men despise,  
You must be proud, if you'll be wise.

## Endnotes

1703

- Note 1: In the 18th century, Britons who prided themselves on their limited monarchy and representative institutions often

emphasized the absolute, arbitrary power of monarchies in Asia.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *lordly dignity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intellectual authority*[Return to reference °](#)

## ANONYMOUS

This anonymous poem rejects heterosexual love and celebrates love between women. Scholars have been fascinated by its forthright stance, though the extreme nature of its rejection of heterosexuality has led some to view its original purpose as ironic and satirical. It is not easy to determine how a diversity of eighteenth-century readers might have responded to its clear, confident declaration. The poem appeared in print once in the eighteenth century, in *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, Translations, and Imitations, by the Most Eminent Hands* (1720), assembled by Anthony Hammond.

## Cloe to Artimesa

While vulgar<sup>o</sup> souls their vulgar love pursue,  
And in the common way themselves undo;  
Impairing health, and fame, and risking life.  
To be a mistress, or what's worse, a wife,  
5 We, whom a nicer<sup>o</sup> taste has raised above  
The dangerous follies of such slavish love;  
Despise the sex,<sup>o</sup> and in ourselves we find,  
Pleasures for their gross<sup>o</sup> senses too refined.  
Let brutish men, made by our weakness vain,  
10 Boast of the easy conquest they obtain.  
Let the poor loving wretch do all she can,  
And all won't please th'ungrateful tyrant, man;  
We scorn the monster and his mistress too,  
And show the world what women ought to do.

### Notes

1720

- <sup>o</sup>: *common, customary*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *more discriminating*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *men*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *coarse, dull*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>

## MARY MASTERS

Mary Masters (ca. 1694–1759) published two volumes, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1733) and *Familiar Letters and Poems on Several Occasions* (1755), though according to an autobiographical note in her first book, her family was poor, her education limited, and “her genius to poetry was always brow-beat and discountenanced by her parents.” Few details are known about her career, but her books included lists of subscribers with many names of women and men famous in the literary world of her times. Her work was anthologized in important collections of work by the foremost women poets of the century, *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755) and *Poems by the Most Eminent Ladies of Great-Britain and Ireland* (1773). She often commented in her poems and published letters on the injustice of the institution of marriage to women, and never herself married. Many of her poems, like the one below, treat her intensely passionate relationships with her female friends.

# To the Same, Enquiring Why I Wept<sup>1</sup>

You fix a dagger in my heart,  
You wound me in the tenderest part,  
And then enquire the reason of my smart.<sup>°</sup>

5 Alas! You talk of death and woe  
That you must quickly undergo;  
Yet ask the cause whence all my sorrows flow.

Ah! Do you think my love so small,  
That I could part with thee, my all,  
Yet not permit one friendly tear to fall?

10 Tell me, my dear Olinda, why  
You question my fidelity,  
Methinks with thee that I could e'en wish to die.

## Endnotes

1733

- Note 1: In a preceding poem, Masters addresses "Olinda"—like other poets, she frequently uses pastoral pseudonyms for her friends—who has contracted a fever which, as the speaker fears, could cause her death.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *sharp pain*[Return to reference °](#)

## JONATHAN SWIFT

"The Lady's Dressing Room" is the first in a series of "excremental" poems in which Swift (see [p. 362](#)) punctures idealizations of women and their beauty. If one object of satire is the grossness of Celia, "the goddess," the romantic illusions of Strephon, her disabused lover, are far more absurd.



# The Lady's Dressing Room

Five hours (and who can do it less in?)  
By haughty Celia spent in dressing,  
The goddess from her chamber issues,  
Arrayed in lace, brocade, and tissues.  
5 Strephon, who found the room was void,  
And Betty otherwise employed,  
Stole in, and took a strict survey  
Of all the litter as it lay;  
Whereof, to make the matter clear,  
An inventory follows here.  
10 And first a dirty smock appeared,  
Beneath the armpits well besmeared.  
Strephon, the rogue, displayed it wide,  
And turned it round on every side.  
In such a case few words are best,  
15 And Strephon bids us guess the rest;  
But swears how damnably the men lie,  
In calling Celia sweet and cleanly.  
Now listen while he next produces  
The various combs for various uses,  
20 Filled up with dirt so closely fixed,  
No brush could force a way betwixt;  
A paste of composition rare,  
Sweat, dandruff, powder, lead, and hair;  
A forehead cloth with oil upon't  
25 To smooth the wrinkles on her front;  
Here alum flower<sup>o</sup> to stop the steams  
Exhaled from sour unsavory streams;  
There night-gloves made of Tripsy's hide,  
Bequeathed by Tripsy when she died,  
30 With puppy water,<sup>1</sup> beauty's help,

Distilled from Tripsy's darling whelp;  
Here gallipots<sup>o</sup> and vials placed,  
Some filled with washes, some with paste,  
Some with pomatum,<sup>o</sup> paints, and slops,  
35 And ointments good for scabby chops.  
Hard by a filthy basin stands,  
Fouled with the scouring of her hands;  
The basin takes whatever comes,  
The scraping of her teeth and gums,  
40 A nasty compound of all hues,  
For here she spits, and here she spews.  
    But oh! it turned poor Strephon's bowels,  
When he beheld and smelt the towels,  
Begummed, bemattered, and beslimed,  
45 With dirt, and sweat, and earwax grimed.  
No object Strephon's eye escapes;  
Here petticoats in frowzy heaps,  
Nor be the handkerchiefs forgot,  
All varnished o'er with snuff and snot.  
50 The stockings why should I expose,  
Stained with the marks of stinking toes,  
Or greasy coifs and pinner<sup>o</sup>s reeking,  
Which Celia slept at least a week in?  
A pair of tweezers next he found  
55 To pluck her brows in arches round,  
Or hairs that sink the forehead low,  
Or on her chin like bristles grow.  
    The virtues we must not let pass  
Of Celia's magnifying glass.  
60 When frightened Strephon cast his eye on't,  
It showed the visage of a giant—  
A glass that can to sight disclose  
The smallest worm in Celia's nose,  
And faithfully direct her nail  
65 To squeeze it out from head to tail;  
For catch it nicely by the head,

It must come out alive or dead.

70       Why Strephon will you tell the rest?  
And must you needs describe the chest?  
That careless wench! no creature warn her  
To move it out from yonder corner,  
But leave it standing full in sight,  
For you to exercise your spite.  
75       In vain the workman showed his wit  
With rings and hinges counterfeit  
To make it seem in this disguise  
A cabinet to vulgar eyes;  
For Strephon ventured to look in,  
Resolved to go through thick and thin;  
80       He lifts the lid, there needs no more,  
He smelt it all the time before.

      As from within Pandora's box,  
When Epimetheus oped the locks,  
A sudden universal crew  
85       Of human evils upward flew,  
He still was comforted to find  
That Hope at last remained behind;<sup>2</sup>  
So Strephon, lifting up the lid  
To view what in the chest was hid,  
90       The vapors flew from out the vent,  
But Strephon cautious never meant  
The bottom of the pan to grope,  
And foul his hands in search of Hope.  
Oh never may such vile machine  
95       Be once in Celia's chamber seen!  
Oh may she better learn to keep  
"Those secrets of the hoary deep!"<sup>3</sup>

      As mutton cutlets, prime of meat,  
Which though with art you salt and beat,  
100       As laws of cookery require,  
And roast them at the clearest fire,

If from adown the hopeful chops  
The fat upon a cinder drops,  
To stinking smoke it turns the flame,  
105 Poisoning the flesh from whence it came,  
And thence exhales a greasy stench,  
For which you curse the careless wench;  
So things which must not be expressed,  
When plumped into the reeking chest,  
110 Send up an excremental smell  
To taint the parts from which they fell,  
The petticoats and gown perfume,  
And waft a stink round every room.  
Thus finishing his grand survey,  
115 The swain disgusted slunk away,  
Repeating in his amorous fits,  
"Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!"  
But Vengeance, goddess never sleeping,  
Soon punished Strephon for his peeping.  
120 His foul imagination links  
Each dame he sees with all her stinks,  
And, if unsavory odors fly,  
Conceives a lady standing by.  
All women his description fits,  
125 And both ideas jump like wits,<sup>4</sup>  
By vicious fancy coupled fast,  
And still appearing in contrast.  
I pity wretched Strephon, blind  
To all the charms of womankind.  
130 Should I the queen of love refuse  
Because she rose from stinking ooze?<sup>5</sup>  
To him that looks behind the scene,  
Statira's but some pocky quean.<sup>6</sup>  
When Celia in her glory shows,  
135 If Strephon would but stop his nose,  
Who now so impiously blasphemes

140

Her ointments, daubs, and paints, and creams,  
Her washes, slops, and every clout<sup>o</sup>  
With which she makes so foul a rout,  
He soon would learn to think like me,  
And bless his ravished eyes to see  
Such order from confusion sprung,  
Such gaudy tulips raised from dung.

## Endnotes

1732

- Note 1: A cosmetic made from the internal organs of a puppy (here from the whelp of Celia's former lapdog). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despite the warnings of his brother Prometheus, Epimetheus married Pandora, the first woman (according to Greek mythology). When the box that Zeus had given her was opened, all evils flew out into the world, and only hope remained. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Paradise Lost* 2.891. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Coincide; after the proverb "Good wits jump" (that is, great minds think alike). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The goddess Venus rose out of the sea. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Strumpet, with a pun on Nathaniel Lee's *Rival Queens* (1677), a play in which Statira was a heroine. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *styptic powder* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *small pots* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *pomade* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *nightcaps* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *rag* [Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

Montagu (see [p. 633](#)) did not like Swift. She objected to his politics (he worked for Tories, she was a Whig), his friendship with Pope (with whom she had bitterly quarreled), his vanity (especially about knowing important people), and his defiant indecency (which she considered not only inappropriate for a clergyman but also a sign of low breeding). Her reply to "The Lady's Dressing Room" mimics its style, but substitutes vulgar names for its mock-pastoral ones (Betty instead of Celia) and mingles personal contempt with a diagnosis of Swift's anti-idealism, which stems, she suggests, from his own insecurities. The poem was originally published anonymously in 1734 under the title "The Dean's Provocation for Writing the Lady's Dressing Room"; the version reprinted here is from a fair copy in Montagu's hand.

# The Reasons That Induced Dr. Swift to Write a Poem Called The Lady's Dressing Room

The Doctor in a clean starched band,<sup>o</sup>  
His golden snuff box in his hand,  
With care his diamond ring displays  
And artful shows its various rays,  
While grave he stalks down —— Street,  
5 His dearest Betty —— to meet.  
    Long had he waited for this hour,  
Nor gained admittance to the bower,  
Had joked and punned, and swore and writ,  
Tried all his gallantry and wit,  
10 Had told her oft what part he bore  
In Oxford's<sup>1</sup> schemes in days of yore,  
But bawdy, politics, nor satyr<sup>2</sup>  
Could move this dull hard-hearted creature.  
Jenny her maid could taste a rhyme  
15 And grieved to see him lose his time,  
Had kindly whispered in his ear,  
"For twice two pound you enter here;  
My lady vows without that sum  
It is in vain you write or come."  
20     The destined offering now he brought  
And in a paradise of thought  
With a low bow approached the dame  
Who smiling heard him preach his flame.  
His gold she takes (such proofs as these  
25 Convince most unbelieving shes)  
And in her trunk rose up to lock it  
(Too wise to trust it in her pocket)

And then, returned with blushing grace,  
Expects the Doctor's warm embrace.  
30 But now this is the proper place  
Where morals stare me in the face  
And for the sake of fine expression  
I'm forced to make a small digression.  
Alas for wretched humankind,  
35 With learning mad, with wisdom blind!  
The ox thinks he's for saddle fit  
(As long ago friend Horace writ)<sup>3</sup>  
And men their talents still mistaking,  
The stutterer fancies his is speaking.  
40 With admiration oft we see  
Hard features heightened by toupée,  
The beau affects<sup>o</sup> the politician,  
Wit is the citizen's<sup>4</sup> ambition,  
Poor Pope philosophy displays on  
45 With so much rhyme and little reason,  
And though he argues ne'er so long  
That all is right, his head is wrong.<sup>5</sup>  
None strive to know their proper merit  
But strain for wisdom, beauty, spirit,  
50 And lose the praise that is their due  
While they've the impossible in view.  
So have I seen the injudicious heir  
To add one window the whole house impair.  
Instinct the hound does better teach  
55 Who never undertook to preach;  
The frightened hare from dogs does run  
But not attempts to bear a gun.  
Here many noble thoughts occur  
But I prolixity abhor,  
60 And will pursue the instructive tale  
To show the wise in some things fail.  
The reverend lover with surprise



Peeps in her bubbies, and her eyes,  
 And kisses both, and tries—and tries. }  
 65 The evening in this hellish play,  
 Beside his guineas thrown away,  
 Provoked the priest to that degree  
 He swore, "The fault is not in me.  
 70 Your damned close stool so near my nose,  
 Your dirty smock, and stinking toes,  
 Would make a Hercules as tame  
 As any beau that you can name."  
 The nymph grown furious roared, "By God!  
 75 The blame lies all in sixty odd,"  
 And scornful pointing to the door  
 Cried, "Fumbler, see my face no more."  
 "With all my heart I'll go away,  
 But nothing done, I'll nothing pay.  
 Give back the money."—"How," cried she,  
 80 "Would you palm such a cheat on me!  
 For poor four pound to roar and bellow,  
 Why sure you want some new Prunella?"<sup>6</sup>  
 "I'll be revenged, you saucy quean"<sup>o</sup>  
 (Replies the disappointed Dean),  
 85 "I'll so describe your dressing room  
 The very Irish shall not come."<sup>z</sup>  
 She answered short, "I'm glad you'll write,  
 You'll furnish paper when I shite."

## Endnotes

1734

- Note 1: Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, headed the government from 1710 to 1714.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Satire (pronounced *say'tir*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Epistles* 1.14.43.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "A townsman; a man of trade; not a gentleman" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A parody of Pope's *An Essay on Man* 1.292, which had just been published.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A name for a sex worker and a worsted cloth worn by clergymen.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A gibe at the supposed crassness of Irishmen (like Swift himself).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *clerical collar*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poses as*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strumpet*[Return to reference °](#)

## HENRY FIELDING

On October 7, 1746, Charles Hamilton was tried in the court of the Quarter Sessions in the English town of Taunton after his wife, Mary Price, reported that, to her surprise, he was not a man. The court found that Hamilton was female and had put on “man’s apparel”—breeches, a periwig, and ruffles—to deceive Price, and the world. It was not easy for the court to determine the right charge to bring against Hamilton. Sex between women, though considered outrageous, was not expressly illegal (unlike sex between men, which was punishable by execution under Britain’s sodomy laws); and while the prosecution alleged that Hamilton had married a total of fourteen women, he could not be called a polygamist because there was no such thing, in the court’s eyes, as marriage between two people of the same sex. Hamilton was prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act of 1744, which gave courts wide latitude to punish people who it deemed were not who they claimed to be. According to Hamilton’s deposition, he was born a daughter to Mary and William Hamilton in Somerset and named Mary, and lived his early years in Scotland. He began wearing his brother’s clothes and publicly identifying as male at age fourteen, and eventually served as apprentice to two “mountebanks,” unlicensed medical practitioners who traveled the countryside dispensing cures. Practicing as a mountebank himself, he met and married Mary Price in the English city of Wells, and they traveled together for two months before Price discovered what she would later swear in court to be her husband’s “true sex.” The court found, in its words, that “the he or she prisoner at the bar is an uncommon, notorious cheat,” and ordered Hamilton to be imprisoned for six months and severely whipped in four different nearby market towns. After that, there is no further record of him, but the figure of “the female husband” which he introduced to English law and culture was used to

categorize numerous nonheteronormative, gender-nonconforming people well into the nineteenth century.

The short pamphlet *The Female Husband* (1746) was produced by the eminent eighteenth-century novelist Henry Fielding (1707–1754) soon after the case of Hamilton was tried. Fielding never interviewed Charles Hamilton, as he claims to have done on the title page, likely taking most of what truth there is in his story from newspaper accounts. The vast majority of Fielding's narrative is pure fiction, starting with the name "George Hamilton" that he gives to the story's protagonist. But *The Female Husband* was written to capitalize on a sensational news story, and thus indicates how news media in the eighteenth century, themselves often trafficking in reckless speculation and outright fabrications, provided a profitable model for English fiction. Fielding's text can be classified as a "criminal biography," an example of which he had already published in *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), a satirical narrative about a notorious London gangster.

The castigation and legally inflicted violence that Charles Hamilton faced in reality, and that George Hamilton undergoes in Fielding's fiction, demonstrate how threatening the eighteenth-century English public could find figures who did not conform to ordinary understandings of gender. Such figures provoked intense cultural anxiety by challenging the idea that gender was biologically determined and clear, and that sexual desire must always follow a path toward the "opposite" gender. Fielding's story begins and ends with heavy moralizing against what he calls the "monstrous" course of life taken by his protagonist. But as the story unfolds, he cannot resist depicting a social world almost entirely suffused with deviations from "the normal," adjacent and connected to the main one. These include the passions unleashed by a new religious movement, Methodism; the irregular practice of medicine by quack doctors; and various sexual curiosities that run from the fantastical naiveté of virgins to the desires of old widows for young, "effeminate" men. Finally the neighbors' cruel enforcement of social and gender norms itself is offered as an example of moral

transgression. Fielding comes to treat George Hamilton with wry fondness, calling him “our adventurer” in a way that recalls his attitude toward his other fictional heroes. While the text varies the pronouns it assigns to Hamilton, perhaps to mock his use of male ones, such variations seem inadvertently to confirm the fluidity of gender that Fielding sets out to reject. Published between his two most famous novels—*The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749)—Fielding’s *The Female Husband* presents its protagonist as a queer reflection of the wandering hero who gives life to his innovations in English fiction.

## The Female Husband<sup>1</sup>

That propense<sup>2</sup> inclination which is for very wise purposes implanted in the one sex for the other, is not only necessary for the continuance of the human species; but is, at the same time, when governed and directed by virtue and religion, productive not only of corporeal delight, but of the most rational felicity.

But if once our carnal appetites are let loose, without those prudent and secure guides, there is no excess and disorder which they are not liable to commit, even while they pursue their natural satisfaction; and, which may seem still more strange, there is nothing monstrous and unnatural which they are not capable of inventing, nothing so brutal and shocking which they have not actually committed.

Of these unnatural lusts, all ages and countries have afforded us too many instances; but none I think more surprising than what will be found in the history of Mrs. Mary, otherwise Mr. George Hamilton.

This heroine in iniquity was born in Isle of Man, on the 16th day of August, 1721. Her father was formerly a serjeant of grenadiers in the Foot Guards,<sup>3</sup> who having the good fortune to marry a widow of some estate in that island, purchased his discharge from the army, and retired thither with his wife.

He had not been long arrived there before he died, and left his wife with child of this Mary; but her mother, though she had not two months to reckon, could not stay<sup>4</sup> till she was delivered, before she took a third husband.

As her mother, though she had three husbands, never had any other child, she always expressed an extraordinary affection for this daughter, to whom she gave as good an education as the island afforded; and though she used her with much tenderness, yet was the girl brought up in the strictest principles of virtue and religion; nor did she in her younger years discover<sup>5</sup> the least proneness to

any kind of vice, much less give cause of suspicion that she would one day disgrace her sex by the most abominable and unnatural pollutions. And indeed she hath often declared from her conscience, that no irregular passion ever had any place in her mind, till she was first seduced by one Anne Johnson, a neighbor of hers, with whom she had been acquainted from her childhood; but not with such intimacy as afterwards grew between them.

This Anne Johnson going on some business to Bristol, which detained her there near half a year, became acquainted with some of the people called Methodists,<sup>6</sup> and was by them persuaded to embrace their sect.

At her return to the Isle of Man, she soon made an easy convert of Molly Hamilton, the warmth of whose disposition rendered her susceptible enough of enthusiasm,<sup>7</sup> and ready to receive all those impressions which her friend the Methodist endeavored to make on her mind.

These two young women became now inseparable companions, and at length bedfellows: for Molly Hamilton was prevailed on to leave her mother's house, and to reside entirely with Mrs. Johnson,<sup>8</sup> whose fortune was not thought inconsiderable in that cheap country.

Young Mrs. Hamilton began to conceive a very great affection for her friend, which perhaps was not returned with equal faith by the other. However Mrs. Hamilton declares her love, or rather friendship, was totally innocent, till the temptations of Johnson first led her astray. This latter was, it seems, no novice in impurity, which, as she confessed, she had learnt and often practiced at Bristol with her methodistical sisters.

As Molly Hamilton was extremely warm in her inclinations, and as those inclinations were so violently attached to Mrs. Johnson, it would not have been difficult for a less artful<sup>9</sup> woman, in the most private hours, to turn the ardor of enthusiastic devotion into a different kind of flame.

Their conversation, therefore, soon became in the highest manner criminal, and transactions not fit to be mentioned past between them.

They had not long carried on this wicked crime before Mrs. Johnson was again called by her affairs to visit Bristol, and her friend was prevailed on to accompany her thither.

Here when they arrived, they took up their lodgings together, and lived in the same detestable manner as before; till an end was put to their vile amours, by the means of one Rogers, a young fellow, who by his extraordinary devotion (for he was a very zealous Methodist) or by some other charms (for he was very jolly and handsome) gained the heart of Mrs. Johnson, and married her.

This amour, which was not of any long continuance before it was brought to a conclusion, was kept an entire secret from Mrs. Hamilton; but she was no sooner informed of it, than she became almost frantic, she tore her hair, beat her breasts, and behaved in as outrageous a manner as the fondest husband could, who had unexpectedly discovered the infidelity of a beloved wife.

In the midst of these agonies she received a letter from Mrs. Johnson, in the following words, or as near them as she can possibly remember:

“Dear Molly,

I know you will condemn what I have now done; but I condemn myself much more for what I have done formerly: for I take the whole shame and guilt of what hath passed between us on myself. I was indeed the first seducer of your innocence, for which I ask God’s pardon and yours. All the amends I can make you is earnestly to beseech you, in the name of the Lord, to forsake all such evil courses, and to follow my example now, as you before did my temptation, and enter as soon as you can into that holy state into which I was yesterday called. In which, though I am yet but a novice, believe me, there are delights infinitely surpassing the faint endearments we have experienced together. I shall always pray for you, and continue your friend.”



This letter rather increased than abated her rage, and she resolved to go immediately and upbraid her false friend; but while she was taking this resolution, she was informed that Mr. Rogers and his bride were departed from Bristol by a messenger, who brought her a second short note, and a bill for some money from Mrs. Rogers.

As soon as the first violence of her passion subsided, she began to consult what course to take, when the strangest thought imaginable suggested itself to her fancy. This was to dress herself in men's clothes, to embark for Ireland, and commence<sup>1</sup> Methodist teacher.

Nothing remarkable happened to her during the rest of her stay in Bristol, which adverse winds occasioned to be a whole week, after she had provided herself with her dress; but at last having procured a passage, and the wind becoming favorable, she set sail for Dublin.

As she was a very pretty woman, she now appeared a most beautiful youth.<sup>2</sup> A circumstance which had its consequences aboard the ship, and had like to have discovered her, in the very beginning of her adventures.

There happened to be in the same vessel with this adventurer a Methodist, who was bound to the same place, on the same design<sup>3</sup> with herself.

The two being alone in the cabin together, and both at their devotions, the man in the ecstasy of his enthusiasm, thrust one of his hands into the other's bosom. Upon which, in her surprise, she gave so effeminate a squall, that it reached the captain's ears, as he was smoking his pipe upon deck. "Hey day," says he, "what, have we a woman in the ship!" and immediately descended into the cabin, where he found the two Methodists on their knees.

"Pox on't," says the captain, "I thought you had a woman with you here; I could have sworn I had heard one cry out as if she had been ravishing,<sup>4</sup> and yet the devil must have been in you, if you could convey her in here without my knowledge."

"I defy the devil and all his works," answered the he-Methodist. "He has no power but over the wicked; and if he be in the ship, thy oaths<sup>5</sup> must have brought him hither: for I have heard thee pronounce more than twenty since I came on board; and we should have been at the bottom before this, had not my prayers prevented it."

"Don't abuse my vessel," cried the captain, "she is as safe a vessel, and as good a sailer as ever floated, and if you had been afraid of going to the bottom, you might have stayed on shore and been damned."

The Methodist made no answer, but fell a groaning, and that so loud, that the Captain giving him a hearty curse or two, quitted the cabin, and resumed his pipe.

He was no sooner gone, than the Methodist gave farther tokens of brotherly love to his companion, which soon became so importunate and troublesome to her, that after having gently rejected his hands several times, she at last recollected the sex she had assumed, and gave him so violent a blow in the nostrils, that the blood issued from them with great impetuosity.

Whether fighting be opposite to the tenets of his sect (for I have not the honor to be deeply read in their doctrines) or from what other motive it proceeded, I will not determine; but the Methodist made no other return to this rough treatment, than by many groans, and prayed heartily to be delivered soon from the conversation of the wicked; which prayers were at length so successful, that, together with a very brisk gale, they brought the vessel into Dublin harbor.

Here our adventurer took a lodging in a backstreet near St. Stephen's Green,<sup>6</sup> at which place she intended to preach the next day; but had got a cold in the voyage, which occasioned such a hoarseness that made it impossible to put that design in practice.

There lodged in the same house with her, a brisk<sup>7</sup> widow of near 40 years of age, who had buried two husbands, and seemed by her behavior to be far from having determined against a third expedition to the land of matrimony.

To this widow our adventurer began presently to make addresses, and as he at present wanted<sup>8</sup> tongue to express the ardency of his flame, he was obliged to make use of actions of endearment such as squeezing, kissing, toying, &c.

These were received in such a manner by the fair widow, that her lover thought he had sufficient encouragement to proceed to a formal declaration of his passion. And this she chose to do by letter, as her voice still continued too hoarse for uttering the soft accents of love.

A letter therefore was penned accordingly in the usual style, which, to prevent any miscarriages, Mrs. Hamilton thought proper to deliver with her own hands; and immediately retired to give the adored lady an opportunity of digesting the contents alone, little doubting of an answer agreeable to her wishes, or at least such a one as the coyness of the sex generally dictates in the beginning of an amour, and which lovers, by long experience, know pretty well how to interpret.

But what was the gallant's surprise, when in return to an amorous epistle, she read the following sarcasms, which it was impossible for the most sanguine temper to misunderstand, or construe favorably.

"Sir,

I was greatly astonished at what you put into my hands. Indeed I thought, when I took it, it might have been an opera song, and which for certain reasons I should think, when your cold is gone, you might sing as well as Farinelli,<sup>9</sup> from the great resemblance there is between your persons. I know not what you mean by encouragement to your hopes; if I could have conceived my innocent freedoms could have been so misrepresented, I should have been more upon my guard: but you have taught me how to watch my actions for the future, and to preserve myself even from any suspicion of forfeiting the regard I owe to the memory of the best of

men, by any future choice. The remembrance of that dear person makes me incapable of proceeding farther.—”

And so firm was this resolution, that she would never afterwards admit of the least familiarity with the despairing Mrs. Hamilton; but perhaps that destiny which is remarked to interpose in all matrimonial things, had taken the widow into her protection: for in a few days afterwards, she was married to one Jack Strong, a cadet in an Irish regiment.

Our adventurer being thus disappointed in her love, and what is worse, her money drawing towards an end, began to have some thoughts of returning home, when fortune seemed inclined to make her amends for the tricks she had hitherto played her, and accordingly now threw another mistress in her way, whose fortune was much superior to the former widow, and who received Mrs. Hamilton’s addresses with all the complaisance she could wish.

This lady, whose name was Rushford, was the widow of a rich cheese-monger, who left her all he had, and only one great grandchild to take care of, whom, at her death, he recommended to be her heir; but wholly at her own power and discretion.

She was now in the sixty-eighth year of her age, and had not, it seems, entirely abandoned all thoughts of the pleasures of this world: for she was no sooner acquainted with Mrs. Hamilton, but, taking her for a beautiful lad of about eighteen, she cast the eyes of affection on her, and having pretty well outlived the bashfulness of her youth, made little scruple of giving hints of her passion of her own accord.

It has been observed that women know more of one another than the wisest men (if ever such have been employed in the study) have with all their art been capable of discovering. It is therefore no wonder that these hints were quickly perceived and understood by the female gallant, who animadverting on the conveniency which the old gentlewoman’s fortune would produce in her present situation, very gladly embraced the opportunity, and advancing with great warmth of love to the attack, in which she was received almost with

open arms, by the tottering citadel, which presently offered to throw open the gates, and surrender at discretion.<sup>1</sup>

In her amour with the former widow, Mrs. Hamilton had never any other design than of gaining the lady's affection, and then discovering herself to her, hoping to have had the same success which Mrs. Johnson had found with her: but with this old lady, whose fortune only she was desirous to possess, such views would have afforded very little gratification. After some reflection, therefore, a device entered into her head, as strange and surprising as it was wicked and vile; and this was actually to marry the old woman, and to deceive her, by means which decency forbids me even to mention.

The wedding was accordingly celebrated in the most public manner, and with all kind of gaiety, the old woman greatly triumphing in her shame, and instead of hiding her own head for fear of infamy, was actually proud of the beauty of her new husband, for whose sake she intended to disinherit her poor great-grandson, though she had derived her riches from her husband's family, who had always intended this boy as his heir. Nay, what may seem very remarkable, she insisted on the parson's not omitting the prayer in the matrimonial service for fruitfulness;<sup>2</sup> drest herself as airy as a girl of eighteen, concealed twenty years of her age, and laughed and promoted all the jokes which are usual at weddings; but she was not so well pleased with a repartee of her great-grandson, a pretty and a smart lad, who, when somebody jested on the bridegroom because he had no beard, answered smartly: "There should never be a beard on both sides": for indeed the old lady's chin was pretty well stocked with bristles.

Nor was this bride contented with displaying her shame by a public wedding dinner, she would have the whole ceremony completed, and the stocking was accordingly thrown<sup>3</sup> with the usual sport and merriment.

During the first three days of the marriage, the bride expressed herself so well satisfied with her choice, that being in company with another old lady, she exulted so much in her happiness, that her

friend began to envy her, and could not forbear inveighing against effeminacy in men; upon which a discourse arose between the two old ladies, not proper to be repeated, if I knew every particular; but ended at the last, in the unmarried lady's declaring to the bride, that she thought her husband looked more like a woman than a man. To which the other replied in triumph, he was the best man in Ireland.

This and the rest which past was faithfully recounted to Mrs. Hamilton by her wife at their next meeting, and occasioned our young bridegroom to blush, which the old lady perceiving and regarding as an effect of youth, fell upon her in a rage of love like a tigress, and almost murdered her with kisses.

One of our English poets remarks in the case of a more able husband than Mrs. Hamilton was, when his wife grew amorous in an unseasonable time:

The doctor understood the call,  
But had not always wherewithal.<sup>4</sup>

So it happened to our poor bridegroom, who having not at that time *the wherewithal* about her, was obliged to remain merely passive, under all this torrent of kindness of his wife; but this did not discourage her, who was an experienced woman, and thought she had a cure for this coldness in her husband, the efficacy of which she might perhaps have essayed formerly. Saying therefore with a tender smile to her husband, "I believe you are a woman," her hands began to move in such direction, that the discovery would absolutely have been made, had not the arrival of dinner, at that very instant, prevented it.

However, as there is but one way of laying the spirit of curiosity, when once raised in a woman, *viz.* by satisfying it, so that discovery, though delayed, could not now be long prevented. And accordingly the very next night, the husband and wife had not been long in bed together, before a storm arose, as if drums, guns, wind and thunder were all roaring together. *Villain, rogue, whore, beast, cheat* all resounded at the same instant, and were followed by curses,

imprecations and threats, which soon waked the poor great-grandson in the garret; who immediately ran downstairs into his great-grandmother's room. He found her in the midst of it in her shift, with a handful of shirt in one hand, and a handful of hair in the other, stamping and crying, "I am undone, cheated, abused, ruined, robbed by a vile jade, imposter, whore.—" "What is the matter, dear madam," answered the youth; "O child," replied she, "undone! I am married to one who is no man. My husband? a woman, a woman, a woman." "Ay," said the grandson, "where is she?"—"Run away, gone," said the great-grandmother, and indeed so she was: for no sooner was the fatal discovery made than the poor female bridegroom whipt on her breeches, in the pockets of which she had stowed all the money she could, and slipping on her shoes, with her coat, waistcoat and stockings in her hands, had made the best of her way into the street, leaving almost one half of her shirt behind, which the enraged wife had tore from her back.

As Mrs. Hamilton well knew that an adventure of that kind would soon fill all Dublin, and that it was impossible for her to remain there undiscovered, she hastened away to the Key, where by good fortune, she met with a ship just bound to Dartmouth,<sup>5</sup> on board which she immediately went, and sailed out of the harbor, before her pursuers could find out or overtake her.

She was a full fortnight in her passage, during which time, no adventure occurred worthy remembrance. At length she landed at Dartmouth, where she soon provided herself with linen, and thence went to Totness, where she assumed the title of a doctor of physic,<sup>6</sup> and took lodgings in the house of one Mrs. Baytree.

Here she soon became acquainted with a young girl, the daughter of one Mr. Ivythorn, who had the green sickness; a distemper which the doctor gave out he could cure by an infallible nostrum.<sup>7</sup>

The doctor had not been long entrusted with the care of this young patient before he began to make love to her:<sup>8</sup> for though her complexion was somewhat faded with her distemper, she was otherwise extremely pretty.



This girl became an easy conquest to the doctor, and the day of their marriage was appointed, without the knowledge or even suspicion of her father, or of an old aunt who was very fond of her, and would neither of them have easily given their consent to the match, had the doctor been as good a man as the niece thought him.

At the day appointed, the doctor and his mistress found means to escape very early in the morning from Totness, and went to a town called Ashburton<sup>9</sup> in Devonshire, where they were married by a regular license which the doctor had previously obtained.

Here they stayed two days at a public house, during which time the doctor so well acted his part, that his bride had not the least suspicion of the legality of her marriage, or that she had not got a husband for life. The third day they returned to Totness, where they both threw themselves at Mr. Ivythorn's feet, who was highly rejoiced at finding his daughter restored to him, and that she was not debauched, as he had suspected of her. And being a very worthy good-natured man, and regarding the true interest and happiness of his daughter more than the satisfying his own pride, ambition, or obstinacy, he was prevailed on to forgive her, and to receive her and her husband into his house, as his children, notwithstanding the opposition of the old aunt, who declared she would never forgive the wanton slut, and immediately quitted the house, as soon as the young couple were admitted into it.

The doctor and his wife lived together above a fortnight, without the least doubt conceived by the wife, or by any other person, of the doctor's being what he appeared; till one evening the doctor having drank a little too much punch, slept somewhat longer than usual, and when he waked, he found his wife in tears, who asked her husband, amidst many sobs, how he could be so barbarous to have taken such advantage of her ignorance and innocence, and to ruin her in such a manner? The doctor being surprised and scarce awake, asked her what he had done. "Done," says she, "have you not married me a poor young girl, when you know you have not—you have not—what you ought to have. I always thought indeed your



shape was something odd, and have often wondered that you had not the least bit of beard; but I thought you had been a man for all that, or I am sure I would not have been so wicked to marry you for the world." The doctor endeavored to pacify her, by every kind of promise, and telling her she would have all the pleasures of marriage without the inconveniences. "No, no," said she, "you shall not persuade me to that, nor will I be guilty of so much wickedness on any account. I will tell my papa of you as soon as I am up; for you are no husband of mine, nor will I ever have anything more to say to you." Which resolution the doctor finding himself unable to alter, she put on her clothes with all the haste she could, and taking a horse which she had bought a few days before, made the best of her way, through byroads and across the country, into Somersetshire, missing Exeter and every other great town which lay in the road.

And well it was for her, that she used both this haste and precaution: for Mr. Ivythorn having heard his daughter's story, immediately obtained a warrant from a justice of peace, with which he presently dispatched the proper officers; and not only so, but set forward himself to Exeter, in order to try if he could learn any news of his son-in-law, or apprehend her there; till after much search being unable to hear any tidings of her, he was obliged to set down contented with his misfortune, as was his poor daughter to submit to all the ill-natured sneers of her own sex, who were often witty at her expense, and at the expense of their own decency.

The doctor having escaped, arrived safe at Wells<sup>1</sup> in Somersetshire, where thinking herself at a safe distance from her pursuers, she again sat herself down in quest of new adventures.

She had not been long in this city, before she became acquainted with one Mary Price, a girl of about eighteen years of age, and of extraordinary beauty. With this girl, hath this wicked woman since her confinement declared, she was really as much in love as it was possible for a man ever to be with one of her own sex.

The first opportunity our doctor obtained of conversing closely with this new mistress was at a dancing among the inferior sort of

people,<sup>2</sup> in contriving which the doctor had herself the principal share. At the meeting the two lovers had an occasion of dancing all night together; and the doctor lost no opportunity of showing his fondness, as well by his tongue as by his hands, whispering many soft things in her ears, and squeezing as many soft things into her hands, which, together with a good number of kisses, &c. so pleased and warmed this poor girl, who never before had felt any of those tender sensations which we call love, that she retired from the dancing in a flutter of spirits, which her youth and ignorance could not well account for; but which did not suffer her to close her eyes, either that morning or the next night.

The day after that the doctor sent her the following letter.

"My Dearest Molly,  
Excuse the fondness of that expression; for I assure you, my angel, all I write to you proceeds only from my heart, which you have so entirely conquered, and made your own, that nothing else has any share in it; and, my angel, could you know what I feel when I am writing to you, nay even at every thought of my Molly, I know I should gain your pity if not your love; if I am so happy to have already succeeded in raising the former, do let me have once more an opportunity of seeing you, and that soon, that I might breathe forth my soul at those dear feet, where I would willingly die, if I am not suffered to lie there and live. My sweetest creature, give me leave to subscribe myself

Your fond, doting,  
Undone Slave"

This letter added much to the disquietude which before began to torment poor Molly's breast. She read it over twenty times, and, at last, having carefully surveyed every part of the room, that nobody was present, she kissed it eagerly. However, as she was perfectly modest, and afraid of appearing too forward, she resolved not to

answer this first letter; and if she met the doctor, to behave with great coldness to him.

Her mother being ill, prevented her going out that day; and the next morning she received a second letter from the doctor, in terms more warm and endearing than before, and which made so absolute a conquest over the unexperienced and tender heart of this poor girl, that she suffered herself to be prevailed on, by the entreaties of her lover, to write an answer, which nevertheless she determined should be so distant and cool, that the woman of the strictest virtue and modesty in England might have no reason to be ashamed of having writ it; of which letter the reader hath here an exact copy:

"Sur,

I Haf recevd boath your too litters, and sur I ham much surprise hat the loafe you priten to haf for so pur a garl as mee. I kan nut beleef you wul desgrace yourself by marring sutch a yf as mee, and Sur I wool nut be thee hore of the gratest man in the kuntry. For thof mi vartu his all I haf, yit hit is a potion I ham rissolv to kare to mi housband, soe noe moor at presant, from your umble savant to cummand."

The doctor received this letter with all the ecstasies any lover could be inspired with, and as Mr. Congreve says in his *Old Bachelor*, thought there was more eloquence in the false spellings with which it abounded than in all Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> She now resolved to be no longer contented with this distant kind of conversation, but to meet her mistress face to face. Accordingly that very afternoon she went to her mother's house, and enquired for her poor Molly, who no sooner heard her lover's voice than she fell a trembling in the most violent manner. Her sister who opened the door informed the doctor she was at home, and let the imposter in; but Molly being then in dishabille, would not see him till she had put on clean linen, and was arrayed from head to foot in as neat, though not in so fine a manner, as the highest court lady in the kingdom could attire herself in, to receive her embroidered lover.

Very tender and delicate was the interview of this pair, and if any corner of Molly's heart remained untaken, it was now totally subdued. She would willingly have postponed the match somewhat longer, from her strict regard to decency; but the earnestness and ardor of her lover would not suffer her, and she was at last obliged to consent to be married within two days.

Her sister, who was older than herself, and had overheard all that had past, no sooner perceived the doctor gone, than she came to her, and wishing her joy with a sneer, said much good may it do her with such a husband; for that, for her own part, she would almost as willingly be married to one of her own sex, and made some remarks not so proper to be here inserted. This was resented by the other with much warmth. She said she had chosen for herself only, and that if she was pleased, it did not become people to trouble their heads with what was none of their business. She was indeed so extremely enamored, that I question whether she would have exchanged the doctor for the greatest and richest match in the world.

And had not her affections been fixed in this strong manner, it is possible that an accident which happened the very next night might have altered her mind: for being at another dancing with her lover, a quarrel arose between the doctor and a man there present, upon which the mother<sup>4</sup> seizing the former violently by the collar, tore open her waistcoat, and rent her shirt, so that all her breast was discovered, which, though beyond expression beautiful in a woman, were of so different a kind from the bosom of a man, that the married women there set up a great titter; and though it did not bring the doctor's sex into an absolute suspicion, yet caused some whispers, which perhaps might have spoiled the match with a less innocent and less enamored virgin.

It had however no such effect on poor Molly. As her fond heart was free from any deceit, so was it entirely free from suspicion; and accordingly, at the fixed time she met the doctor, and their nuptials were celebrated in the usual form.

The mother was extremely pleased at this preferment<sup>5</sup> (as she thought it) of her daughter. The joy of it did indeed contribute to restore her perfectly to health, and nothing but mirth and happiness appeared in the faces of the whole family.

The new married couple not only continued but greatly increased the fondness which they had conceived for each other, and poor Molly, from some stories she told among her acquaintance, the other young married women of the town, was received as a great fibber, and was at last universally laughed at as such among them all.

Three months past in this manner, when the doctor was sent for to Glastonbury to a patient (for the fame of our adventurer's knowledge in physic began now to spread) when a person of Totness being accidentally present, happened to see and know her, and having heard upon enquiry, that the doctor was married at Wells, as we have above mentioned, related the whole story of Mr. Ivythorn's daughter, and the whole adventure at Totness.

News of this kind seldom wants wings; it reached Wells, and the ears of the doctor's mother<sup>6</sup> before her return from Glastonbury. Upon this the old woman immediately sent for her daughter, and very strictly examined her, telling her the great sin she would be guilty of, if she concealed a fact of this kind, and the great disgrace she would bring on her own family, and even on her whole sex, by living quietly and contentedly with a husband who was in any degree less a man than the rest of his neighbors.

Molly assured her mother of the falsehood of this report; and as it is usual for persons who are too eager in any cause to prove too much, she asserted some things which staggered her mother's belief, and made her cry out, "O child, there is no such thing in human nature."

Such was the progress this story had made in Wells, that before the doctor arrived there, it was in everybody's mouth; and as the doctor rode through the streets, the mob, especially the women, all paid their compliments of congratulation. Some laughed at her, others threw dirt at her, and others used terms of reproach not fit to be commemorated. When she came to her own house, she found

her wife in tears, and having asked her the cause, was informed of the dialogue which had past between her and her mother. Upon which the doctor, though he knew not yet by what means the discovery had been made, yet too well knowing the truth, began to think of using the same method, which she had heard before put in practice, of delivering herself from any impertinence; for as to danger, she was not sufficiently versed in the laws to apprehend any.

In the meantime, the mother, at the solicitation of some of her relations, who, notwithstanding the stout denial of the wife, had given credit to the story, had applied herself to a magistrate, before whom the Totness man appeared, and gave evidence as is before mentioned. Upon this a warrant was granted to apprehend the doctor, with which the constable arrived at her house, just as she was meditating her escape.

The husband was no sooner seized, but the wife threw herself into the greatest agonies of rage and grief, vowing that he was injured, and that the information was false and malicious, and that she was resolved to attend her husband wherever they conveyed him.

And now they all proceeded before the justice, where a strict examination being made into the affair, the whole happened to be true, to the great shock and astonishment of everybody; but more especially of the poor wife, who fell into fits, out of which she was with great difficulty recovered.

The whole truth having been disclosed before the justice, and something of too vile, wicked, and scandalous a nature, which was found in the doctor's trunk, having been produced in evidence against her, she was committed to Bridewell, and Mr. Gold,<sup>7</sup> an eminent and learned counsellor at law, who lives in those parts, was consulted with upon the occasion, who gave his advice that she should be prosecuted at the next sessions, on a clause in the vagrant act, *for having by false and deceitful practice endeavored to impose on some of his Majesty's subjects.*<sup>8</sup>

As the doctor was conveyed to Bridewell, she was attended by many insults from the mob; but what was more unjustifiable was the

cruel treatment which the poor innocent wife received from her own sex, upon the extraordinary accounts which she had formerly given of her husband.

Accordingly at the ensuing sessions of the peace for the county of Somerset, the doctor was indicted for the abovementioned diabolical fact,<sup>9</sup> and after a fair trial convicted, to the entire satisfaction of the whole court.

At the trial the said Mary Price, the wife, was produced as a witness, and being asked by the council, whether she had ever any suspicion of the doctor's sex during the whole time of the courtship, she answered positively in the negative. She was then asked how long they had been married, to which she answered three months; and whether they had cohabited the whole time together? to which her reply was in the affirmative. Then the council asked her, whether during the time of this cohabitation, she imagined the doctor had behaved to her as a husband ought to his wife? Her modesty confounded her a little at this question; but at last answered she did imagine so. Lastly, she was asked when it was that she first harbored any suspicion of her being imposed upon? To which she answered, she had not the least suspicion till her husband was carried before a magistrate, and there discovered, as hath been said above.

The prisoner having been convicted of this base and scandalous crime, was by the court sentenced to be publicly and severely whipt four several times, in four market towns within the county of Somerset, to wit, once in each market town, and to be imprisoned, &c.

These whippings she has accordingly undergone, and very severely have they been inflicted, insomuch, that those persons who have more regard to beauty than to justice, could not refrain from exerting some pity toward her, when they saw so lovely a skin scarified with rods, in such a manner that her back was almost flayed; yet so little effect had the smart or shame of this punishment on the person who underwent it, that the very evening she had suffered the first whipping, she offered the jailer money, to procure



her a young girl to satisfy her most monstrous and unnatural desires.

But it is to be hoped that this example will be sufficient to deter all others from the commission of any such foul and unnatural crimes: for which, if they escape the shame and ruin which they so well deserve in this world, they will be most certain of meeting with their full punishment in the next: for unnatural affections are equally vicious and equally detestable in both sexes, nay, if modesty be the peculiar characteristic of the fair sex, it is in them most shocking and odious to prostitute and debase it.

In order to caution therefore that lovely sex, which, while they preserve their natural innocence and purity, will still look most lovely in the eyes of men, the above pages have been written, which, that they might be worthy of their perusal, such strict regard hath been had to the utmost decency, that notwithstanding the subject of this narrative be of a nature so difficult to be handled inoffensively, not a single word occurs through the whole which might shock the most delicate ear, or give offense to the purest chastity.

## Endnotes

1746

- Note 1: The text's complete title on the title page reads, *The Female Husband, or, The Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, Alias Mr. George Hamilton, who was convicted of having married a Young Woman of Wells and lived with her as her Husband, Taken from her own Mouth since her Confinement.*[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dispositional.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A regiment of infantry in the British Army, commonly responsible for guarding members of the royal family, but with operational, combat duties as well. "Grenadiers": originally soldiers with training to throw grenades, later used to refer to companies of the tallest, finest soldiers in a regiment.[Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: Wait. "To reckon": for her pregnancy to come to term.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Reveal.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Originally a movement within the Church of England founded by John Wesley, Methodism was new in the 1740s when *The Female Husband* was published, and its fervor and openness to members of the laboring classes led orthodox Anglicans to view it as a disruptive force. "Bristol": in this city in the west of England, a site of considerable early Methodist activity, Wesley built the New Room in 1739, the oldest meeting house expressly built for Methodist gatherings and worship in the world.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Religious passion, resulting from divine inspiration.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An abbreviation of "mistress," the title "Mrs." could apply in earlier usage, as here, to an unmarried woman.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cunning.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Begin working as a.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Term conventionally used for a boy on the verge of manhood.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With the same plan (to teach Methodism).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Was being ravished (sexually assaulted).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Curses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Large park in the city center of Dublin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Lively, wanton.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lacked.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Stage name of Carlo Maria Michelangelo Nicola Broschi (1705–1782), Italian castrato singer, a major figure in the history of opera, who was a sensation in London in the 1730s.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unconditionally.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The Anglican marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer specifies that a prayer for the couple to “be fruitful in procreation of children” should “be omitted, where the woman is past child-bearing.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the eighteenth century, the wedding game of “flinging the stocking,” thought to be the origin of the custom of throwing garters, predicted the impending marriage of whoever threw a stocking that happened to land on the bride or groom.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Matthew Prior, “Paulo Purganti and His Wife: An Honest, but a Simple Pair,” in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1708).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Port in southwest England. “Key”: the usual 18th-century spelling for *quay*, an artificial bank where ships are loaded and unloaded, as on Dublin’s River Liffey.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A physician. “Totness”: now Totnes, a town in southwest England about fourteen miles from Dartmouth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A miracle cure. “Green sickness”: also called chlorosis, thought in early medicine to afflict sexually inexperienced, post-pubescent young women, supposedly characterized by a greenish cast to the skin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To romance her.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A little over eight miles from Totnes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A city over eighty miles northeast of Ashburton, about fifty miles from Exeter.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: People of the laboring classes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Produced in 1683, *The Old Bachelor* was the first play of William Congreve (see p. 220). Bellmour, one of the principal lovers in the comedy, remarks of a letter from a lady, “there’s more elegancy in the false spelling of this superscription than in all Cicero” (not Aristotle).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The text could be faulty here, and perhaps should read “other,” that is, that man with whom Hamilton quarrels.[Return](#)

[to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Social advancement by marriage. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the mother-in-law of George Hamilton. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sir Henry Gould (1710–1794), the prosecuting attorney as indicated in newspaper reports, was Fielding’s cousin.  
“Bridewell”: one of the larger London prisons, which incarcerated both women and men, though the name became a general one for any prison. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As the charge’s wording here indicates, the Vagrancy Act of 1744 allowed for prosecution of a wide variety of acts of deception and perceived forms of social disorder. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Crime. [Return to reference 9](#)

## MARY LEAPOR

A gardener's daughter, Mary Leapor (1722–1746) spent her short life in or near the small town of Brackley in Northamptonshire. When she was ten or eleven "she would often be scribbling," and poetry turned into a consuming interest. One of her poems describes her sitting "whole evenings, reading wicked plays" by candlelight; according to another, she lost employment as a cook-maid because she would not stop writing, even in the kitchen. Passed around the neighborhood, her verse impressed Bridget Freemantle, the daughter of a former Oxford don; she became Leapor's best friend and mentor. Together they planned to publish Leapor's work. A play was sent to Colley Cibber, the impresario and poet laureate, but it was returned stained by wine. Leapor's health was rarely good, and she died of measles at age twenty-four; she had never seen any of her poems in print. But Freemantle arranged an edition of Leapor's *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1748), with six hundred subscribers, and it was warmly received. Samuel Richardson admired the "sweetly easy poems" so much that he published a second volume; later, William Cowper thought they showed "more marks of a true poetical talent than I remember to have observed in the verses of any, whether male or female, so disadvantageously circumstanced." Recently Leapor's work has attracted renewed attention for its wit and skill as well as its sharp observations about the life of a working-class woman.

The preface to Leapor's *Poems* reports that "the author she most admired was Mr. Pope, whom she chiefly endeavored to imitate." "An Essay on Woman" reflects careful study of Pope's poetry about women and gender, particularly his "Epistle to a Lady." But its view of women's predicaments is very much darker. If women are living contradictions, as Pope had asserted, the reason is that whatever they are and whatever they do can be turned against them. Beauty will be betrayed, wit and learning will be shunned, and the pursuit of

wealth will shrink the soul. Leapor's own situation gives her satire bite. As a gardener's daughter, she knows that the flower of womanhood costs money to cultivate and does not last; as someone witty, poor, in ill health, and excluded from Pope's glamorous world, she sees through romantic myths. In "An Epistle to a Lady" (directly echoing Pope's title), she more autobiographically reflects on education, the main avenue of advancement for women proposed by reformers throughout the period (including Astell, Defoe, Addison, and Johnson). Leapor's experience makes her pessimistic: her learning merely allows her to depict her bleak place in the world on an astronomically expanded scale; and homely, tattered images must intrude on her dreams of the wealth and leisure that she knows a genteel education and a poetic vocation require. But despite Leapor's stress on her frustrating social position and on the softness and weakness of women in general, her verse is strong. This poet never stops fighting against the traps in which she is caught.

## An Essay on Woman

WOMAN—a pleasing but a short-lived flower,  
Too soft for business and too weak for power:  
A wife in bondage, or neglected maid;  
Despised if ugly; if she's fair—betrayed.  
5 'Tis wealth alone inspires every grace,  
And calls the raptures to her plenteous<sup>1</sup> face.  
What numbers for those charming features pine,  
If blooming acres<sup>2</sup> round her temples twine?  
Her lip the strawberry, and her eyes more bright  
Than sparkling Venus in a frosty night;  
10 Pale lilies fade and, when the fair appears,  
Snow turns a negro<sup>3</sup> and dissolves in tears,  
And where the charmer treads her magic toe,  
On English ground Arabian odors grow;  
Till mighty Hymen<sup>4</sup> lifts his sceptred rod,  
15 And sinks her glories with a fatal nod,  
Dissolves her triumphs, sweeps her charms away,  
And turns the goddess to her native clay.  
But, Artemisia,<sup>5</sup> let your servant sing  
What small advantage wealth and beauties bring.  
20 Who would be wise, that knew Pamphilia's fate?  
Or who be fair, and joined to Sylvia's mate?  
Sylvia, whose cheeks are fresh as early day,  
As evening mild, and sweet as spicy May;  
And yet that face her partial husband tires,  
25 And those bright eyes, that all the world admires.  
Pamphilia's wit who does not strive to shun,  
Like death's infection or a dog-day's sun?  
The damsels view her with malignant eyes,  
The men are vexed to find a nymph so wise,  
30

And wisdom only serves to make her know  
The keen sensation of superior woe.  
The secret whisper and the listening ear,  
The scornful eyebrow and the hated sneer,  
The giddy censures of her babbling kind,  
35 With thousand ills that grate a gentle mind,  
By her are tasted in the first degree,  
Though overlooked by Simplicus and me.  
Does thirst of gold a virgin's heart inspire,  
Instilled by nature or a careful sire?  
40 Then let her quit extravagance and play,  
The brisk companion and expensive tea,  
To feast with Cordia in her filthy sty  
On stewed potatoes or on mouldy pie;  
Whose eager<sup>o</sup> eyes stare ghastly at the poor,  
45 And fright the beggars from the hated door;  
In greasy clouts she wraps her smoky chin,  
And holds that pride's a never-pardoned sin.  
If this be wealth, no matter where it falls;  
But save, ye Muses, save your Mira's<sup>6</sup> walls:  
50 Still give me pleasing indolence and ease,  
A fire to warm me and a friend to please.  
Since, whether sunk in avarice or pride,  
A wanton virgin or a starving bride,  
Or wondering crowds attend her charming tongue,  
55 Or deemed an idiot, ever speaks the wrong;  
Though nature armed us for the growing ill  
With fraudulent cunning and a headstrong will,  
Yet, with ten thousand follies to her charge,  
Unhappy woman's but a slave at large.  
60

## Endnotes

1751

- Note 1: Not only blooming but wealthy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Not only hair but property.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Black, when set against the fair one's skin. The hyperbolic comparisons in this passage are intentionally ironic, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The god of marriage.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bridget Freemantle, given the name of an ancient patron of the arts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Leapor's pen name.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *fierce*[Return to reference °](#)



## An Epistle to a Lady<sup>1</sup>

In vain, dear Madam, yes, in vain you strive,  
Alas! to make your luckless Mira thrive;  
For Tycho and Copernicus<sup>2</sup> agree,  
No golden planet bent its rays on me.<sup>3</sup>

5 'Tis twenty winters, if it is no more,  
To speak the truth it may be twenty four:  
As many springs their 'pointed<sup>o</sup> space have run,  
Since Mira's eyes first opened on the sun.  
'Twas when the flocks on slabby<sup>o</sup> hillocks lie,  
10 And the cold fishes rule the watery sky;<sup>4</sup>  
But though these eyes the learned page explore,  
And turn the ponderous volumes o'er and o'er,  
I find no comfort from their systems flow,<sup>5</sup>  
But am dejected more as more I know.  
15 Hope shines a while, but like a vapor flies  
(The fate of all the curious and the wise)  
For, ah! cold Saturn<sup>6</sup> triumphed on that day,  
And frowning Sol denied his golden ray.

You see I'm learned, and I show't the more,  
20 That none may wonder when they find me poor.  
Yet Mira dreams, as slumbering poets may,  
And rolls in treasures till the breaking day:  
While books and pictures in bright order rise,  
And painted parlors swim before her eyes;  
25 Till the shrill clock impertinently rings,  
And the soft visions move their shining wings;  
Then Mira wakes—her pictures are no more,  
And through her fingers slides the vanished ore.

30 Convinced too soon, her eye unwilling falls  
On the blue curtains and the dusty walls;  
She wakes, alas! to business and to woes,  
To sweep her kitchen, and to mend her clothes.<sup>7</sup>

35 But see pale sickness with her languid eyes,  
At whose appearance all delusion flies:  
The world recedes, its vanities decline,  
Clorinda's features seem as faint as mine;  
Gay robes no more the aching sight admires,  
Wit grates the ear, and melting music tires;  
Its wonted pleasures with each sense decay,  
40 Books please no more, and paintings fade away,  
The sliding joys in misty vapors end;  
Yet let me still, ah! let me grasp a friend;  
And when each joy, when each loved object flies,  
Be you the last that leaves my closing eyes.

45 But how will this dismantled<sup>o</sup> soul appear,  
When stripped of all it lately held so dear,  
Forced from its prison of expiring clay,  
Afraid and shivering at the doubtful way?

50 Yet did these eyes a dying parent<sup>8</sup> see,  
Loosed from all cares except a thought for me,  
Without a tear resign her shortening breath,  
And dauntless meet the lingering stroke of death.  
Then at th'Almighty's sentence shall I mourn:  
"Of dust thou art, to dust shalt thou return";<sup>9</sup>  
Or shall I wish to stretch the line of fate,  
55 That the dull years may bear a longer date,  
To share the follies of succeeding times  
With more vexations and with deeper crimes?  
Ah no—though Heav'n brings near the final day,  
For such a life I will not, dare not pray;  
60 But let the tear for future mercy flow,

65                      And fall resigned beneath the mighty blow.  
Nor I alone—for through the spacious ball,<sup>o</sup>  
With me will numbers of all ages fall:  
And the same day that Mira yields her breath,  
Thousands may enter through the gates of death.

## Endnotes

1748

- Note 1: The poem addresses her friend and patron, Bridget Freemantle.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Polish founder of modern astronomy (1473–1543), who thought the Earth circled the sun. Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), Danish astronomer who thought the sun and moon revolved around the stationary Earth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A “golden planet” would have marked Leapor’s birth as auspicious.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Leapor was born in late winter, under the sign of Pisces (the “fishes”).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, no comfort flows from either the “systems” (bodies of doctrine) contained in books or the systems of stars and planets in the heavens.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The planet Saturn was thought to influence gloomy (hence “saturnine”) temperaments.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Compare with Pope, *Eloisa to Abelard* 223–48.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Leapor’s mother, Anne, died around 1742.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Genesis: 3:19.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *appointed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *muddy*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *unclothed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *Earth*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## HANNAH SNELL AND ROBERT WALKER

Hannah Snell (1723–1792) was not the only person in the eighteenth century celebrated in the British press as a woman who passed as a man to serve in Britain's wars as a soldier, but she became the most famous. Though her father was a hosier, her family in Worcester had a military bent, with several of her brothers becoming, and several of her sisters marrying, soldiers or sailors. Snell herself married a sailor, who then abandoned her. She embarked on her own military career to pursue him, adopting her brother-in-law's name James Gray and serving as a marine, most actively in India, from 1747 to 1750. The year she was discharged, she published *The Female Soldier, or the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* with the printer Robert Walker. It is clearly Walker's voice that narrates the story, though the text also insists that the account comes straight from Snell who, as it explains, "could read exceeding well" but could not write. The book made her a celebrity, quickly selling out its first printing and leading to a second in 1750, and launched her brief career in Goodman's Fields Theatre, in which she would sing songs and perform military maneuvers in uniform with a corps of fellow "Amazons" who marched onstage. After demand for her performances waned by 1751, she briefly kept a pub in East London called the Female Warrior, then settled into family life, marrying twice and mothering two children. She remained a figure of cultural memory, her story recounted in Bram Stoker's *Famous Imposters* (1910) and the children's story "Young Amazon Snell" (1913) by Andrew Lang, among other publications through the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.



**Portrait of Hannah Snell**, 1750, engraved by John Faber, after a painting by Richard Phelps.

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The presentation of Snell's gender identity by Walker and Snell herself is complicated. On one hand, the work's title establishes that identity as female, and her "scene" in the alehouse with her comrades toward the end of the story comes across as a revelation of the truth about herself: "I am as much a woman as my mother

ever was, and my real name is Hannah Snell." On the other, the text signals her non-normative gender identity in numerous respects: when she plays soldier as a child, she takes up a masculine role "naturally," as it were, and the narrator flatly declares later that "she had the real soul of a man in her breast"—though some aspects of male behavior, such as sailors' carousing in Lisbon, cause her "the utmost disgust." Finally, her theatrical stint in Goodman's Fields, publicly performing as a woman performing as a man, threw conventional gender categories into a kind of heady (though briefly lucrative) disarray. Her motivations to be a marine seem to exceed her supposedly primary one, to pursue her husband, as her tale develops. In this, her case resembles other publicly recorded accounts of women who dressed as men to follow their husbands or lovers in the military, such as Mrs. Christian Davies, whose widely read *Life and Adventures* (1740) recounted her bravery serving in King William's and the Duke of Marlborough's wars from 1693 to 1706, and Mary Anne Talbot, who fought in the French Revolutionary Wars. Most striking, perhaps, is how positively the text presents Snell's career and prowess as a marine, and how enthusiastically the public seemed to accept her as a heroine, though details of her story reveal the density and subtlety of the period's codes surrounding gender and sexuality, and which lines could and which could never be crossed.

# ***From The Female Soldier; or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell***<sup>1</sup>

To the Public:

Notwithstanding the surprising adventures of this our British heroine, of whom the following pages fully and impartially treat; yet the oddity of her conduct for preserving her sex from being discovered, by which she preserved her virtue, was such that it demands not only respect, but admiration; and as there is nothing to be found in the following sheets but what is matter of fact, it merits the countenance and approbation of every inhabitant of this great isle, especially the fair sex, for whom this treatise is chiefly intended; and the truth of which being confirmed by our heroine's affidavit, made before the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor, the said affidavit is hereunto annexed, in order to prevent the public from being imposed upon by fictitious accounts.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
The extended title on the title page reads, "The female soldier; or, the surprising life and adventures of Hannah Snell, Born in the City of Worcester, who took upon herself the name of James Gray; and, being deserted by her husband, put on mens apparel, and travelled to Coventry in quest of him, where she enlisted in Col. Guise's Regiment of Foot, and marched with that Regiment to Carlisle, in the Time of the Rebellion in Scotland; shewing what happened to her in that City, and her Desertion

from that Regiment. Also a full and true account of her enlisting afterwards into Fraser's Regiment of Marines, then at Portsmouth; and her being draughted out of that Regiment, and sent on board the Swallow Sloop of War, one of Admiral Boscawen's Squadron, then bound for the East-Indies. With the many Vicissitudes of Fortune she met with during that Expedition, particularly at the Siege of Pondicherry, where she received Twelve Wounds. Likewise, the surprising Accident by which she came to hear of the Death of her faithless Husband, whom she went in quest of. The Whole Containing The most surprising Incidents that have happened in any preceeding Age; wherein is laid open all her Adventures, in Mens Cloaths, for near five Years, without her Sex being ever discovered."

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Immediately following the preface of *The Female Soldier* came a deposition sworn by Snell before John Blachford (1682–1759), lord mayor of London, asserting Robert Walker's exclusive right to the publication of her story.[Return to reference 2](#)



### [SOLDIERING AS A CHILD; HER MARRIAGE]

There is one thing so very remarkable in the martial disposition of Hannah Snell, even in her juvenile years, the account of which being so facetious,<sup>3</sup> shall recommend it to the perusal of the reader.

Hannah, when she was scarce ten years of age, had the seeds of heroism as it were implanted in her nature, and she used often to declare to her companions, that she would be a soldier if she lived; and as a preceding testimony of this truth, she formed a company of young soldiers among her play-fellows, and of which she was chief commander, at the head of whom she often appeared, and was used to parade the whole city of Worcester. This body of young volunteers were admired all over the town, and they were styled young Amazon<sup>4</sup> Snell's Company: and this martial spirit grew up with her, until it carried her through the many scenes and vicissitudes she encountered for nigh five years, as is fully and impartially related in this treatise of her adventures.

Some time after she came to London,<sup>5</sup> she contracted an acquaintance with one James Summs, a sailor, who was a Dutchman; this acquaintance was gradually improved into a familiarity, and this familiarity soon created a mutual, though not a criminal passion; for in a little time, Summs made his addresses to her as a lover, and gained her consent, and was married to her at the Fleet, on the sixth day of January, 1743–4.<sup>6</sup> But all his promises of friendship proved instances of the highest perfidy, and he turned out the worst and most unnatural of husbands. Since, though she had charms enough to captivate the heart and secure the affection of any reasonable man, yet she was despised and contemned by her husband, who not only kept criminal company with other women of the basest characters, but also made away with her things, in order to support his luxury, and the daily expenses of his whores. During this unlucky period of the husband's debauchery, [t]he poor woman proved with child, and at the same time felt all the shocks of poverty, without exposing her necessities to her nearest friends. But

at last, her pregnancy laid the foundation for her passing through all the scenes through which she has wandered; for when she was seven months gone with child, her perfidious husband finding himself deeply involved in debt, made an elopement from<sup>7</sup> her. Notwithstanding these her calamities, she patiently bore herself up under them, and in two months after her husband's departure was delivered of a daughter which lived no more than seven months, and was decently interred at her own expense at St. George's Parish in Middlesex.

From the time of her husband's elopement till the time she put on man's clothes, she continued with her sister, who is married to one James Gray, a house carpenter, in Ship Street, Wapping, and from whence she took her departure unknown to any, and was never heard of until her return; and with whom she now dwells.

As she was now free from all the ties arising from nature and consanguinity; she thought herself privileged to roam in quest of the man, who, without reason, had injured her so much; for there are no bounds to be set either to love, jealousy or hatred in the female mind. That she might execute her designs with the better grace, and the more success, she boldly commenced a man, at least in her dress, and no doubt she had a right to do so, since she had the real soul of a man in her breast. Dismayed at no accidents, and giving a full scope to the genuine bent of her heart, she put on a suit of her brother-in-law, Mr. James Gray's clothes, assumed his name, and set out on the 23d of November, 1745, and travelled to Coventry, with a view of finding her husband, where she enlisted on the 27th of the said month of November, in General Guise's regiment,<sup>8</sup> and in the company belonging to Captain Miller.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Pleasant, charming. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Referring to the Amazons, a nation of female warriors in Greek mythology.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: After the death of her parents, Snell moved in with her sister and brother-in-law in Wapping, East London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the Old Style dating system, which was superseded officially in 1752, the new year began on March 25, not January 1, and during the transition to the new system, authors sometimes provided two successive years (as here) for days that fell between those two dates. “The Fleet”: before the Marriage Act of 1753, which stipulated (among other things) that all marriages had to be solemnized in churches, it was common for those seeking speedy or clandestine weddings, especially the poor or those convicted of crimes, to get married at the Fleet Prison in London, which was seen as outside church jurisdiction.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Abandoned.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Guise (1682/3–1765), at this point a lieutenant general, was noted for reckless bravery.[Return to reference 8](#)

## [WOUNDED IN INDIA]

James Gray (for that was the name she took upon herself) was one of the party that was ordered under Lieutenant Campbell, of the Independent Companies, to fetch up some stores from the waterside that had been landed out of the fleet;<sup>9</sup> in doing which they had several skirmishes, and one of the common men was shot dead close on her right side; upon which she fired and killed the very man that shot her comrade; and was very near Lieutenant Campbell when he dropped.

She was also in the first party of the English foot that forded the river to get over to Pondicherry, which took her up to her breast, it being so deep; and was likewise very dangerous, as the French kept continually firing on them from a battery of twelve guns.

On the 11th of August she was put on the picquet guard<sup>1</sup> seven nights successively; and was one of a party that lay two days and two nights without any covering in going through the barrier; and as she was likewise put on duty in the trenches some part of the siege, she was obliged to sit or stand all the while near middle deep in water.

At the throwing up of the trenches she worked very hard for about fourteen days, and was paid 5d. English money per day, by one Mr. Melton, who had been at Goodman's Fields Wells<sup>2</sup> to see her since her singing at those wells.

I cannot help here reflecting on the numerous hardships, fatigues, and dangers she had already undergone since her taking upon herself the habit of a man, owing to the cruel usage of a wicked husband, whom vengeance pursued, as the reader will find in its proper places in the following pages;<sup>3</sup> therefore, in order to keep to the story of our heroine, I shall proceed in my history without further digression.

During all this long space of time, our heroine still maintained her wonted intrepidity, and behaved in every respect consistent with the character of a brave British soldier; and notwithstanding she stood

so deep in water, she fired no less than thirty-seven rounds of shot; and during the engagement, received six shot in her right leg, and five in her left, and what affected her more than all the rest, one so dangerous in the groin that had she applied for any aid and assistance on that account, she must inevitably have discovered what she was resolutely bent at all adventures, if possible, to conceal.

I know the reader will be desirous to know how the ball was extracted out of her groin, and will imagine that it was next to an impossibility it could be performed without a discovery. Now to rectify the scruples of such, I shall relate this account, as attested by herself, which she said was that after she received the twelve wounds, as before mentioned, she remained all that day, and the following night, in the camp, before she was carried to the hospital, and after she was brought there, and laid in a kit,<sup>4</sup> she continued till next day in the greatest agony and pain, the ball still remaining in the flesh of that wound in her groin, and how to extract it she knew not, for she had not discovered to the surgeons that she had any other wound than those in her legs. This wound being so extreme painful, it almost drove her to the precipice of despair; she often thought of discovering herself, that by that means she might be freed from the unspeakable pain she endured, by having the ball taken out by one of the surgeons; but that resolution was soon banished, and she resolved to run all risks, even at the hazard of her life, rather than her sex should be known. Confirmed in this resolution, she communicated her design to a Black woman, who attended upon her, and could get at the surgeon's medicine, and desired her assistance; and her pain being so very great, that she was unable to endure it much longer, she intended to try an experiment upon herself, which was to endeavor to extract the ball out of that wound; but notwithstanding she discovered her pain and resolution to this Black, yet she did not let her know she was a woman. The Black readily came, and afforded her all the assistance she could, by bringing her lint and salve to dress the wound with, which she had recourse to, it being left in the wards where the

patients lay; for which act of friendship she made her a present of a rupee at her departure, which is 3s. 4d.<sup>5</sup> of the currency of that country, but here in England it goes for no more than 2s. 6d. Now the manner in which she extracted the ball was full hardy and desperate: she probed the wound with her finger till she came where the ball lay, and then upon feeling it, thrust in both her finger and thumb, and pulled it out. This was a very rough way of proceeding with one's own flesh; but of two evils, as she thought, this was the least, so rather choosing to have her flesh tore and mangled than her sex discovered. After this operation was performed, she applied some of the healing salves which the Black had brought her, by the help of which she made a perfect cure of that dangerous wound.

The reader will here observe the invincible courage and resolution of this woman who, in the midst of so many inconveniences as she daily encountered, should still be able to guard from a discovery of her sex; but indeed it appears she acted so artfully on every emergency as rendered any attempts of this kind abortive; for notwithstanding the wound she kept from the knowledge of the surgeons, by telling them, when they came to examine her, that all the wounds she had received were in her legs, which they readily believed; and by that means prevented any farther search.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The ensuing narrative describes the English siege of the French East India Company garrison at the port of Pondicherry (now also known as Puducherry) on the southeast coast of India, led by Edward Boscawen (1711–1761), admiral and general, the last major action of the First Carnatic War (1746–48), which was the Indian theater of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48). The river that Snell crosses was

defended at a ford by a French fort at "Areopocong," the town of Ariyankuppam, near Pondicherry. "Independent Companies": such companies were responsible for guarding (garrisoning) particular locations, especially in British colonies, and were not attached to any regiment or battalion.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A picket or piquet guard is an advance unit stationed ahead of the main force to provide early warning of and defense against an enemy attack.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Theater where Snell will perform after she leaves the military. "5d.": that is, five pennies (pennies were abbreviated *d*, after the Latin "denarius").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The text will offer a long account of James Summs's life after he left Snell, including his conviction and execution for a murder he committed in Genoa, though it is reported that he feels most guilty for abandoning his wife.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Three shillings, four pence.[Return to reference 5](#)

## [MANAGING MANHOOD]

Here, however, there was one unavoidable misfortune that she was exposed to, and which she was obliged to struggle with, and bear up with courage, though contrary to her inclinations, and that was the insults of the sailors for want of having a rough beard as they had. And upon which score, when she had her head shaved, they would damn her, in their familiar way, and stigmatize her with the disagreeable title of Miss Molly Gray. As these taunts, however, were not only thrown out in jest, she would return the compliment not only with a smile and an oath,<sup>6</sup> but with a challenge of the best sailor of them all, though not so old as they, to prove herself as good a man as any of them on board, for any wager to be deposited in her master's hands.

Though she seemed not to resent the unlucky nickname they had given her, for very prudential reasons, yet it secretly created her many an uneasy hour: and though by her resolute and manly deportment, she prevented them from carrying the joke too far, yet she could not shake off the odious title till they arrived at Lisbon.

Though she said but little, and that without the least resentment, as before observed, in regard to the nickname she had brought with her to Lisbon, she was determined within herself to shake of that odious appellation in Portugal, if possible, and to behave in such a manner, that the secret she had hitherto kept locked up in her bosom might still remain altogether safe and unsuspected, that she should be happy as to arrive once more in her native country.

Whilst this vessel lay at anchor in the port of Lisbon, the ship's crew would frequently go on shore upon parties of pleasure: and when any such proposal was made by her comrades (for the secret purpose abovementioned) she would be one of the most forward to promote the scheme, and would seem to take a peculiar delight in carousing, or in the commission of any other youthful flights, that they were in reality fond of; though all her compliances were indeed forced, and all she did was the result of necessity, and not choice,



yet she played the part of a boon companion so naturally, and so far distant from what bore the least appearance to effeminacy, that she answered the end proposed. The name of *Miss Molly* was here perfectly buried in oblivion; for as she came into all their wildest measures with the utmost alacrity and readiness, she gave them no grounds to suspect her sex, or give her the least uneasiness on that score.

We shall instance one of the frolics she was there concerned in, only to give the reader an idea of our young adventurer's being a perfect actor. There was one of her intimate acquaintance who was not only a marine as well as herself, but one of her messmates likewise, by name Edward Jefferies, who used frequently to go on shore with her in quest of adventures. Amongst other frolics, these two cronies pursued an amour together, by contracting an acquaintance with two young women of the place, that had no nun's flesh about them.<sup>7</sup> Though neither of them, 'tis true, were to compare with our British beauties, yet the handsomest of the two was not only our heroine's favorite, but was as favorably received as her heart could wish.<sup>8</sup> Jefferies, however, would every now and then throw out an amorous glance at his comrade's mistress, and not being over-fond of his own, told our adventurer that as they were partners in their amours, he thought it was but just and reasonable that he should have a chance at least for a night's lodging with the object of his choice, which he ingeniously acknowledged, he liked much better than his own; and for that purpose he should think he acted fair and above board, would she allow of a toss up to determine the point in debate. Our heroine, in order to comply with her comrade's humor, readily consented to the proposition, notwithstanding she insisted on her absolute right and title, in order to enhance his favor. Accordingly, the moot point was to be determined, by throwing up cross or pile.<sup>9</sup> The lot, in short, luckily fell in favor of Jefferies's side; and though our heroine seemed to part with his mistress with some reluctance, yet to show her friendship and impartiality to her messmate, she delivered up her property in a very formal manner into his arms.

Jefferies highly delighted with his good fortune, and the generosity of his messmate, kept up an intimate correspondence with this Portuguese lady as long as the ship rode at anchor in the port, and retained a greater respect than ordinary for his impartial friend till their happy arrival together at the port of London.

When they set sail for England, the enamored Portugueses would fain have quitted their native place to have had the pleasure of a voyage with their sweethearts; but that indulgence could not be procured, by reason the captain had given express orders that no woman should be admitted on board on any pretense, however plausible however.

But the reader is here to observe, that the reason why this strict order was made was that our female heroine, being in the secret of the intention of the two Portuguese Amazons intending to come on board, had contrived to inform the officers of it; and she declares that her reasons for doing so was, lest by a further intimacy with them, it might be the cause of her sex being discovered.

Our heroine, by thus affecting a gaiety of heart, which was not sincere, and by acting such parts, as in secret gave her the utmost disgust, gave a new turn to her character, and her title to manhood was no more suspected; insomuch that she returned at last to her dear native home, as pure as when she first set out.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Curse. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: They were, that is, not at all like chaste nuns. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Snell was as favorably received by the Portuguese woman as she could wish. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Heads or tails. "Toss up": flip of a coin. "To enhance his favor": to make the favor that Snell did him seem more significant. [Return to reference 9](#)

### [REVEALING WOMANHOOD]

In the midst of all their merriment, and some time before they parted by consent, our heroine being conscious to herself that two suits of clothing were due to her from the regiment,<sup>1</sup> proposed to sell them, fearing still she should lose the same if her sex was discovered; upon which she took 16s. for the two suits of regimental clothing.

The money being now paid, and our heroine having been determined to raise all the ready cash she could before she opened a new scene which she well knew would amuse them; I mean, an open and ingenious discovery of a secret that had been so long kept close, and which she proposed to reveal before they parted; prudently considering that she should never perhaps have so favorable an opportunity again of disclosing her sex to such a number of witnesses at once, who would at any time afterwards be ready to testify the truth of all her merry adventures, as well as the many hardships, fatigues, and imminent dangers she had with so much intrepidity and cheerfulness run through, which, had that important discovery been at that juncture omitted, she wisely reflected that it was very probable that her veracity might be called in question, and that most people might suspect her real adventures, as before particularly related, and look upon the narrative of her life as little better than a romance.<sup>2</sup>

As these motives induced our heroine to make an ingenious discovery of her sex before they parted, as judging it the most seasonable opportunity that could possibly offer itself, she proposed to the company, with her usual freedom and alacrity, to call for the reckoning, and discharge that in the first place, share and share alike, or at least she paid her share; and when that was done, she said, "Now gentlemen, I have one very material secret to disclose to you, and lend me your ears for one minute. 'Tis very probable, gentlemen, that we may not after this merry meeting be so happy as to meet all together at one time and at one place anymore; and 'tis

very probable likewise, that not one of you will ever see your friend and fellow soldier Jemmy Gray any more."

This she uttered in a soft melancholy tone; at which they started, and one and all (as Jemmy was always universally beloved) crying out "God forbid!"—With that she burst out laughing, and then added, "Why, gentlemen, Jemmy Gray, you will find, will, before we part, cast his skin like a snake, and become a new creature.—" And then, turning to her bedfellow Mr. Moody, and addressing herself to him more particularly than the rest, said in her jocular way, "Had you have known, Master Moody, who you had between a pair of sheets with you, you would have come to closer quarters.—In a word, gentlemen, I am as much a woman as my mother ever was, and my real name is Hannah Snell."

At this sudden and unexpected declaration the whole company stood astonished, but after they had pretty well recovered themselves from the consternation she had thrown them into, like Thomas of Didymus,<sup>3</sup> they began to grow hard of belief, and insisted that what she had advanced was all a fiction, and nothing but one of Jemmy's merry conceits to amuse them.

Her brother and sister, however, interposed, and assured them that they would attest the truth of this metamorphosis, if the company required it, upon oath.

This serious confirmation being allowed by them all sufficient to convince them of the matter of fact, they one and all expatiated very largely in their way, in her commendation. They all applauded her intrepidity and presence of mind as a soldier, in the most imminent dangers, even when death itself stared her in the face. In the next place, they sounded forth her praise, in regard to her peculiar dexterity and address<sup>4</sup> as a sailor, and one who very deservedly was taken notice of and highly respected on that account by her superior officers: they proceeded, from that part of her character, to be lavish in her praise with respect to her sincerity as a friend, and to her humane and compassionate regard for all fellow-soldiers and sailors in general, when indisposed, or under any other kind of distress, wherein it lay in her power (through the interest she had in some of

the superior officers) to procure them such relief as the nature of the case required.

They did not however stop here; they expatiated very largely on the evenness of her natural disposition, on the regularity of her conduct, and her peculiar presence of mind, when under the most imminent dangers.

They frankly acknowledged that they never heard her in the least murmur or complain at the toils and fatigues which she frequently underwent; and that she never appeared discontented (as ever they could perceive) though her situation was ever so bad; or in a word, any ways impatient, even when she labored under such a multiplicity of wounds, and felt the most agonizing pains.

As soon as these extraordinary encomiums<sup>5</sup> were over, the abovenamed Mr. Moody, who had been her bedfellow for two nights (as we have hinted before) and the party to whom our Hannah more particularly applied herself at the time of her discovery, was so pleased with the agreeable manner in which she did it, and the encomiums which her comrades gave her, which he was very sensible were no more than the just results of her extraordinary merits, carried the testimonies of his respects to a much higher pitch than any of his comrades; for he protested solemnly and seriously that he was become all on a sudden so enamored with her, on account of her numerous and praiseworthy qualifications, that if Mrs. Hannah had as favorable opinion of him as he had of her, he was very ready and willing to commit matrimony with her that very hour, as in incontestable demonstration of the sincerity of his love and affection.

Though our Hannah made him all the grateful acknowledgments that could be desired for such an unexpected and open declaration of his esteem; yet she modestly refused the generous offer, upon reflecting under what unhappy circumstances she had been in, and what miseries and misfortunes she had been reduced to through the hard-heartedness and inhumanity of a former husband, and was fully determined, if she knew her own mind, never to submit herself to the marriage-yoke<sup>6</sup> any more.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Upon her discharge from the military, Snell and her companions celebrate in an alehouse, along with her sister and brother-in-law. She has already secured the pay for her service and for being wounded (£15) and is still owed two suits of clothes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fiction.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of Jesus's twelve apostles, known as "Doubting Thomas."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Skill. "Peculiar": exceptional.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Declarations of praise.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The bounds of matrimony. Despite this resolution, Snell did marry two more times: to Samuel Eyles, a carpenter, in 1759, with whom she had two children and, after Eyles's death, to a Richard Habgood, in 1772.[Return to reference 6](#)

### [A PUBLIC FIGURE]

It is demonstrable that our heroine (ever since the discovery of her sex to the public) has generously disdained to live a life of indolence and ease; but has shown a more than ordinary ambition to render herself conspicuous in the military way; and the amazing success which she met with on her benefit night at the New Wells in Goodman's Fields,<sup>7</sup> through her common dexterity and address in representing the jovial tar,<sup>8</sup> and the well-disciplined marine, is an incontestable demonstration.

What she did that night, and what additional performances she has exhibited since, has induced the manager of the said house to enter into a contract with her to pay her a weekly salary for the season, which is such a stipend, that no one woman in ten thousand, of her low extraction and want of literature,<sup>9</sup> could, by any act of industry (how laborious soever) with any possibility procure.

As we have brought our heroine on the public stage, and as she, by her wonted presence of mind, and unwearied application to that her casual profession for her present maintenance and support, we imagine a particular detail of all her several performances, together with a transcript of the most humorous and entertaining songs, with which she continues to divert the town, and that too with universal applause, will be thought no disagreeable amusement.<sup>1</sup>

But before we enter on that detail, give us leave to make a few cursory reflections on her extraordinary merit, which, in our humble opinion, must needs place her on a level with the most celebrated ancient heroines. She ought not to be entered on the same list with the late famous Pamela,<sup>2</sup> who for some time alarmed the town with her extraordinary virtues: those, we are all sensible, were imaginary only, and the result of an artful bookseller, or author's brains, who entertained the public, to his no small emolument, with a fabulous story of a lady of his own creating, one that never in reality had any existence; whereas the virtue and chastity in particular of our

heroine, who is no shadow, but true flesh and blood, have been amply displayed in one of the remotest corners of the world; and doubtless will now be displayed all over Europe with equal luster. With what amazing art did she conceal her sex, and by that means preserve her chastity amongst a whole crowd of military men, at the famous siege of Pondicherry, of which we have given we hope a satisfactory account already? With what intrepidity, with what presence of mind, did she behave when on the stormy ocean in a leaky vessel,<sup>3</sup> just ready to sink into the unfathomable abyss? Who, of all the most skillful sailors, was more active and resolute than she was? What marine, how well soever disciplined, ever exercised his small arms better on the poop and quarterdeck than she did? In a word, who fired his pontoon, who brandished his sword with more bravery, and in the attack of the enemy, who with more undaunted courage exposed himself to greater dangers than she did, or who testified a greater readiness to lay down her life for the service of her country, than our female adventurer? If these, and a thousand other instances too tedious to repeat, will not give our heroine an indisputable right and title to as high a character for her honor and virtue as the famed Pamela, though a fictitious one, I am greatly mistaken, and shall freely submit them to the superior judgment of our impartial readers.

## Endnotes

1750

- Note 7: The location in East London was the site of several successive theaters: Snell performed her maneuvers there along with other variety acts. "Benefit night": night at which the proceeds of ticket sales go entirely to the performer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nickname for a sailor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Learning, education.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Later in the narrative, Walker provides a detailed account of Snell's performance, and lyrics to songs she sang.[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Heroine of the sensationally successful and vastly influential novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson (1689–1761). Pamela, like Snell, is a chaste young woman of the laboring classes whose virtue prevails in dangerous circumstances.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The narrative had earlier given an account of Snell's bravery in helping see the ship on which she served, the *Swallow*, through extremely stormy seas on a voyage from Lisbon to Cape Town.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ELIZABETH CARTER

Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806) was a distinguished member of the Bluestocking circle, a group of intellectual women and their male supporters that began meeting in the 1750s, led by Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800). Gifted in languages, Carter published books of poems and numerous translations, and attained an eminence of reputation as a scholar by producing the first English translation of the complete extant works of Epictetus (ca. 50–135 C.E.), the ancient Greek Stoic philosopher. In the following poem, which first appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1741 and later in her 1762 *Poems on Several Occasions*, she gives a witty account of the struggles undergone by the embodied intellect, turning everything “quite upside down” by gendering the mind as female, and depicting the body as its complaining husband.

## A Dialogue

Says Body to Mind, "'tis amazing to see,  
We're so nearly related yet never agree,  
But lead a most wrangling strange sort of a life,  
As great plagues to each other as husband and wife.  
The fault is all yours, who with flagrant oppression,  
5      Encroach every day on my lawful possession.  
The best room<sup>1</sup> in my house you have seized for  
    your own,  
And turned the whole tenement quite upside down,  
While you hourly call in a disorderly crew  
Of vagabond rogues,<sup>2</sup> who have nothing to do  
10      But to run in and out, hurry scurry, and keep  
Such a horrible uproar, I can't get to sleep.  
There's my kitchen<sup>3</sup> sometimes is as empty as  
    sound,  
I call for my servants,<sup>4</sup> not one's to be found:  
They are all sent out on your ladyship's errand,  
15      To fetch some more riotous guests in, I warrant!  
And since things are growing, I see, worse and  
    worse,  
I'm determined to force you to alter your course."  
    Poor Mind, who heard all with extreme  
    moderation,  
20      Thought it now time to speak, and make her  
    allegation.  
"'Tis I that, methinks, have most cause to complain,  
Who am cramped and confined, like a slave in a  
    chain.  
I did but step out, on some weighty affairs,  
To visit, last night, my good friends in the stars,

25 When, before I was got half as high as the moon,  
 You dispatched Pain and Languor to hurry me down;  
 Vi & Armis<sup>5</sup> they seized me, in midst of my flight,  
 And shut me in caverns as dark as the night."  
 "'Twas no more," replied Body, "than what you  
 deserved,  
 30 While you rambled abroad, I at home was half  
 starved:  
 And, unless I had closely confined you in hold,  
 You had left me to perish with hunger and cold."  
 "I've a friend,"<sup>6</sup> answers Mind, "who, though slow, is  
 yet sure,  
 And will rid me, at last, of your insolent power:  
 35 Will knock down your mud walls,<sup>7</sup> the whole fabric<sup>o</sup>  
 demolish,  
 And at once your strong holds and my slavery  
 abolish:  
 And while in the dust your dull ruins decay,  
 I shall snap off my chains, and fly freely away."

## Endnotes

1741, 1762

- Note 1: "The Head" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "The Thoughts" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "The Stomach" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "The Spirits" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: With force and arms (Latin): *trespass vi et armis* is a kind of lawsuit alleging a violent trespass against someone's person or property.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Death" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the Bible, our bodies are commonly said to be "earthen vessels" (see 2 Corinthians 4:7).[Return to reference 7](#)

# Notes

- °: *building*[Return to reference](#) °

## HESTER CHAPONE

From a young age, Hester Chapone (1727–1801) led the life of an intellectual woman. Her father, Thomas Mulso, was a gentleman farmer who encouraged her literary pursuits (her mother reportedly did not). She met numerous writers in her twenties and engaged in a well-known correspondence (1750–51) with Samuel Richardson, which challenged and impressed the older novelist. After a marriage of ten months to John Chapone, a lawyer, ended with his death in 1761, she continued to cultivate long, important friendships with talented women, including Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Montagu, both eminent members of the Bluestocking circle, which supported women's intellectual achievements. At Montagu's suggestion in 1770, Chapone decided to turn the letters of advice she had been sending her young niece since 1765 into a book. The result, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady*, appeared in 1773 and ran to numerous editions into the nineteenth century.

Chapone's *Letters* are an outstanding, influential example of the conduct book, a genre directed particularly at middle-class young women, urging them to live useful, morally vigilant, modest lives. Most were written by men: notable among them were the *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) by James Fordyce (1720–1796; see [p. 707](#)) and *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774) by John Gregory (1724–1773), who tells its addressees to keep their learning to themselves if they wish to attract husbands. Chapone instead recommends that young women explore as many branches of respectable knowledge as they can, including not just household management but also literature, history, the Christian religion, botany, astronomy, the list goes on. (She warns her addressee about novels, advising her "never to read any thing of the sentimental kind" without guidance.) Mary Wollstonecraft, the great feminist author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), singled out Chapone among other conduct-book writers: "Mrs. Chapone's *Letters*

are written with such good sense, and unaffected humility, and contain so many useful observations, that I only mention them to pay the worthy writer this tribute of respect." (Wollstonecraft had only disdain for the deceptive, constricting advice of Fordyce and Gregory.) The selection below elaborates Chapone's views of a social arena of paramount importance to her and to countless other women of the eighteenth-century leisured classes: the emotionally full, mutually supportive female friendship. She inculcates traditional moral and religious teachings, warning young women to choose friends with special care, alert to the dangers of levity and vanity. But instead of adhering to these virtues merely to please fathers and potential husbands, young women should embrace them, according to Chapone, to keep themselves emotionally satisfied, safe, and in as much control of their own lives as possible.

# ***From Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady***

## ***From Letter V: On the Regulation of the Affections***

It is a melancholy consideration that the judgment can only be formed by experience, which generally comes too late for our own use, and is seldom accepted for that of others.—I fear it is in vain for me to tell you what dangerous mistakes I made in the early choice of friends—how incapable I then was of finding out such as were fit for me, and how little I was acquainted with the true nature of friendship, when I thought myself most fervently engaged in it!—I am sensible<sup>1</sup> all this will hardly persuade you to choose by the eyes of others, or even to suspect that your own may be deceived.—Yet, if you should give any weight to my observations, it may not be quite useless to mention to you some of the essential requisites in a friend; and to exhort you never to choose one in whom they are wanting.

The first of these is a deep and sincere regard for religion.—If your friend draws her principles from the same source with yourself, if the gospel precepts are the rule of her life, as well as of yours, you will always know what to expect from her, and have one common standard of right and wrong to refer to, by which to regulate all material points of conduct. The woman who thinks lightly of sacred things, or who is ever heard to speak of them with levity or indifference, cannot reasonably be expected to pay a more serious regard to the laws of friendship, or to be uniformly punctual in the performance of any of the duties of society:—take no such person to your bosom, however recommended by good humor, wit, or any other qualification; nor let gaiety or thoughtlessness be deemed an excuse for offending in this important point.

\* \* \*



A due regard to reputation is the next indispensable qualification.—“Have regard to thy name,” saith the wise son of Sirach, “for that will continue with thee above a thousand great treasures of gold.”<sup>2</sup>—The young person who is careless of blame, and indifferent to the esteem of the wise and prudent part of the world, is not only a most dangerous companion, but gives a certain proof of the want of rectitude in her own mind.—Discretion is the guardian of all the virtues; and, when she forsakes them, they cannot long resist the attacks of an enemy.—There is a profligacy of spirit in defying the rules of decorum, and despising censure, which seldom ends otherwise than in extreme corruption and utter ruin.—Modesty and prudence are qualities that early display themselves, and are easily discerned: where these do not appear, you should avoid not only friendship, but every step towards intimacy, lest your own character should suffer with that of your companion; but, where they shine forth in any eminent degree, you may safely cultivate an acquaintance, in the reasonable hope of finding the solid fruits of virtue beneath such sweet and promising blossoms: should you be disappointed, you will at least have run no risk in the search after them, and may cherish as a creditable acquaintance the person so adorned, though she may not deserve a place in your inmost heart.

The understanding must next be examined:—and this is a point which requires so much understanding to judge of in another, that I must earnestly recommend to you not to rely entirely on your own, but to take the opinion of your older friends.—I do not wish you to seek for bright and uncommon talents, though these are sources of inexhaustible delight and improvement, when found in company with solid judgment and sound principles.—Good sense (by which I mean a capacity for reasoning justly, and discerning truly) applied to the uses of life, and exercised in distinguishing characters and directing conduct, is alone *necessary* to an intimate connection; but without this, the best intentions—though certain of reward hereafter—may fail of producing their effects in this life; nor can they singly constitute the character of an useful and valuable friend.—On the other hand, the most dazzling genius, or the most engaging wit and

humor, can but ill answer the purposes of friendship, without plain common sense and a faculty of just reasoning.

What can one do with those who will not be answered with reason—and who, when you are endeavoring to convince or persuade them by serious argument, will parry the blow with a witty repartee, or a stroke of poignant raillery?—I know not whether such a reply is less provoking than that of an obstinate fool, who answers your strongest reasons with—“What you say may be very true, but this is my way of thinking.”—

\* \* \*

Fancy,<sup>3</sup> I know, will have her share in friendship, as well as in love;—you must please as well as serve me before I can love you as the friend of my heart.—But the faculties that please for an evening may not please for life.—The humorous man soon runs through his stock of odd stories, mimicry, and jest; and the wit, by constantly repeated flashes, confounds and tires one’s intellect, instead of enlivening it with agreeable surprise:—but good sense can neither tire nor wear out;—it improves by exercise—and increases in value, the more it is known:—the pleasure it gives in conversation is lasting and satisfactory, because it is accompanied with improvement;—its worth is proportioned to the occasion that calls for it, and rises highest on the most interesting topics;—the heart, as well as the understanding, finds its account in it;—and our noblest interests are promoted by the entertainment we receive from such a companion.

A good temper is the next qualification \* \* \*. But as this is a quality in which you may be deceived, without a long and intimate acquaintance, you must not be hasty in forming connections before you have had sufficient opportunity for making observations on this head.—A young person, when pleased and enlivened by the presence of her youthful companions, seldom shows ill temper; which must be extreme indeed, if it is not at least controllable in such situations. But, you must watch her behavior to her own family, and the degree of estimation she stands in with them.—Observe her manner to servants and inferiors—to children—and even to animals.

—See in what manner she bears disappointments, contradiction, and restraint; and what degree of vexation she expresses on any accident of loss or trouble. If in such little trials she shows a meek, resigned, and cheerful temper, she will probably preserve it on greater occasions; but if she is impatient and discontented under these, how will she support the far greater evils which may await her in her progress through life? If you should have an opportunity of seeing her in sickness, observe whether her complaints are of a mild and gentle kind—forced from her by pain, and restrained as much as possible—or whether they are expressions of a turbulent, rebellious mind, that hardly submits to the divine hand. See whether she is tractable, considerate, kind, and grateful to those about her; or whether she takes the opportunity, which their compassion gives her, to tyrannize over and torment them. Women are in general very liable to ill health, which must necessarily make them in some measure troublesome and disagreeable to those they live with.—They should therefore take the more pains to lighten the burden as much as possible, by patience and good humor; and be careful not to let their infirmities break in on the health, freedom, or enjoyments of others, more than is needful and just.—Some ladies seem to think it very improper for any person within their reach to enjoy a moment's comfort while they are in pain; and make no scruple of sacrificing to their own least convenience, whenever they are indisposed, the proper rest, meals, or refreshments of their servants, and even sometimes of their husbands and children. But their selfishness defeats its own purpose, as it weakens that affection and tender pity which excites the most assiduous services, and affords the most healing balm to the heart of the sufferer.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Aware. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Ecclesiasticus 41:12. This book, not to be confused with Ecclesiastes, is also known as the Book of Sirach and is included among the apocryphal books of the Bible in the Anglican, King James Version, though it was accepted as canonical in the Roman Catholic and other traditions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here, a powerful, perhaps nonrational attraction to or fondness for a particular person.[Return to reference 3](#)

# **SAMUEL JOHNSON**

## **1709–1784**

Samuel Johnson was famous as a talker in his own time, and his conversation (preserved by James Boswell and others) has been famous ever since. But his wisdom survives above all in his writings: a few superb poems; the grave *Rambler* essays, which established his reputation as a stylist and a moralist; the lessons about life in *Rasselas* and the *Lives of the Poets*; and literary criticism that ranks among the best in English. The virtues of the talk and the writings are the same. They come hot from a mind well stored with knowledge, searingly honest, humane, and quick to seize the unexpected but appropriate image of truth. Johnson's wit is timeless, for it deals with the great facts of human experience, with hope and happiness and loss and duty and the fear of death. Whatever topic he addresses, whatever the form in which he writes, he holds to one commanding purpose: to see life as it is.

Two examples must suffice here. When Anna Williams wondered why a man should make a beast of himself through drunkenness, Johnson answered that "he who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man." In this reply Williams's tired metaphor is so charged with an awareness of the dark aspects of human life that it comes almost unbearably alive. Such moments characterize Johnson's writings as well. For instance, in reviewing the book of a fatuous would-be philosopher who blandly explained away the pains of poverty by declaring that a kindly providence compensates the

poor by making them more hopeful, more healthy, more easily pleased, and less sensitive than the rich, Johnson retorted: "The poor indeed are insensible of many little vexations which sometimes embitter the possessions and pollute the enjoyments of the rich. They are not pained by casual incivility, or mortified by the mutilation of a compliment; but this happiness is like that of a malefactor who ceases to feel the cords that bind him when the pincers are tearing his flesh."

Johnson had himself known the pains of poverty. During his boyhood and youth in Lichfield, his father's bookshop and other businesses plunged into debt, so that he was forced to leave Oxford before he had taken a degree. An early marriage to a well-to-do widow, Elizabeth ("Tetty") Porter, more than twenty years older than he, enabled him to open a school. But the school failed, and he moved to London to make his way as a writer. The years between 1737, when he first arrived there with his pupil David Garrick (who later became the leading actor of his generation), and 1755, when the publication of the *Dictionary* established his reputation, were often difficult. He supported himself at first as best he could by doing hack work for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but gradually his own original writings began to attract attention.

In 1747 Johnson published the Plan of his *Dictionary*, and he spent the next seven years compiling it—although he had expected to finish it in three. When in 1748 Dr. Adams, a friend from Oxford days, questioned his ability to carry out such a work alone so fast and reminded him that the *Dictionary* of the French Academy had needed forty academicians working for forty years, Johnson replied with humorous jingoism: "Sir, thus it is. This is the proportion. Let me see; forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman."

Johnson's achievement in compiling the *Dictionary* seems even greater when we realize that he was writing some of his best essays and poems during the same period. Although the booksellers who published the *Dictionary* paid him what was then the large sum of £1575, it was not enough to enable him to support his household,

buy materials, and pay the wages of the six assistants whom he employed year by year until the task was accomplished. He therefore had to earn more money by writing. In 1749, his early tragedy *Irene* (pronounced *I-re-ně*) was produced at long last by his old friend Garrick, by then the manager of Drury Lane. The play was not a success, although Johnson made some profit from it. In the same year appeared his finest poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes." With the *Rambler* (1750–52) and the *Idler* (1758–60), two series of periodical essays, Johnson found a devoted audience, but his pleasure was tempered by the death of his wife in 1752. He never remarried.

Johnson is thought of as the great generalizer, but what gives his generalizations strength is that they are rooted in the particulars of his self-knowledge. He had constantly to fight against what he called "filling the mind" with illusions to avoid the call of duty, his own black melancholy, and the realities of life. The portrait (largely a self-portrait) of Sober in *Idler* 31 is revealing: he occupies his idle hours with crafts and hobbies and has now taken up chemistry—he "sits and counts the drops as they come from his retort, and forgets that, whilst a drop is falling, a moment flies away."

His theme of themes is expressed in the title "The Vanity of Human Wishes": the dangerous but all-pervasive power of wishful thinking, the feverish intrusion of desires and hopes that distort reality and lead to false expectations. Almost all of Johnson's major writings—verse satire, moral essay, or the prose fable *Rasselas* (1759)—express this theme. In *Rasselas* it is called "the hunger of imagination, which preys upon life," picturing things as one would like them to be, not as they are. The travelers who are the fable's protagonists pursue some formula for happiness; they reflect our naive hope, against the lessons of experience, that one choice of life will make us happy forever.

Johnson also developed a style of his own: balanced, extended sentences, phrases, or clauses moving to carefully controlled rhythms, in language that is characteristically general, often Latinate, and frequently polysyllabic. This style is far from Swift's

simplicity or Addison's neatness, but it never becomes obscure or turgid, for even a very complex sentence reveals—as it should—the structure of the thought, and the learned words are always precisely used. While reading early scientists to collect words for the *Dictionary*, Johnson developed a new vocabulary: for example, *obtund*, *exuberate*, *fugacity*, and *frigorific*. But he used many of these strange words in conversation as well as in his writings, often with a peculiarly Johnsonian felicity, describing the operations of the mind with a scientific precision.

After Johnson received his pension from the Crown in 1762, he no longer had to write for a living, and because he held that “no man but a blockhead” ever wrote for any other reason, he produced as little as he decently could during the last twenty years of his life. His edition of Shakespeare, long delayed, was published in 1765, with a fine preface and fascinating notes. His last important work is the *Lives of the Poets*, which came out in two parts in 1779 and 1781. These biographical and critical prefaces were commissioned by a group of booksellers who had joined together to publish a large collection of the English poets and who wished to give their venture the prestige that Johnson would lend it. The poets to be included (except for four insisted on by Johnson) were selected by the booksellers according to current fashions. Therefore the collection begins with Abraham Cowley and John Milton and ends with Thomas Gray, and it omits such standard poets as Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney, Donne, and Marvell.

The ideal poet, according to Johnson, has a genius for making the things we see every day seem new. The same might be said of Johnson himself as a critic. Johnson is the great champion, in criticism, of common sense and the common reader. Without denying the right of the poet to flights of imagination, he also insists that poems must make sense, please readers, and help us not only understand the world but cope with it. Johnson holds poems to the truth, as he sees it: the principles of nature, logic, religion, and morality. Not even Shakespeare can be excused when “he sacrifices virtue to convenience” and “seems to write without any moral



purpose." Yet Johnson is no worshiper of authority or mere "correctness." As a critic he is always the empiricist, testing theory by practice. He is determined to judge literature by its truth to life, not by abstract rules, and is never afraid to state the obvious, whether the lack of human interest in *Paradise Lost* or Shakespeare's temptation by puns. But at its best, as in the praise of Milton or Shakespeare, his criticism engages some of the deepest questions about literature: why it endures, and how it helps us endure.

**The Vanity of Human Wishes** This poem is an imitation of Juvenal's *Satire* 10. Although it closely follows the order and the ideas of the Latin poem, it remains a very personal work, for Johnson has used the Roman Stoic's satire as a means of expressing his own sense of the tragic and comic in human life. He has tried to reproduce in English verse the qualities he thought especially Juvenalian: stateliness, pointed sentences, and declamatory grandeur. The poem is difficult because of the extreme compactness of the style: every line is forced to convey the greatest possible amount of meaning. Johnson believed that "great thoughts are always general," but he certainly did not intend that the general should fade into the abstract: observe, for example, how he makes personified nouns concrete, active, and dramatic by using them as subjects of active and dramatic verbs: "Hate *dogs* their flight, and Insult *mocks* their end" (line 78). But the difficulty of the poem is also related to its theme, the difficulty of seeing anything clearly on this earth. In a world of blindness and illusion, human beings must struggle to find a point of view that will not deceive them, and a happiness that can last.

# The Vanity of Human Wishes

## *In Imitation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal*

Let Observation, with extensive view,  
Survey mankind, from China to Peru;  
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,  
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;  
5 Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate  
O’erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate,  
Where wavering man, betrayed by venturous Pride  
To tread the dreary paths without a guide,  
As treacherous phantoms in the mist delude,  
Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good.  
10 How rarely Reason guides the stubborn choice,  
Rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant voice;  
How nations sink, by darling schemes oppressed,  
When Vengeance listens to the fool’s request.  
Fate wings with every wish the afflictive dart,  
15 Each gift of nature, and each grace of art;  
With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,  
With fatal sweetness elocution flows,  
Impeachment stops the speaker’s powerful breath,  
And restless fire precipitates on death.  
20 But scarce observed, the knowing and the bold  
Fall in the general massacre of gold;  
Wide-wasting pest! that rages unconfined,  
And crowds with crimes the records of mankind;  
For gold his sword the hireling ruffian draws,  
25 For gold the hireling judge distorts the laws;  
Wealth heaped on wealth, nor truth nor safety buys,  
The dangers gather as the treasures rise.  
Let History tell where rival kings command,

30 And dubious title<sup>o</sup> shakes the madded land,  
When statutes glean the refuse of the sword,  
How much more safe the vassal than the lord;  
Low skulks the hind<sup>o</sup> beneath the rage of power,  
And leaves the wealthy traitor in the Tower,<sup>1</sup>  
Untouched his cottage, and his slumbers sound,  
35 Though Confiscation's vultures hover round.  
The needy traveler, serene and gay,  
Walks the wild heath, and sings his toil away.  
Does envy seize thee? crush the upbraiding joy,  
Increase his riches and his peace destroy;  
40 New fears in dire vicissitude invade,  
The rustling brake<sup>o</sup> alarms, and quivering shade,  
Nor light nor darkness bring his pain relief,  
One shows the plunder, and one hides the thief.  
Yet still one general cry the skies assails,  
45 And gain and grandeur load the tainted gales;  
Few know the toiling statesman's fear or care,  
The insidious rival and the gaping heir.  
Once more, Democritus,<sup>2</sup> arise on earth,  
With cheerful wisdom and instructive mirth,  
50 See motley life in modern trappings dressed,  
And feed with varied fools the eternal jest:  
Thou who couldst laugh where Want enchained  
Caprice,  
Toil crushed Conceit, and man was of a piece;  
Where Wealth unloved without a mourner died;  
55 And scarce a sycophant was fed by Pride;  
Where ne'er was known the form of mock debate,  
Or seen a new-made mayor's unwieldy state;<sup>3</sup>  
Where change of favorites made no change of laws,  
And senates heard before they judged a cause;  
60 How wouldst thou shake at Britain's modish tribe,  
Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe?  
Attentive truth and nature to descry,

And pierce each scene with philosophic eye.  
To thee were solemn toys or empty show  
65 The robes of pleasure and the veils of woe:  
All aid the farce, and all thy mirth maintain,  
Whose joys are causeless, or whose griefs are vain.  
Such was the scorn that filled the sage's mind,  
Renewed at every glance on human kind;  
70 How just that scorn ere yet thy voice declare,  
Search every state, and canvass every prayer.  
Unnumbered suppliants crowd Preferment's gate,  
Athirst for wealth, and burning to be great;  
Delusive Fortune hears the incessant call,  
75 They mount, they shine, evaporate,<sup>4</sup> and fall.  
On every stage the foes of peace attend,  
Hate dogs their flight, and Insult mocks their end.  
Love ends with hope, the sinking statesman's door  
Pours in the morning worshiper no more;<sup>5</sup>  
80 For growing names the weekly scribbler lies,  
To growing wealth the dedicator flies;  
From every room descends the painted face,  
That hung the bright palladium<sup>6</sup> of the place;  
And smoked in kitchens, or in auctions sold,  
85 To better features yields the frame of gold;  
For now no more we trace in every line  
Heroic worth, benevolence divine:  
The form distorted justifies the fall,  
And Detestation rids the indignant wall.  
90 But will not Britain hear the last appeal,  
Sign her foes' doom, or guard her favorites' zeal?  
Through Freedom's sons no more remonstrance  
rings,  
Degrading nobles and controlling kings;  
Our supple tribes repress their patriot throats,  
95 And ask no questions but the price of votes;  
With weekly libels and septennial ale,<sup>7</sup>

Their wish is full to riot and to rail.

100 In full-blown dignity, see Wolsey<sup>8</sup> stand,  
Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand:  
To him the church, the realm, their powers consign,  
Through him the rays of regal bounty shine;  
Turned by his nod the stream of honor flows,  
His smile alone security bestows:  
105 Still to new heights his restless wishes tower,  
Claim leads to claim, and power advances power;  
Till conquest unresisted ceased to please,  
And rights submitted, left him none to seize.  
At length his sovereign frowns—the train of state  
Mark the keen glance, and watch the sign to hate.  
110 Where'er he turns, he meets a stranger's eye,  
His suppliants scorn him, and his followers fly;  
At once is lost the pride of awful state,  
The golden canopy, the glittering plate,  
The regal palace, the luxurious board,  
115 The liveried army, and the menial lord.  
With age, with cares, with maladies oppressed,  
He seeks the refuge of monastic rest.  
Grief aids disease, remembered folly stings,  
And his last sighs reproach the faith of kings.  
120 Speak thou, whose thoughts at humble peace  
repine,  
Shall Wolsey's wealth, with Wolsey's end be thine?  
Or liv'st thou now, with safer pride content,  
The wisest justice on the banks of Trent?  
For why did Wolsey, near the steeps of fate,  
125 On weak foundations raise the enormous weight?  
Why but to sink beneath misfortune's blow,  
With louder ruin to the gulfs below?  
What gave great Villiers<sup>9</sup> to the assassin's knife,  
And fixed disease on Harley's<sup>1</sup> closing life?  
130 What murdered Wentworth, and what exiled Hyde,<sup>2</sup>

By kings protected, and to kings allied?  
What but their wish indulged in courts to shine,  
And power too great to keep or to resign?  
When first the college rolls receive his name,  
135 The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame;  
Through all his veins the fever of renown  
Burns from the strong contagion of the gown:<sup>3</sup>  
O'er Bodley's dome<sup>4</sup> his future labors spread,  
And Bacon's<sup>5</sup> mansion trembles o'er his head.  
140 Are these thy views? proceed, illustrious youth,  
And Virtue guard thee to the throne of Truth!  
Yet should thy soul indulge the generous heat,  
Till captive Science<sup>o</sup> yields her last retreat;  
Should Reason guide thee with her brightest ray,  
145 And pour on misty Doubt resistless day;  
Should no false kindness lure to loose delight,  
Nor praise relax, nor difficulty fright;  
Should tempting Novelty thy cell refrain,  
And Sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain;  
150 Should Beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,  
Nor claim the triumph of a lettered heart;  
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,  
Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;  
Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,  
155 Nor think the doom of man reversed for thee:  
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,  
And pause a while from letters, to be wise;  
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the patron,<sup>6</sup> and the jail.  
160 See nations slowly wise, and meanly just,  
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.  
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend,  
Hear Lydiat's life, and Galileo's<sup>7</sup> end.  
Nor deem, when Learning her last prize bestows,  
165 The glittering eminence exempt from foes;

See when the vulgar 'scapes, despised or awed,  
Rebellion's vengeful talons seize on Laud.<sup>8</sup>  
From meaner minds, though smaller fines content,  
The plundered palace or sequestered rent;<sup>9</sup>  
170 Marked out by dangerous parts<sup>o</sup> he meets the shock,  
And fatal Learning leads him to the block:  
Around his tomb let Art and Genius weep,  
But hear his death, ye blockheads, hear and sleep.  
The festal blazes, the triumphal show,  
175 The ravished standard, and the captive foe,  
The senate's thanks, the gazette's pompous tale,  
With force resistless o'er the brave prevail.  
Such bribes the rapid Greek<sup>o</sup> o'er Asia whirled,  
For such the steady Romans shook the world;  
180 For such in distant lands the Britons shine,  
And stain with blood the Danube or the Rhine;  
This power has praise that virtue scarce can warm,  
Till fame supplies the universal charm.  
Yet Reason frowns on War's unequal game,  
185 Where wasted nations raise a single name,  
And mortgaged states their grandsires' wreaths  
regret  
From age to age in everlasting debt;  
Wreaths which at last the dear-bought right convey  
To rust on medals, or on stones decay.  
190 On what foundation stands the warrior's pride?  
How just his hopes, let Swedish Charles<sup>1</sup> decide;  
A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,  
No dangers fright him, and no labors tire;  
O'er love, o'er fear, extends his wide domain,  
195 Unconquered lord of pleasure and of pain;  
No joys to him pacific scepters yield,  
War sounds the trump, he rushes to the field;  
Behold surrounding kings their powers combine,  
And one capitulate, and one resign;<sup>2</sup>  
200



Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in  
vain;  
"Think nothing gained," he cries, "till naught remain,  
On Moscow's walls till Gothic standards fly,  
And all be mine beneath the polar sky."  
The march begins in military state,  
205 And nations on his eye suspended wait;  
Stern Famine guards the solitary coast,  
And Winter barricades the realms of Frost;  
He comes, nor want nor cold his course delay—  
Hide, blushing Glory, hide Pultowa's day:  
210 The vanquished hero leaves his broken bands,  
And shows his miseries in distant lands;  
Condemned a needy suppliant to wait,  
While ladies interpose, and slaves debate.  
But did not Chance at length her error mend?  
215 Did no subverted empire mark his end?  
Did rival monarchs give the fatal wound?  
Or hostile millions press him to the ground?  
His fall was destined to a barren strand,  
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;<sup>3</sup>  
220 He left the name at which the world grew pale,  
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.  
All times their scenes of pompous woes afford,  
From Persia's tyrant to Bavaria's lord.<sup>4</sup>  
In gay hostility, and barbarous pride,  
225 With half mankind embattled at his side,  
Great Xerxes comes to seize the certain prey,  
And starves exhausted regions in his way;  
Attendant Flattery counts his myriads o'er,  
Till counted myriads soothe his pride no more;  
230 Fresh praise is tried till madness fires his mind,  
The waves he lashes, and enchains the wind;<sup>5</sup>  
New powers are claimed, new powers are still  
bestowed,

Till rude resistance lops the spreading god;  
The daring Greeks deride the martial show,  
235 And heap their valleys with the gaudy foe;  
The insulted sea with humbler thoughts he gains,  
A single skiff to speed his flight remains;  
The encumbered oar scarce leaves the dreaded  
coast  
Through purple billows and a floating host.  
240 The bold Bavarian, in a luckless hour,  
Tries the dread summits of Caesarean power,  
With unexpected legions bursts away,  
And sees defenseless realms receive his sway;  
Short sway! fair Austria spreads her mournful  
245 charms,  
The queen, the beauty, sets the world in arms;  
From hill to hill the beacon's rousing blaze  
Spreads wide the hope of plunder and of praise;  
The fierce Croatian, and the wild Hussar,<sup>6</sup>  
With all the sons of ravage crowd the war;  
250 The baffled prince in honor's flattering bloom  
Of hasty greatness finds the fatal doom,  
His foes' derision, and his subjects' blame,  
And steals to death from anguish and from shame.  
Enlarge my life with multitude of days!  
255 In health, in sickness, thus the suppliant prays;  
Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know,  
That life protracted is protracted woe.  
Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,  
And shuts up all the passages of joy;  
260 In vain their gifts the bounteous seasons pour,  
The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flower;  
With listless eyes the dotard views the store,  
He views, and wonders that they please no more;  
Now pall the tasteless meats, and joyless wines,  
265 And Luxury with sighs her slave resigns.

Approach, ye minstrels, try the soothing strain,  
Diffuse the tuneful lenitives of pain:○  
No sounds, alas! would touch the impervious ear,  
Though dancing mountains witnessed Orpheus<sup>z</sup>  
270       near;  
Nor lute nor lyre his feeble powers attend,  
Nor sweeter music of a virtuous friend,  
But everlasting dictates crowd his tongue,  
Perversely grave, or positively wrong.  
The still returning tale, and lingering jest,  
275       Perplex the fawning niece and pampered guest,  
While growing hopes scarce awe the gathering  
          sneer,  
And scarce a legacy can bribe to hear;  
The watchful guests still hint the last offense,  
The daughter's petulance, the son's expense,  
280       Improve○ his heady rage with treacherous skill,  
And mold his passions till they make his will.  
          Unnumbered maladies his joints invade,  
Lay siege to life and press the dire blockade;  
But unextinguished avarice still remains,  
285       And dreaded losses aggravate his pains;  
He turns, with anxious heart and crippled hands,  
His bonds of debt, and mortgages of lands;  
Or views his coffers with suspicious eyes,  
Unlocks his gold, and counts it till he dies.  
290       But grant, the virtues of a temperate prime  
Bless with an age exempt from scorn or crime;  
An age that melts with unperceived decay,  
And glides in modest innocence away;  
Whose peaceful day Benevolence endears,  
295       Whose night congratulating Conscience cheers;  
The general favorite as the general friend:  
Such age there is, and who shall wish its end?  
          Yet even on this her load Misfortune flings,

300 To press the weary minutes' flagging wings;  
New sorrow rises as the day returns,  
A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.  
Now kindred Merit fills the sable bier,  
Now lacerated Friendship claims a tear;  
305 Year chases year, decay pursues decay,  
Still drops some joy from withering life away;  
New forms arise, and different views engage,  
Superfluous lags the veteran<sup>8</sup> on the stage,  
Till pitying Nature signs the last release,  
And bids afflicted Worth retire to peace.  
310 But few there are whom hours like these await,  
Who set unclouded in the gulfs of Fate.  
From Lydia's monarch<sup>9</sup> should the search descend,  
By Solon cautioned to regard his end,  
In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,  
315 Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise!  
From Marlborough's<sup>1</sup> eyes the streams of dotage  
flow,  
And Swift<sup>2</sup> expires a driveler and a show.  
The teeming mother, anxious for her race,<sup>o</sup>  
Begs for each birth the fortune of a face:  
320 Yet Vane<sup>3</sup> could tell what ills from beauty spring;  
And Sedley<sup>4</sup> cursed the form that pleased a king.  
Ye nymphs of rosy lips and radiant eyes,  
Whom Pleasure keeps too busy to be wise,  
Whom Joys with soft varieties invite,  
325 By day the frolic, and the dance by night;  
Who frown with vanity, who smile with art,  
And ask the latest fashion of the heart;  
What care, what rules your heedless charms shall  
save,  
Each nymph your rival, and each youth your slave?  
330 Against your fame with Fondness Hate combines,  
The rival batters, and the lover mines.<sup>5</sup>

With distant voice neglected Virtue calls,  
Less heard and less, the faint remonstrance falls;  
Tired with contempt, she quits the slippery reign,  
335 And Pride and Prudence take her seat in vain.  
In crowd at once, where none the pass defend,  
The harmless freedom, and the private friend.  
The guardians yield, by force superior plied:  
To Interest, Prudence; and to Flattery, Pride.  
340 Now Beauty falls betrayed, despised, distressed,  
And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest.  
Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects  
find?  
Must dull Suspense<sup>o</sup> corrupt the stagnant mind?  
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
345 Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?  
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,  
No cries invoke the mercies of the skies?  
Inquirer, cease; petitions yet remain,  
Which Heaven may hear, nor deem religion vain.  
350 Still raise for good the supplicating voice,  
But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.  
Safe in his power, whose eyes discern afar  
The secret ambush of a specious prayer.  
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,  
355 Secure, whate'er he gives, he gives the best.  
Yet when the sense of sacred presence fires,  
And strong devotion to the skies aspires,  
Pour forth thy fervors for a healthful mind,  
Obedient passions, and a will resigned;  
360 For love, which scarce collective man can fill;<sup>6</sup>  
For patience sovereign o'er transmuted ill;  
For faith, that panting for a happier seat,  
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat:  
365 These goods for man the laws of Heaven ordain,

These goods he grants, who grants the power to  
gain;  
With these celestial Wisdom calms the mind,  
And makes the happiness she does not find.

## Endnotes

1749

- Note 1: That is, the Tower of London, which served as a prison. Johnson first wrote “bonny traitor,” recalling the Jacobite uprising of 1745 and the execution of four of its Scot leaders.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A Greek philosopher of the late 5th century B.C.E., remembered as the “laughing philosopher” because men’s follies only moved him to mirth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pomp. Mayors organized costly processions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Disperse in vapors, like fireworks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Statesmen gave interviews and received friends and petitioners at levees, or morning receptions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An image of Pallas Athena that fell from heaven and was preserved at Troy. Not until it was stolen by Diomedes could the city fall to the Greeks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ministers and even the king freely bought support by bribing members of Parliament, who in turn won elections by buying votes. “Weekly libels”: politically motivated lampoons published in the weekly newspapers. “Septennial ale”: the ale given away by candidates at parliamentary elections, held at least every seven years.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Thomas Cardinal Wolsey (ca. 1475–1530), lord chancellor and favorite of Henry VIII. Shakespeare dramatized his fall in *Henry VIII*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, favorite of James I and Charles I, was assassinated in 1628.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, chancellor of the exchequer and later lord treasurer under Queen Anne (1710–14), impeached and imprisoned by the Whigs in 1715.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (“to kings allied” because his daughter married James, Duke of York), lord chancellor under Charles II (impeached in 1667, he fled to the Continent). Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, intimate and adviser of Charles I, impeached by the Long Parliament and executed in 1641.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Academic robe; here associated with the poisoned shirt that tormented Hercules.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Bodleian Library, Oxford.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–1294), scientist and philosopher, taught at Oxford, where his study, according to tradition, would collapse if a man greater than he should appear at Oxford.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the first edition, “garret.” For the reason of the change see Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (p. 888).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Astronomer (1564–1642) who was imprisoned as a heretic by the Inquisition in 1633; he died blind. Thomas Lydiat (1572–1646), Oxford scholar, died impoverished because of his Royalist sympathies.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Appointed archbishop of Canterbury by Charles I, William Laud followed rigorously High Church policies and was executed by order of the Long Parliament in 1645.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: During the Commonwealth, the estates of many Royalists were pillaged and their incomes confiscated (“sequestered”) by the state.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718). Defeated by the Russians at Pultowa (1709), he escaped to Turkey and tried to form an alliance against Russia with the sultan. Returning to Sweden, he attacked Norway and was killed in the attack on Fredrikshald.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Frederick IV of Denmark capitulated to Charles in 1700. Augustus II of Poland resigned his throne to Charles in 1704.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: It was disputed whether Charles was shot by the enemy or by his own aide-de-camp.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Elector Charles Albert caused the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48) when he contested the crown of the empire with Maria Theresa (“Fair Austria” in line 245). “Persia’s tyrant”: Xerxes invaded Greece and was totally defeated in the sea battle off Salamis, 480 B.C.E.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When storms destroyed Xerxes’ boats, he commanded his men to punish the wind and sea.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hungarian light cavalry.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A legendary poet who played on the lyre so beautifully that even stones were moved.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, of life, not of war.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Croesus, the wealthy and fortunate king, was warned by Solon not to count himself happy until he ceased to live. He lost his crown to Cyrus the Great of Persia.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, England’s brilliant general during most of the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jonathan Swift, who passed the last four years of his life in utter senility.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Anne Vane, mistress of Frederick, Prince of Wales (son of George II).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Catherine Sedley, mistress of James II.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plants mines beneath, as in the siege of a fortress.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Which humankind as a whole can hardly over-task.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes



- °: *claim of right*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peasant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thicket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accomplishments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Alexander the Great*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painkillers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *family*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncertainty*[Return to reference](#) °

# ***Rambler 60***

## **[BIOGRAPHY]**

*Saturday, October 13, 1750*

—*Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,  
Plenius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.*

—HORACE, *Epistles*, 1.2.3–4

Whose works the beautiful and base contain,  
Of vice and virtue more instructive rules,  
Than all the sober sages of the schools.

—FRANCIS

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination, that realizes the event, however fictitious, or approximates it,<sup>1</sup> however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.

Our passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasure proposed to our minds, by recognizing them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life. It is not easy for the most artful writer to give us an interest in happiness or misery, which we think ourselves never likely to feel, and with which we have never yet been made acquainted. Histories of the downfall of kingdoms, and revolutions of empires, are read with great tranquility; the imperial tragedy pleases common auditors only by its pomp of ornament, and grandeur of ideas; and the man whose faculties have been engrossed by business, and whose heart never fluttered but at the

rise or fall of stocks, wonders how the attention can be seized, or the affections agitated, by a tale of love.

Those parallel circumstances, and kindred images to which we readily conform our minds, are, above all other writings, to be found in narratives of the lives of particular persons; and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.

The general and rapid narratives of history, which involve a thousand fortunes in the business of a day, and complicate<sup>2</sup> innumerable incidents in one great transaction, afford few lessons applicable to private life, which derives its comforts and its wretchedness from the right or wrong management of things, which nothing but their frequency makes considerable, *Parva si non fiunt quotidie*, says Pliny,<sup>3</sup> and which can have no place in those relations which never descend below the consultation of senates, the motions of armies, and the schemes of conspirators.

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. For, not only every man has in the mighty mass of the world great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use; but there is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to humankind. A great part of the time of those who are placed at the greatest distance by fortune, or by temper, must unavoidably pass in the same manner; and though, when the claims of nature are satisfied, caprice, and vanity, and accident, begin to produce discriminations and peculiarities, yet the eye is not very heedful or quick, which cannot discover the same causes still<sup>4</sup> terminating their influence in the same effects, though sometimes accelerated, sometimes retarded, or perplexed by multiplied combinations. We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same

fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure.

It is frequently objected to relations of particular lives, that they are not distinguished by any striking or wonderful vicissitudes. The scholar who passed his life among his books, the merchant who conducted only his own affairs, the priest whose sphere of action was not extended beyond that of his duty, are considered as no proper objects of public regard, however they might have excelled in their several stations, whatever might have been their learning, integrity, and piety. But this notion arises from false measures of excellence and dignity, and must be eradicated by considering, that in the esteem of uncorrupted reason, what is of most use is of most value.

It is, indeed, not improper to take honest advantages of prejudice, and to gain attention by a celebrated name; but the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue. The account of Thuanus<sup>5</sup> is, with great propriety, said by its author to have been written, that it might lay open to posterity the private and familiar character of that man, *cujus ingenium et candorem ex ipsius scriptis sunt olim semper miraturi*, whose candor and genius will to the end of time be by his writings preserved in admiration.

There are many invisible circumstances which, whether we read as inquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science, or increase our virtue, are more important than public occurrences. Thus Sallust, the great master of nature, has not forgot, in his account of Catiline,<sup>6</sup> to remark that *his walk was now quick, and again slow*, as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion. Thus the story of Melancthon<sup>7</sup> affords a striking lecture on the value of time, by informing us that when he made an appointment, he expected not only the hour, but the minute to be fixed, that the day might not run out in the idleness

of suspense; and all the plans and enterprises of De Witt are now of less importance to the world, than that part of his personal character, which represents him as careful of his health, and negligent of his life.<sup>8</sup>

But biography has often been allotted to writers who seem very little acquainted with the nature of their task, or very negligent about the performance. They rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments; and so little regard the manners or behavior of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral.

If now and then they condescend to inform the world of particular facts, they are not always so happy as to select the most important. I know not well what advantage posterity can receive from the only circumstance by which Tickell has distinguished Addison from the rest of mankind, the irregularity of his pulse:<sup>9</sup> nor can I think myself overpaid for the time spent in reading the life of Malherbe, by being enabled to relate, after the learned biographer,<sup>1</sup> that Malherbe had two predominant opinions; one, that the looseness of a single woman might destroy all her boast of ancient descent; the other, that the French beggars made use very improperly and barbarously of the phrase *noble gentleman*, because either word included the sense of both.

There are, indeed, some natural reasons why these narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much instruction or delight, and why most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless. If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence;<sup>2</sup> for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable

particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original.

If the biographer writes from personal knowledge, and makes haste to gratify the public curiosity, there is danger lest his interest, his fear, his gratitude, or his tenderness, overpower his fidelity, and tempt him to conceal, if not to invent. There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsic and casual circumstances. "Let me remember," says Hale, "when I find myself inclined to pity a criminal, that there is likewise a pity due to the country." <sup>3</sup> If we owe regard to the memory of the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Brings it near.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Join.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pliny the Younger's *Epistles* 3.1. Johnson translates the phrase in the preceding clause.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Always.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553–1617), an important French historian, of whom Nicholas Rigault wrote a brief biography, a sentence of which Johnson quotes and translates below.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sallust, a Roman historian of the 1st century B.C.E., wrote an account of Catiline's conspiracy against the Roman state. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Camerarius wrote a life of Melancthon, a German theologian of the 16th century.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir William Temple, characterizing the Dutch statesman John De Witt.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: From Thomas Tickell's preface to Addison's *Works* (1721).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The life of the French poet François de Malherbe (1555–1628) was written by Honorat de Racan.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Information.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: From Gilbert Burnet's *Life and Death of Sir Matthew Hale* (1682).[Return to reference 3](#)

**Rasselas** Johnson wrote *Rasselas* in January 1759 during the evenings of one week, a remarkable instance of his ability to write rapidly and brilliantly under the pressure of necessity. His mother lay dying in Lichfield. Her son, famous for his *Dictionary*, was nonetheless in great need of money with which to make her last days comfortable, pay her funeral expenses, and settle her small debts. He was paid £100 for the first edition of *Rasselas*, but not in time to attend her deathbed or her funeral.

*Rasselas* is a philosophical fable cast in the popular form of an Oriental tale, a type of fiction that owed its popularity to the vogue of the *Arabian Nights*, first translated into English in the early eighteenth century (see [p. 297](#)). Because the work is a fable, we should not approach it as a novel: psychologically credible characters and a series of intricately involved actions that lead to a necessary resolution and conclusion are not to be found in *Rasselas*. Instead we are meant to reflect on the ideas and to savor the melancholy resonance and intelligence of the stately prose that expresses them. Johnson arranges the incidents of the fable to test a variety of possible solutions to a problem: What choice of life will bring us happiness? (*The Choice of Life* was his working title for the book.) Many ways of life are examined in turn, and each is found wanting. Johnson does not pretend to have solved the problem. Rather, he locates the sources of discontent in a basic principle of human nature: the “hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life” ([Chapter 32](#)) and which lures us to “listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope” ([Chapter 1](#)). The tale is a gentle satire on one of the perennial topics of satirists: the folly of all of us who stubbornly cling to our illusions despite the evidence of experience. *Rasselas* is not all darkness and gloom, for Johnson’s theme invites comic as well as tragic treatment, and some of the episodes evoke that laughter of the mind that is the effect of high comedy. In its main theme, however—the folly of cherishing the dream of ever attaining unalloyed happiness in a world that can never wholly satisfy our desires—and in many of the



sayings of its characters, especially of the sage Imlac, *Rasselas* expresses some of Johnson's own deepest convictions.

# **The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia**

## **Chapter 1. Description of a Palace in a Valley**

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow—attend to the history of Rasselas, prince of Abyssinia.

Rasselas was the fourth son of the mighty emperor in whose dominions the Father of Waters<sup>1</sup> begins his course; whose bounty pours down the streams of plenty, and scatters over half the world the harvests of Egypt.

According to the custom which has descended from age to age among the monarchs of the torrid zone, Rasselas was confined in a private palace, with the other sons and daughters of Abyssinian royalty, till the order of succession should call him to the throne.

The place which the wisdom or policy of antiquity had destined for the residence of the Abyssinian princes was a spacious valley<sup>2</sup> in the kingdom of Amhara, surrounded on every side by mountains, of which the summits overhang the middle part. The only passage by which it could be entered was a cavern that passed under a rock, of which it has long been disputed whether it was the work of nature or of human industry. The outlet of the cavern was concealed by a thick wood, and the mouth which opened into the valley was closed with gates of iron, forged by the artificers of ancient days, so massy that no man could, without the help of engines, open or shut them.

From the mountains on every side rivulets descended that filled all the valley with verdure and fertility, and formed a lake in the middle, inhabited by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature has taught to dip the wing in water. This lake discharged its superfluities by a stream, which entered a dark cleft of the mountain on the northern side, and fell with dreadful noise from precipice to precipice till it was heard no more.

The sides of the mountains were covered with trees, the banks of the brooks were diversified with flowers; every blast<sup>3</sup> shook spices

from the rocks, and every month dropped fruits upon the ground. All animals that bite the grass, or browse the shrub, whether wild or tame, wandered in this extensive circuit, secured from beasts of prey by the mountains which confined them. On one part were flocks and herds feeding in the pastures, on another all the beasts of chase frisking in the lawns; the sprightly kid was bounding on the rocks, the subtle monkey frolicking in the trees, and the solemn elephant reposing in the shade. All the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded.

The valley, wide and fruitful, supplied its inhabitants with the necessities of life, and all delights and superfluities were added at the annual visit which the emperor paid his children, when the iron gate was opened to the sound of music, and during eight days everyone that resided in the valley was required to propose whatever might contribute to make seclusion pleasant, to fill up the vacancies of attention, and lessen the tediousness of time. Every desire was immediately granted. All the artificers of pleasure were called to gladden the festivity; the musicians exerted the power of harmony, and the dancers showed their activity before the princes, in hope that they should pass their lives in this blissful captivity, to which those only were admitted whose performance was thought able to add novelty to luxury. Such was the appearance of security and delight which this retirement afforded, that they to whom it was new always desired that it might be perpetual; and as those on whom the iron gate had once closed were never suffered to return, the effect of longer experience could not be known. Thus every year produced new schemes of delight and new competitors for imprisonment.

The palace stood on an eminence, raised about thirty paces<sup>4</sup> above the surface of the lake. It was divided into many squares or courts, built with greater or less magnificence according to the rank of those for whom they were designed. The roofs were turned into arches of massy stone, joined with a cement that grew harder by

time, and the building stood from century to century, deriding the solstitial rains and equinoctial hurricanes, without need of reparation.

This house, which was so large as to be fully known to none but some ancient officers, who successively inherited the secrets of the place, was built as if suspicion herself had dictated the plan. To every room there was an open and secret passage; every square had a communication with the rest, either from the upper stories by private galleries, or by subterranean passages from the lower apartments. Many of the columns had unsuspected cavities, in which a long race of monarchs had repositied their treasures. They then closed up the opening with marble, which was never to be removed but in the utmost exigencies of the kingdom, and recorded their accumulations in a book, which was itself concealed in a tower, not entered but by the emperor, attended by the prince who stood next in succession.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Nile.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Johnson had read of the Happy Valley in the Portuguese Jesuit Father Lobo's book on Abyssinia, which he translated in 1735. This description also owes something to the description of the Garden in *Paradise Lost* 4, and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" may owe something to it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "A gust or puff of wind" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: About 150 feet.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **Chapter 2. *The Discontent of Rasselas in the Happy Valley***

Here the sons and daughters of Abyssinia lived only to know the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose, attended by all that were skillful to delight, and gratified with whatever the senses can enjoy. They wandered in gardens of fragrance, and slept in the fortresses of security. Every art was practiced to make them pleased with their own condition. The sages who instructed them told them of nothing but the miseries of public life, and described all beyond the mountains as regions of calamity, where discord was always raging, and where man preyed upon man.

To heighten their opinion of their own felicity, they were daily entertained with songs, the subject of which was the *happy valley*. Their appetites were excited by frequent enumerations of different enjoyments, and revelry and merriment was the business of every hour, from the dawn of morning to the close of even.

These methods were generally successful; few of the princes had ever wished to enlarge their bounds, but passed their lives in full conviction that they had all within their reach that art or nature could bestow, and pitied those whom fate had excluded from this seat of tranquility, as the sport of chance and the slaves of misery.

Thus they rose in the morning and lay down at night, pleased with each other and with themselves; all but Rasselas, who, in the twenty-sixth year of his age, began to withdraw himself from their pastimes and assemblies, and to delight in solitary walks and silent meditation. He often sat before tables covered with luxury, and forgot to taste the dainties that were placed before him; he rose abruptly in the midst of the song, and hastily retired beyond the sound of music. His attendants observed the change, and endeavored to renew his love of pleasure. He neglected their officiousness, repulsed their invitations, and spent day after day on the banks of rivulets sheltered with trees, where he sometimes listened to the birds in the branches, sometimes observed the fish playing in the stream, and anon cast his eyes upon the pastures and

mountains filled with animals, of which some were biting the herbage, and some sleeping among the bushes.

This singularity of his humor made him much observed. One of the sages, in whose conversation he had formerly delighted, followed him secretly, in hope of discovering the cause of his disquiet. Rasselas, who knew not that anyone was near him, having for some time fixed his eyes upon the goats that were browsing among the rocks, began to compare their condition with his own.

"What," said he, "makes the difference between man and all the rest of the animal creation? Every beast that strays beside me has the same corporal necessities with myself; he is hungry, and crops the grass, he is thirsty, and drinks the stream, his thirst and hunger are appeased, he is satisfied, and sleeps; he rises again, and he is hungry, he is again fed, and is at rest. I am hungry and thirsty like him, but when thirst and hunger cease, I am not at rest; I am, like him, pained with want, but am not, like him, satisfied with fullness. The intermediate hours are tedious and gloomy; I long again to be hungry that I may again quicken my attention. The birds peck the berries or the corn, and fly away to the groves, where they sit in seeming happiness on the branches, and waste their lives in tuning one unvaried series of sounds. I likewise can call the lutanist and the singer, but the sounds that pleased me yesterday weary me today, and will grow yet more wearisome tomorrow. I can discover within me no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense, which must be satisfied before he can be happy."

After this he lifted up his head, and seeing the moon rising, walked towards the palace. As he passed through the fields, and saw the animals around him, "Ye," said he, "are happy, and need not envy me that walk thus among you, burthened with myself; nor do I, ye gentle beings, envy your felicity, for it is not the felicity of man. I have many distresses from which ye are free; I fear pain when I do not feel it; I sometimes shrink at evils recollected, and sometimes

start at evils anticipated. Surely the equity of Providence has balanced peculiar sufferings with peculiar enjoyments.”

With observations like these the prince amused himself as he returned, uttering them with a plaintive voice, yet with a look that discovered<sup>5</sup> him to feel some complacency in his own perspicacity, and to receive some solace of the miseries of life from consciousness of the delicacy with which he felt, and the eloquence with which he bewailed them. He mingled cheerfully in the diversions of the evening, and all rejoiced to find that his heart was lightened.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Showed. [Return to reference 5](#)



### **Chapter 3. The Wants of Him That Wants Nothing**

On the next day his old instructor, imagining that he had now made himself acquainted with his disease of mind, was in the hope of curing it by counsel, and officiously sought an opportunity of conference, which the prince, having long considered him as one whose intellects were exhausted, was not very willing to afford. "Why," said he, "does this man thus intrude upon me; shall I be never suffered to forget those lectures which pleased only while they were new, and to become new again must be forgotten?" He then walked into the wood, and composed himself to his usual meditations; when, before his thoughts had taken any settled form, he perceived his pursuer at his side, and was at first prompted by his impatience to go hastily away; but, being unwilling to offend a man whom he had once revered and still loved, he invited him to sit down with him on the bank.

The old man, thus encouraged, began to lament the change which had been lately observed in the prince, and to inquire why he so often retired from the pleasures of the palace, to loneliness and silence. "I fly from pleasure," said the prince, "because pleasure has ceased to please; I am lonely because I am miserable, and am unwilling to cloud with my presence the happiness of others." "You, sir," said the sage, "are the first who has complained of misery in the *happy valley*. I hope to convince you that your complaints have no real cause. You are here in full possession of all that the emperor of Abyssinia can bestow; here is neither labor to be endured nor danger to be dreaded, yet here is all that labor or danger can procure or purchase. Look round and tell me which of your wants is without supply; if you want nothing, how are you unhappy?"

"That I want nothing," said the prince, "or that I know not what I want, is the cause of my complaint; if I had any known want, I should have a certain wish; that wish would excite endeavor, and I should not then repine to see the sun move so slowly towards the western mountain, or lament when the day breaks, and sleep will no longer hide me from myself. When I see the kids and the lambs

chasing one another, I fancy that I should be happy if I had something to pursue. But, possessing all that I can want, I find one day and one hour exactly like another, except that the latter is still more tedious than the former. Let your experience inform me how the day may now seem as short as in my childhood, while nature was yet fresh and every moment showed me what I never had observed before. I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire."

The old man was surprised at this new species of affliction and knew not what to reply, yet was unwilling to be silent. "Sir," said he, "if you had seen the miseries of the world you would know how to value your present state." "Now," said the prince, "you have given me something to desire. I shall long to see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to happiness."

#### **Chapter 4. The Prince Continues to Grieve and Muse**

At this time the sound of music proclaimed the hour of repast, and the conversation was concluded. The old man went away sufficiently discontented to find that his reasonings had produced the only conclusion which they were intended to prevent. But in the decline of life shame and grief are of short duration; whether it be that we bear easily what we have born long, or that, finding ourselves in age less regarded, we less regard others; or, that we look with slight regard upon afflictions, to which we know that the hand of death is about to put an end.

The prince, whose views were extended to a wider space, could not speedily quiet his emotions. He had been before terrified at the length of life which nature promised him, because he considered that in a long time much must be endured; he now rejoiced in his youth, because in many years much might be done.

This first beam of hope, that had been ever darted into his mind, rekindled youth in his cheeks, and doubled the luster of his eyes. He was fired with the desire of doing something, though he knew not yet with distinctness, either end or means.

He was now no longer gloomy and unsocial; but, considering himself as master of a secret stock of happiness, which he could enjoy only by concealing it, he affected to be busy in all schemes of diversion, and endeavored to make others pleased with the state of which he himself was weary. But pleasures never can be so multiplied or continued, as not to leave much of life unemployed; there were many hours, both of the night and day, which he could spend without suspicion in solitary thought. The load of life was much lightened: he went eagerly into the assemblies, because he supposed the frequency of his presence necessary to the success of his purposes; he retired gladly to privacy, because he had now a subject of thought.

His chief amusement was to picture to himself that world which he had never seen; to place himself in various conditions; to be entangled in imaginary difficulties, and to be engaged in wild

adventures: but his benevolence always terminated his projects in the relief of distress, the detection of fraud, the defeat of oppression, and the diffusion of happiness.

Thus passed twenty months of the life of Rasselas. He busied himself so intensely in visionary bustle, that he forgot his real solitude; and, amidst hourly preparations for the various incidents of human affairs, neglected to consider by what means he should mingle with mankind.

One day, as he was sitting on a bank, he feigned to himself an orphan virgin robbed of her little portion<sup>6</sup> by a treacherous lover, and crying after him for restitution and redress. So strongly was the image impressed upon his mind, that he started up in the maid's defense, and ran forward to seize the plunderer, with all the eagerness of real pursuit. Fear naturally quickens the flight of guilt. Rasselas could not catch the fugitive with his utmost efforts; but, resolving to weary, by perseverance, him whom he could not surpass in speed, he pressed on till the foot of the mountain stopped his course.

Here he recollected himself, and smiled at his own useless impetuosity. Then raising his eyes to the mountain, "This," said he, "is the fatal obstacle that hinders at once the enjoyment of pleasure, and the exercise of virtue. How long is it that my hopes and wishes have flown beyond this boundary of my life, which yet I never have attempted to surmount!"

Struck with this reflection, he sat down to muse, and remembered, that since he first resolved to escape from his confinement, the sun had passed twice over him in his annual course. He now felt a degree of regret with which he had never been before acquainted. He considered how much might have been done in the time which had passed, and left nothing real behind it. He compared twenty months with the life of man. "In life," said he, "is not to be counted the ignorance of infancy, or imbecility<sup>7</sup> of age. We are long before we are able to think, and we soon cease from the power of acting. The true period of human existence may be reasonably estimated as forty years, of which I have mused away

the four and twentieth part. What I have lost was certain, for I have certainly possessed it; but of twenty months to come who can assure me?"

The consciousness of his own folly pierced him deeply, and he was long before he could be reconciled to himself. "The rest of my time," said he, "has been lost by the crime or folly of my ancestors, and the absurd institutions of my country; I remember it with disgust, yet without remorse: but the months that have passed since new light darted into my soul, since I formed a scheme of reasonable felicity, have been squandered by my own fault. I have lost that which can never be restored: I have seen the sun rise and set for twenty months, an idle gazer on the light of heaven. In this time the birds have left the nest of their mother, and committed themselves to the woods and to the skies: the kid has forsaken the teat, and learned by degrees to climb the rocks in quest of independent sustenance. I only have made no advances, but am still helpless and ignorant. The moon, by more than twenty changes, admonished me of the flux of life; the stream that rolled before my feet upbraided my inactivity. I sat feasting on intellectual luxury, regardless alike of the examples of the earth, and the instructions of the planets. Twenty months are past, who shall restore them!"

These sorrowful meditations fastened upon his mind; he passed four months in resolving to lose no more time in idle resolves, and was awakened to more vigorous exertion by hearing a maid, who had broken a porcelain cup, remark that what cannot be repaired is not to be regretted.

This was obvious; and Rasselas reproached himself that he had not discovered it, having not known, or not considered, how many useful hints are obtained by chance, and how often the mind, hurried by her own ardor to distant views, neglects the truths that lie open before her. He, for a few hours, regretted his regret, and from that time bent his whole mind upon the means of escaping from the valley of happiness.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 6: Money or goods.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Weakness.[Return to reference 7](#)

## **Chapter 5. *The Prince Meditates His Escape***

He now found that it would be very difficult to effect that which it was very easy to suppose effected. When he looked round about him, he saw himself confined by the bars of nature which had never yet been broken, and by the gate, through which none that once had passed it were ever able to return. He was now impatient as an eagle in a grate.<sup>8</sup> He passed week after week in clambering the mountains, to see if there was any aperture which the bushes might conceal, but found all the summits inaccessible by their prominence. The iron gate he despaired to open; for it was not only secured with all the power of art, but was always watched by successive sentinels, and was by its position exposed to the perpetual observation of all the inhabitants.

He then examined the cavern through which the waters of the lake were discharged; and, looking down at a time when the sun shone strongly upon its mouth, he discovered it to be full of broken rocks, which, though they permitted the stream to flow through many narrow passages, would stop anybody of solid bulk. He returned discouraged and dejected; but, having now known the blessing of hope, resolved never to despair.

In these fruitless searches he spent ten months. The time, however, passed cheerfully away: in the morning he rose with new hope, in the evening applauded his own diligence, and in the night slept sound after his fatigue. He met a thousand amusements which beguiled his labor, and diversified his thoughts. He discerned the various instincts of animals, and properties of plants, and found the place replete with wonders, of which he purposed to solace himself with the contemplation, if he should never be able to accomplish his flight; rejoicing that his endeavors, though yet unsuccessful, had supplied him with a source of inexhaustible enquiry.

But his original curiosity was not yet abated; he resolved to obtain some knowledge of the ways of men. His wish still continued, but his hope grew less. He ceased to survey any longer the walls of his prison, and spared to search by new toils for interstices which he

knew could not be found, yet determined to keep his design always in view, and lay hold on any expedient that time should offer.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Barred cage. [Return to reference 8](#)



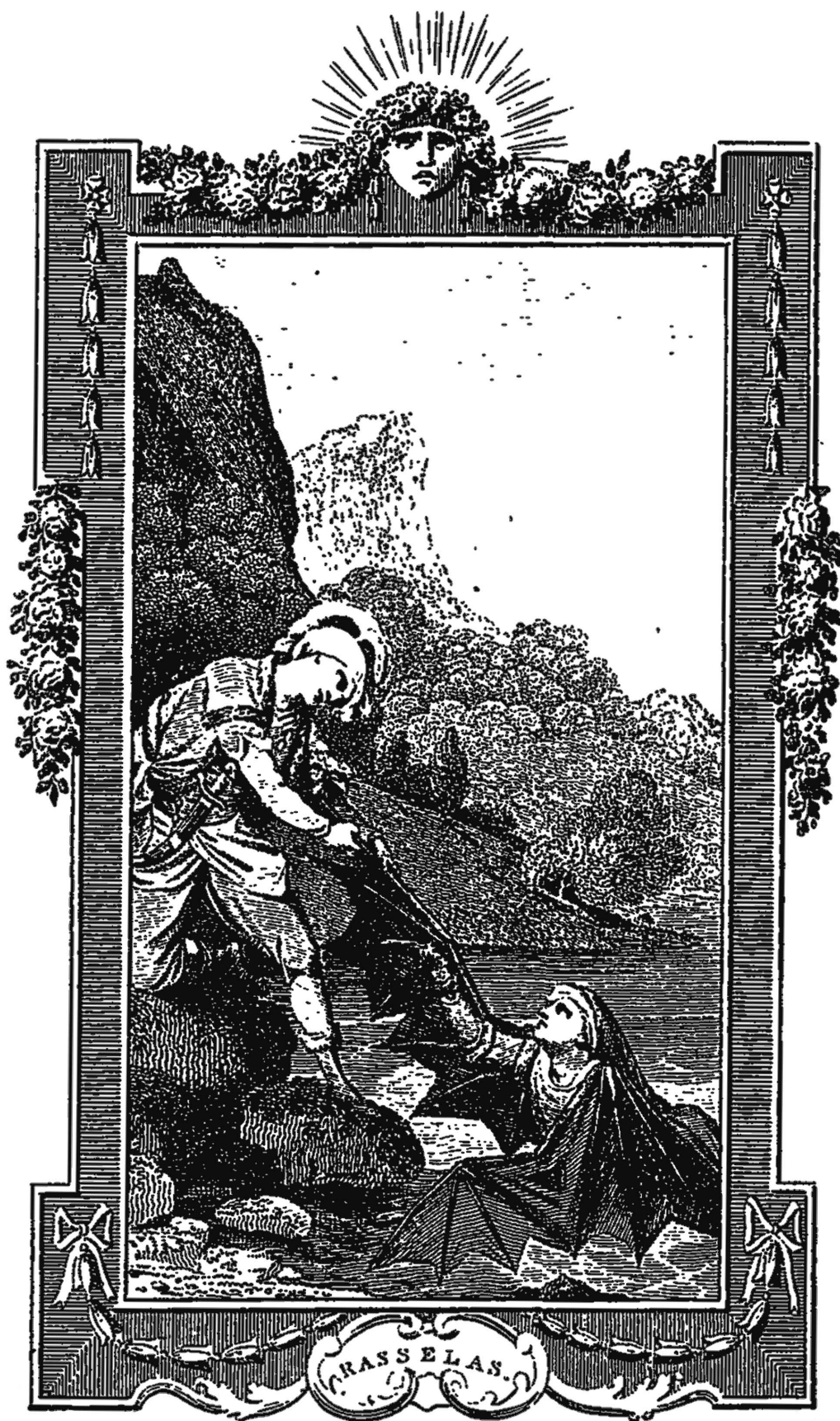
## **Chapter 6. A Dissertation on the Art of Flying**

Among the artists that had been allured into the happy valley, to labor for the accommodation and pleasure of its inhabitants, was a man eminent for his knowledge of the mechanic powers, who had contrived many engines<sup>9</sup> both of use and recreation. By a wheel, which the stream turned, he forced the water into a tower, whence it was distributed to all the apartments of the palace. He erected a pavillion in the garden, around which he kept the air always cool by artificial showers. One of the groves appropriated to the ladies, was ventilated by fans, to which the rivulet that run through it gave a constant motion; and instruments of soft music were placed at proper distances, of which some played by the impulse of the wind, and some by the power of the stream.

This artist was sometimes visited by Rasselas, who was pleased with every kind of knowledge, imagining that the time would come when all his acquisitions should be of use to him in the open world. He came one day to amuse himself in his usual manner, and found the master busy in building a sailing chariot: he saw that the design was practicable upon a level surface, and with expressions of great esteem solicited its completion. The workman was pleased to find himself so much regarded by the prince, and resolved to gain yet higher honors. "Sir," said he, "you have seen but a small part of what the mechanic sciences can perform. I have been long of opinion, that, instead of the tardy conveyance of ships and chariots, man might use the swifter migration of wings; that the fields of air are open to knowledge, and that only ignorance and idleness need crawl upon the ground."

This hint rekindled the prince's desire of passing the mountains; having seen what the mechanist had already performed, he was willing to fancy that he could do more; yet resolved to inquire further before he suffered hope to afflict him by disappointment. "I am afraid," said he to the artist, "that your imagination prevails over your skill, and that you now tell me rather what you wish than what you know. Every animal has his element assigned him; the birds have the

air, and man and beasts the earth." "So," replied the mechanist, "fishes have the water, in which yet beasts can swim by nature, and men by art. He that can swim needs not despair to fly: to swim is to fly in a grosser fluid, and to fly is to swim in a subtler.<sup>1</sup> We are only to proportion our power of resistance to the different density of the matter through which we are to pass. You will be necessarily upborn by the air, if you can renew any impulse upon it, faster than the air can recede from the pressure."



Unknown engraver, **Rasselas**, 1787. Rasselas pulls the artist to shore. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, a tale, in two volumes.*

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"But the exercise of swimming," said the prince, "is very laborious; the strongest limbs are soon wearied; I am afraid the act of flying will be yet more violent, and wings will be of no great use, unless we can fly further than we can swim."

"The labor of rising from the ground," said the artist, "will be great, as we see it in the heavier domestic fowls; but, as we mount higher, the earth's attraction, and the body's gravity, will be gradually diminished, till we shall arrive at a region where the man will float in the air without any tendency to fall: no care will then be necessary, but to move forwards, which the gentlest impulse will effect. You, Sir, whose curiosity is so extensive, will easily conceive with what pleasure a philosopher, furnished with wings, and hovering in the sky, would see the earth, and all its inhabitants, rolling beneath him, and presenting to him successively, by its diurnal motion, all the countries within the same parallel. How must it amuse the pendent spectator to see the moving scene of land and ocean, cities and deserts! To survey with equal security the marts of trade, and the fields of battle; mountains infested by barbarians, and fruitful regions gladdened by plenty, and lulled by peace! How easily shall we then trace the Nile through all his passage; pass over to distant regions, and examine the face of nature from one extremity of the earth to the other!"

"All this," said the prince, "is much to be desired, but I am afraid that no man will be able to breathe in these regions of speculation and tranquility. I have been told, that respiration is difficult upon lofty mountains, yet from these precipices, though so high as to produce great tenuity of the air, it is very easy to fall: therefore I suspect, that from any height, where life can be supported, there may be danger of too quick descent."

"Nothing," replied the artist, "will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must be first overcome. If you will favor my

project I will try the first flight at my own hazard. I have considered the structure of all volant<sup>2</sup> animals, and find the folding continuity of the bat's wings most easily accommodated to the human form. Upon this model I shall begin my task tomorrow, and in a year expect to tower into the air beyond the malice or pursuit of man. But I will work only on this condition, that the art shall not be divulged, and that you shall not require me to make wings for any but ourselves."

"Why," said Rasselas, "should you envy others so great an advantage? All skill ought to be exerted for universal good; every man has owed much to others, and ought to repay the kindness that he has received."

"If men were all virtuous," returned the artist, "I should with great alacrity teach them all to fly. But what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky? Against an army sailing through the clouds neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas, could afford any security. A flight of northern savages might hover in the wind, and light at once with irresistible violence upon the capital of a fruitful region that was rolling under them. Even this valley, the retreat of princes, the abode of happiness, might be violated by the sudden descent of some of the naked nations that swarm on the coast of the southern sea."

The prince promised secrecy, and waited for the performance, not wholly hopeless of success. He visited the work from time to time, observed its progress, and remarked many ingenious contrivances to facilitate motion, and unite levity with strength. The artist was every day more certain that he should leave vultures and eagles behind him, and the contagion of his confidence seized upon the prince.

In a year the wings were finished, and, on a morning appointed, the maker appeared furnished for flight on a little promontory: he waved his pinions a while to gather air, then leaped from his stand, and in an instant dropped into the lake. His wings, which were of no use in the air, sustained him in the water, and the prince drew him to land, half dead with terror and vexation.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Machines. “Mechanic powers”: the forces that cause things to move.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thinner.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Able to fly.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 7. The Prince Finds a Man of Learning**

The prince was not much afflicted by this disaster, having suffered himself to hope for a happier event, only because he had no other means of escape in view. He still persisted in his design to leave the happy valley by the first opportunity.

His imagination was now at a stand; he had no prospect of entering into the world; and, notwithstanding all his endeavors to support himself, discontent by degrees preyed upon him, and he began again to lose his thoughts in sadness, when the rainy season, which in these countries is periodical, made it inconvenient to wander in the woods.

The rain continued longer and with more violence than had been ever known; the clouds broke on the surrounding mountains, and the torrents streamed into the plain on every side, till the cavern was too narrow to discharge the water. The lake overflowed its banks, and all the level of the valley was covered with the inundation. The eminence, on which the palace was built, and some other spots of rising ground, were all that the eye could now discover. The herds and flocks left the pastures, and both the wild beasts and the tame retreated to the mountains.

This inundation confined all the princes to domestic amusements, and the attention of Rasselas was particularly seized by a poem, which Imlac rehearsed,<sup>3</sup> upon the various conditions of humanity. He commanded the poet to attend him in his apartment, and recite his verses a second time; then entering into familiar talk, he thought himself happy in having found a man who knew the world so well, and could so skillfully paint the scenes of life. He asked a thousand questions about things, to which, though common to all other mortals, his confinement from childhood had kept him a stranger. The poet pitied his ignorance, and loved his curiosity, and entertained him from day to day with novelty and instruction, so that the prince regretted the necessity of sleep, and longed till the morning should renew his pleasure.

As they were sitting together, the prince commanded Imlac to relate his history, and to tell by what accident he was forced, or by what motive induced, to close his life in the happy valley. As he was going to begin his narrative, Rasselas was called to a concert, and obliged to restrain his curiosity till the evening.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Recited.[Return to reference 3](#)



## **Chapter 8. The History of Imlac**

The close of the day is, in the regions of the torrid zone, the only season of diversion and entertainment, and it was therefore midnight before the music ceased, and the princesses retired. Rasselas then called for his companion and required him to begin the story of his life.

"Sir," said Imlac, "my history will not be long: the life that is devoted to knowledge passes silently away, and is very little diversified by events. To talk in public, to think in solitude, to read and to hear, to inquire, and answer inquiries, is the business of a scholar. He wanders about the world without pomp or terror, and is neither known nor valued but by men like himself.

"I was born in the kingdom of Goiama,<sup>4</sup> at no great distance from the fountain of the Nile. My father was a wealthy merchant, who traded between the inland countries of Africk and the ports of the Red Sea. He was honest, frugal and diligent, but of mean sentiments, and narrow comprehension: he desired only to be rich, and to conceal his riches, lest he should be spoiled<sup>5</sup> by the governors of the province."

"Surely," said the prince, "my father must be negligent of his charge, if any man in his dominions dares take that which belongs to another. Does he not know that kings are accountable for injustice permitted as well as done? If I were emperor, not the meanest of my subjects should be oppressed with impunity. My blood boils when I am told that a merchant durst not enjoy his honest gains for fear of losing them by the rapacity of power. Name the governor who robbed the people, that I may declare his crimes to the emperor."

"Sir," said Imlac, "your ardor is the natural effect of virtue animated by youth: the time will come when you will acquit your father, and perhaps hear with less impatience of the governor. Oppression is, in the Abyssinian dominions, neither frequent nor tolerated; but no form of government has been yet discovered, by which cruelty can be wholly prevented. Subordination supposes power on one part and subjection on the other; and if power be in

the hands of men, it will sometimes be abused. The vigilance of the supreme magistrate may do much, but much will still remain undone. He can never know all the crimes that are committed, and can seldom punish all that he knows."

"This," said the prince, "I do not understand, but I had rather hear thee than dispute. Continue thy narration."

"My father," proceeded Imlac, "originally intended that I should have no other education, than such as might qualify me for commerce; and discovering in me great strength of memory, and quickness of apprehension, often declared his hope that I should be some time the richest man in Abyssinia."

"Why," said the prince, "did thy father desire the increase of his wealth, when it was already greater than he durst discover or enjoy? I am unwilling to doubt thy veracity, yet inconsistencies cannot both be true."

"Inconsistencies," answered Imlac, "cannot both be right, but, imputed to man, they may both be true. Yet diversity is not inconsistency. My father might expect a time of greater security. However, some desire is necessary to keep life in motion, and he, whose real wants are supplied, must admit those of fancy."

"This," said the prince, "I can in some measure conceive. I repent that I interrupted thee."

"With this hope," proceeded Imlac, "he sent me to school; but when I had once found the delight of knowledge, and felt the pleasure of intelligence<sup>6</sup> and the pride of invention, I began silently to despise riches, and determined to disappoint the purpose of my father, whose grossness of conception raised my pity. I was twenty years old before his tenderness would expose me to the fatigue of travel, in which time I had been instructed, by successive masters, in all the literature of my native country. As every hour taught me something new, I lived in a continual course of gratifications; but, as I advanced towards manhood, I lost much of the reverence with which I had been used to look on my instructors; because, when the lesson was ended, I did not find them wiser or better than common men.

"At length my father resolved to initiate me in commerce, and, opening one of his subterranean treasures, counted out ten thousand pieces of gold. 'This, young man,' said he, 'is the stock with which you must negotiate.'<sup>7</sup> I began with less than the fifth part, and you see how diligence and parsimony have increased it. This is your own to waste or to improve. If you squander it by negligence or caprice, you must wait for my death before you will be rich: if, in four years, you double your stock, we will thenceforward let subordination cease, and live together as friends and partners; for he shall always be equal with me, who is equally skilled in the art of growing rich.'

"We laid our money upon camels, concealed in bales of cheap goods, and travelled to the shore of the Red Sea. When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters my heart bounded like that of a prisoner escaped. I felt an unextinguishable curiosity kindle in my mind, and resolved to snatch this opportunity of seeing the manners of other nations, and of learning sciences unknown in Abyssinia.

"I remembered that my father had obliged me to the improvement of my stock, not by a promise which I ought not to violate, but by a penalty which I was at liberty to incur; and therefore determined to gratify my predominant desire, and by drinking at the fountains of knowledge, to quench the thirst of curiosity.

"As I was supposed to trade without connection with my father, it was easy for me to become acquainted with the master of a ship, and procure a passage to some other country. I had no motives of choice to regulate my voyage; it was sufficient for me that, wherever I wandered, I should see a country which I had not seen before. I therefore entered a ship bound for Surat,<sup>8</sup> having left a letter for my father declaring my intention.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Mentioned by Father Lobo, in the western part of Abyssinian dominions. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Robbed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Information or knowledge.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Do business.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A port in India.[Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 9. The History of Imlac Continued**

"When I first entered upon the world of waters, and lost sight of land, I looked round about me with pleasing terror, and thinking my soul enlarged by the boundless prospect, imagined that I could gaze round for ever without satiety; but, in a short time, I grew weary of looking on barren uniformity, where I could only see again what I had already seen. I then descended into the ship, and doubted for a while whether all my future pleasures would not end like this in disgust and disappointment. Yet, surely, said I, the ocean and the land are very different; the only variety of water is rest and motion, but the earth has mountains and valleys, deserts and cities: it is inhabited by men of different customs and contrary opinions; and I may hope to find variety in life, though I should miss it in nature.

"With this thought I quieted my mind; and amused myself during the voyage, sometimes by learning from the sailors the art of navigation, which I have never practiced, and sometimes by forming schemes for my conduct in different situations, in not one of which I have been ever placed.

"I was almost weary of my naval amusements when we landed safely at Surat. I secured my money, and purchasing some commodities for show, joined myself to a caravan that was passing into the inland country. My companions, for some reason or other, conjecturing that I was rich, and, by my inquiries and admiration, finding that I was ignorant, considered me as a novice whom they had a right to cheat, and who was to learn at the usual expense the art of fraud. They exposed me to the theft of servants, and the exaction of officers,<sup>9</sup> and saw me plundered upon false pretences, without any advantage to themselves, but that of rejoicing in the superiority of their own knowledge."

"Stop a moment," said the prince. "Is there such depravity in man, as that he should injure another without benefit to himself? I can easily conceive that all are pleased with superiority; but your ignorance was merely accidental, which, being neither your crime nor your folly, could afford them no reason to applaud themselves;

and the knowledge which they had, and which you wanted, they might as effectually have shown by warning, as betraying you."

"Pride," said Imlac, "is seldom delicate, it will please itself with very mean advantages; and envy feels not its own happiness, but when it may be compared with the misery of others. They were my enemies because they grieved to think me rich, and my oppressors because they delighted to find me weak."

"Proceed," said the prince: "I doubt not of the facts which you relate, but imagine that you impute them to mistaken motives."

"In this company," said Imlac, "I arrived at Agra, the capital of Indostan, the city in which the great Mogul commonly resides. I applied myself to the language of the country, and in a few months was able to converse with the learned men; some of whom I found morose and reserved, and others easy and communicative; some were unwilling to teach another what they had with difficulty learned themselves; and some showed that the end<sup>1</sup> of their studies was to gain the dignity of instructing.

"To the tutor of the young princes I recommended myself so much, that I was presented to the emperor as a man of uncommon knowledge. The emperor asked me many questions concerning my country and my travels; and though I cannot now recollect any thing that he uttered above the power of a common man, he dismissed me astonished at his wisdom, and enamored of his goodness.

"My credit was now so high, that the merchants, with whom I had traveled, applied to me for recommendations to the ladies of the court. I was surprised at their confidence of solicitation, and gently reproached them with their practices on the road. They heard me with cold indifference, and showed no tokens of shame or sorrow.

"They then urged their request with the offer of a bribe; but what I would not do for kindness I would not do for money; and refused them, not because they had injured me, but because I would not enable them to injure others; for I knew they would have made use of my credit to cheat those who should buy their wares.

"Having resided at Agra till there was no more to be learned, I traveled into Persia, where I saw many remains of ancient

magnificence, and observed many new accommodations<sup>2</sup> of life. The Persians are a nation eminently social, and their assemblies afforded me daily opportunities of remarking characters and manners, and of tracing human nature through all its variations.

“From Persia I passed into Arabia, where I saw a nation at once pastoral and warlike; who live without any settled habitation; whose only wealth is their flocks and herds; and who have yet carried on, through all ages, an hereditary war with all mankind, though they neither covet nor envy their possessions.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Officials or agents.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Purpose.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Conveniences, things requisite to ease or refreshment” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 10. *Imlac's History Continued. A Dissertation upon Poetry***

"Wherever I went, I found that poetry was considered as the highest learning, and regarded with a veneration somewhat approaching to that which man would pay to the angelic nature. And yet it fills me with wonder that, in almost all countries, the most ancient poets are considered as the best: whether it be that every other kind of knowledge is an acquisition gradually attained, and poetry is a gift conferred at once; or that the first poetry of every nation surprised them as a novelty, and retained the credit by consent which it received by accident at first; or whether, as the province of poetry is to describe nature and passion, which are always the same, the first writers took possession of the most striking objects for description and the most probable occurrences for fiction, and left nothing to those that followed them, but transcription of the same events, and new combinations of the same images—whatever be the reason, it is commonly observed that the early writers are in possession of nature, and their followers of art; that the first excel in strength and invention, and the latter in elegance and refinement.

"I was desirous to add my name to this illustrious fraternity. I read all the poets of Persia and Arabia, and was able to repeat by memory the volumes that are suspended in the mosque of Mecca.<sup>3</sup> But I soon found that no man was ever great by imitation. My desire of excellence impelled me to transfer my attention to nature and to life. Nature was to be my subject, and men to be my auditors: I could never describe what I had not seen; I could not hope to move those with delight or terror, whose interests and opinions I did not understand.

"Being now resolved to be a poet, I saw everything with a new purpose; my sphere of attention was suddenly magnified; no kind of knowledge was to be overlooked. I ranged mountains and deserts for images and resemblances, and pictured upon my mind every tree of the forest and flower of the valley. I observed with equal care the crags of the rock and the pinnacles of the palace. Sometimes I



wandered along the mazes of the rivulet, and sometimes watched the changes of the summer clouds. To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination; he must be conversant with all that is awfully<sup>4</sup> vast or elegantly little. The plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, and meteors of the sky, must all concur to store his mind with inexhaustible variety: for every idea<sup>5</sup> is useful for the enforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth; and he who knows most will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his reader with remote allusions and unexpected instruction.

"All the appearances of nature I was therefore careful to study, and every country which I have surveyed has contributed something to my poetical powers."

"In so wide a survey," said the prince, "you must surely have left much unobserved. I have lived till now within the circuit of these mountains, and yet cannot walk abroad without the sight of something which I have never beheld before, or never heeded."

"The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind, and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

"But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind, as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or

country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental<sup>6</sup> truths, which will always be the same. He must, therefore, content himself with the slow progress of his name, condemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place.

“His labor is not yet at an end; he must know many languages and many sciences; and, that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must by incessant practice familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony.”

## Endnotes

- Note 3: In the 7th century, seven peerless Arabic poems were supposed to have been transcribed in gold and hung up in a mosque.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Awe-inspiringly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mental image.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “General; pervading many particulars” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)

## **Chapter 11. Imlac's Narrative Continued. A Hint on Pilgrimage**

Imlac now felt the enthusiastic fit, and was proceeding to aggrandize his own profession, when the prince cried out: "Enough! thou hast convinced me that no human being can ever be a poet. Proceed with thy narration."

"To be a poet," said Imlac, "is indeed very difficult." "So difficult," returned the prince, "that I will at present hear no more of his labors. Tell me whither you went when you had seen Persia."

"From Persia," said the poet, "I traveled through Syria, and for three years resided in Palestine, where I conversed with great numbers of the northern and western nations of Europe, the nations which are now in possession of all power and all knowledge, whose armies are irresistible, and whose fleets command the remotest parts of the globe. When I compared these men with the natives of our own kingdom, and those that surround us, they appeared almost another order of beings. In their countries it is difficult to wish for anything that may not be obtained; a thousand arts, of which we never heard, are continually laboring for their convenience and pleasure; and whatever their own climate has denied them is supplied by their commerce."

"By what means," said the prince, "are the Europeans thus powerful, or why, since they can so easily visit Asia and Africa for trade or conquest, cannot the Asiatics and Africans invade their coasts, plant colonies in their ports, and give laws to their natural princes? The same wind that carries them back would bring us thither."

"They are more powerful, sir, than we," answered Imlac, "because they are wiser; knowledge will always predominate over ignorance, as man governs the other animals. But why their knowledge is more than ours, I know not what reason can be given, but the unsearchable will of the Supreme Being."

"When," said the prince with a sigh, "shall I be able to visit Palestine, and mingle with this mighty confluence of nations? Till

that happy moment shall arrive, let me fill up the time with such representations as thou canst give me. I am not ignorant of the motive that assembles such numbers in that place, and cannot but consider it as the center of wisdom and piety, to which the best and wisest men of every land must be continually resorting."

"There are some nations," said Imlac, "that send few visitants to Palestine; for many numerous and learned sects in Europe concur to censure pilgrimage as superstitious, or deride it as ridiculous."

"You know," said the prince, "how little my life has made me acquainted with diversity of opinions. It will be too long to hear the arguments on both sides; you, that have considered them, tell me the result."

"Pilgrimage," said Imlac, "like many other acts of piety, may be reasonable or superstitious, according to the principles upon which it is performed. Long journeys in search of truth are not commanded. Truth, such as is necessary to the regulation of life, is always found where it is honestly sought. Change of place is no natural cause of the increase of piety, for it inevitably produces dissipation of mind. Yet, since men go every day to view the fields where great actions have been performed, and return with stronger impressions of the event, curiosity of the same kind may naturally dispose us to view that country whence our religion had its beginning; and I believe no man surveys those awful scenes without some confirmation of holy resolutions. That the Supreme Being may be more easily propitiated in one place than in another is the dream of idle superstition, but that some places may operate upon our own minds in an uncommon manner is an opinion which hourly experience will justify. He who supposes that his vices may be more successfully combated in Palestine, will, perhaps, find himself mistaken, yet he may go thither without folly; he who thinks they will be more freely pardoned, dishonors at once his reason and religion."

"These," said the prince, "are European distinctions. I will consider them another time. What have you found to be the effect of knowledge? Are those nations happier than we?"

"There is so much infelicity," said the poet, "in the world that scarce any man has leisure from his own distresses to estimate the comparative happiness of others. Knowledge is certainly one of the means of pleasure, as is confessed by the natural desire which every mind feels of increasing its ideas. Ignorance is mere privation, by which nothing can be produced; it is a vacuity in which the soul sits motionless and torpid for want of attraction; and, without knowing why, we always rejoice when we learn, and grieve when we forget. I am therefore inclined to conclude that if nothing counteracts the natural consequence of learning, we grow more happy as our minds take a wider range.

"In enumerating the particular comforts of life, we shall find many advantages on the side of the Europeans. They cure wounds and diseases with which we languish and perish. We suffer inclemencies of weather which they can obviate. They have engines for the despatch of many laborious works, which we must perform by manual industry. There is such communication between distant places that one friend can hardly be said to be absent from another. Their policy removes all public inconveniences; they have roads cut through their mountains, and bridges laid upon their rivers. And, if we descend to the privacies of life, their habitations are more commodious, and their possessions are more secure."

"They are surely happy," said the prince, "who have all these conveniencies, of which I envy none so much as the facility with which separated friends interchange their thoughts."

"The Europeans," answered Imlac, "are less unhappy than we, but they are not happy. Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed."

## **Chapter 12. The Story of Imlac Continued**

"I am not yet willing," said the prince, "to suppose that happiness is so parsimoniously distributed to mortals; nor can believe but that, if I had the choice of life, I should be able to fill every day with pleasure. I would injure no man, and should provoke no resentment: I would relieve every distress, and should enjoy the benedictions of gratitude. I would choose my friends among the wise, and my wife among the virtuous; and therefore should be in no danger from treachery, or unkindness. My children should, by my care, be learned and pious, and would repay to my age what their childhood had received. What would dare to molest him who might call on every side to thousands enriched by his bounty, or assisted by his power? And why should not life glide quietly away in the soft reciprocation of protection and reverence? All this may be done without the help of European refinements, which appear by their effects to be rather specious than useful. Let us leave them and pursue our journey."

"From Palestine," said Imlac, "I passed through many regions of Asia; in the more civilized kingdoms as a trader, and among the barbarians of the mountains as a pilgrim. At last I began to long for my native country, that I might repose after my travels, and fatigues, in the places where I had spent my earliest years, and gladden my old companions with the recital of my adventures. Often did I figure to myself those, with whom I had sported away the gay hours of dawning life, sitting round me in its evening, wondering at my tales, and listening to my counsels.

"When this thought had taken possession of my mind, I considered every moment as wasted which did not bring me nearer to Abyssinia. I hastened into Egypt, and, notwithstanding my impatience, was detained ten months in the contemplation of its ancient magnificence, and in enquiries after the remains of its ancient learning. I found in Cairo a mixture of all nations; some brought thither by the love of knowledge, some by the hope of gain, and many by the desire of living after their own manner without observation, and of lying hid in the obscurity of multitudes: for, in a

city, populous as Cairo, it is possible to obtain at the same time the gratifications of society, and the secrecy of solitude.

"From Cairo I traveled to Suez, and embarked on the Red Sea, passing along the coast till I arrived at the port from which I had departed twenty years before. Here I joined myself to a caravan and re-entered my native country.

"I now expected the caresses of my kinsmen, and the congratulations of my friends, and was not without hope that my father, whatever value he had set upon riches, would own with gladness and pride a son who was able to add to the felicity and honor of the nation. But I was soon convinced that my thoughts were vain. My father had been dead fourteen years, having divided his wealth among my brothers, who were removed to some other provinces. Of my companions the greater part was in the grave, of the rest some could with difficulty remember me, and some considered me as one corrupted by foreign manners.

"A man used to vicissitudes is not easily dejected. I forgot, after a time, my disappointment, and endeavored to recommend myself to the nobles of the kingdom: they admitted me to their tables, heard my story, and dismissed me. I opened a school, and was prohibited to teach. I then resolved to sit down in the quiet of domestic life, and addressed a lady that was fond of my conversation, but rejected my suit, because my father was a merchant.

"Wearied at last with solicitation and repulses, I resolved to hide myself for ever from the world, and depend no longer on the opinion or caprice of others. I waited for the time when the gate of the *happy valley* should open, that I might bid farewell to hope and fear: the day came; my performance was distinguished with favor, and I resigned myself with joy to perpetual confinement."

"Hast thou here found happiness at last?" said Rasselas. "Tell me without reserve; art thou content with thy condition? or, dost thou wish to be again wandering and inquiring? All the inhabitants of this valley celebrate their lot, and, at the annual visit of the emperor, invite others to partake of their felicity."

"Great prince," said Imlac, "I shall speak the truth: I know not one of all your attendants who does not lament the hour when he entered this retreat. I am less unhappy than the rest, because I have a mind replete with images, which I can vary and combine at pleasure. I can amuse my solitude by the renovation of the knowledge which begins to fade from my memory, and by recollection of the accidents of my past life. Yet all this ends in the sorrowful consideration, that my acquirements are now useless, and that none of my pleasures can be again enjoyed. The rest, whose minds have no impression but of the present moment, are either corroded by malignant passions, or sit stupid in the gloom of perpetual vacancy."

"What passions can infest those," said the prince, "who have no trials? We are in a place where impotence precludes malice, and where all envy is repressed by community<sup>2</sup> of enjoyments."

"There may be community," said Imlac, "of material possessions, but there can never be community of love or of esteem. It must happen that one will please more than another; he that knows himself despised will always be envious; and still more envious and malevolent, if he is condemned to live in the presence of those who despise him. The invitations, by which they allure others to a state which they feel to be wretched, proceed from the natural malignity of hopeless misery. They are weary of themselves, and of each other, and expect to find relief in new companions. They envy the liberty which their folly has forfeited, and would gladly see all mankind imprisoned like themselves.

"From this crime, however, I am wholly free. No man can say that he is wretched by my persuasion. I look with pity on the crowds who are annually soliciting admission to captivity, and wish that it were lawful for me to warn them of their danger."

"My dear Imlac," said the prince, "I will open to thee my whole heart. I have long meditated an escape from the happy valley. I have examined the mountains on every side, but find myself insuperably barred: teach me the way to break my prison; thou shalt



be the companion of my flight, the guide of my rambles, the partner of my fortune, and my sole director in the *choice of life*."

"Sir," answered the poet, "your escape will be difficult, and, perhaps, you may soon repent your curiosity. The world, which you figure to yourself smooth and quiet as the lake in the valley, you will find a sea foaming with tempests, and boiling with whirlpools: you will be sometimes overwhelmed by the waves of violence, and sometimes dashed against the rocks of treachery. Amidst wrongs and frauds, competitions and anxieties, you will wish a thousand times for these seats of quiet, and willingly quit hope to be free from fear."

"Do not seek to deter me from my purpose," said the prince: "I am impatient to see what thou hast seen; and, since thou art thyself weary of the valley, it is evident, that thy former state was better than this. Whatever be the consequence of my experiment, I am resolved to judge with my own eyes of the various conditions of men, and then to make deliberately my *choice of life*."

"I am afraid," said Imlac, "you are hindered by stronger restraints than my persuasions; yet, if your determination is fixed, I do not counsel you to despair. Few things are impossible to diligence and skill."

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Joint possession. [Return to reference 7](#)

### **Chapter 13. *Rasselas Discovers the Means of Escape***

The prince now dismissed his favorite to rest, but the narrative of wonders and novelties filled his mind with perturbation. He revolved all that he had heard, and prepared innumerable questions for the morning.

Much of his uneasiness was now removed. He had a friend to whom he could impart his thoughts, and whose experience could assist him in his designs. His heart was no longer condemned to swell with silent vexation. He thought that even the *happy valley* might be endured with such a companion, and that, if they could range the world together, he should have nothing further to desire.

In a few days the water was discharged, and the ground dried. The prince and Imlac then walked out together to converse without the notice of the rest. The prince, whose thoughts were always on the wing, as he passed by the gate, said, with a countenance of sorrow, "Why art thou so strong, and why is man so weak?"

"Man is not weak," answered his companion; "knowledge is more than equivalent to force. The master of mechanics laughs at strength. I can burst the gate, but cannot do it secretly. Some other expedient must be tried."

As they were walking on the side of the mountain, they observed that the conies,<sup>8</sup> which the rain had driven from their burrows, had taken shelter among the bushes, and formed holes behind them, tending upwards in an oblique line. "It has been the opinion of antiquity," said Imlac, "that human reason borrowed many arts from the instinct of animals; let us, therefore, not think ourselves degraded by learning from the coney. We may escape by piercing the mountain in the same direction. We will begin where the summit hangs over the middle part, and labor upward till we shall issue out beyond the prominence."

The eyes of the prince, when he heard this proposal, sparkled with joy. The execution was easy, and the success certain.

No time was now lost. They hastened early in the morning to choose a place proper for their mine. They clambered with great

fatigue among crags and brambles, and returned without having discovered any part that favored their design. The second and the third day were spent in the same manner, and with the same frustration. But, on the fourth, they found a small cavern, concealed by a thicket, where they resolved to make their experiment.

Imlac procured instruments proper to hew stone and remove earth, and they fell to their work on the next day with more eagerness than vigor. They were presently exhausted by their efforts, and sat down to pant upon the grass. The prince, for a moment, appeared to be discouraged. "Sir," said his companion, "practice will enable us to continue our labor for a longer time; mark, however, how far we have advanced, and you will find that our toil will some time have an end. Great works are performed, not by strength, but perseverance: yonder palace was raised by single stones, yet you see its height and spaciousness. He that shall walk with vigor three hours a day will pass in seven years a space equal to the circumference of the globe."

They returned to their work day after day, and, in a short time, found a fissure in the rock, which enabled them to pass far with very little obstruction. This Rasselas considered as a good omen. "Do not disturb your mind," said Imlac, "with other hopes or fears than reason may suggest: if you are pleased with prognostics of good, you will be terrified likewise with tokens of evil, and your whole life will be a prey to superstition. Whatever facilitates our work is more than an omen, it is a cause of success. This is one of those pleasing surprises which often happen to active resolution. Many things difficult to design prove easy to performance."

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Rabbits. [Return to reference 8](#)

#### **Chapter 14. Rasselas and Imlac Receive an Unexpected Visit**

They had now wrought their way to the middle, and solaced their toil with the approach of liberty, when the prince, coming down to refresh himself with air, found his sister Nekayah standing before the mouth of the cavity. He started and stood confused, afraid to tell his design, and yet hopeless to conceal it. A few moments determined him to repose on her fidelity, and secure her secrecy by a declaration without reserve.

“Do not imagine,” said the princess, “that I came hither as a spy: I had long observed from my window, that you and Imlac directed your walk every day towards the same point, but I did not suppose you had any better reason for the preference than a cooler shade, or more fragrant bank; nor followed you with any other design than to partake of your conversation. Since then not suspicion but fondness has detected you, let me not lose the advantage of my discovery. I am equally weary of confinement with yourself, and not less desirous of knowing what is done or suffered in the world. Permit me to fly with you from this tasteless tranquility, which will yet grow more loathsome when you have left me. You may deny me to accompany you, but cannot hinder me from following.”

The prince, who loved Nekayah above his other sisters, had no inclination to refuse her request, and grieved that he had lost an opportunity of showing his confidence by a voluntary communication. It was therefore agreed that she should leave the valley with them; and that, in the mean time, she should watch, lest any other straggler should, by chance or curiosity, follow them to the mountain.

At length their labor was at an end; they saw light beyond the prominence, and, issuing to the top of the mountain, beheld the Nile, yet a narrow current, wandering beneath them.

The prince looked round with rapture, anticipated all the pleasures of travel, and in thought was already transported beyond his father’s dominions. Imlac, though very joyful at his escape, had

less expectation of pleasure in the world, which he had before tried, and of which he had been weary.

Rasselas was so much delighted with a wider horizon, that he could not soon be persuaded to return into the valley. He informed his sister that the way was open, and that nothing now remained but to prepare for their departure.

## **Chapter 15. *The Prince and Princess Leave the Valley, and See Many Wonders***

The prince and princess had jewels sufficient to make them rich whenever they came into a place of commerce, which, by Imlac's direction, they hid in their clothes, and, on the night of the next full moon, all left the valley. The princess was followed only by a single favorite, who did not know whither she was going.

They clambered through the cavity, and began to go down on the other side. The princess and her maid turned their eyes towards every part, and, seeing nothing to bound their prospect, considered themselves as in danger of being lost in a dreary vacuity. They stopped and trembled. "I am almost afraid," said the princess, "to begin a journey of which I cannot perceive an end, and to venture into this immense plain where I may be approached on every side by men whom I never saw." The prince felt nearly the same emotions, though he thought it more manly to conceal them.

Imlac smiled at their terrors, and encouraged them to proceed; but the princess continued irresolute till she had been imperceptibly drawn forward too far to return.

In the morning they found some shepherds in the field, who set milk and fruits before them. The princess wondered that she did not see a palace ready for her reception, and a table spread with delicacies; but, being faint and hungry, she drank the milk and ate the fruits, and thought them of a higher flavor than the products of the valley.

They traveled forward by easy journeys, being all unaccustomed to toil or difficulty, and knowing, that though they might be missed, they could not be pursued. In a few days they came into a more populous region, where Imlac was diverted with the admiration which his companions expressed at the diversity of manners, stations and employments.

Their dress was such as might not bring upon them the suspicion of having any thing to conceal, yet the prince, wherever he came, expected to be obeyed, and the princess was frightened, because

those that came into her presence did not prostrate themselves before her. Imlac was forced to observe them with great vigilance, lest they should betray their rank by their unusual behavior, and detained them several weeks in the first village to accustom them to the sight of common mortals.

By degrees the royal wanderers were taught to understand that they had for a time laid aside their dignity, and were to expect only such regard as liberality and courtesy could procure. And Imlac, having, by many admonitions, prepared them to endure the tumults of a port, and the ruggedness of the commercial race, brought them down to the seacoast.

The prince and his sister, to whom every thing was new, were gratified equally at all places, and therefore remained for some months at the port without any inclination to pass further. Imlac was content with their stay, because he did not think it safe to expose them, unpracticed in the world, to the hazards of a foreign country.

At last he began to fear lest they should be discovered, and proposed to fix a day for their departure. They had no pretensions to judge for themselves, and referred the whole scheme to his direction. He therefore took passage in a ship to Suez; and, when the time came, with great difficulty prevailed on the princess to enter the vessel. They had a quick and prosperous voyage, and from Suez traveled by land to Cairo.

## **Chapter 16. They Enter Cairo, and Find Every Man Happy**

As they approached the city, which filled the strangers with astonishment, "This," said Imlac to the prince, "is the place where travelers and merchants assemble from all the corners of the earth. You will here find men of every character and every occupation. Commerce is here honorable. I will act as a merchant, and you shall live as strangers, who have no other end of travel than curiosity. It will soon be observed that we are rich; our reputation will procure us access to all whom we shall desire to know; you will see all the conditions of humanity, and enable yourself at leisure to make your *choice of life*."

They now entered the town, stunned by the noise, and offended by the crowds. Instruction had not yet so prevailed over habit, but that they wondered to see themselves pass undistinguished along the street, and met by the lowest of the people without reverence or notice. The princess could not at first bear the thought of being leveled with the vulgar,<sup>9</sup> and for some days continued in her chamber, where she was served by her favorite, Pekuah, as in the palace of the valley.

Imlac, who understood traffic,<sup>1</sup> sold part of the jewels the next day, and hired a house, which he adorned with such magnificence that he was immediately considered as a merchant of great wealth. His politeness attracted many acquaintance, and his generosity made him courted by many dependents. His table was crowded by men of every nation, who all admired his knowledge, and solicited his favor. His companions, not being able to mix in the conversation, could make no discovery<sup>2</sup> of their ignorance or surprise, and were gradually initiated in the world as they gained knowledge of the language.

The prince had, by frequent lectures, been, taught the use and nature of money; but the ladies could not for a long time comprehend what the merchants did with small pieces of gold and silver, or why things of so little use should be received as equivalent to the necessaries of life.



They studied the language two years, while Imlac was preparing to set before them the various ranks and conditions of mankind. He grew acquainted with all who had anything uncommon in their fortune or conduct. He frequented the voluptuous and the frugal, the idle and the busy, the merchants and the men of learning.

The prince being now able to converse with fluency, and having learned the caution necessary to be observed in his intercourse with strangers, began to accompany Imlac to places of resort, and to enter into all assemblies, that he might make his *choice of life*.

For some time he thought choice needless, because all appeared to him equally happy. Wherever he went he met gaiety and kindness, and heard the song of joy or the laugh of carelessness. He began to believe that the world overflowed with universal plenty, and that nothing was withheld either from want or merit; that every hand showered liberality, and every heart melted with benevolence: "And who then," says he, "will be suffered to be wretched?"

Imlac permitted the pleasing delusion, and was unwilling to crush the hope of inexperience, till one day, having sat awhile silent, "I know not," said the prince, "what can be the reason that I am more unhappy than any of our friends. I see them perpetually and unalterably cheerful, but feel my own mind restless and uneasy. I am unsatisfied with those pleasures which I seem most to court; I live in the crowds of jollity, not so much to enjoy company as to shun myself, and am only loud and merry to conceal my sadness."

"Every man," said Imlac, "may, by examining his own mind, guess what passes in the minds of others; when you feel that your own gaiety is counterfeit, it may justly lead you to suspect that of your companions not to be sincere. Envy is commonly reciprocal. We are long before we are convinced that happiness is never to be found, and each believes it possessed by others, to keep alive the hope of obtaining it for himself. In the assembly where you passed the last night, there appeared such sprightliness of air, and volatility of fancy, as might have suited beings of an higher order, formed to inhabit serener regions, inaccessible to care or sorrow; yet, believe

me, prince, there was not one who did not dread the moment when solitude should deliver him to the tyranny of reflection."

"This," said the prince, "may be true of others, since it is true of me; yet, whatever be the general infelicity of man, one condition is more happy than another, and wisdom surely directs us to take the least evil in the *choice of life*."

"The causes of good and evil," answered Imlac, "are so various and uncertain, so often entangled with each other, so diversified by various relations, and so much subject to accidents which cannot be foreseen, that he who would fix his condition upon incontestable reasons of preference must live and die inquiring and deliberating."

"But, surely," said Rasselas, "the wise men, to whom we listen with reverence and wonder, chose that mode of life for themselves which they thought most likely to make them happy."

"Very few," said the poet, "live by choice. Every man is placed in his present condition by causes which acted without his foresight, and with which he did not always willingly cooperate; and therefore you will rarely meet one who does not think the lot of his neighbor better than his own."

"I am pleased to think," said the prince, "that my birth has given me at least one advantage over others, by enabling me to determine for myself. I have here the world before me. I will review it at leisure; surely happiness is somewhere to be found."

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Ordinary people. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Commerce. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Exposure. [Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 17. The Prince Associates with Young Men of Spirit and Gaiety**

Rasselas rose next day, and resolved to begin his experiments upon life. "Youth," cried he, "is the time of gladness: I will join myself to the young men, whose only business is to gratify their desires, and whose time is all spent in a succession of enjoyments."

To such societies he was readily admitted, but a few days brought him back weary and disgusted. Their mirth was without images,<sup>3</sup> their laughter without motive; their pleasures were gross and sensual, in which the mind had no part; their conduct was at once wild and mean; they laughed at order and at law, but the frown of power dejected, and the eye of wisdom abashed them.

The prince soon concluded, that he should never be happy in a course of life of which he was ashamed. He thought it unsuitable to a reasonable being to act without a plan, and to be sad or cheerful only by chance. "Happiness," said he, "must be something solid and permanent, without fear and without uncertainty."

But his young companions had gained so much of his regard by their frankness and courtesy, that he could not leave them without warning and remonstrance. "My friends," said he, "I have seriously considered our manners and our prospects, and find that we have mistaken our own interest. The first years of man must make provision for the last. He that never thinks never can be wise. Perpetual levity must end in ignorance; and intemperance, though it may fire the spirits for an hour, will make life short or miserable. Let us consider that youth is of no long duration, and that in maturer age, when the enchantments of fancy shall cease, and phantoms of delight dance no more about us, we shall have no comforts but the esteem of wise men, and the means of doing good. Let us, therefore, stop, while to stop is in our power: let us live as men who are sometime to grow old, and to whom it will be the most dreadful of all evils not to count their past years but by follies, and to be reminded of their former luxuriance of health only by the maladies which riot has produced."

They stared a while in silence one upon another, and, at last, drove him away by a general chorus of continued laughter.

The consciousness that his sentiments were just, and his intentions kind, was scarcely sufficient to support him against the horror of derision. But he recovered his tranquillity, and pursued his search.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Ideas. [Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 18. *The Prince Finds a Wise and Happy Man***

As he was one day walking in the street, he saw a spacious building which all were, by the open doors, invited to enter: he followed the stream of people, and found it a hall or school of declamation, in which professors read lectures to their auditory.<sup>4</sup> He fixed his eye upon a sage raised above the rest, who discoursed with great energy on the government of the passions. His look was venerable, his action graceful, his pronunciation clear, and his diction elegant. He showed with great strength of sentiment and variety of illustration that human nature is degraded and debased, when the lower faculties predominate over the higher; that when fancy, the parent of passion, usurps the dominion of the mind, nothing ensues but the natural effect of unlawful government, perturbation, and confusion; that she betrays the fortresses of the intellect to rebels, and excites her children to sedition against reason, their lawful sovereign. He compared reason to the sun, of which the light is constant, uniform and lasting; and fancy to a meteor, of bright but transitory luster, irregular in its motion, and delusive in its direction.

He then communicated the various precepts given from time to time for the conquest of passion, and displayed the happiness of those who had obtained the important victory, after which man is no longer the slave of fear, nor the fool of hope; is no more emaciated by envy, inflamed by anger, emasculated by tenderness, or depressed by grief; but walks on calmly through the tumults or the privacies of life, as the sun pursues alike his course through the calm or the stormy sky.

He enumerated many examples of heroes immovable by pain or pleasure, who looked with indifference on those modes or accidents to which the vulgar give the names of good and evil. He exhorted his hearers to lay aside their prejudices, and arm themselves against the shafts of malice or misfortune, by invulnerable patience; concluding that this state only was happiness, and that this happiness was in everyone's power.

Rasselas listened to him with the veneration due to the instructions of a superior being, and, waiting for him at the door, humbly implored the liberty of visiting so great a master of true wisdom. The lecturer hesitated a moment, when Rasselas put a purse of gold into his hand, which he received with a mixture of joy and wonder.

"I have found," said the prince at his return to Imlac, "a man who can teach all that is necessary to be known; who, from the unshaken throne of rational fortitude, looks down on the scenes of life changing beneath him. He speaks, and attention watches his lips. He reasons, and conviction closes his periods.<sup>5</sup> This man shall be my future guide; I will learn his doctrines, and imitate his life."

"Be not too hasty," said Imlac, "to trust or to admire the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men."

Rasselas, who could not conceive how any man could reason so forcibly without feeling the cogency of his own arguments, paid his visit in a few days, and was denied admission. He had now learned the power of money, and made his way by a piece of gold to the inner apartment, where he found the philosopher in a room half darkened, with his eyes misty and his face pale. "Sir," said he, "you are come at a time when all human friendship is useless; what I suffer cannot be remedied, what I have lost cannot be supplied. My daughter, my only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age, died last night of a fever. My views, my purposes, my hopes are at an end; I am now a lonely being, disunited from society."

"Sir," said the prince, "mortality is an event by which a wise man can never be surprised; we know that death is always near, and it should therefore always be expected." "Young man," answered the philosopher, "you speak like one that has never felt the pangs of separation." "Have you then forgot the precepts," said Rasselas, "which you so powerfully enforced? Has wisdom no strength to arm the heart against calamity? Consider that external things are naturally variable, but truth and reason are always the same." "What comfort," said the mourner, "can truth and reason afford me? Of

what effect are they now, but to tell me that my daughter will not be restored?”

The prince, whose humanity would not suffer him to insult misery with reproof, went away, convinced of the emptiness of rhetorical sound, and the inefficacy of polished periods and studied sentences.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Audience.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Completed sentences.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Maxims or moral axioms.[Return to reference 6](#)

## **Chapter 19. A Glimpse of Pastoral Life**

He was still eager upon the same inquiry; and having heard of a hermit that lived near the lowest cataract of the Nile, and filled the whole country with the fame of his sanctity, resolved to visit his retreat, and inquire whether that felicity which public life could not afford was to be found in solitude; and whether a man whose age and virtue made him venerable could teach any peculiar art of shunning evils, or enduring them.

Imlac and the princess agreed to accompany him, and, after the necessary preparations, they began their journey. Their way lay through fields, where shepherds tended their flocks and the lambs were playing upon the pasture. "This," said the poet, "is the life which has been often celebrated for its innocence and quiet; let us pass the heat of the day among the shepherds' tents, and know whether all our searches are not to terminate in pastoral simplicity."

The proposal pleased them, and they induced the shepherds, by small presents and familiar questions, to tell their opinion of their own state. They were so rude and ignorant, so little able to compare the good with the evil of the occupation, and so indistinct in their narratives and descriptions, that very little could be learned from them. But it was evident that their hearts were cankered with discontent; that they considered themselves as condemned to labor for the luxury of the rich, and looked up with stupid malevolence toward those that were placed above them.

The princess pronounced with vehemence that she would never suffer these envious savages to be her companions, and that she should not soon be desirous of seeing any more specimens of rustic happiness; but could not believe that all the accounts of primeval pleasures were fabulous,<sup>7</sup> and was yet in doubt whether life had anything that could be justly preferred to the placid gratifications of fields and woods. She hoped that the time would come, when, with a few virtuous and elegant companions, she could gather flowers planted by her own hand, fondle the lambs of her own ewe, and



listen, without care, among brooks and breezes, to one of her maidens reading in the shade.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Fictional. [Return to reference 7](#)

## **Chapter 20. *The Danger of Prosperity***

On the next day they continued their journey, till the heat compelled them to look round for shelter. At a small distance they saw a thick wood, which they no sooner entered than they perceived that they were approaching the habitations of men. The shrubs were diligently cut away to open walks where the shades were darkest; the boughs of opposite trees were artificially interwoven; seats of flowery turf were raised in vacant spaces, and a rivulet, that wantoned along the side of a winding path, had its banks sometimes opened into small basins, and its stream sometimes obstructed by little mounds of stone heaped together to increase its murmurs.

They passed slowly through the wood, delighted with such unexpected accommodations, and entertained each other with conjecturing what, or who, he could be, that, in those rude and unfrequented regions, had leisure and art for such harmless luxury.

As they advanced, they heard the sound of music, and saw youths and virgins dancing in the grove; and, going still further, beheld a stately palace built upon a hill surrounded with woods. The laws of eastern hospitality allowed them to enter, and the master welcomed them like a man liberal and wealthy.

He was skilful enough in appearances soon to discern that they were no common guests, and spread his table with magnificence. The eloquence of Imlac caught his attention, and the lofty courtesy of the princess excited his respect. When they offered to depart he entreated their stay, and was the next day still more unwilling to dismiss them than before. They were easily persuaded to stop, and civility grew up in time to freedom and confidence.

The prince now saw all the domestics cheerful, and all the face of nature smiling round the place, and could not forbear to hope that he should find here what he was seeking; but when he was congratulating the master upon his possessions, he answered with a sigh, "My condition has indeed the appearance of happiness, but appearances are delusive. My prosperity puts my life in danger; the Bassa<sup>8</sup> of Egypt is my enemy, incensed only by my wealth and

popularity. I have been hitherto protected against him by the princes of the country; but, as the favor of the great is uncertain, I know not how soon my defenders may be persuaded to share the plunder with the Bassa. I have sent my treasures into a distant country, and, upon the first alarm, am prepared to follow them. Then will my enemies riot in my mansion, and enjoy the gardens which I have planted.”

They all joined in lamenting his danger, and deprecating his exile; and the princess was so much disturbed with the tumult of grief and indignation, that she retired to her apartment. They continued with their kind inviter a few days longer, and then went forward to find the hermit.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Pasha, a Turkish viceroy.[Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 21. The Happiness of Solitude. The Hermit's History**

They came on the third day, by the direction of the peasants, to the hermit's cell: it was a cavern in the side of a mountain, overshadowed with palm-trees; at such a distance from the cataract, that nothing more was heard than a gentle uniform murmur, such as composed the mind to pensive meditation, especially when it was assisted by the wind whistling among the branches. The first rude essay of nature had been so much improved by human labor, that the cave contained several apartments, appropriated to different uses, and often afforded lodging to travelers, whom darkness or tempests happened to overtake.

The hermit sat on a bench at the door, to enjoy the coolness of the evening. On one side lay a book with pens and papers, on the other mechanical instruments of various kinds. As they approached him unregarded, the princess observed that he had not the countenance of a man that had found, or could teach, the way to happiness.

They saluted him with great respect, which he repaid like a man not unaccustomed to the forms of courts. "My children," said he, "if you have lost your way, you shall be willingly supplied with such conveniencies for the night as this cavern will afford. I have all that nature requires, and you will not expect delicacies in a hermit's cell."

They thanked him, and, entering, were pleased with the neatness and regularity of the place. The hermit set flesh and wine before them, though he fed only upon fruits and water. His discourse was cheerful without levity, and pious without enthusiasm.<sup>9</sup> He soon gained the esteem of his guests, and the princess repented of her hasty censure.

At last Imlac began thus: "I do not now wonder that your reputation is so far extended; we have heard at Cairo of your wisdom, and came hither to implore your direction for this young man and maiden in the *choice of life*."

"To him that lives well," answered the hermit, "every form of life is good; nor can I give any other rule for choice, than to remove

from all apparent evil."

"He will remove most certainly from evil," said the prince, "who shall devote himself to that solitude which you have recommended by your example."

"I have indeed lived fifteen years in solitude," said the hermit, "but have no desire that my example should gain any imitators. In my youth I professed arms, and was raised by degrees to the highest military rank. I have traversed wide countries at the head of my troops, and seen many battles and sieges. At last, being disgusted by the preferment of a younger officer, and feeling that my vigor was beginning to decay, I resolved to close my life in peace, having found the world full of snares, discord, and misery. I had once escaped from the pursuit of the enemy by the shelter of this cavern, and therefore chose it for my final residence. I employed artificers to form it into chambers, and stored it with all that I was likely to want.

"For some time after my retreat, I rejoiced like a tempest-beaten sailor at his entrance into the harbor, being delighted with the sudden change of the noise and hurry of war, to stillness and repose. When the pleasure of novelty went away, I employed my hours in examining the plants which grow in the valley, and the minerals which I collected from the rocks. But that inquiry is now grown tasteless and irksome. I have been for some time unsettled and distracted: my mind is disturbed with a thousand perplexities of doubt, and vanities of imagination, which hourly prevail upon me, because I have no opportunities of relaxation or diversion. I am sometimes ashamed to think that I could not secure myself from vice, but by retiring from the exercise of virtue, and begin to suspect that I was rather impelled by resentment, than led by devotion, into solitude. My fancy riots in scenes of folly, and I lament that I have lost so much, and have gained so little. In solitude, if I escape the example of bad men, I want likewise the counsel and conversation of the good. I have been long comparing the evils with the advantages of society, and resolve to return into the world

tomorrow. The life of a solitary man will be certainly miserable, but not certainly devout."

They heard his resolution with surprise, but, after a short pause, offered to conduct him to Cairo. He dug up a considerable treasure which he had hid among the rocks, and accompanied them to the city, on which, as he approached it, he gazed with rapture.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: "A vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favor or communication" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)

## **Chapter 22. *The Happiness of a Life Led according to Nature***

Rasselas went often to an assembly of learned men, who met at stated times to unbend their minds and compare their opinions. Their manners were somewhat coarse, but their conversation was instructive, and their disputations acute, though sometimes too violent, and often continued till neither controvertist remembered upon what question they began. Some faults were almost general among them; everyone was desirous to dictate to the rest, and everyone was pleased to hear the genius or knowledge of another depreciated.

In this assembly Rasselas was relating his interview with the hermit, and the wonder with which he heard him censure a course of life which he had so deliberately chosen, and so laudably followed. The sentiments of the hearers were various. Some were of opinion that the folly of his choice had been justly punished by condemnation to perpetual perseverance. One of the youngest among them, with great vehemence, pronounced him an hypocrite. Some talked of the right of society to the labor of individuals, and considered retirement as a desertion of duty. Others readily allowed that there was a time when the claims of the public were satisfied, and when a man might properly sequester himself, to review his life and purify his heart.

One, who appeared more affected with the narrative than the rest, thought it likely that the hermit would in a few years go back to his retreat, and perhaps, if shame did not restrain, or death intercept him, return once more from his retreat into the world. "For the hope of happiness," said he, "is so strongly impressed that the longest experience is not able to efface it. Of the present state, whatever it be, we feel and are forced to confess the misery; yet when the same state is again at a distance, imagination paints it as desirable. But the time will surely come when desire will be no longer our torment, and no man shall be wretched but by his own fault."

"This," said a philosopher who had heard him with tokens of great impatience, "is the present condition of a wise man. The time

is already come when none are wretched but by their own fault. Nothing is more idle than to inquire after happiness, which nature has kindly placed within our reach. The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed; which is not written on it by precept, but engraven by destiny, not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity. He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire; he will receive and reject with equability of temper, and act or suffer as the reason of things shall alternately prescribe. Other men may amuse themselves with subtle definitions, or intricate ratiocination. Let them learn to be wise by easier means; let them observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove; let them consider the life of animals, whose motions are regulated by instinct; they obey their guide, and are happy. Let us therefore, at length, cease to dispute, and learn to live; throw away the encumbrance of precepts, which they who utter them with so much pride and pomp do not understand, and carry with us this simple and intelligible maxim, that deviation from nature is deviation from happiness."

When he had spoken, he looked round him with a placid air, and enjoyed the consciousness of his own beneficence. "Sir," said the prince with great modesty, "as I, like all the rest of mankind, am desirous of felicity, my closest attention has been fixed upon your discourse. I doubt not the truth of a position which a man so learned has so confidently advanced. Let me only know what it is to live according to nature."

"When I find young men so humble and so docile," said the philosopher, "I can deny them no information which my studies have enabled me to afford. To live according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects; to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things."



The prince soon found that this was one of the sages whom he should understand less as he heard him longer. He therefore bowed and was silent; and the philosopher, supposing him satisfied, and the rest vanquished, rose up and departed with the air of a man that had co-operated with the present system.

### **Chapter 23. *The Prince and His Sister Divide between Them the Work of Observation***

Rasselas returned home full of reflections, doubtful how to direct his future steps. Of the way to happiness he found the learned and simple equally ignorant; but, as he was yet young, he flattered himself that he had time remaining for more experiments, and further inquiries. He communicated to Imlac his observations and his doubts, but was answered by him with new doubts, and remarks that gave him no comfort. He therefore discoursed more frequently and freely with his sister, who had yet the same hope with himself, and always assisted him to give some reason why, though he had been hitherto frustrated, he might succeed at last.

"We have hitherto," said she, "known but little of the world: we have never yet been either great or mean. In our own country, though we had royalty, we had no power, and in this we have not yet seen the private recesses of domestic peace. Imlac favors not our search, lest we should in time find him mistaken. We will divide the task between us: you shall try what is to be found in the splendor of courts, and I will range the shades of humbler life. Perhaps command and authority may be the supreme blessings, as they afford most opportunities of doing good: or, perhaps, what this world can give may be found in the modest habitations of middle fortune; too low for great designs, and too high for penury and distress."

## **Chapter 24. *The Prince Examines the Happiness of High Stations***

Rasselas applauded the design, and appeared next day with a splendid retinue at the court of the Bassa. He was soon distinguished for his magnificence, and admitted, as a prince whose curiosity had brought him from distant countries, to an intimacy with the great officers, and frequent conversation with the Bassa himself.

He was at first inclined to believe, that the man must be pleased with his own condition, whom all approached with reverence, and heard with obedience, and who had the power to extend his edicts to a whole kingdom. "There can be no pleasure," said he, "equal to that of feeling at once the joy of thousands all made happy by wise administration. Yet, since, by the law of subordination, this sublime delight can be in one nation but the lot of one, it is surely reasonable to think that there is some satisfaction more popular<sup>1</sup> and accessible, and that millions can hardly be subjected to the will of a single man, only to fill his particular breast with incommunicable content."

These thoughts were often in his mind, and he found no solution of the difficulty. But as presents and civilities gained him more familiarity, he found that almost every man who stood high in employment hated all the rest, and was hated by them, and that their lives were a continual succession of plots and detections, stratagems and escapes, faction and treachery. Many of those, who surrounded the Bassa, were sent only to watch and report his conduct; every tongue was muttering censure and every eye was searching for a fault.

At last the letters of revocation arrived, the Bassa was carried in chains to Constantinople, and his name was mentioned no more.

"What are we now to think of the prerogatives of power," said Rasselas to his sister; "is it without any efficacy to good? or, is the subordinate degree only dangerous, and the supreme safe and glorious? Is the Sultan the only happy man in his dominions? or, is

the Sultan himself subject to the torments of suspicion, and the dread of enemies?”

In a short time the second Bassa was deposed. The Sultan, that had advanced him, was murdered by the Janisaries,<sup>2</sup> and his successor had other views and different favorites.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Common.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Guards of the Turkish ruler.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 25. The Princess Pursues Her Inquiry with More Diligence Than Success**

The princess, in the mean time, insinuated herself into many families; for there are few doors, through which liberality, joined with good humor, cannot find its way. The daughters of many houses were airy<sup>3</sup> and cheerful, but Nekayah had been too long accustomed to the conversation of Imlac and her brother to be much pleased with childish levity and prattle which had no meaning. She found their thoughts narrow, their wishes low, and their merriment often artificial. Their pleasures, poor as they were, could not be preserved pure, but were embittered by petty competitions and worthless emulation. They were always jealous of the beauty of each other; of a quality to which solicitude can add nothing, and from which detraction can take nothing away. Many were in love with triflers like themselves, and many fancied that they were in love when in truth they were only idle. Their affection was seldom fixed on sense or virtue, and therefore seldom ended but in vexation. Their grief, however, like their joy, was transient; everything floated in their mind unconnected with the past or future, so that one desire easily gave way to another, as a second stone cast into the water effaces and confounds the circles of the first.

With these girls she played as with inoffensive animals, and found them proud of her countenance,<sup>4</sup> and weary of her company.

But her purpose was to examine more deeply, and her affability easily persuaded the hearts that were swelling with sorrow to discharge their secrets in her ear: and those whom hope flattered, or prosperity delighted, often courted her to partake their pleasures.

The princess and her brother commonly met in the evening in a private summer-house on the bank of the Nile, and related to each other the occurrences of the day. As they were sitting together, the princess cast her eyes upon the river that flowed before her.

"Answer," said she, "great father of waters, thou that rollest thy floods through eighty nations, to the invocations of the daughter of thy native king. Tell me if thou waterest, through all thy course, a

single habitation from which thou dost not hear the murmurs of complaint?"

"You are then," said Rasselas, "not more successful in private houses than I have been in courts." "I have, since the last partition of our provinces,"<sup>5</sup> said the princess, "enabled myself to enter familiarly into many families, where there was the fairest show of prosperity and peace, and know not one house that is not haunted by some fury that destroys its quiet.

"I did not seek ease among the poor, because I concluded that there it could not be found. But I saw many poor whom I had supposed to live in affluence. Poverty has, in large cities, very different appearances: it is often concealed in splendor, and often in extravagance. It is the care of a very great part of mankind to conceal their indigence from the rest: they support themselves by temporary expedients, and every day is lost in contriving for the morrow.

"This, however, was an evil, which, though frequent, I saw with less pain, because I could relieve it. Yet some have refused my bounties; more offended with my quickness to detect their wants, than pleased with my readiness to succor them: and others, whose exigencies compelled them to admit my kindness, have never been able to forgive their benefactress. Many, however, have been sincerely grateful without the ostentation of gratitude, or the hope of other favors."

## Endnotes

- Note 3: "Gay; sprightly; full of mirth" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Patronage, favor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Division of our responsibilities.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **Chapter 26. *The Princess Continues Her Remarks upon Private Life***

Nekayah, perceiving her brother's attention fixed, proceeded in her narrative.

"In families where there is or is not poverty, there is commonly discord. If a kingdom be, as Imlac tells us, a great family, a family likewise is a little kingdom, torn with factions and exposed to revolutions. An unpracticed observer expects the love of parents and children to be constant and equal; but this kindness seldom continues beyond the years of infancy: in a short time the children become rivals to their parents. Benefits are allayed<sup>6</sup> by reproaches, and gratitude debased by envy.

"Parents and children seldom act in concert; each child endeavors to appropriate the esteem or fondness of the parents, and the parents, with yet less temptation, betray each other to their children. Thus, some place their confidence in the father, and some in the mother, and by degrees the house is filled with artifices and feuds.

"The opinions of children and parents, of the young and the old, are naturally opposite, by the contrary effects of hope and despondence, of expectation and experience, without crime or folly on either side. The colors of life in youth and age appear different, as the face of nature in spring and winter. And how can children credit the assertions of parents, which their own eyes show them to be false?

"Few parents act in such a manner as much to enforce their maxims by the credit of their lives. The old man trusts wholly to slow contrivance and gradual progression; the youth expects to force his way by genius, vigor, and precipitance. The old man pays regard to riches, and the youth reverences virtue. The old man deifies prudence; the youth commits himself to magnanimity and chance. The young man, who intends no ill, believes that none is intended, and therefore acts with openness and candor; but his father, having suffered the injuries of fraud, is impelled to suspect, and too often

allured to practice it. Age looks with anger on the temerity of youth, and youth with contempt on the scrupulosity<sup>2</sup> of age. Thus parents and children, for the greatest part, live on to love less and less; and, if those whom nature has thus closely united are the torments of each other, where shall we look for tenderness and consolation?"

"Surely," said the prince, "you must have been unfortunate in your choice of acquaintance: I am unwilling to believe that the most tender of all relations is thus impeded in its effects by natural necessity."

"Domestic discord," answered she, "is not inevitably and fatally necessary, but yet is not easily avoided. We seldom see that a whole family is virtuous; the good and evil cannot well agree, and the evil can yet less agree with one another. Even the virtuous fall sometimes to variance, when their virtues are of different kinds, and tending to extremes. In general, those parents have most reverence who most deserve it; for he that lives well cannot be despised.

"Many other evils infest private life. Some are the slaves of servants whom they have trusted with their affairs. Some are kept in continual anxiety to the caprice of rich relations, whom they cannot please, and dare not offend. Some husbands are imperious, and some wives perverse; and, as it is always more easy to do evil than good, though the wisdom or virtue of one can very rarely make many happy, the folly or vice of one may often make many miserable."

"If such be the general effect of marriage," said the prince, "I shall for the future think it dangerous to connect my interest with that of another, lest I should be unhappy by my partner's fault."

"I have met," said the princess, "with many who live single for that reason; but I never found that their prudence ought to raise envy. They dream away their time without friendship, without fondness, and are driven to rid themselves of the day, for which they have no use, by childish amusements, or vicious delights. They act as beings under the constant sense of some known inferiority that fills their minds with rancor, and their tongues with censure. They are peevish at home, and malevolent abroad; and, as the outlaws of



human nature, make it their business and their pleasure to disturb that society which debars them from its privileges. To live without feeling or exciting sympathy, to be fortunate without adding to the felicity of others, or afflicted without tasting the balm of pity, is a state more gloomy than solitude; it is not retreat but exclusion from mankind. Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures."

"What then is to be done?" said Rasselas; "the more we inquire, the less we can resolve. Surely he is most likely to please himself that has no other inclination to regard."

## Endnotes

- Note 6: To allay is "to join anything to another, so as to abate its predominant qualities" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Fear of acting in any manner" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)

## **Chapter 27. Disquisition upon Greatness**

The conversation had a short pause. The prince, having considered his sister's observations, told her, that she had surveyed life with prejudice, and supposed misery where she did not find it. "Your narrative," says he, "throws yet a darker gloom upon the prospects of futurity: the predictions of Imlac were but faint sketches of the evils painted by Nekayah. I have been lately, convinced that quiet is not the daughter of grandeur, or of power: that her presence is not to be bought by wealth, nor enforced by conquest. It is evident, that as any man acts in a wider compass, he must be more exposed to opposition from enmity or miscarriage from chance; whoever has many to please or to govern, must use the ministry of many agents, some of whom will be wicked, and some ignorant; by some he will be misled, and by others betrayed. If he gratifies one he will offend another: those that are not favored will think themselves injured; and, since favors can be conferred but upon few, the greater number will be always discontented."

"The discontent," said the princess, "which is thus unreasonable, I hope that I shall always have spirit to despise, and you, power to repress."

"Discontent," answered Rasselas, "will not always be without reason under the most just or vigilant administration of public affairs. None, however attentive, can always discover that merit which indigence or faction may happen to obscure; and none, however powerful, can always reward it. Yet, he that sees inferior desert<sup>8</sup> advanced above him, will naturally impute that preference to partiality or caprice; and, indeed, it can scarcely be hoped that any man, however magnanimous by nature, or exalted by condition, will be able to persist for ever in fixed and inexorable justice of distribution: he will sometimes indulge his own affections, and sometimes those of his favorites; he will permit some to please him who can never serve him; he will discover in those whom he loves qualities which in reality they do not possess; and to those, from whom he receives pleasure, he will in his turn endeavor to give it.

Thus will recommendations sometimes prevail which were purchased by money, or by the more destructive bribery of flattery and servility.

"He that has much to do will do something wrong, and of that wrong must suffer the consequences; and, if it were possible that he should always act rightly, yet when such numbers are to judge of his conduct, the bad will censure and obstruct him by malevolence, and the good sometimes by mistake.

"The highest stations cannot therefore hope to be the abodes of happiness, which I would willingly believe to have fled from thrones and palaces to seats of humble privacy and placid obscurity. For what can hinder the satisfaction, or intercept the expectations, of him whose abilities are adequate to his employments, who sees with his own eyes the whole circuit of his influence, who chooses by his own knowledge all whom he trusts, and whom none are tempted to deceive by hope or fear? Surely he has nothing to do but to love and to be loved, to be virtuous and to be happy."

"Whether perfect happiness would be procured by perfect goodness," said Nekayah, "this world will never afford an opportunity of deciding. But this, at least, may be maintained, that we do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue. All natural and almost all political evils, are incident alike to the bad and good: they are confounded in the misery of a famine, and not much distinguished in the fury of a faction; they sink together in a tempest, and are driven together from their country by invaders. All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience, a steady prospect of a happier state; this may enable us to endure calamity with patience; but remember that patience must suppose pain."

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Merit; one deserving reward. [Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 28. *Rasselas and Nekayah Continue Their Conversation***

"Dear princess," said Rasselas, "you fall into the common errors of exaggeratory declamation, by producing, in a familiar disquisition,<sup>9</sup> examples of national calamities, and scenes of extensive misery, which are found in books rather than in the world, and which, as they are horrid, are ordained to be rare. Let us not imagine evils which we do not feel, nor injure life by misrepresentations. I cannot bear that querulous eloquence which threatens every city with a siege like that of Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> that makes famine attend on every flight of locusts, and suspends pestilence on the wing of every blast that issues from the south.

"On necessary and inevitable evils, which overwhelm kingdoms at once, all disputation is vain: when they happen they must be endured. But it is evident, that these bursts of universal distress are more dreaded than felt: thousands and ten thousands flourish in youth, and wither in age, without the knowledge of any other than domestic evils, and share the same pleasures and vexations whether their kings are mild or cruel, whether the armies of their country pursue their enemies, or retreat before them. While courts are disturbed with intestine<sup>2</sup> competitions, and ambassadors are negotiating in foreign countries, the smith still plies his anvil, and the husbandman drives his plow forward; the necessities of life are required and obtained, and the successive business of the seasons continues to make its wonted revolutions.

"Let us cease to consider what, perhaps, may never happen, and what, when it shall happen, will laugh at human speculation. We will not endeavor to modify the motions of the elements, or to fix the destiny of kingdoms. It is our business to consider what beings like us may perform; each laboring for his own happiness, by promoting within his circle, however narrow, the happiness of others.

"Marriage is evidently the dictate of nature; men and women were made to be companions of each other, and therefore I cannot be persuaded but that marriage is one of the means of happiness."

"I know not," said the princess, "whether marriage be more than one of the innumerable modes of human misery. When I see and reckon the various forms of connubial infelicity, the unexpected causes of lasting discord, the diversities of temper, the oppositions of opinion, the rude collisions of contrary desire where both are urged by violent impulses, the obstinate contests of disagreeing virtues, where both are supported by consciousness of good intention, I am sometimes disposed to think with the severer casuists of most nations, that marriage is rather permitted than approved, and that none, but by the instigation of a passion too much indulged, entangle themselves with indissoluble compacts."

"You seem to forget," replied Rasselas, "that you have, even now, represented celibacy as less happy than marriage. Both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst. Thus it happens when wrong opinions are entertained, that they mutually destroy each other, and leave the mind open to truth."

"I did not expect," answered the princess, "to hear that imputed to falsehood which is the consequence only of frailty. To the mind, as to the eye, it is difficult to compare with exactness objects vast in their extent, and various in their parts. Where we see or conceive the whole at once we readily note the discriminations and decide the preference: but of two systems, of which neither can be surveyed by any human being in its full compass of magnitude and multiplicity of complication, where is the wonder, that judging of the whole by parts, I am alternately affected by one and the other as either presses on my memory or fancy? We differ from ourselves just as we differ from each other, when we see only part of the question, as in the multifarious relations of politics and morality: but when we perceive the whole at once, as in numerical computations, all agree in one judgment, and none ever varies his opinion."

"Let us not add," said the prince, "to the other evils of life, the bitterness of controversy, nor endeavor to vie with each other in subtleties of argument. We are employed in a search, of which both are equally to enjoy the success, or suffer by the miscarriage. It is therefore fit that we assist each other. You surely conclude too

hastily from the infelicity of marriage against its institution; will not the misery of life prove equally that life cannot be the gift of heaven? The world must be peopled by marriage, or peopled without it."

"How the world is to be peopled," returned Nekayah, "is not my care, and needs not be yours. I see no danger that the present generation should omit to leave successors behind them: we are not now inquiring for the world, but for ourselves."

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Family discussion of a question.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In 70 C.E. the Romans, under Titus, besieged and destroyed Jerusalem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Internal, domestic.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 29. *The Debate on Marriage Continued***

"The good of the whole," says Rasselas, "is the same with the good of all its parts. If marriage be best for mankind it must be evidently best for individuals, or a permanent and necessary duty must be the cause of evil, and some must be inevitably sacrificed to the convenience of others. In the estimate which you have made of the two states, it appears that the incommunities of a single life are, in a great measure, necessary and certain, but those of the conjugal state accidental and avoidable.

"I cannot forbear to flatter myself that prudence and benevolence will make marriage happy. The general folly of mankind is the cause of general complaint. What can be expected but disappointment and repentance from a choice made in the immaturity of youth, in the ardor of desire, without judgment, without foresight, without inquiry after conformity of opinions, similarity of manners, rectitude of judgment, or purity of sentiment.

"Such is the common process of marriage. A youth and maiden meeting by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home, and dream of one another. Having little to divert attention, or diversify thought, they find themselves uneasy when they are apart, and therefore conclude that they shall be happy together. They marry, and discover what nothing but voluntary blindness had before concealed; they wear out life in altercations, and charge nature with cruelty.

"From those early marriages proceeds likewise the rivalry of parents and children: the son is eager to enjoy the world before the father is willing to forsake it, and there is hardly room at once for two generations. The daughter begins to bloom before the mother can be content to fade, and neither can forbear to wish for the absence of the other.

"Surely all these evils may be avoided by that deliberation and delay which prudence prescribes to irrevocable choice. In the variety and jollity of youthful pleasures life may be well enough supported without the help of a partner. Longer time will increase experience,

and wider views will allow better opportunities of inquiry and selection: one advantage, at least, will be certain; the parents will be visibly older than their children."

"What reason cannot collect," said Nekayah, "and what experiment has not yet taught, can be known only from the report of others. I have been told that late marriages are not eminently happy. This is a question too important to be neglected, and I have often proposed it to those, whose accuracy of remark, and comprehensiveness of knowledge, made their suffrages<sup>3</sup> worthy of regard. They have generally determined that it is dangerous for a man and woman to suspend their fate upon each other, at a time when opinions are fixed, and habits are established; when friendships have been contracted on both sides, when life has been planned into method, and the mind has long enjoyed the contemplation of its own prospects.

"It is scarcely possible that two traveling through the world under the conduct of chance should have been both directed to the same path, and it will not often happen that either will quit the track which custom has made pleasing. When the desultory levity of youth has settled into regularity, it is soon succeeded by pride ashamed to yield, or obstinacy delighting to contend. And even though mutual esteem produces mutual desire to please, time itself, as it modifies unchangeably the external mien, determines likewise the direction of the passions, and gives an inflexible rigidity to the manners. Long customs are not easily broken: he that attempts to change the course of his own life very often labors in vain; and how shall we do that for others which we are seldom able to do for ourselves?"

"But surely," interposed the prince, "you suppose the chief motive of choice forgotten or neglected. Whenever I shall seek a wife, it shall be my first question, whether she be willing to be led by reason?"

"Thus it is," said Nekayah, "that philosophers are deceived. There are a thousand familiar<sup>4</sup> disputes which reason never can decide; questions that elude investigation, and make logic ridiculous; cases where something must be done, and where little can be said.



Consider the state of mankind, and inquire how few can be supposed to act upon any occasions, whether small or great, with all the reasons of action present to their minds. Wretched would be the pair above all names of wretchedness, who should be doomed to adjust by reason every morning all the minute detail of a domestic day.

"Those who marry at an advanced age will probably escape the encroachments of their children; but, in diminution of this advantage, they will be likely to leave them, ignorant and helpless, to a guardian's mercy: or, if that should not happen, they must at least go out of the world before they see those whom they love best either wise or great.

"From their children, if they have less to fear, they have less also to hope, and they lose, without equivalent, the joys of early love, and the convenience of uniting with manners pliant and minds susceptible of new impressions, which might wear away their dissimilitudes by long cohabitation, as soft bodies, by continual attrition, conform their surfaces to each other.

"I believe it will be found that those who marry late are best pleased with their children, and those who marry early with their partners."

"The union of these two affections," said Rasselas, "would produce all that could be wished. Perhaps there is a time when marriage might unite them, a time neither too early for the father, nor too late for the husband."

"Every hour," answered the princess, "confirms my prejudice in favor of the position so often uttered by the mouth of Imlac, 'That nature sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left.' Those conditions, which flatter hope and attract desire, are so constituted that, as we approach one, we recede from another. There are goods so opposed that we cannot seize both, but, by too much prudence, may pass between them at too great a distance to reach either. This is often the fate of long consideration; he does nothing who endeavors to do more than is allowed to humanity. Flatter not yourself with contrarieties of pleasure. Of the blessings set before

you make your choice, and be content. No man can taste the fruits of autumn, while he is delighting his scent with the flowers of the spring: no man can, at the same time, fill his cup from the source and from the mouth of the Nile.”

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Opinions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Domestic.[Return to reference 4](#)

### **Chapter 30. Imlac Enters, and Changes the Conversation**

Here Imlac entered, and interrupted them. "Imlac," said Rasselas, "I have been taking from the princess the dismal history of private life, and am almost discouraged from further search."

"It seems to me," said Imlac, "that while you are making the choice of life, you neglect to live. You wander about a single city, which, however large and diversified, can now afford few novelties, and forget that you are in a country, famous among the earliest monarchies for the power and wisdom of its inhabitants; a country where the sciences first dawned that illuminate the world, and beyond which the arts cannot be traced of civil society or domestic life.

"The old Egyptians have left behind them monuments of industry and power before which all European magnificence is confessed to fade away. The ruins of their architecture are the schools of modern builders, and from the wonders which time has spared we may conjecture, though uncertainly, what it has destroyed."

"My curiosity," said Rasselas, "does not very strongly lead me to survey piles of stone, or mounds of earth; my business is with man. I came hither not to measure fragments of temples, or trace choked aqueducts, but to look upon the various scenes of the present world."

"The things that are now before us," said the princess, "require attention, and deserve it. What have I to do with the heroes or the monuments of ancient times? with times which never can return, and heroes, whose form of life was different from all that the present condition of mankind requires or allows."

"To know anything," returned the poet, "we must know its effects; to see men we must see their works, that we may learn what reason has dictated, or passion has incited, and find what are the most powerful motives of action. To judge rightly of the present we must oppose it to the past; for all judgment is comparative, and of the future nothing can be known. The truth is, that no mind is much employed upon the present: recollection and anticipation fill

up almost all our moments. Our passions are joy and grief, love and hatred, hope and fear. Of joy and grief the past is the object, and the future of hope and fear; even love and hatred respect the past, for the cause must have been before the effect.

"The present state of things is the consequence of the former, and it is natural to inquire what were the sources of the good that we enjoy, or of the evil that we suffer. If we act only for ourselves, to neglect the study of history is not prudent: if we are entrusted with the care of others, it is not just. Ignorance, when it is voluntary, is criminal; and he may properly be charged with evil who refused to learn how he might prevent it.

"There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science, the vicissitudes of learning and ignorance, which are the light and darkness of thinking beings, the extinction and resuscitation of arts, and all the revolutions of the intellectual world. If accounts of battles and invasions are peculiarly the business of princes, the useful or elegant arts are not to be neglected; those who have kingdoms to govern, have understandings to cultivate.

"Example is always more efficacious than precept. A soldier is formed in war, and a painter must copy pictures. In this, contemplative life has the advantage: great actions are seldom seen, but the labors of art are always at hand for those who desire to know what art has been able to perform.

"When the eye or the imagination is struck with any uncommon work the next transition of an active mind is to the means by which it was performed. Here begins the true use of such contemplation; we enlarge our comprehension by new ideas, and perhaps recover some art lost to mankind, or learn what is less perfectly known in our own country. At least we compare our own with former times, and either rejoice at our improvements, or, what is the first motion towards good, discover our defects."

"I am willing," said the prince, "to see all that can deserve my search." "And I," said the princess, "shall rejoice to learn something

of the manners of antiquity.”

“The most pompous monument of Egyptian greatness, and one of the most bulky works of manual industry,” said Imlac, “are the pyramids; fabrics<sup>5</sup> raised before the time of history, and of which the earliest narratives afford us only uncertain traditions. Of these the greatest is still standing, very little injured by time.”

“Let us visit them tomorrow,” said Nekayah. “I have often heard of the pyramids, and shall not rest, till I have seen them within and without with my own eyes.”

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Buildings. [Return to reference 5](#)

### **Chapter 31. They Visit the Pyramids**

The resolution being thus taken, they set out the next day. They laid tents upon their camels, being resolved to stay among the pyramids till their curiosity was fully satisfied. They traveled gently, turned aside to everything remarkable, stopped from time to time and conversed with the inhabitants, and observed the various appearances of towns ruined and inhabited, of wild and cultivated nature.

When they came to the great pyramid, they were astonished at the extent of the base, and the height of the top. Imlac explained to them the principles upon which the pyramidal form was chosen for a fabric intended to coextend its duration with that of the world; he showed that its gradual diminution gave it such stability as defeated all the common attacks of the elements, and could scarcely be overthrown by earthquakes themselves, the least resistible of natural violence. A concussion that should shatter the pyramid would threaten the dissolution of the continent.

They measured all its dimensions, and pitched their tents at its foot. Next day they prepared to enter its interior apartments, and having hired the common guides, climbed up to the first passage, when the favorite of the princess, looking into the cavity, stepped back and trembled. "Pekuah," said the princess, "of what art thou afraid?" "Of the narrow entrance," answered the lady, "and of the dreadful gloom. I dare not enter a place which must surely be inhabited by unquiet souls. The original possessors of these dreadful vaults will start up before us, and perhaps shut us in forever." She spoke, and threw her arms round the neck of her mistress.

"If all your fear be of apparitions," said the prince, "I will promise you safety. There is no danger from the dead; he that is once buried will be seen no more."

"That the dead are seen no more," said Imlac, "I will not undertake to maintain, against the concurrent and unvaried testimony of all ages, and of all nations. There is no people, rude or learned, among whom apparitions of the dead are not related and

believed. This opinion, which perhaps prevails as far as human nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth; those that never heard of one another would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience can make credible. That it is doubted by single cavilers can very little weaken the general evidence; and some who deny it with their tongues confess it by their fears.

"Yet I do not mean to add new terrors to those which have already seized upon Pekuah. There can be no reason why specters should haunt the pyramid more than other places, or why they should have power or will to hurt innocence and purity. Our entrance is no violation of their privileges; we can take nothing from them, how then can we offend them?"

"My dear Pekuah," said the princess, "I will always go before you, and Imlac shall follow you. Remember that you are the companion of the princess of Abyssinia."

"If the princess is pleased that her servant should die," returned the lady, "let her command some death less dreadful than enclosure in this horrid cavern. You know I dare not disobey you; I must go if you command me, but if I once enter, I never shall come back."

The princess saw that her fear was too strong for expostulation or reproof, and, embracing her, told her that she should stay in the tent till their return. Pekuah was yet not satisfied, but entreated the princess not to pursue so dreadful a purpose as that of entering the recesses of the pyramid. "Though I cannot teach courage," said Nekayah, "I must not learn cowardice, nor leave at last undone what I came hither only to do."

### ***Chapter 32. They Enter the Pyramid***

Pekuah descended to the tents, and the rest entered the pyramid. They passed through the galleries, surveyed the vaults of marble, and examined the chest in which the body of the founder is supposed to have been repositied. They then sat down in one of the most spacious chambers to rest a while before they attempted to return.

"We have now," said Imlac, "gratified our minds with an exact view of the greatest work of man, except the wall of China.

"Of the wall it is very easy to assign the motive. It secured a wealthy and timorous nation from the incursions of barbarians, whose unskillfulness in arts made it easier for them to supply their wants by rapine than by industry, and who from time to time poured in upon the habitations of peaceful commerce, as vultures descend upon domestic fowl. Their celerity and fierceness made the wall necessary, and their ignorance made it efficacious.

"But for the pyramids, no reason has ever been given adequate to the cost and labor of the work. The narrowness of the chambers proves that it could afford no retreat from enemies, and treasures might have been repositied at far less expense with equal security. It seems to have been erected only in compliance with that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life, and must be always appeased by some employment. Those who have already all that they can enjoy must enlarge their desires. He that has built for use till use is supplied, must begin to build for vanity, and extend his plan to the utmost power of human performance, that he may not be soon reduced to form another wish.

"I consider this mighty structure as a monument of the insufficiency of human enjoyments. A king, whose power is unlimited, and whose treasures surmount all real and imaginary wants, is compelled to solace, by the erection of a pyramid, the satiety of dominion and tastelessness of pleasures, and to amuse the tediousness of declining life by seeing thousands laboring without end, and one stone, for no purpose, laid upon another. Whoever



thou art, that, not content with a moderate condition, imaginest happiness in royal magnificence, and dreamest that command or riches can feed the appetite of novelty with perpetual gratifications, survey the pyramids, and confess thy folly!"

### **Chapter 33. *The Princess Meets with an Unexpected Misfortune***

They rose up, and returned through the cavity at which they had entered, and the princess prepared for her favorite a long narrative of dark labyrinths, and costly rooms, and of the different impressions which the varieties of the way had made upon her. But when they came to their train, they found every one silent and dejected: the men discovered<sup>6</sup> shame and fear in their countenances, and the women were weeping in the tents.

What had happened they did not try to conjecture, but immediately inquired. "You had scarcely entered into the pyramid," said one of the attendants, "when a troop of Arabs rushed upon us: we were too few to resist them, and too slow to escape. They were about to search the tents, set us on our camels, and drive us along before them, when the approach of some Turkish horsemen put them to flight; but they seized the lady Pekuah with her two maids, and carried them away: the Turks are now pursuing them by our instigation, but I fear they will not be able to overtake them."

The princess was overpowered with surprise and grief. Rasselas, in the first heat of his resentment, ordered his servants to follow him, and prepared to pursue the robbers with his saber in his hand. "Sir," said Imlac, "what can you hope from violence or valor? the Arabs are mounted on horses trained to battle and retreat; we have only beasts of burden. By leaving our present station we may lose the princess, but cannot hope to regain Pekuah."

In a short time the Turks returned, having not been able to reach the enemy. The princess burst out into new lamentations, and Rasselas could scarcely forbear to reproach them with cowardice; but Imlac was of opinion, that the escape of the Arabs was no addition to their misfortune, for, perhaps, they would have killed their captives rather than have resigned them.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 6: Revealed, betrayed. “Train”: retinue. [Return to reference 6](#)

### **Chapter 34. They Return to Cairo without Pekuah**

There was nothing to be hoped from longer stay. They returned to Cairo repenting of their curiosity, censuring the negligence of the government, lamenting their own rashness which had neglected to procure a guard, imagining many expedients by which the loss of Pekuah might have been prevented, and resolving to do something for her recovery, though none could find any thing proper to be done.

Nekayah retired to her chamber, where her women attempted to comfort her, by telling her that all had their troubles, and that lady Pekuah had enjoyed much happiness in the world for a long time, and might reasonably expect a change of fortune. They hoped that some good would befall her wheresoever she was, and that their mistress would find another friend who might supply her place.

The princess made them no answer, and they continued the form of condolence, not much grieved in their hearts that the favorite was lost.

Next day the prince presented to the Bassa a memorial<sup>7</sup> of the wrong which he had suffered, and a petition for redress. The Bassa threatened to punish the robbers, but did not attempt to catch them, nor, indeed, could any account or description be given by which he might direct the pursuit.

It soon appeared that nothing would be done by authority. Governors, being accustomed to hear of more crimes than they can punish, and more wrongs than they can redress, set themselves at ease by indiscriminate negligence, and presently<sup>8</sup> forget the request when they lose sight of the petitioner.

Imlac then endeavored to gain some intelligence by private agents. He found many who pretended to an exact knowledge of all the haunts of the Arabs, and to regular correspondence with their chiefs, and who readily undertook the recovery of Pekuah. Of these, some were furnished with money for their journey, and came back no more; some were liberally paid for accounts which a few days discovered to be false. But the princess would not suffer any means,

however improbable, to be left untried. While she was doing something she kept her hope alive. As one expedient failed, another was suggested; when one messenger returned unsuccessful, another was dispatched to a different quarter.

Two months had now passed, and of Pekuah nothing had been heard; the hopes which they had endeavored to raise in each other grew more languid, and the princess, when she saw nothing more to be tried, sunk down inconsolable in hopeless dejection. A thousand times she reproached herself with the easy compliance by which she permitted her favorite to stay behind her. "Had not my fondness," said she, "lessened my authority, Pekuah had not dared to talk of her terrors. She ought to have feared me more than specters. A severe look would have overpowered her; a peremptory command would have compelled obedience. Why did foolish indulgence prevail upon me? Why did I not speak and refuse to hear?"

"Great princess," said Imlac, "do not reproach yourself for your virtue, or consider that as blameable by which evil has accidentally been caused. Your tenderness for the timidity of Pekuah was generous and kind. When we act according to our duty, we commit the event to him by whose laws our actions are governed, and who will suffer none to be finally punished for obedience. When, in prospect of some good, whether natural or moral, we break the rules prescribed us, we withdraw from the direction of superior wisdom, and take all consequences upon ourselves. Man cannot so far know the connection of causes and events, as that he may venture to do wrong in order to do right. When we pursue our end by lawful means, we may always console our miscarriage by the hope of future recompense. When we consult only our own policy, and attempt to find a nearer way to good, by overleaping the settled boundaries of right and wrong, we cannot be happy even by success, because we cannot escape the consciousness of our fault; but, if we miscarry, the disappointment is irremediably embittered. How comfortless is the sorrow of him, who feels at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexation of calamity which guilt has brought upon him?"

“Consider, princess, what would have been your condition, if the lady Pekuah had entreated to accompany you, and, being compelled to stay in the tents, had been carried away; or how would you have borne the thought, if you had forced her into the pyramid, and she had died before you in agonies of terror.”

“Had either happened,” said Nekayah, “I could not have endured life till now: I should have been tortured to madness by the remembrance of such cruelty, or must have pined away in abhorrence of myself.”

“This at least,” said Imlac, “is the present reward of virtuous conduct, that no unlucky consequence can oblige us to repent it.”

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Statement of facts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Immediately.[Return to reference 8](#)

### **Chapter 35. *The Princess Languishes for Want of Pekuah***

Nekayah, being thus reconciled to herself, found that no evil is insupportable but that which is accompanied with consciousness of wrong. She was, from that time, delivered from the violence of tempestuous sorrow, and sunk into silent pensiveness and gloomy tranquillity. She sat from morning to evening recollecting all that had been done or said by her Pekuah, treasured up with might recall to mind any little incident or careless conversation. The sentiments of her, whom she now expected to see no more, were treasured in her memory as rules of life, and she deliberated to no other end than to conjecture on any occasion what would have been the opinion and counsel of Pekuah.

The women, by whom she was attended, knew nothing of her real condition, and therefore she could not talk to them but with caution and reserve. She began to remit<sup>9</sup> her curiosity, having no great care to collect notions which she had no convenience of uttering. Rasselas endeavored first to comfort and afterwards to divert her; he hired musicians, to whom she seemed to listen, but did not hear them, and procured masters to instruct her in various arts, whose lectures, when they visited her again, were again to be repeated. She had lost her taste of pleasure and her ambition of excellence. And her mind, though forced into short excursions, always recurred to the image of her friend.

Imlac was every morning earnestly enjoined to renew his inquiries, and was asked every night whether he had yet heard of Pekuah, till not being able to return the princess the answer that she desired, he was less and less willing to come into her presence. She observed his backwardness, and commanded him to attend her. "You are not," said she, "to confound impatience with resentment, or to suppose that I charge you with negligence, because I repine at your unsuccessfulness. I do not much wonder at your absence; I know that the unhappy are never pleasing, and that all naturally avoid the contagion of misery. To hear complaints is wearisome alike to the wretched and the happy; for who would cloud by adventitious grief

the short gleams of gaiety which life allows us? or who, that is struggling under his own evils, will add to them the miseries of another?

"The time is at hand, when none shall be disturbed any longer by the sighs of Nekayah: my search after happiness is now at an end. I am resolved to retire from the world with all its flatteries and deceits, and will hide myself in solitude, without any other care than to compose my thoughts, and regulate my hours by a constant succession of innocent occupations, till, with a mind purified from all earthly desires, I shall enter into that state, to which all are hastening, and in which I hope again to enjoy the friendship of Pekuah."

"Do not entangle your mind," said Imlac, "by irrevocable determinations, nor increase the burden of life by a voluntary accumulation of misery: the weariness of retirement will continue or increase when the loss of Pekuah is forgotten. That you have been deprived of one pleasure is no very good reason for rejection of the rest."

"Since Pekuah was taken from me," said the princess, "I have no pleasure to reject or to retain. She that has no one to love or trust has little to hope. She wants the radical principle of happiness. We may, perhaps, allow that what satisfaction this world can afford, must arise from the conjunction of wealth, knowledge and goodness: wealth is nothing but as it is bestowed, and knowledge nothing but as it is communicated: they must therefore be imparted to others, and to whom could I now delight to impart them? Goodness affords the only comfort which can be enjoyed without a partner, and goodness may be practised in retirement."

"How far solitude may admit goodness, or advance it, I shall not," replied Imlac, "dispute at present. Remember the confession of the pious hermit. You will wish to return into the world, when the image of your companion has left your thoughts." "That time," said Nekayah, "will never come. The generous frankness, the modest obsequiousness,<sup>1</sup> and the faithful secrecy of my dear Pekuah, will always be more missed, as I shall live longer to see vice and folly."



"The state of a mind oppressed with a sudden calamity," said Imlac, "is like that of the fabulous inhabitants of the new created earth, who, when the first night came upon them, supposed that day never would return. When the clouds of sorrow gather over us, we see nothing beyond them, nor can imagine how they will be dispelled: yet a new day succeeded to the night, and sorrow is never long without a dawn of ease. But they who restrain themselves from receiving comfort, do as the savages would have done, had they put out their eyes when it was dark. Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux; something is hourly lost, and something acquired. To lose much at once is inconvenient to either, but while the vital powers remain uninjured, nature will find the means of reparation. Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye, and while we glide along the stream of time, whatever we leave behind us is always lessening, and that which we approach increasing in magnitude. Do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion: commit yourself again to the current of the world; Pekuah will vanish by degrees; you will meet in your way some other favorite, or learn to diffuse yourself in general conversation."

"At least," said the prince, "do not despair before all remedies have been tried: the inquiry after the unfortunate lady is still continued, and shall be carried on with yet greater diligence, on condition that you will promise to wait a year for the event, without any unalterable resolution."

Nekayah thought this a reasonable demand, and made the promise to her brother, who had been advised by Imlac to require it. Imlac had, indeed, no great hope of regaining Pekuah, but he supposed, that if he could secure the interval of a year, the princess would be then in no danger of a cloister.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Slacken. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Obedience. [Return to reference 1](#)

### **Chapter 36. Pekuah Is Still Remembered. The Progress of Sorrow**

Nekayah, seeing that nothing was omitted for the recovery of her favorite, and having, by her promise, set her intention of retirement at a distance, began imperceptibly to return to common cares and common pleasures. She rejoiced without her own consent at the suspension of her sorrows, and sometimes caught herself with indignation in the act of turning away her mind from the remembrance of her, whom yet she resolved never to forget.

She then appointed a certain hour of the day for meditation on the merits and fondness of Pekuah, and for some weeks retired constantly at the time fixed, and returned with her eyes swollen and her countenance clouded. By degrees she grew less scrupulous, and suffered any important and pressing avocation to delay the tribute of daily tears. She then yielded to less occasions; sometimes forgot what she was indeed afraid to remember, and, at last, wholly released herself from the duty of periodical affliction.

Her real love of Pekuah was yet not diminished. A thousand occurrences brought her back to memory, and a thousand wants, which nothing but the confidence of friendship can supply, made her frequently regretted. She, therefore, solicited Imlac never to desist from inquiry, and to leave no art of intelligence untried, that, at least, she might have the comfort of knowing that she did not suffer by negligence or sluggishness. "Yet what," said she, "is to be expected from our pursuit of happiness, when we find the state of life to be such, that happiness itself is the cause of misery? Why should we endeavor to attain that, of which the possession cannot be secured? I shall henceforward fear to yield my heart to excellence, however bright, or to fondness, however tender, lest I should lose again what I have lost in Pekuah."

### **Chapter 37. *The Princess Hears News of Pekuah***

In seven months, one of the messengers, who had been sent away upon the day when the promise was drawn from the princess, returned, after many unsuccessful rambles, from the borders of Nubia, with an account that Pekuah was in the hands of an Arab chief, who possessed a castle or fortress on the extremity of Egypt. The Arab, whose revenue was plunder, was willing to restore her, with her two attendants, for two hundred ounces of gold.

The price was no subject of debate. The princess was in ecstasies when she heard that her favorite was alive, and might so cheaply be ransomed. She could not think of delaying for a moment Pekuah's happiness or her own, but entreated her brother to send back the messenger with the sum required. Imlac, being consulted, was not very confident of the veracity of the relator, and was still more doubtful of the Arab's faith, who might, if he were too liberally trusted, detain at once the money and the captives. He thought it dangerous to put themselves in the power of the Arab, by going into his district, and could not expect that the rover<sup>2</sup> would so much expose himself as to come into the lower country, where he might be seized by the forces of the Bassa.

It is difficult to negotiate where neither will trust. But Imlac, after some deliberation, directed the messenger to propose that Pekuah should be conducted by ten horsemen to the monastery of St. Anthony, which is situated in the deserts of Upper Egypt, where she should be met by the same number, and her ransom should be paid.

That no time might be lost, as they expected that the proposal would not be refused, they immediately began their journey to the monastery; and, when they arrived, Imlac went forward with the former messenger to the Arab's fortress. Rasselas was desirous to go with them, but neither his sister nor Imlac would consent. The Arab, according to the custom of his nation, observed the laws of hospitality with great exactness to those who put themselves into his power, and, in a few days, brought Pekuah with her maids, by easy journeys, to their place appointed, where receiving the stipulated

price, he restored her with great respect to liberty and her friends, and undertook to conduct them back toward Cairo beyond all danger of robbery or violence.

The princess and her favorite embraced each other with transport too violent to be expressed, and went out together to pour the tears of tenderness in secret, and exchange professions of kindness and gratitude. After a few hours they returned into the refectory of the convent, where, in the presence of the prior and his brethren, the prince required of Pekuah the history of her adventures.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Robber.[Return to reference 2](#)

### **Chapter 38. The Adventures of the Lady Pekuah**

"At what time, and in what manner, I was forced away," said Pekuah, "your servants have told you. The suddenness of the event struck me with surprise, and I was at first rather stupified than agitated with any passion of either fear or sorrow. My confusion was increased by the speed and tumult of our flight while we were followed by the Turks, who, as it seemed, soon despaired to overtake us, or were afraid of those whom they made a show of menacing.

"When the Arabs saw themselves out of danger they slackened their course, and, as I was less harassed by external violence, I began to feel more uneasiness in my mind. After some time we stopped near a spring shaded with trees in a pleasant meadow, where we were set upon the ground, and offered such refreshments as our masters were partaking. I was suffered to sit with my maids apart from the rest, and none attempted to comfort or insult us. Here I first began to feel the full weight of my misery. The girls sat weeping in silence, and from time to time looked on me for succor. I knew not to what condition we were doomed, nor could conjecture where would be the place of our captivity, or whence to draw any hope of deliverance. I was in the hands of robbers and savages, and had no reason to suppose that their pity was more than their justice, or that they would forbear the gratification of any ardor of desire, or caprice of cruelty. I, however, kissed my maids, and endeavored to pacify them by remarking, that we were yet treated with decency, and that, since we were now carried beyond pursuit, there was no danger of violence to our lives.

"When we were to be set again on horseback, my maids clung round me, and refused to be parted, but I commanded them not to irritate those who had us in their power. We traveled the remaining part of the day through an unfrequented and pathless country, and came by moonlight to the side of a hill, where the rest of the troop was stationed. Their tents were pitched, and their fires kindled, and our chief was welcomed as a man much beloved by his dependents.

"We were received into a large tent, where we found women who had attended their husbands in the expedition. They set before us the supper which they had provided, and I eat it rather to encourage my maids than to comply with any appetite of my own. When the meat was taken away they spread the carpets for repose. I was weary, and hoped to find in sleep that remission of distress which nature seldom denies. Ordering myself therefore to be undressed, I observed that the women looked very earnestly upon me, not expecting, I suppose, to see me so submissively attended. When my upper vest was taken off, they were apparently struck with the splendor of my clothes, and one of them timorously laid her hand upon the embroidery. She then went out, and, in a short time, came back with another woman, who seemed to be of higher rank, and greater authority. She did, at her entrance, the usual act of reverence, and, taking me by the hand, placed me in a smaller tent, spread with finer carpets, where I spent the night quietly with my maids.

"In the morning, as I was sitting on the grass, the chief of the troop came towards me: I rose up to receive him, and he bowed with great respect. 'Illustrious lady,' said he, 'my fortune is better than I had presumed to hope; I am told by my women that I have a princess in my camp.' 'Sir,' answered I, 'your women have deceived themselves and you; I am not a princess, but an unhappy stranger who intended soon to have left this country, in which I am now to be imprisoned for ever.' 'Whoever, or whencesoever, you are,' returned the Arab, 'your dress, and that of your servants, show your rank to be high, and your wealth to be great. Why should you, who can so easily procure your ransom, think yourself in danger of perpetual captivity? The purpose of my incursions is to increase my riches, or more properly to gather tribute. The sons of Ishmael<sup>3</sup> are the natural and hereditary lords of this part of the continent, which is usurped by late invaders, and low-born tyrants, from whom we are compelled to take by the sword what is denied to justice. The violence of war admits no distinction; the lance that is lifted at guilt and power will sometimes fall on innocence and gentleness.'

“‘How little,’ said I, ‘did I expect that yesterday it should have fallen upon me.’

“‘Misfortunes,’ answered the Arab, ‘should always be expected. If the eye of hostility could learn reverence or pity, excellence like yours had been exempt from injury. But the angels of affliction spread their toils alike for the virtuous and the wicked, for the mighty and the mean. Do not be disconsolate; I am not one of the lawless and cruel rovers of the desert; I know the rules of civil life: I will fix your ransom, give a passport to your messenger, and perform my stipulation with nice punctuality.’<sup>4</sup>

“You will easily believe that I was pleased with his courtesy; and finding that his predominant passion was desire of money, I began now to think my danger less, for I knew that no sum would be thought too great for the release of Pekuah. I told him that he should have no reason to charge me with ingratitude, if I was used with kindness, and that any ransom, which could be expected for a maid of common rank, would be paid, but that he must not persist to rate me as a princess. He said, he would consider what he should demand, and then, smiling, bowed and retired.

“Soon after the women came about me, each contending to be more officious<sup>5</sup> than the other, and my maids themselves were served with reverence. We traveled onward by short journeys. On the fourth day the chief told me, that my ransom must be two hundred ounces of gold, which I not only promised him, but told him, that I would add fifty more, if I and my maids were honorably treated.

“I never knew the power of gold before. From that time I was the leader of the troop. The march of every day was longer or shorter as I commanded, and the tents were pitched where I chose to rest. We now had camels and other conveniencies for travel, my own women were always at my side, and I amused myself with observing the manners of the vagrant nations,<sup>6</sup> and with viewing remains of ancient edifices with which these deserted countries appear to have been, in some distant age, lavishly embellished.

“The chief of the band was a man far from illiterate: he was able to travel by the stars or the compass, and had marked in his erratic expeditions such places as are most worthy the notice of a passenger.<sup>7</sup> He observed to me, that buildings are always best preserved in places little frequented, and difficult of access: for, when once a country declines from its primitive splendor, the more inhabitants are left, the quicker ruin will be made. Walls supply stones more easily than quarries, and palaces and temples will be demolished to make stables of granite, and cottages of porphyry.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Arabs, who claim descent from Ishmael, a son of Abraham. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Scrupulous exactness. “Civil”: civilized. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ready to serve. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nomads. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Traveler. [Return to reference 7](#)



### **Chapter 39. The Adventures of Pekuah Continued**

"We wandered about in this manner for some weeks, whether, as our chief pretended, for my gratification, or, as I rather suspected, for some convenience of his own. I endeavored to appear contented where sullenness and resentment would have been of no use, and that endeavor conduced much to the calmness of my mind; but my heart was always with Nekayah, and the troubles of the night much overbalanced the amusements of the day. My women, who threw all their cares upon their mistress, set their minds at ease from the time when they saw me treated with respect, and gave themselves up to the incidental alleviations of our fatigue without solicitude or sorrow. I was pleased with their pleasure, and animated with their confidence. My condition had lost much of its terror, since I found that the Arab ranged the country merely to get riches. Avarice is an uniform and tractable vice: other intellectual distempers are different in different constitutions of mind; that which soothes the pride of one will offend the pride of another; but to the favor of the covetous there is a ready way, bring money and nothing is denied.

"At last we came to the dwelling of our chief, a strong and spacious house built with stone in an island of the Nile, which lies, as I was told, under the tropic. 'Lady,' said the Arab, 'you shall rest after your journey a few weeks in this place, where you are to consider yourself as sovereign. My occupation is war: I have therefore chosen this obscure residence, from which I can issue unexpected, and to which I can retire unpursued. You may now repose in security: here are few pleasures, but here is no danger.' He then led me into the inner apartments, and seating me on the richest couch, bowed to the ground. His women, who considered me as a rival, looked on me with malignity; but being soon informed that I was a great lady detained only for my ransom, they began to vie with each other in obsequiousness and reverence.

"Being again comforted with new assurances of speedy liberty, I was for some days diverted from impatience by the novelty of the place. The turrets overlooked the country to a great distance, and

afforded a view of many windings of the stream. In the day I wandered from one place to another as the course of the sun varied the splendor of the prospect, and saw many things which I had never seen before. The crocodiles and river-horses<sup>8</sup> are common in this unpeopled region, and I often looked upon them with terror, though I knew that they could not hurt me. For some time I expected to see mermaids and tritons, which, as Imlac has told me, the European travelers have stationed in the Nile, but no such beings ever appeared, and the Arab, when I inquired after them, laughed at my credulity.

"At night the Arab always attended me to a tower set apart for celestial observations, where he endeavored to teach me the names and courses of the stars. I had no great inclination to this study, but an appearance of attention was necessary to please my instructor, who valued himself for his skill, and, in a little while, I found some employment requisite to beguile the tediousness of time, which was to be passed always amidst the same objects. I was weary of looking in the morning on things from which I had turned away weary in the evening: I therefore was at last willing to observe the stars rather than do nothing, but could not always compose my thoughts, and was very often thinking on Nekayah when others imagined me contemplating the sky. Soon after the Arab went upon another expedition, and then my only pleasure was to talk with my maids about the accident by which we were carried away, and the happiness that we should all enjoy at the end of our captivity."

"There were women in your Arab's fortress," said the princess, "why did you not make them your companions, enjoy their conversation, and partake their diversions? In a place where they found business or amusement, why should you alone sit corroded with idle melancholy? or why could not you bear for a few months that condition to which they were condemned for life?"

"The diversions of the women," answered Pekuah, "were only childish play, by which the mind accustomed to stronger operations could not be kept busy. I could do all which they delighted in doing by powers merely sensitive,<sup>9</sup> while my intellectual faculties were

flown to Cairo. They ran from room to room as a bird hops from wire to wire in his cage. They danced for the sake of motion, as lambs frisk in a meadow. One sometimes pretended to be hurt that the rest might be alarmed, or hid herself that another might seek her. Part of their time passed in watching the progress of light bodies that floated on the river, and part in marking the various forms into which clouds broke in the sky.

"Their business was only needlework, in which I and my maids sometimes helped them; but you know that the mind will easily straggle from the fingers, nor will you suspect that captivity and absence from Nekayah could receive solace from silken flowers.

"Nor was much satisfaction to be hoped from their conversation: for of what could they be expected to talk? They had seen nothing; for they had lived from early youth in that narrow spot: of what they had not seen they could have no knowledge, for they could not read. They had no ideas but of the few things that were within their view, and had hardly names for anything but their clothes and their food. As I bore a superior character, I was often called to terminate their quarrels, which I decided as equitably as I could. If it could have amused me to hear the complaints of each against the rest, I might have been often detained by long stories, but the motives of their animosity were so small that I could not listen without intercepting the tale."

"How," said Rasselas, "can the Arab, whom you represented as a man of more than common accomplishments, take any pleasure in his seraglio, when it is filled only with women like these. Are they exquisitely beautiful?"

"They do not," said Pekuah, "want that unaffecting and ignoble beauty which may subsist without spriteliness or sublimity, without energy of thought or dignity of virtue. But to a man like the Arab such beauty was only a flower casually plucked and carelessly thrown away. Whatever pleasures he might find among them, they were not those of friendship or society. When they were playing about him he looked on them with inattentive superiority: when they vied for his regard he sometimes turned away disgusted. As they

had no knowledge, their talk could take nothing from the tediousness of life: as they had no choice, their fondness, or appearance of fondness, excited in him neither pride nor gratitude; he was not exalted in his own esteem by the smiles of a woman who saw no other man, nor was much obliged by that regard, of which he could never know the sincerity, and which he might often perceive to be exerted not so much to delight him as to pain a rival. That which he gave, and they received, as love, was only a careless distribution of superfluous time, such love as man can bestow upon that which he despises, such as has neither hope nor fear, neither joy nor sorrow."

"You have reason, lady, to think yourself happy," said Imlac, "that you have been thus easily dismissed. How could a mind, hungry for knowledge, be willing, in an intellectual famine, to lose such a banquet as Pekuah's conversation?"

"I am inclined to believe," answered Pekuah, "that he was for some time in suspense; for, notwithstanding his promise, whenever I proposed to dispatch a messenger to Cairo, he found some excuse for delay. While I was detained in his house he made many incursions into the neighboring countries, and, perhaps, he would have refused to discharge me, had his plunder been equal to his wishes. He returned always courteous, related his adventures, delighted to hear my observations, and endeavored to advance my acquaintance with the stars. When I importuned him to send away my letters, he soothed me with professions of honor and sincerity; and, when I could be no longer decently denied, put his troop again in motion, and left me to govern in his absence. I was much afflicted by this studied procrastination, and was sometimes afraid that I should be forgotten; that you would leave Cairo, and I must end my days in an island of the Nile.

"I grew at last hopeless and dejected, and cared so little to entertain him, that he for a while more frequently talked with my maids. That he should fall in love with them, or with me, might have been equally fatal, and I was not much pleased with the growing friendship. My anxiety was not long; for, as I recovered some degree

of cheerfulness, he returned to me, and I could not forbear to despise my former uneasiness.

“He still delayed to send for my ransom, and would, perhaps, never have determined, had not your agent found his way to him. The gold, which he would not fetch, he could not reject when it was offered. He hastened to prepare for our journey hither, like a man delivered from the pain of an intestine conflict. I took leave of my companions in the house, who dismissed me with cold indifference.”

Nekayah, having heard her favorite’s relation, rose and embraced her, and Rasselas gave her an hundred ounces of gold, which she presented to the Arab for the fifty that were promised.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Hippopotamuses. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “Having sense or perception, but not reason” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*). [Return to reference 9](#)

## **Chapter 40. *The History of a Man of Learning***

They returned to Cairo, and were so well pleased at finding themselves together, that none of them went much abroad. The prince began to love learning, and one day declared to Imlac, that he intended to devote himself to science,<sup>1</sup> and pass the rest of his days in literary solitude.

"Before you make your final choice," answered Imlac, "you ought to examine its hazards, and converse with some of those who are grown old in the company of themselves. I have just left the observatory of one of the most learned astronomers in the world, who has spent forty years in unwearied attention to the motions and appearances of the celestial bodies, and has drawn out his soul in endless calculations. He admits a few friends once a month to hear his deductions and enjoy his discoveries. I was introduced as a man of knowledge worthy of his notice. Men of various ideas and fluent conversation are commonly welcome to those whose thoughts have been long fixed upon a single point, and who find the images of other things stealing away. I delighted him with my remarks, he smiled at the narrative of my travels, and was glad to forget the constellations, and descend for a moment into the lower world.

"On the next day of vacation<sup>2</sup> I renewed my visit, and was so fortunate as to please him again. He relaxed from that time the severity of his rule, and permitted me to enter at my own choice. I found him always busy, and always glad to be relieved. As each knew much which the other was desirous of learning, we exchanged our notions with great delight. I perceived that I had every day more of his confidence, and always found new cause of admiration in the profundity of his mind. His comprehension is vast, his memory capacious and retentive, his discourse is methodical, and his expression clear.

"His integrity and benevolence are equal to his learning. His deepest researches and most favorite studies are willingly interrupted for any opportunity of doing good by his counsel or his riches. To his closest retreat,<sup>3</sup> at his most busy moments, all are

admitted that want his assistance: 'For though I exclude idleness and pleasure, I will never,' says he, 'bar my doors against charity. To man is permitted the contemplation of the skies, but the practice of virtue is commanded.' "

"Surely," said the princess, "this man is happy."

"I visited him," said Imlac, "with more and more frequency, and was every time more enamored of his conversation: he was sublime without haughtiness, courteous without formality, and communicative without ostentation. I was at first, great princess, of your opinion, thought him the happiest of mankind, and often congratulated him on the blessing that he enjoyed. He seemed to hear nothing with indifference but the praises of his condition, to which he always returned a general answer, and diverted the conversation to some other topic.

"Amidst this willingness to be pleased, and labor to please, I had quickly reason to imagine that some painful sentiment pressed upon his mind. He often looked up earnestly towards the sun, and let his voice fall in the midst of his discourse. He would sometimes, when we were alone, gaze upon me in silence with the air of a man who longed to speak what he was yet resolved to suppress. He would often send for me with vehement injunctions of haste, though, when I came to him, he had nothing extraordinary to say. And sometimes, when I was leaving him, he would call me back, pause a few moments and then dismiss me.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Knowledge.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Leisure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Most secluded place of privacy.[Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 41. *The Astronomer Discovers the Cause of His Uneasiness***

"At last the time came when the secret burst his reserve. We were sitting together last night in the turret of his house, watching the emersion of a satellite of Jupiter. A sudden tempest clouded the sky, and disappointed our observation. We sat a while silent in the dark, and then he addressed himself to me in these words: 'Imlac, I have long considered thy friendship as the greatest blessing of my life. Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful. I have found in thee all the qualities requisite for trust, benevolence, experience, and fortitude. I have long discharged an office which I must soon quit at the call of nature, and shall rejoice in the hour of imbecility<sup>4</sup> and pain to devolve it upon thee.'

"I thought myself honored by this testimony, and protested that whatever could conduce to his happiness would add likewise to mine.

"Hear, Imlac, what thou wilt not without difficulty credit. I have possessed for five years the regulation of weather, and the distribution of the seasons: the sun has listened to my dictates, and passed from tropic to tropic by my direction; the clouds, at my call, have poured their waters, and the Nile has overflowed at my command; I have restrained the rage of the dog-star, and mitigated the fervors of the crab.<sup>5</sup> The winds alone, of all the elemental powers, have hitherto refused my authority, and multitudes have perished by equinoctial tempests which I found myself unable to prohibit or restrain. I have administered this great office with exact justice, and made to the different nations of the earth an impartial dividend of rain and sunshine. What must have been the misery of half the globe, if I had limited the clouds to particular regions, or confined the sun to either side of the equator?'

## **Endnotes**



- Note 4: Feebleness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The fourth sign of the zodiac (Cancer). "The dog-star": Sirius was supposed to cause the heat ("dog days") of summer.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **Chapter 42. *The Opinion of the Astronomer Is Explained and Justified***

"I suppose he discovered in me, through the obscurity of the room, some tokens of amazement and doubt, for, after a short pause, he proceeded thus:

"Not to be easily credited will neither surprise nor offend me; for I am, probably, the first of human beings to whom this trust has been imparted. Nor do I know whether to deem this distinction a reward or punishment; since I have possessed it I have been far less happy than before, and nothing but the consciousness of good intention could have enabled me to support the weariness of unremitted vigilance.'

"How long, Sir,' said I, 'has this great office been in your hands?'

"About ten years ago,' said he, 'my daily observations of the changes of the sky led me to consider, whether, if I had the power of the seasons, I could confer greater plenty upon the inhabitants of the earth. This contemplation fastened on my mind, and I sat days and nights in imaginary dominion, pouring upon this country and that the showers of fertility, and seconding every fall of rain with a due proportion of sunshine. I had yet only the will to do good, and did not imagine that I should ever have the power.

"One day as I was looking on the fields withering with heat, I felt in my mind a sudden wish that I could send rain on the southern mountains, and raise the Nile to an inundation. In the hurry of my imagination I commanded rain to fall, and, by comparing the time of my command, with that of the inundation, I found that the clouds had listened to my lips.'

"Might not some other cause,' said I, 'produce this concurrence? the Nile does not always rise on the same day.'

"Do not believe,' said he with impatience, 'that such objections could escape me: I reasoned long against my own conviction, and labored against truth with the utmost obstinacy. I sometimes suspected myself of madness, and should not have dared to impart

this secret but to a man like you, capable of distinguishing the wonderful from the impossible, and the incredible from the false.'

""Why, Sir,' said I, 'do you call that incredible, which you know, or think you know, to be true?'

""Because,' said he, 'I cannot prove it by any external evidence; and I know too well the laws of demonstration to think that my conviction ought to influence another, who cannot, like me, be conscious of its force. I therefore shall not attempt to gain credit by disputation. It is sufficient that I feel this power, that I have long possessed, and every day exerted it. But the life of man is short, the infirmities of age increase upon me, and the time will soon come when the regulator of the year must mingle with the dust. The care of appointing a successor has long disturbed me; the night and the day have been spent in comparisons of all the characters which have come to my knowledge, and I have yet found none so worthy as thyself.

### **Chapter 43. *The Astronomer Leaves Imlac His Directions***

“Hear therefore, what I shall impart, with attention, such as the welfare of a world requires. If the task of a king be considered as difficult, who has the care only of a few millions, to whom he cannot do much good or harm, what must be the anxiety of him, on whom depends the action of the elements, and the great gifts of light and heat!—Hear me therefore with attention.

“I have diligently considered the position of the earth and sun, and formed innumerable schemes in which I changed their situation. I have sometimes turned aside the axis of the earth, and sometimes varied the ecliptic of the sun: but I have found it impossible to make a disposition by which the world may be advantaged; what one region gains, another loses by any imaginable alteration, even without considering the distant parts of the solar system with which we are unacquainted. Do not, therefore, in thy administration of the year, indulge thy pride by innovation; do not please thyself with thinking that thou canst make thyself renowned to all future ages, by disordering the seasons. The memory of mischief is no desirable fame. Much less will it become thee to let kindness or interest prevail. Never rob other countries of rain to pour it on thine own. For us the Nile is sufficient.’

“I promised that when I possessed the power, I would use it with inflexible integrity, and he dismissed me, pressing my hand. ‘My heart,’ said he, ‘will be now at rest, and my benevolence will no more destroy my quiet: I have found a man of wisdom and virtue, to whom I can cheerfully bequeath the inheritance of the sun.’”

The prince heard this narration with very serious regard, but the princess smiled, and Pekuah convulsed herself with laughter.

“Ladies,” said Imlac, “to mock the heaviest of human afflictions is neither charitable nor wise. Few can attain this man’s knowledge, and few practice his virtues; but all may suffer his calamity. Of the uncertainties of our present state, the most dreadful and alarming is the uncertain continuance of reason.”

The princess was recollected, and the favorite was abashed. Rasselas, more deeply affected, inquired of Imlac, whether he thought such maladies of the mind frequent, and how they were contracted.

#### **Chapter 44. *The Dangerous Prevalence<sup>6</sup> of Imagination***

"Disorders of intellect," answered Imlac, "happen much more often than superficial observers will easily believe. Perhaps, if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state. There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason, who can regulate his attention wholly by his will, and whose ideas will come and go at his command. No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability. All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can control and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any depravation of the mental faculties; it is not pronounced madness but when it comes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech or action.

"To indulge the power of fiction, and send imagination out upon the wing, is often the sport of those who delight too much in silent speculation. When we are alone we are not always busy; the labor of excogitation is too violent to last long; the ardor of inquiry will sometimes give way to idleness or satiety. He who has nothing external that can divert him must find pleasure in his own thoughts, and must conceive himself what he is not; for who is pleased with what he is? He then expatiates in boundless futurity, and culls from all imaginable conditions that which for the present moment he should most desire, amuses his desires with impossible enjoyments, and confers upon his pride unattainable dominion. The mind dances from scene to scene, unites all pleasures in all combinations, and riots in delights which nature and fortune, with all their bounty, cannot bestow.

"In time, some particular train of ideas fixes the attention; all other intellectual gratifications are rejected; the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favorite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood, whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious, and in time despotic. Then fictions begin to operate as

realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.

"This, sir, is one of the dangers of solitude, which the hermit has confessed not always to promote goodness, and the astronomer's misery has proved to be not always propitious to wisdom."

"I will no more," said the favorite, "imagine myself the queen of Abyssinia. I have often spent the hours which the princess gave to my own disposal, in adjusting ceremonies and regulating the court; I have repressed the pride of the powerful, and granted the petitions of the poor; I have built new palaces in more happy situations, planted groves upon the tops of mountains, and have exulted in the beneficence of royalty, till, when the princess entered, I had almost forgotten to bow down before her."

"And I," said the princess, "will not allow myself any more to play the shepherdess in my waking dreams. I have often soothed my thoughts with the quiet and innocence of pastoral employments, till I have in my chamber heard the winds whistle, and the sheep bleat; sometimes freed the lamb entangled in the thicket, and sometimes with my crook encountered the wolf. I have a dress like that of the village maids, which I put on to help my imagination, and a pipe on which I play softly, and suppose myself followed by my flocks."

"I will confess," said the prince, "an indulgence of fantastic delight more dangerous than yours. I have frequently endeavored to image the possibility of a perfect government, by which all wrong should be restrained, all vice reformed, and all the subjects preserved in tranquility and innocence. This thought produced innumerable schemes of reformation, and dictated many useful regulations and salutary edicts. This has been the sport, and sometimes the labor, of my solitude; and I start, when I think with how little anguish I once supposed the death of my father and my brothers."

"Such," says Imlac, "are the effects of visionary schemes; when we first form them, we know them to be absurd, but familiarize them by degrees, and in time lose sight of their folly."

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Predominance. [Return to reference 6](#)



### **Chapter 45. *They Discourse with an Old Man***

The evening was now far past, and they rose to return home. As they walked along the bank of the Nile, delighted with the beams of the moon quivering on the water, they saw at a small distance an old man, whom the prince had often heard in the assembly of the sages. "Yonder," said he, "is one whose years have calmed his passions, but not clouded his reason. Let us close the disquisitions of the night by inquiring what are his sentiments of his own state, that we may know whether youth alone is to struggle with vexation, and whether any better hope remains for the latter part of life."

Here the sage approached and saluted them. They invited him to join their walk, and prattled a while, as acquaintance that had unexpectedly met one another. The old man was cheerful and talkative, and the way seemed short in his company. He was pleased to find himself not disregarded, accompanied them to their house, and, at the prince's request, entered with them. They placed him in the seat of honor, and set wine and conserves before him.

"Sir," said the princess, "an evening walk must give to a man of learning like you pleasures which ignorance and youth can hardly conceive. You know the qualities and the causes of all that you behold, the laws by which the river flows, the periods in which the planets perform their revolutions. Everything must supply you with contemplation, and renew the consciousness of your own dignity."

"Lady," answered he, "let the gay and the vigorous expect pleasure in their excursions; it is enough that age can obtain ease. To me the world has lost its novelty; I look round, and see what I remember to have seen in happier days. I rest against a tree, and consider that in the same shade I once disputed upon the annual overflow of the Nile with a friend who is now silent in the grave. I cast my eyes upward, fix them on the changing moon, and think with pain on the vicissitudes of life. I have ceased to take much delight in physical truth; for what have I to do with those things which I am soon to leave?"

"You may at least recreate<sup>7</sup> yourself," said Imlac, "with the recollection of an honorable and useful life, and enjoy the praise which all agree to give you."

"Praise," said the sage with a sigh, "is to an old man an empty sound. I have neither mother to be delighted with the reputation of her son, nor wife to partake the honors of her husband. I have outlived my friends and my rivals. Nothing is now of much importance; for I cannot extend my interest beyond myself. Youth is delighted with applause, because it is considered as the earnest of some future good, and because the prospect of life is far extended; but to me, who am now declining to decrepitude, there is little to be feared from the malevolence of men, and yet less to be hoped from their affection or esteem. Something they may yet take away, but they can give me nothing. Riches would now be useless, and high employment would be pain. My retrospect of life recalls to my view many opportunities of good neglected, much time squandered upon trifles, and more lost in idleness and vacancy. I leave many great designs unattempted, and many great attempts unfinished. My mind is burthened with no heavy crime, and therefore I compose myself to tranquility; endeavor to abstract my thoughts from hopes and cares which, though reason knows them to be vain, still try to keep their old possession of the heart; expect,<sup>8</sup> with serene humility, that hour which nature cannot long delay; and hope to possess, in a better state, that happiness which here I could not find, and that virtue which here I have not attained."

He arose and went away, leaving his audience not much elated with the hope of long life. The prince consoled himself with remarking that it was not reasonable to be disappointed by this account; for age had never been considered as the season of felicity, and if it was possible to be easy in decline and weakness, it was likely that the days of vigor and alacrity might be happy; that the noon of life might be bright, if the evening could be calm.

The princess suspected that age was querulous and malignant, and delighted to repress the expectations of those who had newly entered the world. She had seen the possessors of estates look with

envy on their heirs, and known many who enjoy pleasure no longer than they can confine it to themselves.

Pekuah conjectured that the man was older than he appeared, and was willing to impute his complaints to delirious dejection; or else supposed that he had been unfortunate, and was therefore discontented. "For nothing," said she, "is more common than to call our own condition the condition of life."

Imlac, who had no desire to see them depressed, smiled at the comforts which they could so readily procure to themselves, and remembered that, at the same age, he was equally confident of unmingled prosperity, and equally fertile of consolatory expedients. He forbore to force upon them unwelcome knowledge, which time itself would too soon impress. The princess and her lady retired; the madness of the astronomer hung upon their minds, and they desired Imlac to enter upon his office, and delay next morning the rising of the sun.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Refresh.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Await.[Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 46. *The Princess and Pekuah Visit the Astronomer***

The princess and Pekuah, having talked in private of Imlac's astronomer, thought his character at once so amiable and so strange, that they could not be satisfied without a nearer knowledge, and Imlac was requested to find the means of bringing them together.

This was somewhat difficult; the philosopher had never received any visits from women, though he lived in a city that had in it many Europeans who followed the manners of their own countries, and many from other parts of the world that lived there with European liberty. The ladies would not be refused, and several schemes were proposed for the accomplishment of their design. It was proposed to introduce them as strangers in distress, to whom the sage was always accessible; but, after some deliberation, it appeared, that by this artifice, no acquaintance could be formed, for their conversation would be short, and they could not decently importune him often. "This," said Rasselas, "is true; but I have yet a stronger objection against the misrepresentation of your state. I have always considered it as treason against the great republic of human nature, to make any man's virtues the means of deceiving him, whether on great or little occasions. All imposture weakens confidence and chills benevolence. When the sage finds that you are not what you seemed, he will feel the resentment natural to a man who, conscious of great abilities, discovers that he has been tricked by understandings meaner than his own, and, perhaps, the distrust, which he can never afterwards wholly lay aside, may stop the voice of counsel, and close the hand of charity; and where will you find the power of restoring his benefactions to mankind, or his peace to himself?"

To this no reply was attempted, and Imlac began to hope that their curiosity would subside; but next day Pekuah told him, she had now found an honest pretense for a visit to the astronomer, for she would solicit permission to continue under him the studies in which she had been initiated by the Arab, and the princess might go with

her either as a fellow-student, or because a woman could not decently come alone. "I am afraid," said Imlac, "that he will be soon weary of your company: men advanced far in knowledge do not love to repeat the elements of their art, and I am not certain, that even of the elements, as he will deliver them connected with inferences, and mingled with reflections, you are a very capable auditress." "That," said Pekuah, "must be my care: I ask of you only to take me thither. My knowledge is, perhaps, more than you imagine it, and by concurring always with his opinions I shall make him think it greater than it is."

The astronomer, in pursuance of this resolution, was told, that a foreign lady, traveling in search of knowledge, had heard of his reputation, and was desirous to become his scholar. The uncommonness of the proposal raised at once his surprise and curiosity, and when, after a short deliberation, he consented to admit her, he could not stay without impatience till the next day.

The ladies dressed themselves magnificently, and were attended by Imlac to the astronomer, who was pleased to see himself approached with respect by persons of so splendid an appearance. In the exchange of the first civilities he was timorous and bashful; but when the talk became regular, he recollected his powers, and justified the character which Imlac had given. Inquiring of Pekuah what could have turned her inclination towards astronomy, he received from her a history of her adventure at the pyramid, and of the time passed in the Arab's island. She told her tale with ease and elegance, and her conversation took possession of his heart. The discourse was then turned to astronomy: Pekuah displayed what she knew: he looked upon her as a prodigy of genius, and entreated her not to desist from a study which she had so happily begun.

They came again and again, and were every time more welcome than before. The sage endeavored to amuse them, that they might prolong their visits, for he found his thoughts grow brighter in their company; the clouds of solicitude vanished by degrees, as he forced himself to entertain them, and he grieved when he was left at their departure to his old employment of regulating the seasons.

The princess and her favorite had now watched his lips for several months, and could not catch a single word from which they could judge whether he continued, or not, in the opinion of his preternatural commission. They often contrived to bring him to an open declaration, but he easily eluded all their attacks, and on which side soever they pressed him escaped from them to some other topic.

As their familiarity increased they invited him often to the house of Imlac, where they distinguished him by extraordinary respect. He began gradually to delight in sublunary pleasures. He came early and departed late; labored to recommend himself by assiduity and compliance; excited their curiosity after new arts, that they might still want his assistance; and when they made any excursion of pleasure or inquiry, entreated to attend them.

By long experience of his integrity and wisdom, the prince and his sister were convinced that he might be trusted without danger; and lest he should draw any false hopes from the civilities which he received, discovered to him their condition, with the motives of their journey, and required his opinion on the choice of life.

"Of the various conditions which the world spreads before you, which you shall prefer," said the sage, "I am not able to instruct you. I can only tell that I have chosen wrong. I have passed my time in study without experience; in the attainment of sciences which can, for the most part, be but remotely useful to mankind. I have purchased knowledge at the expense of all the common comforts of life: I have missed the endearing elegance of female friendship, and the happy commerce of domestic tenderness. If I have obtained any prerogatives above other students, they have been accompanied with fear, disquiet, and scrupulosity; but even of these prerogatives, whatever they were, I have, since my thoughts have been diversified by more intercourse with the world, begun to question the reality. When I have been for a few days lost in pleasing dissipation, I am always tempted to think that my inquiries have ended in error, and that I have suffered much, and suffered it in vain."

Imlac was delighted to find that the sage's understanding was breaking through its mists, and resolved to detain him from the planets till he should forget his task of ruling them, and reason should recover its original influence.

From this time the astronomer was received into familiar friendship, and partook of all their projects and pleasures: his respect kept him attentive, and the activity of Rasselas did not leave much time unengaged. Something was always to be done; the day was spent in making observations which furnished talk for the evening, and the evening was closed with a scheme for the morrow.

The sage confessed to Imlac, that since he had mingled in the gay tumults of life, and divided his hours by a succession of amusements, he found the conviction of his authority over the skies fade gradually from his mind, and began to trust less to an opinion which he never could prove to others, and which he now found subject to variation from causes in which reason had no part. "If I am accidentally left alone for a few hours," said he, "my inveterate persuasion rushes upon my soul, and my thoughts are chained down by some irresistible violence, but they are soon disentangled by the prince's conversation, and instantaneously released at the entrance of Pekuah. I am like a man habitually afraid of specters, who is set at ease by a lamp, and wonders at the dread which harassed him in the dark, yet, if his lamp be extinguished, feels again the terrors which he knows that when it is light he shall feel no more. But I am sometimes afraid lest I indulge my quiet by criminal negligence, and voluntarily forget the great charge with which I am entrusted. If I favor myself in a known error, or am determined by my own ease in a doubtful question of this importance, how dreadful is my crime!"

"No disease of the imagination," answered Imlac, "is so difficult of cure, as that which is complicated with the dread of guilt: fancy and conscience then act interchangeably upon us, and so often shift their places, that the illusions of one are not distinguished from the dictates of the other. If fancy presents images not moral or religious, the mind drives them away when they give it pain, but when melancholic<sup>9</sup> notions take the form of duty, they lay hold on the

faculties without opposition, because we are afraid to exclude or banish them. For this reason the superstitious are often melancholy, and the melancholy almost always superstitious.

“But do not let the suggestions of timidity overpower your better reason: the danger of neglect can be but as the probability of the obligation, which, when you consider it with freedom, you find very little, and that little growing every day less. Open your heart to the influence of the light, which, from time to time, breaks in upon you: when scruples importune you, which you in your lucid moments know to be vain, do not stand to parley, but fly to business or to Pekuah, and keep this thought always prevalent, that you are only one atom of the mass of humanity, and have neither such virtue nor vice, as that you should be singled out for supernatural favors or afflictions.”

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Obsessive. According to Johnson’s *Dictionary*, one definition of melancholy is “a kind of madness in which the mind is always fixed on one object.”[Return to reference 9](#)



## **Chapter 47. The Prince Enters, and Brings a New Topic**

"All this," said the astronomer, "I have often thought, but my reason has been so long subjugated by an uncontrollable and overwhelming idea, that it durst not confide in its own decisions. I now see how fatally I betrayed my quiet, by suffering chimeras to prey upon me in secret; but melancholy shrinks from communication, and I never found a man before, to whom I could impart my troubles, though I had been certain of relief. I rejoice to find my own sentiments confirmed by yours, who are not easily deceived, and can have no motive or purpose to deceive. I hope that time and variety will dissipate the gloom that has so long surrounded me, and the latter part of my days will be spent in peace."

"Your learning and virtue," said Imlac, "may justly give you hopes."

Rasselas then entered with the princess and Pekuah, and inquired whether they had contrived any new diversion for the next day. "Such," said Nekayah, "is the state of life, that none are happy but by the anticipation of change: the change itself is nothing; when we have made it, the next wish is to change again. The world is not yet exhausted; let me see something tomorrow which I never saw before."

"Variety," said Rasselas, "is so necessary to content, that even the happy valley disgusted me by the recurrence of its luxuries; yet I could not forbear to reproach myself with impatience, when I saw the monks of St. Anthony support without complaint, a life, not of uniform delight, but uniform hardship."

"Those men," answered Imlac, "are less wretched in their silent convent than the Abyssinian princes in their prison of pleasure. Whatever is done by the monks is incited by an adequate and reasonable motive. Their labor supplies them with necessaries; it therefore cannot be omitted, and is certainly rewarded. Their devotion prepares them for another state, and reminds them of its approach, while it fits them for it. Their time is regularly distributed; one duty succeeds another, so that they are not left open to the

distraction of unguided choice, nor lost in the shades of listless inactivity. There is a certain task to be performed at an appropriated hour; and their toils are cheerful, because they consider them as acts of piety, by which they are always advancing towards endless felicity."

"Do you think," said Nekayah, "that the monastic rule is a more holy and less imperfect state than any other? May not he equally hope for future happiness who converses openly with mankind, who succors the distressed by his charity, instructs the ignorant by his learning, and contributes by his industry to the general system of life; even though he should omit some of the mortifications which are practiced in the cloister, and allow himself such harmless delights as his condition may place within his reach?"

"This," said Imlac, "is a question which has long divided the wise, and perplexed the good. I am afraid to decide on either part. He that lives well in the world is better than he that lives well in a monastery. But perhaps everyone is not able to stem the temptations of public life; and if he cannot conquer, he may properly retreat. Some have little power to do good, and have likewise little strength to resist evil. Many are weary of their conflicts with adversity, and are willing to eject those passions which have long busied them in vain. And many are dismissed by age and diseases from the more laborious duties of society. In monasteries the weak and timorous may be happily sheltered, the weary may repose, and the penitent may meditate. Those retreats of prayer and contemplation have something so congenial to the mind of man, that, perhaps, there is scarcely one that does not purpose to close his life in pious abstraction with a few associates serious as himself."

"Such," said Pekuah, "has often been my wish, and I have heard the princess declare, that she should not willingly die in a crowd."

"The liberty of using harmless pleasures," proceeded Imlac, "will not be disputed; but it is still to be examined what pleasures are harmless. The evil of any pleasure that Nekayah can image is not in the act itself, but in its consequences. Pleasure, in itself harmless, may become mischievous, by endearing to us a state which we

know to be transient and probatory,<sup>1</sup> and withdrawing our thoughts from that, of which every hour brings us nearer to the beginning, and of which no length of time will bring us to the end. Mortification is not virtuous in itself, nor has any other use, but that it disengages us from the allurements of sense. In the state of future perfection, to which we all aspire, there will be pleasure without danger, and security without restraint."

The princess was silent, and Rasselas, turning to the astronomer, asked him, whether he could not delay her retreat, by showing her something which she had not seen before.

"Your curiosity," said the sage, "has been so general, and your pursuit of knowledge so vigorous, that novelties are not now very easily to be found: but what you can no longer procure from the living may be given by the dead. Among the wonders of this country are the catacombs, or the ancient repositories, in which the bodies of the earliest generations were lodged, and where, by the virtue of the gums which embalmed them, they yet remain without corruption."

"I know not," said Rasselas, "what pleasure the sight of the catacombs can afford; but, since nothing else is offered, I am resolved to view them, and shall place this with many other things which I have done, because I would do something."

They hired a guard of horsemen, and the next day visited the catacombs. When they were about to descend into the sepulchral caves, "Pekuah," said the princess, "we are now again invading the habitations of the dead; I know that you will stay behind; let me find you safe when I return." "No, I will not be left," answered Pekuah; "I will go down between you and the prince."

They then all descended, and roved with wonder through the labyrinth of subterraneous passages, where the bodies were laid in rows on either side.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Serving as a trial or test.[Return to reference 1](#)

### **Chapter 48. Imlac Discourses on the Nature of the Soul**

"What reason," said the prince, "can be given, why the Egyptians should thus expensively preserve those carcasses which some nations consume with fire, others lay to mingle with the earth, and all agree to remove from their sight, as soon as decent rites can be performed?"

"The original of ancient customs," said Imlac, "is commonly unknown; for the practice often continues when the cause has ceased; and concerning superstitious ceremonies it is vain to conjecture; for what reason did not dictate reason cannot explain. I have long believed that the practice of embalming arose only from tenderness to the remains of relations or friends, and to this opinion I am more inclined, because it seems impossible that this care should have been general: had all the dead been embalmed, their repositories must in time have been more spacious than the dwellings of the living. I suppose only the rich or honorable were secured from corruption, and the rest left to the course of nature.

"But it is commonly supposed that the Egyptians believed the soul to live as long as the body continued undissolved, and therefore tried this method of eluding death."

"Could the wise Egyptians," said Nekayah, "think so grossly of the soul? If the soul could once survive its separation, what could it afterwards receive or suffer from the body?"

"The Egyptians would doubtless think erroneously," said the astronomer, "in the darkness of heathenism, and the first dawn of philosophy. The nature of the soul is still disputed amidst all our opportunities of clearer knowledge: some yet say, that it may be material, who, nevertheless, believe it to be immortal."

"Some," answered Imlac, "have indeed said that the soul is material, but I can scarcely believe that any man has thought it, who knew how to think; for all the conclusions of reason enforce the immateriality of mind, and all the notices of sense and investigations of science concur to prove the unconsciousness of matter.

"It was never supposed that cogitation is inherent in matter, or that every particle is a thinking being. Yet if any part of matter be devoid of thought, what part can we suppose to think? Matter can differ from matter only in form, density, bulk, motion, and direction of motion: to which of these, however varied or combined, can consciousness be annexed? To be round or square, to be solid or fluid, to be great or little, to be moved slowly or swiftly one way or another, are modes of material existence, all equally alien from the nature of cogitation. If matter be once without thought, it can only be made to think by some new modification, but all the modifications which it can admit are equally unconnected with cogitative powers."

"But the materialists," said the astronomer, "urge that matter may have qualities with which we are unacquainted."

"He who will determine," returned Imlac, "against that which he knows, because there may be something which he knows not; he that can set hypothetical possibility against acknowledged certainty, is not to be admitted among reasonable beings. All that we know of matter is, that matter is inert, senseless and lifeless; and if this conviction cannot be opposed but by referring us to something that we know not, we have all the evidence that human intellect can admit. If that which is known may be overruled by that which is unknown, no being, not omniscient, can arrive at certainty."

"Yet let us not," said the astronomer, "too arrogantly limit the Creator's power."

"It is no limitation of omnipotence," replied the poet, "to suppose that one thing is not consistent with another, that the same proposition cannot be at once true and false, that the same number cannot be even and odd, that cogitation cannot be conferred on that which is created incapable of cogitation."

"I know not," said Nekayah, "any great use of this question. Does that immateriality, which, in my opinion, you have sufficiently proved, necessarily include eternal duration?"

"Of immateriality," said Imlac, "our ideas are negative, and therefore obscure. Immateriality seems to imply a natural power of

perpetual duration as a consequence of exemption from all causes of decay: whatever perishes, is destroyed by the solution of its contexture,<sup>2</sup> and separation of its parts; nor can we conceive how that which has no parts, and therefore admits no solution, can be naturally corrupted or impaired."

"I know not," said Rasselas, "how to conceive anything without extension: what is extended must have parts, and you allow, that whatever has parts may be destroyed."

"Consider your own conceptions," replied Imlac, "and the difficulty will be less. You will find substance without extension. An ideal form is no less real than material bulk: yet an ideal form has no extension. It is no less certain, when you think on a pyramid, that your mind possesses the idea of a pyramid, than that the pyramid itself is standing. What space does the idea of a pyramid occupy more than the idea of a grain of corn? or how can either idea suffer laceration? As is the effect such is the cause; as thought is, such is the power that thinks; a power impassive and indiscerptible."<sup>3</sup>

"But the Being," said Nekayah, "whom I fear to name, the Being which made the soul, can destroy it."

"He, surely, can destroy it," answered Imlac, "since, however unperishable, it receives from a superior nature its power of duration. That it will not perish by any inherent cause of decay, or principle of corruption, may be shown by philosophy; but philosophy can tell no more. That it will not be annihilated by him that made it, we must humbly learn from higher authority."

The whole assembly stood a while silent and collected. "Let us return," said Rasselas, "from this scene of mortality. How gloomy would be these mansions of the dead to him who did not know that he shall never die; that what now acts shall continue its agency, and what now thinks shall think on for ever. Those that lie here stretched before us, the wise and the powerful of ancient times, warn us to remember the shortness of our present state: they were, perhaps, snatched away while they were busy, like us, in the choice of life."

"To me," said the princess, "the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity."

They then hastened out of the caverns, and, under the protection of their guard, returned to Cairo.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Dissolution of its structure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Not to be separated.[Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 49. *The Conclusion, in Which Nothing Is Concluded***

It was now the time of the inundation of the Nile: a few days after their visit to the catacombs, the river began to rise.

They were confined to their house. The whole region being under water gave them no invitation to any excursions, and being well supplied with materials for talk, they diverted themselves with comparisons of the different forms of life which they had observed, and with various schemes of happiness which each of them had formed.

Pekuah was never so much charmed with any place as the convent of St. Anthony, where the Arab restored her to the princess, and wished only to fill it with pious maidens, and to be made prioress of the order; she was weary of expectation and disgust,<sup>4</sup> and would gladly be fixed in some unvariable state.

The princess thought that, of all sublunary things, knowledge was the best: she desired first to learn all sciences, and then purposed to found a college of learned women, in which she would preside, that, by conversing with the old and educating the young, she might divide her time between the acquisition and communication of wisdom, and raise up for the next age models of prudence, and patterns of piety.

The prince desired a little kingdom, in which he might administer justice in his own person, and see all the parts of government with his own eyes; but he could never fix the limits of his dominion, and was always adding to the number of his subjects.

Imlac and the astronomer were contented to be driven along the stream of life, without directing their course to any particular port.

Of these wishes that they had formed, they well knew that none could be obtained. They deliberated a while what was to be done, and resolved, when the inundation should cease, to return to Abyssinia.<sup>5</sup>



- Note 4: Aversion. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Their destination is their home country, but the text does not say whether they will return to the Happy Valley. [Return to reference 5](#)

**A Dictionary of the English Language** Before Johnson, no standard dictionary of the English language existed. The lack had troubled speakers of English for some time, both because Italian and French academies had produced major dictionaries of their own tongues and because, in the absence of any authority, English seemed likely to change utterly from one generation to another. Many eighteenth-century authors feared that their own language would soon become obsolete: as Alexander Pope wrote in *An Essay on Criticism*,

Our sons their fathers' failing language see,  
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.

A dictionary could help slow such change, and commercially it would be a book that everyone would need to buy. In 1746 a group of London publishers commissioned Johnson, still an unknown author, to undertake the project. He hoped to finish it in three years; it took him nine. But the quantity and quality of work he accomplished, aided only by six part-time assistants, made him famous as "Dictionary Johnson." The *Dictionary* remained a standard reference book for one hundred years.

Johnson's achievement is notable in three respects: its size (forty thousand words), the wealth of illustrative quotations, and the excellence of the definitions. No earlier English dictionary rivaled the scope of Johnson's two large folio volumes. About 114,000 quotations, gathered from the best English writers from Sidney to the eighteenth century, exemplify the usage of words as well as their meanings. Above all, it was the definitions, however, that established the authority of Johnson's *Dictionary*. A small selection is only too likely to concentrate on a few amusing or notorious definitions, but the great majority are full, clear, and totally free from eccentricity. Indeed, many of them are still repeated in modern dictionaries. Language, Johnson knew, cannot be fixed once and for all; many of the words he defines have radically changed meaning since the

eighteenth century. Yet Johnson did more than any other person of his time to preserve the ideal of a standard English.

# ***From A Dictionary of the English Language***

## ***From Preface***

\* \* \*

A large work is difficult because it is large, even though all its parts might singly be performed with facility; where there are many things to be done, each must be allowed its share of time and labor, in the proportion only which it bears to the whole; nor can it be expected that the stones which form the dome of a temple should be squared and polished like the diamond of a ring.

Of the event of this work, for which, having labored it with so much application, I cannot but have some degree of parental fondness, it is natural to form conjectures. Those who have been persuaded to think well of my design will require that it should fix our language, and put a stop to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition. With this consequence I will confess that I flattered myself for a while;<sup>1</sup> but now begin to fear that I have indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience can justify. When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation.

With this hope, however, academies have been instituted, to guard the avenues of their languages, to retain fugitives, and repulse intruders; but their vigilance and activity have hitherto been vain; sounds are too volatile and subtle for legal restraints; to

enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength. The French language has visibly changed under the inspection of the academy;<sup>2</sup> the style of Amelot's translation of father Paul is observed by Le Courayer to be *un peu passé*;<sup>3</sup> and no Italian will maintain that the diction of any modern writer is not perceptibly different from that of Boccace, Machiavel, or Caro.<sup>4</sup>

Total and sudden transformations of a language seldom happen; conquests and migrations are now very rare: but there are other causes of change, which, though slow in their operation, and invisible in their progress, are perhaps as much superior to human resistance as the revolutions of the sky, or intumescence<sup>5</sup> of the tide. Commerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language; they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavor to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect, like the jargon which serves the traffickers<sup>6</sup> on the Mediterranean and Indian coasts. This will not always be confined to the exchange, the warehouse, or the port, but will be communicated by degrees to other ranks of the people, and be at last incorporated with the current speech.

There are likewise internal causes equally forcible. The language most likely to continue long without alteration would be that of a nation raised a little, and but a little, above barbarity, secluded from strangers, and totally employed in procuring the conveniencies of life; either without books, or, like some of the Mahometan countries, with very few: men thus busied and unlearned, having only such words as common use requires, would perhaps long continue to express the same notions by the same signs. But no such constancy can be expected in a people polished by arts, and classed by subordination, where one part of the community is sustained and accommodated by the labor of the other. Those who have much leisure to think, will always be enlarging the stock of ideas, and every increase of knowledge, whether real or fancied, will produce new words, or combinations of words. When the mind is unchained

from necessity, it will range after convenience; when it is left at large in the fields of speculation, it will shift opinions; as any custom is disused, the words that expressed it must perish with it; as any opinion grows popular, it will innovate speech in the same proportion as it alters practice.

As by the cultivation of various sciences, a language is amplified, it will be more furnished with words deflected from their original sense; the geometrician will talk of a courtier's zenith, or the eccentric virtue of a wild hero, and the physician of sanguine expectations and phlegmatic delays.<sup>7</sup> Copiousness of speech will give opportunities to capricious choice, by which some words will be preferred, and others degraded; vicissitudes of fashion will enforce the use of new, or extend the signification of known terms. The tropes<sup>8</sup> of poetry will make hourly encroachments, and the metaphorical will become the current sense: pronunciation will be varied by levity or ignorance, and the pen must at length comply with the tongue; illiterate writers will at one time or other, by public infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety. As politeness increases, some expressions will be considered as too gross and vulgar for the delicate, others as too formal and ceremonious for the gay and airy; new phrases are therefore adopted, which must, for the same reasons, be in time dismissed. Swift, in his petty treatise on the English language,<sup>9</sup> allows that new words must sometimes be introduced, but proposes that none should be suffered to become obsolete. But what makes a word obsolete, more than general agreement to forbear it? and how shall it be continued, when it conveys an offensive idea, or recalled again into the mouths of mankind, when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliarity unpleasing.

There is another cause of alteration more prevalent than any other, which yet in the present state of the world cannot be obviated. A mixture of two languages will produce a third distinct from both, and they will always be mixed, where the chief part of

education, and the most conspicuous accomplishment, is skill in ancient or in foreign tongues. He that has long cultivated another language, will find its words and combinations crowd upon his memory; and haste or negligence, refinement or affectation, will obtrude borrowed terms and exotic expressions.

The great pest of speech is frequency of translation. No book was ever turned from one language into another, without imparting something of its native idiom; this is the most mischievous and comprehensive innovation; single words may enter by thousands, and the fabric of the tongue continue the same, but new phraseology changes much at once; it alters not the single stones of the building, but the order<sup>1</sup> of the columns. If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our style, which I, who can never wish to see dependence multiplied, hope the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavor with all their influence to stop the license of translators, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of France.

If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language.

In hope of giving longevity to that which its own nature forbids to be immortal, I have devoted this book, the labor of years, to the honor of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology without a contest to the nations of the continent. The chief glory of every people arises from its authors: whether I shall add anything by my own writings to the reputation of English literature, must be left to time. Much of my life has been lost under the pressures of disease; much has been trifled away; and much has always been spent in provision for the day that was passing over

me; but I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance foreign nations, and distant ages, gain access to the propagators of knowledge, and understand the teachers of truth; if my labors afford light to the repositories of science, and add celebrity to Bacon, to Hooker, to Milton, and to Boyle.<sup>2</sup>

When I am animated by this wish, I look with pleasure on my book, however defective; and deliver it to the world with the spirit of a man that has endeavored well. That it will immediately become popular I have not promised to myself: a few wild blunders and risible absurdities, from which no work of such multiplicity was ever free, may for a time furnish folly with laughter, and harden ignorance in contempt; but useful diligence will at last prevail, and there never can be wanting some who distinguish desert;<sup>3</sup> who will consider that no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away; that a whole life cannot be spent upon syntax and etymology, and that even a whole life would not be sufficient; that he, whose design includes whatever language can express, must often speak of what he does not understand; that a writer will sometimes be hurried by eagerness to the end, and sometimes faint with weariness under a task, which Scaliger compares to the labors of the anvil and the mine;<sup>4</sup> that what is obvious is not always known, and what is known is not always present; that sudden fits of inadvertency will surprise vigilance, slight avocations<sup>5</sup> will reduce attention, and casual eclipses of the mind will darken learning; and that the writer shall often in vain trace his memory at the moment of need, for that which yesterday he knew with intuitive readiness, and which will come uncalled into his thoughts tomorrow.

In this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed; and though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the author, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it, that the *English Dictionary* was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great;<sup>6</sup> not in the soft obscurities of



retirement, or under the shelter of academic bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow: and it may repress the triumph of malignant criticism to observe, that if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed. If the lexicons of ancient tongues, now immutably fixed, and comprised in a few volumes, be yet, after the toil of successive ages, inadequate and delusive; if the aggregated knowledge and cooperating diligence of the Italian academicians did not secure them from the censure of Beni;<sup>7</sup> if the embodied critics of France, when fifty years had been spent upon their work, were obliged to change its economy,<sup>8</sup> and give their second edition another form, I may surely be contented without the praise of perfection, which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave,<sup>9</sup> and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquility, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Johnson's Plan (1747) had called for "a dictionary by which the pronunciation of our language may be fixed, and its attainment facilitated; by which its purity may be preserved, its use ascertained, and its duration lengthened."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The French academy, founded to purify the French language, had produced a dictionary in 1694; but revisions were necessary within a few years.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A bit old-fashioned (French). Le Courayer's translation (1736) of Father Paolo Sarpi's *History of the Council of Trent* superseded Amelot's (1683).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Like Boccaccio (1313–1375) and Machiavelli (1469–1527), Annibale Caro (1507–1566) was a classic Italian stylist

whose work had preceded the dictionary published in 1612 by the Italian Academy.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Swelling.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Traders.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Sanguine" and "phlegmatic" once referred only to the physiological predominance of blood or phlegm. "Zenith" (the point of the sky directly overhead) and "eccentric" (deviating from the center) were originally astronomical and geometrical terms.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "A change of a word from its original signification" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue" (1712). "Petty": little.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Architectural mode (Doric, etc.), which determines the style and proportions of columns.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Leading physicist and chemist (1627–1691). "Science": knowledge. Richard Hooker wrote *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594–97), a famous defense of the Church of England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Merit.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), a great scholar and lexicographer, wrote Latin verses suggesting that criminals should be condemned to lexicography.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Whatever calls one aside.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* on p. 886.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Paolo Beni's *L'Anticrusca* (1612) violently attacked the first edition of the *Vocabolario* (the Italian dictionary).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Organization.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Johnson's wife had died three years earlier.[Return to reference 9](#)

## [SOME DEFINITIONS: A SMALL ANTHOLOGY]<sup>1</sup>

To CI'VILIZE. *v.a.*<sup>2</sup>

To reclaim from savageness and brutality; to instruct in the arts of regular life.  
We send the graces and the muses forth,  
To *civilize* and to instruct the North.

Amongst those who are counted the *civilized* part of mankind, this original  
law of nature still takes place.

CO'LONY. *n.s.*<sup>5</sup>

1. A body of people drawn from the mother-country to inhabit some distant  
place.

Rooting out these two rebellious septs, he placed English *colonies* in their  
rooms.

*Davie*

2. The country planted; a plantation.

The rising city, which from far you see,  
Is Carthage; and a Trojan *colony*.

*Dry*

CURIO'SITY. *n.s.*

1. Inquisitiveness; inclination to enquiry.

2. Nicety; delicacy.

When thou wast in thy gilt, and thy perfume, they mockt thee for too  
much *curiosity*; in thy rags thou knowest none, but art despised for the  
contrary.

*Shakesp*

3. Accuracy; exactness.

Our eyes and senses, however armed or assisted, are too gross to discern  
the *curiosity* of the workmanship of nature.

*Ray on*

4. An act of curiosity; nice experiment.

There hath been practiced also a *curiosity*, to set a tree upon the north-  
side of a wall, and, at a little height, to draw it through the wall, and  
spread it upon the south-side; conceiving that the root and lower part of  
the stock should enjoy the freshness of the shade, and the upper boughs  
and fruit, the comfort of the sun; but it sorted not.

*Bacon's*

5. An object of curiosity; rarity.

We took a ramble together to see the *curiosities* of this great town.

*Addison's Freeholder, No. 47.*<sup>2</sup>

ENTHU'SIASM. *n.s.*

1. A vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favor or communication.

*Enthusiasm* is founded neither on reason nor divine revelation, but rises from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain.

2. Heat of imagination; violence of passion; confidence of opinion.

3. Elevation of fancy; exaltation of ideas.

Imaging is, in itself, the very height and life of poetry, which, by a kind of *enthusiasm*, or extraordinary emotion of soul, makes it seem to us that we behold those things which the poet paints.

Dryden's

GE'NIUS. *n.s.*

1. The protecting or ruling power of men, places, or things.

And as I awake, sweet music breathe,  
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,  
Or th' unseen *genius* of the wood.

2. A man endowed with superior faculties.

There is no little writer of Pindaric who is not mentioned as a prodigious *genius*.

3. Mental power or faculties.

4. Disposition of nature by which any one is qualified for some peculiar employment.

5. Nature; disposition.

LEXICO'GRAPHER. *n.s.*

A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words.

MELANCHO'LY. *n.s.*

1. A disease, supposed to proceed from a redundance of black bile; but it is better known to arise from too heavy and too viscid blood: its cure is in evacuation, nervous medicines, and powerful stimuli.

2. A kind of madness, in which the mind is always fixed on one object.

3. A gloomy, pensive, discontented temper.

NA'TURE. *n.s.*

1. An imaginary being supposed to preside over the material and animal world.

Thou, *nature*, art my goddess; to thy law  
My services are bound.

Shakespeare

2. The native state or properties of any thing, by which it is discriminated from others.

3. The constitution of an animated body.

4. Disposition of mind; temper.

5. The regular course of things.

6. The compass of natural existence.

If their dam may be judge, the young apes are the most beautiful things in  
*nature*.

7. Natural affection, or reverence; native sensations.

8. The state or operation of the material world.

9. Sort; species.

10. Sentiments or images adapted to nature, or conformable to truth and reality.

11. Physics; the science which teaches the qualities of things.

*Nature* and *nature's* laws lay hid in night,  
God said, Let Newton be, and all was light.

PA'TRON. *n.s.*

1. One who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.

PI'RATE. *n.s.*

1. A sea-robber.

Relate, if business or the thirst of gain  
Engage your journey o'er the pathless main,  
Where savage *pirates* seek through seas unknown  
The lives of others, vent'rous of their own.

2. Any robber; particularly a bookseller who seizes the copies of other men.

SA'TIRE. *n.s.*

A poem in which wickedness or folly is censured. Proper *satire* is distinguished, by the generality of the reflections, from a *lampoon* which is aimed against a particular person; but they are too frequently confounded.

SA'VAGE. *n.s.*

A man untaught and uncivilized; a barbarian.

To deprive us of metals is to make us mere *savages*; to change our corn for the old Arcadian diet, our houses and cities for dens and caves, and our clothing for skins of beasts: 'tis to bereave us of all arts and sciences, nay, of revealed religion.

TA'LENT. *n.s.*

1. A *talent* signified so much weight, or a sum of money, the value differing according to the different ages and countries.

2. Faculty; power; gift of nature. A metaphor borrowed from the talents mentioned in the holy writ.

Persons who possess the true *talent* of raillery are like comets; they are seldom seen, and all at once admired and feared.

*Fe*

3. Quality; nature. An improper and mistaken use.

WIT. *n.s.*

1. The powers of the mind; the mental faculties; the intellects. This is the original signification.

2. Imagination; quickness of fancy.

3. Sentiments produced by quickness of fancy.

The definition of *wit* is only this; that it is a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject.

4. A man of fancy.

To tell them wou'd a hundred tongues require;  
Or one vain *wit's*, that might a hundred tire.

5. A man of genius.

6. Sense; judgment.

7. In the plural. Sound mind; intellect not crazed.

Sound sleep cometh of moderate eating; he riseth early, and his *wits* are with him: but the pain of watching, and choler, and pangs of the belly, are with an insatiable man.

*Ei*

8. Contrivance; stratagem; power of expedients.

## Endnotes

1775

- Note 1: Johnson's definitions include etymologies, which are omitted here. Johnson is also innovative in including numerous quotations from English authors to illustrate the meanings of each word, which he sometimes condenses or otherwise slightly alters for clarity (not all of Johnson's quoted illustrations for each word are included here).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Verb active.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Edmund Waller, from "To My Lord of Falkland," lines 3–4, *Poems &c. Written by Mr. Ed. Waller* (1645).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1690).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Noun substantive; Johnson's term for what we today call simply "noun."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Davies, *Historical Relations, or, A Discovery of the True Causes Why Ireland was Never Intirely Subdu'd nor Brought under*

*Obedience of the Crown of England until the Beginning of the Reign of King James of Happy Memory* (1664). "Septs": divisions of a nation or tribe.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: John Dryden, *The Works of Virgil Containing His Pastorals, Georgics, and Aeneis* (1697), *Aeneid* 1, 341–42. (Johnson mistakenly substitutes "Trojan" for the original word "Tyrian," that is, from the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre.)[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* 4.3. 336–39.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Creation* (1691).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, or, a Natural History, in Ten Centuries* (1627).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joseph Addison, *The Freeholder* (1715–16).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (4th ed., 1700).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry, and Poetic License," preface to *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* (1677).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Milton, *Il Penseroso*, lines 151–54 (line omitted), *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin* (1645).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Johnson adapts the gist of Joseph Addison's essay on genius, in *Spectator* 160 (1711).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John Quincy, *Lexicon Physico-Medicum, or, a New Medical Dictionary* (1719).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: William Shakespeare, *King Lear* 1.2. 1–2.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Joseph Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica, or Confest Ignorance the Way to Science, in an Essay of the Vanity of Dogmatizing, and Confident Opinion* (1665).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alexander Pope, [Epitaph] "Intended for Sir Isaac Newton, in Westminster Abbey," in *The Works of Alexander Pope* (1735).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Alexander Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer* (1725–26), book 3, lines 86–89.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Richard Bentley, *Eight Sermons Preach'd at the Honourable Robert Boyle's Lecture* (1724).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Arbuthnot, *Tables of Ancient Coins, Weights, and Measures* (1727).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote; or, the Adventures of Arabella* (1752). The vast majority of Johnson's quotations are from texts

written by men. This is one of a few examples, however, when a woman writer is included.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry, and Poetic License," preface to *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* (1677).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (1709, 1711), lines 44–45.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Ecclesiasticus, or the Book of Sirach (apocryphal book of the Bible), 31:20.[Return to reference 8](#)



**The Preface to Shakespeare** This is the finest piece of Shakespeare criticism in the eighteenth century; it culminates a critical tradition that began with John Dryden's remarks on Shakespeare and continued as the plays were edited by Nicholas Rowe, Alexander Pope, Lewis Theobald, and William Warburton. Johnson addresses the standard topics: Shakespeare is the poet of nature, not learning; the creator of characters who spring to life; and a writer whose works express the full range of human passions. But the Preface also takes a fresh look not only at the plays but at the first principles of criticism. Resisting "bardolatry"—uncritical worship of Shakespeare—Johnson points out his faults as well as his virtues and finds that his truth to life, or "just representations of general nature," surpasses that of all other modern writers.

# ***From The Preface to Shakespeare***

## **[SHAKESPEARE'S EXCELLENCE, GENERAL NATURE]**

That praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honors due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox; or those who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy will be at last bestowed by time.

Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it not from reason but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes cooperated with chance; all perhaps are more willing to honor past than present excellence; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns and the beauties of the ancients. While an author is yet living we estimate his powers by his worst performance; and when he is dead we rate them by his best.

To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favor. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep or a mountain high, without the

knowledge of many mountains and many rivers; so in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind. Demonstration<sup>1</sup> immediately displays its power and has nothing to hope or fear from the flux of years; but works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discovered in a long succession of endeavors. Of the first building that was raised, it might be with certainty determined that it was round or square, but whether it was spacious or lofty must have been referred to time. The Pythagorean scale of numbers<sup>2</sup> was at once discovered to be perfect; but the poems of Homer we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted arises, therefore, not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

The poet of whose works I have undertaken the revision may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit.<sup>3</sup> Whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost; and every topic of merriment or motive of sorrow which the modes of artificial life afforded him now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favor and competition are at an end; the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished; his works support no opinion with arguments nor supply any faction with invectives; they can neither indulge vanity nor gratify malignity; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as

pleasure is obtained; yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they have passed through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honors at every transmission.

But because human judgment, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible, and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion, it is proper to inquire by what peculiarities of excellence Shakespeare has gained and kept the favor of his countrymen.

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

Shakespeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpracticed by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual: in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species.

It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakespeare with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. It was said of Euripides<sup>4</sup> that every verse was a precept; and it may be said of Shakespeare that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. Yet his real power is not shown in the splendor of

particular passages, but by the progress of his fable<sup>5</sup> and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles<sup>6</sup> who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.

It will not easily be imagined how much Shakespeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life but by comparing him with other authors. It was observed of the ancient schools of declamation that the more diligently they were frequented, the more was the student disqualified for the world, because he found nothing there which he should ever meet in any other place. The same remark may be applied to every stage but that of Shakespeare. The theater, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind. But the dialogue of this author is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation and common occurrences.

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of a modern dramatist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions; and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.

Characters thus ample and general were not easily discriminated and preserved; yet perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other. I will not say with Pope that every speech may be assigned to the proper speaker,<sup>7</sup> because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristical; but perhaps though some may be equally adapted to every person, it will be difficult to find that any can be properly transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right when there is reason for choice.

Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that should form his expectations of human affairs from the play or from the tale would be equally deceived. Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion; even where the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world: Shakespeare approximates<sup>8</sup> the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen, but, if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed.

This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: “The highest degree of deducible or argumental evidence” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pythagoras discovered the ratios that determine the principal intervals of the musical scale.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Horace’s *Epistles* 2.1.39.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Greek tragic poet (ca. 480–406 B.C.E.). The observation is Cicero’s.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plot. “The series or contexture of events which constitute a poem epic or dramatic” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hierocles of Alexandria (5th century C.E.), Greek philosopher.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the preface to his edition of Shakespeare’s plays (1725).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Brings near.[Return to reference 8](#)

## [SHAKESPEARE'S FAULTS]

Shakespeare with his excellencies has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall show them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. No question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown; and little regard is due to that bigotry which sets candor<sup>9</sup> higher than truth.

His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally, but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.

The plots are often so loosely formed that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design. He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting for the sake of those which are more easy.

It may be observed that in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work, and in view of his reward, he shortened the labor to snatch the profit. He therefore remits his efforts where he should most



vigorously exert them, and his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented.

He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expense not only of likelihood but of possibility. These faults Pope has endeavored, with more zeal than judgment, to transfer to his imagined interpolators. We need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle, when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothic mythology of fairies.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology, for in the same age Sidney, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his *Arcadia*, confounded the pastoral with the feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet, and security with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

In his comic scenes he is seldom very successful when he engages his characters in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm; their jests are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious; neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns<sup>2</sup> by any appearance of refined manners. Whether he represented the real conversation of his time is not easy to determine: the reign of Elizabeth is commonly supposed to have been a time of stateliness, formality, and reserve; yet perhaps the relaxations of that severity were not very elegant. There must, however, have been always some modes of gaiety preferable to others, and a writer ought to choose the best.

In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse as his labor is more. The effusions of passion, which exigence forces out, are for the most part striking and energetic; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumor,<sup>3</sup> meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.

In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narration in dramatic poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated

and inactive, and obstructs the progress of the action; it should therefore always be rapid and enlivened by frequent interruption. Shakespeare found it an encumbrance, and instead of lightening it by brevity, endeavored to recommend it by dignity and splendor.

His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, for his power was the power of nature; when he endeavored, like other tragic writers, to catch opportunities of amplification and, instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to show how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader.

It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it awhile, and, if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved<sup>4</sup> by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

Not that always where the language is intricate the thought is subtle, or the image always great where the line is bulky; the equality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar<sup>5</sup> ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

But the admirers of this great poet have most reason to complain when he approaches nearest to his highest excellence, and seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection and mollify them with tender emotions by the fall of greatness, the danger of innocence, or the crosses of love. What he does best, he soon ceases to do. He is not long soft and pathetic without some idle conceit or contemptible equivocation. He no sooner begins to move than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity.

A quibble<sup>6</sup> is to Shakespeare what luminous vapors are to the traveler: he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisitions, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing<sup>7</sup>

attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career<sup>8</sup> or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

It will be thought strange that in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and critics.

For his other deviations from the art of writing, I resign him to critical justice without making any other demand in his favor than that which must be indulged to all human excellence: that his virtues be rated with his failings. But from the censure which this irregularity may bring upon him I shall, with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose, adventure to try how I can defend him.

His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood; that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought.

In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action. He has not, indeed, an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unraveled: he does not endeavor to hide his design only to discover it, for this is seldom the order of real events, and Shakespeare is the poet of nature: but his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires,<sup>9</sup> a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are, perhaps, some incidents that might be spared, as in other poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

## Endnotes

1765

- Note 9: Kindness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In *Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.166 and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, respectively.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rustics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Inflated grandeur, false magnificence.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unfolded.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Mean; low; being of the common rate" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pun.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "To entertain with tranquility; to fill with thoughts that engage the mind, without distracting it" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Course of action; the ground on which a race is run. In Greek legend Atalanta refused to marry any man who could not defeat her in a foot race. Hippomenes won her by dropping, as he ran, three of the golden apples of the Hesperides, which she paused to pick up.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Poetics* 7.[Return to reference 9](#)

# **JAMES BOSWELL**

## **1740–1795**

The discovery of a vast number of James Boswell's personal papers (believed until 1925 to have been destroyed by his literary executors) has made it possible to know the author of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* as well as we can know anybody from the past. His published letters and journals have made modern readers aware of the serious and absurd, the charming and repellent sides of his character. At twenty-two, when he met Johnson, he had already trained himself to listen, to observe, and to remember until he found time to write it all down. Only rarely did he take notes while a conversation was in progress, since to do so would of course have been a serious breach of social etiquette. His unusual memory and disciplined art enabled him to re-create and vividly preserve the many "scenes" that distinguish his journals as they do the *Life*.

Boswell was the eldest son and heir of Alexander Boswell of Auchinleck (pronounced *Affléck*) in Ayreshire, in Scotland, a judge who bore the courtesy title of Lord Auchinleck. As a member of an ancient family and heir to its large estate, Boswell was in the technical sense of the term a gentleman, with entrée into the best circles of Edinburgh and London. By temperament he was unstable, emotionally and sexually skittish. After attending the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow and studying law in Holland, he made the grand tour of Europe; in Switzerland he met and succeeded in captivating the two foremost French men of letters, Jean-Jacques

Rousseau and Voltaire. He visited the beleaguered hero of Corsica, General Pasquale de Paoli, whose revolt against Genoa seemed to European liberals to embody all the civic and military virtues of Republican Rome. Upon returning to England, Boswell wrote *An Account of Corsica* (1768). It was promptly translated into Dutch, German, French, and Italian, and its young author found himself with a considerable European reputation.

By 1769, Boswell was established in what was to prove a successful law practice in Edinburgh and had married his cousin, Margaret Montgomerie. But he kept his ties to London and Johnson. In 1773, he fulfilled a plan first suggested by Johnson ten years earlier to tour the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides together, which resulted in a book by each. Almost every aspect of the adventure should have made it impossible. Johnson, nearing his sixty-fourth birthday and after years of sedentary city living, found himself astride a horse in wild country or in open boats in autumn weather. As a devout Anglican, he was an outspoken enemy of the Presbyterian Church. As a lover of London, he was a stranger to the primitive life of the Highlands. Moreover, for many years he had half-jestingly, half-seriously, made Scots the butt of his wit. But such were Boswell's social tact and Johnson's vigor and curiosity that the tour was a great success. Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) is a thoughtful account of the way that people live in the Hebrides (though some Scots were offended). Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785), a preliminary study for the *Life*, is a lively and entertaining diary that amused Johnson himself.

In 1786, four years after Johnson's death, Boswell abandoned his Scottish practice; moved to London; was admitted to the English bar (but never actually practiced); and, often depressed and drunken, began the *Life*. Fortunately he had the help and encouragement of the distinguished literary scholar Edmond Malone, without whose guidance he might never have finished his task.

Boswell had an overwhelming amount of material to deal with: his own journals, all of Johnson's letters that he could find, Johnson's voluminous writings, and every scrap of information that

his friends would furnish—all of which had to be collected, verified, and somehow reduced to unity. The *Life* is a record not of Johnson alone but of literary England during the last half of the century. But Boswell wrote with his eye on the object, and that object was Samuel Johnson, toward whom such eminent persons as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, Lord Chesterfield—even the king himself—always face. Individual episodes are designed to reveal the great protagonist in a variety of aspects, and the world that Boswell created and populated is sustained by the vitality of his hero.

Boswell's talent is not only narrative but also dramatic. A gifted mimic, he often writes like a theatrical improviser, creating scenes with living people and playing simultaneously the roles of contriver of the dialogue, director of the plot, actor in the drama, and applauding audience—for Boswell kept an eye on his own performance. The quintessence of Boswell as both a social genius and a literary artist is to be found in his description of his visit to Voltaire: "I placed myself by him. I touched the keys in unison with his imagination. I wish you had heard the music."

Although the Johnson of popular legend is largely Boswell's creation, there was much in his life about which Boswell had no firsthand knowledge. At their first meeting, Johnson was fifty-four, a widower, already established as "Dictionary" Johnson and the author of the *Rambler*, and pensioned by the Crown. Boswell knew nothing at firsthand of the long, hard years during which Johnson made his way painfully up from obscurity to fame. And Boswell, himself a glib and rather thoughtless opponent of the abolitionist movement (see [p. 981](#)), mostly suppressed or downplayed Johnson's ardent hatred of slavery. Hence the *Life* is a portrait of the sage as Boswell wanted him to be. Its chief glory is conversation: the talk of a man who has experienced broadly, read widely, and observed and reflected on his observations; whose ideas are constantly brought to the test of experience; and whose experience is habitually transmuted into ideas. The book is as large as life and as human as its central character.

***From The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.***



### [PLAN OF THE *LIFE*]

\* \* \* Had Dr. Johnson written his own life, in conformity with the opinion which he has given, that every man's life may be best written by himself;<sup>1</sup> had he employed in the preservation of his own history, that clearness of narration and elegance of language in which he has embalmed so many eminent persons, the world would probably have had the most perfect example of biography that was ever exhibited. But although he at different times, in a desultory manner, committed to writing many particulars of the progress of his mind and fortunes, he never had persevering diligence enough to form them into a regular composition. Of these memorials a few have been preserved; but the greater part was consigned by him to the flames, a few days before his death.

As I had the honor and happiness of enjoying his friendship for upwards of twenty years; as I had the scheme of writing his life constantly in view; as he was well apprised of this circumstance, and from time to time obligingly satisfied my inquiries, by communicating to me the incidents of his early years; as I acquired a facility in recollecting, and was very assiduous in recording, his conversation, of which the extraordinary vigor and vivacity constituted one of the first features of his character; and as I have spared no pains in obtaining materials concerning him, from every quarter where I could discover that they were to be found, and have been favored with the most liberal communications by his friends; I flatter myself that few biographers have entered upon such a work as this with more advantages; independent of literary abilities, in which I am not vain enough to compare myself with some great names who have gone before me in this kind of writing. \* \* \*

Instead of melting down my materials into one mass, and constantly speaking in my own person, by which I might have appeared to have more merit in the execution of the work, I have resolved to adopt and enlarge upon the excellent plan of Mr. Mason, in his *Memoirs of Gray*.<sup>2</sup> Wherever narrative is necessary to explain,

connect, and supply, I furnish it to the best of my abilities; but in the chronological series of Johnson's life, which I trace as distinctly as I can, year by year, I produce, wherever it is in my power, his own minutes, letters, or conversation, being convinced that this mode is more lively, and will make my readers better acquainted with him than even most of those were who actually knew him, but could know him only partially; whereas there is here an accumulation of intelligence from various points, by which his character is more fully understood and illustrated.

Indeed I cannot conceive a more perfect mode of writing any man's life than not only relating all the most important events of it in their order, but interweaving what he privately wrote, and said, and thought; by which mankind are enabled as it were to see him live, and to "live o'er each scene"<sup>3</sup> with him, as he actually advanced through the several stages of his life. Had his other friends been as diligent and ardent as I was, he might have been almost entirely preserved. As it is, I will venture to say that he will be seen in this work more completely than any man who has ever yet lived.

And he will be seen as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyric, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect. To be as he was, is indeed subject of panegyric enough to any man in this state of being; but in every picture there should be shade as well as light, and when I delineate him without reserve, I do what he himself recommended, both by his precept and his example.

\* \* \*

Of one thing I am certain, that considering how highly the small portion which we have of the table-talk and other anecdotes of our celebrated writers is valued, and how earnestly it is regretted that we have not more, I am justified in preserving rather too many of Johnson's sayings, than too few; especially as from the diversity of dispositions it cannot be known with certainty beforehand, whether what may seem trifling to some, and perhaps to the collector himself, may not be most agreeable to many; and the greater

number that an author can please in any degree, the more pleasure does there arise to a benevolent mind. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *Idler* 84.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Mason, poet and dramatist, published his life of Thomas Gray in 1774:[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pope's Prologue to Addison's *Cato*, line 4.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [THE LETTER TO CHESTERFIELD]

[1754] Lord Chesterfield,<sup>4</sup> to whom Johnson had paid the high compliment of addressing to his Lordship the *Plan* of his *Dictionary*, had behaved to him in such a manner as to excite his contempt and indignation. The world has been for many years amused with a story confidently told, and as confidently repeated with additional circumstances, that a sudden disgust was taken by Johnson upon occasion of his having been one day kept long in waiting in his Lordship's antechamber, for which the reason assigned was that he had company with him; and that at last, when the door opened, out walked Colley Cibber,<sup>5</sup> and that Johnson was so violently provoked when he found for whom he had been so long excluded, that he went away in a passion, and never would return. I remember having mentioned this story to George Lord Lyttelton, who told me he was very intimate with Lord Chesterfield; and holding it as a well-known truth, defended Lord Chesterfield, by saying, that Cibber, who had been introduced familiarly by the back stairs, had probably not been there above ten minutes. It may seem strange even to entertain a doubt concerning a story so long and so widely current, and thus implicitly adopted, if not sanctioned, by the authority which I have mentioned; but Johnson himself assured me that there was not the least foundation for it. He told me that there never was any particular incident which produced a quarrel between Lord Chesterfield and him; but that his Lordship's continued neglect was the reason why he resolved to have no connection with him. When the *Dictionary* was upon the eve of publication, Lord Chesterfield, who, it is said, had flattered himself with expectations that Johnson would dedicate the work to him, attempted, in a courtly manner, to soothe, and insinuate himself with the sage, conscious, as it should seem, of the cold indifference with which he had treated its learned author; and further attempted to conciliate him, by writing two papers in *The World*, in recommendation of the work; and it must be confessed that they contain some studied compliments, so finely turned, that if there had been no previous offense, it is probable that

Johnson would have been highly delighted. Praise, in general, was pleasing to him; but by praise from a man of rank and elegant accomplishments, he was peculiarly gratified. \* \* \*

This courtly device failed of its effect. Johnson, who thought that "all was false and hollow,"<sup>6</sup> despised the honeyed words, and was even indignant that Lord Chesterfield should, for a moment, imagine that he could be dupe of such an artifice. His expression to me concerning Lord Chesterfield, upon this occasion, was, "Sir, after making great professions, he had, for many years, taken no notice of me; but when my *Dictionary* was coming out, he fell a-scribbling in *The World* about it. Upon which, I wrote him a letter expressed in civil terms, but such as might show him that I did not mind what he said or wrote, and that I had done with him."

This is that celebrated letter of which so much has been said, and about which curiosity has been so long excited, without being gratified. I for many years solicited Johnson to favor me with a copy of it, that so excellent a composition might not be lost to posterity. He delayed from time to time to give it me; till at last in 1781, when we were on a visit at Mr. Dilly's,<sup>7</sup> at Southill in Bedfordshire, he was pleased to dictate it to me from memory. He afterwards found among his papers a copy of it, which he had dictated to Mr. Baretti,<sup>8</sup> with its title and corrections, in his own handwriting. This he gave to Mr. Langton; adding that if it were to come into print, he wished it to be from that copy. By Mr. Langton's kindness, I am enabled to enrich my work with a perfect transcript of what the world has so eagerly desired to see.

**TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD**

February 7, 1755

MY LORD,

I have been lately informed, by the proprietor of the *World*, that two papers, in which my *Dictionary* is recommended to the public, were written by your Lordship. To be so distinguished, is an honor, which, being very little

accustomed to favors from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address; and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*<sup>9</sup>—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

Seven years, my Lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it, at last, to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favor. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before.

The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.<sup>1</sup>

Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labors, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favorer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less; for I have been long awakened from that dream of hope in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, my Lord, your Lordship's most humble, most obedient servant,

SAM. JOHNSON.

"While this was the talk of the town," says Dr. Adams, in a letter to me, "I happened to visit Dr. Warburton,<sup>2</sup> who finding that I was acquainted with Johnson, desired me earnestly to carry his compliments to him, and to tell him that he honored him for his manly behavior in rejecting these condescensions of Lord Chesterfield, and for resenting the treatment he had received from him, with a proper spirit. Johnson was visibly pleased with this compliment, for he had always a high opinion of Warburton. Indeed, the force of mind which appeared in this letter was congenial with that which Warburton himself amply possessed."

There is a curious minute circumstance which struck me, in comparing the various editions of Johnson's imitations of Juvenal. In the tenth satire, one of the couplets upon the vanity of wishes even for literary distinction stood thus:

Yet think what ills the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the *garret*, and the jail.

But after experiencing the uneasiness which Lord Chesterfield's fallacious patronage made him feel, he dismissed the word *garret* from the sad group, and in all the subsequent editions the line stands

Toil, envy, want, the *patron*, and the jail.

[1762] The accession of George the Third to the throne of these kingdoms<sup>3</sup> opened a new and brighter prospect to men of literary merit, who had been honored with no mark of royal favor in the preceding reign. His present Majesty's education in this country, as well as his taste and beneficence, prompted him to be the patron of science and the arts; and early this year Johnson, having been represented to him as a very learned and good man, without any certain provision, his Majesty was pleased to grant him a pension of three hundred pounds a year. The Earl of Bute,<sup>4</sup> who was then Prime Minister, had the honor to announce this instance of his Sovereign's bounty, concerning which many and various stories, all equally erroneous, have been propagated: maliciously representing it as a political bribe to Johnson, to desert his avowed principles, and become the tool of a government which he held to be founded in usurpation. I have taken care to have it in my power to refute them from the most authentic information. Lord Bute told me that Mr. Wedderburne, now Lord Loughborough, was the person who first mentioned this subject to him. Lord Loughborough told me that the pension was granted to Johnson solely as the reward of his literary merit, without any stipulation whatever, or even tacit understanding that he should write for administration. His Lordship added that he was confident the political tracts which Johnson afterwards did write, as they were entirely consonant with his own opinions, would have been written by him though no pension had been granted to him.<sup>5</sup>\*

\* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773), statesman, wit, man of fashion. His *Letters*, written for the guidance of his natural son, are famous for their worldly good sense and for their expression of the ideal of an 18th-century gentleman.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Cibber (1671–1757), playwright, comic actor, and (after 1730) poet laureate. A fine actor but a very bad poet, Cibber was a constant object of ridicule by the wits of the town. Pope made him king of the Dunces in the *Dunciad* of 1743.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Paradise Lost* 2.112.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Southill was the country home of Charles and Edward Dilly, publishers. The firm published all of Boswell's serious works and shared in the publication of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779–81).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Giuseppe Baretti, an Italian writer and lexicographer whom Johnson introduced into his circle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The conqueror of the conqueror of the earth (French). From the first line of Scudéry's epic *Alaric* (1654).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: *Eclogues* 8.44.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Warburton, bishop of Gloucester, friend and literary executor of Pope, editor of Pope and Shakespeare, theological controversialist.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In 1760.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An intimate friend of George III's mother, he early gained an ascendancy over the young prince and was largely responsible for the king's autocratic views. He was hated in England both as a favorite and as a Scot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Johnson's few political pamphlets in the 1770s invariably supported the policies of the Crown. The best known is his answer to the American colonies, "Taxation No Tyranny" (1775). His dislike of the Americans was in large part due to the fact that they held enslaved people.[Return to reference 5](#)

## [A MEMORABLE YEAR: BOSWELL MEETS JOHNSON]

[1763] This is to me a memorable year; for in it I had the happiness to obtain the acquaintance of that extraordinary man whose memoirs I am now writing; an acquaintance which I shall ever esteem as one of the most fortunate circumstances in my life. \* \* \*

Mr. Thomas Davies the actor, who then kept a bookseller's shop in Russel Street, Covent Garden, told me that Johnson was very much his friend, and came frequently to his house, where he more than once invited me to meet him; but by some unlucky accident or other he was prevented from coming to us. \* \* \*

At last, on Monday the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back parlor, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him through the glass door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us—he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father's ghost, "Look, my Lord, it comes." I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds soon after he had published his *Dictionary*, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation, which was the first picture his friend did for him, which Sir Joshua very kindly presented to me, and from which an engraving has been made for this work. Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell where I come from."—"From Scotland," cried Davies roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said I, "I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to soothe and conciliate him, and not as an humiliating abasement at the expense of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable, he seized the expression "come from Scotland," which I used in the sense of being

of that country; and, as if I had said that I had come away from it, or left it, retorted, "That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next. He then addressed himself to Davies: "What do you think of Garrick? He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams,<sup>6</sup> because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings." Eager to take any opening to get into conversation with him, I ventured to say, "O Sir, I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," said he, with a stern look, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done: and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." Perhaps I deserved this check; for it was rather presumptuous in me, an entire stranger, to express any doubt of the justice of his animadversion upon his old acquaintance and pupil. I now felt myself much mortified, and began to think that the hope which I had long indulged of obtaining his acquaintance was blasted. And, in truth, had not my ardor been uncommonly strong, and my resolution uncommonly persevering, so rough a reception might have deterred me forever from making any further attempts. Fortunately, however, I remained upon the field not wholly discomfited. \* \* \*

I was highly pleased with the extraordinary vigor of his conversation, and regretted that I was drawn away from it by an engagement at another place. I had, for a part of the evening, been left alone with him, and had ventured to make an observation now and then, which he received very civilly; so that I was satisfied that though there was a roughness in his manner, there was no ill nature in his disposition. Davies followed me to the door, and when I complained to him a little of the hard blows which the great man had given me, he kindly took upon him to console me by saying, "Don't be uneasy. I can see he likes you very well."

A few days afterwards I called on Davies, and asked him if he thought I might take the liberty of waiting on Mr. Johnson at his chambers in the Temple. He said I certainly might, and that Mr.

Johnson would take it as a compliment. So upon Tuesday the 24th of May, after having been enlivened by the witty sallies of Messieurs Thornton, Wilkes, Churchill, and Lloyd,<sup>7</sup> with whom I had passed the morning, I boldly repaired to Johnson. His chambers were on the first floor of No. 1, Inner Temple Lane, and I entered them with an impression given me by the Reverend Dr. Blair,<sup>8</sup> of Edinburgh, who had been introduced to him not long before, and described his having "found the giant in his den"; an expression, which, when I came to be pretty well acquainted with Johnson, I repeated to him, and he was diverted at this picturesque account of himself. Dr. Blair had been presented to him by Dr. James Fordyce.<sup>9</sup> At this time the controversy concerning the pieces published by Mr. James Macpherson, as translations of *Ossian*, was at its height.<sup>1</sup> Johnson had all along denied their authenticity; and, what was still more provoking to their admirers, maintained that they had no merit. The subject having been introduced by Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Blair, relying on the internal evidence of their antiquity, asked Dr. Johnson whether he thought any man of a modern age could have written such poems? Johnson replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children." Johnson, at this time, did not know that Dr. Blair had just published a dissertation, not only defending their authenticity, but seriously ranking them with the poems of Homer and Virgil; and when he was afterwards informed of this circumstance, he expressed some displeasure at Dr. Fordyce's having suggested the topic, and said, "I am not sorry that they got thus much for their pains. Sir, it was like leading one to talk of a book when the author is concealed behind the door."

He received me very courteously; but, it must be confessed that his apartment, and furniture, and morning dress, were sufficiently uncouth. His brown suit of clothes looked very rusty; he had on a little old shriveled unpowdered wig, which was too small for his head; his shirt neck and knees of his breeches were loose; his black worsted stockings ill drawn up; and he had a pair of unbuckled shoes by way of slippers. But all these slovenly particularities were forgotten the moment that he began to talk. Some gentlemen,

whom I do not recollect, were sitting with him; and when they went away, I also rose; but he said to me, "Nay, don't go." "Sir," said I, "I am afraid that I intrude upon you. It is benevolent to allow me to sit and hear you." He seemed pleased with this compliment, which I sincerely paid him, and answered, "Sir, I am obliged to any man who visits me." I have preserved the following short minute of what passed this day:

"Madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world. My poor friend Smart showed the disturbance of his mind by falling upon his knees, and saying his prayers in the street, or in any other unusual place. Now although, rationally speaking, it is greater madness not to pray at all than to pray as Smart did, I am afraid there are so many who do not pray, that their understanding is not called in question."

Concerning this unfortunate poet, Christopher Smart, who was confined in a madhouse, he had, at another time, the following conversation with Dr. Burney:<sup>2</sup> BURNEY. "How does poor Smart do, Sir; is he likely to recover?" JOHNSON. "It seems as if his mind had ceased to struggle with the disease; for he grows fat upon it." BURNEY. "Perhaps, Sir, that may be from want of exercise." JOHNSON. "No, Sir; he has partly as much exercise as he used to have, for he digs in the garden. Indeed, before his confinement, he used for exercise to walk to the ale house; but he was *carried* back again. I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as anyone else. Another charge was that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it."—Johnson continued. "Mankind have a great aversion to intellectual labor; but even supposing knowledge to be easily attainable, more people would be content to be ignorant than would take even a little trouble to acquire it."

Talking of Garrick, he said, "He is the first man in the world for sprightly conversation."

When I rose a second time he again pressed me to stay, which I did. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Mrs. Anna Williams (1706–1783), a blind poet and friend of Mrs. Johnson. She continued to live in Johnson's house after his wife's death and habitually sat up to make tea for him whenever he came home.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Robert Lloyd, poet and essayist. Bonnell Thornton, journalist. Charles Churchill, satirist. These three, and John Wilkes, were bound together by a common love of wit and dissipation. Boswell enjoyed their company in 1763.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Reverend Hugh Blair (1718–1800), Scottish divine and professor of rhetoric and *belles lettres* at the University of Edinburgh.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A Scottish preacher.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For the controversies surrounding Macpherson's claims to have translated poems from the original Gaelic of Ossian, a blind epic poet of the third century, see p. 922. The popularity of the poems both in Europe and in America was enormous.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dr. Charles Burney (1726–1814), historian of music and father of the novelist and diarist Frances Burney, whom Johnson befriended in his old age.[Return to reference 2](#)

[OSSIAN]

MR. BOSWELL TO DR. JOHNSON

Edinburgh, Feb. 2, 1775.

\* \* \* As to Macpherson, I am anxious to have from yourself a full and pointed account of what has passed between you and him. It is confidently told here that before your book<sup>3</sup> came out he sent to you, to let you know that he understood you meant to deny the authenticity of Ossian's poems; that the originals were in his possession; that you might have inspection of them, and might take the evidence of people skilled in the Erse language; and that he hoped, after this fair offer, you would not be so uncandid<sup>4</sup> as to assert that he had refused reasonable proof. That you paid no regard to his message, but published your strong attack upon him; and then he wrote a letter to you, in such terms as he thought suited to one who had not acted as a man of veracity. \* \* \*

What words were used by Mr. Macpherson in his letter to the venerable sage, I have never heard; but they are generally said to have been of a nature very different from the language of literary contest. Dr. Johnson's answer appeared in the newspapers of the day, and has since been frequently republished; but not with perfect accuracy. I give it as dictated to me by himself, written down in his presence, and authenticated by a note in his own handwriting, "*This, I think, is a true copy.*"

MR. JAMES MACPHERSON,

I received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be

deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian.

What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your Homer, are not so formidable; and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard not to what you shall say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

SAM. JOHNSON.

Mr. Macpherson little knew the character of Dr. Johnson if he supposed that he could be easily intimidated; for no man was ever more remarkable for personal courage. He had, indeed, an awful dread of death, or rather, "of something after death";<sup>5</sup> and what rational man, who seriously thinks of quitting all that he has ever known, and going into a new and unknown state of being, can be without that dread? But his fear was from reflection; his courage natural. His fear, in that one instance, was the result of philosophical and religious consideration. He feared death, but he feared nothing else, not even what might occasion death. Many instances of his resolution may be mentioned. One day, at Mr. Beauclerk's house in the country, when two large dogs were fighting, he went up to them, and beat them till they separated; and at another time, when told of the danger there was that a gun might burst if charged with many balls, he put in six or seven, and fired it off against a wall. Mr. Langton told me that when they were swimming together near Oxford, he cautioned Dr. Johnson against a pool which was reckoned particularly dangerous; upon which Johnson directly swam into it. He told me himself that one night he was attacked in the street by four men, to whom he would not yield, but kept them all at bay, till the watch came up, and carried both him and them to the roundhouse.<sup>6</sup> In the playhouse at Lichfield, as Mr. Garrick informed me, Johnson having for a moment quitted a chair which was placed for him between the side-scenes, a gentleman took possession of it, and



when Johnson on his return civilly demanded his seat, rudely refused to give it up; upon which Johnson laid hold of it, and tossed him and the chair into the pit. Foote, who so successfully revived the old comedy, by exhibiting living characters, had resolved to imitate Johnson on the stage, expecting great profits from his ridicule of so celebrated a man. Johnson being informed of his intention, and being at dinner at Mr. Thomas Davies's the bookseller, from whom I had the story, he asked Mr. Davies what was the common price of an oak stick; and being answered six-pence, "Why then, Sir," said he, "give me leave to send your servant to purchase me a shilling one. I'll have a double quantity; for I am told Foote means to *take me off*, as he calls it, and I am determined the fellow shall not do it with impunity." Davies took care to acquaint Foote of this, which effectually checked the wantonness of the mimic. Mr. Macpherson's menaces made Johnson provide himself with the same implement of defense; and had he been attacked, I have no doubt that, old as he was, he would have made his corporal prowess be felt as much as his intellectual. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands* (1775), in which he had publicly expressed his views on the Ossianic poems.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unfair, malicious.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *Hamlet* 3.1.80.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "The constable's prison, in which disorderly persons, found in the street, are confined" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)

## [JOHNSON FACES DEATH]

As Johnson had now very faint hopes of recovery, and as Mrs. Thrale was no longer devoted to him, it might have been supposed that he would naturally have chosen to remain in the comfortable house of his beloved wife's daughter,<sup>7</sup> and end his life where he began it. But there was in him an animated and lofty spirit, and however complicated diseases might depress ordinary mortals, all who saw him, beheld and acknowledged the *invictum animum Catonis*.<sup>8</sup> Such was his intellectual ardor even at this time that he said to one friend, "Sir, I look upon every day to be lost, in which I do not make a new acquaintance"; and to another, when talking of his illness, "I will be conquered; I will not capitulate." And such was his love of London, so high a relish had he of its magnificent extent, and variety of intellectual entertainment, that he languished when absent from it, his mind having become quite luxurious from the long habit of enjoying the metropolis; and, therefore, although at Lichfield, surrounded with friends, who loved and revered him, and for whom he had a very sincere affection, he still found that such conversation as London affords, could be found nowhere else. These feelings, joined, probably, to some flattering hopes of aid from the eminent physicians and surgeons in London, who kindly and generously attended him without accepting fees, made him resolve to return to the capital. \* \* \* Death had always been to him an object of terror; so that, though by no means happy, he still clung to life with an eagerness at which many have wondered. At any time when he was ill, he was very much pleased to be told that he looked better. An ingenious member of the Eumelian Club<sup>9</sup> informs me that upon one occasion when he said to him that he saw health returning to his cheek, Johnson seized him by the hand and exclaimed, "Sir, you are one of the kindest friends I ever had." \* \* \*

Dr. Heberden, Dr. Brocklesby, Dr. Warren, and Dr. Butter, physicians, generously attended him, without accepting any fees, as did Mr. Cruikshank, surgeon; and all that could be done from

professional skill and ability was tried, to prolong a life so truly valuable. He himself, indeed, having, on account of his very bad constitution, been perpetually applying himself to medical inquiries, united his own efforts with those of the gentlemen who attended him; and imagining that the dropsical collection of water which oppressed him might be drawn off by making incisions in his body, he, with his usual resolute defiance of pain, cut deep, when he thought that his surgeon had done it too tenderly.

About eight or ten days before his death, when Dr. Brocklesby paid him his morning visit, he seemed very low and desponding, and said, "I have been as a dying man all night." He then emphatically broke out in the words of Shakespeare:

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,  
And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart?"

To which Dr. Brocklesby readily answered, from the same great poet:

"—Therein the patient  
Must minister to himself."<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Johnson expressed himself much satisfied with the application. \* \* \*

Amidst the melancholy clouds which hung over the dying Johnson, his characteristical manner showed itself on different occasions.

When Dr. Warren, in the usual style, hoped that he was better; his answer was, "No, Sir; you cannot conceive with what acceleration I advance towards death."

A man whom he had never seen before was employed one night to sit up with him. Being asked next morning how he liked his attendant, his answer was, "Not at all, Sir: the fellow's an idiot; he is

as awkward as a turnspit<sup>2</sup> when first put into the wheel, and as sleepy as a dormouse."

Mr. Windham<sup>3</sup> having placed a pillow conveniently to support him, he thanked him for his kindness, and said, "That will do—all that a pillow can do." \* \* \*

Johnson, with that native fortitude, which, amidst all his bodily distress and mental sufferings, never forsook him, asked Dr. Brocklesby, as a man in whom he had confidence, to tell him plainly whether he could recover. "Give me," said he, "a direct answer." The Doctor having first asked him if he could bear the whole truth, which way soever it might lead, and being answered that he could, declared that, in his opinion, he could not recover without a miracle. "Then," said Johnson, "I will take no more physic, not even my opiates; for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded." In this resolution he persevered, and, at the same time, used only the weakest kinds of sustenance. Being pressed by Mr. Windham to take somewhat more generous nourishment, lest too low a diet should have the very effect which he dreaded, by debilitating his mind, he said, "I will take anything but inebriating sustenance."

The Reverend Mr. Strahan,<sup>4</sup> who was the son of his friend, and had been always one of his great favorites, had, during his last illness, the satisfaction of contributing to soothe and comfort him. That gentleman's house, at Islington, of which he is Vicar, afforded Johnson, occasionally and easily, an agreeable change of place and fresh air; and he attended also upon him in town in the discharge of the sacred offices of his profession.

Mr. Strahan has given me the agreeable assurance that, after being in much agitation, Johnson became quite composed, and continued so till his death.

Dr. Brocklesby, who will not be suspected of fanaticism, obliged me with the following account:

"For some time before his death, all his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his

trust in the merits and *propitiation* of Jesus Christ." \* \* \*

Johnson having thus in his mind the true Christian scheme, at once rational and consolatory, uniting justice and mercy in the Divinity, with the improvement of human nature, previous to his receiving the Holy Sacrament in his apartment, composed and fervently uttered this prayer:

"Almighty and most merciful Father, I am now as to human eyes, it seems, about to commemorate, for the last time, the death of thy Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits, and thy mercy; enforce and accept my imperfect repentance; make this commemoration available to the confirmation of my faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity; and make the death of thy Son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption. Have mercy upon me, and pardon the multitude of my offenses. Bless my friends; have mercy upon all men. Support me, by thy Holy Spirit, in the days of weakness, and at the hour of death; and receive me, at my death, to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Having \* \* \* made his will on the 8th and 9th of December, and settled all his worldly affairs, he languished till Monday, the 13th of that month, when he expired, about seven o'clock in the evening, with so little apparent pain that his attendants hardly perceived when his dissolution took place. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1791

- Note 7: Lucy Porter. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The unconquered soul of Cato (Latin). An adaptation of a phrase in Horace's *Odes* 2.1.24. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: A club to which Boswell and Reynolds belonged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: *Macbeth* 5.3.40–46.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “A dog kept to turn the roasting-spit by running within a tread-wheel connected to it” (*OED*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: William Windham, one of Johnson’s younger friends, later a member of Parliament.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Reverend George Strahan (pronounced *Strawn*), who later published Johnson’s *Prayers and Meditations*.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **THOMAS GRAY**

### **1716–1771**

The man who wrote the English poem most loved by those whom Samuel Johnson called “the common reader” was a scholarly recluse who lived the quiet life of a university professor in the stagnant atmosphere of mid-eighteenth-century Cambridge. Born in London, Thomas Gray was the only one of twelve children to survive, and his family life was desperately unhappy. At eight he left home for Eton, where he made intimate friends: Richard West, a fellow poet; Thomas Ashton; and future novelist Horace Walpole, the son of the prime minister. After four years at Cambridge, Gray left without a degree to take the grand tour of France and Italy as Walpole’s guest. The death of West in 1742 desolated Gray, and memories of West haunt much of his verse. He spent the rest of his life in Cambridge, pursuing his studies and writing wonderful letters as well as a handful of poems. Two high-flown Pindaric odes, “The Progress of Poesy” (1754) and “The Bard” (1757), display his learning and his love of nature and the sublime.

Most of Gray’s poems take part in a contemporary reaction against the wit and satiric elegance of Pope’s couplets; poets sought a new style, at once intimate and prophetic. Gray was not easily satisfied; he constantly revised his poems and published very little. Because he held that “the language of the age is never the language of poetry,” he often uses archaic words and a word order borrowed from Latin, where a verb can precede its subject (as in line 35 of the

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard": "Awaits alike the inevitable hour"). But the "Elegy" stands alone in his work. It balances Latinate phrases with living English speech, and the learning of a scholar with a common humanity that everyone can share. Johnson, who did not usually like Gray's poetry, acknowledged that the "Elegy" would live on:

The Churchyard abounds with images that find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning "Yet even these bones" are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him.



# Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat<sup>1</sup>

## *Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes*

'Twas on a lofty vase's side,  
Where China's gayest art had dyed  
    The azure flowers that blow;<sup>o</sup>  
Demurest of the tabby kind,  
The pensive Selima reclined,  
5       Gazed on the lake below.

Her conscious tail her joy declared;  
The fair round face, the snowy beard,  
    The velvet of her paws,  
Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,  
10       Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,  
She saw; and purred applause.

Still had she gazed; but 'midst the tide  
Two angel forms were seen to glide,  
    The genii of the stream:  
15       Their scaly armor's Tyrian<sup>o</sup> hue  
Through richest purple to the view  
    Betrayed a golden gleam.

The hapless nymph with wonder saw:  
A whisker first and then a claw,  
20       With many an ardent wish,  
She stretched in vain to reach the prize.  
What female heart can gold despise?  
    What cat's averse to fish?

25       Presumptuous maid! with looks intent

Again she stretched, again she bent,  
 Nor knew the gulf between.  
 (Malignant Fate sat by and smiled)  
 The slippery verge her feet beguiled,  
 She tumbled headlong in.  
 30  
 Eight times emerging from the flood  
 She mewed to every watery god,  
 Some speedy aid to send.  
 No dolphin came, no nereid<sup>o</sup> stirred:  
 Nor cruel Tom, nor Susan<sup>2</sup> heard.  
 35  
 A favorite has no friend!  
 From hence, ye beauties, undeceived,  
 Know, one false step is ne'er retrieved,  
 And be with caution bold.  
 Not all that tempts your wandering eyes  
 40  
 And heedless hearts is lawful prize;  
 Nor all that glisters gold.

## 1747 **Endnotes**

1748

- Note 1: Selima, one of Horace Walpole's cats, had recently drowned in a large china vessel. Gray wrote this memorial at Walpole's request. For an illustration of this poem by William Blake, See the Image Gallery for this volume. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Servants' names. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *bloom* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *purple* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea nymph* [Return to reference °](#)

# Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The curfew<sup>1</sup> tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

5 Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

10 Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower  
The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,  
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

15 Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude<sup>o</sup> forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

20 The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,<sup>o</sup>  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care;  
No children run to lisp<sup>o</sup> their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

25 Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe<sup>o</sup> has broke;

How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy  
stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
30 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry,<sup>o</sup> the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
35 Awaits alike the inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,  
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies<sup>2</sup> raise,  
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted<sup>3</sup>  
vault  
40 The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn<sup>4</sup> or animated<sup>o</sup> bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honor's voice provoke<sup>o</sup> the silent dust,  
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
45 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,<sup>o</sup>  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page  
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;  
50 Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,<sup>o</sup>  
And froze the genial<sup>o</sup> current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

55           The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
          And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

          Some village Hampden,<sup>5</sup> that with dauntless breast  
          The little tyrant of his fields withstood;  
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
60           Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

          The applause of listening senates to command,  
          The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,  
          And read their history in a nation's eyes,

65           Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone  
          Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;  
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,  
          And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

          The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,  
          To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,  
70           Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride  
          With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

          Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,  
          Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
75           Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
          They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

          Yet even these bones from insult to protect  
          Some frail memorial still erected nigh,  
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture  
          decked,<sup>6</sup>  
80           Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered  
Muse,

The place of fame and elegy supply:  
And many a holy text around she strews,  
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

85 For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

90 On some fond breast the parting soul relies,  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;  
Even from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,  
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.

95 For thee, who mindful of the unhonored dead  
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;  
If chance, o by lonely contemplation led,  
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,  
"Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn  
Brushing with hasty steps the dew away  
100 To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,  
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,  
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

105 "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,  
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

"One morn I missed him on the customed hill,

110       Along the heath and near his favorite tree;  
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;  
  
"The next with dirges due in sad array  
Slow through the churchway path we saw him  
borne.  
115       Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,  
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

### ***The Epitaph***

*Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science<sup>o</sup> frowned not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy marked him for her own.*  
120  
*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a  
friend.*  
  
125       *No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),  
The bosom of his Father and his God.*

ca. 1742–50

## **Endnotes**

1751

- Note 1: A bell rung in the evening.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An ornamental or symbolic group of figures depicting the achievements of the deceased.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Decorated with intersecting lines in relief.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A funeral urn with an epitaph or pictured story inscribed on it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Hampden (1594–1643), who, both as a private citizen and as a member of Parliament, zealously defended the rights of the people against the autocratic policies of Charles I.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare “storied urn or animated bust” dedicated inside the church to “the proud” (line 41).[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *uneducated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hunter’s horn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imperfectly report*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soil*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noble birth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lifelike*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call forth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wielded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inspiration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *creative*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perchance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Learning*[Return to reference °](#)



# Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West<sup>1</sup>

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,  
And reddening Phoebus<sup>2</sup> lifts his golden fire:  
The birds in vain their amorous descant<sup>3</sup> join;  
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire:  
5 These ears, alas! for other notes repine,  
A different object do these eyes require.  
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;  
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.  
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,  
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men:  
10 The fields to all their wonted<sup>o</sup> tribute bear:  
To warm their little loves the birds complain:  
I fruitless mourn to him, that cannot hear,  
And weep the more, because I weep in vain.

1742 **Endnotes**

1775

- Note 1: This poem appears in Gray's commonplace book and was published only posthumously. West, Gray's school friend, died at twenty-five years old. Earlier, West had sent Gray a poem imagining the aftermath of his own death: "nature" will not "take notice," and "Bright as before the day-star will appear, / The fields as verdant, and the skies as clear." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The god of light, a personified sun. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Song, in an echo of *Paradise Lost* 4.603: the nightingale, "her amorous descant sung." [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *usual* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Bard<sup>1</sup>

## *A Pindaric Ode.*<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1

"Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!<sup>3</sup>  
Confusion on thy banners wait,  
Though fanned by Conquest's crimson wing  
They mock the air with idle state.  
5 Helm,<sup>o</sup> nor hauberk's twisted mail,<sup>4</sup>  
Nor even thy virtues, tyrant, shall avail  
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,  
From Cambria's<sup>o</sup> curse, from Cambria's tears!"  
Such were the sounds, that o'er the crested<sup>5</sup> pride  
Of the first Edward scattered wild dismay,  
10 As down the steep of Snowdon's<sup>6</sup> shaggy side  
He wound with toilsome march his long array.  
Stout Glo'ster stood aghast in speechless trance:  
To arms! cried Mortimer, and couched<sup>7</sup> his quivering  
lance.

### 1.2

15 On a rock, whose haughty<sup>o</sup> brow  
Frowns o'er old Conway's<sup>8</sup> foaming flood,  
Robed in the sable garb of woe,  
With haggard eyes the poet stood;  
(Loose his beard, and hoary<sup>o</sup> hair<sup>9</sup>  
Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)  
20 And with a master's hand, and prophet's fire,

Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.  
"Hark, how each giant oak, and desert cave,  
Sighs to the torrent's awful<sup>o</sup> voice beneath!  
O'er thee, O King! their hundred arms they wave,  
25 Revenge on thee in hoarser murmurs breathe;  
Vocal no more, since Cambria's fatal day,  
To high-born Hoel's harp, or soft Llewellyn's lay.<sup>1</sup>"

### 1.3

"Cold is Cadwallo's tongue,  
That hushed the stormy main:<sup>o</sup>  
30 Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed:  
Mountains, ye mourn in vain  
Modred, whose magic song  
Made huge Plinlimmon<sup>2</sup> bow his cloud-topped head.  
On dreary Arvon's shore<sup>3</sup> they lie,  
35 Smeared with gore, and ghastly pale:  
Far, far aloof th' affrighted ravens sail;  
The famished eagle<sup>4</sup> screams, and passes by.  
Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,  
Dear, as the light that visits these sad eyes,  
40 Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,  
Ye died amidst your dying country's cries—  
No more I weep. They do not sleep.  
On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,  
I see them sit, they linger yet,  
45 Avengers of their native land:  
With me in dreadful harmony they join,  
And weave with bloody hands the tissue<sup>5</sup> of thy line."

### 2.1

"Weave the warp, and weave the woof,<sup>6</sup>  
The winding sheet<sup>7</sup> of Edward's race.

50 Give ample room, and verge enough  
The characters of hell to trace.  
Mark the year, and mark the night,  
When Severn shall re-echo with affright  
55 The shrieks of death, through Berkeley's roofs that  
ring,  
Shrieks of an agonizing King!<sup>8</sup>  
She-Wolf of France,<sup>9</sup> with unrelenting fangs,  
That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled mate,  
From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs  
60 The scourge of Heav'n.<sup>1</sup> What terrors round him  
wait!  
Amazement in his van,<sup>o</sup> with Flight combined,  
And Sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind.' "

## 2.2

"Mighty victor, mighty lord,  
Low on his funeral couch he lies!<sup>2</sup>  
65 No pitying heart, no eye, afford  
A tear to grace his obsequies.<sup>o</sup>  
Is the sable warrior<sup>3</sup> fled?  
Thy son is gone. He rests among the dead.  
The swarm, that in thy noon-tide beam were born?  
Gone to salute the rising morn.  
70 Fair laughs the morn,<sup>4</sup> and soft the zephyr blows,  
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm  
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes;  
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm;  
75 Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,  
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening  
prey.' "

## 2.3

"Fill high the sparkling bowl,  
 The rich repast prepare,  
 Reft<sup>o</sup> of a crown, he yet may share the feast:<sup>5</sup>  
 Close by the regal chair  
 80 Fell<sup>o</sup> Thirst and Famine scowl  
 A baleful smile upon their baffled guest.  
 Heard ye the din of battle bray,  
 Lance to lance, and horse to horse?<sup>6</sup>  
 Long years of havoc urge their destined course,  
 85 And through the kindred squadrons mow their way.  
 Ye towers of Julius,<sup>7</sup> London's lasting shame,  
 With many a foul and midnight murder fed,  
 Revere his consort's faith, his father's fame,  
 And spare the meek usurper's<sup>8</sup> holy head.  
 90 Above, below, the rose of snow,  
 Twined with her blushing foe,<sup>9</sup> we spread:  
 The bristled boar in infant gore<sup>1</sup>  
 Wallows beneath the thorny shade.  
 Now, brothers, bending o'er th' accurséd loom  
 95 Stamp we our vengeance deep, and ratify his doom.'  
 "

### 3.1

"Edward, lo! to sudden fate  
 (Weave we the woof. The thread is spun)  
 Half of thy heart we consecrate.<sup>2</sup>  
 (The web is wove. The work is done.)'  
 100 Stay, oh stay!<sup>3</sup> nor thus forlorn  
 Leave me unblessed, unpitied, here to mourn:  
 In yon bright track, that fires the western skies,  
 They melt, they vanish from my eyes.  
 But oh! what solemn scenes on Snowdon's height  
 105 Descending slow their glitt'ring skirts unroll?  
 Visions of glory, spare my aching sight,

Ye unborn ages, crowd not on my soul!  
No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail.<sup>4</sup>  
110 All hail, ye genuine kings, Britannia's issue,<sup>5</sup> hail."

### 3.2

"Girt<sup>o</sup> with many a baron bold  
Sublime their starry fronts they rear;  
And gorgeous dames, and statesmen old  
In bearded majesty, appear.  
115 In the midst a form divine!  
Her eye proclaims her of the Briton-line;  
Her lion-port, her awe-commanding face,  
Attempered sweet to virgin grace.<sup>6</sup>  
What strings symphonious tremble in the air,  
120 What strings of vocal transport round her play!  
Hear from the grave, great Taliesin,<sup>7</sup> hear;  
They breathe a soul to animate thy clay.  
Bright Rapture calls, and soaring, as she sings,  
Waves in the eye of Heav'n her many-colored wings."

### 3.3

"The verse adorn again  
125 Fierce War, and faithful Love,<sup>8</sup>  
And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest.  
In buskined measures move  
Pale Grief, and pleasing Pain,  
With Horror, tyrant of the throbbing breast.<sup>9</sup>  
130 A voice, as of the cherub-choir,  
Gales from blooming Eden bear;<sup>1</sup>  
And distant warblings lessen on my ear,  
That lost in long futurity expire.<sup>2</sup>

135

Fond<sup>o</sup> impious man, think'st thou, yon sanguine<sup>o</sup>  
cloud,  
Raised by thy breath, has quenched the orb of day?  
Tomorrow he<sup>o</sup> repairs the golden flood,  
And warms the nations with redoubled ray.  
Enough for me: with joy I see  
The different doom our Fates assign.<sup>3</sup>  
140 Be thine despair, and scepter'd care,  
To triumph, and to die, are mine."  
He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height  
Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night.

1757 **Endnotes**

1768

- Note 1: Gray prefaced the poem: "The following ode is founded on a tradition current in Wales, that Edward the First, when he completed the conquest of that country, ordered all the bards, that fell into his hands, to be put to death." English king Edward I (1239–1307) won a major victory to subjugate the Welsh in 1283; his decrees against bards were not so directly violent, but Gray uses this "tradition" to link prophetic poetry with a lost Celtic past (in contrast to both Englishness and modernity). Gray first published the poem in 1757 and in 1768 was convinced to help readers by adding learned explanatory notes, some of which are reproduced here. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An irregular ode, often associated with intense emotion. Gray draws on period (mis-)understandings of the Greek poet Pindar's form, organizing his poem into clusters of three movements called strophe, antistrophe, epode. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The voice of the last Welsh bard, cursing Edward I and his incoming English troops. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The hauberk was a texture of steel ringlets, or rings interwoven, forming a coat of mail, that sat close to the body,



and adapted itself to every motion [*Gray's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Ornamented (with plumes).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Snowdon was a name given by the Saxons to that mountainous tract, which the Welsh themselves call *Craigian-eryri*: it included all the highlands of Caernarvonshire and Merionethshire, as far east as the river Conway [*from Gray's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "To fix the spear . . . in the posture of attack" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). "Glo[uce]ster" and "Mortimer": Gray's note explains, two English lords "whose lands lay on the borders of Wales," likely with "the King in this expedition."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Anglicized version of Conwy, a river in northern Wales.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The image was taken from a well-known picture of Raphaël, representing the Supreme Being in the vision of Ezekiel [*from Gray's note*]. Raphael, or Raffaello Santi (1483–1520), was a famous Italian painter.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The last bard starts listing bards who had fallen victim to Edward. This continues into the next stanza. (Gray imagines some of these characters, though the names are Welsh.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A mountain in Wales.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The shores of Caernarvonshire opposite to the isle of Anglesey [*Gray's note*]. Today this area is in Gwynedd county, Wales.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Citing works of geography and science, Gray notes, "eagles used annually to build their aerie among the rocks of Snowdon, which from thence (as some think) were named by the Welch Craigian-eryri, or the crags of the eagles. At this day (I am told) the highest point of Snowdon is called the eagle's nest."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Fine woven cloth. The poem imagines prophecy as weaving, spinning future fates.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The dead bards join their voices to the speaker's in a chorus, lines 49–100, that prophesies doom for Edward's descendants. "Warp" and "woof" are the threads that are woven together, interlocking, to make fabric.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To wrap the dead.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Edward the Second, cruelly butchered in Berkely-Castle [*Gray's note*]. King Edward's son was murdered at the castle near the Severn River in 1327.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Isabel of France, Edward the Second's adulterous Queen [*Gray's note*]. The French-born Isabella (1295–1358) conspired to depose and (some thought) murder her husband.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Triumphs of Edward the Third in France [*Gray's note*]. He becomes the English "scourge" of his mother's country.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Death of that King, abandoned by his children, and even robbed in his last moments by his courtiers and his mistress [*Gray's note*]. Edward III died in 1377.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Edward, the Black Prince, dead some time before his father [*Gray's note*]. Edward III's would-be heir died the year before his father, in 1376.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Magnificence of Richard the Second's reign [*from Gray's note*]. Richard II (Edward III's grandson) became king in 1377, at ten years old.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Richard the Second . . . was starved to death [*from Gray's note*]. He died in 1400, overthrown by the man who became Henry IV.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The descendants of two of Edward III's sons, the Dukes of York and Lancaster, fought the Wars of the Roses (1455–85).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Henry the Sixth, George Duke of Clarence, Edward the Fifth, Richard Duke of York, etc. believed to be murdered secretly in the Tower of London. The oldest part of that structure is vulgarly attributed to Julius Caesar [*Gray's note*].[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Henry VI, whose “line of Lancaster had no right of inheritance to the throne,” Gray’s note explains. Henry was killed in 1471. “Consort”: his wife, Margaret of Anjou. “Father”: Henry V.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The white and red roses, devices of York and Lancaster [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The silver boar was the badge of Richard the Third; whence he was usually known in his own time by the name of *the Boar* [*Gray’s note*]. Richard III (1452–1485) was said to have murdered the young princes, who threatened him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Doom. Addressing Edward I directly, the bards foretell the death of his wife, Eleanor of Castile, in 1290 (“a few years after the conquest of Wales,” Gray’s note explains).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: After the chorus of dead bards concludes, the living bard begs their continued presence before offering his own prophecy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: It was the common belief of the Welch nation, that King Arthur was still alive in Fairy-Land, and should return again to reign over Britain [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Gray’s note points to prophecies that the Welsh “should regain their sovereignty over this island”—which “seemed to be accomplished” with the crowning in 1485 of the first Tudor, a family with Welsh roots.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603). Gray quotes a historical description of her as “lion-like.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Taliesin, chief of the bards, flourished in the VIth century [*from Gray’s note*]. Because Elizabeth secures peace without tyranny, poetry flourishes again.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralize my song,” Spenser’s Proëme to the *Fairy Queen* [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shakespeare [*Gray’s note*]. “Buskined”: alluding to shoes worn onstage by ancient actors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Milton [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The succession of poets after Milton's time [*Gray's note*]. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, he has seen the downfall of Edward I's English line, its replacement by the Welsh Tudors, and the future flourishing of poetry. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *helmet* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Wales's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proud, lofty* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *white or gray* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awe-inspiring* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in front of the group* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *funeral rites* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bereft* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destructive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *encircled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blood-colored* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference °](#)

# **WILLIAM COLLINS**

## **1721–1759**

William Collins was born in Chichester and was educated at Winchester and Oxford. Coming up to London from the university, he tried to establish himself as an author, but he was given rather to planning than to writing books. He came to know Samuel Johnson, who later remembered him affectionately as a man of learning who “loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters” and who “delighted to rove through the meanders of enchantment.” In 1746 Collins published his *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects*, his part in an undertaking, with his friend Joseph Warton, to create a new poetry, more lyrical and fanciful than that of Alexander Pope’s generation. Collins’s *Odes* address personified abstractions (Fear, Pity, the Passions), which are imagined as vivid presences that overwhelm the poet as he calls them to life. In form, these poems represent a new version of the classical Great Ode, derived from the Greek poet Pindar (ca. 522–ca. 443 B.C.E.), which treats lofty themes in an elevated style; Collins returned to Pindar’s regularity of structure, after the relative freedom of most English odes written in preceding decades. But the originality of the *Odes* lies in their intensity of vision, which risks obscurity in quest of the sublime.

To his disappointment, contemporaries preferred his early *Persian Eclogues* to the more difficult *Odes*. Inheriting some money, the poet traveled for a while, but fits of depression gradually deepened into total debility. He spent his last years in Chichester, forgotten by all

but a small circle of loyal friends. As the century progressed he gained in reputation. The Romantics admired his poems and felt akin to him. Coleridge said that "Ode on the Poetical Character" "has inspired and whirled me along with greater agitations of enthusiasm than any the most *impassioned* scene in Schiller or Shakespeare."

# Ode to Evening<sup>1</sup>

If aught of oaten stop,<sup>2</sup> or pastoral song,  
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,  
Like thy own solemn springs,  
Thy springs and dying gales,  
5 O nymph reserved, while now the bright-haired sun  
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,  
With brede<sup>o</sup> ethereal wove,  
O'erhang his wavy bed:  
Now air is hushed, save where the weak-eyed bat,  
10 With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,  
Or where the beetle winds  
His small but sullen horn,  
As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,  
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum:  
Now teach me, maid composed,  
15 To breathe some softened strain,  
Whose numbers,<sup>o</sup> stealing through thy darkening  
vale,  
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,  
As, musing slow, I hail  
Thy genial<sup>o</sup> loved return!  
20 For when thy folding-star<sup>3</sup> arising shows  
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp  
The fragrant Hours, and elves  
Who slept in flowers the day,  
And many a nymph who wreaths her brows with  
25 sedge,  
And sheds the freshening dew, and, lovelier still,  
The pensive Pleasures sweet,  
Prepare thy shadowy car.

Then lead, calm vot'ress, where some sheety lake  
 Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallowed pile  
 30 Or upland fallows gray  
 Reflect its last cool gleam.  
 But when chill blustering winds, or driving rain,  
 Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut  
 That from the mountain's side  
 35 Views wilds, and swelling floods,  
 And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,  
 And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all  
 Thy dewy fingers draw  
 The gradual dusky veil.  
 40 While Spring shall pour his showers, as oft he wont,  
 And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve;  
 While Summer loves to sport  
 Beneath thy lingering light;  
 While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;  
 45 Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,  
 Affrights thy shrinking train,  
 And rudely rends thy robes;  
 So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,  
 Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipped Health,  
 50 Thy gentlest influence own,  
 And hymn thy favorite name!

## Endnotes

1746, 1748

- Note 1: Collins borrowed the metrical structure and the rhymeless lines of this ode from Milton's translation of Horace, *Odes* 1.5 (1673). The text printed here is based on the revised version, published in Dodsley's *Miscellany* (1748). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Finger hole in a shepherd's flute. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The evening star, which signals the hour for herding the sheep into the sheepfold. [Return to reference 3](#)



# Notes

- °: *embroidery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *measures*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *life-giving*[Return to reference](#) °

# CHRISTOPHER SMART

## 1722–1771

In 1756 Christopher Smart, who had won prizes at Pembroke College, Cambridge, as a scholar and poet and was known in London as a wit and bon vivant, was seized by religious mania: “a preternatural excitement to prayer,” according to Hester Thrale, “which he held it as a duty not to control or repress.” If Smart had been content to pray in private, his life might have ended as happily as it began, but he insisted on kneeling down in the streets, in parks, and in assembly rooms. He became a public nuisance, and the public took its revenge. For most of the next seven years Smart was confined, first in St. Luke’s hospital, then in a private asylum. There, severed from his wife, his children, and his friends, he began to write a bold new sort of poetry: vivid, concise, abrupt, syntactically daring. Few of his contemporaries noticed it. After Smart’s release from the institution (1763) he fell into debt—he had always been profligate—and his masterpiece, *A Song to David* (1763), was almost completely ignored. He died, forgotten, in a debtor’s prison. But in the nineteenth century his reputation revived, and with the publication of *Jubilate Agno* in 1939 his poems became newly famous.

*Jubilate Agno (Rejoice in the Lamb)*, written a few lines at a time during Smart’s confinement, is (1) a record of his daily life and thoughts; (2) the notebook of a scholar, crammed with puns and obscure learning, which sets out elaborate correspondences between

the world of the Bible and modern England; and (3) a personal testament or book of worship, antiphonally arranged in lines beginning alternately with *Let* and *For*, which seeks to join the material and spiritual universes in one unending prayer. It has also come to be recognized, since first published in 1939 by W. F. Stead, as a poem—a poem unique in English for its ecstatic sense of the presence of the divine spirit. The most famous passage describes Smart's cat, Jeffery, his only companion during the years of confinement: "For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God." At once a real cat, lovingly observed in all its frisks, and visible evidence of the providential plan, Jeffery celebrates the Maker, as all things do, in his very being.

# ***From Jubilate Agno***

## **[MY CAT JEOFFRY]**

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.  
For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily  
serving him.  
For at the first glance of the glory of God in the  
East<sup>o</sup> he worships in his way.  
For is this done by wreathing his body seven times  
round with elegant quickness.  
5 For then he leaps up to catch the musk, w<sup>ch</sup> is the  
blessing of God upon his prayer.  
For he rolls upon prank<sup>o</sup> to work it in.  
For having done duty and received blessing he  
begins to consider himself.  
For this he performs in ten degrees.  
For first he looks upon his fore-paws to see if they  
are clean.  
10 For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.  
For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the fore-  
paws extended.  
For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.  
For fifthly he washes himself.  
For Sixthly he rolls upon wash.  
For Seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be  
15 interrupted upon the beat.  
For Eighthly he rubs himself against a post.  
For Ninthly he looks up for his instructions.  
For Tenthly he goes in quest of food.  
For having consider'd God and himself he will  
consider his neighbor.

20 For if he meets another cat he will kiss her in  
kindness.  
For when he takes his prey he plays with it to give it  
a chance.  
For one mouse in seven escapes by his dallying.  
For when his day's work is done his business more  
properly begins.  
For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against  
the adversary.  
25 For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his  
electrical skin & glaring eyes.  
For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by  
brisking about the life.  
For in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the  
sun loves him.  
For he is of the tribe of Tiger.  
For the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel Tiger.<sup>1</sup>  
30 For he has the subtlety and hissing of a serpent,  
which in goodness he suppresses.  
For he will not do destruction if he is well-fed,  
neither will he spit without provocation.  
For he purrs in thankfulness, when God tells him he's  
a good Cat.  
For he is an instrument for the children to learn  
benevolence upon.  
For every house is incomplete without him & a  
blessing is lacking in the spirit.  
35 For the Lord commanded Moses concerning the cats  
at the departure of the Children of Israel from  
Egypt.<sup>2</sup>  
For every family had one cat at least in the bag.  
For the English Cats are the best in Europe.  
For he is the cleanest in the use of his fore-paws of  
any quadrupede.

For the dexterity of his defence is an instance of the  
love of God to him exceedingly.  
40 For he is the quickest to his mark of any creature.  
For he is tenacious of his point.  
For he is a mixture of gravity and waggery.  
For he knows that God is his Saviour.  
For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at  
rest.  
45 For there is nothing brisker than his life when in  
motion.  
For he is of the Lord's poor and so indeed is he  
called by benevolence perpetually—Poor Jeoffry!  
poor Jeoffry! the rat has bit thy throat.  
For I bless the name of the Lord Jesus that Jeoffry is  
better.  
For the divine spirit comes about his body to sustain  
it in compleat cat.  
For his tongue is exceeding pure so that it has in  
purity what it wants in music.  
50 For he is docile and can learn certain things.  
For he can set up with gravity which is patience  
upon approbation.  
For he can fetch and carry, which is patience in  
employment.  
For he can jump over a stick which is patience upon  
proof positive.  
For he can spraggle upon waggle<sup>3</sup> at the word of  
command.  
55 For he can jump from an eminence into his master's  
bosom.  
For he can catch the cork and toss it again.  
For he is hated by the hypocrite and miser.  
For the former is afraid of detection.  
For the latter refuses the charge.

For he camels his back to bear the first notion of business.

For he is good to think on, if a man would express himself neatly.

For he made a great figure in Egypt for his signal services.

For he killed the Icneumon-rat very pernicious by land.<sup>4</sup>

For his ears are so acute that they sting again.

65 For from this proceeds the passing<sup>o</sup> quickness of his attention.

For by stroking of him I have found out electricity.

For I perceived God's light about him both wax and fire.

For the Electrical fire is the spiritual substance, which God sends from heaven to sustain the bodies both of man and beast.

For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.

70 For, though he cannot fly, he is an excellent clamberer.

For his motions upon the face of the earth are more than any other quadrupede.

For he can tread to all the measures upon the music.

For he can swim for life.

For he can creep.

1759–63 **Endnotes**

1939

- Note 1: As a cherub is a small angel, so a cat is a small tiger.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: No cats are mentioned in the Bible.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He can sprawl when his master waggles a finger or stick.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The ichneumon, which resembles a weasel, was venerated and domesticated by the ancient Egyptians.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sunrise*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prankishly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *surpassing*[Return to reference °](#)



# **OLIVER GOLDSMITH**

## **ca. 1730–1774**

Oliver Goldsmith was born in Ireland, the son of an Anglican clergyman whose geniality he inherited and whose improvidence he imitated. Disfigured by smallpox, he grew up homely, ungainly, apparently stupid, and certainly idle. Nonetheless, he was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar—that is, a student who did menial jobs for well-to-do undergraduates—and took his B.A. in 1749. After studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh he wandered for a while on the Continent, visiting Holland, France, Italy, and Switzerland. He returned to England in 1756 with a mysteriously acquired M.D. and tried in vain to support himself as a physician among the poor in the London borough of Southwark. Eventually he drifted into the profession of hack writer for Ralph Griffiths, the proprietor of the *Monthly Review*, and later worked for and with the benevolent publisher John Newbery. His first success, *An Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759), attributes the decline of the fine arts in mid-eighteenth-century Europe to the lack of enlightened patronage and to the malign influence of criticism and scholarship. Soon he became a famous author and an intimate of the brilliant circle around Samuel Johnson. Although his writings brought in a great deal of money, extravagance and generosity kept him always in debt. He died owing the prodigious sum (for a man whose only source of income was writing) of £2000.

The variety and excellence of Goldsmith's work are astonishing. His easy and pleasant prose style and shrewd observations of character and scene enliven his essays, especially those in the series *The Citizen of the World* (1762; see [p. 335](#)), and his popular novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). Two plays, *The Good-Natured Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), achieve a sort of hearty and mirthful comedy—unspoiled by the fashionable sentimentality of the moment—that is unique in the century. His two major poems, *The Traveler, or A Prospect of Society* (1764) and *The Deserted Village*, are distinguished for the unforced grace of their couplets and for an air of simplicity that is far from simple to achieve.

# The Deserted Village<sup>1</sup>

Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain,  
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,  
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:  
5 Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,  
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endeared each scene;  
How often have I paused on every charm,  
10 The sheltered cot,<sup>o</sup> the cultivated farm,  
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topped the neighboring hill,  
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers made;  
How often have I blessed the coming day,<sup>o</sup>  
15 When toil remitting lent its turn to play,  
And all the village train, from labor free,  
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,  
While many a pastime circled in the shade,  
The young contending as the old surveyed;  
20 And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,  
And sleights of art and feats of strength went round;  
And still as each repeated pleasure tired,  
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired;  
The dancing pair that simply sought renown,  
25 By holding out to tire each other down;  
The swain mistrustless of his smuttred face,  
While secret laughter tittered round the place;  
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,  
The matron's glance that would those looks reprove:  
30

These were thy charms, sweet village! sports like  
these,  
With sweet succession, taught even toil to please;  
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence shed,  
These were thy charms—But all these charms are  
fled.

35

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,  
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;  
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,  
And desolation saddens all thy green:  
One only master grasps the whole domain,



Thomas Gainsborough, *The Cottage Door*, ca. 1778. Gainsborough painted several versions of

this idealized view of home, motherhood, and childhood as experienced by peasants in rural Britain.

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40 And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain;  
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,  
But choked with sedges, works its weedy way;  
Along thy glades, a solitary guest,  
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;  
45 Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,  
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.  
Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin all,  
And the long grass o'ertops the moldering wall;  
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,  
50 Far, far away thy children leave the land.  
    Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;  
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;  
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
55 When once destroyed, can never be supplied.  
    A time there was, ere England's griefs began,  
When every rood<sup>o</sup> of ground maintained its man;  
For him light labor spread her wholesome store,  
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:  
60 His best companions, innocence and health;  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.  
    But times are altered; Trade's unfeeling train  
Usurp the land and dispossess the swain;  
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,  
65 Unwieldy wealth, and cumbrous<sup>o</sup> pomp repose;  
And every want to opulence allied,  
And every pang that folly pays to pride.  
These gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,  
Those calm desires that asked but little room,  
70 Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,

Lived in each look, and brightened all the green;  
These far departing seek a kinder shore,  
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

75 Sweet Auburn! parent of the blissful hour,  
Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power.  
Here, as I take my solitary rounds,  
Amidst thy tangling walks, and ruined grounds,  
And, many a year elapsed, return to view  
80 Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew,  
Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,  
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

In all my wanderings round this world of care,  
In all my griefs—and God has given my share—  
85 I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,  
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;  
To husband out life's taper at the close,  
And keep the flame from wasting by repose.  
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,  
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,  
90 Around my fire an evening group to draw,  
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;  
And, as an hare whom hounds and horns pursue,  
Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,  
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,  
95 Here to return—and die at home at last.

O blest retirement, friend to life's decline,  
Retreats from care that never must be mine,  
How happy he who crowns in shades like these,  
A youth of labor with an age of ease;  
100 Who quits a world where strong temptations try,  
And, since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly!  
For him no wretches, born to work and weep,  
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep;  
No surly porter stands in guilty state  
105 To spurn imploring famine from the gate;  
But on he moves to meet his latter end,

Angels around befriending virtue's friend;  
 Bends to the grave with unperceived decay,  
 While Resignation gently slopes the way;  
 110 And, all his prospects brightening to the last,  
 His Heaven commences ere the world be passed!  
     Sweet was the sound when oft at evening's close,  
 Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;  
 There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,  
 115 The mingling notes came softened from below;  
 The swain responsive as the milkmaid sung,  
 The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,  
 The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,  
 The playful children just let loose from school;  
 120 The watchdog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,  
 And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant<sup>o</sup> mind;  
 These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,  
 And filled each pause the nightingale had made.  
 But now the sounds of population fail,  
 125 No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,  
 No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,  
 For all the bloomy flush of life is fled.  
 All but yon widowed, solitary thing  
 That feebly bends beside the plashy<sup>o</sup> spring;  
 130 She, wretched matron, forced, in age, for bread,  
 To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,  
 To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,  
 To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn;  
 She only left of all the harmless train,  
 135 The sad historian of the pensive<sup>o</sup> plain.  
     Near yonder copse, where once the garden  
     smiled,  
 And still where many a garden flower grows wild,  
 There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,  
 The village preacher's modest mansion rose.  
 140 A man he was, to all the country dear,  
 And passing rich with forty pounds a year;

Remote from towns he ran his godly race,  
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his  
place;  
145 Unpracticed he to fawn, or seek for power,  
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;  
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,  
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.  
His house was known to all the vagrant train,  
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain;  
150 The long-remembered beggar was his guest,  
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;  
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,  
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allowed;  
The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,  
155 Sate by his fire, and talked the night away;  
Wept o'er his wounds, or tales of sorrow done,  
Shouldered his crutch, and showed how fields were  
won.  
Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to  
glow,  
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;  
160 Careless their merits, or their faults to scan,  
His pity gave ere charity began.  
Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,  
And even his failings leaned to Virtue's side;  
But in his duty prompt at every call,  
165 He watched and wept, he prayed and felt, for all.  
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries,  
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,  
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,  
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.  
170 Beside the bed where parting life was laid,  
And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismayed,  
The reverend champion stood. At his control,  
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul;  
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,



And his last faltering accents whispered praise.  
175       At church, with meek and unaffected grace,  
His looks adorned the venerable place;  
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,  
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.  
180       The service past, around the pious man,  
With steady zeal each honest rustic ran;  
Even children followed with endearing wile,  
And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile.  
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,  
185       Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distressed;  
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,  
But all his serious thoughts had rest in Heaven.  
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,  
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,  
190       Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,  
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.  
      Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,  
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,  
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,  
195       The village master taught his little school;  
A man severe he was, and stern to view,  
I knew him well, and every truant knew;  
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;  
200       Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee,  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
Full well the busy whisper circling round,  
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;  
Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,  
205       The love he bore to learning was in fault;<sup>2</sup>  
The village all declared how much he knew;  
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;  
Lands he could measure, terms and tides<sup>3</sup> presage,  
And even the story ran that he could gauge.<sup>4</sup>  
210       In arguing too, the parson owned his skill,

For even though vanquished, he could argue still;  
While words of learned length, and thundering sound,  
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;  
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,  
215 That one small head could carry all he knew.

But past is all his fame. The very spot  
Where many a time he triumphed, is forgot.  
Near yonder thorn, that lifts its head on high,  
Where once the signpost caught the passing eye,  
220 Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts  
inspired,

Where graybeard Mirth and smiling Toil retired,  
Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,  
And news much older than their ale went round.

Imagination fondly stoops to trace  
225 The parlor splendors of that festive place:  
The whitewashed wall, the nicely sanded floor,  
The varnished clock that clicked behind the door;  
The chest contrived a double debt to pay,  
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;  
230 The pictures placed for ornament and use,  
The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose;<sup>5</sup>  
The hearth, except when winter chilled the day,  
With aspen boughs, and flowers, and fennel gay,  
While broken teacups, wisely kept for show,  
235 Ranged o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

Vain transitory splendors! Could not all  
Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall!  
Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart  
An hour's importance to the poor man's heart;  
240 Thither no more the peasant shall repair  
To sweet oblivion of his daily care;  
No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,  
No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail;  
No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,  
245 Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear;

The host himself no longer shall be found  
Careful to see the mantling bliss<sup>6</sup> go round;  
Nor the coy maid, half willing to be pressed,  
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.

250       Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,  
These simple blessings of the lowly train,  
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,  
One native charm, than all the gloss of art;  
255       Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,  
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway;  
Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,  
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.

But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,  
With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed,  
260       In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,  
The toiling pleasure sickens into pain;  
And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,  
The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy.

265       Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey  
The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,  
'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand  
Between a splendid and an happy land.

Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,  
And shouting Folly hails them from her shore;  
270       Hoards, even beyond the miser's wish abound,  
And rich men flock from all the world around.

Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name  
That leaves our useful products still the same.

275       Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride  
Takes up a space that many poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,  
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds;  
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth  
Has robbed the neighboring fields of half their  
280       growth;

His seat, where solitary sports are seen,

Indignant spurns the cottage from the green;  
Around the world each needful product flies,  
For all the luxuries the world supplies.  
While thus the land adorned for pleasure all  
285 In barren splendor feebly waits the fall.  
As some fair female unadorned and plain,  
Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,  
Slights every borrowed charm that dress supplies,  
Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes:  
290 But when those charms are past, for charms are frail,  
When time advances, and when lovers fail,  
She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,  
In all the glaring impotence of dress:  
Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed;  
295 In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed;  
But verging to decline, its splendors rise,  
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;  
While scourged by famine from the smiling land,  
The mournful peasant leads his humble band;  
300 And while he sinks without one arm to save,  
The country blooms—a garden, and a grave.  
Where then, ah where, shall Poverty reside,  
To 'scape the pressure of contiguous Pride?  
If to some common's fenceless limits strayed,  
305 He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,  
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,  
And even the bare-worn common is denied.  
If to the city sped—What waits him there?  
To see profusion that he must not share;  
310 To see ten thousand baneful arts combined  
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;  
To see those joys the sons of pleasure know,  
Extorted from his fellow creature's woe.  
Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade,  
315 There the pale artist<sup>o</sup> plies the sickly trade;  
Here, while the proud their long-drawn pomps display,

There the black gibbet glooms beside the way.  
The dome where Pleasure holds her midnight reign,  
Here, richly decked, admits the gorgeous train;  
320 Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,  
The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare.  
Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy!  
Sure these denote one universal joy!  
Are these thy serious thoughts?—Ah, turn thine eyes  
325 Where the poor houseless shivering female lies.  
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,  
Has wept at tales of innocence distressed;  
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,  
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;  
330 Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,  
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,  
And pinched with cold, and shrinking from the  
shower,  
With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,  
When idly first, ambitious of the town,  
335 She left her wheel<sup>o</sup> and robes of country brown.  
Do thine, sweet Auburn, thine, the loveliest train,  
Do thy fair tribes participate her pain?  
Even now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,  
At proud men's doors they ask a little bread!  
340 Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene,  
Where half the convex world intrudes between,  
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,  
Where wild Altama<sup>z</sup> murmurs to their woe.  
Far different there from all that charmed before,  
345 The various terrors of that horrid shore;  
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,  
And fiercely shed intolerable day;  
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,  
But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;  
350 Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crowned,  
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;

Where at each step the stranger fears to wake  
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;  
Where crouching tigers<sup>8</sup> wait their hapless prey,  
355 And savage men, more murderous still than they;  
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,  
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.  
Far different these from every former scene,  
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,  
360 The breezy covert of the warbling grove,  
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.  
    Good Heaven! what sorrows gloomed that parting  
    day,  
That called them from their native walks away;  
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,  
365 Hung round their bowers, and fondly looked their last,  
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain  
For seats like these beyond the western main;  
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,  
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.  
370 The good old sire, the first prepared to go  
To new-found worlds, and wept for other's woe.  
But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,  
He only wished for worlds beyond the grave.  
His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears,  
375 The fond companion of his helpless years,  
Silent went next, neglectful of her charms,  
And left a lover's for a father's arms.  
With louder plaints the mother spoke her woes,  
And blessed the cot where every pleasure rose;  
380 And kissed her thoughtless babes with many a tear,  
And clasped them close in sorrow doubly dear;  
Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief  
In all the silent manliness of grief.  
    O luxury! Thou cursed by Heaven's decree,  
385 How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!  
How do thy portions, with insidious joy,

Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy!  
Kingdoms, by thee, to sickly greatness grown,  
Boast of a florid vigor not their own.  
390 At every draught more large and large they grow,  
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe;  
Till sapped their strength, and every part unsound,  
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.  
Even now the devastation is begun,  
395 And half the business of destruction done;  
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,  
I see the rural Virtues leave the land.  
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail,  
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,  
400 Downward they move, a melancholy band,  
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.  
Contented Toil, and hospitable Care,  
And kind connubial Tenderness are there;  
And Piety, with wishes placed above,  
405 And steady Loyalty, and faithful Love:  
And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,  
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade;  
Unfit in these degenerate times of shame,  
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame;  
410 Dear charming Nymph, neglected and decried,  
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride;  
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,  
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;  
Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,  
415 Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well.  
Farewell, and O! where'er thy voice be tried  
On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,<sup>9</sup>  
Whether where equinoctial fervors glow,  
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,  
420 Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,  
Redress the rigors of the inclement clime;  
Aid slighted truth, with thy persuasive strain

Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;  
Teach him that states of native strength possessed,  
425 Though very poor, may still be very blest;  
That Trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,  
As ocean sweeps the labored mole<sup>1</sup> away;  
While self-dependent power can time defy,  
430 As rocks resist the billows and the sky.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

1770

- Note 1:  
*The Deserted Village* is an idealization of English rural life mingled with poignant memories of the poet's own youth in Lissoy, Ireland. Goldsmith was seriously concerned about the effects of the agricultural revolution then in progress, which was being hastened by Enclosure Acts. Either for the sake of more profitable farming or to create vast private parks and landscape gardens, arable land was being "enclosed"—that is, taken out the hands of small proprietors—thus displacing yeoman farmers who, like their ancestors, had lived for generations in small villages, grazing their cattle on common land and raising food on small holdings. The only alternative available to many such people was to seek employment in the city or to migrate to America. In the poem, Goldsmith opposes "luxury" (the increase of wealth, the growth of cities, and the costly country estates of great noblemen and wealthy merchants) to "rural virtue" (the old agrarian economy that supported a sturdy population of independent peasants). His poem is thus at once a nostalgic lament for a doomed way of life and a denunciation of what he regarded as the corrupting, destructive force of new wealth.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because the / was silent, *fault* and *aught* rhymed perfectly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Feasts and seasons in the church year. "Terms": dates on which rent, wages, etc. were due and tenancy began or



ended.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Measure the content of casks and other vessels.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A game in which counters were moved on a board, according to the throw of the dice. "The twelve good rules" of conduct, attributed to Charles I, were printed in a broadside that was often seen on the walls of taverns.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Foaming bliss—that is, foaming ale.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Altamaha River in Georgia.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Not the Asian tiger but the puma.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The river Torne in Sweden falls into the Gulf of Bothnia. Pambamarca is a mountain in Ecuador.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The laboriously built breakwater.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Samuel Johnson, a friend of Goldsmith's, composed the last four lines of the poem.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *cottage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Sunday*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quarter acre*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *oppressive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *idle, carefree*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boggy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gloomy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artisan*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spinning wheel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)

# **JAMES MACPHERSON (Ossian)**

## **1736–1796**

Ossian was a Gaelic bard from the third century—or was he?

In 1760, the young Scottish tutor James Macpherson published *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language*. The book declared these fragments to be “genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry” and associated them with the legendary hero and bard Ossian. The literati of the Scottish Enlightenment loved the idea of an ancient Scottish epic poem to rival Homer’s *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, and Macpherson was encouraged to go to the Highlands to collect more verse to translate—a task that involved searching for extant texts but also listening to old men’s stories and ballads. The results of this work were two epic poems, *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), later published together as *The Works of Ossian, Son of Fingal. Translated by James Macpherson* (1765).

The Ossianic poems were a sensational success. Their reception was informed by lively interest in the period in relationships between Scotland and England but also between the oral and the written, the past and the present. As the influential Scottish literary critic (and Ossian fan) Hugh Blair (1718–1800) put it, the poems feature “the fire and enthusiasm” characteristic of ancient times but also a “tenderness” that resonated with eighteenth-century audiences—this poetry truly “deserves to be styled,” Blair asserted, “*The Poetry of the Heart*.” It seemed to many to capture something primal, heroic,

and sublime about the Scottish Highlands—a place whose culture and way of life had seemed threatened since the British victory over Highland clans at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

Questions about the poems' authenticity, however, soon arose. Had Macpherson really translated these from collected materials, or were the poems the figments of Macpherson's imagination? Dr. Samuel Johnson famously called the poetry "a cheat" and "an imposture" (see [p. 892](#)), and Macpherson could not produce any manuscripts that the Ossian poems exactly translated. The truth was that the Ossianic poems were neither "genuine" literal translations nor complete fakes. Ossian figures in Gaelic oral tradition and early written texts in both Scotland and Ireland, and Macpherson did eagerly collect and work from very old Gaelic ballads, both written and oral. But he also fundamentally reimagined these poems and stories to suit the tastes of his eighteenth-century readers—his poems were more like adaptations than translations.

As the controversy raged on, attempts to figure out precisely what Macpherson had done with his sources stimulated a new fascination about the art that did survive from the Scottish past (and the Irish and Welsh pasts—the figure of the bard catalyzed nationalist feeling across the British Isles). And the Ossian poems continued to be printed and read widely—in Britain but also in France, Italy, and Germany. Early Romantic writers would be inspired by the wild sublimity and tragic melancholy of Ossian's world. The poems also involved a kind of formal experimentation that seemed intriguing: the "translations" lacked rhyme, line, and meter but still seemed undeniably *poetic*. Both of the fragments featured here are about doomed warriors, and both feature the voice of an ancient bard. Contemporaries' fascination with such bardic mouthpieces for a heroic, lost past had everything to do with their sense of their own modernity.

***From* Fragments of Ancient Poetry,  
Collected in the Highlands of Scotland**

## **Fragment 7<sup>1</sup>**

Why openest thou afresh the spring of my grief, O son of Alpin, inquiring how Oscan fell? My eyes are blind with tears; but memory beams on my heart. How can I relate the mournful death of the head of the people! Prince of the warriors, Oscan, my son, shall I see thee no more!

He fell as the moon in a storm; as the sun from the midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the blackness of the storm enwraps the rocks of Ardannider. I, like an ancient oak on Morven,<sup>2</sup> I molder alone in my place. The blast<sup>3</sup> hath lopped my branches away; and I tremble at the wings of the north. Prince of the warriors, Oscan, my son! shall I see thee no more!

Dermid and Oscan were one: They reaped the battle together. Their friendship was strong as their steel; and death walked between them to the field. They came on the foe like two rocks falling from the brows of Ardven. Their swords were stained with the blood of the valiant: warriors fainted at their names. Who was a match for Oscan, but Dermid? and who for Dermid, but Oscan!

They killed mighty Dargo in the field; Dargo before invincible. His daughter was fair as the morn; mild as the beam of night. Her eyes, like two stars in a shower: her breath, the gale of spring: her breasts, as the new-fallen snow floating on the moving heath. The warriors saw her, and loved; their souls were fixed on the maid. Each loved her, as his fame; each must possess her or die. But her soul was fixed on Oscan; my son was the youth of her love. She forgot the blood of her father; and loved the hand that slew<sup>4</sup> him.

Son of Oscan, said Dermid, I love; O Oscan, I love this maid. But her soul cleaveth unto<sup>5</sup> thee; and nothing can heal Dermid. Here, pierce this bosom, Oscan; relieve me, my friend, with thy sword.

My sword, son of Mornny, shall never be stained with the blood of Dermid.

Who then is worthy to slay me, O Oscan son of Oscan? Let not my life pass away unknown. Let none but Oscan slay me. Send me

with honor to the grave, and let my death be renowned.

Dermid, make use of thy sword; son of Mornny, wield thy steel.  
Would that I fell with thee! that my death came from the hand of Dermid!

They fought by the brook of the mountain; by the streams of Branno. Blood tinged the silvery stream, and crudled<sup>6</sup> round the mossy stones. Dermid the graceful fell; fell, and smiled in death.

And fallest thou, son of Mornny; fallest, thou by Oscan's hand!  
Dermid invincible in war, thus do I see thee fall!—He<sup>7</sup> went, and returned to the maid whom he loved; returned, but she perceived his grief.

Why that gloom, son of Oscan? What shades thy mighty soul?

Though once renowned for the bow, O maid, I have lost my fame. Fixed on a tree by the brook of the hill, is the shield of Gormur the brave, whom in battle I slew. I have wasted the day in vain, nor could my arrow pierce it.

Let me try, son of Oscan, the skill of Dargo's daughter. My hands were taught the bow: my father delighted in my skill.

She went. He stood behind the shield. Her arrow flew and pierced his breast.<sup>8</sup>

Blessed be that hand of snow; and blessed thy bow of yew! I fall resolved on death: and who but the daughter of Dargo was worthy to slay me? Lay me in the earth, my fair one; lay me by the side of Dermid.

Oscan! I have the blood, the soul of the mighty Dargo. Well pleased I can meet death. My sorrow I can end thus.—She pierced her white bosom with steel. She fell; she trembled; and died.

By the brook of the hill their graves are laid; a birch's unequal shade covers their tomb. Often on their green earthen tombs the branchy<sup>9</sup> sons of the mountain feed, when midday is all in flames, and silence is over all the hills.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In this fragment, Ossian laments the deaths of his son Oscur, Oscur's friend Dermid (son of Morny), and Oscur's love (the daughter of Dargo). Ossian addresses himself to the son of Alpin, another bard. This was the first of Macpherson's "translations."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In a note to *Fingal*, Macpherson explained, "All the Northwest coast of Scotland probably went of old under the name of Morven, which signifies a ridge of very high hills."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of the storm.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Slayed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Joins with.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "To coagulate; to congeal" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Oscur.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nothing was held by the ancient Highlanders more essential to their glory, than to die by the hand of some person worthy or renowned. This was the occasion of Oscur's contriving to be slain by his mistress, now that he was weary of life. In those early times, suicide was utterly unknown among that people, and no traces of it are found in the old poetry. Whence the translator suspects the account that follows of the daughter of Dargo killing herself, to be the interpolation of some later bard [*Macpherson's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Antlered.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Fragment 12***<sup>1</sup>

Ryno:

The wind and the rain are over: calm is the noon of day. The clouds are divided in heaven. Over the green hills flies the inconstant sun. Red through the stony vale comes down the stream of the hill. Sweet are thy murmurs, O stream! But more sweet is the voice I hear. It is the voice of Alpin, the son of the song, mourning for the dead. Bent is his head of age, and red his tearful eye. Alpin, thou son of the song, why alone on the silent hill? Why complainest thou, as a blast in the wood; as a wave on the lonely shore?

Alpin:

My tears, O Ryno! are for the dead; my voice, for the inhabitants of the grave. Tall thou art on the hill; fair among the sons of the plain. But thou shalt fall like Morar;<sup>2</sup> and the mourner shalt sit on thy tomb. The hills shall know thee no more; thy bow shall lie in the hall, unstrung.

Thou wert swift, O Morar! as a roe on the hill; terrible as a meteor of fire. Thy wrath was as the storm of December. Thy sword in battle, as lightning in the field. Thy voice was like a stream after rain; like thunder on distant hills. Many fell by thy arm; they were consumed in the flames of thy wrath.

But when thou returnedst from war, how peaceful was thy brow! Thy face was like the sun after rain; like the moon in the silence of night; calm as the breast of the lake when the loud wind is laid.

Narrow is thy dwelling now; dark the place of thine abode. With three steps I compass thy grave, O thou who wast so great before! Four stones with their heads of moss are the only memorial of thee. A tree with scarce a leaf, long grass which whistles in the wind, mark to the hunter's eye the grave of the mighty Morar. Morar! Thou art low indeed. Thou hast no mother to mourn thee; no maid with her tears of love. Dead is she that brought thee forth. Fallen is the daughter of Morglan.<sup>3</sup>



Who on his staff is this? Who is this, whose head is white with age, whose eyes are red with tears, who quakes at every step?—It is thy father, O Morar! The father of none but thee. He heard of thy fame in battle; he heard of foes dispersed. He heard of Morar's fame; why did he not hear of his wound? Weep, thou father of Morar! Weep; but thy son heareth thee not. Deep is the sleep of the dead; low their pillow of dust. No more shall he hear thy voice; no more shall he awake at thy call. When shall it be morn in the grave, to bid the slumberer awake?

Farewell, thou bravest of men! Thou conqueror in the field! But the field shall see thee no more; nor the dark wood be lightened with the splendor of thy steel. Thou hast left no son. But the song shall preserve thy name. Future times shall hear of thee; they shall hear of the fallen Morar.

## Endnotes

1760

- Note 1: Both Ryno and Alpin were bards. Macpherson later incorporated this fragment into a longer poem, *The Songs of Selma*, published with *Fingal* (1762).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A fallen hero, here lamented. In *Songs of Selma*, Macpherson glosses the etymology: "Mór-ér, *great man*."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Morar's beloved was the "daughter of Morglan," no other name given.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Britain and Transatlantic Slavery

British pirates and traders had engaged, mostly sporadically, in the European trade in enslaved Africans from the mid-sixteenth century onward, but 1660, the year the monarchy was restored to England, was a major turning point. That year saw the founding of the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa, which was reorganized into the Royal African Company in 1672. It was in this period that enslavement became a mass enterprise in the British economy: the notorious Triangle Trade was established. Ships from London, Liverpool, and Bristol in England, and eventually Glasgow in Scotland, brought manufactured goods such as liquor, textiles, weapons, and gunpowder to the western coast of sub-Saharan Africa, along the Bight of Benin in the Gulf of Guinea. They traded these goods with African elites for enslaved Africans, often those captured in wars between African nations and ethnic groups, fomented by the Europeans themselves to promote the trade. Then began the terrible journey across the Atlantic, known as the Middle Passage: European enslavers forced multitudes of Africans into foully unclean, grotesquely overcrowded ships; approximately 15 percent of them did not survive the journey to the ships' destinations in the Caribbean and mainland North America. Jamaica, which the British seized from the Spanish in 1655, came to be the British Empire's most lucrative and brutal sugar colony: more enslaved people were taken to that relatively small island than to all of mainland North America. British sugar islands in the Caribbean also included Barbados, St. Kitts, Montserrat, Antigua, Grenada—the list goes on. Those who disembarked faced what contemporaries called "seasoning," the adjustment to living and working conditions on plantations—a period of high mortality rates due to disease, malnutrition, mistreatment, the severity of the labor, and suicide.

After this initial period, conditions for enslaved people remained relentlessly harsh, and enslaved women faced the terrible additional threat of sexual violence. Meanwhile the ships that brought Africans to the western colonies would return to Britain with the raw or partly processed products of enslaved labor—especially sugar, but also tobacco, cocoa, coffee, ginger, and cotton—and the cycle would begin again.

The Royal African Company was a royal monopoly: its first governor was the brother of King Charles II, James, Duke of York, who would become King James II in 1685. The Company also supplied the government with precious metals, coining a famous denomination of British currency, the guinea, named for the gold that composed it, sourced from West Africa: originally worth 20 to 25 shillings, it bore symbols associated with the RAC's enslaving activities, including, in different mintages, the elephant, the elephant and castle, and the face of James II. The British engagement with the trade in enslaved Africans would increase to newly high levels during the reign of the next king, William III, with the Trade with Africa Act of 1698. Ending the Company's monopoly, the act allowed all British merchants to engage in the trade if they paid a 10 percent duty to maintain the RAC's infrastructure of enslavement—settlements on the coast of Africa variously called forts, factories, and castles. Subsequently, as part of the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 that ended the War of the Spanish Succession, Britain would gain another component of the trade: the monopoly, called the *asiento de negros*, to supply the Spanish Empire with enslaved Africans for thirty years, in ships principally bound for Cuba, and for Central and South America. The South Sea Company, which held the *asiento*, collapsed spectacularly in 1720 but continued to trade in enslaved people for years afterward, though the *asiento* was frequently interrupted when Britain went to war with Spain. The Royal African Company itself, which regained its monopoly over the British part of the trade in 1714 only to lose it permanently in 1726, finally disappeared in 1750, but was replaced by another British trading consortium, the African Company of Merchants, in 1752. Numerous British business arrangements succeeded, failed, and reorganized,

and companies boomed and went bust during the long engagement of Britain in the transatlantic trade. Through it all, the numbers of Africans taken by British enslavers relentlessly accumulated.

According to the website [slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org), the six peak decades of Britain's total trafficking occurred after 1750, right up to the year of its abolition, 1807, with numbers of people abducted from Africa ranging from 255,346 in 1751–60 to a high of 385,928 in 1791–1800. All told, British enslavers took an estimated 3,259,439 people; of these, 2,733,323 disembarked, enslaved, in the Western Hemisphere.



William Blake, ***Europe Supported by Africa & America***, 1796. Blake follows the allegorical tradition of representing the continents as beautiful women. The armbands on Africa and America signify their enslavement, but their strength supports



Europe, and unlike hers, their eyes meet the viewer's. From John Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam . . . from the Year 1772, to 1777* (1796).

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Despite its steady growth over some 150 years, the British system of enslavement met considerable and consistent resistance, especially from the Black people taken in the trade. Uprisings aboard enslavers' ships were common and widely feared by British traders (see William Snelgrave's account of these fears below). And on the colonial plantations themselves, a sequence of rebellions throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and beyond) seriously challenged Britain's colonial power in the Caribbean. British colonists and writers often linked such rebellions with a particular group of Africans, associated with the Akan ethnic group, whom they called "Coromantee," named after a British fort near the African town of Kormantse in what is now Ghana. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, with a hero said to be from "Coramantien," offers a fictionalized account of one such rebellion in mid-seventeenth-century South America (see [p. 152](#)). Among the most extensive of actual "Coromantee" revolts was Tacky's Rebellion, or Tacky's War, named after its leader (also called Takyi), which began in 1760 on Jamaica and lasted months, with repercussions carrying on for years, providing inspiration to enslaved people throughout the Caribbean and beyond. Other, more quiet forms of resistance by enslaved people, including work slowdowns and acts of sabotage, significantly reduced the profitability of the enslavers' system.



**Portrait of Dido Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray, ca. 1778,** by David Martin. Dido Belle, left, was born enslaved in the West Indies around 1761 to an enslaved woman, Maria Belle. Dido's father, Sir John Lindsay, brought her and her mother to England around 1765, where Dido was baptized. She was taken into the household of Lindsay's uncle, William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, and raised as a free English gentlewoman, with another niece of Lord Mansfield's, Lady Elizabeth Murray (right). Lord Mansfield's famous ruling in the *Somerset* case in 1772 (see below) seemed to many to declare slavery illegal in England—a decision, some suggested, that was influenced by his family relationship to Dido Belle.

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Principled calls in public discourse for abolition resisted slavery at another level. Such challenges were at first isolated and unorganized,

but they grew in urgency and scale, in mainland North America and Britain. In the late seventeenth century, members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, began to preach against enslavement, denouncing it as un-Christian; this developing tradition resulted in the important antislavery texts and abolitionist activism of Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet (see below). Other White abolitionists raised their voices through the middle decades of the century: in Britain, the most famous among them was Granville Sharp (1735–1813). Black activists, including Olaudah Equiano (see [p. 1081](#)) and Ottobah Cugoana (see below), helped lead the British abolitionist movement, which began to gain ground after the *Somerset* decision in 1772, a court case supported by Sharp that seemed to declare that slavery on English soil had no basis in law (see below). Abolitionism finally began to achieve more widespread popular support by the 1780s: it became a celebrated cause among both the fervent and the fashionable in Britain. British parliamentary leaders of the movement to end the transatlantic trade, including William Wilberforce, put the first abolition bill to a vote in 1789, which was defeated by proslavery interests. In North America, the stirrings of abolition began somewhat earlier; Black leaders such as Prince Hall of Boston helped link emancipation of the enslaved to the ideals of the new nation declared in 1776 (see below). By the time the United States Constitution was ratified in 1789, several Northern states had outlawed enslavement, either outright or on schemes of gradual emancipation, and more would soon do so. But the new Constitution created a national structure in which “free” states were bound not only to accommodate but also to help maintain slavery in areas where it continued. Britain banned the transatlantic trade in 1807; the United States would also do so in 1808 (though the trade internal to the United States would go on). In 1833, slavery itself would be finally abolished in nearly all of Britain’s overseas colonies. The campaign against slavery was a long, grinding, passionate one, full of high ideals—though a long (sometimes contested) tradition of historiography has argued that it finally succeeded only when enslavement’s profitability had begun to fail.



Various genres of literature in the eighteenth century addressed enslavement and the traffic in enslaved Africans by blending fact and fiction, idealism and realism, acceptance and critique. Literary historians have been struck by the very large proportion of poems in English about slavery that took a stand against it, from the late seventeenth century onward, and especially after the middle of the eighteenth. But exceptions, such as James Boswell's unambiguously titled "No Abolition of Slavery" (see below), exist; poems such as *The Sugar-Cane* by James Grainger (see below) seem both to deplore and to materially support enslavers' practices; and even ardently antislavery poems employ racializing and other culturally biased rhetoric that demands critical scrutiny. Fiction and drama also treated slavery in complex ways, in passing or at length, but the literary genre that offers perhaps the fullest depiction of it is memoir. Ottobah Cugoano and especially Olaudah Equiano present firsthand views of what being enslaved was like; from the opposite perspective, William Snelgrave offers insight into what he, as an enslaver, thought he was doing. The genres presented here that are not usually considered "literary" today—the petition, the polemic, the philosophical treatise—use carefully crafted, inventive rhetoric to work through arguments about slavery's meanings and costs.

The cluster below offers only a small fraction of writing about slavery published in English in the eighteenth century. A considerable number of pamphlets and essays attempted to justify it, or at least downplay its horrors and extol its economic benefits. The system of enslavement enriched estates across Britain and wielded enormous power in the nation's affairs—in government, business, and the media—and this cannot be understood without a critical encounter with the ideological apparatus that upheld it, represented here by selections from Snelgrave, Grainger, Boswell, and, most graphically, a page from the *Jamaica Mercury*, a newspaper, with advertisements showing how thoroughly slavery was woven into the total economy. The cluster also provides an opportunity to listen to a range of Black voices, from Cugoano to Jupiter Hammon, on the issue of slavery. Black people taken by force into British dominions were using the English language in the period in vast numbers, but writing and

publishing remained almost completely closed to them. Some colonial regimes made English literacy for Black people a crime, and publishers in Britain and elsewhere had little inclination to bring their writing into print. Several Black authors nonetheless arose in these utterly unfavorable circumstances to protest injustices faced by their people, analyze the dynamics of enslavement and other forms of racist oppression, and contribute profoundly to abolitionist causes. They offered much more as well: the literary works of Francis Williams (ca. 1700–1770), Phillis Wheatley (see [p. 985](#)), Ignatius Sancho (see [p. 1019](#)), and others range generously across their authors' intellectual, religious, and aesthetic interests.

The language of enslavement, race, and ethnicity in the eighteenth century differs significantly from current usage. In the following cluster, both White and Black writers commonly use the word "slaves" to refer to those taken in the trade; scholars now refer to "enslaved people" to avoid defining the identity or existence of human beings with a status imposed by force on them by someone else. For similar reasons, scholars now avoid saying that one person was "owned by" or was the "property of" another (and by extension that a person was "sold to" or "bought by" someone else), or that a person was another's "master" or "owner." The word *negro*, sometimes capitalized, was commonly used in the period by Black and White writers as a "correct," respectful, or at least neutral term to refer to people with sub-Saharan African heritage; the word has fallen out of use now because it is seen as antiquated, and some now consider it a slur. Interestingly, among the Black writers included in this volume, only the most militant of them, Ottobah Cugoana, seems to avoid the term, and usually uses "Black" or "African" in his book instead, though it is not easy to conclude exactly what that means. (Of course, like any other polite or correct word, the term *negro* may be employed in the period in dismissive or disparaging ways, and all its occurrences are open to interpretation.) Throughout this volume, the headnotes, footnotes, and other editorial apparatus adhere to current standards of usage, which aim to ensure that our language does not endorse the dehumanizing premises that allowed

this trade to flourish. The language of authors of the Restoration period and the eighteenth century included here is always their own.

# JOHN LOCKE

The *Two Treatises of Government* (1689–90) by John Locke (1632–1704) have served as a blueprint for what has been called modern liberalism: the doctrine that all people are naturally free and must obey only those laws that they themselves or their elected representatives have contrived and ratified. Locke's *Treatises* promote a view of government radically at odds with, and designed to rebut, the theory of absolute monarchy propounded by Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653), whose *Patriarcha* (1680, probably completed by the late 1630s) claimed that subjects owe unquestioning submission to kings, who ultimately derive their authority from God. It is unclear how powerfully Locke's *Treatises* influenced political radicalism in the decades immediately after his death—his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689–90; see [p. 117](#)) exerted a far more overt, palpable influence on philosophy—but by the time of the founding of the United States in 1776, Locke had become an important theorist of liberty for those promoting representative government.

The centrality of the concept of slavery for such discussions is illustrated by the excerpts from the *Two Treatises* below. Locke's definition of slavery—to be subject to “the unconstant, uncertain, unknown arbitrary will of another man”—is deliberately broad. It refers to various systems of slavery throughout history, in Europe, Africa, and Asia, as well as the chattel slavery introduced by Europeans in their colonies in the Western Hemisphere. But for Locke, slavery also applies to a nation's political subjugation to a tyrant, and could describe what the French endured under Louis XIV, or what the English would face under an absolute Stuart monarch. When Britons declare in coming decades that they refuse to be “slaves,” they often have this political meaning in mind; but an awareness of the chattel slavery practiced in British sugar colonies also surely lurked behind such declamations. In Locke's time, these

actualities were becoming more directly evident, as the Royal African Company (founded 1672) increasingly profited by abducting Africans and taking them to a life of forced labor in the Americas. Scholars have long noted that Locke himself held stock in the Company and other ventures that profited from enslavement, and that he helped draft the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina (1669), a legal framework for nearly all territory between Virginia and Florida that granted each plantation owner “absolute power and authority over his negro slaves.” Several interpretations have been advanced as to how Locke could both detest and seem to condone enslavement. In [Chapter 1](#) of the first *Treatise* below, he finds slavery incompatible with “the generous temper and courage of our nation” (a common idea in Britain): perhaps he thought it was acceptable for people of other nations, or “races,” to be enslaved. The selection from the second *Treatise* repeats the ancient idea that combatants captured in a just war were enslavable: it is possible he tried to see people forcibly removed from Africa by Britons as such captives. More broadly, this fissure in Locke’s thinking has been seen as inherent to liberal capitalism, wherein the freedom to make a profit and own property overrides the freedoms of those whom the profiteer-owner exploits.

Some recent scholarship, however, has stressed the fierce antagonism between Locke and the Stuart monarchy which controlled the Royal African Company. Charles II and especially his brother, the Duke of York, later James II, fervently believed in the absolute authority held by some human beings over others and in hereditary rule and servitude. The latter belief was directly relevant to a system developing the idea that enslaved status is heritable. On this interpretation, Locke drafted the Fundamental Constitutions less as an ideologue than as legal secretary for the lords proprietors of the colony. He sold his stock in the RAC soon after he had received it as payment, and he applauded efforts to beat back the institution of slavery in Britain’s colonies. The disgust for slavery in the selections below may thus reflect a development in his thinking: perhaps all forms of slavery, including chattel slavery in British colonies, had

come to seem reprehensible to him. In any case, the selections indicate how fully theories of liberty in the period relied on understandings of slavery, and suggest a range of ways in which the two concepts would be entangled as liberty-loving Britain engaged more and more robustly in the trade in human beings in the decades after Locke.

# ***From Two Treatises of Government***

**From *Treatise 1: Of Government***

## **Chapter I [Introduction]**

1. Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate<sup>1</sup> of man, and so directly opposite to the generous temper and courage of our nation, that 'tis hardly to be conceived that an Englishman, much less a gentleman, should plead for it. And truly I should have taken Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, as any other treatise which would persuade all men that they are slaves, and ought to be so, for such another exercise of wit as was his who writ the encomium of Nero;<sup>2</sup> rather than for a serious discourse meant in earnest, had not the gravity of the title and epistle, the picture in the front of the book,<sup>3</sup> and the applause that followed it, required me to believe that the author and publisher were both in earnest. I therefore took it into my hands with all the expectation, and read it through with all the attention, due to a treatise that made such a noise at its coming abroad, and cannot but confess myself mightily surprised that in a book, which was to provide chains for all mankind, I should find nothing but a rope of sand;<sup>4</sup> useful perhaps to such whose skill and business it is to raise a dust, and would blind the people the better to mislead them; but in truth not of any force to draw those into bondage who have their eyes open, and so much sense about them as to consider that chains are but an ill wearing,<sup>5</sup> how much care soever hath been taken to file and polish them.

2. If anyone think I take too much liberty in speaking so freely of a man who is the great champion of absolute power and the idol of those who worship it, I beseech him to make this small allowance for once, to one who, even after the reading of Sir Robert's book, cannot but think himself, as the laws allow him, a freeman. And I know no fault it is to do so, unless any one better skilled in the fate of it than I, should have it revealed to him that this treatise, which has lain dormant so long,<sup>6</sup> was, when it appeared in the world, to carry, by strength of its arguments, all liberty out of it; and that, from thenceforth, our author's short model was to be the pattern in



the mount,<sup>7</sup> and the perfect standard of politics for the future. His system lies in a little compass, it is no more but this,

“That all government is absolute monarchy.”

And the ground he builds on is this,

“That no man is born free.”

3. In this last age a generation of men has sprung up amongst us that would flatter princes with an opinion that they have a divine right to absolute power, let the laws by which they are constituted and are to govern, and the conditions under which they enter upon their authority, be what they will, and their engagements to observe them ever so well ratified by solemn oaths and promises. To make way for this doctrine, they have denied mankind a right to natural freedom; whereby they have not only, as much as in them lies, exposed all subjects to the utmost misery of tyranny and oppression, but have also unsettled the titles and shaken the thrones of princes (for they too, by these men’s system, except only one, are all born slaves, and by divine right are subjects to Adam’s right heir);<sup>8</sup> as if they had designed to make war upon all government, and subvert the very foundations of human society, to serve their present turn.

**From *Treatise 2: Of Civil Government***

## ***Chapter IV. Of Slavery***

22. The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule. The liberty of man in society is to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the commonwealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact, according to the trust put in it. Freedom then is not what sir Robert Filmer tells us, O. A. 55, "a liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied by any laws";<sup>9</sup> but freedom of men under government is to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it; a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man: as freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but the law of nature.

23. This freedom from absolute, arbitrary power is so necessary to and closely joined with a man's preservation that he cannot part with it but by what forfeits his preservation and life together. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to any one, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another, to take away his life, when he pleases.<sup>1</sup> Nobody can give more power than he has himself; and he that cannot take away his own life, cannot give another power over it. Indeed having by his fault forfeited his own life, by some act that deserves death; he, to whom he has forfeited it, may (when he has him in his power) delay to take it, and make use of him to his own service, and he does him no injury by it. For, whenever he finds the hardship of his slavery outweigh the value of his life, 'tis in his power, by resisting the will of his master, to draw on himself the death he desires.

24. This is the perfect condition of slavery, which is nothing else, but *the state of war continued, between a lawful conqueror and a*

*captive*.<sup>2</sup> For, if once compact enter between them,<sup>3</sup> and make an agreement for a limited power on the one side, and obedience on the other, the state of war and slavery ceases, as long as the compact endures. For, as has been said, no man can, by agreement, pass over to another that which he hath not in himself, a power over his own life.

I confess, we find among the Jews, as well as other nations, that men did sell themselves; but 'tis plain, this was only to drudgery, not to slavery. For it is evident the person sold was not under an absolute, arbitrary, despotical power. For the master could not have power to kill him, at any time, whom at a certain time, he was obliged to let go free out of his service; and the master of such a servant was so far from having an arbitrary power over his life, that he could not, at pleasure, so much as maim him, but the loss of an eye, or tooth, set him free, Exod. xxi.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

1689–90

- Note 1: Situation or condition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In his *Encomium Neronis* (1562), the Italian scholar Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576?) defends the notorious Roman emperor Nero (37–68 C.E.) against the prevailing portrayals of him in Roman and subsequent historiography as cruel and tyrannical.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Facing the title page of Filmer's *Patriarcha* was a large portrait of King Charles II (1630–1685). "Epistle": an introductory letter by the Royalist cleric and controversialist Peter Heylyn (1599–1662) praises Filmer's skill in political theory and argument.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Something not as strong or binding as it may seem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An unsuitable kind of clothing.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Published posthumously in 1680, Filmer's *Patriarcha* was written in the late 1630s.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: See Hebrews 8:5. Locke says that Filmer presents his political theory as if it were the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Filmer claims that kings derive their authority from Adam, whose heirs they are, and who was created an absolute monarch over all humanity, but Locke argues that by Filmer's logic, Adam can have just one rightful heir, under whom even kings are slaves.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Locke quotes from page 55 of the 1679 republication of Filmer's *Observations upon Aristotle's Politics* (first published 1652).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In [Chapter 2](#), section 6 of the *Second Treatise*, Locke explained that the law of nature, which is essentially the will of God as reason reveals it to us, dictates that human beings may not commit suicide.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Locke invokes an ancient explanation and justification of slavery: it is permissible when a person captured in war would otherwise have been put to death, and the state of enslavement is essentially a continuation of the state of war between a "master" and an enslaved person, and a deferral of the death to which the enslaved person was earlier subject.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, once their relationship attains the status of a legal agreement.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Locke refers to [Chapter 21](#) of the biblical book of Exodus, which lays out the rules among ancient Jews for the buying and treatment of servants.[Return to reference 4](#)

## WILLIAM SNELGRAVE

By the time he published *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade* (1734), the English sea captain William Snelgrave (1681–1743) had participated in the trafficking of enslaved Africans for some thirty years. Like other accounts of travel and true adventures in the period, his work is intended to give British readers a sense of what was going on along the edges of a growing empire that was making their home country rich. Packed with commentary and incidents, such as a history of the conflict between the African kingdoms of Whidaw (Xwéda) and Dahomey, and the story of Snelgrave's own kidnapping by pirates off the coast of Africa, the book also describes his role, and understanding of himself, as an enslaver. He says in his preface that he included this description to answer a friend "who had objected against the lawfulness of that trade." While his attempt to justify it is not very long or elaborate—he says he "will not here undertake to refute" all the objections to European practices of enslavement—he nonetheless presents some common rationalizations and a striking picture of a mind working to reconcile itself to trafficking in "these poor people," as he repeatedly calls those he holds in bondage aboard his ship. The account also indirectly suggests the nature and relative force of objections to the trade at Snelgrave's historical moment, decades before an extensive abolitionist movement had grown in North America and Britain toward the end of the century. Snelgrave insists that he treats those he has enslaved with kindness, which he says is both morally right and profitable: relatively humane treatment helps prevent uprisings of captured Africans aboard ship. But by laying stress on how frequently such uprisings occur, and on his own exceptional humanity, he implies that a general cruelty tends to dominate the trade. For a critical response to Snelgrave's characterizations of enslaving practices, see Anthony Benezet (below); and for direct, unvarnished views of the experience of

enslavement from those who endured it themselves, see firsthand accounts by Olaudah Equiano ([p. 1081](#)) and Ottobah Cugoano (below).

***From A New Account of Some Parts of  
Guinea, and the Slave Trade***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **From *Chapter 2***

Before I give a particular relation of the several mutinies among the Negro slaves, whereof I have been a witness, and which is to be the chief subject of this present book,<sup>2</sup> it will be very proper to prefix a short account of the manner how the Negroes become slaves; what numbers of them are yearly exported from Guinea;<sup>3</sup> and then offer a few words in justification of that trade.

As for the manner how those people become slaves; it may be reduced under these several heads.

I. It has been the custom among the Negroes, time out of mind, and is so to this day, for them to make slaves of all the captives they take in war. Now, before they had an opportunity of selling them to the white people,<sup>4</sup> they were often obliged to kill great multitudes, and when they had taken more than they could well employ in their own plantations, for fear they should rebel, and endanger their masters' safety.

2dly. Most crimes amongst them are punished by mulcts and fines; and if the offender has not wherewithal to pay the fine, he is sold for a slave; this is the practice of the inland people, as well as those on the seaside.

3dly. Debtors who refuse to pay their debts, or are insolvent, are likewise liable to be made slaves; but their friends may redeem them: and if they not able or willing to do it, then they are generally sold for the benefit of their creditors. But few of these come into the hands of the Europeans, being kept by their countrymen for their own use.

4thly. I have been told that it is common for some inland people to sell their children for slaves, though they are under no necessity for so doing; which I am inclined to believe. But I never observed that the people near the sea coast practice this, unless compelled thereto by extreme want and famine, as the people of Whidaw<sup>5</sup> have lately been.



Now by these means it is that so many of the Negroes become slaves, and specifically by being taken captive in war. Of these the number is so great that I may safely affirm without any exaggeration that the Europeans of all nations that trade to the coast of Guinea have in some years exported at least seventy thousand. And though this may no doubt be thought at first hearing a prodigious number; yet when 'tis considered how great the extent of this coast is, namely from Cape Verde to Angola, which is about four thousand miles in length; and that polygamy is allowed in general amongst them, by which means the countries are full of people, I hope it will not be thought improbable that so many are yearly exported from thence.

Several objections have often been raised against the lawfulness of this trade, which I shall not here undertake to refute. I shall only observe in general, that though to traffic in human creatures may at first sight appear barbarous, inhuman, and unnatural; yet the traders herein have as much to plead in their own excuse as can be said for some other branches of trade, namely, the advantage of it: and that not in regard of the merchants, but also of the slaves themselves,<sup>6</sup> as will plainly appear from these following reasons.

First, it is evident, that abundance of captives taken in war would be inhumanly destroyed, was there not an opportunity of disposing of them to the Europeans. So that at least many lives are saved; and great numbers of useful persons kept in being.

Secondly, when they are carried to the plantations, they generally live much better there, than they ever did in their own country; for as the planters pay a great price for them, 'tis in their interest to take care of them.<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, by this means the English plantations have been so much improved, that 'tis almost incredible, what great advantages have accrued to the nation thereby; especially to the Sugar Islands,<sup>8</sup> which lying in a climate near as hot as the coast of Guinea, the Negroes are fitter to cultivate the lands there, than white people.

Then as to the criminals amongst the Negroes, they are by this means effectually transported, never to return again; a benefit which

we very much want here.<sup>9</sup>

In a word, from this trade proceed benefits far outweighing all either real or pretended mischiefs and inconveniences. And, let the worst that can be said of it, it will be found, like all other earthly advantages, tempered with a mixture of good and evil.

I come now to give an account of the mutinies that have happened on board the ships where I have been.

These mutinies are generally occasioned by the sailors' ill usage of these poor people, when on board the ships wherein they are transported to our plantations. Wherever therefore I have commanded, it has been my principal care to have the Negroes on board my ship kindly used; and I have always strictly charged my white people to treat them with humanity and tenderness; in which I have usually found my account,<sup>1</sup> both in keeping them from mutinying, and preserving them in health.

And whereas it may seem strange, to those that are unacquainted with the method of managing them, how we can carry so many hundreds together in a small ship, and keep them in order, I shall just mention what is generally practiced. When we purchase grown people, I acquaint them by the interpreter that, now they are become my property, I think fit to let them know what they are bought for, that they may be easy in their minds (for these poor people are generally under terrible apprehensions upon their being bought by white men, many being afraid that we design to eat them; which, I have been told, is a story much credited by the inland Negroes).<sup>2</sup> So after informing them, that they are bought to till the ground in our country, with several other matters, I then acquaint them how they are to behave themselves on board towards the white men; that if any one abuses them, they are to complain to the linguist,<sup>3</sup> who is to inform me of it, and I will do them justice; but if they make a disturbance, or offer to strike a white man, they must expect to be severely punished.

When we purchase the Negroes, we couple the sturdy men together with irons; but we suffer the women and children to go

freely about; and soon after we have sailed from the coast, we undo all the men's irons.<sup>4</sup>

They are fed twice a day, and are allowed in fair weather to come on deck at seven a clock in the morning, and to remain there, if they think proper, till sun setting. Every Monday morning they are served with pipes and tobacco, which they are very fond of. The men Negroes lodge separate from the women and children: and the places where they all lie are cleaned every day, some white men being appointed to see them do it.

\* \* \*

I have been several voyages when there has been no attempt made by our Negroes to mutiny; which, I believe, was owing chiefly to their being kindly used, and to my officers' care in keeping a good watch. But sometimes we meet with stout stubborn people amongst them, who are never to be made easy; and these are generally some of the Cormantines, a nation of the Gold Coast.<sup>5</sup> I went in the year 1721, in the *Henry* of London, a voyage to that part of the coast, and bought a good many of these people. We were obliged to secure them very well in irons, and watch them narrowly: Yet they nevertheless mutinied, though they had little prospect of succeeding. I lay at that time near a place called Mumfort<sup>6</sup> on the Gold Coast, having near five hundred Negroes on board, three hundred of which were men. Our ship's company consisted of fifty white people, all in health. And I had very good officers; so that I was very easy in all respects.

This mutiny began at midnight (the moon then shining very bright) in this manner. Two men that stood sentry at the forehatch way, where the men slaves came up to the house of office,<sup>7</sup> permitted four to go to that place; but neglected to lay the gratings again, as they should have done: whereupon four more Negroes came on deck, which had got their irons off, and the four in the house of office having done the same, all the eight fell on the two sentries, who immediately called out for help. The Negroes

endeavored to get their cutlasses from them, but the lineyards (that is the lines by which the handles of the cutlasses were fastened to the men's wrists) were so twisted in the scuffle that they could not get them off before we came to their assistance. The Negroes perceiving several white men coming towards them, with arms in their hands, quitted the sentries, and jumped over the ship's side into the sea.

I being by this time come forward on the deck, my first care was to secure the gratings, to prevent any more Negroes from coming up; and then I ordered people to get into the boat,<sup>8</sup> and save those that had jumped overboard, which they luckily did: for they found them all clinging to the cables the ship was moored by.

After we had secured these people, I called the linguists, and ordered them to bid the men Negroes between decks<sup>9</sup> be quiet (for there was a great noise amongst them). On their being silent, I asked what had induced them to mutiny? They answered, I was a great rogue to buy them, in order to carry them away from their own country; and that they were resolved to regain their liberty if possible. I replied that they had forfeited their freedom before I bought them, either by crimes, or by being taken in war, according to the custom of their country; and they being now my property, I was resolved to let them feel my resentment, if they abused my kindness; asking at the same time whether they had been ill used by the white men, or had wanted for anything the ship afforded. To this they replied, they had nothing to complain of. Then I observed to them that if they should gain their point<sup>1</sup> and escape to shore, it would be no advantage to them, because their countrymen would catch them, and sell them to other ships. This served my purpose, and they seemed to be convinced of their fault, begging I would forgive them, and promising for the future to be obedient and never mutiny again if I would not punish them this time. This I readily granted, and so they went to sleep. When daylight came we called the men Negroes up on deck, and examining their irons, found them all secure. So this affair happily ended, which I was very glad of; for these people are the stoutest and most sensible Negroes on the

coast; neither are they so weak<sup>2</sup> as to imagine as others do, that we buy them to eat them, being satisfied we carry them to work in our plantations, as they do in their own country.

However, a few days after this, we discovered they were plotting again, and preparing to mutiny. For some of the ringleaders proposed to one of our linguists, if he could procure them an ax, they would cut the cables the ship rid by<sup>3</sup> in the night; and so on her driving (as they imagined) ashore, they should get out of our hands, and then would become his servants as long as they lived.

For the better understanding of this I must observe here that these linguists are natives and freemen of the country, whom we hire on account of their speaking good English, during the time we remain trading on the coast; and they are likewise brokers between us and the Black merchants.

This linguist was so honest as to acquaint me with what had been proposed to him, and advised me to keep a strict watch over the slaves; for though he had represented to them the same as I had done on their mutinying before, that they would all be caught again, and sold to other ships, in case they could carry their point, and get on shore, yet it had no effect upon them.

This gave me a good deal of uneasiness. For I knew several voyages had proved unsuccessful by mutinies, as they occasioned either the total loss of the ships and the white men's lives; or at least by rendering it absolutely necessary to kill or wound a great number of the slaves, in order to prevent a total destruction. Moreover, I knew many of these Cormantine Negroes despised punishment, and even death itself; it having often happened at Barbados and other islands, that on their being any ways hardly dealt with to break them of their stubbornness in refusing to work, twenty or more have hanged themselves at a time in a plantation.

## Endnotes

1734

- Note 1: In its entirety, the title page reads, "A new account of some parts of Guinea, and the slave-trade, containing I. The

history of the late conquest of the Kingdom of Whidaw by the King of Dahomè. The Author's Journey to the Conqueror's C where he saw several Captives sacrificed, &c. II. The manner how the negroes become slaves. The Numbers of them yearly exported from Guinea to America. The Lawfulness of that Trade. The Mutinies among them on board the Ships where the Author has been, &c. III. A relation of the author's being taken by pirates, and the many Dangers he underwent." [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Snelgrave's *New Account* is divided into three books, of which this is the second. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: General name for the vast region in West Africa that lies along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: While current scholarship and accounts of the period bear out Snelgrave's assertion that Europeans primarily trafficked in people captured by African raiders, the transatlantic system of enslavement also relied on a crucial element not mentioned by him but stressed by many observers, such as Anthony Benezet (see below): European companies, operating out of numerous forts along the coast of Africa, often deliberately fomented wars between African nations in order to increase the number of prisoners of war to be enslaved. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Anglicized spelling of Xwéda (in the Yoruba language), a kingdom conquered and annexed by the Kingdom of Dahomey in 1727, in territory occupied in the present day by the Republic of Benin. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Snelgrave lists several commonly alleged "advantages" that enslavement conferred on Africans taken in the trade, though he omits perhaps the most commonly argued one: their potential conversion to Christianity. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Snelgrave's account is contradicted by present historians' estimates of extremely high rates of mortality, malnutrition, and disease, as well as accounts of wretched working and living conditions, endured by enslaved people on

sugar plantations in British and other European colonies in the Caribbean.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Islands in the Caribbean, principally Jamaica and Barbados, where British-controlled production of sugar was centered.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Snelgrave compares the enslavement of people found guilty of crimes in Africa to the penal transportation of convicted people from Britain to the colonies, often as indentured servants who were bound to a “master” to labor for a set period of time, a status that prisoners could accept as an alternative to being publicly hanged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Found to be to my advantage. “Used”: treated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Olaudah Equiano, himself from inland Africa, testifies to this belief in his own account of the Middle Passage (see p. 1090).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The interpreter just mentioned.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Snelgrave’s practice of unchaining captive Africans aboard ship would have been highly unusual; throughout his account, he oscillates between describing what is generally done by slavers to their captives and describing what he thinks are his own exceptionally humane methods.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Region along the upper coast of the Gulf of Guinea, from which gold and other natural resources extracted from inland were shipped. “Cormantines”: a term used by the English (after Fort Kormantine, used by enslavers in what is now central Ghana) for people of the Akan ethnic group, whose homeland is in what is now Ghana and the Ivory Coast.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mumford, now a town in central Ghana.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The outhouse toilet on deck. “Forehatch”: hatch opening to below decks near the front of a ship.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A smaller boat lowered from the ship.[Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: Space in the hull between two inner decks of a ship.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Succeed in their attempt.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Foolish. "Stoutest and most sensible": the reputation for prowess and intelligence of the people whom Snelgrave and other English people called Cormantines was long acknowledged, and furnishes one basis for the heroism of the protagonist of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (see p. 152).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A ship is said to "ride at anchor" when it is moored.[Return to reference 3](#)



## ANTHONY BENEZET

Born in France to Protestant parents, the educator, pacifist, abolitionist, and author Anthony Benezet (1713–1784) lived as a boy in London among members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and when his family emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1731, he developed ties with the Friends in Philadelphia, and built his career there. He founded a free school for Black people in Philadelphia in 1770, and in 1775, the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (later known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society), but his work as an activist began years earlier. Benezet's abolitionism grew from a long tradition of Quaker leadership in objecting to the trade in enslaved people, going back to the late seventeenth century, when a protest against it was launched in 1688 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. By Benezet's time, Quaker rules restricted members from participating in the trade, a position he helped publicize in 1759 with his *Observations on the Inslaving, Importing, and Purchasing of Negroes . . . from the Yearly-Meeting of the People Called Quakers*. He next published *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (1766), which he subsequently revised and expanded, and finally produced *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1772), which repeats and expands passages of his earlier work yet further. In many ways, thanks to figures like Benezet, the abolitionist movement was underway in North America earlier than it was in Britain, where it gathered momentum in the 1780s.

Like Benezet's texts leading up to it, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* builds its case against enslavement by quoting arguments by other writers at length, and appending extensive selections from other polemics. It also describes the rich customs and cultures of numerous African societies to refute arguments made by enslavers (such as William Snelgrave; see above) that Africans are better off

enslaved on colonial sugar plantations. Benezet takes special care to analyze the way in which the trade operates in its entirety, not stopping with the observation that enslaved people taken by Europeans are often prisoners captured in African wars. He emphasizes how European traders encourage African elites to start conflicts and conduct raids into their enemies' territories for the sole purpose of supplying the trade. The presence and incentives of European traffickers have thus corrupted the nations of Africa. Finally, Benezet insists, to a degree unusual even among White abolitionists of his time, that Africans are endowed with talents and intelligence equal to those of people of European or any other descent, and that any appearances to the contrary derive from the dehumanizing effects of enslavement. This antiracist conviction had a profound moral influence on future abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846), who considered Benezet a “venerable man” whose authority and experience as an educator amply testify to the fact that Black people “were as capable of the highest intellectual attainments” as any other human beings. In the excerpts below from *Some Account of Guinea*, Benezet passionately conjoins a statistical account of the enormity of suffering caused by enslavement with a dramatic awareness of that suffering's embodiment in the experience of individual Africans.

## ***From Some Historical Account of Guinea***

## ***Introduction***

The slavery of the Negroes having of late drawn the attention of many serious-minded people, several tracts have been published setting forth its inconsistency with every Christian and moral virtue, which it is hoped will have weight with the judicious, especially at a time when the liberties of mankind are become so much the subject of general attention. For the satisfaction of the serious enquirer who may not have the opportunity of seeing those tracts, and such others who are sincerely desirous that the iniquity of this practice may become effectually apparent to those in whose power it may be to put a stop to any farther progress therein, it is proposed hereby to republish the most material parts of said tracts;<sup>1</sup> and in order to enable the reader to form a true judgment of this matter, which, though so very important, is generally disregarded, or so artfully misrepresented by those whose interest leads them to vindicate it, as to bias the opinions of people otherwise upright; some account will be here given of the different parts of Africa, from which the Negroes are brought to America; with an impartial relation from what motives the Europeans were first induced to undertake and have since continued this iniquitous traffic.<sup>2</sup> And here it will not be improper to premise, that though wars, arising from the common depravity of human nature, have happened as well among the Negroes as other nations, and the weak sometimes been made captives to the strong; yet nothing appears, in the various relations of the intercourse and trade for a long time carried on by the Europeans on that coast, which would induce us to believe, that there is any real foundation for that argument so commonly advanced in vindication of that trade, viz. that the slavery of the Negroes took its rise from a desire in the purchasers to save the lives of such of them as were taken captives in war, who would otherwise have been sacrificed to the implacable revenge of their conquerors.<sup>3</sup> A plea which, when compared with the history of those times, will appear to be destitute of truth; and to have been advanced, and urged, principally by such as were concerned in

reaping the gain of this infamous traffic, as a palliation of that against which their own reason and conscience must have raised fearful objections.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: At the end of his book, Benezet gathers arguments against slavery by several writers, including the English abolitionist Granville Sharp (1735–1813), Scottish jurist George Wallace (1727–1805), Irish-Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), English Baptist minister James Foster (1697–1753), the American physician and (later) Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress Arthur Lee (1740–1792, not identified by name by Benezet), and the bishop of Gloucester, William Warburton (1698–1779). Benezet had also included many of these texts as appendices to his earlier antislavery tracts.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Several chapters of *Some Historical Account of Guinea* describe different cultures in West Africa, as well as accounts of the origins of the Portuguese and English trade in enslaved people.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: For a version of this argument, see William Snelgrave, above.[Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 13**

When the vessels arrive at their destined port in the colonies,<sup>4</sup> the poor Negroes are to be disposed of to the planters; and here they are again exposed naked, without any distinction of sexes, to the brutal examination of their purchasers; and this, it may well be judged, is, to many, another occasion of deep distress. Add to this, that near connections must now again be separated, to go with their several purchasers; this must be deeply affecting to all, but such whose hearts are seared by the love of gain. Mothers are seen hanging over their daughters, bedewing their naked breasts with tears, and daughters clinging to their parents, not knowing what new stage of distress must follow their separation, or whether they shall ever meet again. And here what sympathy, what commiseration, do they meet with? Why, indeed, if they will not separate as readily as their owners think proper, the whipper is called for, and the lash exercised upon their naked bodies, till obliged to part. Can any human heart which is not become callous by the practice of such cruelties be unconcerned, even at the relation of such grievous affliction, to which this oppressed part of our species are subjected.

In a book printed in Liverpool called *The Liverpool Memorandum*, which contains, amongst other things, an account of the trade of that port, there is an exact list of the vessels employed in the Guinea trade, and of the number of slaves imported in each vessel; by which it appears that in the year 1753,<sup>5</sup> the number imported to America by one hundred and one vessels belonging to that port amounted to upwards of thirty thousand; and from the number of vessels employed by the African Company in London and Bristol,<sup>6</sup> we may, with some degree of certainty, conclude, there are one hundred thousand Negroes purchased and brought on board our ships yearly from the coast of Africa. This is confirmed in Anderson's history of trade and commerce, lately printed; where it is said, "That England supplies her American colonies with Negro slaves, amounting in number to above one hundred thousand every year."<sup>7</sup> When the

vessels are full freighted with slaves, they sail for our plantations in America, and may be two or three months in the voyage; during which time, from the filth and stench that is among them, distempers frequently break out, which carry off commonly a fifth, a fourth, yea sometimes a third or more of them: so that taking all the slaves together that are brought on board our ships yearly, one may reasonably suppose that at least ten thousand of them die on the voyage. And in a printed account of the state of the Negroes in our plantations, it is supposed that a fourth part, more or less, die at the different islands, in what is called the seasoning.<sup>8</sup> Hence it may be presumed that at a moderate computation of the slaves who are purchased by our African merchants in a year, near thirty thousand die upon the voyage, and in the seasoning. Add to this the prodigious number who are killed in the incursions and intestine wars,<sup>9</sup> by which the Negroes procure the number of slaves wanted to load the vessels. How dreadful then is this slave trade, whereby so many thousands of our fellow creatures, free by nature, endued with the same rational faculties, and called to be heirs of the same salvation with us, lose their lives, and are, truly and properly speaking, murdered every year! For it is not necessary, in order to convict a man of murder, to make it appear that he had an *intention* to commit murder; whoever does by unjust force or violence deprive another of his liberty, and, while he hath him in his power, continues so to oppress him by cruel treatment, as eventually to occasion his death, is actually guilty of murder. It is enough to make a thoughtful person tremble to think what a load of guilt lies upon our nation on this account; and that the blood of thousands of poor innocent creatures, murdered every year in the prosecution of this wicked trade, cries aloud to Heaven for vengeance. Were we to hear or read of a nation that destroyed every year, in some other way, as many human creatures as perish in this trade, we should certainly consider them as a very bloody, barbarous people; if it be alleged that the legislature hath encouraged and still does encourage this trade, it is answered, that no legislature on earth can alter the nature of things so as to make that to be right which is contrary to the law of God

(the supreme Legislator and Governor of the world) and opposeth the promulgation of the Gospel of *peace on earth, and good will to man*.<sup>1</sup> Injustice may be methodized and established by law, but still it will be injustice, as much as it was before; though its being so established may render men more insensible of the guilt, and more bold and secure in the perpetration of it.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: [Chapter 13](#) follows a chapter that excerpts journals of traders that document the brutality of the capture and transatlantic transport of enslaved Africans.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The book, printed for R. Williams, gives exact lists and statistics that document the trade in enslaved Africans by Liverpool's ships, though these pertain to the year 1752, not 1753 (the print date).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The African Company of Merchants, established by the African Company Act of 1750, replaced the Royal African Company in 1752 and operated out of three English ports, Liverpool, Bristol, and London.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
From Adam Anderson, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* (London, 1764), volume 2, Appendix, [p. 68](#) (slightly misquoted, though 100,000 is Anderson's figure), which describes the Triangle Trade and concludes, "this trade therefore is extremely profitable to England" (69). The website [slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org) now estimates the number of enslaved Africans taken in ships flying the British flag at over 40,000 per year during peak years of the British trade; the discrepancy between this and the higher number presented by Anderson and Benezet may have to do with their uncertainty regarding the structure of the trade after the demise of the Royal African Company in 1750.



[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The grueling, often fatal period of adjustment of enslaved Africans to labor and life in a European colony in the West Indies. "Printed account": Benezet does not cite the source he has in mind.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Civil wars, or wars between African nations and peoples.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Luke 2:14.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Chapter 14

Doubts may arise in the minds of some whether the foregoing accounts relating to the natural capacity and good disposition of the inhabitants of Guinea,<sup>2</sup> and of the violent manner in which they are said to be torn from their native land, are to be depended upon; as those Negroes who are brought to us are not heard to complain, and do but seldom manifest such a docility and quickness of parts, as is agreeable thereto.<sup>3</sup> But those who make these objections are desired to note the many discouragements the poor Africans labor under when brought from their native land. Let them consider that those afflicted strangers, though in an *enlightened Christian country*, have yet but little opportunity or encouragement to exert and improve their natural talents. They are constantly employed in servile labor; and the abject condition in which we see them naturally raises an idea of a superiority in ourselves; whence we are apt to look upon them as an ignorant and contemptible part of mankind. Add to this, that they meet with very little encouragement of freely conversing with such of the whites as might impart instruction to them. It is a fondness for wealth, for authority, or honor, which prompts most men in their endeavors to excel; but these motives can have little influence upon the minds of the Negroes, few of them having any reasonable prospect of any other than a state of slavery; so that, though their natural capacities were ever so good, they have neither inducement or opportunity to exert them to advantage. This naturally tends to depress their minds and sink their spirits into habits of idleness and sloth, which they would in all likelihood have been free from had they stood upon an equal footing with the white people. They are suffered,<sup>4</sup> with impunity, to cohabit together, without being married; and to part when solemnly engaged to one another as man and wife, notwithstanding the moral and religious laws of the land strictly prohibiting such practices. This naturally tends to beget apprehensions in the most thoughtful of those people, that we look upon them as a lower race, not worthy of the same care, nor liable to the same rewards and punishments as

ourselves. Nevertheless it may with truth be said, that both amongst those who have obtained their freedom, and those who remain in servitude, some have manifested a strong sagacity and an exemplary uprightness of heart. If this hath not been generally the case with them, is it a matter of surprise? Have we not reason to make the same complaint of many white servants when discharged from our service, though many of them have had much greater opportunities of knowledge and improvement than the blacks; who, even when free, labor under the same difficulties as before: having but little access to and intercourse with the most reputable white people, they remain confined within their former limits of conversation. And if they seldom complain of the unjust and cruel usage they have received, in being forced from their native country, &c. it is not to be wondered at; it being a considerable time after their arrival amongst us, before they can speak our language; and, by the time they are able to express themselves, they have great reason to believe that little or no notice would be taken of their complaints: yet let any person enquire of those who were capable of reflection, before they were brought from their native land, and he will hear such affecting relations, as, if not lost to the common feelings of humanity, will sensibly affect his heart. The case of a poor Negro, not long since brought from Guinea, is a recent instance of this kind. From his first arrival, he appeared thoughtful and dejected, frequently dropping tears when taking notice of his master's children, the cause of which was not known till he was able to speak English, when the account he gave of himself was that he had a wife and children in his own country; that some of these being sick and thirsty, he went in the night time, to fetch water at a spring, where he was violently seized and carried away by persons who lay in wait to catch men, from whence he was transported to America. The remembrance of his family, friends, and other connections, left behind, which he never expected to see any more, were the principal cause of his dejection and grief. Many cases, equally affecting, might be here mentioned; but one more instance, which fell under the notice of a person of credit,<sup>5</sup> will suffice. One of these

wretched creatures, then about 50 years of age, informed him, that being violently torn from a wife and several children in Guinea, he was sold in Jamaica, where never expecting to see his native land or family any more, he joined himself to a Negro woman, by whom he had two children: after some years, it suiting the interest of his owner to remove him, he was separated from his second wife and children, and brought to South Carolina, where, expecting to spend the remainder of his days, he engaged with a third wife, by whom he had another child; but here the same consequence of one man being subject to the will and pleasure of another man occurring, he was separated from this last wife and child, and brought into this country,<sup>6</sup> where he remained a slave. Can any whose mind is not rendered quite obdurate by the love of wealth hear these relations without being deeply touched with sympathy and sorrow? And doubtless the case of many, very many of these afflicted people, upon enquiry, would be found to be attended with circumstances equally tragical and aggravating. And if we enquire of those Negroes who were brought away from their native country when children, we shall find most of them to have been stolen away, when abroad from their parents, on the roads, in the woods, or watching their corn fields. Now you that have studied the book of conscience, and you that are learned in the law, what will you say to such deplorable cases? When, and how, have these oppressed people forfeited their liberty? Does not justice loudly call for its being restored to them? Have they not the same right to demand it as any of us should have, if we had been violently snatched by pirates from our native land? Is it not the duty of every dispenser of justice, who is not forgetful of his own humanity, to remember that these are men, and to declare them free? Where instances of such cruelty frequently occur, and are neither enquired into, nor redressed, by those whose duty it is *to seek judgment, and relieve the oppressed*, Isaiah i. 17. what can be expected, but that the groans and cries of these sufferers will reach Heaven; and what shall we do *when God riseth up? and when he visiteth*, what will ye answer him? *Did not he that made them, make us; and did not one fashion us in the womb?* Job xxxi. 14.

## Endnotes

1772

- Note 2: In his chapters on the cultures and governments of Africa, Benezet cites numerous sources that attest to the intelligence and moral character of Africans.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That matches the accounts of their strong intellects and good dispositions. "Parts": talents.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Permitted.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A trustworthy person.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pennsylvania.[Return to reference 6](#)

## CONFRONTING THE LAW

The 1770s saw a number of important cases and petitions challenging the legal status of slavery as an institution in Britain, its colonies, and, after 1776, the newly formed United States of America. The legal arena allowed enslaved and free Black people a significant opportunity to raise their voices and directly challenge the laws and nations that oppressed them. In Britain, the famous and far-reaching *Somerset* decision came early in the decade. James Somerset (born ca. 1741) was a Black man brought to England from Boston by his enslaver Charles Stewart in 1769. Baptized in England early in 1771, Somerset escaped from Stewart there but was recaptured later in the year and held in bondage on board a ship in the Thames bound for Jamaica. Somerset's three British godparents, sympathetic to the cause of abolition, challenged Somerset's abduction in the English Court of King's Bench, enlisting the help of the most famous British abolitionist of the day, Granville Sharp (1735–1815). The judge, William Murray, Lord Mansfield (1705–1793), finally ruled in 1772 to set Somerset free. Abolitionists and supporters of Somerset celebrated the decision in London as a major blow against slavery that effectively determined that it could not exist in England. But Mansfield's ruling was deliberately narrow. Some legal scholars think that its principal intent was simply to prevent "masters" (as the ruling calls them) from forcibly removing anyone they controlled—whether servants or enslaved people—from England. Also, Mansfield acknowledges that "positive law" could institute slavery, as it had indeed done in Virginia, Jamaica, and other British colonies. Still, some historians have suggested that the ruling panicked proslavery North Americans who thought it could lead to abolition throughout British dominions, and so led them to support the coming American War of Independence. Other historians have pointed out that Crown-appointed governors consistently vetoed efforts by some American colonial legislatures, inspired by the *Somerset* ruling, to end or curtail slavery themselves. In any

case, slavery would remain legal in British colonies some six decades after the ruling, not ending in most parts of the empire until 1833.

Among those inspired by the *Somerset* decision were the Black authors of a sequence of five antislavery petitions to the legislature of the province, then the state, of Massachusetts through the 1770s. The first of these, below, was submitted on January 6, 1773 and signed simply by “Felix”—a Latin name meaning happy, or fortunate—a writer who is otherwise unknown. (Some speculate that its author may be Felix Holbrook, an activist who was among the Black cosigners of another petition for the same cause a few months later.) He adopts a supplicatory tone in his address to Crown-appointed governor Thomas Hutchinson and the Massachusetts General Court, but he plainly and dramatically describes the dehumanizing condition of enslavement and asserts the dignity and natural rights of Black people. A subsequent petition, below, adopts an altogether more confrontational tone. It was presented by Prince Hall (ca. 1735/7–1807) and seven other Black Americans just months after the Declaration of Independence had created a new nation. The petition has been seen as the first time the Declaration’s ideals of liberty and natural rights were expanded beyond the context of Americans’ struggle against the British Empire. Hall and his copetitioners invoke these ideals instead to expose grave injustices within the new United States itself. They insist that, by permitting slavery, the new nation exists in gross disharmony with its own founding principles. A free man by 1770, Hall was a leader of his community in Boston and wrote numerous subsequent petitions, articles, and speeches supportive of Black people and protective of their rights. These petitions by Black authors did not lead to any legislative successes. But they doubtless influenced the Massachusetts State Constitution (ratified 1780), which declared that “all men are born free and equal”—language that would directly allow a constitutional ruling in 1783 that made slavery illegal in the state. The final legal document below indicates that even within Britain, enslavement subsisted after the *Somerset* case. The great man of letters Samuel Johnson wrote this brief in 1777 on behalf of Joseph Knight, a Black man enslaved

in Scotland who sought to leave the man who held him. Johnson's brief echoes Locke's account of slavery, extends the logic of Mansfield's *Somerset* ruling by calling the laws supporting slavery in Jamaica "merely positive," and, like Prince Hall, disputes the acceptability of slavery in general by invoking "the rights of mankind" and insisting that all people are "by nature free."





# **WILLIAM MURRAY, LORD MANSFIELD**

## **The *Somerset* Ruling<sup>1</sup>**

***Trinity Term, June 22, 1772***

Lord Mansfield—On the part of Somerset, the case which we gave notice should be decided this day, the court now proceeds to give its opinion. I shall recite the return to the writ of *habeas corpus*, as the ground of our determination; omitting only words of form.<sup>2</sup> The captain of the ship on board of which the Negro was taken makes his return to the writ in terms signifying that there have been, and still are, slaves to a great number in Africa; and that the trade in them is authorized by the laws and opinions<sup>3</sup> of Virginia and Jamaica; that they are goods and chattels; and, as such, saleable and sold. That James Somerset is a Negro of Africa, and long before the return of the king's writ was brought to be sold, and was sold to Charles Stewart, Esq. then in Jamaica, and has not been manumitted<sup>4</sup> since; that Mr. Stewart, having occasion to transact business, came over hither, with an intention to return; and brought Somerset to attend and abide with him, and to carry him back as soon as the business should be transacted. That such intention has been, and still continues; and that the Negro did remain till the time of his departure in the service of his master Mr. Stewart, and quitted it without his consent; and thereupon, before the return of the king's writ, the said Charles Stewart did commit the slave on board the *Anne and Mary*,<sup>5</sup> to safe custody, to be kept till he should set sail, and then to be taken with him to Jamaica, and there sold as a slave. And this is the cause why he, Captain Knowles, who was then and now is, commander of the above vessel, then and now lying in the river of Thames, did the said Negro, committed to his custody, detain; and on which he now renders him to the orders of the court.

We pay all due attention to the opinion of Sir Philip Yorke, and Lord Chief Justice Talbot,<sup>6</sup> whereby they pledged themselves to the British planters, for all the legal consequences of slaves coming over to this kingdom or being baptized, recognized by Lord Hardwicke, sitting as Chancellor on the 19th of October, 1749, that trover would lie;<sup>7</sup> that a notion had prevailed, if a Negro came over, or became a Christian, he was emancipated, but no ground in law:<sup>8</sup> that he and Lord Talbot, when Attorney- and Solicitor-General,<sup>9</sup> were of opinion, that no such claim for freedom was valid; that though the Statute of Tenures had abolished villeins<sup>1</sup> regardant to a manor, yet he did not conceive but that a man might still become a villein in gross,<sup>2</sup> by confessing himself such in open court. We are so well agreed that we think there is no occasion of having it argued (as I had intimated an intention at first) before all the judges, as is usual, for obvious reasons, on a return to a *habeas corpus*;<sup>3</sup> the only question before us is, whether the cause on the return is sufficient? If it is, the Negro must be remanded; if it is not, he must be discharged. Accordingly, the return states, that the slave departed and refused to serve; whereupon he was kept to be sold abroad. So high an act of dominion must be recognized by the law of the country where it is used. The power of a master over his slave has been extremely different in different countries. The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political, but only by positive law, which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory. It is so odious, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law.<sup>4</sup> Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from the decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England;<sup>5</sup> and therefore the black must be discharged.

## Endnotes

1772, 1776

- Note 1: An authoritative transcript of the decision, from which the text is taken, appeared in *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench* (1776) compiled by Capel Lofft (1751–1824).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Legal formulae. "Return": the legal reply to the court by John Knowles, the captain of the ship where James Somerset was held after being recaptured. "Writ of *habeas corpus*": legal document enacting *habeas corpus* (Latin; literally, "you have the body"). Such a writ, produced by a court, demands that a prisoner be brought before it to determine the legality of the prisoner's detention. "Ground": basis. Judge Mansfield declares he will summarize, as the basis of his decision, the answer of Knowles to the court's writ of *habeas corpus*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Legal opinions of the courts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legally freed. "King's writ": the answer to the court's writ, in the name of the king, of *habeas corpus*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The ship captained by Knowles on which Somerset was held in bondage after he was recaptured.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Charles Talbot, first baron Talbot (1685–1737), British lawyer and government minister. Sir Philip Yorke (1690–1764), later first Earl of Hardwicke, British lawyer and minister, offered an opinion with Talbot in 1729 that slavery was allowed under English law and that neither becoming baptized nor coming to Britain would immediately free an enslaved person, who could be forcibly transported back to the colonies. Though the Yorke-Talbot opinion was not legally binding and cited no legal precedents or rationale, it was widely accepted, especially by enslavers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The legal claim of possession (trover) would be sustainable.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The common assumption among the British that if baptized, or upon moving to Britain, an enslaved person would immediately be free, had no basis in law.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The attorney-general and solicitor-general are senior legal advisors to the Crown.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Under British medieval law, villeins were serfs bound for life to work at a manor: though they had more rights than enslaved people, they lay under heavy legal restrictions, could not move from the land where they were bound to work, and often inherited their status from their parents. “Statute of Tenures”: another name for the Tenure Abolition Act of 1660, which changed the nature of titles to land.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unlike a villein bound to a manor, a villein in gross was bound to a particular lord; Mansfield compares this to the relationship of Somerset to Stewart and points out that the Tenure Abolition Act did not affect the legal standing of such a relationship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mansfield says he accepts the soundness of all this legal reasoning, so there is no reason to argue in court about Stewart and Knowles’s return to the court’s writ; the only question that remains is whether the return’s reasoning is strong enough to justify slavery in Britain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Mansfield’s ruling suggests that tradition alone, the assumptions of common law, or mere legal opinions such as that of Yorke and Talbot are not enough to justify the institution of slavery in a country. He indicates that in places where positive laws concerning slavery do exist, such as Virginia and Jamaica, it has a sufficient legal basis.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mansfield’s reference to the law of England seemed to leave the question of slavery open in other parts of Britain, though later in the decade the Joseph Knight case in Scotland (see Samuel Johnson, below) referred to the *Somerset* decision as a precedent.[Return to reference 5](#)

# FELIX'S PETITION<sup>1</sup>

Province of the Massachusetts Bay to His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq; Governor; to the Honorable His Majesty's Council, and to the Honorable House of Representatives<sup>2</sup> in General Court assembled at Boston, the 6th Day of January, 1773. The humble petition of many slaves, living in the town of Boston, and other towns in the Province is this, namely that your Excellency and Honors, and the honorable [. . .] Representatives, would be pleased to take their unhappy state and condition under your wise and just consideration.

We desire to bless God, who loves mankind, who sent his son to die for their salvation, and who is no respecter of persons;<sup>3</sup> that he hath lately put it into the hearts of multitudes on both sides of the water, to bear our burthens, some of whom are men of great note and influence; who have pleaded our cause with arguments which we hope will have their weight with this honorable court.<sup>4</sup>

We presume not to dictate to your excellency and honors, being willing to rest our cause on your humanity and justice; yet would beg leave to say a word or two on the subject. Although some of the Negroes are vicious (who doubtless may be punished and restrained by the same laws which are in force against other of the king's subjects) there are many others of a quite different character, and who, if made free, would soon be able as well as willing to bear a part in the public charges; many of them of good natural parts,<sup>5</sup> are discreet, sober, honest, and industrious; and may it not be said of many, that they are virtuous and religious, although their condition is in itself so unfriendly to religion, and every moral virtue except patience. How many of that number have there been, and now are in this province, who have had every day of their lives embittered with this most intolerable reflection, that, let their behavior be what it will, neither they, nor their children to all generations, shall ever be

able to do, or to possess and enjoy anything, no, not even life itself, but in a manner as the beasts that perish.<sup>6</sup>

We have no property! We have no wives! No children! We have no city! No country!<sup>7</sup> But we have a Father in heaven, and we are determined, as far as his grace shall enable us, and as far as our degraded contemptuous life will admit, to keep all his commandments: Especially will we be obedient to our masters, so long as God in his sovereign Providence shall suffer us to be holden in bondage.

It would be impudent, if not presumptuous in us, to suggest to your excellency and honors any law or laws proper to be made, in relation to our unhappy state, which, although our greatest unhappiness, is not our fault; and this gives us great encouragement to pray and hope for such relief as is consistent with your wisdom, justice, and goodness.

We think ourselves very happy that we may thus address the great and general court of this province, which great and good court is to us the best judge, under God, of what is wise, just, and good.

We humbly beg leave to add but this one thing more: we pray for such relief only, which by no possibility can ever be productive of the least wrong or injury to our masters; but to us will be as life from the dead.

Signed,  
FELIX

1773

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The petition was printed in Boston in an antislavery tract, *The Appendix: Or, Some Observations on the Expediency of the Petition of the Africans, Living in Boston &c., Lately Presented to the General Assembly of This Province* (1773).[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: The Massachusetts House of Representatives, the lower house of the Massachusetts General Court, was composed of representatives elected by the towns in the Royal Province of Massachusetts Bay (1692–1774). “His Majesty’s Council”: the Massachusetts Council consisted of twenty-eight members who were elected by the General Court but whose election was subject to the veto of the royal governor. “Thomas Hutchinson”: Hutchinson (1711–1780), royal governor of Massachusetts Bay (1771–74) appointed by the king, was a prominent Loyalist politician and focus of radicals’ anger in Massachusetts.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Makes no distinctions among people according to their rank, wealth, or social importance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Felix likely refers to numerous abolitionists in North America and Britain, including Anthony Benezet of Philadelphia and Granville Sharp, who argued on behalf of James Somerset in the *Somerset* case in British court in 1772.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Talents and abilities. “Public charges”: taxes to support public projects and the poor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Psalms 49:12 and 20.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Treated as property and having no legal status as citizens, enslaved people strictly speaking have no city or country, and likewise do not have marital or parental relations acknowledged by the laws.[Return to reference 7](#)



# PRINCE HALL<sup>1</sup>

## [A Petition to the State of Massachusetts]

To the Honorable Counsel & House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts Bay<sup>2</sup> in General Court assembled, January 13, 1777:

The petition of a great number of Blacks detained in a state of slavery in the bowels of a free and Christian country humbly sheweth that your petitioners apprehend that they have, in common with all other men, a natural and unalienable right to that freedom which the Great Parent of the Universe hath bestowed equally on all mankind, and which they have never forfeited by any compact or agreement<sup>3</sup> whatever—but they were unjustly dragged by the hand of cruel power from their dearest friends, and some of them even torn from the embraces of their tender parents—from a populous, pleasant, and plentiful country; and, in violation of laws of nature and of nations, and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity, brought here either to be sold like beast[s] of burthen, and like them condemned to slavery for life—among a people professing the religion of Jesus, a people not insensible of the secrets of rationable being, nor without spirit to resent the unjust endeavors of others to reduce them to a state of bondage and subjection.<sup>4</sup> Your honors need not to be informed that a life of slavery like that of your petitioners, deprived of every social privilege, of everything requisite to render life tolerable, is far worse than nonexistence.

In imitation of the laudable example of the good people of these States, your petitioners have long and patiently waited the event of petition after petition,<sup>5</sup> by them presented to the legislative body of this state, and cannot but with grief reflect that their success hath been but too similar.<sup>6</sup> They cannot but express their astonishment

that it has never been considered that every principle from which America has acted in the course of their unhappy difficulties with Great Britain pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your petitioners. They therefore humbly beseech your honors to give this petition its due weight and consideration, and cause an act of the legislature to be passed whereby they may be restored to the enjoyments of that which is the natural right of all men—and their children, who were born in this land of liberty, may not be held as slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty-one years. So may the inhabitants of these states be no longer chargeable with the inconsistency of acting themselves the part which they condemn and oppose in others. Be prospered in their present glorious struggle for liberty<sup>7</sup> and have those blessings to them, &c.

## Endnotes

1777

- Note 1: Though historians often single out Prince Hall as the petition's principal author, its signers include seven other Black Bostonians: Peter Bestes (who was primary signatory of an earlier petition submitted in April 1773), Lancaster Hill, Brister Slensen (or Slenser), Jack Pierpont, Nero Sunelo, Newport Sumner, and Job Lock. The following is transcribed, with spelling and punctuation regularized, from a manuscript now held by the Massachusetts Historical Society.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: After the Declaration of Independence of 1776, Massachusetts had become a member state of the United States of America, retaining its governmental structure from colonial times of a Council of twenty-eight elected members, and a lower House of Representatives. After the state constitution was ratified in 1780, a State Senate would constitute the upper house.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hall and the cosigners refer to the common idea, invoked by John Locke and other political theorists, that one can agree by contract to forfeit one's freedom to another (though

Locke denied that one could contract oneself to enslavement).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The petition directly alludes to the White North American colonists' rhetoric in their ongoing struggles against their subjugation to the British Crown. "Rationable": reasonable, or having the capacity of reason.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: At least four petitions by Black Americans and their supporters to end enslavement had been submitted to and rejected by the Crown-appointed governors of Massachusetts Bay.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The petition again alludes to the struggles of the former colonies, who sent numerous petitions to the British Crown asking for their grievances to be redressed. The unsatisfactory responses to these petitions led to the American War of Independence.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: When Hall and the rest submitted their petition in January 1777, the outcome of the War of Independence was uncertain. After a bad year, General George Washington had just won the Battle of Trenton (December 1776), which boosted morale; later in 1777, in October, the Continental Army would gain a yet more significant victory at Saratoga.[Return to reference 7](#)

# **SAMUEL JOHNSON**

## **[A Brief in Support of Joseph Knight]<sup>[1](#)</sup>**

It must be agreed that in most ages many countries have had part of their inhabitants in a state of slavery; yet it may be doubted whether slavery can ever be supposed the natural condition of man. It is impossible not to conceive that men in their original state were equal; and very difficult to imagine how one would be subjected to another but by violent compulsion. An individual may, indeed, forfeit his liberty by a crime; but he cannot by that crime forfeit the liberty of his children. What is true of a criminal seems true likewise of a captive. A man may accept life from a conquering enemy on condition of perpetual servitude; but it is very doubtful whether he can entail that servitude on his descendants; for no man can stipulate without commission for another. The condition which he himself accepts, his son or grandson perhaps would have rejected. If we should admit, what perhaps may with more reason be denied, that there are certain relations between man and man which may make slavery necessary and just, yet it can never be proved that he who is now suing for his freedom ever stood in any of those relations. He is certainly subject by no law, but that of violence, to his present master;<sup>[2](#)</sup> who pretends no claim to his obedience, but that he bought him from a merchant of slaves, whose right to sell him never was examined. It is said that according to the constitutions of Jamaica he was legally enslaved; these constitutions are merely positive;<sup>[3](#)</sup> and apparently injurious to the rights of mankind, because whoever is exposed to sale is condemned to slavery without appeal; by whatever fraud or violence he might have been originally brought into the merchant's power. In our own time princes have been sold, by wretches to whose care they were

entrusted, that they might have an European education; but when once they were brought to a market in the plantations, little would avail either their dignity or their wrongs.<sup>4</sup> The laws of Jamaica afford a Negro no redress. His color is considered as a sufficient testimony against him. It is to be lamented that moral right should ever give way to political convenience. But if temptations of interest are sometimes too strong for human virtue, let us at least retain a virtue where there is no temptation to quit it. In the present case there is apparent right on one side, and no convenience on the other. Inhabitants of this island can neither gain riches nor power by taking away the liberty of any part of the human species. The sum of the argument is this:—No man is by nature the property of another: The defendant is, therefore, by nature free: The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can be justly taken away: That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved; and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not but the justice of the court will declare him free.

## 1777**Endnotes**

1792

- Note 1:  
Johnson, a fierce opponent of slavery, dictated this brief to his biographer James Boswell, who worked on Knight's legal team, and who himself initially espoused but later opposed the abolitionist cause (see [p. 981](#)). The brief supports the appeal of Joseph Knight (born ca. 1753), a Black man who lived enslaved in Scotland. After reading of the *Somerset* decision (see above), he asserted his freedom. In 1778, a Scottish court finally found in favor of Knight, with one of the judges, Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck (James Boswell's father), declaring slavery "unchristian," and Knight "our brother."  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Knight was born in West Africa, taken by enslavers to Jamaica, and transferred, after payment, to a Captain Knight. He was then taken, after payment, by John Wedderburn of

Scotland, around 1766, who returned to Scotland with Knight around 1768.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Compare Lord Mansfield in the *Somerset* decision, who declares that only “positive law”—not common-law traditions but laws on the books—could institute an enslaving system. Here Johnson calls such laws “merely positive,” or artificial and arbitrarily imposed, as contrasted with the laws of nature.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Johnson alludes to William Ansah Sessarakoo (ca. 1736–1770), an African prince born near Annamaboe (now Anomabu), West Africa, who was betrayed into enslavement in Barbados in 1744 by a British sea captain who had promised to bring him to London to be educated. Learning of the betrayal, the Royal African Company freed him. The British press widely reported an incident in 1749 in which Sessarakoo and an African companion attended a performance of Thomas Southerne’s play *Oroonoko, a Tragedy* (adapted from Aphra Behn’s novella), and left at the end of the fourth act in tears.  
[Return to reference 4](#)

## OTTOBAH CUGOANO

In 1787, Ottobah Cugoano (ca. 1757–after 1791) published the *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, one of the most searing, uncompromising indictments of slavery of his time. It appeared two years before another important abolitionist work by his friend and fellow Black activist, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789; see [p. 1081](#)). Cugoano's book is an impassioned philosophical, political, and religious polemic against the traffic in human beings, introduced by a brief description of his life in and abduction from West Africa. He relates that he spent "nine or ten months in the slave gang in Grenada, and about one year at different places in the West-Indies" before being brought to England at the end of 1772, where he learned to read and write and was baptized in 1773, under the name John Stuart, at age sixteen. After that, he was freed from enslavement and is known to have worked as a paid servant to the painters Robert and Maria Cosway, a position that opened the door to his correspondence with a number of important people, including George III himself, Edmund Burke, and the abolitionist Granville Sharp. In London he also met Equiano and other Black campaigners against slavery, and with them formed the Sons of Africa, a group of radicals, now recognized as the first Black political organization in Britain, who wrote letters to London newspapers advocating abolition of the transatlantic trade and of slavery itself. Two years after his *Thoughts and Sentiments* appeared, he published a shortened version of it in 1791, then disappeared from the historical record.

Unlike Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, which gains readers' sympathies by portraying its author as a gentle person brutalized by enslavers' inhumanity, Cugoano sustains a contemptuous outrage at the criminality of human trafficking. He attacks specific pamphlets that sought to justify slavery and enjoys the idea of seeing enslavers

“roasted, saddled, and bridled” like pigs and horses, a form of well-deserved or “condign punishment,” in which the victimizer becomes the victim. Like Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, and many other people who had experienced enslavement, Cugoano warmly embraces the religion of the Europeans. But in his hands, Christianity becomes a weapon of denunciation, a way to expose not only the barbarity of those actually perpetrating the trade but also the complacent hypocrisy of ordinary Britons who allow it to continue. Along the way, he relates “the history of those dreadfully perfidious methods of forming settlements and acquiring riches and territory” by Europeans in the Americas at fatal cost to Indigenous peoples, and compares and contrasts the suffering endured by the poor in European countries and that of enslaved people. By emphasizing the guilt accrued by Europeans on both sides of the Atlantic for their “horrible injustice and barbarous cruelty” in the name of their Christianity, Cugoano achieves a militancy unique among early Black abolitionists.



# ***From Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species***

## **[CRIMES OF THE TRADE; CUGOANO'S EARLY LIFE]**

No necessity, or any situation of men, however poor, pitiful and wretched they may be, can warrant them to rob others, or oblige them to become thieves, because they are poor, miserable and wretched. But the robbers of men,<sup>1</sup> the kidnappers, ensnarers, and slave-holders who take away the common rights and privileges of others to support and enrich themselves, are universally those pitiful and detestable wretches; for the ensnaring of others, and taking away their liberty by slavery and oppression, is the worst kind of robbery, as most opposite to every precept and injunction of the Divine Law, and contrary to that command which enjoins that *all men should love their neighbors as themselves, and that they should do unto others, as they would that men should do to them.*<sup>2</sup> As to any other laws that slave-holders may make among themselves, as respecting slaves, they can be of no better kind, nor give them any better character, than what is implied in the common report—that there may be some honesty among thieves. This may seem a harsh comparison, but the parallel is so coincident that, I must say, I can find no other way of expressing my thoughts and sentiments, without making use of some harsh words and comparisons against the carriers on of such abandoned wickedness. But, in this little undertaking, I must humbly hope the impartial reader will excuse such defects as may arise from want<sup>3</sup> of better education; and as to the resentment of those who can lay their cruel lash upon the backs of thousands, for a thousand times less crimes than writing against their enormous wickedness and brutal avarice, [such] is what I may be sure to meet with.

However, it cannot but be very discouraging to a man of my complexion in such an attempt as this, to meet with the evil aspersions of some men, who say that an African is not entitled to any competent degree of knowledge, or capable of imbibing any sentiments of probity; and that nature designed him for some inferior link in the chain, fitted only to be a slave. But when I meet with those who make no scruple to deal with the human species, as with the beasts of the earth, I must think them not only brutish, but wicked and base; and that their aspersions are insidious and false. And if such men can boast of greater degrees of knowledge than any African is entitled to, I shall let them enjoy all the advantages of it unenvied, as I fear it consists only in a greater share of infidelity, and that of a blacker kind than only skin deep. And if their complexion be not what I may suppose, it is at least the nearest in resemblance to an infernal hue. A good man will neither speak nor do as a bad man will; but if a man is bad, it makes no difference whether he be a black or a white devil.

By some of such complexion, as whether black or white it matters not,<sup>4</sup> I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field. We lived but a few days' journey from the coast where we were kidnapped, and as we were decoyed and drove along, we were soon conducted to a factory,<sup>5</sup> and from thence, in the fashionable way of traffic, consigned to Grenada.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it may not be amiss to give a few remarks, as some account of myself, in this transposition of captivity.

I was born in the city of Agimaque, on the coast of Fantyn; my father was a companion to the chief in that part of the country of Fantee,<sup>7</sup> and when the old king died I was left in his house with his family; soon after I was sent for by his nephew, Ambro Accasa, who succeeded the old king in the chieftdom of that part of Fantee known by the name of Agimaque and Assinee.<sup>8</sup> I lived with his children, enjoying peace and tranquility, about twenty moons, which, according to their way of reckoning time, is two years. I was sent for to visit an uncle who lived at a considerable distance from

Agimaque. The first day after we set out we arrived at Assinee, and the third day at my uncle's habitation, where I lived about three months, and was then thinking of returning to my father and young companion at Agimaque; but by this time I had got well acquainted with some of the children of my uncle's hundreds of relations, and we were some days too venturesome in going into the woods to gather fruit and catch birds, and such amusements as pleased us. One day I refused to go with the rest, being rather apprehensive that something might happen to us; till one of my play-fellows said to me, "because you belong to the great men, you are afraid to venture your carcass, or else of the *bounsam*," which is the devil. This enraged me so much that I set a resolution to join the rest, and we went into the woods as usual; but we had not been above two hours before our troubles began, when several great ruffians came upon us suddenly, and said we had committed a fault against their lord, and we must go and answer for it ourselves before him.<sup>9</sup>

Some of us attempted in vain to run away, but pistols and cutlasses were soon introduced, threatening that if we offered to stir, we should all lie dead on the spot. One of them pretended to be more friendly than the rest, and said that he would speak to their lord to get us clear, and desired that we should follow him; we were then immediately divided into different parties, and drove after him. We were soon led out of the way which we knew, and towards the evening, as we came in sight of a town, they told us that this great man of theirs lived there, but pretended it was too late to go and see him that night. Next morning there came three other men, whose language differed from ours, and spoke to some of those who watched us all the night, but he that pretended to be our friend<sup>1</sup> with the great man, and some others, were gone away. We asked our keepers what these men had been saying to them, and they answered that they had been asking them and us together to go and feast with them that day, and that we must put off seeing the great man till after; little thinking that our doom was so nigh, or that these villains meant to feast on us as their prey. We went with them again about half a day's journey, and came to a great multitude of people,

having different music playing; and all the day after we got there, we were very merry with the music, dancing, and singing. Towards the evening, we were again persuaded that we could not get back to where the great man lived till next day; and when bedtime came, we were separated into different houses with different people. When the next morning came, I asked for the men that brought me there, and for the rest of my companions; and I was told that they were gone to the seaside to bring home some rum, guns, and powder,<sup>2</sup> and that some of my companions were gone with them, and that some were gone to the fields to do something or other. This gave me strong suspicion that there was some treachery in the case, and I began to think that my hopes of returning home again were all over. I soon became very uneasy, not knowing what to do, and refused to eat or drink for whole days together, till the man of the house told me that he would do all in his power to get me back to my uncle; then I eat a little fruit with him, and had some thoughts that I should be sought after, as I would be then missing at home about five or six days. I enquired every day if the men had come back, and for the rest of my companions, but could get no answer of any satisfaction. I was kept about six days at this man's house, and in the evening there was another man came and talked with him a good while, and I heard the one say to the other he must go, and the other said the sooner the better; that man came out and told me that he knew my relations at Agimaque, and that we must set out tomorrow morning, and he would convey me there. Accordingly we set out next day, and travelled till dark, when we came to a place where we had some supper and slept. He carried a large bag with some gold dust, which he said he had to buy some goods at the seaside to take with him to Agimaque. Next day we travelled on, and in the evening came to a town, where I saw several white people, which made me afraid that they would eat me, according to our notion as children in the inland parts of the country.<sup>3</sup> This made me rest very uneasy all the night, and next morning I had some victuals brought, desiring me to eat and make haste, as my guide and kidnapper told me that he had to go to the castle<sup>4</sup> with some

company that were going there, as he had told me before, to get some goods. After I was ordered out, the horrors I soon saw and felt cannot be well described; I saw many of my miserable countrymen chained two and two, some hand-cuffed, and some with their hands tied behind. We were conducted along by a guard, and when we arrived at the castle, I asked my guide what I was brought there for, he told me to learn the ways of the *browfow*, that is the white-faced people. I saw him take a gun, a piece of cloth, and some lead for me, and then he told me that he must now leave me there, and went off. This made me cry bitterly, but I was soon conducted to a prison, for three days, where I heard the groans and cries of many, and saw some of my fellow captives. But when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner. I have forgot the name of this infernal fort; but we were taken in the ship that came for us to another that was ready to sail from Cape Coast.<sup>5</sup> When we were put into the ship, we saw several Black merchants coming on board, but we were all drove into our holes, and not suffered to speak to any of them. In this situation we continued several days in sight of our native land; but I could find no good person to give any information of my situation to Accasa at Agimaque. And when we found ourselves at last taken away, death was more preferable than life, and a plan was concerted amongst us, that we might burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames; but we were betrayed by one of our own countrywomen, who slept with some of the head men of the ship, for it was common for the dirty filthy sailors to take the African women and lie upon their bodies; but the men were chained and pent up in holes. It was the women and boys which were to burn the ship, with the approbation and groans of the rest; though that was prevented, the discovery was likewise a cruel bloody scene.

But it would be needless to give a description of all the horrible scenes which we saw, and the base treatment which we met with in

this dreadful captive situation, as the similar cases of thousands, which suffer by this infernal traffic, are well known. Let it suffice to say that I was thus lost to my dear indulgent parents and relations, and they to me. All my help was cries and tears, and these could not avail; nor suffered long, till one succeeding woe, and dread, swelled up another. Brought from a state of innocence and freedom, and, in a barbarous and cruel manner, conveyed to a state of horror and slavery: this abandoned situation may be easier conceived than described. From the time that I was kidnapped and conducted to a factory, and from thence in the brutish, base, but fashionable way of traffic, consigned to Grenada, the grievous thoughts which I then felt, still pant in my heart; though my fears and tears have long since subsided. And yet it is still grievous to think that thousands more have suffered in similar and greater distress, under the hands of barbarous robbers, and merciless taskmasters; and that many even now are suffering in all the extreme bitterness of grief and woe, that no language can describe. The cries of some, and the sight of their misery, may be seen and heard afar; but the deep-sounding groans of thousands, and the great sadness of their misery and woe, under the heavy load of oppressions and calamities inflicted upon them, are such as can only be distinctly known to the ears of Jehovah Sabaoth.<sup>6</sup>

This Lord of Hosts, in his great Providence, and in great mercy to me, made a way for my deliverance from Grenada.—Being in this dreadful captivity and horrible slavery, without any hope of deliverance, for about eight or nine months, beholding the most dreadful scenes of misery and cruelty, and seeing my miserable companions often cruelly lashed, and as it were cut to pieces, for the most trifling faults; this made me often tremble and weep, but I escaped better than many of them. For eating a piece of sugarcane, some were cruelly lashed, or struck over the face to knock their teeth out. Some of the stouter ones, I suppose often reprov'd, and grown hardened and stupid with many cruel beatings and lashings, or perhaps faint and pressed with hunger and hard labor, were often committing trespasses of this kind, and when detected, they met



with exemplary punishment.<sup>7</sup> Some told me they had their teeth pulled out to deter others, and to prevent them from eating any cane in future. Thus seeing my miserable companions and countrymen in this pitiful, distressed, and horrible situation, with all the brutish baseness and barbarity attending it, could not but fill my little mind<sup>8</sup> with horror and indignation. But I must own, to the shame of my own countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by some of my own complexion, who were the first cause of my exile and slavery; but if there were no buyers there would be no sellers. So far as I can remember, some of the Africans in my country keep slaves, which they take in war, or for debt; but those which they keep are well fed, and good care taken of them, and treated well; and, as to their clothing, they differ according to the custom of the country. But I may safely say that all the poverty and misery that any of the inhabitants of Africa meet with among themselves is far inferior to those inhospitable regions of misery which they meet with in the West Indies, where their hard-hearted overseers have neither regard to the laws of God, nor the life of their fellow men.<sup>9</sup>

Thanks be to God, I was delivered from Grenada, and that horrid brutal slavery.—A gentleman coming to England, took me for his servant,<sup>1</sup> and brought me away, where I soon found my situation become more agreeable. After coming to England, and seeing others write and read, I had a strong desire to learn, and getting what assistance I could, I applied myself to learn reading and writing, which soon became my recreation, pleasure, and delight; and when my master perceived that I could write some, he sent me to a proper school for that purpose to learn. Since, I have endeavored to improve my mind in reading, and have sought to get all the intelligence I could, in my situation of life, towards the state of my brethren and countrymen in complexion, and of the miserable situation of those who are barbarously sold into captivity, and unlawfully held in slavery.

But, among other observations, one great duty I owe to Almighty God (the thankful acknowledgement I would not omit for any

consideration) that, although I have been brought away from my native country, in that torrent of robbery and wickedness, thanks be to God for his good providence<sup>2</sup> towards me; I have both obtained liberty, and acquired the great advantages of some little learning, in being able to read and write, and what is still infinitely of greater advantage I trust, to know something of HIM *who is that God whose providence rules over all, and who is the only Potent One that rules in the nations over the children of men. It is unto Him, who is the Prince of the Kings of the earth, that I would give all thanks.* And, in some manner, I may say with Joseph, as he did with respect to the evil intention of his brethren, when they sold him into Egypt,<sup>3</sup> that whatever evil intentions and bad motives those insidious robbers had in carrying me away from my native country and friends, I trust, was what the Lord intended for my good. In this respect, I am highly indebted to many of the good people of England for learning and principles unknown to the people of my native country. But above all, what have I obtained from the Lord God of Hosts, the God of the Christians! in that divine revelation of the only true God, and the Savior of men, what a treasure of wisdom and blessings are involved? How wonderful is the divine goodness displayed in those invaluable books the Old and New Testaments, that inestimable compilation of books, the Bible? And O what a treasure to have, and one of the greatest advantages to be able to read therein, and a divine blessing to understand!

### **[ON BRITAIN'S COLLECTIVE GUILT]**

But while ever such a horrible business as the slavery and oppression of the Africans is carried on, there is not one man in all Great Britain and her colonies, that knoweth anything of it, can be innocent and safe, unless he speedily riseth up with abhorrence of it in his own judgment, and, to avert evil, declare himself against it, and all such notorious wickedness. But should the contrary be adhered to, as it has been in the most shameful manner, by men of eminence and power; according to their eminence in station, the nobles and senators,<sup>4</sup> and every man in office and authority, must



incur a double load of guilt, and not only that burden of guilt in the oppression of the African strangers, but also in that of an impending danger and ruin to their country; and such a double load of iniquity must rest upon those guilty heads who withhold their testimony against the crying sin of tolerating slavery. The inhabitants in general who can approve of such inhuman barbarities must themselves be a species of unjust barbarians and inhuman men. But the clergy of all denominations, whom we would consider as the devout messengers of righteousness, peace, and good-will to all men, if we find any of them ranked with infidels and barbarians, we must consider them as particularly responsible, and, in some measure, guilty of the crimes of other wicked men in the highest degree. For it is their duty to warn every man and to teach every man to know their errors; and if they do not, the crimes of those under their particular charge must rest upon themselves, and upon some of them, in such a case as this, that of the whole nation in general; and those (whatever their respective situation may be) who forbid others to assist them, must not be very sensible of their own duty, and the great extensiveness and importance of their own charge. And as it is their great duty to teach men righteousness and piety; this ought to be considered as sufficiently obvious unto them, and to all men, that nothing can be more contrary unto it, than the evil and very nature of enslaving men, and making merchandise of them like the brute creation.

For it is evident that no custom established among men was ever more impious; since it is contrary to reason, justice, nature, the principles of law and government, and the whole doctrine, in short, of natural religion,<sup>5</sup> and the revealed voice of God. And therefore, that it is both evident and expedient, that there is an absolute necessity to abolish the slave trade, and the West India slavery; and that to be in power, and to neglect even a day in endeavoring to put a stop to such monstrous iniquity and abandoned wickedness (as the tenure of every man's life, as well as the time of his being in office and power, is very uncertain) must necessarily endanger a man's own eternal welfare, be he ever so great in temporal dignity.<sup>6</sup>

The higher that any man is exalted in power and dignity, his danger is the more eminent, though he may not live to see the evil that may eventually be contributed to his country, because of his disobedience to the law and commandments of God. All men in authority, and kings in general, who are exalted to the most conspicuous offices of superiority, while they take upon themselves to be the administrators of righteousness and justice to others, they become equally responsible for admitting or suffering others under their authority to do wrong. Wherefore the highest offices of authority among men are not so desirable as some may be apt to conceive; it was so considered by the virtuous Queen Anne, when she was called to the royal dignity, as she declared to the council of the nation, that it was a heavy weight and burden brought upon her. For kings are the ministers of God to do justice, and not to bear the sword in vain, but to revenge wrath upon them that do evil. But if they do not in such a case as this, the cruel oppressions of thousands, and the blood of the murdered Africans who are slain by the sword of cruel avarice, must rest upon their own guilty heads in as eventually and plain a sense as it was David that murdered Uriah;<sup>7</sup> and therefore they ought to let no companies of insidious merchants, or any guileful insinuations of wicked men, prevail upon them to establish laws of iniquity, and to carry on a trade of oppression and injustice; but they ought to consider such as the worst of foes and rebels, and greater enemies than any that can rise up against their temporal dignity. From all such enemies, good Lord, deliver them! for it is even better to lose a temporal kingdom, than only to endanger the happiness and enjoyment of an eternal one.

Nothing else can be conceived but that the power of infernal wickedness has so reigned and pervaded over the enlightened nations as to infatuate and lead on the great men, and the kings of Europe, to promote and establish such a horrible traffic of wickedness as the African slave trade and the West India slavery, and thereby to bring themselves under the guilty responsibility of such awful iniquity. The kings and governors of the nations in general have power to prevent their subjects and people from

enslaving and oppressing others, if they will; but if they do not endeavor to do it, even if they could not effect that good purpose, they must then be responsible for their crimes; how much more, if they make no endeavors towards it, even when they can, and where no opposition, however plausible their pretenses might be, would dare to oppose them. Wherefore, if kings or nations or any men that dealeth unjustly with their fellow-creatures, to ensnare them, to enslave them, and to oppress them, or suffer others to do so, when they have it in their power to prevent it, and yet they do not, can it ever be thought that God will be well pleased with them? For can those which have no mercy on their fellow creatures expect to find mercy from the gracious Father of Men? Or will it not rather be said unto them, as it is declared, *that he who leadeth into captivity, shall be carried captive, and be bound in the cords of his own iniquity: Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished; for sin and wickedness is the destruction of any people.*<sup>8</sup>

And should these nations, in the most obnoxious<sup>9</sup> and tenacious manner, still adhere to it as they have done, and continue to carry on in their colonies such works and purposes of iniquity, in oppression and injustice against the Africans, nothing else can be expected for them at last, but to meet with the fierce wrath of Almighty God, for such a combination of wickedness, according to all the examples of his just retribution, who cannot suffer such deliberate, such monstrous iniquity to go long unpunished.

## Endnotes

1787

- Note 1: The epigraph of Cugoano's book, "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or maketh merchandize of him, or if he be found in his hand: then that thief shall die," is an expansion of Exodus 21:16.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Cugoano's adaptation of Matthew 22:39 and 7:12.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lack.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: While apologists for slavery stressed African participation in the slave trade as a way to reduce European culpability for it, Cugoana here defers discussion of the race of the kidnappers, which he will discuss below.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A permanent outpost of European enslavers, of which there were many along the west coast of Africa. "Drove along": driven along on foot.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The island of Grenada was taken in 1762 by the British from the French during the Seven Years' War and became a hub of British enslavement in the Caribbean. "Fashionable way of traffic": usual method of the transatlantic enslaving system.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Fante, an Akan people, inhabited and still inhabit the central and western coastal regions of what is now Ghana. "Fantyn": a coastal area inhabited by the Fante. "Agimaque": now Ajumako, a town on this coast.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Assinie, now the town of Assinie-Mafia, on the south coast of what is now the Ivory Coast. "Ambro Accasa": a chief of the Fante.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Accusations of crime were a common pretext used by kidnappers who supplied the trade in enslaved people.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Advocate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Items commonly traded by Europeans for those they enslaved.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The supposed cannibalism of White traders was a common theme among Africans preyed on by the European trade, especially those from the interior.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Another term used for a factory, or fort, used by European enslavers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: City and port on the central coast of what is now Ghana.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lord of Hosts (Hebrew).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Punishment intended to deter others from acting in this way. "Stupid": insensitive, stupefied.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Cugoano reminds the reader that he is still a child.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cugoano returns more explicitly to the question of African practices of enslavement: though these practices were often invoked in attempts to justify the European transatlantic system, he here sharply differentiates the two practices.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: After about two years in the West Indies, Cugoano was taken to England in 1772 by a man named earlier in the text as Alexander Campbell, who paid the price set by his former enslaver.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God's superintending plan for and protection of the world.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Genesis 37:18–36, which describes how Joseph was sold by his half-brothers into slavery in Egypt.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Members of the House of Lords and the House of Commons.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Religious truth disclosed to the human intellect by reason and the contemplation of the created universe, in contrast to the religious truth revealed by God in the Bible.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: No matter how powerful he is during his mortal life.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See 2 Samuel 11–12: David, in love with Uriah's wife Bathsheba, sent instructions for Uriah to be sent to the front of a fierce battle and then abandoned, thus indirectly causing his death.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cugoano links several Bible verses, including Revelations 13:10, Proverbs 5:22, Proverbs 11:21, and Psalms 94:23.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Gravely guilty, reprehensible.[Return to reference 9](#)

## **SLAVERY IN POETRY**

## JAMES GRAINGER

James Grainger (1721?–1766)—a Scottish poet and medical doctor who spent years on sugar plantations in the Caribbean—wrote several seemingly conflicting things about slavery: he expressed pity for the plight of those enslaved, shared with enslavers his acquired wisdom about how to make the most profitable purchases of human beings, lamented he did not have the power to end slavery altogether, and (wrongly, self-interestedly) suggested that the lives of enslaved people in the Caribbean were really not so bad. Indeed, Grainger said all of these things in a single poem, *The Sugar-Cane* (1764)—a massive poem composed of four books and over 2,500 blank verse lines—and it is an ethical and historical question, how one person and one poem held together these ideas. The very form of his poem also involved him in another contradiction. *The Sugar-Cane* is a georgic poem, modeled after the ancient Latin poet Virgil's *Georgics*, which offered how-to farming advice in verse. Disturbingly, some of the language and ideas that Virgil used when discussing how to choose and treat livestock are here applied to enslaved people (a move that undercuts Grainger's explicit claim in the poem that it is wrong to treat enslaved people as "bestial," not human). Grainger was an "ameliorationist," meaning that he did not want to abolish slavery (as abolitionists did) but to "ameliorate," or improve, the living and working conditions of the enslaved. Grainger's wife was from a wealthy family that owned plantations in the Caribbean, and Grainger personally benefited from slavery on St. Christopher Island (or St. Kitts).

Many scholars understand Grainger's poem as a complex historical record of pro-imperial and proslavery thought in the eighteenth century; they reckon with its racism and try to understand its vision of slavery's place in the British Empire. With its detailed descriptions of nature and often quite scientifically precise footnotes about the island's flora and fauna (some of which are

reproduced here), the poem also offers a rich account of Caribbean islands in the eighteenth century. There is another way to read the poem, too. In *Digital Grainger*, a fascinating online edition of the whole poem, a collective of scholars led by Cristobal Silva, Julie Chun Kim, Kimberly Takahata, and Alex Gil have proposed, additionally, reading the poem “against the grain of Grainger’s pro-slavery narrative.” They suggest looking for what the poem shows, in spite of itself, about “the everyday lives of the enslaved and other marginalized subjects of the plantation.” For instance, they explain, the “provision grounds” that Grainger describes at the end of the selection here—lands set aside for enslaved people to grow their own food—might “be read as records of the resourcefulness and creativity of their cultivators, who dealt with the poor quality of lands they were given by learning to grow plants that others shunned.” While much early British abolitionist verse offers sentimental or general depictions of enslaved people, Grainger’s poem—almost unintentionally and often in uncomfortable, challenging language—might allow glimpses into Black lives on St. Kitts (and even hints of Black resistance amid horrifying circumstances).



## ***From The Sugar-Cane*<sup>1</sup>**

Genius of Africk!<sup>2</sup> whether thou bestrid'st<sup>o</sup>  
The castled elephant; or at the source,  
(While howls the desert fearfully around,)  
Of thine own Niger,<sup>3</sup> sadly thou reclin'st  
Thy temples shaded by the tremulous<sup>o</sup> palm,  
5 Or quick papaw,<sup>4</sup> whose top is necklaced round  
With numerous rows of party-colored<sup>o</sup> fruit:  
Or hear'st thou rather from the rocky banks  
Of Rio Grandê, or black Sanaga?<sup>5</sup>  
Where dauntless thou<sup>6</sup> the headlong torrent brav'st  
10 In search of gold, to brede<sup>o</sup> thy woolly locks,  
Or with bright ringlets ornament thine ears,  
Thine arms, and ankles: O attend my song.  
A muse that pities<sup>7</sup> thy distressful state;  
Who sees, with grief, thy sons in fetters bound;  
15 Who wishes freedom to the race of man;  
Thy nod assenting craves: dread Genius, come!  
  
Yet vain thy presence, vain thy favoring nod;  
Unless once more the muses, that erewhile  
Upheld me fainting in my past career,  
20 Through Caribbe's<sup>o</sup> cane-isles; kind condescend  
To guide my footsteps, through parched Libya's  
wilds;<sup>8</sup>  
And bind my sun-burnt brow with other bays,  
Than ever deck'd the Sylvan bard before.

\* \* \*

In mind, and aptitude for useful toil,

The negroes differ: muse that difference sing.<sup>9</sup>  
Whether to wield the hoe, or guide the plane;  
40 Or for domestic uses thou<sup>1</sup> intend'st  
The sunny Libyan: from what clime they spring,  
It not imports; if strength and youth be theirs.

Yet those from Congo's wide-extended plains,  
Through which the long Zaire<sup>o</sup> winds with crystal  
45 stream,  
Where lavish Nature sends indulgent forth  
Fruits of high flavor, and spontaneous seeds  
Of bland nutritious quality, ill bear  
The toilsome field; but boast a docile mind,  
And happiness of features. These, with care,  
50 Be taught each nice<sup>2</sup> mechanic art: or trained  
To household offices: their ductile souls  
Will all thy care, and all thy gold repay.

But, if the labors of the field demand  
Thy chief attention; and the ambrosial<sup>o</sup> cane shade  
55 Thou long'st to see, with spiry<sup>o</sup> frequency,<sup>o</sup>  
Many an acre: planter, choose the slave,  
Who sails from barren climes; where want alone,  
Offspring of rude necessity, compels  
The sturdy native, or to plant the soil,  
60 Or<sup>3</sup> stem vast rivers for his daily food.

Such are the children of the Golden Coast;  
Such the Papaws,<sup>4</sup> of negroes far the best:  
And such the numerous tribes, that skirt the shore,  
65 From rapid Volta to the distant Rey.<sup>5</sup>

But, planter, from what coast soe'er they sail,  
Buy not the old: they ever sullen prove;  
With heart-felt anguish, they lament their home;  
They will not, cannot work; they never learn

70 Thy native language; they are prone to ails;  
And oft by suicide their being end.—

Must thou from Africk reinforce thy gang?<sup>6</sup>—  
Let health and youth their every sinew firm;  
Clear roll their ample eye; their tongue be red;  
Broad swell their chest; their shoulders wide expand;  
75 Not prominent their belly; clean and strong  
Their thighs and legs, in just<sup>o</sup> proportion rise.  
Such soon will brave the fervors of the clime;  
And free from ails, that kill thy negroe-train,  
A useful servitude will long support.  
80

Yet, if thine own, thy children's life, be dear;  
Buy not a Cormantee,<sup>7</sup> though healthy, young.  
Of breed too generous<sup>o</sup> for the servile field;  
They, born to freedom in their native land,  
Choose death before dishonorable bonds:  
85 Or, fired with vengeance, at the midnight hour,  
Sudden they seize thine unsuspecting watch,  
And thine own poinard bury in thy breast.

\* \* \*

165 Nor, Negroe, at thy destiny repine,  
Though doomed to toil from dawn to setting sun.  
How far more pleasant is thy rural task,  
Than theirs who sweat, sequestered from the day,  
In dark tartarean caves, sunk far beneath  
The earth's dark surface;<sup>8</sup> where sulphureous  
170 flames,  
Oft from their vapory prisons bursting wild,  
To dire explosion give the caverned deep,  
And in dread ruin all its inmates whelm?<sup>o</sup>—  
Nor fateful only is the bursting flame;  
The exhalations of the deep-dug mine,  
175

Though slow, shake from their wings as sure a  
death.

With what intense severity of pain  
Hath the afflicted muse, in Scotia,<sup>o</sup> seen  
The miners racked, who toil for fatal lead?  
What cramps, what palsies shake their feeble limbs,  
180 Who, on the margin of the rocky Drave,<sup>9</sup>  
Trace silver's fluent<sup>o</sup> ore? Yet white men these!

How far more happy ye,<sup>1</sup> than those poor slaves,  
Who, whilom,<sup>o</sup> under native, gracious chiefs,  
185 Incas<sup>2</sup> and emperors, long time enjoyed  
Mild government, with every sweet of life,  
In blissful climates? See them dragged in chains,  
By proud insulting tyrants, to the mines  
Which once they called their own, and then  
despised!

See, in the mineral bosom of their land,  
190 How hard they toil! how soon their youthful limbs  
Feel the decrepitude of age! how soon  
Their teeth desert their sockets! and how soon  
Shaking paralysis unstrings their frame!  
Yet scarce, even then, are they allowed to view  
195 The glorious God of day, of whom they beg,  
With earnest hourly supplications, death;  
Yet death slow comes, to torture them the more!

With these compared, ye sons of Afric, say,  
200 How far more happy is your lot? Bland<sup>o</sup> health,  
Of ardent eye, and limb robust, attends  
Your custom'd<sup>o</sup> labor; and, should sickness seize,  
With what solicitude are ye not nursed!—  
Ye Negroes, then, your pleasing task pursue;  
And, by your toil, deserve your master's care.

205 When first your Blacks are novel<sup>o</sup> to the hoe;

Study their humors:<sup>3</sup> Some, soft-soothing words;  
Some, presents; and some, menaces subdue;  
And some I've known, so stubborn is their kind,  
Whom blows, alas! could win alone to toil.

210

Yet, planter, let humanity prevail.—  
Perhaps thy Negroe, in his native land,  
Possessed large fertile plains, and slaves, and herds:  
Perhaps, whene'er he deigned to walk abroad,  
The richest silks, from where the Indus<sup>4</sup> rolls,  
His limbs invested<sup>o</sup> in their gorgeous pleats:  
Perhaps he wails his wife, his children, left  
To struggle with adversity: Perhaps  
Fortune, in battle for his country fought,  
Gave him a captive to his deadliest foe:  
Perhaps, incautious, in his native fields,  
(On pleasurable scenes his mind intent)  
All as he wandered; from the neighboring grove,  
Fell ambush dragged him to the hated main.<sup>o</sup>—  
Were they even sold for crimes; ye polished, say!  
Ye, to whom Learning opes her amplest page!  
Ye, whom the knowledge of a living God  
Should lead to virtue! Are ye free from crimes?  
Ah pity, then, these uninstructed swains;<sup>5</sup>  
And still let mercy soften the decrees  
Of rigid justice, with her lenient hand.

230

Oh, did the tender muse possess the power,  
Which monarchs have, and monarchs oft abuse:  
'Twould be the fond ambition of her soul,  
To quell tyrannic sway; knock off the chains  
Of heart-debasing slavery; give to man,  
Of every color and of every clime,  
Freedom, which stamps him image of his God.  
Then laws, Oppression's scourge,<sup>6</sup> fair Virtue's prop,

235

240 Offspring of Wisdom! should impartial reign,  
To knit the whole in well-accorded strife:  
Servants, not slaves; of choice, and not compelled;  
The Blacks should cultivate the Cane-land isles.

\* \* \*

'Til morning dawn, and Lucifer<sup>7</sup> withdraw  
His beamy<sup>o</sup> chariot; let not the loud bell  
Call forth thy negroes from their rushy couch:<sup>8</sup>  
And ere the sun with mid-day fervor glow,  
When every broom-bush<sup>9</sup> opes<sup>o</sup> her yellow flower;  
410 Let thy black laborers from their toil desist:  
Nor till the broom her every petal lock,  
Let the loud bell recall them to the hoe.  
But when the jalap<sup>1</sup> her bright tint displays,  
When the solanum<sup>2</sup> fills her cup with dew,  
415 And crickets, snakes, and lizards 'gin<sup>o</sup> their coil;  
Let them find shelter in their cane-thatched huts:  
Or, if constrained unusual hours to toil,  
(For even the best must sometimes urge their gang)  
With double nutriment reward their pains.

420  
Howe'er insensate<sup>3</sup> some may deem their slaves,  
Nor 'bove<sup>o</sup> the bestial rank; far other thoughts  
The muse, soft daughter of humanity!  
Will ever entertain.—The Ethiop<sup>4</sup> knows,  
The Ethiop feels, when treated like a man;  
425 Nor grudges, should necessity compel,  
By day, by night, to labor for his lord.

Not less inhuman, than unthrifty those;  
Who, half the year's rotation round the sun,  
Deny subsistence to their laboring slaves.  
430 But would'st thou see thy negroe-train increase,  
Free from disorders; and thine acres clad

With groves of sugar: every week dispense  
Or English beans, or Carolinian rice;  
Iërne's<sup>o</sup> beef, or Pensilvanian flour;  
435 Newfoundland cod, or herrings from the main  
That howls tempestuous round the Scotian isles!

Yet some there are so lazily inclined,  
And so neglectful of their food, that thou,  
Would'st thou preserve them from the jaws of death;  
440 Daily, their wholesome viands<sup>o</sup> must prepare:  
With these let all the young, and childless old,  
And all the morbid<sup>o</sup> share;—so heaven will bless,  
With manifold increase, thy costly care.

Suffice not this; to every slave assign  
445 Some mountain-ground: or, if waste broken land  
To thee belong, that broken land divide.  
This let them cultivate, one day, each week;  
And there raise yams, and there cassada's root:  
From a good daemon's staff cassada<sup>o</sup> sprang,  
450 Tradition says, and Caribbees believe;  
Which into three the white-robed genius broke,  
And bade them plant, their hunger to repel.<sup>5</sup>  
There let angola's<sup>6</sup> bloomy bush supply  
For many a year, with wholesome pulse their board.  
455 There let the bonavist,<sup>7</sup> his fringed pods  
Throw liberal o'er the prop; while ochra<sup>8</sup> bears  
Aloft his slimy pulp, and help disdains.  
There let potatoes<sup>o</sup> mantle o'er the ground;  
Sweet as the cane-juice is the root they bear.  
460 There too let eddas<sup>9</sup> spring in order meet,  
With Indian cale,<sup>1</sup> and foodful<sup>o</sup> calaloo:  
While mint, thyme, balm, and Europe's coyer herbs,  
Shoot gladsome forth, nor reprobate the clime.

## Endnotes

1764

- Note 1: These selections are from Book IV of the long poem, in which Grainger turns his attention from agricultural practices and the cultivation of sugar cane to the handling of an enslaved labor force.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A personification, the Spirit of Africa.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A major river in West Africa, running between what we today call Guinea and Nigeria.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Grainger has noted earlier that this tree's "botanical name is Papaya."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: What are today called the Koliba and Senegal Rivers—both also in West Africa.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He still addresses the "Genius" of Africa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The pitying comes from Grainger's muse, his source of poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A conventional plea to the Muses who had sustained him thus far to continue to "guide" him for one final book of his poem.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Virgil's poem urges attention to differences in different soils, plants, and animals, suggesting the husbandman work with each specific thing's innate capabilities. Grainger problematically extends this georgic logic to humans, then lists stereotypes he associates with people from different parts of Africa.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Grainger addresses the "planter," the term he uses for the owner or overseer of the "plantation," the enslaver. This "planter" is not himself doing any planting.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Requiring scrupulous exactness" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: “Or . . . or” is a Latinism for “either . . . or”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: People from an area of West Africa around what is now Ghana and Benin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Two more West African rivers (the Volta and Rio-del-Rey), in what are now called Ghana and Cameroon, respectively.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, acquire additional enslaved people from Africa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A people, whom the British named after their Fort Kormantine in what is now Ghana, who were blamed by Europeans for inciting numerous rebellions of enslaved people in the Caribbean and North America in the 17th and 18th centuries.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Grainger addresses enslaved people, offering an ideologically loaded comparison of their plight to that of Scottish coal and lead miners. “Tartarean”: “hellish” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A river in Hungary, on whose banks are found mines of quicksilver [*Grainger’s note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A Virgilian phrasing. See John Dryden’s 1697 translation of Virgil’s “happy husbandman”: “Oh happy, if he knew his state.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Indigenous peoples in South America. Grainger compares the plight of enslaved Africans in British colonial holdings to those enslaved by the Spanish. This is a version of the “Black Legend” that allowed British propagandists to argue they were humane, by comparison with the Spanish.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Grainger again addresses the “planter” with advice.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A river in Asia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A conventional, poetic word for rural laborers, often used in georgic poetry.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: What will destroy Oppression.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The morning star.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Beds made from rushes (parts of a plant). Again Grainger addresses the White figures of power, offering advice about when to have their enslaved laborers begin a day of work.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This small plant, which grows in every pasture, may, with propriety, be termed an American clock; for it begins every forenoon at eleven to open its yellow flowers, which about one are fully expanded, and at two closed [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The jalap, or marvel of Peru, unfolds its petals between five and six in the evening, which shut again as soon as night comes on, to open again in the cool of the morning. This plant is called four o'clock by the natives, and bears either a yellow or purple-colored flower [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: So some authors name the fire-weed, which grows everywhere. . . . It bears a white monopetalous flower, which opens always about sunset [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Insensible, unfeeling.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here representing all Africans.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To an ancient Caribbean, bemoaning the savage uncomfortable life of his countrymen, a deity clad in white apparel appeared, and told him, he would have come sooner to have taught him the ways of civil life, had he been addressed before. He then showed him sharp-cutting stones to fell trees and build houses; and bade him cover them with the palm leaves. Then he broke his staff in three; which, being planted, soon after produced cassada. See Ogilby's *America* (1671) [*Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pigeon pea's.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This is the Spanish name of a plant, which produces an excellent bean [*Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Or Ockro [okra]. This shrub, which will last for years, produces a not less agreeable, than wholesome pod. It bears all the year round. Being of a slimy and balsamic nature, it

becomes a truly medicinal aliment in dysenteric complaints  
[*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The French call this plant Tayove. It produces eatable roots every four months, for one year only [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This green, which is a native of the New World, equals any of the greens in the Old [*Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *ride*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quivering*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *multicolored*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *braid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the Caribbean's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the Congo River*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fragrant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pointy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crowdedness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proper*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noble*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bury*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Scotland*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flowing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mild, soothing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *new*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clothed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ocean*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *full of beams*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *begin*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *above*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *Ireland's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cassava*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweet potatoes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plentiful*[Return to reference](#) °

## WILLIAM SHENSTONE

Among the twenty-six elegies included in the *Works in Verse and Prose* (2 volumes, 1764) by the British writer and garden designer William Shenstone (1714–1763) is one that adopts the voice of an enslaved African, whose sufferings Shenstone considers alongside his own. As a group, Shenstone's elegies treat his personal life, his melancholy, and his unrequited love for a woman he calls Delia. It was common in poetry to dramatize the pains of love: using an ancient poetic idiom, male poets often declared themselves the "slaves" of the women on whom they fixated. But Shenstone's Elegy XX does something markedly different. He begins by acknowledging that his sufferings are insignificant and even pleasing compared to the plight of those subject to enslavement. In lofty, heroic language, he imagines the voice of an African cruelly victimized by European Christians, who hypocritically speak to him of goodness and heaven. The poem's antislavery themes so far exceeded its original context—Shenstone's melancholic account of his own life—that the famous British abolitionist Granville Sharp included it in two of his antislavery tracts, *An Essay on Slavery* (1773) and *The Just Limitations of Slavery in the Laws of God* (1776), with the first four stanzas lopped off, under the title "An Elegy on the Miserable State of an African Slave." Throughout the poem, Shenstone subtly acknowledges the distances between his own poetic language and the actual experiences and feelings of the African whom he and other Britons endeavor to imagine sympathetically.

## Elegy XX

***He compares his humble fortune with the distress of others;  
and his subjection to Delia, with the miserable servitude of  
an African slave.<sup>1</sup>***

Why droops his heart, with fancied<sup>o</sup> woes forlorn?  
Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky?  
What pensive crowds, by ceaseless labors worn,  
What myriads, wish to be as blest as I!

5      What though my roofs devoid of pomp<sup>o</sup> arise,  
Nor tempt the proud to quit his destined way?  
Nor costly art my flowery dales disguise.<sup>2</sup>  
Where only simple friendship deigns to stray?

10     See the wild sons of Lapland's chill domain,<sup>3</sup>  
That scoop their couch<sup>o</sup> beneath the drifted snows!  
How void of hope they ken<sup>o</sup> the frozen plains,  
Where the sharp east<sup>o</sup> forever, ever blows!

15     Slave though I be, to Delia's eyes a slave,  
My Delia's eyes endear the bands<sup>o</sup> I wear;  
The sigh she causes well becomes the brave.  
The pang she causes, 'tis even bliss to bear.

20     See the poor native quit the Lybian shores,<sup>4</sup>  
Ah! not in love's delightful fetters bound!  
No radiant smile his dying peace restores,  
Nor love, nor fame, nor friendship heals his wound.

Let vacant bards<sup>o</sup> display their boasted woes,  
Shall I the mockery of grief display?

No, let the muse his<sup>o</sup> piercing pangs disclose,  
Who bleeds and weeps his sum of life away!

25 On the wild beach in mournful guise he stood,  
Ere the shrill boatswain<sup>5</sup> gave the hated sign;  
He dropt a tear unseen into the flood;<sup>o</sup>  
He stole one secret moment, to repine,

Yet the muse listened to the complaints he made;  
Such moving complaints as nature could inspire;  
30 To me the muse his tender plea conveyed,  
But smoothed, and suited to the sounding lyre.<sup>o</sup>

"Why am I ravished<sup>6</sup> from my native strand?<sup>o</sup>  
What savage race protects this impious gain?  
Shall foreign plagues infest this teeming land,  
35 And more than sea-born monsters plough the main?  
<sup>o</sup>

Here the dire locusts horrid swarms prevail;  
Here the blue asps with livid poison swell;  
Here the dry dipsas<sup>7</sup> writhes his sinuous mail;  
40 Can we not here, secure from envy, dwell?<sup>8</sup>

When the grim lion urged his cruel chase,  
When the stern panther sought his midnight prey,  
What fate reserved me for this Christian race?  
O race more polished, more severe than they!

45 Ye prowling wolves pursue my latest cries!  
Thou hungry tiger, leave thy reeking den!  
Ye sandy wastes in rapid eddies rise!  
O tear me from the whips and scorns of men!

Yet in their face superior beauty glows;  
Are smiles the mien<sup>o</sup> of rapine and of wrong?  
50

Yet from their lip the voice of mercy flows,  
And even religion dwells upon their tongue.

Of blissful haunts<sup>o</sup> they tell, and brighter climes,<sup>o</sup>  
Where gentle minds conveyed by death repair,<sup>9</sup>  
55 But stained with blood, and crimsoned o'er with  
    crimes,  
Say, shall they merit what they paint<sup>o</sup> so fair?

No, careless, hopeless of those fertile plains,  
Rich by our toils, and by our sorrows gay,  
They ply our labors, and enhance our pains,  
60 And feign these distant regions to repay.<sup>1</sup>

For them our tusked elephant expires;  
For them we drain the mine's embowelled gold;  
Where rove the brutal nations' wild desires?—  
Our limbs are purchased, and our life is sold!

65 Yet shores there are, blest shores for us remain,  
And favored isles with golden fruitage crowned,  
Where tufted flowerets paint the verdant plain,  
Where every breeze shall med'cine<sup>o</sup> every wound.

There the stern tyrant that embitters life  
70 Shall, vainly suppliant, spread his asking hand;  
There shall we view the billow's raging strife,  
Aid the kind breast, and waft his boat to land."

## Endnotes

1764

- Note 1: All of Shenstone's numbered elegies are introduced with these brief descriptions, called "arguments," of the contents of the following poems. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Shenstone, a thoughtful and influential gardener, devoted much of his comparatively narrow resources to



beautifying his often-visited estate, the Leasowes.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Now called Sápmi, the land of the Sámi people in the far north of Europe. (The English name “Lapland” is now avoided because the term “Lapp” for the Sámi is understood to be pejorative.)[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Though Libya, a country of North Africa, was mostly unaffected by European trafficking in enslaved people, Shenstone uses the term *Lybian* poetically to stand for all Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Poetic name for the pilot of a ship transporting enslaved people.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Taken by force.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A snake often mentioned in ancient Greek literature whose bite is said to cause thirst.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See *Paradise Lost* 1.259–60, where Satan says of Hell: “th’Almighty hath not built / Here for his envy, will not drive us hence.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Resort to for comfort and healing.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And pretend to live in a way that pays the price demanded by heaven to enter it.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *imagined*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *showy wealth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shelter, place of rest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *view*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *east wind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fetters*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vacuous poets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the African’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tide*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poet’s harp*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shore*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *open ocean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *facial expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heaven* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *climates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *portray*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heal*[Return to reference](#) °

## JUPITER HAMMON

Among the founders of Black American literature, Jupiter Hammon (1711–ca. 1806) was born enslaved to the Lloyd family on Long Island, New York. The circumstances under which he learned to read and write are not established, though it is possible he was taught at a schoolhouse along with the Lloyd children. His first published literary work, the poem “An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries” (1761), was written when he was nearly fifty, in 1760, and it stands as the first published poem by a Black North American poet. Some eighteen years later, he published the poem “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” (1778), which praises and encourages the younger Black poet’s Christian piety. Such themes prevail throughout his work, as he promotes the acceptance of God’s will and gratitude for Christ’s salvation. Among his most well-known pieces is his prose *An Address to Negroes in the State of New York*, a speech he gave in 1786, when he was seventy-one years old, to the African Society, the first Black social and political organization in New York City. While still stressing a message of obedience and salvation, the speech also affirms that “liberty is a great thing,” and says he wishes that “the young negroes were to be free.” (At his age, he felt that leaving the home in which he had lived his life enslaved and attempting to compete in the “free” labor market would only expose him to utter destitution.) He concludes by placing his hope in heaven, “where we shall find nobody to reproach us for being Black, or for being slaves.”

Dating to the same year as *An Address*, Hammon’s poem “An Essay on Slavery” was unpublished in his lifetime. It adopts many of the speech’s themes, with a more striking insistence that slavery is an evil and that liberty is the human destiny of Black people. The poem, in Hammon’s own hand, was located in a Yale University library by the scholar Julie McCown, and she and another scholar, Cedrick May, analyzed and published it in 2013. The poem

complicates the previously common view of Hammon as merely compliant and uninterested in contesting enslavement. McCown and May argue that Hammon likely intended to publish it alongside *An Address*, and persuasively speculate that elements of its message might have been too inflammatory for the Lloyd family to allow it into print. The edition by McCown and May (which is reproduced here, with notes abridged) meticulously records evidence of Hammon's revisions to the manuscript: final wordings, marked in the main text below with asterisks, can be compared to initial wordings marked with asterisks in the right margins. As McCown and May point out, some of these final revisions more decisively place the moral blame for slavery on "Man," not on God or the nature of things, and imply that it is the duty of humanity to replace slavery with liberty. The text below preserves the idiosyncrasies of Hammon's handwriting, spelling, and style—notably clean and consistent by eighteenth-century manuscript standards—while indicating a carefully revised, largely finished production.

# **An Essay on Slavery, with submission to Divine providence, knowing that God Rules over all things—**

***Written by Jupiter Hammon—***

## **1**

Our forefathers came from Africa  
tost over the raging main  
to a Christian shore there for to stay  
and not return again.

## **2**

5 Dark and dismal was the Day  
When slavery began  
All humble thoughts were put away  
Then slaves were made \*by Man.

## **3**

10 When God doth please for to permit  
That slavery should be  
It is our duty to submit  
Till Christ shall \*make us free

## **4**

Come let us join with one consent  
With humble hearts \*and say  
For every sin we must repent

15 And walk in wisdoms way.

## 5

If we are free \*we'll pray to God  
If we are slaves the same  
\*It's firmly fixt in \*\*his word.  
20 Ye shall not pray in vain.

## 6

Come blessed Jesus in thy Love  
And hear thy Children cry  
And send them smiles now from above  
And grant them Liberty.

## 7

25 Tis thou alone can make us free  
We are thy subjects two<sup>1</sup>  
Pray give us grace to bend a knee  
The time we stay below.

## 8

30 This unto thee we look for all  
Thou art our only King  
Thou hast the power to save the soul  
And bring us flocking in.

## 9

We come as sinners \*unto thee  
We know thou hast the word  
Come blessed Jesus make us free

35 And bring us to our God.

## 10

Although we are in slavery-  
We will pray unto our God  
He hath mercy ~~hid~~<sup>2</sup> beyond the sky  
40 Tis in his holy word.

## 11

Come unto me ye humble souls  
Although you live in strife  
I keep alive, \*I save the soul  
And give eternal life.

## 12

45 To all that do repent of sin  
\*Be they ~~there~~<sup>3</sup> bond or free.  
I am their savior and their king  
They must come unto me.

## 13

50 Hear the words \*now of the Lord  
The call is loud and certain  
We must be judged by his word  
Without respect of person.<sup>4</sup>

## 14

55 Come let us seek his precepts now  
And love his holy word  
With humble soul we'll surely bow

And wait the great reward.

## 15

Although we came from Africa  
We look unto our God  
To help with our hearts to sigh and pray  
And Love his holy word.

## 16

Although we are in slavery  
Bound \*by the yoke of Man  
We must always have a single Eye  
And do the best we can.

## 17

Come let us join with humble voice  
Now on the christian shore  
If we will have our only choice  
Tis Slavery no more.

## 18

Now [~~surely~~ surely] let us not repine  
And say his wheels are slow<sup>5</sup>  
He can fill our hearts with things divine  
And give us freedom two.

## 19

He hath the power all in his hand  
And all he doth is right  
And if we are tide to ~~the~~ yoke of man



\*We'll pray with all our might.

## 20

80 This the State of thousands now  
Who are on the christian shore  
Forget the Lord to whom we bow  
And think of him no more.

## 21

85 When shall we hear the joyfull sound  
Echo the christian shore  
Each humble voice with songs resound  
That Slavery is no more.

## 22

Then shall we rejoice and sing  
Loud praises to our God  
Come sweet Jesus heavenly king  
Thou art the son \*Our Lord.

## 23

90 We are thy children blessed Lord  
Tho still in Slavery  
\*We'll seek thy precepts Love thy word  
Untill the day we Die.

## 24

95 Come blessed Jesus hear us now  
And teach our hearts to pray  
And seek the Lord to whom we Bow

Before tribunal day.

## 25

100 Now Glory be unto our God  
All praise be justly given  
Come seek his precepts Love his works  
That is the way to Heaven.—

---

Composed By Jupiter Hammon  
A Negro Man belonging to Mr John Lloyd  
Queens-Village on Long Island—

November 10th 1786

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A word Hammon misspells, or miswrites, twice in the manuscript (see also line 73).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here the manuscript strikes out the word “hid” without replacing it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Ephesians 6:8.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Without considering a person’s social status.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hammon alludes to the proverb, “the wheels (or mills) of God’s judgment grind exceedingly slow, but exceedingly fine”: that is, divine justice, though seemingly delayed, will result in all people receiving precisely what they deserve.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- \*: to [Return to reference \\*](#)

- \*: *come again*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *to*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *we will*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *It is*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *his holy*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *up to*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *and*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *Whether*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *of*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *to*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *We must pray through day and night.*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *of God*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *We*[Return to reference \\*](#)

## HANNAH MORE

The author, educator, and philanthropist Hannah More (1745–1833) led a life crowded with literary successes, and with causes: she wrote and worked to reform the aristocracy, educate the poor, and establish “modern” methods to educate women as well, with an eye toward equipping them to fulfill the social roles their gender enjoined on them. Her intellect and passions were particularly strongly engaged by the movement to end the British trade in enslaved people, which gained adherents and fervor in Britain in the late 1780s. In 1787, she met William Wilberforce, the chief parliamentary campaigner for abolition, and published *Slavery, a Poem* early in 1788 to support the first bill to end the trade that would be promoted by Wilberforce and his allies. The bill’s failure in 1789 only invigorated More to work harder for the cause. When Parliament at last banned the British trade in 1807, she joined the newly formed African Institution, which sought to establish a refuge for freed Black people in Sierra Leone, in West Africa; and worked in subsequent decades to rid the British colonies of slavery itself, a task finally accomplished by the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, a few months before her death.

More’s poem *Slavery* orchestrates many contrasting energies. She insists on the mass scale of the moral catastrophe of slavery, differentiating herself from earlier writers such as Aphra Behn and Thomas Southerne, who focused on the injustice of enslaving singularly exalted individuals like Oroonoko and Imoinda (see [p. 152](#)). But she also tells the story of Quashi, a noble African enslaved in the West Indies whom she learned about from her friend, the abolitionist minister James Ramsay; and her poem includes sentimental vignettes that visualize an African husband torn from his wife and infant, and address a murdering slaver on the brink of his crime. Further complexities emerge from her sympathetic yet stereotyped, generalizing views of Africans’ “rude energy” and

"strong but luxuriant virtues." More weaves a somewhat confused language of otherness to portray Africans alongside social groups with whom she and her readers were more familiar. Like heroes of Roman antiquity, Africans are noble "pagans," that is, non-Christians. But More also repeatedly refers to Africans as "savages," implicitly distinguishing them from "civilized" ancient Romans, as well as from modern Europeans. She nevertheless also casts European enslavers as "barbarians," perhaps alluding to the hordes from northern Europe who wrecked the civilization of Rome. Finally all these frail distinctions break down in the poem's concluding section: at a dramatic moment of reversal, she addresses the "WHITE SAVAGE!" (line 211) who perpetrates the abductions, murders, and expropriations of European colonialism. The poem comes to rest with the descent of angelic Mercy, a universalizing Christian influence sent to all peoples from heaven.

## ***From Slavery, a Poem***

\* \* \*

Though not to me, sweet bard,<sup>1</sup> thy powers  
belong,  
50 Fair truth, a hallowed guide! inspires my song.  
Here art would weave her gayest flowers in vain,  
For truth the bright invention would disdain.  
For no fictitious ills these numbers<sup>o</sup> flow,  
But living anguish, and substantial woe;  
55 No individual griefs my bosom melt,  
For millions feel what Oroonoko felt:  
Fired by no single wrongs, the countless host  
I mourn, by rapine dragged from Afric's coast.  
Perish th'illiberal thought which would debase  
60 The native genius of the sable race!  
Perish the proud philosophy, which sought  
To rob them of the powers of equal thought!  
Does then th'immortal principle within  
Change with the casual<sup>o</sup> color of a skin?  
Does matter govern spirit? or is mind  
65 Degraded by the form to which 'tis joined?  
No: they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,  
And souls to act, with firm, though erring, zeal;  
For they have keen affections, kind desires,  
70 Love strong as death, and active patriot fires;<sup>o</sup>  
All the rude energy, the fervid flame,  
Of high-souled passion, and ingenuous shame:  
Strong but luxuriant<sup>o</sup> virtues boldly shoot  
From the wild vigor of a savage root.  
Nor weak their sense of honor's proud control,  
75 For pride is virtue in a pagan<sup>2</sup> soul;

A sense of worth, a conscience<sup>o</sup> of desert,  
A high, unbroken haughtiness of heart:  
That self-same stuff which erst<sup>o</sup> proud empires  
    swayed,  
Of which the conquerors of the world were made.  
80 Capricious fate of man! that very pride  
In Afric scourged, in Rome was deified.  
    No Muse, O Quashi!<sup>3</sup> shall thy deeds relate,  
No statue snatch thee from oblivious<sup>o</sup> fate!  
For thou wast born where never gentle muse  
85 On valor's grave the flowers of genius strews;  
And thou wast born where no recording page  
Plucks the fair deed from time's devouring rage.  
Had fortune placed thee on some happier coast,  
Where polished souls heroic virtue boast,  
90 To thee, who sought'st a voluntary grave,  
Th'uninjur'd honors of thy name to save,  
Whose generous arm thy barbarous master spared,  
Altars had smoked, and temples had been reared.<sup>4</sup>  
    Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,  
95 Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;  
I see, by more than fancy's mirror<sup>o</sup> shown,  
The burning village, and the blazing town:  
See the dire victim torn from social life,  
The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife!  
100 She, wretch forlorn! is dragged by hostile hands,  
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!  
Transmitted miseries, and successive chains,  
The sole sad heritage her child obtains!  
Ev'n this last wretched boon their foes deny,  
105 To weep together, or together die.  
By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,  
See the fond links of feeling nature broke!  
The fibers twisting round a parent's heart,  
Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.  
110

Hold, murderers, hold! not aggravate distress;  
 Respect the passions you yourselves possess;  
 Ev'n you, of ruffian heart, and ruthless hand,  
 Love your own offspring, love your native land.  
 Ah! leave them holy freedom's cheering smile,  
 115 The heaven-taught fondness for the parent soil;  
 Revere affections mingled with our frame,<sup>o</sup>  
 In every nature, every clime the same;  
 In all, these feelings equal sway maintain;  
 In all the love of HOME and FREEDOM reign:  
 120 And Tempe's vale, and parched Angola's sand,<sup>5</sup>  
 One equal fondness of their sons command.  
 Th'unconquer'd savage laughs at pain and toil,  
 Basking in freedom's beams which gild his native  
 soil.  
 Does thirst of empire, does desire of fame,  
 125 (For these are specious crimes)<sup>6</sup> our rage inflame?  
 No: sordid lust of gold their fate controls,  
 The basest appetite of basest souls;  
 Gold, better gained by what their ripening sky,<sup>7</sup>  
 Their fertile fields, their arts<sup>8</sup> and mines supply.  
 130 What wrongs, what injuries does oppression  
 plead  
 To smooth the horror of th'unnatural deed?  
 What strange offence, what aggravated sin?  
 They stand convicted—of a darker skin!  
 Barbarians, hold! th'opprobrious commerce spare,  
 135 Respect *his*<sup>o</sup> sacred image which they bear:  
 Though dark and savage, ignorant and blind,  
 They claim the common privilege of kind;<sup>o</sup>  
 Let malice strip them of each other plea,  
 They still are men, and men should still be free.  
 140 Insulted reason loathes th'inverted trade—  
 Dire change! the agent is the purchase made!<sup>9</sup>  
 Perplexed, the baffled muse involves<sup>o</sup> the tale;



145 Nature confounded, well may language fail!  
The outraged goddess with abhorrent eyes  
Sees MAN the traffic, SOULS the merchandize!

\* \* \*

215 And thou, WHITE SAVAGE! whether lust of gold,  
Or lust of conquest, rule thee uncontrolled!  
Hero, or robber!—by whatever name  
Thou plead thy impious claim to wealth or fame;  
Whether inferior mischiefs<sup>1</sup> be thy boast,  
A petty tyrant rifling Gambia's coast:  
Or bolder carnage track thy crimson way,  
Kings dispossessed, and provinces thy prey;  
Panting to tame wide earth's remotest bound;  
220 All Cortez murdered, all Columbus found;<sup>2</sup>  
O'er plundered realms to reign, detested Lord,  
Make millions wretched, and thyself abhorred;—  
In reason's eye, in wisdom's fair account,  
Your sum of glory boasts a like amount;  
225 The means may differ, but the end's the same;  
Conquest is pillage with a nobler name.  
Who makes the sum of human blessings less,  
Or sinks the stock of general happiness,  
No solid fame shall grace, no true renown,  
His life shall blazon,<sup>o</sup> or his memory crown.  
230 Had those advenferous spirits who explore  
Through ocean's trackless wastes, the far-sought  
shore;  
Whether of wealth insatiate, or of power,  
Conquerors who waste, or ruffians who devour:  
235 Had these possessed, O Cook!<sup>3</sup> thy gentle mind,  
Thy love of arts, thy love of humankind;  
Had these pursued thy mild and liberal plan,  
DISCOVERERS had not been a curse to man!

\* \* \*

Shall Britain, where the soul of freedom reigns,  
Forge chains for others she herself disdains?  
Forbid it, Heaven! O let the nations know  
The liberty she loves she will bestow;  
Not to herself the glorious gift confined,  
255 She spreads the blessing wide as humankind;  
And, scorning narrow views of time and place,  
Bids all be free in earth's extended space.

What page of human annals can record  
A deed so bright as human rights restored?  
260 O may that god-like deed, that shining page,  
Redeem OUR fame, and consecrate OUR age!

And see, the cherub Mercy from above,  
Descending softly, quits the sphere of love!  
On feeling hearts she sheds celestial dew,  
265 And breathes her spirit o'er th'enlighten'd few;  
From soul to soul the spreading influence steals,  
Till every breast the soft contagion feels.  
She bears, exulting, to the burning shore  
The loveliest office o angel ever bore;  
270 To vindicate the power in Heaven adored,  
To still the clank of chains, and sheathe the sword;  
To cheer the mourner, and with soothing hands  
From bursting hearts unbind th'oppressor's bands;  
To raise the luster of the Christian name,  
275 And clear the foulest blot that dims its fame.

As the mild spirit hovers o'er the coast,  
A fresher hue the withered landscapes boast;  
Her healing smiles the ruined scenes repair,  
And blasted nature wears a joyous air.  
280 She spreads her blest commission from above,  
Stamped with the sacred characters of love;  
She tears the banner stained with blood and tears,  
And, LIBERTY! thy shining standard rears!

285 As the bright ensign's<sup>o</sup> glory she displays,  
See pale OPPRESSION faints beneath the blaze!  
The giant dies! no more his frown appalls,  
The chain untouched, drops off; the fetter falls.  
Astonished echo tells the vocal shore,  
Oppression's fallen, and slavery is no more!  
290 The dusky myriads<sup>o</sup> crowd the sultry plain,  
And hail that mercy long invoked in vain.  
Victorious power! she bursts their two-fold bands,  
And FAITH and FREEDOM spring from Mercy's hands.

## Endnotes

1788

- Note 1: More has just addressed Thomas Southerne in lines not included here ("plaintive Southerne!" 37), the Irish dramatist who adapted *Oroonoko* (1688) by Aphra Behn for the stage, as *Oroonoko, a Tragedy* (1696): as in Behn's story, the title character is a noble African prince whose resistance to enslavement ends in his death.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Non-Christian, "heathen," but also a term Europeans commonly applied to people they did not consider civilized.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
It is a point of honor among negroes of a high spirit to die rather than to suffer their glossy skin to bear the mark of the whip. Qua-shi had somehow offended his master, a young planter with whom he had been bred up in the endearing intimacy of a play-fellow. His services had been faithful; his attachment affectionate. The master resolved to punish him, and pursued him for that purpose. In trying to escape Qua-shi stumbled and fell; the master fell upon him; they wrestled long with doubtful victory; at length Qua-shi got uppermost, and, being firmly seated on his master's breast, he secured his legs with one hand, and with the other drew a sharp knife; then

said, 'Master, I have been bred up with you from a child; I have loved you as myself: in return, you have condemned me to a punishment of which I must ever have borne the marks: thus only can I avoid them'; so saying, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead, without a groan, on his master's body. Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment of African Slaves* [More's note]. More condenses and freely paraphrases an anecdote related in James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784), [pp. 249–53](#). Ramsay, a surgeon and Anglican minister who worked on St. Kitts in the Caribbean, offers firsthand accounts of Quashi and many other enslaved people to illustrate both the inherent nobility of Africans and their need to be converted to Christianity (which forbids suicide).

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: In contemplating the honors Quashi would have received had his deed be done in a more celebrated place and time such as ancient Rome, More again reminds us that the code of honorable suicide that he shares with Roman heroes is non-Christian. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Namib desert extends along the coast of Angola in southwestern Africa. "Tempe's vale": at the foot of Mount Olympus, the Vale of Tempe figures prominently in ancient Greek stories of the gods. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: More has no objection to imperial ambitions and the love of fame, but will go on to say that the trade in enslaved people is driven not by those noble impulses but by a true (not merely "specious") crime, the "sordid lust of gold" (line 127). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: It was commonly or fancifully believed that the heat of the sun "ripens" precious metals in the earth. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Besides many valuable productions of the soil, cloths and carpets of exquisite manufacture are brought from the coast of Guinea [More's note]. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Human beings, normally the “agents” who make commercial transactions, are themselves made commodities in human trafficking.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Deeds excused as merely small-scale crimes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: More compares the scale of the crimes of Britain in Africa to the extent of the Western Hemisphere as Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) found it in 1492. “Cortez”: Hernán Cortéz (1485–1547), Spanish conqueror of the Aztec Empire.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: James Cook (1728–1779), captain in the Royal Navy, cartographer, and explorer of the South Pacific, whom Britons of More’s time often celebrated as a humane explorer (see Anna Seward, “An Elegy on Captain Cook,” p. 348), but whose legacy as a promoter of British colonialism has recently been more critically assessed.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *verses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nonessential*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *passions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *profuse*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *consciousness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in the past*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forgetful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imagination*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *physical constitution*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *God’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the human species*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confusedly entangles*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glorify*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *function, duty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *insignia’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Africans*[Return to reference °](#)

## JAMES BOSWELL

The Scottish biographer, diarist, and lawyer James Boswell initially seemed inclined against slavery, working on the legal team that supported the appeal of Joseph Knight, an enslaved man in Scotland who first sued for his freedom in 1774, and soliciting an abolitionist argument to support Knight's case in 1777 from his friend Samuel Johnson (see above). Boswell also attended a meeting of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. But by the time he published his masterpiece, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791; see [p. 884](#)), his position had shifted. In the *Life*, he consistently worked, scholars have pointed out, to mute the vigorous antislavery sentiments of his literary hero. The same year the *Life* appeared, Boswell also anonymously published *No Abolition of Slavery, or the Universal Empire of Love*, a lampoon of the leading parliamentary abolitionists that also rehearses familiar arguments made by slavery's apologists: he claims that Africans are happy to be enslaved on British plantations, that the promoters of ending the transatlantic trade do not understand how deleterious to British commerce such a ban would be, that God intends society to be a hierarchy in which some groups must be subordinated to others, and so on. He concludes with the most bizarre point of all, seemingly made, after a fashion, in jest. Love holds ultimate power over everybody, Boswell muses, making all men its slaves, and stopping Britain's transatlantic system of chattel slavery would have no effect on this universal "slavery" of the romantic kind. The poem facetiously advances this idea as a compliment to the unnamed young woman it addresses, evoking offhand the sufferings of the Middle Passage and the often fatal "seasoning" of enslaved Africans in British Caribbean colonies to illustrate Boswell's own pangs of love. His analogy suggests how easily some White Britons of the era could minimize or connive at the painful realities of enslavement

when they were invested, financially, ideologically, or otherwise, in its continuance.

# ***From No Abolition of Slavery; or, The Universal Empire of Love***

\* \* \*

Noodles,<sup>1</sup> who rave for abolition  
Of *th'African's improved condition*,<sup>2</sup>  
At your own cost fine projects try;  
Don't *rob*—from *pure humanity*.

25      Go, W—, with narrow skull,  
Go home, and preach away at Hull,<sup>3</sup>  
No longer to the senate<sup>4</sup> cackle,  
In strains which suit the tabernacle;<sup>o</sup>  
I hate your little witling<sup>o</sup> sneer,  
Your pert and self-sufficient leer,  
30      Mischief to trade sits on thy lip,  
Insects will gnaw the noblest ship;  
Go, W—, be gone, for shame,  
Thou dwarf,<sup>5</sup> with a big-sounding name.

\* \* \*

55      What frenzies will a rabble seize  
In lax luxurious days, like these;  
THE PEOPLE'S MAJESTY, forsooth,  
Must fix our rights, define our truth;  
Weavers<sup>6</sup> become our lords of trade,  
And every clown throw<sup>7</sup> by his spade,  
60      T'*instruct* our ministers of state,  
And *foreign commerce* regulate:  
Ev'n *bony* Scotland with her dirk,<sup>8</sup>  
Nay, her starved Presbyterian *kirk*,<sup>9</sup>



65 With ignorant effrontery prays  
Britain to dim the western rays,<sup>1</sup>  
Which while they on our island fall  
Give warmth and splendor to us all.

\* \* \*

180 He who to thwart GOD'S system<sup>2</sup> tries,  
Bids mountains sink, and valleys rise;  
Slavery, subjection, what you will,  
Has ever been, and will be still:  
Trust me, that in this world of woe  
Mankind must different burthens know;  
185 Each bear his own, th'apostle spoke;<sup>3</sup>  
And chiefly they who bear the yoke.<sup>4</sup>  
From wise subordination's plan  
Springs the chief happiness of man;  
Yet from that source to numbers flow  
Varieties of pain and woe;  
190 Look round this land of freedom, pray,  
And all its lower ranks survey;  
Bid the hard-working laborer speak,  
What are his scanty gains a week?  
All huddled in a smoky shed,  
195 How are his wife and children fed?  
Are not the poor in constant fear  
Of the relentless overseer?<sup>5</sup>

LONDON! Metropolis of bliss!  
200 Ev'n there sad sights we cannot miss;  
Beggars at every corner stand,  
With doleful look and trembling hand;  
Hear the shrill piteous cry of *sweep*,  
See wretches riddling<sup>o</sup> an ash heap;  
The streets some for old iron scrape,  
205 And scarce the crush of wheels escape;

Some share with dogs the half-eat bones,  
From dunghills picked with weary groans.

\* \* \*

Lo then, in yonder fragrant isle  
Where nature ever seems to smile,  
The cheerful gang!<sup>6</sup>—the negroes see  
Perform the task of industry:  
Ev’n at their labor hear them sing,  
245 While time flies quick on downy wing;  
Finished the business of the day,  
No human beings are more gay:  
Of food, clothes, cleanly lodging sure,  
Each has his property secure;  
250 Their wives and children are protected,  
In sickness they are not neglected;  
And when old age brings a release,  
Their grateful days they end in peace.  
  
255 But should our wrongheads have their will,  
Should Parliament approve their bill,  
Pernicious as th’effect would be,  
T’abolish negro slavery,  
Such partial freedom would be vain,  
Since love’s strong empire must remain.

260  
VENUS, czarina<sup>o</sup> of the skies,  
Despotic by her killing eyes,  
Millions of slaves who don’t complain,  
Confess her universal reign:  
And Cupid too well-used to try  
265 His bow-string lash, and darts to ply,  
Her little *Driver* still we find,  
A wicked rogue, although he’s blind.<sup>7</sup>

Bring me not maxims from the schools;<sup>o</sup>

270 Experience now my conduct rules;  
O ——! trust thy lover true,  
I must and will be slave to you.<sup>8</sup>

Yet I must say—but prithee smile,—  
'Twas a hard trip to Paphos<sup>9</sup> isle;  
By your keen roving glances caught,  
275 And to a beauteous tyrant brought;  
My head with giddiness turned round,  
With strongest fetters I was bound;  
I fancy from my frame and face,  
You thought me of th'Angola race:<sup>1</sup>  
280 You kept me long indeed, my dear,  
Between the decks of hope and fear;  
But this and all the *seasoning*<sup>2</sup> o'er,  
My blessings I enjoy the more.

285 Contented with my situation,  
I want but little REGULATION;  
At intervals *chanson à boire*  
And good old port in my *Code noire*;<sup>3</sup>  
Nor care I when I've once begun,  
How long I labor, in the sun  
290 Of your bright eyes!—which beam with joy,  
Warm, cheer, enchant, but don't destroy.

My charming friend! it is full time  
To close this argument in rhyme;  
The rhapsody must now be ended,  
295 My proposition I've defended;  
For, slavery there must ever be,  
While we have mistresses like thee!

- Note 1: If the abettors of the Slave trade Bill should think they are too harshly treated in this Poem, let them consider how they should feel if *their* estates were threatened by an agrarian law; (no unpalatable measure) and let them make allowances for the irritation which themselves have occasioned [*Boswell's note*].  
"Noodles": fools.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That the Africans are in a state of savage wretchedness, appears from the most authentic accounts. Such being the fact, an abolition of the slave trade would in truth be precluding them from the first step towards progressive civilization, and consequently of happiness, which it is proved by the most respectable evidence they enjoy in a great degree in our West-India islands, though under well-regulated restraint [*from Boswell's note*, which goes on to compare enslaved Africans to Scottish Highlanders, whom Boswell considered primitive, who protested the union of 1707 with England].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The initial letter W (line 25) provided by Boswell indicates William Wilberforce (1759–1833), leader of the parliamentary antislavery faction, member for Kingston upon Hull in the north of England, and a passionate evangelical Christian (see line 28).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The question now agitated in the British Parliament concerning slavery, is illustrated with great information, able argument, and perspicuous expression, in a work entitled, *Doubts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, by an Old Member of Parliament*; printed for Stockdale, in Picadilly, 1790. It is ascribed to John Ranby, Esq. [*Boswell's note*, which goes on to acknowledge that the "evils" of enslavement should "be humanely remedied" without abolition, praising the Slave Trade Act of 1788, also known as Dolben's Act, which limited the number of enslaved people who could be transported in ships, based on the ships' sizes].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wilberforce was a little over five feet tall.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Manchester Petition [*Boswell's note*]. The petitioning campaign for abolition, begun in 1788 in support of the 1789

abolition bill, included one from Manchester, a center of textile manufacture, with around 11,000 signatures (about a fifth of the city's population).[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Vote. "Clown": an unsophisticated, rustic person, a peasant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A long dagger carried by men in the Scottish Highlands; also a small, ceremonial version of this, worn tucked in a kilt by Highlanders. "Bony": an older spelling of *bonny*, Scottish term designating a pleasing appearance, with a play on the underfed leanness Boswell associates with his home country.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Some of the Scottish Presbyteries petitioned [*Boswell's note*]. Sixteen of the 101 petitions in favor of abolition submitted to Parliament in 1788 came from Scotland, most from the ecclesiastical courts, or presbyteries, representing congregations in particular areas.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Trade from the West Indies (which depended on enslavement), depicted metaphorically as the sun's rays.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The state of slavery is acknowledged in both the Old Testament and the New [*Boswell's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Galatians 6:5.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Those who perform manual labor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Parish officer responsible for administering the Poor Laws, designed to provide relief and work for the poor, and keep them under supervision.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sir William Young has a series of pictures, in which the negroes in our plantations are justly and pleasingly exhibited in various scenes [*Boswell's note*]. Young (1724/5–1788), British plantation owner and holder of enslaved people, who served in various posts in the British West Indies, including governor of Dominica. The pictures to which Boswell refers could be those by Italian artist Agostino Brunias (ca. 1730–1796), who painted scenes of West Indian life for Young.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cupid, god of love, is often depicted as blindfolded, or blind. "Driver": Boswell, elaborating his conceit that love is a

kind of slavery, compares Cupid to one who “drives” enslaved people, that is, one who forces them to work.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The poem is “Addressed to Miss ——,” and Boswell here seems to refer to her again; she has been tentatively identified as Frances Bagnall (or Bagnal), sister of the wife of Boswell’s friend Sir William Scott, Baron Stowell.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A city on the island of Cyprus, where Aphrodite (the Roman goddess Venus) landed after she rose from the sea, and where the worship of her was centered in the ancient world.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Angola blacks are the most ferocious [*from Boswell’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The grueling, often fatal period of adjustment of enslaved people to life and work on British plantations in the Caribbean. “Between the decks”: that is, of an enslaver’s ship. Boswell further develops his comparison between his infatuation with a young woman and being brutalized in the transatlantic enslaving system.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Properly *code noir* (French, black code), French laws enacted by Louis XIV (1638–1715) in 1685 that regulated the conditions of enslavement in French colonies. Boswell presumably applies the term to his port, a fortified wine, because of its dark color. “REGULATION”: Boswell maintains his view that the trade in enslaved people should be better regulated, but not abolished. “*Chanson à boire*”: drinking song (French).[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *church*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feebly witty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sifting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *empress*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *academic theories*[Return to reference](#) °

## **PHILLIS WHEATLEY**

### **ca. 1753–1784**

The poet who would become Phillis Wheatley was born in West Africa around 1753—we do not know the details of precisely when and where. We do know, though, that enslavers forcibly took her, shipped her to America, and put her up for sale in 1761. While living in Boston as the legal property of John and Susanna Wheatley, the future poet learned to read and write, began to publish individual poems, and chose to be baptized as a Christian. Her book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, appeared in 1773, with a prefatory note in which important White male figures of Boston patronizingly vouch for their belief that Wheatley was capable of writing it. She was freed from enslavement later that year, and in 1778 she married John Peters, a free Black man. They had three children, but all of them died young. The poet herself died, poor, in 1784, and her grave is unmarked.





Frontispiece portrait engraving of **Phillis Wheatley**, in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, 1773, after a painting perhaps by Scipio Moorhead (see [p. 995](#) for Wheatley's poem addressed to him).

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The name on the title page of her *Poems*—Phillis Wheatley—bears a violent history. We do not know what she was named in Africa when she was born. In America she became “Phillis,” named after the slaving ship that carried her through the Middle Passage to Boston. “Wheatley” was the last name of the family to which she was enslaved. Later, after her book had been published, she became free, married, and took on her husband’s last name, “Peters.” Many scholars today use the second last name as the only name she herself chose, one marking instead a history of love. Phillis Wheatley Peters later wrote another volume of poems—one that might have borne this chosen name and, as Black American poet June Jordan wrote in 1985, “would have been the poetry of someone who had chosen herself, free, and brave to be free in a land of slavery”—but Wheatley Peters was unable to arrange for its publication. This poet who could not get support for her second book, however, is now one of the most read and most important eighteenth-century writers.

Wheatley wrote in North America: she belongs in a tradition of American and African American literature. But she is also part of the British tradition. Her first big success was a poem on the English Methodist preacher George Whitefield, dedicated to the English Countess of Huntingdon, Selina Hastings. And when Wheatley was unable to get her poems published in Boston, Hastings helped her arrange for English publication. Wheatley traveled to London, where her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* were first printed in 1773. (On the journey, she penned a “Farewell to America”: “for *Britannia’s* distant shore / We sweep the liquid plain”). Moreover, Wheatley knew and admired the works of English poets like John Milton and Alexander Pope, and her poetry creatively repurposed the forms of Miltonic blank verse and Popean couplets. Like Milton and Pope, moreover, Wheatley is deeply interested in classical Greek and Latin poetic traditions—she meditates thoughtfully on her place in these in “To Maecenas.”

The neoclassical aspects of Wheatley’s work have sometimes disappointed or puzzled later readers, who seem to wish that she wrote in a more lyric or Romantic mode about her personal experiences and feelings. Other later readers have wanted her to be

more vehement or angry in her condemnation of slavery. Yet we should not wish these formally brilliant poems to be otherwise. We ought to respect, on her own terms, Wheatley's careful thinking about poetry, about her engagement in a learned tradition, and about what she could or should say.

## To Maecenas<sup>1</sup>

MAECENAS, you, beneath the myrtle shade,  
Read o'er what poets sung, and shepherds played.  
What felt those poets but you feel the same?  
Does not your soul possess the sacred flame?  
5 Their noble strains your equal genius shares  
In softer language, and diviner airs.

While Homer<sup>2</sup> paints Io! circumfused<sup>o</sup> in air,  
Celestial Gods in mortal forms appear;  
Swift as they move hear each recess rebound,  
10 Heav'n quakes, earth trembles, and the shores  
resound.

Great Sire of verse, before my mortal eyes,  
The lightnings blaze across the vaulted skies,  
And, as the thunder shakes the heav'nly plains,  
A deep-felt horror thrills through all my veins.  
15 When gentler strains demand thy graceful song,  
The length'ning line moves languishing along.  
When great Patroclus courts Achilles' aid,  
The grateful tribute of my tears is paid;  
Prone on the shore he feels the pangs of love,  
20 And stern Pelides<sup>3</sup> tend'rest passions move.

Great Maro's<sup>4</sup> strain in heav'nly numbers flows,  
The Nine<sup>5</sup> inspire, and all the bosom glows.  
O could I rival thine and Virgil's page,  
Or claim the Muses with the Mantuan Sage;<sup>o</sup>  
25 Soon the same beauties should my mind adorn,  
And the same ardors in my soul should burn:  
Then should my song in bolder notes arise,

And all my numbers pleasingly surprise;  
 But here I sit, and mourn a grov'ling mind,  
 That fain would mount, and ride upon the wind.  
 30

Not you, my friend, these plaintive<sup>o</sup> strains become,  
 Not you, whose bosom is the Muses' home;  
 When they from tow'ring Helicon<sup>6</sup> retire,  
 They fan in you the bright immortal fire,  
 But I less happy, cannot raise the song,  
 35 The fault'ring music dies upon my tongue.

The happier Terence<sup>7</sup> all the choir inspir'd,  
 His soul replenished, and his bosom fir'd;  
 But say, ye Muses, why this partial grace,  
 To one alone of Afric's sable race;  
 40 From age to age transmitting thus his name  
 With the first glory in the rolls of fame?

Thy virtues, great Maecenas! shall be sung  
 In praise of him, from whom those virtues sprung:  
 While blooming wreaths around thy temples spread,  
 45 I'll snatch a laurel from thine honored head, }  
 While you indulgent smile upon the deed. }

As long as Thames in streams majestic flows,  
 Or Naiads<sup>8</sup> in their oozy beds repose,  
 While Phoebus<sup>o</sup> reigns above the starry train,  
 50 While bright Aurora<sup>9</sup> purples o'er the main,  
 So long, great Sir, the muse thy praise shall sing,  
 So long thy praise shall make Parnassus<sup>1</sup> ring:  
 Then grant, Maecenas, thy paternal rays,  
 Hear me propitious,<sup>o</sup> and defend my lays.  
 55

- Note 1: Maecenas (70–8 B.C.E.) was a patron of poets in classical Rome, celebrated at the beginning of poems by Horace and Virgil. Wheatley uses the classical name to praise a patron in her own time (possibly Selina Hastings, John Wheatley, the man who held her enslaved, or Mather Byles, a Boston minister and poet who was among those who testified to the authenticity of Wheatley’s poems).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Greek poet celebrated as author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (probably somewhere around the 8th or 7th century B.C.E.). Wheatley addresses Homer throughout this stanza—he is the “Great Sire” at line 11 and the referent of “thy” at line 15.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A name for Achilles, a heroic warrior depicted in the *Iliad*. “Patroclus courts Achilles’ aid”: an incident from Book 16.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Maro is another name for the ancient Roman poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The nine classical Muses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A mountain in Greece, fabled to be the home of the Muses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He was African by birth [*Wheatley’s note*]. Terence (ca. 195–159 B.C.E.), the great Roman playwright, was from North Africa, arrived in Rome while enslaved, and gained his freedom.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Greek mythology, the spirits of rivers and streams.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “The goddess that opens the gates of day; poetically, the morning” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Another mountain in Greece said to be the home of the Muses.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *spread around*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Virgil*[Return to reference °](#)

- 〇: *sad, lamenting*[Return to reference](#) 〇
- 〇: *the sun*[Return to reference](#) 〇
- 〇: *favorably*[Return to reference](#) 〇

# To the University of Cambridge, in New-England<sup>1</sup>

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,  
The muses promise to assist my pen;  
'Twas not long since I left my native shore  
The land of errors, and Egyptian gloom:  
5 Father of mercy, 'twas thy gracious hand  
Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 'tis giv'n to scan the heights  
Above, to traverse the ethereal space,  
And mark the systems of revolving worlds.  
Still more, ye sons of science ye receive  
10 The blissful news by messengers from heav'n,  
How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows.  
See him with hands out-stretcht upon the cross;  
Immense compassion in his bosom glows;  
He hears revilers,<sup>2</sup> nor resents their scorn:  
15 What matchless mercy in the Son of God!  
When the whole human race by sin had fall'n,  
He deigned to die that they might rise again,<sup>3</sup>  
And share with him in the sublimest skies,  
Life without death, and glory without end.

Improve your privileges while they stay,  
Ye pupils, and each hour redeem, that bears  
Or good or bad report of you to heav'n.  
Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,  
By you be shunned, nor once remit<sup>o</sup> your guard;  
25 Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.  
Ye blooming plants of human race divine,



An Ethiop<sup>4</sup> tells you 'tis your greatest foe;  
 Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,  
 And in immense perdition<sup>5</sup> sinks the soul.

1773

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Harvard University (founded 1636) in Cambridge, then a Boston suburb.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: People who revile, or scorn, Jesus (and religion generally).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fundamental Christian teachings: human sin led to a fall from Eden, and Jesus died for these sins, "that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Used here as a general synonym for African.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Destruction; ruin; death"; also "Eternal death" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *relax*[Return to reference °](#)

# On Being Brought from Africa to America

5 'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,  
Taught my benighted soul to understand  
That there's a God, that there's a Savior too:  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
"Their color is a diabolic die."  
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,<sup>1</sup>  
May be refined, and join th' angelic train.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Biblical figure who killed his brother, Abel. Genesis 4:15 has God "sett[ing] a mark upon Cain"; in the 18th century, this "mark" was sometimes associated with Black skin.[Return to reference 1](#)

# Thoughts on the Works of Providence<sup>1</sup>

Arise, my soul, on wings enraptured, rise  
To praise the monarch of the earth and skies,  
Whose goodness and beneficence appear  
As round its center moves the rolling year,  
Or when the morning glows with rosy charms,  
5 Or the sun slumbers in the ocean's arms:  
Of light divine be a rich portion lent  
To guide my soul, and favor my intent.  
Celestial muse, my arduous flight sustain,  
And raise my mind to a seraphic<sup>o</sup> strain!

10 Adored for ever be the God unseen,  
Which round the sun revolves this vast machine,  
Though to his eye its mass a point appears:  
Adored the God that whirls surrounding spheres,<sup>o</sup>  
Which first ordained that mighty Sol<sup>o</sup> should reign  
15 The peerless monarch of th' ethereal train:  
Of miles twice forty millions<sup>2</sup> is his height,  
And yet his radiance dazzles mortal sight  
So far beneath—from him th' extended earth  
Vigor derives, and ev'ry flow'ry birth:  
20 Vast through her orb<sup>3</sup> she moves with easy grace  
Around her Phoebus in unbounded space;  
True to her course th' impetuous storm derides,<sup>4</sup>  
Triumphant o'er the winds, and surging tides.

25 Almighty, in these wond'rous works of thine,  
What Pow'r, what Wisdom, and what Goodness  
shine?  
And are thy wonders, Lord, by men explored,  
And yet creating glory unadored!

Creation smiles in various beauty gay,  
While day to night, and night succeeds to day:  
30 That Wisdom, which attends Jehovah's<sup>o</sup> ways,  
Shines most conspicuous in the solar rays:  
Without them, destitute of heat and light,  
This world would be the reign of endless night:  
35 In their excess how would our race<sup>5</sup> complain,  
Abhorring life! how hate its length'ned chain!  
From air adust<sup>6</sup> what num'rous ills would rise?  
What dire contagion taint the burning skies?  
What pestilential vapors, fraught with death,  
40 Would rise, and overspread the lands beneath?

Hail, smiling morn, that from the orient<sup>7</sup> main  
Ascending dost adorn the heav'nly plain!  
So rich, so various are thy beauteous dies,  
That spread through all the circuit of the skies,  
45 That, full of thee, my soul in rapture soars,  
And thy great God, the cause of all adores.

O'er beings infinite his love extends,  
His Wisdom rules them, and his Pow'r defends.  
When tasks diurnal<sup>o</sup> tire the human frame,  
The spirits faint, and dim the vital flame,  
50 Then too that ever active bounty shines,  
Which not infinity of space confines.  
The sable veil, that Night in silence draws,  
Conceals effects, but shows th' Almighty Cause;  
Night seals in sleep the wide creation fair,  
55 And all is peaceful but the brow of care.  
Again, gay Phoebus, as the day before,  
Wakes ev'ry eye, but what shall wake no more;  
Again the face of nature is renewed,  
Which still appears harmonious, fair, and good.  
60 May grateful strains salute the smiling morn,  
Before its beams the eastern hills adorn!

Shall day to day and night to night conspire  
To show the goodness of the Almighty Sire?  
This mental voice shall man regardless hear,  
65 And never, never raise the filial pray'r?  
To-day, O hearken, nor your folly mourn  
For time misspent, that never will return.

But see the sons of vegetation<sup>8</sup> rise,  
And spread their leafy banners to the skies.  
70 All-wise Almighty Providence we trace  
In trees, and plants, and all the flow'ry race;  
As clear as in the nobler frame of man,  
All lovely copies of the Maker's plan.  
The pow'r the same that forms a ray of light,  
75 That called creation from eternal night.  
"Let there be light," he said:<sup>9</sup> from his profound<sup>1</sup>  
Old Chaos heard, and trembled at the sound:  
Swift as the word, inspir'd by pow'r divine,  
Behold the light around its maker shine,  
80 The first fair product of th' omnific<sup>2</sup> God,  
And now through all his works diffused abroad.

As reason's pow'rs by day our God disclose,  
So we may trace him in the night's repose:  
Say what is sleep? and dreams how passing  
85 strange!<sup>3</sup>

When action ceases, and ideas range  
Licentious and unbounded o'er the plains,  
Where Fancy's queen in giddy triumph reigns.  
Hear in soft strains the dreaming lover sigh  
To a kind fair, or rave in jealousy;  
90 On pleasure now, and now on vengeance bent,  
The lab'ring passions struggle for a vent.  
What pow'r, O man! thy reason then restores,  
So long suspended in nocturnal hours?

95      What secret hand returns the mental train,  
And gives improved thine active pow'rs again?  
From thee, O man, what gratitude should rise!  
And, when from balmy sleep thou op'st thine  
          eyes,  
          Let thy first thoughts be praises to the skies. }  
100      How merciful our God who thus imparts  
O'erflowing tides of joy to human hearts,  
When wants and woes might be our righteous lot,  
Our God forgetting, by our God forgot!

          Among the mental pow'rs a question rose,  
          "What most the image of th' Eternal shows?"  
105      When thus to Reason (so let Fancy rove)  
Her great companion spoke immortal Love.<sup>4</sup>

          "Say, mighty pow'r, how long shall strife prevail,  
          And with its murmurs load the whisp'ring gale?  
          Refer the cause to Recollection's shrine,  
110      Who loud proclaims my origin divine,  
The cause whence heav'n and earth began to be,  
And is not man immortalized by me?  
Reason let this most causeless strife subside."  
          Thus Love pronounced, and Reason thus replied.  
115

          "Thy birth, celestial queen! 'tis mine to own,  
          In thee resplendent is the Godhead shown;  
          Thy words persuade, my soul enraptured feels  
          Resistless beauty which thy smile reveals."  
120      Ardent she spoke, and, kindling at her charms,  
She clasped the blooming goddess in her arms.

          Infinite Love where'er we turn our eyes  
          Appears: this ev'ry creature's wants supplies;  
          This most is heard in Nature's constant voice,  
          This makes the morn, and this the eve rejoice;

125 This bids the fost'ring rains and dew's descend  
 To nourish all, to serve one gen'ral end,  
 The good of man: yet man ungrateful pays  
 But little homage, and but little praise.  
 130 To him,<sup>o</sup> whose works arrayed with mercy shine,  
 What songs should rise, how constant, how divine!

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Providence is "The care of God over created beings; divine superintendence" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). In this poem Wheatley participates in Christian and scientific traditions of finding admirable design and wisdom in God's creation, or "Works."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A period estimate of the distance between the sun and the earth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The orbit of Earth (personified as a woman).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Earth "derides" (or scorns) unpredictable weather phenomena, staying "True to her course."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The human race.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Burnt up; hot as with fire, scorched" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Eastern, where the sun rises.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Plants.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Genesis 1:3: "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Deep abyss.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "All-creating" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.3.159: "'twas passing strange."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Love (personified as Reason's companion) is about to speak.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Notes

- °: *angelic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *planets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God*[Return to reference](#) °



# On Imagination

Thy various works, imperial queen,<sup>1</sup> we see,  
How bright their forms! how decked with pomp by  
thee!

Thy wond'rous acts in beauteous order stand,  
And all attest how potent is thine hand.

5      From Helicon's refulgent<sup>2</sup> heights attend,  
Ye sacred choir, and my attempts befriend:  
To tell her glories with a faithful tongue,  
Ye blooming graces, triumph in my song.

10      Now here, now there, the roving Fancy<sup>3</sup> flies,  
Till some loved object strikes her wand'ring eyes,  
Whose silken fetters all the senses bind,  
And soft captivity involves the mind.

15      Imagination! who can sing thy force?  
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?  
Soaring through air to find the bright abode,  
Th' empyreal<sup>4</sup> palace of the thund'ring God,  
We on thy pinions<sup>o</sup> can surpass the wind,  
And leave the rolling universe behind:  
From star to star the mental optics rove,  
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.  
20      There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,  
Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded soul.

25      Though Winter frowns to Fancy's raptured eyes  
The fields may flourish, and gay scenes arise;  
The frozen deeps may break their iron bands,  
And bid their waters murmur o'er the sands.

30 Fair Flora may resume her fragrant reign,  
And with her flow'ry riches deck the plain;  
Sylvanus<sup>5</sup> may diffuse his honors round,  
And all the forest may with leaves be crowned:  
Show'rs may descend, and dew's their gems disclose,  
And nectar sparkle on the blooming rose.

35 Such is thy pow'r, nor are thine orders vain,  
O thou the leader of the mental train:  
In full perfection all thy works are wrought,  
And thine the scepter o'er the realms of thought.  
Before thy throne the subject-passions<sup>6</sup> bow,  
Of subject-passions sov'reign ruler Thou;  
At thy command joy rushes on the heart,  
40 And through the glowing veins the spirits dart.

Fancy might now her silken pinions try  
To rise from earth, and sweep th' expanse on high:  
From Tithon's bed now might Aurora rise,<sup>7</sup>  
Her cheeks all glowing with celestial dyes,  
45 While a pure stream of light o'erflows the  
          skies. }

The monarch of the day I might behold,  
And all the mountains tipt with radiant gold,  
But I reluctant leave the pleasing views,  
Which Fancy dresses to delight the Muse;  
50 Winter austere forbids me to aspire,  
And northern tempests damp the rising fire;  
They chill the tides of Fancy's flowing sea,  
Cease then, my song, cease the unequal lay.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Wheatley addresses Imagination, personified as a queen. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: “Bright; shining; glittering; splendid” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*). “Helicon”: a mountain in Greece, the home of the Muses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fancy is another word for imagination.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the “highest and purest region of heaven” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A personification or mythological god of forests (from Latin *sylva*, forest). “Flora”: a personification or mythological goddess of flowers (from Latin *flora*, flower).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Human passions imagined as subject to Imagination’s rule.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Greek and Roman myth, Tithonus is the man loved by Aurora (called Eos in Greek), the goddess associated with dawn.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *wings*[Return to reference °](#)

**To the Right Honorable William, Earl of  
Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal  
Secretary of State for North America, &c<sup>1</sup>**

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,  
Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn:  
The northern clime beneath her genial ray,  
Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway:  
5 Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,  
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,  
While in thine hand with pleasure we behold  
The silken reins, and Freedom's charms unfold.  
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies  
10 She shines supreme, while hated faction dies:  
Soon as appeared the Goddess long desir'd,  
Sick at the view, she<sup>2</sup> languished and expir'd;  
Thus from the splendors of the morning light  
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.

15 No more, America, in mournful strain  
Of wrongs, and grievance unredressed  
complain, }  
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,  
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand  
Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land.<sup>3</sup>

20 Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,  
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatched from Afric's fancied happy seat:

25      What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labor in my parent's breast?  
Steeled was that soul and by no misery moved  
That from a father seized his babe below'd:  
30      Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

For favors past, great Sir, our thanks are due,  
And thee we ask thy favors to renew,  
Since in thy pow'r, as in thy will before,  
To sooth the griefs, which thou did'st once deplore.  
35      May heav'nly grace the sacred sanction give  
To all thy works, and thou for ever live  
Not only on the wings of fleeting Fame,  
Though praise immortal crowns the patriot's name,  
But to conduct to heav'ns refulgent fane,<sup>o</sup>  
40      May fiery coursers<sup>o</sup> sweep th' ethereal plain,  
And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,  
Where, like the prophet,<sup>4</sup> thou shalt find thy God.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: In 1772, William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth (1731–1801), was appointed as secretary of state in charge of the North American colonies. In the poem Wheatley addresses him, on the occasion of his appointment, with "hope" (line 5) for improved conditions in the colonies; in an accompanying letter, she had wished him "all Possible success, in your undertakings for the Interest of North America." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Faction, personified, dies when the "Goddess," Freedom, appears. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wheatley uses the common colonist rhetoric equating Britain's tyrannical imperial control with slavery. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A reference to 2 Kings 2:11: “there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire,” and “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sacred place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *horses*[Return to reference °](#)

## To S. M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works<sup>1</sup>

To show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,  
And thought in living characters to paint,  
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,  
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,  
How did those prospects give my soul delight,  
5 A new creation rushing on my sight?  
Still, wond'rous youth! each noble path pursue,  
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:  
Still may the painter's and the poet's fire  
To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!  
10 And may the charms of each seraphic<sup>o</sup> theme  
Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!  
High to the blissful wonders of the skies  
Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.  
Thrice happy, when exalted to survey  
15 That splendid city, crowned with endless day,  
Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:  
Celestial Salem<sup>2</sup> blooms in endless spring.

Calm and serene thy moments glide along,  
And may the muse inspire each future song!  
20 Still, with the sweets of contemplation blessed,  
May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!<sup>3</sup>  
But when these shades of time are chased away,  
And darkness ends in everlasting day,  
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,  
25 And view the landscapes in the realms above?  
There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,  
And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow:

No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs,<sup>4</sup>  
 Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes,  
 For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,  
 And purer language on th' ethereal plain.  
 Cease, gentle muse! the solemn gloom of night  
 Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: S. M. is Scipio Moorhead, an enslaved young painter in Boston. He might be the artist of the portrait of Wheatley that served as the source of her book's famous frontispiece engraving (see p. 986).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jerusalem was also called Salem; Wheatley imagines a heavenly city.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Johnson's *Dictionary* gives relevant definitions: "to adorn" but also "to inclose" or "surround."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Damon is a classical pastoral name, and a lover's "sighs" a pastoral theme.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *angelic*[Return to reference °](#)



## Letter to Samson Occom<sup>1</sup>

Rev'd and honored Sir,

I have this day received your obliging kind epistle, and am greatly satisfied with your reasons respecting the Negroes, and think highly reasonable what you offer in vindication of their natural rights: Those that invade them cannot be insensible that the divine light is chasing away the thick darkness which broods over the land of Africa; and the Chaos which has reigned so long is converting into beautiful Order, and reveals more and more clearly the glorious dispensation of civil and religious liberty, which are so inseparably united, that there is little or no enjoyment of one without the other: Otherwise, perhaps, the Israelites had been less solicitous for their freedom from Egyptian slavery; I don't say they would have been contented without it, by no means, for in every human breast, God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom; it is impatient of oppression, and pants for deliverance; and by the leave of our modern Egyptians<sup>2</sup> I will assert, that the same principle lives in us. God grant deliverance in his own way and time, and get him honor upon all those whose avarice impels them to countenance and help forward the calamities of their fellow creatures. This I desire not for their hurt, but to convince them of the strange absurdity of their conduct whose words and actions are so diametrically opposite. How well the cry for liberty and the reverse disposition for the exercise of oppressive power over others agree—I humbly think it does not require the penetration of a philosopher to determine.

### Endnotes

1774

- Note 1: This letter is from February 11, 1774, and a month later, on March 11, it was published in the *Connecticut Gazette*, where an unnamed editorial voice patronizingly offered Wheatley's

letter to readers “as a Specimen of her Ingenuity.” Wheatley had gained her freedom the previous fall. On Samson Occom, see p. 355.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Wheatley’s biographer Vincent Carretta explains: Wheatley “equate[s] contemporaneous slave owners—‘Modern Egyptians’—with Old Testament villains, and by implication people of African descent with the Israelites, God’s chosen people.” “By the leave of”: with the permission of.[Return to reference 2](#)

# Sentiment

The connection between literature and the emotions has been a focus of critical attention since ancient times. Aristotle's *Poetics* (ca. 330 B.C.E.), for instance, says that the aim of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear. And religious and moral writing has always been intent on the passions, though their influence has usually been seen as negative. (Five of the Seven Deadly Sins, including Greed and Envy, are passions.) But a profound reevaluation of the social meaning and power of feeling developed in Britain in the eighteenth century. Changes in practices of material culture helped drive this transformation. The massive growth of Britain's commercial wealth in the period depended on ever more encounters between strangers—buyers and sellers, retailers and consumers, travelers and locals—in big cities (especially, of course, London), stock exchanges and shops, and public places like coffeehouses, parks, and assemblies. And this gave cultural commentators a reason to stress the pleasing emotions arising from commerce, a term used to signify both sociable and financial exchange. The English philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), remarked in 1709 that in a civil society, “we polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of *amicable Collision*”; people coming together socially reveal and refine their naturally warm feelings toward each other. The Anglo-Dutch physician and philosopher Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) retorted gleefully that greed, pride, and selfishness make a society thrive, not amicability or politeness. Either way, the passions had a new, crucial role to play: they made a nation prosperous and happy. The debate engaged other notable thinkers, including the Irish-Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), who took Shaftesbury's side, arguing that God had implanted naturally benevolent feelings in all of us toward each other. Some began to insist that we own up to the fact that feelings are our sole source of energy and motivation:

“reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them,” declared David Hume (see below). Finally Hutcheson’s student and Hume’s friend Adam Smith would unite the period’s dual emphases on feelings and commercial activity to help lay the ideological foundations of the modern age: in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), he argued that a nation prospered not by following moral rules and rational planning but by allowing free play to “the private interests and passions of individuals.”

Literature invested in the new prestige of feelings. This created not only a new kind of content but also a new relationship between literary works and readers. One of the most influential novelists of the age, Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), wrote epistolary novels because letters supposedly written by the principal characters immersed readers in their emotional states more directly and immediately than a detached narration would. Samuel Johnson remarked, “if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment.” Johnson and others use the term *sentiment* to identify a kind of feeling that affects thinking: as the Scottish critic and philosopher Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) puts it, “every thought prompted by passion is termed a *sentiment*.” And the idea that plot could be almost entirely subordinated to the display of sentiment furnished fiction with a new motive, especially after the mid-eighteenth century. The works of Laurence Sterne, including *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), attained their high points in emotional episodes that would have been too insignificant for earlier fiction. In *Tristram*, Uncle Toby’s refusal to kill a fly solicits the reader’s own tenderness, and a chance encounter between Yorick, protagonist of *A Sentimental Journey*, and a passing monk leads to a sentimental exchange of their snuffboxes and a flood of tears. In *The Man of Feeling* (1771) by the Scottish writer Henry Mackenzie (see below), the tears flow so regularly, in incident

after incident, that they seem almost like a programmed response. The multitude of fictions after 1770 subtitled "A Sentimental Novel" promised to fulfill readers' expectations—to cry, feel their protagonists' sorrows, and sigh at the injustice of the world. Sentimentalism established itself in literature by promoting a set of recognizable emotional protocols and roles, which could be taken up by readers in the real world. But sentimental works also often pressed against their own conventions. Sterne enjoys the ironies as well as the affecting powers of his sentimental performances, and poets like Ann Yearsley (see below) recognize how the codes of sentiment could falsify as well as heighten her naturally strong feelings.

One region of culture over which sentiment exercised a profound and sometimes surprising influence was gender. Women's emotional susceptibility had long been seen as a given, and the era of sentiment exaggerated this purported aspect of feminine character yet more. "Great sensibility of taste is generally accompanied by lively passions," remarked the Scottish philosopher Alexander Gerard in 1759; "women have always been considered as possessing both in a more eminent degree than men." Women sometimes resisted this imperative, as Frances Greville does in her poem "A Prayer for Indifference" (see below). And though women poets after midcentury were often expected to produce poems addressed to Sentiment or to Sensibility—that aspect of the personality endowed with taste and prone to be affected by evocative situations and objects—they used them as opportunities to define and assert their own emotions. The culture of sentiment stretched expectations about men further. Sentimental men were expected to weep. Masculinity could include sympathy for the suffering of others, delicately emotional friendships between men, and a passion for sentimental literature, which men consumed at least as much as women. In many ways, the man of feeling was a kind of fantasy. Harley, the protagonist of Mackenzie's novel, is presented as an exceptional case, unlike other men. But the novel also includes

framing devices to show how rougher, less emotionally susceptible men may be touched by Harley's sensitivity in spite of themselves.

In literature and life, sentiment almost always entails a social situation, one person's encounter with some other being, a person or animal, or even an object imaginatively imbued with sentience. (Individuals rarely get sentimental all by themselves.) In his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; see below), Adam Smith called the mechanism whereby people share their feelings "sympathy": our imaginations create in us, however imperfectly, versions of the feelings of someone else. We can sympathize with nearly any exhibited emotion, but Smith recognized that pain and suffering were especially powerful sympathetic objects. Scenes in prisons or hospitals, figures afflicted by poverty, oppression, or abuse, dogs or jackasses mistreated by hard-hearted owners recur in sentimental literature, which hence discovers a natural tendency to reflect on social cruelties and injustices. The exchange of letters in 1766 between the formerly enslaved man Ignatius Sancho and Sterne (see below) helped establish a sentimental strand in the literature of the abolitionist movement in Britain, a strand taken up by numerous writers appalled by the trade in enslaved people: White writers imagined what it felt like to be enslaved, torn from loved ones in Africa, abused in a British sugar colony.

But many have noted the limitations of sympathy as a political force. In the wake of his exchange with Sancho, Sterne finds that sentiment works best when directed at just one other person—he says the thought of multitudes of enslaved Africans "did but distract me." Often sentimental feeling can be an end in itself, so absorbing that it blocks people from trying to do anything about the pain with which they sympathize. Reflecting on slavery and injustice in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft bitterly brushes aside a merely sentimental response: "such misery demands more than tears." Sympathy could seem like a kind of emotional vampirism, always on the hunt for sentimental stimulation from suffering people. Still, for many who understood and presented themselves as people of feeling, such as Sancho himself, and

Olaudah Equiano (see [p. 1081](#)), sentimental discourse was not a dead end but an opening door. A feeling for others' suffering may lead to feeling a commitment to relieve it. Though always very personal in motive and effect, sentiment as defined in the period nonetheless builds the feelings of others into our sense of ourselves and finds its purpose in closing distances between people.

# DAVID HUME

The boldness and radical intent of the thought of David Hume (1711–1776), the Scottish philosopher, essayist, and historian, could scarcely appear in a stronger light than in the following selection from his first book, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40). The *Treatise* is a work full of groundbreaking arguments: it questions what we can know about the relation of causes to effects, undermines commonsense notions of personal identity, and insists that the language of facts and the language of moral obligation are entirely distinct. This section dismisses a long philosophical tradition that had identified the passions as the chief enemies of moral life and recruited reason to block their influence and motivate good actions. For Hume, passions are always our sole motivations, moral or otherwise. Though Hume's argumentation here is intricate and rich in implication, his principal contention can be clearly drawn. Reason can identify what is true or false in our abstract ideas (by analyzing relations between them) or in our beliefs about the world (by assessing our experience of it). But such facts are in themselves inert. They do not matter to us unless our passion is already engaged in some situation to which they are relevant. Being told that  $2 + 2 = 4$  will not motivate us to do anything—unless greed, for instance, has already excited us about a scheme to double our money. A passion, in Hume's terminology, is an "original influence": unlike the conclusions of reason, a passion cannot be true or false—it just *is*—and while reason may help a passion attain its end, or lead it astray, it cannot demonstrate that any passion is somehow



“untrue.” “’Tis not contrary to reason,” Hume declares, “to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.” A flair for dramatic utterances like this one enlivens Hume’s prose, as he suddenly reveals how far his methodical thinking has led. But while Hume discovers a more complete power in passions over our motives, perhaps, than had ever been asserted before, he does not abandon us to a moral life governed by wildly passionate whims. At the section’s end, he maintains that morality is a contest not between reason and passion but between “calm passions” and violent ones, the former moderating, the latter out of control. The *Treatise* initially did not exercise much influence on discussions of morality in common life or philosophical discourse, and Hume would later repackage many of its arguments and observations in elegant, more accessible essays and enquiries. But its philosophically rigorous account of the passions’ motivational power anticipates a general impulse in British culture after midcentury: to recognize the basis of our moral lives in feelings.

# ***From A Treatise of Human Nature***

### ***Book 2, Part 3, Section 3. Of the Influencing Motives of the Will***

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates.<sup>1</sup> Every rational creature, 'tis said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, till it be entirely subdued, or at least brought to a conformity with that superior principle. On this method of thinking, the greatest part of moral philosophy, ancient and modern, seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field, as well for metaphysical arguments, as popular declamations, than this supposed preeminence of reason above passion. The eternity, invariableness, and divine origin of the former have been displayed to the best advantage; the blindness, unconstancy, and deceitfulness of the latter have been as strongly insisted on. In order to show the fallacy of all this philosophy, I shall endeavor to prove *first*, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and *secondly*, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.

The understanding<sup>2</sup> exerts itself after two different ways, as it judges from demonstration or probability; as it regards the abstract relations of our ideas, or those relations of objects of which experience only gives us information. I believe it scarce will be asserted that the first species of reasoning alone is ever the cause of any action. As its proper province is the world of ideas, and as the will always places us in that of realities, demonstration and volition seem, upon that account, to be totally removed from each other. Mathematics, indeed, are useful in all mechanical operations, and arithmetic in almost every art and profession: But 'tis not of themselves they have any influence. Mechanics are the art of regulating the motions of bodies *to some designed end or purpose*; and the reason why we employ arithmetic in fixing the proportions of numbers is only that we may discover the proportions of their

influence and operation. A merchant is desirous of knowing the sum total of his accounts with any person. Why? but that he may learn what sum will have the same *effects* in paying his debt, and going to market, as all the particular articles taken together.<sup>3</sup> Abstract or demonstrative reasoning, therefore, never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment concerning causes and effects; which leads us to the second operation of the understanding.

'Tis obvious that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carried to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. 'Tis also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but making us cast our view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. But 'tis evident in this case that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. 'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object. And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know that such objects are causes, and such others effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connexion can never give them any influence; and 'tis plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connexion, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us.

Since reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition, I infer, that the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion. This consequence is necessary. 'Tis impossible reason could have the latter effect of preventing volition, but by giving an impulse in a contrary direction to our passion; and that impulse, had it operated alone, would have been able to produce volition. Nothing can

oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse; and if this contrary impulse ever arises from reason, that latter faculty must have an original influence on the will, and must be able to cause, as well as hinder any act of volition. But if reason has no original influence, 'tis impossible it can withstand any principle which has such an efficacy, or ever keep the mind in suspense a moment. Thus it appears that the principle which opposes our passion cannot be the same with reason, and is only called so in an improper sense. We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. As this opinion may appear somewhat extraordinary, it may not be improper to confirm it by some other considerations.

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence,<sup>4</sup> and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects, which they represent.

What may at first occur on this head is that as nothing can be contrary to truth or reason except what has a reference to it, and as the judgments of our understanding only have this reference, it must follow, that passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are *accompanied* with some judgment or opinion. According to this principle, which is so obvious and natural, 'tis only in two senses that any affection can be called unreasonable. First, when a passion, such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition or the existence of objects, which really do not exist. Secondly, when in exerting any passion in action, we choose means insufficient for the designed end, and deceive ourselves in our

judgment of causes and effects. Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. A trivial good may, from certain circumstances, produce a desire superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable enjoyment; nor is there anything more extraordinary in this, than in mechanics to see one pound weight raise up a hundred by the advantage of its situation.<sup>5</sup> In short, a passion must be accompanied with some false judgment in order to its being unreasonable; and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment.

The consequences are evident. Since a passion can never, in any sense, be called unreasonable, but when founded on a false supposition or when it chooses means insufficient for the designed end, 'tis impossible that reason and passion can ever oppose each other, or dispute for the government of the will and actions. The moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means, our passions yield to our reason without any opposition. I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases. I may will the performance of certain actions as means of obtaining any desired good; but as my willing of these actions is only secondary, and founded on the supposition that they are causes of the proposed effect; as soon as I discover the falsehood of that supposition, they must become indifferent to me.

'Tis natural for one that does not examine objects with a strict philosophic eye, to imagine that those actions of the mind are entirely the same, which produce not a different sensation, and are not immediately distinguishable to the feeling and perception.

Reason, for instance, exerts itself without producing any sensible emotion; and except in the more sublime disquisitions of philosophy, or in the frivolous subtilties of the schools,<sup>6</sup> scarce ever conveys any pleasure or uneasiness. Hence it proceeds that every action of the mind which operates with the same calmness and tranquility is confounded with reason by all those who judge of things from the first view and appearance. Now 'tis certain there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, though they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, considered merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are supposed to proceed from the same faculty, with that which judges of truth and falsehood. Their nature and principles have been supposed the same, because their sensations are not evidently different.

Beside these calm passions, which often determine the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind, which have likewise a great influence on that faculty. When I receive any injury from another, I often feel a violent passion of resentment, which makes me desire his evil and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself. When I am immediately threatened with any grievous ill, my fears, apprehensions, and aversions rise to a great height, and produce a sensible<sup>7</sup> emotion.

The common error of metaphysicians has lain in ascribing the direction of the will entirely to one of these principles,<sup>8</sup> and supposing the other to have no influence. Men often act knowingly against their interest; for which reason the view of the greatest possible good does not always influence them. Men often counteract a violent passion in prosecution of their interests and designs; 'tis not therefore the present uneasiness alone which determines them. In general we may observe, that both these principles operate on

the will; and where they are contrary, that either of them prevails, according to the general character or present disposition of the person. What we call strength of mind implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent; though we may easily observe, there is no man so constantly possessed of this virtue, as never on any occasion to yield to the solicitations of passion and desire. From these variations of temper proceeds the great difficulty of deciding concerning the actions and resolutions of men, where there is any contrariety of motives and passions.

## Endnotes

1739–40

- Note 1: The conflict between reason and passion is a ubiquitous theme in 18th-century discourse on morals, philosophical and otherwise, and indeed the preponderance of Western moral philosophy going back at least to Plato (429?-347 B.C.E), though a tradition on which Hume draws, including English philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Irish-Scottish philosopher and professor Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), postulated that we have an innate moral sense that imparts benevolent feelings that guide our actions.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hume uses the term *understanding* to refer to the two operations of reason: these consist, as he will say subsequently, of “demonstration” (logical or mathematical proof) and “probability” (empirical reasoning based on experience).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a merchant calculates what he owes “any person,” and what that person owes him, to arrive at a specific total that will influence his choices to pay off his debts and sell goods.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A passion does not represent any state of affairs in the world, but rather is itself a thing in the world, or a particular, positive state (or “modification”) of a particular thing, that is, a person.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: Hume refers to a lever, whereby a relatively small force may lift a heavier load.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The pointless disquisitions of medieval Scholastic philosophy, derived from Aristotle.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Felt, palpable.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Calm passions or violent passions.[Return to reference 8](#)

# ADAM SMITH

The Scottish philosopher, professor, and political economist Adam Smith (1723–1790) wrote two landmark works in the history of thought, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). The latter stands as the principal founding document of classical economics, while the former offers the richest, most evocative account in eighteenth-century British philosophy of the role of feelings in our moral lives. In the *Theory*, Smith draws inspiration from other major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, notably his teacher at the University of Glasgow, Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), and his elder friend David Hume, by whom his thinking was especially influenced. But his work stands out for its attention to the origins of moral sentiments in social relationships, illustrated with psychologically complex examples. The first chapter of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “Of Sympathy,” establishes this emphasis: our feelings, according to Smith, materialize in a kind of dialogue with those of others. By sympathy, Smith means something more than commiseration with sadness or pain: sympathy springs from our instinctive capacity to imagine what someone else is feeling—suffering, joy, triumph, anxiety, anything—and produce a version of that feeling in ourselves. Part of the interest of such sympathetic imagination arises from its imperfection. Smith begins by acknowledging the truism that we can never really feel what someone else feels. Sympathy helps us cross this gulf, and often recreates what is felt by others uncannily well. But sometimes it leads us to feel things that another person ought to feel but does

not; sometimes it simply fails to connect with particular emotions displayed by others, like rage; and sometimes it mimics feelings imputed to those, like the dead, who can feel nothing at all. The flexibility and subtlety of sympathy in the *Theory* make it particularly useful for thinking about literature. Smith directly refers to tragedy and prose fiction to substantiate his account. Sympathetic literary emotions are mirrorings, again, of feelings that do not really exist (feigned by actors or made up by authors). Especially pertinent to literature is Smith's idea of a sentiment's "situation": for another person's feeling to affect us properly, we need to know the story behind it. In the years after Smith's theory appeared, as authors increasingly put strong feeling at the center of literature, they also developed new ways to situate it, using embedded frame stories, suggestive fragments of prose, or intimate depictions of domestic life to bring what others feel, as Smith says, "home to ourselves."

# ***From The Theory of Moral Sentiments***

## ***Of Sympathy***

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others is too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.

Though our brother is upon the rack,<sup>1</sup> as long as we are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did and never can carry us beyond our own person,<sup>2</sup> and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our

own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. For as to be in pain or distress of any kind excites the most excessive sorrow, so to conceive or to imagine that we are in it, excites some degree of the same emotion, in proportion to the vivacity or dullness of the conception.

That this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy<sup>3</sup> with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels, may be demonstrated by many obvious observations, if it should not be thought sufficiently evident of itself. When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob,<sup>4</sup> when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do in his situation. Persons of delicate fibers<sup>5</sup> and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers that are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the corresponding part of their own bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner. The very force of this conception is sufficient, in their feeble frames, to produce that itching or uneasy sensation complained of. Men of the most robust make observe that in looking upon sore eyes they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate than any other part of the body is in the weakest.

Neither is it those circumstances only which create pain or sorrow that call forth our fellow-feeling. Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an

analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator. Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance<sup>6</sup> who interest us is as sincere as our grief for their distress, and our fellow-feeling with their misery is not more real than that with their happiness. We enter into their gratitude towards those faithful friends who did not desert them in their difficulties; and we heartily go along with their resentment against those perfidious traitors who injured, abandoned, or deceived them. In every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the bystander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer.

Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was perhaps originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.

Upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person. The passions, upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned. Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion. A smiling face is, to everybody that sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance, on the other hand, is a melancholy one.

This, however, does not hold universally, or with regard to every passion. There are some passions of which the expressions excite no sort of sympathy, but before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them, serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them. The furious behavior of an angry man is more likely to exasperate us against himself than against his enemies. As we are unacquainted with his provocation, we cannot bring his case home to ourselves, nor conceive anything like the passions which it

excites. But we plainly see what is the situation of those with whom he is angry, and to what violence they may be exposed from so enraged an adversary. We readily, therefore, sympathize with their fear or resentment, and are immediately disposed to take party<sup>7</sup> against the man from whom they appear to be in danger.

If the very appearances of grief and joy inspire us with some degree of the like emotions, it is because they suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the person in whom we observe them: and in these passions this is sufficient to have some little influence upon us. The effects of grief and joy terminate in the person who feels those emotions, of which the expressions do not, like those of resentment, suggest to us the idea of any other person for whom we are concerned, and whose interests are opposite to his. The general idea of good or bad fortune, therefore, creates some concern for the person who has met with it, but the general idea of provocation excites no sympathy with the anger of the man who has received it. Nature, it seems, teaches us to be more averse to enter into this passion, and, till informed of its cause, to be disposed rather to take part against it.

Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect. General lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to enquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible.<sup>8</sup> The first question which we ask is, "What has befallen you?" Till this be answered, though we are uneasy both from the vague idea of his misfortune, and still more from torturing ourselves with conjectures about what it may be, yet our fellow-feeling is not very considerable.

Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality. We blush for the impudence and

rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behavior; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, had we behaved in so absurd a manner.

Of all the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind, the loss of reason<sup>9</sup> appears, to those who have the least spark of humanity, by far the most dreadful, and they behold that last stage of human wretchedness with deeper commiseration than any other. But the poor wretch who is in it laughs and sings, perhaps, and is altogether insensible of his own misery. The anguish which humanity feels, therefore, at the sight of such an object, cannot be the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer. The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment.

What are the pangs of a mother, when she hears the moanings of her infant that during the agony of disease cannot express what it feels? In her idea of what it suffers, she joins to its real helplessness her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder; and out of all these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. The infant, however, feels only the uneasiness of the present instant, which can never be great. With regard to the future it is perfectly secure, and in its thoughtlessness and want of foresight possesses an antidote against fear and anxiety, the great tormentors of the human breast, from which reason and philosophy will in vain attempt to defend it when it grows up to a man.

We sympathize even with the dead, and overlooking what is of real importance in their situation, that awful<sup>1</sup> futurity which awaits them, we are chiefly affected by those circumstances which strike our senses, but can have no influence upon their happiness. It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more



thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections and almost from the memory of their dearest friends and relations. Surely, we imagine, we can never feel too much for those who have suffered so dreadful a calamity. The tribute of our fellow-feeling seems doubly due to them now when they are in danger of being forgot by everybody; and by the vain honors which we pay to their memory, we endeavor, for our own misery, artificially to keep alive our melancholy remembrance of their misfortune. That our sympathy can afford them no consolation seems to be an addition to their calamity; and to think that all we can do is unavailing, and that, what alleviates all other distress, the regret, the love, and the lamentation of their friends, can yield no comfort to them, serves only to exasperate our sense of their misery. The happiness of the dead, however, most assuredly is affected by none of these circumstances; nor is it the thought of these things which can ever disturb the security of their repose. The idea of that dreary and endless melancholy, which the fancy naturally ascribes to their condition, arises altogether from our joining to the change which has been produced upon them our own consciousness of that change; from our putting ourselves in their situation, and from our lodging, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies, and thence conceiving what would be our emotions in this case. It is from this very illusion of the imagination which renders the foresight of our own dissolution so terrible to us, and the idea of those circumstances, which undoubtedly can give us no pain when we are dead, makes us miserable while we are alive. And from thence arises one of the most important principles in human nature, the dread of death, the great poison to the happiness, but the great restraint upon the injustice of mankind, which, while it afflicts and mortifies the individual, guards and protects the society.

## Endnotes

1759

- Note 1: An instrument of torture whereby a victim's body is stretched by degrees on a frame at the wrists and ankles.[Return](#)

[to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Body, individual existence.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Imagination.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Crowd.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Nerves.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A general term for long-form prose fiction, which for Smith would include the novel.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Take sides.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Felt, perceptible.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Insanity or madness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Awe-inspiring.[Return to reference 1](#)

# FRANCES GREVILLE

Moving in the loftiest social circles, the poet Frances Greville (ca. 1727–1789), born Frances Macartney, was famous in her time for being a fashionable “beauty” and highly regarded for her witty, intellectually commanding conversation. Her poetry mostly consisted of clever verses about high society, intended to be ephemeral. But her poem “A Prayer for Indifference” captured the imagination of her age. It was likely written around 1756 and widely circulated in manuscript, then was published in various slightly different versions in compilations and anthologies through the 1760s and beyond. It has been called the most celebrated poem by a British woman in the second half of the eighteenth century. Her husband seemed to resent any public attention she gained, and their marriage went from bad to disastrous, ending by 1788 in a legal separation after he had lost all his own money and tried to lay hold of hers. Greville’s famous poem testifies to the power of sentimental feeling by its strenuous attempt to reject it. She asks for the protection of Indifference, personified as a nymph who will prevent her from feeling too much, and others from feeling too much for her. The poem was often printed with rejoinders, largely forgotten, from other poets praising sensibility, but Greville’s “Prayer” remains memorable for the intensity with which she renders the feelings she yearns to escape.

## A Prayer for Indifference

Oft I've implored the gods in vain,  
And prayed till I've been weary;  
For once I'll try my wish to gain  
Of Oberon,<sup>1</sup> the fairy.

5 Sweet airy being, wanton sprite,<sup>o</sup>  
That liv'st in woods unseen,  
And oft, by Cynthia's silver light,<sup>2</sup>  
Tripst<sup>o</sup> gaily o'er the green;

If ere thy pitying heart was moved  
(As ancient stories tell)  
10 And for th'Athenian maid who loved,  
Thou soughtst a wondrous spell,<sup>3</sup>

O! deign once more t'exert thy power;  
Haply some herb, or tree,  
15 Sovereign as juice from western flower,<sup>4</sup>  
Conceals a balm for me.

I ask no kind return of love,  
No tempting charm to please;  
Far from the heart such gifts remove,  
20 That sighs for peace and ease.

Nor ease, nor peace, the heart can know,  
That, like the needle true,<sup>5</sup>  
Turns at the touch of joy or woe,  
But turning trembles too.

25 Far as distress the soul can wound,

'Tis pain in each degree;<sup>o</sup>  
Bliss goes but to a certain bound;<sup>o</sup>  
Beyond is agony.

Then take this treacherous sense of mind,<sup>6</sup>  
Which dooms me still to smart;<sup>o</sup>  
30 Which pleasure can to pain refine,  
To pain new pangs impart.

O! haste to shed the sovereign balm,  
My shattered nerves new-string,  
35 And for my guest, serenely calm,  
The nymph Indifference bring.

At her approach, see Hope, see Fear,  
See Expectation fly,<sup>o</sup>  
40 With Disappointment in the rear,  
That blasts the promised joy.

The tears which Pity taught to flow  
My eyes shall then disown;  
The heart that throbbed at others' woe  
Shall then scarce feel its own.

45 The wounds which now each moment bleed,  
Each moment then shall close,  
And peaceful days shall still succeed  
To nights of calm repose.

O fairy elf, but grant me this,  
This one kind comfort send,  
50 And so may never-fading bliss  
Thy flowery paths attend!

So may the glow-worm's glimmering light  
Thy tiny footsteps lead  
To some new region of delight,

55                   Unknown to mortal tread;  
And be thy acorn goblets filled  
                    With heaven's ambrosial<sup>2</sup> dew,  
From sweetest freshest flowers distilled,  
60                   That shed fresh sweets for you.  
And what of life remains for me  
                    I'll pass in sober ease,  
Half pleased, contented will I be;  
                    Contented, half to please.

## 1756/7 **Endnotes**

1763

- Note 1: A king of fairies in medieval and early modern literature and folklore, and a prominent character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (ca. 1595/6). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Moonlight. Cynthia is another name for Artemis, a Greek goddess of the moon. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon pities Helena, an "Athenian maid" who loves Demetrius, and orders his "knavish" fairy servant Puck to sprinkle a potion on the eyelids of Demetrius while he is asleep, which will make him fall in love with the first person he sees upon waking, intended to be Helena. Puck mistakenly puts the potion on the eyelids of another man, Lysander, who falls in love with Helena instead. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The potion Oberon sends Puck to find is extracted from "a little western flower . . . And maidens call it love-in-idleness" (2.1)—another name for pansy. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As a compass's needle will always point to true north, a susceptible heart will always be affected by the emotions that accompany love. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Several 1760s versions have "sense of mine." "Sense": sensibility, sensitivity to emotion. [Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Ambrosia is the drink or food of the gods. "Acorn goblet": elves and fairies were said to drink out of acorn cups, or caps; see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Puck mentions elves who "climb into their acorn-cups" (2.1). [Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *spirit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skips, dances* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *increment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hurt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *depart* [Return to reference °](#)

# IGNATIUS SANCHO

The remarkable life of Ignatius Sancho (ca. 1729–1780) began aboard an enslaver's ship, on which he was born in the midst of the Middle Passage. After he and his parents reached New Grenada, a vast Spanish colony in northern South America, his mother died of disease, and his father "defeated the miseries of slavery by suicide" (in the words of the early biography that originally introduced Sancho's *Letters*). Baptized as Ignatius by a Spanish bishop, Sancho was later taken, as a two-year-old, to Britain, where he was held enslaved by three unmarried sisters in Greenwich, who named him Sancho (after Don Quixote's squire) and refused to educate him. But as a child, he met John, second Duke of Montagu (1690–1749), who sponsored his education and to whose estate in Blackheath he escaped, at around age twenty, shortly after the duke's death. Sancho's initial rejection by the widowed duchess nearly drove him to despair, but she soon took him on as butler, a free and paid servant, to the household. Thereafter his relation to the Montagu family became a source of stability and support in his life: the duchess bequeathed an annuity of £30 to him at her death, and the next duke, her son George, took him on as his valet; and after ill health made it impossible for Sancho to continue in service, the Montagu family helped set him up as owner of a grocery store in London, in 1774. He shared this enterprise with his wife Anne (1733–1817), whom he had married in 1758; his first biographer describes her as "a very deserving young woman of West-Indian origin." The couple had seven children, four of whom lived to



adulthood. Sancho's life in London was that of a highly cultured and accomplished man. He composed and published a substantial body of music, including minuets, cotillons, country dances, and songs, many of which have been recorded and can be heard online today. (His early biography also mentions a "Theory of Music" that he published, but which is now lost.) His love of theater led him to write two plays (both also lost) and form friendships with eminent actors, including David Garrick and John Henderson; his friends also included many painters, professional and amateur, on whose work he would offer his judgment. He is said to be the first Black Briton to vote in parliamentary elections (1774 and 1780), a right secured by his status as an independent business owner and householder. When he died in 1780, of complications of gout and other ailments, he left behind a group of friends—writers, painters, and other artists, and people of every social station from servants to the nobility—who looked to him for guidance and sympathetic, playful, and critically minded friendship.

His fame as a writer had its beginnings in a letter he wrote in 1766 to the celebrated novelist Laurence Sterne, deploring the treatment of enslaved Africans in Britain's colonies and urging Sterne to advocate for them in print. Sterne's reply became an important text for the nascent British abolitionist movement when it was published, along with Sancho's letter, in his posthumous 1775 *Letters*. Sancho's own body of correspondence, published as *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (2 volumes, 1782), also appeared after his death. Many of his stylistic gestures were influenced by his literary hero Sterne, such as a copious use of long dashes. The letters' thematic elements—such as a sympathetic connection to animals, and displays of benevolent feeling that extends far beyond the Christian world—also connect them to the larger body of sentimental literature of his time. He clearly intends to present himself in his correspondence as an exemplary man of feeling. But his unique position in British culture allowed him to do things with this role that other people of sentiment could not. As a Black man, he advocated for the people whom the British Empire

enslaved and exploited. He does not stop, as Sterne does, with single, affecting examples, but trenchantly diagnoses the whole system, and its base motivations ("money—money—money," as one selection below says, putting the sentimental dash to a new purpose). The letters document his times with uncommon keenness of observation. (A series on the Gordon Riots, not included here, offers powerful eyewitness testimony to the explosive anti-Catholic violence, looting, and arson that shook London in the summer of 1780.) But mostly the letters display the humanity, idiosyncratic charm, and confident intelligence of their author, which challenged racist assumptions of ordinary White readers, in Britain and beyond, in an unprecedented way.

***From* Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho,  
an African**

## ***Volume I, Letter XLVII***

TO MR. M—<sup>1</sup>

August 25, 1777.

JACK-ASSES.

My gall has been plentifully stirred—by the barbarity of a set of gentry,<sup>2</sup> who *every morning* offend my feelings—in their cruel parade through Charles Street<sup>3</sup> to and from market—they vend potatoes in the day—and thief in the night season.—A tall lazy villain was bestriding his poor beast (although loaded with two panniers<sup>4</sup> of potatoes at the same time) and another of his companions, was good-naturedly employed in whipping the poor sinking animal—that the gentleman-rider might enjoy the two-fold pleasure of blasphemy<sup>5</sup> and cruelty—this is a too common evil—and, for the honor of rationality, calls loudly for redress.—I do believe it might be in some measure amended—either by a hint in the papers, of the utility of impressing such vagrants for the king's service<sup>6</sup>—or by laying a heavy tax upon the poor Jack-asses—I prefer the former, both for thy sake and mine;—and, as I am convinced we feel instinctively the injuries of our *fellow creatures*, I do insist upon your exercising your talents in behalf of the honest sufferers.—I ever had a kind of sympathetic (call it what you please) for that animal—*and do I not love you?*<sup>7</sup>—Before Sterne had wrote them into respect,<sup>8</sup> I had a friendship for them—and many a civil greeting have I given them at casual meetings—what has ever (with me) stamped a kind of uncommon value and dignity upon the long-eared kind of the species, is that our Blessed Savior, in his day of worldly triumph, chose to use that in preference to the rest of his own blessed creation—“meek and lowly, riding upon an ass.”<sup>9</sup> I am convinced that the general inhumanity of mankind proceeds—first, from the cursed false principle of common education—and, secondly, from a total

indifference (if not disbelief) of the Christian faith;—a heart and mind impressed with a firm belief of the Christian tenets, must of course exercise itself in a constant uniform general philanthropy—such a being carries his heaven in his breast—and such be thou! therefore write me a bitter Philippick<sup>1</sup> against the misusers of Jack-asses—it shall honor a column in the Morning Post<sup>2</sup>—and I will bray—bray my thanks to you—thou shalt figure away the champion of poor friendless asses here—and hereafter shalt not be ashamed in the great day of retribution.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Sancho would send you some tamarinds.—I know not her reasons;—as I hate contentions, I contradicted not—but shrewdly suspects she thinks you want cooling;<sup>4</sup>—Do you hear, Sir? send me some more good news about your head.—Your letters will not be the less welcome for talking about J—M—,<sup>5</sup> but pray do not let vanity so master your judgement—to fancy yourself upon a footing with George for well looking:—if you were indeed a proof sheet—you was marred in the taking off—for George (ask the girls) is certainly the fairest impression.<sup>6</sup>

I had an order from Mr. H<sup>7</sup>—on Thursday night to see him do Falstaff—I put some money to it, and took Mary and Betsy<sup>8</sup> with me—it was Betty's first affair—and she enjoyed it in truth—H—'s Falstaff is entirely original—and I think as great as his Shylock;—he kept the house in a continual roar of laughter;—in some things he falls short of Quin<sup>9</sup>—in many I think him equal.—When I saw Quin play, he was at the height of his art, with thirty years judgement to guide him. H—, in seven years more, will be all that better—and confessedly the first<sup>1</sup> man on the English stage, or I am much mistaken.

I am reading a little pamphlet,<sup>2</sup> which I much like: it favors an opinion which I have long indulged—which is the improbability of eternal Damnation—a thought which almost petrifies one—and, in my opinion, derogatory to the fullness, glory, and benefit of the blessed expiation of the Son of the Most High God—who died for the sins of all—all—Jew, Turk, Infidel, and Heretic;—fair—sallow—brown

—tawney—black—and you—and I—and every son and daughter of Adam.—You must find eyes to read this book—head and heart—with a quickness of conception thou enjoyest—with many—many advantages—which have the love—and envy almost of yours,

I. SANCHO.

Respects in folio to Mrs. H——.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The letter is addressed to John Meheux (1751–1839), one of Sancho's frequent correspondents and a close friend.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sancho uses the term ironically to refer to street vendors of vegetables, not to the landed upper echelon of British society; he will continue in this vein of class satire through the letter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sancho opened his grocery store in 1774 at 19 Charles Street, now called King Charles Street, in Westminster, London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Large baskets for carrying food.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The donkey driver apparently curses as he whips the animal.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sancho contemplates the forced conscription of the vegetable sellers into Britain's armed forces, who were fighting in the American War of Independence when the letter was written.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sancho's letters to Meheux often playfully tease him in this way.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sterne fondly treats jackasses in both his novels; notably in Book 7, ch. 32 of *Tristram Shandy*, he feeds a macaroon to one suffering under a heavy load.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sancho alludes to Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem, described in John 12:12–16, which itself alludes to Zechariah

9:9.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Angry speech of denunciation; the term derives from the speeches of Greek orator Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.E.) denouncing Philip of Macedon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London newspaper and scandal sheet that ran from 1772 to 1937; in Sancho's day it offered brief, angry items.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Judgment day. "Figure away": make a big impression as.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tamarind seeds have a laxative effect, and "to cool" means to cause to flow. "Mrs. Sancho": Sancho had married his wife, born Ann (or Anne) Osbourne, in 1758.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, John Meheux, his addressee.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sancho's metaphor is from printing: John Meheux, his family's eldest son, may be a "proof sheet"—a page printed first to check for errors—but his younger brother George is the best copy from the press ("the fairest impression").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John Henderson (1747–1785), a distinguished Shakespearean actor of the day and a friend of Sancho's, who appeared as Falstaff in both *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the summer of 1777, at the Haymarket Theatre. "Order": a free or reduced-price ticket.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sancho refers to his daughters Mary Ann (1763–1805) and Elizabeth (1766–1837), who was called both Betsy and Betty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: James Quin (1693–1766), eminent English actor of Irish descent, of the generation before Henderson.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Best.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The pamphlet has not been identified.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The "Mrs. H——" referred to in letters by Sancho to Meheux has not been identified. "In folio": a folio is the largest

book, so Sancho pays his greatest respects to her.[Return to reference 3](#)



## ***Volume I, Letter LVII***

TO MR. F—<sup>4</sup>

Charles Street, January 27, 1778.

Full heartily and most cordially do I thank thee—good Mr. F—, for your kindness in sending the books—that upon the unchristian and most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes—the illegality—the horrid wickedness of the traffic—the cruel carnage and depopulation of the human species—is painted in such strong colors—that I should think would (if duly attended to) flash conviction—and produce remorse in every enlightened and candid reader.—The perusal affected me more than I can express;—indeed I felt a double or mixt sensation—for while my heart was torn for the sufferings—which, for aught I know—some of my nearest kin might have undergone—my bosom, at the same time, glowed with gratitude—and praise toward the humane—the Christian—the friendly and learned Author of that most valuable book.—Blest be your sect!<sup>5</sup>—and Heaven’s peace be upon them!—I, who, thank God! am no bigot—but honor virtue—and the practice of the great moral duties—equally in the turban—or the lawn-sleeves<sup>6</sup>—who think Heaven big enough for all the race of man—and hope to see and mix amongst the whole family of Adam in bliss hereafter—I with these notions (which, perhaps, some may style absurd) look upon the friendly Author—as a being far superior to any great name upon your continent.—I could wish that every member of each house of parliament had one of these books.—And if his Majesty perused one through before breakfast—though it might spoil his appetite—yet the consciousness of having it in his power to facilitate the great work—would give an additional sweetness to his tea.—Phyllis’s poems<sup>7</sup> do credit to nature—and put art—merely as art—to the blush.—It reflects nothing either to the glory or generosity of her master—if she is still his slave—except he glories in the *low vanity* of having in his wanton power a mind animated by Heaven—a genius superior to

himself—the list of splendid—titled—learned names, in confirmation of her being the real authoress,—alas! shows how very poor the acquisition of wealth and knowledge are—without generosity—feeling—and humanity.—These good great folks—all knew—and perhaps admired—nay, praised Genius in bondage—and then, like the Priests and the Levites in sacred writ, passed by—not one good Samaritan amongst them.<sup>8</sup>—I shall be ever glad to see you—and am, with many thanks,

Your most humble servant.  
IGNATIUS SANCHO.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Identified as Jabez Fisher (1717–1806), a Quaker of Philadelphia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sancho refers to the Society of Friends, or Quakers, who early on opposed slavery staunchly. The reference leads scholars to suspect that the “Author” of the books whom Sancho celebrates is the Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet, author of many antislavery works, including *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1772; see p. 939).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Part of the ceremonial attire of an Anglican (or Catholic) bishop. “Turban”: Sancho uses the term to signify adherents of Islam.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by the Black American enslaved woman Phillis Wheatley had appeared in 1773 (see p. 985).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the parable of the Good Samaritan in the gospel of Luke 10:25–37, Jesus tells of a priest and then a Levite who pass an injured traveler by without helping him; a Samaritan who passes next tends to the traveler’s wounds. “The real authoress”: A list of some twenty names appeared at the front of Wheatley’s book, including those of Thomas Hutchinson, Crown governor of Massachusetts, and John Hancock, testifying

to the authenticity of Wheatley's authorship of her work.[Return to reference 8](#)

## ***Volume II, LETTER I***

**TO MR. J—W—E.<sup>9</sup>**

1778.

Your good father insists on my scribbling a sheet of absurdities, and gives a notable reason for it, that is, "Jack will be pleased with it."—Now be it known to you—I have a respect both for father and son—yea for the whole family, who are every soul (that I have the honor or pleasure to know anything of) tinctured—and leavened with all the obsolete goodness of old times—so that a man runs some hazard, in being seen in the W—e's society, of being biased to Christianity.—I never see your poor Father—but his eyes betray his feelings—for the hopeful youth in India—a tear of joy dancing upon the lids—is a plaudit not to be equaled this side death!—See the effects of right-doing, my worthy friend—continue in the tract of rectitude—and despise poor paltry Europeans—titled Nabobs.<sup>1</sup>—Read your Bible—as day follows night, God's blessing follows virtue—honor—and riches bring up the rear—and the end is peace.—Courage, my boy—I have done preaching.—Old folks love to seem wise—and if you are silly enough to correspond with grey hairs—take the consequence.—I have had the pleasure of reading most of your letters, through the kindness of your father.—Youth is naturally prone to vanity—such is the weakness of Human Nature, that pride has a fortress in the best of hearts—I know no person that possesses a better than Johnny W—e—but although flattery is poison to youth, yet truth obliges me to confess that your correspondence betrays no symptom of vanity—but teems with truths of an honest affection—which merits praise—and commands esteem.

In some of your letters which I do not recollect, you speak (with honest indignation) of the treachery and chicanery of the natives.<sup>2</sup>—My good friend, you should remember from whom they learnt those vices:—the first Christian visitors found them a simple, harmless

people—but the cursed avidity for wealth urged these first visitors (and all the succeeding ones) to such acts of deception—and even wanton cruelty—that the poor ignorant natives soon learnt to turn the knavish and diabolical arts which they soon imbibed—upon their teachers.

I am sorry to observe that the practice of your country (which as a resident I love—and for its freedom—and for the many blessings I enjoy in it—shall ever have my warmest wishes—prayers—and blessings); I say, it is with reluctance that I must observe your country's conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East—West-Indies—and even on the coast of Guinea.—The grand object of English navigators—indeed of all Christian navigators—is money—money—money—for which I do not pretend to blame them—Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth into every part—to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love—society—and mutual dependence:—the enlightened Christian should diffuse the riches of the Gospel of peace—with the commodities of his respective land—Commerce, attended with strict honesty—and with Religion for its companion—would be a blessing to every shore it touched at.—In Africa, the poor wretched natives—blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil—are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing:—the Christians' abominable traffic for slaves—and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty kings<sup>3</sup>—encouraged by their Christian customers—who carry them strong liquors, to enflame their national madness—and powder and bad firearms, to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping.—But enough—it is a subject that sours my blood—and I am sure will not please the friendly bent of your social affections.—I mention these only to guard my friend against being too hasty in condemning the knavery of a people who bad as they may be—possibly—were made worse by their Christian visitors.—Make human nature thy study—wherever thou residest—whatever the religion—or the complexion—study their hearts.—Simplicity, kindness, and charity be thy guide—with these even savages will respect you—and God will bless you!

Your father—who sees every improvement of his boy with delight—observes that your hand-writing is much for the better—in truth, I think it as well as any modest man can wish:—if my long epistles do not frighten you—and I live till the return of next spring<sup>4</sup>—perhaps I shall be enabled to judge how much you are improved since your last favor:<sup>5</sup>—Write me a deal about the natives—the soil and produce—the domestic and interior manners of the people—customs—prejudices—fashions—and follies.—Alas! we have plenty of the two last here—and what is worse, we have politics—and a detestable Brother's war<sup>6</sup>—where the right hand is hacking and hewing the left—whilst angels weep at our madness—and devils rejoice at the ruinous prospect.

Mr. R—<sup>7</sup> and the ladies are well.—Johnny R—has favored me with a long letter; he is now grown familiar with danger<sup>8</sup>—and can bear the whistling of bullets—the cries and groans of the human species—the roll of drums—clangor of trumpets—shouts of combatants—and thunder of cannon—all these he can bear with soldier-like fortitude—with now and then a secret wish for the society of his London friends—in the sweet blessed security—of peace—and friendship.

This, young man, is my second letter;—I have wrote till I am stupid, I perceive—I ought to have found it out two pages back.—Mrs. Sancho joins me in good wishes—I join her in the same;—in which double sense believe me,

Yours, &c. &c.

I. SANCHO.

Very short.

Postscript.

It is with sincere pleasure I hear you have a lucrative establishment<sup>9</sup>—which will enable you to appear and act with decency;—your good sense will naturally lead you to proper œconomy<sup>1</sup>—as distant from frigid parsimony, as from a heedless extravagancy—but as you may possibly have some time to spare

upon your hands for necessary recreation—give me leave to obtrude my poor advice.—I have heard it more than once observed of fortunate adventurers—they have come home enriched in purse—but wretchedly barren in intellects—the mind, my dear Jack, wants food—as well as the stomach—why then should not one wish to increase in knowledge as well as money?—Young says—“Books are fair Virtue’s advocates and friends”<sup>2</sup>—now my advice is—to preserve about 20 l. a year for two or three seasons—by which means you may gradually form a useful, elegant, little library—suppose now the first year you send the order—and the money to your father—for the following books—which I recommend from my own superficial knowledge as useful.—A man should know a little of geography—history, nothing more useful, or pleasant.

Robertson’s Charles the Fifth, 4 vols.

Goldsmith’s History of Greece, 2 vols.

Ditto, of Rome, 2 vols.

Ditto, of England, 4 vols.

Two small volumes of Sermons—useful—and very sensible—by one Mr. Williams,<sup>3</sup> a dissenting minister—which are as well as fifty—for I love not a multiplicity of doctrines—a few plain tenets—easy—simple and directed to the heart—are better than volumes of controversial nonsense.—Spectators—Guardians—and Tatlers—you have of course.—Young’s Night-Thoughts—Milton—and Thomson’s Seasons<sup>4</sup> were my summer companions for near twenty years—they mended my heart—they improved my veneration to the Deity—and increased my love to my neighbors.

You have to thank God for strong natural parts<sup>5</sup>—a feeling humane heart—you write with sense and judicious discernment—improve yourself, my dear Jack, that if it should please God to return you to your friends with the fortune of a man in upper rank, the embellishments of your mind may be ever considered as greatly superior to your riches—and only inferior to the goodness of your heart. I give you the above as a sketch—your father and other of your friends will improve upon it in the course of time—I do indeed judge that the above is enough at first—in conformity with the old

adage—"A few Books and a few Friends, and those well chosen."  
Adieu. Yours,

I. SANCHO.

## Endnotes

1782

- Note 9: Jack Wingrave (1757–1797), the son of a friend of Sancho's, John Wingrave (1729–1807), was stationed as a soldier with the British East India Company in Calcutta (Kolkata) when this letter was written.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: From *nawab* (Urdu, "governor"), a term for a Muslim local ruler of the Mughal Empire in South Asia, extended to refer, as here, to a British person made extremely wealthy by the East India Company's activities in India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sancho provides a footnote quoting two letters, of 1776 and 1777, from Jack Wingrave, which disparage the inhabitants of India as "a set of canting, deceitful people."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The African kings who were encouraged by Europeans, and paid with European goods, to facilitate the transatlantic trade in enslaved people.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sancho suffered from gout and health problems brought on by obesity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Letter.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The American War of Independence.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Roger Rush, a friend and correspondent of Sancho's, who served Sir Charles Bunbury as a valet.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Rush, Roger's brother, served as a surgeon during the American War of Independence.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A position in India that will allow him to make money.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thriftiness.[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Slightly misquoted from Edward Young, *Night-Thoughts, on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–45), Night 8, line 275.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: David Williams, *Sermons, Chiefly on Religious Hypocrisy* (1774). Sancho also recommends William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of Emperor Charles the Fifth* (4 vols., 1769–72); and Oliver Goldsmith, *The Grecian History* (2 vols., 1774), *The Roman History* (2 vols., 1769), and *The History of England* (4 vols., 1764–71).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sancho mentions a group of texts representative of polite literature in his century, including periodical essays collected from the *Spectator* (1711–12, 1714, principally by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele), the *Guardian* (1713, Richard Steele and others), and the *Tatler* (1709, Richard Steele and others); and poetry such as Edward Young's *Night-Thoughts* (see above), the works of John Milton (1608–1674), and James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–30; see p. 726).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Talents, endowments.[Return to reference 5](#)

## ANTISLAVERY SENTIMENT: THE SANCHO–STERNE EXCHANGE

The exchange of letters between the great Anglo-Irish novelist and minister Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) and the wit, composer, and formerly enslaved man Ignatius Sancho (ca. 1729–1780; see above) illustrates the transformative moral power, and some of the political limitations, of literary idioms of sentiment. Without having met him, Sancho reached out in 1766 to Sterne, one of his favorite authors, who had condemned slavery in a brief passage in a published sermon. Sancho's letter urges Sterne to extend himself further to generate more sympathy for the enslaved Africans abused in Britain's Caribbean sugar colonies, without exactly asking him to advocate for the abolition of the transatlantic trade. Such advocacy would not become a political force in Britain until two decades later. But Sterne's tender reply itself was taken up in that struggle. Published in 1775 in a posthumous collection of Sterne's letters, it became a source of emotional conviction for abolitionists. Sancho first came to public notice as a result of this publication, and would himself posthumously gain fame as a letter-writer when his literary executors printed *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (1782), two years after his death. The two letters below, with the fictional vignettes by Sterne published in the wake of his exchange with Sancho, dramatize the way deep feeling for the suffering of others can be raised. Sancho's letter seems deliberately limited in scope: he asks Sterne to bestow merely "one half hour's attention" to slavery, and focuses as much on the pleasure such sympathy would bring Sterne as on the suffering of the kidnapped Africans on whose behalf he writes. In his reply, Sterne confesses a certain helplessness in the face of mass suffering, even as it fills his heart with sorrow. The stylistic devices shared by both letters—such as the copious dashes, representing sentimental pauses and transitions—

draw attention to the writer's evolving sympathetic feeling, and to that extent at least, away from the feeling's causes. (Sancho doubtless picked up the technique of the long, "Shandean" dash from his literary mentor.) The "tender tale" to which Sterne alludes in his letter to Sancho would appear in the final, ninth volume of his masterwork of literary experimentation, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67). The scene dramatizes the tentative development of an antiracist moral consciousness of two simple, isolated souls, Toby and Trim, who share a brief fragment of a story with only one detail: a Black girl in a shop brushing away flies without killing them. The chapter promises a fuller account of her suffering (and that of Trim's brother Tom) that never materializes. The ironies of fellow-feeling come fully into view in the excerpt from Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), published the year he died. The narrator Yorick, facing imprisonment himself, describes his effort to imagine the feelings of those who have lost their liberty. He finds that the vast scale of enslavement in colonial America simply blocks this sympathetic imagination, so he concocts an image of a "pale and feverish" man in prison, and manages the details of this fictional scenario according to his own sentimental whims. (In his letter, Sancho also seemed to allow that sentimental sympathy has trouble extending itself to multitudes, when he concedes that a "benevolent heart" might find sufficient gratification by contributing to the relief "only of one" enslaved person.) While sentiment can project sympathy across the globe, its imperative to locate suffering that can be brought "home to ourselves" (as Adam Smith says), or "near me" (in Sterne's words), also sometimes limits its reach.

## Sancho to Sterne

[July 1766]

REVEREND SIR,

It would be an insult on your humanity (or perhaps look like it) to apologize for the liberty I am taking.—I am one of those people whom the vulgar and illiberal call "*Negurs*."<sup>1</sup>—The first part of my life was rather unlucky, as I was placed in a family who judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience.—A little reading and writing I got by unwearied application.—The latter part of my life has been—thro' God's blessing, truly fortunate, having spent it in the service of one of the best families in the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>—My chief pleasure has been books.—Philanthropy I adore.—How very much, good Sir, am I (amongst millions) indebted to you for the character of your amiable uncle Toby!<sup>3</sup>—I declare, I would walk ten miles in the dog days, to shake hands with the honest corporal.<sup>4</sup>—Your Sermons<sup>5</sup> have touched me to the heart, and I hope have amended it, which brings me to the point.—In your tenth discourse, page seventy-eight, in the second volume—is this very affecting passage—"Consider how great a part of our species—in all ages down to this—have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries, nor pity their distresses.—Consider slavery—what it is—how bitter a draught—and how many millions are made to drink it!"—Of all my favorite authors, not one has drawn a tear in favor of my miserable black brethren—excepting yourself, and the humane author of Sir George Ellison.<sup>6</sup>—I think you will forgive me;—I am sure you will applaud me for beseeching you to give one half hour's attention to slavery, as it is at this day practiced in our West Indies.—That subject, handled in your striking manner, would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many—but if only of one—Gracious God!—what a feast to a benevolent heart!—and, sure I am,

you are an epicurean<sup>7</sup> in acts of charity.—You, who are universally read, and as universally admired—you could not fail—Dear Sir, think in me you behold the uplifted hands of thousands of my brother Moors.<sup>8</sup>—Grief (you pathetically<sup>9</sup> observe) is eloquent;—figure to yourself their attitudes; hear their supplicating addresses!—alas!—you cannot refuse.—Humanity must comply—in which hope I beg permission to subscribe myself, Reverend, Sir, &c.

## I. SANCHO

# 1766 **Endnotes**

1782

- Note 1: A slur, derived from Middle French (*nègre*), with complex etymological influences from and cognates in other European languages in the 18th century and earlier, used chiefly in the Caribbean to refer to a Black person. “The liberty I am taking”: of writing to Sterne without knowing or having been introduced to him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The family of the Duke and Duchess of Montagu employed Sancho as a butler and then helped finance his grocery store in London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A principal character in Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*, Captain Toby Shandy was loved by readers for his gentleness and naivete (see excerpt from *Tristram Shandy* below).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Corporal Trim, another simple, affectionate character in *Tristram Shandy*, servant to Captain Toby Shandy (see below). “Dog days”: the hottest days of the summer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As the early volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were making Sterne a literary celebrity, he published two volumes of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1760), his own sermons, under the name of one of the characters of *Tristram*. As Sancho notes, the mention of slavery appears in Sermon X, in volume 2.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Early in the two-volume novel *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) by Sarah Scott (1720–1795), the title character is appalled by the brutal treatment of enslaved people in Jamaica, and the racism that accompanied and drove it.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: One who takes pleasure in; after the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (371–270 B.C.E), who taught that the happy life consisted of reasonable pleasures.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In older English usage, a term referring to a dark-skinned person, usually from North or sub-Saharan Africa; Sancho's usage of it in his day has a poetic or romantic quality.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Movingly.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Sterne to Sancho

Coxwould, July 27, 1766

There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little events (as well as in the great ones) of this world: for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro-girl, and my eyes had scarce done smarting with it, when your letter of recommendation, in behalf of so many of her brethren and sisters, came to me—but why *her brethren*?—or yours, Sancho! any more than mine? It is by the finest tints, and most insensible gradations, that nature descends from the fairest face about St James's,<sup>1</sup> to the sootiest complexion in Africa:—at which tint of these is it, that the ties of blood are to cease? and how many shades must we descend lower still in the scale, ere mercy is to vanish with them? But 'tis no uncommon thing, my good Sancho, for one half of the world to use the other half of it like brutes, and then endeavor to make 'em so.—For my own part, I never look *westward*, (when I am in a pensive mood at least) but I think of the burthens which our brothers and sisters are *there* carrying, and could I ease their shoulders from one ounce of them, I declare I would set out this hour upon a pilgrimage to Mecca for their sakes—which by the bye, Sancho, exceeds your walk of ten miles in about the same proportion, that a visit of humanity, should one of mere form.<sup>2</sup>—However, if you meant my Uncle Toby more he is your debtor.—If I can weave the tale I have wrote into the work I am about<sup>3</sup>—'tis at the service of the afflicted—and a much greater matter; for in serious truth, it casts a sad shade upon the world, that so great a part of it are, and have been so long bound in chains of darkness, and in chains of misery; and I cannot but both respect and felicitate you, that by so much laudable diligence you have broke the one—and that by falling into the hands of so good and merciful a family, Providence has rescued you from the other.

And so good-hearted Sancho adieu! and believe me I will not forget your letter.

Yours,  
L. STERNE.

## 1766 **Endnotes**

1775

- Note 1: The court of the British monarch in London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Sterne's long walk to Mecca for the sake of enslaved people would be longer than Sancho's "ten miles in the dog days" to the degree to which a genuinely benevolent mission ("a visit of humanity") is morally superior to one of politeness ("mere form"). In the next sentence, Sterne seems to wonder if Sancho meant to refer to Captain Toby Shandy instead of Corporal Trim, when Sancho said in his letter that he would undertake this journey "to shake hands with the honest corporal."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Book 9 of *Tristram Shandy*.[Return to reference 3](#)



# ***From The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy [Sterne]***

## **[UNCLE TOBY AND CORPORAL TRIM DISCUSS SLAVERY AND RACE]**

When Tom, an' please your honor,<sup>1</sup> got to the shop, there was nobody in it, but a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long cane, flapping away flies—not killing them.—'Tis a pretty picture! said my uncle Toby—she had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy—

—She was good, an' please your honor, from nature, as well as from hardships; and there are circumstances in the story of that poor friendless slut,<sup>2</sup> that would melt a heart of stone, said Trim; and some dismal winter's evening, when your honor is in the humor, they shall be told you with the rest of Tom's story, for it makes a part of it—<sup>3</sup>

Then do not forget, Trim, said my uncle Toby.

A Negro has a soul? an' please your honor, said the corporal (doubtingly).

I am not much versed, corporal, quoth my uncle Toby, in things of that kind; but I suppose, God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me—

—It would be putting one sadly over the head of<sup>4</sup> another, quoth the corporal.

It would so; said my uncle Toby. Why then, an' please your honor, is a black wench to be used<sup>5</sup> worse than a white one?

I can give no reason, said my uncle Toby—

—Only, cried the corporal, shaking his head, because she has no one to stand up for her—

—'Tis that very thing, Trim, quoth my uncle Toby,—which recommends her to protection—and her brethren with her; 'tis the

fortune of war which has put the whip into our hands *now*—where it may be hereafter, heaven knows!—but be it where it will, the brave, Trim! will not use it unkindly.

—God forbid, said the corporal.

Amen, responded my uncle Toby, laying his hand upon his heart.

## Endnotes

1767

- Note 1: A phrase Trim repeats as a form of politeness to his employer, Captain Shandy. “An’ ”: if (it). “Tom”: Trim’s brother, whose story he is telling. Tom enters the shop of a sausage-maker’s widow in Lisbon, whom he is courting.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In past usage, the term, for girl or woman, had a neutral or even a positive sense, in addition to various derogatory ones.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The novel, in its last volume at this point, never gets to this story.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In a position of superiority over.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Treated.[Return to reference 5](#)

# ***From A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy [Sterne]***

## **[THE STARLING]**

—And as for the Bastile!<sup>1</sup> the terror is in the word—Make the most of it you can, said I to myself, the Bastile is but another word for a tower—and a tower is but another word for a house you can't get out of—Mercy on the gouty! for they are in it twice a year—But with nine livres<sup>2</sup> a day, and pen and ink, and paper, and patience, albeit a man can't get out, he may do very well within—at least for a month or six weeks; at the end of which, if he is a harmless fellow, his innocence appears, and he comes out a better and wiser man than he went in.

I had some occasion (I forget what) to step into the court-yard, as I settled this account; and remember I walked down stairs in no small triumph with the conceit of my reasoning—Beshrew<sup>3</sup> the *somber* pencil! said I, vauntingly—for I envy not its powers, which paints the evils of life with so hard and deadly a coloring. The mind sits terrified at the objects she has magnified herself, and blackened: reduce them to their proper size and hue, she overlooks them—'Tis true, said I, correcting the proposition—the Bastile is not an evil to be despised—but strip it of its towers—fill up the fossè<sup>4</sup>—unbarricade the doors—call it simply a confinement, and suppose 'tis some tyrant of a distemper—and not of a man, which holds you in it—the evil vanishes, and you bear the other half without complaint.

I was interrupted in the hey-day of this soliloquy, with a voice which I took to be of a child, which complained "it could not get out."—I looked up and down the passage, and seeing neither man, woman, nor child, I went out without farther attention.

In my return back through the passage, I heard the same words repeated twice over; and looking up, I saw it was a starling hung in

a little cage.—“I can’t get out,—I can’t get out,” said the starling.<sup>5</sup>

I stood looking at the bird: and to every person who came through the passage it ran fluttering to the side towards which they approached it, with the same lamentation of its captivity—“I can’t get out,” said the starling—God help thee! said I, but I’ll let thee out, cost what it will; so I turned about the cage to get to the door; it was twisted and double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces—I took both hands to it.

The bird flew to the place where I was attempting his deliverance, and thrusting his head through the trellis,<sup>6</sup> pressed his breast against it, as if impatient—I fear, poor creature! said I, I cannot set thee at liberty—“No,” said the starling—“I can’t get out—I can’t get out,” said the starling.

I vow, I never had my affections more tenderly awakened; nor do I remember an incident in my life, where the dissipated spirits, to which my reason had been a bubble, were so suddenly called home.<sup>7</sup> Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings upon the Bastile; and I heavily walked upstairs, unsaying every word I had said in going down them.

Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, slavery! said I—still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.—’Tis thou, thrice sweet and gracious goddess, addressing myself to LIBERTY, whom all in public or in private worship, whose taste is grateful, and ever wilt be so, till NATURE herself shall change—No *tint* of words can spot thy snowy mantle, or chymic<sup>8</sup> power turn thy scepter into iron—with thee to smile upon him as he eats his crust, the swain is happier than his monarch, from whose court thou art exiled—Gracious heaven! cried I, kneeling down upon the last step but one in my ascent—grant me but health, thou great Bestower of it, and give me but this fair goddess as my companion—and shower down thy miters, if it seems good unto thy divine providence, upon those heads which are aching for them.<sup>9</sup>

THE CAPTIVE.  
PARIS.

The bird in his cage pursued me into my room; I sat down close to my table, and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure<sup>1</sup> to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination.

I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery: but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me.—

—I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then looked through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.

I beheld his body half wasted away with long expectation and confinement, and felt what kind of sickness of the heart it was which arises from hope deferred. Upon looking nearer I saw him pale and feverish: in thirty years the western breeze had not once fanned his blood—he had seen no sun, no moon, in all that time—nor had the voice of friend or kinsman breathed through his lattice—his children —

But here my heart began to bleed—and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait.

He was sitting upon the ground upon a little straw, in the furthest corner of his dungeon, which was alternately his chair and bed: a little calendar of small sticks were laid at the head, notched all over with the dismal days and nights he had passed there—he had one of these little sticks in his hand, and with a rusty nail he was etching another day of misery to add to the heap. As I darkened the little light he had, he lifted up a hopeless eye towards the door, then cast it down—shook his head, and went on with his work of affliction. I heard his chains upon his legs, as he turned his body to lay his little stick upon the bundle—He gave a deep sigh—I saw the iron enter into his soul<sup>2</sup>—I burst into tears—I could not sustain the picture of confinement which my fancy had drawn—I started up from my chair,

and calling La Fleur, I bid him bespeak<sup>3</sup> me a *remise*, and have it ready at the door of the hotel by nine in the morning.

I'll go directly, said I, myself to Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul.<sup>4</sup>

La Fleur would have put me to bed; but—not willing he should see anything upon my cheek which would cost the honest fellow a heart ache—I told him I would go to bed by myself—and bid him go do the same.

## Endnotes

1768

- Note 1: State prison in Paris, usually spelled “Bastille” (French, a fortress or fortification), used by the French monarchy. Yorick, the English protagonist of *A Sentimental Journey*, realizes while visiting Paris that he has forgotten his passport, a potentially grave offense that may land him in prison, especially because Britain and France are at war.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A livre, an old unit of French currency, was worth between one and one and a half British shillings in the 18th century. “Gouty”: those afflicted by gout.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Curse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A ditch fronting a fortification for defensive purposes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Like parrots, European starlings can imitate a variety of sounds, including human speech.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lattice or grate, part of the cage.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Made natural and reasonable again. “A bubble”: a dupe.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chemical.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A miter, the ceremonial headwear of a bishop, signifies the peak of worldly success for Yorick, who is a minister in the Church of England; but he does not desire or ache for such success because liberty is enough for him.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Imagine.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Anglican Book of Common Prayer translates Psalms 105:18 “the iron entered his soul,” in a description of Joseph’s

captivity.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Call for, order. "La Fleur": Yorick's French servant who accompanies him on his journey.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Étienne François, marquis de Stainville, duc de Choiseul (1719–1785), French secretary of state, minister of war, and minister of the navy, whom Yorick will ask, through an intermediary, to supply him with a passport.[Return to reference 4](#)

# HENRY MACKENZIE

The fame of Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831), Scottish man of letters and lawyer, rests on the reputation of his first novel, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), though he wrote two others, as well as three plays, and numerous essays for the periodicals he edited, the *Mirror* (1779–80) and the *Lounger* (1785–87), on the model of Addison and Steele's *Spectator* (1711–14). He was a leader in the Scottish literary scene for five decades; a founding member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland's national academy of arts, letters, and sciences; and he also pursued an important legal career, filling the post of Scotland's comptroller of taxes in 1779. When he died in 1831, Scotland lost a figure whose literary life and sensibility linked the Scottish Enlightenment to the Romantic era.

Readers today turn to *The Man of Feeling* to find one of the most intense expressions of the sentimental ethos that dominated the final three decades of the eighteenth century. Mackenzie's first novel follows his English literary forebears Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) and Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) in focusing on intricately situated feelings instead of plot. Like Sterne's experiments in fiction, the story of Mackenzie's protagonist, Harley, emerges in jumbled, anecdotal fragments: the book's structural conceit is that its text is pieced together by a person who knows nothing of Harley, from torn manuscript pages he found being used as wadding for a hunting rifle. Many sections are missing; the book begins at Chapter XI. But unlike Sterne's and Richardson's fictions, *The Man of Feeling* pursues a grim strain of social satire. The exemplar of true sensitivity, Harley,



travels to London—the center of a corrupt society—and back, and encounters numerous cheats, cynics, and morally desensitized people along the way, as well as those whom they have victimized. These victims, like Harley, are no match for the cruel world. The excerpt from the novel below distills the themes of sentimental literature so well that it was anthologized and published separately several times as “The Story of Old Edwards,” in the decades after the novel’s appearance. In it we meet a series of figures inviting Harley’s and the reader’s sympathy: Edwards himself, the old, disabled veteran and dispossessed tenant farmer, his destitute family, two family dogs who die pitiably, an old Indian man tortured by soldiers of the British East India Company, orphaned children, and so on. As this list indicates, a concern for justice often motivates Harley’s acts of sympathetic identification: landlords oppress the poor for their own comforts and amusement, humans wantonly abuse animals, and colonialists torment the peoples they colonize. Each anecdote of oppression calls forth Harley’s tears—and so many tears flow, in Edwards’s story and *The Man of Feeling* at large, that some later readers have found them laughable rather than touching. Harley’s state of hypersensitivity, unsurprisingly, blocks him from imagining, let alone fighting for, actual social change. As his conversation with Edwards about British crimes in India winds down, all he can do is sigh against “the general current of opinion” that applauds wealth gained by oppression, and resolve to “live sequestered from the noise of the multitude.” It is plain that *The Man of Feeling* intends to expose widespread injustice: the novel does not simply deplore a few exceptionally bad actors or incidents. If the protocols of sentiment leave Harley dispirited and withdrawn in the face of a bad world, the conclusions and actions to which they may lead readers are less easy to determine.

## ***From The Man of Feeling***

### ***Chapter XXXIV. He meets an old acquaintance.***

When the stage-coach arrived at the place of its destination,<sup>1</sup> Harley began to consider how he should proceed the remaining part of his journey. He was very civilly accosted<sup>2</sup> by the master of the inn where he alighted, who offered to accommodate him either with a post-chaise or horses, to any distance he had a mind: but as he did things frequently in a way different from what other people call natural, he refused these offers, and set out immediately a-foot, having first put a spare shirt in his pocket,<sup>3</sup> and given directions for the forwarding of his portmanteau. This was a method of traveling which he was accustomed to take: it saved the trouble of provision for any animal but himself, and left him at liberty to choose his quarters, either at an inn, or at the first cottage in which he saw a face he liked: nay, when he was not peculiarly attracted by the reasonable creation,<sup>4</sup> he would sometimes consort with a species of an inferior rank, and lay himself down to sleep by the side of a rock, or on the banks of a rivulet. He did few things without a motive, but his motives were rather eccentric: and the useful and expedient were terms which he held to be very indefinite, and which therefore he did not always apply to the sense they are commonly understood in.

The sun was now in his decline, and the evening remarkably serene, when he entered a hollow part of the road, which winded between the surrounding banks, and seamed the sward<sup>5</sup> in different lines, as the choice of travelers had directed them to tread it. It seemed to be little frequented now, for some of these had partly recovered their former verdure. The scene was such as induced Harley to stand and enjoy it; when, turning round, his notice was attracted by an object, which the fixture of his eye on the spot he walked had before prevented him from observing.

An old man, who from his dress seemed to have been a soldier, lay fast asleep on the ground; a knapsack was rested on a stone at his right hand, while his staff and brass-hilted sword were crossed at his left.

Harley looked on him with the most earnest attention. He was one of those figures which Salvator<sup>6</sup> would have drawn; nor was the surrounding scenery unlike the wildness of that painter's backgrounds. The banks on each side were covered with fantastic shrub-wood, and at a little distance, on the top of one of them, stood a fingerpost,<sup>7</sup> to mark the directions of two roads which diverged from the point where it was placed. A rock, with some dangling wild flowers, jutted out above where the soldier lay, on which grew the stump of a large tree, white with age, and a single twisted branch shaded his face as he slept. His face had the marks of manly comeliness impaired by time; his forehead was not altogether bald, but its hairs might have been numbered;<sup>8</sup> while a few white locks behind crossed the brown of his neck with a contrast the most venerable to a mind like Harley's. "Thou art old," said he to himself; "but age has not brought thee rest for its infirmities: I fear those silver hairs have not found shelter from thy country, though that neck has been bronzed in its service."<sup>9</sup> The stranger waked. He looked on Harley with the appearance of some confusion: it was a pain which he knew too well to think of causing in another; he turned and went on. The old man readjusted his knapsack, and followed in one of the tracts on the opposite side of the road.

When Harley heard the tread of his feet behind him, he could not help stealing back a glance at his fellow-traveler. He seemed to bend under the weight of his knapsack; he halted on his walk, and one of his arms was supported by a sling, and lay motionless across his breast. He had that steady look of sorrow, which indicates that its owner has gazed upon his griefs till he has forgotten to lament them; yet not without those streaks of complacency, which a good mind will sometimes throw into the countenance, through all the incumbent load of its depression.

He had now advanced nearer to Harley, and, with an uncertain sort of voice, begged to know what it was o'clock; "I fear," said he, "sleep has beguiled me of my time, and I shall hardly have light enough left to carry me to the end of my journey." "Father!" said Harley (who by this time found the romantic enthusiasm rising

within him) "how far do you mean to go?" "But a little way, Sir," returned the other; "and indeed it is but a little way I can manage now: 'tis just four miles from the height to the village, thither I am going." "I am going there too," said Harley; "we may make the road shorter to one another. You seem to have served your country, Sir, to have served it hardly too; 'tis a character<sup>1</sup> I have the highest esteem for.—I would not be impertinently inquisitive; but there is that in your appearance which excites my curiosity to know something more of you; in the meantime suffer me to carry that knapsack."

The old man gazed on him; a tear stood in his eye! "Young gentleman," said he, "you are too good; may heaven bless you for an old man's sake, who has nothing but his blessing to give! but my knapsack is so familiar to my shoulders, that I should walk the worse for wanting it; and it would be troublesome to you, who have not been used to its weight." "Far from it," answered Harley, "I should tread the lighter; it would be the most honorable badge I ever wore."

"Sir," said the stranger, who had looked earnestly in Harley's face during the last part of his discourse, "is not your name Harley?" "It is," replied he; "I am ashamed to say I have forgotten yours." "You may well have forgotten my face," said the stranger, "'tis a long time since you saw it; but possibly you may remember something of old Edwards."—"Edwards!" cried Harley, "oh! heavens!" and sprung to embrace him; "let me clasp those knees on which I have sat so often: Edwards!—I shall never forget that fireside, round which I have been so happy! But where, where have you been? where is Jack? where is your daughter? How has it fared with them, when fortune, I fear, has been so unkind to you?"—"Tis a long tale," replied Edwards; "but I will try to tell it you as we walk."

"When you was at school in the neighborhood, you remember me at Southhill: that farm had been possessed by my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, which last was a younger brother of that very man's ancestor, who is now lord of the manor.<sup>2</sup> I thought I managed it, as they had done, with prudence; I paid my rent regularly as it became due, and had always as much behind<sup>3</sup> as

gave bread to me and my children. But my last lease was out soon after you left that part of the country; and the squire, who had lately got a London attorney for his steward, would not renew it, because, he said, he did not choose to have any farm under £300 a year value on his estate; but offered to give me the preference on the same terms with another, if I chose to take the one he had marked out, of which mine was a part.

"What could I do, Mr. Harley? I feared the undertaking was too great for me; yet to leave, at my age, the house I had lived in from my cradle! I could not, Mr. Harley, I could not; there was not a tree about it that I did not look on as my father, my brother, or my child: so I even ran the risk, and took the squire's offer of the whole. But I had soon reason to repent of my bargain: the steward had taken care that my former farm should be the best land of the division: I was obliged to hire more servants, and I could not have my eye over them all; some unfavorable seasons followed one another, and I found my affairs entangling on my hands. To add to my distress, a considerable corn-factor<sup>4</sup> turned bankrupt with a sum of mine in his possession: I failed paying my rent so punctually as I was wont to do, and the same steward had my stock taken in execution<sup>5</sup> in a few days after. So, Mr. Harley, there was an end of my prosperity. However, there was as much produced from the sale of my effects as paid my debts and saved me from a jail: I thank God I wronged no man, and the world could never charge me with dishonesty.

"Had you seen us, Mr. Harley, when we were turned out of Southhill, I am sure you would have wept at the sight. You remember old Trusty, my shag house-dog; I shall never forget it while I live; the poor creature was blind with age, and could scarce crawl after us to the door; he went however as far as the gooseberry-bush; that you may remember stood on the left side of the yard; he was wont to bask in the sun there: when he had reached that spot, he stopped; we went on: I called to him; he wagged his tail, but did not stir: I called again; he lay down: I whistled, and cried Trusty; he gave a short howl, and died! I could

have lain down and died too; but God gave me strength to live for my children."

The old man now paused a moment to take breath. He eyed Harley's face; it was bathed in tears: 'twas a tale he had been accustomed to think often on; he dropped one tear, and no more.

"Though I was poor," continued he, "I was not altogether without credit. A gentleman in the neighborhood, who had a small farm unoccupied at the time, offered to let me have it, on giving security for the rent; which I made shift<sup>6</sup> to procure. It was a piece of ground which required management to make anything of; but it was nearly within the compass of my son's labor and my own. We exerted all our industry to bring it into some heart.<sup>7</sup> We began to succeed tolerably well, and lived contented on its produce, when an unlucky accident brought us under the displeasure of a neighboring justice of the peace, and broke all our family happiness again.

"My son was a remarkable good shooter; he had always kept a pointer on our former farm, and thought no harm in doing so now; when one day, having sprung a covey of birds on our own ground, the dog, of his own accord, followed them into the justice's. My son laid down his gun, and went after his dog to bring him back: the game-keeper, who had marked<sup>8</sup> the birds, came up, and seeing the pointer, shot him just as my son approached. The creature fell; my son ran up to him: he died with a complaining sort of cry at his master's feet. Jack could bear it no longer; but flying at the game-keeper, wrenched his gun out of his hand, and with the butt end of it, felled him to the ground.

"He had scarce got home, when a constable came with a warrant, and dragged him to prison; there he lay, for the justices would not take bail, till he was tried at the quarter-sessions<sup>9</sup> for the assault and battery. His fine was hard upon us to pay; we contrived however to live the worse for it, and make up the loss by our frugality: but the justice was not content with that punishment, and soon after had an opportunity of punishing us indeed.

"An officer with press-orders<sup>1</sup> came down to our county, and having met with the justices, agreed that they should pitch on a

certain number, who could most easily be spared from the county, whom he would take care to make it rid of: my son's name was in the justices' list.

"'Twas on a Christmas Eve, and the birthday too of my son's little boy. The night was piercing cold, and it blew a storm, with showers of hail and snow. We had made up a cheering fire in an inner room; I sat before it in my wicker-chair; blessing Providence, that had still left a shelter for me and my children. My son's two little ones were holding their gambols<sup>2</sup> around us; my heart warmed at the sight; I brought a bottle of my best ale, and all our misfortunes were forgotten.

"It had long been our custom to play a game at blind-man's-buff on that night, and it was not omitted now; so to it we fell, I, and my son, and his wife, the daughter of a neighboring farmer, who happened to be with us at the time, the two children, and an old maidservant, that had lived with me from a child. The lot fell on my son to be blindfolded: we had continued some time in our game, when he groped his way into an outer room in pursuit of some of us, who, he imagined, had taken shelter there; we kept snug in our places, and enjoyed his mistake. He had not been long there, when he was suddenly seized from behind; 'I shall have you now,' said he, and turned about. 'Shall you so, master?' answered the ruffian, who had laid hold of him; 'we shall make you play at another sort of game by and by.'"—At these words Harley started with a convulsive sort of motion, and grasping Edwards's sword, drew it half out of the scabbard, with a look of the most frantic wildness. Edwards gently replaced it in its sheath, and went on with his relation.

"On hearing these words in a strange voice, we all rushed out to discover the cause; the room by this time was almost full of the gang.<sup>3</sup> My daughter-in-law fainted at the sight; the maid and I ran to assist her, while my poor son remained motionless, gazing by turns on his children and their mother. We soon recovered her to life, and begged her to retire and wait the issue of the affair; but she flew to her husband, and clung round him in an agony of grief and terror.



"Amongst the gang there was one of a smoother aspect, whom, by his dress, we discovered to be a serjeant of foot: he came up to me, and told me, that my son had his choice of the sea or land service, whispering at the same time, that if he chose the land, he might get off, on procuring him another man, and paying a certain sum for his freedom. The money we could just muster up in the house, by the assistance of the maid, who produced, in a green bag, all the little savings of her service; but the man we could not expect to find. My daughter-in-law gazed upon her children with a look of the wildest despair: 'My poor infants!' said she, 'your father is forced from you; who shall now labor for your bread? or must your mother beg for herself and you?' I prayed her to be patient; but comfort I had none to give her. At last, calling the serjeant aside, I asked him, if I was too old to be accepted in place of my son? 'Why, I don't know,' said he; 'you are rather old to be sure, but yet the money may do much.' I put the money in his hand, and coming back to my children, 'Jack,' said I, 'you are free; live to give your wife and these little ones bread; I will go, my child, in your stead; I have but little life to lose, and if I stayed, I should add one to the wretches you left behind.' 'No,' replied my son, 'I am not that coward you imagine me; heaven forbid, that my father's grey hairs should be so exposed, while I sat idle at home; I am young, and able to endure much, and God will take care of you and my family.' 'Jack,' said I, 'I will put an end to this matter, you have never hitherto disobeyed me; I will not be contradicted in this; stay at home, I charge you, and, for my sake, be kind to my children.'

"Our parting, Mr. Harley, I cannot describe to you; it was the first time we ever had parted: the very press-gang could scarcely keep from tears; but the serjeant, who had seemed the softest before, was now the least moved of them all. He conducted me to a party of new-raised recruits, who lay at a village in the neighborhood; and we soon after joined the regiment. I had not been long with it when we were ordered to the East Indies, where I was soon made a serjeant, and might have picked up some money, if my heart had been as hard as some others were; but my nature was never of that

kind, that could think of making rich at the expense of my conscience.

"Amongst our prisoners was an old Indian, whom some of our officers supposed to have a treasure hidden somewhere; which is not an uncommon practice in that country. They pressed him to discover it. He declared he had none; but that would not satisfy them: so they ordered him to be tied to a stake, and suffer fifty lashes every morning till he should learn to speak out as they said. Oh! Mr. Harley, had you seen him, as I did, with his hands bound behind him, suffering in silence, while the big drops trickled down his shrivelled cheeks and wet his grey beard, which some of the inhuman soldiers plucked in scorn! I could not bear it, I could not for my soul, and one morning, when the rest of the guard were out of the way, I found means to let him escape. I was tried by a court-martial for negligence of my post, and ordered, in compassion of my age, and having got this wound in my arm, and that in my leg, in the service, only to suffer 300 lashes, and be turned out of the regiment; but my sentence was mitigated as to the lashes, and I had only 200. When I had suffered these, I was turned out of the camp, and had betwixt three and four hundred miles to travel before I could reach a sea-port, without guide to conduct me, or money to buy me provisions by the way. I set out however, resolved to walk as far as I could, and then to lay myself down and die. But I had scarce gone a mile, when I was met by the Indian whom I had delivered. He pressed me in his arms, and kissed the marks of the lashes on my back a thousand times: he led me to a little hut, where some friend of his dwelt, and after I was recovered of my wounds conducted me so far on my journey himself, and sent another Indian to guide me through the rest. When we parted he pulled out a purse with two hundred pieces of gold in it. 'Take this,' said he, 'my dear preserver, it is all I have been able to procure.' I begged him not to bring himself to poverty for my sake, who should probably have no need of it long, but he insisted on my accepting it. He embraced me: —'You are an Englishman,' said he, 'but the Great Spirit has given thee an Indian heart; may he bear up the weight of your old age,

and blunt the arrow that brings it rest!’ We parted; and not long after I made shift to get my passage to England. ’Tis but about a week since I landed, and I am going to end my days in the arms of my son. This sum may be of use to him and his children; ’tis all the value I put upon it. I thank heaven I never was covetous of wealth; I never had much, but was always so happy as to be contented with my little.”

When Edwards had ended his relation, Harley stood a while looking at him in silence; at last he pressed him in his arms, and when he had given vent to the fulness of his heart by a shower of tears, “Edwards,” said he, “let me hold thee to my bosom; let me imprint the virtue of thy sufferings on my soul. Come, my honored veteran! let me endeavor to soften the last days of a life, worn out in the service of humanity; call me also thy son, and let me cherish thee as a father.” Edwards, from whom the recollection of his own suffering had scarce forced a tear, now blubbered like a boy; he could not speak his gratitude, but by some short exclamations of blessings upon Harley.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: After traveling to London, Harley gets out of the stagecoach near his home in the countryside, the location of which is not specified in the novel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Greeted.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sack, satchel.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Human beings, created by God as reasonable creatures. “Peculiarly”: especially.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cut through the grass.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), Italian painter, immensely popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries for his haunting figures and sublime, wild landscapes, seen as a proto-Romantic by art historians.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A signpost marking a crossroads, often in the shape of a hand with a finger pointing the way.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Counted.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The British government's lack of support for discharged soldiers was often deplored in the period.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Role, function in life.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, his great-grandfather was of the same noble blood as the landlord of the farm at which Edwards's side of the family had worked as tenants for generations.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Left over.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A dealer in grain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Legally seized for nonpayment of debt.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Found an expedient.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fertility.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Seen, spotted. Edwards's son is not allowed to hunt on his neighbor's property.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Local court sessions held four times a year.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Orders to forcibly recruit men into military service.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Playing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Recruits were typically captured by groups of men called press-gangs.[Return to reference 3](#)

***Chapter XXXV. He misses an old acquaintance.—An  
adventure consequent upon it.***

When they had arrived within a little way of the village they journeyed to, Harley stopped short, and looked steadfastly on the mouldering walls of a ruined house that stood on the roadside. "Oh, heavens!" he cried, "what do I see: silent, unroofed, and desolate! Are all thy gay tenants gone? do I hear their hum no more? Edwards, look there, look there! the scene of my infant joys, my earliest friendships, laid waste and ruinous! That was the very school where I was boarded when you was at Southhill; 'tis but a twelvemonth since I saw it standing, and its benches filled with cherubims: that opposite side of the road was the green on which they sported; see it now ploughed up! I would have given fifty times its value to have saved it from the sacrilege of that plough."

"Dear sir," replied Edwards, "perhaps they have left it from choice, and may have got another spot as good." "They cannot," said Harley, "they cannot; I shall never see the sward covered with its daisies, nor pressed by the dance of the dear innocents: I shall never see that stump decked with the garlands which their little hands had gathered. These two long stones which now lie at the foot of it, were once the supports of a hut I myself assisted to rear: I have sat on the sods within it, when we had spread our banquet of apples before us, and been more blest—Oh! Edwards, infinitely more blest than ever I shall be again."

Just then a woman passed them on the road, and discovered<sup>4</sup> some signs of wonder at the attitude of Harley, who stood, with his hands folded together, looking with a moistened eye on the fallen pillars of the hut. He was too much entranced in thought to observe her at all; but Edwards civilly accosting her, desired to know, if that had not been the school-house, and how it came into the condition they now saw it in. "Alack a day!" said she, "it was the school-house indeed; but to be sure, Sir, the squire has pulled it down because it stood in the way of his prospects."<sup>5</sup> "What! how! prospects! pulled down!" cried Harley. "Yes, to be sure, sir; and the green, where the

children used to play, he has ploughed up, because, he said, they hurt his fence on the other side of it.”—“Curses on his narrow heart,” cried Harley, “that could violate a right so sacred! Heaven blast the wretch!

And from his derogate body never spring

A babe to honor him!—<sup>6</sup>

But I need not, Edwards, I need not” (recovering himself a little), “he is cursed enough already: to him the noblest source of happiness is denied; and the cares of his sordid soul shall gnaw it, while thou sittest over a brown crust, smiling on those mangled limbs that have saved thy son and his children!” “If you want anything with the school-mistress, sir,” said the woman, “I can show you the way to her house.” He followed her without knowing whither he went.

They stopped at the door of a snug-looking house, where sat an elderly woman with a boy and a girl before her, with each a supper of bread and milk in their hands. “There, Sir, is the school-mistress.”—“Madam,” said Harley, “was not an old venerable-looking man school-master here some time ago?” “Yes, sir, he was; poor man! the loss of his former school-house, I believe, broke his heart, for he died soon after it was taken down; and as another has not yet been found, I have that charge in the meantime.”—“And this boy and girl, I presume, are your pupils?”—“Ay, sir; they are poor orphans, put under my care by the parish; and more promising children I never saw.” “Orphans!” said Harley. “Yes, Sir, of honest creditable parents as any in the parish; and it is a shame for some folks to forget their relations, at a time when they have most need to remember them.”—“Madam,” said Harley, “let us never forget that we are all relations.” He kissed the children.

“Their father, sir,” continued she, “was a farmer here in the neighborhood, and a sober industrious man he was; but nobody can help misfortunes: what with bad crops, and bad debts, which are worse, his affairs went to wreck, and both he and his wife died of broken hearts. And a sweet couple they were, sir; there was not a properer man to look on in the county than John Edwards, and so

indeed were all the Edwardses." "What Edwardses?" cried the old soldier hastily. "The Edwardses of Southhill; and a worthy family they were."—"Southhill!" said he, in a languid voice, and fell back into the arms of the astonished Harley. The school-mistress ran for some water, and a smelling-bottle,<sup>7</sup> with the assistance of which they soon recovered the unfortunate Edwards. He stared wildly for some time, then folding his orphan grandchildren in his arms, "Oh! my children, my children," he cried, "have I found you thus? My poor Jack! art thou gone? I thought thou shouldst have carried thy father's grey hairs to the grave! And these little ones"—his tears choked his utterance, and he fell again on the necks of the children.

"My dear old man!" said Harley, "Providence has sent thee to relieve them; it will bless me, if I can be the means of assisting you." "Yes, indeed, sir," answered the boy; "father, when he was a-dying, bade God bless us; and prayed, that if grandfather lived, he might send him to support us."—"Where did they lay my boy?" said Edwards. "In the Old Churchyard," replied the woman, "hard<sup>8</sup> by his mother." "I will show it you," answered the boy, "for I have wept over it many a time, when first I came amongst strange folks."<sup>9</sup> He took the old man's hand, Harley laid hold of his sister's, and they walked in silence to the churchyard.

There was an old stone, with the corner broken off, and some letters, half-covered with moss, to denote the names of the dead: there was a cyphered<sup>1</sup> R. E. plainer than the rest; it was the tomb they sought. "Here it is, grandfather," said the boy. Edwards gazed upon it without uttering a word: the girl, who had only sighed before, now wept outright; her brother sobbed, but he stifled his sobbing. "I have told sister," said he, "that she should not take it so to heart; she can knit already, and I shall soon be able to dig, we shall not starve, sister, indeed we shall not, nor shall grandfather neither." The girl cried afresh; Harley kissed off her tears as they flowed, and wept between every kiss.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Demonstrated.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: It blocked his view.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Harley adapts King Lear's curse of his daughter Goneril, reversing the gender (see *King Lear* 1.4).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A bottle with smelling salts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Close.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Strangers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Interwoven, like letters of a monogram.[Return to reference 1](#)



### ***Chapter XXXVI. He returns home.—A description of his retinue.***

It was with some difficulty that Harley prevailed on the old man to leave the spot where the remains of his son were laid. At last, with the assistance of the school-mistress, he prevailed; and she accommodated Edwards and him with beds in her house, there being nothing like an inn nearer than the distance of some miles.

In the morning, Harley persuaded Edwards to come with the children, to his house, which was distant but a short day's journey. The boy walked in his grandfather's hand; and the name of Edwards procured him a neighboring farmer's horse, on which a servant mounted, with the girl seated on a pillow before him.

With this train Harley returned to the abode of his fathers: and we cannot but think, that his enjoyment was as great as if he had arrived from the tour of Europe, with a Swiss valet for his companion, and half a dozen snuff-boxes, with invisible hinges,<sup>2</sup> in his pocket. But we take our ideas from sounds which folly has invented; Fashion, Bon ton, and Vertù,<sup>3</sup> are the names of certain idols, to which we sacrifice the genuine pleasures of the soul: in this world of semblance, we are contented with personating<sup>4</sup> happiness; to feel it is an art beyond us.

It was otherwise with Harley: he ran upstairs to his aunt, with the history of his fellow-travellers glowing on his lips. His aunt was an œconomist;<sup>5</sup> but she knew the pleasure of doing charitable things, and withal was fond of her nephew, and solicitous to oblige him. She received old Edwards therefore with a look of more complacency than is perhaps natural to maiden ladies of threescore, and was remarkably attentive to his grandchildren: she roasted apples with her own hands for their supper, and made up a little bed beside her own for the girl. Edwards made some attempts towards an acknowledgment for these favors; but his young friend stopped them in their beginnings. "Whosoever receiveth any of these

children"<sup>6</sup>—said his aunt; for her acquaintance with her bible was habitual.

Early next morning, Harley stole into the room where Edwards lay: he expected to have found him a-bed; but in this he was mistaken: the old man had risen, and was leaning over his sleeping grandson, with the tears flowing down his cheeks. At first he did not perceive Harley; when he did, he endeavored to hide his grief, and crossing his eyes with his hand expressed his surprise at seeing him so early astir. "I was thinking of you," said Harley, "and your children: I learned last night that a small farm of mine in the neighborhood is now vacant: if you will occupy it, I shall gain a good neighbor, and be able in some measure to repay you the notice you took of me when a boy, and as the furniture of the house is mine, it will be so much trouble saved." Edwards's tears gushed afresh, and Harley led him to see the place he intended for him.

The house upon this farm was indeed little better than a hut; its situation, however, was pleasant, and Edwards, assisted by the beneficence of Harley, set about improving its neatness and convenience. He staked out a piece of the green before for a garden, and Peter, who acted in Harley's family as valet, butler, and gardener, had orders to furnish him with parcels of the different seeds he chose to sow in it. I have seen his master at work in this little spot, with his coat off, and his dibble<sup>7</sup> in his hand: it was a scene of tranquil virtue to have stopped an angel on his errands of mercy! Harley had contrived to lead a little bubbling brook through a green walk in the middle of the ground, upon which he had erected a mill in miniature for the diversion of Edwards's infant grandson, and made shift in its construction to introduce a pliant bit of wood, that answered with its fairy clack to the murmuring of the rill that turned it. I have seen him stand, listening to these mingled sounds, with his eye fixed on the boy, and the smile of conscious satisfaction on his cheek, while the old man, with a look half turned to Harley and half to heaven, breathed an ejaculation of gratitude and piety.

Father of mercies! I also would thank thee! that not only hast thou assigned eternal rewards to virtue, but that, even in this bad

world, the lines of our duty, and our happiness, are so frequently woven together.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Indicative of superior craftsmanship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Taste, interest, or a depth of knowledge in the fine arts. “Bon ton”: fashionable social life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Imitating or impersonating.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: One who keeps a strict, thrifty watch over domestic expenditures.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Mark 9:37.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A stick used to make holes in which to plant seeds.[Return to reference 7](#)

***A FRAGMENT.<sup>8</sup> The Man of Feeling talks of what he does not understand.—An incident.***

\* \* \* "Edwards," said he, "I have a proper regard for the prosperity of my country: every native of it appropriates to himself some share of the power, or the fame, which, as a nation, it acquires; but I cannot throw off the man<sup>9</sup> so much, as to rejoice at our conquests in India. You tell me of immense territories subject to the English: I cannot think of their possessions, without being led to inquire, by what right they possess them. They came there as traders, bartering the commodities they brought for others which their purchasers could spare; and however great their profits were, they were then equitable. But what title have the subjects of another kingdom to establish an empire in India? to give laws to a country where the inhabitants received them on the terms of friendly commerce? You say they are happier under our regulations than the tyranny of their own petty princes. I must doubt it, from the conduct of those by whom these regulations have been made. They have drained the treasuries of Nabobs,<sup>1</sup> who must fill them by oppressing the industry of their subjects. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the motive upon which those gentlemen do not deny their going to India. The fame of conquest, barbarous as that motive is, is but a secondary consideration: there are certain stations in wealth to which the warriors of the East<sup>2</sup> aspire. It is there indeed where the wishes of their friends assign them eminence, where the question of their country is pointed at their return. When shall I see a commander return from India in the pride of honorable poverty? You describe the victories they have gained; they are sullied by the cause in which they fought: you enumerate the spoils of those victories; they are covered with the blood of the vanquished!

"Could you tell me of some conqueror giving peace and happiness to the conquered? did he accept the gifts of their princes to use them for the comfort of those whose fathers, sons, or husbands, fell in battle? did he use his power to gain security and freedom to the regions of oppression and slavery? did he endear the

British name by examples of generosity, which the most depraved are rarely able to resist? did he return with the consciousness of duty discharged to his country, and humanity to his fellow-creatures? did he return with no lace on his coat, no slaves in his retinue, no chariot at his door, and no Burgundy at his table?—these were laurels which princes might envy—which an honest man would not condemn!”

“Your maxims, Mr. Harley, are certainly right,” said Edwards. “I am not capable of arguing with you; but I imagine there are great temptations in a great degree of riches, which it is no easy matter to resist: these a poor man like me cannot describe, because he never knew them; and perhaps I have reason to bless God that I never did; for then, it is likely, I should have withstood them no better than my neighbors. For you know, sir, that it is not the fashion now, as it was in former times, that I have read of in books, when your great generals died so poor, that they did not leave wherewithal to buy them a coffin; and people thought the better of their memories for it: if they did so nowadays, I question if anybody, except yourself, and some few such, would thank them a whit.”

“I am sorry,” replied Harley, “that there is so much truth in what you say; but however the general current of opinion may point, the feelings are not yet lost that applaud benevolence, and censure inhumanity. Let us endeavor to strengthen them in ourselves; and we, who live sequestered from the noise of the multitude, have better opportunities of listening undisturbed to their voice.”

They now approached the little dwelling of Edwards. A maidservant, whom he had hired to assist him in the care of his grandchildren, met them a little way from the house: “There is a young lady within with the children,” said she. Edwards expressed his surprise at the visit: it was however not the less true; and we mean to account for it.

This young lady then was no other than Miss Walton.<sup>3</sup> She had heard the old man’s history from Harley, as we have already related. Curiosity, or some other motive, prompted her to desire to see his grandchildren: this she had an opportunity of gratifying soon, the

children, in some of their walks, having strolled as far as her father's avenue. She put several questions to both; she was delighted with the simplicity of their answers, and promised, that if they continued to be good children, and do as their grandfather bid them, she would soon see them again, and bring some present or other for their reward. This promise she had performed now: she came attended only by her maid, and brought with her a complete suit of green for the boy, and a chintz gown, a cap, and a suit<sup>4</sup> of ribbons, for his sister. She had time enough, with her maid's assistance, to equip them in their new habiliments before Harley and Edwards returned. The boy heard his grandfather's voice, and, with that silent joy which his present finery inspired, ran to the door to meet him: putting one hand in his, with the other pointed to his sister, "See," said he, "what Miss Walton has brought us."—Edwards gazed on them. Harley fixed his eye on Miss Walton; hers were turned to the ground;—in Edwards's there was a beamy moisture.—He folded his hands together—"I cannot speak, young lady," said he, "to thank you." Nor could Harley neither. There were a thousand sentiments;—but they gushed so impetuously on his heart, that he could not utter a syllable. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1771

- Note 8: In keeping with the novel's fragmentary structure, this "Fragment" intrudes to offer a conversation about British colonialism in India between Harley and Edwards, though its subsequent "Incident" follows from the previous point in the plot. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Divest himself of his humanity. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anglicized form of *nawab* (Urdu, derived from *nawwāb*), local rulers of the Mughal Empire. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British soldiers and officials of the East India Company. "Stations in wealth": positions in India whereby riches are secured by British colonialists. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The young woman with whom Harley is hopelessly and silently in love.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Set.[Return to reference 4](#)

## ELIZABETH RYVES

The poet, dramatist, and translator Elizabeth Ryves (1750–1797) inherited property from her family in her home country of Ireland, but she lost it in legal proceedings and went to London, where she attempted, and failed, to recover it by petitioning the government. She then tried to support herself there by writing. Though she got substantial work as a writer and translator, she remained desperately poor. Her *Poems on Several Occasions* appeared in 1777. A notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1797 printed after her death relates that when “she lodged in an obscure part of the city, she would spend her last shillings, herself unprovided with a dinner, in the purchase of a joint of meat for a starving family that occupied the floor above her.” The poem here proudly embraces a susceptibility to feeling while acknowledging its often painful costs.



# Ode to Sensibility

## *I.*

The sordid<sup>o</sup> wretch who ne'er has known,  
To feel for miseries not his own;  
Whose lazy pulse serenely beats,  
While injured worth her wrongs repeats;  
5 Dead to each sense of joy or pain,  
A useless link in nature's chain,<sup>1</sup>  
May boast the calm which I disdain.

## *II.*

Give me a generous soul, that glows  
With others' transports, others' woes;  
Whose noble nature scorns to bend,<sup>o</sup>  
10 Though Fate her iron scourge extend:  
But bravely bears the galling yoke,  
And smiles superior to the stroke,  
With spirit free and mind unbroke.

## *III.*

Yet, by compassion touched, not fear,  
15 Sheds the soft sympathizing tear,  
In tribute to affliction's claim,  
Or envied merit's wounded fame.  
Let Stoics scoff! I'd rather be  
Thus curst with sensibility,  
20 Than share their boasted apathy.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

1777

- Note 1: An allusion to the notion of the great chain of being, in which higher and lower elements interlock in “one stupendous whole” (Pope, *An Essay on Man* 1, 267).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The aim of Stoic philosophy in ancient Greece was *apatheia* (Greek, “without pathos or passion”), an unperturbedness in the face of suffering.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *coarse, despicable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *submit*[Return to reference °](#)

# ANN YEARSLEY

The title page of the first book of poems by Ann Yearsley (1753–1806), published in 1785, identifies her as “a Milkwoman of Bristol.” Selling milk did not generate enough income to support her, her husband (designated as “a laborer” in local records), and their five children, and by 1784 the family had fallen into extreme poverty. Among the philanthropic people who came forward to help them was the poet and reformer Hannah More (see [p. 976](#)), who learned that Yearsley wrote poetry and sponsored the publication of her first book, generating a large list of eminent subscribers, and around £600. Yearsley’s relationship with More soon soured, as the latter insisted that the book’s profits be put in trust to keep the money away from Yearsley’s husband. Publicly angry at More for her interference, Yearsley eventually gained control of her money at the expense of the support and friendship of More and her circle. Her second book, *Poems on Various Subjects, by Ann Yearsley, Milkwoman of Clifton, Near Bristol* (1787), found other well-connected subscribers. She continued her literary career, writing a play that was produced at Bristol in 1789 (published 1791), a long historical novel (1795), and a final volume of poetry (1796), as well as several stand-alone works, such as *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* (1786).

The poem “Addressed to Sensibility” appears first in her second book and sets its tone. Sensibility was seen as an especially interesting topic for women poets in the period, and the word occurred in many of their poems’ titles; Hannah More’s own poem

"Sensibility" appeared in 1782. But Yearsley's work is distinguished by the complex perspective she brings to sensibility. Her own susceptibility to emotion governs her life, but she also understands that literary feeling is a refined discourse deployed by those more educated and socially elevated than herself. Her poem is crowded with various sentimental figures and scenarios conjured by memory, including a youth in Bedlam, an institution in London where the mentally ill were confined, a "haughty insult" that ended a friendship (it is hard here not to recall her relationship with More), and the tears of a pastoral figure, Lysander, which elicit the speaker's sympathy. The pain consistently caused by sensibility seems to lead Yearsley to reject it. (Later in *Poems on Various Subjects*, a companion poem to this one titled "To Indifference" will implore, "leave me, Sensibility!") But by the end of "Addressed to Sensibility," Yearsley seems to value the honesty of her own pain. Unlike the refined, educated, rule-bound sensibility that has become a mode of feeling affected by the wise and fashionable, Yearsley comes to embrace the rawness of her "untaught" emotions.

## Addressed to Sensibility

Oh! Sensibility! Thou busy nurse  
Of injuries once received, why wilt thou feed  
Those serpents in the soul? their stings more fell<sup>o</sup>  
Than those which writhed round Priam's priestly  
son;<sup>1</sup>

5 I feel them here! They rend my panting breast,  
But I will tear them thence: ah! effort vain!  
Disturbed they grow rapacious, while their fangs  
Strike at poor Memory; wounded she deplores  
Her ravished joys and murmurs o'er the past.

10 Why shrinks my soul within these prison<sup>2</sup> walls  
Where wretches shake their chains? III-fated youth,<sup>3</sup>  
Why does thine eye run wildly o'er my form,  
Pointed with fond enquiry? 'Tis not *me*  
Thy restless thought would find; the silent tear  
Steals gently down his cheek: ah! could my arms  
15 Afford thee refuge, I would bear thee hence  
To a more peaceful dwelling. Vain the wish!  
Thy powers are all unhinged, and thou wouldst sit  
Insensible to sympathy: farewell.  
Lamented being! ever lost to hope,  
20 I leave thee, yea despair myself of cure.

For, oh, my bosom bleeds, while griefs like thine  
Increase the recent pang. Pensive I rove,  
More wounded than the hart,<sup>o</sup> whose side yet holds  
The deadly arrow: friendship, boast no more  
25 Thy hoard of joys, o'er which my soul oft hung;  
Like the too anxious miser o'er his gold.  
My treasures are all wrecked; I quit the scene

Where haughty insult cut the sacred ties  
Which long had held us: Cruel Julius!<sup>4</sup> take  
30 My last adieu. The wound thou gav'st is death,  
Nor canst e'en thou recall<sup>o</sup> my frightened sense  
With friendship's pleasing sound; yet while I clasp  
Thy valued image to my aching mind,  
And viewing that, forgive thee; will deplore  
35 The blow that severed two congenial souls!

Officious<sup>o</sup> Sensibility! 'tis thine<sup>5</sup>  
To give the finest anguish, to dissolve  
The dross<sup>o</sup> of spirit, till all essence, she  
Refines on real woe; from thence extracts  
40 Sad unexisting phantoms, never seen.

Yet, dear ideal mourner, be thou near  
When on Lysander's<sup>6</sup> tears I silent gaze;  
Then, with thy viewless pencil,<sup>o</sup> form his sigh,  
His deepest groan, his sorrow-tinged thought,  
45 With immature impatience, cold despair  
With all the tort'ring images that play,  
In sable hue, within his wasted mind.

And when this dreary group shall meet my  
thought,  
Oh! throw my pow'rs upon a fertile space,  
50 Where mingles ev'ry varied soft relief.  
Without thee, I could offer but the dregs  
Of vulgar consolation; from her cup  
He turns the eye, nor dare it soil his lip!  
Raise thou my friendly hand; mix thou the draught  
55 More pure than ether, as ambrosia clear,  
Fit only for the soul; thy chalice fill  
With drops of sympathy, which swiftly fall  
From my afflicted heart: yet—yet beware,  
Nor stoop to seize from passion's warmer clime

60 A poisonous sweet.—Bright cherub, safely rove  
 Through all the deep recesses of the soul!  
 Float on her raptures, deeper tinge her woes,  
 Strengthen emotion, higher waft her sigh,  
 Sit in the tearful orb, and ardent gaze  
 65 On joy or sorrow. But thy empire ends  
 Within the line of SPIRIT. My rough soul,  
 O Sensibility! defenseless hails  
 Thy feelings most acute. Yet, ye who boast  
 Of bliss *I* ne'er must reach, ye, who can fix<sup>o</sup>  
 70 A rule for sentiment, if rules there are,  
 (For much I doubt, my friends, if rule e'er held  
 Capacious sentiment) ye sure can point  
 My mind to joys that never touched the heart.  
 What is this joy? Where does its essence rest?  
 75 Ah! self-confounding sophists,<sup>z</sup> will ye dare  
 Pronounce *that* joy which never touched the heart?<sup>8</sup>  
 Does education give the transport keen,  
 Or swell your vaunted grief? No, Nature feels  
 Most poignant, undefended, hails with me  
 80 The Powers of Sensibility untaught.

## Endnotes

1787

- Note 1: In Greek mythology, Laocoön, a Trojan priest in some stories called the son of King Priam of Troy, was attacked along with his two sons by giant snakes; the scene was depicted by many painters and sculptors.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bedlam [*Yearsley's note*]. The common name for Bethlehem Hospital in London (founded 1247), in which the mentally ill were confined in the 18th century.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A male patient in the asylum.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Another unidentified male figure in the poem.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Sensibility, it is your role or duty.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A common pastoral name that may refer to a character crossed in love in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/6).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Incompetent philosophers whose arguments contradict themselves.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Will you give the name "joy" to something that cannot affect the heart?[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *painful, deadly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *male deer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bring back*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interfering, intrusive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dregs, impurities*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *invisible paintbrush*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *establish*[Return to reference °](#)



## FRANCES BURNEY

### 1752–1840

In the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf described Frances Burney as “the mother of English fiction.” Burney herself also rightly emphasized the originality of her work. At the age of twenty-six, she pitched the idea for her first novel, *Evelina* (1778), to the bookseller who would publish it: “I believe it has not before been executed, though it seems a fair field open for the Novelist.” Yet, Burney’s claim for the novel’s originality—in the letter to the bookseller and, more cautiously yet palpably, at the end of the novel’s preface—also relies on her deep understanding of her distinguished predecessors in novel writing. *Evelina* is an epistolary novel (presented as a series of letters), a form influentially employed in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48) as a way to depict characters’ emotions at the very moment they write, in the midst of the plot, not knowing the outcome. But Burney combines a Richardsonian moral sensibility with a bright comic vein evident in some of the other predecessors her preface cites, like Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett. Burney’s writing crackles with humor and can be relentless in satirically exposing bad manners or a selfish heart.

Burney did not divulge her identity to that bookseller, nor confide in anybody except two siblings and a cousin about the composition of the novel, nor put her name on the title page when the book appeared. Only after its publication did delighted readers, including Samuel Johnson, Hester Thrale, and her father Charles Burney, find

her out and sing her praises. Burney's father was a popular teacher and historian of music, and her family's London social circle included famous writers, actors, and musicians. Though she was shy and not encouraged by her father as much as her sisters, Burney educated herself and honed her intellect and observational skill among this cultured elite. She also learned the book business by helping her father prepare his own work for the press. As a teenager, she had drafted a version (now lost) of *Evelina's* backstory. Her first novel features, as *Evelina's* subtitle explains, "a young lady's entrance into the world," that is, the world of London high society. *Evelina*, a beautiful ingénue from the country, stumbles in learning the codes that govern conduct at public resorts and private parties and that shape taste, desire, and love. The selections reprinted here occur early in the novel, when *Evelina* first encounters London social life and learns, to her cost, how rules of politeness can serve as vehicles for aggression. It may be tempting to draw parallels between Burney's inexperienced first heroine and Burney herself at her literary debut—as the novel's preface and other introductory material encourage—but such parallels only go so far. Though *Evelina* widened Burney's acquaintance and buoyed her confidence with praise from powerful advocates, she did not begin her career artlessly and seemed to comprehend her own genius from the beginning. For the rest of her career as the most formidable English novelist of the late eighteenth century, Burney would continue to test the novel's range, dropping the epistolary style for a detached, sometimes severe, third-person narrator. *Cecilia* (1782) expanded her satirical and sentimental scope to present the fashionable world of London as a kind of wasteland; the immensely popular *Camilla* (1796) again mixed comedy and romantic feeling to portray the trials in love and life of a family's siblings; and her final novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), explored the possibilities of historical fiction, employing Gothic touches against a background of the French Revolution.

Burney's home life was tumultuous. She and her stepmother disliked each other, and Burney fell in love with a young clergyman

who never got around to proposing. In 1786, to please her father, she accepted a place as a lady-in-waiting at court, where the paralyzing etiquette and lack of independence tormented her for the next five years, until she finally managed to resign. At forty-one she married a French émigré, General Alexandre-Gabriel-Jean-Baptiste d'Arblay. Despite the disapproval of her father—d'Arblay was penniless, Catholic, and politically liberal—the marriage was happy. Madame d'Arblay soon bore a son, and her fictions brought in good money. After she joined her husband in France, in 1802, the Napoleonic Wars prevented them from returning to England for ten years.

Burney never stopped writing—not only novels and plays but perpetual letters and journals, recording whatever she saw for friends and family as well as herself. These diaries and letters, edited after her death by a niece, made her famous again in the nineteenth century. Even the most informal pages display Burney's gifts: a knack for catching character, a wonderful ear for dialogue, wry humor, and a swift pace that carries the reader along from moment to moment. Her special subject is embarrassment—often her own. Her clear-eyed view of the world can also be incredibly painful, as in her gripping account of a mastectomy. In her first journal entry, she frees herself to write with utter honesty by pretending that nobody is going to read her. But her private thoughts are reported so fully and faithfully that, in the end, every reader can share them.

## ***From Evelina***[1](#)

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The complete title on the title page is *Evelina, or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World, in a Series of Letters*.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Preface***

In the republic of letters, there is no member of such inferior rank, or who is so much disdained by his brethren of the quill,<sup>2</sup> as the humble novelist: nor is his fate less hard in the world at large, since, among the whole class of writers, perhaps not one can be named of which the votaries are more numerous but less respectable.

Yet, while in the annals of those few of our predecessors, to whom this species of writing is indebted for being saved from contempt, and rescued from depravity, we can trace such names as Rousseau, Johnson,<sup>3</sup> Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, no man need blush at starting from the same post, though many, nay, most men, may sigh at finding themselves distanced.<sup>4</sup>

The following letters are presented to the public—for such, by novel writers, novel readers will be called,—with a very singular mixture of timidity and confidence, resulting from the peculiar situation of the editor,<sup>5</sup> who, though trembling for their success from a consciousness of their imperfections, yet fears not being involved in their disgrace, while happily wrapped up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity.

To draw characters from nature, though not from life,<sup>6</sup> and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters. For this purpose, a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart, her ignorance of the forms,<sup>7</sup> and inexperience in the manners of the world, occasion all the little incidents which these volumes record, and which form the natural progression of the life of a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty, for the first six months after her *entrance into the world*.

Perhaps were it possible to effect the total extirpation of novels, our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit from their annihilation; but since the

distemper they have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of time, and bitter diet of experience, surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than contemned.

Let me, therefore, prepare for disappointment those who, in the perusal of these sheets, entertain the gentle expectation of being transported to the fantastic regions of romance, where fiction is colored by all the gay tints of luxurious imagination, where reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the *marvelous* rejects all aid from sober probability. The heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is

No faultless Monster that the world ne'er saw;<sup>8</sup>

but the offspring of nature, and of nature in her simplest attire.

In all the arts, the value of copies can only be proportioned to the scarceness of originals: among sculptors and painters, a fine statue, or a beautiful picture, of some great master, may deservedly employ the imitative talents of younger and inferior artists, that their appropriation to one spot may not wholly prevent the more general expansion of their excellence;<sup>9</sup> but, among authors, the reverse is the case, since the noblest productions of literature are almost equally attainable with the meanest. In books, therefore, imitation cannot be shunned too sedulously; for the very perfection of a model which is frequently seen, serves but more forcibly to mark the inferiority of a copy.

To avoid what is common, without adopting what is unnatural, must limit the ambition of the vulgar herd of authors: however zealous, therefore, my veneration of the great writers I have mentioned, however I may feel myself enlightened by the knowledge of Johnson, charmed with the eloquence of Rousseau,

softened by the pathetic<sup>1</sup> powers of Richardson, and exhilarated by the wit of Fielding and humor of Smollett, I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked; whence, though they may have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers, and, though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren.

The candor of my readers I have not the impertinence to doubt, and to their indulgence I am sensible I have no claim; I have, therefore, only to entreat, that my own words may not pronounce my condemnation; and that what I have here ventured to say in regard to imitation, may be understood, as it is meant, in a general sense, and not be imputed to an opinion of my own originality, which I have not the vanity, the folly, or the blindness, to entertain.

Whatever may be the fate of these letters, the editor is satisfied they will meet with justice; and commits them to the press, though hopeless of fame, yet not regardless of censure.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Fellow writers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
However superior the capacities in which these great writers deserve to be considered, they must pardon me that, for the dignity of my subject, I here rank the authors of *Rasselas* and *Eloise* as Novelists [*Burney's note*]. Burney refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), French philosopher and author of the novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), along with Samuel Johnson (see *Rasselas*, [p. 802](#)). Filling out her list of respectable novelists are Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688–1763), Henry Fielding (see [p. 689](#)), Samuel Richardson (see [p. 692](#)), and Scottish writer Tobias Smollett (1721–1771).  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outrun. "Post": starting line.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Burney strikes the Richardsonian pose as "editor" of the letters composing *Evelina*, though she also acknowledges that

they and the characters who wrote them are fictional.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: *Evelina's* characters represent human nature but not real people.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Etiquette, rules of behavior.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, *An Essay upon Poetry* (1682), line 235.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: So that the master's single copy will not confine his talent to a single place.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Passionately moving.[Return to reference 1](#)



## ***Volume I, Letter VIII***

**EVELINA TO THE REV. MR. VILLARS.**<sup>1</sup>

Howard Grove, March 26.

This house seems to be the house of joy; every face wears a smile, and a laugh is at everybody's service. It is quite amusing to walk about, and see the general confusion; a room leading to the garden is fitting up for Captain Mirvan's study.<sup>2</sup> Lady Howard does not sit a moment in a place; Miss Mirvan is making caps; everybody so busy!—such flying from room to room!—so many orders given, and retracted, and given again!—Nothing but hurry and perturbation.

Well but my dear Sir, I am desired to make a request to you. I hope you will not think me an encroacher; Lady Howard insists upon my writing!—Yet I hardly know how to go on; a petition implies a want,—and have you left me one? No, indeed.

I am half ashamed of myself for beginning this letter. But these dear ladies are so pressing—I cannot, for my life, resist wishing for the pleasures they offer me,—provided you do not disapprove them.

They are to make a very short stay in town.<sup>3</sup> The Captain will meet them in a day or two. Mrs. Mirvan and her sweet daughter both go;—what a happy party! Yet, I am not *very* eager to accompany them: at least, I shall be contented to remain where I am, if you desire that I should.

Assured, my dearest Sir, of your goodness, your bounty, and your indulgent kindness, ought I to form a wish that has not your sanction? Decide for me, therefore, without the least apprehension that I shall be uneasy, or discontented. While I am yet in suspense, perhaps I may *hope*, but I am most certain, that when you have once determined, I shall not repine.

They tell me that London is now in full splendor. Two playhouses are open,—the Opera-House,—Ranelagh,—and the Pantheon.<sup>4</sup>—You see I have learned all their names. However, pray don't suppose that I make any point of going, for I shall hardly sigh to see them depart

without me; though I shall probably never meet with such another opportunity. And, indeed, their domestic happiness will be so great,—it is natural to wish to partake of it.

I believe I am bewitched! I made a resolution when I began, that I would not be urgent; but my pen—or rather my thoughts, will not suffer me to keep it—for I acknowledge, I must acknowledge, I cannot help wishing for your permission.

I almost repent already that I have made this confession; pray forget that you have read it, if this journey is displeasing to you. But I will not write any longer; for the more I think of this affair, the less indifferent to it I find myself.

Adieu, my most honored, most revered, most beloved father! For by what other name can I call you? I have no happiness or sorrow, no hope or fear, but what your kindness bestows, or your displeasure may cause. You will not, I am sure, send a refusal without reasons unanswerable, and therefore I shall cheerfully acquiesce. Yet I hope—I hope you will be able to permit me to go! I am, with the utmost affection, gratitude, and duty, your

EVELINA ———

I cannot to *you* sign *Anville*,<sup>5</sup> and what other name may I claim?

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Early in volume 1, Evelina, wide-eyed and naive, recounts her experiences as she travels away from her guardian, Reverend Arthur Villars, and the quiet home in Berry Hill, in Dorsetshire, where he raised her. She writes, first, from Howard Grove in Kent, home of family friend Lady Howard, her daughter Mrs. Mirvan, and her granddaughter Miss Maria Mirvan (Evelina's friend).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The women prepare for Captain Mirvan's return to England after seven years away. Mrs. and Miss Mirvan (his wife and daughter) plan to meet him in London briefly before returning with him to Howard Grove.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stately building hosting assemblies and concerts.  
“Ranelagh”: public pleasure gardens. Evelina lists London’s most fashionable places of entertainment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Villars has invented the surname Anville to help Evelina prevent questions about her past, though her real paternity is a key plot point.[Return to reference 5](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter IX***

**MR. VILLARS TO EVELINA.**

Berry-Hill, March 28.

To resist the urgency of entreaty is a power which I have not yet acquired: I aim not at an authority which deprives you of liberty, yet I would fain guide myself by a prudence which should save me the pangs of repentance. Your impatience to fly to a place which your imagination has painted to you in colors so attractive surprises me not; I have only to hope that the liveliness of your fancy may not deceive you: to refuse, would be raising it still higher. To see my Evelina happy is to see myself without a wish: go then my child; and may that Heaven, which alone can, direct, preserve, and strengthen you! To that, my love, will I daily offer prayers for your felicity; O may it guard, watch over you! Defend you from danger, save you from distress, and keep vice as distant from your person as from your heart! And to me, may it grant the ultimate blessing of closing these aged eyes in the arms of one so dear—so deservedly beloved!

ARTHUR VILLARS

## ***Volume I, Letter X***

**EVELINA TO THE REV. MR. VILLARS.**

Queen-Ann-Street, London,<sup>6</sup> Saturday, April 2.

This moment arrived. Just going to Drury-Lane theatre. The celebrated Mr. Garrick performs *Ranger*.<sup>7</sup> I am quite in ecstasy. So is Miss Mirvan. How fortunate, that he should happen to play! We would not let Mrs. Mirvan rest till she consented to go; her chief objection was to our dress, for we have had no time to *Londonize* ourselves; but we teased her into compliance, and so we are to sit in some obscure place, that she may not be seen. As to me, I should be alike unknown in the most conspicuous or most private part of the house.

I can write no more now. I have hardly time to breathe—only just this, the houses and streets are not quite so superb as I expected. However, I have seen nothing yet, so I ought not to judge.

Well, adieu, my dearest Sir, for the present; I could not forbear writing a few words instantly on my arrival; though I suppose my letter of thanks for your consent is still on the road.

Saturday Night.

O my dear Sir, in what raptures am I returned! Well may Mr. Garrick be so celebrated, so universally admired—I had not any idea of so great a performer.

Such ease! such vivacity in his manner! such grace in his motions! such fire and meaning in his eyes!—I could hardly believe he had studied a written part, for every word seemed to be uttered from the impulse of the moment.

His action—at once so graceful and so free!—his voice—so clear, so melodious, yet so wonderfully various in its tones!—such animation!—Every look *speaks*!

I would have given the world to have had the whole play acted over again. And when he danced—O how I envied Clarinda!<sup>8</sup> I

almost wished to have jumped on the stage and joined them.

I am afraid you will think me mad, so I won't say any more; yet, I really believe Mr. Garrick would make you mad too, if you could see him. I intend to ask Mrs. Mirvan to go to the play every night while we stay in town. She is extremely kind to me, and Maria, her charming daughter, is the sweetest girl in the world.

I shall write to you every evening all that passes in the day, and that in the same manner as, if I could see, I should tell you.

Sunday.

This morning we went to Portland chapel, and afterwards we walked in the mall of St. James's Park,<sup>9</sup> which by no means answered my expectations: it is a long straight walk, of dirty gravel, very uneasy to the feet; and at each end, instead of an open prospect, nothing is to be seen but houses built of brick. When Mrs. Mirvan pointed out the Palace<sup>1</sup> to me—I think I was never much more surprised.

However, the walk was very agreeable to us; everybody looked gay, and seemed pleased, and the ladies were so much dressed, that Miss Mirvan and I could do nothing but look at them. Mrs. Mirvan met several of her friends. No wonder, for I never saw so many people assembled together before. I looked about for some of *my* acquaintance, but in vain, for I saw not one person that I knew, which is very odd, for all the world seemed there.

Mrs. Mirvan says we are not to walk in the park again next Sunday, even if we should be in town, because there is better company in Kensington Gardens.<sup>2</sup> But really if you had seen how much every body was dressed, you would not think that possible.

Monday.

We are to go this evening to a private ball, given by Mrs. Stanley, a very fashionable lady of Mrs. Mirvan's acquaintance.

We have been *a-shopping*, as Mrs. Mirvan calls it, all this morning, to buy silks, caps, gauzes, and so forth.

The shops are really very entertaining, especially the mercers;<sup>3</sup> there seem to be six or seven men belonging to each shop, and

every one took care, by bowing and smirking, to be noticed; we were conducted from one to another, and carried from room to room, with so much ceremony, that at first I was almost afraid to go on.

I thought I should never have chosen a silk, for they produced so many I knew not which to fix upon, and they recommended them all so strongly, that I fancy they thought I only wanted persuasion to buy every thing they showed me. And, indeed, they took so much trouble, that I was almost ashamed I could not.

At the milliners, the ladies we met were so much dressed, that I should rather have imagined they were making visits than purchases. But what most diverted me was, that we were more frequently served by men than by women; and such men! so finical, so affected! They seemed to understand every part of a woman's dress better than we do ourselves; and they recommended caps and ribbands with an air of so much importance, that I wished to ask them how long they had left off wearing them!<sup>4</sup>





**"Ridiculous Taste, or the Ladies Absurdity,"** 1771, Matthias (or Matthew) Darly. This print satirizes fashionable hairdos worn by upper-class women, which, according to social commentators, had grown to extreme proportions. The hairdresser ascends a



ladder to complete his work, while the lady's husband uses a sextant to measure its altitude.

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The dispatch with which they work in these great shops is amazing, for they have promised me a complete suit of linen against<sup>5</sup> the evening.

I have just had my hair dressed. You can't think how oddly my head feels; full of powder and black pins, and a great cushion on the top of it.<sup>6</sup> I believe you would hardly know me, for my face looks quite different to what it did before my hair was dressed. When I shall be able to make use of a comb for myself I cannot tell, for my hair is so much entangled, *frizzled* they call it, that I fear it will be very difficult.

I am half afraid of this ball tonight, for, you know, I have never danced but at school; however, Miss Mirvan says there is nothing in it. Yet, I wish it was over.

Adieu, my dear Sir; pray excuse the wretched stuff I write, perhaps I may improve by being in this town, and then my letters will be less unworthy your reading. Meantime, I am, your dutiful and affectionate, though unpolished,

EVELINA.

Poor Miss Mirvan cannot wear one of the caps she made, because they dress her hair too large for them.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: The residence rented by the Mirvan family on Queen Anne Street was in a fashionable district in the west of London, now called Marylebone.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: David Garrick was the most influential actor of the period and also a manager of the Drury Lane Theatre in London. Ranger is the lead character in Benjamin Hoadly's comedy *The Suspicious Husband* (1747), one of Garrick's signature roles.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A character in *The Suspicious Husband*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A fashionable walk in St. James's Park in central London. "Portland chapel": a chapel near where the Mirvan family was staying.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: St. James's Palace, located close to the Mall of St. James's Park, was then the primary London home of the royals. (Buckingham House was also nearby and might loosely be called a palace, but it was not yet built up into the current form of Buckingham Palace.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Another fashionable park in London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sellers of fine fabrics.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Had stopped wearing them themselves. Commentators in the period sometimes depicted commerce as feminizing or remarked that commercial activity could throw conventional gender roles into confusion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To be ready for.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Women's hairstyles had gotten increasingly—sometimes extravagantly—elaborate and large. Period satirical prints showed women dwarfed or toppled by their towering hair.[Return to reference 6](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter XI***

### **EVELINA IN CONTINUATION.**

Queen-Ann-Street, April 5, Tuesday morning.

I have a vast deal to say, and shall give all this morning to my pen. As to my plan of writing every evening the adventures of the day, I find it impracticable; for the diversions here are so very late, that if I begin my letters after them, I could not go to bed at all.

We passed a most extraordinary evening. A *private* ball this was called, so I expected to have seen about four or five couple; but Lord! my dear Sir, I believe I saw half the world! Two very large rooms were full of company; in one were cards for the elderly ladies, and in the other were the dancers. My mamma Mirvan, for she always calls me her child, said she would sit with Maria and me till we were provided with partners, and then join the card-players.

The gentlemen, as they passed and re-passed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honor of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense. I don't speak of this in regard to Miss Mirvan and myself only, but to the ladies in general: and I thought it so provoking, that I determined in my own mind that, far from humoring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who would seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me.

Not long after, a young man, who had for some time looked at us with a kind of negligent impertinence, advanced, on tiptoe, towards me; he had a set smile on his face, and his dress was so foppish, that I really believed he even wished to be stared at; and yet he was very ugly.

Bowing almost to the ground with a sort of swing, and waving his hand with the greatest conceit, after a short and silly pause, he said, "Madam—may I presume?"—and stopped, offering to take my hand. I drew it back, but could scarce forbear laughing. "Allow me,

Madam," (continued he, affectedly breaking off every half moment), "the honor and happiness—if I am not so unhappy as to address you too late—to have the happiness and honor—"

Again he would have taken my hand, but bowing my head, I begged to be excused, and turned to Miss Mirvan to conceal my laughter. He then desired to know if I had already engaged myself to some more fortunate man? I said No, and that I believed I should not dance at all. He would keep himself, he told me, disengaged, in hopes I should relent; and then, uttering some ridiculous speeches of sorrow and disappointment, though his face still wore the same invariable smile, he retreated.

It so happened, as we have since recollected, that during this little dialogue, Mrs. Mirvan was conversing with the lady of the house. And very soon after, another gentleman, who seemed about six-and-twenty years old, gaily but not foppishly dressed, and indeed extremely handsome, with an air of mixed politeness and gallantry, desired to know if I was engaged, or would honor him with my hand. So he was pleased to say, though I am sure I know not what honor he could receive from me; but these sort of expressions, I find, are used as words of course,<sup>7</sup> without any distinction of persons, or study of propriety.

Well, I bowed, and I am sure I colored; for indeed I was frightened at the thoughts of dancing before so many people, all strangers, and, which was worse, *with* a stranger; however, that was unavoidable, for though I looked round the room several times, I could not see one person that I knew. And so he took my hand, and led me to join in the dance.

The minuets were over<sup>8</sup> before we arrived, for we were kept late by the milliner's making us wait for our things.

He seemed very desirous of entering into conversation with me; but I was seized with such a panic, that I could hardly speak a word, and nothing but the shame of so soon changing my mind prevented my returning to my seat, and declining to dance at all.

He appeared to be surprised at my terror, which I believe was but too apparent: however, he asked no questions, though I fear he

must think it very strange; for I did not choose to tell him it was owing to my never before dancing but with a school-girl.

His conversation was sensible and spirited; his air and address were open and noble; his manners gentle, attentive, and infinitely engaging; his person is all elegance, and his countenance, the most animated and expressive I have ever seen.

In a short time we were joined by Miss Mirvan, who stood next couple to us. But how I was startled when she whispered me that my partner was a nobleman! This gave me a new alarm; how will he be provoked, thought I, when he finds what a simple rustic<sup>9</sup> he has honored with his choice! one whose ignorance of the world makes her perpetually fear doing something wrong!

That he should be so much my superior in every way quite disconcerted me; and you will suppose my spirits were not much raised, when I heard a lady, in passing us, say, "This is the most difficult dance I ever saw."

"O dear, then," cried Maria to her partner, "with your leave, I'll sit down till the next."

"So will I too, then," cried I, "for I am sure I can hardly stand."

"But you must speak to your partner first," answered she; for he had turned aside to talk with some gentlemen. However, I had not sufficient courage to address him, and so away we all three tripped,<sup>1</sup> and seated ourselves at another end of the room.

But, unfortunately for me, Miss Mirvan soon after suffered herself to be prevailed upon to attempt the dance; and just as she rose to go, she cried, "My dear, yonder is your partner, Lord Orville, walking about the room in search of you."

"Don't leave me then, dear girl!" cried I; but she was obliged to go. And now I was more uneasy than ever; I would have given the world to have seen Mrs. Mirvan, and begged of her to make my apologies; for what, thought I, can I possibly say to him in excuse for running away? He must either conclude me a fool, or half mad; for any one brought up in the great world, and accustomed to its ways, can have no idea of such sort of fears as mine.

My confusion increased when I observed that he was everywhere seeking me, with apparent perplexity and surprise; but when, at last, I saw him move towards the place where I sat, I was ready to sink with shame and distress. I found it absolutely impossible to keep my seat, because I could not think of a word to say for myself, and so I rose, and walked hastily towards the card-room, resolving to stay with Mrs. Mirvan the rest of the evening, and not to dance at all. But before I could find her, Lord Orville saw and approached me.

He begged to know if I was not well? You may easily imagine how much I was embarrassed. I made no answer; but hung my head like a fool, and looked on my fan.

He then, with an air the most respectfully serious, asked if he had been so unhappy as to offend me?

"No, indeed!" cried I, and, in hopes of changing the discourse, and preventing his further inquiries, I desired to know if he had seen the young lady who had been conversing with me?

No;—but would I honor him with any commands to her?

"O, by no means!"

Was there any other person with whom I wished to speak?

I said *no*, before I knew I had answered at all.

Should he have the pleasure of bringing me any refreshment?

I bowed, almost involuntarily. And away he flew.

I was quite ashamed of being so troublesome, and so much *above* myself as these seeming airs made me appear; but indeed I was too much confused to think or act with any consistency.

If he had not been swift as lightning, I don't know whether I should not have stolen away again; but he returned in a moment. When I had drank a glass of lemonade, he hoped, he said, that I would again honor him with my hand, as a new dance was just begun. I had not the presence of mind to say a single word, and so I let him once more lead me to the place I had left.

Shocked to find how silly, how childish a part I had acted, my former fears of dancing before such a company, and with such a partner, returned more forcibly than ever. I suppose he perceived my uneasiness, for he entreated me to sit down again, if dancing was

disagreeable to me. But I was quite satisfied with the folly I had already shown; and therefore declined his offer, though I was really scarce able to stand.

Under such conscious disadvantages, you may easily imagine, my dear Sir, how ill I acquitted myself. But, though I both expected and deserved to find him very much mortified and displeased at his ill fortune in the choice he had made, yet, to my very great relief, he appeared to be even contented, and very much assisted and encouraged me. These people in high life have too much presence of mind, I believe, to *seem* disconcerted, or out of humor, however they may feel: for had I been the person of the most consequence in the room, I could not have met with more attention and respect.

When the dance was over, seeing me still very much flurried, he led me to a seat, saying that he would not suffer me to fatigue myself from politeness.

And then, if my capacity, or even if my spirits had been better, in how animated a conversation I might have been engaged! It was then I saw that the rank of Lord Orville was his least recommendation, his understanding and his manners being far more distinguished. His remarks upon the company in general were so apt, so just, so lively, I am almost surprised myself that they did not reanimate me; but indeed I was too well convinced of the ridiculous part I had myself played before so nice<sup>2</sup> an observer, to be able to enjoy his pleasantry: so self-compassion gave me feeling for others. Yet I had not the courage to attempt either to defend them or to rally in my turn, but listened to him in silent embarrassment.

When he found this, he changed the subject, and talked of public places, and public performers; but he soon discovered that I was totally ignorant of them.

He then, very ingeniously, turned the discourse to the amusements and occupations of the country.

It now struck me that he was resolved to try whether or not I was capable of talking upon *any* subject. This put so great a constraint upon my thoughts, that I was unable to go further than a monosyllable, and not ever so far, when I could possibly avoid it.

We were sitting in this manner, he conversing with all gaiety, I looking down with all foolishness, when that fop who had first asked me to dance, with a most ridiculous solemnity approached, and, after a profound bow or two, said, "I humbly beg pardon, Madam,—and of you too, my Lord,—for breaking in upon such agreeable conversation—which must, doubtless, be much more delectable—than what I have the honor to offer—but—"

I interrupted him—I blush for my folly—with laughing; yet I could not help it; for, added to the man's stately foppishness, (and he actually took snuff between every three words) when I looked round at Lord Orville, I saw such extreme surprise in his face,—the cause of which appeared so absurd, that I could not for my life preserve my gravity.

I had not laughed before from the time I had left Miss Mirvan, and I had much better have cried then; Lord Orville actually stared at me; the beau, I know not his name, looked quite enraged. "Refrain—Madam," (said he, with an important air) "a few moments refrain!—I have but a sentence to trouble you with.—May I know to what accident I must attribute not having the honor of your hand?"

"Accident, Sir!" repeated I, much astonished.

"Yes, accident, Madam—for surely,—I must take the liberty to observe—pardon me, Madam,—it ought to be no common one—that should tempt a lady—so young a one too,—to be guilty of ill-manners."

A confused idea now for the first time entered my head, of something I had heard of the rules of an assembly; but I was never at one before—I have only danced at school—and so giddy and heedless I was, that I had not once considered the impropriety of refusing one partner, and afterwards accepting another. I was thunderstruck at the recollection: but, while these thoughts were rushing into my head, Lord Orville, with some warmth, said, "This lady, Sir, is incapable of meriting such an accusation!"

The creature—for I am very angry with him—made a low bow and with a grin the most malicious I ever saw, "My Lord," said he,



"far be it from me to *accuse* the lady, for having the discernment to distinguish and prefer—the superior attractions of your Lordship."

Again he bowed, and walked off.

Was ever any thing so provoking? I was ready to die with shame. "What a coxcomb!" exclaimed Lord Orville: while I, without knowing what I did, rose hastily, and moving off, "I can't imagine," cried I, "where Mrs. Mirvan has hid herself!"

"Give me leave to see," answered he. I bowed and sat down again, not daring to meet his eyes; for what must he think of me, between my blunder, and the supposed preference?

He returned in a moment, and told me that Mrs. Mirvan was at cards, but would be glad to see me; and I went immediately. There was but one chair vacant, so, to my great relief, Lord Orville presently left us. I then told Mrs. Mirvan my disasters, and she good-naturedly blamed herself for not having better instructed me, but said she had taken it for granted that I must know such common customs. However, the man may, I think, be satisfied with his pretty speech, and carry his resentment no farther.

In a short time, Lord Orville returned. I consented, with the best grace I could, to go down another dance, for I had had time to recollect myself; and therefore resolved to use some exertion, and, if possible, to appear less a fool than I had hitherto done; for it occurred to me, that, insignificant as I was, compared to a man of his rank and figure, yet, since he had been so unfortunate as to make choice of me for a partner, why I should endeavor to make the best of it.

The dance, however, was short, and he spoke very little; so I had no opportunity of putting my resolution in practice. He was satisfied, I suppose, with his former successful efforts to draw me out; or, rather, I fancied he had been inquiring *who I was*. This again disconcerted me, and the spirits I had determined to exert, again failed me. Tired, ashamed, and mortified, I begged to sit down till we returned home, which we did soon after. Lord Orville did me the honor to hand me to the coach, talking all the way of the honor *I* had done *him*! O these fashionable people!

Well, my dear Sir, was it not a strange evening? I could not help being thus particular, because, to me, every thing is so new. But it is now time to conclude. I am, with all love and duty, your

EVELINA

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Formulaic phrases.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Balls often began with minuets, rather formal and difficult dances, and then usually gave way to less demanding country dances.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Country girl.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stepped lightly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Exact.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter XII***

### **EVELINA IN CONTINUATION.**

Tuesday, April 5.

There is to be no end to the troubles of last night. I have this moment, between persuasion and laughter, gathered from Maria the most curious dialogue that ever I heard. You will, at first, be startled at my vanity; but, my dear Sir, have patience!

It must have passed while I was sitting with Mrs. Mirvan, in the card-room. Maria was taking some refreshment, and saw Lord Orville advancing for the same purpose himself; but he did not know her, though she immediately recollected him. Presently after, a very gay-looking man, stepping hastily up to him cried, "Why, my Lord, what have you done with your lovely partner?"

"*Nothing!*" answered Lord Orville, with a smile and a shrug.

"By Jove," cried the man, "she is the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life!"

Lord Orville, as he well might, laughed, but answered, "Yes, a pretty modest-looking girl."

"O my Lord!" cried the madman, "she is an angel!"

"A *silent* one," returned he.

"Why ay, my Lord, how stands she as to that? She looks all intelligence and expression."

"A poor weak girl!" answered Lord Orville, shaking his head.

"By Jove," cried the other, "I am glad to hear it!"

At that moment, the same odious creature who had been my former tormentor joined them. Addressing Lord Orville with great respect, he said, "I beg pardon, my Lord,—if I was—as I fear might be the case—rather too severe in my censure of the lady who is honored with your protection—but, my Lord, ill-breeding is apt to provoke a man."

"Ill-breeding!" cried my unknown champion, "impossible! that elegant face can never be so vile a mask!"

"O Sir, as to that," answered he, "you must allow *me* to judge; for though I pay all deference to your opinion—in other things,—yet I hope you will grant—and I appeal to your Lordship also—that I am not totally despicable as a judge of good or ill-manners."

"I was so wholly ignorant," said Lord Orville, gravely, "of the provocation you might have had, that I could not but be surprised at your singular resentment."

"It was far from my intention," answered he, "to offend your Lordship; but, really, for a person who is nobody, to give herself such airs,—I own I could not command my passions. For, my Lord, though I have made diligent inquiry—I cannot learn who she is."

"By what I can make out," cried my defender, "she must be a country parson's daughter."

"He! he! he! very good, 'pon honor!" cried the fop,—"well, so I could have sworn by her manners."

And then, delighted at his own wit, he laughed, and went away, as I suppose, to repeat it.

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"But what the deuce is all this?" demanded the other.

"Why a very foolish affair," answered Lord Orville; "your Helen<sup>3</sup> first refused this coxcomb, and then—danced with me. This is all I can gather of it."

"O, Orville," returned he, "you are a happy man!—But *ill-bred*?—I can never believe it! And she looks too sensible to be *ignorant*."

"Whether ignorant or mischievous, I will not pretend to determine, but certain it is, she attended to all I could say to her, though I have really fatigued myself with fruitless endeavors to entertain her, with the most immovable gravity; but no sooner did Lovel begin his complaint, than she was seized with a fit of laughing, first affronting the poor beau, and then enjoying his mortification."

"Ha! ha! ha! why there's some genius in that, my Lord, perhaps rather—*rustic*."

Here Maria was called to dance, and so heard no more.

Now, tell me, my dear Sir, did you ever know any thing more provoking? "*A poor weak girl!*" "*ignorant or mischievous!*" What mortifying words! I am resolved, however, that I will never again be tempted to go to an assembly. I wish I had been in Dorsetshire.

Well, after this, you will not be surprised that Lord Orville contented himself with an inquiry after our healths this morning, by his servant, without troubling himself to call; as Miss Mirvan had told me he would: but perhaps it may be only a country custom.

I would not live here for the world. I care not how soon we leave town. London soon grows tiresome. I wish the Captain would come. Mrs. Mirvan talks of the opera for this evening; however, I am very indifferent about it.

Wednesday morning.

Well, my dear Sir, I have been pleased, against my will, I could almost say, for I must own I went out in very ill humor, which I think you cannot wonder at: but the music and the singing were charming; they soothed me into a pleasure the most grateful, the best suited to my present disposition in the world. I hope to persuade Mrs. Mirvan to go again on Saturday. I wish the opera was every night. It is, of all entertainments, the sweetest and most delightful. Some of the songs seemed to melt my very soul. It was what they call a serious opera, as the comic<sup>4</sup> first singer was ill.

Tonight we go to Ranelagh. If any of those three gentlemen who conversed so freely about me should be there—but I won't think of it.

Thursday morning.

Well, my dear Sir, we went to Ranelagh. It is a charming place, and the brilliancy of the lights, on my first entrance, made me almost think I was in some enchanted castle, or fairy palace, for all looked like magic to me.

The very first person I saw was Lord Orville. I felt so confused!—but he did not see me. After tea, Mrs. Mirvan being tired, Maria and I walked round the room alone. Then again we saw him, standing by

the orchestra. We, too, stopped to hear a singer. He bowed to me; I curtsied, and I am sure I colored. We soon walked on, not liking our situation: however, he did not follow us, and when we passed by the orchestra again, he was gone. Afterwards, in the course of the evening, we met him several times, but he was always with some party, and never spoke to us, though whenever he chanced to meet my eyes, he condescended to bow.

I cannot but be hurt at the opinion he entertains of me. It is true, my own behavior incurred it—yet he is himself the most agreeable, and, seemingly, the most amiable man in the world, and therefore it is, that I am grieved to be thought ill of by him: for of whose esteem ought we to be ambitious, if not of those who most merit our own?—But it is too late to reflect upon this now. Well I can't help it;—however, I think I have done with assemblies!

This morning was destined for *seeing sights*, auctions, curious shops, and so forth; but my head ached, and I was not in a humor to be amused, and so I made them go without me, though very unwillingly. They are all kindness.

And now I am sorry I did not accompany them, for I know not what to do with myself. I had resolved not to go to the play tonight; but I believe I shall. In short, I hardly care whether I do or not.

\* \* \*

I thought I had done wrong! Mrs. Mirvan and Maria have been half the town over, and so entertained!—while I, like a fool, stayed at home to do nothing. And, at the auction in Pall-mall,<sup>5</sup> who should they meet but Lord Orville! He sat next to Mrs. Mirvan, and they talked a great deal together: but she gave me no account of the conversation.

I may never have such another opportunity of seeing London; I am quite sorry that I was not of the party; but I deserve this mortification, for having indulged my ill-humor.

Thursday night.

We are just returned from the play, which was King Lear,<sup>6</sup> and has made me very sad. We did not see any body we knew.

Well, adieu, it is too late to write more.

Friday.

Captain Mirvan is arrived. I have not spirits to give an account of his introduction, for he has really shocked me. I do not like him. He seems to be surly, vulgar, and disagreeable.

Almost the same moment that Maria was presented to him, he began some rude jests upon the bad shape of her nose, and called her a tall, ill-formed thing. She bore it with the utmost good-humor; but that kind and sweet-tempered woman, Mrs. Mirvan, deserved a better lot. I am amazed she would marry him.

For my own part, I have been so shy, that I have hardly spoken to him, or he to me. I cannot imagine why the family was so rejoiced at his return. If he had spent his whole life abroad, I should have supposed they might rather have been thankful than sorrowful. However, I hope they do not think so ill of him as I do. At least, I am sure they have too much prudence to make it known.

Saturday night.

We have been to the opera, and I am still more pleased than I was on Tuesday. I could have thought myself in paradise, but for the continual talking of the company around me. We sat in the pit,<sup>7</sup> where every body was dressed in so high a style, that, if I had been less delighted with the performance, my eyes would have found me sufficient entertainment from looking at the ladies.

I was very glad I did not sit next the Captain, for he could not bear the music, or singers, and was extremely gross in his observations of both. When the opera was over, he went into a place called the coffee-room, where ladies as well as gentlemen assemble. There are all sorts of refreshments, and the company walk about, and *chat* with the same ease and freedom as in a private room.

On Monday we go to a ridotto,<sup>8</sup> and on Wednesday we return to Howard Grove. The Captain says he won't stay here to be *smoked*

*with filth* any longer; but, having been seven years *smoked with a burning sun*, he will retire to the country, and sink into *a fair weather* chap.<sup>9</sup> Adieu, my dear Sir.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Helen of Troy (from ancient Greek myth and poetry) was famously beautiful.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Operas were divided into two kinds, serious (*opera seria*) and comic (*opera buffa*).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Likely Christie's auction room.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The play by Shakespeare.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Seating area on the ground floor of the theater in front of the stage.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A public assembly with dancing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Evelina repeats the Captain's coarse phrasing and nautical slang.[Return to reference 9](#)



## ***Volume I, Letter XIII***

### **EVELINA IN CONTINUATION.**

Tuesday, April 12.

My dear Sir,

We came home from the ridotto so late, or rather, so early, that it was not possible for me to write. Indeed, we did not *go*, you will be frightened to hear it,—till past eleven o'clock: but nobody does. A terrible reverse of the order of nature! We sleep with the sun, and wake with the moon.

The room was very magnificent, the lights and decorations were brilliant, and the company gay and splendid. But I should have told you, that I made many objections to being of the party, according to the resolution I had formed. However, Maria laughed me out of my scruples, and so once again—I went to an assembly.

Miss Mirvan danced a minuet, but I had not the courage to follow her example. In our walks I saw Lord Orville. He was quite alone, but did not observe us. Yet, as he seemed of no party, I thought it was not impossible that he might join us; and though I did not wish much to dance at all,—yet, as I was more acquainted with him than with any other person in the room, I must own I could not help thinking it would be infinitely more desirable to dance again with him, than with an entire stranger. To be sure, after all that had passed, it was very ridiculous to suppose it even probable, that Lord Orville would again honor me with his choice; yet I am compelled to confess my absurdity, by way of explaining what follows.

Miss Mirvan was soon engaged; and, presently after, a very fashionable, gay-looking man, who seemed about 30 years of age, addressed himself to me, and begged to have the honor of dancing with me. Now Maria's partner was a gentleman of Mrs. Mirvan's acquaintance; for she had told us it was highly improper for young women to dance with strangers, at any public assembly. Indeed it was by no means my wish so to do: yet I did not like to confine myself from dancing at all; neither did I dare refuse this gentleman,

as I had done Mr. Lovel, and then, if any acquaintance should offer, accept him: and so, all these reasons combining, induced me to tell him—yet I blush to write it to you!—that I was *already engaged*; by which I meant to keep myself at liberty to a dance or not, as matters should fall out.

I suppose my consciousness<sup>1</sup> betrayed my artifice, for he looked at me as if incredulous; and, instead of being satisfied with my answer, and leaving me, according to my expectation, he walked at my side, and, with the greatest ease imaginable, began a conversation, in the free style which only belongs to old and intimate acquaintance. But, what was most provoking, he asked me a thousand questions concerning *the partner to whom I was engaged*. And, at last, he said, “Is it really possible that a man whom you have honored with your acceptance can fail to be at hand to profit from your goodness?”

I felt extremely foolish, and begged Mrs. Mirvan to lead to a seat, which she very obligingly did. The Captain sat next her, and, to my great surprise, this gentleman thought proper to follow, and seat himself next to me.

“What an insensible!” continued he, “why, Madam, you are missing the most delightful dance in the world! The man must be either mad, or a fool.—Which do you incline to think him yourself?”

“Neither, Sir,” answered I, in some confusion.

He begged my pardon for the freedom of his supposition, saying, “I really was off my guard, from astonishment that any man can be so much and so unaccountably his own enemy. But where, Madam, can he possibly be?—Has he left the room?—or has not he been in it?”

“Indeed, Sir,” said I peevishly, “I know nothing of him.”

“I don’t wonder that you are disconcerted, Madam, it is really very provoking. The best part of the evening will be absolutely lost. He deserves not that you should wait for him.”

“I do not, Sir,” said I, “and I beg you not to—”

“Mortifying, indeed, Madam,” interrupted he, “a lady to wait for a gentleman:—O fie!—careless fellow!—What can detain him?—Will

you give me leave to seek him?"

"If you please, Sir," answered I, quite terrified lest Mrs. Mirvan should attend to him, for she looked very much surprised at seeing me enter into conversation with a stranger.

"With all my heart," cried he; "pray, what coat has he on?"

"Indeed I never looked at it."

"Out upon him!" cried he; "What! did he address you in a coat not worth looking at?—What a shabby wretch!"

How ridiculous! I really could not help laughing, which, I fear, encouraged him, for he went on.

"Charming creature!—and can you really bear ill usage with so much sweetness? Can you, *like patience on a monument,*<sup>2</sup> smile in the midst of disappointment? For my part, though I am not the offended person, my indignation is so great, that I long to kick the fellow round the room!—unless, indeed," hesitating and looking earnestly at me, "unless, indeed,—it is a partner of your own *creating?*"

I was dreadfully abashed, and could not make an answer.

"But no!" cried he (again, and with warmth) "It cannot be that you are so cruel! Softness itself is painted in your eyes:—You could not, surely, have the barbarity so wantonly to trifle with my misery."

I turned away from this nonsense with real disgust. Mrs. Mirvan saw my confusion, but was perplexed what to think of it, and I could not explain to her the cause, lest the Captain should hear me. I therefore proposed to walk; she consented, and we all rose; but, would you believe it? this man had the assurance to rise too, and walk close by my side, as if of my party!

"Now," cried he, "I hope we shall see this ingrate.—Is that he?"—pointing to an old man, who was lame, "or that?" And in this manner he asked me of whoever was old or ugly in the room. I made no sort of answer; and when he found that I was resolutely silent, and walked on, as much as I could without observing him, he suddenly stamped his foot, and cried out, in a passion, "Fool! idiot! booby!"

I turned hastily toward him: "O, Madam," continued he, "forgive my vehemence, but I am distracted to think there should exist a wretch who can slight a blessing for which I would forfeit my life!—O! that I could but meet him!—I would soon—But I grow angry: pardon me, Madam, my passions are violent, and your injuries affect me!"

I began to apprehend he was a madman, and stared at him with the utmost astonishment. "I see you are moved, Madam," said he, "generous creature!—but don't be alarmed, I am cool again, I am indeed,—upon my soul I am,—I entreat you, most lovely of mortals! I entreat you to be easy."

"Indeed, Sir," said I very seriously, "I must insist upon your leaving me; you are quite a stranger to me, and I am both unused, and averse to your language and your manners."

This seemed to have some effect on him. He made me a low bow, begged my pardon, and vowed he would not for the world offend me.

"Then, Sir, you must leave me," cried I.

"I am gone, Madam, I am gone!" with a most tragical air; and he marched away, a quick pace, out of sight in a moment; but before I had time to congratulate myself, he was again at my elbow.

"And could you really let me go, and not be sorry?—Can you see me suffer torments inexpressible, and yet retain all your favor for that miscreant who flies you?—Ungrateful puppy!—I could bastinado him!"<sup>3</sup>

"For Heaven's sake, my dear," cried Mrs. Mirvan, "who is he talking of?"

"Indeed—I do not know, Madam," said I, "but I wish he would leave me."

"What's all that there?" cried the Captain.

The man made a low bow, and said, "Only, Sir, a slight objection which this young lady makes to dancing with me, and which I am endeavoring to obviate. I shall think myself greatly honored, if you will intercede for me."

"That lady, Sir," said the Captain coldly, "is her own mistress." And he walked sullenly on.

"You, Madam," said the man (who looked delighted, to Mrs. Mirvan), "you, I hope, will have the goodness to speak for me."

"Sir," answered she gravely, "I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with you."

"I hope when you have, Ma'am," cried he (undaunted), "you will honor me with your approbation: but, while I am yet unknown to you, it would be truly generous in you to countenance me; and, I flatter myself, Madam, that you will not have cause to repent it."

Mrs. Mirvan, with an embarrassed air, replied, "I do not at all mean, Sir, to doubt your being a gentleman,—but—"

"But *what*, Madam?—that doubt removed, why a *but*?"

"Well, Sir," said Mrs. Mirvan (with a good-humored smile), "I will even treat you with your own plainness, and try what effect that will have on you: I must therefore tell you, once for all—"

"O pardon me, Madam!" interrupted he eagerly, "you must not proceed with those words, *once for all*; no, if *I* have been too *plain*, and though a *man*, deserve a rebuke, remember, dear ladies, that if you *copy*, you ought, in justice, to *excuse* me."

We both stared at the man's strange behavior.

"Be nobler than your sex," continued he, turning to me, "honor me with one dance, and give up the ingrate who has merited so ill your patience."

Mrs. Mirvan looked with astonishment at us both. "Who does he speak of, my dear?—you never mentioned—"

"O, Madam!" exclaimed he, "he was not worth mentioning—it is a pity he was ever thought of; but let us forget his existence. One dance is all I solicit; permit me, Madam, the honor of this young lady's hand; it will be a favor I shall ever most gratefully acknowledge."

"Sir," answered she, "favors and strangers have with me no connection."

"If you have hitherto," said he, "confined your benevolence to your intimate friends, suffer me to be the first for whom your charity is enlarged."

"Well, Sir, I know not what to say to you,—but—"

He stopped her *but* with so many urgent entreaties, that she at last told me, I must either go down one dance, or avoid his importunities by returning home. I hesitated which alternative to choose; but this impetuous man at length prevailed, and I was obliged to consent to dance with him.

And thus was my deviation from truth punished; and thus did this man's determined boldness conquer.

During the dance, before we were too much engaged in it for conversation, he was extremely provoking about *my partner*, and tried every means in his power to make me own that I had deceived him; which, though I would not so far humble myself as to acknowledge, was, indeed, but too obvious.

Lord Orville, I fancy, did not dance at all; he seemed to have a large acquaintance, and joined several different parties: but you will easily suppose I was not much pleased to see him, in a few minutes after I was gone, walk towards the place I had just left, and bow to, and join Mrs. Mirvan!

How unlucky I thought myself, that I had not longer withstood this stranger's importunities! The moment we had gone down the dance, I was hastening away from him, but he stopped me, and said that I could by no means return to my party, without giving offense, before we had *done our duty of walking up the dance*.<sup>4</sup> As I know nothing at all of these rules and customs, I was obliged to submit to his directions; but I fancy I looked rather uneasy, for he took notice of my inattention, saying, in his free way, "Whence that anxiety?—Why are those lovely eyes perpetually averted?"

"I wish you would say no more to me, Sir," (cried I peevishly) "you have already destroyed all my happiness for this evening."

"Good Heaven! What is it I have done?—How have I merited this scorn?"

"You have tormented me to death; you have forced me from my friends, and intruded yourself upon me, against my will, for a partner."

"Surely, my dear Madam, we ought to be better friends, since there seems to be something of sympathy in the frankness of our dispositions.—And yet, were you not an angel—how do you think I could brook such contempt?"

"If I have offended you," cried I, "you have but to leave me—and O how I wish you would!"

"My dear creature," (said he, half laughing) "why where could you be educated?"

"Where I most sincerely wish I now was!"

"How conscious you must be, all beautiful that you are, that those charming airs serve only to heighten the bloom of your complexion!"

"Your freedom, Sir, where you are more acquainted, may perhaps be less disagreeable; but to *me*—"

"You do me justice," (cried he, interrupting me) "yes, I do indeed improve upon acquaintance; you will hereafter be quite charmed with me."

"Hereafter, Sir, I hope I shall never—"

"O hush!—hush!—have you forgot the situation in which I found you?—Have you forgot, that when deserted, I pursued you,—when betrayed, I adored you?—but for me—"

"But for you, Sir, I might, perhaps, have been happy."

"What then, am I to conclude that, *but for me*, your *partner* would have appeared?—poor fellow!—and did my presence awe him?"

"I wish *his* presence, Sir, could awe *you*!"

"His presence!—perhaps then you see him?"

"Perhaps, Sir, I do," cried I, quite wearied of his raillery.

"Where?—where?—for Heaven's sake show me the wretch!"

"Wretch, Sir?"

"O, a very savage!—a sneaking, shame-faced, despicable puppy!"

I know not what bewitched me—but my pride was hurt, and my spirits were tired, and—in short—I had the folly, looking at Lord Orville, to repeat, “*Despicable*, you think?”

His eyes instantly followed mine; “Why, is *that* the gentleman?”

I made no answer; I could not affirm, and I could not deny: for I hoped to be relieved from his teasing, by his mistake.

The very moment we had done what he called our duty, I eagerly desired to return to Mrs. Mirvan.

“To your *partner*, I presume, Madam?” said he, very gravely.

This quite confounded me; I dreaded lest this mischievous man, ignorant of his rank, should address himself to Lord Orville, and say something which might expose my artifice. Fool! to involve myself in such difficulties! I now feared what I had before wished; and therefore, to *avoid* Lord Orville, I was obliged myself to *propose* going down another dance, though I was ready to sink with shame while I spoke.

“But your *partner*, Ma’am?” (said he, affecting a very solemn air) “perhaps he may resent my detaining you: if you will give me leave to ask his consent—”

“Not for the universe.”

“Who is he, Madam?”

I wished myself a hundred miles off. He repeated his question, “What is his name?”

“Nothing—nobody—I don’t know—”

He assumed a most important solemnity; “How!—not know?—Give me leave, my dear Madam, to recommend this caution to you; never dance in public with a stranger,—with one whose name you are unacquainted with,—who may be a mere adventurer,—a man of no character,—consider to what impertinence you may expose yourself.”

Was ever any thing so ridiculous? I could not help laughing, in spite of my vexation.

At this instant, Mrs. Mirvan, followed by Lord Orville, walked up to us. You will easily believe it was not difficult for me to recover my



gravity; but what was my consternation, when this strange man, destined to be the scourge of my artifice, exclaimed, "Ha! My Lord Orville!—I protest I did not know your Lordship. What can I say for my usurpation?—Yet, faith, my Lord, such a prize was not to be neglected."

My shame and confusion were unspeakable. Who could have supposed or foreseen that this man knew Lord Orville! But falsehood is not more unjustifiable than unsafe.

Lord Orville—well he might—looked all amazement.

"The philosophic coldness of your Lordship," continued this odious creature, "every man is not endowed with. I have used my utmost endeavors to entertain this lady, though I fear without success; and your Lordship will not be a little flattered, if acquainted with the difficulty which attended my procuring the honor of only one dance." Then, turning to me, who was sinking with shame, while Lord Orville stood motionless, and Mrs. Mirvan astonished,—he suddenly seized my hand, saying, "Think, my Lord, what must be my reluctance to resign this fair hand to your Lordship!"

In the same instant, Lord Orville took it of him; I colored violently, and made an effort to recover it. "You do me too much honor, Sir," cried he, (with an air of gallantry, pressing it to his lips before he let it go) "however, I shall be happy to profit by it, if this lady," (turning to Mrs. Mirvan) "will permit me to seek for her party."

To compel him thus to dance, I could not endure, and eagerly called out, "By no means,—not for the world!—I must beg—"

"Will you honor *me*, Madam, with your commands," cried my tormentor; "may *I* seek the lady's party?"

"No, Sir," answered I, turning from him.

"What *shall* be done, my dear," said Mrs. Mirvan.

"Nothing, Ma'am;—any thing, I mean—"

"But do you dance, or not? you see his Lordship waits."

"I hope not,—I beg that—I would not for the world—I am sure I ought to—to—"

I could not speak; but that confident man, determined to discover whether or not I had deceived him, said to Lord Orville,

who stood suspended, "My Lord, this affair, which, at present, seems perplexed, I will briefly explain;—this lady proposed to me another dance,—nothing could have made me more happy—I only wished for your Lordship's permission, which, if now granted, will, I am persuaded, set everything right."

I glowed with indignation. "No, Sir—It is your absence, and that alone, can set every thing right."

"For Heaven's sake, my dear," (cried Mrs. Mirvan, who could no longer contain her surprise), "what does all this mean?—were you pre-engaged?—had Lord Orville—"

"No, Madam," cried I, "—only—only I did not know that gentleman,—and so—and so I thought—I intended—I—"

Overpowered by all that had passed, I had not strength to make my mortifying explanation;—my spirits quite failed me, and I burst into tears.

They all seemed shocked and amazed.

"What is the matter, my dearest love?" cried Mrs. Mirvan, with kindest concern.

"What have I done?" exclaimed my evil genius, and ran officiously for a glass of water.

However, a hint was sufficient for Lord Orville, who comprehended all I would have explained. He immediately led me to a seat, and said, in a low voice, "Be not distressed, I beseech you: I shall ever think my name honored by your making use of it."

This politeness relieved me. A general murmur had alarmed Miss Mirvan, who flew instantly to me; while Lord Orville the moment Mrs. Mirvan had taken the water, led my tormentor away.

"For Heaven's sake, dear Madam," cried I, "let me go home,—indeed I cannot stay here any longer."

"Let us all go," cried my kind Maria.

"But the Captain, what will he say?—I had better go home in a chair."<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Mirvan consented, and I rose to depart. Lord Orville and that man both came to me. The first, with an attention I but ill

merited from him, led me to a chair; while the other followed, pestering me with apologies. I wished to have made mine to Lord Orville, but was too much ashamed.

It was about one o'clock. Mrs. Mirvan's servants saw me home.

And now,—what again shall ever tempt me to an assembly? I dread to hear what you will think of me, my most dear and honored Sir: you will need your utmost partiality to receive me without displeasure.

This morning Lord Orville has sent to inquire after our healths: and Sir Clement Willoughby, for that, I find, is the name of my persecutor, has called: but I would not go down stairs till he was gone.

And now, my dear Sir, I can somewhat account for the strange, provoking, and ridiculous conduct of this Sir Clement last night; for Miss Mirvan says, he is the very man with whom she heard Lord Orville conversing at Mrs. Stanley's, when I was spoken of in so mortifying a manner. He was pleased to say he was glad to hear I was a fool, and therefore, I suppose, he concluded he might talk as much nonsense as he pleased to me: however, I am very indifferent as to his opinion;—but for Lord Orville,—if then he thought me an idiot, now, I am sure, he must suppose me both bold and presuming. Make use of his name!—what impertinence!—he can never know how it happened,—he can only imagine it was from an excess of vanity:—well, however, I shall leave this bad city tomorrow, and never again will I enter it.

The Captain intends to take us tonight to the Fantoccini.<sup>6</sup> I cannot bear that Captain; I can give you no idea how gross he is. I heartily rejoice that he was not present at the disagreeable conclusion of yesterday's adventure, for I am sure he would have contributed to my confusion; which might perhaps have diverted him, as he seldom or never smiles but at some other person's expense.

And here I conclude my London letters,—and without any regret, for I am too inexperienced and ignorant to conduct myself with

propriety in this town, where every thing is new to me, and many things are unaccountable and perplexing.

Adieu, my dear Sir; Heaven restore me safely to you! I wish I was to go immediately to Berry Hill; yet the wish is ungrateful to Mrs. Mirvan, and therefore I will repress it. I shall write an account of the Fantoccini from Howard Grove. We have not been to half the public places that are now open, though I dare say you will think we have been to all. But they are almost as innumerable as the persons who fill them.

## 1778 **Endnotes**

1779

- Note 1: Self-consciousness. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He quotes Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (ca. 1601) 2.4.114. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hit him with a stick. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In country dances, couples moved down through two lines of dancers and then back up the lines. It was a breach of etiquette to stop halfway. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A mode of transportation for hire, carried by chairmen. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As Evelina explains in the next letter, "a little comedy, in French and Italian, by puppets." [Return to reference 6](#)

## ***From The Journal and Letters***

[FIRST JOURNAL ENTRY]

*Poland Street, London, March 27, 1768<sup>1</sup>*

To have some account of my thoughts, manners, acquaintance and actions, when the hour arrives at which time is more nimble than memory, is the reason which induces me to keep a journal: a journal in which I must confess my *every* thought, must open my whole heart! But a thing of this kind ought to be addressed to somebody—I must imagine myself to be talking—talking to the most intimate of friends—to one in whom I should take delight in confiding, and feel remorse in concealment: but who must this friend be?—to make choice of one to whom I can but *half* rely, would be to frustrate entirely the intention of my plan. The only one I could wholly, totally confide in, lives in the same house with me, and not only never *has*, but never *will*, leave me one secret *to* tell her.<sup>2</sup> To whom, then *must* I dedicate my wonderful, surprising and interesting adventures?—to *whom* dare I reveal my private opinion of my nearest relations? the secret thoughts of my dearest friends? my own hopes, fears, reflections and dislikes—Nobody!

To Nobody, then, will I write my Journal! since To Nobody can I be wholly unreserved—to Nobody can I reveal every thought, every wish of my heart, with the most unlimited confidence, the most unremitting sincerity to the end of my life! For what chance, what accident can end my connections with Nobody? No secret *can* I conceal from No—body, and to No—body can I be *ever* unreserved. Disagreement cannot stop our affection, Time itself has no power to end our friendship. The love, the esteem I entertain for Nobody, Nobody's self has not power to destroy. From Nobody I have nothing to fear, the secrets sacred to friendship, Nobody will not reveal, when the affair is doubtful, Nobody will not look towards the side least favourable.—

I will suppose you, then, to be my best friend; tho' God forbid you ever should! my dearest companion—and a romantick girl, for mere oddity may perhaps be more sincere—more *tender*—than if

you were a friend in propria personae<sup>3</sup>—in as much as imagination often exceeds reality. In your breast my errors may create pity without exciting contempt; may raise your compassion, without eradicating your love.

From this moment, then, my dear girl—but why, permit me to ask, must a *female* be made Nobody? Ah! my dear, what were this world good for, *were* Nobody a female? And now I have done with *perambulation*.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This is the first page of Burney's first journal, begun when she was fifteen.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Burney's younger sister Susanna. In 1773, when Burney spent the summer away from home, she began a journal for her sister, continuing it off and on until 1800, when Susanna died.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As a real person.[Return to reference 3](#)

[A YOUNG AND AGREEABLE INFIDEL]

Bath, June 1780

Miss White<sup>4</sup> is young and pleasing in her appearance, not pretty, but agreeable in her face, and soft, gentle and well bred in her manners. Our conversation, for some time, was upon the common Bath topics,—but when Mrs. Lambart left us,—called to receive more company, we went, insensibly, into graver matters.

As I soon found, by the looks and expressions of this young lady, that she was of a *peculiar cast*, I left all choice of subjects to herself, determined quietly to follow as she led. And very soon, and I am sure I know not how, we had for topics the follies and vices of mankind,—and indeed she spared not for lashing them!—The *women* she rather excused than defended, laying to the door of the *men* their faults and imperfections;—but the *men*, she said, were *all* bad,—*all*, in one word, and without exception, *sensualists*.

I stared much at a severity of speech for which her softness of manner had so ill prepared me,—and she, perceiving my surprise, said “I am sure I ought to apologise for speaking *my* opinion to *you*,—*you*, who have so just and so uncommon a knowledge of human nature,—I have long wished ardently to have the honour of conversing with you,—but your party has, altogether, been regarded as so formidable, that I have not had courage to approach it.”

I made, as what could I do else, disqualifying speeches, and she then led to discoursing of happiness and misery;—the *latter* she held to be the *invariable* lot of us all,—and “*one* word,” she added, “we have in our language, and in all other, for which there is never any essential necessity,—and that is *pleasure*.” And her eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

“How you amaze me!” cried I: “I have met with *misanthropes* before, but never with so complete a one,—and I can hardly think I hear right when I see how young you are.”

She then, in rather indirect terms, gave me to understand that she was miserable *at home*,—and in *very direct* terms that she was



wretched *abroad*, and openly said that to affliction she was born, and in affliction she must die, for that the world was so vilely formed as to render happiness *impossible* for its inhabitants.

There was something in this freedom of repining that I could by no means approve, and as I found by all her manner that she had a disposition to even *respect* whatever I said, why I now grew very serious, and frankly told her that I could not think it consistent with either truth or religion to cherish such notions.

"One thing," answered she, "there is which I believe *might* make me happy,—but for that I have no inclination;—it is an amorous disposition. But that I do not possess; I can make myself no happiness by intrigue."

"I hope not, indeed!" cried I, almost confounded by her extraordinary notions and speeches,—“but surely there are worthier subjects of happiness attainable.”—

"No, I believe there are not,—and the reason the men are happier than us, is because they are more sensual."

"I would not *think such thoughts*," cried I, clasping my hands with an involuntary vehemence, "for worlds!"—

The Miss Caldwells then interrupted us, and seated themselves next to us,—but Miss White paid them little attention at first, and soon after none at all, but, in a low voice, continued her discourse with me; recurring to the same subject of happiness and misery, upon which, after again asserting the folly of ever hoping for the former, she made this speech—

"There may be, indeed, *one moment* of happiness,—which must be the finding one worthy of exciting a passion which one should dare own to himself! *That* would, indeed, be a moment worth living for! but that can never happen,—I am sure not to *me*,—the men are so low, so vicious,—so worthless!—no, there is not one such to be found."

\* \* \*

"Well,—you are a most extraordinary character indeed! I must confess I have seen *nothing like you!*"

"I hope, however, *I* shall find something like myself,—and, like the magnet rolling in the dust, attract some metal as I go."

"That you may *attract* what you please, is of all things most likely;—but if you wait to be happy for a friend resembling *yourself*, I shall no longer wonder at your despondency."

"O!" cried she, raising her eyes in ecstasy, "*could* I find such a one!—male or female,—for sex would be indifferent to me, with such a one I would go to *live* directly."

I half laughed,—but was perplexed in my own mind whether to be *sad* or *merry* at such a speech.

"But then," she continued, "after *making*—should I *lose* such a friend—I would not survive!"

"Not survive?" repeated I; "what can you mean?"

She looked down, but said nothing.

"Surely you cannot mean," said I, *very* gravely indeed, "to put a violent end to your life?"

"I should not," said she, again looking up, "hesitate a moment."

I was quite thunderstruck,—and for some time could not say a word;—but when I *did* speak, it was in a style of exhortation so serious and earnest I am ashamed to write it to you lest you should think it too much.

She gave me an attention that was even *respectful*, but when I urged her to tell me by what *right* she thought herself entitled to *rush unlicensed on Eternity*,<sup>5</sup> she said—"By the right of believing I shall be *extinct*."

I really felt *horror'd!*

"Where, for heaven's sake," I cried, "where have you picked up such dreadful reasoning?"

"In *Hume*," said she;—"I have read his *Essays*<sup>6</sup> repeatedly."

"I am sorry to find they have power to do so much mischief; you should not have read them, at least, till a man equal to Hume in *abilities* had answered him. Have you read any more infidel writers?"

"Yes,—Bolingbroke,<sup>7</sup>—the divinest of all writers!"

"And do you read nothing upon the *right* side?"

"Yes,—the Bible, till I was sick to death of it, every Sunday evening to my mother."

"Have you read Beattie on the immutability of Truth?"<sup>8</sup>

"No."

"Give me leave, then, to recommend it to you. After Hume's *Essays*, you *ought* to read it. And even, for *lighter* reading, if you were to look at Mason's elegy on Lady Coventry,<sup>9</sup> it might be of no disservice to you."

\* \* \*

This was the chief of our conversation,—which indeed made an impression upon me I shall not easily get rid of, a young and agreeable *infidel* is even a shocking sight,—and with her romantic, flighty and unguarded turn of mind, what could happen to her that could surprise?

Poor misguided girl!<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Lydia Rogers White (ca. 1763–1827) would become a well-known London hostess and wit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Burney echoes lines from William Mason's dramatic poem *Elfrida* (1752).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The edition of David Hume's *Essays* published in 1777, the year after his death, included two essays previously suppressed: "Of Suicide," which argues that suicide is not a transgression, and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which argues that immortality is unlikely and cannot be proved.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The philosophical *Letters, or Essays, addressed to Alexander Pope* (1754) by Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke,

advocates a religion and ethics based on nature rather than on the teachings of the established church.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770), attempts to refute Hume and other “infidels.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Burney quotes eight lines on immortality from William Mason’s elegy “On the Death of a Lady” (1760).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A fictional version of the “young infidel” plays a major role in Burney’s last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814).[Return to reference 1](#)

## [A MASTECTOMY]

*Paris, March 22, 1812<sup>1</sup>*

Separated as I have now so long—long been from my dearest father—brothers—sisters—nieces, and native friends, I would spare, at least, their kind hearts any grief for me but what they must inevitably feel in reflecting upon the sorrow of such an absence to one so tenderly attached to all her first and forever so dear and regretted ties—nevertheless, if they should hear that I have been dangerously ill from any hand but my own, they might have doubts of my perfect recovery which my own alone can obviate. And how can I hope they will escape hearing what has reached Seville to the south, and Constantinople to the east? from both I have had messages—yet nothing could urge me to this communication till I heard that M. de Boynville<sup>2</sup> had written it to his wife, without any precaution, because in ignorance of my plan of silence. Still I must hope it may never travel to my dearest father—But to you, my beloved Esther, who, living more in the world, will surely hear it ere long, to you I will write the whole history, certain that, from the moment you know any evil has befallen me your kind kind heart will be constantly anxious to learn its extent and its circumstances, as well as its termination.

About August, in the year 1810, I began to be annoyed by a small pain in my breast, which went on augmenting from week to week, yet, being rather heavy than acute, without causing me any uneasiness with respect to consequences: Alas, “what was the ignorance?” The most sympathizing of partners, however, was more disturbed: not a start, not a wry face, not a movement that indicated pain was unobserved, and he early conceived apprehensions to which I was a stranger. He pressed me to see some surgeon; I revolted from the idea, and hoped, by care and warmth, to make all succor unnecessary. Thus passed some months, during which Madame de Maisonneuve, my particularly intimate friend, joined with M. d’Arblay to press me to consent to an examination. I thought

their fears groundless, and could not make so great a conquest over my repugnance. I relate this false confidence, now, as a warning to my dear Esther—my sisters and nieces, should any similar sensations excite similar alarm. M. d'Arblay now revealed his uneasiness to another of our kind friends, Mme. de Tracy, who wrote to me a long and eloquent letter upon the subject, that began to awaken very unpleasant surmises; and a conference with her ensued, in which her urgency and representations, aided by her long experience of disease, and most miserable existence by art, subdued me, and, most painfully and reluctantly, I ceased to object, and M. d'Arblay summoned a physician—M. Bourdois? Maria will cry;—No, my dear Maria, I would not give your beau frere<sup>3</sup> that trouble; not him, but Dr. Jouart, the physician of Miss Potts. Thinking but slightly of my statement, he gave me some directions that produced no fruit—on the contrary, I grew worse, and M. d'Arblay now would take no denial to my consulting M. Dubois, who had already attended and cured me in an abscess of which Maria, my dearest Esther, can give you the history. M. Dubois, the most celebrated surgeon of France, was then appointed accoucheur to the empress, and already lodged in the Tuilleries,<sup>4</sup> and in constant attendance: but nothing could slacken the ardour of M. d'Arblay to obtain the first advice. Fortunately for his kind wishes, M. Dubois had retained a partial regard for me from the time of his former attendance, and, when applied to through a third person, he took the first moment of liberty, granted by a *promenade* taken by the empress, to come to me. It was now I began to perceive my real danger, M. Dubois gave me a prescription to be pursued for a month, during which time he could not undertake to see me again, and pronounced nothing—but uttered so many charges to me to be tranquil, and to suffer no uneasiness, that I could not but suspect there was room for terrible inquietude. My alarm was increased by the nonappearance of M. d'Arblay after his departure. They had remained together some time in the book room, and M. d'Arblay did not return—till, unable to bear the suspense, I begged him to come back. He, also, sought then to tranquilize me—but in words only; his looks were shocking! his

features, his whole face displayed the bitterest woe. I had not, therefore, much difficulty in telling myself what he endeavored not to tell me—that a small operation would be necessary to avert evil consequences!—Ah, my dearest Esther, for this I felt no courage—my dread and repugnance, from a thousand reasons *besides* the pain, almost shook all my faculties, and, for some time, I was rather confounded and stupified than affrighted.—Direful, however, was the effect of this interview; the pains became quicker and more violent, and the hardness of the spot affected increased. I took, but vainly, my proscription, and every symptom grew more serious.

\* \* \*

A physician was now called in, Dr. Moreau, to hear if he could suggest any new means: but Dr. Larrey<sup>5</sup> had left him no resources untried. A formal consultation now was held, of Larrey, Ribe, and Moreau—and, in fine, I was formally condemned to an operation by all three. I was as much astonished as disappointed—for the poor breast was no where discoloured, and not much larger than its healthy neighbor. Yet I felt the evil to be deep, so deep, that I often thought if it could not be dissolved, it could only with life be extirpated. I called up, however, all the reason I possessed, or could assume, and told them that—if they saw no other alternative, I would not resist their opinion and experience:—the good Dr. Larrey, who, during his long attendance had conceived for me the warmest friendship, had now tears in his eyes; from my dread he had expected resistance.

\* \* \*

All hope of escaping this evil now at an end, I could only console or employ my mind in considering how to render it less dreadful to M. d'Arblay. M. Dubois had pronounced "il faut s'attendre à souffrir, Je ne veux pas vous tromper—Vous souffrirez—vous souffrirez *beaucoup!*"<sup>6</sup> M. Ribe had *charged* me to cry! to withhold or restrain myself might have seriously bad consequences, he said. M.

Moreau, in echoing this injunction, inquired whether I had cried or screamed at the birth of Alexander—Alas, I told him, it had not been possible to do otherwise; Oh then, he answered, there is no fear!—What terrible inferences were here to be drawn! I desired, therefore, that M. d’Arblay might be kept in ignorance of the day till the operation should be over. To this they agreed, except M. Larrey, with high approbation: M. Larrey looked dissentient, but was silent. M. Dubois protested he would not undertake to act, after what he had seen of the agitated spirits of M. d’Arblay if he were present: nor would he suffer me to know the time myself over night; I obtained with difficulty a promise of 4 hours warning, which were essential to me for sundry regulations.

From this time, I assumed the best spirits in my power, *to meet the coming blow*;—and support my too sympathizing partner.

\* \* \*

Sundry necessary works and orders filled up my time entirely till one o’clock, when all was ready—but Dr. Moreau then arrived, with news that M. Dubois could not attend till three. Dr. Aumont went away—and the coast was clear. This, indeed, was a dreadful interval. I had no longer any thing to do—I had only to think—two hours thus spent seemed never-ending. I would fain have written to my dearest father—to you, my Esther—to Charlotte James—Charles—Amelia Lock—but my arm prohibited me: I strolled to the salon—I saw it fitted with preparations, and I recoiled—But I soon returned; to what effect disguise from myself what I must so soon know?—yet the sight of the immense quantity of bandages, compresses, sponges, lint—made me a little sick:—I walked backwards and forwards till I quieted all emotion, and became by degrees, nearly stupid—torpid, without sentiment or consciousness;—and thus I remained till the clock struck three. A sudden spirit of exertion then returned,—I defied my poor arm, no longer worth sparing, and took my long banished pen to write a few words to M. d’Arblay—and a few more for Alex, in case of a fatal result. These short billets I could only deposit safely, when the cabriolets<sup>7</sup>—one—two—three—four—



succeeded rapidly to each other in stopping at the door. Dr. Moreau instantly entered my room, to see if I were alive. He gave me a wine cordial, and went to the salon. I rang for my maid and nurses,—but before I could speak to them, my room, without previous message, was entered by 7 men in black, Dr. Larrey, M. Dubois, Dr. Moreau, Dr. Aumont, Dr. Ribe, and a pupil of Dr. Larrey, and another of M. Dubois. I was now awakened from my stupor—and by a sort of indignation—Why so many? and without leave?—But I could not utter a syllable. M. Dubois acted as commander in chief. Dr. Larrey kept out of sight; M. Dubois ordered a bedstead into the middle of the room. Astonished, I turned to Dr. Larrey, who had promised that an arm chair would suffice; but he hung his head, and would not look at me. Two *old mattresses* M. Dubois then demanded, and an old sheet. I now began to tremble violently, more with distaste and horror of the preparations even than of the pain. These arranged to his liking, he desired me to mount the bedstead. I stood suspended, for a moment, whether I should not abruptly escape—I looked at the door, the windows—I felt desperate—but it was only for a moment, my reason then took the command, and my fears and feelings struggled vainly against it. I called to my maid—she was crying, and the two nurses stood, transfixed, at the door. “Let those women all go!” cried M. Dubois. This order recovered me my voice—“No,” I cried, “let them stay! *qu’elles restent!*” This occasioned a little dispute, that re-animated me—The maid, however, and one of the nurses ran off—I charged the other to approach, and she obeyed. M. Dubois now tried to issue his commands *en militaire*,<sup>8</sup> but I resisted all that were resistable—I was compelled, however, to submit to taking off my long robe de chambre,<sup>9</sup> which I had meant to retain—Ah, then, how did I think of my sisters!—not one, at so dreadful an instant, at hand, to protect—adjust—guard me—I regretted that I had refused Mme de Maisonneuve—Mme Chastel—no one upon whom I could rely—my departed angel!<sup>1</sup>—how did I think of her!—how did I long—long for my Esther—my Charlotte!—My distress was, I suppose, apparent, though not my wishes, for M. Dubois himself now softened, and spoke soothingly. “Can *you*,” I cried, “feel for an

operation that, to *you*, must seem so trivial?"—"Trivial?" he repeated—taking up a bit of paper, which he tore, unconsciously, into a million pieces, "*oui—c'est peu de chose—mais—*"<sup>2</sup> he stammered, and could not go on. No one else attempted to speak, but I was softened myself, when I saw even M. Dubois grow agitated, while Dr. Larrey kept always aloof, yet a glance showed me he was pale as ashes. I knew not, positively, then, the immediate danger, but every thing convinced me danger was hovering about me, and that this experiment could alone save me from its jaws. I mounted, therefore, unbidden, the bedstead—and M. Dubois placed me upon the mattress, and spread a cambric handkerchief upon my face. It was transparent, however, and I saw, through it, that the bedstead was instantly surrounded by the 7 men and my nurse. I refused to be held; but when, bright through the cambric, I saw the glitter of polished steel—I closed my eyes. I would not trust to convulsive fear the sight of the terrible incision. A silence the most profound ensued, which lasted for some minutes, during which, I imagine, they took their orders by signs, and made their examination—Oh what a horrible suspension!—I did not breathe—and M. Dubois tried vainly to find any pulse. This pause, at length, was broken by Dr. Larrey, who in a voice of solemn melancholy, said "Qui me tiendra ce sein?"<sup>3</sup> —"

No one answered; at least not verbally; but this aroused me from my passively submissive state, for I feared they imagined the whole breast infected—feared it too justly,—for, again through the cambric, I saw the hand of M. Dubois held up, while his forefinger first described a straight line from top to bottom of the breast, secondly a cross, and thirdly a circle; intimating that the whole was to be taken off. Excited by this idea, I started up, threw off my veil, and, in answer to the demand "Qui me tiendra ce sein?" cried "C'est moi, Monsieur!"<sup>4</sup> and I held my hand under it, and explained the nature of my sufferings, which all sprang from one point, though they darted into every part. I was heard attentively, but in utter silence, and M. Dubois then, re-placed me as before, and, as before, spread my veil over my face. How vain, alas, my representation!

immediately again I saw the fatal finger describe the cross—and the circle—Hopeless, then, desperate, and self-given up, I closed once more my eyes, relinquishing all watching, all resistance, all interference, and sadly resolute to be wholly resigned.

My dearest Esther,—and all my dears to whom she communicates this doleful ditty, will rejoice to hear that this resolution once taken, was firmly adhered to, in defiance of a terror that surpasses all description, and the most torturing pain. Yet—when the dreadful steel was plunged into the breast—cutting through veins—arteries—flesh—nerves—I needed no injunctions not to restrain my cries. I began a scream that lasted unintermittingly during the whole time of the incision—and I almost marvel that it rings not in my ears still! so excruciating was the agony. When the wound was made, and the instrument was withdrawn, the pain seemed undiminished, for the air that suddenly rushed into those delicate parts felt like a mass of minute but sharp and forked poniards,<sup>5</sup> that were tearing the edges of the wound—but when again I felt the instrument—describing a curve—cutting against the grain, if I may so say, while the flesh resisted in a manner so forcible as to oppose and tire the hand of the operator, who was forced to change from the right to the left—then, indeed, I thought I must have expired. I attempted no more to open my eyes,—they felt as if hermetically shut, and so firmly closed, that the eyelids seemed indented into the cheeks. The instrument this second time withdrawn, I concluded the operation over,—Oh no! presently the terrible cutting was renewed—and worse than ever, to separate the bottom, the foundation of this dreadful gland from the parts to which it adhered—Again all description would be baffled—yet again all was not over,—Dr. Larrey rested but his own hand, and—Oh heaven!—I then felt the knife rackling<sup>6</sup> against the breast bone—scraping it!—This performed, while I yet remained in utterly speechless torture, I heard the voice of Mr. Larrey,—(all others guarded a dead silence) in a tone nearly tragic, desire every one present to pronounce if anything more remained to be done; or if he thought the operation complete. The general voice was yes,—but the finger of Mr. Dubois—which I literally *felt* elevated

over the wound, though I saw nothing, and though he touched nothing, so indescribably sensitive was the spot—pointed to some further requisition<sup>7</sup>—and again began the scraping!—and, after this, Dr. Moreau thought he discerned a peccant atom—and still, and still, M. Dubois demanded atom after atom—My dearest Esther, not for days, not for weeks, but for months I could not speak of this terrible business without nearly again going through it! I could not *think* of it with impunity! I was sick, I was disordered by a single question—even now, 9 months after it is over, I have a head ache from going on with the account! and this miserable account, which I began 3 months ago, at least, I dare not revise, nor read, the recollection is still so painful.

To conclude, the evil was so profound, the case so delicate, and the precautions necessary for preventing a return so numerous, that the operation, including the treatment and the dressing, lasted 20 minutes! a time, for sufferings so acute, that was hardly supportable—However, I bore it with all the courage I could exert, and never moved, nor stopped them, nor resisted, nor remonstrated, nor spoke—except once or twice, during the dressings, to say “Ah Messieurs! que je vous plains!”<sup>8</sup> for indeed I was sensible to the feeling concern with which they all saw what I endured, though my speech was principally—*very* principally meant for Dr. Larrey. Except this, I uttered not a syllable, save, when so often they re-commenced, calling out “Avertissez moi, Messieurs! avertissez moi!”<sup>9</sup> Twice, I believe, I fainted; at least, I have two total chasms in my memory of this transaction, that impede my tying together what passed. When all was done, and they lifted me up that I might be put to bed, my strength was so totally annihilated, that I was obliged to be carried, and could not even sustain my hands and arms, which hung as if I had been lifeless; while my face, as the nurse has told me, was utterly colorless. This removal made me open my eyes—and I then saw my good Dr. Larrey, pale nearly as myself, his face streaked with blood, and its expression depicting grief, apprehension, and almost horror.

When I was in bed,—my poor M. d’Arblay—who ought to write you himself his own history of this morning—was called to me—and afterwards our Alex.—

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Burney (now Madame d’Arblay) sent this letter to Esther Burney, her sister; it describes an operation performed the previous September.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because Chastel de Boinville’s wife was English, it was likely that news of the illness would spread to the Burney family in England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Brother-in-law. Maria (or Marianne), Esther Burney’s daughter, had married Antoine Bourdois, whose brother was a prominent French physician.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The royal palace in Paris. “Accoucheur”: obstetrician.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dominique-Jean Larrey, “Napoleon’s surgeon,” is remembered for his courage on the battlefield and his innovative procedures.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: You must expect to suffer. I do not want to deceive you—you will suffer—you will suffer *greatly* (French). Operations were then performed without anesthetics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Carriages.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In military fashion (French). Most of the attending physicians had been army surgeons.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Dressing gown.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Susanna, Burney’s favorite sister, had died in 1800.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Yes—it is not much—but— (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Who will hold this breast for me? (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *I will* (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Daggers.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Raking (?).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Necessity. Surgical practice of the time dictated that “the whole diseased structure” be cut out, no matter how long or painful the operation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: How I pity you! (French).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Give me warning! (French).[Return to reference 9](#)

### [M. D'ARBLAY'S POSTSCRIPT]

No! No my dearest and ever more dear friends, I shall not make a *fruitless* attempt. No language could convey what I felt in the deadly course of these seven hours. Nevertheless, every one *of you, my dearest dearest friends*, can guess, must even know it. Alexandre had no less feeling, but showed more fortitude. He, perhaps, will be more able to describe to you, nearly at least, the torturing state of my poor heart and soul. Besides, I must own, to you, that these details which were, till just now, quite unknown to me, have almost killed me, and I am only able to thank God that this more than half angel has had the sublime courage to deny herself the comfort I might have offered her, to spare me, not the sharing of her excruciating pains, that was impossible, but the witnessing so terrific a scene, and perhaps the remorse to have rendered it more tragic. For I don't flatter myself I could have got through it—I must confess it.

Thank heaven! She is now surprisingly well, and in good spirits, and we hope to have many many still happy days. May that of peace soon arrive, and enable me to embrace better than with my pen my beloved and ever ever more dear friends of the town and country. Amen. Amen!<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The wound healed without infection. Burney returned to England later in 1812 and lived for twenty-eight more years.[Return to reference 1](#)

## **WILLIAM COWPER**

### **1731–1800**

William Cowper found great success as a poet—he is among the most beloved writers of the period. Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge felt close to him, and so did many literary women. His personal life, however, was complicated, sometimes anguished and tumultuous. After attempting suicide in 1763, he believed that he was damned for having tried to commit the unforgivable sin, the “sin against the Holy Ghost.” From then on, a refugee from life, he looked for hope in Evangelicalism and found shelter first, in 1765, in the family of the clergyman Morley Unwin, and after Unwin’s death, with his widow, Mary Unwin, who cared for Cowper until her death in 1796. Their move to rural Olney (pronounced *Own-y*) in 1768 brought them under the influence of the strenuous and fervent Evangelical minister John Newton, author of “Amazing Grace.” With him Cowper wrote the famous *Olney Hymns*, still familiar to Methodists and other Nonconformists. But a second attack of his illness, in 1773, not only frustrated his planned marriage to Mary Unwin but left him for the rest of his life with the assurance that he had been cast out by God. He never again attended services, and the main purpose of his life thereafter was to divert his mind from numb despair by every possible innocent device. He gardened, he kept pets, he walked, he wrote letters (some of the best of the eighteenth century), he conversed, he read—and he wrote poetry.



When his poetry was published, it brought him a measure of fame that his modest nature could never have hoped for.

Cowper's major work is *The Task* (1785), undertaken at the bidding of Lady Austen, a friend who, when he complained that he had no subject, directed him to write about the sofa in his parlor. It began with a mock-heroic account of the development of the sofa from a simple stool, but it grew into a long meditative poem of more than five thousand lines. The poet describes his small world of country, village, garden, and parlor, and from time to time he glances toward the great world to condemn cities and worldliness, war and slavery, luxury and corruption. The tone is muted, the sensibility delicate, the language on the whole precise and clear. Contemporary readers responded powerfully, recognizing their own concerns in his pious and humorous musings.

## ***From The Task***

**From *Book 1***

**[A LANDSCAPE DESCRIBED. RURAL SOUNDS]**

150 Thou<sup>1</sup> knowest my praise of nature most sincere,  
And that my raptures are not conjured up  
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,  
But genuine, and art partner of them all.  
How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne  
155 The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
While admiration, feeding at the eye,  
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.  
Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned  
The distant plow slow moving, and beside  
160 His laboring team, that swerved not from the track,  
The sturdy swain diminished to a boy!  
Here Ouse,<sup>2</sup> slow winding through a level plain  
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,  
Conducts the eye along its sinuous course  
165 Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,  
Stand, never overlooked, our favorite elms,  
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;  
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream  
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,  
170 The sloping land recedes into the clouds;  
Displaying on its varied side the grace  
Of hedgerow beauties numberless, square tower,  
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
Just undulates upon the listening ear,  
175 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.  
Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,  
Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years—  
Praise justly due to those that I describe.  
180 Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,

Exhilarate the spirit, and restore  
The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,  
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood  
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike  
185 The dash of ocean on his winding shore,  
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;  
Unnumbered branches waving in the blast,  
And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.  
Nor less composure waits upon the roar  
190 Of distant floods, or on the softer voice  
Of neighboring fountain, or of rills that slip  
Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall  
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length  
In matted grass, that with a livelier green  
195 Betrays the secret of their silent course.  
Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,  
But animated nature sweeter still,  
To soothe and satisfy the human ear.  
Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one  
200 The livelong night: nor these alone, whose notes  
Nice-fingered art<sup>3</sup> must emulate in vain,  
But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime  
In still repeated circles, screaming loud,  
The jay, the pie,<sup>o</sup> and even the boding owl  
205 That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.  
Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,  
Yet heard in scenes where peace forever reigns,  
And only there, please highly for their sake.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Mary Unwin.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The village of Olney, where Cowper and Mary Unwin were living, is situated on the river Ouse.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Refined skill, such as that of a flutist imitating the nightingale's song. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *magpie* [Return to reference °](#)

[CRAZY KATE]

There often wanders one, whom better days  
Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimmed  
535 With lace, and hat with splendid ribband bound.  
A servingmaid was she, and fell in love  
With one who left her, went to sea, and died.  
Her fancy followed him through foaming waves  
To distant shores; and she would sit and weep  
540 At what a sailor suffers; fancy, too,  
Delusive most where warmest wishes are,  
Would oft anticipate his glad return,  
And dream of transports she was not to know.  
She heard the doleful tidings of his death—  
545 And never smiled again! And now she roams  
The dreary waste; there spends the livelong day,  
And there, unless when charity forbids,  
The livelong night. A tattered apron hides,  
Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown  
550 More tattered still; and both but ill conceal  
A bosom heaved with never-ceasing sighs.  
She begs an idle pin of all she meets,  
And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,  
Though pressed with hunger oft, or comelier clothes,  
555 Though pinched with cold, asks never.—Kate is  
crazed!

**From *Book 3***



## [THE STRICKEN DEER]

I was a stricken deer, that left the herd  
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed  
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew  
110 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
There was I found by one who had himself  
Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,  
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.  
With gentle force soliciting<sup>4</sup> the darts,  
115 He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.  
Since then, with few associates, in remote  
And silent woods I wander, far from those  
My former partners of the peopled scene;  
With few associates, and not wishing more.  
120 Here much I ruminate, as much I may,  
With other views of men and manners now  
Than once, and others of a life to come.  
I see that all are wanderers, gone astray  
Each in his own delusions; they are lost  
125 In chase of fancied happiness, still wooed  
And never won. Dream after dream ensues;  
And still they dream that they shall still succeed,  
And still are disappointed. Rings the world  
With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind  
130 And add two-thirds of the remaining half,  
And find the total of their hopes and fears  
Dreams, empty dreams.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: "To endeavor to draw out by the use of gentle force" (*OED*).[Return to reference 4](#)

**From *Book 4***

**[THE WINTER EVENING: A BROWN STUDY]**

Come evening once again, season of peace,  
Return sweet evening, and continue long!  
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,  
245 With matron-step slow-moving, while the night  
Treads on thy sweeping train; one hand employed  
In letting fall the curtain of repose  
On bird and beast, the other charged for man  
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day;  
250 Not sumptuously adorned, nor needing aid  
Like homely featured night, of clustering gems;  
A star or two just twinkling on thy brow  
Suffices thee; save that the moon is thine  
No less than hers, not worn indeed on high  
255 With ostentatious pageantry, but set  
With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,<sup>5</sup>  
Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.<sup>6</sup>  
Come then and thou shalt find thy votary calm,  
Or make me so. Composure is thy gift.  
260 And whether I devote thy gentle hours  
To books, to music, or the poet's toil,  
To weaving nets for bird-alluring fruit;  
Or twining silken threads round ivory reels  
When they command whom man was born to  
265 please;<sup>7</sup>  
I slight thee not, but make thee welcome still.  
Just when our drawing rooms begin to blaze  
With lights by clear reflection multiplied  
From many a mirror, in which he of Gath,  
270 Goliah,<sup>8</sup> might have seen his giant bulk  
Whole without stooping, towering crest and all,  
My pleasures too begin. But me perhaps  
The glowing hearth may satisfy awhile

With faint illumination that uplifts  
The shadow to the ceiling, there by fits  
275 Dancing uncouthly to the quivering flame.  
Not undelightful is an hour to me  
So spent in parlor twilight; such a gloom  
Suits well the thoughtful or unthinking mind,  
The mind contemplative, with some new theme  
280 Pregnant, or indisposed alike to all.  
Laugh ye, who boast your more mercurial powers  
That never feel a stupor, know no pause,  
Nor need one. I am conscious,<sup>o</sup> and confess,  
Fearless, a soul that does not always think.  
285 Me oft has fancy ludicrous and wild  
Soothed with a waking dream of houses, towers,  
Trees, churches, and strange visages expressed  
In the red cinders, while with poring eye  
I gazed, myself creating what I saw.  
290 Nor less amused have I quiescent watched  
The sooty films that play upon the bars,<sup>9</sup>  
Pendulous and foreboding, in the view  
Of superstition prophesying still,  
Though still deceived, some stranger's near  
295 approach.<sup>1</sup>  
'Tis thus the understanding takes repose  
In indolent vacuity of thought,  
And sleeps and is refreshed. Meanwhile the face  
Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask  
Of deep deliberation, as<sup>o</sup> the man  
300 Were tasked to his full strength, absorbed and lost.  
Thus oft reclined at ease, I lose an hour  
At evening, till at length the freezing blast  
That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home  
The recollected powers, and snapping short  
305 The glassy threads with which the fancy weaves  
Her brittle toys, restores me to myself.

How calm is my recess, and how the frost,  
 Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear  
 The silence and the warmth enjoyed within.  
 310 I saw the woods and fields at close of day,  
 A variegated show; the meadows green,  
 Though faded; and the lands where lately waved  
 The golden harvest, of a mellow brown,  
 Upturned so lately by the forceful share.<sup>o</sup>  
 315 I saw far off the weedy fallows<sup>2</sup> smile  
 With verdure not unprofitable, grazed  
 By flocks fast feeding and selecting each  
 His favorite herb; while all the leafless groves  
 That skirt the horizon wore a sable hue,  
 320 Scarce noticed in the kindred dusk of eve.  
 Tomorrow brings a change, a total change!  
 Which even now, though silently performed  
 And slowly, and by most unfelt, the face  
 Of universal nature undergoes.  
 325 Fast falls a fleecy shower. The downy flakes,  
 Descending and with never-ceasing lapse,<sup>3</sup>  
 Softly alighting upon all below,  
 Assimilate all objects. Earth receives  
 Gladly the thickening mantle, and the green  
 330 And tender blade that feared the chilling blast,  
 Escapes unhurt beneath so warm a veil.

## Endnotes

1785

- Note 5: Encircling band. Evening is seen both as a personified goddess, whose "zone" is her royal belt, and as a natural phenomenon, where the "zone" is a stripe of color in the sky.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The moon looks larger at evening, when just over the horizon, than at night, when it is higher and brighter.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, women.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Goliath, the giant of Gath slain by David (1 Samuel 17:19–51).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The grate of a fireplace.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The piece of soot that often flaps on the bars of a grate was called a “stranger” and was supposed to portend an unexpected visitor. Compare lines 272–310 with Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Plowed but unseeded land.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Gentle downward glide.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *conscious of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as if*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plowshare*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Castaway

Obscurest night involved the sky,  
The Atlantic billows roared,  
When such a destined wretch as I,  
Washed headlong from on board,  
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,  
5 His floating home forever left.

No braver chief<sup>1</sup> could Albion boast  
Than he with whom he went,  
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast,  
With warmer wishes sent.  
10 He loved them both, but both in vain,  
Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine,  
Expert to swim, he lay;  
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,  
15 Or courage die away;  
But waged with death a lasting strife,  
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted; nor his friends had failed  
To check the vessel's course,  
20 But so the furious blast prevailed,  
That, pitiless perforce,  
They left their outcast mate behind,  
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succor yet they could afford;  
And, such as storms allow,  
25 The cask, the coop, the floated cord,

Delayed not to bestow.  
But he (they knew) nor ship, nor shore,  
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

30 Nor, cruel as it seemed, could he  
Their haste himself condemn,  
Aware that flight, in such a sea,  
Alone could rescue them;  
Yet bitter felt it still to die

35 Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives, who lives an hour  
In ocean, self-upheld;  
And so long he, with unspent power,  
His destiny repelled;

40 And ever, as the minutes flew,  
Entreated help, or cried, "Adieu!"

At length, his transient respite past,  
His comrades, who before  
Had heard his voice in every blast,

45 Could catch the sound no more.  
For then, by toil subdued, he drank  
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him; but the page  
Of narrative sincere,

50 That tells his name, his worth, his age,  
Is wet with Anson's tear.  
And tears by bards or heroes shed  
Alike immortalize the dead.

55 I therefore purpose not, or dream,  
Descanting on his fate,  
To give the melancholy theme  
A more enduring date:



60 But misery still delights to trace  
Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allayed,  
No light propitious shone,  
When, snatched from all effectual aid,  
We perished, each alone;  
65 But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

1799 **Endnotes**

1803

- Note 1: George, Lord Anson (1697–1762), in whose *Voyage* (1748) Cowper, years before writing this poem, had read the story of the sailor washed overboard in a storm. [Return to reference 1](#)

**OLAUDAH EQUIANO**  
**ca. 1745–1797**



**Abolitionist Medallion.** In 1787, the factory of master potter Josiah Wedgwood produced this jasperware medallion, a little over one inch in diameter, to advocate for the emerging abolitionist movement. Soon it became a fashionable ornament, adorning hairpins, necklaces, and other items worn by those wishing to signal their support for the parliamentary campaign in the late 1780s to end the British trade in enslaved Africans, which would not be successful until 1807.

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*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, published in 1789, is the classic story of an eighteenth-century African's descent into slavery and rise to freedom. Equiano describes how he was raised in an Ibo village (in modern Nigeria), kidnapped by African raiders, and sold into slavery. Particularly powerful is his account of the horrors of the Middle Passage to Barbados in the Caribbean. There, an English naval officer took him to serve as a cabin boy and renamed him Gustavus Vassa, after a sixteenth-century Swedish hero who freed his people from the Danes (such names concealed the status of enslavement, because slavery was frowned on by the British Navy). During years at sea, as well as a period at a London school, Equiano acquired a basic education. He also underwent baptism, a ritual that many enslaved people expected to make them free. But his hopes were cruelly disappointed when, after six years' service, he was suddenly transferred to another enslaver for payment and shipped to the West Indies. There a Quaker merchant, Robert King, held him enslaved, employed him as a clerk and a seaman, and eventually allowed him, in 1766, to buy his freedom. Equiano went back to England, working first as a hairdresser and later voyaging all over the world, even taking part in an effort to find a passage to India by way of the North Pole. Equiano's recent biographer, Vincent Carretta, has raised doubts about the account that the *Interesting Narrative* gives of the early parts of Equiano's life: parish and British naval records indicate he was born not in Africa but in South Carolina and hence did not himself undergo the Middle Passage. Whether fact or fiction

—scholars may never determine conclusively—his description of his days in Africa, abduction, and suffering in the enslaver's ship gives a voice to countless Africans who faced such experiences and dramatizes the undeniable realities of the trade to a White readership. Equiano's publication of his story was the culmination of his involvement in the abolitionist movement through the 1780s and was an important contribution to that movement, not only for its explicit arguments against the trade in enslaved people but also for his self-presentation as a humane, strong, intelligent, Christian man of African descent, and a free and eloquent British subject. The book went through many editions and made Equiano famous. He married an Englishwoman, fathered two daughters, and died in London in 1797.

The *Interesting Narrative* combines several literary genres. It is a captivity narrative, a spiritual autobiography, a travel memoir, an adventure story, and an abolitionist tract. The early chapters describe the healthy, cheerful, and virtuous life of Africans, contrasted with European inhumanity, and the later chapters show how much a Black man can achieve, when given a chance. Equiano does not disguise the strains of his position as he is pulled between different identities and different worlds. His main purpose, however, is clearly to force his readers to face the ordeals an enslaved person must endure—to live in his skin. If Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* taught Europeans to sympathize with Africans, Equiano taught them that a Black man could speak for himself.

***From The Interesting Narrative of the Life  
of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa,  
the African, Written by Himself***

### **[ *The Dedication to Parliament* ]**

To the Lords Spiritual and Temporal,<sup>1</sup> and the Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain. *My Lords and Gentlemen,*

Permit me, with the greatest deference and respect, to lay at your feet the following genuine narrative; the chief design of which is to excite in your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the slave-trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen. By the horrors of that trade was I first torn away from all the tender connexions that were naturally dear to my heart; but these, through the mysterious ways of Providence, I ought to regard as infinitely more than compensated by the introduction I have thence obtained to the knowledge of the Christian religion, and of a nation which, by its liberal sentiments, its humanity, the glorious freedom of its government, and its proficiency in arts and sciences, has exalted the dignity of human nature.

I am sensible I ought to entreat your pardon for addressing to you a work so wholly devoid of literary merit; but, as the production of an unlettered African, who is actuated by the hope of becoming an instrument towards the relief of his suffering countrymen, I trust that *such a man*, pleading in *such a cause*, will be acquitted of boldness and presumption.

May the God of heaven inspire your hearts with peculiar benevolence on that important day when the question of abolition is to be discussed,<sup>2</sup> when thousands, in consequence of your determination, are to look for happiness or misery!

I am,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Your most obedient,

And devoted humble servant,

Olaudah Equiano,

or

Gustavus Vassa.

Union-Street, Mary-le-bone,<sup>3</sup>

March 24, 1789.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In the 18th century, the House of Lords included both bishops of the Church of England and peers of the realm with inherited titles.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The parliamentary campaigner against the trade in enslaved people, William Wilberforce (1759–1833), made his first speech for abolition in May 1789, some two months after Equiano dated his dedication. The first bill to abolish the trade was deferred until 1790, when it was voted down. “Peculiar”: remarkable, distinctive.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Equiano’s address in London.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***From Chapter 1***

### **[LIFE IN AFRICA]**

I believe it is difficult for those who publish their own memoirs to escape the imputation of vanity; nor is this the only disadvantage under which they labor: it is also their misfortune, that what is uncommon is rarely, if ever, believed, and what is obvious we are apt to turn from with disgust, and to charge the writer with impertinence. People generally think those memoirs only worthy to be read or remembered which abound in great or striking events, those, in short, which in a high degree excite either admiration or pity: all others they consign to contempt and oblivion. It is therefore, I confess, not a little hazardous in a private and obscure individual,<sup>4</sup> and a stranger too, thus to solicit the indulgent attention of the public; especially when I own I offer here the history of neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant. I believe there are few events in my life, which have not happened to many: it is true the incidents of it are numerous; and, did I consider myself an European, I might say my sufferings were great: but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a *particular favorite of Heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life. If then the following narrative does not appear sufficiently interesting<sup>5</sup> to engage general attention, let my motive be some excuse for its publication. I am not so foolishly vain as to expect from it either immortality or literary reputation. If it affords any satisfaction to my numerous friends, at whose request it has been written, or in the smallest degree promotes the interests of humanity, the ends for which it was undertaken will be fully attained, and every wish of my heart gratified. Let it therefore be remembered, that, in wishing to avoid censure, I do not aspire to praise.

That part of Africa, known by the name of Guinea, to which the trade for slaves is carried on, extends along the coast above 3400 miles, from the Senegal to Angola, and includes a variety of



kingdoms. Of these the most considerable is the kingdom of Benin, both as to extent and wealth, the richness and cultivation of the soil, the power of its king, and the number and warlike disposition of the inhabitants. It is situated nearly under the line,<sup>6</sup> and extends along the coast about 170 miles, but runs back into the interior part of Africa to a distance hitherto I believe unexplored by any traveler; and seems only terminated at length by the empire of Abyssinia,<sup>7</sup> near 1500 miles from its beginning. This kingdom is divided into many provinces or districts: in one of the most remote and fertile of which, called Eboe, I was born, in the year 1745, in a charming fruitful vale, named Essaka.<sup>8</sup> The distance of this province from the capital of Benin and the sea coast must be very considerable; for I had never heard of white men or Europeans, nor of the sea: and our subjection to the king of Benin was little more than nominal; for every transaction of the government, as far as my slender observation extended, was conducted by the chiefs or elders of the place.

\* \* \*

We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle, or other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion. The assembly is separated into four divisions, which dance either apart or in succession, and each with a character peculiar to itself. The first division contains the married men, who in their dances frequently exhibit feats of arms, and the representation of a battle. To these succeed the married women, who dance in the second division. The young men occupy the third; and the maidens the fourth. Each represents some interesting scene of real life, such as a great achievement, domestic employment, a pathetic story, or some rural sport; and as the subject is generally founded on some recent event, it is therefore ever new. This gives our dances a spirit and variety which I have scarcely seen elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> We have many

musical instruments, particularly drums of different kinds, a piece of music which resembles a guitar, and another much like a stickado.<sup>1</sup> These last are chiefly used by betrothed virgins, who play on them on all grand festivals.

As our manners are simple, our luxuries are few. The dress of both sexes is nearly the same. It generally consists of a long piece of calico, or muslin, wrapped loosely round the body, somewhat in the form of a highland plaid.<sup>2</sup> This is usually dyed blue, which is our favorite color. It is extracted from a berry, and is brighter and richer than any I have seen in Europe. Besides this, our women of distinction wear golden ornaments; which they dispose with some profusion on their arms and legs. When our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they afterwards dye, and make it into garments. They also manufacture earthen vessels, of which we have many kinds. Among the rest tobacco pipes, made after the same fashion, and used in the same manner, as those in Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

Our manner of living is entirely plain; for as yet the natives are unacquainted with those refinements in cookery which debauch the taste: bullocks,<sup>4</sup> goats, and poultry supply the greatest part of their food. These constitute likewise the principal wealth of the country, and the chief articles of its commerce. The flesh is usually stewed in a pan; to make it savory we sometimes use also pepper, and other spices, and we have salt made of wood ashes. Our vegetables are mostly plantains, eadas,<sup>5</sup> yams, beans, and Indian corn. The head of the family usually eats alone; his wives and slaves have also their separate tables. Before we taste food we always wash our hands: indeed our cleanliness on all occasions is extreme; but on this it is an indispensable ceremony. After washing, libation is made, by pouring out a small portion of the food, in a certain place, for the spirits of departed relations, which the natives suppose to preside over their conduct, and guard them from evil. They are totally unacquainted with strong or spirituous liquors; and their principal beverage is palm wine. This is gotten from a tree of that name by tapping it at the top, and fastening a large gourd to it; and

sometimes one tree will yield three or four gallons in a night. When just drawn it is of a most delicious sweetness; but in a few days it acquires a tartish and more spirituous flavor: though I never saw any one intoxicated by it. The same tree also produces nuts and oil. Our principal luxury is in perfumes; one sort of these is an odoriferous wood of delicious fragrance: the other a kind of earth; a small portion of which thrown into the fire diffuses a most powerful odor.<sup>6</sup> We beat this wood into powder, and mix it with palm oil; with which both men and women perfume themselves.

In our buildings we study convenience rather than ornament. Each master of a family has a large square piece of ground, surrounded with a moat or fence, or enclosed with a wall made of red earth tempered; which, when dry, is as hard as brick. Within this are his houses to accommodate his family and slaves; which, if numerous, frequently present the appearance of a village. In the middle stands the principal building, appropriated to the sole use of the master, and consisting of two apartments; in one of which he sits in the day with his family, the other is left apart for the reception of his friends. He has besides these a distinct apartment in which he sleeps, together with his male children. On each side are the apartments of his wives, who have also their separate day and night houses. The habitations of the slaves and their families are distributed throughout the rest of the enclosure. These houses never exceed one story in height: they are always built of wood, or stakes driven into the ground, crossed with wattles, and neatly plastered within, and without. The roof is thatched with reeds. Our day-houses are left open at the sides; but those in which we sleep are always covered, and plastered in the inside, with a composition mixed with cow-dung, to keep off the different insects, which annoy us during the night. The walls and floors also of these are generally covered with mats. Our beds consist of a platform, raised three or four feet from the ground, on which are laid skins, and different parts of a spongy tree called plantain. Our covering is calico or muslin, the same as our dress. The usual seats are a few logs of wood; but we have benches, which are generally perfumed, to accommodate

strangers: these compose the greater part of our household furniture. Houses so constructed and furnished require but little skill to erect them. Every man is a sufficient architect for the purpose. The whole neighborhood afford their unanimous assistance in building them and in return receive and expect no other recompense than a feast.

As we live in a country where nature is prodigal of her favors, our wants are few and easily supplied; of course we have few manufactures. They consist for the most part of calicoes, earthenware, ornaments, and instruments of war and husbandry. But these make no part of our commerce, the principal articles of which, as I have observed, are provisions. In such a state money is of little use; however we have some small pieces of coin, if I may call them such. They are made something like an anchor; but I do not remember either their value or denomination. We have also markets, at which I have been frequently with my mother. These are sometimes visited by stout mahogany-colored men from the southwest of us: we call them Oye-Eboe, which term signifies red men living at a distance. They generally bring us firearms, gunpowder, hats, beads, and dried fish. The last we esteemed a great rarity, as our waters were only brooks and springs. These articles they barter with us for odoriferous woods and earth, and our salt of wood ashes. They always carry slaves through our land; but the strictest account is exacted of their manner of procuring them before they are suffered to pass. Sometimes indeed we sold slaves to them, but they were only prisoners of war, or such among us as had been convicted of kidnapping, or adultery, and some other crimes, which we esteemed heinous. This practice of kidnapping induces me to think, that, notwithstanding all our strictness, their principal business among us was to trepan<sup>2</sup> our people. I remember too they carried great sacks along with them, which not long after I had an opportunity of fatally seeing applied to that infamous purpose.

Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance. We have plenty of Indian corn,

and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture; they are about the size of the largest sugarloaf,<sup>8</sup> and finely flavored. We have also spices of different kinds, particularly pepper; and a variety of delicious fruits which I have never seen in Europe; together with gums of various kinds, and honey in abundance. All our industry is exerted to improve those blessings of nature. Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus we are all habituated to labor from our earliest years. Every one contributes something to the common stock; and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious. The West India planters prefer the slaves of Benin or Eboe to those of any other part of Guinea, for their hardiness, intelligence, integrity, and zeal. Those benefits are felt by us in the general healthiness of the people, and in their vigor and activity; I might have added too in their comeliness. Deformity is indeed unknown amongst us, I mean that of shape. Numbers of the natives of Eboe now in London might be brought in support of this assertion: for, in regard to complexion, ideas of beauty are wholly relative. I remember while in Africa to have seen three negro children, who were tawny, and another quite white, who were universally regarded by myself, and the natives in general, as far as related to their complexions, as deformed. Our women too were in my eyes at least uncommonly graceful, alert, and modest to a degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence<sup>9</sup> amongst them before marriage. They are also remarkably cheerful. Indeed cheerfulness and affability are two of the leading characteristics of our nation.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: A person unknown to the public.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: As in his title, Equiano uses the term *interesting* in a literal sense (common in the 18th century) of “capable of winning people over to one’s interest,” as well as “fascinating” or “engaging.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nearly at the equator. The Kingdom of Benin in the 18th century (not to be confused with the modern-day Republic of Benin) was located just north of the equator in what is now Nigeria.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Another name for the Ethiopian Empire in East Africa.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Village in the eastern part of what is now Nigeria. “Eboe”: another spelling of Igbo or Ibo, an ethnic group whose homeland occupies territory in what is now Nigeria.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: When I was in Smyrna I have frequently seen the Greeks dance after this manner [*Equiano’s note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Also spelled “sticcado,” an instrument like a xylophone.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, a kilt, worn in the Scottish Highlands.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The bowl is earthen, curiously figured, to which a long reed is fixed as a tube. This tube is sometimes so long as to be borne by one, and frequently out of grandeur, by two boys [*Equiano’s note*].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Steers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Also spelled “eddoes,” a tropical root vegetable.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: When I was in Smyrna I saw the same kind of earth, and brought some of it with me to England; it resembles musk in strength, but is more delicious in scent, and is not unlike the smell of a rose [*Equiano’s note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Entrap, ensnare.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cylindrical form in which refined sugar was most often sold until the late 19th century; the largest were about 30

inches high. "Without culture": without being cultivated.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Sexual immorality.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***From Chapter II***

### **[ABDUCTION AND CAPTIVITY]**

I hope the reader will not think I have trespassed on his patience in introducing myself to him with some account of the manners and customs of my country. They had been implanted in me with great care, and made an impression on my mind, which time could not erase, and which all the adversity and variety of fortune I have since experienced served only to rivet and record; for, whether the love of one's country be real or imaginary, or a lesson of reason, or an instinct of nature, I still look back with pleasure on the first scenes of my life, though that pleasure has been for the most part mingled with sorrow.

I have already acquainted the reader with the time and place of my birth. My father, besides many slaves, had a numerous family, of which seven lived to grow up, including myself and a sister, who was the only daughter. As I was the youngest of the sons, I became, of course, the greatest favorite with my mother, and was always with her; and she used to take particular pains to form my mind. I was trained up from my earliest years in the art of war; my daily exercise was shooting and throwing javelins; and my mother adorned me with emblems, after the manner of our greatest warriors. In this way I grew up till I was turned the age of eleven, when an end was put to my happiness in the following manner:—Generally when the grown people in the neighborhood were gone far in the fields to labor, the children assembled together in some of the neighbors' premises to play; and commonly some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant, or kidnapper, that might come upon us; for they sometimes took those opportunities of our parents' absence to attack and carry off as many as they could seize. One day, as I was watching at the top of a tree in our yard, I saw one of those people come into the yard of our next neighbor but one, to kidnap, there being many stout young people in it. Immediately on this I gave the alarm of the rogue, and he was surrounded by the stoutest



of them, who entangled him with cords, so that he could not escape till some of the grown people came and secured him. But alas! ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked, and to be carried off, when none of the grown people were nigh. One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was some sleep, which allayed our misfortune for a short time. The next morning we left the house, and continued travelling all the day. For a long time we had kept the woods, but at last we came into a road which I believed I knew. I had now some hopes of being delivered; for we had advanced but a little way before I discovered some people at a distance, on which I began to cry out for their assistance: but my cries had no other effect than to make them tie me faster and stop my mouth, and then they put me into a large sack. They also stopped my sister's mouth, and tied her hands; and in this manner we proceeded till we were out of the sight of these people. When we went to rest the following night they offered us some victuals; but we refused it; and the only comfort we had was in being in one another's arms all that night, and bathing each other with our tears. But alas! we were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together. The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth. At length, after many days travelling, during which I had often changed masters, I got into the hands of a

chieftain, in a very pleasant country. This man had two wives and some children, and they all used<sup>1</sup> me extremely well, and did all they could to comfort me; particularly the first wife, who was something like my mother. Although I was a great many days' journey from my father's house, yet these people spoke exactly the same language with us.

\* \* \*

From the time I left my own nation I always found somebody that understood me till I came to the sea coast. The languages of different nations did not totally differ, nor were they so copious<sup>2</sup> as those of the Europeans, particularly the English. They were therefore easily learned; and, while I was journeying thus through Africa, I acquired two or three different tongues. In this manner I had been travelling for a considerable time, when one evening, to my great surprise, whom should I see brought to the house where I was but my dear sister! As soon as she saw me she gave a loud shriek, and ran into my arms—I was quite overpowered: neither of us could speak; but, for a considerable time, clung to each other in mutual embraces, unable to do anything but weep. Our meeting affected all who saw us; and indeed I must acknowledge, in honor of those sable destroyers of human rights,<sup>3</sup> that I never met with any ill treatment, or saw any offered to their slaves, except tying them, when necessary, to keep them from running away. When these people knew we were brother and sister they indulged us together; and the man, to whom I supposed we belonged, lay with us, he in the middle, while she and I held one another by the hands across his breast all night; and thus for a while we forgot our misfortunes in the joy of being together: but even this small comfort was soon to have an end; for scarcely had the fatal morning appeared, when she was again torn from me forever! I was now more miserable, if possible, than before. The small relief which her presence gave me from pain was gone, and the wretchedness of my situation was redoubled by my anxiety after her fate, and my apprehensions lest her sufferings should be greater than mine, when I could not be

with her to alleviate them. Yes, thou dear partner of all my childish sports! thou sharer of my joys and sorrows! happy should I have ever esteemed myself to encounter every misery for you, and to procure your freedom by the sacrifice of my own. Though you were early forced from my arms, your image has been always rivetted in my heart, from which neither *time nor fortune* have been able to remove it; so that, while the thoughts of your sufferings have damped my prosperity, they have mingled with adversity and increased its bitterness. To that Heaven which protects the weak from the strong, I commit the care of your innocence and virtues, if they have not already received their full reward, and if your youth and delicacy have not long since fallen victims to the violence of the African trader, the pestilential stench of a Guinea ship, the seasoning<sup>4</sup> in the European colonies, or the lash and lust of a brutal and unrelenting overseer.

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Thus I continued to travel, sometimes by land, sometimes by water, through different countries and various nations, till, at the end of six or seven months after I had been kidnapped, I arrived at the sea coast. It would be tedious and uninteresting to relate all the incidents which befell me during this journey, and which I have not yet forgotten; of the various hands I passed through, and the manners and customs of all the different people among whom I lived: I shall therefore only observe, that in all the places where I was the soil was exceedingly rich; the pumpkins, eadas, plantains, yams, &c. &c. were in great abundance, and of incredible size. There were also vast quantities of different gums, though not used for any purpose; and everywhere a great deal of tobacco. The cotton even grew quite wild; and there was plenty of redwood. I saw no mechanics<sup>5</sup> whatever in all the way, except such as I have mentioned. The chief employment in all these countries was agriculture, and both the males and females, as with us, were brought up to it, and trained in the arts of war. \* \* \*

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believe were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not; and one of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass; but, being afraid of him, I would not take it out of his hand. One of the blacks therefore took it from him and gave it to me, and I took a little down my palate, which, instead of reviving me, as they thought it would, threw me into the greatest consternation at the strange feeling it produced, having never tasted any such liquor before. Soon after this the blacks who brought me on board went off, and left me abandoned to despair. I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my

ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced any thing of this kind before; and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings,<sup>6</sup> I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water; and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself. In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men, I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought, if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate: but still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves. One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner. I could not help expressing my fears and apprehensions to some of my countrymen: I asked

them if these people had no country, but lived in this hollow place (the ship): they told me they did not, but came from a distant one. "Then," said I, "how comes it in all our country we never heard of them?" They told me because they lived so very far off. I then asked where were their women? had they any like themselves? I was told they had: "and why," said I, "do we not see them?" they answered, because they were left behind. I asked how the vessel could go? they told me they could not tell; but that there were cloths put upon the masts by the help of the ropes I saw, and then the vessel went on; and the white men had some spell or magic they put in the water when they liked in order to stop the vessel. I was exceedingly amazed at this account, and really thought they were spirits. I therefore wished much to be from amongst them, for I expected they would sacrifice me: but my wishes were vain; for we were so quartered that it was impossible for any of us to make our escape. While we stayed on the coast I was mostly on deck; and one day, to my great astonishment, I saw one of these vessels coming in with the sails up. As soon as the whites saw it, they gave a great shout, at which we were amazed; and the more so as the vessel appeared larger by approaching nearer. At last she came to an anchor in my sight, and when the anchor was let go I and my countrymen who saw it were lost in astonishment to observe the vessel stop; and were now convinced it was done by magic. Soon after this the other ship got her boats out, and they came on board of us, and the people of both ships seemed very glad to see each other. Several of the strangers also shook hands with us black people, and made motions with their hands, signifying I suppose we were to go to their country; but we did not understand them. At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the

place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs,<sup>7</sup> into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. Happily perhaps for myself I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from<sup>8</sup> my extreme youth I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself. I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs. Every circumstance I met with served only to render my state more painful, and heighten my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites. One day they had taken a number of fishes; and when they had killed and satisfied themselves with as many as they thought fit, to our astonishment who were on the deck, rather than give any of them to us to eat as we expected, they tossed the remaining fish into the sea again, although we begged and prayed for some as well as we could, but in vain; and some of my countrymen, being pressed by hunger, took an opportunity, when they thought no one saw them, of trying to get a little privately; but they were discovered, and the attempt procured them some very severe floggings.

One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery,

somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea; immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed. Those of us that were the most active were in a moment put down under the deck, and there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her, and get the boat out to go after the slaves. However two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery. In this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate, hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade. Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many. During our passage I first saw flying fishes, which surprised me very much: they used frequently to fly across the ship, and many of them fell on the deck. I also now first saw the use of the quadrant; I had often with astonishment seen the mariners make observations with it, and I could not think what it meant. They at last took notice of my surprise; and one of them, willing to increase it, as well as to gratify my curiosity, made me one day look through it. The clouds appeared to me to be land, which disappeared as they passed along. This heightened my wonder; and I was now more persuaded than ever that I was in another world, and that every thing about me was magic. At last we came in sight of the island of Barbados,<sup>9</sup> at which the whites on board gave a great shout, and made many signs of joy to us. We did not know what to think of this; but as the vessel drew nearer we plainly saw the harbor, and other ships of different kinds and sizes; and we soon anchored amongst them off Bridge Town. Many merchants and planters now came on board, though it was in the evening. They put us in separate parcels,<sup>1</sup> and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this we should be



eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and, when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and were soon to go on land, where we should see many of our country people. This report eased us much; and sure enough, soon after we were landed, there came to us Africans of all languages. We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard, where we were pent up altogether like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age. As every object was new to me, every thing I saw filled me with surprise. What struck me first was that the houses were built with stories, and in every other respect different from those in Africa; but I was still more astonished on seeing people on horseback. I did not know what this could mean; and indeed I thought these people were full of nothing but magical arts. While I was in this astonishment one of my fellow prisoners spoke to a countryman of his about the horses, who said they were the same kind they had in their country. I understood them, though they were from a distant part of Africa, and I thought it odd I had not seen any horses there; but afterwards, when I came to converse with different Africans, I found they had many horses amongst them, and much larger than those I then saw. We were not many days in the merchant's custody before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this:—On a signal given (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make a choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted.<sup>2</sup> In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again. I remember in the vessel in which I was brought over,

in the men's apartment, there were several brothers, who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion to see and hear their cries at parting. O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? Are the dearest friends and relations, now rendered more dear by their separation from their kindred, still to be parted from each other, and thus prevented from cheering the gloom of slavery with the small comfort of being together and mingling their sufferings and sorrows? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Treated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Furnished with as large vocabularies.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, Black people who enslaved others in Africa.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The period during which enslaved Africans were forced to adjust to brutal working and living conditions in European colonies in the Western Hemisphere, which often proved fatal. "African trader": a European trader on the coast of West Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: People who work with tools or machines.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A network of small ropes around the ship kept enslaved people from jumping overboard.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Latrines.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Because of.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The easternmost Caribbean island, then an important center for the trade of sugar and enslaved people.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Groups sorted to be sold as one lot.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Doomed.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***From Chapter VII***

**[A FREE MAN]**<sup>3</sup>

Every day now brought me nearer my freedom, and I was impatient till we proceeded again to sea, that I might have an opportunity of getting a sum large enough to purchase it. I was not long ungratified; for, in the beginning of the year 1766, my master bought another sloop, named the *Nancy*, the largest I had ever seen. She was partly laden, and was to proceed to Philadelphia; our Captain had his choice of three, and I was well pleased he chose this, which was the largest; for, from his having a large vessel, I had more room, and could carry a larger quantity of goods with me. Accordingly, when we had delivered our old vessel, the *Prudence*, and completed the lading of the *Nancy*, having made near three hundred per cent, by four barrels of pork I brought from Charlestown, I laid in as large a cargo as I could, trusting to God's providence to prosper my undertaking. With these views I sailed for Philadelphia. On our passage, when we drew near the land, I was for the first time surprised at the sight of some whales, having never seen any such large sea monsters before; and as we sailed by the land one morning I saw a puppy whale close by the vessel; it was about the length of a wherry boat, and it followed us all the day till we got within the Capes. We arrived safe and in good time at Philadelphia, and I sold my goods there chiefly to the Quakers. They always appeared to be a very honest discreet sort of people, and never attempted to impose on me; I therefore liked them, and ever after chose to deal with them in preference to any others.

One Sunday morning while I was here, as I was going to church, I chanced to pass a meeting house. The doors being open, and the house full of people, it excited my curiosity to go in. When I entered the house, to my great surprise, I saw a very tall woman standing in the midst of them, speaking in an audible voice something which I could not understand. Having never seen anything of this kind before, I stood and stared about me for some time, wondering at

this odd scene. As soon as it was over I took an opportunity to make inquiry about the place and people, when I was informed they were called Quakers.<sup>4</sup> I particularly asked what that woman I saw in the midst of them had said, but none of them were pleased to satisfy me; so I quitted them, and soon after, as I was returning, I came to a church crowded with people; the church-yard was full likewise, and a number of people were even mounted on ladders, looking in at the windows. I thought this a strange sight, as I had never seen churches, either in England or the West Indies, crowded in this manner before. I therefore made bold to ask some people the meaning of all this, and they told me the Rev. Mr. George Whitfield<sup>5</sup> was preaching. I had often heard of this gentleman, and had wished to see and hear him; but I had never before had an opportunity. I now therefore resolved to gratify myself with the sight, and I pressed in amidst the multitude. When I got into the church I saw this pious man exhorting the people with the greatest fervor and earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery on Montserrat beach. I was very much struck and impressed with this; I thought it strange I had never seen divines exert themselves in this manner before, and I was no longer at a loss to account for the thin congregations they preached to.

When we had discharged our cargo here, and were loaded again, we left this fruitful land once more, and set sail for Montserrat. My traffic had hitherto succeeded so well with me, that I thought, by selling my goods when we arrived at Montserrat, I should have enough to purchase my freedom. But, as soon as our vessel arrived there, my master came on board, and gave orders for us to go to St. Eustatia,<sup>6</sup> and discharge our cargo there, and from thence proceed for Georgia. I was much disappointed at this; but thinking, as usual, it was of no use to murmur at the decrees of fate, I submitted without repining, and we went to St. Eustatia. After we had discharged our cargo there we took in a live cargo, as we call a cargo of slaves. Here I sold my goods tolerably well; but, not being able to lay out all my money in this small island to as much advantage as in many other places, I laid out only part, and the

remainder I brought away with me neat.<sup>7</sup> We sailed from hence for Georgia, and I was glad when we got there, though I had not much reason to like the place from my last adventure in Savannah;<sup>8</sup> but I longed to get back to Montserrat and procure my freedom, which I expected to be able to purchase when I returned. As soon as we arrived here I waited on my careful doctor, Mr. Brady, to whom I made the most grateful acknowledgments in my power for his former kindness and attention during my illness.

While we were here an odd circumstance happened to the Captain and me, which disappointed us both a good deal. A silversmith, whom we had brought to this place some voyages before, agreed with the Captain to return with us to the West Indies, and promised at the same time to give the Captain a great deal of money, having pretended to take a liking to him, and being, as we thought, very rich. But while we stayed to load our vessel this man was taken ill in a house where he worked, and in a week's time became very bad. The worse he grew the more he used to speak of giving the Captain what he had promised him, so that he expected something considerable from the death of this man, who had no wife or child, and he attended him day and night. I used also to go with the Captain, at his own desire, to attend him; especially when we saw there was no appearance of his recovery; and, in order to recompense me for my trouble, the Captain promised me ten pounds, when he should get the man's property. I thought this would be of great service to me, although I had nearly money enough to purchase my freedom, if I should get safe this voyage to Montserrat. In this expectation I laid out above eight pounds of my money for a suit of superfine clothes to dance with at my freedom, which I hoped was then at hand. We still continued to attend this man, and were with him even on the last day he lived, till very late at night, when we went on board. After we were got to bed, about one or two o'clock in the morning, the Captain was sent for, and informed the man was dead. On this he came to my bed, and, waking me, informed me of it, and desired me to get up and procure a light, and immediately go to him. I told him I was very sleepy, and

wished he would take somebody else with him, or else, as the man was dead, and could want no farther attendance, to let all things remain as they were till next morning. "No, no," said he, "we will have the money tonight, I cannot wait till tomorrow; so let us go." Accordingly I got up and struck a light, and away we both went and saw the man as dead as we could wish. The Captain said he would give him a grand burial, in gratitude for the promised treasure; and desired that all the things belonging to the deceased might be brought forth. Among others, there was a nest of trunks of which he had kept the keys whilst the man was ill, and when they were produced we opened them with no small eagerness and expectation; and as there were a great number within one another, with much impatience we took them one out of the other. At last, when we came to the smallest, and had opened it, we saw it was full of papers, which we supposed to be notes; at the sight of which our hearts leapt for joy; and that instant the Captain, clapping his hands, cried out, "Thank God, here it is." But when we took up the trunk, and began to examine the supposed treasure and long-looked-for bounty, (alas! alas! how uncertain and deceitful are all human affairs!) what had we found! While we were embracing a substance we grasped an empty nothing. The whole amount that was in the nest of trunks was only one dollar and a half; and all that the man possessed would not pay for his coffin. Our sudden and exquisite joy was now succeeded by as sudden and exquisite pain; and my Captain and I exhibited, for some time, most ridiculous figures—pictures of chagrin and disappointment! We went away greatly mortified, and left the deceased to do as well as he could for himself, as we had taken so good care of him when alive for nothing. We set sail once more for Montserrat, and arrived there safe; but much out of humor with our friend the silversmith. When we had unladen the vessel, and I had sold my venture, finding myself master of about forty-seven pounds, I consulted my true friend, the Captain, how I should proceed in offering my master the money for my freedom. He told me to come on a certain morning, when he and my master would be at breakfast together. Accordingly, on that morning I went, and met the Captain there, as he had appointed.

When I went in I made my obeisance to my master, and with my money in my hand, and many fears in my heart, I prayed him to be as good as his offer to me, when he was pleased to promise me my freedom as soon as I could purchase it. This speech seemed to confound him; he began to recoil; and my heart that instant sank within me. "What," said he, "give you your freedom? Why, where did you get the money? Have you got forty pounds sterling?" "Yes, sir," I answered. "How did you get it?" replied he. I told him, very honestly. The Captain then said he knew I got the money very honestly and with much industry, and that I was particularly careful. On which my master replied, I got money much faster than he did; and said he would not have made me the promise he did if he had thought I should have got money so soon. "Come, come," said my worthy Captain, clapping my master on the back, "Come, Robert" (which was his name), "I think you must let him have his freedom; you have laid your money out very well; you have received good interest for it all this time, and here is now the principal at last. I know Gustavus has earned you more than an hundred a-year, and he will still save you money, as he will not leave you:—Come, Robert, take the money." My master then said, he would not be worse than his promise; and, taking the money, told me to go to the Secretary at the Register Office, and get my manumission<sup>9</sup> drawn up. These words of my master were like a voice from heaven to me: in an instant all my trepidation was turned into unutterable bliss; and I most reverently bowed myself with gratitude, unable to express my feelings, but by the overflowing of my eyes, while my true and worthy friend, the Captain, congratulated us both with a peculiar degree of heartfelt pleasure. As soon as the first transports of my joy were over, and that I had expressed my thanks to these my worthy friends in the best manner I was able, I rose with a heart full of affection and reverence, and left the room, in order to obey my master's joyful mandate of going to the Register Office. As I was leaving the house I called to mind the words of the Psalmist, in the 126th Psalm, and like him, "I glorified God in my heart, in whom I trusted." These words had been impressed on my mind from the



very day I was forced from Deptford<sup>1</sup> to the present hour, and I now saw them, as I thought, fulfilled and verified. My imagination was all rapture as I flew to the Register Office, and in this respect, like the apostle Peter<sup>2</sup> (whose deliverance from prison was so sudden and extraordinary, that he thought he was in a vision), I could scarcely believe I was awake. Heavens! who could do justice to my feelings at this moment! Not conquering heroes themselves, in the midst of a triumph—Not the tender mother who had just regained her long-lost infant, and presses it to her heart—Not the weary hungry mariner, at the sight of the desired friendly port—Not the lover, when he once more embraces his beloved mistress, after she had been ravished from his arms!—All within my breast was tumult, wildness, and delirium! My feet scarcely touched the ground, for they were winged with joy, and, like Elijah, as he rose to Heaven,<sup>3</sup> they “were with lightning sped as I went on.” Every one I met I told of my happiness, and blazed about the virtue of my amiable master and captain.

When I got to the office and acquainted the Register with my errand he congratulated me on the occasion, and told me he would draw up my manumission for half price, which was a guinea. I thanked him for his kindness; and having received it and paid him, I hastened to my master to get him to sign it, that I might be fully released. Accordingly he signed the manumission that day, so that, before night, I who had been a slave in the morning, trembling at the will of another, was become my own master, and completely free. I thought this was the happiest day I had ever experienced; and my joy was still heightened by the blessings and prayers of the sable race, particularly the aged, to whom my heart had ever been attached with reverence.

As the form of my manumission has something peculiar in it, and expresses the absolute power and dominion one man claims over his fellow, I shall beg leave to present it before my readers at full length:

*Montserrat.*—To all men unto whom these presents shall come: I Robert King, of the parish of St. Anthony in the said island, merchant, send greeting: Know ye, that I the aforesaid Robert King, for and in consideration of the sum of seventy pounds current money of the said island,<sup>4</sup> to me in hand paid, and to the intent that a negro man-slave, named Gustavus Vassa, shall and may become free, have manumitted, emancipated, enfranchised, and set free, and by these presents do manumit, emancipate, enfranchise, and set free, the aforesaid negro man-slave, named Gustavus Vassa, for ever, hereby giving, granting, and releasing unto him, the said Gustavus Vassa, all right, title, dominion, sovereignty, and property, which, as lord and master over the aforesaid Gustavus Vassa, I had, or now I have, or by any means whatsoever I may or can hereafter possibly have over him the aforesaid negro, for ever. In witness whereof I the above-said Robert King have unto these presents set my hand and seal, this tenth day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and sixty-six.

ROBERT KING

Signed, sealed, and delivered in the presence of Terrylegay, Montserrat.

Registered the within manumission at full length, this eleventh day of July, 1766, in liber D.<sup>5</sup>

TERRYLEGAY, REGISTER.

In short, the fair as well as black people immediately styled me by a new appellation, to me the most desirable in the world, which was Freeman, and at the dances I gave my Georgia superfine blue clothes made no indifferent appearance, as I thought. Some of the sable females, who formerly stood aloof, now began to relax and appear less coy; but my heart was still fixed on London, where I hoped to be ere long. So that my worthy captain and his owner, my late master, finding that the bent of my mind was towards London, said to me, "We hope you won't leave us, but that you will still be with the vessels." Here gratitude bowed me down; and none but the

generous mind can judge of my feelings, struggling between inclination and duty. However, notwithstanding my wish to be in London, I obediently answered my benefactors that I would go in the vessel, and not leave them; and from that day I was entered on board as an able-bodied sailor, at thirty-six shillings per month, besides what perquisites I could make.<sup>6</sup> My intention was to make a voyage or two, entirely to please these my honored patrons; but I determined that the year following, if it pleased God, I would see Old England once more, and surprise my old master, Capt. Pascal, who was hourly in my mind; for I still loved him, notwithstanding his usage of me,<sup>7</sup> and I pleased myself with thinking of what he would say when he saw what the Lord had done for me in so short a time, instead of being, as he might perhaps suppose, under the cruel yoke of some planter. With these kind of reveries I used often to entertain myself, and shorten the time till my return; and now, being as in my original free African state, I embarked on board the *Nancy*, after having got all things ready for our voyage. In this state of serenity we sailed for St. Eustatia;<sup>8</sup> and, having smooth seas and calm weather, we soon arrived there: after taking our cargo on board, we proceeded to Savannah in Georgia, in August, 1766. While we were there, as usual, I used to go for the cargo up the rivers in boats; and on this business I have been frequently beset by alligators, which were very numerous on that coast, and I have shot many of them when they have been near getting into our boats; which we have with great difficulty sometimes prevented, and have been very much frightened at them. I have seen a young one sold in Georgia alive for six pence. During our stay at this place, one evening a slave belonging to Mr. Read, a merchant of Savannah, came near our vessel, and began to use me very ill. I entreated him, with all the patience I was master of, to desist, as I knew there was little or no law for a free negro here; but the fellow, instead of taking my advice, persevered in his insults, and even struck me. At this I lost all temper, and I fell on him and beat him soundly. The next morning his master came to our vessel as we lay alongside the wharf, and desired me to come ashore that he might have me flogged all round

the town, for beating his negro slave. I told him he had insulted me, and had given the provocation, by first striking me. I had told my captain also the whole affair that morning, and wished him to have gone along with me to Mr. Read, to prevent bad consequences; but he said that it did not signify, and if Mr. Read said anything he would make matters up, and had desired me to go to work, which I accordingly did. The Captain being on board when Mr. Read came, he told him I was a free man; and when Mr. Read applied to him to deliver me up, he said he knew nothing of the matter. I was astonished and frightened at this, and thought I had better keep where I was than go ashore and be flogged round the town, without judge or jury. I therefore refused to stir; and Mr. Read went away, swearing he would bring all the constables in the town, for he would have me out of the vessel. When he was gone, I thought his threat might prove too true to my sorrow; and I was confirmed in this belief, as well by the many instances I had seen of the treatment of free negroes, as from a fact that had happened within my own knowledge here a short time before. There was a free Black man, a carpenter, that I knew, who, for asking a gentleman that he worked for for the money he had earned, was put into jail; and afterwards this oppressed man was sent from Georgia, with false accusations, of an intention to set the gentleman's house on fire, and run away with his slaves. I was therefore much embarrassed, and very apprehensive of a flogging at least. I dreaded, of all things, the thoughts of being striped,<sup>9</sup> as I never in my life had the marks of any violence of that kind. At that instant a rage seized my soul, and for a little I determined to resist the first man that should offer to lay violent hands on me, or basely use me without a trial; for I would sooner die like a free man, than suffer myself to be scourged by the hands of ruffians, and my blood drawn like a slave. The captain and others, more cautious, advised me to make haste and conceal myself; for they said Mr. Read was a very spiteful man, and he would soon come on board with constables and take me. At first I refused this counsel, being determined to stand my ground; but at length, by the prevailing entreaties of the captain and Mr. Dixon, with whom

he lodged, I went to Mr. Dixon's house, which was a little out of town, at a place called Yea-ma-chra.<sup>1</sup> I was but just gone when Mr. Read, with the constables, came for me, and searched the vessel; but, not finding me there, he swore he would have me dead or alive. I was secreted about five days; however, the good character<sup>2</sup> which my captain always gave me as well as some other gentlemen who also knew me procured me some friends. At last some of them told my captain that he did not use me well, in suffering me thus to be imposed upon, and said they would see me redressed, and get me on board some other vessel. My captain, on this, immediately went to Mr. Read, and told him, that ever since I eloped from the vessel his work had been neglected, and he could not go on with her loading, himself and mate not being well; and, as I had managed things on board for them, my absence must retard his voyage, and consequently hurt the owner; he therefore begged of him to forgive me, as he said he never had any complaint of me before, for the many years that I had been with him. After repeated entreaties, Mr. Read said I might go to hell, and that he would not meddle with me; on which my captain came immediately to me at his lodging, and, telling me how pleasantly matters had gone on, he desired me to go on board. Some of my other friends then asked him if he had got the constable's warrant from them; the captain said, No. On this I was desired by them to stay in the house; and they said they would get me on board of some other vessel before the evening. When the captain heard this he became almost distracted. He went immediately for the warrant, and, after using every exertion in his power, he at last got it from my hunters; but I had all the expenses to pay. After I had thanked all my friends for their attention, I went on board again to my work, of which I had always plenty.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Frustrated in his hope to be set free in England, Equiano is shipped to Montserrat, a British colony in the Leeward Islands of the West Indies. Robert King, a prosperous Quaker merchant from Philadelphia, pays the price set for him, treats him kindly, and values him as a reliable worker. By being useful to a friendly sea captain, Thomas Farmer, Equiano has opportunities to travel and trade goods for money. Eventually King promises to let him purchase his freedom for his original cost: £40.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quaker meetings are not led by clergy; any worshipper who feels inspired by God can rise to speak.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Whitefield (1714–1770), a famous evangelist who helped found Methodism, was in Britain, not Philadelphia, in 1766. It is possible that Equiano had heard him preach the previous year, in Savannah, Georgia. Equiano's later conversion to Methodism will become a dominant theme of his life story.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An island in the Netherlands Antilles (West Indies).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Intact.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The year before, a drunken enslaver and his servant had beaten Equiano so brutally that he nearly died.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Release from slavery.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The port near London where Equiano's English enslaver took payment for him from another enslaver.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Acts, chap. xii, ver. 9 [*Equiano's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: 2 Kings 2:11.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The equivalent of £40 in British money.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Book or register D.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Even while enslaved, Equiano had made side deals to obtain money, and here he looks ahead to making extra money

from such dealing.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Michael Pascal, a British enslaver who formerly held Equiano, brought him to England and treated him with apparent kindness, seeming to indicate that he would free him; but after several years in England, during which time Equiano became baptized and gained an education, Pascal abruptly transferred him to another enslaver for payment, who brought Equiano back to England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Island in the northern Leeward Islands in the Caribbean.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Whipped. "Embarrassed": perplexed, put in a problematic position.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Yamacraw, a bluff and settlement then outside the city of Savannah, Georgia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reference as to my character.[Return to reference 2](#)



## ***From Chapter XII***

### **[LETTER TO THE QUEEN]**

March the 21st, 1788, I had the honor of presenting the Queen with a petition on behalf of my African brethren, which was received most graciously by her Majesty:<sup>3</sup>

*To the QUEEN's most Excellent Majesty*  
Madam,

Your Majesty's well-known benevolence and humanity emboldens me to approach your royal presence, trusting that the obscurity of my situation will not prevent your Majesty from attending to the sufferings for which I plead.

Yet I do not solicit your royal pity for my own distress; my sufferings, although numerous, are in a measure forgotten. I supplicate your Majesty's compassion for millions of my African countrymen, who groan under the lash of tyranny in the West Indies.

The oppression and cruelty exercised to the unhappy negroes there, have at length reached the British legislature, and they are now deliberating on its redress;<sup>4</sup> even several persons of property in slaves in the West Indies have petitioned parliament against its continuance, sensible that it is as impolitic as it is unjust—and what is inhuman must ever be unwise.

Your Majesty's reign has been hitherto distinguished by private acts of benevolence and bounty; surely the more extended the misery is, the greater claim it has to your Majesty's compassion, and the greater must be your Majesty's pleasure in administering to its relief. I presume, therefore, gracious Queen, to implore your interposition with your royal consort, in favor of the wretched Africans; that, by your Majesty's benevolent influence, a period<sup>5</sup> may now be put to their misery; and that they may be raised from the condition of brutes, to which they are at present degraded, to the rights and situation of freemen, and admitted to partake of the



blessings of your Majesty's happy government; so shall your Majesty enjoy the heartfelt pleasure of procuring happiness to millions, and be rewarded in the grateful prayers of themselves, and of their posterity.

And may the all-bountiful Creator shower on your Majesty, and the royal family, every blessing that this world can afford, and every fulness of joy which divine revelation has promised us in the next.

I am your Majesty's most dutiful and devoted servant to command,

Gustavus Vassa,

The Oppressed Ethiopian.<sup>6</sup>

No. 53, Baldwin's Gardens.

## Endnotes

1789

- Note 3: At the request of some of my most particular friends, I take the liberty of inserting it here [*Equiano's note*]. "The Queen": Charlotte (1744–1818), consort to George III, supported the abolitionist cause, and was rumored to be biracial. At this point in his life, Equiano is living in London and a major figure in the abolitionist movement.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Discussion of the first, unsuccessful bill to end Britain's trade in enslaved Africans began in 1788.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: End.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Though Equiano is from the kingdom of Benin, "Ethiopian" was commonly used as a general term for an African.[Return to reference 6](#)

# APPENDICES

# **Volume A: The Middle Ages**

# General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

## Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four*

*Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English*

*Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of*

*the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*

(1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

## Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible



range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos ([https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_old.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm) and [https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_middle.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm)); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at [www.mlalrg.org/public](http://www.mlalrg.org/public)) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George

Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the

*Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at [www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com).

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), [www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online). There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

## **Literary Criticism and Theory**

*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle*

*Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and*

*the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and '80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and '30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

(1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman,

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,



*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books

as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and

Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy,*

*Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

# Literary Terminology\*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

## A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

**accent** (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

**act**: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

**aesthetics** (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending

untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

**Alexandrine:** a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

**allegory** (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

**alliteration** (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

**allusion:** Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

**anagnorisis** (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

**anapest:** a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

**anaphora** (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, p. 724).

**animal fable:** a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

**antithesis** (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1446).

**apostrophe** (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

**apposition:** a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases

"heaven-kingdom's Guardian," "the Measurer's might," "his mind-plans," and "the work of the Glory-Father" each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of "praise."

**assonance** (Latin "sounding to"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," line 100: "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed" (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

**aubade** (originally from Spanish "alba," dawn): a **genre**. A lover's dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, "The Sun Rising" (see vol. B, p. 886). Larkin recasts the genre in "Aubade" (see vol. F, p. 795).

**autobiography** (Greek "self-life writing"): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author's path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.

**ballad stanza**: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See "Sir Patrick Spens" (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett's poems (vol. F, pp. 719–24); Eliot, "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, "This Be The Verse" (vol. F, p. 795).

**ballade**: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, "send off"). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).



**bathos** (Greek “depth”): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last” (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

**beast epic**: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

**biography** (Greek “life-writing”): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

**blank verse**: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

**blazon**: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved’s face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**burlesque** (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

**caesura** (Latin "cut") (plural "caesurae"): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," lines 5–8: "By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun" (see vol. F, p. 722), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

**canon** (Greek "rule"): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

**catastrophe** (Greek "overturning"): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

**catharsis** (Greek "cleansing"): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

**character** (Greek "stamp, impression"): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the "fuller," or more "rounded," a character is said to be. A "stock" character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

**chiasmus** (Greek "crosswise"): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," line 104, "The crime was common, common be the pain" (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: "They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide" (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

**classical, classicism, classic**: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, "classical" primarily describes the

works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. "Classicism" denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. "Classic" denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

**climax** (Greek "ladder"): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: "Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement" (see vol. B, pp. 1165–66).

**comedy**: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

**comic mode**: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

**connotation**: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term "depression" and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase "the blues."

**consonance** (Latin "sounding with"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose

vowel sounds are different. Herbert, "Easter," line 13: "Consort, both heart and lute . . ." (see vol. B, p. 1181).

**convention:** a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

**couplet:** a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek "two lines") is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: "Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me" (see vol. B, p. 923).

**dactyl** (Greek "finger," because of the finger's three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Oregon."

**decorum** (Latin "that which is fitting"): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

**deixis** (Greek "pointing"): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a "here" and a "now" from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "now," "then") are examples of deixis, or "deictics." This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

**denotation:** A word has a basic, "prosaic" (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word

“steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

**denouement** (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

**dialogue** (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

**diction**, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

**didactic mode** (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

**diegesis** (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

**dimeter** (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Rumming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for

single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, p. 1195).

**discourse** (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

**dramatic irony**: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

**dramatic monologue** (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F, pp. 1161–63).

**ecphrasis** (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

**elegy**: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, p. 901]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, p. 977).

**emblem** (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such

interpretation.

**end-stopping:** the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

**enjambment** (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

**epic** (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1427); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, p. 808). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

**epigram:** a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, p. 1047).

**epigraph** (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

**epistle** (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals.

The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, p. 771). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

**epitaph:** a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

**epithalamion** (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

**epyllion** (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

**essay** (French "trial, attempt"): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**euphemism** (Greek "sweet saying"): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, "he passed away").

**exegesis** (Greek "leading out"): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

**exemplum** (Latin "example"): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.



**fabliau** (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

**farce** (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

**figures of speech**: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

**figures of thought**: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

**first-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

**frame narrative**: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

**free indirect style**: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often

implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

**genre and mode:** The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

**georgic** (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

**hermeneutics** (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

**heroic poetry:** see **epic**.

**hexameter** (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a

Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

**homily** (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

**homophone** (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

**hyperbaton** (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, p. 899). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1428).

**hyperbole** (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1271); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

**hypermetrical** (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

**hypotaxis**, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a

single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: “As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river’s mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he” (vol. B, p. 1586). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

**iamb**: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, “Vermont.”

**imitation**: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

**irony** (Greek “dissimulation”): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. “It’s a beautiful day” is unironic if it’s a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

**journal** (French “daily”): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

**lai**: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

**legend** (Latin “requiring to be read”): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**lexical set**: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

**litotes** (from Greek “smooth”): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: “differences of no slight import” (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, “Sunt Leones,” lines 11–12: “And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do” (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

**lullaby**: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, “Lullaby” (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

**lyric** (from Greek “lyre”): Initially meaning a song, “lyric” refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus “The Wife’s Lament” (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole” (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

**masque**: a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

**metaphor** (Greek “carrying across,” etymologically parallel to Latin “translation”): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, “London,” lines 11–12: “And the hapless Soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls” (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

**meter:** Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

**metonymy** (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

**mimesis** (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

***mise-en-abyme*** (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

**monometer** (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

**myth**: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**novel**: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel’s openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

**novella:** a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

**occupatio** (Latin “taking possession”): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as “praeteritio” (Latin “passing by”). See Chaucer, *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

**ode** (Greek “song”): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, “An Horatian Ode” (vol. B, p. 1280), or Keats, “Ode on Melancholy” (vol. D, p. 973). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson’s “Ode on Cary and Morison” (vol. B, p. 1057).

**omniscient narrator** (Latin “all-knowing narrator”): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, “On the Western Circuit” (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

**onomatopoeia** (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, p. 726).

**order:** A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator



begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin "in the middle of the matter"). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, "A Letter of the Authors" (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French "story") for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here "narration") for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

**ottava rima: a verse form.** An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ's speech from the Cross in Lydgate's *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, p. 690).

**oxymoron** (Greek "sharp blunt"): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: "darkness visible" (see vol. B, p. 1429).

**panegyric: a genre.** Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek "showing"), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek "sweet speaking"), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

**parable: a genre.** A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

**paradox** (Greek "contrary to received opinion"): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song," line 12: "O sweete harm so quainte" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**parataxis**, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

**parody**: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**pastoral** (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepherdes Calender* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

**pathetic fallacy**: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, p. 1404). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

**pentameter** (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very

flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: "O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers" (see vol. B, p. 1431).

**performative:** Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a "performative." See also **speech act**.

**peripeteia** (Greek "turning about"): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

**periphrasis** (Greek "declaring around"): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

**persona** (Latin "sound through"): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor's voice; in literary discourse *persona* (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

**personification**, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, p. 971).

**plot:** the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

**point of view:** All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

**protagonist** (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

**pun:** a **figure of thought**. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**quatrain:** a **verse form**. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, p. 1212).

**refrain:** usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

**register:** The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial

register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, “the boss”). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

**rhetoric:** the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

**rhyme:** a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ (“dead” / “head”). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line (“decays” / “days”). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables (“fountains” / “mountains”). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: “The guests are met, the feast is set” (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

**rhyme royal:** a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer

and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**rhythm:** Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

**romance:** a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath’s Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

**sarcasm** (Greek “flesh tearing”): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, “Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children” (see vol. C, p. 891).

**satire** (Latin for “a bowl of mixed fruits”): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt’s “Mine Own John Poins” (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

**satiric mode:** Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift’s travel narrative *Gulliver’s Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** “A Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

**scene:** a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

**sensibility** (from Latin, “capable of being perceived by the senses”): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of “sensibility,” such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe’s *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper’s passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, p. 1076).

**short story:** a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).



**simile** (Latin "like"): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word "like" or "as," of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, "The Storm," lines 29–30: "Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail." Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1436).

**soliloquy** (Latin "single speaking"): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

**sonnet**: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or "volta," often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt" (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, "London, 1802" (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, "If We Must Die" (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, p. 977).

**speech act**: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting



a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

**Spenserian stanza:** a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, p. 851), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, p. 953).

**spondee:** a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

**stanza** (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

**story:** a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

**stream of consciousness:** usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

**style** (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its

“tone.” We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

**sublime:** As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

**syllable:** the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

**symbol** (Greek “token”): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

**synecdoche** (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

**syntax** (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of

the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

**taste** (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

**tercet:** a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

**terza rima:** a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, p. 802); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F, p. 975); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, p. 808).

**tetrameter** (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

**theme** (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

**third-person narration:** relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to

explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

**topographical poem** (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

**topos** (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

**tradition** (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

**tragedy**: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

**tragic mode**: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

**tragicomedy**: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

**translation** (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

**trimeter** (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, p. 1195).

**triplet:** a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**trochee:** a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

**type** (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

**unities:** According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, p. 876).

**vernacular** (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

**verse form:** The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

**villanelle:** a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, p. 693).

**wit:** Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's definition of true wit as "Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

**zeugma** (Greek "a yoking"): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word "take" is used in two senses: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

## **B: Publishing History, Censorship**

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

**bookseller:** In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

**censorship:** The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative

sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

**codex:** the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

**copy text:** the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

**copyright:** the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work’s publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the



exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

**folio:** the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

**foul papers:** versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

**incunabulum** (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

**manuscript** (Latin, "written by hand"): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and

reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

**paleography** (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

**parchment:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

**patronage, patron** (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

**periodical:** Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but

still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

**printing:** Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

**publisher:** the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers' Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

**quire:** When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a "gathering" or "signature"). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

**royalties:** an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

**scribe:** In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

**scriptorium** (plural "scriptoria"): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

**serial publication:** generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

**Stationers' Company:** The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

**subscription:** An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

**textual criticism:** Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

**variants:** differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

**vellum:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

**watermark:** the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene, for her help.[Return to reference \\*](#)

# Geographic Nomenclature

**The British Isles** refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

**Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

**The British Empire** took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia,** and **New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth,** and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.



# British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing ( $\frac{1}{4}$  penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
2½ shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
2½ pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	

1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.

<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" ( <i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year

# The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty," princes and princesses as "Your Highness," the other hereditary nobility as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship." Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father's title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward's marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92



temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

# **The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain**

## ***England***

### **SAXONS AND DANES**

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II1016–1016

Canute the Dane1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward1066–1066 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF NORMANDY**

William I, the Conqueror1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I1100–1135

## **HOUSE OF BLOIS**

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I1135–1154

## **HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET**

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II1199–1216

Henry III, son of John1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I 1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF LANCASTER**

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed),

1470–1471 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF YORK**

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III 1461–1470 (deposed),

1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV 1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback 1483–1485 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF TUDOR**

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV 1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII 1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII 1547–1553

Mary I, “Bloody,” daughter of Henry VIII 1553–1558

Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII 1558–1603

## **HOUSE OF STUART**

James I (James VI of Scotland) 1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I 1625–1649 (executed)

## **COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE**

Council of State 1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector 1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver 1658–1660 (resigned)

## **HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)**

Charles II, son of Charles I 1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I 1685–1688

## **(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)**

## **HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU**

William III of Orange, by  
Mary, daughter of Charles I  
and Mary II, daughter of James II 1689–1701–1694

Anne, second daughter of James II 1702–1714

## *Great Britain*

### **HOUSE OF HANOVER**

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I 1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

### **HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA**

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

### **HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)**

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI 1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II 2022–

# Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a



community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late

fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more

Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of

these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the "Glorious Revolution" in 1688 deposed the

Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the

extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as "Christian" on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of

religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

## The Universe According to Ptolemy

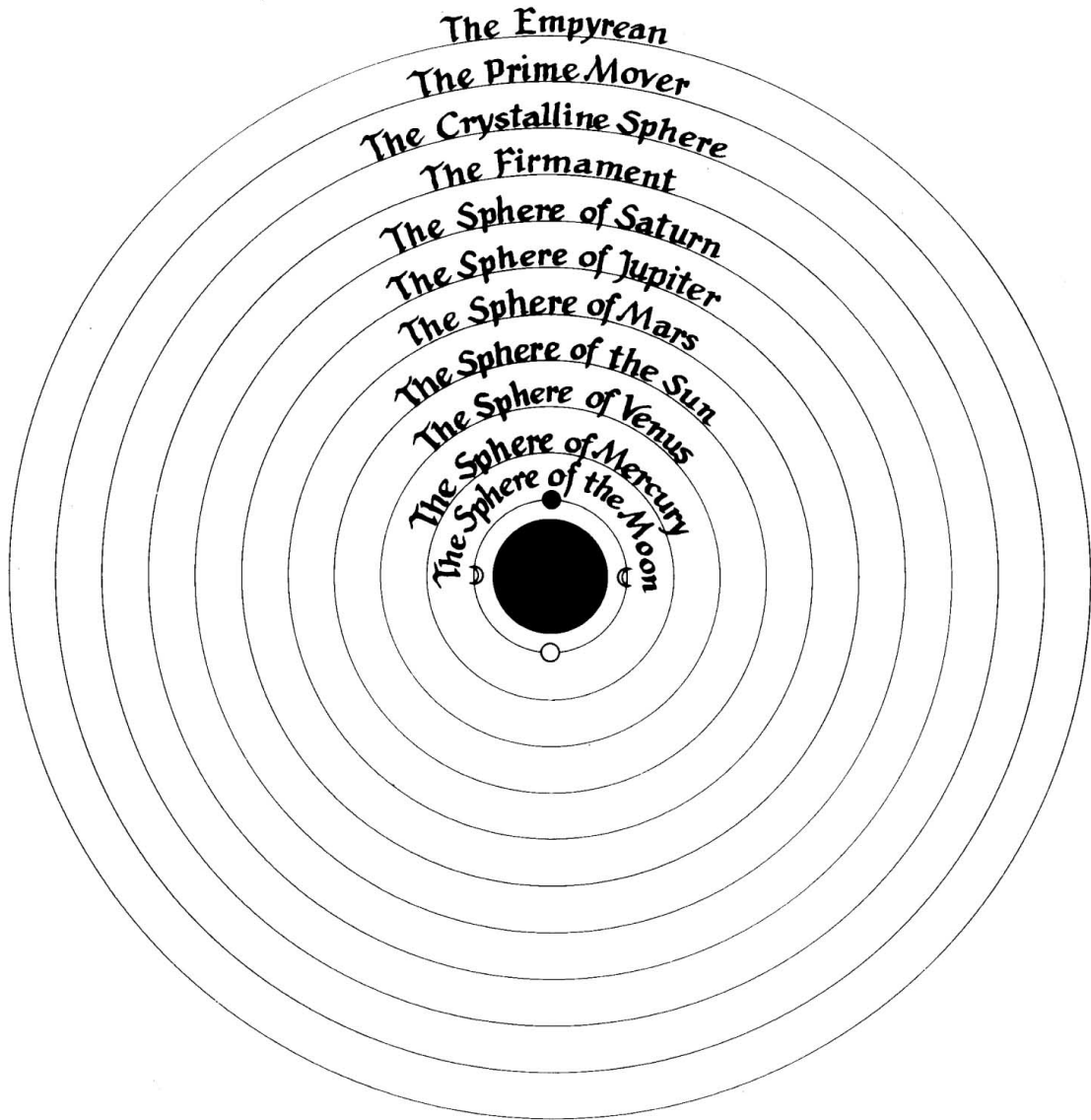
Ptolemy was a Roman astronomer of Greek descent, born in Egypt during the second century C.E.; for nearly fifteen hundred years after his death his account of the design of the universe was accepted as standard. During that time, the basic pattern underwent many detailed modifications and was fitted out with many astrological and pseudoscientific trappings. But in essence Ptolemy's followers portrayed the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, planets, and fixed stars set in transparent spheres orbiting around it. In this scheme of things, as modified for Christian usage, Hell was usually placed under the earth's surface at the center of the cosmic globe, while Heaven, the abode of the blessed spirits, was in the outermost, uppermost circle, the empyrean. But in 1543 the Polish astronomer Copernicus proposed an alternative hypothesis—that the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa; and despite theological opposition, observations with the new telescope and careful mathematical calculations insured ultimate acceptance of the new view.

The map of the Ptolemaic universe below is a simplified version of a diagram in Peter Apian's *Cosmography* (1584). In such a diagram, the Firmament is the sphere that contained the fixed stars; the Crystalline Sphere, which contained no heavenly bodies, is a late innovation, included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies; and the Prime Mover is the sphere that, itself put into motion by God, imparts rotation around the earth to all the other spheres.

Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, used two universes. The Copernican universe, though he alludes to it, was too large, formless, and unfamiliar to be the setting for the war between Heaven and Hell in *Paradise Lost*. He therefore used the Ptolemaic



cosmos, but placed Heaven well outside this smaller earth-centered universe, Hell far beneath it, and assigned the vast middle space to Chaos.



# **Volume B: The Sixteenth Century and the Early Seventeenth Century**

# General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

## Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four*

*Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English*.

*Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of*

*the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*

(1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

## Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible

range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos ([https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_old.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm) and [https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_middle.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm)); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at [www.mlalrg.org/public](http://www.mlalrg.org/public)) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George



Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the

*Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at [www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com).

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), [www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online). There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

## **Literary Criticism and Theory**

*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle*

*Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and*

*the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and ’80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and ’30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

(1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman,

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books



as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and

Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy,*

*Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

# Literary Terminology\*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

## A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

**accent** (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

**act**: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

**aesthetics** (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending

untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

**Alexandrine:** a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

**allegory** (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

**alliteration** (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

**allusion:** Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

**anagnorisis** (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

**anapest:** a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

**anaphora** (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

**animal fable:** a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

**antithesis** (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, [p. 1448](#)).

**apostrophe** (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

**apposition:** a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases

“heaven-kingdom’s Guardian,” “the Measurer’s might,” “his mind-plans,” and “the work of the Glory-Father” each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of “praise.”

**assonance** (Latin “sounding to”): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott,” line 100: “His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed” (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

**aubade** (originally from Spanish “alba,” dawn): a **genre**. A lover’s dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, “The Sun Rising” (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in “Aubade” (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

**autobiography** (Greek “self-life writing”): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author’s path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*.

**ballad stanza**: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See “Sir Patrick Spens” (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett’s poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, “Sweeney among the Nightingales” (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, “This Be The Verse” (vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

**ballade**: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, “send off”). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, “The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse” (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

**bathos** (Greek “depth”): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last” (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

**beast epic**: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

**biography** (Greek “life-writing”): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

**blank verse**: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

**blazon**: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved’s face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**burlesque** (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.



**caesura** (Latin "cut") (plural "caesurae"): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," lines 5–8: "By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun" (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

**canon** (Greek "rule"): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

**catastrophe** (Greek "overturning"): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

**catharsis** (Greek "cleansing"): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

**character** (Greek "stamp, impression"): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the "fuller," or more "rounded," a character is said to be. A "stock" character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

**chiasmus** (Greek "crosswise"): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," line 104, "The crime was common, common be the pain" (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: "They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide" (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

**classical, classicism, classic**: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, "classical" primarily describes the

works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. "Classicism" denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. "Classic" denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

**climax** (Greek "ladder"): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: "Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement" (see vol. B, [pp. 1167–68](#)).

**comedy**: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

**comic mode**: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

**connotation**: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term "depression" and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase "the blues."

**consonance** (Latin "sounding with"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose

vowel sounds are different. Herbert, "Easter," line 13: "Consort, both heart and lute . . ." (see vol. B, [p. 1183](#)).

**convention:** a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

**couplet:** a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek "two lines") is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: "Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me" (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

**dactyl** (Greek "finger," because of the finger's three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Oregon."

**decorum** (Latin "that which is fitting"): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

**deixis** (Greek "pointing"): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a "here" and a "now" from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "now," "then") are examples of deixis, or "deictics." This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

**denotation:** A word has a basic, "prosaic" (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word

“steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

**denouement** (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

**dialogue** (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

**diction**, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

**didactic mode** (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

**diegesis** (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

**dimeter** (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Rumming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for

single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, [p. 1197](#)).

**discourse** (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

**dramatic irony**: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

**dramatic monologue** (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F, [pp. 1158–60](#)).

**ecphrasis** (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

**elegy**: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, [p. 970](#)).

**emblem** (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such

interpretation.

**end-stopping:** the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

**enjambment** (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

**epic** (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, [p. 1427](#)); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, [p. 808](#)). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

**epigram:** a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, [p. 1049](#)).

**epigraph** (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

**epistle** (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals.

The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

**epitaph:** a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

**epithalamion** (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

**epyllion** (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

**essay** (French "trial, attempt"): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**euphemism** (Greek "sweet saying"): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, "he passed away").

**exegesis** (Greek "leading out"): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

**exemplum** (Latin "example"): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.



**fabliau** (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

**farce** (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

**figures of speech**: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

**figures of thought**: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

**first-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

**frame narrative**: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

**free indirect style**: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often



implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

**genre and mode:** The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

**georgic** (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

**hermeneutics** (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

**heroic poetry:** see **epic**.

**hexameter** (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a

Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

**homily** (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

**homophone** (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

**hyperbaton** (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, [p. 1430](#)).

**hyperbole** (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, [p. 1273](#)); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

**hypermetrical** (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

**hypotaxis**, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a

single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: “As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river’s mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he” (vol. B, [p. 1588](#)). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

**iamb**: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, “Vermont.”

**imitation**: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

**irony** (Greek “dissimulation”): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. “It’s a beautiful day” is unironic if it’s a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

**journal** (French “daily”): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

**lai**: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

**legend** (Latin “requiring to be read”): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**lexical set**: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

**litotes** (from Greek “smooth”): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: “differences of no slight import” (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, “Sunt Leones,” lines 11–12: “And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do” (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

**lullaby**: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, “Lullaby” (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

**lyric** (from Greek “lyre”): Initially meaning a song, “lyric” refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus “The Wife’s Lament” (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole” (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

**masque**: a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

**metaphor** (Greek “carrying across,” etymologically parallel to Latin “translation”): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, “London,” lines 11–12: “And the hapless Soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls” (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

**meter:** Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

**metonymy** (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

**mimesis** (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

***mise-en-abyme*** (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

**monometer** (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

**myth**: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**novel**: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel’s openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

**novella:** a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

**occupatio** (Latin “taking possession”): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as “praeteritio” (Latin “passing by”). See Chaucer, *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

**ode** (Greek “song”): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, “An Horatian Ode” (vol. B, [p. 1282](#)), or Keats, “Ode on Melancholy” (vol. D, [p. 973](#)). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson’s “Ode on Cary and Morison” (vol. B, [p. 1058](#)).

**omniscient narrator** (Latin “all-knowing narrator”): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, “On the Western Circuit” (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

**onomatopoeia** (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

**order:** A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator

begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin "in the middle of the matter"). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, "A Letter of the Authors" (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French "story") for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here "narration") for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

**ottava rima: a verse form.** An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ's speech from the Cross in Lydgate's *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

**oxymoron** (Greek "sharp blunt"): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: "darkness visible" (see vol. B, [p. 1431](#)).

**panegyric: a genre.** Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek "showing"), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek "sweet speaking"), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

**parable: a genre.** A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

**paradox** (Greek "contrary to received opinion"): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song," line 12: "O sweete harm so quainte" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).



**parataxis**, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

**parody**: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**pastoral** (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

**pathetic fallacy**: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, [p. 1406](#)). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

**pentameter** (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very

flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: "O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers" (see vol. B, [p. 1433](#)).

**performative:** Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a "performative." See also **speech act**.

**peripeteia** (Greek "turning about"): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

**periphrasis** (Greek "declaring around"): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

**persona** (Latin "sound through"): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor's voice; in literary discourse *persona* (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

**personification**, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, [p. 971](#)).

**plot:** the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

**point of view:** All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

**protagonist** (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

**pun: a figure of thought.** A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**quatrain: a verse form.** A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, [p. 1214](#)).

**refrain:** usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

**register:** The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial

register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, “the boss”). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

**rhetoric:** the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

**rhyme:** a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ (“dead” / “head”). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line (“decays” / “days”). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables (“fountains” / “mountains”). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: “The guests are met, the feast is set” (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

**rhyme royal:** a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer

and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**rhythm:** Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

**romance:** a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath’s Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

**sarcasm** (Greek “flesh tearing”): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, “Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children” (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).

**satire** (Latin for “a bowl of mixed fruits”): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt’s “Mine Own John Poins” (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

**satiric mode:** Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift’s travel narrative *Gulliver’s Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** “A Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

**scene:** a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

**sensibility** (from Latin, “capable of being perceived by the senses”): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of “sensibility,” such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe’s *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper’s passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, [p. 1076](#)).

**short story:** a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

**simile** (Latin “like”): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word “like” or “as,” of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, “The Storm,” lines 29–30: “Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail.” Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, [p. 1438](#)).

**soliloquy** (Latin “single speaking”): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

**sonnet**: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or “volta,” often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, “Whoso List to Hunt” (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, “London, 1802” (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, “If We Must Die” (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, “Clearances” (vol. F, [p. 970](#)).

**speech act**: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting



a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

**Spenserian stanza:** a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, [p. 851](#)), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, [p. 953](#)).

**spondee:** a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

**stanza** (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

**story:** a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

**stream of consciousness:** usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

**style** (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its



“tone.” We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

**sublime:** As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

**syllable:** the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

**symbol** (Greek “token”): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

**synecdoche** (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

**syntax** (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of

the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

**taste** (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

**tercet:** a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

**terza rima:** a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, [p. 802](#)); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F, [p. 968](#)); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, [p. 806](#)).

**tetrameter** (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

**theme** (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

**third-person narration:** relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to

explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

**topographical poem** (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

**topos** (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

**tradition** (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

**tragedy**: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

**tragic mode**: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

**tragicomedy**: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

**translation** (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

**trimeter** (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, [p. 1197](#)).

**triplet**: a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**trochee**: a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

**type** (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

**unities**: According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

**vernacular** (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

**verse form:** The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

**villanelle:** a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

**wit:** Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's definition of true wit as "Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

**zeugma** (Greek "a yoking"): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word "take" is used in two senses: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

## **B: Publishing History, Censorship**

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

**bookseller:** In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

**censorship:** The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative

sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

**codex:** the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

**copy text:** the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

**copyright:** the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work’s publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the

exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

**folio:** the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

**foul papers:** versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

**incunabulum** (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

**manuscript** (Latin, "written by hand"): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and



reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

**paleography** (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

**parchment**: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

**patronage, patron** (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

**periodical**: Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but

still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

**printing:** Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

**publisher:** the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers' Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

**quire:** When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a "gathering" or "signature"). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

**royalties:** an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

**scribe:** In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

**scriptorium** (plural "scriptoria"): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

**serial publication:** generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

**Stationers' Company:** The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

**subscription:** An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

**textual criticism:** Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

**variants:** differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

**vellum:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

**watermark:** the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference \\*](#)

# Geographic Nomenclature

**The British Isles** refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

**Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

**The British Empire** took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth**, and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.

# British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing (1/4 penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
2 1/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
2 1/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	



1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.

<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" ( <i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year

# The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty," princes and princesses as "Your Highness," the other hereditary nobility as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship." Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father's title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward's marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92

temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.



Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

# Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a

community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that

marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own

lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring

the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to

Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from

voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots



Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as “Christian” on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

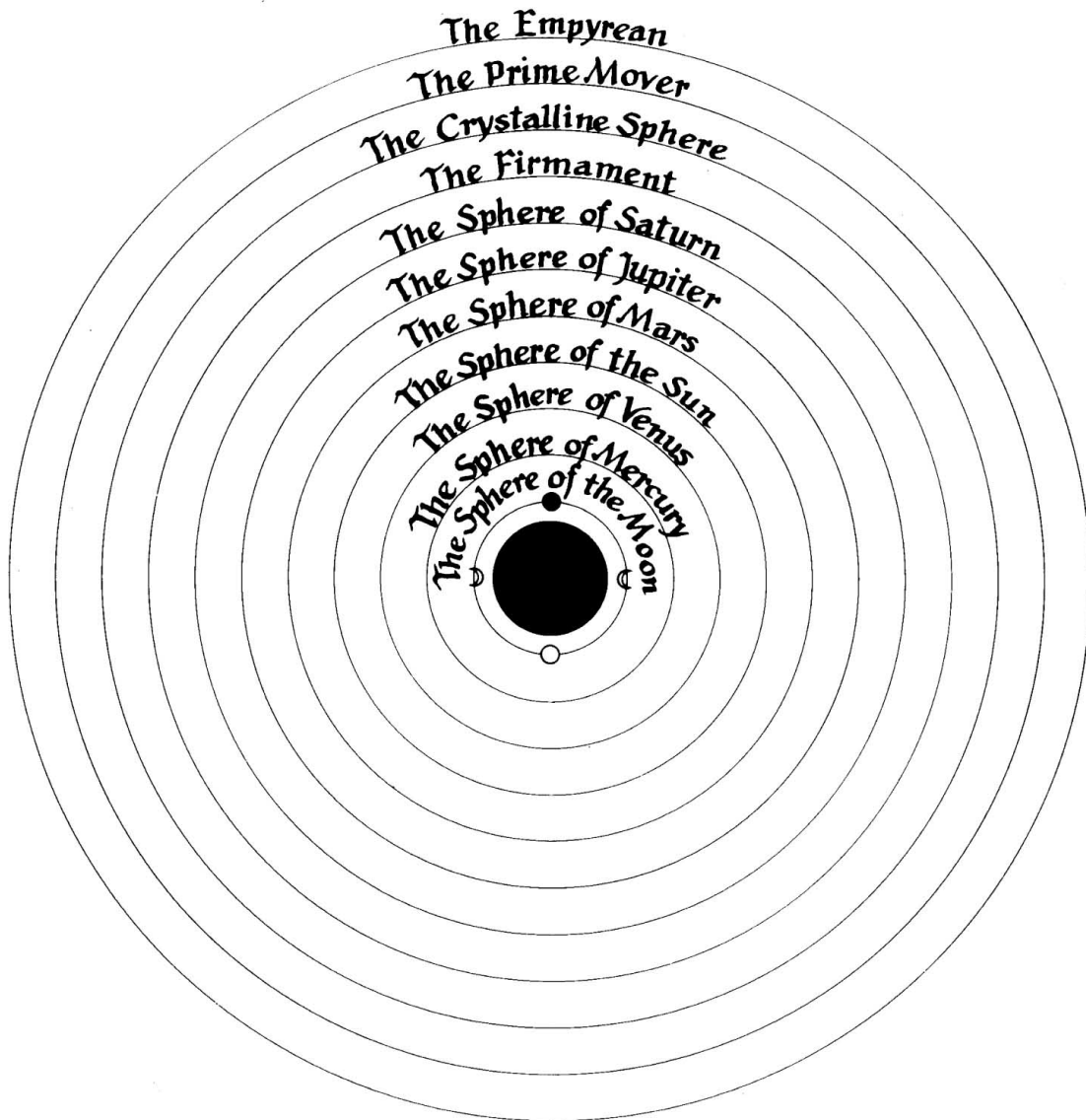
# The Universe According to Ptolemy

Ptolemy was a Roman astronomer of Greek descent, born in Egypt during the second century C.E.; for nearly fifteen hundred years after his death his account of the design of the universe was accepted as standard. During that time, the basic pattern underwent many detailed modifications and was fitted out with many astrological and pseudoscientific trappings. But in essence Ptolemy's followers portrayed the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, planets, and fixed stars set in transparent spheres orbiting around it. In this scheme of things, as modified for Christian usage, Hell was usually placed under the earth's surface at the center of the cosmic globe, while Heaven, the abode of the blessed spirits, was in the outermost, uppermost circle, the empyrean. But in 1543 the Polish astronomer Copernicus proposed an alternative hypothesis—that the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa; and despite theological opposition, observations with the new telescope and careful mathematical calculations insured ultimate acceptance of the new view.

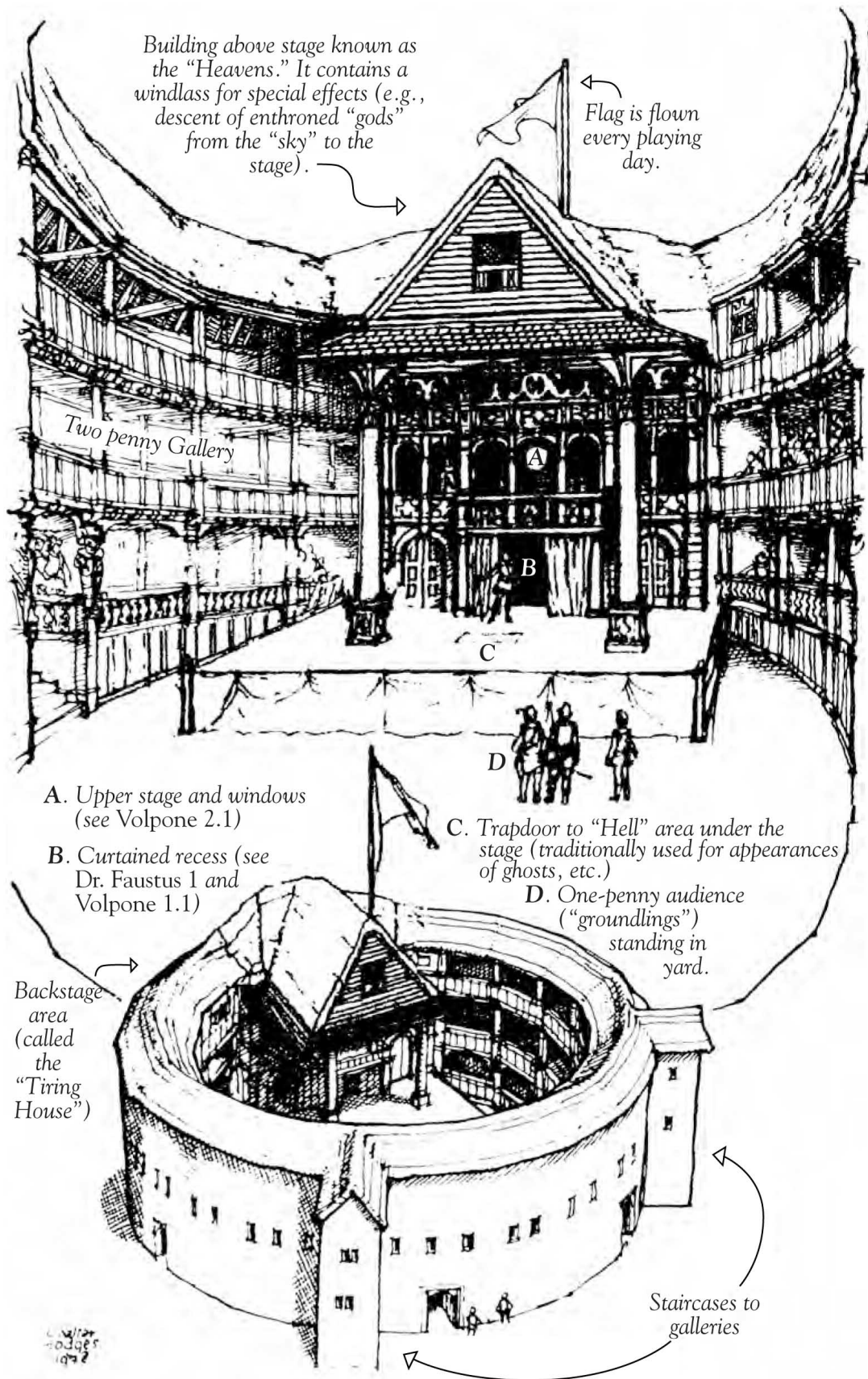
The map of the Ptolemaic universe below is a simplified version of a diagram in Peter Apian's *Cosmography* (1584). In such a diagram, the Firmament is the sphere that contained the fixed stars; the Crystalline Sphere, which contained no heavenly bodies, is a late innovation, included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies; and the Prime Mover is the sphere that, itself put into motion by God, imparts rotation around the earth to all the other spheres.

Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, used two universes. The Copernican universe, though he alludes to it, was too large, formless, and unfamiliar to be the setting for the war between Heaven and Hell in *Paradise Lost*. He therefore used the Ptolemaic cosmos, but placed Heaven well outside this smaller earth-centered

universe, Hell far beneath it, and assigned the vast middle space to Chaos.



# **A LONDON PLAYHOUSE OF SHAKESPEARE'S TIME**





# **Volume C: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century**



# General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

# Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded.

Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009);

*The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other

stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden

White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

## Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos ([https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_old.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm) and [https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_middle.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm)); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal

(3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at [www.mla.org/public](http://www.mla.org/public)) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (ABELL)*, compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the *DNB* has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed.



Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the *Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at [www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com).

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online,

<http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), [www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online). There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

# Literary Criticism and Theory

*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The*

*Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and '80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and '30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977);

Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to*

*Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and*

*Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia*

*Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above)



and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to*

*Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary

biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

# Literary Terminology\*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference \\*](#)

## A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

**accent** (synonym "stress"): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun "accent," for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

**act**: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

**aesthetics** (from Greek, "to feel, apprehend by the senses"): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

**Alexandrine**: a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

**a llegory** (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

**a lliteration** (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable.

Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

**allusion:** Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

**anagnorisis** (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

**anapest:** a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

**anaphora** (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

**a nimal fable:** a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

**a ntithesis** (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now

who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1448).

**a postrophe** (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**.

An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

**apposition:** a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases "heaven-kingdom's Guardian," "the Measurer's might," "his mind-plans," and "the work of the Glory-Father" each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of "praise."

**a ssonance** (Latin "sounding to"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," line 100: "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed" (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

**a ubade** (originally from Spanish "alba," dawn): a **genre**. A lover's dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, "The Sun Rising" (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in "Aubade" (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

**a utobiography** (Greek "self-life writing"): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author's path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.

**ballad stanza:** a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See "Sir Patrick Spens" (vol. D, p. 38 ); Louise Bennett's poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (vol. F, p. 501 ); Larkin, "This Be The Verse" (vol. F, p. 795 ).

**ballade:** a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, "send off"). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

**bathos** (Greek "depth"): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: "Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last" (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

**beast epic:** a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

**biography** (Greek "life-writing"): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

**blank verse:** a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare's plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among



many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

**blazon**: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved's face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**burlesque** (French and Italian "mocking"): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

**caesura** (Latin "cut") (plural "caesurae"): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," lines 5–8: "By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun" (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

**canon** (Greek "rule"): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

**catastrophe** (Greek "overturning"): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

**catharsis** (Greek "cleansing"): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

**character** (Greek "stamp, impression"): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a

preordained narrative pattern, the “fuller,” or more “rounded,” a character is said to be. A “stock” character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

**chiasmus** (Greek “crosswise”): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, “Eloisa to Abelard,” line 104, “The crime was common, common be the pain” (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: “They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide” (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

**classical, classicism, classic**: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, “classical” primarily describes the works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. “Classicism” denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. “Classic” denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

**climax** (Greek “ladder”): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: “Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement” (see vol. B, pp. 1167–68).

**comedy**: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

**comic mode:** Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

**connotation:** To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term “depression” and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase “the blues.”

**consonance** (Latin “sounding with”): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose vowel sounds are different. Herbert, “Easter,” line 13: “Consort, both heart and lute . . .” (see vol. B, p. 1183).

**convention:** a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

**couplet:** a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek “two lines”) is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: “Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me” (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

**dactyl** (Greek “finger,” because of the finger’s three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, “Oregon.”

**decorum** (Latin “that which is fitting”): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

**deixis** (Greek “pointing”): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a “here” and a “now” from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as “here,” “there,” “this,” “that,” “now,” “then”) are examples of deixis, or “deictics.” This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

**denotation**: A word has a basic, “prosaic” (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word “steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

**d enouement** (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

**dialogue** (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

**d iction**, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

**d idactic mode** (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

**diegesis** (Greek for "narration"): a term that simply means "narration," but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

**dimeter** (Greek "two measure"): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, "The Tunning of Elinour Rummung" (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, p. 1197).

**discourse** (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

**dramatic irony**: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

**dramatic monologue** (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, p. 217 ); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, p. 416 ); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, p. 498 ); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F).

**ecphrasis** (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, p. 677).

**elegy**: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**)

devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, p. 231); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, p. 677); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F).

**emblem** (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such interpretation.

**end-stopping**: the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, p. 679). Compare **enjambment**.

**enjambment** (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, p. 679).

**epic** (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1429); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, p. 391); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, p. 808). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself

easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

**epigram**: a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, p. 1049).

**epigraph** (Greek “inscription”): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book’s title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work’s themes in the most compressed form possible.

**epistle** (Latin “letter”): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals. The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, “Mine Own John Pains” (see vol. B, p. 131), or Leapor, “An Epistle to a Lady” (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*).

**epitaph**: a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, “The Author’s Epitaph, Made by Himself” (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

**epithalamion** (Greek “concerning the bridal chamber”): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

**epyllion** (plural “epyllia”) (Greek: “little epic”): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

**essay** (French “trial, attempt”): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).



**euphemism** (Greek “sweet saying”): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, “he passed away”).

**exegesis** (Greek “leading out”): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

**exemplum** (Latin “example”): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

**fabliau** (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

**farce** (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

**figures of speech**: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

**figures of thought**: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

**first-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”),



and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

**frame narrative:** Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

**free indirect style:** relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

**genre and mode:** The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

**georgic** (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

**hermeneutics** (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

**heroic poetry:** see **epic**.

**hexameter** (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, p. 221 ).

**homily** (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

**homophone** (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

**hyperbaton** (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1430).

**hyperbole** (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1273); Auden, "As I Walked Out One

Evening," lines 9–12: " 'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

**hypermetrical** (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

**hypotaxis**, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: "As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he" (vol. B, p. 1588). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

**iamb**: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, "Vermont."

**imitation**: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

**irony** (Greek "dissimulation"): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. "It's a beautiful day" is unironic if it's a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an

extended example of irony, see Swift's "Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

**journal** (French "daily"): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

**lai**: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

**legend** (Latin "requiring to be read"): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the "Arthurian legend" but the "myth of Proserpine."

**lexical set**: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

**litotes** (from Greek "smooth"): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: "differences of no slight import" (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, "Sunt Leones," lines 11–12: "And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do" (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

**lullaby**: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, "Lullaby" (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

**lyric** (from Greek "lyre"): Initially meaning a song, "lyric" refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus "The Wife's Lament"

(see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole" (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

**masque:** a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

**metaphor** (Greek "carrying across," etymologically parallel to Latin "translation"): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, "London," lines 11–12: "And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls" (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

**meter:** Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter**, and

**hexameter.** In the definitions below, “u” designates one unstressed syllable, and “/” one stressed syllable.

**metonymy** (Greek “change of name”): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus “The Press,” designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

**mimesis** (Greek for “imitation”): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

***mise-en-abyme*** (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

**monometer** (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

**myth: a genre.** The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**novel:** an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main

European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel's openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

**novella:** a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

**occupatio** (Latin "taking possession"): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as "praeteritio" (Latin "passing by"). See Chaucer, *Nun's Priest's Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

**ode** (Greek "song"): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (vol. D, p. 381 ); and Marvell, "An Horatian Ode" (vol. B, p. 1282), or Keats, "Ode on Melancholy" (vol. D, p. 973 ). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson's "Ode on Cary and Morison" (vol. B, [p. 1058–59](#)).

**omniscient narrator** (Latin "all-knowing narrator"): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, "On the Western Circuit" (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).



**onomatopoeia** (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**.

Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote.

Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

**order:** A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin “in the middle of the matter”). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, “A Letter of the Authors” (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French “story”) for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here “narration”) for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

**ottava rima:** a **verse form**. An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ’s speech from the Cross in Lydgate’s *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

**oxymoron** (Greek “sharp blunt”): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: “darkness visible” (see vol. B, p. 1431).

**panegyric:** a **genre**. Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek “showing”), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of



vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek “sweet speaking”), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

**parable:** a **genre**. A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

**paradox** (Greek “contrary to received opinion”): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song,” line 12: “O sweete harm so quainte” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**parataxis**, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

**parody:** a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**pastoral** (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepherd’s Calendar* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

**pathetic fallacy:** the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, p. 1406). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, p. 467 ).

**pentameter** (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: “O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers” (see vol. B, p. 1433).

**performative:** Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. “I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison,” if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a “performative.” See also **speech act**.

**peripeteia** (Greek “turning about”): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

**periphrasis** (Greek “declaring around”): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

**persona** (Latin “sound through”): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor’s voice; in literary discourse persona (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to

the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

**personification**, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, [p. 971](#)).

**plot**: the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

**point of view**: All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

**protagonist** (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

**pun**: a **figure of thought**. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**quatrain**: a **verse form**. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, p. 1214).

**refrain:** usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

**register:** The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, "the boss"). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

**rhetoric:** the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

**rhyme:** a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ ("dead" / "head"). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line ("decays" / "days"). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables ("fountains" / "mountains"). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: "The guests are met, the feast is set" (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**;

Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

**rhyme royal**: a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**rhythm**: Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

**romance**: a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p.](#)

[263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

**sarcasm** (Greek "flesh tearing"): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children" (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).

**satire** (Latin for "a bowl of mixed fruits"): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt's "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

**satiric mode**: Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift's travel narrative *Gulliver's Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** "A Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

**scene**: a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

**sensibility** (from Latin, "capable of being perceived by the senses"): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow

feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of "sensibility," such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper's passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, [p. 1076](#)).

**short story:** a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

**simile** (Latin "like"): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word "like" or "as," of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, "The Storm," lines 29–30: "Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail." Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1438).

**soliloquy** (Latin "single speaking"): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

**sonnet:** a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or "volta," often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally



for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt" (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, Sonnets (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, "London, 1802" (vol. D, p. 390 ); McKay, "If We Must Die" (vol. F, p. 576 ); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F).

**speech act:** Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

**Spenserian stanza:** a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, p. 851 ), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, p. 953 ).

**spondee:** a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

**stanza** (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

**story:** a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

**stream of consciousness:** usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it



perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

**style** (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its "tone." We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

**sublime:** As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

**syllable:** the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

**symbol** (Greek "token"): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

**synecdoche** (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

**syntax** (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

**taste** (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

**tercet:** a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

**terza rima:** a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, p. 802 ); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, p. 657 ). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, p. 808 ).

**tetrameter** (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

**theme** (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

**third-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns (“he,” “she,” etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

**topographical poem** (Greek “place writing”): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

**topos** (Greek “place,” plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer’s spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

**tradition** (from Latin “passing on”): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer’s culture. “Tradition” is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

**tragedy**: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later

transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

**tragic mode:** Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

**tragicomedy:** a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

**translation** (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

**trimeter** (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, p. 1197).

**triplet:** a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**trochee:** a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

**type** (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

**unities:** According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time,

place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

**vernacular** (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

**verse form:** The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

**villanelle:** a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

**wit:** Originally a synonym for “reason” in Old and Middle English, “wit” became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope’s definition of true wit as “Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed” (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

**zeugma** (Greek “a yoking”): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word “take” is used in two senses: “Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea” (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

## B: Publishing History, Censorship

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

**bookseller:** In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

**censorship:** The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

**codex:** the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

**copy text:** the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.



**copyright:** the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work's publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

**folio:** the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

**foul papers:** versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

**incunabulum** (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

**manuscript** (Latin, “written by hand”): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

**paleography** (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

**parchment**: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

**patronage, patron** (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

**p eriodical:** Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

**p rinting:** Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

**p ublisher:** the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers’ Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

**quire:** When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a “gathering” or “signature”). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

**royalties:** an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

**scribe:** In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

**s criptorium** (plural “scriptoria”): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

**serial publication:** generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

**Stationers' Company:** The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

**subscription:** An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

**textual criticism:** Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

**variants:** differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

**vellum:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

**watermark:** the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

# Geographic Nomenclature

**The British Isles** refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

**Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

**The British Empire** took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth**, and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.



# British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing (1/4 penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
21/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
21/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	

1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.

<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" ( <i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year

# The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty," princes and princesses as "Your Highness," the other hereditary nobility as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship." Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father's title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward's marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92



temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

# **The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain**

## ***England***

### **SAXONS and DANES**

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II 1016–1016

Canute the Dane 1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute 1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute 1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II 1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward 1066–1066 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF NORMANDY**

William I, the Conqueror 1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I 1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I 1100–1135

## **HOUSE OF BLOIS**

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I 1135–1154

## **HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET**

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I 1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II 1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II 1199–1216

Henry III, son of John 1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III 1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I 1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF LANCASTER**

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed), 1470–1471 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF YORK**

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III 1461–1470 (deposed),

1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV 1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback 1483–1485 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF TUDOR**

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV 1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII 1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII 1547–1553

Mary I, “Bloody,” daughter of Henry VIII 1553–1558

Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII 1558–1603

## **HOUSE OF STUART**

James I (James VI of Scotland) 1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I 1625–1649 (executed)

## **COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE**

Council of State 1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector 1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver 1658–1660 (resigned)

## **HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)**

Charles II, son of Charles I 1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I 1685–1688

## **(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)**

## **HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU**

William III of Orange,  
by Mary, daughter of Charles II and  
Mary II, daughter of James II 1689–1701–1694

Anne, second daughter of James II 1702–1714

***Great Britain***

## **HOUSE OF HANOVER**

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I 1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

### **HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA**

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

### **HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)**

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI 1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II 2022–

# Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a



community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that

marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own

lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring

the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to

Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from

voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots

Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as “Christian” on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.



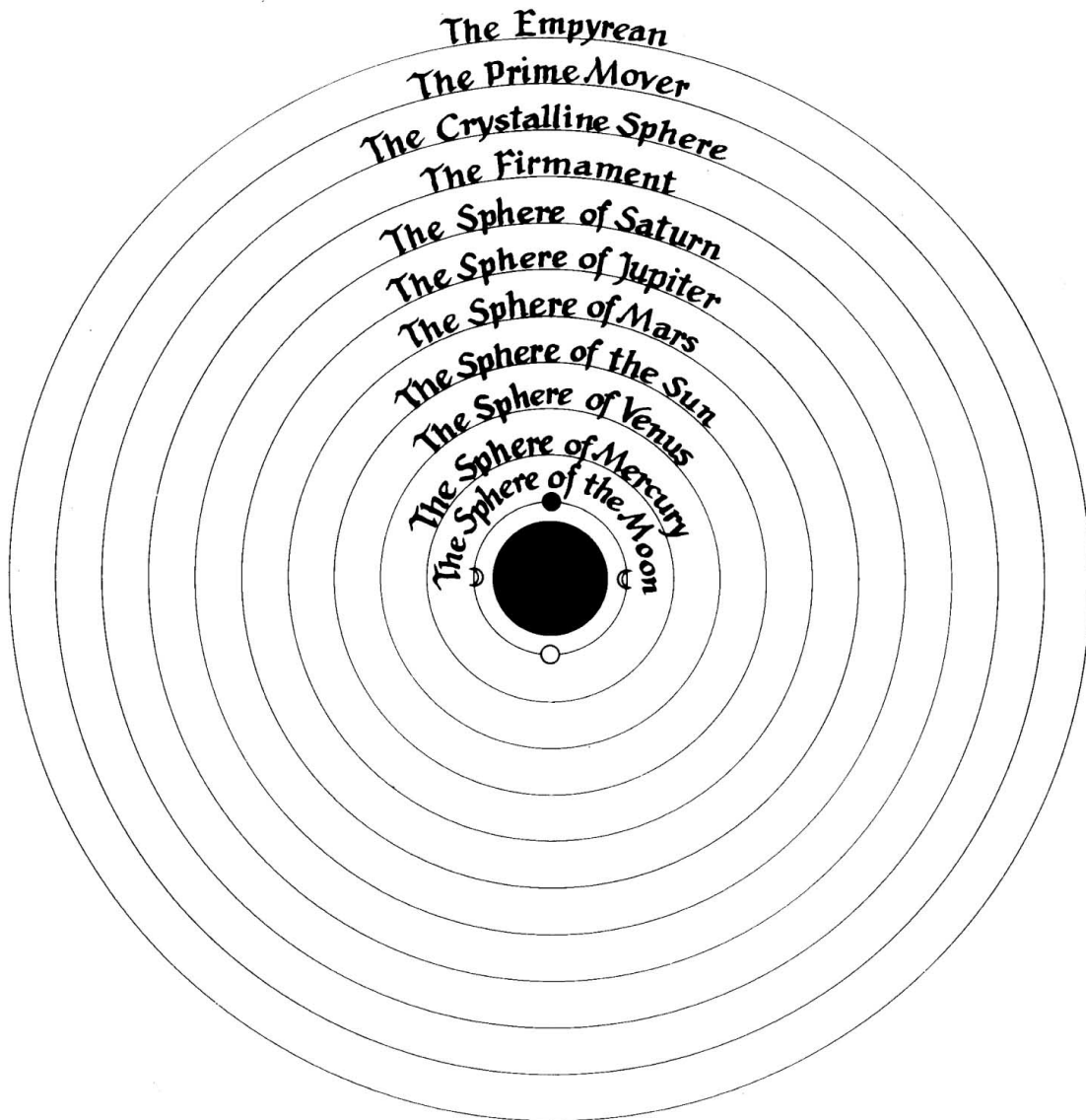
# The Universe According to Ptolemy

Ptolemy was a Roman astronomer of Greek descent, born in Egypt during the second century C.E.; for nearly fifteen hundred years after his death his account of the design of the universe was accepted as standard. During that time, the basic pattern underwent many detailed modifications and was fitted out with many astrological and pseudoscientific trappings. But in essence Ptolemy's followers portrayed the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, planets, and fixed stars set in transparent spheres orbiting around it. In this scheme of things, as modified for Christian usage, Hell was usually placed under the earth's surface at the center of the cosmic globe, while Heaven, the abode of the blessed spirits, was in the outermost, uppermost circle, the empyrean. But in 1543 the Polish astronomer Copernicus proposed an alternative hypothesis—that the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa; and despite theological opposition, observations with the new telescope and careful mathematical calculations insured ultimate acceptance of the new view.

The map of the Ptolemaic universe below is a simplified version of a diagram in Peter Apian's *Cosmography* (1584). In such a diagram, the Firmament is the sphere that contained the fixed stars; the Crystalline Sphere, which contained no heavenly bodies, is a late innovation, included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies; and the Prime Mover is the sphere that, itself put into motion by God, imparts rotation around the earth to all the other spheres.

Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, used two universes. The Copernican universe, though he alludes to it, was too large, formless, and unfamiliar to be the setting for the war between Heaven and Hell in *Paradise Lost*. He therefore used the Ptolemaic cosmos, but placed Heaven well outside this smaller earth-centered

universe, Hell far beneath it, and assigned the vast middle space to Chaos.



# **PERMISSIONS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# **Image Galleries**

# **The Middle Ages (to ca. 1485)**

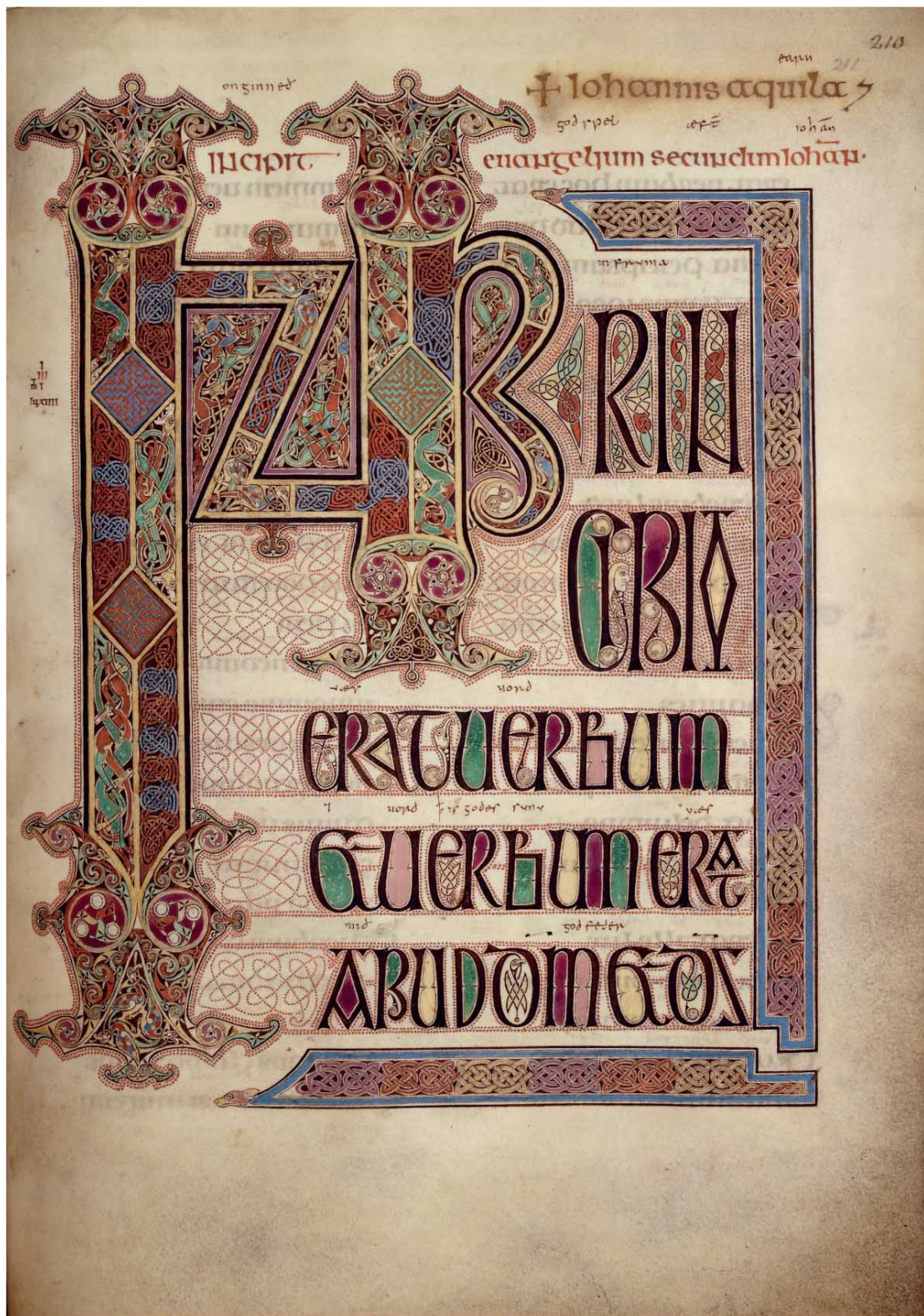


Scepter, from the Sutton Hoo Treasure, ca. 625 C.E.

Discovered in 1939, among other items ( jewelry, pottery, fragments of a helmet and shield), in a funeral ship buried in a mound near the coast of East Anglia, the scepter—probably a symbol of royal authority—consists of a massive ceremonial whetstone carved with faces and attached to a ring of twisted bronze wires mounted by an intricately carved stag. The treasure suggests the one laden on Scyld's funeral ship in *Beowulf* (lines 26–52; p. 43) and the material world imagined throughout the poem; the scepter evokes the “gold standard . . . / high above [the king's] head.”

---





Lindisfarne Gospels, opening page of the Gospel of St. John



This book was produced in the early eighth century in the monastery at Lindisfarne, an island off the coast of Northumbria in northeastern England. It was written on vellum (animal skin). This magnificent page expresses the dynamic cultural encounter of different traditions. The large letters form the beginning of the Gospel of St. John in Latin ("*In Principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus . . .*" ["In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and God . . ."]); within the letters of that learned language, which voice a Christian theology influenced by Greek philosophical ideas, the illuminator mixes Germanic pre-Christian visual and vernacular elements: the complex, abstract, interlaced patterns, with animal and human forms, fill and/or surround the letters (see the snake tucked into the stem of the capital "P" and the human face that emerges from the "c" of "*cipio*"); and a later, tenth-century monk has provided an interlinear translation of the Latin (beginning "onginneth godspel"), written above the Latin heading "*incipit evangelium*" ("[Here] begins the gospel . . .").

---



*Mappa mundi*, or "map of the world," after 1262



More than a thousand *mappae mundi* survive from the western Middle Ages (see pp. 287–88). Most follow a “T-O” pattern: the habitable world appears as a circle, an “O,” divided into three regions by a “T” signifying the Mediterranean Sea. Since the map is oriented with east at the top, Asia appears there; Europe is on the bottom left; Africa, the bottom right. The crossbars of the “T” intersect at the world’s center, Jerusalem. Britain is a marginal detail near the edge. This map, known as the Psalter World Map, is not quite seven inches high, and its small surface is crowded with 170 individual inscriptions. It would have been used not for navigation but for contemplating the organization and diversity of the divinely governed world.

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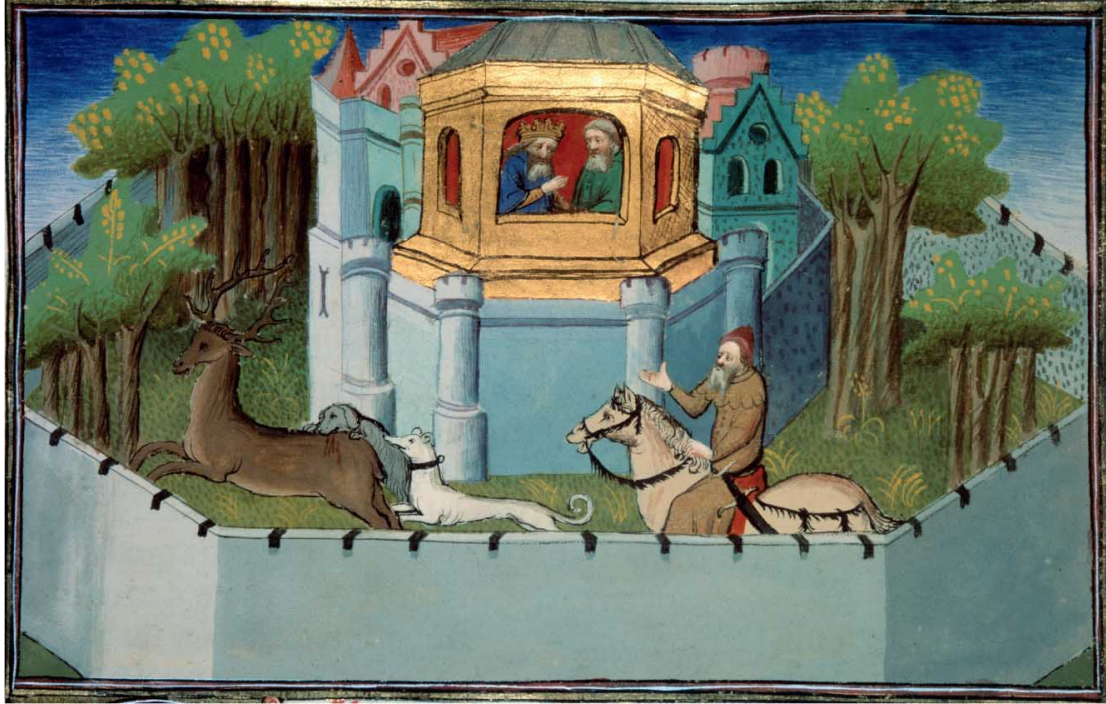


*The King of Tars*, manuscript illumination, 1330s

This illustration accompanies a London-produced manuscript of the Middle English romance *The King of Tars* (see pp. 292–319). It depicts the Sultan of Damascus in two scenes of worship. The one on the left shows him alone worshipping an idol—a religious practice wrongly attributed to Muslims by numerous medieval Christian texts. The one on the right depicts him with his Christian wife, the Princess of Tars, worshipping before a crucifix. The pigment used for the figures’ skin color has evidently become

discolored with age, making them both appear dark—despite the fact that the Princess is “white as feather of swan” and that the Sultan, after deciding to convert, “all white became through Godes grace.”

---



Palace of the Great Khan, from *The Book of John Mandeville*, 1410–12

This illustration from a French manuscript of *The Book of John Mandeville* shows the palace of the Great Khan, ruler of Cathay, shimmering with golden splendor (see pp. 327–28). As Mandeville recounts, the lavish grounds make it possible for the Khan to go hunting “without ever leaving his palace.” The author is fascinated by the riches, esoteric learning, and elaborate social organization of Cathay. This sumptuous manuscript, owned and read by important French noblemen, contains *Mandeville* and several other medieval texts about contact between Europe and Asia.

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The Wilton Diptych, Flemish school, 1395–96

Richard II commissioned this double-panel painting, both pious and political, not long before his deposition. In it he is portrayed as a boy, perhaps ten years old, the age at which he became king. Two English kings, St. Edmund and St. Edward “the Confessor,” and John the Baptist, Richard’s patron saint, present the young king to the Virgin and Child, who are surrounded by angels. The Christ Child blesses the red-cross standard of St. George (the patron saint of England), about to be given into the kneeling king’s open hands. Richard’s robe and the angels’ sleeves display his personal emblem, a white hart (punning on *riche-hart*).

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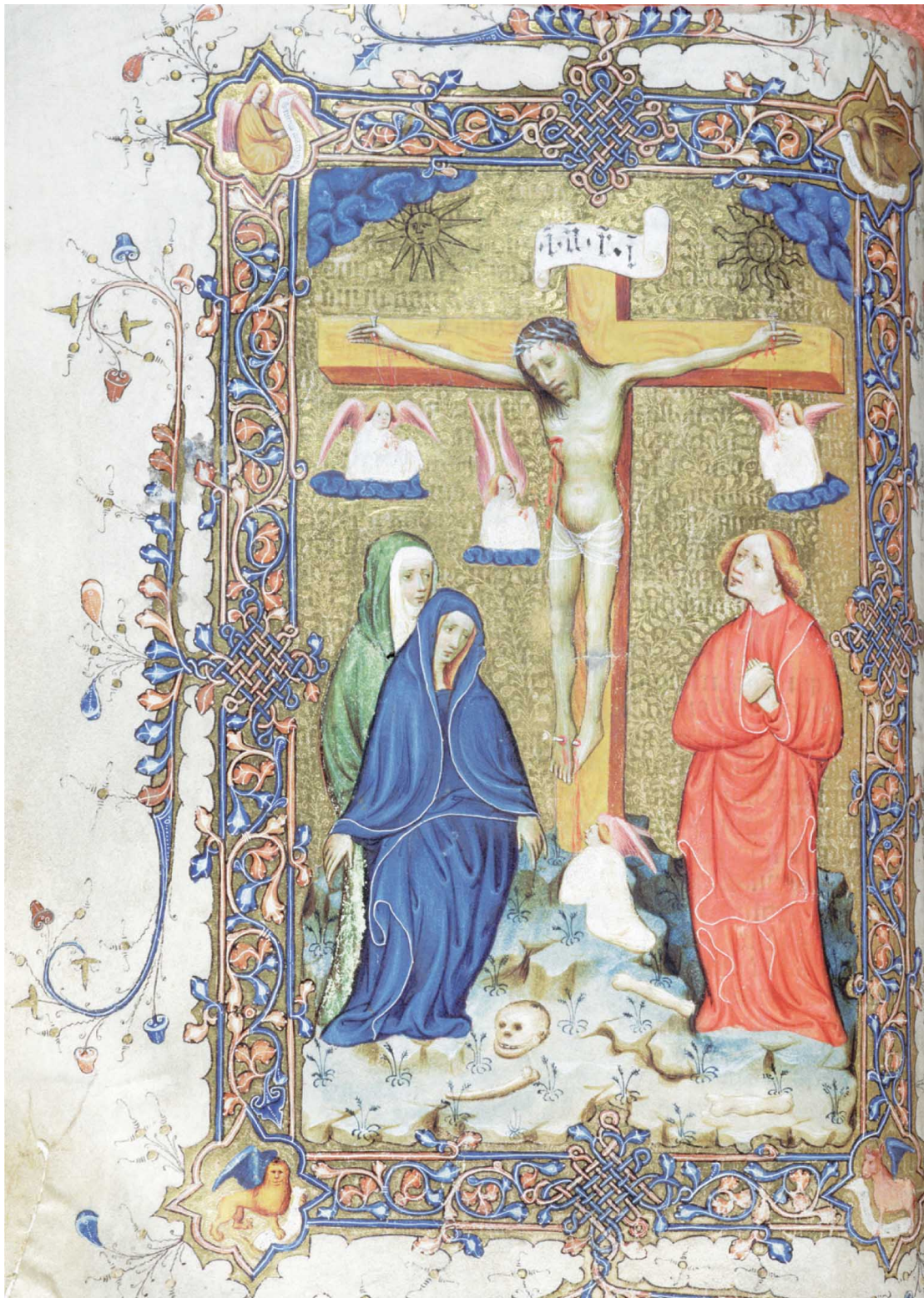


*Allegory of Good Government*, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1338–39

The extraordinary energies of later medieval urban culture (here Siena) are represented within larger structures of defense and aggression: the external walls of the city (lower right) protect against invasion from competing city states (for example, nearby Florence), even as the medieval skyscrapers within the walls signal intra-city competitions for urban power. Within these defensive structures, the commercial, educational, artisanal, and cultural activities of the city are pursued. Note, respectively, the agricultural products near the city gate on the right; the school room (right center); the shoe-maker (center); and the dancers (center). Siena's great cathedral (tower and dome) is placed on the far margin (upper left) of the fresco.

---





*The Crucifixion, Lapworth Missal, 1398*

This late medieval manuscript illumination typically portrays the humanity of Christ: frail, eyes closed, head inclining on his shoulder. At the sides stand the Virgin mother, who swoons in the arms of Mary Magdalene, and St. John the Evangelist. The skull signifies Golgotha (place of skulls), the site of the Crucifixion. According to medieval legend, the tree of knowledge had stood on the same site and Adam was buried there: thus the skull is that of Adam, whose original sin is being redeemed by the blood that the angels are collecting. The sun and moon symbolize the New and Old Testaments: as the sun illuminates the moon, the light of the New Testament reveals the hidden truths of the Old. Symbols of the four evangelists appear in the corners of the intricately decorated frame.

---





Portrait of Chaucer, ca. 1411



In his poem *The Regiment of Princes*, Thomas Hoccleve, a younger disciple of Chaucer, memorializes "My maistir Chaucer, flour of eloquence, / Mirour of fructuous entendement, / O universel fadir in science!" One manuscript preserves a small portrait of Chaucer that Hoccleve placed in the margin so "That they that han of him lost thought and mynde / By this peynture may ageyn him fynde." Chaucer holds a rosary in his left hand; attached to his gown, a penknife (used for making and mending quill pens) or pen case functions as a symbol of authorship.

---



Manuscript illumination of pilgrims leaving Canterbury, ca. 1420

Chaucer's pilgrims never get to Canterbury, but they do in the prologue to John Lydgate's *The Siege of Thebes*. In the prologue, Lydgate, a monk of Bury St. Edmund's and an enthusiastic follower of Chaucer, tells how on his own pilgrimage to Canterbury he encounters Chaucer's pilgrims. The Host invites the monk to join the company on their return journey and calls on him to tell the first tale. Lydgate is the middle figure in a monk's cowl, costumed more soberly than Chaucer's Monk. The cathedral and walls of Canterbury appear in the background.

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Limbourg Brothers, *Tres Riches Heures* of John, Duke of Berry,  
February scene, folio 2v

This page forms part of the splendid book of hours (a prayer book of daily and occasional prayers) commissioned by John, Duke of Berry (d. 1416), third son of John II of France. The illuminated manuscript, produced in 1412–16, begins with a page devoted to the activities of each month. This page is for the month of February. Like the opening of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written just twenty or so years earlier, the scene is divided between the natural, cyclical movement of the cosmos above and the human world below. The semi-circle at top represents the sun in its chariot moving as it always does (according to Ptolemaic astronomy) between the zodiacal signs of Aquarius and Pisces (the Fish). The rectangle below represents peasants working to survive in winter conditions: taking stock to market, chopping firewood, warming themselves by the fire. The semi-circle is divided by the necessity of numbers; the rectangle, by contrast, reveals that the human, constructed world is subject to accident: note, for example, the birds eating the accidentally spilled seeds.

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*The Money Lender and His Wife*, Quentin Metsys, 1514

Metsys (d. 1530) worked in Antwerp (modern Belgium), one of the major trading centers of northwestern Europe in the later Middle Ages. Here we see the material world depicted in all its mesmeric attraction (note the gaze of both husband and wife, fixated on the coins as they are weighed); we also see how the material world pulls the gaze away from the spiritual world: the wife's eyes have drifted from her prayer book to the coins. The turn of both gazes seems oblivious to the possible spiritual consequences of obsessively material focus: neither husband nor wife seems to take in the fact that the scales that weigh the money might remind them of the weighing of souls at the Last

Judgment. Neither does the couple take in the spiritual resonances of the objects on the shelves behind them (for example, apple and extinguished candle). The entire painting, indeed, is an essay in observation and attention (note, for example, the convex mirror in the foreground, which reveals a figure in the room absorbed in a book).

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# The Sixteenth Century 1485–1603



*St. George and the Dragon* (London version), Paolo Uccello, ca. 1455–60.

A depiction by the Florentine artist Uccello of the legend that was to inspire Edmund Spenser in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*. Already held on a leash by the elegant lady—as if the struggle’s outcome were not in doubt—the dragon submits to the knight’s lance (thrust through the nose in a gesture that better recalls the domestication of cattle than the thwarting of an enemy). The desolate cave is strangely conjoined with the formal garden and



the lady's elegant court dress: the story is imagined as located at once in the wilderness and at the very center of civilization.

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*Thomas More, Hans Holbein, 1527*

Painted on the eve of More's great conflict with Henry VIII over the validity of the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Holbein's portrait emphasizes both the chancellor's importance and his strength of character. More wears the heavy gold chain and rich dress of high office, which he had satirized a decade earlier in *Utopia*. In all probability, if early biographies of More can be believed, he also wears a hair shirt under the velvet and fur, a hidden, painful reminder of the vulnerable flesh that he secretly mortified.

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*Edward VI and the Pope: An Allegory of the English Reformation, English school, ca. 1568–71*

In this detail from a work of Protestant propaganda, the dying Henry VIII points to his young son and heir, Prince Edward, who is seated on a chair of state and is now Supreme Head of the Church of England. An open book at Edward's feet is inscribed

with a line from the New Testament's First Epistle of Peter: "The word of the Lord endureth forever." The book, symbolizing the power of vernacular Bible translation, crushes the pope, to whose tiara are attached ribbons inscribed "Idolatry" and "Superstition." The attack on the papacy is underscored by the words "Feigned holiness," and the inscription across the pope's chest, "All flesh is grass," makes the point that the Catholic pontiff is an ordinary, corruptible mortal. To the left two monks flee the pope's downfall. Several places in the painting were intended for further inscriptions, but for unknown reasons these were never completed.

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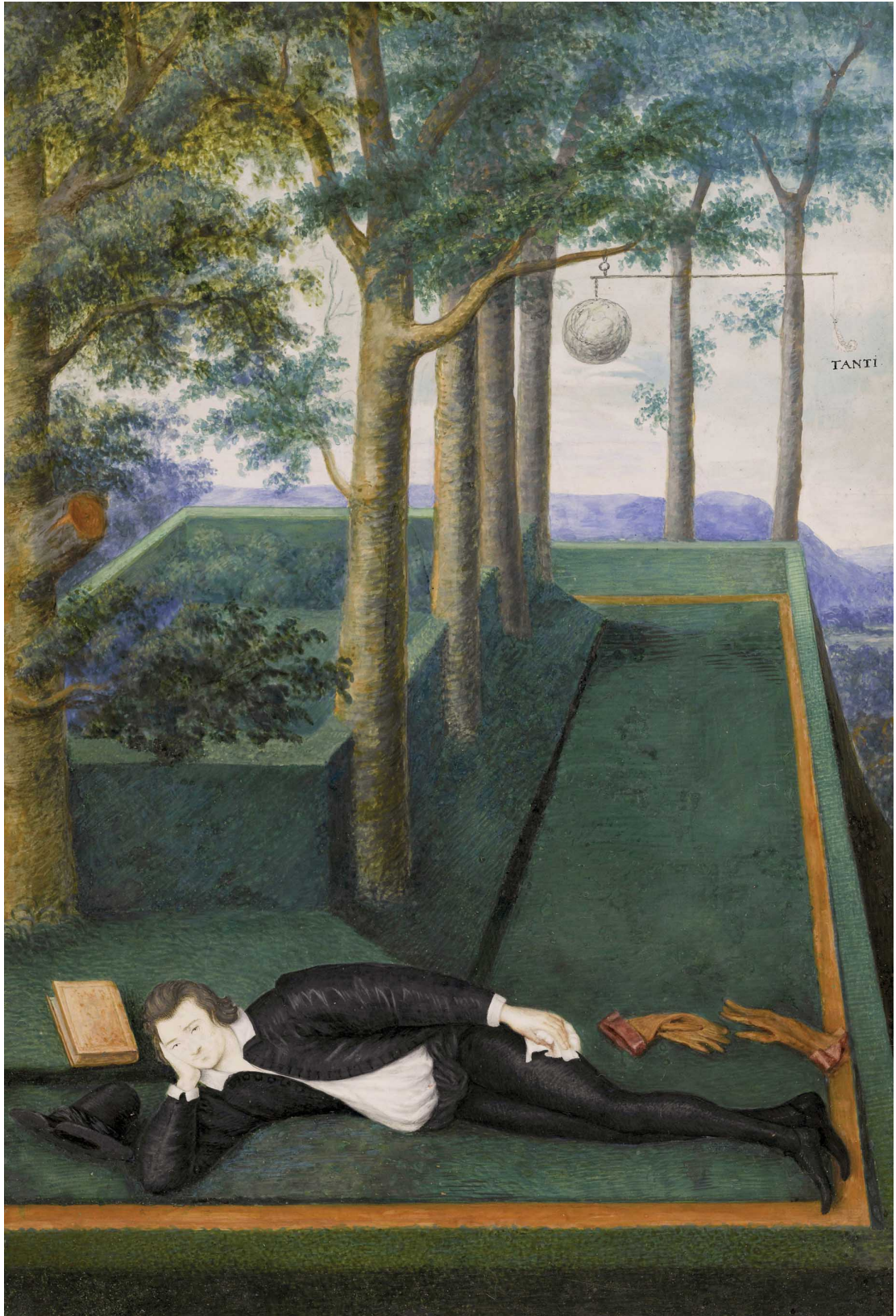


*The Wife and Daughter of a Chief*, John White, 1585

Accompanying Thomas Hariot's *Brief and True Report of the New-found Land of Virginia*, John White's watercolors chronicle Algonquin life as seen by the English voyagers. Here, a girl "of the age of 8 or 10 yeares" carries a European doll, dressed in full Elizabethan costume, that she has clearly been given as a gift by the strange visitors. The presentation of small gifts was a regular English practice, frequently alternating with murderous violence. White's drawing manages to convey both the exoticism and the dignity that Hariot and others perceived in the American natives.

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*Henry Percy, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Northumberland, Nicholas Hilliard, ca. 1590–95*

Henry Percy's interests in natural science, mathematics, astronomy, alchemy, and philosophy earned him the nickname "The Wizard Earl." One of the wealthiest aristocrats in England, Percy became the patron of a remarkable group of scientists and intellectuals. He often joined them in conducting experiments and making astronomical observations, but in this elegant miniature, he is alone, reclining in a formal garden overlooking a distant landscape. His slightly disheveled dress and pose suggest the melancholy temperament that was highly regarded in this period. The emblematic object hanging in the tree—a globe or cannon ball balanced by a feather—has long tantalized interpreters, as has the significance of the word *tanti* (in Latin, "so much"; in Italian, "so many"). In 1605, suspected of conspiracy against King James, Percy was imprisoned in the Tower of London. During his imprisonment, which lasted for sixteen years, he continued his scientific experiments.

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Portrait of Abd al-Wahid bin Masoud bin Muhammad al-Annuri,  
artist unknown, 1600

In 1600 the forty-two- year- old al-Annuri arrived in London as the ambassador of the Moroccan ruler Mulay Ahmed al-Mansur with a proposal for a military alliance with England against Spain. The imposing appearance of the ambassador made a sensation in London and may have influenced Shakespeare's conception of what the Moor Othello looked like.

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Elizabethan Gloves, London, ca. 1600

"See how she leans her cheek upon her hand," Romeo sighs, as he looks up at Juliet on her balcony; "O, that I were a glove upon that hand / That I might touch that cheek!" It was fashionable among the Elizabethan elite to wear fancy gloves, often perfumed

with sweet-smelling oils. These particularly elaborate leather gloves, decorated with satin, silk, and seed pearls, were in all likelihood a gift, most probably a love-token. Their imagery includes weeping eyes, to symbolize love-sickness, and pansies, also known at the time as "love-in- idleness" or "heartsease."

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*The "Chandos" Portrait of William Shakespeare, anonymous, date unknown*

The formal portrait of the playwright that appears in the First Folio edition of his works depicts him stiffly posed in a brocade jacket and a heavily starched collar. Here, in a portrait named

after its owner, the Duke of Chandos, Shakespeare is presented less formally and more as his friends and colleagues may have known him. The artist is unknown, but some speculate that it may have been Shakespeare's fellow actor Richard Burbage.

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*A Young Man*, Nicholas Hilliard, ca. 1600

This tiny painting from a playing card approximately two inches square represents the "other side" of Elizabethan love poetry: passion replaces languor. The image of the lover tormented by the "fire" of his mistress's eyes or the hellish inner torment of desire was common. Though Sidney's *Astrophil* lives "in blackest winter night," he feels "the flames of hottest summer day" (p. 550), while even disillusioned lovers in Shakespeare's sonnets do not know how "To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell" (p. 637). The locket held by the young man presumably contains another miniature: a portrait of the beloved.

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*Elizabeth I in Procession*, attributed to Robert Peake, ca. 1600

Carried on a litter like an image of the Virgin in the religious processions of previous centuries, the gorgeously arrayed Queen Elizabeth is shown here as a time-defying icon of purity and

power. When the painting was executed, the queen was sixty-seven years old. Until the end of her life, she continued her custom of going on "Progresses" through the realm: surrounded by her courtiers and ladies in waiting, she would venture forth to show herself to her people, many of whom nearly bankrupted themselves to entertain her in style.

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The Drake Jewel, Nicholas Hilliard, ca. 1580s



Elizabeth I gave this remarkable jewel to Sir Francis Drake, the Elizabethan naval hero and explorer, sometime before 1591. (He is wearing it in a portrait painted in that year.) The profile head of an African man superimposed on that of a European woman makes ingenious use of the brown and white bands of the sardonyx (a variety of quartz). The Black man is shown wearing a *paludamentum*, the mantle worn by Roman emperors and generals, and Elizabeth may have selected it to show her imperial ambitions. The contrast between “black” and “fair” was central to the poetry of her period, with Elizabeth’s whiteness, often accentuated through makeup, serving as an ideal. See, for example, Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 3; *Othello*; and Lovelace’s “A Black Patch on Lucasta’s Face.”

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*Sir Walter Raleigh (Raleigh)*, unknown English artist, 1588

This portrait of the soldier, courtier, politician, and writer was painted in the year of the attack by the Spanish Armada. Raleigh presents himself as the queen's devoted servant, wearing her

colors of black and white and her emblem (the pearl, symbol of virginity) in his left ear. The pearls on Raleigh's sable-trimmed cloak form the rays of a "sun in splendor," a heraldic divide also found in portraits of the queen. In the top left-hand corner, over the motto "Amor et Virtute" ("By love and virtue") is a crescent moon, the device of Elizabeth as the moon goddess Cynthia, and the subject of a poem by Raleigh himself.

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*Sir Anthony Mildmay, Knight of Apthorpe, Northamptonshire,*  
Nicholas Hilliard, ca. 1590–93

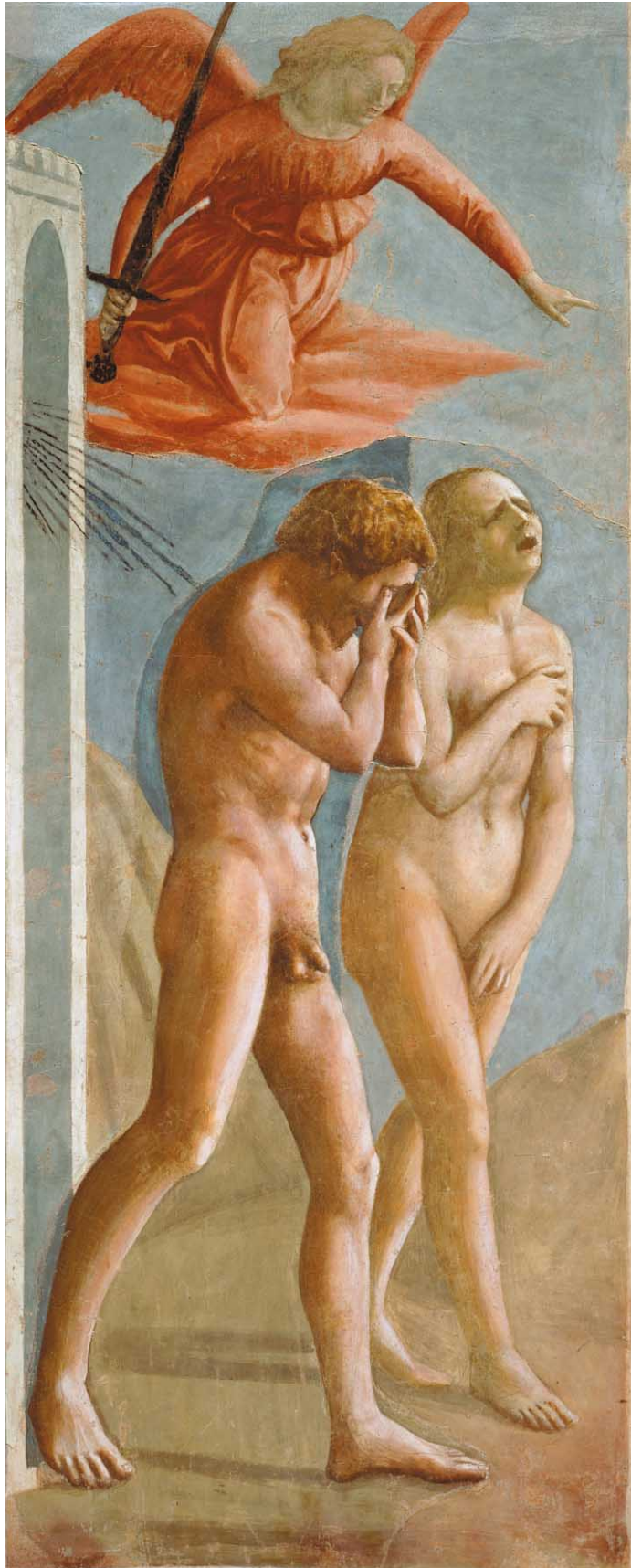
The Elizabethan upper classes indulged in unrestrained, utterly shameless exhibitions of sartorial costliness and splendor.

Anthony Mildmay was a gentleman of no particular distinction, military or otherwise, but he presents himself here in the midst of dressing (or undressing) either for battle or, more likely, for one of the ceremonial combats known as jousts. The portrait enables him to show off both his lavish suit of armor and his legs. His dog seems suitably impressed.

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## **The Early Seventeenth Century 1603–1660**





*The Expulsion from Paradise*, Masaccio, ca. 1427–28

This striking fresco shows an agonized Adam and Eve being driven from Eden by a sword-wielding angel. Adam is so overcome he buries his face in his hands; Eve's face is a mask of despair. They do not touch: each seems imprisoned in his or her own pain. While Adam and Eve experience great emotional torment in Books 9 and 10 of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's representation of their expulsion from Paradise at the end of Book 12 is notably different from Masaccio's (see p. 1659).

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*John Donne*, anonymous, ca. 1595

This portrait presents Donne in the guise of a melancholy lover fond of self-display; the signs are his broad-brimmed black hat, soulful eyes, sensual lips, delicate hands, and untied but expensive lace collar. Parts of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* (pp. 886–902) date from this period. Melancholy was supposedly



caused by an excess of black bile and was often associated with scholarly and artistic temperaments. Robert Burton's massive and extremely popular *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) saw it as a near universal attribute of the period. Famous literary characters with melancholic temperaments include Hamlet, *Twelfth Night's* Duke Orsino, *As You Like It's* Jacques, and Milton's Il Penseroso (p. 1395).

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*Lady Sidney and Six of Her Children*, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, ca. 1596

This portrait of Barbara (Gamage) Sidney, wife of Sir Robert Sidney of Penshurst, provides an insight into domestic relations in the period, as well as an illuminating comment on Ben Jonson's poem "To Penshurst" (p. 1051). Robert Sidney (brother of Sir Philip Sidney) is absent, serving as governor of the English

stronghold in Flushing. Lady Sidney is portrayed as a fruitful, fostering mother. Her hands rest on her two sons—both still in skirts, though the heir wears a sword; the four daughters are arranged in two pairs, the elder of each pair imitating her mother's nurturing gesture. The eldest daughter will become Lady Mary Wroth, author of *Urania* and the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (p. 1072).

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Queen Elizabeth of England  
wife to Edward VI of England  
described by John G. G. G.



*Lucy, Countess of Bedford, as a Masquer, attributed to John de Critz, ca. 1606*

Lucy (Harington) Russell, Countess of Bedford, prominent courtier, favorite of Queen Anna, patron of Donne and Jonson, and frequent planner of and participant in court masques, is shown in masquing costume for the wedding masque *Hymenaei* (1606), by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones. Jonson describes the masquing ladies as "attired richly and alike in the most celestial colors" associated with the rainbow, with elaborate headdresses and shoes, "all full of splendor, sovereignty, and riches." Their masque dances were "fully of subtlety and device."

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"A Daughter of Niger" and "Torchbearer of Oceania," Inigo Jones, ca. 1605

Inigo Jones's career in theatrical design for the court began with his scenic and costume designs for Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) (pp. 1041–48). The four hundred preparatory drawings Jones made for the production include these watercolor renderings of "A Daughter of Niger" and the "Torchbearer of Oceania." Images of these and other masque costumes influenced Shakespeare's *Tempest*, as well as John Smith's and Richard Ligon's views of women "performers" in Virginia and the Cape Verde Islands, respectively. The blackface makeup in *The Masque of Blackness* was the subject of discussion among contemporaries. (For another discussion of makeup, see Jonson's "Fine Lady Would-be," p. 1049.) Cavendish's prose utopia *The Blazing World* (1666) features people with a wide range of skin colors, "Complexions; not white, black, tawny, olive-or ash-colored," but azure, deep purple, "grass-green," scarlet, and orange (p. 1366).

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*Henry, Prince of Wales with Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex in the Hunting Field, Robert Peake, ca. 1605*

Henry, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of James I and Anna of Denmark, is shown here as a man of action. He is attended by

Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, the son of Elizabeth I's disgraced favorite. Even as the painting celebrates the boys' likeness, subtle variations in their clothing indicate the differences in their social status. The painting represents the idealized male friendship we see celebrated in poems such as Donne's verse letter to Henry Wotton (p. 906) and Jonson's Cary-Morison ode (p. 1057).

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*Anna of Denmark, and a Groom, Paul Van Somer, 1617*

Anna of Denmark a princess and member of the Oldenburg dynasty, married James VI, king of Scotland and the future king of England, in 1589. Here we see her in full power: dressed for



the hunt and standing in front of Oatlands Palace and the gate she had commissioned from Inigo Jones. The unidentified Black groom holding the queen's horse wears the scarlet and gold livery of the House of Oldenburg, reminding viewers of the queen's political connections.

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*Cookmaid with Still Life of Vegetables and Fruit*, Nathaniel Bacon, ca. 1620–25

An accomplished English amateur painter, Bacon was related to the writer Sir Francis Bacon, and his wife was one of Queen Anna's ladies of the bedchamber. Netherlandish influences are evident in this remarkable painting. The eroticism of the painting is obvious; the ripe melons surrounding the cookmaid bear a marked resemblance to her voluptuous bosom. According to a letter dated to June 1626, Bacon was growing melons in his estate in East Anglia. Poetic blazons often compare women and their body parts to food; see, for example, Herrick's "Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast" (p. 1226). But this painting resonates most powerfully with the image of young women bearing an

“emblem of themselves in plum, or pear” in Jonson’s “To Penshurst” (p. 1054) and with Marvell’s “The Garden” (p. 1281), in which the speaker, overwhelmed with the erotic rush of nature’s plenty, “stumbl[es] on melons” and falls “on grass.”

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*Apollo and Diana” or “The Liberal Arts Presented to King Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria,” Gerrit van Honthorst, 1628*

George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, who plays a starring role in this painting, was assassinated in August 1628, probably while it was still a work in progress. The painting represents Buckingham as Mercury leading the seven Liberal Arts out of a dark cave in which they have been languishing, and presenting them to Charles I (as Apollo, god of art and learning) and Henrietta Maria (as Diana, Apollo’s sister, and goddess of virginity), while winged cherubs distribute the rewards of royal (or divine) patronage.

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*Charles I on Horseback*, Sir Anthony Van Dyck, 1637–38

One of Charles I's court painters, knighted and pensioned by the king, Van Dyck produced several portraits of the royal family and their circle at court. This magnificent equestrian portrait of the king in armor presents him as hero and warrior, in a pose that



looks back to portraits and statues of Roman emperors on horseback. It was painted to be hung at the end of the Long Gallery in St. James Palace.

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*Oliver Cromwell, Robert Walker, ca. 1649*

By the time of the 1649 execution of King Charles I, Cromwell was the foremost general in the New Model army. His harsh campaign in Ireland (1649–50), marked by massacres of the native Irish, is celebrated in poems by Milton and (more ambivalently) Marvell (p. 1280). Upon the Restoration of the monarchy, Cromwell's body was disinterred from Westminster Abbey and his head was placed upon a pole above Westminster Hall. Robert Walker painted portraits of the major parliamentary figures, including paired portraits of Lucy and John Hutchinson (see p. 1240 in this volume). A comparison with Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I on horseback (above) reveals both Walker's indebtedness to and differences from the court painter.

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# The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century 1660–1785



*Great Fire of London, Dutch school, 1666*

The fire of London, described by Dryden in *Annus Mirabilis* (p. 32) and by Pepys in his diary (p. 74), destroyed most of the central city. In the foreground of this panorama, huddled refugees carry their belongings away from the city. Under a pall of smoke across the Thames, St. Paul's Cathedral blazes in the center, with London Bridge on the far left and the Tower on the far right. The fire raged for four days, after which a new city eventually rose from the ashes.

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*Bristol Docks and Quay*, anonymous, early eighteenth century

Bristol, in southwest England, profited enormously from the expansion of transatlantic slavery. From this port, merchants sent trinkets, guns, and rum to West Africa in exchange for enslaved people, who were transported to North America and the West Indies in exchange for money and sugar. This painting shows a bustling metropolis whose trade makes possible the busy shops at the right and the great houses in the background.

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Pineapple and Butterfly, from *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, Maria Sibylla Merian, 1705

Merian (1647–1717) was a remarkable German artist and naturalist who in 1699 traveled with her daughter to Surinam, then a Dutch colony in South America. Merian's *Metamorphosis* featured extraordinarily detailed images of many plants and animals unfamiliar to Europeans. Her scientific illustrations were notable for depicting these life forms not as static or isolated, but in their various life stages and interacting with other creatures in their habitats. Here she shows a pineapple with a cochineal insect and multiple life stages of a butterfly.

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*Gulliver Taking Leave of the Houyhnhnms*, Sawrey Gilpin, 1769

In part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift cleverly makes use of the eighteenth-century British love of horses. Gulliver's infatuation with the dignity and nobility of the Houyhnhnms reflects the feelings of many hunters mounted for the chase or of gentlefolk promenading in the park; some preferred horses to human beings. Commercially, "horse painters" found eager and wealthy buyers, while Sawrey Gilpin tried to elevate horse painting by placing his horses against rich landscapes and in historical settings.

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*Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, Joshua Reynolds, 1762

Sir Joshua Reynolds specialized in portraits that characterized his subjects by alluding to classical literature and art. Here, the great actor David Garrick is torn between Comedy, on the left, and



Tragedy, on the right. The picture parodies a well-known image, Hercules between Virtue and Pleasure, and alludes to Guido Reni (Tragedy) and Correggio (Comedy). Exalted Tragedy urges Garrick to follow her, but darling Comedy drags him away.

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*The Beggar's Opera*, act 3, scene 11, William Hogarth, 1729

The highwayman Macheath, in leg irons, stands at the center, flanked by the women between whom he cannot choose. To the left, Lucy kneels before the jailer Lockit; to the right, Polly kneels before her father, Peachum. In the rear, a group of prisoners waits for its cue. But the setting is not so much a prison as the theater; spectators are seated on each side of the stage. Hogarth connects the audience with the actors just as *The Beggar's Opera* does, suggesting corruption "through all the employments of life." Behind Peachum, John Gay confers with his producer, John Rich.

Below them, seated at the far right, the Duke of Bolton (note his Star of the Garter) exchanges a rapt gaze with Polly; a satyr points down at him. On opening night, the duke fell in love with the actor who played Polly, Lavinia Fenton. He returned every night, until they became lovers—two decades later, they married.

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*A Philosopher Giving That Lecture on the Orrery, in Which a Lamp Is Put in Place of the Sun, Joseph Wright, 1766*

Joseph Wright came from the English Midlands, where an intense interest in science helped spark the industrial revolution. The orrery, a mechanism that represents the movements of the planets around the sun, was one of many devices that taught the public to appreciate the wonders of science. In this picture, the philosopher at the center bears a striking resemblance to



portraits of Sir Isaac Newton, who had cast light on the solar system. Strong effects of light and shade play over the faces around the lamp, as if to reflect the literal meaning of enlightenment.

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*The Death of General Wolfe*, Benjamin West, 1771

History painting—pictures that represent a famous legend or historical event—was the most prestigious genre of eighteenth-century art. West's painting of Wolfe, who died on the day that he captured Quebec, revolutionized the genre by dressing the figures in contemporary clothes, not classical togas. Twelve years after his death, Wolfe had become an icon; the composition draws on images of mourners around the dead Christ. The poetic shading is also appropriate to Wolfe. The night before he died, he is supposed to have said of Gray's "Elegy" (p. 899) that he "would

rather have been the author of that piece than beat the French tomorrow"; and in his copy of the poem, he marked one passage: "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

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*The Parting of Abelard from Heloise*, Angelika Kauffmann, ca. 1778

Angelika Kauffmann, born in Switzerland in 1741, was a child prodigy; at eleven she made a name in Italy for her portraits. From 1766 to 1781 she lived in England, where she was admired both as a singer and as a painter. During the eighteenth century,

the affair of Abelard and Heloise, which Pope depicted as a struggle between God and Eros, softened into a sentimental love story. Rousseau's novel *The New Heloise* (1761) helped transform the heroine into a saint of love. In an Age of Sensibility, Kauffmann portrays a youthful and feminized Abelard, not a wounded middle-aged scholar, and pathos, not repentance, marks this tender parting.

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*The Parting of Abelard from Heloise*, Angelika Kauffmann, ca. 1778

The great British portraitist and landscape painter Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) composed many versions of this scene. Eighteenth-century artists and writers confronted the lives of the rural poor, with increasing vividness and varying degrees of



idealization, from Thomas Gray's deeply pondered musings on the poor's deprivations and uncorrupted purity of life in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), which mourns the depopulation and loss of innocence of the countryside, to poems by working-class writers Stephen Duck and Mary Collier, which take a harder view of rural life. Gainsborough's painting is suffused with "sensibility," as it tenderly and dramatically presents motherhood and innocent children in a glowing group, surrounded by darker, expressive, wild natural forms.

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*A Linen Market with a Linen Stall and Vegetable Seller in the West Indies*, Agostino Brunias, ca. 1780

Brunias was retained in the 1770s by colonial administrator Sir William Young to document life on several Caribbean islands that Britain had gained from the French by the end of the Seven

Years' War (1763), including Dominica (of which Young would later become governor). This painting depicts rich Europeans, the people they enslaved, and free people of color in Roseau, capital of Dominica, all participating in a harmonious commercial scene. James Boswell, in a note to his poem "No Abolition of Slavery" (see p. 984, n. 6), takes Brunias's paintings at face value, citing them as evidence that Britain's plantations and colonies were cheerful places. Art historians have held more complex views. Brunias deliberately ignores the violence and exploitation of colonies built on enslavement, yet also seems to celebrate the diversity of island life: the subtle, wide variety of his subjects' skin tones, as here, as well as the different degrees of status represented by nonwhite people, and even the richly various details of their clothing, seem to call into question the stark, binary racial categories on which slavery had come to rely.

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*Portrait of an East India Company Official in India, Dip Chand, ca. 1760–64*

Dip Chand was an Indian artist associated with the Murshidabad area. In this painting, he depicts an East India Company official in a distinctively Indian way. The official sits on the ground holding a hookah, with betel nut for chewing nearby; two attendants



stand in the background, and a steward or visitor in front. The portrait is likely of William Fullerton, a surgeon in the East India Company and one-time mayor of Calcutta (now Kolkata). He was the only survivor of an attack on the Company in Patna by local ruler Mir Qasim in 1763.

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*Tipu's Tiger*, ca. 1782–99

Tipu Sultan, or Sultan Fateh Ali Sahab Tipu (1751–1799), was the Muslim ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore in South India from 1782 to 1799, and fought against British East India Company incursions in a series of Anglo-Mysore Wars. Known as the Tiger of Mysore, he commissioned this mechanical sculpture around 1795, carved in wood and over five and a half feet long, of an Indian tiger devouring a European soldier. Inside the tiger is a pipe organ, and when the crank to the left of it is turned, the soldier emits groans and raises his arm. Despite initial military successes, Tipu was finally defeated and killed in battle at his besieged capital Srirangapatna in 1799 by the British, who thereby gained control of South India; and the object was

shipped to what would become the Victoria and Albert Museum.  
It remains a potent symbol of Indian resistance to British rule.

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## CHAPTER 1. OF SENSE

Concerning the thoughts of man, I will consider them first singly and afterwards in train or dependence upon one another. Singly, they are every one a representation or appearance of some quality or other accident of a body without us, which is commonly called an object. Which object worketh on the eyes, ears, and other parts of man's body, and by diversity of working produceth diversity of appearances.

The original of them all is that which we call sense. (For there is no conception in a man's mind which hath not at first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense.)<sup>5</sup> The rest are derived from that original.

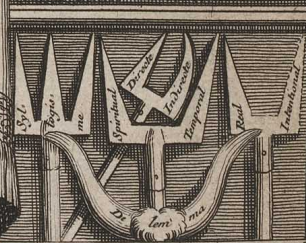
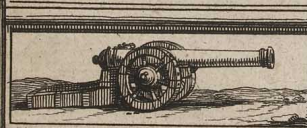
To know the natural cause of sense is not very necessary to the business now in hand, and I have elsewhere written of the same at large. Nevertheless, to fill each part of my present method, I will briefly deliver the same in this place.

The cause of sense is the external body or object which presseth the organ proper to each sense, either immediately as in the taste and touch, or mediately, as in seeing, hearing, and smelling; which pressure, by the mediation of nerves and other strings and membranes of the body continued inwards to the brain and heart, causeth there a resistance or counterpressure or endeavor of the heart to deliver itself;<sup>6</sup> which endeavor, because outward, seemeth to be some matter without. And this seeming or fancy is that which men call sense; and consisteth, as to the eye, in a light or color figured; to the ear, in a sound; to the nostril in an odor; to the tongue and palate in a savor; and to the rest of the body in heat, cold, hardness, softness, and such other qualities as we discern by feeling. All which qualities called "sensible"<sup>7</sup> are, in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter by which it presseth our organs diversely. Neither, in us that are pressed, are they anything else but diverse motions; for motion produceth nothing but motion. But their appearance to us is fancy, the same waking, that dreaming. And as pressing, rubbing, or striking the eye makes us fancy a light; and pressing the ear produceth a din; so do

the bodies also we see or hear produce the same by their strong though unobserved actions. For if those colors and sounds were in the bodies or objects that cause them, they could not be severed from them, as by glasses<sup>8</sup> and in echoes by reflection we see they are; where we know the thing we see is in one place, the appearance in another. And though at some certain distance the real and very object seem invested with the fancy it begets in us, yet still the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another. So that sense in all cases is nothing else but original fancy, caused (as I have said) by the pressure, that is by the motion, of external things upon our eyes, ears, and other organs thereunto ordained.



*Non est potestas Super Terram quae Comparetur ei Iob. 41. 24.*



# LEVIATHAN

Or  
THE MATTER, FORME  
and POWER of A COMMON  
WEALTH ECCLESIASTICALL  
and CIVIL.

By THOMAS HOBBS  
of MALMESBVRY.

London  
Printed for Andrew Crooke  
1651.



**Leviathan.** Abraham Bosse's frontispiece for *Leviathan* was based on a sketch by Hobbes. The "Leviathan" or commonwealth is shown as a gigantic human figure holding a scepter and a sword; the figure is made up of many tiny individual humans who have joined together in the social contract. Hobbes's royalist sympathies are betrayed in the figure's face, which is that of King Charles. The small pictures in the lower part of the engraving display the various attributes of civil power on the left, and ecclesiastical power on the right.

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But the philosophy schools<sup>9</sup> through all the universities of Christendom, grounded upon certain texts of Aristotle, teach another doctrine, and say for the cause of vision, that the thing seen sendeth forth on every side a visible species—in English, a visible show, apparition, or aspect, or a being seen—the receiving whereof into the eye is seeing. And for the cause of hearing, that the thing heard sendeth forth an audible species, that is an audible aspect or audible being seen, which entering at the ear maketh hearing. Nay for the cause of understanding also they say the thing understood sendeth forth intelligible species, that is an intelligible being seen, which coming into the understanding makes us understand. I say not this as disapproving the use of universities, but because I am to speak hereafter of their office in a commonwealth, I must let you see on all occasions by the way what things would be amended in them; amongst which the frequency of insignificant speech<sup>1</sup> is one.

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## Endnotes

- Note 5: This view of the mind as a blank sheet written on by physical experience will influence the philosophy of John Locke and David Hume.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hobbes's physiology of sense is, in keeping with his premises, strictly mechanical.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: That is, accessible through the senses.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mirrors.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Led by the Scholastic philosophers (schoolmen).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unmeaningful speech. Compare Bacon's critique of the idols of the marketplace and the theater in *Novum Organum* 43–44 and 59–62.[Return to reference 1](#)